

Estyn's Policy and Guidance for Managing Stress in the Workplace

April 2020

Information sheet

Information box

For further advice contact: Lead Officer: Health, safety and wellbeing

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- A business rationale assessment has been carried out and this policy contributes to Estyn's strategic objectives and delivery principles.
- An equality impact assessment has been carried out and this policy is not deemed to adversely impact on any people on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- This policy and its associated procedures are agreed by Estyn's management and Trades Unions.

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Introduction

Organisational approach

Estyn values each of our employees and the contribution they make to our work. We realise that stress and stress-related symptoms can prevent people from performing to the best of their ability and can affect their general health and wellbeing.

We are committed to meeting the employer's duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in the workplace, which includes those of a psychological nature, and to introduce control measures to eliminate or reduce that risk.

We recognise the challenges (both organisational and personal) associated with identifying stress and discussing it openly, and aim to support staff and managers in meeting these challenges.

The appended Stress Management Toolkit contains detailed guidance designed to help managers and their staff identify and deal with stress-related problems as part of a joint responsibility for their health and safety.

The Health & Safety Executive defines work related stress as "*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work*". There is a difference between pressure and stress. The effects of reasonable pressure and challenge can be positive and motivating and are often essential in a job. Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive and is the natural but distressing reaction because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them. Stress is not in an illness – it is a state, but, if prolonged or intense, it can induce or contribute to ill health and can increase the risk of conditions like heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal illness or skin conditions.

Scope of the policy

Policy aims

Estyn aims to:

- provide a healthy work environment where workplace stress is identified and avoided, where possible
- provide an open, supportive culture which promotes personal wellbeing, where those affected by stress are encouraged to discuss problems and possible solutions constructively and where managers and staff work together to identify and prevent stress in the workplace
- consider the potential impact on personal wellbeing of organisational changes such as redesigning roles, changing the work environment
- work closely with managers, staff and trade unions to promote wellbeing and to reduce stress in the workplace
- ensure that adequate resources are provided to support the policy and promote staff wellbeing; this includes training and access to external support services (e.g. counselling and occupational health) as appropriate

To whom does this policy apply?

This policy applies to all permanent employees of Estyn, seconded and temporary staff regardless of their age, gender, gender identity, disability, race, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation or marital status, responsibilities for dependants, working patterns (such as the need, or desire, to work part-time hours) or other irrelevant considerations. It does not form part of the contract of employment.

How we manage stress in the workplace

Research has shown that dealing with stress-related issues at an early stage can have beneficial effects, not only on the individual's wellbeing, but can also reduce sickness absence in the longer term and enable productivity levels to be maintained.

Both managers and individuals share responsibility for identifying the signs of stress and for working together to explore solutions to problems, the [Managing Attendance guide](#) provides advice on the warning signs of stress.

Managers engage in regular, open discussion with individual employees and encourage staff to raise issues of concern at the earliest opportunity so that they can consider the potential impact on their personal wellness, and on work performance and achieving objectives.

Estyn will consider issues in a sensitive and non-judgemental way and will offer appropriate support to individuals who may be suffering stress.

Assessing risks

Estyn:

- assesses the risks of stress associated with work processes and working practices on a regular basis and works closely with employees to identify individual cases of stress at an early stage, before it becomes a problem, which may involve changes to the work programme of an individual, on a case-by-case basis
- identifies and reduces the factors that cause individuals to feel they may be under pressure at work by completing a [stress risk assessment](#) of the work processes and by evaluating the responses to staff surveys and informal feedback

If an individual displays symptoms of stress or highlights stress as an issue or if they have been absent from work with a stress-related illness, the line manager will complete an [individual stress risk assessment](#) with the individual.

Staff surveys

Estyn will use the Civil Service People Survey as a tool to help identify the areas in an individual's working life that can contribute to causing stress.

Access to confidential counselling services

Where the line manager or the employee considers that personal wellbeing is being affected by stress the employee can seek free, independent guidance from Estyn's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or from other sources, for example the employee's General Practitioner. The EAP can offer confidential advice, guidance for staff and managers to help them manage pressure and counselling. The [CareFirst](#) website will give more information on the services provided using the following log on

details:

- Username: est001 & password: styn1234),
- Password:styn1234

Alternatively staff can call the Telephone Counselling & Information Line on 0800 174 319

These contact details can also be found on the intranet homepage. The service is confidential and individual users will not be revealed to Estyn, except in extreme circumstances, for example if there is a risk to life.

