

HAZARDS CAMPAIGN

Mental Health and the Workplace

Trade Union Response and Action

Trade Unions need to negotiate with their employers to introduce a comprehensive policy and strategy on Mental Health. However we should not underestimate that many of our employers are not only hostile to talking about mental health with trade union representatives but also taking any action on it. All too often where they do take any positive action it is simply communicating information, providing a mental health awareness day or permitting trade union reps to go on training and take on the responsibility for individuals mental ill health.

Trade unions need to take a collective and direct approach to ensure that their management are meeting their duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act and the Management of Health Safety and Welfare Regulations. Our priority as Health and Safety Representatives should be to ensure our management are: using the methodology, tools and information available on the HSE website; that where our management fail to do this we record all information, collate audit trails of where we have requested action and information; and make this available to our health and safety enforcement officers. The HSE train their officers in what management should do and what the required standards are on workplace stress, however they are not yet enforcing it. So it is important that trade unions negotiate and establish good practices, challenge bad employment practices and share successes with other health and safety representatives. Finally, it is important to avoid resilience training and other initiatives which concentrate on the individual rather than a collective approach.

There are three main areas where trade unions should take direct action:

- 1. Strategy for preventing work related stress and mental ill health**
- 2. Supporting individuals at work with mental ill health**
- 3. Providing a positive mental health work environment**

1. Strategy for preventing work related stress and mental ill health

Trade Unions to negotiate a strategy that includes:

- I. All Employees, Management and Trade Union reps should be trained in Mental Health Awareness
- II. All Management and Trade Union reps should be trained in the Management Standards Approach
- III. Set up a Stress Steering Group to take the work forward – see document 'setting up a stress steering group terms of reference'
 - a. Gather data: existing information and commission more evidence if needed
 - b. Analyse results
 - c. Prioritise areas and allocate responsibilities
 - d. Decide who might be harmed and how:

- e. Use The Management Standards to evaluate the main causes of harm. The Management Standards classify the principal causes of work-related stress into 6 key areas:
 - i. Demands
 - ii. Control
 - iii. Support
 - iv. Relationships
 - v. Role
 - vi. Change
 (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>)
- f. Decide how the risks will be eliminated and controlled (actions and timescales)
- g. Record all actions
- h. Review periodically or when there is a change, incident or new process or building

2. Supporting Individuals at work with Mental Ill Health

Trade Unions should negotiate with their employer to:

- a. Introduce a disability passport to record agreed individual needs work adjustments, which moves with the individual to all areas.
- b. Individuals needing adjustments should be supported by their trade union representative in all meetings and it should be conducted by an employer's representative with required training.
- c. Attendance at mental health consultations should be agreed.
- d. Flexible working should be agreed following periods of absence and if required on a continuous basis
- e. No pressure periodic reviews should be introduced.

3. Providing a positive mental health work environment:

Trade Unions to negotiate with their employer to:

- a. Ensure everyone trained in mental health awareness
- b. Encourage open conversations on mental health without reprisals
- c. Any acts of victimisation or inappropriate behaviour must be acted on quickly
- d. Ensure good working conditions, pay. Top factors of work related stress leading to mental ill health include:
 - i. Job insecurity
 - ii. Overwork
 - iii. Stress
 - iv. Poor Management and unfairness at work
 - v. Emotional labour
 - vi. Trauma
 - vii. Work related harm
 - viii. Hazardous exposures that affect your mental health
 - ix. Access to means
 (<http://www.hazards.org/suicide/suicidalwork.htm>)
- e. Introduce flexible working to suit individual needs
- f. Ensure management are trained in effective and supportive people management
- g. Encourage all incidents of stress are recorded in the Accident book, investigated and findings shared with employees and their representatives
- h. Further action of support should be introduced for serious incidents

Further Information:

<http://www.hazards.org/stress/mentalhealth.htm>

RISKS - <https://www.tuc.org.uk/mediasentre/register>

Greater Manchester Hazards Centre fact sheets on Stress