



International
Wellbeing Insights
People, Culture & Wellbeing



Stress Management Society
from distress to de-stress

MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS

SKILLS SESSION:

S.T.E.A.D.Y. FRAMEWORK



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MARS



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WELCOME

Change and pressure are part of working life. What makes the difference is how we respond when things feel uncertain, demanding, or unsettled.

In the world we find ourselves in, many of us are navigating significant transformation. Shifting priorities, new ways of working, and evolving expectations can create a sense that everything is moving at once. In these moments, it is natural for people to experience a range of emotions, from excitement and curiosity to uncertainty or concern.

Research continues to show the impact that sustained pressure can have in the workplace.

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

S.T.E.A.D.Y is a simple framework designed to help people find steadiness during periods of pressure, uncertainty, or change. It does not remove the challenges around us, but it helps us respond in ways that are more grounded, balanced, and supportive, both for ourselves and for others.

Whether you are supporting colleagues as a Mental Health Champion, navigating change within your own role, or helping others find clarity during uncertainty, the S.T.E.A.D.Y approach offers a way to remain grounded while everything around us evolves.

Because while we cannot stop the tide of change, we can learn how to anchor ourselves within it.

Welcome Aboard



S.T.E.A.D.Y. FRAMEWORK



The S.T.E.A.D.Y Model is a framework designed to help people stay grounded and navigate periods of pressure, uncertainty, and change with greater clarity and balance. Through Slowing the system, Tuning into mixed emotions, Exploring what's steady and what's shifting, Adjusting expectations, Deciding on one

meaningful next step, and remembering You don't have to carry everything alone, the framework reminds us that steadiness is not the absence of pressure, it is the ability to pause, reconnect, and respond with intention when life feels uncertain or overwhelming.

By providing practical tools to pause, reflect, and respond more intentionally to pressure, the framework reminds us that even in moments of uncertainty or overwhelm, steadiness is possible, and with the right awareness and support, people can reconnect with what grounds them and move forward with greater clarity and balance.

Key Aspects of the S.T.E.A.D.Y. Framework

- **Regulating the nervous system first** - Before we can think clearly or solve problems, we need to slow the stress response. The S.T.E.A.D.Y framework recognises that calming the body and mind is the first step to regaining perspective and control.
- **Building self-awareness and emotional literacy** - Understanding what we are feeling and why allows us to respond with intention rather than reacting on autopilot. The framework encourages curiosity about our internal experience.
- **Creating psychological safety through human connection** - Supportive conversations and compassionate listening help people feel seen, heard, and less alone in their challenges. Steadiness is often strengthened through connection with others.
- **Encouraging practical, manageable action** - When stress feels overwhelming, small and meaningful steps help restore a sense of agency. The framework focuses on realistic actions that move people forward without adding pressure.

S.T.E.A.D.Y. FRAMEWORK



Example in Scenario:

Adam has been feeling overwhelmed at work. Demands have increased, expectations feel unclear, and the constant pace of change is starting to affect his focus and confidence.

Slow the System Down

Support Adam to pause before problem-solving. Encourage a moment to breathe and settle so his stress response can calm and he can think more clearly.

Tune Into Emotions

Invite Adam to name what he is feeling. Acknowledging emotions helps him feel heard and reduces the intensity of the moment.

Explore What Is Steady vs Shifting

Support Adam in separating what he can control from what is outside his control. This can reduce overwhelm and bring focus to what is manageable.

Adjust Expectations of Self & Others

Support Adam in reflecting on whether the expectations he is holding himself to are realistic right now, and where self compassion may be needed.

Decide One Meaningful Next Step

Support Adam in identifying one small step that would support him right now, such as having a conversation, seeking support, or taking a pause.

You Don't Carry the Organisation's Change

Remind Adam that he does not have to carry the weight of the wider situation alone. Your role as a Champion is to listen and walk alongside him, not to fix the change itself.

SLOW THE SYSTEM:

KEY SKILLS:

- Pause before responding – Give space rather than rushing to fix or advise.
- Use calm, steady language – Your tone and pace help regulate the conversation (Remember: Mirroring & Matching)
- Normalise taking a moment – Reassure the person that it is okay to slow down.