Occupational Health Services

Estyn will consult its Occupational Health provider, as appropriate, to seek advice about individual cases and to agree appropriate return to work programmes or to make workplace adjustments to existing working practices to help reduce the effect of pressure at work on employees, particularly after a period of sickness absence. An Occupational Health referral can be made at any time if a manager is concerned about an employee's health.

Awareness raising and training

The guidance in the Stress Management Toolkit appended to this policy is intended to help managers and individuals to identify, understand and manage stress in the workplace.

Estyn will continue to support managers to help them to be able to identify problems at an early stage by providing appropriate awareness-raising training and authoritative advice and guidance. Such support helps managers to deal with individual cases appropriately. We will also continue to support staff to help them to identify potential stressors and to manage them appropriately by providing training and other resources.

All line managers and employees also have access to trained [Mental Health First Aiders](#)

Estyn's Stress Management Workplace Toolkit

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Section 1: Definition and possible stress-related symptoms in the workplace

What is stress?

- 1 The Health & Safety Executive defines work related stress as “*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work*”.
- 2 This definition makes an important distinction between the effects of reasonable pressure and challenge which can be positive and motivating and work related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to excessive pressure because a person is unable to with the demands being placed on them. Stress is not in itself an illness – it is a state, but, if prolonged or intense, it can induce or contribute to ill health.
- 3 Mental health is how we think, feel and behave. The symptoms of work related stress and common mental health problems can be similar. Work related stress can trigger an existing mental health problem that the person may have otherwise successfully managed without letting it affect their work. For people with existing mental health issues, work related stress may worsen their problem. If work related stress reaches a point where it has triggered an existing mental health problem, it becomes hard to separate one from the other. [Estyn's health and wellbeing policy](#) outlines how we nurture positive mental health and includes links to online resources.

Stress versus pressure

- 4 People have different coping limits in relation to perceived pressure or stress. It is important to acknowledge and recognise the distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be positive and motivating) and stress, which arises when an individual cannot cope with the demands placed on them at a given time, be they domestic or work related.
- 5 All of us can experience stress at some time during our lives which may affect our work performance. In order to be able to address stress-related issues promptly and effectively it is important to recognise the signs of stress in yourself and in colleagues. Common indicators include a change in behaviour or attitude, change in performance, and an increase in short-term sickness absence.

Example indicators of stress

- 6 It is not up to an individual or their manager to diagnose stress. If there is cause for concern, then the GP should be consulted. It is up to individuals and managers to recognise that behaviours have changed, be aware that something is wrong and taken action. Care should be taken not to over react to small changes in behaviour. Action should be taken when behavioural changes continue.
- 7 The following list may be helpful in clues to identifying potential stress. It is not exhaustive, and the presence of one or more of these symptoms does not

necessarily indicate that stress is the cause; but it is something that you should consider. If identified you should take appropriate action to determine if stress is an issue, using the guidance and [Individual Stress Assessment form](#).

Type of symptom	Sign in yourself
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative or depressed feeling • Disappointment with yourself • Increased emotional reactions – more tearful or sensitive or aggressive • Loneliness, withdrawn • Loss of motivation commitment and confidence • Mood swings (not behavioural)
Mental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion, indecision • Can't concentrate • Poor memory • Anxious, changed moods, disturbed sleep
Behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in eating habits • Increased smoking, drinking or drug taking 'to cope' • Mood swings effecting your behaviour • Changes in sleep patterns • Twitchy, nervous behaviour • Changes in attendance such as arriving later or taking more time off
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in heart rate, increased blood pressure • Sweating, blushing, skin conditions • Increased cholesterol and glucose levels • Muscle tension, loss of function, soreness, stiffness • 'butterflies' in stomach, dry mouth, appetite suppression • Reproductive and growth system suppression

Signs in others

- Uncharacteristic errors
- Indecisiveness or uncharacteristic quietness
- Change in working hours and patterns (longer or shorter working, extended lunches and not taking holidays)
- Reckless driving
- Making complaints e.g. about time pressures
- Unreliability
- Resistance to change, loss of motivation and commitment
- Irritability, demonstrating bad temper, mood swings
- Poor concentration, memory lapses
- Increase in sickness absence
- Poor relationships with colleagues
- Changes in demeanour – passiveness or aggression, personality clashes, bullying or excessive criticism of others

- Shows of emotion, crying, sulking
- Loss of confidence, motivation
- Tendering resignation

Section 2: Estyn's approach to managing stress

- 8 Stress is not a sign of weakness; all of us can experience stress at some time in our lives whether caused by work or personal circumstances. Stress affects people in different ways. People have different coping limits, and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another.

