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BAGGAGE HANDLING

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF LIFE IN QUARANTINE

...AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU AND YOUR MEMBERS

Just because some of us are now allowed back into our workplaces, if only in limited numbers, that doesn't mean we've fully processed the emotional and psychological baggage of being in quarantine, with its anxiety, uncertainty, and stress.

Even brief, temporary periods of isolation can negatively impact physical and mental wellbeing, **which can lead to feelings of fear, sadness, anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion, among others**.

While sharing office space and collaborating in teams was once considered standard, innocuous stuff, now it could be stress-provoking and anxiety-inducing for those returning to work while still dealing with the psychological impact of weeks of social isolation.

SO, HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR TEAM UNPACK THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE?

As HR staff, business managers , plans sponsors, and corporate leaders, you're now designated "baggage handlers" for your members. But you don't have to navigate that new job title alone. Here are some ways you can support your people as they come into the workplace a little psychologically and emotionally heavier than before.

As a human resources professional or someone on the leadership team, it's important to look after your own wellbeing first, so you're in a better position to help others. It's an idea we like to call putting your own "oxygen mask" on first.

Transparent communication is key.

Clear and honest communication will help members feel connected. Share new policies and procedures and encourage questions. Let members know their physical and mental wellbeing is the top priority.

### Let people know that it's OK to feel whatever they're feeling.

Everyone processes their experiences differently, and many returning members may worry that it's not OK to still feel anxious, stressed, or fearful.

Offer tools and training to ensure a physically and psychologically safe environment.

Let members know what new safety measures are in place to keep them healthy and how everyone can do their part to create a safe workplace. Be sure members understand that their mental health is just as important a priority as their physical health. You might even consider conducting a survey to find out how you can best support members as they transition back to a normal routine.

Share updated sick leave policies.

Members will want to know what happens if they or a family member becomes ill. A long-term plan for both physical and mental sick leave is imperative.
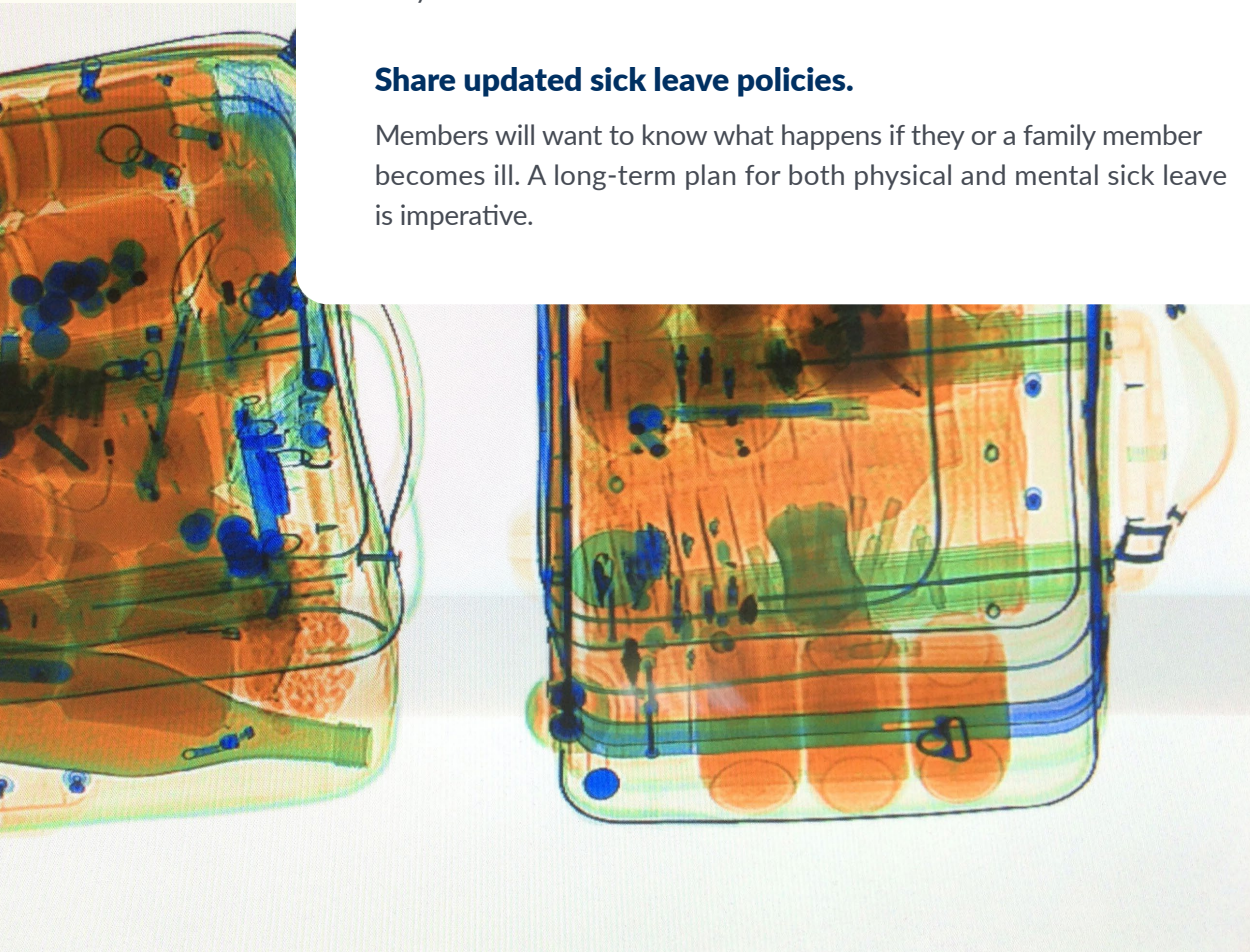
Consider creating mental health support groups onsite (or online).

