



ATTENDANCE AWARENESS PROGRAM

2014 Revision

Overview

Purpose of the Program

At Trent University, every employee fulfills a key link in the functioning of the team. Consistent and punctual attendance is a critical key to the success of Trent. Unscheduled absences create additional workload demands on co-workers and Supervisors that impede our obligations to the university community. It is an expectation of employment that all employees of Trent University are responsible for their prompt and regular attendance at work.

The Attendance Awareness Program has been implemented to promote regular attendance and ensure absenteeism is managed through consistent and positive non-disciplinary intervention strategies and, as such, addresses innocent or non-culpable absenteeism only. The University recognizes that there are many reasons for innocent absenteeism. The Attendance Awareness Program is based on cooperation between the manager and the employee and emphasizes the following:

- the promotion of regular and improved attendance;
- a standard protocol for managing attendance; and,
- provides employees with timely support and assistance whenever possible.

Focus on Correction

Trent University employees must be able to fulfill the requirements of their job on a regular basis; however, from time to time, every employee will have a reasonable and unavoidable cause that prevents him/her from being available for work. Employees who keep such absences to a minimum and keep the university informed of circumstances are not the focus of this policy. The purpose of this policy is to reduce excessive absenteeism.

At all steps of this procedure, the focus is on working with the employee to correct those problems that are causing absenteeism. Counseling by management or external professionals is used as a means of working with the employee to solve the absenteeism problem.

Only where employee absences are so frequent and disruptive that the employee is no longer able to fulfill the employment relationship, will termination be considered

This is a guideline of the steps necessary to correct absenteeism. If, at any step, management believes the employee is making significant progress towards solving his/her absenteeism problem, the procedures may be modified.

Management acknowledges its role in assisting the employee while corrective steps are being taken.

**Non-Culpable
(Innocent)
Absenteeism**

This occurs when an employee is absent from work through no fault of his/her own because of a legitimate illness or injury. Innocent absenteeism will be managed in a non-disciplinary manner recognizing that employees may require assistance to attend work regularly. Innocent absenteeism includes absences due to illness and sick (paid and unpaid). **This program addresses non-culpable absences only.**

**Culpable
(Blameworthy)
Absenteeism**

This occurs when an employee is absent from work due to factors within the employee's control. Culpable absenteeism will not be managed as part of the Attendance Awareness Program. Culpable absenteeism may be grounds for discipline and managed through Trent's progressive discipline policy. Culpable absenteeism includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- unauthorized lateness/leaving work early;
- failure to notify of absence;
- unexcused absence ;
- abuse of leave;
- failure to explain absence; and,
- absence unsupported by medical documentation when required.

**Legislative
Requirements/
Underlying
Principles**

Trent University is committed to meeting its obligations under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. To this end, the University will make all reasonable efforts to assist employees with work related injuries, illnesses and ongoing disabilities to remain at work or to return to work as soon as they are able.

The Attendance Awareness Program is non-disciplinary and is intended to provide a supportive/accommodating approach to helping employees in their efforts to attain regular attendance. In this regard, meetings and accommodation plans will consider and respect each employee's situation.

**Employee Copy
of Records**

Every employee will be provided with a record of their attendance, upon request.

Process

If an employee's absenteeism exceeds the organization's threshold, it will be brought to the employee's attention by the Supervisor.

If the employee continues to have high absenteeism, the Supervisor will meet with him/her with a goal of correcting the matter.

Continued high absenteeism will be the subject of a series of counseling sessions with the Assoc. VP, Human Resources and the appropriate Vice President.

An employee whose attendance improves for a sustained period can exit the program.

Employee Responsibilities

Trent employees will:

- attempt to schedule appointments whenever possible to minimally disrupt normal departmental work schedules outside work hours;
- inform Supervisor of the first day of absence, providing an indication of the expected length of absence, and report to Supervisor on return to work from absence;
- provide sufficient medical documentation, as requested, to support the absence from work, the return to work, and any required accommodation; and,
- cooperate in any return to work and/or accommodation efforts.

Supervisor Responsibilities

Department Managers and Supervisors are expected to:

- apply and administer the Attendance Awareness program;
- promote two way communication with employees regarding standards and expectations;
- foster a healthy and productive environment;
- ensure medical documentation given is kept confidential and forwarded to Human Resources, for placement in the employee's medical file;
- identify situations that require an employee to be referred to other support services (e.g. Employee Awareness Program, Wellness Works);
- consult Human Resources and keep them informed on an ongoing basis;
- work with Human Resources to assist in identifying accommodation opportunities to allow an employee to remain at work or return to work as soon as they are able.

Collective Agreement

Should there be any provision in a collective agreement which differs from that of this program; the terms of the collective agreement prevail.

Absenteeism Records

What Constitutes Absenteeism

Absence from work is any circumstance where an employee who is scheduled or is otherwise expected to be at work is not at work.

