



THRIVE  
@WORK

Training Programme for well-being at work

## Module 6:

# Work-related Stress Management

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**pulso**  
group

PASSIONATE PEOPLE, HEALTHY ORGANISATIONS

# Objectives:

- Understand what stress is, how people react to stress and what are the consequences of stress for individuals and organisations;
- Know common causes of work-related stress;
- Be able to assess the main stressors at workplace;
- Be able to propose and apply strategies to prevent work-related stress;
- Be able to apply solutions to manage and reduce stress at the workplace.

# Structure:

- Learning Unit 1 – What is stress
- Learning Unit 2 – Causes of stress at workplace
- Learning Unit 3 – Work-related stress prevention and management



# Learning unit 1 – What is stress

Is stress always bad?

Quiz





# Learning unit 1 – What is stress

## Acute stress vs Chronic stress

- **Acute stress**
  - Short-term stress that goes away quickly.
  - Can be positive in short bursts, ex. avoiding danger or meeting a deadline.
- **Chronic stress**
  - Lasts longer
  - Usually related to an unsatisfactory life or work situation
  - Any type of stress that goes on for weeks or months is chronic stress.
  - Serious health problems





# Learning unit 1 – What is stress

- Reaction to stress (00:20 – 1:00)





# Learning unit 1 – What is stress

## Stress at the workplace

### WHO:

- Work-related stress: when people are presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope.
- **Worse** when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues, as well as little control over work processes.

### Pressure vs Stress:

- Fields with significant pressure, such as medical professions, nurses, caregivers, social workers, soldiers and top chief officers.
- Reasonable work challenge or pressure perceived by an individual as acceptable may be positive, keeping workers alert, motivated, able to work and learn.
- Excessive or unmanageable pressure leads to stress.



\* examples of the most stressful jobs, Indeed 2021

# Learning unit 2 – Causes of stress at the workplace

Work-related stress is mostly caused by:

- Poor work organisation & work design: clear and coherent job description, appropriate workload, clearly set processes and operations
- Poor management: lack of control and support, excessive control, overlapping supervising roles and conflict of roles, or poor management skills
- Unhealthy human relations: bossing, mobbing, bullying or harassment



# Learning unit 2 – Causes of stress at the workplace

## Work contents:

- job content
- workload and work pace
- working hours
- participation and control

## Work context:

- Career development, status and pay
- The worker's role in the organisation
- Interpersonal relationships
- Organisational culture
- Work-life balance

*Healthy lifestyle, including good interpersonal relationships, stable family life, enough sleep and outdoor activities are instrumental for building stress resilience\*, which is an important buffer against the stress caused by work.*



\* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022

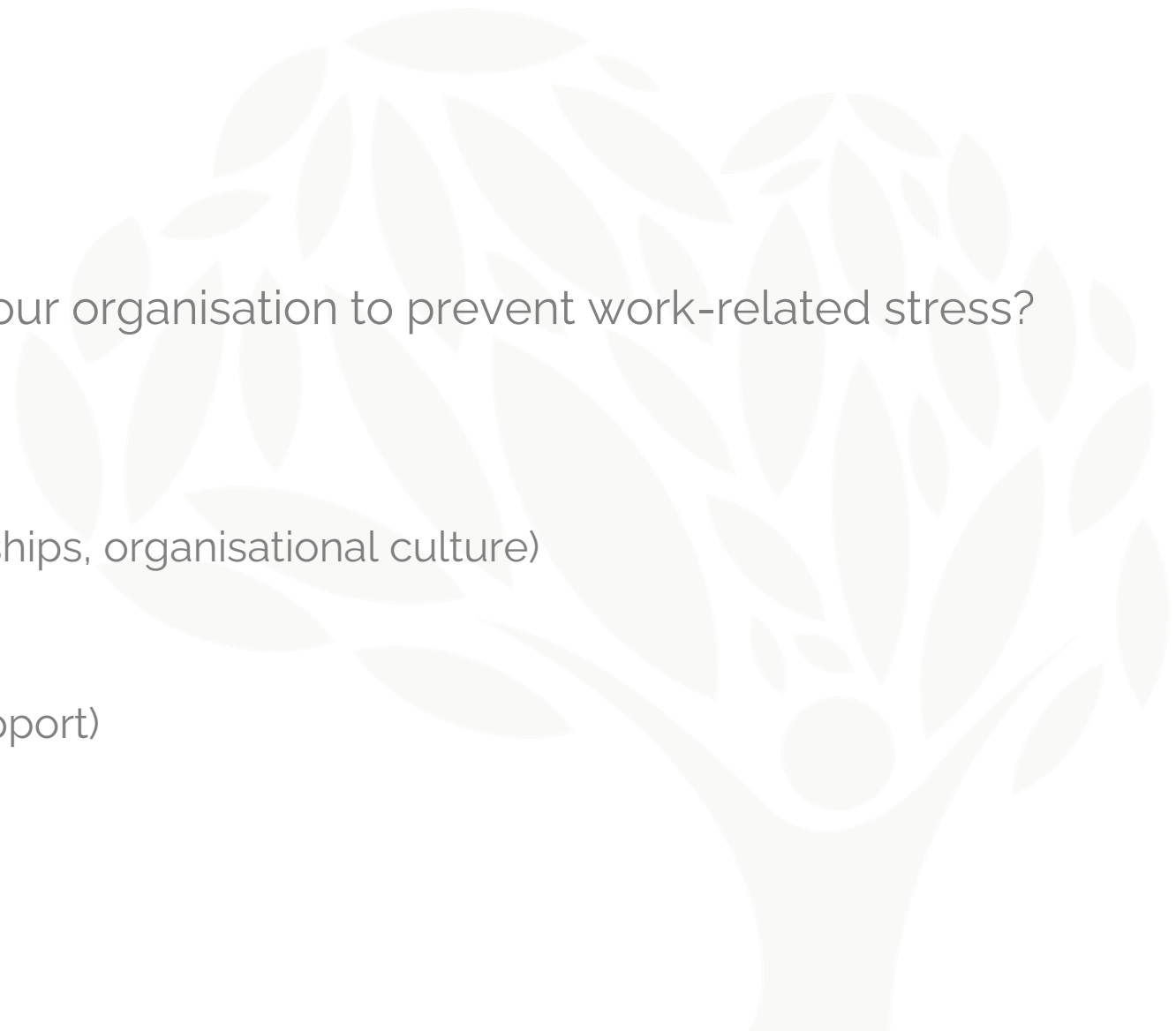
# Learning unit 2 – Causes of stress at the workplace

