

Reference Number: UHB 496  
Version Number: 1

Date of Next Review: September 2025  
Previous Trust/LHB Reference Number:

## Management of Stress in the Workplace Guidelines

### Introduction and Aim

These guidelines are designed to assist employees and managers/supervisors in managing stress. The mental health guide has similar themes to the stress guide and should be consulted when necessary. These guidelines are covered by the Employee Health and Wellbeing Policy EHIA. Training on communication skills for supervisors/managers is available via the Learning & Education Department.

The aim of this guideline is to provide practical tools and techniques to supporting employees who are experiencing stress either within or outside of work whilst raising awareness of some of the contributing factors which may affect someone's wellbeing.

***“Stress is how we react when we feel under pressure or threatened. It usually happens when we are in a situation that we don't feel we can manage or control”***  
(Mind, 2022)

It is important to distinguish between pressure which can be positive motivator if managed correctly and stress which if excessive and prolonged can be detrimental to health. What triggers stress and the capacity to deal with stress varies from person to person and even within the same person at a different time. Stress is influenced by a variety of factors including support systems at home and work, personality, individual resilience and coping mechanisms.

Stress is not an illness, however if experienced for a prolonged period it can result in psychological illness e.g., anxiety, depression or physical symptoms such as headaches and musculoskeletal symptoms such as back and/or shoulder pain. Early detection of stress allows action to be taken before the pressure becomes a problem, and it will be easier to reduce and eliminate the cause.

A common concern raised by members of staff is a 'lack of staff'; these comments should be acknowledged and clarified – “to do what, specifically”. Managers/supervisors can also enquire “who needs to undertake that task? Is there someone else who can help?”. Short staffing should be recognised as a contributor to stress; however, some staff will feel they are the only person who is qualified/able to complete certain tasks, reassure staff that they will still be valued, even if they correctly delegate authority to another individual. The [All Wales Delegation Guidelines](#) can be used to support with this.

### Objectives

- Provide managers with the tools to support staff experiencing stress
- Give confidence to individuals experiencing stress that mechanisms are in place to support them

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- Create a culture of openness and togetherness in dealing with challenging situations

### Scope

These guidelines apply to all staff including those on honorary contracts and bank workers.

### Equality and Health Impact Assessment

A standalone Equality and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) has not been completed as these guidelines support and are aligned to the Employee Health and Wellbeing Policy. A EHIA was conducted for this Policy and the supporting documents and this found there to be a positive impact.

### Documents to read alongside this Procedure

Employee Health and Wellbeing Policy  
 People and Culture Plan  
 Supporting Employee Mental Health Guidelines  
 Stress Risk Assessment  
 Health and Safety Policy  
 Managing Attendance at Work Policy  
 Flexible Working Policy  
 Respect and Resolution Policy  
 Equality, Inclusion & Human Rights Policy  
 NHS Wales Disciplinary Policy and Procedure  
 Redeployment Procedure  
 Incident, Hazard and Near Miss Reporting Policy  
 Minimal Manual Handling Policy  
 Management of Violence and Aggression Policy

### Accountable Executive or Clinical Board Director

Executive Director of People and Culture

### Author(s)

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### Disclaimer

If the review date of this document has passed please ensure that the version you are using is the most up to date either by contacting the document author or the

[Governance Directorate.](#)

### Summary of reviews/amendments

Version Number	Date Review Approved	Date Published	Summary of Amendments
1	12/04/2011	22/08/2011	New Policy to replace Trust Version310

