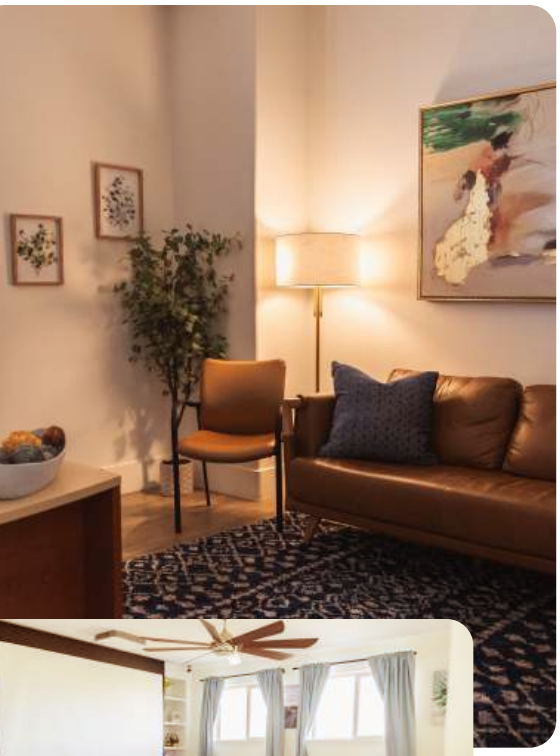
Taking Leave for
Mental Health Treatment

A Practical Guide to FMLA, Short-Term Disability, and Workplace Support

Understand how FMLA, short-term disability, and other leave options can support time away or a reduced schedule while you receive mental health treatment.

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When Mental Health Symptoms Begin Affecting Your Work

Work-related stress can leave anyone feeling tired, irritable, or overwhelmed. But when emotional distress persists, intensifies, or begins affecting your ability to work and manage everyday responsibilities, it may be time to seek professional support.

Signs that you may benefit from a mental health assessment include:

- Exhaustion that does not improve with time off or rest
- Persistent anxiety, depression, hopelessness, or emotional numbness
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or completing responsibilities
- Changes in sleep, appetite, relationships, or everyday routines
- Increasing irritability, anger, or withdrawal
- Using substances or other behaviors to cope
- Difficulty remaining safe or functioning independently
- Symptoms that have not sufficiently improved with your current treatment

Finding the Right Level of Support

Mental health treatment is not one size fits all. Some people benefit from weekly outpatient therapy or psychiatric care, while others need additional structure and support.

Depending on your needs, treatment may include:

Traditional outpatient care: Therapy or psychiatric appointments scheduled around everyday responsibilities

Intensive outpatient treatment: Several treatment sessions each week while continuing to live at home

Residential treatment: Twenty-four-hour support in a therapeutic setting when symptoms significantly affect safety, stability, or daily functioning

Partial hospitalization: More frequent, structured daytime treatment without overnight care

A qualified clinician can assess your symptoms, functioning, treatment history, safety, and support system to recommend an appropriate level of care.

FMLA May Apply to More Than Residential Treatment

Eligible employees may be able to use FMLA for qualifying mental health treatment at different levels of care, not only residential treatment. Depending on the circumstances, leave may be used:

- In one continuous period
- Intermittently for appointments or treatment sessions
- Through a medically necessary reduced work schedule
- During a more intensive outpatient, partial hospitalization, or residential program

The diagnosis or program name alone does not determine eligibility.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Explained

FMLA is a federal law that may provide eligible employees with up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, job-protected leave during a designated 12-month period for qualifying family or medical reasons.
A mental health condition may qualify when it meets the FMLA definition of a serious health condition (for example, when it requires inpatient care or continuing treatment by a healthcare provider). Attending treatment does not, by itself, guarantee FMLA eligibility.

However, you may be eligible if all of the following apply:

- [ ] You work for an employer covered by the FMLA.
- [ ] You have worked for that employer for at least 12 months.
- [ ] You have completed at least 1,250 hours of service during the 12 months before your leave begins.
- [ ] Your employer has at least 50 employees within 75 miles of your worksite.

