

Managing Stress Management in the Workplace

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Policy

1. Introduction

BrisDoc has a duty to ensure that all workplace risks are managed appropriately, including the management of work-related stress. The policy has been developed in line with guidance from the Health and Safety Executive, and provides guidance for managers on identifying and managing the cause and effect of workplace stressors.

BrisDoc recognises that stress and stress-related symptoms can prevent people from performing to the best of their ability and can affect their general health and wellbeing. Managing stress will be integral to BrisDoc's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

BrisDoc is committed to developing a working environment that protects the health, safety and welfare of all our staff. BrisDoc is obliged to meet its employer's duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to:

- ensure that staff are not unduly harmed by their work activities,
- to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in the workplace, including those of a psychological nature, and
- introduce control measures to eliminate or reduce that risk.

To ensure BrisDoc meets its obligations and creates as stress free an environment as possible, any breaches to this policy will be taken seriously and, if appropriate, formal action may be taken in line with the appropriate policy

BrisDoc recognises the challenges (both organisational and personal) associated with identifying stress and discussing it openly, and aims to support employees and managers in meeting these challenges. Work-induced stress is now widely recognised as a significant problem in the health service as well as in all other sectors of the economy.

BrisDoc will take all reasonable steps to reduce health and safety risks from stress in the workplace to as low a level as reasonably practicable.

2. Purpose

The primary purpose of this policy is to set out procedures and practices that have been designed to help managers and their staff identify and deal with stress related problems as part of a joint responsibility for their health, safety and well-being.

3. Definitions

Definition of Stress

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as “the natural reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

Stress, for the purposes of this policy, is described as the natural reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them, whether it be caused by work and/or personal circumstances.

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Work-related stress might also be defined as a pattern of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological reactions to adverse and noxious aspects of work content, work organisation, and work environment. It is characterised by high levels of arousal and distress, and often by feelings of not coping.

Stress is not in itself an illness, but, if prolonged or intense, it can induce or contribute to mental or physical ill health.

It should be noted, however, that people react to pressure and demands in different ways. As such, care must be taken to avoid making uninformed assumptions about particular individual's ability to cope with a situation.

Definition of Risk Assessment

A systematic review of all work activities and working environments to identify hazards and develop control measures that eliminate, reduce or control the risk in order to produce safer working conditions.

4. Risk Management Approach

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 require employers to adopt modern risk management techniques such as:

- identify any hazards and assess all the risks to the health and safety of employees, and record the findings of the assessment. Stress should be considered along with other work hazards.
- review and modify risk assessments at regular intervals and also when there are developments or changes in the work or if 'adverse events' have taken place
- provide health surveillance where the risk assessment shows that adverse health conditions have occurred, or are likely to occur, under the particular conditions of work. This may aid early detection of stress
- apply the following principles or hierarchy to preventative and protective measures:
 - a) avoid the risk altogether,
 - b) combat risks at source,
 - c) wherever possible, adapt work to the individual,
 - d) implement improved working methods and technological changes, where these can make work safer,
 - e) incorporate risk prevention strategies as part of a coherent policy,
 - f) give priority to those measures that protect the whole workplace.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Workforce Support Department

- The Workforce Support department is responsible for:
 - Ensuring that the policy is implemented, regularly reviewed and updated.
 - Giving guidance to managers on the stress policy.
 - Helping monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.
 - Advising managers and individuals on training requirements.

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- Providing continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment, and encouraging referral to occupational health or workplace counsellors where appropriate.
- Supporting the design and implementation of BrisDoc's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Line Managers

Line Managers have a joint responsibility with staff to identify and assess the potential risks (using BrisDoc's risk management framework – Appendices A & B) arising from stressful situations in the workplace, and prevent stress as far as is reasonably practicable. If a member of staff shows signs of stress, or is returning from a period of sickness absence where stress was stated as the cause or a contributing factor towards the absence, the Line Manager should have a discussion with the individual and follow the procedure as defined in BrisDoc's policy for managing absences.

It is the responsibility of Line Managers to undertake the aforementioned discussions as directed, and to identify and where appropriate, report potential stress hazards that become apparent from performance development reviews, supervisory meetings, return to work discussions, and in their day-to-day dealings with staff under their responsibility.

Line Managers are responsible for:

- Understanding the legal implications of stress in the workplace and being equipped with the necessary skills to ensure that they are doing everything to comply with health and safety law.
- Encouraging and engaging in effective two-way communication with staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- Ensuring staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
- Monitoring workloads to ensure that team members are not overloaded.
- Monitoring working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking in line with the Working Time Regulations 1998 (Appendix A).
- Monitoring holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- Actively involving staff in decision making and allowing them a degree of control over elements of how and when they do their job.
- Thinking about the way jobs are designed, overall importance and the structure of the workflow.
- Considering personal abilities of the individual and their training needs.
- Ensuring that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.
- Providing employees with the opportunity to talk about any issues causing stress.
- Being vigilant and offering additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or relational.
- Considering reasonable adjustments for the individual experiencing stress where appropriate.
- Attending training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensuring that job descriptions are always accurate and up to date and inform employees in advance of organisational changes that may affect their role.
- Considering how and when occupational health and workplace counselling might be of benefit to individuals.
- Supporting the design and implementation of BrisDoc's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

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Staff

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, staff have a duty to be responsible for their own health and safety at work and that of those around them.

