Stress & Mental Well-being Policy & Guidance

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1			
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This Policy is not for publication externally

West Berkshire
C O U N C I L

Contents

1. **Purpose**

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

    1.1.1   Promote good mental health and well-being for all employees of the Council;

    1.1.2   Promote an open and supportive culture where mental health concerns can be discussed and managed effectively;

    1.1.3   Provide employees who are experiencing poor mental health with access to appropriate help and support;

    1.1.4   Provide managers with guidance and tools to support and manage employees experiencing mental health issues;

1.2 The policy has been the subject of consultation with trade unions and heads of service, and has been approved by the Chief Executive and Personnel Committee.

2. **Applicability**

2.1 This Policy applies to all non-school based employees working for the Council, including those working from home or at non-Council locations.

2.2 It is the responsibility of each employee and other person mentioned in Section 2.1 to familiarise themselves with and adhere to this Policy.

3. **Policy & Commitment**

3.1 The Council's commitment to employee health, safety and welfare is set out in the West Berkshire Council Health, Safety & Welfare policy. The Council is committed to providing a healthy and safe working environment for all employees.

3.2 The Council recognises that stress, anxiety and depression are the most common causes of sickness absence amongst employees.

3.3 Mental Health problems can be triggered by both work and personal factors. The Council aims to provide a working environment which avoids placing excessive pressure on employees, and is also committed to supporting those who are experiencing difficult and stressful situations in their private lives.

3.4 The guidance section sets out practical ways of supporting and managing staff experiencing stress or mental ill-health caused by either work or personal stressors.

4. **Roles and Responsibilities**

4.1 The overall responsibility for employee well-being and stress management in West Berkshire Council rests with the Chief Executive.

4.2 The responsibility for day-to-day management of stress and mental well-being throughout West Berkshire Council rests with the Head of Human Resources working with the Health and Safety Manager. They are also responsible for maintaining this Policy for providing advice and guidance on its implementation.

4.3 To prevent and manage work-related stress and to support mental well-being all managers need to:

Accept that mental ill-health and work-related stress might be problems for their staff.

Understand what work-related stress is and the relationship between work and home stress.

Listen to their staff and take action on what they find out.

Set expectations with their staff, so that they understand what managers can and cannot do for them.

Make time to tackle stress properly, and support the mental well-being of their team.

4.4 Managers are responsible for:

4.4.1 following good day-to-day people management practices, including regular one-to-ones and appraisals;

4.4.2 ensuring that they have the skills and/or training to be able to recognise the signs of stress, this will include attending mandatory training for managers;

4.4.3 undertaking return to work interviews with employees after every sickness absence, and using the Return to Work Form for Stress-Related Absence (Appendix B) where absence may have been caused by stress;

4.4.4 using the individual stress risk assessment, where appropriate;

4.4.5 make appropriate onward referrals for counselling or occupational health;

4.4.6 promoting a healthy work life balance among employees e.g. by encouraging lunch breaks and ensuring annual leave is used;

4.4.7 putting into place reasonable work practices to reduce workplace stress where appropriate;

4.4.8 consulting with recognised trade union representatives on any large scale changes to work practices or work design that could cause stress.

4.5 Heads of Service/ Service Directors are required to:

4.5.1 monitor sickness absence against the absence targets for their service, and

4.5.2 give appropriate support to managers so that they can perform their responsibilities.

4.6 Employees are responsible for:

4.6.1   contributing to their own health and well-being;

4.6.2   raising issues of workplace stress with their managers promptly.

4.7 Human Resources are responsible for:

4.7.1   providing advice, guidance and training to managers on reducing and managing the impact of stress at work;

4.7.2   facilitating the referral of employees to the Council's occupational health service by their manager, where appropriate;

4.7.3   facilitating the referral of employees to a confidential counselling service as appropriate, where requested by the manager.

4.8 Corporate Health and Safety Team are responsible for:

4.8.1   maintaining an individual stress risk assessment template and supporting managers in carrying out assessments.

4.8.2   providing specialist advice to managers and employees on stress management.

4.8.3   informing the Council of any changes to national guidance or legislation on the management of stress at work.

5. **Management Guidance**

This section provides managers with practical advice on responding to concerns, and supporting and managing employees who are experiencing stress or mental ill-heath. The causes of the stress or mental ill-health could be work-related or personal.

5.1 When a new employee starts

5.1.1   The pre-employement medical questionnaire will highlight if any reasonable adjustments need to be made for a new member of staff because of a disability, e.g. a mental health condition.

