

Organising and campaigning on

Stress & Mental Health

AT WORK



UNITE CONQUERING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

May 2011



Introduction

The **Unite Disabled Members' Committee** are working with our colleagues in the **Health and Safety department** and **Mental Health Nurses Association** to campaign against work place stress and to prevent work place discrimination for people who have a mental health condition. Unite is also campaigning against the cuts in the Health Service that support people with mental health conditions.

Stress at work is increasingly becoming the major cause of occupational ill health and mental health conditions. 20 per cent of people have a mental health condition during their lifetime.

- Cuts to public services are having a serious impact on work place stress. Members are becoming distressed at the growing inability to serve the public in a safe working environment.
- Every year UK businesses lose £26 billion and 70 million working days because of conditions like workplace stress.
- Work place stress is preventable; it is a serious health and safety concern that can lead to mental health illness.
- Unite will not tolerate members with a mental health condition being discriminated against on the grounds of disability.
- Unite is fully opposed to cuts in mental health services.
- Mental health jobs and services are vital roles in maintaining and improving the health of the nation. Unite is campaigning to retain jobs and services in the national health service. Visit our website to find out more details of how you can get involved to save our NHS.

Whilst some employees end up being ill, or having to leave, or take time off, many others continue to work under increasing levels of stress, but can also testify the impact that this has had on their personal health, their family, the quality of their work, their organisation, and their morale.

The tragedy is that this is avoidable. If management undertook risk assessments of the situation and enacted an action plan with a view to managing and preventing work-related stress, which is their duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, then work related stress would not be as prevalent.

Even if these issues are yet to hit your workplace, having risk assessments, policies and processes in place to address these issues are of utmost importance.

Unite is campaigning to help you transform the place where you work. We will ensure that you are equipped to make a difference there.

Representing Members who experience stress at work

It is important to explain to members that our role as Unite work place representatives is to provide representation on issues relating to employment. It is essential that you do not provide counselling or health advice to members as a work place representative and use the information provided to ensure our members can access health advice and support where necessary

As far as the members are concerned who raise individual concerns, work place and safety representatives must :

- Be prepared to listen and give initial advice only to members who are suffering from stress, harassment or bullying at work.
- Discuss with the member how to progress a case through internal grievance procedures, if necessary.
- Advise members not to attend meetings regarding a grievance without union representation.
- Be aware of the possibility that the individual case may form part of a wider issue.
- Recognise your limitations and refer the case to specialists where necessary eg a more senior union official, the employer's occupational health ,welfare or employee assistance programme, Other external sources of help

Representatives also need to be aware that:

- Members may be anxious that all aspects of their case need to be considered and that this may demand a lot of your time.
- You may not be able to help the member yourself, particularly if expert help is needed.

Unite – Health & Safety



Campaign outline

We are asking all Unite representatives to work together to conduct a workplace survey. Depending on your union structure in your work place, you should involve workplace reps, health and safety reps and equality reps in your campaign.

If you are able to conduct this survey with the support of management or jointly with them, then this would be very positive in moving the campaign forward. Of course, in some workplaces this will not be possible. The survey is accessible electronically or in paper format. We will then be asking representatives to analyse the results of this survey.

You may want to form a working party with management as early as you can during this campaign. Once you have analysed the results, the next step is to have a meeting with the management with the aim of carrying out risk assessments and implementing an effective stress policy in the work place.

Even if there are policies and processes in place, it is important to review their effectiveness and upgrade action plans where necessary. A working party may be part of your negotiations and consultations committee, health and safety committee, or a new sub-group.

Unite will also be running training for representatives to ensure that you are best equipped to lead this campaign in your workplace. You can apply to attend a Unite Education course.

For more information about Unite stress training, see below under Next Steps.

Setting out your action plan

All campaigns take planning. Unite suggests that you agree a timetable for your campaign at the outset alongside the support that we are providing you. This will give your campaign structure, and help everyone to focus. We want to help you to run this campaign in the best way you can in your workplace. You know what will work best for your organisation and the support that you need from Unite to achieve this. You will find useful resources in this campaign pack in addition to this campaign briefing.

- Unite Health and Safety Department survey on work place stress
- Unite Research Guide – Stress in the Workplace
- Unite Equality Department Guide to disability discrimination at work
- Mind Guide to surviving working life.
- TUC Guide: Representing and Supporting for members with mental health problems at work.
- HSE Model Stress policy.
- Stress and mental health at work – a Labour Research Department guide for union reps.

Getting others involved

It is important that this campaign is not seen as something that the representatives are doing, but a campaign for the whole work place.

As a first step it is really important to communicate with your colleagues across the work place. If your organisation is spread across different sites, you could seek out volunteers to represent their project or work place. Some union members may have a particular interest in this issue, and will want to get involved in the campaign.

This campaign provides you with a good opportunity to get others involved with the union. Equally, colleagues should be encouraged to join the union. Stress may permeate every part of your life, and the fact that the union is working to reduce and remove work-related stress should be a motivator in itself for people to join the union and be part of the campaign.

