



Stress Management Policy

This policy outlines Discovery Schools Academy Trust aim to provide a working environment and apply management practices which promote the wellbeing of staff.

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Document History

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V1.0	July 2020	Director of Operations	New policy
V1.0	October 2020	Director of Operations	Consulted on with Trade Unions at meeting held on 7.10.20
V1.1	Dec 2021	Director of Operations	Review date corrected to November 2022 in line with review period deadline.
V1.2	October 2023	People Director	Document reviewed in line with review period. Inclusion of Active Care support via EAP for individuals signed off work due to stress related illness.

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Scope

This policy applies to all employed by Discovery Schools Academies Trust (Discovery) and aims to set out the Trust's position on stress to provide Senior Leaders and line managers with an understanding of the problem, including a definition and a summary of the more common causes. It also sets out responsibilities for both employees and line managers and clarifies the support, information and training that is available to deal with the problem.

Purpose

Discovery places a high value on maintaining a healthy, safe and supportive working environment that maintains and promotes the health, wellbeing and mental health of all its employees. The Trust is committed to improving the organisational environment through effective and sensitive management, enabling individuals to cope successfully with the demands and pressures of work.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Wellbeing Policy and Attendance Management Policy.

Discovery acknowledges the potential impact that work has on an individual's physical and mental health, and that there is a moral and legal duty for taking steps to promote employee well-being as far as reasonably practicable. The Trust is committed to fostering a culture of co-operation, trust and mutual respect, where all individuals are treated with dignity, and can work at their optimum level.

Discovery recognises that work-related stress has a negative impact on employee's well-being, and that it can take many forms and so needs to be carefully analysed and addressed.

The Stress policy expands upon the Trust's Health & Safety Policy and Wellbeing Policy, setting out how the school will promote the well-being of employee by:

- Creating a working environment where potential work-related stressors as far as practicable are avoided, minimised or mitigated through good management practices, effective HR policies and employee development.
- Increasing line managers' and employees' awareness of the causes and effects of stress.
- Promoting self care through the Employees Assistance Programme.
- Providing a route for clinician support in cases where employees are signed unfit to work due to stress related absence.
- Developing a culture that is open and supportive of people experiencing stress or other forms of mental ill-health.
- Developing the competence of managers through the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours framework, so that they manage individuals effectively and fairly.
- Engaging with employees to create constructive and effective working partnerships both within Schools and across the organisation.
- Encouraging staff to take responsibility for their own work and effectiveness as a means of reducing their own stress and that of their colleagues.

Definition Of Stress

There is no universal definition of stress. However the Health and Safety Executive define stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. Stress itself is not an illness – it is a state. If stress becomes excessive and prolonged however, mental and physical illness may develop. Stress affects different people in different ways and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another. Some individuals will recognise or acknowledge that their health is affected and will seek help; others will not recognise or acknowledge that they are stressed although it may be apparent to their manager or colleagues.

Effects On The Individual

In the short term, the employee may cope well as s/he/they tries to adjust or find methods of coping with the demands. Over a longer period of time, as the individual’s body and mind are subjected to a perceived prolonged threat or attack, a variety of symptoms related to ill health could occur and these may be followed by serious stress-related illness. It is usually recognised that stress can affect the body in three different ways, physically, behaviourally and emotionally. Individuals can suffer from one, or a combination of these symptoms, for either short or long term periods.

Physical symptoms include:	Behavioural symptoms include:	Emotional symptoms include:
Backache Fatigue Blurred vision Dizziness Muscle tension Skin rashes Breathing difficulties Headaches Raised heart rate Chest pains Changes in menstrual patterns Sweating palms, dry mouth, nervous twitches	Absenteeism Erratic moods Apathy Difficulty concentrating or remembering Increased use of alcohol/tobacco Increased use of tranquillisers Indecision Unusually emotive or impulsive Accidents Loss of appetite Making more errors Loss of creativity Evading duties or responsibilities Complaining	Anxiety Irritability Low self-esteem and confidence Depression Loss of libido Guilt and sadness Fear and panic Poor sleep Aggression Inappropriate behaviour Withdrawn from social contacts Mood swings

Self-Management

Practical guidance for employees to alleviate the negative side of stress:

Concretely identify the problem or problems

Many people recommend the idea of listing all of your troubles, then dividing them into those over which you have some control, and those you don’t. Ignore those you can’t control and instead working on practical solutions to those over which you have some influence can reduce feelings of stress.

