

Stress at Work

A Manager's Toolkit



Introduction

This toolkit has been developed to complement Defra's Stress at Work policy, which is available on the Defra intranet (<http://intranet/dhsu/References/Booklets/stress%20booklet.pdf>). It aims to provide an accessible guide to the main factors in the successful prevention and recognition of stress at work and some pointers to aid the effective rehabilitation of employees who have been absent from work with stress-related illnesses. In order to give a holistic approach to the issue of managing stress at work the toolkit is divided into three areas: prevention, recognition and rehabilitation.

From the most senior levels down, all line managers have a responsibility for the wellbeing of their staff. As an integral part of that responsibility, managers must be able to identify and assess the potential risk arising from stressful situations within the workplace. While managers are not expected to be experts on stress and are not doctors or psychologists, good management practice such as being approachable, supportive and leading by example can go a long way towards identifying and dealing with stress-related problems. Taking time to deal with difficulties at an early stage will reduce sickness absence in the longer term and enable productivity levels to be maintained.

There will inevitably be occasions where managers need to handle stress issues alongside other issues, for example poor performance. In such cases, managers should follow relevant HR procedures and seek advice from the HR Service Centre.

Of course, managers are not solely responsible for the wellbeing of their staff; employees are also responsible for their own well being and need to work together with line managers to identify and discuss areas of stress. Being able to identify stress as an issue is a positive step and being able to ask for and seek the appropriate support is a strength. Employees should be assured that they will not be adversely affected as a result of raising a problem.

Prevention

The key to prevention of stress in the workplace is effective and appropriate communication. This involves not only communication between the line manager and employee, but communication between peers, timely and focussed training on stress-related issues, proper management of HR processes and early communication with, and between, the many sources of support available within the Department. The prevention chart and checklist provide some suggestions as to actions that can be taken by managers to help minimise the risk of stress at work in their teams. The checklist can also be used to log actions that have been taken.

Recognition

It will not, of course, always be possible to prevent stress occurring, so it is also essential that managers are able to identify the signs of stress in their

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staff. Monitoring the signs, e.g. deterioration in work performance, an increase in sick absence or decrease in motivation, may identify a stress problem. However, a sense of balance and proportion is essential so that individuals do not feel that they are being placed under additional pressure or excessive scrutiny by line managers. Line managers also need to carefully monitor medical or self-certificates of absence for indications of stress or stress-related illnesses. The recognition flowchart and symptoms checklist will assist managers in identifying whether an individual may be suffering from stress at work and what initial steps should be taken. However, the checklist will only be of real value if managers know their staff well and are able to spot a variance from their usual behaviours. It is important to note that the checklist is not comprehensive and that it should not be used to diagnose stress, but simply as a guide to highlight possible stress and, more importantly, to inform discussion with the individual concerned.

Rehabilitation

Once stress has been identified, whether the individual remains at work or is away on sick absence, a plan of action is needed to address the problem. Where appropriate, employees should be encouraged to seek medical advice; however this is not a substitute for management action. *If an employee complains of or is diagnosed as suffering from stress, the circumstances must be investigated by the line manager to ensure that the problem is understood and taken seriously.* It is vital to ensure that confidentiality regarding personal interviews is maintained at all times. Managers must contact the Departmental Health & Safety Unit (DHSU) as soon as possible if one of their team is diagnosed as, or believed to be suffering from, stress or a related condition. It may be necessary to seek medical advice from the Occupational Health Provider (OHP); the HR Service Centre (HRSC) can advise on the procedure for an occupational health referral. The manager will need to work with the individual, HR, and the DHSU Adviser to produce a rehabilitation action plan suited to the specific circumstances and needs of both the individual and the organisation. *In all such cases it will be necessary for the manager or the HR /DHSU Adviser to conduct an individual stress assessment (ISA).* An Individual Stress Assessment form and rehabilitation checklist are included.

Notes for guidance

Please read these notes carefully before using the following forms and checklists.

