



THE MERCIAN TRUST

Managing Stress and Promoting Positive Health & Wellbeing Policy and Guidance

Effective from:

March 2026

Approved by:

People & Culture Committee

Responsibility:

Director of People and Organisational Development

Policy changes since the last review

- No changes.

Review process:

This policy will be reviewed according to The Mercian Trust's Policy Schedule outlined in its Scheme of Delegation. If there are any changes in legislation or legal requirements, an earlier review will be conducted to ensure compliance and relevance.



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Policy statement

- 1.1 Our Trust has developed a managing stress and wellbeing policy to promote positive mental health and wellbeing of all staff. It covers our commitment to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff; the responsibilities of managers and others for maintaining psychological health; health promotion initiatives; communicating and training on health issues; the range of support available for the maintenance of mental health and organisational commitment to handling individual issues.
- 1.2 The aim of this policy is to describe the Trust's commitment to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing of staff in its broadest, holistic sense, setting out how Trust fulfil our obligations, the responsibilities of different functions and specialists and the range of services available to help staff maintain health and wellbeing. The Trust recognises that wellbeing and performance are linked. Improving staff's ability to handle pressure and to balance work and home life will ultimately lead to improved performance.
- 1.3 The Trust recognises the importance of identifying and tackling the causes of work-related stress. We also recognise that personal stress, while unrelated to the workplace, can adversely affect the wellbeing of staff at work.
- 1.4 Mental wellbeing is relevant for all staff, which means every member of staff can play a part in improving wellbeing in the workplace. By addressing mental health issues, the Trust can improve the general wellbeing of staff, reduce absenteeism, lower staff turnover and increase productivity.
- 1.5 This procedure does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. We may vary any of the provision detailed within this policy without consultation.

2 Who is covered by the policy?

- 2.1 The procedure applies to all employees regardless of length of service. It also applies to any agency workers, casual staff, self-employed contractors/consultants and volunteers.

3 Legal Obligations

- 3.1 Our Trust has a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that your health is not put at risk by excessive pressures or demands arising from the way work is organised.
- 3.2 This policy takes account of our obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Employment Rights Act 1996, Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Working Time Regulations 1998 and Equality Act 2010.

4 Understanding stress and mental health

- 4.1 Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or demands placed on them. Sustained over a period of time, stress can lead to mental and/or physical illness.

- 4.2 Mental health is a term used to describe our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing; it affects how we think, feel and act and how we cope with the normal pressures of everyday life. Positive mental health is rarely an absolute state since factors inside and outside work affect mental health, meaning that we move on a spectrum that ranges from being in good to poor mental health.
- 4.3 There is an important distinction between working under pressure and experiencing stress. Certain levels of pressure are acceptable and normal in every job. They can improve performance, enable individuals to meet their full potential and provide a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, when pressure becomes excessive it produces stress and undermines mental health.
- 4.4 Pressures outside the workplace, whether the result of unexpected or traumatic events such as accidents, illness, bereavement, family breakdown or financial worries, can result in stress and poor mental health. They can also compound normal workplace pressures.
- 4.5 We recognise that individuals react to similar situations in different ways and that what triggers stress and poor mental health varies from person to person.

5 Our approach to mental wellbeing

- 5.1 We will:
 - 5.1.1 Promote a culture of open communication by providing both formal and informal channels through which staff can raise concerns.
 - 5.1.2 Take account of stress and mental wellbeing when planning and allocating workloads. We will provide opportunities to discuss these through supervision and regular catch ups and meetings between staff and their leaders.
 - 5.1.3 Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not overworking and monitor holidays to ensure that staff are using their entitlement appropriately.
 - 5.1.4 Ensure risk assessments include or specifically address work-related stress.
 - 5.1.5 Facilitate requests for flexible working where reasonably practicable in accordance with our Flexible Working Policy.
 - 5.1.6 Ensure that in any workplace reorganisation our change management processes are designed to minimise uncertainty and stress.
 - 5.1.7 Implement policies and procedures to address factors that can cause or worsen stress in particular so that we can provide a workplace free from harassment, bullying and victimisation and address inappropriate behaviour through disciplinary action.
 - 5.1.8 Provide training to help all staff understand and recognise the causes of work-related stress and mental ill health, the impact of stress from factors in everyday life and the steps they can take to protect and enhance their own mental wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

5.1.9 Provide support services such as occupational health, confidential counselling and an employee assistance programme for staff affected by or absent by reason of stress.

5.1.10 Provide access to on-line resources that will provide staff with practical advice and support to help staff manage their wellbeing.

6 Responsibilities

6.1 Employees

All staff should ensure that they are familiar with this policy and act in accordance with its aims and objectives. Staff should plan and organise their work to meet personal and organisational objectives and co-operate with support, advice and guidance that may be offered by line managers. Anyone who experiences or is aware of a situation that may result in work-related stress or undermine mental wellbeing at work should speak to a manager or a trusted colleague.

6.2 Line managers

All line managers have a responsibility to recognise potential issues of work-related stress or mental ill health in the staff they manage. They will be given training to support them in this and should seek advice from the HR team in the event that they have concerns. All managers should provide support to staff by working with the HR team and through making appropriate referrals to the Occupational Health provider via the HR team where appropriate. In particular, they need to:

- Promote a culture of open communication.
- Effectively plan and provide feedback on performance.
- Ensure that staff receive necessary training and support.
- Monitor workloads and reallocate work where necessary.
- Ensure that staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and others, and act on behaviour that falls below those standards.

6.3 Human resources support

HR team will develop Trust -wide policies and procedures, to protect the wellbeing of employees, assist line managers in supporting individuals, and liaise as appropriate with occupational health and other medical professionals, with the object of helping employees to maintain good psychological health.

