

Apprentices and other young workers

Protecting them from psychosocial and other risks in the workplace

The age and development of workers is a relevant matter to consider in managing psychosocial risks in workplaces.

Apprentices and other young workers have characteristics that can place them at a higher risk of harm associated with exposure to psychosocial hazards.

Dedicated supervisory support in the form of information, instruction and mentoring from good role models in their workplace is critical to protecting apprentices and other young workers from work-related harm.

Why do I need to have regard for the work health and safety of apprentices and other young workers?

The Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA) require persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to have regard to all relevant matters when determining what control measures to implement to mitigate psychosocial risks.

The developmental profile of young workersⁱ, including those who are apprentices or trainees, is a relevant matter, as it can influence their workplace interactions and behaviours, and, in turn, individual and collective work health and safety.

The work health and safety implications of being an apprentice or other young worker

Brain development in young workers can affect work health and safety due to how it affects their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical functioning.

Compared to people aged in their late 20s or older, young people are more likely to have an underdeveloped capacity for decision-making, impulse control, risk assessment, attention, concentration, complex problem solving, emotion regulation, and resisting social pressure to conform with group norms.ⁱⁱ

They also tend towards delayed sleep schedules, (shorter sleep on weeknights and sleeping late on weekends to recover lost sleep), which makes them more vulnerable to daytime sleepiness.ⁱⁱⁱ

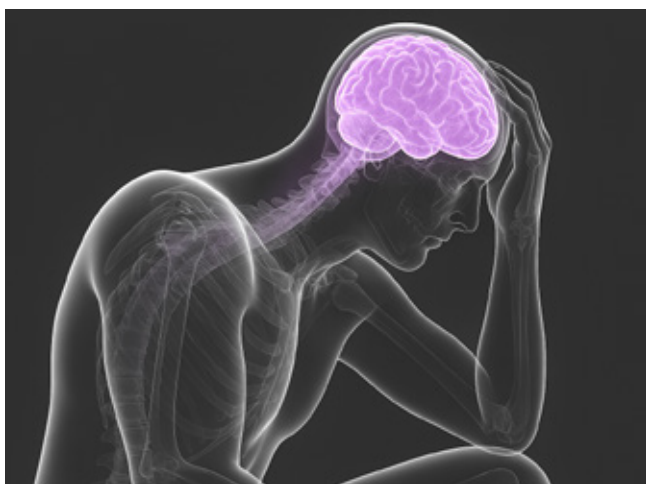


The risk of fatigue is exacerbated for young workers who have underdeveloped strategies for managing fatigue and sleepiness^{iv}, who manage competing demands of work, education, sport, and social commitments, have unpredictable work arrangements, precarious employment, high workload, and limited ability to self-advocate for improved working conditions.^v

This developmental profile of young workers has work health and safety implications. Compared to older workers, young workers can be more likely to:

- prioritise social acceptance over safety, especially in environments where there is pressure to conform to group norms.^{vi} Workplaces characterised by a high degree of group pressure to conform are particularly prone to bullying.^{vii} Young workers exposed to bullying in such environments may respond with reciprocal harmful behaviours as a form of counter-aggression or a drive to conform;
- be susceptible to stress or other psychological challenges or conditions arising from exposure to unmanaged psychosocial risks;^{viii}
- experience serious accidents at work;^{ix} and
- require comprehensive training and supervision to understand and adhere to safety procedures.^x

Young workers may also be more susceptible to exposure to harmful workplace behaviours, such as bullying, given that they are often of a lower status or lack power in unequal work relationships.^{xi}



What are the key things that PCBUs should do to protect the health and safety of apprentices and other young workers?

PCBUs can meet their obligations to protect apprentices and other young workers from psychosocial hazards and risks by ensuring that they are:

- assigned to roles and tasks that are a sound match for their interests and strengths;
- supervised and provided on-the-job training by skilled or qualified persons with an aptitude for, and interest in developing others' knowledge and skills;
- provided with work relevant and appropriate to their position description, trade or declared vocation;
- aware of their right to be consulted about how psychosocial risks are managed in their workplace and how to raise concerns;
- safeguarded from potential recriminations or other negative consequences should they raise concerns about work health and safety matters;
- given clear task direction, direct instruction and coaching to acquire relevant skills and knowledge, and constructive feedback to develop skill proficiency; and
- provided with induction training suitable for the worksite, and ongoing instruction on safety issues relevant to the tasks performed.^{xii}



See this [e-toolkit for young workers](#) published by SafeWork NSW. It features information for young workers about their WHS rights and responsibilities, tools for employers who are training and supervising young workers, information for parents and guardians about how to talk about WHS with young people and guidance for those who educate and train young workers about WHS.