Line managers' responsibility

- 9 Line managers have an important role to play in getting to know colleagues and being alert to any changes in them or the signs of any problems.
- 10 Line managers have a joint responsibility with staff to identify and assess the potential risks arising from stressful situations in the workplace and prevent stress as far as is reasonably practical. If a member of staff shows signs of stress, or is returning from a period of sickness absence where stress was stated as the cause or a contributing factor towards the absence, the line manager should have a discussion with the individual using the [Individual Stress Assessment](#) of the toolkit.

Individual responsibility

- 11 Individuals and their managers share responsibility for identifying workplace stress and working together to manage it, so it is important to be aware of the symptoms and acknowledge the effects of stress, so that any issues can be addressed effectively. Provided it is addressed promptly and effectively, it should not normally affect an individual's health or career prospects, although it may be that, in some cases, alternative roles or jobs may provide a relief for the work pressure being experienced.

Possible sources of stress

- 12 Stress affects people in different ways and what one person finds stressful can be normal to another. Many diverse factors can cause stress, some are work-related and some are personal. The list below is intended to facilitate consideration of possible causes of stress but is not exhaustive.

Work/career

- Lack of control over work or decision making
- No variety of work – boredom
- Lack of skills/knowledge or training
- Fear of technology
- Amount of work – overloaded or insufficient
- Conflicting priorities
- Fluctuations in workload
- Bullying, harassment, risk of violence or verbal threats or abuse
- Relationships with colleagues and/or managers
- Resources (staff/equipment)
- Unsociable hours

- Workplace location
- Work environment (heating, ventilation, space, noise, workstation design)
- Job insecurity
- Uncertainty of career path
- Lack of promotion prospects
- Change or restructuring of role
- Lack of recognition of work/contribution
- Lack of involvement or engagement
- Complaints
- Isolation due to new work practices (home-working)

Personal

- Bereavement
- Illness or injury
- Family pressures
- Caring responsibility for another person
- Relationship or other personal problems
- Financial worries
- Conflict between the demands of home and work
- Travel to work (delays to transport or traffic)
- Ill health or disability (whether newly diagnosed, unstable or progressive)
- Lack of support at home
- Change in living conditions e.g. moving home
- Domestic violence or abuse

Individual perspective

- 13 While managers are not expected to be experts on stress and are not doctors or psychologists, good management practice includes being approachable, supportive and leading by example, and can go a long way towards identifying and dealing with stress-related problems. The example indicators of stress at Section 1 are intended to help spot the signs of stress before it becomes a problem for individuals. Make a note of any that you consider may be relevant, use this to construct a tailored action plan, and put it into practice.
- 14 Of course, managers are not solely responsible for the welfare of their employees; individuals are also responsible for their own wellbeing and need to work with you to identify and attempt to find solutions for the symptoms identified possibly using the Independent Stress Assessment in Section 3.

Organisational perspective

- 15 Stress can emanate from organisational issues and must be addressed initially from this perspective. A number of management issues and practices can contribute to individuals' stress such as:
- long working hours culture
 - control mechanisms e.g. high levels of monitoring

- lack of clarity of role/expectations
- confusion regarding lines of management
- lack of management support
- conflicting priorities
- lack of communication
- lack of consultation or involvement
- limited responsibility
- little flexibility in working patterns

16 Research has shown that taking time out to deal with difficulties at an early stage will reduce sickness absence in the longer term and enable productivity levels to be maintained. Line managers and employees should be proactive and attempt to eliminate or reduce the likelihood of stress before it occurs.

