Guide to Fostering Psychologically Healthy and Safe Workplaces

Introduction

This guide will assist the City of Toronto management in fostering psychologically healthy and safe workplaces by providing guidance for meeting the objectives and strategies outlined in the [City's Psychological Health and Safety Policy](). This guide is to be used in conjunction with the [policy](), [Mental Health in our Workplace webpage,]() and the [Psychosocial Risk Assessment](), [guidelines,]() and [training]() available on ELI.

This guide focuses on the organizational risk factors that impact employees' health and safety in the workplace and does not focus on individual risk factors. Organizational risk factors are broader and encompass systemic issues within the workplace, affecting multiple individuals. In contrast, individual risk factors focus on specific characteristics or circumstances of individual employees.

Psychological health and safety in the workplace refer to the overall well-being of employees' mental health within their work environment. It encompasses organizational factors that contribute to employees' psychological well-being and aims to create a supportive atmosphere that prevents psychological harm. Just as physical health and safety measures are crucial to prevent incidents and injuries/illnesses, psychological health and safety measures are essential to protect employees from the negative impacts of work-related stressors and challenges.

Psychologically unsafe workplaces can lead to poor employee mental health and stress, which can impact job performance, productivity, absenteeism, and engagement.

Psychologically healthy and safe workplaces are ones that promote employees' mental health and well-being and actively work to prevent harm to employees' psychological health and safety.

Psychological health and safety in the workplace is an organizational priority that requires commitment from knowledgeable leadership.

Management Responsibilities

Supervisors and managers often play a crucial role in addressing concerns on behalf of the employer. They are instrumental in implementing policies and practices that promote a psychologically safe environment for employees.

The City of Toronto encourages supervisors and managers to promote psychological health and safety in the workplace for two primary reasons:

1. To promote mental health and well-being, creating a healthy work environment that supports employees' overall psychological well-being.
2. To reduce the risk of mental injuries and strain, fostering a safe workplace that minimizes the likelihood of adverse psychological impacts on employees.

Supervisors and managers can foster work environments that support employee health and safety by learning about the available tools and implementing a workplace approach to support mental health and prevent psychological harm.

Psychosocial Hazards

There are [13 Psychosocial Risk Factors](#) that can positively or negatively impact the mental health of employees. When the impact is negative, the psychosocial risk factor may become a psychosocial hazard.

A psychosocial hazard refers to any factor in the workplace that can negatively influence an individual's psychological health and well-being. Psychosocial hazards can cause harm by creating unhealthy stress (e.g. frequency, duration, and intensity). If left uncontrolled, they can negatively impact employees' mental health outlook (e.g. languishing) and create mental harm, injuries, and illness (e.g. burnout).

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires employers and supervisors to take every precaution reasonable under the circumstances for the protection of workers. This general duty clause can also be interpreted for the protection of employees with respect to their psychological well-being and efforts to prevent psychological injuries/illnesses.

Recognize, Assess, Control and Evaluate (RACE) for Psychosocial Hazards

The concept of "Recognize, Assess, Control and Evaluate" (RACE) is a systematic approach to managing hazards in the workplace. Psychosocial hazards can also be managed using this approach. It provides a structured framework for identifying, evaluating, mitigating, and continuously monitoring psychosocial hazards to enhance employee well-being and to create a healthy and safe work environment.

The RACE framework emphasizes proactive management of psychosocial hazards, starting with awareness and recognition of these hazards. It then proceeds through evaluation of the risk, followed by implementation of targeted control measures. Lastly, ongoing evaluation ensures that controls are effective and relevant, allowing for adjustments and improvements over time.

Hierarchy of Controls for Psychosocial Hazards

The Hierarchy of Controls is a framework used in Occupational Health and Safety to guide organizations in exploring ways of managing and mitigating workplace hazards. When applied to psychosocial hazards, which encompasses aspects of the workplace that affect employees' mental and emotional well-being, the hierarchy helps prioritize interventions to foster psychologically healthy and safe work environments.

Elimination and Substitution:

Ideally, remove or completely eliminate the source of psychosocial hazards. Psychosocial hazards cannot always be eliminated, as there are interactions that cannot be avoided in some lines of work. Substitution could involve restructuring work processes to reduce stressors significantly.

Engineering Controls:

Redesign work processes or workflows to minimize exposure to psychosocial hazards. This might include restructuring teams or adjusting job roles to improve job satisfaction and reduce stress.

Administrative Controls:

The implementation of policies and procedures that address psychosocial hazards. This may include adherence to the City's Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination policy, conflict resolution procedures, or guidelines for workload management.

These controls can also include the provision of training and awareness programs to educate employees and management on recognizing, understanding, and managing psychosocial hazards.

Personal Protective Equipment:

Although personal protective equipment is not an appropriate control measure for psychosocial hazards, the intent of this level in the Hierarchy of Controls is to provide controls directly at the worker-level.

