

LEICESTERSHIRE

FIRE and RESCUE SERVICE

SERVICE PROCEDURE

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**HEALTH AND
SAFETY**

**MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY**

LEICESTERSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MENTAL HEALTH POLICY

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Mental health problems appear to be one of the biggest health issues that any workplace is facing, especially that of stress. (Labour Force Survey 1995) Therefore this policy has been produced to work towards reducing the impact on our employees of mental health issues in workplace and applies to everyone.
- 2 We recognise that not all stressors are work related and wherever possible will offer support for those individuals that are dealing with problems outside of the workplace, to support them in continuing at work/returning to work.

THE AIMS OF OUR POLICY IS

- Build on and develop strategies that work towards a healthy organisation.
- Minimise and wherever possible eliminate excessive workplace pressures through appropriate risk assessment
- Provide appropriate training in the workplace for both managers and employees.
- Ensure that support mechanisms are in place in supporting an individual in remaining at work/or returning to work following a period of absence.
- To improve our communication processes.
- To review and audit this policy to ensure that the organisation is meeting their goals.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO ACHIEVE THIS?

- 3 Everyone is different so everyone deals with pressure in a different way and it would be good to think that we can eliminate all pressures, but there is never a pressure free environment and some pressures whether work or non work-related can be challenging and rewarding. However an

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individual's ability to manage pressure is not limitless and when there is an imbalance between demands and an individual's ability to cope then the symptoms of stress may manifest.

- 4 ¹Symptoms of stress may also occur when an individual has little demands placed upon them, as this can lead to feelings of being under-valued, under stimulated and bored.

THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE WILL:

- Support an individual who has a mental health problem or feels they are stressed through work.
- Ensure that each individual is dealt with sensitively, consistently and in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Where appropriate utilise outside agencies to assist with issues arising from concerns at work.
- Review existing policies and procedures to ensure that current policies are supportive of mental health issues.

THE EMPLOYEE WILL BE EXPECTED TO:

- Raise issues of concern with their line manager, occupational health, Human Resources, Trade Union representatives
 - Cooperate fully and accept support and the offer of counselling when recommended.
- 5 It is recognised that employees may have counsellors outside of the service
- 6 **To achieve our aim of avoiding and reducing mental ill health in the workplace the following needs to be undertaken:**

WORKPLACE MANAGEMENT AND CULTURE

- 7 Create an environment that has clear objectives and that objectives set are clearly linked to the organisation's objectives. Where communication channels are open and employees more involved and aware, especially important in times of change.
- Give employees the opportunity to contribute and have some influence over their work,

¹ NB Stress is a term used for a collection of symptoms. However, it is important to remember that the ailments associated with stress can also have other causes.

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- Involvement in the risk assessment process.
- Planning the workload to give variety to the job
- Appropriate training/equipment for the role.
- Where possible flexible in working hours.
- Well-defined jobs roles, workloads that stretch the individual and are reasonable in what is expected.
- Employees should be encouraged to take their holidays and their appropriate work breaks. If they work excessive hours due to a busy period they should be encouraged to take the lieu hours worked.
- Regular staff appraisals/Personal development reviews and informal chats regarding their work.

TRAINING

- 8 Provide training for both managers and employees on and around the issue of mental health and stress. Bringing it into the open and raising awareness that stress/mental health problems are not a sign of failure, weakness or an inability to cope. Encouraging individuals to be open and frank.
- 9 Management training will cover
 - Stress management,
 - Stress awareness and
 - Stress Risk Assessment
 - Understanding surrounding Mental Health issues and where support can be obtained from i.e. Human Resources/Occupational Health
 - Ensure managers are aware of the policies in place to support them and the employees.
 - Guidance on how to support an individual who has is recovering from mental ill health
- 10 Employee training will cover
 - Stress management and awareness.
 - Making them aware of the policies in place to support them in the workplace. If appropriate provide copies to those who wish to have them.
 - Providing them with the information on what is available for them in the workplace. i.e. ICAS, OH, HR

GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS ON HOW TO MANAGE AN EMPLOYEE WHO MAY BE EXPERIENCING A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM, INCLUDING STRESS

- 11 If you are aware of what the warning signs are regarding mental health/stress related problem then you may be able to take action at an earlier stage, which may help to stop the problem escalating.

Changes in usual behaviour
Performance declining
Sickness absence increasing
Tiredness/irritability/rapid changes in mood
Poor timekeeping
Tearfulness/headaches
Difficulties in relationships at work
Loss of sense of humour
Increased use of alcohol/smoking/drugs
Over performance-driving themselves to excess

- 12 If these signs are there then don't be afraid to use the normal management procedures to discuss these with the employee. For example this can be undertaken via appraisals, informal chats, work planning.

