

An illustration of a person with a beard sitting at a desk with a laptop, working. The background is dark purple with various icons floating around: a checkmark in a circle, an envelope, two speech bubbles (one with a phone icon), and a speech bubble with '24/7'. There are also small white stars and circles scattered throughout.

A Manager's Guide to the

# Employee Assistance Service

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# Introducing the EAS

Welcome to your guide to Spectrum.Life's EAS. This booklet will help you understand the service so that you and your families can all gain the maximum benefit from it.





# Common Queries from Employees

## When should I use an EAS?

The EAS can help with a wide variety of problems. Our fully qualified team of counsellors and experts are highly experienced in personal and work related issues and can support anyone experiencing difficulties with with certain issues including, but not limited to:

- Depression, anxiety, stress
- Grief and bereavement
- Addictions
- Relationship and marital problems
- Work stress and work-life balance issues.

## Who will I speak to?

When contacting the EAS you will get straight through to a fully qualified, accredited and experienced counsellor who will work with you to ensure you get the most appropriate help with whatever issue you are having.

Our counsellors can understand the root causes of an emotional issue and help with onwards referral to the most appropriate service.

## What happens on the initial call?

On first contact, the Case Manager will explain what the service can provide and its confidential nature. The only information that must be provided is where you work to initially access the service.

If follow up referral is necessary, in order to set up an employee's case file, the Case Manager will gather some additional information from the service user such as, name, date of birth and contact details.

This information is stored securely and is never shared with your school, colleagues or Department of Education and Skills. It is only ever shared when absolutely necessary with qualified and accredited professionals, and the service user will always be made aware of this beforehand.

## The information is gathered for a couple of reasons such as:

- To check service users's eligibility for the service.
- So that the team will be able to find and access the contact details and can get in touch with the service user if needs be.
- To enable the Case Manager to create and keep a full record of all of a service users's contact with the service to keep track of their case, referral etc. and ensure they are receiving all of the care they need as promptly and efficiently as possible.
- So that in the event of the Case Manager being unavailable when the service user is looking for help, the other members of the team will have the details of the case at hand and will be able to provide the service user with the most up to date and accurate guidance.
- So that wherever appropriate, the Case Manager will be able to share the necessary details with the relevant professional the service user is being referred to e.g. counsellor, legal expert etc.





# Managing Stress in the Workplace

Workplace stress is becoming a major health and safety concern for employees and employers alike. The profile of stress in the media has led to an increase in awareness of the negative effects that stress can cause and the number of workplace stress litigation claims are on the increase.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, companies have a duty to take measures to control that risk.

For example, The Irish High Court has indicated in a recent judgement that an employer who offers a confidential advice service with referral to appropriate counselling or treatment service is unlikely to be found in breach of duty.

However, if you are aware that an employee is struggling to cope at work, the onus is on the organisation and managers to actively provide support and make accommodations to help that employee cope better. Most managers don't know what to do in these situations and feel ill prepared to manage them effectively.

## Understanding stress

A definition of stress is "the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them". There is a difference between pressure and stress. It is important to recognise that some pressure is good and helps us to perform at our best, but too much can lead to poor performance and negative health effects.

## Pressure & performance

Pressure is inevitable. While it can stimulate individuals to achieve, grow and learn it can also lead to periods of stress. The ways in which people respond to pressure impacts directly on their performance and wellbeing. It is vital to manage pressure effectively, and as managers it is important to recognise and understand how pressure affects employees. Too much or too little pressure can be harmful.

## Early warning signs

One of the most effective ways of managing pressures on your employee is to be aware of some of the early warning signs of excess stress. Here are some things to watch out for:

### Physiological

- Weight loss or weight gain
- Frequent colds or flu
- Increase in frequency of lateness
- Increase in accidents
- Decrease in attention to personal hygiene/care

### Cognitive

- Prone to errors
- Forgetful
- Decrease in alertness
- Decrease in concentration
- Disruptive behaviour at work

### Emotional

- Frequent mood swings
- Apathy
- Hostility
- Tearfulness
- Change in social behaviour with colleagues

