

Return-to-work & re-engagement guide

For employees returning after menopause-related absence, surgical menopause, or a period of reduced hours. Also useful when a high performer becomes quiet, misses meetings, or asks to step back — before assuming performance is the issue.

Before they return

- Ask what would help most: full brief, no brief, quiet week, a buddy?
- Do not stack the first day with meetings.
- Confirm any agreed accommodations are in place — desk, fan, room, calendar blocks.
- Brief the immediate team on what to say (and what not to ask).

The first week

- A short 1:1 on day one — 15 minutes, no agenda.
- Protected time for catch-up, not new deliverables.
- Camera-off default in meetings.
- One "how's it going" check-in mid-week — not a performance conversation.

The first month

- Review what's working and what's not. Adjust the plan.
- Do not schedule performance reviews in the first thirty days back.
- Offer a phased return — reduced days or hours — if not already in place.
- Confirm the accommodations plan is written down and owned by someone.

When a strong performer goes quiet

Before opening a performance conversation, consider whether life-stage symptoms could be a factor. Signs can include cameras off, cancelled meetings, uncharacteristic errors, sleep disruption, or withdrawal. Ask: "Is there anything going on outside work that's making work harder right now? You don't have to name it."

Scripts

Welcome back — first hour

"Welcome back. Nothing on the agenda today. What would be most useful right now — coffee, a walk, or just some quiet?"

Mid-week check-in

"How's the week landing? What's one thing we could tweak for next week?"

When performance is being questioned by others

"I hear the concern. Before we go into a performance frame, I want to make sure we've offered the right support. Let me lead that conversation."

What not to do

- Do not put them on a stretch project in week one.
- Do not restructure their role while they are away.
- Do not comment on how they look.
- Do not use "how are you feeling?" as your only check-in. Ask what would help.

Unbranded guide. Adapt freely for internal use. Not legal advice.