

APS Practice Note to Support Mental Health Awareness CPD



This practice note will cover the importance of health and wellbeing. Moral, legal and financial reasons for promoting good standards of health and safety. The barriers around achieving and maintaining the standards set for managing health and safety within the organisation.

Introduction

There are many issues that impact on our mental health including our physical health, our social situation, our living environment and/or genetic factors. It is well established that poor mental health potentially has a negative impact on physical health, this puts us all at risk of developing a mental health illness at any time during our lives. Workers who experience stress, anxiety or depression are unlikely to perform as well in the workplace. This can create or lead to more general health and safety risks. Identifying mental health issues early is vital, so appropriate support and treatment can be accessed.

While employers have the legal duty of care for the health and wellbeing of their workers, it also makes good business sense. Positive management of stress can increase efficiency and productivity, improve staff retention, reduce sickness payments and other associated costs. Therefore, this is good for workers, good for team morale and good for your business.

Health and Wellbeing

The World Health Organisation defines health as: “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.

Wellbeing “is a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one’s goals, and where one enjoys a satisfactory quality of life”.

Health and wellbeing definitions can be subjective and often linked to individual feelings and experiences, and interpretation may vary from culture to culture. What one person feels is their perfect state of wellbeing may be completely different to another person. This stands to reason as we all have different goals, ambitions and personalities.

We could describe mental health as the way we think and the way we feel. It is our overall wellbeing - the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy. Mental health and physical health are inextricably linked, with mental health influencing physical health and vice versa.

Review your first aid needs assessment and consider what provision is needed. Following the assessment, you might decide it will be beneficial to have personnel trained in physical and mental health issues. Organisations should look at developing a wellbeing policy and consider effective communication channels, ensuring the message flows to the workforce, (not a paperwork exercise). Without healthy and productive workers, organisations may struggle to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. People are your greatest asset, show them you care by training all levels of the workforce to raise awareness on mental health, look at ways of sharing resources to promote awareness

and provide workers with self-help tools and wellbeing programmes.

An effective training programme will help Management and Human Resources identify issues and a guide to signpost people to the appropriate help. Mental health experts have been warning us a mental health pandemic will follow as a result of COVID-19, never has there been more urgency for organisations to take the lead and promote mental health initiatives in their workplace.

Doing nothing is not an option, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 imposes general duties on employers to secure the health, safety and welfare of people at work and protect others against the risks arising from the work activity. Occupational or work-related ill health is the term used about health issues and is concerned with those illnesses or physical and mental health issues that are either caused or triggered by workplace activities.

The Association of Project Safety (APS) are taking the lead by with their one-day mental health conference “Building the Future of Workplace Mental Health”.

APS programme of CPD (46) will be focusing on mental health awareness; this course has been specially tailored for APS members. It will be delivered in association with ‘Safehands’ and ‘Vector Equilibrium’, building on their acclaimed and highly successful mental health programme. The primary objective of the CPD 46 Mental Health Awareness workshops is to mitigate the risk of people becoming mentally unwell and to give them the confidence and skills to help themselves as well as supporting colleagues, friends and family who may be suffering with poor mental health.

Work-related Stress

Figures from the Health and Safety Executive and the Mental Health Foundation show stress is a significant factor for UK organisations and workers overall. Stress, depression or anxiety and musculoskeletal disorders accounted for many lost days due to work-related ill health.

Stress is a reaction to events or experiences in someone's home life, work life or a combination of both. Mental illnesses, mental health issues and stress can exist independently – people can experience work-related stress and physical changes such as high blood pressure, without having anxiety, depression, mental illnesses or mental health issues. They can also have anxiety and depression without experiencing stress. The key differences between them are their cause(s) and the way(s) they are treated.

Recognising the signs of stress will help employers take steps to stop, lower and manage stress in their workplace. The Health and Safety Executive define stress as “the adverse 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. Organisations must be committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of their employees and recognise workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stress.

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work. The law requires employers to tackle stress, under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, (to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities) and under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, (to take measures to control that risk). Approximately one-in-seven people say they find their work either stressful or extremely stressful. Some common causes of work-related stress are listed below:

- Excessively high workloads, with unrealistic deadlines and under pressure.
- Insufficient workloads, making people feel their skills are being underutilised.
- A lack of control over how people carry out their work.
- A lack of interpersonal support or poor working relationships, leading to a sense of isolation.