Group discussion:

In which areas would you like to invest in your organisation to prevent work-related stress?

For example,

- Work content (ex. job content)
- Work context (ex. interpersonal relationships, organisational culture)
- Work organisation (ex. work pace)
- Management (ex. lack of control and support)



# Learning unit 3 – Work-related stress prevention and management

- Work-related stress, especially long-term and chronic stress, is harmful for both employees and organisation.
- Be aware of the issue, able to recognise excessive work pressure, prevent and manage stress
- Part of strategic management, performance management, policies on employee care, development and well-being programmes



# Learning unit 3 – Work-related stress prevention and management

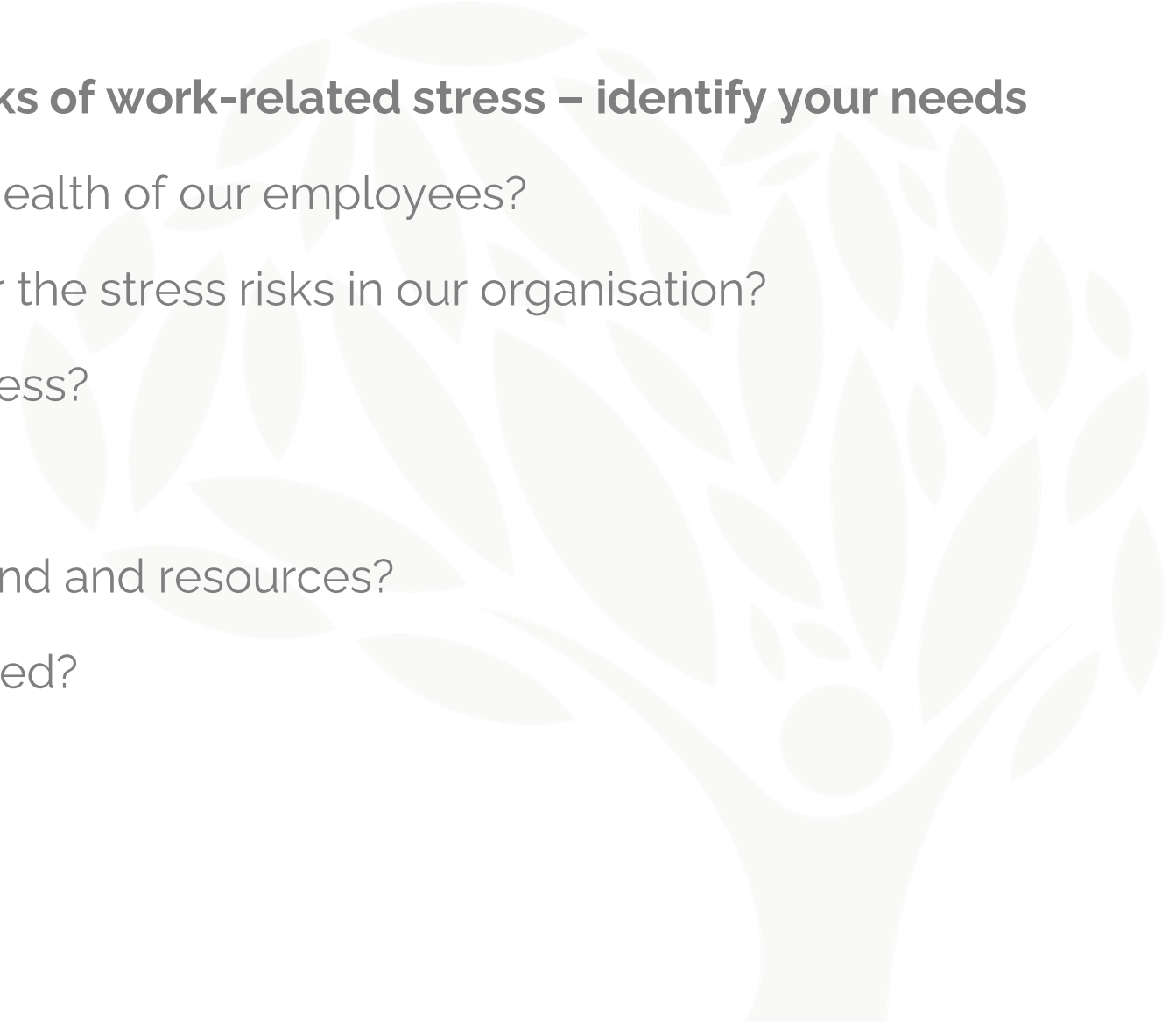
## Role of HR department:

- Guardian of employees' well-being, fairness and morality in the company
- Monitor and identify potential stressors at the workplace (physical environment, work organisation, interpersonal relations).
- Assess the psychosocial risks of work-related stressors for employees and the organisation.
- Ensure minimisation of these risks to prevent work-related stress.
- Provide support to employees in stress prevention and solution.
- Provide support to managers in stress prevention and management.
- Develop and sustain a well-being culture in the company.

