

# Sample Policy – Psychological Health and Injury

## 1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to provide a systematic approach to:

- creating and sustaining healthy conditions for the physical and psychological well-being of our employees
- preventing psychological injury
- identifying and positively managing psychological injury

This policy applies to everyone in **[insert organisation name]**.

## 2. Definitions

Stress is “*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them*”<sup>1</sup>. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

Pressure - if managed correctly - can be positive, challenging and helps to keep us motivated, but excessive pressure can lead to stress which undermines performance and affects health.

## 3. Principles

**[insert organisation name]** is committed to protecting and promoting the health, safety and welfare of its employees. Psychological injury is recognised as a health and safety issue and we acknowledge the importance of:

- supportive leadership and work-team climate
- increasing morale
- identifying and reducing workplace stressors

Work related stress is an identifiable hazard within our working environment, and **[insert organisation name]** has a duty to make every effort to ensure good practice and safe systems of work.

## 4. Outcomes

- The working life of staff is improved
- Individual, team and organisational effectiveness are improved
- Staff engagement, motivation and commitment increase.
- As far as possible, psychological injury will be prevented in **[insert organisation name]** workers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Health and Safety Executive – UK b

## 5. Functions and Delegations

Position	Delegation/Task
Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure necessary resources are available for policy implementation</li> <li>• Promote and maintain workplace health and safety.</li> <li>• Ensure leadership, climate and morale are developed, measured and reviewed</li> <li>• Monitor risk management</li> </ul>
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Eg CEO</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Establish and implement systems associated with the Psychological injury Policy</li> <li>○ Ensure Psychological injury policies and procedures are effectively implemented and adhered to.</li> <li>○ Promote and monitor morale, climate and leadership.</li> <li>○ Ensure that bullying and harassment are not tolerated.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Eg supervisor / line manager</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ carrying out leadership behaviours to support employee wellbeing</li> <li>○ noticing and responding to early signs of employee disengagement, such as withdrawal and counterproductive behaviours</li> <li>○ providing guidance for all managers and supervisory staff in supportive leadership practices.</li> <li>○ encouraging a culture where staff are not stigmatised, but supported, if they experience psychological injury</li> <li>○ offering immediate and ongoing support to staff involved in traumatic or stressful incidents, complaints or claims</li> <li>○ ensuring the provision of confidential counselling for staff affected by either workplace or external stress factors</li> <li>○ identifying workplace stressors at a local level, and conducting risk assessments if appropriate, to eliminate stress or control the risks that might cause stress and regularly review these.</li> <li>○ offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation.</li> <li>○ using the annual appraisal discussion as an opportunity to feedback on the performance of all staff in helping to manage psychological injury,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
WHS Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to improve workteam climate and leadership, increase morale, reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.</li> </ul>
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give guidance to managers on the psychological injury policy.</li> <li>• Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating statistics on morale, climate, and sickness absence statistics.</li> <li>• Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.</li> <li>• Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to EAP counsellors where appropriate.</li> </ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance with Psychological injury Policy</li> <li>• Familiarise yourself with the literature concerning morale, climate, leadership and psychological injury</li> <li>• Participate in team development activities</li> <li>• Keep engaged with the workplace during periods of work absence.</li> <li>• Raise issues of concern with your WHS Representative, line manager or <b>[insert position]</b></li> <li>• Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.</li> </ul>

## 6. Policy Implementation

The WHS Committee will perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.

All staff have access to policies and procedures relating to psychological injury

Tailored training is provided to persons with specific tasks where psychological injury is a risk.

Records of activities are maintained, including training undertaken, information provided to workers and the use of strategies to prevent and manage psychological injury.

There are mechanisms for monitoring compliance with the psychological injury policy

## 7. Policy Detail

### 7.1 Leadership to support employee wellbeing

Managers are educated, supported and reviewed in regard to the following:

#### Promotion of employee wellbeing:

- Empathy (trustworthy, even-handed, understanding, pro-active)
- Clarity (clear goals, micro and macro objectives, delegations)
- Engagement (decision-making, goal-alignment, teamwork)
- Learning (feedback, coaching, professional development)

#### Identification of, and response to, employee disengagement:

- withdrawal behaviours
  - discretionary absenteeism
  - lasteness
  - turnover
  - cynicism
- counterproductive behaviours
  - productivity (eg misuse of time and resources, unsafe behaviour, poor attendance, presenteeism, alcohol / drug use)
  - property (eg theft, destruction, misuse of information)
  - political (eg gossip, favouritism, blaming behaviours)
  - interpersonal (eg inactivity, harassment, bullying, and violence)

### 7.2 Risk Management Approach

**[insert organisation name]** will identify workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed. For more information, see [Appendix 1](#).

