


Mental Health
Awareness
Handbook





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Our goal is to facilitate the knowledge required to help CUPE members maintain and improve mental health, and to support members in identifying good mental health practices.



UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

It is important for our Health and Safety Representatives to recognize the difference between mental health and mental illness. Good mental health can help lead to a healthier and more productive workforce.

With this booklet we hope to show you ways to monitor and address mental health in the workplace. As a union representative it is not your role to identify or suggest treatment for mental illness, rather you should refer the members to their health care provider(s).


Mental Health: (Source: CMHA)

Mental Health means striking a balance in all aspects of one's life: social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental. Everyone's personal balance will be unique and the challenge is to keep this balance.

Here are some examples that can affect one's mental health: bullying, stress, isolation, age and life changes, work/life balance, sleep, grief, parenting and unemployment.

Mental Illness: (Source: CMHA)

Mental illness can take many forms just as physical illnesses do. There is still a great deal of stigma around mental illnesses as they are still feared and misunderstood by many people. Mental illnesses, also called psychiatric disorders, are treatable.



Some examples of Mental Illnesses are: Anxiety Disorders, Bipolar Disorders, Depression, Eating Disorders, Mood Disorders, Schizophrenia, Self-Injury, and Suicide.


MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE:

Identifying the 13 Psychological Risk Factors

Employers have responsibilities with respect to workers mental health. These responsibilities can be best identified through assessing the 13 psychological risk factors in the workplace. These risk factors help workers and unions identify the needs of workers with respect to their mental health.

Here is a quick synopsis: *(Source: University of Waterloo)*

- 1. Psychological Support** is an environment supportive of employees' psychological and mental health concerns, and responds appropriately.
- 2. Organizational Culture** is the degree to which a work environment is characterized by trust, honesty, and fairness.
- 3. Clear Leadership and Expectations** is effective leadership and support that helps employees know what they need to do, how their work contributes to the organization, and whether there are impending changes.
- 4. Civility and Respect** is where interactions in the workplace are respectful and considerate.

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5. **Psychological Competencies and Requirements** is where there is a good fit between employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies and the requirements of the position.
 6. **Growth and Development** is the encouragement and support for the development of employee interpersonal, emotional and job skills.
 7. **Recognition and Reward** includes appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of employees' efforts in a fair and timely manner.
 8. **Involvement and Influence** is where employees are included in discussions about how their work is done and how important decisions are made.
 9. **Workload Management** is where tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.
 10. **Engagement** is where workers feel connected to their work and are motivated to do their job well.
 11. **Balance** is where there is recognition of the need for balance between the demands of work, family and personal life.
 12. **Psychological Protection** is where psychological safety is ensured, workers feel able to ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes and problems, or propose a new idea without fearing negative consequences.
 13. **Protection of Safety** is where appropriate action is taken to protect the physical safety of employees.




HOW CAN UNIONS AND HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES HELP?

1. Training

Mental health awareness is growing throughout the country. Workplaces should commit to training management and workers to help assist the employer in achieving a psychologically healthy and safe environment.

Suggested training considerations (not a complete list) are:

- CMHA's certified Psychological Health and Safety Advisor Training program (management and worker)
- CUPE education courses (worker)
 - > Combatting Workplace Bullying
 - > Conflict Resolution
 - > Creating Racial Justice
 - > Duty to Accommodate
 - > Saying "NO" to Harassment
 - > Women Breaking Barriers
 - > Preventing Mental Injury at Work

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- > Harassment Prevention in the Workplace
 - > Workload and Overwork
 - > Creating Psychologically, Healthy and Safe workplaces
 - > Understanding Mental Health

To gain access to this training contact your CUPE Local executive.

2. Assessing the work environment

A recommended tool for assessing your work environment is **stressassess.ca** by Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers.

This site provides separate assessment tools for both individual workers and the overall workplace environment.

