2024

The role of managers in creating mentally healthy workplaces

► A practical guide

Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

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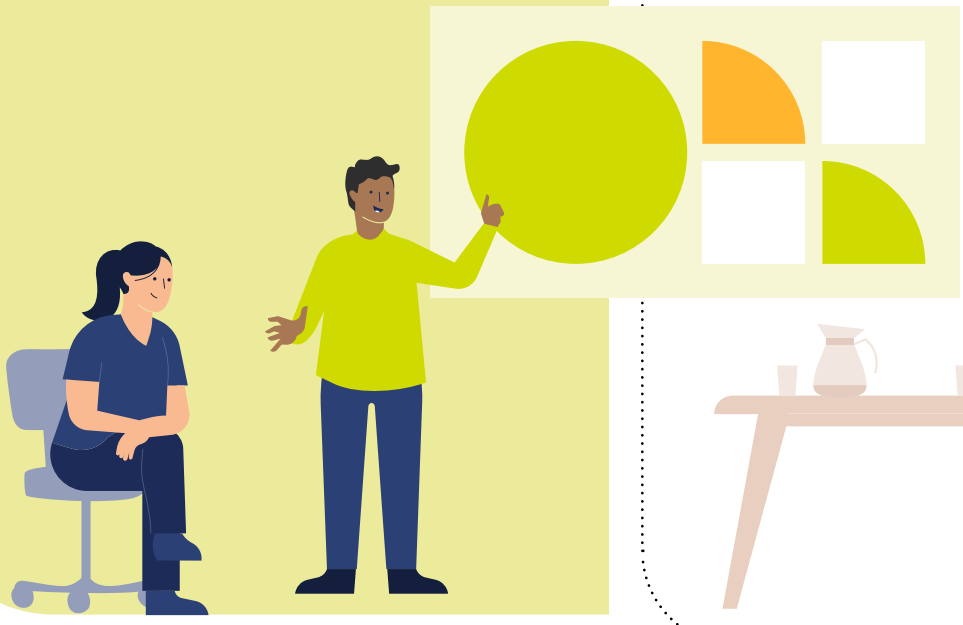
About this guide

This guide was developed to share evidence-based approaches managers can use to help build mentally healthy workplaces. It is suitable for managers from organisations of all sizes and industries. It outlines ways managers can support mentally healthy workplaces at the organisation level and the team level, including examples of what they should—and should not—do. It also offers guidance on how managers can protect their own mental health and wellbeing.



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Why we need a guide

This guide emerged as part of the National Workplace Initiative, after early research and consultation highlighted the challenges that many managers experienced building mentally healthy workplaces. The guide is based on extensive research and consultation with managers.

The guide aims to help managers:

- advocate for mental health and wellbeing at the organisation level
- create a mentally healthy environment for their teams
- protect their own mental health and wellbeing.

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3.1 What is a mentally healthy workplace?

Work plays a significant role in our lives and can affect mental health and wellbeing. Work can help support people's mental health, by offering purpose, structure, opportunities for growth and development, financial security and social connection. But work can also negatively affect mental health through poor work design, poorly handled change, and outdated leadership practices, organisational policies and technology. Experiences like bullying, harassment, unreasonable demands and micromanagement can also harm mental health, confidence and careers.

A mentally healthy workplace creates environments, cultures and practices that protect and promote mental health. A mentally healthy workplace also responds to people experiencing mental ill-health. It generates positive outcomes for individuals, teams and the wider organisation.[1]

3.2 Why do mentally healthy workplaces matter?

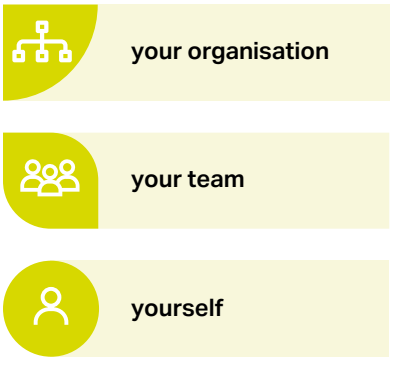
There are many benefits to mentally healthy workplaces. Increasingly, workers indicate mental health and organisational culture are key factors when considering employment opportunities. This has become increasingly so following the COVID-19 pandemic, with workers revising their expectations about culture, flexibility at work, psychologically safe working environments and more comprehensive support from their workplaces. Not only does a mentally healthy workplace allow you to attract highly skilled staff, but it also supports your organisation in retaining talent, reducing high levels of turnover and improving worker satisfaction.

In addition, advocating for a mentally healthy workplace can benefit your organisation through:

- thriving workers
- higher productivity
- lower unplanned leave
- fewer occupational injuries and illnesses
- fewer workers' compensation claims
- higher engagement and job satisfaction
- lower turnover and rehiring costs
- higher worker loyalty
- a positive return on investment.[3]

3.3 What will I find in this guide?

This resource guides managers working to create mentally healthy workplaces, no matter your industry or the size of your team. It provides information on what you can do to support a mentally healthy workplace as a manager across **your organisation and your team,** and for **yourself**. The topics covered under each of these themes are summarised below.



3.4 How can I advocate for a mentally healthy workplace within my organisation?

As a manager, your ability to influence how mentally healthy your workplace is can be limited and depends on your organisation's existing policies and appetite for change. However, you can become an advocate and spark important conversations within your leadership team to increase the organisation's focus on mental health and support a mentally healthy workplace. By understanding how your workplace environment impacts your organisation's mental health, you can start to consider how you can advocate for change at an organisation level. Table 1 summarises ways you can advocate for a mentally healthy workplace within your organisation.

Table 1: How you can advocate for a mentally healthy workplace within your organisation

My role as a manager within **my organisation**

Area of need	Topic	What this topic covers:
Advocating for a mentally healthy workplace	Advocating for a mentally healthy workplace	- How to understand your role as a manager in advocating for a mentally healthy workplace, and tips for speaking with your leadership team. - Understanding the importance of knowing your team members as individuals, making sure that they are included in decisions that impact them, and why this matters.
Championing a flexible and adaptable workplace	Championing flexibility and adaptability in managing workplace and external pressures	- How to help build flexibility and adaptability in your workplace by understanding how these capabilities are influenced, and strategies on how to support your workplace at an organisation, team and individual level.
Contributing to an inclusive, respectful and cohesive workplace culture	Championing and celebrating diversity and inclusion	- Understanding what 'workplace culture' is and how you can support good workplace culture in your organisation. - The importance of celebrating diversity and inclusion across your organisation, and how to avoid 'surface inclusion', which can make your team members feel more isolated.
	Identifying and escalating psychosocial hazards	- Helping to identify psychosocial hazards and raising them with top management to ensure your organisation meets its legislated requirements.
	Reducing mental health stigma	- Understanding what mental health stigma is, including the 4 types of stigma that may be present in your workplace, and tips on how you can reduce stigma.

3.5 How can I support a mentally healthy workplace within my team?

As a leader and role model for your team, you can positively influence your team's experience within the workplace. This includes understanding the potential hazards to positive mental health your team face at work, as well as learning how to recognise the signs of mental illness, and knowing how to respond and help workers thrive. Each team member brings their own experiences and preferences, so it is important to understand them as people and not just workers. Table 2 summarises how you can support a mentally healthy workplace for your team.

Table 2: How you can support a mentally healthy workplace for your team

My role as a manager within **my team**

Area of need	Topic	What this topic covers:
Managing hazards to positive mental health in the workplace	Addressing bullying, discrimination and harassment	- Understanding bullying, discrimination and harassment as a psychosocial hazard, and the individual and organisational level impacts. - Knowing how to prevent and manage bullying, discrimination and harassment in your workplace.
	Supporting individuals to understand their roles and responsibilities at work	- How a lack of certainty and frequent changes may impact your team members' understanding of their role, and strategies to increase role clarity for them.
	Supporting individuals in navigating change and impactful events	- Understanding how the uncertainty of navigating career and life changes may challenge your team's mental health. - How your team members may react and how you can support them when they are transitioning to a new role, or experiencing an impactful or life event.
	Supporting individuals in balancing work with other priorities and responsibilities	- Understanding workplace flexibility and legal requirements for offering flexible working arrangements. - Accommodating flexible working arrangements, and difficulties you may experience when implementing flexible working arrangements within your team. - Knowing the benefits of supporting flexible working arrangements.
	Managing the volume and diversity of workloads across the team	- Knowing the 6 main causes of worker burnout. - Understanding high workloads, how you can support your team and how you can help manage volume and diversity of workloads for team members experiencing mental ill-health.
	Managing conflicts and difficult interpersonal relationships	- Recognising potential sources of workplace conflict that may arise in your team, how to proactively prevent conflict, and what you can do if conflict arises. - Knowing additional tips for implementing a dispute resolution process for your team.

Recognising and responding to signs of mental ill-health and distress in the workplace	Identifying if a person is experiencing mental ill-health or distress	- Understanding how mental ill-health can impact anyone, and how to pick up potential signs that someone in your team is exhibiting symptoms of mental ill-health.
	Approaching conversations about mental health and suicide	- Knowing what to consider before speaking to your team member about mental health and suicide, and how to approach the conversation. - Understanding the importance of ongoing support for team members who may be experiencing mental ill-health.
	Connecting individuals to treatment pathways	- Understanding different levels of treatment pathways that are available based on an individual's needs, and what resources are available. - If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), knowing how they can help.
	Making reasonable adjustments for individuals experiencing mental ill-health and supporting teams working with the individual	- Knowing what reasonable adjustments are and how you can identify what might be appropriate for team members experiencing mental ill-health. - Knowing examples of reasonable adjustments. - Making sure reasonable adjustments to support a team member experiencing mental ill-health do not negatively impact other team members.
	Conducting performance management for individuals experiencing mental ill-health	- Knowing what to consider when performance managing team members who are experiencing mental ill-health.
	Supporting individuals and teams when an individual is returning to work after an absence due to mental ill-health	- Knowing the potential negative impact returning to work may have on your team member's mental health. - Identifying barriers and concerns that team members may have when considering returning to work following an absence due to a period of mental ill-health. - Knowing how to help develop a return-to-work plan for team members who are returning to work. - Supporting your wider team when a team member returns to work, considering workload concerns and protecting their wellbeing. - Understanding what the wider team needs to know before their colleague returns to work.
Supporting individuals to thrive in the workplace	Supporting individuals in finding purpose in their work	- Understanding the importance of motivation and feeling connected to our work. - Knowing how low job control can impact mental health. - Helping your team have greater job control and purpose in their work by involving them in decision making, increasing their job autonomy where possible, and understanding how the availability of 'good work' can support team wellbeing.
	Facilitating professional and personal development	- Knowing why learning opportunities are important and the impact of structured and unstructured learning. - Knowing how mental health-specific training can help you and your team.
	Enabling and facilitating meaningful professional and personal connections	- Understanding the importance of social connection and fostering a sense of belonging within your team. - Recognising how a strong relationship between you and your team members can benefit your team's culture. - Learning tips on how to facilitate healthy communication. - Learning strategies to cultivate positive relationships and a sense of belonging in your team.

Providing person-centric recognition and reward	- Knowing the benefits of providing reward and recognition to your team members. - Understanding how person-centric recognition and reward cultivates a positive workplace culture for your team. - Learning tips to help you recognise your team members in a meaningful way.
Supporting team members who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	- Understanding Aboriginal concepts of social and emotional wellbeing. - Knowing 5 key themes that can inform your response to mental-ill health in the workplace with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. - Learning additional factors to consider when supporting team members who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.
Supporting team members from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds	- When supporting your team members, understanding how experiences for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may differ. - Understanding the broader needs of people from linguistically diverse backgrounds and how you can support them.
Supporting team members who identify as being part of the LGBTQI+ community	- Understanding how members of the LGBTIQ+ community are at greater risk of experiencing mental health concerns within the workplace. - Understanding how you can increase visibility and approach positively sharing information for LGBTIQ+ team members. - Recognising the importance of supporting intentional and consistent messaging within the workplace to create a culture of inclusiveness and authenticity. - Knowing how to support team members belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community. - Learning additional factors to consider when supporting trans and gender diverse team members.

3.6 How can I protect my own mental health in the workplace?

Your team will look to you to set the example for how to manage their wellbeing at work, and before you can support your team members, it is important that you look after yourself. Being a manager can be very stressful, particularly if team members are experiencing mental health challenges, and it is likely that you are also experiencing competing priorities both professionally and personally. To ensure you can support your team and fulfil the obligations of your role, you need to look after your own mental health to avoid burnout and negative impacts to your own wellbeing. Table 3 summarises the topics that can help you manage risks to your own mental health and wellbeing at work and to further support you in advocating for a mentally healthy workplace at all levels.

Table 3: How you can protect your own mental health in the workplace

My role as a manager within **yourself**		
Area of need	**Topic**	**What this topic covers:**
Managing risks to my own mental health and wellbeing at work	Adjusting to becoming a manager	- Recognising the impact of the uncertainty that you may experience while adjusting to becoming a manager, and learning tips on how to support yourself as you transition into your role. - Knowing how to delegate effectively.
	Managing competing priorities	- Knowing how to be proactive in managing competing priorities in your personal and professional life as you manage your team and yourself, and tips and considerations to remember.
	Managing stress and burnout	- Learning the types of burnout you may experience in your role and how you can manage stress and burnout.
	Prioritising self-care	- Understanding the importance of self-care, including how to build a self-care plan and practise self-care. - Remembering the importance of looking after yourself, especially if you are supporting a team member who is experiencing mental ill-health.

Introduction

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4.1 About

We spend a significant proportion of our lives at work, so our workplaces play a key role in supporting our mental health, and the mental health of our colleagues. In fact, an individual's job can significantly impact their mental health, and by providing opportunities to grow, connect, learn and make positive connections, workplaces can act as a positive source of comfort and support when workers experience mental ill-health or stress. Alternatively, workplaces can also negatively impact workers, such as through stress and burnout.

As leaders and role models in the workplace, managers across all industries play a role in supporting their teams in protecting and managing mental health and promoting mentally healthy workplaces. Often, managers are best placed to identify and address risks to their team's mental health under the National Workplace Initiative's 3 pillars of mentally healthy workplaces: Protect, Respond and Promote.

