

# CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR WORKPLACE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

## An EU-OSHA resource for workplaces

### Introduction to using conversation starters

Conversation starter scenarios are a resource to facilitate group discussions in the workplace or during vocational training. These conversation starters include scenarios that have been designed for use with workers who are involved in tasks that have the potential to cause musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and their managers and supervisors, and scenarios that have been designed to support the need for prompt and effective communication between a worker and their manager about a musculoskeletal health problem. These scenarios can be used as a starting point to initiate a discussion, with suggested topics and introductory questions. They can be used in a discussion-style workshop or as an opener to a training session.

Larger groups could be divided into smaller groups, or pairs, to discuss each scenario, the topics for discussion and their points of view. The groups should then come back together to share their points of view. If the facilitator divides a larger group into smaller groups, each could be given the same scenario or they could be given different scenarios.

- The situations used are intended to highlight some of the challenges faced by workers and the importance of understanding company procedures relating to the prevention of MSDs, including which responsibilities lie with employers and which lie with workers.
- The situations can be tailored to reflect the needs of an organisation through the incorporation of its own policies and procedures relating to the prevention of MSDs.
- Through discussion, workers should feel better equipped and better informed to deal with situations in which judgement decisions are required.
- Through discussion, workers, managers and supervisors should recognise the importance of early symptom reporting in reducing the risk of workers developing MSDs and in supporting sustainable working lives.

Facilitators may also consider adapting the scenarios and questions to other jobs and work situations, maintaining the same approach.

### Conversation starter 6: Small family business

You work in a small family business that has been at the same premises for a number of years. The facility is not purpose built and over the years materials have accumulated. Much of the storage is below waist height, which creates a manual handling risk and the potential for lower back pain.

You are loyal to the family but concerned about the impact on your hands, arms and back of moving and carrying materials.

#### What do you do?

Topics for discussion

- Do you recognise a similar scenario in your own workplace? Do you agree that early symptoms of an MSD suggest that a full reassessment of the workplace is required?
- Bearing in mind that this is a small business, what skills does the team involved in the risk assessment process need to have to undertake this successfully? What are the benefits of working as a team to identify MSD risk factors in your workplace?

- What is the importance of good housekeeping and storage as part of a workplace review? How would you raise your concerns with your employer?
- What is the value that workers add to an organisation?

## Further information on MSDs

At the links below you will find resources from EU-OSHA providing straightforward information about MSDs and how to prevent them, which will help you to prepare the activities; the factsheets could also be used as handouts for participants:

- *Healthy workers, thriving companies — a practical guide to wellbeing at work: tackling psychosocial risks and musculoskeletal disorders in small businesses:*  
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/healthy-workers-thriving-companies-practical-guide-wellbeing/view>
- 'Musculoskeletal disorders': <https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/musculoskeletal-disorders>
- 'Factsheet 71 — Introduction to work-related musculoskeletal disorders':  
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/factsheets/71/view>
- 'Factsheet 72 — Work-related neck and upper limb disorders':  
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/factsheets/72/view>
- 'Factsheet 73 — Hazards and risks associated with manual handling of loads in the workplace': <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/factsheets/73/view>
- 'Factsheet 87 — Workforce diversity and risk assessment: ensuring everyone is covered Summary of an Agency report: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/factsheets/87/view>
- 'E-fact 19 — Prevention of vibration risks in the construction sector':  
<https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/e-facts/efact19/view>

## Further information on leadership and worker participation

- *Worker participation in occupational safety and health — a practical guide:*  
[https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/reports/workers-participation-in-OSH\\_guide/view](https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/reports/workers-participation-in-OSH_guide/view)
- *Management leadership in occupational safety and health — a practical guide:*  
[https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/reports/management-leadership-in-OSH\\_guide/view](https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/reports/management-leadership-in-OSH_guide/view)