

Parents, supervisors and co-workers have greatest interpersonal influences in reducing young worker injuries

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Nick Turner, Haskayne School of Business professor, has completed a research paper into the high rate of injuries among younger workers. Credit: Riley Brandt, University of Calgary

Parents, as your kids prepare for their summer jobs, have you talked to them about workplace safety? You really should.

A new national study examined for the first time who [influences](#) the [safety](#) behaviour of young workers aged 15 to 24. The researchers looked at six sources of influence—parents, siblings, teachers, friends, supervisors and co-workers—to see how they related to the workers' risk-taking behaviour and frequency of minor [work](#) injuries.

Their findings show that among the six sources of influence, parents, supervisors and co-workers had the largest positive influence. The study "Injunctive Safety Norms, Young Worker Risk-taking Behaviors and Workplace Injuries" was recently published in the journal *Accident Analysis & Prevention*.

Teachers' influence on young workers is minimal

"What was surprising is that even with 18-year-olds, parents can still have an influence on how their children behave at work," says co-author Nick Turner, a Haskayne School of Business professor and new research chair with the Canadian Centre for Advanced Leadership in Business. "Compared to parents, supervisors, and co-workers, teachers didn't have an effect.

"This may be because for teachers to have an influence on kids' work safety behaviours, they need more structured, consistent interaction with kids about work—which parents, supervisors, and co-workers naturally have more of an opportunity to do."

Workplace injuries for young workers take a significant toll every year. In 2015, according to statistics from the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada, there were 15 deaths among workers aged 15 to 24 and 30,207 [injury](#) claims. In a separate study published in 2015, the researchers found incidence rates of minor injuries—burns, cuts, strains, etc. that did not require time off work—to have occurred at least once a month to one in three surveyed workers.

Parents play important role in promoting work safety with their kids

"If we're thinking about ways to promote work safety among young workers, we should not forget that alongside supervisors and co-workers, parents can play an important role, even though parents may not be directly involved in their kids' workplaces," says Turner.

Supervisors and parents who make safety an important part of what they talk about and practise can reduce risky behaviour and injuries among young workers.

"Getting a sense that your manager actually cares about safety—whether it's part of your work conversations, that she or he is open to suggestions about how to improve safety, etc.—sends the message that your [supervisor](#) and your employer care about you. That's motivating. This is likely the same pathway for [parents](#)," says Turner.

Temporary, seasonal nature of work creates singular challenges for youth

Turner also notes it is important to remember that young workers face particular challenges in their [summer jobs](#), compared to adult workers doing the same type of work.

"Given the temporary and seasonal nature of their work, many young workers do not get very much safety training, despite managers acknowledging that safety training is important. Compared to adult workers, [young workers](#) may also lack job-specific knowledge, the confidence to speak up about unsafe work conditions, and a sense of how vulnerable they may be to work injuries," says Turner.

More information: Simon Pek et al. Injunctive safety norms, young worker risk-taking behaviors, and workplace injuries, *Accident Analysis & Prevention* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.aap.2017.06.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2017.06.007)

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