

Wellbeing Conversations

The health and wellbeing of your team is a high priority. As a manager, you have a specific responsibility to consider the health and wellbeing of your team but it can be difficult knowing how to approach conversations about mental health or emotional distress.

There aren't any special skills required to talk about wellbeing and you're not expected to know all the answers but there are some things to consider when having your wellbeing conversations:

- Plan and prepare
- Chose the right location and timing
- Be fully present and actively listen - including noticing what they don't say!
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Give them time to speak without interruption or moving to a solution
- Think 'win win'. Effective relationships are built on mutual respect and trust
- Ask the right / relevant questions
- Be aware of differing beliefs and values
- A good conversation also involves honest and accurate feedback
- Build confidence through practise – having difficult or challenging conversations may seem daunting. Through practise this can help you to develop your skills in this area
- Recognise your own boundaries and when you may need to seek further support for the individual
- Be clear about confidentiality from the start and remember you are not infallible

A simple way of looking at it is imagining you are a detective looking for clues and as you become aware, these clues and signs will present themselves to you as the first point of contact.

It is also important to remember that sometimes just having space to talk or vent will solve the issue without any further action. Having a confidential space to share how they are feeling will often be the solution in itself.

But what if they don't want to talk?

You can:

- **Be patient** - You won't always know the full story, and there may be reasons why they are finding it difficult to open up.
- **Offer emotional support and reassurance** - Let them know you care and you'll be there if they change their mind.
- **Inform them how to seek help when they're ready**

You can't:

- **Force someone to talk to you** - It can take time for someone to feel able to talk openly, and putting pressure on them to talk might make them feel less comfortable telling you about their experiences.
- **Force someone to get help** - As adults, we are all ultimately responsible for making our own decisions. This includes when – or if – we choose to seek help when we feel unwell.
- **See a doctor for someone else** - A doctor might give you general information about symptoms or diagnoses, but they won't be able to share any specific advice or details about someone else without their agreement.

And remember, the process will take time. The time invested will change person-to-person, as everyone is different and deserves to be treated as an individual.

People buy into people and this is the key to having an honest conversation around mental health.