Change your thinking

Some of the most productive and rewarding stress relief techniques involve adjusting the way we think about our situations. Small shifts in perspective can quickly free up creative energy and increase our options. Welfare Support Counselling options should be explored as well as other counselling options. Counsellors are trained to help you to take a fresh look at your situation.

Keep fit

A key component of any approach involves making a change; doing something different. This often involves doing something physical, although not necessarily taking up jogging or going to the gym. Even just a quick 20-minute walk can help.

In the slightly longer term, you could examine your eating habits and diet. Changing to a healthy diet is a good thing in general but there are, for some people, advantages in learning to take the time to prepare and cook fresh food. It can be a relaxing activity in itself. Skipping breakfast and eating on the run or in a rush does nothing to support a body suffering from stress and can also contribute to symptoms.

At times of distress sugar, alcohol or caffeine can over stimulate and produce highs and lows that can lead to deeper distress, especially in excess.

Relaxation

Do something that forces you to think about something other than work – something that needs your active involvement.

Rest

Sleep is very important. There are, as with learning to relax, a number of guides available.

Your doctor

If you have any concerns about the degree to which you feel stressed, visit your doctor.

Your colleagues, your settings and your union

If the cause of stress lies in organisational issues, you will need to address them in an organisational context. This is where the support of colleagues becomes invaluable. Talk to them about your issues – they may have new ideas or even just shared experiences which may help half the problem. Talk to your line manager or the Trust HR Team about concerns and seek help or advice. Voice fears about job security or changes in job structure etc. Tell line managers if jobs are:

- Overloaded – too much to do, not enough time
- Underloaded – not enough to do, repetitive etc.

Prioritising your workload dealing with the high priority jobs first and completing them will create a sense of achievement and boost your morale. Matching your workload and pacing your abilities and training will make your successes sustainable – don't be afraid to delegate or ask for assistance.

Should you experience feelings of frustration or anger in the workplace try a range of techniques to avoid expressing them – taking deep breaths or breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth; standing back and counting to ten etc. and consciously trying to maintain a sense of humour can keep things in perspective and can all help. Speak to the Trust HR Team about any such episodes of anger or frustration you may feel or witness.

There may be outside personal pressures to add to those at work. Developing a personal action plan to tackle both issues could be very beneficial. You may also feel it appropriate to refer to your Trade Union who generally have considerable experience in handling these issues.

For further information, visit websites such as:

[Home | Health Assured \(healthassuredap.co.uk\)](http://Home | Health Assured (healthassuredap.co.uk))

www.hse.gov.uk/stress

www.isma.org.uk

www.stressmanagement.co.uk

www.managingstress.com

Employee Wellbeing

Discovery recognises that good management is important to make employees feel valued and well-informed. Whilst line managers must take a lead, employees have a responsibility to speak out if experiencing problems at work which may affect performance. The earlier that problems or potential problems are identified, the better.

Responsibilities

Head teachers/ line managers / members of the SLT are responsible for:

- Taking complaints regarding employee stress levels seriously
- Upholding confidentiality
- Looking out for potential issues and incidents in their teams/schools and dealing with them appropriately.

Discovery HR Team

- Giving guidance to schools on the stress policy.
- Helping monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.

