



*Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute
Valuation Joint Board*

POLICY ON STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

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Please contact a member of the Health & Safety Group





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Policy on Stress in the Workplace

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This Policy sets out to ensure that stress is properly managed, positively addressed and where possible, prevented. The Policy is based on guidance provided by a number of Health & Safety Executive (HSE) documents relating to the Tackling of Stress and Stress Management Standards, as well as West Dunbartonshire Council's Policy on Stress in the Workplace.

2. WHAT IS STRESS

- 2.1 Many people can be confused over the difference between pressure and stress, even though there is a great deal of difference between the two. We all experience pressure on a daily basis, and need it to motivate us and enable us to perform at our best – but if we experience too much pressure without the opportunity to recover, we can feel unable to cope and stress is the result.

The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as being “*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them*”. This definition makes an important distinction between the positive effects of reasonable pressure and challenge, which can be motivational and stimulating, and the negative effects which result when a person considers the demands placed upon them to be excessive or unreasonable. If a person considers that there is an imbalance between demands upon them and the resources they have available this can lead to stress.

Stress can happen to anyone, and should not be seen as a weakness. Instead, an individual needs help to deal with the pressures which are contributing to the stress.

3. DUTY OF CARE

- 3.1 Under UK law, employers have a duty of care to ensure their employees are not harmed by work-related stress. They also have a duty to assess the risk arising from hazards at work, including stress. The VJB takes these responsibilities seriously and will assess the nature and scale of stress risks in the workplace and take action where necessary.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

- 4.1 The VJB will promote a supportive environment in which:
- Our organisational arrangements will be risk assessed (see Risk Assessment)
 - Individuals can ask for assistance
 - Confidential support is available to employees
 - If and when potential hazards are identified, action is taken to prevent stress wherever possible

5. AIMS OF THE POLICY

- 5.1 This Policy aims to ensure that:-
- Employees understand that work related stress and health issues are treated seriously and that consistent and clear guidance is provided for managers and employees to help them deal with stress issues
 - There is a consistent approach from managers in dealing with stress to promote a healthier, motivated workforce
 - There is a greater awareness of the causes of stress and measures exist that can reduce or prevent it, including providing confidential support to employees experiencing work or personal problems which cause them stress
 - By effectively tackling stress where it is identified or has the potential to become a problem, the result could be improved attendance and reduced staff turnover.

6. ASSESSING RISK FACTORS

6.1 Everyone can experience pressure at some time in his or her life and pressure often helps individuals to feel stimulated and can improve performance. However, when pressure is excessive, prolonged or comes from too many directions at the same time problems can arise. Excessive pressure challenges our ability to cope by creating a feeling of being out of control and when demands become excessive or unreasonable, it may become increasingly difficult, if not impossible to cope.

No job should itself be inherently stressful. It is the interaction of a person with his/her job, and the individual's perceptions of this, that can result in stress. What is stressful for one person may not be for another.

6.2 This Policy is aimed at:

- Supporting and equipping managers with the ability to recognise and identify areas where employees may experience unnecessary pressures which can lead to harmful levels of stress.
- Introducing practical methods by which these can be prevented, reduced and/or controlled.

6.3 This policy incorporates the HSE's Management Standards for work-related stress and incorporates a risk assessment approach based on the HSE's "5 Steps to Risk Assessment", as follows:

Step 1 – Identify the hazards

Step 2 – Decide who may be harmed and how

Step 3 – Evaluate the risk

Step 4 – Record the findings

Step 5 – Monitor & review

6.4 Step 1 – Identify the Hazards

There are many factors that can cause undue pressure and stress to employees. The HSE has identified six broad risk factors:

Demands – includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment.

Control – how much say a person has in the way he/she does the work.

Support – includes the encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line managers and colleagues.

Relationships – includes the promotion of 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 a person doesn't have conflicting roles.

Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

It is widely recognised that stress can be caused or made worse by a number of situations such as:-

- Problems at work, long hours or shift working, too much or too little work, job insecurity, organisational change, lack of control and conflicting/heavy demands.
- Actual or threatened violence, bullying or harassment
- Relationship problems – with a spouse, partner, children, friends or colleagues
- Financial difficulties
- Lack of training, absence of clarity on role and standards

This list is indicative of factors which can cause stress and is not exhaustive.

