



Psychological health and safety: A framework for success

Managing psychological health and safety in the workplace is as important as managing physical health and safety. A psychologically healthy and safe workplace prevents harm to workers' mental health and promotes mental well-being.

While many factors outside the workplace can affect mental health, it is an employer's responsibility to address the factors that are within the control, responsibility, or influence of the workplace. These three principles help to create, support, promote, and maintain a psychologically healthy and safe workplace:

1. **Show leadership commitment**
2. **Develop supportive managers and supervisors**
3. **Ensure worker participation**

Many employers already operate according to these principles, which are outlined in more detail in this document. Those who effectively promote psychological health and safety have greater productivity and employee engagement. Their workers experience less conflict and higher morale, and are less likely to leave.

Risk management model

The approach to managing psychological health and safety is similar to the approach for managing risks to physical health and safety: understanding risks, implementing safety measures, communicating safety information, and monitoring measures for effectiveness.

Begin by identifying the psychosocial hazards in your workplace, which are conditions that have the potential to cause psychological harm. There are five categories of psychosocial hazards, which are described in more detail later in this document:

- **Interpersonal environment**
- **Job design**
- **Workplace conditions**
- **Need for employer supports**
- **Exposure to traumatic events**

Principles for psychologically healthy and safe workplaces

1. Show leadership commitment

Leaders need to set the tone by demonstrating their commitment to psychological health and safety. **Leadership & commitment** are a critical part of enhancing health and safety culture and performance. Additionally, leaders can provide training that equips managers and supervisors with the skills to recognize and address the psychological health and safety needs of workers.

What is leadership?

Leadership for psychological health and safety will vary depending on the organization. In small companies, key leaders may be owners who directly influence the work environment and set the tone for the mental well-being of workers. In larger companies, leaders responsible for psychological health and safety are typically in senior management, driving organizational policies and initiatives.

Leadership involves fostering a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. It's important to listen and communicate effectively. Demonstrating transparency and authenticity will also help earn trust.

Leadership commitment in action

Leaders can influence and improve workers' psychological health and safety outcomes. The following key actions can play a significant role:

- Senior managers commit to and are involved with stress-management practices.
- Leaders measure workers' perceptions of how management values their psychological health and safety in relation to productivity goals.
- Employers develop a psychological health and safety policy that is reviewed and updated regularly.
- Employers actively engage workers and seek opportunities for feedback on their psychological well-being.
- Employers discuss psychological health and safety issues and solutions with workers.

Leaders can show commitment by proactively addressing psychosocial hazards. This may include the following:

- Ensure access to necessary resources.
- Ensure job demands are manageable.
- Prioritize prevention activities such as conducting psychosocial risk assessments.
- Communicate openly and encourage worker participation.
- Integrate psychological health and safety policies into the overall occupational health and safety program required by [sections 3.1–3.3](#) of the Regulation.
- Lead by example.

Regardless of a company's size, a commitment to continuously improving health and safety performance, backed by action, starts at the top.

Benefits of effective leadership

Effective leadership can improve people's health and the organization's bottom line. Be aware, however, that a cultural shift toward a psychologically healthy and safe workplace takes time.

2. Develop supportive managers and supervisors

Managers and supervisors often have the most influence in shaping workplace culture. They can gather and use worker feedback, provide guidance, and make decisions. Managers and supervisors help ensure that all levels of an organization embrace the organization's approach to psychological health and safety.

Enhancing relationships with workers

The quality of relationships between managers and workers can make the difference in workers feeling comfortable voicing concerns or reporting mistakes or risks. Here are some key ways to enhance relationships and increase worker participation:

- Increase awareness and understanding of psychological health and safety — use personalized approaches, such as self-assessments and goal setting, and communicate effectively about existing supports.
- Reduce stigma and apathy — share personal stories and nurture mental health champions who can offer assistance and education.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality where appropriate and required.
- Facilitate worker participation — encourage discussion about psychological well-being, conduct psychosocial risk assessments collaboratively, provide guidance on prevention activities such as voicing concerns to a joint health and safety committee or worker representative, offer peer support, and offer training where needed.

Development in action

Consider ways to develop the following skills and characteristics in managers and supervisors:

- **Good communication skills**
Provide clear and concise direction to the team and ensure workers understand what is expected of them in the workplace.
- **Ability to foster supportive and trusting relationships**
Act reliably, honestly, and transparently to build workers' sense of safety and foster team cohesion.
- **Respect and empathy**
Be thoughtful and try to understand varying points of view. Listen actively so everyone has space to be heard and ensure that all team members feel valued and supported.
- **Ability to problem solve and work collaboratively**
Deal with problems promptly and objectively, approach challenges with a team mindset, and ensure worker participation and involvement where appropriate and practicable.
- **Competence**
Have a good working knowledge of job duties, expertise in workplace policies and procedures, awareness of resources, and literacy in psychological health and safety.
- **Awareness of disability management and resources**
Know about and understand relevant programs; communicate with providers and agencies such as WorkSafeBC. Understand the relationship between being off work and psychological health, and manage [return to work](#) in a way that considers workers' mental well-being along with their physical well-being.
- **Leading by example**
Take care of one's own mental health to model self-awareness and stress-management strategies for workers.

Benefits of developing managers and supervisors

Supporting managers and supervisors in their development and equipping them with psychological health and safety education, practical tools, and strategies can positively impact their relationships with workers. Effective management can also significantly reduce claims costs and disability timeframes, as workers recover faster and remain connected to work.

3. Ensure worker participation

Workers contribute to a positive workplace culture by actively participating in programs and initiatives. When they have opportunities to provide valuable feedback to managers and leaders, they see that their psychological health and safety is prioritized.

