

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Returning to Work if You've Been Furloughed

If you were furloughed at work due to the COVID-19 pandemic and your organization is beginning to resume, you may be experiencing a mix of emotions as you prepare to return to your job.

Bear in mind that this will be a time of change. You may experience anger that you were furloughed or relief that your life is gradually starting to feel “normal” again. You may find yourself struggling to adjust after a period of time away. Others may be returning after a period of new and challenging responsibilities like home schooling, caregiving, or volunteering.

Preparing mentally for your return
The COVID-19 pandemic affected many aspects of our daily lives, especially when it came to work. As you come back from a furlough, remember that your organization or even your role may seem very different.Even as rules around lockdown are eased, you and your colleagues may find yourselves continuing with physical distancing, and having to stagger your hours, and even wear masks in the workplace. Try to maintain a positive attitude and an open mind and follow the recommendations of your local health authority and your organization’s policies.

Here are some other ways to mentally prepare for your return to work.

If you will need adjustments at work, talk to your manager or HR contact. The person who manages you while on you are furlough may be a manager, human resources (HR) representative or a case manager. You may find that your situation has changed due to COVID-19 or that you may have a different working situation than your partner or other members of your household which could affect childcare changes or caregiving for family members. Public transport timetables may also be affected. It is important that you maintain an open dialogue with your manager or HR so that they know what adjustments you might need.

Get in touch with your manager and your coworkers before your return. If you know that you are returning from furlough, your manager has probably spoken to you about what you can expect upon your return. However, they may also have more information about work priorities and any changes to your role. Connecting with your manager prior to your return to work will give you knowledge of what might be different and this may support you in preparing for this. Before you come back, you may also want to drop a line to the colleagues you work with closely.

Manage your stress. It is normal to feel stressed or anxious around returning to work following any period of leave and it can be helpful to have an open dialogue with your manager or HR representative about how you feel. To support yourself, find healthy ways to cope with stress, such as a walk, long run, yoga session, or meditation. You may also try to take a few minutes to read a book, listen to music or do another activity you enjoy. If you are feeling overwhelmed, reach out to your organisation’s assistance programme for resources and support.

Before you return
Do what you can to prepare yourself and your family for your transition back to work. Your return will be smoother if you have had a chance to address your personal and family needs.

Finalize your plans for childcare as far in advance as possible. If you have children, your regular childcare situation may still be interrupted so it’s best to reach out to your childcare providers early for details. You may also find that you need to adjust your childcare plans to a new work pattern if your

regular working hours have changed. A trial run of the new arrangement during your last week of furlough will help you and your child adjust to the transition. If you can, plan backup childcare as well.

Re-establish your routine. Your routines may have changed during lockdown, and now they may change again. However, there are some simple things you can do to help get you back on track:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Observe regular mealtimes, and eat a healthy diet.
- Get regular exercise. Even if some physical distancing orders remain in place, you can try aerobics, walking, jogging, dancing, gardening, or yoga at home.

When you're back at work
Going through a furlough can bring up many different emotions. You have experienced stress, uncertainty, anxiety, relief, or even happiness—sometimes in quick order.

Some of these emotions may still be with you when you return to work. This is normal. Try to manage your expectations in your first days back**.** You may feel less motivated than usual or have less energy, have trouble concentrating or staying focused, feel very emotional, or not feel much of anything at all. This is typical and will begin fade as you adjust to your return to work.

Keeping a positive attitude is important to easing your transition back. Here are five ideas for how you can set yourself up for success as you return.

Turn up to work ready and rested. It can be difficult to feel positive when you're exhausted.

Be present. During working hours, try to direct your energy and attention towards your work and set boundaries so that you can recharge when you're off the clock.

Create and prioritize a to-do list. Doing so can add structure to your work and enable you to focus more easily on the tasks at hand. Include everyday tasks that you may not typically include on a to-do list, as you may need the reminder until you get back into the swing of things.

Begin planning something to look forward to. A loosening of lockdown restrictions at work will also mean an easing of other restrictions. This being the case, look forward to connecting with others and think about events or activities that will bring you joy.

Define your goals. What are the next targets you are working towards? Determine what you are hoping to accomplish and identify the steps that will get you there. Having clearly-established goals can lift your spirits and provide some much needed motivation.

If you are struggling with the transition back to work after a furlough, speak to your manager or HR representative. You can also contact your assistance program to speak to a caring counsellor who can offer you support.

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