

# Mental Health Awareness Guide

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The goal of the CUPE Ontario Health and Safety Committee is to facilitate knowledge sharing required to help CUPE members maintain and improve mental health, and to support members in identifying good mental health practice.

# UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS

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 mental illnesses or suggest treatment. If the subject arises in the course of your health and safety duties, you must refer the members to their healthcare provider(s).

## *Mental health: (Source: CMHA)*

Good mental health is characterized by a healthy balance in all aspects of one's life: social, physical, spiritual, economic and intellectual. Everyone's personal balance is unique, and the challenge is to keep this balance. Positive mental health at work can lead to a healthier workforce and improve productivity.

Some examples that can negatively affect one's mental health include bullying, stress, isolation, age and life changes, poor work/life balance, insufficient sleep, grief, 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, and they are still feared and misunderstood by many people. Mental illnesses, also called mental or psychiatric disorders, are treatable. Some examples of mental illnesses include mood disorders, such as bipolar, depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance abuse disorder and schizophrenia. To learn more about these mental illnesses, consult the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), or visit the CMHA website ([cmha.ca/find-info/mental-illness/diagnoses](http://cmha.ca/find-info/mental-illness/diagnoses)).

You may encounter other terms when looking at the outcomes of poor mental health at work:

- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is a mental disorder which can emerge as a natural emotional response following a highly frightening or traumatic event or events usually involving harm to oneself or another person. A person who has PTSD may experience disruptive or chronic stress long after the harm of the event(s) has dissipated. Symptoms can vary but often are combinations of triggers and recalls of the event, sleep disturbances, anger, emotional numbness and negative thoughts.
- **Burnout** is the outcome of a prolonged response to chronic stressors at work. The World Health Organization calls it “an occupational phenomenon. The symptoms generally include:
  - Overwhelming physical, emotional or mental exhaustion
  - Feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job
  - Reduced personal accomplishment, productivity, morale, and ability to cope.
  - Source: ILO  
([www.iloencyclopaedia.org/part-v-77965/psychosocial-and-organizational-factors/chronic-health-effects/item/68-burnout](http://www.iloencyclopaedia.org/part-v-77965/psychosocial-and-organizational-factors/chronic-health-effects/item/68-burnout))
- **Moral Injury** is generally recognized as emotional, spiritual, or moral guilt experienced by a participant or witness in an event that infringes on their values or beliefs. Feelings of moral injury can also occur when someone is persuaded or compelled to withhold care and treatment of others in ways that directly oppose their ethical and moral understanding of right and wrong.
- **Vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress** are generally used to describe trauma or stress experienced by those providing personal or professional care and support to traumatized people. Symptoms can sometimes mirror those of the person they are supporting.
- **Empathic fatigue**, previously referred to as compassion fatigue, is generally recognized as an adverse reaction (e.g., loss of empathy) resulting from overwhelming stress and the emotional toll of supporting and caring for others. Although empathic fatigue can result from a single traumatic incident, it is often associated with cumulative exposure to repeated stressful events. Symptoms can include a sense of helplessness, confusion, and emotional withdrawal from clients, coworkers, family and friends.

Note: The DSM-5 does list diagnoses for Burnout, Moral Injury, Vicarious Trauma and Secondary Traumatic Stress and Empathic Fatigue.

## *The psychosocial focus rather than the psychological approach*

When attempting to resolve issues affecting poor mental health at work, the workplace parties need to focus on identifying and eliminating the psychosocial factors at work rather than trying to diagnose and solve psychological problems of individual workers. Here's why:

- A psychosocial approach recognizes that work has an impact on mental well-being. It focuses on identifying and eliminating work-related psychosocial hazards that harm workers to restore good protective work practices.
- A psychological approach focuses on the individual worker and their personal characteristics. It assumes that work doesn't affect mental well-being and that any mental health problems a worker has are personal.

## *Assumptions people make about mental health at work*

Misinformation and people's assumptions about mental health can often hinder meaningful change to improve conditions at work.

**Assumption #1** - Poor mental health is just a product of the individual and is rooted in their home life or personal experiences.

**Reality** - Not all people start work with perfect mental health. People may find their mental health slip or suffer an actual mental illness after they encounter unreasonable job demands and accompanied by a lack of support from management.

**Assumption #2** - The job "is what it is" and there is no way to change things?

**Reality** - Psychosocial hazards, like all other hazards at work, can be prevented. However, you have to know how to identify and assess them before trying to eliminate or control them.

When we just look at the person, what that means is, 'Hey we've got to treat that person.' 'You can't work here because you're the problem.' 'We have to get rid of that person.' Then, it becomes that person's problem, not the responsibility of the organization that employs them."

**Christina Maslach - Social psychologist and author**

# MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

## *Identifying psychological risk factors*

Employers have legal responsibilities to provide safe work while equally protecting workers' physical and mental health. The first step to protecting and improving the work is to identify and assess the psychosocial risk factors that impact mental health. These risk factors help workers and unions identify the needs of workers with respect to their mental health.

Here is a quick synopsis: (Source: CAN/CSA Z1003 Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace)

1. **Psychological support** is found in an environment supportive of employees' psychological and mental health concerns, and in one that responds appropriately to those concerns.
2. **Organizational culture** is characterized by the degree to which a work environment promotes 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** are features of a workplace where interactions in the workplace that are respectful and considerate.
5. **Psychological competencies and requirements** broadly match employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies and the requirements of the position.
6. **Growth and development** are the encouragement and support for the development of employee interpersonal, emotional and job skills.
7. **Recognition and reward** include appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of employees' efforts in a fair and timely manner.
8. **Involvement and influence** are experienced by employees who are included in discussions about how their work is done and how important decisions are made.
9. **Workload management** is achieved when tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.
10. **Engagement** happens when workers feel connected to their work and are motivated to do their job well.
11. **Balance** is the recognition of the need for balance between the demands of work, family and personal life.
12. **Psychological protection** ensures psychological safety, enabling workers to ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes and problems, or propose new ideas without fearing negative consequences.
13. **Protection of safety** ensures appropriate action is taken to protect the physical safety of employees.
14. **Other chronic physical stressors** may be identified by employees.

