

Northwestern

Staff Medical/Parental Leave Do's & Don'ts for Managers

Understand University Leaves and other Resources that Provide Support

Do familiarize yourself with [Northwestern leave options and resources](#). Please see the [Staff Leave Administration Manager and Administrators Reference](#) guide for detailed information.

Do be aware that medical and parental leaves are managed by Northwestern's leave administrator The Hartford. The Hartford determines leave eligibility while keeping personal health information confidential. Please note that Northwestern will have a new vendor, MetLife, administering leaves in 2025. This document and other resources will be updated accordingly when that new partnership takes effect.

Do direct the employee to [The Hartford](#) as soon as they indicate a need for a leave or notify you about a serious health condition that may require time away from work.

Communicate Clearly and Compassionately

Do acknowledge the need for a leave with empathy. Understand that medical or parental leave can be a significant and personal matter. Express your support and offer your best wishes for their health or family situation.

Do ensure all communication is respectful and considers the employee's need for privacy.

Do ask about the logistics of the leave. It is OK to ask when they will need to go out, approximately how long they will need, and when they think they will return to work.

Don't ask for details related to the employee's health condition or parental situation. If the employee voluntarily shares information, it is OK to acknowledge it and express empathy—but avoid intrusive questions about their personal situation.

Do keep the details of the leave and the employee's health conditions confidential if the employee voluntarily shares such information with you.

Don't share specific details about the employee's leave or health with others.

Don't engage in speculation or informal discussions about the leave situation outside of necessary conversations with HR or departmental leadership.

Don't let the employee's leave impact their Performance Excellence evaluation, promotions, or job security. Their absence should not affect their standing within the University.

Don't overlook the need to provide the employee with updates if they desire or if it affects their work or department.

Plan for Coverage

Do work with the employee to develop a comprehensive transition plan if there is notice for the leave. This might include delegating responsibilities, research tasks, or administrative duties to others.

Do inform relevant departments and stakeholders about the absence, ensuring smooth transitions and minimal disruption to academic and administrative functions.

Don't expect the employee to work or monitor email while out on leave. On extremely rare occasions, if a significant question arises that only the employee can answer, you may contact them but it should not be a regular occurrence. There should be an understanding that the employee may not be available or able to respond to such inquiries during the leave, and there should not be an expectation that they will reply

Facilitate a smooth return from leave

Do check in prior to the expected return to work date, to verify whether they will be coming back to work or will be requesting an extension. If they need to request an extension, they should contact The Hartford.

Do create a plan for the employee's return to work, which may include a phased return or refresher meetings to bring them up to speed.

Do be prepared to address any new needs or adjustments the employee may have when they come back, such as changes in workload.

Do be prepared to meet with them on their first day back to communicate significant updates or changes in the workplace that might affect the employee's role or responsibilities.

Do refer the employee to the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance to request an accommodation if they should need one to perform the essential functions of their job.

Don't assume the employee's readiness to return or their ability to handle a full workload based on their leave.

Don't encourage or pressure the employee to return to work before they are ready or before their leave period officially ends.

Don't ignore feedback from the employee about their leave experience or reintegration. Use their input to improve future leave management practices and ensure a supportive work environment.