

Community of practice psychological health and safety questions

Dec. 2, 2025 meeting

Answers provided by Dr. Joti Samra

Q: Can you give us some general information on how to handle a situation when a manager says the problem is that the claim type is interpersonal and not harassment?

A: In most cases, workplace challenges involve interpersonal issues rather than legally defined bullying or harassment. Managers should address these issues through clear performance management, leadership and clearly communicated expectations. They should also provide performance feedback in both verbal and written formats, and schedule follow up discussions to monitor progress. Consider supporting and building emotional intelligence skills and competencies for people leaders and employees to effectively manage interpersonal conflict and challenges.

Resources:

- Clear leadership and expectations: worksafesask.ca/resources/psych-health-safety-resource-centre/workplace-psychological-health-and-safety/clear-leadership-and-expectations
- Psychological demands: worksafesask.ca/resources/psych-health-safety-resource-centre/workplace-psychological-health-and-safety/psychological-demands
- Performance management: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/topicsearch?searchstring=Performance&page=0&pagesize=10
- Emotional intelligence for employees: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/emotional-intelligence-for-employees
- Emotional intelligence for leaders: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/emotional-intelligence-for-leaders

Q: How should a workplace manage an employee who cannot perform effectively and uses psychological issues as an excuse for poor performance?

A: Within any workplace or employment setting, there exists contractual obligations where an employee is expected to effectively perform a set of tasks/roles/responsibilities in exchange for monetary compensation. When performance is not effective, regardless of the reasons or perceived “excuses,” the role of the workplace and managers/supervisors within that workplace is to engage in effective

problem solving, conflict management and support performance management. Stay away from assumptions and labels, such as “psychological health issues are being used as an excuse for not showing up on time” and instead focus on behaviours. For example, ask, “Your role requires you to be on site and shift-ready by 8:25 a.m. How can we ensure this happens moving forward?”

Resources:

- Performance management: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/topicsearch?searchstring=Performance&page=0&pagesize=10
- Problem solving and conflict management: worksafesask.ca/resources/psych-health-safety-resource-centre/psychologically-safe-leadership/problem-solving-and-conflict-management/

Q: What are the best metrics to monitor?

A: There are no “one-size-fits-all” metrics that are the best to monitor. Rather, organizations should determine what are the most relevant metrics to their organization. Examples of metrics to consider include:

- turnover/retention rates
- employee satisfaction/engagement ratings
- absenteeism rates
- grievance data
- safety incident data
- Employee Family Assistance Program/prescription/extended benefits utilization

Resources:

- Evaluation planning for psychological health and safety: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/evaluation-planning-for-psychological-health-and-safety

Q: Many psychological health and safety seminars and webinars address larger issues. What advice do you offer customer-facing employees who experience consistent, moderate stress due to job demands, compassion fatigue and changes? Many sessions emphasize building resilience and self-care to decompress. How do individuals find time to manage this ongoing stress when they return home to their families?

A: Customer-facing employees who experience ongoing, moderate stress can benefit from a variety of different workplace supports. Along with educational and team-building activities that build resilience and encourage self-care, employers can also provide coaching or mentorship supports, such as:

- Pairing new employees or those who are experiencing significant stress with experienced workplace mentors.
- Reviewing shift schedules and lengths, including ensuring employees receive adequate breaks.
- Offering a buffer period of 15 to 30 minutes before the end of a shift for administrative or other non-customer-facing tasks, allowing time to decompress.
- Providing opportunities to debrief particularly challenging interactions with a coworker or colleague.

Resources:

- Healthy break activities: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/healthy-break-activities
- Work-life balance: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/work-life-balance-tips

Q: What do you feel are the best ways to prevent injuries and illness in the workplace?

A: At a very high level, organizations should consider ways to embed principles of psychological health and safety within their organization at all stages of the employment life cycle, from hiring to termination. Some natural places to start include:

- Ensuring an organization has a psychological health and safety-related policy statement.
- Providing manager and supervisor training on psychologically safe leadership skills and approaches.
- Providing resilience or self-care strategies for all employees.

Resources:

- Psychological health and safety policy recommendations: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/psychological-health-and-safety-policy-recommendations
- Tools and resources for employers: worksafesask.ca/resources/psych-health-safety-resource-centre/tools-and-resources-for-employers
- Psychological health and safety roadmap: worksafesask.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Psychological-Health-Safety-PHS-Roadmap.pdf

Q: What practical strategies would you recommend for organizations that want to integrate psychological health and safety into their workplace, but feel stuck in the planning stage and unable to move forward?

A: Don't make psychological health and safety overwhelming. You can start anywhere. It almost doesn't matter where you start. Build internal expertise by appointing one to two staff members who become proficient in psychological health and safety, including understanding standards, such as CSA Z1003, and relevant provincial legislation.

Ultimately, psychological health and safety centres on interpersonal relationships – how employees connect, communicate and relate in the workplace. Organizations should proactively and effectively manage interpersonal challenges as a starting point.

Resources:

- Psychological health and safety roadmap: worksafesask.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Psychological-Health-Safety-PHS-Roadmap.pdf
- Where to start with psychological health and safety: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/where-do-we-start-with-psychological-health-and-safety
- Organizational psychological health and safety strategies: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/topic/Organizational-strategies/Psychological-health-and-safety

Q: Can you explain a toxic work environment and how it differs, or doesn't, from harassment at work? How does a toxic environment affect psychological health and overall company productivity/success?

A: A toxic work environment is a broad term. Workplace harm can result from many factors, such as overwhelming workloads, unsupportive leadership, unclear job roles, external demands and stressors, and many other factors including harassment.

Harassment is one specific psychosocial factor or hazard in the workplace, but organizations should recognize the full range of factors that are potential hazards in the workplace. Conducting an organizational review or employee survey aligned with psychological health and safety standards is the best way to do this.

Resources:

- Guarding minds at work: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/guarding-minds-at-work
- Harassment and bullying: workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/harassment-and-bullying-prevention