

HEALTH AND
WELLBEING



A Better,
Safer
Railway

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Impacts of Lone Working A Guide for Managers



Introduction

The findings and suggestions presented in this guide are based on an RSSB research, conducted to understand the impacts of lone working on health, safety and wellbeing in the rail industry. Our research involved a workshop with a group of industry professionals; a literature review; and interviews with 22 lone working employees and 16 managers of lone workers. The full report can be accessed on [SPARK](#). This guide gives managers the tools to:

- Identify lone workers
- Understand the impacts and risks associated with lone working
- Address risks and protect the health and wellbeing of lone workers in the rail industry

A guide for employers and HR professionals and another for lone workers themselves have also been produced.

Why it is important to understand the impacts of lone working

It is estimated that between 47 % and 79 % of workers in the rail industry¹ could be classified as lone workers, and this number is likely to grow over time with increasingly squeezed resources and economic pressures. Many roles that would traditionally have been performed by two people are now undertaken by a single person. However, often the processes, policies and practices for these roles have not changed

¹ Estimation based on data from two train operating and two freight operating companies.

accordingly. Understanding the challenges and risks associated with lone working in rail is key to meeting legal requirements and ensuring the rail industry operates safely.

What is lone working?

Prior to this research, an official, industry-wide definition of lone working in rail had not been established. The following definition has now been developed:

A lone worker is ... ‘Someone who works physically alone for a number of hours, with low levels of contact with other colleagues.’

The core characteristics of lone working in the rail industry are:

- **Being physically alone without a colleague nearby.**
This includes working alone with no colleagues nearby, having no colleagues at the work location (such as at a signal box) and/or working out of sight or earshot of other colleagues (for example working in a station office at night). Importantly, the presence of colleagues rather than people is a key feature; public facing roles such as train guards would generally be seen as lone working.
- **Being alone for more than a few hours at a time.**
Typically, lone working constitutes a large proportion of a shift and would not include those that find themselves temporarily alone (for instance the last person to lock up).

- **Having a low level of direct or immediate contact with colleagues.**

This may include being out of contact, or out of immediate contact, with colleagues. It includes cases where colleagues are contactable, but contact is limited for reasons such as poor signal and people not being available. It also includes roles with limited 'routine' points of contact, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues at breaks or at the end of a shift. It may not include home working where colleagues are likely to be more accessible for regular contact, for example through calls and emails.

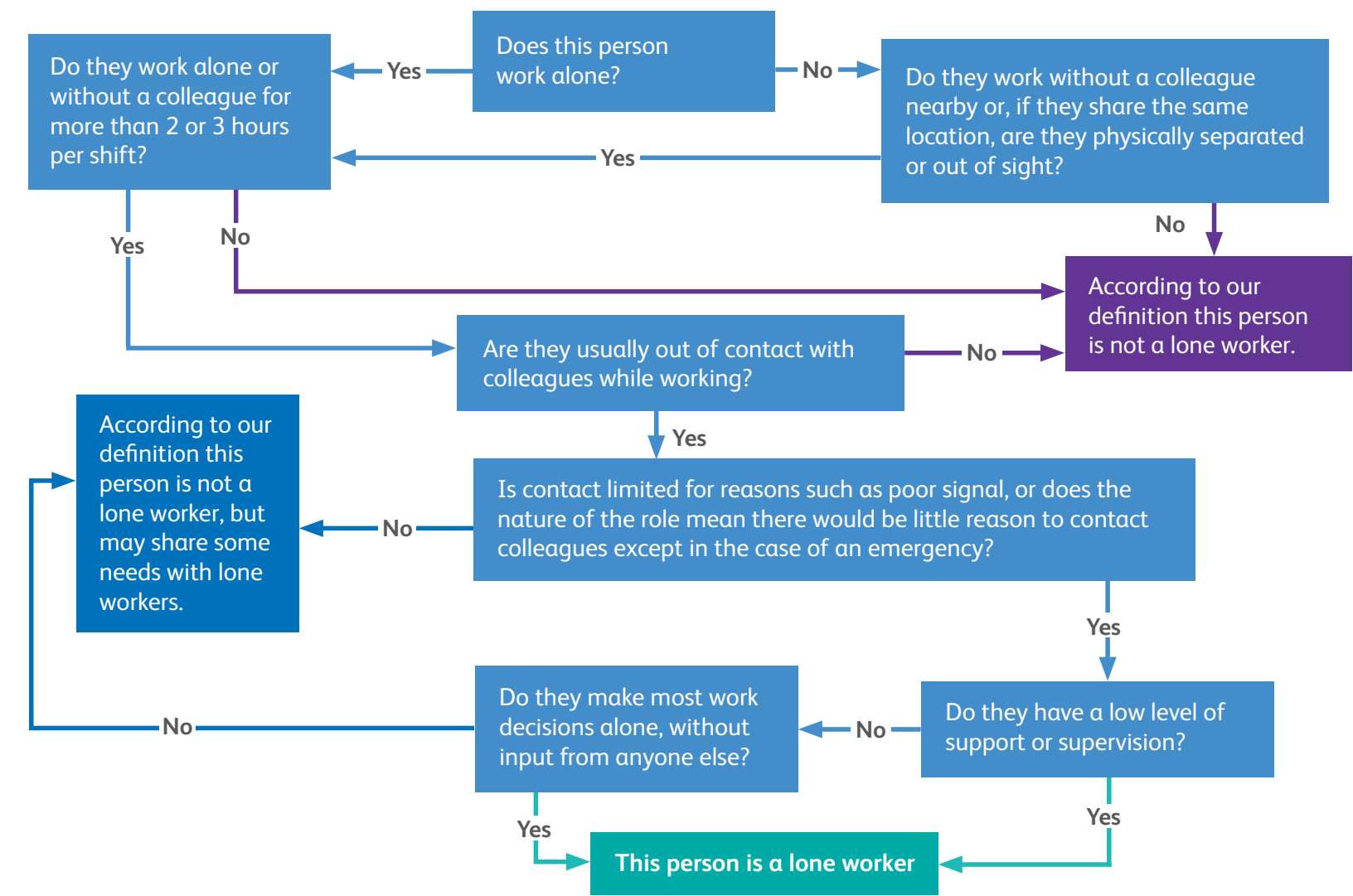
- **Having a low level of support or supervision.**

