# **An example of a policy on STRESS AT WORK**

## **Introduction**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as "…*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.*" It highlights that stress is not an illness – it is a state, however if stress becomes excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.

The HSE make a distinction between being under pressure, which it states can often improve performance and be a good thing, and stress which results from excessive demands and pressures.

## **Policy**

In a world of constant change, we recognise that we experience pressure to perform and conflicting demands, therefore stress will be experienced by all of us at some point. Since stress is a human perception, what might be stressful for one person may not be for another. We are all different, have different life experiences, different genes and different states of health and levels of coping skills.

Stress can arise in any job and we will take reasonable steps to identify and deal with stress through the use of risk assessments, good management practices and, staff involvement. Stress caused by factors outside of the workplace can also have a detrimental impact on individuals, and the charity.

## **Stress Caused by Personal Life**

Where all or part of the causes of stress are related to home or personal factors, we will take what steps we can to support you to manage or resolve the cause of stress. This may involve, for example, responding positively to requests for flexible working, temporarily reducing workload or responsibilities, allowing time off to attend doctors, counsellor or solicitor appointments and so on.

## **Stress Caused by Employment**

Regular staff supervision, annual appraisal, team meetings and an 'open door' policy should provide the opportunity for staff and managers to discuss any concerns about stress. Our policies and procedures provide guidance on expectations to ensure good staff relations and clarity.

If you feel there are pressures building up in your job you are encouraged to talk to your line manager. This will enable your manager to discuss the causes of stress and to take steps to reduce levels of anxiety.

Your manager (in some situations an alternative person may be more appropriate) will meet with you to identify the nature of the problem, discuss the causes of stress and discuss what can be done to alleviate or manage the stress. Your manager may need to make enquiries to decide what help could be offered. Consideration will be given to a stress risk assessment. Your manager will agree an action plan with you, and will organise a date on which the plan will be reviewed.

If these steps do not help reduce stress, then you should talk to your manager as soon as possible (without waiting for the review date) with a view to considering what further steps could be put in place to reduce levels of anxiety either on a temporary or permanent basis.

## **The Role of Management in Preventing/Managing Stress**

We will take the following actions to assist in preventing and managing stress:

* Providing opportunities for staff to contribute ideas, especially in planning and organising their jobs
* Allow staff plan work and make decisions over how their work should be tackled
* Help staff prioritise work
* Having clear objectives linked to the job
* Talk regularly to staff to ensure people know what their job requires them to do
* Provide staff with the necessary training to do their jobs
* Use techniques such as job rotation and job enrichment where appropriate
* Make sure other hazards such as the threat of violence, are identified and controlled
* Avoid encouraging excessive hours and promote a culture in which stress is not regarded as a weakness
* Ensure there are effective systems for preventing or dealing promptly with bullying and harassment
* Consider flexible working solutions to work/life balance problems
* Have good communication structures with staff and encourage employees to raise any concerns regarding stress.

## **Further information**

For further information about stress and what to do about stress at work, the tools and templates on the [HSE website](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm) may be of assistance and the [NHS](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/understanding-stress.aspx) provides some helpful information on recognising and dealing with stress.

**Important notice**

This is an example of an employment policy designed for a small not-for-profit employer adhering to statutory minimum requirements and does not constitute legal advice. As with all policies it should be consistent with your terms and conditions of employment as well as your culture and aspirations. There is no one size fits all!