

## **Initial Contact Guidelines for Communication with Absent Employees**

### **Preamble**

The following Initial Contact Guidelines were developed to assist front line staff in managing their employees when they become absent. This document is intended as a reference document to assist you in communication with your staff.

It is important that both employees and management understand their key roles in this process in order to reduce the impact of absence on operational areas and for assisting employees back to work in a safe and early manner. Engaging in ongoing communication with your staff promotes a healthy organizational culture and contributes to our corporate values.

### **INITIAL CONTACT - STEPS**

#### **GOALS:**

- To assist employees with a safe and early return to work
- To minimize the impact of employee absence on department operations

#### **PURPOSE OF CONTACT:**

It is important that the supervisor clearly expresses the purpose of their call and should include the following points:

- Convey support – employer cares and values their employees
- Get information – for the purposes of operational business needs
- Give information – advise employees what is required of them

#### **PROCEDURE SUMMARY:**

- Employee notifies their supervisor they are unable to attend work
- Supervisor completes On/Off Duty report (if required)
- Supervisor makes contact with the employee as soon as they are aware of the absence
- Supervisor completes the initial contact form and places in Supervisor's file
- Supervisor conducts follow up contacts as required

**NOTE:** Employers are not permitted to request information regarding the specific nature of the illness (if applicable) and the employee should be advised of this during the initial contact. However, the employer is permitted to ask and receive answers to various questions that are outlined on the Initial Contact form.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - GENERAL**

### **1. When should I contact an absent employee?**

As soon as you become aware of the absence – within 24 hours would be ideal. You will have to use discretion in some situations.

### **2. I left a message for the employee to contact me and they have not responded? What should I do?**

If they have an answering machine, explain why you are calling and give them a time frame to respond. If no answering machine, then try 3 times at various intervals throughout the day and document. If still no response, courier a letter to their home address advising them to contact you ASAP. Ensure you maintain notes of all conversations and copies of correspondence on the supervisor's file. If the employee fails to respond after these attempts, consult with your supervisor and HR Business Partner to determine whether any formal action should be taken (i.e. absence without permission).

### **3. I contacted the employee and they refused to answer my questions. What should I do?**

There may be situations where the employee is either uncomfortable or does not completely understand the reasons why you have contacted them. The questions outlined in the Initial Contact form are intended to assist the supervisor through this process. It is important that you provide an explanation and offer clarification to the employee regarding the purpose of your contact. If the employee still refuses to answer your questions, consult with your supervisor and HR Business Partner for guidance.

### **4. What if the employee shares medical information with me and I didn't ask them?**

Indicate to them once again that you do not require this information and it is considered confidential. However, it is up to the employee whether they choose to share this information with their supervisor and if so, maintain confidentiality.



**5. I contacted an employee and they state that I am picking on them, or I'm never sick so why are you calling me now? What should I say?**

Advise the employee that you are concerned about their current absenteeism and wish to offer support. You are not singling them out, as this is part of your ongoing supervisor's responsibility for all your employees.

**6. What if an employee does not know their work restrictions? What should I be asking them to do?**

They will need to discuss this with their treating doctor and fill out a Return to Work with Restrictions form and return it to you ASAP. Modified or alternate work opportunities can be considered upon receipt. In addition, indicate to the employee you can provide them with a copy of a detailed description of their position (Job Demands Analysis) for review by their doctor. The JDA can be obtained by contacting your Business Unit's Return to Work Coordinator.

**7. If the employee has work restrictions, how do I determine if I can accommodate?**

The Return to Work with Restrictions form documents both the employee's abilities and limitations. It is important to match the employee's restrictions to suitable modified work opportunities to ensure the employee's ability to safely return to work is not compromised. Should you require assistance, please contact your supervisor and/or the Return to Work Coordinator for your department.

**8. Why do I have to accommodate someone with problem absenteeism?**

The employer has a legal obligation to do so where the employee's absenteeism can be attributed to a medical condition that constitutes a disability under the protected grounds of Alberta Human Rights.

**9. What if I'm unable to accommodate an employee in my own work area? What do I do?**

If you are unable to accommodate an employee on a modified basis either in your work area or in their position elsewhere, contact your supervisor and the Return to Work Coordinator for your Business Unit. They will examine other available accommodation options.

**10. Why am I required to provide medical documentation for every absence?**

Occasionally employees are identified with excessive absenteeism. By requesting medical documentation for every absence, this ensures the employee is seeking and receiving appropriate medical treatment and support to assist them with maintaining regular attendance. Consult with your HR Business partner prior to proceeding.

**11. Is the employee responsible for the costs associated with completing the Return to Work with Restrictions form?**

Yes, but the City of Calgary will reimburse them to a maximum of \$15 for the doctor to complete this form. The employee must submit a copy of the invoice for this service to their department payroll. Please have them contact payroll directly for further information on the payment procedure.