

Managing Through COVID-19



How to Support Your Employees' Mental Health An Employer's Guide

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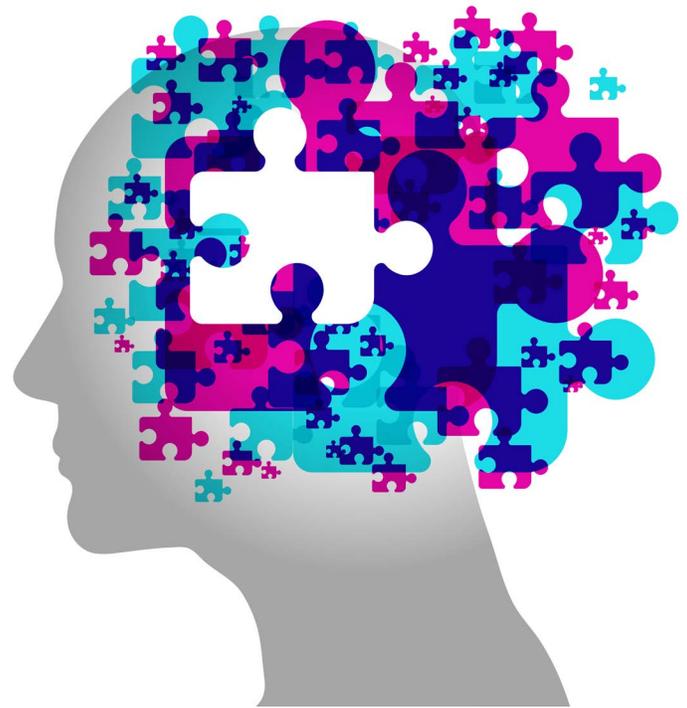
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Preface

This is an unprecedented time of change for all of us. Some workplaces are needing to drastically adapt the way they do business, while others have had to close temporarily. Even though the current situation is new, you can still use proven mental health resources and strategies to support your employees.

The **National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace** provides all workplaces with guidance on how to protect the mental health of their employees. This guide provides recommendations on how to protect your employee’s mental health during the time of COVID-19. These recommendations are designed to ensure that employers are considering the 13 factors within the Standard that help to create and maintain a mentally healthy and safe workplace. The development of the recommendations also takes into consideration best practices around **change management**, **workplace trauma**, and **resilience**. Each recommendation makes reference to the psychological health and safety support that it relates to.

This employer guide was developed by adapting information from the **National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace** and the **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health** website.





Recommendations to Protect the Mental Health and Safety of all Workplaces

- **Keep your employees informed about new and upcoming changes as much as possible** (*clear leadership and expectations*) – When people are informed of what changes are coming and how things are being addressed, they are better able to cope with the change.
- **Ask employees what their needs are during this time** (*involvement and influence*) – Involving your employees in assessing their work needs during this time will provide them with some level of control over the situation.
- **Acknowledge the many emotions that your employees will be experiencing** (*change management*) – This is not a normal time, and it is very normal for people to be experiencing anxiety and many different emotions at this time. It is important to acknowledge that and to let your employees know they are not alone.
- **Ensure that there are social supports for your employees** (*change management, psychological protection*) – Remember, physical distancing does not mean social isolation. Use existing health and safety groups that focus on mental health or assign employees to pay specific attention to reaching out and connecting with other employees virtually.
- **Promote positive ways to cope through this challenge** (*resilience*) – Share positive coping strategies with your employees to protect their current mental health. Here are just some examples:

- Limiting the amount of time, they spend focusing on COVID-19
 - Sharing stories of recovery
 - Encouraging ways to keep their bodies and minds healthy, like eating good food and getting physical activity
 - Sharing positive stories of physical distancing, like spending more time with your loved ones in your home or discovering new ways to connect to loved ones outside of your home through technology
- **Share the reality that we are all in this together with your employees (*resilience*)** – Let your employees know that there is a purpose to why we are all making the changes and sacrifices that we are making right now. That meaning and purpose is to keep each other safe. We are all in this together.
 - **Ensure your employees know how to access mental health support (*psychological support*)** – Let your employees know about existing EAP or EFAP programs that your workplace provides. For additional supports call the Distress Centre of Ottawa at 613-238-3311 or visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/CovidMentalHealth.





Recommendations for Protecting the Mental Health and Safety of Essential Workers

- **Set up your workplace to allow for physical distancing** (*physical safety*) – Be clear and direct about the steps you are taking to keep employees and members of the community you serve safe.
- **Follow recommendations from trusted sources such as Ottawa Public Health to ensure that your workplace is taking appropriate precautions** (*physical safety*) – Ottawa Public Health has developed a website that provides up-to-date information to [workplaces during the pandemic](#).
- **Designate a ‘safe room’ where employees can go** (*psychological protection, workplace trauma*) – In this time, more than ever, people need to take a step away from this current reality. A quiet space to collect themselves and to take time for themselves can give them the opportunity to decompress and to be able to continue working.
- **Consider flexibility with days and shifts that employees are working** (*balance*) – Where possible, be flexible with the days and times that your employees are working. Given the current situation many of your employees may be experiencing added responsibilities outside of work. This could include challenges with childcare or eldercare.
- **Encourage employees to take their days off** (*balance, psychological demands*) – Many people are working long hours during the pandemic. This makes the time that they do take off that much more critical to both their mental and physical health.