5.1.2   Where a condition is well-managed, it may be that the employee is considered disabled under the Equality Act (2010) but no adjustments are required when s/he starts work.

5.1.3   Managers should ask new employees to share information about any disability and/or history of mental or physical illness, explaining that if there is openness about the disability or condition it will be easier to provide support and adjustments if they are needed in the future.

5.1.4   Record this discussion as part of a one-to-one or induction meeting and share with the employee. Keep the information confidential unless you agree with the employee to share more widely e.g. with the team.

5.2 When a manager suspects an employee is stressed or mentally unwell at work

5.2.1   When a manager believes an employee is seriously unwell, in mental health crisis, or threatening to harm themselves or others this may be an emergency. In this situation contact HR for advice on the best course of action, or dial 999 in the unlikely event that the individual presents an immediate risk of harm to those around them.

5.2.2   Where a line manager becomes concerned that an employee is becoming stressed or mentally unwell, a confidential discussion, normally one-to-one, should be arranged promptly. During the discussion, the manager should provide examples of the behaviours seen, or the concerns raised, which have led to the belief that employee is stressed or mentally unwell.

5.2.3   The employee may be upset or resistant to discussing the concerns, or may prefer to have a discussion with someone else. Where this is the case, agree who the employee will speak to. This will often be the line manager's manager. It should be someone who can agree appropriate actions as part of the discussion, i.e. not a work colleague.

5.2.4   Managers can encourage staff to contact their trade union representative, who can be involved in any discussions if that is the individual's wish.

5.2.5   Where the employee does choose to confide in the manager, this may be about work or personal issues, or a combination of both.

5.2.6   By the end of the meeting, agree actions to address the concerns. These might include:

- Temporary support measures e.g. workload reduction, some working at home, advice around prioritising work etc
- Agreement to meet together more frequently to discuss stress/ well-being
- Advising the employee to see their GP
- A referral for confidential counselling
- A referral to Occupational Health
- A self referral (by the member of staff) to Talking Therapies, Recovery in Mind or other mental health support service (see Appendix E)

The Manager should make a note of the concerns and agreed actions and share this with the employee. It would be good practice to arrange a date to review the situation together.

5.3 When an employee says their sickness absence is caused by work-related stress

5.3.1   An employee who is absent from work because of sickness may inform their manager that the reason is work-related stress, either when they initially report their absence, on a self-certificate, at a return to work interview, or on a Fit Note (medical certificate).

5.3.2   Whenever a manager becomes aware of this, s/he should tell the member of staff that the Council takes reports of work-related stress seriously and aims to provide appropriate support. The manager should

arrange to do the Return to Work interview for Stress-Related Absence with the member of staff.

5.3.3   The Return to Work interview form for stress-related absence (Appendix B) guides managers through the discussion to be had at the meeting and aims to help them to identify appropriate actions to support an individual to return to work, and to minimise future risk. Agreed actions are likely to be similar to those in 5.2 above, with the additional option to carry out a detailed individual risk assessment (see appendix C), with support and guidance from the Health and Safety team. HR can provide further advice on undertaking this meeting. Members of staff may seek the support of their trade union representative with a risk assessment.

5.3.4   It is expected that employees who give work-related stress as the cause for any period of sickness absence will be referred to Occupational Health to seek further advice and demonstrate a duty of care. The referral will normally take place after the Individual Stress Assessment has been carried out by the manager. Seek advice from HR in cases of long-term sickness or if a manager does not believe referral to Occupational Health to be appropriate.

5.4 When a team or group of employees shows signs of stress

5.4.1   A manager may become aware of a particular group, or team who are showing signs of stress. These signs might include increased tensions between team members, relationship difficulties, poor performance, mistakes, high turnover or increased sickness absence. This may be for a reason already identified e.g. organisational change, or for an unidentified reason.

5.4.2   The manager should discuss the concerns with their line manager or Head of Service/ Service Director.

5.4.3   The manager may choose to meet with individuals, in a similar way to 5.1, to give examples of the behaviours and discuss stressors for the individual and the team. The members of the team may prefer to speak to different manager in the service and this should be facilitated.

5.4.4   Once a view has been formed about the causes of any stress, the manager may seek advice from the Health and Safety team.

6.   **Advice for Employees**

6.1 On starting work with the Council, new employees are encouraged to share information about any disabilities, and/or history of mental or physical illness so that reasonable adjustments can be made. Although pre-employment health questionnaires are completed, the full information provided is not shared with line managers because of the sensitivity of the information. Making your manager aware of a disability during the first few weeks of employment, even if no immediate adjustments are needed, makes it easier for him/her to provide support and adjustments if they are needed in the future.

