HR & OD POLICIES
human resources and organisational development

Stress and Mental Wellbeing Guidance

Guidance

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

1. INTRODUCTION

Aberdeenshire Council recognises that poor mental health can affect physical health, social wellbeing and productivity and it is therefore of the highest importance to minimise the workplace being a contributory factor to stress related ill health. Proper support for someone suffering with work related stress or poor mental wellbeing can enable the person to continue to work to a high standard within the organisation. This guidance is intended to set out the arrangements in place to meet the aims of the Council's Stress & Mental Wellbeing Policy to promote good mental health in the workplace.

2. REDUCING THE STIGMA

Although mental health problems affect as many as one in four people, there is still considered to be a significant stigma associated with these conditions, which means people may feel unable to talk about their problems and seek help. Aberdeenshire Council recognise the importance of promoting open communication between a manager and their employee and are therefore committed to raising awareness of mental health in the workplace.

HR&OD will continue to raise awareness of mental wellbeing through healthy working lives campaigns and activities. In addition, online training is available to all employees via ALDO, this includes Mentally Healthy Workplace Training which raises awareness of mental health conditions in a workplace setting or Mental Health Awareness Training for employees who are supporting someone with a mental health condition.

Managers are encouraged to raise awareness of mental wellbeing in the workplace. If support is required to do this then they should contact the Council's Wellbeing team - hrodwellbeing@aberdeenshire.gov.uk / 01467 532 932

3. REDUCING THE RISK OF STRESS BY CARRYING OUT A RISK ASSESSMENT

Stress is someone's natural reaction to perceived excessive pressure; it is not a disease. Where pressure is short lived and not excessive, any effect is likely to be short lived and cause no harm. But if stress is excessive and goes on for some time it can lead to both physical and behavioural effects, such as raised blood pressure, headaches, dizziness, depression and even a nervous breakdown. Every person responds to pressures in different ways; an exciting challenge to one person is a worry to another. The levels of stress will vary depending on many factors such as

motivation, support from managers, working relationships, work routine, colleagues, family and friends and of course personal resilience.

A good manager should talk regularly with their employees and try to identify their work related stressors. Ordinary plain good management and regard for people may well be an effective way of dealing with stress and reducing effects.

Some work related stressors are identified below:

- Demands – this includes issues such as workload (including too little work), 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 that they do not have conflicting roles.

- Change – how local or organisational change impacts on the persons job.

Managers must ensure a stress risk assessment is carried out to identify and reduce workplace stressors as far as is reasonably practicable. A stress risk assessment should be carried out for a group of employees who are involved with similar tasks and activities. A team stress risk assessment tool has been developed as a step by step guide to support managers to carry out a stress risk assessment. It is crucial that employees' views are taken into consideration while carrying out a stress risk assessment. To evidence this it is recommended that the final assessment is 'signed off' by employees or a representative group of employees. This risk assessment should be reviewed and updated at regular intervals and retained alongside other risk assessments.

This risk assessment aims to identify tasks in which there may be a potential to affect employees stress levels, such as dealing with the public, working within tight deadlines or other factors which may cause stress such as heavy workloads or staff shortages. When completing a stress risk assessment, primary, secondary and tertiary control measures should be considered; primary interventions attempt to eliminate the sources of stress by focusing on changing the physical or socio-political environment to match individual needs; secondary interventions should focus on helping individuals manage stress without trying to eliminate or modify workplace stressors; and tertiary prevention strategies seek to assist individuals who are

experiencing on-going problems emanating either from the work environment or their work lives.

> **For example:**
>
> A customer facing employee who regularly deals with customer complaints may be at risk of higher level of stress than employees who do not have regular contact with the public:
>
> Possible primary control measures:
>
> - Customers are asked to make complaints via the contact centre which removes the customer facing aspect of this role.
> - Customers are asked to make complaints in writing which removes the customer facing aspect of this role.
> - A mechanism to report threatening or violent behaviours is introduced so any trends can be tracked, investigated and reduced in the future.
> - The underlying reason for the complaint is resolved resulting in a reduction of complaints.
>
> Possible secondary control measures:
>
> - Additional training on dealing with challenging customers is provided.
> - Additional training on customer service is provided.
> - A designated rest area away from members of the public to allow them to have an undisturbed break.
> - Additional 1:1s with line manager
> - Shadowing arranged with more experienced colleagues.
>
> Possible tertiary control measures (only if the stress cannot be eliminated or controlled):
>
> - Employees are given training on mindful thinking techniques which may assist them to relax in stressful situations.
> - Employees are sign posted to the Wellbeing Teams Stress Reduction sessions.
> - Employees are given the assistance of counselling support via the Council's Employee Assistance Programme.
> - Employees are given addition 1:1s so that they understand that they have a caring and supportive line manager.