Estyn's approach to stress

- 17 The following are approaches being taken by Estyn managers to reduce the risk of work related stress and to deal with issues before they become a problem:
- Working with managers, staff and the trade unions to develop appropriate policies and to establish effective working practices to prevent stress in the workplace where it is practicably possible to do so.
 - Communicating regularly and openly with the people being line managed, taking account of those who work remotely or from home.
 - Encouraging communication and support between staff.
 - Involving staff in the planning process so that they understand their role, and what support they will have to help them carry out their duties.
 - Consulting staff, particularly during periods of change. Being open and honest about what is happening and how it may affect them. Where possible, managers discuss changes in work, and particularly additions to workload and management expectations, with them in advance.
 - Ensuring that staff have clear, SMART objectives through Estyn's performance management system and that these are reviewed. Where appropriate or possible, consider adjusting timescales.
 - Adopting a partnership approach; encouraging staff to talk to managers at an early stage about work related stress, mental health issues and their concerns about work and to work jointly to tackle work related stress.
 - Initiating regular discussions on a one-to-one basis about job loading and responsibilities. Some staff may need encouragement to talk about their difficulties. Helping them to voice concerns that they may have about pressure, and about how it is affecting them. Adopting a non-judgemental, supportive approach.
 - Liaising with other managers who share staff resources to quantify and prioritise

work.

- Recognising and praising staff appropriately for their input and effort.
- Making sure staff have the skills, training and resources required for the job by providing adequate induction, training, feedback etc and assessing development needs continuously.
- Offering practical support, e.g. training, coaching, job shadowing.
- Assessing and prioritising opportunities for personal and job-related development as well as for self-determination and professional responsibility.
- Managing induction and promotion effectively. Being open and honest about promotion prospects.
- Considering and supporting the longer term development needs and aspirations of team members.
- Identifying areas of insufficient resource and alerting more senior managers in order to seek guidance on priorities.
- Monitoring new staff as they may be unfamiliar with the work and the environment.
- Discouraging a long working hours culture and ensuring that staff take a minimum 30-minute meal break every day.
- Ensuring that staff take their annual leave entitlement, unless it is being carried forward for a specific purpose.
- Ensuring a safe and healthy working environment and consulting the Lead Officer: Health, safety and wellbeing regarding any suspected deficiencies.
- Ensuring staff have a workstation assessment and that all the necessary control measures are in place.
- Watching out for symptoms of stress in colleagues (whether physical, emotional or behavioural) and encouraging them to talk about stress without their feeling that they will be criticised for doing so.
- If a problem is reported, investigating the particular circumstances to ensure that the problem is fully understood. Conducting an [Individual Stress Assessment](#) as soon as possible to help find out if any disability or health condition may be affecting the type of work that can be carried out, or to identify any training needs necessary to enable the individual to adapt back into the workplace.
- Sensitively managing the return to work of individuals who have had stress-related problems.
- Assessing or reassessing the needs of individuals with a disability for specific

aids and equipment, etc, as time progresses, liaising as necessary with the Lead Officer for health, safety and wellbeing.

- Offering support, particularly at times of crisis, and signposting staff to other sources of support such as Human Resources team, Trade Union representatives and/or the Employee Assistance Programme.
- Leading by example, and if one's own levels of stress are in danger of becoming harmful, then taking steps to improve the situation, referring to the guidance in the toolkit.
- Taking into account the potential impact of stress when monitoring performance. Using the performance management arrangements, where appropriate, to discuss such issues, (not waiting until end of year or mid-year reviews to address them).
- Wherever possible minimising those factors which give rise to stress or make stress worse. However if there is an impact on performance which persists after relevant and reasonable adjustments (in the case of disability) have been made, this should be recorded as part of the CPM process (making reference to mitigating factors where appropriate). More advice on setting objectives and measuring performance is available in Estyn's [Performance Management Guidance](#).
- Ensuring that staff are familiar with Estyn's [Equal Opportunities](#) and [Bullying and Harassment](#) Policies and take appropriate action if any breach occurs. Estyn does not tolerate discrimination, harassment, bullying or inappropriate behaviour of any kind, and it will take proportionate action should it occur.
- Counselling employees into redeployment or retraining for a job role that they will find less stressful.

Section 3: Guidance for managers – Individual Stress Assessment Process

Preparing for the assessment

- Consider if you are the appropriate person to conduct the stress assessment. This will usually be the immediate line manager but if there is any doubt about this or any aspect of the process ask the HR team for advice and guidance.
- Agree a date for the assessment with the member of staff.
- Allow sufficient time for the meeting and ensure that a private area, where you won't be interrupted, is available. Don't underestimate how much time it may take for the employee to express their concerns.
- Read the guidelines in the toolkit and review the suggested questions which you can use to structure the assessment. Pick and choose the ones that are relevant, not all of them will be, and think of any others that might help.

