

H12 – Opening Statement

Stress

Work-related stress

Stress caused by work is the second biggest occupational health problem in the UK (after back problems). Because there's still a stigma attached to mental health problems, employees are often reluctant to seek help in case they're seen as unable to cope.

Many situations can lead to stress at work. These include:

- Poor relationships with colleagues
- An unsupportive boss
- Lack of consultation and communication
- Too much interference with your private, social or family life
- Too much or too little to do
- Too much pressure, with unrealistic deadlines
- Work that's too difficult or not demanding enough
- Lack of control over the way the work is done
- Poor working conditions
- Being in the wrong job
- Feeling undervalued
- Insecurity and the threat of unemployment.

If employees suffer from stress, don't ignore it. If left unchecked, stress can have a significant effect on their health and wealth. Companies have a legal duty to take action. And it's in their interests to do so, given that a stress-free workforce is happier, more efficient and more productive.

This procedure will help you identify and eliminate stressors in the workplace.



H12 – Stress

What is this?

This is a written procedure which indicates basic methods that a company should implement to avoid work-related stress.

Companies should recognise that excessive pressures can have a negative effect on both health and performance at work. They should be committed to promoting good health at work, recognise any negative effects that stress may have on individual members of staff, and provide suitable support mechanisms for members of staff suffering from the negative effects of stress.

Through the risk assessment process, a company should identify hazards and assess all mental and physical risks to health and safety with the objective of reducing them, as far as is reasonably practicable.

The person responsible for implementing this procedure is:

How should individuals who show signs of stress be handled?

All referrals should be dealt with in complete confidence. Members of staff should be offered any relevant counselling, help with stress reduction techniques, and a full appraisal of their work situation.

What are the causes of stress in the workplace?

Stress in the workplace can be caused by any combination of a number of quite diverse factors, such as:

- Job design and lack of control over workload
 - Working environment
 - Relationships with others at work
 - Communication arrangements
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What about extraneous stressors?

There may be problems outside the workplace that will cause an individual member of staff to suffer from the negative effects of stress, and these may affect an individual's health and performance within work. In this situation, undue negative stress may occur as a result of work-related and non-work-related factors.

What do we need to do?

The person responsible for implementing this procedure should:

- Ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that excessive stress is eliminated from the work environment, and that the necessary risk assessments are completed and acted upon in the case of workplace stress factors.
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- Provide suitable support mechanisms for members of staff suffering from the negative effects of stress.
- Encourage a working environment where members of staff who feel they are suffering from the negative effects of stress can approach their managers in confidence, in order that necessary support mechanisms can be put in place.
- Encourage a culture where stress is not seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence.
- Ensure there is adequate rehabilitation of employees returning to work after periods of absence.

What else should a company do to help eliminate stress in the workplace?

The company should:

- Provide suitable training and guidance for line managers to enable them to recognise symptoms of negative stress in their staff and themselves.
- Provide suitable training and guidance to line managers to enable them to undertake the necessary risk assessments in relation to stress in the workplace, and to arrange for implementation of effective control measures where appropriate.
- Provide information and training for staff in general on the effects of stress at work, effective communication, handling difficult situations, time management and employee relations.
- Undertake general health promotion activities within the workplace.
- Provide the appropriate mechanism to promote an individual's return to full health as quickly as possible.

Undertaking a stress risk assessment

When completing stress risk assessments it is good practice to set up a stress steering group. They can then set up a working plan and focus on the 6 main risk factors; demands, controls, support, relationships, role and change.

They should identify who is at risk, evaluate the risk and identify controls, record the findings and monitor and review the situation

Guidance on the risk factors

Demands

Includes issues such as workload, work patterns, and the work environment.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;



- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

Control

How much say the person has in the way they do their work.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- the organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- employees are consulted over their work patterns.

Support

Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- employees receive regular and constructive feedback



Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- employees share information relevant to their work;
- the organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

Role

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- the organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

Change

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The Standard is that:

- employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.



What should be happening/States to be achieved:

- the organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- the organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- employees are aware of timetables for changes; and
- employees have access to relevant support during changes.