6.5 Step 2 – Decide Who May be Harmed and How

Managers will monitor employees' work situations and look for potential hazards, which might be organisational and/or personal. As part of this process, managers should be aware of the earlier statement that what is stressful for one person may not be for another. Tools which can assist in this part of the process are sickness absence records and staff satisfaction surveys. The formal stress audit questionnaire attached is a tool produced by the HSE and it will be issued to all staff and examined on return to assist with the identification of existing and/or potential problems. The results will be circulated to all staff.

6.6 Step 3 – Evaluate the Risk

Using the information gathered in Step 2, the VJB's performance in relation to each of the six risk factors can be determined, and priority areas identified.

Finding solutions to the problems which have been highlighted is not the sole responsibility of the Management Team or the Health & Safety Group, rather the process should involve staff at all levels by means of team meetings or temporary focus groups set up to tackle specific issues.

The evaluation process will incorporate:

- Asking ourselves if we are doing enough to alleviate/prevent stress
- The identification of control measures already in place
- Consideration of anything else that needs to be done

6.7 Step 4 – Record the Findings

The joint consultation process between management and other employees should provide identifiable targets and actions, and Action Plans will be prepared, based on the findings of the Risk Assessments which have been completed, and publicised to all staff involved.

Examples of Risk Assessment items are:

- Agreed changes in some management procedures
- Improved communication channels
- Management development training, e.g. listening skills, effective feedback, appraisals, delegation

6.8 Step 5 – Monitor & Review

On an annual basis the risk identification process and live Action Plans will be examined by the Health & Safety Group to ensure they are being enacted, and to identify possible improvements, by listening to staff comments (from the annual issue of the questionnaire – which may be incorporated into the general staff feedback questionnaires) and tackling strategies that are not working.

7. SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES

- 7.1 The VJB is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment, which encourages all employees to advise their manager when they consider their health and wellbeing is being affected. The VJB will also ensure that employees are aware that confidential and supportive advice is available from the Welfare Officer and the Employee Counselling Service provided by West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC). Management will identify personal development needs and introduce measures to ensure employees are fully equipped to perform the duties of their post.
- 7.2 Employees can arrange to have an informal meeting with their manager or another member of the Management Team (since the stress may be arising from difficulties they have with their own line manager) to discuss any stress they may be experiencing. Consideration will be given to possible changes to the job and/or working practices. A further informal meeting will be arranged to review whether any changes made have had the anticipated effect. A record of any meetings should be kept using Form VJB/STR/01 (see Appendix 1). These records will be maintained by the Depute Assessors.

- 7.3 Employees have a responsibility to themselves and others to minimise excessive pressures and demands by behaving responsibly, acting reasonably, self-assessing their development needs and ensuring their own wellbeing. Where employees are experiencing difficulties they will be encouraged to contact the Employee Counselling Service provided by West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) for additional support. Appointments can be made at any time, including during working hours and employees may confidentially attend with full pay to benefit from individual counselling.
- 7.4 Further details regarding the Counselling Service, including information on self-referral, are available from West Dunbartonshire Council's Personnel Intranet Site or West Dunbartonshire Council Personnel Circular No:11-00 (although the contact names are now Karen Bell or Lyn Hughes).
- 7.5 Employees can also obtain support from their Trade Union Representative or through their own GP. Any action and/or support that the Council provides should not be seen as an alternative to seeking professional medical assistance.

8. MANAGERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

- 8.1 Managers have a clear role in supporting this Policy by identifying and preventing stress risks. Managers need to be alert to the physical effects of stress such as increased absences, behavioural and/or mood changes and lowering levels of performance in employees.

Managers should:

- Be prepared to challenge organisational arrangements
 - Ensure clarity in relation to job requirements
 - Ensure there is effective 2-way communication in the workplace
 - Ensure employees have been adequately trained for their jobs
 - Fairly and consistently manage poor performance and poor attendance
 - Record actions taken on VJB/STR/01
 - Where necessary refer employees to support services
 - Seek advice and guidance from WDC's Health & Safety Officers, Personnel Officers and/or Welfare Officers, via the VJB's Management Team
 - Be aware of the services provided by the Employee Counselling Service
 - Record Absences certified as being due to stress, and inform the Depute Assessor accordingly
- 8.2 Managers will be equipped to confidently address stress in the workplace with any training needs identified through the Personal Training and Development process.

