

CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How: Work-Related Stress

OALCF ALIGNMENT

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A2. Interpret documents	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	1
Competency F - Engage with Others	N/A	1

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Postsecondary |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School Credit | |

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

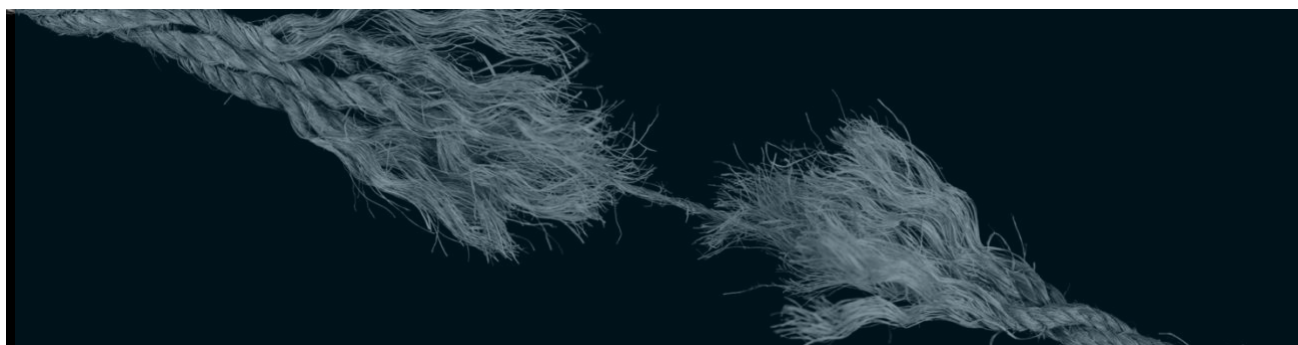
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adaptability | <input type="checkbox"/> Numeracy |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creativity and innovation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital | |

NOTES: Part seven of an eleven-part series on workplace norms for employed learners.

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WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW

Note for practitioners:

This series of **Skills for Success Curriculum Resources** is a beginner's guide to the modern workplace for LBS learners. The goal is to provide essential tools to employed learners, or learners seeking employment, so that they can thrive as employees. This series considers personal development topics ranging from conflict resolution to time management; topics focused on changes in the workplace; and mental health issues like stress management.

The overall focus of the series is on helping employees (or aspiring employees) understand their rights and responsibilities.

These resources are learner-based and activity-focused, with each topic area serving as a mini-lesson, followed by personalized activities. The activities invite learners to respond to lesson material or explore their own ideas on the subject. The series is divided into eleven sections that can be used separately or in tandem:

- Your Rights in the Workplace
- Adaptability in the Workplace
- Collaboration in the Workplace
- Communication in the Workplace
- Creativity and Innovation in the Workplace
- Problem Solving in the Workplace
- Work-Related Stress
- Time-management
- Conflict Resolution
- Self-Advocacy
- Changes in the Workplace

*This is Section Seven, Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How:
Work-Related Stress*

***Important:** This material involves discussion of stressful situations. It may be triggering to some learners; others may prefer to it independently in private. If so, have them disregard suggestions to discuss certain questions with teacher or partner.

WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW: Work-Related Stress

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Overview

Are you currently employed? Are you about to start a new job? There are many things about the modern workplace that you may not know.

This resource series is designed to help you get the most out of your employment. When you have a job, there are several important questions you should ask:

- What are my rights?
- How can I advocate for myself?
- How should I expect to be treated on the job?
- What are the expectations at a modern workplace?
- What has changed at workplaces over the last few years?
- How can I be my best at:
 - conflict resolution
 - time-management
 - communication

You may also face other challenges on the job. Do you have concerns about:

- stress on the job
- mental health at your workplace

This resource series will consider these topics and more. Participate in the lessons and activities. You will learn to get the most out of the modern workplace.



Introduction

What is Work-Related Stress?

Work-related stress is a response to demands and experiences at work. Some pressure at work can be motivating. Too much pressure can lead to stress. Change or conflict at work can also cause stress.

Work-related stress can lead to negative health outcomes. It puts workers at greater risk of mental health conditions like anxiety and depression. It can also lead to poor performance at work.

