



THRIVE GUIDE

RETURNING TO WORK

For many of us, the last couple of months have seen significant change and a need to quickly adapt to new ways of living and working. Whilst these changes have no doubt caused some stress in one way or another, for many of us this has been an opportunity to slow down, spend time with family, learn new things, practise self-care, among many other things. So naturally, the return back to the workplace—however that looks for you—will present a new set of challenges and adjustments.

The purpose of this guide is to give you some helpful tips to support your transition back to the workplace. Whether that be returning from furlough, going back to the office, or working entirely remotely for the foreseeable future. This guide can also be used by line managers to support the return of their team or furloughed workers.



TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR TRANSITION BACK TO THE WORKPLACE

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PREPARATION



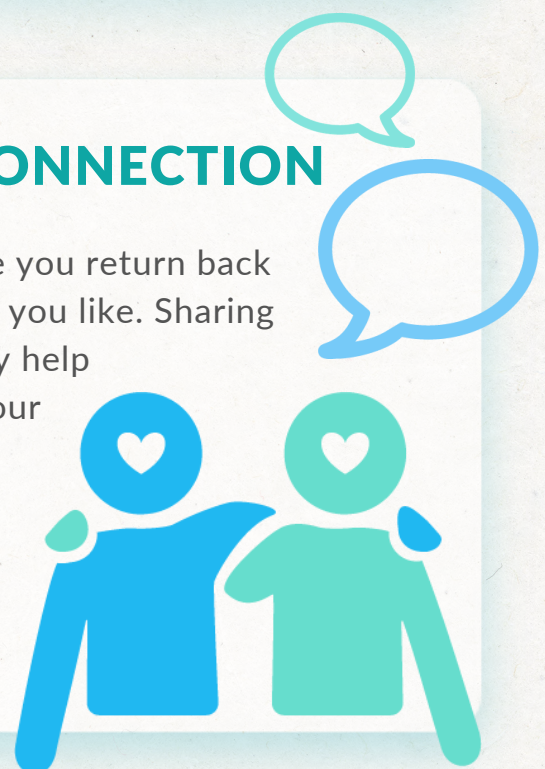
Preparation may help you to adjust, especially if you're returning from furlough or going back to the workplace. Think about if there is anything you need to know, such as updates on the guidelines and social distancing policies at your workplace. There might be new rules in place, there might be new equipment to make the work environment safer and also there may be requirements for the use of personal protective equipment. Make sure you understand these changes in advance so that they don't come as a shock on your first day back.

Try to mentally go through your first day at work and think about anything that is unclear to you or where you may need support or adaptations. There may be changes to your responsibilities or to how you will commute to work. If you are feeling stressed about the uncertainty it is useful to write out a schedule and to consider what are the actual different scenarios. You may find it helpful writing out a schedule or plan for your first week back so that you feel more in control.

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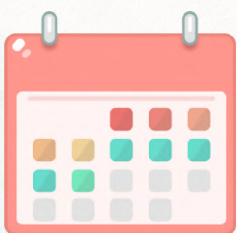
COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION

You may want to reach out to your colleagues before you return back to work. Check-in with them and talk about anything you like. Sharing feelings about recent months and your wellbeing may help you to find common ground and may also increase your resilience. You could arrange to meet colleagues for a coffee before work and then go into the office together. Being connected may help you to feel more comfortable going back to the office and meeting other colleagues again.





- **Be active:** Exercise is one of the most effective ways of dealing with stress. It will also help you to get a better night's sleep.
- **Mindfulness** is a mental state achieved by focusing attention on the moment to moment experience. Being aware of when our thoughts get captured by regrets or the worries and being able to disengage from that automatic way of thinking can be very helpful when managing stress.
 - Meditation and breathing exercises help to slow down the heart rate and clear the mind. Meditation is a skill that requires practice and might not be for everyone.
 - Other ways you can be mindful might include going for a walk, doing yoga, reading, or anything else that helps to relax your mind.
- **Be grateful** for something each day. Make it a practice to write it down, perhaps first thing in the morning. By writing down positive things, we can shift from automatic negative thoughts to healthier ones. You may also want to write down things that you have enjoyed during the lockdown and that you would like to continue in the future (e.g staying in regular contact with friends, practising meditation or taking time to prepare a nice meal).
- **Stay connected:** Friends, family and colleagues make a great support network. Sometimes it feels easier to keep our worries and struggles to ourselves and we may even feel guilty or ashamed about them. Engaging with people in our support network can be a powerful way to alleviate some of the stress you feel and may help you problem-solve better. Just talking things out with someone can help us find solutions.



