



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

## Policy for Prevention and Management of Stress in the Workplace

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## 1. Policy statement

The Health Service Executive (HSE) believes that our employees are our most important asset in the delivery of high quality health and social services. We are committed to protecting your safety, health and welfare at work.

We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and it is important to identify and reduce workplace stress. This policy sets out a framework for us to achieve this; this policy is consistent with the guidance provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the state agency with responsibility for promoting health and safety at work in Ireland. The HSA has published *Work-Related Stress – a Guide for Employers*<sup>1</sup> and *Work Related Stress- Information Sheet for Employees*<sup>2</sup>, both of which contain valuable information.

Please read the HSE policy with our Corporate Safety Statement<sup>3</sup> and with the site specific Safety Statement for your area. You should also consult other HSE policies and strategies that relate to the safety, health and welfare of employees. Each service should develop its own Safety Statement and operational guidelines within the framework below.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to give guidance to the HSE, our managers and employees on how to prevent, identify and manage stress in the workplace, with a focus on risk assessment and hazard identification.

## 3. Scope of the policy

This policy applies to all our staff.

## 4. Accountability – relevant legislation

In Ireland, the main law governing health and safety at work, including workplace stress, is **The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005**.<sup>4</sup>

Under this law, we have a duty of care and must do what is 'reasonably practicable' to provide a safe working environment for all our employees. This means providing a workplace free from both physical and psychosocial injury and avoiding improper conduct and behaviour, including stress and bullying. The Act sets out responsibilities for both the employer and employees.

Other relevant legislation includes:

- **The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997**
- **The Employment Equality Act 1998 and 2007**

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- **The Equal Status Act 2000-2004**
- **The Disability Act 2005**

## 5. Definitions

There are many definitions of stress-related terms<sup>1</sup>. For this policy, we use the following:

- **Stress** is a mental and physical condition which results from pressure or demands that strain or exceed your capacity or perceived capacity to cope. The sources of such pressure or demands are called **stressors**.

While stress may result from different aspects of life, the main focus of this policy is on work-related stress. Factors that are not work-related can affect you in the workplace.

It should be noted that work generally provides opportunities for developing and maintaining positive mental health and well-being.

- **Work-related (WRS) or occupational stress:** the conditions, practices and events at work which may give rise to stress. WRS is stress caused by or made worse by work.

There is a difference between positive stress, which is associated with a sense of challenge and excitement, and negative stress which is dominated by worry, anxiety and agitation. This policy is mainly concerned with negative stress and the related risk factors.

- **Stress response:** the normal way the body reacts to challenging events, which energises the human system to meet the challenge.
- **Chronic stress:** although the initial stress response is normal, if it remains active over a long period as a result of chronic stress, it can drain your physical and mental resources. This can lead to ill health or extreme and lasting exhaustion (**burnout**).

Most forms of stress are caused by stressors that gradually push people beyond their capacity to cope comfortably. However, single events can sometimes set off intense and complex stress reactions. These are generally referred to as **critical incidents**.

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of definitions and potential causes of Work Related Stress, prepared by the Health & Safety Authority, is included in Appendix 1  
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- **Critical incidents:** tend to involve sudden exposure to death or life threatening injury to yourself or others, for example serious accidents or extreme violence. These incidents can be traumatic. Traumatic reactions within a month of the incident are called **acute stress**. Reactions that develop later are called **post traumatic stress**.

**Stress management** is a term used for all activities aimed at controlling stress. It includes efforts to identify, prevent and reduce stressors in the workplace and to assist employees affected by or at risk of stress. We need stress management systems at a number of levels, rather than focusing on any one level; the main aspects of each are set out below and guidance is provided on how to implement these in section 7.2 of this document.

- **Level 1: Primary (Promotion and Prevention)**

These are strategies aimed at our entire workforce which promote wellbeing and prevent or minimise the occurrence of stress. These include:

- Creating a supportive environment and culture in which the safety and welfare of staff is a priority;
- Implementing health and safety and ‘Dignity at Work’ policies;
- Giving out information on the supports available to staff;
- Managers working with staff to identify and deal with potential stressors.

- **Level 2: Secondary (Management)**

These are strategies to prevent health concerns from causing major symptoms by helping employees to manage or cope better with stress.

At a **preventative** level, we aim to:

- Encourage staff to take responsibility for their own health, giving them information on safety, health and welfare and their own health and wellbeing;
- Increase their ability to cope, through stress management and work and wellbeing workshops.

Secondary **interventions** involve recognising stress at an early stage and acting appropriately to prevent it getting worse. This includes acting quickly to provide support immediately after a major stressor or a critical incident, such as violence in the workplace.

- **Level 3: Tertiary (Minimisation)**

This means to manage, rehabilitate or treat symptoms of existing stress-related problems or diseases to minimise potential harm. It involves referring employees to support services once a problem has been identified for:

- Confidential advice, guidance, support or counselling;
- Access to specialised clinical services for staff who need them.

