

The 'Five Whys' analysis

Seven steps > Step 2 > Key tool



Using the 'Five whys' approach can help to identify the root causes of good or bad health and safety practice, and therefore help bring about behavioural change.

By asking 'Why?' up to five times, you can:

- investigate the causes of an accident or incident;
- identify solutions to prevent an incident happening again;
- make links between the root causes of good or bad practice; and
- learn good practice lessons to improve health and safety in your business.

How to conduct a 'Five whys' analysis

- For any incident of good or bad practice you want to know more about, ask the individual or team to describe this and write what they say down. This not only helps better understand the issue but also helps in terms of teamwork.
- Then ask why this situation happened and write that answer down too.
 - Discuss with them whether this answer describes the root cause of the problem.
 - If it doesn't, then ask 'Why?' again.
- Keep asking why, whether up to five times or more.

When using the 'Five whys' analysis, try to:

- Ask proper questions that delve deeper into the issue. Simply repeating the word 'Why?' is not likely to help.
- Avoid being or appearing confrontational.
- Avoid making questions personal or accusatory (eg say 'Why do you think the ladder slipped?' not 'Why did you make the ladder slip?')

For further information see www.hse.gov.uk/construction.

The *Leadership and worker involvement toolkit* is aimed particularly at small and medium sized businesses and is designed to help improve your health and safety and bring additional benefits to your business performance and productivity. See: www.hse.gov.uk/construction/lwit/