

The right start: building safe work for young workers

Elliot Parkinson (Principal Advisor, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland): Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is excited to share this short film about managing young workers - 'The right start'. Young workers, particularly those employed in the construction, manufacturing, transport and warehousing, agriculture and labour hire industries are a priority group that we target in order to achieve our goal of reducing the number of work-related injuries and fatalities in Queensland.

This group is a priority because about one in every one hundred young workers suffers a serious injury at work in Queensland every year.

Each one of those injuries happens to someone who is just starting out in their careers and it has a significant impact on them, their colleagues, families and friends.

Over the last few years, we've done a lot of work to better understand what makes young people more prone to getting injured at work.

What we have learnt is that relying on young workers to speak up when they feel unsafe is not effective.

Young people are more likely to avoid asking questions and jump straight into work to try and impress their supervisors and co-workers. So it's these people that can have the biggest influence on a young person's safety at work.

This film focuses on the important role that supervisors and managers play in designing work that keeps young workers safe.

It follows two young workers throughout their day and highlights the different experiences they have based on the effectiveness of their supervisor. You will also hear insights provided by industry leaders on how they are actively engaging with their young workers to keep them safe today and develop them into future leaders in health and safety.

Onscreen text: The right start – building safe work for young workers

Narrator: Workers aged between 15 and 24 years make up about 18% of the Queensland workforce. 4,000 young workers suffer a serious injury at work each year.

That's an injury that keeps them off work for at least five days and possibly one that will affect their ability to work for the rest of their life.

A serious injury affects not just the worker but their colleagues and supervisor, their family and their friends.

As a supervisor or manager of a young worker, you have the greatest influence on their attitude to work safety. This means ensuring an appropriate level of supervision relevant to the tasks that they are performing.

Damien Goodwin (Shamrock Civil Engineering): With a young worker, they normally just come out of school, so they wanna work, they wanna earn a bit of money, so they like to try and impress straightaway. And to impress, you normally think you need to get in there and do flat-out work and that sometimes could create a bit of drama.

Neil Ivison (Rail Systems Project Manager, Laing O'Rourke): You try and open up dialogue with them around what have they actually experienced, and if they've just been in school and then they've just joined us, well, we know we've got to look after them that little bit more.

Damien Goodwin (Shamrock Civil Engineering): We have a lot of dangers in our industry. They mightn't look dangerous until you start doing stuff like jumping down steps or whatnot. You just gotta be aware they'll come up to a hole - instead of just taking the way down, they think, "Ooh, jump down and get it done quick and easy", that's where they find themselves in strife.

Narrator: Young workers have a unique risk profile. They may not notice when a situation becomes dangerous or they may misjudge the level of risk. They may be less likely to ask questions or raise safety concerns. And they model their behaviour off others, whether that behaviour is right or wrong.

Onscreen text: Induction and training, Supervision and feedback, Support and mentoring

Effective induction, proper training, regular supervision and support and mentoring is vital for a young worker to adopt the right attitude to safety and develop safe work practices.

Let's follow two young workers as they go about their work day to see how the interactions with their supervisors and their experiences can differ.

This is Adam. He is 19 and lives with his mum and dad. He's been working as a civil construction trainee for the last three months. His boss, Ray, values young workers. Ray knows that his business's safety system needs to accommodate Adam's unique risk profile. To ensure he is safe at work and is productive for the business, Ray follows the "tell me, show me, watch me" approach.

This is Ryan. He is 21 and he is a first-year apprentice tiler. He has just moved in with his girlfriend, Emily. Ryan hopes one day to be his own boss with his own business. Ryan's boss, Dan, thinks young workers are often a hassle, slow, and spend more time checking their phones than focusing on their work.

Onscreen text: Induction and training

Ray: Hey, Adam. Could you come over here for a minute, please, mate? Um, I'm just going to get you to do a bit of work on the excavator today. OK, I know you've done your unit of competency, but, you know, using one on site's a different story.

Adam: Yeah.

Ray: So what I'm going to do is get you to move that pile of dirt on that flat over to here.

Adam: Alright, cool.

Ray: Do you feel comfortable with that?

Adam: Yeah.

Ray: Alright. Wonderful. We'll just start off with a pre-check. Then we'll just jump inside the cab and check all the controls, because they can vary from machine to machine, OK?

