



# GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS OF EMPLOYEES RETURNING FROM MEDICAL LEAVES

The process of working with an employee returning to work after a medical leave can be challenging at times, for both an employee and their supervisor. Normally all parties have some concerns and anxieties about what is the best way to handle the reentry. Following are some general recommendations to consider before and during the transition back to work for an employee which may make the situation easier for all parties. We encourage you to consider these ahead of time if possible, and to consult one of our offices if you have any particular concerns in any given situation.

## PRIOR TO AN EMPLOYEE'S RETURN TO WORK

At some point during an employee's leave call them and wish them well. Instead of asking "when are you coming back?" you should ask "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Research has shown that communication from a supervisor to an employee while they are on leave is one of the most positive determinants to a successful return to work transition.

- Collect and assimilate all departmental communications that have transpired during the employee's absence
- If applicable, make a list of any changes in the employee's work assignments
- If possible, assign a coworker to review with the returning employee changes that may have occurred during the employee's absence
- Develop your own checklist of expectations, with estimated timetables that you can subsequently review with the employee
- Check with your Unit HR representative (or central HR representative) about any particular concerns the employee may have
- Consider the priorities you need them to address, so that they will know your expectations, with appropriate timetables.

## WHEN THE EMPLOYEE RETURNS TO WORK

At a Return to Work transition meeting and during first week of the employee's return:

- Acknowledge to the employee that it is normal for them to have some anxieties and questions about their return to work.
- Acknowledge that you are not going to divulge (or have) any medical diagnostic or personal medical information about their leave or condition.
- Provide the employee with the compilation of the communications and staffing changes (if any) that have occurred within the department while they were on leave.
- Assign them to meet formally with each other unit/department member to get an update from them on what they believe are significant changes and occurrences while they were on leave.

Assign a completion date:

- If feasible, consider alternate work hours if that will assist with the employee's return to work transition.
- Set up some regular "check in" meetings to check status and give encouragement and feedback.

Supervisors who need additional information and assistance with facilitating an employee's return to work following an illness or injury are encouraged to contact the Faculty and Staff Counseling and Consultation Office (<http://fascco.umich.edu/>), Telephone: (734) 936-8660 or Email: [fascco@umich.edu](mailto:fascco@umich.edu).

## GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES RETURNING FROM MEDICAL LEAVES

Returning to work after a medical leave can be challenging for many people. It is normal to have some difficulties in making this transition. It is common to have both physical and emotional symptoms during this

process. Below are some things to consider as you plan your return to work. Thinking about these things ahead of time may help you return to work smoothly. Some suggestions may not apply to your situation.

## PRIOR TO RETURNING TO WORK

Consider these coping skills to deal with stress.

Get support from others.

- Talk to people who you trust about your frustrations, feelings and concerns.
- Inform them that you simply need them to listen. Merely being heard can help.
- Talk to people who share your illness/condition. This can help you gain information and support.

Monitor your mood.

- Monitor your ability to take pleasure in your usual interests and hobbies. Are you generally losing interest in these things?
- Recognize your mood, especially feelings down in the dumps/blue/depressed.
- Watch for symptoms of fatigue.
- Report these symptoms to your primary care doctor.

Watch for worries and anxiety.

- Recognize feelings of nervousness about returning to work. Does this nervousness keep you from doing your usual activities?
- Identify whether you are concerned about what others think of you when you return to work.

Are you embarrassed or ashamed about your absence? Sometimes merely identifying your thoughts and worries can reduce their severity.

Monitor your thoughts.

- Practice positive, logical self-talk.
- Watch for negative thoughts about yourself, your condition and others.
- Being positive attracts others to you and impacts the way you feel.

Assess your physical pain and symptoms.

- Watch for the impact that physical pain may have on you.
- For instance, does it make you more irritable or moody?
- Think about things that may make it easier for you.

Educate yourself about your illness and treatment options.

- Do you understand your physician orders?
- Does your physician have any concerns about your return to work?
- Do you understand your medication regimen?
- Are you following through with your doctors orders?

Are you worried about your long term health? If so, try to identify the specific concerns. This might lead you to practical solutions.

Monitor your sleep pattern. Do you sleep more or less than eight hours? If so, share this information with your physician.

Have you gained weight or had changes in your appetite?

Get organized. Keep a file on all your insurance claims, dates, payments received and payments you have made.

## AFTER YOUR RETURN TO WORK

Continue to consider the previous suggestions even after you return to work.

Enlist the support of co-workers whom you trust.

Consider what to say to co-workers when you return.

- Rehearse these comments beforehand.
- You are not required to disclose details about your health condition.
- You may want to consider the following examples:
  - “I had some medical procedures done.”
  - “I was out on doctor’s orders.”
  - “I had some health issues that I had to take care of.”
  - “I had a medical condition that was being looked at.”

If possible, enlist the support of your supervisor.

Prepare for your discussion with your supervisor by making a list ahead of your conversation. Remember to ask or discuss the following questions:

- What changes have occurred while you were out?
- Have there been any staff changes?
- Are there any new job assignments or expectations for your job?
- Are there any new policies or procedures that you should know?
- Discuss any considerations you may need to return to work.

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## OTHER RESOURCES

- For help with questions about benefits or payroll, contact the SSC Contact Center at (734) 615-2000.
- For information and resources to help staff and supervisors with requesting a medical leave of absence or an extension of a previously granted medical leave of absence, consult the Leave of Absence Toolkit (<https://myumi.ch/Z3wkJ>)
- For other resources related to an employee’s long-term absence, visit Resources for Managing Absences Due to Injury or Illness. (<https://myumi.ch/4r5e6>)
- For counseling and other resources to help faculty, staff and supervisors with the transition back to work, contact the university’s Mental Health Counseling and Consultation Services (<https://myumi.ch/5JxA3>) (Faculty and Staff Counseling and Consultation Office and the Michigan Medicine Office of Counseling and Workplace Resilience).



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