

## Policy for Protection against Work-related Stress and Anxiety

### AIMS OF POLICY

The first aim of this policy is to raise awareness of stress and anxiety (see below) among members of staff, so as to encourage everyone to take individual and collective responsibility for addressing problems that affect their own and others' wellbeing and performance.

The SLT can usually do no more than show due consideration for the personal problems which individuals contend with in their private lives; whereas we constantly strive to improve individual and organisational management of key influences on the level of work-related stress and anxiety experienced by staff.

The second aim of this policy is therefore to identify those key work-related influences and the mechanisms we can use for combating them. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the key influences are:

- ✓ workplace demands (e.g. workload, working environment);
- ✓ control (e.g. how much say a person has in their work);
- ✓ support (e.g. encouragement, training, resources);
- ✓ relationships (e.g. positive attitude, respect);
- ✓ role (e.g. clear responsibilities, avoiding conflict);
- ✓ change (quest for improvement, complexity of communications).

Lakeside recognises that feelings of stress and anxiety do not always emanate exclusively from either an individual's private life or work-related pressures: these two spheres interact, so that staff may be fragile when they arrive at work or become exhausted and dispirited during the course of a day. We expect staff to protect themselves and their colleagues against letting personal problems interfere with their work, as far as they are able, and to seek help when self-protection is not enough. Lakeside buys into independent help and advice which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days. **Details of support can be found on the well-being noticeboards in the Gents and Ladies toilets.**

Leaders, managers and mentors will be vigilant, on the look out for signs of stress or anxiety, and will not necessarily wait to be approached before intervening. The school's policy is to empower individuals by raising awareness and to be pro-active in exercising its duty of care.

### TERMINOLOGY

Stress is an adverse reaction to pressure from past or present experiences.

Anxiety is a similarly debilitating state, except that it relates to apprehension about future pressure. Pressure can be energising and a spur to action but, when it is out of proportion to what individuals can tolerate at a given point in their lives, then the resulting stress or anxiety can be detrimental to health and ability.

Depression can be triggered by intense and prolonged stress or anxiety, childhood experiences, loneliness, excessive alcohol or drug use, physical illness and poor diet. However, in some people there is no obvious trigger. It is not simply feelings of sadness or loss that affect us all from time to time, it is an illness that requires medical attention and possibly treatment or expert intervention.

Staff who are reluctant to visit their GP (despite symptoms such as disturbed sleep, lack of energy or motivation, avoiding intimacy with family and friends, loss of confidence and self esteem, feeling tearful, Low, despairing or guilty) might find it easier to decide upon a wise course of action after exploring on-line help from a reputable website; e.g. [www.Livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.Livinglifetothefull.com) . Thoughts of self-harm or suicide put the need for medical help beyond doubt.

Candidates for jobs at Lakeside will be asked about their resilience (i.e. their ability to "bounce back" from stressful or anxiety-provoking situations), because our ethos depends upon members of staff being able to project mentally and emotionally healthy attitudes towards pupils, parents, and colleagues under pressure. A positive psychological climate is essential for the work we do.

When colleagues become ill or disabled but can potentially continue performing their duties to a high standard without detriment to themselves or others, the school is happy to organise support within its means or to make reasonable adjustments (as defined in Disability Discrimination legislation). However, our working environment is such that shelter from physical, mental and emotional challenges cannot be maintained for long.

Exercise of our duty of care to staff may involve a risk assessment, which will be considered in the light of any available advice from a GP, a specialist consultant or Occupational Health. Such assessments are carried out by a senior leader/manager in collaboration with the member of staff under stress. Nobody at Lakeside is employed to make a diagnosis of depression or advise on how it should be treated.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

The school is an organisation that is constantly striving to improve, but this will only be sustainable if demands on staff are reasonable, individuals feel in control and well supported, people relate well at a personal level, their roles complement one another, and everyone communicates as effectively as they can.

In *Recovery from Stress* (2000) Tony Attwood said the key to sustainability is,

"to get to that critical point at which the drive for improvement becomes central to the life of the school. And this means making sure everyone appreciates that the school can and will change any aspect of its work which it seems reasonable to change. In the improving school, communication is open and free. Advice is freely sought and freely given. Everyone's opinion is valued. New ideas are considered constantly and without worry".

