



Stress at Work

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Whole procedure	Change to new format



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Stress at Work

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1.0 Introduction

Well designed, organised and managed work is good for us, but when there is insufficient attention to job design, work organisation and management, it can result in stress related illnesses in workplaces.

Stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them (either at work or at home). Work related stress can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and other issues such as errors.

Pressures can also arise from an individual's personal life as well as from work. People vary in their capacity and ability to cope with different types of pressure. Some individuals will recognise that their health is affected and will seek help. Others will not recognise or acknowledge that they are stressed, although this may be apparent to their manager and work colleagues. In itself, stress is not an illness. However, there is evidence that if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged this can lead to mental and physical ill health.

1.1 Understanding Stress

The fast and unprecedented changes in today's working environment have intensified awareness of the issue of stress. Some individuals thrive on major challenges, especially when these challenges motivate and stimulate these individuals. However, if this becomes a constant pressure which breaches their tolerance threshold, it can lead to stress, and prolonged stress can lead to serious health problems.

2.0 Potential Causes of Work Related Stress

There are seven generally identified factors that are potential causes of work-related stress, and an eighth added by Ark.

2.1 Organisational Culture

Ark are committed to having a sound organisational culture where:

- there is good, effective, accurate and frequent communication with all employees;
- there is a commitment to consulting with employees and keeping employees informed of issues that affect them;
- there is a commitment to supporting employees e.g. through access to our employee assistance programme;
- decisions and problems are addressed and resolved; and
- all employees are valued.

2.2 Job Demands

Common work related demands which may cause stress are:

- overwork, or excessive hours;
- excessive travel;
- not enough work;
- boring and repetitive work;
- pay;
- job insecurity;
- changes in the workplace or manner of work;
- poor workplace relationships, bullying or harassment, violence and aggression;
- lack of training or support; and
- oppressive or unsupportive management culture 'blame culture'.

2.3 Workplace Environment

The environment in which the work is carried out is equally important. Common environmental factors leading to work related stress are:

- poor or inappropriate lighting;
- noise;
- poor thermal comfort;
- insufficient space, poor workplace design;
- poor ventilation and/or humidity control; and
- poor décor and/or maintenance of premises.

2.4 Level of Control

The amount of control workers have over their work activities and may be closely associated with the demands of the job. Common control-related stressors for employees may include:

- lack of opportunities to plan their own work;
- lack of decision-making opportunities relating to their work; and
- lack of consultation on issues affecting their work.

The more control employees have over their work activities (within their capabilities) the less stressful the work will become.

2.5 Relationships with Managers

The nature of the relationships that employees develop or have with their managers, peers and/or other colleagues may also be a cause of work related stress. Obvious stressors in these circumstances are bullying, discrimination or harassment. Ark have clear policies and procedures in place for investigating and dealing with these types of complaints.

Lack of manager and/or peer support are well known stressors and it is important that employees are supported (even when things do not go according to plan). Positive discussions with employees to determine why certain things have happened and how to prevent recurrences is much more productive than negative “name and blame” methods or unwarranted.

2.6 Management of Change

A lot of work-related stress is associated with changes at work, whether those changes are on an individual level, e.g. change to work routines, work equipment, etc. or on an organisational level e.g. relocation to a different area, job security, etc. In many of these cases lack of, or poor communication, is often a key factor. Ark are committed to providing good, clear, regular, honest and accurate information on any change issues that will affect our employees.

2.7 Role within Organisation

Work related stress can also be associated with the way that employees perceive their role within the organisation. Specific examples are where employees are not clear about how and where they fit into the organisational structure. Ark are committed to providing individuals with training, information and instruction so all employees are clear about what their work involves and what their specific role and responsibilities are.

2.8 Trauma

Sometimes after experiencing trauma we can experience stress or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which may be temporary. After any particular trauma situation the Ark manager should have a debriefing discussion with the employee/s and then decide on any further course of action.

The effects of a trauma may take some time to show.

Examples of this type of trauma within ARK are the death of a service user, or witnessing the severe injury of a supported person or colleague.

3.0 Symptoms of Stress

Stress sufferers often demonstrate well-recognised physiological symptoms and/or behavioural indications or signs. These symptoms and/or signs will vary from person to person and may not all necessarily be present at any given time.

The common physiological symptoms can include:

- increased heart rate;
- increased sweating;
- headaches;
- giddiness;
- blurred vision;
- aching muscles, particularly neck and shoulders;
- rashes; and
- reduced immunity to infections.

Common psychological and behavioural indicators can include:

- depression or generally negative outlook;
- increased anxiety;
- aggressive behaviour;
- increased irritability and moodiness;
- increased intake of alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, etc.;
- reduced ability to sleep;
- lack of concentration;
- loss of appetite;
- poor work performance;
- inability, or reduced ability, to cope with normal tasks and situations;
- increased sickness absence; and
- poor time-keeping

In most cases the symptoms are short lived and do not cause permanent harm. However, if the causative factors are allowed to continue, the effects will be more sustained and may cause long-term psychological and physical problems.

The key for Ark managers and employees is to recognise these indicators or any other changes in an employee's health and /or behaviour patterns. The sooner the symptoms and signs are recognised, the more quickly supportive actions can be taken and the less likely that the symptoms will be serious or long term.

4.0 Managing Stress

In order to control work related stress, we need to ascertain whether or not it exists in the workplace. We will carry out extra duty of care risk assessments in accordance with this policy and HS21 (Extra Duty of Care) based on the factors detailed above, and this will indicate what factors are present and how likely they are to be the cause of work related stress.

Ark aim to manage stress by involving staff in a problem solving approach:

- managing stress through effective and sensitive actions;
- developing working practices to reduce factors which may lead to stress in the workplace;
- developing procedures to manage problems that do occur and to support individuals who are stressed;
- increasing awareness of stress and methods to combat it, for example through access to our employee assistance programme;
- assisting employees in managing pressure in themselves and others;
- follow the [HSE Management Standards](#) approach for tackling stress;
- monitoring procedures and outcomes, to assess the effectiveness of the policy.

4.1 Monitoring Stress

Stress should be taken seriously, investigated, and resolved if possible. In addition to the measures set out in this policy, we will carry out a work-related extra duty of care risk assessment for those employees who have indicated they have a potential issue with stress.

All affected employees will be invited to take part in the risk assessment and will have responsibility to ensure preventative measures to control risks are followed. The significant findings of these risk assessments will be recorded and reviewed at regular agreed intervals with the employee and Ark manager.

5.0 Implementation and Review

5.1 Implementation

The Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that this procedure and the policy that support it, are followed by all Employees and Board Members.

5.2 Review

The Chief Executive will ensure that this procedure is reviewed at least every three years, and that any amendments required are submitted to the Board of Management for approval.