

Managing attendance: A series of scenarios

Estimated reading time: 11 minutes 10 seconds

This section illustrates how some of the guidance in this section can be applied in the workplace. The stories have been developed by Business Disability Forum and aim to show the reality of situations and, how your response as a manager, might evolve.

The scenarios below are examples only – if you think your organisation would benefit from tailored examples for training materials please contact our [Learning and Development team](#).

Scenario 1: Amy and Daniel

Short term absences related to work related stress

Introduction

On reviewing sickness absence levels of her new team Amy is also concerned about Daniel. He is often late in the mornings and tends to leave work early. He often calls in sick for a day or two at a time.

Amy sets up a meeting with Daniel to explore if there are any underlying issues. She reads his job description, attendance records and his last appraisal before the meeting.

The initial discussion

Amy first of all reassures Daniel that this is just a meeting to discuss how he is getting on and to see if there is anything she can do to make it easier for him to do his job.

She tells him that she has noted that he was late once or twice a week in the last month and he had two days off through sickness. In addition, he had missed two deadlines on projects recently. She tells him that she is surprised by this because his last appraisal

showed that he met all his targets last year and said that he was a committed member of the team.

Amy asks Daniel if he is happy at work and if he is having any problems that are making it difficult for him to come in on time and do his job. Daniel tells Amy that he gets on well with all the team and has no problems. He apologises for missing the deadlines and says that he will try harder to come in on time.

Amy accepts his reassurances but says she will want to talk to him again if there are no improvements to explore what she could do to help him meet his deadlines and targets.

Daniel's concerns

A few weeks later Daniel asks to speak to Amy. He tells her that he has been feeling fed up and de-motivated at work recently. This is because he feels the department has been understaffed for so long. One member of the team, Usha has been on long-term sick leave and his colleague Caroline is frequently off sick at short notice.

He does understand that it is not his colleagues' fault that they are unwell, but it has meant that he has had to pick up their work.

He said he had been working long hours and on weekends for nearly six months but recently he had felt that he had had enough and had stopped because he was so tired.

Amy's response

Amy says she understands that it has been difficult for Daniel and hopes that now a new member of staff has joined the team Daniel's workload will ease.

She speaks to the HR team and agrees that Daniel can take a week as additional paid leave in recognition of the long hours he has worked so that he can rest. Following this however, targets must be met. Daniel promises Amy that when he returns his time keeping and attendance will improve.

Scenario 2: Amy and Caroline

Time off to attend appointments and therapy

Introduction

On reviewing sickness absence levels of her new team Amy is also concerned about Caroline. She is also often late in the mornings or tries to leave a little early. She also frequently calls in sick for a day or two at a time.

Amy has noted that Caroline will not meet her targets this month. Amy decides to talk to Caroline to see if there are any underlying issues and arranges to meet her. She makes sure she has Caroline's job description, attendance records and has read her last appraisal notes before the meeting.

The initial discussion

At her meeting with Caroline, Amy reassures her that this is just to see how she is getting on and to ask if there is anything she can do to help her do her job.

Amy tells Caroline that she has noted that Caroline is late most mornings, has called in sick for the day on four occasions and has had one longer period of absence during the last two months.

Caroline is initially defensive and says she is working as hard as she can. Amy agrees that Caroline seems to be working hard throughout the day, but she is still struggling to meet her targets. Amy asks if Caroline is having particular problems with any part of her job.

Caroline's concerns

Caroline becomes tearful and says that she has been finding it hard to cope because she has recently become a single parent and her son has been having problems at school. She admits that some of the days she has taken off sick have in fact been because she needed to deal with her son. She has, been to see her GP and has received a diagnosis of depression. Her GP has prescribed anti-depressants and referred her to a psychotherapist who wants to see her once a week for eight weeks.

The anti-depressants make her drowsy and slow making her late in the mornings. She finds that they make it hard for her to concentrate when she is at work. She is very worried about the effect on her work and the possibility of losing her job and so says that she will not go to the psychotherapy sessions as they mean taking any more time off work as she cannot go in the evenings because of her son.

Amy's response

Amy reassures Caroline that she is not about to lose her job. Amy however suggests that Caroline thinks about going back to her GP to explain about the side effects of the anti-depressants.

Amy also asks Caroline to see if it is possible to arrange the psychotherapy sessions at the beginning or end of the working day to minimise disruption. Even if this isn't possible Caroline can take the time she needs for eight weeks to go to the appointments. The sessions may help Caroline at work in the long term and the organisation is committed to making adjustments such as time off for treatment for a disability like depression.

Finally, Amy tells Caroline that she must not take time off sick to look after her son. If there is an emergency or she needs to go to her son's school unexpectedly she should ring Amy to tell her and she should be able to take this time as carer's leave. Other time must be taken as annual leave.

Scenario 3: Amy and David

Understanding the impact of fluctuating conditions

Introduction

David is a new member of staff who was recruited by Amy after she started managing the team. A few months after starting work David calls in sick for three days.

