

Courtland School
Everybody Can Be Somebody

<h2 style="margin: 0;">Stress Awareness Policy</h2>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 There is a national acceptance that stress does exist in the working environment. With this recognition has come an increasing concern to find ways of helping people to cope with high levels of stress, they and their colleagues may be experiencing and the adverse effects on their lives. Stress should not be confused with pressure. Pressure and challenging demands are an inevitable and potentially beneficial aspect of working life.

1.2 The Health and Safety Executive outlines a practical approach to Stress Management:

"There is no such thing as a 'pressure free' job. Every job brings its own set of tasks, responsibilities and day-to-day problems, and the pressures and demands these place on us are an unavoidable part of working life. We are after all paid to work and to work hard and to accept the reasonable pressures that go with that "

"Some pressures can, in fact, be a good thing. It is often the tasks and challenges we face at work that provide the structure to our working days, keep us motivated and are the key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. But people's ability to deal with pressure is not limitless. Excessive workplace pressure and stress ... can be harmful... damage business performance and undermine the health of your workforce. "

1.3 This section to the Corporate Health Safety and Welfare Policy has been prompted by the desire of the council to respond to potential and actual stressors which have been identified through staff turnover, sickness absence, referrals to Occupational Health, surveys and complaints.

1.4 The LA understands that stress is a legitimate health issue; excessive or negative stress should not be seen as an inevitable part of modern life or of working life nor as a sign of individual's susceptibility or weakness. Employees suffering unacceptable pressures and/or stress related illness will be encouraged to seek help from their line manager.

2.0 AIMS

The aims of this policy are to:

- 2.1 Describe the procedures to be taken to comply with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- 2.2 Assist individuals to understand the causes of stress; learn ways of reducing the risk of stress impacting upon their and their colleagues' personal and working lives.
- 2.3 To explain some of the measures the Leadership Team at Courtland School has taken to reduce workload and thus reduce the risk of stress.

3.0 APPLICATION

This procedure applies to all members of staff.

4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 No current legislation refers specifically to the control of stress at work. It is not possible, given the current levels of knowledge, to set requirements or standards. The LA does however have a duty under Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that workplaces are safe and healthy and the Management of Health & Safety Regulations 1992 require employers to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in the workplace and to introduce measures to control those risks.
- 4.2 Ill health caused by stress at work must be treated in the same way as ill health caused by other elements in the workplace. The LA have a duty to ensure that employees' health is not put at risk by excessive or sustained levels of stress caused by the way work is organised, the way people relate to each other at work or simply the day to day demands placed on employees.

5.0 WHAT IS STRESS?

- 5.1 Stress is people's natural reaction to excessive pressure, it is not a disease or something always associated with work. Many things can make an individual stressed. For example, stuck in traffic coming to work, the prospect of a difficult meeting, fear of stress, divorce or even a boring routine. Certain amounts of pressure provide a healthy stimulus - an invigorating challenge - but too much or too little pressure can lead to unpleasant feelings of stress. If stress is excessive and goes on for some time it can lead to ill health.
- 5.2 The range of physical, mental and psycho-social stress symptoms can vary between Individuals, similarly, how much pressure the individual feels depends on them and how they see the situation. Individuals are likely to feel stress when they perceive a mismatch between the demands the situation makes upon them and what they perceive as their ability to respond.

6.0 CAUSES OF STRESS

- 6.1 There is no set formula for predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress as people respond differently to various types of pressure. An exciting challenge to one individual may be a daunting task to another, a repetitive job may appear boring and monotonous, but some people like and feel comfortable with routines. A lot depends on individual personalities, experience and motivation and support available from the school's managers, colleagues and family.
- 6.2 Much also depends on pressures felt by people from sources unrelated to work in home and personal life. Some people often come to work from a background of family sickness, bereavement, marital or other personal problems. Although these issues are outside employer's responsibilities; good employers will want to be aware of them because they make employees more vulnerable to work pressures as well as affecting their judgement and performance.
- 6.3 Generally, harmful stress levels are likely to occur when:
- pressures are prolonged or pile on top of each other
 - people feel trapped or have no control over demands placed upon them.
 - people are confused by conflicting demands on them.
- 6.4 Within public services organisations, stressors have been found to include:
- poor communication
 - negative management style
 - poor job design and limited opportunity for career progression
 - inadequate induction
 - bureaucracy
 - lack of resources
 - external factors which can make people feel uncertain about their work, career
 - prospects or job security
 - having to cover for colleagues whose performance is poor
 - working with too many temporary and agency staff who are unable to undertake the full range of duties
 - inadequate I.T. Systems
 - fear of being blamed if things go wrong
 - long or unsociable hours
 - bullying and harassment

7.0 **INDICATORS WHICH MAY POINT TO A STRESS PROBLEM**

Both the Leadership Team and staff of Courtland School have opportunities to identify and reduce stress in the workplace.