When to use the toolkit

- When advised by an occupational health report that a stress risk assessment should be carried out, or
- At the request of an individual who feels s/he may be suffering from stress at work, or
- When a manager is concerned that an individual at work is displaying possible signs of stress or has been diagnosed as having a stress-related condition, or
- When an individual is absent from work due to stress or a stress-related condition.

If you are unsure, please contact the HR Service Centre or your DHSU Adviser for further guidance.

Who should complete the toolkit?

Normally the toolkit should be completed jointly by the individual and their line manager. However, if that is not possible, or is inappropriate (for example if the manager is perceived as being a source of stress), then another manager, HR or DHSU Adviser should be asked to assist. If you are unsure, please contact HR or DHSU.

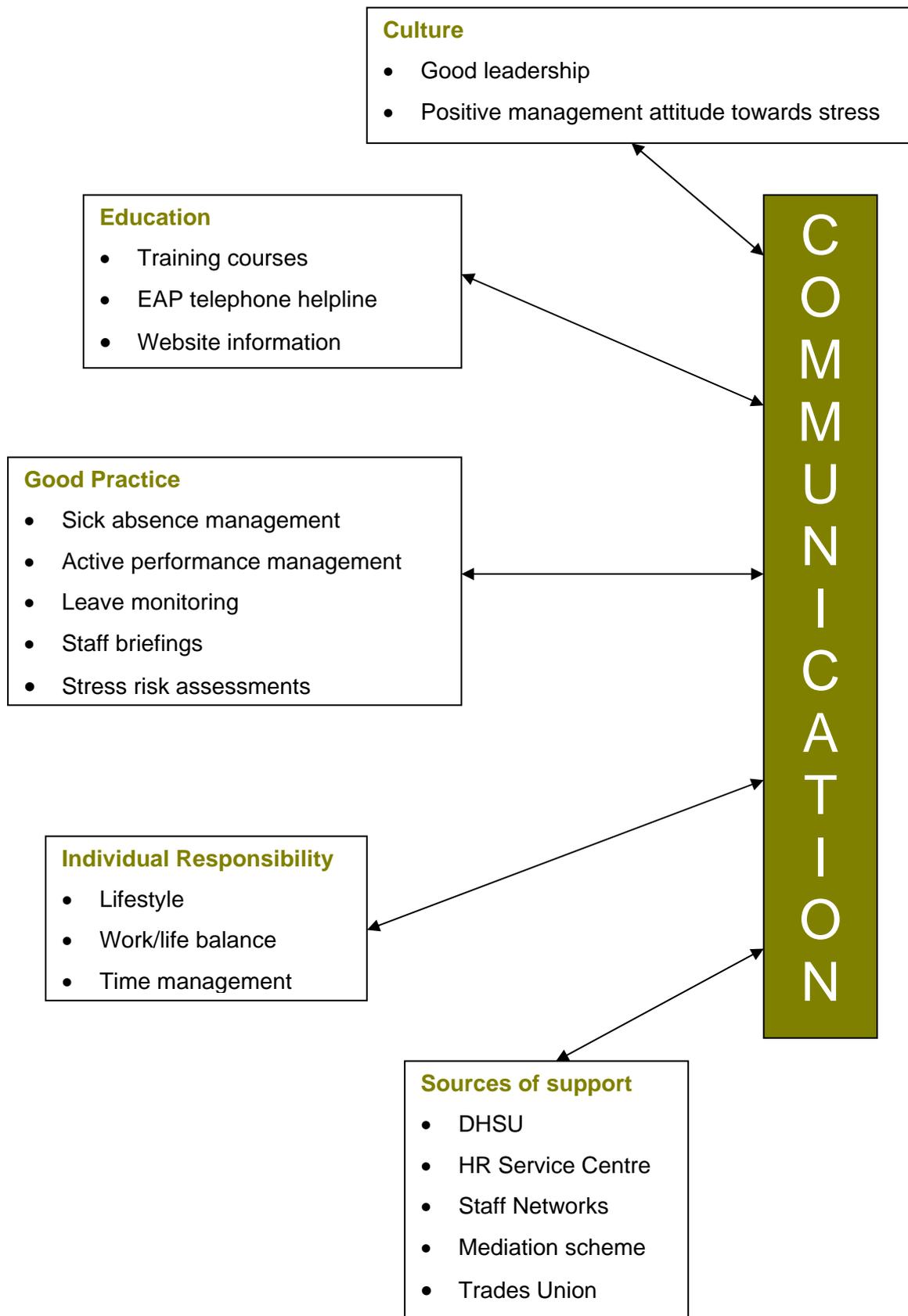
How to complete the toolkit.

