



Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

An initiative of the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace



How to Use **GuardingMinds** More Effectively @ WORK

Guarding Minds @ Work is a free resource to help you and your organization improve psychological health and safety in your workplace.

Guarding Minds @ Work consists of a set of self-serve tools to assess and address factors known to impact employee psychological health and safety and evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts. You can get started at www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.

This guide, developed with support from the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, can help you get buy-in and commitment from workplace stakeholders through thoughtful preparation and a plan for assessing and acting on the results.

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Getting buy-in

Each of the following points can help you be prepared to respond to questions and concerns from senior leaders in management or labour. This is important in order to get buy-in and commitment to proceed with a plan to address psychological health and safety in your workplace. Others have found that without this prior approval, the process can be halted by concerned leaders who are not clear on risks and benefits.

Consider the costs and benefits of addressing psychological health and safety in your workplace.

- The economic and social benefits of a psychologically healthy and safe workplace should include sustainability of an engaged workforce and a healthy bottom line.
- For help in establishing costs see [Making the Business Case](#), as well as [The Business Case for Psychological Health and Safety](#) which provides more information about benefits.
- A SWOT (strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis can be a useful tool for decision-making for all sorts of situations. Free information for conducting a SWOT analysis is provided courtesy of [Businessballs Free Work and Life Learning](#).
- Many organizations or departments will report that they are very busy, and may believe that they do not have enough time or resources to invest in this.
- Simply opening up dialogue about the [Guarding Minds @ Work psychosocial factors](#), may result in positive changes, even without a formal implementation process. Larger initiatives and programs are not always required.

Be prepared to respond to concerns that addressing psychological health and safety will open up a “can of worms” or invite unreasonable criticism of the workplace.

- Avoiding or denying issues related to psychological health and safety in the workplace may allow problems to get worse until they become a crisis.
- Proactively considering psychological health and safety issues can help prevent time-consuming and morale-dampening situations.
- The [National Standard for Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) provides an evidence-based framework to support taking action and helping avoid risk to employee psychological safety.

Estimate the time and effort required to do the assessment, analyze results and implement change.

The size and scope of your plan will be relative to the complexity of your organization and the initiatives you choose to implement. Some organizations have completed all tasks over a couple of weeks, while others have required several months.

Estimate the time your organization may need for the following tasks:

- Develop the business case, including baseline measurements.
- Secure senior leadership commitment, including labour and management.
- Create a communication plan addressing potential concerns.
- Set up the assessment process, choosing how and what will be measured.
- Conduct the assessment using *Guarding Minds @ Work*. (This is probably the easiest part).
- Analyze the results of the *Guarding Minds @ Work* assessment tools.
- Communicate results, celebrate successes, and identify areas for improvement.
- Engage the workforce in developing action plans. This participation is critical to success.
- Engage the workforce in implementing the plans. This needs to become part of day to day routine.
- Measure outcomes. Did the plans achieve the goals that were set?
- Take corrective action including additional plans or modifications.
- Establish a process of continual improvement. Consider re-administering the survey every couple of years.
- Ongoing time allocation, e.g. even one hour every two weeks per team, should be considered to allow for an ongoing process of sustaining psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Consider competing demands and priorities.

Addressing psychological health and safety is always important. Like other health and safety approaches, it is an ongoing process, but if this is a new approach in your organization, you may wish to consider the following:

