

# **WORK PRESSURE GUIDE**

## **RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS**

**UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.**

## WHY THIS GUIDE?

One in six employees in the Netherlands suffer from burn-out issues (TNO). What is the size of your team? Early identification and opening work pressure up for discussion is important for preventing and controlling excessive work pressure at UT. This 'work pressure guide' is a tool for you as a manager to identify high work pressure among employees in your team and to opening up this topic for discussion.

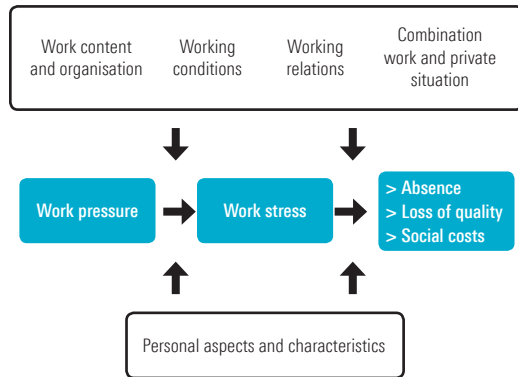
# TABLE OF CONTENT

What is work pressure?	4
When does work pressure becomes work stress?	5
How do you recognize work stress?	6
Checklist	7
What do you look out for?	8
Handling the conversation	9
Three steps	10
Do's and don'ts	11
Conversational tool	12
The work pleasure top-10	13
Where can you get support as a manager?	15
Colofon	16

## WHAT IS WORK PRESSURE?

“Work pressure is a situation in which there is a discrepancy between the work requirements in terms of work content and the work context and the employee’s ability to perform the work adequately.”

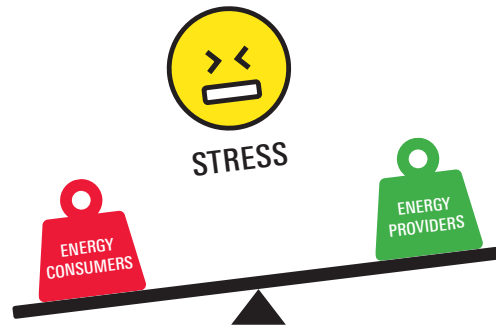
(working definition TNO report R12-10877)



# WHEN DOES WORK PRESSURE BECOMES WORK STRESS?

Work stress arises when there is a discrepancy between tasks that provide energy and tasks that cost energy.

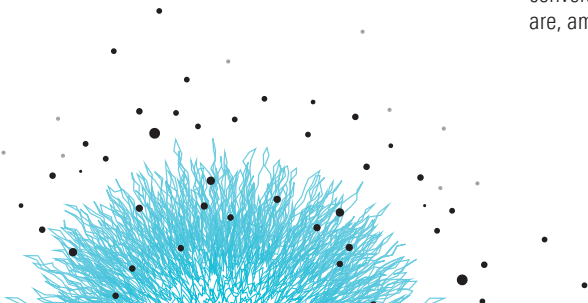
[www.monitorarbeid.tno.nl/cijfers/factsheets/factsheet-werkstress](http://www.monitorarbeid.tno.nl/cijfers/factsheets/factsheet-werkstress)



## HOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE WORK STRESS?

Everyone handles stress differently. As a manager, you should mainly look out for a change in behaviour in someone. There are signals that could point towards too much stress and could give cause for having a conversation with the employee in question. These are, among other things:

Use this check-list on the next page to help identify issues. Together determine whether there actually is work stress.



- Physical complaints, tiredness, sleep problems
- Irritability / low-spirit
- Forgetful / making an uncommon number of errors/concentration issues
- Being late regularly or being absent
- Having trouble with work changes or schedule changes
- Complaining a lot or making cynical remarks
- Working slower than is normal, not being able to finish things
- Too many working hours structurally
- Being erratic
- Being distant or withdrawn



## WHAT DO YOU LOOK OUT FOR?

Some people have characteristics that make them extra sensitive to stress. Others have characteristics that help them handle stress well.

### Examples of personality aspects that increase stress:

- Large sense of responsibility
- Wanting to keep control at all times
- Self-sacrifice
- High amount of loyalty
- Dutiful
- Not being able to/not wanting/not daring to say no

### Examples of personality aspects that reduce stress:

- Being satisfied more easily/being able to accept imperfection
- Willing to think about yourself
- Being able to let go
- Being able to set your boundaries.
- Being able to put things into perspective
- Allowing yourself to enjoy things
- Keeping your cool



## HANDLING THE CONVERSATION?

Entering into a conversation about work stress is no simple task. It is a sensitive and personal topic. Three steps can help you have such a conversation in a respectful and constructive way. You should realize that a good relationship with your employee is the foundation for a good conversation. Building and maintaining this relationship is a constant interaction.



