

# Answers to 5 FAQs about Safety Orientations for New & Young Workers: Training



Study after study has shown that new workers and workers under age 25 are at greater risk of being injured at work than other segments of your workforce. This increased risk is largely due to the fact that new and young workers are likely to be unfamiliar with your workplace, its hazards and equipment, and its OHS program. So to counter their increased risk of injury, get all new and young workers familiar with the hazards and safety rules in your workplace by requiring them to attend a safety orientation. Here are answers to five frequently asked questions about safety orientations for new and young workers.

## 5 FAQs

### [Q: Who's Required to Get an Orientation?](#)

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**A:** Given the increased safety risks that new and young workers face, you'd think that most, if not all, jurisdictions would specifically require safety orientations for such workers. But as [this chart](#) shows, only a handful of jurisdiction's specifically require employers to provide orientations to workers deemed 'new' under the OHS laws. And only BC, NB and the Yukon specifically require safety orientations for young

workers, that is, those under age 25 (BC and NB) and 19 (YK).

Does that mean new and young workers in the remaining jurisdictions shouldn't get safety orientations? The OHS laws across Canada require employers to provide workers with adequate training to ensure their health and safety at work. And employers also have a duty to provide workers with training and information about hazards *before* they're exposed to those hazards, which certainly suggests that safety orientations may be required.

In fact, some jurisdictions have said as much in bulletins, guides, etc. For example, a ['Safety Moment' publication](#) from Newfoundland's OHS Branch of Service NL notes that young workers are often at a greater risk of injury and their injuries tend to occur during the first few weeks on the job, that is, when they're new. So it says, 'Young workers need to properly orientated and informed of safety risks.' And Prince Edward Island's WCB has a [guide for employers of young workers](#) that says, 'When hiring young workers it is important that you orient them to your workplace before you expect them to be responsible for the work you hired them to do. A critical part of this workplace orientation will be the Safety Orientation, when you introduce new workers to the many aspects of safety in your workplace.' (The guide also notes that many of the observations made in it about young workers apply equally to new workers.)

*Bottom line:* It's likely at least a best practice in all jurisdictions to require all new workers to attend a safety orientation. So who qualifies as a 'new' worker? Using the broad definitions contained in the OHS laws of those jurisdictions with specific new worker training requirements, require safety orientations for any worker who's:

- New to your workplace, even if experienced in general. A new worker who's highly qualified to do the job he was hired for is still unfamiliar with *your* workplace, its

- hazards and its OHS program;
- New to the job or position if the hazards associated with the job or position are different from the hazards in the worker's previous job or position;
  - Relocated to a new area in the workplace or new worksite if the hazards in that area or worksite are different from the hazards in the worker's previous workplace;
  - Returning to the workplace after an absence, such as maternity or medical leave, if the hazards have changed while the worker was gone; or
  - Affected by a change in the workplace's hazards.

Note that in many cases, new workers and young workers are overlapping groups. (In fact, some OHS regulators are [subsuming young workers](#) into the category of new workers in their prevention and enforcement efforts.) So requiring new workers to attend a safety orientation will likely catch many young workers, too. But some young workers may not technically be new. For example, a 17-year-old worker may work for you for a few months over the summer and then return again during his next break from school. If he's returning to the same position and there are no new hazards in the workplace, he may not qualify as a 'new' worker and so technically may not need a safety orientation. However, given the increased risk of injury to young workers as shown by various studies, consider requiring such workers to attend a safety orientation even if they've previously attended one.

## **Q: Who Should Provide the Training?**

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**A:** Whoever provides your safety training in general, such as the HR director, a JHSC member, a supervisor, a union representative or an outside safety trainer, is likely also competent to give a general safety orientation as well, which simply involves providing basic safety information that's

relevant to *all* workers, such as fundamental safety rules, emergency procedures, who the members of JHSC are and the location of first aid kits. In addition, new and young workers should get an orientation on the specific hazards of the jobs they'll be doing. The job-specific elements of the orientation should be given by a competent person who's familiar with those hazards and the related safety rules, such as a supervisor or lead hand.

## **Q: When Should You Provide an Orientation?**

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**A:** You should give new and young workers at least an overview of key safety information on their first day and a general safety orientation within their first day or two on the job. As such workers are trained on how to perform their new jobs, they should get the job-specific safety training before they encounter each new hazard, perform each new task or operate each new piece of equipment.

