

	MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESS	Document No:	WHS-PRO-008
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1. Purpose

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) recognises that Workplace stress can have serious, negative consequences for both workers and the organisation and is to be minimised. The purpose of this procedure is to endeavour to provide a healthy and safe workplace that is free from workplace harassment, violence and stress.

To this end, the ACBC will endeavour to:

- work with supervisors who have identified workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed as part of the health and safety risk assessment process
- provide training for all supervisory staff in good management practices
- provide a confidential Employee Assistance Programme for workers affected by stress

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all ACBC Agencies. It covers all workers at ACBC and ACBC controlled premises.

3. Related Documents

[ACBC Work Health & Safety Policy](#)

ACT : Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011
 NSW : Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011
 QLD : Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011
 SA : Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012
 VIC : Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007

4. Definitions

Workplace Stress

Workplace stress can be defined as the psychological and emotional responses that occur when workers perceive an imbalance between their work demands and their capacity and/or resources to meet these demands. Stress responses occur when the imbalance is such that the worker perceives they are not coping in situations where it is important to them that they cope.

Workplace stress is not a disease. Worker's responses to stressors may be positive or negative depending on the type of demands placed on them, the amount of control they have over the situation, the amount of support they receive and the individual response of the person.

PCBU

PCBU stands for Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking. Although the term refers to a 'person', it covers both individuals and organisations. For ACBC Agencies, the PCBU is the Committee of The Australian Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, (which acts as the agent of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference pursuant to the Deed of Agent's Appointment dated 15 July 1992).

Worker

A worker is any individual that carries out work for a PCBU. Workers include:

- An employee
- A contractor or sub-contractor
- An employee of a labour-hire company
- An apprentice or trainee
- A work experience student
- A volunteer

Supervisor

The Supervisor is a Bishop, a Priest, an Agency Head, Director, Manager, Coordinator or Team Leader, who is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of workers.

Health and Safety Representative (HSR)

A Health and Safety Representative is a worker nominated and elected by employees at a workplace to act as their Health and Safety Representative in accordance with the relevant State or Territory legislation.

5. Responsibilities

Supervisors

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that:

- Workers are consulted to identify workplace stressors and to eliminate or control them. This may be done through forums such as staff meetings, one-on-one meetings with individual workers, emails, surveys, etc.
- They are able to identify the signs of workplace stress and consult with workers to resolve them.
- They encourage workers to report stressors and work with workers to resolve them.
- Workers have access to information about the Employee Assistance Program.
- Any corrective actions assigned to them have been implemented within the agreed timeframe.
- Feedback from workers on effectiveness of corrective action is obtained.
- They review corrective action to ensure they are implemented and effective.
- They participate in formal/informal training relating to good management practices.
- They seek advice from the Office for Employment Relations or the HR function in their agency if they are unsure how best to deal with a worker's reported or obvious stress.

Health and Safety Representative (HSR)

The Health and Safety Representative (where appointed) should:

- Alert their supervisor of any risks which may arise in their workplace.

Workers

Workers should:

- Report work related stressors to their supervisors and participate in the risk assessment and control process.
- Provide assistance in determining what corrective action is required.
- Provide feedback on any corrective actions taken.
- Access the Employee Assistance Program where workplace stress has a negative impact.

Employment Relations Advisor (Office for Employment Relations)/HR Function

The Employment Relations Advisor or HR function in a Agency will:

- Assist supervisors in identifying, assessing and controlling the risks associated with workplace stressors as requested.
- Provide mentoring and training as required to supervisors in good management practices.
- Provide assistance on dealing with stress

6. Sources of Workplace Stress

Workplace stress may be a reaction people have when faced with factors such as excessive work pressures, conflicts between individuals, lack of clear direction from supervisors, inadequate resources to cope, lack of control over work load/flow or where job requirements are not matched to capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. It can be exacerbated by a lack of support from colleagues and supervisors.

It is important to be able to recognise signs of workplace stress such as:

- High absenteeism rates;
- Workers' compensation claims;
- Observed uncharacteristic behaviour of workers which may suggest a stress response, for example - anger, depression or poor work performance.

Work characteristics and workplace stress

Aspects of the Work Environment	Conditions causing hazard
Organisational culture and function	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, lack of definition of organisational objectives.
Role in organisation	Lack of role clarity, responsibility for people
Career development, career stagnation and uncertainty, under-promotion/over-promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work	Decision latitude/control, low participation in decision-making, lack of control over work
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social/physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, conflict, lack of social support, bullying
Home/work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home
Work environment and work equipment	Problems regarding reliability, availability, suitability and maintenance or repair of equipment and facilities
Task design	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, underuse of skills, high uncertainty
Workload/Workplace	Work overload/underload, lack of control over pacing, high levels of time pressure

In addition to these hazards, the individual's susceptibility to developing mental stress may be influenced by:

- type A behaviour. (People with Type A personalities are often high-achieving "workaholics." They push themselves with deadlines, and dislike both delays and ambivalence)
- psychological hardiness. This refers to the coping strategies, attitudes and beliefs that help people work through the stressors of life.
- negative affectivity. This is a broad personality trait that refers to *the stable tendency to experience negative emotions*. People who are high in negative affectivity are more likely to report negative affective mood states across time and regardless of the situation.
- cognitive distortions and negative thinking patterns. Cognitive distortions are ways that our mind convinces us of something that isn't really true. These inaccurate thoughts are usually used to reinforce negative thinking or emotions.
- coping style. This refers to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events.

7. Controlling Workplace Stressors

Building a culture where workers and their supervisors can communicate openly and freely is the most effective way to manage workplace stressors. Ensuring that workers can speak to their supervisors without fear of reprisals or discrimination will enable them to offer assistance in managing stress.

Examples of control measures to manage the risk of work-related stress include:

- Improving supervisor skills through coaching, mentoring and/or training;
- Planning workloads to meet potential demands;
- Setting clear performance goals/accountability;
- Ensuring role clarity and reassessing job descriptions;
- Implementing new or adjusting current HR procedures;
- Providing assistance (e.g. Employee Assistance Program);
- Communicating policy and availability of assistance;
- Checking understanding and implementation of changes;
- Ensuring training in organisational overview, expectations, role, technology etc;
- Ensuring processes and culture to provide support in roles likely to encounter issues such as violence or death;
- Including stress modifiers in workers daily life in a Health and Wellbeing program (e.g. regular exercise, sound nutrition, social support and ensuring a balance between work and leisure time, drug/alcohol/stimulation dependence, relaxation skills etc.)
- Promoting effective early rehabilitation

Organisation of work

Some factors of work organisation are governed by industrial awards and agreements. However, other factors relating to the organisation of work which can contribute to effective minimisation of stress include:

- Encouraging workers to use and develop their own resources appropriate to the job content;
- Maximising opportunities for workers to influence work situations, methods and pace;
- Addressing the social environment of the workplace so that it allows for human contact and encourages co-operation; and
- Ensuring the workplace layout and environment fosters effective work outcomes, for example sitting people in quiet areas when a high level of worker concentration is required.

8. Records

These records are to be retained in accordance with ACBC records management practices:

Risk Assessment and Control Form ([WHS001](#))

Minutes of meeting (in regard formal discussions relating to workplace stress)

Diary notes (in regard to informal discussions relating to stress)