

Managing employee stress: new Acas guidance

In the know

Acas has published new guidance for employers on dealing with stress in the workplace after HSE statistics showed that almost half a million people in the UK report stress is making them ill. This guidance sits alongside other new assistance for employers on promoting good mental amongst employees.

Impact of stress on employees

- The guidance was published following Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reports that over 480,000 people claimed stress related to work was making them ill;
- HSE statistics show that this makes up almost 40% of all work-related illness.

What is stress?

- The guidance includes the definition of stress as the “adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”. It points out that a certain amount of pressure is a benefit to employees who will feel motivated to perform well. However, when that pressure is excessive, employees can suffer negative effects;
- The guidance highlights that stress itself is not an illness but the impact of it on individuals can lead them to suffer from physical and psychological illness.

What causes stress?

- Demands of the job; lack of control over work; lack of support from managers; lack of trust in colleagues; minimal information on expectations at work and poor change management are all noted in the guidance as stressors.

What employers can do

- Where it is identified that procedures to tackle stress in the workplace need to be improved, an action plan should be developed including proposed solutions and actions to be taken to achieve those;
- Although employers are not expected to be experts, they

- should be prepared to help an employee experiencing stress;
- Employers should be familiar with the signs of stress e.g. changes in mood, usual behaviour or standard of work; being withdrawn; more tired than normal; increased sickness or lateness;
- Be proactive about opening discussions with employees who appear to be suffering from stress;
- Be sensitive, patient, open minded and try to find out what the cause is;
- Consider what support or changes might would rectify the situation, on either a permanent or temporary basis. More than one informal discussion may be required;
- Agree what the employee’s colleagues are to be told;
- Check in with the employee regularly, either through planned meetings or informal chats, and continue to monitor employee’s wellbeing.

Croner Tips

- **Although stress, on its own, is not a disability and therefore the duty to make reasonable adjustments does not apply, the employer’s general duty of care still applies;**
- **Proactivity is key. If you spot signs of stress in an employee, do not wait for them to come to you. Make your own sensitive enquiries.**

The content of this briefing is correct at the time of publishing.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this article