



Mental Health & Stress

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The Company believes that its employees are its most valuable resource and that their wellbeing is vital to effective performance at work and the continued provision of high quality services. To this end, the Company is committed to providing maintaining and promoting a healthy and supportive working environment.

- Under the terms of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Company has a duty to ensure the health and safety of its employees as far as is reasonably practical.
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place a duty on the Company to assess and control the degree of stress in the workplace.
- The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the Company not to discriminate against employees who suffer from a disability under the Act, which includes long term ill health caused by stress at work.

Although the Company has no control over external or personal factors, it is committed to managing stress and risks within its control, and to providing support to employees who are suffering from stress.

Aims of the Policy

- To ensure the physical and mental health of all employees;
- To promote a healthy, safe and friendly working environment and control and reduce risks to mental health;
- To help provide and maintain a supportive and non judgmental working environment;
- To provide effective support to all employees in managing stress and other mental health problems, and to encourage better recognition of mental health issues; and
- To recognise that the prevention of stress is easier than dealing with it once it has arisen.

Stress and its Recognition

Stress is a natural reaction to excessive pressure that is experienced by everybody. When stress is experienced consistently over a period of time, its effects can become detrimental and lead to further and more serious psychological and physical illnesses. Stress itself can be caused by an infinite number of variables which will vary enormously in different individuals. By way of example, personal factors like family problems can easily affect an individual's work, while work based factors like bullying, lack of training or poor working conditions can just as easily spill over into the home.

Recognising stress can be difficult as its effects will vary from person to person but the following signs can sometimes indicate that someone is experiencing difficulty:

- Changes in behaviour;
- Indecisiveness;
- Absenteeism; or
- Increase in the use of tobacco or alcohol.

Although the Company has no control over external factors which may be more difficult to identify the Health and Safety Executive has identified 6 main causes of stress at work which the Company can affect:

- Demands made on employees;
- The level of control employees have over their work;
- The support employees receive from managers and colleagues;
- The clarity of an employee's role within the organization;
- The nature of relationships at work; and

- The way that changes are managed.

The Company is aware that stress is easier to manage before it becomes a problem and with that in mind will endeavour to operate in a fashion that takes all of the above factors into account. The Company will also always be open to discuss how an alteration of one or more of these factors might produce a better working environment.

Principles

- The Company will conduct an annual assessment of the risks to employees' health, both mental and physical, based on data collected from staff at work including absence data, staff turnover, grievance cases, accidents and exit interviews.
- The Company will always listen to any concerns that employees may have. If employees believe that their work is putting their mental health or wellbeing at risk, they should speak to their line manager and/or the HR team. All such concerns will be treated with respect and dignity, and employees will be provided with the necessary information to make informed decisions.
- A referral to the occupational health team will be made after the initial discussion, if appropriate.
- The Company recognises that stress and other mental health issues may require periods of sick leave or absence in order to recover from stress.
- Where necessary the Company will facilitate the managed return to work of employees who have been absent due to stress.
- All cases will be dealt with in accordance with the Company's policy on equality and diversity details of which are available in the Company handbook.
- All discussions, requests for help and advice will be kept strictly confidential and the information gathered will be held in accordance with the Company's Data Protection Policy.
- Where necessary the Company will provide access to specialist psychological assistance.

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