

Entering the Workforce and Young Workers

Career
Transition
Series



Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

Paper 2

About the career transition series

About these guides

These guides are a nine-part series developed to share research-led practices on career transitions to help support mentally healthy workplaces. In this series, you will find best practice strategies along with the stories of organisations supporting their people through eight key transitions. We share first-hand accounts of the career transitions many of us will experience in our lifetimes, whether it is having a baby or a career change, a personal crisis, or retiring from the workforce altogether.

Why these guides exist

Developed by the National Mental Health Commission in partnership with Transitioning Well, these guides emerged as part of the National Workplace Initiative (NWI) after early research and consultation highlighted the toll of a number of career transition points on the mental health of employees. These guides are based on the findings of this [Green Paper](#). They blend published research, insights from experts, and first-hand stories of individuals who have experienced or supported their people through transitions. We thank everyone who contributed to these guides and the organisations who permitted us to share their unique stories.

What these guides aim to do

- Recognise the impact of career transitions on workplaces and workers
- Inform workplace leaders and individuals about the importance of supporting transitions throughout the career journey
- Showcase how organisations can support workers across the life cycle in helping to promote and sustain mental health at work
- Share inspiring examples of forward-thinking organisations implementing research-led practices to proactively support career transitions.



Organisational-led approaches to support mentally healthy workplaces



Supporting young workers as they enter the workforce can have benefits for their long-term mental health and wellbeing.

About this transition

People aged 30 years and under make up a large proportion of Australia's working population. They work across different types of roles, such as casual 'first job' employees, apprentices and trainees, graduates and those commencing full-time career roles and increasingly, side hustles.

Young workers entering the workforce can face unique stressors from a mental health and wellbeing perspective. Apprentices and trainees can have vulnerabilities, including a sense of disposability and poor working conditions such as long hours, physically demanding work, low wages and poor supervision. Those employed on working visas can also experience power disparities and age and language barriers.

Graduates moving into full-time work can experience mixed feelings – pride and achievement, and some distress, overwhelm and under preparedness. Many young workers are also moving into new careers and/or taking on side hustles, including gig type work and entrepreneurial activities, which can add to their overall demands. Casual workers are often working and studying at the same time with low workplace influence and control, and little investment from the workplace.

Key Messages

1. Young people provide significant value to the workplace but can be vulnerable to a range of mental health and wellbeing challenges.
2. Impacts on young worker mental health can be driven by factors including job strain, inadequate supervision and training, limited networks, competing life pressures, workplace harm, workplace bullying and harassment, and substance use.
3. Positive early experiences at work can be a protective factor to help develop resilience and the ability to adapt to challenges at work and improve longer-term mental health and wellbeing outcomes.



Key considerations

Early adulthood can be a peak age of onset for many mental disorders – 75% of people will experience their first mental illness by age 24.

Kessler et al., 2007²

15% of young workers under 25 report high levels of psychological distress, with this figure doubling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021³

Over 61% of young people under 35 years old are worried about their finances, job security and failure to meet their career goals.

Bain & Company, 2022⁴



Why it is important for an organisation to support this transition



The health benefits of work are well understood for individuals across all ages; however, workforce entry can negatively impact a young person's mental health and wellbeing. For many young people, entering the workforce can be a new experience, characterised by a series of short-term, unrelated, demanding, unstable, unsafe, stressful 'survival jobs'. The school-to-work transition has been documented as a critical developmental point for young workers. Research finds young workers are more likely to experience a higher prevalence of job strain (i.e. low-control jobs with high psychological demands) and unemployment (i.e. casual and temporary employment) than older workers.

Young people are also frequently undergoing other life changes. These relatively significant moves to independence may result in distress depending on how they are experienced.

Adverse employment experiences affecting young people can increase the risk of depression and/or anxiety, and young workers are less likely to report negative workplace experiences to management. Positive early experiences at work can be a protective factor to help develop resilience and the ability to adapt to challenges at work and improve longer-term mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Risks and their impacts on the organisation⁵

Mental health and wellbeing challenges associated with young people entering the workplace affect individuals, organisations and society generally.