### 7.3 Consultation

**[insert organisation name]** will consult with Health Safety Representatives on proposed action relating to the prevention of psychological injury.

#### **7.4 Training**

[insert organisation name] will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.

#### **7.5 Individual susceptibility**

[insert organisation name] will provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.

#### **7.6 Resources for a Psychological Health Strategy**

[insert organisation name] will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement [insert organisation name]'s agreed psychological health strategy.

[insert organisation name] and its staff will promote psychological health in the workplace by:

- successfully implementing this Psychological injury Policy and expecting all staff to be conversant with it, particularly their level of personal responsibility.

#### **7.7 Work Health Safety representatives**

Health and Safety Representatives must be:

- meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.
- able to consult with workers on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys.
- meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process.

Health and Safety Representatives should:

- be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR.
- be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to psychological injury.
- conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least every 3 months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

#### **7.8 Promoting physical and psychological health at work**

[insert organisation name] promotes health at work through:

- A focus on supportive leadership, climate and employee wellbeing
- a proactive approach to managing the risk factors for psychological injury
- providing information to staff on how they can promote physical and psychological health

## 7.9 Prevention

In order to prevent psychological injury from developing, **[insert organisation name]** will, as far as is reasonably practicable:

- promote supportive leadership
- focus on employee morale and wellbeing
- proactively manage operational stressors such as:
  - demands
  - control
  - support
  - role clarity
  - relationships
  - recognition and reward
  - change
  - fairness

For individual staff, the line manager should also be aware of the following and take any necessary action:

- Consider adjustments for staff who have a recognised disability which comes under the scope of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992).
- Be aware of staff training and development needs:
  - Upon a new appointment
  - Transfer and where there is a change of responsibilities
  - Introduction of new work equipment and or new technology
  - Introduction of a new work system or any changes to existing work systems.
- Ensure bullying and harassment are not tolerated
- Refer to relevant **[insert organisation name]** policies and guidelines where staff have been involved in an incident, complaint, claim, or has been asked to be a witness. Immediate support should be offered if necessary.

## 7.10 Keeping an eye on early signs of disengagement

To help recognise early signs of employee disengagement **[insert organisation name]** managers will:

- Use supervision/appraisal/reviews to talk to staff about any issues or concerns they may have
- Provide relevant training to enable staff to recognise when they are feeling disengaged
- Provide information about available services which will help staff feel confident about the support available, such as:
  - Flexible working hours
  - Internal training
  - Private space
  - Specialist equipment
  - Reallocating workload
- Foster a culture in which staff feel comfortable disclosing mental health issues
- Regularly monitor how staff are feeling

- Cultivate positive, open relationships with staff; talk with, and listen to, staff.

### 7.11 Immediate support for staff

Staff experiencing health symptoms related to workplace stress are able to receive immediate support from their line manager, or via [eg EAP] or via the [eg 24 hour telephone counselling advice line].

Staff can also request a confidential 'self-referral' appointment by contacting [eg EAP].

### 7.12 Accessing information on the management of psychological injury

Information on the management of psychological injury can be found on the **[insert organisation name]** website in [insert location – eg *Psychological Health in the Workplace*].

### 7.13 Support telephone Numbers

- [eg EAP] ph:
- [eg 24 hour telephone counselling advice line] ph:

### 7.14 Sickness Absence

Where work related stress leads to sick leave, **[insert organisation name]**'s sick leave and work health and safety policies will be followed.

## 8. References + Resources

### 8.1 External

Cotton, P (2009). *Current Issues in the Return to Work Management of Psychological Injury*. [www.workcover.com/documents.ashx?ld=1614&type=ppt](http://www.workcover.com/documents.ashx?ld=1614&type=ppt)

Health and Safety Executive – UK- b. *An example of a stress policy*. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/examplepolicy.pdf>. Accessed 12/01/12.