# Learning unit 3 – Work-related stress prevention and management

## Questions to consider when assessing risks of work-related stress – identify your needs

- Could work stress be affecting the health of our employees?
- Is there a system in place to monitor the stress risks in our organisation?
- Do our employees show signs of stress?
- What are the potential stressors?
- Is there an imbalance of work demand and resources?
- How can the stress problem be solved?



# Learning unit 3 – Work-related stress prevention and management

## Main sources of information:

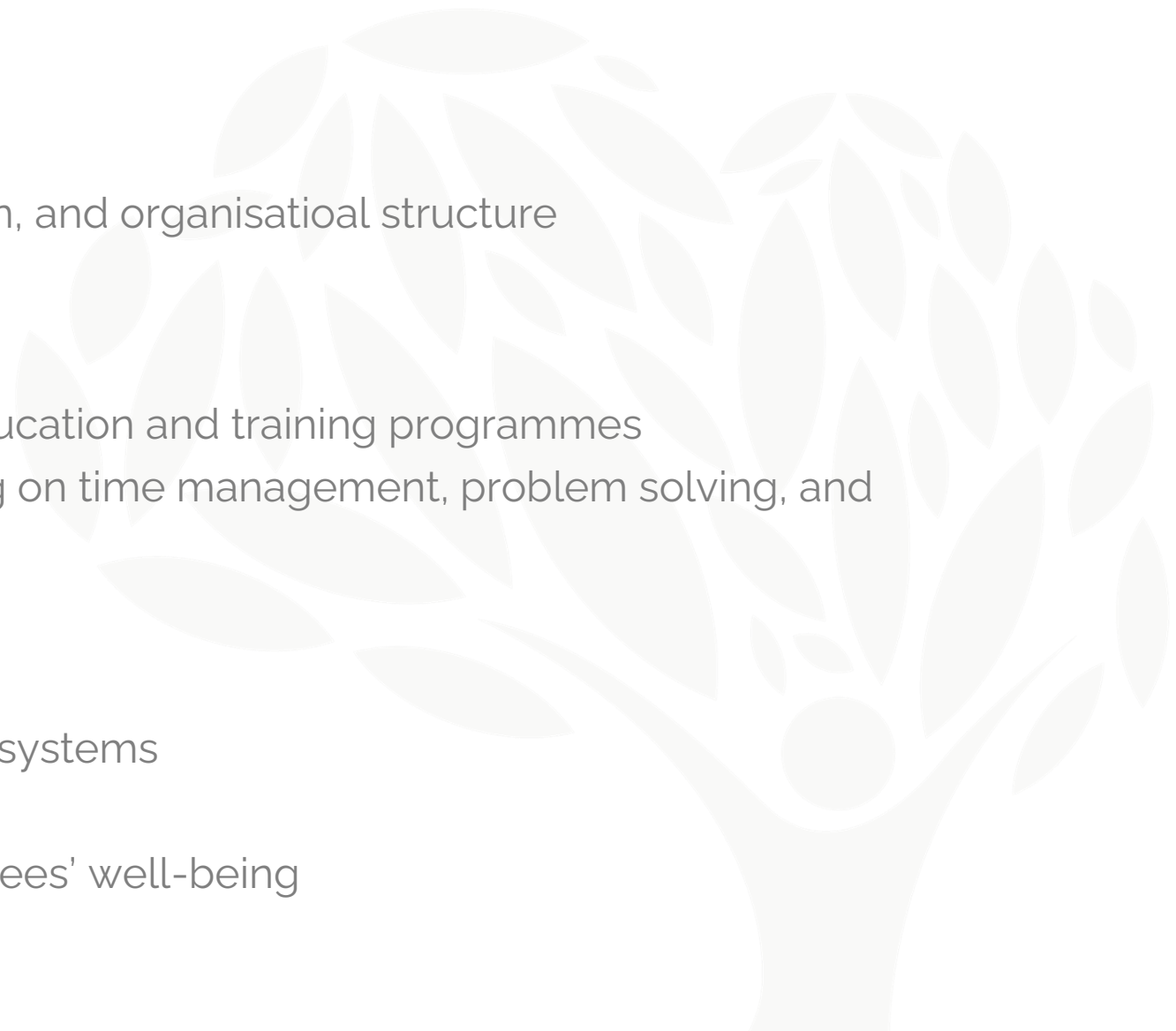
- Quantitative:
  - Employees' sickness absence, staff turnover, changes in individual and group performance levels, accidents and mistakes at the workplace, conflicts within teams, undesirable behaviour (violence and harassment), etc.
- Qualitative:
  - Talk with managers and especially employees about their work, problems and whether work is affecting their health.
  - Ask about challenging situations and their reactions.
  - Avoid asking directly if they "are stressed". Instead, ask about three best and worst aspects of their job, exploring whether these are under their control and if they receive adequate support.
  - Ask questions about specific jobs, working contexts and conditions to be able to identify the stressors.
- A thorough assessment with a systematic approach.



