



Return to Work

Thanks to those that attended Dr. Samra's Webinar on Tuesday, June 16th. We had great turnout and engagement followed by a lively discussion in a more intimate office hours setting.

If you missed the session, you can access it at our PH&S Community of Practice Page below. WorkSafe Saskatchewan also has special discounts on all MyWorkplaceHealth e-Learning programs for Saskatchewan workers and workplaces with 67% off certificate programs and 33% off single courses automatically applied at checkout.

[PH&S Community of Practice Page](#)

[MyWorkplaceHealth E-Learning Page](#)

Return to Work Q&A (See: [Return-to-Work Toolkit](#))

Question: *What should employers consider when supporting a return to work (RTW) for an employee experiencing a mental health concern?*

Answer: A successful return to work is not simply about determining whether someone is "ready" to come back. From a Psychological Health & Safety (PH&S) perspective, employers should focus on creating conditions that support a sustainable, psychologically safe, and productive return.

Question: *How do I talk to my employee about what's going on?*

Answer: As a leader, you don't need the perfect words to start a conversation about mental health struggles in the workplace - you just need to say something! You can start

by saying, "I've noticed you haven't been your usual self lately. What would be helpful for you at this moment?"

Question: *What am I allowed to say?*

Answer: Employees have a right to privacy, so it's understandable if you're not sure what to say! The details that the employee offers will depend on their relationship with you. Maintain confidentiality. Keep the conversation focused on work-related performance, NOT on their mental health condition.

Question: *Can I ask for a diagnosis?*

Answer: Knowledge of the precise medical diagnosis is not necessary to provide accommodations to your employee. Asking for details about the name of the condition, test results, treatments, etc should be avoided. Employees have a right to privacy and are only required to disclose information related to the limitations associated with their condition.

Question: *Do I need to ask for a medical opinion?*

Answer: As an employer, you can request medical confirmation of a condition when accommodation is needed.

Question: *What kind of accommodations can I offer?*

Answer: There are a variety of accommodation strategies. Understanding the interplay between the job requirements and the limitations of the employee can help you determine an ideal accommodation strategy.

Question: *How will the employee return to the workplace after a leave of absence?"*

Answer: There are several things that can help to ensure a successful return to work after a leave of absence due to mental health. Developing a return-to-work plan prior to beginning the leave, staying in touch during the leave, and slowly returning to regular work hours by following a graduated return to work plan. Please see our **[Return to Work Toolkit](#)** to learn more.

Resources:

- WSMH Resources for Leaders: **[Return to Work Response from Leaders](#)**
- EMPLOYEES: **[Getting Support When you Return to Work](#)**
- ACCOMMODATION STRATEGIES: **[Accommodation Strategies](#)**

Key considerations include:

1. Focus on abilities, not diagnoses.

Employers generally do not need to know an employee's specific diagnosis. Instead, discussions should focus on functional abilities, restrictions, limitations, and workplace supports that may be required.

2. Assess workplace factors that may have contributed.

If workplace stressors played a role in the employee's absence, it is important to understand and address those factors. Workload, role clarity, psychological demands, workplace relationships, leadership practices, or exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events may need to be reviewed.

3. Develop a structured RTW plan.

A gradual return may be appropriate depending on the circumstances. Plans should clearly outline hours, duties, expectations, supports, and timelines for review. Flexibility is important, as recovery is rarely linear.

4. Ensure supervisors are prepared.

Managers play a critical role in the success of a return to work. They should understand their responsibilities, maintain appropriate confidentiality, communicate regularly, and know how to recognize signs that additional support may be needed.

5. Consider psychological safety during reintegration.

Employees may feel anxious about returning, concerned about stigma, or worried about how colleagues will perceive their absence. Respectful communication, confidentiality, and a supportive team environment can help ease the transition.

6. Monitor and adjust as needed.

A return-to-work plan should be viewed as a living document. Regular check-ins can help identify emerging challenges, evaluate whether accommodations remain effective, and determine whether adjustments are required.

7. Remember that RTW is a shared responsibility.

Successful returns involve collaboration among the employee, employer, supervisor, healthcare providers (where appropriate), union representatives (if applicable), and disability management professionals. Open communication and clear expectations are essential.

Ultimately, the goal of a psychologically healthy return to work is not simply getting someone back to work—it is helping them return in a way that supports both well-being and long-term success.

PH&S Tip:

When planning a return to work, ask: "What conditions need to be in place for this employee to be successful and stay successful?" This shifts the focus from short-term attendance to sustainable recovery and performance.

[Submit your Return to Work Questions Here for Dr. Joti Samra](#)

September 22, 2026 | 10 - 11:30am

- Topic: **Psychologically Safe Leadership**
- Office hours: 11:30am-12:30pm

December 9, 2026 | 10-11:30am

- Topic: **Psychological Health & Safety for Small Businesses / Teams**
- Office hours: 11:30am-12:30pm



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