



## Managing stress at work

### What work is the NIOSH doing on stress?

The National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) is responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury and illness in the United States.

One of NIOSH's research areas is workplace stress. It has an extensive website providing case studies, guidance and supporting research reports; and a number of publications for employers and employees.

NIOSH's Stress at Work booklet ([www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html#g](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html#g)) identifies some of the sources of stress at work, and an approach to achieving continuous improvement in tackling stress.

The NIOSH guidance falls into two parts: causes and solutions which are outlined below in more detail.

### Conditions that may cause job stress

NIOSH highlights 6 areas that may cause job stress, they include:

- **The Design of Tasks:** heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long work hours and shiftwork; hectic and routine tasks that have little inherent meaning, do not utilize workers' skills, and provide little sense of control.
- **Management Style:** lack of participation by workers in decision- making, poor communication in the organization, lack of family-friendly policies.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** poor social environment and lack of support or help from coworkers and supervisors.
- **Work Roles:** conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility, too many "hats to wear."
- **Career Concerns:** job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth, advancement, or promotion; rapid changes for which workers are unprepared.
- **Environmental Conditions:** unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, air pollution, or ergonomic problems.

## Dealing with workplace stress

The second part of the NIOSH booklet is an approach to identify and tackle stress in three steps.

### Step one: identify the problem

The best way to do this will depend greatly on the size and scope of the organization. These are some tips to begin with:

- Hold group discussions with employees.
- Design an employee survey.
- Measure employee perceptions of job conditions, stress, health and satisfaction.
- Collect objective data.
- Analyze data to identify problem locations and stressful job conditions.

### Step two: design and implement interventions

- Target source of stress for change.
- Propose and prioritize intervention strategies.
- Communicate planned interventions to employees.
- Implement Interventions.

### Step three: evaluate the interventions

Evaluation is a crucial, and often overlooked, step in the intervention process. NIOSH recommends:

- Conduct both short and long-term evaluations.
- Measure employee perceptions of job conditions, stress, health and satisfaction.
- Include objective measures.
- Refine the intervention strategy and return to Step one.

The NIOSH website provides much more detailed information, along with examples and case studies, of this approach to stress prevention.

## How will this be of use to me?

If you are involved in a program of work within your school to identify and manage stress or to improve wellbeing, information and guidance from the NIOSH should be extremely useful. You may also find this information of interest if you are seeking specific solutions to problems within your classroom or department.