

How Acas can help you tackle stress

Do you think bullying has a place in your organisation? Are you concerned about constantly improving efficiency and job design? Would you object to having your office door open one day a week to discuss ideas with colleagues? Do you want the training you offer to be relevant to those attending?

These are just some of the questions discussed at a recent focus group we ran with a large public sector organisation. The aim of the focus group — to tackle stress.

Stress is a difficult subject to ignore in today's workplace. Nearly every week a new survey or piece of research will come up with new statistics about stress.

Stress is linked to everything from anxiety and depression to back pain, alcohol and drug dependency. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that a total of 11.4 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2008/09 at a cost of approximately £4 billion.

So what's so special about the work we do?

An example of how we work

Let's say two major causes of stress have been identified where you work:

- the amount of pressure felt by some of your teams
- the negative relationships between some managers and their team members.

We are experts at getting people to work well together.

We will work with you to set up a focus group to:

- identify the real issues
- get people talking to each other
- generate ideas
- come up with an action plan.

Acas can help you implement the management standards to tackle the six main causes of stress identified by HSE:

- the **demands** made on employees
- the level of **control** employees have over their work
- the nature of working **relationships**
- the **support** employees receive from managers and colleagues
- the clarity of an employee's **role** within the organisation
- the way that **change** is managed.

HSE provide material and resources that help you to understand the causes of stress at work, and identify and solve problems in your workplace. This can be found at www.hse.gov.uk.



We can also help you implement the action plan, embed new ways of working and train your people.

We can also train your staff to run focus groups themselves.

Getting to the root of the problem is where we come in. The focus group might find that your problem is about bullying and harassment. There might be a serious problem or there may just be a perception that the issue is not taken seriously enough.

We can help you write and implement a policy to tackle the problem and then train your managers and staff so that bullying and harassment is no longer an issue in your workplace.

The demand on your employees may be caused by jobs being poorly designed. We will help you to listen to the views of your employees. They are likely to know all about the bottlenecks and how you can improve efficiency.

As a manager, it's up to you to make the final decisions, but the more you involve people in coming up with ideas to tackle issues the happier they will be with the results.

Acas and the bigger picture

Stress is probably not the only thing on your mind right now. You will have many other priorities.

Our stress advisers understand how the different pieces of the jigsaw fit together at work. They understand the connection between good relationships at work and higher productivity. They also understand that what you want are practical ideas and not jargon or theory.

That is why we have launched the interactive **Acas Model Workplace**. This new online diagnostic tool gives an overall picture of your strengths and weaknesses as an organisation. It covers everything from pay to equality and representation to flexible working.

To try the **Acas Model Workplace** visit www.acas.org.uk.

Acas stress advisers are:

- independent
- impartial
- experienced

and above all, they recognise the value of people working together.