[Company Name / Logo]

Template Document: Stress at Work Policy

Introduction

This document defines stress, explains its symptoms and encourages staff who feel they are suffering from the negative effects of stress to come forward and seek help.

Legal Considerations

The following pieces of legislation apply to this policy:

* Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
* Protection from Harassment Act 1997
* Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
* Equality Act 2010.

How to Generate Your Policy

Throughout the policy, you will see <red text> for any details that should be customised with your own relevant information. Text in *blue italics* is for your information only and should be removed from the final document.

Customising Your Policy

**Delete this page by clicking Insert -> Cover Page -> Remove Current Cover Page. You should delete this prior to updating your table of contents, to ensure that the page references are all correct.**

Stress at Work Policy

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1. Purpose
   1. We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
   2. Being under pressure often improves performance and can be a good thing. However, when those demands and pressures become excessive, this may lead to stress which can have an adverse impact on both working and personal lives.
   3. We aim to provide a working environment where stress is not seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence, and where employees who believe they are suffering from the negative effects of stress feel able to approach us in confidence, in order that the necessary support mechanisms can be put in place. In addition, we aim to assist those who may be suffering from workplace or personal stress by offering confidential support.

*<We advise that you make all your policies non-contractual to minimise the risk of a breach of contract claim, and also to enable ease of updating.>*

* 1. Therefore, this policy seeks to clarify our responsibilities in relation to stress management, raise awareness of the issue and how it can be recognised and outline the support available. This policy is not contractual, but indicates the way in which we plan to deal with the issue of stress at work.

1. Scope
   1. <Tailor to suit the range of workers in your business:> This policy applies to all employees at all levels within the business, including apprentices and those on fixed-term contracts.
2. Definitions
   1. The Health and Safety Executive defines **“stress”** as: “the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope.” In other words, stress occurs when the pressures on a person exceed their ability to deal with them.
3. The Causes and Symptoms of Stress
   1. Whilst most staff can benefit from a certain amount of pressure in their job as it helps with motivation, too much pressure can become overwhelming. Whilst stress itself is not an illness, the psychological impact can lead to conditions such as anxiety and depression, which in turn can lead to physical conditions.
   2. There are two types of stress. Acute stress is usually caused by a particular deadline, general time pressure or anticipation of a task which the employee will find difficult. Most people have the ability to anticipate and deal with episodes of acute stress and accept them as a normal part of working life.
   3. Chronic stress can develop over time as a consequence of continual pressure being placed on the employee which can cause adaptive changes in behaviour giving rise to the symptoms described below. It is this stress that can cause serious physiological and psychological problems for the individual. Employees may show psychological symptoms which can be grouped into four categories:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Fixation:   * repetition of arguments in meetings * belligerence * refusal to listen to advice and suggestions * using solutions known to be inadequate | Regression:   * crying * arguments * immature behaviour * personality clashes * sulking * temper * emotional responses |
| Withdrawal:   * arriving late * leaving early * long lunch breaks * absenteeism * resigning | Aggressive behaviour:   * malicious gossip * criticism of others * working to rule * strikes * graffiti * damaging property * shouting |

* 1. Stress can be caused by a variety of reasons including:
* heavy (or light) targets or workloads
* insufficient resources
* ineffective equipment or tools
* long working hours
* rapid change and uncertainty
* harassment or bullying in the workplace
* boredom
* ill health
* personal relationship problems including separation and domestic abuse
* housing – moving, selling, eviction
* nuisance neighbours
* family concerns including caring responsibilities
* bereavement
* financial difficulties
* legal disputes.
  1. Symptoms might include:
* declining performance
* failure to meet deadlines
* loss of motivation
* poor concentration
* chronic tiredness and depression
* anxiety attacks
* headaches/migraines
* excessive drinking/smoking
* irritability, short temper and other “out of character” behaviour
* muscle tension (neck/back)
* raised blood pressure
* ulcers
* sleeplessness
* frustration/dissatisfaction and/or poor working relationships
* reduced productivity
* increased susceptibility to illness
* weight loss
* frequent short-term absences
* reduced appetite
* symptoms of mental illness or coronary heart disease.

It is important to bear in mind that stress may come under the definition of “disability”. If, in individual circumstances, a medical report confirms this to be the case, as with other disabilities, we will take steps to make any reasonable adjustments which may be recommended.

1. Our Responsibilities
   1. We aim to take reasonable steps to look after our employees' mental health and welfare, and to ensure that they do not have excessive demands placed on them by their jobs. As stress may also be caused by bullying, harassment and violence, we aim to provide a working environment that is, as far as is reasonably practicable, free from these influences. However, we are entitled to assume that all employees can cope with the normal day-to-day pressures of their job; if this is not the case, they should inform us.
   2. We recognise our responsibilities by:

* placing a high importance on the health, safety and welfare of all employees in the conduct of our business
* accepting the legal and moral obligation to provide and maintain a safe and healthy workplace
* providing a commitment to support employees who require help for stress-related problems
* providing information to employees about the harmful effects of stress to promote preventative action
* requiring our managers to be ambassadors of this policy and ensuring they set an example themselves in sensible working practices and consider how to get the best out of their teams without affecting their health.