## **Q: What Should an Orientation Cover?**

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**A:** The OHS laws in those jurisdictions with new and/or young worker orientation requirements may spell out the topics that a company must include in such orientations. These topics typically required to be covered in a general safety orientation include:

- The company's OHS program and policy and the consequences for violating that policy;
- Workers' rights and responsibilities under the law, such as the right to refuse unsafe work and the duty to comply with the safety rules;
- Employer's rights and responsibilities under the law, such as the duty to provide a safe workplace;

- Workplace health and safety rules;
- Communication of safety information, such as the location of safety bulletin boards;
- Procedures for reporting safety incidents, including near misses;
- Hazards specific to the workplace, such as any hazardous substances used there or the presence of confined spaces;
- General hazards, including workplace violence;
- PPE;
- Location of prohibited or restricted areas;
- Location of first aid facilities, and how to summon first aid and report injuries and illnesses;
- Emergency procedures;
- Instruction and demonstration of workers' specific tasks or processes;
- WHMIS, especially understanding MSDSs/SDSs and labels;
- Supervisor's name and contact information; and
- The JHSC (or health and safety representative), including who the members are and how to contact them.

**ORIENTATION CHECKLIST:** Download this [Model Young Worker Safety Orientation Checklist](#), adapt it for any orientation requirements in your jurisdiction's OHS laws and use it to ensure that your general safety orientation covers all of the necessary topics.

## **Q: How Should the Orientation Be Conducted?**

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**A:** If several new/young workers start at the same time, it's appropriate to give the general safety orientation to such workers as a group because that aspect of the orientation will apply to all of them. As for topics or hazards that aren't common to all new/young workers, orientations on those topics and hazards should be given specifically to each worker'or

group of workers'who'll be doing the same job at the same site.

Your orientation should include giving new/young workers key safety information in writing, such as the company's OHS policies and safety rules, and an employee handbook, if you have one, which they can use as references when needed. But your orientation should not solely consist of distributing these written materials, telling new/young workers to read this information and calling it a day. An effective orientation requires you to review the safety information with the workers and ensure that they understand it, such as by quizzing them on the material.

Note that in many ways, giving an orientation is like giving any other type of safety training. But with orientations, you should also consider your audience and any training issues that may be specific to new and young workers. For example, consider language and cultural barriers when training workers who are not only new to your workplace but also new to Canada. Workers with a working knowledge of conversational English may have a limited ability to *read* English. So although they may be able to understand safety information presented to them orally, they may not be able to read the written safety materials you give them (see '[Safety Training: Does Safety Training and Material Have to Be Multilingual](#)').

Also, young workers may be more receptive to certain kinds of training techniques or approaches. For example, young workers may have shorter attention spans, so communications should be punchy and brief. And visual messages may be more effective with this group of workers. (For more suggestions, see '[Young Worker Safety Tips from England](#).')

**Insider Says:** As with all safety training, ensure that you document the safety orientations you provide to all new/young workers. If you don't document your orientations, you won't be able to prove that you provided them. And a lack of proof

could undermine the company's due diligence defence if, say, a new worker is injured and the company is charged with failing to properly train him.

## **BOTTOM LINE**

Because new and young workers are especially vulnerable, they may require special attention and additional measures to ensure their health and safety. By providing a safety orientation to these workers when they begin work for your company, you give them a strong safety foundation and teach them the importance of taking safety seriously from day one.

## **7 Safety Tips for Protecting New & Young Workers**

New and young workers want to make a good impression. So they may be reluctant to ask too many questions. But you can't let new and young workers stumble through procedures in an effort to avoid asking a 'dumb' question especially if staying quiet puts them at risk. So here are seven tips to help you combat this reluctance and keep new and young workers are safe on the job:

1. As part of your orientation for new/young workers, tell them that if they're ever confused about any procedures, they must go to a supervisor rather than attempt to figure out the problem on their own. Supervisors should never criticize or belittle them for questions.
2. Tell them how to report unsafe or unhealthy conditions and reinforce your expectation that they'll do so without delay. (And make sure they understand that they should [report even minor injuries](#).)
3. Ensure they're properly trained on safe work procedures, PPE they need to use and the hazards that they could face on the job. And don't simply take a new or young

worker's word that he's clear on the procedure. Have that person explain and demonstrate the tasks he'll be required to perform.

4. Don't overload them with information. Provide training in manageable chunks so they can absorb and retain the information.
5. Ensure that new and young workers are closely supervised. Also, ask other experienced workers to watch out for them and intervene if they see a new or young worker performing a task unsafely or incorrectly. ([ID new workers](#) so that co-workers will know who they are.)
6. Give them written safety information they can use for reference when needed.
7. Be a good role model and ensure supervisors do the same. If you aren't wearing required PPE or are taking unsafe shortcuts, what sort of example are you setting.