



Fairfield
Farm
Trust

Charity No. 273924

Stress Policy

Policy number	New or Reviewed	Date of next review	Responsibility
P020	November 2019	November 2021	Director of HR & Workforce Dev.

'Providing outstanding opportunities for people with learning difficulties to be successful'

Introduction

- 1.1. Fairfield Farm Trust (FFT) recognises that stress at work can be harmful and can have a detrimental effect upon both the individuals concerned and upon the business as a whole.

2. Definition of stress

- 2.1. The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.” This makes an important distinction between pressure and stress. Pressure can be motivating and improve performance. Stress is a negative reaction that people have to excessive pressures which may make them feel unable to cope.
- 2.2. Stress is a state and not an illness and is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. This may be due to work or factors outside work. There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a ‘buzz’ and be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when the pressure becomes excessive. If the excessive pressure (stress) continues for prolonged periods of time, it can have adverse effects on an individual’s physical and mental health as well as performance at work.

3. Symptoms of stress

- 3.1. Any set of tasks, responsibilities and day-to-day problems result in pressures and demands being placed upon almost any employee in any working environment. Individuals accept reasonable pressures which are, in the main, considered as positive and motivational. These pressures can provide the key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction.
- 3.2. It is only when there is excessive and unreasonable workplace pressure, beyond that contained within a person’s job description, that it might become harmful. It can then damage performance and undermines the health of a workforce as described below:
 - Harmful stress levels differ for individuals, based on personality, experience, motivation and the support received from management, colleagues, family and friends. But where pressures build and continue for some time, the effects of stress can become more sustained and far more damaging, leading to longer-term psychological problems and physical ill health.
 - Long-term stress has been associated with conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, depression, ulcers (actually caused by bacteria) and thyroid disorders.
 - There can also be associated behavioral effects, such as increased anxiety and irritability, a tendency to drink more alcohol and smoke more, difficulty sleeping, poor concentration and an inability to deal calmly with everyday tasks and situations.
 - The ability to cope with high levels of stress can also be affected by events being experienced outside of work. Situations such as bereavement, family sickness, marital or other inter-personal problems also cause stress.

3.3. Indicators of potentially harmful stress levels to watch out for are:

- Pressures which are cumulative and/or prolonged.
- Demands placed upon the individual over which he/she has lost control.
- Demands which are conflicting – causing confusion.
- High levels of uncertainty or under-utilisation of skills.
- Inflexible and/or over-demanding work, beyond that of the job description, and/or travel schedules.
- Prolonged inter-personal conflicts.
- Absences of leadership and/or understanding from managers.

3.4. Physical conditions such as noise, heat, humidity, vibration and a presence of toxic or dangerous materials or other hazards might also increase stress levels for the employees working within that environment.

4. The impact of stress

4.1. At an organisational level, stress can result in deterioration of morale, performance and staff turnover. Sickness absence due to stress can cause a domino effect where increased workloads due to sickness absence of a colleague can in turn lead to increased workload pressures and stress in other members of the team.

5. FFT approach to managing stress

5.1. FFT takes the issue of stress very seriously to ensure the health and well-being of its employees as well as the smooth running of the business.

5.2. If you are feeling the effects of stress, or suspect a colleague is stressed, please inform your manager. Your manager will examine the causes of stress involved and together with the Director of HR & Workforce Development, will look at ways in which the stress can be eliminated or reduced. This will be done in full consultation with the affected employee. The employee may also be asked to undertake a confidential consultation with Occupational Health.

5.3. The necessary changes will be made in accordance with the cause of stress, the nature of work and the resources available. Such measures may include:

- Ensuring that employees' skills, abilities and personalities match the demands of the job, which may mean varying the type of work or work location.
- Improving training.
- Improving career structures.
- Improving communications and consultation.
- In some instances it may be desirable to take long-term measures aimed at improving the quality of working life. These may include the following:
 - Meeting on a regular basis to identify, investigate and attempt to solve work related problems. This can help to improve job satisfaction and produce a higher quality service.
 - Taking a critical look at the organisation of tasks and the structuring of jobs, in consultation with employees, to provide satisfaction for them and to increase their effectiveness.
 - Giving an individual more responsibility for a defined area of work, where possible.
 - Considering team working. This gives a group of people greater responsibility for effective performance whilst also setting specific goals for the team.