To support individual team members, the team as a group and their organisation as a whole, managers must consider how best to effectively support a mentally healthy workplace. It involves looking after their own mental and physical wellbeing and setting an example for their teams, as well as supporting team members. In doing so, managers can help their workplace thrive by improving job satisfaction, worker loyalty and return on investment, while decreasing unplanned leave, turnover, and occupational injuries and illnesses.

This resource aims to help managers create a mentally healthy workplace. It is based on the Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces (https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/explore-resources/blueprint-mentally-healthy-workplaces) as part of the National Workplace Initiative.

3 pillars of mentally healthy workplaces

Protect Respond Promote

4.2 Why is creating a mentally healthy workplace so important?

Mentally healthy workplaces are important for many reasons, not just for individuals and teams, but also for businesses. An individual experiencing mental ill-health can incur significant cost; it can also impose costs on the organisation they work for due to factors including:

- **presenteeism**, which is when individuals who are experiencing physical or mental-ill health come to work and work at levels that are less than optimal
- **absenteeism**, which is when individuals are consistently absent from work without good reason or for unplanned reasons.

Organisations have legal obligations related to work health and safety that include psychological health. These obligations include taking reasonably practicable steps to identify and manage psychosocial hazards, which are aspects of work that can lead to psychological or physical harm. These hazards can stem from how work is designed and managed, the work environment and equipment, interactions with others or the types of tasks required. Creating a mentally healthy workplace can help people manage periods of stress from life outside work too.

Despite 90% of workers believing mental health is an important concern for organisations, only 50% of workers think they work in a mentally healthy workplace.[2] When people work in a positive environment that supports their mental health, they will likely be more engaged, motivated and willing to go above and beyond for their roles and their organisation.

Further, for every dollar spent on developing a mentally healthy workplace, businesses will see a positive return on investment of approximately $2.30. This benefit is thanks to the resulting positive impact on workers, which results in lower absenteeism, higher productivity and fewer workers' compensation claims.[3] You can use this return on investment tool (https://www.thriveatwork.org.au/resources/return-on-investment/) to calculate the potential cost savings your business may achieve by taking steps to create a mentally healthy workplace, no matter the size of your business and your industry.

Beyond this positive return on investment, businesses creating mentally healthy workplaces can receive additional benefits, including attracting and keeping good staff. Increasingly, people looking for employment opportunities are seeking out workplaces that support mental health. With 75% of workers identifying it as a key consideration.[2] Businesses investing in developing a positive environment that supports mental health are also more likely to receive better applicants, with workers noting this is the second most important factor when deciding whether or not to accept a job offer.

A survey of workers found almost 50% of respondents had previously left a job due to the mental health environment within that workplace.[2] The better the workplace environment, the more likely staff will want to stay. This, along with reduced absenteeism, increases productivity because workers and team members are more committed, and able and willing to do their best work.

Together, these benefits help give your team and your organisation a competitive advantage.[4]

Key takeaways

- Many hazards and risks in the workplace can negatively impact mental health. All workplaces have legal obligations related to workplace health and safety, which includes psychological health.
- By identifying hazards and risks in your workplace, as a manager, you can put plans in place to manage and minimise them, creating a better work environment for yourself and your team.
- Building strong relationships with your team members as individuals, rather than just as workers, supports their mental health and provides a safe and positive environment within your workplace.

4.3 Benefits of a mentally healthy workplace

The Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces (https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/explore-resources/blueprint-mentally-healthy-workplaces) identifies the following benefits of a mentally healthy workplace:

- thriving workers
- increased productivity
- decreased unplanned leave
- decreased occupational injuries and illnesses
- decreased workers' compensation claims
- increased engagement and job satisfaction
- decreased turnover and re-hiring costs
- increased worker loyalty
- a positive return on investment.[3]

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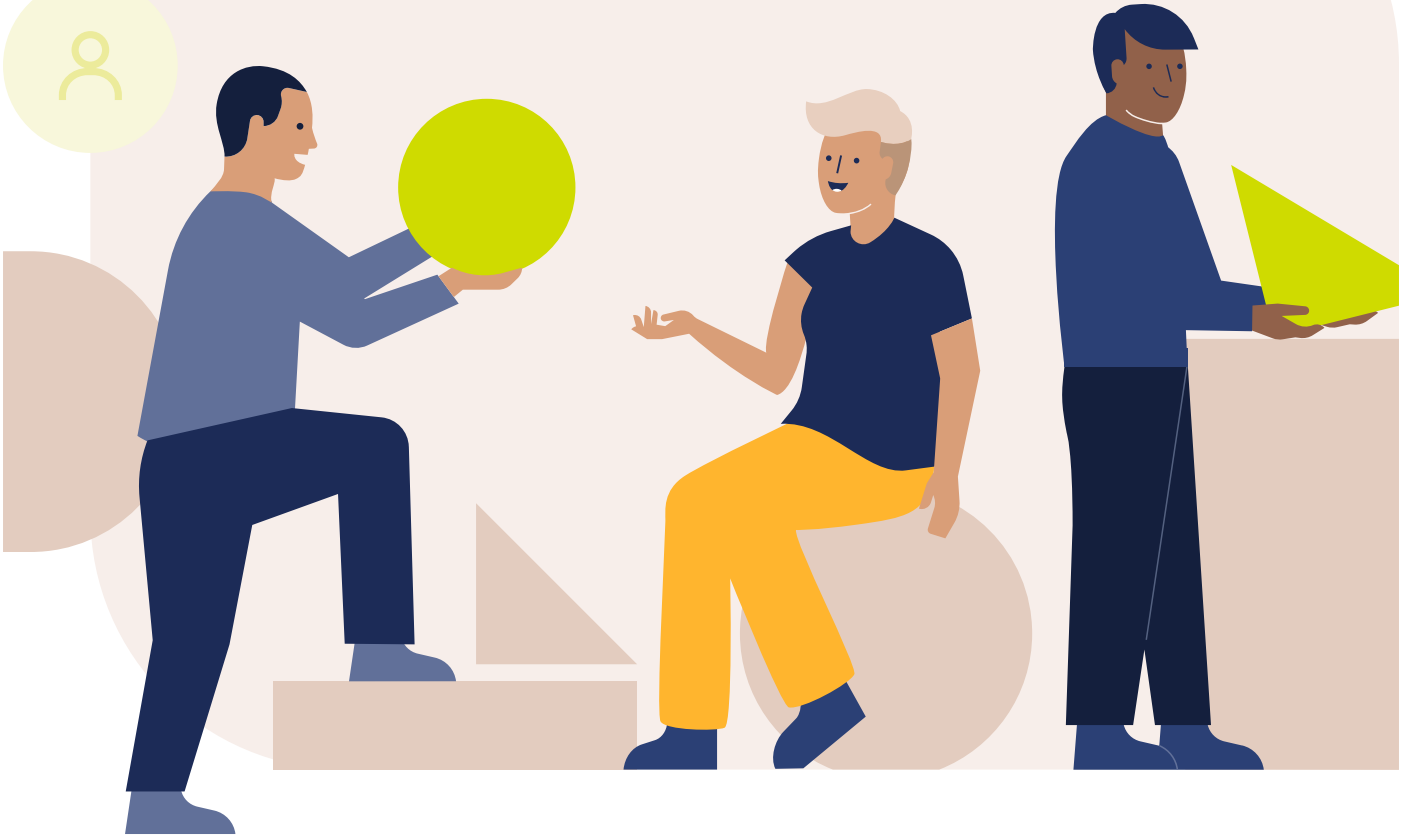
How can I advocate for a mentally healthy workplace within my organisation?



5.1 Advocating for a mentally healthy workplace

As a manager, your role in advocating for mentally healthy workplaces is shaped by your organisation's policies and the support you receive from top management.

While your role as a manager is integral to developing mentally healthy workplaces, you need support from your organisation and wider workplace for any changes to have real, lasting impact. That is, it is important to advocate for the support from top management, because workers often look to top management to set workplace tone, culture and policies (Figure 1).

You can reach out to top management to receive the support you need in several ways:

- **Complete a workplace pulse check.** You can test how mentally healthy your workplace is compared with other organisations in your industry using a tool such as the NSW Government's Workplace Pulse Check (https://www.nsw.gov.au/mental-health-at-work/workplace-pulse-check). You can share results with top management and work together to consider the steps and actions to improve your score.

- **Highlight and escalate psychosocial hazards to top management.** As noted above, organisations and businesses have legal obligations to identify and manage psychosocial hazards in the workplace—that is, aspects of work that can lead to psychological or physical harm. As a manager, you are uniquely placed to identify psychosocial hazards that may occur within your team or the broader organisation. You can escalate these hazards to top management, especially where system-level or structural changes are required (for example, changes to organisational policies).

- **Explain the benefits of a mentally healthy workplace to top management.** There are many benefits to investing time and money into creating a mentally healthy workplace—both financial (for example, reduced cost of absenteeism and presenteeism) and non-financial (for example, improved productivity, improved worker satisfaction, benefits for organisational reputation). Using the available research and tools such as Thrive at Work's return on investment calculator, (https://www.thriveatwork.org.au/resources/return-on-investment/) you can illustrate the benefits that can be gained by championing a mentally healthy workplace, including how it can support top management in improving the organisation's bottom line.

- **Ask for the help you need.** Developing a mentally healthy workplace requires dedication from all levels within the organisation. When you can, encourage top management to reiterate the support that workers receive. When faced with barriers to creating mentally healthy workplaces, or supporting a team member experiencing mental ill-health, ask for support from top management. This might lead to a better outcome for your team member and yourself.

- **Share resources.** For top management to empower their workers, they must understand the legal obligations that organisations carry in supporting workers' psychological health. These include legal responsibilities under the:
  - *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2011A00137/2018-07-01/text
  - *Disability and Discrimination Act 1992* http://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00763
  - *Privacy Act 1988* http://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/the-privacy-act.

There are several resources available to support organisations understand these obligations, such as the NSW Government's Leader's Resource Kit (https://www.nsw.gov.au/mental-health-at-work/mental-health-at-work-resources/resource-kits/leaders-resource-kit). You can share resources like these with your leadership team to help equip them to provide necessary support.[5]

Figure 1: How to create a mentally healthy workplace

Image source: *NSW Government. How to create a mentally healthy workplace.*

You can find more information about developing a plan for a mentally healthy workplace here (https://www.nsw.gov.au/mental-health-at-work/managing-mental-health-your-workplace/how-to-create-a-mentally-healthy-workplace).

5.2 Championing a flexible and adaptable workplace

Teams and individuals face many pressures in the workplace which can result in mental fatigue, stress and burnout. A positive workplace environment can help people feel more prepared to handle workplace stressors by helping them feel valued, included and accomplished. This in turn leads to more positive outcomes for team members as individuals, but also for your organisation. You can help workers build coping techniques as part of advocating for a mentally healthy workplace.

Being adaptable relates to a person's ability to handle difficulties in their life, both personally and professionally, or their ability to recover when faced with difficulties. Particularly in the workplace, this is important to a person's ability to cope in a high stress environment and respond to stressors in a positive way. Being adaptable supports organisations to grow and thrive, and is important for individual wellbeing. A range of factors may impact an individual's ability to be flexible and adaptable, and as a manager, you can support teams positively respond to stressors.

Tips for building a flexible and adaptable workplace

Strategies to build flexibility and adaptability generally fall under 4 categories:

1. **Leadership development.** Build leadership capabilities and support workers to manage stress and protect their health and wellbeing through regular and consistent workplace training.

2. **Management of job design risks.** Review physical, environmental and psychosocial factors that may cause stress in the workplace and review critical incidents, taking a risk management approach (see SafeWork NSW's framework below). Information about managing psychosocial hazards is covered in sections 5.3.2 and 6.1.

3. **Organisational or team culture.** Identify and implement initiatives and strategies that support:
   - Positive psychological constructs – This includes things such as optimism (encouraging a positive outlook for the organisation), self-esteem (use reward and recognition to increase and maintain confidence and self-worth), and motivation (establish a collective goal or purpose towards which the organisation's collective energy can be directed).
   - Cultural change interventions – For example, formal changes may include how your organisation manages performance or shares internal communications. Informal interventions may include developing more meaningful connections with the organisation, encouraging informal social gatherings, ad hoc meetings, or modelling mentally healthy practices and leading by example.[7]

4. **External environmental and systemic considerations.** Inform workers about workplace policies and processes, including any changes. Engage in conversations about the external environment and how it affects the organisation.

Reflection

What are some of the challenges in your workplace that impact workers' adaptability?

What systems do you have in place to help build adaptability in facing these challenges?

5.3 Contributing to a safe, inclusive and respectful workplace culture

What is workplace culture?

Workplace culture can be defined as how a workplace addresses staff members who are dealing with stress, heavy workloads, deadlines that are unrealistic and job uncertainty. It also relates to how team members who are experiencing mental health conditions are supported, or not supported, as well as the attitude that exists towards discrimination.

While everyone has a responsibility to contribute to positive working environments, as a manager, you have a critical role in creating an inclusive, respectful and unified culture for the organisation.

You can build a positive culture through:[8]

- culture-building strategies, such as acknowledging cultural celebrations as a regular agenda item in workplace meetings
- training, such as conducting coaching with workers to encourage engagement with the desired workplace culture, including training on inclusive language
- communicating and displaying the intended culture as a role model and leader, such as using inclusive language when speaking to your team and in wider communications.

By building a strong workplace culture and environment within your organisation, you can act as a key pillar in promoting and celebrating diversity and inclusion. This can help reduce the stigma around mental ill-health and help-seeking behaviour, and build strong, impactful relationships that support people's careers and mental health.

5.3.1 Importance of celebrating diversity and inclusion

By ensuring workers feel included, involved and accepted within your workplace, you can support them in feeling psychologically safe and give them a sense of belonging. Anti-discrimination legislation protects all workers, but to further champion and celebrate diversity beyond these requirements, you can undertake cultural sensitivity training and encourage the celebration of significant days. You can also encourage workers to raise concerns and speak up formally and informally, to help them feel heard instead of dismissed.

You can also encourage the creation of positive networks for groups such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTQI+) communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. In doing so, managers can build self-esteem and trust, and support a happier and healthier workplace.

- Be careful to ensure workers from diverse groups do not feel they are only being asked to contribute as a representative of their social group. This is called surface inclusion, which can make people feel like they belong less!

