

## THE DANGER ZONE

### A guide to discussing well-being and stress with individual employees

- when you are particularly concerned about their well-being

If you notice – or if somebody else tells you – that one of your employees is in the danger zone, it is important that you reach out quickly and invite the employee in question to a one-to-one meeting.

The employee may also contact you directly, in which case you should also offer a one-to-one meeting.

In the danger zone, it is important that you:

- adapt the dialogue and the content to the specific situation. If you notice that the employee is very affected by the situation, only talk about the most necessary things.
- assess the degree to which the person is overburdened
- find ways to ensure the employee can find peace of mind and rest as quickly as possible
- control and steer the dialogue more than you would if talking to an employee who is not suffering from stress. People in the danger zone are rarely able to come up with solutions or assess their options themselves, so you need to take responsibility for this as a manager.
- show respect and compassion for the employee whilst also taking control. This includes helping the employee to prioritise tasks in order to reduce workload. For example, it may be possible to postpone some tasks until a later date.
- be accommodating and understanding if the employee gets emotional during the meeting.

As a manager, you should also consider the following questions – before, during and after the one-to-one meeting:

- What are we doing right now? What is realistically possible in the current situation?
- Is there something that could be done right now to enable the employee to be in the workplace in a manageable way (that will not aggravate the situation)?
- What help is available from the workplace in terms of advice or support? (cf. the possibility to get psychological counselling)
- Do I need to put a temporary safeguarding scheme in place or arrange for the employee to go on full- or part-time sick leave? Remember that going on part-time sick leave can help mitigate the serious effects of stress and reduce the risk of the employee going on full-time sick leave. So don't hesitate to suggest this.

#### Before the one-on-one

Be honest and direct when you reach out to an employee you are concerned about. Say, for example:

“I would like to invite you to a one-to-one meeting, because I am concerned about your well-being and workload.

### During the one-on-one meeting

Frame the discussion by repeating the reason for and aim of the meeting. It is worth taking some time for you and your employee to balance your expectations.

You might also wish to point out that the dialogue is confidential, because for many people stress can be a sensitive topic to discuss with their manager.

At this point, it could be a good idea to tell the employee that AU offers psychological counselling and, if relevant, suggest that they contact their own GP.

Questions that may help you assess the employee's situation and decide on specific courses of action:

- How are you?
- I have noticed ... and therefore I'm worried that you are under too much pressure at the moment / might be heading into the danger zone.
- How do you experience the situation yourself?
- Where are you on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is having no stress and 10 is having several serious stress symptoms?
- Are there any factors here at the workplace that are making you feel under pressure/stressed?
- Do you have any ideas about what could help alleviate your situation right now?
- I would suggest that you.... Examples: get help to prioritise your tasks, don't do some of your tasks, go on full-time or part-time sick leave, get psychological counselling, contact your own doctor, etc.
- What else could I or your colleagues do to help alleviate your situation?

At the end of the meeting, it's important that you draw up a joint plan/agreement about:

- How you will reduce work-related pressures
- Full-time or part-time sick leave (if relevant)
- How much you will communicate with each other whilst the employee is on sick leave
- Follow-up procedures
- Information for colleagues

### After the one-on-one

As a manager, it is your responsibility to arrange for other members of staff to take over some of the tasks from the employee in question (if necessary) – and to communicate these arrangements clearly.

Remember to follow up on the meeting and the agreements you've made.

In the event that the employee goes on sick leave, you can find [advice on sickness absence meetings here](#). You can contact your HR partner and read more on how to manage a [phased return to work following stress-related sick leave here \(Danish\)](#).

When an employee is affected by stress, it's a good idea to consider whether other employees may also be feeling overburdened – and whether you need to make any changes and adjustments in your unit/department to prevent more members of staff coming down with stress.

*This guide has been made with inspiration from:  
Martini M, Tøttrup, CA & Krarup, M (2017). Lederens stresshåndbog: Styrk dine lederkompetencer, når  
det gælder stress.  
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