Different rules may apply to public agencies, public and private elementary and secondary schools, airline flight crews, and certain government employees.

FMLA may provide:

- Up to 12 workweeks of qualifying leave
- Leave taken continuously, intermittently, or through a reduced schedule when permitted
- Continuation of group health coverage under the same conditions
- Restoration to the same or an equivalent position after qualifying leave
- Protection from interference or retaliation for exercising FMLA rights

FMLA leave is generally unpaid. However, accrued paid leave, employer-sponsored short-term disability benefits, or state paid-leave programs may provide income during some or all of the absence.

Your employer will likely request documentation from your provider and will determine whether your leave is designated as FMLA-protected.

This guide provides general educational information and is not legal advice. Eligibility and available protections depend on individual circumstances. Consult your employer's human resources department, the U.S. Department of Labor, or a qualified attorney for guidance.

Options That May Help Replace Income

FMLA generally provides unpaid, job-protected leave. Depending on where you work and the benefits available through your employer, other programs may replace or supplement part of your income while you receive treatment.

States That Offer Mandatory Paid Medical Leave:

California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Minnesota
New Jersey
New York
Oregon
Rhode Island
Virginia
Washington
Washington DC

States That Offer Voluntary Paid Medical Leave:

Alabama
Arkansas
Florida
Kentucky
New Hampshire
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Vermont
Virginia

State Paid Family and Medical Leave

A growing number of states have paid family or medical leave programs. Eligibility, benefit amounts, qualifying conditions, employer requirements, and application procedures vary considerably.

Your eligibility may depend on:

- The state in which you work
- Your earnings or hours worked
- The reason and duration of your leave
- Whether your condition is supported by appropriate medical documentation
- How your state program coordinates with employer-provided benefits

Visit your state labor or paid-leave agency for current information.

Short-Term Disability Benefits

Short-term disability insurance may replace a portion of your income when a qualifying health condition prevents you from working. Coverage is generally offered by an employer, purchased individually, or available through a state program.

Mental health conditions may qualify, but approval depends on the specific policy and supporting medical documentation. Before relying on this benefit, ask:

- Does my plan cover mental health conditions?
- Is there a waiting period?
- What percentage of my income may be replaced?
- How long can benefits continue?
- Are there exclusions or preexisting-condition provisions?
- Can disability benefits run at the same time as FMLA or another leave program?

Short-term disability provides an income benefit; it does not, by itself, guarantee that your job will be protected. To ensure job protection while receiving mental health treatment, be sure to speak with your HR department about FMLA and protected leave of absence policies.



What Information Must I Share?

> You do not ordinarily have to provide your employer with your complete medical record. However, you must provide enough information for your employer or leave administrator to determine whether your absence may qualify for FMLA protection.

Your employer may request information from your provider. Information may include:

- When the condition began and how long it is expected to last
- Relevant medical facts supporting the need for leave
- Whether you are unable to perform essential job functions
- The anticipated treatment or leave schedule
- Whether intermittent leave or a reduced schedule is medically necessary

Typically, employees are not necessarily required to disclose a specific diagnosis, but the documentation must be complete and sufficient to support the request.

FMLA-related medical information must generally be maintained as a confidential medical record, separate from routine personnel files. Under limited circumstances, an authorized representative of the employer may contact your provider to authenticate or clarify a certification. However, your direct supervisor may not contact your healthcare provider.

Planning for Treatment and Time Away From Work

The steps will vary depending on your clinical needs, employer, benefits, and treatment schedule, but you do not need to have every detail resolved before asking for help.

1. Speak With a Treatment Provider
2. Review Your Workplace Benefits
3. Notify Your Employer

1. Speak With a Treatment Provider

Contact a qualified mental health provider for an assessment. The purpose is to understand what you are experiencing and determine the level of support that may be appropriate.
Recommendations may include:

- Outpatient therapy or psychiatric care
- Intensive outpatient treatment
- Partial hospitalization
- Residential treatment
- Another community or medical resource

Ask the provider about the anticipated schedule, frequency, and duration of treatment. You may need this information when discussing leave or workplace accommodations.

