Managing Stress Under COVID-19 Conditions

Seek Professional Help or Relief if You Need It

- If you are becoming ill or your health is deteriorating dramatically because of the stress you’re experiencing, please contact your doctor or call Ontario Telehealth right away. Lots of healthcare providers are working remotely via telephone and Internet, so reach out without delay.
- If you need a medical leave from work, please begin with your healthcare providers and follow up by contacting Peggy Smith in the QUFA office, who can help you understand how various leave provisions work and what you might qualify for at Queen’s.
- If you think you may need a leave from work for non-medical reasons, Peggy is also your first point of contact. By “non-medical reasons,” I mean because your dependent-care obligations or other limitations prevent you from working, or from working in particular ways.
- If you can continue to work but are not sure if you can do the work assigned in the ways assigned (or assumed), contact Peggy to learn about accommodations and how they work. You will want to start by reading her Grievance Corner article in the most recent issue of QUFA Voices.
- If none of the above apply to you but you need to talk it out with a professional, contact the Employee and Family Assistance Plan (EFAP) providers. This service is confidential and free to Queen’s employees. The EFAP can get you connected with a counsellor quickly.

Important Contact Details

- Peggy Smith, QUFA Grievance Officer: smithpe@queensu.ca
- Queen’s Employee Assistance Program: http://www.queensu.ca/humanresources/wellness-accessibility/employee-and-family-assistance-program, or call 1.800.663.1142 or 1.866.398.9505 (numéro sans frais, en français)
- Ontario Telehealth: call 1.866.797.0000
• Beginning 1 July 2020, when we switch to Manulife as the provider of extended medical benefits, we will be able to claim up to $1,000 per year for registered psychological services. It’s not much, but it’s better than the status quo, which is $0 for these services.

Seek Community Supports

• Find a support community if you have no one to share your burden with. QUFA is going to initiate some novel kinds of Member meetings—Solidarity Socials—where you can share your stories with other faculty, librarians, and archivists at Queen’s in a confidential forum. These kinds of meetings won’t stop the stress, but knowing you’re not alone can help.

• Write it down. No, really. You can keep it to yourself or send us your written story. We’ve set up a small informal committee of QUFA leaders who are interested to hear whatever you want to share. We won’t do anything with your story, but if we see that you need to know about a provision in the collective agreement or the COVID-19 letter of understanding, our band of experts will make sure you’re made aware of your rights. Contact QUFA Vice-President Jordan Morelli (Physics) at morelli@queensu.ca, QUFA Equity Representative Lynne Hanson (Law) at lh2@queensu.ca, or QUFA Executive Member at Large Laeeque Daneshmend (Mining) at laeeque.daneshmend@queensu.ca.

Take a Break

I know that one’s immediate reaction to this kind of simple-minded advice is, “if I could take a break, I wouldn’t be in this stressed-out situation to begin with!” I also recognize that there are parts of our lives that we cannot unplug or walk away from at a whim, or at all. But, we can acknowledge that our work for Queen’s, for students, for colleagues, and for our disciplines can be set aside from time to time; that we can accept “good enough” when it’s good enough; and that in these strange times, maintaining “before-times” levels of excellence, productivity, and responsiveness is an unreasonable ask. When it comes down to it, the only way to reduce stress loads is to control exposure to stressors, and that means walking away from some set of stressors some of the time.

For most of us, the stressors we can at least temporarily avoid or limit are those in the workplace. With all that in mind, consider the following concrete tips for managing work stress:

• Keep some physical and temporal boundaries between work and home life, despite the evident bleed between them.
• Take the 24-hour “no-screens challenge” (no computers, no phones, no TVs) this weekend to give your mind and your eyes a break. If it works, do it each week.
• Take your vacation time. Even if you have to stay home or stay local, time away from work demands and concerns, and e-mails and Zoom meetings, will help.

Recognize Your Limits

Whatever resilience you have relied on in the past, things have changed now; resilience is stretched, coping strategies aren’t available or have exhausted their magic. We don’t all need professional support, but probably most of us could do with an empathetic ear or some fresh ideas for how to get on, get through, and take a break from daily demands. Acknowledge this reality, and if there’s something QUFA can do to help, please reach out to us.

Leslie Jermyn can be reached at jermynl@queensu.ca.

1 June 2020