

Guidance for Managers: Stress Risk Assessment

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A Risk Assessment approach is at the heart of any plan to reduce the risk of workplace stress. This guidance provides advice for managers on how to conduct a Stress Risk Assessment both for teams as well as individuals.
- 1.2 Much of the guidance amounts to good management practice, however, the advantage of adopting a risk based system is that it is a proactive approach aimed at preventing stress before it occurs.

2 Stress Risk Assessments: The Process

- 1.3 Conducting Stress Risk Assessments is not an 'exact science', however, the Health and Safety Executive have developed guidance on doing this that makes it as straightforward as possible for managers. Much of what is necessary to do to reduce stress in teams amounts to good management practice. People respond to pressure in different ways depending on factors such as personality, experience, coping styles etc. However, the management standards outlined by the HSE are based on research findings which highlight the main areas or sources of workplace stress and how best to reduce these.

Communication is an essential part of keeping stress levels down, so having dedicated opportunities for staff to discuss their concerns is important

3 The Five Steps to Risk Assessment

- 3.1 A Risk Assessment is designed and developed with staff groups to protect and support people. There are many circumstances where it is necessary to develop a Risk Assessment with individuals for their own protection and support. The five steps to Risk Assessment that most managers will be familiar with are:
 1. Identify the hazards (stressors at work)
 2. Decide who might be harmed and how
 3. Evaluate the risk and take action
 4. Record your findings
 5. Review and monitor you assessment over time

- 3.2 Once risks have been identified, an action plan should be drawn up for implementation which is then reviewed. This plan should carry details of who will carry out the action and the proposed timescale.
- 3.3 Appendix 4 shows a Stress Risk Assessment template which can be used to record sources of stress, actions to be taken by whom and the review date.

4 When to Carry Out a Stress Risk Assessment

- 4.1 As good practice, and to promote team wellbeing, a Team Stress Risk Assessment could be carried out on at least an annual basis in much the same way as other Risk Assessments are. However, associated action plans should be reviewed regularly (e.g. at least every 6 months) and more frequently if changes are taking place. An individual Stress Risk Assessment should be conducted when a member of staff tells you that they are experiencing work related stress or they are on sick leave because of work-related stress.
- 4.2 The process of conducting a Team Stress Risk Assessment is cyclical and involves assessing the hazards (i.e. different sources of stress at work), planning action, implementing control measures and reviewing these.

5 The Six Main Sources of Stress at Work

- 5.1 The hazards which relate to stress fall into 6 main areas. These equate to the key work related factors with potential to cause stress in an organisation and are as follows:

- **Demands of the job**
- **Job Role**
- **Control of work environment**
- **Relationships within the workplace**
- **Change**
- **Support**

- 5.2 The Health and Safety Executive has developed management standards which equate to these six areas of stress. The factors which cause stress in these six areas can be found in Appendix 2. Guidance on how to reduce stress and implement the standards can be found in Appendix 3. More detailed information in general relating to these standards and to team stress risk assessments can be found on the HSE website.

6 What do Risk Assessments Involve?

- 6.1 Risk Assessments can involve any number of methods on a continuum from informal discussions with staff through to more structured focus groups or questionnaire surveys.

6.2 The HSE have produced a questionnaire tool to assess risk of stress in teams, however, for the purposes of conducting a Stress Assessment on an individual, it is sufficient to use the six areas of stress outlined by the HSE as guidance for asking some very simple, straightforward questions. The validity of self-report and questionnaire based surveys is sometimes called into question because they ask about how people feel or the perceptions they have of stress. However, evidence suggests that individual perceptions play an important role in predicting stress-related ill health and therefore gathering the views of your staff can be a very useful indicator of potential sources of stress. The next section gives more information on Individual and Team Stress Risk Assessments and how to conduct these.

7 Team Stress Risk Assessment

7.1 There are a number of ways in which managers can assess whether there is a problem with stress in their teams. Managers can gather data in the following ways:

- Team discussion/Focus Groups (guidance on conducting Focus Groups in Appendix 5)
- Analysis of Appraisal Reports
- Analysis of Sickness Absence Data
- Analysis of staff turnover
- Stress questionnaires such as the HSE indicator tool* (Appendix 7)

7.2 HSE have developed an Indicator Tool that can be administered to staff. It is made up of 35 items that ask about “working conditions” that are known to be potentials for work-related stress. These working conditions correspond to the six stressors outlined above. All responses can be compiled into HSE’s Analysis Tool which computes an average figure for each of the six sources of stress.

7.3 ***The Patient Safety Officers can give further advice on the use of the HSE Indicator Tool for Assessing Stress in Teams**

7.4 The HSE Questionnaire Tool is a more detailed way of gathering data about your Team, however, it is important not to rely solely on questionnaires but to also discuss with staff particular aspects of their job which may be causing stress.

A simple way of doing a quick analysis is to ask in your team meeting what are 3 good things about the job and 3 bad things

8 INDIVIDUAL STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 An Individual Stress Risk Assessment should be completed in the following circumstances:

- If a manager is aware following a self-certification, GP medical certificate or being informed personally by the employee that their sickness absence is as a result of stress
- If the Occupational Health Doctor has requested this for an employee who has been off sick with stress related to the workplace

8.2 Some members of the Team may be more susceptible to developing work-related stress than others. In particular those who:

- Have a history of significant psychological or physical health problems
- Have been absent from work due to work-related stress
- Have personal difficulties which may be unrelated to work
- Are inexperienced in their role

8.3 You may be aware of some of these factors in some of your staff, but if in doubt ask sensitively and in confidence regarding the risks of work-related stress. Many people cope well if they know their manager is supportive.

8.4 When the Risk Assessment Form is completed, place a copy in the staff member's personal file and review actions taken within 2-4 weeks.

- **Appendix 1:** gives examples of some questions you can use to conduct an Individual Stress Risk Assessment
- **Appendix 2:** details the factors which create stress in each of the six areas outlined above
- **Appendix 3:** gives information on actions managers can take to prevent or reduce stress once it has been identified in individuals or in teams
- **Appendix 4:** shows a Stress Risk Assessment Form which can be completed for individuals or for teams(to be used in conjunction with Appendices 1, 2 and 3)
- **Appendix 5:** An example of a completed Risk assessment Form for individuals

- **Appendix 6:** Guidance on running a Focus Group
- **Appendix 7:** HSE Indicator Tool for Work-Related Stress