- People being asked to do a job where they have insufficient experience or training.
- Concerns about job security, lack of career opportunities, or the level of pay.
- Bullying, violence or harassment.
- A blame culture within your organisation, where people are afraid to get things wrong or admit to making mistakes.
- Weak or ineffective management, leaving employees with no sense of direction, or over-management, leaving people feeling undervalued and affecting their self-esteem.
- Lack of clarity over job role.
- A poor physical working environment.

Work-related stress is a management issue that managers can help to resolve, and it is often a symptom of poor employee relations and lack of leadership, training, communication and control. Organisations that communicate effectively and on a regular basis with their employees and have effective systems and procedures in place for dealing with these issues are more likely to avoid work-related stress and can deal with potentially stressful situations when they arise.

Developing an open and positive culture of health and wellbeing is good business practice; well-motivated employees can have an equally positive impact on the productivity and effectiveness of a business and its operational activities. Understanding common causes of stress in the workplace can help managers to assess what is happening in their organisation and help identify solutions to the lowest level or try and remove it completely. Actively managing the effects of work-related stress, along with workplace hazards, is required for the health, safety and wellbeing of employees, in order to reduce the impact on cost and productivity.

The following are some possible business benefits that could be expected when encouraging a balanced approach to health and wellbeing throughout the workforce:

- Improved staff retention and reduced sickness absence.
- Higher commitment and a positive team morale.
- Improved brand.
- Improved resilience.
- Higher productivity.
- Fewer accidents and lower cases of ill health.

As an employer, you can help manage and prevent stress by improving conditions at work. But you also have a role in adjusting and helping someone manage a mental illness or mental health issue at work. Carrying out a stress audit is one of the best ways to identify whether stress is an issue at your workplace; it will also help you to assess the risk from stress people in your organisation may face, and it can also be done as part of your health and safety risk assessment.

A useful starting point for an audit is to ask staff the three best and worst things about their job, and whether any of these put them under excessive pressure. You can also use questionnaires to gather the same information; there are a range of different ones available. It may be better to develop your own checklist of areas that are relevant to your needs and specific working conditions to your business operations. Several important areas you should consider are listed below:

- Work scheduling and the type and design of work.
- Working relationships with colleagues.
- The level of communication and reporting to the line manager or supervisor.
- The physical working environment.
- Employee's expectations of their work.

The Health and Safety Executive produce the management standards workbook, organisations should use this as a starting point and reference guide. They also provide a useful checklist, designed to help organisations clarify whether their own risk assessment approach to stress is appropriate and sufficient and can be accessed through their own website.

Click link, from the Health and Safety Executive on a case study to show that a positive approach on health and safety management can bring results.
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/casestudies/singer-instruments.htm>

Moral, Legal and Financial Reasons

There are some powerful incentives for organisations to aim for and endeavour to manage health and safety effectively. These incentives are moral, legal and financial. In a low hazard organisation, health and safety may be supervised by a single competent manager. In a high hazard industry, many different specialists may be required to assist and provide support to managers, ensuring health and safety standards are satisfactory and suitable risk control measures are in place.

There are many barriers to the achievement of effective, satisfactory standards, such as the pressure of production or performance targets, financial and time constraints. In these difficult economic times, businesses and organisations are looking to reduce costs and this often impacts on the management of health and safety, such as the maintenance of machinery, equipment and the training of staff and workers.

- Moral reasons are centred on the need to protect people from injury and disease.
- Occupational health is the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social wellbeing of workers in all occupations.
- Legal reasons are embedded in criminal and civil law, compliance with health and safety duties are not optional.
- Financial reasons, infringements of health and safety law with the consequent fines, compensation payments and associated financial costs.

However, this is a complex area of law and there are also cases brought within civil law where individuals have successfully applied cases against their employers. It is recommended legal advice is always sought by the individual and the employer should the need arise.

Summary

The Health and Safety Executive believes effective management of health and safety is vital to employee wellbeing and has a role to play in enhancing the reputation of business and help them achieve high-performing teams along with a financial benefit to the business. Health and safety law is relevant to all types of industries, businesses and organisations and affects all aspects of work.

