



# Avoiding Overload: Managing **Stress and Burnout** in Cyber Security



# Hello!

## My name is Lisa Ventura

I am the Founder of Cyber Security Unity, a global community which has been set up to unite the industry and help combat the growing cyber threat. I am also the Founder of "All Together Now" which provides help and support to those affected by bullying and abuse in cyber and infosec, a qualified mindset coach and a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA).





# How common is stress and burnout in Infosec and Cyber Security?

According to a report from **TINES** entitled "The State of Mental Health in Cyber Security released in May 2022: Stress and burnout is reaching epidemic levels, and has increased exponentially during the COVID-19 crisis



Nearly  
**1 in 3**

security team members experience **tremendous stress**, and this got markedly worse during the COVID-19 crisis

**27%**

Say their **mental health has declined** over the past year

**51%**

Have been **prescribed medication** for their mental health. Of those, 58% are **currently taking medication** for their mental health. Additionally, 49% are **currently seeing a therapist**.



STRESS and BURNOUT in cyber security is a

# HUGE PROBLEM

Despite this, most security leaders and others working in cyber security are passionate about what they do and the potential to make a real difference, even when the job is stressful.





# Factors contributing to the increase of stress and burnout in cyber security

- ◇ Constant and more sophisticated, organised threats/attacks
- ◇ The speed of innovation relating to threats is increasing
- ◇ Lack of downtime
- ◇ Low sense of personal worth/value and high degree of cynicism
- ◇ Solitary nature of remote working
- ◇ Cyber security is not widely accepted as a strategic function
- ◇ Workplace bullying and bullying/abuse from the wider community





# Factors contributing to the increase of stress and burnout in Infosec and Cyber Security

- ◇ Skills shortage
- ◇ Increasing regulation
- ◇ Having to secure too much data in too many places
- ◇ Threat of losing job or being disciplined
- ◇ Very rare for people in cyber security to seek professional help when feeling overwhelmed





# How do mental health issues manifest themselves?



## Poor mental health can manifest itself via:

- ◇ Bouts of insomnia
- ◇ A decline in performance
- ◇ Increasing use of drugs or alcohol
- ◇ Over or under eating
- ◇ Taking more sick days
- ◇ Withdrawal from activities that were once enjoyed
- ◇ Loss of motivation
- ◇ Physical and mental exhaustion

If left unchecked cyber security professionals can be at risk of depression and anxiety disorders





## Recognising the signs of burnout

Burnout is a reaction to prolonged or chronic job stress and is characterised by three main things:

- ◇ Exhaustion
- ◇ Cynicism and having less identification with your job
- ◇ Feelings of reduced professional ability

If you find yourself identifying with these things,  
**you are at risk of burnout**





# Recognising the signs of stress

- ◇ irritable, aggressive, impatient or wound up
- ◇ over-burdened
- ◇ anxious, nervous or afraid
- ◇ like your thoughts are racing and you can't switch off
- ◇ unable to enjoy yourself
- ◇ depressed
- ◇ uninterested in life
- ◇ like you've lost your sense of humour
- ◇ a sense of dread
- ◇ worried about your health
- ◇ neglected or lonely

Some people who experience severe stress can also sometimes have suicidal feelings

# Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

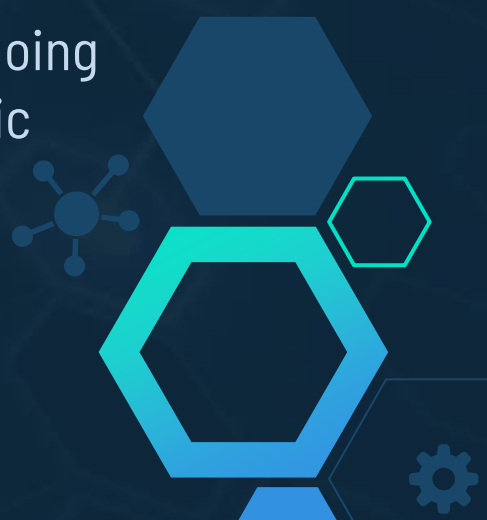
- ◇ In extreme situations, cyber security professionals can develop **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**
- ◇ Although this is not like the **PTSD** that veterans suffer from, it is still very debilitating
- ◇ Many are first-hand witnesses to cyber attacks that leave lasting damage to the organisations they help protect
- ◇ This can carry over into their work in the future as a reminder of the worst that can happen
- ◇ Panic can set in when security pros see signs that remind them of past incidents, manifesting as PTSD