1. Procedure
   1. Any employee who believes they are suffering from the negative effects of stress, rather than worrying about it, is encouraged firstly to speak to <specify whom, e.g. “their manager”>. Alternatively, they should speak with <insert job title, e.g. “the HR Manager”>.
   2. If necessary, we will carry out a stress risk assessment. This will include a review of the employee’s actual duties against those described in their job description. The risk assessment will identify pressures at work that could cause high and long-lasting levels of stress, identifying who could be affected by these pressures and taking appropriate steps to deal with them, such as lessening workload or transferring to other duties where appropriate. The results of the risk assessment will be communicated to those involved.
   3. Alternatively, during any performance reviews, analysis will be undertaken to ensure that employees are competent to fulfil their roles. Appropriate action will be taken to remedy any gaps in knowledge, skills or experience which may lead to stress, and to ensure that employees feel confident to undertake their roles to the best of their ability.
   4. The possibility of changing working conditions or making changes to reduce stress on the employee will be discussed, whilst recognising the needs of the employee, their work colleagues and the business.
   5. All employees should support their colleagues if they believe they are experiencing work-related stress, and should encourage them to talk to someone about it.
   6. If we are aware that an employee is suffering from stress, we will take such steps as are appropriate, firstly to try to manage the situation. This may include reviewing workloads, providing training or improved equipment, or transferring to other duties, on a temporary or permanent basis, as appropriate.
   7. We may request the employee consent to us writing to their GP for a medical report. <Optional, either:>As an alternative, or as an additional resource, the employee may choose to contact the following counselling service: <insert details>. This is a confidential service and we are not informed of the details of any conversations with them. <or> We will appoint an occupational health provider to provide counselling where appropriate.
   8. Employees are encouraged to make us aware of any serious non-work-related problems that may also impact on their attendance and work performance so that these can then be taken into account when assessing performance.
   9. Managers should review the workload and responsibilities of those returning to work after experiencing work-related stress to prevent any further injury to health.
   10. Employees taking medication to control their condition are required to inform us so that these details can be kept on file and made available to any medical or first aiders that may be involved in a medical emergency or accident.
   11. Only as a final stage, and after going through a full investigation process and where no alternative action is appropriate, will we consider terminating employment on the grounds of ill health.

*<The section below is optional and may be deleted if you do not do this.>*

1. Monitoring
   1. To monitor compliance with the policy, we will:

* monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overloaded or overworked
* monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their full entitlement
* schedule work and handover periods to ensure that employees are able to take their rest breaks
* regularly check any records of “call out” to ensure that appropriate compensatory rest has been provided
* analyse our absence records to identify any patterns for absences caused by work-related stress.

*<The section below is optional and may be deleted if you do not have this. If you are unsure you can check with your business insurance providers to see if this is included or available at an additional cost.>*

1. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
   1. An employee assistance programme (EAP) is an employee benefit which has been put in place to support employees with personal and/or work-related problems which may have an impact on their health, performance and wellbeing. From the little things through to life-changing events, our EAP offers a free and confidential assessment and can provide you with access to <Tailor to suit your scheme:> 24/7 unlimited telephone counselling support for all employees and their immediate family members; up to five face-to-face counselling sessions; 24/7 telephone access to qualified nurses, doctors and pharmacists; 24/7 personal legal advice on everyday issues such as debts, purchasing property and consumer rights; access to an online household legal document library and law guide.
   2. The full details of this can be found in our EAP information, a copy of which is <specify location, e.g. “included in the Employee Handbook”>.
2. Related Policies and Documents

*<Tailor your list as appropriate to the policies and documents in place within your business – the list below contains only suggestions:>*

* Absence Due to Illness or Injury Policy
* Bullying and Harassment Policy
* Equal Opportunity Policy
* Flexible Working Policy
* Health and Safety Policy
* Holidays and Other Absence From Work Policy
* Managing Difficult and Violent Situations at Work Policy
* Training and Development Policy

The above list is not exhaustive.

1. Further Information

Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to <specify whom>.

1. Policy Owner

This policy is owned and maintained by <specify whom e.g. “the Managing Director”>.

1. Policy Review Date

Date last reviewed: \_ \_/ \_ \_/ \_ \_

Checklist

Upon completion of customisations please ensure you have:

* customised all red relevant text and removed all blue italic text
* diarised a reminder to review and update the form
* removed the front cover (see instructions on front cover)
* removed this checklist!