Employees are responsible for:

- Raising issues of concern with your line manager.
- Accepting support where appropriate

Prevention

Employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their own physical and mental wellbeing. Discovery offers a range of measures, including practices in addition to the Health & Safety Policy and Wellbeing Policy, to prevent or identify potential problems. These include:

- Pre-placement health questionnaire

- Stress risk assessments
- Welfare support and counselling

Poor communication can lead to anxiety and uncertainty, and Discovery is continually striving to improve internal communication, to keep the trust well informed on issues that may affect employees.

Management

There are measures in place to monitor the overall 'health' of the Trust. Employee sickness levels are monitored across schools and data collected termly .

Individual Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees:

- will ensure that there is Health and Safety Policy in place to address the management of well-being on the workplace

Trust Leadership Team:

- will provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate
- support the development of stress risk assessments as appropriate
- will support schools to deal with the well-being of staff during the aftermath of a critical incident

Headteacher and SLT

- To support steps taken to develop a culture of co-operation, trust and mutual respect within their schools.
- To keep up to date with best practice for managing health and stress in the workplace
- Through the school wellbeing action plans, ensure information is provided to staff about stress-related illnesses, how to manage their own stress and their obligations to inform managers about risks at work
- To ensure feedback and wider concerns about risks to health from stress at work reaches the Trust Leadership team and to consider the examination of stress as a possible factor in relation to frequent or long-term absenteeism for members of staff
- To encourage initiatives and events that promote health and well-being.

Line Managers

- Treat individuals reporting to them with consideration and dignity, and will promote a culture of mutual respect in the teams they manage. They will not permit unacceptable behaviour and will take decisive action when issues are brought to their attention.
- To report any concerns to appropriate senior personnel or the HR manager while maintaining any obligations to confidentiality.
- Line Managers play a vital role in the identification and management of physical and mental stress within Discovery. They are likely to see the problems first hand, will be in the best position to notice changes in staff behaviour that may indicate a stress-related problem and will often be the first point of contact when an individual feels stressed.
- Line Managers also need to consider how their own behaviour can affect the mental health of staff and where possible, to help alleviate any problem.

- Take action in the interests of all their colleagues where performance by a member of staff may cause stress to their colleagues.

Employees

- Have the responsibility of informing their line manager if they feel the pressure of the job they hold is putting them or anyone else at risk of ill health.
- Employees should feel able to suggest ways in which work might be organised to alleviate health issues
- To inform the headteacher or line manager if they are suffering from a medical condition that appears to be long-term, and is affecting their ability to carry out day to day tasks, including memory and learning
- Discuss any reasonable adjustments that could be made to assist them in performing their role
- To accept opportunities for counselling when recommended
- Engage with Active Care through the Trust Employee Assistance Provider

HR Manager

- Provide advice to managers of staff and employees on best practice in relation to human resource management, developing policies and procedures as required.
- Ensure there are arrangements in place to support individuals experiencing stress, referring them to Occupational Health where appropriate.
- Ensure effective risk assessments have been carried out, are monitored regularly and any recommendations are implemented, Ensure there are arrangements in place to support managers experiencing problems with employee performance.
- Seek the views of employees on the effectiveness of the School's Work Related Stress policy using staff surveys and other appropriate questionnaires.

Why Assess The Risks?

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 employers have a general duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health of their employees at work. This includes taking steps to make sure they do not suffer stress-related illness as a result of their work. The stress risk assessment process is outlined in detail through appendix one

Management Of Individuals' Experience Of Stress Related Ill Health

Cases will usually be identified from one or more of the following:

- Changes of the behaviour or attitude of an individual as observed by management and/or colleagues,
- A medical certificate specifying work-related stress,
- An industrial injury form,
- A report from Occupational Health
- Self-identification perhaps during appraisal

Not all staff suffering from work-related stress will be absent from work and often when a person is under extreme stress they fail to recognise the symptoms – but others may. The sooner the need for support can be identified, the better. It is also important to be aware that stress may not be work related.

