



**Horbury School**  
**A Specialist Language College**

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# **STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

## 1. **Introduction**

Effective overall management of work-related stress requires a proactive approach that is part of a positive strategy. This involves a systematic approach to addressing the risks of stress at source, rather than focussing time and money on “curing” stressed employees – in other words in reacting to the effects of stressors in the workplace. Whilst a reactive approach will help those who have become stressed it is ineffective in preventing or reducing the incidence of work-related stress. This is because it deals with something that has already happened and does not put measures in place to stop it from happening in the first place. The principle of health and safety management and risk assessment is to prevent harm or ill health occurring.

An effective stress management strategy will include interventions within each of the three levels outlined below. An effective strategy should also include the following:-

- Consultation with employees and safety representatives
- Access to competent advice
- Carrying out suitable and sufficient risk assessments and keeping them under review
- Applying general principles of stress prevention i.e.
  - Involving employees;
  - Ensuring that managers and supervisors have effective interpersonal skills;
  - Increasing the amount of autonomy & control employees have over their work;
  - Having fair and unbiased recruitment and selection processes that ensure there are enough appropriately qualified and competent employees;
  - Implementing training and development programmes (including regular refresher & update training) that ensure the organisation does not make demands that are beyond the abilities and resources of employees.
- Making appropriate provisions for vulnerable groups
- Effective and systematic risk management arrangements
- Recording and reporting of accidents and incidents
- Provision of emergency procedures.

Management support, leadership and commitment are essential, especially at a senior level, if interventions are to be successfully implemented, developed and sustained.

## 2. **Levels of Intervention and control**

There are three levels of intervention for prevention and control of work-related stress – primary, secondary and tertiary.

### 2.1 **Primary level**

Primary level interventions focus on:-

Identifying possible root causes of work-related stress

Assessing risks to individuals and groups within the organisation and to the organisation as a whole.

This will involve the process of risk assessment and may also involve other investigations such as the use of baseline studies, surveys and audits. The HSE Stress Management Toolkit should be used at this level.

For the primary level to be successful it is important that all staff involved in the initiative are:

- Given basic information on stress so that they are familiar with the issue
- Properly informed as to why action is being taken
- Clear about their role in the initiative

## 2.2 **Secondary Level**

The Secondary Level of intervention sets out to improve the overall situation in the workplace. It can involve:

- Taking preventative action by implementing recommendations identified within risk assessments and measures arising from surveys
- Equipping managers to recognise and address the possible causes of stress in themselves and others
- Raising general awareness amongst employees of the early signs and symptoms of stress and how to help themselves and others deal with them.

Measures that may be identified at the secondary level could include training for managers and staff as well as redesigning tasks and activities and remodelling the way in which services are provided. The actions taken should be evaluated and monitored.

## 2.3 **Tertiary Level**

Tertiary level interventions focus on treatment and rehabilitation of individuals whose health and/or safety has been affected by stress. Such measures may include the use of an Employee Assistance Programme and provision of support.

## 3. **The role of a steering group – Horbury School’s Safety Committee**

It is best practice for organisations to appoint a steering group to oversee and monitor the development and implementation of stress management measures. Within schools senior staff might undertake this. Where this is not practiced perhaps a stress steering group could be established comprising of staff that represent all employee groups.

The steering group should have and fulfil the following characteristics and roles:-

- Have authority to act within the terms of its remit
- Report back regularly to senior management on progress in achieving objectives
- Receive input from the workforce and its representatives and provide regular feedback
- Oversee planning and implementation of the stress management strategy and monitor progress
- Monitor and review risk assessments and their effectiveness
- Provide effective channels of communication between different sections and groups within the workplace
- Help to identify where further developments are required to improve prevention and control

#### 4. **Risk assessing for stress**

- 1) Identify the hazard
  - i.e. the stressors – the things that may cause stress
- 2) Identify who may be harmed by the stressors and how
- 3) Evaluate the risk –
  - What is the likelihood that the consequences identified will be realised, and are existing control, or risk reduction, measures adequate – if not what more needs to be done
- 4) Record the main findings, inform others and put precautions in place
- 5) Monitor and review the effectiveness of the measures taken do they work? Has anything changed? Are they still valid? Does anything more need to Be done or done differently?) Revise the assessment if necessary.

#### 4.1 **Identifying stressors**

Identifying potential stressors can appear problematic, as they are not always obvious. Even though individual responses to a particular stressor may vary from one person to another, this does not preclude the hazard from having the potential to cause harm. If there is a potential for harm this should be assessed and suitably controlled.

