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## Stress Management

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## 1 Overview

### 1.1 What is this about?

1.1.1 We understand that policing and working in the police environment can be a physically and mentally challenging job. We expect our officers and staff to be able to cope with a certain amount of pressure as part of the job. But when the ability to cope with the amount of pressure turns to stress, this guidance explains what individuals and managers can do to identify and manage stress.

### 1.2 Who is this for?

1.2.1 This information is for all authority/police staff and officers.

### 1.3 Key information

- We have a duty under common law to ensure the health and safety of our officers and staff. We also have a statutory duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to provide and maintain a healthy and safe working environment for our staff.
- Stress is defined by the NHS as “the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Pressure turns into stress when you are unable to cope.”
- Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.”
- Team members who are affected by stress (either work related or personal) should speak to
  - their manager;
  - the Employee Assistance Programme;
  - a Trade Union/Police Federation representative (if a member);
  - or
  - the relevant staff association (if appropriate)
- All discussions will be treated in confidence, and appropriate support will be offered.

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- Where stress/trauma has been caused by a traumatic or distressing incident at work, it is often more appropriate to use the Trauma Risk Management process (TRiM). Sometimes, if the stress is caused by a combination of a traumatic incident and ongoing work-related stress, it may be appropriate to use a combination of the TRiM and stress management processes to manage the situation. Such cases should be discussed with People Direct, to make sure the most appropriate process is being used.

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## **2 Staff/Officer**

### **2.1 What you need to do:**

- Take an active approach to looking after your own wellbeing, and managing your health and fitness.
- Look out for anything that might be a potential cause of stress for you or your colleagues, either in the workplace or elsewhere. Try to resolve these issues before they become too big a problem.
- Attend any stress awareness sessions offered, which will help you understand stress and how to deal with it.
- Work together with your manager so that they are able to help you resolve any issues that may be causing you stress.

### **2.2 Our commitment**

2.2.1 We are committed to trying to prevent and manage work-related stress. We also try to provide help and support to you if you are going through personal/domestic stress. We aim to:

- create an environment where our officers and staff feel emotionally strong enough to cope with the demands and pressures of work;
- create an environment where stress is managed as much as possible;
- provide support to you if you are going through stress, and support you so you can stay at work or return to work if you have been off sick; and
- educate and support our people on how to recognise and manage stress and wellbeing.

2.2.2 We will try to be as flexible as possible to support you through this difficult time. The more you tell us, the more we can try to help you.

### **2.3 How we can help**

2.3.1 Your manager can offer support if you are feeling stressed, especially if the stress is work related. They will also be able to help if you want to change your working arrangements in any way to help you cope. For example, a temporary or permanent flexible working plan could help you manage the stress better.

2.3.2 Completing the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form

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(100-005) may help you work out how you can manage the stress and feel better. You can complete this form with or without your manager, but remember, the more your manager knows about how you are feeling, the more they may be able to help.

- 2.3.3 Consider the support that is offered to you by colleagues, managers, friends, and/or family. This may mean talking to them about how you are feeling, or taking them up on the offer of childcare or accompanying you to a GP appointment. Different people will be able to offer different kinds of support.

### **3 Manager**

#### **3.1 What you need to do:**

- If you think someone in your team may be suffering from stress, speak to them in private, and offer support.
- Remember that discussions with the team member about their stress and the situation(s) causing it should be treated as confidential. If you are concerned and feel you need to share details of the team member's stress with a colleague, manager, or People and Development (P&D), ask for permission first.
- Be as flexible as possible with any member of your team whose health and wellbeing are affected by stress.
- Remind team members that the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) can provide help.
- Offer to complete an Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form (100-005) with any team member who is suffering from stress – or signpost them to it if they would prefer to complete it themselves.

