06D SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Key questions to ask

- Why should I promote social and emotional wellbeing in my workplace?

- What can I do to promote social and emotional wellbeing in my workplace?

- How do I know if our program has been a success?

- How have others done it?

- Where can I go for more information?

In this section of the Healthy Workplace Resource Toolkit, we look at how you can provide a workplace environment that contributes to the positive social and emotional wellbeing of your employees.

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WHY SHOULD I PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN MY WORKPLACE?

Social and emotional wellbeing is about our ability to work productively, realise our abilities, contribute to our community and cope with the normal stresses of life.

In the same way that poor physical health can lead to a physical disorder or illness, poor social and emotional wellbeing can lead to disorders such as anxiety, depression and/or other mental illnesses. Being socially and emotionally well is essential for the overall health and wellbeing of your employees.

Effectively managing and promoting positive social and emotional wellbeing in the workplace not only has a positive impact on employees, it also benefits organisations through reduced absenteeism, presenteeism and sick leave.

There are many factors that contribute to the social and emotional wellbeing of your employees, both inside and outside the workplace.

Employers have an important role in managing workplace factors that can have a negative impact on an employee's social and emotional wellbeing. It is equally important for employers to provide an environment and culture that is supportive of issues outside the workplace that might be influencing an employee's overall wellbeing. These issues might be around family or relationships, health concerns or other pressures an employee might be facing.

Stress

Stress is a normal part of life and can be a positive thing that helps us achieve our best or meet a challenge. Too much stress, however, can have a negative impact on an employee's social and emotional wellbeing. Stress is linked to a range of physical and mental health problems such as cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal issues and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. There can also be negative consequences for the wider organisation when the effects of stress lead to increased absenteeism, presenteeism and employee turnover.[1]

Stress can be caused by factors both inside and outside the workplace. Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker.[1,2] Workplace stress is a growing concern in Australia[1] and affects all employment sectors

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and occupational levels.[3] Research has shown that work-related factors such as poor organisational practices, work overload and pressure, lack of job control, and unclear work roles can lead to stress and have a negative impact on the wellbeing of your employees.[4]

For more information on stress and how it can be caused by work factors, as well as the impact of stress on work outcomes, download the following resource from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

(i) FACT SHEET   Stress and the workplace - information for employers

Non–work related factors such as family and relationship issues and financial pressures are common causes of stress. These issues can also impact on an employee's performance at work and organisations can play a role in supporting their employees to manage stressful situations outside the workplace.

For more information on non–work related factors, and how these may impact work outcomes, download the following resources from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

(i) FACT SHEET   Domestic violence and the workplace - information for employers

This fact sheet discusses the impact that domestic violence can have in the workplace, and what employers can do to help.

(i) FACT SHEET   Fatigue management

This fact sheet discusses the impact that fatigue can have in the workplace, and what employers can do to help.

(i) FACT SHEET   Financial stress

This fact sheet discusses the impact that financial stress can have on employees, and what employers can do to help.

WHY SHOULD I PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN MY WORKPLACE?

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction that everyone feels at some time, usually in response to impending danger or in anticipation of an event that might be pleasant or unpleasant. An anxiety disorder is when anxiety is severe or long-lasting and begins to interfere with a person's life or relationships. Prolonged anxiety can lead to depression.[5]

Common symptoms of anxiety that can impact on an employee's performance at work include:

- excessive worrying and emotional distress
- irrational thinking
- physical responses such as stomach pains
- avoidance behaviours.

For more information on anxiety, download the following resources from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

Depression

Depression is a mental illness that has a variety of symptoms, and may appear differently in different people. Common symptoms of depression include persistent sadness, tiredness and lack of energy and motivation, which in the workplace can lead to decreased concentration and reduced productivity and engagement.[5] Depression is very different to experiencing a 'down' day or two, or the lack of motivation everyone feels at some time.

While there are numerous factors that contribute to depression, Australian statistics suggest that 13.2% of depression in men and 17.2% of depression in women is attributable to workplace stress.[4]

For more information on depression, including signs and symptoms, how you can help an employee with depression, and where you can go for more information, download the following resource from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

Anxiety disorders

FACT SHEET

This fact sheet from the Australian organisation *beyondblue* gives more information on the spectrum of anxiety disorders, their common treatment and how you might be able to help someone living with an anxiety disorder.

How you can help someone with anxiety or depression

FACT SHEET

This fact sheet from *beyondblue* gives more information about how to talk to someone who might be living with depression or anxiety.

Depression and the workplace - information for employers

FACT SHEET

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WHAT CAN I DO TO PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN MY WORKPLACE?

There is growing evidence to suggest that our social and emotional wellbeing is positively affected by engaging in meaningful activities, enjoying a balanced diet and taking part in regular exercise. All of these things help us to maintain the correct balance in our body and mind.[5] Establishing a health and wellbeing program in your workplace is a good way to support the social and emotional wellbeing of your employees, as well as minimise the impact of stress, depression and anxiety on your organisation.

