

Supervision of Young People

An Employer Guide

Young workers are workers aged up to 25 years including apprentices, school-based apprentices, and trainees. Young workers are a diverse group of people who may react and behave differently to more experienced employees in the same situations. This is where you can help them. Many young workers lack experience, maturity and awareness when they start out in the work force so need additional guidance during their first job.

The brains of males do not fully mature until they are around 25 years of age, females a little earlier. However, young workers up to 21 years of age are typically at a higher risk of injury because of lack of life and work experience, and minimal exposure to safe work practices and effective supervision.

“Yet to be developed brain” – The term “yet to be developed” brain when applied to young workers means that information is not processed, understood, or stored/remembered as you might expect it is when you give direction to a young worker.

This is because the neural pathways are not yet fully connected. As a result, young people tend to process information with the amygdala, the part of the brain associated with:

- Emotions
- Impulse
- and Instinctive behaviour

At this stage in their development, a young worker cannot be relied upon to process and retain information with:

- Good judgement
- Awareness; and
- Consideration of the immediate and long-term consequences of a particular course of action

in the way an adult brain is inclined to consider, process and retain information.

You will often find you need to explain a task several times to ensure understanding. This is because the yet to be developed brain is not able to retain the information in an ordered and retrievable manner.

Young workers are generally characterised by the following behaviours and attitudes:

- A young worker will be keen to do the right thing.
- Be keen to get on with the job.
- Likely not have all the skills you may assume they have.
- Tend to underestimate the risk and overestimate their ability.

Key behaviours of Supervisors of young workers are to:

- Repeat the message; and
- Test that the information has been received, processed and understood as expected.

The way to do this is to have the young worker repeat back to you what you have just discussed and agreed to. A greater degree of patience is required from supervisors when managing young workers.





Supervision of Young People at Work

It is always useful to think about where your supervision of any work group sits on a continuum. That is, the amount of supervision you are required to have in place, ranging from direct (close task-based supervision) to indirect (routine oversight of the work being performed.)

Indirect Supervision



Direct Supervision



You might have less supervision, **indirect supervision** when:

- The work is repetitive;
- Experience people are doing the work;
- The work is simple; and/or
- The work is low risk.

You might move towards more **direct supervision** when:

- The work is new;
- The work is high risk;
- The work is complex;
- There is a heightened customer interest in the work; and/or
- The work is being done by a new employee regardless of age; or
- **The work is being done by a young worker.**



Key Supervisory Steps

Key supervisory steps to reduce the likelihood of injury to a young worker and to accelerate their learning. When speaking to young people, take a moment to confirm with them that they have understood the message. For example:

“What would they do if”?

- The work changes from the plan?
- There is something they don't understand about the tool they are given or what process to follow?
- They are not sure about a job step or task.
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Reaffirm that you expect them to STOP and ASK if they do not understand anything.





Supervisory Steps

- Look for opportunities to acknowledge good work. This includes when they ask questions for clarity. This will reinforce how the task should be done along with building confidence and encouraging the behaviour to be repeated.
- Remember young workers do not have experience, perspective, nor can they 'read between the lines;'
- Invite interaction and questions. Generally young workers will be shy in a supervisor – worker situation; and
- Set short term goals for young workers. Review progress each week as this will allow results to be seen and success to be tangible.

This guide has been adapted from Young workers at Programmed: A SUPERVISOR'S GUIDE. Programmed is a leading provider of Staffing, Facility Management, Maintenance and Care services. We employ over 30,000 people every year across a broad range of industries and partner with more than 10,000 customers, small and large.