

IGLOO Return to Work Toolkit

Toolkit for Line Managers



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INTRODUCTION TO THIS TOOLKIT

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed for the person responsible for supporting the employee on sick leave and during their return back to work. This could be either the line manager or Human Resources (HR) advisor.

Everyone's experience of ill-health is different. People with the same health condition often display different signs or symptoms and some might not show any at all. Whatever the reason for sick leave, it is vital that your employee is provided with the support that they need to return to and stay in work.

- It may be that they have been mentally unwell, such as stress, anxiety, panic or depression, or physically unwell,
- Remember, it is common for people who are unwell physically to also experience poor mental health.

Why use this toolkit?

Returning to work is not easy for many employees and most need help on returning, whether it is back to their work site or back to homeworking. Getting your employee back to working well is key for you, for the employee and the team.

Many managers feel unsure about what to say to a returning employee and worry about making things worse. It can also feel challenging when there are other demands on your time. BUT there are some easy things that you can do to support an employee in this situation. This is not about additional skills, it is about good management plus extra empathy, kindness and patience. This toolkit draws on evidence and best practice to help you support your employee and comply with your Trust/Practice's absence policies.

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. As a manager, 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 employee and take action to support them.

Everyone’s experience of mental health is slightly different. Some signs of poor mental health to look out for are:

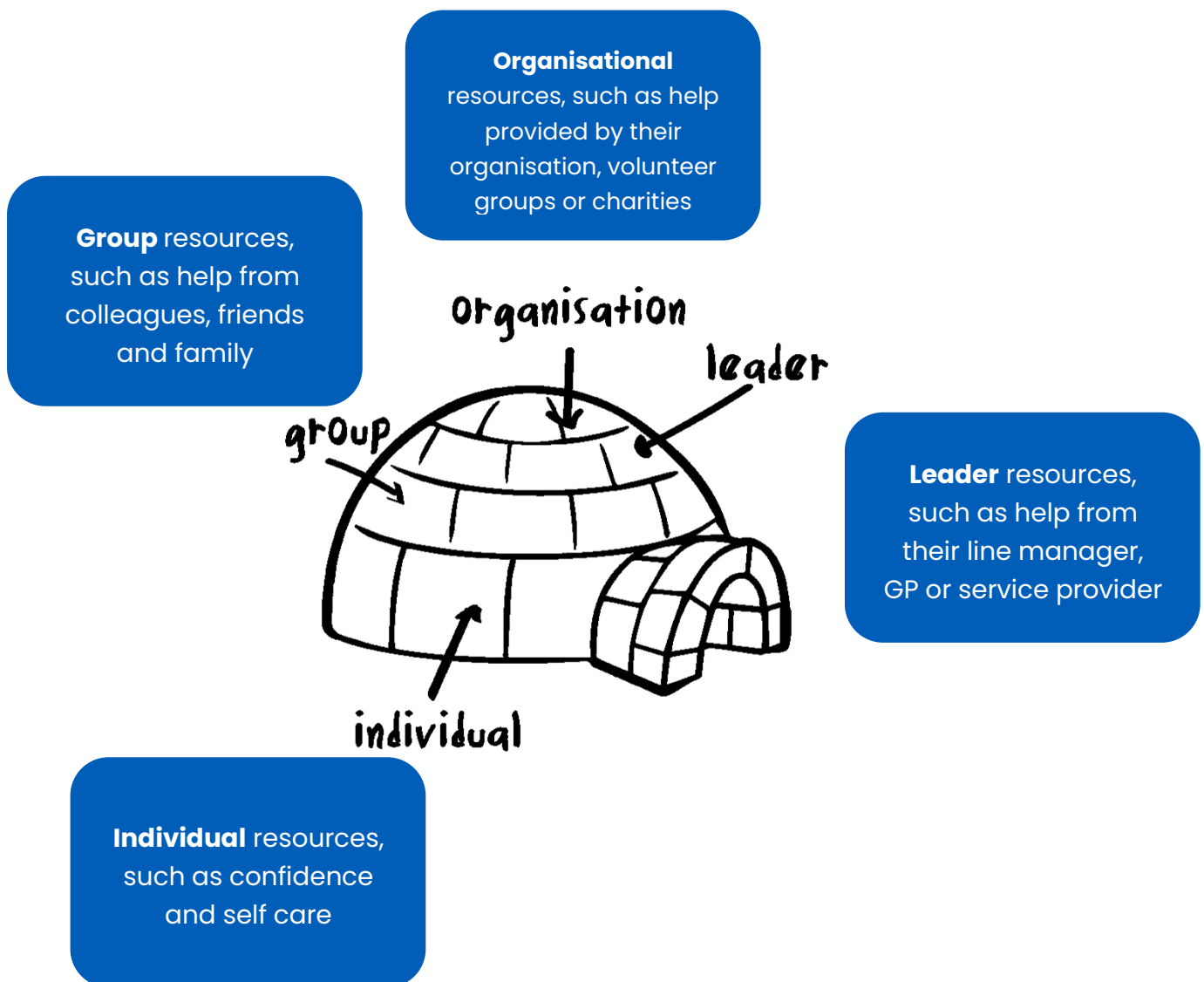
Physical Signs	Behavioural Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness or low energy • Easily distracted • Reporting headaches • Looking uneasy • Mentions general pain • Mentions trouble sleeping • Taking lots of short term sick leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggling with workload • Struggling with concentrating or keeping focused • Change in motivation • Drinking or smoking more • Negative attitude • Irritability or anger • Not taking care of themselves
Emotional Signs	Cognitive Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling overwhelmed by things • Mood changes • Changes in how they interact with others • Mentioning worries or fears • Tearfulness • Not talking much or avoiding social activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty finding words • Taking longer to do things that they used to find easy • Having to think harder than before • Forgetting things • Racing thoughts • Unable to focus • Thinking about only the negative of a situation

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.

