



Dudley
Clinical Commissioning Group

STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

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REVIEWERS

This document has been reviewed by:

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APPROVALS

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N.B: the version of this policy posted on the intranet must be a PDF copy of the approved version.

DOCUMENT STATUS

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RELATED DOCUMENTS

These documents will provide additional information.

Contents

1.0	Policy Overview	4
2.0	What is stress?	5
3.0	Identification of Possible Stressors and Causation Factors	5
4.0	Work Related Stress	5
5.0	Stress at Home / Personal Stress	6
6.0	Process for Managing Stress for Staff	6
7.0	Managing the Return to Work	7
8.0	Duties and Responsibilities	8
9.0	Management Responsibilities	8
10.0	Staff Support	10
11.0	Equality Statement	11

1.0 Policy Overview

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define work related stress and identify a corporate approach to the management of stress within the workplace. The policy provides a framework to assist managers and employees to deal with the issues that arise from work related stress and to help employees deal with it and maintain their attendance.

1.2 Who this policy applies to

The policy applies to all staff that are employees of the organisation in either a permanent, fixed term or temporary position.

1.3 Key principles

The organisation is committed to promoting the wellbeing of all its employees, and recognises that stress cannot only affect their health but also attendance, work performance and relationships with colleagues.

Most people experience pressure at some time during their working life. Pressure is not only inevitable, but also essential to help us feel stimulated and excited about achieving the goals that give us a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

The organisation recognises that stress can be caused or exacerbated by various factors within the workplace. Also, that stress related illness can account for a significant proportion of sickness absence and under performance within the organisation.

Stress from external sources, such as problems within family life, can impact upon the workplace. Although this is beyond the realms of this policy, the organisation advocates that it is good practice to both recognise that outside factors have a bearing on occupational stress and that such issues should be dealt with as compassionately as is reasonable practicable.

1.4 Legal considerations

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
Equality Act 2010
Employment Rights Act 1996
Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Regulations) 2004
Data Protection Act 1998

2.0 What is stress?

2.1 Well-designed, organised and managed work is good for us but when insufficient attention to job design, work organisation and management has taken place, it can result in work related stress. Work related stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them. Stress, including work related stress, can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as more errors.

2.2 The Health & Safety Executive's full definition of stress is as follows:

"The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."

2.3 For the purposes of this policy, the term 'stress' will be used solely in the context as defined above.

2.4 Stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop e.g. depression, nervous breakdown or heart disease.

2.5 Stress affects people in different ways and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another. With each new situation a person will decide what the challenge is and whether they have the resources to cope. If they decide they do not have the resources, they will begin to feel stressed. How they appraise the situation will depend on various factors, including:

- their background and culture;
- their skills and experience;
- their personality;
- their personal circumstances;
- their individual characteristics;
- their health status;
- their ethnicity, gender, age or disability; and
- other demands both in and outside work

3.0 Identification of Possible Stressors and Causation Factors

3.1 Common causative factors related to stress are referred to as “stressors” and vary depending on individual circumstances. Individuals can be affected by stress due to work related stressors or personal stressors.

4.0 Work Related Stress

4.1 Stress can affect anyone at any level of the business and recent research shows that work related stress is widespread and is not confined to particular sectors, jobs or industries.

4.2 The Health and Safety Executive have identified six factors that can lead to work related stress if they are not managed effectively:

Demands

Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs.

Control

Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work.

Support

Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.

Relationships

Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work.

Role

Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities.

Change

Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.

5.0 Stress at Home / Personal Stress

- 5.1 An individual can experience excessive pressure and demands outside of the workplace just as much as they can at work. This type of stress tends to build up over time because of a combination of factors that may not all be work related. Factors can include; Family, Personal, and Social factors.
- 5.2 Although difficult to control outside stressors, Dudley CCG recognises the importance of adopting a holistic approach to employee well-being and understands that to manage work related stress effectively; the organisation needs to recognise the importance and interaction of work and home problems.

