

Manager fact sheet:

Having Supportive and Effective Conversations



Sensitive workplace conversations are part of a manager's role. They may involve wellbeing concerns, performance issues, conflict, workload pressure, behavioural concerns or changes affecting an employee or team.

These conversations can feel difficult, but they are often important. Preparing carefully, communicating respectfully and listening without judgement can help keep the discussion constructive and focused on the issue at hand. As a manager, your role is to create a respectful conversation, understand the situation, clarify expectations and identify appropriate next steps.

What you may notice

A supportive conversation may be needed when an employee's wellbeing, behaviour, communication or performance appears to have changed.

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What this may look like

Communication

Becoming defensive, avoiding conversations or finding it difficult to discuss concerns.

Wellbeing

Appearing distressed, withdrawn, overwhelmed or unusually flat.

Performance

Missed deadlines, reduced quality of work or difficulty completing usual tasks.

Behaviour

Increased irritability, reduced participation or changes in how the employee engages with others.

Attendance

Increased lateness, absences or changes in work patterns.

Team Impact

Tension, reduced collaboration or concerns being raised by others.

These signs do not always indicate a serious issue, but they may suggest that a timely, respectful conversation could help.

How to have a supportive conversation

On the next page are some strategies you can use to help make workplace conversations more supportive and effective. You can also access the [Manager Assistance Program through PeopleSense by Altius](#) at any stage. Support from a qualified psychologist can help you prepare for difficult conversations, navigate sensitive issues with confidence and identify appropriate support pathways for your employees.

How to have a supportive conversation

1. Prepare before the conversation

Think about what you have noticed, what the conversation needs to cover and what outcome may be helpful.

2. Choose the right setting

Have the conversation privately, allow enough time and avoid raising sensitive issues in front of others.

3. Focus on observable facts

Talk about specific behaviours, work impacts or concerns rather than making assumptions about causes or intent.

4. Listen without judgement

Give the employee time to respond. Listen to understand before moving to solutions or next steps.

5. Keep the conversation respectful

Use calm, clear language and avoid blame, labels or personal criticism.

6. Maintain appropriate boundaries

Keep the focus on workplace support, expectations and next steps.

7. Agree on practical next steps

Clarify what will happen next, who is responsible and when you will check in again

8. Seek guidance when needed

If you are unsure how to prepare, respond or follow up, access the [Manager Assistance Program](#) for support

How Manager Assistance Can Help

Manager Assist provides confidential guidance from a qualified psychologist to help managers prepare for and navigate difficult workplace conversations.

Manager Assist can help you:

- plan what to say and how to say it
- respond to employee distress or disclosure
- maintain professional boundaries
- discuss wellbeing, behaviour or performance concerns
- consider practical workplace support options
- identify when HR or another pathway should be involved

Manager Assist can also help you reflect on communication style, team dynamics and workplace factors that may be affecting the conversation.



Reaching out early makes a real difference.
Contact [PeopleSense](#) to book a confidential
appointment with a qualified psychologist.

If you are having thoughts of self-harm or suicide, seek urgent support immediately.
Call 000, Lifeline on 13 11 14.

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