Most lone workers make the majority of their work decisions alone without input from others. This may be experienced as having to make decisions under pressure, and not being able to contact someone for support and advice.



Is my direct report a lone worker?

Given the diversity of roles within the rail industry, it is difficult to tell if someone would be classified as a lone worker by a role description alone. This decision tree has been designed to help quickly identify individuals who are lone workers.



Please note that some of your direct reports may not fit the definition of lone working agreed for the industry, but may still experience some of the challenges described for lone workers (for example loneliness). Please discuss these challenges with your team to ensure they are adequately supported. Additionally, some events (for example, health and safety requirements) may increase the likelihood of roles temporarily becoming lone worker roles.

The section “Examples of lone working roles in rail” provides a list of potential lone working roles in the rail industry.

What are the impacts and risks of lone working?

Our research found that lone working is associated with a range of positive and negative outcomes.

Negative outcomes tend to result from the pressure of lone decision making (including the perceived responsibility for passengers and colleagues) and the lack of social interaction and support from colleagues. Some of these are experienced as a direct result of lone working (such as isolation) and others are made worse, or more likely, by lone working (for instance weight gain resulting from comfort eating). Many of the impacts are also interrelated, where one will lead to another (for instance boredom and tiredness leading to loss of focus and concentration).

For some employees lone working has many benefits and is indeed a preferred way of working. This may be to do with the type of person they are (they may prefer their own company) or their prior experience of working in teams.

The table below shows positive and negative impacts and risks of lone working. It is however important to note that the impacts and risks described are a summary and do not mean to reflect all the possible experiences of lone working. As a manager, it is important you explore with lone workers in your team which of these may be relevant to them.

Emotional	Physical and Behavioural
✗ Isolation ✗ Loneliness ✗ Psychological exhaustion ✗ Stress ✗ Anxiety ✗ Risk of post-traumatic stress ✗ Feeling vulnerable and unsafe ✗ Boredom ✓ Confidence and self-esteem ✓ Feeling of calm ✓ Relaxation	✗ Tiredness ✗ Physical fatigue ✗ Weight gain* ✗ Reduced movement* ✗ Unhealthy eating patterns and /or diet**
Work-related	Personal Safety risks
✗ Risk of misjudgements or poor decision making ✗ Lack of colleague support ✗ Loss of focus and concentration ✗ Presenteeism ✓ Increased autonomy ✓ Increased mastery or self-efficacy in role ✓ Improved decision making ✓ Ability to self manage and work independently ✓ Enjoyment of own company	✗ Risk of violence, threats, aggression, abuse (including racial, homophobic, sexual) and intimidation from members of the public ✗ Being unable to ask for help quickly should an emergency occur (such as a suicide) ✗ Being unable to receive help quickly should an accident or incident occur to self

