

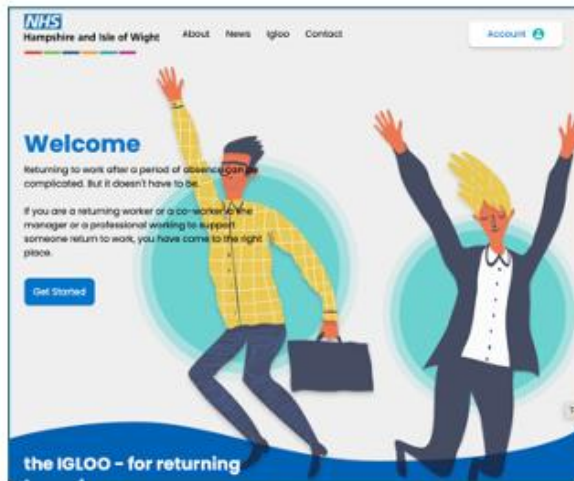
Returning well

Tips and tools help you
support return to work

[LINKS TO THE IGLOO RETURN TO WORK TOOLKITS](#)



As a manager, you play a key role in supporting your team member back to work. We have developed step by step guidance to help you support your member of staff through this journey.



This online resource has step-by-step guidance to help you support someone back to work. It is designed to work alongside your **Trust/Practice's policy** and provides information about good practice, exercises to help you prepare for conversations with your returning employee and your team, and checklists to make sure you have everything in place to support them on their return.

There are also resources for the returning individual and your team so that everyone is supported.

All of the resources are designed to help us take a shared approach to supporting return to work. This way, we can make sure that we give our returning staff the best chance of getting back to work and **staying well in work** in the months ahead.

Access the IGLOO Return to Work Toolkit [here](#)

Please see the [people portal](#) for your access code

IGLOo Return to Work Toolkit

Toolkit for Colleagues



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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.

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:

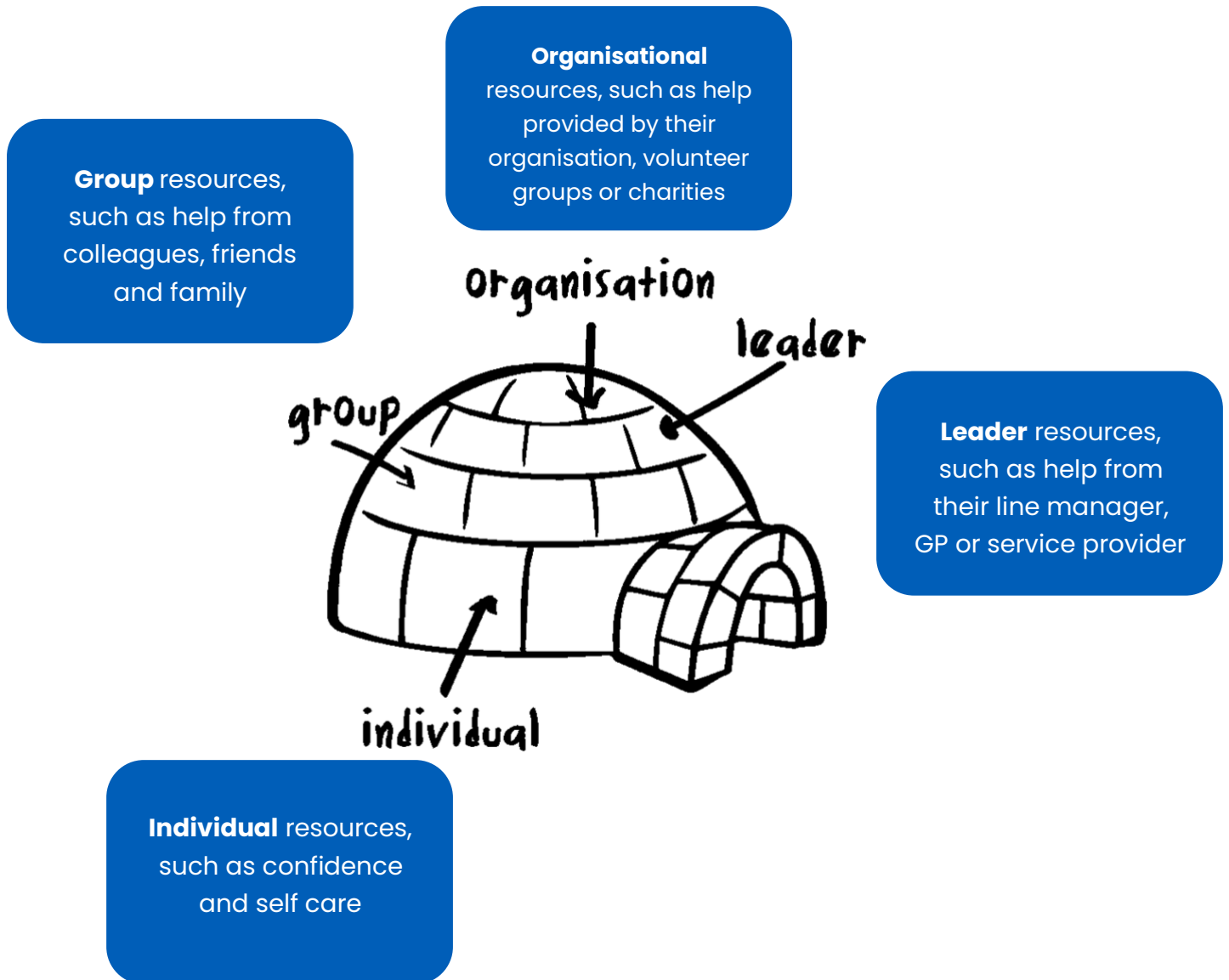
- Behavioural signs – struggling with workload, low levels of concentration and focus, difficulty in organising, low productivity, negative attitude, changes in motivation.
- Emotional signs – feeling anxious or irritable, mood changes, changes in how they interact with colleagues, too much emotion, 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.

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.



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.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising self-care • Establishing clear boundaries between work and leisure 	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating structure in the working day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding from others • Receiving non-judgmental support 	Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving feedback on tasks from colleagues • Getting help when doing challenging tasks • Being treated as you did before not as someone with ill-health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a consistent point of contact • Facilitating of links to external services and treatment 	Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing what information about the absence and return is communicated to colleagues • Continuing to provide support and work adjustments • Being available but not intrusive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing work-focused counselling 	Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

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?			

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.			
	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?			
Leader		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			

		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.

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



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

Email: hello@affinityhealthatwork.com

Online version of this toolkit: www.returntowork.co.uk

Visit us on www.affinityhealthatwork.com

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IGLOO Return to Work Toolkit

Toolkit for Individuals



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INTRODUCTION TO THIS TOOLKIT

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is for employees on sick leave. Many people who are on sick leave find that it affects how they feel about themselves and things around them. This toolkit is helpful if:

- You've been feeling low or experiencing mental health struggles.
- You're off for another reason, but you also feel low, stressed, anxious, or depressed. It is common for people who are unwell physically to also experience low mental health.

This toolkit aims to bring together information that you might find helpful, whatever the reason for your absence. The guidance and exercises provided here do not take the place of clinical recommendations. Please also seek information from your doctor, health specialist, and relevant charities and support groups to understand how your specific health condition may affect you and your work.

Why use this toolkit?

There are many common concerns when it comes to getting back to work following sickness absence. People worry that they will be seen as weak or not up for the job. Some fear that they may never be able to work again. But did you know that with the right support many people successfully return to work following ill-health every day? And that:

- For many of us, work is very important. Work not only allows us to earn money, but also gives us a sense of identity and supports our health and wellbeing.
- Many people want to get back to work as safely and quickly as possible following sickness absence.
- Having a period of ill-health does not always affect your ability to work. However, if you feel that it does, you may want to think about asking for some changes to your work in order to return to work and continue to do your job well.

You may have conflicting emotions about returning to work, and this is understandable. There is no 'right' way to feel. This toolkit will help you manage your worries and concerns and will assist you in the different stages of your return to work journey.