IGLOO and the role of line managers

Research has shown there are a number of resources people need to help them stay at work following a period of absence. Everyone has their own set of resources inside and outside of work. We call this their IGLOO. An employee's IGLOO is made up of different resources that help them:



As a line manager, you make up one part of your employee's IGLOO. You are most likely to be their first point of contact when they are unwell and are responsible for the day-to-day management of the employee. Evidence shows that line managers have a significant impact on successful return to work; what they do and how they behave can affect whether the returner is able to return to and stay in work.

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit covers six steps which follow the journey of the employee from initial sick leave to return and stability back at work. At the end of each step of the toolkit there are checklists for you to complete. These provide clear information on the **actions you need to take** and **what to say or write** when you are communicating with your employee. Within each checklist is space for you to keep notes, including date of completion, so that you have a record of the support you have provided.

Step 1

Initial sick leave

- Prep work: What to do before you contact the employee
- Contacting the employee (as soon as possible after 1-2 weeks sick leave)
- Follow-up actions

Step 2

During sick leave

- Keeping in touch with the employee
- Developing management skills
- Looking after the rest of the team
- Using a coordinated approach, if needed

Step 3

Preparing for return to work

- Arranging the return to work meeting (around week 4)
- Preparing for the return to work meeting
- Holding a return to work meeting

Step 4

First week back at work

- Preparing for the employee's first day back
- Supporting the employee in their first day/week back at work

Step 5

Staying healthy and productive at work

- Regular check-ins over the first few weeks back at work
- Supporting the team to stay well at work

Step 6

Job crafting to stay well in work

- Task job crafting
- Relational job crafting
- Cognitive job crafting



The right mindset for managing sick leave and return to work

Getting into the right mindset is important for managing your employee's return to work well as it will help you to be professional yet understanding in how you deal with your employee. Many people who are off sick feel replaceable and are worried that they are no longer valued by their Trust/Practice. Talking to your employee with the right mindset will help show that you care about them and recognise the contribution they make.

Three steps for getting into the right mindset:



What you can do to improve your communication with your employee:



- Spend enough time preparing what you will say to the employee to make sure you use the right words and phrases that are supportive.



- Practice active listening skills such as remaining neutral and non-judgemental, being patient and not interrupting or feeling the need to fill silences and asking questions for clarification.



- Summarise back what they have said to show them you have heard them.



Individual toolkit

There is a similar toolkit for employees to use that will support them during their sick leave and return to work. You can find out more about the employee toolkit on this website. We encourage you to look through the individual toolkit so both you and your employee can be aware of their actions and responsibilities.

STEP 1: INITIAL SICK LEAVE

By the time you start using this toolkit, you may have already taken some of the steps in this stage. If not, we suggest you do them as soon as possible.

Managers are often reluctant to contact employees while they are off work with poor mental health. They may be concerned their contact will be unwelcome, or that it may make the situation worse. However, maintaining contact throughout sickness absence increases the chances of employee returning to work. It can help relieve the anxiety of returning to work for the employee and can help you as the employer with your work planning.

There are some important actions you can take **as soon as your employee has gone over one to two weeks of sick leave** that will make a difference to their return to work:

Making contact with the employee and asking how they are doing

Making it clear that the employee should look after themselves and get well rather than rush back to work

Letting the employee know that the Trust/Practice will support them during their absence

Managing initial sick leave

This section covers three main areas to help you manage the initial period of sickness absence:

1. Prep work
2. Making contact with your employee
3. Follow up actions

Because every Trust/Practice is different and everyone's experience of supporting people varies, start where it makes most sense for you.

1. Prep work – to do before you contact your employee

Employees who are absent from work benefit from someone inside the Trust/Practice providing them with a helping hand to understand what they need to do and why. This can also help avoid any confusion later on. Before you contact the employee, it is important that you are clear about your Trust/Practice's policies and practices, and where to find further information and advice (see Step 1 Actions Checklist).

2. Making contact with your employee

The next step is to make contact with your employee. **If they have not already contacted you, you should contact them.** This could be by phone or by email. Use Step 1 Communications Checklist for information on what to cover in the initial conversation/email and to keep track of what you discuss and agree.

Sometimes it is difficult to know the right words to use with someone who is recently off work, especially if their mental health is affected. Words that are sympathetic can help the employee feel understood and supported. Further examples are given below:

Sorry to hear you are feeling unwell, you are missed

Take time to look after yourself and let me know if we can do anything to help you

I wanted to check you had a copy of our absence policy and know what we need to do/how things while you are off work

Let me know what you would like your colleagues/team to know about your absence

What's the best way for me to keep in touch with you?

Is there any outstanding work we can cover for you while you are off?

3. Follow-up actions

After contacting your employee there may be a number of follow-up actions you need to take, such as communicating with the rest of the team (see Step 1 Actions Checklist).



Individual Toolkit

The employee version of this toolkit asks your employee to note what they would like you to know about their sick leave and how they would like you to keep in touch.

