

Psychological Health and Safety

Psychological Health and Safety Program - Controlling Psychosocial Hazards

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What does it mean to control psychosocial hazards?

The goal of control measures is to minimize workplace psychosocial factors that may be negatively influencing mental health and well-being. Control measures should follow the same hierarchy as traditional health and safety principles, where interventions addressing the source of the hazard are prioritized. This approach means prioritizing control measures that can affect the whole organization instead of only focusing on measures individuals may take.

For example, consistently asking for workers' input in the initial job design or when evaluating effectiveness of work processes can protect everyone against exposure to low job control, which can have a negative impact on mental health. A consistent feedback process also provides everyone opportunities for engagement and involvement, which is another workplace factor that can impact worker mental health.

Which psychosocial hazards should be addressed first?

All the hazards identified during [assessments](#) can be addressed at the same time, or the workplace can focus on one or a few of them at a time then address more later. There is a lot of room for creativity when implementing control measures. Sometimes, actions to address one psychosocial hazard can also help improve other psychosocial factors.

When choosing the psychosocial hazards to prioritize, consider:

- The results and any identified trends from the assessments

- The likelihood, impact, and consequences of each hazard that was found in the assessments
- Whether the organization has internal resources and expertise that can help address the psychosocial hazard
- Whether there are external organizations that could help as necessary (such as health and safety or mental health associations or consultants)

Create opportunities for staff to take part in brainstorming possible solutions. These opportunities not only encourage innovation but can also foster engagement and participation in the control measures down the line.

As with implementing any health and safety controls, be careful that the control measures do not create any new hazards.

No matter what control measures the organization decides to use, it is important to be specific in their execution. Make it clear who will be responsible for the design and implementation of the control measures and create a timeline of milestones for each component of the initiative.

What are some examples of psychosocial control measures?

Below are examples of control measures that can help improve workplace psychological health and safety. There are many more possible control measures, and resources are available to help organizations develop control measures that fit their needs.

Demonstrate support by allocating resources

It is important for leaders to support the prevention of psychosocial hazards through allocating time, budget, or people resources. The amount of time or resources can vary between organizations based on need and ability.

Foster a supportive environment and build connections

One foundation of psychological health and safety is an environment where everyone feels safe to share feedback, have conversations about difficult subjects, and to build relationships and trust. When having regular check-ins with their team, it is important that leaders listen to feedback or difficulties, not to pass judgement but to gather information to determine what supports might be helpful.

Give leaders tools to develop trust in the workplace

Provide resources and education to the organization's leaders to help them develop emotional intelligence and maintain a psychologically safe management style. The goal is to achieve a work environment where everyone knows that even when others disagree with a perspective or opinion, they respect the person and have everyone's best interest in mind. Make sure everyone in the organization is treated fairly and held accountable for their actions.

Consider the impact on people when making decisions

Make sure all decisions are made considering how they can potentially affect employees' mental health, their work, and their collaboration with coworkers. Thoroughly communicate any changes and let everyone know how the change might impact them.

Communicate more than you think you need to

Leaders should keep their team informed about changes and updates that can impact their work and set up channels for the team to communicate feedback and concerns. Make sure everyone is aware of available mental health resources and continuously encourage everyone to use them.

Improve work planning

Make sure tasks are planned considering any other responsibilities that the employee has and leave enough room for the unexpected. If the work might be too much for one person, consider putting multiple people on the task. Encourage employees to speak up if they run into obstacles that increase the workload and offer flexibility where possible.

Support the leaders in the middle

Equip managers and supervisors with skills to communicate clearly and flexibly so they can offer support to their team members. Create an environment that allows managers and supervisors to adopt habits that supports positive mental health so they can model healthy behaviours for their team.

Integrate psychosocial hazard prevention into the occupational health and safety program

Add psychosocial hazard prevention to the organization's health and safety policy, programs, training, plus hazard identification and risk assessment tools. This integration demonstrates that psychosocial hazards are given the same importance as physical hazards and can be addressed using the same methods.

Integrate mental injuries and distresses in accommodation and return-to-work procedures

Just like with physical injuries, employers or supervisors do not need to know the details of the mental injury to help employees return to work. Employers just need to know the functional abilities of the employee, provided by the employee's healthcare providers, to understand what the employee may need at each stage of their re-integration.

Promote mental well-being

To maintain a psychologically healthy and safe work environment, psychosocial hazard prevention should be combined with mental well-being promotion. Prevention addresses the sources of mental injury or distress in the work environment, and promotion addresses strategies at the individual level to reduce stress and foster resiliency.

Why is it important to tell everyone about the control measures?

Make sure to help everyone understand the purpose of the initiative, how it will be implemented, and how it will be monitored and evaluated. People are more likely to participate in initiatives that they understand. Talk about the control measures and provide updates during regular events including employee orientations and staff and team meetings.

Are there resources that can help?

The [Healthy Minds @ Work](#) web portal contains a collection of resources that can help workplaces develop control measures that fit their needs. These resources can help support workplace mental health efforts in creating a space where workers feel safe, respected, and valued. You can also reach out to the [occupational health and safety regulator](#) of your jurisdiction to see if they have programs for helping workplaces get started.

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