Defining stress

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Work-related stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as:

> "The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work." (HSE 2021)

Work-related stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them. It is not in itself an illness, but physical or mental illness may manifest if the causal factors are not addressed.

Two people can be subject to the exact same experience and have very different physical responses. Within a workplace each and every situation can bring a different reaction to different individuals. Stress is subjective and is all about how the individual perceives and interprets the factors which could cause stress. It is not the same as stimulus. Therefore, there is no suggestion that 'stress can be good for you.' Stress is caused by a stimuli and can be either positive or negative that prompts an action.

Stress is often missed because it is not visibly evident. Individuals can be suffering from the effects of stress, which could be caused by a number of different factors, but their tolerance can become reduced by factors in the workplace. This could result in a sudden and unexpected reaction to a certain event or events. Like many issues which cause a reaction in an individual, the event which causes a stress reaction or illness may only be a contributing factor, not the only factor.

Ultimately if an individual is continually exposed to an environment (work or non- work) over a long period of time, or as a result of a sudden traumatic event stress-related ill health can present itself. Some of these ways are listed in the signs of stress section below.

The use of the HSE Stress Management Standard as part of the risk assessment process provides the organisation with examples of suitable

control measures that can be put in place to assist the manager and the employee.

The Talking Toolkit provides a simple and practical framework to enable teams and managers dealing with issues, to engage in constructive conversations to identify the causes of stress, anxiety, or concerns. The toolkit also includes proven solutions that may resolve or prevent identified workplace stress related problems.

The talking toolkit for:

- England

- Scotland

- Wales (in English and Welsh)