



**A•S•U**  
Australian Services Union

## **Support Person's Guide to**

**BEST PRACTICE RETURN TO WORK FOR A STRESS INJURY**



*Injured workers are entitled and should be encouraged to seek support, assistance and representation in the return to work process.*

*This role can be filled by a health and safety representative, a union delegate or any co-worker, family member or friend the injured worker nominates.*

*This document is designed to be a step by step guide so that the person supporting the worker suffering from a stress injury is better prepared for the complex processes which might accompany the return to work process.*

# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	1
PHASE 1: EARLY INTERVENTION .....	2
PHASE 2: CLAIM LODGED .....	3
PHASE 3: CLAIM ACCEPTANCE .....	4
PHASE 4: RETURN TO WORK PHASE .....	6
PHASE 5: MONITORING AND REVISING THE RETURN TO WORK PLAN .....	7
STEP BY STEP GUIDE .....	9

## PREVENTING WORK-RELATED STRESS

The burden of workplace stress on employers, organisations and individuals is significant and the best strategy for work-related stress focuses on prevention as the most important objective. To minimise the detrimental effects of stress employers should adopt a systematic approach that focuses on addressing the sources of job stress and preventing it from occurring in the future.

*The best practice return to work guidelines for a stress injury were developed by the Australian Services Union with the support of WorkSafe Victoria's Return to Work Fund. © Victorian WorkCover Authority. The information contained in this report is protected by copyright and cannot be reproduced in any form without the express permission of the Victorian WorkCover Authority.*



## Phase 1: Early Intervention

**Step 1:** Injured workers to report injury or illness as soon as possible

- ◆ All workers should be encouraged to report all incidents likely to lead to a work related stress injury or illness.

**Step 2:** Injured worker to be provided with support

- ◆ The employer should contact the injured worker as soon as possible after the injury happens and a workplace meeting between the worker and the employer should be organised.
- ◆ The employer should identify the return to work (RTW) coordinator and in consultation with the injured worker someone who can act as a support person, for example an OHS Representative or union delegate or friend or family support.
- ◆ The support person should establish contact with the injured worker as soon as is practicable and ask if they would like support at the meeting.
- ◆ At the meeting ensure that the worker is advised of the company EAP program and other support services.
- ◆ Ensure that the injured/ill worker is advised of their entitlement to lodge a claim for workers compensation and their obligation to lodge the claim as soon as possible. Relevant forms should be available at the workplace.
- ◆ Take notes and keep a record of the meeting and any subsequent meetings and interventions where you are present.



## Phase 2: Claim Lodged

### Step 1: Employer to contact the injured worker

- ◆ If a claim is lodged the employer or RTW coordinator should contact the injured worker as soon as possible and a workplace meeting between the worker and the employer should be organised.
- ◆ The support person should also be contacted and advised of the date and time of the meeting.

### Step 2: Meeting with the injured worker

- ◆ The support person should contact the injured worker and ask if they would like support at the meeting.
- ◆ The meeting should be with the nominated RTW coordinator and after consultation with the injured worker it may be agreed to include the manager or supervisor of the worker.
- ◆ At the meeting the following topics should be covered:
  1. How the worker is feeling and what treatment they are receiving. The employer should adopt a no fault attitude in all communication and focus on the medical treatment and safety of the worker.
  2. The employer should discuss what assistance is available for paying medical and rehabilitation expenses and weekly compensation until the claim is determined.
  3. The worker should be advised that the employer will be contacting their treating practitioner at intervals to review their progress and to find out how the employer can assist with their recovery and return to work.
  4. The employer should outline the organisation's Return to Work program and highlight the support available for the worker.
  5. If the worker is well enough a discussion should begin on the underlying issues relating to the claim and whether other workers might be exposed to the same stress hazards.
  6. Changes that can be implemented to remove any barriers that may exist to the injured worker safely returning to work and to eliminate or reduce the risk to psychological health that has been identified should also be considered.



## Phase 3: Claim Acceptance

### Step 1: Return to Work Planning

- ◆ A Return to Work (RTW) plan must be prepared within 10 days from the date that the injured worker's claim for weekly payments is accepted.
- ◆ It is a written action plan that outlines how the employer will assist the injured worker return to work in a way that is appropriate to their capacity as soon as possible.
- ◆ The goals of the RTW plan should be developed in consultation with, and endorsed by the worker and treating practitioner.
- ◆ The worker may also choose to involve their support person.