6.0 Process for Managing Stress for Staff

- 6.1 When an employee exhibits signs of excessive stress, it is essential to identify occupational stressors (see previous section).
- 6.2 Despite the best efforts of all concerned, it may be that some employees do experience stress at work. The following process should be adhered to in this circumstance, whether the employee is present at or absent from work. Specific duties and responsibilities for the manager, employee and HR are outlined in the next section.

Prompt Action

Prompt and sensitive action should be taken once it is known that an employee may be suffering from stress.

Contact

Agree regular contact with the individual on an informal basis, either via telephone or face to face. If the employee is absent from work, an agreed date and time for contact should be made via telephone or as part of a review meeting under the Sickness Absence Management Policy.

Rapport and Support

Allow the employee to speak openly and honestly, sometimes allowing an individual to 'let off steam' will reduce stress levels. Consider a referral to Occupational Health, or to staff counselling, where help can be sought. If the employee is absent from work and meets the absence triggers, an Occupational Health referral should be conducted.

Stress Risk Assessment

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) outline the standards that managers should follow in order to identify the risks with stress. Managers are encouraged to visit the website to carry out these assessments with their staff:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/step1/index.htm>

Stress Audit

Encourage the employee to make a list of work duties and responsibilities, and identify which areas are causing excess pressure. This will also assist in the identification of key stressors and establish the root cause of excessive pressures. A template for this can be found in Appendix 1.

Action and Record Keeping

Establish agreed action points with the employee to agree a way forward with managing stress factors and encouraging attendance. Records and/or notes of meetings and agreed outcomes should be kept to evidence support to the employee and can be a useful reminder to both parties. All documentation should be kept confidential.

7.0 Managing the Return to Work

- 7.1 It is vital that an employee's return to work after an absence is managed effectively, and managers should consult the Sickness Absence Management Policy on how to conduct this process. In all cases, an employee Return to Work form must be completed and kept on the employee personal file.
- 7.2 Managers show a supportive, non-judgmental attitude to employees suffering or recovering from a stress related illness. They should ensure flexibility and sensitivity in arranging a realistic, structured return to work rehabilitation plan. It may be helpful to request a report from Occupational Health about the employee's fitness in order to identify any areas of work that should be avoided in the rehabilitation process.
- 7.3 Managers should also take all reasonable steps so that any employee returning to work after absence due to stress related illness is not exposed to the same levels or stressors or triggers that caused the illness.
- 7.4 Returning to full health and productivity can be a lengthy process. The employee may need regular reviews of the progress made, and managers may need to make reasonable adjustments within their team to redistribute work, or redesign processes to avoid further episodes of stress related illnesses in the team.

8.0 Duties and Responsibilities

Employee Responsibilities

- 8.1 Individuals need to be aware of their own range of feelings and reactions to stressful situations and their personal methods of coping. They should also endeavour to recognise the warning signs of excessive stress being suffered by colleagues.
- 8.2 Staff should seek professional advice and support from their GP where possible for work related and personal related stress and stress related illnesses. In addition, staff should seek support from Occupational Health and staff counselling (where required) which can be arranged through a self-referral or line manager.
- 8.3 Excessive pressure and personal stress is not always evident in individuals, and line managers may not be aware of the stressors or triggers that affect their staff. Employees have a level of responsibility to take in maintaining their own health and well-being and have a duty to inform their line managers when work place pressure is excessive so that reasonable steps can be taken to reduce this wherever possible. Likewise, where a stress related illness is diagnosed by a GP, staff are encouraged to inform their line manager.
- 8.4 Employees can take further steps to avoid or reduce stressors and prevent the stress of others by:
 - Understanding and recognising the signs of stress in others and themselves
 - Making an effort to contribute during consultation processes
 - Raising concerns about stress in the workplace in a timely and appropriate manner
 - Being sensitive and supportive to other colleagues
 - Taking personal responsibility in managing our own stress (e.g. taking regular exercise, ensuring lunch breaks are taken, using annual leave entitlement, ensuring that we actively include positive interludes in what might otherwise be a negative day, making use of the support available at an early stage etc.)
 - Avoiding the misuse of alcohol and drugs
 - Not being a cause of stress to other colleagues