**Note:** While it is important to provide support to employees who experience stress in the workplace, the only way to improve the overall health of our workforce is to reduce stress at primary and secondary levels. The HSE will use feedback from our employee support services to inform our primary and secondary initiatives and will take positive action on the main issues presented by our employees.

## **6. Responsibilities and roles**

We could significantly reduce the human and organisational cost of stress, from ill-health, absences from work and lower productivity, if we all work together to address workplace stress. This starts with **promoting awareness** of situations that may cause workplace stress and finding ways to address these early on. It also involves **creating supportive workplaces** that facilitate staff who experience stress to report it. Corporate management, senior managers, line managers and employees each have a responsibility to contribute to this and to take steps to deal with issues identified.

### **6.1. Responsibilities of corporate and senior management**

Our corporate management is responsible for having in place systems, processes and resources to ensure the safety, health and welfare of our staff and those affected by our activities. We must apply the principles of prevention to our efforts to prevent improper conduct or behaviour, including stress and bullying.

Our Corporate Safety Statement (Section 3: Organisation and Responsibility) sets out arrangements for these and how to monitor them. It also specifies the responsibilities for each level of management from CEO and corporate level to line managers.

Each National Director should define the accountability for safety, health and welfare for their area, set out clear roles and responsibilities for each level of management and communicate and implement the Corporate Safety Statement. Corporate management must also have in place structures to consult with management, employees and safety representatives in safety, health and welfare matters.

## 6.2. Responsibilities of line managers

The day-to-day management of safety, health and welfare at work is a responsibility of line management. As a line manager you must:

- Ensure that the systems, processes and resources needed to manage safety, health and welfare are in place within your area; if they are not, you should advise senior management and outline perceived deficits.
- Have in place a site or service specific Safety Statement based on a risk assessment. This should clearly reflect any risks identified within your area and set out how you will address them;
- Communicate the Safety Statement and its obligations throughout your area;
- Report to your senior manager any risks that are beyond your ability to control.

In carrying out these responsibilities, you should:

- Foster a positive, supportive work environment, where good communication, support and mutual respect is the norm;
- Be aware of all relevant legislation and policies relating to the safety, health and welfare of employees and make these available to employees in your area;
- Carry out regular risk assessment of potential stressors in the workplace, including environmental factors such as staffing levels, skill-mix issues - working closely with staff and colleagues to identify possible negative effects; record in risk register and report to senior manager if necessary;
- Implement, and advocate for if needed, appropriate interventions to address identified stressors, such as training;
- Recognise signs of stress in yourself and in others;
- Talk to staff members who are experiencing stress;
- Be aware of the range of employee support services available and how to refer people to them. Give this information to staff in your area;
- If staff experience traumatic or critical incidents, refer to the **Health Service Executive's Policy for Preventing and Managing Critical Incident Stress**<sup>5</sup>.

## 6.3. Responsibilities of employees

We expect all our employees (including managers) to take responsibility for the following:

- To take care of your own safety, health and welfare and that of others. This includes efforts to prevent or reduce stress;
- You must not be under the influence of an 'intoxicant' at work, this includes drugs and alcohol;
- You must not engage in any improper conduct or behaviour which may be potential stressors for yourself or others;

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- You must report work practices and events that cause you undue or unnecessary stress to your manager, and complete a 'HSE hazard/incident/ near miss' report form as required, indicating that stress is the issue;
- You must co-operate with us in carrying out our statutory duties, for example, by attending training required by a risk assessment.

#### **6.4. HSE Supports**

Our Corporate Safety Statement identifies 'competent persons' under the Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. These are people with the appropriate training, experience and knowledge to support managers and employees in carrying out their responsibilities.

HSE supports include:

- **Human resource staff**
- **Health and safety staff**
- **Occupational health services**
- **Employee assistance and staff counselling services**

Their role is to provide relevant and timely advice, guidance and support to managers and employees on how to comply with their legislative duties. Where appropriate, they can also provide counselling to employees.

They should also help to promote effective safety, health and welfare practices and to develop relevant training programmes. Please consult them as part of your planning and decision making.

Staff may elect **health and safety representatives** to represent them in consultations with the HSE.

### **7. Procedures**

#### **7.1. Hazard identification and risk assessment**

We must identify, assess and eliminate or manage to the lowest possible level any hazards in the workplace which may be a risk to the safety, health and welfare of employees and those affected by our activities. Anyone with responsibility for resources and employees has a duty to ensure this.

Stress in the workplace is a hazard under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and it must be assessed and managed in the same way as physical hazards. Risk management is a structured step-by step problem solving approach, involving participation and consultation. In your role as manager, please note the following:

1. Have a systematic and continuous process in place to identify hazards and assess risks, in consultation with employees.
2. Maintain written records at all stages of the process.
3. Once a hazard has been identified, evaluate the level of risk it poses, based on how likely it is to occur and its likely impact.
4. Make recommendations to eliminate the hazard if possible, or to reduce the risk to an acceptable level (see below):
  - a. Eliminate the risks – change the system to eliminate source of stress;
  - b. Contain the risk – limit its impact or reduce the number of causes of stress; or
  - c. Protect from the risk – reduce the degree of exposure to the factors that cause stress; and
  - d. Monitor the risks – continuously review levels of stress.