Sick leave and mental health

Being unwell can impact every aspect of our lives – especially how we think and feel. Everyone’s experience of mental health is slightly different. Mental health problems affect ONE IN SIX workers each year so if you are struggling with your mental health **you are not alone**. Some signs of poor mental health to look out for are:

Physical Signs	Behavioural Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness • Having trouble with sleep • Headaches • Not feeling hungry (eating more or less than usual) • Uneasy feeling or pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggling with workload • Struggling with concentrating or keeping focused • Change in motivation • Drinking or smoking more • Negative attitude • Not taking care of yourself
Emotional Signs	Cognitive Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling anxious or irritable • Extreme mood changes • Changes in how you interact with others • Extreme worries or fears • Feeling tearful • Feeling isolated or socially withdrawn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty finding words • Taking longer to do things that you used to find easy • Having to think harder than before • Forgetting things

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

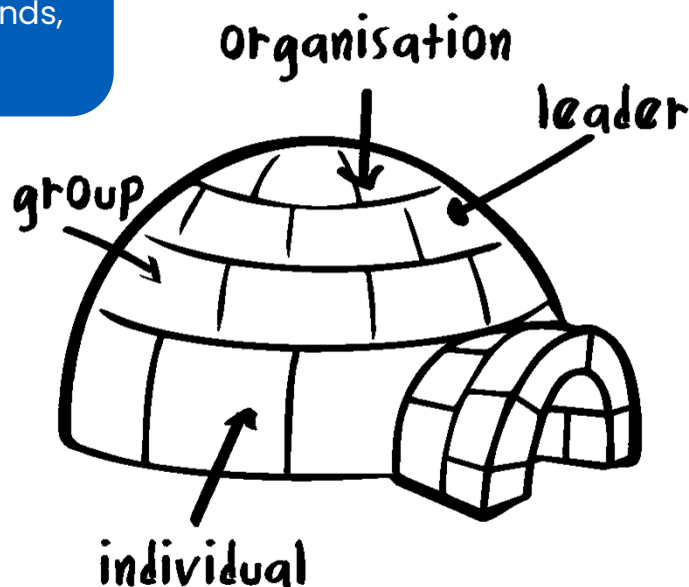
- It can be sudden, as a result of a specific event or experience
- It can come on slowly, as a result of constant pressures and demands
- It may be related to other conditions, such as chronic pain or a different condition that makes you worry all the time.

The IGLOO approach and how it can help you

You do not need to do everything on your own. 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. Your IGLOO is made up of different resources that help you, including:

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

Organisational resources, such as help provided by your trust or practice, volunteer groups or charities



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

Individual resources, such as confidence and self-care

No matter what the reason for your absence from work is, your employer has a **duty** to support your mental wellbeing while you are off work and on your return to work. You can find out more [here](#). Depending on your workplace, your HR contact or occupational health advisor may manage your absence and return to work. In most cases, it will be your line manager.

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit covers six main steps from your initial sick leave to being back at work.

Each step of the toolkit includes checklists for you to complete. These provide clear information on the actions you need to take and what to include when you speak to your employer. These steps include:

Step 1

Initial Sick Leave

- Understanding your Trust/Practice's policies around sick leave
- Making contact with your line manager

Step 2

During Sick Leave

- Getting treatment and support
- Taking steps to improve your health
- Keeping in contact with your employer

Step 3

Preparing for Return to Work

- Letting your employer know you are ready
- Preparing for return to work
- Return to work meeting and plan

Step 4

First week back at work

- Connecting with your manager
- Connecting with your colleagues
- Building up your stamina and work fitness

Step 5

Staying healthy and productive at work

- Prioritising your health
- 'Checking in' with yourself regularly
- Maintaining your social connections

Step 6

Job crafting to stay well in work

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



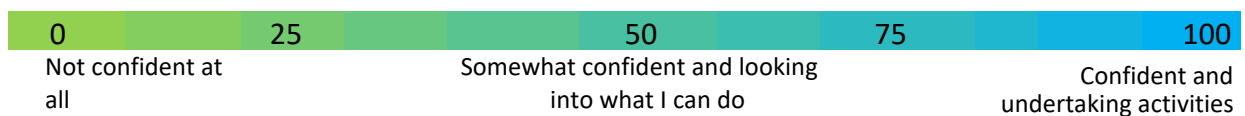
Set aside time regularly to work through the toolkit to give you time to think about your answers. Follow the actions in each step before moving onto the next one.

It is natural that some days will feel better than others. Returning to work is a process and can take time. It's okay if you find you're managing less well and want to go back to activities that you have already done to help build your confidence.

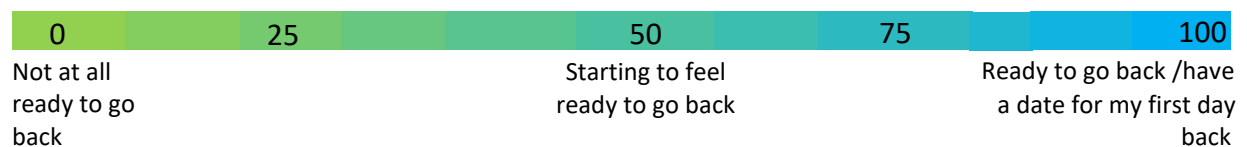
Take a moment to answer the questions below. These will help you decide what step of the toolkit you need to start at.

For the questions below, please circle anywhere on the line that reflects you best:

On a scale of 1 – 100, how confident are you in managing your health?



On a scale of 1 – 100, how ready do you feel to return to work at this moment?



If you scored **less than 50** on both questions, don't worry. Go to **STEP 1 'Initial sick leave'** to begin your recovery whilst on **sick leave**.

If you scored **50 or more** on both scales you may be ready to go into **STEP 3 'Preparing for return to work'**.

If your score is very close to 50, you might want to build up your confidence by visiting some sections from **STEP 2 'During sick leave'**. It's okay to refer back to previous steps at any point.

If your score is below 50, you are likely to benefit from focusing on your recovery journey and focus on the exercises in **Step 2 'During sick leave'**.



Line Manager toolkit

There is a similar toolkit for your line manager or HR advisor to use that will help them to support you during your sick leave and return to work. You can find out more about the manager toolkit on this website.

If the relationship with your manager is difficult, discussing your absence from work might be hard. You can always get advice from your HR contact or with a conciliation service such as [Acas](#).

STEP 1: INITIAL SICK LEAVE

By the time you start using this toolkit, it is likely you will have been off work for at least 2 weeks. In this time, you may have already taken some of the actions suggested in this step. If not, try to do the following as soon as possible:

- 1. Understand your Trust/Practice's policies around sick leave**
- 2. Make contact with your line manager and agree how you will stay in touch**

1. Understanding your Trust/Practice's policies around sick leave

It is a good idea for you to check your **Trust/Practice's** Managing Absence and Wellbeing policy so that you know what they expect of you and what sick pay you are entitled to. You should be able to ask your line manager or HR advisor for this information. Your Trust/Practice may offer support services (eg counselling, support groups) to employees struggling with their mental health so you should find out if and how you can access these.

You are able to self-certify your absence for up to 7 days, but will need to get a 'Fit Note' (previously sick note) from your GP for any longer absences. If you have not already done so, visit your GP so that you can access the help you need from them.

2. Making contact with your line manager

Talking about your health can be a daunting experience, but many people find they get a lot more understanding and support once they start talking about it. You may decide to tell different people more or less information but finding ways to communicate is vital. As well as letting your Trust/Practice know that you are off sick, it is helpful to contact your line manager.

When contacting your line manager, give them as much detail as you feel comfortable with about **your reasons for absence** so that they are aware of your situation. The more information you share, the easier it is for them to help you. Tell them about: your health, how it is affected by your work, and whether it will affect your ability to work.

You should also discuss **how you will keep in contact** during the absence. While this can sometimes feel strange or unpleasant, evidence shows that employees who have kept in regular contact with work have a more positive return to work experience. It can help you feel more part of the team, more supported and less alone. Agree with your employer: **who** you will keep in contact with (eg line manager or HR advisor) **how** (eg by phone, email, text, video), and **how often** (eg once a week, once a fortnight, once a month).

Use the Step 1 Actions Checklist to record what you have done so far about your sick leave and use the Step 1 Communications Checklist to help you when you make contact with your employer.