9.0 Management Responsibilities

- 9.1 The organisation has a duty of care to ensure that, as an employer, it takes all reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare and of its employees. In practice, this means that the CCG, through managers, must create and maintain an organisational culture which is conducive to the well-being of employees. Managers must adopt a way of working which supports this aim through attention to the following:

Risk Assessment

- Assess the risk of work related stress in their team and identify and implement measures that can be taken to eliminate or control these risks
- Endeavour to recognise signs of stress or a potential problem in their employees
- Consult the HSE website for guidance:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/step1/index.htm>

Stress Audit

- As part of the process of stress management, managers are encouraged to undertake a stress audit with their staff. This will help identify any stressors or triggers and where work pressure may be excessive and where work can be redistributed.

Culture

- Ensure that employees are clear about the organisational values, policies and procedures and where they can find further information and support if they require it
- Create a supportive environment in which employees feel able to express their views and opinions freely
- Promote a genuine feeling that the contributions of all employees to the organisation are valued
- Always advocate equality of opportunity as the only way to succeed as an organisation
- Consider the spirit of the Improving Working Lives initiative when making decisions

Communication

- Promote and encourage two-way communication
- Use team meetings to problem solve and share best practice
- Pay particular attention to effective communication during periods of change
- Give prompt, positive feedback. Recognise and praise good performance even if it is only by means of a “thank you”.

Relationships

- Actively work on building good working relationships with all staff
- Promote the necessity and benefits of teamwork
- Tackle conflicts between employees at an early stage. Endeavour to resolve problems informally without recourse to specific policies and procedures
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work

The Work

- Treat job descriptions as working documents and update them, with the employee, when necessary
- Conduct meaningful, timely performance appraisals without exception
- Ensure clarity and realism about role objectives, workloads, and deadlines
- Ensure employees are not constantly overloaded or underutilised
- Advance planning should take account of periodic increases in workload
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not consistently overworking. Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement
- Have a systematic approach to planning and time management
- Look at the practical job design, giving employees as much control as possible over the way they work
- Refrain from inappropriate delegation

Training and Development

- Ensure that employees receive the training needed to carry out their role to the required standard
- Allow the necessary time for employees to implement new skills
- Encourage mentoring and coaching where appropriate

Physical Environment

- Check that the physical environment is fit for purpose
- Ensure that there is due attention paid to health and safety requirements
- Improve work equipment where possible
- Ensure that heating, lighting, noise and ventilation are at an acceptable level
- Ensure that employees have secure, adequate provision for storing personal items
- Establish an appropriate place away from the workstation for rest and meal breaks

Involvement and Consultation

- Ensure that there are regular opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making
- Where possible, encourage employees to plan their own work
- Try to seek employees views when setting deadlines
- Seek suggestions from employees on how to improve any aspect of working life

Personal Skills

- Set a good personal example
- Keep your promises
- Demonstrate your trustworthiness
- Be consistent yet flexible with fairness but without tolerating poor performance
- Don't bully to achieve your aims
- Be approachable, a good listener and non-judgmental

10.0 Staff Support

- 10.1 Help and support can be obtained on all aspects of managing stress from your line manager, Human Resources, Occupational Health, staff counselling services or the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in relation to both work related and personal stress.

Occupational Health

Dudley CCG has access to an Occupational Health service. Referrals can be made via the employee's line manager who will complete a referral form.

Staff Counselling Services

Dudley CCG has access to the Mind Matters counselling service which can be accessed via a referral to the Occupational Health service. Further information can be found on their website: <http://www.mindmatterscounselling.org.uk>.

