



Stress in the Workplace Policy

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1. Statement of Policy

- 1.1 The policy sets out the NMITE’s aim and objectives for the management of health and wellbeing in relation to stress at work.
- 1.2 NMITE is committed to promoting a healthy and supportive working environment. To this end, NMITE believes that its employees are its most important asset and their wellbeing is essential to effective work performance.
- 1.3 Whilst NMITE has no control over external or personal factors, it is committed, where possible, to manage risks which are within its control. It is also committed to develop procedures, employee development measures and support systems to assist all employees to understand and recognise the nature a cause of stress and to take positive steps to manage stress effectively. It is essential that NMITE encourages employees to achieve a good work life balance in order to enhance their wellbeing.

2. Definition of Stress and its effects

- 2.1 Stress may be defined as the adverse reaction people have to pressure or other types of demand placed on them. What triggers stress and the capacity to deal with stress varies from person to person. Individuals react in different ways to similar situations. Work related stress occurs where people perceive they cannot cope with what is being asked of them at work. No one is immune to work related stress.
- 2.2 Stress is not an illness, but, if experienced for a prolonged period, can result in psychological issues, such as anxiety, depression or physical symptoms such as headaches and, if particularly severe, it is thought to contribute to physical illnesses such as high blood pressure or heart disease and susceptibility to frequent minor problems. Developing coping strategies such as taking exercise and finding ways of relaxing can help combat the effects of stress. Regrettably, people experiencing stress often adopt negative coping strategies such as drinking too much alcohol and caffeine, skipping meals and smoking, of which can compound the problem.



- 2.3 At an organisational level, stress can result in deterioration of morale, performance and staff turnover. Sickness absence due to stress can cause a domino effect where increased workload due to sickness absence of a colleague can in turn lead to increased workload pressures and stress in other members of the team.

3. Responsibilities of all Employees

Employees have a responsibility to take reasonably practical steps to minimise their own stress levels and those of their fellow colleagues who may be affected by their acts or omissions. They also have a legal responsibility to comply with the Health & Safety at Work legislation and other statutory regulations to take reasonable care of their health and safety and that of other persons with whom they work. Employees should, therefore, draw to the attention of the SLT or HR Department any concerns about work related stress which might present a health hazard to themselves or other persons.

4. Responsibilities of Managers

To enable Managers to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of instances of excessive and sustained work-related stress which are brought to their attention, they will receive information about the basic physical and psychological symptoms of stress (as referred to in Appendix A) to take appropriate and reasonable action to avert this. The Manager is neither expected nor presumed to have specialist knowledge in this area and should seek assistance accordingly from the HR Department.

5. What to do if you believe you may be experiencing Work Related Stress

There is a self-help leaflet available, offering several coping mechanisms for stress. However, if none of these measures are effective or appropriate in your situation, then the following steps should be taken:

- If you notice symptoms of stress in yourself or experience health issues which affect your work, you should discuss them with your Manager in the first instance.
- If you decide this is not appropriate, or you feel that the matter requires additional professional guidance, you should contact the HR Department who may, depending upon circumstances, suggest that you are assessed by your GP.
- NMITE may contact your GP, with your permission, to seek support regarding future management.
- If information is required from your GP, you have a right to view and comment on the report prior to it being sent to the HR Department.
- The release of medical information from your GP requires your specific consent in accordance with the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988.



Appendix A - Guidance for Managers – Stress at Work

Introduction

Everyone feels stress at some time. It is what gives us the get up and go every day, as well as the ability to cope with emergencies. Sometimes we suffer from too much stress. Stress can be experienced by anyone and leads to a loss of sense of wellbeing and unheeded it can be incapacitating and detrimental to health.

Definition

Stress results from a perceived imbalance between the demands made on a person, including self-imposed ones and the personal and environmental resources available to meet those demands. Stress can arise from undemanding as well as over demanding jobs.

Stress occurs when:

- Demands are too great
- Demands seem to be too great
- If you find your work boring or repetitive
- If stress at home reduces your ability to cope
- When a few small demands all suddenly happen at once this can reduce your ability to cope. e.g when you are ill or upset

When looking for causes of stress, it is important to look at your whole life, at home and at work, to get a true picture.





Stress Responses

Hormones produced by the body in danger causes the symptoms of stress. This is called 'fright, flight or fight response'. When we are not able to cope with a situation at home or at work we are left with these hormones with nowhere to go. This results in physical as well as mental discomfort that are stress symptoms. Stress is also used to describe pressures that cause stress. E.g. work demands. It is easier to think of these separately as 'stressors' at home or work.

