

## What is Psychological Health & Safety?

There's a new idea in occupational health: this idea is psychological health and safety. Psychological health and safety is about safeguarding the psychological health of employees.



**DID YOU  
KNOW?**

A psychologically healthy and safe workplace is one that promotes employees' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to employee psychological health due to negligent, reckless or intentional acts.



**DID YOU  
KNOW?**

*While psychological health and psychological safety are deserving of equal protection, it is important to note that from a strategic perspective, ensuring safety (in the sense of preventing psychological harm) is a prerequisite to the promotion of health.*

**Psychological health** comprises our ability to think, feel and behave in a manner that enables us to perform effectively in our work environments, our personal lives, and in society at large. **Psychological safety** is different - it deals with the risk of injury to psychological well-being that an employee might experience. **Improving the psychological safety of a work setting involves taking precautions to avert injury or danger to employee psychological health.**

It is important to note that psychological health problems occur on a *spectrum*, from mild psychological difficulties on one end to severe psychological disorders on the other. The most common psychological health problems in the workplace are anxiety and depression. These conditions account for a large proportion of the negative impacts on employees and employers.

## **Needs, Rights and Guarding Minds @ Work**

GM@W is based on the premise that there are a finite number of psychosocial workplace factors that influence mental or psychological health in either a positive or a negative direction.

The essence of GM@W as a strategy is to identify not only those factors that are acting as supports for mental health but also those that present risks to mental health with the goal of strengthening the former and abating the latter.

Otherwise stated, GM@W is a method for addressing and supporting certain basic human needs at work so that their lack of fulfilment does not end up presenting risks to mental health.

Not all needs fall into this protected category, however. Only those needs that can reasonably be addressed in the workplace are relevant here. These basic needs can also be represented as rights that are protected in one way or another by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and by other provincial and federal legislation.

Stated in this manner, the workplace can be seen to have a crucial role in at least protecting, and possibly promoting:

1. Dignity and respect for the person (serving basic needs for the sense of self-worth and self-esteem)
2. Security, integrity and autonomy of the person (serving the need to feel safe both physically and psychologically)
3. Organizational justice (serving the need to feel that one belongs to a community in which there is respect for due process and fair procedures)

To one degree or another, the psychosocial factors described in Guarding Minds @ Work all revolve around the protection and promotion of these three major clusters of needs and rights.