

Returning to Work? How to Manage COVID-19 Anxiety

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It's hard to believe that it's been two months since social distancing measures came into effect and non-essential businesses were forced to close. During this time, thousands of Canadians across the country have been working from the comfort of their own home. Some companies, like Twitter, have even [announced](#) that they're providing their employees the option of working from home indefinitely. But not every company has the flexibility to provide this option to their employees, and you may be one of these companies. So, what does this mean for you and your employees? As an HR manager, there are certain things you can do to ensure your employees feel safe and secure returning to work in the midst of the pandemic.

Here are some of my recommendations for addressing COVID-19-related anxiety in the workplace:

Inform your employees of new safety measures

Prior to your employees returning to work, let them know of any and all changes you've made to your health and safety policies, specifically in regards to COVID-19, to keep them safe. I recommend hosting a virtual town hall or conference call to allow your employees to express any concerns. This will provide you with an opportunity to address their concerns before they return, and make any additional changes to your policies based on their feedback and needs.

If you notice [changes in their behaviour](#) while at work, this could be a direct result of fear and anxiety they are experiencing as a result of COVID-19. In this case, speak with your employee by letting them know you've noticed changes in their behaviour, and ask them if there is anything you can do to support them including offering them counselling support through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Open communication will be of utmost importance for both managers and employees at this time.

Show empathy and compassion

Even though businesses are reopening, the COVID-19 pandemic remains. Validate your employees' feelings and concerns with empathy and compassion, and make them feel heard. Keep in mind that not all businesses will be reopening, and some businesses like childcare centres are only being opened to meet the needs of essential workers. With that in mind, if an employee expresses a desire to continue working from home, and if it's a viable option, I suggest accommodating their request. [Studies](#) have shown that working from home can boost employee productivity. If you choose to pursue this route, you may consider setting clear expectations and boundaries for your employees so they are aware of their responsibilities. And, of course, follow up with them along the way to see how they are doing.

Promote self-care

It's easy to become distracted by ruminating thoughts, especially during a pandemic. To combat this, encourage your employees to [practice self-care](#). You may consider hosting mindfulness or other relaxation workshops during or outside of work hours in order to help your employees cope with their stress. Aspiria offers several [downloads on our website](#) that you find useful. Additionally, you might encourage them to step outside on their lunch breaks for some fresh air or to take a walk around the building for some exercise. Most importantly, encourage your employees to look out for each other, and ensure you are leading by example by taking care of them.

I wish you success and good health as you navigate your employees back to work. Remember, your EAP is a great resource for all employees to take advantage of, now and in the future. For additional tips and resources, you may also consider referring them to Aspiria's [COVID-19 Toolkit](#).