Actions Checklist: Initial sick leave

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (include dates where applicable)
1: Checked the following		
My Managing Attendance and Wellbeing policy and what it means for my pay		
Got a Statement of Fitness for Work, or fit note or know how to get one if I need one (see here for more information)		
2: Talked to the relevant person at work (e.g. line manager or someone else) about		
My sick leave including how my health affects me and long I might be on sick leave		
My employer's sick leave policy and pay		
How I will keep in contact with them during my absence		
What information I would like to be shared to colleagues about my absence		
Handing over any pressing job tasks to my manager/ colleagues		
3: Access any workplace support services		
Find out about mental health support services offered by my employer		
Access any workplace support resources such as Employee Assistance Programmes, occupational health, compassionate employer's hub , counselling, self-care information		

Communication Checklist: Making contact with your employer

What to cover	Example	Have I done this?	Notes
Start off by exchanging pleasantries			
State why you are calling:	<i>"I wanted to talk to you about my sickness absence and the reason I have been off work"</i>		
If you feel comfortable, give them the details of your ill-health.	<i>"I am experiencing..." "I am having trouble with..." "I do not know why, but I feel..."</i>		
Talk about how your ill-health affects your ability to do your job.	<i>"I am finding it difficult to concentrate/ am making mistakes that I do not usually make"</i>		
If relevant – talk about how your work has contributed to your ill-health	<i>"Yesterday a patient was aggressive, and I feel..." "I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work / emails/ tasks I need to do"</i>		
Suggest your preference for communication while off.			
Confidentiality: Tell them whether you would like your reason for absence to be kept confidential to all colleagues/clients or whether you would like your immediate team to be told.			
Your questions: Ask your employer to clarify anything you are unsure about, for example sickness pay, whether they will let HR know etc.			

STEP 2: DURING SICK LEAVE

During your absence, you should keep up with any rehabilitation and treatment activities recommended to you by your GP, healthcare specialist and during any discussions with the occupational health team. It is not unusual for your mood to be affected when you are feeling ill and off sick from work, regardless of your reasons for absence. Reading through and completing the exercises provided here may help improve your wellbeing. They may also help you structure your thoughts about work.

This step is about building your strengths toward mental health and work. It covers three sections:

- 1. Getting treatment and support**
- 2. Taking steps to improve your mental health**
- 3. Keeping in contact with your employer**

1. Getting treatment and support

If your mental health is poor or you are experiencing symptoms of stress, anxiety, panic or depression, it can become difficult to take care of yourself and interact with others. The first step to getting better is to check that you are getting the support you need to manage your wellbeing. If you are not sure where to find support, you can look [here](#) for some advice.

You can self-refer to NHS Talking Therapies to discuss your mental health and/or speak to the GP for mental health support. As well as professional advice, you should seek the support of those around you – your family, friends and colleagues. Please refer to our exercise '[your support network](#)' for help with this.

Telling anyone about your wellbeing is hard because you don't want to be viewed in a different way, treated differently, or discriminated against, or you might not be comfortable opening up about it. To help you get started, you can use some of words in this page:



You may also benefit from speaking to others who have experienced poor mental health. People often find comfort in meeting others who are going through similar experiences.

2. Taking steps to improve your mental health

It is important to do things that make you feel good to improve your mental health. Many people feel guilty about doing these things when they are off work because the things that help us get better are often the things we usually do in non-work time. This may include seeing a friend for coffee, watching a film, sitting in the park. But the strong recommendation is to **give yourself permission to do things you enjoy** without feeling guilty.

You should keep up with any treatment plan set by your health professional.

You might want to try some of the activities listed below to support your wellbeing. Different things work for different people, so try them all until you find something that works for you. Here are some suggestions::

- **Plan your day** and try to do something that is good for you every day.
- **Set some goals to work towards** – these need to be realistic and

achievable. See our exercise on [setting goals and action plans](#)

- **Look after your basic needs** – research shows that there are a number of things that are important to us all for a healthy happy life.
 - [Sleep well](#)
 - [Eat healthily](#)
 - [Be active](#)
 - Connect with others
 - Take notice of your surroundings
 - Learn something new
 - Give back to others

Use our exercise on [ways to wellbeing](#) to help you identify activities that you can do throughout the week to help your wellbeing.

- **Keep a diary** – you could write about how you have felt, what has gone well or not so well each day. Writing can help us process our thoughts and may help you see how things are changing for you. If you don't like writing, try a [gratitude diary, mood diary or mindful/reflective diary](#).

Use the exercises towards the end of this toolkit to find what works for you.

The NHS has lots of tips to help you look after your lifestyle, visit the [ONE YOU](#) , [Live Well](#) or [Mindfulness](#) pages for more information.

It is also important to recognise whether you have any negative **thoughts about work** and if these are contributing to your poor mental health. When you feel low, anxious, or stressed, you may find the ways you're thinking become difficult to cope with or unhelpful, which can make recovery and/or returning to work more difficult. Recognising when you have these types of unhelpful thoughts is a great first step to reducing them. See our exercise on [thoughts about work](#) for help with this.

3. Keeping in contact with your employer

Keep in regular touch with your workplace as it will make it easier for you when you are ready to return to work. Do this in the ways you agreed (see Step 1) and use the Step 2 Communications Checklist for suggestions on what to cover.

You may also find it helpful to arrange to meet a trusted colleague outside of the workplace. You do not need to talk about work, but this can help you to stay connected with work.

Things to Note

1. **Use the exercises** towards the end of this work book to help you improve your mental health during sick leave.
2. **Completing the actions in this step of the toolkit** (and repeating them as often as needed), can help support your mental wellbeing whilst on sick leave and help you manage any concerns about work.
3. The next step will be to develop a Return to Work (RTW) plan. Take a look at the next steps even if you feel you will be off work for a while longer. This does not mean you need to rush to get back to work but it can help you think about when you might be ready to get back.

Actions Checklist: Improving your mental health

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (including dates where applicable)
1. Get treatment and support from professionals:		
Talk to my GP about my mental health and ask about treatment options		
Ask my employer for a referral to occupational health		
Ask for any support available through my workplace (eg counselling, support groups)		
Seek help and advice from mental health charities		
2. Get help and support from others:		
Ask my family, friends and colleagues for support. (See the ‘your support network’ exercise for help with this)		
Find support groups, networks and services in my local area or join an online forum.		
3. Take steps to look after my well-being:		
Engage in other activities to support my well-being (eg action plans , diaries , ways to well-being exercise , thoughts about work exercise)		

Communication Checklist: Keeping in contact with your employer

What to cover	Have I done this?	Notes
Start off by exchanging pleasantries		
If you feel comfortable, update them on the details of your ill-health.		
If you feel comfortable, let them know what you are doing to improve your health (eg trips to GP, receiving therapy etc)		
Let them know if you are any clearer about when you will return to work		
If you feel comfortable, ask how things are going at work.		
Remind them of your preference for communication while off.		
Remind them of your preferences regarding confidentiality.		
Your questions: Ask your employer to clarify anything you are still unsure about.		

STEP 3: PREPARING FOR RETURN TO WORK

Depending on your reason for sick leave and how long it has been, you may be ready to start thinking about returning to work.

Making a return To work plan doesn't mean you need to rush into returning, it just helps put things into place for when you are ready to do so. This gives time to have conversations and preparations and help build your confidence so that things are in a good place when you return.

Everyone is different, but generally:

- the best time to develop a return to work plan is three to four weeks into your sick leave, even if you feel you will be off work for much longer. However, if you're off for less than 3 weeks you might end up completing the different steps at the same time rather than one after the other.
- the plan will be in place for as long as needed. For some this is two weeks, for others four-six weeks, for others it may be six months. The plan will help you while you work out what helps you stay well and in work.
- Make sure to refer to your Trust/Practice policy around return to work planning.

Before you begin this step have a look at our readiness to return to work exercise (Step 3 Exercise 1) in the Appendix to help you decide whether you are ready to move onto this step. If you still have concerns about returning to work, use the questions and concerns activity sheet (see Appendix) to work out who you should discuss these with.