Actions Checklist: Initial sick leave

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (include dates where applicable)
Before contacting employee		
Record the employee's date and reason for absence		
Check whether a Fit Note has been provided		
Know your Trust/Practice's policies and procedures on sickness absence and return to work		
Know who you can ask for further information or guidance about managing the absence if needed		
Familiarise yourself with the employee version of this toolkit.		
When contacting employee		
Make contact with employee and (use Step 1 Communication Checklist to know what to cover)		
After contacting employee		
Send the employee a link to the employee version of the guide		
Email or send a short summary of the conversation and what was agreed on how to keep in touch to the employee and your HR contact		
Put regular contact meetings into your calendar as a reminder		
Speak to the employee's team/colleagues about their absence from work, using only what the employee has agreed to be shared		
Encourage work colleagues to keep in touch with the employee (if agreed with employee)		
Other actions you would like to take (note here)		

Communication Checklist: Making initial contact with your employee – what to cover

Date of initial contact: _____

Format of contact (eg email, telephone): _____

What to cover	Have I done this?	Notes
Ask them how they are feeling		
Let them know your Managing Absence and Wellbeing policy and where to access Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Services.		
Request a Fit Note if required and the employee has not sent it yet		
Let them know that the Trust/Practice will support them during their absence and signpost them to any services it can provide (e.g. employee support groups, counselling services etc)		
Make it clear they should look after themselves and focus on getting better, not rush back to work		
Tell them it's okay for them to be socially active whilst on sick leave (e.g. going shopping, joining support groups or social networks, meeting friends etc)		
Encourage them to get out and about for fresh air and exercise		
Agree how you will keep in contact during their sick leave (including who, how, and when)		
Ask them what they would like to tell their colleagues/team about their absence		
Ask them if they would be happy for their colleagues to get in touch with them		
Ask them to use the individual toolkit to support them whilst they are off work		
Ask if they have any questions		

STEP 2: DURING SICK LEAVE

Whilst your employee is on sick leave there are some things you can do which would benefit them and the rest of the team. These include:

- 1. Keeping in touch with the employee on sick leave and referring to Occupational Health where appropriate**
- 2. Developing management skills**
- 3. Looking after the rest of the team**
- 4. Using a coordinated approach (if needed)**

1. Keeping in touch

Evidence shows that staying in touch and keeping the conversation going helps employees return to work sooner. The pressures from our day to day jobs may mean we sometimes forget to keep in touch with someone on sick leave, especially if they agreed they will get in touch with you and they haven't. There can be a number of reasons why they have not kept in touch such as feeling too poorly, or simply forgetting. Some employees may not have family or friends to support them whilst they are off work. Not having support can affect wellbeing and make recovery even more difficult for those employees who have poor mental health.

Please see the **Step 2 Communications Checklist** on what to do and what to say when you keep in contact with your employee.

Remember

**Get yourself in the right mindset
before contacting the employee – be professional yet understanding and
practice active listening.**

2. Refresh your people management skills

Good people management skills are particularly important when it comes to supporting an employee when they are back at work. Research has identified four key sets of manager behaviours that are vital to support the health and wellbeing of those who work for them:

- Being respectful and responsible
- Managing and communicating existing and future work
- Managing difficult situations
- Managing the individual within the team

For guidance on how to improve these behaviours, take a look at the [CIPD website](#) which provides a range of resources including a self-assessment and exercises to help managers support the health, well-being and engagement of their staff.

3. Looking after the rest of the team

It is important during this stage to consider the impact of the absence on others in the Trust/Practice, including the rest of the team and yourself. Try to avoid putting too much extra work on others while the employee is off sick, as this may affect how they feel about the employee when they return.

If the absence is work-related, explore how the rest of the team and Trust/Practice are coping with similar pressures. As part of this, you could hold a meeting to discuss the six areas set out in the [Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards](#). These outline aspects of work that can cause stress, if they are not properly managed.

When you are a team member down this can be difficult for your business so it is also important to look after yourself. [Here](#) is the official NHS guidance on how to look after your well-being which you may find useful.

4. Using a coordinated approach (if needed)

If your employee's absence is recurring, **goes beyond four weeks**, or is particularly challenging to manage, you may want to involve others from your Trust/Practice to help you manage the return using a **coordinated** approach.

A coordinated approach is a joint activity where people with different expertise work together to provide the right support for the employee on sick leave. For example, a group could include some of all of the following:

- A line manager/employer
- A Human Resources (HR) professional
- An Occupational Health (OH) advisor
- A trade union representative (if appropriate)
- The Employee Assistance Programme
- Any other person that is essential to this process

There are many benefits of using a coordinated approach. It can help the absent employee feel valued and ensure they get specialist support. There are also benefits to the Trust/Practice including a quicker return to work by the employee and less pressure on the line manager in dealing with the employee's absence and return to work on their own. If a coordinated approach is taken it can be useful to keep a note of the different people involved and their expertise so that everyone is included in discussions as time goes on. It is also crucial to keep your own line manager informed when dealing with an employee on sick leave to ensure continued support.

Actions Checklist: During sick leave

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (include dates where applicable)
Reflect on your behaviour as a manager. Is there anything you could do to improve?		
If team members are given additional responsibilities during sick leave, check that they are OK with this, make sure they know that this is temporary and will be reviewed.		
If the absence is work-related, explore how the rest of the team and Trust/Practice are coping with similar pressures.		
Keep in contact with employee (see Step 2 Communication Checklist on what to cover)		
Use a coordinated approach if needed (use record sheet).		
Alert your line manager about the absence and its subsequent impact on the service.		

Communication Checklist: Keeping in touch

Date of contact(s): _____

Format of contact(s) (e.g. email, telephone): _____

What to cover	Have I done this?	Notes
Ask about their health and wellbeing		
Check if they have accessed support available through work (e.g. mental health support if appropriate)		
Keep them up to date with news and events at work (but not about their job or tasks as this might increase feelings of worry or stress about work)		
Ask if they have been in touch with any colleagues		
Check if they have any messages for colleagues		
Check if they would like to be included in any social events whilst on sick leave		
Remind them to use the employee Return-to-work toolkit		
Ask if they have any questions for you		

Example coordinated approach record sheet

Case management for (employee name):

Return to work team members:	Their role:	Contact details:

STEP 3: PREPARING FOR AN EMPLOYEE'S RETURN TO WORK

Your employee may know when they are returning to work and/or may have a return to work date, but if they do not then generally the best time to develop a Return to Work Plan **is three to four weeks into an absence**. However, this may vary depending on personal circumstances or expected length of sick leave. If you start to develop and discuss the plan too soon, you may put pressure on the employee. If you leave it too late, you may affect the employee's confidence to return to work.