At the assessment

- Explain what you are doing and why. Address any concerns the member of staff may have about carrying out an assessment.
- Allow the member of staff to explain their concerns. Do not be judgmental, defensive, or argue that what is said is untrue, or otherwise minimise what he/she says, just listen.
- Use the suggested questions, or any others you feel might help, as necessary.
- Listen to all of their concerns before discussing what actions you both should take. They may have several concerns, the biggest issue may not surface until you are some way through the discussion.
- If you think the member of staff's current behaviour is adding to the problem, and that they should change, save this until you discuss the best action to take.
- The member of staff may become distressed during the assessment; it's not easy to discuss things that make you stressed. Be prepared for this.
- If they raise issues that relate to their personal life, these may impact on their ability to cope at work, so it is appropriate to discuss them if the member of staff is willing.
- Use the [Individual stress assessment form](#) to record your discussions. You should take notes during the meeting. Make sure the member of staff knows you are paying them full attention, and use the protective markings OFFICIAL, PERSONAL.

- It may be appropriate to have a break (even for a day or so) before discussing what action to take. Outlining the issues can be emotionally draining for someone who is feeling stressed.
- You may need to ask a member of the HR team for advice before deciding what action to take, especially if you can't see a solution to the member of staff's problems.

Taking action

- There is always some action that can be taken – even if you can't provide a solution to all of the member of staff's problems, you may be able to reduce their effects. Perhaps the person (or a colleague) needs to change their perceptions, to agree to differ or to put something aside. If the member of staff accepts there is something they cannot change, you can still provide them with support.
- Sometimes a combination of issues can seem overwhelming. If you can resolve some of the person's issues, they may be better able to resolve or cope with their other issues.
- You have a responsibility to take action to help and support the member of staff. Equally, if it is appropriate, you should encourage the person to consider what they can do to help themselves.
- Consider contacting Estyn's independent counselling service provided as part of our Employee Assistance Programme and other sources of support.
- Set a date to review progress.
- At review meetings, discuss and record the progress the member of staff has made, agree any further actions, and set a further review date, if necessary.

Frequently asked questions

How do I know if I am stressed / How do I recognise stress in somebody who works for me?

- 18 There are likely to be changes in the individual which may be physical (outward appearance or sickness), behavioural, emotional and / or intellectual (change in performance). Section 1 of the Toolkit gives examples of indicators of stress, though the list is not exhaustive.
- 19 Individuals often do not recognise the symptoms of stress in themselves. They are not aware that they are stressed until their health deteriorates or someone points out that their behaviour or character has changed. The list of possible stress-related sources of in Section 2 may help you to recognise the symptoms in yourself (or in others), whether they are caused by work or by other factors outside work.

What is the legal background?

- 20 Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Estyn has a statutory duty to assess the nature and scale of risks to your health in the workplace, (which includes those of a psychological nature), and to introduce measures to eliminate or control the risks identified. This is normally achieved through a risk assessment.
- 21 Employees have a responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions or omissions.
- 22 This means that staff should consider stress-related issues jointly with their manager.

If I feel that I am stressed, what should I do and who should I speak to?

- 23 If you consider that you are experiencing stress, look at the guidance in the toolkit and work with your line manager (if appropriate) and other sources of available help, to help reduce the stressing factors.
- 24 If you wish to seek support, you can discuss the matter with anyone you choose. You are encouraged to speak to your line manager, particularly if you think that your work is contributing to your stress or may be affecting your performance or health. Your manager cannot help you to alleviate a stressful situation if they are unaware of it.
- 25 If your circumstances are affecting your work, your manager will need to take your circumstances into account in assessing your performance, but will also be best placed to offer you practical support.
- 26 If appropriate, your manager will conduct an individual stress assessment (with you to explore, identify and assess potential risks arising in the workplace. The assessment needs to be undertaken jointly. It is important that you are constructive

and aim to seek practical solutions to the issues.

- 27 If for any reason you feel that you cannot approach your manager, you may wish to discuss your situation with another manager within your management chain, with the Human Resources section or seek advice from the Employee Assistance Programme, through which you can access support from trained counsellors. The confidential service is available 24 hours a day, every day via a free phone number **0800 174 319**
- 28 The Trade Unions (PCS or FDA) will also be available to offer support and assistance if required.
- 29 In some cases financial support can be considered through the [Charity for Civil Service](#).

Who is responsible for dealing with stress in the work place?

- 30 Staff and line managers have a joint responsibility to identify and prevent issues in the work place that may lead to stress. This is set out in legislation and is also a practical approach to dealing with issues effectively.

