



# **Stress Management Policy**

## **September 2021**

To be reviewed  
September 2022

## **Introduction**

The James Montgomery Academy Trust and \_\_\_\_\_ School recognise our Health and Safety responsibilities and will take steps to identify, prevent and address the causes of stress related issues. We aim to promote a culture of care and mutual support to minimise stress and to ensure all employees are able to do their job to their best ability. This in turn will help us provide high quality teaching and learning for our students.

In dealing with the issues of stress in school the Trust will, to the best of our ability, ensure that the following systems are in place, understood and acted upon. The schools Local Governing Body (LGB) shares with JMAT the overall responsibility for implementing this policy.

This policy sets out our approach to managing stress in the workplace.

This policy applies to all staff who work for the Trust. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

## **The Role of the School**

- Ensure that the Stress Policy is brought to the attention of all staff who work in the school.
- Complete Stress Risk Assessment
  - Identify potential causes of stress within the workplace
  - Identify action necessary to reduce stress as far as is reasonably practical
  - Share the findings with staff and the Governing Body.
  - Monitor and audit the arrangements to continuously improve the quality of the working environment and minimise stress conditions wherever possible
- Provide Information and Training
  - Raise awareness of stress and help individuals recognise it in themselves and others
  - Help individuals deal with their own stress
- Encourage staff to report their views and to discuss stress-related issues with a member of the schools Senior Management Team.
- Ensure that individuals who have or have had symptoms of stress-related illness are treated responsibly and fairly at an early stage, that confidentiality is ensured, and that Individual Risk Assessments are undertaken as necessary.
- Provide individuals with support for work related issues, family or mental health problems
- Ensure equality of treatment of staff.
- Review and monitor sickness absence levels and staff turnover
- Establish a culture in school where stress is reviewed as a serious issue rather than viewed as a personal weakness.

## **The Role of the Staff Member**

- Individuals have a duty to co-operate with the school in minimising, so far as is reasonably possible, work related stress. Individuals can make reasonable adjustments to working practices due to change beyond the school's control
- Individuals who feels they are suffering from stress should, wherever possible, inform their line manager so they have an opportunity to support with or resolve the problem

## **Stress Risk Assessment**

School Stress Risk Assessments will be undertaken following consultation with staff.

The findings of the School Stress Risk Assessment will be communicated promptly to staff and the Governing Body.

Individual Risk Assessments will be undertaken for individuals who have or have had symptoms of stress-related illness and these will be treated with appropriate confidentiality.

## **Stress**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work”. They state that stress is not an illness but a “state” and that illness, whether mental and/or physical, develops as a result of stress which is prolonged and excessive.

A certain amount of pressure is a normal part of most jobs and it can be beneficial in helping to keep an individual motivated. However, there is an important distinction between working under pressure and when pressure becomes excessive and produces stress, which can be detrimental to health. We recognise that what triggers stress and the capacity to deal with stress varies from person to person.

HSE management standards identify 6 broad categories of risk factors for work related stress.

These are:

- Demands – such as workload and exposure to physical hazards
- Control – how much say an individual has in the way they do their work
- Support – from peers and managers, training, catering for individual differences
- Relationships – issues such as bullying and harassment
- Role – an individual’s understanding of the work role and prevention of role conflicts
- Change – how change is managed and communicated

## **Personal Stress**

This may be due to a number of reasons, such as health problems, home pressures, bereavement, family illness or worry, marital or other interpersonal problems, financial issues.

Situations and worries at home can make people more vulnerable to the effects of stress. It can exacerbate work-related stress and affect a person’s ability to cope. Whilst personal stress is beyond the school’s responsibility, leaders should be aware of this as it can make individuals more vulnerable to stress at work. School will also offer assistance or provide information where possible.

## **Signs of stress**

Some common signs of stress are listed below. However, experiencing one or more of these does not necessarily give an indication of stress.

- Persistent or recurrent moods, for example anger, irritability, detachment, worry, depression, guilt and sadness, mood swings (being tearful or over sensitive).
- Physical effects e.g. aches and pains (headaches, back ache, neck ache), raised heart rate, increased sweating, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders.
- Poor and/or changed behaviours for example, increased absence levels (including arriving late at work), difficulty concentrating or remembering things, inability to switch off, loss of creativity, loss of motivation, making more errors (poor performance), double checking everything, covering up

mistakes by lying, working long hours/not taking a break, changes to sleeping or eating habits, increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs, poor attitude, behaviour and relationships with colleagues.

- Prolonged or extreme exposure to the possible symptoms of stress is associated with serious chronic diseases such as heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal problems, anxiety or depression.

Signs that an individual is experiencing stress will vary according to how the individual reacts to stress. Leaders should be aware of changes in an individual's behaviour that are more than just a "one-off" incident.

These should be acted upon promptly and discussed with the individual. This will include offering support, such as encouraging the employee to seek advice from his or her GP, who will be able to make a diagnosis.

### **Ethical Factors**

Prolonged periods of stress can have an adverse effect on health. These can be

- Physical: e.g. heart disease, back pain, headaches, multiple minor illnesses.
- Psychological: e.g. anxiety, depression. Stress can also lead to inappropriate coping strategies.

### **Legal Factors**

Schools are legally obliged to take action against work-related stress. In part this is a duty under health and safety law, however other legislation also applies.

