



CONSTRUCTION TRADES MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING TOOLKIT

JULY 15, 2024



Developed by the ReSTORE Lab
Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science Department
University of Toronto



ONTARIO **ELECTRICAL** LEAGUE



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Table of Contents

What is mental health?.....3

Good mental health can be described as.....4

Eight dimensions of wellbeing.....5

Main challenges that skilled trade workers face.....6

Wellbeing recommendations for employers and contractors.....7-8

Wellbeing recommendations for first and second year apprentices.....9

Wellbeing recommendations for journeypersons and later year apprentices.....10

Journeyperson and apprentice resources.....11

Sleep quality and tips.....12-13

When to ask for help.....14

Where to ask for help.....15-16

Emergency and crisis lines.....17

Additional resources.....18

References.....19

Authors: Behdin-Nowrouzi-Kia, Aaron Howe, Ali Bani-Fatemi, Kishana Balakrishnar, Alexia Haritos, Edris Formuli, Stephanie Long, and Maryna Mazur

How to use: This document is based on emerging evidence in the construction trades and the data collected from the Ontario Electrical League’s SDF 1 to 3 sponsorship of the research activities conducted at the Restore Lab, within the Department of Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science at the University of Toronto. The information contained within this toolkit is for educational purposes only and recommendations found in this report may not be relevant to every construction workplace.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

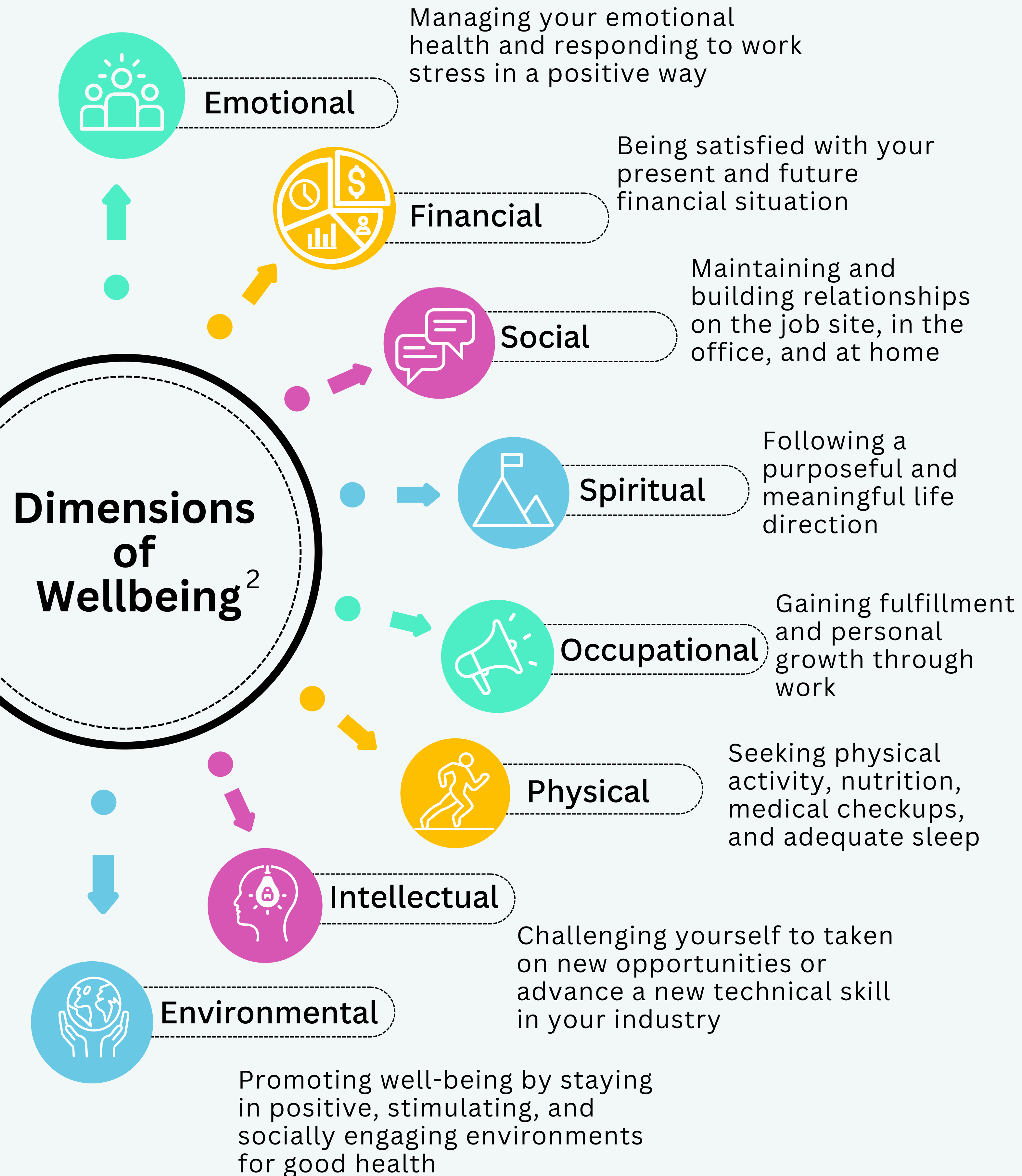
“Mental health is a state of well-being, and we all have it. Just like physical health, it’s essential to look after our mental health. It’s not just about surviving, it’s about thriving. It’s about enjoying life, having a sense of purpose, and being able to manage life’s highs and lows.”¹





