

Stress and mental wellbeing at work policy

1. About this policy

- 1.1 We are committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff. We recognise the importance of identifying and tackling the causes of work-related stress. We also recognise that personal stress, while unrelated to the workplace, can adversely affect the wellbeing of staff at work. We want to support the mental wellbeing of all our staff and will provide appropriate support for staff who are suffering from stress or mental ill health, on a confidential basis where appropriate, regardless of its source.
- 1.2 We will:
- (a) Promote a culture of open communication. We want staff to feel confident that any concerns they raise about their work or working environment will be addressed. We will provide both formal and informal means for them to raise concerns.
 - (b) Take account of stress and mental wellbeing when planning and allocating workloads. We will provide opportunities to discuss these through our appraisal processes.
 - (c) Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking and monitor holidays to ensure that staff are using their entitlement.
 - (d) Ensure risk assessments include or specifically address work-related stress.
 - (e) Facilitate requests for flexible working where reasonably practicable in accordance with our Flexible Working Policy.
 - (f) Ensure that in any workplace reorganisation our change management processes are designed to minimise uncertainty and stress.
 - (g) Implement policies and procedures to address factors that can cause stress at work, or add to personal stress, in particular so that we can:
 - (i) provide a workplace free from harassment, bullying and victimisation; and
 - (ii) address inappropriate behaviour through disciplinary action.
 - (h) Provide support for staff affected by or absent by reason of stress.
- 1.3 This policy covers all employees, officers, consultants, contractors, interns, casual workers and agency workers.
- 1.4 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and we may amend it at any time.

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2. Legal obligations

- 2.1 We have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that your health is not put at risk by excessive pressures or demands arising from the way work is organised.
- 2.2 This policy takes account of our obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Employment Rights Act 1996, Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Working Time Regulations 1998 and Equality Act 2010.

3. Responsibility for the policy

- 3.1 We will monitor the development of good practice in approaches to work-related stress and mental wellbeing at work and will keep our practices and the effectiveness of this policy under review to ensure it is achieving its stated objectives.
- 3.2 All managers have a responsibility to recognise potential issues of work-related stress or mental ill health in the staff they manage.

4. Understanding stress and mental health

- 4.1 Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or demands placed on them. Stress is not an illness but, sustained over a period of time, it can lead to mental and/or physical illness.
- 4.2 Mental health is a term to describe our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing; it affects how we think, feel and act and how we cope with the normal pressures of everyday life. Positive mental health is rarely an absolute state since factors inside and outside work affect mental health, meaning that we move on a spectrum that ranges from being in good to poor mental health.
- 4.3 There is an important distinction between working under pressure and experiencing stress. Certain levels of pressure are acceptable and normal in every job. They can improve performance, enable individuals to meet their full potential and provide a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, when pressure becomes excessive it produces stress and undermines mental health.
- 4.4 Pressures outside the workplace, whether the result of unexpected or traumatic events such as accidents, illness, bereavement, family breakdown or financial worries, can result in stress and poor mental health. They can also compound normal workplace pressures.
- 4.5 We recognise that individuals react to similar situations in different ways and that what triggers stress and poor mental health varies from person to person.

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5. Supporting mental wellbeing at work

- 5.1 We want to ensure that our workplace supports good mental health for all staff. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when events at work or outside work result in staff feeling that their mental health is suffering. Anyone who feels that they are suffering from work-related stress should follow the steps set out in paragraph 6 in addition to making use of the support services referred to in this policy which all staff are encouraged to access if they ever feel they need support or assistance.
- 5.2 All managers should provide support to staff. In particular, they need to:
- (a) Promote a culture of open communication.
 - (b) Effectively plan and provide feedback on performance.
 - (c) Monitor workloads and reallocate work where necessary.
 - (d) Ensure that staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and others, and act on behaviour that falls below those standards.
- 5.3 Help and information can also be obtained from Mind, the mental health charity, www.mind.org.uk or the Samaritans, www.samaritans.org.
- 5.4 If any member of staff is considered by their manager or colleagues to be at serious risk of self-harm, or of harming others, action must be taken straight away. The matter should be referred to your line manager or People and Culture who will seek medical advice if that is reasonably practicable. Every effort will be made to contact any person nominated by the member of staff as an emergency contact. Where necessary the emergency services will be called. The wellbeing of the member of staff and those around them will at all times be our first concern.

6. Addressing work-related stress

- 6.1 If you believe you are suffering from work-related stress you should discuss this with your manager or supervisor in the first instance. If you feel unable to do so you should contact People and Culture. You should also access the support services referred to in paragraph 5.
- 6.2 Once an issue affecting your health comes to the attention of your line manager, supervisor or People and Culture we will discuss with you what steps can be taken to address that issue. Those steps may include any of the following:
- (a) A review of your current job role, responsibilities, workload and working hours. Adjustments may be agreed to these, on a temporary basis and subject to further review, where appropriate.

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- (b) Where it appears that stress has been caused by bullying or harassment, investigation under our Disciplinary and/or Grievance Procedures.
- (c) Referral for medical advice, treatment and/or a medical report to be provided by our medical advisers or any specialist or GP who has been treating you.
- (d) If you are on sickness absence, discussion of an appropriate return to work programme. Our Sickness Absence Policy may be applied.

7. Absence due to stress or mental ill health

- 7.1 If you are absent due to work-related stress or mental ill health, you should follow the sickness absence reporting procedure contained in your contract and/or our Sickness Absence Policy.
- 7.2 In cases of prolonged or repeated absence it may be necessary to apply the procedure set out in our Sickness Absence Policy and/or Capability Procedure.

8. Confidentiality

- 8.1 Information about stress, mental health and mental wellbeing is highly sensitive. Every member of staff is responsible observing the high level of confidentiality that is required when dealing with information about stress or mental health whether they are supporting a colleague or because they are otherwise involved in the operation of a workplace policy or procedure.
- 8.2 Breach of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action.
- 8.3 However, there are occasions when information about stress or mental wellbeing need to be shared with third parties. For example:
 - (a) Where steps need to be taken to address work-related stress such as reallocating work within a team.
 - (b) Where medical advice is required on how to support a member of staff, address issues raised by work-related stress or address issues raised by mental ill health.
 - (c) Where allegations of harassment, bullying or other misconduct require a disciplinary investigation or proceedings to take place.
 - (d) Where a member of staff presents an immediate danger to themselves or others.

In these circumstances, wherever possible, matters will be discussed with the member of staff concerned before any action is taken.

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9. Protection for those reporting stress or assisting with an investigation

- 9.1 Staff who report that they are suffering from work-related stress or mental ill health, who support a colleague in making such a report or who participate in any investigation connected with this policy in good faith will be protected from any form of intimidation or victimisation.
- 9.2 If you feel you have been subjected to any such intimidation or victimisation, you should seek support from your line manager or People and Culture. You may also raise a complaint in accordance with our Grievance Procedure.
- 9.3 If, after investigation, you are found to have provided false information in bad faith, you will be subject to action under our Disciplinary Procedure.

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