

The Perfect Storm

nipsa
Protecting Public Services
Supporting Public Servants

Stress at Work: A NIPSA Guide



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Introduction

Our members have been under sustained attack as part of the government's perfect storm of ideological driven cuts to jobs, services, pay and pensions. As part of the Stormont House Agreement the government pledged to cut 20,000 public sector jobs over a four year period. This commitment was restated within the "Fresh Start" Agreement. We have already seen the impact this is having in the Northern Ireland Civil Service with 3,200 jobs due to be lost through the Voluntary Exit Scheme by the end of March 2016. On top of this we have seen hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs lost in other areas of the public sector such as Housing, Voluntary and Community sector, Health, Education and Libraries with many more to follow. As part of the "Fresh Start" Agreement we will also see a complete overhaul of the welfare system with the implementation of the Welfare Reform Bill.

The impact on the staff remaining will be substantial and a major health, safety and wellbeing issue. The increase in stress related cases in recent years has coincided with cuts in public services and job losses. As well as causing anxiety and uncertainty among the workforce it has also led to increases in workloads, with less staff being asked to do more. According to a survey conducted by the Health and Safety Executive (GB) in 2012 the number one cause of stress is increases in workload. However they also show that lack of support and control, changes at work, role uncertainty, violence and bullying (all possible symptoms of job cuts) are significant factors.

What is Stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as *"the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them"*.

What the Law says

If a member is suffering from work-related stress as a result of increases in workloads or undue pressure placed upon them as a

result of staff shortages, posts being unfilled and reallocation of work, the employer has a duty to manage and eliminate the risk as they have with any other hazard.

The **Health and Safety at Work Order (NI) 1978** requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees.

The **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 2003** requires employers to assess the risks of ill health (including stress related conditions) arising from work-related activities, ensuring that hazards are removed or proper control measures are put in place to reduce the risk, this includes the risk to mental health.

The **EU Directive 89/391** extends the duty on employers to both physical and psychological health of employees in connection with the working environment.

Other legislation that may be relevant to work-related stress includes:

- **The Working Time Regulations (NI) Order 1998:** These place limits on the length of the working day and week, places restrictions on night working and sets out entitlement to breaks, daily rests etc. These requirements are important when it comes to dealing with long hours culture and a lack of rest;
- **The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (as amended):** Stress may be a symptom of an underlying condition that could amount to a disability. Under the DDA employers are required, in such an eventuality, to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, such as reducing an employee's workload when they are stressed;
- **The Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended):** May be used where stress is caused by for example, a male/female line manager treating a male/female member of staff in an overbearing and dominating way;

- **The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended):** May be used where stress is caused by a manager treating an employee in a discriminatory way on the grounds of their race;
- **The Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997:** This may be relevant where stress is caused by harassment.

The Legal Precedents

1995 - Walker vs. Northumberland CC: the first really successful case where the second breakdown was deemed to be employer responsibility.

2002 - Hatton and other cases: Four cases taken together where judgements were overturned on Appeal leading to closer focus on foreseeability and causation and setting out the Hale 16 principles;

2004 - Barber vs. Somerset CC: one of the group of Hatton cases further appealed, established need for employer to look at employee's condition and to make appropriate adjustments;

2005 - Hartman vs. Essex MH Trust: further reinforced the Hale 16 principles;

2007 - Hiles vs. S Gloucs PCT and Daw vs. Intel Corp UK: both claimants had broken down emotionally at work and employers were found wanting in respect of failure to investigate causes;

2008 Dickens vs. O2: reinforced that employers have a duty to investigate once they become aware of employee health problems.



An important message in all of these cases is the fit note must clearly state that the member is suffering from a "psychiatric injury due to work-related stress".

Causes of Stress

Excessive Workloads

There are times when our workload is manageable but it's when it becomes unmanageable that stress begins to kick in. This could be due to staff shortages, voluntary exit schemes, early retirements, vacancy controls, maternity and long term sick leave, resulting in posts not being filled. The work still needs to be done and there is a culture that it is divided amongst the staff who are left behind.

Performing duties above your pay grade and not adequately trained

Being given duties above your pay grade can cause stress for a number of reasons:

- Allocated a task without sufficient training;
- Other staff questioning your role;
- Not having the support of management and other colleagues.



FYI

If the training to carry out a job safely and competently is not provided this leaves you and others at risk.