An additional resource is the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) that is found at **copsoq-network.org** This tool is a questionnaire and comes in three forms long, medium, and short. As with the above site it can be used to assess the whole workplace or used in individual cases.

The implementation of these types of surveys can be achieved through a recommendation by your health and safety committee to your employer.



3. Taking action

One of the most comprehensive tools that can be used to take action on workplace stress, help with mental injury prevention and create a psychological safety action plan, is The Mental Injury Toolkit (MIT) available at ohcow.on.ca/mental-injury-toolkit.html

The MIT toolkit will provide your health and safety committee with a better understanding of workplace stress and what to do about it. The guide gives definitions, common causes of mental distress, an Ontario focused legal framework, possible actions to take, and access to additional resources.

WHAT KIND OF ACCOMMODATIONS ARE NEEDED FOR WORKERS WITH A MENTAL HEALTH/MENTAL ILLNESS ISSUE?

Depending on the mental health issue or illness a worker is dealing with, there are a number of options available. Affected workers should speak to their local union representative who can assist them in approaching the employer to have accommodations set up in their workplace.

Some of these accommodations could include:

Flexible scheduling

- Flexibility in the start or end of working hours to accommodate effects of medication or for medical appointments.
- Part-time shifts (which may be used to return a worker to



a full-time position).

- More frequent breaks

Changes in supervision

- Modifying the way instructions and feedback are given. For example, written instructions may help an employee focus on tasks.
- Having weekly meetings between the supervisor and employee may help to deal with problems before they become serious.

Changes in training


- Allowing extra time to learn tasks.
- Allowing the worker to attend training courses that are individualized.

Modifying job duties

- Exchanging minor tasks with other workers.
- Changing the schedule of tasks to suit the worker.

Using technology

- Allowing the worker to use a lamp instead of fluorescent lights to eliminate a flicker which may be irritating or cause a reaction.
- Providing the worker with a tape recorder to tape instructions from a supervisor, training programs and meetings if they have difficulty with memory.
- Allowing the worker to use head phones to protect them from loud noises.




Modifying work space or changing location

- Allowing the worker to relocate to a quieter area where they will be free from distractions.
- Allowing the worker to work at home.
- A job coach may be provided to help in a number of ways such as helping the worker to reduce their anxiety by providing feedback or observing their work and making suggestions about accommodation.

A job coach may be someone from outside the organization that assists the employee in the workplace. Alternately, someone within the workplace, such as a peer or human resources staff person might perform this role.

It can be useful to work with a medical professional to help provide guidance through the accommodation process.

More than anyone else, the worker will know what accommodation they need to allow them to work productively. By talking directly with the worker, you will likely be able to come up with solutions that meet the needs of the individual as well as the organization.



WHAT ARE THE ACCOMMODATION RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES, AND UNIONS?

(Source Mentalhealthworks.ca)

In some instances workplaces may not yet be equipped to prevent mental injuries caused by hazards in the workplace and accommodations must be sought. Here is a reminder of the accommodation responsibilities of the workplace parties.


You can download more detailed information on the duty to accommodate at:

https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/duty_to_accommodate.pdf

https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/checklist_duty_to_accommodate_en.pdf


The employer should:

- Create an atmosphere in which employees are comfortable asking for accommodation. This means providing employees with information about the organization's accommodation policy, and creating procedures that allow for the request to be made confidentially.
- Assume that the employee's request is made in good faith.
- Work with the employee, and experts if necessary, to explore all possible accommodations.
- Maintain records of the request and steps taken to deal with the request.

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- Respect the confidentiality of the information provided by the employee.
 - Respond to accommodation requests in a timely manner.
 - Require the employee to provide only that information which is necessary to develop an appropriate accommodation.
 - Respond to requests for accommodation even if they are not made in a formal manner or using the term “accommodation.”
 - Pay the costs related to accommodation including any medical certificates required.
 - Ensure that managers are aware of their obligation to prevent an employee from being harassed in the workplace because of their disability/condition. Accommodation should be done in a way that does not subject the employee to ridicule. The employee should also be assured that the organization will not tolerate any form of harassment.
 - Ensure that progressive performance management processes are in place to identify and assist employees with disabilities prior to their disability leading to a performance issue.

