

## MFT Preventing Stress and Emotional Ill Health in the Workplace

Mary Frances Trust (MFT) seeks to maintain a positive and supportive working environment for all its staff and volunteers. It recognises that excessive or prolonged pressure in the workplace can have a negative impact on the organisation and individuals, and that this can be prevented and alleviated through appropriate action on the part of individuals and their managers. This policy aims to establish standards for managers and staff on the prevention and management of work-related stress. It provides guidance to managers and supervisors to facilitate the implementation of these standards, as well as information on sources of support available to individuals' experiencing feelings of stress.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Patrick Wolter, *Chief Executive*

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## Definition

MFT adopts the definition of stress used by Health and Safety Executive (HSE), namely "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them", and which draws a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when pressure becomes excessive.

Stress is a state, and where stress lasts for only a short time there is usually no lasting effect. However, if the stress is sustained over a longer period, it can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, work performance, and morale. This can then lead to burn out. Reducing and preventing work-related stress therefore brings clear benefits to the employer as well as to staff. MFT has adopted the approach to the management and prevention of stress recommended by the HSE, which is based on the HSE's 'management standards'.

## Prevention

MFT recognises that it has a duty of care towards its staff and its volunteers and a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment.

## Organisational Approach

MFT aims to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that staff work in a positive, safe, and supportive working environment by seeking to:

- Promote sound management practice.
- Provide a framework of employment, health, and safety policies.
- Promote equality of opportunity and provide a workplace where harassment and bullying are not tolerated.
- Foster effective workload allocation and feedback on performance.
- Promote good communication throughout the organisation.
- Provide information and training to enable staff to develop their skills and maximise their contribution to the success of MFT.

- Provide appropriate employee support using monthly supervisions with their Line manager, to include standard agenda items of 'Check in', 'Workload', 'Concerns' and 'Further Support Needs'. Also, the availability of reflective spaces for the whole team with the Clinical Lead.

### **Managers' responsibilities**

Managers play an important role in facilitating and supporting staff to carry out their jobs effectively and to contribute to the success of MFT. To minimise the risk of work-related stress, managers should:

- Ensure good communications, particularly where there are organisational or procedural changes.
- Ensure that jobs are properly designed, with realistic demands and workload, and that expectations and job role are clear.
- Ensure that staff are trained to undertake the demands of their job and are empowered to contribute to decisions about how the job is done.
- Ensure that there are regular opportunities to discuss the work and obtain feedback on performance, e.g., regular one-to-one meetings, team meetings and reflective spaces.
- Ensure staff are aware and take advantage of MFT's workplace support programme through BHSF.
- Monitor working hours and holidays to ensure that staff are not overworking and are taking appropriate breaks. This includes toil being taken close to the time it is accrued.
- Identify or respond to issues of concern promptly and seek constructive solutions.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful training and development opportunities.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated.
- Recognise changes in behaviour and offer additional support to any member of staff who is known to be experiencing stress when notified or identified.

We understand that it may be necessary to carry out disciplinary procedures to address poor performance or conduct. It is recognised that the prospect of disciplinary proceedings or the proceedings themselves may be stressful for the staff involved. This should not of itself prevent managers from pursuing legitimate management action: indeed, lengthy delays in the disciplinary process may aggravate stress. Managers should, however, seek advice as to how to support the member of staff concerned while the disciplinary process is in progress to mitigate the effects of any stress. Similar advice may be necessary in the context of the grievance procedure. Discussions with the Senior Management Team about the best course of action during a process are vital.

### The HSE Management Standards

The HSE has identified six key "Management Standards" that represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, well-being, and organisational performance. These management standards provide a practical framework which organisations can use to minimise the impact of work-related stress. The Management Standards are summarised below. The stress in the workplace risk assessment should be based on these.

|                      | HSE management standard                                                                 |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Demands</b>       | Staff can cope with the demands of the job                                              |
| <b>Control</b>       | Staff can have a say about the way work is done                                         |
| <b>Support</b>       | Staff receive adequate information and support from colleagues and managers             |
| <b>Relationships</b> | Staff are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying or harassment at work |
| <b>Roles</b>         | Staff understand their role and responsibilities                                        |
| <b>Change</b>        | Staff are involved in and consulted about any organisational changes                    |

The above, based on the HSE management standards, is intended to provide managers and staff with guidance on the practical steps they can take to identify and address potential sources of workplace stress.

## **Risk Identification and Assessment**

All staff may experience periods of pressure at work at some time, and short periods of pressure are not necessarily of concern. It is the risk from sustained and/or excessive pressure, without the opportunity to recover, that needs to be assessed, and measures put in place to control the risk of adverse effects.

MFT should always include an assessment of the potential for work-related stress, and how this can be mitigated, for example, by the provision of appropriate training and support, ensuring effective and timely communication, by considering the timing of new initiatives to avoid conflicting deadlines and priorities, by ensuring the demands on staff are not otherwise excessive, and by seeking to ensure a supportive management culture.

Similarly, departmental managers should have arrangements in place to identify and address potential stressors in the workplace - for example, a review of sickness absence records/certificates, particularly those indicating stress, data on staff turnover, and issues raised in individual supervisions and staff meetings.

MFT is committed to improving management practice through the provision of regular supervisions, training and one to one support, the promotion of anti-bullying policies, as well as supporting positive initiatives such as the recognition and of individual contribution to the work of MFT.

## **Management of individual cases of stress**

Where cases of workplace stress are identified, managers should seek information from the individual as to the contributory factors perceived by the individual and possible remedies.

The early detection of individuals experiencing related health difficulties is vital, and managers and individuals are encouraged to seek advice and assistance at as early a stage as possible. Signposting of employees to the employee support programme from BHSF is supportive.

## Employee Responsibilities

It is essential that staff play an active role in contributing to their own well-being and development, as well as to the success of MFT. To minimise the risk of work-related stress, staff should:

- Make it clear to their line manager that they are experiencing the effects of distress, ill health (emotional or physical) when identified.
- Ensure good communication with colleagues and their line manager.
- Support colleagues wherever possible.
- Engage in discussion about their performance and act on feedback.
- Raise issues of concern at an early stage and seek constructive solutions during supervisions, staff meetings, or by requesting a meeting with their line manager.
- Ensure that harassment and bullying are not tolerated.
- Seek appropriate advice and support at an early stage if difficulties arise.

It is hoped that a proactive approach will mitigate the occurrence of potentially harmful levels of stress. However, where a member of staff feels under undue pressure, he or she should alert their line manager, or another appropriate person, or a colleague who may be able to speak on his or her behalf, or otherwise to seek assistance as soon as possible.