

# Stress Busters for Councillors

Mental health issues affect up to 1 in 4 people at any one time. Holding public office can pull you in multiple directions. It sometimes places you in highly charged situations and the interactions you have with people can increase the risk of experiencing stress, anxiety and/or depression.

## Top Tips for Elected Members

Stress is a normal physical response that can help us deal with everyday challenges. However, if you are frequently stressed you may start to suffer physically, mentally and emotionally. This may manifest itself through feelings of irritation, anxiety or lack of self-esteem and you may have difficulties concentrating and making decisions. Symptoms also include headaches, muscle pain, tiredness and sleep problems. You may start drinking or smoking more, snapping at people and avoiding problems or people.

The good news is you're not alone and there are a number of things to help maintain healthy stress levels.

Here are eight stress busters, which can help you to cope with these feelings or work to avoid them.

### 1. **Prioritise 'Me Time'**

You have many demands on your time. Whilst helping others has been shown to support wellbeing, as a Councillor it is easy to get caught up in focusing on your work and community and forgetting about 'me time'. Try to prioritise some regular time for yourself to socialise, exercise, or just relax.

### 2. **Being active helps**

Being physically active can directly reduce levels of stress hormones and improve your mood. This doesn't mean hitting the gym every day. Day-to-day activities such as walking, housework and gardening can all help increase your heart rate to benefit both your body and mind. Why not combine work and physical activity by having a walking meeting?

### 3. **Be in control**

Despite the often-unpredictable nature of your role, there are things that you can predict and plan for. You can also learn to pre-empt those things that can be challenging. Find ways that help you be in control as much as possible. Planning your time, having a regular surgery and only using social media at certain times of the day, for example, all help to try and prevent things from getting overwhelming.

### 4. **Sometimes you have to say no**

You have a lot of people making demands of you. It is impossible to do everything that's asked of you, so have a criteria upon which you decide what you can do, what others may be able to do on your behalf and the things you will say no to.

#### **5. Have a good support network**

Support networks come in different shapes and sizes; from your family and friends to your colleagues and acquaintances. A good support network can help us to feel better, consider challenges from a different perspective and limit the feeling of isolation that can come from the elected office. Talking to others can help, as can relaxing and having fun!

#### **6. Avoid unhealthy habits**

We all know that alcohol, smoking and caffeine are often used by many of us to cope with stress. They may help us feel better in the short-term but their longer-term effects can be harmful to our health and wellbeing. To truly reduce stress you need to tackle the cause and consider healthier alternatives to get that quick fix, for example short breathing exercises.

#### **7. Accept the things you can't change**

As a Councillor you will see and hear some difficult things. You will experience stressful and sometimes upsetting situations. Part of your resilience to those things comes from knowing that changing a difficult situation is not always possible. Instead, try to concentrate on the things you are able to change and the positive impact you can have.

#### **8. Look at the big picture**

When there's too much to do in too little time, focus on the highest priority. One way to identify this is to ask yourself, 'If I only did one of these things, which would matter 5 years from now?' or imagine you are going on holiday after today – what's most important to complete before you go?

For further information on how to boost your mood to help you be the best that you can be for yourself and others, visit the **NHS Moodzone** resource centre.

If you are worried that it might be more than stress, there is support available through your GP.

Turning Point provides online health and wellbeing support for workplaces via Rightsteps Wellbeing. Get your employees on-demand, 24/7 support from a range of wellbeing resources covering mind, body and behaviour. Find out visit

[www.rightsteps.co.uk/wellbeing](http://www.rightsteps.co.uk/wellbeing)