

Absence Management Procedure

At Wirral Montessori we encourage all our employees to maximise their attendance at work while recognising that employees will, from time to time, be unable to come to work due to sickness. By implementing this policy, we aim to strike a reasonable balance between the pursuit of our business needs and the genuine needs of employees to take occasional periods of time off work because of sickness. This policy and procedure establishes a framework to support individuals and the organisation in times of sickness absence. It ensures that appropriate and consistent advice is provided and that assistance and support is offered to employees and, where necessary, action is taken.

Principles

We aim to provide a healthy working environment and demonstrate commitment to health, safety and the welfare of staff in order to maximise attendance.

Management is responsible for regularly monitoring and taking appropriate action in connection with sickness and other unplanned absence.

Exclusion periods for contagious illnesses

Working with children means that you are in contact with illnesses which can be highly contagious. We take the health of children and staff very seriously therefore if you have any contagious illness you should adhere to the same exclusion periods as children. This will ensure that you are able to recover appropriately and that this illness is not passed on to other staff, children or parents. The manager will advise you of any exclusion times required (see the sickness and illness and infection control policies).

Sickness absence reporting procedure

Reporting sickness absence should be done using the following guidelines. Failure to follow these guidelines could delay any sick pay due to you and could possibly result in disciplinary action.

1. On your first day of absence, you must:
 - Telephone the nursery and speak to the manager
 - Give brief details of your illness and your expected length of absence.
 - Telephone and speak to someone yourself. Text message and emails are not an acceptable form of communication for this purpose. Contact someone within one hour of your normal start time. If you are due to start at 8:00am then please contact the manager at least half an hour before your shift is due to start.
2. If you have been unable to determine how long the absence will last, and it exceeds the third day, you must contact your manager again on the fourth day.
3. On returning to work you must complete a copy of the 'Employee's statement of sickness self-certification form'. This should be signed by nursery management.

4. For absences of more than seven consecutive days, you must provide a 'fit note' completed by a qualified medical practitioner for the period of absence.
5. After returning to work from any sickness absence leave, a 'return to work' interview may be undertaken by the employee and manager. This will not happen in all circumstances, and we may hold such meetings at our discretion. However, such meetings will normally be held in the following circumstances:
 - Where the absence has exceeded 14 days
 - Where the nature of the illness means that duties on return to work may need to be altered and clarification and/or consultation is required
 - Where a member of staff has had two or more absences in 12 weeks.

During the return to work interview the following will be discussed:

- The reason for absence
- Whether adjustments to the role (on a temporary or more permanent basis) are required and what they are. These might include adjusted work patterns, start and finish times and changes of duties
- Future requirements and expectations, e.g. improved attendance
- The return to work interview should be recorded and signed by both the manager and employee and a copy attached to the employee's file.

Where an employee's attendance record gives cause for concern because of the duration or frequency of absence, this should be brought to the attention of the employee through a discussion with the manager.

Throughout any stage of discussions on sickness absence, employees may be accompanied by a work colleague.

The abuse of sick leave and pay regulations may be classified as misconduct and will be dealt with through the disciplinary procedure.

Frequent and/or persistent short-term sickness absence

Short-term absence may be short periods of one or two days occurring frequently.

Absence of this nature can be identified by one of the following indicators and should be classed as a trigger:

- Four self-certified spells of absence in one calendar year
- A total of 10 working days or more of self-certified absence in one calendar year
- Patterns of absence over a period, e.g. an individual regularly taking Mondays or Fridays off
- Where an employee's attendance record is significantly worse than those of comparable employees, or absence problems have gone on for a considerable length of time.

Long-term sickness absence

For the purposes of the policy, long-term sickness absence is defined by the nursery as absences lasting over one month.

Where absences have lasted over 10 working days or more, the manager should contact the member of staff concerned to obtain an initial assessment of the problem and to offer any further help or assistance.

At this point and where felt appropriate after further assessment of the problem, the manager will arrange a face-to-face meeting or telephone conference between themselves and the member of staff. The meeting should:

- Seek to confirm the reasons and nature of the absence and its likely duration
- Ensure that the member of staff is aware of the nursery's concern regarding their health and necessary absence from work
- Give consideration to any personal problems being encountered
- If appropriate, gain agreement from the member of staff to contact their doctor or specialist in order to establish the likely length of absence and the long-term effect on capability in relation to job performance and attendance at work.

If all other avenues have been investigated, the absence continues or, following return to work, the attendance record does not improve, a subsequent meeting should be arranged. At this point, unless there are reasonable grounds to believe there will be an improvement in the foreseeable future, the manager should inform the member of staff that long-term sickness absence due to ill health may put their employment at risk and the possibility of termination by reason of capability or suitability to work with children might have to be considered, taking into account any medical information available.

The position will be reviewed periodically and ultimately it may become necessary from a business perspective to consider termination of employment. In these circumstances, the nursery will:

- Review the employee's absence record to assess whether or not it is sufficient to justify dismissal
- Consult the employee
- Obtain up-to-date medical advice through occupational health
- Advise the employee in writing as soon as it is established that termination of employment has become a possibility
- Meet with the employee to discuss the options and consider the employee's views on continuing employment
- Allow a right of appeal against any decision to dismiss the employee on grounds of long-term ill health
- Arrange a further meeting with the employee to determine any appeal
- Following this meeting, inform the employee of its final decision
- Act reasonably towards the employee at all times.