Adam: Yep.

Ray: OK? And then together we're just going to go through the safe work method statement, OK?

Adam: Too easy.

Ray: So you've probably seen a SWMS before on other high-risk activities. So, but we'll still go through, just so that you understand the measures we have in place to ensure the safe operation of the excavator.

Adam: Yeah.

Ray: OK? So we'll be doing a few easy navigation tasks. I'll be in constant contact and watching you at all times.

Adam: Alright.

Ray: OK? Just remember, the exclusion zone is marked out. If anything or anyone comes inside that zone, you need to immediately stop.

Adam: Alright, cool.

Ray: OK? Any questions?

Adam: No, I'm ready to go.

Ray: Alright. Whoa! (LAUGHS) Nice enthusiasm. What do you need to do? Uh, just be moving the excavator around. I'll lift up the bucket. You'll be in eye contact just in case anything goes wrong. And if anyone enters the exclusion zone, I'll stop.

Ray: Excellent. Great stuff. OK, you reckon you can handle it?

Adam: Yeah, definitely.

Ray: Alright, onya go.

Dan: Ryan, awesome that you can grace us with your presence from college. Now, look, mate, we've got a lot on our plate today. Know how to use a tile cutter?

Ryan: Yeah.

Dan: Alright, good. What about a grinder?

Ryan: Uh... Yeah, yeah, we've done that.

Dan: Alright, good. I need you to head out to the ute and get the tile cutter and grinder, and change the blade on the grinder. Then I want you to make a dozen cuts with a 60-mil trim and then I want you to cut two with a 90-mil waste with a 4-inch grinder. You good to do that, mate?

Ryan: Yeah.

Dan: Alright, good. Let's get stuck in. And, Ryan, no mucking around today, mate. We've got a lot on our plate.

Ryan: Yep.

Onscreen text: Supervision and feedback

Ray: Great job. Good stuff. Were you comfortable with that?

Adam: Yeah, I just stick to the plan and it's all sweet.

Ray: That's it. That's what they're there for. Yeah, just do everything according to the book, OK? That means following the work plan and SWMS, and that way we don't even have any near-miss incidents on this site. OK. Any questions?

Adam: Nah, I'm all good.

Ray: What I'm going to do now is get you to do something a little bit more interesting than that. I'll get you to move the materials from here over to the stockpile. Alright?

Adam: OK.

Ray: But first of all, I'll do a demo. I want you to watch that closely. I'll ask you to step outside the exclusion zone. And just watch me carefully, OK?

Adam: Alright.

Dan: Yeah, righto, mate. That sounds good. We've got a lot on the go at the moment. Hang on a sec, mate. Ryan! Ryan! (GRINDER WHIRRS, THEN STOPS)

Mate, where's the guard for the grinder? What's going on with the glasses and the earplugs? I thought you knew what you were doing.

Ryan: Yeah, I do. It's the other guys. They didn't have it on, so I thought I didn't need it. I'm sorry, but...

Dan: Mate, head to the back of the trailer and get the guard for the grinder and don't worry about what these other guys are up to, OK? Just focus on what you have to do. I haven't got time to babysit today, mate. I really need you to get stuck in and get this job done, OK? And then come see me. Alright?

Ryan: Yeah.

Dan (on the phone): Alright. Sorry about that, mate. Yeah. Yeah, no, we've just got a few dramas with the apprentice. Yeah, no. We'll sort it out. All good.

Onscreen text: Support and mentoring

Ray: Adam! How did your week at training college go this week?

Adam: Oh, yeah, it was OK. You know, the teacher's alright. But, actually, it's really good using the simulator first. But I'd rather be doing real stuff on site, you know?

Ray: Well, I'm really glad you're enjoying it. Obviously, you know, you're paying attention because you're picking things up really quickly.

Adam: Oh, thank you.

Ray: Speaking of college, I probably should take a look at your training records before you take off hey?

Adam: Oh, yeah, that would actually be pretty good.

Ray: Alright. Well, I'll come with you now.

Adam: Sweet.

Ray: No worries. So, I hear you play in a band.

Dan: Ryan, there you are, mate. Shipping off early today.

Ryan: Alright. Do you want me to just finish this up, then?

