

Want new ideas for reducing employee absence?

5 Action points to consider.

Welcome to the first of what will be a regular blog providing information and advice on a range of occupational health topics.

Firstly, let me introduce myself. I am an occupational health nurse manager with a long career in both the public and private sectors, working extensively with organisations to improve employee health management in a business focused way. I have recently set up a company called The Occupational Health Business Ltd. www.theohbusiness.co.uk and provide occupational health and safety services and advice on the Equality Act to businesses throughout the United Kingdom as well as training for managers and HR professionals.

This has all been a challenge to say the least, especially getting the website right, but I think we are nearly there now...hopefully.

Ideas To Reduce Employee Absence

Of course if an employee has a genuine medical condition which renders them incapable of carrying out **all** of their work tasks, they should not be at work. However, often employers wait until the arrival of the sick note to focus on employee attendance, when steps could be taken a long time before to try and keep the employee at work in some capacity.

Action Points :-

1. Tune in to your employees.

Be aware of what is happening in your organisation. Who has problems with child care, elderly relatives or is going through a divorce? Which employees are attending their GPs or hospital for tests or minor treatments? How will their situation develop over the next few months?

Have you got employees with existing conditions? Do you know if they are likely to be progressive? Have you thought about how their job role may need to change in the future to accommodate their varying or advancing symptoms?

2. Start a dialogue to offer support at an early stage.

Consider how the employee's situation or health condition may develop at an early stage and what may be available to support them to stay in work. Discuss with Managers what options may be possible if the employee's circumstances do become more difficult. Speak with the employee regularly and offer support. Talk about various scenarios and develop a plan which both sides see as achievable. The aim is to keep employees at work in some capacity.

3. Ensure reasonable adjustments have been worked out beforehand.

The Equality Act 2010 requires reasonable adjustments to be implemented within an organisation for employees with medical conditions or disabilities. Even employees who are a carer for someone with a medical condition or disability, may fall under the provision of the Act.

Evaluate what reasonable adjustments are possible in your organisation should an employee become unable to carry out some or all of their role. How flexible can you be? Just because a role has always been done in a particular way doesn't mean it can't be delivered in a different, but equally effective way. Work these out across the organisation before the problem occurs. It should form a part of your contingency planning.

Look at enlisting the help of occupational health, charities and specialist agencies to look at what grants may be available for equipment etc.

4. Work with occupational health advisers.

Utilise occupational health advice to advise you what an employee **can** do at work in respect of their individual health conditions. The occupational health adviser will know your workplace and is expert in advising on fitness for work. Writing for a GP report will only give you information on the medical aspects of a condition, it will not provide you with any specific work related capability advice. It will also be costly and take ages to arrive.

5. Evaluate your attendance policies and include pre absence strategies.

Ensure company policies and procedures also focus on preventing employee absence as well as managing it when it occurs. Have you got an occupational health policy in place? Have you looked at a health and wellbeing strategy to focus on these areas within your organisation? Look at trends and consider implementing health promotion programmes to improve employee health awareness.

Don't let the sick note become the trigger for action.