

Resilience Essentials

HANDBOOK for SCHOOLS



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WELCOME TO YOUR RESILIENCE ESSENTIALS HANDBOOK!

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is about our ability to adapt and bounce back when things don't go as planned.

Resilient people don't dwell on failures; they acknowledge the situation, learn from their mistakes and challenges, and then move forward. To ensure that we're all as resilient as we can be and are ready for the very busy times we all face, we have created a Resilience and Wellbeing Toolkit to help you develop your personal resilience as well as supporting your team and colleagues to build theirs.

WHAT'S IN THE WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE TOOLKIT?

- **Resilience Essentials Handbook** – this handbook gives you tools to recognise the symptoms of stress and low resilience in yourself and your team and the coping strategies you can develop to build it.
- **Chat Cards** – this set of cards are designed to be your quick 'go-to' point of reference for stressful situations and what resilient strategies you can employ to overcome them. They're called chat cards because they are designed as a support tool for you to 'talk' yourself and/or your team/colleagues into adopting behaviours that are going to help you/them during challenging situations.

Unfortunately resilience isn't something that builds overnight or can even be recognised until challenges are faced and met. It's something that needs regular attention. The more time and effort you invest in developing protective behaviours, the more you will be prepared and ready to face any challenges or stressful situations that come your way. Imagine resilience as a brick wall and a balloon.



Building a wall takes time, one brick at a time, but the more bricks you add the stronger it becomes. If one or two bricks are removed, the wall would still stand. Just like building a wall, resilience requires lots of things to be put in place to strengthen it over time.



A balloon is quick and easy to inflate, it only takes a few puffs of air, but it's also very easy to burst or deflate. You can do one or two things to develop resilience, just like expending one or two puffs of air, but it won't be strong enough to protect you in times of stress. You are still likely to burst!

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

1. Read through this Resilience Essentials Handbook to familiarise yourself with what resilience is, how to identify signs of stress and what you can do to improve your situation and that of your team or colleagues.
2. Once you're comfortable with the information in this handbook, you can start using the Chat Cards, as often as you need, to give you suggested actions.
3. Be vigilant for signs of low resilience and stress within yourself and others and if you lead others, arrange a 1-to-1 meeting with them and talk them through relevant content in the handbook and / or the cards, asking them to suggest actions they might take.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRESSURE AND STRESS?

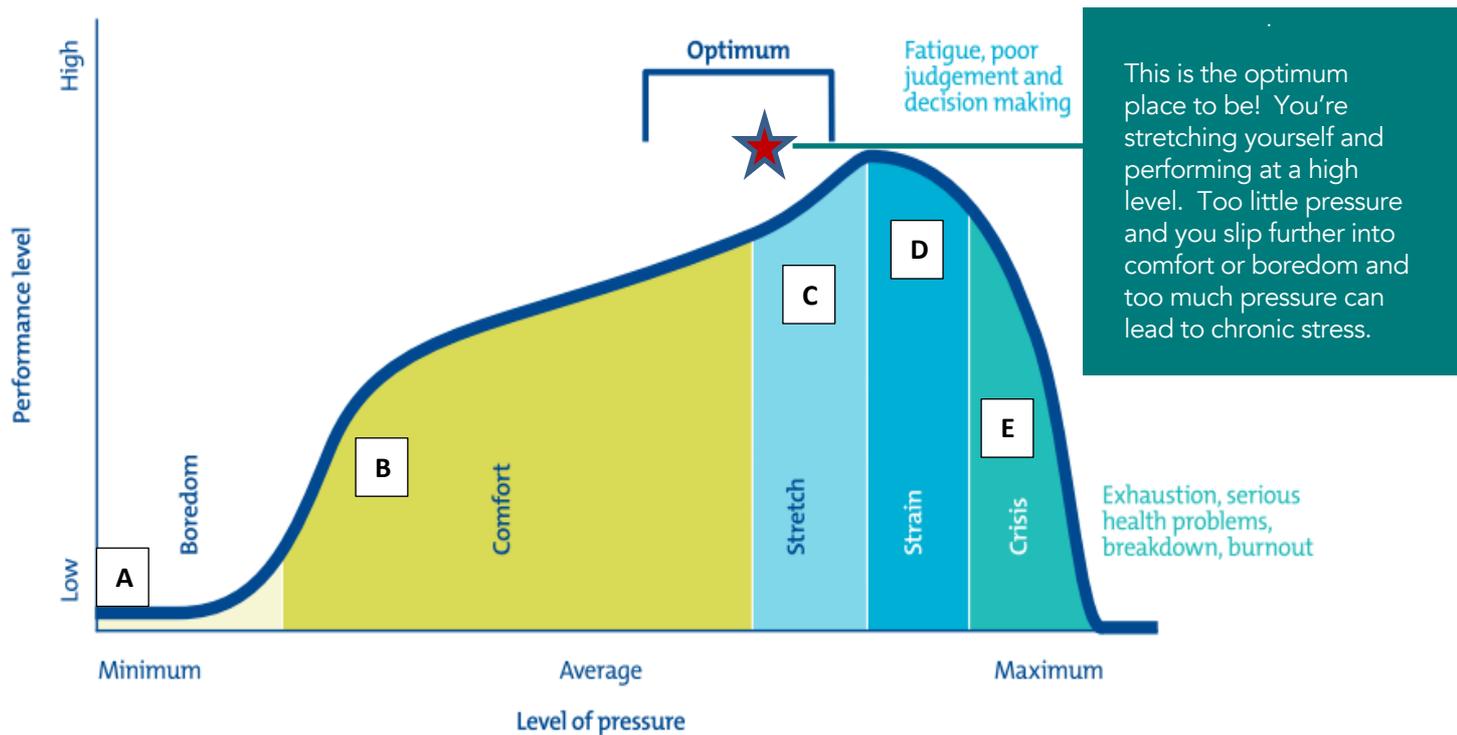
Pressure can be positive and a motivating factor and is often essential in helping you to carry out your job, particularly when something needs to be done quickly. It can help you to work at your best, achieve your goals and perform better.

Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive and it is a natural reaction which is also called our fight or flight response. It is not an illness but a state. Acute stress can occur when faced with a challenging situation, such as a job interview or exam, and is natural, and it is when this state remains and becomes chronic that mental and physical illness can develop.

The diagram and table below will help you identify how your performance level is impacted when pressure increases:

Pressure performance stages

© Steven Williams



TOP TIP!



It is important to build an understanding of how both you, your team and colleagues are experiencing pressure. You can use this diagram to plot where you feel you and they are currently. You could even share this diagram in a team briefing or 1-to-1s and ask everyone where they would say they are on the curve. It's a useful tool for identifying what support everyone needs to keep them in the optimal performance area.

While workload suggests staff in schools are less likely to be under level of pressure A and often in C and above, there will be times when people are looking for greater responsibilities and other opportunities.

LEVELS OF PRESSURE	THE IMPACT	TOP TIPS
BOREDOM A 	<p>No interest in achieving deadlines and targets can leave team members feeling undervalued, with little sense of purpose. They may appear unenthusiastic, slow and lethargic because they aren't engaged.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your team member and ask what they they can do to change their situation and how they feel. • Agree SMART objectives and targets and clearly communicate and regularly check in on progress. • You should address this early!
COMFORT B 	<p>Team members are mainly doing what they know how to do and are presented with no great challenge. For some, this can be a good place but it also means there is probably little risk being taken and innovation shown. Others may find it unstimulating without enough stretch.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With team members who are coasting in the comfort zone (perhaps they are ready for promotion and there are no vacancies), offer them some additional responsibilities / tasks/ challenges. • Ask what would provide greater stretch or fulfilment and agree on actions they will take. • Do address this before they slip backwards or become frustrated.
STRETCH C 	<p>Team members are generally working at pace – they have a heavy workload, may also be learning something new or pushing themselves to perform and be more productive. Some enjoy the challenge but others may start to feel uncomfortable and need to include recuperation and recovery time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep an eye on anyone in this zone who might be showing signs of strain and ask how they might remove some pressure or find some recovery time. • Stretch those team members who appear to be thriving with additional responsibilities and invite them to contribute ideas for their own and the school's development. • Remember that people need recovery and a sustained period of time in stretch can lead to strain.
STRAIN D 	<p>The line between stretch and strain can be a fine one and can be influenced by both the length of time in stretch and the nature and pace of the challenges faced. There are some dangers to spending too long in 'stretch'. An increasing number of challenges may mean that team members feel less able to cope which could lead to a state of stress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you notice one of your team feeling strain, speak with them immediately and agree any tasks they can let go or how they might address the situation. • Discuss the signs of strain and stress with your team so they can identify them and act quickly to prevent it from getting out of control and moving to crisis. • Provide support through the chat cards and coping strategies and encourage team members to take time out at lunch and break. Switching tasks, doing something you / they enjoy, and drinking and eating can all help.
CRISIS E 	<p>This is the tipping point for wellbeing and resilience, where a team member may sense a lack of control and feel exhausted. This can lead to burnout, negative attitudes, sickness and absence and if not addressed, mental ill-health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you notice, have an open and honest conversation and reassure your team member that you will support them. • Agree what and how to take responsibilities away so that the individual can recover and feel like they are regaining control. • Encourage them to focus on their wellbeing and find the right support and keep talking!

