



Health and Safety Toolbox Talks

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TOOLBOX TALK:

Stress Management

Speaker: Safety Manager/Foreman

Audience: Workers

I. Introduction

We are here today to focus on stress management and job stress, specifically to talk about what stress is, its threats to health and happiness, sources of job stress, and solutions.

Stress is a buzzword we hear all the time in lots of different contexts – stress at work, stress at home. We hear about it in commercials, newspaper ads, from our doctors, from people who care about us. What does stress mean to you? *Ask workers.*

Stress is an important topic for everyone and especially for people working in the construction industry, since the job is both physically and mentally demanding.

II. Different Types of Stress?

There are different types of stress. A stressor can be a one time or short-term occurrence, or it can be long lasting.¹ We are going to focus on work-related stress, which we will call job stress. **Job Stress** is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the job demands and requirements do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor physical and mental health and even injury.

Stress is not a sign of weakness or failure. In fact, it probably indicates your overall investment in the work you are doing.

Not all stress is bad. Stress can motivate people to perform, like when they need to take a test or interview for a new job. It can even help you in a dangerous situation in which you need to run fast for safety. However, job stress is often about bigger issues that require solutions.²

III. Relevance of Topic: Why Stress is Bad for Your Well-being

Stress affects everyone from time to time. A report published by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) states that 40% of workers report that their job is “very or extremely stressful.” ¹ Does that number strike anyone as higher than you would have thought?

Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than are any other life stressor – more so than even financial problems or family problems.² Again, surprising?

Health care expenses are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress. Chronic job stress can put you at risk for:

- Substance abuse
- Aggression³
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Musculoskeletal Disorders
- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Workplace Injury
- Suicide
- Cancer
- Ulcers
- Impaired Immune Function

IV. What Causes Work Stress?

Working conditions can play a direct role in causing job stress. Individual and situational factors also contribute to stress related to work. Conditions that may lead to stress include:

- The Design of Tasks (heavy workload, not getting breaks, etc.)
- Management Style (poor communication between workers and management)
- Co-worker Relationships
- Work Rules (roles and expectations are not clear)
- Career Concerns (job insecurity, lack of growth opportunity or promotion, unexpected changes)
- Environmental Conditions of Work (unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions like noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems)

IV. Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms of Stress

You may not always be aware of your body's response to stress. Routine stress may be hard to notice at first because of the source of the stress is constant and does not have a clear start or stop. Warning Signs of Stress include³:

- Headache
- Sleep disturbances/difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Short Temper
- Upset Stomach
- Job dissatisfaction
- Low morale

V. How to Deal with Job Stress (how to make *changes* that lead to less stress)

Anybody here have some things they do to get rid of stress? There are many ways!

1. It is helpful first to reflect on exactly what part of work is causing stress. Look back to the causes of stress previously mentioned.
 - a. What elements can you change?
 - b. What elements require communication with others?
 - c. What can be changed about your work environment?
 - d. What resources do you need?
2. Ways to Manage Stress at Work:
 - a. Utilize your **social connections**
 - i. Talk to people around you at work including co-workers or your boss if you feel comfortable, and at home
 - b. Take **breaks** when you need them³
 - c. Be **aware** of your health and stay on top of your care
 - d. **Exercise** to boost your mood and reduce stress
 - e. Do **relaxation** activities (even setting aside time to sit and listen to music without distractions counts)
 - f. Know when to **talk to a healthcare provider** if you are overwhelmed
3. Characteristics of healthy, low-stress work organizations that you can work towards with your colleagues:
 - a. Recognition of employees for good work performance (telling someone they did well, giving bonuses for good work)

- b. Opportunities for career development (allowing workers opportunities to advance)
 - c. An organizational culture that values the individual worker
 - d. Management actions that are consistent with organizational values (rewarding employees for good safety behavior)
 - e. Are there any other examples you can think of?
4. Everybody contributes to a healthy, low-stress culture at work. It is on everyone to work together, communicate, and help each other combat job stress.

VI. Conclusion

We have a limited amount of time here, so I want to make sure you take note of the resources we have provided. It is important to remember that you are your own biggest ally when it comes to stress. Though sometimes stress can be visible to friends, co-workers, and loved ones, *you* are the best judge of how you feel and what is causing you stress.

Resources

1. "5 Things You Should Know About Stress." National Institute of Mental Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>
2. "Stress in the Workplace" Safety and Health (2016, March 01) <http://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/stress-in-the-workplace-2>
3. "Workplace Stress." NIOSH Science Blog (2007. December 3). <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2007/12/03/stress/>

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Manage your job stress

Nearly everyone experiences stress at some time in their life.

It's not a sign of weakness or failure—it likely shows your investment in your work. However, stress is a sign that you may need to make some changes.

How to deal with job stress

- Reflect on exactly what part of work is causing stress
 - What elements can you personally change?
 - What elements require communication with others?
- Ways to manage stress on your own
 - **Exercise** to help boost your mood and reduce stress
 - Do **relaxation** activities (Even setting aside time to relax and listen to music without distractions counts)
 - Set **goals** and priorities
 - Use your **social connections**: Talk to people who can provide emotional and other support. Ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations
 - Take **breaks** when you need them
 - Get **other points of view** from friends or colleagues
 - Be aware of your **health** and stay on top of your care
 - Avoid resorting to alcohol for short-term relief
 - **Talk to a healthcare provider** if you are overwhelmed

Information on STRESS MANAGEMENT

These articles and resources can help you learn to cope with stress:

“Workplace Stress” NIOSH Science Blog (December 3, 2007)

blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2007/12/03/stress/

“Stress in the Workplace” Safety and Health (March 1, 2016)

www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/stress-in-the-workplace-2

“5 Things You Should Know About Stress.” National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml

Center for Workplace Mental Health website

workplacementalhealth.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Referral Helpline and Behavioral Health Treatment Locator

800-662-HELP (4357)
findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

University of Michigan Depression Center’s Tips for Coping At Work

www.depressiontoolkit.org/download/TipsforCopingatWork.pdf

“Right Direction” Work Depression Screening tool

www.righdirectionforme.com/DepressionatWork.html