8.3 Many existing VJB and WDC Policies adopted by the VJB also support the commitments expressed in this Policy and these include:-

- Maximising Attendance Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Special Leave Scheme
- Training and Development Policy

9. EMPLOYEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

9.1 Employees should:-

- Familiarise themselves with this Policy, to enable them to have an understanding of the risk factors which cause stress, and equip them to participate fully in any discussions
- Bring problems to the attention of Managers, either formally by using form VJB/STR/01, or informally by simply raising the matter with their line manager and talking it through
- Be honest with the causes of anxieties/stresses
- Be aware of the services of the Employee Counselling Service provided by West Dunbartonshire Council
- Be prepared to self-assess individual performance against the requirements of the job
- Complete training as required, and read all communications
- Consider volunteering to participate in discussions and on any focus groups set up to tackle identified stress issues
- Recognise that they have a responsibility for their own personal stress and try to help themselves where possible

10. ILL-HEALTH

10.1 Where an employee considers he/she is suffering from ill health due to work related stress, this should immediately be brought to the attention of the line manager (or other member of the Management Team, if appropriate), who will assess the options available to provide assistance. These could include the following:-

- Coaching, assistance in prioritising work, guidance, mentoring, training, and where possible redistribution of workload
- Amending the previous job/responsibilities, where practicable, to remove the causes of stress
- Interim changes to working hours
- Redeployment into a less demanding role, where an alternative job exists within the VJB
- Employee Counselling Service
- Monitoring and review of situation
- Personal support from WDC's Welfare Officer
- Medical advice from WDC's Medical Adviser

11. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

11.1 The Management Team will collate details on the overall levels of stress in the organisation, so that action can be focussed where someone is experiencing stress. This information may include:-

- Recorded absences certified as being due to stress
- Relevant harassment/grievance complaints
- Levels of sickness or absenteeism within a job type or specific section
- Unusually high levels of staff turnover within a section

12. LONG-TERM BENEFIT

Employees who have their health and well being looked after are often more productive, which provides job satisfaction to the employee and a contented and effective staff member for the VJB.



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NOTIFICATION OF WORKPLACE STRESS

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT RECORDS ARE KEPT ON WORK ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR HEALTH. PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND PASS TO YOUR LINE MANAGER OR A MEMBER OF THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

PART 1- Employee Details

1. Name:

Section:

Place of Work:

Job Designation:

Day and date of notification of work related stress:

2. Do you feel any of the following have caused the stress you are experiencing?
Please tick any of the following boxes

Your Work

- Boring or repetitive work
- Unacceptable target times
- Lack of training
- Heavy workload

Responsibilities

- Unfair allocation of duties
- Expanded responsibility
- Duties outwith remit

Relationships:

- Feeling ostracised or not seen to be part of the team
- Poor relationships with colleagues
- Bullying
- Racial harassment
- Sexual harassment.

Balancing Work and Home:

- Inflexible work schedules
- Taking work home

Working Conditions:

- Unsafe working conditions
- Poor equipment/facilities

Management/Supervision:

- No personal control over the work activity
- Lack of communication and consultation
- Lack of support and poor delegation skills
- Fails to listen

- Other** (please give details)

3. In your opinion what action could prevent the stress you feel:

4. Please describe the symptoms you have experienced:

NAME..... **DESIGNATION**.....

SIGNATURE..... **DATE**.....

MANAGER'S RESPONSE

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT RECORDS ARE KEPT ON CONCERNS RAISED BY EMPLOYEES AS CAUSING THEM STRESS. PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM DETAILING ACTIONS TAKEN

PLEASE DETAIL ACTIONS YOU FEEL ARE NEEDED FROM YOUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE EMPLOYEE

1. Please provide details of actions discussed and timescales set:

2. Have you suggested Employee Counselling Service if it is relevant: **YES/NO**

3. Please detail date of next meeting to review actions:

4. Please comment on the outcome of the actions taken:

NAME..... DESIGNATION

SIGNATURE..... DATE.....

