



STRESS

This guide supplements the Council's Strategic Framework for Stress Management. It is intended to help managers prevent and deal with work related stress.

OUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Council as the employer and you as a manager are legally responsible for making sure that employees working for us don't come to any harm. This includes harm from stress related illness caused by their normal work as well as from accidents or negligence. We all work under some pressure and for most people, most of the time this enhances performance. However, managers need to consider the following issues:

- where an employee is known to suffer from stress or have a mental health problem, extra care should be taken
- signs of stress or complaints from an employee who is known to be at risk should not be ignored
- you should know the risks placed on employees, ignorance of the facts is not acceptable in law
- we should provide safe systems of work for employees

WHAT YOU AS A MANAGER CAN DO TO HELP

Stress may be a consequence of factors at home and/or work. You should identify what you can do as a manager to help:

- you need to identify stress-related hazards and risks in the workplace
- make sure that people are adopting safe systems of work
- adopt good people management skills, be sensitive to the effect that your style of management is having on employees
- changing the style, if it is contributing to employee stress, should not be taken as relinquishing your right to manage
- make sure everyone receives fair and equal treatment
- don't allow bullying or harassment to take place, take immediate action
- meet with employees when they return to work after sickness absence, this may help identify concerns before they become a problem
- consider other support we could give that might reduce stress at home.

SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

- irritability
- withdrawal from social groups

- emotional outbursts which are out of character
- apathy
- negative thinking
- mental exhaustion
- irrational thinking
- difficulty in making decisions
- being difficult
- behaviour which is out of character

People react to stress in different ways. Also it is important to remember that the above symptoms aren't necessarily an indicator that an employee is suffering from stress.

MANAGING EMPLOYEES WHO ARE SUFFERING FROM STRESS

If someone in your team is suffering from stress, here is a range of options to think about:

- referral to the Council's external counsellor
- re-allocation of some duties on a temporary basis
- re-assess allocation of work in the team – is it fairly distributed?
- re-assess targets – are they realistic?
- training and coaching where time management is an issue
- training or coaching where employees don't have the skills to do the job particularly if new systems have been introduced
- changes to working practices
- changes to physical working conditions
- more management/supervisory support
- making use of flexible working practices, such as a staged return to work (you should speak to the Personnel Section about this)

Don't try to deal with a situation which may be out of your depth, for example alcoholism, depression, bereavement etc. Ask for help from the Corporate Human Resources Service.

IF SOMEONE IN YOUR TEAM IS OFF WORK WITH A STRESS RELATED ABSENCE

Consider whether or not a home visit is appropriate. You need to telephone the employee to ask their permission. You must make it quite clear that you would like to visit out of concern for the employee's health. You must also be sensitive to the employee's needs and what may cause further stress. In any event some form of contact should be made with the employee whether it be by you or one of the employee's colleagues on your behalf. If you have any concerns ask the Corporate Human Resources Services for advice as to how to proceed.

Before carrying out a home visit or making contact you should consider what support you can offer where the stress may be work related. (Obviously this would not be done through the employee's colleague).

If the absence exceeds six weeks, you should consider inviting the person in to see you or a more senior manager. The employee should be allowed to bring a relative or friend and you should also have someone else present. The purpose of the meeting will be to find out what support you can provide which will help the employee return to work. You should seek advice from the Corporate Human Resources Services when you get to this stage.

WHEN AN EMPLOYEE RETURNS TO WORK AFTER A STRESS RELATED ABSENCE

You must monitor the situation very carefully. At the return to work interview you should discuss and agree what you can do to help. This should be put in writing. You should also make clear to the employee that if they feel that a work situation will cause them to be ill, they must bring it to your immediate attention. You should also arrange to see them regularly to make sure that action promised is taking place, that they do not suffer a relapse, and to provide them with support.

If after considering all the options and implementing what is reasonably practicable, the employee still feels that they will be stressed in particular situations, seek advice from the Personnel Section. In effect the employee is incapable of doing their job and may need to be advised to go home and see their doctor for a medical certificate.

ASSESSING THE RISK OF STRESS

Harmful levels of stress are very difficult to predict. An employee's ability to deal with work pressure is affected by a number of factors including their home circumstances and personality. This should be taken into account when assessing the risk relating to an individual employee.

