



Psychological Health and Safety at Work

The Why, What, and How of Psychological Safety

Why this matters

Psychological health is something everyone experiences. It shifts over time and is shaped by life, work, relationships, and broader social conditions. Work is one of the most influential environments in this mix. Most people in Canada spend between 30 and 40 hours per week at work, which means workplace conditions have a direct and lasting impact on overall well-being.

The reality is that psychological health challenges are common and affect workplaces every day. In any given week, more than 500,000 Canadians are unable to work due to a psychological health issue. This is not just an individual concern. It affects team dynamics, productivity, retention, and organizational culture.

Workplace factors play a significant role. High workloads, unclear expectations, lack of support, and exclusionary practices can contribute to stress and harm. On the other hand, supportive leadership, inclusive practices, and psychologically safe environments can improve engagement, innovation, and overall performance.

Across Canada, there is growing recognition that psychological health and safety is a shared responsibility. National standards and provincial efforts across Atlantic Canada are encouraging employers to take proactive steps. This is not about fixing people. It is about creating environments where people can do their best work without harm.

Employers also have legal obligations. Across federal and provincial jurisdictions, organizations are required to prevent harassment, provide safe workplaces, and respond appropriately to concerns. In Nova Scotia, recent updates require written harassment policies and clear reporting and investigation processes.

What is psychological health and safety?

A psychologically healthy and safe workplace is one that actively works to prevent harm to employees' mental health and promotes well-being.

This includes reducing workplace factors that can cause psychological injury, building conditions that support respect, inclusion, and belonging, and creating systems where people feel safe to speak up, contribute ideas, and ask for support.

Psychological safety shows up in everyday workplace interactions. Employees feel comfortable saying they do not understand, admitting mistakes, raising concerns, and sharing ideas without fear of negative consequences.

In Canada, the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace provides a leading framework for this work.

[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

How to take action

Psychological health and safety is built through consistent, everyday actions. A helpful way to approach this work is through five key drivers that shape workplace experience.

1. Psychological and Social Support

People feel supported by their organization, their leaders, and their colleagues. This includes regular check-ins, access to support, and leaders who listen and respond with care.

[Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

[Guarding Minds at Work](#)

2. Organizational Culture

The workplace is built on trust, respect, and inclusion. People feel valued, differences are respected, and leaders model inclusive behaviour.

[Not Myself Today](#)

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

3. Clear Leadership and Expectations

Leaders communicate clearly, provide direction, and model healthy practices. This includes setting expectations, being transparent, and providing consistent guidance.

[Psychological Health and Safety Toolkit for Leaders](#)

4. Civility and Respect

Employees treat each other with fairness, dignity, and respect. Conflict is addressed early and respectfully, with a focus on impact and resolution.

[Respectful Workplace Resources](#)

5. Psychological Protection

The organization actively works to prevent psychological harm. This includes clear reporting processes, timely responses, and follow-up.

[WorkSafeNB](#)

[WorkplaceNL](#)

[WCB Nova Scotia](#)

From Awareness to Action

Psychological health and safety is an ongoing process of learning, listening, and improving. Organizations often start with awareness and training, then move toward assessing their current state, identifying gaps, and taking action.

Small steps matter. Clear communication, supportive check-ins, and inclusive practices can make a meaningful difference. Over time, these actions build a workplace where people feel safe, valued, and able to contribute fully.

Key Takeaways

Psychological safety is built daily through small actions. Everyone has a role to play. Taking proactive steps now helps reduce risk and strengthen workplace culture.