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2	08/07/2014	20/05/2016	Updated Policy to reflect organisational changes
3	09/01/2019	15/03/2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reformatted in UHB style.</li> <li>• Reformatted and written as a Procedure. It was previously a Policy</li> <li>• Emphasis on Welsh Government documentation relating to mental health in the workplace</li> <li>• Section 1 Responsibilities updated to reflect current roles</li> <li>• Section 2.1 and 2.2 information on common mental health conditions and PTSD has been added</li> <li>• Section 3 supporting staff with mental health added</li> <li>• Section 5 hyperlinks to Useful Information/Legislation added</li> <li>• Appendix 1 Signs of Stress Added</li> <li>• Appendix 2 Brief Tips about Self-care and self-help after a traumatic event added</li> </ul>
4	21/09/2022	06/10/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Guidelines previously part of UHB 071 Management of Stress and Mental Health in the Workplace Procedure.</li> <li>• HSE support materials</li> <li>• Inclusion of REACTMH course for managers</li> <li>• Mental Health and Stress Procedure split into two separate guidelines</li> <li>• Suggested interventions included within appendix for employee and manager to implement</li> </ul>

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## 1 Responsibilities

If you are consulting this procedure then you are either experiencing a period of stress or you have a member of staff expressing a stressful episode. Staff experiencing stress should always be treated with respect and dignity. Many staff members may find it difficult to discuss their stress levels; staff members should be initially be reassured and thanked for raising their concerns.

When concerns cannot be discussed within that working day then a mutually agreed time should be arranged. The postponement of an initial stress discussion should be used to ensure adequate time is available to both staff member and manager/supervisor. When arranging an initial discussion staff should be reassured that their concerns will be listened to; managers/supervisors should also consider the urgency for the initial discussion – could there be further predictable episodes of stress before the initial discussion.

### ***Responsibilities of the employee***

Discussing individual stress can be a difficult conversation. Employees are entitled to their privacy; however, we would encourage staff members to have the courage to discuss the pressures affecting them with their line manager. Employees are encouraged to be proactive addressing areas that have an impact on their stress levels in a bid to reduce the severity of the issue.

Generally, it is recommended for staff members to discuss factors that may impede their ability to work at their highest ability as early as possible. This will allow the manager/supervisor to be flexible within the needs of the service and offer any support/referrals in a timely manner. Staff members should familiarise themselves with resources available from the Employee Wellbeing Service and the Cardiff and Vale Recovery College.

### ***Responsibilities of the manager/supervisor***

Managers/supervisors are required to ensure a receptive, supportive approach is displayed towards the disclosure of stress. Managerial professionalism will prevent any 'off the cuff remarks' being misinterpreted by staff members. As a leader, the manager/supervisor should set a supportive and caring tone for employees to discuss the stress they are facing and to help find suitable solutions to ease the pressure the employee is under.

As stress can affect individuals and groups differently, it is recommended that managers/supervisors take a proactive approach to managing stress in the workplace. Proactive interventions include implementing Wellbeing Champions (you can do this by emailing [employee.wellbeing@nhs.wales.uk](mailto:employee.wellbeing@nhs.wales.uk)) in the team, having regular wellbeing check ins with employees and creating a safe environment for the team to be open about how they are feeling without the fear of judgement.

Managers/supervisors should be aware of the stress risk assessment template. Guidance on completing a risk assessment is available from the Health & Safe

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Executive website (see Appendix 2) and the Employee Wellbeing Service who offer regular workshops on stress risk assessments (Appendix 2 for booking site); the internal Health & Safety Team produce regular dashboards and provide Health & Safety training ([HealthandSafety.Training.cav@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:HealthandSafety.Training.cav@wales.nhs.uk)).

## 2 What are common causes of stress?

Factors that influence stress and the stress response can be related to an individual's:

- Background and culture
- Skills and experience
- Personality, individual factors and resilience
- Personal circumstances
- Health status
- Gender, age, race or disability
- Other demands both in and outside work

## 3 What are the signs of stress?

We all experience stress differently in different situations. Sometimes we might be able to tell right away when we're feeling under stress, but other times we might keep going without recognising the signs. Stress can affect us both emotionally and physically, and it can affect the way we behave.

Everyone has a responsibility to learn to recognise and act on the signs of stress in ourselves and others. Some of the items in this list may not be signs of stress if the individual always behaves this way. It is important to look for changes in the way people behave that could be linked with excessive pressures.

