

Swift Academies

Stress Guidance for Employees

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1.0 Purpose of the Guidance

1.1 This guidance supplements the Trust Policy on the Management of Stress and the Managers' Guide on the Management of Stress. It aims to:

- help you to take a proactive approach to coping with pressures that may lead to stress, and
- advise on the procedures to be taken should you feel that you are suffering from stress

1.2 This guidance should be read in conjunction with the policy document. Cross-references will be made to the policy where appropriate.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Every job brings its own set of tasks, responsibilities and day-to-day problems. The pressures and demands that these may place on you are an unavoidable part of working life and can, in fact, have a positive effect by acting as a stimulant and helping you to work hard and complete tasks to deadlines, leading to greater confidence and job satisfaction.

2.2 However, the ability to deal with pressure is not limitless. Extreme and/or prolonged pressure can lead to stress. When this happens, you feel unable to cope with what you feel to be the excessive pressure or demands placed upon you. This can produce negative physical, emotional or behavioural effects.

2.3 The way in which you handle pressure depends on your personality, experience, motivation and external circumstances and on the support available from managers, colleagues, family and friends. Learning (with the help of others where necessary) to manage reactions to pressure so as to avoid the negative consequences that could lead to stress can enable you to live more comfortably with the pressures in your life.

3.0 Symptoms of Stress

3.1 Physical symptoms of stress can include headaches; tiredness or insomnia; loss of appetite or craving comfort food; indigestion; feeling jumpy and/or suffering cramp, muscle spasms or nervous twitches; raised heartbeat and increased breathlessness and sweating.

3.2 These effects are usually short-lived and when the pressure recedes, there is a quick return to normal and no lasting harm is caused. However, too many pressures over a period of time can lower your resistance and make you prone to illness and/or depression.

4.0 Causes of Stress

4.1 Causes of stress specific to the workplace can include the following (although this list is by no means exhaustive):

Table 1: Possible Causes of Work-Related Stress

Cause	Description
Work overload	Having more work than can be handled on a regular basis.
Work underload	This can occur when starting a new job or moving jobs within the organisation where the new role and responsibilities are not yet clear.
Emotional involvement	When the nature of the job involves being regularly subject to personal abuse, involved in disturbing situations, or dealing with illness or death.
Conflict between work and free time	Where situations set work demands in conflict with home life and encroach on free time (such as meetings arranged at times that clash with childcare arrangements or overrun into them).
New technology	Continually having to adjust to new systems.
Travelling	Either a long return journey between work and home, or having to spend periods of time away from home due to work.
Organisational structure	Feeling uncomfortable about your level of responsibility within the organisation, or feeling cut off from office communications in which you feel you should be involved.
Unclear responsibilities	Working for someone who gives poor directions, or asks you to do things that are not part of your job description.
Lack of reward	Insufficient job satisfaction.
Promotion	Lack of scope for advancement, adjusting to a new position, or over-promotion.
Environment	Problems with air conditioning or heating systems, working in cramped conditions etc.
Working Relationships	Personality conflicts, changes in personnel, bullying or

	harassment.
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4.2 Work may not be the only cause of stress. You may come to work against a background of bereavement, family sickness or worry, marital or other interpersonal problems.

5.0 Taking a Proactive Approach

5.1 When you start to feel under pressure, it is important to keep things in perspective and remember that there are ways to cope with all problems. Starting to tackle issues puts you in control, which is one of the best coping strategies.

5.2 If you feel that the source of the pressure is work-related, it is worth seeing if you can try to improve the situation yourself in the first instance. The following tables outline some methods that you may find helpful:

Table 2: Time Management Techniques

Method	Description
List your priorities	Work out which tasks you need to do now and which can wait. Pausing to take stock can prevent you from approaching everything that occurs as a crisis.
Complete each task you start	Try to concentrate on one thing at a time and to finish one task before starting another. Take steps to avoid being interrupted.
Pace yourself	Arrange short breaks during the day and switch off from work for a few minutes. Take your lunch break away from your place of work whenever possible, perhaps combining this with a short walk outside to get some fresh air. If this is not possible, don't continue working whilst you eat your sandwich. Short breaks are refreshing and more than compensated for by increased energy afterwards.
Delegate where you can	This will give you more time for the essential elements of your job. Try to avoid the train of thought that you can do the job better than anyone else. If you don't give others the opportunity, they won't learn. However, it is important to manage delegation carefully so as not to place excessive pressures on the person to whom the work is to be delegated.
Prepare for quieter periods	Defer non-urgent jobs until then. Use the time positively to bring everything up-to-date.
Take control of timing	If you are in a position to influence the time of meetings, work out when you need to leave work, or the earliest time you can arrive, and only make yourself available during those times.