- Organizations may choose to begin with only looking at one of the factors identified by the *Guarding Minds @ Work* assessment tools and known to impact psychological health and safety. One example is workload management. Workload management is not about doing less work, but doing work with less stress. This can open up dialogue, identify solutions, reduce stress-related absenteeism, and help create an atmosphere for continued improvement.
- Leading-edge organizations that conscientiously choose best practices for continual improvement can add a Psychological Health and Management System to existing policies and processes.
- If you have a poisoned or toxic workplace, it is important to put safeguards in place to help ensure that no further harm is done to psychological health and safety. This could include immediately addressing issues of violence, harassment, bullying or discrimination as identified by the *Guarding Minds @ Work* survey or already known to the organization.
- Be transparent about accepting responsibility for the current situation, and the need to make changes. By accepting responsibility, you can reduce the need for others to justify or defend their current behaviours or positions, and open the door to a new way of doing business.
- Employers of choice or those who have already won recognition for their healthy workplaces can use the heightened focus on psychological health and safety to continue to energize and motivate the workforce.
- If there has been a recent traumatic incident in the workplace, being open about the effects of the trauma and providing effective supports could be a first response. This can also be a window of opportunity to engage staff in building protective factors around psychological health and safety in the workplace. It will be necessary to be sensitive to the current ability of those who are affected by the trauma to engage in this process, but in many cases it could be helpful in the recovery process. See also Addiction Response, Grief Response, Suicide Response and Mental Health First Aid.
- Consider organizational readiness for change. There may be internal or external factors that enhance or impede action, such as a pending merger or major reorganization.
- If there are current labour disputes this may not be the ideal time to begin a process where management and the union are expected to co-operate closely.
- If there are impending difficult business issues such as shutdowns, layoffs, terminations or deployments, the focus should be on limiting the risk related to the impact of these issues. In these situations, employees who are left in the workplace may face increased workplace demands that can make it more difficult for them to also become involved in the development of new processes. This should not prevent the workplace from zeroing in on how the particular psychological health and safety issues currently impact the workforce (e.g. change management, grief at the loss of co-workers or increased workload pressures).
- **Engage external experts, if appropriate.** *Guarding Minds @ Work* is a free, self-serve resource, but some organizations prefer an external consultant to assist. Existing knowledge and expertise may reduce overall effort and time.
- **Show that this is a priority to the organization by obtaining written commitment from senior leadership (labour and management)**, in the form of a directive or policy statement, in support of addressing psychological health and safety in your workplace.

Developing and communicating the assessment plan

- **Identify one or more champions** in the ranks of senior leadership who have the ability to influence and mobilize resources and commitment throughout the process.
- **Establish a psychological health and safety working group** comprised of key stakeholders who will help drive the process.
 - o These stakeholders should come from all levels of management, and include employees and employee representatives.
 - o Where possible, involve a representative from each department, such as human resources, occupational health and safety or finance.
 - o Include someone with communication skills in the working group.

- o Include someone with authority to access organizational data to help inform working group decisions.
- o The mandate of the working group is to plan the assessment, analysis, and communication about the process. They would help steer the planning, implementation, evaluation and continual improvement stages.
- o Finalize a timeframe and budget for the stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of your psychological health and safety initiative.
- o Involve key stakeholders in discussion about the working group's approach, getting critical feedback from employees, union, and management before communicating the plan to the rest of the workforce.

Clearly communicate your plan. Explicitly state potential concerns and explain how your approach will address these. For messaging ideas, see [Commitment Leadership and Participation](#). Getting everyone on the same page in this way, has been known to begin the process of improving psychological health and safety, even before any other actions have been taken.

- **Determine who needs to receive the communication** and how best to deliver it.
 - o Ensure you communicate with all workplace stakeholders including senior management, union representatives, line managers, occupational health and safety representatives, human resource professionals, your employees and any other individuals who play a role in the workplace.
 - o Provide written communication to those without access to a computer.
 - o Consider holding meetings to discuss the process in person or instruct each department or team leader to hold a discussion after they have been thoroughly briefed.
 - o Consider any other challenges or limitations, which may include employees working offsite, vision or other impairments, vacation, on leave, etc.

Choosing *Guarding Minds @ Work* assessment tools

- You can conduct the online employee survey and/or bring together a team to complete the organizational review. See [Guarding Minds @ Work: Assessment Resources](#). You have access to two major forms of assessment:
 1. *Guarding Minds @ Work (GM@W) Employee Survey*. It is a completely automated resource that allows you to register and send out a link to the survey to every employee. You can print a copy of the [Survey Questions](#) to review.

Employee identity is kept confidential and the aggregated results provide a snapshot of how the organization is rated by employees on measures that are known to impact psychological health and safety in the workplace. See [GM@W Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information about confidentiality.
 2. *GM@W Organizational Review*, which is completed manually, usually by a leadership team or key informants with access to the relevant information. It walks the users through a series of questions about existing conditions, requires an analysis of data, and helps educate about the factors affecting psychological health and safety in the workplace. You can read more about [How to Get Started](#) or go directly to download the [Organizational Review Worksheets](#).

