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# Communicating the safety message

A guide to providing health and safety information, training and consultation



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# Introduction

Good communication between everyone at work – whether it is employers providing workers with appropriate safety instructions or asking them for their ideas on how to keep everyone safe and healthy – is essential in reducing the risk of people being injured or made ill during work activities.

Put simply, if staff are to understand how to keep themselves and others safe and healthy, they must be provided with suitable information, instruction and training on the safe working practices to follow. However, good communication also means consulting and involving employees on the best ways of managing health and safety risks, as research has shown that workplaces where staff are involved in taking decisions about health and safety are safer and healthier.

This guide provides an overview of the steps employers can take to effectively communicate with workers on health and safety issues – such as providing information and training and consulting them on health and safety matters.

## Thomas Tevlin

Editor



Because  
Experience  
Counts

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# Communicating the safety message

**A**lthough an employer might provide the best equipment and procedures to minimise the risk of workers being injured or made ill, these measures will not be enough to keep people safe and healthy unless there is excellent communication between everyone at work on all aspects of health, safety and wellbeing.

Indeed, good communication – whether it is employers providing workers with information, instruction and training on the hazards and risks they face, or consulting and involving staff when developing suitable risk controls – is vital in ensuring everyone understands how to work safely and is genuinely committed to doing so.

The starting point for effective health and safety communication is providing employees and, where appropriate, others at work – such as contractors – with adequate health and safety information, instruction and training. Workers must be given all the information and training they need to understand the hazards and risks they may face; the measures in place to protect them; and how to follow these systems and work without putting themselves or others, such as colleagues or the public, at risk of injury or ill health.

Employers must also supervise their employees – and other staff under their control – to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, their health and safety. This means, for instance, supervising and monitoring workers to ensure they are

following the information and training given – for instance, checking they are wearing any personal protective equipment that has been provided.

Under UK law, employers are also required to [consult all their employees](#) – or the employee safety representatives, if present – on anything at work that could substantially affect employees' health and safety. The general idea behind this is that, by giving employees information about the hazards they may face – and allowing them to raise concerns, suggest solutions and influence the final decisions on the best ways of reducing the associated risks – employers can decide on and implement the most effective systems and equipment to protect the health and safety of their staff and others.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says consulting and involving employees on health and safety matters can lead to better decisions about ways of managing the risk of injury and ill health at work.

**“Workers must be given information and training so they understand the hazards and risks.”**

## Some facts and numbers

# 441,000

workers in Britain  
reported suffered  
a non-fatal injury at  
work in 2020-21 (LFS)



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## 142

workers killed at  
work in Britain in  
2020/21 (HSE)

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## 1.7

million workers in  
Britain suffering from  
work-related ill health  
(new or long standing  
cases) in 2020/21 (LFS)

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## 451,000

workers in Britain  
reported suffering from  
a new case work-related  
stress, depression or  
anxiety in 2020/21 (LFS)

Sources: HSE/Labour Force Survey (LFS - estimates based on self-reports by workers) 2020/21, [hse.gov.uk/statistics](https://hse.gov.uk/statistics)

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Employees must be given appropriate health and safety information and training when they first start work.

For example, employees – and employee health and safety representatives – usually have extensive knowledge about their job and the business, meaning they are well placed to understand the hazards and risks and to help their employer to develop the most effective ways of controlling or removing the associated risk of injury or ill health.

HSE adds that if employees are actively involved in reaching decisions about the best ways of reducing risks, they are more likely to be committed to implementing and following them.

This guide provides some general advice on ways of communicating health and safety information to workers – in particular, by providing information and training. It also provides general guidance on how to communicate with workers on

health and safety, such as how to consult and involve them in decisions about ways of managing the risks.

It is based on guidance from HSE and more detailed advice on the topic is available from HSE and other reputable advisory bodies. See the back pages for some suggested sources of guidance.

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### Information and training

The first step in achieving effective communication on health and safety at work is to provide workers with adequate and appropriate information, instruction and training so they know how to work without posing a risk to the health and safety of themselves and others.

HSE says that as well helping to prevent accidents and ill health by

ensuring workers have the knowledge to work safely, providing adequate information and training can help to create a positive safety culture, where safe and healthy working becomes second nature to all.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, all UK employers must provide “such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, to far as is reasonably practicable”, the health and safety at work of their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on this by requiring employers to provide their employees with “comprehensible and relevant” information on:

- The risks and hazards they may face at work, as identified by the employer’s risk assessment
- The preventive and protective measures that are in place, or will be introduced, to eliminate or reduce the risks
- The steps employees must take if they encounter risks or hazards, and how to work safely
- The responsibilities of employees to comply with and follow site rules and safe working procedures
- The procedures to follow in the event of an emergency or a dangerous situation – such as a fire alert, explosion, chemical spill, security alert or dangerous electrical fault.

