



# Management of Stress Policy

May 2015

Signed .....

Leicestershire County Council

# Operational Policy & Guidance

## The Management of Stress in the Workplace

March

# 2014

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Leicestershire County Council (LCC) is committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of employees. LCC recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stress.
- 1.2 The Health and Safety Executive define 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.
- 1.3 Employers have legal responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure the health safety and welfare at work of their employees. This includes minimising the risk of stress-related illness or injury to employees. As an employer, the County Council has a legal duty to identify and assess risks to an employee’s health, safety and welfare. Where risks are identified, appropriate preventative and protective measures must be taken to remove or reduce the risks.

## 2.0 Symptoms of stress and the effects in the workplace

- 2.1 Stress can cause changes in those experiencing it. In some cases there are clear signs that people are experiencing stress at work and if these can be identified early, action can be taken before the pressure becomes a problem. This may make it easier to reduce and eliminate the causes. Stress can show itself in many different ways - a stress reaction can affect a person’s physical health, emotional wellbeing and behaviour. The list below identifies some of the key symptoms:

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Behavioural</b>
High blood pressure	Anxiety	Over eating and under eating
Insomnia	Depression	Excessive use of alcohol and cigarettes
Fatigue/Dizziness	Lack of a sense of humour	Drug abuse
Headaches	Mood swings	Poor time keeping
Digestive disorders	Excessively angry/aggressiveness	Obsessive erratic behaviour
Slouched posture	Poor concentration	Forgetfulness
Bloodshot eyes	Apathy	Indecisiveness
Sweating	Being tearful	Neglect of appearance
Chest pain/Sensation of heart racing	Loss of confidence	Withdrawing from social contact and support networks
Shallow breathing	Negative thoughts	Not taking breaks at work
Nervous sensations/tense muscles		Not participating in hobbies and pastimes

Loss of appetite		
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2.2 Failing to manage stress can have adverse effects on an organisation. It can lead to underperformance in individuals and within teams. The effects can include:

- Errors in work
- Poor decision making
- Lack of creativity
- Job dissatisfaction
- Reduced productivity
- Poor quality of work
- Absenteeism

As well as sickness absence costs, other financial costs can be significant. Possible costs can include:

- Loss of customers
- Ill health retirements
- Litigation
- Employment tribunals

## 3.0 Managing stress in the workplace

### 3.1 Assisting employees who are experiencing stress

3.1.1 Knowing when to assist an employee isn't always obvious. Everybody has different thresholds for pressure and stress. What is stressful to one person may not be the same for another. A stress reaction is often triggered by the perception of fear, threat or pressure. An individual's perception will vary from one person to the next.

3.1.2 There are some common situations which can arise in the workplace, which may indicate that support is required. Such circumstances are:

- An employee may inform their line manager that they are feeling stressed.
- An employee may have uncharacteristic sickness absences that state or implies a stress reaction.
- An employee may be signed off work by their GP and their fit note identifies stress as the cause. (A fit note could also state anxiety and depression, which can be the effect of experiencing stress over a significant period of time).

3.1.3 In some circumstances, an employee may not recognise how stressed they are. It is their colleagues who spot uncharacteristic behaviour or signs and symptoms. In these situations, line managers may wish to talk to the employee to see if support is required. This discussion can be delegated to another member of the management team, if the line manager is identified as a reason for the stress reaction. Initiating a discussion may be difficult, if the employee is anxious or distressed. This can be overcome by

explaining the purpose of the meeting. Inform the employee that you would like to discuss their wellbeing. Be supportive and empathetic so that the problems can be tackled in a positive way. Ask about possible causes and explore together some options for addressing the issues. Make notes of your meeting together and ensure that you both agree with the accuracy of the account. If the employee is unable to discuss how they feel, or they are unable to identify the cause, suggest other people to talk to. This could include a sympathetic family member, a colleague, their trade union representative, their doctor, or the Employee Wellbeing and Counselling Service.

- 3.1.4 If there are concerns about the employees' level of attendance, capability to perform their role, or professional conduct, seek advice from Human Resources before arranging to meet. If there are no concerns, but advice is necessary to prepare for the meeting, contact Human Resources, your Health and Safety Advisor, or the Employee Wellbeing Service for further information.