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

- 1. Letting your employer know you are ready**
- 2. Preparing for return to work**
- 3. Having a return to work meeting and making an return to work plan**

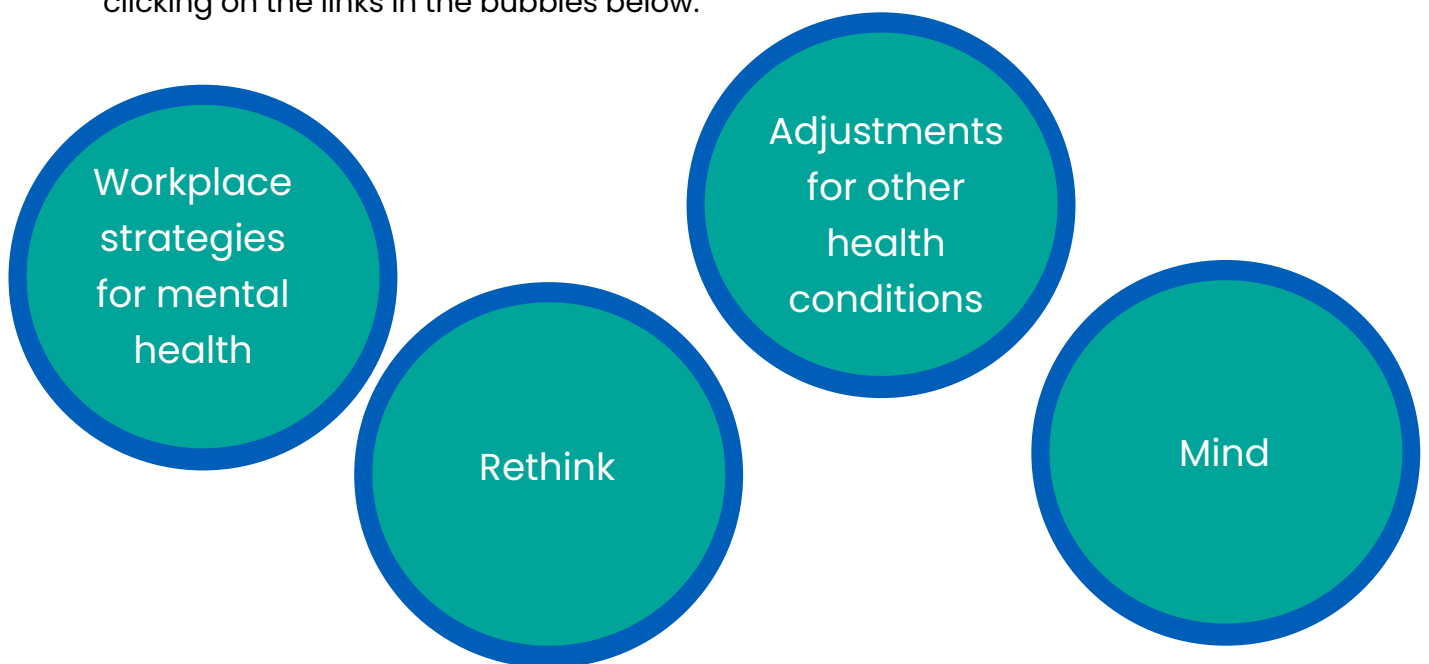
1. Letting your employer know you are ready

Planning your return to work can be difficult, and you might feel that you don't know where to begin. Arranging a return to work meeting with your workplace contact is a good way to start so mention it to your contact. You will be able to discuss where, when and with whom to have the meeting.

2. Preparing for return to work

It is important that you prepare for your return to work meeting so that you can discuss with your employer any changes you may need when you return (e.g. start times, more frequent breaks). These are known as work adjustments.

In Step 3 Exercise 2 you will find a list of possible work adjustments that could be useful (see Appendix). More detail on other work adjustments can be found by clicking on the links in the bubbles below.



We have put together a 'return to work conversation guide' (see Appendix) to help you and your employer prepare for the meeting and to give structure to the meeting itself. Take a look at this so you can prepare what you want to say.

3. Having a return to work meeting and making a plan

Use the return to work conversation guide to help steer you through this meeting.

Many people find it difficult to talk about health and work, including managers. Be confident to steer conversations in ways you think are best for your return. For example, if the manager is only focusing on policies and procedures, give them a chance to talk about your health: it is likely that they are not sure how to discuss this.

Sometimes it can be difficult to talk about what you need to support you at work. Below are some suggestions of how you could use open-ended questions to introduce the topic of work adjustments:

- How can we make sure that my work environment is safe and comfortable?
- Can we discuss what work I can do when I return so that I don't feel overloaded?
- Can we talk about the possibility for me to have flexitime?
- Could we discuss the possibility of task rotation?
- How can we adapt my start and finish time, so I am able to cope with commuting?
- Can we work out a plan for me to have short breaks throughout the day, so I don't get too tired?
- What further training or retraining on XXXX can I get? I am aware things may have changed whilst I've been off...

While it might not be possible to have all the adjustments you want, having a clear idea of what you need and having an open and honest conversation with your work contact will help improve your return to work experience. Remember, this is a joint activity and your employer might have their own requests, so remain flexible about work adjustments.

Use the exercises towards the end of this toolkit to help you prepare for your return to work.

The Step 3 Actions Checklist on the next page covers what you need to do to prepare for your return to work.

Actions Checklist – preparing to return to work

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (including dates where applicable)
1. Do the groundwork		
Check your Trust/Practice’s policy on return to work – use the workplace intranet or handbook or speak to your key contact at work		
Arrange to have a return to work meeting with your employer		
2. Prep work – consider possible work adjustments that may help when you return to work		
Consider changes to hours/shift rota that might help (eg a later start time, regular breaks)		
Consider changes to work duties that might help (eg fewer meetings, face to face patient work, reduce time on feet)		
Consider changes to your physical work environment that might help (eg a quiet room)		
Consider whether you need additional support to help with homeworking		
Consider whether having a colleague meet you on your first day back would help (if returning to worksite)		
Consider any other workplace adjustments that may be helpful		
3. Prep work – go through the return to work conversation guide		
Consider whether you have any health symptoms or triggers that colleagues could look out for		
Think about whether you will need any time off for appointments or health-related activities		

Think about how your health impacts your ability to do your work		
Think about how your work impacts your health and note any adjustments that will help (using learning from above)		
Think about your work priorities and those of the Trust or Practice.		
Think about the impact of any adjustments on your team and what can be done to help this		
4. Attend the return to work meeting		
Use the 'return to work conversation guide' in the meeting		
Agree and complete a return to work action plan with your employer, including how and when it will be reviewed.		

STEP 4: FIRST WEEKS BACK AT WORK

Being back at work after sick leave might feel a little overwhelming to start with. It can take several weeks for you to settle back in, especially if you are slowly increasing your work hours and/or job tasks over the coming weeks. It is important to take your time and be kind to yourself as you go.

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

- 1. Connecting with your manager**
- 2. Connecting with your colleagues**
- 3. Building up your stamina and work fitness**

1. Connecting with your manager

Your employer should follow-up with you once you are back, in line with your agreed return to work plan. You should let them know early on if you are experiencing any problems and need to revisit your workplace adjustments. Keep communication open, honest and specific so your manager knows how you are doing and whether you need more support.

2. Connecting with your colleagues

When you go back to work, having a good connection with your work colleagues and workplace contacts can help you settle in better. It can make all the difference to how you perform at your job and how positive you feel about your workplace.

If you are **homeworking**, communicating remotely can be a bit more difficult, but video and phone calls may help you feel more connected than using email.

3. Building up your stamina and work fitness

Returning to work is exhausting for many people. New noises, people to connect with, changed systems and processes to learn or refamiliarize yourself with. Many people find that they want to 'prove' themselves when they return to work, to show themselves and others that they are ready to be back and that they can perform

as well as they used to do. While this is only natural, it is important to give yourself time to build up your stamina or your work fitness. Take frequent rests when you need them, ask for help when you need it and make sure that people at home are aware you are going back to work and that you might need a little more support than usual at this time. Protecting your health is vital to prevent relapse.

Use the Step 4 Actions Checklist to make sure everything is in place so your return to work can go as smoothly as possible. If any of it isn't, you should raise your concerns with your manager and see what they can do to help.

Actions Checklist: First week back at work

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (including dates where applicable and what I need to do if answered no)
Checked my agreed work adjustments are in place		
Set clear boundaries between work and home (e.g. clear routine for homeworkers, walk for a commute)		
Arranged with my manager how they will check in with me to see how I am doing		
Arranged with my manager/colleagues how they will give feedback to me on the work I am doing		
Raised any concerns I have with my manager		
Been in contact with my colleagues/team		
Spoken to friends and family so that they know I am returning to work and can look out for me and help me if I need it.		

STEP 5: KEEPING HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE AT WORK

When you are back at work, remember to continue to do the things that made you feel well enough to return to work. There are three stages to this section:

- 1. Prioritising your health**
- 2. 'Checking in' with yourself regularly**
- 3. Maintaining your social connections**

1. Prioritising your health

Being back at work might make it a bit more difficult to look after your health but it is important that you keep up with the activities that helped you to get better. This may be keeping up with therapy or exercise, setting small and realistic goals, treating yourself and sticking to a Wellness Action Plan (see Step 2). You may also like to access any workplace resources to keep you healthy, such as employee support groups.

For tips on how to look after your health, visit the NHS website [ONE YOU](#).

