



Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association

**ADVICE FOR SENIOR
MANAGERS ON
MANAGING
STRESS IN THE
WORKPLACE**



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This short leaflet has been prepared by the Senior Managers Advisory Panel. The aim is to provide Head Teacher and Depute Head Teacher members with a concise summary of the main aspects of recognising and preventing stress in themselves and their staff.



What is Stress?

While work can provide us with structure, purpose, satisfaction and self-esteem, it can also put us under pressure. Pressure is integral to work and is a factor in keeping us motivated from day to day. A significant portion of our lives is spent in schools which, by their very nature, are vibrant and yet challenging places, with daily pressure-filled situations. A certain amount of pressure enables us to become more productive. Excessive and prolonged pressure can, however, have a negative effect, producing a range of physical and emotional problems which can be debilitating.

Sometimes stress is not specifically related to work but to personal circumstances such as:

- relationship difficulties or a divorce
- serious illness in the family
- caring for dependants such as children or elderly relatives
- bereavement
- moving house
- debt problems

Such influences can have a significant impact on people's ability to fulfil their work obligations nevertheless.

Stress can be triggered suddenly or can be the result of a combination of factors which accumulate over a longer period of time. Some people are affected more than others and what is stressful to one person might not be for another. Some thrive in high pressure environments; others prefer structure and routine.

As Senior Managers, it is essential that we:

- recognise stress in ourselves and in colleagues
create a school ethos, structures and processes which help prevent stress and
- support colleagues at times when they are vulnerable.
- recognise the impact of stress triggered by external or personal factors



How to Recognise Stress

Signs that you might be experiencing stress *yourself* could include:

- poor judgement and indecisiveness
- difficulty in concentrating
- a lack of assertiveness
- irritability, aggressiveness, depression or loss of sense of humour
- physical symptoms such as breathlessness, headaches, chest pains, nausea, sleeplessness, high blood pressure and constant tiredness

Stress can be magnified if you are isolated. If you have no one to confide in, you can easily get things out of proportion.

Factors which may lead to work-related stress in *yourself and others* include:

- Excessive time pressures
- Too much or too little responsibility/ feelings of lack of control
- Confusion over role and responsibilities
- Lack of job variety and interest
- Inadequate training and/or lack of opportunity to learn new skills
- Poor work/life balance
- Difficult relationships at work
- Uncertainty over job prospects or a change of role



These may lead to recognisable *physical symptoms* such as:

- Headaches and muscular tension
- Backache and neck ache
- Increased susceptibility to colds and other infections
- Excessive tiredness and difficulty sleeping
- Raised heart rate
- Increased sweating
- Blurred vision
- Skin rashes
- Tinnitus

How to Manage Stress and Alleviate its Negative Effects

A) In yourself

At times, being a Senior Manager of a school might make you feel as if you are in the midst of a maelstrom, with no control over the elements. For times like these, the following strategies may prove beneficial:

- Share the load by raising concerns with a colleague whom you trust or those who manage you
- Consider discussing concerns with your Line Manager
- Develop a management team with a relationship based on trust and sharing
- Utilise trusted outsiders for an objective viewpoint
- Set realistic goals and expectations for yourself and for the school
- If the staff expect you to be infallible, re-educate them and yourself
- Learn to delegate, and to say 'no'
- Look for reasons to praise yourself and the school
- Use technology to become more organised and to manage your time
- Analyse problems in order to find solutions instead of worrying about them
- Maintain outside interests; take exercise; relax; give yourself time to reflect.



B) In others

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations 1999 and Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Local Authorities, as employers, have a duty to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities as well as to take measures to control the risk. Schools' Senior Managers have an important role to play, and have a right to be fully supported by their employing Authority when doing so.

A School ethos which is fair, open, honest, helpful, supportive, industrious and welcoming provides an atmosphere which is more conducive to good health. Setting realistic targets and deadlines, encouraging communication and allowing for flexibility can help ease some pressure in the workplace. A combination of organisational responsiveness and stress management awareness is a useful approach to addressing stress in the workplace. An effective approach is to put much of the solution in the hands of those who are closest to the issue – staff themselves.

Staff can be enabled to take more responsibility for their own futures. Equally, they can be encouraged towards greater self-belief in the workplace, with enhanced self-assessment and personal planning ability, greater willingness to recognise and use assertiveness, and greater skills in communication and networking.

An empowered individual is likely to be much less predisposed towards the negative effects of stress and more capable of dealing with it. While the role of the employer or manager must not be under-played, self development and awareness play an essential part in the fight against stress related ill health.

Senior Managers should consider including in their CPD programme courses in self-assertiveness, self-awareness and self belief. They could also consider using independent counselling services.





Health Scotland provides information and resources, including a risk assessment questionnaire, online through its Work Positive scheme (www.healthscotland.org.uk/workpositive). The risk assessment package 'Helps to identify sources of pressure in the organisation. This allows priority issues to be identified and action taken accordingly.'

Some people may need to seek further help from their GP as they may be suffering from anxiety or depression which needs medical treatment. Further treatment might necessitate the need for anti-depressant medication or some form of counselling and their GP will be able to advise on this.

Assistance may also be available from Occupational Health Support through the Local Authority.

Stress is an inevitable but complex companion to our working lives. Without challenges and pressures, work would lack sparkle, but we all have the capacity to be overwhelmed by work-related stress, and to experience its exhausting effects. The aim should be to manage stress by becoming aware of our individual ways of responding to it, through making effective changes to our working and home lifestyles, and utilising support from others.

For further information and advice about stress management contact Fiona Dalziel at info@ssta.org.uk

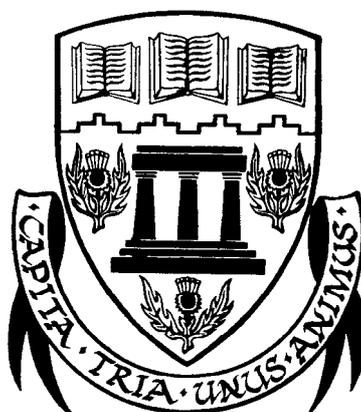
NOTES

Please use this page to record stress issues you wish to discuss with the SSTA or your Line Manager

Seeking Further Help for Work Related Stress

The SSTA offers a range of services including:

- Support and advice from our professional staff
- Liaison with other Senior Managers to offer support
- Services of a trained Counsellor
- Mediation
- Advice on the management of workplace stress
- Courses in self-empowerment



Contact Us

If you have any queries then please do not hesitate to contact us at:

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*OR
By e-mail at
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*Or for urgent issues by telephone on
0131 313 7300*