

Policy on work-related Stress

Introduction

The BBC is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our staff and we recognise that work-related stress is an important issue. The aim of this policy is to help staff and managers identify, manage and control stress at work. It does not specifically cover trauma, which is a small but significant part of stress at work. Trauma refers to the emotional, psychological or physical harm that can result from incidents that are outside an individual's usual experience. Information on how to deal with traumatic stress can be found on the [myRisks website](#) or you can contact your HR manager for advice.

The BBC recognises that it is sometimes difficult to separate out the effects of work-related stress from those of non-work related stress. While this policy only covers work-related stress we will deal sympathetically with staff whose domestic circumstances or state of health make it difficult for them to cope temporarily with the pressure of work.

Definition

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them."

What triggers stress and the capacity to deal with stress varies from person to person. Individuals react differently to pressure in different situations and at different stages of their lives. Usually, however, individuals cope well with short-term pressure – indeed some pressure can be positive and motivating – but find it more difficult to cope with long-term, intensive pressure.

Stress is not an illness but, if experienced for a prolonged period, can contribute to ill health such as anxiety, depression, ulcers, heart disease and alcohol and drug dependency.

Signs of stress

The outward signs of stress will vary from individual to individual. Responses to stress may be emotional, behavioural, cognitive or physical, and can alter the way a person feels, thinks and behaves. Signs of stress include changes in a person's mood or behaviour, such as deteriorating relationships with colleagues, irritability, indecisiveness, absenteeism, reduced performance or complaints about health. In particular, significant levels of absenteeism for what appears to be minor health problems could be brought about by work-related stress.

Causes of work-related stress

The causes of stress will vary from individual to individual. The Health and Safety Executive have identified six broad factors that can contribute to work-related stress:

Demands - staff can feel overloaded if they think they are not coping with the workload, work patterns or type of work they are asked to do.

Control - staff can feel disaffected if they perceive they have no say over how and when they do their work.

Role - staff can feel dissatisfied if they do not understand their role within their organisation.

Relationships - staff may find relationships difficult to manage if they feel there are no clear systems in place for promoting positive behaviour and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Support - staff may feel they are not supported if they do not know what help is available and if they do not receive regular feed-back.

Change - staff can find change difficult to cope with – especially if it is not managed and communicated in a timely manner.

Responsibility for Managing Stress

BBC

The BBC wants to ensure that work-related stress is taken seriously and that it is not seen as a “taboo” subject. We have a number of initiatives and policies that can help staff manage their working lives. These include:

- The [Feedback & Development framework](#) which encourages regular feedback about job performance.
- Our policy on [flexible working](#).
- [myRisks](#) (Health & Safety) which offers practical advice on how to deal with stress.
- Workshops for managers and staff and management training, including the leadership programme (see [learn.gateway](#) for more information).

BBC staff also have access to free and confidential counselling on any issue, including work and non-work related stress, through BUPA. For more information please go to <http://home.gateway.bbc.co.uk/benefits/main.asp?page=103>.

Managers

Managers should assess the risks in the work they control and take action to eliminate, or reduce, its harmful effects – including stress. The assessment should take into account the HSE factors outlined above, what is in place to control them and whether further action is needed.

In assessing the risk, managers are generally entitled to assume that staff can withstand the normal pressures of the job and to take what they say at face value. As in other broadcasting organisations, some activities in the BBC are often carried out within a highly challenging and intense environment – and many staff thrive in these situations.

Managers need to be aware that individuals with certain pre-existing health problems may be at increased risk. If a manager is aware that an individual may be at increased risk they should seek advice from Occupational Health or HR.

Staff

If a member of staff believes that they may be experiencing work-related stress they should seek assistance as early as possible by talking to their line manager or contacting Occupational Health.

Process for managing stress

If a manager becomes aware that a member of staff may be experiencing work-related stress, the manager should in the first instance talk to the member of staff and try to address their concerns. Often advice and reassurance from line managers and colleagues can be the simplest and most effective way of helping staff who may be experiencing stress. If appropriate managers should also consider the way the work is organised and managed, taking into account the possible causes of stress outlined above.

If an individual is experiencing serious and immediate problems their manager may need to encourage them to seek further help through their doctor, and obtain further advice on how to manage the situation in the workplace by referring them to the [occupational health department](#).

Sometimes stress can lead to long term ill health. These cases should be managed using our sickness procedure.

In a minority of cases stress can cause health problems that come under the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act. If a manager is unsure of whether a stress-related illness amounts to a disability they should refer the individual to Occupational Health. The BBC has a separate procedure on retaining disabled staff which should be followed once it has been established that an individual is disabled; this can be found on: <http://home.gateway.bbc.co.uk/peoplepolicies/main.asp?page=347>

Legislative background

Employers have a legal duty to assess the risk of work-related stress and to take measures to control these risks.

The Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to secure the health (including mental health) and safety of employees whilst at work and, among other things, provide a safe place to work; ensure safe systems of work and provide information and training. This includes taking steps to make sure that employees do not suffer stress-related illness as a result of their work. The Act also requires employees to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others and to co-operate with the employer in discharging their duties under the Act.

In addition, under The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to carry out a suitable assessment of the health and safety risks to which their employees are exposed whilst at work. This includes assessing the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and to take measures to control the identified risk.