

HOW TO.....MANAGE WORK-RELATED STRESS

What is work-related stress?

The Health and Safety Executive defines work-related stress as:

'The adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other demands placed on them at work'.

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on this.

Recognising signs of stress in an individual

Some common signs of stress are:

- Persistent or recurring moods; anger, irritability, frustration, detachment or withdrawal from others, worry or anxiety, depression, guilt, sadness.
- Physical signs: aches and pains, raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin problems, sleep disorders, exhaustion, nausea, lowered resistance to minor illnesses.
- Behaviour changes: difficulty concentrating, losses of memory, poor judgement, making more mistakes, checking things repeatedly, increasing use of coffee, alcohol, drugs, tobacco or other stimulants.

If an individual experiences stress over long periods, they may also develop high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, chronic anxiety and/or long-term depression.

Managers should be vigilant of the following:

- An increase in overall sickness absence – especially frequent short absences.
- Poor work performance – less output, lower quality of work, poor decision making, poor timekeeping, increased occurrence of accidents.
- Relationships at work – poor relationships with customers or conflict with other employees

Employee's attitude and behaviour – poor timekeeping, loss of motivation or commitment, working long hours but with decreasing effectiveness, erratic behaviour

Possible sources of stress in the workplace

The following are examples of some of the things that can cause work-place stress:

- Poor physical working conditions or job design.
- Uncontrolled or excessive workloads and working hours
- Conflicting demands and uncertainty about responsibilities.
- Complaints from customers, other employees or other sources.
- Inconsistent or poorly communicating management or lack of support.
- Unresolved and/or unaddressed issues raised by the employee.
- Being set tasks which are inappropriate to ability or lack of adequate training.
- Harassment and bullying.

How to.....manage work-related stress (cont'd)

Employer's responsibilities

An employer is responsible for ensuring the health of their employees is not adversely affected by their work.

You should treat work-related stress as a health and safety risk factor and ensure that:

- ✓ Stress is one of the hazards assessed when completing risk assessments.
- ✓ Good communication processes operate within your business,
- ✓ You have a supportive culture in place and that stress-related issues can be openly discussed.
- ✓ Employees have clearly defined role expectations and work objectives that are understood by everyone.
- ✓ An employee's workload is appropriate, and the demands of the job do not exceed their ability or capability.
- ✓ Employees are provided with the appropriate training to do their role.
- ✓ Employees know they can (and should) report work-related stress.
- ✓ Managers are trained to recognise and deal with work-related stress.
- ✓ Good working relationships are maintained in your organisation.
- ✓ Organisational change is managed and communicated effectively.
- ✓ You develop individual action plans for employees suffering from stress.

Investigating work-related stress

If an employee tells you that they are experiencing stress in the workplace you are advised to do the following:

- ✓ Arrange a meeting to listen to the employee's concerns and try to find out the nature of the stress involved. E.g. harassment / bullying, environmental, workloads, communication problems, workplace relationships, performance problems, etc.
- ✓ Take notes of all discussions / meetings.
- ✓ Consider what action(s) may be taken to address the employee's concerns
- ✓ Check whether existing procedures have been activated if appropriate. E.g. grievance procedure, harassment procedures, training.
- ✓ Arrange an appointment with occupational health to obtain a medical view where appropriate.
- ✓ Develop individual action plans for employees suffering from stress.
- ✓ Offer counselling where appropriate.
- ✓ Seek expert advice.

Further information

For more information visit <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>

I hope you found this guide useful. Contact me at Karen@KDDHRSolutions.com if you would like more information.