

Step 5: Having a Return to Work conversation



KEY FACTS:

- To make sure the employee returns to work successfully, you will need to have a return to work (RTW) conversation. You will need also to work together to develop a return to work plan, and a plan for reviewing the person's work and health.
- Managers can tend to focus the RTW conversation around policies and procedures instead of the interaction with this person. This has a negative impact on both the employee and employer.
- Many managers find discussions around employees' health and RTW difficult. The better prepared you are, the easier it becomes.



WHAT TO DO:

- Make sure you have prepared for the discussion following [Step 4](#) in this guide.
- Use the [Return to work conversation guide on the Return to Work website](#) to prepare for, and support you through, this conversation.
- Let the employee know you will be using the conversation guide so that they are prepared and know what questions you will ask them. (This will help them give more constructive answers as well as help to reduce their anxiety about the meeting.)
- Prepare for the return to work conversation ([See the checklist in step 4](#))
- Get yourself into the right mind-set – sensitive, empathic, professional.



WHAT TO DO DURING THE CONVERSATION:

- ✓ Take the lead in the return to work conversation.
- ✓ Listen and reflect back
- ✓ Find ways to make the conversation authentic wherever possible, even though you are following a process set out in the guide.
- ✓ Focus on the future, not the past.
- ✓ You may need to seek further advice/ agreement from other people before confirming adjustments to the role. Let the employee know what you are doing and when you will get back to them.
- ✓ Write up the agreed return to work plan together and agree how you will monitor and review over time.



WHAT NOT TO DO:

- × Take formal 'minutes': this is not necessary and makes employees feel vulnerable. It looks like you are collecting evidence to manage them out. Have a conversation instead.
- × Allow the employee to go back into their old job with all of their old responsibilities and workload straight away. Remember when you come back from holiday, it is hard to catch up. This is similar but probably much harder, because the person may not be feeling 100%.



WHAT TO SAY: [See the Return to work conversation guide on the return to work website.](#)