Use the checklists – but remember that they are not comprehensive lists and in particular that the symptoms checklist should be used simply to highlight potential problems and not to diagnose stress. You may want to use the prevention checklist as an occasional health-check for your team. The rehabilitation checklist contains a number of prompts for the effective management of stress-related absences.

An Individual Stress Risk Assessment (ISA) should be carried out jointly with the individual, the main focus being on the discussion, not the form-filling. Keep in mind that the purpose of the ISA is not to find areas of blame, but to identify areas that can be remedied and constructive action that can be taken.

If you are unsure, or in the event of disagreements about what action needs to be taken, please contact your DHSU Adviser, HR Service Centre or the EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) for advice.

Prevention



Prevention checklist

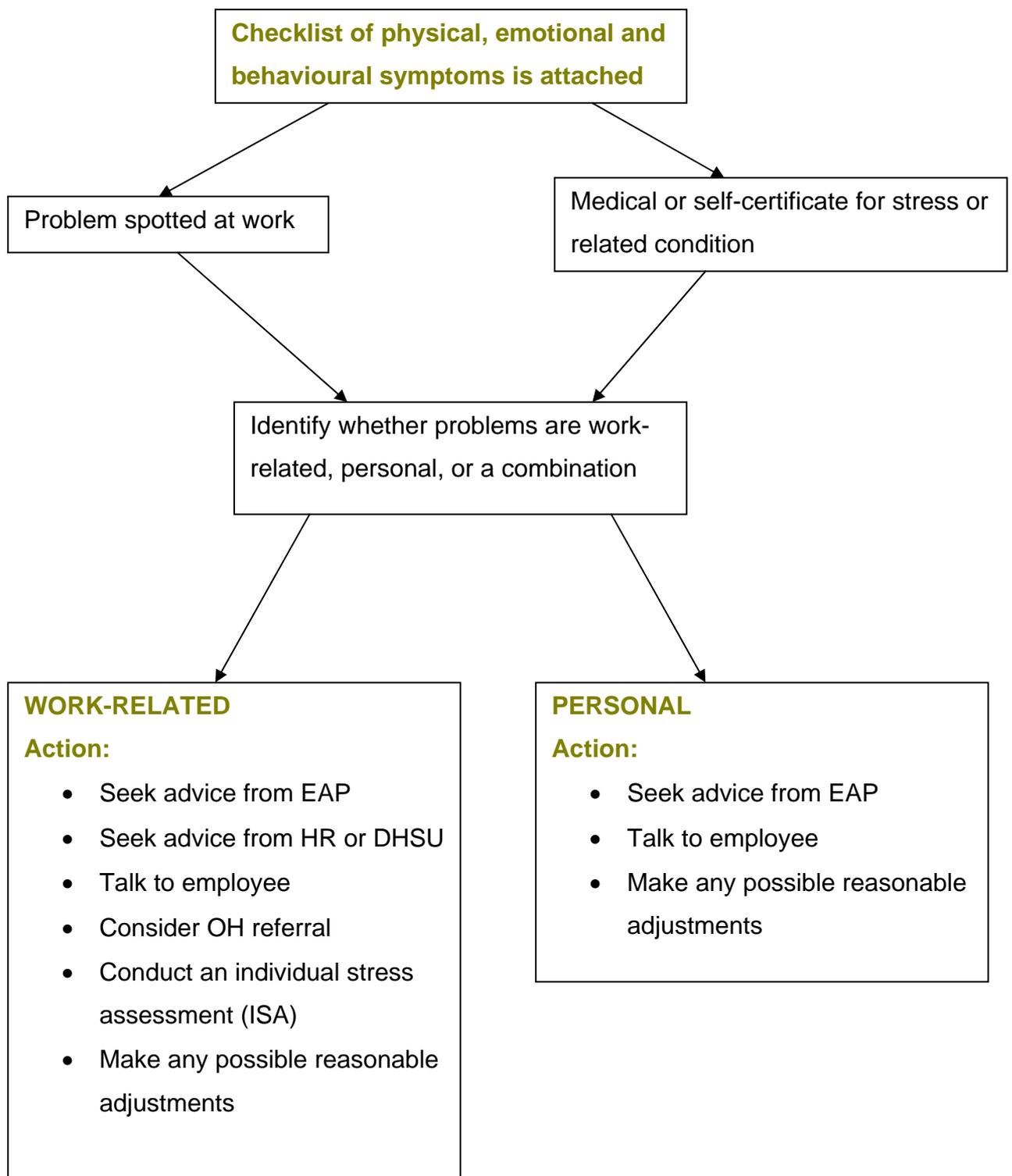
KEY ISSUES	YES/NO	COMMENTS/ACTIONS
Education		
Staff are aware of StressWeb (http://intranet/Stress_Web/default.asp)		
Managers and staff are aware of the EAP telephone number (0800 2888 222)		
Managers are aware of how to use the LDT external training providers to arrange stress management/awareness sessions		
Managers are aware that they can approach DHSU for advice on running stress awareness sessions		
Managers are aware of the videos that are available to hire from DHSU		

