Working together
to reduce stress at work

A guide for employees

International Stress Management Association^{UK}

International Stress
Management
Association^{UK}

acas
making work work

HSE

What is work-related stress, and why do we need to tackle it?

There is a difference between **stress** and **pressure**. We all experience pressure on a daily basis, and need it to motivate us and enable us to perform at our best. It's when we experience too much pressure without the opportunity to recover that we start to experience stress. The HSE definition of stress is "the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them".

We can all feel stressed at times when we feel as though everything becomes too much, when things get on top of us, or when we feel as though we are unable to cope. It affects us in different ways at different times and is often the result of a combination of factors in our personal and working lives.

Work-related stress can be tackled by working with your employer to identify issues at source and agreeing realistic and workable ways to tackle these.

To help do this, HSE has produced new Management Standards and guidelines on work-related stress for employers and employees and their representatives (available at www.hse.gov.uk/stress). This leaflet, produced by the International Stress Management Association[UK], and backed by the HSE and Acas, explains what these are, and what you can do to help your employer to help you. You can also find more information by visiting the websites listed on the back page of this leaflet.

"Stress is often a symptom of poor employment relations and can seriously affect productivity. Organisations who talk regularly with their employees and have sound systems and procedures in place for dealing with issues like absence and discipline are much more likely to avoid work-related stress and to be able to deal with potentially stressful situations when they arise." Acas

What do the Management Standards mean to me?

As a result of HSE's new Management Standards:

- Your manager will have access to advice to help improve their understanding of stress and take it seriously.
- If you are experiencing work-related stress, you should be listened to and help should be available from your manager or employee representative.

- In the past, the causes of stress were well known but little if anything was done to fix them. The new Standards mean managers will now have to work with you to find solutions, so your problems should reduce over time.
- The processes involved with the Standards mean that employees and their representatives will be given an opportunity to give their views and to help create action plans to help reduce stress at work.

How can I support my employer?

As an employee, you too have a duty to take care of your health and safety at work. You should:

- Familiarise yourself with HSE's risk factors and Management Standards so you can contribute more fully to discussions.
- Speak up if you're experiencing a problem, and talk to your manager to find a win-win solution. Remember, it's part of their role to help you do this.
- Help your manager to help you. To put effective plans in place, your manager will need information from you, so take an active part in any discussions or stress risk assessments, and make sure you complete any questionnaires when you are asked to do so.
- Volunteer to attend discussion groups, action planning meetings

etc. They're for your benefit, and your managers will need your help in deciding what will work and what will not.

- Remember that consultation is a two-way process. Your managers must take your opinions into consideration when deciding what actions to take, and must communicate the reasons for their decisions.
- Read all communications. Make sure you understand the reasons for decisions and provide feedback if required.
- Attend any stress management training courses arranged by your employer, which will help you understand stress and how to deal with it.
- Recognise that you have a responsibility for your own personal stress and try to help yourself where possible.

What should I do if I'm becoming stressed?

Try to identify the causes and what you can do to make things better. Ideally, tell your manager at an early stage. If your stress is work-related, this will give them the chance to help and prevent the situation getting worse, while even if it isn't work-related, they may be able to do something to reduce some of your pressure.

If the source of pressure is your line manager, find out what procedures are in place to deal with this. If there aren't any, talk to your employee representative, HR department or Employee Assistance Programme / counselling service (if you have one). Alternatively, talk to your trade union safety representative or union representative, who can also provide advice on a range of work-related topics.

Many employees are reluctant to talk about stress at work, due to the stigma attached to it. They fear they will be seen as weak. But stress is not a weakness, and can happen to anyone. Remember: no employer should subject their employees to work-related stress, and this is an issue both you and employer should take seriously.

"Workplace stress is one of the biggest causes of employee absence – and also one of the more difficult issues to manage. The Management Standards will help employers identify and manage stress at work by providing a framework to pinpoint particular causes of stress, as well as achievable solutions." CIPD

What are HSE's new Management Standards and how do they work?

Under UK law, employers have a "duty of care" to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees while at work. They also have to assess the risks arising from hazards at work including work-related stress.

To help employers understand how to do a risk assessment for work-related stress, HSE has identified six key areas (or "risk factors") that can be causes of work-related stress. These are:

- the **demands** of your job
- your **control** over your work
- the **support** you receive from managers and colleagues
- your **relationships** at work
- your **role in the organisation**
- **change** and how it's managed

Your employer needs to gain a detailed understanding of what these risk factors look like where you work, identify which areas may be presenting problems, and work with employees and their representatives to take action to reduce these problems.

To assist with this, HSE has produced its new Management Standards, including targets for organisations to aim towards. There is one standard for each risk factor. "Demands", for example, covers issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment, and includes guidance on what should be happening in your organisation if the Standard is being achieved. As well as helping your managers understand the causes of stress at work, the Standards process provides a means of assessing how your workplace is performing, and gives ideas on how to make improvements.

The target is for all organisations to match the performance of the top 20% of employers that are successfully minimising work-related stress. This means your employer will need to:

- Assess the risk and potential causes of stress within your organisation – for example by looking at sickness absence records or attitude surveys, or conducting specific stress-related surveys or focus groups.

- Use these to assess how the organisation is performing in relation to the six risk factors. This includes managers talking to their teams to identify stress "hot spots".

- Decide on improvement targets and action plans, in consultation with staff or their representatives.

"The TUC welcomes these standards. In the absence of legislation, they are the most effective tool that employers can use to help end the epidemic of stress-related illnesses. We hope that employers will work with safety representatives and stewards to use them within every workplace." TUC

The International Stress Management Association[UK]

The International Stress Management Association (ISMA) is one of the world's largest, most widespread and fastest growing organisations of Stress Management professionals. The UK branch, ISMA[UK], is a registered charity (no. 1088103, and company limited by guarantee no. 4079657) with a multidisciplinary professional membership. It exists to promote sound knowledge and best practice in the prevention, reduction and management of personal and work-related stress; and sets professional standards for the benefit of individuals and organisations using the services of its members.

HSE

On 3 November 2004, HSE launched new management standards and tools to help employers and employees work together to prevent excessive work-related stress. The new material is available at www.hse.gov.uk/stress and will help organisations meet their existing duty of care and their duty to assess the risk of work-related stress. The standards define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where stress is being managed effectively. The toolkit consists of a survey and continuous improvement model which enables organisations to compare themselves with others.

This builds on HSE's guidance "Tackling work-related stress – a managers' guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being" (HSG 218) and "Real Solutions – Real People". Both are priced publications available via www.hse.gov.uk/publications.

For further information, please visit
www.isma.org.uk
www.hse.gov.uk
www.acas.org.uk

International Stress Management Association[UK] **HSE** **acas** making work work **TUC** **cipd**