2. Review Your Workplace Benefits

Contact your human resources department, benefits administrator, or leave management company to ask about:

- FMLA eligibility and required forms
- Paid sick leave or accrued paid time off
- Short-term disability coverage
- State paid-leave benefits
- Employee assistance programs
- Reasonable accommodations or a reduced schedule

You can initially ask about policies without providing your entire medical history.

3. Notify Your Employer

When the need for leave is foreseeable, employees should generally provide at least 30 days' notice. If 30 days' notice is not practicable, or if the need for treatment is unexpected, notice should be provided as soon as practicable.

Generally, you do not need to use the term "FMLA" in your first request, but you must provide enough information to indicate that the leave may qualify. Follow your employer's usual process for requesting leave unless circumstances prevent you from doing so.

Sequoia's Support For You

Our case management team can help provide your benefits administrator with treatment-related information and appropriate clinical documentation. Your employer or leave administrator makes the final determination regarding FMLA, disability, and other workplace benefits. Your provider does not determine the outcome of your leave or short term disability request.

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Completing the Documentation for Leave

Once a treatment plan and anticipated schedule have been established, your employer or leave administrator may ask for certification from an appropriate healthcare provider.

The certification process can feel personal, especially when you are trying to maintain privacy at work. Again, you are generally not expected to share every detail of your experience. The documentation typically just focuses on the information necessary to support your need for leave, such as how your condition affects your ability to work and the anticipated frequency or duration of treatment.

When appropriate and with your authorization, your provider can complete the clinical portions of the requested documentation. Your employer or leave administrator is responsible for determining whether the request qualifies for FMLA or another workplace benefit.

If the documentation is incomplete, you should ordinarily be given an opportunity to provide the missing information. Because every employer and leave administrator has its own process, ask where forms should be submitted, when they are due, and whether additional documentation will be required.

Preparing for Treatment and Leave

Planning for treatment while you are already struggling can feel overwhelming. We recommend prioritizing and staring with the steps that are most immediate, and allowing trusted support persons to help you where possible.

Practical preparation checklist:

- [ ] Schedule an assessment and discuss the recommended level of care.
- [ ] Ask the program about its schedule, anticipated duration, costs, and insurance coverage.
- [ ] Contact HR or your leave administrator to request the appropriate forms.
- [ ] Ask what workplace benefits may be available, including FMLA, paid leave, short-term disability, or accommodations.
- [ ] Ask an appropriate treating provider to complete any required clinical certification.
- [ ] Clarify when and how documentation must be submitted.
- [ ] Consider what you would like to share with your supervisor or colleagues.
- [ ] Talk with trusted supports about childcare, pet care, transportation, or household responsibilities.
- [ ] Create a plan for bills, insurance premiums, and other time-sensitive obligations.
- [ ] Identify the people you can contact for emotional or practical support during treatment.

Preparing for care is not a test. You don't have to complete it perfectly. Your treatment team, support system, and benefits representatives can each help with different parts of the process.

> Navigating FMLA and Disability benefits can be confusing and frustrating, especially for individuals navigating mental health challenges. At Sequoia Behavioral Health, our case management team can provide comprehensive assistance with the process if needed.

Finding a Level of Care That Fits Your Needs

Treatment decisions are deeply personal. The most appropriate level of care depends on your symptoms, safety, daily functioning, treatment history, support system, and goals. Practical realities such as work, caregiving, transportation, and finances also deserve thoughtful consideration.

You deserve care that reflects the full context of your life, not only the symptoms you are experiencing. Whichever provider you choose, your treatment team should take time to understand your needs, strengths, responsibilities, support system, treatment history, and goals. Together, you can identify a level of care that offers meaningful support while honoring your individual circumstances.