Key:

Green = positive impacts

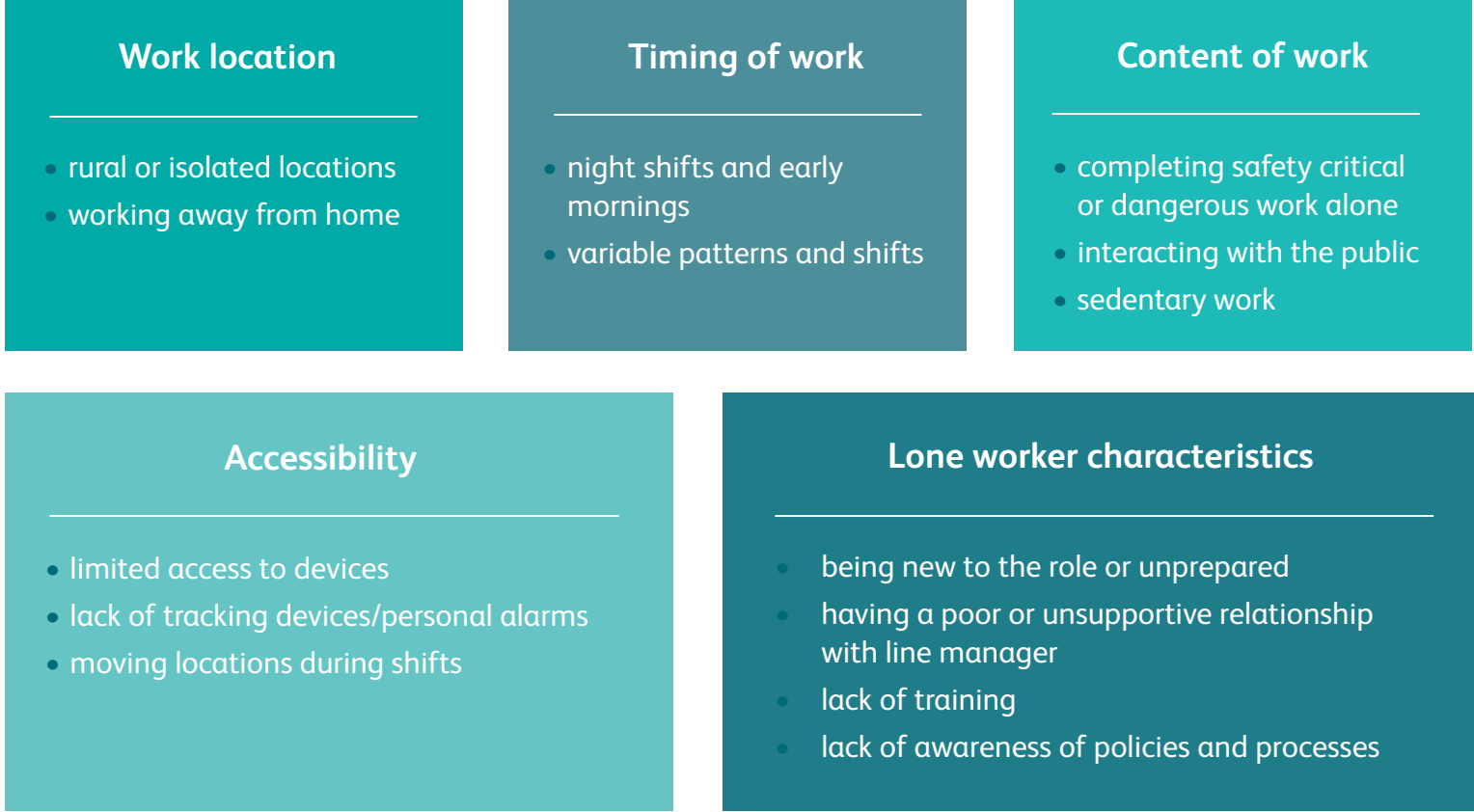
Red = negative impacts

* can be a risk for diabetes and heart failure.

** a particular issue for those working night shifts.

What factors can make lone working worse?

Our research demonstrated that some factors can make the negative outcomes more likely and/or more strongly experienced. These are summarised in the diagram below.



How to address the risks to lone workers?