Applying controls at the worker-level can include providing supportive resources, including offering an Employee Assistance Program, mental health support, counselling services, or access to external mental health professionals. This acts as the last line of defense to support employees dealing with psychosocial hazards.

The concepts of RACE and the Hierarchy of Controls are explored in the section below.

13 Psychosocial Risk Factors

The City of Toronto has adopted the CSA Psychological Health and Safety Standard, as a part of conducting psychosocial risk assessments, which engages employees to evaluate the current level of psychological health and safety hazards in the workplace.

The Standard recommends the 13 Psychosocial Risk Factors for consideration. Although these risk factors are not the sole contributors of mental well-being in the workplace, taking them into account will increase the effectiveness in promoting mental well-being in the workplace.

Conducting a Psychosocial Risk Assessment, which is a process aimed at evaluating the 13 Psychosocial Risk Factors, is a joint responsibility between management and employees.

The following table outlines the 13 Psychosocial Risk Factors, providing general intent of the strategy for each risk factor, the goals for implementation, and offers clear considerations for controls to achieve implementation.

Psychosocial Risk Factor	Strategy	Implementation	Considerations for Controls (Management)	Consideration for Controls (Employees)
Balance	Encourage a healthy work-life balance for employees	Strive for reasonable working hours, discourage excessive overtime, and support employees in taking time off when needed	• Sending communications, e.g. emails, phone calls, etc., during work hours • Providing flexible work arrangements, i.e. work from home, where applicable • Providing clear expectations around employee availability, communication, and technology during off-work periods • Encouraging staff to take their entitled breaks, e.g. lunchtime, sick time, vacation time, earned days off, parental leave	• Using vacation, float days and other City benefits or entitlements in a manner that supports work/life balance, where possible • Identifying any work scheduling challenges with work-life responsibilities, i.e. child-care, caregiving • Discussing work hours or alternate solutions with management, when needed
Civility & Respect	Promote a culture of civility and respect within the workplace	Communicate and enforce respectful behavior, and address any disrespectful conduct promptly	• Modeling and fostering respectful behavior among team members and immediately address misunderstandings/miscommunications • Avoiding giving preferential treatment to employees • Praising employees for jobs done well and for positive contributions • Helping employees improve/learn from mistakes by providing respectful and constructive feedback	• Showing respect of others' ideas, values, and beliefs • Modelling respectful behavior • Addressing acts of incivility when they occur by respectfully speaking directly to the person; having an open mind if approached by a colleague about perceived incivility and trying to see the situation from the other person's perspective

Clear Leadership & Expectations	Provide clear leadership and define expectations for employees	Communicate roles and responsibilities effectively, and offer guidance and feedback for clarity	• Communicating the level of performance required, annually or as frequently as required, to receive the desired result • Defining the duties, functions and time allocated to each task of employees' position, if possible • Organizing strategies and clearly communicates changes to employees	• Asking for direction or clarification for expectations and goals • Being transparent with work and responsibilities you expect from others • Having team discussions on upcoming changes or challenges, so all team members are aware of their responsibilities

				• Communicating if work tasks and expectations are unclear
Engagement	Enhance employee engagement and involvement in work-related decisions	Seek employee input, involve them in goal setting, and encourage active participation in decision-making processes	• Promoting City of Toronto Employee Engagement survey and action items based off employee feedback • Committing to Toronto Public Service values • Asking for employees' feedback on their role and tasks • Cultivating a positive, inclusive, engaging workplace culture and environment	• Connecting with colleagues by planning team building activities • Volunteering for developmental opportunities • Maintaining positive and healthy work relationships
Growth and Development	Support employees' professional growth and development	Offer training opportunities, mentorship programs, and clear paths within the organization	• Regularly checking-in with staff to learn about long-term and short-term goals for the year • Creating equitable and inclusive mentorship opportunities for staff that • Providing staff with opportunities and time to attend professional development training and workshops • Educating staff on City of Toronto Tuition reimbursement policy and process • Permitting new team members to shadow more seasoned staff, when possible	• Taking initiative to shadow co- workers/leaders • Being a mentor to others formally or informally as well as seeking mentors or coaches • Informing management of short-term and long-term career goals • Identify skills or knowledge gaps, as well as learning and developmental needs in order to address them

| Involvement & Influence | Encourage employee involvement and influence in workplace matters | Seek and value employees' input, involve them in discussions, and consider their ideas and suggestions | • During major organization changes or restructuring, using surveys to receive feedback from employees on proposed outcomes
• Involving staff in the decision-making process that involves changes that will impact their job duties | • Offering constructive suggestions about improving efficiency, service delivery, and business operations
• Engaging a diversity of voices, opinions, and representations to work on committees and projects |