Our Trust operates practices and policies that ensure staff are able to achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and other commitments and adhere to the working limits set out in the Working Time Regulations 1998.

6.4 Occupational health

The Trust has engaged occupational health professionals who will provide a comprehensive service designed to help staff stay in work, or to return to work, after experiencing mental health problems. This will include preparing medical assessments of individuals' fitness for work following referrals from the Trust, liaising with GPs and working with individuals to help them to retain employment/engagement.

Occupational health professionals will play a critical part in developing rehabilitation plans for staff returning to work after absences related to mental ill health, and work with GPs and line managers on designing/amending jobs and working environments to ensure that rehabilitation is successful. Advice will also be taken from our occupational health professionals regarding design and implementation of any suitable health promotion and lifestyle behaviour management programmes, including initiatives on managing pressure and ongoing health conditions at work.

7 Training and communications

- 7.1 Line managers and staff should regularly discuss individual training needs to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to adapt to ever-changing job demands. An examination of training needs will be particularly important prior to, and during, periods of organisational change.
- 7.2 Line Managers will receive training so they are able to recognise the symptoms and causes of mental ill health.
- 7.3 Staff will receive training in mental health awareness so they are able to recognise the symptoms of mental ill health in themselves and others in addition to recognising causes.
- 7.4 Managers and staff are encouraged to participate in communication/feedback exercises, including stress audits and staff surveys. All staff are expected to be aware of the importance of effective communication and to use the media most appropriate to the message, for example team meetings, one-to-one meetings, electronic communications and Trust-wide methods. The Trust will ensure that structures exist to give staff regular feedback on their performance, and for them to raise concerns.
- 7.5 The Trust will consider special communication media during periods of Trust change.

8 Occupational health support

- 8.1 Line managers can contact the organisation's occupational health service via the HR team. Staff can also speak to their line managers if they would like to be considered for support from occupational health. A comprehensive occupational health service is available, from individual health screening to the design of return-to-work plans for those rehabilitating after a period of long-term sickness absence.
- 8.2 Workplace wellbeing services provided by the occupational health team include:
 - workstation assessments;
 - pre-employment screening;
 - fitness-for-work assessments;
 - return to work plans;
 - advice in relation to reasonable adjustments.
- 8.3 If staff believe that their work, or some aspect of it, is putting their wellbeing at risk they should, in the first instance, speak to their line manager. The discussion should cover workload and other aspects of job demands and raise issues such as identified training needs.

- 8.4 A referral to the occupational health team will be made if this is considered appropriate after an individual's initial discussion with their manager.

9 Other services and support

- 9.1 Other measures available to support staff in maintaining health and wellbeing include:

- procedures for reporting and handling inappropriate behaviour (for example bullying and harassment);
- special leave arrangements;
- opportunities for flexible working;
- support for workers with disabilities; and
- the Trust's grievance policy;
- a trust-wide Employee Assistance Programme that includes access to a wide range of practical advice and support to help staff manage their wellbeing; and
- provision of a healthcare cash plan
- further help and information can also be obtained from Mind, the mental health charity, www.mind.org.uk or the Samaritans, www.samaritans.org.

- 9.2 If any member of staff is considered by their line manager or colleagues to be at serious risk of self-harm, or of harming others, action must be taken straight away. Every effort will be made to contact any person nominated by the member of staff as an emergency contact. Where necessary the emergency services will be called. The wellbeing of the member of staff and those around them will always be our first concern.

10 Addressing work-related stress

- 10.1 If you believe you are suffering from work-related stress you should discuss this with your line manager in the first instance. If you feel unable to do so you should contact either the HR team or speak to a trusted colleague. You can also seek advice and support through the Employee Assistance Programme. Vivup who operates our EAP can provide confidential telephone support as well as access to practical on-line advice and resources. To contact them call 03303 800 658 or access their website at [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

- 10.2 Once an issue affecting your health comes to our attention, we will discuss with you what steps can be taken to address that issue. Those steps may include any of the following:

- A review of your current job role, responsibilities, workload and working hours. Adjustments may be agreed to these, on a temporary basis and subject to further review, where appropriate.
- Where it appears that stress has been caused by bullying or harassment, investigation under our Disciplinary and/or Grievance Procedures.

- Referral for medical advice, treatment and/or a medical report to be provided by our Occupational Health providers or any specialist or GP who has been treating you.

11 Absence due to stress or mental ill health

11.1 If you are absent due to work-related stress or mental ill health, you should follow the sickness absence reporting procedure and our Sickness Absence Policy.

11.2 In cases of prolonged or repeated absence it may be necessary to apply the procedure set out in our Sickness Absence Policy.

12 Confidentiality

12.1 Information about stress, mental health and mental wellbeing is highly sensitive. Every member of staff is responsible for observing the high level of confidentiality that is required when dealing with information about stress or mental health whether they are supporting a colleague or because they are otherwise involved in the operation of a workplace policy or procedure.

12.2 A breach of confidentiality may give rise to disciplinary action.

12.3 However, there are occasions when information about stress or mental wellbeing needs to be shared with third parties. For example:

- Where steps need to be taken to address work-related stress such as reallocating work within a team.
- Where medical advice is required on how to support a member of staff, address issues raised by work-related stress or address issues raised by mental ill health.
- Where allegations of harassment, bullying or other misconduct or where a grievance is raised and requires an investigation or proceedings to take place.
- Where a member of staff presents an immediate danger to themselves or others.

12.4 In these circumstances, wherever possible, matters will be discussed with the member of staff concerned before any action is taken.

13 Relationship with other policies

13.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with other policies and procedures covering attendance and health, including policies on special leave, flexible working, the management of short and long-term absence, sick pay, bullying and harassment and staff training and development.