Individuals suffering from some of the following symptoms may be feeling the effects of stress:

Psychological Signs	Emotional Signs	Physical Signs	Behavioural Signs
Inability to concentrate or make simple decisions	Tearful	Aches/pains & muscle tension/grinding teeth	Not making time for relaxation or pleasurable activities
Memory lapses	Irritable	Frequent colds/infections	Increased reliance on alcohol, smoking, caffeine, recreational or illegal drugs
Becoming rather vague	Mood swings	Allergies/rashes/skin Irritations	Becoming a workaholic
Easily distracted	Extra sensitive to criticism	Constipation/diarrhoea/ IBS	
	Defensive	Weight loss or gain	

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Less intuitive & creative	Feeling out of control	Indigestion/heartburn/ulcers	Poor time management and /or poor standards of work
Undue worrying	Lack of motivation	Hyperventilating/lump in the throat/pins & needles	Absenteeism
Negative thinking	Angry	Dizziness/palpitations	Self-neglect / change in Appearance
Depression & anxiety	Frustrated	Panic attacks/nausea	Social withdrawal
Prone to accidents	Lack of confidence	Physical tiredness	Relationship problems
Insomnia or waking tired	Lack of self-esteem	Menstrual changes/loss of libido/sexual problems	Recklessness
		Heart problems/high blood pressure	Aggressive / anger outbursts
			Nervousness
			Uncharacteristically lying

*Please note the above is not associated solely to stress and could be indicative of other conditions. If concerned the individual should be encouraged to seek advice from their GP*

#### **4 Signs of stress in a team or group**

Managers should look out for signs of stress not just in individual employees but also in teams. If one member of a team has reported stress symptoms the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) recommend surveying other members of the team. Below is a list of signs that could indicate stress in a team/group:

- Disputes and disaffection within the group
- Increased staff turnover
- Increased complaints and grievances
- Increased sickness absence
- Increased reports of stress
- Poor performance
- Customer dissatisfaction or complaints
- Low morale
- Decreased team working
- Clinical incidents
- Staff conflict
- Refusal to engage in change

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The HSE have created a free survey to assist in reviewing stress levels within a team. The survey can be administered for up to 50 responses, (paid versions for more responses are available). The survey can be conducted electronically or on paper; the electronic version will create a stress survey report comparing the results to the top and bottom quartiles of public service organisations. The link for the tool is available in Appendix 2

## 5 How to support your staff member(s)

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards identify six main areas that can lead to work related stress if not managed properly. These are demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. Appendix 1 contains guidance on having a conversation with a staff member about their stress, Appendix 2 contains useful resources, Appendix 3 contains example practical interventions that could be applied to relieve stress in the workplace and Appendix 4 contains individual tips for personal application of dealing with stress.

### REACT Mental Health Training Course

Although this course is designed around having conversations about mental health, it can also be useful to use a similar approach in language and conversation when approaching an employee about stress.

REACTMH can be used to have a difficult conversation with a colleague who may not appreciate they are struggling or know they are but might not want to or be able seek help. This approach is especially useful for colleagues who are dealing with repeated exposure to potentially traumatic events (PTEs). This course will provide a useful set of skills including:

1. How to have a guided conversation (chat) with a colleague
2. Be better placed to identify whether there is an urgent need for support and whether there is a risk to a colleague or others continuing without any support
3. Factors to discuss during the conversation, having a measure of the impact and effect on a colleague
4. What to look out for in self and colleagues during these extremely testing times

Please contact the Education, Culture and Organisational Development Team to book onto a REACTMH course.

## 6 Stress and mental health

Stress is not a mental condition, though it is important to recognise that the two can be closely interlinked. If someone is experiencing high levels of stress it can trigger mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression, likewise someone who has a mental health condition may find their symptoms exasperated by stress.

If you are concerned about a member of staff, please refer to the mental health guidelines.