Examples of culturally, nationally, and internationally significant days

Culturally significant

- St Patrick's Day
- Eid
- Mid-Autumn Festival
- Lunar New Year
- Diwali

Nationally significant

- Wear it Purple Day
- R U OK Day
- National Sorry Day

Internationally significant

- International Women's Day
- World Braille Day
- World Environment Day

See section 6.4 (Tailoring responses based on an individual's background and experiences) for detailed guidance.

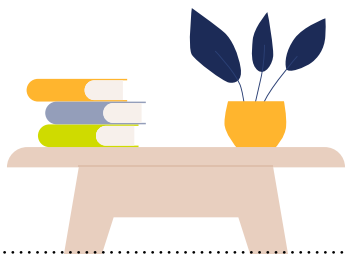
5.3.2 Highlighting and escalating psychosocial hazards

As noted above, organisations and businesses have legal obligations related to work health and safety that include psychological health. These obligations include taking reasonably practicable steps to identify and manage 'psychosocial hazards', which are aspects of work that can lead to psychological or physical harm (see box below). They can stem from how work is designed and managed, the work environment and equipment, interactions with others or the types of tasks required.

As a manager, you can be well placed to identify psychosocial hazards that may occur at the broader organisation level. You can also raise awareness of these issues and/or escalate these hazards to the top management level, especially if they require structural or organisation-wide responses (for example, changes to organisational policies).

Additional resources:

- **Safe Work Australia information on psychosocial hazards:** https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards
- **Safe Work Australia Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work** https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work



4 key steps to managing psychosocial hazards

Safe Work Australia developed a 4-step process for managing psychosocial injury, intervening early and taking action to prevent workers from becoming ill or sustaining a psychological injury.

Step 1: Identify psychosocial hazards – Find things and situations that could harm people by talking and listening to workers, inspecting the workplace, taking note of how workers interact, reviewing reports and records, and using surveys to gather information from workers.

Step 2: Assess risks – Consider what could happen if someone is exposed to a psychosocial hazard, the degree of harm that may result, and the likelihood of that outcome.

Step 3: Control risks – Take reasonably practicable steps to eliminate hazards if possible or minimise them if they cannot be eliminated.

Step 4: Review control measures – Maintain, monitor, review and if necessary revise control measures to make sure they remain effective.

5.3.3 Reducing mental health stigma

Mental health stigma is one of the greatest hurdles to effective mental health policies in the workplace. It can be particularly challenging in industries or organisations where there are difficulties with expressing emotions or stronger expectations on workers to be self-reliant. It is important to consider stigma relating to clinical mental ill-health and stigma that focuses on broader mental health challenges, such as social disconnection, isolation and loneliness.

Four types of stigma may impact your workplace:

1. **Personal stigma** includes stigmatising attitudes and beliefs towards other people, such as when workers are harassed about their mental health, and attitudes that exist within some peoples and cultures that stigmatise mental health challenges and/or understand mental ill-health to be a weakness.

2. **Perceived stigma** is a belief that others have negative or stigmatising opinions and may prevent individuals from asking their colleagues for support or seeking a promotion. They believe they will be judged for their mental health, or there will be negative consequences for disclosing their mental health condition.

3. **Self-stigma** relates to views that a person may have about themselves and negative stereotypes they may have internalised about themselves, which may result in feeling unworthy for employment or promotion. It may prevent them from seeking help due to a belief that they should be able to recover on their own and be more resilient.

4. **Structural stigma** exists within a workplace's policies and cultural norms that restrict opportunities, resources and wellbeing of those with mental ill-health. It may discourage workers from seeking formal support if policies require them to meet certain health requirements.

Understanding the nuances around diversity and inclusion can help you understand the complexities around mental health and wellbeing, and how best to challenge beliefs and attitudes that might spread stigma within your organisation.

Training and organisational level programs and initiatives to build capability can help support a positive shift within workplaces. But it is also important that you set the example and encourage regular and open conversations about mental health and the importance of seeking help when needed. As workers build their capability, knowledge and understanding, workplaces can shift perception around mental health and help seeking.

Tips for reducing mental health stigma in your workplace

- Learn more about mental health and how best to respond to mental health challenges and mental ill-health.
- Establish positive working environments and reduce risks to mental health in your workplace.
- Develop workplace mental health and wellbeing policies as required.
- Encourage positive and open conversations around mental health.
- Regularly check in with workers about their wellbeing.

Reflection

Have you noticed behaviour in your workplace that might be a result of mental health stigma?

What systems do you have in place to help prevent stigma in your workplace?

6

How can I support a mentally healthy workplace for my team?

This section aligns to the **Protect** pillar of the Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces (https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/explore-resources/blueprint-mentally-healthy-workplaces).

6.1 Managing hazards to positive mental health in the workplace

Mental health can be impacted by various factors, and in the course of employment, your team members may come across situations that negatively influence their mental health. Employers have a responsibility towards the wellbeing of their workers while they are at work and must be conscious of their workers' psychological wellbeing. Psychosocial hazards are circumstances or factors within the workplace that may lead workers to experience physical or psychological harm.

Given many psychosocial hazards may arise in the workplace, as a manager you should consider how you can support your team by building a strong, positive culture free from discrimination, bullying and harassment, while also supporting team members as individuals.

To help prevent workers from experiencing harm such as burnout, you can ensure each person understands their role and responsibilities, and how they contribute to your workplace. You can also manage the volume and diversity of workloads across the team, and any conflicts or difficulties that may arise in their interpersonal relationships.

Opposite are some additional examples of psychosocial hazards that may occur in your workplace.

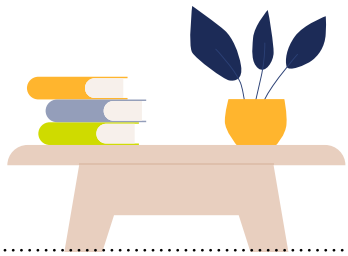
Examples of psychosocial hazards that may be present in the workplace

Potential workplace psychosocial hazards	Examples
Job demands	A team member is responsible for a task that will require them to work unusually long hours for an extended period.
Low job control	A mid-level team member cannot make small decisions without approval from their supervisor.
Lack of sufficient support	Adequate information to perform a specific task is not shared with the team members responsible for completing the job.
Lack of understanding about role	Multiple team members are involved in the same task, and it is unclear what responsibilities each team member holds.
Poor organisational change management	A team is not consulted before a decision is made that will impact their working hours.
Lack of adequate reward and recognition	Two staff members are involved in a successful project, but only one is acknowledged by the wider team for the success.
Bullying and harassment (including instances of sexual harassment)	A team member repeatedly makes comments about a fellow colleague's personal life, despite their colleague informing them that their comments make them feel uncomfortable.
Lack of organisational justice	A worker is blamed for the delay in a delivery of office supplies, despite the worker having ordered the supplies by the correct deadline.
Experiencing traumatic events	While restocking shelves, a worker witnesses a customer experience an accident that reminds the worker of a traumatic memory.
Remote or isolated work	A worker's role requires them to work in an office after hours, resulting in a lack of connection to their colleagues who work during office hours.

Poor physical environment	A broken air conditioner is not fixed, so all workers in the office experience extreme heat levels while at work.
Violence and aggression	A worker responsible for answering phone calls is treated with aggression when they advise customers that the staff member they wish to speak with is not available.
Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions	A disagreement between co-workers about a promotion outcome is not addressed or resolved, and results in a breakdown in teamwork which impacts the wider team's morale.

Additional resources

- **Safe Work Australia information on psychosocial hazards:** https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards
- **Safe Work Australia Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work** https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-managing-psychosocial-hazards-work
- **Mentally Healthy Workplaces digital platform, Psychosocial hazards** https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/topics/psychosocial-hazards



Industry-specific resources for managers to support managing of psychosocial hazards

- **Beyond Blue good practice framework** (https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/bl2042_goodpracticeframework_a4.pdf) for managers working in police and emergency services organisations
- **Safe Work NSW fact sheet** (https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1037342/mental-health-in-construction-fact-sheet.pdf) for mental health for managers working in construction
- **The Law Society of NSW's Being Well in the Law** (https://www.lawsociety.com.au/sites/default/files/2018-08/Being%20Well%20in%20the%20Law%20Guide.pdf) Guide for individuals working in the legal industry

To find resources specific to your industry, visit the Industry pages (https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/find-industry) on the Mentally Healthy Workplaces digital platform

Reflection

Have you noticed any potential psychosocial hazards in your workplace?

6.1.1 Addressing discrimination, bullying and harassment

Bullying, harassment and discrimination are considered psychosocial hazards under work health and safety legislation. They can negatively affect the individuals involved as well as the organisation as a whole:

Individual impacts

- Feelings of isolation, social isolation or family dislocation
- Loss of confidence and withdrawal
- Stress, depression and anxiety
- Illness such as cardiovascular disease, immune deficiency and gastrointestinal disorders (as a result of stress)
- Suicidal thoughts
- Financial impacts (where the event results in the worker leaving the workforce, temporarily or permanently)

Organisational impacts

- Loss of knowledge, experience and skilled staff due to staff turnover
- High costs of recruitment and training
- Loss of productivity
- Low morale and low levels of job satisfaction
- Loss of diversity and its associated benefits in the workplace
- Potential reputational damage

What is bullying, harassment or discrimination?

Bullying occurs when one person repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards another person, and this behaviour creates a risk to physical or psychological health and safety. Bullying can also occur between groups of people, or between a group and an individual.

Examples of bullying may include repeatedly:

- behaving aggressively towards someone
- teasing or playing practical jokes on someone
- pressuring someone to behave inappropriately
- excluding someone
- imposing unreasonable work demands.

Note: Taking reasonable steps to manage poor performance is not bullying.

Harassment can include behaviour such as:

- telling insulting jokes about racial groups
- sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages
- displaying racially offensive or pornographic posters or screen savers
- making derogatory comments or taunts about a person's disability
- asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including their sex life.

Even as a once-off incident, these actions can still count as harassment.

Sexual harassment

One type of harassment is sexual harassment which can include behaviour such as:

- staring, leering or unwelcome touching
- sending explicit or sexually suggestive emails or text messages
- displaying pornographic posters or screen savers
- asking intrusive questions about someone's personal life, including their sex life
- unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex
- unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against a person.

Even a once-off incident can be sexual harassment. Sexual harassment connected with employment can be considered serious misconduct and can be a valid reason for dismissal.

To find out more, look at the Fair Work Ombudsman Advice: (https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employment-conditions/bullying-sexual-harassment-and-discrimination-at-work).

Discrimination occurs when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics such as their sex, sexual orientation, age, race or disability. Discrimination can be direct or indirect.

Some examples of **direct discrimination** include:

- not employing the best person for the job because of a disability
- paying a woman less than a man to do the same job
- not employing a married woman because she may want to start a family
- not employing a person from a particular racial group because they will not 'fit in' with their co-workers.

- **Indirect discrimination** can be less obvious. It can happen when organisations put in place conditions that seem to treat everyone equally, but that disadvantage some people.

Some examples include:

- requiring a deaf person to attend a meeting without an Auslan interpreter
- not offering part-time workers the same opportunities for mentoring, training and promotion as full-time workers
- offering only married people working in remote locations allowances and leave to visit their families (not those who are single or in de facto relationships)
- not allowing workers to wear hats or other headwear at work, which can affect people from some racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Sex-based discrimination

Sex discrimination happens when a person is treated less favourably because of their sex, gender identity, intersex status, sexual orientation, marital or relationship status, family responsibilities, because they are pregnant or might become pregnant or because they are breastfeeding.

Some examples of **direct sex discrimination** include:

- not employing a woman because she will not fit into a 'traditionally' male workplace
- paying a woman less than a man for doing the same job.

Examples of **indirect sex discrimination** include:

- not allowing workers to take short breaks at particular times (which may disadvantage women who are breastfeeding)
- offering only married people working in remote locations allowances and leave to visit their families (not those who are single or in de facto relationships).

How can I prevent and manage bullying, harassment or discrimination?

- **Preventing bullying, harassment, and discrimination**

As with many other work-related risks to mental health, prevention is the best approach, rather than intervening once bullying, harassment or discrimination has already occurred.

Some ways you can reduce the risk of these behaviours in the workplace include:

- **Create a positive workplace culture.** Model behaviours that are respectful and make it known to workers that any behaviour that is bullying, harassment or discrimination will be taken seriously and could result in dismissal. Make all workers aware of this information to avoid singling anyone out.

- **Advocate for clear procedures to respond.** Ensure you understand and are prepared to follow your organisation's policies and procedures if these behaviours do occur; advocate for policies if they do not already exist. They include reporting, formal complaints procedures, conflict resolution processes and informal and formal warnings.

- **Address complaints early.** If a worker informally complains about the behaviour of another worker or contractor, address the issue before it goes further.

- **Reduce risk factors.** Many factors can lead to strained relationships, bullying and harassment in the workplace. Examples include high job demands, role conflict and ambiguity, lack of training or poor communication. Proactively identify, assess and address these risks.

Legal obligations related to bullying, harassment and discrimination

Every organisation (and individuals working for the organisation) has legal obligations related to bullying, harassment and discrimination under the following **federal (national)** laws:

- Model Work Health and Safety Bill
- *Fair Work Act 2009*
- *Privacy Act 1988*
- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984.*

Each state and territory also has its own anti-discrimination legislation that is governed by an equal opportunity and anti-discrimination agency.

Under these Acts:

- you must take 'reasonably practicable' steps to identify, prevent and address bullying, harassment and discrimination as they may negatively impact a worker's physical or psychological health and safety
- if a worker experiences a psychological injury because of exposure to bullying, harassment and discrimination, your organisation may be liable under workers' compensation legislation
- certain activities may be prosecuted under criminal law, for example damage to property, physical assault, sexual assault or intimidation. In some circumstances, civil action may be taken to claim damages that result from being exposed to these behaviours in the workplace.

What are microaggressions?

A microaggression is any comment or action that subtly, and often unconsciously or unintentionally, expresses a biased or intolerant attitude towards a person who belongs to a marginalised group.[10]

You should also be conscious of the impact of microaggressions in your workplace, and how they affect the mental health of team members.

