**<INSERT ORGANISATION NAME>** **COVID-19: RETURNING EMPLOYEES’ MENTAL HEALTH CHECKLIST**

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| Tick off each point after consideration. | |
| Meet virtually with staff before they return. Discuss your proposed safety measures, any changes to the business, what employees should expect on the first day back and any worries staff have. |  |
| Be sympathetic to individual employees’ circumstances. Some may be worried about childcare arrangements, commuting on public transport, catching the virus themselves or transmitting it to a vulnerable family member. Some may have suffered a bereavement or be finding it difficult to cope at the moment. Staff who feel their concerns are listened to will be more engaged, more productive and more loyal. |  |
| Consider refresher training to rebuild furloughed employees’ confidence. |  |
| Seriously consider any flexible working requests. You’re legally obliged to accept such requests unless there’s a clear business reason not to do so. An improved work-life balance is also good for employees’ mental health and long-term performance. |  |
| Consider a phased return. This may be necessary anyway for social distancing but will also help staff to readjust mentally. Options include moving staff from full to flexible furlough before the scheme ends and (at least initially) implementing a blend of home and office working. |  |
| Prioritise the return of staff who have found remote working challenging. |  |
| Hold a socially distanced ‘welcome back’ meeting with employees (groups and/or individuals). As part of this, clearly set out your distancing and hygiene rules. People dislike change and any confusion will increase stress and ill feeling, make staff feel unsafe and distract them from their job. |  |
| Share details of any mental health support you offer, such as mental health first aiders or an employee assistance programme. Or refer staff to external sources of help, such as Mind’s guides on topics such as relaxation, sleep and how to cope when supporting someone else (see bit.ly/3ohilbG). |  |
| Review your support for anyone with an existing mental health condition. |  |
| Encourage managers to look out for warning signs of distress and to offer early support. Putting off that difficult conversation could lead to a decline in performance and attendance. If managers are uncomfortable holding sensitive conversations, provide training. |  |
| HR staff and managers should look after their own mental health. |  |
| Encourage employees to be respectful and understanding. Those who are relieved to be back in the workplace or who have worked throughout the pandemic should avoid criticising or judging anxious returners or colleagues who they perceive have been granted special treatment. Good relationships between team members are vital for positive mental health and effective working. |  |
| Ensure staff know who to go to if they have concerns about safety, wellbeing or unfair treatment. Deal with any complaints sensitively and follow your grievance procedure if necessary. |  |