6.2 If an employee starts to feel stressed or mentally unwell at any time, they should share this with their line manager at an early stage. Being open with your manager is the best way of getting support. If an employee would rather speak to someone other than their line manager, they should carefully consider who to talk to; this should usually be someone within your service, e.g. your line manager's manager.

6.3 The Council's Public Health and Wellbeing service offers a range of resources to support people to manage their mental health and to promote mental well-being. Appendix D gives more details, together with contact details for a variety of external organisations who offer support to people experiencing stress or mental ill-health.

6.4   The recognised trade unions also offer support and resources to support their members with stress and mental health.

7.   Failure to comply with the Stress and Mental Well-being Policy

7.1 Failure to comply with this policy and guidance may lead to employees being exposed to unnecessary or avoidable stress at work. Stress may not be identified early enough to deal with it effectively, thus putting employees' health at risk.

7.2 Failure to identify and act upon stress at work may lead to increased absence from work, underperformance at work, and increased employee turnover, putting service delivery at risk. This may have an effect on meeting objectives set in the Council Strategy and Service Plans.

8.   Review

8.1 This policy will be reviewed to respond to any changes and at least every five years.

8.2 The Service responsible for reviewing and maintaining this Policy is Human Resources working with the Health and Safety Manager.

9.   List of Appendices

Appendix A   HSE Stress Management Standards

Appendix B   Return to Work Interview Form – Stress-related Absence

Appendix C   Stress Risk Assessment Guidance & Template

Appendix D   Stress – Guidance for Employees

Appendix E   Sources of Guidance for employees about Mental Health and Well-being.

Glossary

Stress – the HSE define stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Well-being – the Cambridge Dictionary definition is 'the state of feeling healthy and happy'.

Other Relevant Documentation

- Stress Awareness (Mandatory e-learning course);

- Health, Safety and Welfare Policy;

- Induction and Probation Policy, Procedures and Guidance;

- Performance Management Policy and Procedure (Appraisal);

- Sickness Absence – Reporting and Management – Policy, Procedure and Guidance;

- Responding to Bullying and Harassment Policy and Guidance.

APPENDIX A – HSE Stress Management Standards

The HSE National 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. The Management Standards represent a set of conditions that, if actively managed, reflect a high level of health well-being and organisational performance.

Demands

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:

- 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

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:

- 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

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:

- 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

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:

- 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

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:

- 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

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:

- 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.

APPENDIX B

Return to Work Interview Form – Stress-Related Absence
This must be completed by the line manager for ALL periods of stress related sickness absence

Name of employee:	
Job title:	
Date of return to work interview:	

Number of days sickness absence in past 12 months		
Number of days sickness absence due to stress-related illness		
Number of periods of sickness in past three months		
Patterns of absence causing concern?	Yes	No

[The triggers to hold an informal meeting to discuss absence are:
- Three or more sickness/injury absences in a rolling 3 month period
- Unacceptable patterns of absence
- A period of long term sickness absence of more than 28 calendar days]

The following points should be discussed, and actions agreed, as appropriate. Circle the appropriate answer:

Is the employee fit to return to work?	**YES/NO**
If the absence is longer than seven calendar days, has a doctor's certificate of fitness to work or hospital certificate been supplied to cover the period?	**YES/NO**
What do you think caused you to become stressed? Was it pressures at work, home, or a combination of both these factors? *(where work is a factor, the manager should conduct an individual stress risk assessment and refer to OH – see below)*	**HOME/ WORK/ COMBO.**
What are the main reasons for you feeling stressed at work?	
Do you feel you could talk to me or another manager about any work concerns you have? If no, who do you feel able to speak to? (NAME _____)	**YES/ NO**
Do you feel that you could talk to me or another manager about any personal concerns you may have? We may be able to identify additional support that would be helpful.	**YES/ NO**
Do you have any health concerns which are impacting on your ability to carry out your role?	**YES/NO**

(If the employee drives for work or operates machinery) Are you fit to carry out your driving/ machinery duties? Are you taking any medication (prescribed or otherwise) that could affect your ability to drive, operate machinery or any other aspect of their role? *(If you or the employee have any concerns they must be referred to Occupational Health before they are allowed to undertake these duties.)*	**YES/NO** **YES/NO**
Is there anything else you would like to discuss? (if Yes, record below)	**YES/ NO**

Notes for Manager:
- If the employee has confirmed that the stress related absence was triggered by workplace factors:
  - you must complete an individual **stress risk assessment** with the employee
  - you must refer the employee to Occupational Health
- Consider if counselling may helpful for the employee but refer to Occupational Health first if you are not sure
- Consider if informal management action is appropriate where the employee has reached one of the triggers above.