Through the insights gathered on lone working in the rail industry and across a number of other industries we developed a checklist and a series of recommendations that can be incorporated into your risk assessment processes. These are grouped into four categories of management style: mental health advocacy, approach to safety, individual empathetic approach, and monitoring and reviewing.

How to use these resources

1. Use the “Checklist for managers of lone workers in the rail industry” below to compare the approach you and your organisation currently use and identify how it could be enhanced or changed. This way you can develop priority areas.
2. For the priority areas identified, look at the relevant suggestions and ideas in the “Recommendations for managers of lone workers” section. You might also want to access “additional resources”.
3. Use the recommendations and resources to define a plan for making changes in your priority areas. Complete the ‘Action plan’ to record what needs to be done, who needs to be involved, and when the action needs to be taken.
4. Share the action plan with your manager and your lone working team members, so they can comment on its relevance.

More information about the research behind the checklist and recommendations can be taken from the full report which can be downloaded from SPARK. Alternatively contact us for support to implement these findings.

There are guides for your organisation and lone workers which may be useful in ensuring that your actions are consistent and complimentary to those of your team members.

Checklist for managers of lone workers in the rail industry

This checklist is the first step for identifying areas where further support to lone workers can be provided. All items in this checklist have been developed as a result of the research findings.

Please mark the applicable box on a scale from 0 [No, not at all] to 5 [Yes, completely] or [Don’t know] and provide examples.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Evidence and comments
Mental Health Advocacy								
Do you promote and protect your own health and wellbeing?								
Do you talk about mental health in your team openly and without stigma?								
Do you feel comfortable starting conversations with your team members about their wellbeing?								
Are you aware of the mental health resources available in your organisation?								
Do you signpost your team to available mental health resources and encourage them to access support?								

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Evidence and comments
Approach to safety								
Do you ensure lone workers are equipped with tracking and personal safety devices and that they know how to use them?								
Do you tell your team how important their personal safety is to you?								
Have you worked with your lone workers to conduct risk assessments?								
Do your lone workers have the skills to conduct dynamic risk assessments (where they assess the risks whilst working)?								
Do you encourage your team to report issues and incidents to you, however small?								
Do you follow clear and consistent processes in dealing with issues your team members bring to you?								

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Evidence and comments
Individual empathetic approach								
Have you joined any networks where you share hints, tips and learnings with other managers of lone workers?								
Do you treat all your team members equally (for instance fair distribution of management time and equal access to opportunities)?								
Do you have regular informal conversations with your lone workers?								
Are you able to adapt the way that you manage based on each lone worker's individual preferences?								
Do you think ahead about the support, training or resources lone workers might need?								
Do you encourage and enable lone workers to attend relevant training courses?								
Do you regularly show lone workers appreciation for the work they do?								

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Don't Know	Evidence and comments
Monitoring and reviewing								
Have you talked to your manager or thought about how to get more support or time for people management in your role?								
Do you consider the particular challenges and needs of lone workers in all your practices (such as selection, induction and progression)?								
Have you reviewed each lone worker role to consider the risk factors and develop better solutions?								
Have you discussed roles and support needs with your lone workers?								
Do you monitor and review your team members' workloads?								
Have you considered the safety critical elements of your lone workers' roles and how to mitigate the risk these present?								
Do you consider interaction with other employees when designing shift patterns and rosters for your lone workers?								
Do you encourage your lone workers to interact with each other to share experiences, create social networks and develop coping strategies?								

Recommendations for managers of lone workers in the rail industry

After completing the checklist you can use the recommendations below to address the priority areas you have identified.

Recommendation for managers	
Mental health advocacy	
Prioritise protecting and promoting your own health and wellbeing	Our research highlighted how time poor and pressurised the role of many managers is. In order to support your team members, you need to be well yourself. Access resources at the end of this guide for ideas on how to look after yourself and model healthy behaviours for your team members.
Reduce the stigma around mental health by discussing wellbeing with your lone workers	Many employees feel there is a stigma in the industry around mental ill health, as it is seen as a sign of weakness. This leads to reluctance among employees to come forward for help and support. Rather than relying on your team members to come forward, be pro-active, and start the conversation, even when there is no obvious sign of anything being wrong. You may find this hard initially. Asking about their weekend, or sport may help you start a conversation. Resources in the “Additional resources” section, including RSSB’s Guide for line managers on promoting good mental wellbeing, can help with this. Normalise mental health by talking about it as part of everyday life rather than something that only happens in extreme circumstances. Ask your team members ‘How are you really?’, and create an openness in the team where members can share experiences and feelings without negative repercussions. If you feel comfortable, you can share your own reflections on mental health by drawing personal experiences. If you feel ill-equipped to have conversations about wellbeing with your team, you may consider accessing training. Manager training should focus: • People management, including stress management • Conducting employee stress risk assessments • Starting conversations about difficult subjects such as wellbeing, bereavement or loss • Time management and boundary setting

