

How to Proceed in Cases of Absenteeism

Hi. I'm Sonya Dixon from Auburn University's Human Resources. This video is part of our QuickDive learning series. Our goal is to help you as a supervisor and as a leader. Today's QuickDive is about how to proceed in cases of employee absenteeism. By the end of this short video, you should be able to identify two areas to consider before proceeding with discipline.

Be Alert for Medical Issues

First, in cases of excessive absenteeism, it's important to be alert for medical issues. Don't pry, but if employees want to take time off because they're ill or are caring for a sick relative, you need to know what's going on.

The FMLA applies to illness requiring "ongoing" medical treatment. In other words, if the person has seen a doctor at least twice for a condition, the law may have kicked in even though they never made a formal FMLA request.

If you think an employee's leave is covered by the FMLA, you're required to inform employees of their rights and provide the proper paperwork. Contact AU Human Resources for more information.

Look for Any Ongoing Personnel Issues.

Second, look for any ongoing personnel issues. Confronting attendance issues rarely happens in a vacuum. Employees often interpret disciplinary action on one thing as retaliation for another, and numerous laws prohibit retaliation.

Here's an example. A woman filed a sexual harassment complaint against a co-worker. Two weeks later, the complaining employee faces disciplinary action on attendance. In the mind of the employee, she's being disciplined as retaliation for her complaint. That's trouble.

Always double-check personnel files or check with HR to see if these types of issues exist.

Here's the Bottom Line

Act carefully when employees have absenteeism problems. Many organizations act too quickly and fire employees who have attendance issues. Remember, you can never fire someone for taking FMLA leave or requesting a reasonable accommodation under ADA – no matter what their attendance history may be.

For more information, contact us at employeeerel@auburn.edu or visit our website at auburn.edu/hr.