YOUR FIRST STEPS

- Be aware of what puts you under pressure and might lead to stress.
- Accept that it is natural to feel pressure and even stress for short periods.
- Learn to recognise when your feelings (emotions and mindset) become excessive and/or prolonged, and you are in the strain and crisis sections to the right of the diagram.
- Take action, for example take a break or switch tasks to help you remain productive, resilient and well.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LOWER RESILIENCE AND STRESS?

When you have low levels of resilience i.e. you find it difficult to bounce back, or are in a state of prolonged and chronic stress you may experience symptoms, which if they continue, might indicate you need to take action.

POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS



You may:

- find it hard to sleep
- change your eating habits
- smoke or drink more
- avoid colleagues, friends and family
- over react to problems



Physical symptoms you experience might include:

- tiredness
- indigestion and nausea headaches
- changes in bowel habits
- aching or painful muscles, back or neck pain; and/or palpitations



Emotionally you are likely to:

- become more irritable or angry
- have greater mood swings
- be more anxious
- feel numb
- feel disappointed with yourself
- be more tearful or aggressive
- feel less motivated or committed
- feel drained and listless



Mentally you may:

- be more indecisive
- find it hard to concentrate
- suffer loss of memory
- feel more confused than usual
- have feelings of inadequacy or low self-esteem

While all these are indicators of those with lower levels of resilience and who are experiencing stress, they may also be indicative of other conditions. If you are concerned about yourself please seek advice from your line manager, principal or trusted friend. If you are concerned about a colleague, speak to them or their line manager.



TOP TIP!

Stress can affect different people in different ways. What causes stress in one person may not affect another at all. If you are a manager you need to be mindful that things that don't cause you to be stressed could have significant impact on others. It's about getting to know your team, their tolerance levels and behaviours. If there is low resilience or high stress across a larger group of people within your school or department, you may see regular instances of:

- disputes and disaffection within the team
- increase in staff turnover
- increase in complaints and grievances
- increased sickness and absence
- poor team performance
- increases in parent dissatisfaction or complaints

HOW CAN I BUILD RESILIENCE AND REDUCE STRESS?

Pressure is something you will experience and not all stress can be avoided. It's not healthy to avoid a situation that you know needs to be addressed. Below are some strategies you might follow:

AVOID THE STRESSOR

You may be surprised by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate!

- **Learn how to say "No"** – know your limits and stick to them. While in peak times there is more to do, be aware of when you are approaching too much strain and explore what you can stop doing. Taking on more than you can handle may help in the short term but will ensure you are not able to give your best over longer periods
- **Take control of your environment** – if there are specific jobs that you find more challenging then you might be able to change them with other members of the team or change the way you do them.
- **Avoid hot-button topics** – if you repeatedly argue about the same subject or with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion
- **Prioritise** – remove things from your daily to-do list by being clear about what is really important and learn to plan more effectively.
- **Avoid distractions and interruptions** – you can plan 'availability time' rather than always having to be available to make sure you can get important non-classroom tasks done.



CHANGE THE STRESSOR

If you can't avoid the pressure or stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life. Examples include:

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up** – if something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
- **Be willing to compromise** – if you ask someone to change their behaviour, be willing to do the same.
- **Be more assertive** – don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them.
- **Plan ahead** – poor personal management, preparation and planning can make you less resilient in the face of challenges. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's much harder to stay calm and focused.