2. "Checking in" with yourself regularly

When you have been back at work for a while, your work and your routine should start to feel like normal. Your manager should check in with you regularly to see how you are getting on. You should also check in with yourself to see whether any workplace adjustments can be tweaked and adapted, or whether you are ready to return to your full job.

If you are feeling much better, tell your manager what you would like to do. For example, you might say... "I am feeling ready to take on more responsibility and go back to my previous workload. Specifically"

If you still have concerns, use the [thoughts about your work](#) worksheet to help you identify where certain thoughts are making it difficult for you to cope or are making you worry. You can also use the [questions and concerns](#) worksheet to identify whom you can talk to about your questions or worries and set a date for

when you will do this by. It is important you do this as soon as possible so your worries and concerns do not build up.

3. Maintaining your social connections

Friends, colleagues, line managers, charities and work and health professionals all have a role to play in helping you return and stay productive and healthy at work. Reaching out and chatting to people in your support network about how you feel may help you manage your worries and stop them from building up and affecting your wellbeing.

The Step 5 Actions Checklist will remind you of the actions you need to take to ensure you stay healthy and productive at work.

Actions Checklist: Keeping healthy and productive at work

What to do	Have I done this?	Notes (including dates where applicable and what I need to do if answered no)
<i>For my health, I have done the following...</i>		
Identified any useful support groups or networks at work and have joined		
Accessed workplace support resources such as counselling, self-care information		
Kept in touch with my manager/occupational health advisor about how I'm doing		
Made use of a mental health first aider/work buddy		
Kept in touch with GP, therapist, support group		
Taken regular rest breaks		
Kept up with other activities that support my well-being		
<i>I have checked in regularly with myself to consider...</i>		
What has been going well		
What could be improved		
<i>To help with my social connections, I have...</i>		
Attended social events with colleagues, whether online or in person		
Spoken to a colleague/team about work or more generally at least every week to build social support		
Reached out to friends and family		

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.

There are five stages to this section:

- 1. What is job crafting?**
- 2. What are the benefits of job crafting?**
- 3. Examples of job crafting**
- 4. Case studies**
- 5. How to job craft to stay well in work**

1. What is job crafting

There are four 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
- Environmental job crafting – making small changes to your physical working environment
- Cognitive job crafting – changing the way that you see your job

Not all forms of job crafting will be possible in all roles. This is especially true for roles where employees work directly with patients or in emergency care. But it's important to recognise that even in these jobs, there will be opportunities to adjust some aspects of the work. For instance, employees might be able to tweak their schedules slightly or find new ways to collaborate with colleagues. Being aware of the different ways you can shape your job to your needs will help you manage your 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 different ways that someone can job craft – these small changes could make a real difference. Some examples 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

- Talk about communication to help you work at your best, e.g. bullet point instructions in an email rather than spoken face to face.
- Sharing information about what you can and can't do at work with colleagues
- Agree regular one to one meetings with your line manager or mentor

Environmental Job Crafting

- Working from home if possible when you need 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 you can do in the day, in the next few months
- Looking at the bigger picture, how does your job fit in
- Raising awareness of health in your Trust/Practice

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.

How to job craft to stay well at work

While some people find that job crafting happens naturally, it can be helpful to use a structured approach and to involve your line manager in the process. This way, you can make sure that you are doing what is needed of you in your job, but in a way that works for you and for your Trust/Practice.

It can be helpful to think about 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

Use the exercises to get you started. You can use the exercises to prepare for job crafting possibilities and explore what aspects of work you may wish to propose to your manager.

After these initial steps it is helpful to trial your job crafting plan, discuss with your line manager how long you will trial the plan for and when you will meet to review and tweak your plan.

SUMMARY

Returning to work is a process, and over time you should find that you are back into the routine of your job. But remember, depending on the reason of your long-term sick leave, you may feel better on some days and find that on other days you're managing less well. The activities and resources in this toolkit can be used as many times as you need.

If you find you're managing less well, you may want to go back to some of the activities in this toolkit to help support you, which is okay to do. You may also want to speak to your GP or see the following section for links to further guidance and support.

Where to go for further information

Mental wellbeing

- [Mind](#) (mental health charity)
- [CALM](#) (movement against suicide)
- [Men's Health Forum](#) (charity)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Samaritans](#) (mental health charity)
- [NHS mental health and work](#) (advice)

Physical health

- [Diabetes UK](#)
- [Blood pressure UK](#)
- [Arthritis Foundation \(muscle/joint pain\)](#)
- [British Lung Foundation](#)
- [British Heart Foundation](#)
- [Working with long COVID | CIPD](#)

Visit our IGLOO website at www.returntowork.co.uk to find:

- Further information on local services and professional support
- To find out about the latest research.
- An online version of this toolkit
- Other IGLOO toolkits designed for human resource and occupational health professionals, leaders and line managers and colleagues.
- Downloadable resources to support your return to work

Exercises to help you to return to and stay in work

In this section you will find a selection of exercises that have been designed to support you on your return to work journey.

Everyone is different, and everyone has different needs. What works for one person, doesn't necessarily work for someone else.

Try these exercises to see which ones help you prepare for your return to work.

Many people find that they need to continue these exercises once they have returned to work to give them the best chance of staying happy and healthy. You can return to these exercises as many times as you need to.

Step 2 Exercise 1: Your support network

When you are feeling unwell, you can sometimes avoid talking to others including partners, friends or family, and avoid social situations. You might also find it hard to accept support, or you might be worried about being seen as weak. But being alone can make you feel worse and friends, family and colleagues want you to feel better. Having a social connection is an important step towards recovery.

Everyone's support network looks different. For some, it's family, for others its co-workers or friends or sometimes even someone whom you don't know that well, but you feel comfortable talking to. What's important is to recognise the people who you can rely on and can help you be more resilient whilst on sick leave.

If you already have people that can support you, record it in the table below and note how they could help you.

My Support Network

What form of support would be helpful right now?	Which person or groups could provide me with that support?	How could I obtain support from them?	When will I do this by?	Date completed
<i>Example: I need someone to talk to about my wellbeing</i>	<i>Example: Terry, my friend</i>	<i>Example: we'll go out for a drink and I'll tell him</i>	<i>Example: Friday 18th</i>	<i>Example: Monday 21st</i>
<i>Example: I need help with understanding my workplace's sick leave policy</i>	<i>Example: Sally from HR</i>	<i>Example: I will email her</i>	<i>Example: Tomorrow (Tuesday 15th)</i>	<i>Example: Tuesday 15th</i>

Step 2 Exercise 2: Setting goals and action plans

If you find it difficult to make changes to your routine such as including or increasing your physical activity, developing an **action plan** can really help. An action plan helps you to set a **goal**, no matter how small. Writing down your goal helps you to think about it more clearly and helps your mind to focus on what actions will assist you to reach your goal.

A good action plan should be:

1. **Manageable.** Your plan should be realistic, small changes are easier to start with.
2. **Action-oriented.** Make a plan for what you will do, not what you feel you need to do.
3. **Specific.** Note down the steps you will take to reach your goal, any obstacles that might stop you reaching your goal and to overcome them.
4. **Time-limited.** Set a deadline for meeting your goal. If you find you have not done much to meet your goal, you can adjust it or adjust your actions. You can also build your goals as you get confident in meeting them.

Remember, your goal could be anything that is important for your health and it can be as small as you need to, to help your recovery. For example, getting a nap every day, making yourself breakfast or going out for a walk. See the example below.

Action plan – completed example

Print this template as many times as you need to.

Date	Wednesday 5 th Jan 2023
My goal	To make breakfast for myself
What steps do I need to take for my goal?	Decide what food I want, leave the house, go into the shop, buy breakfast,
What will stop me from reaching my goal?	I don't have the energy to go out I don't like being in crowds
What will I do to overcome my obstacles?	I will shop online to make sure I have food at home I will go later in the day when shops are less busy I will ask someone to come with me for the first time I try
How often will I work on my own goal?	I will try this every morning to make it a habit
When do you want to achieve your goal by?	By February 16 th (my birthday) I will have had breakfast every morning that week
<i>Goal check</i>	
Date	20 th Jan
Have I met my goal?	Not yet. I had breakfast three mornings this week
Why did this work/not work?	I didn't like the breakfast I chose
What will I do next? (note here, and then complete another action plan, if needed)	I will have a few options available at home I will ask Jean to check in on me to help me to take action when I forget/ don't manage

Action plan - template

Print this template as many times as you need to.

