

Reduced workload: the impact on mental health & wellbeing



When working as a contractor or licensee, it is normal for the amount of work to fluctuate. Some reasons include customer demand and economic changes. Just like when our workload increases, reductions in workload can also impact how we feel.

Helplessness

When we are exposed to, or impacted by, something beyond our control, such as changes in workload, it is normal to feel uncomfortable. When we feel helpless, looking for ways to separate yourself from the reasons for the event is important. Remember, this experience is something you are going through, not because of you.

Compromised resilience

Resilience is the ability to cope with stress, bounce back, and learn from difficult or challenging events. During times of unfamiliar or significant change, our resilience can be tested. This can lead to increased negative thoughts and stress.

How does my body react to stress?

While low levels or short-term stress can promote productivity and growth, ongoing stress can negatively impact our wellbeing.

A threat is something that can cause us damage or harm and is something our bodies automatically respond to. When we are exposed to a threat our body goes into a **fight or flight response**.

Imagine you are being chased by a tiger: Your heartbeat will start to increase rapidly, you will begin to sweat and tense up as your body prepares to run as fast as you can. This is your body's natural survival instinct, also known as a stress response. Other events that may be less threatening but cause us worry or concern, can still lead us to have this stress response.

When facing reduced workload, we may notice the same reactions occur in our body. Try noticing and paying attention to these reactions. When do you notice these reactions or feelings? Is there a certain issue, concern or activity that leads to this response?

Plan ahead and keep your mind occupied

While we cannot always predict when we may be experiencing quiet or reduced periods of work, we can plan activities during these times. When your workload is reduced, consider this an opportunity to engage in activities that you may not have time for otherwise, or provide you the time to prioritise self-care. Consider using this time for:

- Rest and recovery
- Networking with other licensees or contractors
- Training and development for yourself and your team
- Team building activities

Managing my emotional response

It is inevitable that we will experience stress throughout our lives. While our reactions to stress and worry are often automatic, and we cannot change everything that happens, we can change how we react. We can manage how our experiences influence us by managing our emotional responses.

When we are going through difficulties that we have little control over, there are a number of things we can focus on to assist in maintaining and strengthening our resilience and better managing our mental wellbeing.

1 Optimistic outlook

When we're experiencing challenge or change, practicing being optimistic can keep our mind at ease. It can also reduce stress and lead to more rational thinking and decision making. Here is a short activity that can assist in your reflections.

Consider this equation.

Event = Outcome

Think of an event that made you feel stressed and how you reacted.

Financial difficulty = I feel hopeless

Now, think about how you can respond in a more helpful or optimistic way and how this may influence the outcome.

Event + Respond = Outcome

Financial difficulty + this is short-term = I will get through this

How we think about an event plays a large role in determining whether we get stressed by the event.

2 Thinking Traps

Certain thinking patterns or thoughts can lead to feelings of stress and anxiety. These patterns are called 'Thinking Traps,' and can lead to significant reductions in mental wellbeing. Consider these 8 common Thinking Traps and if you find yourself engaging in any, remember that they are unhelpful and can lead you to misinterpret or react to an event.

1. Jumping to conclusions
2. Tunnel vision
3. Overgeneralising
4. Magnifying and minimising
5. Personalising
6. Externalising
7. Mind reading
8. Emotional reasoning

TIP: When you begin to move into unhelpful thinking traps, try to reframe your thoughts in a more helpful light and engage in helpful self-talk.

What support is available?

There are a number of support options that can assist you during this time.

Financial Support

Australian Government's Financial Information Service

132 300

Wellbeing Services

Lifeline

13 11 14

Access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

lifeline.org.au

Head to Health

Mental health resources for mental illnesses and treatment options.

headtohealth.gov.au

Workforce Assistance Program (WAP)

1300 687 327

An initiative by Australia Post to provide confidential support.