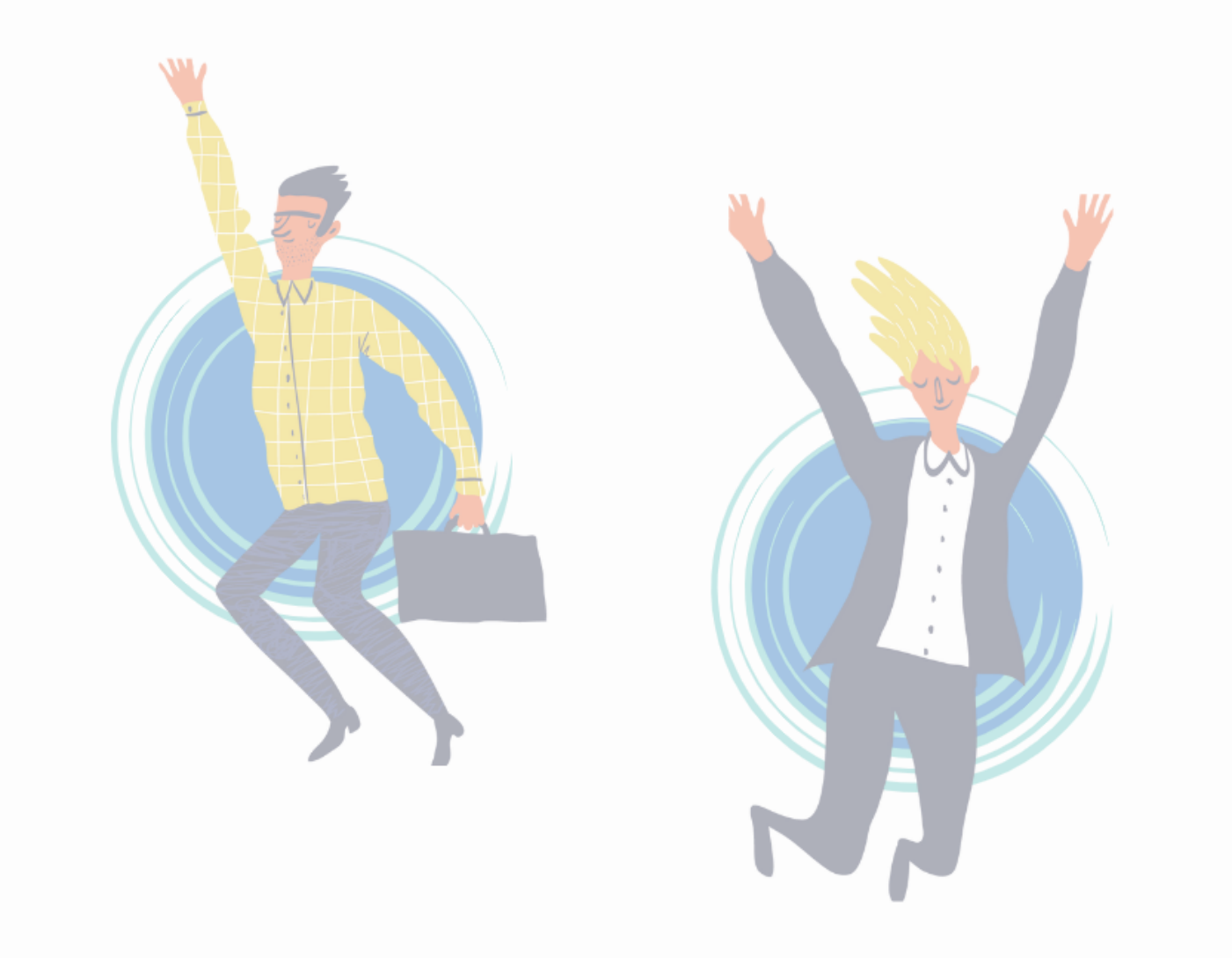
NHS
Hampshire and Isle of Wight

IGLOo Return to Work Toolkit

Toolkit for Colleagues



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Contents

INTRODUCTION TO THIS TOOLKIT 3

Who is this toolkit for? 3

What can you do to help a colleague returning to work? 3

SICK LEAVE AND MENTAL HEALTH 4

IGLOO AND THE ROLE OF COLLEAGUES 5

IGLOO RTW Example 6

Checklist: How can you help a colleague strengthen their IGLOO 7

FURTHER INFORMATION 10

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS TOOLKIT

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed for co-workers of an employee who is on sick leave or returning to work.