The Management Regulations also set out a number of specific situations, circumstances and times where adequate health and safety training must

be provided to employees. These are:

- When employees first start work for the employer
- If employees are exposed to new or increased risks – for example, due to a change to their job role or working environment, or the introduction of new or alerted equipment or technology.

The Management Regulations also require employers to repeat employees’ health and safety training “periodically where appropriate”. This generally means refresher training will be required if, for example, there is evidence that employees’ skills or knowledge have become rusty or need updating.

The law also requires employers to provide health and safety training free of charge and it must take place during working hours.

Crucially, the Management Regulations also require employers to take account of employees’ “capabilities as regards health and safety” when entrusting them with work tasks. By implication, this means considering factors such as the employees’ existing knowledge and understanding of hazards, risks and safe working practices; and whether issues as the employees’ language or literacy skills could affect their ability to understand instructions and work safely.

It is also vital to remember that, although UK safety law only requires employers to provide health and safety training to their own employees, by law all people working for or under the control of an employer, or visiting their work site – such as temporary staff and contractors –

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must be given adequate health and safety information by the host or main employer. This includes information on the hazards and risks they may face; the precautions in place to deal with those risks and how to follow them; and the procedures to follow in an emergency.

As a result, employers need to consider whether non-employees working for them, or present on their site, require information and instruction.

There are also various UK safety regulations that require employers to provide employees (and sometimes others) with suitable health and safety information, instruction and training when undertaking specific tasks and faced by certain hazards and risks.

For example, if noise is likely to be at or above the lower exposure action values set out in the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 – posing a risk of hearing damage – the employees at risk must be provided with instruction and training on how to protect their hearing.

HSE guidance on legislation, such as on the Manual Handling Regulations, also stresses the importance of providing employees with suitable information and training to enable them to avoid the risk of injury or ill health from specific hazards.

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### Training: steps to take

HSE has published general, introductory [advice](#) on how to provide health and safety information, instruction, training and supervision to workers. It also provides more detailed guidance on how to adequately inform and train workers

on the health and safety procedures to follow when faced by specific hazards and risks, such as hazardous substances, harmful levels of noise and work at height.

HSE's leaflet, [Health and safety training – a brief guide](#), suggests taking a five-step approach to planning and providing information and training.

The first step is to decide which employees – and, if appropriate others, such as contractors – require information and training and what it should cover.

All UK employers are legally required to assess the health and safety risks their work activities could pose to their workers and others. The idea is to identify the potential hazards; who could be harmed by them and how; and the best ways or eliminating or controlling the risk of injury and ill health.

The results of the risk assessment(s) should therefore be used to identify the knowledge and skills employees and others need to work in a safe and healthy fashion. Employers should also consider if health and safety law requires them to provide specific information and training – such as training for workplace first aiders or operators of machinery or mobile plant, such as lift trucks.

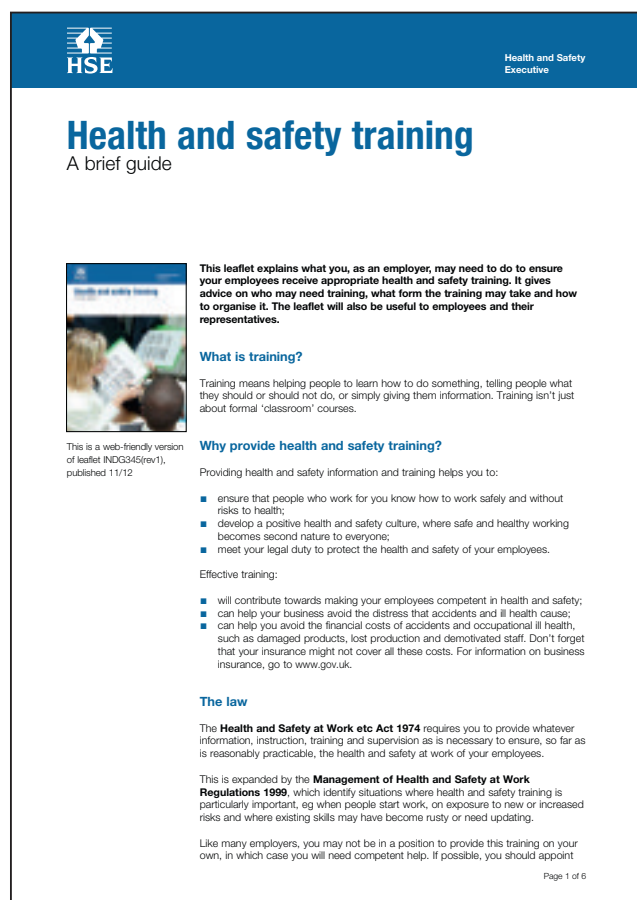
The knowledge and skills employees require to work in safe manner should then be compared with the workforce's current understanding and skills to spot any gaps that need to be addressed.

