

## Staff Welfare – Induction Documents (to host online)

### Personal Action Plan

Living and working in a city like Geneva (family duty station) or alternatively in a conflict zone (hardship duty station), we can all face different stressful situations. It is important, at the beginning of your employment, to review how well you cope with stress, and then make changes to manage better in stressful situations. We also have some questions for you to review and answer to make sure that you (and your family) are fully prepared.

The guidance and recommendations that follow can be helpful. If you need more help, please contact the IOM Staff Welfare Unit: [swu@iom.int](mailto:swu@iom.int)

Before you start your first day of work, please make sure of the following (this is a series of personal preparation exercises; you are not expected to share your responses):

#### *Family*

##### **If you are posted to a family duty station:**

Find out as much as you can about what is possible and available in the city of the duty station for your family/partner, such as accommodation, transportation, food, medical facilities, social activities and schools (see your Country Office Guide for new staff).

Think about what will help your family/partner to move, such as taking favourite possessions and belongings, having goodbye parties or making arrangements for them to stay in touch with family and friends.

Ask your local Human Resources Officer what requirements are necessary and what resources may be available for your spouse/partner if they would like to find employment.

##### **If you are posted to a hardship duty station:**

Before you start work, guarantee that your partner/immediate family have all the support needed while you are away. Who will support them in your absence? How will they resolve problems and difficulties (e.g. emotional and financial)?

Have you made sure that all financial and legal matters have been addressed properly and that they can be resolved remotely if necessary?

Have you completed a will and/or arranged for a power of attorney in case of an emergency? Remember to complete all necessary beneficiary forms as appropriate (e.g. IOM and UNJSPF) if needed.

How will you ensure that you can communicate with your family and friends? Who, at home, needs help with setting up any technology, for example, joining WhatsApp or learning how to use Skype?

### ***Psychological Preparation***

It is important to be psychologically prepared when you are going to work at your duty station. Think back to the relevant training that you have done: UNDSS BSAFE and, for some countries, Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments (SSAFE).

What are the important points that you need to remember?

Think about similar experiences you have had. What did you learn about yourself? How can you prepare for this mission based on your past responses?

Read as much as possible about your new duty station. Talk to people who are there or have recently worked there.

What types of stressors (internal and external factors that trigger stress) might you encounter in your new work environment? How could you react to each one?

Internal Stressors	External Stressors

Notes:

- Examples of internal stressors are history of depression, worries linked to experiences of critical incidents, fear because of little experience of living in a foreign country and concerns about safety.
- Examples of external stressors are poor living accommodation, travel delays and limited connectivity.

What are your own coping skills for stress? Please write them down in the following table. This is a private exercise and there is no expectation that you will be asked to share. Include strategies for supporting your family/partner if appropriate.

Coping Strategies	Positive	Negative
<b>Day-to-day coping</b>		
Social/Emotional: Who supports you? How do you solve problems?		
<b>Healthy living: eating, drinking habits and physical exercise</b>		
Work: What is your work pattern? How many hours do you work?		
<b>Emergencies/Critical incidents</b>		
What are your coping mechanisms as a leader of critical incidents?		
What are your coping mechanisms as an individual in a critical incident?		

Which of these will be very helpful to you in your new work environment? What needs to change? Who will support you during the change?

### ***Mental and Physical Health Preparation***

Your mental and physical health are critical to ensuring that you are able to deal with stressful situations and use coping strategies. Please complete the following table to review your own mental and physical health needs and the actions you should take.

Prior to completing the table, review IN/229 Rev.2: Medical Requirements for Official Travel and Procedures for Accidents/Illnesses during Official Travel. It contains information about IOM medical procedures to follow in case of accidents or illnesses that occur while on official duty.

Mental and Physical Health	Actions to Take
Given your history, what special precautions will you need to take to be able to work?	
What medication and/or specialist equipment will you need to take?	

Mental and Physical Health	Actions to Take
What extra support will you need if your mental and/or physical health deteriorates suddenly?	
What extra support will you need if you have to be relocated/evacuated?	