Some examples of good mental health practices include engaging in physical activity, consuming a healthy nutritious diet, spending time with family and friends, maintaining a good sleep schedule, learning from setbacks, and engaging in meaningful life activities.

8 DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING





MAIN CHALLENGES SKILLED TRADES WORKERS FACE³



Poor Sleep
Quality



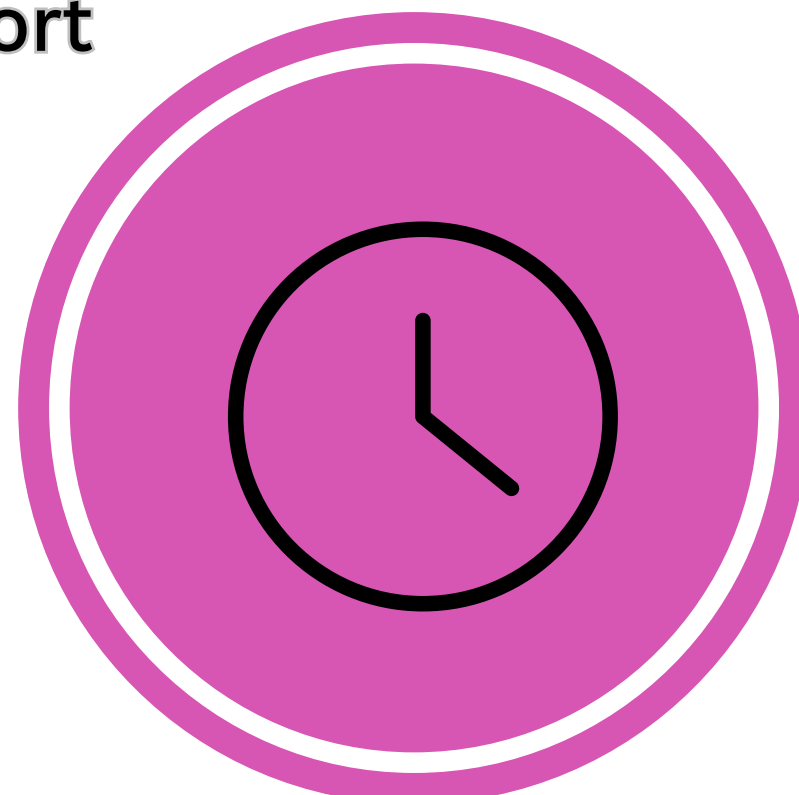
Low Job
Support



Work - Family
Conflict



Interpersonal
Conflicts



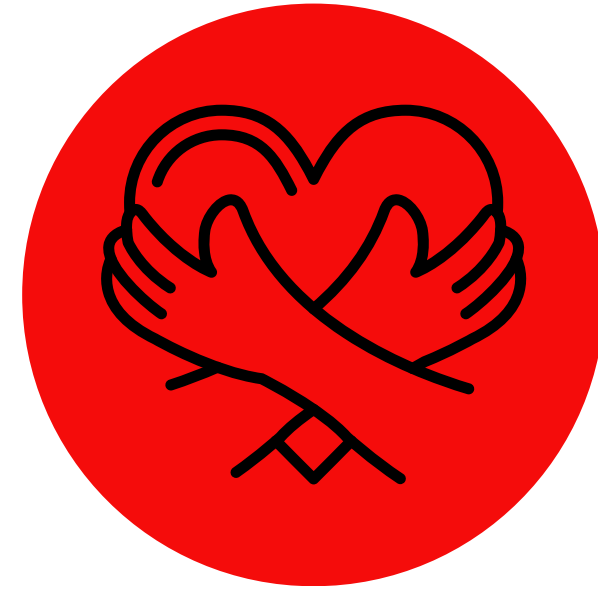
Long Work
Hours

WELLBEING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS AND CONTRACTORS⁴⁻¹¹

Your health and well-being begins with self-care



Find ways to be positive. Create measurable goals to achieve productivity targets. Reflect on areas of work that you find success and look for improvement. Assess your interactions with your workforce.



