

Policy Name: Stress at Work Policy

Policy Type: Discretionary

Issue Date: 25th June 2025

To Be Reviewed: Biennially

Approved by: CEO

Review Date: 25th June 2027

1 Aims

- 1.1 We (Orbis Education Trust) are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of all employees and recognise that their wellbeing is important. The Trust recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors. The Trust is further committed to providing the support and assistance necessary to enable Employees to undertake their job duties in an environment that is as stress-free as possible.
- 1.2 The Trust's aim is to ensure Employee Stakeholders' health and safety at work and that they are not subjected to excessive workloads, onerous working practices or a detrimental work environment.

2 Purpose

We aim to provide a working environment where stress is not seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence, and where employees who believe they are suffering from the negative effects of stress feel able to approach us in confidence, in order that the necessary support mechanisms can be put in place. In addition, we aim to assist those who may be suffering from workplace or personal stress by offering confidential support. Therefore, this policy seeks to clarify our responsibilities in relation to stress management, raise awareness of the issue and how it can be recognised and outline the support available. This policy is not contractual but indicates the way in which we plan to deal with the issue of stress at work.

3 Scope

This policy applies to all employees at all levels within the trust.

4 The Law

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a general duty upon all employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all Employees.

5 Definitions

The Health and Safety Executive defines “stress” as: "the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope." In other words, stress occurs when the pressures on a person exceed their ability to deal with them.

6 The causes and symptoms of stress

6.1 Whilst most staff can benefit from a certain amount of pressure in their job as it helps with motivation, too much pressure can become overwhelming. Whilst stress itself is not an illness, the physiological impact can lead to conditions such as anxiety and depression which in turn can lead to physical conditions.

6.2 There are two types of stress. Acute stress is usually caused by a particular deadline, general time pressure or anticipation of a task which the employee will find difficult. Most people have the ability to anticipate and deal with episodes of acute stress and accept them as a normal part of working life.

6.3 Chronic stress can develop over time as a consequence of continual pressure being placed on the employee which can cause adaptive changes in behaviour giving rise to the symptoms described below. It is this stress that can cause serious physiological and psychological problems for the individual. Employees may show psychological symptoms which can be grouped into four categories:

Fixation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• repetition of arguments in meetings• belligerence• refusal to listen to advice and suggestions• using solutions known to be inadequate	Regression <ul style="list-style-type: none">• crying• arguments• immature behaviour• personality clashes• sulking• temper• emotional responses
Withdrawal <ul style="list-style-type: none">• arriving late• leaving early• long lunch breaks• absenteeism• resigning	Aggressive behaviour: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• malicious gossip• criticism of others• working to rule• strikes• graffiti• damaging property• shouting

6.4 Stress can be caused by a variety of reasons including:

- heavy (or light) targets and workloads
- insufficient resources

- ineffective equipment or tools
- long working hours
- rapid change and uncertainty
- harassment or bullying in the workplace
- boredom
- ill-health
- personal relationship problems including separation and domestic abuse
- housing – moving, selling, eviction, nuisance neighbours
- family concerns including caring responsibilities
- bereavement
- financial difficulties
- legal disputes

6.5 Symptoms might include:

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| • declining performance | • reduced appetite |
| • failure to meet deadlines | • muscle tension (neck/back) |
| • loss of motivation | • raised blood pressure |
| • poor concentration | • ulcers |
| • chronic tiredness and depression | • frequent short-term absences |
| • anxiety attacks | • frustration/dissatisfaction and/or poor working relationships |
| • sleeplessness | • reduced productivity |
| • headaches/migraines | • increased susceptibility to illness |
| • excessive drinking/smoking | • irritability, short temper and other 'out of character' behaviour |
| • weight loss/gain | |
| • symptoms of mental illness or coronary heart disease. | |

6.6 It is important to bear in mind that stress may come under the definition of "disability". If, in individual circumstances, a medical report confirms this to be the case, as with other disabilities, we will take steps to make any reasonable adjustments which may be recommended.

7 Our responsibilities

7.1 We aim to take reasonable steps to look after our employees' mental health and welfare, and to ensure that they do not have excessive demands placed on them by their jobs. As stress may also be caused by bullying, harassment and violence, we aim to provide a working environment that is, as far as is reasonably practicable, free from these influences. However, we are entitled to assume that all employees can cope with the normal day-to-day pressures of their job: if this is not the case, they should inform us.

7.2 We recognise our responsibilities by:

- placing a high importance on the health, safety and welfare of all employees in the conduct of our Trust

- accepting the legal and moral obligation to provide and maintain a safe and healthy workplace
- providing a commitment to support employees who require help for stress-related problems
- providing information to employees about the harmful effects of stress to promote preventative action
- ensuring there are Mental Health Champions within our schools to support any members of staff experiencing stress.
- supporting a Staff Wellbeing Group in each school
- offering every member of staff the opportunity to have a wellbeing discussion with their line manager as part of our appraisal process to better understand our staff and how they manage stress
- to conduct workload impact assessments as part of new initiatives and regular sludge audits to ensure we are not adding unnecessary workload and pressures to staff.
- regular surveys on staff wellbeing
- supporting staff members to achieve a good balance with their work and personal commitments by offering flexible working opportunities such as POS and wellbeing leave.
- requiring our senior leadership team to be ambassadors of this policy and ensuring they set an example themselves in sensible working practices and consider how to get the best out of their teams without affecting their health.

8 The Policy

- 8.1 The Trust will identify all workplace stressors to enable line managers to conduct risk assessments with individuals who have requested support or have been identified through absence management as suffering from stress. These risk assessments, which will be completed by both the individual and the line manager, will assist in eliminating stress or will control the risks from stress for that individual. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed between the individual and the line manager.
- 8.2 The Trust will provide training for Mental Health Champions to enable them to identify stress in individuals and how to support them, to include:
- How to implement recommendations of risks assessments
 - How to ensure good communication between Line Managers and their teams, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
 - Ensuring members of their team are fully trained to discharge their duties
 - Ensuring members of their team are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities
 - Monitoring workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded
 - Ensuring members of their team are multi-skilled to ensure job roles have a variety to keep them interested and stipulated.
- 8.3 Each school will have a wellbeing group to discuss the issues affecting employees and conduct regular surveys and feedback on staff issues.