- Thousands of people suffer from work-related stress.
- Millions of working days are lost to stress and depression.

Work-related stress can be a serious issue. It should be identified and managed.



Let's discuss!

Soon we will learn more about work-related stress. First let's talk about **your** situation.

Check the boxes that apply to you:

- ☐ I am easily stressed in various circumstances.
- ☐ I often get stressed at work.
- ☐ I get stressed when there is change.
- ☐ I get stressed when there is conflict.
- ☐ I have personal challenges that cause me stress.



Are you in a different situation? Discuss with your teacher or partner.



Your Goals!

It's time to think about your **goals**:

1. Are you currently looking for work? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. If so, what sort of work interests you? Discuss with your teacher and partner.
3. How do you think improving your **stress-management skills** might help you at work?



Optional Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

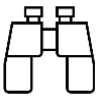
- Make a list of five jobs that interest you.
- Now re-write the list.
- Put the job you'd like most at the top.
- Then put the job you'd like second-most. And so on.
- Write the letter **D** beside any of these jobs that might involve **deadlines**.
 - Jobs with **deadlines** can cause more work-related stress.

Causes

Causes of Work-Related Stress

1. Work-related stress might occur due to **on-the-job pressures**:

- an employee feels overwhelmed or confused by a task
- co-workers have a conflict with each other
- a manager does not offer adequate support to employees
- there are deadlines

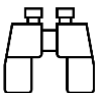


An Example:

An employee starts a new job as a landscaper. The employee is still learning and makes some mistakes. The boss gets angry. But the boss does not teach the employee how to improve. The employee feels very stressed at the situation.

2. Work-related stress might also occur due to **changes in the workplace**:

- an employee is assigned a new role
- a manager is given more responsibility
- new workplace rules or systems are introduced
- employees are hired or let go



An Example:

A factory worker has been on the same part of the assembly line for years. The manager switches the worker to a new part of the line. The worker finds the new work more difficult and feels stressed.

3. Work-related stress might also occur due to **problems with the workplace:**

- incompetent management
- unsafe or unsatisfactory working conditions
- poor organization or systems



An Example:

The brakes of a FedEx delivery truck are squeaking. The driver thinks the truck is unsafe to drive. The manager ignores the requests to get the brakes fixed. The driver feels very stressed.

4. Work-related stress might also occur **if a worker has unique personal challenges:**

- a physical disability
- mental health challenges
- issues with addiction
- homelife struggles
- a second or third job



An Example:

A fast food worker has three jobs to make ends meet. The worker must hurry from job to job. The worker is not getting enough sleep. The worker is very stressed.

- Everyone handles stress differently. Some people have more resilience or experience handling stress. But work-related stress can happen to **anyone!**



1. What are three causes of work-related stress?

2. What are some things that might cause you stress at work? Discuss with your partner or teacher.

3. Have you experienced stress at work? Discuss the cause with your partner or teacher.



Symptoms

Symptoms of Work-Related Stress

Work-related stress can result in a variety of outcomes. It can impact physical health. It can affect emotional and mental wellbeing. It can negatively affect behaviour. It can also impact performance on the job.



Let's discuss!

Soon we will learn more about stress symptoms. First let's talk about **your** situation. Discuss the questions below with your teacher or partner:

- Do you know the ways that you express stress?
- Do you have physical symptoms?
- Do you have emotional or mental symptoms?
- Does your behaviour change?
- Are you sometimes unaware of your stress symptoms?

1. Physical Symptoms of Work-Related Stress

Stress can impact your **physical health** in various ways:

- headaches
- muscle aches and pains
- nausea or feelings of malaise
- digestive problems



More **physical** symptoms of work-related stress:

- chest pains
 - breathing problems
 - losing or gaining weight
 - feelings of weakness or exhaustion
- There may be **more** physical symptoms. Everyone experiences stress differently.

2. Emotional and Mental Symptoms of Work-Related Stress

Stress can affect your **emotional and mental health** in numerous ways:

- feelings of anxiety or depression
 - lack of concentration and focus
 - losing motivation or confidence
 - feeling moody or sensitive
 - feeling irritable or temperamental
 - strong emotional swings
 - feeling overwhelmed
- There may be **more** emotional and mental symptoms. Emotional and physical symptoms might be experienced together.



