

Mental Health

Mental Health - How to Address and Support

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Why should employers be concerned about mental health?

The overall health of a workplace includes both the physical and psychological well-being of its workers. By treating mental health and its psychological component equally with the physical environment, a workplace can support their workers' overall well-being. Poor mental health not only hurts the individual, it also reduces corporate profits. It's important that all levels of the workplace – including the Board of Directors, management, finance, and human resources departments – get involved to incorporate mental health at your workplace. It is also necessary to engage your health and safety committee and workers – we all have a shared responsibility for health and safety, including mental health.

There is no one "right way" to create a mentally healthy workplace because every workplace is different – from the people doing the work, to the work that needs to be done, to the leaders running the organization, the size of the organization, the external environment that influences the community, and the external resources the company draws. All of these factors play a role in employee mental health.

There is also a legislative requirement for employers to protect the mental and physical health of their employees. Many provincial occupational health and safety acts have been expanded to include harm to psychological well-being in the definition of harassment. In jurisdictions that do not have explicit legislation dealing with psychological health in the workplace, the general duty clause would apply. Some legislation now recognizes psychological health and safety as part of overall health and safety responsibilities by using terms like 'psychological well being' and 'psychological injury'. Psychological health and safety can also be found in the following legislated areas:

- Definition of harassment and violence
- Purpose of the Act
- Definition of health and safety
- Definition of injury
- Adjustment of the work environment to address the well-being of the worker

In jurisdictions that do not have explicit legislation addressing psychological health in the workplace, the [general duty clause](#) would apply. Please refer to the [legislation](#) in your jurisdiction for specific requirements.

Are there any specific issues in the workplace that affect employee mental health?

Research has identified several workplace factors – known as psychosocial risk factors (PSR) – that can have an impact on organizational health, the health of individual employees, and the financial bottom line. The way work is carried out and the context in which work occurs can have a significant impact on an employee's mental health – positively or negatively. When employees have a negative exposure to these factors, there is potential for the development of [stress](#), demoralization, depressed mood, anxiety, or burnout.

Organizations need to consider all of these in their efforts to create a mentally healthy workplace. The factors are:

- Balance
- Civility and Respect
- Clear Leadership and Expectations
- Engagement
- Growth and Development
- Involvement and Influence

- Organizational Culture
- Protection of Physical Safety
- Psychological Competencies and Demands
- Psychological Protection
- Psychological and Social Support
- Recognition and Reward
- Workload Management

Workplace issues that can also affect mental health include:

- stigma and discrimination
- demand/control and effort/reward relationships
- presenteeism
- job burnout
- harassment, violence, bullying and mobbing
- problematic substance use

For more information about these issues, please see the OSH Answers [Mental Health - Psychosocial Risk Factors](#).

What can workplaces do to support mental health?

A psychologically safe and healthy workplace is one that promotes workers' mental well-being and does not harm employee mental health through negligent, reckless or intentional ways. For example, a psychologically safe workplace would be free of excessive fear or chronic anxiety. An organization's commitment should start at the top.

One way to achieve a psychologically safe workplace is to create and implement a [Comprehensive Workplace Health and Safety \(CWHS\) Program](#). This program is a series of strategies and related activities, initiatives and policies developed by the employer, in consultation with employees, to continually improve or maintain the quality of working life, health, and the well-being of the workforce. These activities are developed as part of a continual improvement process to improve the work environment (physical, psychosocial, organizational, economic), and to increase personal empowerment and personal growth.

What can be done to gain support and participation across the organization?

When introducing psychological health and safety initiatives, it is important to get buy-in from all levels in the organization. Support and participation will help to improve the environmental and behavioural factors that influence how all employees interact with each other on a daily basis.

Senior leaders

Owners and senior leaders have the critical capacity to positively influence workplace culture, management practices, priorities, and values through setting expectations, leading by example, and allocating time, people power, and resources.