Arrange regular meetings with your manager to discuss your work	In this way, work-related issues can be discussed and resolved before they become problematic and start to cause excessive pressure.
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Table 3: Other Methods of Controlling Stress at Work

<p>Anticipate stress and prepare for it</p>	<p>Although you cannot prepare for unexpected events, you will be aware of the kind of situations that cause you stress. Plan ahead how you would like things to go, decide how you should behave differently and rehearse this. Decide also what to do if things don't go as well as you hope, and plan to give yourself a treat afterwards.</p>
<p>Develop your communication skills</p>	<p>Communicating well is one of the most vital workplace skills, as this is how you make others aware of you, your views and needs. If you can communicate effectively, you are likely to find that you have a greater sense of being in control. For example, if you are confident that you can talk problems through with others without becoming embroiled in a fight, you can approach your job more calmly. You may wish to discuss what training is available in this area with your manager.</p>
<p>Learn to take constructive criticism</p>	<p>Communicating well also means listening carefully. This involves learning how to take criticism. Constructive criticism is about helping you do what you do better, it is not intended as a personal attack.</p>
<p>Improve your self-esteem</p>	<p>This involves re-evaluating your view of yourself and your self-worth. Make a list of all the things you do well. When you learn to respect and value yourself more, it becomes easier to respect others.</p> <p>In this sense, respect doesn't mean 'admire', but rather recognising that other people have values and feelings and need to be treated with the care you would wish for yourself. It is always more pleasant to work where there is mutual respect.</p> <p>This includes trying to understand your colleagues better and the pressures that they are under which might make them behave as they do. Acknowledging their difficulties as well as your own can help you to find working solutions that suit you all.</p>
<p>Negotiating Skills</p>	<p>Try to be more assertive and learn to say no if necessary. You may wish to discuss what training is available in this area with your manager.</p>
<p>Training and Development</p>	<p>You may feel that you would benefit from further development, either to increase the skills/knowledge needed to do your job, or self-development training to help you to manage the pressures in your life. Any such learning needs should be discussed with your line manager.</p>

Table 4 ‘Coping Strategies’ to Help you to Maintain Work-Life Balance.

<p>Keep healthy</p>	<p>The better shape you are in physically, the more able you are to cope with having a busy lifestyle.</p> <p>Eat well and follow a balanced diet. A diet of wholesome, healthy foods can help stabilise your moods. Consuming sugar, caffeine, alcohol and nicotine can increase your stress, making coping more difficult. Drink more plain/mineral water.</p> <p>Try to get enough sleep and be as consistent with your sleep schedule as possible.</p> <p>Exercise is a good way of winding down and releasing pent-up frustrations. Choose a form of exercise you enjoy, such as a regular long walk, swimming, playing sport or going to the gym.</p>
<p>Immerse yourself in a favourite activity or hobby</p>	<p>This will give you a block of time when you can focus on a task instead of the problems in your life.</p>
<p>Make time for yourself</p>	<p>It is important to set aside time every day to look forward to and use exactly as you want, when no-one will be making demands on you.</p>
<p>Allocate time for addressing your problems</p>	<p>Designate some time once a week to address your worries. If you catch yourself worrying at other times, remind yourself to put the worry out of your mind until the official time. Note down the steps you can take to tackle your worries - then forget them until you have taken the action.</p>
<p>Treat Yourself</p>	<p>However small the treat, doing something to make you feel good relegates problems and pressures to the background for a while and helps to put them in perspective. Make a list of the things you enjoy and which help you to relax and make sure you make time to do them.</p>
<p>Think Positive</p>	<p>Don't get caught up in the prospect of all you have to do. Plan things to look forward to, like days out or holidays. Enjoy the good moments which every day has and don't spoil them by worrying about problems. Keep problems in perspective and remember that they don't last for ever.</p>
<p>Make time for laughter and fun</p>	<p>This is good for general well-being and helps you to relax.</p>
<p>Try not to be a perfectionist</p>	<p>Congratulate yourself for what you have achieved and don't concentrate on your short-comings.</p>
<p>Don't blame others</p>	<p>Developing personal responsibility for your own actions</p>