Below is a brief of signals that will be considered:

7.1 **Performance**

Reduction in output

Increase in errors
Poor decision-making
Indecisiveness
Deterioration in planning and control of work

7.2 Attitude and Behaviour

Irritability
Loss of motivation and commitment
Working increasingly long hours but achieving less
Poor time-keeping

7.3 Relationships at Work

Deteriorating relationships with colleagues
Deteriorating relationships with children

7.4 Sickness/Absence

Increase in sickness absence; particularly frequent short periods of absence.

8.0 MEASURES TO MINIMISE POTENTIAL STRESS

8.1 Leadership Team Training

The Leadership Team have a fundamental role in any successful health and safety policy. The Headteacher needs to have detailed knowledge of school demands, work environment and the characteristics of individual staff. This enables them to monitor, recognise and assess unacceptable pressures and potential stressors.

BPSI offers courses for managers in the following:

Interpersonal Skills
Recruitment and Selection Interviewing
Managing Change
Managing Attendance, Discipline and Grievance
Time Management
Managing Organisational Stress

8.2 Individual Training

To assist individuals who recognise there are constant pressures in their day to day life BPSI will provide courses on Managing Personal Stress, which are always advertised on the BPSI website. The Headteacher may also identify these courses as suitable for individuals at, for example, Performance Appraisal Reviews. Where the Headteacher/ Performance Appraisal reviewer identifies this need they should contact BPSI.

8.3 Selection of Staff and Job Design

Staff are one of a school's most valuable assets. While this is fact it is also true to say that the value of a member of staff to a school can be dramatically reduced if the employee is de-skilled, de-motivated or unable to cope with daily pressures. To overcome this potential problem, the recruitment process must be thorough.

At Courtland we are committed to safer recruitment and:

- the full range of tasks and demands of the job will be set out clearly in the job description/person specification and sent to all candidates.
- all references will seek information about the candidate's sickness and absence records, but care will be taken in the interpretation of the references. Where there is cause for concern there is a need to investigate because there may be a perfectly legitimate reason for any absence. Where appropriate, employment references will also ask specific references about the candidate's ability to handle stressful situations.
- any areas of potential pressure in the job should be identified and discussed at interview. For more senior positions selection testing may be appropriate. Advice should be sought from Human Resources Operations Unit.

8.4 Induction and Promotion

Courtland School recognises the importance of a planned induction process. A timetable for induction will be drawn up in addition to formal reviews after 2 weeks, one term and one year. The stress policy will also be discussed.

Existing staff can also be exposed to increased pressures when they are promoted or take on new roles. The same induction process should apply.

8.5 Teamwork

Creating a supportive culture in the school can help to relieve stress. The Leadership Team at Courtland School place a very high priority on teamwork. Actions or words that could affect other staff in the school should be considered carefully and always discussed, either one to one with the member of staff concerned or in a group/team situation. Formal examples might include Key Stage Meetings, Staff Meetings, TLC's, Senior Leadership Team Meetings but informal communication is also vital. All members of staff have a duty to ensure they communicate clearly and effectively **and in a polite manner**. The welfare of the children should always be paramount in any action or decisions taken by an individual, or team.

8.6 Consultation

Whenever possible, the Leadership team at Courtland School will promote consensus in teams. However this is not always possible as leaders in the school will sometimes

have to overturn a previous decision or "go against" the majority. Such action may leave staff confused or vulnerable but leaders are committed to explaining (where practicable) why they have used their discretion. Moreover, managers in the school see **consultation** as the most important part of the decision making process.

8.7 Managing Change

The world of education is constantly changing with new initiatives arriving in schools at an alarming rate. This can be a major cause of stress. The school's policy is to consider carefully whether or not to implement changes which are not statutory and to plan for them where they are beneficial or necessary. The school puts a very high priority on training in order that staff can acquire the necessary skills to cope with the change. The School Improvement Plan is the tool by which significant changes are planned and introduced with all staff being consulted.

8.8 Flexible Working Arrangements

Staff are often working parents which can sometimes add pressure to their work duties. The leadership team will listen sympathetically to occasional requests for flexibility in working hours eg. to visit their child's school for a special event. When their child is ill the leadership team understands that child care arrangements can be difficult to arrange and will be flexible in the approach to the occasional day's absence. A similar approach will be taken regarding the care of elderly parents. This is in accordance with the Absence policy.

8.9 Harassment and Dignity at Work

Harassment, discrimination and bullying are negative behaviours which can have a devastating effect on individuals and can lead to fear, stress and anxiety. The council has a Harassment and Dignity at Work Policy and has produced management guidance notes for dealing with these issues. A support officer scheme is also in operation to offer assistance to staff suffering harassment or bullying in the work place. The scheme supports staff by offering first contact counselling and help identify possible options and advise on the council's procedure. The scheme also aims to help raise the awareness of perpetrators.

The policy and support officer scheme has been well publicised. It is critical that awareness about the policy is sustained and that workplace culture continues to encourage staff to deal with such issues, with the confidence that they will be taken seriously.