Bullying, Harassment and Violence

Authoritarian, dictatorial, insensitive and sometimes cruel management styles are well recognised causes of work-related stress illnesses.

There are various definitions of bullying but all agree that it involves the unjust exercise of power by one individual over another using means intended to humiliate, frighten, denigrate or injure the victim.

Bullies use offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour against their victims to cow them into submission, to hide their own ineffectiveness, or to pass on to those over whom they exercise authority, the bullying that they are suffering from those who exercise authority over them. Often the aim of the bullying is to exclude and isolate the victim from co-workers. Sometimes bullies behave this way in the mistaken belief that this is 'strong' management and sometimes, it seems, simply for the pleasure of making somebody suffer. A particularly nasty dimension is added when there is a sexual, racial or religious dimension to the behaviour as can often be the case.

Bullying may be overt or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual. A bully does not have to be face to face with his/her victim. People can be bullied by memo, by email, or telephone. Some regard the inappropriate use of automatic supervision methods such as computer recording of downtime from work or the number of calls handled, as an insidious form of bullying. Some workers are subject to malicious use of websites, email, mobile phone texting, social networking and other uses of technology to create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. This 'cyber' bullying is a growing problem.



FYI

For more information see NIPSA's Dignity at Work Guide

http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Equal%20Opportunities/Dignity_at_Work_13215_web.pdf

Also available Tackling Violence at Work Guide *[http://](http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/HS/Ref-A5_0167.pdf)*

www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/HS/Ref-A5_0167.pdf

Many forms of behaviour can constitute bullying. The following, though not an exhaustive list, may constitute bullying:

- Ignoring or excluding you;
- Giving you unachievable tasks;
- Negative body language;
- Spreading malicious rumours/gossip;
- Giving you meaningless or unpleasant jobs regularly;
- Making belittling remarks;
- Undermining your integrity;
- Withholding information deliberately;
- Making you look stupid in public;
- Undervaluing your contribution and not giving you credit for your work.

The Environment You Work In

Poor working conditions, such as noise, heating or bad lighting can be very distracting e.g. noise, straining eyes/migraines due to bad lighting and these all affect how we feel in work and affect our mood. This over a continuous period of time can be quite stressful.

Issues in Your Personal Life

Sometimes our work life balance can become challenging and it is impossible to compartment our lives. Line managers and employers should do their best to support the person whilst they are experiencing these challenges.

Effects and Symptoms of Stress

Our world moves at a breakneck pace, and there's a consistent onus put on us to work harder, move faster and get further before we die. Unfortunately, we could all die sooner because of this very notion. Stress not only causes depression and mental strain, but it has a big physical impact on your body as well.

Many of the things you might think are normal physical ups and downs are actually due to stress. That headache you always get may be caused by stress. Same with your asthma and eczema. The bad back you think is due to your advanced age? It could be because of stress. If you're constipated or have diarrhoea, it might have more to do with stress than anything you've had to eat. These are just some of the effects of acute or temporary stress. Chronic stress over an extended period of time can do as much damage to your body as smoking, not eating right and failing to exercise.

Physical Effects of Acute Stress

Acute stress is an immediate reaction to a stressful situation. It could mean that you're in danger, you've just had a work deadline moved up, your boss is in your face yelling at you. When you get stressed out suddenly, a chain reaction occurs in your body. First, your **hypothalamus** is activated. It's located above the brain stem and is responsible for linking your **nervous system** (your body's communicator) to your **endocrine system** (a group of organs that release hormones) by way of the pituitary gland. This also tells the **sympathetic nervous system** to get going.

This part of your nervous system controls what you may know as the fight-or-flight response. It's basically your body's way of dealing with acute stress.

The physical effects of this kind of immediate stress range from an increased heartbeat to shallow breathing. This is because there's a greater flow of oxygen into the body. Your pupils will dilate to allow more light to enter your eye. All of these things happen because of a release of **adrenaline** - the body's main stress hormone. There's also a release of **cortisol**, another stress hormone, by the adrenal gland. Cortisol will jack up your blood pressure and blood sugar. Your liver will begin to manufacture some **glucose** to provide you with extra energy as well. After your stress goes away you may feel a physical crash - this is because of the extra glucose you've burned off. It essentially leaves you



Cognitive Symptoms

- Memory problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor judgment
- Seeing only the negative
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Constant worrying



Emotional Symptoms

- Moodiness
- Irritability or short temper
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Depression or general unhappiness



Physical Symptoms

- Aches and pains
- Diarrhoea or constipation (IBS)
- Nausea, dizziness
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Loss of sex drive
- Frequent colds



Behavioural Symptoms

- Eating more or less
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
- Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

with a low supply of blood sugar, like when you haven't had anything to eat all day.

