



Woodlane High School

achieving success in a nurturing environment

Staff Stress Management Policy

Updated: June 2024

Next Update: June 2027

Introduction

We have a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the employees as far as reasonably practicable and to have reasonable care for the health and safety of our employees. This includes taking steps to minimise the risk of stress or stress-related illnesses. We are committed to identifying, tackling and preventing the causes of work-related stress and aim to promote a culture of care and mutual support to minimise stress and to ensure all employees are able to do their job to their best ability. We must be particularly mindful of the increased stress and pressures surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, which still impact staff today. This in turn will help us provide high quality teaching and learning for our pupils.

This policy sets out our approach to managing stress in the workplace.

Also contained within the policy is practical guidance for managers and employees on how to manage stressful situations, set out in **Appendix 1**.

This policy applies to all staff at the school (teachers and support staff), referred to as employee within this document.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

What is stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as “***the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work***”. They state that stress is not an illness but a “***state***” and that illness, whether mental and/or physical, develops as a result of stress which is prolonged and excessive.

A certain amount of pressure is a normal part of most jobs and it can be beneficial in helping to keep an individual motivated. However, there is an important distinction between working under pressure and when pressure becomes excessive and produces stress, which can be detrimental to health. We recognise that what triggers stress, and the capacity to deal with stress, varies from person to person.

Stress may be experienced as a result of the workplace, external factors, or a combination of both. Workplace factors could include the nature of the employee's work, the volume of the work, working hours, environmental factors, changes such as a restructure or redundancy programme, or bullying or harassment by colleagues or third parties.

The Management Standards for work related stress define the way and organisation manages the risks from work related stress. There are six key areas that cover the primary sources of stress at work that if not managed effectively could lead to poor health, reduced productivity and increased absence. These are: Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role and Change. An examination of these areas forms part of the stress risk assessment process that demonstrates good practice in managing stress (see Appendix 2).

Signs of stress

Some common signs of stress are listed below, however experiencing one or more of these does not necessarily give an indication of stress:

- Persistent or recurrent moods, for example anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness, mood swings (being tearful or over sensitive).
- Physical effects e.g. aches and pains (headaches, back ache, neck ache), raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders.
- Poor and/or changed behaviours for example, increased absence levels (including arriving late at work), difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, loss of motivation, making more errors (poor performance), double checking everything, covering up mistakes by lying, working long hours/not taking a break, changes to sleeping or eating habits, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs, poor attitude, behaviour and relationships with colleagues.
- Prolonged or extreme exposure to the possible symptoms of stress is associated with serious chronic diseases such as heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety or depression.

Signs that an individual is experiencing stress will vary according to how the individual reacts to stress. Key for the line manager to be aware of are changes in an individual's behaviour that are more than just a "one-off" incident.

These signs should be acted upon promptly and discussed with the employee. This will include offering support, such as encouraging the employee to seek advice from his or her GP who will be able to make a diagnosis. Employees can also access the employee assistance programme.

Support

Senior staff will monitor sickness absence and workloads, and ensure that there is clear system within the school to promote a culture of open communication and encouragement. We will create reasonable opportunities for employees to discuss areas of concern in an

environment where stress is not considered as a weakness or failure. We will also hold return to work interviews, with any employee who has been absent, in line with the local authority Sickness Absence Policy, to establish whether there is any underlying problem and, if so, what the employer/employee could do to address it.

The school promotes a flexible working arrangement for eligible senior leaders and teachers, which is aimed to improve wellbeing and reduce stress, along with other benefits. Please see our 'Teacher Flexible Working Approach (Whole School) Policy' for full details.

The school promotes a 'sanity break' system whereby teachers are permitted 1 day off-curriculum for 'self-directed' activity, either in-school or out. The timing of this 'informal' day should be negotiated well in advance and agreed with the Headteacher.

We will be alert to the possibility of stress as set out in section 3 of this policy. However, employees who believe they are suffering from stress should ask their line manager for help and support in the first instance. If you feel unable to do so, you should contact the Headteacher.

Once an issue affecting an employee's health is brought to our attention, steps will be taken to support the employee to minimise the risk of harm and to identify additional arrangements to reduce the risk of work-related stress to as low a level as reasonably practicable. We may:

- carry out further investigations
- review job descriptions to identify tasks that may involve stressors
- carry out a risk assessment to evaluate the risk of work-related stress, considering the existing arrangements that are in place, and ensure that significant findings of the risk assessment are recorded
- carry out a stress risk assessment with the employee to identify whether stress is an issue with a view to addressing the situation. A stress risk assessment pro-forma is available at Appendix 2
- provide information and training, such as identifying opportunities for development relevant to the employee's position
- fund counselling or therapy for a fixed period
- refer the employee to occupational health in line with the Sickness Absence Policy
- if an employee is absent from work due to sickness, apply the Sickness Absence Policy as applicable etc.