- **Organise your time:** make lists, plans and daily calendars. Time management is key to helping you feel in control and able to handle the pressure.
- **Setting small, achievable goals** may also help you to increase your motivation and self-esteem.
- **Boundaries and routine:** setting clear boundaries between home and work is key for wellbeing and may help you to switch off. Creating a routine may enable you to set clear boundaries. For example, stick to a sleep schedule and be strict with yourself about when you will finish work.





ANXIETY AND WORRIES

We have a bias to confuse uncertainty with risk, even though they are not the same. Whenever there is any change, there is increased uncertainty and this can lead to worrying. It happened before the lockdown, it happened at the beginning of the lockdown and it will happen again as the lockdown ends.

If you find yourself getting distracted or distressed by worries, no matter what they are, it may help to create a list of these worries as and when they come into your head, then allowing yourself to return to what you were doing. Allocate yourself no more than 30 minutes per day at a specified time to work through your worry list. Do this in a place where you won't be disturbed and that you don't associate with sleep or relaxation, such as the kitchen. You might find that when you get to your worry time some of your worries have now gone. Work through your worry list one by one and sort them into things you can do something about now and things you might have to deal with at a later date. When evaluating the worries you can follow this simple approach:

- Is this worry truly important or not?
- Is it urgent or can it be delayed?
- Can it be shared or delegated?
- What is the worst that can happen here?
- What is the real likelihood of something bad happening?
- Can I do anything to reduce the chances of this bad outcome?
- What are the consequences of doing those things to minimise risk, is the remedy worse than the problem?
- Can I accept the remaining risk reminding myself that nothing ever is 100% certain

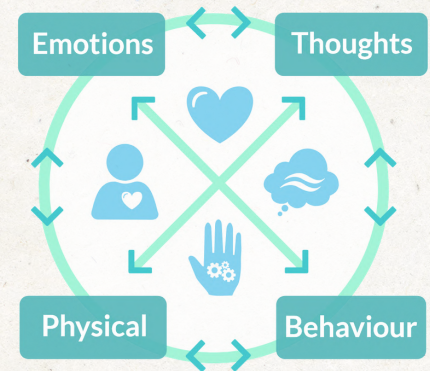


Dealing with worries in this way can help to challenge hypothetical concerns, negative emotions and to put things into perspective, as well as make you feel more confident and productive. Over time, this process will become automatic.

HELPFUL TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT):

Practising cognitive behavioural skills may help you to identify thoughts or feelings that may not be helpful in a particular situation. You may learn to challenge and reposition these thoughts so that they influence your mood and behaviour in an adaptive way. CBT is an effective treatment for a variety of mental health conditions, but learning these skills may also prevent them from occurring.



DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION (DMR):

Focuses on the mind-body connection. Effective at reducing anxiety and improving sleep

CALM BREATHING:

Another mind-body exercise which activates your “rest and digest” system, reducing stress, anxiety and panic and improves sleep

MEDITATION:

Attention training, improves mental wellbeing, increases self-awareness and helps to manage stress

SELF SUGGESTION:

Helps to create a feeling of calmness in stressful situations

APPLIED RELAXATION:

Rapid relaxation (30sec), best learned after CBT and DMR



WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT:

We've all gone through extreme changes in our daily life in the last few months. In many cases, we can manage stress independently, however there may be instances where you need a bit of support. Remember that mental health is different for everyone, but here are some common signs and symptoms that might indicate a need for external support:



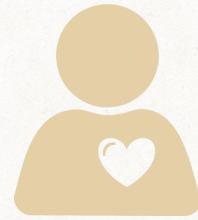
Psychological:

Excessive and uncontrollable worry
Distress
Tearfulness
Low mood
Hopelessness
Persistent doubt
Low motivation
Loss of humour
Being more easily upset
Lacking in confidence
Feeling overwhelmed
Pessimism
Worthlessness
Loneliness
Easily frustrated/irritated



Behavioural:

