



## **St Michael's CE (VA) Primary School**

**Lyme Regis**

**Learners growing together with God**

**Children's' values - Respect, Koinonia, Perseverance,  
Generosity, Thankfulness.**

# **Stress Management Policy, Procedure and Guidance**

**for St Michael's CE VA Primary School**

<b>Signature of Headteacher:</b>	<b>Mr N Kiddle</b>
<b>Signature of Governing body:</b>	<b>Mrs M Ellis</b>
<b>Date ratified by the Governing Body:</b>	<b>Monday 23rd January 2017</b>
<b>Next review date:</b>	<b>Annual</b>

# **Stress Management Policy, Procedure and Guidance**

for **St Michael's CE VA Primary School**

**December 2004  
Human Resources**

## Contents

Paragraph	
	<b>Policy</b>
1.	Introduction
2.	Scope
3.	Definition
4.	Policy Statement
5.	Statement of Intent
6.	Responsibilities
7.	Review
8.	Associated Policies
	<b>Procedure for Reporting Work Related Stress</b>
9.	Aim
10.	Procedure
10.1	Part A
10.2	Part B
10.2.1	Section 1
10.2.2	Section 2
10.3	Part C
10.4	Part D
11.	Head Teacher/Chair of Governor Responsibility
12.	Support
13.	The County Council
	<b>Guidance for Managers</b>
14.	What is work related stress?
15.	What effect can stress have on individuals?
16.	What are the implications of work related stress for the School?
17.	Risk Assessments
18.	Employee absence due to work related stress
	<b>Appendices</b>
1	Pro-forma for Reporting Work Related Stress
2	HSE 'Tackling Work Related Stress'
3	HSE 'Caring for Those with Work Related Stress'
4	Contact List

## STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy and the accompanying documents have been developed in consultation with head teachers and the recognised trades unions. The aim of the policy is to deal with, and offer guidance in, a range of issues related to the management of stress at work with a view to reducing the incidence of work related stress within **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School.
- 1.2 **St Michael's CE VA Primary** recognises its duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees. This policy, procedure and guidance takes into account the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act and appropriate Regulations under the Act.

### 2. Scope

- 2.1 The policy and the accompanying documents apply to all employees within the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School. It has been recommended by Dorset County Council to Schools where the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School Governing Body has formally adopted this Policy, Procedure and Guidance. This recommendation recognises the joint responsibility of both the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School Governing Body and Dorset County Council to provide appropriate support and protection to its employees.

### 3. Definition

- 3.1 Stress is defined as '*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them*' (Health & Safety Executive, 2001).
- 3.2 Pressure can improve performance, but when demands and pressures become excessive, this can lead to stress. As a result individuals, teams and schools will suffer.
- 3.3 Work related stress is defined as that which is caused by factors emanating from work practices/environments. The Health and Safety Executive has identified the following factors that can have an impact on stress:
- **Culture** – of the organisation and how it approaches work related stress;
  - **Job Demands** – such as workload and exposure to physical hazards;
  - **Control** – how much say an individual has in the way they carry out their work;
  - **Relationships** – with other colleagues, covering issues such as bullying and harassment;
  - **Change** – how organisational change is managed and communicated within an organisation;
  - **Role** – whether the individual understands their role and whether the organisation ensures individuals do not have conflicting roles; and
  - **Support, Training and Factors Unique to the Individual** – support from peers and line management, training to enable the employee to carry out their duties, and catering for individual differences, e.g. a disability.

### 4. Policy Statement

4.1 Dorset County Council is actively committed to addressing the causes of stress at work to reduce work place stress, and respond with an appropriate level of support. The County Council will ensure that:

- appropriate training is made available for **The Head Teacher** to assist **them** in identifying the causes and signs of stress, how to carry out risk assessments and respond to individual employees suffering from stress (further details regarding risk assessments can be found at paragraph 17);
- risk assessments are regularly undertaken;
- employees have access to confidential support and counselling;
- clear guidance is given to **The Head Teacher** on **their** responsibilities and the procedure to be followed if an employee is suffering from occupational stress;
- all employees are informed of their responsibilities and the procedure for reporting work related stress;
- all issues of work related stress are dealt with as **promptly** as possible;
- responsibilities within the policy are clearly allocated: and
- will not consider the reporting of work related stress as a weakness, but a mechanism to ensure support through a systematic managed process.

## 5. **Statement of Intent**

5.1 The County Council will aim to:

- consult teachers, managers, trades unions and employees to assist in identifying particular causes of stress;
- encourage and develop a positive organisational culture where communication, support and mutual respect is normal practice;
- use surveys, audits and questionnaires, as appropriate, to identify areas of concern or risk;
- review sickness absence data, staff turnover and (where available) exit interview statistics to identify particular areas where stress may be particularly prevalent;
- encourage all employees to participate in health promotion events;
- ensure teachers and managers are particularly alert to issues of stress in situations of change, for example, or where investigations are taking place, and to progress these in a way which minimises stress;
- improve workplace communication and employee participation;
- provide and support employees who are (or likely to become) stressed; and
- reduce work related stress in accordance with set targets.

