



## Mental Health Works – Return to Work Discussion

**Caution:** Each of the steps below involve professional standards that must be adhered to including doing no harm to any participant, confidentiality, and ethical conduct. The ability to apply evidence-based techniques is required and both cognitive behavioural and narrative approaches are used. Further it is necessary to understand and honour all applicable laws including privacy laws, labour laws, and human rights laws. This document is intended to share information only and is not permission for anyone to hold themselves out as a Mental Health Works consultant, nor is it intended as a complete guide to the return-to-work process.

**Objective:** To facilitate an agreement that will enable the employee to successfully return-to-work or remain at work while maintaining productivity and improving workplace relations.

1. Provide training to the direct manager or supervisor in terms of managing employees who may be experiencing mental health issues.
2. Provide awareness education to all staff.
3. Determine the essential duties of the position and review the complete job description.
4. Review any relevant workplace policies (i.e. harassment, discrimination, sick leave, absenteeism, etc.)
5. Determine the employer's concerns about possible challenges.
6. Determine the concerns of other stakeholders including union, human resources, occupational health, co-workers, etc.
7. Determine the employee's perception of their strengths in relation to the position.
8. Determine the employee's perception of possible challenges.
9. Determine the healthcare provider's perception of possible challenges.
10. Facilitate a conversation (*given the entire context provided in steps 2 thru 8*) about accommodations to address the challenges, while retaining the use of the employee's strengths. Remember that the employee is the best judge of what will work for them.
11. Develop an agreement that will address past concerns, employee's accommodation, and ways to address future workplace issues.
12. Ensure that both employer and employee see the agreement as realistic and workable.

Accommodations to consider only when the employee is unable to come up with their own responses:

If the challenge is maintaining **stamina**:

- Vary tasks throughout the day
- Provide more opportunities to learn new responsibilities to increase interest
- Ask for a self-paced workload
- Supportive employment services or work coach
- Do some or all of the work from home

- Job-sharing
- Change to part-time work
- Provide back up for regular breaks
- Take more frequent breaks
- Take longer breaks

If the challenge is **concentration**:

- Remove all but essential functions of job
- Reduce or remove interruptions
- Play soothing music
- Break large tasks into a series of smaller tasks
- Take a break when concentration declines
- Increase natural lighting in your work area
- Work from home

If the challenge is **organization and/or deadlines**:

- Use a daily to-do list and mark off items as completed
- Use calendars and reminders
- Use an electronic organizer – handheld or PC
- Break large tasks into a series of smaller tasks
- Ask for regular reminders from your supervisor
- Arrange regular meetings for follow-up and to set priorities

If the challenge is **memory**:

- Use a recorder for discussions and meetings
- Write down important or complicated issues
- Ask for instructions in writing
- Ask for the minutes of every meeting
- Ask for assignments in writing
- Ask for additional training time

If the challenge is **working relationships**:

- Have regular meetings to review and address issues
- Have management outline clear expectations
- Define what constitutes good working relationships
- Ask for open and honest feedback in a prompt manner
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
  - o Look at possible or previous issues – consider a way to address
- Ask for correspondence in writing
- Ask for clear expectations and the clear consequences for not meeting them
- Ask for written work agreements

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- Develop a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of each accommodation
  - o Think about how to measure effectiveness – i.e. deadlines met, no outbursts, etc.
- Do not discuss non-work related issues in the work area
- Explain to employees (or have your supervisor explain) about the accommodation
- Ask for the option of not attending work related social functions

## If the challenge is handling **stress & emotions**:

- Seek help from mental health counsellors or Employment Assistance Program
- Ask employer to provide praise and positive reinforcement
- Ask for time off to attend counselling sessions or medical appointments
- Ask for phone calls to doctors or others to gain necessary support during the workday
- Ask for a clear outline of expectations to avoid misunderstandings
- Consider awareness training for co-workers about how to effectively interact with you
- Consider awareness training for all staff on mental illness

## If the challenge is **dealing with change**:

- Let your employer/supervisor know that you will feel anxious when a change is introduced
- Ask to be informed in advance of changes, if possible, so that you can prepare yourself psychologically
- Ask to maintain communication with a previous supervisor to ensure effective transition
- Ask for regular meetings to discuss work-related problems with your supervisor

Please remember that the foundation of the Mental Health Works approach is to honour the voice of the employee with a mental health issue. By encouraging and coaching the employee to develop their own unique solution, you also allow them to increase their control and commitment to both well-being and good performance.