Small comments that may not be made with the intention of causing harm to fellow colleagues may alienate other workers, and you should take care to:

- be aware of any microaggressions occurring within your teams
- acknowledge when it happens
- call out any inappropriate behaviour.

Examples from the workplace: Addressing bullying

Seema has been feeling uncomfortable at her workplace because her colleagues regularly meet after work for drinks but do not invite her. During work hours, her team regularly play practical jokes on her, such as moving things on her desk, or hiding behind potted plants to jump out and scare her as she walks past. While her colleagues find the jokes amusing, Seema does not. She has raised this with her manager, Steven, on multiple occasions, however he laughs her off, telling her that they are just having fun and trying to lighten the mood.

Upset by the ongoing practical jokes and from being excluded, Seema again raises her concerns with Steven, however he tells her she is being too sensitive. Seema bursts into tears and eventually chooses to leave the company.

Learning opportunity

Steven should have taken Seema's concerns seriously when she first came to him. By brushing her off, he further made her feel isolated and reduced her confidence in herself.

To support her, Steven should have acted quickly to speak to the team about bullying behaviours and made it clear that such behaviour is not tolerated, and that informal and formal warnings would be given, resulting in disciplinary action if needed.

6.1.2 Supporting individuals to understand their roles and responsibilities at work

Uncertainty, frequent changes, conflicting roles, or ambiguous responsibilities and expectations may make it harder for workers to understand their roles, which can cause stress. A lack of role clarity is a common psychosocial hazard that can contribute to poor mental health, and one that managers can influence. You are workers' most immediate source of information about roles and responsibilities at work.

Safe Work Australia[11] outlines some strategies that you can use to help provide role clarity to team members:

- Provide clear instructions and expectations, explain why roles, responsibilities and tasks have been allocated, and ensure workers understand.
- Ensure workers assigned to the same task understand who is doing what.
- Adjust tasks or processes that frequently create conflict or confusion or result in frequent mistakes.
- Update job descriptions and any role expectations.
- Following changes:
  - implement regular check-ins and encourage open discussion among team members
  - provide all workers with an induction and ensure they understand their role
  - provide guidelines for what to do when expectations do not align
  - implement systems to help workers identify issues or conflicts and resolve them.

Examples from the workplace: Managing organisational change

A mid-sized organisation looked at restructuring, including reallocating roles across every level. Top management engaged managers to help with several strategies that would give workers role clarity and ease the transition to the new structure:

- As suggested and advocated for by managers, top management **delivered an organisation-wide induction** for all workers, to help them understand the new structure and where teams would sit.
- Managers held **one-on-one meetings** with each team member so they could better understand their role and responsibilities.
- Managers also scheduled **ongoing check-ins** with team members so they could ask any clarifying questions. Managers could also provide additional updates as information became available.

Learning opportunity

Working with managers to develop and implement change management strategies proved successful:

- Workers felt confident about the changes and that their leadership team was accessible during the changes.
- Productivity increased because workers better understood their responsibilities and could take ownership of their work.

6.1.3 Supporting individuals in navigating change and impactful events

As our lives change and evolve, both professionally and personally, challenges may arise to our mental health. Transitioning between roles at work or life transitions (such as starting a family, managing financial pressures or retiring) can leave workers feeling uncertain and stressed.

Supporting team members who are transitioning into new roles

You can support team members transitioning into new, different or more senior or leadership roles (such as becoming managers themselves) by taking the following steps to simplify the process and protect their mental health:

- Understand the person's background and skills to determine how to best prepare them for their new role.
- Have the person shadow their predecessor or a person in a similar role.
- Empower workers to manage their workloads, delegating to others in the team (where appropriate and possible).
- Avoid placing too much pressure on people by giving them low-risk opportunities before transitioning into the new role.
- Share insights and information from your own experiences (where relevant) or identify a mentor, coach or buddy to help ease the person into their new role.
- Provide training on soft skills such as setting goals, conflict management and resolution, performance management, communication styles, negotiation, empathy, delegation and time management.
- Support team members to network within and outside of the organisation.
- Give workers enough room to fail as they learn to adapt to their new position.
- Reward and recognise small achievements in the new role.

Supporting team members during an 'impactful event'

Life can take unexpected twists and turns, and different events can impact the people you manage at work. At some point, you will likely need to support your team during a difficult time. Any incident, event or series of events that is unexpected, overwhelming and threatening lives or safety may be emotionally impactful. The events may be sudden, planned, ongoing situations or a series of events that occur one after the other.

Examples of impactful events may include:

- accidents or a death
- extreme weather events or disasters
- pandemics
- terminal illness
- being involved in a robbery or assault.

Reactions to emotionally impactful events

People can react to emotionally impactful events very differently. Potential reactions include changes in:

- bodily sensations, such as increased heart rate, nausea, restlessness, difficulty concentrating
- emotions, such as sadness, fear, anxiety, panic, irritability, anger, numbness
- thoughts, such as worry, questions, uncertainty, thinking about worst case scenarios, pessimism, confusion
- behaviours, such as inactivity (freezing), absences from work, social withdrawal.

People may experience reactions immediately or after a delay, or reactions may build over time. In some instances, people may develop post-traumatic stress disorder. This may include recurring thoughts about the event, memories or nightmares, hyperarousal or feeling on edge and easily startled, and avoidance of places or things associated with the event. If people show these signs, ensure they are safe, offer support and encourage them to seek advice from a mental health professional.

It is important for you to be aware of signs and symptoms of distress, provide understanding and support at work, and encourage improved self-care and help seeking. You may need to consider whether temporary reasonable adjustments at work would be helpful for an individual and check in with them regularly in case they experience a delayed reaction or their symptoms get worse.

Supporting team members navigating life changes

Many life transitions can impact people at work, such as starting a family, managing financial pressures or retiring. People may feel uncertain and stressed, but you can help.

How you can support team members who are navigating life changes:

- Show empathy and compassion.
- Make yourself available and build strong relationships so people feel more comfortable approaching you about their concerns.
- Avoid prying to prevent workers from becoming uncomfortable.
- Listen and use collective terminology to ask how the person can be supported to show solidarity (that is, ask questions such as, "How can we support you through this?").
- Check in with the person regularly.
- Be transparent and consistent about how workers are treated, because solutions will set a precedent.

Remember!

A supportive manager is very helpful, but there are limits to how much you can help. It is important to stay within the competencies and boundaries of your role. Rather, encourage people to seek professional help or support within their existing support network as well as the supports provided at work.

If a team member requires emergency support, you can find a list of services at www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/emergency-help/

Reflection

Does your workplace have policies to support workers who are experiencing key career and life changes and transitions?

What strategies could help your team navigate these changes

6.1.4 Supporting individuals to be more flexible and adaptable

Each person's ability to adapt is shaped by their childhood experiences, values, life goals, and personal needs and preferences. As a manager, it is important to understand the unique differences between your team members when supporting them to be flexible and adaptable.

These 3 principles can help:

1. **Connect with your workers as individuals.** Understand who they are, their personal and professional priorities, and the unique skills they bring to the team and organisation.

2. **Avoid making assumptions about what your workers need**, including how they like to work or receive feedback, what reasonable adjustments they might need to balance their work and life commitments, and how their demographics (for example, their cultural background, gender identity, or sexual orientation) might influence their needs.

3. **Avoid making decisions on behalf of an individual.** Instead, consult and collaborate with individuals to determine aspects of their working arrangements, including any supports to protect and maintain their mental health and wellbeing.

Key managerial behaviours to help build your team's adaptability

When considering how you interact with workers and how this may impact their resilience, 5 key behaviours can positively impact your team:

- Be fair and open with workers, showing consistency throughout your interactions.
- When handling conflict, take complaints seriously and ensure team members feel supported.
- Be available to provide team members clarity and guidance when needed.
- Build high quality relationships with all team members.
- Support the development of your team members.

Individual-level interventions

You can help support workers develop skills related to 3 categories:[13]

1. **Individual and personal characteristics.** This includes encouraging workers to make time for mindfulness activities within the workplace, such as taking regular breaks.

2. **Environmental considerations.** This might include helping workers review their workloads regularly and manage job demands, so they are not overwhelmed and feel supported.

3. **Interactions between individuals and the environment.** This can include giving workers opportunities to engage in resilience training that considers both individual and environmental factors and how they interact.

Tips for building adaptability

You can help workers build their capability to overcome challenges by:

- setting goals that motivate workers, helping them to stretch their capabilities while still being achievable
- celebrating team successes
- coaching workers to be ambitious
- encouraging supportive working environments
- communicating and managing work and resources so workers know what to expect.

6.1.5 Supporting individuals to balance work with other priorities and responsibilities

While our time in the workplace takes up a significant portion of our lives, we all have priorities and responsibilities outside work, and we need to balance our time to meet all our obligations. Your team members will likely feel additional stress if they do not receive adequate support, including support from their workplace.

Flexible working arrangements can reduce the burden on workers and minimise negative impacts on their mental health. As a manager, you can support worker wellbeing by enabling flexible work arrangements that help workers manage their work and personal responsibilities.

How to support team members who are working flexibly

- Work closely with the person to agree on flexible working arrangements, including how their hours will be monitored, and how work–life balance and wellbeing will be considered.
- Clearly communicate and agree on expectations with the person and review existing workloads, tasks and responsibilities to account for the new working arrangements.
- Review any impacts that may fall on other team members.
- Ensure the person is not unfairly penalised for having worked part time when assessing performance.

Difficulties accommodating flexible work

Your organisation's ability to accommodate flexible working arrangements (FWAs) may depend on your industry, as well as the role of the person requesting the arrangements. Certain industries, such as retail, trades or emergency services, require workers to be physically present to do their job.

While workplace flexibility is important for worker retention, FWAs are not suitable for some roles, especially those in dynamic work environments.

However, it is important to be aware of possible arrangements that may support your team.

Understanding workplace flexibility

Australian Government legislation includes provisions for workers with caring responsibilities, which includes carer's leave entitlements and a right to flexible working arrangements.[14] The Fair Work Ombudsman defines workplace flexibility as when an organisation and a worker agree on changes to standard working arrangements so the worker can better balance their work and personal commitments. FWAs can be requested by workers who have worked for the same employer for at least 12 months and if they meet one or more of the following criteria:

- are the parent or have responsibility for the care of a child who is school aged or younger
- are a carer
- have a disability
- are 55 years or older
- are experiencing family or domestic violence
- provide care or support to a household member or immediate family who requires support because of family or domestic violence.

You can access additional information on the need for a team focus when supporting flexibility in the Diversity Council of Australia's Future-Flex Mainstreaming Flexibility by Team Design Guide (https://www.dca.org.au/resources/di-planning/flexibility/future-flex-a-strategic-approach#:~:text=Future%2DFlex%20is%20a%20new,to%20maximise%20performance%20and%20wellbeing).

There is more that you can do to help your team beyond meeting the minimum legal requirements to offer FWAs to all workers. Taking a best practice approach to FWAs can provide many benefits for your workplace, including:

- greater job satisfaction
- lower levels of workplace stress
- lower absenteeism
- increased productivity
- increased ability to attract and retain skilled staff.

The NSW Government designed a toolkit to help you design your own flexible working trial; you can access it here (https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/Design-your-own-flexible-working-trial-toolkit.pdf).

You can find out more about flexible work and recommendations on how to effectively lead and manage flexible work, including for virtual teams, here (https://www.transformativeworkdesign.com/flexible-work).

6.1.6 Managing the volume and diversity of workloads across your team

Worker burnout has been noted in workplaces for many years. It is now included in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases as a syndrome that is believed to result from chronic workplace stress that has not been managed successfully.

There are 6 main causes of burnout:

- Workers have an unsustainable workload.
- Workers lack control over their work.
- Workers do not feel they are appropriately rewarded for their efforts.
- Workers lack a supportive community within the workplace.
- The workplace is not fair.
- Workers' values and skills are not aligned.

Understanding high workloads

High workloads are a particular concern since the COVID-19 pandemic and changing work environments. Increasingly, workers struggle to manage their workloads, and studies indicate many experience burnout regularly.

Workers may experience high workloads when:

- there is too much work to complete
- work is consistently fast paced
- there are significant time pressures to complete work.

While you should take care to avoid and manage high workloads, you should also be aware of how low workloads, and highly repetitive and monotonous tasks can act as psychosocial hazards for your team members.

A low workload occurs where your team member must complete tasks that are all very similar or below their skills and abilities. An example is 'underemployment', which happens when a person's education, skills or experience is much higher than what they need to do their job.

Understanding low job control

Low job control can include circumstances where:

- workers have little control over parts of their work
- workers feel they do not have many opportunities to adapt how they work or adopt more efficient ways of working
- the work is tightly scripted or too fast paced
- the work involves strict processes that do not allow your team to apply their skills or judgement
- the level of autonomy does not match people's abilities.

How you can support your team

You can help workers avoid burnout by ensuring the amount of work, and the difficulty of their tasks, matches their skills and experience.

Managing volume and diversity of workloads for team members experiencing mental ill-health

If a worker experiences mental ill-health, particularly if they are returning to work following a period of absence, you may need to facilitate workload adjustments to support their transition back to work. They may not be able to manage a full-time workload; they will need your support to negotiate adjustments in workload or additional support.

Remember!

When managing someone's workload, review the workloads of other team members to ensure they do not have to carry an unfair burden.

6.1.7 Managing conflicts and difficult interpersonal relationships

Conflicts and challenges can emerge between team members or individuals within a workplace, leading to and resulting from micro- and macroaggressions, the spread of gossip and rumours, and other disrespectful behaviours. Despite there being several sources of conflict, only a small proportion of conflict incidences are reported and handled through formal grievance processes.

Some sources of conflict that you may have witnessed in your workplace include:

- low intensity deviant acts, such as rude verbal and non-verbal behaviours
- any form of bullying, harassment or discrimination
- unacceptable language
- uncivil behaviour, such as not replying to an email
- differences in personality style or working
- not valuing other people's views, background or experiences
- ignoring people or being discourteous.

As a manager, you are typically one of the first to become involved to deal with workplace conflict. So it is important you receive people management training to give you skills to handle conflict resolution.

What do I do if conflict arises?

