

Psychological health and safety: A joint responsibility

A person's job and workplace should not harm their mental health. Many employers recognize this and strive to create psychologically safe and healthy workplaces. They promote workers' well-being and work to control risks and prevent harm.

But some things are outside of an employer's control. For example, genetics, personal issues, family concerns, and financial challenges can all impact an individual's mental health.

Maintaining a psychologically healthy workplace is therefore a joint responsibility. Employers must minimize mental health hazards at the workplace. Individuals should strive to understand what they need to maintain good mental health—for themselves and their co-workers—and seek support if those needs are not being addressed.

Explain dangers

We all have basic emotional needs. When these needs are not met in the workplace, it can cause psychological (or mental) harm to workers.

For example:

- Lack of recognition may lead employees to believe their work is not valuable.
- Excessive and/or conflicting job demands may cause undue, prolonged stress, ultimately resulting in worker burnout.
- An unaddressed culture of harmful social norms may discourage workers from seeking help for physical injuries and mental health concerns.

Identify controls

There are many factors that can affect the psychological health of a workplace. Employers and management should regularly assess these factors to ensure they are not negatively impacting workers' mental health—and make changes when needed.

These factors include*:

- Psychological support
- Organizational culture
- Clear leadership and expectations
- Civility and respect

- Psychological job demands
- Growth and development
- Recognition and reward
- Involvement and influence
- Workload management
- Engagement
- Work/life balance
- Psychological protection from violence, bullying, and harassment
- Protection of physical safety
- Other chronic stressors as identified by workers

Workers should strive to better understand how to protect their well-being in the workplace—and the well-being of their colleagues. They can play a positive role by:

- Learning to communicate in an emotionally intelligent way. For example, by identifying biases, acknowledging differences, speaking with clarity, and listening to others
- Respectfully interacting with others without judging them
- Supporting co-workers who may be struggling due to mental health or addiction issues
- Monitoring their own mental health and substance use, and seeking help when needed
- Speaking up about fit-for-duty concerns (with regard to themselves or others), when required

Demonstrate

Show your commitment to learning by taking a free online webinar, *Psychological Health and Safety Awareness*[†], offered by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. Encourage your team to do so as well.

Ask your leadership what strategies have been put in place to address mental health risk factors at the workplace.

*mentalhealthcommission.ca/13-factors-addressing-mental-health-in-the-workplace

†ccohs.ca/products/courses/phs-awareness

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Facilitator support resources

Prepare

- Review IHSA's [Mental health safety talks: facilitator's guide \(W131\)](#) for advice on how to talk about mental health with workers, encourage participation, and become a workplace mental health leader.
- Watch this video for an explanation of the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) and how implementing it can help to address mental health hazards at work.
- Read the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety's fact sheet on [assessing psychological hazards](#) in the workplace.
- Bookmark this webpage to learn more about the [factors that can affect psychological health and safety in the workplace](#)—from workload management to the protection of physical safety.
- Post the [13 Psychological Health and Safety Factors printout](#) and [Healthy Minds at Work](#) poster.

Reinforce

Show your commitment to learning by taking a free online webinar, [Psychological Health and Safety Awareness](#), offered by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. Encourage your team to do so as well. Ask your leadership what strategies have been put in place to address mental health risk factors at the workplace. Advocate for change if you believe there are holes in your organization's psychological health and safety strategy.

Next steps

Consider delivering an [On the Agenda](#) workshop to address specific factors that affect psychological health and safety in the workplace.

More resources

- Work to [build your emotional intelligence](#), so that it becomes possible to control your reactions and communicate more effectively with others—especially when it comes to difficult topics.
- Learn how improving your [social awareness](#) can help you to respond to others in a supportive and nonjudgmental way.
- Discover ways to [support co-workers](#) who may be struggling with mental health or addiction issues.
- Get a better understanding of what it means to be "[fit for duty](#)"—and how fitness can be assessed.

Questions

Consider asking your crew these questions after delivering the safety talk:

- In the safety talk, we identified many factors that affect psychological health and safety. Can you name four of them?

Take this as an opportunity to re-read the list and reinforce learning.

- One way to keep each other safe at work is to ensure we are all fit for duty each day. Being impaired is a significant safety risk. But impairment is not always about substance use. Perhaps you did not get enough sleep due to the pain of a nagging injury. Or maybe you are mentally distracted due to a stressful situation at home. How can we make sure co-workers who are impaired for any reason are able to speak up without retribution? If they do not speak up, how can the rest of us speak up so that we can all work safely?

Do *you* have questions? Did your crew have questions you could not answer? Remember, it is okay to not have all the answers. **For further support, please contact IHSA by email: info@ihsa.ca.**