

# Conducting the Back-to-Work Conference

## OVERVIEW

A back-to-work conference is designed to increase the likelihood of an employee's return to satisfactory performance following a period of absence from work for the treatment of a health condition.

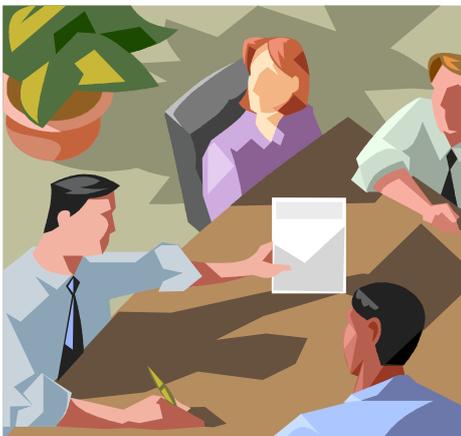
A back-to-work conference includes the employee, the EA professional, and supervisor/manager.

A back-to-work conference will include discussion about job performance issues that existed prior to the EAP referral. These may include attendance, quality of work, availability, conduct, attitude, or other concerns of the employer.

The back-to-work conference discusses anticipated communication between the employee, the EAP, and the supervisor permitted by the consent for the release of confidential information. The EAP will recommend that an active consent be maintained throughout the follow-up period.

## SUPERVISOR CHECKLIST

➤ The supervisor welcomes employee back to work. Encourage and validate employee's worth to the organization. Reports on what other employees have said relevant to missing employee, and desire to see the employee back at work.



➤ The supervisor should praise the employee for seeking help, but should add that the organization's concern is helping the employee perform satisfactorily. The employee's job security or promotional opportunities are not affected by his or her decision to seek help for a personal problem.

➤ Discuss job performance problems that existed prior to referral and that should no longer exist. Mention that periodic follow-up discussions will occur between the employee and the supervisor.

➤ Discuss anticipated consequences if performance problems should again appear. (Disciplinary actions, etc.)

➤ Discuss changes in the workplace or on the job that have occurred during employee's absence. Help employee to feel confident about coming back to work.

➤ Tell the employee you are looking forward to having him/her back and that you will offer support necessary to catch-up on work assignments missed. Discuss other work or make-up issues.

➤ Ask whether the employee has any questions about leave, insurance use, or other benefits.

## EAP ROLE

1. The EA professional will discuss anticipated follow-up meetings with employee or contacts by phone. Discuss any accommodations or alterations in work schedule or duties necessary to manage or treat the health condition.

2. The EA professional discusses what type of communication will occur between the EAP and the supervisor. For example, informing supervisor about employee's participation in the EAP; reporting missed or broken appointments; providing feedback on cooperation with it's recommendations. (EAP recommendations usually support the healthcare provider's recommendations.)

3. Length of time that the EAP will follow up.

4. EAP and supervisor's commitment to confidentiality and privacy. The employee's treatment and where he or she has been is confidential.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

The back-to-work conference *is not* confrontational. However, the employer's concerns about job performance issues are firmly discussed. It is not a meeting that focuses on telling the employee "the way things are" or one that causes the employee to feel "talked down to."

The spirit of a back-to-work conference should be one of cooperation, support, overview, and clear expectations.

The back-to-work conference should not be a forum to terminate or demote the employee. EAPs do not attend disciplinary actions or meetings where employees are surprised by adverse actions. An employee should always know the true purpose of any meeting involving the EAP.

Employees frequently attempt to disregard and violate their discharge summary and treatment recommendations. If an employee has been treated for a serious behavioral-medical condition, the treatment provider will discourage vacation after treatment to permit involvement in the recovery program. The EAP will always support this recommendation. **Treatment recommendations are NOT discussed in a back-to-work conferences, but it is important for employers to know that it is commonly recommended that the employee forego vacations and time off following inpatient treatment.**

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