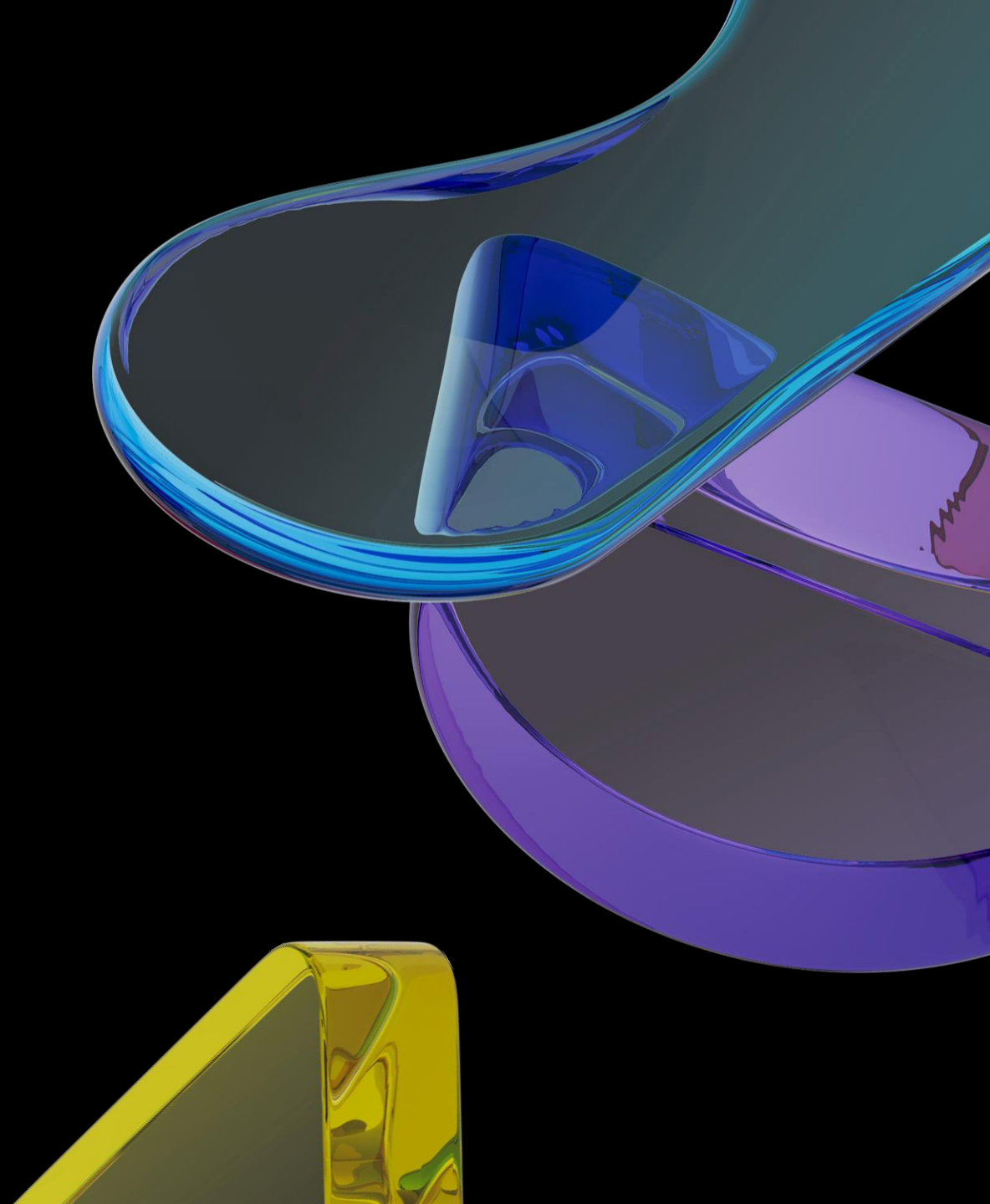




The value of creating a culture of trust:

Japan in focus

June 2026



Introduction and context

Introduction

Focal Data surveyed 1,008 working adults. 604 of these had experienced physical health challenges, while 404 had experienced psychological health challenges.

