



# **SUPPORTING STUDENT SAFETY: CO-OP TEACHER'S GUIDE**



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Public Services Health  
& Safety Association



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## PURPOSE:

This guideline is designed to support co-op teachers in helping students have a safe, positive, and meaningful experience during their work placements. It provides practical strategies and information to assist teachers in promoting health and safety, guiding students to recognize, assess, and respond to potential hazards in the workplace.

In addition to this guideline, the Health and Safety Student Placement Resource Manual is available for students. This manual helps students better understand potential risks of harm, how to protect themselves, and how to reduce the chance of injury. By using these resources, co-op teachers can help students develop strong safety habits, build confidence, and contribute to a safe and respectful work environment.

Health and safety are a shared responsibility. Whether you are a student, supervisor, or coworker, everyone plays a role in identifying hazards, assessing risks, and taking steps to prevent accidents. Supporting students in learning these skills prepares them for future success and helps create safer workplaces for everyone.

## THE ROLE OF THE CO-OP TEACHER

Co-op teachers play a critical role in ensuring that students have a safe, meaningful, and educational work placement experience. As the primary liaison between the school and the workplace, they are responsible for placing students in environments that are physically and emotionally safe, respectful, and conducive to learning. This includes verifying that each placement has a **competent supervisor** who understands and fulfills their legal obligations under the **Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)**.

Although co-op teachers are not considered workplace supervisors under **OHSA Section 27**, they have **professional and legal responsibilities** under the **Education Act** and the **Ontario Curriculum for Cooperative Education (2018)**. These responsibilities are designed to protect students and support their development as young workers.

### Key Responsibilities of Co-op Teachers Include:

- **Conducting pre-placement assessments** to ensure the workplace meets safety, accessibility, and educational criteria. Even previously assessed placements must be reassessed to confirm ongoing suitability.
- **Confirming that placement supervisors** are competent, understand their legal duties, and are committed to providing site-specific training, supervision, and support.
- **Delivering health and safety instruction** in the classroom before placement begins, using resources to ensure students understand workplace hazards, rights, and responsibilities.
- **Monitoring student progress** through regular check-ins, site visits, and communication with both students and supervisors to ensure continued safety and learning.
- **Advocating for student success**, addressing concerns promptly, and ensuring students are treated fairly and respectfully throughout their placement.
- **Withdrawing students from placements** if any health, safety, or well-being concerns arise, and ensuring that updated assessments are completed before resuming the placement.

### Legal Context



Under OHSA, co-op students are legally defined as **workers**, which entitles them to the same protections as paid employees. Co-op teachers should ensure students are aware of their rights under OHSA, the **Employment Standards Act**, the **Workplace Safety and Insurance Act**, the **Ontario Human Rights Code**, and the **Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**.

## HOW SUPERVISING TEACHERS CAN BEST SUPPORT STUDENTS

- Ensure students receive a thorough orientation on workplace expectations, safety procedures and hazard awareness.
- Review the student's placement details and confirm that the employer has a health and safety program in place.
- Review the Work Education Agreement with students and ensure all required documentation is complete.
- Teach students about the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and their rights as young workers. (O. Reg. 297/13 (worker mandatory health and safety awareness training).
- Discuss potential hazards students may encounter in their specific placement.
- Discuss how to report workplace hazards.
- Serve as a point of contact for students who have concerns or questions about their placement.
- Advocate for students' wellbeing and intervene if a placement is unsafe or inappropriate.
- Maintain regular communication with both the student and the placement employer.
- Conduct check-ins or site visits to ensure the student is safe, supported, and learning effectively.
- Keep records of student placements, safety training, and any incidents or concerns that arise.
- Ensure that students complete any required training, forms or evaluations related to health and safety.

## ENSURING A SAFE PLACEMENT: THE CO-OP TEACHER'S OVERSIGHT ROLE

As part of their legal and professional responsibilities, co-op teachers must ensure that students are placed in workplaces that are safe, educationally appropriate, and supervised by competent individuals who understand their obligations under the **Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)**.

One of the key responsibilities of the co-op teacher is to **verify that the workplace supervisor conducts a thorough initial inspection** of all areas where the student may be assigned work. This includes offices, storage rooms, service zones, and maintenance areas. While no workplace is entirely free of hazards, the goal is to ensure that risks are identified, documented, and appropriately managed before the placement begins.