### ***Personal Action Plan***

Review your responses to the questions above first and then write a personal action plan as outlined below. Take a look at Annex 5 (Coping Strategies) to determine if there are any new strategies you would like to adopt.

The aim is to help you cope more effectively in your new work environment. This is a PERSONAL plan and you are not required to share confidential information. You may share the main points with OHU or the IOM Staff Welfare Officer if you want additional support for your duties.

Personal Action Plan
1. Name: Contact details:
2. Names of support persons: Contact details:
3. Date completed: Review date:
4. Please write down your positive coping skills for each of these areas:  a) Family  i) How will you maintain contact with your family?  ii) Who will support them if there is a critical incident at your hardship duty station?  iii) How will you help them integrate into the new country (family duty station)?
b) Day-to-day coping  i) Take regular breaks from work as much as possible.  ii) Eat and drink healthily, not doing anything in excess.  iii) Sleep six to eight hours per night.  iv) Maintain personal hygiene.

## Personal Action Plan

### c) Emergencies/Critical incidents

#### *Family duty station*

- i) How will you support yourself in case of an emergency?
- ii) What are the critical incident support mechanisms that are available in the duty station?
- iii) What actions might you need to take to support your family if there is an emergency or a critical incident at your family duty station?

#### *Hardship duty station*

- i) What actions will you take in the short term to manage yourself in the emergency?
- ii) What support can you access if there is a critical incident (e.g. explosion of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED))?
- iii) What actions will you take to ensure that you are looking after yourself in the long term (e.g. planning regular holidays, seeing a counsellor, making sure that you have quality time with your partner and family)?

### d) Practical matters

- i) What physical items do you need to take with you to your duty station so you can maintain your coping strategies (e.g. special food, music, yoga mat)? Remember to first check to see what is available/provided at your duty station.
- ii) If you are working at a hardship duty station, after you have arrived, make sure that you prepare a “run bag” that contains only essential documents and items (maximum weight 15kg). This will be all that you will be allowed to take by UNDSS if you have to be relocated (within the country) or evacuated (to another country).

### e) Mental and physical health

Are there any mental and/or physical health issues that are important to share confidentially with relevant personnel?

**For any questions regarding this Personal Action Plan, please contact the Occupational Health Unit or the Staff Welfare Unit .**



## Coping Strategies

Have you ever found yourself in a stressful situation and wished you knew how to cope with the challenges you faced? Here are some suggestions (from the Staff Welfare team). If you have health conditions, remember to check with your doctor before trying any of these suggestions.

### *Physical Actions*

Doing 10 minutes of physical activity three times a day can improve mood, relieve depression and increase feelings of well-being.

- Good posture (i.e. sitting up straight) helps you to take in more oxygen and perform better during stressful activities such as deadlines.
- Acupressure is also a good stress reliever. Take the thumb and index finger of one hand to squeeze the soft spot on the palm between the thumb and index finger of the other hand. Hold for three counts. Switch sides. With the thumb and index finger, squeeze each of your fingers all over. Use your thumb to rub each joint in a circular motion. Then hold each finger at its base and pull gently to stretch it, sliding your grip up the finger and off the tip. For extra benefits, use a dab of lavender oil, which can aid relaxation.
- Hold a small hard ball between both hands and roll it around. Place the ball on the floor and put one foot on top of it and move the ball around the sole and toes of that foot. Repeat with the other foot.
- Rub your earlobes with your fingers slowly. This will help you relax.
- Sewing, knitting, crocheting and similar activities can help. Repetitive actions can soothe (according to Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine).
- You should be taking 12–18 deep breaths per minute. You can check by placing one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your abdomen. If you are breathing properly, there should be regular movement of your upper and lower chest. If you are not, then it is likely you are breathing in a shallow way. It is important to practice regular deep breathing. This will help you think and act more constructively. Here are some exercises:
  - *Intentional breathing*: Sit in a comfortable chair with a straight back. Place your hands on your sides just above your hip bones. Inhale

deeply into your abdomen (your hands should move as your body expands and contracts). Exhale. Repeat these three to four times. Move your hands to the middle of your ribs. Continue breathing and feel your body expand. Repeat these three to four times. Move your hands to your collar bones and, again, feel your body moving. Repeat three to four times. You have relearned how to carry out a full breath.