Recommendation for managers	
Raise awareness of your organisation’s mental health provisions	Ensure you are aware of all the resources available to you and your team and signpost and encourage your team members to access support. Provide your lone workers with the “guide for lone workers” associated with this research to demonstrate your commitment to their wellbeing.
Safety approach	
Emphasise the importance of lone workers’ personal safety	Ensure that lone workers are fully equipped with tracking and personal safety devices (panic alarms, safety devices, mobiles, first aid kits) and that they know how to use them should they work in isolated locations or in safety critical roles. Communicate how important their personal safety is.
Build a safety culture in your team	Many lone workers accept risk as part of their role which is a danger-ous approach to take. Conduct risk assessments around your lone workers roles and ensure they have the skills needed to conduct dy-namic risk assessments, whereby they assess the risks and take neces-sary precautions whilst working. Not only is this useful from a safety behaviour perspective but it can also improve focus and concentra-tion. Human Resources (HR) or Occupational Health (OH) departments may be able to support this activity. More information is available in the “Additional resources”.
Encourage reporting of issues and incidents	Build a culture where the reporting of incidents is encouraged. Through reporting you can better understand your workers’ needs and proactively support them and their development.
Ensure all issues brought to you are taken seriously	Follow clear and consistent processes and ensure that all issues are escalated and dealt with according to your organisational policy. Make lone workers aware of all available policies and guidance. Taking issues seriously will encourage team members to be proactive and talk to you.

Recommendation for managers	
Individual empathetic approach	
Connect with other managers of lone workers	Join or begin informal networks with other managers of lone workers to share hints, tips and experiences on how best to manage this population.
Provide all team members with your time	It is easy, particularly when you are time poor, to focus attention on those who are most vocal, or most in distress. But it is important to give all your team members equal time and treatment. The more you can do this, the greater the level of trust you will build. Where possible take time to see them face-to-face. Raise any workload pressures with your manager and organisation.
Connect with your lone workers as individuals	Some lone workers may feel that conversations with their manager,are always work and compliance related. Try to balance formal management and scheduled reviews with informal conversations and check-ins.
Take an individual approach	Lone working challenges are different across roles and individuals. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to management, check with your lone workers how to adapt your style and behaviour to your employees’ needs (for example for those working nights, you may want to prioritise and pay particular attention to isolation and sup-port options).
Encourage and enable appropriate training	Not attending training can be an issue for lone workers. Highlight the importance of training and development and encourage employees to attend. Signpost and highlight training and development opportunities to your team.
Demonstrate appreciation and recognition for work	When we are busy, taking time to thank and appreciate our team for work is often sidelined. This, however, is particularly important for your lone workers who will miss out on ad-hoc opportunities for feedback.

Recommendation for managers	
Monitoring and reviewing	
Try managing upwards	Talk to your manager about how to gain more time in your role for people management. You may be able to automate some processes, distribute responsibility across your team, make use of wellbeing ambassadors and/or create buddy systems with your team members.
Build lone worker considerations into management practices and processes	Think about and address the additional challenges and barriers for lone workers in all your practices, such as selection, induction, progression and development. This could involve talking to new starters about the potential impacts of this type of work; and considering how progression may be affected when there is less opportunity to network and demonstrate competence to others.
Conduct a job review on each lone working role	In time pressured environments support for lone workers often involves reacting to crises and issues. Rather than wait for a crisis to occur, consider risk factors your lone workers may face. See the section “Factors which make the experience worse for lone workers”. For instance, for lone workers undertaking safety critical work, you may want to consider doubling up on certain parts of the role; for night workers and those in isolated locations you may instigate further tracking and checking in processes. Talk to your lone workers about what would best support them.
Discuss lone working with your team to collaboratively design more effective working patterns	Encourage conversations with lone workers in your team about the support they need, or ideas they have for change. The guide for lone workers includes a lone workers’ wellbeing action plan (LWWAP) template that can be used to structure this conversation.
Monitor and review workloads	Time pressures reduce safety behaviour, so ensure that lone workers are able to complete their tasks safely in the time allocated.
Build interaction into shift patterns	Consider how rostering could increase opportunities for lone workers to socially interact with colleagues, for example at the end of shifts, during breaks and lunches, to address issues of isolation.
Encourage and enable lone worker informal groups	Encourage and enable lone workers to interact with each other and with other lone workers by sharing experiences, creating social networks and developing coping strategies. Consider building time into their shifts to interact with each other.