Engage in self-care. Schedule time in your day to monitor how you are feeling. Take a break to stretch and alleviate tension in your body. Make an effort to ensure your nutrition needs for the day are being met.



Acknowledge work stress. Communicate with your support-system (e.g. family and friends, co-workers, healthcare provider) when you are dealing with increased stress at work. Utilize positive coping skills to manage your stress.



Take responsibility for your physical and mental health. Assess your body for pain, injuries, and signs of stress. Make time to have a bi-annual or annual medical check up to maintain your mental and physical health.



Maintain work life-balance. Make time to engage in hobbies, activities, or spending time with loved ones or friends. Evaluate and assess any barriers that prevent you from achieving a satisfying life outside of work.



Maintain a healthy sleep schedule. Assess your sleep quality, work productivity, and experience of daytime sleepiness. Ensure you are attempting to sleep 7-8 hours/day. Address any sleep concerns with sleep hygiene strategies or consult your doctor.

WELLBEING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS AND CONTRACTORS

5-13

Supporting your workforce

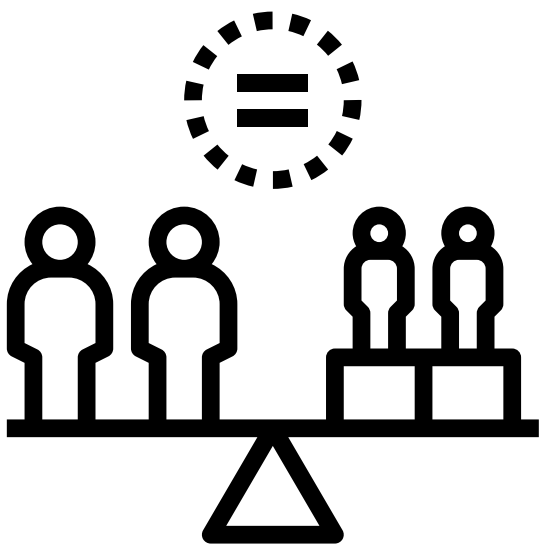
BUILD TRUST WITH EMPLOYEES



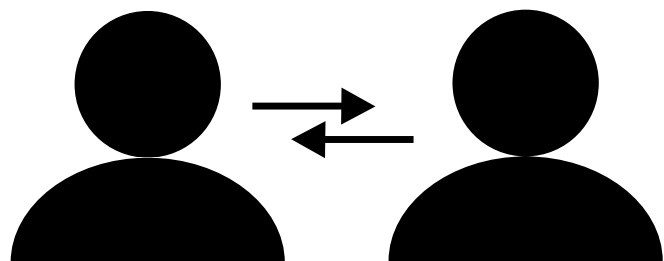
Periodically gather feedback from employees and apprentices on working conditions. Let the employees direct the conversation. Take actionable steps to address feedback and improve the working environment.

PROMOTE EQUITY BETWEEN WORKERS OF ALL RACES, ETHNICITIES, CULTURES, AND GENDERS

Show interest in learning about how to support your employees with different identities. Ask non-judgemental questions and learn about any barriers in the workplace that might be preventing their ability to perform and succeed at work.



MAKE TIME TO CONNECT WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES AND APPRENTICES



The benefits of working in a self-employed business is the opportunities for mentorship in operating a business, autonomy with work, and the 'family' camaraderie. Schedule time to connect with your employees during work to understand any work challenges they are experiencing. Think about organizing social events outside of work for co-workers to maintain and develop social connection.



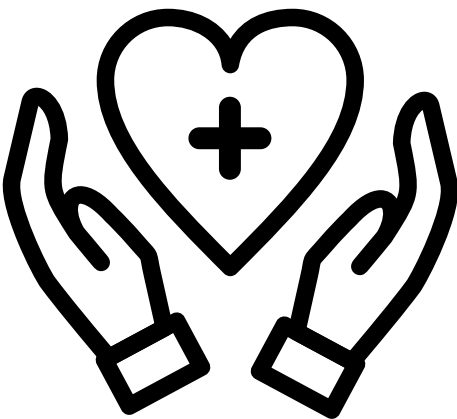
SHARE LIVED EXPERIENCE IN MANAGING WORK AND HOME DEMANDS WHILE WORKING IN THE SKILLED TRADES



Display leadership by openly discussing the challenges of working in the skilled trades and offer your experience as guidance. Be open and candid as to elicit others to share their experiences as you work to build team trust and respect.