### Step 2: Employer to develop an Offer of Suitable Employment (OSE)

- ◆ The employer must develop an Offer of Suitable Employment (OSE) including hours and duties, in conjunction with the treating doctor, and if there is one, the occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP) and the injured worker to ensure that the plan is achievable and meaningful to the injured worker.
- ◆ The worker may also choose to involve their support person.
- ◆ Transitional roles for return to work should be considered.
- ◆ The focus should be on improving/building work capacity – returning to work, even on alternative duties, is more beneficial than waiting until the worker has the capacity for returning to their pre-injury role.
- ◆ The OSE must consider the impact on the safety of worker and other staff members affected by modified duties.
- ◆ It should set clear timeframes and identify and clarify key roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ If the need arises the plan should be flexible.

**Step 3:** Employer to build and gain support of the treating practitioner.

- ◆ The employer should consult with the treating practitioners. If the injured worker agrees the employer should organise a meeting with the treating doctor at their clinic or at the workplace to discuss strategies that can be adopted which will assist the worker to achieve their return to work goals.
- ◆ The support person may be asked to accompany the injured worker.

**Step 4:** Referral to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP)

- ◆ The employer should consider a referral to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP) with proven experience in psychological claim management.
- ◆ The worker should be given a choice of three ORPs by the employer or the Claim Agent

**Step 5:** Employer to maintain regular contact with worker

- ◆ The employer should maintain regular contact with the injured worker regardless of whether they have the capacity for work or not.





## Phase 4: Return to Work Phase

### Step 1: Regular meetings with the worker to monitor progress

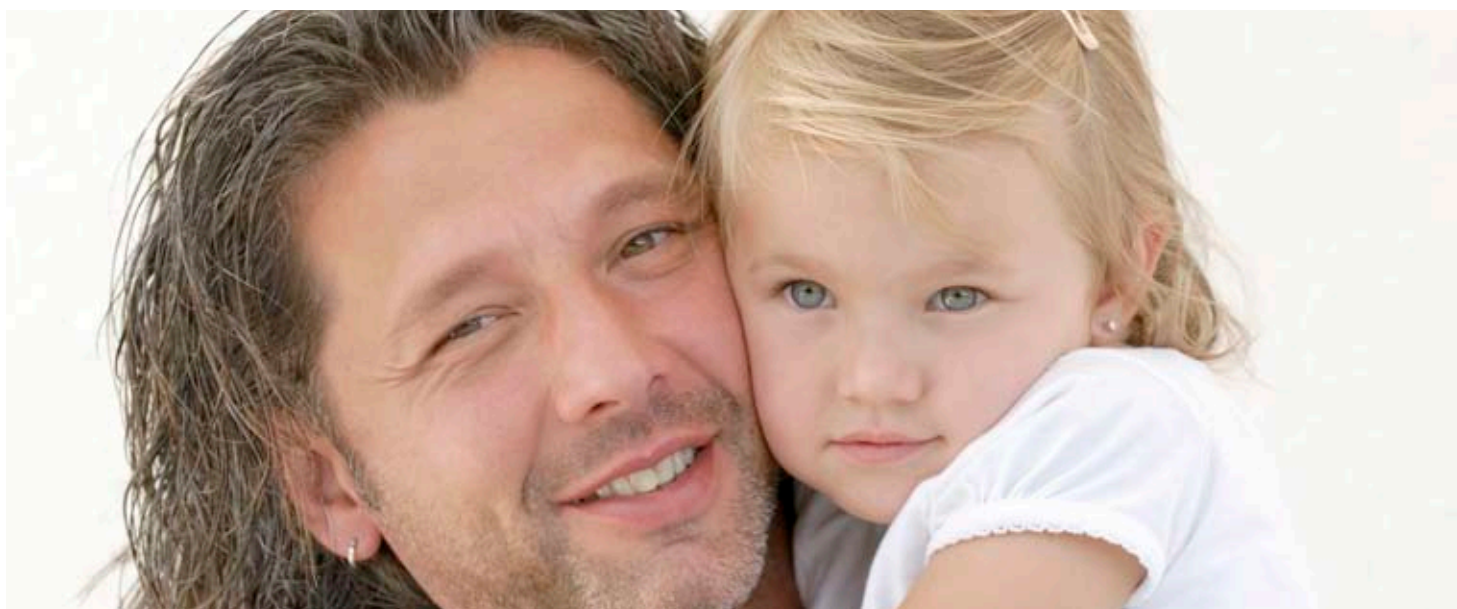
- ◆ Regular meetings should be organised to monitor the progress of the return to work and to address any issues in a consultative manner.
- ◆ The injured worker may choose to involve their support person.

