



Feeling Stressed: Keeping Well

**A Preventative Approach
Towards Harmful Levels of Stress At Work**

Personal Workbook

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Feeling Stressed: Keeping Well

Stress, depression and anxiety are the cause of more working days lost than any other work-related illness.

For some, the link between stress and mental health may be a new one. We all need and, to a degree, thrive on stress: it gives us energy, it helps with performance, it inspires confidence. But when stress become harmful, perhaps due to too much (or too little) work, lack of time for social, family and personal activities, inadequate training to do the job, or external factors this can lead to other mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Prevention is better than cure. *Feeling Stressed: Keeping Well* offers a Personal Workbook with which you can develop an effective and very practical, common sense approach to overcoming distressing symptoms which can sometimes arise from harmful levels of stress. It's a tool with which you can gain more control over problems or difficulties you encounter as a result of stress caused by workload, relationships with colleagues, outside work pressures or other issues.

Going through the Workbook will take time: it can be done alone, but many find it very valuable to have a supporter, someone they trust, and work on it together.

It can become a practical support for you to refer to daily as a reminder and guide, and also turn to at times of difficulty. It's designed as an aid for learning about yourself, what helps you and what doesn't, and how to get progressively more in control of your life and your experience. It can be (and perhaps over time, as you learn more about yourself, should be) reviewed and amended.

Feeling Stressed: Keeping Well helps you think about things you do and could do on a daily and less frequent basis to keep yourself well – to think about what really works for you. It'll also help you recognise triggers – those things that happen to us that set off uncomfortable behaviours, thoughts or feelings – and how to deal with them. This workbook also looks at the subtle signs of changes in our thoughts or feelings or behaviour which indicate action needs to be taken to avoid becoming unwell. There's also space to plan action, think about who else can help you, and to review and learn from experience.

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Using this Workbook

Under each heading we have given some examples to help you think through the topics covered in the Workbook – and they are simply that: just examples – you will have your own personal ones. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. You are also encouraged to record ‘Action Points’ in response to some of the issues you have been thinking about.

We’ve allowed a whole page per topic – but it’s up to you how much you write. You may like to put it all in a ring binder so you can add pages if you wish.

The Workbook belongs to you and you decide how to use it. No one else can write it for you. No one else should ever ask to see it. You decide who to show it to and you decide whether you want someone to work with you on it or not. You decide how much time to spend on it and when to do it. It becomes *your guide* to support *your wellbeing*.

Keep it near you – keep yourself well.

Acknowledgements

Feeling Stressed: Keeping Well is based on elements of the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) originally developed by Mary Ellen Copeland and a group of mental health service users who wanted to work on their own recovery. The full version of WRAP is what worked for them and also includes instructions on developing a crisis plan, as a means of guiding others on how best to make decisions and to take care of the person affected by mental ill health, for those times when problems and symptoms have made it very difficult for them to do so by themselves.

***Wellness Recovery Action Plan* by Mary Ellen Copeland
Edited by Piers Allott
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1. Taking Each Day at a Time

Many people vary in how they feel from day to day. The weather, diet, lack of sleep, our health and many other factors can govern whether we have a 'good' or a 'bad' day.

This first section helps you to consider what makes you you.

What am I like when I am well, when I am feeling alright?

Examples: active, calm, spontaneous, fun, creative, outgoing, quiet

When I feel well, I am ...

What do I do *each day* to keep myself feeling well, feeling alright?

Examples: relaxation, phoning a friend, going for a walk, sport/gym, music, sleeping well, eating properly

This is what I need to do for myself each day to keep myself feeling as well as possible ...

What helps make sense of life for you or give it value?

Examples: creativity, religious belief, a philosophy, special memories, music, family

Things that are important to me are....

What do I do *less often* than every day to keep myself feeling well, feeling alright?

Examples: holidays, see a relation, start new project/course/job, review life goals or ambitions

This is what I need to do for myself every so often (weekly, monthly, yearly) to keep myself feeling as well as possible ...

What are some of the things you feel you may want to work on to keep yourself well?

Examples: taking a holiday, drink less, friendships, exercise

These are the things that I know I need to do to sustain my wellbeing, but for some reason do not do them ...

Reminders

Look back through what you have written so far – what conclusions can you draw that may be helpful?

In my experience these are the things that support my wellbeing – this *really* works for me ...

Action Point: Keeping Well

These are some things that I would like to try to see if they would support my wellbeing ...

2. Understanding Triggers

Triggers are **things that happen to us** that are likely to set off a chain reaction of uncomfortable or unhelpful behaviours, thoughts or feelings. In this second section you will explore your personal triggers and consider what you can do to avoid and control them.

Recognition: What are my triggers?

Examples: problems at work, anniversary of loss or trauma, ways that others treat you, being over-tired, family conflict, illness

These are things which can cause me to feel stressed, irritable, unhappy, difficult to be with...

Action Point: Avoiding & Controlling Triggers

Examples: controlling breathing, focusing on priorities, avoiding stressful situations, talking to a friend or counsellor, playing music

What can I do to avoid or limit my exposure to things that trigger me? What can I ask others to do (or not to do) to help?

What can I do when I am triggered to prevent things from getting worse? What can I ask others to do (or not to do) to help?

3. Identifying warning signs

Early warning signs are the subtle signs of changes in our thoughts or feelings or behaviour, which indicate that you may need to take action to avoid a worsening of your condition or situation. In this third section, you will be considering such changes and your response to them.

Recognition: What are my early warning signs?

Examples: reaction to being 'told off', withdrawal, making a drama in to a crisis, strong emotions, forgetfulness, being obsessed with thoughts, being 'mentally tired'

What are the subtle signs of changes within me that I notice and others may notice?

Action Point: What Can I Do About Them?

Examples: talking to a friend or counsellor, rationalising thoughts, being assertive, getting organised, focussing exercises, making lists

What action can I take when I recognise the early warning signs? What can I ask others to do (or not to do) to help?

4. Supporters

It's sometimes difficult to ask for help: but it's important to do so – and it's OK to do so.

List those people who could provide some additional support when things get difficult. They can be family members, work colleagues, friends or healthcare professionals. You may want to name some people for certain tasks.

These are my supporters:

Name	Connection/role
Phone number	

Name	Connection/role
Phone number	

Name	Connection/role
Phone number	

Name	Connection/role
Phone number	

Name	Connection/role
Phone number	

There may also be people who have done or said things in the past that you did not like.

I *do not want* the following people involved in any way:

Name

Why you do not want them involved (optional)

Name

Why you do not want them involved (optional)

5. Reviewing the Situation

This section is for completion at a later stage when necessary.

If despite your best efforts at caring for yourself and working with others, you still go through a difficult patch – this is not the end of the world, nor does it mean you cannot recover and the issues can be helped. Recovery is a process that you can get back to at any time and after any experience, no matter how bad. But in order to do so it will be very helpful to reflect on what has happened to you and learn from it. Some can do this alone, most of us are greatly helped by having someone we trust to turn to, and talk it over together – but pick your time when you are ready and willing to make sense of it, and you have the energy to do so. Then talk and think through what has happened, and compare this with what you have written so far.

What have you learned about yourself and others through this difficulty?

Are there any of your Action Points that didn't work out as you had hoped?

What's the one smallest change you can make which would make the biggest difference next time?

What else might you do differently next time?

What changes can you make now to your workbook and the Action Points to make further difficulties less likely? (Print off new pages and date them if that helps)

**Your guide to support your wellbeing
Keep it near you – keep yourself well**