The more members there are in the union, the more effective you will be on all issues. We have, therefore, added a couple of questions into the survey to encourage greater engagement at this stage.

The survey

It is important to identify the extent of the issues of stress within your organisation. Unite has therefore designed a questionnaire for you to distribute. You can then analyse the results.

We have enclosed hard copies of the survey. At the bottom, there is space for you to add details as to who staff should return their survey to, and by when.

Should you wish to run this survey electronically, you may wish to use an electronic survey tool like Survey Monkey, which is available free on line and is simple to set up.

You may want to alter the survey to meet the needs of your organisation. Should this be the case, then please feel free to do this, or discuss this with your regional officer.

Increasing participation in the survey

When people are busy at work, filling out a survey may not be their number one priority. So here are a few ideas which could help encourage staff to complete their survey.

- carry out the survey with staff by interviewing individuals
- go round your workplace gathering surveys
- have a day when you have a box in your main entrance for people to hand in their surveys
- have a lunch time meeting about the campaign, and get people to complete and hand in their surveys then hold a prize draw for those that hand in their survey
- if you have run an on-line survey, send out reminders for people to return their survey
- if you are using the paper format of the survey, you can still mail out electronic reminders.

Analysing the survey results

When you have received the survey results, you need to analyse what is going on in your workplace. Questions that ask for “yes” or “no” responses can be analysed as a percentage. So, for example, if 42 people said “yes” and 8 people said “no” you can then say 84% said “yes”.

Where there are questions calling for respondents to identify priorities, e.g. the question what has been the impact of stress on you? (tick all that are relevant), then you can list the most relevant in order of those which have been ticked the most.

Where there are open questions, e.g. what do you believe your organisation can do to reduce the levels of stress placed on you? then it is worth picking out some to quote.

Also, as you read through the answers to the open questions, you should note when similar answers occur most commonly; in other words, look for trends.

You may also want to have some discussions with members of staff at the organisation by way of a follow-up. This is especially important if particular issues have been brought to light in your survey.

Once you have finished analysing the results of the survey, then write a brief report

highlighting the results. Unite would find it very helpful if you can e-mail your report to siobhan.endean@unitetheunion.org

It is likely that you will wish to present your findings to management.

Remember, one case of work-related stress is one case too many, and therefore your organisation should press ahead ensuring that it has an effective action plan to deal with this issue.

Next steps

Consider whether you want to attend a Unite Education course on stress management – a trade union view.

1. You can find details of courses from the Unite website: http://www.unitetheunion.org/member_services/education/education_programme/2010_course_dates
2. Consider holding a work place meeting to discuss the issue of stress and mental health at work. You can use the resources in this pack and the information from the Mind Website as useful resources to support your discussion. Remember to bring recruitment forms to the meeting. The best protection for working people is to be a member of Unite.
3. Arrange a meeting with management. We hope that you would have had the opportunity to work with management on the survey, however recognise that many colleagues would not. We would encourage you to set up a meeting with management to discuss the results.
4. Work with your Unite Health and Safety Reps to carry out a risk assessment
5. Negotiate an effective Stress Policy for your workplace using the model policy attached — and build into it procedures to ensure it is monitored for effectiveness and reviewed periodically.
6. Review all other policies and procedures to ensure they are not discriminating against members with mental health problems.
7. Encourage your employer to set up a formal Employee Assistance Programme.
8. Develop a positive policy statement to publicise to members that Unite is tackling the issue of Stress and mental health at work.

9. Use the *Mind Guide to Surviving Working Life* to provide members with information in how to get support if they have a mental health condition.

10. Stay in touch. Contact your Regional Women’s Organiser to let them know how your campaign is progressing. Their contact details are below.

Regional Women’s & Equalities Organisers

Scotland

Elaine Dougall 0845 604 4384
John Smith House
145-165 West Regent Street
Glasgow, G2 4RZ

North East, Yorkshire & Humberside

Sue Pollard 0113 236 4830
Unite the Union, 55 Call Lane
Leeds, LS1 7BW

London & Eastern

Mel Whitter 020 8800 4281
‘Woodberry’, 218 Green Lanes
London, N4 2HB

Ireland

Taryn Trainor 02890 232 381
26-34 Antrim Road
Belfast, BT15 2AA

West Midlands

Natalia Stepnowska 0121 553 6051
Transport House, 9-17 Victoria Street
West Bromwich, B70 8HX

East Midlands

Maureen Scott-Douglas 0133 254 8400
Pride Point Drive, Pride Point
Derby, DE24 8BX

Wales

Belinda Robertson 02920 394 521
1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9SD

North West

Helen Osgood 0151 203 1907
Jack Jones House, 2 Churchill Way
Liverpool, L3 8EF

South West

Karen Cole 0117 923 0555
6th Floor, Tower House
Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN

South East

Mary Sayer 0845 605 2193
South East Centre
Ruscombe Business Park
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