



Psychological health and safety at work

As an employee, how psychologically safe do you feel at work? Talking about the mental well-being of employees can trigger many questions:

- How do we help protect the mental well-being of employees?
- What makes a workplace psychologically safe or unsafe?
- What can employers and employees do to boost mental well-being in their workplaces?

Psychological safety at work is defined as “the result of every reasonable effort being made to protect the mental health of employees” (Guarding Minds at Work, Shain, 2009).

Examples of psychologically unsafe workplaces are those that permit harassment, discrimination, verbal abuse, unfairness and disrespect. At the extreme, they also allow bullying or other forms of violence.

Employees who work in psychologically unsafe workplaces may find that their mental health is affected. For instance, they may experience anxiety or depression or be unable to function normally, either at work or at home.

Other work factors that can affect your mental health include

- the ways your work is carried out (for example, deadlines, workload or work methods), and
- the context in which your work occurs (for example, relationships with supervisors, co-workers and customers).

According to Guarding Minds at Work, there are a range of factors that help foster psychologically safe workplaces.

- Co-workers and supervisors are supportive of—and respond appropriately to—concerns around your psychological and mental well-being.
- You have an understanding that trust, honesty and fairness will prevail.
- Leaders help you address your concerns and identify how your work contributes to the organization overall.

- In all interactions with your co-workers and customers, respect and consideration are encouraged.
- There is a good fit between your interpersonal and emotional competencies and the requirements of your job function.
- You receive support in the development of your interpersonal and emotional skills, in addition to your specific job skills.
- You receive recognition and appreciation for your efforts and accomplishments in a timely manner.
- You are included in discussions about how your work is to be done and how important decisions are to be made.
- Your tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the timeframes given.
- You feel connected to your work and are motivated to do your job well.
- There is recognition of the need for work-life balance.

Employers should be interested to know that research has shown workplaces that take a proactive approach to psychological health and safety are better able to retain employees and maintain their productivity and creativity.

Employees can also play a positive role in supporting mental well-being at the workplace. By thinking about and identifying those actions you should continue, and those you'd like to see more or less of in your workplace, you can start to encourage a more psychologically safe workplace.

Learn more

[Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#)

Commonly asked questions and answers about bullying in the workplace in Canada.

[Guarding Minds @ Work](#)

A workplace guide to psychological health and safety.

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