Physical Symptoms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fear- Palpitations- Feeling sick- Sweating- High blood pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Headaches- Back & Neck ache- Migraine- Bowel problems- Indigestion & Stomach ulcers
Psychological Symptoms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Anxiety- Worry about everything- Poor self-image- Sexual problems- Cannot relax	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Poor decision making- Poor concentration and memory- Tired all the time- Feeling of loss of control- Increased accidents
Behavioural Symptoms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Avoidance of stressors- Sleep disturbance- Family problems- 'Couldn't care less' attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Poor job satisfaction- Aggression- Drugs & alcohol abuse- Poor performance
Personality	
<p>How much stress you can take also depends on the type of person you are. The so-called Type A personality tends to suffer most from stress. They are often seen as workaholics and they also tend to be the hardest working individuals in an Organisation. This shows that stress can be a positive as well as a negative attribute.</p>	

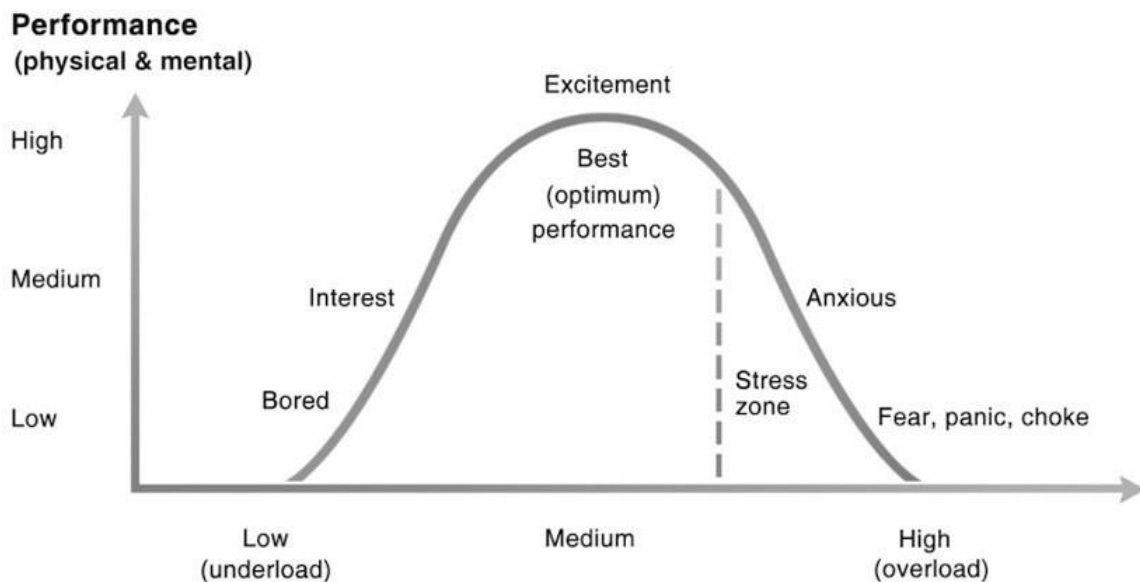


Characteristics of the Type A personality are sustained drive, aggressiveness, preoccupation with deadlines, competitiveness, desire to achieve, chronic haste, impatience and mental alertness.

Stress versus Challenge

The positive aspects of stress have been mentioned earlier. We can think of this as 'healthy tension'. Without challenge and commitment, we are bored and unproductive. With sufficient 'engagement' we perform well without problems.

Clearly a point will be reached where maximum output is reached. People who are high achievers will often try to give 110% at work. Always trying to do this can result in the development of the negative symptoms of stress, resulting in exhaustion, ill health and eventually breakdown.



What can you do about Stress?

Look at your life; you can reduce your vulnerability to stress by looking at your whole life, remember the model at the beginning. How satisfied are you with your life? You are much less likely to enjoy your job if your life in general is a source of frustration and update.

Think about your close relationships, your finances, your friends, your leisure and work.

You can always talk to your GP, RELATE or Citizens Advice.

Are you Physically Fit and Well?

You can protect yourself against stress, for this you need to look after your health.

Try not to smoke
Drink Sensibly

Take regular exercise Eat a balanced diet

A healthy lifestyle will help you cope with Stress and help you sleep.

