

# PORTFIELD SCHOOL & SATELLITE CENTRES



## POLICY DOCUMENT FOR A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO OCCUPATIONAL STRESS



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Welsh Heritage  
Schools Initiative



Menter Ysgolion y  
Drefnadaeth Gymreig



Cynlluniau Ysgolion Iech - Rhwydwith Cymru

## **Review of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed biennially unless changes of circumstances or legislation requires it to be amended earlier.

Signed: ..... Signed: .....  
Headteacher Chair of Governors

Date: .....

## **Portfield School Mission Statement**

Working together    Learning together    Achieving together

At Portfield School we strive to  
Create a happy, safe, supportive and stimulating learning environment  
Value everyone  
Develop everyone's personal, social, emotional health and wellbeing  
Promote relevant academic and vocational skills  
Meet individual needs through an imaginative and flexible approach  
Enable all learners to achieve their full potential

UNCRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Portfield School places the values and principles of the UNCRC at the heart all policies and practices  
Portfield School is a Rights Respecting School

# **PRESSURE AT WORK**

## **A PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS**

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Policy Statement

The Risk Management of Stress

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The Role of the

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(Version: August 2001)

## POLICY STATEMENT

Pembrokeshire County Council accepts its responsibility to create a working environment which provides support for **all** its employees and to harness the positive aspects of stress while seeking to keep the adverse effects to a minimum.

It is therefore committed to positively developing and implementing a corporate strategy to help both employees and managers to be proactive when dealing with issues related to stress at work within the confines of available resources and as far as reasonably practicable.

***Stress will be treated no differently than any other health risk. Risk assessments will be undertaken to assist in removing or reducing the unnecessary risk.***

Nearly everyone is, to some degree, affected by stress at work depending on personality, the kind of work undertaken, changes in personal circumstances, other factors, eg age, finances, health. It is also recognised that certain jobs can place emotional demands on employees due to continuous contact with or responsibility for people.

The Council recognises that not all stress which affects its employees is necessarily work related and may, where appropriate and reasonably practicable, support employees in these areas, particularly if they impact on the employee's performance in the workplace.

Significant levels of stress may lead to conflict, poor performance, ill health absences and high employee turnover and managers are required to monitor and manage these characteristics in the pursuance of stress reduction. Fair, reasonable and supportive management styles will be actively encouraged to help maintain and promote a healthy, happy and effective workforce.

The Council will provide, through an Occupational Health Service, professional medical advice and support. It will give assurances that individuals will be able to discuss stress-related issues in confidence with their line manager or nominated officer. It will promote, through training, a greater awareness of undue occupational stress; its causes and controls. ***Line managers will attend relevant stress management training***

This policy *is* supported by **a procedure**, which is designed to assist both managers and employees in its implementation.

## THE RISK MANAGEMENT OF STRESS

### **Background**

Life places demands and pressure on us all. We need some demands to remain motivated, healthy and to perform at our best. But if these pressures are too heavy or last too long people can experience the physical and mental reactions commonly known as "stress". Prolonged stress can lead to both physical and mental health problems. Pembrokeshire County Council is committed to the introduction and promotion of safe working practices, the promotion of good health and the prevention, where reasonably practicable, of temporary or long-term ill health. The Council will therefore take such action, as it deems appropriate to maintain a safe working environment, which minimises the internal pressures that are considered stress making through an effective stress management programme.

### **Risk Management of Stress**

***Recognises symptoms as early as possible and so allows action to be taken to reduce or eradicate excessive stress.***

**Risk management** involves 4 processes – Identification, evaluation, remedy and monitoring.

#### **1. IDENTIFICATION**

The Authority will take reasonable, practicable steps to protect employees from risks that are reasonably foreseeable whilst bearing in mind :-

- The magnitude of the risk of injury which is reasonably foreseeable
- The seriousness of the consequences for the person to whom the duty of care is owed and the risk occurring
- The costs and practicality of preventing the risk.
- The potential costs of not preventing the risk

***A review of each service/section needs to be undertaken to realistically determine whether stress is an issue. Particularly when there are significant changes in work practice.***

***Note The assessment should be periodically reviewed, eg temporary increases in workloads during periods of change, staff shortages or when issues are highlighted. Also to be taken into account is the pre-disposition of some employees to stress.***

## **2. EVALUATION**

- 2.1 A risk assessment ([Appendix 1 template](#)) should be undertaken to establish a clear understanding of which workplace factors are likely to cause occupational stress so that effective control measures can be applied.

