

# Work-related Stress

## Schools Safety Guide

### Document information

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## 1. Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as, *“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them.”*

This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can occur when pressure becomes excessive and can be detrimental to health. Stress is not an illness – it is a state, but it can be an indicating factor for other illnesses, both physical and psychological.

In 2020/21 the UK, estimated that around **822,000** workers suffered from work-related stress, depression or anxiety (new or long-standing) and an estimated **38.8 million** working days were lost in total due to either; work-related stress, depression or anxiety. Therefore, it is in the best interests of the employer and the employee that issues around workplace stressors are addressed.

This school safety guide explains the actions schools need to take to meet their legal obligation and the commitments made in the school’s health and safety policy to manage work-related stress. It also outlines what schools should consider in the context of non-work-related stress and employee wellbeing.

## 2. The Law

There is no legislation that relates specifically to stress but the following regulations touch upon the issue:

- **Health and Safety at Work Act** – Employers have a general duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the **health**, safety and **welfare** of employees at work. This implies that measures should be in place to ensure that employees do not suffer stress-related illnesses because of their work.
- **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations** – Employers are required to undertake a risk assessment, and this assessment must also take into consideration the risk of stress-related ill health or unsafe working practices that may be caused or exacerbated by stress.

Managers must assist the employer in proactively addressing work-related stress, so the likelihood of employees suffering from it is reduced.

## 3. The Health and Safety Executive’s (HSE) Management Standards

The HSE has developed the “Management Standards” approach to tackling work-related stress. They cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

1. **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment;

2. **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work, such as the order it is done, and without being micro-managed;
3. **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues;
4. **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour;
5. **Role** – whether people understand their role within the school and whether the school ensures that they do not have conflicting roles;
6. **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the school.

The HSE's Management Standards approach helps employers prepare for and conduct an appropriate risk assessment. The full guidance is available on the [HSE webpage](#).

#### 4. Managers Responsibilities – Risk Assessment

Stress must be considered as a common hazard when completing general risk assessment (e.g. risk assessments for the jobs employees do, or a particular task) as people's responses may differ when they are feeling the symptoms of stress or overload. A specific stress risk assessment will be undertaken where multiple incidents of work-related stress are reported in a team; and the factors associated with the work are known to affect the way people and employees feel and respond.

Please see [Appendix 1](#) that provides a process map of the stress risk assessment procedure.

**When carrying out the stress risk assessment it's important to focus on organisational-level issues that have the potential to impact on groups and large numbers of employees, rather than individual employees. This approach is likely to give bigger benefits.**

Completing a stress risk assessment requires a level of preparation and planning. Before completing the stress risk assessment, managers must use one of the [stress management techniques](#) (e.g. survey or talking toolkit) to determine whether work-related stress is a problem. The information obtained from the survey or discussion may identify 'hot spots' and what the likely underlying causes may be; which can then be incorporated into the stress risk assessment. Managers must also:

- become familiar with the HSE management standards for stress;
- allocate sufficient resources to coordinate the stress risk assessment. This may include tasks such as circulation and collection of surveys, collation; and
- analysis of survey data, preparation of papers for focus group meetings, organising meetings, writing up of the stress risk assessment, monitoring the action plan and other data, etc.

A [model stress risk assessment](#) is available to download from the PPS webpage. Please note that the model assessment must be made specific to the team by editing / deleting any part that does not apply and adding additional risks / hazards / controls specific to the team where appropriate.

The findings of the risk assessment must then be shared with all those to which it applies. The risk assessment will need to be reviewed regularly; this includes reviewing your action plan to ensure controls have been implemented and regularly evaluating information to see what affect it is having. This could include reviewing sickness absence data, holding review meetings, repeating stress surveys etc.

## 5. Managers Responsibilities- Supporting employees

Managers have an important role in assisting their employers to proactively address work-related stress and in doing so reduce the likelihood of employees suffering from it. They have a role in maintaining employee health and wellbeing and minimising the likelihood of stressful circumstances and situations arising for their staff.

The role you play as a manager is crucial to the successful implementation of the approach to work-related stress.

It is not up to you as a manager to diagnose stress, but it is up to you to recognise that behaviours have changed, be aware that something is wrong and take prompt action. Take care not to over react to small changes in behaviour. Managers need to act when these behavioural changes continue.

Managers have a duty to ensure that work does not make their team members ill. Understanding how to spot the signs of stress in the team, and then knowing what to do to reduce stressors, will help managers achieve this. This will include the commitment to:

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments.
- Communicate well, particularly where there are organisational changes.
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities, where practicable.
- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking.
- Attend training in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is addressed.
- Liaise with the employer's specialist Occupational Health (OH) advisers on stress issues.
- Report their concerns to appropriate senior managers, while maintaining any obligations of confidentiality.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support (e.g. use the [HSE website resources](#) that gives useful links to specialised organisations) to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, such as bereavement or separation.

The HSE have produced a [practical guide](#) to help line managers support and manage people with mental health problems in the workplace. It is strongly recommended that all managers make themselves aware of this resource.

