Swift Academies
Manager's Guide to the Trust's Policy on the Management of Stress

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1.0 Purpose of the Guidance

1.1 This guidance has been written in conjunction with the Trust Management of Stress Policy to provide more in-depth help and guidance for managers on managing workplace stress. Separate guidance is available for employees in the "Employees' Guide to Coping with Stress'.

1.2 This guidance provides information on the identification and management of stress within the workplace, highlighting the legal and employment considerations, some of the causes, and practical steps for dealing with it.

1.3 The guidance acknowledges that individuals may experience sources of stress from outside the workplace which can impact on the workplace. It also recognises that individuals develop their own mechanisms for dealing with stress.

1.4 The Trust already has a number of procedures and support measures in place that can help managers to deal with stress issues. This guidance also lists these and explains how they may be helpful.

2.0 An Employer's Responsibility

2.1 The Trust as an employer, has a criminal law duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure that employees do not suffer ill health resulting from stress caused at work. In practice, this means that the Trust must be alert to any problems which may develop in this area and take steps to avoid exposing their staff to excessive and sustained levels of stress at work. Indeed, every employee has a responsibility and legal duty to minimise the risk of stress at work. Also under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, managers must keep under assessment the risk of stress related ill health to individual employees. Such assessments supplement any formal and recorded risk assessments which have been carried out on activities of the employee group, which involve significant exposure to stress related environmental, ergonomic or operational hazards (please see section 7 of this guide).

2.2 The Trust also has a similar duty of care in relation to its employees under civil law. The case of Walker v Northumberland County Council (1995) highlighted an employer's apparent failure to exercise this duty in so far as it was aware, by virtue of prior medical history, that failure to provide adequate workplace assistance to a senior social worker would be detrimental to his health. By failing to respond to requests to alleviate pressure, the employer was found to have been negligent.
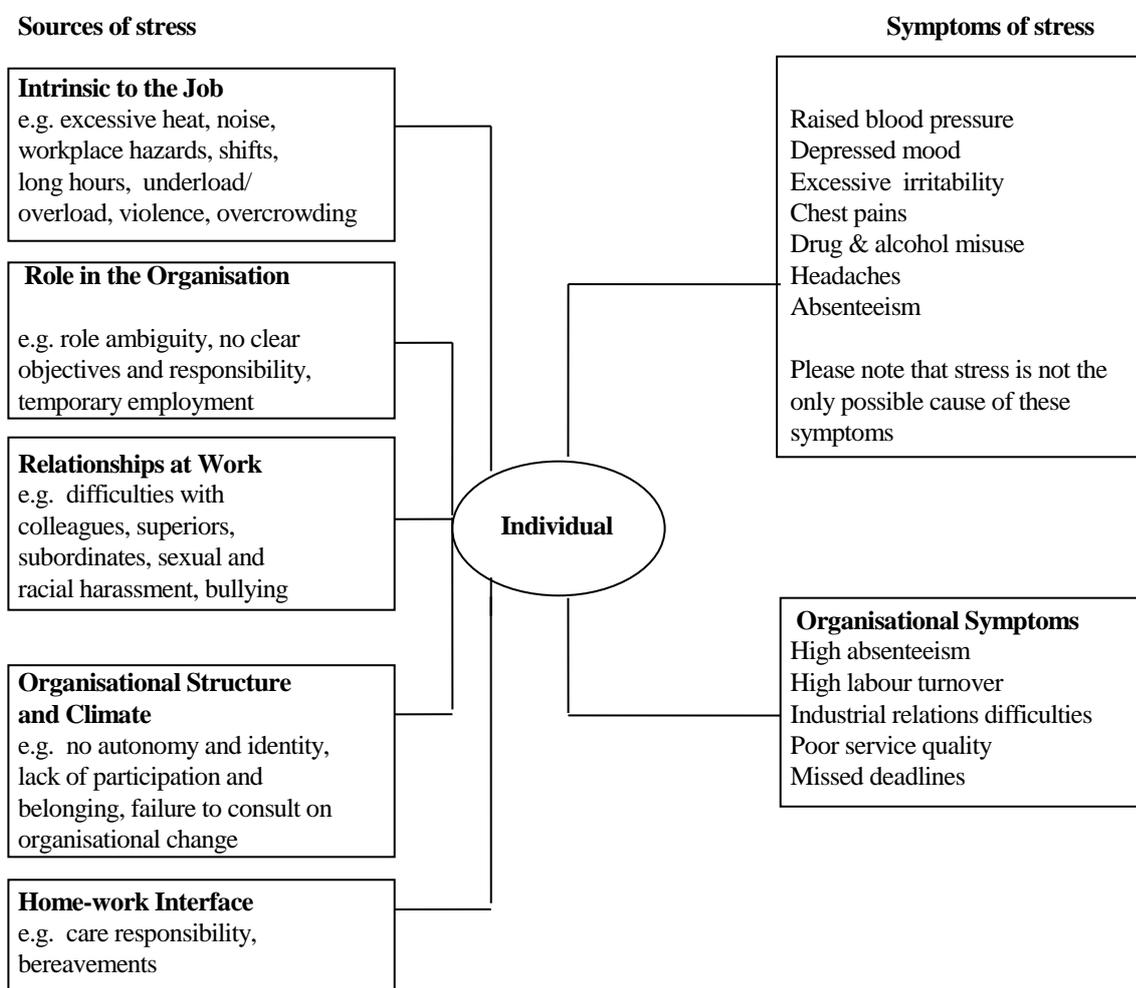
3.0   Stress and its Causes

3.1   Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them, i.e. what an individual feels to be beyond their ability to cope. It can arise when they worry that they cannot cope, or feel threatened or harassed. The effects are usually short lived and cause no lasting harm and when the pressure recedes, there is a quick return to normal.

