Guide for the leader

When a team member is reported absent due to illness in the form of stress or poor well-being

Danica Pension

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The number of Danes suffering from mental illness or poor mental health has soared in recent years. One in every four Danes will suffer from mental illness before reaching the age of 50. The number is as high as one in every three Danes when seen over a person's full lifespan.

As a leader, part of your leadership task is to pay attention to whether any of your team members are showing signs of poor mental well-being. Should one of your team members suffer from stress or poor well-being, it may be possible to avoid his/her being reported absent.

So what can you as a leader specifically do in case of poor staff well-being or when a team member is showing early signs of stress?

Professional curiosity helps prevent poor well-being and stress
Do you have a team member who is showing early signs of stress?

If a team member is under particular strain for a period of time, it is important that the team member and you as a leader together explore the options available to resolve the situation.

With professional curiosity and without crossing the team member's boundaries, you can ask questions about his/her problems and then assume responsibility for helping the team member find a solution.

For useful advice about how to approach the talk, specific tools are available to you at Danica Pension erhverv: Stress

If you find out that your team member suffers from poor well-being or stress, you should recommend him/her to contact Danica Pension. Use us – today rather than tomorrow. The sooner the team member starts receiving treatment for stress, the sooner the treatment will be effective and the lesser the negative effects such as anxiety and depression will be.

According to WHO, stress is one of the primary causes of illness in Europe today.

If a team member suffers from poor well-being

It may be difficult to talk about the specific challenges facing a team member. The following subjects serve as inspiration for talks with the team member:

- What conditions at work have contributed to triggering the team member's stress symptoms?
- Has the team member been through an unusual stressful period that is now over or is the workload constantly heavy?
- Has the team member seen many organisational changes?
- Has the team member been given the necessary support to adapt his/her performance to the new conditions?
- Have expectations alignment, goals and priorities been unclear?
- Has it been clear who is responsible for ensuring that the team member's work tasks and working conditions match?
- How can the team member's working conditions be changed?
- Which persons need to be involved to make changes, if need be?
- Have any special situations had an impact on the team member's well-being?
- Have any work functions been particularly strenuous?
- Have any relations posed a special challenge to the team member?

REMEMBER to take minutes of the talks and follow up frequently.

Can reporting of absence due to illness be avoided?

To prevent absence due to illness, it may be a good idea for you and your team member to review all the team member's tasks to get an overview of their extent.

Some tasks will most likely have to be assigned to others, and the table below may be of help to obtain an overview:

Task	Time spent	Deadline	Partner	Customer	Priority	Assigned to

Talks about staff well-being

Follow up with frequent talks about staff well-being, reflecting the subjects you talked about during your initial discussions. For instance, a talk could be held once a week – preferably at the same time every week.

Show professional curiosity in the team member's situation.

Agree about a quick and easily accessible way for providing help to the team member in case symptoms or discomfort increases.

Stick to the agreements you and the team member make together. If the team member fails to stick to an agreement, it is often a symptom that something is not right.

When a team member is reported absent due to illness:

There are often a lot of questions and outstanding matters when a team member of yours is reported absent due to illness. Below you find "the leader's checklist" for handling the situation where a team member is reported absent due to illness.

- ☐ Are there any outstanding tasks?
- ☐ Are there any colleagues or other persons who need to be informed about the team member's absence?
- ☐ Should automatic replies to emails be set up?
- ☐ Should calls and text messages for the team member be redirected to a colleague?
- ☐ Schedule fixed times for telephone contact with the absent team member.
- ☐ Agree with the absent team member whether colleagues may contact him/her.
- ☐ Notify HR or similar function.
- ☐ Advise the team member on contacting Danica Pension to obtain assistance with possible treatment.

Talks with a team member who is reported absent due to illness

When a team member of yours is reported absent due to illness, it is important to stay in touch with him/her with regular talks. Agree early on how and how often you and the team member are to talk.

What can you and the team member talk about?
The purpose of the talks is to make sure that you and your team member maintain your good relationship and that the team member stays in touch with the workplace. This will make it easier to return to work.

The talks are also to ensure that you as a leader can find out how long the team member expects to be absent and whether the team member may be able to return to work sooner.

For example, you and the team member can talk about whether anything can be done so that your absent team member returns to work sooner. Could a temporary change in the team member's tasks, for instance, make it easier for him/her to return to work?

What questions are you allowed to ask?

Many leaders are not sure what they are allowed to or can ask a team member who is ill. Below are some example of what questions you as a leader are allowed to and can ask.

- How long do you expect to be reported absent due to illness?
- Is there anything we can do for you to return to work sooner?
- Which of your normal tasks would be difficult to perform at present?
- Would other tasks be easier for you to perform?
- What should your working day look like for you to manage even though you are not completely well?
- How can we together make a plan for your safe return to work as soon as possible?