Initial action

As soon as there is reason to believe an individual is suffering from work-related stress, line managers should make contact with the HR manager to help identify the best route forward. This could include a referral to an Occupational Health professional or Active Care through the Trust's Employee Assistance Provider.

If the individual is unaware of concerns, there should be a brief informal meeting between them and their direct manager/member of SLT where the concerns can be outlined. They should then be invited to attend a further meeting whereby they will be entitled to be accompanied to discuss the way forward. It should be made clear that there is concern for their health and that support can be provided.

Where it is clear that the member of staff is aware of the issue, an informal meeting should be arranged as soon as possible to clarify the support to be provided or which already exists.

Meeting with the individual

Where it becomes clear that a member of staff appears to be suffering from stress, arrangement must be made to informally discuss the difficulties they are experiencing. It must be emphasised that such a meeting is voluntary and strictly confidential with a view only to supporting them.

If there is any reluctance to speak directly to their own Line Manager/member of SLT or HR Manager for whatever reason, arrangements must be in place for individuals to speak in confidence to a 'safe person' who could be another member of the SLT or even an Advisory Board member. Staff will not be pressured into blindly following any procedure without any consideration for how they are feeling.

The objective of the meet is to determine whether there is an underlying work-related cause for the stress and whether Discovery can take action to support the individual and help reduce the stress they are experiencing.

Underlying issues

The aim of an informal meet is to identify any underlying issues causing the stress and whether any of those issues are work-related. Where necessary a written risk assessment will be undertaken and ways of assisting the individual to minimise their levels of stress explored.

If the underlying issues are solely related to an individual's home or social life then ways in which the individual feels the School can assist and support them must be discussed. It may be that all or the majority of the stress the individual is experiencing is due to outside pressures that are not work-related. It is important to distinguish between the pressures which managers can assist with directly and the personal, social or domestic pressures which they may be able to influence indirectly.

Typical interventions or support that could be offered as indirect assistance in such cases include:

- Offering special leave

- Adjusting working hours on a temporary basis
- Allowing for time off work
- Refereeing to employee counselling
- Networking support from colleagues/friends
- Referral to the Citizens Advise Bureau

In each instance, please seek advice from the HR Manager.

Monitoring and reviewing individual cases

Depending on the severity of the case there may be a number of reviews along the pathway to a full return to work. A full review of progress would take place at the end of an agreed period. Where there has been an absence from work, the review will be an agreed period following the full-time return to work.

The review meeting should consider whether action taken has been helpful. Further action may be necessary and will vary dependent on circumstances. Medical advice may be received to the effect that the employee should not return to their present job. In these circumstances, the employee should be advised of the implications of the medical advice and possible options.

Action in cases of the Headteacher suffering work-related stress

As with other staff, the Headteacher may show signs of stress. If the Headteacher recognises that they are stressed they should initially seek support from the Director Of Primary Education.

If members of staff have reason to believe that the Headteacher is suffering from stress, they should report concerns to a member of the SLT or the Director of Primary Education as soon as they arise.

Personal Or Home Life Issues

If a member of staff is suffering from stress due to a non-work related issue, but are unwilling to share concerns, managers should respect that, but offer support and suggest others who may be able to help such as their trade union representative, HR Manager, occupational health professional, GP, a colleague or a friend.