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## **Appendix 1. Initial Discussion Tool**

As with all sensitive discussions ensure the environment is private, comfortable and steps made to avoid unnecessary interruptions. Managers/supervisors may wish to visit the Employee Wellbeing website for stress information/resources before the discussion. Small gestures such as making the staff member a hot drink can be a useful tool for psychological purposes. The tone, language and nonverbal cues used in opening the stress discussion should be supportive to the staff member. Some examples are

“Let’s talk about how you are”

“Stress can be problem for all us at time to time, let’s talk about what’s going on”

“I’m getting the idea you might be under quite a lot of stress at the moment”

The manager/supervisor should be prepared to hear statements they may disagree with; generally staff members should be given adequate time to voice their concerns without interruption. Individual points can then be addressed after the staff member has discussed their concerns. Some staff members may find it difficult to specify individual tasks/roles that are causing them stress. The manager/supervisor may find it useful to offer the ‘Stress Risk Assessment’ (Appendix 2) to clarify thinking. Staff members might benefit from journaling their daily routine and highlighting the stress pinch points.

The UHB stress risk assessment (Appendix 2) can be used to formulate an action plan, this should be reviewed at 4 – 6 weeks with the staff member. Managers/supervisors should monitor the prevalence of stress across the workforce and report it to their line manager; when necessary the risk register should be updated.

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## **Appendix 2. Resources & Further Support**

1. [Stress Risk Assessment](#)
2. [ESR 000 NHS Wales-Well-being Conversation Guide:](#)
3. [EHWS: Staff Wellbeing for Managers and Staff:](#)
4. [NHS Guidance on Stress:](#)
5. [NHS Mental Health](#)
6. [Mind – Wellness Action Plan Guide for Line Managers](#)
7. [Mind – Wellness Action Plan for Employees](#)
8. [NHS Employers – Wellbeing Conversation Guidance](#)
9. [5 ways to wellbeing](#)
10. [Every Mind Matters, NHS](#)
11. [HSE Stress Survey](#)
12. [Employee Wellbeing Service - bookings \(Eventbrite\)](#)
13. [HSE toolkit on talking about stress](#)

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### Appendix 3. Example optional adjustments and interventions to support your staff member(s)

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Staff Members</b>	<b>Manager</b>
Wellbeing champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask your manager or colleagues if there is a wellbeing champion in the department. Some departments have wellbeing boards providing wellbeing champion details.</li> <li>• If the staff member feels comfortable speaking to the wellbeing champion they may provide useful signposting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement wellbeing champions within the team / department</li> <li>• Ask for expressions of interest from staff to volunteer for position</li> <li>• Support the nominated staff member(s) to attend associated training</li> <li>• Supported to nominated staff member(s) to allocate time to sharing resources, checking in with staff and updating recent information</li> </ul>
Wellbeing check ins and check outs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in team wellbeing checks when on shift</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce opportunity for staff to share their current concerns / pressures (e.g. alongside morning briefing, acknowledge your door is open between 08:30-09:30 if anyone wants to discuss anything)</li> <li>• Keep track of recurring issues as there could be a trend across the team</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to the employee wellbeing for advice and guidance</li> </ul>
Stress diary record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff member to record a stress diary of triggers and signs to monitor key influences and factors causing stress at work / home</li> <li>• Acknowledge key contributing factors to stress and suggest methods which would help improve the situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check in with staff member to discuss diary (e.g. two weeks in)</li> <li>• Help identify key trigger points associated with home / work</li> <li>• Work with the staff member to address any work-related factors that could be causing stress and assist with finding solutions</li> <li>• Set follow up check in date</li> </ul>
Peer support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We would like staff members to be open about mental health conditions with supportive colleagues. However, some staff members may find alternative support systems beneficial.</li> <li>• Engage in peer support system with colleagues to share advice on coping mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate peer support sessions either informally or formally (e.g. buddy up in pairs, group discussion, notice board) for tips on dealing with stress</li> <li>• Encourage open dialogue in the team on coping mechanisms and helping each other out</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practically apply new coping mechanisms and monitor stress levels (e.g. via diary)</li> </ul>	
Protect and promote wellbeing time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify wellbeing needs and aim to protect time for it (e.g. taking a lunch break; getting fresh air; having lunch with a colleague)</li> <li>• Setting personal and professional boundaries to protect yourself (e.g. communicating your needs; clarifying you are taking your 10-minute break away from computer/ward wherever possible to maintain safety levels)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting wellbeing needs as a positive act</li> <li>• Role modelling wellbeing behaviours to encourage staff to participate</li> <li>• Create open culture about variety of wellbeing needs, people respond differently to different needs (e.g. a walk v time reading v chatting)</li> </ul>
Work distribution and allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify existing workload capacity and any pressure points</li> <li>• Consider realistic and practical solutions that would help alleviate any pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with staff member to identify key pressure points causing stress in the workplace</li> <li>• Work with the staff member to implement any realistic and practical solutions to relieve pressure point</li> </ul>