Returning to work is not easy and most people need help on returning, whether they are returning to their work site or back to homeworking. Everyone plays a role in supporting employees back to work, including co-workers.

What can you do to help a colleague returning to work?

Many people do not know what to say or do when a colleague comes back to work and worry about saying the wrong thing. It can feel challenging to know how best to help them, especially when there are other pressures and demands on your time. BUT there are some easy things that you can do to support someone in this situation. This is not about additional skills or requirements, it is about good team work plus extra empathy, kindness and patience.

Your returning colleague is likely to be experiencing mixed feelings. They might be looking forward to returning to a sense of normality but are also likely to be apprehensive about how they will manage work and whether they will be able to maintain their health when back at work. These concerns are normal.

This guide is designed to help you support a colleague returning to work following a period of absence. It draws from the latest evidence to outline what works, and what does not, when it comes to helping someone back to work. Many returners have a different manager on their first day back and many do not have anyone to greet them on their first day. Use this guide to give you examples of ways you could make a returning employee feel safe, welcome, and productive at work.

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Sick leave and mental health

Each year 16,400 workers leave work as a result of injury or illness, many of whom could have stayed at work with better support. While some people may be off work because of a mental health condition, many people who are off due to physical conditions go on to develop poor mental health.

It is important to be able to recognise the signs and signals of poor mental health so that you are able to spot these in your returning colleague and take action to support them.

Mental health is complicated. Everyone's experience of mental health is slightly different. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether someone is experiencing stress, anxiety or depression. A really important sign is a change in the person's behaviour – are they behaving differently? Here are some of the common signs and signals:

- Behavioural signs – struggling with workload, low levels of concentration and focus, difficulty in organising, low productivity, negative attitude, changes in motivation.
- Emotional signs – feeling anxious or irritable, mood changes, changes in how they interact with colleagues, too much emotion, feeling isolated or socially withdrawn.
- Physical signs – tiredness, having sleepless nights, increased drinking and/or smoking, not feeling hungry, headaches.

Often there is no one obvious cause to poor mental health, however we do know that:

- It can be sudden, as a result of a specific event or experience
- It can come on slowly, as a result of constant pressures and demands
- It may be related to other conditions, such as chronic pain or a different condition that can cause worry all the time.

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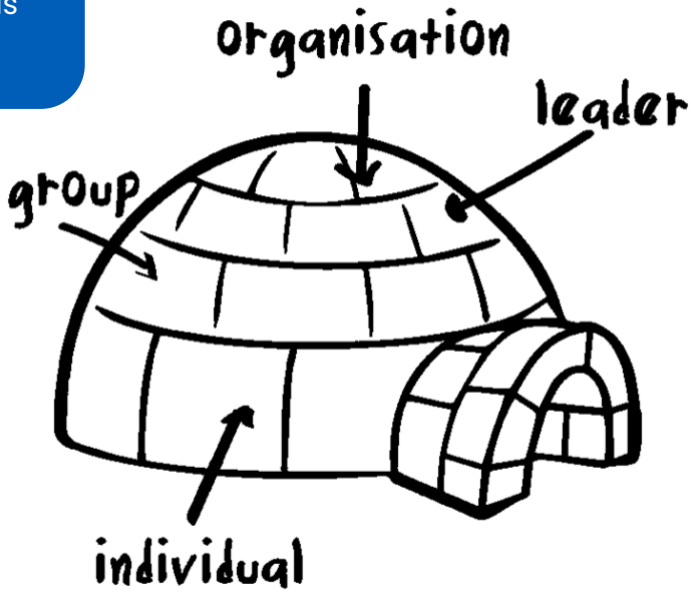
IGLOO and the role of colleagues

We all need other people to help us stay happy and healthy. Everyone has their own set of resources inside and outside of work. We call this your IGLOO.

Organisational resources, such as help provided by their organisation, volunteer groups or charities

Group resources, such as help from colleagues, friends and family



Leader resources, such as help from their line manager, GP or service provider

Individual resources, such as confidence and self care

We can't do everything on our own. When people have been unwell, they often need help from others. Colleagues, friends and family, line managers and others can help the individual build their IGLOO. Remember, an employee with strong resources is much more likely to stay in and be productive at work.

