

Management of Stress at Work Policy

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This document is available in alternative formats upon request, such as large print, electronically or community languages.	

Document History and Control:

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1	28/01/2019	New policy	Gemma Farley, HR Manager
2	28/02/2022	Updated job titles and team titles, and policy titles. Amendment to responsibilities from Risk Management team to Advisory team as appropriate (section 4). Glossary updated (section 15).	Gemma Farley, Employee Relations and Wellbeing Manager

Executive Summary

The guidelines in this policy set out to be proactive to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees. Hazards and risks within the organisation will be managed proactively and effectively to ensure compliance with statutory rights.

Additionally, this policy outlines how to identify, assess and manage risks in the workplace associated with work related stress.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Trust is committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of employees and recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue.
- 1.2 The Trust has duties under the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999), and the Equality Act (2010) to ensure that employees are not unduly harmed by their work activities.
- 1.3 These duties extend to the management of work-related stress.
- 1.4 In addition to the statutory duties, there are a number of NHS standards and assurances relevant to the successful management of health and safety risks within the Trust, which include:
 - NHSLA
 - NICE guidelines (2009) on promoting mental wellbeing at work.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide a systematic approach to the identification and management of workplace pressures which have the potential to induce or result in workplace stress within the Trust.
- 2.2 The policy will support staff in ensuring that hazards and risks within the organisation are managed proactively and effectively to ensure compliance with statutory rights.
- 2.3 The Trust aims to develop a working environment that promotes the health and wellbeing of all staff. This can be achieved by identifying and managing the underlying causes of stress within the organisation.
- 2.4 The Trust is also committed to supporting the employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance and to supporting staff who have experienced traumatic or distressing events either in the work environment or personal circumstances external to the workplace.
- 2.5 By acknowledging that any employee may experience stress and that seeking help and support is not an admission of weakness; providing management and staff with the necessary resources, skills and support to identify, assess and manage risks arising from organisational stressors. Encouraging employees who report stress to take an active involvement in addressing its causes and seeking help from other professionals.
- 2.6 These aims will be met by implementing the management standards developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to support a reduction in the levels of workplace stress. These six management standards cover the primary sources of stress at work and provide a framework for undertaking stress risk assessments.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Trust, including bank staff, agency staff, students, trainees and volunteers.

4. Duties and Responsibilities

4.1 Trust Board

- 4.1.1 Has strategic responsibility to ensure that systems are in place to assess, control and minimise stress within the organisation.

4.2 Advisory Team

- 4.2.1 Give guidance, training and support to managers on implementing this policy
4.2.2 Assist and support managers to identify potential sources of stress within their department utilising the HSE Management Standards and to implement measures as a result of analysis
4.2.3 Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress
4.2.4 Encourage all staff to use the support services available to them as appropriate

4.3 Health and Safety (Risk team)

- 4.3.1 Consult on changes to work practices/ design that could precipitate stress

4.4 General Managers/ Clinical Directors

- 4.4.1 Will ensure that the annual stress risk assessment (available from the Advisory team) has been undertaken. Any actions required as a result of this should be carried out and documented.
4.4.2 Are responsible for implementing this policy within their own areas of responsibility and for ensuring that it is brought to the attention of all employees.

4.5 Managers

- 4.5.1 Implement appropriate and effective measures to manage those risks through open discussion with staff as appropriate
4.5.2 Routinely review any related risk assessments
4.5.3 Ensure that where an employee has reported stress related to work, that they are being treated in the same way as those with any other occupational related health problem
4.5.4 Ensure that employees are aware of, and are provided with access, appropriate support; for example, the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health Department, and the Psychological Therapies team.
4.5.5 Ensure that all incidents that result in absence reported as work-related stress are managed effectively in line with the Trust Attendance Policy.
4.5.6 Carry out Return to Work Meetings.
4.5.7 Monitor the effectiveness of any measures that are put in place to manage workplace stress.
4.5.8 Be aware of any external/ personal stressors an employee is experiencing, such as bereavement or divorce, and offer support as appropriate

- 4.5.9 Ensure employees are not overworking (including additional bank work) and take their annual leave entitlement regularly throughout the year; mandating leave is taken if required.
- 4.5.10 Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within the department and that the appropriate policy is adhered to.

4.6 Staff Side Representatives

- 4.6.1 Support their members in line with the requirements of this policy
- 4.6.2 Ensure that their members are aware of the availability of Occupational Health Department support and the Employee Assistance Programme.

