

Business Focus

Helping You Improve Productivity through Healthy & Safe Workplaces

Healthy, safe workplaces not only mean better quality of life for workers, they also translate to more profitable businesses and lower insurance premiums for employers. Employee well-being is good for business and saves employers money because healthy workers are more productive, less dependent on health benefit plans, absent less often and have higher job satisfaction.

When it comes to promoting workplace health and well-being, it can be helpful to consult an occupational therapist, who can work with employers to create emotionally and physically safe work environments that meet the needs of employees.

Healthy workplaces should include considerations with respect to **psychological/emotional safety** (i.e. mental health) as well as **physical safety**. "Emotionally safe" workplaces promote inclusion and acceptance of all employees, regardless of age or ability. Ensuring respect, open communication and acceptance will minimize stress and promote good mental health for all employees*.

Emotional safety

A work environment that is emotionally safe includes:

- ❑ Supportive social relationships with colleagues and managers/supervisors. Employees should feel free to communicate openly* without fear of retribution or rejection of their ideas.
- ❑ Employee assistance programs that are well promoted and easily accessible to employees.
- ❑ Reasonable workload with sufficient resources to complete tasks.
- ❑ Some degree of employee empowerment in the form of input, decision making and a sense of control.
- ❑ Promotion of work-life balance and allowance for reasonable accommodations when needed.* (e.g. working from home, flexible hours, private work areas for people needing to concentrate, job coaching and peer support).
- ❑ A process in place to accommodate workers with disabilities.
- ❑ A commitment to workplace mental health.
- ❑ A sense of fairness, rewards based on merit, and recognition or appreciation for a job well done.
- ❑ Opportunities for continuing professional development, education and training.



Work Information Newsletter is developed by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist and owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre in Ottawa that specializes in workplace mental health.

This issue focuses on how to design a healthy workplace as a crucial step to a productive and profitable business.

Past newsletters may be found at the www.ergo-wise.com.

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Emotionally Safe Workplaces

- ❑ Supportive
- ❑ Open communication
- ❑ Zero harassment
- ❑ Job match
- ❑ Job accommodation
- ❑ Employee empowerment



Physically Safe Workplaces

- ❑ Good ergonomics
- ❑ Health & lifestyle choices
- ❑ Emergency response teams
- ❑ Zero violence
- ❑ OHS standards
- ❑ WHMIS

Healthy workplaces translate into profit

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- Job matching*: Ensuring employees' abilities, interests and goals correspond with their jobs will improve performance and reduce boredom while decreasing absenteeism, turnover and training costs.
- A zero-tolerance policy for harassment. Well-defined policies should be in place and workers should receive training.

*From a literature review regarding mental health and mental illness in the workplace: Cockburn, Kirsh, Krupa, & Gewurtz, 2004. *Occupational Therapy Now*, 6(5), 7-14.

Physical safety

While your workplace might not seem physically "dangerous," it might be more hazardous than you think. Every workplace has the potential for occupational hazards, which can be prevented or minimized through simple precautions.

Use this occupational therapy checklist to ensure a physically safe workplace:

- ✓ **Ensure good ergonomics** to improve positioning. This helps to decrease muscle stress, prevent injuries, and reduce absenteeism. Simple *ergonomic tips* can ensure proper workstation positioning and promote worker comfort and health.

(Ergonomic tips are available at the download section of ergo-wise.com).

- ✓ **Consider office design and accessibility** in your workplace in order to accommodate employees with a spectrum of physical abilities and needs. Physical disabilities requiring accommodation can include mobility-related, visual and hearing impairments or chronic medical conditions. Accommodations could include special computer software or hardware, wheelchair ramps and accessible washrooms.
- ✓ **Address health and lifestyle** issues. Cafeteria and vending machines should offer healthy food choices, and employees should be encouraged to remain physically active. Many companies subsidize gym memberships or arrange corporate rates.
- ✓ **Establish emergency response programs** where designated personnel are trained in first aid and emergency response in order to handle situations until an ambulance arrives.
- ✓ **Zero tolerance for violence** includes well-defined policies that are in place and regular training is given to workers.

- ✓ **Establish occupational health & safety standards** that are specific to your organization. Summarize them in a health and safety manual that is easily accessible to employees. Provide training programs.

- ✓ **Set up standards in Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)** in environments that expose employees to hazardous substances. This includes cautionary labelling according to requirements set out under the Hazardous Products Act and Controlled Products Regulations administered by Health Canada.

(For more information, visit http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/whmis-simdut/ref_man/cpr_fig_1-rpc_fig_1_e.html)

It is in an employer's best interest to create mentally and physically healthy work environments. An investment in the work environment will translate into healthy and satisfied employees and ultimately boost the bottom line.



ERGO-Wise specializes in workplace mental health. We assist employers in meeting their duty to accommodate employees with physical and/or emotional needs.

We prepare employees to return to work by developing the cognitive work skills they require to be successful at the job as well as addressing the emotional issues related to return-to-work after a disability leave.

Contact us to find out how our team of professionals can make a difference in your workplace!

- Return-to-work programs
- Job accommodation
- Vocational testing
- Work placements
- Physical reconditioning
- Ergonomics
- Psychological services
- Pain management

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