

2

Psychosocial safety is more than self-care



Helps shift the conversation from individual coping and self-care to work design, systems, support and psychosocial risk.



Reflection statements



2.1 The organisation looks beyond individual coping and self-care to identify work-related causes of pressure, harm or distress, including workload, systems, support, behaviours, culture and workplace relationships.



2.2 Leaders and staff understand that bullying, harassment, discrimination, sexual harassment, exclusion, poor workplace relationships and unsafe culture can create or increase psychosocial risk.



A Conversation Starter Pack for Aged Care
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Looking beyond self-care

Self-care and wellbeing support can help workers recover from pressure, but they do not remove psychosocial hazards from the work. Psychosocial safety requires organisations, leaders and teams to look at the work itself: how it is designed, managed, supported, communicated and reviewed.

Self-care is still important. Workers need opportunities to rest, recover, seek support and care for their wellbeing. However, self-care should not be used as the main response to repeated work-related pressure. If workers are repeatedly exposed to high workload, emotional demands, unclear roles, poor support, conflict or uncertainty, the focus also needs to be on what is creating that pressure. Safer work means looking at the source of the risk, not only how individuals are coping with it.

Psychosocial safety and psychological safety

Psychosocial safety and psychological safety are related, but they are not the same.

Psychosocial safety: is about protecting workers from psychological harm caused by work-related hazards. It focuses on the conditions, systems, behaviours and expectations that may expose workers to harm.

This includes things like high job demands, poor support, unclear roles, exposure to distress or aggression, poor change management, bullying, harassment, violence, conflict, remote or isolated work, and low control over how work is done.



Psychological safety: is about whether people feel safe to speak up, ask questions, raise concerns, admit mistakes and offer ideas without fear of humiliation, punishment or being dismissed. Psychological safety is important. Workers need to feel safe to raise concerns about workload, role clarity, client risk, family distress, team pressure or unsafe systems.

However, psychological safety does not replace psychosocial safety. A team may feel able to speak up and still be exposed to unsafe workloads, repeated distress, unclear roles or poor support.

Psychological safety is important because workers need to feel safe to raise concerns. But it does not replace psychosocial safety. A team may feel able to speak up and still be exposed to unsafe workloads, repeated distress, unclear roles or poor support.



Why this matters in aged care

In aged care and community care, workers may be supporting older people and families through complex needs, grief, uncertainty, changing services, funding limits and distress. When the response focuses only on individual self-care, workers may be left feeling responsible for managing pressure that is created or intensified by work design, systems, communication or role expectations. This can make it harder to notice when work needs to be reviewed, clarified, better supported or changed. Self-care may support recovery, but safer work requires attention to the source of the risk.

What this should prompt

This resource should prompt workers, teams and leaders to ask whether pressure is being treated mainly as an individual wellbeing issue, when it may also be connected to workload, support, role clarity, emotional demands, communication or systems. Repeated pressure should not be managed through self-care messages alone. Under work health and safety duties, organisations need to identify and manage psychosocial risks. This means looking at what is creating the pressure and what needs to be reduced, clarified, redesigned or better supported.

This pack introduces key concepts and conversation starters to help workers, teams and leaders begin this work. It does not replace training, supervision, WHS advice, psychosocial risk assessment, consultation or organisational processes.



Identify and manage psychosocial risks.



Reference: Safe Work Australia, Managing psychosocial hazards at work and Psychosocial hazards. Organisations should also refer to relevant state or territory WHS/OHS legislation, regulations, codes of practice and regulatory guidance.