## Behavioural

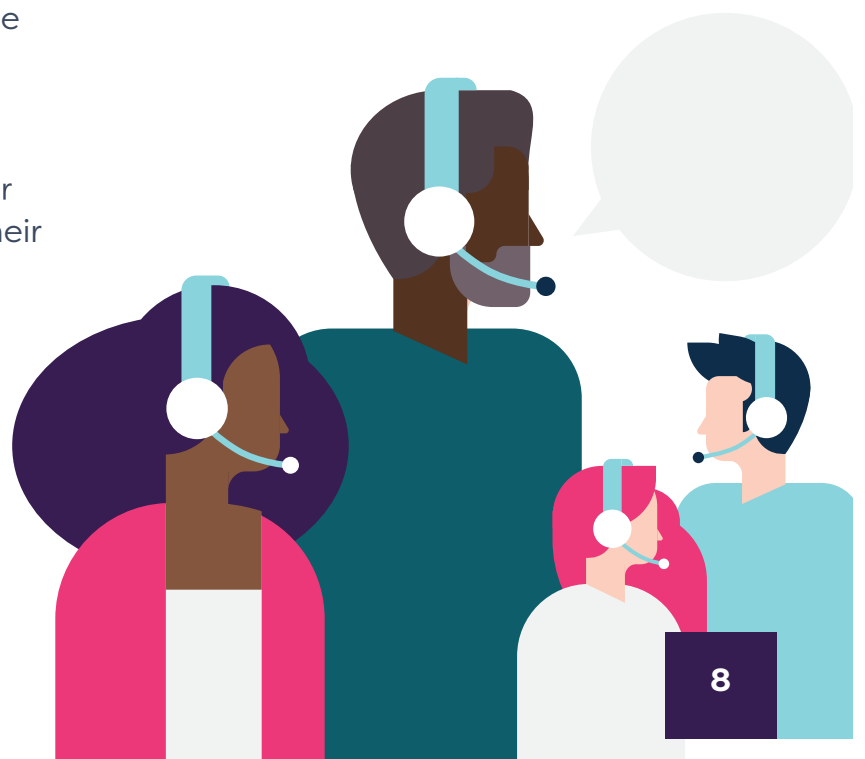
- Change in the quality/quantity of work
- Missed appointments and deadlines
- Lack of social interest
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty following instructions

## The most important thing to watch out for when trying to identify signs and symptoms of stress is change.

If we consider a time when we have ourselves been under stress, such as just before a deadline, often we behave differently than we normally would. We can become short-tempered, agitated, aggressive, pre-occupied and antisocial. Sometimes it is difficult to notice these changes over a long period of time so it is important to look closely at any changes in routines, social interactions, general mood and the quality of someone's work. Some common symptoms are listed above.

When stress becomes overwhelming and it is difficult to see how we can rectify the situation, counselling can be particularly helpful in trying to help an individual identify alternative options and strategies for coping.

The longer it takes for someone to ask for help, the more disruption the issue will cause in someone's life and the worse the stress will become. For example, when someone gets into financial difficulties they may become angry, pre-occupied and stressed, this may in turn affect their work, which could lead to them losing their job, which will obviously make their financial situation much worse.







# Dos & Don'ts for Reducing Workplace Stress

The HSE has identified six causes of stress in organisations: demands, control, relationships, support, change and role. The following recommended dos and don'ts are supported by the Health & Safety Authority.

## Demands

Do:

- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding
- Provide realistic deadlines
- Provide adequate training and resources for doing the job
- Design jobs that provide meaning and stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills
- Provide sufficient challenge/pressure to keep staff motivated and interested in their work
- Attend to the physical environment –take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, extra noise levels, vibration, dust etc. where possible
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse, and take steps to deal with it

Don't:

- Ask people to do tasks that they are not trained to do
- Encourage staff to take work home with them
- Allocate more work to a person or faculty unless they have the resources to cope with it
- Allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours

## Control

Do:

- Allow staff some control over the pace of their work
- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision making
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work
- Negotiate shift work schedules

Don't:

- Monitor employees movements in detail (including toilet breaks)
- Monitor working style, unless necessary
- Ask staff to stay late without notice

## Relationships

Do:

- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in work teams
- Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers
- Provide support for staff who work in isolation
- Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other

Don't:

- Allow ANY bullying behaviour

## Support

Do:

- Ensure that employees receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job
- Provide constructive, supportive advice at annual appraisal
- Provide flexibility in work schedules, where possible
- Allow phased return to work after long-term sickness absence
- Hold regular meetings
- Deal sensitively with employees experiencing problems outside work

Don't:

- Trivialise the problems of others
- Discriminate against people on grounds of sex, race or disability or for any other reason

## Change

Do:

- Explain what the school wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) take place
- Consult with employees at an early stage, and throughout the change process
- Involve your employees in the planning process so that they understand how their work fits in

Don't:

- Delay communicating any new developments. This will help reduce rumours spreading

## Role

Do:

- Provide a clear job description
- Define work structures clearly, so that all employees know who is doing what and why
- Give all new employees a thorough induction to your school
- Define work objectives (e.g. through a personal work plan)
- Avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of two parties

Don't:

- Make changes to the scope of someone's job, or their responsibilities (e.g. at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what will be required of them and accepts it