4.7 Occupational Health

- 4.7.1 Provide specialist advice on managing stress to individuals referred for support.
- 4.7.2 Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their manager regarding a planned return to work.
- 4.7.3 Offer information about access to the Employee Assistance Programme and other supportive services available.
- 4.7.4 Advise staff or refer routes to other healthcare professionals as appropriate

4.8 Employees

- 4.8.1 All employees have a duty to take care of their own health and safety at work. The effectiveness of this policy depends upon staff co-operation in preventing and managing stress.
 - 4.8.2 Report promptly to their line manager any stress-related issue (both work-related and external/ personal) that may adversely affect them, their work or those affected by their actions.
 - 4.8.3 Where an employee feels unable to report their concerns to their line manager, they may discuss the issues confidentially with:
 - 4.8.3.1 Their manager's manager
 - 4.8.3.2 Their Trade Union or Professional organisation
 - 4.8.3.3 The Employee Assistance Programme
 - 4.8.3.4 Occupational Health
 - 4.8.3.5 The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
 - 4.8.3.6 The Advisory team
 - 4.8.4 Be alert to the signs of stress (**Appendix 2**) in colleagues and encourage the individual to seek help at an early stage.
 - 4.8.5 Ensure annual leave entitlement is taken regularly throughout the year.
 - 4.8.6 Participate in this policy and HSE management standards process.
 - 4.8.7 Co-operate with their line manager in implementing any actions which have been identified to reduce the risk of work-related stress.
 - 4.8.8 Be prepared to consider options to address problems and attend appropriate training as recommended by their manager or escalate to the next manager above.
- 4.9 If following a report of work-related stress and subsequent action by the line manager, an individual feels that the risks to their health and wellbeing have not been adequately resolved, they should refer back to their line manager.

5. Stress Management Process

- 5.1 In order to assist employers to identify hazards and risks which may cause harm, the HSE has researched and developed a set of Management Standards for Work Related Stress (MSWRS) that has identified six potential stressors, which if properly managed, can help to reduce work related stress.
- 5.2 In summary the HSE Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work and these are:

Demands	This includes issues such as workload, work patterns, and the work environment
Control	How much say the person has in the way they do their work
Support	This includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
Relationships	This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
Role	Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
Change	How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

- 5.3 Where it is identified that there may be issues related to performance or capability, these may be supported through the Trust's Managing Performance Policy (available on the Trust intranet).
- 5.4 Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards Indicator Tool
- 5.4.1 The HSE have developed Management Standards analysis and indicator tools that enable managers to collect and analyse the above information.
- 5.4.2 The HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool (MSIT) is a way in which a team, individual or manager can help to identify what stressors exist in the workplace and provide a means by which an agreement can be reached on how these stressors can be eliminated, reduced or best controlled. Whether performing the assessment as a team, individual or manager, all groups start by completing the HSE MSIT questionnaire (available from the Advisory team). A flow chart for the procedure is in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.4.3 The questionnaires are completed either online or in paper format and the analysis is exported in the form of a report.
- 5.4.4 **Appendix 3** gives a brief summary of examples of the main causes of stress under each of the Management Standards headings and how they can be addressed. Further advice can be sought from the Advisory team.

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 The Trust's established processes, as detailed in the Trust's Risk Management Policy, for hazard identification and risk assessment may also be applied to the identification, assessment and control of organisational stressors. The main principles of such an assessment are to:

- 6.1.1 Identify the hazards (stressors)
- 6.1.2 Decide who might be harmed and how
- 6.1.3 Evaluate the risk by identifying actions already taken and determining if they are sufficient or if more needs to be done.
- 6.1.4 Recording the significant findings of the assessment
- 6.1.5 Monitor and review the assessment at appropriate intervals

6.2 Identify the Hazards

- 6.2.1 The MSIT should be used by managers annually (every two years maximum) dependent upon the level of risk identified.
- 6.2.2 The management standards analysis will help identify levels of workplace stress in individuals and groups. Where medium to high levels of stress are identified, the MSIT can be used to clarify workplace sources of stress.
- 6.2.3 Personal stressors can also impact an individual's ability to do their job and it is important to be able to identify these. A personal stress risk assessment may be undertaken by Occupational Health using a validated psychological measurement following a management referral.

6.3 Who can be harmed and how?

- 6.3.1 The pressures of workplace stressors can be identified through the effects they have on an individual, a team or the organisation itself.

6.4 Evaluate the risks

- 6.4.1 Use of the stress analysis enables managers to identify:
 - 6.4.1.1 The actions that are already being taken
 - 6.4.1.2 Whether current actions are sufficient
 - 6.4.1.3 What more needs to be put in place to reduce and manage the identified stressors.