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Working Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify any key factors in the workplace impacting on stress levels (e.g. facilities, working hours, shift patterns, team dynamics)</li> <li>• Consider reasonable adjustments that would help alleviate any pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with staff member to identify key factors causing stress in the workplace</li> <li>• Work with the staff member to implement any reasonable adjustments to relieve pressure points (e.g. flexibility in hours, allocating certain days to minimise stress, adjustment team processes)</li> </ul>
Scheduled, regular breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying point during the day where stress appears to be higher and recognising the need for a break</li> <li>• Communicating with manager and colleagues on needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheduling and protecting breaks for staff on fair system</li> <li>• Accommodating wherever possible staff preferred break times (e.g. rota afternoon breaks to reduce fatigue)</li> </ul>
Wellbeing dialogue normalised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate to manager and colleagues on wellbeing needs</li> <li>• Share coping mechanisms with colleagues to encourage open dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage wellbeing conversations amongst team</li> <li>• Encourage proactive interventions and support systems within team (e.g. wellbeing champion training)</li> </ul>

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Protect and utilise annual leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule annual leave throughout the year to reduce work overload</li> <li>• Request annual leave early to increase chances of approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage staff to schedule and protect annual leave allocation</li> <li>• Role model good practice (e.g. delegate responsibilities when on annual leave to have break away from work duties)</li> </ul>
Occupational Health referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees can self-refer themselves to Occupational Health for confidential advice</li> <li>• If employees require reasonable adjustments to their workplace, referrals must come from their line manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managers can refer employees to Occupational Health for advice and guidance on reasonable adjustments to support them in the workplace</li> <li>• Managers can also consult with Occupational Health for confidential advice</li> </ul>
Mandatory Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate time to complete training courses if time away from day job allows to take break from department pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where possible, support staff member to complete mandatory training or CPD as part of hours to take a break from clinical or office pressures</li> </ul>

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#### **Appendix 4. General guidance for individuals managing stress**

- Try talking about your feelings to a friend, family member or health professional. You could also contact [Samaritans](#), [call: 116 123](tel:116123) or email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) if you need someone to talk to
- Find out more about [10 stress busters](#) – including [getting started with exercise](#) and setting aside time for yourself
- Use easy [time-management techniques](#) to help you take control
- Use [calming breathing exercises](#)
- Plan ahead for stressful days or events – planning long journeys or making a list of things to remember can really help
- Consider peer support, where people use their experiences to help each other. [Find out more about peer support](#) on the Mind website
- Listen to [free mental wellbeing audio guides](#)
- Do not try to do everything at once – set small targets you can easily achieve
- Do not focus on the things you cannot change – focus your time and energy into helping yourself feel better
- Try not to tell yourself that you're alone – most people feel stressed at some point in their life and support is available
- Try not to use alcohol, cigarettes, gambling or drugs to relieve stress – these can all contribute to poor mental health
- Contact the Employee Wellbeing Service if you require any support: [employee.wellbeing@nhs.wales.uk](mailto:employee.wellbeing@nhs.wales.uk)
- External support can be found on [Canopi](#) (previously HHP)