

Menopause and the workplace policy



RHODES AVENUE
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Approved by:
Full Governing
Body

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1. Policy Aims

Rhodes Avenue is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works here. Rhodes Avenue recognises that women experiencing the menopause, whether before, during or after this time of hormonal change and associated symptoms, may need additional consideration, support and adjustments. We recognise that the menopausal symptoms can also affect transgender people including non-binary and intersex people. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may be different for those among these communities. Although the policy refers to women, please consider that 'people who menstruate' also require consideration. Experiences and perceptions of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status. It is important to recognise that for many reasons, people's individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly. The menopause can also affect partners and families too.

Rhodes Avenue is committed to developing a workplace culture that supports workers experiencing the menopause in order for them to feel confident to raise issues about their symptoms and ask for reasonable adjustments at work.

The aim of the policy is to:

- educate and inform managers to understand how the menopause can affect staff, and how they can support those experiencing the menopause at work
- foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations, or engage in discussions about the menopause in a respectful and supportive manner and ask for support and outline reasonable adjustments that could be made at work
- raise wider awareness and understanding among all employees about the menopause, for this reason, the menopause at work is an issue for men as well as women.
- enable workers experiencing the menopause to continue to be effective in their jobs
- To ensure that conditions in the workplace do not make menopausal symptoms worse and that appropriate adjustments and support are put in place, recognising that the menopause and perimenopause is an individual experience and therefore there is no 'one size fits all' solution.
- To reduce sickness absence due to menopausal symptoms and help us recruit and retain valued employees experiencing the menopause.

2. Policy Statement

This policy is part of Rhodes Avenue's commitment to ensuring the health and safety and wellbeing of all the workforce.

This policy is part of the school's commitment to equality and diversity. We are committed to creating a workplace that respects and values each other's differences, that promotes dignity and combats prejudice, discrimination and harassment. This policy seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance and enhance the reputation of Rhodes Avenue as an employer of choice.

We recognise that many of the changes to workplace culture and adjustments offered here may not only be of benefit to workers experiencing the menopause, but to all staff.

Rhodes Avenue is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all its workers and recognises that women may need additional consideration, support and adjustments before (perimenopause), during and after the menopause. This policy sets out the guidelines for employees on providing the right support to manage menopausal symptoms at work.

The policy acknowledges that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the menopause and so it is intended as a support guide for all workers. All stakeholders agree to work proactively to make adjustments where necessary to support women experiencing the menopause and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse.

Exclusionary or discriminatory practices will not be tolerated

This policy applies to all staff who are employed at Rhodes Avenue Primary School.

3. The Legislative Setting

Rhodes Avenue undertakes to comply with its legal obligations as set out below:

The **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974)** requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to undertake general risk assessments which should include specific risks to menopausal women, see section 5.3.

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

4. Definition of the menopause

The menopause is a natural transition stage in most women's lives. For some it will be medically induced. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may have a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms whilst experiencing the menopause and peri-menopause and may often encounter difficulties at work as a result of their symptoms.

Each woman will be affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time, and menopausal symptoms can often indirectly affect their partners, families and colleagues as well.

Some studies suggest that women of African descent may have more prevalent and severe symptoms.

Disabled women and those with pre-existing health conditions, may find that the menopause can aggravate their existing impairments and health conditions or even trigger new ones. Menopausal symptoms can in turn also be made worse by the disabled woman's impairment or health condition.

Some trans men may experience natural menopausal symptoms. Some trans women may experience pseudo-menopausal symptoms related to their hormone therapy treatment. Some non-binary people may experience menopausal symptoms.

Rhodes Avenue recognises that for many reasons, peoples' individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly.

Menopausal symptoms may include:

- Hot flushes – a very common symptom that can start in the face, neck or chest, before spreading upwards and downward, may include sweating, the skin becoming red and patchy, and a quicker or stronger heart rate.
- Heavy and painful periods and clots, leaving those affected exhausted, as well as practically needing to change sanitary wear more frequently. Some affected may become anaemic.
- Night sweats, restless leg syndrome and sleep disturbance.
- Low mood, irritability, increased anxiety, panic attacks, fatigue, poor concentration, loss of confidence and memory problems.
- Urinary problems - more frequent urinary incontinence and urinary tract infections such as cystitis. It is common to have an urgent need to pass urine or a need to pass it more often than normal.
- Irritated skin – including dry and itchy skin or formication, and dry eyes. Also vaginal symptoms of dryness, itching and discomfort.
- Joint and muscle aches and stiffness.
- Weight gain.
- Headaches and migraines.
- Menopausal hair loss.
- Osteoporosis - the strength and density of bones are affected by the loss of oestrogen, increasing the risk of the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis.
- Side effects from hormone replacement therapy (HRT), a form of treatment for menopausal symptoms for some people (although not suitable or appropriate for all).