Work can contribute to an employee's social and emotional wellbeing by providing social connectedness and focus.[5] A supportive and consultative workplace culture acknowledges the importance of social and emotional wellbeing, encourages open communication and feedback, and considers social and emotional wellbeing issues as part of the development of all workplace policies and procedures.

Ensuring that work activities are satisfying and health-promoting is also beneficial to the social and emotional wellbeing of your employees. This includes work that:

- provides interesting and challenging duties
- has genuine responsibility
- provides opportunity for achievement by individuals
- includes recognition for such achievements
- has scope for individual advancement and growth.[3]

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WHAT CAN I DO TO PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN MY WORKPLACE?

The following table lists some example strategies and activities to promote social and emotional wellbeing in your workplace. Remember, it's a good idea to use a mix of activities that cover people, place and policy.

	Examples of strategies to promote social and emotional wellbeing	People	Place	Policy
👍	Provide information that supports social and emotional wellbeing, for example, brochures, fact sheets, intranet, posters and access to seminars. The fact sheets in this toolkit can be used for this purpose	✓		
👍	Promote local recreation leisure opportunities such as book clubs, local walking groups, art and craft groups, parks, and relaxation and yoga classes	✓		
👍	Promote telephone support services such as *beyondblue*, Lifeline and employee assistance programs	✓		
👍	Offer flexible working arrangements that take into consideration employees' circumstances outside the workplace (such as child care and family illnesses)			✓
👍	Support employees to attend external events about social and emotional wellbeing issues such as those held during WorkSafe month www.worksafe.tas.gov.au or Mental Health Week www.mentalhealthweek.com.au	✓		
👍	Offer training or support from superannuation providers, such as seminars or one-on-one sessions on financial planning and retirement planning	✓		
👍	Create policies that provide guidance to supervisors on supporting employees with social and emotional wellbeing issues			✓
👍	Organise regular social functions and include employees' families	✓		
👍	Allocate break-out spaces for staff to have time out, rejuvenate or make private phone calls		✓	
👍	Offer free or subsidised workplace massages		✓	
👍⊕	Create a staff health and wellbeing library	✓		
👍⊕	Develop an intranet page that links to support services such as *beyondblue* online training, MoodGYM www.moodgym.anu.edu.au and e-couch www.ecouch.anu.edu.au	✓		
👍⊕	Run an in-house safety week or month with a focus on mental health	✓		
👍⊕	Arrange external speakers on topics such as conflict resolution, time management and personal finance management	✓		
👍⊕	Provide access to employee assistance program providers. The Employee Assistance Professional Association of Australasia www.eapaa.org.au can advise you of local providers	✓		
👍⊕	Provide access to an organisational psychologist to support individuals, managers/supervisors and your organisation to develop and implement appropriate initiatives	✓		
👍⊕	Review policies and practices to ensure they promote social and emotional wellbeing and actively support employees' issues, including return to work following time off for a mental illness			✓

👍 This symbol indicates an easy or low-resource activity.

👍⊕ This symbol indicates a more comprehensively resourced activity.

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WHAT CAN I DO TO PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN MY WORKPLACE?

	Examples of strategies to promote social and emotional wellbeing	People	Place	Policy
👍⊕	Provide training for managers on understanding the impact of the work environment on social and emotional wellbeing	✓		
👍⊕	Encourage managers to provide formal recognition for exceptional employee efforts (for example, hosting a lunch, providing a gift voucher)	✓		
👍⊕	Have a health and wellbeing plan in place that encourages employees to find work/life balance, and that supports employees to eat nutritiously, exercise regularly and accommodate other commitments			✓
👍⊕	Offer education programs around social and emotional wellbeing issues such as emotional intelligence, resilience, mindfulness, stress management and conflict resolution	✓		
👍⊕	Offer referral pathways to connect employees to support services such as mental health, domestic violence and/or substance abuse services	✓		
👍⊕	Provide critical incident support for managers and individuals	✓		
👍⊕	Participate in the Business in Mind research program www.businessinmind.edu.au	✓		

👍 This symbol indicates an easy or low-resource activity.

👍⊕ This symbol indicates a more comprehensively resourced activity.

Return to work

Sometimes an employee may need time off as a result of depression, anxiety or a related disorder – regardless of whether or not the episode was related to the workplace. It is important that organisations support employees as they transition back to work.

For more information on how to support an employee's return to work following a break due to a social or emotional wellbeing issue, download the following resource from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

ⓘ FACT SHEET

Helping employees successfully return to work following depression, anxiety or a related mental health problem: Guidelines for organisations

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HOW DO I KNOW IF OUR PROGRAM HAS BEEN A SUCCESS?

The best way to find out if your social and emotional wellbeing initiatives have been a success is to look at the impact of any changes you have made to your workplace. It's a good idea to work out how you are going to do this early on, so you can ask the right questions and collect the right information.