CONSIDER ANNUAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS INCENTIVES

Offer small wellness incentives for good performance at work (e.g. 1-month fitness memberships, footwear) to promote employees and apprentices health.



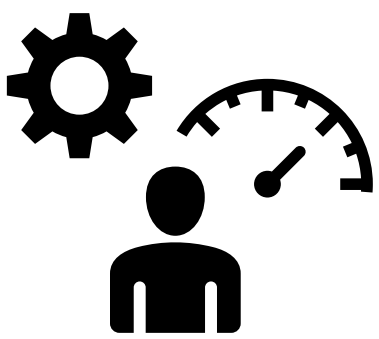
MAKE INJURY PREVENTION A PRIORITY DURING SAFETY MEETINGS

Discuss the importance of personal fitness to avoid physical injury and long-term pain at work. By improving our physical health, we are also addressing mental health and longevity.



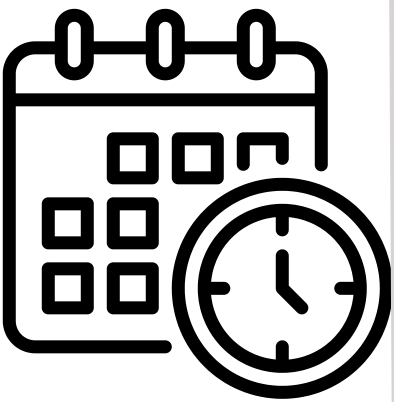
MONITOR AND OPTIMIZE WORKLOAD

Review the workload demands of your existing projects. Consult and monitor your employees to determine if they have capacity to increase their work demands without sacrificing work-life balance.



CONSIDER OFFERING FLEXIBLE OR MODIFIED WORK SCHEDULES

Work-family conflict and personal stress can impact work. Consider offering flexible or modified work schedules so that your employees can tend to their personal responsibilities that may arise through a standard work week.



CONSIDER JOB AND WORK SCHEDULE RE-DESIGN

Research has shown that specific body postures and movements can increase risk for injury and poor health. Gather feedback from your employees to work demands match their resources. Look for solutions to provide more resources or re-design how the work is completed.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIRST AND SECOND YEAR APPRENTICES¹³⁻¹⁶

ENGAGE

- Take opportunities to engage with your co-workers in your workplace
- Be open to new working experiences and learning opportunities
- Find a peer support group with those you identify
- Engage in apprentice-led events to network and meet others working in trades

MAINTAIN

- Learn from setbacks by taking assessing and understanding the reasons why
- Plan achievable goals with your work performance and overall health
- Focus on work-life balance by performing self-care activities such as spending time with family and friends, exercising, engaging in hobbies, and trying new activities
- Maintain healthy routines around physical, mental health, and sleep

REFLECT

- Find and maintain a routine with your work, personal life, and sleep schedule
- Build and utilize supportive relationships to alleviate stress
- Plan future health and careers goals
- Reflect on areas improvement and create a plan to address them

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOURNEYPERSONS & LATER YEAR APPRENTICES^{7,11-13}



IDENTIFY

- Observe sources of personal and work-related stress and their impact
- Be aware of your body's reaction to stress and physical pain
- Gather feedback from others (e.g. co-workers, supervisor) on your work performance and areas of improvement

ADDRESS

- Have consistent and open lines of communication with your supervisor to discuss areas of strength and improvement, as well as workload challenges
- Focus on personal adjustments that you can make at work to improve your experience
- Leverage your social support system (e.g. friends, family, spouse, co-workers) when things get tough at work

FIND STRATEGIES AND SUPPORT

- Find personal strategies to promote rest and well being outside of work (e.g. physical activity, hobbies, restful activities)
- Set boundaries between work and personal time. Make sure to allocate time to spend with friends and family
- Schedule breaks during your workday to alleviate stress and engage in routine self-care activities
- Make routine health check ups with your primary care provider

ACTION

- Stay engaged and connected socially with your peers and co-workers
- Reward yourself for improvement and positive change



JOURNEYPERSON/ APPRENTICE RESOURCES

Strategies to talk about mental health at work:

<https://thinkmentalhealth.ca/watch-videos/>

<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/mental-health-awareness-videos>

Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (Ontario Colleges)

<https://campusmentalhealth.ca/training/>

Support Ontario Youth

<https://www.supportontarioyouth.ca/>

Stella's Place

<https://stellasplace.ca/>

Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario

<https://youthhubs.ca/>

Organizations Supporting Women in the Skilled Trades
Women on Site.