A suitable and sufficient evaluation of the risk will :-

- Identify the significant risk arising out of the particular job undertaken
- Enable the manager to identify and prioritise the measures that need to be taken
- Be appropriate to the nature of the work and be such that it remains valid for a reasonable period of time

- 2.2 In basic terms the evaluation will look for pressures at work which could cause high and long lasting levels of stress. It should be considered that stress need not be work-related. To decide who might be harmed by these, whether enough is being done to prevent that harm or if control measures need to be implemented eradicating or reducing the risk **would be a priority**. The evaluation, whilst covering the people, the process and the environment should take account of other influences ie by identifying peaks in demand or changes in the environment. The final part of the evaluation should be to consult with the relevant employees (or a cross section of) to confirm the findings of the evaluation and to agree, where possible, the priorities. The end result of this process should be an Action Plan. This should take into account :-

What has been learnt from the audit  
 What improvements are needed  
 Which are the priorities  
 How success of any improvements will be measured  
 How those improvements will be benchmarked

***( 'Risk Management of Stress' document which must be completed by the appropriate line manager).***

All employees relevant to that evaluation **will receive general information**. Any subsequent individual action plan to be distributed to **employee concerned only**.

Action plans to be monitored and reviewed periodically (at least at six monthly intervals)

## **3. REMEDY**

- 3.1 Managers need to be alert to the sources of stress, how it is manifested and what can be done about it. There are consequences in taking the wrong action or doing nothing at all. The employees concerned should be given support on a regular basis, and this needs to be monitored.

- 3.2 Stress can be tackled more effectively when effective and consistent measures are taken.

### 3.3 **Primary level**

#### Proactive Measures eg.

- Through regular team meetings, where **information is shared**
- Clear job design and purpose
- Good communication channels

#### Prevention eg.

- Increase general awareness of health at work issues
- Use of counselling support
- Positive feedback to employees

#### **Secondary** – raising awareness of mechanisms to deal with stress eg,

- Time management training/prioritising
- Lifestyle management

#### **Tertiary** – dealing with the more extreme effects of stress eg,

- Urgent intervention
- referral to Occupational Health Service
- positive measures for re-introduction into the work place

3.4 Counselling is available and face-to-face counselling can be provided. Personnel Division to be contacted by managers, in the first instance.

3.5 ***'Positive Approach' Check list has been produced to assist managers in dealing with issues*** ([Appendix 3](#)) [Definition of Stress](#) ([Appendix 4](#))

### 3.6 Performance Review

Use Performance Review not only to discuss current performance and continuing training & development, but also as an opportunity to discuss workload and supplementary needs, eg stress management, assertiveness training/time management and where necessary include in the action plan outcomes to support the individual in pursuance of these needs.

### 3.7 Exit Interview

The exit interview is a sound management practice whenever an employee leaves. Apart from the opportunity it provides for trying to persuade a valuable employee to withdraw a resignation, the exit interview can fulfil other significant objectives eg,

1. It can highlight the reasons for employee turnover
2. It can alert management to the possible need for change to improve existing practice or an underlying relationship with stress.

A pro forma for conducting Exit Interviews is available ([Appendix 5](#)). This can be self-completed.

### 3.8 Manager/Employee Meetings

A crucial part of stress management is the analysis of "perceived stress". Is the stress due to work or not?

Once the origins have been identified, a problem solving approach can be adopted.

3.9 A meeting should be scheduled where an employee and his or her manager or nominated officer can discuss a way forward.

The employee should always be made aware of what you intend to do with the information you gather. Sensitivity and confidence are important, as well as respect by all parties.