#### **3.2 Stress prevention**

- 3.2.1 You can help to prevent your team members from work-related stress, through the work environment you create, the way you manage, and examples you set.
- 3.2.2 You should create an environment where the stresses of work are managed as much as is reasonably possible, and where mental and physical wellbeing are seen as equally important. Promote a culture of open communication between managers and team members, which can help prevent stress from occurring.
- 3.2.3 Ensure all your team members are properly trained and supported to carry out their roles. Discuss performance, workloads and objectives with them on a regular basis, and ensure that appropriate development opportunities are given.
- 3.2.4 Monitor and review workloads to ensure work is evenly distributed and all team members are able to cope with the volume of work expected of them. Keep an eye on working hours, patterns, overtime and flexi-time, to ensure that team members' working hours are in line with the Working Time Regulations, and allow for a good work-life balance.



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- 3.2.5 Make sure all of your team members are aware of the support that is available to them, e.g. the EAP.
- 3.2.6 Where issues are raised, you should resolve these at individual level and at team level where possible. You can, and should, still seek advice and guidance from P&D as appropriate, but issues should not be escalated unless necessary.
- 3.2.7 Try to spot any early warning signs that a team member may be suffering from stress, and offer support as soon as possible. Understand that in some cases, a team member may prefer to speak to the EAP or another manager or colleague, rather than speaking to you – as long as they are seeking support, this is fine.
- 3.2.8 A person can experience excessive pressure and demands outside work just as much as they can at work. Although we don't have a legal responsibility to tackle personal causes of stress amongst our team members we should recognise the impact they can have on work performance and the moral responsibility of taking an understanding and supportive approach in such circumstances.

### 3.3 Offering support

- 3.3.1 If a member of your team tells you that they are suffering from stress (either personal or work related), or a 'fit note' confirms this, you should talk to them, in private, about what they are going through and discuss how you might be able to help.
- 3.3.2 Offer to support your team member by contacting the EAP. They may be comfortable contacting them themselves, or they may find it easier for you to make the phone call and make a referral on their behalf.
- 3.3.3 Offer to help them fill in a Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form (100-005) – or if they are not comfortable doing this with you, suggest they fill one in on their own or with another manager or colleague. See the How to Help a Team Member Complete an Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form document for more information.
- 3.3.4 You should keep a copy of the form while it is still being worked on and referred to. Once it is completed you should send it to P&D for filing, if you have permission. Alternatively return the form to the individual for filing and place a memorandum in their personal file saying that this is what has been done.
- 3.3.5 Be as flexible as possible when considering time off to attend medical appointments, as well as for other reasons that may have an impact on their stress levels. It may be that a flexible work plan (either temporary or permanent) may help them, so discuss what options may be available to them, and consider any flexible working applications in line with the Flexible Working procedure. Remember not to make any guarantees or promises at

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this stage, as it may not be possible to approve all flexible working applications.

- 3.3.6 Remember, providing support and assistance for team members who are experiencing stress will often mean that the individual is able to maintain better attendance.
- 3.3.7 Stress can be a symptom of an underlying condition, or it can lead to other conditions, like depression or anxiety. In such cases, consider whether the condition could be a disability according to the Equality Act 2010. If so, you have to consider what reasonable adjustments might help, like reducing workload or flexible work patterns.

### **3.4 Support for you**

- 3.4.1 Our EAP offers a management consultancy service. This can help you to figure out how to manage workplace situations involving stress, and give guidance on how to have difficult conversations with team members.
- 3.4.2 It can also give guidance on how to manage workplace situations that have potential to become stressful, for example:
  - tackling a performance issue;
  - delivering bad news;
  - managing attendance issues; or
  - coping with change, such as a team restructure.
- 3.4.3 To access this service, just phone the EAP and explain what you are looking for.
- 3.4.4 P&D can also offer support and guidance - however you should always ask the team member for their permission to discuss the situation with P&D first.

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## 4 Resources

### Forms

- Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form (100-005)

### Reference Documents

- How to Have a Difficult Conversation
- How to Help a Team Member Complete an Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form
- Manager Frequently Asked Questions
- Officer/Staff Frequently Asked Questions
- What is Stress?

