

Communicating with the worker



When a worker first reports their injury or illness

Early and supportive communication is key. Workers who are contacted by their Return to Work Coordinator, Manager or Supervisor within the first few days are twice as likely to return to work without requiring additional time off, compared to those who were contacted after two weeks.

- The priority for your initial contact with the worker is their wellbeing. Ask how they are and show genuine care and concern
- Open-ended questions are better e.g.
 - During your initial contact with the worker, ask how they would like you to check-in e.g.

“How are you feeling generally?”

“Are you getting the help you need?”

“Do you prefer phone, text or email?”

While the worker is away, keep in regular contact with them

The main aim of these conversations is to stay in touch. Make it clear that the worker's return to good health is the priority and that you are available for support. Some examples are:

“I can imagine this must be challenging for you, how are you coping with everything?”

“We're all here for you and looking forward to your return.

Is there anything that I or the team can do to support you?”

When the worker is improving and preparing to return to work, welcome them back gradually

Injured or ill workers really value efforts by their Return to Work Coordinator and Supervisor to discuss changes that could be made to the worker's workplace, or to their duties, for their safe return.

“I'd like to help you return to work gradually.”

“You don't have to be 100% well to come back, we'll support you to do the work you feel able to do.”

“We want to make sure that your return goes smoothly.

Let's discuss if there are ways that we can make changes to the work you do.”

When the worker returns, check in with them regularly. They may need more support to start off with.

“We want you to successfully return to work, my main aim is to support you to make that happen.”

“How have you been coping with the changes in your work life?”



This resource has been adapted from the Safe Work Australia guide:
Managing the relationship with an injured or ill worker during return to work



R U OK?
How to have a conversation