ADAPT TO THE STRESSOR

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to pressure and stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude. Examples include:

- **Reframe problems** – rather than fuming about being given a different job, see it as an opportunity for more responsibility, variety or to recharge.
- **Look at the big picture** – how important will it be to you in the long-term? Will it matter in a month? A year? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your standards** – perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Usually “good enough” is good enough!
- **Focus on the positive** - reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and help keep things in perspective.



ACCEPT THE STRESSOR

Some sources of pressure and stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as people calling in sick, parents calling in with a complaint, or some last minute changes. In such cases, the best way to cope is to simply accept things as they are. Examples include:

- **Focus on the things you can control** – recognise when you worry about things you can't control and choose how to react to them.
- **Look for the upside** – when facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If decisions you make contribute to stressful situations, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Share your feelings** – talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a specialist. This can be cathartic, even if you can't alter the stressful situation.
- **Learn to forgive** – accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes and that often what you perceive isn't the intent of the other person / people involved. Learn to let go of anger and resentment and move on. It only hurts you in the long run.



WHAT CAUSES LOWER RESILIENCE AND STRESS?

You need to be able to identify what causes you stress. This section is broken down in to 6 sections which identify potential risk factors and areas that could test and reduce your levels of resilience. Each one is relevant to your day to day experiences in school. Getting familiar with these will help you to plan and manage everything in a way that builds your resilience rather than deflating it!

THE 6 MAJOR RISK FACTORS ARE:

- The **demands you face** (workload, work patterns and working environment)
- **Control** (how much say you have in the way you do your work)
- The **support you receive** (the encouragement from leaders and colleagues and the resources to which you have access)
- Your **relationships at work** (the extent to which positive working practices and behaviours are encouraged and problems dealt with)
- **Your role** (whether you clearly understand what is expected of you)
- **Change** (how it's managed and communicated to you)

You are likely to experience stress when you perceive one of the above risk factors is greater than your ability to cope with it. There are many examples in school that could cause you to feel this way, and particularly during your busiest times. We will explore some of these throughout the rest of this section.

Once you are familiar with the things that may cause you stress, you can then use the Chat Cards to help to deal with them. The cards give you quick action tips that you can put in place to help you deal with situations in the moment.

THE DEMANDS YOU FACE

 If you are to be productive, happy and successful then you have to be able to cope with the demands of your job. This includes being able to successfully manage your workload, work patterns and the environment.

You are already busy and the demands on you can regularly increase through:



- Other staff absence and sickness
- Planning for parent evenings and other events
- Extra – curricula activities
- Taking on additional work or responsibilities without feeling you have the knowledge or skills
- Responding to parents and being able to meet their needs
- Training and supporting new staff members
- Poor student/pupil behaviour and disruptions
- Attending meetings
- Systems change

It's also likely that there will be parts of your job or situations you find more challenging or where you are under greater pressure and this is natural. It is important you accept this and focus on actions you can take to better manage the times when this happens.

The **Chat Cards** have suggestions for how you might better deal with the demands you face.

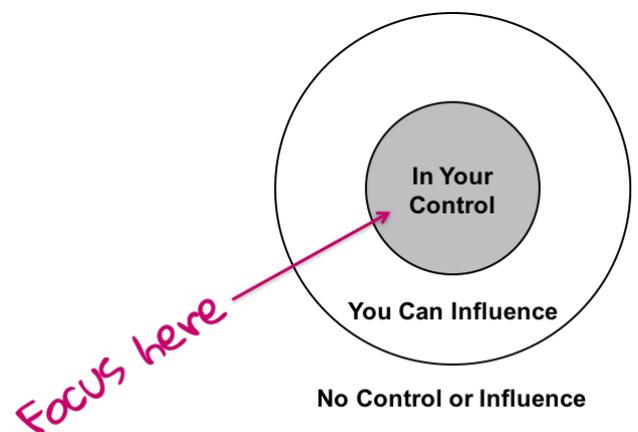
THE CONTROL YOU HAVE OVER YOUR WORK

! If you feel you have some say about the way you are able to carry out your work you are likely to feel more in control, and more resilient in the face of adversity. It isn't always possible to have control, particularly when there is a need to respond to student / pupil demands and other changes, such as:

- As a leader, teacher or staff member, much of your days timetable is set for you.
- The curriculum is usually decided (though you have choices around how you do things).
- Other people, e.g. staff absences or student behaviour (these also add to the demands on you)
- Interruptions and being asked to solve other people's problems
- External influences, such as Government and inspectors!
- The way you are asked to carry out much of your work.

