

ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE CONCERNS ABOUT ON-SITE WORK

Employee health and safety is critical.

Employees with a disability or documented health risk are encouraged to contact the ADA Coordinator, Heather Roop (heather.roop@uky.edu), in the Office of Institutional Equity and Equal Opportunity to learn more. During any conversations with employees about their concerns with returning to on-site work, we must be mindful of employee medical privacy rights, which generally prohibit disclosure of personal health information without proper consent or authorization.

HR Employee Relations (er@email.uky.edu) is also available to consult with supervisors and staff employees about their concerns. Faculty are encouraged to contact the Office of Faculty Advancement (facultyadv@uky.edu).

For employees without a disability or health risk, the following discussion guide may be helpful for supervisors to better understand and address an employee's specific concerns.

Questions to ask if the concern is unclear

- What do you feel is needed before you can safely return to on-site work?
- What can I do to help you feel more confident in or comfortable with a return to on-site work?

Addressing concerns about health and safety of the workspace or office

Suggested clarifying questions

- Are you familiar with the health and safety measures the University is taking before returning employees to on-site work? [See the Return to On-Site Operations Guidance for Supervisors on the UK coronavirus website.](#)
- What are your specific concerns about the health and safety measures our department is implementing before returning to on-site work?

Ideas

- Involve your employees in the process of creating a safe workspace. We all feel we've lost some control over our daily lives. Help to restore a sense of empowerment by encouraging active participation in changes.
- Consider giving an employee a virtual tour of the office prior to returning on site. It may be helpful for employees to see where plexiglass is installed, where there are physical distancing markers, and the location of signs about health and safety measures.

Addressing concerns about child care or other caregiving needs

Suggested clarifying questions:

- (If the department can accommodate) Would flexible hours while working on site or a flexible schedule (e.g. on site for three days and remote for two) help address the concern?

Ideas

- Connect the employee with HR Work-Life: www.uky.edu/hr/work-life/resources-for-parents. This team is available to help employees understand and explore options, from full-time, center-based care to part-time and in-home child care. They can also connect the employee with the UK Working Parents Network to talk with other parents about their concerns and share tips and ideas.
- Connect the employee with HR Work-Life's elder care offerings: www.uky.edu/hr/work-life/elder-care. These services exist to help employees find caregiving resources, including personal referrals to community services and help selecting the right services for their loved one's needs.

Other tips for helping employees become more comfortable with returning to on-site work

- Focus on transparency in your communication. Provide regular updates on what the university is doing to keep employees safe. Encourage two-way communication regarding concerns and how these are being addressed or are planned for addressing in the future.
- Supervisors should learn to recognize mental health concerns or signs of emotional distress. Ensure employees know Work+Life Connections counseling offers telehealth therapy if they would like to talk with someone.
 - Signs someone may be struggling include changes in performance and productivity that are *inconsistent with the employee's typical behavior*, such as missing deadlines, arriving later than usual on a regular basis, absenteeism, irritability and anger, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, or behaving withdrawn during meetings or other conversations.
- Have a daily or frequent check in with each employee on your team. The check in can be quick, but it should focus more on how the employee is feeling and doing vs. their performance and productivity.
- Consider a phased approach that first allows employees to return on a voluntary basis, begins with a limited number of days per week or staggers schedules, and shifts with different entry and exit times.

Additional support for supervisors

- If after attempting to address concerns you find yourself unable to achieve what the employee is requesting (e.g. waiting to return until a vaccine is available), please get in touch with Environmental Health and Safety regarding specific health and safety concerns or HR Employee Relations regarding general concerns.