

# Newport Infant School

It is the Policy of Newport Infant School to follow the Telford and  
Wrekin

## Stress Management

Date of Policy Creation	October 2014
Policy Lead	Governing Body
Date of Policy Adoption by Governing Body	November 2014
Frequency of review	Annually
Review Due	November 2015

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## THE LAW

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to do everything reasonably practical to protect employees from risks to their health whilst at work. Similarly there is a requirement on employees to take care of their own and others health. Health can include mental as well as physical health. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require risk assessments to be carried out and documented, control measures to be put in place and monitored for effectiveness - these requirements apply to work related stress as they do to any other work related health risk.

### 1. KEY ACTION POINTS

- Ensure that all employees are clear about their responsibilities for stress prevention as set out in this policy.
- Use the stress audit on an annual basis to identify areas of concern and investigate and implement ways of reducing stress.
- Ensure that all employees have easy access to the details of the confidential employee counselling service.

### 3. DEFINITION

Stress can be defined as the condition that produces a mental, physical and behavioural response in a person where he or she feels unable to cope with the demands imposed upon them, which may lead eventually to incapacity and illness.

### 4. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Telford & Wrekin Council recognises that stress is a health issue.

The council as a caring employer will assess the risks to health from work related stress and where reasonably practicable control this wherever effective means to do so can be identified.

The Council will also provide support to those suffering from stress related illness, whatever the cause, to help employees to return to full health and productivity.

### 5. GENERAL CAUSES

Modern society has many well known causes of stress and many jobs undertaken by Telford & Wrekin Council employees are inherently difficult and demanding. The process of monitoring performance can also be stressful but is essential to the efficient provision of Council services. Whether someone is made ill as the result of the stress they are under depends very much on how much control they perceive that they have over the situation that they find themselves in. It also depends on how long the stress continues, how severe it is and whether someone is under stress from several sources at once.

In the course of a lifetime there are inevitable stressful events such as the death of a loved one, change of job or house, money worries, relationship difficulties etc. Obviously all these cannot be controlled by Telford & Wrekin Council. The effects, however, can spill over into peoples working lives which is where the support offered by the Council can help.

Similarly work related stress can impact on an employees personal relationships and family life, if these relationships suffer long term damage as a result there may be a consequent knock-on effect on work performance.

In schools as in all modern organisations just one person being off sick increases the pressures on everyone else in the team who are trying to cope with an increased work-load as a result. If the absence is a long one, which is often the case with stress related illness, then these pressures can be enormous and can cause stress in others.

There are well-known work related stressors some of which occur from time to time and in various locations at Telford and Wrekin Council including schools. These include:

- Uncertainty about expectations, objectives, job security or career prospects.
- Inflexible and over demanding work schedules or additional unscheduled work.
- Prolonged conflict between individuals.
- Lack of leadership and understanding from managers.
- Poor communication.
- Poor working environments or equipment.

## **6. STRESS PREVENTION - HOW INDIVIDUALS CAN HELP THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER**

As employees we *all* have a legal duty to care for our own and other's health and safety at work. We can do this by:

- Understanding and recognising the signs of stress in ourselves and others.
- Taking up the training available and putting it into practice
- Being sensitive and supportive to our colleagues
- Taking personal responsibility in managing our own stress (eg taking regular exercise, using leave entitlement, ensuring that we actively include positive interludes in what might otherwise be a negative day, making use of the support available at an early stage etc)
- Not being a cause of other's stress.

## **7. STRESS PREVENTION - HEAD'S AND MANAGER'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

Heads and other managers have additional responsibilities to prevent and manage stress. Stress management has no "secret" ingredient, it is basic good people management, treating everyone with respect and dignity, as a human being, in line with the Council's stated values.

It includes the following:

***Assessment:***

- Assess the risk of work related stress in the school (use the questionnaire in the appendix if appropriate) and identify and implement measures that can be taken to control these risks.

***The work:***

- Clarity and realism about objectives, workloads, targets and deadlines.
- Advance planning to take account of periodic increases in work-load.
- Systematic approach to planning and time management.
- Improve the work environment and equipment where possible.
- Practical job design giving employees as much control as possible over the way they work.