<https://www.womenonsite.ca/about>

Skills for Change

<https://skillsforchange.org/wist>

Supporting Women in the Skilled Trades Canada

<https://switcanada.caf-fca.org/>

Canadian Association of Women in Construction

<https://cawic.ca/>





SLEEP QUALITY¹⁷⁻¹⁹

Sleep is important for your health and can improve your performance at work.¹⁶ The national guideline for sleep is for adults to receive 7-8 hours/night.¹⁷ Poor sleep quality in construction electrical workers may lead to: accidents, reduced work performance, slower injury recovery, poor mental health, irritability, daytime fatigue, cardiovascular disease, alcohol and substance use.^{18, 19}



TIPS TO IMPROVE SLEEP FROM ANXIETY CANADA²⁰



Create a comfortable
sleep environment



Get out of the bed if
you can't fall asleep
for 20-30 minutes



Exercise (3x/week)
must be more than 2
hours before bedtime



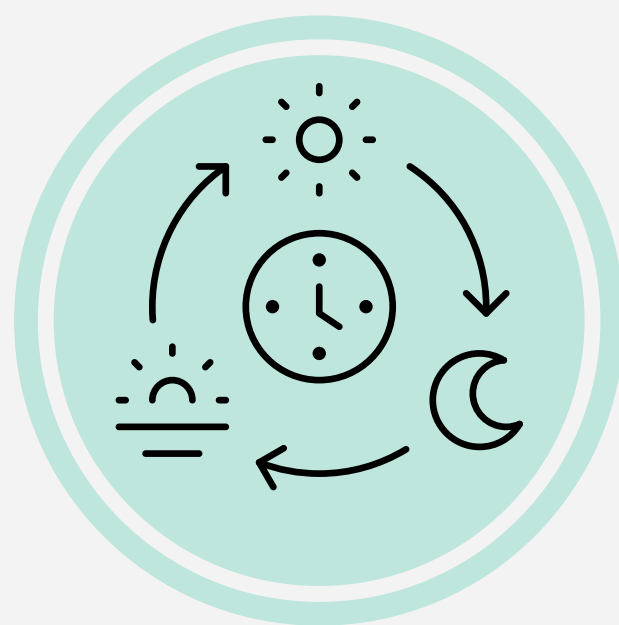
Avoid caffeine, alcohol
or smoking at least 4
hours before bed



Leave your work stress
outside of the
bedroom



Try waking up at the
same time every day



Bedtime routine



Relaxation before bed

WHEN TO ASK FOR **HELP**

Please use this screening tool for educational purposes only.

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. Have you experienced a physical injury in the past 12 months? | Y / N |
| - If yes, did you receive medical attention for that injury or accident? | Y / N |
| 2. Have you been involved in a work-related accident? | Y / N |
| 3. Do you still experience physical pain from that injury or accident? | Y / N |
| 4. Have you sustained a head injury or concussion at work? | Y / N |
| - Do you still experience ongoing symptoms? | Y / N |

If you have answered 2 of the bolded questions as “Yes”, it may be time to discuss your current or pre-existing injury with a healthcare professional.

Please consider the past month, when answering the following:

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Are you sleeping less than 6 hours/day? | Y / N |
| 2. Do you find yourself ‘exhausted’ or ‘always tired’ at work? | Y / N |
| 3. Have you noticed any significant changes in your appetite? | Y / N |
| 4. Have you been experiencing irritability or low mood at work or home? | Y / N |
| 5. Have you noticed any changes in your ability to concentrate? | Y / N |
| 6. Do you feel frustrated at work or home, most days? | Y / N |
| 7. Have you noticed any changes in your ability to pay attention or decision-making at work? | Y / N |
| 8. Have you lost interest/pleasure in leisure or life activities outside of work? | Y / N |
| 9. Are you experiencing increased muscle aches or soreness? | Y / N |
| 10. Do you have negative thoughts about your job? | Y / N |
| 11. Are you stress or worried about your future career outlook? | Y / N |
| 12. Do you have feelings of hopelessness or guilt? | Y / N |
| 13. Have you observed a noticeable increase in your use of substance(s) (including alcohol, drugs, cigarette smoking, etc.) | Y / N |

If you have answered 4 of these questions as “Yes”, it may be time to make an appointment to discuss your health and well-being with a healthcare professional.

WHERE TO ASK FOR HELP

If a non-emergency or crisis, take note of your mental health through the following screening questionnaires that can assist you in determining the severity of your concern or to learn more about mental health hygiene.

