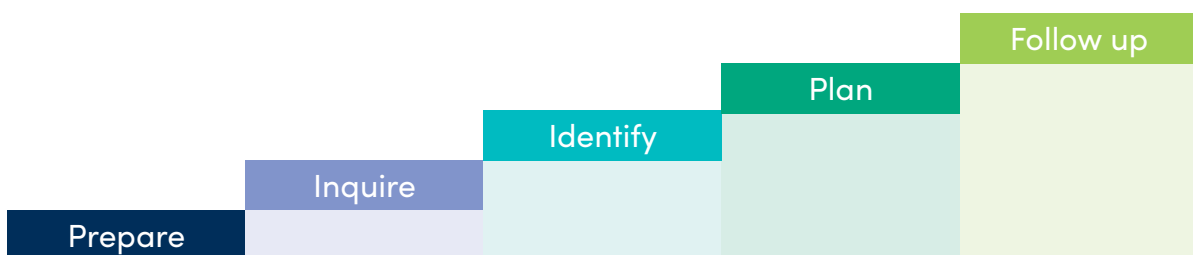




Factsheet

Supportive Conversations

Though there are no hard and fast rules for conducting an effective and supportive conversation, the following step model may provide you guidance as to what, when and how to facilitate a helpful conversation with a team member you may be concerned about. This factsheet is not a replacement to HR processes or guidelines in your organisation—always consult your HR representative prior to a significant conversation, especially if you feel your team member may be at risk in any way.



1. Prepare

Before conducting a conversation where an emotional response may be triggered, invest some time to reflect and plan prior to the conversation. The following questions can be useful to ask yourself when identifying and clarifying potentially important information prior to meeting with your team member:

- What is my goal or primary reason for having this conversation?
- What, if any, HR implications do I need to consider first?
- What is the best time and place to conduct this conversation? Have I allowed enough time so the individual does not feel rushed? Have I ensured this conversation can be held in private?
- What will be the best time/place to invite them to this meeting to avoid increased anxiety?
- How am I feeling prior to this conversation? Am I feeling focused? Is this a topic I have feelings about?
- What are my current assumptions about this particular individual? Do I have any biases that may impact my objectivity?

2. Inquire

Inquiry is simply about gathering and sharing relevant information so that a more informed decision can be discussed regarding what type of support, if any, the individual may require from the organisation.

Why are we meeting?

First, it will be important to minimise undue stress by informing the individual of why you have requested to meet. It's important that you provide only examples of behaviours that you have noticed and not make assumptions as to the reasons behind the behaviours.

Example: *"I wanted to check in to see how you have been feeling lately."*

Limits of confidentiality

Though it can create some reluctance to share information, generally it is better to inform people ahead of time that although you intend the conversation to remain confidential, there may be things that you have to inform others about. This usually relates to any comments or behaviours that indicate that they may be a risk to themselves or others.

Example: *"Before we get started, I want you to know that we are here to support you. However as a duty of care, we may need to reach out to our EAP service to assist you. This service is completely confidential and provides access to professional psychologists and other services that may help you with the challenges you are currently facing."*

Get a sense of how they are feeling

Your goal is not to lead an interrogation or pry into personal feelings. You are simply trying to gain an understanding of how they are feeling and how that may be impacting their ability to perform their work responsibilities.

Example: *"Can you help me understand how you have been feeling lately?"*

Contributing factors

Again, you do not want to pry, but it can be helpful to know generally what may be the contributing factor(s) towards the change in their mood and/or behaviours. This is particularly important if there are dynamics at work that may be contributing.

Example: *"Has there been a change in your home or work situation which may be contributing or causing you to feel this way? How long have you been feeling this way? Is there anything about your current work role that may be making your ability to cope more difficult?"*

Impact on working capacity

The tone in which you ask this question is important, as you do not want to infer this is a formal performance management interview. It is important to understand what aspects of an individual's role they may find challenging at the moment. For example, if their ability to concentrate, remember details or quickly problem-solve is being impacted, this will not only lead to performance issues but may create additional stress for the individual. This information provides more tangible opportunities to negotiate potential short-term adjustments to roles.