Any decision to terminate employment will be taken by the Owner making sure the capability procedure has been exhausted.

Occupational health

The nursery reserves the right to request employees to attend an appointment with an Occupational Health Advisor (e.g. consultant, GP) during their employment, if it is reasonably deemed necessary due to sickness absence, changes in health or the role, or where it is necessary to seek an expert medical opinion as to whether or not the employee can fulfil their job role or whether any reasonable adjustments should be made to the employee's role.

The nursery will seek to engage the services of an independent Occupational Health Advisor in situations where expert medical opinion is required and work with them to identify the best course of action in circumstances of sickness absence.

Access to medical records

The Access to Medical Records Act 1988 gives individuals the right of access to medical records relating to themselves which have been prepared by a medical practitioner for employment purposes. The Act provides that:

- Employers must gain the consent of employees before requesting reports from medical practitioners
- Employers must inform employees of their rights in respect of medical reports
- The employee has the right of access to the report before the employer sees it, provided appropriate notification is given
- The employer is responsible for notifying the medical practitioner that the employee wishes to have access
- The employee may ask for a report to be amended or may attach a statement to the report
- Having seen the report, the employee may wish to withhold consent to it being supplied.

Where the nursery requests further medical information about the health of staff from an individual's General Practitioner or Specialist, or its own occupational health provider, the provisions of the Act will be followed.

Throughout any interviews regarding sickness absence, staff are entitled to the support of and/or representation by a work colleague or recognised trade union representative.

Sick Pay

During the first 6 months of employment, there is no entitlement to company sick pay. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will be paid in accordance with Department for Work and Pensions requirements and no payment will be made for the first three working days in a period of incapacity for work.

Company sick pay entitlement:

The nursery will pay company sick pay dependent on length of service, as shown below:

. **Zero - 12 months** : SSP only

. **1year – 5 years**: 10 working days (full pay) per annum. Thereafter SSP for a length of time to be discussed with your employer.

. **Over five years**: 15 working days (full pay) per annum. Thereafter SSP for a length of time to be discussed with your employer.

Sick Pay is calculated on a rolling 12 month basis i.e. the amount of sickness during the last 12 month period.

Once Company sick pay has been exhausted, any further sick leave will be unpaid or subject to SSP in accordance with regulations and rates applicable at the time.

Annual leave and sick pay

Where an employee falls sick or is injured while on annual leave, the nursery may allow the employee to take sick leave and take the annual leave at a later time during the year. **This policy is subject to the following strict conditions:**

- The total period of incapacity must be fully certificated by a qualified medical practitioner
- The employee must contact the manager as soon as he/she knows that there will be a period of incapacity during the pre-planned annual leave in accordance with the Sickness Absence Reporting Procedure
- The employee must submit a written request no later than five days after returning to work setting out how much of the annual leave period was affected by sickness and the amount of leave that the employee wishes to take at another time
- Where the employee is overseas when he/she falls sick or is injured, evidence must be produced that the employee was sick by way of either a medical certificate or proof of a claim on an insurance policy for medical treatment received at the overseas location.

Where the employee fulfils all of the above conditions, we will allow the employee the same amount of annual leave as the amount lost due to sickness or injury.

Sickness or injury shortly before a period of planned holiday

If an employee is ill or is injured before the start of a period of planned annual leave, we will agree to the employee postponing the annual leave dates to another mutually agreed time. Any period of sickness absence will then be treated in accordance with the employer's normal policy on sickness absence.

The employee must submit a written request to postpone the planned annual leave and this must be accompanied by a letter from his/her doctor confirming that he/she is unfit to take the annual leave.

Replacement annual leave dates

Where it is agreed that an employee can take replacement annual leave at a later time, the employee should nominate replacement annual leave dates as soon as possible, with the dates being subject to the agreement of the employee's manager in the usual way.

Employees should endeavour to take any replacement annual leave within the same holiday year as the days lost as a result of sickness or injury. In the event that part or all of the annual leave is lost due to incapacity towards the end of the nursery's holiday year, and there is insufficient time left during that year for the replacement annual leave to be taken, the employee will be permitted to carry over the replacement annual leave to the next holiday year. However, this leave must be taken as early in the new holiday year as possible.

Serious illness/injury of an employee's immediate family

This will be looked at on an individual basis and your manager will agree with you a reasonable period of paid leave time initially, with additional unpaid leave if a significant amount of time off is required. You need to also consider taking holiday/TOIL and working flexibly i.e. making adjustments to the length of the working day, changes in hours/days worked etc.

Death of a member of an employee's immediate family

This leave applies on the death of an employee's spouse, life partner, parent, brother, sister, grandparent, dependant or other relative for whom the employee has special responsibility or has had special ties.

Generally, the amount of time off required will be at the manager's discretion and will depend on individual circumstances but up to one working week paid leave would be considered.

This policy is reviewed on an annual basis.