Stress warning-sign plan

Keep the learning visible. Match each early sign with a practical response rather than waiting for a difficult week.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

What I have learned

If I notice...	A small response I can use	Support / when to review

Helpful habits to keep

Support / when to ask for help

Review date / reminder

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Using this resource

Stress warning-sign plan

What this helps with

An early-warning plan links signs of overload with actions you can recognise and use. It should include changes in circumstances, not just symptoms inside you. For example, extra responsibilities may call for a workload conversation rather than another calming exercise. Review the plan when things are relatively settled and after demanding periods. It is a guide to noticing and responding sooner, not a way to guarantee that stress will never return.

How to use it

1. List your early signs in thoughts, body, behaviour and daily routine.
2. Identify circumstances that make overload more likely.
3. Match each sign with one realistic action or source of support.
4. Define what would mean the current plan is insufficient and professional help is needed.
5. Set a review date and keep the plan somewhere easy to find.

A fictional worked example

Jodie noticed that overload usually began with skipping lunch, rereading emails late at night and becoming short-tempered at home. Her plan linked those signs to a review of current demands, a conversation about priorities and asking for practical help. After several weeks of pressure, she also noticed persistent low mood and difficulty sleeping. Rather than adding more tasks to her self-help plan, she arranged a healthcare discussion. The sheet helped her distinguish an ordinary busy week from a pattern needing more support. She kept useful strategies from earlier weeks while accepting that circumstances and needs could change.

Keep in mind

Seek assessment if distress persists, functioning deteriorates or physical symptoms concern you. This is not a diagnostic checklist or crisis plan. If a situation becomes unsafe, prioritise appropriate protection and urgent support rather than waiting for the scheduled review.

Sources and attribution

NHS. Every Mind Matters: Stress.

Health and Safety Executive. Work-related stress and how to manage it: Causes of stress at work.

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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