Notes of discussion (continue on separate sheet if necessary):
Actions for manager: to carry out (Circle as appropriate): Individual Stress Risk Assessment   Counselling Referral Referral to Occupational Health   Informal Sickness Absence Meeting

Signed		**Date**
Line Manager		
Employee		

This form should be retained securely by the service for a period of three years after the end of the tax year to which it relates and the date of the return to work interview recorded on My View.

APPENDIX C
Stress Risk Assessment Guidance & Template

Managers should follow these steps and guidance when completing stress risk assessments for staff in their teams. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) *Management Standards* have been used as the framework for the risk assessment template. Managers should attend the *Stress Mindfulness and Wellbeing* training course (classroom) and undertake regular e-learning refreshers (called *Stress Awareness*) to ensure that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertake a risk assessment.

This advice and template are designed to be used by managers when carrying out stress risk assessments with an individual employee. If you believe there is a wider issue with stress in your team refer to section 5.4 of the WBC *Stress and Mental Well-being Policy & Guidance.*
Managers should set aside appropriate time for discussion and drafting stress risk assessments. In order for a stress risk assessment to be successful, it is important to be open, to listen, to try to identify the stressors involved, consider and agree what can be done, be honest and do what you say you will do.

Step 1 – Identify the Hazards

A list of generic stressors are detailed against the six HSE Stress Management Standards (Demand, Role, Control, Support, Relationships, Change), which will need to be reviewed with issues being recorded in the 'Issues Identified' column. There may be service-specific stress issues that you want to look at. The HR Service lead on monitoring sickness absence across the Council and produce regular reports to Heads of Service/ Service Directors which can include sickness absence due to stress .

Step 2 – Who might be harmed?

Look at stress factors for the employee, consider the workloads and work styles different staff or teams have. Information can be provided by HR on the results of previous Employee Attitude Surveys or sickness absence which may give an indicative view of stress.

The HSE have some useful resources and further information here www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Step 3 – Evaluate the risks and decide on solutions

The stress risk assessment template details possible solutions, although this is not exhaustive, and managers and employees may be able to identify others which are more relevant to the person/situation being assessed.

Comparing current sickness absence results to those in the past may be of use, and benchmarking to other similar services may be useful. Ultimately the type of questions you are looking to answer include:

- Does the person have stress issues, and how serious are they?
- What are the most significant factors which are causing stress and/or sickness absence? e.g. change management
- Are there short, medium and longer term solutions we could try or are there others we can learn from?

Step 4 – Record the findings and implement the appropriate solutions

Complete the template and identify who will be implementing the solutions identified; this might be managers and/or staff. Realistic deadlines should be set and support given to those with responsibilities.

Step 5 – Review the Assessment regularly to ensure it remains valid

It's a good idea to set a number of meeting dates to give you and the employee the opportunity to review the stress risk assessment and ensure actions are effective or if anything else needs to be done. Where both the manager and employee are satisfied that the stress issues identified have either been removed or reduced to acceptable levels then the stress risk assessment can be closed.

WBC Stress Risk Assessment Record

Please read the guidance on conducting a stress risk assessment before using this template.

Directorate	
Service	
Team	
Manager	
Employee	

List the Hazards/ Stressors	Issues Identified	Possible Solutions	Action by Whom?	Action by when?	Date complete
Demands					
Stressors: Work Overload; Long Hours;		- Prioritise tasks; - Look at jobs design and working practices; - Check leave is being taken; - Cut out unnecessary work and communications; - Enable individuals to plan their own work.			
Inappropriate qualifications &/ or experience for job; Over promotion; Skill set not suitable for current role.		- Must ensure at interview that successful candidate has appropriate skills; - Ensure that training & development is assessed, and actions taken to cover gaps (training needs evaluation); - Monitor workplace policies in practice: discrimination.			
Boring or repetitive work; Too little to do.		- Job rotation/ role review; - Assess workstation (work environment) and work practice for possible solutions; - Increase the variety of tasks, give group/ team greater responsibility for organising work.			
Inadequate resource for tasks.		- Analyses requirements for projects/ tasks: - Equipment; - Priorities; - Deadlines.			