***Personal skills:***

- Set a good personal example.
- Be consistent yet flexible with fairness but without tolerating poor performance.
- Don't bully.
- Be approachable, a good listener and non-judgemental.

***Development:***

- Manage resources to facilitate appropriate training and development, to include training on dealing with stress. Allow time to implement the skills acquired.
- Regular supervision/ staff development sessions at which work place stressors are discussed to allow timely and suitable support to be provided. It would be appropriate to use the work related stress audit to focus attention on specific issues.

***Communication:***

- Use the techniques of the Communication strategy to ensure good two-way communication, use team meetings to problem solve.
- Effective management of change, closely involving employees at every stage.
- Give prompt, positive feedback, recognise and reward good performance even if it is only by means of a "thank you". Celebrate success and promote fun.

***Management of stressed employees***

- Action must be taken promptly but sensitively once it is known that an employee is suffering from stress. Problems left un-tackled escalate.
- If any employee reports work related stress problems take action to resolve the problem as far as is reasonably practical. Document action taken.
- Supportive non-judgmental attitude to employees suffering or recovering from stress.
- Flexibility and sensitivity in arranging a realistic, structured return to work rehabilitation plan for employees recovering from stress.
- Take all reasonable steps so that any employee returning to work after absence due to work related stress is not exposed to the same levels or nature of stress that caused the illness.

## **8. STRESS PREVENTION - SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

In addition to the responsibilities held by all managers, senior management have a duty to consider the consequences of proposed changes to strategy or policy. The available

resources must be managed to allow change to happen without causing undue stress to employees at any level.

The process of Best Value should be used to help identify priorities and enable resources to be used to best effect not only for the customer but also for the employees providing the service.

It is important that senior management make a public and sincere commitment to managing stress that is then translated into action and carried through in all their decisions.

Senior management should ensure that they themselves and their employees, especially managers, are properly trained in people management skills.

Senior managers have a role to play in recognising and rewarding the successes of employees. Direct congratulation of success to the individual concerned by the Member, Head, Head of Service or Director has significant positive impact.

## **9. STRESS PREVENTION - SOURCES OF HELP**

Help and support to prevent stress can be obtained from a number of sources within Telford & Wrekin Council.

Employee Development run regular courses on "Handling Personal Stress" and "Stress and the Manager". Also relevant are many of the other courses on offer including:

- Effective leadership
- Handling difficult customers
- Managing difficult people
- Team building skills for managers
- The power of positive behaviour
- The manager and change
- Effective meetings
- Handling discipline
- Managing sickness absence
- The managers role in health and safety
- Communication planning workshop

For full details and how to nominate someone for a course contact the Education Training Liaison Officer Gill Sanderson on 202418.

Personnel Officers have a wealth of experience of dealing with the people issues that can cause stress. Involve and consult them in any strategy to reduce work related stress. Personnel officers will monitor the levels of sickness absence in each section that is attributable to stress to ensure that stress management strategies are effective.

The model policy on Dignity at Work for schools sets out clearly the procedures to be followed if bullying is alleged.

The Personal Safety Policy gives practical advice on avoiding violent or aggressive situations and the procedures to follow if they do arise.

Policies on Alcohol and Substance Misuse are currently being developed to assist with recognising and dealing with these issues.

The Occupational Health and Safety Team can give confidential support and advice on stress issues and can also advise on health and safety issues that can lead to stress if not controlled. Consult them early on proposed changes to work environment, work equipment or work practices.

The Council provides a wide range of exercise and leisure facilities which employees should be encouraged to use. For details of what is available contact any of the Council's leisure facilities - numbers are in the internal directory.

There are many organisations that can help in particular situations eg Gingerbread, CRUSE.

## 10. SYMPTOMS

However well the causes of work related stress are managed it is inevitable that employees from time to time will suffer from stress. One of the first steps in managing stress is being able to recognise it either in yourself or others.

