Introduction

Southwark Children’s and Adults Services are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of staff. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

The management team has fully adopted the council policy on managing stress in the workplace and will provide the necessary resources to ensure implementation. The policy on managing stress applies to everyone working across Children’s and Adults Services, including schools and managers /headteachers are responsible for implementation of the policy in their area of responsibility. Some staff work in teams with partner organisations, including integrated management teams. It will therefore be necessary for managers in these settings to make themselves aware of all applicable guidance, information and procedures.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the council stress policy and employee health and wellbeing strategy.

Definition of stress

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can be detrimental to health.

Stress is not an illness – it is a state. However, if stress becomes too excessive and prolonged, mental and physical illness may develop.

Work is generally good for people if it is well designed, but it can also be a great source of pressure. There is a difference between pressure and stress. Pressure can be positive and a motivating factor, and is often essential in a job. It can help people achieve their goals and perform better. Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. Stress is a natural reaction to too much pressure.

A person experiences stress when they perceive that the demands of their work are greater than their ability to cope. Coping means balancing the demands and pressures placed on you (i.e. the job requirements) with your skills and knowledge (i.e. your capabilities). Stress can also result from having too few demands, as people will become bored, feel undervalued and lack recognition. If they feel they have little or no say over the work they do or how they do it, this may cause them stress.
Specific Requirements

Heads of service/leadership teams will ensure that suitable & sufficient local arrangements are in place to:

- Identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Consult with Trade union safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress
- Implement measures to reduce stress at work
- Provide training for managers and supervisory staff in good management practices
- Provide training for employees in building personal resilience/stress management
- Provide support and confidential counselling for staff affected by stress
- Encourage a culture where stress is not seen as a weakness
- Provide adequate resources to implement the stress policy and employee health and wellbeing strategy

STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS/HEADTEACHERS

Stress is widely recognised as a serious problem in the workplace, both for individuals and organisations. Although difficult to identify positively whether the causes of stress are caused by workplace issues or from issues at home, it is performance in the workplace that suffers. This is why it is important to manage the effects of stress however they are caused.

Stress can be defined as the “adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them”. There is a distinction between pressures, from challenges that can be stimulating, and stress, which is the reaction to too much pressure.

This guidance, which is based on the HSE’s Management standards approach to stress, provides advice on identifying stress and how that stress can be reduced in the workplace. The early detection of stress will prevent the possibility of stress related illness.

Risk Assessment

Managers/headteachers are responsible for assessing the risks arising from hazards at work, this includes work-related stress. It is important to remember when assessing risk that everyone reacts to stress in different ways and some people are more susceptible to the effects of stress than others. It is better to identify if stress is a possible problem in the workplace and take action to reduce the risk than it is to wait for someone to be made ill and then try to reduce the impact. Stress is not part of the job!

The process of risk assessment is detailed in the departmental risk assessment procedure, but briefly the stages are:

- Identify the risk factors
- Decide who may be harmed and how
- Evaluate the risk
- Record the significant findings
- Monitor and review the assessment
Managers/ headteachers should use the Children's and Adults Services generic stress risk assessment as a guide to developing their team/service stress risk assessment and strategy for managing work-related stress.

Risk assessments should be reviewed at least every two years, if there is a significant change or if someone has time off for a stress related illness. If an assessment is carried out for an individual employee the record should be maintained as part of their personnel file.

The HSE have developed a checklist where you can review whether your stress risk assessment is suitable and sufficient www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/checklist.pdf

### Identifying if stress is a problem

There are a number of methods that can be used to help in identifying if stress is a problem. They will also help to identify the causes of stress (the stressors).

