Work-related stress and how to manage it

1. Overview

Employers have a legal duty to protect workers from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it.

What is stress?

HSE defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Workers feel stress when they can't cope with pressures and other issues. Employers should match demands to workers' skills and knowledge. For example, workers can get stressed if they feel they don't have the skills or time to meet tight deadlines. Providing planning, training and support can reduce pressure and bring stress levels down.

Stress affects people differently – what stresses one person may not affect another. Factors like skills and experience, age or disability may all affect whether an worker can cope.

There are six main areas of work design which can effect stress levels. You should manage these properly. They are:

- demands
- control
- support
- relationships
- role
- change

Employers should assess the risks in these areas to manage stress in the workplace.

Signs of stress

Stress is not an illness but it can make you ill. Recognising the signs of stress will help employers to take steps to stop, lower and manage stress in their workplace.

How to help

The earlier a problem is tackled the less impact it will have. If you think that a worker is having problems, encourage them to talk to someone, whether it's their line manager, trade union representative, GP or their occupational health team.

Our Talking Toolkits can help line managers have simple, practical conversations with workers which can help prevent stress.

To protect workers from stress at work, employers should assess risks to their health. These example stress risk assessments may help.

You may need to develop individual action plans for workers suffering from stress. HSE's Management Standards may also help you to identify and manage the six causes of stress at work.