

Health and Safety Programs

Orientation for Workers - General

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What is worker orientation?

Worker orientation is the process of introducing new, inexperienced, and transferred workers to the organization, their supervisors, co-workers, work areas, and jobs, and especially to health and safety requirements. During this time, the organization will:

- Provide a tour of the general facility and work areas
- Explain how the work unit functions
- Complete administrative requirements, such as those tasks with the human resource or information technology departments, and
- Introduce various policies and rules.

Orientation ensures that both the employer and the new worker complete the fundamental requirements to officially begin work. Providing training and extra assistance during the initial period of employment is critical, regardless of the age of the worker, as they may not be familiar with the hazards of the job or the workplace.

During this phase, each worker develops the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to work in a safe and healthy manner.

Is workplace orientation different from workplace onboarding?

Yes. Workplace orientation and workplace onboarding are closely connected, but they serve different purposes and operate on very different timelines.

Orientation is typically a brief, introductory experience often lasting only a few hours or, at most, a couple of days. Its primary focus is on general administrative tasks and health and safety compliance-related requirements.

Onboarding, however, extends far beyond this initial introduction. Onboarding is a worker's transition into a new working environment, and it can sometimes take a while to complete, ranging from 30, 60, or 90 days or even up to a full year, for an individual to integrate into the workplace. An effective onboarding process should be a learning experience that includes comprehensive job training, relationship building with co-workers and supervisors, safe work procedures, skills development, and ongoing support to adapt to the workplace culture and role.

While orientation addresses the question, "What do I need to get started?", onboarding helps employees address "How can I succeed and grow here?". Combined, they provide a seamless transition.

Who should participate in workplace orientation?

While training (or refresher training) is always important, orientation should always be provided to "new workers."

New workers include:

- Young workers, under 25 years of age
 - People of all ages who are starting new jobs
 - People transferred from other parts of their organizations
 - All workers where the process or hazards have changed in the workplace
 - Workers returning after a leave of absence (e.g., maternity, paternity, medical, etc.)
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Why is workplace orientation important?

Workplace orientation and training help to prevent occurrences that can lead to injuries or property damage, as it provides the worker with the essential information they need to perform work safely and confidently. Training is a key part of an effective [health and safety program](#). Employers are responsible for ensuring workers are properly prepared before they begin their workplace tasks.

Health and safety education should start with worker orientation when a worker joins the organization or is transferred to a new job. It has been found that inexperienced workers, in general, are involved in incidents at a higher rate than others. While experience can only be gained through time, both health and safety education and job skills training can be used to improve this record.

What topics should be covered during orientation?

Items related to health and safety that should be included are:

- [Emergency procedures](#), including evacuation and [first aid](#).
- Location of first aid stations.
- [Health and safety responsibilities](#), including those specified by legislation.
- Reporting of injuries, unsafe conditions, and [hazards](#).
- Use of [personal protective equipment](#).
- The [three rights](#) granted to workers - the right to know, the right to participate, and [the right to refuse](#) dangerous work.
- Hazards present at the workplace, including those outside of the daily working area.
- Safe operating procedures, and reasons for these procedures.
- Any human resources, employment standards, and health and safety-related policies and procedures along with specific procedures (e.g., absence reporting, [hazard reporting](#), reporting injury or illness, etc.).
- Role of the [employee assistance program](#) and how to access it
- Support (e.g., who to call when there is an emergency, technical issues, etc.)
- Security protocols (e.g., how to access workplace premises, after-hour access, etc.)

All workers, but especially new, inexperienced, or transferred workers, should be encouraged to ask questions at any time when doubt exists as to correct procedures or their ability to do the task safely. Workers should know the answers to these questions:

- What are the hazards of the job?
- When is job safety training available?
- What safety equipment do I need to do my job?
- Do I need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE)? Will I receive training on how to use the PPE?
- What do to do in case of a fire or another emergency?

