

## 6. Focus on pressure of work and stress

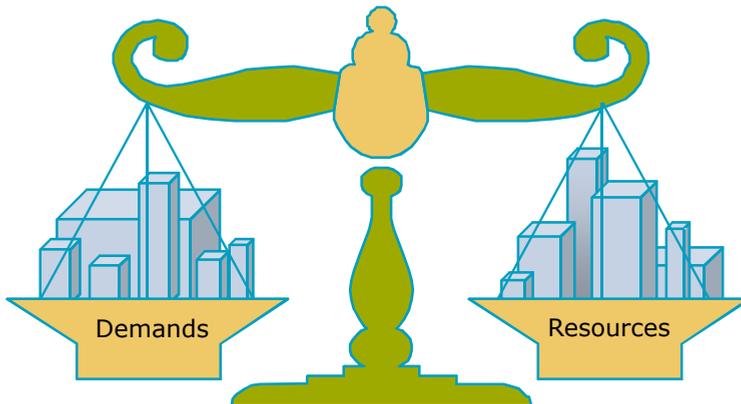
### Stress – the facts

Stress is the body's 'flee or fight' reaction that is automatically activated when exposed to mental or physical activity on the edge of what we can cope with. The brain signals the adrenal cortex to produce adrenalin – the catalyst for the rapid changes that occur. The central nervous system is also affected, raising awareness and speeding up reactions. Together they act to help the body escape acute danger. If the body stays in its alert condition for too long, however, it leads to wear on the organism.



“Stress is not an illness, it is a condition. It is a natural reaction to an imbalance between the resources we have and the demands we make on it. There can be several reasons for such an imbalance arising from work and home life. If it persists for a long time, stress can lead to disease.”

*This definition of stress is by stress researcher Dr. Bo Netterström.*



### Reasons for stress aboard

- Demands that are impossible to live up to
- Unclear expectations for one's performance
- Lack of qualifications and/or experience
- Lack of knowledge, oversight or information about the job
- Little opportunity to make use of abilities and qualifications
- Little influence on the job and/or organization of work
- Unresolved conflicts aboard
- Meaningless work
- Lack of support from management and workmates

- Uncertainty of employment
- Work/ life imbalance
- Social isolation

### **Signs of stress**

Be aware of signs of stress – in the crew as a whole and as individuals

#### **General signs of stress in the crew**

- Poor motivation and efficiency
- Poor quality and service.
- Meetings and agreements cancelled
- Aggressive atmosphere
- No humour

#### **Signs of stress in the individual**

As a manager or employee, be aware of the symptoms and signs of stress described below. This applies if you experience them yourself or see/hear a colleague complaining or reporting several of the symptoms below which are physical, mental and behavioural.

Physical symptoms:

- Tense muscles in neck, body
- Frequent colds and flu
- Allergy
- Raised pulse
- Cardiovascular disease
- Head/stomach ache
- Shaking/nervous tic
- Sleeplessness
- Fainting
- Fatigue

Mental symptoms:

- Bad mood
- Endless worries
- Irritability/anger
- Less desire to socialise with others
- Loss of/increased appetite
- Feeling pressurised at work
- Difficulty concentrating/remembering
- Depression



*A feeling of not being able to live up to the demands of work can cause stress.*

#### Behavioural symptoms:

- Sleeplessness
- Increased intake of alcohol, coffee and tobacco
- Drug abuse
- Anger and aggression
- Isolation, lack of emotion
- Reduced motivation and commitment
- Reduced performance
- Increased sick leave

#### **Difference between being busy and stress**

- Being busy is most often associated with the wish and motivation to tackle jobs that need doing.
- You get energy and satisfaction by doing the job and pleasure from having reached your target.
- Such feelings are totally absent when suffering stress.
- There is no pleasure or energy and you just go on to the next task immediately.

#### **Prevent stress – make for better well-being**

Generally, a good sense of well-being aboard means fewer conflicts and less stress, and even if they do arise, the crew will be more confident that they can be dealt with them by themselves or with help from a manager.



*Plan work so crew get their rest.*

As a manager, creating well-being means you should act as follows:

- Prevent stress and 'short fuses' by organizing duties appropriately.
- Create clear frameworks and help by prioritizing duties.
- Give crew the opportunity to influence their duties.
- Take responsibility for creating a preventative culture aboard.
- Work to develop standard agreements for good relations aboard (see the Communication Tool p. 76).

### **Preventative strategies**

#### **At the joint level and the role of management in tackling stress**

- Make stress and well-being the subject of general discussion aboard (see Methods for general meetings on well-being p. 85).
- Set clear goals for the process.
- Make demands on your own management/company.
- Management is responsible for prioritizing duties.
- Feed-back to crew help prevent stress.
- Management planning should be predictable and realistic.
- Social and professional support.
- Look after yourself – a stressed-out manager is not a good role model and stress is contagious.

