MetLife | Return to Health – Occupational Health Insights

Overcoming and Responding to Resistance



What is Resistance?[1]

- Resistance may occur when we expect or encourage change when the employee is not ready.
- Resistance can be conscious or unconscious.

What are the types of resistance?[1]

- **Issue resistance** can occur regarding a specific issue or change being proposed.
- **Relational resistance** can be associated with the nature of the relationship between the disability administrator and the employee.

What can resistance look like?[1]

- Some signs may include:
  - Interrupting you while you're speaking.
  - Being distracted or uninterested.
  - Becoming argumentative or defensive.

When Encountering Resistance[1]:

- **Reflect the statement:** "You don't seem to enjoy the idea of returning to work."
- **Reflect the emotion:** "It sounds like you're uncomfortable with the idea of returning to work."
- **Reflect ambivalence:** "One part of you would like to return to work to have that structure back, but the other doesn't think you can keep up with the workflow or expectations."
- **Acknowledge resistance:** "It seems like we've gotten off track, so let's slow down and take a step back."
- **Support choice/control:** "You're in control here, so if you'd like to shift away from this conversation, we can move on to something else.

Reminders[1]:

- Express empathy, support and understanding in a kind and non-confrontational manner.
- Support self-efficacy by reminding the employee they are capable of success or making a change.
- Acknowledge the employee may feel anxious, nervous, or overwhelmed about return to work.
- Support the employee by validating their concerns and emotions.
- Ask follow up questions to allow the employee to elaborate on their concerns.
- Engage in active listening to show understanding and validation of the employee's perspective.

Avoid and Resist[1]:

- Arguing and persuading
- Blaming
- Making light of the situation
- Oversharing and gossip
- Responding with anger
- Becoming defensive

1. University of Missouri. "Motivational Interviewing (MI) Rolling with Resistance." *WiseWoman*, Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women, health.mo.gov/living/healthcondiseases/chronic/wisewoman/pdf/MIRollingwithResistance.pdf. Accessed 17 June 2025.

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ReturnToHealth@MetLife.com