Mental Health Self-Check System:

<https://theworkingmind.ca/continuum-self-check/>

Mental Health Anxiety Screen:

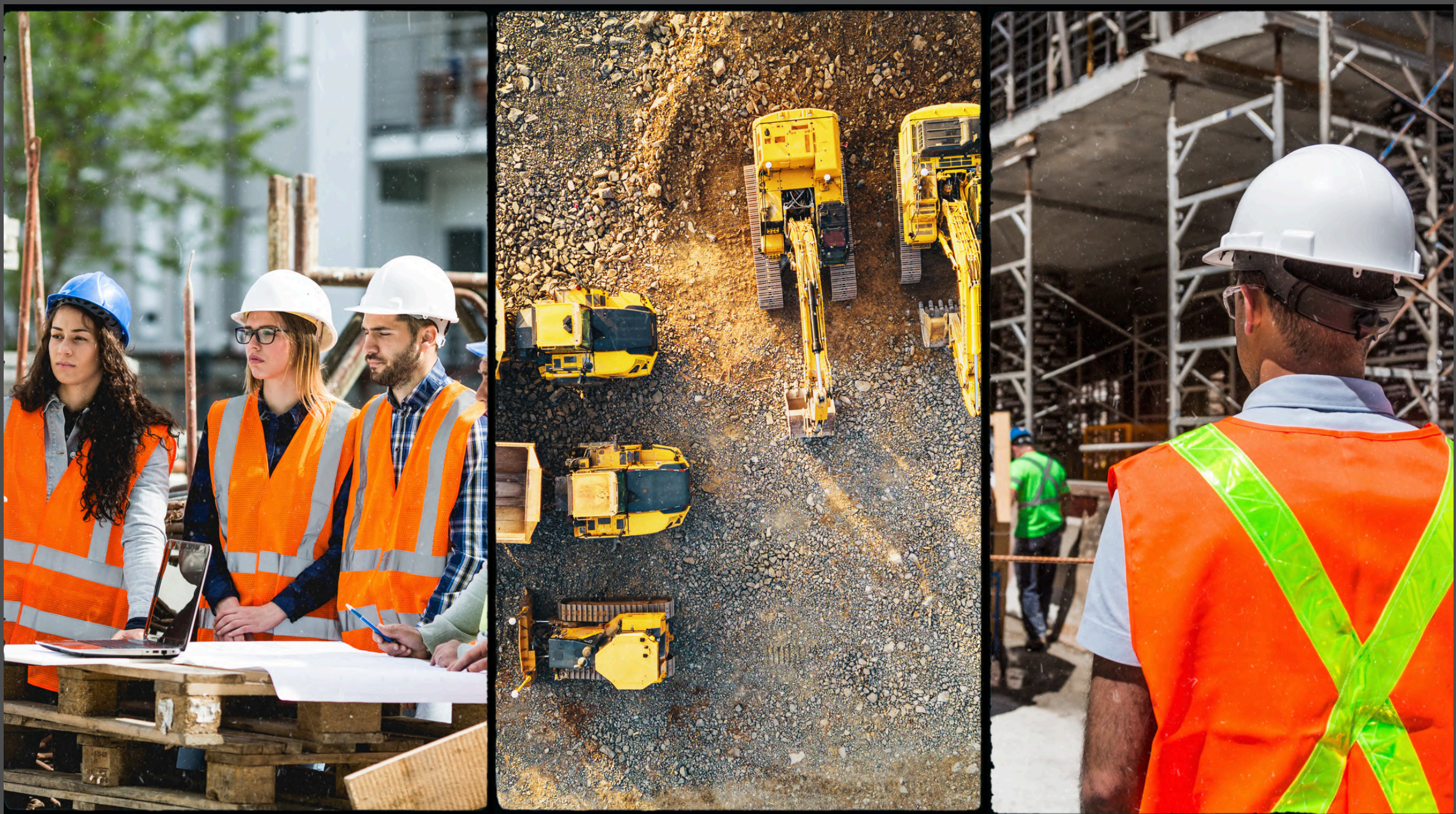
<https://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=survey&ID=3>

Mental Health Depression Screen:

<https://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=survey&ID=42>

Mental Health Screening:

<https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/screening/online/>





**Use
personal
coping
skills**

**Speak with someone in
your existing support
system (e.g. friends,
family, co-workers,
support group)**

**Make an appointment with
your physician to confirm there
are no other medical reason(s)
for how you are feeling**

**Speak with a mental health professional
(social worker, psychotherapist,
psychologist), occupational therapist or
request a specialist psychiatric referral**

**Call a Crisis or Distress Support Line
Call Health Ontario at 8-1-1 to talk to a nurse
practitioner**

When experiencing stress at work it is important to receive timely support to help address the mental and/or physical challenges you are experiencing. For daily stresses that you can manage, start with accessing your personal coping skills and speaking with someone in your existing social support system. If you are experiencing long-term stress and/or imminent health and safety risk, please consider reaching out to a healthcare professional or emergency services.

