

# Supporting Staff during the Covid-19 outbreak

## How stress affects different personality types – an MBTI approach

This is a challenging and unsettling time, and it's natural to feel overwhelmed on occasion. Even in ordinary times 70% of workers report finding their job stressful some of the time. Some degree of challenge and stimulation is essential of course, and feeling stressed by a situation can be a very individual matter.

During this time it may be useful to consider how your personality may affect your stress response. Developing a better understanding can help you recognise your stress triggers, acknowledge your feelings and consider what actions you might take to restore balance. Increasing self-awareness can aid in building resilience as well as helping you practice coping techniques that may have worked for you in the past.

Myers Briggs Type theory suggests that when we are under moderate stress our usual personality characteristics become exaggerated. For example, someone who is usually outgoing and lively may become even louder, possibly oversharing to the point of being annoying or inappropriate. Someone who is normally organised and decisive may appear overbearing, rigid and abrupt. Click to learn more about how different personality types can be affected by stress.

## How stress affects different personality types – an MBTI approach

The diagram below highlights how different people are stressed by different factors. For those not familiar with Myers Briggs terminology the following descriptors may help. We can use all these preferences, although one of each pair will likely come more naturally.

**Extraverts** – prefer to get their energy from being with and around others

**Introverts** – prefer to get their energy from their own internal resources

**Sensors** – practical realists who prefer gathering information through their 5 senses

**iNtuitives** – visionaries who prefer big picture thinking, ideas and associations

**Thinkers** - Decision makers who prefer objective facts and impersonal criteria

**Feelers** - Decision makers for whom personal values and maintaining harmony are key

**Judgers** - prefer structure, order, plans and schedules

**Perceivers** - go with the flow and prefer a more emergent and flexible approach to life

## Each MBTI Type will be stressed by different activities or situations



You could use this information to better understand yourself or as a discussion topic for team meetings. Discussing preferences with your team can build an understanding of collective resilience as well as ensuring team members have an appreciation of how others respond to stress and have the support they need. Sharing a preference can help team members who are feeling isolated if they are working in new or different ways and building compassionate connections across the team can enhance wellbeing.

### Spotting when you or colleagues are severely stressed and what can help

When our energy levels are seriously depleted this can trigger a particular stress response that Myers Briggs refers to as being 'In the Grip'. Individuals who are experiencing this Grip response may behave in an uncharacteristic manner and their actions appear exaggerated or extreme. They may come across as touchy, on edge and their reactions may seem suddenly 'all or nothing', all subtlety is lost. For example an extravert may suddenly become unusually quiet and withdrawn, or someone who is usually meticulously organised will start losing things and appear uncharacteristically chaotic. For others, these responses can manifest as physical symptoms affecting sleep, appetite or obsessing about their appearance for example.

This Grip response can be brought on by extreme fatigue or stress, illness or major life transitions. Fortunately, the Grip experience doesn't usually last very long, provided the person realises they need to act. This is where colleagues can help too as they may spot the warning signs first. These challenging times can also be an opportunity for self-discovery. Learning to recognise our own particular stress triggers and how best to respond can enhance self-awareness and our emotional intelligence.

If you recognise that you are acting out of character that's the time to seek support and consider how to restore your equilibrium. For many of us, lack of control is a major stressor so trying to focus on something that you can control can be soothing and stabilising – provided this is a healthy activity of course.

The table below shows some of the typical responses of the 16 Types under severe stress and what may help alleviate this. This summary table can only show some of the possible reactions and all are opposites of what would be typical behaviour for these Types.

This may all look and sound rather negative and miserable. But again please remember that all healthy personality types have very many more positive qualities and characteristics and these are what we see for the majority of the time.

In 'normal' times the Leadership and OD team are able offer team development sessions based around Myers Briggs principles. In the meantime if you'd like to find out more or discover your own Type please contact Mandy Jeffery who is a qualified practitioner via email [mandy.jeffery@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:mandy.jeffery@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

Source material taken and adapted from The Myers Briggs Company's '*Quick Guide to Everyday Stress*' and '*In the Grip*' by Naomi L Quenk

**Myers Briggs Personality Types under severe stress and *what may help in italics***

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ISTJ</b></p> <p>Tend to catastrophise, imagining a host of negative possibilities for themselves and others, forgetting their usual calm judgement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Get away in a pleasant environment</i></li> <li>• <i>Validation from others of their competence</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ISFJ</b></p> <p>Tend to catastrophise, imagining a host of negative possibilities, expressing these without considering the impact on others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Get away in a pleasant environment</i></li> <li>• <i>Validation from others of their competence</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INFJ</b></p> <p>May overindulge in 'sensing' activities eg TV or overeating, or fixate on normally unimportant detail eg may clean or tidy obsessively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Straightforward concern</i></li> <li>• <i>Time out to be quiet and r-energise</i></li> <li>• <i>Simple hobbies</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTJ</b></p> <p>May obsess over normally unimportant data or overindulge in sensing activities such as TV, food or shopping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Straightforward concern</i></li> <li>• <i>Time out to be quiet and r-energise</i></li> <li>• <i>Simple hobbies</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ISTP</b></p> <p>Inappropriate displays of anger and emotional outbursts that they find acutely embarrassing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Time alone and time out from the situation</i></li> <li>• <i>Not being asked how they feel</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ISFP</b></p> <p>Uncharacteristically critical of self and others expressing harsh and negative judgements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Validation from and talking to a close friend</i></li> <li>• <i>Fun and relaxing activities, meditation</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INFP</b></p> <p>Seriously doubt their own competence becoming critical and judgemental of self and others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Validation from and talking to a close friend</i></li> <li>• <i>Fun and relaxing activities, meditation</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTP</b></p> <p>Inappropriate displays of anger and emotional outbursts that they find acutely embarrassing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Time alone and time out from the situation</i></li> <li>• <i>Not being asked how they feel</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ESTP</b></p> <p>Negative fantasies, imagining other do not care about them, convincing themselves of evidence for this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reassurance, help with tasks and setting priorities</i></li> <li>• <i>Manage distractions</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ESFP</b></p> <p>Feel overwhelmed by negative possibilities and will attempt to rationalise these with simplistic explanations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reassurance, help with tasks and setting priorities</i></li> <li>• <i>Manage distractions</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENFP</b></p> <p>Overwhelmed with detail, losing perspective. Distorted facts will become or paramount importance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pay attention to physical needs</i></li> <li>• <i>Meditation, relax</i></li> <li>• <i>Sensitive support</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENTP</b></p> <p>Overwhelmed with detail, placing great importance on minor or distorted facts, clouding their ability to see the big picture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pay attention to physical needs</i></li> <li>• <i>Meditation, relax</i></li> <li>• <i>Sensitive support</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ESTJ</b></p> <p>May feel alone and unappreciated but unable to communicate their distress and despair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Physical activity</i></li> <li>• <i>Time alone or quiet support from a trusted friend</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ESFJ</b></p> <p>Uncharacteristically critical of self and others, greatly troubled by negative thoughts and opinions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Time alone or talking to a neutral party</i></li> <li>• <i>Journal writing or a new project</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENFJ</b></p> <p>Suddenly and uncharacteristically critical and fault finding. Keep this to themselves but greatly upset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Time alone or talking to a neutral party</i></li> <li>• <i>Journal writing or a new project</i></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENTJ</b></p> <p>Overwhelmed by self doubt, feeling alone and unappreciated but unable to express their feelings to others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Physical activity</i></li> <li>• <i>Time alone or quiet support from a trusted friend</i></li> </ul>