When people experience stress or uncertainty, the nervous system can move into a threat response. In this state, people may react quickly, feel overwhelmed, or struggle to think clearly. The first role of a Mental Health Champion is not to solve the problem immediately, but to help slow the emotional pace of the moment. By creating a calm and steady space, you help the person move from reaction into reflection.

Core Components:

1. Creating Psychological Pause

Encouraging a short pause can help interrupt the body's immediate stress response. By allowing a moment to breathe, reflect, or simply slow down, you help the person move from reacting emotionally to thinking more clearly and feeling more present in the conversation.

2. Regulating the Pace of the Conversation

Slowing your speech, allowing moments of silence, and not pushing for immediate answers helps reduce intensity and creates space for the person to process what they are feeling.

3. Modelling Calm Presence

Your calm tone, attentive listening, and steady body language can have a powerful regulating effect. By remaining grounded and present, you help the other person feel safer, more supported, and better able to share openly.

! What Not to Do When Slowing Down the System:

- Don't rush the conversation. Moving too quickly can increase pressure and make the person feel they need to solve everything immediately.
- Don't minimise their feelings. Avoid phrases like "It's not that bad" or "Everyone feels like this." This can unintentionally invalidate their experience.
- Don't fill every silence. Silence can feel uncomfortable, but it often gives the person the space they need to think and regulate their emotions. Practice W.A.I.T.
- Don't mirror panic or urgency. If you become rushed or reactive, it can reinforce the stress response rather than helping the situation settle

TUNE INTO MIXED EMOTIONS

KEY SKILLS:

- Emotional Literacy – Recognising and naming different emotions clearly.
- Empathic Listening – Listening deeply with our eyes, ears and heart.
- Validation – Showing that their emotions are understandable and accepted.

People can feel hopeful and worried, excited and uncertain, or grateful and frustrated at the same time during change.

“Tuning into mixed emotions” means recognising and making space for these contradictions rather than trying to simplify them or move quickly to solutions. When you acknowledge the full range of feelings someone is experiencing, it helps the person feel seen, understood, and less alone in the transition

Core Components:

1. Acknowledging Contradictory Feelings

A key part of this step is recognising that someone might feel hopeful about new opportunities while also feeling uncertain or fearful about what might be lost. Naming both sides of the experience helps people feel understood rather than judged.

2. Creating Space Without Rushing to Solutions

When people express mixed emotions, the instinct is often to reassure or fix things quickly. Instead, focus on slowing the conversation and giving space for feelings to be expressed without rushing to solutions. This allows important concerns to surface.

3. Normalising Emotional Complexity

People often feel they should respond to change in just one way, which can create confusion or self-judgement. It is natural to experience multiple emotions at the same time.

⚠ What Not to Do When Tuning into Mixed Emotions:

- Don't rush to silver linings. Avoid quickly reframing the situation positively, as this can dismiss genuine concerns.
- Don't oversimplify feelings. Mixed emotions are normal during change and shouldn't be reduced to one interpretation.
- Don't assume you know how they feel. Let the person describe their experience rather than speaking for them.
- Don't fall into toxic empathy. Support with care, but avoid absorbing the distress or "falling into the well" with them.

TUNING INTO MIXED EMOTIONS IN PRACTICE

Step 1 - Pause and listen fully

Give the person space to explain what they are experiencing without interrupting or trying to respond immediately.

Step 2 - Notice the different emotions present

Listen for signs of more than one feeling, for example, hope alongside uncertainty, or excitement alongside concern. Remember to listen with your eyes, ears and heart. You can also use tools such as Empathy Mapping and The Feelings Wheel.

Step 3 - Reflect the mixed emotions back

Gently acknowledge both sides of what you are hearing. This helps the person feel understood and validates their experience.

Step 4 - Create space for them to explore further

Invite them to share more about what each part of the experience feels like, allowing the conversation to unfold naturally.

