



RECOGNISING DISTRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Distress can be caused by either work or external factors, such as a health condition or personal crises. While you may not be able to control external factors other than offer support, you are able to control to an extent factors at work that may be contributing to your staff member's distress. It is your role as a manager to monitor your employees and take note in any changes that may be unusual of their 'normal' day to day behaviour.



SIGNS OF DISTRESS

A person who is experiencing 'distress' may display some of these signs. These may be noticeable over time (i.e. not just having 'bad day'), or be a marked change from their usual presentation in the workplace:

- **Behaviour** is unusual or inappropriate, for example, aggression, avoidance, withdrawal, 'odd' or bizarre behaviour.
- **Cognitive** difficulties, for example, poor concentration, memory lapses, confusion, poor decision making
- Continuing **emotional** signs, for example, negativity, over-reactions, irritability, outbursts
- Accompanying **physical** signs, for example headaches, hangovers, fatigue, significant weight changes.

HOW MIGHT THIS LOOK IN THE WORKPLACE?

- ✚ Turning up late
- ✚ Appearing fatigued/tired
- ✚ Easily angry or frustrated with tasks or people
- ✚ Avoidance behaviour. e.g. not undertaking key tasks, avoiding being around work colleagues
- ✚ Not meeting reasonable deadlines
- ✚ Not able to manage multiple tasks/demands
- ✚ Lack of motivation
- ✚ Lethargy (reduced energy)- "Flat"
- ✚ Taking significant amounts of leave
- ✚ Reports of frequent illness, injury, pain, discomfort, emotional distress, poor sleep, tension, headaches
- ✚ Emotionality e.g. crying or angry outbursts
- ✚ Requiring a lot of guidance/supervision
- ✚ Tasks may take longer-loss of efficiency
- ✚ Sensitive to feedback/perceived criticism
- ✚ Mental fogginess or easily distracted.





WORK FACTORS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO EMPLOYEE DISTRESS

Some of the factors at work that could be contributing to your staff member's distress include:

- ✚ expectations that they will work long hours or take work home with them
- ✚ excessive workloads, unrealistic deadlines or unreasonable expectations of work rate
- ✚ inadequate skills, training, resources and support
- ✚ poorly specified roles and responsibilities
- ✚ unclear performance expectations and performance management systems
- ✚ boring or repetitive work, or too little to do
- ✚ lack of control over work activities
- ✚ poor work/life balance
- ✚ interpersonal conflict with other team members
- ✚ bullying or harassment
- ✚ poor communication from management, particularly at times of change
- ✚ fears about job security
- ✚ critical incidents, for example natural disasters or threats from clients
- ✚ perceived lack of fairness and transparency in decision-making.



In the first instance, you should open up a sensitive and confidential discussion with your staff member about what you have observed, and try to address the issue wherever possible. Working with your staff member to find a solution as soon as possible can help prevent any further psychological illness occurring.

*'Are you ok?
You don't seem
yourself.'*

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- ✚ Employee Assistance Program 1300 360 364
- ✚ Manager Assist 1300 360 364
- ✚ Staff Support and Rehabilitation Advisor 3365 1146
- ✚ Faculty HR
- ✚ OHS 3365 2365