Processes		
All sick absence is monitored in compliance with Departmental policy		
Staff and managers are encouraged to take regular breaks (a minimum of 30 minutes should be taken for lunch)		
Staff and managers are encouraged to take their full annual leave allowance		
Performance is managed in compliance with Departmental policy		
There is regular communication with all staff via team briefing sessions		
Stress risk assessments are carried out where needed		

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KEY ISSUES	YES/NO	COMMENTS/ACTIONS
Culture		
All managers demonstrate the behaviours set out in the 'Big 5' Leadership Behaviours		
Managers communicate a positive attitude towards management of stress in the workplace		
Individual Responsibility		
All staff are encouraged to achieve a sensible work/life balance		
Staff are encouraged to take responsibility for time management		
Staff are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle		
Sources of Support		
Staff and managers are aware of, and encouraged to use, DHSU Advisers and the EAP helpline		
Staff and managers understand how and when to contact the HR Service Centre		
Staff and managers are aware of, and know how to contact, the relevant Trades Union		
Staff and managers are aware of and encouraged to join the Staff Networks		
Staff and managers are aware of, and encouraged to use, the Mediation service.		

Recognition



Recognition checklist

Important note: this checklist is not comprehensive and should be used only as a means of identifying possible areas of stress and not as a diagnostic tool.

Symptom	Displayed? (yes/no)
Performance at Work	
Inconsistent performance	
Uncharacteristic errors	
Indecisiveness	
Signs of tiredness	
Reckless driving	
Making complaints	
References to time pressures	
Resistance to change	
Irritability	
Memory lapses	
Lack of holiday planning and taking	
Longer or excessive hours	
Taking work home	

Withdrawal of interest or commitment	
Arriving late/leaving early	
Uncharacteristic quietness	
Extended lunches	
Absenteeism	
Increase in sick absence	
Tendering resignation	
Loss of confidence	
Unreliability	
Passiveness or lack of commitment	
Lack of motivation	