Date	
My goal	
What steps do I need to take for my goal?	
What will stop me from reaching my goal?	
What will I do to overcome my obstacles?	
How often will I work on my own goal?	
When do you want to achieve your goal by?	
<i>Goal check</i>	
Date	
Have I met my goal?	
Why did this work/not work?	
What will I do next? (note here, and then complete another action plan, if needed)	

Step 2 Exercise 3: Ways to wellbeing

Research shows that there are a number of things that we can do to help keep ourselves happy and healthy. Work through this checklist and see if there are any ways you could improve your wellbeing

For support on how to help yourself in these areas, see the NHS websites [ONE YOU](#), [Live Well](#) or [Mindfulness](#) and the [Mind website](#).

Ways to wellbeing	Do I do enough of this?	Action to improve my wellbeing
<p>Sleep Getting enough sleep and good quality sleep each night helps our body and mind recover and prepare for the next day.</p>		
<p>Eat Eating a healthy balanced diet is important for our physical and mental health.</p>		
<p>Move Keeping active is good for our physical and mental health. For example, walk, cycle, run, go to the gym, take up yoga. Find an activity that you enjoy.</p>		
<p>Connect with others Social connections help our mental health. For example, arrange to meet a friend for lunch or a walk, visit neighbours.</p>		

<p>Take notice</p> <p>Reflecting on what is going on around you helps our mind health. For example, look at nature, your surroundings.</p>		
<p>Learn</p> <p>Learning new things helps us build self-esteem. For example, sign up for a course, learn a new skill from a friend, read a book.</p>		
<p>Give</p> <p>Giving back to others makes us feel good. For example, volunteer in your community, help others with shopping/ tasks, do something nice for a stranger.</p>		
<p>Do things that make you feel happy</p> <p>For example things you used to do that made you feel good before you became ill</p>		
<p>Do things you are good at</p> <p>For example things that you enjoy and know that you can do well</p>		

Step 2 Exercise 4: Write a diary

Gratitude diary

Why: Keeping a gratitude diary has been found to have many benefits. We rarely make time to think about what we are grateful for. Keeping a gratitude diary can help re-programme our brains to recognise the positive things in our lives and our environment. This can kick start a cycle of positive thoughts and improve your mental health.

How: Write down three things that you are grateful for. You can be grateful for anything – it is your diary. But try to be as specific as you can. Repeat every day for at least three weeks and see if you notice a change!

Mood diary

Why: Understanding when you are at your best – and worst – can help you organise your day. You can then do the most important things when you are at your peak and develop ways of managing the times or tasks you find difficult.

How: Write down what you are doing and how you are feeling every two hours over a week. It doesn't matter if you miss some, or if you fill it in a few hours late. The aim is to reflect on what you are doing and how you feel over the week.

Journal

Why: Writing can help us become aware of our thinking patterns, for example if you have repetitive negative thoughts. Journaling helps you to be mindful of your day in terms of what went well. It reduces negative thoughts by thinking about ways to improve on things that were challenging.

How: Write what ever comes to mind about your day, you might want to write about what went well today, what didn't go so well and what could be done differently tomorrow. This can help you recognise small changes that can help you cope better and behave in way that moves you towards your goals in the future.

Step 2 Exercise 5: Thoughts about work

When you feel low, anxious, or stressed, you may find the ways you're thinking [feeling or reacting] become difficult to cope with or unhelpful. These types of thoughts can make recovery and/or returning to work more difficult. Recognising when you have these types of unhelpful thoughts is a great first step to reducing them. See Table 1 below for types of unhelpful thoughts.

Table 1: Types of unhelpful thoughts

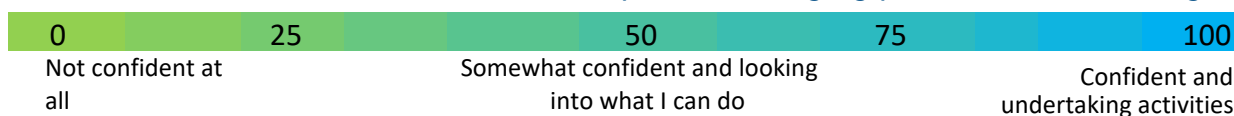
Styles of thinking	What is it?	What is an example of it?
Fortune telling	You automatically anticipate things will turn out badly	Thinking 'I'm not going to get better'
Catastrophising	You worry about extreme and horrible outcomes to a situation	You make a mistake at work and you think you will lose your job
All-or-nothing thinking	Thinking about things in black or white categories	You think you are either a success or a failure
Overgeneralising	A single negative event is seen as a never-ending pattern	You get poor feedback on a project and you think 'I will always get poor feedback'
Mislabelling	You attach negative labels to yourself	Thinking 'I'm no good at this'
Magnification and minimisation.	You automatically assume the worst, or you play down a positive situation	Not valuing your own contribution to a project
Negative filtering	You find it hard not to focus on single negative details	You get lots of positive feedback, but you focus on the one negative feedback
Mind reading	You believe other people always have negative thoughts about you	For example, a new neighbour ignores you and you think 'it's because they don't like me'
Emotional reasoning	You feel your negative views about yourself or a situation is how things really are	For example, 'I feel it, so it must be true'.
'Should' statements	You try to motivate yourself with 'should statements', leading to negative feelings.	For example, you believe you 'should' clean the house every day, but you do not have the time to do it, and then you feel guilty

1.Situation or event	2.What I am thinking	3.How I am feeling about it	4.Is this an unhelpful thought? (<u>match from list</u>)	Looking at it another way			
				5.Is this always true? What is the evidence?	6.What will happen if my thoughts in no. 2 continue this way?	7.What should I be thinking that is more encouraging or useful?	8.How can I practice this alternative thought? Who can support me?
Example: My manager asked lots of questions about my job and what needed to be handed over, and only asked one question about my health	Example: My sick leave is a nuisance to my manager as it has added extra work for them to sort out my workload	Example: Worried and anxious that I am causing problems for everyone	Example Magnification, mind-reading, emotional reasoning	Example: No, my manager did reassure me that my workplace is supporting me during my sick leave	Example: I will expect the worst and will worry even when things are good between myself and my workplace	Example: My manager wants to help me stop worrying about work whilst I am on sick leave by making sure my important tasks get done	Example: Thinking of positive past experiences with my manager, discussing with trusted colleagues, workplace coach

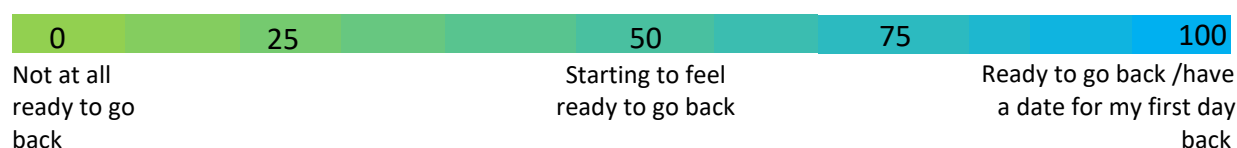
If you feel a work situation or a worry is leading you to an unhelpful thought, complete the table below. This may help you process your thoughts and to see if there could be another way to look at your situation or manage your worry. You can come to this activity whenever you find yourself having unhelpful thoughts.

Step 3 Exercise 1: Readiness to return to work

On a scale of 1 – 100, how confident are you in managing your mental wellbeing?



On a scale of 1 – 100, how ready do you feel to return to work at this moment?



YOUR SCORES

If you scored **less than or around 50** on both scales, you may still have concerns about your health and how you feel about going back to work. If that is the case, you may want to:

- Talk to your GP or other healthcare professional about your concerns
- Complete the [questions and concerns](#) worksheet below to help you identify who else could help you address your concerns
- Revisit some sections from in **STEP 2**.

If you scored **over 50** and you don't have any significant concerns about your health or returning to work, continue onto **STEP 3: preparing to return to work**. If you do have concerns, you may want to talk to your GP first.

Step 3 Exercise 2: Questions and concerns

Use this worksheet to note any questions and concerns that you might have whilst preparing to return to work and when you are back at work. You can print off the worksheet as many times as you need to, in order to record any questions and concerns that you might have over time.