## 6. **Responsibilities**

6.1 **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School Governing Body will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing the effective implementation of this policy. **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School Governing Body will also be responsible for ensuring that the development of the culture of the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School takes account of the principles set out in this policy and ensuring that the policy is implemented effectively within the School. This will include arranging for appropriate training to be provided to teachers and managers (including the recognition and management of stress in themselves and others), and the monitoring of sickness absence and employee turnover.

6.2 **Head Teachers** will:

- undertake appropriate training;

- ensure employees undertake appropriate training;
- ensure all teachers, and managers are trained as necessary to undertake risk assessments and are aware of their responsibilities within this policy;
- ensure that the policy and procedure is effectively implemented within their School;
- ensure that prompt and appropriate action is taken as a result of a risk assessment or the stress reporting procedure being initiated;
- ensure that employees have the skills and tools necessary to carry out their duties;
- monitor sickness absence;
- provide a supportive 'open-door' policy to employees who wish to discuss and/or report work related stress;
- monitor workloads and working hours;
- ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated;
- ensure employees are aware of other supportive mechanisms in place, e.g. contact details for Dorset County Council's Staff Counsellor, Contact Officers, the national Teacher Support Network, and Headline (the support line for Dorset head teachers); and
- identify posts where there are potentially high levels of stress, and ensure that additional support is put in place so that high pressure levels will be alleviated, as far as is reasonably practicable.

### 6.3 **Individual employees** will:

- be responsible for ensuring their own health, safety and welfare as far as is reasonably practicable;
- initiate the reporting procedure(s) as soon as they recognise that levels of stress are becoming unacceptable to them, and understand that the School would not consider this to be a sign of weakness;
- participate in finding solutions to problems of perceived stress; and
- assist the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School by reporting areas for improvement and ensuring their own individual behaviour is appropriate.

### 6.4 **Recognised Trades Unions** will:

- co-operate with the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School and Dorset County Council in the promotion of health and safety;
- assist in identifying high risk areas where priority action may be required;
- assist in monitoring progress towards achieving a reduction in work related stress and in the review of the policy; and
- participate, where appropriate, in finding solutions to problems of perceived stress.

### 6.5 **The County Council** will:

- ensure the recommendation of the policy to schools;
- arrange for appropriate training to be made available to teachers, managers and employees, which will include the recognition and management of stress in themselves and others;
- monitor sickness absence trends and staff turnover on a county wide basis; and
- ensure the Health & Safety and Occupational Health Services provide appropriate support and guidance to employees, to include a confidential service from the Staff Counsellor and support from Contact Officers.

## 7. **Review**

7.1 This policy will be reviewed annually as a standing item by the **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School Governing Body.

## 9. PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING WORK RELATED STRESS

### Aim

- 9.1 **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School recognises that excessive levels of stress can have a negative effect on mental and physical health. It will therefore seek to take all reasonably practicable steps to protect employees from high levels of stress and support them as appropriate.
- 9.2 **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School will not consider the reporting of work related stress as a weakness, but a mechanism to ensure support through a systematic managed process.
- 9.3 **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School recognises that stress related illnesses are rarely the result of work issues alone. There are often other contributory factors over which the School has no control or influence but which nevertheless may affect performance/attendance at work. In these circumstances there may be temporary adjustments to working patterns, for example, which would assist in reducing stress. Head Teachers have the discretion to agree such adjustments at any time. **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School also has statutory obligations to comply with, such as Parental Leave and Time Off for Dependents.
- 9.4 Where pressures have been identified on particular posts which may lead to stress, **St Michael's CE VA Primary** School will ensure that additional support is put in place and that high pressure levels will be alleviated, as far as is reasonably practicable.
- 9.5 The aim of this procedure is to ensure that issues of **work related stress** are raised by employees as soon as possible, appropriate action is taken at an early stage, and that employees and managers together arrive at solutions.

## 10. Procedure

In order to report work related stress Part A of the Pro-forma should be completed (see Appendix 1). This will initiate the appropriate action to be taken. The Pro-forma is a four part document that is completed in a staged process, allowing for informal action to be taken. It is anticipated that most cases will be resolved informally, but if this is not viable the Pro-forma includes a risk assessment process to identify the potential stressors and control measures agreed, and it ensures that progress is monitored and reviewed.

