



**One in five.**

According to Health Canada, that's the number of Canadians who will directly experience mental illness in their lifetime. That means someone close to you may need someone to talk to, or a shoulder to lean on.

Take an active role in contributing to better mental health for yourself and others. Return to work is one of the 5Rs of workplace mental health. Read on to learn more about how understanding return to work can make a difference.

## Return to work

A successful, healthy and timely return to work from mental health disability leave is not only possible, it is highly probable. The main issue is ensuring that there are no undue barriers to the return, such as negative expectations by the returning employee or others. Most individuals who take a leave of absence from work due to mental health have been struggling with the issue prior to their leave. This struggle may have impacted work at that time. A well planned return offers a fresh start.

# What you can do to promote a successful return to work



## As a person with a mental health issue returning to work:

- **Be prepared.** Expect a few questions from co-workers and others about how you are doing. If this makes you anxious, prepare and rehearse a response. Your disability case manager or EFAP counsellor can assist in your preparation. Remember, most often people ask questions because they care about your well-being. A brief and gracious response is typically all that is needed.
- **Take care of yourself.** You will likely be more fatigued than usual for the first couple of weeks of your return. Plan for this with support at home if possible and by ensuring that you get adequate rest and exercise and maintain a healthy diet.
- **Be as clear as possible about what you can do.** Talk to your manager and be open about what you are able to do and where you have challenges, need support or require more information. It is important for you to actively participate in the development of your return-to-work plan.
- **If you are struggling, reach out for help.** Problem solve with your manager if challenges arise with the return-to-work plan. Contact the EFAP not only as part of your return-to-work preparation but also if you have concerns after your return. Most successful returns have some challenges along the way, the important thing is to address them early.

## As a co-worker:

- **Welcome your co-worker back.** Support your co-worker by being friendly, warm and respectful. There is no need to overdo it. Just show that you are glad he or she is back.
- **Respect the return-to-work plan.** The return-to-work plan will have clear expectations of your co-worker and perhaps even you. By doing your part and respecting the duties that your co-worker has been assigned, you are not only supporting your co-worker but also contributing to a safe work environment.
- **Speak up.** Let others know when you feel their actions or words reinforce stigma or undermine your co-worker's return-to-work plan. Alternatively, discuss any concerns with your manager so he or she can address the issue.

## As a people leader:

- **Remember that every return to work is a transition.** Think about the support that you offer to a new employee and offer the same. When an employee has been away from work due to a health issue, some reorientation may be necessary if he or she was struggling before the absence or if the absence was prolonged. A welcoming approach goes a long way in setting the stage for success, and frequent check-ins on how things are going will enable quick and early problem solving and support a sustainable return.
- **Set expectations.** Set realistic goals and standards based on the needs of the workplace and your employee's current abilities. Knowing what to expect will help reduce some of the returning employee's apprehensions and will also help to determine integration milestones and success outcomes.
- **Lead by example.** Be a role model. By actively showing that you value, trust and respect the employee who is returning to the workplace, you will create a welcoming and supportive work environment. When co-workers and others in the organization see you treating a returning employee with trust and respect, they will likely follow your lead.

Visit [morneaushepell.com](http://morneaushepell.com) for additional mental health related information and resources, or contact your Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) provider for individualized support.