Tall Oaks Academy Trust
POLICY
Staff Stress Management
September 2021

Approved by ꙶ. Wilson **S Wilson Executive Headteacher**

Date of Next Review: September 2024

Policy for Staff Stress Management

Aim

To have strategies to promote a healthy organisation, to reduce and eliminate stress due to excessive workplace pressure and to train employees to manage change and identify issues which may lead to occupational stress. We are raising employee awareness of occupational stress indicators and support services available, both internal and external

We recognise that we have a duty to our employees to take all reasonable steps to minimise the adverse effects on them of stress in the workplace.   The aim of the policy is to ensure that stress management procedures are in place to safeguard the Trust and help employees raise stress-related problems at work, while also recognising that some of the causes of stress may not be within the Trust's control.

Strategy

To assist the Trust in its compliance with its statutory duties towards stress management at work, the following approaches will be taken to alleviate the effects of stress on the individual.

Guidance will be provided to help identify the symptoms of stress amongst employees at an early stage and to assist them in using the various support mechanisms available.

The Trust will seek, wherever possible, to alleviate stressful working conditions by ensuring that the right culture and climate is created in which employees are valued, have an opportunity to be involved in planned changes, and are adequately informed and involved in decision making. We encourage positive styles of management which improve co-operation and positive feedback as well as clearer understanding of the Trust's policies.

It is recognised that training has an important role to play in creating a working environment which is positive to coping and dealing with stress at work. Training will be made available to all employees to help them deal effectively with stress management at work, understand their roles and the stress management at work procedure.

Scope

All employees are expected to follow this policy and take advantage of it to ensure that stress at work is managed effectively. Additionally, the policy will be widely publicised and be available for inspection within School.

The Nature of Stress

There is no such thing as a 'pressure-free' environment and some pressures at work and home can be seen as challenges. However, people's ability to deal with pressure is not limitless.

Pressure and stress

Pressure can be defined as work demands which require an individual to achieve a high level of output without relaxation. Some individuals will respond to high workloads and a succession of tight deadlines by holding their work performance at a high level for a period of time without deterioration in them or work quality. However, all individuals have thresholds of pressure tolerance which will vary from time to time due to personal, domestic or workplace factors. Excessive workplace pressure and the stress to which it can lead to can be harmful. It can damage an employee's health and undermine the organisation's performance.

Occupational Stress Indicators

In order to reduce stress, it is essential that the signs/symptoms of stress are recognised as soon as possible, both in ourselves and our colleagues.

Examples of these symptoms/signs fall typically into four categories:

Staff Attitude and Behaviour

- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Staff working increasingly long hours but for diminishing returns
- Erratic or poor timekeeping
- Out of character/irritability/rudeness/anger (with colleagues, pupils or parents)
- Threats to resign
- Introversion/extroversion
- Impulsive/emotional
- Un able to self-regulate emotions
- Inability to focus and concentrate

Work Performances

- Reduction in output or performance
- Increase in wastage and error rates
- Poor decision making
- Deterioration in planning and control or work

Sickness Absence

- Increase in overall sickness absence, in particular frequent short periods of absence

Relationships at Work

- Tension and conflict between colleagues
- Poor relationships with colleagues, pupils or parents
- Increase in industrial relations or disciplinary action

What causes harmful levels of stress?

There is no simple way of predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress. People respond to different types of pressure in different ways. An exciting challenge to one person may be a daunting test to another; a repetitive job might be viewed by some as boring and monotonous, but others may like and feel particularly comfortable with this type of routine. In general, harmful levels of stress are most likely to occur where excessive hours are continually worked and/or pressures pile on top of each other or are prolonged

Signs which may point to a stress problem in school

- there is too little work/too much work
- the work is repetitive
- people feel trapped or unable to exert any control over the demands placed on them
- unrealistic deadlines/targets are given
- people are confused by conflicting demands placed on them
- there is lack of necessary training
- there is no employee development
- there are too many changes or new initiatives introduced at the same time or in quick succession

Problems at work can be triggered or made worse when

- people feel a high degree of uncertainty about their work
- communication is poor
- work schedules are inflexible and over-demanding
- there is prolonged conflict between individuals, including possibly sexual or racial harassment, or bullying, or where employees are treated with contempt or indifference
- there are threats of violence/aggression
- employees witness violence or aggression
- there is lack of understanding and leadership from managers and supervisors

Physical conditions in the working environment can also be stressful

These may include excessive noise, heat, humidity, and workplace constraints

Possible Consequences of Stress

For the employee, stress can result in a range of unpleasant emotions such as tension, frustration, anger, anxiety and depression. These can lead to lack of interest at work, reduced job satisfaction and an inability to cope, which combine to affect performance.