	will help you keep in control of your own life.
Develop flexibility	Have a flexible approach to your own methods and those of others. Being too rigid creates stress when things don't go to plan.
Talk over problems	One of the best ways to fight stress is to discuss your problems with a friend, relative or colleague. Talking to other people shows that you're not alone and helps to put problems and worries into perspective and may even lead to a solution to your problem. If you have difficulty talking about what's bothering you, writing about the situation in a diary can be equally effective.
Use a variety of relaxation techniques	These can include deep-breathing exercises, yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, massage, reflexology or listening to relaxation tapes.

6.0 Procedures for Dealing with Stress

- 6.1 The Trust hopes that instances of workplace stress can be minimised by taking the proactive approach outlined in the Management of Stress Policy and related guidance. However, all individuals have a responsibility to speak up on their own behalf if they feel under stress - be it due to work or pressures outside the workplace which may impact on your work. It is in the Trust's interest that you feel happy and positive about work, as this reflects on your performance.
- 6.2 In cases where you feel under stress due to perceived excessive pressure or demands placed upon you in the workplace, or due to other work-related issues, you should discuss this with your manager to explore ways of addressing the situation. If the nature of your problem makes it difficult to speak to your line manager, you may alternatively wish to speak to your manager's manager, trade union representative or to a counsellor.
- 6.3 Counsellors are trained to listen but not to judge. They help you to see anxieties in a new light and possibly identify a new way of dealing with them. Stress counselling may be available through the Trust.
- You may be offered reasonable paid time off to attend stress counselling sessions at management discretion, or may make arrangements for counselling outside your working hours if you prefer. **Please note that this counselling will be strictly confidential between yourself and your counsellor and that no details or records will be disclosed without your written permission.**
- 6.4 Teaching staff may also/alternatively wish to contact 'Teacherline' (Tel. 0800 0562 561), which offers a specifically targeted confidential counselling service.
- 6.5 Your General Practitioner may also be able to help. Details of specific counselling services (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Debt Counselling) can also be accessed via the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) or by looking in the local telephone directory/Yellow Pages.

- 6.6 In cases where you have approached someone in your line management chain and do not feel that your concern is being adequately addressed, you may take action under the Trust's Grievance procedures. **However, this should be only used as the last resort and not as a substitute for effective communication between yourself and your manager/manager's manager.**
- 6.7 If the cause of your stress relates to harassment or bullying, you should refer to the Trust's Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy for guidance.
- 6.8 If the cause of your stress relates to a concern that you are unable to reach the standards required of your job, you should refer to the Trust's Capability Policy for guidance.
- 6.9 If stress is leading to substance misuse or increased alcohol consumption, please refer to the Substance Misuse and Alcohol at Work policies.
- 6.10 Where stress causes ill health which leads to a deterioration in job performance, it will be treated as a health problem and you will be encouraged to seek help under the terms of the Trust's Sickness Management Policy.

7.0 Summary and further Guidance

- 7.1 Pressure is something which effects everybody and there is no such thing as a pressure-free job. However, the Trust will seek to maintain a well-managed work environment in which every reasonable effort will be made to keep pressure caused by work factors to an acceptable level by taking the proactive approach outlined in the Management of Stress Policy and related guidance.
- 7.2 A 'Stress Awareness Course' may be available for employees to attend on request. The aim of the course is to help employees to cope with the pressures that they may encounter in their day-to-day work, or pressures in their personal/home lives which could impact on their performance at work. The training also includes arrangements for reporting cases of stress and arrangements for seeking help.
- 7.3 Further advice on specific aspects of this guidance may be obtained from the Trust's HR and Health & Safety Provider.