

Frequently Asked Questions

Occupational Health and Safety

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING DURING COVID-19



The Coronavirus Pandemic has impacted our society and workplaces in various ways. A lot of people may feel worried, anxious, uncertain, overwhelmed and stressed during this time. Employers have an ongoing obligation to ensure that the work that their employees are required to perform does not create a risk to their psychological health. Therefore, it's important that those who are affected are provided the support they need.

Creating a work environment that is safe, positive, supportive, inclusive and without risks to employees' health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable, is a legal obligation for employers and/or self-employed persons and everyone needs to take responsibility for achieving a safe and healthy workplace.

Below is some general advice in response to enquiries we have received but we encourage you to contact the Master Builders OHS Team on (03) 9411 4555 for any specific enquiries.

What can I do as an employer to promote a positive and supportive workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Here are some ways that you can encourage your employees to stay mentally healthy and to promote a positive and supportive workplace during this difficult time:

- Prioritise employees' mental health – employees may feel anxious about their health, losing their job and being able to provide for their households. Accordingly, keep communicating with your employees, ensure that they understand what is required of them whilst the social distancing measures are in place, listen to their concerns and respond appropriately, allow employees to take time off to rest if they are struggling.
- Lead the organisation in an open and honest manner – transparent communication during this time is crucial and two-way communication is important. It will provide your employees with a sense of security, ability to plan ahead and manage their time and resources accordingly.

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- Manage employee's workload - keep giving employees clear directions, maintain open communication and ensure that they understand what and how their job needs to be done differently at the present time.
- Prioritise work/life balance and an inclusive workplace environment, ensuring there is no discrimination against any employees who are required to self-isolate or any ethnic groups.
- Provide mental health support - allow your employees who are struggling to take time off to look after their mental health and provide them with resources referred to below.

How can I actively encourage employees to look after their own mental health during this uncertain time?

Communicate to your employees that you recognise and understand the feelings of anxiety, distress and concern many people may be experiencing in relation to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and promote some of the tips for coping with COVID-19:

Find a healthy balance in relation to media coverage and stick to the facts communicated by public-health agencies

- Try and keep things in perspective
- Follow prevention tips to stay healthy
- Practice stress and anxiety management exercises that work for you
- Try to maintain a positive attitude that you can deal with whatever situation you may face
- Connect with others and reach out for help if you feel overwhelmed
- Provide mental support to employees who are in self-isolation or quarantine
- Seek confidential support from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or any other support provided in the workplace

What resources can I provide my employees to help?

There are many excellent Mental Health Support services available:

- WorkSafe Victoria's [Work Well Program](#)
- [Incolink Wellbeing and Support services](#)
- [Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service](#)

You can also provide employees with the following information:

- [Work Well toolkit](#)
- [Beyond Blue factsheet](#)
- [DHHS - Coping with feelings of anxiety](#)

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Information on a number of help lines and support groups can also be made available for employees, including:

[1800RESPECT](#)

Confidential information, counselling and support service open 24 hours to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

[Black Dog Institute](#)

Information on symptoms, treatment and prevention of depression and bipolar disorder.

[Carers Australia](#)

1800 242 636

Short-term counselling and emotional and psychological support services for carers and their families in each state and territory.

[Embrace Multicultural Mental Health](#)

A national platform for multicultural communities and Australian mental health services to access resources, services and information in a culturally accessible format.

[Headspace](#)

1800 650 890

Free online and telephone service that supports young people aged between 12 and 25 and their families going through a tough time.

[Kids Helpline](#)

1800 55 1800

A free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.

[MensLine Australia](#)

1300 78 99 78

A telephone and online support, information and referral service, helping men to deal with relationship problems in a practical and effective way.

[Head to Health](#)

An innovative website that can help you find free and low-cost, trusted online and phone mental health resources.

[MindSpot Clinic](#)

1800 61 44 34

An online and telephone clinic providing free assessment and treatment services for Australian adults with anxiety or depression.

For more information,
contact the MBV team at
mbassist@mbav.com.au or on (03) 9411 4555

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[National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation \(NACCHO\)](#)

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and Aboriginal Medical Services in each state and territory.

[QLife](#)

1800 184 527 3pm-12am

QLife is Australia's first nationally-oriented counselling and referral service for LGBTI people. The project provides nation-wide, early intervention, peer supported telephone and web-based services to diverse people of all ages experiencing poor mental health, psychological distress, social isolation, discrimination, experiences of being misgendered and/or other social determinants that impact on their health and wellbeing.

[Relationships Australia](#)

1300 364 277

A provider of relationship support services for individuals, families and communities.

[SANE Australia](#)

1800 18 7263

Information about mental illness, treatments, where to go for support and help carers.

[Support after Suicide](#)

Information, resources, counselling and group support to those bereaved by suicide. Education and professional development to health, welfare and education professionals.

Support groups and online forums

Talking about what's going on with others who understand – or may be going through something similar – can really make a difference.

Black Dog Institute have a list of support groups in every state and territory that can help people connect with groups of people who meet regularly to discuss their experiences, their problems and their strategies for coping.

