COVID-19 Psychological Safety Information for Employers within the Child and Family Services Sector

⇒ How Leaders can effectively manage risks psychological health for frontline workers?
⇒ What are the possible psychosocial hazards arising from COVID-19?
⇒ How to effectively manage working from home risks
⇒ Key steps employers can take to minimise workplace stress and workplace isolation?
⇒ Tips for managing stress and isolation arising from COVID-19
⇒ Further information and resources

The Australian Government continues to closely monitor the outbreak of COVID-19. You can access the latest information from www.australia.gov.au.

⇒ **How Leaders can effectively manage risks psychological health for frontline workers?**

Employers have a duty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act *2004* (OHS Act) which apply to their employee's psychological health too during COVID-19. This is a stressful time for all Victorians and Employers must do what they can to identify and reduce psychological and physical risks to frontline workers and others at the workplace.

A **psychosocial hazard** is defined by SafeWork Australia as '*anything in the design or management of work that causes stress'.* Stress is the reaction a person has when they perceive the demands of their work exceeds their ability or resources to cope. Work-related stress if prolonged or severe can cause psychological and physical injury.

Employers can effectively manage their employees psychological through taking a risk management approach to psychological workplace safety. During COVID-19, it is more important for frequent contact for ongoing support during remote working arrangements, social support and support for frontline workers. The Risk Management Approach to Psychosocial Hazards is shown here as 4 key steps.

⇒ **What are the possible psychosocial hazards arising from COVID-19?**

In February 2020, WorkSafe Victoria released a video Psychological health - Is the work safe? Do I feel safe?

This video explains the relationship between physical hazards and the organisational factors that may result in psychological hazards that may affect employees in Victorian workplaces.   Click the **link** here to watch the video: (please insert the hyperlink on the 'link' button https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/video-psychological-health-work-safe-do-i-feel-safe)

For the Child and Family Welfare services sector, psychosocial hazards arising form COVID-19 may include:

- **Exposure to aggression or violence** – for example in residential care units or outreach program visits etc
- **Increased work demands** – for example courier drivers
- **Isolated work** – for example where employees are remote working
- **Low support** – for example workers employees in isolation may feel they don't have the normal support they receive to do their jobs or where work demands have dramatically increased supervisors may not be able to offer the same level of support or limited access
- **Poor environmental conditions** – for example where temporary workplaces may be hot, cold or noisy.
- **Poor organisational change management** – for example if organisations are restructuring to address the effects of COVID-19 and providing no information or support to employees.

⇒ **How to effectively manage working from home risks**

Employers have made working from home arrangements **where possible**.

For our frontline workers who are working within residential care units and within other care facilities, Employers should consult their employees regularly to ensure they are safe.

Employers should offer employees support, including access to Employee Assistance Program support and other supports when required.

WorkSafe Victoria has further OHS information about working from home. See this information Minimising Spread of Coronavirus – Working from home. (please insert this hyperlink here https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/minimising-spread-coronavirus-covid-19-working-home and then remove the link once completed).

⇒ **Key steps employers can take to minimise workplace stress and workplace isolation?**

Employers can manage psychosocial risks in the same way as managing physical risks. Workplace stress and isolation is a key psychological health risk to monitor during COVID-19.

Safe Work Australia has produced a useful infographic on the **Four steps to preventing psychological injury at work** which shows how the 4-step risk management approach can be applied to the above psychosocial risks.

⇒ **Tips for managing stress and isolation arising from COVID-19**

The **Heads Up** (insert hyperlink: https://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-employers) Program has useful information on creating mentally healthy workplaces for Employers and Employees.
It acknowledges that whilst most jobs involve some degree of stress, this can affect people at all levels within an organisation, including frontline employees, managers and senior leaders in different ways.

Some stress is reasonable, but it becomes an issue when it is excessive and ongoing. There are some strategies everyone can adopt to manage and reduce their own stress levels, as well as find a positive work-life balance.

There are **tips** for how to manage stress and isolation as an Employer:

- **Frequently check in** and ask how your employees are going and if there is anything stressing them

- **Keep your employees well informed** with information from official sources, regularly communicate with frontline or remote employees and share relevant information as it comes to hand
- **Consult your employees** on any risks to their psychological health and how these can be managed
- **Provide employees with an OHS point of contact** to discuss their concerns and to find workplace information in a central place
- **Keep your employees informed** about their entitlements if they become unfit for work or have additional caring responsibilities
- **Seek opportunities to proactively support employees** who may be more at risk of workplace psychological injury (e.g. frontline workers) and encourage employees to access their workplace mental health and wellbeing, such as your employee assistance programs or positive supervision. Create team wellbeing initiatives or positive mental health and wellbeing activities to promote a mentally healthy workplace.

⇒ **Further information and resources**

Every day more information for Employers about how to manage their OHS duties becomes available. WorkSafe Victoria has recently published their new Safety Alert for the healthcare and social assistance sector which is included in the links below.

You can also visit the following websites for further information on how to care for your employees mental health during COVID-19: Visit the following sites for information on caring for mental health:

- Australian Psychological Society – Tips for coping with coronavirus anxiety
- Beyond Blue – Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak
- Comcare – Coronavirus: looking after your mental health
- Head to Health – COVID-19 Support
- Heads Up – Creating a mentally healthy workplace (insert hyperlinkhttps://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/what-is-a-mentally-workplace/9-attributes-of-a-healthy-workplace?&gclid=Cj0KCQjw4dr0BRCxARIsAKUNjWR9x9zzlo6Ugp95BH7GHYypKd9QlaNvzNsxsTDqwUNWHkKMilU39hAaAvyiEALw_wcB)
- Headspace – How to cope with stress related to coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Safe Work Australia - Work-related psychological health and safety: A systematic approach to meeting your duties.
- WorkSafe Victoria – Exposure to Coronavirus (please insert this hyperlink here - https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/safety-alerts/exposure-coronavirus-workplaces)
- VicHealth – How to look after your mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic outbreak

⇒ **Further Support at the Centre**

If you have a **COVID-19 OHS query** or require **further support** on how to keep your employees safe during COVID-19, you can email your query to covid19@cfecfw.asn.au.