

Managing Stress at Work Policy and Procedure

HR9.7 Employment Policies

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1. Introduction
   1. To provide a framework to assist MHA and colleagues to identify and address the causes and symptoms of stress where it has an actual or potential negative impact on their wellbeing in the workplace. MHA recognises its’ statutory duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and wellbeing of our colleagues.
   2. MHA will seek to support those colleagues who, whilst their stress doesn’t impact on the workplace or their performance, are still suffering the consequences of stress.
2. Scope and Purpose
   1. This policy is for all MHA colleagues.
3. What is Stress?
   1. Whilst MHA recognises that we may all feel pressure from time to time to complete a piece of work or meet a deadline, stress is distinctively different.
   2. Stress is commonly defined as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.
   3. Stress can have negative effects on an individual, including:
   * Fatigue
   * Anxiety and depression
   * Low self-esteem
   * Adverse effects on performance
   * Problems sleeping
   * Other health problems, such as migraine, raised blood pressure, increased alcohol use, etc.
   * “Burnout”, physical and emotional exhaustion caused by severe or prolonged stress.
   1. Stress can also have the following effects on the organisation:
   * Increased levels of absenteeism and staff sickness
   * Increased staff turnover
   * low staff morale
   * Increased number of accidents, mistakes and other incidents
   * Increased levels of conflict
4. Addressing Stress and the Causes of Stress
   1. If you are experiencing stress or signs of stress you should report it and seek support, at the earliest opportunity, be that from your line manager, our Employee Assistance Programme or other sources e.g. Chaplaincy, HR or if appropriate to your circumstances and the causes of your stress from relevant external resources.
   2. Any request will be dealt with in a confidential and supportive manner.
   3. The responsibility for addressing stress and its’ causes lies with all both Operations and Support Services and these responsibilities are detailed below.
5. Operations
   1. Job design – MHA will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that jobs will be designed in such a manner that:
   * The role and responsibilities are clearly defined and communicated.
   * Colleagues receive appropriate training and equipment in order to discharge their role and responsibilities competently.
   * A safe work environment (including appropriate equipment) is provided and maintained.
   * The requirements and targets of the role will be achievable and realistic.
6. Management
   1. Inconsistent, indifferent, or bullying styles of management are not acceptable within MHA and where identified will be addressed.
   2. During periods of change the levels of uncertainty suffered by individuals inevitably increase, which can often lead to anxiety and stress. MHA will seek to reduce this to a minimum by a supportive management style along with regular and effective communication and information.
   3. Managers at all levels will remind their colleagues to take regular breaks and annual leave and lead by example on both issues.
   4. Encourage a culture where experiencing or discussing stress is not seen as a sign of weakness.
   5. Ensure that colleagues experiencing stress are supported and signposted to additional support. This may involve use of the Stress Risk Assessment at Appendix 2 taking into account the HSE Management Standards at Appendix 1.
   6. Consider interim or long-term actions (e.g. flexible working) which may reduce and/or alleviate the causes of the stress and/or its’ symptoms.
   7. Ensure that those who have been absent due to stress are appropriately supported on their return.
   8. Ensure colleagues are appropriately trained and provided with the necessary equipment and resources to undertake their role in a competent and safe manner.
   9. Seek to plan workloads to avoid last minute rushes and unreasonable deadlines being placed on colleagues.
   10. Ensure that regular 1:1s and appraisals take place as these provide an opportunity to spot and discuss the early signs of stress and its’ possible adverse effects.
7. Health and Safety Team
   1. Where a colleague identifies a stress related concern they should raise this with their line manager in the first instance.
   2. The line manager can contact the Health and Safety team for advice and support on any issue and should always do so where either a problem persists or is beyond their experience or capacity to address.
   3. Depending on the issues and its’ impact on the colleague(s) raising or being affected by the concern, HR and the other support below can also be accessed.
8. Human Resources / People Development
   1. Provide guidance to line managers and colleagues on this policy and its’ operation.
   2. Provide analysis of the reasons for absence to identify any actions which may be required to reduce absence and support colleagues.
   3. Provide access to our Occupational Health Service for advice on those who have been off work due to stress, and how their return to work can be managed and sustained, and to support those at work to remain healthy and effective at work.
   4. Work with the Health and Safety Team to ensure that MHA has a robust stress risk assessment process and that other stress management tools are developed as appropriate.
9. Colleagues
   1. Raise a concern with their line manager or the HR team if they believe they or another colleague are suffering from stress.
   2. Ensure that their own actions, inactions or words do not add to or cause stress in others.
   3. Attend any relevant training in relation to stress awareness or stress management.
   4. Work with their line manager to identify any work-related causes of stress and potential remedies for that stress.
   5. MHA will monitor the following areas in order that the possible contribution of excessive stress might be considered:
   * Staff retention rates.
   * Sickness absence reasons.
   * Staff survey.
   1. The results of each monitoring exercise will be considered with a view to taking appropriate action where adverse trends begin to appear or where specific areas are highlighted as deserving particular attention and support.
10. Volunteers
    1. Support for volunteers is detailed in the Volunteering Policy, and support should reflect the principles of this policy.
11. Roles and Responsibilities