- 13 Try to use open questions, as this will give the employee the opportunity to answer the question in his or her way. An example is "How are you doing at the moment" "Is there anything we could help with"

- 14 If an employee feels they are experiencing the symptoms above they should be able to approach their immediate manager to discuss their concerns. Therefore create a working environment where the employee feels it is safe to talk without discrimination.

- Provide a private meeting area where there will be no disruptions.
- Be open you may not be able to solve all the problems and make them aware that if you have concerns about themselves or others that you will seek advice. I.e. HR/OH/Senior staff
- Agree what adjustments can be made and how the problems will be monitored
- Act promptly to issues of bullying/discrimination/gossip
- Individuals may wish to have someone with them offer this opportunity.
- If an individual feels they couldn't discuss the issues with you offer them an alternative. For example Occupational Health, HR, another manager

DISTRESSED EMPLOYEES

- 15 Again use open questions to find out what is happening and if the problem is with the individual or does it involve the team/organisation. Are there problems outside of work and are they aware of the support that is available to them through the workplace (OH/ICAS/HR) and or outside organisations.
- 16 If you can put actions in place then do so and find out what the employee thinks would be appropriate. If the employee is willing to declare ask if medication or ongoing health problems are impacting on the current situation.
- 17 Reassure regarding confidentiality and agree what if anything may need to be said to colleagues. Agree the next stage any actions and review meeting.

MANAGING AN EMPLOYEE WHO IS TEARFUL OR UPSET

- 18 If an employee becomes tearful or upset it doesn't mean that you are doing a poor job. It is important that you stay with them and give them a chance to recover with dignity. Reassure them that it is OK to be upset and that you are listening. Establish some kind of dialogue, and reassure them that the discussions can be help at a pace that suits them. State that there job is safe and that you what to offer what support you can to assist.
- 19 During this time the manager should stay calm and not feel under pressure to do something straight away. The manager may also need time to consider the options and with the individual distinguish what is urgent and important.
- 20 At this stage you may wish to use the support mechanisms in place within the organisation.
- 21 If the problems persist you should encourage the individual to seek medical support if this is not in place.

PATTERNS OF SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 22 If an employee is having short bursts of sickness absence for a variety of reasons, there may be an underlying problem.

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- 23 Return to work interviews provide a good opportunity to discuss the employee's absence and to offer support, remember these are undertaken for all absences not just those that you feel may be related to stress/mental health problems. **Refer also to Brigade Procedures No. 9, Part 1, Absence Management Procedure – Return to work interview, page 4 and Absence Management Procedure Guidelines.**

SICK CERTIFICATES CITING STRESS

- 24 When you receive a sick certificate citing stress talk to the individual to ascertain what is happening and what support you can offer.

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYEE WHO IS OFF SICK

- 25 The absence management procedure advises on sickness absence management and when to refer to Occupational Health these should be adhered to. **Refer also to Brigade Procedures No. 9, Part 1, Absence Management Procedure and Absence Management Procedure Guidelines.**
- 26 It is important that you keep in touch. Reassure the employee and give them the opportunity to talk. Is there any support you could offer?

AVOID

- Putting pressure on them to divulge personal/medical information
- Putting pressure on them to name a return to work date as this may only add to their pressure and they won't know how long it will take.

RETURNING TO WORK

- 27 Once the employee is at a stage where they are recovering invite them in for tea, meet their colleagues without any pressure of wanting them to return to work. Keep them informed of any changes.
- 28 When planning the return to work consider:
- What changes are you able to accommodate realistically that the employee feels has contributed to their absence.
 - Agree how their progress will be monitored
 - Set achievable goals and be realistic about their workload
 - Discuss honestly the things you can and cannot change
 - Would it be useful to have someone to work alongside for a period?

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- Have frequent meetings, some informal to discuss how the employee is doing and to address any problems that may arise
- Welcome the employee back.
- Be understanding as treatment medication may be ongoing

- Avoid making the person feel like they are a special case as it can cause problems with the individual and peers.

WHAT IF THE RETURN TO WORK IS UNSUCCESSFUL?

29 Try to:

- Review the progress made, what adjustments are in place and discuss with the employee. Talk to the individual on the best way forward. Should you consider transfer, ill- health retirement, or resignation? Further advice will need to be sought from Occupational health and Human Resources on these issues.

- If it is a performance issue or conduct issue rather than relating to health or disability, use normal management procedures.

REFERENCES

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Department of Health & Mind Out, (2002) Working Minds, Making Mental Health Your Business Toolkit

The Mental Health Foundation (2002) A Practical Guide to Managing and Supporting Mental health in the Workplace