Participating in a challenging environment "without worry" is easier said than done, but good quality advice can make a difference. In-service education and training help staff recognise stress and anxiety in themselves or in others (see Appendices 2 and 3), and it can ensure that staff are aware of the School's mechanisms for combating work-related stress and anxiety (see below).

## **MECHANISMS FOR COMBATING WORK-RELATED STRESS AND ANXIETY**

These mechanisms operate by either supporting individuals at risk of suffering or already suffering from stress/anxiety or by pre-emptive means of protecting the workforce.

Pre-emptive means of protecting the workforce include:

- ✓ A Code of Ethics which stresses the importance of treating one another with courtesy and respect and a commitment to deal effectively with any instance where this is not observed;
- ✓ An open ethos in which Line managers are available to discuss issues causing concern to their colleagues;
- ✓ Organising in such a way as to allow staff to relax and recover during contractual breaks (emergency encroachment on breaks is the exception and not the rule);
- ✓ Offering discretionary breaks mid-morning;
- ✓ Protecting Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time for teachers;
- ✓ Timetabling training, meetings and other events;
- ✓ Considering the amount of work to be undertaken when setting tasks and deadlines;
- ✓ Fostering a culture in which members of staff are given a "breathing space" in which to recover from traumatic events, without any implication of failure to cope;( see 'Violence and Agression Policy')

- ✓ A culture that recognises the impact of difficult issues, including working with fragile pupils and those who are highly challenging, and seeks to ensure that staff have the opportunity to talk through their feelings when they need to do so;
- ✓ Assigning mentors to all new staff and others needing support;
- ✓ The support of staff with particular roles including the school nurse, Autism team and Behaviour Support Team who may assist teams in difficult situations;
- ✓ A constructive approach to performance management;
- ✓ Monitoring practice through formal and informal observations;
- ✓ Training staff to the extent that they feel competent to perform their duties well;
- ✓ Learning from investigations of reported stress and anxiety, so as to avoid the same problems being repeated for others;
- ✓ Responsible recruitment and retention, balancing reasonable adjustments in terms of Disability Discrimination legislation with rigour in ensuring all staff have the physical, emotional and mental fitness to safeguard pupils' education and well-being and to play a full part as effective team (and School community) members.

Other support for individuals includes:

Participation in a counselling service.

- ✓ Opportunities to develop skills to manage stressful situations - for example, discussing specific issues with more experienced colleagues, observing colleagues at work, undertaking training;
- ✓ Informal support from a mentor or line manager to talk through the causes of stress, the action which the member of staff has taken so far and possible action to reduce the difficulties that the member of staff is experiencing;
- ✓ A structured meeting relating to possible stress overload, at which a manager records possible causes, previous experience of stress/anxiety and strategies to alleviate suffering, present risk (a separate risk assessment will be necessary, if either party believes an individual is at risk), action proposed and a decision on whether to refer to Occupational Health or a medical practitioner or a counsellor;
- ✓ Management of absence, with a meeting: 1. to review absence after a particular 'trigger point' has been reached or where the pattern of absence indicates cause for concern; or 2, to discuss return to work after any prolonged absence and the possible need for a phased or supported return.

## Appendix I

### THE 7 STAGES OF STRESS

Stage 1: You know there is stress in your Life but you quite enjoy the buzz that the adrenaline gives you in coping with it. After the stress peaks you recover and relax.

Stage 2: The relaxation doesn't happen, and the feeling of stress stays with you Longer than it should. Your behaviour starts to change little by little. At first you hardly notice the changes.

Stage 3: You recognise that you are feeling stressed, but just cannot see a way out of the problem. You would Like to cut out certain stressful activities but simply cannot - others rely on you, they are part of your Life, you have to work to earn money... If questioned you start to blame others.

Stage 4: In order to cope with the pressures of Life you start cutting out other activities that used to be fun. You justify this by saying that you are too tired, or blame your lack of involvement on other changes in circumstances.

Stage 5: You become more and more exhausted at the end of each day. Nuisances become irritants. The instability of your reactions grows so that others comment on them. The stress level so dominates your life that you cannot see the wood for the trees.

Stage 6: You keep on working and working on all sorts of things, but actually avoid dealing with the real you and the real problems you face. Slowly you lose all contact with the real you.

