



Psychological Safety

Policy

This policy outlines the practical steps schools can take to proactively protect, manage, and support the psychological safety of all school staff.

Summary

- Creating psychological safety in the workplace can greatly improve an individual's experience of work and increase individual mental health and wellbeing. When people feel safe at work, issues are more likely to be understood and addressed before they cause an injury.
- It is the responsibility of all staff to contribute to a psychologically safe workplace.
- Principals or their delegates must consult on, and communicate about, psychosocial risks and controls in the workplace.
- Regularly reviewing data, including staff feedback, staff indicators and workplace data can support school leadership in identifying areas of concern (refer to [Identifying psychosocial hazards](#) in the procedure).
- A checklist is available to school leaders to assist school principals or their delegate in reviewing their current school environment, including strengths and areas for improvement, to proactively implement the foundations of a psychologically safe workplace.
- Schools can have some of the most dynamic and challenging work environments. Therefore, it is important to note that a work environment completely free of psychosocial hazards can be difficult to achieve.
- Principals are not responsible for managing hazards outside of the workplace, however there are a range of supports they can refer or provide to staff, such as the [Employee Wellbeing Support Services](#).
- The [Psychological safety and risk management procedure](#) explains how to identify, assess, control and monitor psychosocial hazards and risks in the workplace.

Details

A psychologically safe workplace is one that promotes staff mental health and wellbeing by reducing work-related risk factors and psychosocial hazards, and actively prevents and addresses psychological injury and illness.

Working can be seen as generally beneficial to a person's mental health and wellbeing, as it can provide structure, purpose and a sense of identity and belonging. By creating psychologically safe workplaces,

schools not only contribute to improving the mental health and wellbeing of their staff but may also create healthier environments for students and the school community.

The department aims to support staff to be healthy and safe, reduce the stigma of mental health in the workplace and support staff to remain at work and engaged with the school community wherever possible. It's important that everyone at the department works together to create psychologically safe workplaces that promote and protect mental health and wellbeing (refer to the [Health, Safety and Wellbeing policy](#) and the [Safe and Well in Education Framework \(PDF\)](#) for further information).

Work-related psychosocial hazards in schools can include, but are not limited to:

- students with challenging behaviours
- work-related violence and aggression
- sexual harassment
- bullying
- discrimination and racial, religious or cultural vilification
- poor support
- poor organisational change management
- high and low job demands
- poor workplace relationships
- exposure to traumatic events.

This policy does not cover student mental health and wellbeing. Refer to the [Mental Health in Schools policy](#) for information regarding student mental health and wellbeing.

For more specified information on the risk management methodology for preventing, managing and responding to health, safety and wellbeing risks posed by work-related violence and other unsafe behaviours in schools, refer to the [Work-Related Violence in Schools policy](#), [Workplace Bullying policy](#), [School Community Safety Orders](#), [Behaviour – Students](#) and [Sexual Harassment – Employees policy](#).

Roles and responsibilities in promoting psychological safety

Under the [Occupational Health and Safety \(OHS\) Act 2004 \(Vic\)](#), managing the risks related to mental health and wellbeing and psychological safety is a shared responsibility between the department, the principal or their delegate and school staff.

Department roles and responsibilities

The [Health, Safety and Wellbeing policy](#) outlines the department's commitment to support, promote and protect the health, safety and wellbeing of all school staff.

The department must provide or maintain systems of work and a working environment that is, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risk to physical and psychological health. This includes providing supports and resources to enable school leaders and staff to achieve psychologically safe workplaces and support their own wellbeing.

Principal or delegate roles and responsibilities

The principal or their delegate must, in consultation with school staff, and health and safety representatives (HSR), where elected, identify, assess, control, monitor and prioritise psychological health and safety risks and hazards relevant to the school's particular environment. The principal or their delegate must be aware and respond to new and existing hazards raised with them as per the [OHS Risk Planning and Management policy](#).