Looking at the Causes of Stress in your Work

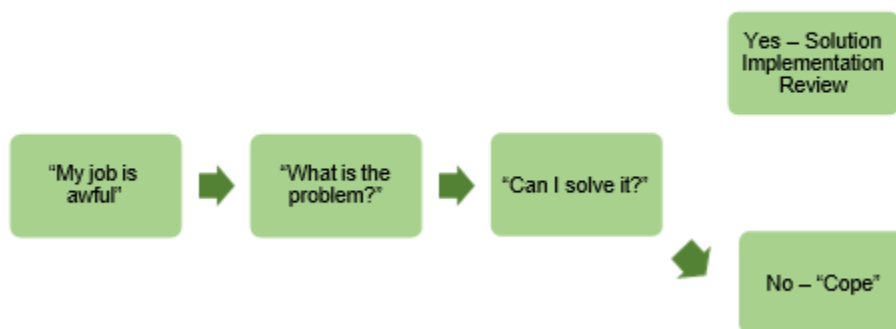
You can come aware of your stress points at work and decide how they might be eased. Talk to your Manager and/or the HR Department, they can help you pinpoint areas of concern and liaise with management to help solve the problems. Attempt to reduce stress by reducing stressors to a minimum. In addition to these negative aspects of work, remember also the positive ways to increase job satisfaction.

Job Enrichment Programme

- Rotation of the most stressful activities
- Modification of working activities
- Delegation of work
- Autonomy, openness and worker participation
- Flexible working time

Coping

Not all stress at work can be solved, this is where coping strategies are most useful. This pragmatic approach can be illustrated by:





Stress Therapy

ABC

Awareness: First identify the problem; all the things you have read so far will help you with this.

Balance: Don't get things out of perspective. No-one is indispensable. We all make mistakes, no one can do everything perfectly the first time. Life is all about enjoying your home and family life, as well as working hard to help, make your university efficient and effective.

Control: Key elements of taking control include assertiveness, good time management, prioritisation, delegation and worrying about changeable things

Skills to Support Managing Stress

- 1. Relaxation** – We have already mentioned the importance of improving general health. If you feel tense all the time, try relaxation exercises. Essentially the technique involves becoming aware of your breathing and muscle tone. It requires focused attention and is not simply flopping in front of the TV.
- 2. Visualisation** – This enables you to look ahead and prepare for stressful events. Calm can be induced by visualisation of a warm tropical beach as well as planning events and positive thinking.
- 3. Letting go of Stress** – Everyone has a different way of doing this. Some use hobbies like gardening, reading or walking. It is good to find an outlet for emotional build ups. Crying is not a weakness but a natural way of letting go. Laughing can do the same.
- 4. Be Assertive** – Stress can sometimes result when you feel unable to say what you really think or feel. Many people bottle up their thoughts for so long that they may end up saying the wrong thing. Assertiveness is being straight with people in a considerate way, being self – confident, understanding other people's points of view, being able to negotiate and reach workable compromises. Having self-respect and respect for others.
- 5. Time Management** – Establish your priorities; make a list of what must be done, what should be done, and what you would like to do. Cut out time wasting. Learn to drop unimportant things and say no or delegate. Make a list of achievable goals. Do not waste time making excuses for NOT doing something.



Professional Help

You can do a lot to prevent or control the effects of stress on your life. Sometimes, however you cannot do this on your own. If this happens then seek help. It is not a sign of weakness, knowing what you need is a sign of strength. See your GP. They may refer you for counselling. Your GP may also recommend a course of Drug Therapy. Counselling and drug treatments are complementary and speed up and maximise the chances of a full recovery.



Think Positive

Positive Thought Patterns – will help you see things in perspective:

Talk it out - Share it with someone else. Others will welcome your trust.

Write it out - It is easier to see it in perspective when it is put to paper

Shrug it off - Raise your shoulders then drop them, relax your body.

Breathe it away - Inhale deeply, exhale heavily a few times - calm your thoughts.

Sort it out - List practical options, weigh up, decide and then act

Delay it - Put aside 15 minutes for a worry session. Leave it until then.

Work it off - Do something physical. Clear your head. Divert your energy.

Reverse it - Consider taking the opposite approach, explore alternatives.

Laugh it off - Lighten it with humour. Be generous with smiles.

Balance it - Consider the good consequences and feel good about it.

Cancel it - Think positively, don't let the negative thoughts pull you down.

Hold it - Say stop, pause and think. Now take a fresh look.



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