Guide for Employees

What can you do to make sure you thrive on your return to work
Returning to work after a period of absence can bring mixed feelings. Often people are looking forward to returning to a sense of normality, but are also 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. In fact did you know that 1 in 6 people experience mental ill health and 1 in 3 ‘fit notes’ signed by doctors are for mental ill-health?

This guide is designed to help you during the first few months of your return to work. It draws from the latest evidence to outline what works, and what does not, when it comes to getting back to work safely, and productively.

You can’t do it all by yourself. When we are unwell we need help from others. Colleagues, friends and family, line managers and others can help you build your IGLOO. Remember, with a range of people to support you, you are much more likely to stay in and be productive at work.
What is stress, anxiety and depression?
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 – you may find it helpful to share this information at work if you find it difficult to describe how your mental health impacts you:

- **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or irritable, mood changes, changes in how you interact with colleagues, too much emotion, feeling isolated or socially withdrawn.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.

Understanding your IGLOo
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:

**Individual** resources – like confidence, self-care

**Group** resources – help from colleagues, friends and family

**Organisational** resources – help provided by your organisation, volunteer groups or charities

Your IGLOo for returning to work following mental ill-health includes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At home the following actions help returning employees</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>At work, the following help returning employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising self-care</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Creating structure in the working day</td>
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<td>Establishing clear boundaries between work and leisure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding from others</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Receiving feedback on tasks from colleagues</td>
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<td>Receiving non-judgmental support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting help when doing challenging tasks</td>
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<td>Having a consistent point of contact</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Being treated as you did before not as someone with mental ill-health</td>
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<td>Facilitating of links to external services and treatment</td>
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<td>Accessing work-focused counselling</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Agreeing what information about the absence and return is communicated to colleagues</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Continuing to provide support and work adjustments</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being available but not intrusive</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing flexible working practices and leave policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providing work-focused counselling</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Demonstrating care through support</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Establishing a culture where mental health is not stigmatised</td>
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</table>

For more details on signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, and the possible impact on work – visit Every Mind Matters
How strong is your IGLOo?

Use the checklist here to test the strength of your IGLOo and help you to build a strong IGLOo.

1. Look at the checklist. Read the statements in the ‘Do I...’ column. Think about whether you would answer ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘sometimes’. Mark your answer in the column.

2. Use the checklist here to test the strength of your IGLOo. If you answer yes to these questions, you have a strong IGLOo. If you answer ‘sometimes’ or ‘no’ think about whether this would be helpful to you.

3. What else do you need/need to do? If you answer ‘sometimes’ or ‘no’ what needs to happen to make this part of your IGLOo stronger? It may be something you need to do, you need someone else to do, or you need to ask for.

4. How do you make this happen? Think about what you can do to make this happen. If you need someone else to do something, how can you ask them to do it? Need help and advice? Ask friends and family, colleagues, your line manager, GP, Human Resources, Occupational Health, charities/support groups, union reps.

Remember...

Returning to work is not always easy, but having support can make a huge difference. If you are finding it difficult, ask a trusted colleague or friend to help you work through the questions and identify some concrete actions that you, or they, can take to help you build your IGLOo.

| Resources | Location | Do I...? | Do I... Yes, No, Sometimes | I need to... | I can make this happen by...
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Create structure in my working day? E.g. divide up tasks in to smaller components, diarise meetings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritise self-care by leaving work on time and scheduling in exercise, appointments, cooking etc?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Get feedback on the work I am doing from my colleagues?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Feel understood and listened to by my family and friends?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Discuss with my line manager what information is communicated to colleagues so that I feel in control of what is said about me?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Have a consistent point of GP or clinical/therapeutic contact?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Have access to flexible working to help me balance my work and health?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Have access to work-focused counselling from the NHS or other charitable service</td>
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</table>
Where to go for further information

Mental health
Every Mind Matters
Mind
Mental Health Foundation
Time to talk

Professional bodies
CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)
IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health)
HSE (Health and Safety Executive)
ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)
DRC (Disability Rights Commission)
SOM (Society of Occupational Medicine)

Managing mental health at work:
ACAS Managing staff absence guide
ACAS Mental health at work guidance
Mental Health at Work
Access to Work

www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters
www.mind.org.uk
www.mentalhealth.org.uk
take-time-to-talk.com

www.cipd.co.uk
www.iosh.co.uk
www.hse.gov.uk
www.drc.org.uk
www.som.org.uk

www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1900
www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk
www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

Biographies

Professor Karina Nielsen is Director of the Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on the design, implementation and evaluation of organizational interventions in the field of organizational health.

Dr Joanna Yarker is Director of Affinity Health at Work, a workplace wellbeing consultancy. Her work uses evidence based approaches to improve health and wellbeing at work for employees, teams, managers and organisations.

About these Guidelines
These guidelines have been developed by a research team from Sheffield University, in partnership with Affinity Health at Work. The research was funded by the Productivity Insights Network, a multidisciplinary network funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Supported by a diverse steering group of subject matter experts, practitioners, policy makers, employers and employees who have returned following mental ill-health, the research team followed 38 employees who had returned to work following a period of absence, and 20 line managers who had managed a returning employee. Using thematic analysis, the team identified the resources that employees reported helped them stay and be productive at work. Once the interviews had been analysed the steering group supported the design of the guidelines presented here.