Excessive workloads; Employees working under excessive pressure.		▪ Review workload and demands regularly and as an integral part of the performance management process. ▪ Support staff in planning their work, and try to establish what aspects of their job they find challenging. Redistribute work or set different work priorities if staff not coping			
Control					
Not being able to balance the demands of work and life outside work.		• Encourage a healthy work-life balance; • Ensure staff take their allocated holiday allowance and distribute it fairly across the year (up to 5 days can be taken over); • Managers to be aware that some staff require more frequent contact, support and reassurance; • Identify were management control is excessive (e.g. not respecting off duty time), and make changes. • Identify if any patterns in absence.			
Rigid work patterns and breaks; Fixed deadlines occurring in different parts of the year; Lack of control over work.		• Flexible working to assist – Timelord; • Consider flexible working patterns e.g. if targets are met when working from home but not when working in the office etc. • Consult with staff to allow them to influence the way the jobs are done, and what the real deadlines and priorities are.			
Conflicting work demands.		• Set realistic deadlines for tasks (S.M.A.R.T); • Take into account that team individuals may be different, and try to allocate work so that everyone is working in the way that they work best; • Be clear about tasks required and agree outcomes and timescales where possible.			

Support					
Return to work system; Sickness & absence management; Lack of Managerial support through emotional demanding work;		• Policies and systems in place, monitored and consistently applied, e.g. counselling offered; • Measure trends and changes; • Investigate variations; • Check management skill & assess training needs; • Ensure people have the support they require and access to any specialist advice.			
Induction.		• New staff properly inducted, existing staff transferring or promoted or returning to work after long absence also to be inducted – manager training; • Mentoring roles; • DDA adjustments in place, reviewed and checked.			
Post disciplinary		• Support staff as appropriate - regular review meetings to ensure support.			
Relationships					
Poor relationship with others in Team; Staff complaints or rising absence trends.		• Investigate causal factors; • Discuss the problem openly with individuals; • Follow complaints procedure; • Checking management skills and assess training needs.			
Bullying or confrontational communications style.		• Encourage constructive & positive communications between staff; • Managers should discuss & address bullying and/ or confrontational communications styles with member of staff who display these behaviours;			
Bullying, racial or sexual harassment.		• Provide & communicate Bullying & Harassment Policy's to individuals; • Practice by example and make it clear what behaviours are not acceptable; • Provide details of empirical evidence: absence trends, complaints, etc			

Lack of support or fear culture within, from management and co-workers		• Support & Encourage staff, protect them from reprisals; • Consider introducing a mentoring & counselling scheme; • Investigate and take action as appropriate as soon as possible.			
Role					
Clear lines of accountability & responsibility.		• Ensure good communication systems exist and are in place from top to bottom; • Set 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 & 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 success. • Deal with issues/concerns promptly but fairly.			
A culture that considers stress a sign of weakness.		• Approachable management which wants to know about problems & will try to help 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 & assess training needs; • Schedule work in a way that allows recovery time after unavoidable busy periods.			

Change					
Fears about job security/ grading; Poor communication – uncertainty about what is happening; Not enough time allowed to implement change; Inexperience/ fear of new technology; Lack of skills for new tasks; Not enough resource allocated for change process.		• Provide effective support for staff throughout the process; • Consult with staff likely to be involved in change management 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; • Ensure effective two-way communication throughout the process – staff should know what the process in & timescales; • Consider training needs – do people have to 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.			

Risk assessment completed by		**Signature**	
Risk assessment completed for		**Signature**	
Date assessment completed			
Risk assessment to be reviewed (set a number of meeting dates to give opportunity to review the assessment and ensure actions are effective etc.)	Please state		

Comments (record progress and any other issues below)
Date stress risk assessment concluded (when issues have been resolved to both managers and staff satisfaction).

Stress – Advice for Employees

Approved By:	Reference Number WBC_HSGC 23	Issue Date: June 2019	Scheduled Document Review Annual

Stress at Work

In Britain, 13.4 million working days are lost every year through stress at work. But these figures may not be entirely accurate as these show those workers who have formally stated that stress is the cause of the absence. As we know, it remains unacceptable to say "I just can't cope today so I am not coming in" and therefore we tend to make other excuses, masking the real figures. West Berkshire Council acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stress factors.

Definition of stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines 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.

Pressure v Stress

We all need some pressure in our lives. It is the thing that drives and motivates us. However when we experience too much pressure without the opportunity to recover, that is when we start to experience stress.