As with the wider study, we explored absenteeism, presenteeism and work exit, to understand the impact of health and wellbeing challenges for Japanese employees and what steps their companies can take to mitigate the effects.

Context

Japan faces ongoing challenges relating to productivity and economic inactivity. According to the OECD Productivity Indicators, productivity growth has remained modest compared with other advanced economies and is the lowest in the G7¹.

Labour force participation was around 63.8% in 2025², meaning a significant inactive population outside work. Like many advanced economies, Japan has an ageing population, meaning making the most of the working-age population is critical.

Absence decisions in Japan are more constrained by social and institutional factors than in other markets, with strong norms around attendance, expectations of commitment and group responsibility, and a reluctance to burden colleagues.

As a result, absenteeism in Japan is relatively insensitive to individual-level factors such as confidence, even where support is available. Instead, workers adjust through remaining in work at reduced capacity, making in-work performance the primary margin of adjustment, with productivity losses manifesting through reduced effectiveness, concentration, or output rather than time away.

Supporting this, evidence from a longitudinal study of Japanese employees shows that productivity losses arising from a range of factors, including job demands, self-rated health status, dietary habits, and health literacy, are primarily mediated through presenteeism³.



Key findings

Japan's results stand apart from the wider study, suggesting a different behavioural response to HW challenges. Overall, we found that confidence mainly affects whether people work while unwell (presenteeism), not whether they take time off work (absenteeism).

Confidence

Confidence was low amongst Japanese respondents, Only 24% were confident coming forward about psychological health issues, and only 42% for physical health challenges. Similarly, only a fifth of Japanese workers were confident in their employer supporting them to find a solution around psychological health issues, rising to 38% for physical health.

	A line manager	Office counselling service	My HR department	A team director
Completely confident	6%	11%	6%	8%
Partially confident	25%	24%	24%	27%
Not confident	47%	43%	56%	49%

Table 1: Comfort raising a psychological health challenge with different people

	A line manager	Office counselling service	My HR department	A team director
Completely confident	15%	16%	14%	15%
Partially confident	35%	32%	36%	39%
Not confident	27%	28%	33%	28%

Table 2: Comfort raising a physical health challenge with different people

Absenteeism

Japanese employees with low confidence that their employers will be supportive actually take less sick leave, both in terms of frequency and duration.

This may be due to distinctive norms around attendance and workplace behaviour in Japan⁴, including a greater reluctance to challenge authority or raise issues directly, as well as more hierarchical organizational structures.

Presenteeism

Employees with low confidence in Japan are more likely to keep working even when sick, leading to higher rates of presenteeism. This effect is especially strong for those experiencing mental health issues.

Presenteeism risk is higher among employees who have low confidence when it comes to approaching and obtaining a solution from their employer, reinforcing the role of workplace support structures in shaping in-work productivity outcomes.

Work exit

Japanese employees were significantly more likely to leave their jobs due to psychological challenges than in other markets. The risk of leaving work for those with physical health issues is similar to the other markets: 29% in Japan vs 33% average across the three others.

This points to a substitution effect: rather than absenteeism and presenteeism rising in tandem confidence offering a productivity premium, Japanese workers with lower confidence are more likely to remain at work despite reduced capacity, while their more confident counterparts are more willing to take time off when HW challenges arise. Increased presenteeism is particularly marked for those with psychological health challenges, rising from 53.1% among confident employees to 77.3% for those with low confidence.

While this may be due to strong cultural norms around attendance, this does not mean there is no economic impact. In fact, low absence can hide real productivity losses, with employers overlooking the impact of people working while unwell.