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The IGLOO for returning to work following ill-health includes:

At home the following actions help returning employees	Resources	At work, the following help returning employees
• Prioritising self-care • Establishing clear boundaries between work and leisure	**Individual**	• Creating structure in the working day
• Understanding from others • Receiving non-judgmental support	**Group**	• Receiving feedback on tasks from colleagues • Getting help when doing challenging tasks • Being treated as you did before not as someone with ill-health
• Having a consistent point of contact • Facilitating of links to external services and treatment	**Leader**	• Agreeing what information about the absence and return is communicated to colleagues • Continuing to provide support and work adjustments • Being available but not intrusive
• Accessing work-focused counselling	**Organisation**	• Providing flexible working practices and leave policies • Providing work-focused counselling • Demonstrating care through support • Establishing a culture where discussions around health and mental health are not stigmatised

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How can you help your colleague strengthen their IGLOO?

Use the checklist here to see what you can do to help your colleague build their IGLOO.

1. Read the statements in the 'Do I…' column. Answer 'yes', 'no' or 'sometimes'. Mark your answer in the column.

2.Use the checklist here to test the strength of your contribution to your colleagues' IGLOO. If you answer yes to these questions, you help your colleague build a strong IGLOO. If you answer 'sometimes' or 'no' think about whether they might like your help.

3.What else could you do to help? If you answer 'sometimes' or 'no' what could you do to make this part of their IGLOO stronger? It may be something you need to do, you need someone else to help you do, or you need to ask for.

4.How do you make this happen? Think about what you can do to make this happen. Need help and advice? Ask friends and family, colleagues, Line manager, GP, Human Resources, Occupational Health, charities/ support groups, union reps.

Resources	**Location**	**Do I?…..**	**Do I…Yes, No, sometimes**	**I need to…..***If you answered "sometimes" or "no", what else would be helpful?*	**I can make this happen by….** *need help and advice? Ask friends and family, Need help and advice? Ask Human Resources, Occupational Health, colleagues, charity/ support groups, union reps;*
Individual	**Work**	Help the employee create structure in the working day? E.g. divide up tasks in to smaller components, diarise meetings.			
	Home	Enable the employee to prioritise self-care by ensuring the employee leaves work on time and by allowing flexibility for exercise, appointments etc?			
		Ensure the employee has clear boundaries between work and home?			

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Group	**Work**	Provide feedback on tasks to build confidence?			
		Help out when doing challenging tasks?			
		Treat the employee the same as before, not someone different or who is experiencing ill-health			
	Home	** While you can't influence how friends and families behave, if you know that the returning employee is experiencing difficulties outside work, this could make the group support in work even more important for them.			
Leader	**Work**	Check in with my line manager about what the employee wants us to know, and accept that they may not want me to know everything about their absence?			
		Accept that my line manager may put in place support and work adjustments, even beyond the first month, to help the returning employee?			
		Look out to ensure that my returning colleague has access to our line manager?			
	Home	** While you cannot influence the support the employee is able to access from their GP, if you know that the employee is finding access to support difficult it might be appropriate			

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		to direct them to occupational health support.			
Organisational	**Work**	Know what the policies are for flexible working and absence so that I can share them if needed?			
		Support the employee to access flexible working and work adjustments that are outlined in the organisations policy?			
		Know if the organisation offers work-focused counselling, and if so, do I know where they can find it?			
	Home	** While you cannot influence the support offered to the employee outside of work, if you know they want but are not able to access support it may be appropriate to direct them to Occupational Health, HR or your workplace EAP.			

Remember... Returning to work is not always easy, but having support can make a huge difference. If you are not sure what your colleague would find helpful, ask them. Talk through the checklist with them and identify some concrete actions that you can take to help them build their IGLOO.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Mental health
Every Mind Matters www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters
Mind www.mind.org.uk
Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Professional bodies
CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) www.cipd.co.uk
IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) www.iosh.co.uk
HSE (Health and Safety Executive) www.hse.gov.uk
ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)
www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461
DRC (Disability Rights Commission) www.drc.org.uk
SOM (Society of Occupational Medicine) www.som.org.uk

Managing mental health at work
ACAS Managing staff absence guide
www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4199
ACAS Mental health at work guidance
www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1900
Mental Health at Work www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk
Access to Work www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

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For further information about the return to work toolkit please contact Affinity Health at Work

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