Staff are responsible for:

- Raising issues of concern with their Line Manager or Workforce Support Department. Stress interventions have been found to be more effective where the initiative is at an individual level to address a specific problem.
- Recognising their shared responsibility to identify stress in themselves and others at an early stage.
- Coming to terms with their own feelings so they know when they are feeling stressed.
- Developing effective behavioural skills such as assertiveness and time management which can lessen the stress they are feeling. This could be reflected in training opportunities or addressed in counselling sessions.
- Establishing a support network.
- Developing a lifestyle that protects against stress.
- Accepting opportunities for occupational health referral when recommended.
- Considering opportunities offered for professional counselling when recommended.
- Contributing to the risk assessment process by working collaboratively with their Line Manager.
- Recognising their own training needs and responsibility for wellbeing and development within the job.

6. Process

Staff

There are many things people can do to relieve the symptoms of stress. Advice produced by the Health and Safety Executive outlines some of them. A copy of this is available by downloading a copy directly from the HSE website:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mymental.htm>

If none of these measures (listed on the above website link) are effective or appropriate to the staff member's situation, the following steps should be taken:

- Discuss with your manager any symptoms of stress or any health issues which affect work capability. If the immediate Line Manager may be a possible source of the stress then a more senior manager should be contacted.
- If it is felt that this is not appropriate, or that the matter requires additional professional guidance, the HR Department should be contacted who may, depending upon circumstances, suggest an assessment by an Occupational Health specialist.
- The involvement of the Occupational Health specialist at an early stage can help facilitate the co-ordination of communication between BrisDoc and the individual's own GP, as well as provide advice about managing stressors.

Line Managers

The Health & Safety Executive website provides helpful information for line managers on stress via. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>

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When it is brought to the attention of a manager or supervisor that a member of staff has symptoms of stress, including frequent short-term absences, which is affecting their work or could lead to their work being affected, the following steps are to be taken.

Step 1

The manager should try to work out what factor or factors are causing the stress by arranging an informal and supportive meeting with the member of staff to identify the potential causes of harm using the risk assessment process (Appendix A & B). Potential causes may relate to the following:

- Workload
- Job role design
- Bullying/ Harassment
- Lone working
- Sleep deprivation (including due to night working)
- Personal reasons

The member of staff should be given the opportunity to ask for the meeting to be at home (if the member of staff is currently off work with sickness absence at the time), in the workplace, or another appropriate venue instead.

As the purpose of this stage is to keep the discussion as informal as possible, it is not entirely necessary for either party to be accompanied unless there are exceptional circumstances or either party requests it. The manager is advised to risk assess visiting an employee at their home address and, if required take a colleague or member of the workforce support team to accompany them.

The manager should investigate the circumstances in a confidential manner, including taking account of matters such as workload, actual working practices, incidents, appropriate training, control measures identified by risk assessments, and the observations of any witnesses. The aim is to identify any workplace hazards that may be causing or lead to work-related stress and to identify possible solutions. All discussions with the individual concerned should be carried out in a relaxed and sympathetic manner.

In consultation with the affected employee appropriate steps to eliminate or control the hazard that is causing the stress will be identified, noted and mutually agreed on the risk assessment form (Appendix B).

Where appropriate, the matter may at this stage be referred to another procedure to deal with the source of the problem (e.g. Bullying & Harassment policy if this is the cause of the stress), or the Workforce Support Department contacted for advice.

The Workforce Support team are always available to provide guidance and assistance where necessary.

Step 2

After the meeting, the manager will review the notes taken from the meeting and make arrangements for further meetings if necessary.

The manager will then confidentially inform their senior management and the Workforce Support Department of the situation, the steps being taken to resolve the matter, and any agreed review dates to ensure the stress is being managed effectively.

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Step 3

There will always be action to be taken. Even if a solution cannot be provided, managers can assist in reducing the effects of stress in the workplace by providing the member of staff with their support e.g. more regular 1:1 meetings, discussions with the individual to check in on how they are coping in the workplace.

At review meetings, discuss and record the progress the member of staff has made, agree any further actions, and set a further review date, if necessary.

If both the manager and the member of staff consider the matter requires additional professional guidance, reference should be made to the Workforce Support Department who may, depending on circumstances, suggest to the staff member that they will be assessed by an Occupational Health specialist if they haven't been so already or given contact details for confidential counselling.