The co-op teacher should confirm that the supervisor is meeting safety standards and that the workplace has the capacity to support the student's health, safety, and learning. This includes evaluating whether the site has an operational health and safety program, whether staff are available and competent to provide safety training, and whether workers have the right to participate in health and safety matters. Specifically, the teacher should verify if the workplace has a Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) or a Health and Safety Representative, as required by legislation, and ensure the student will have access to these resources for support.

### The Purpose of the Initial Workplace Inspection Is To:

- Ensure the site is safe and appropriate for student placement.
- Confirm the presence of an operational health and safety program.



- Identify and document actual or potential hazards in the environment or work procedures.
- Determine if any hazards require immediate attention, training, or protective measures.
- Verify that staff at the placement site are competent to provide safety training and supervision.
- Evaluate whether existing safety policies, procedures, and controls are adequate to protect student health and safety.
- Ensure students receive accurate safety information before beginning their placement.
- Confirm that the student's orientation will include hazard recognition and current controls.
- Verify that workers rights to know, participate, and refuse unsafe work are respected and supported through policies, training, and access to a JHSC or Health and Safety Representative.

The number and timing of inspections during the placement should be based on the level of risk in the workplace. After the initial inspection, the workplace supervisor should evaluate risks and prioritize hazards based on the severity of potential consequences. The co-op teacher must also ensure that students have received a health and safety orientation that includes hazard recognition and control measures, helping them understand workplace risks and how to respond appropriately.

By actively overseeing this process, co-op teachers fulfill their duty to advocate for student safety and success, ensuring that every placement supports both learning and well-being.

See Appendix A for a sample workplace safety checklist that can be used to guide.

## ASSESSING RISK

Assessing risk is a crucial step in maintaining a safe work environment and protecting students during their placement. Once a hazard has been identified, it's essential to assess the level of risk it poses to prioritize corrective actions. This involves determining how workers might be harmed, estimating the likelihood of the hazard causing injury or illness, and evaluating the potential severity of the outcome.

Risk is typically assessed by considering both **probability** and **severity**.

Probability assesses the likelihood of harm occurring, considering factors such as the nature and frequency of exposure, the number of workers affected, and historical data on similar incidents.

Severity refers to the seriousness of the consequences, ranging from minor injuries to permanent disability or fatality.

For example, a high-risk hazard is very likely to cause serious harm and should be addressed immediately; lower-risk hazards, on the other hand, may require less urgent controls or monitoring. By systematically assessing risk, supervisors can make informed decisions that help prevent incidents and ensure a safer placement experience for students.

See Appendix B for a sample Risk Matrix Guide



		PROBABILITY OF INJURY		
		High	Medium	Low
SEVERITY OF INJURY	Major	High	High	Medium
	Moderate	High	Medium	Low
	Minor	Medium	Low	Low

*Severity x Likelihood =  
Risk Rating and Priority*

## RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

A variety of health and safety resources are available to support co-op teachers in their role of protecting student well-being during work placements. These tools help educators understand legal responsibilities, assess workplace safety, deliver effective pre-placement instruction, and respond to concerns. Resources such as the Ontario Curriculum for Cooperative Education, and Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development guidelines provide practical support for ensuring students are placed in safe, respectful, and educational environments.

### Internal Resources:

- [PSHSA - Slips, Trips and Falls](#)
- [PSHSA - Psychological Health & Safety](#)
- [PSHSA - Checklist for Identification of Risk Factors Associated with Hand-Arm & Back Injuries](#)
- [PSHSA - How Much Can You Lift?](#)
- [PSHSA - Kitchen & Cafeteria Checklist](#)
- [PSHSA - Ladder Inspection Checklist](#)
- [PSHSA - Ladder Safety Fast Fact](#)
- [PSHSA - Machine Guarding Checklist](#)
- [PSHSA - New Worker Health and Safety Checklist](#)
- [PSHSA - Working At Heights - Elevated Work Platforms \(Lifts\)](#)

### External Resources:

- [Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development](#)
- [WSIB Ontario](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: Young Workers](#)
- [The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12](#)
- [Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, S.O. 1997, c.16, Sched.A](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1 | ontario.ca](#)