There are three key stages in this section of the guide:

- 1. Arranging the return to work meeting**
- 2. Preparing for the return to work meeting**
- 3. Holding the return to work meeting**

A breakdown on what to do is covered in the Step 3 Actions Checklist and Step 3 Communications Checklist at the end of this section. In addition to these we recommend that you use our 'Return to Work Conversation Guide' to help you prepare for the return to work meeting and to guide the discussion in the meeting. This includes a range of questions you should ask and helpful tips on how to phrase them.

Remember

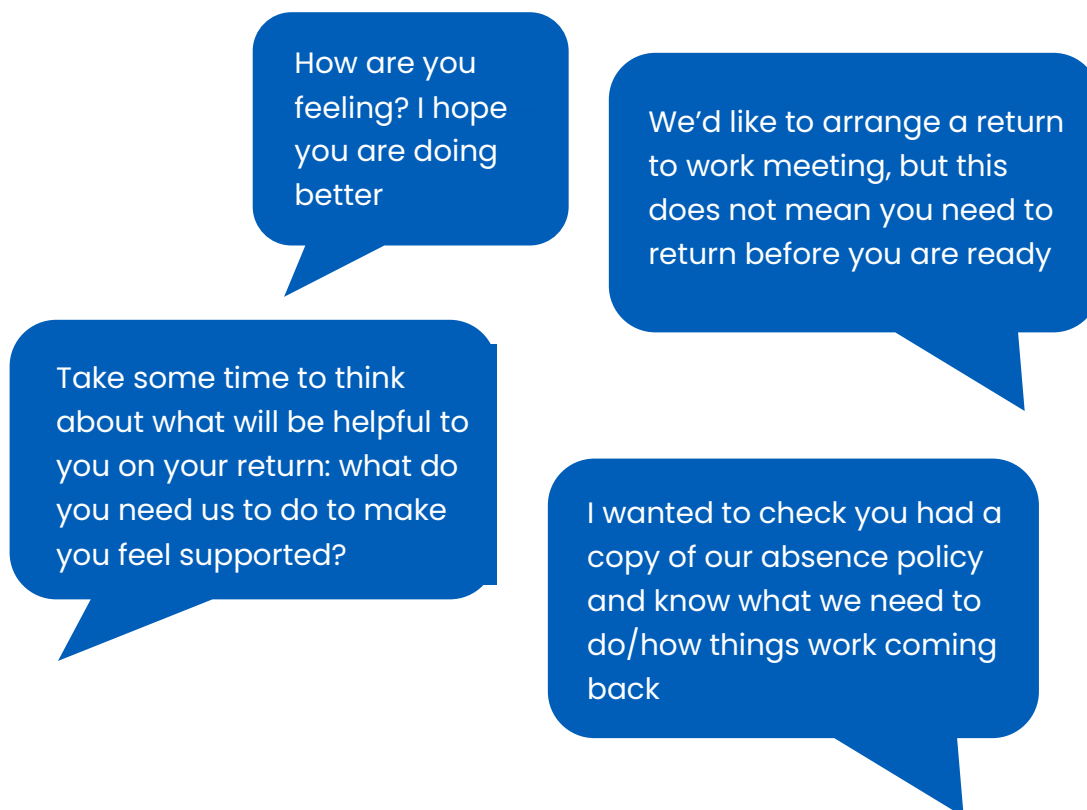
**Get yourself in the right mindset
before each conversation – be professional yet understanding and practice
active listening.**

1. Arranging the return to work meeting

When you contact your employee, make it clear you are setting up a date and time to have a return to work meeting with them but there is no pressure for them to return too soon. Familiarise yourself with your return to work policies and

procedures so that you can explain these to your employee. See Step 3 Communications Checklist at the end.

When you arrange the meeting, use words that are sympathetic so the employee feels understood and supported. Some examples are given below:



2. Preparing for the return to work meeting

A Return to Work Plan should be a joint activity between the employee and their line manager (and any other relevant person if using a coordinated approach). It is important that you and the employee are prepared for the return to work meeting so that you have both thought about any separate ideas you hold, what the priorities are and what a successful return would like for each of you. After you have agreed a return to work meeting date with your employee, the next step is to make sure you have all the information you require to discuss any support they might need to help them return to work. For example, they may need some [work adjustments](#). You can find examples of work adjustments [here](#). An OH appointment can also help assess whether any adjustments might be helpful for the return to work.

There is also some information on the following websites:

- [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive's Display Screen Equipment \(DSE\) assessment](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive's Manual Handling assessment](#)

While there are some things we cannot change about work, some things can be easily adjusted, at least temporarily, to help employees. Most adjustments cost little or nothing to implement, they just require some time to make a change in a process or task.

Some of the things you will need to consider are:

- Whether the absence is work-related and issues need to be dealt with before the employee returns to work
- The employee's role and what the priorities are
- The Trust/Practice needs, your needs as manager, and your team's needs
- Whether there are any flexible working policies and other policies that could support the employee's return to work, if needed
- Whether there are any work adjustments that could be made if requested by the employee; and how long you, as a business, could accommodate these
- Whether the employee could gradually build up their work hours over their first few weeks back at work

Please refer to our return to work conversation guide for help in preparing for the meeting. This sets out the areas you will discuss in the meeting.