3.2   Where the effects are short-lived, stress is not the same as ill health. However, in some cases, when pressures are intense and continuous, the effects of stress can lead to longer term psychological problems (such as anxiety and depression) and physical ill health (such as heart disease, high blood pressure, thyroid disorder and ulcers).

3.3   Figure 1, illustrates potential sources of stress at work, and the effects they can have on both the individual and the organisation.

Fig 1 Sources and Effects of Stress

Sources of stress

| **Intrinsic to the Job** |
| e.g. excessive heat, noise, workplace hazards, shifts, long hours, underload/ overload, violence, overcrowding |

| **Role in the Organisation** |
| e.g. role ambiguity, no clear objectives and responsibility, temporary employment |

| **Relationships at Work** |
| e.g. difficulties with colleagues, superiors, subordinates, sexual and racial harassment, bullying |

| **Organisational Structure and Climate** |
| e.g. no autonomy and identity, lack of participation and belonging, failure to consult on organisational change |

| **Home-work Interface** |
| e.g. care responsibility, bereavements |

Individual

Symptoms of stress

Raised blood pressure
Depressed mood
Excessive irritability
Chest pains
Drug & alcohol misuse
Headaches
Absenteeism

Please note that stress is not the only possible cause of these symptoms

Organisational Symptoms
High absenteeism
High labour turnover
Industrial relations difficulties
Poor service quality
Missed deadlines

3.4   People are different and will react differently to different types of pressure. There is, therefore no simple way of predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress. Much will depend on the individual's own personality, experience and motivation and the support received from managers, colleagues, family and friends. Stress should not be seen only as a personal problem, but as an issue, which Managers must take seriously and be committed to addressing. The individual should not be made to feel guilty about stress, but rather be encouraged and supported in dealing with the problem.

3.5   Whilst stress can affect individual employees, it can also affect a whole group of employees who might, for example, be subject to a common workplace pressure.

3.6   Factors in an employee's personal life, such as bereavement, or relationship difficulties, family problems etc., can also cause or contribute to stress and have an adverse effect on their working life.

4.0   What to Look Out For

4.1   The following are examples of the symptoms of stress which employees may display:

- inability to deal calmly with everyday tasks and situations
- behaviour which is different from normal
- poor concentration
- poor performance
- frequent short-term sickness absence
- sickness absence diagnosed as anxiety, depression or stress
- poor time-keeping

5.0   A Positive Approach to Stress Management

5.1   Managers must adopt a positive approach to stress management in the workplace, both in terms of taking pro-active steps to limit the potential sources of stress in the workplace and in reacting to an employee who shows symptoms of stress. **The underlying theme of this approach is good management and a regard for people.** This is an intrinsic part of the role of all Trust managers and leaders.

5.2   The Trust Management of Stress Policy encourages employees to approach their manager if they feel that they may be suffering from stress. It is important that managers address any such issues raised by employees within a reasonable timescale, as employees have the right to raise a grievance under the Trust's procedures if they feel that the issue has not been addressed.

5.3   If the alleged cause of stress relates to possible sexual or racial harassment or bullying, the procedures set out in the Trust's Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy should be followed.

5.4   If the alleged cause of stress relates to an employee's concern that they are unable to reach the standards required of the post, the procedures set out in the Trust's Capability Policy should be followed.

5.5   If the alleged stress is leading to substance misuse or increased alcohol consumption, the procedures set out in the Trust's Substance Misuse and Alcohol at Work policies should be followed.

5.6. The Appendix attached to this guidance - "A Positive Approach to Stress Management" looks at a number of areas in the workplace which might cause stress and gives some examples of the possible mechanisms for handling these, together with sources of in-house specialist assistance for managers. The mechanisms available and their suitability will naturally depend on individual circumstances.

5.7 **All teaching staff can use the national counselling, support and advice services for teachers provided by Teacherline (Tel. 0800 0562 561).** Stress counselling will be strictly confidential between the counsellor and the employee. No details or records will be disclosed without the written permission of the employee concerned.

5.8 In addition, the Trust already has a number of procedures and facilities in place to support managers in identifying and managing stress in the workplace. These are described in sections 6 to 9.

6.0 Trust's Sickness Management Procedure

6.1 The Trust's Sickness Management Procedure requires managers to monitor all sickness absence and to undertake reviews where there is concern about an employee's level or pattern of absence. These procedures will help managers to identify where the absence is directly due to stress, or may be due to stress-related symptoms. Managers should be aware that an unsympathetic approach may, in itself, exacerbate stress induced conditions.

