



To: Circuit Managers, Subject Advisors and Principals

Topic: **Supporting teachers who are experiencing stress during the pandemic.**

Message Objective(s): To assist officials to be able to support teachers experiencing stress during the pandemic.

Message: What is stress? It is the feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure. We all experience stress in one way or the other and more so now because of the coronavirus that there is still so much to learn about and a health crisis for which the country and the world seemed unprepared.

Even if we do not succumb to the coronavirus, we are likely to endure chronic stress that result from our fear and anxiety about the pandemic. Teachers, like all of us have been forced to deal with changed workforce environment and restrictions about social distancing, wearing of masks, limited number of learners attending school, disrupted timetabling, closure and reopening of schools after positive cases all put a strain on our educators and they get overly stressed.

Managers need to look out for common symptoms of chronic stress from their employees and assist them to deal with it. These include headaches, insomnia, muscle tension, fatigue, and muscular twitches. Behavioural symptoms like increased smoking, eating, or drinking are signs of stress. Emotional symptoms such as irritability anxiety or depression, feeling sad, angry, or scared become common and are easy to identify. Managers are encouraged to look out for these outward signs and assist their subordinates. Beware of the iceberg illusion, where you can only see the outward signs but cannot get the real cause of those signs. Supportive managers take time and effort to find out the cause of the outward signs they see in their subordinates and support them to deal with them by providing psychosocial support at the workplace.

Here are some of the practical ways to support teachers experiencing stress

- Ask them to make a list of things they are grateful about.
- Make them feel valued and appreciate their contributions to the institution.
- Implement a buddy system and encourage peer support.
- Operate an open door-door policy for staff to report problems, preferably to someone different from their line manager.
- Work to proactively address conflicts: emphasize the importance of a supportive team environment.
- Encourage teachers to do regular exercises
- Encourage them to do something creative like art, craft or writing to get their minds off stuff.
- Ask teachers to listen to music, read a book, speak to trusted friend or family member.
- Ask them to get spiritual help or refer them to social workers or psychologists

Sometimes how happy we can be, depends, not on the situation we find ourselves in but on how we organise our minds as we deal with the devastating effects of the pandemic.

From: George Taodzera (Georget@nect.org.za) 079 368 0612



Reference: Basic Psychosocial Skills: A COVID-19 Responder's Guide, Psychosocial Support: A model for South African Schools. model for South African Schools.