While working proactively to prevent conflict in your workplace is an important step, you should also have the knowledge and skills to effectively handle conflict when it arises. Here are some ways you can encourage your team members to resolve conflict informally:

- Speak to each team member individually to better understand the source of the problem, while giving them an opportunity to voice their concerns.
- Act as a facilitator between team members and bring them together to communicate both sides of the conflict.
- Protect team members by removing them from conflict situations to prevent the situation from escalating.
- be open to gathering ideas on how to address conflict within your team.

Proactively managing workplace conflict can mean addressing the conflict before it becomes a serious issue that impacts your team's mental health.

How you can develop strong relationships with your team to manage conflict:

- Build and maintain a good relationship with each team member.
- Be aware of the tensions in your workplace.
- Acknowledge when a worker is causing stress to others within the team or the workplace.
- Set clear expectations of conduct within your team.

How you can prevent conflict in your workplace:

- Be alert for risks and signs, such as changes in performance or staff morale, or an increase in absences within your team.
- Identify and act early to maintain a culture that does not tolerate bullying.
- Manage workplace stress and risks to reduce conflict that may result in bullying.
- Seek training and development so you can develop productive and respectful workplace relationships.

Additional resources:

You can find out more about dispute resolution best practice here (https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/best-practice-guides/effective-dispute-resolution) and by accessing the Fair Work Ombudsman's Best Practice Guide (https://www.fairwork.gov.au/sites/default/files/migration/711/effective-dispute-resolution-best-practice-guide.pdf).

It is important to understand how to facilitate difficult conversations within your team and know when to escalate. You can find out more about how to navigate crucial conversations by accessing the Allianz guide to crucial conversations for managers here (https://www.allianz.com.au/images/internet/How-to-navigate-crucial-conversations-A-guide-for-managers.pdf).

Additional tips for selecting and adopting a dispute resolution process

When considering the dispute resolution process to manage conflict, the Fair Work Ombudsman has tips to ensure processes meet best practice:

- Ensure the process is simple and credible.
- Be sensitive to team members and their concerns.
- Seek clarification and encourage team members to express their opinions and feelings.
- Listen to team members and ensure they feel heard.
- Set expectations to resolve the conflict, while recognising more serious concerns may require escalation.
- Establish an escalation process if the dispute cannot be resolved, whether through top management or third party assistance.
- Ensure the process is consistent so team members know all disputes will be approached with the same values and objectivity.
- Ensure prompt action and resolution.
- Be transparent so all workers are aware of the dispute resolution process within the organisation.

Examples from the workplace:
Managing conflict

Judy has noticed some tension between two of her team members, Candace and Steve, over the past few weeks. Judy approached them both separately and organised one-on-one chats in a meeting room. During these meetings, Judy discovered Steve felt Candace ignored his contributions to the team and took credit for some of his work, while Candace was frustrated that he had ignored some of her recent emails.

Once Judy better understood each team member's position, she asked them to join her together so that they could discuss the problem. By facilitating a conversation between her team members, Judy and her team achieved the following outcomes:

- When Steve told Candace about his frustration, Candace apologised and thanked him for his support.
- Steve also apologised to Candace for ignoring her emails.

Following the meeting, Steve and Candace returned to their original positive working relationship. At the next team meeting, Judy reiterated to the entire team the importance of teamwork, encouraging them to speak to her if they had any concerns, and letting them know that it was her hope that the team could work together to resolve any concerns as needed.

Judy checked in with her team regularly and continued to monitor for any behaviour that might suggest conflict.

This section aligns to the **Respond** pillar of the Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces. (https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/explore-resources/blueprint-mentally-healthy-workplaces).

6.2 Recognising and responding to signs of mental ill-health and distress in the workplace

6.2.1 Identifying if a person is experiencing mental ill-health or distress

Mental ill-health can impact anyone, irrespective of their age or background; an estimated 1 in 5 people experience mental ill-health concerns at any given point.[15]

Given the prevalence of mental ill-health within society, and therefore within workplaces, recognising signs of mental ill-health is an important managerial skill. To best help your team and champion a mentally healthy workplace, you must be able to look beyond the stigma that surrounds mental ill-health in the workplace and learn to recognise and identify signs of mental ill-health, whether it be stress, depression, anxiety or a more complex mental health condition.

What are the facts?

To identify mental ill-health in team members and support them, you must be able to differentiate between mental ill-health stigma and the facts. According to the Black Dog Institute, (https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/black-dog-institute-mental-health-toolkit-2017.pdf) this includes understanding:

- mental ill-health is a common experience, and 1 in 5 Australians will experience mental ill-health at some point
- mental ill-health is caused by genetic, biological, social and environmental factors, not by a character flaw
- personal weakness does not cause mental ill-health, nor is it 'cured' by personal strength
- individuals experiencing mental ill-health can get better, and with appropriate treatment, people can and do
- mental ill-health does not permanently reduce a person's capacity to function at work, and although during periods of mental ill-health workers' productivity may be affected, recovery generally brings a return to previous functioning levels.

You can find out more about complex mental health conditions in the workplace at Safe Work Australia (https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/resources-and-publications/video-and-audio/complex-mental-health-workplace).

Potential signs and symptoms of mental-ill health

Key behavioural changes in a team member may suggest that they are experiencing mental ill-health. By learning to recognise the signs, you will be better equipped to support them and help them recover. Being able to notice changes and recognise when a team member may need help starts with building a sense of connection with your team to understand what is important to them and what behaviours may indicate things are different.

Signs may include:[16]

- confused thinking
- prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- feelings of extreme highs and lows
- excessive fears, worries and anxieties
- social withdrawal
- strong feelings of anger
- growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- suicidal thoughts
- numerous unexplained physical ailments.

6.2.2 Approaching conversations about mental health and suicide

When you notice a change in a worker's performance or their behaviour, consider whether it may be useful to discuss it with them.

When starting a conversation with a worker about their mental health, remember there is no one correct way to approach the conversation. The key consideration is to be genuine and supportive, even if you do not have all the answers.

Here are some tips that can help you have the conversation:

- Ensure the conversation happens at a time that suits you and your team member, and in a private location.
- Discuss the changes that you have noticed and ask the team member if there is anything they would like to talk about.
- Encourage your team member to speak with you, but understand they may not wish to.
- Reassure the team member that their privacy will be respected. You cannot share information without their permission unless there is a risk of serious harm. In this case, you should share the information with one person at work who can increase safety (such as human resources).
- Actively listen to your team member without interrupting them with solutions.
- Mind your body language and confirm your understanding of what your team member told you to ensure accuracy.
- Consider what the team member needs moving forward and ask them how you can help.

Importance of ongoing support

To ensure your team member knows you will continue to provide support, consider the next steps, such as:

- discussing options for additional support
- ending the conversation with a plan for next steps
- acknowledging the team member is valued and appreciate that they chose to share their story
- checking in with them again in the coming days (and on an ongoing basis).

Unexpected outcomes?

Sometimes, conversations about mental health do not go as expected or produce the desired outcome. If this happens:

- respect the team member's choice if they do not wish to speak about the topic, while leaving the door open to have the conversation another time
- be ready and willing to try multiple times to open the conversation
- understand that the effort of showing support and offering to discuss the matter can still help make a difference, and the team member may choose to seek help at a later time or speak with others.

If the team member indicates they feel suicidal or have plans to take their own life, immediately seek guidance from an HR professional, an Employee Assistance Program or Lifeline.

Approaching conversations about suicide

If you are concerned someone may be at risk of suicide, you can start a conversation several ways. Examples include asking how they are or telling them about your week, before asking about their week.

When discussing suicide, ask direct questions and listen with empathy. To encourage conversation, follow up with open ended questions, and reassure the team member that they are not alone, and that they are supported.

Importantly, do not try to talk the person out of suicide by talking about how it would hurt their friends and family, try to fix the problem, or dismiss their feelings as attention seeking. Find out if they have a plan; individuals with a plan are at a higher risk of attempting suicide. Following the conversation, you can make a safety plan to help them:

- recognise their warning signs
- ensure their surroundings are safe
- remember they have reasons to live
- identify things that can help make them feel strong
- connect with people who can help, personally and professionally.

You can write down details on a piece of paper or use an app, such as Beyond Blue's Beyond Now suicide safety planning app.

Conversations about suicide can be emotionally draining, so take care of yourself. If you feel shaky, consider talking it through with a person you trust.

What is the right terminology?

Terminology can be important, so take care to avoid stigmatising terminology such as:

- committed suicide
- successful suicide
- completed suicide
- failed attempt at suicide
- unsuccessful suicide.

Instead, Beyond Blue advises using more appropriate terminology, including:

- died by suicide
- suicided
- ended his/her/their life
- took his/her/their life
- attempted to end his/her/their life.

Examples from the workplace:
Talking about mental health

Julia noticed her team member Louise started turning up late to work and failed to complete tasks on time. After a meeting, Julia walked up to Louise as she was about to take her lunch break and asked her why she was always late and was unable to complete her tasks.

Louise looked very uncomfortable and did not answer. When Julia pushed Louise for a response, Louise gathered her things and walked away without finishing the conversation or sharing details about her circumstances.

Learning opportunity

The conversation did not have the outcome Julia hoped for. For a better outcome, Julia could choose a more suitable time and private location and take a gentler approach to asking if there is anything Louise would like to discuss rather than confronting them.

6.2.3 Connecting individuals to treatment pathways

Multiple treatment pathways can provide support, from self-help to intensive treatment. While you do not have to make these decisions, it can be helpful to understand the various types of treatments available. Five levels of treatment intensity take a stepped approach:

- **Level 1 – Self-management** (for example, self-help resources and publicly available information)
- **Level 2 – Low intensity** (for example, self-help resources, group support, digital mental health tools)
- **Level 3 – Moderate intensity** (for example, low intensity interventions as well as psychological services if required)
- **Level 4 – High intensity** (for example, face-to-face services through primary care, supported by psychiatrists as necessary, as well as clinician supported digital mental health services, and low and moderate level interventions)
- **Level 5 – Acute and specialist community mental health services** (for example, specialist mental health care, intensive team-based specialist assessments and interventions through state mental health services, and support via the National Disability Insurance Scheme as well as multiagency care).[17]

If your organisation provides Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), you can encourage team members to access the program as needed. Evidence suggests organisations that invest in robust mental health benefits can better support workers in seeking treatment.[18] EAPs that include mental health support and counselling are one method of doing so.

Additional interventions that you can direct people to include:

- online self-help treatment programs such as myCompass
- app-based mental health support
- regularly engaging in direct and open conversations to encourage team members towards formal treatment pathways if needed.[15]

6.2.4 Making reasonable adjustments for individuals experiencing mental ill-health and supporting teams working with the individual

A reasonable adjustment is any type of assistance or adjustment that is necessary, possible and reasonable to help reduce or remove barriers to working.

When a worker discloses that they have a mental health condition, legislation means employers must make reasonable adjustments to support them in the workplace. A wide range of possible adjustments are recommended to help guide managers make necessary changes as required.

The Australian Human Rights Commission provides guidance on how you can identify reasonable adjustments via 4 key steps:

- Identify the 'inherent' or 'core' requirements of the worker's role.
- Assess their skills and abilities.
- Identify reasonable adjustments with the worker by being flexible, thinking laterally and looking for good ideas to adapt.
- Check the worker is able to meet the core requirements of their role with reasonable adjustments.[19] Adapting existing good practice examples from within your team or organisation (or even outside your organisation) may help you successfully implement reasonable adjustments.

Examples of reasonable adjustments:[20]

- flexible hours or change to start or finish times; change of workspace, for example quieter, more or fewer people around, dividing screens
- working from home at certain times or on certain days in a given period
- changes to break times
- provision of quiet rooms
- lightbox or seat with more natural light
- time off for appointments related to their mental health, such as therapy and counselling
- temporarily changing duties, for example changing the balance of desk work and customer-facing work, reducing caseloads, changing shift patterns
- reallocation of some tasks or amendments to the worker's job description or duties
- redeployment to a more suitable role
- increased supervision or support from manager, buddy, mentor
- extra help with managing and negotiating workload
- debriefing sessions after difficult calls, customers or tasks
- mediation to manage difficulties between colleagues
- access to a mental health support group or disability network group
- a 'safe space' in the workplace where the person can have some time out or access support
- information to promote self-care
- encouragement to build up resilience and activities that support good mental health such as exercise, meditation or healthy eating
- regular opportunities to discuss, review and reflect on people's positive achievements. This can help people to build up positive self-esteem and develop skills to better manage their triggers for poor mental health.

Examples from the workplace: Making reasonable adjustments

Daniel has managed his team for over 2 years, and in that time has developed a strong relationship with each team member. Sofia joined his team 8 months ago, and for the most part, has been a high-performing worker who enjoys socialising with the team and engaging in friendly team banter. Recently, Daniel noticed Sofia has been quieter than usual, declining all invitations to social events and getting frustrated when encountering problems with her work, often failing to submit reports by the deadline.

When he approached her to ask if there is anything she would like to talk about, Sofia discloses she has a mental health condition and is currently struggling to keep up with her work. Daniel organises another meeting to discuss her role and how he and the organisation can help. They agree that as she finds social situations difficult at the moment, flexible working arrangements will be put in place to allow her to work from home and during the hours that suit her. Daniel also reallocates some of Sofia's tasks to Tina, another team member who has some capacity after completing their own project and agreed they can manage the workload.

After implementing these adjustments, Sofia's performance at work improves. Daniel regularly checks in with her virtually to ensure she feels included and keeps up to date on all matters at the office while she focuses on her health.

Supporting teams working with individuals experiencing mental ill-health who are receiving reasonable adjustments

While you have an important role in supporting team members experiencing mental ill-health, you also carry a duty to support and protect the mental health of your wider team. Here are some strategies to ensure any reasonable adjustments do not produce unfair outcomes for other team members:

- Develop a workplan to clarify roles, responsibilities and reasonable adjustments.
- Communicate reasonable adjustments that have been implemented with other team members after discussing with the worker if they are comfortable and agree on how to communicate these changes to the team.
- Review the workloads of other team members to manage absences and ensure other workers are not unfairly impacted.

If your team does require additional support, it may be useful to reach out to top management to request additional help or resources to help manage the changes in your team.[21]

Examples from the workplace: Supporting the rest of the team

Emiko recently helped her organisation implement reasonable adjustments to support Paul, a member of her team experiencing mental health challenges. Due to Paul's reduced working hours, Emiko redistributed some of Paul's workload to the rest of her team. Emiko received approval from Paul to share that reasonable adjustments have been put in place.

