

# Talking Toolkit

Preventing work-related stress  
in construction



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# Introduction

Stress, depression and anxiety are the second biggest cause of work-related ill health in the construction industry. The earlier this problem is tackled, the less impact it will have on workers and business. Taking positive action can help to create a more engaged workforce, boost productivity and save money. This toolkit is aimed at small businesses with a regular workforce (employed and contracted) who want to start looking at this issue. It will also help site managers wanting to identify project-specific issues.

**The earlier this problem is tackled, the less impact it will have on workers and business.**

# Purpose of this toolkit

Work-related stress is not an illness, but it can make you ill. HSE defines stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’. Workers feel stress when they can’t cope with pressure and other issues. It can affect people differently – what stresses one person may not affect another. Starting the conversation is an important first step in preventing work-related stress. This toolkit will help you to do this.

Acting on work-related stress also helps to address some key aspects relating to mental ill health. The two often go together as work-related stress can aggravate an existing mental health problem, making it more difficult to control. However, they can also exist independently. Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. Common mental health problems can be caused by things unconnected to work. Some aspects of mental health therefore fall outside of work-related stress and this toolkit. The construction industry has introduced its own wider initiatives to help promote positive mental health and support those in need.



**Starting the conversation is an important first step in preventing work-related stress. This toolkit will help you to do this.**



# Using the talking toolkit

There are six main themes linked to work-related stress. By starting simple and practical conversations in these areas, you will be taking steps to reduce pressure, manage potential stressors and limit the negative impact work might be having on staff. The toolkit outlines how workers should feel in relation to these themes and provides a series of questions to help explore what the issue might be where this is not the case.

The toolkit is designed to be used flexibly. There is no set format for these conversations nor how they should be conducted. Here are some tips:

- **Timing:** This depends on what works best for you. You could have one conversation a week.
- **Theme:** Your conversations could focus on one theme at a time and you could cover the themes that you feel are most important first.
- **Setting:** The conversations could be held on a one-to-one basis or with a whole team – during a tea break, for example.
- **Time:** Make time for these discussions. They don't have to be more than 10 or 15 minutes for each theme.
- **Openness:** The toolkit relies on open and honest discussion around issues. Everyone needs to listen to what is being said.
- **Questions:** The questions are intended to help start a discussion. They are not prescriptive; the important thing is to have a conversation that is relevant to your work.
- **Solutions then actions:** These should be agreed together.

It is important to remember that the overall responsibility for managing work-related stress rests with the employer. You need to ensure that supervisors or site managers are appropriately supported when tackling this issue. This toolkit is not the only resource you should use if there are existing work-related stress problems. More help and information is available at **the HSE work-related stress website**.

**The toolkit relies on open and honest discussion around issues. Everyone needs to listen to what is being said.**



# Conversation one – Demands

## How you should feel:

- You can cope with the demands of your job.
- You are provided with achievable demands in relation to the hours that you work.
- Your skills are matched to the demands of your job.
- Concerns about your work environment are listened to and addressed.

## Talk through the following questions:

### • Does your workload generally feel achievable?

*Think about whether there are enough people to do the work and if deadlines are realistic.*

### • Have you had sufficient training to carry out your job?

*Think about whether you can apply your skills and knowledge in full or whether you are limited or challenged in what you can do. Do you need any additional training?*

### • Are your working hours and commuting times reasonable?

*Think about whether you have sufficient breaks in the work day. Do you have at least 11 hours' rest before the start of your next shift? Are there suitable arrangements in place to support you if you have a long commute?*

### • What changes could be made to help you cope with the issues that you have talked about?

*Think about what you and your site supervisor or manager could do differently.*

## Agreed Action Plan

# Conversation two – Control

## How you should feel:

- You are consulted over the way your work is organised and undertaken.
- You have regular opportunities to discuss and provide input to the work.
- You are encouraged to use your skills and initiative.
- You are consulted over things that affect your work.
- You are encouraged to develop new skills.

## Talk through the following questions:

- Do you have a say in how your work is planned?

*For example, are you consulted on risk assessments and method statements?*

- Do you feel that your job is secure?

- Do you have competing demands or requests which you find difficult to complete?

- What changes could be made to help you manage the issues that you have talked about?

*Think about what you and your site supervisor or manager could do differently.*

## Agreed Action Plan





# Conversation three – Support

- How you should feel:**
- You receive information and support from other workers and site managers.
  - You know what support is available and how to access it.
  - You know how to get the resources you need.
  - You receive regular and constructive feedback.

**Talk through the following questions:**

- **Do you think that this site is a positive place to work? Do you feel valued?**

*Think about the overall working environment and the welfare facilities provided. Think also about the support you get from your colleagues and site manager.*

- **Do you have the time and opportunity to discuss any underlying or emerging problems and/or pressures?**

- **Do you know who to talk to and are you comfortable asking for support if you need it?**

*Think about where you would go for help if you were experiencing an issue and whether you would feel comfortable doing so. Do you know how to access support if you need it?*

- **What measures could be put in place to improve the support you get and tackle the issues that you have talked about?**

*Think about what you and your site supervisor or manager could do differently.*

## Agreed Action Plan

# Conversation four – Relationships

- How you should feel:**
- You are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours on site such as bullying and harassment.
  - Positive behaviours are promoted on site.
  - There are agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour.
  - Managers are enabled and encouraged to deal with unacceptable behaviour.
  - You are aware of the systems in place to enable you to report unacceptable behaviour and are encouraged to do so.

**Talk through the following questions:**

- **Do you feel that all people on site are treated fairly and with respect?**

*Think about whether you have experienced or witnessed unacceptable behaviour. If you have, do you think it was dealt with satisfactorily?*

- **Do you have good relationships with those with whom you work and your site supervisor or manager?**

- **Is your opinion sought and can you have an honest and open conversation with the site management, other contractors and/or the client?**

*Think about whether you can you raise issues and trust that they will be dealt with.*

- **What improvements could be put in place to improve working relationships and help you cope with the issues that you have talked about?**

*Think about what you and your site supervisor or manager could do differently.*

**Agreed Action Plan**



# Conversation five – Role

## How you should feel:

- You understand your role and responsibilities.
- Your requirements on site are clear to you.
- You can ask for clarification or raise your concerns if you are uncertain of your role.

## Talk through the following questions:

- **Are you clear about your responsibilities?**

*Also, think about any informal or assumed roles that you have. Are you clear about what is expected?*

- **Do you feel that you are given opportunities to develop and use the skills you possess?**

- **What changes could be made to help you better understand your role and cope with the issues that you have talked about?**

*Think about what you and your site supervisor or manager could do differently.*

## Agreed Action Plan



# Conversation six – Change

## How you should feel:

- Your site management keep you informed when changes are being made.
- You get enough information to understand why changes are being made.
- You are consulted on changes and given the opportunity to influence the proposals.
- You are aware of the impact of any changes and, if necessary, you are given training that will support you.

## Talk through the following questions:

- Do you feel that your site handles change well?

*Think about recent examples where things have changed and the impact of those changes.*

- Are you made aware of changes on your site, especially when they affect your job, before they are carried out?

*Can you provide input to the changes before they are made?*

- Do you feel that you are given enough notice when you move to another site or project?

- What measures could be taken to help you cope with the changes that you have talked about?

*Think about recent examples where things have changed and the impact of those changes.*

## Agreed Action Plan





## Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk). You can order HSE priced publications at <https://books.hse.gov.uk>

HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This publication is available on the HSE website at [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/talking\\_toolkit.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/talking_toolkit.htm)

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