EMERGENCY & CRISIS LINES:

Call for Emergency Services: 9-1-1

Crisis Services Canada: Call 1-833-456-4566 | Text 4564

Suicide Crisis Helpline: Call or text 9-8-8

Toronto Distress Centres: (416) 408-4357 or 408-HELP

Distress and Crisis Ontario: <http://www.dcontario.org/>

Spectra Helpline: (905) 459-7777 (Brampton or Mississauga)

Durham Crisis and Mental Health Line: (905) 666-0483

Distress Centre Halton Region

Oakville: 905-849-4541

Burlington: 905-681-1488

Milton/Halton Hills: 905-877-1211

Ottawa Region Crisis Line: 613-238-3311 or 1-833-456-4566

Hamilton: 905-561-5800

Waterloo-Kitchener Region: 1-844-437-3247

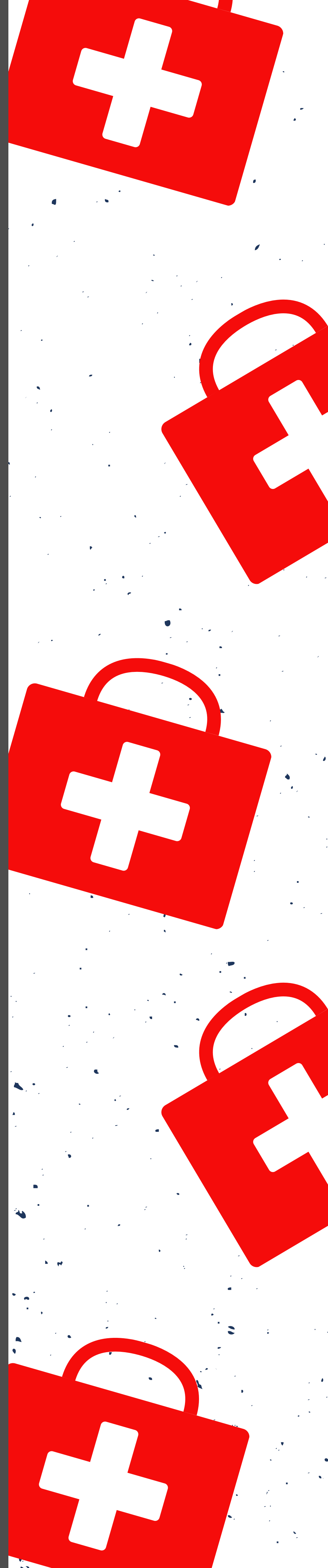
Simcoe County: 1-888-893-8333

North Bay and District: 1-800-352-1141

Telecare Peterborough: 705-745-2273

Kingston and Frontenac: 613-544-4229

Ottawa and Region: 1-866-996-0991



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Substance, Alcohol, and Drug Use

Drug Rehab Services (1-877-254-3348)

Alcoholics Anonymous (www.aa.org)

Narcotics Anonymous (<https://canaacna.org/>)

SMART Recovery (<https://smartrecovery.org/>)

Breaking Free (<https://www.breakingfreeonline.ca/>)

Community Resources and Programs

211 Ontario (<https://211ontario.ca/search/>)

Connex Ontario (<https://www.connexontario.ca/en-ca/>)

Mental Health Support

BounceBack Ontario (<https://bouncebackontario.ca/>)

Psychologist Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists>)

Canadian Mental Health Association (<https://ontario.cmha.ca/>)

Anxiety Canada (<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>)

Mood Disorders Society of Canada (<https://mdsc.ca/>)

Mental Health Commission of Canada

(<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/>)

Access MHA (Eastern Ontario only (<https://www.accessmha.ca/>))

Apps and Worksheets

Mindshift CBT app: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/>

Insight Timer app: <https://insighttimer.com/en-ca>

Feeling Moodie: <https://feelingmoodie.com/>

Doze: <https://www.dozeapp.ca/>

Breathe 2 Relax: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/breathe2relax/>