EXPLORE WHAT'S STEADY VS SHIFTING

KEY SKILLS:

- Curious Questioning – Asking open, thoughtful questions that help people reflect on their situation.
- Reflective Listening – Demonstrating understanding by accurately reflecting back what is being shared.
- Perspective Building – Helping someone see both what is shifting and what remains steady to restore balance.

During times of change, attention often focuses on uncertainty and what may be lost. Exploring what is shifting alongside what remains steady helps people regain perspective and a sense of orientation. This step supports people in recognising both the reality of change and the parts of their world that still provide stability.

Core Components of Protect Your Peace

1. Identifying Areas of Uncertainty

Change can bring questions about roles, priorities, or the future. Taking time to recognise what currently feels unclear or unsettled helps people acknowledge the reality of the situation rather than ignoring it.

2. Identifying What Remains Steady

Even during significant change, some things stay consistent, such as personal strengths, relationships, values, or familiar ways of working. Noticing these stabilising factors can help people feel more grounded.

3. Gently Reframing Agency

While people may not control the wider organisational change, there are often still areas where they have influence or choice. Exploring these gently helps restore a sense of direction without minimising the challenges they may be facing.

⚠ What Not to Do When Exploring Steady vs Shifting

- Don't push someone to find stability too quickly. People may need time to process what feels uncertain before noticing what remains steady.
- Don't impose your perspective of what should feel stable. What feels grounding to one person may not feel steady to another.
- Don't focus only on what's changing. Staying only in uncertainty can reinforce overwhelm rather than helping restore balance.
- Don't rush the reflection. Give people time to think and recognise what still feels reliable or supportive.

EXPLORING STEADY VS SHIFTING IN PRACTICE

Step 1 – Invite reflection on what feels uncertain

Begin by gently asking what currently feels unclear or unsettled. This helps acknowledge the reality of change and what feels most present for them.

Step 2 – Listen for what is shifting

Pay attention to the areas they describe as changing, such as priorities, roles, or expectations.

Reflect these back to show you understand what feels different or unstable.

Step 3 – Explore what still feels steady

Encourage them to notice what has remained consistent, such as strengths, relationships, or values.

Identifying these stabilising factors can help restore a sense of grounding.

Step 4 – Bring both sides into perspective

Acknowledge both what is shifting and what remains steady.

Holding both together can help people feel more oriented during uncertainty.

ADJUST EXPECTATIONS OF SELF AND OTHERS

KEY SKILLS:

- Self-Awareness – Noticing pressure or unrealistic expectations.
- Compassionate Communication – Responding with understanding rather than judgement.
- Boundary Setting – Adjusting priorities or pace in a realistic way.

During periods of change, people often place pressure on themselves or others to continue performing as though nothing has changed. Adjusting expectations helps create a more realistic and compassionate response to transition, recognising that energy, focus, and capacity may shift for a time. This step supports wellbeing while helping people stay steady and sustainable

Core Components of Embrace Togetherness

1. Recognising Pressure

This involves noticing the internal or external pressure to keep going as normal, even when circumstances feel unsettled. Bringing this pressure into awareness can help reduce stress and self-judgement.

2. Normalising Reduced Capacity

During change, it is natural for focus, energy, and productivity to fluctuate. Recognising this helps people respond with greater understanding rather than seeing it as failure.

3. Recalibrating Standards Temporarily

This means adjusting expectations, priorities, or pace in a realistic way during transition. It is not about lowering standards indefinitely, but about responding to change with flexibility and care.

⚠ What Not to Do When Adjusting Expectations of Self and Others

- Don't ignore the pressure people may be under – Unspoken expectations to “carry on as normal” during change can quietly increase stress and strain.
- Don't normalise burnout as commitment – Treating constant overworking or exhaustion as dedication can reinforce unhealthy standards.
- Don't assume everyone has the same capacity – People process and adapt to change at different speeds and in different ways.
- Don't make temporary adjustments feel permanent – Recalibrating expectations during change should support sustainability, not signal lowered standards forever.

ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS OF SELF AND OTHERS IN PRACTICE

Step 1 – Notice the hidden expectation

Pay attention to assumptions about how things “should” continue despite the change. Bringing these expectations into awareness helps make them easier to question and adjust.