- Informal talks to staff - to find out the mood of individuals or the team. If people seem continually unhappy, are not themselves, or are not performing well, ask if there is a problem.
- Supervision/Performance appraisals-These offer an opportunity to have a one-to-one discussion about work and to explore whether people in your team are experiencing excessive pressure
- Team meetings - These can provide very useful opportunities for team members to identify and share views on current issues that may be potential sources of pressure
- Sickness absence data - Can help to identify organisation wide problems, particularly if sickness is higher in one particular area. High levels of sickness absence may indicate a potential problem. Investigate the reason for the absences. Remember, stress related sickness absence is sometimes not reported in these terms, because people are often ashamed to admit to it.
- 'Walk-throughs' - observing work processes to assess whether there are any obvious aspects of the job (such as the way work is done, the pace of work, or working conditions) which may cause excessive pressure.
- Staff turnover- 'exit interviews' may highlight common reasons why people have decided to leave, and if work related stress was a factor
- Use staff surveys and questionnaires. The HSE produce an indicator and analysis tool, which can be downloaded at; [http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm)

### Symptoms

Identifying the indications that someone may be suffering from stress is often very difficult. Changes can occur over a long period of time and may need to involve advice from human...
resources, health and safety professionals and occupational health specialists.

Some common signs of stress include:

- Reduced performance
- Change in behaviour patterns
- Inability to meet deadlines
- Loss of motivation
- Poor concentration
- Tiredness or irritability
- Excessive drinking or smoking
- Physical decline and increased sickness absence
- Excessive mood changes or out of character behaviour
- Poor working relationships

What causes stress and how to manage it

Stressors are the things that cause work related stress. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have identified six main groups that can cause stress, which they call “Management Standards”. These are the demands placed upon the employee, the control they have over their activities, the available support, working relationships within the team, their role and management of change. The standards should be used to assess how well the organisation is performing in relation to the six risk factors. Managers will need to talk to their teams to identify stress ‘hot spots’ and then decide on improvement targets and action plans, in consultation with staff or their representatives.

Line managers play a vital role in the identification and management of stress within Children’s and Adults Services. Managers are likely to see the problems causing the stress first hand, will be in the best position to notice changes in staff behaviour that may indicate a stress-related problem and will often be the first point of contact when an individual feels stressed.

All managers need to be equipped with the correct skills and behaviours to be able to manage these situations. Line managers play a critical role in specifying task and job requirements and allocating individual job roles for those in their immediate team. This is a key part of job design, so your actions and behaviour could have a very important impact on the quality of working life of your team. The HSE has designed a tool to allow managers to assess whether they currently have the behaviours identified as effective for preventing and reducing stress at work.

Visit [http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm) to complete the line manager competency indicator tool to assess your management competencies.

When discussing work-related stress managers should consider the following:

- Make sure that sufficient time is spent clarifying what the problem is. It is important to be as specific as possible as this will help in the development of effective solutions
- Ask how this area of work activity became a problem? What happened? Has it always been a problem? If not, what has changed?
- What would be the mechanisms for introducing suggested improvements? Who will take the work forward? Who needs to be involved? What are the first steps? How will you monitor progress?
- Is the problem a one-off? Is an intervention really required? If it is, how will suggested solutions solve identified problems?
- It is important not to take on too many actions. You may need to prioritise.
- Refer to the Children’s and Adults Services generic stress risk assessment, and use this as a guide to developing individual/ team risk assessments and strategy for managing work-related stress.
- Contact human resources, occupational health and health and safety for support and guidance
- Familiarise yourself with relevant policies, guidance and well-being initiatives as outlined below:
  - Corporate Policy on Managing Stress
  - Occupational Health Service (OHS) contract covering:
    - Pre-employment screening
    - Employee confidential counselling helpline
    - Employee referral
  - Working Time Regulations
  - Performance management procedure including:
    - Job description for post
    - Performance management scheme
    - One-to-one supervision/meetings
    - Team meetings/briefings
    - Coaching/mentoring
  - Individual workplan & learning development plan incorporating:
    - Workloads
    - Job design
    - Personal development
    - Training needs
    - Ensuring that systems of work prevent individuals from taking on excessive workloads or excessive hours
  - Supportive management style
  - Workplace risk assessments for building, workstation & job detailing hazards and control measures required including risk of violence and aggression, work-related stress, lone working
  - Equality and diversity procedure
  - Monitoring of staff movements
  - Work-life balance initiatives including:
    - Flexi-time
    - Flexible work patterns including compressed working week & working from home
    - Stress management/ work-life balance training and workshops
  - Capability procedure
  - Annual leave entitlement
  - Robust sickness management regimes including:
    - Prompt response to stress situations
    - After an absence return to work interview
    - Short-term remedies e.g. modified work patterns
  - Council and Departmental Stress Reducing Initiatives:
    - HR resource pack on Managing Employee Stress
    - Well being/stress management sessions
    - Schools wellbeing programme
    - Well being website on intranet
    - Newsletters, emails
    - Assisted leisure costs
    - Stress awareness training
    - Massage sessions
    - Health promotion events
    - Generic work-related stress risk assessments
    - Mediation service
    - Access to the services of a Chaplain