An Example:

A dishwasher at a restaurant is in conflict with the chef. The dishwasher feels anxious, unfocused, and nauseous at work. The dishwasher is experiencing physical and emotional symptoms of stress.

3. Behavioural Changes Caused by Work-Related Stress

Work-related stress can change the way you behave. Often these changes are for the worse:

- trouble sleeping
 - changes to diet (eating less, more, or less healthily)
 - increased drug or alcohol consumption
 - isolating yourself from others
- There may be **more** behavioural changes. These changes can impact your homelife. They can impact the quality of your work on the job.

4. Performance Issues Caused by Work-Related Stress

Stress at the workplace often means reduced on-the-job performance:

- more mistakes and accidents
- more communication breakdowns
- more sick days
- strained relationships between co-workers



An Example:

A cashier at Canadian Tire has been given a new role as manager. The cashier feels overwhelmed by the new responsibilities. The cashier begins to get headaches and feel anxious at work. The cashier begins to have trouble sleeping and calling in sick. The cashier does not make the new schedule on time as a result.



Reflect!

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Read the example above with the Canadian Tire cashier.
2. What are three types of stress the cashier experiences?
3. How is the cashier's homelife affected?
4. How is the cashier's work performance affected?
5. Consider the stress symptoms discussed earlier. Which bother you the most?
Discuss with your partner or teacher.

Stress Management

It's important to identify stress as soon as possible. The longer the issues persist, the worse they will get. Identify your stress and then try to **manage** it. There are several steps you can take to manage work-related stress. You can:

- learn to improve **communication** with managers and co-workers
- learn to **adapt** at home or work
- **problem solve** using **creative** solutions to your problems

Managing Stress #1: Learn to Improve Communication with Managers and Co-Worker

No one wants to admit that they are struggling at work. But being open about your stress is the first step to addressing it. Sharing your situation will hopefully get you some extra support.

There are lots of ways that good communication can help reduce stress. Here are some strategies to try:

- **Listen carefully.** This can help you avoid confusion about a role or task.
- **Ask questions** when you don't understand. If you are confused, tell someone.
- **Ask for help** if you need it. At work you are part of a team. Your boss and coworkers are there to support you.
- **Avoid misunderstandings** by:
 - speaking clearly and with enough volume
 - showing that you understand with a nod or a thumbs up
 - paying attention to non-verbal cues like smiling or frowning

Maintain good relationships with co-workers by:

- treating others with respect and fairness
- being patient and polite
- adapting your communication style to the situation

Advocate for yourself by:

- sharing your ideas and concerns with co-workers and managers
 - communicating with confidence
- Sometimes managers are **not** supportive. They may even be the source of your stress. You may need to rely on other stress-management strategies.



An Example:

A warehouse worker sees that a co-worker has made a mistake. The co-worker has stacked boxes in an unsafe way. This causes the warehouse worker some stress. The warehouse worker speaks to the co-worker politely. The co-worker is rude and ignores the warehouse worker. This adds to the warehouse worker's stress.

The warehouse worker shares these concerns with the manager. The warehouse worker speaks clearly and with enough volume. The warehouse worker speaks with confidence. The manager is supportive. The manager tells the warehouse worker that the situation will be addressed. The warehouse worker gives a thumbs up.

The manager speaks to the co-worker and the work environment becomes safer. The warehouse worker feels less stressed.

**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

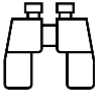
1. Read the example above about the warehouse worker.
2. How did the warehouse worker use good communication to reduce their stress?
3. How did the warehouse worker's experience at work improve?
4. Do you find it easy or difficult to ask for help? Discuss with your teacher and partner.
5. Do you feel that you have good communication skills? Discuss with your teacher and partner.

Managing Stress #2: Adapt at Home or Work

Being adaptable means **making changes for improvement**. Making key changes at home or work can reduce your stress. Try to:

- Use better **time-management**. Give yourself a little more time to get ready for work and arrive on time. Organize your time to complete work tasks more efficiently.
 - Find more balance by learning to say no. Having a job is a responsibility. Say no to some social events to be rested and ready for work.
 - Is a role or task at work causing stress? Look into changing roles. Be willing to try new things. New roles or tasks might be more suited to your abilities.
 - Improve your work routines:
 - Be sure to eat before work and bring a lunch.
 - Take the breaks that you are entitled to.
 - Ask for a regular schedule. This might help you establish better routines.
- Change can be hard. Take small steps. Try one new strategy at a time.