## THREE STEPS

**1. Create the situation in which you can have the conversation.**

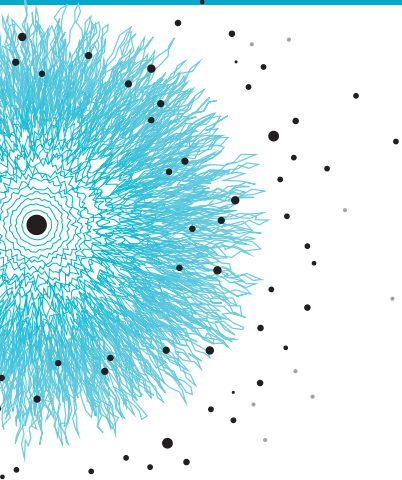
For example, ask about a specific event, such as how was your weekend? How was that meeting? How are you feeling?

**2. Do not talk about work content, but focus on the employee's well-being.**

For example, if an employee starts talking about intrinsic topics, then ask a question that turns focus back on the employee. "How do you feel about this?"

**3. Keep an open mind during the conversation and talk about what you see.**

- Point out behaviour: I can tell that lately you ...
- Talk about what this does to you: It makes me worried, because ...
- Allow for gaps in the conversation: Give your conversational partner enough time to react. Really listen to the answer and ask follow-up questions, use open questions. Do not provide solutions at this time.
- If there is no reaction you can ask another question or say something yourself ...
- For example: What do you think about this? Do you want to discuss this another time? Shall we schedule this?



### DO'S:

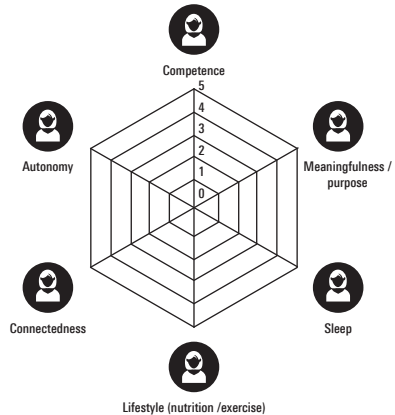
- Listen, summarise and ask further questions
- Time out, scheduling a follow-up meeting
- Taking the problem seriously, even if you do not think it is an issue
- Give personal attention
- Revisit prior conversations (show your involvement)
- Give a good example yourself

### DON'TS

- Filling in things for the employee
- Discussing content
- Coming up with all sorts of solutions on the spot



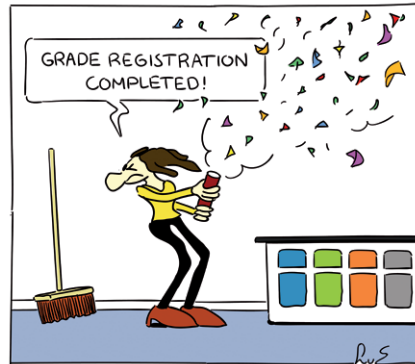
This cobweb model can be a starting point for a conversation. You can ask your employee to fill in how they are feeling on a scale from 1 to 5.



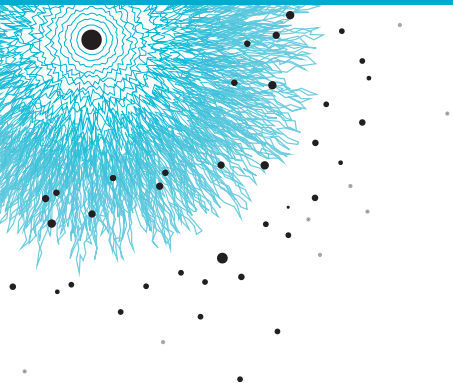
1. Give your employees freedom in how to approach their work
2. Support your employees by displaying sincere attention and involvement
3. Show your appreciation for the work your employees do
4. Offer flexible working hours if this is possible
5. Coordinate the amount of work with your employees' capacity



6. Compliment your employees
7. Make sure that the right person is doing the right job
8. Invest in your employees' strong suits
9. Celebrate successes, make sure that results and effort do not go unnoticed
10. Respect it when an employee says "No" and talk to them about it



## WHERE CAN YOU GET SUPPORT?



You can always consult the HR advisor of your faculty or department with respect to questions or worries about work pressure or questions about your employees. Every situation is unique, together you will look for a suitable solution.

Employees can use the anonymous consultation hour at the Health and Safety Service (Arbodienst). They can discuss their personal situation there. Ask your HR advisor.

The CTD offers training courses in the field of leadership, time management, etc.: [www.utwente.nl/ctd](http://www.utwente.nl/ctd)

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You can find further information and tools about work pressure, on [www.utwente.nl/workpressure](http://www.utwente.nl/workpressure)