In our Corporate Safety Statement, we promote the Health and Safety Authority (HSA)'s **Guidance on the Management of Safety, Health and Welfare in the Health Sector**<sup>6</sup> and its related audit tool. The HSA has developed this tool specifically for auditing safety and health management systems in the healthcare sector. We recommend that this is used throughout the HSE for providing evidence of best practice in the management of health, safety and welfare.

The HSA has developed an audit tool, in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive in the UK; this is known in Ireland as **Work Positive**<sup>7</sup> and as the **Management Standards**<sup>8</sup> in the UK. Work Positive, which was updated in Ireland in 2011, is a survey method for assessing employee perception of different potential environmental hazards at their place of work at that point in time. The HSA recommends the use of **Work Positive** to identify hazards and assess risks relating to workplace stress.

This audit tool (see Appendix 2) identifies six key sources of stress at work, around which it has developed a set of management standards for assessing workplace stress. These include:

- Demands of the job
- Control
- Support
- Relationships
- Role
- Change

Taken together, these define the culture of the organisation and can be used to measure the performance of the organisation or work unit. Where effective systems and work practices are in place to address these, workplace stress is unlikely to be a major problem. Where these standards are not met, the likelihood of workplace stress increases.

This approach to risk assessment can be used with an **individual employee or with groups of employees** and can help to assess risk at **service or unit level with groups of staff**. Work Positive includes a survey to identify potential workplace stressors as well as a process to identify potential solutions. You can use the results of the survey to measure your service against the management standards. Stressors are labelled as 'low', 'medium' or 'high' risk.

Further information and detailed guidance on how to use the management standards and the Work Positive audit tool can be found in Appendix 2 and on the HSA website [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie) and the UK Health and Safety Executive website: [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).

Further resources can also be found on: <http://www.managingwellbeing.com>

Section 7.2 provides guidance to managers on key aspects of their role and responsibilities as set out in this policy.

## **7.2. Guidance to managers**

### **7.2.1. Promoting well-being and preventing stress in the workplace**

Research indicates that the following activities help to promote employee well-being and reduce stress in the workplace.

- **Promote good communications in the workplace**

We need to focus on improving communications at every level of the HSE and between levels. This is particularly important at times of major change. Good communication with staff, based on sensitivity, awareness and confidentiality, is often key to addressing stress related issues effectively. Regular and open communication can reduce suspicion of management and improve teamwork by ensuring all staff understand and appreciate each other's role. **Regular staff meetings** lead to greater understanding of each other's perspectives, and help to foster supportive working relationships.

- **Provide clear leadership and opportunities for team building**

Good interpersonal relationships in the workplace are the most powerful way to protect against potential stressors. Where strong relationships exist between work colleagues, staff show higher levels of coping skills and are better able to identify possible solutions to problems. Providing clear leadership and working through **teams** is a very effective way to create a healthier and safer workplace and to resolve onsite issues. Staff may need training and support to participate effectively in teams.

- **Encourage staff to take part in decision-making and problem solving**

Daily work routines can suppress innovation and deplete the energy of staff and managers. If you don't make time to meet and discuss problems, things will stay the way they have always been. A regular time-slot at staff meetings dedicated to service improvements can give staff an opportunity to provide suggestions and give you the space to listen to and encourage your staff.

- **Effective recruitment and induction practices are essential**

Ensuring that people are well matched to their job will reduce the potential for workplace stress. Provide clear **job descriptions** and **role clarity** to avoid confusion and use them as a basis for measuring performance. If staff know what is expected of them and others they will be more confident in their roles.

An **induction** programme for new staff will help them to find their role within the team and carry out their duties to the necessary standards. It also reduces pressure on existing staff. As part of their induction, you should make new staff aware of policies, including those relevant to health, safety and welfare, and the various sources of help and support available within the HSE. You should also provide an induction to staff who are promoted, transferred or redeployed to your service.

- **Provide feedback on performance**

A culture where everyone's contribution is genuinely valued will help combat workplace stress. Give staff **regular feedback** on the things they are doing well, not just on the things that can be improved. A well-managed **performance management system**, linked to the staff member's job description and with agreed outcomes and timeframes, can reduce the potential for stress in the workplace.

- **Where possible, provide opportunities for flexible work practices**

Some flexibility or control of your own work significantly helps to reduce potential stress in the workplace. Examples of this include the sequence in which you carry out your work, your ability to use your own initiative or work creatively with people or tasks, the opportunity to take part in meetings and flexibility in when you can take your leave.