The diarrhoea we talked about on the previous page comes about because stress can make the bowels move faster. When your bowels are moving rapidly, there's less time for water to be reabsorbed into your body and just like that, you suddenly have watery stools. Thanks, stress!

Many health problems are caused or exacerbated by stress, including:

- Pain of any kind;
- Heart disease;
- Digestive problems;
- Sleep problems;
- Depression;
- Weight problems;
- Auto immune diseases;
- Skin conditions, such as eczema.

Physical Effects of Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is a state of prolonged and continuous stress, and it can have some pretty drastic effects on your body. What's happening here is that your sympathetic system that helps you deal with the fight-or-flight response is always turned on. But in this case, there's not an immediate danger that you face and then come down from, achieving homeostasis. It's not good for your body to be in a constant state of danger management.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress Overload

The graphic on page 8 shows some of the common warning signs and symptoms of chronic stress. The more signs and symptoms you notice in yourself, the closer you may be to stress overload.

Keep in mind that the signs and symptoms of stress overload can also be caused by other psychological or medical problems. If you're experiencing any of the warning signs of stress, it's important to see a doctor to help determine if your symptoms are stress-related.

Duties and Responsibilities

Board/Directors/Chief Executives

Need to consider how they will:

- Monitor factors that might suggest there is a problem with stress-related illness in the business, for example, high rates of absenteeism, staff turnover, poor performance, conflict between staff;
- Ensure there is a health and safety policy that addresses the issue of stress in the workplace, including, if appropriate, a stress management strategy which is effectively communicated to all staff;
- Ensure an effective generic risk assessment has been carried out, and is monitored regularly and with any recommendations being implemented and adequately funded;
- Plan for stress-related risks when embarking on significant organisational change.

Line Managers

Line managers have an important role in assisting employers to proactively address work related stress, and in doing so reduce the likelihood of employees suffering from work related stress. They are crucial to the successful prevention and management of work related stress within their team. They tend to be the one of the first ports of call when there is a problem and they are in an ideal position to be able to identify and manage stress.

If a manager has the appropriate skills they are better able to deal with stress within the team. Line managers' roles and responsibilities include:

- To understand what work related stress is, what causes it and how it can be prevented and managed;
- To engage and communicate with staff about stress and raise awareness;
- To be aware of your organisation's policies and procedures on this issue;
- To support and get involved in organisational initiatives to tackle stress, for example, encouraging staff to complete questionnaires attend focus groups or suggest solutions;
- To understand their role is to prevent and manage work related stress and that they can sometimes cause or exacerbate it;
- To be aware of their competencies in managing and preventing this issue and how this can impact on staff, as well as taking action to improve their competencies;
- To identify work related stress in their team members early, to carry out an individual risk assessment and work with the individual and human resources in resolving the problem;
- To support staff to prevent work related stress and to help them manage it once it occurs, including providing access to relevant support services;
- To carry out a team and/or individual risk assessment to identify risks and implement solutions that will prevent work related stress in their area;
- To help staff return successfully to work after work related stress;
- To be aware and supportive of factors affecting staff.

Employees

Employees also have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and of others who may be affected by their actions.

Employees should:

- Inform their employer if they feel the pressure of the job is putting them or anyone else at risk of psychiatric injury;
- Talk to your GP about your concerns and how the stress is affecting your health;
- Suggest ways in which the work might be organised to alleviate the stress;
- Discuss any reasonable adjustments that could be made to assist them in performing their job.

Employees have a responsibility to raise concerns and tell their manager or trade union representative about possible problems and sources of stress. If the organisation is not aware of a problem it can be difficult for action to be taken.

Employees' roles and responsibilities include:

- To understand what work related stress is, what causes it and how it can be prevented and managed;
- To be aware of your organisation's policies and procedures on this issue;
- To help identify potential causes of stress for yourself or your colleagues before they become a problem and to raise them with your line manager, trade union representative or other suitable individual;
- To support and get involved in organisational initiatives to tackle this issue, for example, completing questionnaires, attending focus groups or suggesting solutions as part of Management Standards process;
- To be supportive of colleagues experiencing work related stress;

- To work with your line manager or HR department in identifying solutions to help you return to work effectively and quickly.