If you review the HSE definition of stress you will note that stress can never be considered a good thing as stress is 'the adverse reaction to excessive pressure'. Whilst some pressure can be good as long as it is controlled and we have the opportunity to recover.

Remember: Stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.
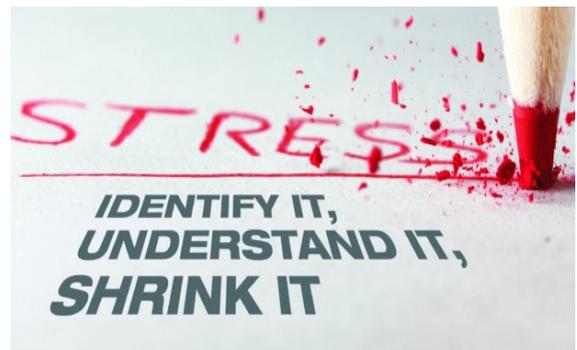
Signs and Symptoms of stress:

It is important that we are able to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress in ourselves and in our colleagues. So what are we looking for? Some symptoms may seem fairly minor but can be an indication that stress is building and without support may lead to a more serious situation.

Stress Spotting . . .

Less inclination to do the things you used to enjoy

Being less sociable than you used to be

Fatigue

Racing thoughts

Inability to focus/concentrate

Difficulty sleeping

Sleeping too much

Weight loss or gain

Drinking or smoking more

Less able to control your emotions, be that anger or sadness

A lack of emotion

Irritability and short temperedness

Feelings of anxiousness or feeling overwhelmed

Headaches/migraines

Panic attacks

Irritable bowel syndrome

Everyone can suffer from stress to some extent, it's part of life both at home and at work. The important thing is how much stress people are under and how it is managed by themselves and their managers.

There are number of reasons that staff can be stressed due to their work and these can be assessed via a stress risk assessment:

1. Work Demands
Includes issues like workload, work patterns, the working environment, and work hazards.

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

3. Support
Includes the supervision, training and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

4. Relationships
Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and procedures for dealing with unacceptable behavior from colleagues and the public.

5. Role
Whether people understand their role within the organisation and the organisation ensures that people don't have conflicting roles.

6. Change
How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated.

7. Personal problems outside work
These can be all manner of issues and need to be treated in confidence and sympathetically. Whilst you may not be able or expected to solve these issues you maybe to be flexible about how and when people work or provide information on where to find further information, support and help if needed.

Solutions may involve:
- Addressing concerns on workload or work environment.
- Providing more support or training
- Involvement of occupational health who can often provide suggestions and solutions
- Improving work relationships and team working.
- Providing staff with counselling

So what can we do to help ourselves and our colleagues?
- Raise the issue of stress and discuss it with each other and at team meetings
- Support each other and be honest about how you are feeling and coping with your workload and/or home life
- Try to ensure you maintain a good work/life balance
- Share problems with your co-workers
- Be mindful of the signs and symptoms of stress in yourself and others
- Do not ignore the signs and symptoms of stress in yourself or others

For more information:
- NHS information at:
  https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/
- The HSE guidance at:
  http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/
- WBC Stress & Mental Well-being Policy available on the intranet.
- - WBC Public Health & Well-being Service - A Practical Guide to support line managers and employees' health and wellbeing in the workplace

For further information and support please contact WBC Health & Safety Team:
- healthandsafety@westberks.gov.uk
- or
- schoolshealthandsafety@westberks.gov.uk

Appendix E
Sources of Guidance for Employees about Mental Health and Well-being

These are just a few sources of information for employees about Mental Health and well-being.

Internal:

WBC Public Health & Well-being Service - A Practical Guide to support line managers and employees' health and wellbeing in the workplace

WBC Five Ways to Well-being: https://info.westberks.gov.uk/fivewaystowellbeing

Staff Well-being pages on the intranet: http://intranet/index.aspx?articleid=31853

External:

NHS information: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/

Talking Therapies Self-referral (Berkshire Healthcare Trust):
https://www.talkingtherapies.berkshire.nhs.uk/page_sa.asp?fldKey=217

The HSE guidance at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

Anxiety UK: https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/

Mind UK: https://www.mind.org.uk/

Newbury Family Counselling Service: 01635 521296 www.newburycounselling.org

Cruse Bereavement Care West Berkshire: 01635 523573 www.crusewestberks.org

Rethink Mental Illness: National Helpline 0300 500 0927 Monday to Friday 10am to 2pm