3. Holding the return to work meeting

Who? The return to work meeting should be led jointly by you and the employee and anyone else involved in the return to work process

Where? The meeting should be held in a private, confidential space with no distractions where possible

How? During the conversation you should:

- Take the lead in the return to work conversation but ask the employee how you can best support them. Remember, they are the expert on what they need.
- Listen and reflect back.
- Find ways to make the conversation authentic wherever possible, even though you are following a process set out in the guide.
- Focus on the future, not the past.
- Write up the agreed return to work plan (see template) together and agree how you will monitor and review over time.

Refer to the return to work conversation guide for information on what to cover in the meeting and tips on how to phrase the questions.



Individual toolkit

The individual toolkit asks your employee to note their usual job tasks and duties, consider what work adjustments they might find useful and to discuss these with you.

Actions Checklist: Preparing for return to work

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (n)
Before the return to work meeting		
Check your policies and procedures on sickness absence and return to work		
Check your risk assessment procedures for returning to work		
Arrange the return to work meeting with the employee (see guide on what to cover)		
Send the employee written confirmation of the return to work meeting, the purpose of it and what to expect		
Use the 'return to work conversation guide' to prepare		
Send the employee the 'return to work conversation guide'		
In the return to work meeting		
Use the 'return to work conversation guide' to discuss the issues for both the employee and the Trust/Practice		
Agree and complete a return to work plan (see template)		
If you need to seek further advice/ agreement from other people before confirming adjustments, let the employee know what you are doing and when you will get back to them.		
Suggest an informal meeting with yourself or a colleague nearby before the first day and/or offer to meet them at the station/ car park/ main reception to help ease first day nerves.		
After the return to work meeting		
Send a copy of the agreed plan to the employee		
If absence carries on some time after the meeting, check whether the return to work plan needs to be adapted before they return		

Communications Checklist: Arranging the return to work meeting with the employee

Date of contact: _____

Format of contact (e.g. email/telephone): _____

What to cover	Have I done this?	Notes
Ask about their health and wellbeing		
Explain the return-to-work process/procedures		
Agree on a return to work meeting date		
Agree who will be involved in the meeting (if using a coordinated approach)		
Agree where the meeting will take place (for example, over the phone, in a meeting room)		
Reassure the employee that just because you are having a return to work meeting does not mean there is any pressure on them to return		
Ask the employee to look at the step on 'preparing to return to work' in their Return-to-work toolkit		
Let the employee know you will be using the 'return to work conversation guide' so that they are prepared and know what questions you will ask them. (This will help them give more constructive answers as well as help to reduce their anxiety about the meeting.)		
Give the employee an opportunity to ask questions		

Example Return to work plan		
Name of employee		Possible return date:
Nature of absence:		Date of this meeting:
Type of meeting (e.g. first meeting)		
Attendees		
Agreed work priorities		
Impact of health on work		
Type of return (e.g. homeworking, back on worksite)		
Reasonable work adjustments	Duties	Adjustments
Other reasonable adjustments (e.g. gradual return, flexible hours, equipment etc) (see appendix for examples)		
Length of Return-to-work plan		
Review date		
Plan Agreed by:		
Name and signatures		

STEP 4: SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYEE BACK INTO WORK

It is important that an employee continues to be supported after returning to work. In this step we discuss:

- 1. Preparing for the employee's first day back**
- 2. Supporting the employee in their first day/week back at work**

1. Preparing for the employee's first day back

Before your employee's first day back, make sure you have everything in place ready for their return. You will need to have made any adjustments ahead of their return and to have conducted any risk assessments to ensure it is safe for them to come back. The Step 4 Actions Checklist details everything you need to do.

2. Supporting the employee in their first day/week back at work

Make sure you check in with your employee on their first day and during the first week back at work to see how they are getting on, understand any concerns and find out whether they need further support. Use the Step 4 Communications Checklist to know what to do and what to say.

Some questions you could use to check-in with how your employee is feeling are:

How are you feeling about being back at work?

Is there anything that is challenging for you that I can help with?

Is your workload manageable for you?

Is there anything you would like more support in?



Individual toolkit

The employee version of this toolkit asks your employee to follow their return to work plan, note any changes needed to discuss with you and to stay connected with people at work.

Remember

Get yourself in the right mindset
before checking in with the employee – be professional yet understanding and
practice active listening.

Actions Checklist: Supporting the employee back at work

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (include dates where applicable)
Before the return		
Make sure employee's work adjustments are in place before their first day back (whether onsite or homeworking)		
Carry out any workplace risk assessments before their return		
Make employee's team members or colleagues aware of their return date		
On the first day back/ first week		
Ensure that you or whoever has agreed to meet with the employee on their first day back does so		
Check in with employee to see how they are getting on (see guide)		

Communications Checklist: Checking in with employee

Date of contact: _____

Format of contact (e.g. email/telephone): _____

What to cover	Have I done this?	Notes
Ask how they are feeling and how they are getting on		
Advise your employee to take regular breaks, especially in the first few days		
Make sure they are clear about the work adjustments that have been put in place		
Explain any changes to the employee's role or responsibilities		
Tell the employee about any workplace changes during their absence		
Tell the employee they can get in touch with you if they have any concerns or questions		
Tell them about any workplace mental health support available		
Remind them about the employee return to work toolkit		

STEP 5: STAYING HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE AT WORK

It is important not to assume the employee is fully functional when they return as this may take some time. Giving an employee too much work too soon can lead to further absences, or to the employee leaving the Trust/Practice.