To support the rest of her team, Emiko created a detailed plan so everyone is clear on their roles and responsibilities. She also regularly checks in with each person, to ensure they do not feel overworked with their new workloads, redistributing work as needed.

6.2.5 Performance management for individuals experiencing mental ill-health

A worker's performance can be impacted by many internal or external factors, and you may struggle to understand whether the cause is mental health related. This can make it difficult for you to decide how to proceed when a team member's performance level changes.

When approaching performance management for workers experiencing mental ill-health, you will need to account for certain considerations, including:

- any personal circumstances that may contribute to performance
- the impact of mental ill-health on poor performance
- the seriousness of the performance concerns
- encouraging and enabling conversations around performance concerns and health issues that may impact performance.

Further, if you know a team member has a mental health issue, focus on how their mental ill-health may affect their work, rather than continuing the performance management process. It may be better to consider what reasonable adjustments can be made to support the worker, rather than undertaking the performance management process.

The Australian Human Rights Commission provides guidance on how to approach performance management for workers with performance issues who are experiencing mental ill-health. This guidance includes steps on what to consider before proceeding, and discussion points to guide conversations, such as indicating to the team member:

- that a performance concern exists
- awareness of the team member's mental ill-health
- willingness to explore reasonable adjustments
- willingness to discuss how mental health impacts their work and performance.[22]

When considering what action to take, encourage the team member to seek help, consider how you can adjust the workplace arrangements to support them through reasonable adjustments, and encourage ongoing conversations to readjust your strategy as needed.[21]

6.2.6 Supporting individuals and teams when an individual is returning to work after an absence due to mental ill-health

Return to work can be a stressful experience for many. Clear return-to-work plans and considerations are important for team members returning after experiencing mental ill-health or following a significant life event, such as parental leave or gender reassignment surgery. As individuals return to work and readjust to work life and expectations, they may experience mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression or general feelings of distress. These feelings are common and you should be mindful that returning team members may experience fatigue, anxieties and major stress, particularly around socialisation.

Fears and concerns when returning to work

Team members with mental ill-health may struggle to return to work due to several factors that act as significant barriers as they readjust to work life. You must be conscious of these factors and consider them when developing a return-to-work plan to support workers and overcome the barriers. Examples include:

- fears colleagues may discover their diagnosis
- the stigma associated with mental ill-health and the lack of awareness and understanding on how mental health affects work performance
- actual or perceived lack of planning or support for their return to work from their employer
- the reaction from colleagues, such as suggestions the team member is using their mental ill-health as an excuse to not work
- a reduction in self-confidence because of the episode of depression and/or anxiety
- a lack of clarity around the type of assistance they will receive from you or their supervisors
- concerns work-related contributors or causes of stress, anxiety and depression have not been appropriately reported or addressed by the workplace.[23]

When you help organise a return to work for a team member, the return-to-work plan should seek approval and feedback from workers and worker representatives, and should ideally guide you to ensure:

- commitment to help workers return to work
- understanding of the expectations, roles and responsibilities of everyone involved
- a structure for what happens when a worker discloses a mental health challenge
- specific instruction on how you and other supervisors should seek advice regarding the mental health challenge and the actions that need to be taken
- availability of contacts for other sources of advice within the organisation
- reasonable adjustments can be made for the team member
- procedures exist to stay in contact with staff who are on sick leave
- provision for return-to work plans that are agreed to by all impacted parties
- definition of responsibilities to enact the return-to-work plan
- links to any other key policies as relevant.[24]

Supporting the development of a return-to-work plan

There are several considerations for developing a return-to-work plan, noting your organisation should ensure the approach is fair and consistent, while being flexible and tailored to the individual.[24]

All relevant individuals who need to know should be informed of the reasonable adjustments that have been made to support the worker. Other important factors include:

- offering a variety of options to support a flexible return to work
- providing carefully monitored and regularly evaluated and improved adjustments
- offering flexibility and job task modifications to accommodate their capabilities.

To ensure the worker is aware of roles and resources for making adjustments, inform them of relevant flexible working initiatives.

Return-to-work coordinators

A return-to-work coordinator may be appointed to act as the key point of contact for the worker.

To better support the returning worker, the coordinator should discuss any work-based issues that would assist the worker to feel more confident and comfortable returning to work, advise them of sickness, absence and disability policies, as well as any reasonable adjustments to assist them when they return.

The coordinator should reassure the worker about practical issues such as job security and dealing with financial concerns, while also encouraging absent workers to talk to their own doctor, or other healthcare adviser, about what they may be able to do as they make progress or adjust to their circumstances. At the end of each conversation with the worker, the return-to-work coordinator should agree on when the next follow-up contact will be.

What should a return-to-work plan look like?

A return-to-work plan should include:

- date the worker will return to work
- the time period the plan will cover
- the roles and responsibilities of all individuals involved
- a description of duties for the worker
- any reasonable adjustments that will support the worker to remain at work
- any information about impact that the adjustments will have on the terms and conditions of the worker's employment, such as leave, superannuation and any other employment benefits
- advice received from healthcare providers and human resources
- strategies to support managing stress, especially around any workplace activities that may trigger stress for the worker, such as deadlines, meetings or conflict
- the process for enacting the plan
- the review process for the plan, including review dates and individuals responsible for undertaking reviews.[24]

Additional resources:

- Beyond Blue provides additional information on how you can support team members returning to work following an absence due to mental ill-health, and is available here (https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/228707/suprt-rtrn-work-depr.pdf).
- Return to Work has a number of resources available to help you support your team, including case studies, tools and helpful information, and are available here (https://returntowork.workplace-mentalhealth.net.au/)

Supporting teams working with individuals who are returning to work after an absence due to mental ill-health

How to support your team

While respecting the privacy of your team member with mental ill-health, you also need to support other team members working with the individual returning to work to address any workload concerns. You would do the same for other workers who are absent or performing differently due to health concerns.

You can do this by:

- providing clear, accurate information to the worker's colleagues about the nature of the mental ill-health (where the worker has provided consent)
- depending on the team's mental health literacy, arranging for mental health training to ensure appropriate understanding of mental ill-health, and minimise the perpetuation of stereotypes or misconceptions when the worker returns
- discussing concerns other workers may have and co-designing ideas to resolve them where possible
- ensuring the physical and psychological safety of all workers
- providing support and counselling, including through access to EAPs (where available).[25]

What staff need to know when a team member is returning to work:[24]

- how they can reduce stressors that increase a worker's risk of relapse of mental health problems
- how they can support workers with a mental health challenge in ways that promote recovery
- how to interact with a worker who is distressed
- how to respond in a mental health crisis situation
- it is not necessary to be without symptoms of the mental health challenge to function successfully at work
- symptom improvements and work performance improvements may happen at the same or different rates
- despite looking fine, the worker may still be unwell
- the worker may be anxious about returning to work.

Other useful information for team members:

- the importance of early identification and intervention for preventing or limiting relapse in a worker experiencing a mental health challenge
- the things they may notice that might indicate a worker has a mental health challenge, such as effects on attendance, completing work tasks and displaying unusual behaviours
- the benefits for workers of disclosing their mental health challenge to the organisation (for example, to allow access to supports)
- the fears workers may have about disclosing their mental health challenge (for example, stigma from others and not wanting to identify as 'crazy')
- the level of support needed by workers experiencing a mental health challenge will fluctuate, as the symptoms of most mental health challenges come and go over time
- the mental health and disability support services available through the organisation and in the community
- the negative attitudes of others can be a major problem for a worker experiencing a mental health challenge
- the myths surrounding health problems which lead to stigma and limit the potential productivity of workers experiencing mental health challenges
- the relevant laws and organisation policies that affect interaction with workers experiencing mental health challenges
- the value of work for health and recovery.

This section aligns to the **Promote** pillar of the Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces (https://beta.mentallyhealthyworkplaces.gov.au/explore-resources/blueprint-mentally-healthy-workplaces).

6.3 Supporting individuals to thrive in the workplace

6.3.1 Supporting individuals in finding purpose in their work

It is important that we feel motivated and connected to others in our workplace. Employers carry a responsibility to manage psychosocial hazards within the workplace, and in supporting mentally healthy workplaces, you should consider the impact that low motivation can have on the mental health of your team members. If team members feel as though they lack purpose in the work that they do, if they have limited control over their role and responsibilities, and if they feel as though they are not progressing or developing, they may experience negative impacts on their mental health.

You can take the following steps to help your team feel a stronger sense of control and purpose, including:

- connecting them to opportunities for personal and professional training and development
- ensuring they are meaningfully recognised for their contributions to the team and the workplace.

What can I do to support my team members in having job control and finding purpose in their work?

Involvement in decision making

Having limited participation in decision making, or limited control over their own areas of work can negatively impact team members' mental health. You can promote positive mental health, build trust and contribute to mentally healthy workplaces by giving your team opportunities to shape their work and involve them in decisions. Team members will be more engaged and less likely to experience burnout.

The best way to involve team members in decision making is to communicate relevant information, including task details and broader strategic information (such as the company vision). Examples of participation and involvement practices include:

- participatory problem-solving groups
- project teams or quality circles – people work together on tasks with considerable responsibility delegated to the team level
- suggestion schemes – workers are given channels to contribute new ideas to managers
- consultation exercises and meetings – workers are encouraged to share ideas
- delegation of certain responsibilities – workers are trusted to make some decisions for themselves
- multi-channel structured decision making processes – communications upwards, downwards and sideways within the organisation
- industrial democracy – representative participation, including co-determination (where workers can vote on board of directors in a company) and other forms of shared governance.

Job autonomy

Job autonomy can positively impact your team's psychological wellbeing. A mentally healthy workplace empowers people to work autonomously and take pride and control in their work.

You can do this by giving team members work that is appropriately challenging and of the right quality, the tools and space to work autonomously, and support and regular feedback.

Here are several ways that you can help facilitate greater job control for your team:

- Self-direction. Allow your team to have a say in how their work is organised, how problems are tackled, and the pace of their work.
- Input into the decision making process (as above). Involve team members in allocating responsibility for tasks, and encourage them to participate in the management process.
- Consultation and communication. Develop a working environment where team members are consulted and can provide feedback on changes that will impact their tasks.

- Appropriate supervision. Consult with your team when developing performance monitoring systems and developing team-based targets which help build teams and measure performance and organisational goals.

Job crafting

Job crafting is one way your team can shape their work—an individual alters aspects of their own tasks to improve the fit between their work and their individual preferences. Your workplace can facilitate job crafting by providing the structural resources needed for workers to undertake training to enhance skillsets, and exercise autonomy over the tasks and processes that involve them.

Availability of 'good work'

Generally, having a job protects mental health by providing financial and social benefits. However, a job that actively promotes positive mental health is one in which a person can really thrive. Several factors contribute to what could be termed 'good work'. For example, the International Labor Organisation defines 'decent work' as:

- productive and delivering a fair income
- promoting economic security and social protection for families
- providing prospects for personal development and social integration
- encouraging freedom for people to express their concerns and organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives
- ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment.[26]

Good work can be enhanced through job design and job crafting processes that maximise the opportunity for work-related psychological health benefits. Positive psychology research suggests focusing on PERMA (Positive emotions, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment at work) to promote high levels of positive mental health.[27]

Research shows the following 3 questions are very strongly associated with measures of performance, engagement, retention, resilience and inclusion:

- Was I excited to work every day last week?
- Did I have a chance to use my strengths every day?
- At work, do I get a chance to do what I am good at and something I love?[28]

While somewhat utopian, these questions guide us towards deliberate thinking about how to create a good match between a person and their job, by focusing on people's interests, values, strengths and enjoyment.

Examples from the workplace: Helping people find purpose in work

Karl thinks his team feel unmotivated and has noticed limited participation during discussions. Due to the nature of their work, he knows opportunities to assign new tasks are limited, and current protocols require close supervision. Karl includes a new agenda item in the weekly team meeting to discuss innovation ideas on how to improve their workflow and give team members more autonomy over their daily tasks. While specific tasks cannot be changed, Karl tells his team that they are welcome to adapt their working styles to suit themselves so long as the work is completed on time and to the appropriate standard.

After implementing these simple strategies, Karl notices a significant improvement in meeting participation. His team regularly provide suggestions to improve their workflow, and their mood improves as they individually adapt their own processes to complete tasks.

6.3.2 Facilitating professional and personal development

Learning and development opportunities across a broad range of topics can support your team's engagement by helping them feel challenged and valued. These activities improve their performance, satisfaction and morale as they are supported to grow and progress as workers and people.

You can help them develop by speaking to top management about increasing learning opportunities within your workplace and encouraging team members to take advantage of training opportunities. You can further support them by ensuring their workloads allow them to participate in structured and unstructured learning and development opportunities.[29]

Structured and unstructured learning and development

Structured learning and development opportunities include formal training programs involving clear instructions and goals that are established by a dedicated instructor.

Unstructured training may be less formal, such as self-driven learning modules, other small tasks that present growth opportunities on the job, and online challenges team members can complete at their own pace.

Mental health-specific training and development

Structured, formal training to build capability relating to mental health and wellbeing can help promote a positive mental health culture at your organisation. This training can help you fulfil your legal obligations as a manager, by helping you better understand how mental health can affect a person's life, while also helping reduce the stigma that surrounds mental ill-health.

As you and your team undergo crucial training to build confidence and capability to support mentally healthy workplaces, you can also lead by example and promote positive mental health outcomes.

Formal training to create inclusive and safe workplaces for culturally and linguistically diverse people, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also promotes positive mental health for all workers.

What is the value of managers completing mental health training?

A study by the Black Dog Institute found managers with mental health training reported improved confidence and significant reductions in sick leave taken by their team members. The manager was also more likely to contact workers who were away from work due to mental ill-health to provide ongoing support, which in turn helped those workers return to work sooner.

The research also showed a $10 return on every dollar an organisation spent on training.[30]

Reflection

Does your organisation provide you and your team learning opportunities?

Is your team given appropriate time to engage in structured and unstructured learning opportunities?

