

Step 1: Dealing with initial absence



KEY FACTS:

- **All employers are required to record information about employee absences.** When contacting your manager/employer, give them as much detail as you can so that they are aware of your situation. Tell them about: your health, how it is affected by your work, and whether it will affect your ability to work. Communications from employers when you are off work can seem formal. This can sometimes make them feel accusatory, but it is usual for employers to ask for relevant information consistent with company policy.
- Your employer has a responsibility to support your mental health while you are off work and on your return to work.
- In severe cases of mental ill-health, you may feel numb and unable to ask questions or ask for help, even with this employee guide as support. If this is the case, ask someone (friend, family, colleague) to help you work through this guide.



WHAT TO DO:

- Tell your employer you will be off work and try to give them an indication of how long you will be off if you can.
- If there are any urgent work issues that you need to hand over to colleagues, try to deal with these straight away.
- Check your company's absence policy so that you know what they expect of you.
- Agree with your employer how you will keep in contact with one another during your absence. You can suggest how you want to be contacted during your sickness absence. You can also say who is as your preferred contact person within the company (although this may not always be practical depending on the size of the company). There is a template and checklist below to help with this.
- You are able to self-certify your absence for up to 7 days, but will need to get a '[Fit Note](#)' (previously sick note) from your GP for any longer absences. Visit your GP early so that you can access the help you need.
- Importantly, take steps to help yourself get better. The next step in this guide (step 2) gives some ideas on this.



WHAT TO SAY:

- Talking about your mental health can be a daunting experience, but many people find they get a lot more understanding and support once they start talking about it. You may decide to tell different people more or less information but finding ways to communicate is vital.
- Still feeling uneasy? Take a look at some of the benefits of [disclosure](#). Or you may find it useful to listen to others talking about their mental health ([see personal stories on the time to change website](#)).
- Here are some template emails you can edit and send to your employer and a telephone checklist with examples that may be helpful. Remember, how you feel may change over time, so you do not need to be definite in your decisions at first.



TEMPLATE LETTER/EMAIL:

[Letter/email for you to edit and use to tell your employer you will be absent from work.](#)



CHECKLIST:

[Checklist for telling your employer you will be absent from work.](#)



WHAT TO DO if you feel your manager is the cause of your mental ill-health

If you have a difficult relationship with your manager, or you think the way your manager behaves towards you is making your health worse, this can make talking about your health even harder. It is very likely that your manager does not realise that their behaviour is upsetting you. They may be under pressure themselves. Or problems in your relationship with them may be due to a misunderstanding about your work priorities. While it is not easy, there are some things you can do to help re-set your relationship.

- To have an effective conversation, you will need to identify specific situations, and describe actions or behaviours that make you feel unhappy. There is no point in saying how you feel about your manager's treatment of you if you are not able to give specific examples of the behaviour or situations that lead to your feelings. For example, "When I say hello to Jane each morning she ignores me, this makes me feel un-valued" is more likely to lead to a helpful discussion than saying "You make me feel un-valued."
- Consult a different manager or designated colleague, who is trusted by both you and your manager, and ask if they can help you talk to your manager. Or you may want to talk to a Human Resource professional if you have one in your company.
- You could give your manager the [employer version of this guide](#).
- You could seek advice from a conciliation service such as [ACAS](#) who have expertise in working with employees and employers.