

MANAGING THE RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

Supporting Employees: Returning to work

Managers and supervisors have a special role to play in helping their employees adjust during periods of prolonged stress. Here are some ways of providing support to employees during the unique challenges the return to work may present.

Get up to speed

To help you feel more in control in a rapidly changing situation, stay as up-to-date as possible on the latest news and recommendations.

- › Know your company's absence policies, and if/how they have been modified for COVID-19. Communicate it to employees so they know what to do if they show symptoms.
- › Understand the precautions your company is taking with the return to work. Know what to do if you suspect or confirm that someone is ill.
- › Be aware of the potential for stigma in the workplace. Educate employees on what we know of the disease and how it's transmitted. Consider enforcement of anti-discrimination policies, if needed.

Communicate with your team

The act of communicating to your team shows them that you're paying attention to their concerns. This can help reduce stress levels and increase focus.

- › Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation. Reflect the normal fears and anxieties that we all share.
- › Express your support. Let them know that you and your company leadership want to help.
- › Provide regular updates on policy changes and announcements. Ensure they understand where to find the latest communications from leadership.
- › Encourage open communication with you and among the team. Consider implementing an "open door" policy. Tell them how to connect with you.

Maintain stability and structure

As a manager, you play a key role in helping employees find firm footing in the face of their fears. One way to address anxiety is to make the work environment as stable and predictable as possible.

- › Get back to the basics to ensure the transition back to work is as smooth as possible. Clarify expectations of productivity and work processes. Review material, equipment, or technology support needs regularly. Provide assistance in a timely manner so employees have the resources they need to be productive.
- › Try to resurrect a sense of normalcy where you can. Many things have changed. What can remain the same? Regular lunch meetings, check-ins before meetings, or other routines can help provide an anchor for employees as their world shifts.
- › Address specific fears with a rational approach. Reassure them what is being done to protect them in the workplace.
- › Be responsive. Answer questions as much as you can, and follow up on questions you don't know the answer to. Show your team that you are reliable, providing knowledge and reassurance where you can.
- › Remind employees of their resilience. They've overcome significant challenges already. How did they do it? How can they use those same resources to cope now?

Be sensitive to specific challenges

This pandemic has brought a host of unprecedented challenges for all of us, and not only in the workplace. While you can't change these circumstances for your employees, as a manager you can be compassionate and sensitive to them.

- › Ask what they need. Don't assume you won't be able to help or that they have adequate support. Even simple accommodations can make a difference.
- › Be empathetic and listen. Sometimes employees may simply need to talk and share their feelings. Being able to just listen, without giving advice or sharing your own experiences, can be one of the best ways to support them.
- › Try to be flexible and adjust your expectations for a while. With each new transition, employees are coping not only with their own adjustments to a new routine, but are also helping their families navigate the transition, as well. Additional patience, understanding, and flexibility may be in order.
- › Remind employees of resources available to them in the community and through their jobs, including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- › Respect their privacy. If they don't want to talk, don't force them. Let them know that you are there to support them in any way you can, whenever they are ready.

Return-to-work Resources

Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC):

Health Promotion Materials:

www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html

Keeping the Workplace Safe:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/stay-safe.html>

Plan, Prepare, and Respond in Businesses and Workplaces: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html

Worker safety and support:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/worker-safety-support/index.html

World Health Organization (WHO):

Preparing the workplace: www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf

Guidance for schools, workplaces, & institutions:

www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/guidance-for-schools-workplaces-institutions



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