

Returning to Work After Mental Health Difficulties Workbook

Rebuilding Confidence and Returning to Work at Your Own Pace

Created by Safe Haven Connect CIC

Welcome

Returning to work after experiencing mental health difficulties can feel like a significant step.

You may feel excited to return, but it's also completely normal to experience worries about how you'll cope, what others may think or whether you'll be able to manage your workload.

Everyone's recovery journey is different.

There is no right or wrong timeline, and it's important to remember that returning to work doesn't mean your recovery is complete. Recovery is an ongoing process that deserves patience, understanding and self-care.

This workbook has been designed to help you rebuild confidence, prepare for your return to work and develop practical strategies to support your wellbeing in the workplace.

Remember...

> "Returning to work isn't about proving yourself—it's about continuing your recovery while rebuilding confidence."

What You'll Learn

Throughout this workbook you'll explore:

- ♥ Preparing to return to work
- ♥ Building confidence after time away
- ♥ Managing workplace anxiety
- ♥ Communicating with your employer
- ♥ Setting healthy expectations

- ♥ Managing stress and workload
- ♥ Recognising early warning signs
- ♥ Looking after your wellbeing
- ♥ Creating a personal return-to-work plan
- ♥ Maintaining long-term wellbeing

Before You Begin

This workbook is designed to support you as you prepare for, or return to, work following mental health difficulties.

There are no right or wrong answers.

Take your time and complete the exercises at your own pace. Some activities may encourage you to reflect on your recovery journey and think about what support you may need.

Every positive step forward is progress.

A Thought to Remember

> "Recovery isn't measured by how quickly you return—it's measured by how well you look after yourself along the way."

Module 1 – Preparing to Return to Work

Returning to work can bring many emotions.

You may feel hopeful one day and anxious the next.

These mixed emotions are completely normal.

Returning to work is not about pretending everything is fine. It's about finding a balance that allows you to continue your recovery while gradually rebuilding your confidence.

Some people return on reduced hours or with adjusted duties. Others may need regular check-ins or additional support.

There is no single "correct" way to return to work.

The most important thing is finding an approach that supports both your wellbeing and your recovery.

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Module 1 – Preparing to Return to Work

Returning to work after mental health difficulties can feel both exciting and worrying.

You may be looking forward to getting back into a routine while also feeling concerned about coping, managing your workload or how others may respond.

These feelings are completely normal.

Recovery doesn't stop when you return to work. In fact, returning to work is often another important stage of your recovery journey.

The aim is not to return exactly as you were before. The aim is to return in a way that supports your health, confidence and long-term wellbeing.

Common Feelings Before Returning to Work

Tick any that you recognise.

- ☐ Feeling anxious
- ☐ Feeling excited
- ☐ Worried about coping
- ☐ Concerned about what colleagues may think
- ☐ Low confidence
- ☐ Fear of becoming unwell again

- ☐ Feeling motivated
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Unsure if you're ready
- ☐ Looking forward to having a routine again
- ☐ Other:

Reflection Exercise

Take a few moments to reflect.

What are you most looking forward to about returning to work?

What worries you the most?

What support would help you feel more confident?

Preparing Before Your First Day

Being prepared can help reduce anxiety.

Consider the following.

- ☐ Plan your journey.
- ☐ Prepare your clothes the night before.
- ☐ Pack your lunch.
- ☐ Set realistic expectations.
- ☐ Get enough sleep.
- ☐ Arrive a little early.
- ☐ Know who to speak to if you need support.
- ☐ Remind yourself that it's okay to take things one step at a time.

Communicating With Your Employer

If you feel comfortable, discussing your return with your manager may help.

Topics you may wish to discuss include:

- ✓ A phased return.
- ✓ Temporary adjustments.
- ✓ Flexible working where appropriate.
- ✓ Regular wellbeing check-ins.
- ✓ Any support that would help you succeed.

Remember, you don't have to share every detail of your mental health if you don't want to.

Activity – My Return to Work Plan

My return date:

What am I most confident about?

What concerns me most?

What support would help me?

One positive thing I will remind myself before returning:

Remember

Returning to work is not about proving yourself.

It is about continuing your recovery while rebuilding confidence at a pace that supports your wellbeing.

Some days will feel easier than others, and that's completely normal.

Key Takeaway

> Returning to work isn't the end of your recovery—it is another important step in your journey towards wellbeing.

Module Summary

Returning to work after mental health difficulties can bring mixed emotions. By preparing ahead, recognising your concerns, communicating your needs and setting realistic expectations, you can make your return feel more manageable and support your ongoing recovery.