For example:

- The Employment Rights Act 1996
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Working Time Regulations 1998
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, employers have a general duty, so far as is reasonably practicable, to protect the health of their employees at work.

Similarly under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 employers have a duty to assess risks, apply principles of prevention and provide training.

### **Business Factors**

The effects of work-related stress can be many-fold on the individual, colleagues, children and the school as a whole. It can be a major factor in reduced staff performance, engagement and motivation, increased sickness absence, presentism and staff turnover. Having a positive, satisfied, and psychologically healthy staff will produce benefits for the individual and the school.

## **Appendix 1**

### **WORK RELATED STRESS - RISK ASSESSMENT**

Work related stress is defined as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them”.

This distinguishes between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge and work related stress, which is the distressing reaction to demands or pressures that the person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time. Apart from the ethical and economic arguments that are beyond dispute, the law requires the school to assess risk from stress, to apply the principles of prevention, to ensure staff capability and to provide training.

#### **STEP 1: LOOKING FOR THE HAZARD - THE MAIN TYPES OF HAZARDS**

1. Culture - of the school and how it approaches work related stress
2. Demands - such as workload and exposure to physical hazards
3. Control - how much say the person has in the way they do their work
4. Relationships - covering issues such as bullying and harassment
5. Change - how School change is managed and communicated in the organisation
6. Role - whether the individual understands their role in the organisation; and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles
7. Support - training and issues unique to the individual

#### **STEP 2: DECIDE WHO MIGHT BE HARMED AND HOW**

Work related stress could affect any member of staff for any of the seven risk factors identified in Step 1. For example, at certain busy times of the year, those returning to work after a stress related illness, or those who have a domestic crisis such as bereavement.

#### **STEP 3: EVALUTE THE RISKS AND DECIDE IF ENOUGH IS BEING DONE**

Consider how likely it is that each hazard mentioned in Step 1 could cause harm in your School.

In each case consider:

1. What action is already being taken?
2. Is it sufficient?
3. If not, what more must be done

Risks should be combated at organisational level at source before considering training needs, in terms of pressure management, or counselling. Action to protect everyone should be taken rather than for just a few.

#### **STEP 4: RECORD YOUR FINDINGS USING THE JMAT RA MANAGEMENT TOOL**

The main findings of the risk assessment must be recorded in writing and its' contents shared with staff and Governors. The document should be used to monitor progress.

#### **STEP 5: REVIEW YOUR ASSESSMENT AND REVISE WHERE NECESSARY**

Assessments must be reviewed regularly or whenever significant changes occur in the School, or in the way it handles its business. This should be in consultation with staff.

## Appendix 2

### GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH STRESSFUL SITUATIONS IN SCHOOLS

There are many different times in the school year that can provide additional pressure to employees. These may include:

- Ofsted Inspections
- report writing
- parent consultation/open evenings
- meeting with/calling parents
- accountability (targets)
- finance (particular issue for the headteacher)
- premises matters (particular issue for the headteacher and facilities team)
- recruitment/ staffing issues

### POSSIBLE STRATEGIES FOR STAFF

- attend all relevant induction/training/ Inset sessions that are provided so that you are aware of all school processes
- make yourself fully aware of the procedure to follow for each circumstance
- know who to call on for support if they need it
- explain that you are struggling before it becomes too difficult to cope with, and seek help and advice

Other ways that can help you at work and therefore deal with stress include:

- good diet (e.g. eat breakfast and lunch)
- drink plenty of water throughout the day
- learn to manage your time effectively
- exercise (including yoga and relaxation)
- take time out (e.g. don't work all weekend and evenings)

### POSSIBLE STRATEGIES FOR LEADERS TO SUPPORT STAFF

Staff react more positively when they understand the rationale behind decisions and fully understand what is expected of them. Leaders who takes time to explain are likely to have better motivated staff than ones who does not.

Support from leaders can help minimise work related stress. Such support would typically include management issues such as planning, supervision, training and development and a consideration of the persons work / life balance.

- **Planning** - The first stage in the planning process should be to ensure, wherever possible, there are sufficient resources in terms of money, people and time to do the work.
- **Communication** - Talk to staff at an early stage to make sure they are involved in the planning and decision making processes. Before setting tasks, discuss the work with staff and encourage them to be realistic about how long things take.
- **Roles and Responsibilities** - Allocate clear roles and responsibilities to team members when it has been decided what the key objectives are going to be for the work required.

- **Training** - If training needs have been identified, make sure that the person receives the training and is comfortable applying the skills before delegating the task.
- **Supervision** - Ensure that adequate supervision is in place to help individuals manage workloads and targets. Actively discourage staff from unhealthy work habits such as working too many hours. Talk to your staff to find out why they are working late. Reassure them that any problems can be overcome through discussion and provide advice where necessary and help the team prioritise their work. Remember that staff need to receive acknowledgement for a job well done.
- **Work-life Balance** – Leaders should recognise that staff have to balance their work and home life commitments. Inflexible working arrangements can sometimes contribute to an individual's stress levels and leaders should be sensitive to the individual's home circumstances.
- **School Organisation** - If stress is affecting several staff you will need to review whether organisational factors may be a cause, e.g. excessive cover demands, inappropriate time-tabling, unrealistic targets, inadequate breaks, inadequate facilities, amount/quality of non-teaching support, total volume of work and hours.