Included in absenteeism calculations are:

- absence due to illness or injury;

Not included in absenteeism calculations are the following, based on approval by the Supervisor:

- vacation;

- statutory holidays unless the employee is scheduled to work;
- bereavement;
- compassionate leave granted by the Supervisor;
- jury/court/witness leave;
- work-related injury;
- long term disability;
- approved paid leave;
- disciplinary absences;
- medical/dental appointments ;
- the University elects to close;
- lieu time taken;
- maternity leave;
- parental leave;
- training; and,
- union leave.

The Supervisor will need to accommodate situations where the employee is routinely absent for legitimate medical reasons (e.g. ongoing therapy), which cannot be accommodated during personal time.

Threshold for Scheduling a Review

The threshold, effective January 1, 2006, is the number of days absent equal to or greater than nine [9] days **and** occurrences equal to or greater than four [4] occurrences, in a twelve [12] month period. The threshold will be prorated for regular recurring employees and regular part-time employees.

The Supervisor will review absences at and above the threshold, whether culpable or non-culpable, with the employee. The threshold standard will be reviewed periodically.

PROCEDURE FOR DISCUSSIONS

Purpose of Discussions

The purpose of a counseling meeting is:

- to bring to the employee's attention his or her attendance record;
- to have a supportive, solution-focused discussion on how to handle work priorities and service delivery issues;
- to discuss possible causes of the absenteeism; and
- to determine ways of improving the employee's attendance.

It is a reminder that regular attendance at work is an implicit condition of employment.

Personal Privacy

An employee is not required to divulge the diagnosis of illness to an employer, unless he/she wishes to do so.

Attendance records are private and should not be circulated or shared.

Informal Discussion of Concern

In cases where an employee's absenteeism **does not exceed the threshold, however the Supervisor is concerned about the employee's attendance**, an informal discussion can be held. The discussion could include the following:

- an acknowledgement of the absences;
- an offer to discuss any circumstances contributing to the absenteeism with which management may be able to assist with. This should include a discussion of other support services available [EAP]; and/or,
- the process of accommodation may be initiated if required and supported by medical documentation
- a supportive, solution-focused discussion on how to handle work priorities and service delivery issues.

Step 1 **Supervisory Discussion –** **Action plan established**

An employee with absences **at or above the threshold** will be asked to meet with their Supervisor. This discussion will include the following:

- the reason for the interview;
- a reminder of the effect of absenteeism on the University, service to students and extra load on other staff;
- an overview of the current year and the previous year's absenteeism record;
- an outline of the steps of the Attendance Awareness Program;
- an offer to discuss any circumstances contributing to the absenteeism with which management may be able to assist. This

should include a discussion of other support services available (e.g. EAP);

- the process of accommodation may be initiated if required and supported by medical documentation; and,
- an action plan should be established for improving attendance. If the objectives are being met, a review meeting should occur no later than 6 months, preferably within 3 months. If objectives are not being met a step 2 meeting should occur sooner, but within a reasonable time frame for an improvement to occur.

The discussion is designed to ensure that the employee understands the employer's concern about his/her absenteeism and also to explore any problems for which there may be a solution. The Supervisor will review the employee's history of absences, steps the employee has taken to correct the situation, possible additional solutions and, provide any assistance management can render.

If requested, a union representative will be present.

Step 2 – Meeting with Supervisor; Letter of Concern

If, within a reasonable time frame, the objectives of the action plan established in Step 1 are not being met, a meeting should occur.

As in Step 1, the discussion will include the following:

- the reason for the interview;
- **a supportive, solution-focused discussion on how to handle work priorities and service delivery issues;** an overview of the current year and the previous year's absenteeism record;
- an outline of the steps of the Attendance Awareness Program;
- an offer to discuss any circumstances contributing to the absenteeism with which management may be able to assist. This should include a discussion of other support services available (e.g. EAP);
- the process of accommodation may be initiated if required and supported by medical documentation; and,
- an action plan with a specific time frame should be established for improving attendance.

If requested, a union representative will be present.

A letter to the employee will follow the discussion and will include the following:

- an outline of the steps of this policy(or policy to be provided);

- a statement as to where the employee is in the process;
- an overview of the employee's absentee record including the number and length of absences;
- past efforts used to bring this problem to the employee's attention (if applicable);
- past efforts or offers to help by management;
- a summary of the discussion and any plans made;
- a request for medical documentation, if required; and,
- detail what consequences will follow if there is no noticeable improvement.

A copy will be forwarded to the union and Human Resources to be put in the employee's medical file.

Step 3
Discussion with
Department
Head

If the absences continue, the employee will be requested to attend a meeting with his/her Supervisor **and the Department Head** to discuss the absences and to establish an action plan for improving their attendance.

The record of absences, action plans established, review dates and potential next steps will be documented and a copy given to the employee [see Step 2 - **Letter of Concern**]. A copy will be forwarded to Human Resources, to be put in the employee's personnel file

The employee will be advised that regular attendance is a condition of employment.

The process of accommodation may be initiated, supported by medical documentation.

Short term objectives should be established for improving attendance. If the objectives are being met, a review meeting should occur no later than 6 months, preferably within 3 months. If objectives are not being met a step 4 meeting should occur sooner but within a reasonable time frame for improvement to occur.

If requested, a union representative may be present.