### **7.2.2. Promoting awareness of stress, stressors and solutions**

- Always be aware of the duty of care to provide safe systems of work;
- When conducting risk assessment, work closely with staff and colleagues to identify sources of stress in the workplace and to introduce realistic and appropriate stress control strategies;
- Provide staff with opportunities to raise and discuss concerns they may have with regard to their area of work;
- Support and work with staff to identify any additional training or information that they may need to effectively and safely carry out their duties;
- Liaise with your local Health and Safety or Performance and Development Unit to access training relating to safety, health and welfare for yourself and your staff;
- Encourage and facilitate staff to avail of any stress management training provided to help them to recognise and manage their own stress;
- Address problems sensitively and confidentially when these arise. Don't let them fester;
- Be aware of the range of employee support services available and how to refer to them, for example Occupational Health, Employee Assistance and Staff Counselling. Ensure that employees in your area also have this information. Maintain appropriate levels of confidentiality at all times;
- Be attentive to staff going through stressful life events such as bereavement or separation and, where appropriate, remind staff of the supports available.

### **7.2.3. Managing stress in the workplace**

1. You should ensure that, as far as it can be, the workplace you are responsible for is a safe and healthy one.
2. Be alert to signs of stress in the workplace, as detecting it and intervening early is often the key to managing stress effectively.
3. If an employee tells you that they are experiencing stress, your early response is critical to successfully addressing the issue. You should respond in an appropriate, sensitive and supportive manner.
4. Ask the employee if you can explore the issues together in order to identify the source of stress. If the workplace is the stressor, then it is important to discuss the aspects of work that they perceive to be causing the stress. Decide together what steps to take to prevent the stress from recurring. If you need guidance, contact the Employee Relations, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance or Staff Counselling Services.
5. Offer to refer the employee to Occupational Health, Employee Assistance or Staff Counselling or they may choose to self-refer to these services.

6. If you feel that the source of stress may come under our Dignity at Work policy<sup>9</sup>, tell the staff member this and give them a copy of the policy and details of the 'support contact persons'.
7. Make all reasonable efforts to work with the employee to eliminate or minimise the sources of stress and to increase their ability to cope.
8. Keep a record of what you agree with the employee and have regular meetings with them to monitor the situation.
9. It is important that both of you focus your early discussions on attempts to resolve the matter by going through steps 1-8 above.

If the employee continues to report work-related stress due to an issue that comes under our Grievance Procedure<sup>10</sup>, invite them to make a complaint under the Grievance Procedure in order to resolve the matter.

In this case, the employee should, with support as needed, set out in writing what they see as the source of their stress related ill-health. Alternatively, you may document the details as set out by the employee and you should both sign this record.

Be mindful of the employee's stress at all stages.

#### **7.2.4 Managing stress-related absence**

Employees suffering from stress will sometimes be absent on sick leave. It is essential that you manage the absence effectively and sensitively. Please follow our Managing Attendance Policy and Procedures<sup>11</sup> and the specific guidance on managing stress-related absences set out below.

If you need advice and support, contact the Occupational Health Department.

1. When a medical certificate cites stress as the reason for the absence, you should respond to the employee in an appropriate, sensitive and supportive manner. You should explain to them that, as per HSE policy, you will keep in regular contact with them during their absence, and agree how best to do this.
2. Contact the employee to identify the source of stress. If the employee perceives that the cause of stress is work-related, you must work with them to identify the sources of workplace stress and find an acceptable solution. You can use the Management Standards approach (see Appendix 2) for this purpose.
3. Following a risk assessment, consider what steps you can reasonably take to prevent or reduce the stress from recurring.

4. You should also offer to refer the employee to the Occupational Health Department, Employee Assistance or Staff Counselling service to provide support and to identify any measures that can be taken to enable them to return to work quickly and safely. Remind them that they can also self-refer to these services.
5. You must plan an employee's return to work after a stress-related illness and be assured that they are fit to return to work. Plan the return with the employee and with specialist advice from Occupational Health, Health and Safety, Employee Relations, or employee support services, if appropriate.
6. Have regular meetings with the employee to monitor the situation. Continue to liaise closely with the employee support services referred to above, as needed.

#### **7.2.5. When the source of stress is not work-related**

In some cases, stress may be caused by difficult life circumstances outside of work that can affect working life. You should provide support in a sensitive manner to enable the staff member to continue at work or to return from sick leave as soon as possible.

Offer to refer them to Occupational Health, Employee Assistance or Staff Counselling service. If you can, offer flexible working arrangements during a particularly difficult time. This can be of considerable help and facilitate the employee to continue at work or to return early if they are on sick leave.

#### **7.2.6 Preventing and managing critical incident stress**

The HSE's policy for preventing and managing stress following a critical incident or traumatic stressor in the workplace is an integral part of our overall workplace stress policy. Although only a small percentage of people who experience critical incidents will develop serious symptoms, the gravity of the impact on these people requires special care. We aim to provide such care and where possible, seek to prevent the incidents, reduce their impact, and support those affected.