Employers must remember they have a legal duty to consult their employees (and/or the employee safety representatives) on the planning and organisation of the health and safety



## Free guidance:

Free guidance on how to communicate health and safety information to workers is available from organisations such as HSE and health, safety and wellbeing advisory bodies and associations.



**For HSE's guidance see:**  
[hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

training to be provided to employees. The idea is that by consulting those who undertake the work, employers can increase the chances of the information and training they provide being relevant and effective.

HSE says that, as a general rule, the following people should receive suitable information, instruction and – if appropriate – training:

- **The employer** – so they understand how to identify hazards and control risks at work, and how to consult employees on health and safety issues
- **Managers and supervisors** – so they understand what is expected of them in terms of managing health and safety
- **Employees** – so they understand how to work safely and how to report health and safety concerns to their managers
- **Contractors and self-employed people working for the employer or present on site** – they may need information and instruction so they are aware of any specific hazards and the precautions to follow.

The second step is to decide on the organisation's training priorities. HSE says that, in general, employers should prioritise training for situations where a lack of information and competence could result in serious harm; and where people have particular needs – such as new recruits, young workers and staff taking on new responsibilities.

The third step is to decide on the most suitable and effective methods of providing the information and training. There are a variety of possible training methods, including providing face-to-

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face or written information or instruction; ‘on-the-job’ training or coaching; short talks on specific safe working practices (‘toolbox talks’); classroom-type training; and computer-based or online training.

HSE says training can often be delivered effectively in-house by the employer’s own staff, providing the trainer has the necessary knowledge and competence. If necessary, employers can also use external help, such as training providers.

The fourth step is to deliver the training, ensuring the information is easy-to-understand and follow, and the fifth step is to check the training has worked.

According to HSE, typical questions to ask when assessing the effectiveness of the information and training include:

- Do employees understand what is required of them?
- Are workers actually working as they have been trained to?
- Do workers and line managers think the training is relevant and effective?
- Has there been any improvement in health and safety performance, or positive changes in behaviour?

HSE says keeping records of the training can help an employer to manage their training programme. Employers should also monitor their training records as part of the systems they have in place to spot if and when refresher training is required.

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### New starters

HSE warns workers are as likely to have an accident in the first six months at a workplace as during the whole of the rest

of their working life. The extra risk is due to a number of factors, such as a lack of familiarity with the job, work environment and hazards, and a reluctance to raise concerns about health and safety risks.

However, the Management Regulations require employers to provide employees with adequate health and safety training when they first start work.

Therefore, all new employees must be provided with adequate health and safety induction training when before they begin their employment. The content and extent of the induction will depend on a variety of factors, such as the nature of the hazards and risks and the new starter’s capabilities, such as their familiarity with the work and risk controls.

As a result, there is no mandatory list of topics that should be covered in an induction and instead employers should use the findings of their risk assessments and their assessment of the worker’s knowledge and capabilities to decide on the information and training to provide. However, a health and safety induction should generally cover:

- The risks that new workers may be exposed to and the precautions they must take to avoid those risks
- The general health, safety and emergency arrangements – such as the nature and location of any first aid equipment and personnel, and the fire and emergency procedures to follow
- Employees’ responsibilities under health and safety law – including taking care of their own and others’ health and safety; following the training they have been given when using

any work items provided to them; co-operating with their employer on health and safety; and reporting any situations at work that pose a serious and imminent risk to people.

As explained earlier, employers must also provide adequate supervision for their employees – and, if necessary others, such as contractors under their control – to ensure their health and safety.

HSE says effective supervision can help an employer to check that workers have fully understood the information and training given and have the necessary capacity and competence to work safely.

In addition, all UK workplaces are legally obliged to either display a copy of HSE's poster [\*Health and Safety Law: What you need to know\*](#), or to provide staff with the corresponding leaflet. These outline both the employer's duty to protect the health and safety of workers and the duties of employees to work in a safe and healthy fashion.

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## Worker involvement

Another vital aspect of effective health and safety communication is to consult employees on health and safety matters and to involve them in making decisions about ways of managing the risks.

Employers are [legally required to consult their employees](#) – and/or the employee safety representatives – on anything at work that could substantially affect employees' health and safety. The idea is that employers provide their employees with adequate information about the health and safety hazards they

face and allow workers to raise concerns and make suggestions about the best ways of reducing the associated dangers.

HSE says consultation should be a two-way process, where employees are allowed to raise their concerns and the employer listens to and takes account of what they say before making any decisions about how to manage the risks.

However, HSE says consulting and involving workers in managing health and safety does not remove the right of employers to make the final decision about ways of managing the risks. The employer is still responsible for making the final decision – but must consult employees and consider their views before deciding how best to protect their health and safety.

