International Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing

Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

COPING WITH CHANGE HANDBOOK 2025

For further information, please contact
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WELCOME

Stress is part of life — it's how we respond to it that matters.

In today's fast-paced world, pressure is everywhere: demanding deadlines, shifting expectations, and constant change. A manageable level of stress can drive performance. But when stress becomes persistent and overwhelming, it can have serious consequences for our health, focus, and productivity.

According to the CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work 2023 report, stress is the leading cause of long-term absence in the workplace. Meanwhile, the ONS reports that 1 in 6 working-age adults experience symptoms of anxiety or depression at any given time.

The total cost of poor mental health to UK employers is now estimated at £56 billion per year — a sharp increase from pre-pandemic levels.

We know now that stress is not just a feeling — it affects the entire body. It's linked to high blood pressure, heart disease, digestive issues, insomnia, anxiety, burnout, and even weakened immunity. If left unmanaged, the toll is both personal and professional.

This programme is designed to help you build resilience, boost self-awareness, and take back control.

You'll learn to spot the signs of unhelpful stress, manage pressure more effectively, and respond in ways that protect your wellbeing and performance.

Whether you're leading a team, juggling multiple priorities, or simply trying to stay on top of daily demands, the tools in this programme will help you find balance — so you can not just cope, but thrive.

Welcome Aboard

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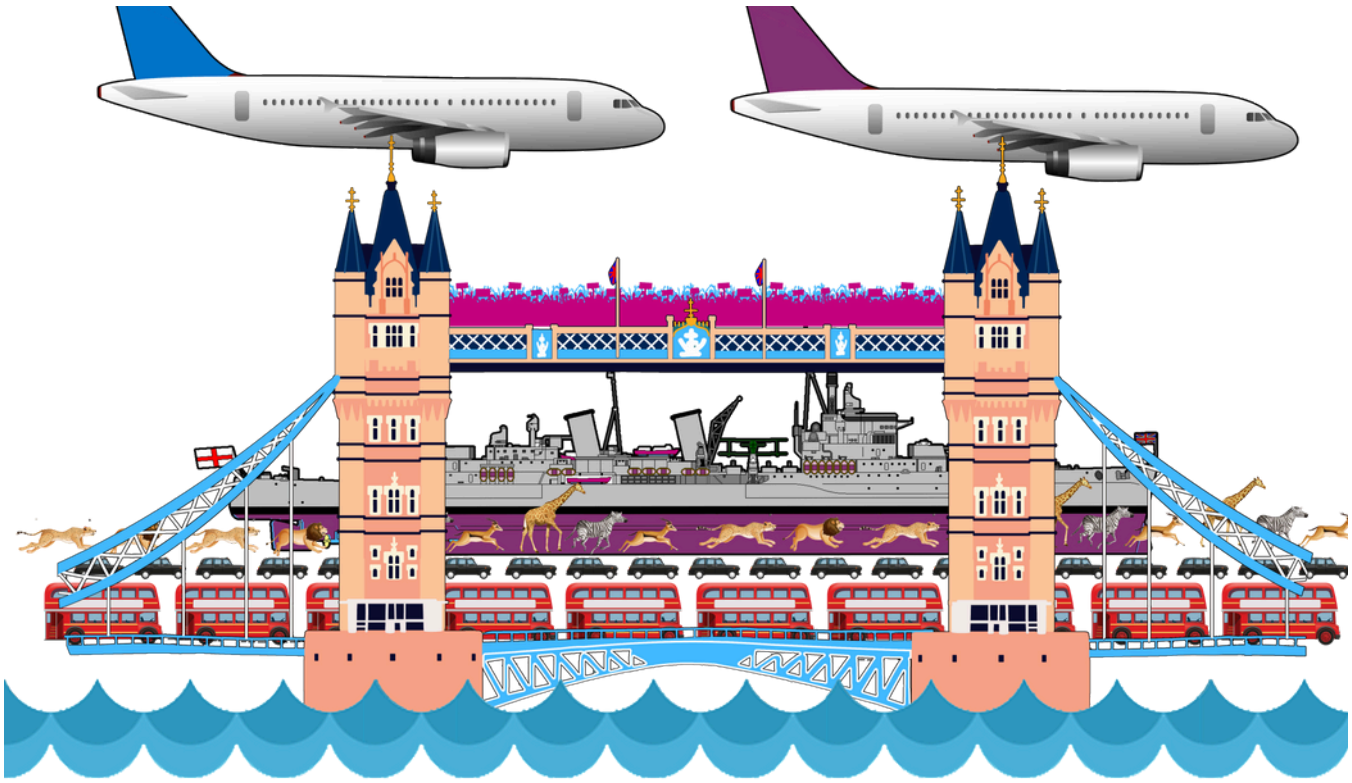
THE BRIDGE ANALOGY