1. Need for regular 'check-ins' and ongoing review

Ongoing communication and review of the return to work plan will give the employee the best possible chance of staying in work and staying healthy.

The plan should stay in place until the employee has been back at work for a sustained period. Everyone's needs are different, so for some people this may be two weeks, for others four–six weeks or for some six months. Where employees have a long-term condition that fluctuates over time, this may need an ongoing review. If so, it is helpful to agree with them when and how these reviews should take place.

Have regular meetings with your employee to:

- Check on their wellbeing
- Review their progress and work adjustments
- Identify obstacles that may prevent adjusting back to work
- Check how the employee and the team are managing
- Check and address any gaps in support

Use the Step 5 Actions Checklist to ensure you keep on top of the actions you need to take in the first few weeks or months of the employee's return, depending on how they are feeling. For support on what to say to your employee, refer back to the Step 4 Communication Checklist on what to cover when you check in with your employee. If the employee feels unable or finds it difficult to raise concerns with you, you should arrange for them to have an alternative point of contact.

2. Returning to work remotely

Some employees will return to work remotely. If this is the case, it is important to remember that communicating remotely removes many of the social cues that we rely on at work. It is easy to miss how the employee is performing which might cause miscommunication and misunderstanding between you and the employee, or between the employee and their team or colleagues. Extra efforts may be needed to listen closely to what is being said, and to ask questions to check you have interpreted them correctly. The CIPD provides [guidance on managing and supporting remote workers](#), including tips on how to communicate with them remotely.

3. Job crafting to support employees back at work

Some individuals benefit from making changes to the way that they are working to shape a job that meets their needs. This is called job crafting. It can be helpful as it allows people to work to their strengths. There are three types of job crafting:

- Task job crafting – changing the number, scope and type of tasks completed
- Relational job crafting – changing the number or quality of interactions with other people
- Cognitive job crafting – changing the way that they see their job

Not all forms of job crafting will be possible in all roles, but being aware of the different ways you can help the employee shape their role to their needs will help them manage their health and perform well at work. Further information on job crafting is available in Step 6 (page 36).

4. Longer term support

Most employees will return to work feeling well and may not need further adjustments or support for long. However, some might need longer-term support to prevent the risk of further sick leave. For these employees, decisions around work adjustments might also need to be changed.

Employees who might need long-term support usually show ongoing signs of:

- Tiredness or pain
- Low or aggravated mood
- Slower thinking
- Worrying more than usual
- Difficulty talking to colleagues
- Avoiding social settings or specific work tasks

If the issues are ongoing, you should arrange monthly check-ins to check how they are doing and monitor work adjustments. You may also like to encourage your employee to complete Mind's employee's Wellness Action Plan (access [here](#)) and share it with you so you can both look for individual signs that would indicate poor mental health.

5. Long term disability

While some people experience a one-off episode of ill-health, sometimes ill-health can become a long-term chronic condition. Check the UK [Equality Act 2010](#) (except for Northern Ireland) to see if your employee's health may fall under the Equality Act. Long-term adaptations may also be necessary for people who do not fall under current Equality Act definitions. More information can be found on the ACAS website [here](#).

If you need to make long-term adaptations to an employee's job, the Government's 'Access to work' scheme might be able to provide a grant: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>

Actions Checklist: Ongoing review

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (include dates where applicable)
Review the employee's return to work plan with them after the first few days/week and consider any changes that need to be made		
Arrange a time for the plan to be reviewed (this may be in weeks or a couple of months)		
Arrange quick regular check-ins with your employee (e.g. weekly 15-minutes) in the way agreed to make sure that they are managing their work and health and to agree work priorities.		

STEP 6: JOB CRAFTING TO STAY WELL IN WORK

Some individuals benefit from making changes to the way that they are working to shape a job that meets their needs. This is called job crafting. It can be helpful as it allows people to work to their strengths.

This section includes: :

- **What is job crafting?**
- **What are the benefits of job crafting?**
- **Examples of job crafting**
- **Case study**
- **How to job craft to stay well in work**

1. What is job crafting

There are three types of job crafting:

- Task job crafting – changing the number, scope and type of tasks completed
- Relational job crafting – changing the number or quality of interactions with other people
- Cognitive job crafting – changing the way that they see their job

Not all forms of job crafting will be possible in all roles, but being aware of the different ways job crafting can take shape may help you to explore how it can be used to help your employees manage their health and perform well at work.

2. What are the benefits of job crafting?

Employees and managers can work together to job craft so that employees are working to their strengths, in a way that helps them to thrive – and the business to thrive too.

Job crafting has been found to lead to improvements in job satisfaction, engagement, productivity and performance and wellbeing. So, job crafting might be able to help returning employees to tailor their work so that they are able to work at their best, and stay well in work, but it can also be good for everyone in the team.

3. Examples of job crafting

There are many ways that someone can job craft – these small changes could include:

Task Job Crafting

- Structuring the working day
- Breaking down tasks into smaller parts
- Prioritising tasks
- Taking regular small breaks between tasks

Relational Job Crafting

- Discussing communication preferences e.g. bullet point instructions in an email rather than spoken face to face.
- Employee can discuss what they can and can't do at work with colleagues
- Agreeing regular one-to-one meetings

Environmental Job Crafting

- Working from home when needed and possible to concentrate for longer periods of time
- Requesting accommodations to physical workspace to support recovery and comfort.