## 3.2 Conducting a stress risk assessment

- 3.2.1 When an employee feels that work is the cause of stress a **manager must act**. A stress risk assessment is a tool that is used to identify the causes of stress. It also specifies measures to remove or reduce the cause. A model stress risk assessment has been developed and can be found in Appendix 1. The model risk assessment is based on the HSE Management Standards which cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:
- **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
  - **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
  - **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
  - **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
  - **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
  - **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.
- 3.2.2 In the first instance, line managers and employees should work through a stress risk assessment together. Being able to work together on the issues will help to sustain a good working relationship and good levels of understanding and communication. On some occasions, it may not be appropriate for a line manager to conduct a risk assessment. In these situations, an alternative member of the management team or a member of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service could conduct the risk assessment. An employee may need support at a risk assessment and may request that a colleague or trade union representative attends.
- 3.2.3 As the cause of a stress reaction will vary according to individuals, it is important to address the cause rather than evaluating whether the reason is justified. For example,

an employee may have the same workload as other team members. However, recovery from recent surgery and a breakdown in a personal relationship, may temporarily affect their ability to manage their normal job role. Working with their concerns and finding positive solutions to address the matter will encourage a successful recovery from stress. Being judgemental may exacerbate their stress reaction and is likely to cause deterioration in relationships with line management. If you have concerns that the matter may not be temporary, you may wish to take advice from Human Resources.

- 3.2.4 It is often a misconception that all of the action points will be the responsibility of the line manager or employer to facilitate. Whilst this may be the case for some of the risk assessment, the employee needs to engage in the process of managing their stress reaction too. Examples of action points for an employee may include counselling, attending training and learning new skills. The person responsible for each action point should be identified on the risk assessment.
- 3.2.5 Each of you should keep a copy of the risk assessment. The line manager's copy should be kept in a secure place with other records such as supervision or 1 to 1 notes. There is no requirement to send a copy of the stress risk assessment to Human Resources, unless they initiated the assessment or are conducting casework in relation to the employee.
- 3.2.6 In all instances, employees experiencing stress should be made aware of the [Employee Wellbeing Service](#). This is a confidential counselling and welfare support service. To contact the service telephone 0116 305 6178.

### 3.3 **When an employee is absent from work due to stress**

- 3.3.1 During an employee's absence from work be supportive and maintain contact with the employee. Your contact should reflect your concern for their wellbeing. Avoid discussions about their work tasks, and the effects their absence has on service delivery. Such discussions exacerbate stressful feelings and hinder recovery. If you have concerns about the wider management of your workforce during an employee's absence, seek advice from your management team and Human Resources.
- 3.3.2 If an employee will not speak to line management, you may wish to send a card or informal note. Or if they prefer, suggest another member of your management team that they can talk to. It is not uncommon for employees to experience difficulties in talking to colleagues, at the onset of sickness absence. Often 'time out' from associations with work is required to reduce or stop a stress reaction. During this phase, employees often feel unable to address the matters that may be causing stress. They describe feelings of numbness, confusion, forgetfulness, and a lack of clarity which makes decision making difficult. GPs may advise employees to participate in rehabilitative activities. This could include exercise and maintaining contact with supportive individuals. Exercise has been shown to be as effective as an anti-depressant in the treatment of mild to moderate depression. It is therefore appropriate

for employees to participate in such activities as walking the dog, swimming, using the gym etc, if their condition is stress, anxiety or depression related.

- 3.3.3 In the vast majority of cases, lack of contact from an absent employee is temporary. Most employees will wish to discuss their difficulties and will welcome support from their line manager on how they can be assisted to return to work. Research suggests that maintaining contact is helpful to recovery. No communication with the workplace can cause feelings of isolation and lack of value. This can increase the risk of depression. If you haven't had contact with the employee after a fortnight, a call, letter, or card, enquiring about their wellbeing should be made. If the lack of communication persists, a referral to Occupational Health may be appropriate. This can be arranged by Human Resources.
- 3.3.4 If you make a referral to Occupational Health, ensure that you inform the employee of your actions. Assure them this is normal procedure and is not a punitive measure. Explain that you are seeking the advice of a medical professional in order to highlight any areas of concern and how the workplace can promote their recovery.
- 3.3.5 A stress risk assessment may be necessary if the absence is work related. This should be done in conjunction with the attendance management procedure.
- 3.3.6 An employee may find it helpful, if they can re-familiarise themselves with the workplace as they progress through their recovery. For example, rather than send their fit note, employees may wish to hand deliver it, and use the opportunity to meet colleagues. Meeting colleagues socially, e.g. for lunch, can also be helpful in building confidence to return to work. It can be a useful first step, if the employee has been offered a therapeutic return.

### **3.4 Risk assessing teams using stress surveys**

- 3.4.1 The Health and Safety Executive recommend a survey to assess if work related stress is an issue for your workforce.
- 3.4.2 Individual perceptions play an important role in predicting stress related ill health. Gathering the opinions of employees can be a useful indicator of the health of your organisation, and potential sources of work related stress.
- 3.4.3 The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service recommend that managers distribute the HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool to all employees in their team. The survey consists of 35 items that ask about 'working conditions' known to be potential causes of work related stress. (See page 5). These working conditions correspond to the six stressors of the HSE Management Standards. The employee answers according to how they feel about these aspects of their work. All responses can then be compiled into an Excel-based analysis tool, on the HSE website. The HSE provide information on how to proceed, if the results reveal that work related stress exists.

