

Understanding & managing stress & worry

Back to Basics

This year's theme for Mental Health Awareness Week is community, a word that sums up our Foundation network.

The City & Guilds Foundation work with a range of individuals from educators to learners, employers to job seekers. Empathy, a drive for change and the want to support others are three characteristics that our network has in spades. We know however, that working on the frontline, supporting individuals who have often faced complex trauma and barriers can take its toll.

We've put together this brief guide with practical tips that can help recognise and manage stress, worry, and the emotional cost of caring for others.

Stress Is Inevitable

Without A Buffer, Stress Can Overflow And Spill Over Into Other Areas

According to [NHS Mental Health Services monthly statistics in February 2025](#)



2.05

million people were in contact with mental health services at the end of February. The majority of these (1.37 million) were contact with adult mental health.

According to Mental Health UK and findings from 2025 Annual Burnout Report



1 in 5

workers needed to take time off work due to poor mental health caused by pressure or stress in the past year.



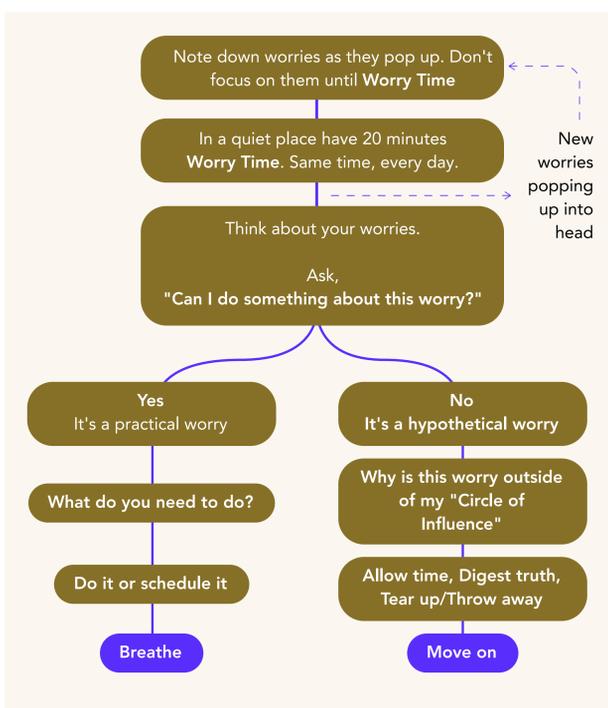
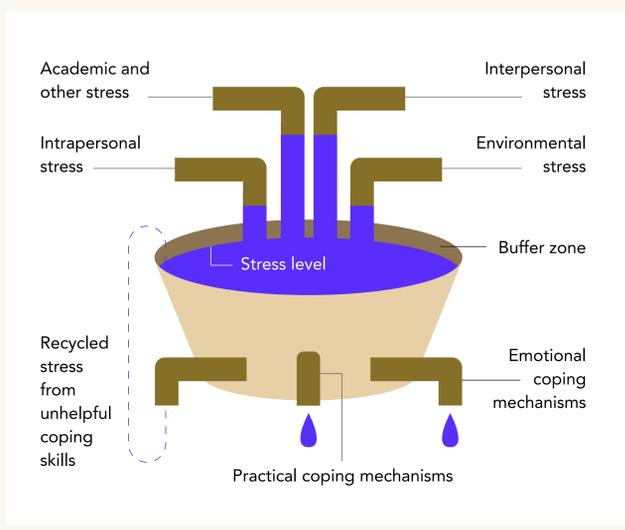
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of working UK adults said that stress impacted sleep (64%), diet (45%) or self confidence (44%).



Stress Bucket

This is a great way to visualise how we can cope with what life throws at us.



Worry Diary

This is a simple way to get a grip on the constant whirlwind of worry that can cloud your vision.

Tips for using the worry diary

- **Note It Down**
Record worries in a diary or journal.
- **Worry Time**
Set aside time daily to focus on worries.
- **Think About Them**
Analyze hypothetical worries and discard them.
- **Put Plans into Place**
Take action on practical worries.
- **Keep Trying**
Consistency is key to managing worries effectively.

Understanding and managing the cost of caring

Compassion Fatigue as an educator

The NHS defines compassion fatigue as

"emotional cost of caring for others or their emotional pain, whereby the individual struggles emotionally physically and psychologically from helping others as a response to prolonged stress or trauma"



Signs And Symptoms Of Compassion Fatigue

Adapted from Figley (2002), Stamm (2010), Noor et al (2025)

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioural/ Somatic	Work Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decreased concentration • disorientation • apathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • powerlessness • anxiety • intrusive thoughts • numbness • lack of self-satisfaction • loss of purpose • fear • feeling overwhelmed • desensitisation to others experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irritability • withdrawal/isolation • hypervigilance • loss of sleep • difficulty concentrating • headaches • rapid heart rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lowered motivation • absenteeism • exhaustion • self-criticism

Supportive Strategies For Individuals

- ✓ **Develop a Self-Care Strategy:** Prioritize your own wellbeing
- ✓ **Practice Self-Compassion:** Be kind to yourself and recognize your limits
- ✓ **Set Boundaries:** Create emotional boundaries and stick to them.
- ✓ **Seek Peer Support:** Connect with colleagues for emotional support.
- ✓ **Build Recovery into Your Day:** Take micro-breaks for breathing, stretching, or stepping outside.
- ✓ **Reclaim Small Joys:** Engage in activities that bring you joy.



Supportive Strategies For Managers & Organisations

- ✓ **Build a Culture of Psychological Safety:** Encourage openness about emotional challenges.
- ✓ **Acknowledge Compassion Fatigue:** Normalize conversations around wellbeing and stress.
- ✓ **Advocate for Systemic Support:** Provide regular wellbeing check-ins and access to mental health support
- ✓ **Monitor Workload:** Ensure staff are not overburdened and set clear role boundaries.
- ✓ **Training and Development:** Educate staff on compassion fatigue and self-care practices.
- ✓ **Embed Wellbeing into CPD:** Include wellbeing in professional development programs.
- ✓ **Designate Recovery Time:** Integrate recovery periods into the school year, such as wellbeing days and no-email weekends.