This aspect of the policy relates to the exposure of employees to potentially traumatic events which are outside their normal work experience. As we need to respond to these in a qualitatively different way than normal work situations, the HSE has prepared a separate document – **Health Service Executive's Policy for Preventing and Managing Critical Incident Stress**<sup>5</sup> to provide guidance to managers. You should also consult the HSE strategy for managing work-related aggression and violence in the health services.<sup>12</sup>

Please note that the responsibilities outlined earlier in this document – for promoting employee wellbeing, identifying potential stressors, risk assessment and intervention – also apply to Critical Incident Stress.

Section 7.3 provides guidance to employees on key aspects of their role and responsibilities as set out in this policy. Please note: all managers are also employees and should also read this section.

### **7.3 Guidance to Employees**

#### **7.3.1. Promoting wellbeing and preventing stress in the workplace**

Research shows consistently that people who manage their stress effectively:

- exercise regularly
- have social support and make use of it
- have found ways of reducing anger and excessive worry
- are optimistic
- have a balanced diet
- avoid too much alcohol, recreational drugs and other drugs

In addition, we offer the following advice to all employees:

- Be aware of your own limitations and know when to ask for advice, help or support. In particularly stressful periods, either personal or work-related, remember that confidential support is available through the Occupational Health service, Staff Counselling or Employee Assistance Programme.
- Manage your own personal stress. Help yourself where possible with an active lifestyle that promotes physical and mental health. This will help you to create a buffer against the negative effects of stress.
- At work, take reasonable care of your own health and safety and that of your colleagues.
- Take all reasonable steps to understand your role and responsibilities and the role of others in your department. Ask questions that will help you understand your work tasks and responsibilities. Work becomes less stressful when you are 'in the know'.
- Talk to your line manager if you have a problem and work together to find a solution. Letting a problem fester can be a major source of stress.



- Be sensitive and, where possible, supportive to colleagues who may be showing signs of stress.
- Be respectful, courteous and fair when dealing with your colleagues. Ensuring that you are not a source of stress to others can reduce general stress levels.
- Take an active part in any discussions or assessments on workplace stress and, where possible, in any training sessions provided.

### **7.3.2 Guidance for employees experiencing workplace stress**

1. If you are experiencing symptoms of stress that are affecting your work, it is important that you tell your manager. Together you can explore the sources of stress (using the Management Standards approach if these are work-related) and agree any reasonable steps to address them. The sooner you discuss the problem, the sooner you can identify a solution with your manager.
2. Your manager may, if you agree, refer you to the Occupational Health Department or Employee Assistance or Staff Counselling services for professional support.
3. Your manager may also contact the Employee Relations Department for more information or guidance.
4. If you prefer, you may contact the Occupational Health Department, Employee Assistance or Staff Counselling services or the Employee Relations Department yourself. You can do this without discussing the issue with your manager.
5. If your manager is aware that you are experiencing stress, they will give you the contact details to access employee support services.

## **8. Monitoring and evaluation**

Corporate and senior management must audit the safety management systems in place to prevent and manage stress in the workplace to ensure the HSE complies with the legislation. Managers at all levels of the HSE should maintain written records at every stage of the risk management cycle and have a system in place for storing information needed for audit.

## **9. Consultation**

This policy was developed by a sub-group of the national Health and Safety Advisors' group. It was circulated in draft form to key stakeholders including the national Human Resource team, Occupational Health and employee support services, senior service managers throughout the HSE and Trade Unions and Staff Associations. It has been revised to reflect feedback received. It will be reviewed regularly through the agreed procedures.

## **10. Implementation**

### **10.1 Communication**

The HSE must make this policy and its Corporate Safety Statement available to all employees, in line with its statutory obligation. It will use electronic and other communications means to disseminate these as widely as possible. This will include external providers of services to the HSE and, in particular, those providing employee support services.

Managers must create an awareness of the policy throughout their services.

### **10.2 Responsibilities for implementation**

Managers at all levels of the organisation are responsible for implementing this policy within their area. Effective implementation will require training and support for managers.

### **10.3 Resources**

The Corporate Safety Statement acknowledges that implementing these safety management systems will require extra resources. Initially, this will require a significant allocation of resources to ensure adequate training for managers.

Managers should identify any resources they need arising out of their risk assessment processes, report these to senior management and include them in the annual planning process.

## **11. Frequency of review**

Health and Safety Statements must be reviewed when there is a major change in the matters to which the risk assessment relates or when they may no longer be valid.

We recommend that managers review their implementation plan for preventing and managing workplace stress every year so that monitoring workplace stress becomes a routine part of their management practice. Corporate management should agree key indicators for this to ensure it is being monitored effectively.

This policy should be reviewed every two years or earlier if circumstances require it. Any reviews will reflect feedback from managers and employees on how well it is working.