[HSE says research has shown](#) that workplaces where staff are involved in taking decisions about health and safety tend to be safer and healthier, have better productivity rates and higher levels of workforce motivation. Studies have also shown that when employees are involved in health and safety decision-making the organisation sees improvements in overall efficiency and quality.

There is thought to be a variety of reasons for this. For example, HSE says employees are often the best people to understand the risks in their workplace, so can help the employer to make better decisions about how to effectively manage them. Also, if employees are actively involved in drawing up and deciding on the health and safety procedures, there is a greater likelihood of them being committed to following them.

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HSE reminds employers that consultation and workforce involvement in health and safety is not something to be daunted by or discouraged about, and it does not have to be lengthy or bureaucratic. For example, in a small business an informal process of talking to employees regularly and considering their views when taking decisions might be a suitable form of consultation. However, it may be necessary to have more formal and detailed consultation arrangements and allocate additional time to the process – for example, for a large workforce or complex risks.

There are two key sets of regulations that require organisations to consult their workforce on health and safety matters.

In workplaces where the employer recognises trade unions (and trade unions are recognised for collective bargaining purposes), the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 apply. If so, the union can decide to appoint health and safety representatives (known as ‘safety representatives’).

If the union does this, the employer must consult those representatives on health and safety matters affecting the employees they represent.

In workplaces where employees are not in a trade union; where a trade union is present but the employer does not recognise it; a trade union is recognised but has decided not to appoint safety representatives; or a trade union is recognised by the employer but those employees who are not members of that union do not want the union to represent them on health and safety matters; the

Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 will apply.

In these circumstances, employers can choose to either consult employees directly as individuals; through elected health and safety representatives (known as ‘representatives of employee safety’); or through a combination of two, depending on what is appropriate

The law requires employers to consult employees – and/or the employee safety representatives – about anything in the workplace or work activities that could substantially affect employees’ health and safety. This means employees must be consulted about:

- Any change which may have a substantial effect on employees’ health and safety – for example, new or different procedures, types of work, equipment, premises and ways of working, such as shift patterns
- The employer’s arrangements for getting competent people to help them comply with health and safety law (a competent person is someone who has the knowledge, skills and experience to help an employer to meet their health and safety duties)
- The information the employer must give to employees on the likely risks arising from their work and the preventive and protective measures employees must follow (employers should discuss with employees and/or their representatives the best way for this information to be shared)
- The planning and organisation of health and safety training that must be provided to employees



- The health and safety consequences of introducing new technology.

Employers are required to assess the health and safety risks their employees and others could be exposed to at work, and to take all reasonably practicable steps to protect people from harm.

HSE therefore says when carrying out risk assessments, employers should consult and involve their employees and/or the safety representatives, as they will often have ideas about the problems and ways of solving them. By involving the people who do the work in assessing the risks, this will help to ensure the hazards and risks are correctly identified and the proposed controls will work in practice.

However, HSE stresses this does not mean that formal consultation is required before every task-specific risk assessment. Instead, the regulator says consultation with employees and/or safety representatives should form part of the general risk assessment process.

Employers must provide their employees and the safety representatives with the information they need to participate fully and effectively in the consultation. When consulting trade union appointed or employee-elected safety representatives, employers must also provide them with the information necessary for them to fulfil their functions.

The information that is given to employees and safety representatives should enable them to understand:

- The risks and dangers from their work, or the risks and dangers that could arise if there are changes to their work
- The measures in place – or proposed

– to eliminate or control the risks to employees' health and safety

- The steps employees should follow if they are exposed to a risk or a dangerous situation, including the emergency procedures to follow
- The name of the organisation's competent person, who is responsible for helping the employer to comply with their health and safety duties.

HSE says employers should already have the relevant information they need to provide to employees and safety representatives as part of their safety management system – such as copies of risk assessments or accident records.

It says there is no need for employers to present the information in a different format or provide it as a separate package, or to get hold of additional information for employees or representatives.

The law does not state when and for how long employers must consult employees and/or safety representatives about health and safety matters. Instead, it says consultation must be carried out “in good time”. HSE says this means employers must allow enough time:

- To explain the issues to employees and/or the representatives, including the steps the employer plans to take
- For employees and/or the safety representatives to consider the issue and make an informed response to the employer, and
- For the employer to consider and take account of the employees' responses before making a final decision.

Therefore, there are no specific

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frequencies set out in law for when and how long consultation should take place. Instead, HSE says employers should generally consult promptly and regularly.