If an employee complains about stress try to identify and address the source. Involve the employee and encourage them to build up as full a picture as possible. Above all, maintain an

open and understanding attitude. See “A Positive Approach to Stress Management” note for guidance ([Appendix 3](#)).

Specialist advice is available from a variety of sources, eg GP, occupational health, counselling services, the community mental health centre.

### 3.10 Severe/Chronic cases

In situations where stress leads to a severe medical problem resulting in the inability of the employee to undertake the duties of their post and it is not reasonable or possible to alleviate the cause(s) of stress, the situation should be fully explored with the employee. Where necessary the Authority’s procedure for dealing with ill health should be utilised.

### 3.11 Violent Incident Assaults

Where employees are involved in a violent incident/assault, the Authority will take action and support colleagues through its Violence [the Local Authority](#) Work Policy.

### 3.12 Traumatic Situations

Employees who, through their work, are exposed to a traumatic situation through an event like a major disaster, fire, assault, etc. will be offered appropriate counselling. Personnel Division to be contacted.

### 3.13 On-going assessment

Where there is an Action Plan to reduce work-related stress for an employee the Plan must be maintained on a permanent basis or until such time as medical evidence suggests it is no longer needed.

## **4. MONITORING**

- 4.1 The Health and Safety Group, which comprises of both management and employee representatives will review the effectiveness of this policy and procedure and will consider further programmes of activity to develop this strategy further.

## **5. LINE MANAGER RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Day to day management of occupational stress within their area of responsibility
- To ensure that all employees have access to this policy and procedure
- To undertake a risk evaluation and document results. To monitor and review agreed action
- To know employees as individual members of staff
- To be aware of early warning signs that people are not coping, and respond positively
- To be approachable and to introduce measures to promote a positive culture
- To encourage task variation where practicable
- To try to understand how people’s own behaviour, e.g. choosing to work long hours, not scheduling tasks sensibly, can have an adverse effect
- To take health risks such as stress seriously and to be understanding towards employees who admit to being under too much pressure
- To identify training needs and to ensure that appropriate training is provided, and that employees and line management attend.

## **6. THE ROLE OF THE PERSONNEL DIVISION**

The [Local Authority](#) Personnel [Department](#) will provide a link for both employees and managers by:

- ensuring the maintenance of a consistent approach across all departments when dealing with issues associated with stress
- as necessary referring employees who are suffering from stress or stress-related conditions to the Occupational Health Service
- assisting managers in the implementation of this policy
- assisting employees wishing to raise issues with their manager but who feel unable to address the matter without support (not withstanding employees who wish to have their trade union representative support them).

It should be noted that, whilst personnel professionals have a duty to familiarise themselves with the causes of stress, etc, they are not qualified to intervene in cases of serious disorder. Employees will be referred to the appropriate medical practitioner or counsellor who will decide whether specialist help is needed in these cases.

It remains a manager's responsibility to ensure that they, as line manager, take the necessary appropriate action.

## **7. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

- To seek support and assistance if they believe they are suffering from the effects of stress
- To consider how behaviour impacts on colleagues; it could be putting them under increased levels of stress
- To acknowledge that personal health is important. If there are problems then the manager needs to know so that changes can be made to help
- To be supportive of colleagues who may be experiencing undue stress
- To raise stress related problems with a line manager or nominated officer, as appropriate, eg Personnel link officer
- To inform a line manager or nominated officer if there is a belief that a colleague is suffering from undue stress
- To comply with policy and procedural guidelines
- To raise the issue that they may be in the wrong job
- To consider re-deployment or new career path.



**Four steps for successful pro-active Risk Management:**

**IDENTIFY**

**EVALUATE**

**REMEDY**

**MONITOR**

**1. IDENTIFICATION**

Carry out review of your service/section to realistically determine whether stress is an issue. Note the methods employed. Tick the sections where appropriate.

- a. Talking to employees [ ]
- b. Team Briefings [ ]
- c. Management Team Meetings [ ]
- d. Performance Reviews and work review meetings [ ]
- e. Specific problem/s raised by employee [ ]

f. Other (specify) .....