### Related Procedures

- Attendance Management
- Disability in Employment
- Flexible Working
- Trauma Risk Management

### Useful Links

- Acas: Dealing with Stress in the Workplace
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Healthy Working Lives: Stress at Work
- How To: Stress Management
- HSE Website: 'Work related stress – health and safety in the workplace'
- International Stress Management Association
- Mind, the mental health charity: Blue Light Information
- Mind, the mental health charity: How to Manage Stress
- NHS: 10 Stress Busters
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Trades Union Congress (TUC) Rep Guidance: Stress
- Working Time Regulations 1998

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## Appendix A

# How to Have a Difficult Conversation

### What...?

As a manager if you are concerned about a member of your team, you may need to address the matter by having a 'difficult conversation'. You may need to talk about some emotional issues you have noticed or need to let them know that you have concerns about their performance at work.

### Why...?

By having a frank discussion with the team member and allowing them to be open and honest, we can minimise the negative impact on them.

### How...?

It is often possible to discuss your concerns during regular, business as usual meetings with the team member, such as:

- regular work planning sessions;
- appraisals; or
- informal chats about progress

These should always take place in a private, confidential setting where the employee feels at ease.

Before raising concerns with a team member, consider:

- What are the behaviours that are causing you to be concerned?
- What do you think could be causing these behaviours?

To prompt and help the team member be more open, try to highlight specific examples of their behaviour. Highlight that these examples seem to be out of character for that person, and that you wonder if anything is bothering them.

Questions should be simple, open and non-judgemental to give the staff member an opportunity to explain in their own words. If there are specific grounds for concern, such as impaired performance, it is important to address these at an early stage.

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Having difficult conversations can arouse strong emotions and require a great deal of patience and understanding.

However, it is important that people should be treated in the same way as someone with physical health problems – a good starting point is asking how they are.

### Conversation Checklist

- Avoid interruptions – switch off phones, ensure colleagues can't walk in and interrupt.
- Ask simple, open, non-judgemental questions.
- Avoid judgemental or patronising responses.
- Speak calmly.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Listen actively and carefully.
- Encourage the team member to talk.
- Show empathy and understanding.
- Be prepared for some silences, and be patient.
- Focus on the person, not the problem.
- Avoid making assumptions, or being prescriptive.
- Follow up in writing, especially agreed actions or support.

You might find it helpful to use open questions that allow the employee maximum opportunity to express concerns in his or her own way. For example:

- “How are you doing at the moment?”
- “Is there anything I can do to help?”

If you have specific grounds for concern, such as poor performance, it is important to talk about these at an early stage. Ask questions in an open, exploratory and non-judgemental way. For example:

- “I've noticed that you have sometimes been arriving late recently and wondered if everything was okay?”
- “You seem to be a bit down/upset/under pressure/frustrated/angry. Is everything okay?”
- “I've noticed the reports are late when they usually are not. Is everything okay?”

This type of question should enable the team member to explain or raise any issues they have.

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### Team members who appear distressed

If you are speaking with a member of your team who appears particularly distressed, try asking open questions about what is happening, how they are feeling and what impact this is having on their work/personal life:

- How long have they felt like this?
- Is it an ongoing issue or something that has just arisen?
- Are there any problems outside of work that they want to talk about and/or it would be helpful for you to know about?
- Are they aware of possible sources of support such as relationship/bereavement counselling, drugs/alcohol services, legal or financial advice?
- Are they aware of support that the organisation may provide, such as the EAP?
- Is there any aspect of medical care that it would be helpful for you to know about? (For example, side effects from medication that might impact on their work in relation to health and safety.)

The team member does not have to tell you any of this if they do not want to, but they should be aware that you cannot provide support and guidance if you are not aware of the problem.

You may also want to discuss:

- Any coping strategies that the workplace could support.
- Whether to inform colleagues, and if so, who should share this information?
- Setting a review date and a regular way of communicating.

If you feel the issue that has affected the team member may affect others in the team/organisation, there may be an opportunity to discuss this with those affected. It is important to get the consent of the individual involved before raising with others.

Remember the support that is available to you within the organisation. This may include your own line manager, People and Development (P&D), or the management consultancy resource available through the EAP.

The guidance given here is very much about managing the situation within the organisation. It is important, however, that where appropriate you encourage the staff member to seek professional help. This may be through their GP or alternatively you can refer them to the Employee Assistance Programme.

If you have any questions about the support services included in this document, the Health and Wellbeing Team can provide more information and assistance. Their details are on the Wellbeing page of the intranet.