Dan: Mate a couple of guys will finish off the ensuite. They'll shut up shop, but I want you to finish those cuts, put them in the corner, ready for the morning.

(PHONE RINGS)

Dan: Dan speaking.

Ryan: so just with this next placement, do you want me to put it, like...

(Guitar music as Adam plays, Ryan sits in waiting room with a bandage on his hand)

Elliot: An effective form of inducting a young worker into a particular task can be using the "tell me, show me, watch me" approach. So that involves providing a verbal and written instruction into performing the task, demonstrating how to perform it safely, and then providing feedback while watching the young worker actually demonstrating the task.

Dr David Drummond (Head of Health, Safety and Environment, Laing O'Rourke Australia): With our young workers, in terms of how we manage inductions and characteristics of supervision, we think about how they learn, their learning styles. These days it's more around about visual rather than just general written communication.

Neil Ivison: We're trying to use more visual aids, which is always in your face rather than some guy reading from the piece of paper.

Elliot Parkinson: So an induction's really important into a particular task or using a particular piece of equipment, making sure that that worker's competent in performing that work. They understand the work that's going on around them but they're supervised.

David Drummond: In terms of supervision, we talk about supervisors being more understanding of how young workers learn, how important it is that they actually have more interactions with the supervisor on a day-to-day basis rather than being left alone.

Neil Ivison: We have to have good conversations with them. "We've told you not to use your phone. Are you sure you're alright? You seem a bit distracted". You know, it's just another level of engagement with our workforce.

Elliot Parkinson: We know that providing mentoring and social support is really important to allow young workers to engage with their work environment socially.

David Drummond: We have a mentoring program that we use on a regular basis which identifies a supervisor to take more action or someone who's been in the industry a long period of time and takes them under their wing and helps them through their new career probably for the first three to six months.

Neil Ivison: You can usually tell when you first meet someone, you know, perceptual, and you can usually judge how....whether someone's a strong character or, you know, a bit more reserved and you sit down and have your one-to-one with them and "What's your experience?" and then you start to look at, "Hold on, he'd probably be better going with that guy. He's a little bit withdrawn and we need to give him that little bit more support". Whereas you get some youngsters who are very brash, know-it-all, done it all before, and they need a bit of temper, so we put them with one of our stronger guys who's probably a little bit more outspoken.

David Drummond: Their values are different than older people. They've been in the industry a long period of time. So we try and leverage off those values and use them to guide them through their decision making throughout their career. We also try not to ostracise them and highlight them by wearing different-coloured hats. So they are part of the workforce. The supervisors really need to have a one-to-one relationship with them.

Elliot Parkinson: Proactive initiatives around financial skills, mental health and wellbeing, physical health and wellbeing, even literacy, those kind of issues can impact on a young worker's health and safety. While it might not be directly a safety initiative, it has positive safety outcomes by engaging young workers within the work environment. Some of the examples that we've seen where industry is engaged with their young workers around safety has had really positive outcomes.

So it's helped them to understand some of the documentation and systems that they've got in place and why they're important. It's helped them to understand why they do the role that they do that way and the dangers that might be associated with those roles.

Narrator: Through effective induction and training, appropriate supervision and good feedback and supportive mentoring, young workers will become more aware of how to do the job safely.

Engaging with young workers through consultation will also enable them to share their ideas around work health and safety and help to improve the way that safety is managed in your workplace.

David Drummond: Unless we get in and support it as an industry the importance of the young workers and their interactions and the value they bring, recognising this, they are a little bit in that risk group of high incidents. However, we can actually manage risk no different than any other risk that we see in our sites.

Neil Ivison: The best advice I would give to anybody is keep open communication, keep talking and make them feel part of what we do.

David Drummond: There is a lot to be gained from young workers and the information and knowledge that they can impart to us to learn as an organisation and as an industry as a whole.

Onscreen text:

Work safe. Home safe. Visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland thanks the following organisations and people for their participation in this film.

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Damien Goodwin

David Drummond

Elliot Parkinson

Neil Ivison

Elliot Parkinson: We would like this film to be used at workplaces to start a conversation with supervisors and managers that encourages them to reflect on how they engage with their young workers about health and safety.

Show the film at meetings and use it in presentations.

Lead a discussion about improving the way your leaders provide inductions, training, supervision, feedback, support and mentoring.

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