

Absence Management

How to 1: Adopt a work-focussed approach

Advice for line managers

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Introduction

This guide helps you to adopt a positive, work-focussed approach with employees whose health is affecting, or might affect, their attendance. You should take advice from HR for support and guidance.

A work focussed approach

All research suggests that work can be good for physical and mental health and well-being. In many cases an ongoing attachment to, and focus on, work can lead to a speedier recovery. Being ill or injured does not always prevent a person from getting to work or undertaking some work. Providing the employer is prepared to be flexible, employees can often undertake some of their normal role or other meaningful work, especially with reasonable help from their employer.

You will explore ways to support employees who are ill or injured to attend work if they are well enough to do so. This is called a work-focussed approach. You will talk to the employee to identify ways to help them stay at or return to work as soon as they are able.

This approach is not about trying to get the employee to work if they are not well enough. It is about working together to find ways to help the employee to work whilst they recover.

When to adopt a work focussed approach

Early intervention is important to minimise the impact of ill health on attendance. You should adopt a work-focussed approach during **all** discussions with the employee about their health and/or attendance, such as a Return to Work Discussion or a Formal Attendance Review Meeting.

Talk to the employee as soon as you become aware they have a health issue, which might affect their ability to carry out their duties. This may be before they have taken any sickness absence. This discussion will enable any help or support needed to be identified and implemented early and to embed the approach that it is still possible to work whilst unwell.

Things to consider when adopting a work focussed approach

Below are some tips to help you during any discussion with an employee who is experiencing ill health. You will need to use those that are appropriate to the circumstances.

- Help the employee to understand that work is generally good for physical and mental health and wellbeing, and many people with health conditions can, with basic support, work as they recover from their condition.
- Consider with the employee whether their health is affecting their ability to carry out their duties effectively. It is not the case that employees have to carry out their entire role or do nothing at all. By identifying those **functions** (e.g. typing, writing, lifting, bending, stretching, working at heights and/or confined spaces, standing, sitting, listening, speaking etc.) the employee can carry out, or might be able to do with help, you need to identify **aspects** of their work, or other work, they can do.
- Explore what is preventing, or might prevent, the employee from attending work. Consider whether any temporary workplace adaptations may enable the employee to continue to work, or return to work. Make any reasonable adjustments where an employee has a disability.
- Respect the employee's decision to take sickness absence when they are unable to work due to illness or injury.
- Reassure the employee you are not trying to pressure them into returning to work before they are ready. However, you need to have an idea of the likely length of their absence so that you can think about possible courses of action and plan how to cover their work.

- Ask the employee if they have sought medical advice (for example from a doctor, dentist or hospital) and what advice was offered.
- Ask the employee if they wish to consider redeployment to another role or a temporary/permanent reduction in hours.
- Consider whether a referral to Occupational Health is appropriate. Remind the employee about the support available from the Employee Wellbeing Service, NOSS Counselling Service and external providers such as Access to Work.