Action plan

Write down key actions to further support lone working employees based on the priority areas identified in the *Checklist for managers of lone workers* and ideas from the *Recommendations for managers of lone workers* and *Additional resources* sections. You may want to share this action plan with your manager and lone workers.

Key areas	What do I do well?	What could I improve upon?	What action shall I take to better manage my lone workers?	What resources do I need? Would I need support from anyone in the organisation?	When will this be completed?
Mental health advocacy					
Safety approach					
Individual empathetic approach					
Monitoring and reviewing					

Additional resources

Examples of lone working roles in rail

Train operating companies	Freight operating companies	Infrastructure managers
• Train drivers • Catering staff • Train guards • Cleaning staff • Revenue Protection Officers • Barrier staff • Shunters • Station despatch staff • Ticket office staff • Depot drivers • Fitters (mobile maintenance staff) • Driver team – managers, on call managers • Depot staff, ‘Train crew’, supervisors	• Train drivers • Night-time TOPS operators • Ground staff • Fitters (mobile maintenance staff) • Shunters • Control room staff • Driver managers • Trainpersons (similar to guards) on some services • Operations managers	• Signallers • Patrolmen • Overhead-line inspectors • Outside party interest surveyors • Track walkers, bridge examiners • Bridge strike examiners • Local operations managers • Hand signallers, crossing keepers • Mobile operations managers • Pilotmen • On call managers • Earthworks people

Resources to support talking about health and wellbeing

Health and Safety Executive (HSE):
[Talking toolkit, preventing work-related stress](#)

Based on the HSE Management Standards, this toolkit helps managers discuss how to prevent work-related stress with their staff.

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD):
[People managers’ guide to mental health](#)

Developed by Mind and the CIPD this guide contains information, practical advice and templates to help managers facilitate conversations about stress and poor mental health.

Resources for dynamic risk assessments

Risk assessments are typically conducted in advance of a job or role to assess *what may or could happen*. However, dynamic risk assessments enable lone workers to assess risks whilst on the job *when something does happen* and when there is a change in circumstances. It may be that your organisation has existing dynamic risk assessment policies or training available through HR or H&S.

RSSB: [The G-Force decision making tool](#)

Offers a logical, structured process for operational decision making.

Resources to promote and protect team memebers’ wellbeing

IOSH: [out of sight, out of mind](#)

This report and toolkit helps practitioners and line managers understand the challenges and develop the relevant behavioural approaches to support the safety and health of distributed or remote workers.

RSSB: [Guide for line managers on promoting good mental wellbeing](#)

Guide to support line managers understand how mental wellbeing can be improved and maintained.

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD):
[How to help your team thrive at work](#)

A short guide detailing four steps that managers can take to help their team thrive and avoid stress affecting the success of their team.

Mind: [Supporting staff with mental ill health](#)

This resource aims to guide employers and managers support staff experiencing mental ill-health.

HSE: [Line Manager Competency Indicator Tool](#)

This explores what managers need to do to prevent and reduce employee stress. It provides tools to help managers assess if they have the behaviours identified as effective for preventing and reducing stress at work. Its aim is to help managers in developing their skills.

RSSB: [Managing fatigue risk, the role of line managers and supervisors](#)

This resource supports managers in understanding how they can support staff to manage fatigue risk.

RSSB: [Training](#)

RSSB provides training on a variety of topics, including mental health, human factors and non-technical skills.

Resources to promote and protect your own wellbeing

For urgent mental health support for you or someone else

- To find local [NHS urgent mental health support](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
 - Call any time 116 123
 - Email for a reply within 24 hours: jo@samaritans.org
- Shout
 - Text ‘SHOUT’ to 85258 — Text ‘YM’ if you’re under 19

Resources to support your mental health

- [Every Mind Matters](#)
- [Good Thinking](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [Samaritans](#)
- [Mental Health at Work](#)

Professional employment related advice and support:

- [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#)
- [Institution of Occupational Safety and Health](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive](#)
- [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service](#)
- [Disability Rights Commission](#)

My notes



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