.....

Comments .....

.....

.....

.....

**2. EVALUATION**

a. Are there general problems within part or all of the department/section? If so, which? .....

.....

b. Are there particular problems with an individual/s - If so, who? .....

.....

c. Have you interviewed the individual/s concerned? (see Appendix 2 'Counselling Checklist) YES/NO

d. Are the problems work related? Comment .....

e. Are the problems on-going or only at certain times? .....

f. Are personality clashes causing/increasing stress? If so who is involved? .....

.....

g. How does the individual perceive their workload? Comment .....

.....

Other comments: .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**3. REMEDY** (Tick which possible remedies are to be used and comment more fully below)

- a. Changing job roles to suit individual/s where possible [ ]
- b. Moving individual/s to another part of the department/section [ ]
- c. Ensure that appropriate tools for the job are available [ ]
- d. Suitable training for duties undertaken [ ]
- e. Additional support for the duties required [ ]
- f. Counselling - where required and arranged through Personnel [ ]
- g. Improve channels of communication [ ]
- h. Discuss options with Personnel [ ]
- i. Other action to be taken (specify) [ ]

.....  
.....

Comments:.....  
.....  
.....

**4. MONITOR**

- a. Date when next general evaluation will take place.....
- b. Is it marked in your diary? YES/NO
- c. Where individuals are involved how often will you re-evaluate them?.....
- d. Are you fully documenting meetings with individuals who have particular problems? YES/NO
- e. Have you agreed a course of action with the individuals concerned & formally recorded it? YES/NO
- f. The way forward – agreed outcomes:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**\*NB: This form must be completed by the appropriate Line Manager**

NAME:.....

POSITION:.....

DEPARTMENT:.....

ESTABLISHMENT ADDRESS.....

**Have YOU received training in Stress Management? YES/NO**

**If NO please contact Personnel -Training and Development for inclusion on the next available course!**

SIGNED:.....DATE:.....

## **Appendix 2**

## **COUNSELLING CHECKLIST**

The following key points have been identified to assist managers in counselling type interviews so that both manager and employee may gain maximum benefit.

### **Preparation**

Choose a place to talk, which is quiet, free from interruption and not open to view

Research before the meeting and have any necessary papers available at the meeting

Allow sufficient time and if there are time constraints, inform the employee at the outset

Give the employee the option of being accompanied by a supportive colleague

If you are approaching the employee following information received from a colleague, decide in advance the extent to which you can reveal your source and gain their approval before proceeding

Plan how you will introduce and discuss the perception of the situation

Be prepared for the employee to have a different expectation of the interview. You are not there to solve the problem for them

Understand that the employee's view of the facts will be more important than the facts themselves and that their behaviour may not reflect their true feelings

### **The Interview**

Welcome the employee and clarify the general purpose of the interview

Assure the employee that matters will be treated with sensitivity and respect.

Reassure the employee that the discussion will not be used against them in the future

Be prepared to prompt or encourage the employee to move into areas they appear hesitant about by using a suitable variety of open, closed and focused questions

Encourage the employee to look more deeply into statements made

Ask the employee to clarify any statements you do not understand

Try to take the initiative in probing important areas, which may be embarrassing/emotional

Recognise that some issues may be so important that the employee may wish to discuss them over and over again

If the employee becomes defensive. Try to identify the reason, relax the pressure or try another approach

Summarise the conversation in your own words, this helps the employee recognise that you are listening carefully and allows you to clear up any areas which you have misunderstood

At the close of the interview clarify any decisions reached and agree what follow up support would be helpful

### **Overcoming barriers**

Do not take notes at inappropriate moments – this can lead to barriers being established

Accept that you may not like the employee but your role is to offer support and guidance

Be careful not to take sides

Try to understand the situation from the employee's perspective

Listen attentively. Resist the temptation to talk about your own problems even if they appear similar

Recognise that you can only do so much – refer the employee to professionals such as occupational health, counselling service via Personnel Division, etc. if you do not feel equipped to adequately support the employee.