### 3. Stress Management Techniques

#### Stress Survey

If you have **more than 25 employees**, then the school should use the HSE stress management standards. You will be responsible for implementing a stress steering and focus group, carrying out a survey of your employees using the [stress indicator tool](#) and using the [analysis tool](#) to inform your stress risk assessment.

More detailed guidance on how this can be achieved, and links to the HSE resources you will need for each step of the process can be found in [Appendix 2](#) of this document.

#### HSE's Talking Toolkit

If your school has **fewer than 25 employees**, then the stress survey approach will not work effectively. Therefore, you will be responsible for ensuring that stress is discussed with your team using the [HSE stress – talking toolkit \(Education\)](#). This is a self-explanatory resource for managers to follow and will enable you to gather information to incorporate into your team's general and/or stress risk assessment.

This resource should also be used if you become aware of an employee who raises work-related stress as an issue. The employee's individual action plan may also identify additional measures that may then need to be added to the team/service area risk assessment.

### 4. Balancing Job Requirements with Capabilities

A person experiences stress when they perceive that their work demands are greater than their ability to cope. Coping means balancing the demands and pressures placed on them (job requirements) with their skills and knowledge (capabilities). So, if an employee has a tight deadline on a project they feel they do not have the skills or ability to do well, they may begin to feel undue pressure which could result in work-related stress.

The Department for Education's 'Reducing workload in your school' can help you and your school to review and streamline workload through collaborative discussion: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-workload-reduction-toolkit>

A poster and pamphlet developed by teachers working with the Department for Education and Ofsted offers tips on reducing teacher workload regarding marking, planning and resources and data management, following three independent reviews of these areas of workload: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-workload-poster-and-pamphlet>

The Department for Education's Workload Reduction Toolkit gives practical advice and tools for school leaders and teachers to help review and reduce workload:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reducing-school-workload>

## 5. Responsibilities of Employees

Employees have a responsibility to raise concerns and tell their manager or representative about possible problems and sources of stress. If the employer is not aware of a problem, it can be difficult for action to be taken.

Employees should proactively engage with any actions that are suggested by their line manager or other professional, such as occupational health.

## 6. Dealing with home-related stress

Employees may bring home-related stress into the workplace. Although not legally responsible for stress that originates in the home, well-managed organisations will have arrangements that allow them to address it. This might include such things as access to counselling services, adaptations to the work or offering flexible working hours.

It is sometimes difficult to identify what stress is caused by problems at home, and what is caused by work. Using the talking toolkit mentioned above can help tease this out.

## 7. Absence from Work

Stress related sickness may result in an employee being absent from work for a longer period than physical accidents/some other illnesses. If staff are absent because of work-related stress, getting them back to work as quickly and safely as possible is obviously a key priority. A well-managed, early return to work intervention, is likely to reduce the risk of absence becoming long-term (defined as an absence period of longer than four working weeks). The use of the [HSE stress – talking toolkit \(Education\)](#) can assist in informing a discussion between the employee and their manager.

## 8. Employee wellbeing

Despite the best intentions of the school, there may be occasions when employees need additional, professional support. Schools should have arrangements in place for employees to access a confidential and professional counselling service. This may be arranged locally, through the employer's human resources (HR) service, or signposting to external organisations such as;

MIND, <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

NHS choices <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/>

Samaritans, <https://www.samaritans.org/> ☎: 116 123 (24 hours a day, free to call), or email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) (response time 24 hours)

The Education Support Partnership who offer a free, confidential helpline, grants to support staff experiencing financial issues and guidance on handling stress and managing work/life balance. ☎: 08000 562 561 <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