It is essential to collect some information before you start, for example:

- What percentage of employees know where to go for support in the workplace for a social and emotional wellbeing issue?

- What percentage of employees access support for social and emotional wellbeing issues (if available through the organisation)?

- What support services are available for managers and employees dealing with social and emotional wellbeing issues?

- How many of your policies and procedures incorporate social and emotional wellbeing issues?

- How many workplace events take place that relate to social and emotional wellbeing? This can include training or information sessions on social and emotional wellbeing, as well as events held outside the workplace such as book groups or weekend bushwalks.

- What systems are in place for employees to provide feedback on workplace issues such as rosters and hours of work?

This data will only be useful if it matches your program and objectives. For example, there is no need to measure employee awareness of workplace support services if none exist yet.

The baseline data you collect will be essential when you come to evaluate your program, as you can ask the same questions and see whether the results are different. You will then be able to identify if your program has been effective, or whether you need to change your initiatives to provide better support to your employees.

There are many questions you can ask that will help you evaluate your program, including:

- Are your employees making good use of the support offered as part of your program?
    - What is the level of employee participation in the initiatives offered?
    - How many employees have participated in the social and emotional wellbeing initiatives offered (e.g. subsidised massage)?

- Can you see that managers and employees have accepted the requirements of your policy and/or program?
    - Is there evidence of managers considering social and emotional wellbeing issues (e.g. when developing rosters)?
    - What are employees saying about the changes that have been made (e.g. that they feel less stressed, more confident, more empowered to seek assistance)?

- What has been the effect of the program on employees?
    - What percentage of employees are aware of how they can access support services for social and emotional wellbeing issues?
    - What percentage of employees know where to go for support in the workplace if they have a social and emotional wellbeing issue?
    - Has the percentage of employees accessing support services changed since the implementation of your program?
    - What do your employees think about the program (do they think it has been effective)?

How you collect this information will differ depending on your organisation's size and regional spread. There is a range of data collection methods that you could try, such as surveys, interviews and discussion groups.

For more information on evaluating your program, download the following resource from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

A simple guide to evaluation

FACT SHEET

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HOW HAVE OTHERS DONE IT?

Juicy Isle, Tasmania

Juicy Isle is a Tasmanian owned and operated food manufacturing and distribution company located in Cambridge, near Hobart. The family-owned company, in operation since 1971, employs approximately 90 people, mainly in blue collar occupations.

Juicy Isle recently helped one of its young employees, Brodie, to make some lifestyle changes that have significantly contributed to his wellbeing.

While seeking full-time work and receiving unemployment benefits, Brodie had worked occasionally as a casual employee in the Juicy Isle warehouse.
After negotiations with Workskills (a community-based employment services provider), Juicy Isle employed Brodie full-time in its warehouse about three years ago. As Brodie had not worked consistently for some time, there were some initial adjustments necessary to help him make this transition.

Brodie's manager, Anne, took Brodie 'under her wing', and gave Brodie the start he needed to help him on his way. Anne and Brodie were able to have a difficult conversation that was necessary so that Brodie's hygiene and appearance would be acceptable for the workplace.

Anne soon noticed improvements in his attitude and productivity.

Having not held down full-time employment before, Brodie's financial management skills were also minimal. With some help from the company's finance manager, Brodie learnt skills that enabled him to budget his wages on the important spending areas, such as groceries and bills, without using credit. Brodie used the simple method of creating envelopes for each area of spending and allocating the necessary cash to each envelope every time he was paid. This helped Brodie to reduce his debts and eliminate the use of credit, putting him in control of his spending.

With these two areas of his life vastly improved, Brodie sought to make positive changes in his health as well, eating more nutritious foods and participating in regular physical activity. Brodie was able to purchase healthy foods from the on-site cafeteria, and soon decided to start running. Over time, Brodie reduced his weight by over 20 kg.

Image courtesy of Juicy Isle

From a simple conversation with his employer, Brodie was able to turn his life around. The impact on his workmates and his young family has been dramatic. This no-cost intervention has also potentially created a long-term Juicy Isle employee which will save the business money by reducing costs associated with advertising for and retraining new staff.

'Not only did Brodie turn his life around, but Juicy Isle has gained a valuable employee, and I, as his manager, feel a great sense of satisfaction seeing what Brodie has achieved,' said Anne.

> 'I am really grateful to Juicy Isle for giving me a go when it seemed like no one else would. I really like working here and I hope I will stay here for a long time – I owe so much to this company. Don't ever let yourself give up – there is nothing you can't do or can't accomplish.' – Brodie

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WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

There are several organisations that can assist you with information around social and emotional wellbeing and related issues.

For a list of these organisations, their contact details and the services they can provide, download the following resource from this CD-ROM or from the *Good health. Good business.* website at www.workcover.tas.gov.au/goodhealthgoodbusiness

i **FACT SHEET** Where to go for more information - Social and emotional wellbeing

REFERENCES

1. Medibank Private 2008, *The cost of workplace stress in Australia*, Medibank Private, Australia.

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