## SOURCES

- [Personal protective equipment fit requirements | ontario.ca](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1 | ontario.ca](#)
- [CCOHS: Personal Protective Equipment](#)
- [CCOHS: Tips for Young Workers](#)
- [CCOHS: Emergency Planning](#)
- [Emergency Response Planning Guide](#)
- [The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12](#)



## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE WORKPLACE SAFETY CHECKLIST

<b>Person completing the checklist:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>

GENERAL - Workplace Safety	Y/N	Corrective Action
Are the floors clear of debris, loose materials, worn carpet, etc?		
Are emergency exits clearly marked and unobstructed?		
Are fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and emergency equipment accessible and maintained?		
Are materials neatly and safely stored?		
Is there clear signage for hazards?		
Supervision & Training	Y/N	Corrective Action
Will the student be adequately supervised by a trained staff member?		
Is there a clear orientation or onboarding process for students?		
Will safety procedures and emergency protocols be communicated to students?		
Equipment & Tools	Y/N	Corrective Action
Are tools and machines in good working order and properly maintained?		
Are safety guards and emergency shutoffs in place and functional?		



Will students be trained before using the equipment?		
<b>Ergonomics &amp; Physical Demands</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Corrective Action</b>
Are tasks appropriate for the student's physical abilities?		
Are there risks of repetitive strain, heavy lifting, or awkward postures?		
Are mechanical aids or proper lifting techniques used?		
<b>Emergency Preparedness</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Corrective Action</b>
Are emergency procedures posted and reviewed?		
Are evacuation routes and muster points identified or communicated?		
Are staff trained in first aid or emergency response?		
<b>Hazardous Substances</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Corrective Action</b>
Are hazardous substances properly stored and labelled?		
Were safety data sheets available for each product?		
Are WHMIS symbols and Safety Data Sheets (SDS) available and accessible?		
Are students expected to handle chemicals, and if so, will they receive proper training?		
<b>Personal Protective Equipment</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Corrective Action</b>
Will the student be provided with the appropriate P.P.E?		



Will the student be trained on the proper use of the P.P.E?		
<b>Workers Rights &amp; OHS Protections</b>	<b>Y/N</b>	<b>Corrective Action</b>
Is there a Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) or Health and Safety Representative (HSR) available to support workers?		
Are students informed of their right to know about workplace hazards?		
Are students informed of their right to participate in health and safety matters (e.g., access to JHSC/HSR)?		
Is there a clear procedure for work refusal or stoppage, and is the student aware of it?		



## APPENDIX B: SAMPLE RISK MATRIX

It's important to recognize that assessing health and safety risks often involves a degree of subjectivity.

		PROBABILITY OF INJURY		
		High	Medium	Low
SEVERITY OF INJURY	Major	High	High	Medium
	Moderate	High	Medium	Low
	Minor	Medium	Low	Low

### Step 1: Determine Probability

Probability determines how likely the hazard is to cause injury, and to determine this, you would look at the nature of exposure, time spent exposed, number of workers exposed, how often they are exposed and historical data.

- **High:** Injury or Illnesses due to exposure to this hazard is very likely (i.e., more than 80%)
- **Medium:** There is a chance that this hazard will cause injury or harm (i.e., 50%)
- **Low:** The hazard will probably not cause injury or harm (i.e., below 10%)

PROBABILITY RATING	
High	Injury or illness due to exposure to this hazard is very likely
Medium	There is a chance that the hazard will cause injury or illness
Low	The hazard will probably not cause injury or illness



### Step 2: Determine Severity

Severity is how serious injury or illness could be rated using major, moderated or minor.

SEVERITY RATING	
<b>Major</b>	The hazard could cause fatal or serious injury/illness and/or damage resulting in permanent or long term disability and/or significant loss
<b>Moderate</b>	The hazard could cause injury, illness and/or property damage resulting in lost time.
<b>Minor</b>	The hazard could only cause minor injury or illness without lost time or other loss

### Step 3: Risk Rating and Priority

Plot the probability and severity of injury on the risk priority chart to determine if the risk is high, medium or low.

		PROBABILITY OF INJURY		
		High	Medium	Low
SEVERITY OF INJURY	Major	High	High	Medium
	Moderate	High	Medium	Low
	Minor	Medium	Low	Low