

Menopause Policy



Approved by: The Trust Board

Recognised unions have been consulted on this document via the Unity Schools Partnership Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Unity Schools Partnership and all of its academies ('the Trust') have a positive attitude towards the menopause and will treat all individuals with dignity and respect during this time and ensure that the workplace promotes an open and honest culture in which menopause can be discussed.

The Trust is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works within the central trust and all of the academies. The Trust is committed to the health and wellbeing of its workforce, and it recognises that staff may need additional consideration, support and adjustments during this transitional time before, during and after the menopause. The Trust is committed to ensuring that individuals feel confident in discussing menopausal symptoms and asking for support and adjustments in order to continue with their role within the organisation.

The Trust recognises that the menopause is an equality and occupational health and safety issue and that women and transgender people may need appropriate flexibility, support and adjustments during the time of change before, during and after the menopause.

2. AIMS

- 2.1. To create an environment where female and transgender employees who are affected by the menopause feel confident enough to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for support and adjustments at work.
- 2.2. To ensure that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place, as well as recognising that the menopause and perimenopause is an individual experience and therefore there is no 'one size fits all' solution.
- 2.3. To reduce sickness absence due to menopausal symptoms and retain valued employees in the workplace.
- 2.4. To ensure that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect within their working environment.

3. RATIONALE

- 3.1. This policy sets out the guidelines for members of staff and managers on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work. It is not contractual and does not form part of the terms and conditions of employment.

4. THE LEGISLATIVE SETTING

- 4.1. The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Act, employers are required to do risk assessments under the Management Regulations which should include specific risks to menopausal women and transgender people if they are employed.

4.2. The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. Note that conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

5. DEFINITIONS

5.1. The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women, although it can be brought on as a result of other medical conditions or certain surgical interventions. It refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months.

5.2. After a woman has not had a period for a year, this is considered to be 'postmenopausal'.

5.3. The Trust recognises that a proportion of its employees will be working through and well beyond the menopause.

5.4. The Trust recognises that the menopause affects all women, and it can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

5.5. The peri-menopause is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause and can often last four to five years although for some women it may continue for many more years or for others may last just a few months. It varies greatly in different individuals. During the time of the peri-menopause individuals may begin to experience symptoms due to changes in their hormone levels. These symptoms may vary in degree between different individuals. Due to the fact that they may be still having regular periods at the onset of the symptoms, many individuals do not always realise that they are experiencing the peri-menopause and may not understand what is causing their symptoms; and can be a barrier to accessing support.

5.6. The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. In the UK, the average age is 51, but it can happen much earlier. Many women experience the menopause before 45 (early menopause) and a significant number of women experience the menopause before the age of 40 (premature menopause). Some women experience a medical/surgical menopause which can occur suddenly when the ovaries are damaged or removed by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.

5.7. People from the non-binary, transgender and intersex communities may also experience menopausal symptoms.

5.8. The Trust recognise that for many reasons; peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. Some people seek medical advice and treatment for the symptoms of the perimenopause (the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience changes, such as irregular periods or other menopausal symptoms) and menopause (defined biologically as reaching a natural end to reproductive life).

5.9. A common form of treatment is known as hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Many women find these treatments helpful for alleviating symptoms, but HRT is not suitable or

appropriate for all women. Some people using HRT may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

6. SYMPTOMS OF MENOPAUSE

- 6.1. It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe.
- 6.2. Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically including, but not exclusively, hot flushes, poor concentration, headaches, panic attacks, heavy/light periods, anxiety, and loss of confidence. Some women also experience difficulty sleeping. Other symptoms include vaginal symptoms, Urinary problems Migraines and headaches, Reduced muscle mass, Skin irritation, Palpitations – heartbeats that suddenly become more noticeable.
- 6.3. These symptoms (which can vary in degree) may be experienced even though menstruation continues so women who are still having regular periods may not realise that they are experiencing the perimenopause and not understand the cause of their symptoms.

Menopause Symptoms in Other Circumstances

- 6.4. There are other circumstances in which symptoms may be experienced: Whilst menopause is usually a process involving gradual change, it can sometimes be sudden and acute following serious illness, medication or surgery. Sudden menopause tends to experience more severe symptoms and may require treatment and/or postoperative care to manage further problems. Younger women undergoing treatments for conditions such as endometriosis (estimated to affect around 1 in 10 women of reproductive age) and infertility (affecting around 1 in 7 couples), may experience menopausal symptoms whilst receiving treatment. Surgical and medical treatments as part of an individual's gender transition can result in menopause symptoms.
- 6.5. Post Menopause Symptoms continue on average for four years from the last period and can continue for up to 12 years. There is potentially an increased risk of certain conditions, including heart disease and osteoporosis (brittle bones) during post-menopause because of lower levels of certain hormones. These risks are higher for those who have had an early or premature menopause.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1. Employer Responsibility:

