

# Responding to Stress Policy

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## Policy Checklist

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## Version Control

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<b>Version History</b>			
Version	Notes on revisions/modifications and who document was circulated or presented to	Date	Lead Policy Author
V2	Circulated to Corporate HROD and Trade Unions. Substantial amendments have been made to original Managing Stress in the Workplace Policy and is now renamed Responding to Stress Policy with amendments included.	09/06/2022	Dr Fra Agnew

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### **1.0 Introduction**

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) is committed to promoting a healthy, happy, engaged and resilient workforce as central to improving the quality and safety of patients' experiences.

*'There is a clear case that poor staff health and wellbeing has a significant impact on the performance of NHS organisations.'* (Prof Michael West, 2018)

This policy was developed in reference to the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Stress Management Standards (HSE, 2017). According to HSE there are six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity, presenteeism, increased sickness absence and can be the primary sources of stress at work. As an employer, the Trust has a duty to ensure that risks associated from work activity are properly managed to avoid or reduce excessive work related stress.

### *Workplace Stressors*

The HSE Management Standards identify six key aspects of organisational culture that impact on levels of stress. Employees and managers are encouraged to refer to these key areas when reviewing interactions between the work environment and employee wellbeing (Please see accompanying Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit):

<b>Demands:</b>	Workload, work pattern, work environment.
<b>Control:</b>	The level of influence a person has in how they conduct their work.
<b>Support:</b>	The level of encouragement, support and resources provided by organisation, management and colleagues.
<b>Relationships:</b>	The efforts made by the organisation to promote positive working behaviours and reduce conflict.
<b>Role:</b>	The level of clarity and understanding a person has of their role and how it sits within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures they do not have conflicting roles.
<b>Change:</b>	How organisational change is managed, including how it is communicated within the organisation.

This policy also sits within the Trust's Workplace Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Framework 2022-2025. This is a critical building block of our People Framework 2022-2025. Wellbeing is viewed as essential to 'creating a great place to work' for our people and is therefore one of our three people priorities. Our HWB Framework sets out our vision and aims for employee wellbeing. We have adopted a proactive approach to promoting wellbeing for individuals, teams and across the organisation.

Our focus and commitment therefore is not only on responding to individuals who are impacted as a result of work-related stress but also on striving towards the intentional promoting and improving of our people's well-being. Promoting employee wellbeing and striving towards environments and culture which are compassionate and supportive should be viewed as key in mitigating and preventing work-related stress.

We recognise the links between good mental and physical health. Both aspects need to be afforded significant attention. More than physical health; wellbeing is also about our mental, social, psychological and emotional health.

The policy is focused on the guidance to support employees and managers in preventing, recognizing and responding to all symptoms of work-related stress. This is, as outlined above, embedded within the overall proactive promotion of employee wellbeing and supportive, compassionate environments.

## **2.0 Purpose and Aims**

This policy describes the Trust's approach to dealing positively with stress.

It sets out the arrangements to ensure all our people are aware:-

- of the need to focus on wellbeing;
- that the Trust is committed to supporting the wellbeing of our people;
- of what their responsibilities are;
- of the 'Responding to stress' process; and
- of the wellbeing support and development available.

## **3.0 Objectives**

The objectives of this policy are to:-

- Highlight our commitment to wellbeing as inextricably linked to our commitment to preventing and mitigating the impact of work-related stress on all employees.
- Promote the continuum of support available and highlight the different roles and responsibilities of everyone in the organisation to support wellbeing and mitigate stress.
- Embed the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit as a supportive, collaborative and preventative resource for managers and employees.
- Support and assist all employees to proactively and intentionally engage in supporting their wellbeing.
- Remove or reduce the causes of stress where these are identified as being rooted within the organisation.

- Improve the ability of managers and individual employees to recognise stressors ('triggers' known to create stressful situations) and respond appropriately.
- Improve the ability of employees to recognise individual and team stressors and respond appropriately.

#### **4.0 Policy Statement**

The Trust is committed to:

- Positively promoting the Health and Wellbeing of all employees, through the Health & Wellbeing Framework.
- Ensuring a Responding to Stress action planning process is in place to support managers and employees to engage in conversations and equip them with guidance around the different levels of support.
- Positively promoting both wellbeing and specific stress management programmes with a view to preventing, reducing or mitigating the risks from work-related stress.
- Raising awareness of the causes of stress and its impact on health, wellbeing and performance and addressing any stigma associated with this.
- Ensuring support and assistance for employees who are experiencing stress and ensuring this is accessible and well publicised throughout the Trust.

#### **5.0 Scope of Policy**

This policy applies to all employees of the Trust. All employees are encouraged to take personal responsibility for themselves both inside and outside of the work environment and where possible to support others to do the same. This responsibility is encouraged within an organisation that strives to be supportive and compassionate and which recognises the need to identify and address organisational factors that may impact upon levels of stress within an individual, team or service.