	Psychological health challenges	Physical health challenges
Yes	64%	29%
No	35%	60%

Table 3: Percentage who have left work due to a HW challenge

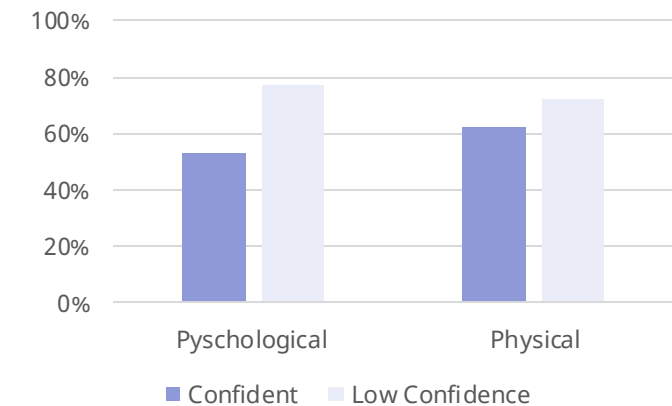


Figure 1: Japanese workers reporting presenteeism, by confidence status

The role of standards

Japanese respondents had limited familiarity with workplace wellbeing standards. 71% reported either having heard of these standards without being clear on what they included, or not being familiar with them at all.

30% believe their employer would be unwilling to make reasonable workplace adjustments to support psychological health needs – pointing to a clear disconnect between provision and perceived accessibility.

This may contribute to a deeper sense of resignation among some workers, where employees disengage from efforts to improve their wellbeing because they believe seeking help will not lead to meaningful change.



Implications

For employers, lower absence rates may mask substantial underlying productivity losses, as employees continue working while unwell but with reduced effectiveness. This can lead to persistent output losses, increased error rates, and potential longer-term deterioration in health.

More broadly, absence-based metrics alone will understate the true impact of health and wellbeing challenges in Japan, highlighting the need for organizations to better identify and manage presenteeism, particularly among lower-confidence employees.

