The Diocese of Palmerston North and its Parishes are committed to reducing and managing stress that arises from our workplace environment.

**Coverage**

The Diocese is a Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (**PCBU**).

Each Parish is also separately a Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (**PCBU**).

Stress may arise from both personal and organisational sources. A PCBU clearly has a degree of control only over the latter, and these procedures provide a framework for stress management in the organizational settings that each PCBU has a degree of control over.

**Definitions**

**Stress -** An interaction between the person and their (work) environment and is the awareness of not being able to cope with the demands of one’s environment, when this realisation is of concern to the person, in that both are associated with a negative emotional response.

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.

**Background**

We all need a level of stress in order to be healthy. From time to time, everyone can feel sad, depressed, anxious, tense or afraid. These are common and natural human emotions. But sometimes these feelings can become so overwhelming that coping with day-to-day life – work, leisure, and relationships – becomes difficult.

##### *“Stress is inevitable: distress is not”*

**Procedures**

The PCBU will assist all workers understand the causes of stress, and work together in ways that encourage positive responses to work demands. The PCBU will:

* enable workers to identify indicators or symptoms of stress and to assess the extent to which they or other individuals are responding positively or negatively.
* encourage managers and those responsible for others in the workplace and workers to seek information and early assistance in managing their own stress in a constructive way.
* provide information and advice regarding the causes and impact of stress in the work environment, and offer ways for managing stress positively.

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.

When identifying extreme stress or distress in a colleague or someone you are responsible for in the workplace it can be helpful to try to identify the factors in the various categories that are contributory. This enables decision makers to design appropriate responses.

**The PCBU Manager is responsible for:**

* + Facilitating training and information for managers and team leaders in effective management practices and styles, covering the nature of stress, and promoting responsible prevention and rehabilitation attitudes towards it.
	+ Making free specialist counselling available for workers, if deemed required.

**The PCBU Health and Safety adviser/coordinator is responsible for:**

* + Providing up to date and accessible information on stress and ways to manage stress in the workplace.

**A Manager or Team Leader is responsible for:**

* + 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.
	+ Implementing the prevention actions outlined below.

*Suggested prevention actions*

* + Allow workers to participate in collaborative decision making.
	+ Allow workers 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.
	+ 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.

#### All workers are responsible for (where applicable):

* + Managing time and realistically prioritising tasks
	+ Taking regular, necessary breaks during the day
	+ Taking annual leave
	+ Taking leave accrued as time in lieu as soon as practicable
	+ Not working excessively long hours
	+ Discussing with your manager or team leader 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 manager or team leader, if possible.

Workers are asked to bring any concerns to the PCBU through their Manager. Feedback is an important means of identifying and correcting hazards. When a hazard, such as extreme stress or distress, is identified the PCBU Health and Safety adviser or coordinator will provide a response and recommended action.

 **Approval and Review**

This Procedure was approved by the Diocese of Palmerston North on 14 November 2016

This Procedure was ratified by the Parish of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

This Procedure will be reviewed by the Diocese of Palmerston North on 1 November 2017

**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).

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. 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 interactions between all aspects of our lives are complex. No one model of ‘stress’ covers all the fragments of information that are known about it and its implied coping strategies.

***Healthy Work –* Managing stress and fatigue in the workplace** – created by the former Department of Labour, 2003, may be a helpful resource to workers at all levels of the organisation, see <http://tinyurl.com/stressfatigue>to download the document or request a copy from the Diocesan Office – dmullin@pndiocese.org.nz