

Employee Well-being Insights

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5 Tips for Keeping Young Employees Safe

Employers are legally required to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees, regardless of age. However, it's especially important for employers to consider the needs of young employees, as younger staff may be more likely to be involved in accidents at work. In fact, those new to their jobs are as likely to be involved in accidents within the first six months as during the entirety of their working lives, according to the HSE. As such, employers should take measures to protect young employees and promote workplace safety. This article includes five tips for doing so.

1. Verify Young Employees' Ages

Young employees have different employment rights from adult workers. Additionally, they may be subject to protections in relation to the hours they can work. Employers must verify young people's ages before offering employment and ensure adherence to [child employment laws](#). It's best practice for employers to keep birth certificates on file for all employed youth.

In order to fully comprehend the laws surrounding younger employees, employers must understand the definitions of "young people" and "children," as defined by the HSE:

- A **young person** is anyone under 18.
- A **child** is anyone who has not yet reached the official minimum school leaving age (MSLA)—the school year in which a pupil turns 16.

Children who have not reached the MSLA cannot be employed in industrial workplaces, such as

factories and construction sites, except when on work experience. Children under 13 are generally prohibited from any form of employment.

The employment rules for children between the ages of 13 and the MSLA vary depending on their respective local authority areas. Employers can check if any by-laws are in place by [contacting their local councils](#).

2. Conduct Thorough Risk Assessments

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have a responsibility to ensure that young people are not exposed to workplace hazards due to lack of experience, lack of maturity or being unaware of existing or potential risks. Accordingly, employers should thoroughly review and update any workplace risk assessments.

When assessing risks, it's important to consider factors that may influence the health and safety of younger staff. For example, young employees may be:

- **Impressionable**—Young people are still learning about the world and forming opinions, making them susceptible to peer pressure. On seeing colleagues being unsafe in the workplace, they could be more likely to follow suit.
- **Eager to impress**—In attempts to compete with their more experienced colleagues, younger workers may try to

impress their employers by working longer hours or carrying out tasks they aren't trained to do. These behaviours could put their safety at risk.

- **Lacking in confidence**—Younger workers may not have the confidence to challenge older colleagues or speak up about safety issues. Additionally, they may pretend that they've understood safety instructions—even if they haven't—for fear of embarrassment.
- **Lacking in concentration**—Young employees may find it difficult to concentrate for long periods. Poor concentration can lead to poor decision-making, which could have negative consequences for workplace safety.
- **More easily fatigued**—Those new to their jobs may be increasingly susceptible to fatigue. If ignored, tiredness can cause employees to make mistakes.

Additionally, employers must consider whether the work young employees will do:

- Involves harmful exposure to toxic substances or radiation
- Poses health risks related to extreme cold, heat, noise or vibration
- Is beyond their physical or psychological capacity
- Involves a likelihood of accidents that cannot reasonably be recognised or avoided due to lack of experience or insufficient attention to safety

Should the work pose any of these concerns, a young person—not a child—can only carry out such work if the task is properly supervised by a competent person, is necessary for their training and has its risks reduced to the lowest level that's [reasonably practicable](#).

3. Educate Young Employees on Prohibited Jobs and Permitted Schedules

Once risk assessments are complete, employers should pass any findings along to young employees. Although employers are responsible for ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations, it's important for young employees to know the rules in place to protect them,

including how long they can work each day and which tasks they cannot perform. Furthermore, employers may wish to place warning signs in no-access areas or on machinery that shouldn't be used, thus establishing visual safety reminders.

4. Train Young Employees on Job Hazards and Safety Precautions

Employers shouldn't presume that young employees are aware of the safety measures they should take to avoid workplace injuries. In fact, research by Edinburgh University found that adolescent brains continue to develop into adulthood and don't reach full maturity until approximately 25 years of age. As such, younger employees could make poor decisions when it comes to safety. It's vital that employers train younger workers on job hazards and proper safety precautions.

5. Encourage Young Employees to Raise Safety Concerns

Young employees may feel reluctant to bring safety issues to the attention of their respective employers. That's why employers should communicate to these workers that safety is a priority and teach them how to report safety concerns. If possible, employers may wish to appoint safety representatives so young employees have approachable individuals they can go to for help.

Conclusion

Child employment laws prohibit employers from allowing young employees to perform certain tasks and work more than a specified number of hours. Failing to comply with relevant laws could result in significant consequences for employers, including prosecution and fines. Moreover, younger employees are at higher risk of workplace accidents, particularly in their first six months of employment. It's imperative that employers prioritise the safety of young employees to help reduce injuries and prevent child employment law violations.

For additional workplace guidance, contact W H & R McCartney Insurance Brokers today.