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## Appendix B

# How to Help a Team Member Complete an Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form

## What...?

The Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form (100-005) gives a structured approach to help a team member work through the pressures they might face in the working environment, and consider if these are a source of stress. If so, a management plan is included to consider what can be done to reduce the risks to performance and health.

This tool is based on asking questions which are noted on the HSE Management Standards for work-related stress.

This guide tells you how to support a team member in filling in the Individual Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form if they are suffering from work-related stress.

## When...?

If one of your team members tells you that they may be experiencing work-related stress, or if you get a medical certificate noting the cause of illness as work-related stress, the law says we have a duty to help them manage this stress and stop it from getting worse. So you should use this guide to help you do this. You should take action to help and support your staff member as soon as possible after finding out about their work-related stress.

## How...?

You should encourage the team member to fill in the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form (100-005) as soon as possible. They should complete Parts A and B on their own (but if they ask for your support, you should help them). You should meet with them to fill in Part C together. If you/they want a representative from P&D to come along and help too, this is possible – just contact People Direct to arrange it. Or if they would prefer to complete Section C with another manager instead of you, that is fine, too.

The meeting should be a positive experience, where the team member can open up to you about their concerns, and you can discuss these with them. You should work together to find ways for the stress to be managed and reduced, including any reasonable adjustments that could be put in place. This might include applying to

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temporarily reduce working hours or amend working patterns, getting a colleague to help out with a particularly heavy workload, or amending the team member's job on a temporary basis. Anything that might help should always be considered.

It is important that you ask the team member for their ideas of how the stress could be managed, as well as making your own suggestions.

Discuss the feedback with the team member, and prepare a management plan. The team member should actively contribute to this part of the process. A stress management plan will:

- help set goals to work towards;
- help decide on priorities;
- demonstrate commitment from both the manager and the team member;
- give you something to evaluate and review against; and
- consider possible mitigating factors, solutions or reasonable adjustments which could be implemented.

Once the form has been completed, agree on a review date – this should be no more than one month later. On the review date, meet to discuss and review the Individual Stress Risk Assessment Questionnaire Form (100-005) with the team member. Make sure you write the update on the form so all progress is documented.

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## Appendix C

### Frequently Asked Questions - Manager

#### **What are signs of stress that I should look out for in my team members?**

You can find a list of some common symptoms of stress, and factors that could add to stress, in the What is Stress? document.

Some of these are symptoms you might notice from a team member's day-to-day activities; but you might only pick up on some other symptoms through good attendance management.

For example, if a team member phones in sick with a bad headache, you might notice that this is the third headache that they have had in a short period. You should then discuss with them whether they might be under more pressure than they realise. Encourage them to speak to either the EAP or their GP about this, if they feel they might be suffering from stress.

#### **One of my team members seems to be feeling stressed, but they have not come to me to talk about it. What should I do?**

If you are concerned about a team member, you should speak to them in private and offer your support. Some people may open up and talk about how they are feeling once you ask – and even just talking about it can really help. Even if the individual does not want to talk to you, and/or says they are feeling fine, you should let them know that you are there for them if they feel they need support at any point. It may still be appropriate to give them the details of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Remember, we want to support our officers and staff members, and stop problems before they occur. But you should always make sure that confidentiality is maintained – so have meetings in private, and don't talk about the feelings/situations discussed in front of others.

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## Appendix D

### Frequently Asked Questions - Officer/Staff

#### **I am experiencing stress – what can I do?**

As well as speaking to your manager or contacting the Employee Assistance Programme, there are many online resources that can give you ideas of how to manage your stress, and help you feel better. Some recommended sites can be found in the Resources section of the Stress Management procedure.

#### **I am going through a difficult period in my personal/home life, and it is causing me to feel stressed. Do I need to tell my manager?**

You do not need to tell your manager if you do not want to, but we would encourage you to do so. Your manager can offer support and help make sure that your work is not adding to your stress, if you tell them. If you do not tell your manager, they will not be able to help. But it is your choice to do what feels best for you.

#### **I have been feeling under a lot of pressure at work recently, and it is affecting my mood. I went to the GP and they have diagnosed me with work-related stress. Do I need to tell my manager?**

You do not need to tell your manager if you do not want to, but we would encourage you to do so. This will allow them to offer support and guidance.

