

Protection of Physical Safety

Think of your workplace. There are many parts of the PHYSICAL work space that can impact you. There can be some more obvious hazards that are part of your job. Do you work with machinery? With chemicals? Do you work outdoors? There can also be parts of your physical work that may affect you over a long period of time that might be harder to see. Do you work with computers? Around a lot of noise? Do you sit for long periods of time?

The truth is that ALL workplaces have physical hazards. It's how workplaces are PROACTIVE to address physical hazards that help employees feel safe. Workplaces that do this well offer good protection of physical safety. When you think about it, your physical work space doesn't only affect your body, but it could also affect your mental health. Working in a noisy environment could not only affect your hearing, but also your focus. Working with angry clients could affect your mental energy. Working with chemicals or machinery requires you to be alert.

Let's meet Ayesha. Ayesha is a new employee at a manufacturing company. Ayesha has a lot of past experience working in manufacturing... the big change for her is that her new company uses different technology than what she's used to. Ayesha's supervisor puts her to work the first day, with a very short orientation session. Her supervisor thinks that because of her past experience Ayesha should know how to operate the heavy machinery and protect herself from harm and risks associated with them. This makes Ayesha feel stressed and anxious. This is really NOT a healthy OR safe situation for Ayesha and she feels like she is putting herself at-risk of harm. She is hesitant about speaking to her new boss about this as it is her first day on the job. How can workplaces make sure their employees feel protected from physical harm?

In Ayesha's case, her new company would benefit from a standardized orientation training process. This would ensure that employees are aware of all of the risks - physical and psychological -associated with their jobs. They would then know the proper process to raise concerns, as and if they come up. A standardized process also ensures that everyone is on the same page... that they have been given the same knowledge. This is useful to ensure consistent use of physical equipment. More importantly, it enhances employee safety and productivity. Supervisors also need to check in with workers to ensure that they understand and apply to their job what they learned during training.

Some training is now required by provincial, territorial, and/or federal laws. Companies can also provide training to their staff about how their physical work space can affect their mental health. Letting employees know HOW TO report incidents, and also WHAT supports are available if an incident does occur can be reassuring for staff.

Depending on the workplace, the tools and environment can be changed to reduce risks or manage hazards to the employees. This could be as simple as installing proper lighting, reducing noise, having panic alarms, or increased ventilation.

Although a lot of the responsibility around employee safety is on the employer, everyone should play a role in physical safety at work. Employees also have a responsibility. If you notice anything that can cause harm in your workplace, be sure to tell your supervisor. Also, if you don't feel safe doing something at work, let your boss know if you'd benefit from any additional training.

After watching this video, list three ways that your workplace helps keep you physically safe. What is one area that your workplace can improve on? Speak about it with your supervisor this week.

Protection of Physical Safety is one of 13 factors that support psychological health and safety in the workplace. Learn more at: [MentalHealthCommission.ca/NationalStandard](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/NationalStandard)

For more resources for your workplace, check out [haveTHATtalk.ca](https://www.haveTHATtalk.ca)

Developed in collaboration by Ottawa Public Health and the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

With content adapted with permission from Mindful Employer Canada

And support from Bell Let's Talk.