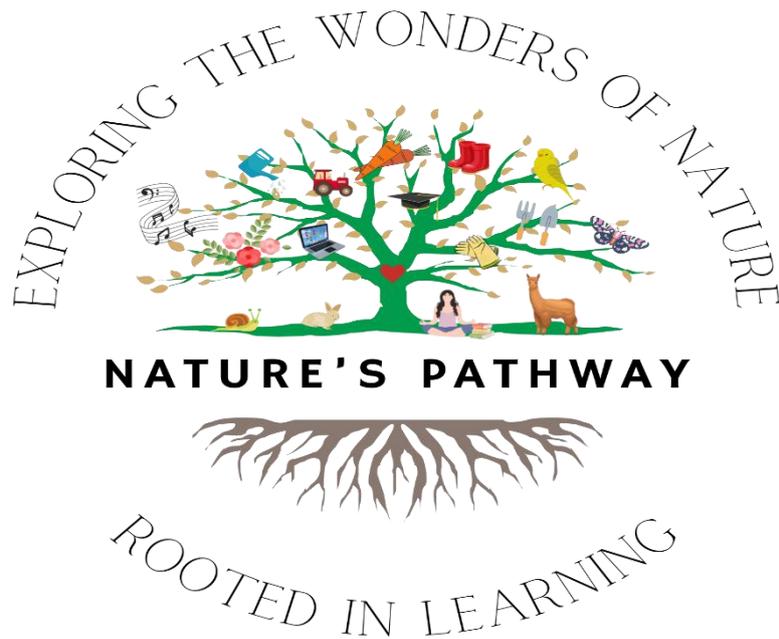


# Natures Pathway



## Wellbeing and Mental Health Policy

Commencement Date: 31<sup>ST</sup> January 2026

Review Date: 31<sup>ST</sup> January 2027

Signed: N. Butler

## Introduction Natures Pathway

recognises that mental health is as important as physical health, acknowledges that, on average, one in four people will experience a mental health difficulty in the course of a year; and that such problems can cause real and lasting damage, both to the individual and to the community. The organisation also recognises that the majority of people who experience mental health difficulties can overcome them or learn to live with them especially if they are supported early on.

This policy applies to staff and volunteers and aims to ensure that they feel supported in their work.

## Policy

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 and safety and wellbeing.

This will be achieved by:

- Providing a healthy work environment where workplace stress is identified and avoided, where possible.
- Provide an open, supportive culture which promotes personal wellbeing, where those affected by stress are encouraged to discuss problems and possible solutions constructively and where managers and staff work together to identify and prevent stress in the workplace;
- Increasing awareness and understanding of stress related issues through training and the promotion of staff wellbeing;
- Providing access to external support services (e.g. confidential counselling and occupational health) as appropriate.
- Stress, for the purposes of this policy, is described as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them, whether it be caused by work or personal circumstances.

This definition makes an important distinction between the beneficial effects of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulating and motivating) and work-related stress, which is the natural but distressing reaction to perceived demands or “pressures” that an individual cannot cope with at a given time. 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.

Stress is not in itself an illness, but if prolonged or intense, it can induce or contribute to ill health. The organisation recognises that it has a legal and moral duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of its staff. As such, any contravention of this policy will be considered a serious breach of health and safety practice, and may result in disciplinary action against those involved.

The policy

- a. supports the effectiveness of its staff in the services which it provides;
- b. seeks to enhance the ability of employees to benefit from those provisions;
- c. seeks to prevent the unwanted development that the response to one individual's mental health difficulty significantly affects other people's mental health. For example, a member of staff who has to deal with a colleague who has mental health difficulties may find that personally distressing and disruptive to other commitments. The Farm's policy is to help individuals to respond successfully to those difficulties.

Definitions and terminologies

The term "mental health difficulties" is one which encompasses a wide range of experiences which affect an individual's ability to balance his/her life. The difficulties can range from stress and anxiety through to serious mental health conditions diagnosed and treated by the health services. Although a difficult definition to give in precise terms, it is important to avoid the use of negative terms with stigma attached which may deter staff from accessing the support required. The inappropriate use of medical terms which might mislead and label unnecessarily must be avoided. Staff will be encouraged to respond to individual needs rather than labels.

Interactions with other policies

This policy interacts with and refines other policies. The organisation's duty of care towards its staff is determined externally by legislation such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Human Rights Act (1998), Data Protection Act (1998), Disability Discrimination Act (1995). The organisation exercises that duty of care through this policy and through the following related policies, procedures and notes for guidance:

- ◆ Health and Safety Policy
- ◆ Equality & Diversity Policy
- ◆ Respect and dignity Policy
- ◆ Complaints and Grievance Procedures
- ◆ Sickness Absence Policy

#### ◆ Managing Stress and wellbeing in the workplace Policy and procedure

While mental health and wellbeing issues may be relevant to the application of the above policies, the relationship between this policy and the following other policies, procedures and notes for guidance is especially important:

- ◆ Staff confidentiality
- ◆ Disability statement
- ◆ Disciplinary procedures Staff confidentiality

While all dealings with staff are subject to confidentiality, it must be emphasised that this is often of paramount importance with regard to those experiencing mental health difficulties. However, it must also be emphasised that confidentiality may be necessarily breached in certain circumstances where the individual is deemed to be a risk either to him/herself or to other people. If there is a conflict between these two statements then it should be stressed that the safety of the individual and/or the safety of other members of our community takes precedence over confidentiality.

#### Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act defines a disability as “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities” and defines “long-term” as “12 months or more”. Certain mental health difficulties may fall under this definition and will therefore qualify as disabilities. When a member of staff discloses a long-term mental health difficulty (and, therefore, a disability) to a member of staff, this disclosure will be passed on to the Office Manager in order to facilitate support. The organisation must make reasonable adjustments in order not to disadvantage the individual. However, most cases are likely to be of shorter duration, in which case the situation will be dealt with under the Sickness Absence policy and procedures –

#### Disciplinary Procedures

The behaviour of some individuals experiencing a mental health difficulty may be very disruptive and may contravene disciplinary codes and/or be detrimental to the wellbeing of other members of the organisation. Formal action may be suspended where an individual has declared to the Farm a mental health difficulty in order to bring to the individual's attention the effects of the behaviour, and to seek to identify suitable support to moderate that behaviour.

## Responsibilities

All employees and their managers share responsibility for identifying workplace stress and working together to manage it, so it is important to be aware of the symptoms and acknowledge the effects of stress, so that any issues can be addressed effectively.

Natures Pathway will -

- ◆ promote good mental health and wellbeing and consideration of this goal within all relevant aspects of its operation.
- ◆ provide central support and advisory services.
- ◆ provide training and guidance to staff.
- ◆ encourage a non-stigmatising community to enhance the effectiveness of its actions.
- ◆ monitor the effectiveness of this policy through its annual policy revision schemes.

Staff are expected to:

- ◆ maintain a non-stigmatising environment.
- ◆ treat each member of staff with a mental health difficulty as an individual, not a problem or a condition.
- ◆ take advantage of training and information sources.
- ◆ uphold confidentiality (wherever safety is not at risk).
- ◆ recognise the limits to what they can do. The organisation recognises that where individuals help a colleague experiencing mental health difficulties, each person has boundaries or limits to his/her knowledge, responsibilities and competence, and that these boundaries must be respected. The organisation will provide for its employees suitable advice and training on:
  - ◆ identifying mental health difficulties and making initial responses to individuals;
  - ◆ recognising the need to refer an individual to support services;
  - ◆ accessing the organisation's support network;

## Process

What to do if you believe you may be experiencing symptoms of stress

There are many things you 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 are effective or appropriate in your situation, the following steps should be taken:

- If you notice symptoms of stress in yourself or experience any health issues which affect your work, you should consider discussing this with your manager or supervisor in the first instance. If your immediate line manager may be a possible source of the stress then the Director be contacted.
- If you decide that this is not appropriate, or you feel that the matter requires additional professional guidance, you should contact the staff HR.

Where a member of staff indicates 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 Form Med 3 "fit note" that a member of staff is, or has been, affected by work-related stress, the Director will consult with the appropriate line manager to formulate a response

The member of staff affected by work related stress, or reporting a possible case of work related stress, has the right to be accompanied by a union rep or member of staff at any meetings held with him or her under this procedure. Where a member of staff is absent from work or on sick leave, such meetings will not be held until the person has returned to work, or is ready to return to work. However, this should not prevent other aspects of the investigation from proceeding. How the organisation will respond Managers play an important intermediary role between the employee and the organisation and early intervention is key. The sooner action is taken, the better the chances are of the individual making a full and speedy recovery.

The organisation is obligated, by law, to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities and take action to control that risk. Therefore, before any action is taken line managers should take advice from the Director.

When it is brought to the attention of a manager 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, ensuring the Director is advised in the first instance for monitoring purposes.

#### 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 and, if they choose, their union representative.

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 signed off at the time), in the workplace, or other 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 if the visit is to take place at the employee's home address. During this meeting, managers should seek to identify the nature of the problem.

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 member(s) of staff, appropriate steps to eliminate or control the hazard that is causing the stress will be identified, noted and mutually agreed on the form. Where appropriate, the matter may at this stage be referred to another procedure to deal with the source of the problem (e.g., to take disciplinary action if the stress is being caused by bullying).

## Step 2

After the meeting, the manager will review the notes taken from the meeting and make note to arrange any further meetings if necessary. The manager will then inform the Director and if necessary the senior management team of the situation and of the steps being taken to resolve the matter and any agreed review dates to ensure the stress is being managed effectively.

## 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. 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 Director who may, depending on circumstances, signpost the staff member to an external third party.

## Step 4

Wellbeing and Mental Health Policy V03.docx Page 6 of 6 Provided the stress 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. In any such cases, a joint strategy will be agreed with the employee concerned and their manager and the Director.

## 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 be offered a return to work meeting, in line with the agreed Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure. 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. Where the member of staff requests, this meeting may take place at their home or another suitable venue away from the working environment.

## Training and Guidance

The organisation will ensure that training courses and guidance are made available to raise awareness of this policy and to assist staff in managing personal stress. Training and guidance will also 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.

Support network information:

This policy was last reviewed on: 31<sup>ST</sup> January 2026

Signed: N Butler

Renew Date 31<sup>ST</sup> January 2027 or as needed