Cognitive Job Crafting

- Setting realistic expectations about what can be done in the day, in the next few months
- Looking at the bigger picture, how does their job fit in
- Raising awareness of mental health in the Trust/Practice

4. Case studies

Naz's story

Naz is a registered nurse who worked in the NHS for 20 years. She recently returned to work following a period of long-term absence due to back pain resulting from a repetitive strain injury which she sustained whilst at work. Naz had also been experiencing symptoms of occupational burnout prior to her absence, due to working long hours during the Covid-19 pandemic. She has always led a busy life outside of work. She has two young children one of whom has difficulties with their mobility and often use a wheelchair. Naz enjoys spending time in nature going on long walks and cooking.

Prior to her absence, Naz had been feeling disengaged from her work. She found herself loosing compassion for the patients she treated. Her injury impacted her ability to care for her child during her absence and this made her feel resentment towards her role.

During Naz's long term absence she received an invitation to take part in the IGLOO study. Naz had already been aware of the IGLOO study as she had seen posters around her department and was particularly intrigued by Job Crafting. She returned to her role in a gradual way, and started to feel her job would be much easier to manage if she could make small changes to the way she worked.

Naz used the job crafting exercises to reflect on her tasks. Using the "A good day at work" exercise she considered the balance of her daily activities. She appreciates inputting patient notes are a non-negotiable aspect of her work, but she realised that she finds these tasks draining. She decided to switch the order of her tasks, making sure that completing patient notes was followed with more enjoyable aspects of her job to her which are patient facing.

Naz also began to think about her energy levels. Working without a break throughout the day, and going home to a demanding parenting role, was damaging her wellbeing. Naz committed to a morning ritual of meditation and gentle stretching at home in her living room 15 minutes before her children woke up for school. This helped to set her up for the day in a positive way. Naz also started to take her lunch break, often taking a short

walk around the hospital grounds. She found that she would return to the ward feeling refreshed and could be a more effective clinician.

As her back injury was work-related, Naz was anxious about the physical nature of her role. She worried about saying anything to her manager as she didn't want others to see her as incapable. Naz spoke with her manager and realised that her concerns were misplaced. Her manager didn't expect her to do any lifting, and in fact would be pleased if Naz was more cautious about physically demanding tasks. Naz used the toolkit exercises to challenge her unhelpful thoughts. Her manager and the occupational health team worked together to refer her to a fast-tracked physio-therapy appointments which she was able to attend during working hours. This was great for her as it helped her recovery and didn't impact her collecting her children from school.

Naz thought hard about the environmental aspect of her role. Although having a pleasant communal staff space would make a big difference to her, providing somewhere calm and peaceful to rest during breaks, she knew she had very little control this. She mentioned this at the monthly team briefing and started to talk to colleagues about what could be done to improve the space. Together, they agreed to buy a new coffee machine. Everyone on the ward recognised Naz's efforts in making it happen and Naz felt really valued by her team.

Naz found the formal reflective practice with her mentor and the wider team helpful. She noticed that the thoughts about her role had become negative whilst she was struggling. She felt she had lost compassion for her patients and wasn't delivering the levels of care she ought to. She also realised that others would share stories about the good work they have done and that they had seen her do, and often praised her for the impact she made on her patients' lives. Naz had read about the gratitude journal exercise in the IGLOO toolkits and started to make notes of the small things she was grateful for. She made notes about all sorts of things, her children eating their dinner without fuss, a smooth journey to work, about doing her part to enhance lives of patients and moments talking to colleagues. Naz found that she gradually felt lighter around her peers and patients. Over the next month she realised she didn't have to keep trying to force herself remember to think about the good things, she was actually enjoying her work life once again.

Naz still has down days. Sometimes her back is quite painful, sometimes she feels it is an effort to be positive around others. When things are harder she makes sure she tells her managers or a colleague, so that they can remind her to go for a walk, or help her job craft so she does more of the things that help her feel good, like talking to patients. Overall things are getting better, and Naz feels she has a good plan and new strategies to help her stay well.

5. How to job craft to stay well at work

While job crafting can happen naturally, it can be helpful to use a structured approach and work with your employee to job craft where needed. This way, you can make sure that you are doing what is needed of you as a manager to provide accommodations, but in a way that works for your employee, your team and for your Trust/Practice.

It can be helpful to think about working with your employee through the following steps when developing and trialling job crafting:

- Prepare to explore job crafting possibilities
- Explore job crafting possibilities
- Develop a job crafting plan
- Discuss and agree your job crafting plan
- Trial your job crafting plan
- Review and tweak your job crafting plan

Further information on each of these actions can be found in the actions checklist.

Actions Checklist: Job crafting – example provided to individuals.

As a manager it can be helpful to think about how your returning employee could job craft, then together you can identify ways to make it work for them, your team and for your Trust/Practice.

Remember, everyone is different. What has worked for someone else in the past may not work for them. AND, they may have different ideas about what would be helpful. Think about suggestions and then work together to develop a plan.

Questions to think about to help you develop a job crafting plan	Notes
Preparing to explore job crafting possibilities	
What are the core requirements of the job?	
Is there anything they might not be able to do yet or may be worried about?	
What are their strengths? What did they enjoy doing at work before their absence?	
Exploring job crafting possibilities	
Task – Could changing the number, scope and type of tasks completed be helpful? If so, what would that look like?	
Relational – Could changing the number or quality of interactions with other people be helpful? If so, what would that look like?	
Cognitive – Could changing the way that they see their job be helpful? If so, what would that look like?	
Developing a job crafting plan	
Thinking about the job crafting options above, list those you would	

like to take forward to discuss with your returning employee?	
For each of the job crafting actions, consider what impact it might have on others and the Trust/practice, and what can be done to limit any impact. See example plan and discussion template.	
Discussing your job crafting plan	
Have you arranged to meet with your employee to discuss your job crafting plan? Is there anything you can do to make sure the meeting is as smooth as possible?	
Agreeing your job crafting plan	
Have you written out your job crafting plan and agreed this with your employee?	
Have you agreed how long you will trial your job crafting plan for? How will you know if it is working well for them, for your team and for you/ the Trust/practice?	
Trialling your job crafting plan	
It can be hard to stick to new routines. Consider how you might support your employee to keep to the plan. How will you do this?	
Have you agreed how colleagues can support the job crafting? Sometimes this can be helpful so that colleagues understand why they are working in a different way. What information has been shared with colleagues? Could you facilitate this discussion?	