N.B. This is not an exhaustive list.

Menopausal symptoms may also exacerbate existing impairments and conditions that those affected may already be struggling to cope with.

Perimenopause

The perimenopause is the period in a woman's life when she starts to experience hormonal fluctuations and changes to her periods. The average time for a woman to be perimenopausal is between four to five years. During this time, periods may become increasingly heavy and irregular, meaning it is vitally important for a woman experiencing symptoms to be close to toilets and shower facilities. For some women, the symptoms during this time can be worse than the actual menopause.

Menopause

A woman is described as being menopausal when they have gone 12 months without a period and when her ovaries are no longer responsive. The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 51. American evidence suggests that this is different for Asian and women of African descent. An Asian woman may start her menopause later and women of African descent slightly earlier. To date, there is no UK evidence on this issue.

Post-menopausal

This is the time after menopause has occurred, starting when a woman has not had a period for 12 consecutive months. The average time for women experiencing symptoms of the menopause is five years, but many women experience symptoms for up to ten years and 3% of women will experience symptoms for the rest of their lives. Post-menopausal women have

an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis and managers should be aware of this.

5. Support for employees experiencing the menopause

Rhodes Avenue is committed to a programme of action to make this policy effective and will work with the trade unions to take positive action to support staff experiencing the menopause.

All staff will be provided with appropriate information and training so that they are able to better understand the effects of the menopause and be comfortable about discussing and addressing the impact that it can have on employees in carrying out their roles.

All staff training will be supported by awareness campaigns aimed at supporting the development of an understanding and supportive culture.

All policies and procedures should take account of the effects of the menopausal symptoms to ensure that employees experiencing the menopause are not disadvantaged as a result of their symptoms.

Rhodes Avenue recognises that some employees experiencing the menopause may find that related symptoms may impact on their health and wellbeing, and we aim to provide as much support as is reasonably practicable for individuals.

We recognise that the menopause is a very personal experience and therefore different levels and types of support and adjustments may be needed.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to let a member of the Headship team know or the alternative contact (see below) know if they are struggling with symptoms that may impact on their work, so that appropriate support is provided. Such information will be treated confidentially and in accordance with Rhodes Avenue's data protection policy.

An alternative contact is available to employees experiencing the menopause should they not feel comfortable discussing their problems with their line manager, (particularly if they are male). This is the school's Business Manger. Employees may also prefer to discuss their problems with an alternative agency, e.g. Occupational Health.

Managers should make allowances should there be an additional need for sickness absence by employees experiencing the menopause in order to manage their menopausal symptoms. Absence will be recorded as related to menopausal symptoms and managers will consider such absence as an ongoing condition requiring the consideration of reasonable adjustments and flexibility in absence procedure triggers. Further details can be found in the 'Sickness absence policy and procedure'.

Rhodes Avenue recognises the potential impact of menopausal symptoms on performance by employees experiencing the menopause. Managers will seek to support staff sympathetically rather than moving directly to capability or disciplinary procedures. Further details can be found in the 'Performance management, capability and disciplinary procedures'.

Rhodes Avenue will ensure that gender sensitive and personal risk assessments are undertaken (by the staff member's line manager or person designated by the Headteacher) to consider the specific needs of employees experiencing the menopause and to ensure that the working environment will not make their symptoms worse. The risk assessment will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments that may be required.

Common areas in particular to consider are:

- workplace temperature and ventilation
- access to adequate toilet and washing facilities
 - access to drinking water
 - working times and break times
- workplace stress and workload
- bullying and harassment.

Further details can be found in the Health and safety policy and procedure's.