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Symptom	Displayed? (yes/no)
Aggressive behaviour	
Bullying	
Excessive criticism of others	
Harassment	
Vandalism	
Shouting	
Argumentative	

Emotional or immature behaviour	
Crying	
Sulking	
Bad temper	
Emotional responses	
Personality clashes	

Negative behaviour	
Repetitive arguments at meetings	
Belligerence	
Refusal to listen to advice and suggestions	
Using solutions known to be inadequate	
Increased smoking and/or drinking of alcohol	
Lack of, or inappropriate, humour	

Rehabilitation checklist

ACTION	COMMENTS/ACTIONS	DATE
Initial Communication		
Notify DHSU and HR Service Centre that the individual is believed to be suffering from stress or related illness		
Make early contact with the individual – but seek advice from DHSU on best approach if unsure		
Agree future contact arrangements with individual		

Next Steps		
Discuss with HR/DHSU whether OH referral is needed		
Keep in touch with the individual as agreed – remember contact must be supportive		
Encourage the individual to seek support from the EAP		

Individual Stress Assessment (ISA)		
Discuss with HR & DHSU the need for and timing of an ISA		
Agree who should carry out the assessment (manager, HR/ DHSU adviser)		
Conduct ISA		
Discuss outcome and agree actions needed with HR and DHSU		
Discuss action to be taken with individual		
Ensure any OH recommendations taken into account		

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ACTION	COMMENTS/ACTIONS	DATE
Return to Work		
Discuss with the individual ISA actions and any other barriers to return to work		
Take all possible steps to eliminate or reduce stressors and barriers		
Consider and discuss flexible return to work options with individual, HR and DHSU		
Agree a return to work plan		
If a stressor relates to bullying/harassment or another relationship problem, discuss whether mediation would help		
Review the plan regularly both prior to and following the individual's return to work, and agree adjustments as needed		

Individual Stress Assessment Form

Employee..... Assessor.....

Criteria	Any issues here? What are they?	Level of risk -H/M/L	Cause and effect	Action taken to remedy	What further action is needed?
Demand					
Are the demands of the job realistic?					
Does X have the necessary skills and ability to do the job?					
Does X have the necessary resources (time/equipment) to do the job effectively?					
Is, or does X find, the job repetitive and monotonous?					
Are there any problems with the physical work environment?					
Is X exposed to the threat of physical violence/verbal abuse from customers or the public?					

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Control					
Does X have a say in the way their work is undertaken?					
Is the pace of the work driven by a source beyond X's control, e.g. a machine?					
Is X encouraged to show initiative and use their full range of skills?					
Does X feel able to air concerns about their work environment?					
Support					
Does X get support from colleagues?					
Does X know how to access, and actually get, support from managers?					
Is X aware of and encouraged to use other sources of support (EAP, Employee Support Service, Networks)					

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Has X had proper training for and support in their role?					
Relationships					
Is X aware of procedures to resolve work place conflict?					
Does X feel able to report any concerns?					
Does X work alone or as part of a team?					
Does X feel that openness, honesty and respect are encouraged in the work environment?					
Role					
Does X experience conflicting demands at work?					
Has X received proper induction?					
Has X got a clear and up to date PDP?					
Does X understand how their job fits into the organisation?					
Is X able to organise their work effectively?					

Change					
Does X understand any change that is affecting their role/work environment?					
Has X been consulted about how the change will impact on them?					
Is X aware of the support available to help them through the period of change?					

Important: There may be other elements of the working environment that are effecting the individual that are not covered by the above criteria. If anything is mentioned during the course of the assessment that may be relevant, please record details, the level of risk and action taken/planned to minimise future risk.

Criteria	Any issues here? What are they?	Level of risk -H/M/L	Cause and effect	Action taken to remedy	What further action is needed?

Employee signature..... Date..... Assessor signature..... Date.....

A copy of this form, once completed and signed, should be retained by the individual, the manager and HR.