

Dealing with Work-related Christmas Stress

Did you know that, according to a study conducted by global HR firm ADP, 64% of Australians are stressed at least once a week at work?

With Christmas approaching, the usual stressors of work can be amplified due to various factors, including:

1. There's the same amount of work to do and less of the month to finish it.
2. External pressures like finances and social schedules can become overbearing.
3. In some sectors, like retail and hospitality, Christmas is the busiest time of the year.

However, there are several things individuals and leader/managers can do to ensure that the lead-up to Christmas isn't too stressful.

AS AN INDIVIDUAL

When it comes around, it's important to be able to enjoy your Christmas break to the fullest. This break might be a few weeks as your business shuts down, or just a couple of days as your organisation continues to trade throughout December. Whatever the case, you won't enjoy it if you carry the stress of work with you! In the meantime, it's important to take care of yourself and your workload!

1) Plan ahead and organise

You know when your last day is before your Christmas break, but you may still have a number of work-related tasks to check off before you log

off. Organisation is key. Ensure you set deadlines for yourself and plan ahead to ensure you've ticked everything off before Christmas. It can sometimes be easy to either leave jobs until the last minute, plan to do them after your break, or ignore them entirely! Not completing tasks now can cause unnecessary stress in the short-term and later down the line, so planning ahead and tying up any loose ends can make it easier for you to relax when you're enjoying your Christmas holiday.

2) Communicate and know when to push back

For some organisations and departments, the lead-up to Christmas can be one of the busiest times of the year. As a result, work can quickly pile up, causing heightened levels of stress. During these times, it's important to talk to your manager about your workload and how they can help to manage it. If you think you've got too much to do, don't be afraid to push back and respectfully request that it be evenly distributed amongst your team.

3) Maintain healthy habits

Whether it's the office Christmas party or drinks out with friends, the Christmas lead-up can see an increase in social events, and in food and alcohol intake. While all of these activities are enjoyable, too much can cause fatigue and sluggishness during the day which can impact your ability to complete your work. Learn to say no if you feel you have too much in your diary outside of work and ensure you're dialling up your self-care — whether that's exercise, eating healthily or practicing mindfulness.

AS A LEADER/MANAGER

As well as self-care, business leaders and managers need to pay particular attention to their staff and their stressors during this period.

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1300 our eap (1300 687 327)

info@convergeintl.com.au

convergeinternational.com.au

1) Plan a Christmas-themed activity

If you have your team in one office, get everyone to decorate together. An easy group activity such as this can be very therapeutic. As well as decorating their own desks, you can also arrange festive activities such as Secret Santa, Christmas jumper day, and of course, the office Christmas party. All of these activities are ideal for morale and camaraderie.

2) Help staff manage workloads

Time management is a big source of stress in December. Since the season has fewer work days but the same amount of work, help your employees plan ahead as much as possible so that their productivity isn't affected. You may also look to outsource or take on temporary staff over busy periods.

3) Maintain good communication

Make sure to increase your communication with your employees this season or at least maintain effective channels when things get busy. By regularly checking in to see if everyone is okay, your team are more likely to come to you if there is a potential issue with their workload or mental health.

4) Help staff reduce their financial stress

Financial stress is one of the biggest pressures during December, so think about the ways you can help your employees with this. Of course, Christmas bonuses and gift cards can help with this, but so can holding a workshop on "holiday budgeting" or "how to avoid overspending".

5) Check for signs of anxiety or depression

Christmas and New Year can be a lonely time for people, especially for those who have recently lost a loved one, so be aware that some may need alone time while others may feel isolated and will need encouragement to get involved. Keep your eyes open for the tell-tale signs of negative mental health and be prepared to give extra support to these people.

6) Encourage a work/life balance

Can you offer your employees more work-from home and/or flexible hours this season? If your employees can schedule work around their personal lives, you'll see a huge difference in productivity and wellbeing.

Even if it's as simple as allowing people to work earlier and leave earlier, so they can take care of their children or finish their Christmas shopping.

FRONTLINE WORKERS

For customer-facing organisations, Christmas is usually the busiest time of the year. This puts extra pressure on people who work in these sectors. If this applies to you, it's important to consider the following points to help you look after your mental health:

1. Manage your expectations and expect the unexpected. This will help ensure that you are prepared if things don't go to plan.
2. Be kind to yourself and your co-workers. Lots of people have mental health struggles, financial pain and heightened anxiety through this period and will appreciate some extra gestures of kindness and care towards each other. Ultimately, you are all in this together.
3. Understand that customers are likely stressed at this time of year too, which may mean that their normal levels of resilience and politeness may be strained.
4. Practice self-care strategies that work for you. You know what keeps you calm and centred. For some it's yoga, for others it's mindfulness exercises or a quiet walk amongst nature. Do what you know recharges your batteries.

REACH OUT FOR HELP

The Christmas period can be a stressful time without the added complications experienced this year, so if you're beginning to struggle with your mental health, it's okay to ask for help. Our friendly staff are available 24/7 to take your call on **1300 687 327** if you want to talk to a mental health professional.

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