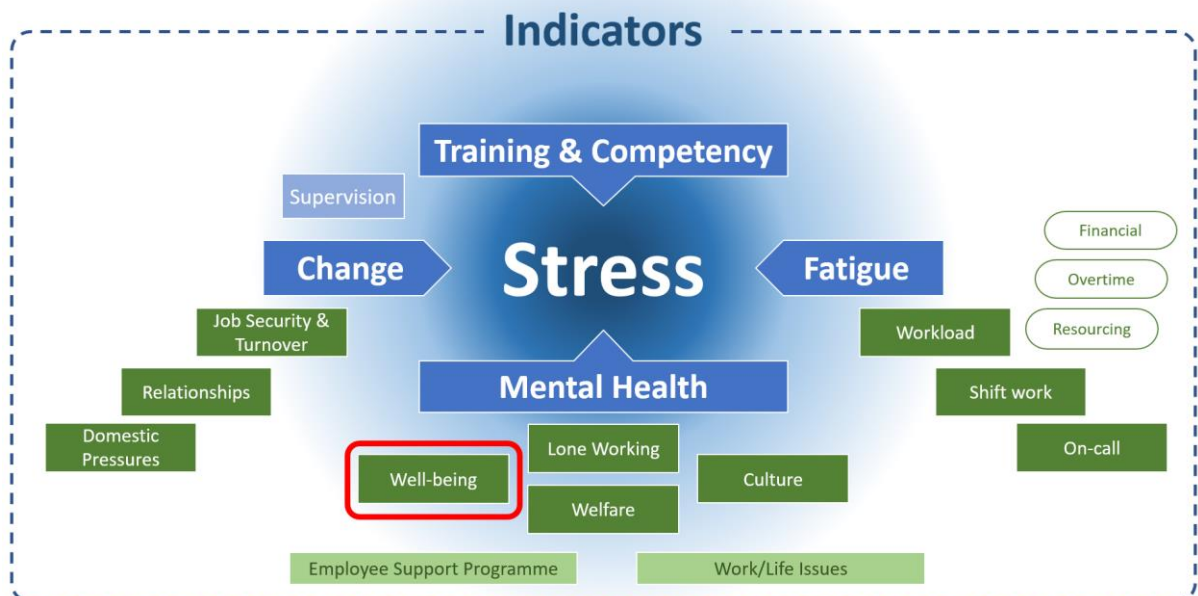# CDOIF: STRESS – Mental Health: A guide to recognising and managing well-being issues in the workplace

Remember, we can all experience problems, so consider your own mental health, well-being and stress levels.

What is well-being?

The World Health Organisation constitution states: "Health is **a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."**
Poor mental health can lead to a variety of symptoms resulting in work-related stress, anxiety and depression.

Well-being is not just the absence of disease or illness. It's a combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction.

Why should an employer be concerned about well-being and the mental health of their employees?

Although there is no legal requirement to manage wellbeing for your workers it is clearly a component of good mental health so taking steps to consider and secure the well-being of workers can have a positive impact on mental health and help to reduce work-related stress.

How do I know if I may have a problem?

- Sickness / increased absence.

- o Employee(s) suddenly show a greater frequency of absence, or a doctor has signed them off due to stress
- **Poor or lack of engagement.**
  - o For example this may lead to an employee under-performing or undertaking additional overtime without delivering on productivity
- **Change in work relationships (i.e withdrawn, argumentative).**
  - o Distancing and/or deterioration between established relationships
  - o Confrontations or reticent when spoken to or asked to take on addition work

- **Increase in incidents involving people.**
  - o People under stress or suffering from poor mental health have lower engagement, communication and concentration skills which may lead to an increase in accidents / incidents.
- **Increased use of an employer's employee assistance (EAP) or occupational health programme, if in place.**

- **Physical health**
  - o Impacts on a person's physical health can cause fatigue, personal worry about self or close family relations and it may also make them susceptible to other illnesses.

What should I be doing?

Ensure there are effective and robust leading and lagging indicators (KPI) in place to monitor and highlight potential or developing problems. For example, an indicator that illustrates an increase of sickness absence rates or use of an EAP programme (see HSE guidance on supporting workers with long term illness).

Implement an open culture where people feel safe and comfortable to talk and raise well-being concerns, either with colleagues or management. [see Briefing Note on culture for more details on how].

Raise awareness of mental health and well-being across the workforce and the impacts it can have, both positive and negative, on individuals and the business as a whole.

You might monitor socio-economic trends for potential risks and the impacts they may have, both on the individuals and the business as a whole, for example new technology such as AI and the perceived risk it may pose to job security.   This is often referred to as 'horizon scanning'

How can I do it?

- **Staff culture / conduct a well-being survey.**
  - o Consider developing or engaging a survey company to create a questionnaire that enables you to understand the current culture and values of both your organisation and staff. Good culture survey examples can be found within the further information section of this guidance.

- **Consider using a Stress risk assessment tool.**
  - o This is another method that can be used to identify potential 'hot spots' of stress within teams and individuals that allows for timely intervention before it becomes a significant issue or lost time. The HSE website offers a wide range of advice as well as the stress indicator

tool to help businesses to identify and manage stress in the workplace. Please refer to the further information section for more detail.

- Hold regular line management 1-2-1 conversations with staff, that includes mental health & well-being – <u>ideally these should be face to face</u>.
  - o Such forms of engagement allow supervisors and managers to directly engage with individual members of their workforce. Such engagement develops relationships that allow a better understanding of work carried out, and therefore allow better opportunities to identify blockers and stress points before they occur. Training and awareness for line managers on how to carry out these discussions is beneficial in ensuring they are handled sensitively.

- Sponsor a community action program – this fosters relationships and the positivity of helping others outside of the work environment.
  - o A community support programme has many benefits, some of which are the fostering of team building, thereby preventing silo's from forming. It also encourages staff to give back to their own communities which is proven to help develop positive mental health through social connectedness, and finally such programmes help to develop the crucial non-technical skills.

- Signpost information to other organisations or services that can help or provide to external support, i.e. MIND, Samaritans etc.
  - o This could be an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) that allows individuals to seek assistance outside of their employer, in cases where confidentiality may be an issue or concern. Alternatively, an employer can signpost to external support organisations - further details of which can be found in the Further Information section.

- Provide Mental health awareness training for staff, or invite external speakers to present at site safety meetings on the topic of mental health and well-being.
  - o Mental Health awareness sessions for employees helps to break down perceived barriers and myths. It helps to educate individuals as to warning signs and so enables staff to be better prepared and protected in to the future, as well as feeling confident to help others.

Further Information

(1) HSE Stress website http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm

(2) Mental Health and Work, (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2008)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/212266/hwwb-mental-health-and-work.pdf

(3) Tackling workplace stress using the HSE Stress Management Standards - TUC and HSE guidance for health and safety representatives (TUC/HSE 2017)
https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tacking-workplace-stress-guide.pdf

(4) IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) – Stress - https://www.iosh.co.uk/Books-and-resources/Our-OH-toolkit/Stress.aspx

(5) How to tackle work-related stress: A guide for employers on making the Management Standards work
http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg430.pdf

(6) 'Managing the causes of work related stress – A step-by-step approach using the Management Standards' - (HSG218 ISBN 9780717662739) is now available from HSE Books priced £10.95 or free pdf download
http://books.hse.gov.uk/hse/public/saleproduct.jsf?catalogueCode=9780717662739

(7) Health and Safety for Disabled people - Health and safety for disabled people at work - HSE

Disclaimer
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