
Returning to your workplace – a guide for employees



Just as we've all become used to the 'new normal' – working remotely, video meetings, no commuting – it's going to change, *again*. While some of us have enjoyed working from home, others have struggled with social isolation from their work colleagues and environment, and some have experienced a bit of both.

So, what does a successful return to the workplace look like? In the first instance, organisations will implement a Recovery Plan, which outlines the process for returning to work. Recovery may not necessarily be a return to business as usual but is a staged process to assist in the implementation of whatever will be an organisation's 'new normal'.

Many organisations recognise that there are valuable learnings to take away from 2020. Supported by digital tools and communication, we have demonstrated that much of our work happens anywhere and that we don't have to be tied to our work location to be effective and productive. It's also anticipated that for some, more flexible work arrangements will continue to be an option.

But what if there are feelings of anxiety, fear and worry about returning onsite? Firstly, it's important to acknowledge that these are normal reactions.

Some concerns around returning to your workplace could be:

- Reliance on public transport and potential exposure to COVID 19
- Needing to maintain social distancing in the workplace
- Needing to be mindful of increased safe hygiene practices in the workplace
- Decreased time spent with family, exercising or improving work/life balance, due to the return to a daily commute.

What can be done to help relieve some of these concerns?

- **Communicate, communicate, communicate** – to your Manager, Team Leader, HR Specialists. Ask them what's in place to keep you safe. Let them know what support you may need physically (e.g. personal protective equipment (PPE)) or emotionally/mentally (e.g. having input into your Return to Work Plan).
- **Keep your stress busting toolkit handy** – deep breathing exercises, mindfulness practice or helpful apps such as 'Smiling Mind' – use the tools that work best for you.
- **Maintain good nutrition, exercise and sleep** – looking after your physical health is essential for good mental health and overall wellbeing.
- **Seek support if needed** – Your Employee Assistance Program (1800 099 444 for Caraniche at Work customers), GP, Peer Support Network, or resources such as beyondblue and Lifeline.

It's unlikely that the working world will return to the 'business as usual' we knew before COVID. Change will remain a constant in our lives for a while to come. In the meantime, the trick to maintaining a positive outlook will be successfully embracing a new way of doing things, while managing the uncertainty that come with change.