**Appendix 3**

**A POSITIVE APPROACH TO STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Things that can help	Management style & input	Sources of specialist help
<b>The Job</b>		
Flexible work schemes	Refer to existing schemes	Personnel Division
Planned and agreed work hours	Improve work schedule and try to avoid excessive overtime	Monitoring of flex time system by Heads of Section. Personnel Division
Targets that are stretching but reasonable	Performance Review	Training & Development, Personnel Division
Well defined tasks and responsibilities	Performance Review	Training & Development, Personnel Division
Variety of tasks to perform	Good job design	Personnel Division
Proper use of skills	Performance Review and effective deployment	Training & Development, Personnel Division
Training for those dealing with the public or clients	Refer to Training & Development Manual	Training & Development, Personnel Division
Proper risk assessment and control of hazards in the job	Training for managers in conducting risk assessments.	Safety Officers, Risk Manager
Clear information and training for employees on assessed risks and control measures	Health & Safety policy, copy of relevant risk assessment	Safety Officers, Risk Manager

**The Department**

Clearly defined objectives and responsibilities linked to service objectives	Performance Plan	Policy & Corporate Planning Division Training & Development, Head of Section
Support and training for those with high level of responsibility for the welfare and well being of people	Training In counselling skills, team building, stress management etc.	Training & Development, Personnel Division
Opportunity for employees to contribute to ideas	Regular team meetings, team brief, focus groups	Training & Development, Personnel Division, Marketing & Communication Division

**Relationships at Work**

Training in interpersonal skills and in dealing with conflict	Training & Development	Training & Development, Personnel Division
Effective systems for dealing with interpersonal conflict, bullying, harassment, including grievance and proper investigation of complaints	Relevant policy and procedure	Personnel Division

**The Structure and Culture**

Clear objectives	Departmental Performance Plan	Relevant Head of Section
Good communication	Team briefing, regular team meetings, newsletters, training in effective communication skills	Line manager/supervisor, Training & Development, Personnel Division
Employee involvement, particularly in periods of change	Consultation	Personnel Division, Trade union representatives
Good management support and appropriate training and development of employees		Training & Development, Personnel Division
Effective team work	Team building training	Training & Development, Personnel Division

## **Appendix 4**

## **DEFINITION OF STRESS**

“Stress” is an umbrella term with no specific scientific meaning that we use to label things we don’t like. Specific problems are absenteeism, bullying, poor performance, anxiety, interpersonal conflict or work overload. Every one of these is different and has different causes and different solutions.

Stress is the “wear and tear” our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment. It has physical and emotional effects on us and can create positive and negative feelings.

It can also be described as an imbalance between the demands and pressures placed on an individual and their ability to cope.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “the reaction people have to excessive demands or pressure, arising when people try to cope with tasks, responsibilities or other types of pressures connected with their jobs but find difficulty, strain or worry in doing so”.

Fundamental to understanding stress is recognition that it is the perceived inability of the individual to exercise control or discretion over their work or workplace.

The Council recognises that stress is primarily an organisational, as opposed to an individual, issue and that stress prevention is more relevant than stress counselling.

Stress is more likely to occur when :-

- Pressures pile up
- Pressure is prolonged
- People feel unable to exert control over demand
- People are unclear over conflicting demands

## **THE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS**

Stress can manifest itself in a variety of different ways and is usually dependent upon the person experiencing the problem. Managers should therefore endeavour to monitor the following areas of concern and consider whether they may indicate stress related problems at work :-

- Periodic ill health
- A deterioration or breakdown in professional and personal communication
- Unreasonable behaviour towards colleagues and others (short temper, rudeness, aggression and anger)

Other signs to look out for :-

## **PHYSICAL SIGNS**

Loss of appetite	Frequent indigestion
Difficulty sleeping	Constipation or diarrhoea
Feeling tired all the time	Frequent sweating
Dizziness, nausea	Feeling irritable
Breathlessness	Headaches
Muscular pains	Nervous tics and clumsiness