The results of this review can be useful to compare leadership perspectives with that of employees who complete the survey. The organizational review is also helpful for small business owners, team leaders or any organization where an employee survey is not possible or practical.

Conducting the organizational review

There are generally two ways to conduct the *GM@W* Organizational Review:

- a. Assign the review process to department or division heads, and have multiple reviews done by respective management teams.
- b. Conduct one organization-wide review involving either just the business owner or other management personnel. This strategy is particularly well suited to small organizations.

Conducting the *GM@W* Organizational Review involves:

- Collecting pertinent background and baseline information as outlined in [Conducting a *GM@W* Organizational Review: Getting Started](#).
- Describing attributes of each department/division.
- Answering questions that provide a score for each [Psychosocial Factor](#), completing the review questions related to risks, strengths and areas for improvement.

Completing the *GM@W* Organizational Review may only take a few hours once all relevant data has been compiled. The resulting scores can be entered into the [Selection of *GM@W* Suggested Actions](#) form.

Conducting the employee survey

- Begin by registering for the survey tools using the [GM@W Dashboard Login](#). This registration is necessary to receive a link that can be sent to your employees. Note: While the individual who is administering the survey must register, each participant who is taking the survey does not need to register
- Before sending the link to the survey, you may want to provide an opportunity for staff to ask questions and clarify the process and intent.
- The form letter "[Introducing *GM@W*](#)" found after you login can be used or modified to develop your own initial communication with staff about the survey. This communication advises staff that you will be sending them a link to the survey and provides information about confidentiality, data security and how the information will be communicated and used.
- Once the survey is activated, the individual who registered will be sent an email that has a link to the survey that can be forwarded to employees.
- To encourage participation in the survey, some organizations provide incentives. One organization offered a pizza party for the department that had the highest number of respondents, and provided time during working hours (usually less than 20 minutes) to complete the survey.

Address employee privacy concerns



- Employees should understand that:
 - o Participation in this data collection project is voluntary.
 - o They may choose not to participate.
 - o The choice to not participate will have no adverse effects on employment.
 - o Each employee has anonymity when completing and returning his or her submission.
 - o No personal or identifying information will be gathered. Survey respondents will only be asked about their experiences and perceptions about their workplace from the perspective of their current position
 - o If an employee chooses to participate and later changes his or her mind, he or she can stop completing the survey at any time and the responses will not be saved.
 - o Any information that is obtained during this data collection project will be kept strictly confidential.
 - o Only aggregate data with 10 or more survey responses will be analyzed and reported; individual-level data will not be accessed. If there are fewer than 10 respondents to the survey, no data will be analyzed or reported.

Choosing whether to segment the employee survey

Once you have signed into the [Dashboard](#), you will have the opportunity to choose whether to segment your survey results. Some organizations may wish to know more about the psychosocial factor profile for a particular department, employee group or geographical location. The *GM@W* survey can be segmented to permit analysis of particular areas and compare this with the overall profile for the organization.

- When choosing whether to segment survey results, there are pros and cons to including segmentation question options. As noted previously, *GM@W* survey results will not be reported for any category that has fewer than 10 respondents to protect the anonymity of employees.
- It is important to consider whether survey results can be accurately interpreted or actions effectively supported when excessive segmentation occurs.
- If you do decide to segment, a guiding principle is to choose the fewest segmentation question options to provide valuable information for your workplace. The following table describes the pros and cons of segmentation.

Segmentation Questions Options

	Potential Pros 	Potential Cons 
Department or Branch	Different departments or branches may have significantly different issues, and this allows them to receive the results that are most relevant.	The survey should not become a competitive process, and differentiating among similar departments may increase discord.
Province or Region	Where the geographic factors (e.g. rural, urban or remote) impact psychological health or safety, this would provide differentiation.	Where the geographic factors are not relevant, this category may not be useful.
Gender	If your workplace is either male or female dominated or a traditional gender-specific sector, this may be of relevance.	Where the roles are similar and equitable between males and females, this category may create an unnecessary divide.
Union Membership	If your workplace is unionized, this category should be chosen to help the union understand the perspective of its members.	If your workplace is not unionized this category is not relevant.
Working Alone	If your workplace has employees who are working from home or in isolated locations without co-workers, this category can consider their unique experiences, as long as you have more than 10 respondents in this category.	Some employees may misinterpret the category of working alone as not being part of a team rather than working away from the office.

