

Supporting employees on mental health leave is critical for their recovery and a safe return to work. This guide offers practical, trauma-informed strategies to help managers, supervisors, and return-to-work coordinators connect, communicate, and collaborate in a respectful way.

TIP: Keep this guide on your desk or in a shared manager resource folder for quick reference.

Step 1: Reflection

Reflect on assumptions and biases before reaching out.

Key questions:

- How do I understand what led to the injury?
- What assumptions might I be making about the employee and their situation?
- How could those assumptions affect my tone, expectations, or communication?

Goal: Approach with compassion, curiosity, and psychological safety.

Step 2: Planning

- Identify the best person to maintain contact (someone the employee trusts).
- Choose method (email, text) and timing.
- Plan your message:
 - Express genuine concern for wellbeing
 - Let them know they are missed
 - Reinforce that support is available

Focus: Outreach should feel supportive, not intrusive.

Step 3: Initial Outreach

- Ask for preferred time for a brief call:

“Hi [Name]! I hope you’re taking the time you need to rest and recover. We miss having you around and wanted to check in to see how we can best support you during this time. If you’re open to it, when would you feel comfortable with a brief phone call?”
- Be patient if there’s no response, follow up respectfully (e.g., about one week later).
- Document all contact attempts (date, method, and purpose).

Step 4: Engagement

- Create space for them to share. Listen actively, validate feelings, and build trust.
- Ask what check-in frequency feels comfortable (weekly, bi-weekly).
- Optional prompts:
 - *“What do you enjoy about work?”*
 - *“What do you miss about work?”*

Be transparent: The goal is connection, not rushing a return-to-work.

Step 5: Supporting Employee Success

- Use Workplace Strategies for Mental Health Guide: [Supporting Employee Success: A Tool to Help Employees Be Successful at Work](#)
- Example reflective **questions:** *“What will allow you to be successful at your job and still have energy at the end of the day?”*

Goal: Collaborative on a sustainable, supportive return-to-work plan

Avoid

- Asking for diagnoses or personal details
- Pressuring for timelines or updates
- Minimizing experiences or over-reassuring
- Sharing workplace stressors unless requested