The employee should:

- Tell the employer that they require accommodation because of a disability and, to the greatest extent possible, set out the type of accommodation needed. The employee does not necessarily have to advise the employer as to the specific nature of the disability, but they do have to provide enough information so that the employer can understand the accommodation needed.
- If requested, provide supporting documentation from a health care provider or other person in order to assist the employer in developing an appropriate accommodation.

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- Work with the employer and union to determine an appropriate accommodation. This includes working with any experts the employer has retained to assist with the accommodation.
 - Meet all relevant job requirements and standards once the accommodation has been provided.
 - Continue to work with the employer to ensure the accommodation remains effective.

Unions are required to:


- Actively participate in the accommodation process and support the member.
- Share responsibility with the employer to develop and implement accommodation.
- Support accommodation requests even where they are not consistent with the collective agreement unless it would create an undue hardship.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL ILLNESS (Source: CMHA)

It is important to have some background knowledge with respect to mental illness, though only qualified medical practitioners should diagnose mental illnesses.

Next page is some general information on various types of mental illnesses.

Please remember if a member is suffering from a mental illness they should speak to their health care provider(s).



Anxiety Disorders are a form of mental illness. Different types of anxiety disorders include: Phobias, panic disorder, agoraphobia and social anxiety disorder


Bipolar Disorder is a form of mood disorder that causes people to feel intense, prolonged emotions that affect their mental well-being, physical health, relationships and behaviour. Additionally, someone with bipolar disorder also has episodes of mania that may include extreme optimism, euphoria and feelings of grandeur; rapid, racing thoughts and hyperactivity; a decreased need for sleep; increased irritability; impulsiveness and possibly reckless behaviour.

Depression is also a form of mood disorder. A major depressive disorder, usually called "depression," is different from the "blues." Someone experiencing depression is grappling with feelings of severe despair over an extended period of time.

Obsessive compulsive disorder is made up of unwanted thoughts, images, or urges that cause anxiety (obsessions) or repeated actions meant to reduce that anxiety (compulsions).

Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur after a very scary or traumatic event, such as abuse, an accident, or a natural disaster. Symptoms of PTSD include reliving the event through nightmares or flashbacks, avoiding reminders of the traumatic event, and feeling unsafe in the world, even when a person isn't in danger.

Eating Disorders are not just about food. They are often a way to cope with difficult problems or regain a sense of control.



Schizophrenia is a complex biochemical brain disorder that affects a person's ability to determine what is real and what is not.

Self-Injury, also called self-harm and self-abuse, refers to deliberate acts that cause harm to one's body, mind and spirit.

Suicide is a difficult topic to bring up. When someone talks about suicide or brings up concern for a loved one, it's important to take action and seek help quickly. Experts in the field suggest that a suicidal person is feeling so much pain that they can see no other option. They often feel they are a burden to others, and in desperation see death as a way to escape their overwhelming pain and anguish.



Resources

The resources listed below are not meant to replace clinical diagnostic tools but rather to provide possible avenues to address mental health in the workplace.

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers **www.ohcow.on.ca**

Canadian Mental Health Association.... **www.ontario.cmha.ca**

Copenhagen Psychosocial questionnaire... **www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk**

Mental Health Works... **www.mentalhealthworks.ca**

Guarding Minds at Work.... **www.guardingmindsatwork.ca**

Not Myself Today –Fighting Mental Health Stigmas....
www.notmyselftoday.ca

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health....
www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Many of these resources were used in the production of this booklet.

This is not a complete list of resources but were chosen because they seemed to be the most applicable. We encourage you to do more research if needed.