### 10.1 PART A

As soon as employees (or line managers or others) recognise that stress levels at work are becoming (or will become) unacceptable, they should complete **Part A** of the Pro-forma, to inform the **Head Teacher** of identified stress related symptoms and perceived cause.

Where possible this should be done whilst the employee is still at work, i.e. well before the point at which any individual is contemplating the need to take sick leave due to the effects of stress.

Every effort should be made to include the **Head Teacher** as the first point of contact/discussion when issues are raised. However, in the event that **Head Teacher** is identified as contributing to the symptoms, then Part A should be sent by the

employee (or on behalf of the employee) to the next line of management above the **Head Teacher** and copied to the **Chair of Governors**.

Where a Head Teacher identifies stress, Part A should be sent to the Chair of Governors who will be required to undertake appropriate consultation with the HR Manager to determine the necessary action to be taken. However, should the Chair of Governors be identified as contributing to the symptoms, then Part A should be sent directly to the HR Manager.

As detailed on the form, Part A should also be sent by the employee (or on behalf of the employee) to Occupational Health, who will monitor the progress of the identified problem.

If necessary, the Pro-forma can also be completed on behalf of the employee (e.g. by a manager or Trades Union Representative).

## 10.2 **PART B**

Following submission of Part A, employees are entitled to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative, to any meetings regarding work related stress.

Part B should be completed jointly at a meeting between the employee and the **Head Teacher**, and has been designed to give two response options to the initial reporting of work related stress.

10.2.1 **Section 1** can be used to record the outcome of an informal discussion between the employee and their **Head Teacher** to determine an agreed action plan to minimise the problem. If this agreement is reached, a review date should be set between the employee and the **Head Teacher** to ensure both parties remain satisfied with the outcome and stress levels have continued to be reduced as a result of the action taken. A copy of the agreed action detailed within this section, should be forwarded to Occupational Health.

10.2.2 **Section 2** should be used where Section 1 is not completed, either because an informal agreement cannot be reached, or a detailed assessment of the issues is required.

The detailed assessment identifies any specific areas of work related stress against a list of known stressors. On completion of the checklist, a summary of the key issues should be recorded and jointly signed and dated by both parties. A copy of the agreed action detailed within this section, should be forwarded to Occupational Health. The **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** will use this checklist as essential information when developing the action plan (Part C).

In seeking to find solutions to any problems of perceived stress, the employee should be encouraged to participate in any discussion with **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors**, and will be invited to contribute solutions that are suitable for them and the service. If solutions are to be effective then they must be mutually acceptable. Each employee has their own threshold for handling stress and this threshold may vary in different situations and at different times.

## 10.3 **PART C**

Part C should be completed by the **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** in discussion with the employee (and line manager as appropriate). The control measures should be balanced against the identified areas of work related stress in Part B and agreed as achievable levels of intervention.

Review dates must be set and recorded on Part C ensuring review of the agreed control measures.

#### 10.4 **PART D**

This section of the Pro-forma is completed by the **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors**, and it should ensure a consistent approach is taken to all identified areas of work related stress.

**Part C and D** should be completed and made available to those involved in the process (including Occupational Health), within four weeks of the receipt of Part A from the employee.

#### 11. **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors Responsibility**

11.1 **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** is responsible for ensuring that any issue of work related stress is dealt with speedily and effectively. They may arrange for an appropriate line manager to undertake actions within this procedure but cannot delegate the overall responsibility of ensuring that each issue is dealt with appropriately i.e. **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** is responsible for completing Section C and D to discuss the outcome and what reasonable action can be taken to reduce any unacceptably high levels of stress.

11.2 On receipt of the Pro-forma from an employee, the **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** will ensure that the matter has been dealt with appropriately. If Part B Section 1 has not been completed, the **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** will ensure that the risk assessment has been undertaken, and meeting/s have been held with the employee and the line manager (or appropriate manager).

11.3 **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** must ensure that any additional notes or documentation (to that of the Pro-forma) are kept for audit/evidence purposes, and copied to the employee and to Occupational Health.

#### 12. **Support**

##### 12.1 **Contact Officers**

Contact Officers are work colleagues from a variety of Directorates within Dorset County Council who have been trained to provide confidential support and guidance for employees experiencing difficulties in the work place.

Contact Officers are not tied to any one Directorate or School. They are not counsellors but can offer confidential and independent support and guidance on an informal basis to help employees get through a difficult period at work.

A Contact Officer will not make any decisions on behalf of an employee nor are they acting as Dorset County Council representatives in any formal sense. At all times it is the employee themselves who will control what happens next, and seeing a Contact Officer does not necessarily set any wheels in motion. Head teachers are not told about the contact and the only time when confidentiality cannot be

guaranteed is when the safety of others is involved, where there is serious breach of conduct, or where the law requires it.

## 12.2 **Headline**

Headline is a confidential support service for Dorset head teachers staffed by experienced clinical psychologists. They specialise in supporting head teachers through stressful periods and aim to help them in the management of stress and the development of personal resilience. The aim is to maintain strong leadership in schools and reduce absences through stress related illness. This service is funded by Dorset County Council and is therefore free to Dorset head teachers. Please refer to Appendix 4 for contact details.

## 12.3 **Teacher Support Network**

A national Teacher Support Line is available to all serving and trainee teachers, which offers information, support or concentrated short term counselling to help employees cope with the demands of teaching. Please refer to Appendix 4 for contact details.

## 13. **The County Council**

- 13.1 Occupational Health will ensure that the Staff Counsellor is aware of all issues of work related stress. Contact will be made with all employees who report work related stress to ensure that they are aware of the support that can be provided. Support may be provided internally, e.g. by the Staff Counsellor or a Contact Officer, or a referral may be made to an external source of support. Ultimately, it is an employee's decision whether or not to seek support from the Staff Counsellor.
- 13.2 Occupational Health will assist in monitoring progress of Pro-formas/action plans.
- 13.3 The County Council will monitor county wide sickness absence and provide management information regarding stress related illnesses.
- 13.4 Schools will be invited to buy in to appropriate training provided by the HR Service. Training for managers will include how to recognise and deal with stress in themselves and their employees. Training will also be available to all employees on how to manage their own stress levels.
- 13.5 The Health & Safety and/or Occupational Health Services within HR will provide support and advice to Directorates and individual employees as appropriate.

## **GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS**

### **14. What is Work Related Stress?**

Work related stress is defined as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It should also be recognised that on occasions insufficient demands can also be stressful e.g. those employees 'on-standby'.

There is an important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure (which can be stimulating and motivating), and work related stress which is a distressing reaction to demands or pressures that the individual perceives as unreasonable and/or that they cannot cope with at a given time. Work related stress is not an illness, but if prolonged or intense it can lead to increased problems with ill health for employees.

Everyone can experience work related stress in principle. No one is 'immune'. Individuals react differently to different pressures at various times so what one employee may find unacceptable may not affect another employee in the same way.

### **15. What effect can stress have on individuals?**

Stress can manifest itself in a number of ways:

- behaviour - e.g. jumpy, moody, aggressive, drug or alcohol abuse;
- thinking style - e.g. indecisive, negative, rigid, low concentration, paranoid;
- emotional reactions - e.g. drained, phobias, depressed, irritable, withdrawn, defensive;
- physical symptoms - e.g. headaches, infections, back and neck pain, blurred vision, palpitations, insomnia; and
- actions - e.g. missing deadlines, absenteeism, poor time-keeping, long hours, stockpiling work, low productivity.

### **16. What are the implications of work related stress for the School?**

It is essential that managers are trained to deal with stress related cases. As well as direct costs in terms of days lost through stress related illnesses, there are also many indirect costs. Although clearly there will be costs involved in initially solving the issues of stress in the short term, there will be savings in the long term such as preventing:

- reduced morale and commitment to work;
- poor relationships with colleagues (the absence of one employee may in turn lead to increased workloads for others thus causing a 'domino' effect);
- reduced performance and productivity;
- increased accidents;
- higher staff turnover;
- the time and cost of intervention; and
- the time and costs associated with any claims and subsequent impact on insurance premiums.

### **17. Risk Assessments**

The purpose of carrying out a risk assessment is to establish if existing control measures are sufficient or if more needs to be done to minimise the identified risks to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Completing a risk assessment will not in itself reduce work related stress, but the actions taken as a result should do so.

The County Council has adopted the HSE's five step approach to risk assessment of work related stress:

Step 1	Identify the hazards
Step 2	Establish who might be harmed and how
Step 3	Develop an action plan
Step 4	Take action
Step 5	Evaluate and share your work

A programme of training will be provided for all relevant managers to ensure that they are competent to carry out risk assessments in relation to work related stress.

All managers will have access to the HSE publication "Tackling Work Related Stress – A manager's guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being" which identifies seven categories of risk factors for work related stress.

Managers responsible for carrying out risk assessments should ensure that each of the seven factors are adequately assessed and seek advice and/or assistance from the County Health and Safety Manager, an HR Officer or Occupational Health as appropriate.

## **18. Employee absence due to work related stress**

Assessment and preventative action is aimed at reducing work related stress but however effective the risk assessment process might be, there may still be occasions when an individual employee suffers ill health as a direct result of work related stress. Where **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** become aware that an employee is absent from work as a result of ill health caused by work related stress, the circumstances should be investigated as a matter of urgency. Although this task can be delegated, ultimately the responsibility falls on the **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors**.