6.5 Record your findings

- 6.5.1 Completion of the MSIT acts as a record of the findings of the assessment and the action plan will include the recommendations for addressing issues raised.
- 6.5.2 Audits undertaken and action plans developed in response to these assessments are recorded and monitored by the relevant group or individual.

6.5.3 Where a risk has been identified and an action plan developed a summary report should be disseminated to all relevant employees and their representatives. In these circumstances the risk identification assessment and risk register procedure on the MSIT should also be completed and submitted if necessary.

6.6 Risks

6.6.1 Risk assessments should consider those factors that are likely to cause intense or sustained levels of work-related stress, taking into account existing measures to control the risks.

6.6.2 Risk assessments should also be undertaken before any significant changes to:

- 6.6.2.1 An individual's work, including working relationships and workload
- 6.6.2.2 The working environment
- 6.6.2.3 An individual's responsibilities, including promotion
- 6.6.2.4 The organisation, including relocation, re-building, mergers and new reporting structures.

6.6.3 A risk assessment should also take place when change is likely to expose an individual to unreasonable stress.

6.6.4 Individual risk assessments should be reviewed following:

- 6.6.4.1 Any period of stress related sickness/absence
- 6.6.4.2 A complaint or other report of stress
- 6.6.4.3 Any other change that may make the findings of the original assessment invalid

6.6.5 The frequency at which an assessment is undertaken and reviewed can also be identified through the performance review process.

6.6.6 The significant findings of any assessment should be recorded and communicated to those affected.

6.7 Managing the risks

6.7.1 The Trust aims to support staff at work by:

- 6.7.1.1 Reducing Pressures – reducing as far as reasonably practicable the causes of stress at source.
- 6.7.1.2 Managing Pressure – equip employees to manage stressors by facilitating access to stress management training courses and health & wellbeing activities available through the organisation.
- 6.7.1.3 Coping Strategies – support employees who are finding it difficult to cope by advocating the use of counselling, complimentary therapies etc. Union representatives may also be able to offer support to staff who feel stressed.

6.7.2 Whatever initiatives are considered, their successful implementation will depend upon the involvement of the affected individual or group, use of the MSIT promotes this involvement.

6.7.3 Managers should seek the advice and assistance of the Occupational Health service in the implementation, monitoring and review of any actions taken to manage work related stress.

7. Other support

7.1 Employees may wish to seek support from sources other than Occupational Health, their manager, the Advisory team, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, or the Psychological Therapy team within the Trust.

7.2 The Employee Assistance Programme is available to staff and their immediate family provided by Care first who provide an independent and confidential 24/7 service. Their details are available on the Trust intranet or can be obtained from the Advisory team.

7.3 Other support could be available from a Trade Union Representative, their General Practitioner (GP) or professional body (if applicable).

8. Training and Awareness

The policy will be published on Qnet and a series of communications will be produced to raise awareness of the policy. Training will be provided to managers across QVH to ensure compliance. This will be included as part of the Leading the Way management and leadership programme at QVH. Details of training availability will be available on Qnet.

9. Equality

All public bodies have a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010. To have due regard to the elimination of discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.

Equality Impact Assessments will ensure discrimination does not occur also on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010.

This policy and protocol will be equality impact assessed in accordance with the Trust's impact assessment toolkit. Completed assessments are available upon request from qvh.eqia@nhs.net.

10. Freedom of Information

Any information that belongs to the Trust may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This act allows anyone, anywhere to ask for information held by the Trust to be disclosed (subject to limited exemptions). Further information is available in the Freedom of Information Act Trust Procedure which can be viewed on the Trust Intranet.

11. Records Management

Records are created or received in the conduct of the business activities of the Trust and provide evidence and information about these activities. All records are also corporate assets as they hold the corporate knowledge about the Trust. The Trust has a Records Management Policy for dealing with records management. Compliance with and the application of this policy will ensure that the Trust’s records are complete, accurate and provide evidence of and information about the Trust’s activities for as long as is required.

12. Review

This policy will be reviewed in 3 years’ time. Earlier review may be required in response to exceptional circumstances, organisational change or relevant changes in legislation or guidance.

13. Discipline

Breaches of this policy will be investigated and may result in the matter being treated as a disciplinary offence under the Trust’s Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

14. Monitoring Compliance with this Policy

The annual NHS Staff Survey and quarterly Staff Friends and Family Test will provide evidence to QVH that this policy is embedded in practice.