**The management standards for work-related stress**

The Management Standards define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where the risks from work-related stress are being effectively managed and controlled. The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and
well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. The six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

**DEMANDS**  
Demands – includes issues like workload, working patterns, and the physical environment

**Possible solutions**  

**Workload**
- Hold regular team meetings to discuss the anticipated workload (and to deal with any planned absences)
- Hold regular meetings/supervision with individuals to discuss their workload and any anticipated challenges
- Develop personal work plans to ensure staff know what their job involves
- Adjust work patterns to cope with peaks and staff absences (this needs to be fair and agreed with employees)
- Allocate sufficient resources for staff to be able to do their jobs (time, equipment, etc.)
- Provide training (formal or informal) to help staff prioritise, or information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities

**Competency**
- Devise a system to keep training records up-to-date to ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job
- Implement personal development/training plans
- Link training to performance monitoring arrangements to ensure it is effective and sufficient

**Working patterns**
- Review working hours and shift work systems – have these been agreed with staff?
- Consider changes to start and end times to help employees to cope with pressures external to the department (e.g. child care, poor commuting routes, etc)
- Develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours

**Physical environment and violence**
- Ensure your risk assessments for physical hazards and risks are up to date
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse. Take steps to deal with this in consultation with employees
- Encourage staff to attend training that will help them deal with and defuse difficult situations (see violence at work policy and guidance)

**Do…**
- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding
- Provide realistic deadlines
- Provide adequate training and resources for doing the job
- Design jobs that provide stimulation and opportunities for staff to use their skills
- Provide sufficient challenge/pressure to keep staff motivated and interested in their work
- Attend to the physical environment – take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, noise levels etc, where possible
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse, and take steps to deal with it

**Don’t…**
- Ask people to do tasks that they are not trained to do
- Encourage staff to take work home with them
- Allocate more work to a person or team unless they have the resources to cope with it
- Allow workers to ‘cope’ by working longer hours
Ask young people (under 18 years of age) to take on work that may be beyond their emotional maturity

**CONTROL**
Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work

**Possible solutions**
- Agree systems that enable staff to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken, e.g. through project meetings, one-to-ones, performance reviews, etc
- Hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the anticipated output and methods of working. Provide opportunities for discussions and input
- Allocate responsibility to teams to take projects forward:
  - discuss and define teams at the start of a project
  - agree objectives
  - agree roles
  - agree timescales
  - agree the provision of managerial support
- Talk about the way decisions are made – is there scope for more involvement?
- Talk about the skills people have, and if they believe they are able to use these to good effect. How else would they like to use their skills?

**Do…**
- Allow some control over the pace of their work
- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work
- Negotiate shift work schedules

**Don’t…**
- Monitor employees movements in detail (including breaks)
- Monitor working style, unless necessary (e.g. where there are child protection needs)
- Ask staff to stay late without notice

**RELATIONSHIPS**
Relationships – includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

**Possible solutions**
- Ensure all staff are aware of the ‘Code of Conduct for Employees’
- Agree and implement procedures to prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work – communicate this to staff
- Implement a confidential reporting system to enable the reporting of unacceptable behaviour
- Implement the grievance and disciplinary procedure for dealing with unacceptable behaviour – circulate and/or display
- Select or build teams which have the right blend of expertise and experience
- Encourage staff to attend training that will help them deal with and defuse difficult situations (see violence at work policy and guidance)
- Encourage good communication and provide appropriate training to aid skill development (e.g. listening skills, confidence building, etc.)
- Discuss how individuals work together and how they can build positive relationships
- Identify ways to celebrate success (e.g. informal lunches/wash up meetings at the end of a project)

**Do…**
- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in work teams
Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers
Provide support for staff who work in isolation
Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other
Agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure that people are aware of these