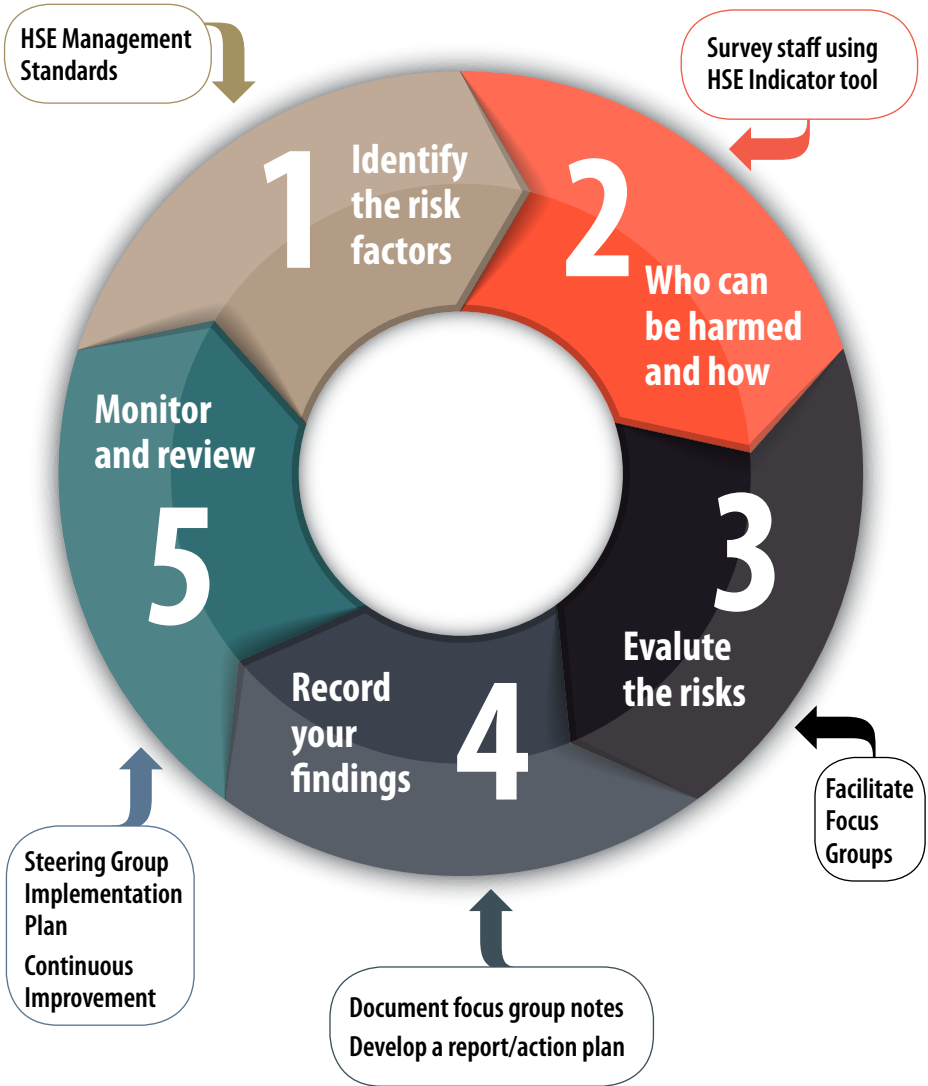
Risk Assessment

The law places a legal duty on employers to risk assess work-related stress as they do with any other hazard both at an **organisational** and **individual level**. A risk assessment is a way of identifying the hazards or things that may cause harm, assessing the likelihood (risk) of these hazards causing harm, and then putting in place all “reasonably practical” steps to avoid and minimise them.

The most effective tool for **organisations** to identify the cause of workplace stress and implement practical solutions to manage the risks is by the use of the **HSE Management Standards** which have been endorsed by the TUC and adopted by the HSENI (http://www.hseni.gov.uk/guidance/topics/stress/management_standards.htm).

While the standards are primarily designed to address stress at an organisation level they can be used as a framework for managing stress at an **individual** level. Managing work-related stress should be incorporated into performance management systems.

Five Step approach to Risk Assessment



The Management Standards

The Management Standards have been designed to assist employers in identifying causes of stress in the workplace. It demonstrates good practice through risk assessment, allows evaluation of the current situation using surveys and other techniques, and promotes active discussion with employees to help decide upon practical improvements.