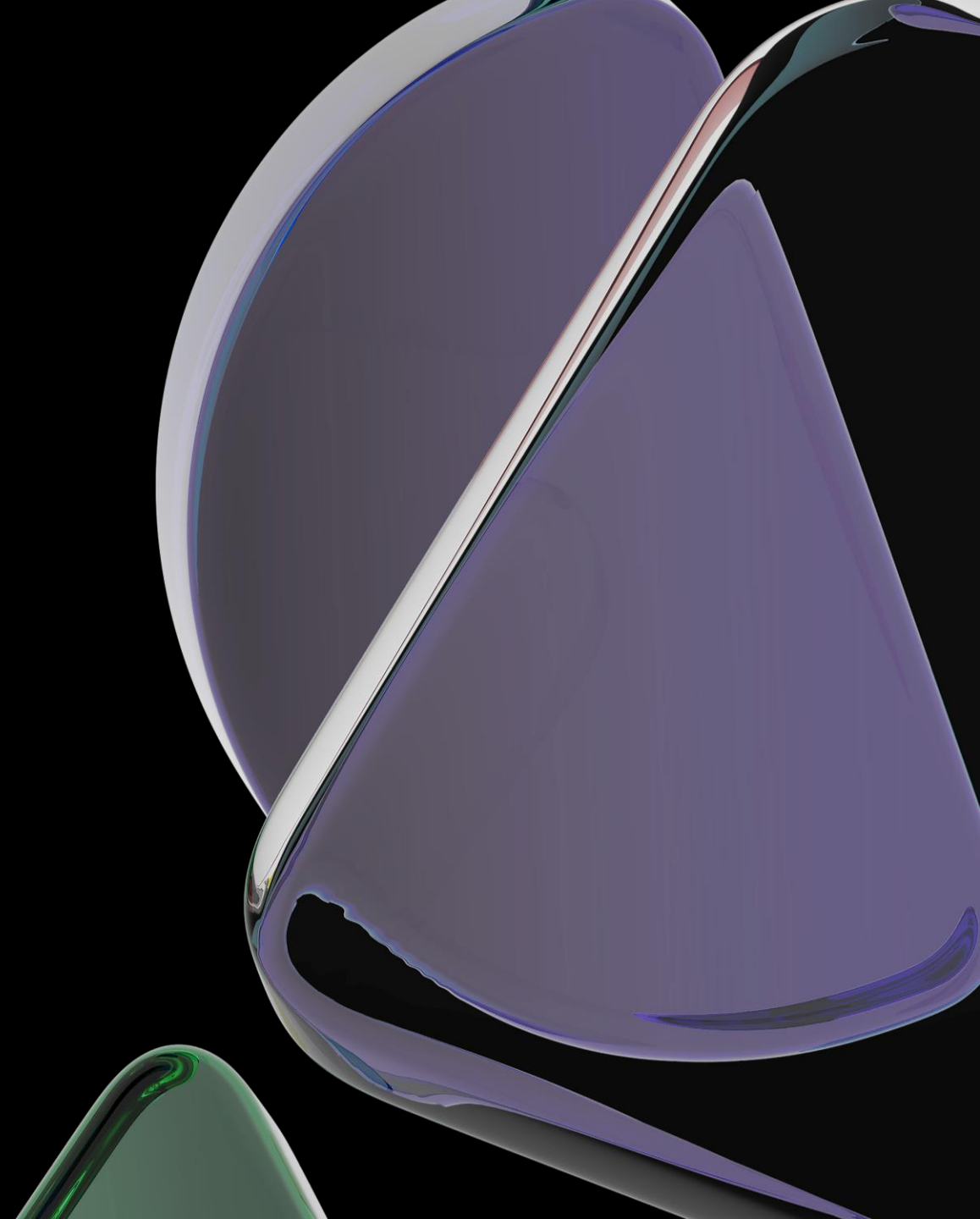
Ultimately, Japanese organizations need to look beyond absence metrics. Building a culture of trust, where employees feel able to seek support and believe it will make a difference, will be essential to closing Japan's productivity gap and strengthening workforce resilience.





Practical Support Guides

Detailed guidance for supporting health and wellbeing challenges in the workplace



Supporting employees with psychological health challenges – A practical guide for employers

What good looks like

- **Inclusivity:** Actively challenge stigma, discrimination and harmful behaviours
- **Compassion:** Enable open, supportive conversations about mental health
- **Awareness:** Train employees to recognize warning signs and intervene early
- **Proactive management:** Address workload, pressure and workplace stressors
- **Flexibility:** Adapt roles, hours and expectations where needed
- **Leadership accountability:** Make mental health a visible leadership priority
- **Peer support:** Enable safe spaces for employees to support each other

How to build a culture of trust

Drawing on key standards on psychological health and safety at work ([BS EN ISO 45003](#)) and suicide and the workplace ([BS 30480](#)), Kate Field, Global Head of Human and Social Sustainability at BSI, identifies three priority areas for employers to foster a supportive, adaptable and mentally healthy workplace.

Review your current approach against this guide and identify one action you can implement this quarter to build employee confidence.

Encourage trust by reducing stigma

Create an environment where employees feel safe to speak up early

- Train managers to respond consistently, empathetically, and without judgement
- Create clear, confidential routes for employees to disclose mental health challenges
- Actively challenge stigma by not tolerating dismissive, harmful, or stigmatizing language
- Encourage open dialogue on mental health by sharing stories of recovery and resilience
- Raise awareness of mental health and suicide prevention interventions to normalize support

Put the right support in place

When employees do speak up, ensure the right support is consistently available

- Provide workplace adjustments, including flexibility in working patterns and workload management
- Enable regular, supportive manager check-ins
- Offer to specialist support (e.g. EAP, occupational health, counselling)
- Create supportive working environments, including quiet or recovery spaces where possible

Identify risks early and act before they escalate

Take a proactive approach to managing the workplace factors that affect mental health