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Role | Responsibilities |
| **All MHA Colleagues** | All those persons referred to within the Scope of this policy are required to adhere to its’ terms and conditions. Colleagues are responsible for ensuring they read understand and comply with this policy. |
| **Line Manager** | Individual line managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is shared with colleagues and applied within their own area. |

1. Training and Monitoring
   1. Compliance is assessed through direct observation, monitoring, and supervision of our colleagues.
2. Communication and Dissemination
   1. This policy is disseminated and implemented within all MHA services through MHA’s channels of communication.
   2. Each colleague’s line manager must ensure that all teams are aware of their roles, responsibilities.
   3. This policy will be available to the people we support and their representatives in alternate formats, as required.
   4. Any review of this policy will include consultation with our colleagues, review of support planning, incident reports, quality audits and feedback from other agencies.
   5. Queries and issues relating to this policy should be referred to the Standards and Policy Team [policies@mha.org.uk](mailto:policies@mha.org.uk)
3. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
   1. Equality, Diversity, and Impact Assessment to be complete at next full review.
4. Resources
   1. MHA policy documents, procedures, and guidance
   * Volunteering Policy
   * Menopause Policy and Guidance
   * Sickness Absence Policy
5. Appendices
   * Appendix 1 - HSE Management Standards
   * Appendix 2 – Stress Risk Assessment Action Plan and Guidance

Appendix 1 - HSE Management Standards

| Main Causes of Stress: | What you can do about it: | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. **Demands** | | |
| * Colleagues indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and * Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. | * The organisation provides colleagues with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work * Colleagues’ skills and abilities are matched to the job demands * Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of colleagues * Colleagues' concerns about their work environment are addressed | |
| 1. **Control** | | |
| * Colleagues indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work * Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns | * Where possible, colleagues have control over their pace of work * Colleagues are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work * Where possible, colleagues are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work * The organisation encourages colleagues   to develop their skills   * Colleagues have a say over when breaks can be taken * Colleagues are consulted over their work patterns | |
| 1. **Support** | | |
| * Colleagues indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and managers; and * Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns | * The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support colleagues * Systems are in place to enable and encourage line managers to support their reports * Systems are in place to enable and encourage colleagues to support their colleagues * Colleagues know what support is available and how and when to access it * Colleagues know how to access the required resources to do their job * Colleagues receive regular and constructive feedback | |
| 1. **Relationships** | |
| * Colleagues indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work * Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns | * The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness * Colleagues share information relevant to their work * The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour * Systems are in place to enable and encourage line managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour * Systems are in place to enable and encourage colleagues to report unacceptable behaviour |
| 1. **Role** | | |
| * Colleagues indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities * Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns | * The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon colleagues are compatible * The organisation provides information to enable colleagues to understand their role and responsibilities * The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon colleagues are clear * Systems are in place to enable colleagues to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities | |
| 1. **Change** | | |
| * Colleagues indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change * Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns | * The organisation provides colleagues with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes * The organisation ensures adequate consultation on changes and provides opportunities for colleagues to influence proposals * Colleagues are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, colleagues are given training to support any changes in their jobs * Colleagues are aware of timetables for changes * Colleagues have access to relevant support | |

Appendix 2 Stress Risk Assessment Action Plan and Guidance

**Guidelines for completing the individual stress action plan**

**Background**

The Stress Risk Assessment aims to encourage colleagues and managers to work together to address issues that night be causing or contributing to stress. A key part of this process is helping the colleague to identify the issues they feel are involved and suggesting ways in which things might be improved.

Whilst we would always advise a colleague to approach their line manager if they are experiencing any concerns, we do appreciate that sometimes a colleague may feel that they can’t talk to a line manager about stress related issues, particularly if they feel they will be treated unsympathetically or if they believe the line manager is part of the problem.

This document can be used to help a colleague identify their areas of concern and then be used to inform a discussion about those concerns with their line manager.

As an alternative if the colleague isn’t able to have such a conversation they can send this document to their manager of the HR department.

This document may also be of use to those colleagues who find their role has become more challenging of late or who are absent from work and seeking to return, potentially in conjunction with a referral to Occupational Health and the report they subsequently produce.

It may also be of use as a tool for a line manager to help support a colleague who maybe hasn’t recognised or acknowledged that they are struggling.

When completing a Stress Action Plan, the person concerned can take into account the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards (detailed above).

These Management Standards are simply a framework to help organise a persons’ thoughts and structure a conversation about: -

1. What might be causing them to feel the effects of stress and
2. What can be done to reduce, remove, and/or manage the effects of stress.

It is not necessary for all six HSE factors to be relevant or contributing in order to be suffering from stress.