The aim of the investigation will be to determine which risk factors are involved, what changes have already been made (if any), and what changes need to be made in order for the employee to return to work. The results should be communicated to the employee and, as in other cases where issues of work related stress are raised, an action plan should be drawn up in agreement with the individual. It will be the responsibility of the **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** to ensure that the action plan is monitored and the outcomes are effective.

The results of the investigation and assessment should also be provided in confidence to Occupational Health where a medical referral is **Head Teacher/ Chair of Governors** may find it helpful to involve an HR Officer in the investigation.

**HSE's PUBLICATION  
"TACKLING WORK RELATED STRESS"  
(A Managers' Guide to Improving and Maintaining  
Employee Health and Well-being)**

**Factor 1: Culture**

Organisational culture is key in determining how successful you will be in managing work related stress. Organisational culture is often very strong, rooted in history, and difficult to change. A healthy organisational culture will be one where communication, support, and mutual respect are the norm.

An organisation has a positive culture when:

- work related stress and health issues are treated seriously and the organisation responds positively to any concerns;
- there is good, open, communication between employees and between employees and management;
- staff are consulted and, where possible, able to participate in decisions that may affect them;
- staff are supported emotionally and practically;
- staff "buy into" their work, i.e. they are undertaking the tasks because they understand what they are trying to achieve and are proud of their achievements for personal and organisational reasons;
- problems are recognised and solved promptly;
- working long hours is not encouraged; and
- staff are not encouraged to take work home.

**So: are you doing enough?**

**If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ communicate regularly with your staff, particularly those working remotely and/or from home, and be open and honest about what is happening at work and how this may affect them;
- ✓ adopt partnership approaches in the workplace to encourage staff to work with you to tackle work related stress or any emerging business problems. Encourage people to talk to you at an early stage about work related stress, mental health issues, and their concerns about work. Create an environment where these issues do not carry stigma;
- ✓ try to involve your staff in the planning process so that they understand how their work "fits in";

- ✓ offer internal support. This could be a practical thing, like coaching, or it could be emotional support, e.g. when personal crises such as illness and bereavement, financial worries etc affect your staff.

The way you embrace these issues can influence how committed employees feel towards the organisation and how committed they feel the organisation is to their welfare. It can also affect how willing employees are to talk about matters that are causing them genuine concern.

## **Factor 2: Demands**

Demands on the individual are often quoted as the main cause of work related stress. In this section we will look at what that really means and what you can do to ensure that demands do not become unmanageable.

### **Demands: Work overload**

Work overload can occur when a person is allocated a great deal of work, but insufficient resources (in terms of ability, staff, time, or equipment) to cope with it.

Broadly speaking there are two different types of work overload. Quantitative overload is simply having too much work to do in the time available. Qualitative overload is work that is too difficult for the employee to do, possibly because it is a new area and they have not received appropriate training; or because they do not have the intellectual or physical capacity to do the work; or because they have been set an impossible task (regardless of resource or ability).

Employees faced with work overload may try to cope by working excessive hours, which may lead to health problems and problems outside work. Working excessive hours can lead to fatigue, which in turn can impact on performance, creating a “vicious circle” of more time and effort being put into the work, with less being achieved. Employees may also take work home, which can be detrimental to their family and social life.

We also know that work involving a fast pace and the need to resolve conflicting priorities is associated with a higher risk of psychiatric disorder, poor physical fitness or illness. An example is several people giving the same person large amounts of work with short deadlines.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that most staff need to have a certain amount of challenge and pressure to keep them interested in the work and motivated. The key is to strike the right balance through discussion with all those involved in the work.

There may be occasions when the Service has to work at an extreme level to meet a deadline. When these occasions arise, staff should be told why it is essential to meet the deadline, that their extra efforts are appreciated, and that this will be an infrequent event. Management should consider how to reward their staff after they have made an exceptional effort for the good of the Service.

### **Demands: Capability and capacity**

Regulation 13(1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers, when entrusting tasks to employees, to take into account their capabilities as regards health and safety. Paragraph 80 of the Approved Code of Practice on the Regulations says:

*“When allocating work to employees, employers should ensure that the demands of the job do not exceed the employees’ ability to carry out the work without risk to themselves or others... Employers should review their employees’ capabilities to carry out their work, as necessary.”*

This includes making sure that employees’ mental health is not put at risk through the work they are required to do. Providing adequate training for the job is an important ingredient.

You should also pay particular attention to the demands placed on young workers. Regulation 19(2) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 prohibits the employment of a young person for work that is beyond his or her psychological capacity; for example, dealing with violent and aggressive behaviour, or having to take decisions under pressure may be work that is beyond a young person’s emotional coping ability.

### **Demands: Work underload**

The problem here lies with the employee not being sufficiently challenged by work. Job underload, associated with repetitive routine, boring and under-stimulating work can lead to the employee feeling dissatisfied and under-utilised.

