

# Stress at Work

## POLICY STATEMENT

Kaeo-Kerikeri Union Church recognises the responsibility of the PCBU to actively reduce and manage stress in the work place and the place where we do things together. Stress may arise from both personal and organisational sources. Kaeo-Kerikeri Union Church clearly has a degree of control only over the latter, and these guidelines provide a framework for stress management in the workplace.

## PURPOSE

To assist all workers/parishioners to understand the causes of stress, and work together in ways that encourage positive responses to demands. To enable people to identify indicators or symptoms of stress and to assess the extent to which they or other individuals are responding positively or negatively. To encourage the minister, councillors, and parishioners to seek information and early assistance in managing their own stress in a constructive way. To provide information and advice regarding the causes and impact of stress in the work environment, and offer ways for managing stress positively. To have procedures for dealing with negative stress or distress effectively.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

### **The Minister [or Designated Person] is responsible for:**

- Facilitating training and information for the leadership in effective management practices and styles, covering the nature of stress, and promoting responsible prevention and rehabilitation attitudes towards it
- Providing up-to-date and accessible information on stress  
Adjusting the physical environment, the workload, task design, pacing of work and work schedules to alleviate significant stress/distress for an individual, in full consultation with the individual concerned
- Encouraging referral to specialist counselling as appropriate

### **All workers and volunteers with designated tasks are responsible for (where applicable):**

- Managing your time and realistically prioritising tasks
- Taking regular, necessary breaks during the day
- Taking your annual leave
- Taking leave accrued as time in lieu as soon as practicable
- Not working excessively long hours
- Discussing with your minister [or another member of the Ministry Leadership Team] the issues that are causing you stress, along with any suggested solutions
- Seeking advice and help from others – talk to partners, friends, colleagues, a professional counsellor or your minister if possible.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*“Stress arises when a person’s capabilities are overwhelmed by demands”*

Every day, individuals are confronted with a variety of demands or 'stressors'. These may arise from either personal sources (e.g. ill-health, marital discord, family problems, financial uncertainty, or from institutional sources such as work overload or underload, role conflict, lack of control or physical environment). Stressors produce a biochemical response in the body which prepare the body to do what is essential during a stressful situation (in preparation for fight or flight).

The stress response is highly functional and can lead to elevated performance, through constructive and creative responses, increased and well-directed energy, improved morale and motivation, and increased efficiency and effectiveness. Where an individual is exposed to demands that are too intense, frequent or chronic, the stress response can create unhealthy, destructive outcomes (e.g. cardiovascular disease or depression).

There are wide individual differences in the way we each respond to stressors, and therefore the optimum stress load that maximises performance varies by individual and by task. (The Yerkes-Dodson Law refers to the fact that performance increases with increasing stress loads up to an optimum point, and when the stress load becomes too great, performance decreases.)

## COMMON SIGNS

### Some common signs of stress in individuals are:

- Headaches, feeling tired, or having difficulty sleeping
- Worrying a lot, feeling anxious and tense for no explained reason
- Having difficulty concentrating, finding it hard to make decisions
- Lower level of confidence, making mistakes, forgetting things
- Feeling impatient and irritable, drinking more alcohol, smoking more.

*"Stress is inevitable: distress is not"*

## CATEGORIES

### Organisational stressors can be grouped into four categories:

**Physical:** The physical environment in which one works (e.g. temperature, office design, noise, lighting).

**Task:** The nature of the work itself, the specific activities assigned to the worker (e.g. reception, budget management).

**Role:** The expectations that others have of one's role and its function within the organization (e.g. conflicting or ambiguous expectations).

**Interpersonal:** The social, personal and working relationships that exist.

## PREVENTION

- Allow people to participate in collaborative decision making.
- Allow people to exercise as much autonomy and control as is practical.
- Provide training to enable work to be done most effectively.
- Consider job design, job descriptions and performance targets with the aim of reducing unnecessary stressors.
- Consult with workers to identify stressors in the workplace.
- Promote activities that make the workplace healthier, more stimulating and more fun.

- Carefully match people to jobs by considering their individual skills, capabilities and needs.

### **EARLY INTERVENTION**

- Act immediately if a worker seems overly stressed.
- Explore whether their stress is in any way job related, discuss ways of alleviating it in the short term initially, and then focus on the sources of stress to consider long-term solutions.
- Short-term solutions could include sharing tasks amongst other workers, taking leave, or adopting flexible or reduced hours.
- Long-term solutions should aim to eliminate or minimise the cause of stress where possible – the preventative strategies outlined above should be used.

### **REFERENCES**

The Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 and Amendment