Bill 148 - 6 changes that could affect your workplace

Public response to Ontario’s *Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*, has primarily focused on increases to the minimum wage. However, the Bill aims to help workplaces support their workers through life’s challenges. Look further and you’ll find changes that aim to help promotes the mental health and well-being of employees dealing with difficult circumstances.

"This is a great Bill that really makes the mental health of workers, a priority," says WSPS Consultant Krista Schmid. "It can help people return from a leave of absence in a more mentally healthy state."

Krista identifies four actions employers can take to help employees facing difficult circumstances transition in and out of work as easily as possible. But first, an overview of changes to employment leave in Bill 148:

* **Personal emergency leave**. Previously, people in workplaces with 50 or more employees could take up to 10 days of unpaid leave annually due to illness, injury and other emergencies. Now all employees are eligible for 10 personal emergency leave days a year, including two paid days if the person has been employed for seven days or longer.
* **Domestic or sexual violence leave**. Someone employed for at least 13 consecutive weeks can now take up to 10 individual days of leave and up to 15 weeks of leave if the person or their child experiences domestic or sexual violence or the threat of violence. The first five days of leave will be paid; the rest, unpaid.
* **Family medical leave**. This unpaid leave, to care for or support a family member with a serious medical condition, has been extended from up to 8 weeks within a 26-week period to up to 28 weeks within a 52 week period.
* **Pregnancy leave for employees who suffer a stillbirth or miscarriage**. The leave has increased from six to 12 weeks after the loss.
* **Critical illness/critically ill child care leave**. Workers can now take 37 weeks in a 52-week period to provide care or support to a critically ill child who is a family member, and 17 weeks in a 52-week period to provide care or support to a critically ill adult family member.
* **Crime-related child death or disappearance**. The existing leave will now be divided into two types:
  + a crime-related child disappearance leave providing up to 104 weeks of leave without pay
  + a child death leave, providing up to 104 weeks leave without pay for the death of a child for any reason

Four actions for employers

In response to these changes, Krista suggests:

1. creating an environment in which people feel comfortable coming forward; some may prefer to continue working rather than take a leave
2. reviewing and revising handbooks, policies and practices affected by the changes
3. providing awareness training to managers, supervisors and other employee relations personnel
4. communicating the changes to all employees

"Workplaces that support employees through life's challenges, lead to increased employer loyalty, greater employee engagement, higher productivity and sustainability," says Krista.

How WSPS can help

Visit [ThinkMentalHealth.ca](http://www.thinkmentalhealth.ca/) for free resources to help you make mental health a priority in your workplace.

This article was prepared by Workplace Safety and Prevention Services (WSPS). For more information, visit [www.wsps.ca](http://www.wsps.ca/) or contact WSPS at [customercare@wsps.ca](mailto:customercare@wsps.ca).