Step 2 – Create space to reflect on current demands

Invite the person to consider what responsibilities or pressures feel most present right now. This helps identify where expectations may need to shift.

Step 3 – Explore what flexibility could look like

Encourage thinking about where priorities, timelines, or approaches could be adjusted during this period. Small shifts can reduce unnecessary strain while maintaining direction.

Step 4 – Reinforce a sustainable approach

Highlight the importance of pacing and balance during transition. A steadier approach helps people stay engaged and effective over time.

YOU DON'T CARRY THE ORGANISATION'S CHANGE

KEY SKILLS:

- Boundary Awareness – Knowing where your support role begins and ends.
- Emotional Detachment with Care – Staying compassionate without taking on others' distress.
- Sustainable Support – Supporting others while protecting your own wellbeing.

Supporting others through change does not mean taking responsibility for the change itself. This step focuses on maintaining clear boundaries so support remains steady and sustainable. The role is to walk alongside others as they navigate uncertainty, without trying to fix the situation or absorb the emotional weight of the change.

Core Components of Embrace Togetherness

1. Clarifying Responsibility Boundaries

Recognising that organisational decisions and outcomes sit outside your role. Support focuses on listening and presence rather than solving the change itself.

2. Releasing the Need to Fix or Absorb Everything

Letting go of the pressure to provide answers, certainty, or emotional containment for every concern raised.

3. Walking Alongside Rather Than Carrying

Offering support and understanding while allowing others to process and navigate the change themselves.

⚠ What Not to Do When You Don't Carry the Organisation's Change

- Don't speculate about organisational decisions – Avoid guessing or interpreting what might happen, as this can increase uncertainty.
- Don't position yourself as the messenger of the change – Your role is to support the conversation, not represent or explain the organisation's decisions.
- Don't take responsibility for resolving the situation – Supporting someone does not mean solving the change or providing answers.
- Don't absorb the emotional weight of the change – Offer care and presence without carrying the stress or anxiety on behalf of others.

YOU DON'T CARRY THE ORGANISATION'S CHANGE IN PRACTICE

Step 1 – Stay grounded in your role

Focus on listening and supporting the person's experience of the change. Remind yourself that your role is to support reflection, not explain organisational decisions.

Step 2 – Avoid stepping into organisational answers

If questions arise about strategy, outcomes, or decisions, avoid guessing or interpreting. Keep the conversation centred on how the person is experiencing the situation.

Step 3 – Hold supportive boundaries

Offer empathy and presence without taking responsibility for resolving the change. This helps keep the conversation supportive while protecting your role.

Step 4 – Maintain steadiness in the conversation

Stay calm and present even when uncertainty remains. Your steadiness can help the other person feel supported without needing all the answers.

S.T.E.A.D.Y. IN CONTEXT

Kellanova Acquisition

MARS is currently experiencing a period of organisational change following the acquisition of Kellanova. Change on this scale can bring a wide range of reactions across teams.

In a recent check-in session, several associates shared that this period has brought a mix of emotions. Some spoke about excitement and curiosity about what the future may bring, while others described uncertainty about new ways of working, leadership changes, and how the integration may affect them personally.

Associates also highlighted that even after taking time away from work, there can still be a quiet sense of tension or unsettledness as teams continue adjusting to the evolving landscape.

As Mental Health Champions, it can be helpful to remember that these mixed reactions are a natural response to change.

The S.T.E.A.D.Y framework provides a simple way to support conversations during this time, helping associates slow down, acknowledge mixed emotions, explore what remains steady, adjust expectations during transition, take one meaningful next step, and maintain healthy boundaries while supporting others.



S.T.E.A.D.Y. EXERCISE

Sarah, a Mental Health Champion at MARS, has noticed that one of her associates, Ahmed, has been quieter than usual in team meetings since the Kellanova acquisition was announced. In a recent conversation, Alex shared:

"I know the change could be good in the long run, but right now it feels like everything is shifting. I'm trying to stay focused, but it's hard to know what to prioritise and where things are heading."

Alex is still performing in their role, but they seem unsettled and unsure about the future.