Don’t...
Allow any bullying behaviour or harassment

CHANGE
Change – how departmental/corporate change (large or small) is managed and communicated

Possible solutions
- Ensure all staff are aware of why the change is happening – agree a system for doing this
- Define and explain the key steps of the change. Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the programme
- Establish a system to communicate new developments quickly
- Agree methods of communication (e.g. intranet, meetings, notice boards, letters, e-mail, feedback forums, etc) and frequency (weekly, monthly, etc)
- Ensure that staff are aware of the impact of the change on their jobs
- Provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change. Have an ‘open door’ policy to help staff who want to talk to their managers about their concerns. Involve staff in discussions about how jobs might be developed and changed. Review unit and individual work plans after change to ensure unit and individual objectives are clear

Do...
- Explain what the department wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) takes place
- Consult with staff at an early stage and throughout the change process
- Involve your staff in the planning process so that they understand how their work fits in

Don’t...
- Delay communicating new developments
- Underestimate the effects of minor changes

ROLE
Role – whether people understand their role within the team and whether the manager ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

Possible solutions
- Hold team meetings to enable members to clarify their role and to discuss any possible role conflict
- Share team/department targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual role
- Agree specific standards of performance for jobs and individual tasks and review periodically
- Introduce personal work plans which are aligned to the outputs of the unit
- Introduce or revise job descriptions to help ensure that the core functions and prioritises of the post are clear
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure that individuals are clear about their role and knows what is planned for the coming months
- Develop suitable induction arrangements for new staff – make sure all members of team understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit

Do...
- Provide a clear job description
- Define work structures clearly, so that all team members know who is doing what, and why
- Give all new members of staff a through induction to your team/department

Children’s and Adults Services Health and Safety
March 2014 Version 3
Define work objectives (e.g. through a personal work plan)
Avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of the department and the customer

Don’t...
Make changes to the scope of someone’s job, or their responsibilities (e.g. at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what is required of them, and accepts it

SUPPORT
Support – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues

Possible solutions
• Hold regular one-to-ones to talk about any emerging issues or pressures
• Hold regular liaison/team meetings to discuss unit pressures
• Include ‘work-related stress/emerging pressures’ as a standing item for staff meetings and/or performance reviews
• Seek examples of how people would like to, or have, received good support from managers or colleagues – can these be adopted across the team?
• Ask how employees would like to access managerial support – ‘open door’ policies, agreed times when managers are able to discuss emerging pressures, etc.
• Introduce flexibility in work schedules (where possible) to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments
• Develop training arrangements and refresher sessions to ensure training and competencies are up-to-date and appropriate for the core functions of employees jobs
• Talk about ways the department could provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside of work
• Circulate information in other areas of support (human resources, occupational health etc)

Do...
Ensure that staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job
Provide constructive, supportive advice during performance appraisals
Provide flexibility in work schedules (where possible)
Allow phased return to work after long-term sickness absence
Hold regular liaison/team meetings
Provide opportunities for career development
Deal sensitively with staff experiencing problems outside work

Don’t...
Trivialise the problems of others
Discriminate against people on grounds of sex, race or disability or any other reason

Further information on the HSE management standards approach and how by working together the causes of work related stress can be successfully tackled, please visit the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk

STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES

Introduction
Children’s and Adults Services are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees and recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue. Departmental arrangements are in place to ensure the following:
• The risk to your health from work-related stress is assessed
• Measures to eliminate (or where that is not possible reduce) that risk are put in place
• Consultation with you, either directly or through your trade union or other representative, about workplace and organisational changes that are likely to significantly affect your health and safety

This guide contains information on what you can do to help prevent work related stress. There is a difference between stress and pressure. We all experience pressure on a daily basis, and need it to motivate us and enable us to perform at our best. It’s when we experience too much pressure without the opportunity to recover that we start to experience stress.

We can all feel stressed at times when we feel as though everything becomes too much, when things get on top of us, or when we feel as though we are unable to cope. It affects us in different ways at different times and is often the result of a combination of factors in our personal and working lives.

Work-related stress can be tackled by working with your employer to identify issues at source and agreeing realistic and workable ways to tackle these.

