



COVID-19

DEALING WITH STRESSED COLLEAGUES

Managing your own stress levels can be taxing enough, but how can you help someone else with theirs, without it becoming your burden?

It can be difficult to help someone who appears stressed and unhappy - how do you approach the subject, what should you say, and how do you know when to listen and when to offer advice?

How to recognise a colleague who may need help

People can experience stress whatever level their job is, but how we react to pressure is different for all of us. Some people can seem to be coping well and then erupt in anger, or dissolve in tears, while others let you know how much they have on all the time.

Some of the warning signs to look out for include moodiness, indecision, forgetfulness, and being cynical and demotivated.¹

How can you help?

Talking to other people can be a great way of coping with stress. It can give a different perspective on the problem, provide ideas on how to deal with the stress, and provide reassurance and support.



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How to approach someone you suspect of needing help

Approaching someone who you think could be suffering from stress can be difficult. If you know them well, you could approach the subject head on and ask how they are doing. Or, perhaps mention that you have a lot of work on and ask if they also do. Talking to people can help them realise they are not alone in feeling pressure. All they may be looking for is a little reassurance that they are coping and that it's quite normal to feel some degree of pressure.

If you don't know them very well, you could make an effort to be more approachable or speak to another colleague you



know they are close to. When you are stressed little things that go badly can seem a lot worse than they really are, but little acts of kindness can go a long way. Why not offer to make them a cup of coffee or make an effort to say hello in the mornings? Or, perhaps ask if they want anything when you pop out for lunch? They may start to open up to you.

What can you suggest they do?

There are many things they could do to help them reduce the stress they encounter in their daily working lives. They may need a little help working out exactly what is causing their stress; is their workload too great? Do they have poor time management? Maybe they don't understand what is expected of them? Talking to you may help them put their problems into perspective and encourage them to take positive actions.

An easy first step is to make sure desks are clean and organised so the things that are needed are to hand. Next, make sure the day is structured and write a list of everything that needs to be done. Prioritise the work that needs most urgent attention.

If deadlines are not going to be met, make sure the relevant people are informed. Work that is not completed due to poor time management and organisation is a reflection of the individual, but work not completed due to unrealistic deadlines or excessive demands has to be reassessed.

If personal issues are the problem, and not something you want to be involved in or that they want to talk about, perhaps you can suggest that they talk to friends or family, or maybe take a little time off. Be sensitive to their feelings and what you know of the situation.

How to prevent stress from being passed to you

Coping with your own stress is difficult enough, but having to help someone else cope with their stress as well can turn



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into a burden. If you honestly don't have time to help a colleague or are worried that their stress will affect you negatively, seek help. Talk to your manager or to your human resources department in confidence.

If you do choose to help a colleague, it is important that you don't allow their stress to impact on your daily working life, for example, make a point of talking to them at their desk rather than at your desk - this way you control the amount of time you spend with them.

Be firm. If you are really busy explain that you cannot discuss things at the moment and it would be better when you can give them your full attention at a later time. If you can't give them the time they need, suggest someone else that they could talk to who may be able to help.

Make sure you follow good time management and organisational practices to ensure that you have a coping strategy for yourself in place when faced with stress before helping someone else tackle their stress.

Offering practical advice such as the above and showing that you are happy to listen and talk things over when needed will make a big difference to someone.

References:

1. How it affects us. Stress Management Society. <https://www.stress.org.uk/how-it-affects-us>. Visited 10 June 2020.



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Together, all the way.®



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