If stress is having a negative impact on an employee's performance, and his or her performance does not improve despite the manager having taken reasonable steps to alleviate

pressure on the employee, it might be necessary to follow the Capability Procedure.

Record keeping and confidentiality

Information in relation to the management of stress will be kept to ensure an accurate record is available of what was discussed, actions taken, and for monitoring purposes.

Records will be kept on the employee's personal file. All records will be treated as confidential and kept no longer than necessary.

Appendix 1

Guidance for managers and employees on dealing with stressful situations in schools

There are many different elements in the school year that can provide additional pressure to employees. These may include:

- dealing with challenging behaviour
- Ofsted Inspections
- report writing
- parent consultation/open evenings
- meeting with/calling parents
- accountability (targets)
- finance (particular issue for the Headteacher and SBM)
- premises matters (particular issue for the Headteacher, SBM and Site Manager)
- recruitment/staffing issues (particular issue for the Headteacher and senior leaders)
- conflict in the workplace
- impact on mental health and resilience following the Covid-19 pandemic

It is strongly advised that in order to combat these areas of pressure, employees should:

- attend all relevant induction/training/staff training/INSET sessions that are provided so that they are aware of all school processes
- make themselves fully aware of the procedure to follow for each circumstance, for example, the School's Positive Behaviour Policy, Complaints Procedure etc.
- know who to call on for support if they need it
- admit that they are struggling before it becomes too difficult to cope, and seek help and advice

Other ways that can help you at work and therefore deal with stress include:

- good diet (e.g. eat breakfast and lunch)
- drink plenty of water throughout the day
- learn to manage your time effectively
- exercise (including yoga and relaxation)
- take time out (e.g. don't work all weekend and evenings)

- avoid procrastination

All employees who are members of a Union or Professional Association are advised to contact these organisations for support and guidance.

The Headteacher/line managers could take the following steps to help to prevent stress:

- **Encourage communication within the team:** When employees feel that they can discuss problems with their colleagues, this can help to reduce the risk of stress. This could be achieved by holding regular team meetings and encouraging staff to approach their manager and colleagues informally with any issues that they have.
- **Foster good relations with employees:** Line managers should take the time to get to know their team members, so that changes to their normal behaviour are easier to spot.
- **Ensure that employees have an appropriate amount of work to do:** When employees feel that they are unable to cope with their workload, this can cause stress. Managers should regularly review the amount of work employees have, for example at regular appraisals. They should consider the impact of absences and departures on remaining staff and how the work can be shared fairly within the team.
- **Ensure that individuals take proper breaks:** Senior leaders should check that employees are not regularly working long hours and that they take regular breaks. If an employee is consistently working through lunch, the line manager should try to establish if this is because of a short-term increase in work or if it is a longer-term issue. Senior leaders should set a good example by taking breaks and working appropriate hours.
- **Have regular meetings with employees:** Having regular meetings with team members about their work will give line managers a good idea of what employees are doing and any problems that they have.
- **Conduct performance reviews:** Line managers should carry out formal performance reviews with the individuals in their team in line with the school policy and give employees the opportunity to raise concerns during these meetings. This process should include setting clear, achievable objectives for the individual.
- **Provide appropriate training:** Line managers should conduct regular reviews to identify training needs for the members of their team. Employees could be involved in identifying their own training needs. Where training needs are identified, the line manager should provide training. Training is particularly important for employees who have additional responsibilities following a promotion.
- **Be alert during periods of change:** Line managers should keep employees well

informed and encourage them to raise concerns during periods of change, for example when the organisation is going through a restructure.

- **Recruit employees who have the skills to perform the role:** When recruiting, line managers should consider what the duties of the job will be and what skills and experience the successful candidate will need. This will help to ensure that the right person is recruited to the job, so the job-holder does not feel out of his or her depth.
- **Do not delay:** Line managers should take immediate action when they suspect that an individual is stressed or when an employee informs them that he or she is experiencing stress. This should help to avoid the problem escalating and helps avoid liability if the employee ends up making a claim, and should help the employee to make a swift recovery.

If the Headteacher/line manager becomes aware that an employee is experiencing stress they should arrange to meet with the employee. This meeting should be held in private and be kept informal in nature. The line manager should ask the employee whether or not he or she has been experiencing stress and what the employee considers to be the contributing factors.

