Psychological & Psychosocial Safety for Return-to-Work

Considering potential psychological barriers and mitigating the risk of psychosocial hazards is vital for a successful return-to-work for an injured or ill worker. This quick-reference guide outlines the most common barriers and hazards and how employers can address them.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO RETURN-TO-WORK:

These are psychological issues that impact a person's mental wellbeing and may prevent them from being able to successfully return to their current employer.

- **Fear of re-injury** which can lead to anxiety, stress, and avoidance behaviors.

- **Loss of confidence** in their ability to perform job duties causing feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

- **Financial concerns** about lost income which can exacerbate stress and anxiety.

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS TO BE AWARE OF:

These are factors in the design or management of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm.

- **Social isolation** from their colleagues and supervisors, particularly if they've been absent for a long time or are on reduced or different duties. This can make it difficult for them to get support.

- **Discrimination or stigmatisation** because of an injury, which can make it difficult for them to talk about their experiences to others and get the help they need.

- **Fear of returning to a toxic workplace or difficult manager** if those psychosocial hazards were affecting the prior to injury.

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HOW TO CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR RETURN-TO-WORK

- ✓ **Hold regular 1:1 sessions** between the manager and the returning worker where it's safe for them to raise concerns
- ✓ **Address any conflict** between the manager and the employee is prior to them returning to work
- ✓ **Offer training in psychosocial hazards** to managers to enable them to identify and remove/reduce hazards
- ✓ **Building a positive team culture** through events, recognition and appreciation programs, inclusion and anti-discrimination policies, and "Welcome Back" activities
- ✓ **Adhere to formal policies and risk management strategies** that address psychosocial hazards
- ✓ **Providing education and support** to employees about the return-to-work process, including their rights and responsibilities
- ✓ **Encourage open communication** between employees, supervisors and healthcare providers to address any concerns or challenges before the employee returns to work
- ✓ **Offer flexible work arrangements** such as modified duties or reduced hours to help employee gradually transition back to their job
- ✓ **Providing access to resources** such as employee assistance programs or counselling to help employees cope with fear of re-injury
- ✓ **Being patient and understanding** with employees who are returning to work and understanding their capacity
- ✓ **Monitor for signs of discrimination or bias** against the returning employee and take steps to address these in workplace meetings

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For more information on psychosocial hazards visit:
www.kinnect.com.au/national-safe-work-month-resources