



Stony Brook  
University

# THE OMBUDS OFFICE

*We're here to listen with an open mind.  
We're here to help resolve problems fairly.*

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## TIPS FOR MANAGERS/SUPERVISORS RE: EMPLOYEES RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE

### Scenarios managers/supervisors may anticipate

- For many employees who may have already been vaccinated and are socializing with loved ones and friends, there may not be any significant concerns
- For employees who have medical conditions or have loved ones with compromised immune systems, the thought of returning to the workplace can be filled with anxiety
- For employees who may have contracted COVID-19 or had a family or friend become sick or die from the virus, the idea of returning to the workplace creates fear
- For employees who are mistrustful or do not believe in vaccinations, yet feel they have no protection from the virus, returning to the workplace can also create anxiety and fear
- For employees who had the vaccine and are concerned about being around their co-workers who are not vaccinated
- For employees who are advised by their physicians to not get the vaccine due to a medication contraindication
- For employees who may not be as concerned about COVID-19 and may not be compliant with safety precautions
- Finally, many employees may resist returning to the workplace, because they have been able to do either all or a considerable portion of their job remotely. They may feel that they have been productive, have communicated well with their team and their supervisor and are requesting to work remotely either full-time or a few days per week.





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## Having the conversation with employees about returning to the workplace

1. [Listen empathically](#) without interruption as much as possible.
2. Be nonjudgmental and refrain from imposing your beliefs or values.
3. Recognize that diversity plays a role in personal health & safety decisions and the choice to be vaccinated; E.g. (fear, mistrust, and resistance can be due to historical maltreatment and other factors, such as cultural, religion, political beliefs, etc.).
4. Identify together the staff member's concerns. Consult your manager if necessary.
5. Since many concerns can be addressed by the Stony Brook [Stronger Together](#) website, refer to those particular resources and take the time to explain them.
6. Share how you have prepared the work environment for the employee's safe return. Review the [Facilities & Services FAQ](#) on the Stronger Together website.
7. Ask the employee what would help in the transition back to work.
8. When met with resistance, do not try to reason or argue your point of view, listen patiently and remind the employee of their options.
9. Recognize that this has been a serious and deadly virus. The employee may have been sick with the virus, or experienced a loved one(s) who has died or has been ill and/or hospitalized.
10. For tips on having a "difficult conversation" or on "communication" or "conflict," refer to the [Ombuds Office's Quick Tips](#). There are downloadable handouts, videos and articles that can prepare you for conversations with your employees.
11. Refer to the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) to address employee's anxiety or fear and [Healthier U](#) for wellness resources.

