



TALKING TO CO-WORKERS

Often when people don't understand behaviors, they make assumptions. Making assumptions may cause people to say things at work that you find hurtful, confusing or that make you feel pressured to respond. Generally, people don't intend to cause harm, but may not think carefully about how their words affect you, and may not be aware of your needs.

You can choose how you respond to comments or questions about how you are coping, why you may be doing things at work differently, reasons why you were away, or your current health status. Take time to consider how much information you want to share and how you want it shared.

Usually, co-workers respond better when given enough information to understand what is going on.

If you are returning to work, talk to your manager before you start back about how you want information handled. For more information, see http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca/wti/talking_to_coworkers.

Some possible responses to questions and comments

So what was wrong with you? Why were you off for so long?

I was off work because I was ill. It took me a long time to feel better, but I'm feeling much better now. I'm very glad to be back and to reconnect with you and with the team.

It must have been nice to have all that time off! I would love a vacation right now.

You sound pretty stressed. I wish that I had been on vacation. Actually I was working really hard to get better, so that I could return to work and be part of the team again.

We all bent over backwards to do your work while you were away.

I am grateful that you filled in for me while I was away. I was also working really hard while I was away to get better so that I could come back and do my part.

Why are you not back full time? Are you still sick?

My doctor has suggested that I return to work gradually, so that I can adjust slowly back to full days. I've been told that this is often the best way for people to return to work successfully.

Why are you only doing some of your tasks?

It is part of a plan put in place to accommodate me so that I gradually build up to my full workload.

Why are you only doing the easy tasks?

It is part of a plan put in place to accommodate me through a successful transition back to my regular duties.

While you were away, your replacement did a fabulous job. She cleaned up all your files. We're going to miss how organized she was!

I am feeling a bit vulnerable right now, and it's kind of hard for me to hear about how great my replacement was! I'm really looking forward to contributing to the team again.

See also Understanding Needs at Work http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca/wti/understanding_needs and Conversations that Consider Needs http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca/wti/considering_needs.