

Having a Conversation About Absence & Wellbeing



Before the conversation

- Choose a private place to talk and keep the meeting as informal and relaxed as possible.
- Make it clear anything discussed will be kept confidential unless agreed otherwise.

Prepare your questions

- How are you doing at the moment?
- You seem to be a bit down/upset/under pressure/frustrated/angry. Is everything okay?
- I've noticed you've been arriving late recently and I wondered if you're okay?
- I've noticed the reports are late when they usually are not. Is everything okay?
- Is there anything I can do to help?
- What would you like to happen? How?
- What support do you think might help?
- Have you spoken to your GP or looked for help anywhere else?

Sometimes we say we're fine when we're not. To really find out, ask twice.

Opening the conversation

- Approach the conversation in a sensitive and calm manner and manage emotions carefully.
- Ask how they are doing.
- Explain the reason for the conversation.

During the conversation

- Listen carefully and don't make assumptions.
- Reassure them that you are there to try to help.
- Be patient and don't try to force them into talking if they do not want to.

If they disclose they are experiencing ill health:

- Have they been to the GP and if so, what they recommended and whether any medication has been prescribed that may affect their performance
- Talk through any parts of their role they are struggling with or feel unable to do.
- Take a break if emotions take over

If they become angry or distressed:

- Stay calm.
- Reassure them that you're only trying to help and as their manager you're responsible for ensuring they are coping.

It's important to take a break if necessary.

At the end of the conversation

Check if there's anything else they'd like to discuss.

If they share details of ill health or concerns:

- Highlight sources of support such as the EAP/ Mental Health First Aiders/ Health and Wellbeing pages on the Bridge.
- Agree what will happen next, such as whether we will seek an Occupational Health report or if a further meeting will be arranged to discuss support options.

If they are currently absent from work:

- Discuss what they would like their colleagues to know about the reason for their absence.
- Agree what information can be shared and what must stay confidential.

Reassure them you're available at any time if they ever want to talk.

After the conversation

If they have opened up about ill health or shared concerns:

- Think about potential support or adaptations that may help.
- Arrange a further meeting to discuss support options.
- Document what was discussed and agreed and share a copy of your notes with them.

If they haven't opened up or have stated that there is no problem:

- Monitor the situation, and if you still have concerns consider seeking advice from sources such as HR or your line manager (confidentially).

Your support doesn't end here – continue to be approachable and available and check in regularly.

Role modelling openness and reassuring colleagues that they will be listened to with empathy, confidentially and supported wherever possible will help make it much easier to speak openly.

Other resources:

The ['It's my Conversation'](#) resources on the Bridge detail how to have really good coaching conversations.

The [Health and Wellbeing Pages](#) hold information around the support available for colleagues which you may want to sign post to and discuss during your conversation.

If your conversation includes discussing a mental health condition, you may want to take a copy of the [Mental Health Support](#) booklet to talk through.