

Stress Management Policy

Introduction.

The school policy for Stress Management was developed and agreed by the whole staff and has the full agreement of the Governing Body. The policy was approved and ratified by the Governing Body during the Spring Term 2008.

The Governing Body of Ambleside Primary school recognises that stress is potentially a major cause of ill health amongst its staff. Stress related illness can be caused by work or by issues outside work. The Governing Body is committed to eliminating the foreseeable causes of stress at work, or if that is not possible, minimising or reducing the risk or work-related stress to employees to the lowest level.

The LEA, Governing Body and Head Teacher recognise that the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a duty of care on employers to provide and maintain safe systems of work and a working environment which is, as far as is reasonably practical, safe and without risks to health.

Further, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a duty of care to assess significant risks to health and safety and, where these risks cannot be eliminated, implement control measures to minimise or reduce risk.

Aims

Through this policy we aim to:

- Seek to eliminate or, if not possible, reduce the causes of work-related stress.
- Investigate all reports of work-related stress and ensure remedial action is taken – developing safe systems of work and introducing practical preventative measures.
- Provide information for staff to help them recognise the symptoms of stress and give practical guidance on the measures that may be taken to assist individuals suffering from potentially stress related symptoms.
- Provide employees with details of the City Council counselling service (Counsel Line).
- Take a supportive attitude towards individuals experiencing stress whatever the cause.
- Respect confidentiality at all times – with individual cases only being discussed in the appropriate forum.
- Monitor and evaluate absence levels due to stress related illnesses.
- Monitor, evaluate and review the effectiveness of the Policy and procedures for the elimination and management of stress on a regular basis.
- Eliminate, or if not possible, reduce the causes of work-related stress and provide supportive strategies for staff. This will:
 - Ensure good employment practice
 - Ensure all legal obligations are met
 - Reduce the direct and indirect costs of stress
 - Help staff maintain a healthier work-life balance.

Definition of stress

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as

“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them”.

Stress is part of everyday life and an individual's stress level can vary depending on their tolerance and threshold. However, there is an important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulating and motivating) and stress, which is the reaction to the demands that a person feels when they cannot cope at a given time.

Injury can be interpreted as either mental or physical and while stress is not an injury in itself a mental illness such as a nervous breakdown is.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)

The DDA defines a 'disabled person' as someone with

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”

Also that a

“ mental impairment includes an impairment resulting from a clinically well recognised illness”.

Employees who experience temporary and short-term cases of stress related illness would therefore not fall within the scope of the Act. However, longer-term cases and other forms of stress related conditions such as past history of long-term depression may be covered by the Act.