- Proactively assess workplace stressors, recognizing that different workers face unique stressors based on cultural, personal, organizational or social factors
- Train managers and colleagues on how to identify unmet needs in those around them, recognize warning signs and take proactive steps to intervene
- Monitor patterns in absence, workload, and engagement to spot emerging risks

Supporting employees with menstrual or menopausal health challenges – A practical guide for employers

What good looks like

- Supportive physical environment. Employees can manage symptoms with dignity through to appropriate facilities and comfortable working conditions
- Open, stigma-free culture: Menstrual and menopausal health is handled respectfully and without embarrassment or judgement
- Informed and confident managers: Line managers understand symptoms (e.g. fatigue, pain) and feel equipped to respond consistently and supportively
- Visible leadership commitment: Senior leaders champion menstrual and menopausal health, set expectations, and ensure accountability
- Early, flexible support: Adjustments (e.g. workload changes) are offered early to prevent issues escalating into absence or reduced performance

How to build a culture of trust

Drawing on the Menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace guide ([BS 30416](#)), Kate Field, Global Head of Human and Social Sustainability at BSI identifies three priority areas for employers to create more inclusive workplaces.

Review your current approach against this and identify one action you can implement this quarter to build confidence. If you're keen to do more, [download BS 30416](#) at no cost.

Build trust in a supportive culture

Create an environment where there is no stigma surrounding menstruation and peri/menopause. While policies are key, they must be supported by a culture that actively normalizes and supports these experiences. Proactive interventions can include:

- Increase understanding of how symptoms (e.g. fatigue, pain, brain fog, hot flushes) can affect confidence and performance, encouraging empathy and support
- Encourage open, respectful conversations so employees feel safe to raise concerns early
- Clearly define senior leader responsibility for supporting employees, and consider appointing a senior sponsor or advocate
- Establish champions who can raise awareness, provide peer support and embed good practice
- Create supportive working environments, including quiet or recovery spaces if possible

Create a supportive physical environment

Ensure the workplace environment enables employees to manage symptoms with dignity and comfort. This can include:

- Quiet spaces for rest and recovery
- Easy access to toilet, washing and changing facilities
- Free access to menstrual products and hygienic disposal
- Thermal comfort (e.g. ventilation, fans, flexible temperature control)
- Suitable uniforms and PPE (comfortable, breathable, adjustable where possible)

Put the right support in place

When employees do speak up, ensure the right support is consistently available.

- Provide employees with access to guidance on managing symptoms (e.g. lifestyle changes, medical support, practical coping strategies) and signpost to relevant internal and external resources
- Offer workplace adjustments, including flexibility in working patterns and workload management
- Enable regular, supportive manager check-ins. Provide clear guidance on managing job demands and agreeing flexible working adjustments.

Supporting employees with physical health challenges – A practical guide for employers

What good looks like

- An inclusive, able environment: Workspaces are designed so everyone can move, work and recover with dignity, comfort and independence
- Early, practical support: Adjustments are offered quickly (e.g. flexibility, ergonomic changes, task redesign) to prevent issues escalating into absence
- Informed and confident managers: Line managers understand how physical health conditions can affect work and feel equipped to respond consistently and supportively
- A culture of openness and trust: Employees feel safe to raise physical health challenges, knowing they will be listened to and supported without stigma

How to build a culture of trust

Drawing on recommendations in Design for an able and inclusive built environment ([BS 83001](#)) and Occupational health and safety management systems ([ISO 45001](#)), Kate Field, Global Head of Human and Social Sustainability at BSI identifies three priority areas for employers to create more inclusive workplaces.

Review your current approach against this and identify one action you can implement this quarter to build confidence. If you're keen to do more, download [BS 8300-1](#) and [ISO 45001](#).

Create a space that's inclusive by design

Go beyond meeting the minimum requirements to:

- Create workspace that can be easily and safely used by everybody with dignity
- Provide choice that is convenient and avoids separation or segregation
- Recognize that everyone benefits from improved ability, including disabled people, older people and people who do not consider themselves to be disabled.