As a manager, what can I do to prevent harmful stress in the work place?

- 31 Carry on following the guidance in this toolkit and in other Estyn policies, e.g. managing attendance policy, performance management guidance etc. Monitoring, regular discussion with staff about workloads and expectations and risk assessments all play a key part in identifying and eliminating, or managing, stress within the workplace.

What if someone I manage considers they are experiencing stress?

- 32 If one of your staff considers that they are experiencing stress, you should arrange a confidential meeting with them and look into the circumstances to ensure that the problem is understood and taken seriously. Avoid excessive questioning which may be perceived as intrusive and can, in itself, be stressful. Staff who have persistent symptoms should be encouraged to seek medical advice, e.g. from their doctor or through Estyn's Employee Assistance Programme. This is something that would follow where management support has not been enough to alleviate symptoms.
- 33 You should consider completing the individual stress assessment (ISA). The ISA is a discussion tool which can be used by individuals, working with their managers, to explore, identify and assess potential risks of stress arising within the work place. The main focus should be on the discussion, rather than on form filling, and its purpose is not to find areas of blame, but to identify constructive practical actions that can be taken to relieve stress. It is essential to maintain absolute confidentiality at all times in providing support to the individual.
- 34 The HR team can advise on conducting the discussion, if necessary.

What should I do if I consider someone who I manage to be stressed?

- 35 The situation needs to be handled sensitively. Ask to meet the individual in private. Inform them that you are concerned for their wellbeing as you have noticed a change in their behaviour. Let them know that they can talk to you in confidence.
- 36 Do not push the issues if the person does not want to talk to you. Let them know that you are available and provide them with other sources of support or advice, refer them to Estyn's independent counselling service provided through the Employee Assistance Programme.

What if someone I manage goes off sick and has been diagnosed with, or considers that they are experiencing, stress?

- 37 You should follow the guidance in the [Attendance Management Policy and Guide](#). When the individual returns to work you will need to conduct a return to work interview. As part of the discussion you should look at the reasons for the illness, consider any recommendations from the doctor on the fit note and practical actions to minimise the risk of further episodes, using the ISA in Section 3 of the Toolkit. If the stress was work related you should seek to address the causes and make appropriate adjustments, focusing on what the individual can do to reduce the risks in the future and what you can do to support them, but bearing in mind that staff still have to satisfy their employment contracts.

As a manager, how can I help someone if they are showing signs of stress?

- 38 In the context of the way in which you work, you should be:
- Thinking about your own management style and its potential effect. Seek feedback from others on your style and use that feedback in a constructive way. Try to be self-aware and recognise whether any factors in your own life could be affecting the way you handle issues with colleagues.
 - Encouraging a supportive atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable to talk about their situation, without fear or stigma. Take the time to listen to concerns and take them seriously. Studies have shown that people in lower grades may not feel as able to bring their concerns to the attention of their managers.
 - Encouraging staff to ask questions when they have uncertainties and to make constructive suggestions as to how any difficulties identified can be addressed.
 - Being sympathetic and sensitive to your staff's needs, particularly in times of crisis by being flexible with regard to taking leave at short notice, applying the special leave provisions where appropriate, and being open-minded about requests for different working patterns and implement them where it is practical to do so.
 - Seeking support and advice from the Human Resources section and encouraging your staff to seek help through the Employee Assistance Programme where appropriate.

- Making workplace adjustments to enable staff to undertake their role if they have a clinically-diagnosed stress-related disability, or one which may increase susceptibility to stress problems.

39 When managing workloads, you should be:

- Meeting regularly with your staff to promote effective working e.g. involve all relevant staff in important decisions such as how work is distributed, and how it fits in with business objectives, and agreed deadlines. Reorganising tasks and responsibilities following discussion with all those affected. Organising work to ensure balanced workloads, with well-defined tasks, realistic and reasonable targets, and where possible, with sufficient variety.
- Finding out why colleagues are working long hours (if they are) and investigate ways of reducing this. Plan and agree work with staff to avoid the need to work excessive hours, by helping them to prioritise work and review possible adjustments to deadlines. Ensure objectives are SMART.
- Involving staff in co-ordinating work patterns and/or extra hours to meet job demands. Giving staff more control over their own work. Monitor work supportively and ensure workloads are covered during absences as far as possible without overburdening others.
- Considering increasing the workload and/or responsibility of staff with insufficient work in a controlled manner, or reassessing how work is distributed, and whether a fairer or more even allocation of work is required.
- Ensuring staff are adequately trained to do their job effectively, including in relation to using technology.
- Reporting concerns to line managers at the earliest opportunity where it is evident that previously agreed reasonable deadlines are now contributing to stress-related absences or complaints because absences have made deadlines more difficult to achieve.