The key things to watch out for are changes in behaviour that continue for more than a few days such as:

### *In the individual:*

- Mood changes
- Irritability
- Aggressiveness
- Poor memory and concentration
- Difficulty in sleeping
- Panic attacks and anxiety
- Increased alcohol or tobacco consumption

### *In their work:*

- Increased sickness absences (especially short frequent absences)
- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Erratic or poor timekeeping
- Working longer hours but to little effect
- Reduced work out put
- Increased errors
- Poor decision making
- Deteriorating planning and control
- Tension and conflict with others
- Poor relationships with clients
- Increase in discipline problems.

## 11. HEALTH EFFECTS

Stress has real physical effects such as:

- Headaches
- Aching neck and shoulders
- Raised blood pressure
- Digestive problems

- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Lowered resistance to infection

Most of these effects are short lived and cause no lasting harm. When the pressure is removed there is a quick return to normal.

If, however, pressures are intense and continue for some time, the effects of stress are more sustained and can lead to longer term physical and mental health problems such as:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Ulcers
- Thyroid disorders.

## **12. SUPPORT AVAILABLE**

To many people stress is a sensitive and embarrassing issue as some people still persist in seeing it as a sign of weakness rather than as a physiological reaction. Confidential support is available to any employee who feels they are suffering from stress.

In the first instance, if the employee feels able to, the problems they are having should be discussed with their head, manager, supervisor or personnel officer and suitable support identified (eg change in work arrangements, counselling etc).

The central Occupational Health and Safety team is available to help. Any employee can contact the Occupational Health Advisors Gill Bowie or Chris Doody on 202018 for advice and support in identifying a way forward. All calls remain strictly confidential and nothing is divulged to anyone without the employee's permission unless another person's health and safety would otherwise be endangered.

The employee counselling team is a team of professional counsellors who have helped many employees come to terms with and recover from the stress from which they are suffering. Most employees using the service manage to remain at work. The service is free to the individual using it. Leaflets advertising the service should be readily available to all employees. Contact the Personnel or Occupational Health and Safety units to obtain copies.

The counsellors are:

<b>Diana Hedges</b>	<b>01743 352651</b>
<b>Mo Price</b>	<b>01785 254298</b>
<b>Brian Turner</b>	<b>01952 812606</b>
	<b>mobile 07974 781228</b>

in addition Education employees can also contact:

<b>Sheri Wright</b>	<b>01952 522610</b>
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### **13. MANAGING RETURN TO WORK**

It is vital that an employee's return to school after a work related stress absence is managed effectively. There have been a number of high profile legal cases recently resulting in large compensation payments being made to employees who have suffered ill health as a result of work related stress then return to the same situation that caused the problem in the first place.

Identifying the particular aspects of the work situation that have caused the stress is the first step and needs to be done in conjunction with the employee, personnel officer, head or manager and occupational health.

Once the causes of stress have been identified actions can be taken to reduce or avoid these. Various options may need to be considered:

- change in working hours or pattern
- improved communication and support
- change in workload or nature
- redeployment

Whatever is decided upon needs to be looked at in the context of the whole team to ensure that it is equitable and not just going to cause stress to others.

Returning to full health and productivity can be a lengthy process and a phased return to work may be needed with regular reviews of the progress being made.

Once an employee believes that they are suffering from work related stress it is important that records are kept of the actions taken.

### **14. POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

Post traumatic stress disorder is a particular condition that can occur in individuals who witness at first hand or are involved in particularly horrific events involving actual or threatened death.

The individual will re-experience symptoms, often in the form of nightmares or flash-backs. Often the symptoms are so intolerable that the person tries to avoid situations that remind them of the original trauma. This can lead to shut down of emotional expression and social withdrawal. They may also be very much on edge, suffer insomnia and irritability because of the fear of going through the same experience again.

- ◆ People do recover but it takes a long time.
- ◆ Support and counselling must be offered.

