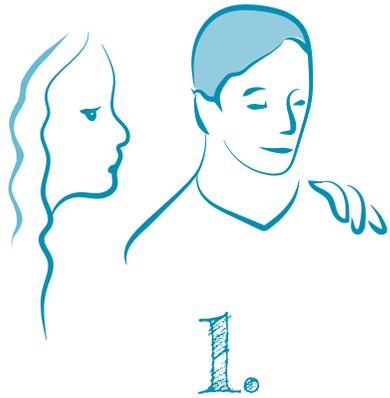


INFORMATION KIT FOR SUPERVISORS

to help support an Employee
going through an illness

Tools for
planning the return to work,
keeping in touch during sick leave and
handling absences in the
work community



Support immediately after diagnosis: listen, focus, be present

- ▶ Give the Employee space and listen to their wishes.
- ▶ Prepare yourself for the possibility that, in a state of shock, the Employee may share information about their illness openly and in detail. Regard the shared information with sensitivity and confidentiality.
- ▶ Tell the Employee that they do not have to share the details of their health situation, they can only talk about what they are comfortable with.
- ▶ Be sympathetic. Manage your emotions and set your own limits. You do not need to be a therapist. You can direct the Employee to Occupational Health Care services or Human Resource Management. Help is also available from other professionals like: Specialized Nurses, Physical Therapists, Rehabilitation Counsellors and Social Workers. Remember that you can turn to your own Supervisor for support.
- ▶ Instead of focusing on what to say, it is more important to look for solutions together. It is good to follow the Employee's lead about what to talk about. Do not belittle the experience of the Employee by sharing your own experiences about illnesses.

- ▶ Encourage the Employee to contact the workplace if they have any questions regarding their work during sick leave.
- ▶ Each person's health situation can vary greatly, so try not to act on assumptions. After some time, it will become clear how long the sick leave will be and whether the Employee can continue to work.
- ▶ Establish with the payroll department how long the Employee will receive their salary and who will ensure the uninterrupted payment of benefits. Human Resource Management should be able to provide information on where support can be obtained, for example with regard to the Employee's financial situation.

2.



Communication during sick leave

- ▶ Keep in touch and treat the Employee just as before. They are the same person as they were before getting sick.
- ▶ Keeping in contact is usually welcomed and not perceived as inconvenient or intrusive. And, it can be easier to talk about difficult matters, when a regular conversation is already ongoing.
- ▶ Think about how you would like to be contacted. If calling does not feel natural, you can send a card, flowers, or text message etc.
- ▶ For example, a cancer diagnosis can bring some emotionally intense times. When you call, you can ask whether it is a good moment or if they prefer you calling back later.



Handling absence within the work community

- ▶ Respect the Employee's right to privacy and their wishes. The Employee might not necessarily want colleagues to know about their illness.
- ▶ If the Employee wishes to openly share details about their absence, ask them how and when they wish the matter to be shared with others. You can act as a messenger.
- ▶ Do not forbid the Employee to share details of their illness with others in the work community.
- ▶ Recognize the impact the Employee's illness may have on the work community. Some people may need external support to help them cope with feelings and issues arising from a workmate's illness.



4.

Planning the return to work



- ▶ A successful return to work requires proactiveness, and possible adjustments or modifications to the work tasks should be considered in advance. Ensure that the work community is aware and understands why it is important to adjust or modify the work upon their return.
- ▶ Many people who have been ill, look forward to returning to work. Well in advance, plan and discuss together, how the return will proceed. Remember that it can take quite a lot of time to fill in the forms needed to meet the statutory obligations.
- ▶ Occupational Health Care professionals also have the task of providing support to the Employer in these situations by helping them make a Return to Work Plan.
- ▶ Preparing for a joint meeting with Occupational Health Care professionals and the Employer is important. Many are nervous about the consultation or feel that the preparations are burdensome.
- ▶ Occupational Health Care professionals help in assessing a person's work ability. They also know the process and resources to assist the Employee and Employer in finding a successful path for the return to work.
- ▶ It is the responsibility of the Employer to determine whether work adjustments can be made at the workplace to facilitate the Employee's situation and to support their ability to work.
- ▶ Listen to the Employee's wishes.
- ▶ The Plan for returning to work supports both the Employer and the Employee. Write down together what has been agreed and prepare a clear timeline so that the matter will not be forgotten in the rush of the daily work.