Analyzing results and engaging the workforce

Once you have closed the survey, a *GM@W* Overview Report will be automatically generated. This is available to you when you log back in to the [Dashboard](#) on the *Guarding Minds @ Work* website.

Refer to [Selection of *GM@W* Suggested Actions](#) for information on how to interpret the results from the survey and organizational review.

- Look at how your employees rated the psychosocial factors in comparison with the normative sample of working Canadians. The *GM@W* Overview Report will identify areas of concern and strength ranging from “Serious Concerns” (red) to “Relative Strengths” (green). Lower scores indicate greater levels of concern.
- The following are some tips to help you gain a better understanding of the results from the *GM@W* Survey Results and/or the *GM@W* Organizational Review Results:
 - Level I: Start with the factor(s) for which “Serious Concerns” have been flagged.
 - Level II: Select the factor(s) for which “Significant Concerns” have been flagged.
 - Level III: Select the factor(s) for which “Minimal Concerns” have been flagged.
 - Level IV: If you do not have any factor(s) with Significant, Moderate or Minimal Concerns, you are to be commended! However, this may be the time to develop a plan of action to build on your areas of “Relative Strength”.Within each level, place the greatest priority on:
 - o Psychological Protection and Psychological Support, which are the two Psychosocial Factors that can contain critical items.
 - o Factors that are particularly relevant to key incidents or events (e.g., discrimination, harassment, unfair treatment due to mental illness, etc.).
 - o Factors that are particularly relevant to changes occurring within your organization or work unit (e.g., if there have been recent changes in leadership, you may want to select Clear Leadership & Expectations).
 - o Factors that disproportionately impact your organization financially.
- Analyze the results to consider which actions and responses your organization will take. There are several possible approaches:
 - o There are many considerations that can guide the decision as to where to start taking action. In reviewing the results of your existing data, the *GM@W* Organizational Review or *GM@W* Employee Survey, it is important to first identify any safety concerns, and issues such as bullying, harassment, violence or discrimination, that should be addressed first.
 - o The next step may be to identify whether there are any issues relating to human rights, health or safety.
 - o You could also start with [psychosocial factors](#) that have been identified as potential areas of strength. This can allow you to build on good work already done on those areas of strengths, understanding that many of the psychosocial factors can be protective even in the face of other unavoidable stressors.
 - o You may wish to address psychosocial factors where perceptions of management (as per the *GM@W* Organizational Review) differ significantly from employee perspective (as per the *GM@W* Employee Survey).
 - o Finally, consider engaging employee feedback and guidance on the psychosocial factor(s) that they perceive to be most important through focus groups, suggestion boxes or staff meetings. You can share the results of all factors with short descriptions, which are provided below, or provide a select number that you want to focus on and have the employees prioritize.

Sharing results

Many organizations will find that they have survey results indicating potential areas of strength. Celebrating these areas helps reinforce the employee contributions to a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

It is important to show organizational commitment by sharing some plan of action with all staff soon after the results are in.

The communication should also include intended outcomes and improvements for the future. Clearly communicate that the workplace will not become ideal overnight but will continue to focus on improving psychological health and safety and requires the contribution of all employees.

- Engage all staff and stakeholders in helping to determine how to make positive impacts on psychological health and safety in the workplace. Each employee has a responsibility to contribute since how they interact with others has a direct effect on psychological health and safety.
- Engage work teams in discussing and developing plans of action. Ensure that these plans include a method to evaluate results.
 - o Some level of communication and facilitation skills is useful for those who will be leading these discussions. Even those who do not feel competent in these areas can use the information and tools found in [*On the Agenda*](#) to their advantage.
 - o For additional ideas on approaches to take, read [*Psychological Health and Safety: An Action Guide for Employers*](#).

Considering a range of appropriate actions

This can help guide teams who will engage in developing and implementing action plans. By choosing a range of appropriate actions that meet both the organization's needs and the employee's needs, you can ensure that the results will be mutually beneficial.

