

Factors influencing the health and safety of young people

Everyone is different, and that applies to young people. Some will be shy, others are confident or over-confident, there is no one rule for all.



The following may be useful when assessing the factors that can influence the health and safety of young people:

- **Make the information engaging.**
Health and safety can be a difficult subject to engage young people. Some may have a greater inclination to take risks and may be blasé about the dangers, which could result for example in them taking shortcuts with safety, not using PPE or driving unsafely.
- **Impressionable.**
Young people are new to work and are naturally impressionable. They are still forming their views on the world. They are susceptible to peer pressure. If their colleagues are taking unsafe risks they are more likely to follow suit.
- **Eager to impress.**
This could lead to some young people working longer hours, not taking breaks, not raising issues about safety for fear of being seen as a 'complainer', or attempting to carry out tasks that they are not trained to do.
- **Lack confidence.**
Young, inexperienced workers may not have faith in their own ability. They may be too intimidated to challenge older workers. They may not 'speak up' about a safety issue for fear of being wrong or being blamed. Some young workers may say that they understand a procedure or instruction when they do not – so as not to appear foolish or forgetful.
- **Tiring easily.**
Young people, especially when they are new and unused to work, are more susceptible to fatigue. This can lead to them making mistakes or being unable to concentrate.
- **Lack of concentration.**
Being unused to work, young people may find it difficult to concentrate for long periods. Problems in their personal life can cause them to become easily distracted. Alcohol and drugs consumption is higher than average amongst young people. This can lead to a drop in performance, slower reaction times, or feeling tired or unwell.
- **Difficulty making decisions.**
Research has shown that a young person's brain is still developing into their 20's and that the part of the brain responsible for making complex decisions is one of the last to develop. They may find it more difficult to make decisions when under pressure.

New to the job

One of the key factors influencing the health and safety of young people is simply being new to a job. The Health and Safety Executive says that workers new to a job are as likely to have an accident in the first six months at a workplace as during the whole of the rest of their working life.

This means workers new to a site:

- may not recognise hazards as a potential source of danger
- may not understand 'obvious' rules for use of equipment
- may be unfamiliar with site layout - especially where site hazards may change from day to day

¹ HSE Statistics 2011/12.