

**When they grow  
up they want to be  
a somebody...**



**Not a statistic.**

## **Joe Who? Discussion Guide**

**A youth to youth play on  
younger worker health and safety**

**WorkSafe™**

WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF BC

[www.WorkSafebc.com](http://www.WorkSafebc.com)

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>How to use this guide.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Before viewing the video .....</b>	<b>5</b>
User tip #1: Provide background.....	5
User tip #2: Introduce the video .....	6
User tip #3: Introduce the story of the play .....	7
<b>Show the video .....</b>	<b>8</b>
User tip #4: Prepare viewers .....	8
<b>After viewing the video.....</b>	<b>9</b>
User tip #5: Discuss the issues raised by the play ...	9
User tip #6: Consider some myths and facts .....	9
User tip #7: Discuss possible actions .....	14

## INTRODUCTION

The safety of young workers is everyone's job. Employers, workers, unions, educators, parents, youth, the community, and the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) of B.C. all have a part to play. Young workers—hesitant to ask for proper safety training or to question the safety of work procedures—are at higher risk for workplace injury than any other age group of workers. Helping to prevent young worker injuries is a priority of the WCB and a shared responsibility of the community at large.

Joe Who? is one of the many awareness activities undertaken by the WCB to reduce injuries among young workers. This video shows a live performance of a peer-to-peer stage play written and performed by drama students at McNair Secondary School in Richmond, B.C. Using various scenes describing what can happen when young workers don't ask for help, the play moves from what children dream of being "when they grow up", to how a workplace injury can limit their choices in life and keep them from realizing their dreams.

This discussion guide was developed to provide background for viewing the video and suggestions for facilitating discussion after viewing. Anyone working or connected with youth can use this guide to introduce and discuss the topic of young worker health and safety.

## How to use the video and guide

It is recommended that you preview the video before showing it and read the three sections of this guide:

1. The “Before Viewing the Video” section provides background information on why youth are at special risk for injuries at work and explains how and why the play was produced.
2. The “Show the Video” section includes viewing tips regarding the content of the play.
3. The “After Viewing the Video” section contains suggestions for engaging youth and others in a post-video discussion about on-the-job health and safety issues and action steps that can help youth come home uninjured at the end of their work day.

## **BEFORE VIEWING THE VIDEO**

### **User Tip #1: Provide Background**

Before showing the video, share the following background information with viewers to help them understand that youth are especially vulnerable to workplace injuries.

### **Youth and workplace injuries**

B.C. has more than 250,000 young workers ranging in age from 15 to 24. Many are high school, college, or university students who hold part-time jobs while attending school and who take on full-time jobs during summer months. Others work full-time, usually in entry-level jobs, and are just beginning their climb up the work ladder. They work in many areas – from fast-food and retail clothing sales to construction and tree planting.

These young people have one thing in common – they are at high risk of being injured on the job. Their injuries range from minor to serious, result in short-term or long-term disabilities, and sometimes in death. Like all workers, they have a right to a safe and healthy workplace.

Facts:

- Young workers are at the greatest risk of getting injured during their first six months on the job.
- Young men are more likely to be injured on the job than any other group of workers.

For more information on the kind of injuries sustained by youth see <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/IndustryProfiles.asp>

## **User Tip #2: Introduce the Video**

Explain how the play was created and the format that is used.

### **About Joe Who?**

This video shows a performance of the play developed in 2002 by students for students. Young workers advised WCB that youth tend to “tune out” safety messages because they think “That could never happen to me.” Nevertheless, the young workers also commented that the more often a message is conveyed and the more realistic it is, the more likely it will connect with youth. They also noted that hearing these messages from people their own age would have the strongest impact.

The play was created by drama students at McNair Secondary School in Richmond. The students brainstormed and developed a series of workplace vignettes, then pieced them together to form the play. McNair has made the play and the director’s notes available to other secondary school theatre groups through the WCB. Joe Who? has been performed at schools, at conferences, and at industry associations in various parts of B.C. and Canada.

## **User Tip #3: Introduce the Story of the Play**

To help set the stage for viewing the video, discuss how a drama such as this play can be used to deliver a message in an indirect manner. Explain how the students who wrote the play learned about the issues.

### **How was the play developed?**

The students and their teachers met with WCB representatives, who gave them statistics and information about injury rates. They also learned about the rights and responsibilities of workers, and heard real-life case studies of injuries to young workers. The students were given binders full of statistics, studies, and quotations. They spent 200 hours researching the topics and developing the play.

Joe Who? is made up of various scenes that show how children dream of grown-up work life, and how young workers enter the real work-world. Many of the lines in the play are direct quotations from employers, workers and their families.

The play focuses on asking questions and making open-ended statements about what it's like to be a young worker, not on answering questions about the rights and responsibilities of workers and employees.

## SHOW THE VIDEO

### **User Tip #4: Prepare Viewers**

The video is 20 minutes long and features scenes that some viewers may find disturbing. It is recommended that you preview the video before showing it.

This play was written by youth for youth, and therefore the language used, the content, and the tone of the play are all directed at this audience. The play's subject matter reflects the experiences of this group as seen through their eyes and told through their own voices. It is recommended that you discuss this aspect with your audience before viewing the video.

