

Risk factor or indicator identified (Work Content)	Possible solutions
<b>Boring, repetitive work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redesign jobs to increase the variety of tasks</li> <li>Use job rotation to increase task variety where redesign is not possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Physical working environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the work environment in consultation with employees.</li> <li>Ensure that there are effective systems in place to identify and control risks.</li> <li>Ensure employees know and can access the consultative mechanisms in place to respond to their concerns (Health and Safety Representatives and consultative committees).</li> </ul>
<b>Shift work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use best practice shift systems to minimise fatigue. Specifically, ensure that rosters permit adequate time between shifts for employees to arrive at work well rested.</li> <li>Avoid mandatory night shifts for older employees.</li> </ul>
<b>Workload</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide supportive leadership—regularly review workloads, prioritise tasks, define performance quality expectations, cut out unnecessary work, give warning of urgent jobs, meet training needs, and encourage employees to raise and discuss problems so solutions can be developed.</li> <li>Ensure that staffing levels and performance capacities are adequate, including to meet periods of peak demand.</li> <li>Where practicable, give employees some control over the way they do their work.</li> <li>Avoid unrealistic deadlines.</li> <li>Where practicable, substitute heavy manual tasks with machinery to reduce physical workloads.</li> <li>Avoid encouraging employees to regularly work long hours.</li> <li>Put systems in place to respond to individual concerns. Consider whether low morale, unsupportive leadership and poor work team climate are the real issues.</li> <li>Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'demands' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>
<b>Work pace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set reasonable work rate standards.</li> <li>Avoid machine-paced work.</li> <li>Design to allow self-pacing at varying rates where practicable.</li> <li>Ensure adequate work breaks and, where practicable, allow some flexibility in the timing of breaks to match employees' needs.</li> <li>Use job rotation to enable respite for employees working at fast pace.</li> <li>Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'demands' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>

For table sources and further information on specific solutions see *Working Well: An organisational approach to preventing psychological injury* (Comcare 47: 2005).

### Want to know more?

For more information on strategies to prevent and manage work-related stress and psychological injury:

**visit** Comcare's Stress and Psychological Injury Information Portal at [www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)

**read** *Working Well: An organisational approach to preventing psychological injury*

(Comcare 47: 2005);

Easy Reference Guide: *Steps to prevent and manage psychological injury* (Comcare 56: 2005);

Easy Reference Guide: *Recognition, resolution and recovery: early intervention to support psychological health and wellbeing* (Comcare 46: 2005);

The Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk); or

**call** Comcare on 1300 366 979.

For information on treatment of depression and anxiety, visit *Beyondblue*, the National depression initiative's website at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au).



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# Working well: strategies to prevent psychological injury at work

## Easy Reference Guide

**This easy reference guide provides a summary of possible solutions that may be considered to prevent work-related psychological injury.**

To prevent work-related stress and psychological injury Comcare recommends that agencies:

- Promote safe and supportive workplaces.
- Identify the sources of potential harm to employee health and wellbeing.
- Systematically assess the risk of employees being harmed.
- In consultation with employees, middle and senior managers, develop and implement a plan to
  - address the workplace factors that are risks of psychological injury (primary intervention)
  - minimise the impact of stress on employees by responding to warning signs and intervening early (secondary intervention)
  - provide safe and effective rehabilitation and return to work for individuals once an injury has occurred (tertiary intervention).
- Monitor and review the implementation and effectiveness of interventions and aim for continuous improvement.

Many of the factors that contribute to work-related stress and psychological injury stem from poor people management practices. In particular, lack of supportive leadership and poor work team climate have been identified as key risks. Supportive leaders and a high quality work team climate strongly influence individual morale, which buffers employees against the impact of work-related stress risk factors. However, a range of possible work content and context factors should be considered. Different prevention strategies may be required, depending on the factors prevailing in the particular organisation, workplace or work team.

