



Mental Health
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Workplace
Mental Health



How employers can help **WOMEN WHO ARE RETURNING TO WORK**

Many women face challenges when returning to work, whether it's due to maternity leave, a leave of absence, or an unplanned break related to the pandemic.

Besides having to meet difficult decisions, anxiety can arise, especially if the time off was a year or more. Being sidelined through unemployment and family obligations can also take a toll on a woman's confidence. The following tips were designed to help employers make such transitions easier and less stressful – for the woman returning, for her co-workers, and for the organization.

Return-to-work policy changes or reminders

A woman's return to work may be a good opportunity to open a dialogue about any gaps in her resume. There will often be a chance to examine the strengths she has gained during her time away, no matter what the reasons.

It may also be a good time to examine your return-to-work policy and revise it if necessary. Tools such as [Supporting Employees Success](#) can help you create a plan that works for everyone.

Workload management

To avoid overwhelming her when she returns, and support the team's success, plan to distribute workloads equitably and create a reduced workload plan for her with a graduated return to full capacity.

It's important to communicate and discuss any revised workload management plans so all the employees involved feel supported and understand their responsibilities.

Accommodate flexible return-to-work planning

Being innovative and flexible with the woman's schedule can be helpful. Consider a part-time return, a work-from-home arrangement, a staggered or gradual return, or a hybrid solution to accommodate her needs during the transition.

If she's returning from maternity leave, consider providing a quiet space for privacy, if needed.

Modify and clarify expectations

A long period off can itself bring change. A woman's schedule, priorities, and perspectives may be different, and your previous expectations of her as an employee may need to be adjusted to support her success.

So, clarifying one another's expectations about roles and responsibilities is a good idea. A conversation about what works for both of you can reduce unnecessary stress for everyone involved.

Show kindness and empathy

A return after time away can take a toll on a woman's mental health. Be sure that she knows she is supported, and be considerate of how she might be feeling. If you notice she is having difficulties, talk to her about what could help to alleviate stress. Support her success as a whole person, not just as an employee.

Be patient and provide resources

After a leave of absence, it can take time for a woman to get back into her routine. Try to be patient and give her the gift of time. Allow for a gradual readjustment, and communicate this to her as she is preparing to return.

Provide as much information and as many resources as she needs to let her know support is available. Encourage her to use company benefits and employee assistance programs, if available, or help her connect with community resources.

For further support, consider teaming her up with a woman who has lived through a similar experience.

Resources to help with return-to-work planning

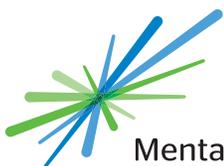
Return to Work Response for Leaders – How to plan a successful return to work for your employees

Goal Setting in a Year of Uncertainty – How anyone can set goals and stick to them in uncertain times

What Flexibility Looks Like – Learn some of the many ways a workplace can be flexible (see Flexible Work Life)

Supporting Employee Success – How to develop an effective workplace plan with your employees

We hope this tip sheet has been helpful. Please reach out if you need information, have questions, or want to know more about what we offer at wmh@mentalhealthcommission.ca.



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