

A Guide to Enhancing your Migrant Domestic Worker's Mental Well-being

For Employer of Migrant Domestic Worker



Introduction

Migrant domestic workers (MDWs) leave their families and country to work in Singapore so that they can give their loved ones a better life back home.

They may feel stressed working and living in a new environment. As an employer, you can support her to settle down well and look after her well-being.

Read on to learn more about stress, how you can help manage your MDW's stress level, and the channels to seek help from!



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1. What is stress?

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It is normal to experience stress sometimes. The events or situations that cause stress could be different across people as it is based on the way they see and react to the circumstances.

MDWs may feel stress for a variety of reasons:



Adjusting to a new environment and a different cultural background.



Inability to understand instructions well due to language barriers.



Unfamiliarity with performing their chores.



Unable to cope with the workload.

Some level of stress can motivate you to meet challenges and achieve your goals. However, too much stress becomes harmful as it can cause anxiety and health problems such as a weakened immune system and depression.

2. What are the signs and symptoms of stress?

Look out for the following signs and symptoms of your MDW being overly stressed:



Disturbed sleep

- sleeping a lot or not sleeping well



Change in appetite

- eating too much or not eating



Social withdrawal

- lack of interest, talking less, poor eye contact, listlessness



Irritability

- getting frustrated or upset easily



Drop in quality of the work

- becoming forgetful

If your MDW has such signs and symptoms, she may be feeling stressed. You can help her manage and overcome them early.

If these signs and symptoms persist and are not addressed, it may result in the MDW taking drastic actions such as:



Running away
from their
employers' home



Turning abusive
towards people
whom they
provide care for



Committing
self-harm

3. How can you help manage her stress?

Stress is always present in our lives, but it can be managed.

Let us look at some common scenarios that MDW employers face and see how best to handle them.



My MDW is working in Singapore for the first time. She tells me that she misses her family back in her hometown.

Support from family and friends is essential for your MDW to overcome stress. You can ask her to call back home or write a letter to her loved ones. Provide her with the means to keep in touch with her loved ones and persons who can lend her a listening ear.



My MDW could not complete the tasks that I have assigned to her. I must constantly monitor her.

Have a chat with her. Ask her if there is anything that is troubling her. If it is work-related, understand her concern and discuss how you can help her do a better job. Guide her along in the details of the tasks.

Be patient with your MDW. Your MDW may take some time to get used to her tasks and settle in your family. As she gets better at her work, encourage her and show her your appreciation.



My MDW always complains that she is tired and looks listless.

It can be exhausting to be in the presence of others all the time. While MDWs are expected to take care of household needs, they also need their own space and time. Give her privacy and allow her some time to de-stress.

Apart from the common scenarios, there are many healthy habits that can protect one from harmful effects of stress. You can help your MDW to adopt some of the healthy habits by following these tips:



Ensure that your MDW has healthy and balanced meals. Encourage her to have more fruits and vegetables.

You should also ensure that your MDW is not skipping her meal. Allow her to have sufficient time to complete her meal before continuing the household chores.



Encourage your MDW to do stretching exercising every day.

Allow your MDW to have 10-15 minutes of rest time to do some stretching exercise every day. You or your family member can also do it together as a form of healthy lifestyle.



Ensure your MDW has sufficient rest and sleep. Plan her work and rest schedule, especially if she needs to wake up at night to care for an infant or elderly.

Discuss and communicate openly with your MDW on the planned schedule so that both parties are clearly aware of what to expect from each other.

A happy MDW is a more motivated and productive worker! Take good care of your MDW and make her feel valued. In turn, she will also put in her best to care for your family.

4. Find out how Mimik's employer worked with a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) to help her overcome her stress



Mimik (not her real name) was a first-time domestic worker in Singapore. Two weeks into her employment, she broke down in front of her employer. She could not control her emotions and would cry and shout when anyone moved or disrupted the order of the household items. Mimik was reluctant to speak with her employer when questioned about her behaviour.

Mimik's employer decided to seek help. Her employer called the Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training (FAST) via their 24-hour helpline for assistance. FAST responded and spoke to Mimik. It turned out that Mimik was stressed over her own personal matters back home and was unable to adapt to her new environment.