CARRY OUT A RISK ASSESSMENT IN THE USUAL WAY

- identify the hazards
- evaluate the risk
- evaluate the control measures
- record the assessment
- inform employees
- implement the control
- review regularly

Some hazards are difficult to assess, for example gauging whether or not workloads are too heavy and therefore a hazard. As a rule of thumb, if you believe they would cause the average healthy person working at that level to be ill from stress, they should be classed as a hazard. If you need help with risk assessments contact the Health and Safety Team.

SOME POSSIBLE CAUSES OF STRESS AT WORK

Work Demands

- dealing with client groups where there is a risk from physical violence
- dealing with client groups where there is risk from sexual or verbal abuse
- introduction of new technology
- any form of change which affects the job or job holder

- too much or too little work
- too complex or too simple work
- unclear work objectives
- responsibility for people, whether it be other employees or clients
- coping after a traumatic incident

People

- relationships in the team
- relationships with clients
- management style

The Work Environment

- poor lighting, noise or uncomfortable temperature
- long hours
- working with hazardous materials

ASSESSING RISK AND CONTROL MEASURES

For the hazards you've identified, determine whether the risk of illness from stress is high, medium or low.

Then consider what reasonable and practicable measures can be introduced to eliminate the hazard.

Where the hazard cannot be eliminated, consider what reasonable and practicable measures can be taken to reduce and/or control the risk.

POSSIBLE ACTION TO REDUCE OR CONTROL RISK FROM STRESS

- consider whether or not training or coaching would help
- introduce safer working practices
- ensure lone workers adopt safe working practices
- make sure relevant policies are followed, such as monitoring verbal abuse
- consider re-allocation of work loads
- consider whether tasks which are not adding value can be dispensed with
- consider changes to the physical environment (e.g. heating, lighting etc.)
- provide information on reducing stress to employees

BE A GOOD MANAGER

- know your employees, their strengths and weaknesses
- make sure each team member has been trained to do their job
- recognise and praise good achievements
- show people that you value them and their job

- be fair and ensure equality of opportunity
- communicate with your team
- hold regular team meetings
- set clear realistic objectives and targets
- monitor and evaluate the achievement of targets and provide feedback
- treat each team member as an individual and with respect
- where there are problems speak to the employee in private
- do not allow harassment or bullying, act immediately
- know what personnel policies help balance demands of home and work
- help newly appointed employees become competent and feel valued
- look out for symptoms of stress and changes in behaviour
- support employees through bad patches

If you feel you could benefit from training in managing stress or in positive people management both courses are listed in the Corporate Training Programme.

SOME QUESTIONS MANAGERS HAVE ASKED

What if the employee believes that work-related stress is damaging their health?

Firstly remember that we have a legal responsibility to make sure that an employee's job doesn't cause them to be ill. Check to see if there is anything that you can do, which is reasonably practicable, that will help. If after taking reasonable steps to alleviate the stress the employee still believes that particular situations at work will make them ill, seek advice from the BTST Human Resources Service. You may need to advise the employee to go home and see their doctor for a medical certificate.

If I refer someone to the external Counsellor will I get any feedback as to how they are doing?

Probably not. The service is strictly confidential. If however the employee asks the counsellor to raise matters on his/her behalf this will be done through the BTST Human Resources Service .

When should I refer someone to the Council's doctor?

If absence is becoming a problem (see the sickness absence policy). You may also need to refer an employee to the doctor if they have previously suffered a stress related absence and they have indicated that doing their job will cause a relapse. You will need to provide the doctor with a job description and background information so that they can assess whether or not the employee is fit to carry out the job.

I'm worried that I don't have time to meet my legal responsibilities?

If you manage people this is just as important as the technical or professional aspects of your job. We realise all managers are busy people and for day to day management you don't have to make set appointments to know your employees. This can be done "on-the-hoof". If you suspect a problem then you should make time to see them.

If I suspect one of my drivers of having a drink problem, what should I do?

Get advice from the BTST Human Resources Service. On no account allow a driver to drive a vehicle if you can smell alcohol on their breath.

I've an employee who is finding it difficult to cope with changes at work. His performance has been below standard for a while. It's obviously causing him stress and affecting the work of the team. What can I do?