#### **At the individual level**

- Meet your targets and expectations in your work and your opportunities.
- Identify what exactly makes you stressed-out in your work and speak to your line manager and colleagues about it.
- Try to influence your duties.

- Use your social network on shore and aboard. Just identifying problems reduces your stress.
- Take exercise, meditate or relax.
- Work on your limits and say no.
- Set clear targets for what you want out of your job, your family and your whole life.
- Consider the options you actually have for reducing your level of stress instead of complaining to everybody. Moaning about things will not remove your stress.
- Think of workable solutions when you have relationship problems and ensure that your solution meets everybody's reasonable needs.
- Match your level of ambition and performance to the pressures on your time and work. None of us is superhuman.

## **Bullying**

Managers are especially responsible for ensuring a good mental working environment aboard, especially when it comes to bullying. As a manager, you need to take bullying seriously and it is important that you take a constructive approach to addressing and dealing with conflicts.

### **Definition of bullying:**

- Bullying arises when one or more people regularly and over an extended period, or repeatedly and abusively, subject one or more other people to offensive actions that the victim sees as wounding or humiliating.
- Aggressive actions only become bullying when those subjected to them are unable to defend themselves.
- Teasing that both parties regard as good-natured, or occasional rows are not bullying.

The definition comes from the Danish Working Environment Service's guidance on "Bullying and sexual harassment".

### **Bullying actions**

Bullying can happen and be expressed in many ways. Here are the most ordinary situations that managers should be aware of:

- Keeping back essential information
- Wounding remarks
- Reducing or taking away responsibility and duties without justification
- Backbiting or exclusion from the social and professional community
- Being told off or laughed at
- Threatened or actual physical attacks
- Animosity or silence in response to questions or attempts to talk
- Talking down the victim's job, performance at work or abilities
- Unpleasant written messages, for example e-mail
- Unpleasant teasing



*Be aware that work can involve conflicting demands.*

- Sneering or disparagement due for example to age or gender
- Being made to work on personal matters for example

**Examples of reasons for bullying:**

- Bullies who feel that their jobs are under threat may choose to run down and intrigue against competitors. They do so by making it sound as if they have professional objections and are acting in the best interests of the company.
- A new manager is seen as a threat to a group.
- Someone wishing to avoid harassment takes part in bullying another person so as to be accepted as one of the gang.
- A manager wishes to get rid of an employee but it turns out not to be so easy. The manager tries instead to make life miserable for the individual.

**Bullying can also arise as a result of other mental impacts in the working environment, such as:**

- Exaggerated, contradictory or unclear demands on employees.
- Differences in treatment.
- Change can lead to bullying if not accompanied by information and openness.
- A lack of constructive problem-solving in the workplace.
- Unclear values and standards for workplace conduct.
- Differences in attitudes and views between people in the workplace.

## 10 tips for managers on dealing with bullying

1. Be a good role model.  
The way you treat other people inspires them to do the same: Do not be a bully yourself, protect potential victims and show the crew that you will not put up with bullying.
2. Help establish a personnel policy that prevents bullying. Or follow up on the one you have. For example, make local agreements on the ground rules for "Good communication aboard" (see Toolkit p. 76).
3. Cover the mental working environment in the workplace risk assessment and ensure to follow up on any problems or hold a meeting in which you discuss well-being (see Toolkit p. 85).
4. Be open in employee appraisals and listen out for signals of bullying.  
Always take it seriously if an employee feels badly treated and chooses to report it.
5. Listen to the victim and the bully.  
Do not reach hasty conclusions. Try to get the parties to talk.
6. Make passive witness active in getting the bully to stop.
7. Take action if you detect bullying.  
You are jointly responsible if, as manager, you just let it happen.
8. Find simple, practical solutions.
9. Show the crew that they can come to you if they are bullied and contact other people in the company from whom the bully can ask for help.
10. Take care not to be misunderstood - and not seen as a bully yourself.

### What the manager can also do

#### Day-to-day dialogue

Routine dialogue between management and the rest of the crew is vital for being aware of the mental working environment and for working on it.

#### Employee appraisals

Whilst these appraisal meetings are intended for employee development, they can also give the impression an indication of conditions at work and well-being aboard.

**If you want to know more**

"Stress", Thomas Milsted, Jyllandspostens Press 2006 (Only available in Danish).

"The 7 habits of highly effective people", Stephen R. Covey, Simon & Schuster, 2004.

"Stress in the workplace", Bo Netterstrøm (Only available in Danish).

Links:

[www.center-for-stress.dk](http://www.center-for-stress.dk)

[www.seahealth.dk](http://www.seahealth.dk)