A colleague may request a Stress Risk Assessment form due to concerns they may about how they may feel towards work or in themself.

Colleagues or line managers can always approach the HR team to discuss their situation or concerns, and HR will seek to assist them, or sign post them to other potential sources of support e.g. Employee Assistance Programme or third party organisations as appropriate.

**Section 1 - The Stress Self-Assessment**

This section is to be completed by the colleague.

Line managers would not usually be involved in assisting a colleague to complete this section but if the colleague wishes them to help there is no reason why they should not do so.

The aim of completing the form is twofold:

* + One, to establish what the colleagues’ current situation is in terms of their role and workplace relations etc and,
  + Secondly, for the colleague and line manager to consider what changes or adjustments to any of the areas of concern identified might help in addressing those concerns.

Once the colleague has completed this section they should share it with their line manager who will set up a meeting to discuss the concerns raised.

The colleague can take someone along to support them at this meeting, if they wish.

At the meeting, the manager in discussion with the employee, completes Section 2.

Review dates should be agreed and further meetings arranged to check progress and to review the contents in case there have been any changes which need to be reflected in the Action Plan.

Both the colleague and the line manager should sign the form to show that it’s a true and accurate record of the discussion.

The line manager must keep a copy of the form and give one to the colleague. They should also arrange for a copy to go on the colleague’s personal file.

At each review meeting, the line manager and colleague should discuss the progress against agreed actions, and the colleagues’ “current” perceptions of the levels and effects of the stress they are experiencing.

The line manager should amend the form to show any new issues and agreed actions, and where there has been progress.

Again, both parties should sign the form, keep a copy and make sure one goes on the colleague’s personal file.

To assist colleagues in completing the form they may wish to take into account the following points:

* + Try to be as specific as you can, particularly when filling in the current situation and examples columns.

For example, a simple statement such as

* + “I can’t cope with my workload” doesn’t give much insight as to which issues are causing the stress

A better example would be

* + ’I can’t cope with my workload because the deadlines are too close together’

The sections which look at the future with regard to the colleagues’ role, responsibilities, work relations etc need to focus on what can be different and how they can be different.

These sections also need to take into account what can practicably be achieved.

Consequently, in terms of the above example about unrealistic deadlines it won’t be practical to ask for them to be removed altogether but it might be possible and/or appropriate to agree for them to be spread out over more days, or to be staggered across different points of a month.

Whilst MHA can most effectively influence work based issues the colleague can raise non-work issues under “other factors” as it may still be possible to make some alterations at work which may help the colleague.

**Section 2**

This should be completed by the line manager, but in full discussionwith the colleague.

When completing this section, it is important to focus on one issue or “activity” at a time and complete all columns of the form before moving to the next “activity”.

When looking at the “proposed solution” column it is important to focus as far as possible on simple clear actions and if any problems arise in delivering the “proposed solution” that this is reported back to the colleague in a timely manner and the Action Plan updated accordingly.

In the unlikely event that no solutions appear to be possible this should be recorded along with the “barriers” that have resulted in this situation.

It is important that the line manager and colleague agree and adhere to realistic review dates. If they need to be altered please ensure that the colleague is informed at the earliest opportunity.

It is also important to record if the meeting is an initial or review meeting.

**Colleague Stress Risk Assessment Form**

**To be completed by Colleague.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Role** | **Date** |

The Present - What is currently of concern to you about any of the following: your role, your working relations, or other aspects of your employment. (Please give specific examples and any necessary background information)

|  |
| --- |
| **My role** |
| **My working relations** |
| **Other factors** |

**Use additional sheet if required.**

The Future - What would you like to be different in the future? (Try to think about which things you can influence and which things you need assistance to change / influence)

|  |
| --- |
| **My role - What I can change or need help to change** |
| **My working relations - What I can change or need help to change** |
| **Other factors - What I can change or need help to change** |

**Use additional sheet if required.**

**Stress Action Plan**

To be completed jointly by the line manager and colleague. Please note when using a paper copy that the form size can be typed up and expanded electronically or you can use extra copies to ensure everything is captured.

Copy to be given to colleague and copy to be placed on file.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Colleague | | Line Manager | | Date  Initial / Review Meeting (circle as appropriate) | |
|  | **Role** | | **Working Relations** | | **Other factors** |
| Activity / Hazard  (Please detail relevant issues under as many headings as apply) |  | |  | |  |
| Resulting  concern(s)  (Please specify which concern applies to which heading Role, Working Relations etc) |  | | | | |
| Proposed solutions  (Please specify which solution applies to which heading Role, Working Relations etc) |  | | | | |
| Person(s) responsible  for solution |  | | | | |
| Support or resources required |  | | | | |
| Date Completed |  | | | | |
| Review – who / when |  | | | | |

1. Version Control

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Version | Version Date | Revision Description / Summary of Changes | Author and Review Panel | Next Review Date |
| 2 | November 2024 | * Transferred to standard template * Review date extended | Author  Standards and Policy Manager | February 2025 |