



Stress and Mental Health Policy

Introduction

SLI believes that our Team Members are our most important asset and are committed to protecting your safety, health and welfare at work, this includes physical, mental and emotional health. This policy outlines our provisions to prevent and address mental health and stress issues among our staff. Stress and mental health issues can adversely affect the health and wellbeing of those who experience it. SLI wishes to support Team Members who are experiencing these either as a result of work-related, or non-work related matters.

The primary purpose of this policy is to ensure Team Members are afforded a safe, secure and supportive place of employment where they are feel comfortable to seek assistance if they are experiencing stress or mental health issues. It is also important they feel encouraged to perform and feel they are an integral part of the organisation.

SLI has adopted the following guidelines for staff and volunteers based on the *Employment Equality Acts 1998-2011*, the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* and *Employment Equality Act 2015*. We recognise that mental health difficulties (e.g. stress, anxiety, and depression) are covered by the Disability ground under the Employment Equality Acts, and we are committed to the provision of reasonable accommodation, where appropriate and necessary.

We require that all staff, Management Committee, and volunteers read and agree to the following policy.

Definitions

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as:

- › "A state of well-being in which the individual realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to their community."

Stress

Stress is a natural occurrence, which brings mind and body to higher states of readiness and allows people to function and respond more quickly and effectively. Stress therefore has a natural and positive place in our make-up. In many instances the demands made upon Team Members can be experienced as stimulating or motivating, providing individuals with the energy they need to function at 'peak performance'. Such pressure can be beneficial to the Team Member in the performance of their work. However, individuals will respond in different ways to such demands. Stress can be defined as a perceived imbalance between demands placed on the individual on one hand and their ability to cope with those demands on the other. While a certain level of pressure is an important feature of a healthy working environment, prolonged exposure to a stressful working environment can be damaging to the health of Team Members.

- › **Occupational Stress (Work Related Stress):** Relates to stress in the workplace where a Team Member reacts to situations of excessive pressure or demands being placed on them which manifests itself into physical or behavioural changes. Such demands, or the perception of such matters, can be created by environment, workload or relationship issues. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work state that Work Related Stress is experienced when the demands of the work environment exceed the Team Members ability to cope with (or control) them.



- **Critical Incident Stress:** Relates to stress induced by exposure to profoundly disturbing events. A Team Member exposed to sudden, or disturbing events may suffer from stress to varying degrees and, if the person's normal coping mechanisms are overwhelmed, the effects of such stress may become negative.
- **Beyond the Workplace Stress:** Relates to stress influenced by such factors as a Team Member's home life, family and civil responsibilities, transport arrangements, family care, leisure and educational activities that may interact positively or negatively with elements of the work environment and therefore affect overall job quality, satisfaction and productivity. Some Team Members may be subject to stress outside of their work environment, but their ability to cope may manifest itself in work.

Disclosure

There is no obligation on any team member to disclose that they have a mental health difficulty. A mental health difficulty may not impact on a person's capability to carry out the demands of their job and in this case, they may feel there is no reason to disclose.

However, it is difficult for us to support appropriately a staff member if we are unaware of any difficulties they are experiencing. We are committed to working positively with anyone disclosing information about their mental health difficulties, so that we can identify what may help them to function productively in work. If you experience stress or a mental health issue which you feel is affecting your health and wellbeing you can consult your manager in the strictest confidence or raise the issue through grievance procedures.

In the case of a disclosure that has arisen due to a mental health difficulty interfering with the individual's ability to do their job, we will adopt a partnership approach with the individual to explore and clarify the following:

1. What difficulties is the person experiencing, and how is this stopping/hampering the person doing their job?
2. What supports (reasonable accommodations) would be needed to "close the gap" and enable the person to be fully capable to carry out the demands of their job?
3. How do we make a decision about reasonable accommodation, and how do we effectively and sensitively communicate that decision?
4. How do we effectively and sensitively implement a reasonable accommodation?

In order for this partnership approach to be successful, it is necessary for the individual to be open to disclosing their current difficulties and to exploring options through conversation. The aim of this supportive conversation is to explore and identify how we can work together for them to be able to carry out their work in a safe and supported way. It is difficult to help a staff member if they are unwilling to engage with the supports and resources that are available to them or talk through how solutions can be found. We are committed to respect for individual privacy and confidentiality. Information that is disclosed to us will be treated sensitively and will be stored in accordance with our legal responsibilities under the Data Protection legislation.

Implementation

The policy ensures confidentiality and addressing any issue in a timely manner. The Manager has a specific responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. We expect all employees and volunteers to abide by the policy and help to create a supportive and effective environment which is its objective. Discussing wellbeing with your team members should form part of your regular conversations and staying connected with their team and remain vigilant in relation to the wellbeing of team members.



If a team member makes a disclosure, discuss together with the individual the questions as set out in the 'Disclosure' part of this policy adopting a partnership approach. Work through the supports and resources available to the individual and explore options that may help such as their own GP/counselling service who may be aware of their difficulty. Where you have agreed on any reasonable accommodations that could be introduced to help support the staff member at this time, develop an action plan and agree to check in regularly to ensure the current arrangements are working for everyone.


If a team member has not made a disclosure but you are concerned about their mental health, as a first step, reach out to them. If this has no avail reach out to your manager. If there is continued concern for their welfare, managers are advised to reach out to meet with the team member, possibly leading to advice to speak to their occupational health provider.

As your employer we care, and we will help where possible.

Monitoring and review

We will establish appropriate information and monitoring systems to assist the effective implementation of our stress and mental health policy. The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed regularly and action taken as necessary.

The Stress and Mental Health Policy will be reviewed in June 2025, or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers.

Signed:  (John Hawkes, SLI Board Chair)

This policy was approved by SLI's Management Committee, June 2023.