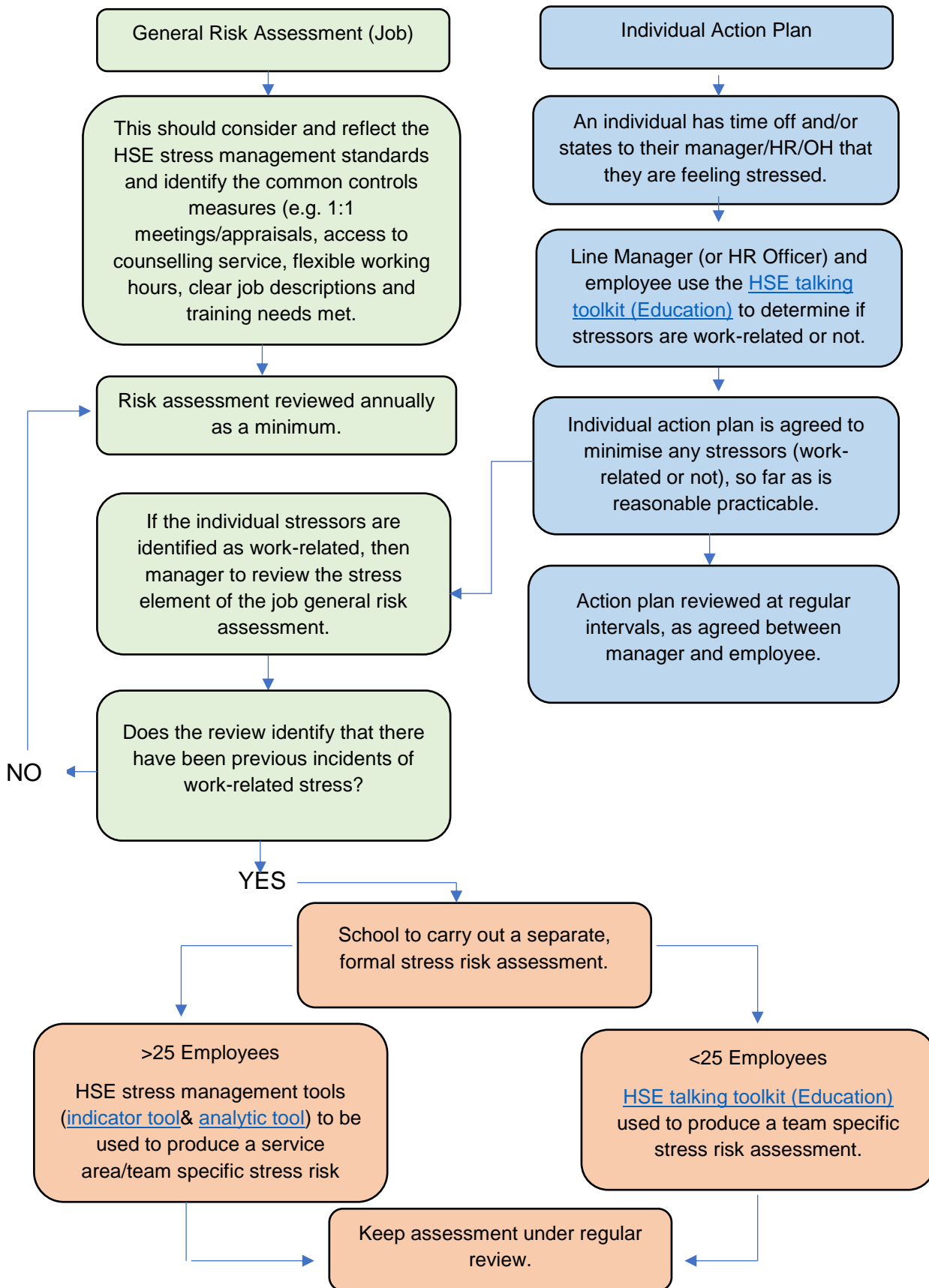
## 6. Further information

Further information on Stress is available on the HSE's website:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>



## Appendix 1 – Risk Assessment Process Map



## Appendix 2 – How to use the management standards

What are the tools I should use?

The HSE have also produced several [tools and templates](#) that are designed to be used alongside the Management Standards. These include:

- The Indicator Tool consists of a questionnaire that can be issued to employees to indicate the degree to which they might be feeling stressed.
- The Analysis Tool is a spreadsheet that can be used to analyse the views of those completing the questionnaire and assess the service's performance.
- An action plan and worked example
- Guidance on running Steering and Focus Groups
- A Talking Toolkit for use with small teams or individuals who present with stress or return to work after a work-related stress absence.

### Where do I start?

After you have gained commitment from the Senior Leadership team (SLT) there are five steps to using the HSE stress management standards.

#### Step 1: [Identify the risk factors](#)

Members of the steering group, and others involved in the project, should understand HSE's Management Standards. These highlight the six main risk factors for work-related stress and indicate good management practice in each of these areas.

#### Step 2: [Who can be harmed and how](#)

You should assess any gap between the school's current performance and that described in HSE's Management Standards. You can do this by gathering and analysing data on the school's performance to compare against the Management Standards.

#### Step 3: [Evaluate the risks](#)

The main aim of this step in HSE's Management Standards approach is to take the data collection and analysis from the previous step and talk the conclusions through with a representative sample of employees and work with them to develop solutions.

#### Step 4: [Record the findings](#)

By now you will have consulted your employees, explored areas of concern and taken some initial steps to develop some proposed solutions. You should record your findings – to do this you could produce and share an action plan, which will:

- help you set goals to work towards
- help you to prioritise
- demonstrate that you are serious about addressing employees' concerns

- provide you with something to evaluate and review against

### Step 5: Monitor and review

Step 5 of HSE's Management Standards approach is about reviewing the actions you take to tackle any identified causes of work-related stress:

- Monitor: review your action plan to ensure the agreed actions are being implemented,
- Evaluate: check if the solutions you have implemented are effective,
- Decide what further action or data gathering is needed. If the solutions are not working, what else can you do? If the solutions are working, can they be rolled out across other parts of the school?

Finally, the last stage in HSE's stress Management Standards is to consider whether the school's policies, procedures, local arrangements should be reviewed in the light of the findings from your risk assessment. Policies/procedures/arrangements that may need review include:

- Grievance procedure (where relationships may have deteriorated, harassment, bullying, etc),
- Sickness absence (maintaining contact when employees are off sick and return to work interviews),
- Equality, where this deals with mental health issues and reasonable adjustments.