



# RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM (RTW)

## TOOLS FOR MANAGERS

### HOW TO CONDUCT A RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEW

*“Two out of three employees believe that return-to-work interviews have cut employee absence rates,” according to a study by Personnel Today.*

A return to work interview should be carried out as part of an organization’s absence management policy. Depending on your work environment, the interview may be formal or informal. Whichever approach you use, a record should be kept of the interview, however brief.

### INTERVIEW KEY POINTS

- Welcome employee back to work
- Ensure that the employee is fully fit to return to work by requesting & reviewing medical documentation
- Establish the reasons for absence and what treatment has been sought (any questions regarding treatment should be directly related to job requirements)
- Discuss whether any challenges may arise from work
- Check any paperwork regarding absence (ie: occupational health reports) raise any concerns if there are discrepancies and give the employee the opportunity to explain
- Bring the employee up-to-date with news from the team, department and organization as a whole
- Establish priorities and work plan
- Agree to any reasonable adjustments

### HOW TO SET UP THE INTERVIEW

- Make sure the employee is given **warning** of the interview so that it is not sprung on them. He or she needs to know the time and place for the meeting, and it should be before returning to their workstation
- The interview should be held in **private** and given sufficient time for any discussions. Holding the conversation in the middle of a busy office or on the way to an important meeting is not appropriate and will not help achieve the aims.
- The boundaries for **confidentiality** need to be set and understood by the employee. Medical information should only be shared on a need-to-know basis and be strictly relevant to job duties.

### POTENTIAL DIFFICULTY OF RETURN TO WORK INTERVIEWS AFTER STRESS RELATED ABSENCE

- If an employee has been absent from work due to a stress related illness, the manager conducting the interview must take into account the **emotions** that the employee may have. These may include **shame** and **embarrassment**, and may mean that the employee is reluctant to talk about their absence. The manager will need to take time to establish understanding and build the trust of the employee.

### APPROACH TO BE USED DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Be **supportive** - Remain **open-minded**
- **Listen** – stop talking, allow time for the employee to think and speak
- **Concentrate** and fact-finding
- **Ask questions** without being too intrusive

