

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is stress?

Stress is defined by the Health & Safety Executive 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.

If pressure is managed correctly it can lead to improved motivation, performance and increased job satisfaction. Stress, which is a negative state, results when the pressure becomes too great for the individual to deal with.

Stress is not an illness, but a term used to describe a state where people undergo emotional, behavioural and mental changes in response to excessive pressure. However, if stress becomes excessive and prolonged, this can lead to mental and physical illnesses.

### 2. If I am feeling stressed at work, who should I talk to?

You have a duty to take all reasonable steps to promote and protect your own health and wellbeing and at the earliest opportunity, to advise your manager of any concerns you have about work-related pressures and stress.

### 3. My manager is the source of my occupational stress; can I speak to someone else?

If you do not feel comfortable speaking to your manager you can approach your line manager's manager or if you feel that the matter requires additional professional guidance, you should contact the [Human Resources](#) for advice on the way forward.

### 4. I am suffering from personal stress, what can I do?

If you are facing problems in your personal life, whilst you are not obliged to disclose the details of your personal problems, it may be helpful to have a discussion with your manager regarding what help can be made available such as counselling, temporary reduction to hours (impact on salary/holiday entitlement will be explained), bereavement support, debt advice etc to enable you to return to effective working. [Sources of Support](#)

### 5. Will conversations be confidential?

Managers are expected to record informal discussions on the stress record of discussion form and issue a letter following any formal meeting with you which will then be placed on your personal file held by Human Resources. The stress record of discussion form may also be forwarded to the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team if there are work-related factors contributing to your wellbeing

If your manager is concerned about managing your situation, they may also seek advice from Human Resources, their line manager or occupational health. These discussions with Human Resources or their manager will be in your best interests and confidentiality will be maintained by all concerned.

If you are referred to the Council's Occupational Health Service for further advice and guidance, you will be informed of your rights regarding confidentiality.

All medical assessments conducted by the Occupational Health Service (OHS) are carried out in confidence and in accordance with the appropriate professional codes of practice and the Data Protection Act (1998). As a result, medical information cannot be released without your prior consent.

The OHS also informs you of your rights under the Access to Medical Records Act 1988 whereby you are required to give written consent prior to OHS requesting information from your GP or specialist. You also have the right to access the report before it is forwarded to OHS.

## **6. What will happen if I advise my manager that I am feeling stressed at work?**

If you are currently attending work your manager should arrange to meet with you informally to discuss what you consider to be the contributing factors. The discussion will be recorded on the stress record of discussion form and forwarded to Human Resources and if there are work-related factors contributing to your wellbeing a copy of the form will also be sent to the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team.

As the meeting is informal, there will be no right to representation. The meeting will take place in a private location, sufficient time will be set aside and the meeting will be conducted in an open and supportive manner.

If you advise that you are facing problems in your personal life your manager may discuss what help can be made available such as counselling, temporary reduction to hours, bereavement support, debt advice etc to enable you to return to effective working. [Sources of Support](#)

If work-related factors have been highlighted by you, your manager should explain the stress action plan process and agree with you whether it would be

appropriate to develop an individual stress action plan or whether appropriate control measures could be agreed out with the stress action plan process.

If appropriate control measures can be agreed as part of the initial discussions your manager should ensure that the control measures are either documented on the stress record of discussion form or by other means deemed appropriate by you and your manager. A review of the control measures should also be planned at an appropriate juncture.

If circumstances are such that engaging with you to agree an individual stress action plan is appropriate your manager will provide you with a sample stress action plan, a blank stress action plan, the information pertaining to the HSE management standards and agree an appropriate timescale for you to return the action plan with part 1 completed.

Your manager will meet with you again to discuss the information provided by you on part 1 of the stress action plan in order to agree appropriate control measures. A date will also be set to review the agreed stress action plan.

A referral to occupational health may also be considered as appropriate.

**7. I believe that the cause of my stress is the behaviour of others, if I advise my line manager of this, what is likely to happen?**

Your manager will discuss with you how the matter can be resolved informally and will advise you of the Council's Fairness at Work procedure/Grievance Procedure for Teachers.

If you choose not to pursue your concerns in accordance with the Council's Fairness at Work procedure/Grievance Procedure for Teachers, the Council may be obliged to take steps to investigate these issues so as to ensure it is meeting its obligations to provide a safe working environment.

You will be made aware of any management actions.

**8. I am absent from work due to work related stress, how will this be managed?**

If you are absent from work and your manager is made aware that the reason for the absence is due to work related stress, your manager should ascertain from you whether you are fit to engage in a formal sickness absence meeting in accordance with the Council's Health & Attendance Procedure for Teachers or Maximising Attendance Procedure to discuss your stressors at the earliest opportunity.

If your health is such that your stressors can be discussed with a view to developing a stress action plan and one has been completed previously, it should be enclosed with the invite letter. If a plan does not already exist, a

sample stress action plan, blank stress action plan and the information pertaining to the HSE management standards should be enclosed.

If you advise that you are not fit to engage in a formal sickness absence meeting to discuss your stressors your manager should inform you that a formal long term sickness absence meeting in accordance with the Council's Health & Attendance Procedure for Teachers or Maximising Attendance Procedure will be arranged, if it is likely that you will be absent for four weeks or more.

Depending on individual circumstances further formal long term sickness absence meetings to discuss your continued absence may be required. A referral to occupational health may also be deemed appropriate.

If following the invite to the long term sickness absence meeting you advise that you are not fit to attend the long term absence meeting your manager should advise you that a referral to occupational health will be made to ascertain when it is likely that you will be fit to engage.

**9. What other sources of support are available in addition to speaking to my manager?**

The Council has a range of internal supports in place. In addition to these, the Council has identified [external sources of support](#) for you to contact.

**10. How can I actively manage my own levels of stress?**

There are a number of articles available which provide suggestions on how you can build your resilience and/or suggested strategies for dealing with stress. Some suggestions can be found in the [How to – help yourself](#) and the [Health & Wellbeing Pages](#)

**11. My manager and I cannot come to an agreement as to the appropriate control measures, how can this be resolved?**

In the event of a failure to agree, your manager should contact Human Resources for further guidance.

**12. I am suffering from work-related stress and my manager has decided that the stress action plan process would be an effective way of assisting me in identifying my stressors and potential control measures but I do not wish to engage in the process, what should I do?**

You should speak with your manager and advise them as to why you do not wish to engage in the stress action plan process and discuss suitable alternatives. N.B. Your manager may contact Human Resources for further guidance following this discussion.

**13. I am currently absent due to work-related stress and I do not feel I am well enough to remain in contact with my manager as per the sickness absence reporting procedure, what should I do?**

You must notify your manager of this by text, email, or ask a third party to do this on your behalf. Your manager will then arrange for a referral to be made to occupational health in order to ascertain when you will be fit to engage and remain in contact as per the sickness absence reporting procedure.

It may be that occupational health may suggest that you can maintain contact via text and email until you are fit to remain in contact with your manager as per the sickness absence reporting procedure

You must still provide medical certificates from your GP to cover your absence.