This document has been developed in accordance with the Trusts Key Principles for Policy development.

## 6.0 Responsibilities

The implementation and embedding of this policy requires the commitment and support from all levels of our organisation.

### Trust Board

The role of the Trust Board is to take corporate responsibility for the overall strategic direction of the Trust and for ensuring the organisation is able to deliver on the implementation of this policy.

### Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has responsibility for ensuring that there is an appropriate structure for the monitoring and review of arrangements to manage and reduce work related stress. The Chief Executive has appointed the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development as Lead Director with responsibility for establishing and monitoring the implementation of the Responding to Stress Policy.

### Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development

The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development will provide strategic leadership, direction and oversight of this policy and its implementation. S/he will ensure that:

- Support and development is provided to managers and employees on identifying and managing stress and in the use of the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit.
- Supporting wellbeing is integrated as part of good people management practice within the Trust eg supervision, appraisal, team meetings.
- Support, guidance and advice is provided for individuals who are experiencing the impact of stress.
- Arrangements are in place for our people to access counselling services or specialist support as required.
- To ensure analysis of organisational data eg sickness and absenteeism data, workforce turnover, staff survey, etc to identify hotspots within the organisation that will require focus group facilitation.

### Directors

The Chief Executive requires Directors to establish and monitor the implementation of this Policy within their area of responsibility. This will include:

- Promoting openness and discussion on wellbeing and the application of the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit (See Appendix 1).
- Ensuring a supportive management culture that acknowledges the need for all employees to have an appropriate work-life balance.

- Ensuring that organisational change is managed within their Directorate in a way that provides for good communication, support and participation opportunities for employees.
- Leading by example by providing an effective role model for others.
- Ensuring through Appraisal and other people management processes that our people are competent to undertake their duties.
- To work in partnership with Trade Union Representatives to support our people and as a consequence improve the overall performance of the organisation.

### Line Managers

All managers are responsible for the following:

- Have a working knowledge and adhere to this policy.
- Adopting a supportive management style.
- Actively promoting employee health and wellbeing within their team / service.
- Promoting, supporting and responding to both wellbeing and stress.
- Using the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit action plans to address issues identified. Taking positive action, as is reasonably practicable, to support employee wellbeing and reduce likely causes of stress.
- Ensuring that individuals are aware of how to access sources of advice and support services themselves and refer individuals for assistance to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service as appropriate (See Page 12).
- Being sensitive to changes in individual behaviour and performance at work.
- Adopting a non-judgemental approach to individuals who may be experiencing signs and symptoms of stress.
- Ensuring good communication at all levels within their department / service, particularly where there are organisational and/or procedural changes.
- Ensuring, through the Appraisal and other people management processes that individuals are competent to undertake their duties. This should include regular monitoring and discussion of workloads, working time, work life balance and general health and wellbeing.
- Promoting openness and discussion on wellbeing and stress issues and the application of the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit.
- Where stress has been identified as a reason for sickness absence a referral to the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service should be considered where appropriate following completion of the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit and associated action plan.
- Working with the Employee Relations Department and Occupational Health and Wellbeing Services in ensuring that appropriate return to work programmes, based on risk assessment, are planned and implemented for those who have been absent from work as a result of stress related issues.

## Employees

All employees are responsible for the following:

- Considering their own wellbeing and monitoring their personal levels of stress and remaining aware of how both may impact on their work.
- Seeking support and discuss issues at the earliest opportunity with their line manager in the first instance, and they can ask their line manager to go through the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit with them.
- Have a working knowledge of this policy.
- Becoming familiar with the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit.
- Becoming aware of the different employee supports available.
- Individuals must comply with any steps taken by their line manager to reduce or eliminate work-related stress including attending support and development opportunities as required.

## Trade Union Side representatives

Trade Union Side representatives are there to support our people and advise their members. They should work in partnership with the Trust in the management of stress to improve the overall performance of the organisation. Responsibilities include:

- Encouraging our people to voice any concerns about their work environment with their line manager in an appropriate way.
- Addressing work-related stress in partnership with management.
- Raise issues of concern regarding the health and wellbeing of employees through the appropriate partnership forum.

## Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service

The Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service is responsible for:

- Providing guidance to managers on the identification and management of stress, including advice on successfully rehabilitating an individual returning to work following stress related absence.
- Assessing and supporting those individuals presented to the service with symptoms of stress.
- Appropriately signposting to supports including our employee wellbeing website U Matter, Inspire, Conditions Management Programme, Relate NI, SES Workable.
- Appropriately processing internal referrals to Occupational Health Psychology.

## **7.0 Legislative Compliance, Relevant Policies, Procedures and Guidance**

The Trust has a legal duty under the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations to assess the risk of stress-related ill-health arising from work activities; and under the Health & Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 to take measures to control such risks. Other related policies include the Trust's Health and Wellbeing Framework, Work Life Balance Policy.