If you are signed off work due to work-related stress, your fit note will probably state “work-related stress” as the illness. Your manager will see this and know that you are suffering from work-related stress. So you do not need to tell them in this case, as they will already know – but you might want to anyway, as they will want to talk to you about the reason for your absence.

#### **I am feeling stressed because of my work. I have not been to see my GP though. Do I need to tell my manager?**

You do not need to tell your manager if you do not want to, but we would encourage you to do so. This will allow them to offer support and guidance.

#### **I feel that my work-related stress is caused by my manager, so do not want to talk to him/her. What should I do?**

We understand if you do not want to talk to your own manager about your work-related stress, especially if you feel that they might have an impact on how you are

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feeling. But we cannot help you if you do not tell us that you are suffering from work-related stress.

If you feel that you cannot talk to your own manager, you should speak to another manager who you feel more comfortable with. You should also think about contacting the Employee Assistance Programme, as they are able to offer practical advice, as well as counselling, in some cases

### **What are some signs of stress that I should look out for in myself and my colleagues?**

You can find a list of some common symptoms of stress, and factors that could add to stress, in the What is Stress? document.

### **I have noticed some signs of stress in one of my colleagues. What should I do?**

You should speak to the colleague in private, if you feel comfortable doing so, and check if they are ok. Suggest that they speak to their manager, and seek support from their GP and/or the Employee Assistance Programme. Depending on how close you are to this person, you may want to offer more personal support too – this is fine, if you feel comfortable doing so.

If you do not want to talk to the colleague directly, you might want to speak to your manager, to make them aware of your concerns. They can then speak to the colleague, if required.



## What is Stress?

Stress is a physical, behavioural, and psychological response to too much or too little pressure. We can feel stress as a negative reaction to too much pressure or the types of demands placed on us.

Stress is an individual thing, so something that causes someone else stress may not be stressful for you, and something that is stressful for you may not be stressful for someone else. It can also depend on other factors in life, so a situation or demand that caused you stress five years ago may not feel stressful if it happened again today.

Some situations or demands that could cause stress are:

- a workload that is too heavy;
- lack of control over workload or situation;
- poor work relationships – with colleague(s) or manager(s);
- bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation;
- continual or rapid change;
- lack of job security;
- responsibility without authority;
- not enough support from manager(s);
- personality conflicts;
- poor communications;
- not enough training; and
- a career not developing as well/as quickly as hoped.

Sometimes, major life events can add to pressure and make it even more difficult to cope. Some examples of major life events are:

- death of partner or close family member;
- if either the individual or a close family member is suffering from a serious or long-term illness, or a disability;
- divorce or separation;

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- new child;
- change of job;
- moving house;
- financial problems;
- criminal prosecution.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Stress**

Anyone can experience stress, no matter what level they are working at. If you notice any of these symptoms in yourself or a colleague, you should consider seeking support.

Here are some examples of symptoms to look out for (this list is not exhaustive):

#### **Emotional Symptoms**

- Negative or depressive feeling
- Disappointment with him/herself
- More emotional reactions – more tearful, sensitive, or aggressive
- Loneliness, being withdrawn
- Loss of motivation, commitment, and confidence

#### **Mental Health Symptoms**

- Confusion, indecision
- Can't concentrate
- Poor memory

#### **Behavioural Symptoms**

- Changes in eating habits
- Increased smoking, drinking, or drug taking “to cope”
- Mood swings affecting the team member's behaviour
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Twitchy, nervous behaviour
- Lack of confidence
- Doesn't want to make decisions
- Needs to constantly seek reassurance from others
- Working long hours but not getting much done
- Making more mistakes

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- Changes in attendance, such as arriving later or taking more time off

### **Physical Symptoms**

- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Sleeplessness
- Phobias
- Depression
- Recurring minor ailments such as the cold, cold sores, etc.

Remember, the above symptoms may indicate that someone is suffering from stress, but they may also be symptoms of other conditions. If you are concerned about a colleague, you should talk to them and encourage them to go to their GP or contact the Employee Assistance Programme for support.