The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people haveto excessivepressures or othertypesof demand placedon them'.

This links very closely to one of our definitions of stress; a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that:

"DEMANDS EXCEED THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES THE INDIVIDUAL IS ABLE TO MOBILISE."

The International Wellbeing Insights uses 'The Bridge' analogy to approach the topic of mental health, wellbeing and stress. When a Bridge is carrying too much weight, it will eventually collapse. It is possible to see the warning signs before this happens, 'The Bridge' would bow, buckle and creak.

The same principle can be applied to human beings, with excessive demands and challenges placed on our bridges. There may be early warning signs. Howeverstress can creep up on some of us, resulting in an unexpected breakdown.

'The Bridge' analogy can also be applied to a team or organisation as a whole by looking for more general signs such as team deadlines not being met or a decrease in team morale.

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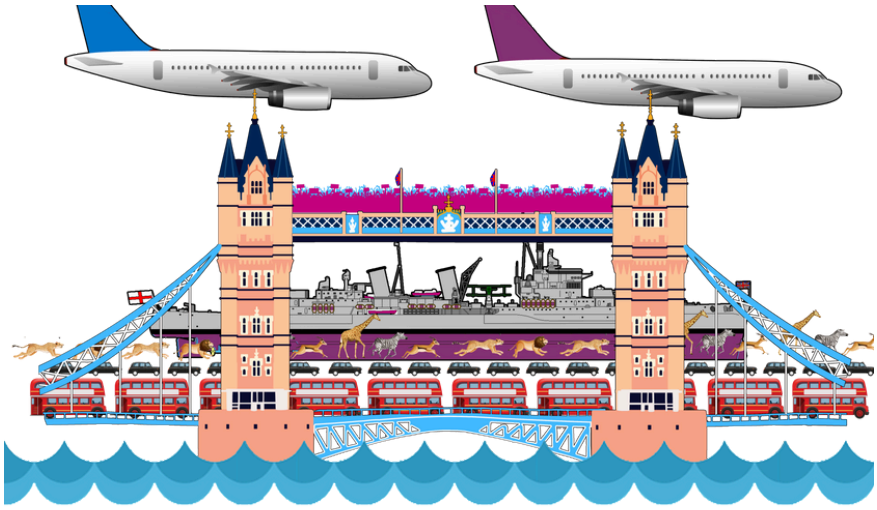
WHAT'S ON YOUR BRIDGE?



1. HOW DOES CHANGE AFFECT YOUR BRIDGE?

2. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BRIDGE WHEN FACED WITH CHANGE?

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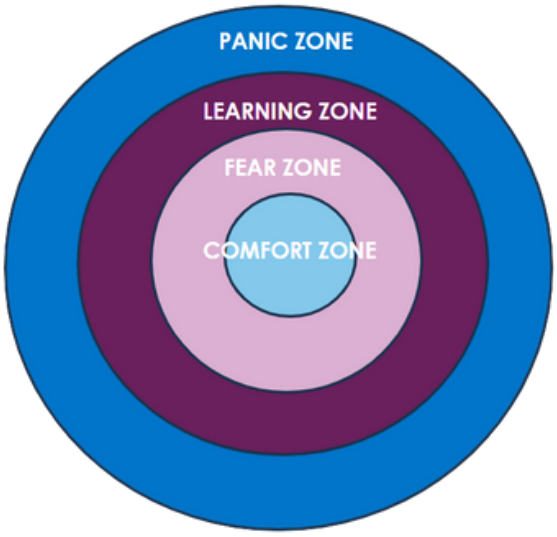
THE CHANGE MODEL



COMFORT ZONE

The starting point – a place of safety and familiarity, but with little room for growth.
Example: Sticking to tasks you know well at work because they feel easy and safe, even though you're no longer challenged.

