

Stress at Work in Early Years Policy

Background

This early years provision is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees and to promoting a positive working environment. The organisation recognises that work-related stress is a serious issue that can have a negative effect on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of its staff. It will therefore take all reasonable action to combat work-related stress through the development and adoption of good-working practices.

The early years provision recognises its duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare of its employees. This includes taking reasonable steps to prevent them from suffering stress-related illness as a result of their work.

Definition of Stress

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as “an adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure” or to other types of demand placed on them at work. This early years provision understands that the HSE clearly link work-related stress to factors such as: excessive work demands, overwork, lack of control over work, bullying and harassment, lack of support from colleagues, managers and supervisors, lack of adequate training, unclear job roles or job role conflict and change.

This organisation accepts the key message of the HSE that employers can take effective action to prevent work-related stress and that this will benefit both staff and employer.

Effects of Stress

This early years provision recognises that stress can have a number of negative effects on an individual, including:

- fatigue
- anxiety and depression
- low self-esteem
- adverse effects on performance
- problems sleeping
- other health problems, such as migraine, raised blood pressure, increased alcohol use, etc
- “burnout” — physical and emotional exhaustion caused by severe or prolonged stress.

Stress can also have the following effects on the early years provision:

- high levels of absenteeism and staff sickness
- increased staff turnover
- low staff morale
- increased number of accidents and mistakes
- high levels of conflict
- increased incidence of accidents.

Policy

In order to combat work-related stress in this early years provision:

- a positive workplace culture will be encouraged where staff wellbeing is prioritised and both staff and managers develop an increased awareness and understanding of stress at work issues
- local support will be provided for employees who are experiencing work-related stress to enable them to remain in work wherever possible or support them in returning to work
- wherever a manager perceives stress to be a potential problem for a member of staff — commonly during or as a follow-up to a period of sickness — that manager should talk to the member of staff in strict confidence and see if they require additional support
- managers should take all reasonable actions to support members of staff — typical long-term support might include a temporary or permanent change of job role, adjustment in workload, a tapered return to work, etc.
- prompt access to confidential occupational health support will be provided for any employees affected by stress
- the management will work with staff and staff representatives to conduct appropriate risk assessments and identify all workplace factors that could be contributing to unacceptable levels of stress at work
- risk assessments will include a review of the effectiveness of current measures taken to reduce workplace stress — these will be adapted and new control measures introduced wherever necessary to eliminate stress or reduce the risks from stress to acceptable levels
- risk assessments will be regularly reviewed, particularly during periods of significant workplace or workforce change or where stress is identified as a particular issue
- managers and staff representatives will regularly monitor and review sickness absence rates and data to look for trends that could indicate stress as a contributory cause
- training will be provided for all line managers and supervisory staff in good management practices in relation to stress at work, including training in identifying stress and taking appropriate action
- occupational health service contracts will include support for stress at work, including individual confidential stress counselling, the provision of appropriate stress management training for managers, high-level support with risk assessments, etc.

Responsibilities

Managers

In this early years provision managers will:

- provide support to staff who they feel may be experiencing work-related stress problems, including support to staff who have been off work due to stress and those on a planned return to work
- take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality and discretion when supporting staff with work-related stress issues
- offer additional support to any member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, should it be appropriate
- ensure that staff experiencing stress have access to appropriate sources of confidential advice and support, such as appropriate occupational health support
- carry out or contribute to stress risk assessments within their area of responsibility
- ensure good two-way communication between themselves and staff, particularly when major organisational or procedural changes are occurring which are deemed to be “stressful” throughout the organisation
- ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated within this organisation in any circumstances
- monitor workloads and working hours to ensure that staff are not overloaded or overworking
- monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement
- ensure staff have adequate opportunities for rest, meals and refreshments.

Employees

In this early years provision employees will:

- be encouraged to report issues of concern relating to work-related stress to their line manager
- be asked for their consent before being referred for occupational health support or for confidential counselling relating to stress problems at work
- be expected to attend all statutory and mandatory health and safety training.

Implementation, review and monitoring

The senior management of this organisation will:

- monitor the implementation of this policy
- maintain an overview of its effectiveness
- review it as required.

Scope

All managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented.

This policy will apply to everyone in the organisation, including full-time and part-time staff, temporary and agency staff, and volunteers.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Policy review date: _____