Activity being monitored	Methodology to be used for monitoring	Responsibility for monitoring	Frequency of monitoring and reporting	Process for review and improvement
Work related stress audit (teams/ departments)	HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool	Advisory team	Annual	Annual report
Sickness absence rates relating to work related stress	Measuring and reporting sickness absence rates including work related stress	Workforce Services and Advisory team	Annual	Annual report

Raising awareness of the effects of stress on individuals and business performance through training, development and through health and wellbeing initiatives.

Data will be used fairly, ethically and confidentially and in accordance with the sensitive personal data provisions of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018.

15. Glossary / explanation of terms used

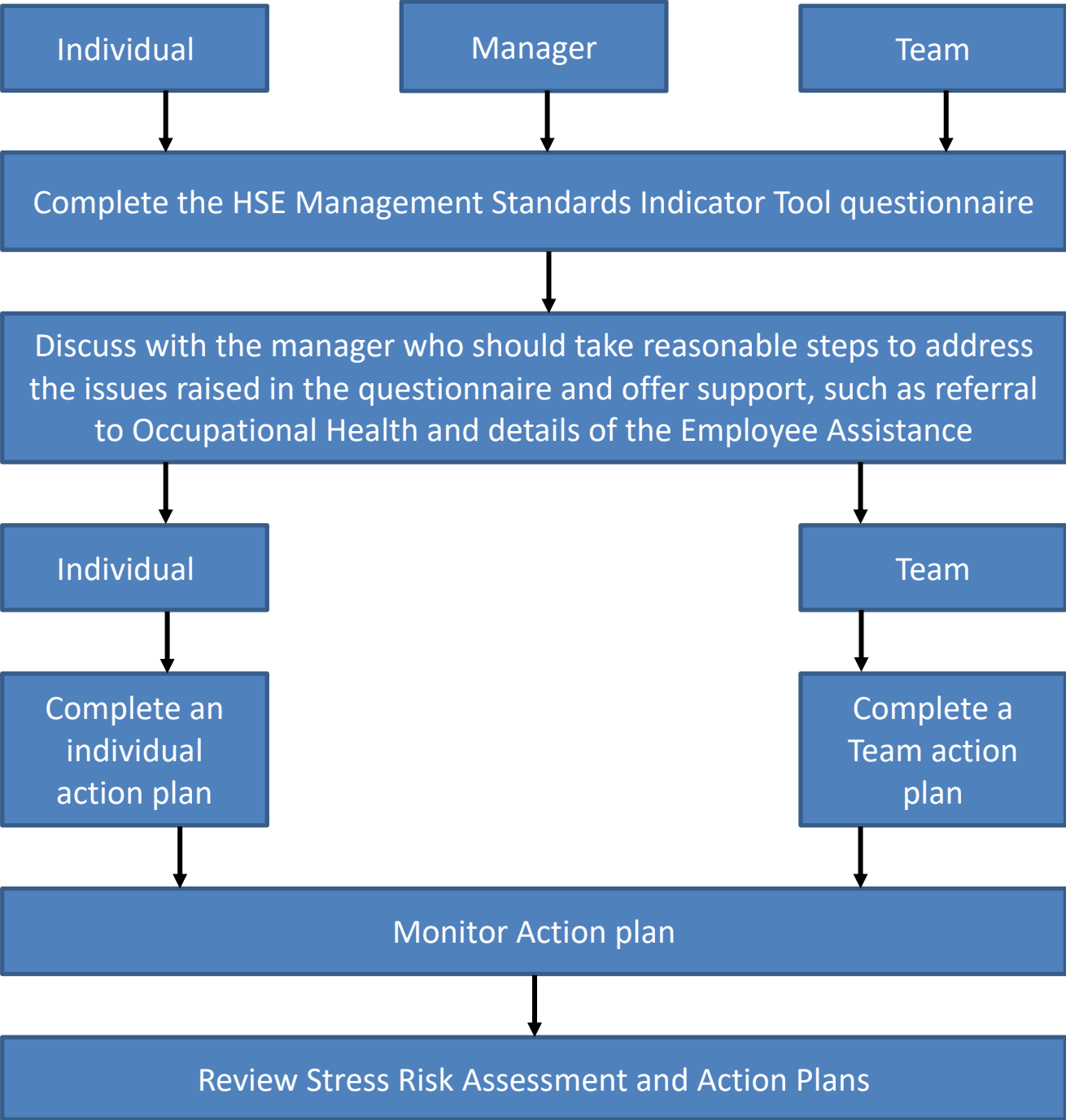
Acronym/ Abbreviation/ Term	Meaning
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
MSWRS	Management Standards for Work Related Stress
MSA	Management Standards Assessment
Risk assessment	A careful examination of what, in the workplace, could cause harm, loss or damage. The likelihood and severity and what controls are required to manage the risk
Person	Includes: staff, patients, relatives, members of the public, volunteers, contractors and anyone else who may be affected by the Trust activities
NHSLA	NHS Litigation Authority (NHSLA) manages negligence and other claims against the NHS in England on behalf of its member organisations
NICE guidelines (2009) on promoting mental wellbeing at work	The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline covers how to create the right conditions to support mental wellbeing at work. The aim is create a culture of participation, equality and fairness in the workplace based on open communication and flexible working