### **3.5 Traumatic incidents involving employees**

- 3.5.1 If an employee is involved in a serious incident at work, or is witness to such an event, it is important that this is recognised and acted upon at an early stage. Stress reactions are very common in these circumstances.
- 3.5.2 Providing debriefing opportunities are a good course of action. Often these are arranged informally. Employees may gather as a staff group to reflect and discuss what has happened. It is good practice for managers to arrange a group meeting to provide accurate, up to date information on what has occurred. It is also an opportunity to assess the wellbeing of the staff, and to notify them of sources of support. There are occasions when you may not be permitted to share information with your staff team. In these circumstances, take advice from Human Resources and other professional on how to address your staff team.
- 3.5.3 There may be some employees whose experience of the incident is more profound than that of others. In these instances, a more formal type of support may be required.
- 3.5.4 As well as individual counselling, the Employee Wellbeing Service can provide group debriefing sessions to employees who have been involved in a traumatic incident.

### **3.6 When the matter is personal**

- 3.6.1 It is not always possible to stop pressures in our personal lives from affecting our work. A stress reaction, anxiety and depression present physical, emotional and behavioural changes that are not always easy to control. There may be occasions when the symptoms of stress caused by pressure in our personal lives, manifest themselves in the workplace.
- 3.6.2 Managers have no direct responsibility to make improvements to an employee's personal situation.
- 3.6.3 However, it is good practice to provide a supporting role to employees who are distressed or finding work difficult to manage. Examples could include:
- Providing a 'time out' opportunity to ease their distress
  - Giving them some time to talk and be listened to
  - Providing them with details of the Employee Wellbeing Service
- 3.6.4 If their circumstances are affecting their ability to work, a risk assessment around the job role may be appropriate.
- 3.6.5 There are some occasions when a manager must act, regardless of whether the origin of stress is work or personal. These are:
- If the behaviour of an employee creates a risk to the safety of colleagues and service users
  - If the employee's ability to operate machinery or drive a vehicle is impaired

- If the behaviour of an employee's family member creates a risk to colleagues, service users and the employee
- If the employee suggests that they will commit suicide or an act of serious self harm that could endanger their life and that of others

3.6.6 In all of these circumstances, seek support from Human Resources, the Employee Wellbeing Service and/or your Health, Safety and Wellbeing Advisor.

## 4.0 Further Information and Contacts

1. **Being Well, Doing Well** - a CIS web area of information on physical and mental wellbeing, and managing stress.
2. **Employee Wellbeing Service** - a counselling and wellbeing support service for employees of Leicestershire County Council. LCC's Employee Wellbeing Advisers are:

Simon Bamkin  
Telephone: 0116 305 7504  
Email: [simon.bamkin@leics.gov.uk](mailto:simon.bamkin@leics.gov.uk)

Alison Earl  
Telephone: 0116 305 6178  
Email: [alison.earl@leics.gov.uk](mailto:alison.earl@leics.gov.uk)

Linda Williams  
Telephone: 0116 305 6078  
Email: [linda.p.williams@leics.gov.uk](mailto:linda.p.williams@leics.gov.uk)

3. **Employee Service Helpdesk**  
Telephone: 0116 305 8155

### 4. Unions

Unison  
Telephone: 0116 305 6153  
Email: [unison@leics.gov.uk](mailto:unison@leics.gov.uk)

NASUWT  
Telephone: 0115 976 7180  
Email: [rc-eastmids@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:rc-eastmids@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)

NAHT  
Telephone: 0300 30 30333  
Email: [info@naht.org.uk](mailto:info@naht.org.uk)

NUT  
Telephone: 0116 275 6658  
Email: [secretary@leicestershire.nut.org.uk](mailto:secretary@leicestershire.nut.org.uk)

GMB  
Telephone: 0116 251 0922

5. **Health and Safety Executive - HSE: Stress**
6. The Samaritans

Telephone: 08457 90 90 90

7. For information on training opportunities on wellbeing, stress and managing change, please contact your departmental Learning and Development co-ordinator or email [nominations@leics.gov.uk](mailto:nominations@leics.gov.uk)