A key challenge remains the need for a greater understanding of the causes and effects of poor mental health. This would undoubtedly assist with the identification and development of approaches to deal with the issue. Anyone can suffer from work-related stress, no matter what work they do or what level of the organisation they operate at. If work-related stress is not addressed it can lead to common mental health conditions.

The main barrier to obtaining support is the stigma associated with mental health. People with mental health issues can work to their full potential; however they often fear prejudice from society. Studies have shown people with mental health issues would like to be treated the same as other employees, and being at work can often improve their mental health and wellbeing.

In the current climate, many businesses have embraced flexible working and working from home, more and more of us may find ourselves plunged into doing so, far longer than originally expected. Lack of communication, lone working is pointing to an increase in work-related stress and mental health issues. Inadequate home set-up arrangements could be causing thousands of workers discomfort from working remotely, and they are at risk from developing some form of musculoskeletal pain. Employers have the same health and

safety responsibilities for home workers as for any other workers. It is important to address these issues now to ensure home working arrangements are sustainable in the future.

Empathy and trust are a platform for effective understanding, communication and building relationships. They are essential factors in developing solutions, avoiding or diffusing conflict. Establishing trust is about listening and understanding, not necessarily agreeing (which is different) with the other person, listening without judging. A useful focus to aim for when listening to another person is to try to understand how the other person feels, and to discover what they want to achieve. Of all the communications skills, listening is arguably the one which makes the biggest difference. Both management and employees foster trust by listening to what each person has to say. Management and employees should practise consistent behaviour. Consistency allows everyone in the company to know what to expect from the job and from each other.

Legislative Requirements

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.
- Protection from Harassment Act.
- Equality Act.
- The Employment Equality Act.
- The Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act.
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations.
- Construction (Design and Management) Regulations.
- Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations.

The above list is not exhaustive, other legislation also applies.
Refer to: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/statinstruments.htm>
Statutory Instruments owned and enforced by HSE/local authorities.

The legal basis for considering the mental health of employees is embedded within the Health and Safety at Work Act, reinforced by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations with the employer's stress risk assessment embedded at the heart of the process. However, this is a complex area of law and there are also cases brought within civil law where individuals have successfully applied cases against their employers.

It is recommended legal advice is always sought by the individual and the employer should the need arise.

Bibliography

Introduction to Health and Safety at Work, NEBOSH Endorsed, Sixth Edition.

Construction Industry Training Board, (CITB) Site Safety Plus.

A: Legal and Management.

B: Health and Welfare.

Mental Health First Aid England, Instructor's Manual.

The Health and Safety Executive website

Working together to reduce stress at work, a guide for employers and mental health conditions, work and the workplace.

The Health and Safety Executive, Management standard for tackling work-related stress.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/equivalence.htm>

Mental Health Foundation website.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

ROSPA Occupational Safety and Health Journal.

Further Reading

Additional mental health resources include;

<https://www.constructionindustryhelpline.com/>

<https://www.lighthouseclub.org/>

<http://www.mind.org.uk/>

<http://rethink.org/>

<http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/>

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/>

<http://www.sane.org.uk/>

This practice note can be accessed in alternative formats by contacting APS

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Status of this guidance

The contents of this practice note are intended for information and general guidance only. If you need guidance on how to approach the challenges associated with specific situations and projects, you should seek advice from a suitably qualified person.

APS 5 New Mart Place
Edinburgh EH14 1RW
T: 0131 442 6600
E: info@aps.org.uk



@apstalk



[linkedin.com/company/associationforprojectsafety](https://www.linkedin.com/company/associationforprojectsafety)

About APS

The Association for Project Safety [APS] is a professional body dedicated to eliminating deaths, reducing injury and tackling ill-health associated with construction. APS aims to improve, and promote excellence in, professional practice in design and construction health & safety risk management, helping everyone manage risk and implement building regulations effectively and proportionately. The association contributes to the national debate on building and infrastructure safety, regulation and legislation, providing training, education and support and member networking opportunities. APS works with other bodies and partners to improve – through good design and throughout the life-cycle of projects and buildings – health & safety for everyone involved in construction and use.