## **EMOTIONAL SIGNS**

Swings in mood	Increased worrying
Irritability	Feeling tense
Drained, no enthusiasm	Cynical
Loss of confidence	Feeling nervous, apprehensive, anxious
Feelings of helplessness	Lack of self-esteem
Lack of concentration	Withdrawal into daydreams

## **BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS**

More accident prone	Poor work
Increased smoking	Increased consumption in alcohol
Impaired speech	Increased dependence on drugs
Loss of interest in sex	Overeating or loss of appetite

Poor time management                      Taking work home more  
Too busy too relax                      Withdrawal from supportive relationships  
Change in sleep pattern, difficulty in getting to sleep and waking tired  
Not looking after yourself

Please note that the above symptoms could also be attributable to other medical conditions and therefore stress should not be assumed as the underlying cause. A medical diagnosis will **always** be required.

## **RECOGNITION OF THE SYMPTOMS**

Subtle changes in people's behaviour, which may indicate a problem. It is widely accepted that stress is multi-causal and cumulative. In terms of liability, the Council is responsible for work related stress only. However, it will endeavour to support all employees regardless of the cause of the stress.

### Symptoms

Excessive hours being worked  
Sickness absence – stress or stress related  
Behaviour which becomes erratic  
Failure to take annual leave  
Impatience with colleagues  
Temper  
Irritability  
Lack of concentration  
Declining willingness to delegate or communicate  
Excessive fatigue  
Being accident prone  
Tension headaches  
Anxiety  
Sleep problems  
Loss of self esteem  
Shortage of breath  
Muscle tension  
Nervousness

## **POTENTIAL SOURCES OF STRESS**

There are a few factors that are known to lead to stress e.g. the repetitive nature of some jobs, shift work, workload, lack of job security, lack of career opportunity, technological advances leading to new skill requirements, inadequacy, insecurity, poor working relationships, exclusion from the decision making process, personal issues, restricted social contact, lack of training etc.

Other factors that can lead to stress are :-

- Poor or inconsistent management
- A change of job
- Too many managers
- No control over pace or content of work
- Being a supervisor
- Under or over promotion
- Too much or too little responsibility
- Unreasonable time pressures or deadlines
- Poor working conditions
- Excessive noise
- Uncertainty about role
- Mismatch between tasks and resources
- Irregular or long hours
- Lack of feedback or acknowledgement

Potential sources of stress are pressures from organisation, clients, other organisations and agencies, management, colleagues or balancing home life with the demands of work.

In addition to the above, an important and often overlooked cause of stress is the failure of an individual to take responsibility for self management of their learning and development and their consequent loss of confidence and inability to do the job.

## **ANXIETY**

Anxiety should not be confused with stress. Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state characterised by fearfulness, and unwanted and distressing physical symptoms. It is a normal and appropriate response to stress but becomes a recognisable illness when it is disproportionate to the severity of the stress, continues after the stressor has gone, or occurs in the absence of any external stressful event.

Stress is not deemed to be an 'illness' as such but may be defined as an imbalance between perceived demand and perceived ability to meet that demand.

Stress at work is now widely recognised as a major cause of employee ill health and sickness absence.

**Appendix 5**

**EXIT INTERVIEW FORM**

NAME OF EMPLOYEE : \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF COMMENCEMENT : \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF LEAVING : \_\_\_\_\_

STATED REASON FOR LEAVING : \_\_\_\_\_

Opinion of the employee about his or her job :

VERY SATISFYING  
SATISFYING  
NOT SATISFYING


VERY GOOD

GOOD

POOR

SUPERVISION  
TRAINING  
REMUNERATION  
CAREER PROSPECTS  
GENERAL CONDITIONS OF SERVICE  
WORKING CONDITIONS  
WORKPLACE COMMUNICATIONS




***Other information provided by the employee (to include any reasons for any 'not satisfying' or 'poor' responses to the above questions)***

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments by the Interviewer :

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewer : \_\_\_\_\_ Name : \_\_\_\_\_

Position Held: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of employee : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_