Employees who are experiencing the menopause can apply for the following adjustments to support them at work:

- Control over environmental factors – with provision of desk fans on request, review of office seating plans so that affected employees can be near the window or open doors, or away from direct sources of heat such as radiators, fitting blinds to windows, greater access to chilled drinking water, and to toilets and washing facilities.
- Where uniforms are provided, to use natural fibres wherever possible.
 - Flexibility over uniform and dress codes should they exacerbate symptoms such as hot flushes and sweating, and provision of additional spare uniforms.
- Changing/washing facilities for staff to change clothes during the working day.
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks, or increased breaks during the working day, and if required providing cover as necessary for these breaks.
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments.
- Temporary changes to the employee's duties, such as undertaking fewer high-visibility work like formal presentations or meetings or on reception because it can be difficult to cope with symptoms such as hot flushes, or assessing how work is allocated or whether the employee is affected at particular points of the day.

This is not a definitive list of adjustments. Rhodes Avenue will consider additional suggestions put forward by members of staff. It is recognised that many of these practical and potential adjustments to the workplace, that will make working life more manageable for menopausal women, will benefit all staff. See Appendix 2 for further adjustment suggestions.

Confidential support is available for eligible employees from the employee assistance programme (see appendix 1) and this may include counseling if appropriate, in addition to practical information and advice. Please see The School Business Manager or your Headship team link for further details.

6. Roles & Responsibilities

Employees

It is recognised that everyone who works at Rhodes Avenue has a role to play in ensuring a comfortable working environment for all staff, including those experiencing the menopause.

All staff should take a personal responsibility to look after their health.

Employees are encouraged to inform their manager or a member of the Headship team (or the alternative contact, should they not feel comfortable speaking to their manager) if they are struggling with menopausal symptoms and need any support, so that they can continue to be effective in their jobs.

Those who are experiencing challenges due to the menopause are encouraged to raise their concerns.

Employees experiencing the menopause are encouraged to seek support through their GP, the employee assistance programme and other external organisations.

All staff have a responsibility to contribute to a respectful and productive working environment, be willing to help and support their colleagues, and understand any necessary adjustments their colleagues are receiving as a result of their menopausal symptoms.

Employees should report any instances of harassment, victimisation or discrimination experienced because of issues related to the menopause.

If an employee is found to have harassed, victimised or discriminated against another employee in relation to the menopause, then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

Employees are also encouraged to make healthier lifestyle choices to help with some of the symptoms such as:

- Eating healthily and regularly – research has shown that a balanced diet can help in alleviating some symptoms, in keeping bones healthy and in not gaining weight.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Exercising regularly - to reduce hot flushes, improve sleep, boost mood and maintain aerobic fitness levels.
- Not smoking – to help reduce hot flushes and the risk of developing serious conditions such as cancer, heart disease and stroke.
 - Ensuring alcohol intake is within recommended levels and cutting down on caffeine and spicy food – all of which can trigger hot flushes.
 - Having access to natural light.
- Staying cool at night – wearing loose clothes in a cool and well-ventilated room to help with hot flushes and night sweats.
 - Ensuring adequate rest and relaxation – to reduce stress levels and improve mood (through, for example, activities such as mindfulness, yoga and tai chi)
- Trying vaginal lubricant or moisturiser – available from shops and pharmacies for anyone experiencing vaginal dryness.

Line Managers

Managers should ensure that all employees are aware of this policy and understand their own and the employer's responsibilities. Training on women's health issues including the menopause will be provided to all managers. This will also include any specific issues for Asian women, women of African descent, disabled women and trans employees.

Managers (with the support of HR where requested) should encourage employees to discuss the impact of their menopausal symptoms on their work-life and encourage them to access the support and adjustments offered. They should promote a positive attitude to discussions around women's health issues.

Managers should be ready and willing to have open discussions about the menopause, appreciating the personal nature of the conversation, and treat the discussion sensitively, confidentially and professionally.

Managers will consider all requests for support and adjustments sympathetically and will not discriminate against those employees who are experiencing the menopause, and put in place the required support or adjustments in a timely manner.

Agreed adjustments and actions to be implemented are recorded via an action plan (Appendix 1). Ensure ongoing dialogue via a follow-up meeting and ensure that all agreed adjustments are adhered to and reviewed as regularly as necessary. 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.

All employees must be treated fairly and consistently. Employees need to be confident that they will not be treated less favourably if they take up any support available to employees experiencing the menopause.

Rhodes Avenue will take seriously and investigate any complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, using the agreed procedures and respecting confidentiality.

All requests for support or adjustments must be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the data protection policy.

Managers will support employees in informing their colleagues about the situation if appropriate.

The most important and valuable thing a manager can do is listen and, wherever possible, respond sympathetically to any requests for reasonable adjustments at work.