### **Demands: Physical environment**

Aspects of the physical environment that can affect employees include noise, vibration, temperature, ventilation, humidity, lighting and hygiene.

Some studies have shown that employees make a greater number of errors when there are high noise levels, and noise levels have also been found to increase vulnerability to accidents. Exposure to noise is associated with reported fatigue, headaches, irritability and reduced ability to concentrate.

In one study, reported stress levels were increased by a combination of different factors, depending on where people were working and the physical environment they were exposed to.

Vibration is considered to be a powerful source of stress. It affects brain chemistry and function.

In those exposed to harmful substances, fears concerning the effects of these can increase anxiety.

### **Demands: Psychosocial environment**

#### Violence

You should already be assessing the risk of violence to your staff. HSE defines violence as:

*“Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment.”*

People who deal directly with the public may face aggressive or violent behaviour. They may be sworn at, threatened or even attacked. This can be a cause of anxiety for your employees.

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 employers must notify their health and safety enforcing authority if any act of non-consensual physical violence done to a person at work results in their death, serious injury or incapacity for normal work for three or more days.

**So: are you doing enough?**

**If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ ensure there are sufficient resources to do the work allocated:
  - if there are insufficient resources, seek guidance from management about priorities;
  - support your staff by helping them prioritise, or renegotiate deadlines;
  - cover workloads during staff absences;
- ✓ if people are underloaded, think about giving them more responsibility, but make sure they have been adequately trained;
- ✓ strike a balance between ensuring that employees are interested and busy, but not underloaded, overloaded, or confused about the job;
- ✓ train staff so they are able to do their jobs;
- ✓ encourage staff to talk to you at an early stage if they feel they cannot cope;
- ✓ talk to your team regularly about what needs to be done, because this can:
  - help you understand the challenges the team are currently facing and any pressures they are under;
  - find ways of sharing out the work sensibly and agreeing the way forward with the team;
  - gain team cohesion and commitment to the work you have planned – if the whole team is aware of what needs to be done and by when, they are likely to be more responsive to you. Allocating more work to a stretched team without explanation is not helpful;
  - ensure shift work systems are agreed with staff and that the shifts are fair in terms of workload;
  - gain understanding and commitment to unplanned tight deadlines and the exceptional need for long hours;
  - help you manage any unexpected absences or losses to the team – everyone knows the key stages of the project and what each other's role is;
- ✓ lead by example;
- ✓ have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment to control the physical hazards and risks. Further information on many physical hazards and how you can control them is available from HSE;
- ✓ assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse and take appropriate steps to deal with it.

**Factor 3: Control**

Control is the amount of say the individual has in how their work is carried out. Research has shown that not having much say in how work is done may be associated with poor mental health and a higher risk of alcohol dependency.

Research also suggests that when there are greater opportunities for participating in decision-making, greater satisfaction and higher feelings of self-esteem are reported. Non-participation appears to be linked to work related stress and overall poor physical health.

**So: are you doing enough?**

**If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ give more control to staff by enabling them to plan their own work, make decisions about how that work should be completed and how problems should be tackled;
- ✓ enrich jobs by ensuring that staff are able to use various skills to get tasks completed, and that staff can understand how their work fits in with the wider aims of the Service;
- ✓ only monitor employees' output if this is essential. Regular meetings with staff could be arranged to see how things are going. At these meetings managers could provide advice and support where necessary, and ensure that staff are coping;
- ✓ a supportive environment is crucial. Staff need to know that managers will support them, even if things go wrong or if they find that they are unable to cope with added pressures.

**Factor 4: Relationships**

We use the term “relationships” to describe the way we interact with people at work for business purposes.

Other people can be important sources of support, but they can also be sources of stress. At work, relationships with bosses, peers and subordinates can dramatically affect the way we feel at the end of the day. There are two particular aspects of relationships that could lead to work related stress – bullying and harassment.

***Bullying and harassment***

In this guidance, we take “harassment” to mean unwanted conduct based on sex (including transgender status), race, colour, religion, and nationality. Ethnic or national origin or disability that affects the dignity of people at work.

In this guidance, we take bullying to mean persistent unacceptable behaviour (or a single, grossly unacceptable, act) by one or more individuals working in the organisation against one or more employees. This behaviour is perceived by the person experiencing it to be offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or involving an abuse of power. It includes:

- any act or threat of physical violence; and
- repeated:
  - verbal abuse (including shouting or swearing);
  - insubordination;
  - victimisation, humiliation or ridicule;
  - libel, slander or malicious gossip;
  - spying, pestering, or other inappropriate intrusive questioning, particularly into personal or domestic life;
  - setting impossible or arbitrary objectives or deadlines;
  - excessive supervision;
  - unjustified faultfinding;

- withholding information that the employee has a reasonable expectation of being given, exclusion from meetings that the employee has a reasonable expectation of attending or other forms of unreasonable ignoring of the employee;
- refusing without reasonable cause reasonable requests for leave or training; or
- maliciously preventing career development.