Step 4

Provided the situation is being managed promptly and effectively, the effects of stress should not normally affect an individual's health or career prospects. Wherever reasonably practicable, a member of staff experiencing excessive and sustained symptoms of work-related stress will have their work adapted, including the possibility to apply for an alternative role or employment within BrisDoc (subject to existing vacancies), so as to remove the risk or reduce it to an acceptable level.

In any such cases, a joint strategy will be agreed with the employee concerned and their manager, Workforce Support Department, the Occupational Health specialist and, if appropriate, a trade union representative.

Following steps 1 to 3, where a member of staff indicates again, on a self-certificate, that they consider their absence from work to be due to work-related stress, or where a GP indicates on a "fit note" that a member of staff is, or has been, affected by work-related stress, the Workforce Support department will consider automatically initiating a referral to the Occupational Health specialist and will alert the Line Manager (if appropriate).

The member of staff affected by work-related stress, or reporting a possible case of work-related stress, may be accompanied by his/her union representative (or another colleague) at any meetings held with him or her under this procedure. It is recognised that on occasions such a meeting may need to take place whilst the member of staff is absent from work or on sick leave in order to support them to be ready to return to work. Any inability to meet should not prevent other aspects of any intervention proceeding.

7. How will BrisDoc Respond

Managers play an important intermediary role between the employee and BrisDoc and early intervention is key. The sooner support is given and action taken, the better the chances are of the individual making a full and speedy recovery.

Stress management interventions can be broken down into 3 following groups:

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Primary Interventions

Aims to reduce the number and/or intensity of stressors and looks at ways of reducing workplace stressors such as conflicting jobs demands and an unclear job role. The example of primary interventions may be redesigning the job role or working conditions.

Secondary Interventions

Aims to modify the individual's response to stressors and refers to the systems that BrisDoc can introduce in order to help staff cope with a stressful job or working environment. The example of secondary interventions may be stress management training, communication or information sharing.

Tertiary Interventions

Aims to help individuals by using strategies designed to alleviate the impact that stressful work has on individual employees by offering counselling.

Counselling

Any member of staff who is, or is believed to be experiencing work-related stress will be offered free confidential counselling up to 6 weeks. Managers will notify the HR department who will make initial contact with the counselling service to inform them that BrisDoc will cover the costs. However, it will be up to the individual to contact the counselling service directly to arrange their consultation. All counselling services are strictly confidential – they will not disclose any information to BrisDoc about what the individual discusses with them, nor will BrisDoc ask the service for any details of what is shared. Staff will also be encouraged to consult their own GP.

8. Return to Work Policy

Any member of staff ready to return from any period of sickness absence as a result of work-related stress will have a return-to-work meeting, in line with policies for managing absences, during which time a risk assessment (Appendix B) will be conducted or existing assessment reviewed. The purpose of this will be to outline the measures that have or will be taken to eliminate or control the hazards that led to the stress. This may also involve discussing an initial return to work on a programme of reduced hours or days per week gradually building up to a full return, usually within 4 weeks.

Where the member of staff requests, this meeting may take place at their home or another suitable venue away from the working environment.

9. Training and Guidance

Training and guidance will be provided for managers to enable them to implement this policy, to assess their own behaviour as a possible source of stress at work, and to develop strategies that prevent the incidence of work-related stress.

BrisDoc will ensure that awareness is raised of this policy through team meetings, 1:1 meetings, newsletters and radar, and that staff are assisted in managing personal stress.

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10. Monitoring and Review

The Workforce Governance Board (WGB) will receive regular reports on any potential or actual incidences of stress (details of which are kept confidential and anonymous) and review this policy accordingly. This may also include reports on sickness levels, working time and any incidences of high staff turnover. Where appropriate, the WGB may ask for a stress audit to be undertaken in any service or department where it has a particular concern.

11. Health & Wellbeing

As part of its commitment to the health, safety and well-being of its staff, BrisDoc will, through its health and wellbeing strategy, policies and practices, help to promote good physical health and mental wellbeing with staff. Staff will be encouraged to take proper breaks away from their workstation, to participate in sporting and other relaxation activities, and to develop a healthier lifestyle. As such, BrisDoc will fully enforce its no-smoking and drug and alcohol policies. It will also ensure that staff have easy access at work to fresh drinking water.

Related Policies

- Sickness Absence Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Induction Policy
- PDR Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Managing Performance Policy
- Code of Expectations and Standards of Behaviour
- Family Friendly & Flexible Working Policy

12. Change Register

Date	Reviewed and amended by	Revision details	Issue number
December 2017	NC	New Policy	1
April 2021	HHW		2

The following changes have been made to the policy between the 2017 and 2021 versions

- Changed document format
- Removed reference to HR department and replaced with workforce support department
- Changed wording around how and when HR will refer to Occupational Health.