

Mindful Work

The HSE webinar about the Talking Toolkit

Summary points

- stress is now the biggest cause of days lost – 660k cases last year – and growing
- impacts are both on the employer, but on the individual employee
- cost can be 4x salary loss, presenteeism is 2x cost of sickness
- workload pressure esp due to austerity, more work to do by fewer people
- when pressure is continuous, can lead to chronic physical and mental illness, substance abuse etc
- burn-out is now recognised by WHO as a workplace condition
- work is more cognitively demanding with IT
- in some industries talking about stress is taboo, esp when redundancy is looming
- however in last 5 years the term work related stress is more openly talked about
- in some industries suicide has increased, esp men working away from home
- recent reports eg by Mind, Stevenson Farmer point to the issue and the cost
- the Talking Toolkit aims to address the need to start a conversation
- aims to give people a basis & key questions for discussion
- it's based on the HSE Management Standards – relationships, change, role, control, demands and support
- communication is fundamental – identifying the problem & how it can be managed
- this simplifies the process and meets the concern that 'stress is too hard a subject'
- this can be used as a team tool – fostering better communication
- good to start the conversation by asking 'what to do to improve the workplace'
- performance reviews are an opportunity to raise these issues
- as an individual, one can use to toolkit to prompt the conversation with a manager
- unions may help in this process
- useful to point to the stats about stress
- IT can be a stress factor if staff are not inducted properly
- with mobile phones there is no let up, difficult to turn off
- employment contracts cannot demand constant exposure to work on demand
- we have lives out of work and we need this balance
- when an employee says they are stressed, it's useful to widen the conversation to chunk down the issues and see how problems can be addressed
- 'work related stress' may be too general a term
- H&S at Work Act requires employers to identify the risk of stress at work – there is a duty to do this and to look after people
- 'work related stress' is a shorthand – it's a series of conditions, that employers can do something about
- top 3 causes are demands, control and change – all of which can be managed
- stress needs to be addressed I 3 ways – 1) organisational culture so everyone from the top down is happy to talk about stress and mental health, 2) then building resilience for individuals (eg mindfulness), 3) then dealing with restoring people back to work when they have burned out

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- the HSE approach is to try to prevent the cause in the first place – if people learn to cope better that's good, but they could soon be back in the same toxic environment
- the resilience and the organisational approach must be taken together
- open and transparent discussion in the face of possible redundancies can be useful, plus a support mechanism

See links:

Talking Toolkit

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/stress-talking-toolkit.pdf>

Mindful Work also has a Stress Check tool as part of our free tools, that aims to break stress down into bite sized chunks - here's the link:

<https://mindfulwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Stress-test-2018-1.pdf>