Employees under stress can show a wide variety of behavioural changes. Colleagues or managers may be able to identify such employees at an early stage by being aware of some of the changes in normal patterns of behaviour which may suggest increasing stress. Stress may cause symptoms like headaches, indigestion and muscle tension and disrupted sleep patterns. Over a longer period, it may also contribute to chronic health problems. Responses to stress vary, both between individuals and between physical symptoms or psychological disturbance.

Avoiding and Reducing Stress

The provision of early stress counselling can be a useful coping mechanism for employees. In some cases, it may also help to facilitate a solution to the problem at source. Stress counselling will not always be enough however, and does not address the issue of avoiding stress build-up in the first place; this section outlines some of the actions that managers and employees can take to avoid and reduce unhealthy stress.

Action Managers Can Take

The following represent some of the actions which Managers can take to avoid or reduce the build-up of unhealthy stress in their employees.

Raising Awareness

- Excessive stress can damage the health of the individuals. Stress can also affect the performance of employees, and the organisational ability to function effectively. This in turn places additional pressure on Managers.
- Raising awareness of the causes of stress, and the coping mechanisms can help to prevent unnecessary suffering.
- Training can be made available for both employees and managers.

General Management and Culture

People are more vulnerable to stress at times of great change or uncertainty. Managers can help by providing clear objectives for all employees. This can be achieved via

- Appraisal and Performance Management interviews and Staff Meetings
- Good communication of policies, procedures, standards, programmes and achievements. Communication needs to be effective and two-way.

Managers can help by inviting feedback from employees and listening to what they have to say

- Providing appropriate support, training and development to help employees meet the requirements of the job
- An open culture, which encourages employees to talk about stress. Talking is an important release mechanism which prevents stress 'bottling up' and developing into serious symptoms. Employees will not talk about stress in an environment which sees stress as a sign of weakness or inability to cope. Many employees could provide support for each other in terms of ideas and suggestions if stress were discussed more openly

Decision making and planning

Stress is often aggravated by a feeling of inability to influence issues at work. Managers can help by ensuring: -
- Employees are given an opportunity to influence decision making, and contribute ideas
- Employees are allowed input into the planning and organisation of their own work
- Employees understand clearly, their role in relation to the team, department and Trust.

Workload and Workplace

Stress may be aggravated by inefficient work scheduling and/or an uncomfortable workplace. Clearly certain constraints affect a Manager's ability to act in this area. Nevertheless, Managers can help by:

- Providing well defined tasks and responsibilities in each job and delegating effectively and responsibly
- Providing variety in the job where possible
- Promoting awareness of hazards within the job, and taking appropriate action to minimise them. Risk assessments should be carried out on all hazardous operations and updated following a change in conditions
- Ensuring that the workplace is adequately maintained and safe. A regular routine check of premises can help to ensure that minor maintenance issues are dealt with promptly
- Dealing promptly with any issues, which may place additional unnecessary pressure on other team members
- Where issues are outside the authority of the Line Manager, communicating effectively with senior management

Employee Support

A range of options is available for providing support to all employees suffering from work related stress.

Line Manager Support

The Line Manager is an important first port of call for employees suffering from unhealthy levels of stress, and he/she may be able to provide valuable practical and emotional support in the short term. However, an employee may also wish to contact the Executive Headteacher directly for help or advice.

Counselling Support

Counselling support is also available for people suffering from stress.

Formal Process

Employees, suffering from work related stress may be referred to our healthcare providers. Employees who are on long term sickness leave as a result of stress will be dealt with in line with the Staff Sickness Absence Policy

Self Help

There are a wide range of organisations providing help and advice on a voluntary basis to individuals undergoing traumatic or difficult situations.

Harassment Support

Where stress is related to harassment in the workplace, employee should request an interview with the Head teacher in the first instance, unless the Head teacher is not impartial in which case the employee should contact the Executive Head teacher in the first instance or the Board of Trustees via the Clerk.