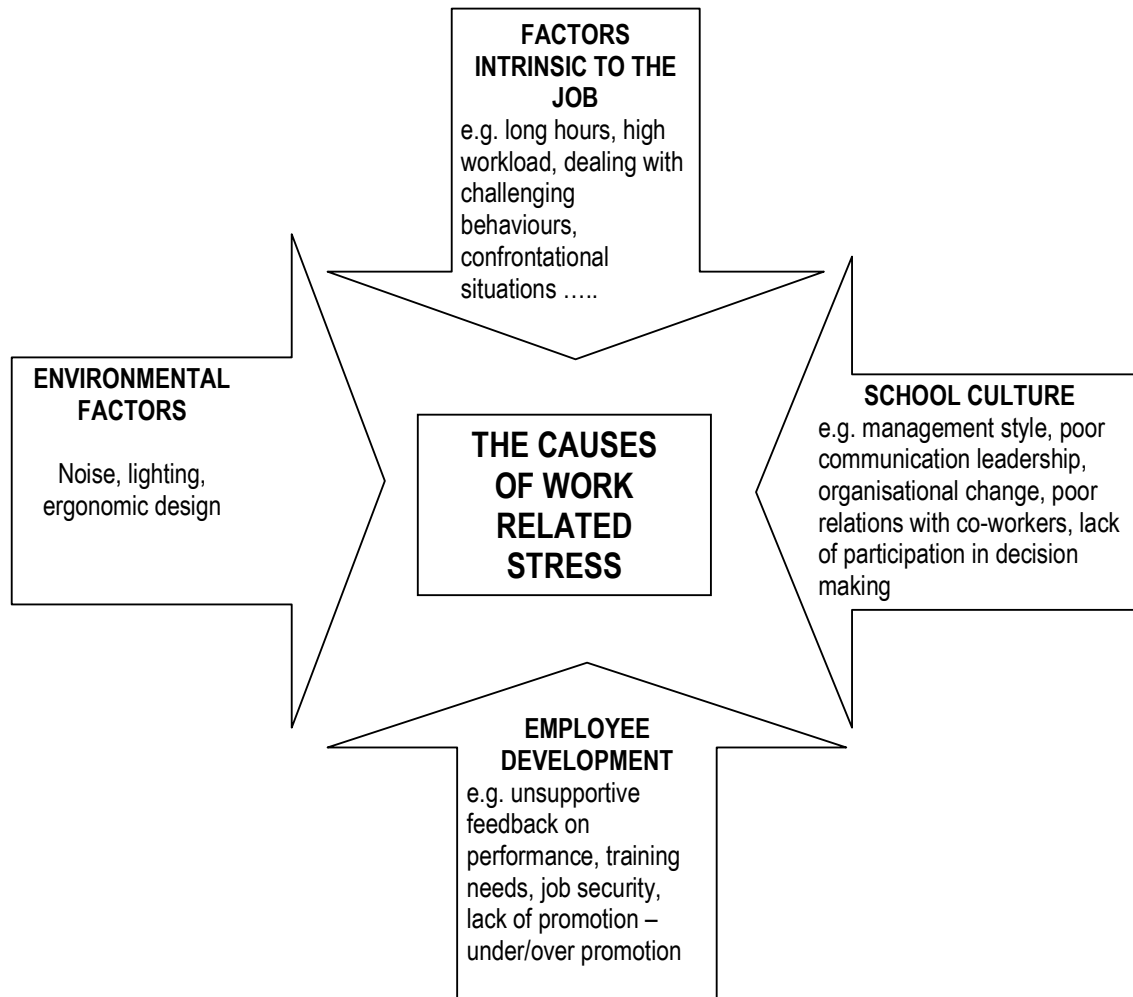
The Causes Of Stress

Causes of an individual's stress may be work-related or non-work related and it may not be possible to predict how or when a person will be adversely affected by the pressures they experience. Within school there are times that are particularly stressful for our staff e.g. OfSTED inspections, HMI Inspection, school re-organisations/closures, but there are many on-going, continual factors that may cause stress in particular the degree and speed of current educational change.

Common causes of non-work related stress may include:

- Bereavement
- Relationship breakdown
- Problems relating to children/parents
- Illness in the family
- Financial problems
- Personal issues such as gender, sexuality
- Experience of chronic illness
- Addiction
- Abuse
- Violence
- House move.

Common causes of Work-Related Stress may include:



Effects Of Stress

The effects of stress can be short-lived provided timely and appropriate action is taken. Early recognition of the signs of stress is beneficial to both the employee and the school.

Effects On The Individual:

Work-related stress is not an illness but if it is prolonged or particularly intense, it can lead to increased problems with ill health e.g. heart disease, anxiety, depression, high blood pressure etc. It can also lead to other behaviours that are not helpful to health such as weight loss/gain, drinking too much caffeine, alcohol and smoking.

Effects On The School:

Stress has implications for a school and reducing stress is cost-effective. For example stress can cause:

- An increase in sickness absence, which leads to increased workloads for others
- Reduced staff performance
- Reduced staff morale
- Increased staff turnover
- Increased parental complaints

Signs of Stress

Early recognition of the signs of stress is beneficial to both staff and our school. It is important to recognise that people demonstrate some of the symptoms of stress at various times in their life. This does not necessarily mean they are suffering from stress. The levels of stress that an individual feels will correspond to the symptoms they experience.

Physical Signs	→	Nausea Headaches Fatigue Shoulders, neck, back pain Cramps Chest pain Palpitations Weight loss/gain
Behavioural Signs	→	Smoking Alcohol – increased drinking Nail biting Changes to eating habits Erratic mood changes
Emotional Signs	→	Intolerance and irritability Withdrawal of social contact Low self-esteem Guilt Panic
Work Related Signs	→	Worrying inappropriately Reduction in productivity Increase in error rates Indecisive/ poor decision making Deterioration in planning/control of work Tension/conflict between colleagues Increase in disciplinary issues Loss of motivation/commitment Working longer hours with little achievement Erratic/poor timekeeping Increased absence Evading deadlines Lack of concentration

Identifying Work-Place Stress

Sickness Absence Analysis

An analysis of sickness absence can identify stress. Consideration may be given to:

- Individual problems – where there may be increased rates of either short-term or long-term absences, or possible stress related diagnosis
- Whether there may be group problems – where there are numbers of employees with increased sickness absence rates or with possible stress related diagnosis
- By looking at medical certificates for stress as a specific reason for absence.

Performance Management /Supervision Processes

The performance management /supervision process provides an opportunity for discussing and identifying if an employee has a problem. The head teacher will listen to the employee and encourage them to discuss their feelings. Many staff are reluctant to admit to feeling

stressed at work as they may perceive it as a sign of weakness or feel it goes against the management culture.

The school's approach to stress should be supportive. If the cause of stress is not work related the employee should be supported via existing mechanisms such as their GP, Occupational Health, Counsel Line etc. Where an employee has been absent from work for a long period measures such as a phased return or a temporary reduction in hours or a temporary reduction in responsibility could be considered to aid in the return to school.

If the source of stress is work related the head teacher will undertake a risk assessment/risk reduction approach to the problem (this is a delegated responsibility from the LEA). All reasonable, practical steps should be taken to ensure the health and safety of employees

Stress is an issue that the school takes seriously and is supportive and understanding to staff who admit that they are under too much pressure.

Staff can often feel isolated and unable to share their problems with others, creating a supportive culture, an open door policy helps eliminate feelings of having to cope alone and reduce stress.