16. References and associated documents

Organisation	Author	Date of publication	Title of document
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	www.hse.gov.uk	10/2009	How to tackle work related stress: A guide for employers on making the management standards work
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	www.hse.gov.uk	2009	Managing the cause of work related stress: A step by step approach using management standards
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	www.hse.gov.uk	2017	Tackling work related stressing using the management standards approach
Health and Safety at Work Act	www.opsi.gov.uk	1974	Stationary Office
The Management of health & Safety at Work Regulations	www.opsi.gov.uk	1999	Stationary Office

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf	06/2011	Five Steps to Risk Assessment
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/principlespoints.htm	2013	Sensible Risk Management

Appendix 1 – flowchart for HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool



Appendix 2 – Signs of stress

The first signs that indicate employees may be suffering from excessive pressure or stress are changes in behaviour or performance. The kinds of change that may occur are listed below.

<p>Work performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • declining/inconsistent performance • uncharacteristic errors • loss of control over work • loss of motivation/commitment • indecision • lapses in memory • increased time at work • lack of holiday planning/usage 	<p>Regression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crying • arguments • undue sensitivity • irritability/moodiness • over-reaction to problems • personality clashes • sulking • immature behaviour
<p>Withdrawal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arriving late to work • leaving early • extended lunches • absenteeism • resigned attitude • reduced social contact • elusiveness/evasiveness 	<p>Aggressive behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • malicious gossip • criticism of others • vandalism • shouting • bullying or harassment • poor employee relations • temper outbursts
<p>Other behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • out-of-character behaviour • difficulty relaxing • increased consumption of alcohol • increased smoking • lack of interest in appearance/hygiene • accidents at home or work • reckless driving • unnecessary risk-taking 	<p>Physical signs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nervous stumbling speech • sweating • tiredness/lethargy • upset stomach/flatulence • tension headaches • hand tremor • rapid weight gain or loss • constantly feeling cold

Appendix 3 – examples of the main causes of stress

A brief summary of examples of the main causes of stress under each of the Management Standards headings and how they can be addressed

Main causes of stress	How they can be addressed
<p>Demands Employees often become overloaded if they cannot cope with the amount of work or type of work they are asked to do</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure employees understand what they have to do and how to do it • Identify and address training needs • Consider whether working flexible hours would help employees to manage (application under the Flexible Working and Agile Working Policy)
<p>Control Employees can feel disaffected and perform poorly if they have no say over how and when they do their work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve employees in the way work is carried out • Engage and/ or consult employees about decisions • Build effective teams with responsibilities for outcomes • Review performance to identify strengths and weaknesses
<p>Support Levels of sickness absence rise if employees feel they cannot talk to managers about issues that are troubling them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give employees the opportunity to talk about issues causing stress • Be sympathetic and supportive • Keep employees informed about what is going on in the organisation • Offer a management referral to Occupational Health; alternatively advise they can self-refer • Remind employees of the Employee Assistance Programme provided by Care first
<p>Relationships A failure to build relationships based on good behaviour and trust can lead to problems related to discipline, grievance and bullying</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have clear procedures for handling misconduct and poor performance • Have clear procedures for employees to raise grievances • Tackle any instance of bullying and harassment and make it clear such behaviour will not be tolerated
<p>Role Employees will feel anxious about their work and the organisation if they don't know what is expected of them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a thorough induction for new employees using a checklist of what needs to be covered. • Provide employees with a written statement of employment particulars. • Give employees clear job descriptions. • Maintain a close link between individual and organisational objectives.

<p>Change Change needs to be managed effectively or it can lead to uncertainty and insecurity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan ahead so changes can be signposted and managers and employees are prepared.• Consult with employees about prospective changes so they have a real input and work together with you to solve problems.
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