FEAR ZONE

The stage where change begins, often bringing feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and uncertainty.
Example: Being asked to give a presentation for the first time and feeling anxious, doubting your ability, or worrying about what others will think.

LEARNING ZONE

The sweet spot where manageable anxiety pushes us to adapt, develop new skills, and embrace growth.
Example: Delivering that presentation, realising you can handle it, learning new skills, and gaining confidence to take on bigger opportunities.

PANIC ZONE

When change becomes overwhelming or too fast, leading to heightened stress, panic, and burnout.
Example: Being asked to present to a large audience with no preparation time, leaving you overwhelmed, panicked, and unable to perform at your best.

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THE CHANGE MODEL- REFLECTION EXERCISE

What can you do to get into your comfort zone?

What do you experience when in this zone?

What skills or strengths have you developed in the past when you embraced change?

Reflect on a moment where change felt overwhelming. What pushed you there?

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CHANGE

Understanding change is a crucial step toward personal and professional growth. Embracing change can improve our adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving abilities, helping us navigate challenges with confidence and clarity.

This survey will guide you through a series of reflective questions to explore how you perceive and respond to change in various aspects of your life and work.

The goal of this exercise is not to assign a score or benchmark, but to encourage self-awareness and identify areas where you can develop habits or strategies to navigate change more effectively.

ASSESS YOUR ABILITY TO CHANGE	AGREE	DISAGREE
ARE YOU OPEN TO NEW IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES?	Y	N
DO YOU REGULARLY REFLECT ON YOUR BEHAVIORS AND HABITS?	Y	N
CAN YOU EASILY ADAPT TO UNEXPECTED SITUATIONS? DO YOU SET PERSONAL GOALS FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT?	Y	N
HAVE YOU SUCCESSFULLY MADE POSITIVE CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE BEFORE?	Y	N
ARE YOU WILLING TO STEP OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE?	Y	N
DO YOU SEEK FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS ON YOUR BEHAVIOR?	Y	N
CAN YOU MAINTAIN MOTIVATION WHEN FACING OBSTACLES?	Y	N
DO YOU HAVE A SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR MAKING CHANGES?	Y	N
ARE YOU PATIENT WITH YOURSELF DURING THE CHANGE PROCESS?	Y	N
CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE REASONS WHY YOU WANT TO CHANGE?	Y	N
ARE YOU WILLING TO SEEK HELP OR RESOURCES WHEN NEEDED?	Y	N
DO YOU CELEBRATE SMALL VICTORIES IN YOUR CHANGE JOURNEY?	Y	N
TOTAL		

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WHY ARE YOU FINDING IT HARD TO CHANGE

When the general public were asked to complete the sentence

"WHY AM I STRUGGLING WITH CHANGE?..."

The most popular answers are

1. FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Change often involves stepping into uncharted territory, which can be intimidating. The uncertainty about outcomes or how to adapt can create anxiety and resistance, making it challenging to embrace change.

2. IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE

Change disrupts familiar routines and comfort zones, pushing individuals to adapt to new situations that may feel awkward, stressful, or unfamiliar. This discomfort can act as a deterrent to fully committing to change.

3. MY PAST

Past experiences, especially failures or negative outcomes from previous attempts at change, can create self-doubt or a reluctance to try again. Emotional baggage or learned behaviors can also make moving forward more difficult.

4. LOSING CONTROL

Change often requires giving up a sense of control over familiar processes or outcomes. This perceived loss of control can lead to resistance, as individuals fear they may not be able to manage the new circumstances effectively.