- **Ensure those in leadership are taking time off and role modelling positive coping strategies** (*psychological protection*) – Ensure that leadership sets a good example and takes time off as well. This will help them protect their own physical and mental health and ensure that they can stay strong during this time, and it will demonstrate to their employees that everyone needs to take time to rest.
- **Acknowledge the work and dedication that your employees demonstrate** (*recognition and reward, engagement*) – Essential workers of all kinds are showing everyone just how much we rely on them. It is important now, and every day to let them know that they are appreciated, and we are all grateful.
- **Ensure that you reach out to employees that are off work** (*workplace trauma*) – Making sure all employees are managing this situation as well as possible is important. Reach out to employees who are off work through emails or phone calls. Find out what contact works best for your employee.





Recommendations for Protecting the Mental Health and Safety of Employees Working from Home

- **Ensure your employees have the tools and resources they need to continue to do their job** (*Workload management*) – For many employees, working from home is a new experience. Ensure that your employees have the tools that they need to continue to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.
- **Encourage employees to take their days off** (*Balance*) – Many people are working long hours during the pandemic. This makes the time that they do take off that much more critical to both their mental and physical health.
- **Ensure those in leadership are taking time off and role modelling positive coping strategies** (*psychological protection*) – Ensure that leadership sets a good example and takes time off as well. This will help them protect their own physical and mental health and ensure that they can stay strong during this time, and it will demonstrate to their employees that everyone needs to take time to rest.
- **Acknowledge the work and effort that your employees are putting into adapting to this new situation** (*recognition and reward, engagement*) – Many people find change to be difficult. This current situation is a change that no one anticipated, and it is important to acknowledge and thank your employees for their efforts.
- **Ensure that you reach out to employees that are off work** (*workplace trauma*) – Making sure all employees are managing this situation as well as possible is important. Reach out to employees who are off work through emails or phone calls. Find out what contact works best for your employee.

- **Consider flexibility with hours of work** (*balance, psychological demands*) – Many of your employees are balancing a new way of work with new or additional challenges at home.
- **Remember that this is not ‘business as usual’ and work with your employees to find a solution** (*workload management, involvement and influence, balance*) – Even if your employees have the tools required to work from home, they are facing many different priorities. Employees could be balancing childcare or other caregiver roles or be at home without the support of other loved ones. Work with them to help them meet the needs of their job as well as the needs of their current situation at home.
- **Acknowledge the importance of the sacrifices your employees are making by working from home** (*resilience, recognition and reward*) – Let your employees know that you see and acknowledge the challenges they are going through by teleworking. However, also let them know that there is meaning and purpose behind why they are doing this. We are all in this together.
- **Encourage patience and humour from all your employees while adjusting to telework** (*resilience, psychological support*) – This current situation is not normal, and everyone copes with stress and change differently. Remind your employees to be patient with themselves and with their co-workers.
- **Share benefits of this current situation with your employees** (*growth and development, change management, resilience*) – While this was not an expected situation, benefits can still develop from this. People are adapting and learning new skills that can be useful after the COVID-19 pandemic ends.



Recommendations for Protecting the Mental Health and Safety of Employees in Workplaces that are Required to Close

- **Keep your employees informed about new and upcoming changes as much as possible** (*clear leadership and expectations*) – When people are informed of what changes are coming and how things are being addressed, they are better able to cope with the change.
- **Communicate openly and honestly about the potential for job loss and any plans in place to support your employees** (*psychological protection, change management*) – Transparency is essential to protect the psychological well-being of your staff. People need to know what to changes to expect if they are going to be able to develop a plan to manage them.
- **Inform your employees about the assistance available to them from the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments** (*psychological protection*) – People will feel supported when they know that there are resources available to them to help them get through this difficult time.
- **As a business, look into the assistance available to support your business for the Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments** (*psychological protection*) – These supports can help you to manage your stress during this time as well as help you plan for the immediate future.
- **Acknowledge the value of the work that your employees have already contributed to the organization** (*civility and respect, change management, recognition and reward*) – Demonstrate the value that your employees have contributed to your organization. For example, let them know that the work they have done has benefited their local community, or your organization, or whatever the appropriate example is for your workplace.
- **Continue to reach out to your employees during this time** (*psychological support, engagement*) – Where appropriate, keep in contact with your staff. Keep them informed of any changes that they can expect.
- **Ensure that your employees know where to go to get help if they need it** (*psychological protection, civility and respect*) - This is a challenging time for many people, but even more so for those that must worry about their financial security. Please let your employees know that they are not alone and there are people that they can talk to. For additional supports call the Distress Centre of Ottawa at 613-238-3311 or visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/CovidMentalHealth.

Resources

Information on COVID-19

[OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/coronavirus)

[OttawaPublicHealth.ca/CovidMentalHealth](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/covidmentalhealth)

[Public Health Ontario](#)

[Public Health Agency of Canada](#)

Mental health resources related to COVID-19

[The Royal – COVID-19 and your Mental Health](#)

[Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association – COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Bell Let's Talk – COVID-19 Resources](#)

[The Working Mind COVID-19 Self-care & Resilience Guide](#)

[Wellness together Canada – Mental Health and Substance Use Support](#)

[Resource Hub: Mental health and wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Websites to support workplaces to protect psychological health and safety in the workplace

[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

[Guarding Minds at Work](#)

[Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

[Think Mental Health](#)

[haveTHATtalk - Workplaces](#)