FAST facilitated private counselling sessions with her and arranged for group counselling sessions together with Mimik's employer. The counselling sessions helped her settle down into her job and give her the confidence to continue with the employment.

Through the various support, Mimik no longer has frequent meltdowns and can communicate better with her employer.

5. Where can I seek help for my MDW?

If your MDW is feeling stressed or anxious, and need further help or support, you can ask your MDW to call the NGOs or the Mental Health Organisation hotlines. You could also call on behalf of your MDW.

Non-Governmental Organisations:	Contact No:
The Centre for Domestic Employees (CDE) provides basic face-to-face counselling for both MDWs and their employers regarding employment-related matters.	1800 225 5233 (24 hours)
Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training (FAST) provides helpline and Befrienders Service to help MDWs who are in trouble or in distress.	1800 339 4357 (24 hours)
Mental Health Organisations:	Contact No:
Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) provides counselling services for people who are emotionally affected.	1800-283-7019 (toll-free)
Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) provides emotional support for those in distress.	1800 221 4444 (24 hours)
Singapore Counselling Centre provides counselling and psychological services to enable one to mitigate stress and overcome the various issues of life.	6339 5411 (Counselling fees are chargeable)
Silver Ribbon provides counselling service to persons with mental health issues and their caregivers to understand why they are delaying or defaulting their treatment.	6386 1928



Please note that the above helplines only provide counselling advices. In life threatening situation, you should call the police emergency hotline "999" immediately.

6. List of courses and activities that you can sign up for your MDWs to help them de-stress and spend their rest days meaningfully

List of Courses offered by AIDHA

Course Name	Course Objectives
Module 1: Manage Your Money & Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Learn how to save, budget, plan and stick to a budget. ✓ Build self-esteem and improve your presentation & communication skills. ✓ Improve relevant and practical IT skills on computer and phone.
Module 2: Plan Your Financial Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop an achievable long-term personal financial plan. ✓ Become a capable financial decision-maker. ✓ Learn how to invest savings in productive assets.
Module 3: Start Your Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Learn how to start and manage a business. ✓ Understand the business environment and develop a strategy for your business. ✓ Develop an achievable business plan
Improve Your English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Learn to communicate more effectively in English. ✓ Increase confidence in speaking and writing English.



Scan the QR Code or find out more and enrol for Aidha's courses here:

<https://www.aidha.org/contact-us/courses-overview/>

FREE courses

Introduction to Financial Education	This interactive workshop will help you understand the life-changing benefits of making better-informed financial decisions.
How to Open a Bank Account	Find out the benefits of opening a bank account in Singapore and pick up tips on what to look out for when opening one.
Understanding Debt	Debt, utang, hutang, அகௌ, ூය. What is it and how to avoid it? Learn how to understand the true cost of debt in this course.
Building Your Resilience	Resilience is about being able to stay strong during difficult times. Learn how to manage challenging situations and remain strong in this course.
Dealing with Stress	In this interactive workshop, you will learn about how stress affects you and ways you can manage it, with other MDWs and a friendly Aidha mentor.
Debt Counselling Explained	Learn how to get to grips with your personal debt situation in our follow-up session to Understanding Debt (in partnership with AMP).



Scan the QR Code or find out more and register for Aidha's FREE courses here:

<https://www.aidha.org/courses/free-short-courses/>

List of Events and Workshops offered by Foreign Domestic Worker Association for Social Support and Training (FAST)

Mental Resilience Facebook Live Stream Talkshow	Provides MDWs a safe platform to share on their issues. Engage in fun conversation and participate in the quizzes to win attractive prizes. The platform promotes the social support services and work life balance programmes that FAST has for MDWs.
Mental Resilience Workshops	FAST prioritises the holistic wellbeing of MDWs and aims to educate MDWs on resilience through interactive and engaging workshops. These workshops will touch on the areas of cognitive, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual aspects of MDWs to help them to stay strong in face of challenges.



FAST activities are free for all MDWs! Scan the QR Code for more details and for other available courses at FAST's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/FAST.org.sg>.



Notes

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