It is important that NIPSA are consulted and involved in the introduction of the standards at every stage.

The Management Standards define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where the risks from work-related stress are being effectively managed and controlled.

They cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the **six Management Standards** cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

Demands: this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

Control: how much say the person has in the way they do their work.

Support: this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

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

Role: whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures they do not have conflicting roles.

Change: how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Demands...

...the standard should be: Staff 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.

Possible solutions:

Workload

- Develop personal work plans to ensure staff know what their job involves;
- There could be weekly or monthly team meetings to discuss the anticipated workload for the forthcoming week/month;
- Make reasonable adjustments to alleviate excessive workloads;
- Ensure sufficient resources are available for staff to be able to do their jobs;
- Provide training (formal or informal) to help staff prioritise, or information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities;
- Undertake risk assessment/survey of workloads.

Competency

- Managers should devise a system to keep training records up to date and to ensure employees feel competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job;
- Should consider implementing personal development/training plans which help individuals to identify development/training needs/opportunities which can then be discussed with management.

Demands...

Working patterns

- Review working hours and shift work systems – have these been agreed with staff;
- Consider changes to start and end times to help employees to cope with pressures external to the organisation (e.g. child care, poor commuting routes etc);
- Develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours.

Physical environment and violence

- Ensure risk assessments for physical hazards and risks are up to date;
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse. Take steps to deal with this in consultation with employees and others who can help (e.g. the police, charities);
- Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations (e.g. difficult phone calls, aggressive members of the public).

Managers Should...

- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding;
- Provide realistic deadlines;
- Provide adequate training and resources for doing the job;
- Vary work to provide stimulation and opportunities for staff to use their skills;

Demands...

- Attend to the physical environment – take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, noise levels, vibration, dust etc where possible;
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse, and take steps to deal with it.

Managers Shouldn't...

- Ask people to do tasks that they are not trained to do;
- Encourage staff to take work home with them;
- Allocate more work to a person or team;
- Allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours or missing breaks;
- Ask young people (under 18 years of age) to take on work that may be beyond **their emotional maturity**.

Control...

...the standard should be: Staff indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work, and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Possible solutions

- Staff are consulted over their work patterns;
- Agree systems that enable management and staff to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken, e.g. through project meetings, one-to-ones, performance reviews;
- Hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the anticipated output and methods of working. Provide opportunities for discussion and input;
- Allocate responsibility to teams rather than individuals to take projects forward discuss and define teams at the start of a project;
 - agree roles;
 - agree timescales;
 - agree the provision of managerial support, e.g. through regular progress meetings.
- Talk about the way decisions are made – is there scope for more involvement?
- Talk about the skills people have and if they believe they are able to use these to good effect;
- How else would they like to use their skills?
- Where possible, staff have control over their pace of work;

Control...

- Staff are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, staff are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.

Managers Should...

- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making;
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work.

Managers Shouldn't...

- Monitor employees' movements in detail (including breaks);
- Monitor working style, unless necessary (e.g. where there are child protection needs);
- Ask staff to stay late.

Support...

...the standard should be: Staff indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors and Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Possible solutions

- The organisation should have policies and procedures to adequately support staff;
- Systems should be in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- Systems should be in place to enable and encourage staff to support their colleagues;
- Staff know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Staff know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Staff receive regular and constructive feedback.

Other Possible Solutions

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to talk about any emerging issues or pressures;
- Hold regular liaison/team meetings to discuss unit pressures;
- Include 'work-related stress/emerging pressures' as a standing item for staff meetings and/or performance reviews;
- Seek examples of how people would like to, or have, received good support from managers or colleagues – can these be adopted across the unit?

Support...

- Ask how employees would like to access managerial support, e.g. 'open door' policies, or agreed times when managers are able to discuss emerging pressures;
- Introduce flexibility in work schedules (where possible) to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments;
- Develop training arrangements and refresher sessions to ensure training and competencies are up to date and appropriate for the core functions of their jobs;
- Talk about ways the organisation could provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside work;
- Disseminate information on other areas of support (human resources department, occupational health, trained counsellors, charities);
- Offer access to counsellors.

Managers Should...

- Ensure staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job;
- Provide constructive, supportive advice at annual appraisal;
- Provide flexibility in work schedules, where possible;
- Allow phased return to work after sickness absence;
- Hold regular liaison/team meetings;
- Provide opportunities for career development;
- Deal sensitively with staff experiencing problems outside work.