Because of the impact of the play, many viewers will be affected and you may need to give them some time to reflect on what they have seen.

## **AFTER VIEWING THE VIDEO**

### **User Tip #5: Discuss the Issues Raised by the Play**

Give viewers a moment to reflect on what they have seen and heard before talking further about the play.

Use the discussion questions below to begin a conversation about the play and the issue of young worker health and safety.

#### **Discussion starters**

- What happened to Joe in the play?
- What safety messages/issues were conveyed in the play?
- What role does the employer and supervisor play in keeping workers safe at work?
- What role does the worker play in keeping himself or herself safe at work?
- What can parents do to help keep their kids safe at work?
- What are some of the potential hazards at your place of work?
- What strategies could you use to keep yourself safe at work?

### **User Tip #6: Consider Some Myths and Facts**

The following myths and facts provide an excellent way to further engage viewers in a discussion about young worker safety.

Explain to viewers that we all need to know the facts – and to know what we can and should be doing to help keep young workers safe on the job.

You may want to present the following information in the form of a quiz. Read each numbered statement and ask if viewers think it is a “fact” or a “myth,” then relay the facts provided.

### **Myth #1: Young workers are at no more risk than other workers.**

Facts: Young people between 15 and 24 years are particularly vulnerable to work-related injuries. They're eager to please and have much to offer, but they typically lack the experience to judge what's safe and what's not. Some are convinced nothing bad could ever happen to them. Others lack confidence so they don't question what happens at their workplace.

Young workers are at the greatest risk of getting injured during their first six months on the job. Young men are more likely to get hurt than any other group of workers.

Young people are also at risk for other reasons. Often, young workers:

- Receive little or no safety training or supervision
- Are reluctant to ask questions for fear of appearing stupid
- Are assigned physically demanding or dangerous tasks
- Have to use equipment or machinery designed for adults
- Are unaware of their rights and responsibilities
- Are distracted by other things going on in their lives
- Are tired from juggling school, homework, a job, and family/social life
- Feel rushed and pressured to get things done

## **Myth #2: It's only jobs in industries such as construction and forestry that have risks for young workers.**

Facts: When people think about the risk of workplace injury, they assume it is pretty much limited to jobs in construction, forestry, manufacturing, or agriculture. And it's true – these industries can be hazardous.

However, most B.C. youth work in restaurants, supermarkets, and retail stores. Safe jobs, right? Wrong. People are often shocked to hear that these are the sectors with the highest rate of injury to young workers.

## **Don't assume youth are safe, no matter what their job.**

The most common causes of injuries/accidents in restaurants, supermarkets, and general retail are:

- Back sprain and strain from pushing or pulling
- Getting hit by a falling object
- Contact with a hot object
- Falls, trips, and slips

## **Myth #3: Injuries to young workers are usually minor ones.**

Facts: Injuries to young workers do include minor strains, cuts, and bruises that heal quickly. But young workers also suffer from severe injuries – fractures and dislocations, for example – that result in short-term disability. Worst of all, young workers can and do suffer from very serious injuries such as amputations, broken backs, and third-degree burns.

These injuries can mean permanent impairment, disfigurement, and disability.

While the overall number of injuries to young workers in B.C. has declined, the number of serious injuries has not.

Serious injuries to young workers most commonly occur in the restaurant industry.

**Myth #4: Young workers don't have any health and safety rights on the job – they can get fired for speaking up.**

Facts: All workers in B.C. are protected by the Workers Compensation Act. This legislation says employers must provide a safe workplace, adequate training and supervision, and properly maintained and functioning safety equipment.

Workers also have the right to refuse work if they believe the task or conditions are unsafe. The Act also protects them from disciplinary action for reporting a safety or other work-related problem. Concerns can be reported anonymously to the WCB at 604 276-3100 in the Lower Mainland or toll-free at 1 888 621-SAFE (7233) from elsewhere in the province.

Many young workers believe minor injuries such as cuts, back strain, and burns are just part of having a job. This is not true. Every injury could and should be prevented.

Workplace safety is a right. It's also a responsibility. Young workers have responsibilities too. They need to:

- Follow safe work procedures to protect themselves and others
- Use safety equipment and protective clothing
- Immediately correct or report a safety problem to their supervisor or employer (or to the WCB if necessary)
- Ask their supervisor for help and training before starting any unfamiliar task

### **Myth #5: It's up to the WCB to guarantee workplace safety for young workers.**

Facts: Keeping young workers safe is a shared responsibility. Employers, unions, co-workers, parents, educators, youth, the community, and the WCB all have a part to play.

The WCB is working with a variety of partners on young worker initiatives such as awareness campaigns, education and outreach programs, and advisory groups. Together, we're helping to reduce the rate of injury to young workers.

### **Resources**

Information and help concerning young worker safety is just a mouse click or a phone call away:

- WCB's Web site <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org> is dedicated exclusively to the safety of young workers. It includes a broad range of information as well as resource materials for all groups that can be downloaded for free.