What is worker participation?

Worker participation means employees are included in discussions, decisions, and initiatives about workplace factors that affect their mental well-being. This includes identifying and addressing psychosocial risks, providing feedback on support, and collaborating with management.

Participation means being present or involved. It can lead to better engagement and a deeper connection and commitment to work. Engaged workers are more likely to make a meaningful difference in their workplace.

Worker participation in action

Workers should be encouraged to take proactive steps to safeguard their psychological health and safety, practice self-awareness, set boundaries, seek support, and participate in workplace initiatives. This can include:

- Contributing to psychosocial risk assessments
- Participating in prevention activities
- Voicing concerns with the joint health and safety committee or worker representative
- Offering or receiving peer support

Employers can facilitate worker participation by:

- Offering encouragement and positive reinforcement
- Removing barriers to participate
- Providing time, training, and resources to actively participate
- Integrating discussions of well-being into regular manager and worker interactions

Benefits of worker participation

Worker participation is essential to building a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. Participation provides the foundation for worker engagement. When workers are engaged, they enjoy their work more, take pride in their work, are willing to go the extra mile, and feel more connected to their employer's goals.

Managing psychosocial hazards

This section describes five categories of psychosocial hazards and provides examples of control measures that can help reduce their potential effects on the psychological health and safety of workers.

Interpersonal environment

The work environment is not respectful. Open communication is not promoted, and conflicts and counterproductive behaviours are not addressed. Hazards can include:

- Harassment and violence
- Interpersonal conflict
- Lack of respect and civility
- Unclear conflict resolution processes
- Team incompatibility

Example

Hazard	Control
Lack of respect and civility	Foster respectful workplace interactions This starts with leaders and managers modelling behaviours they want others to exhibit. Acknowledging workers' contributions and efforts creates a workplace culture where everyone feels valued. Promoting respectful interactions can also help reduce work-related bullying. Ensure that competition does not erode interpersonal respect.

Job design

Employees are not provided with clear roles, growth opportunities, or a sense of appropriate autonomy.

Job design directly affects workload, demands, and job control. Hazards can include:

- Low role clarity
- Poor job fit
- Low job control
- High or low variety of job tasks
- High or low job demands
- Prolonged, unreasonably excessive workload

Example

Hazard	Control
Lack of worker input into job design	Provide formal and informal opportunities for worker input. Take actions when practicable.

Example continues

Hazard	Control
Lack of worker input into job design	A workplace with a culture of open, honest, effective communication and consultation helps workers express ideas and feel safe to participate. Create opportunities for workers to be open and honest about the challenges of the job. Receiving their feedback, and sharing ideas about potential modifications, can give workers the ability to influence job design and improve their job performance. These exchanges can provide insights into what resources are required to manage identified challenges.

Workplace conditions

Employees are subjected to workplace conditions that negatively affect their well-being and job performance.

Hazards can include:

- Inadequate occupational health and safety program
- Unsafe physical environment
- Lack of equipment, including personal protective equipment
- Inadequate communication about health and safety

Example

Hazard	Control
Inadequate communication about health and safety	<p>Promote a workplace culture where workers can feel comfortable raising health and safety concerns and discussing solutions. When workers feel their views are valued and that physical hazards are being addressed, it reduces the psychosocial harm.</p> <p>Eliminating the hazard (the poor workplace condition) rather than controlling it is always the preferred option. When elimination is not possible, take steps to control the risks.</p> <p>At the same time, provide opportunities to build worker knowledge of psychological health and safety and available resources. A proactive approach can significantly increase early interventions and can help reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions.</p>

Need for employer supports

Management does not provide adequate, meaningful, and effective policies, assistance, resources, and initiatives to meet worker needs. Hazards can include:

- Unclear leadership expectations
- Lack of supervisor support
- Absence of a psychological health and safety policy
- Limited access to mental health resources
- Inattention to equity, diversity, and inclusion

Example

Hazard	Control
Absence of a psychological health and safety policy	Develop a psychological health and safety policy. The policy and procedures should be developed with worker input and incorporate a risk management approach to identify, assess, and control hazards. Establishing policies and procedures demonstrates to workers the importance of psychological health and safety.

Exposure to traumatic events

There are inadequate trauma-informed policies and support systems to help workers cope with a traumatic event.

Hazards can include:

- Lack of pre-traumatic event support and education
- Lack of post-traumatic event support and education
- Cumulative and single-incident trauma exposures
- Lack of mental health resources

Note: A *traumatic event* is an emotionally shocking event that, in most cases, is experienced or witnessed by the worker. It can include events identified in [section 68](#) of the *Workers Compensation Act*, including incidents that result in serious injury.

Example

Hazard	Control
Lack of mental health resources, education, and support	Access internal and external supports and resources. External resources could include WorkSafeBC's Critical Incident Response program, which offers support to employers and workers after a traumatic event. As an internal approach, leaders, managers, and workers can strive for a healthy work-life balance and practise self-care. Leaders and managers who model behaviours such as the following encourage these behaviours in their employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limiting working time to a defined range of hours and avoid taking work home, as this can hinder time for personal recovery.• Taking breaks and connecting with others.• Actively engaging in self-care activities.

Note: It's always preferable to control risks by eliminating the hazard — in this case, by preventing exposure to traumatic events — but this may not always be possible.

For more information

For more information and resources, visit [Managing psychological health & safety](#) on worksafebc.com.

You can also view WorkSafeBC's [Mental Health Strategy](#), which outlines the organization's approach to workplace psychological health and safety.