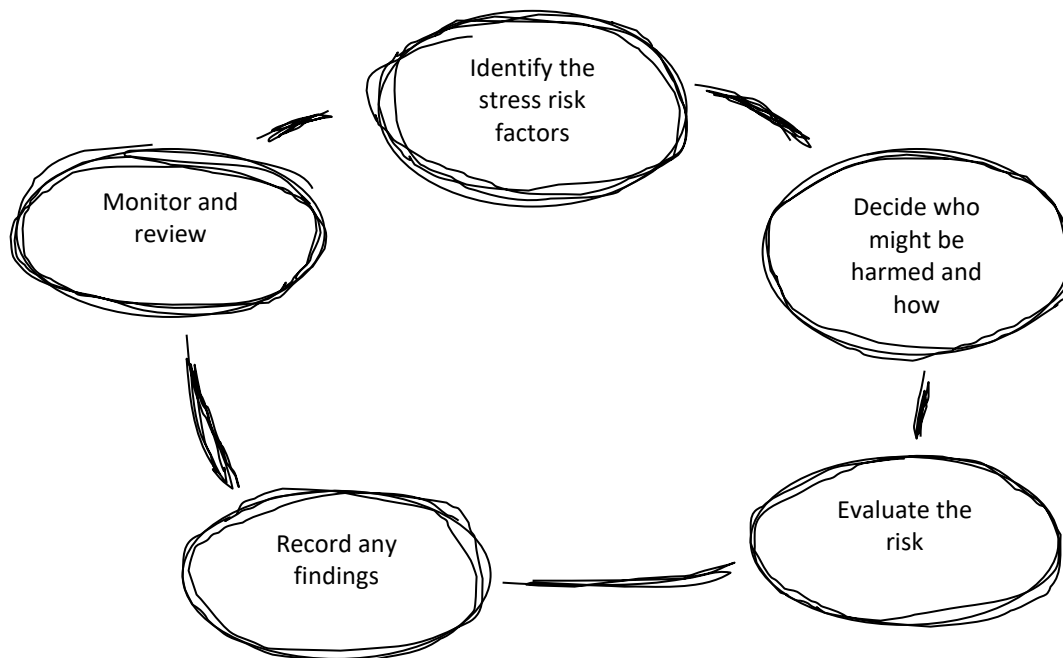
If they are able to share their concerns, it is important that managers listen and offer appropriate advice or direction. Adjustments may be possible to the individual's working life in the short term so that they can spend more time resolving personal issues. Please refer to the HR Manager for further advice.

In addition, certain kinds of positions, by their nature, place heavy emotional demands on staff, which, if not properly addressed can result in harmful levels of stress.

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the HR Manager to assess its effectiveness, and will be updated as necessary. A formal review will be completed every three years and presented to the HR Committee for approval.

Appendix One - Risk Assessment



Step 1 – Identify the stress risk factors

Discovery is committed to identifying what it is about the work that has the potential to cause a stress-related illness. This will be achieved through the use of:

- Wellbeing surveys
- Open communication with staff
- Analysis of absence rates

There are six areas of work that can have a negative impact on employee health if not properly managed:

- **Demands** – includes workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** – how much say a person has in the way they do their work
- **Support** – includes the encouragement, resources provided by the School, line management and colleagues
- **Role** – whether staff fully understand their role within the School
- **Change** – how school change is managed and communicated to staff
- **Relationships** – promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

Step 2 - Decide who might be harmed and how

Discovery is committed to identifying who is at risk by considering the staff affected, how long they are exposed to the stressful situations and any particularly vulnerable workers

Step 3 – Evaluate the risks

Discovery will consider measures already in place. The first and most desirable control measure is to remove the source of stress altogether where possible. The next most effective measure is to find ways of reducing the amount of stress experienced by staff. Measures introduced to minimise the risk of stress will be reasonably practicable. Therefore the cost of putting in place the control measure will not exceed the benefit to be gained. After identification of the control measures has been achieved, the risk will be evaluated. An estimate will be made of:

- The likelihood that stress will occur, given the control measures in place, and
- The severity or consequences of harm which could occur

Step 4 – Record the findings

Discovery is committed to recording the findings of any significant risk and to put in place new or additional control measures. The findings provide:

- Proof that the statutory duty for risk assessment has been carried out, and
- A basis for revision of the assessment

Step 5 – Monitor and review

The effectiveness of measures to control stress and address stress related problems should be monitored. Discovery is committed to monitoring the actions within any plan to ensure they are having the desired effect in the appropriate timescale. This may be achieved by:

- The comparison of sickness and absence levels
- The comparison of accidents and near-misses
- The review of complaints and staff turnover