Support...

Managers Shouldn't...

- Trivialise the problems of others;
- Discriminate against people on grounds of sex, race, disability or any other Section 75 ground.

Relationships...

...the standard should be: Staff indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Possible solutions

- Develop a written policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour at work – **and** communicate this to staff - such as a dignity at work policy, bullying and harassment policy;
- Agree and implement procedures to prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work – and communicate this to staff;
- Agree and implement a confidential reporting system to enable the reporting of unacceptable behaviour;
- Agree and implement a grievance and disciplinary procedure for dealing with unacceptable behaviour – circulate and/or display these;
- Select or build teams which have the right blend of expertise and experience for new projects;
- Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations;

Relationships...

- Encourage good communication and provide appropriate training to aid skill development (e.g. listening skills, confidence building etc);
- Discuss how individuals work together and how they can build positive relationships;
- Identify ways to celebrate success (e.g. informal lunches/ wash-up meetings at the end of a project).

Role...

...the standard should be: Staff indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities and systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Possible solution

- Hold team meetings to enable members to clarify their role and to discuss any possible role conflict;
- Display team/department targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual role;
- Agree specific standards of performance for jobs and individual tasks and review periodically;
- Introduce personal work plans which are aligned to the outputs of the unit;
- Introduce or revise job descriptions to help ensure the core functions and priorities of the post are clear;
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure individuals are clear about their role and know what is planned for the coming months;

Role...

- Develop suitable induction arrangements for new staff – make sure all members of the team understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit.

Managers Should...

- Provide a clear job description;
- Define work structures clearly, so that all team members know who is doing what, and why;
- Give all new members of staff a thorough induction to your organisation;
- Define work objectives (e.g. through a personal work plan);
- Avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of the business and the customer.

Managers Shouldn't...

- Make changes to the scope of someone's job, or their responsibilities (e.g. at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what is required of them, and accepts it.

Change...

...the standard should be: Staff indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Possible solutions

- Ensure all staff are aware of why the change is happening – agree a system for doing this;
- Define and explain the key steps of the change. Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the programme;
- Establish a system to communicate new developments quickly;
- Agree methods of communication (e.g. meetings, notice boards, letters, e-mail, feedback forums etc) and frequency (e.g. weekly, monthly);
- Ensure staff are aware of the impact of the change on their jobs;
- Provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change. Have an 'open door' policy to help staff who want to talk to their managers about their concerns. Involve staff in discussions about how jobs might be developed and changed;
- Review unit and individual work plans after the change to ensure unit and individual objectives are clear.

Managers should...

- Explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) takes place;

Change...

- Consult staff at an early stage, and throughout the change process;
- Involve staff in the planning process so that they understand how their work fits in.

Managers Shouldn't...

- Delay communicating new developments;
- Underestimate the effects of minor changes.



Resilience?

In recent years many consultants have claimed that the way to improve productivity in the workplace is to make your staff more “resilient” to stress and work demands. There is now an industry being developed to promote this. However, for NIPSA the issue is not how you change the worker to help them cope with pressure, but how you change the workplace to remove unreasonable stress and demands.

What Branch/Safety Representatives can do

Safety representatives need to intervene at the primary level. They should act to address the causes of stress and so prevent workers developing stress-related symptoms and illness which in turn may lead to absence, and in the worst cases, nervous breakdown, mental illness and even suicide. See www.hazards.org/suicide/cryingshame.htm

To do so the safety representative should ensure that:

- The employer has an effective stress control policy in place;
- The implementation of the policy and its effectiveness is monitored;
- The employer is using the management standards and toolkit correctly;
- Suitable and sufficient risk assessments are conducted, taking stress into account as a hazard;
- Real control measures are in place to eliminate factors that cause stress;
- Safety representatives are fully involved in dealing with stress-related issues;
- Any partnership in the stress management project is a true partnership, and;
- The safety committee monitors and checks the actions identified are fully implemented.

Monitor the workplace

Safety representatives need to keep in regular contact with their members and check that stress problems are under control. Ensure that there are suitable procedures for members to report problems, and that any problems can be tackled by representatives without exposing the members concerned to risk of victimisation.

Safety representatives can survey their members using the TUC Stress MOT to identify which stressors are the biggest problem (see www.tuc.org.uk/stressmot).