- *Foundational breathing:* Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the ground, eyes closed and hands on your lap. Start breathing in and out very slowly. This can be helped by listening to slow music with a beat and regulating your breath with the beat of the music (12–18 breaths per minute).

### **Healthy Living**

Even if you do not feel like eating and drinking healthily, it is important to continue to do so.

Try to eat a healthy well-balanced diet including alkaline foods that can reduce stress reactions, such as lentils, sweet potatoes, eggplants, garlic, carrots, ginger, beetroots, broccoli, Brussel sprouts and avocados.

Keep some dried fruits and nuts handy. Snack on these instead of sugar and avoid blood sugar highs. Eat three meals a day. Your last meal should be eaten at least three hours before you go to bed.

Choose ginseng tea instead of coffee – it gives your metabolism a kick-start like coffee and soothes anxiety as well.

If you find it difficult to go to sleep, then get out of bed and do some activity – such as listening to music or reading – until you feel ready to go to sleep. Another strategy is to lie in bed and rub your stomach gently and focus on slowing your breathing down until you fall asleep.

Alternatively, keep a diary by your bedside and write down any concerns and worries that are recurring. Tell yourself you will deal with them in the morning.

If you do not feel well, make sure that you seek medical advice before assuming that you can manage by yourself.

## **Work**

If you find that you are forgetful and/or find it difficult to concentrate, make sure that you are breathing properly first. Then perhaps take a short break where you carry out a small physical activity to relax. It may be helpful to pair up with a colleague and think about how you can support each other and double-check your work. Remember to be patient with yourself especially if you are in a very stressful situation.

If the situation is very stressful, then think about the stressors that are present and make a list. Separate them into ones that you can do something about and those that you have to accept.

Make sure that you pay attention to IOM and UNDSS security advice and follow it, both at work and at home.

Be careful about what information you pay attention to. Only listen to news from reliable sources.

Take regular breaks at work – ten minutes every hour.

Plan your week. Look at and analyse what you did last week. How much of your week was productive? How did you spend your time? What changes do you need to make?

What or who is irritating or annoying you? Whose problem is it? How will you talk to them to solve the problem or is it one that you need to address within yourself?

Work culture is the character and personality of your organization. Do you feel positive about going to work? Is the culture supportive? If it is negative, what can you do to address it? What should you talk to leaders about?

Is anyone harassing or bullying you? What impact does it have on your life? What have you done about it? It could be helpful to speak to the Office of the Inspector General (to lodge formal complaints) or the Ombudsperson (to discuss issues in a safe space).



## ***Social Support and Emotions***

Talk to partners, friends and family. Social support has been proven to lower stress. Remember to be supportive of each other and plan for how you will cope as an individual and as a family rather than thinking about the difficulties themselves.

It is also important to only confide in one or two people about your emotions, concerns and problems. If you share such information with a lot of people, then there is a risk of repetition rather than resolution of the issues.

Plan for worst-case scenarios, rehearse and then you will know what to do. Make sure you seek advice from IOM Security or UNDSS as needed.

Be careful in how you explain any difficult situation to children. It is best to be truthful, but only tell them a few things at a time. Double-check that they have understood you correctly. Using stories about how fictitious children have coped can help.

Remember that young children (and some teenagers/young adults) will not be able to speak about their emotions, but they are likely to act them out. Be patient with them.

Try to follow a normal routine as much as possible. Think about how you can do this, including talking about everyday things, dreams you or your family or friends have, and maintaining leisure and social activities.

There may be times when you cannot show your emotions, but it is important to acknowledge them when you can. It is important to share your emotions and concerns with, at least, one person.

Keeping feelings and worries to yourself does not really help.

You can feel frightened, and this can affect your ability to pay attention and focus. Think about what you are fearful of and then work out what you can do to address the issues. If there is little that can be done, what could you do to accept and address your fear?

Practising your religion can be helpful.

Listening to music has been proven to reduce stress responses such as high blood pressure and elevated heart rate.

People working near plants reacted 12 per cent faster and were less stressed based on blood pressure readings taken before and after a typing assignment.