Lack of sleep
Difficulty concentrating
Difficulty relaxing / Restlessness
Poor diet / reduced exercise
Substance misuse
Outbursts of anger or aggression
Increased sickness absence
Uncharacteristic errors
Overreaction to problems



Physical:

Poor sleep/fatigue
Headaches
Appetite and weight changes
Shakiness
Sweating
Constantly feeling cold
Tingling in hands and feet
Heart racing
Difficulty breathing
Dry mouth
Dizziness

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT:

Grief is a natural reaction to losing someone close to us. Grief can be difficult and stressful and people react differently to a bereavement. As it may take a long time to overcome, it may be helpful to talk to people who you trust and who may be able to help you reflect, offer support and share your experiences. Understanding the grief process and the common stages of the grief cycle may be helpful. Take one day after the other, try not to judge yourself and learn about your triggers. You may want to engage in positive memorable activities such as making yourself a memory box or sharing stories with family and friends. This can help you to process your grief in a healthy way.

If you are supporting someone who has suffered a bereavement, give them time. Let them know that you care about them and that you are listening and don't worry about finding the right words. You may also encourage self-management, self-care, peer-support groups and other support options.

- <https://www.cruse.org.uk>
- **Employee Assistance Programmes** (ask your employer for more details)
- **Thrive in-app coaching** - chat confidentially to a psychologist at the touch of a button

HOW MANAGERS CAN SUPPORT THEIR EMPLOYEES

As a manager you should consider the following:

Make sure that your employees are ready to return to work - Acknowledge the fact that certain individuals might be nervous about returning to work in the current situation and may require adjustments.

Be clear about safety rules - Explain the organisation's health and safety rules before anyone returns to the workplace and make sure you support these changes. Clearly communicate what kind of risk assessment has been done and the measures that are in place to ensure employees' safety at work (distance guides, protective clothing, mitigation strategies etc.).

Offer support and keep open communication - Make yourself available to your employees, listen to their concerns and put any adjustments in place.

Inclusive and supportive culture

Some team members may need adjustments to their work schedule as they may be shielding themselves, still have children at home or have other needs. To practice an inclusive and open culture, managers should encourage an open and supportive environment where team members can communicate their needs and discuss reasonable adjustments where required, such as flexible working hours. Encourage proactive communication between team members, especially where adjustments to work tasks or schedules is concerned, to ensure transparency.

1-2-1s with employees about re-orientation and wellbeing

1-2-1s should be used as an opportunity to check-in with your team and talk about both work-related and other topics. Use open-ended questions to establish how your employees are feeling and make sure you are actively listening. It can help to share your own concerns or reservations about the return to work as this creates a space for mutual feedback and helps to build rapport.

Some questions you may want to consider:

- How are you feeling about returning to work?
- What adjustments do you need?
- How can I support you?
- How are you finding your current workload?
- What challenges are you dealing with at the moment?



SUPPORTING FURLOUGHED WORKERS:

Work plays a key role in maintaining and enhancing employees' positive mental health. Certain individuals might be affected more by being furloughed and may need extra support. For instance, new employees, those who live on their own or those with existing mental or physical health conditions. It is therefore important to be clear and transparent with your staff. Provide reassurance that the furlough scheme is not caused by mismanagement of the company or underperformance, but due to difficult circumstances that we are all facing. Ensure you talk to your staff as early as possible about the possibilities of returning to work and don't make any false promises. Have regular check-ins with your furloughed workers to provide updates and ask how they are coping, this will help to keep them in the loop and part of the team. It is also important to help employees stay connected with the company and their team. An assigned buddy might be helpful to offer peer support and the missing human interaction.

PHASED RETURN TO WORK

Many organisations are considering a phased approach to re-introduce staff to their jobs and the workplace. A phased return to work involves gradually building up to an employee's usual hours and job duties over an agreed period of time. Here are some advantages of this type of return.

ADVANTAGES OF PHASED RETURN:



Employees build their strength, capacity and tolerance to work in a stepped way. This is also helpful when work is very demanding or there is high workload in the office environment.



Employees gradually return to normal working life which positively contributes to their wellbeing.



Allows for mutual agreement of individual return to work by tailoring it to an employees needs and capabilities.

Other resources:

Mind offers a free **wellness action plan** which can help you to support your own or your employees' mental wellbeing by setting clear goals and expectations.