



Advocating for a Safe Return to Work

Organizations are considering issues and protocols for transitioning workers back to a safe office environment. Employees also have their own concerns and ideas related to these issues. Some guidelines for workers to explore their needs and communicate their ideas with decision-makers are provided here.

First, explore your personal concerns and needs. Also ask yourself about your co-workers concerns and needs. Reflect on your organization's views and beliefs and how similar or divergent they are with yours. Identify how you would like your organization to address your concerns and needs. Consider where flexibility exists in your and your organization's situation.

Once you are clear about these issues, how might you broach a conversation regarding your concerns and needs in a safe way with your organization's decision makers? Here are a few suggestions:

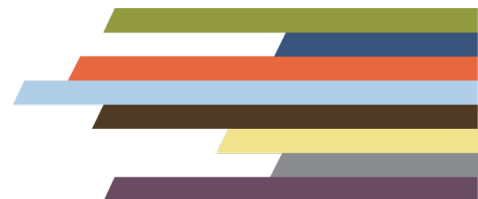
Clarify Your Needs

Consider expressing your requests as SMART objectives (**S**pecific; **M**easurable; **A**chievable; **R**elevant; **T**ime-defined). Use neutral language, taking care to avoid words or labels that may be controversial or inflammatory. Prioritize your needs and limit your requests to 3-5 solutions. Requests can be framed as workplace protocols or as alternative suggestions for accomplishing work tasks. Knowing the flexibility in your and your organization's situation can be useful in suggesting alternatives, such as working from home or using teleconferencing technology to meet work goals.

Use "I" Messages

Also known as assertive communication, using "I" messages keeps communication open and respectful. "I" messages have several components:

- Feeling – I feel... e.g., I feel concerned about safety and anxious about being in close contact with people at work again.



- Request – I need... e.g., In order to feel safe returning to work, I need... or I'm wondering if you'd consider...
- Ask – Could you help... e.g., How can we work on these ideas together so I feel safe coming back to work? or Do you think you could do this for me so I can feel safe coming back to work?

Practice delivering your "I" messages with co-workers, and get their feedback. How does the communication make them feel? Is it clear? Do they have suggestions for ways to strengthen your communication? And remember that we are all works in progress and can change our opinions based on our caring for others and their needs, so be positive that your advocacy will be effective.

Know Your Bottom Line

Finally, know your Bottom Line. What is negotiable to you? What is non-negotiable? What other resources do you have in advocating with decision makers? Your Human Resources department can be very helpful in negotiating solutions. Occasionally mutually acceptable solutions cannot be found, and then we must consider whether it may be time for us to seek employment in an organization whose values are more congruent with our own.