It is best to deal with these issues and stress before they become lasting problems that keep infosec and cyber security professionals from doing their best work



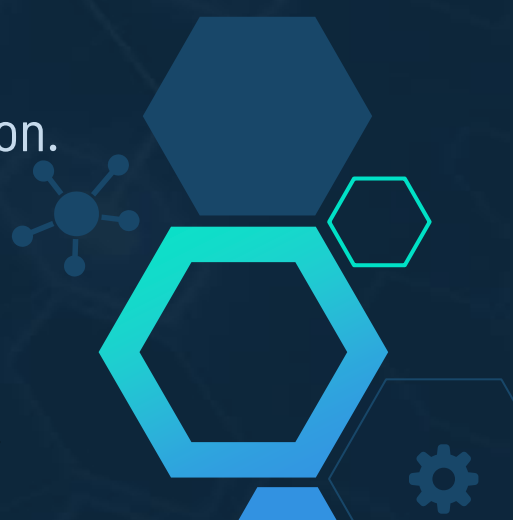
# Tips for combatting stress and burnout

- ◇ If you are feeling burnt out or stressed, talk to your colleagues and family members
- ◇ Carry out an emotional needs audit to identify which of your needs are not being met at work, and set positive and achievable goals to help get those needs met
- ◇ Use wellbeing related apps (e.g. Headspace)
- ◇ Know your energy patterns and plan your work accordingly i.e. doing tasks that require more brain power when feeling most energetic and easier admin tasks when you are feeling low on energy
- ◇ Avoid turning to drugs and alcohol, excessive eating, etc.
- ◇ Take regular physical exercise





# Tips for combatting stress and burnout in the workplace

- ◇ **Try not to take things personally** - you can only do so much
  - ◇ **Use reframing** (*challenge assumptions, look for learning opportunities in situations, ask what's good about a situation etc.*) to rationalise a situation i.e. stand back from the problem and question whether it's as bad as it first appeared.
  - ◇ **Relaxation techniques**  
e.g. 7/11 breathing, muscle tension/relaxation, guided visualisation.
  - ◇ **Mindfulness**  
use short mindful exercises, take regular breaks, eat mindfully, focus on one task at a time, be present and pay attention, be mindful in all communications and make time for self-reflection.
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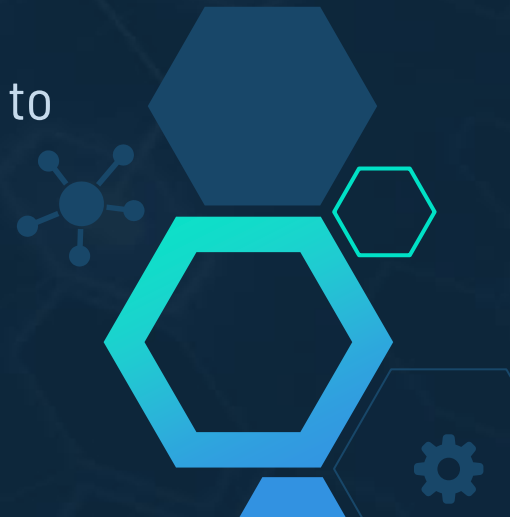


## More tips for combatting stress and burnout in the workplace

- ◇ When dealing with challenging communicators (*rude, aggravated, etc.*) remain calm and focus on the subject at hand. Ask them to clarify what they mean or tell them your understanding of what they said.