Further advice and support on carrying out a stress risk assessment please refer to the HSE website or seek advice from the Council's Wellbeing Team. hrodwellbeing@aberdeenshire.gov.uk / 01467 532 932

13-07-2018

Please note, an employee or group of employees can request that a risk assessment is carried out by either their line manager, or whereby their line manager is the perceived cause of stress, by another manager within their service. Employees should first seek support from a manager from within their service.

4. MONITORING

To ensure standards are maintained, and improved where necessary, Aberdeenshire Council will undertake ongoing monitoring of the organisation's overall performance via the Council's employee survey and via a programme of Health and Safety Audits.

It will also be the responsibility of each manager to monitor the employees under their control for symptoms of stress or other mental health problems and where appropriate provide them with early support.

What might you notice?	What could you do?
An increase in unexplained absence or sick leave. _Poor performance_ _Poor timekeeping_ _Poor decision making_ _Uncommunicative or moody behaviour_	Start by having a quiet word and ask them if everything is okay and if there is anything that you as their manager can do to support them. If your employee doesn't identify an issue then let them know that you are concerned about changes you have noticed recently and assure them that you are there to support them where possible, however it is also important to raise concerns regarding performance/attendance or conduct where necessary. If work related stress is identified as an issue then explain that you have a responsibility to investigate the reasons for this by carrying out an individual stress risk assessment (see section below). If another mental health problem is identified as an issue e.g depression/anxiety then ask them what could be done to support them in the workplace. Advise them of the free counselling service available to them which they may find useful. Make small adjustments as appropriate to help them in the short term e.g. removing a particular task allowing them time to catch up with other work.

	Keep a record of unusual behaviour/changes which may help you with any future OH referrals. If your employee's attendance or performance does not improve then consider a referral to the Council's Occupational Health provider.

5. SUPPORTING AN EMPLOYEE SUFFERING FROM WORK RELATED STRESS

*Please note that this is relevant where an employee is suffering from poor mental health which has been caused, in part, by work. If an employee is absent from work as a result of work-related stress then managers should refer to the council's Attendance Management Policy.

The key to managing an employee suffering from work related stress is to take an early intervention approach to investigate and implement controls to reduce the source of pressure they are facing as far as is practicable. Open and regular communication between a line manager and their employee is the simplest and most effective mechanism to do this.

Where an employee has specifically identified that they are suffering from work-related stress (and remain at work) then their line-manager should aim to meet with them at an early opportunity. It should be explained to the employee that this initial meeting is to investigate the sources of pressure they are facing and if there is anything that can be done to prevent these pressures from building up. Managers may find it useful to use the Stress Self-Assessment Questionnaire; this could be issued for completion prior to a meeting or used as the basis for a discussion during a meeting. On completion of the Stress Self-Assessment questionnaire, the employee's line manager should aim to meet their employee within 7 calendar days to discuss, and where appropriate, agree any support or adjustment(s) that can be made within defined timescales. It is important to retain adequate records of any agreed actions and timescales to support any subsequent referral to Occupational Health.

As work related stress can be a complex condition resulting not only from pressure from work but also from an employee's private life, it is advisable to gather some good professional advice at the earliest opportunity. A referral to Occupational Health must therefore be considered with every case of work related stress. Where appropriate it would be beneficial to detail any support or adjustments that have already been put in place by submitting a copy of the self-assessment questionnaire alongside a referral to Occupational Health.

13-07-2018

It is important to consider that in some circumstances an employee may perceive their manager as part of the reason for their work-related stress. If this is the case, then employees are encouraged to discuss this where possible with their line manager, HR&OD or a trade union representative. When a manager thinks that this might be the case they should discuss their options with HR&OD. If an employee does not feel comfortable discussing specific matters with their line manager then they may be contacted by another manager from their service or someone from HR&OD in an attempt to resolve the issue.

For further guidance on supporting an employee suffering from work related stress please contact the Council's Wellbeing Team. hrodwellbeing@aberdeenshire.gov.uk / 01467 532 932

6. SUPPORTING AN EMPLOYEE SUFFERING FROM POOR MENTAL WELLBEING OR ANOTHER MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

*Please note that this is relevant where an employee is suffering from poor mental health which has not been attributed to work.

If your employee lets you know that they are suffering from a mental health problem, for example, anxiety or depression, it would be useful to arrange a meeting to find out how you can support them within the workplace. This should take place in a confidential environment. It is important to remember that most people with mental health problems can continue to work and you should not automatically assume that a mental health problem makes them less able in any way.

Aim to cover the following with them:

- Allow them to explain how their mental health problem will affect them on a day to day basis

- Ask them what, if anything, they would like explained to their colleagues. It must be up to the individual if they want anyone to know but it may help their colleagues to understand any behaviour changes, periods of absence or changes in work

- Ask them whether there is anything in work which may be contributing to their mental health problem

- Ask them if there is anything which would help them in their day to day work. There may be some obvious changes such as changing a particular piece of work they are struggling with or allowing them time away to seek medical or counselling

support. It may simply be enough that you are aware of their mental health problem and can support them whenever possible.

