

Step 3: Maintaining communication throughout absence

KEY FACT:

Managers are often reluctant to contact employees while they are off work with mental ill-health. They may be concerned their contact may be unwelcome, that it may make the situation worse. Or they may not know what to say. However, maintaining contact throughout sickness absence improves the likelihood of the employee returning to work. It can help relieve the anxiety of returning to work for the employee and can help you as the employer with your work planning.

WHAT TO DO:

- After 7 days, request Fit note (previously called the sick note) if one has not sent by the employee (see example email below).
- **Consider carefully the content of the Fit Note and ensure that it is safely filed**
- Remember to keep in touch with the employee in the ways you agreed with the employee. Check-in with them at regular intervals. If you have not yet agreed how you will keep in contact, see the [template in step 1](#).
- If the absence progresses, the following options are open to you:
 - a. Request a Human Resource Professional or Occupational Health professional to review the situation. See the [NHS Health at Work Network website](#) for the NHS Occupational Health support, the [Society of Occupational Medicine website](#) for more information, and the [Chartered Institute of Personnel Development website](#) for further information.
 - b. After 4 weeks absence, you can refer the employee to the Fit for Work services. Fit for Work is a voluntary service that offers employees access to occupational health services, which is available to a worker after they have been off for four weeks or more due to sickness. See the [Fit for Work services website](#) for more information.
 - c. Request to liaise with GP (see example email below). You can write to the employee's GP, providing details of the role and asking them to consider the impact of return. Please note, GPs will only act with the consent of their patient. Many GPs do not have expertise in employment matters or occupational health. So, GPs may be reluctant or unable to give detailed advice.

WHAT TO SAY:

Using the knowledge and skills developed in Steps 1 and 2, continue to keep in contact with the employee throughout their absence. Make sure you do this in the way you have agreed (i.e. via email, phone, directly or via a trusted colleague).

The following templates provide suggested text for emails or letters that you to edit and send to your employee as appropriate. If you haven't already done so, you can send the [employee guide](#).

TEMPLATE EMAIL/LETTER:

[Example email to edit and send to the employee to request the fit note and information from GP.](#)

TEMPLATE EMAIL/LETTER:

[Example email to edit and send to the GP to request information.](#)