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### Trade union and elected safety representatives

If an employer recognises a trade union and the union has appointed, or is about to appoint, safety representatives, the employer must consult those representatives on health and safety matters relevant to the employees they represent. Union-appointed safety representatives are entitled to:

- Represent the relevant employees on health and safety during discussions with the employer, including making representations to the employer on potential hazards and dangers at work
- Investigate accidents, near misses and other potential hazards and dangerous occurrences in the workplace
- Investigate complaints made by an employee they represent about their health, safety or welfare at work
- Present the findings of investigations to the employer
- Inspect the workplace
- Represent employees when health and safety inspectors contact or consult the union safety representative
- Request that a health and safety committee is formed, providing the request is made in writing by two or more trade union-appointed safety representatives
- Attend meetings of the firm's health and safety committee, if one exists.

In organisations where trade unions are not recognised – or where a trade union is recognised but has decided not to appoint safety representatives – employers can choose to either consult employees directly as individuals or through elected safety representatives drawn from the workforce, or through a combination of the two.

Under the law, employee-elected safety representatives have fewer functions than trade union-appointed safety representatives. However, they are entitled to:

- Represent the workforce in discussions with the employer on matters affecting the health and safety of the employees they represent
- Take up concerns with the employer about potential hazards and dangerous occurrences in the workplace that may affect the employees they represent
- Represent employees when consulted by health and safety inspectors.

Employers can decide to give employee-elected representatives some or all of the extra functions of a trade union-appointed representative, if the elected representatives agree. This includes the power to examine the causes of accidents, investigate potential hazards and dangers and inspect the workplace.

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### Ways to consult

When it comes to deciding on the best ways of consulting and involving the workforce on health and safety, employers have a number of options.

The appropriate method will depend on a variety of factors, such as whether trade union-appointed and/or employee-elected safety representatives are present and the size and structure of the business and its workforce. In short, employers can choose to consult:

- Directly with all individual employees
- With and through trade union-appointed representatives and/or employee-elected representatives
- Through a combination of the two methods.

HSE says employers must ensure the methods they chose are practical for the purpose of properly consulting the workforce on health and safety matters.

For example, in a small, low-risk, non-unionised workplace an employer may talk directly to their employees about health and safety matters on a regular basis and take account of what they say. Therefore, this may be an adequate form of consultation with employees.

However, in a large company where trade union safety representatives do not exist, it may not be practical to consult all individual employees directly. In this situation, employers may need to arrange for their employees to elect representatives of their choice to represent them in consultations with the employer on health and safety matters.

When an employer decides to consult directly with all employees, HSE says there are a variety of methods for achieving this. These include:

- One-to-one discussions – these can be effective in a small business, for instance

- Regular ‘walkabouts’ – where the employer meets staff face-to-face, providing them with the opportunity to raise concerns and share ideas
- Making a health and safety a standing item on the agenda of routine team meetings
- Special workforce meetings – such as calling the whole workforce together to hear their views
- Work groups – these can be established to tackle specific issues and can bring together employees who are directly involved with the topic so they can contribute solutions
- Using the company’s intranet site to provide health and safety information and request the views of employees
- Staff surveys and suggestion schemes, notice boards and newsletters.

If trade union-appointed safety representatives, and/or employee-elected safety representatives, are present, employers can consult them using a variety of methods.

For example, on some occasions, it may be appropriate and suitable for employers to hold one-to-one meetings with a union appointed or employee-elected safety representative. However, HSE says that in general, it is best to consult with safety representatives through a proper forum – such as a dedicated health and safety committee.

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## Acting on the results

Once the employer has consulted their employees, and/or the safety representatives, HSE says they must

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consider the employees' views before making the final decision about ways of controlling the risks.

HSE says employers should provide feedback to employees and/or the health and safety representatives to explain the reasons for any decisions taken as this will show workers' views have been taken into account. It adds employers should agree a process with their employees and the safety representatives for how the employer will respond to the health and safety issues raised by staff and explain the decisions they eventually make.

HSE says consultation will not always result in agreement between the employer and their employees and representatives on ways of addressing health and safety matters. As a result, the employer should have arrangements in place for handling and settling disagreements between themselves and their employees and the representatives on health and safety issues.

However, HSE says employers should generally be able to resolve differences of opinion between themselves and the workforce by being open, explaining the reasons behind decisions and following any agreed procedures for resolving problems.

In conclusion, HSE says employers should try to create a genuine partnership between themselves and their employees (and/or the representatives) to manage health and safety risks. This should be based on the principles of trust, respect, co-operation and joint problem solving.

It says employers should establish a 'culture of collaboration' with staff,

where concerns, ideas and solutions are freely shared and acted upon, so the whole workforce becomes engaged in promoting a healthy and safe environment. HSE says a genuine partnership between the employer and workers provides greater potential for health and safety improvements than simply complying with the basic duties to consult workers on health and safety.

Finally, HSE adds employers should regularly review their arrangements for consulting and involving employees in managing health and safety to ensure managers and employees are working effectively together to improve the management of health and safety risks.

