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**How to support a member of staff returning from absence due to mental health problems**

Returning to work after taking time off due to ill-health can often be a daunting experience. This can be enhanced in the case of mental health related absence. A supportive manager and an agreed return to work plan can support the member of staff in making an effective return to work. Managers should be aware that some individuals will be fearful about disclosing their mental health problems due to perceived stigma. It isn’t necessary to be without symptoms to function successfully at work.

Managers should consider:

* The member of staff may be anxious about the return. Acknowledge this, listen to concerns and ask what you can do to address these concerns.
* A return to work plan may need to be tailored to the individual and their specific needs / condition – Occupational Health can provide advice.
* Familiarise yourself with the nature and symptoms of the mental health condition.
* During discussions with the member of staff, it is important to focus on the impact of their condition in the workplace and what actions can address them, rather than the details of the health condition itself. Focus on what the individual can do – not what they can’t.
* The impact of the symptoms of mental health problems can fluctuate over time – as will the level of support required.
* Discus with the member of staff how any potential stressors or triggers can be reduced or managed to decrease the risk of relapse.
* Offering flexibility in working arrangements in the early stages of the return – this could include a phased return or flexibility in terms of hours or location of work.
* Ensuring confidentiality, but also agreeing with the member of staff about whether colleagues need to be aware of any adjustments that are being made.
* Examine the individual’s role carefully – is there anything that may have contributed to the condition – and if so how can this be addressed. If you are not sure, ask the individual.
* Make sure that the member of staff returns to manageable tasks and objectives.
* Include in the return to work plan any time off required for continued treatment.
* Remember that support will need to continue for some time following a return to work – meet regularly to discuss progress and continuing challenges.