Health and Safety Executive

The Health and Safety Executive have a web page with information and resources to help understand the causes of stress at work, and to identify and solve problems in the workplace. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>.

There are also links to useful leaflets for example: Working together to reduce Stress - a guide for employees <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc686.pdf>.

Human Resources

Dudley CCG line managers and staff can contact the CCG HR team for any advice or guidance regarding work related stress and stress related absence management.

11.0 Equality Statement

- 11.1 In applying this policy, the organisation will have a due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and provide for good relations between people of diverse groups. In particular on the grounds of the following characteristics protected by the Equality Act (2010); age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, in addition to offending background, trade union membership or any other personal characteristic.

Individual Stress Action Plan

What is your view of the current situation?	Please try to provide evidence of specific examples	Planning for the future	
		The most significant issues that the individual wishes to be addressed.	Individual's proposals about how each of these issues should be addressed.

Individual Stress Action Plan

Summary of actions proposed by employee.	Actions to be taken by management.	Explanations of reason for any inaction.	Review date for each action and details of progress at that date.

Employee's signature	Date:	Manager's signature	Date:
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Individual Stress Action Plan - Guidance

Criteria for Use

The individual Stress Action Plan is a tool which enables employees to identify the issues which have caused them to experience increased levels of stress, and to work with their Manager toward solutions which help reduce this risk. The circumstances in which this tool must be used are;

- If an individual reports difficulties in coping with their work and/or personal life
- If the individual is absent from work and reports experiencing increased stress, or stress related illness
- If the Manager identifies a pattern of sickness absence, and feels that this may be stress related
- If the Manager is concerned about the individuals performance at work and feels that this may be stress related

NB: If the Manager does have concerns that the individual may be experiencing increased stress, this must be confirmed with the employee before initiating use of the Stress Action Plan.

Notes for Employees

The overall aim of the Stress Action Plan process is for individual employees and their managers to investigate the causes of (and solutions to) stress together. It is not a blaming opportunity, but rather a chance to reflect upon the situation and the circumstances around it, and to identify how to reach a satisfactory outcome (e.g. if individuals are off work - that they are able to return to work). Approaching it in this way means that employees can play a major part in clearly identifying the issues involved, and how these issues could be addressed.

The first stage of the Stress Action Plan process is for the individual concerned to complete Part 1 of the Stress Action Plan Form. They should not complete it with their line manager, but either complete it alone or with the support of another person (e.g. colleague, member of the HR team, staff side representative).

NB. It is important that individuals using this tool are as specific as possible with the information and examples they provide.

Employee's Perceptions of Stressors

Individuals should write down their perceptions/feelings about the situation (e.g. no one listens to me, can't cope with workload, no one interested, no support from manager, etc.). Simple statements such as 'I feel stressed' will not enable the 'Stress Action Plan' approach to be successful.

Evidence of Perceptions

Individuals should provide examples of how they have arrived at their perceptions (e.g. instances that have led them to feel that they have no support from their manager).

The future

Individuals should then write down the most significant issues in their work situation that they would want to see addressed (using examples from the evidence column), and how they would like these issues to be resolved.

Non-work factors

Individuals should also document any non-work issues that are causing / contributing to their stress and how the organization may be able to help them with those issues.

Notes for Line Manager's or Employee Representative

Summary of actions proposed by employee

Each of the actions requiring action and identified by the employee needs to be summarised and put in order of importance

Actions to be taken by management

Using the actions proposed, each action needs to be individually considered and comment on what action will be introduced and has been introduced to address the concerns raised.

Explanations of reason for any inaction

Identify specific reasons for why actions are not going to be resolved or addressed

Review date for each action and details of progress at that date.

Identify a suitable review date for each of the actions identified and then at the review date, identify the actions that have been introduced. If the actions are not completed, identify what further actions are proposed with review date