Questions that may be appropriate to ask include:

- “I’m concerned that you appear to be under some pressure. Can we talk about it?”
- “One of your colleagues has told me in confidence that she is worried about you.”
- “Are there any problems at home that you want to talk about?”
- “I want to help resolve this issue. Do you think that some extra training or support might help?”
- “I think we should meet again in a couple of weeks to see how things are going, but in the meantime, please come and talk to me if you have any concerns.”

After the meeting the Headteacher/line manager may need to conduct a more detailed investigation to establish the causes of, and contributing factors, the stress, particularly where the employee alleges that it is a result of conflicts in the workplace, poor management or bullying, for example. Once the line manager has established the reason behind the stress, he or she should explore what steps the organisation could take to alleviate the situation.

Steps that could be appropriate for the line manager to take to help relieve the employee's stress include:

- a phased return to work (following sickness absence)
- temporary or permanent flexible working arrangements, for example reduced hours
- redistribution of some of the employee's work
- a temporary or permanent change in duties

- providing training for the employee
- referring the employee for counselling
- putting in place a mentoring arrangement.

What action is appropriate will depend on the circumstances, including the reasons for the stress, the nature of the job, and what is considered reasonable.

Appendix 2

Stress Risk Assessment Form - to be completed by Headteacher / line manager where there is a potential issue identified.

Employee Name: _____

Reason for Assessment: _____

What are the potential hazards and stressors in relation to the following hazard categories		What control measures can be put in place?	Priority action (H,M,L)	Action taken By whom/ by date
Hazard Categories	Problems Identified			
Demands - this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.				
Control - how much say the person has in the way they do their work.				
Support - this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.				
Relationships – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.				
Role - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.				
Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.				

Headteacher/line manager signature: _____ Date: _____

Employee's signature (if completed with employee): _____ Date: _____

Date of Review	Outcome of review and follow up action

Guidance notes on completing the stress risk assessment form

Things to consider when assessing the role:

1. What are the potential hazards and stressors?

Examples:

Demands

- Long hours
- Unreasonable deadlines
- Client expectations (*e.g. that they'll solve the problem*)
- Excessively busy periods
- Inadequate rest and holidays
- Inadequate staffing
- Inappropriately qualified for the job
- Over promotion
- Skills not recognised – promotion prospects not fulfilled
- Boring or repetitive work
- Too little to do
- Employees experiencing excessive workloads
- Employees working under excessive pressure
- Inability to cope with key aspects of the role

The physical working environment

- poor temperature control
- noise
- lack of facilities for rest/breaks
- poor lighting
- poor ventilation
- badly placed or designed workstations

The psychological working environment

- Threat of aggression or violence
- Disruptive, angry or stressed children
- Angry or stressed parents/members of the public
- Difficult colleagues
- Verbal abuse
- Poor management practices

Control

- Not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work
- Rigid work patterns and breaks
- Fixed deadlines occurring in different parts of the year
- Lack of control over work
- Conflicting work demands

Support

- Lack of effective return to work system
- Non-compliance with sickness and absence management policy
- Lack of managerial support through emotionally demanding work
- Inadequate inductions
- Reaction to post disciplinary, grievance, capability or suspension
- Lack of adequate training

Relationships

- Poor relationships with others
- Staff complaints or rising absence trends
- Perception of bullying or confrontational communications styles from others
- Bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- Lack of support or fear culture from management and co-workers

Role

- Lack clear lines of accountability and responsibility
- Lack of communication and consultation (both sides)
- Perception of a culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems
- Failure by the organisation to recognise success
- A culture that considers stress a sign of weakness
- Personal risk in relation to the role (*e.g. money, lone working*)

Change

- Fears about job security / grading
- Poor communication – uncertainty about what is happening
- Not enough time allowed to implement change
- Inexperience/fear of new technology
- Lack of skills for new tasks
- Not enough resource allocated for change process
- Other personal fears, relocation

2. Is there a high, medium or low risk of stress, and why?

- Does the type of job in combination with the working environment and organisation result in a high, medium or low risk?
- What does history/experience tell us?
- What are the worst problems?

3. What control measures can be put in place?

- Training for job
- Job organisation
- Rest and meal break arrangements
- Job rotation
- Good working environment
- Security measures such as alarms, or buddying
- Local policy defined and upheld
- Counselling

4. Priority & timescale

Some suggested goals:

High risk: Priority 1 (fix first)

Initiate simple actions immediately, and devise a plan to review longer term other actions within 3 months.

Medium risk: Priority 2 (fix after all priority 1 have been attended to)

Systematically review and initiate actions within 12 months.

Low risk: Priority 3 (fix last)

Document the risk assessment and revisit after 12 months.