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### Managing work-related stress and supporting mental health

Good communication between an employer and employees is crucial for effectively managing all risks to workers' health, safety and wellbeing. This applies both to physical risks – such as during work at height or when using machinery – and health risks, such as exposure to hazardous substances, like chemicals.

One area that has gained increased prominence in recent years is employers taking steps to reduce the risk of work-related stress and to support the mental health of their workers.

Generally speaking, work can be good for our mental health and wellbeing – for example, by providing us with a sense of identity and achievement. However, if employers fail to properly manage various aspects of the design and organisation



of work – such as ensuring employees can cope with the demands of their jobs – staff can suffer work-related stress. In turn, this can have a damaging effect on their mental and physical health and their performance and productivity. Stress can also have also a negative impact on the business, creating problems such as higher levels of sickness absence.

Most people benefit from a certain amount of pressure at work as it helps to motivate them, boosts their energy and productivity levels and gives them a sense of ambition. However, if the pressure workers are under at work exceeds their ability to cope, they can suffer stress, which can damage both their mental and physical health.

Although stress is not an illness itself, it can cause workers to feel physically and psychologically unwell, such as feeling distressed and having difficulty sleeping. If the stress is prolonged and unmanageable, it can cause or aggravate mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. Research also suggests there are strong links between stress and physical ill health, such as heart disease.

Work-related stress can also aggravate a pre-existing mental health problem that an employee was otherwise successfully managing without it negatively affecting their work.

In simple terms, employees feel stress when they can't cope with pressures and other issues. For example, an employee might experience stress if they have demands placed on them that they find difficult to cope with. A common example would be a worker becoming stressed

because they feel they don't have the skills or time to meet a tight deadline.

If the pressure that a person is under exceeds their ability to cope – particularly if the pressure lasts for a long time – the stress can become unmanageable.

HSE says there are six main areas that can lead to work-related stress if they are not managed properly. These are:

- **Demands** – for example, employees can become overloaded if they cannot cope with the amount of work or type of work they are asked to do
- **Control** – for example, employees can feel disaffected and perform poorly if they have no say over how and when they do their work
- **Support** – for example, levels of sickness absence often rise if staff feel they cannot talk to managers about issues troubling them
- **Relationships** – for example, a failure to build relationships based on good behaviour and trust can lead to problems related to discipline, grievances and bullying
- **Role** – for example, staff may feel anxious about their work and the organisation if they don't know what is expected of them and/or don't understand how their work fits into the objectives of the organisation
- **Change** – for example, if change is not managed effectively it can lead to uncertainty and insecurity.

Under the Management Regulations 1999, employers are required to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from their work activities. If there is a risk of stress-related ill health arising from the

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work, the employer is then required under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to take steps to remove or reduce the risk, as far as is reasonably practicable.

However, HSE says work-related stress can be tackled and managed by addressing key aspects of the design of work. This means, for example, ensuring workloads are appropriate and there is adequate support for employees from their managers.

HSE says it is important employers take a preventive approach to tackling stress at an organisational level. This means aiming to prevent and manage the root causes of work stress, rather than trying to deal with problems after they occur.

In its general [introductory guidance](#) on managing work-related stress, HSE says employers should look out for the signs of stress among individuals and teams – such as a change in the standard of an individual's work or arguments among teams. If the stress is being caused by, or is linked, to issues at work, like pressure, they should take action to protect workers – such as reducing the pressure and removing or reducing the causes of stress. As well as limiting the harm to an individual, this might involve reviewing the working conditions in the relevant area and if necessary taking steps to control the risk of stress to other workers.

To help employers eliminate or control the risk of ill health from stress, HSE has developed a set of [Management Standards](#). These provide an organisational framework for employers and employees (and employee representatives), to work together to

identify and then eliminate or reduce the risk of harmful stress at work.

The standards are designed to help employers conduct an appropriate risk assessment on the causes and extent of work-related stress; decide how well they are managing the risk of stress; and produce an action plan to both prevent stress and manage its root causes.

They cover six key areas of work design which, if not properly managed, can cause work-related stress. As indicated above, the six areas are:

- **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** – how much say people have over the way they do their work
- **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line managers and colleagues
- **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures staff do not have conflicting roles
- **Change** – how organisational change (large and small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

For each standard, there are statements about good management and work practices that employers should be implementing and achieving to eliminate or reduce the causes of harmful stress at work. There are also statements of

‘what should be happening’ or ‘states to be achieved’ explaining good practice for managing the causes of stress at work and advice on how to achieve them.

The general idea is that, once an employer has identified and assessed the causes and extent of stress at work, they can decide if there are any gaps between their current performance in managing stress and the ‘states to be achieved’ for the six standards. The employer should then work with their managers, employees (and/or the employee representatives) to improve the six key areas of work design so they prevent the root causes of work-related stress.