Focussing on facts not emotions can help keep both parties composed

- ◇ The best way to deal with passive-aggressive behaviour is to try to understand the person's behaviour and try to build a positive relationship with the person. Being kind, communicative and non-threatening can help people like this feel more relaxed



# Tips to help manage your mental health at work

- ◇ Look at your working environment (*e.g. working hours, time off/out, workplace culture*)
- ◇ People often feel measured by where they fit in an ever increasing hierarchy of qualifications and not on their potential or the value they add to the company
- ◇ Social events and team-bonding events
- ◇ Times of uncertainty at work can cause immense pressure on individuals
- ◇ Cutting out negative behaviour – workplaces that tolerate bullying or harassment experience inefficiency, high staff turnover and poor relationships within teams at all levels
- ◇ Leave space between meetings
- ◇ If doing something awkward do it first thing in the day to get it out of the way – eat that frog!

# More tips for managing your mental health at work

- ◇ In open-plan offices set aside quiet rooms and hotdesking areas that offer more privacy
- ◇ Helping employees to understand the important role they play towards an organisation's vision and mission
- ◇ Creating an organisational culture of openness and communication is crucial to addressing insecurity
- ◇ Unhealthily high stress work environments do not have to be an inevitability of the cyber security workplace
- ◇ Cultural change needs to happen at board level by people who want to change it and understand it fully
- ◇ Demonstrate that every employee is valued
- ◇ HR teams to address providing resource to invest in wellbeing of cyber security staff

# My tips for managing your mental health

- ◇ **Make time for things outside work that you enjoy** – I enjoy karate, bullet journaling, retro computing, reading, and watching movies
- ◇ **Take regular breaks** no matter how busy you get during the day
- ◇ **Get up and to go bed at the same times** every day – this will help you maintain a routine
- ◇ **Make time for family and friends** – I make sure that my husband and I have proper time together where we don't talk about work, especially in the evenings – you will often find us browsing YouTube looking at funny videos or watching films together on our home cinema system. At the weekends I always organise catch ups with my friends for some down time.

# Bullying and Abuse in Infosec and Cyber Security

- ◇ One of the biggest things that impacts mental health in infosec and cyber security is bullying and abuse.
- ◇ There are different types of bullying and abuse:
  - Workplace bullying and abuse
  - Social media/online bullying and abuse that is viewed publically
  - Bullying and abuse via DMs, emails and private messages
  - Bullying and abuse in person

**Bullying and abuse is NOT acceptable under ANY circumstances and it has GOT to stop!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

**Having been a victim of all these kinds of abuse, I founded #AllTogetherNow to provide support and resources to victims.**

# #AllTogetherNow

A new community that has been founded to provide help and support to victims of any type of bullying and abuse.

If you would like to get involved please contact me via [lisa@csu.org.uk](mailto:lisa@csu.org.uk).



#StrongerTogether

#BeExcellentToEachOther

# Further reading and resources

## CREST

[www.crest-approved.org/2020/01/29/crest-report-highlights-problems-of-stress-and-burnout-among-cyber-security-professionals/index.html](http://www.crest-approved.org/2020/01/29/crest-report-highlights-problems-of-stress-and-burnout-among-cyber-security-professionals/index.html)

Nominet - [www.nominetcyber.com/ciso-stress-a-sign-of-digital-burnout](http://www.nominetcyber.com/ciso-stress-a-sign-of-digital-burnout)

Action for Happiness - [www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)

NHS - [www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress)

Headspace [www.headspace.com/mindfulness](http://www.headspace.com/mindfulness)

## MIND

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/what-is-stress](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/stress/what-is-stress)

# Open discussion and Questions

How do you manage your  
mental health?

Hints, tips, suggestions?  
Pop them in the chat!



# Contact Me

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**Thank you for attending my presentation:**

Stronger Together: Fostering **Mental Health** Resilience in Cyber Security

I look forward to seeing you in the future!