- Explain to them that the council has policies and procedures in place to support employees with a mental health problem. Reassure them that they are a valued employee and that you as their manager will support them wherever possible.

- Policies that may be useful for you and your employee are:

  [Attendance Management](#)

  [Mental Health & Wellbeing](#)

  [Health & Safety](#)

  [Occupational Health](#)

  [Special Leave](#)

  [Flexible Working](#)

  [Domestic Abuse](#)

  [Alcohol & Drug Misuse](#)

  [Zero Tolerance](#)

  [Disability Leave](#)

  [Equality Policy](#)

- Encourage them to seek help and support if they have not done so already. Ensure they are aware of Aberdeenshire Council's [Employee Assistance Programme (counselling service)](#) where they can access face to face and telephone counselling support free of charge.

- Consider putting an emergency plan in place for mental health emergencies. For example, it would be useful to agree what course of action to take if your employee starts showing behaviour which may appear worrying, or out of character.

7. SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES FOLLOWING A TRAUMATIC EVENT

It is recognised that, as a local authority, employees may from time to time experience traumatic incidents. As a result, some staff may experience some very normal symptoms in relation to some abnormal circumstances and these may affect their health and ability to cope with day to day life. All staff should be made aware of the support available via the Council's Employee Assistant Provider following a traumatic event. Group critical incident support can also be arranged by employee's line manger where necessary.

For further information, contact the Council's Wellbeing Team.
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8. SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES WITH A MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITY IN LINE WITH THE COUNCIL'S EQUALITY POLICY

The Equality Act 2010 states that a disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has an adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The effect must be substantial (that is, more than trivial or minor), adverse, and long-term (that is lasting or likely to last for more than 12 months, or for the rest of the life of the person concerned). As set out in Aberdeenshire Council's Equality Policy reasonable adjustments must be considered for employee's suffering from a mental health problem which would be considered to be substantial, adverse and long-term.

What adjustments are reasonable is determined on a case-by-case basis. Reasonable adjustments can include making changes to premises, hours, duties and procedures, arranging training, acquiring or modifying equipment, and redeployment. Whether an adjustment is reasonable in a given situation will depend on issues such as its effectiveness in resolving the disadvantage to the disabled person, practicability, costs, associated disruption to business, and the resources available. Adjustments should be discussed with the HR & OD Service.

Managers should treat any employee suffering from a mental health problem fairly, consistently and should not make them feel guilty about their condition. Managers should make reasonable adjustments to allow them to remain at or return to work where necessary.

9. SUPPORT AND TRAINING

[Mental Health @ Work Training for managers](#) – Face to Face
The aim of the course is to understand common mental health problems and how to cope with and deal with these in a positive way in your role as a manager. Occupational Stress will be covered along with your responsibilities as a manager in dealing with this in terms of both organisational policy and under legislation.

[Stress relief workshop (2.5 hours)](#) – Face to Face
For all employees who are prone to stress and would like to investigate the reasons and potential solutions behind work related stress. If you would like to hold a stress relief workshop in your workplace please contact the Wellbeing Team.

[Mentally Healthy Workplace Training](#) – ALDO
Available to all employees to raise awareness of mental health conditions in a workplace setting

[Mental Health Awareness Training](#) – ALDO
For employees who work with people who may be at risk of mental health problems.

[Employee counselling](#)
All employees have access to a free independent counselling service via the Employee Assistance Programme. Counselling support can be arranged as close to the employee's home or place of work as possible at a mutually acceptable time of day. No matter how small the problem the EAP is available to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[Managers counselling helpline](#)
Aberdeenshire Council's Employee Assistance Programme has a confidential manager support helpline where managers can discuss their Employee's mental health condition with a trained counsellor on a completely confidential basis.

[External Occupational Health Advisor](#)
Occupational health support is available to all employees throughout the council. Where an employee has a mental health problem which is impacting on their work, or has resulted in an absence from work, Occupational Health support may be appropriate. Occupational Health may be able to provide advice on a particular mental illness, advice on a programme of support to help the individual remain or return to work. For further guidance on referring an employee to Occupational Health please refer to [Occupational Health Referral Process Guidance.](#)

[Trade Unions](#)
Can be contacted for further advice and support.

For further advice please contact the Council's Wellbeing Team.
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13-07-2018

Stress and Mental Wellbeing Guidance

Index of Documents

Guidance

Revision Date	Previous Revision Date	Summary of Changes
07/03/2016	-	To provide greater support to managers and employees to tackle stress and mental wellbeing issues at work.
30/10/2017	07/03/2016	Contact details and links amended
13/07/2018	30/10/2017	Reference to Mediation removed