Next Module

Module 2 – Rebuilding Confidence and Managing Workplace Anxiety

Module 2 – Rebuilding Confidence and Managing Workplace Anxiety

Returning to work after a period of mental health difficulties can sometimes affect your confidence.

You may question your abilities, worry about making mistakes or feel anxious about situations that previously felt manageable.

These feelings are common.

Confidence is not something that returns overnight—it grows through experience, support and taking small, manageable steps.

Remember:

> "Confidence grows every time you prove to yourself that you can take the next step."

Understanding Workplace Anxiety

Returning to work may trigger worries such as:

"What if I can't cope?"

"What if I become unwell again?"

"What will my colleagues think?"

"What if I make mistakes?"

"What if I let people down?"

These thoughts can feel convincing, but they are often driven by anxiety rather than facts.

Learning to recognise and challenge these thoughts can help you rebuild confidence.

Reflection Exercise

Think about your return to work.

What worries you the most?

Are these worries based on facts, or are they assumptions?

What would you say to a friend in the same situation?

Building Confidence Through Small Steps

Confidence grows through action.

Instead of trying to do everything at once, focus on one small step at a time.

Examples include:

- ✓ Completing one task.
- ✓ Asking one question.
- ✓ Speaking to one colleague.
- ✓ Taking your scheduled breaks.
- ✓ Finishing your working day without feeling guilty.

Small achievements build lasting confidence.

Managing Anxiety During the Working Day

If anxiety begins to increase, try these simple techniques.

- ☐ Pause for a moment.
- ☐ Take five slow breaths.
- ☐ Relax your shoulders.
- ☐ Drink some water.
- ☐ Focus on one task at a time.
- ☐ Take a short break if possible.
- ☐ Speak to someone you trust.
- ☐ Remind yourself that progress is more important than perfection.

Activity – My Confidence Plan

Complete the following.

One task I feel confident doing:

One task that worries me:

One small step I can take this week:

One positive thought I want to remember:

One person I can ask for support:

Celebrating Progress

Returning to work is an achievement.

Take a moment to recognise what you've already accomplished.

This week I am proud that I...

Remember, every positive step counts, no matter how small it may seem.

Remember

You don't have to return exactly as you were before.

Your experiences may have changed you, but they may also have helped you develop resilience, self-awareness and a greater understanding of your wellbeing.

Recovery isn't about going backwards—it's about moving forward with new strengths.

Key Takeaway

> Confidence returns gradually. Every small success helps rebuild trust in yourself and supports your ongoing recovery.

Module Summary

Returning to work can bring anxiety and self-doubt, but these feelings don't define your ability or your future. By taking small steps, challenging anxious thoughts, celebrating your progress and asking for support when needed, you can rebuild confidence and continue your recovery while succeeding at work.

Next Module

Module 3 – Looking After Your Wellbeing and Preventing Relapse

Module 3 – Looking After Your Wellbeing and Preventing Relapse

Returning to work is an important milestone, but protecting your mental wellbeing is just as important as returning.

Recovery isn't about never having difficult days. It's about recognising when you're struggling, taking positive action early and asking for support when you need it.

Looking after yourself is not selfish—it helps you stay healthy, resilient and able to continue your recovery.

Remember:

> "Your wellbeing deserves the same attention as your workload."

Recognising Your Early Warning Signs

Everyone experiences mental health differently.

Learning to recognise your own warning signs can help you take action before things become overwhelming.

Tick any that you recognise.

- ☐ Feeling constantly tired
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Increased anxiety
- ☐ Low mood
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Avoiding colleagues
- ☐ Calling in sick more often
- ☐ Losing motivation
- ☐ Feeling emotionally drained
- ☐ Negative self-talk
- ☐ Other:

Looking After Yourself at Work

Looking after your wellbeing during the working day can make a real difference.

Consider the following.

- ☐ Take regular breaks.
- ☐ Stay hydrated.
- ☐ Eat regular meals.
- ☐ Get fresh air during breaks.
- ☐ Pace yourself.
- ☐ Ask for help if your workload becomes too much.
- ☐ Finish work on time where possible.
- ☐ Leave work at work.
- ☐ Celebrate small achievements.
- ☐ Be kind to yourself.

Reflection Exercise

Think about your current routine.

What helps you feel your best?

What situations make your wellbeing more difficult?

What changes could support your recovery?

Creating My Wellbeing Plan

Three things I will do to protect my wellbeing:

1.

2.

3.

When I notice my mental health getting worse, I will...

People I can contact for support:

One healthy habit I will continue every day:

Building a Healthy Work-Life Balance

A healthy balance helps reduce stress and supports long-term recovery.

Tick the habits you'd like to build.