Step 4
Meeting with
Human
Resources

Should the employee be unable to meet the objectives established in Step 3, further discussions and more detailed action planning will be initiated to determine the employee's ability to fulfill the employment contract at Trent.

A meeting will be convened by a Human Resources representative. Additionally, further action plans may be proposed to ensure regular attendance.

A copy of the notes of the meeting will be given to the employee and a copy placed in the employee's medical file.

Objectives will be established for improving attendance. If the objectives are

being met, a review meeting should occur no later than 6 months, preferably within 3 months. If objectives are not being met a Step 5 meeting should occur sooner, but within a reasonable time frame for improvement to occur.

Employees must be warned, no later than Step 4, that if he/she does not or cannot achieve the objectives set, and every reasonable precaution has been made to assist the employee, termination may be required.

A union representative must be present.

Step 5
**Final Review
and Action
Planning - VP**

Should the previous steps not result in improvement; a final review meeting will be held to summarize action plans and the record of absences. The meeting will be chaired by the appropriate VP. The purpose of the meeting will be to highlight that the continued absenteeism is unacceptable, that the action plans have not resulted in improved attendance and that this is a final review.

After ensuring that there is no underlying disability preventing regular attendance, the employee will be advised that his/her attendance will be reviewed and if there is no improvement, a last chance agreement will be issued.

A union representative must be present.

Step 6
Termination

If the absence of the employee is outside his/her personal control and will be ongoing for the foreseeable future, a final notice will be sent to the employee. The written documentation will indicate the following:

- the objectives that have not been met;
- a warning of the severity of the employee's absenteeism problem;
- the employee's attendance will be reviewed over the next month; and,
- should there be no improvement, the employee will be terminated.

A meeting will be held with the employee, the Supervisor, the Department VP and Human Resources to review the entire case history. The steps of warning, written warning and suspension will be reviewed. Again, it must be confirmed that there is no underlying disability preventing regular attendance.

If evidence of the employee's condition indicates that there is no reasonable expectation that the employee will be able to return to work to fulfill their normal job function on a sustained basis over a reasonable time in the future, the employee may be terminated.

A union representative must be present.

Prior to termination, the following items will be considered:

- the employee's record of absence must be clearly excessive;

- it must be clearly demonstrated that there is little likelihood that the employee will be able to attend work on a regular basis in the future;
- the employee was clearly made aware of his/her absence in comparison to the acceptable level for the department and the university;
- the employee has not made every effort to regain health and return to work;
- the employee was offered assistance;
- the employer informed the employee of the unworkable situation resulting from his/her absence;
- the employer attempted to accommodate the employee by offering a more suitable position or reduction in hours;
- appropriate time has elapsed to allow for recovery;
- the absenteeism continues up to the date of termination (i.e. no significant improvements);
- there is a consequence of disruption to the organization or other employees; and,
- the employee has been treated fairly and without discrimination

Exiting the Program

When an employee achieves an attendance record for one year that is below the threshold, he/she will be able to exit the program.

MEDICAL DOCUMENTATION

Doctor's Note

A Doctor's note will be required for absences beyond 4 days. Further, in cases where an employee has a high absenteeism record, a Doctor's note may be required for any absence from work.

The original note must be signed by the doctor and must be provided on the official stationary of the physician that includes their name, address and telephone number. The note must contain the following information:

- **Full name of employee**
- **Date assessed as unable to perform regular duties**
- **An indication that there is treatment being provided**
- **Prognosis on a return to work date or**
- **Date of the next assessment (if employee remains off work)**

Functional Abilities Form

There are situations where an employee may be able to work on a limited basis. For example, an employee with an injury which can be aggravated by heavy lifting may be reassigned to do other work to avoid the lifting

restriction.

The Functional Abilities Form is designed to provide a list of restrictions for accommodation, while not requesting any confidential data such as diagnosis.

Completion of this form may be requested in the event of any absence which extends beyond 30 days. It may also be requested in the event of high absenteeism.

The form is also used upon returning to work after an extended absence to ensure that it is appropriate for the employee to return to work and to identify whether or not there continues to be any restriction(s) on doing the work.

If using a doctor's note instead of a Functional Abilities Form (FAF), the original note must be signed by the doctor and must be provided on the official stationary of the physician that includes their name, address and telephone number. The note must contain the following information:

- **Full name of employee**
- **Date assessed as unable to perform regular duties**
- **An indication that there is treatment being provided**
- **Prognosis on a return to work date or**
- **Date of the next assessment**

Note: A doctor's note in place of a FAF must contain all of the above information to ensure continued sick leave benefits.

If requiring accommodation (gradual return to work or restricted duties or both) a FAF or a doctor's note must include:

- **Full name of employee**
- **Date the employee is to return to work**
- **Detailed/specific information on the nature of restrictions (i.e.no bending, sitting, lifting). Must include the duration of the restrictions**
- **Reassessment date if applicable**
- **An indication that there is on-going treatment being provided (do not want to know the details of the treatment just that it is occurring)**

Note: Some physicians prefer using a Functional Abilities Form (FAF) as it is easier than writing an extensive medical note.