

Workplace Stress – Health and Safety

What are the HSE Management Standards for work related stress?

The Management Standards define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where the risks from work related stress are being effectively managed and controlled. The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

- **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.

The Management Standards represent a set of conditions that, if present, reflect a high level of health well-being and organisational performance. They:

- demonstrate good practice through a step by step risk assessment approach;
- allow assessment of the current situation using surveys and other techniques;
- promote active discussion and working in partnership with employees to help decide on practical improvements that can be made; stress by: identifying the main risk factors for work
- help simplify risk assessment for work related related stress;
- help employers focus on the underlying causes and their prevention; and
- provide a yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.



HSE website

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

“How to tackle work-related stress

A guide for employers on making the Management Standards work”

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg430.pdf>

An example of a stress policy (from HSE, <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/examplepolicy.pdf>)

Introduction

We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors. This policy will apply to everyone in the company. Managers are responsible for implementation and the company is responsible for providing the necessary resources.

Definition of stress

The HSE define stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

Policy

The company will:

- identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- consult with TU Safety Reps on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.
- provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company’s agreed stress management strategy.

Responsibilities

Managers will:

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their jurisdiction.
- Ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly re organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking. Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work

Occupational health and safety staff will:

- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress.
- Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Inform the employer and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

Human resources will:

- Give guidance to managers on the stress policy.
- Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.
- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate.

Employees will:

- Raise issues of concern with your Safety Representative, line manager or occupational health.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

Safety representatives

- Safety Reps must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.
- Safety Reps must be able to consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys.
- Safety Reps must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process.
- Safety Reps should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR.
- Safety Reps should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any TU training on workplace stress.
- Safety Reps should conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least every 3 months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

Safety Committee

- The joint Safety Committee will perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.
- The Safety Committee will oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

Signed by Managing Director: Date:
 Employee Representative Date:

Coping policies or Prevention Policies?

Many employers, rather than trying to reduce stress, are introducing what they call “stress management” programmes, which are really nothing to do with prevention.

Typically these programmes have three parts: a) employer attempts at employee support, usually a few sessions of cognitive behavioural therapy or counselling aimed at helping them “cope” and return to work; b) general training on how to deal with stress (usually through learning online) and often including “awareness raising”; and c) giving information or training to line managers on how to recognise and support those with a stress-related condition. Employers stress management programmes are often linked to “wellbeing” initiatives.

What these programmes have in common is that they focus on the effects of stress – not the problem. Although the employer accepts that there is a stress problem, at no time is the working environment being changed. The causes remain, while only the symptoms are being addressed. This is akin to management offering physiotherapy for production line workers with back pain caused by lifting and twisting, rather than reducing the manual handling itself.

(from “Mental Health and the Workplace - A TUC Education Workbook” August 2018)

‘No evidence’ mental health first aid works says HSE

What is MHFA?

Mental Health First Aid is a first aid approach to mental health. It follows a training programme that teaches participants how to notice and support an individual who may be experiencing a mental health concern and provide help – often through connecting them with a route to help and support.

Once they are trained, the role of a Mental Health First Aider in the workplace is to be a point of contact for an employee who is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. This interaction could range from having an initial conversation through to supporting the person to get appropriate help. There can also be a proactive role in making sure that fellow workers have a better understanding of mental health issues. In the decade from 2007, almost 200,000 Mental Health First Aiders were trained in the UK.

What do MHFAiders do?

MHFA trainees undertake a standard 12-hour course, usually delivered over two days or four half-days, covering:

- Common mental health problems
- Attitudes and the 'See Me' anti-stigma campaign
- The five steps of mental health first aid (ALGEE, below)
- Symptoms of depression
- Alcohol, drugs and depression
- Crisis first aid for suicidal behaviour and depression
- What are anxiety disorders
- Crisis first aid for panic attacks and acute stress reaction
- What are psychotic disorders (schizophrenia, bipolar disorder)?

MHFAiders are taught to spot the signs and symptoms of mental health issues and to feel confident guiding people towards support. They are encouraged to use the 'ALGEE' approach:

- Ask about suicide
- Listen non-judgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage the person to get appropriate help and support
- Encourage self-help strategies.

Is it effective?

While there is growing enthusiasm and government support for mental health first aid (MHFA) in the workplace, there is 'no evidence' it actually leads to any improvements. This is the conclusion of a new 'summary of the evidence' by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE notes "it is not possible to state whether MHFA training is effective in a workplace setting," adding: "There is a lack of published occupationally-based studies, with limited evidence that the content of MHFA training has been considered for workplace settings." The report concludes: "There is consistent evidence that MHFA training raises employees' awareness of mental ill health conditions. There is no evidence that the introduction of MHFA training in workplaces has resulted in sustained actions in those trained, or that it has improved the wider management of mental ill-health."

The HSE report comes after the TUC this year said that while support for workers is a good thing, "mental health first aiders are not the only option and for union reps usually are not the best option". TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson states that MHFA should not be a substitute for prevention. "Unions clearly must be involved both in working with their employer around mental health and supporting members with mental health problems, but MHFA is unlikely to be the most suitable training for trade union representatives. That is why Mental Health Awareness training is often more appropriate as there is much more emphasis on prevention."

Recent research by IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) reached similar conclusions finding that MHFA has a value in raising awareness, but participants often feel it is used by organisations to bypass wider responsibilities of employers to their workforce.

Stress Checklist for health and safety reps:

- Is there a problem with stress in your workplace?
- Has the employer taken effective action to address this?
- If not have they done a risk assessment that includes stress?
- If not, or if it is inadequate – ask for one to be done (this is a legal requirement)
- If they have done a risk assessment, have they acted on the findings?
- If not – ask for a workplace stress prevention plan.

If your employer has introduced support for people with stress-related conditions instead of prevention measures, insist that they use the HSE management standards.