My questions or concern	Who can I talk to about this?					Date completed
	Partner/ family	Friends/ colleagues	HR, line manager or employer	GP, counsellor, mental health charity	Advisory services/ Union rep	
<i>Example: What if I am never ready to return to work?</i>	<i>Example: I'm single</i>	<i>Example: My friend Smaira</i>	<i>Example: Amanda Day</i>	<i>Example: My GP and Mind Charity</i>	<i>Example: Citizen's Advice</i>	<i>Example: Spoke to my GP on Wednesday 5th. Had a chat with Amanda on Friday 7th and feel reassured that I will be supported on my return</i>

Step 3 Exercise 3: Work adjustments

Work adjustment	Would any of these work adjustments help me work well? (notes*)
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	
Identify how mood changes depending on the time of day and tasks in order to tackle more challenging tasks when 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 customers/public – e.g. divert phone – 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 with opportunity to come in while on sick leave to keep up to date with what is going on in the office.	

*If so, think about how you can ask for this adjustment in a way that gives you the best opportunity of making it happen? Consider the benefits to you and the knock on effects to others you work with.

Step 3: Return to work conversation guide

This guide provides an example structure of a return to work conversation

	What to expect	What to be prepared to talk about – Examples for you to use as a guide
Setting the scene	1. Hello and how are you?	<p>It is likely that your manager will try to set you at ease. Think about how you want to respond. When we haven't prepared, we sometimes say too much or too little. You could also say: "How has everyone been? What changes have there been since I have been away from work?"</p>
	2. An outline of the process	<p>Your manager will outline the purpose of the meeting. They may say "There will be some things that we can change or put in place, but there may be things that we can not change. We can work together to agree the best way forward." "The conversation will cover three things. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about how your health might affect your work, and how your work might affect your health, so we can think about this as we plan and organise your work. • Talk about how we can balance your needs with the needs of the Trust/Practice. • Put together a return to work plan. The plan will include your work activities, how we monitor your work and health, and how we communicate the plan to the rest of the team/clients." <p>They may also say: "Just because you are coming back to work, doesn't mean you have to go back to the full job straight away: it might be a little while before you feel ready for that."</p>

	What to expect	Why this is important	What to think about and say
About your health	3. Questions about how you are feeling about your health	You do not have to give full details about your illness, but providing some information can help you access help and support.	Think about what you want to say. You may say:.. "I am feeling much better in some ways. For example, I can do..... But I still find that I am tired/ it difficult to concentrate etc.. '
	4. Understand the impact of medication, psychotherapeutic treatment or health-related activity on work	It can be helpful to have protected time for treatment or adjustments to work to take medication.	Think about what you need to stay well and be clear about what your manager/ workplace can do to help you do this.
	5. Understanding signs and triggers	It can be helpful to know about specific signs or triggers so that you can help to prevent relapse.	Think about what you want to tell them. What signs/ signals would be helpful for them to know? How can they help you if they notice them? What should they say?

	What to expect	Why this is important	What to think about and say
About your work	6. Understand the impact of health on your work	Many employees are worried about specific aspects of the job. Understanding your concerns will help identify where help is needed and prevent future problems.	What are you worried about? Are there things you would find easy to start with? Are there some things you would prefer to have a buddy to work with you on to start with?
	7. Understand how work may be affecting your health	Many people say that work makes existing health problems worse.	Might work impact your health or slow your recovery? If you have any concerns now is the time to raise them.
	8. Manager/ business concerns. .	It is important to consider the Trust/Practice's needs, your managers needs and your team's needs alongside your own needs as a returning employee.	Some of your suggested changes might not be possible. Be prepared for this. Think about a few alternatives so that you can suggest these if the first idea is not possible.

	What to expect	Why this is important	What to think about and say
Identify priorities and adjustments	9. Explore tasks, priorities and adjustments	Thinking about the different tasks and how the job is done can help you identify areas that might need to change during the return.	<p>You will need to agree which tasks are priorities and which adjustments are put in place.</p> <p>Remember, you might need to try things out for a few weeks before you know whether they work or not.</p>
Think about the team	10. Consider the impact of any adjustments on the team	It is helpful to anticipate any impact of adjustments or changes on others so that this can be carefully managed.	<p>Think about what you want others to know.</p> <p>Think about who you would like to tell them.</p>

	What to expect	Why this is important	What to think about and say
Plan	11. Develop and agree a return to work plan	If a plan is in place then everyone is clear on what has been agreed and what needs to be done.	Think about how you will know things are working well. What will you say or do if things need to change? What would you like your manager to say or do if they need something to change?
Gaining agreement from	12. Explain if you need to get agreement from others before completing return to work plan	Some changes involve other people, or are changes to your working contract.	Every Trust/Practice is different. Ask if you can provide any more information to help any adjustments get actioned.

Summary of discussion – Template

People present:

Date of discussion:

Nature of the absence	
Impact of medication, psychotherapeutic treatment or health-related activity on work	
Signs and triggers	
Impact of your health on your work	
Aspects of work to consider	

Manager / business concerns	
Agreed priorities and adjustments	
Success criteria – how do we know things are working?	
These adjustments will be reviewed on...	
If adjustments are not working for either the person or the business, we will....	

Step 6. Exercise 1: Preparing for job crafting- A good day at work

To prepare for job crafting possibilities it can be helpful to think about what you do during a day at work, and break this down into: Tasks, Relational, Environmental and Cognitive.

What would these parts of your job look like on a good day, to help you thrive at work?

A day at work – what do you do...	On a good day what would this look like...
Tasks	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Relational (meetings, communication moments by phone, email, line management, lunch with a colleague)	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Environmental (Your desk, commute, start time, breaks):	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Cognitive (What do you think about your job? How does your role contribute to the bigger picture?) :	
1.	
2.	
3.	

Step 6 Exercise 2: Exploring job crafting possibilities: small changes

Write down 2 or 3 small changes you could make on a regular basis (every day or every week)

How would these small changes help you to thrive at work more often?

Type of crafting	Small changes I could make...	How this would help me thrive at work more of the time...
Task	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
Relational	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
Environmental	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
Cognitive	1.	
	2.	
	3.	

Step 6 Exercise 3: Developing a job crafting plan

Before discussing job crafting with your line manager it is helpful to make a job crafting plan, listing the job crafting possibilities you would like to trial, why this will be helpful, what impact it might have on others or the business and what can be done to limit the impact.

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



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

Email: hello@affinityhealthatwork.com

Online version of this toolkit: www.returntowork.co.uk

Visit us on www.affinityhealthatwork.com

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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:

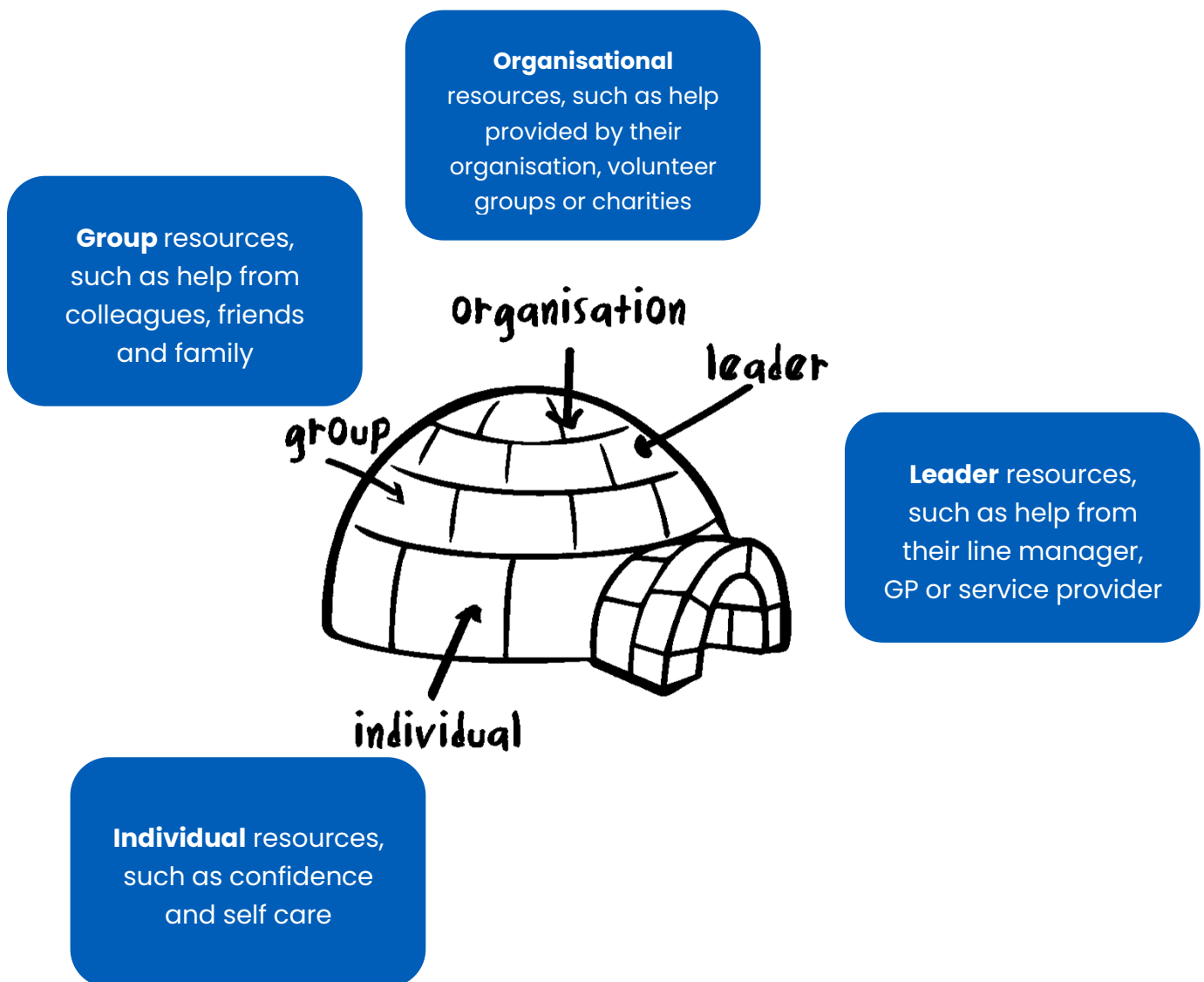
Physical Signs	Behavioural Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness or low energy • Easily distracted • Reporting headaches • Looking uneasy • Mentions general pain • Mentions trouble sleeping • Taking lots of short term sick leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggling with workload • 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