## References

All Health Service Executive policies, strategies and other documents can be accessed on <http://hsenet.hse.ie>

- <sup>1</sup> Work-Related Stress -a Guide for Employers; Health & Safety Authority ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie))
- <sup>2</sup> Work-Related Stress – Information Sheet for Employees; Health & Safety Authority ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie))
- <sup>3</sup> Health Service Executive Corporate Safety Statement, 2009
- <sup>4</sup> Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, Health & Safety Authority ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie))
- <sup>5</sup> Health Service Executive’s Policy for the Prevention and Management of Critical Incident Stress, (2012)
- <sup>6</sup> Guidance on the Management of Safety, Health and Welfare in the Health Sector, Health & Safety Authority, 2006 ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie))
- <sup>7</sup> Work Positive-prioritising organisational stress (2011) ([www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)), ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))
- <sup>8</sup> The Management Standards for Work -related Stress ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))
- <sup>9</sup> Dignity at Work: Anti-bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy and procedures. 2009 revision (<http://hsenet.hse.ie>)
- <sup>10</sup> Health Service Executive’s Grievance Procedures (2004)
- <sup>11</sup> Health Service Executive’s Managing Attendance Policy and Procedures (2009)
- <sup>12</sup> McKenna, K. (2008) *Linking Safety and Service: Together Creating Safer Places of Service*. Health Service Executive; Ireland.

## **Appendix 1:**

*Extract from HSA document Work-Related Stress: a Guide for Employers*

### **Defining Stress**

Stress can be broadly defined as the negative reaction people have to aspects of their environment as they perceive it. Stress is therefore a response to a stimulus and involves a sense of an inability to cope. We each perceive, interpret, cope with and react to the world differently, but a stress reaction is an unpleasant state of anxiety.

Two things should be kept in mind: firstly, being stressed is a 'state' - and therefore not permanent in all but the most extreme cases; secondly, when we are stressed, or under the influence of stress, we are less likely to behave in the rational way we do when we are calm.

How we manage pressure is influenced by many factors, some past, some current; how we learned, how others behaved around us when we were young, what behaviours were rewarded and what punished. We all cope better when we have support and when we have resources such as time, equipment, know-how and control.

Causes of short-term stress include tough deadlines, having to carry out tasks we find very difficult, having to do many things at once, or having to act in difficult circumstances or under external pressures - for instance, when under extra emotional strain or feeling low or upset.

Stress generally comes from aspects of personal lives; bereavement is a major cause of stress, as is loss of any kind, including through divorce or separation. Other life events which are stress-inducing include being ill or illness of a partner or family member, unemployment, financial pressure, running a business and indebtedness.

Being stressed may not be articulated by everyone in the same way: for instance, although we all experience stress through loss, people will explain the experience differently, cope with it differently, acknowledge it differently and recover from it in many different ways.

There are healthy ways to overcome stress - good lifestyle, diet, social solidarity, meaningful work which can broaden our social ties - as well as unhealthy ways to react - such as over- or under- eating, excessive drinking, angry outbursts, defensiveness - which can lead to lack of quality sleep, decreased exercise and social isolation.

## **Defining Work Related Stress (WRS)**

*Extract from HSA document Work-Related Stress: a Guide for Employers*

Work Related Stress (WRS) is stress caused or made worse by work. It simply refers to when a person perceives the work environment in such a way that his or her reaction involves feelings of an inability to cope. It may be caused by perceived / real pressures / deadlines / threats / anxieties within the working environment.

'Stress occurs when an individual perceives an imbalance between the demands placed on them on the one hand, and their ability to cope on the other. It often occurs in situations characterised by low levels of control and support.' (Professor Tom Cox, I-WHO, University of Nottingham, UK)

Audits for hazards leading to stress have become more and more commonly integrated into health and safety systems generally. This owes partly to the fact that stress also has implications for Human Resource Management (HR), sickness absence management and occupational health generally.

People behave differently when under pressure:

- Some people feel very threatened but keep it to themselves;
- Others behave in very aggressive ways, without acknowledging that their behaviour is caused by stress;
- Others react to the same issue in quite calm ways, feeling unthreatened and relaxed;
- Others who are highly aware of their moods report that they are not very stressed by the issue, but enjoy its challenge;
- Others have very low tolerance of any threats, and so find smaller, simpler demands made of them quite threatening and start feeling stressed as soon as these demands are made of them.

It's not easy to establish the degree to which the work environment and factors outside of work contribute to an individual's stress level. Someone who is experiencing stressful life events may find that he or she is less able to cope with demands and deadlines at work, even though work is not the cause and had never been a problem before.

Workplaces which have good communications, respectful relations and healthy systems of work can help people recognise and manage the type of stress which may have more than one cause; such workplaces tend to get the best results in achieving a healthy and productive workforce.

## Causes of WRS

*Extract from HSA document Work-Related Stress: a Guide for Employers*

There are differences in underlying causes and triggers of WRS for everyone. However, some workplace factors are more likely to lead to stress than others: badly designed shift work, poor communications, and poor or even non-existent systems for dealing with bullying and harassment can all increase levels of workplace stress.

