Stress toolbox talk: managing stress at work (free PDF)

29 CFR 1926.21, 1926.50, 1910.151, 1904.35, 1904.29

Date _____ Trainer _____ Location _____

Opening question

What are the biggest sources of stress on this job, and how can you tell when it is getting to you?

Why it matters

Stress is how your body and mind react to pressure, like tight deadlines, long hours, money worries or problems at home. A little pressure can keep you sharp, but stress that piles up for weeks wears you down, hurts your sleep and makes it harder to focus. On a jobsite, a worker who is distracted or rushing is more likely to miss a hazard, skip a step or make a wrong move.

Key points

1. **Know the signs of stress**
   Stress shows up in the body and in behavior: headaches, a tight neck or jaw, trouble sleeping, a short temper, worry you cannot shut off or pulling away from the crew. You might also notice more mistakes, near misses or forgotten steps. When you see these signs in yourself or a coworker, treat them as a warning, not a weakness.

2. **Stress and safety are connected**
   A stressed mind wanders, and rushing to catch up is often when people cut corners. Before a hazardous task, pause for a moment and check your head as well as your tools and equipment. If you are too distracted to work safely, tell your supervisor before the task starts, not after something goes wrong.

3. **Take control of what you can**
   Break a big day into smaller tasks, do the most important ones first and focus on one thing at a time. Take your breaks, drink water and eat real food, because a tired, hungry body handles pressure worse. If the schedule or workload is not realistic, say so early so the plan can change.

4. **Busy seasons and the holidays**
   Year-end deadlines, extra shifts, money worries, travel and family pressure can pile up at the same time. Plan time off early, set a budget and go easy on alcohol, which can make stress and sleep worse. Some people feel lonely or are grieving a loss during the holidays, so check in on coworkers who seem down.

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5 Talk to someone and look out for each other

Talking with a coworker, friend, family member or supervisor you trust can take some of the weight off. If a coworker seems stressed for weeks at a time, ask in private how they are really doing, listen without judging and help them find support. If your company has an employee assistance program (EAP), find out how to reach it before you need it. Anyone can call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night, and if someone is in immediate danger, call 911.

6 What OSHA says about stress

OSHA has no specific standard for workplace stress; the general duty to train still applies. In construction, the employer must instruct each employee in recognizing and avoiding unsafe conditions and the regulations that apply to their work environment. OSHA's recordkeeping rule also requires employers to have a reasonable procedure for employees to report work-related injuries and illnesses, and employers must not discharge or discriminate against any employee for reporting one (29 CFR 1904.35(b)(1) and (b)(1)(iv)).

29 CFR 1926.21(b)(2)

Scenario

Picture this: It is the week before a holiday, and the crew is behind schedule. A foreman has been working long days, sleeping badly and worrying about bills. He snaps at a helper, skips the pre-task check on a lift and rushes a cut he has made many times. A coworker notices he does not seem like himself. What should the coworker say or do, and what could the foreman do to get back in control?

Crew discussion

1. What are the most common sources of stress on our job, and which ones can we fix together?
2. What helps you deal with stress before it becomes too much?
3. What would you say to a coworker who seems stressed out for weeks at a time?
4. How can the company and our supervisors help reduce stress on this crew?

Bottom line **Notice the signs of stress in yourself and others, slow down before risky work and talk to someone before the pressure builds up.**

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Sign-in sheet / Hoja de asistencia

Topic / Tema Stress management / Manejo del estrés

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Trainer / Instructor _____ Location / Lugar _____ Company / Empresa _____

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