- ☐ Leave work on time where possible.
- ☐ Take annual leave.
- ☐ Spend time with family and friends.
- ☐ Exercise regularly.
- ☐ Get enough sleep.
- ☐ Make time for hobbies.
- ☐ Limit overtime.
- ☐ Practise mindfulness or breathing exercises.
- ☐ Switch off work notifications after hours.
- ☐ Spend time outdoors.
- ☐ Do something I enjoy every week.

Remember

Needing support doesn't mean you've failed.

Recovery isn't always a straight line.

Some days will be easier than others, and that's completely normal.

Looking after your mental health is something you deserve every day—not just when you're struggling.

Key Takeaway

> Protecting your wellbeing is one of the most important parts of a successful and sustainable return to work.

Module Summary

Returning to work is only one part of recovery. Maintaining your wellbeing through healthy routines, recognising early warning signs and seeking support when needed can help you continue building confidence and reduce the risk of becoming overwhelmed again.

Next Module

Module 4 – Creating Your Personal Return-to-Work Wellbeing Plan

Module 4 – Creating Your Personal Return-to-Work Wellbeing Plan

Returning to work after mental health difficulties is a significant achievement. It takes courage, determination and self-belief.

As you continue your recovery, remember that your wellbeing should remain a priority. A personal wellbeing plan can help you recognise early warning signs, maintain healthy habits and continue building confidence in the workplace.

Recovery is ongoing, and it's okay to adjust your plan as your needs change.

Remember:

> "Recovery isn't about never struggling again—it's about knowing how to support yourself when challenges arise."

My Personal Wellbeing Plan

My biggest priority when returning to work is:

One thing I will do each day to protect my wellbeing:

One healthy boundary I will maintain:

One strength I will remind myself of:

One person I can talk to if I'm struggling:

Recognising My Early Warning Signs

Tick any signs that tell you your mental wellbeing may be declining.

☐ Feeling overwhelmed

☐ Increased anxiety

☐ Difficulty sleeping

- ☐ Feeling emotionally exhausted
- ☐ Constant worrying
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Withdrawing from colleagues
- ☐ Loss of motivation
- ☐ Negative self-talk
- ☐ Changes in appetite
- ☐ Feeling hopeless
- ☐ Other:

My Daily Wellbeing Checklist

Tick the habits you'd like to maintain.

- ☐ Get enough sleep.
- ☐ Eat regular meals.
- ☐ Stay hydrated.
- ☐ Take regular breaks.
- ☐ Leave work on time where possible.
- ☐ Spend time outdoors.
- ☐ Exercise regularly.
- ☐ Practise mindfulness or breathing exercises.
- ☐ Stay connected with supportive people.

☐ Make time for hobbies.

☐ Celebrate my progress.

☐ Be kind to myself.

Reflection Exercise

Looking back through this workbook...

What have I learned about myself?

What has helped my recovery the most?

What workplace adjustments or habits support my wellbeing?

What advice would I give myself if I started struggling again?

My Personal Promise

Complete the sentence below.

To support my mental wellbeing, I promise myself that I will...

Remember

Returning to work after mental health difficulties is something to be proud of.

Your recovery matters.

Your wellbeing matters.

You deserve support, understanding and kindness—especially from yourself.

There is no need to rush your recovery or compare your journey with anyone else's.

Take each day as it comes and celebrate every step forward.

Key Takeaway

> Returning to work is not the end of your recovery—it is the beginning of a new chapter built on resilience, self-awareness and hope.

Congratulations!

Well done on completing the Returning to Work After Mental Health Difficulties Workbook.

We hope this workbook has helped you prepare for your return to work, rebuild your confidence and develop practical strategies to support your mental wellbeing.

Remember that recovery takes time, and asking for support is a sign of strength.

Be proud of how far you've come and continue taking one step at a time.

About Safe Haven Connect CIC

Safe Haven Connect CIC is dedicated to improving mental health and wellbeing through free educational resources, self-help workbooks, peer support and community initiatives.

Our mission is to make mental health support more accessible, reduce stigma and help people build happier, healthier lives.

Explore more free workbooks and wellbeing resources at:

 www.safehavenconnect.org

Safe Haven Connect CIC

Building stronger communities through connection, support and wellbeing.

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The information contained within this workbook is general in nature and may not be suitable for everyone. If you are concerned about your mental or physical health, or if your symptoms are persistent, worsening or causing significant distress, please seek advice from your GP or another appropriately qualified healthcare professional.

If you are experiencing severe emotional distress, thoughts of self-harm or suicide, or believe you or someone else is at immediate risk of harm, contact your local emergency services or your local mental health crisis service immediately.

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