

Stress Background Information

STRESS: PROMPTS TO SOLUTIONS

From HSE Guidance HSG218: Managing The Causes of Work Related Stress

Some Things To Consider If You Have Identified A Problem With Demands

Workload

- Develop personal work plans to ensure staff know what the job includes
- Hold weekly team meetings to discuss the anticipated workload for the forthcoming week (and to deal with any planned absences)
- Hold monthly meetings with individuals to discuss their workload and any anticipated challenges
- Adjust work patterns to cope with peaks and staff absences (this needs to be fair and agreed with employees)
- Ensure sufficient resources are available for staff to be able to do their jobs (time, equipment, etc)
- Provide training (formal or informal) to help staff prioritise, or information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities.

Competency

- Devise a system to keep training records up to date to ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job
- Consider implementing personal development/training plans which enable individuals to identify development/ training opportunities which can then be discussed with management
- Link training to performance monitoring arrangements to ensure it is effective and sufficient

Working Patterns

- Review working hours and shift work systems – have these been agreed with staff?
- Consider changes to start and end times to help employees to cope with pressures external to the organisation (eg, child care, poor commuting routes etc)
- Develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours

Physical environment and violence

- Ensure your risk assessments for physical hazards and risks are up to date
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse. Take steps to deal with this in consultation with employees and others who can help (eg, the police, charities)
- Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations (eg, difficult phone calls, aggressive members of the public)

Do....

- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding
- Provide realistic deadlines
- Provide adequate training and realistic resources for doing the job
- Design jobs that provide stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills
- Provide sufficient challenge /pressure to keep staff motivated and interested in their work

- Attend to the physical environment – take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, noise levels, vibration, dust etc wherever possible
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse and take steps to deal with it

Don't.....

- Ask people to do tasks they are not trained to do
- Encourage staff to take work home with them
- Allocate more work to a person or team unless they have the resources to cope with it
- Allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours
- Ask Young People (under 18 years of age) to take on work that might be beyond their emotional maturity.

Some Things To Consider If You Have Identified A Problem With Control

- Agree systems that enable staff to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken (eg, through project meetings, one-to-ones, performance reviews)
- Hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the anticipated output and methods of working. Provide opportunities for discussion and input
- Allocate responsibility to teams rather than individuals to take projects forward:

Discuss and define teams at the start of a project

Agree objectives, roles, timescales and the provision of management support (eg, through regular progress meetings)

- Talk about the way decisions are made – is there scope for more involvement?
- Talk about the skills people need and if they believe they are able to use these to good effect. How else would they like to use their skills?

Do....

- Allow staff some control over the pace of their work
- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work
- Negotiate shift-work schedules

Don't....

- Monitor employees movements in detail (including breaks)
- Monitor working style, unless necessary (eg, where there are child protection issues)
- Ask staff to stay late without notice

Some Things To Consider If You Have Identified A Problem With Support

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to talk about any emerging issues or pressures
- Hold regular liaison/team meetings to discuss unit pressures
- Include 'work related stress/emerging pressures' as a standing item for staff meetings and/or performance reviews
- Seek examples of how people would like to have, or have, received good support from managers or colleagues – can these be adopted across the unit?
- Ask how employees would like to access managerial support, eg 'open door' policies, or agreed times when managers are able to discuss emerging pressures
- Introduce flexibility in work schedules (where possible) to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments
- Develop training arrangements and refresher sessions to ensure training and competencies are up to date and appropriate for the core functions of people's jobs
- Talk about ways the organisation could provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside work.
- Disseminate information on other areas of support (eg, HR, Occ Health, counsellors, charities)
- Offer training in basic counselling skills/ access to counsellors

Do....

- Ensure staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of the job
- Provide constructive supportive advice at annual appraisal
- Provide flexibility in work schedules, where possible
- Allow phased return to work after long term sickness absence
- Hold regular liaison/ team meetings
- Provide opportunities for career development
- Deal sensitively with staff experiencing problems outside work

Don't....

- Trivialise the problems of others
- Discriminate against people on ground of sex, race or disability or any other reason

Some Things To Consider If You Have Identified A Problem With Relationships

- Develop a written policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour at work – communicate this to staff
- Agree and implement procedures to prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work – communicate this to staff
- Agree and implement a confidential reporting system to enable the reporting of unacceptable behaviour
- Agree and implement a grievance and disciplinary procedure for dealing with unacceptable behaviour – circulate and/or display these
- Select or build teams which have the right blend of expertise and experience for new projects
- Provide training to aid staff deal with and defuse difficult situations
- Encourage good communication and provide appropriate training to aid skill development (eg listening skills, confidence building etc)
- Discuss how individuals work together and how they can build positive relationships
- Identify ways to celebrate success (eg informal lunches/ wash-up meetings at the end of a project)

Do...

- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in work teams
- Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers
- Provide support for staff who work in isolation
- Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other
- Agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure people are aware of these

Don't....

- Allow any bullying or harassment

Some Things To Consider If You Have Identified A Problem With Role

- Hold team meetings to enable members to clarify their role and to discuss any possible role conflict
- Display team/department targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual role
- Agree specific standards of performance for jobs and individual tasks and review periodically
- Introduce personal work plans which are aligned to the outputs of the unit
- Introduce or revise job descriptions to help ensure the core functions of the post are clear
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure individuals are clear about their role and know what is planned for the coming months
- Develop suitable induction arrangements for new staff – make sure all members of the team understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit

Do....

- Provide a clear job description
- Define work structures clearly, so that all team members know who is doing what, and why
- Give all new members of staff a thorough induction to your organisation
- Define work objectives (eg through a personal work plan)
- Avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of the business and the customer

Don't...

- Make changes to the scope of someone's job, or their responsibilities (eg at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what is required of them, and accepts it.

Some Things To Consider If You Have Identified A Problem With Change

- Ensure all staff are aware of why the change is happening – agree a system for doing this
- Define and explain the key steps of the change. Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the programme
- Establish a system to communicate new developments quickly
- Agree methods of communication and frequency.
- Ensure staff are aware of the impact of change on their jobs
- Provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change. Have an 'open door' policy to help staff who want to talk to their managers about how jobs might be developed and changed
- Review unit and individual work plans after the change to ensure unit and individual objectives are clear.

Do...

- Explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) takes place
- Consult staff at an early stage, and throughout the change process
- Involve staff in the planning process so that they understand how their work fits in.

Don't...

- Delay communicating new developments
- Underestimate the effects of minor changes.