Bullying and harassment are two forms of behaviour that are unacceptable in organisations and almost inevitably generate stress and can lead to stress related illnesses.

**So: are you doing enough?**

**If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ work in partnership with staff to ensure that bullying and harassment never emerge as an issue. One way of doing this is by having procedures in place, such as disciplinary and grievance procedures, to deal with instances of unacceptable behaviour;
- ✓ in consultation with staff and trade unions, draw up effective policies to reduce or eliminate harassment and bullying;
- ✓ communicate the policies and make it clear that senior management fully supports them;
- ✓ communicate the consequences of breaching the policies;
- ✓ create a culture where members of the team trust each other and can be themselves while they are at work;
- ✓ encourage your staff to recognise the individual contributions of other team members and the benefits of the whole team pulling together.

**Factor 5: Change**

Many organisations have undergone significant change in the last decade or so. They have had to adapt the way they work to accommodate, for example, new technology, competition and changing market conditions. Often their response has included restructuring, downsizing and adopting entirely new ways of working. Poor management of change can lead to individuals feeling anxious about their employment status, and reporting work related stress.

Change can be a stop-start event. That is, the organisation may have a clear objective for a change and securing that objective marks the end of the change process. However, many organisations make more subtle, frequent, changes that can affect staff just as much as a large-scale change, if not properly managed.

**So: are you doing enough?**

**If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change takes place – explain the timetable for action and what the first steps are going to be. Talk about what the change will mean in terms of day-to-day activity and discuss whether there are any new training needs;
- ✓ communicate new developments quickly to avoid the spread of rumours in the organisation. If the organisation is planning a major change your staff are likely to be discussing job security, whether they will need to relocate, and whether their terms and conditions will change;

- face-to-face communication is generally best so that people have the opportunity to ask questions and say what they feel, but any means, e.g. paper or electronic, would be helpful;
  - have an “open door” policy where staff can talk to you about their concerns or any suggestions they have for improving the way the change is managed;
- ✓ give staff the opportunity to comment and ask questions before, during, and after the change;
  - ✓ involve staff in discussions about how jobs might be developed and changed and in generating ways of solving problems;
  - ✓ supporting your staff is crucial during a change;
  - ✓ help staff who are to be made redundant by the change by giving them the skills they need to find a new job, e.g. by helping them to write a CV and prepare for interviews;
  - ✓ after the change, think about revising work objectives to avoid role conflict and role ambiguity which can cause work related stress;
  - ✓ revise your risk assessment to see if any changes e.g. a decrease in staff numbers have resulted in increased hazards to staff. Remember that social changes (e.g. if staff are now working with a completely different group of people) may have more of an impact on the individual than technological or geographical changes.

### **Factor 6: Role**

You can help to reduce stress by ensuring that a person’s role in the organisation is clearly defined and understood, and that the expectations placed on them do not conflict. There are two potentially stressful areas associated with a person’s role in an organisation. They are “role conflict” and “role ambiguity”.

#### ***Role conflict***

Role conflict exists when an individual is torn by conflicting job demands or by doing things he or she does not really want to do, or things which the individual does not believe are part of their job. Workers may often feel themselves torn between two groups of people who demand different types of behaviour, or who believe the job entails different functions.

#### ***Role ambiguity***

Role ambiguity arises when individuals do not have a clear picture about their work objectives, their co-workers’ expectations of them, and the scope and responsibilities of their job. Often this ambiguity results simply because a manager or supervisor has never adequately explained what is required of them or because the job has changed without this being acknowledged in the job description.

A wide range of situations can create role ambiguity. For example, entering a new job or organisation, a promotion or transfer, a new boss, the first supervisory responsibility, or adapting to a change in the structure of the existing organisation.

**So: are you doing enough?**

**If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ make sure your staff have a clearly defined role, e.g. through a personal work plan which enables them to understand exactly what their roles and responsibilities are;
- ✓ encourage your staff to talk to you at an early stage if they are not clear about priorities or the nature of the task to be undertaken;
- ✓ talk to all your staff regularly to make sure that they are completely clear about the current job, what it entails, what you expect of them and what they can expect from you;
- ✓ make sure that new members of staff receive a comprehensive induction to your organisation. If this is not arranged centrally, you should do it locally;
- ✓ if your organisation has gone through change, check with members of your team to make sure they understand their new roles and are comfortable with them.

### **Factor 7: Support, training and factors unique to the individual**

Regulation 13 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 says that every employer should provide adequate health and safety training, but we also recommend that members of staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their jobs.