- 7.1.1. The Trust will educate and inform managers and employees to be aware of how the menopause can affect working women and transgender people, taking account of the particular circumstances in schools, and about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support those experiencing them.
- 7.1.2. Where women members of staff feel uncomfortable going to their line manager, because he is a man, or someone much younger, or both, we will ensure that an alternative contact is available. Confidentiality will always be respected.
- 7.1.3. The risk assessments which we undertake will consider the specific needs of menopausal employees, and, in doing so, we will consult with union representatives and employees and share with all managers and new managers, requesting signatures to confirm that measures are understood and will be acted upon. Risk assessments will include consideration of temperature and ventilation issues and will also address welfare issues, such as access to toilet facilities and cold water, during and outside break and lunch times.
- 7.1.4. All schools across the Trust will make adjustments where necessary to support individuals experiencing the menopause, and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse. It is important to note that adjustments need to be considered on an individual basis and within the school environment in which they are working.

These could include simple measures such as:

- leaving doors open where appropriate
- ensuring that windows can be safely opened
- ensuring that it is possible to regulate the temperature in a classroom or other room by turning down radiators (as long as the temperature does not drop below 18 degrees Celsius, this will be comfortable for all occupants)
- provision of fans
- fitting blinds to windows
- establishing a system that allows cover for women or transgender people who need to access toilet/ washing facilities while they are teaching (to deal with heavy and recurring bleeding)
- considering requests for changes to working arrangements, e.g. temporary part-time working
- swift permission for absence to attend menopause-related medical appointments
- adjusting workplace procedures and processes to support and avoid any detriment to menopausal employees. This is not a definitive list of measures. All schools across the Trust will actively listen to employees and union representatives and consider adjustments in light of the school context and the safety of students and staff members.

- 7.1.5. It is recognised that many of these practical and easy-to-institute changes to the workplace, which will make working life more bearable for menopausal women and transgender people will benefit all staff.
- 7.1.6. Managers can only be sympathetic and supportive though if they are aware that their member of staff is experiencing difficulties. Research has shown that people may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed approaching their manager to discuss any difficulties in managing their menopausal symptoms. This is particularly the case if their manager is younger than them or male and, as menopause can affect levels of confidence, if the person they are talking to has no idea about the menopause. This can be particularly true for trans or non-binary staff who are not 'out' to their colleagues or manager, and also for men who may be embarrassed to admit that they are affected by the experiences of their partner. It is therefore important that all managers are aware of the symptoms associated with the menopause and understand the issues affecting people going through it. This will help in fostering an environment where we are all more comfortable talking about the menopause, the symptoms and measures that could help in minimising these. Managers should be sensitive to any feelings of discomfort, listen to concerns and complaints and consider what can be done to reduce and minimise the impact symptoms may be having on the staff members performance within the workplace.
- 7.1.7. All schools are encouraged to elect a menopause 'champion' for those who may be affected by the menopause to approach if they would like to open a dialogue in relation to any symptoms that they may be having and also reasonable adjustments that they feel could alleviate these. Some schools may choose to elect a health and safety 'champion' which menopause would come underneath in terms of addressing it with employees.

7.2. Line Manager Responsibility:

- 7.2.1. Line managers who work with staff who may be affected by the menopause should:
- Familiarise themselves with this menopause policy.
 - Provide a safe place to allow the member of staff to speak openly and honestly.
 - Be ready and willing to listen and have open discussions about menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treating the discussion sensitively and confidentially and allowing adequate time for the discussion.
 - Any specific needs identified (including reasonable adjustments that are agreed) should be recorded and reviewed regularly.
 - To be aware of the potential impact of menopause on performance. If someone's performance suddenly dips, it is worth considering whether the menopause may be playing a part in this.
 - Will seek advice from the Trust's HR team as well as the GP and/or occupational health practitioner if necessary.
 - Staff should not experience any detriment because they may need time off during this time. Any absences will be managed in line with the Employee

Absence and Attendance Policy and discretion will be applied by the line manager in line with this.

7.2.2. Where adjustments are unsuccessful, or if symptoms are proving particularly severe, the line manager may:

- Discuss with the employee a referral to occupational health for further advice.
- Review occupational health advice, and implement any additional recommendations
- Update the action plan and continue the review process.

7.3. Occupational Health Responsibilities:

7.3.1. The role of occupational health is to:

- Carry out a holistic assessment of the employee to ascertain whether or not the working environment may be exacerbating menopause symptoms
- Discuss with the employee what adjustments would help
- Signpost to other appropriate sources of help and advice

7.4. All Employee are responsible for:

- taking responsibility for looking after their health
- being open and honest in conversations with HR and occupational health
- contributing to a respectful and healthy working environment
- being willing to help and support their colleagues
- accepting and supporting any necessary adjustments their colleagues request are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Further Advice

If any staff, contractor or visitor requires any further information regarding this policy or support they should either ask their Headteacher **or** contact the HR Helpdesk at hrhelpdesk@unitysp.co.uk or telephone 01440 333401.