

Supporting workers

It's important to talk about stress and create an open and honest environment at work. This can help workers to talk about how they are feeling, and to get the support they need.

Talking about work-related stress

Managers should be sensitive and supportive when talking to workers about work-related stress.

When a manager becomes aware that someone is experiencing stress, they should arrange an informal chat in private. They should:

- make time for the meeting in the working day
- be open minded about how the person might be feeling
- ask open questions
- listen to what they are being told
- try to identify the cause of the stress
- work together on possible solutions

Managers should support workers by signposting to any internal or external specialist help, if needed.

Find out more about:

- [supporting mental health at work](#)
- [specialist mental health support resources](#)

Acas also offers [training for managers on mental health in the workplace](#).

If someone does not feel comfortable talking to their manager

If someone does not feel comfortable talking to their manager, they might be able to talk to someone else. For example:

- another line manager
- someone they work with

If available, they could talk to:

- a trade union representative, if they're a member of a trade union
- a mental health champion
- an employee support network

Being clear about confidentiality

An employer should reassure the worker that they will not share anything they tell them with anyone else. But if there is a good reason to do so, they should be clear about who they'll share it with and why.

For example, the line manager might need to:

- tell human resources if it involves taking time off work
- get specialist help if the worker's safety is at risk

Making an action plan

When a worker is experiencing work-related stress, they should agree with their employer what they can do to reduce it. One way of doing this is to put in place an action plan.

This should include:

- what the problem is
- the proposed solution
- what actions to take to achieve the solution
- the dates by which to achieve each action
- a date to review the plan and see if it has achieved its aim

[Use a Wellness Action Plan from Mind](#)

Making adjustments at work

If a worker is disabled their employer must make [reasonable adjustments](#).

If a worker is experiencing work-related stress but is not disabled, the employer should still talk with them about adjustments that might help. Often it's enough to agree simple changes to working arrangements or responsibilities.

This might include:

- flexible working hours
- allowing more rest breaks
- giving someone different responsibilities
- helping them to prioritise their workload
- providing training or mentoring

When making any adjustments, managers should:

- review them regularly to check that they are effective
- consider how to support the rest of the team so that they're not overloaded

Protecting workers from discrimination

Stress on its own is not classed as a medical condition. However, stress might affect someone with a physical or mental health impairment classed as a disability. They would be protected from discrimination.

For example, Sam has been diagnosed with anxiety. Work-related stress is making Sam's anxiety worse. Sam must not be discriminated against because of their anxiety.

By law (Equality Act 2010), someone is disabled if both of these apply:

- they have a 'physical or mental impairment'
- the impairment 'has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'

Substantial means 'more than minor or trivial' and long-term means 'has lasted or likely to last for 12 months or more'.

If a worker is disabled, their employer must not discriminate against them because of their disability.

Find out more about:

- [disability discrimination at work](#)
- [what disability means by law](#)
- [understanding mental health and the law](#)

Disciplinary or grievance procedures

A disciplinary or grievance procedure can be very stressful. An employer should carefully balance wellbeing and the need not to delay a procedure unnecessarily.

An employer should always follow:

- their own policy, if they have one
- the [Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures](#)

The Acas Code applies to anyone with the [legal status of employee](#). But it's good practice for employers to follow it for all workers.

Employers should consider how they can provide support to avoid causing more stress. For example, allowing the person to be accompanied when there is no legal right to be.

The employer must make [reasonable adjustments](#) if the worker is disabled.

If a worker is not able to attend a meeting

If a worker does not feel able to attend a meeting due to work-related stress, the employer should consider rearranging.

In some cases, with the worker's agreement, it might be appropriate to get professional medical advice on how to carry out the procedure fairly.

If an employer believes they cannot delay the procedure or they want to proceed without the worker, they should [contact the Acas helpline](#).

Related content

[More support for managing disability at work](#)