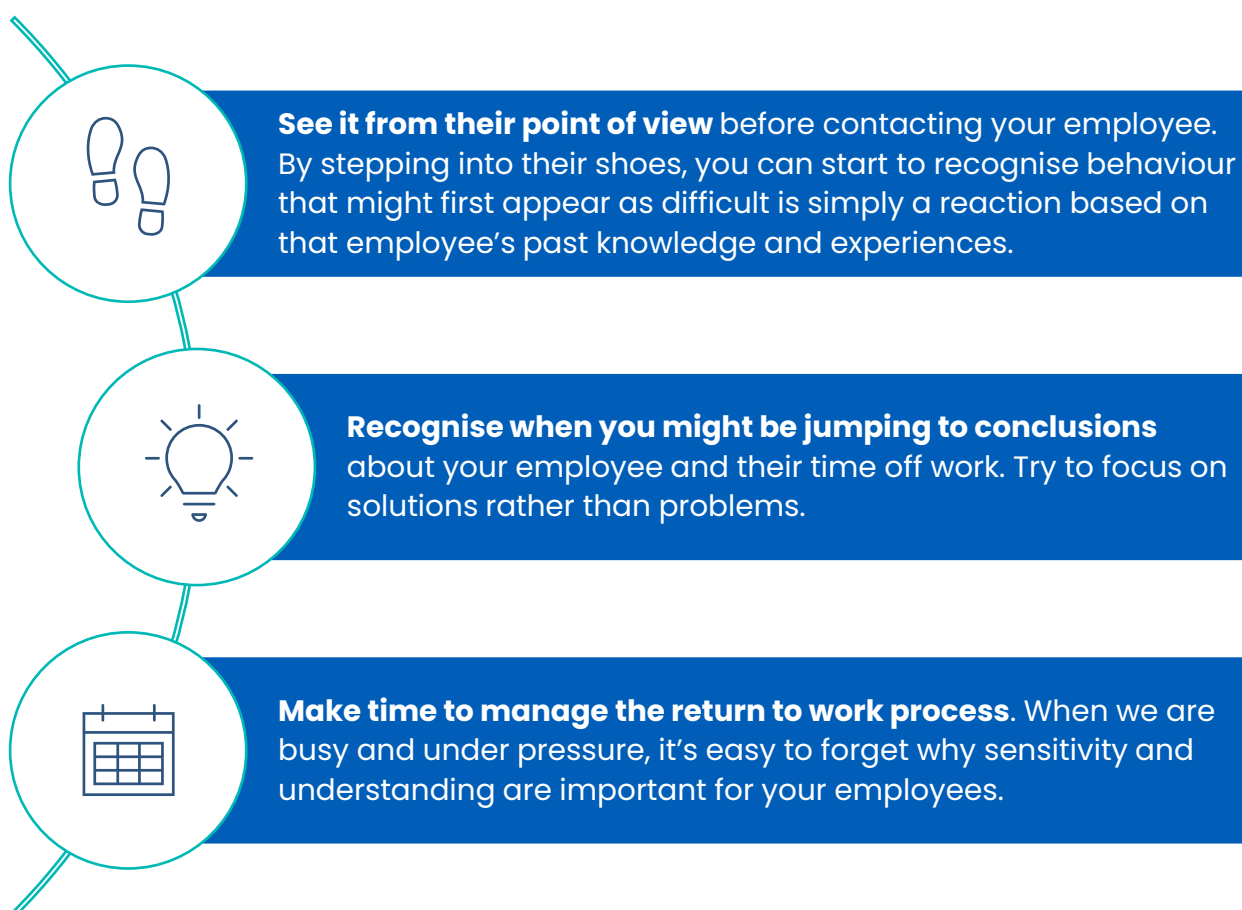
- Task job crafting
- Relational job crafting
- Cognitive job crafting



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

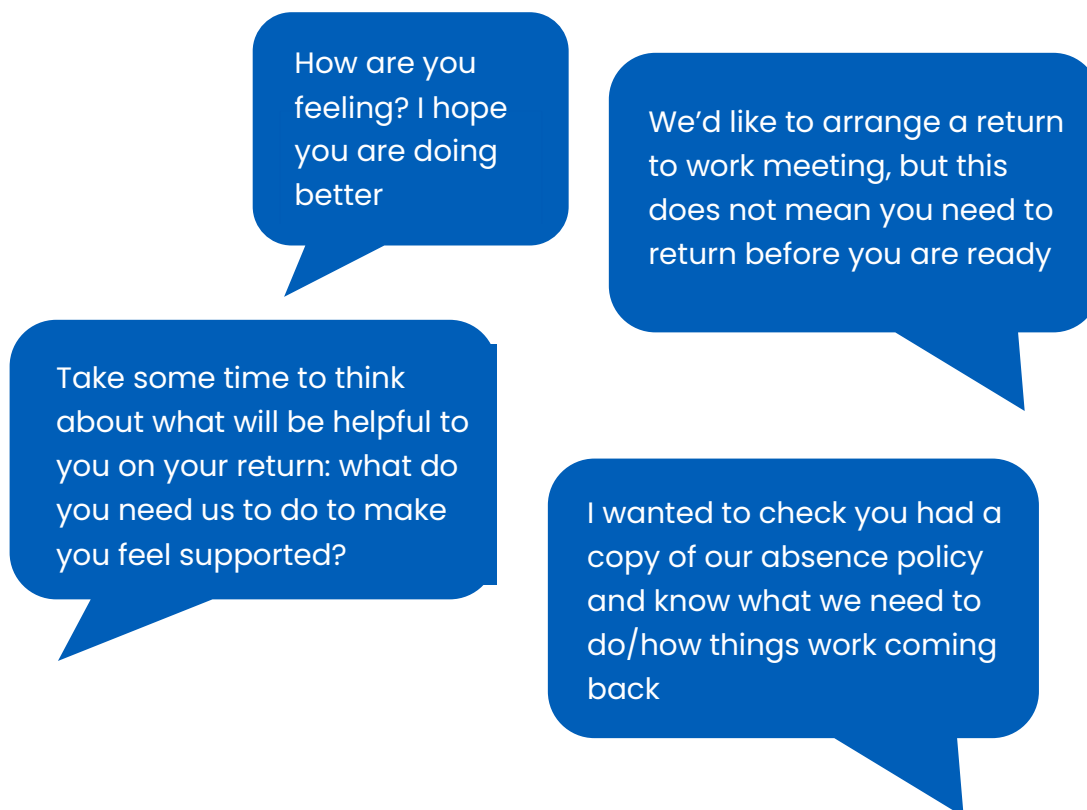
**Get yourself in the right mindset
before each conversation – be professional yet understanding and practice
active listening.**

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 losing 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.	