

# HCC Workplace Stress Policy



## Policy Statement

1. Huntingdonshire Community Church (HCC) is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees and volunteers. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
2. This policy will apply to everyone in the Church.
3. Managers are responsible for implementation and the Church is responsible for providing the necessary resources.

## Definition of Stress

4. The Health and Safety Executive define 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, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

## Stress as a Cause of Sickness

5. Stress, whether work-related or personal, can be a legitimate cause of sickness. This means that employees suffering from stress-related conditions are entitled to the same sickness benefits and support as they would receive for any other health issue. Employees should be able to report stress as a reason for absence. Mental health conditions like stress should be reported in the same way as for physical illnesses, ensuring consistency. When employees return to work after stress-related sickness, a clear process should be agreed between line manager and employee for managing their reintegration. This might include a phased return-to-work plan, reduced hours, or altered duties.
6. This stress policy should guide managers in recognising early signs of stress, reducing the need for prolonged absences by offering timely intervention or support (eg counselling or flexible work arrangements).

## Involvement of Occupational Health

7. Occupational health services provide specialist advice on managing work-related stress and help ensure that employees are physically and mentally fit to perform their duties. Early referral is encouraged when stress is first identified in order to prevent escalation.
8. The following are signs of stress that may cause managers to consider a referral to Occupational Health:
  - Prolonged absence due to stress or mental health concerns.
  - Frequent or repeated short-term absences related to stress or anxiety.
  - Noticeable changes in behaviour, such as withdrawal, irritability, or reduced performance.
  - Employee reports or self-disclosure of experiencing high levels of work-related stress.

9. The following are examples of situations that would normally warrant a referral to occupational health:

- After a stress risk assessment identifies significant risks to an employee's well-being.
- When a line manager is concerned about an employee's ability to cope with job demands despite adjustments.
- When stress or mental health issues are affecting the employee's performance, attendance, or conduct.
- If an employee requests a referral due to concerns about stress-related health problems.
- Following a formal grievance related to workplace stress or bullying.

10. Steps for making an occupational health referral:

- Line manager identifies signs of stress in an employee and conducts a stress risk assessment
- Line manager has discussion with employee
- If the manager believes specialist advice is required, this is discussed with the employee and the employee's agreement obtained
- An Occupational Health referral form is completed
- Employee attends an appointment with Occupational Health
- Manager receives Occupational Health report with recommendations; employee reviews report
- The report's recommendations are implemented, and the employee's well-being is monitored
- Thorough records and confidentiality are maintained throughout

11. Following the referral and implementation of any recommendations, adjustments to workload, environment, or working hours, should be considered, along with temporary reassignments or reduced duties. Regular follow-up meetings should take place to assess the employee's progress and well-being.

#### **HCC Will:**

12. Promote a culture of openness where employees feel comfortable discussing stress without fear of stigma.
13. Identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
14. Consult with staff and volunteers on all proposed actions relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
15. Provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.
16. Provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
17. Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the Church's agreed stress management strategy.

#### **Responsibilities**

18. **Managers**

- Conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their jurisdiction
- Ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes
- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties
- Ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities

- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded
- Monitor working hours, overtime and holidays to ensure that staff are not overworking, and are taking their full holiday entitlement
- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction
- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work, eg bereavement or separation

19. **Senior Leader**

- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress
- Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments
- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work
- Refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress
- Inform the Church and the Health and Safety Committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work

20. **Trustee/Senior Leader's Responsibilities**

- Give guidance to managers on the stress policy
- Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics
- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements
- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate.

21. **Employees**

- Raise issues of concern with your Safety Representative, line manager or Trustees.
- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.