Beyond Blue online forums are also a great way to connect with people online, in a safe and anonymous environment, to discuss anxiety, depression, suicide and a range of life issues. Anyone in Australia can participate in discussions, connect with others and share their experiences with our community.

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A team member has come to me expressing anxiety and stress over job security, what are my obligations as their employer and how can I support my employee?

Best workplace outcomes are achieved when employers and employees and their representatives work together, cooperatively and constructively. Providing role clarity helps employees feel more relaxed and in control. It also improves engagement, job satisfaction, commitment and productivity. In addition to the mental health benefits, it also means co-workers understand who is responsible for certain topics when they need help.

It's important to keep employees up to date with changes as they arise and point them in the direction of reputable sources of information, such as [DHHS' website](#). You should also aim to keep communicating with employees in an open and honest manner about what your business is going through and how it may affect the employees.

Employees who are experiencing hardship, may be able to claim Incolink Hardship payment or may be able to access Centrelink or other government wage subsidy programs. Workers who have been in the construction industry for seven years or more may be able to access their long service leave through CoINVEST.

If feeling anxious, uncertain or overwhelmed, you and your employees can contact the below support lines:

Lifeline Australia 13 11 14

A crisis support service offering short term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.

Kids Helpline 1800 551 800

A free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

Mental health information and support for all Victorians

For more support information as an employer you can access the following links:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/business-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/disputes-disasters-and-succession-planning/illness-and-business-management-plan/coronavirus-business-support>

<https://www.mbav.com.au/news-information/news/economyfinance/urgent-message-ceo-covid-19-coronavirus-guidelines-building-and?economyfinance>

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<https://www.mbav.com.au/news-information/news/economyfinance/urgent-message-ceo-covid-19-coronavirus-guidelines-building-and?economyfinance>

I have had instances of alleged inappropriate conduct occur on building sites, directed towards some ethnic groups, how can I resolve these issues and set clear standards of behaviour for my workforce?

- Workplace harassment and bullying should not be tolerated in any form. As there can be a risk of workplace bullying wherever people work together, you, as an employer, should put in place measures to control such risks. There is limited evidence to show interventions after bullying has occurred are effective. Prevention is the key to creating a safe working environment.
- Where there is an alleged incident of workplace bullying, this is best managed by dealing with it as soon as an employer is aware there is a problem. An employer's failure to prevent or address workplace bullying could send a message that bullying is an accepted behaviour in the workplace.
- Members are reminded of the following steps you can take to assist you with preventing and managing instances of alleged harassment or bullying:
- Call a member of our OHS and IR teams at MBAV to assist you understand your obligations and actions to take
- Consult, develop, implement and communicate a workplace harassment and bullying policy
- Educate and inform managers and supervisors regarding their roles and responsibilities in respect to preventing workplace harassment and bullying. Provide them with information, such as an introduction to the topic and their responsibilities that [you can access here](#).
- Ensure you and your employees understand your legal obligations in this regard, an overview can be [found here](#).
- Remember – prevention is better than cure. Understand how to mitigate the risks, see some practical [suggestions here](#).
- Involve your employees in matters that affect their safety. Consult with workers and run toolbox meetings to help them understand the appropriate workplace standards, what bullying and harassment consists of, how it can be reported and how you will manage alleged cases. Practical case studies to educate your workforce [can be accessed here](#).

Further Information

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/bullying-workplace>

What do I do if one of my employees has a family member who becomes unwell?

This can create uncertainty for workers grappling with the 'new normal' during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly when aspiring to live and work in accordance with the restrictions imposed by Government.

Unless the family member has returned from overseas, been around someone who is confirmed to have contracted COVID-19, is being tested for COVID-19 and has close contact with your employee and/or your employee is experiencing some of the symptoms of coronavirus, additional precautions or actions may not be necessary.

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However, this is so long as you adhere to good personal hygiene standards and social distancing principles in the workplace. Additionally, you need to remind the employee that if they do become unwell themselves, they must notify their manager/ supervisor and not attend the workplace.

Employees who do choose to self-isolate as a precaution due to the uncertainty around a family member who is unwell may be able to access a leave entitlement, paid or unpaid. Members seeking further information about the options available should contact Master Builders Victoria's Industrial Relations Team.

My team member is getting stressed more readily when I provide ordinary directions and work instructions. What are some practical things I can adopt to manage these situations well?

It is understandable under these difficult circumstances that employees may experience higher levels of stress and research shows that this can lead to decreased job performance, higher error rates and reduced quality of work. Effective communication and reasonable management action delivered in a reasonable way is essential at this time. This may include repeating work instructions to ensure retention of information, checking to ensure understanding of any changes to work procedures and practices as well as checking in on the emotions of team members and providing additional reassurance and support. Leaders may need to develop their capabilities to communicate effectively, manage change, manage the emotions of others, being able to adapt their style for this current climate of chaos and uncertainty as well as managing performance in this difficult environment.

Employees should also be reminded of the additional support available, such as an employee assistance program (EAP) or Incolink, where it exists as well as the resources referred to earlier.