6.3.3 Enabling and facilitating meaningful professional and personal connections

Social connection and the feeling of belonging to a group is one of the most powerful resources for health protection and promotion. And given many of us spend almost a third of our lives at work, it is not surprising that our working relationships are so important for our wellbeing. By meaningfully connecting with your team members, you can better understand them as individuals, and better support them to feel more comfortable sharing their interests and concerns. You can promote positive connections by being transparent about your own interests and stories. Incorporating small celebrations for events that are meaningful to your team also helps build strong and positive relationships, and provide reminders to regularly recognise people's positive contributions to the team.

What is social connection and how can I foster it in my teams?

Social connection is more than just 'getting along' with people. As humans, we crave contact and connection with other people. Psychologists studying the human need for belonging found it is an important motivator of our behaviour—just like food, shelter and safety. Social connection is the experience of feeling close and connected to others, and includes feeling cared for and valued.

Positive social connections and meaningful relationships are built on:

- trust
- integrity
- good communication
- appreciation
- empathy and care
- fun
- authenticity
- reciprocity of support.

Here are some practical ways that you can help foster positive working relationships and cultivate a sense of belonging among team members:

1. **Give your team a compelling and shared purpose.** A compelling purpose is something that everyone can buy into and get behind, and it helps to instil a strong sense of belonging.

2. **Have regular face-to-face meetings.** Spending time with your team, listening to their concerns or celebrating team successes fosters a strong sense of trust. It is also an opportunity to identify and address issues that might exist within the team.

3. **Identify and harness people who are 'positive energisers'.** People gravitate towards positive energisers. They build a belief and capacity in others and can create positive energy networks. Look for ways to leverage this energy by considering the composition of work teams in terms of personality and personal strengths.

4. **Create opportunities for bonding and connection.** Giving workers opportunities to get to know each other better can help cultivate a sense of camaraderie and unity, and increase trust and open communication.

5. **Address conflict proactively.** There will likely be times when people do not agree. As a manager, it is important to be close enough to your teams to recognise when this happens, not allow it to escalate and address issues swiftly and proactively.

6. **Share information openly.** The more information you can share with your team, the more people will feel empowered, and have a greater sense of purpose and trust. It is also a 2-way street: encourage team members to share information to help them feel valued and included.

7. **Express gratitude.** This is an important, but often overlooked, way of increasing connection and happiness among people at work. Celebrate successes, large and small!

Additional resources:

- **SuperFriend. Building Thriving Workplaces: Guidelines and Actions.** Available at: https://superfriend.com.au/resource/building-thriving-workplaces/
- **Icare NSW Social Connections Toolkit.** Available at: https://www.icare.nsw.gov.au/social-connections-toolkit/#gref
- **5 ways to Wellbeing.** Available at: https://5waystowellbeing.org.au

Building strong connections in a virtual or hybrid working environment

As working from home (WFH) becomes more normalised within society, along with other flexible working approaches, WFH may be a 'reasonable adjustment' for team members who are experiencing mental-ill health (refer to section 6.2.4). As such, it is important to design WFH arrangements that support workers' mental health.

Unfortunately, WFH arrangements can contribute to social and workplace isolation, which occurs when people have minimal contact with others, causing loneliness—an emotional reaction to isolation. You should be aware of the trade-offs that come from WFH arrangements, such as:

- reduced opportunities for collaboration and networking among colleagues
- less face-to-face interaction with managers
- potential impacts on career progression due to being less visible to senior staff and having fewer learning and development opportunities.

Social isolation has been linked to mental ill-health, emotional distress, poor health behaviours, suicide and premature death.

Connecting with your team virtually

Facilitating and fostering social connections

It is important to consider how you can build strong team connections in a virtual setting. While you may be concerned about productivity when working virtually, take care not to build a culture of mistrust with your team. These are some strategies to support social engagement and connections between people working from home include:

- Hold morning updates. Use video conferencing to check in so the team stays on track and important news is communicated.
- Over-communicate. Repeat your messages several times, re-post content and announcements on several channels and platforms to make sure they reach everyone.
- Hold walking meetings. Everyone gets out walking for the meeting and afterwards you share photos.
- Offer virtual coffees: Get the team together on video and have a coffee and chat, or a drink after work.
- Promote team socialising. Set up a book club or movie club, hold trivia nights, attend the same webinar or set up regular meditation, yoga or stretch sessions.
- Be open and authentic (to the extent that you feel comfortable). Share personal stories, photos, videos (pets, home office, walks, garden, food) so that the team feels bonded. Set up a place to recommend online events and classes, recipes, books, TV shows, movies and songs.

You can play a crucial role in facilitating social engagement and connections within your team by scheduling time for people to communicate and connect. You can also play a role in creating a work environment that continues to foster these connections.

Ensuring support for workers at home

It is important that your team feels they can contact and connect with you, and that they are supported. Here are some ways you can help keep virtual teams connected:

- Establish structured check-ins where team members can raise concerns and ask questions. Acknowledge any stresses.
- Offer multiple methods of communication, such as video conferences or individual messages.
- Create opportunities for social interaction, such as starting each call with time to discuss non-work related matters and check in with each other, or organising virtual dinners.
- Establish rules of engagement so your team knows the best ways to contact each other and share information.
- Be aware your team turns to you for guidance on how to react to sudden situations and acknowledge the stresses and anxieties they face, while also reaffirming your faith and confidence in them.

6.3.4 Providing person-centric recognition and reward

The anxiety-buffer hypothesis suggests high self-esteem can act as a buffer against threats to a person's mental health.[31] As a manager, you can support people's self-esteem using recognition programs with a human connection that is specific to the person being recognised. Environments with appropriate, fair and timely appreciation and acknowledgement of efforts benefit from lower turnover, and greater engagement and wellbeing among team members.

Here are some ways you can recognise your team members:

- Provide both formal written and verbal feedback, through an available company process or platform, as well as regular informal feedback immediately after a task well done.
- Ask people how they would like to be recognised—publicly or via private feedback.
- Acknowledge efforts, and not just the results.
- Demonstrate a genuine interest in people as individuals and their lives outside work.
- Provide frequent praise and encourage team members to acknowledge and praise each other too.

Examples from the workplace: Recognising people's efforts in the workplace

Jacob manages a team of 5 people. Over the past 6 months, he has noticed morale is low, and 2 team members recently resigned, increasing hiring costs for his organisation. During their exit interviews, workers indicated they felt undervalued and were seeking more meaningful opportunities.

At the next team meeting, Jacob adds an agenda item to thank his team for their efforts during the recent busy period. Privately, Jacob also gives each person specific feedback to thank them for their efforts and achievements. Through these discussions, Jacob learns many in the team feel overworked. To support them, he offers the team an afternoon off to take some time back for themselves.

As Jacob begins to regularly include positive feedback into his conversations with individuals and wider team meetings, he notices team morale improves along with greater engagement and better outcomes.

Reflection

How do you reward and recognise your workers?

What other ways can you reward and recognise workers?

6.4 Tailoring responses based on an individual's background and experiences

When thinking about conversations with workers, remember no approach can be applied uniformly and yield the same results. You must be guided by what is important to each person, while acknowledging their unique experiences. This is particularly true when supporting workers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Supports for these groups should reflect:

- a recovery-oriented approach (for example, focusing on a person's strengths and capabilities, rather than their mental ill-health)
- a holistic approach (for example, considering their wellbeing from a physical, psychological, social, cultural or spiritual perspective)
- a person-centred approach (for example, considering the person's needs, interests and goals, as well as understanding the role that their family, community, culture and cultural contexts may have in their recovery)
- a trauma-informed approach (for example, understanding how trauma may have impacted their life)
- empowerment (for example, encouraging a person to take control of their own life and feel empowered).[32]

6.4.1 Supporting team members who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Knowing how to appropriately support and acknowledge Aboriginal concepts of social and emotional wellbeing is important. Social and emotional wellbeing is an integral component within the holistic view that many Indigenous Australian peoples take towards health. The Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration presents 5 key themes that can inform your response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiencing mental-ill health:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and healing should be recognised across all parts of the Australian mental health system, and in some circumstances support specialised areas of practice.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and healing combined with clinical perspectives will make the greatest contribution to achieving the highest attainable standard of mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values-based social and emotional wellbeing and mental health outcome measures in combination with clinical outcome measures should guide the assessment of mental health and suicide prevention services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence and leadership is required across all parts of the Australian mental health system for it to adapt to, and be accountable to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and achieve the highest attainable standard of mental health and suicide prevention outcomes.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders should be supported and valued to be visible and influential across all parts of the Australian mental health system.[33]

When approaching mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 3 key considerations for care include holistic, person- and family-centred care and healing; culturally safe, trauma-informed quality care; and connected care.

To further support understanding, NSW Health notes the importance of understanding:

- the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they share their story
- how culture, family, community, country and spirituality can significantly impact their journey
- how using familiar terms such as social and emotional wellbeing instead of mental ill-health may be better understood
- how families, kinship and extended clan groups should be included
- how stigma, discrimination and trauma may significantly impact their life.

Additional resources:

You can also direct workers to apps and sources such as:

- iBobbly (https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/digital-tools-apps/), the Black Dog Institute's social and emotional wellbeing self-help app
- Headspace Yarn Safe (https://headspace.org.au/yarn-safe/), an online resource which provides information and support, along with videos sharing personal stories
- WellMob (https://wellmob.org.au/), to help connect individuals to community health workers and online wellbeing resources
- Yarning SafeNStrong (https://www.vahs.org.au/yarning-safe-n-strong-media/), a free and confidential counselling service that has been developed by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with culturally suitable counsellors

6.4.2 Supporting team members from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

When supporting culturally and linguistically diverse team members, you must recognise experiences may differ. All approaches may not be appropriate for all workers, and people from diverse backgrounds may be less likely to seek support for mental ill-health due to stigma and cultural beliefs and norms. You should assess your cultural competency and develop adaptable strategies that account for added sensitivities that may arise for people from culturally diverse backgrounds, while also building a workplace culture that supports diversity and inclusivity.

You should also:

- consider differences in how family may be involved in decision making
- consider how gender may impact from a cultural perspective
- consider emotional responses to those who are perceived as authoritative figures
- consider how stigma, discrimination and trauma may significantly impact their life
- be patient when communicating and clarify when there is uncertainty
- communicate in a way the person understands, and realise it may take time to find the most suitable approach
- understand some team members may prefer speaking to a colleague who speaks the same language and is from the same culture, while others may prefer to speak to someone who does not belong to the same community
- consider whether to use a professional interpreter to help communicate with the worker.[32]

Broader needs of people from linguistically diverse background

A large portion of the Australian public are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: in 2021, 48.2% of Australians have at least one parent that was born overseas, and 27.6% were born overseas.[34]

So, workplaces must recognise the needs of these workers and implement suitable communication methods to meet workplace health and safety obligations.

Language barriers are the highest risk factor making culturally and linguistically diverse workers more likely to experience psychosocial harm in the workplace. Consider how language and cultural barriers may undermine a team member's ability to carry out their work safely, and provide support and solutions to help keep them healthy and safe. Workplace health and safety information should be communicated in an easily accessible format to help prevent and reduce workplace breaches, incidents, illnesses and injuries.

Here are some useful strategies for providing easily accessible information:

- Provide materials that are translated in the team member's preferred language.
- Use face-to-face communication (over written communication) so you can check for understanding and clarify information if necessary.
- Use practical demonstrations to show workers how to complete their tasks.
- Translate images, signs and symbols.
- Provide assistance and support via another worker from the same language group (when that person agrees to help and receives appropriate training).
- Provide access and support for the worker to attend English language classes.
- Use a service to help translate and interpret.[35]

Examples from the workplace: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade CALD Strategy

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) strategy is founded on 3 key pillars:

- Valuing, promoting, and increasing awareness of cultural and language diversity by:
  - celebrating days of significance such as Harmony Day and Australian Citizenship Day
  - developing a calendar of significant diversity dates
  - supporting the role of a Champion to promote a safe and inclusive workplace that celebrates and values diversity while also raising issues affecting culturally and linguistically diverse staff as needed
  - encouraging staff to use tools and websites to educate themselves about different cultures
  - maintaining and promoting the availability of reflection rooms for prayer, meditation and self-reflection
  - supporting staff to access leave for important cultural and religious holidays
  - maintaining language proficiency allowances and recognising the value of their multi-lingual workforce.
- Enhancing inclusiveness within DFAT work practices by:
  - providing workplace diversity briefs to workers on their first postings
  - briefing staff at all levels on bullying, harassment and discrimination before they start work
  - supporting a network of Diversity and Anti-Harassment Officers
  - looking to expand existing awareness training programs
  - having leaders model and champion inclusive behaviours and cultures, by completing cultural competency training.
- Engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse staff, diversity and cultural organisations and communities by:
  - promoting high level dialogue on diversity issues
  - supporting activities to promote diversity and inclusion
  - encouraging culturally and linguistically diverse staff to set up informal mentoring with more senior staff
  - actively promoting inclusive consultations processes.

6.4.3 Supporting team members who identify as LGBTQI+

Members of the LGBTIQ+ community are at greater risk of experiencing mental health concerns within the workplace. Understanding how you can increase visibility and share information to support LGBTIQ+ team members is important, including providing intentional and consistent messaging to create a culture of inclusiveness and authenticity. Strategies include adopting inclusive language, non-gendered acknowledgements and communications.

At an organisation level, programs that amplify LGBTIQ+ voices and develop and facilitate safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ team members can further support workers' mental health. Other factors to consider include:

- recognising diversity in all people, whether it is their sexuality, sex or gender
- respecting each person's right to choose their own gender
- where appropriate, using gender neutral language and terminology
- using each individual's preferred pronouns
- showing empathy for how stigma, discrimination and prejudice may affect LGBTIQ+ workers
- acknowledging trauma may be a factor
- remembering an individual's race, ethnicity, religion, age, class and professional identities will also be important in understanding their support needs.

Additional considerations for trans and gender diverse individuals

Trans and gender diverse individuals who are undergoing gender transition or affirmation may experience additional stress that affects their mental health. In such cases, you (supported by your organisation) should appoint a case manager who acts as a primary contact for the team member; this person should be open, compassionate and sensitive to the worker's situation. The case manager should be confident in addressing any conflicts that may arise with colleagues; you should also ask that person if they need support through the process (for example, a support person).