Proactively manage health risks at work

Take a preventative approach to physical health and wellbeing

- Identify and reduce workplace risks (e.g. manual handling, repetitive tasks, poor ergonomics)
- Ensure work activities, equipment and environments are fit for purpose and regularly reviewed
- Encourage early reporting of discomfort or injury, before it worsens
- Use data (e.g. absence trends, injury reports) to identify patterns and take action

Put the right support in place

When employees do speak up, ensure the right support is consistently available.

- Provide employees with to guidance on managing symptoms (e.g. lifestyle changes, medical support, practical coping strategies) and signpost to relevant internal and external resources
- Offer workplace adjustments, including flexibility in working patterns and workload management
- Enable regular, supportive manager check-ins. Provide clear guidance on managing job demands and agreeing flexible working adjustments.

A practical guide for employers – Supporting neurodiverse employees including those with autism, ADHD and dyslexia

What good looks like

- A sensory-supportive environment: Workspaces reduce distraction and overload, with to calm, flexible spaces
- A culture where difference is valued: Neurodiversity is normalized, stigma is challenged, and inclusion is part of everyday behaviour
- Personalized support that unlocks strengths: Adjustments are tailored early, helping individuals perform at their best

How to build a culture of trust

Drawing on Design for the mind. Neurodiversity and the built environment ([PAS 6463](#)) and Occupational health and safety management. Psychological health and safety at work. Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks ([BS EN ISO 45003](#)), Kate Field, Global Head of Human and Social Sustainability at BSI identifies three priority areas for employers to create more inclusive workplaces.

Review your current approach against this and identify one action you can implement this quarter to improve support and build employee confidence. If you're keen to do more, download PAS 6463 free of charge.

Create a physical environment that supports sensory needs

Ensure the workplace enables neurodiverse employees to work comfortable, without unnecessary sensory overload. This can include:

- Reduce overstimulation by avoiding overly bright colours, cluttered spaces, or visually busy environments
- Provide to calm, quiet or low-stimulation spaces for focus and recovery
- Manage noise levels, minimizing background noise and offering noise-reduction options (e.g. headphones, quiet zones)
- Prioritize natural light over harsh artificial lighting, and reduce flicker where possible
- Provide to outdoor or nature spaces as a retreat for calm and decompression

Clear communication creates a culture where all minds can thrive

Communication is central to building trust and enabling neurodiverse employees to succeed. Organizations that actively normalize difference create more inclusive and productive workplaces. Proactive interventions can include:

- Leaders visibly demonstrate understanding, flexibility, and commitment to adjustments
- Share and celebrate best practice examples and case studies across the organization
- Provide clear, consistent updates on policies, processes, and available support
- Use simple, structured and unambiguous communication (e.g. clear instructions, written follow-ups)

Put personalized support and adjustments in place

Neurodiverse employees often thrive when support is tailored to their individual strengths and needs. Practical actions include:

- Offer reasonable adjustments, such as flexible working patterns, task structuring, or alternative ways of working
- Enable regular, supportive check-ins focused on wellbeing and performance, not just outputs
- Provide managers with guidance on how to co-create adjustments with employees

Products and Services

Standards services

Utilize best practice frameworks and guidelines to develop credible health and wellbeing strategies.

Find out more [here](#).