Risk factor or indicator identified (Work Context)	Possible solutions	Risk factor or indicator identified (Work Context)	Possible solutions	Risk factor or indicator identified (Work Context)	Possible solutions
<b>Change management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide effective leadership during periods of change.</li> <li>• Build the capacity of managers to support their employees through times of change.</li> <li>• Review how the organisation provides employees with information about proposed changes.</li> <li>• Establish consultation and communication processes to engage employees in change and provide access to relevant support during changes.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'change' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>	<b>Customer-related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement policy and procedures that deal with threatening or inappropriate customer behaviour to ensure that employees feel secure during interactions with customers (also see 'violence' below).</li> <li>• Provide customer-focussed training to enhance an employee's ability to separate personal emotions from the inherent demands of the job. 'Role separation' may be important to coping with the unique stressors of human services work.</li> <li>• Focus on control/autonomy and social support as these have been recognised as important in determining the impact of customer-related factors.</li> </ul>	<b>Performance management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement effective performance management systems with clear expectations and procedures that are understood by managers and employees. Aim for a two-way process, covering positive feedback on performance, areas for improvement, future goals and objectives and training needs.</li> <li>• Train managers to provide effective development-oriented feedback.</li> <li>• Encourage a culture of continuous feedback, rather than restricting feedback to performance reviews.</li> <li>• Also see 'Performance capacity and career development'.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'support' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>
<b>Climate/culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on recruiting and developing supportive leaders with strong people management skills.</li> <li>• Use organisational development programs to improve the quality of leadership and people management practices (focusing on clarity around work expectations and objectives, strong employee engagement processes, good co-worker relations, goal congruence, provision of development-oriented feedback, and transparency and equity of organisational processes and procedures).</li> <li>• Develop accountability for people-related outcomes at all levels of the organisation.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standards as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>	<b>Decision latitude/control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop supportive leaders who delegate and encourage participation and initiative.</li> <li>• Encourage leaders to provide support when things go wrong—discourage the development of a 'blame culture'.</li> <li>• Use development programs and team projects to encourage initiative and involvement in decision making.</li> <li>• Ensure that regular team meetings are held that provide scope for employees to participate in decisions that concern their work.</li> <li>• Ensure that consultative mechanisms enable participation in broader organisational issues.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'control' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>	<b>Role in organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure roles and responsibilities are clearly specified, regularly reviewed and modified where necessary, in consultation with staff, eg as part of the business planning process.</li> <li>• Where role conflicts emerge, review relevant roles and responsibilities. If current roles are appropriate, clarify these in consultation with staff. If not appropriate, establish revised roles in consultation with staff.</li> <li>• Avoid situations where an individual takes on dual roles where conflicts of interests might occur.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'role' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>
<b>Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the systems in place for top-down communications (such as newsletters, briefings, regular meetings).</li> <li>• Consider systems to provide staff feedback and staff involvement in decision-making—such as team and group meetings.</li> <li>• Consider systems to improve cross functional communications—such as forums to discuss common problems and solutions, and shared leadership and governance models.</li> </ul>	<b>Harassment/bullying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote a supportive leadership culture that will not accept bullying and which encourages and acts on reports of such behaviour.</li> <li>• Develop and implement an organisational policy on harassment/bullying.</li> <li>• Clearly define the complaints process, inform and train managers and employees on their rights and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Develop networks or groups of trained contact officers, advisers in the human resource area of the agency, employee assistance programs, and informal complaint procedures.</li> <li>• Provide support during any investigation process.</li> <li>• Consider guidance published by the Australian Public Service Commission on this issue.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'relationships' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>	<b>Occupational violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a violence vulnerability audit, considering all of the environments in which the organisation operates.</li> <li>• Develop a policy in relation to violence and aggression against employees, including a statement that occupational violence is unacceptable and a commitment to prevention and support strategies.</li> <li>• Develop a control plan for any identified 'at risk' areas (eg clients do not have access to dangerous implements or objects that could be used as weapons or missiles, no ready access to cash/valuables/drugs on site, waiting rooms comfortable and waiting times reduced).</li> <li>• Take into account how staff move between working areas, parking lots and transport when assessing vulnerability and developing the control plan.</li> <li>• Consider using architectural and engineering designs as part of the control plan for 'at risk' areas (eg facility has safety glass, good internal and external lighting, escape routes planned to prevent entrapment of employees, wide counters, duress alarms, communication devices, design for visibility or include CCTV in high risk areas).</li> <li>• Ensure that risk controls cover employees exposed to violence (consider ratios of staff to clients, skills, training and experience, use of rotations to reduce exposure, procedures and back up for staff working alone or in areas of isolation, support and supervision).</li> <li>• Ensure procedures are in place to manage critical incidents, emergencies and evacuations and that drills are used to test their effectiveness.</li> <li>• Where risk controls include security devices, ensure periodic servicing, testing and maintenance is carried out.</li> <li>• Investigate and assess all reports and threats, including near misses, and regularly review the effectiveness of controls.</li> </ul>
<b>Co-worker relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the characteristics of teams that are working well within the organisation to help identify what can be done to improve workgroup interactions in areas with problems.</li> <li>• Establish clear job descriptions and task assignments, supportive supervisory styles, participative decision making and prior agreed mechanisms to reduce conflict.</li> <li>• Don't ignore signs of conflict, and use EAPs or external mediators if help is needed to resolve issues.</li> <li>• Use work team projects to improve interactions, eg a work-based project with focussed coaching so that new behaviours are integrated into the core business of the team.</li> <li>• Consider short-term secondments to and between work units to improve understanding of the work.</li> <li>• Consider using the HSE's Management Standard on 'relationships' as a better practice guide to the states to be achieved.</li> </ul>	<b>Performance capacity and career development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review recruitment strategies to ensure that individuals are recruited, inducted and trained to have a clear understanding of work expectations, objectives and requirements, the skills and abilities to carry out their tasks competently, and appropriate support to enable them to do so.</li> <li>• Consider using probationary employment to assess suitability.</li> <li>• Consider using mobility, mentoring and career counselling programs to better match individuals to jobs, broaden the skill base and assist in developing career paths.</li> <li>• Use team based projects to broaden skills and develop responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<b>Work/life balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to appropriate flexible working time arrangements (eg part-time work, home based work, job sharing, phased retirement, additional purchased leave, non-standard working hours).</li> <li>• Reinforce policies through provisions in certified and workplace agreements.</li> </ul>
<b>Critical incidents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement an organisational policy on critical incident response.</li> <li>• Provide access to practical, emotional and social support.</li> <li>• Provide factual information, monitor employee reactions.</li> <li>• Provide access to early intervention for employees who report distress.</li> </ul>				