- Where do I find fire extinguishers, first aid kits, first aid rooms, and emergency assistance?
 - What are my responsibilities regarding health and safety?
 - If I notice something wrong, who should I report it to?
 - Who is responsible for answering safety-related questions?
 - What do I do if I get injured or have an incident?
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How should the orientation sessions be structured?

Orientation can occur in many forms; it may be classroom style, online training, with a mentor, or through on-the-job practical training. In most situations, a combined style is most effective. All training should be documented and recorded. Documentation may include the worker demonstrating their ability to accurately complete a task, a checklist signed off by the worker, or a quiz to confirm their knowledge of the material. The key is to design an onboarding approach that fits the workplace environment and accommodates any accessibility needs of the new worker.

A new worker can be expected to absorb only a reasonable amount of information in the first few days. Be sure to pace the orientation to ensure all of the information or skills are learned, but the individual is not overwhelmed. Soon after the orientation sessions conclude, workers should be assessed on their understanding of the items discussed. In this way, both the quality of the orientation training and the level of understanding can be evaluated.

An effective worker orientation is one that is structured and customized. Using a worker [orientation checklist](#) helps to ensure that each orientation consistently provides the key information and support to all new workers.

How can workplace orientation help a worker psychologically?

Role Clarity

Clear role expectations provided during workplace orientation can boost worker confidence and reduce mental stress. When workers understand their responsibilities, they are better equipped to perform their job with more certainty, which can reduce role confusion, mistakes, and help prevent workplace incidents. Supervisors can provide role clarity by outlining a detailed job description and conducting frequent check-ins to confirm that the worker understands and is meeting the role expectations. Do not assume the new worker already knows how to meet the job requirements, even if they have transferred over from another department. The worker is now in a new environment that may have new processes and hazards that should be clearly outlined.

Inclusivity

Given that an average worker in Canada can spend 30-40 hours per week at work, the psychological need to be in an inclusive environment is essential to help new workers integrate into a new work environment. A lack of inclusivity can lead to worker alienation and isolation. To help, managers can be intentional about organizing team introductions, facilitating connections with other departments, and creating opportunities for workers' suggestions, ideas and feedback to be heard, when necessary. These activities promote inclusiveness and help new workers feel welcomed, valued, and psychologically safe in the new environment.

Builds Trust

Workplace orientation creates early opportunities for open communication between the new workers and their direct reports. When workers see supervisors as approachable and responsive, it builds trust and makes them feel safe to ask questions, give feedback, report hazards, and share ideas without fearing negative consequences. For example, a manager who maintains an open-door policy, and schedules frequent check-ins helps build that trust through communication which can support a psychologically safe and healthy workplace.

It is important for workplaces to not only proactively identify the health and safety hazards in the workplace, but also the [psychological risk factors](#) that can impact the well-being of all workers, especially during new worker orientation.

What are some tips to consider when delivering worker orientation?

- Be prepared in advance - Have materials, schedules, and PPE ready; make sure the workers' workstation is set up beforehand.
- Create a welcoming environment - Greet the worker, introduce key staff, and give a brief overview of the organization.
- Keep information manageable - Present information in clear, small sections, pace the information to avoid overwhelming the worker.
- Prioritize safety - Review hazards, procedures, emergency protocols, reporting processes, and PPE use.
- Demonstrate tasks clearly - Show tasks step-by-step, emphasize proper technique, and allow hands-on practice.
- Encourage questions - Foster an open environment; check in regularly to confirm understanding.
- Use written and visual aids- Provide checklists, diagrams, and materials they can refer back to.
- Set clear expectations - Explain duties, performance standards, schedules, and communication channels.

- Collect feedback - Ask about their orientation experience to identify what works and what needs improvement.
 - Follow up - Check in after the first day, week, and month; reinforce key points and address challenges early.
 - Make it an enjoyable experience - An enjoyable orientation sets the tone for how workers perceive the workplace. Positive first impressions can boost confidence and reduce first-day nerves.
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