- [Occupational health and safety management systems \(BS ISO 45001:2023\)](#)
- [Psychological health and safety at work – Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks \(BS ISO 45003:2021\)](#)
- [Menstruation, Menstrual Health and Menopause in the Workplace \(BS 30416\)](#)
- [Suicide and the Workplace \(BS 30480\)](#)
- [Occupational health and safety management: Guidelines on performance evaluation \(BS ISO 45004:2024\)](#)
- [Ergonomic principles related to mental workload – Part 2: Design principles \(BS ISO 10075-2\)](#)
- [Provision of lone worker services. Code of practice \(BS 8484:2022\)](#)
- [Ergonomics – General approach, principles and concept \(BS ISO 26800:2011\)](#)



BS 30480 Suicide and the Workplace

The UK's first standard dedicated to addressing the risk of suicide and its impact in the workplace

The standard was informed by lived experience and expert input and published by BSI as the UK National Standards Body. It aims to provide organizations with practical and evidence-based recommendations to help plan for, respond to, and support people affected by suicide or those with thoughts of suicide in the workplace and beyond.

[Research](#) shows one in four adults has contemplated suicide and one in 13 has attempted it. For every suicide death, at least 135 people, including colleagues, clients, and communities alike, are estimated to be directly or indirectly affected. This means suicide touches nearly every workplace at some point, whether through loss of a colleague,

supporting someone in crisis or managing the complex emotional and operational aftermath. Yet organizations are not necessarily equipped to address this issue openly and effectively.

This landmark standard is free to download and offers clear guidance for organizations of all sizes and sectors, including public bodies, charities, social enterprises, businesses and commercial enterprises. In addition, BSI has published a practical first steps guide to support which assists organizations in taking action in a manageable way.

In this first six months the standard has been downloaded over 12,000 times across 133 countries and territories and has had positive feedback from a number of organizations.

[Discover the free standard here](#) and a [practical first steps guide here](#).

“Adopting BS 30480 has given us a clear, evidence-based framework... It has helped us normalize conversations about suicide and staff mental health, reduce stigma, and give colleagues the confidence and language to respond compassionately and safely. We’re already seeing increased openness, stronger cross-team collaboration, and staff feeling more supported in managing emotional load.”

– Marie Greenhalgh

Relationships Director, Inclusion Education



Products and Services

Assurance services

We exist to have a positive impact on society. One of the ways we do this is by providing independent expertise to your training and auditing needs. Our specialists have a deep understanding of the unique needs of industries, regulations and best practice. Our assurance offerings include training courses, professional qualifications, gap assessments, auditing, and certification

We offer assurance services against key standards, supporting organizations with prioritizing their people and their own impact in areas such as:

- [Occupational Health & Safety at Work \(ISO 45001\)](#)
- [Psychological Health and Safety at Work \(ISO 45003\)](#)

BSI provides assurance services that recognize that ways of working have changed. Our hybrid audits and remote training solutions each combine our capabilities with our integrated technology to provide a seamless, full-service experience with a more consistent, flexible approach while reducing carbon emissions. These provide a more sustainable and streamlined approach to audit and training delivery.

Combining physical face to face audits and remote audits and remote and on-demand training with our integrated technology enables BSI to optimize and deliver the best solutions for your organization and people

Consulting services

Our focus on health, safety and workplace well-being empowers our clients to meet the needs of any workforce during every life stage. This in turn will manifest in a highly engaged, more productive workplace culture reducing absenteeism, increasing talent retention, and protecting brand reputation. Workplace health is organizational wealth.

Related services:

- Well-being and Total Worker Health® solutions
- Strategy and culture transformation
- Ergonomics solutions
- Industrial hygiene and indoor air quality programs
- Customized training solutions

Find out more [here](#).



Footnotes

¹[OECD Employment Outlook 2025](#): Japan, OECD, July 2025

²[Japan](#), ILOSTAT, accessed May 2026

³Goto, E., Ishikawa, H., Okuhara, T., Okada, H., Tsunozumi, A., Kagawa, Y., Fujino, Y., & Kiuchi, T. (2022). Associations between job and workplace factors, health and physical factors, personal factors, and presenteeism among general employees in Japan: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 64(1), e12344

⁴Kurogi, K., Ikegami, K., Ando, H., & Ogami, A. (2025). Effect of perceived workplace health support on absenteeism and presenteeism among Japanese workers: A prospective cohort study. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 67(1), uiaf018.