**An Example:**

A fast food worker is making mistakes on the job. The worker is warned by the boss. The situation causes the worker a lot of stress.

The worker realizes that they are making mistakes because they are tired at work. They are tired because they are up late drinking on work nights.

The worker decides to make a change. They decide to reduce their drinking and not stay up late on work nights. Their work improves and the boss is happy. This reduces the fast food worker's stress.

**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

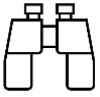
1. Read the example above about the fast food worker.
2. How did the worker use adaptability to reduce their stress?
3. Have you adapted at work or home to reduce stress? Discuss with your teacher and partner.

Managing Stress #3: Problem Solve Using Creative Solutions

Stress doesn't always have an obvious source. Take time to think about the problem. Pinpoint the cause. Try to find a creative solution.

Maybe you can't completely eliminate the cause of the stress. There are other things you can do to help you manage better:

- Improve your **self-care**:
 - Reduce your alcohol and drug consumption.
 - Try to find time for light exercise.
 - Try to eat better.
 - Try to be grateful for the good things.
 - Caring for yourself will help you develop **resilience**.
 - You will feel less stress.
 - You will handle the stress you feel much better.
 - If the stress gets worse, seek help:
 - Confide in co-workers and managers.
 - Confide in loved ones and friends.
 - Seek professional help.
- **Self-care** and **resilience** will help you cope with stress. But don't hesitate to seek help. There are resources at the end of this resource.

**An Example:**

A cashier works at the Bulk Barn. The cashier is having trouble focusing. They make mistakes when punching in product codes. Customers are angry. The situation is causing the cashier a lot of stress.

The cashier doesn't know why they can't focus. They take the time to think about the problem. They realize they also feel weak. They realize they can't focus and feel weak because they haven't eaten. They did not eat breakfast and did not bring a lunch.

**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Read the example above about the cashier.
2. How could the cashier use problem solving and adaptability to reduce their stress?



- Make a list of five situations that might cause you stress at work.
- Make a list of strategies you might use to handle each situation.
- Discuss your lists with a teacher or partner.

Skills For Success

Skills for Success and Work-Related Stress

The **Skills for Success** (SFS) are the everyday skills Canadians need for work, learning and life. Several SFS are required to manage work-related stress:

- **Communication.** Good communication helps to avoid conflicts and confusion. It solves problems when they do arise.
- **Collaboration.** Collaboration is a great way to build relationships at work. This helps avoid conflict and gives you a support network.
- **Adaptability.** Managing your stress will require you to adapt to the situation. Make healthy changes and reduce your stress.
- **Problem Solving.** Dealing with work-related stress requires identifying the problem. Then think about it carefully. Then work toward a solution.
- **Creativity and Innovation.** Sometimes solving the problem of work-related stress requires creativity. Imagine how your situation could improve. Use your skills and creative thinking to get there.



What are your strongest SFS? Which do you most need to work on?
Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Reflect!

Learn more about the Skills for Success here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html>

Next Steps

Are you feeling stressed at work? Is it getting worse? Don't hesitate to seek help. There are many resources available to help you. Some are listed below:

- The Canadian Mental Health Association. Tips and resources for dealing with stress: <https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/understanding-and-finding-help-for-stress/>
- Support for when you are in crisis at Talk Suicide:
 - Call anytime: **1-833-456-4566**
 - Text between 4pm and midnight ET: **45645**
- eMentalHealth.ca offers a listing of local mental health resources: <https://www.ementalhealth.ca/Ontario/Stress/index.php?m=heading&ID=118>
- ConnexOntario offers free mental health support 24/7 by phone or chat: <https://www.connexontario.ca/en-ca/>
- 211 Ontario offers free mental health services:
 - Call **211** or toll free at **1-877-330-3213**
- Distress and Crisis Ontario offers crisis centres in many communities: <https://www.dcontario.org/>
- Also see the other resources in this series: **Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How**