



Stress in the Workplace Policy

The URC Preschool have a legal duty of care to their staff to ensure that stress is treated like any other health hazard that they could incur. The primary and early years sector has seen growth in the high levels of stress that staff can experience and an increasing need to offer protection and support for this. We are committed to recognising, preventing and dealing with work related stress within the setting in order to ensure the welfare of our staff and guarantee that they are able to carry out their job to the best of their ability.

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as *“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”*. Some believe that by putting stress on their employees they are able to get the best performance out of them however it is clear that excessive amount of stress can lead to mental and physical ill health.

The Result of Stress at the URC

Stress in the workplace can have a negative impact for the manager as it could lead to an increase in staff absences, low staff morale, increased number of accidents and mistakes, poor relationships and an increase in staff turnover.

More importantly, stress can have harmful effects on our employees as they could experience fatigue, anxiety, headaches, nausea, panic attacks and a lack of motivation to work. In some cases, stress could lead to high blood pressure, diabetes, alcoholism and mental health problems.

This can have an effect on the children in the staff’s care as the anxiety could be felt by the children and cause distress, there could be a loss of continuity as staff take time off work and lack of concentration by staff could put the children in the setting at risk.

Prevention of Stress at the URC

The Education Support Partnership charity states that stress in Educational settings is a growing trend and resulting in staff leaving the profession, the educational sector is known for having high levels of stress and heavy workloads. At the URC we identify these workplace factors to be associated with high levels of stress and have enforced the following precautions to deal with stress in the workplace:

Factor	Reason for increased stress	Precaution in place to deal with stress factor
High workloads and long hours.	This wouldn't leave enough 'down-time' for the staff to have a life away from the workplace with their family and friends.	Staff are given breaks if they are working a full day, they are also given PPA time to complete necessary paperwork throughout the term.
Low levels of staffing.	This would lead to a high teacher-child ratio and too many jobs for one employee to carry out.	It is ensured that colour groups within the setting are evenly distributed between members of staff and a key person would have no more than 9 children to observe throughout a term. The URC always keep within the correct teacher to child ratio for their age group.
Lack of clear goals, objectives and targets.	This would put pressure on the employee and could lead to confusion over what they need to achieve.	Termly supervision talks ensure that staff are aware of what is expected of them and check that they are on track to achieve targets for all of the children in their care.
Unachievable deadlines.	This would overwork the employee and lead to a feeling of defeat if they are unable to complete this work in the timeframe given.	Staff are given PPA time throughout the term to complete necessary paperwork, staff are encouraged to come forward if they have concerns over any deadlines they cannot achieve for either work related or personal reasons.
"Over-management"	This would lead to the staff feeling unempowered and undervalued.	At the URC we work as a team and everyone's opinions are valued. Half termly staff meetings give employees the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have and suggest new ways to optimise the performance of the preschool.

Workplace bullying, discrimination and harassment.	This would cause the employee to worry about coming in to work in case of an assault.	The URC preschool does not tolerate bullying of any kind whether by staff, children or parents. Management look out for signs of any sort of abuse and it is encouraged that employees follow the whistle blowing policy if they need to make a complaint about another member of staff.
Poor levels of training or an induction.	An employee might not feel comfortable undertaking tasks if they have not had sufficient training.	It is mandatory at the URC that all staff complete an induction in the form of a checklist ensuring that every vital part or their job description is explained. Staff are also encouraged to attend training courses throughout their career to progress their CPD. Staff are also given the opportunity to highlight any area that they feel they need developing in their annual appraisal.
Lack of knowledge on workplace changes.	This would cause the employee to feel undervalued and unfamiliar with the workplace when carrying out their job.	A short daily staff briefing highlighting any immediate changes being made to the layout of the setting or the routine allows staff to be informed of changes made within the preschool. Any larger changes are addressed at the half termly staff meeting and are open to discussion as a team.

Additionally, employees have a duty to safeguard their own health and safety including issues related to stress at work. Employees should ensure that they:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy.
- Speak up if they are experiencing a problem.
- Attend any stress management training courses available to them.

They can further reduce the risk of stress through 'self-help' mechanisms such as:

- Avoiding unnecessary confrontation.
- Taking regular exercise.
- Eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- Talking to family or friends to share their thoughts and fears.
- Exercising good time management skills and not taking on more than they can cope with.

Signs of Stress

Even though precautions are put in place to ensure that the effect of stress is minimised, we accept that stress can be inevitable to an employee in certain situations and therefore it is our utmost responsibility to recognise symptoms of stress in employees. In the URC we look out for the following signs and changes in behaviour that could mean that an employee is experiencing stress in the workplace:

- The employee is withdrawn.
- The employee is displaying bursts of anger, irritability, pessimism, worry, guilt or sadness.
- The employee is experience physical symptoms of headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, sleep disorders, sweating or a raised heart rate.
- The standard of the employees work declines.
- The employee has an increased number of absences.
- The employee has difficulty concentrating or remembering.
- The employee covers up mistakes by lying.
- The employee increases their use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs.
- There is a change in the employee's relationship with other members of staff.

It should be acknowledged that experiencing one or more of these symptoms does not necessarily give an indication of stress, changes in an individual's behaviour should be more than a one-off occurrence.

Dealing with Stress at the URC

If there is a cause for concern for a staff member experiencing stress in the setting it should be acted upon promptly and discussed with the employee. Once the issue is brought to our attention, we will take multiple steps to ensure that the issue is effectively handled and dealt with.

When discussing a stress related issue with a staff member, the manager will ensure that the discussion is carried out at a comfortable time and place for the affected party with a sufficient amount of time allocated to ensure that the employee feels relaxed whilst talking about their problems. It is vital that the manager comes across in a sensitive and approachable manner whilst they are listening to the employee and asking open-ended questions that would allow the individual to express themselves entirely. If the manager is unable to help the individual, the best person to

support them will be contacted under the agreement of the employee. This could be in the form of a GP or counsellor.

The origin of the stress should be identified, and changes should be made to ensure that the stress does not reoccur in the future. Actions taken by the manager to ensure a reduction in stress levels could be in the form of:

- A redesign of the employee's job role and responsibilities.
- A change in the employee's working hours.
- More training for the employee.
- Giving the employee time off or rearranging hours on a temporary basis.

If the employee requires time off work for their stress related illness it should be ensured that they are positively rehabilitated back into the work setting upon their return. The manager should take the following steps to ensure their return to work is smooth and less stressful than their departure:

- The employee will be welcomed back.
- The employee will not be exposed to the same factors that originally caused them stress.
- The employee will not be overloaded with work initially.
- Any side effects of medication that the employee has been put on will be considered when assessing their performance.
- Regular communication with the employee should be ensured to guarantee no further difficulties.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality

Information from any discussion with an employee regarding issues with stress in the workplace will be kept ensuring that the preschool possess an accurate record of what was discussed, any actions that were taken and any monitoring of the employee after the initial discussion took place. These records will be kept in the employee's personal file, they will be treated as confidential and kept no longer than necessary.

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