## **8.0 Equality & Human Rights Considerations**

This policy has been screened for equality implications as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Equality Commission guidance states that the purpose of screening is to identify those policies which are likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to these.

Using the Equality Commission's screening criteria, no significant equality implications have been identified. The policy will therefore not be subject to an equality impact assessment.

Similarly, this policy has been considered under the terms of the Human Rights Act 1998, and was deemed compatible with the European Convention Rights contained in the Act.

## **9.0 Sources of Advice and Further Information**

### Supporting our Managers:

Managers are in a key position to assist with recognising, reducing, and responding to stress in employees. It is known that having a supportive and trusted relationship can be a protective factor in challenging times, and conversely, that the felt absence of this support can exacerbate the difficulties experienced. Evidence, however, not only highlights the vital role managers play in mediating the impact of workplace stress on employee wellbeing; it also has shown us how managers experience significant symptoms of stress in relation to the unique challenges of their role.

As a line manager you may find that in supporting employees who are struggling with work-related issues and/or personal issues, that you may need extra support. You may experience an additional strain as a result of trying to help. The key message is as a line manager the more you look after your own health and wellbeing, the more you will be able to offer compassionate support to your employees and be proactive in supporting their health and wellbeing as well as responding during times of difficulty. Knowing how to provide the right support whilst looking after your own wellbeing can be difficult to balance and there are supports available.

These include:

- Support from your own line manager.
- Advice from Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service (028-37564800).
- Accessing same employee supports and resources as employees including U-Matter, Inspire and the Support & Development Portfolio.
- The confidential [Managers Support Service](#) from OHWBS.
- ‘Supporting our People’ toolkit that outlines useful sources of advice and further information to help our people manage their own health and wellbeing while also looking after others around them – click [here](#)

### Supporting our Employees:

We encourage all employees to proactively engage in supporting their own wellbeing. In many roles, we have to anticipate that work-related stress will impact on both our emotional and physical wellbeing. In tandem with the organisation providing compassionate and supportive care and environments for our people, we want to highlight dual responsibility and the need for employees to be proactive in promoting their own wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

We encourage all employees to avail of resources and supports available within the Trust, to build knowledge and skills in terms of looking after their wellbeing and responding to stress. This includes the accompanying ‘Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit’ and a range of self-help information on the ‘U-Matter Website’.

Employees are also asked to promote wellbeing with their colleagues, managers and teams. We also encourage employees to look out for symptoms of stress in their colleagues and to be willing to show support or speak with management on their behalf if this is needed.

Support can also be accessed via:

- Trade Union representative.
- Inspire confidential counselling service 0800 800 0002.
- Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service – 028-37564800.
- U-Matter website.

Employees should raise any training or development needs with their manager, for example, during development of their Appraisal or within Supervision, where this applies. If there are no routine opportunities for meeting, employees are encouraged to contact their line manager to organise a meeting.

If for any reason you do not feel comfortable speaking with your line manager around feeling stressed at work, we encourage you to speak with another senior member of your team or Directorate, your work colleagues, a member of the Human Resources Department, the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service (028 37564800), Trade

Union Representative, Inspire Workplace Counselling service (0808 800 0002) or your own GP.

### Guidelines for Referring to OHWBS

The following are occasions where an Occupational Health referral is appropriate:

- If there is no reported improvement in symptoms or wellbeing of the employee who has accessed identified resources/support services and the actions from the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit outlined in Appendix 1 have been followed up.
- If health problems/concerns are identified as contributing to work stress/issues.
- As part of the managing attendance protocol as appropriate.
- If a referral is required under the managing attendance protocol.
- If assessment is required with regard to fitness to attend meetings/to complete the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit.
- If assessment is required in relation to fitness for work.

This policy and accompanying toolkit is aimed at increasing the capacity of and empowering our managers and employees in promoting wellbeing and mitigating stress. We encourage referrals to the OHWBS department where and when appropriate. However, we want to highlight the importance of not automatically referring an employee that reports wellbeing challenges or work-related stress. Whilst recognising the challenges and demands our managers face, the evidence and research highlights how immediate, responsive and supportive conversations and interactions have enormous benefit both in preventing exacerbation of work-related stress and promoting the wellbeing of employees to sustain them in their roles.

We recommend embedding wellbeing conversations and if needed subsequently the Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit as resources to employ first. This should inform an action plan which identifies resources/support services and mitigating causes of stress. This plan should be monitored and reviewed.

When a referral to Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service is considered appropriate, the referral should include:

- Detail relevant to the situation and likely to be of benefit to the assessment.
- Related measures in place/or actions already taken.
- Any specific questions requiring a response.

If there is any query regarding appropriateness of a referral, please contact the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service and speak with an Occupational Health Practitioner who will advise you on your query (028-37564800).

### **Appendix 1 – [Responding to Stress Talking Toolkit](#).**