Psychosocial Risk Factor	Strategy	Implementation	Considerations for Controls (Management)	Consideration for Controls (Employees)
			• Supporting employees to have a level of influence of how they will adapt to changes	• Being an employee engagement or mental health and wellness ambassador
Organizational Culture	Foster a positive organizational culture that aligns with employees' values	Communicate and reinforce the organization's culture, values, and ethics consistently	• Creating values-based policies and procedures to guide decision making • Completing conflict resolution practices training • Apply a psychological health and safety lens to all policies and programs including orientation, onboarding, recruitment. • Creating activities and events that promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture	• Contributing to a workplace that is respectful, inclusive, and trustworthy • Completing the Count Yourself In survey • Completing the Employee Engagement survey • Providing feedback to management about experiences in the workplace
Protection of Physical	Ensure a safe and comfortable physical workspace for employees	Regularly assess and improve workplace hazards to enhance employee well-being	• Assessing physical and psychosocial hazards and employing control measures to mitigate or prevent harm • Providing proper training and standardized processes surrounding safe work • Providing appropriate equipment to complete work tasks • Ensuring timely responses to critical incidents	• Identifying physical and psychosocial hazards to management and suggest possible solutions to mitigate them • Using appropriate equipment for job task • Completing required training

| Psychological and Social Support | Provide psychological support and resources for employees | Offer access to mental health resources, counselling, and the Employee Assistance Program to support mental well-being | Reviewing the People Leader Checklist: Supporting Workplace Mental Health Communicating support for mental health and wellness in our workplace Regularly checking-in with staff Hosting stigma reduction campaigns and events Being supportive of mental health initiatives in the workplaces | Seeking a mentor or colleague for support Disclosing to your manager when accommodations or support are needed Coordinating and promoting mental health and wellness initiatives within your division Sharing wellness resources and TELUS Health Supports and |

Psychosocial Risk Factor	Strategy	Implementation	Considerations for Controls (Management)	Consideration for Controls (Employees)
			- Having knowledge of accommodation process - Hosting wellness, resiliency and stress management workshops for staff - Distributing and promoting City of Toronto mental health and wellness benefits and EAP information at team meetings - Assigning mentors to new employees to provide peer support	Resources (Username: Toronto, Password: EAP) at team meetings - Sharing Mental Health Resources & Tools for City Employees i.e. What's your Stress Index, Check Up from the Neck Up - Being mindful of language and behaviors when discussing mental health issues
Psychological Competencies & Demands	Promote the development of psychological competencies among employees and manage demands	Offer training on stress management, resilience, and emotional intelligence to help employees navigate workplace challenges	- Considering emotional and interpersonal competencies in recruitment and promotion processes - Embedding interpersonal and emotional competencies into job descriptions and interview processes - Reviewing psychological demands of the jobs regularly - Ensuring risks or threats to psychological safety are identified and mitigated	- Identifying job tasks that may cause prolonged stress and anxiety - Be open to sharing workloads or changing work tasks to support the team

| Psychological Protection | Create a culture that protects employees from psychological harm | Apply the Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination Policies and practices, provide training on respectful conduct, and encourage reporting of incidents | • Understanding City of Toronto Psychological Health and Safety policy
• Being trained on City of Toronto policies and processes on Human Rights and Anti Harassment/ Discrimination, Workplace Violence, Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence, Managing Employees With Health Issues, etc.
• Conducting and reviewing psychosocial risk assessments | • Identifying psychosocial hazards in the workplace
• Completing all required City of Toronto training
• Complete and share Toronto for All Learning
• Join or be an ally to a Community of Inclusion |

Psychosocial Risk Factor	Strategy	Implementation	Considerations for Controls (Management)	Consideration for Controls (Employees)
			- Fostering a psychologically safe, respectful, trust-worthy and inclusive environment where employees can openly share ideas, report problems and mistakes - Training all management and employees in Mental Health First Aid - Embedding an equity lens in all policies and process and promote equity initiatives	
Recognition & Reward	Recognize and reward employees for their contributions and achievements	Implement a structured recognition program that appreciates employees' efforts and motivates them	- Developing individual and group led recognition events and initiatives for accomplishments - Maintaining clear practices for recognizing effort and providing feedback - Providing direct recognition and praise to employees on a regular basis - Praising effort as well as the result	Sharing credit where it is due by mentioning the names of individuals who played a role on a task
Workload Management	Conduct workload assessments and ensure workloads are reasonable and manageable	Regularly review workload distribution, prioritize tasks, and provide resources to handle workload effectively	- Allocating resources to balance workload amongst employees - Rearranging assignments to prevent excessive work demands, where possible - Reducing inefficiencies in work processes to reduce workload for staff - Adjusting workload for accommodated employees - Engaging the team in frequent workload management discussions and collaborating on solutions and ideas	- Offering support to team members - Advising management when experiencing challenges in meeting work demands - Identifying accommodation needs and respecting the accommodation needs of others - Offering creative solutions to aid in managing team workload