

STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

Experts have warned that the COVID pandemic has caused a mental health crisis. New ways of working introduced in the wake of lockdown risk exacerbating this. Whether employees work at home or in the workplace, employers must support those with poor mental health and take active steps to stop work-related stress before it occurs.

Branches can use the following 10-point checklist to appraise their employer's practice. It should give branches tangible steps they can take to address stress and mental health in their workplaces.

Does your employer have a stress and mental health policy?

Good policies establish the employer's commitment to removing or minimising stressful work and supporting the mental health of all staff, especially those with mental health problems. It should link with other policies like home and flexible working; sickness absence; equality, diversity and inclusion; and health and safety.

For more information, see Prospect's mental health guide: <http://bit.ly/Prospect-MHG>

Is prevention favoured over cure?

This is less to do with documentation and more about the employer's actions. Employers are increasingly aware that mental health is an important workplace issue and provide a range of wellbeing support services. This is important, but too few put similar resources into considering and tackling the ways in which the workplace causes mental ill health.

For more information, see Prospect's stress guide: <http://bit.ly/prospect-stress>

Is mental health and stress addressed on the joint health and safety committee?

Mental health is a workplace health issue, and the employer must consult the union on how it is tackling the risks that can cause it. The joint committee should monitor and scrutinise trends, interventions and strategies concerning mental health.

Are there clear expectations concerning communication and work boundaries for remote workers?

Remote working has led to a reliance on technology to communicate. This is often accompanied by the tacit expectation that employees are always available and must respond to messages quickly, which can lead to stress and burnout. In agreement with the union, management should clearly articulate a series of expectations around availability

and communication, which could be set out in a remote work or working time policy. For example, expectations could include that: employees are only to work a set number of hours; messages are only responded to in working hours, and not right away; meetings are only held when necessary; and leaders will role model these behaviours.

Is there a stress risk assessment?

Employers have a legal obligation to assess and manage harmful organisational and job factors like workload, poorly managed change or bullying. The employer should work out – in consultation with the union – how to remove or reduce the risks.

For more information, see Prospect's briefing, *How good is my employer's stress risk assessment?*: <http://bit.ly/stress-ra>

Are line managers and employees trained in mental health?

Line managers should be trained to spot signs of distress; support people with conditions; and understand how work and their actions can affect employees' mental health. Training staff will make them more aware of the causes of mental ill health, be more confident in supporting colleagues and help destigmatise the issue.

Are there reasonable adjustment passports?

These documents, which detail an employee's agreed workplace adjustments, prevent them having to reassess adjustments when they get a new supervisor or change teams.

For more information, see the TUC's interactive guide for reps on reasonable adjustment passports: <http://bit.ly/DP-reps-guide>

Does your employer monitor employee mental health and exposure to sources of stress?

Surveys and other sources of data, such as sickness absence, will help identify the way that work is affecting employee mental health and who is at risk. This data can also be used in the stress risk assessment.

Information about sources of data can be found at <http://bit.ly/stress-data>

Are employees provided with access to psychological therapies?

Employee assistance programmes and counselling services can help employees who are struggling. If the provider also offers other occupational health services, it should be SEQOHS accredited.

Are there workplace adjustments for people with mental ill health?

Simple changes, made after discussion, will often be all that are required.

For more information, see Prospect's Disability resource pack for reps and members: <http://bit.ly/disability-resource>