Reviewing and tweaking your job crafting plan

When will you review the job crafting plan over the next few months?	
What are the criteria for success i.e. how will you know that the job crafting is working well for you, them, the team, and the Trust/Practice?	
Have you agreed how you discuss any problems that arise i.e. if changes need to be made before the agreed review meeting?	

Actions Checklist: Developing a job crafting plan

Job crafting possibility	Why this will be helpful	What impact might it have on others/ this business	What can be done to limit the impact
e.g. Breaking down each task into smaller tasks	It helps me to plan what needs to be done and keep organised, which helps me from spiralling worries about what I have not done or what I have missed	Limited	N/a
e.g. working from home on Tuesdays	I find commuting stressful and have a regular appointment at 1pm. This would allow me to recharge and also I won't need to explain to everyone why I am leaving site.	Colleagues may think it is not fair if they are not able to work from home; they might need me to help with work	Explain why this is helpful and that it is temporary while I rebuild my health; let them know I am on the phone if needed between 2.30pm -5pm

FURTHER INFORMATION

The activities and resources for managing an employee's sick leave and return to work can be used as many times as you need with each employee. Remember, each employee may have different needs, and some might need less or more time off work than others. Some employees might come back to work for a short while before going on sick leave again – using the same steps and actions with each of your employees should help you create a common approach to managing long-term sick leave.

Where to find further information:

Mental health and mental health conditions

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Samaritans: <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/workplace/>

Mental health at work: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk>

Good Thinking: <https://www.good-thinking.uk>

Every Mind Matters: <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/>

HSE guidance for work stress – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress>

Rethink: <https://www.rethink.org/>

Time to Change helps employers to talk about mental health at work and you can find further information here: www.time-to-change.org.uk

Sickness absence management and return to work

CIPD guide to managing a return after long term absence:

<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/absence/managing-return-to-work-after-long-term-absence>

NICE guidance on workplace health: long-term sickness absence and capability to work: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng146>

Acas Managing staff absence guide:

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4199>

Access to Work: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>

Fit note: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note>

COVID 19 Resources

Society of Occupational Medicine COVID-19 return to work guide for recovering workers https://www.som.org.uk/COVID-19_return_to_work_guide_for_recovering_workers.pdf

NICE COVID 19 rapid guideline: managing the effects of COVID-19: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng188>

Musculoskeletal conditions (muscle and joint pain)

Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance: <http://arma.uk.net>

Versus Arthritis: <https://www.versusarthritis.org>

Back care: <http://www.backcare.org.uk>

Cardiovascular conditions

British Heart Foundation: <https://www.bhf.org.uk>

Stroke Association: <https://www.stroke.org.uk/>

Different Strokes: <https://differentstrokes.co.uk/>

Respiratory conditions

Asthma UK: <https://www.asthma.org.uk/>

British Lung Foundation: <https://www.blf.org.uk/>

Cancer

Marie Curie: <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk>

Macmillan Cancer Support: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk>

Cancer Research UK: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/what-is-cancer>

Neurological conditions

The Neurological Alliance: <https://www.neural.org.uk>

FND Hope UK: <https://fndhope.org/>

MS Society: <https://www.mssociety.org.uk>

MS Trust: <https://www.mstrust.org.uk>

ME/CFS (Myalgic encephalomyelitis/ chronic fatigue)

The ME Association: <https://meassociation.org.uk>

APPENDIX

Step 3: Work adjustments Exercise

Work adjustments should be discussed and agreed with your returning employee. They will also be encouraged to think about what might help, but before you meet it can be useful to think about what adjustments you could put in place.

Remember:

- You and your employee may have different ideas about what will help. Try to take the employees lead and give them flexibility to try different things if you can.
- What works one week may not work as time goes on, so there is need to review and revise ways of working.
- Think about what will work for the returning employee, and the impact on the team.

Would any of these work adjustments help your employee work well?	Could you help them to make it work? If so, how?
Changes to hours/shifts:	
Gradual increase in hours and/or days worked for example, working two days a week for the first week, three for the second etc.	
Reduced work hours (temporary or permanent)	
Adjust working hours, such as later start times, so they don't have to travel in peak times	
Change in shift patterns	
Frequent break times to allow for rest	
Flexible working such as working from home, flexitime or part-time work	
Suggest that the employee identifies how their mood changes depending on the time of day and tasks they do so they can tackle more challenging tasks when they have more energy	

Paid time off from work for treatment or rehabilitation	
Changes to work duties:	
Changes or adjustments to tasks, e.g. different duties	
Reduced workload or fewer more manageable pieces of work	
Consider deadlines and workload planning to avoid peaks of pressure	
Out of office email to reduce pressure of responding to emails	
Reduced contact with patients/public- for an initial period	
Colleague or team support with managing job duties or workload	
Changes to physical workspace:	
Different or quiet workspace	
Other adjustments to workplace premises, e.g office, desk, chair, etc.	
Other:	
Change work teams	
Changes or modifications to communication including instructions, directions and feedback	
New or refresher training in certain tasks or skills	
Flexibility to attend (or not) meetings, offsite events or social events	
Keep in Touch days whereby the employee can come in while they are on sick leave to keep up to date with what is going on in the office.	