To gain support and participation from senior leaders:

- Help leaders understand the legal, ethical, and economical benefits of psychological health and safety
- Identify champions from all levels of the organization
- Establish decision-making procedures and clearly identify who are responsible for the development and implementation of psychological health and safety initiatives

To gain support and participation from managers:

- Communicate the purpose of psychological health and safety initiatives and who are responsible for them
- Clearly demonstrate senior leaders' support
- Recognize managers' efforts in performing the day-to-day duties of ensuring a healthy and safe workplace
- Ask for feedback from managers about the roll-out of mental health initiatives and respond to their concerns
- Help managers understand how their work and their team's work might be affected by new initiatives and what resources and supports are available
- Highlight the importance of training and equipping managers with skills and resources to help them respond to issues brought up by their team

Managers

Managers and supervisors are often tasked with balancing between meeting business targets and wanting to model healthy habits and support their team members. Managers and supervisors are also on the front lines of addressing mental health issues that are reported or intentionally noticed through interactions with their team.

All employees

Initiatives may fall short of their intended effect if employees are not given a clear idea of the initiative's end goal and whether their participation is encouraged by the organization's leaders.

To gain support and participation from all employees:

- Help employees understand the purpose of the initiatives and how the initiatives might impact their experience at work
 - Clearly demonstrate senior leaders', managers', and supervisor's support
 - Assure everyone that initiatives are about assessing and minimizing workplace factors that are associated with negative mental health outcomes rather than identifying personal strengths and weaknesses or asking for personal medical status
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What else can employers do?

Below are eight strategies that employers can use to encourage positive mental health:

1. Encourage active employee participation and decision making
2. Clearly define employees' duties and responsibilities
3. Promote work-life balance
4. Encourage respectful and non-derogatory behaviours
5. Manage workloads
6. Allow continuous learning
7. Have conflict resolution practices in place
8. Recognize employees' contributions effectively

(Adapted from Canadian Mental Health Association's [Workplace Mental Health Promotion, A How-To Guide](#).)

Additionally, employers can:

- When implementing a new process or procedure, always consider the psychological impact of the change.
- Assess psychological safety in your workplace and develop a plan to address it. See [Guarding Minds @ Work](#) or the CSA Standard "[Z1003-13 \(R2022\)](#) Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation" for more information.
- Develop a policy statement that reflects your organization's commitment to making workplace mental health a priority. A policy demonstrates leadership and commitment. Additionally, your health and safety policy should address commitment to addressing psychosocial risk factors as well as other hazards

- Explicitly include mental health and psychological safety in your health and safety committee mandate.
- Develop policies and practices to address workplace harassment, violence, and bullying. Review your current policies and procedures and consider how they might be positively or negatively contributing to issues of violence and harassment.
- Provide education and training that ensures managers and employees know how to recognize hazards such as harassment, bullying, and psychologically unhealthy work conditions. This training provides concrete ways for co-workers to recognize and talk about health issues in general. Managers can additionally contribute to a positive work environment if they have the skills and knowledge to identify and respond to issues before they escalate.
- Educate all health and safety committee members about the importance of psychological health in the workplace.
- Ask the worker representative(s) on the committee to bring forward general workplace psychological health issues that affect their workforce rather than any individual's particular situation. Require that individual privacy and confidentiality be respected at all times.
- Develop policies regarding problematic [substance use in the workplace](#) and/or [impairment at work](#) make sure all employees are aware of the steps they need to follow.

Does CCOHS have any other resources to help?

Yes! We have several related OSH Answers on health promotion, wellness and psychosocial issues. The following are just a few of the topics that you can find on [OSH Answers](#):

- [Mental Health - Introduction](#)
- [Mental Health - Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace](#)
- [Mental Health - Having Courageous Conversation](#)
- [Mental Health - Addressing Conflicts](#)
- [Workplace Health and Wellness Program - Getting Started](#)
- [Samples of Workplace Health Program Elements](#)
- [Sample Workplace Health and Wellness Survey](#)
- [Workplace Stress - General](#)
- [Work/Life Balance](#)
- [Violence and Harassment in the Workplace](#)

- [Bullying in the Workplace](#)
 - [Internet Harassment or Cyberbullying](#)
 - [Employee Assistance Programs \(EAP\)](#)
 - [Substance Use in the Workplace](#)
 - [Impairment at Work](#)
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Fact sheet last revised: 2022-05-25

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