# Learning unit 3 – Work-related stress prevention and management

## Prevention of work-related stress (WHO):

- Primary:
  - Physical working conditions, work design, and organisatioal structure
  - Clear communication
- Secondary:
  - Company-specific and needs-driven education and training programmes
  - Training on coping skills, such as training on time management, problem solving, and communication
  - Employee assistance program
- Tertiary:
  - Sensitive and responsible management systems
  - Positive climate and culture
  - Awareness of the importance of employees' well-being

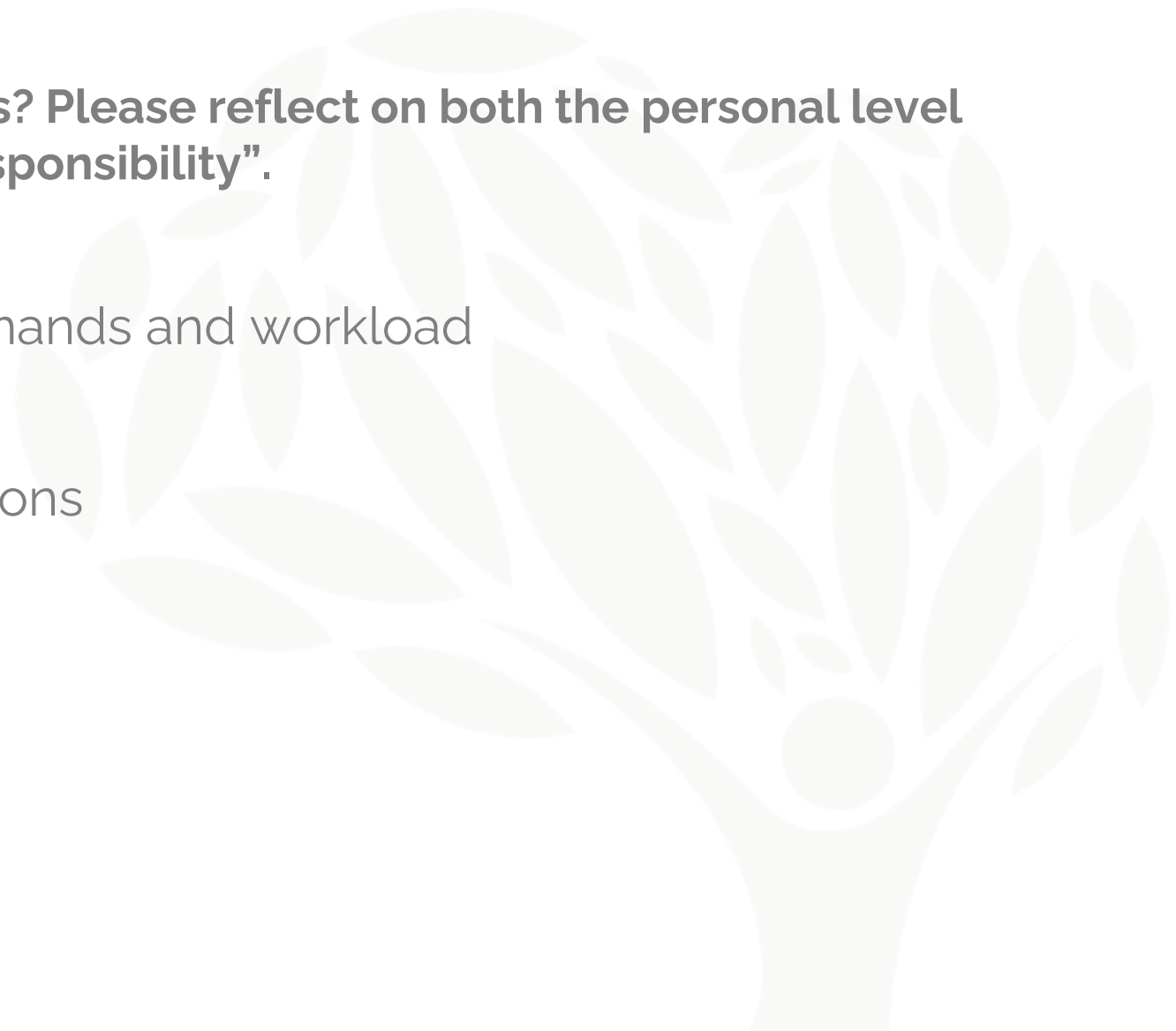


# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

**Group discussion: What are your solutions? Please reflect on both the personal level and the organizational level – “Shared responsibility”.**

- Stress caused by overwhelming demands and workload
- Stress caused by job content
- Stress caused by interpersonal relations



# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

### **Cause of stress: overwhelming demands and workload**

#### Solution - **personal** level:

- An analysis of the job, responsibilities and time required to perform work tasks is necessary.
- Involve supervising manager and the employee. This will allow you to revise and reduce the workload adequately.
- Redistributing tasks among other employees, managers, colleagues or interns if possible.
- Identify if the problem is the amount of work or the lack of competencies. If the demands exceed the employee's competencies, consider providing them with additional training or reassigning the task to a more qualified colleague. If the problem lies in too many activities, involving an assistant or intern to whom supportive tasks can be delegated can help.

# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

### **Cause of stress: overwhelming demands and workload**

#### **Solution - organizational level:**

- Don't underestimate the importance of training.
- Digitalisation and automation of work processes are only helpful and make work more efficient if used properly. Some workers may find these transformations more difficult than others and need additional training or support.
- Job roles consisting of very different tasks which may create strong pressure on employees. For example, if a worker has to communicate with clients, colleagues and partners, and at the same time work on the development of a product which requires a longer period of undisturbed concentration. → “untouchable days” may be the right solution to provide the worker with the time to focus on deep creative work without disturbing the flow.
- An “untouchable day” is a day flagged in the calendar where nothing can interrupt the worker – no e-mails, calls, meetings. It can be two days a week, or one day in two weeks, depending on the needs and possibilities of the worker, team and organisations. These days should be planned ahead and communicated with everyone who might be concerned. Read more about “untouchable days” [here](#).

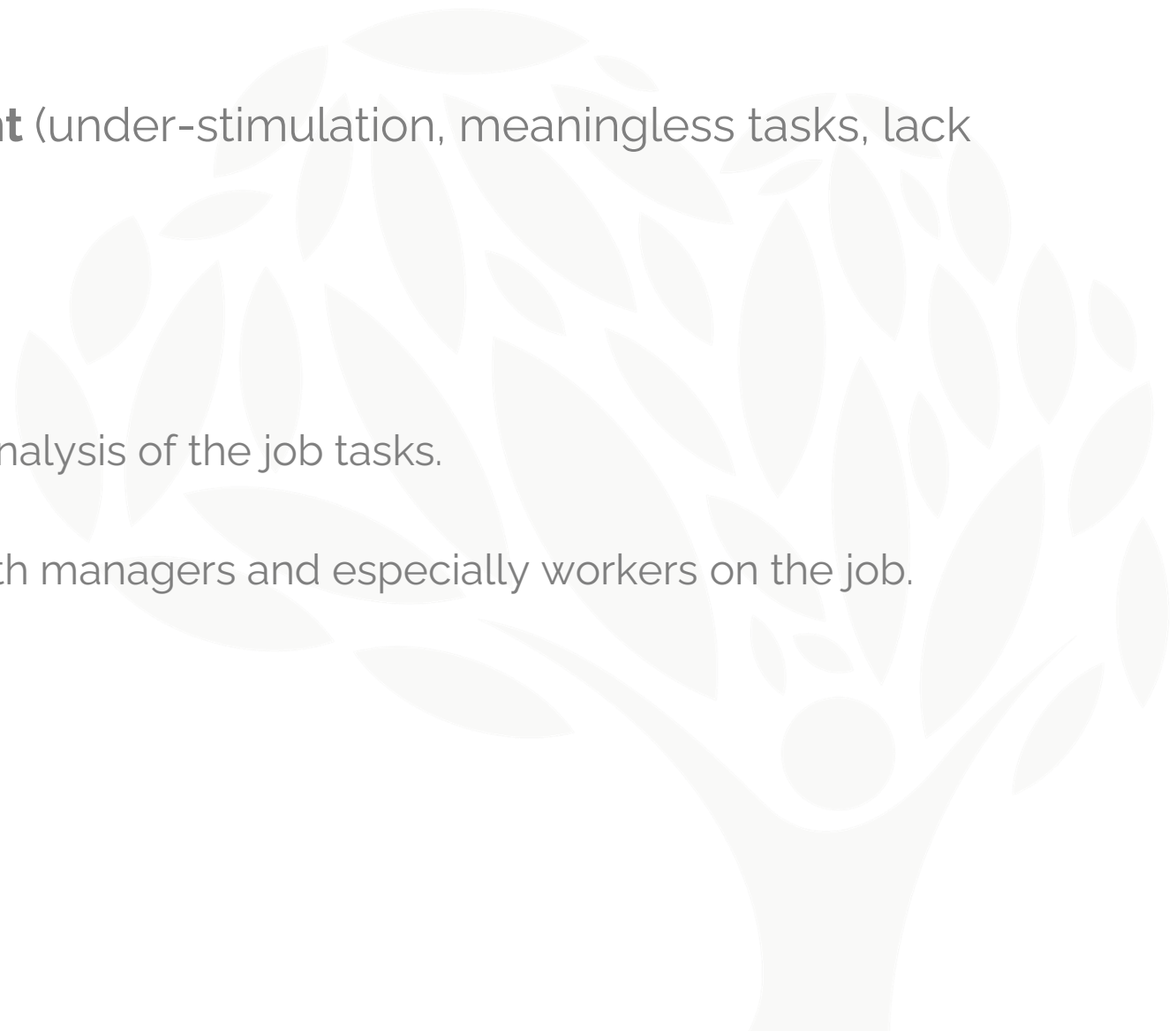
# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

**Cause of stress: problems with job content** (under-stimulation, meaningless tasks, lack of variety)

### **Solution - personal level:**

- Revision of the job content based on a close analysis of the job tasks.
- Observation, and conversations/interviews with managers and especially workers on the job.



# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

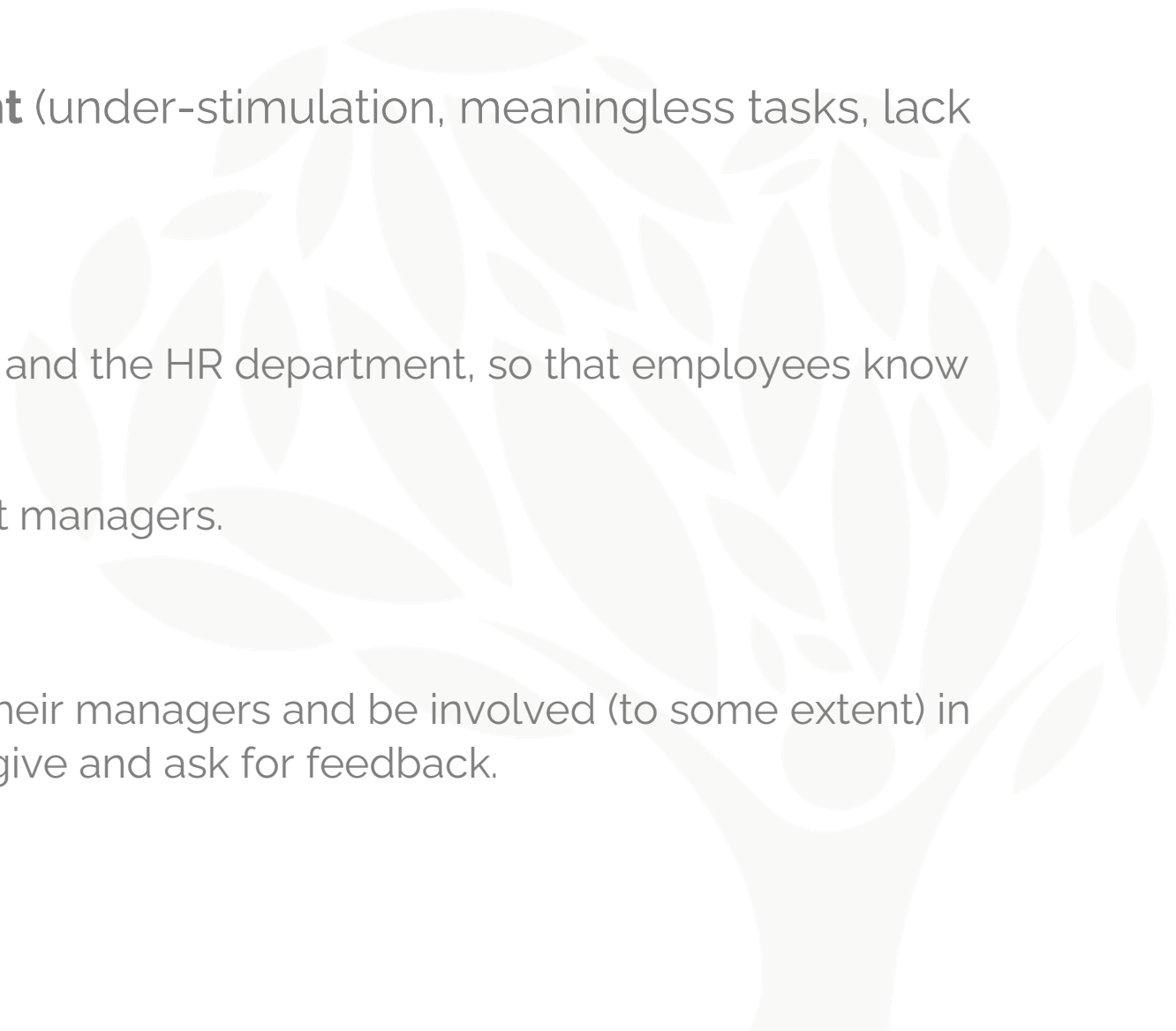
**Cause of stress: problems with job content** (under-stimulation, meaningless tasks, lack of variety)

### **Solution - management level:**

- Provide opportunities to speak with managers and the HR department, so that employees know that they are heard.
- Plan a regular team and 1:1 meeting with direct managers.

### **Solution - organizational level:**

- Give employees opportunities to speak with their managers and be involved (to some extent) in decision-making regarding their job content, give and ask for feedback.
- Work with employee's motivation.



# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

### **Cause of stress: interpersonal relations**

#### **Solution - organizational level:**

- Identify the core of interpersonal problems, observe the working environment, talk to employees and managers to find out what the stressors are.
- Some of the typical issues include unsupportive supervision, poor relationships with colleagues, isolated work, in the worse cases bullying, harassment and violence. The latter can't be tolerated and the manager together with the HR department must intervene immediately.
- Problems with teamwork and relations among workers as well as workers and managers can be improved with team-building activities (on-the-job, or even more effectively off-the-job).
- To be able to recognise and tackle issues in interpersonal relations, provide open and transparent communication channels, encourage open and honest communication among team members and between employees and managers.

