

MANAGING STRESS DURING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Changes in the workplace such as restructuring, downsizing, or shifts in organizational priorities can create uncertainty and stress, often making it difficult for individuals to effectively manage daily responsibilities. Questions about possible loss of employment can understandably bring additional stress and anxiety. Recognizing normal stress responses and adopting strategies for both the workplace and home can help maintain our ability to function while managing with challenging times.

Common Reactions to Stress

During times of change, it is common to experience a range of emotional and physical stress responses, including:

- **Sleep disruptions:** Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restless nights may occur.
- **Emotional responses:** Feelings of helplessness, frustration, or fear of the unknown, may be challenging to manage. These feelings may lead to increased irritability or problematic anger, that cause us to act in ways that are hurtful to ourselves or those around us.
- **Distressed thinking:** Increased uncertainty can lead to overthinking, rumination, and a heightened sense of threat.
- **Panic:** Less commonly, physical symptoms, such as shortness of breath, racing heart, dizziness, and difficulty concentrating may arise.

Practical Actions to Manage Stress

During times of uncertainty, taking proactive steps can help manage stress and improve overall well-being. Below are practical strategies for both the workplace and home to maintain balance and resilience with the goals of *staying calm, focusing on the things you can control, staying connected with others, and maintaining hope in the face of uncertainty.*

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1. At Work

■ **Practice self-care at work:** Take short breaks, step outside, and engage in breathing exercises to stay grounded. Ensure that you are eating enough and drinking enough water throughout the day. Limit consumption of caffeine, which can increase stress.

■ **Maintain routine and structure:**

Consistency provides a sense of control in uncertain times.

- **Focus on task management:** Break down work into manageable steps to prevent feeling overwhelmed.
- **Seek and share support:** Being connected to others can be helpful. Share concerns with trusted colleagues and supervisors. Recognize that your colleagues may be experiencing stress differently. Show patience, offer encouragement, and support one another during periods of change and uncertainty to build shared resilience.
- **Limit exposure to workplace negativity:** Avoid speculation that fuels anxiety. If workplace news is causing distress, consider taking breaks from it, and balance difficult conversations with constructive or uplifting activities.
- **Stay informed from reputable sources:** During uncertain times rumors can abound. Ensure information is valid and up-to-date before acting upon it. Official workplace communications should be trusted and prioritized.
- **Seek professional help:** If you are struggling with the level of distress you are experiencing, contact someone who can provide professional assistance (e.g., primary care provider, mental health clinician, spiritual advisor).

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2. At Home

- **Practice self-calming by engaging in mindfulness and meditation:** Deep breathing, practiced relaxation, and journaling can help manage stress.
- **Respond to family anxiety:** Just as you may feel anxious, so may your family. If family members express fears (e.g., “Mommy, will we have to move?”), provide honest, supportive responses that acknowledge their concerns while focusing on constructive ways forward:
 - » “We are doing everything we can to stay safe and secure. We will get through this together.”
 - » “It’s okay to be worried, and I will always be here to talk with you.”
 - » “Let’s focus on what we can do today and take things one step at a time.”
- **Stay connected with others:** Engage with activities with family and friends that bring joy and respite from work-related concerns.
- **Healthy conversations about stress:** Discuss worries with trusted friends and family, taking care to focus on realistic concerns and avoiding exaggerated fears.
- **Plan ahead:** Identify actionable steps to prepare for changes while focusing on what you can control and influence.
- **Sleep hygiene:** Establish a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, limit screen time before bed, and engage in relaxation techniques.
- **Physical activity and healthy eating:** Regular exercise and proper nutrition help maintain resilience during stressful times.

- **Limit alcoholic beverages and tobacco use:** While these may seem like quick ways to manage stress, they can actually increase anxiety, disrupt sleep, and negatively impact overall health.
- **Plan ahead:** Identify actionable steps to prepare for changes while focusing on what is within your control and things you have the ability to influence.
- **Maintain hopefulness:** Seek a shared understanding with family and friends that together you can manage any future changes.

Looking Forward

Uncertain times can also bring unexpected opportunities. None of us can see around the next corner and know for sure how things will turn out. While immediate worries are a normal part of adapting to change, resilience is built on maintaining a long-term perspective. Plan ahead by identifying actionable steps to prepare for potential changes while focusing on what is within your control.

Remember

Stress is a normal reaction to organizational change. By utilizing proven coping strategies, maintaining social connections, and learning to manage worry effectively, individuals and families can navigate uncertain times with greater resilience and confidence.

For more resources on stress management and mental health, visit: www.CSTSonline.org