- For example, when selecting appropriate actions and responses, consider the following (adapted from the [*Selection of Effective Actions: Applying a Quality Framework*](#)):
 - o Appropriateness: Is the action or response appropriate given the needs and resources of your particular organization?
 - o Acceptability: Is the action or response acceptable to all relevant workplace stakeholders, including management, employees, union and clients?
 - o Accessibility: Is the action or response available and accessible to all relevant workplace stakeholders (e.g. language or geographic location)?
 - o Effectiveness: Is the action or response consistent with evidence that indicates that the intended consequence is what your organization requires?
 - o Efficiency: Can the action or response be implemented in a cost-effective and timely fashion?
 - o Safety: Could the action or response present an unintended health or safety risk?

Consider a policy review

Your analysis of the results may indicate the necessity to develop or refine policies within the organization. This relates to organizational practices and processes that are part of the day-to-day experience in the workplace. Elements and Priorities for Working Towards a Psychologically Safer Workplace can help you to do this.

Create a high level strategy for what is practical for your organization to focus on in the near future.

Examples:

- o "To address psychological health and safety, we will begin by focusing on management training."
- o "To address psychological health and safety, we will begin by raising mental health awareness."
- o "To address psychological health and safety, we will begin with a policy review."
- o "To address psychological health and safety, we will begin by holding focus groups."

Suggested responses by factor

Below are Suggested Responses from www.guardingmindsatwork.ca for each factor and a brief description. Fillable Action Planning Worksheets are also available, at www.guardingmindsatwork.ca. You will find actions and responses that can be implemented with a minimal investment of resources or cost to the organization. Lack of budgetary funds does not have to prevent you from moving forward with meaningful actions and responses.

PF1: Psychological Support Suggested Responses

A work environment where co-workers and supervisors are supportive of employees' psychological and mental health concerns, and respond appropriately as needed.

PF2: Organizational Culture Suggested Responses

A work environment characterized by trust, honesty and fairness.

PF3: Clear Leadership & Expectations Suggested Responses

A work environment where there is effective leadership and support that helps employees know what they need to do, how their work contributes to the organization, and whether there are impending changes.

PF4: Civility & Respect Suggested Responses

A work environment where employees are respectful and considerate in their interactions with one another, as well as with customers, clients and the public.

PF5: Psychological Competencies & Requirements Suggested Responses

A work environment where there is a good fit between employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies and the requirements of the position they hold.

PF6: Growth & Development Suggested Responses

A work environment where employees receive encouragement and support in the development of their interpersonal, emotional and job skills.

PF7: Recognition and Reward Suggested Responses

A work environment where there is appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of employees' efforts in a fair and timely manner.

PF8: Involvement and Influence Suggested Responses

A work environment where employees are included in discussions about how their work is done and how important decisions are made.

PF9: Workload Management Suggested Responses

A work environment where tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.

PF10: Engagement Suggested Responses

A work environment where employees feel connected to their work and are motivated to do their job well.

PF11: Balance Suggested Responses

A work environment where there is recognition of the need for balance between the demands of work, family and personal life.

PF12: Psychological Protection Suggested Responses

A work environment where employees' psychological safety is ensured.

PF13: Protection of Physical Safety Suggested Responses

A work environment where management takes appropriate action to protect the physical safety of employees.

Planning for continual improvement

- Consider including in all business discussions about new or revised policies, procedures, programs and interactions the question:

“How might this impact psychological health and safety?”

This may allow you to permanently embed psychological health and safety considerations into your workplace without devoting a lot of time to an add-on program.

- Execute the plans developed by work teams.
- Measure results and look for opportunities for corrective action or improvement. See [Evaluation and Corrective Action](#).
- Continue the cycle for a method of continual improvement. See [Continual Improvement](#).
- Take advantage of the Evaluation Worksheets provided for each of the factors:
 - o Psychological Support Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Organizational Culture Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Clear Leadership and Expectation Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Civility and Respect Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Psychological Competencies and Requirements Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Growth and Development Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Recognition and Reward Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Involvement and Influence Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Workload Management Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Engagement Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Balance Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Psychological Protection Evaluation Worksheet
 - o Protection of Physical Safety Evaluation Worksheet