Example: *"What aspects of your work are you finding the most challenging given how you've been feeling lately?"*

Current coping strategies

It's important to identify what, if any, strategies your team member has already put into place. This could range from speaking to their doctor or accessing professional support, through to making changes at home.

Again, detail is not required for their privacy, but it is important to understand the steps they are taking to manage their current challenge. This provides information about the degree to which the individual has taken responsibility for their wellbeing and also highlights potential gaps in support.

Example: *"Do you have any support networks that you have contacted to talk about some of the challenges you are dealing with? We recommend you access our EAP service that offers a range of options such as face-to-face, phone or text messaging consultations. They also have a variety of resources you can access at any time on their website."*

3. Identify

Individuals may sometimes forget the personal strengths that they can call on in challenging times. This can include their previous experiences, even if they are not directly related. If they got through another big challenge in their life that required determination and courage, it can be a great way of reminding them that they have demonstrated these qualities in the past and can apply these same strengths to their current challenge.

Sometimes people have difficulty generating ideas of what their strengths are, particularly if their self-confidence is being impacted upon. A supportive conversation can help to motivate them to acknowledge the strengths you've observed in them throughout the time you have worked together.

Example: "This sounds like a challenging time for you. What is it about you that is allowing you to cope as well as you have been? What other strengths or abilities can you call on for helping you overcome this challenge? e.g. determined, adaptable, humour, patience.

Besides your own abilities, what other resources and supports in your life can you call on? e.g. family, friends, doctor, other professional support.

Are you aware that another source of support you can call on is our EAP service? It is confidential and offers support in a range of areas, including counselling. Would that be a support service you believe could be helpful?

I am glad to hear you are getting support from your doctor. Is there anything that I or the organisation may be able to do to support you with this?"

4. Plan

This is a critical step in conducting a supportive conversation. Depending on the particular challenge the individual is facing and how emotional they are feeling, this planning stage may need to be left for another meeting.

When you are ready to generate a plan, the primary focus should be on how you as their leader and the organisation can best support the individual back to full health. This may simply mean that you occasionally check in with the team member to see how they are coping, but no change to their work role is required. In other situations, the plan may involve negotiating adjustments to workload, or organising for them to take sick leave and/or leave during work hours to allow access to support services.

Whatever the plan, it will likely need to be modified as time goes on. Ideally, this should be a genuine negotiation process with the team member leading the process and generating the plan. Your job is to inform them about the work-related options available and the limits of those options.

Example: Ask the team member what they see is a next reasonable step towards supporting them back to full health.

"Given how you are currently feeling and that you have identified you are accessing support services, what do you think would be best regarding your current responsibilities at work? We do have scope to discuss adjusting your role if that would help assist you as you deal with this particular challenge?"

What other information may you need/or what other changes will need to occur to help you decide whether to seek professional assistance?"

Decide when and how often you will check in with them to review current coping capacities and discuss implementation of any adjustments if required.

Example: "I appreciate this is a challenging time for you and you are making steps to manage it. I would also like to check in with you on weekly basis just to see how things are going and if there is any additional support I or the organisation can provide to assist you within your work role. What would be the best time and day for having a quick check in?"

5. Follow up

Once a plan of action is in place, it is important to have brief follow-ups to see how the team member is progressing. Again, it's important to note that this is not about seeking personal information regarding what external supports they are accessing, but rather how they perceive they are able to manage their current work role. If applicable, it may include discussion about whether further adjustment is required or if a return to more typical roles and responsibilities is appropriate. Before confirming any return to normal workloads, it may be best to consult with your HR advisor as well as other services if they are providing external supports.

It is important to check in with your team member to ensure that they are making positive steps and reaching out to the appropriate services for support. Casual check-ins and a weekly catch-up is a good way to ensure that communication lines remain open and your team member continues to feel valued and connected to the organisation. During these sessions, it is also important to ensure that you provide encouragement and validation of both their progress and the commitment they are demonstrating.

