

7.3 Occupational Health & Safety

In this section: - What is occupational health and safety - How to ensure safety in schools - How to manage stress

- [Information on acts, rules and regulations on Health and Safety](#)
- [Further Reading: The Importance of Occupational Health and Safety](#)
- [Best Practice: How to secure health and safety in schools](#)
- [Best Practice: How to prepare in case of an accident in school](#)
- [Best Practice: How to manage stress](#)
- [Best Practice: How to report poor OHS](#)

Information on acts, rules and regulations on Health and Safety

Information on acts, rules and regulations on Occupational Health and Safety in school is available in:

- Psychological Training Manuals produced by MBSSE on Health and Safety
- SL Labour Congress Manual in Health and Safety in the Workplace
- Labour laws on occupational health and safety
- Local council laws on occupational health and safety

Further Reading: The Importance of Occupational Health and Safety

The school hosts pupils and teachers, both of whom spend a large part of their day in the school environment. The school environment must be a healthy and safe place to be for all.

According to the Teaching Service Commission Act, the TSC is responsible for the wellbeing of teachers.

An important part of wellbeing is to ensure existing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations are appropriately adopted, health and safety measures are implemented in the work environment, and teachers take care of their own health and safety to enable them to thrive in their jobs and perform to a high standard.

Health and safety hazards in the school environment may include:

- Lack of hygiene and WASH facilities
- Chalk dust from using blackboards
- Bad electricity wiring and installations
- Lack of fire extinguishers and accessible fire-escapes
- Lack of first aid kit and sick bay for accidents or health emergencies
- Lack of health facilities
- Poor disposal of refuse
- Lack of canteen facilities – food in the open
- Unsafe playing grounds
- Lack of fencing to prevent intrusion, including dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions.
- Mosquito infestations (even small pools of water are a breeding ground)
- Toxic materials stored incorrectly or used without protective precautions

- Unsafe building structures and arrangements
- Sitting and standing positions causing back and shoulder tension
- Overcrowded and noisy classrooms
- Bad ventilation
- Lack of ramps, toilet facilities and other arrangements for disabled teachers and pupils
- Air and other forms of pollution, including smoke from cars and cigarettes
- Poor accessibility and lack of zebra crossings
- Slippery floors.

Lawmakers, those responsible for school construction and facilities, school inspectors, supervisors, education and school boards and committees, school leaders and the teachers all have a role to play in ensuring health and safety in schools for both teachers and pupils. It is a cross-cutting area between HR represented by the TSC and TSC-DOs and other professional disciplines, such as school supervision and quality assessment represented by the MBSSE and DEOs.

It is therefore important for school authorities at all levels to work together on OHS and have regular and clear systems in place for checks and monitoring. Besides the risk of personal costs of inadequate health and safety precautions, there are serious legal implications in case of accidents and work-related health issues.

Who is responsible

Department of Teacher-Employer Relations, TSC:

- oversees OHS policy and regulations, labour laws and other legal OHS instruments applying to teachers and ensures they are formulated, available, updated and implemented.

The MBSSE:

- the MBSSE Inspectorate and DEO-DD, inspectors and supervisors ensure OHS regulations and standards are adhered to in all schools across the country and report back on deficiencies.

Schools, school leaders, SMC/BoG and other local players:

- ensure OHS regulations and standards are adequate and adhered to on a daily basis, and report to the DEO/TSC-DO immediately if this is not the case. They should also record cases

in their regular school reports.

Other institutions with responsibilities of Occupational Health & Safety include:

- SLTU
- SL Labour Congress
- Ministry of Labour
- Ministry of Health and Sanitation
- Ministry of Social Welfare (gender and children affairs)
- Teachers' associations
- Municipal and Local Councils
- Standards Bureau
- Consumer Protection Agency.

Best Practice: How to secure health and safety in schools

IT IS IMPORTANT TO APPLY the MBSSE's standard procedures, manuals and checklists.