Role of the Employee

Individual / groups of staff may suffer at sometime in their working life from stress at work. It is important that they are able to recognise factors in the workplace, which may cause stress. It is also helpful if they recognise the signs and symptoms of stress in themselves or others in order to take positive action.

Legally staff have a duty under Section 7 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Regulation 14 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omission whilst at work.

There are support mechanisms and procedures in school to help them resolve workplace stress:

If staff feel that there are aspects of their work which are causing them to feel excessively stressed they should discuss them with the Head Teacher who will try and help resolve the situation.

The Head Teacher may also ask if they have any problems related to stress, either as part of performance management/management supervision sessions or absence control procedures.

If the problems are related to home or are of a personal nature they may also wish to discuss them with the Head Teacher, who may be able to assist with emotional support or practical help such as compassionate leave. Please be assured, the Head Teacher will treat all conversations in strictest confidence.

Seeking Other Support

Staff may feel that talking to the Head Teacher is difficult and in these circumstances they may wish to contact their trade union representative for support and advice. They have contacts with their own support systems, the LEA and other outside agencies who they can approach with the member of staff or on their behalf.

The City Council also provides 'Counsel Line', a confidential counselling service. The service is independent of management and the only way anyone else will know if staff contact them is if the member of staff chooses to tell them. Counsel Line can be approached

on a wide range of issues including stress but also financial issues, legal issues, bereavement, marital relations, health concerns, alcohol/drug abuse etc.

Teachers may wish to call the Teacher Support Line which provides free information, support and counselling 24 hours a day.

Support can also be gained from a GP, the LEA, agencies who provide information and advice in respect of specific issues e.g. Relate. A full list of these with the contact numbers can be found in the 'Stress Pack'.

There are many things which can help an individual improve the situation to gain short-term relief and provide strategies for dealing with on-going stress:

- Be assertive – stand up for oneself
- Develop good points both in oneself and others
- Be positive, see the positive side of oneself and others
- Relaxation – this opposes the stress response and helps the re-balancing process
- Physical activity – use up the energy created by the stress response, this helps restore balance and build fitness
- Sleeping well – adopt regular sleep patterns
- Avoid trying things which cause more side effects than the stress such as alcohol, smoking, caffeine, overeating, aggression
- Eat well – the basis for good health which helps individuals to handle the pressure of stress
- Friendships – give the opportunity to talk and share
- Emotional release – laughing, crying and talking helps release some of the tensions of stress rather than keeping them bottled up
- Appreciate the present rather than dwelling on the past.

Role of the Head teacher and Governing Body

The governing body and head teacher are responsible for the health and safety of the employees in the school. When identifying the hazards employees face consideration should be given to the causes of stress, making reductions as far as possible and taking appropriate action to monitor.

- To seek to protect employees from undue stress at work, dealing with stress related issues and taking appropriate action.
- To assess significant risks to health and safety and, where these risks cannot be eliminated, implement control measures to minimise or reduce the risk.
- To take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. This includes mental hazards such as work-place stress as well as physical hazards.
- To carry out an individual stress assessment. Please note these are carried out on a confidential basis
- Put in place measures to eliminate, or where that is not possible, to reduce that risk of stress.
- Encourage staff to maintain a work-life balance
- Ensure confidentiality of those seeking help
- Use existing procedures such as compassionate leave, urgent domestic leave as appropriate
- Promote the provision of Counsel Line and Teacher Line
- Respond promptly to complaints of bullying, harassment etc
- Ensure grievance, complaints and disciplinary policies should be seen as fair
- Be accessible to staff to discuss problems
- Raise awareness of stress and demonstrate that it is not an indication of weakness

- Help new staff by having a good induction programme
- Encourage staff to talk about feelings of stress
- Encourage supportive behaviour in other team members
- Develop a team spirit to reduce feelings of isolation
- Provide support to staff returning to work after long term absence e.g. phased return, shorter hours
- Provide training on stress – on an individual or group basis e.g. INSET
- Provide training on time management, management skills, assertiveness etc.
- Ensuring effective communication takes place involving all staff
- Fostering co-operation not competition – encouraging teamwork and participation
- Set clear aims and having clear policies
- Ensure sufficient and appropriate training

Sources Of Help

Human Resouces	915 0689
Counsel Line	958 9090
Teacher support line	0 800 0 562 561

Trade Union support and consultation

ATL	915 5770 or	078 3627 9662
GMB	915 3762 or	079 7758 3745
NAHT	923 1067	
NASUWT	967 5115 or	079 7351 2393
NUT		079 7081 6896
SHA	974 4444	
UNISON	941 2556	

Careline	020 8514 1177
Carers line	080 8808 7777
Cruse Bereavement Service	087 0167 1677
Drinkline	080 0917 8282
Gambling line	084 5560 0013 33
National Debtline	080 8808 4000
National Drugs Helpline	080 0776 600
NHS Direct	084 5464 7

Racial Equality & Equal Opportunities

All staff have equal access to these employment conditions regardless of their gender, disability or ability. We plan to meet the needs for all groups and individuals. Ambleside Infant and Nursery school is committed to creating a positive climate that will enable everyone to work free from racial intimidation and harassment and to achieve their full potential.

Review

This policy will be reviewed in the spring term 2012.