Happify: <https://www.happify.com>

Mood Mission: <http://moodmission.com>

REFERENCES

1. Mental health: What is it, really? (2020, January 13). Canadian Mental Health Association. <https://cmha.ca/news/mental-health-what-is-it-really/>
2. Swarbrick, M. (2006). A wellness approach. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 29(4), 311–314. <https://doi.org/10.2975/29.2006.311.314>
3. Chan, A. P. C., Nwaogu, J. M., & Naslund, J. A. (2020). Mental Ill-Health Risk Factors in the Construction Industry: Systematic Review. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 146(3), 04020004. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)CO.1943-7862.0001771](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)CO.1943-7862.0001771)
4. Cocker, F., Martin, A., Scott, J., Venn, A., & Sanderson, K. (2013). Psychological Distress, Related Work Attendance, and Productivity Loss in Small-to-Medium Enterprise Owner/Managers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 10(10), 5062–5082. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10105062>
5. Blake, H., Bullock, H., & Chouliara, N. (2023). Enablers and barriers to mental health initiatives in construction SMEs. *Occupational Medicine*, 73(6), 317–323. <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqad075>
6. Li, K., Wang, D., Sheng, Z., & Griffin, M. A. (2022). A Deep Dive into Worker Psychological Well-Being in the Construction Industry: A Systematic Review and Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Management in Engineering*, 38(5), 04022051. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)ME.1943-5479.0001074](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)ME.1943-5479.0001074)
7. Pirzadeh, P., Lingard, H., & Zhang, R. P. (2022). Job Quality and Construction Workers’ Mental Health: Life Course Perspective. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 148(12), 04022132. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)CO.1943-7862.0002397](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)CO.1943-7862.0002397)
8. Tijani, B., Osei-Kyei, R., & Feng, Y. (2022). A review of work-life balance in the construction industry. *International Journal of Construction Management*, 22(14), 2671–2686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15623599.2020.1819582>
9. Nowrouzi-Kia, B., Bani-Fatemi, A., Howe, A., Akeela, F., Lo, J., Jaswal, S., & Krishnan, A. (2022, May 11). Ontario Electrical League: Supporting Employers in Apprentice Training
10. Nowrouzi-Kia, B., Bani-Fatemi, A., Howe A., Shahzad, M., Chattu, V., Nega, N., Yuen, B., Alam, B., Youn, E. (2023). Supporting Employers in Apprentice Training: Outcomes of a Training and Mentoring Program for Electrical and Plumbing Employers. (Report No 2.). University of Toronto. http://restore.rehab/OEL_Report_Year2_May2023.pdf
11. Nowrouzi-Kia, B., Howe, A., Bani-Fatemi, A., Li, Y., Haritos, A., Long, B-Z. S., Formuli, E., Nandan, S., Balakrishnar, K., Zhu, S. & Hao, Y, (2024). Wired for Change: Examining Recruitment, Retention and Mental Health to Diversify the Electrical Skilled Trades. University of Toronto.
12. Howe, A. S., Shahzad, M., Yuen, B., Tan, J., Saini, H., Saade-Cleves, N., Chattu, V. K., Bani-Fatemi, A., & Nowrouzi-Kia, B. (2024). Physical and social correlates of occupational health in the construction industry: A scoping review. *Environmental Health Insights*.
13. Lingard, H., & Turner, M. (2017). Promoting construction workers’ health: A multi-level system perspective. *Construction Management and Economics*, 35(5), 239–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2016.1274828>
14. Greacen, P., & Ross, V. (2023). Exploring the Impact of Social Identity on the Bullying of Construction Industry Apprentices. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(21), 6980. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20216980>
15. Ross, V., Mathieu, S. L., Wardhani, R., Gullestrup, J., & Kölves, K. (2021). Factors Associated With Workplace Bullying and the Mental Health of Construction Industry Apprentices: A Mixed Methods Study. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 629262. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.629262>
16. McCormack, D., Djurkovic, N., & Casimir, G. (2013). Workplace bullying: The experiences of building and construction apprentices: Workplace bullying: the experiences of building and construction apprentices. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, n/a-n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1744-7941.12014>
17. Howe, A. S., Bani-Fatemi, A., Tjahayadi, E., Haritos, A., Hao, Y., Zhu, S., Formuli, E., & Nowrouzi-Kia, B. (2024). A quantitative examination of sleep quality, burnout, psychological distress, and social support availability of electrical workers in Ontario, Canada. *Discover Public Health* (Under Review)
18. Ahn, Y. H., Lee, S., Kim, S. R., Lim, J., Park, S. J., Kwon, S., & Kim, H. (2021). Factors associated with different levels of daytime sleepiness among Korean construction drivers: A cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-12062-3>
19. Kim, Y., Lee, S., Lim, J., Park, S., Seong, S., Cho, Y., & Kim, H. (2021). Factors Associated with Poor Quality of Sleep in Construction Workers: A Secondary Data Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(5), 2279. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052279>
20. Getting a good night’s sleep. Anxiety Canada. (n.d.). Retrieved on July 4, 2024 from <https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/SleepHygiene.pdf>