

Return-to-Work Conversation

Welcome someone back after a mental health absence, and plan the return together

The first conversation after time off sets the tone for the return. Done well, it makes someone feel welcome and gives them a plan. Done badly, or not at all, it can make coming back harder than the absence itself.

The aim is a supportive, practical conversation about work. You do not need to know the details of anyone's health, and they do not have to share them.

IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

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Before they return

- Read any fit note or occupational health advice, and check with HR on process.
- Agree with the employee what, if anything, colleagues will be told.
- Book the conversation for their first morning, somewhere private.
- Think about what has changed while they were away, and how to update them without overwhelming them.

The conversation

QUESTION	NOTES
Welcome back. How are you feeling about being here?	
Is there anything you want me or the team to know, or not to know?	
What would help in the first few weeks?	
Are there any parts of the job you are worried about?	
How would you like us to check in, and how often?	

The return plan

	AGREED
Hours or phasing for the first weeks	
Workload and priorities	
Adjustments, if any	
Check-in dates	
Who to contact if things get harder	
Review date	

REMEMBER

A phased return is a plan, not a test. Expect some ups and downs, keep the check-ins going after things seem settled, and adjust as you go.