Stress can arise from repeated or cumulative exposures to one or more stressors. It is important therefore to recognise situations involving multiple stressors and take account of any variations in the nature, frequency, duration and type of exposures involved. Examples of combined stressors would include –

- Long working hours plus intensive workloads
- Dealing with members of the public plus emotionally demanding work
- A noisy environment that is also excessively warm and humid and is crowded
- Fear of violence plus insecure premises in known trouble spots

Work-related stressors should also be combined with stressors in people's personal lives, as each is likely to impact on the other.

#### 4.2 **Gathering information about sources of stress**

The HSE's list of common workplace stressors and the HSE & Trade Union table of stressors within education (see both above) are a good starting place to identify possible causes of stress in a school. The lists can form useful checklists, which can be added to as other stressors are identified. There are many methods, both qualitative and quantitative, of gathering information about what causes stress in any organisation.

Qualitative methods would include:-

- Formal and informal consultation and discussions with staff and employee representatives
- Observing what is happening in the workplace
- Conducting performance appraisals
- Holding focus groups
- Conducting exit interviews
- Conducting return to work interviews
- Questionnaires

Quantitative methods would include:-

- Statistical analysis of
  - Absence data,
  - Accident data,
  - Time sheets or other indicators of time worked,
  - Staffing records,
  - Training records,
  - Temporary and agency staff usage records,
  - Records of complaints or appeals,
  - Disciplinary records
- Stress surveys
- Stress audit
- Workload surveys
- Environmental surveys (e.g. noise, heat, light)
- HSE indicator tool for work-related stress

Both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used to help identify the individuality of the response to potential stressors. Using only one method may also cause some stressors to be missed.

#### 4.3 **Identifying people at risk**

Those people who may be at risk will usually be identified when information is gathered about stressors. Some of the qualitative methods use, such as discussions with staff and performance appraisals may identify people or groups who, in addition to those who are vulnerable, may be more susceptible to stress. This group would include, for example, people who have a heavy workload, those who lack control over their work activities, those who work in poor conditions and those with emotionally demanding jobs.

#### 4.4 **Evaluate the risk**

Risk evaluation involves:-

- Considering the likely consequences of exposure to stressors and the severity and extent of harm that might be caused.
- Checking the measures that have already been taken to prevent and control the risk.
- Evaluating the measures already taken in light of the risk assessment so far – are the precautions adequate and does anything more need to be done?
- Looking at what further measures might be appropriate to improve prevention and control of risks
- Deciding what action is needed and what the priorities are.

The HSE Stress Management Standards Toolkit will help to identify the priorities within the six key areas of role, demands, relationships, control, change and support.

#### 4.5 **Preventing and controlling risks**

The evaluation stage should identify a list of priorities. The most serious risks should be at the top of the list and as such should be tackled first.

For every risk the problem solving process should first establish whether the stressor can be eliminated and if not to what extent can it be minimised or reduced. If a significant risk remains after all reasonably practicable actions are taken to reduce the risk, measures should be introduced that protect individuals from the stressors – such as provision of training in how to cope with stress, provision of additional support, allowing staff to complete tasks at home or temporarily reduce their working hours. It must be remembered, however, that any measures designed to protect individuals from stressors will only apply to the time at which they are provided and will not necessarily be suitable for anyone else. The stressors will also remain – unless they are of a transitory nature (e.g. workload that has high peaks at specific times but which is reasonable at all other times).

#### 4.6 **Recording the findings**

There is no stipulated method of recording the main findings of the assessment process, however it is essential that a written record is kept that identifies the stressors, who is likely to be affected by them, what action is required to remove or reduce any risk, the dates for action to be completed and who is responsible for implementation.

The findings should be shared with employees where appropriate.

#### 4.7 **Monitoring**

Monitoring is a vital part of stress risk assessment. It can provide indications of what works and what does not work so well, which in turn will enable more effective intervention.

Many of the activities involved in monitoring will mirror the activities undertaken when identifying stressors and will include –

- Checking that action plans and preventative measures have been communicated and are being implemented
- Finding out whether the preventative measures are proving effective by reviewing feedback and outcomes
- Checking that proposed changes are properly assessed.
- Reviewing these assessments before proposals are finalised and introduced, and amending accordingly if required
- Obtaining feedback from staff and managers
- Ensuring vulnerable groups are adequately protected
- Identifying new or emerging risks
- Collecting and analysing data
- Examining the incidence of sickness absence, accidents and incidents

The methods used for identifying stressors can equally be applied to monitoring, however, it is important to avoid “survey fatigue” although routine annual surveys will provide an indication, over time, that actions are having an effect.

4.8 **Review**

Risk assessments should be reviewed

- At regular intervals
- Where there are reasons to believe they are no longer valid
- Whenever changes take place that could affect the risks or people exposed to the risks
- If new research findings identify previously unavailable alternatives

Date Submitted to Personnel Sub-Committee:.....

Headteachers Signature: .....

Name of Headteacher: .....

Chair of Governing Body's Signature: .....

Name of Chair of Governing Body: .....