6.2 If managers feel that the period of sickness absence relates to stress, professional support, advice and counselling is available through:

- Referral to the Trust's Occupational Health provider.
- Referral for Counselling, or other external support agencies (e.g. for drug or alcohol dependency)

6.3 By following the procedures set out in the Sickness Management Policy and related guidance, managers will ensure that they take the most appropriate action where stress results in long term or frequent absence.

7.0 Risk Assessment and Avoidance

7.1 The appropriate application of risk assessments, safety inspections, occupational hygiene surveys, health and safety procedures etc., will identify the measures needed to avoid stress factors caused by adverse environmental or ergonomic conditions or employee concerns over health and safety risks from operational procedures.

7.2 Of particular relevance are the risk assessment, avoidance and control measures related to:

- The habitual use of Display Screen Equipment - identification and training of habitual users; ergonomic assessment and modification of their work stations

- Work which involves significant exposure to potentially violent or threatening situations: application of appropriate guidance and procedures; provision of appropriate physical security measures; training of employees to deal with difficult situations.

- Exposure to prolonged high noise levels.

8.0 Cultural Factors

8.1 Work pressures and workplace culture can affect an employee's well-being and lead to stress which may then result in absence or a deterioration in performance. In such cases, the Trust is able to provide support through:

- Appraisal; which clearly identify employee work objectives and the support they need to achieve them (to be supplemented by regular discussion between manager and employee)
- Training in interpersonal skills and managing difficult situations
- Stress Awareness and Stress Management training courses
- Debriefing after violent incidents

9.0 Personal Matters

9.1 Although the primary concern for Managers is to deal with stress arising in the workplace, employee's home and personal problems may affect them at work and the following may be helpful:

- Compassionate leave or time off for counselling
- Time off for Dependents and Urgent Domestic Reasons
- Bereavement leave
- Flexible working e.g. revised hours or duties, part-time work, job sharing etc.

10.0 Summary

10.1 Stress is something that affects us all. There is no such thing as a pressure free job. All jobs have their own set of tasks, responsibilities and day to day problems, and the pressures these place upon us are an unavoidable part of working life. We are all paid to work hard and to accept reasonable pressures. What managers must recognise, however, is that people's ability to deal with pressure is not limitless.

10.2 Excessive workplace pressure can lead to harmful levels of stress which can damage performance and undermine the health of individuals. However, positive management efforts to control and reduce levels of stress will have the beneficial effect of improving performance and service, encouraging better staff relationships and reducing turnover.

10.3 It is unrealistic, and probably undesirable, to expect to be able to remove stress completely from the workplace, but, taking measures to control harmful levels of stress will help keep employees fit and our services effective and competitive. By following this guidance, managers will enable the Trust to comply with the law and prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, cases of ill health due to stress arising from work activities.

10.4 This guidance will be subject to review to reflect operational experience, changes in legislative requirements and best practice.

11.0 Further Guidance

Further advice on specific aspects of this guidance may be obtained from the Trust's HR and Health & Safety provider.

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

Things that can help	Consider the following Management style and input

Intrinsic to the job

Flexible work Schemes	Refer to existing scheme
Planned and agreed work hours	Improve work scheduling and try to avoid excessive overtime
Targets that are stretching but reasonable	Appraisal/regular discussion between manager and employee
Well defined and communicated tasks and responsibilities	Appraisal/ regular discussion between manager and employee
Plenty of variety, avoiding short work cycles	Good job design
Proper use of skills	Skills audit coupled with effective deployment
Proper training for those dealing constantly with the public or client groups	Dealing with difficult situations training
Absence of excessive noise, heat, humidity, vibration	Occupational hygiene surveys
Proper risk assessment and control of hazards in the job	Statutory risk assessments on the employee group. Health and Safety manuals and training for managers, Safety Inspections
Clear information and training to employees on assessed risks and control measures	Health and safety codes of practice, guidance notes and training for employees

Role in the Organisation

Clearly defined objectives and responsibilities linked to service objectives	Performance Management/regular discussion between manager and employee
Support and training for those with high level of responsibility for the welfare and well-being of people	Possibly training in counselling skills, team building, stress management
Opportunities for staff to contribute ideas in the planning and organization of their own jobs	Consider the introduction of a performance development scheme and/or regular planned meetings with individual staff

Things that can help	**Consider the following Management style and input**

Relationships at Work

Training in interpersonal skills	Training on interpersonal skills/team building
Effective systems for dealing with interpersonal conflict, bullying and racial or sexual harassment, including grievance and proper investigation of complaints	Anti Harassment and Bullying procedures Grievance procedures

Organisational Structure & Culture

Clear Objectives	Trust Plans
Good Communication	Regular meetings, newsletters, communication skills
Close employee involvement, particularly in periods of change	Consultation
Good management support and appropriate training and development of staff	Performance Management /regular discussion between manager and employee
Effective team work	Team building