Each person will have different needs; the following questions can help you understand how best to support them:

- Is there a specific date from which the person will present as their gender, or do they prefer to transition over time? If they select a date, is there enough time to enact practical measures?
- Will the worker have a new name and/or pronoun? If so, what will they be and from when should you and colleagues start using them?
- Does the worker want to announce their transition to some or all of their colleagues? Do they want to do it in person; via an email sent by them or a trusted individual; at a meeting where they are present; at a meeting where they are absent; or through a video or other format?
- What resources can be made available to staff to educate them on trans and gender diversity issues? For example, an external presenter or member of the trans or gender diverse community with personal experience may conduct a presentation.
- Depending on the issue, how should questions from staff be addressed? Should they be directed to the worker, the HR team or the case manager?
- What topics should be avoided and are not appropriate?

Key considerations

Some common issues may arise that the organisation should minimise where possible:

- Ensure the person can use the toilet or change room that reflects and affirms their gender.
- If your workplace requires a uniform, give trans workers a new uniform that matches their gender identity.
- Ensure the process for workers to change their name on all documents aside from official records is as simple as possible and is available immediately after the worker requests the change. Help the worker change their name on formal documents such as superannuation and tax.
- Avoid unreasonable delays on activities such as changing or reissuing their email account, computer login, ID car or badge, personnel records and payroll. (Employers should not require the worker to register a change of sex with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages before letting them change their employment records.)
- Allow transitioning workers to use sick leave for medical appointments and surgeries, and make reasonable adjustments if a worker discloses they are experiencing gender dysphoria. (Employers are not entitled to know if a person is underdoing hormone treatment, surgery or counselling unless the worker chooses to disclose this information).
- Be prepared to manage the reactions of the person's co-workers, such as by:
  - developing a standard response about issues related to physical appearance and toilet use
  - encouraging workers to raise concerns in private with the case manager to avoid placing the transitioning worker in an uncomfortable or harmful position
  - being aware workers may unintentionally call the person by an incorrect pronoun, the wrong name (misgendering) or their former name (deadnaming). Understand this can be hurtful to trans or gender diverse people; consistent or intentional misgendering or deadnaming may constitute unlawful discrimination.
- Consider and prepare for consequences for workers who treat a transitioning worker unfavourably.
- Speak to the person to determine if they are comfortable disclosing their gender identity, particularly to new workers who commence work following the person's transition.

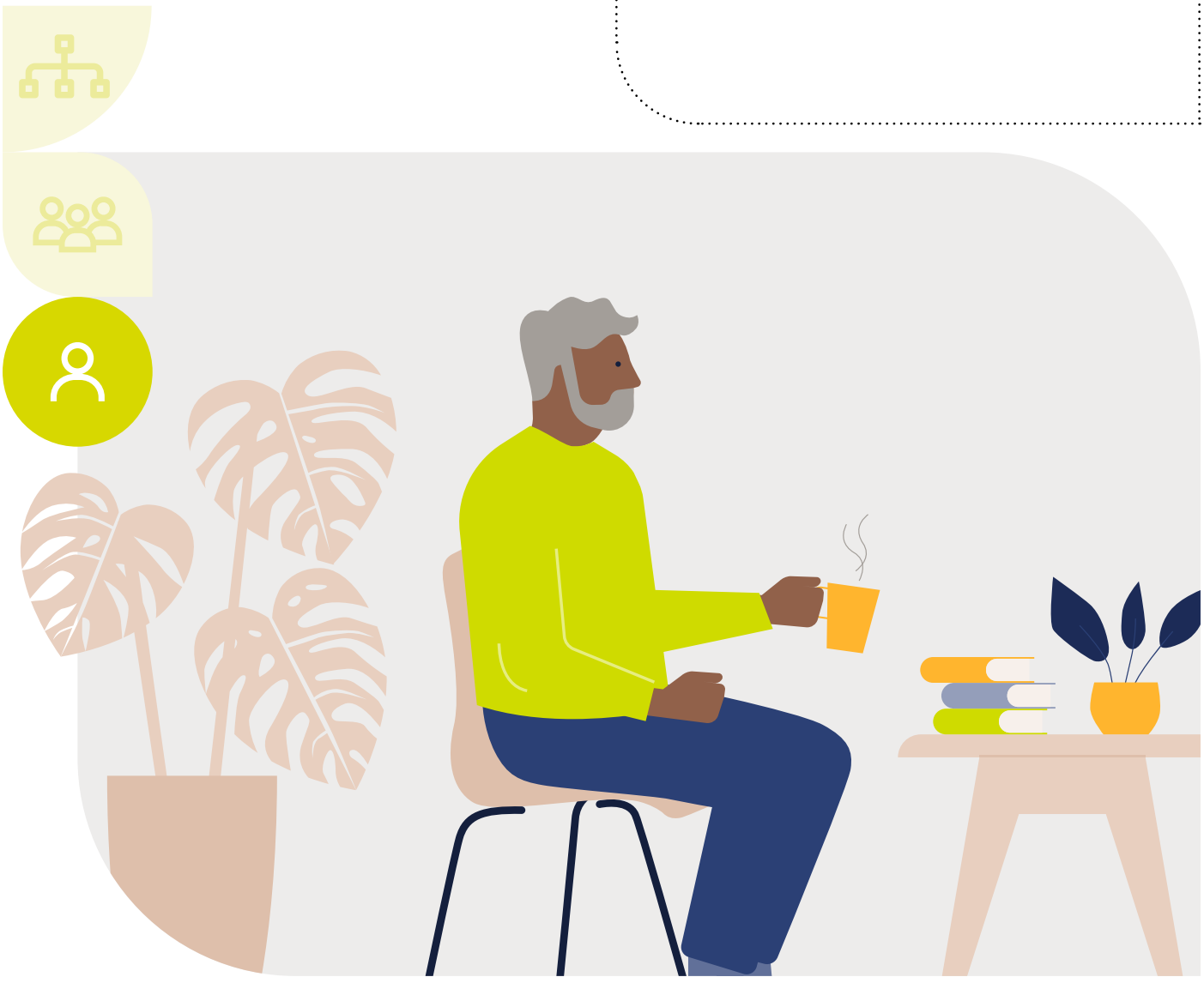
Managing discrimination risks

Consider the possible discrimination risks that may arise, including the following examples:

- Requiring a team member to use a toilet or change room that does not match their affirmed gender will constitute gender identity discrimination.
- Refusing a team member time off to attend a medical appointment may constitute impairment or gender identity discrimination.
- Refusing a name change at the worker's request may constitute indirect discrimination.

7

How can I protect my own mental health within the workplace?



7.1 Managing risks to my own mental health and wellbeing at work

7.1.1 Adjusting to becoming a manager

As a manager, you have the opportunity to support and guide your team, championing the culture that supports each person to grow and thrive in your workplace. As their first point of call in your workplace, you can have a direct positive impact on their lives.

Alongside the autonomy and involvement in decision making that you may get, you may also encounter several stressors. If you are new to your role, you may also experience uncertainty and stress.

It is important that you protect your own mental health during this change and adjustment, and work to empower and advocate for your own and your team's mental health. A key action is to lead by example. By openly prioritising your own mental health, you can lead the conversation; showing your vulnerability and acknowledging you are human breaks down stigma and highlights the importance of self-care and seeking help.

Here are some things to remember as you support yourself as you transition into the role of a manager:

- the difference between leading and managing, and the importance of inspiring, guiding and sharing purpose with your team, rather than focusing only on budgets and wider goals
- the new social dynamics that will emerge with former colleagues as you learn to manage those who were previously your peers
- the need to let go of your previous role and learn to delegate appropriately to ensure your own wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of your team members.

Reflection

How do you think you can prioritise your mental health as you are adjusting to your new role?

How often do you give and accept feedback from your team members?

Tips for delegating effectively

Here are some tips to help you delegate tasks and activities to team members:[36]

- Try to assign tasks based on your team members' strengths, and their goals.
- Be clear and communicate the desired timeframes and outcomes to team members, and ensure they understand the context of the tasks.
- Ensure team members have access to the right resources, training and authority to complete their tasks.
- Avoid micromanaging, but establish clear communication channels so team members feel comfortable approaching you when needed.
- Allow for failure to give your team members the chance to learn and empower them to try different approaches.
- Be patient with team members and give them time to improve.
- Provide feedback, and ask for feedback in return to help you delegate more efficiently.
- Always give credit to team members for the work they achieve and recognise their successes.

Remember!

You have the chance to set an example for your team and normalise seeking help when needed. Whether you are transitioning into your role as a new manager, or you have been in your role for some time, you should always reach out and ask for help when you need it. The responsibility for your team is not yours alone, and if you are struggling—either personally or professionally—you should reach out to your organisation or your support system for help.

7.1.2 Managing competing priorities

As a manager, your team members will look to you to understand how to manage their wellbeing, competing priorities at work, and their work–life balance.

Managing competing work priorities

Typically, you will be responsible for many tasks that will impact not only yourself, but also your wider team and organisation. To look after yourself and your team, meet deadlines and complete other tasks, several healthy habits can help you take care of yourself. Examples include setting small goals, making and sticking to a schedule, reflecting on the outcomes, and being kind to yourself.

Be proactive in work management!

Proactively monitor and review your own workload to allow for prioritisation and planning, so you can keep your team members, as well as your own leadership informed.[37] Setting smaller goals and keeping track of your tasks can help you better track your progress. It also enables you to proactively communicate your workload when assessing your capacity to take on other roles or responsibilities.

Managing competing work and personal priorities

Self-care and help-seeking behaviour is important in managing your own mental health. You may have several other priorities that require your attention beyond work, such as carer responsibilities, studying, or maintaining a healthy work–life balance. Here are some habits that can help:

- Think about what is important to you and your values.
- Manage your time effectively, by using tools such as calendars, apps and to-do lists.
- Set boundaries within the workplace, such as limiting your access to emails after work, or letting your team know that you will be offline for a few hours.
- Take time to rest, relax and exercise regularly.[38]

Other things you can do include having a set time that you will leave work (and stick to it!), and schedule activities after work to encourage leaving on time.[39]

Reflection

What steps do you currently take to manage competing priorities within your workplace?

How do you balance your work commitments and personal priorities?

7.1.3 Managing stress and burnout

The most effective leaders for mentally healthy workplaces engage in reflective practice and professional and personal development so that they can self-lead and lead others. Being open, approachable and reflective, and acting with integrity and balanced judgement tends to foster higher levels of engagement, inclusiveness, commitment performance and wellbeing among team members.[40] Due to the sometimes-stressful nature of being a manager, you may experience periods of stress and burnout.

There are many types of burnout, including the following:[41]

- Frenetic burnout is usually experienced by people who are very committed to their roles, to the point of ending up overworked and exhausted. This is due to a failure to create boundaries or push back on unrealistic deadlines, leading to them agreeing to take on additional responsibility and regularly work overtime.
- Under-challenged burnout occurs when people feel indifferent about their work and have lost interest, potentially due to a lack of developmental or growth opportunities. Beyond general dissatisfaction, individuals may receive minimal feedback and acknowledgement. This type of burnout is often experienced by individuals who have parenting, caregiving and other labour-intensive roles.
- Worn-out burnout is experienced by those who feel so disengaged at work that they disregard their responsibilities, giving up and feeling like they have hit a wall. This usually occurs when people feel undervalued, are not recognised or properly managed, or lack control over their role.

Everyone has signs that they are under stress or strain, which may include:

- body cues such as muscle tension, headaches, restlessness or nausea
- mood changes like anxiety, feeling on edge or low motivation
- behaviour changes like overeating or undereating, irritable reactions, difficulty concentrating on work, difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol or substance use.

If you notice you are feeling mentally and physically exhausted, you are disconnecting from the people around you and you are unable to stay motivated and focus on simple tasks, you may be experiencing burnout.[42]

You can manage stress and avoid burnout by prioritising your own wellbeing and self-care. This might include taking a break from electronics, spending some time outside, getting exercise, or practising mindfulness and mediation.

Other things you can do include:

- speaking to someone you trust about how you are feeling, including a manager, mentor, friend or family member
- focus on completing tasks that are on your plate, even if it is not perfect
- being gentle with yourself and setting boundaries.[42]

If these experiences are difficult to manage or they are causing you concern, consider talking to your GP, Employee Assistance Program, or a mental health professional.

Reflection

Have you noticed any signs of stress or burnout in your own life?

Do you currently have any strategies to help you manage stress and burnout?

7.1.4 Prioritising self-care

What is self-care?

The Black Dog Institute refers to self-care as the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in regularly to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing. This might include engaging in regular exercise, reading, meditation, disconnecting from technology, or speaking with a friend or family member.[43]

As a manager, you have a significant role in establishing and maintaining a healthy work environment. Supporting team members who are at risk of, or who are experiencing, mental ill-health can create an emotional load. When you are managing others, it can be challenging to find time to look after yourself. Self-care can fall to the bottom to the priority list; however, it is an important factor in managing your mental and physical wellbeing.

To help manage the stressors of your daily life and the challenges of being a manager, incorporate self-care activities into your routine. It helps you avoid stress and burnout, makes you more productive and puts you in a better position to support your team and your organisation in developing a mentally healthy workplace.

Building a self-care plan

The Black Dog Institute has a 4-step template to help you build your own self-care plan:

1. Evaluate your coping skills.
2. Identify your daily self-care needs.
3. Reflect. Examine. Replace.
4. Create your self-care plan.

You can download a copy of the template and start your self-care journey here (https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/how-to-use-self-care-planning-to-improve-your-emotional-wellbeing-even-when-you-dont-think-you-need-it/).

If you are supporting team members who are experiencing mental ill-health, it is important that you care for yourself both emotionally and physically. This includes developing a support network, reaching out to your friends and family when you need to talk, and regularly making time to do activities you enjoy.[44]

Self-care will look different for each individual; it is about what you need to maintain and enhance your health and wellbeing. For example, you can:

- eat a healthy and balanced diet that includes nutritious foods
- engage in exercise regularly, preferably outside in nature
- have a good sleep pattern and get enough sleep
- build relaxation into your routine, such as through meditation, yoga and breathing exercises
- think about what is important to help you find meaning and purpose through difficult times
- carve out time regularly to engage in your interests and hobbies
- consider how you can support your community or undertake volunteering
- plan activities or experiences that you can look forward to, such as a vacation.[44]

Reflection

How do you prioritise self-care?

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8

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