If you've considered all the options for managing work related stress, you will need to tackle it as a performance problem but firstly ask the BTST Human Resources Service for their advice. What you must not do is allow the problem to drift without taking any action.

If you have any other questions, or are unsure what action to take or need any advice on stress related matters, speak to your manager or contact the BTST Human Resources Service.

Individual Stress Assessment

There are occasions when it is appropriate to review the potential stress associated with a particular individual or a specific job function. The following format enables input to be provided by both the employee concerned and their manager. Both assessments can then be used in a review meeting to agree the way forward.

An individual stress assessment can be initiated in any one of the following ways:

- By an individual
- By an individual's manager
- As a result of a generic workplace risk assessment
- By the Occupational Health Adviser
- By the individual's trade union representative, with written permission from the individual

Following initiation, both the individual and/or their representative and the appropriate manager should arrange to meet within ten working days. Prior to the meeting, they should both complete the attached assessment form. The meeting should review the forms and:

1. Address areas in which the individual and the manager have different perceptions
2. Address areas where both parties agree there are potential causes of stress

Other parties, such as a Human Resources or trade union representative can be present if the individual and manager agree that this would be appropriate and useful.

An action plan should then be agreed and confirmed in writing. A date should be set for a review to assess the effectiveness of the actions and to agree further measures if necessary.

INDIVIDUAL STRESS ASSESSMENT FORM

(for completion by the employee and their line manager)

The Health and Safety Executive defines work-related stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'

This form will help identify potential sources of work-related stress. It will be used as the basis for a review meeting to develop an action plan to address key issues.

Please use a supplementary sheet when there is insufficient space on the form to provide full information.

Date of Assessment:	
Name of Individual:	
Job Title:	
Line Manager:	
Brief description of duties:	

	please tick :	Always	Sometimes	Never
1.	Is the work environment free of extreme aspects, such as excessive noise, extremes of temperature or lighting, work outdoors in all weathers, work space limitations?			
2.	Is there an accurate and up to date job description that properly reflects current duties and responsibilities?			
3.	Are performance objectives and targets clearly defined?			
4.	Is regular feedback provided regarding performance against objectives?			
5.	Is there sufficient involvement in decision making which impacts on working practices and priorities?			
6.	Is there praise for a job well done?			
7.	Is the work appropriately matched to the individual skills and knowledge?			
8.	Is the training sufficient for the job?			
9.	Are training needs regularly assessed and reviewed?			
10.	Was the induction programme appropriate and sufficient?			
11.	Is there clarity about the role in the team and as part of the department?			
12.	Is there a culture of regular good communications and consultation within the team?			

13.	Are regular team meetings held which provide a forum where staff can raise and resolve issues with managers and peers?			
14.	Are there regular workload meetings with the manager?			
15.	Is the manager accessible and approachable?			
16.	Is sufficient and timely information provided regarding new developments?			
17.	Is there an opportunity to comment and ask questions at times of change, in good time to make a difference?			
18.	Is there scope for career progression?			
19.	Is there adequate job security?			
20.	Is there a balance of workload between team members?			
21.	Is it possible to work flexibly in times of workload pressure?			
22.	Do any problems arise from working unsociable hours or shift work?			
23.	Is there encouragement for a healthy work-life balance?			
24.	Are the work demands reasonable within the timescales and resources available?			
25.	Do you have enough time in the regular working hours to do all that has to be done?			
26.	Is there a lunch break of at least 30 minutes every day?			
27.	Is there enough to do, during the regular working hours?			
28.	Is there sufficient variety in the work?			
29.	Do any problems arise because of contact with people who may be aggressive or violent?			
30.	Do any problems arise because of contact with people who are vulnerable or have special needs?			
31.	Is the environment free of bullying and harassment?			
32.	Is the environment free of discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, disability, religion or any other protected attribute?			
33.	Please tell us if there is anything else that you feel is contributing to work-related stress.			
34.	Are there any additional issues outside of work which might contribute to your stress ?			
35.	Are there any additional issues you wish to discuss ?			

Action Plan					
Issue to be addressed	Practical Solution	Who will take it forward	When	Action Completed	Review date ?