- The WCB Prevention Information Line can answer questions about workplace health and safety. Concerns can be reported anonymously. Phone 604 276-3100 in the Lower Mainland or 1 888 621-SAFE (7233), toll-free, from elsewhere in the province.

## **User Tip #7: Discuss Possible Actions**

Be part of the solution and help youth build the skills and knowledge they need to keep safe at work. Work with youth and others on some of the action items below.

### **Take Action: What can youth do?**

Young workers need to work safely and without undue risk to themselves or others. To keep safe on the job, youth can do the following:

- Ask to be trained about safe work procedures and how to recognize on-the-job hazards.
- Follow safe procedures and encourage others to do so.
- Know their workplace health and safety rights and responsibilities.
- Ask questions if they are uncertain about anything.
- Get involved and support young worker health and safety programs.

## Take Action: What can educators do?

Educators are in a unique position to provide youth with learning opportunities regarding young worker safety. Supporting their entry into the workforce can have a lasting effect and can help to create a generation of safe workers. Educators can do the following:

- Talk to students about health and safety hazards in the workplace, and their rights and responsibilities as workers.
- Use the Student WorkSafe curriculum designed for teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12. (To access curriculum materials, go to <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org/sResources-Educators.asp>).
- Make sure school-based work experience programs give students information on workplace health and safety.
- Support and promote WorkSafe health and safety education programs in schools.
- Invite speakers from the WCB's Young Worker Speakers Resource to speak to students. (Visit <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org> for more information).
- Encourage Parent Advisory Committees (PACs) and schools to focus on the issue of young worker health and safety.
- Provide, or encourage youth to pursue, training and education that helps young workers recognize and deal with workplace hazards.
- Ask youth what personal commitment to their safety on the job they will make as a result of watching Joe Who?

- Have students write their own play on young worker health and safety, or adapt Joe Who? to reflect their community/school.
- Be an advocate for young worker health and safety in their school, district, and community.
- Get involved and support young worker health and safety programs.

## **Take Action: What can parents do?**

Parents play an important supportive role in helping youth navigate the world of work. Parents can make workplaces safer for children by treating workplace health and safety as a top priority and by being proactive. Talk about safety before and during the time youth engage in work activities.

Parents can also:

- Prepare your children for work beforehand by finding out about workplace health and safety and talking to them about the risk of workplace injury. Ask if they've taken WCB's Student Work-Safe program or any other safety education and find out what they know about their workplace rights and responsibilities.
- Once your children start working, ask questions about the tasks they're doing at work and the safety training and supervision they're receiving.
- Support your children by encouraging them to think through the job and identify risks before they start.
- Encourage your children to trust their instincts and if they feel something is unsafe, to check with their supervisor before doing the task.
- Stay involved and model safety at home.

- Ask your children what personal commitment they will make as a result of watching Joe Who?
- Get involved and support young worker health and safety programs.

## **Take Action: What can employers do?**

Employers and supervisors are responsible for making sure young workers do their jobs without unnecessary risk. Role modeling and teaching youth about safety at the workplace has a lasting effect. Along with knowing and complying with workplace health and safety regulations, employers can do the following:

- Provide comprehensive training and make sure that young workers are appropriately supervised.
- Create a workplace culture that encourages young workers to ask questions about any health and safety concerns they may have.
- Involve young workers in health and safety committees and activities.
- Provide, or encourage young workers to pursue, training and education that helps them recognize and deal with workplace hazards.
- Speak to local community and youth groups about health and safety.
- Be an advocate for young worker health and safety in your organization, industry, and community.
- Get involved and support young worker health and safety programs.

## **Take Action: What can unions do?**

Unions can help to keep youth safe on the job by ensuring young workers' rights are upheld in the workplace. Organized labour representatives can also do the following:

- Talk to young people about hazards in the workplace and their rights and responsibilities as workers.
- Speak to local schools and community groups about young worker health and safety.
- Conduct awareness programs with youth and other union members.
- Provide, or encourage youth to pursue training and education that helps young workers recognize and deal with workplace hazards.
- Be an advocate for young worker health and safety in your union, industry, and community.
- Get involved and support young worker health and safety programs.

## Take Action: What can community and youth groups do?

Community and youth groups involved with young people play a key role in raising awareness of workplace health and safety.

They can create a culture where young worker safety is a high priority. Members of community and youth groups can also do the following:

- Talk to young people about hazards in the workplace and their rights and responsibilities as workers.
- Provide, or encourage youth to pursue, training and education that helps young workers recognize and deal with workplace hazards.
- Invite speakers from the WCB's Young Worker Speakers Resource to speak at group meetings. (Visit <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org> for more information).
- Be an advocate for young worker health and safety in your community group.
- Get involved and support young worker health and safety programs.

For more detailed information on what you as a youth, educator, parent, employer, union member, or community member can do, go to

[http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org/PDFs/youngworker/2003\\_camp/infobulletins.pdf](http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org/PDFs/youngworker/2003_camp/infobulletins.pdf).

**Be part of the solution. Work  
with youth, employers, parents,  
unions, and your community to  
help youth be safe on the job.**

**Keeping young workers safe  
—it's up to all of us.**



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