8.10 Grievance Procedure

The LA believes its workforce should be treated equally and with respect. The grievance procedure provides a means for dealing promptly with grievances. Grievances which are not dealt with can fester leading to poor employee relations,

which can lead to stress and major disputes. New guidelines about how to deal with grievances have recently been adopted by the council.

Mediation has also been included in the grievance guidelines. Mediation can offer a swift and cost effective way of managing conflicts at work. The process brings people together in the presence of an impartial third party who facilitates people coming to an agreement.

Increased number of grievances can be a sign of growing pressure at work and this can manifest itself as stress, tension and conflict between colleagues and poor relationships with children.

8.11 Capability Procedure

The capability procedure is intended to deal sensitively with a perceived "gap" between an individual's performance and the required performance standards for the job. Poor performance can be both a source and consequence of stress. At Courtland we are committed to tackling poor performance at the earliest possible stage as this can help resolve the issue and minimise possible stress within the individual and amongst colleagues. Human Resource Operations Unit assists the school's management in applying the capability procedure in a sensitive and effective manner.

8.12 Violence at Work

Employees who experience violence at work, the threat of violence or anxiety about violence will experience pressures which in some individuals may result in stress. The Corporate Health, Safety & Welfare Policy requires the school to identify those work areas where the risk of violence is significant and to introduce appropriate control measures which help to maintain the safety and health of those involved. (See Section 9 "Violence at Work" of the Corporate Health, Safety & Welfare Policy for details).

8.13 Return to Work after Absence

In consultation with the member of staff and if necessary advice from the Occupational Health Unit and Human Resources Operations Unit, the school would plan for an individual's return to work after a stress related illness. For example, a person who has been absent due to stress may be ready to return to some aspects of their job but not others and it may be possible to adjust work responsibilities or to arrange for them to work on a part-time basis initially.

After the member of staff returns to work the Headteacher should continue to meet with them to discuss their recovery and the factors which may have contributed to the stress. Meetings may be required more frequently initially when progress has to be more closely supervised. If the member of staff is still finding difficulties coping then the Headteacher could attempt to redesign the job temporarily or consider transfer of the employee to another post. The advice of the

Occupational Health Unit should be sought. Human Resources Operations Unit may be able to advise on alternative employment. Any alternative working arrangements should be reviewed after three months.

8.14 Reduction in Workload

Our policy is to reduce the workload of staff.

9.0 PROVIDING HELP FOR THOSE EXPERIENCING STRESS SYMPTOMS

Offering help and support to staff who are affected by pressures and stress is extremely beneficial if it is offered in conjunction with proactive action so far as is reasonably practical, to reduce the stresses. The Headteacher will offer those employees suffering from stress symptoms referral to the Occupational Health Unit. The Occupational Health Unit is usually able to arrange counselling via the individual's own General Practitioner. The school currently employs HEWS and staff training on what they provide has already been given. Copies of how to contact a free service for the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) are kept in the Staffroom. This new service is provided by Capita and provides 24/7 telephone service with professional and qualified trained advisors. To access the free EAP telephone service you need to call 0800 716 017. In addition to the helpline, this programme also offers an online portal, which can be found at www.employeecare.com

10.0 MONITORING FOR STRESS IN THE WORK PLACE

10.1 Performance Appraisal

At Performance Appraisal interviews/ reviews the opportunity will be taken to encourage staff to raise any problems arising from work which may be creating pressure such as conflicting priorities, excessive work load, lack of job satisfaction, training needs and discuss ways of resolving these. Performance Appraisal Interviews are for all members of Staff employed by the school.

10.2 Absence Monitoring

The Headteacher/Welfare Officer is responsible for day to day monitoring of staff absence. When a member of staff returns from a period of absence the Headteacher will inquire as to the illness, ensure the employee is fit to return for work and that the notification procedure under the sickness scheme is complied with. Where the absence is long term the Headteacher, whilst adopting a sensitive and sympathetic approach, will contact the employee. If stress is identified as a factor for the member of staff's absence, the local stress risk assessment may need to be reviewed and the employee should be referred to the Occupational Health Unit so that confirmation of fitness can be made. The procedure for dealing with the member of staff's ill health is outlined in the Personnel Procedures Manual.

10.3 Referrals to Occupational Health Unit

The Occupational Health Unit will be contacted for advice if needed. Confidentiality will be kept at all times. Where a trend in mental health is associated with work practices, the unit in conjunction with the relevant service will undertake analysis with a view to identifying support solutions. Occupational Health will be contacted if a member of Staff comes back to work on a phased return, for longer than two weeks, after a long term absence.

10.4 Leavers

A leaver's questionnaire will be given to all Barnet leavers. These should be monitored by Human Resources Strategy Unit as they indicate what has influenced the individual's decision to leave and how they felt about working in Barnet. On receipt of a questionnaire, which identifies work pressures as factors, the Headteacher will be contacted, so that the stress risk assessment may be reviewed if necessary.

Stress Awareness Policy

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