Therefore, the general idea behind the standards is that employers and employees (and/or employee representatives) work together to:

- Measure the current extent of harmful stress at work that could have a negative impact on employees’ health and safety
- Identify the causes or (potential causes) of stress, and
- Identify the most effective ways of removing or reducing the risk of harmful stress by improving aspects of the work design and work culture.

Therefore, employers should consult and involve their staff when assessing the risk of stress at work; identifying the possible causes; and deciding how best to protect workers from the stress-related ill health.

HSE says employees who do the work are often best placed to identify what is causing stress and suggest ways that aspects of the work – such as the task, working conditions and relationships at

work – could be improved to prevent or reduce harmful levels of stress.

HSE and other advice organisations provide free advice on improving aspects of the work design and culture to prevent or reduce stress at work. These include ensuring sufficient resources (such as time and equipment) are available for staff to do their jobs; allowing employees some control over the pace of their work; designing jobs to provide stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills to keep them motivated; and promoting positive behaviours to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.

In particular, HSE suggests a variety of preventive measures that are particularly relevant to effective health and safety communication. These include asking workers for their views on how to prevent or reduce stress and providing information and training so workers have the skills and knowledge to better cope with pressure at work.

Some key tips from HSE include:

- Hold regular meetings, both with individuals and teams, to discuss their workloads, any anticipated challenges and any emerging issues or pressures
- Provide training to help staff prioritise their workload, or information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities
- Ensure staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job
- Regularly check the training given to ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job

## Communicating the safety message

- Encourage employees to develop their skills, asking them how they would like to use their skills and finding out if they believe they can use their skills to good effect – for example, by drawing up personal development plans that allow staff to identify the skills they would like to develop and any training opportunities they would like to pursue
  - Provide all new members of staff with a thorough induction to the organisation and its policies and procedures, including details of who to speak to about work-related stress
  - Provide employees with timely information to help them understand any proposed organisational changes that may affect them
  - Ensure there is adequate employee consultation on any proposed changes and provide opportunities for employees to influence the proposals
  - If there are organisational changes that could impact on the way employees carry out their role, ensure staff are given training to support and deal with any changes to their jobs
  - Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making, especially where it affects them
  - Provide training to help employees deal with and defuse difficult situations, such as difficult phone calls or aggressive customers
  - Have a written policy and procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour at work – such as bullying and harassment – and a confidential system for people to report such behaviour
  - Provide information on the support available for those experiencing stress or poor mental health, such as the employee assistance programme
  - Develop ways for employees to raise and report their concerns about work-related stress, stress in their personal lives and any mental health worries – such as creating an open environment where staff are encouraged to speak to their line manager, human resources team or their family doctor
  - Train managers to spot the early signs of stress and poor mental health and how to support staff suffering from stress or mental health problems.
- Further detailed guidance on managing work-related stress and supporting the mental health of employees is available from organisations like Acas, BITC, CIPD, IOSH, Mates in Mind, Mind and Mental Health at Work.

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### Finally...

Health and safety communication takes many forms – from informing staff of potential hazards and how to avoid or deal with them, to consulting and involving the workforce in health and safety issues.

By taking these steps, employers can ensure their workers fully understand the risks and hazards they face. They can also encourage workers to play an effective role in helping the organisation to improve its management of health and safety risks.

In turn, this should translate into an improved safety culture at work.



# Recommended reading

**HSE guidance on minimising risks from Covid-19**  
[hse.gov.uk](https://hse.gov.uk)

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**Health and safety made simple/toolbox**  
[hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety](https://hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety)  
[hse.gov.uk/toolbox](https://hse.gov.uk/toolbox)

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**Managing for health and safety/managing risks**  
[hse.gov.uk/managing](https://hse.gov.uk/managing)  
[hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm)

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**Health and safety training: a brief guide**  
[hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.htm)

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**Health and safety law. What you need to know poster, leaflet and pocket card**  
[hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/lawposter.htm)

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**Workers' health and safety (webpages)**  
[hse.gov.uk/workers/index.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/workers/index.htm)

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**Your health, your safety. A brief guide for workers**  
[hse.gov.uk/workers/hse27.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/workers/hse27.htm)

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**Working in Great Britain from overseas/HSE guidance leaflets in various languages**  
[hse.gov.uk/migrantworkers](https://hse.gov.uk/migrantworkers)  
[hse.gov.uk/languages/index.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/languages/index.htm)

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**Worker involvement (HSE webpages)**  
[hse.gov.uk/involvement/index.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/involvement/index.htm)

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**Consulting employees on health and safety. A brief guide to the law**  
[hse.gov.uk/involvement/publications.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/involvement/publications.htm)

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**Involving your workforce in health and safety: guidance for all workplaces**  
[hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg263.htm](https://hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg263.htm)