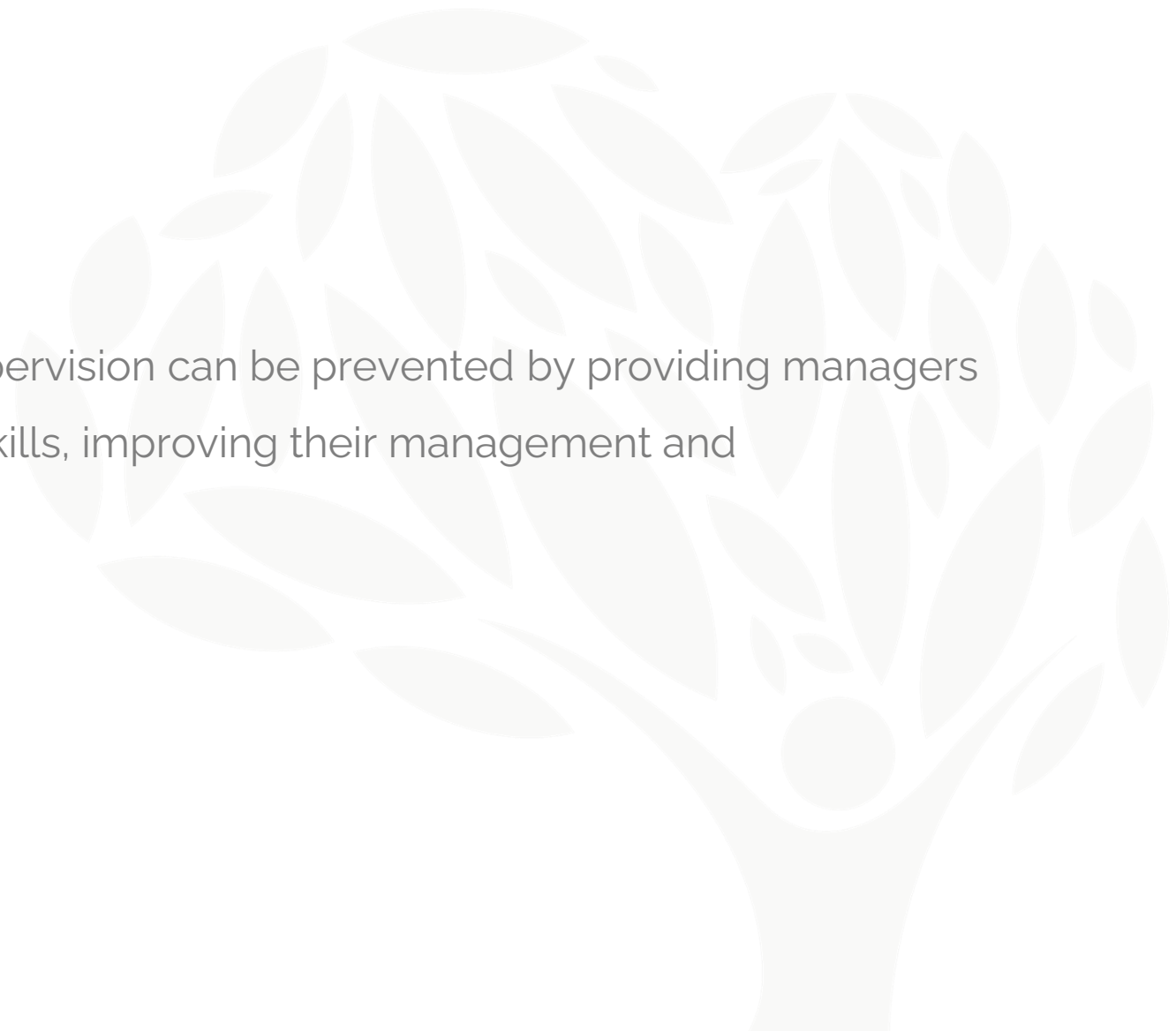
# Learning unit 3 – Solutions to stress

## *Different causes, different solutions*

### **Cause of stress: interpersonal relations**

#### **Solution - management level:**

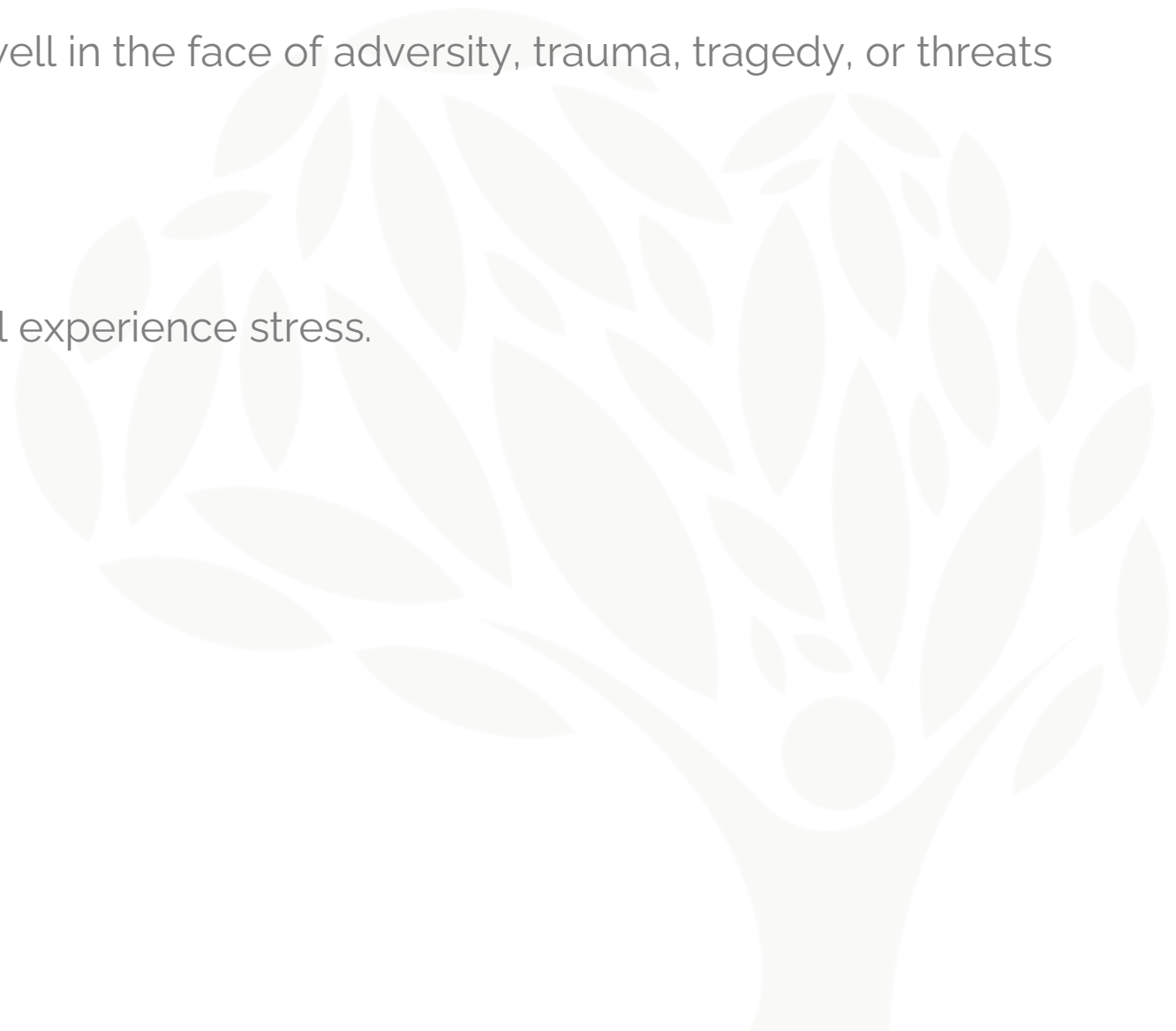
- Problems with insufficient or unsupportive supervision can be prevented by providing managers with training in management and leadership skills, improving their management and communication style.





## Learning unit 3 – Build stress resilience

- **Stress resilience** - the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, or threats or significant sources of stress (*APA*).
- **Not** resistance to or avoidance of stress.
- People with a great deal of resilience will still experience stress.
- A long process.
- Our advice:
  - Look after your well-being
  - Build your support network
  - Learn to recognise your stressors
  - Organise your time



# Learning unit 3 – Build stress resilience

## Organise your time

- Identify when you have the most energy. “Morning person”?
- Create your personal to do lists and prioritise the tasks.
- Break down huge tasks in smaller steps and set smaller, achievable targets.
- Vary your activities throughout your workday. A personal rule to read and respond e-mails.
- Multitasking is usually very stressful and not effective. Try not to do too much at once, focus on single tasks and on concluding them well. Prioritise tasks to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- Learn to say no. Let people know if their demands are unreasonable or unrealistic.
- Have breaks and take your time to relax during your working hours.
- If the work is too much or exceeds your capacity, ask for help. This applies to personal life too.

# Learning unit 3 – Build stress resilience

## Tips and exercises: Stress relieving exercises at the workplace

1. **Do something else** - Stop for a moment, step away from your work and do something else.
2. **Move**
  1. **Get up from your desk.** You can take a walk around the office, visit a colleague, etc.
  2. Do a few **stretching exercises** at your desk or if possible, in a relax area: [Check these desk stretches to help you de-stress at work](#)