### Step 2: Employer to consult with other employees and health & safety representatives

- ◆ The employer should provide an explanation to other workers on the situation of the absence, the length of expected absence (if known) and anticipated adjustments in the workplace as part of the RTW plan.
- ◆ They should consult with the worker regarding how this communication should occur and if they wish to involve the support person.
- ◆ They should ensure that confidentiality is maintained at all times.
- ◆ They should model positive behaviour within the workplace.

### Step 3: Employer to manage the risk or hazard

- ◆ The employer should consult with the injured worker and the health & safety representative about any proposed changes to address the underlying issues relating to the claim to manage the risk of further injury.
- ◆ They should also consult about any changes that can be implemented to allow the worker to return to work successfully.
- ◆ They should consider workplace modifications such as changes to the physical environment, putting in place a support team, implementing graduated hours.





# Phase 5: Monitoring & revising the Return to Work plan

## **Step 1:** Regular meetings with management, worker, supervisors, and other interested parties

- ◆ Return to work monitoring should take place after the first day, then at a minimum weekly for the duration of the RTW plan for the first month. The frequency of the meetings may decrease as the worker gets closer to achieving a successful return to work.
- ◆ A clear agenda should be set and the meeting should stay focused on achieving good outcomes for all parties.
- ◆ The worker may choose to involve their support person in these meetings.

## **Step 2:** Regular checking of the plan & being alert to the need for changes to the plan

- ◆ It is vital with a stress injury that the employer is attentive and responsive to signs of recurrence or aggravation of the injury and that the worker reports any such signs.
- ◆ It is also important to identify any increased capacity to return to pre-injury duties.
- ◆ Any change to the RTW plan should be done in consultation with the worker, support person, treating practitioner and ORP if involved.

## **Step 3:** Post Claim evaluation

- ◆ The worker, supervisor, manager and support person should be given the opportunity to give feedback on the success or otherwise of the return to work process and about ways of improving the process for the future.

*For more information or assistance contact the WorkSafe Advisory Service, your Union or Employer Association or visit the WorkSafe website at [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)*





# Step by step checklist for the support person to best practice return to work

## PHASE 1: EARLY INTERVENTION

- **Step 1:** Injured workers to report injury or illness as soon as possible
- **Step 2:** Injured worker to be provided with support

## PHASE 2: CLAIM LODGED

- **Step 1:** Employer to contact the injured worker
- **Step 2:** Meeting with the injured worker

## PHASE 3: CLAIM ACCEPTANCE

- **Step 1:** Return to Work Planning
- **Step 2:** Employer to develop an Offer of Suitable Employment (OSE)
- **Step 3:** Employer to build and gain support of the treating practitioner
- **Step 4:** Referral to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP)
- **Step 5:** Employer to maintain regular contact with worker

## PHASE 4: RETURN TO WORK PHASE

- **Step 1:** Regular meetings with the worker to monitor progress
- **Step 2:** Employer to consult with other employees and health & safety representatives
- **Step 3:** Employer to manage the risk or hazard

## PHASE 5: MONITORING & REVISING THE RETURN TO WORK PLAN

- **Step 1:** Regular meetings with management, worker, supervisors, and other interested parties
- **Step 2:** Regular checking of the plan & being alert to the need for changes to the plan
- **Step 3:** Post Claim evaluation



**A•S•U**  
Australian Services Union

Australian Services Union, Private Sector Branch, Level 1/117 Capel St, Nth Melbourne 3051  
**p.** 9320 6700 **e.** [info@asupsvic.org](mailto:info@asupsvic.org) **w.** [www.asuvic.org](http://www.asuvic.org)