Table 1 below sets out other potential causes. A person can experience WRS as a result of various factors, often with a number of factors occurring at the same time. Some of these are a matter of the individual's perception in the moment, so we cannot assume automatically that the problem is the responsibility or fault of a system.

**Table 1: Contextual and content factors defining the hazard of WRS (from I-WHO, UK\*)**

<b>CONTEXT TO WORK</b>	<b>Potential Hazardous Conditions</b>
<b>Organisational culture</b>	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, lack of definition of organisational objectives.
<b>Role in organisation</b>	Role ambiguity and role conflict; responsibility for people unclear.
<b>Career development</b>	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under or over promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work.
<b>Decision latitude/ control</b>	Low participation in decision making, lack of control over work.
<b>Interpersonal relationships at work</b>	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support.
<b>Home-work interface</b>	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home, dual career problems.

<b>CONTENT OF WORK</b>	<b>Potential Hazardous Demands</b>
<b>Work environment and equipment</b>	Problems regarding the reliability, availability, suitability and maintenance or repair of both equipment and facilities.
<b>Task design</b>	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, underuse of skills, high uncertainty.
<b>Workload/pace of work</b>	Work overload or underload, lack of control, over pacing, high level of time pressures.
<b>Work schedule</b>	Poorly managed shift working, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsocial hours.

\* *Institute of Work, Health & Organisations, University of Nottingham, UK*

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## **Causes of Workplace Stress - HSE research**

Research within the HSE\* using the Work Positive framework indicates that while there are a range of potential stressors associated with each workplace, the following are common to many:

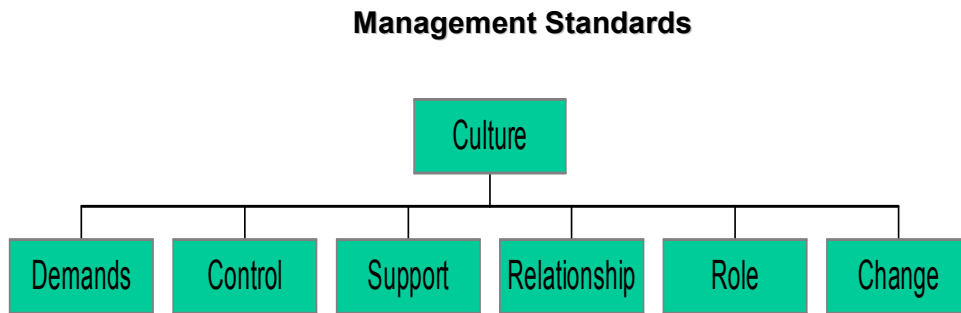
- High workloads, intense pressure, constant deadlines
- Lack of Control over work demands, conflicting demands
- Powerlessness - a sense that 'nothing can be done about it'
- Poor communication /consultation and/or information sharing
- Lack of feedback on performance & feeling undervalued
- Management style, inflexible working arrangements & unpredictable hours
- Uncomfortable work environments; frustration with faulty equipment
- Interpersonal conflict
- Change and uncertainty

\* Work Positive, HR Dept. HSE West

## Appendix 2

### 'Management standards' approach to risk assessment

The Health and Safety Executive in the UK has and the Health and Safety Authority in Ireland have identified six key areas for assessing potential sources of stress in the workplace. These are known as the '**management standards**'. They cover the primary sources of stress at work and can be used to measure performance in these areas. The six key areas are listed below.



#### 1. Demands of the job

In a healthy organisation, staff are neither overloaded nor under loaded with work and all employees are capable of doing what is expected of them. We should also observe this balance in matching effort and reward. Effort needs to be recognised and acknowledged, if not financially rewarded.

#### 2. Control

In a healthy organisation, employees can take part in decision making and are able to effectively use their range of skills.

#### 3. Support

In a healthy organisation, all employees have support and training and are able to balance work and life outside work.

#### 4. Relationships

In a healthy organisation, there are good working relationships and bullying and harassment at work is clearly dealt with.

#### 5. Role

In a healthy organisation, all employees are aware of what is expected of them in their role and how it will contribute to the organisation's strategy.

#### 6. Change

In a healthy organisation, the strategy for change is clear and all employees are aware of change and how it will affect them.



The management standards are designed to aid discussion about the impact of these potential sources of workplace stress. Managers can use these as a framework for identifying risk with one employee or with a group.

The Health and Safety Authority recommends **Work Positive** as the audit tool of choice for workplace stress. A number of case studies are included on the HSA website. Work Positive has been widely used in the Irish health services in recent years and a number of sites within the HSE have participated in the action research leading to its up-dating and revision in Ireland.

The HSA is now collaborating with the University of Ulster in relation to work place stress and an extensive range of support materials are available on the HSA website. It is possible to download the Work Positive survey in paper format from [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie) and there is also an on-line facility for completing it, which is managed by the University of Ulster.