If you do feel frustrated or under pressure because you have to work in a different way to your preference then your first step is to consider whether you do actually have more control than you think. Identify specific issues and ask yourself what choices you have?

There will be things that happen or ways that you have to work that you have no control over. It is important that you accept this and focus only on those things within your control.



Continually challenging or trying to change things that sit outside your circle of control will lead to stress and impact on your enjoyment and performance. If you are not sure then speak to your line manager or colleagues, as there may be opportunities to influence what is happening.

If you do ask and it becomes clear that you do not have a choice then accept this and focus back on those areas that are within your control.

Use the 'PLANNING' Chat Card to help you identify what you might do in this area.



THE SUPPORT YOU RECEIVE



Do you have the information you need to do your job effectively and to enjoy it! That's part of the aim of providing you with resources such as this, but there are many other areas where you may need support:

- From your line manager and other members of school leadership
- From colleagues
- In dealing with parents, particularly where issues raised cannot be easily or quickly resolved
- Where to find documents and planning tools
- Issues with other members of your team or student behaviour
- Systems and other school processes
- What is expected from your marking, for example is fear of getting it wrong meaning you are doing too much?



So how can you help to make sure you get the support you need?

1. Make sure you know **what information and resources are available** to support you in your school – if you are not sure of something then don't wait to be told or be frightened to speak up.
2. **Give support to your colleagues** and line manager when it is needed. People tend to reciprocate and so the more supportive you are to others, the more support you are likely to receive back.
3. Learn to **recognise when you need support** and don't be afraid to ask for help. Your line manager and colleagues will want to be there for you. Be aware of any relationships that are not healthy and you might need to work on – don't ignore this. Remember others may not have the same characteristics and preferences as you and their behaviour may simply be representative of this, rather than any deliberate attempt to hinder you.
4. **Ask for training or development** that will help you to do your job better and mean you will feel more able to carry it out.
5. **Practice self-care and look after yourself.** Do take the opportunity to change tasks and relax during any breaks or lunch, even if it is for a short period. Drink water and eat as needed to maintain energy levels. It is much easier to feel supported and to support others when you are taken care of first. You must put your oxygen mask on before helping others!

Start with the 'PEOPLE' and 'PHYSICAL ACTION' Chat Cards to help address this area.

YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES

How does your school promote positive working practices to avoid conflict and take steps to deal with unacceptable behaviour. There may be times when your relationships with other colleagues may be strained or you feel their behaviour towards you (or others) is inappropriate, unacceptable or causing you stress. If this is happening then speak with them, your line manager and/or a trusted colleague.

You are likely to know if there is a problem in this area if you identify there is:

- Increases in or a high level of sickness and absences (which also adds to the demands you and others face).
- A high level of turnover and/or inexperience in the school.
- People regularly turning up late to meetings, events or places they should be and/or letting colleagues down.



Relationships are all about awareness. How aware are you about your behaviour and the behaviour of others?

1. Find out **what are your trigger points**. Are there specific people or actions that cause a break down in their relationship with you (or others). Identify what these are and either address them with the individual or learn to accept them. It is likely they are just different to you. Where these are significant or affect a larger number of people they do need to be tackled.
2. **Ask for support**, if you are unsure what to do, either from your line manager or a trusted colleague.
3. Reflect honestly and **recognise when it may be your behaviour that is causing an issue**. Don't be afraid to ask others for perspective and feedback. Ask what you might do differently to change the situation – remember if you want others to change it is likely that you will need to change too.
4. **Ask for training or development** that will help, for example in how to hold coaching conversation.

Start with the 'PEOPLE' Chat Card to help address this area.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE

How well you understand your role and what is expected of you will help you to reduce any workplace stress and build your resilience. It will also help make sure you perform effectively and you will be more likely to enjoy your work.

