

# RISK SIMPLIFIED

## RESOURCES:

- [The American Institute of Stress](#)
- [PRISMtv – Stress Management](#)
- [Vector Solutions – Workplace Stress](#)

## QUESTIONS:

[Email PRISM Risk Control](#)

or call 916.850.7300

## Managing Stress in the Workplace

By Scarlett Sadler

According to various reports published by the American Institute of Stress (AIS), 40% of workers have reported their job was very or extremely stressful. Even though stress can come from many sources, workplace stress can lead to several concerns such as employee accidents, burnout, absenteeism, diminished productivity, turnover, and even workplace violence.

### How does an employee experience stress or become stressed?

Stress can be experienced differently from one employee to another, however by definition, **stress** is “a state of mental or emotional strain or tension from adverse or very demanding circumstances which cause strong feelings of worry or anxiety.” Stress is a perception, and when an employee perceives a situation as stressful, they may believe they do not have the resources to deal with it. The stress can linger in such a way that it gradually begins to affect an employee negatively. When employees experience stress in the workplace that cannot be managed or is perceived as a threat, it can set the stage for injury, illness, and chronic health concerns such as obesity, heart issues, high blood pressure, and an increased risk of mental health problems. Helping employees understand stress and how to manage their stress is very important.



### Understanding Stress

There are often situations or challenges that occur in our work environment that agencies are unaware of, leading to workplace stress. The less control an employee has over their work environment, the more likely they are to experience work related stress. Some causes of stress in the workplace include:

- Excessive workloads
- Unclear expectations
- Organizational change
- Limited resources
- Technology (Outdated equipment, Software)
- Low salaries
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Lack of control
- Lack of social support
- Environmental factors (Temperature, Lighting, Noise)

Often employees cannot control the demands that are placed on them; however, they can be empowered to control their response to those demands and explore solutions to help manage their stress. Stress can appear in many different forms, and it can appear differently amongst employees. What one employee perceives as stressful, another employee may perceive as enjoyable. Some signs of stress that might be present in the workplace are:

- Increased absenteeism and tardiness
- Poor memory, focus, and ability to reason
- Inability to take responsibility
- Increase in dangerous risk taking
- Poor communication, negative effect on relationships

Some of these indicators may result from a personal, non-work related situation or other underlying issues. It is critical for peers and supervisors to approach all concerns with poise and professionalism. If an employee appears to be experiencing workplace stress, it is important to ensure that the agency addresses concerns and is also prepared and familiar with the available resources such as its Employee Assistance Program (EAP).



## Managing Stress

Stress is not experienced universally, and accordingly, there are no universal stress management techniques. There are, however, various tools available that agencies can use to help employees eliminate or manage the cause of stress, including the following simple 5 step process:

1. **Acceptance** - Employees may not be able to control the job demands; however, they can control their response to those demands. Encourage employees to learn to accept things outside of their control.
2. **Evaluation** - Encourage employees to look at the facts and the obstacles they are facing. Ask employees to use practicality to determine what can be changed and what strategies can be used to move forward.
3. **Adjust** - Encourage employees to begin making small daily changes that include focusing on health and wellbeing. Remind employees they can control only what is within their control. Things like the weather, traffic, colleagues' behavior, and members of the public cannot be controlled.
4. **Focus** - Encourage employees to focus on a task, the problem, and the steps to complete the task. As an employee completes a step, suggest that they physically tick steps off of a checklist. This can reduce anxiety over a task and build confidence when visually seeing the completed task come to fruition.
5. **Thrive** - Moving forward, employees build resilience and look for opportunities to evaluate situations to add value and change. When an employee becomes vested in a solution to a problem, they feel valued. It allows for more creativity in their actions.

Employees are an agency's biggest asset. It is important for agencies not only to understand and recognize the signs of stress but to implement procedures to address stress in the workplace and provide resources to mitigate any concerns. For additional questions, please contact [Risk Control](#).