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**Home working guidance (HSE)**  
[hse.gov.uk/home-working/](https://hse.gov.uk/home-working/)

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**Lone working guidance (HSE)**  
[hse.gov.uk/lone-working](https://hse.gov.uk/lone-working)

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**Young people at work (HSE webpages)**  
[hse.gov.uk/youngpeople](https://hse.gov.uk/youngpeople)  
**Vulnerable workers guidance (HSE)**  
[hse.gov.uk/vulnerable-workers/](https://hse.gov.uk/vulnerable-workers/)

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**New to the job (HSE)**  
[bit.ly/37LncyP](https://bit.ly/37LncyP)

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**Gig economy, agency and temp workers (HSE)**  
[bit.ly/3xQlaln](https://bit.ly/3xQlaln)

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**Fire safety in the workplace (government guidance)**  
[bit.ly/3xDXDHj](https://bit.ly/3xDXDHj)  
[bit.ly/2SqjHX9](https://bit.ly/2SqjHX9)  
[bit.ly/3dtMgKH](https://bit.ly/3dtMgKH)

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**Stress and mental health at work HSE webpages**  
[hse.gov.uk/stress](https://hse.gov.uk/stress)

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**Acas guidance on topics such as supporting workers' mental health and managing home and hybrid workers**  
[acas.org.uk](https://acas.org.uk)

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**Business in the Community (BITC) toolkits on topics such as supporting mental health at work**  
[bitc.org.uk](https://bitc.org.uk)

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**CIPD guidance on topics like mental health at work and supporting home workers**  
[cipd.co.uk](https://cipd.co.uk)

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**IOSH guidance on issues like managing risks to remote workers**  
[iosh.com](https://iosh.com)

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**Mates in Mind guidance on mental health**  
[www.matesinmind.org](https://www.matesinmind.org)

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**Mental Health at Work toolkits for employers**  
[mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](https://mentalhealthatwork.org.uk)

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**Mental Health at Work Commitment**  
[mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment](https://mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment)

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**Mind guidance on supporting mental health**  
[mind.org.uk/workplace](https://mind.org.uk/workplace)

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# Further help

## Acas

Independent organisation that provides impartial advice and training for employers and employees to create positive employer/employee relationships and working cultures. Provides free guidance on topics such as how to ensure good communication and consultation with staff on employment relations issues. This includes guidance on supporting mental health at work.

[acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)

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## British Safety Council

Offers a wide range of training courses and qualifications that teach employers and workers how to manage health, safety and environmental risks. The courses and qualifications also encourage everyone to play their part in keeping the workplace safe and healthy. They are available via e-learning, distance learning and classroom learning.

[www.britsafe.org](https://www.britsafe.org)

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## Being Well Together

Programme from the British Safety Council that provides employers with a wide range of services and tools to enable them to support worker health and wellbeing. Supporters have a range of benefits, such as support for their wellbeing programme and wellbeing training and guides for employers and employees.

[www.beingwelltogether.org](https://www.beingwelltogether.org)

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## Business in the Community (BITC)

Charity that provides free guidance for UK businesses on improving and supporting the physical and mental health of their workers.

[bitc.org.uk](https://bitc.org.uk)

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## CIPD

Professional UK body for human resources and people development. Offers free guidance on employment-related issues such as supporting workers' mental health and implementing flexible, home and hybrid working.

[cipd.co.uk](https://cipd.co.uk)

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## Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

Responsible for enforcing health and safety law at most industrial workplaces in the UK. Offers a wide range of online guidance on managing various health and safety risks.

[hse.gov.uk](https://hse.gov.uk)

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## Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland

Enforces health and safety law in Northern Ireland. Also offers guidance to employers.

[hseni.gov.uk](https://hseni.gov.uk)

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## Healthy Working Lives (Scotland)

Free health and safety advice service for Scottish employers of all sizes.

[healthyworkinglives.com](https://healthyworkinglives.com)

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## Healthy Working Wales

Free health and safety advice service for employers and employees in Wales. Website provides guidance to help employers improve the health, safety and welfare of their staff.

[www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home](https://www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk/home)

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## IOSH

Chartered body and membership organisation for safety and health professionals. Provides a wide range of free online guidance on managing all aspects of worker health, safety and wellbeing.

[iosh.com](https://iosh.com)

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## Mates in Mind

A sister charity of the British Safety Council that helps UK employers to support the mental health of their workers. It offers training designed to get everyone thinking and talking about mental health and to give people the skills to support the mental wellbeing of their colleagues.

[www.matesinmind.org](https://www.matesinmind.org)

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## Mental Health at Work

Website that brings together a variety of guidance on mental health at work.

[mentalhealthatwork.org.uk](https://mentalhealthatwork.org.uk)

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Photo taken by Hollie Jacobs from Brown & Mason

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