Here are some examples that may cause you or others to struggle in this area:

- You are new and still learning.
- You have multiple roles, for example, teaching, form tutor, and head of year / department.
- Following significant changes.
- Conflicting messages or directions from one or more leaders.



So how can you make sure you are clear on what you need to do?

1. **Speak with your line manager.** As preparation you can write out what you believe are the expectations of your role in a simple note for yourself and then ask your line manager for their view.
2. **Create a detailed personal development plan** to address any gaps between your current skills and those you might need to be fully competent in all aspects of your role. The more able you are to tackle what is needed from you, the less likely it is that you will experience workplace stress.
3. **Look for other information and policies** that cover areas of concern and speak with your manager and colleagues to really understand the expectations of different stakeholders.
4. **Managers can ask team members to talk through their role and their responsibilities.** This is a great way to check understanding and also involve individuals in a discussion that will help them to take ownership for delivering what is expected of them.

Don't be afraid to ask about anything you are unsure about to help you better enjoy and be successful in your role.

Use the 'PURPOSE' Chat Card to help you identify what you might do in this area.

! HOW CHANGE IS MANAGED AND COMMUNICATED

How change is managed and communicated to you will affect how resilient you are likely to be when you meet any challenge or adversity. It is often fear of the unknown, failure, uncertainty or worry about what others think that can make change difficult to cope with in an organisation. If you aren't sure what is going on, take steps to actively involve yourself in the change and to help you understand what is coming, so you are more likely to know:

- How it will impact on your current workload.
- The effect it might have on your emotions (if it is being imposed and you have little control).
- If it might mean you need to take on new responsibilities or even change roles.
- Any changes to structures or ways of working that affect you.



However, it may not always be possible to keep you fully informed and while some change may be outside your control, there are some steps you can take to better manage change for yourself and your team:

- Make sure you are involved in decisions that affect you and ask about them. If you lead others then involve them in decisions and communicate early and regularly about any changes that are to be made.
- Delegate effectively and ensure you pass responsibilities to other members of your team.
- Where it is known, set out a schedule for any change and a timetable for communications and stick to it or if the change is coming from others, ask them for their timetable.
- Keep people updated or ask for updates – it is much better to over rather than under communicate. It stops people making their own assumptions.



Now you are aware that it is natural for any of the above, as well as other, challenging situations to put pressure on you. When this happens recognise you do have a choice. It is how you respond and the decisions you make that determine whether you take changes in your stride and show resilience.

The 'POSITIVE MINDSET' Chat Card is a good place to start.

HOW ELSE CAN I LOOK AFTER MY WELLBEING?

MAKE MORE TIME FOR FUN AND RELAXATION

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of work that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury. Olympian athletes spend as much time focusing on recovery and recuperation, as they do on training and events!

- Include time for rest and relaxation in your daily schedule.
- Connect with others. Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will help your resilience and protect you from stress.
- Make sure you do something you enjoy every day, whether it's listening to or playing music, reading, meeting friends, walking or riding a bike.
- Keep your sense of humour. Smile and laugh (including the ability to laugh at yourself)!

ADOPT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

You can build your internal resources so you are likely to be more resilient by strengthening your physical health. Below are some examples you can consider, if you don't do them already:

- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat.
- **Keep hydrated** and when feeling tired or strained, a drink of water can often help as a first step.
- **Reduce caffeine and sugar.** The temporary caffeine and sugar "highs" often end with an energy and mood crash.
- **Avoid an excess of stimulants** such as alcohol and energy drinks as using these as an easy escape from stress, provides only temporary relief.
- **Get enough sleep.** Feeling tired will increase your stress as it may lead to irrational thinking.



Adopting any of these strategies will need focus and effort and may mean changing deep rooted habits and beliefs.

TOP TIP



Make sure that you communicate with your team on a regular basis around promoting wellbeing and managing their stress levels. It's really important that you take care of yourself first and lead by example. This is important as your team will follow your actions not words!

You can keep referring back to this handbook anytime you need a refresher and don't forget to use the Chat Cards too. They are a great source of quick and practical actions you can put in place.

Remember, building resilience and managing your wellbeing takes time. It's a marathon not a sprint! Start today. It's in Your Hands!