Visualization reduces stress. Sit comfortably and focus on your breathing with your eyes closed. Keep concentrating on your breathing for five minutes and then focus on a picture or music that reminds you of peace.

### ***Excess Behaviour***

Overuse of cigarettes and other substances and excess behaviours (e.g. eating too much) does not help you to cope effectively. It is best to speak to a counsellor who will help you develop alternative strategies to manage worry and stress.

### ***Past Events Returning***

Experiencing a critical incident or severe stress can bring back memories of similar past events. If this happens, you can try one or more of the following:

- Write down what happened in the one(s) that you remember, what you did well and what could have been done differently. Praise yourself for what you did. Forgive yourself if needed.
- Think of a positive memory of another event or time. When the memory of the incident comes back, think of the positive memory instead.
- Wear a bracelet or an item that reminds you of good times and then touch the bracelet or item whenever the negative memory returns.

**For any questions regarding this Personal Action Plan, please contact the Occupational Health Unit or the Staff Welfare Unit.**



## **CIGNA REIMBURSEMENT FOR EXTERNAL COUNSELLING OR PSYCHOTHERAPY**

IOM's medical plan covers psychological treatment at 90% up to a maximum of 52 sessions per calendar year unless there are justified circumstances, such as inpatient care. Reimbursement for psychological support is the same for international and national staff covered by the insurance. However, for nationals, the coverage is limited for treatment in the country of the duty station.

Here is a quick guide on obtaining approval of the cost of therapy from Cigna insurance:

### **Treatment given by a licenced psychiatrist**

1. You can start your treatment with a psychiatrist without any additional steps. Up to 12 therapy sessions will be reimbursed.
2. If you need to continue your treatment after the 12 sessions, your psychiatrist needs to send an updated medical report indicating the following:
  - a. the diagnosis and the type of psychotherapy recommended
  - b. the number of sessions required, and
  - c. the estimated duration of treatment.

### **Treatment given by a licenced counsellor, psychologist, psychoanalyst (licenced qualified paramedical - other than doctor)**

1. If you need psychological support, make an appointment with a normal ~~doctor/General Practitioner or a psychiatrist. They can prescribe~~ up to 12 therapy sessions for you (Note: for couples' therapy, the maximum number of sessions is 10 with a prescription).

2. Make an appointment with a **therapist** and start your sessions. You will need to pay but, afterwards, Cigna will reimburse you 90% of the costs. If you need medication, please also consult a psychiatrist.
3. For approval of further sessions (beyond 12 sessions) the therapist will write a detailed medical report for Cigna. Confidential medical information can be sent directly to Cigna's medical consultant at [medicalboard@cigna.com](mailto:medicalboard@cigna.com). You will also need a new prescription for the additional sessions from your General Practitioner or a psychiatrist.

**IMPORTANT:** if you need **urgent** and acute psychological support you can go straight to a counsellor or psychologist, without having to pass by your GP. Up to 3 sessions will be reimbursed without prescription.

Please note that since IOM outsourced therapy and medical services to Cigna in March 2021, no one needs to be informed about you doing therapy. Cigna will make sure that all information related to your treatments is kept strictly confidential.

We encourage you to use therapy if you feel the need.

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All communication or queries to Cigna needs to include the staff Personal Reference Number, Full name and date of birth.

You may contact Cigna at [iom@cigna.com](mailto:iom@cigna.com) and at IO Care Team [admissions@cigna.com](mailto:admissions@cigna.com) or through your app on the phone to submit the cost estimates and request the LOG for the clinic.

Find here the different emails used in CIGNA for the different services

**Email:** [iom@cigna.com](mailto:iom@cigna.com)

**Phone:** +3232931807

**Fax:** +3236632855

<http://www.cignahealthbenefits.com>

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**For hospital admission and request for Letter of Guarantee**

[admissions@cigna.com](mailto:admissions@cigna.com)

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In case or an emergency you can call Belgium office at +32 3 293 18 07 or use the Call me back option from the App.

**Prior approval of treatments:**

[medicalboard@cigna.com](mailto:medicalboard@cigna.com)