People can participate based on shared interests, work schedules, or team assignments. Participation doesn't have to be mandatory, but it's a comfort to know that the resources are there, if needed.

Lead by example.

Show your members that you understand this is a "new normal" by talking openly, both one-on-one and in group settings, about the emotional impact of quarantine.

Educate managers on how to determine if team members need extra support.

Be sure managers know the signs to look for to gauge if members are struggling, and the resources to refer them if they are.

Be flexible.

It may take a while to get back into the routine of working in a structured environment. You could consider offering flexible work hours for the first few weeks, or allowing people to work remotely a set number of days or hours per week.

Focus on a return to normalcy where possible.

Rituals are important for bonding and creating a shared identity. When it's safe to do so, consider re-introducing member birthday celebrations, casual Fridays, and other pre-pandemic company rituals that encourage connection and a sense of community.

TAKE CARE OF YOU

Don't forget: You're a member, too. More importantly, you're a human being. If you want to help guide your people through this time, you're going to have to **put the oxygen mask on yourself first**. Here are some ideas on how to do that.

Acknowledge your feelings.

While you may be overjoyed that you're finally getting out of the house and interacting with human beings other than your family, be sure to take the time to acknowledge the psychological impact quarantine has had on you. Sweeping things under the rug and pretending everything is OK when it's not **can do more harm than good**.

Make your physical and mental wellbeing a priority.

Eat healthy, exercise regularly, get a good night's sleep consistently, limit screen time, spend time outside, focus on positive thoughts, and **make personal time a priority**.

Limit your news consumption.

Yes, we all need to stay informed. But there's a difference between getting your news from a reliable, reputable source once or twice a day to keep up to date, and binge-reading everything that mentions the pandemic and its negative impact.

Practice R A I N .

RAIN stands for Recognize, Accept, Investigate, and Nurture. It's a simple process that can help you **reset, re-center, and reground yourself in three minutes flat**.

Seek professional help if you need it.

Take advantage of telehealth and online therapy resources if you aren't comfortable meeting in person with a therapist. You may also be able to tap into mental health resources at your workplace.

Connect with others.

If you've been cooped up with your family for the last several weeks, you may think you've had a gracious plenty of "connecting with others." But for those quarantining alone, spending time with friends and co-workers after a long period of social isolation, even over a Zoom call, can be a balm for your soul—and it's great for your mental health, too!

REMEMBER

The psychological and emotional impacts of life in quarantine are far-reaching and likely to evolve with our global reality. As you help others in this transition with their baggage, don't forget to unpack your own.

We're here to help you navigate your new reality. If you have questions or want to learn more about how NS can help you and your teams prioritize your wellbeing right now, please reach out to us at learnmore@naturallyslim.com.