



Occupational Stress Management

Objective:

Stepping Stones Child Care Centre is committed to providing a healthy and safe workplace for its employees. This commitment extends to all aspects of occupational health and safety including the effects of stress.

Stepping Stones will take every reasonable step required to reduce the risk of staff members developing work induced stress related disorders.

Definitions:

Stress is defined as the emotional and physical effects of stressors in an individual's work, home or social environment. An additional view is that stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they worry they can't cope.

Causes of harmful effects of stress:

Stepping Stones Child Care Centre is aware that there is no simple way of predicting what will cause harmful levels of stress. The levels of stress that are harmful differ for each individual according to their personality, experience, motivation and importantly the support they receive from managers, colleagues, family and friends. The ability to cope with high levels of stress will also be determined by the amount being experienced outside of work, resulting from such situations as bereavement, family sickness, and marital or other interpersonal problems.

Harmful stress is more likely to occur when there is/are:

- a) Pressures which are cumulative and or/prolonged.
- b) Demands placed upon the individual over which he/she feels he/she has lost control.
- c) Lack of competence or training.
- d) Demands which are conflicting, which lead to confusion.
- e) High levels of uncertainty about their work, their objectives or job prospects.
- f) Over demanding or too simplistic work schedules.
- g) There is prolonged conflict between individuals.
- h) Absence of leadership and or understanding from management.

These factors, combined with others such as health problems and pressures outside work, may lead to the reduction in the ability to cope with pressures at work.

EFFECTS OF STRESS

Excessive stress can manifest itself in physical, emotional or behavioral effects. These effects are usually short-lived and cause no lasting harm. When the pressures recede, there is quick return to normal. Stress is not therefore the same as ill health. It is only when pressures are intense and continue for some time that 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 and depression. These conditions may arise from other causes, and if a particular individual is suffering from one of these disorders, it will be for a medical practitioner to advise on the extent to which it is work related.

PROVISIONS TO PREVENT HARMFUL LEVELS OF STRESS

1. Role/Job Description – responsibilities and tasks can be clarified and communicated to each staff member at Stepping Stones.
2. Staff members are not placed in roles for which they do not have the ability, experience and qualifications.
3. There is scope for varying working conditions and for people to influence the way their jobs are done – increasing their control, interest and sense of ownership.
4. Stepping Stones will monitor and if necessary, change physical conditions in the workplace, such as noise, heat, humidity, overcrowding, bad ergonomic design or other hazards that might increase stress levels for staff.
5. Leadership and Management. Stepping Stones endeavors to provide a consistent and caring style of management from Director/s and Proprietor. Should there be periods of change, the levels of uncertainty suffered by individuals inevitably increase and efforts will be made to reduce these to the minimum by regular communication.
6. Stepping Stones will provide training in identifying causes of stress, managing stress and communication.

2. SOME GUIDELINES FOR STAFF TO ALLEVIATE THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF STRESS

1. Identify the problem/problems.
2. Try and think of solutions.
3. If you can change the situation, do so.
4. Raise the issue at a staff meeting, or talk to Director about concerns and for help and advice.
5. Let Director know if workload is too heavy or light.
6. Prioritise your workload. Deal with high priority tasks first.
7. Match your workload and pace to your abilities and training. Do not be afraid to ask for help.
8. Try not to express or experience anger in the workplace. If this emotion comes to the fore, take a deep breath, “stand back” in your minds eye (count to ten) before reacting. Devise your own personal strategy for this emotion.
9. Try to maintain a sense of humour and keep things in perspective. How bad is the event when compared with some world catastrophe?
10. Practice “self care” and make time to do something for yourself. Make healthy life choices – get regular exercise, eat healthy food, get plenty of sleep, discover new hobbies.

11. Attend training offered by Stepping Stones - it will make your time at work easier and more enjoyable.

3. FURTHER ACTIONS

If the above guidelines have been met without resolution of the stress/stressor, then the following is recommended:

1. One to one discussion with the Director/ Proprietor - (This is subsequent to any discussions in 2.4) The Director will be the first point of formal contact for Stepping Stones staff member who is reporting stress in the workplace. The Proprietor is the first point of formal contact for the Director if he/she is reporting stress.
2. Investigation by Director of workplace stressor (within 3 days of 3.1)
3. Centre Director/ Proprietor may make referrals to:
 - (a) Mediation
 - (b) Counseling
 - (c) Dispute process
 - (d) Medical adviceand/or
 - (e) Stress leave
 - (f) Discussions with union personnel (work practices, awards, conditions etc)
 - (g) Attainment of a second medical opinion or report from other health professionals
 - (h) Any other such action as may be appropriate

Source:

- Workers Health Centre www.workershealth.com.au

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