Workplace Stress Management Guidance

Health Safety Executive Standards

The Health Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards are indicators of best practice and represent a set of conditions that if present:
- Demonstrate good practice
- Promote active discussion and working in partnership with employees and their representatives to identify practical improvements that can be made
- Identify the main risk factors, help employees focus on the underlying causes and their prevention

They cover six key areas of work design, which if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates.

The six HSE Management Standards are as follows:

Demands	Includes issues such as workload, work patterns and work environment
Control	How much of a say the employee has in the way they do their work
Support	Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the Council, line managers and colleagues
Relationships	Includes promoting positive working relationships to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
Role	Do people understand their role within the Council and does the Council ensure they don't have conflicting roles
Change	How the Council manages change and how change is communicated

Practical Solutions

In order to support line managers, guides on possible solutions for identified workplace stressors is provided below. These suggestions are not intended to be complete lists of all that is required but can be used to provide indicative practical solutions for common issues.

HSE Management Standards	
Demands	
Stress Factors	**Possible solutions**
- Work demands - Excessive workloads - Excessive pressure - Long hours - Proper rest and holidays - Inadequate staffing	- Prioritise tasks - Review workload and demands regularly - Support staff in planning their work. Try to establish what aspects of their job they find challenging - Redistribute work or set difference work priorities - Look at job design and working practices - Check leave is being properly taken is work being taken home? - Is there constant communication during off-duty time by e-mail, text, and phone?

	- Cut out unnecessary work and communications - Review workloads and staffing, and enable individuals to plan their work - Hold regular 1-2-1's to discuss workload - Check management skills and assess training needs
- Inappropriately qualified for the job - Over promotion - Skills not recognised – promotion prospects not fulfilled	- Make sure individuals are matched to jobs – people can be over and under qualified - Analyse skills alongside the tasks - Provide training for those who need more, e.g. when introducing new technology - Review and consider selection, skills criteria, job profiles, training and supervision - Career planning discussion, training needs evaluation - Monitor workplace policies in practice: discrimination
- Repetitive work - Too little to do	- Job enrichment/job rotation/role review - Assess workstation and work practice for possible solutions - Consider changing the way jobs are done by moving people between jobs, giving individuals more responsibility, increasing the scope of the job, increasing the variety of tasks, or giving a group of workers greater responsibility for effective performance of the group
Inadequate resources for task	Analyse requirements for any project/task: - equipment - staffing - priorities - deadlines
The physical working environment: - poor temperature control - noise - lack of facilities for rest/breaks - poor lighting - poor ventilation - badly designed workstations	- Make sure workplace hazards are properly controlled - Undertake risk assessments of workspace and significant tasks
The psychological working environment: - threat of aggression or violence - verbal abuse - poor management practices	- Report violence/threats to line manager/HR - Investigation of complaints and appropriate training - Monitor absence levels and trends. Compare with other departments, other councils/businesses etc. - Look at the individual and any risk factors that apply to this particular person
Control	
Stress Factors	**Possible solutions**
Not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work	- Encourage a healthy work-life balance - Ensure staff take all their allocated holidays and distribute it fairly across the year

	• Develop a communications protocol that ensures people have rest time completely free of all work-related messages. Over-anxious people often need to be in constant contact. Over-controlling management tends not to respect off duty time
• Rigid work patterns and breaks • Fixed deadlines occurring in different parts of the year • Lack of control over work	• Try to provide some scope for varying working conditions and flexible work patterns where possible (e.g. flexible working hours, working from home on occasion etc.) • Consult with people to allow them to influence the way their jobs are done, what the real deadlines are and what the priorities are
• Conflicting work demands	• Set realistic deadlines for tasks • Consider that individuals are different, and try to allocate work so that everyone is working in the way that helps them work best, takes account of their home obligations and makes best use of their skills • Be clear about tasks required

Support

Stress Factors	Possible solutions
• Lack of management support	• Hold regular 1-2-1's, team meetings and ADR's to talk about emerging issues or pressures • Ask employee how they would like to access managerial support, i.e. open door, set times etc • Talk about ways the Council can provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside of work • Consider flexibility in work scheduled where possible to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments
• Lack of colleague support	• Include work related stress/emerging pressures as a standing item for staff meetings/ADR's • Hold regular team meetings to discuss anticipated workloads and to deal with planned absences • Encourage team working
• Unclear of supports available	• Disseminate information on support from others such as HR, Occupational Health, EAP, 4 Pillars of Wellbeing, Anti-poverty services etc • Include Employee Briefing Scripts and Employee Wellbeing Scripts in team meetings

Relationships

Stress Factors	Possible solutions
• Poor relationships with others • Staff complaints or rising absence trends	• Investigate causal factors • Provide training in interpersonal skills, non-discriminatory practices and employee conduct standards • Discuss the problem openly with individuals • Follow complaints procedures • Check management skills and assess training needs
• Bullying or confrontational communications styles	• Provide and communicate Bullying & Harassment Policy

• Bullying, racial or sexual harassment	• Managers should discuss and address bullying and/or confrontational communications styles with member of staff immediately • Practise by example and make it clear what behaviours are not acceptable. • Encourage constructive and positive communications between staff • Consider training and policy guidance
• Lack of support or fear culture within from management and co-workers	• Support and encourage staff, protect them from reprisals • Consider introducing a mentoring/counselling scheme • Investigate and act as appropriate as soon as possible • Consider training on Employee Code of Conduct policy

Role

Stress Factors	Possible solutions
• Clear lines of accountability and responsibility	• Ensure good communication exists and are in place from top to bottom • Set and communicate management standards to ensure best practice in clarity of job function, responsibility for staff management and welfare • Make it clear to staff that management will try to ensure that their problems will be handled sensitively and at the appropriate level of management
• Lack of communication and consultation	• Communicate clear business objectives • Aim for good communication and close employee involvement, particularly during periods of change or high pressure
• A culture of blame when things go wrong, denial of potential problems • Failure to recognise success	• Be honest, set a good example, and listen to and respect others • Acknowledge and reward successes
• A culture that considers stress a sign of weakness	• Approachable management which wants to know about problems and will try to help to resolve them
An expectation that people will regularly work excessively long hours or take work home with them	• Avoid working excessively long hours • Lead by example • Check management skills and assess training needs • Schedule work in a way that allows recovery time after unavoidable busy periods

Change

Stress Factors	Possible solutions
• Fears about job security / grading • Poor communication – uncertainty about what is happening • Not enough time allowed to implement change	• Provide effective support for staff throughout the process • Consult with staff likely to be involved in a change programme – fear and uncertainty can lead to increased anxiety, unfounded gossip, poor employment relationships and increased absence • Getting together as a team can help people to feel less isolated with their concerns

• Inexperience/fear of new technology • Lack of skills for new tasks • Not enough resource allocated for change process • Other personal fears, relocation	• Ensure effective two-way communication throughout process – knowing exactly what is going to happen when can help people feel less anxious about a change • Consider training needs – do people have the tools and skills to effect change? • Consider changes in teams or work environment – a small change, e.g. a different positioning of desks, can have a major impact on communication and work relationships to help people not to feel isolated