



Teachers Managing Absence (F8) Toolkit
TMA (F8)01:
Conducting an Early Support Discussion



Section 1	Conducting an Early Support Discussion
Section 2	TMA 01(a) – Early Support Discussion Form

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1.0	11 th August 2025	

Section 1: Conducting an Early Support Discussion

When a Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher has concerns about a Teacher's or Associated Professional's wellbeing or the Teacher/Associated Professional reports an absence, or a potential absence, the Head Teacher / Depute Head Teacher should take steps where appropriate to arrange an Early Support Discussion (face to face or remotely) to establish whether there is any immediate support that can be offered that might either prevent an absence or assist the Teacher's/Associated Professional's recovery and allow an earlier return to work.

It is recognised that not every absence or potential absence will require this level of support (i.e. absent due to stomach bug, cold/flu, etc.) but as a minimum immediate support should be offered in cases of psychological or musculoskeletal conditions to organise early intervention measures such as;

- Physiotherapy Referral – [info here](#)
- Employee Assistance Programme - [info here](#)
- Occupational Health Referral [info here](#)
- Stress Assessment (this should always be offered where the employee reports work related stress but may also be useful where the employees personal stress is impacting on work) – [info here](#)
- Signposting to other support and resources - [info here](#)
- Temporary Adjustments – this could be nothing more than a later start time

Whilst early intervention is important to minimise the impact of ill-health on attendance or performance it is important to remember that this is an informal discussion and as such the discussion must be conducted in a supportive and constructive manner.

The Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher and the Teacher/Associated Professional should work together to explore what the Teacher /Associated Professional can do or might be capable of doing with help and support, to continue to work or return to work whilst they recover.

Where the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher has noticed a change in a Teacher's/Associated Professional's behaviour it is important that the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher raises their concerns with and encourages the Teacher/Associated Professional to disclose what may be the cause of any such change. It is important to recognise that the individual may not wish to disclose information at this time although an offer of support has been made in a sensitive and supportive manner.

It is recognised that some Teacher's/Associated Professional's may already have an unacceptable level of attendance, and whilst the Head Teacher/Depute Head Teacher can remind them of this and their obligations to attend work, it is crucial that this discussion should not be used to advise the employee of any formal action that may be taken as that would undermine the supportive nature at this stage of the supporting attendance process.

To assist with these discussions' Head Teachers and Depute Head Teachers are encouraged to use the 4 A's method, which is detailed below.

The Early Support Discussion form TMA (F8) 01(a), attached below, can also be used to make an informal note of the discussion and any agreed actions. A copy can be provided to the Teacher/Associated Professional should they wish to see it.

The 4 A's – Ask, Assess, Advise, Assist

1. ASK

As a manager it's your job to ensure you manage your team effectively and provide appropriate support where an employee had advised you, or you have observed that they are struggling physically and/or mentally. A 5-10-minute discussion aimed at helping someone before an absence occurs takes less time and effort in the long term. It can be as simple as asking an employee how they are and if there is anything you can do to help!

2. ASSESS

If an employee doesn't want to engage in a discussion with you at that time, don't push it. You can still offer them support (is there anything you can do at that point to help them). Ensure that the employee knows that they can speak to you when they are ready – keep the door open so to speak!

3. ADVISE

If you as the manager have concerns about an employee – maybe you have noticed that they are not attending meetings or seem tired all the time it is important that you make them aware of your concerns. Also, sometimes people are unaware of the potential implications of their lifestyle or behaviour. We aren't doctors or trained counsellors, but we can signpost employees and encourage them to seek help and support.

4. ASSIST/ARRANGE

Once a discussion/s have taken place provide information to employees on relevant support and external resources that are available to assist them. Employees have a responsibility to look after their own Health & Wellbeing, however as the manager you may need to make arrangements for additional support such as a referral to occupational health or temporary adjustments e.g. adjustment to working hours, to help them remain at work or improve their working environment. Pave the way for your employees to feel and give them the time and support they might need.

Section 2: TMA (F8) 01 (a) - EARLY SUPPORT DISCUSSION FORM

TMA (F8) 01 (a) - EARLY SUPPORT DISCUSSION FORM			
Section 1. Teacher or Associated Professional Details			
Name:		Employee No:	
Location/Unit:		Job Title:	
Head Teacher/Depute Head Teachers Name:			
Section 2. Summary of Discussion & Agreed Actions			
1	Is the Teacher / Associated Professional currently absent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Date commenced:	No <input type="checkbox"/>
2	If absent, what is the reason for absence?		Work Related Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3	Summary of Discussion		
4	Has the Teacher / Associated Professional been signposted to any internal/external support/resources?	WorkWellNL <input type="checkbox"/> LearnNL <input type="checkbox"/> Money Advice <input type="checkbox"/> EAP (Employee Assistance Programme) <input type="checkbox"/> GP Support <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> (please state)	
5	Is there any early intervention measures that can be provided at this stage? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		
	Physiotherapy <input type="checkbox"/>	Employee Counselling <input type="checkbox"/>	Individual Stress Risk Assessment <input type="checkbox"/>
	Occupational Health Referral <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/> (please state)	
6	Would the Teacher / Associated Professional benefit from undertaking amended/lighter duties on a temporary basis at this time?	No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (if yes provide details)	
7	Would the Teacher / Associated Professional benefit from a temporary adjustment to their work pattern at this time?	No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (if yes provide details)	
Date of Discussion:			