This will help to identify the areas of the workplace which most need risk assessments. Safety representatives can also use mapping techniques to identify problems.

Safety representatives should report their concerns and those of their members to management in writing.

Stress Policy

Safety representatives can negotiate a work-related stress prevention policy with their employer, preferably as part of the overall health and safety policy. An effective policy on work-related stress should:

- Recognise that stress is a health and safety issue;
- Recognise that stress is about the organisation of work;
- Be jointly developed and agreed with unions;
- Have commitment from the very top;
- Guarantee a blame-free approach;
- Apply to everyone.

The objectives of a work-related stress policy should be to:

- Prevent stress by identifying the causes of workplace stress and eliminating them;
- Recognise and deal with stress-related problems through consultation, participation and co-operative working;
- Ensure that managers, supervisors and employees are trained to deal with and prevent work-related stress;
- Rehabilitate employees suffering stress through the provision of a suitable wellbeing programme and independent confidential counselling.

Checklist for Branch/ Safety Representatives



- Is there a problem with stress in your workplace?
- Has the employer taken effective action to address this?
- If not, have they done a risk assessment that includes stress?
- If not, or it is inadequate – ask for one to be done (this is a legal requirement);
- If they have done a risk assessment, have they acted on the findings?
- If not – ask for a prevention plan;
- If your employer has introduced support for people with stress-related conditions instead of prevention measures, insist that they use the HSENI Stress Management Standards;
- Finally, has your Branch incorporated stress management into its campaigning and organising strategy?

In Summary



Useful Resources

NIPSA Publications

NIPSA Health and Safety Representatives Toolkit

Available to download:

http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/HS/Hands_Toolkit_web.pdf

A Guide to Tackling Violence at Work

Available to download:

http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/HS/Ref-A5_0167.pdf

A Guide to Dignity at Work

Available to download:

http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Equal%20Opportunities/Dignity_at_Work_13215_web.pdf

Domestic Violence: A Trade Union Guide

Available to download:

http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA/media/NIPSA/PDFs/NIA/Equal%20Opportunities/A5_0150_web_1.pdf

NIPSA Spotlight Stress and Mental Health in the Workplace

Available to download:

<http://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Health-and-Safety/Newsletters>

Publications from external organisations

Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI). Mental Wellbeing. A general guide for employers on creating a working environment that encourages mental wellbeing

Available to download:

http://www.hseni.gov.uk/mental_wellbeing_guide_for_employers.pdf

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Managing the Causes of Work Related Stress

Available to download:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg218.pdf>

Useful Websites

HSENI Stress Homepage

<http://www.hseni.gov.uk/guidance/topics/stress.htm>

HSENI Line Manage Competency Indicator Tool

http://www.hseni.gov.uk/hseni_indicatortool.pdf

HSENI website tools and templates

http://www.hseni.gov.uk/resources.htm?srch_topic=6090

NI Direct Access to Work Scheme. Disability Employment

<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/people-with-disabilities/employment-support/work-schemes-and-programmes/access-to-work-practical-help-at-work.htm>

Hazzards Magazine

www.hazards.org/suicide/cryingshame.htm

TUC Stress MOT

www.tuc.org.uk/stressmot

Carecall

<http://www.carecallwellbeing.com>

MindWise

<http://www.mindwisenv.org>

Public Health Agency

Are responsible for 'Mind Your Head' programme and 'Lifeline' crisis response helpline service for Northern Ireland

Tel: 0300 555 0114 Lifeline: 0808 808 8000

Websites: www.publichealth.hscni.net
www.mindingyourhead.info
www.lifelinehelpline.info

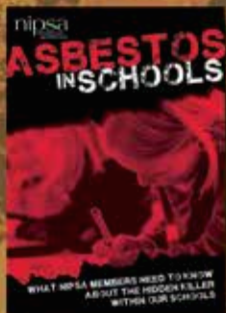


nipsa Health & Safety PUBLICATIONS

The latest publications from NIPSA Health and Safety Committee are available in print from NIPSA Headquarters and also available to download from the NIPSA website. Back issues of Spotlight and Spotlight eZines are also available from the NIPSA website:

<https://www.nipsa.org.uk/NIPSA-in-Action/Health-and-Safety/Newsletters>

www.nipsa.org.uk



Also Available

We also have a new updated edition **A Guide to Dignity at Work** available from NIPSA Headquarters or a download from the NIPSA Website.

A Guide to
dignity
at
work