Your staff need to be competent and feel comfortable doing their jobs. You should provide training (either in-house or externally) to equip staff with the skills they need. If you take on a new piece of work, make sure that the objectives can be achieved using the skills and competencies your staff have, or that could be developed quickly.

If you are recruiting new members of staff make sure, as far as you can, that they are matched to the job (in terms of skills, ability, and commitment), receive an induction, and are aware of your policy on work related stress.

The way you support both new and existing staff is key to reducing, or moderating, work related stress. The way you provide that support can vary from offering help in times of crisis, through to informally congratulating a member of the team for a job well done.

Social support at work is also important. The Whitehall II Study of “Work related factors and ill health” in civil servants found that low social support at work was associated with poor mental health, poor health functioning and increased sickness absence. However high social support at work had a protective effect, being associated with reduced risk of both short and long spells of sickness absence.

Even when the work has not been completed to the standard you required, you should attempt to provide constructive, supportive, advice. For example, you can provide advice on where things went wrong and what you would like to see happen in the future. Simply reprimanding your staff and doing nothing else is unlikely to be helpful – your staff will not learn anything and are likely to be anxious about undertaking similar tasks in the future.

Finally, you need to take account of the “make up” of your team. For example, some members may thrive on working to tight deadlines, others may like to plan their work so that they know what they have to do and when. Try, as far as possible, to cater for these individual differences by talking to your staff as a team – you might find that there is scope to allocate the work in a way that suits all team members, or that you can manage the work in a different way for different people.

Do not try to train staff to become “stress resistant”. There is little evidence it works, but even so, stress management is not the answer – stress prevention is.

**So: are you doing enough?  
If not, here are some ideas:**

- ✓ give support and encouragement to staff, even when things go wrong;
- ✓ listen to your staff and agree a course of action for tackling any problems – it is important for staff to feel that the contribution they make at work is valued;
- ✓ involve your staff – they need to “do their bit” to identify problems and work towards agreed solutions;
- ✓ encourage staff to share their concerns about work related stress at an early stage;
- ✓ provide your staff with suitable and sufficient training to do their jobs;
- ✓ give new staff a proper induction into the Service and organisation;
- ✓ take into account that people’s skills and the way they approach the work will differ;
- ✓ value diversity – don’t discriminate against people on grounds of race, sex or disability or other irrelevant reasons;
- ✓ encourage a healthy “work-life balance”;
- ✓ encourage staff to take their annual leave entitlement and their meal breaks.

**CARING FOR THOSE WITH WORK RELATED STRESS**  
**(Reproduced from Part 3 of “Tackling Work related Stress” (HSE))**

**I know some of my team are reporting work related stress. What can I do?**

Despite the precautions you have taken, you may find that a member of the Service is experiencing work related stress. The following section provides some general advice on the things you can do to ensure that you are comfortable dealing with the person, and that they know you care for their well-being.

**How you can help**

***Things about you***

- You should develop the skills you need to deal with stressed and distressed members of staff and talk about any identified needs with your superior (who in turn needs to think about their training needs).
- Try not to be panicked by emotion. Acceptance, reassurance and a calm, measured response will be helpful. Ask if there is anyone the person wants to have contacted (if it seems appropriate).

***Things you can do***

- Ensure that you do not penalise employees for feeling the effects of too much pressure.
- Positively encourage staff to manage their own well being at work, and provide them with the support they need to do this. Managers need to respond helpfully to members of staff who are going through stressful times. Simply listening to people can help.
- You could ask the person how you could help rather than just assuming a particular course of action is best. Even in acute distress people can have a clear sense of their own needs. You may wish to note the agreed action points for ease of reference.
- At a suitable time, explore whether work is a factor and ensure the person knows what kind of support the organisation can offer.
- Discuss whether any changes in workload or other adjustments would help. Talk about any resources the organisation has that can help, e.g. an employee assistance service, other access to counselling, a confidential talk with a member of staff who is not their supervisor, etc.

**Rehabilitation**

***How can you help?***

- Ensure there are arrangements for staff to have an early return-to-work interview. At that interview, focus on the person rather than on any work problems that arose due to an absence.
- Make sure that people who have been off sick with a stress related illness feel that they are welcome back.

- Make sure that the person is not placed in a situation that contains the same factors that led to their illness.
- If you discover that work caused, or was part of the cause, of the ill health leading to absence, you should address the problems and make alterations.
- Your staff are likely to feel uncomfortable if they think that you are giving them special treatment or are not giving them enough to do. Make sure that the person undertakes the range of duties you would expect a person in that job to do, but reduce those elements of work that were excessive and led to illness. If feasible, you could offer to reduce responsibilities in the short-term, or offer part-time working, to gradually phase the person back into work.