Your task: Using the S.T.E.A.D.Y framework, write down how Sarah could respond to Ahmed at each step.

S – Slow the System

How could Sarah help slow the conversation and create a moment of calm before responding or offering solutions?

Your answer: _____

T – Tune into Mixed Emotions

How could Sarah acknowledge the different emotions Ahmed might be experiencing during this change?

Your answer: _____

E – Explore What's Steady vs Shifting

What questions could Sarah ask to help Ahmed reflect on what feels uncertain and what still feels steady?

Your answer: _____

A – Adjust Expectations of Self and Others

How could Sarah help Ahmed reflect on the expectations they may be placing on themselves during this transition?

Your answer: _____

D – Decide One Meaningful Next Step

What small step could Sarah encourage Ahmed to consider that might help them feel more clarity or steadiness this week?

Your answer: _____

Y – You Don't Carry the Organisation's Change

How could Sarah remain supportive while recognising that she is not responsible for solving the organisational change?

Your answer: _____

INTEGRATING THE S.T.E.A.D.Y. FRAMEWORK INTO YOUR ROLE AS MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPION

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Across the MARS MEA region, teams are navigating a period of change following the Kellanova acquisition. Change can bring a mix of curiosity, excitement, uncertainty, and pressure as associates adapt to evolving priorities, structures, and ways of working. The S.T.E.A.D.Y framework helps Mental Health Champions support these conversations in a grounded and balanced way.

How to integrate S.T.E.A.D.Y into your practice:

- Use S.T.E.A.D.Y as a guide for supportive conversations. Whether in a quick check-in, a corridor conversation, or a more reflective discussion, the framework can help you stay present and structured in how you respond.
- Focus on listening and presence. Often associates are not looking for answers, they need space to talk through how change is affecting them.
- Encourage realistic expectations during transition. Recognising that focus, energy, and clarity may fluctuate during change can help reduce pressure within teams.
- Support small, meaningful next steps. Helping someone identify one manageable action can restore a sense of agency during uncertainty.
- Protect your own boundaries as a Champion. The S.T.E.A.D.Y framework reminds us that supporting others does not mean carrying the responsibility for organisational change.

By weaving the S.T.E.A.D.Y framework into everyday conversations, Mental Health Champions can help foster steadiness, connection, and psychological safety across teams during periods of transition.

As a Mental Health Champion at MARS, your presence can act as an anchor during times of change, offering calm, stability, and grounded support for associates. By using the S.T.E.A.D.Y framework, you first drop your own anchor, steady yourself, and then support others as they navigate uncertainty.



SIGNPOST & SUPPORT

Find your local Associate Assistance Program provider

<https://team.ffmpeg.com/sites/AAP>

Connect with the Mars Ombudsman Team

<https://ombudsman.mars.com/en/privacy/contactlist>

Contact your local Associate Health & Wellbeing Team for further

national services

Global Be Well Together Site

<https://my.mars.com/sites/associate-health-and-wellbeing/SitePage/197127/home>

Mars Energy Management

<https://my.mars.com/sites/associate-health-wellbeing/SitePage/12439187/energize-your-day>

Associate Health & Wellbeing - Mental health (mars.com)

<https://my.mars.com/sites/mental-health/SitePage/12437341/mental-health-matters>

MAS Hub (Mars Associate Survey)

<https://team.ffmpeg.com/sites/MarsAS>

MVH4You

<https://www.mvh4you.com/>

ASK Training

<https://www.vetfolio.com/pages/ask-assess-support-know>

LinkedIn Learning

<https://www.linkedin.com/learning>

One Mind

<https://onemind.org/>

SIGNPOST & SUPPORT

What is the AAP?

Provides free and confidential short-term counseling, referrals and follow up services to Associates and their family members who have personal and/or work related concerns - 24/7, 365 days.

How do I access the AAP?

Find your local AAP provider here: <https://team.effem.com/sites/AAP>

Or scan the QR code below



Mars Veterinary Health Associates: Please refer to your business units intranet site or reach out to your P&O leader for more health & wellbeing resources.



NOTES

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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





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:

