
Strathearn School

Menopause Policy

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1. Introduction

This document sets out Strathearn School's commitment to supporting women in the workplace. This policy recognises that women may need additional consideration, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during and after the menopause.

Strathearn School is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. It is also committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all our colleagues. We understand that others may experience menopause-type symptoms, while we use the words woman/she/her throughout this document, this support is designed for all our colleagues.

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women, it refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months and a woman has reached the end of her reproductive life. It usually happens between 45 and 55 years of age, although can happen any time up until a woman's mid 60's or a premature menopause can occur in women before the age of 45.

The perimenopause, which is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause, can often last for four to five years although for some women it may continue for many more years or for others last just a few months. During the time of the perimenopause women may begin to experience symptoms due to changes in their hormone levels. These symptoms may vary in degree between different individuals from mild to very significant.

2. Purpose

The School aim to live through its vision of **ENCOURAGE – EMPOWER - EXCEL**. In doing so, we endeavour to support our staff to succeed in a caring environment.

Through adopting a workforce policy, Strathearn can ensure women continue in employment throughout the menopause with their needs taken into account. This should have a positive impact on the levels of absenteeism and provide confidence for the women in this age group.

Legislation applicable to the policy:

- **Health and Safety at Work Order 1978 (Amended 1989)** requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Order, employers are required to complete risk assessments under the Management Regulations which should include specific risks to menopausal women if they are employed.
- **Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976** as amended prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of gender.
- **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995** as amended prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of disability. Conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the DDA and require reasonable adjustments.
- **Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006** prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of age.

- **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998** places a duty on Strathearn School to consider positive action through paying due regard, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. The School also has a duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination.

3. Aim

The aim of this policy is to make managers aware of their responsibility to understand the menopause and related issues and how they can affect staff. It also aims to raise wider awareness and understanding amongst employees and to outline support and reasonable adjustments that are available.

Strathearn School aims to create an environment where women feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work, if necessary. Strathearn is committed to ensuring that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place, where necessary.

Strathearn takes a proactive stance, will promote a greater understanding of the menopause and seek to eradicate any exclusionary or discriminatory practices. This policy is intended to provide clarity and direction on how staff should deal with menopause related issues, either for individual colleagues experiencing the menopause or those who are affected indirectly for example partners, colleagues or line managers.

This policy will also support women who experience menopause due to conditions such as endometriosis or having a hysterectomy.

4. Scope of the policy

The policy is a guide for managers and the reasonable adjustments guidance will also support managers in managing menopause within their team.

The definition of the menopause is the period in a woman's life (typically between the ages of 45 and 55) when menstruation ceases. But it is important to note that women can suffer from menopause symptoms at both a younger and an older age and therefore it is key to be mindful of the circumstances of the staff member themselves.

5. Roles/Responsibilities

Line managers should make themselves aware of this policy and the symptoms. Staff should approach their line manager if they need a reasonable adjustment due to menopausal symptoms. Line managers are duty bound to then explore a reasonable adjustment.

6. Key Principles

It is recognised that the **menopause is a very individual experience**, and that people can be affected in different ways and to different degrees, therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

As menopausal symptoms are typically experienced for several years, it will be treated as a 'transition' rather than a one-off event.

Appropriate information/support will be provided to all staff with regards to the menopause. Employees experiencing issues due to the menopause can be supported through the School Health Nurse or the Disability Employment Support Service (DESS) who advise on reasonable adjustments. They may also wish to talk to a General Practitioner or Occupational Health or external groups such as NICE.

A personal menopause assessment can be carried out through conversation with the Principal in the first instance by member of staff before approaching their line manager about adjustments to working conditions but does not have to be shared. Any adjustments will be considered and acted on appropriately within an appropriate timescale.

7. Symptoms

Women may experience some or all of these symptoms (the list is not exhaustive).

- Hot flushes;
- Changes to mood;
- Fatigue;
- Problems with memory;
- Palpitations;
- Loss of confidence;
- Night sweats;
- Joint aches;
- Insomnia and sleep disturbances;
- Dry skin and skin irritation;
- Headaches;
- Vaginal dryness, itching and discomfort;
- Irregular and/or heavy, painful periods, clots and flooding;
- Increased perspiration during the day;
- Depression;
- Dry eyes;
- Anxiety;
- Hair loss;

- Panic attacks;
- Urinary problems; and/or
- Poor concentration.

Symptoms can begin months or even years before a woman's period stops and last several years after the last period, although some women experience them for longer and can need medication to alleviate the symptoms.

The effects on a woman's physical and emotional health can significantly impact how she does her work and her relationships with colleagues. There are a number of varying treatment options for women ranging from natural remedies to medical intervention.

Strathearn School recognises its responsibility to take into account difficulties women may experience during the menopause and to provide support and advice in this regard.

Reasonable Adjustments

Line managers should be supportive during this time and should be aware of symptoms and realise that it can be daunting or embarrassing for a woman to openly discuss their issues. As part of a regular one to one process, line managers should ensure that there is space for staff to discuss wider issues that may be impacting their work, including any health issues.

There is a range of reasonable adjustments that can be considered by managers, should a female member of staff seek support due to the menopause or a condition that can affect the onset of menopause such as a hysterectomy or endometriosis. It is important that a reasonable adjustment is tailored to the needs of the employee and no one size will fit all in this regard.

Any adjustment should be tailored to an individual's needs through discussion, it is essential that assumptions are not made regarding a woman's health and experience during menopause or the age at which she is displaying symptoms. In certain circumstances, where a woman experiences extreme symptoms, it may be necessary for them to be referred to Occupational Health.

Line managers should be as flexible as possible during this time.

The line manager could carry out an assessment to consider the specific requirements of menopausal women. The assessment could look at issues such as:

- Temperature and ventilation; and/or
- Access to toilet facilities and cold water.

Access to support

Although Strathearn School expects line managers to take a positive and supportive approach towards discussions about menopause, we know that individual staff members who are affected may still feel uncomfortable talking directly to their line manager.

To meet the needs of these individuals, staff can avail of dedicated support from the Equality & Diversity Unit, Disability Employment Support Service who have expertise in reasonable adjustments.

Staff may also wish to talk to another colleague whom they trust or speak to their Trade Union representative for support.

8. Implementation

Dissemination

This policy will be relevant to all women experiencing menopausal symptoms. The policy will also give advice and guidance to line managers.

The policy should be used as guidance for line managers effective immediately. The Equality & Diversity Unit can be contacted to discuss concerns with the policy.

The policy should also be included in staff briefings; inclusion in induction checklist for new staff; and be made available without access to computers in hard copy format.