- Compared with older workers, young workers entering the workforce are at a higher risk of workplace-related harm, including mental illness. Industries where young workers are concentrated, such as tourism and hospitality, were disproportionately affected during the pandemic by job losses, reduced hours, and uncertain business futures.
- Younger workers—especially those with low educational attainment, low socioeconomic status, and early experimentation with alcohol/drug use—are more likely than older workers to use alcohol or drugs at work. This is more prevalent in male-dominated 'blue-collar' industries (e.g. construction, manufacturing, mining and agriculture) and trades with high levels of work stress, long hours and relatively easy access to alcohol in the workplace (e.g. hospitality and food service). Many of these industries and trade-related occupations are characterised by high rates of psychological distress and associated risk factors including poor working conditions, work stress and psychosocial factors such as unsupportive workplace relationships.
- Young workers are vulnerable to workplace bullying and more likely to encounter unwanted sexual advances at work, especially young female workers. In addition, young workers perceive greater inequity in their treatment at work compared with older workers.

What workers think of their experience of entering the workforce⁶

Young workers typically seek assistance through social media such as Reddit, Twitter, Blogs, LinkedIn, and Google.



They are discovering that university education is not fulfilling their workplaces needs. For example, under preparedness in interpersonal skills, and outdated education which reduces employability.



Young people are entering jobs in new fields (not studied at university) and distancing themselves from traditional careers.



Young workers are increasingly seeking workplaces with a focus on positive mental health and wellbeing.



4 ways those entering the workforce and young workers can internalise the transition

According to Nancy K Schlossberg, a leading expert in transitions and career development, a transition is defined as any event or non-event that results in changed roles, relationships, routines and assumptions.⁷

In entering the workforce, this transition may look like this:

Roles

"I am moving from a dependent student to an independent adult worker".



Relationships

"Workmates are a key part of my social circle now".



Routines

"I have to make time for work, whether casual or permanent, and structure my routines around my commitments".



Assumptions

"My time is more valuable now that I am moving to an adult role".



Common challenges



Young workers can come under several pressures early in their career journey including;

Job strain

Young workers are more likely to experience job strain (low control and high physical, emotional and time-related demands of work), underemployment and insecure work (i.e. casual and temporary employment) than older workers. This may have been further exacerbated by the economic repercussions of COVID-19.

Inadequate supervision and training

Young workers do not yet have the skills or knowledge about workplace health and safety developed from experience in the workforce, which can leave them at risk in the workplace. Inadequate supervision and training for many younger workers can also increase this risk.

Limited networks

The increase in hybrid work arrangements is restricting development and maturity of professional networks for many young workers.

Competing life pressures

The many life changes common for this age group, as they move to independence, may result in distress, with common mental disorders often occurring in the first three decades of life.

Work-place harm

Young workers are at a higher risk of workplace-related harm. In part, this is due to limited experience and confidence recognising and reporting both physical and psychological hazards, and feeling stressed, tired and overworked.

Workplace bullying and harassment

Young workers are especially vulnerable to workplace bullying and more likely to encounter unwanted sexual advances at work.

Substance use

This increases in prevalence in male-dominated, 'blue-collar' industries (e.g. construction, manufacturing, mining and agriculture) or workplaces with high levels of work stress, long hours, and easy access to alcohol in the workplace (e.g. hospitality and food service).

Tips to support early career transitions



For Organisations

Define, promote and provide high quality work for younger workers. High quality work refers to work that has a reasonable balance of job demands, control, job security and a balance of effort and reward.

Develop a culture of supporting young workers via inductions to welcome younger employees into the organisation; regular check-ins around transition; and pairing younger workers with peers as well as experienced employees and mentors.

Provide inclusive leadership training and development that positively embraces the benefits of young workers and addresses unconscious bias. Deliver training for younger workers to address the potential risks associated with a lack of experience. Training should be practical and meaningful focused on how to do their jobs, with appropriate support.

Feeling overwhelmed and not sure where to start?

When developing initiatives to support younger workers such as those listed above, draw upon the range of best practice guides and resources already developed. For some great examples see the 'Worth a Read & Watch' section.



