

Tips for managing worker stress from COVID-19

Types of stress your staff might be experiencing

There are things that may stress your workers during the COVID-19 pandemic which may not be work related. Even though you may not have legal obligations in relation to that stress, you should take this into account, and if you are able to, offer workers increased support and flexibility to get through this difficult time. These stressors could include some or all of the following:

- 1 **Financial stress** e.g. from reduced hours, loss of employment (such as their own secondary employment or their partners)
- 2 **Balancing work and caring responsibilities** e.g. from trying to work while also meeting the needs of children and others unable to attend their usual activities or care arrangements
- 3 **Concern for vulnerable family members/friends** e.g. from concerns they might get the virus or increased emotional stress at not being able to visit and assist elderly relatives
- 4 **Change to activities that support good mental health** e.g. reduced exercise because of closure of gyms, reduced holidays because of travel limitations and reduced social interactions.

How you can support your staff

- 1 Regularly **ask your workers** how they are going and if anything is stressing them.
Where workers are distressed about the challenging conditions caused by the pandemic,
- 2 **acknowledge their feelings** about the situation and **reassure workers** they are doing what they can in the circumstances.
- 3 **Stay informed** with information from official sources and regularly communicate or share this information with workers.
- 4 **Consult your workers** and representatives on any risks to their psychological health and physical health and safety.
- 5 **Support** innovations to address the psychosocial risks where you reasonably can.
- 6 Provide workers with a **point of contact** to discuss their concerns.
- 7 Make **workplace information** available in a central place.
- 8 Inform workers about their **entitlements** if they become unfit for work or have caring responsibilities.
Inform workers about their **rights** under WHS laws, including the right to stop work in certain circumstances and the right not to be discriminated against or disadvantaged for raising work health and safety concerns in the workplace.
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- 10 Proactively **support workers** who you identify to be more at risk of workplace psychological injury.
- 11 **Refer** workers to appropriate work related mental health and wellbeing support services, such as employee assistance programs or the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service.