Residential Treatment

Residential treatment provides 24-hour care in a structured and supportive therapeutic environment. Clients receive intensive, coordinated support from a multidisciplinary team, including therapists, psychiatric providers, nurses, behavioral health staff, and care coordinators. With care available throughout the day and night, clients have the structure and support needed to build stability, strengthen coping skills, and engage more fully in the healing process.

Partial Hospitalization Program

A partial hospitalization program, or PHP, provides structured treatment during the day while allowing clients to return home outside program hours. It may be appropriate for someone who needs more support than an intensive outpatient program can provide but does not require residential care.

PHP includes group therapy, individual clinical support, psychiatry, care coordination, and more.

Intensive Outpatient Program

An intensive outpatient program, or IOP, offers more structure and frequency than traditional weekly therapy while allowing clients to continue living at home.

Depending on need, clients may attend three or five sessions each week. IOP can provide meaningful support for people who need consistent therapeutic engagement while maintaining some work, school, family, or community responsibilities.

Virtual Intensive Outpatient Program

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Individualized Treatment at Sequoia

Depending on your unique needs, treatment may incorporate approaches such as:

- Somatic Experiencing
- Internal Family Systems
- Cognitive and dialectical behavioral therapies
- Accelerated Resolution Therapy
- EMDR (if clinically appropriate and the client is adequately prepared)
- Mindfulness and experiential practices
- Individual, group, and family support
- Psychiatric care and medication management







Returning to Work: Supporting a Thoughtful Transition

Returning to work is an important phase of the treatment process. Time away can initially create space for stabilization, reflection, and the development of new coping skills; returning offers an opportunity to apply those insights to your everyday life. A thoughtful plan should consider how your schedule, workload, and other demands may affect your mental health. Together with your treatment team, you can identify supportive boundaries and a plan for responding if symptoms begin to intensify.

Your return to work plan may include:

- Continuing outpatient therapy or psychiatry
- Recognizing early signs that additional support may be needed
- Identifying workplace stressors and developing healthier ways to respond
- Establishing realistic boundaries around workload and availability
- Maintaining sleep, nutrition, movement, and supportive relationships
- Creating a plan for difficult days or changes in symptoms
- Exploring workplace accommodations when appropriate
- Remaining connected to peer, family, alumni, or community support

Recovery is rarely a perfectly linear process. Needing continued support or asking for additional help during a transition does not diminish the progress you have made.

Understanding Your Return-to-Work Rights

Following qualifying FMLA leave, an eligible employee is generally entitled to return to the same position or an equivalent position with substantially similar duties, pay, benefits, and working conditions. Certain limitations can apply, so speak with your employer or leave administrator about your individual circumstances.
If you need additional support to perform your job, you may also wish to ask whether a Reasonable Accommodation is available. Depending on your circumstances, accommodations might include a modified schedule, time for ongoing appointments, changes in communication methods, or another adjustment that supports your ability to perform essential job responsibilities.

The Department of Labor provides detailed guidance on restoration to an equivalent position, while the EEOC explains how certain mental health conditions may qualify for workplace accommodations.

You Deserve Support That Considers the Whole Person

Seeking treatment can feel especially vulnerable when you are also thinking about your career, family, finances, and responsibilities to others. These concerns are not separate from your mental health; they are part of the context in which healing takes place.

Whichever provider you choose, you deserve a treatment team that listens carefully, respects your autonomy, and considers both your clinical needs and the realities of your life.

Final Notes & Reflections

Use this space to capture any final thoughts, key takeaways, questions, or reminders you'd like to carry forward.

What Sets Sequoia Apart

Truly effective mental health treatment should be personal, centering, and grounded in evidence. In our small and intimate clinic, our patients can experience just that.

Our program blends traditional therapy with proven holistic modalities and community support in a home-like environment. Daily individual and small group treatment is balanced with rest and reflection time so that lasting growth can take place. We also accommodate personal needs through access to community support groups and responsible medication management.



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