ⁱ The International Labour Organisation defines young workers as those aged between 15 and 24 years. International Labour Organisation (2018). Improving the safety and health of young workers. ILO; Geneva, 10.

ⁱⁱ Glendon, A. I. (2006). Brain development during adolescence: Some implications for risk-taking and injury liability. *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety – Australia and New Zealand*, 22, 137-150; Sowell, E. R., Thompson, P. M., Tessner, K. D., and Toga, A. W. (2001). Mapping continued brain growth and gray matter density reduction in dorsal frontal cortex: Inverse relationships during post adolescent brain maturation. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 21(22), 8819-8829; Steinberg L. (2008). A Social Neuroscience Perspective on Adolescent Risk-Taking. *Developmental Review*, 28(1), 78–106.

ⁱⁱⁱ Taylor, A., Wright, H. R., and Lack, L. C. (2008). Sleeping-in on the weekend delays circadian phase and increases sleepiness the following week. *Sleep and Biological Rhythms*, 6, 172-179.

^{iv} Summala, H., and Mikkola, T. (1994). Fatal accidents among car and truck drivers: effects of fatigue, age, and alcohol consumption. *Human Factors*, 36(2), 315-326.

^v Paterson, J. L., Clarkson, L., Rainbird, S., Etherton, H., and Blewett, V. (2015). Occupational fatigue and other health and safety issues for young Australian workers: an exploratory mixed methods study. *Industrial Health*, 53(3), 293-294.

^{vi} Steinberg L. (2008). A Social Neuroscience Perspective on Adolescent Risk-Taking. *Developmental Review*, 28(1), 78–106; Santor, D. A., Messervey, D., and Kusumakar, V. (2000). Measuring peer pressure, popularity, and conformity in adolescent boys and girls: Predicting school performance, sexual attitudes, and substance abuse. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29, 163-182.

^{vii} Salin, D., and Hoel, H. (2020). Organizational risk factors of workplace bullying. In S.V. Einarsen et. al., *Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace*, Boca Raton: CRC Press, 311.

^{viii} Hanvold, T. N., Kines, P., Nykänen, M., Thomée, S., Holte, K. A., Vuori, J., ... and Veiersted, K. B. (2019). Occupational safety and health among young workers in the Nordic countries: a systematic literature review. *Safety and Health at Work*, 10(1), 3-20

^{ix} Hanvold, T. N., Kines, P., Nykänen, M., Thomée, S., Holte, K. A., Vuori, J., ... and Veiersted, K. B. (2019). Occupational safety and health among young workers in the Nordic countries: a systematic literature review. *Safety and Health at Work*, 10(1), 3-20; Laberge, M., and Ledoux, E. (2011). Occupational health and safety issues affecting young workers: A literature review. *Work*, 39(3), 215-232; Salminen, S. (2004). Have young workers more injuries than older ones? An international literature review. *Journal of Safety Research*, 35(5), 513-521.

^x Guerin, R. J., Toland, M. D., Okun, A. H., Rojas-Guyler, L., and Bernard, A. L. (2018). Using a modified theory of planned behavior to examine adolescents' workplace safety and health knowledge, perceptions, and behavioral intention: A structural equation modeling approach. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 47, 1595-1610; Turner, N., Deng, C., Granger, S., Wingate, T. G., Shafqat, R., and Dueck, P. M. (2022). Young workers and safety: A critical review and future research agenda. *Journal of Safety Research*, 83, 79-95.

^{xi} Zapf, D., and Einarsen, S. V. (2020). Individual antecedents of bullying: Personality, motives and competencies of victims and perpetrators. In S.V. Einarsen et. al., *Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace*, Boca Raton: CRC Press, 281-303.

^{xii} These measures largely reflect the requirements of Standard Five of the South Australian Skills Standards. (South Australian Skills Commission (2021)). This Standard also specifies that apprentices and trainees are not trained or supervised by another apprentice or trainee without approval from the South Australian Skills Commission.



See the [SafeWork SA website](#) for more information about psychosocial risk management



Government of South Australia
SafeWork SA