### **15. STRESS AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE**

The main work related stressors for Telford & Wrekin Council as a whole have already been identified but this doesn't identify local issues within individual schools that need attention. In order to be able to prioritise actions to prevent or reduce work related stress, a risk assessment needs to be carried out in each team or school. It is the head's or team manager's responsibility to ensure that such an audit is carried out on an annual basis. The attached pro forma can be used for this purpose. It can also be used

individually to give structure to discussion of stress issues during supervision or employee development sessions where employees are happy to do this.

The first step in carrying out the stress audit is to discuss it with the employees concerned and their union representatives to explain the purpose behind it and the need for their co-operation as for dealing with any other health and safety matter.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject, some groups of employees will no doubt wish for the audit to be completely confidential without their head or manager seeing individual replies. Where this is the case then occupational health and safety or your personnel section can undertake to collate the results for any school and return the collective results, thereby ensuring confidentiality. If this service is required then it must be prearranged with Occupational Health or Personnel before the audit questionnaires are sent out.

Once the audit has been completed and the collective results received the high scoring areas need to be picked out and an action plan put together and implemented to address these. The plan will need to detail the actions to be taken, by when and by whom.

As with any other health and safety risk assessment there is a need to monitor the situation to see if the actions taken were effective and to reassess the situation periodically (as a minimum at least once per year) or when there are significant changes. The questionnaire could be re used as part of this process.

#### **16 Useful references**

For those working in schools the HSE publication "Managing Occupational Stress" ISBN 07176 1292 9 is useful.

HSE publication " Mental well being in the work place" ISBN 0 7176 1524 3

Both of the above are available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 6FS Tel. 01787 88116

**STRESS AUDIT FORM**

**Please complete the following and return it to: .....**by

NAME (optional)	TIME IN POST (optional)	AGE (optional)	NUMBER ON ROLL	TYPE OF SCHOOL P /I /J /S /Sp
(optional - please tick which applies) <b>Are you:</b>				
A full time teaching head?		A teacher?		
A non or semi teaching head?		An ancillary?		
A head of department?		Another school based employee?		

**Please score your answers by putting a whole number in the box using a Scale of 0 to 4.**

These aspects of my working life make me feel stressed:

Almost never	0	Usually	3
Occasionally	1	Nearly always	4
Quite often	2		

		<u>SCORE</u>
1	Poor problem solving support from Education & Training Portfolio	
2	Insufficient positive feedback from governors, the head, parents, other staff	
3	Insufficient time to do good work	
4	Financial management of school and budget problems	
5	Insufficient personnel, safety, occupational health or counselling support.	
6	Working relationships with staff	
7	Pupil behaviour, smoking, drugs, sex, bullying or violence etc.	
8	Failing staff , absenteeism or potential dismissal issues	
9	Continuing National Curriculum changes	
10	OFSTED inspections	

11	Relationships with and support from school governors	
12	Relationships with parents or parent associations	
13	Too much work to cope with	
14	Unrealistic expectations of you or the school	
15	Poor in-school admin or clerical support	
16	Maintenance of school buildings and teaching resources	
17	School safety and external violence	
18	After-hours meetings	
19	Insufficient training or time for training	
20	Other factors	

### MANAGING STRESS

Stress varies for different people and is not always a problem. Stress is part of everyday life and helps to motivate us and keep us alert to danger. However, too much stress can leave us feeling anxious and unable to cope - and may be a danger to our health.

#### How to Cope with Stress

The best ways to keep stress under control . .

- Relaxation to lower blood pressure, muscle tension and mental arousal
- Exercise to use up the fats and sugars released into the blood to keep blood pressure low
- Time management - to set priorities and get organised
- Nurture your relationships - to share problems, keep things in perspective, and smile, laugh and enjoy yourself. Remember a trouble shared is a trouble halved.

People feeling stress should feel free to talk, in confidence, to any member of the Senior Management Team.

Useful telephone numbers:

Rose Gardner      01785 664080  
Sheri Wright      01952 522610

**Newport Infant School**  
**Stress Management Policy**

Brian Turner      01952 812606 or 07974 781228  
Diana Hedges      01743 352651  
Mo Price            01875 254298  
DfEE Helpline      0800 562 561

Telford and Wrekin Council offer an Employee Counselling Service (leaflet on display in the Staff room)