Developing a plan of action

On his return to work Amy asks to see David. She tells him it is her policy to try to talk to all her staff when they return from a period of sick leave to make sure that they are alright. David tells her that he has recovered now and thinks that it was the cold snap last week that made him feel unwell as the cold and damp affects his MS.

Amy asks if there is anything that could be done to help David and he suggests that working from home on days when it is particularly cold so that he doesn't have to go out might help.

They agree that David will ring Amy on cold days when he is feeling unwell to ask if he can work at home that day.

Scenario 4: Amy and Usha

Managing a return to work from long-term absence

Introduction

Usha has been off sick for nearly six months. Amy reads the notes on Usha's file and notes that no one seems to have been in touch with Usha recently. Amy contacts the previous team manager to ask why.

He tells Amy that Usha had been diagnosed with cancer and had gone off sick after starting chemotherapy. He had not wanted to add to her worries by contacting her at home and hadn't really known what to say to her.

Usha continues to send in statements of fitness for work from her GP that say she is recovering from surgery and chemotherapy. The last statement did suggest Usha might be fit for some work now.

Developing a plan of action

Amy decides to contact Usha to see how she is getting on. Before doing so however Amy contacts the HR team to confirm her understanding that Usha's sick pay will be reduced by half after six months.

The HR team informs Amy that Usha's pay will be reduced unless there is a good reason why it should not e.g. if the reason why Usha is still absent is because she is waiting for adjustments that will enable her to work.

Amy writes to Usha to introduce herself as her new manager. She says that she is sorry to learn that Usha had been so ill and asks if Usha feels up to a telephone conversation the following Friday morning so that they can get to know each other.

Amy suggests that Usha email or texts her or leaves a telephone message to let Amy know if she can telephone her.

The initial discussion

Usha emails Amy to say that she had an operation two months ago and is still receiving treatment, but she is a great deal better than she had been and that she is available for a telephone conversation.

During the telephone call Usha asks Amy if she still has a job. Amy reassures her that there is still a job for her that she can come back to when she feels ready. Amy suggests that as a first step she and Usha should meet. Usha agrees to the meeting but seems reluctant to come into the office, so Amy suggests a café in town.

At the meeting Amy allows Usha to tell her about the job she used to do, her illness and how it has affected her and her family and how she is now feeling much better than before even if things are not exactly the same. Amy asks Usha if she feels ready to come back to work, perhaps part-time and if there is anything that Amy can do to make returning easier. Usha tells Amy that she has been thinking about coming back as she is aware that her sick pay is about to be reduced.

Usha's concerns

Although she misses her colleagues and the daily routine of going to work, Usha worries about how much she has missed by being away. She's not sure how she is going to get up to speed again, especially as she can get tired very quickly and may not be able to work long hours like before.

Usha then tells Amy that she's worried about how seeing her old colleagues because she is very self-conscious about the way she now looks as she has had a mastectomy and now wears a scarf to cover her head. She used to have long black hair and liked wearing fashionable clothes and has found the reaction of friends and family to the change in her appearance difficult.

Amy's response

Amy asks Usha how she would feel about coming into the office one day in the few next weeks for a cup of tea. Amy will tell her colleagues that she is coming in and she could catch up with her old colleagues and meet the new people. In the meantime, Amy

promises to send Usha a copy of the latest internal newsletter and notes about a project that she thinks Usha will find interesting and on which she might work when she returns.

Usha's old colleagues were delighted to see her again and pleased that she might be coming back to work. Usha also said she felt a lot better having taken the first step towards coming back to work and realised how much she had missed it. She makes an appointment to see her GP to talk to him about being signed fit to return to work.

Summary: important aspects highlighted in these scenarios

- **If you spot patterns of behaviour be confident in tackling them:** you have a responsibility to explore any underlying issues that you do not know about.
- **Develop a clear understanding of the context:** draw evidence from job descriptions, previous appraisals and, if relevant, a history on targets set and achieved.
- **The first step is to talk:** aim for open communication even if it involves potentially difficult conversations. Listen and connect with the issues so you can determine what adjustments, if any, need to be made.
- **When evaluating a response be aware of what help might be available within your organisation:** you can talk confidentially to HR or Occupational Therapists.
- **Develop a clear response and follow up:** be clear what adjustments or other responses are being put in place and for how long, ensure your staff know when a follow up conversation will happen and what improvements you are aiming to see.

Business Disability Forum has an [Advice Service](#) available for managers working in organisations within our membership. To discuss any disability matters call on +44-(0)20-7403-3020 or email us at advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.

Business Disability Forum also provides a range learning and development offerings. For more information, see our [Learning and Development page](#) or contact our team at training@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.



Creating a disability-smart
world together

Business Disability Forum is committed to ensuring that all its products and services are as accessible as possible to everyone. If you wish to discuss anything with regard to the accessibility of this document please contact us.

Business Disability Forum
Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London SE1 2NY

Tel: +44-(0)20-7403-3020

Fax: +44-(0)20-7403-0404

Email: enquiries@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Web: www.businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Business Disability Forum is a company limited by guarantee with charitable objects.

Registered charity number: 1018463.

Registered Office: Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, London SE1 2NY.

Registered in England under Company Number: 2603700