School staff roles and responsibilities

While at work, school staff, including contractors and volunteers, must take reasonable care for their own health and safety and the safety of others who may be affected by their actions or omissions. School staff must support ongoing prevention and safety management of workplace mental health and wellbeing by:

- reporting hazards, risks and incidents in the workplace using [eduSafe Plus](#) (staff login required)
- cooperating with their employers' actions to provide and maintain a safe working environment, including following any policies, information or instruction provided
- positively contributing overall to a mentally healthy and psychologically safe environment.

Key requirements to enable a psychologically safe workplace

Principals or their delegates must maintain, and review annually, an OHS risk register (templates available from the [Resources tab](#)) that includes:

- the psychosocial hazards relevant to the school environment
- the department-mandated psychosocial hazards:
 - o workplace bullying
 - o work-related stress
 - o work-related violence or aggression
 - o students with challenging behaviours
- control measures to eliminate or reduce risks, including controls that are currently implemented and those that are planned.

Principals or their delegates must identify psychosocial hazards in the school, implement effective controls and monitor and review hazards and controls in consultation with school staff who are or are likely to be affected, and health and safety representatives (HSR) (where elected). This may include:

- encouraging all staff to report psychosocial hazards, incidents and near misses in eduSafe plus
- identifying and assessing further psychosocial hazards occurring or likely to occur in the school and monitoring existing risk controls, including by regularly reviewing workplace data, including near miss, hazard and injury reports from eduSafe Plus
- determining the level of risk by assessing the hazard following the process outlined in the assessing psychosocial risks section of the procedure
- informing school staff about controls in place to manage psychological risk in the school, including the mental health supports available to staff
- maintaining records in relation to psychological risk assessment and consultation
- considering further information, instruction, training and supervision that may be required to support school staff in completing work as safely as possible.

The [Psychological safety and risk management procedure](#) contains detailed, practical information about how schools can meet these key requirements.

Department supports for schools

The department offers [health, safety and wellbeing training](#) for school leaders as part of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership's offering of strategic management training. This full day training aims to build the understanding of the foundations necessary to effectively manage health, safety and wellbeing in schools, including the development and maintenance of the OHS risk register. All school leaders are encouraged to attend this training.

Contact the [OHS Advisory Service or regional OHS service officers](#) who can provide free advice and hands-on support in relation to psychological risk management in the school.

A range of mental health and wellbeing supports are provided by the department – refer to [Employee Wellbeing Support Services](#) and [further expert health, safety and wellbeing supports](#) for further information.

Related definitions

Mental health

Mental health is defined as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in ([World Health Organisation, 2022](#)).

Psychosocial hazard

'Psychosocial hazards are factors in the design or management of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm' ([WorkSafe, 2023](#)). Examples include work-related stress, work-related violence or aggression, and workplace bullying. Throughout the [Psychological safety and risk management procedure](#), the term 'psychosocial' is used to discuss mental health and wellbeing hazards and risks.

Psychological safety

Psychological safety is the foundation of high-performing teams and resilient organisations. When team members feel psychologically safe, they are empowered to speak up, seek help, acknowledge mistakes and questions existing methods. This culture of openness and honesty significantly reduces risks, improves problem-solving, enables effective idea execution and promotes a sense of belonging and inclusion among all team members.

Related policies

- [Behaviour – Students](#)
- [Complaints, Misconduct and Unsatisfactory Performance](#)
- [Flexible Work](#)
- [Health, Safety and Wellbeing](#)
- [Inclusive Workplaces](#)
- [Medical Advisory Service](#)
- [Mental Health in Schools](#)
- [Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Management in Schools](#)
- [OHS Consultation and Communication](#)
- [OHS Risk Planning and Management](#)
- [Principal Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Managing and Reporting School Incidents \(Including Emergencies\)](#)
- [Respectful Behaviours within the School Community](#)
- [Respectful Workplaces](#)
- [School Community Safety Orders](#)
- [Sexual Harassment – Employees](#)
- [Workers' Compensation](#)
- [Workplace Bullying](#)
- [Work-Related Violence in Schools](#)

Relevant legislation, compliance codes, standards

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 \(Vic\)](#)
- [Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation, 2013. National Standard of Canada](#)

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the school's three-year review cycle.

