CORPORATE HEALTH & SAFETY - schools – stress management



# STRESS MANAGEMENT

# GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS



## LEGISLATION

* Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
* Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

* Identify through a risk assessment and application of the Stress Management Standards, whether there is a systemic issues with stress in the workplace
* Ensure that a policy and procedures on stress management are in place
* Ensure that where an individual informs you that they have stress that you consider this and take appropriate action
* Ensure that support services and measures are in place for any individual who is suffering from stress

## INTRODUCTION

Employers have a legal duty to their employees to take reasonable care for their safety at work. Up to the beginning of the 1990’s this duty almost exclusively concerned physical injuries. Since then, the law has developed to include a duty to take reasonable care for their safety from mental, psychological or psychiatric injuries that emanate from workplace stress.

Stress is defined as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’. Stress is not the same as pressure. Being under pressure often improves performance, and can be a good thing.

However when pressures become excessive, that can lead to stress. Too much work related stress can affect workers' health. Long-term or (severe) stress can, result in actual physical and/or mental illness. Failure to tackle stress at work could give rise to enforcement action or legal complaints (such as personal injury claims).

## STRESS IN EDUCATION

The main issues raised by those in educational establishments are:

* Long working hours
* Excessive workload
* Pressures of school inspections
* Providing cover for teacher shortages and absences
* Poor management
* Disruptive pupil behaviour

To assess the potential for and control of stress, it is important to ascertain at what level, if any, an issue with stress at work exists. A number of actions can be undertaken as follows:

* Staff can complete a confidential questionnaire
* Sickness absence levels can be reviewed
* Employee turnover figures can be reviewed
* Performance appraisals can be reviewed to identify if staff have expressed any concerns
* Stress Management Standards can be reviewed to determine compliance

## STRESS MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

To assist employers in meeting their legal requirements, the HSE have introduced ‘Stress Management Standards’. The Standards are intended to help and encourage employers to meet these existing legal obligations (to assess and control stress). They help measure an organisation’s performance in managing work-related stress.

The Standards look at the six key areas of work that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress.

Information on the Standards in available from: [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm)

## TAKING ACTION

Best practice is to take a more proactive stance employing a Stress Management Strategyconsisting of a Primary, Secondary and Tertiary level of intervention as follows:

Primary: The primary intervention is concerned with identifying the possible causes of stress plus the level of risk to individuals and the organisation as a whole. This will be achieved through the process of risk assessment. For this level of intervention to be effective it is vital that all those involved both understand the issue of work-related stress and are committed to taking action.

Secondary: The secondary intervention sets out to improve the overall situation in the workplace by implementing any recommendations identified in the risk assessment. A Stress Management Policy, if not already in existence, would be drawn up at this stage and circulated to all staff stating clearly the organisation’s written policy on stress.

Tertiary: This stage deals with the treatment and rehabilitation of those individuals who have suffered ill health as a result of stress. Support schemes are usually employed at this stage. These can be obtained through the Occupational Health section at the Town Hall.

## INDIVIDUALS

If an individual expresses that they are suffering from stress or they are signed off sick with stress/work-related illness, establishments should:

* Try to address the source(s) of the stress based upon the Stress Management Standards
* Involve the employee and personnel in decisions

### Further Information

Additional information in respect of the stress standards can be found at: [www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm)