

Strategies to Support Employees Transition Back to Campus

While some employees may feel enthusiastic and energized about the fall return to campus, others may experience re-entry anxiety. As the conversations about returning to campus continue to emerge, employees may experience symptoms of anxiety, panic and worry; they may feel stressed and overwhelmed, experience trouble with sleep, tiredness and irritability and may withdraw from colleagues. These reactions are normal and expected in times of change and transition. This document outlines some strategies that supervisors can use to support employees to successfully transition from remote to on-campus work. Recognizing that in some areas not all employees will be returning to campus at the same time, supervisors are also encouraged to explore strategies to ensure team cohesion when managing a mix of remote and on-campus employees.

Five Strategies to Support Employees Transition from Remote to on Campus Work

1. Conduct regular check-ins/one-on-one meetings

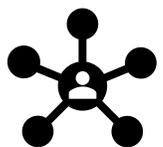


Frequent individual check-ins/one-on-one meetings with employees are critical in the period leading to the re-entry back to campus as well as during the initial weeks. These meetings can provide employees with the opportunity to bring forward concerns and share fears and anxieties that they may be experiencing. These also provide a great opportunity to ask employees for their feedback on the protocols that have been implemented to keep them safe. The following are some examples of questions that can start the conversation:

- How are you feeling about returning to campus?
- What can I do to support you as you transition back?
- Do you have any concerns or anticipate any challenges? Is there anything I could do to help address some of the stressors that you may be experiencing?

Be alert to any changes in behaviours which may indicate that someone is struggling with the transition and do not hesitate to reach out to them. For example, “I noticed that you haven’t been yourself lately, is everything okay?”. For more information refer to the [Having Supportive Conversations](#) information sheet.

2. Communicate regularly



Be specific when sharing plans and provide as much detail as you can. Communicate any changes that have been implemented in your department to prepare for employees’ safe re-entry to campus. It is important that employees are aware of what to expect on their return to work, what changes have happened in their work area, expected norms for interaction, etc. Take photos to help employees visualize the changes and share these with employees. This will not only help employees feel safer, but it can also help them to prepare for the changes that they will encounter when they return.

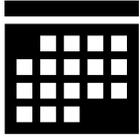
Be positive in your communication and reassure employees that you are doing everything possible to create a safe and motivating work environment. As the re-entry date approaches, employees will have a lot of questions, make yourself available to answer questions and actively encourage them to bring questions forward.

3. Strengthen team cohesion and build rapport



Plan for an activity, within the COVID-19 protocols, to welcome back employees, celebrate the successes over the last year and provide opportunities to catch-up on news and re-connect with colleagues. Sharing experiences can help re-build in-person connections and rapport that may have been lost while working remotely. If managing a mix of remote and on-campus employees, look for opportunities to introduce activities to build cohesion between employees working remotely and those working on campus.

4. Prepare for a settling-in period



It is going to take time for employees to re-build routines and shift their mindset from working remotely to on campus. It is important to offer some flexibility during the settling-in period. If it is operationally feasible, a gradual increase in hours spent on campus may help employees ease back into the office.

Set realistic priorities for the settling-in period and meet regularly with your team to discuss progress and to work together to address any emerging challenges.

5. Foster a mentally healthy work environment



Promote a culture of kindness within your team and encourage employees to support one another. Be proactive and take the time to talk about the importance of mental health. Do not assume that employees are aware of the mental health supports available to them, connect them to the [Employee Mental Health Resources](#) and the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#).

Encourage employees to make health and wellness a priority and to build self-care into their daily and weekly routine to help improve resilience and prevent burnout. For more information refer to the [Promoting a Culture of Wellness](#) information sheet.

Do not forget to also be kind to yourself. Give yourself the permission to feel stressed, worried, anxious, etc. Acknowledge that many of your colleagues are also feeling this way and that it is okay to take a pause and just breathe.

Resources Consulted

Canadian Mental Health Ontario. Return to the Workplace: A psychological toolkit for heading back to work. Retrieved from: <https://ontario.cmha.ca>

Harvard Business Review (June 2020). Help Your Employees Manage Their Reentry Anxiety. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org>

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University of Toronto. Managing Anxiety Around Returning to Campus. Retrieved from: <https://hrandequity.utoronto.ca>

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HAYS. Transitioning Staff Back to the Workplace Post COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.hays.com.au>



Putting the COVID-19 Employee Pulse Check Survey into Action

This initiative has been designed to address the areas of focus and key actions emerging from the survey results.

Areas of Focus: Mental Health & Wellbeing, Communication, Engagement and Supports