- **(These should be issued by the MBSSE and made available at all schools at all times. Request copies from MBSSE)**

OHS from an HR perspective for school leaders who report to MBSSE/DEOs or TSC/TSC DOs if anything to report

- Develop, maintain and update an emergency plan for the school in case of fire, flooding, hurricanes or other disasters.
- Ensure school leaders and selected staff are trained in first aid and every school has a complete first aid kit with instructions.
- Replace blackboards with whiteboards.
- Ensure smoke-detectors, fire-extinguishers and fire-exits are placed in the school according to Sierra Leone safety-regulations.
- Ensure staff are fire trained.
- According to safety regulations, regularly check smoke detectors work and fire-exits are open and passable.
- Ensure driveways for fire-vehicles and ambulances are passable and in a good state.
- Keep chemicals and toxic materials in a locked store.
- Ensure crowding in the classrooms doesn't prevent pupils from leaving safely in case of emergency.
- Test the school grounds and premises for broken glass, razor blades, sharp stones, nails and other objects that may harm teachers and children.

- Ensure playgrounds follow safety standards.
- Ensure classrooms are well ventilated and illuminated.
- Ensure the school has access to health facilities and phone numbers of accessible medical doctors, health clinics and hospitals.
- Ensure WASH facilities adhere to standards and are in good working order; enforce handwashing.
- Ensure food is prepared and consumed following the best hygienic practices.
- Ensure the school has ramps, toilets and other facilities required by teachers and pupils with disabilities.
- Ensure schools are fenced.
- Ensure proper disposal refuse.
- Ensure regular cleaning and fumigation.
- If tiled, ensure floors are covered in the correct floor tiles that are not slippery and dangerous, particularly when wet.

Best Practice: How to prepare in case of an accident in school

Follow prevailing national and district manuals, regulations, guidance and manuals.

- **(MBSSE must ensure that these and other necessary information is available at all schools at all times)**
- Have a plan and phone/contact numbers accessible in the school office, preferably on the wall.
- Always have a complete first aid kit available at the school and staff trained in first aid.
- If minor accident, apply first aid.
- If major accident, apply first aid, call the ambulance and refer to a hospital or health centre.
- Inform parents or care giver for pupils.
- Inform spouse and family members for teachers.
- In case of a serious accident, ensure to inform TSC, NASSIT, Office of National Security and the Ministry of Labour after the event.

Best Practice: How to manage stress

There is an increased focus on work-related stress in HR in almost all occupations across the world. This also applies to teachers and school leaders who are under pressure from politicians and parents to ensure excellent and competitive results, who work under challenging circumstances, and whose responsibilities often go beyond teaching in the classroom.

In Sierra Leone, teachers face added challenges of overcrowding in the classroom; lack of facilities, materials and tools; and HR processes still under improvement.

There is a considerable literature on the subject of work-related stress and advice can also be found online. The teaching service may organise conferences, seminars and training on this topic which should be included in school leader training and mentoring programmes.

Sierra Leonean school leaders and others gave the following simple, general, good advice to manage stress:

- Try to maintain a good work-life balance. The TSC, SMC/BoG and school must enable this.
- Keep a tidy and orderly classroom.
- Plan your time. Prepare realistic weekly and daily plans for tasks, including timing and stick to it.
- Do one task at a time; do not think of the 4-5 other tasks you need to do later.
- Keep meetings short and focussed. Keep to the planned end time of the meeting.
- Receive mentoring and coaching by a trusted senior or peer if you need to adjust your work methods.
- Confide with a trusted colleague or guidance counsellor when you face challenges
- Keep fit, eat healthy food and exercise regularly.
- Nurture a good social life.
- Nurture positive thoughts. Turn your negatives to positives.
- Practice prayer, mindfulness, meditation, breathing exercises.

Best Practice: How to report poor OHS

- Follow procedures in the Code of Conduct.
- If you observe a lack in OHS precautions in a school inform the school leader and make sure the SMC/BoG are informed. Follow MBSSE and TSC directives.
- The school leader should write a brief report/letter describing the deficiency. If they don't, write it yourself.
- Submit the report to the DEO-DD with copy to TSC-DO-DD.
- If a visit by the DEO school supervisors is immediately forthcoming, report to the supervisor who will take appropriate action.
- The DEO-DD submits their report to the MBSSE Inspectorate with copy to TSC-HQ, Department of Teacher-Employer Relations.
- The DEO and the TSC-DO check action is taken promptly and immediately.