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Question	Yes	No	Possible Actions	Agreed Action/s
<b>1. Role Definition:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is role clearly defined?</li> <li>• Are duties and responsibilities clear?</li> <li>• Is it clear how to perform role?</li> <li>• Is role clearly linked to goals and objectives for the department?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure expected duties and responsibilities are not excessive and demands not unreasonable</li> <li>• Clarify goals, objectives and success criteria for the job/role - ensuring no ambiguity</li> <li>• Give regular clear feedback on performance</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Control:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do individuals have a say in how to do and plan their work?</li> <li>• Can employee set own work speed?</li> <li>• Can employee decide when to take a break?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where practicable, enable staff to exert autonomy within role</li> <li>• Encourage delegation and empowerment of others</li> <li>• Encourage training to support delegation (to individual and team)</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Work Pressures – High:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are unrealistic deadlines set?</li> <li>• Is employee required to work long hours?</li> <li>• Is employee given work from different commissioning groups with conflicting priorities?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer support in prioritising tasks and cut out unnecessary work and bureaucracy</li> <li>• Try to give warning of urgent jobs</li> <li>• Assist in the scheduling of work to ensure adequate and appropriate resources</li> <li>• Ensure job demands are matched in terms of quantity, complexity and intensity to individuals skills and abilities</li> <li>• Support staff when undertaking new and unfamiliar tasks</li> <li>• Meet regularly to review workload</li> <li>• Avoid encouraging staff to work long hours, take work home or build excessive flexi.</li> <li>• Encourage staff to take annual leave allowance</li> </ul>	

<p><b>4 Work Pressures – Low:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the work boring, monotonous or unchallenging?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where reasonably practicable, rotate boring and repetitive jobs</li> <li>• Where possible increase the variety of tasks – through projects, shadowing etc</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5 Relationships at Work:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is employee subject to personal harassment – verbal and/or behaviour?</li> <li>• Are relationships at work strained?</li> <li>• Is there a high probability of friction and anger between colleagues?</li> <li>• Is bullying an issue?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage team working</li> <li>• Encourage team members to give open and honest feedback to each other</li> <li>• Demonstrate and encourage appreciation of others</li> <li>• Promote an atmosphere of mutual respect</li> <li>• Ensure all staff are aware that inappropriate behaviour at work will not be tolerated.</li> <li>• Refer to the Dignity at Work Policy and attend the training to support this policy</li> <li>• Seek the support of HR if an allegation of harassment or bullying is made</li> </ul>	
<p><b>6 Support:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If work demands increase or are outside an individuals' ability to cope are colleagues/manager available to help and support?</li> <li>• Is employee given the opportunity of supportive feedback on the work they do?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how to raise concerns and call on support</li> <li>• Attend a Stress Management Workshop</li> <li>• Encourage/enhance team working /support.</li> <li>• Discuss workflow and support mechanisms at regular team meetings</li> <li>• Encourage open communication with colleagues and line management.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>7 Change:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are employees consulted / updated about changes at work that affect them?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure clear and appropriate communication on proposed changes</li> <li>• Ensure individuals understand the reasons for change and the likely</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are employees clear about how change will affect them in practice?</li> <li>• Is there adequate consultation about workplace issues / changes?</li> </ul>			<p>timescales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure adequate consultation wherever possible and provide opportunities for comment and input.</li> <li>• Give support to individuals during the change process</li> </ul>	
<p><b>8 Training:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is additional training required to support individuals in undertaking job/role?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training as required</li> <li>• Ensure PDRs are properly conducted and followed up.</li> <li>• Ensure changes to role are supported with relevant training as necessary.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>9 Physical Demands and Work Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does role involve excessive physical demands such as heavy lifting, standing for long periods of time, repetitive movements, hand held vibration tools etc?</li> <li>• Is the work environment adequate / comfortable – Temp/humidity, lighting, noise, welfare facilities etc?</li> <li>• Is there a risk to physical safety and emotional/mental wellbeing from service users, members of the public etc?</li> <li>• Is there a risk to physical safety and emotional/mental wellbeing due to lone working?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a H&amp;S Risk Assessment</li> <li>• Remove excessive and unreasonable demands</li> <li>• Check what Health Surveillance support can be provided by Occupational Health</li> <li>• Encourage suggestions on how to improve work environment – and give these due consideration.</li> <li>• Undertake an H and S risk assessment to manage potential risk from service users and/or public.</li> <li>• Undertake an H and S risk assessment if employee is a lone worker.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>10 Other Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any other issues / stressors that need to be taken account of – e.g. difficulties at home, unexpected life changes, traumatic incidents, etc?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support individuals where possible</li> <li>• Offer to support them through referring to Welfare Adviser/Counsellor.</li> <li>• Seek advice from HR on supporting employees with long term health conditions</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any on-going/long term physical or mental health conditions that may be a contributing factor?</li> <li>• Has GP/Occupational Health identified any issues for consideration ?</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek advice from Occupational Health on any identified medical issues for consideration</li> </ul>	
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\*The Possible Action/s column details some suggestions for consideration / action. This list is not exhaustive.

\*The Action/s column should include details of what the issues are, what measures are currently in place, what improvements can be made and what actions will be taken to make the improvements.

**Date for review**.....