- 5.4 It is sometimes necessary for managers to invoke disciplinary procedures to address poor performance or conduct, and to protect other staff from the adverse effects of such under-performance. It is recognised that the prospect of disciplinary proceedings or the proceedings themselves may be stressful for the staff involved. This should not in itself prevent managers from pursuing legitimate management action: indeed lengthy delays in the disciplinary process may aggravate stress. Line managers should, however, seek advice if necessary from the Director of HR & Workforce Development, as to how to support the member of staff concerned while the disciplinary process is in progress to mitigate the effects of stress. Similar advice may be necessary in the context of the grievance procedure.

6. Ill health

- 6.1. Where an employee suffers from ill health and is absent from work due to stress, FFT will not endanger that individual's health further by placing him/her back into his/her previous job without first effecting change. The employee will be invited to a welfare meeting where the following may be considered:
- An introduction of a safe system of work – amending the previous job/responsibilities, where practicable. Changes in hours will also be considered.
 - Redeployment into a less stressful role.
 - Any other measures that FFT can take within its control that will alleviate the stress and enable a return to work for the employee.
- 6.2. It may not be possible to eliminate all pressures that are believed to be causing stress at work; however FFT aims to make all employees aware of such factors and deal with any such issues as effectively as possible.
- 6.3. If it is not possible for FFT to implement changes that will help the employee return to work, the employment may be brought to an end, following consultation with the employee, following a fair capability process.

7. Employee Responsibilities

It is essential that staff play an active role in contributing to their own well-being and development, as well as to the success of the department and FFT, by using the resources available to carry out their role effectively. In order to minimise the risk of work-related stress, staff should:

- ensure good communication with colleagues and their line manager;
- support colleagues by providing appropriate information and by sharing knowledge and resources where appropriate;
- engage in discussion about their performance and act on feedback;
- raise issues of concern at an early stage and seek constructive solutions;
- make use of the support and training resources available, such as Occupational Health
- ensure that harassment and bullying are not tolerated;
- seek appropriate advice and support at an early stage if difficulties arise.

It is hoped that a proactive approach will mitigate the occurrence of potentially harmful levels of stress. However, where a member of staff feels under undue pressure, he or she should alert their line manager, or another appropriate person (examples of appropriate people include Occupational Health, Director of HR & Workforce Development, or a colleague who may be able to speak on his or her behalf), or otherwise to seek assistance as soon as possible.

8. Long-term strategy

- 8.1. To ensure that all instances of stress are as minimal as possible FFT will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that jobs will be designed in such a manner that:
 - The responsibility and tasks can be clarified and communicated to each jobholder.
 - The job is achievable by the jobholder who can receive credit for its accomplishment.
 - Employees are not given a role for which they do not have the ability.
 - Timely training and instruction with regard to the job, the working environment and identified specific pressures can be given.
- 8.2. Where appropriate, as part of the normal risk assessment process, jobs will be assessed in order to identify tasks and responsibilities that may place prolonged and harmful levels of stress upon the jobholders. When necessary, and in consultation with the jobholders, job design may then be altered in order to reduce the risk. However there are some roles that are stressful and it may be difficult to make adjustments due to the needs of FFT.
- 8.3. It is each employee's responsibility to become familiar with this policy and adhere to its terms.

9. Review of policy

- 9.1. The Senior Leadership Team and Trustees will perform an important role in ensuring this policy is implemented.
- 9.2. The Senior Leadership Team and the Trustees will oversee monitoring the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.
- 9.3. This policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD

Clair Beaty-Pownall

Director of HR & Workforce Development
November 2019