7. Review and Monitoring

Rhodes Avenue will ensure that all new employees, supervisors and managers will receive induction on the policy.

Adequate resources will be made available to fulfil the aims of this policy.

The policy will be widely promoted, and copies will be freely available and saved on the staff intranet (DropBox).

This policy will be reviewed jointly by school leaders and Governors.

The purpose of this monitoring and review is to identify where reasonable adjustments can be made to working conditions, practices and policies in order to make this policy effective.

8. Glossary

Menopause – a natural transition stage in most women’s lives lasting from four to eight years, although for some women it can be much longer. Most women experience the menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. It is marked by changes in the hormones and the woman stops having periods. Women may also experience a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms as a result of the menopause.

Premature menopause – for some women, it can be experienced at a much younger age, in their 30s or even younger. This is sometimes called premature ovarian insufficiency. The NHS estimates that 1 in every 100 women will experience premature menopause.

Medical or surgical menopause – there are some medical circumstances that will create an immediate menopause, whatever the woman’s age, such as a medically induced menopause to shrink fibroids or when the ovaries are damaged by specific interventions such as treatment for cancer, or when a woman’s ovaries are removed as part of a hysterectomy.

Perimenopause – a period of time before the menopause, in the years leading up to the menopause where there can be significant changes for women, including irregular and heavy menstrual bleeding and many of the classic symptoms associated with menopause.

Post-menopause – a term used when a woman’s periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months. However other menopausal symptoms may not have ended so soon. Problematic symptoms may continue for years.

Women of African descent (Black) – here the term is used in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK with a shared history, who have suffered from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today’s society.

Disabled person – under the Equality Act, a disabled person has a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. In some cases, menopausal symptoms may meet the definition of ‘impairment’.

Trans man – identifies as male but was assigned female at birth.

Trans woman – identifies as female but was assigned male at birth.

Non-binary – people who do not think of themselves as simply male or female. They may define themselves as both, neither or something entirely different. Their gender identity is more complicated.

9. Further information

Workplace alternative contact details – (School Business manager)

EPM

NHS information

www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-menopause

NICE guidelines on 'Menopause: diagnosis and treatment'

www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information

Menopause Matters

www.menopausematters.co.uk

Women's Health Concern

www.womens-health-concern.org

Daisy Network

<https://www.daisynetwork.org>

The Menopause Exchange

www.menopause-exchange.co.uk

Dr Louise Newson – "The Definitive Guide to the Perimenopause and Menopause" Yellow Kite 2023.

Balance App.

January 2024 Rhodes Avenue Staff INSET information

Appendix 1

Line managers

It is recognised that the menopause is a very personal experience and different adjustments and levels of support may be needed for different individuals.

Line managers should seek to provide reasonable support and adjustments when needed to help women deal with issues arising from the menopause.

Should an employee request a meeting to discuss concerns of the menopause, it is recommended that line managers adhere to the following:

- Arrange a meeting at a convenient time for both parties;
- Allow the employee to be accompanied if they want it. This can be a trade union representative or a colleague;
- Choose a venue that provides privacy and is unlikely to be disturbed;
- Allow adequate time to talk;
- Encourage the employee to be open and honest. It is difficult to help when you haven't got the full picture;
- If the employee wishes to speak to another manager, this should be allowed;
- Keep a note of all discussions and agree outcomes and next steps (the 'Confidential Discussion Record – Menopause' should be used to facilitate this);
- Agree a follow-up meeting to review the situation.

Confidential Discussion Record – Menopause

Date:

Present:

Staff details

Name:

Job Title:

Summary of discussions:

Agreed action points/reasonable adjustments:

Agreed date of review meeting:

Signed (staff).....

Signed (manager).....