# HOW CAN UNIONS AND HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES HELP?

## *Training*

Employers have legal responsibilities to provide safe work while equally protecting workers' physical and mental health. The first step to protecting and improving the work is to identify and assess the psychosocial risk factors that impact mental health. These risk factors help workers and unions identify the needs of workers with respect to their mental health.

In consultation with the health and safety committee, an employer must develop and maintain a program for mental health training that:

- Provides awareness to workers, supervisors, and upper management about the nature of poor and good mental health, mental illness and stigma.
- Ensures staff are aware of the psychosocial hazards which can't be eliminated in their work.
- Educates and trains staff on the measures and procedures to protect workers from psychosocial hazards in their work.
- Provides staff awareness about support and resources available to those who are experiencing poor mental health at work.
- Ensures that supervisors and management are trained in trauma-informed approaches for dealing with staff in crisis.

Suggested training considerations (not a complete list) are:

- CMHA's certified Psychological Health and Safety Advisor Training program (management and worker)
- MHC's Mental Health First Aid Training programs (management and worker)
- CUPE Education Workshops (worker):
  - Anti-harassment and Bystander Training
  - Challenging Racism in the Workplace
  - Conflict at Work
  - Conflict Resolution
  - Creating Accommodation-Friendly workplaces
  - Creating Harassment-Free Workplaces
  - Disability and Ableism in the Workplace
  - Duty to Accommodate
  - Preventing Mental Injuries at Work
  - Psychologically Safe Workplaces
  - Respect at Work: Stop Bullying, Harassment & Violence
  - Safer spaces for Two-Spirit, Trans, and Non-Binary Workers
  - Sexual Violence and Harassment at Work
  - Women Breaking Barriers
  - Violence Prevention
  - Workload and Overwork
  - Understanding Mental Health

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

### *Assessing the work environment*

Knowing which psychosocial factors are negatively affecting workers' mental health is a crucial step before implementing solutions to improve conditions at work. A recommended tool for assessing your work environment is Stress Assess ([stressassess.ca](http://stressassess.ca)) developed by Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers.

This site provides separate assessment tools for both individual workers and the overall workplace environment. The survey is a shortened version of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) at [copsoq-network.org](http://copsoq-network.org). COPSOQ is a recognized tool to gather valid and reliable information about the main psychosocial risk factors. The questionnaire has long, medium, and short versions. As with Stress Assess, 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.

## *Taking Action*

As part of its Mental Health Toolkit, CUPE National developed the Mental Health Guidelines to help members make the connection between work and well-being. Using the guidelines, you or members will find ways to explain in clear language how work affects well-being, how and why stress can cause harm, how to reframe resilience to a psychosocial approach to improve psychological health and safety, how to make improvements through bargaining, and strategies to implement the hierarchy of controls.

The Mental Health Toolkit, including the Guidelines are available at:  
[cupe.ca/mental-health](http://cupe.ca/mental-health)

A comprehensive tool 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](http://ohcow.on.ca/mental-injury-toolkit)

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.

The ILO's Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints provide practical solutions and activities (control measures) an employer can implement to minimize or eliminate the impact of psychosocial hazards. Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints is available at [ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_168053/](http://ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_168053/)

The control measures for better workplace mental health can be short and long-term, generalized and specific, and may involve internal and external resources. The health and safety committee must ensure that any control measures implemented by the employer are reviewed periodically to ensure they are meeting their objective(s).

# TYPES OF WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES/ILLNESS

Depending on the mental health issue or illness a worker is dealing with, there are a number of options available to implement. Affected workers are strongly encouraged to 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 headphones to protect them from loud noises.
- **Modifying workspace or changing location:**
  - Allowing the worker to relocate to a quieter area where they will be free from distractions.
  - Allowing the worker to work remotely.
  - A job coach may help the worker reduce their stress by observing their work, providing positive feedback and recommending changes to the accommodation.

A job coach may be someone from outside the organization that assists the employee in the workplace. Alternatively, 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?

In some instances, workplaces may not yet be equipped to prevent mental injuries caused by hazards in the workplace, and an accommodation 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: [cupe.ca/mental-health-and-duty-accommodate](http://cupe.ca/mental-health-and-duty-accommodate)

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. 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 certificate 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 it 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.
- 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 undue hardship.

# 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 work- place.

CUPE Mental Health Toolkit: [cupe.ca/mental-health](http://cupe.ca/mental-health)

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers: [ohcow.on.ca](http://ohcow.on.ca)

Canadian Mental Health Association: [ontario.cmha.ca](http://ontario.cmha.ca)

Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire: [copsoq-network.org](http://copsoq-network.org)

Mental Health Works: [mentalhealthworks.ca](http://mentalhealthworks.ca)

Guarding Minds at Work: [guardingmindsatwork.ca](http://guardingmindsatwork.ca)

Not Myself Today –Fighting Mental Health Stigmas: [notmyselftoday.ca](http://notmyselftoday.ca)

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health: [workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com](http://workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com)

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

This is not a complete list of resources but those provided were chosen with CUPE members and their workplaces in mind. We encourage you to do more research if needed.