

Stress is not good for you.

“Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them” (HSE 2001)

It can be helpful to think of stress as a **reaction**. To pressure. Or heavy workloads. Or new things. Or new people. Or a demanding boss. Or the people you manage.

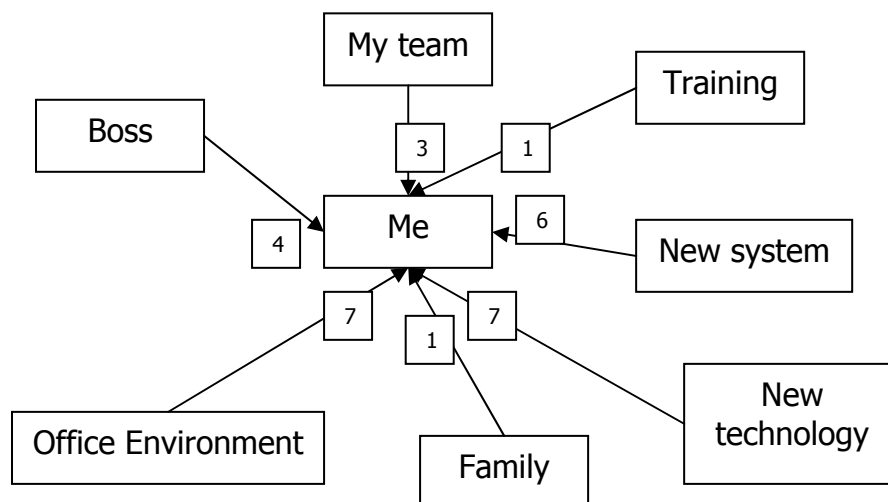
It helps if we can separate these things. The cause and the reaction. We all have pressure at work. We all work with other people. We all have difficult days. We all face problems. And these things are not, by themselves, “bad things”. They don’t cause stress for everyone.

We **can** react to them positively. We **can** get more done on a busy day. We **can** be refreshed by new things. We **can** get a sense of satisfaction from solving a hard problem.

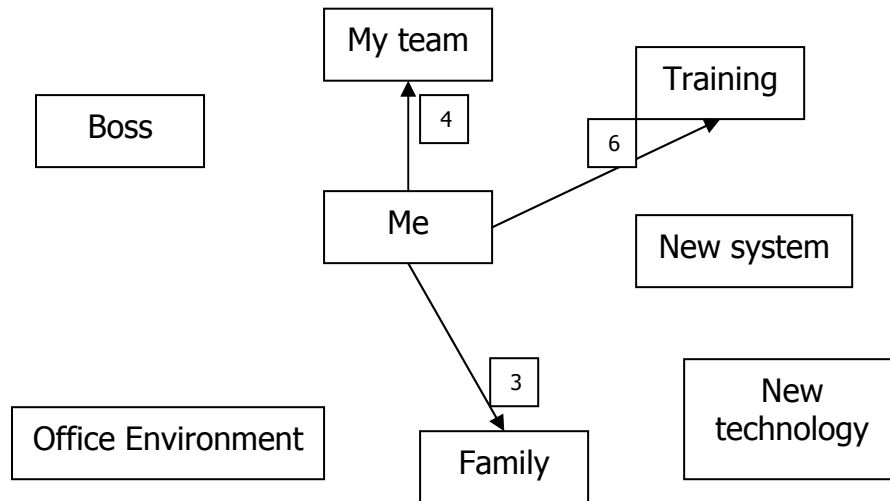
But if our reaction to them is “adverse”, we are “stressed”. And this is not good for us. Stress (this adverse reaction) is closely linked to heart disease – beaten only by smoking and fatty diets.

So if you are stressed at work, there are things which your employer can do for you. And they have a duty to do these things, just as they have a duty to make sure your building is safe to work in. If stress is an issue for you at work, talk to them and ask for the help you need. They may find things they can do with you personally, or things they can change in the organisation.

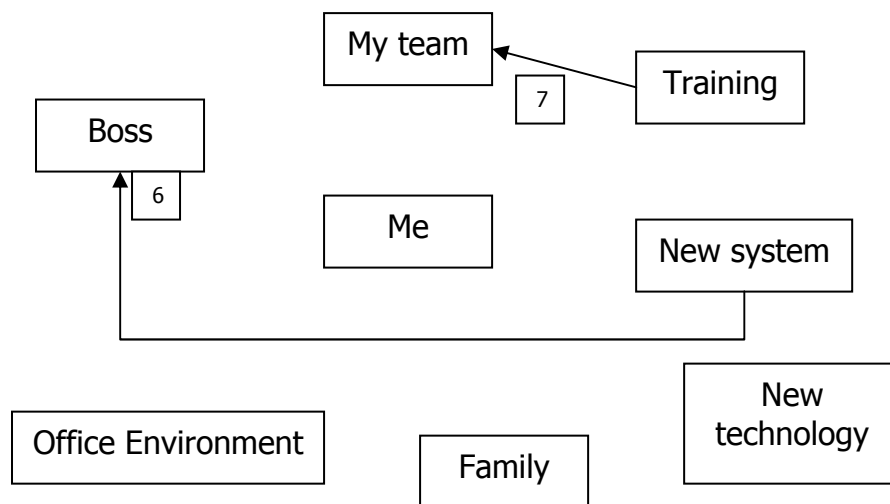
One thing you may like to do for yourself is to draw a “stress map”. Plot out all the key elements of the situation, and work out how much stress each component causes for you. (High scores = high stress). Look closely at the patterns you draw for yourself. This person is more stressed by systems than people.



Then add the amount of stress **you** cause other components. Maybe you are taking some of the stress home with you, and this is having a bad effect on your family. Or maybe you are taking some of the stress from the office environment and passing it on to your team. Maybe your bad reaction to new technology means you are ignoring the training programme which is suffering as a result:



Then add any other adverse effects. Maybe the new system is causing your boss lots of stress. Or perhaps the team aren't performing well because the training scheme isn't ready...



You get the picture. Soon you'll have a clearer idea of which components are causing stress to each other. And you may realise that the stress you are experiencing is not your "fault".

This won't make your stress go away. But it may help you to decide what needs to be done first, what you can do about it yourself, and what you will need help with.

And if you think that this stress is affecting your health, talk to your doctor or your employer.

Stress is not good for you. Sorting it out is.