Stage 7: You Lose contact with your own identity and suffer a complete breakdown.

This analysis takes Whitefields School's adaptation of that in Tony Attwood's Recovery from Stress: a School Manager's Guide to Helping Colleagues, published in 2000 by First and Best in Education.

## Appendix 2

### STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT EVERYDAY FEELINGS

1. Do you feel as if you are suffering from higher levels of stress than in the past? Yes / No
2. Do you feel as if your job is a cause of stress or anxiety for you? Yes / No
3. Do you feel that other aspects of your life are causing you stress - for example, events at home, worries about your family, worries about your job security, money worries, and so on.  
Yes / No
4. Do you feel physically less well than you did last year? Yes / No
5. Do you ever find yourself seeing problems at work as a threat rather than as a challenge?  
Yes / No
6. Do you ever find yourself seeing problems outside work as a threat rather than as a challenge?  
Yes / No
7. Do you feel that there is virtually nothing you can do about improving your current position or lifestyle? Yes / No
8. Do you feel too rushed or too busy in your daily life? Yes / No
9. Have you stopped doing things that you used to do for fun? For example, have you dropped out of certain social or sporting activities that you used to enjoy - perhaps because you just feel too tired now? Yes / No
10. Do you feel that you ought to be undertaking more physical exercise? Yes / No
11. Do you feel that your lifestyle leads you to be Less healthy than you ought to be? Yes / No
12. Do you find yourself seeing issues and events in black and white rather than from a very flexible point of view? For example, do you catch yourself saying or thinking, "if this happens then I will never do that again" or anything like that? Yes / No
13. Do you think other people at work are making too great a demand on you or your time?  
Yes / No
14. Do you feel that you could do your job better, if only other people (i.e. colleagues, or the local authority, or the government or its agencies) would do their bit?  
Yes / No
15. Do you ever find yourself saying, "I give up" in relation to problems at work or at home?  
Yes / No
16. Have you found yourself in the past year becoming irrationally angry about what, on reflection, you know are minor matters? Yes / No
17. Do you find yourself feeling anxious before coming to work, or before entering a classroom?  
Yes / No
18. Do you find that you are not sleeping as well as you used to? Yes / No
19. Do you find that your mind gets full of repetitive negative thoughts at times - e.g., when watching a not too interesting TV programme, when in the bath, when driving, or when on public transport? Yes / No

20. Do you find it hard to say no when asked to do something, even if you know it will cause you difficulties, or that you simply don't have time to do it? Yes / No

21. Do you find it troublesome that sometimes it is not possible to get every lesson right?

Yes / No

22. Do you feel as if your working life is out of control, with you just responding to each issue and problem that is forced upon you? Yes / No

23. Do you feel that you do not attain the goals you have set out in life? Yes / No

24. Are there issues from your past Life which still cause you worry or concern on a regular basis?

Yes / No

25. Do you feel you could do your job a Lot better if only other people would let you or if only other people would give you the resources to allow you to do your job better?

Yes / No

26. Do you feel you are drinking more alcohol than you should? Yes / No

27. During the past year have you lied about the amount of alcohol you have drunk on a particular occasion? Yes / No

28. Do you feel you are smoking more than you should? Yes / No

29. Do you feel that you are more reliant on drugs/ medication than you should be? Yes / No

30. Do you feel that something is wrong, but these questions simply don't apply to you?

Yes / No

*This is not a definitive, medically approved questionnaire (which you can find on the [www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com) website); it is just a method of helping you focus on your lifestyle and whether your life-work balance might be contributing to an unhealthy level of stress. If your number of "yes" answers was over 10, you ought to consider how to reduce your stress level and talk to a trusted manager, counsellor or doctor*

## Appendix 3

### RECORD OF MEETING RELATING TO POSSIBLE STRESS OVERLOAD.

A signed and dated record, which could be set out as a form or a letter, should include: Staff member's name

Others present at the meeting

Factors in individual's life or work that might be causing stress

Note of any past stress suffered

Details of any past help or support in relation to stress or anxiety

Staff member's assessment of the situation

Any action or treatment already proposed

Leader/ manager's view on whether the staff member might be at risk

Staff member's view on whether he or she might be at risk

Further in-school action proposed

Whether an Occupational Health or another referral has been (or should be) made Any other information