

Psychological injuries: Supporting a worker's safe and timely return to work

Presented in partnership with WCB (Presenter: Erin Eden, Operations and Risk Management, and Amanda Wyatt, Psychological Injury Coach, Workers' Compensation Board – Alberta)

Best Practices for employers in preventing psychological injuries and supporting workers

- Be aware of early warning signs that someone may not be okay. Not everyone will verbalize if they are struggling, so watch for non-verbal clues.
- Foster a workplace culture that minimizes stigma and encourages open lines of communication. Early treatment and intervention lead to a quicker recovery and return to work!
- Don't ignore interpersonal issues among staff; they may be the seeds of bullying and harassment claims.
- If your workers are struggling with a psychological problem, make sure they are familiar with the resources available to them through your workplace.
- Promote your modified work program before injuries occur and reinforce your program again while an injured worker is recovering. The best recoveries involve a safe and timely return to work!

Focus on return to work

- Keep in touch and identify the person who will consistently communicate with the worker throughout the recovery process, so they feel supported and know who to connect with.
- Prepare a pre-negotiation offer if your worker hasn't yet been cleared for modified duties.
- Participate in all return-to-work planning discussions with WCB to focus on return to modified employment.
- Be creative and flexible and offer modified duties as soon as your worker is cleared to return to work by their treatment providers.
- Prepare co-workers for your injured worker's return and set expectations around a supportive and gradual return as needed.
- Follow up with your employees after they return to work and have a contingency plan.

Action to support successful outcomes

- Communicate job security. When workers know they have a place to belong and return to they can focus their energy on recovery.
- Create a support system around your worker's return. This could mean scheduled check-ins, peer support, re-integration, and flexibility. Ask your worker what they need for a safe and supportive return to work.
- Balance support with privacy. Let your worker decide if they want to share their story with their peers and put your energy into creating a supportive workplace.
- Management of peer response. Gossip and whispers will build stigma and barriers around your injured workers. Set the tone and make expectations clear.
- Allow space to rebuild psychological stamina. It's wonderful that your worker is back to work, but they may over-estimate what they can do once they return to work.

What if I need help?

Navigating a psychological injury claim can feel daunting, and WCB is here to support you and your workers. Contact us directly or visit our website for great information on developing a return-to-work plan and supporting workers with psychological injuries. We also have half-day employer seminars free to our account holders, psychological injury coaches, and a call centre that can answer your questions or get you in touch with the right person when needed.

Our toll-free number is 1-866-922-9221.