

How to manage your emotions at work

As our professional lives become increasingly demanding and the line between the home and the workplace is further blurred, it's little wonder so many workers feel overwhelmed.

Deadlines may be getting tighter as to-do lists get longer. Workplace culture may be toxic and relationships with colleagues may be strained. Mental health is in the spotlight more than ever, so it's time to acknowledge how we're really feeling when we're at work.

[Anxiety and other mental distress](#) will affect most New Zealanders at some point in their lives. And while it may not be a healthy emotion in the long term, it is completely valid, says Sabina Read, SEEK's Resident Psychologist.

"Emotions like anxiety, stress, frustration or even apathy are perfectly normal, so long as they don't seriously impede everyday life," says Read. "They are just as valid as the emotions we tend to view as more positive, like such as satisfaction, pride and happiness. It's how you respond to them that makes a difference."

Start with acceptance

If you feel anxious, stressed or even angry, it's easy to judge yourself or feel you're the one with the problem.

"We tend to beat ourselves up when we're not feeling how we think we should be feeling all the time," says Read. "But self-compassion and acceptance of your feelings is a good first step in managing difficult emotions."

The next step, says Read, is to take a break from the situation that may be causing the emotion.

"When we're emotionally overwhelmed, it takes at least 20 minutes for our nervous system to calm down, so it's important to give yourself time to let your body reset before you take any action."

While pausing to recover from the rush of emotion is useful, Read says waiting days to respond to a grievance can increase stress or anxiety.

"Delaying a response for too long can cause you to brood or blame, which can actually make you feel worse," she says. "A good rule of thumb is time your response to be more than 20 minutes and less than 24 hours from when the grievance occurred."

Creating change you want

Stewing in resentment can heighten anxiety, so Read recommends taking action to resolve the problem that triggered the emotional response.

“Others may not be aware that their behaviour is a problem, or they may assume that you’ll accept it,” says Read. “Ultimately, it’s our own responsibility to drive the change that we want, but it’s important to let your emotions settle before taking action.”

Read also recommends finding activities that recharge your energy and bring you joy.

“Physically move your body, read a good book or laugh with your loved ones – seek out whatever soothes you and makes you happy. These activities act as circuit breakers for feeling overwhelmed and can help you re-set your equilibrium.”

It’s natural to experience a range of emotions, especially as working lives continue to evolve. “We are all human and every emotion is valid,” says Read. “Difficult emotions like anxiety or anger are there to tell you something, so treat them as valuable reminders to change your situation or to change the way you think about it.”

Read more:

- [How to talk to your boss about boundaries](#)
- [How to beat burnout while working from home](#)
- [4 signs your workplace is toxic – and what to do about it](#)