Because it involves statistical analyses, Work Positive is more effective with larger numbers of employees. However, you can also use it as part of a risk assessment process with smaller groups to guide discussions about identifying potential stressors and possible solutions.

### Action plans

Whether you use the Work Positive toolkit or the Management Standards approach set out above, an action plan is a key part of the risk assessment process. It should include the following:

1. What is the problem?
2. How was the problem identified?
3. What actions are you going to take in response?
4. How you arrived at this solution;
5. Some key milestones and dates to reach them by;
6. A commitment to provide feedback to employees on progress;
7. A date to review your progress against the plan.

You can get more information on using Work Positive from the Irish Health and Safety Authority [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie) (go to workplace stress; then go to work positive on left, open page and see link) and on the Management Standards from the UK Health and Safety Executive website [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) or

## Guidance based on the Work Positive / Management Standards

1. **Demands of the job:** includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment.

### The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

### What should be happening?

- The demands on staff within the agreed hours of work are adequate and achievable;
- Employee's skills and abilities are matched to their job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

**Discuss these issues:** workload, work patterns and the work environment

### Questions to consider:

- Is the staff member able to cope with the demands of their job?
- Are the demands of the job excessive?
- Are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns?

2. **Control:** how much say employees have in the way they do their work.

### The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have some input as to the way they do their work; and
- There are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

### What should be happening?

- Where possible, employees have some control over some aspects of their work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- Employees have some say over when they take their breaks, where possible; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns/rosters/shifts.

**Discuss these issues:** Work activities and environment and each person's control over how work is carried out; consulting with staff.

**Questions to consider:**

- Does the staff member have any influence in the way they carry out their work activities, such as when they take their breaks?
- Are staff able to use their own initiative and skills?
- Are they encouraged to develop new skills?
- Are systems in place locally to respond to any individual /group concerns?

3. **Support:** includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources you receive from the organisation, line management and colleagues.

**The standard is that:**

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- There are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concern.

**What should be happening?**

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the resources they need to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

**Discuss these issues:**

- What encouragement, sponsorship and resources are provided by the organisation, line management and by colleagues?

**Questions to consider:**

- Do staff receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and managers?
- Do staff know what support is available and how and when to access it?
- Do staff know how to access the resources they need to do their job?
- Do staff receive regular and constructive feedback?

4. **Relationships:** includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

**The standard is that:**

- Employees state that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviour; and
- There are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**What should be happening?**

- We promote positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- We have agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour e.g. 'Dignity at Work' policy;
- We have systems in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- We have systems in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

**Discuss these issues:**

- Whether positive working relationships are promoted and present in the workplace, to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviours.

**Questions to consider:**

- Have staff been subjected to unacceptable behaviours, such as bullying?
- Do we manage unacceptable behaviour effectively?
- Are there mechanisms for staff to report unacceptable behaviours?

5. **Role:** that you understand your role within the organisation and we ensure that you do not have conflicting roles.

**The standard is that:**

- Employees state that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- There are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**What should be happening?**

- We ensure that, as far as possible, the different requirements we place on employees are compatible;
- We provide information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- We ensure that, as far as possible, the requirements we place on employees are clear; and
- We have systems in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

**Discuss these issues:**

- Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.

**Questions to consider:**

- Do staff say that they understand their role and responsibilities?
- In case of re-deployment, either short-term or long-term, has employee adequate information on their role and responsibility in the new location?
- As far as possible, are the different requirements we place on staff compatible and clearly understood?

6. **Change:** How we manage organisational change (large or small) and communicate it in the organisation.

**The standard is that:**

- Employees state that we engage them often when undergoing an organisational change; and
- There are systems in place locally to respond to any individual/group concerns - e.g Staff Association agreements, Grievance procedures.

**What should be happening?**

- We provide employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- We consult adequately with employees on changes and give them opportunities to influence proposals via agreed frameworks, including those with Trade Union/ Staff Associations.
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If needed, we give employees training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes; and
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

**Discuss these issues:**

- How we manage organisation change (large or small) and communicate it in the organisation

**Questions to consider:**

- Do managers engage with staff frequently when undergoing any organisational change?
- Do we consult staff enough?
- Do we give timely information about the reasons for proposed changes?
- Are staff aware of likely timescales for change?
- Do staff have access to relevant support during changes?

In addition to these 6 management standards, the Work Positive framework also sets out the following workplace stress indicators:

**Indicators:**

**The standard is that:**

- Employees indicate that pressure at work does not affect their health;
- Systems are in place to monitor and review common indicators of high pressure at work.

**What should be happening / states to be achieved:**

- The organisation monitors accidents and identifies their causes;
- The organisation has a Health and Safety Policy in place;
- The organisation monitors sickness absence and identifies reasons for absence;
- The organisation monitors turnover of staff and identifies reasons for resignation;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to identify and manage low morale among staff;
- The organisation monitors the performance/productivity of its staff; and
- Systems are in place for employees to raise concerns about their health and safety at work.