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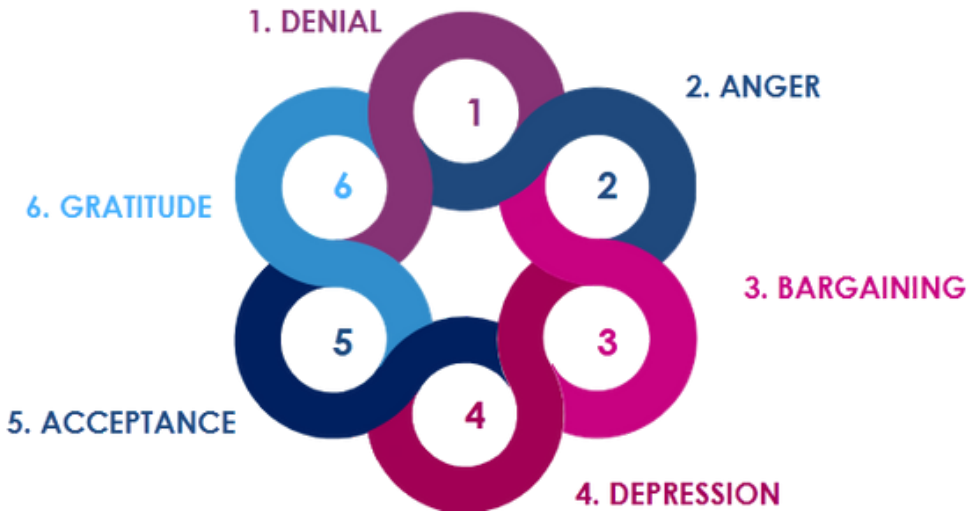
THE CHANGE KNOT



DENIAL

Individuals struggle to acknowledge the need for change, often avoiding the reality of the situation. This reaction stems from a desire to maintain the status quo and resist disruption.

ANGER

When the reality of change begins to set in, frustration and anger may arise. These emotions can be directed at themselves, others, or the circumstances, as individuals grapple with feelings of helplessness or unfairness.

BARGAINING

Individuals attempt to regain control or negotiate their way out of change. They may look for compromises or ways to delay or minimise the impact of the change.

DEPRESSION

As the weight of change becomes unavoidable, feelings of sadness, overwhelm, or hopelessness may emerge. This stage reflects the emotional processing of what has been lost or altered.

ACCEPTANCE

Individuals begin to come to terms with the change. They shift their focus towards adapting and finding ways to move forward, embracing the new reality.

GRATITUDE

Individuals not only accept the change but also recognise its value. They may feel thankful for the growth, lessons, or opportunities that the change has brought into their lives.

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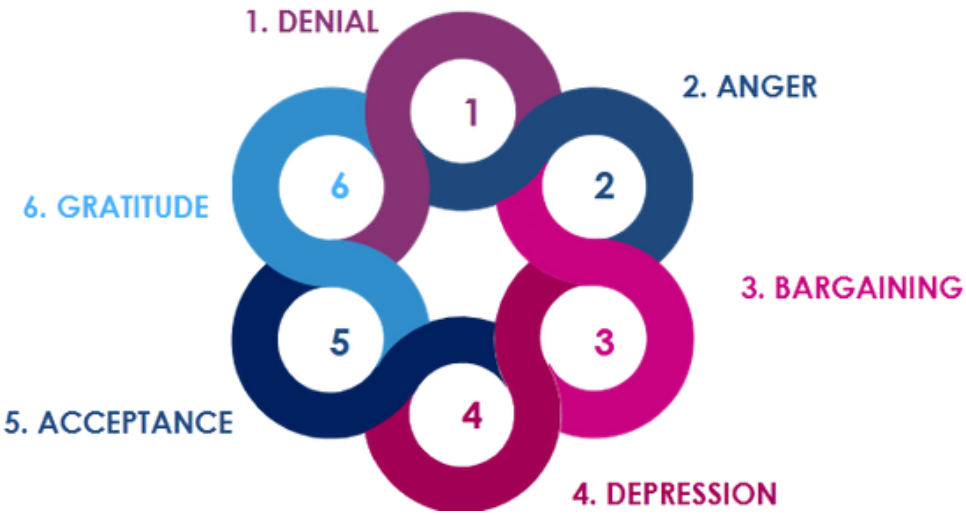
THE CHANGE KNOT



1. WHICH STAGE OF THE CHANGE KNOT DO YOU FIND YOURSELF GETTING STUCK IN MOST OFTEN, AND WHY

2. WHAT PERSONAL STRENGTHS OR STRATEGIES HAVE HELPED YOU MOVE FROM ONE STAGE TO THE NEXT IN PAST EXPERIENCES OF CHANGE?

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WHAT COULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

CHANGE

Change is an inevitable aspect of life and has a profound impact on our personal and professional experiences. Understanding the dynamicsof change, including how it relates to stress and the comfort zone, can empower individuals to navigate transitions more effectively.

