



Returning to work after a personal crisis

How do I manage my emotions if I find it hard?

After a personal crisis or difficult event, some people find it a relief to return to the normality and structure of work. They may find it keeps them occupied and can prevent them thinking about recent events.

Others however, find it really tough to return to work. You may not discover your real feelings about returning to work until you actually get there, so it is worth keeping an open mind.

Teaching and lecturing can be difficult to return to as the constraints of the classroom and schedule mean it is hard, or even impossible, to take time out if you are feeling emotional. Working with children and young people can be draining both physically and emotionally even when you are feeling on top of the world, so don't be too harsh on yourself if you are finding it harder work than usual.

Early on, you may also be able to use a coworker or administrator to step in if things get a bit hard for you.

How do I handle colleagues and students when I get back?

When you first get back to work you may be surprised at the reactions of your colleagues or students. Some of them may feel uncomfortable about mentioning what has happened, which can make you feel isolated, or like they don't care. Others may keep talking about it, when all you want to do is forget about it all and move on with things.

If their behavior upsets you, try to remember that most of them are doing their best and don't mean to upset you - many of them won't have dealt with a situation like yours any more frequently than you have.

It is best to try to let someone know what your needs are or what you would prefer and then they can let others know, if you don't feel comfortable speaking to everyone about this. It might also be useful mentioning to a friend or manager what you feel comfortable with before you come back.

Although it is uncommon, some people may resent your absence and try to make things hard for you. If this happens, make sure you speak with your manager as soon as possible, as this is not acceptable behavior.

Pupils may be more likely to resent your absence, particularly if you teach teenagers or young adults.

By nature, many of them may be fairly egocentric and may be more focused on their own feelings of abandonment at an important time in their lives, without thought as to what you have just gone through. If at all possible, it might help to let them know what has happened - for example your mother has just died, or your partner has cancer.

Even if you don't feel comfortable sharing the gist of your problem with them, reassure them that you will do your best to help them catch up. Remember also that many of them might be quite direct in their questions, so prepare your responses in advance!

Where can I find more support?

If you are an educator from one of the districts that have signed up to this service and you wish to speak to a qualified counselor, you can call the toll free Educator Support Line on 1-877-876-4327.

The National Association of School Psychologists has a resource page for dealing with crisis in schools. You can access this page at the following address:

www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/index.aspx