How much information will I need to give?

- 40 It is entirely up to you to decide how much information you are comfortable divulging. Your line manager or those you contact through Estyn's Employee Assistance Programme will not seek to pressurise you into talking about things you do not wish to discuss.
- 41 Whoever you may choose to speak to, their main concern will be to ensure your health and wellbeing at work. They will therefore simply seek to obtain sufficient information to enable a practical action plan to be agreed with you and to ensure that you are adequately supported.

I don't want everyone to know what is happening to me

- 42 Your right to confidentiality, safety and your decision-making is paramount. No disclosure by your line manager or the Employee Assistance Programme provider

will be made without your express permission except in the most extreme circumstances, such as:

- if it is believed you are at risk of serious injury or death;
- if your situation involves a criminal prosecution; or
- when it is believed that there is a substantial risk of harm to staff or people under your care, including any children.

What happens if I do not want to discuss my personal problems with anyone?

- 43 If you decide that you do not wish to talk to anyone at work then your decision will be respected. However if your colleagues or line manager are concerned that you are showing signs of stress, then this cannot be ignored and might be raised privately with you. It is your line manager's duty to ensure your health and safety at work and you also have personal responsibility for your own health and safety. Your manager also has a duty to raise issues of attendance or performance with you. Identifying a stress problem is not a sign of weakness and you will not be adversely affected as a result of raising a problem. We would urge you not to suffer alone or with no support.

My circumstances are affecting my ability to do my job. What can I do?

- 44 If you choose to disclose your situation to your line manager, you will be able jointly to consider what practical measures might assist you.
- 45 You may be able to apply for a period of unpaid leave to deal with a short-term problem, or to apply for flexible working arrangements to meet a longer-term need.
- 46 Most importantly your manager will also be able to discuss specific practical initiatives in the work place which might be necessary in order to relieve or prevent stress.
- 47 They will also be in a position to take account of your circumstances if your attendance, performance or conduct is giving cause for concern. Your manager will adopt a sympathetic and supportive approach to assist you in meeting the required standards and may discuss a move to an alternative role or redeployment where it is the case that you are not suited to a job at your current level of responsibility.
- 48 Remember you can speak in confidence to your manager, HR team, your Trade Union representative, or access the counselling services provided by the Employee Assistance Programme.

Are there any self-help measures that I can also consider?

- 49 Yes. The guidance below is designed to provide some initial support to help you to identify and prevent stress, whether this emanates from work or your personal circumstances.

Work related stress

- Review the list of common factors that may possibly be causes of stress in Section 2 of the toolkit and make a note of any that you consider may be relevant to you. Work with your line manager to construct a tailored action plan based on the sources of work related stress you have agreed and put it into practice, using the individual stress assessment form as a basis for any discussion.
- Reduce pressure on yourself by planning and prioritising. Your manager can offer help and support with this.
- Agree work priorities and timescales with your manager to eliminate the need to work long hours.
- Ensure that your objectives are SMART.
- Consider learning and development opportunities that can offer practical advice and develop the skills needed to manage and cope with work-related stress, e.g. time management, stress management, assertiveness.
- Take planned leave and do not work excessively long hours.
- Be realistic if your job is making you ill and it cannot be changed, consider other jobs that may be available, or consider a different working pattern and discuss this with your manager and colleagues.

Stress caused by personal factors

- Confide in family, friends or colleagues.
- Concentrate your energies on solving the problem rather than worrying about it.
- Speak to your GP if you are worried about your health.
- Ask for and accept help from others.
- If you smoke, stop smoking or at least try to cut down – get help with this through your GP or local NHS Trust.
- Eat healthily.
- Avoid excessive alcohol consumption – alcohol acts as a depressant.
- Limit your caffeine intake.
- Be physically active – exercise helps to reduce stress and produces endorphins (good mood substances) in the brain.
- Learn relaxation techniques.
- Get enough sleep.

- If you're ill, rest.
- Manage your time and be realistic about what you can achieve, try to be careful to agree to deadlines you can manage at the outset of projects or tasks.