



## FACT SHEET – RECOGNISING ‘DISTRESS’ IN THE WORKPLACE

Distress can be caused by either work or external factors. While you may not be able to control external factors other than offer support, you are able to control to an extent factors at work that may be contributing to your staff member’s distress. It is your role as a manager to monitor your employees and take note in any changes that may be unusual of their ‘normal’ day to day behaviour.

### SIGNS OF DISTRESS

A person who is experiencing ‘distress’ may experience some of the following:

- **physical changes** – tiredness, stomach ulcers, weight loss or gain, digestive disorders, headaches, reduced reaction times, rashes, dishevelled appearance,
- **emotional changes** – increased tension, anxiety, depression, frustration, irritability, feelings of emptiness, loss of confidence, and
- **behavioural changes** – over/under eating, interpersonal difficulties, difficulty in sleeping, workplace conflict, aggressive or passive behaviour, unplanned absences, misuse of alcohol and other drugs, indecisiveness, deteriorating relationships with colleagues, reduced participation in work activities, reduced performance or increased mistakes, not getting things done, erratic behaviour, inability to concentrate, difficulty with memory.

### FACTORS AT WORK THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO DISTRESS

Some of the factors at work that could be contributing to your staff member’s distress include:

- expectations that they will work long hours or take work home with them,
- excessive workloads, unrealistic deadlines or unreasonable expectations of work rate,
- inadequate skills, training, resources and support,
- poorly specified roles and responsibilities,
- unclear performance expectations and performance management systems,
- boring or repetitive work, or too little to do,
- lack of control over work activities,
- poor work/life balance,
- interpersonal conflict with other team members,
- bullying or harassment,
- poor communication from management, particularly at times of change,
- fears about job security,
- critical incidents, for example natural disasters or threats from clients, and
- a lack of fairness and transparency in decision-making.

You should discuss with your staff member why they feel distress, and try to address the issue wherever possible. Working with your staff member to find a solution as soon as possible can help prevent any further psychological illness occurring.