

Dealing with Stress, a guide for employees and employers

1. THE CAUSES OF STRESS

The potential causes of stress in employees are many. Some may be attributable to the workplace and others to the employee's personal life.

In respect of the workplace the following are potential stressors:-

- the nature of the job (boring, repetitive, dangerous)
- a long hours culture
- heavy workloads, inflexible work schedules/teaching timetables
- the method of working including working conditions
- lack of role definition; role conflict
- change – operational processes and/or structural
- communication problems
- a lack of leadership and support from head teachers and/or governors
- feeling a high degree of uncertainty about work objectives, the job or career prospects
- prolonged conflict between individuals, including possible sexual or racial harassment or bullying or where employees are treated with contempt or indifference
- a negative culture e.g. denial of potential problems; a culture of blame
- physical danger e.g. hazardous chemicals, risk of violence
- responsibility for other (e.g. in a teaching or caring environment)
- unrealistic expectations

2. POTENTIAL STRESSORS IN PERSONAL LIVES

- relationships
- money
- health
- bereavement
- moving house
- having children
- problems with neighbours
- family problems

3. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

The symptoms of stress can manifest themselves in emotional, physical or behavioural issues such as:-

- raised heart rate
- increased sweating
- headaches
- dizziness
- blurred vision
- aching neck and shoulders
- skin rashes
- lowering of resistance of infection
- increased anxiety and irritability
- difficulty in sleeping

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- poor concentration and an inability to deal calmly with everyday tasks and situations

4. EMPLOYEE STRESS CAN AFFECT THE SCHOOL

Individual effects of stress may include:-

- reduced morale/commitment to work
- physical and/or mental ill-health
- poor judgment; lack of concentration; poor memory
- poor relationships with pupils or parents
- tension and conflict between colleagues
- high job dissatisfaction
- burnout, tiredness, exhaustion
- escapist drinking
- most of the above but reflected in the employee's personal life; low life satisfaction

5. THE ORGANISATIONAL EFFECTS OF STRESS MAY INCLUDE:

- impact of excessive bureaucracy within the school environment
- increased absenteeism and decreased productivity
- reduced quality of work and pupils attainment and behaviour
- increase in industrial relations problems
- increase in disciplinary cases
- high employee turnover
- increase in ill-health dismissals
- negative impact on organisational culture
- increased pressure on work colleagues
- poor use of management/teaching time
- potential (costly) litigation
- high costs associated with sick pay, providing cover for absent employees, recruitment costs, training costs
- loss of knowledge, skills and experience

6. WHAT EMPLOYEES SHOULD DO

- Recognise the signs of their own stress
- Seek ways to reduce the incidence of stress
- Discuss with line managers concerns and enter open dialogue on reducing the impact of stress and /or removing unnecessary stress
- Seek support and talk to those who could help

6 WHAT MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNORS WILL DO

- Be aware of the signs of stress
- Be vigilant to those who are displaying possible indicators of being stressed

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- Ensure communication routes are open so that colleagues feel comfortable to discuss issues should they wish to
- Ensure support agencies and staff welfare agencies are made available to staff as appropriate
- Listen to concerns where work based scenarios are contributing to increased stress levels
- Being proactive about understanding where the stress points are within the school and its organisation
- Seeking to make changes, where possible to reduce unnecessary stress caused by the working conditions at school.

7. ADVICE - 10 things to make the school happier

1. Debate, define and share the core purpose of the school. Talk it up.
2. Test every decision against core purpose and only have meetings which serve core purpose.
3. Find time to plan, deliver and evaluate the best possible learning experiences.
4. Stop talking about OFSTED, behaviour and coping with change and start talking about learning.
5. Socialise together.
6. Celebrate success extravagantly.
7. Stop fretting about small stuff like who pays for staffroom tea and coffee.
8. Take time to improve the school's appearance.
9. Talk up the importance of roles and job function rather than status seniority and income.
10. Include work life balance in staff appraisals.

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8. ADVICE 10 things to make the classroom happier

1. Look after your own health and well-being.
2. Focus on solutions and positives rather than failures and setbacks.
3. Make learning itself a focus of learning for your class
4. Restore your sense of humour.
5. Capture every student being successful at some point.
6. Show your excitement about learning.
7. Talk up what successful group work 'looks like'.
8. Mix the class groupings.
9. Know and use everyone's name.
10. Prepare each lesson to be the very best you are capable of teaching.

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