  3. Try progressive muscle relaxation to let go that tension. It can also be a nice breathing and mediation exercise.

# Learning unit 3 – Build stress resilience

## Tips and exercises: Stress relieving exercises at the workplace

### 3. Breathe

Deep breathing is so powerful that The American Institute of Stress named it the best stress reduction technique (Morin, 2015). Try some of these simple breathing exercises to help you overcome stressful situations and anxiety at work:

- **Mindful Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Get into a comfortable position, close your eyes, and start to notice your breath. Breathe normally while paying attention to the pace and depth. Is your breath deep, shallow, quick or slow? Becoming aware of your breathing can help you become more mindful of your body's response to stress and can notice when you need to deliberately relax your breathing.
- **Counted Breathing:** As you **inhale**, place your tongue on the roof of your mouth right behind your teeth, then breathe through your nose and **slowly count down from five**; on the **exhale**, let the air escape through your mouth and **count back up to eight**. Then repeat.
- **Visualization Breathing:** As you **inhale**, imagine that all the stress in your body is coming from your extremities and into your chest. Then, as you **exhale**, imagine that the stress is leaving your body through your breath and dissipating right in front of you. Slowly, deliberately repeat the process (Scott, 2020).

# Learning unit 3 – Build stress resilience

## Tips and exercises: Stress relieving exercises at the workplace

### 4. Meditate

Deep breathing is an imperative for meditation, but if it doesn't seem enough and stressful thoughts seem to be haunting you, try a guided meditation. There are various mobile apps and videos available online. You just need to get in a comfortable position, put on headphones and start.

- Headspace Mini Meditation "Let Go of Stress" (1:06)
- Headspace Mini meditation "Breathe" (1:10)
- Headspace Mini meditation "Managing Anxious Thoughts And Stress With Mindfulness" (2:27)

## Learning unit 3 – Build stress resilience

- Mini Meditation “Let Go of Stress”





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