Appendix 2 – Workplace issues/suggested adjustments

Symptom	Examples of workplace factors which could worsen or interact with symptoms	Potential adjustments
Daytime sweats, hot flushes, palpitations	Lack of access to rest breaks or suitable break areas. Hot flushes and facial redness may cause women to feel self-conscious, or the sensation may affect concentration or train of thought.	Be flexible about additional breaks. Allow time out and access to fresh air. Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Ensure cover is available so workers can leave their posts if needed.
Night time sweats and hot flushes. Insomnia or sleep disturbance	Rigid start/finish times and lack of flexible working options may increase fatigue at work due to lack of sleep.	Consider temporary adjustment of hours to accommodate any difficulties. Allow flexible working. Provide the option of alternative tasks/duties. Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence. Reassure workers that they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets.
Urinary problems; for example, increased frequency, urgency, and increased risk of urinary infections	Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress, embarrassment and an increase in stress levels. Staff member may need to access toilet facilities more frequently, may need to drink more fluids and may feel unwell.	Ensure easy access to toilet and washroom facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks during work to go to the toilet. Ensure easy access to supply of cold drinking water. Take account of peripatetic workers schedules and allow them to access facilities during their working day. Make allowances for potential additional need for sickness absence.
Irregular and/or heavy periods	Lack of access to adequate toilet facilities may increase the risk of infection and cause distress, embarrassment and an increase in stress levels. Staff member may need to access toilet and washroom facilities more frequently.	Ensure easy access to well maintained toilet and washroom or shower facilities. Allow for more frequent breaks in work to go to the toilet/ washroom. Ensure sanitary products readily available. Take account of peripatetic workers schedules and allow them to access facilities

		during their working day. Ensure cover is available so staff can leave their posts if needed.
Skin irritation, dryness or itching	Unsuitable workplace temperatures and humidity may increase skin irritation, dryness and itching. There may be discomfort, an increased risk of infection and a reduction in the barrier function of skin.	Ensure comfortable working temperatures and humidity. Ensure easy access to well maintained toilet and washroom or shower facilities.
Muscular aches and bone and joint pains	Lifting and moving, as well as work involving repetitive movements or adopting static postures, may be more uncomfortable and there may be an increased risk of injury.	Make any necessary adjustments through review of risk assessments and work schedules/tasks and keep under review. Consider providing alternative lower-risk tasks. Follow Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance and advice on manual handling and preventing MSDs (musculoskeletal disorders).
Headaches	Headaches may be triggered or worsened by many workplace factors such as artificial lighting, poor air quality, exposure to chemicals, screen work, workplace stress, poor posture/ unsuitable workstations, unsuitable uniforms or workplace temperatures.	Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity and good air quality. Ensure access to natural light and ability to adjust artificial light. Allow additional rest breaks. Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Carry out Display Screen Equipment (DSE) and stress risk assessments.
Dry eyes	Unsuitable workplace temperatures/humidity, poor air quality and excessive screen work may increase dryness in the eyes, discomfort, eye strain and increase the risk of infection.	Ensure comfortable working temperatures, humidity and good air quality. Allow additional breaks from screen based work. Carry out DSE risk assessments.
Psychological symptoms, for example: • Depression • Anxiety • Panic • Mood changes • Loss of confidence	Attacks Excessive workloads, unsupportive management and colleagues, perceived stigma around the menopause, bullying and harassment and any form of work-related stress may exacerbate symptoms. Stress can have wideranging negative effects on mental and physical health and wellbeing. Performance and	Carry out a stress risk assessment and address work-related stress through implementation of the HSE's management standards. Ensure that workers will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload, tasks or performance management targets. Ensure that managers understand the menopause and are

	<p>workplace relationships may be affected.</p>	<p>prepared to discuss any concerns that staff may have in a supportive manner. Ensure managers have a positive attitude and understand that they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed. Allow flexible/home working. Make allowance for potential additional need for sickness absence. Ensure that staff are trained in mental health awareness. Raise general awareness of issues around the menopause so colleagues are more likely to be supportive. Provide opportunities to network with colleagues experiencing similar issues (menopause action and support group). Ensure a quiet area/room is available. Provide access to counselling services.</p>
<p>Psychological symptoms: • Memory problems • Difficulty concentrating</p>	<p>Certain tasks may become more difficult to carry out temporarily; for example, learning new skills (may be compounded by lack of sleep and fatigue), performance may be affected and workrelated stress may exacerbate these symptoms. Loss of confidence may result.</p>	<p>Carry out a stress risk assessment and address work-related stress through implementation of the HSE's management standards. Reassure workers that they will not be penalised or suffer detriment if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets. Ensure that managers understand the menopause and are prepared to discuss any concerns that staff may have in a supportive manner. Ensure managers have a positive attitude and understand that they should offer adjustments to workload and tasks if needed. Reduce demands if workload identified as an issue. Provide additional time to complete tasks if needed, or consider substituting with alternative tasks. Allow flexible/home working. Offer and facilitate alternative methods of communicating tasks and planning of work to assist memory. Ensure a quiet area/room is available.</p>

		Provide access to counselling services.
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