Remember: stress is not a weakness. Employers have a duty to protect your health and safety at work and a good manager will appreciate any suggestions you have for reducing work-related stress. Work-related stress is a symptom of an organisational problem, not an individual weakness.

What is work-related stress?

Children’s and Adults Services have adopted the Health and Safety Executive definition of work-related stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them’.

This makes an important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulating, motivating, and can give a ‘buzz’) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or ‘pressures’ that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.

Who experiences work-related stress?

Everyone can, in principle. No one is ‘immune’. Stress can hit anyone at any level of an organisation and recent research shows that work related stress is not confined to particular sectors, jobs or industries. Work-related stress exists where people perceive they cannot cope with what is being asked of them at work. Stress can be an unnoticed and gradual build up of the many pressures experienced in work, at home and in everyday life. Most people are able to cope with the big issues in life and can find them exciting but for some they are too demanding or combined with everything else going on, they can become overwhelming, resulting in stress. Stress effects people in different ways that can either be dealt with or if not spotted or understood, or adequately tackled lead to more problems both physical and mental

It is important to remember that work-related stress is not an illness, but if it is prolonged or particularly intense, it can lead to increased problems with ill health. For example:

♦ Physical effects
  o heart disease
  o back pain, gastrointestinal disturbances and various minor illnesses;
♦ Psychological effects
  o anxiety and depression

It can also lead to other behaviours that are not helpful to your health, such as skipping meals, drinking to much caffeine or alcohol and smoking cigarettes.
You are not alone if you feel very or extremely stressed. In the country as a whole, as many as one in five people could be feeling the same way. In the workplace, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require you as an employee to tell your employer about any shortcomings in their health and safety arrangements. This is particularly important when tackling work-related stress – it requires a partnership between you, your manager, and your employer: a partnership based on honesty and trust, where you all say what you feel.

What can you do at work?

Try to identify the causes and what you can do to make things better-Tell your manager at an early stage. If your stress is work-related, this will give them the chance to help and prevent the situation getting worse. Even if it isn’t work-related, they may be able to do something to reduce some of your pressure.

Many employees are reluctant to talk about stress at work, due to the stigma attached to it. They fear they will be seen as weak. But stress is not a weakness, and can happen to anyone. Remember no employer should subject their employees to work-related stress, and this is an issue both you and your employer should take seriously.

You can help at work by

- ‘Doing your bit’ for managing work-related stress by talking to your manager: if they don’t know there’s a problem, they can’t help. If you don’t feel able to talk directly to your employer or manager, ask a trade union or other employee representative to raise the issue on your behalf
- Supporting your colleagues if they are experiencing work-related stress. Encourage them to talk to their manager, human resources, trade union or staff representative
- Seeing if the counselling service can help
- Speaking to your GP if you are worried about your health
- Discussing with your manager whether it is possible to alter your job to make it less stressful for you, recognising your and your colleagues needs
- Trying to channel your energy into solving the problem rather than just worrying about it. Think about what would make you happier at work and discuss this with your manager
- Be aware of the Council/Children’s and Adults Services well-being initiatives including:
  - Massage sessions
  - Health promotion events
  - One-to-one supervision/meetings with your manager/supervisor
  - Schools wellbeing programme
  - Employee assistance programme
  - Council well-being website
  - Subsidised membership of Council run leisure facilities

What can you do out of work?

The following advice will not prevent work-related stress, but may help you take care of yourself and ensure that you don’t make the problem worse. You can

- Eat healthily
- Stop smoking – it doesn’t help you to stay healthy, even though you might think it relaxes you
- Try to keep within Government recommendations for alcohol consumption – alcohol acts as a depressant and will not help you tackle the problem
- Watch your caffeine intake – tea, coffee and some soft drinks (e.g. cola drinks) may contribute to making you feel more anxious
- Be physically active – it stimulates you and gives you more energy
- Try learning relaxation techniques – some people find it helps them cope with pressures in the short term
• Talk to family or friends about what you’re feeling – they may be able to help you and provide the support you need to raise your concerns at work

**What to do after a stress-related illness?**

If you have been off work with a stress-related illness, talk to your manager when you return. Say how you feel, explain what led to the event and what you would like to see happen. Further support and guidance is available from Human resources and Occupational health.