From a psychological perspective, change often disrupts established routines and expectations, triggering a stress response. This is rooted in our brain's natural tendency to favor predictability and safety. When faced with uncertainty, the brain activates the fight-or-flight response, which can result in feelings of anxiety, resistance, or overwhelm. However, change also presents an opportunity for growth and development when approached with the right mindset and tools.

The comfort zone model illustrates how individuals operate within familiar and predictable boundaries. Stepping outside this zone often leads to discomfort but is necessary for personal and professional growth. Beyond the comfort zone lies the "stretch zone," where learning and development occur, and beyond that, the "panic zone," where stress may become counterproductive. Striking a balance between challenge and support is key to leveraging change for growth while managing stress effectively.

1. Understand the Nature of Change: Recognise that change is a process, often involving stages such as precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Acknowledging these stages can help normalize emotional responses. source
2. Embrace a Growth Mindset: View change as an opportunity to learn and adapt rather than a threat to stability. This mindset shift can reduce stress and increase resilience. source
3. Identify and Address Stressors: Break down the sources of stress associated with change. Focus on what is within your control and develop a plan to address those elements. source
4. Expand Your Comfort Zone Gradually: Take small, manageable steps toward embracing change to avoid entering the panic zone. Regularly challenging yourself with new experiences can make larger transitions feel less daunting. source
5. Build Emotional Resilience: Practice mindfulness, meditation, or deep breathing to stay grounded. These techniques can help regulate the stress response and enhance emotional stability. source
6. Seek Support from Others: Connect with peers, mentors, or support groups to share experiences and gain perspective. Social support is a key factor in managing stress during change. source
7. Develop a Structured Plan: Set realistic goals, timelines, and actions to navigate the change process effectively. Having a clear plan can reduce feelings of uncertainty and overwhelm. source

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MY 30 DAY ACTION PLAN

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER…ONLY IF YOU APPLY IT OR TAKE ACTION.

THIS IS ABOUT YOUR LIFESTYLE.

HOW DID YOU DO? WHAT ARE YOU DOINGWELL? WHAT COULD NEED IMPROVEMENT?

BUILD YOUR PERSONAL RESILIENCE.

Finding meaningful ways to engage yourbrain and occupy your time can help alleviate the distress and irritabilitythat poor wellbeing brings.
The coping mechanisms that will work bestfor you will have a lot to do with your personalsituation

FOR EXAMPLE:

"I WILL LIMIT MY SUGAR INTAKE AND REACH OUT FOR FRUIT INSTEAD"
"I WILL GO TO BED 30 MINUTES EARLIER

ACTION POINT 1 - BETTER EQUIP MYSELF WITH CHANGE: I WILL...

ACTIONPOINT 2—CHANGE THE WAY MY ABILITY TO CHANGE AFFECTS MY WELLBEING : I WILL…

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ABOUT INTERNATIONAL WELLBEING INSIGHTS

Big ideas, inspiring stories, robust ethics and strong principles and a values driven approach have been at the heart of our organisation since our inception.

We believe that wellbeing isn't just a perk — it's the foundation of a thriving, high-performing, and sustainable workplace. Our mission is simple but powerful: to empower organisations and individuals to take control of their wellbeing, creating cultures where people don't just survive but truly thrive.

We've been at the forefront of workplace wellbeing since 2003, helping organisations worldwide build happier, healthier, and more resilient teams. But we're not here to tick boxes or promote one-off initiatives — we're here to drive meaningful, lasting change.

Our mission is to maximise physical, mental, emotional and social health as well as improve relationships, performance, productivity, creativity, morale, recruitment and retention by creating a resilient workforce and equipping them to cope with change and adversity.

For more information or to book a workshop or a free no-obligation consultation, see www.wellbeing.work or call 0203 142 8659 or email info@stress.org.uk

If you would like more information about stress and how to manage it, visit www.stress.org.uk

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We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

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We have supported many organisations, including:

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