Just under one in every five Danes in employment has a high stress level.

What must you as a leader remember when a team member is reported absent due to illness?

- Early intervention prevents long-term absence due to illness. The sooner you start helping a team member with Danica Pension's measures, the greater is the possibility that the team member will recover quickly.
- Inform the team member about the insurance package to which he/she has access to via Danica Pension.
- If a team member is expected to be absent due to illness for a long-term period, you can notify Danica Pension through NemRefusion that one of your team members is reported absent due to illness.
- If a team member is absent due to illness for more than 30 days, you must submit an application for reimbursement of sickness benefits through NemRefusion at Virk.dk not more than five weeks after the first sickness absence day.
- When a team member has reported a loss of earning capacity, you and your team member are offered leadership/HR guidance through the social adviser function at Danica Pension where focus is on retention and security during the period of absence due to illness.

What are the rules?

As a leader, you may find it confusing to navigate the jungle of laws and regulations applicable to absence due to illness. In the following, we present the most important ones:

The statutory sickness absence interview
An employer is under a legal obligation to conduct a personal sickness absence interview with a team member not more than four weeks after the first sick day. The purpose of the interview is for the team member to return to work.

Is a leader allowed to contact a team member who is ill?
Yes, as a leader you are allowed to call a team member who is reported absent due to illness. That is particularly relevant in case of long-term illness.

What questions are a leader not allowed to ask?
You are not allowed to ask your team member for details of the nature of his/her illness.

But you are allowed to and should focus on what it will take for the team member to return to work. Is it possible, for instance, for the team member to return to work gradually?

Fit for work certificate
The fit for work certificate consists of two parts. Part one must be completed by the leader and the team member and describes the tasks to be performed and when the team member can return to work.

Subsequently, the second part of the certificate must be completed by your team member's doctor to obtain a medical assessment of whether and when the team member can return to work.

When a team member is ready to return to work

When your team member says that he/she is ready to return to work in full or in part, it is a good idea to plan the return. For example, the plan could look like the following:

Step 1: Start with what is known	Start by together defining the tasks that can be undertaken at the beginning of the process. Start with known and routine tasks.
Step 2: Fixed working hours	Plan fixed working hours at the beginning and make sure that they followed.
Step 3: Follow-up meetings	Find out together what characterises a good working day. On the basis of that, set a number of milestones that will be considered at regular follow-up meetings.
Step 4: A good working day?	Schedule fixed weekly follow-up meetings (duration of about 10 minutes) for the coming two or three months and give priority to them. The leader is responsible for convening these meetings.
Step 5: Inform colleagues	The leader informs the colleagues about the plan. In particular, make sure to inform them about the fixed working hours so that the colleagues know what to expect.
Step 6: Stick to the plan	Stick to the plan and learn from the process.

The most important things you and your team member must consider when preparing the plan

In combination with the model on the left, you and your team member can use the following specific tool to prepare the plan for his/her return.

Theme	Agreed on XX XX	Agreed on XX XX	Agreed on XX XX
Working hours			
Work tasks			
Collaboration interfaces and relations			
Physical location			
Information			
Follow-up			

- Firstly, agree what the team member must do if things get difficult. You as a leader or a designated colleague can be the team member's go-to person if things get difficult.
- What is important to the team member in terms of scheduling working hours?
- What is a good first week/month for the team member in terms of number and scheduling of working hours?
- Are there any special times during the day when the team member is more energised?
- Does the team member have any appointments with a psychologist or a doctor that you and the team member need to consider?
- Should the working hours be scheduled so that the team member takes his/her lunch break with his/her colleagues?

Do you need information or advice?
Contact Danica Pension,
Healthcare Business on
+45 45 13 17 17

Remember communication and information for others

For example, you and your team member could discuss the following:

- What does your team member want you to tell his/her colleagues?
- Is there anything the team member does not want them to know?
- Is there anyone who particularly needs to be informed of your agreements with the team member? Will you or your team member inform them?
- How would the team member like his/her colleagues to welcome him/her back to work?
- Does the team member want the colleagues to ask questions about his/her situation, or is he/she most comfortable about informing them himself/herself?

The leader is responsible for preparing the plan for the team member's return to work, but the plan is always based on a dialogue with the team member.

Do you need information or advice?

Danica Pension has experienced social advisers who offer advice on how you as a leader can handle a team member's poor well-being or stress.

We discuss your options and provide specific information or advice if a team member has been or is about to be reported absent due to illness.

Contact Danica Pension, Healthcare Business on +45 45 13 17 17.

Sources

- *National Center for Biotechnology Information*
- *The National Health Profile 2017*
- *Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment*

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