For Individuals

Working conditions can greatly affect mental health and wellbeing. Great organisations invest in the mental health literacy of all workers (young and old) and their knowledge around health and safety protocols. When done well, training gives young workers the ability to advocate for their rights and fair treatment at work, look after their mental health and wellbeing proactively as well as that of their peers, increase their confidence in reporting incidents, and a knowledge of where and how to seek help if needed.

Access support when needed. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or graduate programs can often sit untouched on a company's intranet. Ask your supervisor about availability and access to the company's unique resources. These supports can help individuals through the various career transitions and assist in clarifying personal goals and career direction.

Reach out to an ally. Health and safety representatives (HSRs) are another resource in the workplace for younger workers. HSRs play a critical role in making workers safer at work and advocate for workers to ensure their views and concerns are heard.

Entering the workforce

Case study

At a glance



- Viva Energy was looking to support their 2022 graduate cohort with the transition from university into work.
- They undertook a number of successful initiatives for graduates to build connections and learn more about the organisation, team culture and strategic vision.

Viva Energy is one of the largest players in the energy market. Every day their products help people reach their destination, fuel industries, support local businesses and communities. Viva Energy plays an important role in the local economy by keeping Australians moving today and building a sustainable energy future for tomorrow.

Activities and outcomes

To support their 2022 graduate cohort with the transition from university into work, Viva Energy undertook a number of initiatives including;

- **Pre-Program activities** to engage graduates early, build connection and belonging to the company and each other.
- **Comprehensive two-day induction** which built on the pre-program activities which enabled graduates to learn about the business, the culture and future strategy and connecting graduates with their support networks and each other.
- **Three-part workshop series** delivered by Transitioning Well which covered important skills for Transition and Transformation, including how to live a sustainable and integrated life.

“Most graduates were coming straight from university and had spent two years in lockdown and studying online so the additional support was really valuable.”

Letitia Otto, Employee Experience Manager

Key result

The key intervention activities supported graduates in their transition from university to employment with graduates feeling well supported and line managers reporting how well they have settled into their roles.

Key Takeaway

Engaging graduates early is key for them to build connections and a sense of belonging to the company.



Advice for others

- The pre-program activities to build connections early with the cohort were very beneficial.
- The comprehensive two-day induction helped graduates build knowledge and connections.
- We recommend maximising face-to-face engagements during the pre-program activities and provide more opportunities to build social connections during the induction. Our pre-program activities were restricted due to COVID-19 lockdowns, so we will consider a different approach for the 2023 cohort.
- The Transition Program helped normalise how graduates were feeling, and the challenges and emotions they were experiencing particularly after the disruption as a result of COVID-19.



Worth a read and watch

Read

Employing young workers,

Fair Work Australia, 2022

Read here: <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/best-practice-guides/employing-young-workers>

Young workers eToolkit,

Safe Work NSW, 2022

Read here: <http://safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/at-risk-workers/young-workers-toolkit>

UMM ... is that safe? Helping young workers speak up,

Work Safe Victoria, 2022

Read here: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/news/2022-02/umm-safe-helping-young-workers-speak>

Young workers: information for employees,

Work Safe Victoria, 2022

Read here: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/young-workers>

Watch

Young workers tell us their views on work safety

Safe Work Australia, 2016

Watch here: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/resources-and-publications/video-and-audio/young-workers-tell-us-their-views-work-safety>



Read more in this series:

Paper 1

Career Transitions Series: General Principles

Paper 2

Career Transition Series: Entering the Workforce and Young Worker Transitions

Paper 3

Career Transition Series: Learning to Lead (*this guide*)

Paper 4

Career Transition Series: Parenting and Caring

Paper 5

Career Transition Series: Redundancy and Career Change

Paper 6

Career Transitions Series: Health-Related Changes

Paper 7

Career Transition Series: Relocation

Paper 8

Career Transitions Series: Crisis and Career Shocks

Paper 9

Career Transitions Series: Late Career and Retirement

[Click here to read the other papers in this series](#)



References

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- 4 Bain & Company. The Working Future: More Human, Not Less. [Internet] Bain & Company. 2022. Available from: https://www.bain.com/contentassets/d620202718c146359acb05c02d9060db/bain-report_the-working-future.pdf
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