Health and Safety Executive – UK- a. What are the Management Standards for work related stress? <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm> Accessed 12/01/12.

Mental Health Commission of Canada (2011). *The road to psychological safety*. [http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Workforce\\_2011/The\\_Road\\_to\\_Psychological\\_Safety.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Workforce_2011/The_Road_to_Psychological_Safety.pdf) . Accessed February 2012.

SafeWork Australia (2011). *Model Code of Practice - How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks* . <http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Pages/Manage-WHS-Risks-COP.aspx>

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (2010). Management of workplace stress policy. [http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/resources/about\\_us/foi/policies/stress\\_management\\_policy.pdf](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/resources/about_us/foi/policies/stress_management_policy.pdf) Accessed March 2012.

Shaw Trust (2010). *Early Warning Signs*. <http://www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk/how-do-i/healthy-workspace/early-warning-signs/> Accessed March 2012.

Shift (2007). *Line Managers' Resource: A practical guide to managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace* <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/manage-mental-health.pdf> Accessed March 2012.

## 8.2 Legislation

Work Health and Safety Act 2011

Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011

## 9. Appendix 1: Risk Management Approach to Workplace Stressors

Workplace stressor risk management has traditionally focused on individuals, within an organisation, who are already distressed<sup>2</sup>. This approach is not only costly, but it also means that the employer may not be fully meeting the obligation to prevent or minimise risks from people being exposed to stressors at work.

Managers will use SafeWork Australia's **four-stage process** for identifying and managing risks for work-related stress.

- a. **identify hazards** - find out what could cause harm
- b. **assess risks if necessary** - understand the nature of the harm that could be caused by the hazard, how serious the harm could be and the likelihood of it happening
- c. **control risks** - implement the most effective control measure that is reasonably practicable in the circumstances
- d. **review control measures** to ensure they are working as planned.

### Identify the hazards

The first step in the risk management process is to identify workplace hazards. This means looking for those things in the workplace that have the potential to cause harm.

Indicators related to operational stressors include: productivity levels, rates of absenteeism, separation rates/turnover, exit interviews, staff engagement / morale, client feedback, peak demands, analysing incident reports and data trends.

---

<sup>2</sup> The State of Queensland - Department of Justice and Attorney-General (2010). Tip Sheet 2

## Assess and prioritise the risk

This step involves assessing the likelihood and consequences of injury or illness that may result from exposure to workplace stressors.

### How to conduct a risk assessment

Risk factors for psychological injury can be assessed by understanding worker complaints, observing interactions between workers, gaining feedback from workers, having one-on-one discussions with workers and through the use of focus groups or a worker survey. Findings from focus groups or worker surveys would then inform a decision about the likelihood and consequences of injury or illness from exposure to workplace stress and make it clear which risk factors are contributing to that risk.

## Control Risks

### Decide on control measures

After assessing the risk and determining which factor(s) have the greatest contribution to that risk, the most appropriate control measure(s) to enable it to be properly managed needs to be selected. When selecting a particular control, it is important to be able to justify why it was chosen over a different measure.

Deciding on control measures may mean altering a problem risk factor (eg reducing work demands, increasing the level of control a worker has over his/her job, increasing the amount of peer and/or supervisor support a person is receiving).

### Implement control measures

After the most appropriate control measures have been identified, the next step is to put these controls into place. Examples of control measures to manage the risk of psychological injury include:

- improving supervisor/managerial skills via coaching, mentoring and/or training
- planning workloads to meet potential demands
- setting clear performance goals/accountability
- ensuring role clarity and reassessing job descriptions
- setting new or adjusting current HR procedures
- providing assistance (e.g. an employee assistance program)
- communicating policy and availability of assistance
- checking understanding and implementation of changes
- promoting effective early rehabilitation.

## Monitor and review

The last step of the risk management process is to monitor and review the effectiveness of the control measures that have been implemented. When monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of control measures, **[insert organisation name]** will weigh up whether the chosen controls are effective or whether they need some modification.