

Starting and supporting a conversation about wellbeing

Planning the meeting

Step 1: Your thinking – What is it that you have noticed about your colleague?

- **Has their work performance changed:** are they missing deadlines, has their output reduced, are they making more errors than normal, has their decision-making become less reliable, has their planning and organisation deteriorated?
- **Have their relationships at work changed:** have you noticed there is more tension and conflict around them, are you noticing more complaints about their behaviour and attitude, are they less sociable, are they withdrawn, are they louder and more disruptive than before?
- **Have their attitudes and behaviors changed:** do they appear less motivated, do they seem to be working either more or fewer hours, has their absence increased, what are their energy levels like, do they appear more problem focused, are they complaining more?
- **How is their general health:** do they suffer more with headaches, aches and pains, general tiredness?

Step 2: Consider what you want to achieve from the meeting – Having a clear sense of purpose for the conversation helps you focus on what you are trying to achieve and becomes a great steer if you feel things are going off track. Ask yourself what is your ideal outcome for this conversation? Do you:

- want to understand what is affecting your colleague so you can work together to resolve it?
- want to help your colleague address the issues and increase their wellbeing?

see overleaf

As you plan consider your motivations going into the meeting – there is a risk that:

Our motivations become about us wanting to fix it, which we can't. We can only support and assist the individual – without them owning their part of the situation no real change will take place.

Our motivations are about getting them to return to their higher levels of performance. If we focus only on their performance and not on their wellbeing, we again will not help them deal with the aspects that are ultimately affecting their performance.

We want them to just sort it, they might not fully understand what is happening and how to fix it, if we have a drive to get to the fix it stage before we've given individuals a chance to talk about things, then we will potentially create further problems.

Step 3: Setting up the meeting environment –

Our environment plays an important part about how we feel, so it's important to find a confidential space and that the seating and lighting is conducive to a relaxed conversation, free from interruptions.

Consider:

- where will be the best place to have this conversation (on site/off site)?
- can you find a quiet space for a private conversation?
- when is the best time to have the conversation?

How will your colleague react? – Take some time to consider how the other person might be feeling about this conversation.

- What assumptions will they be making?
- How will they be feeling?
- What will they be thinking?

A great technique is to put yourself in their shoes and consider how they might be feeling and what they might be thinking.

- What can you do to alleviate any concerns and or fears they may be having?
- What would work best for them in letting them know that you'd like a conversation?
- If you have wellbeing conversations regularly then this is just an extension of the normal process. If it's not, then you need to think about how best to let them know and how much notice would be helpful.

The next step is to **plan the content** of the conversation – considering what you want to cover in the conversation, perhaps using this structure:

- How will you start it?
- What areas are you wanting to explore with them?
- What are some good questions that might be helpful?
- How will you get them to commit to action?
- How will you end it?

Having the conversation

Clarifying the purpose for the conversation

This is the why we are here and what do we together want to achieve.

Ideas of phrases you could use:

- I thought it might be helpful for you and I to have a conversation about your wellbeing and how you are feeling at the moment
- I've noticed you're not yourself at the moment and thought it might be helpful for us to have a conversation about it, what are your thoughts?
- I've noticed a few things that seem out of character... I thought it might be helpful to talk about them and see how we can work together to help change them.
- how are you feeling at the moment as I've noticed you don't seem as... as you normally do.

Once you've got clarity around 'the what' you are there to do, it is sometimes helpful to agree what would be helpful to achieve together by the end of the conversation. A great place to start is to ask them a question:

- what would be helpful for you to achieve by the end of the conversation?
- at the end of the conversation what would you like to have achieved?
- what would success look like for you by the end of our conversation?
- what would you like from this conversation?

Once you have their thinking around this, you can then share your thoughts about what might be helpful and achievable with the timeframe of one conversation.

Exploring their thinking, thoughts and feelings

This is about expanding their exploration around what is happening from their perspective, checking out the data and information you have noticed through exploration of their thinking. Good open questions will be helpful:

- how are you feeling?
- what's your thinking around how you are at work at the moment?
- with your outcome in mind where would be a great place to start this conversation?

If this then leads them to explore some of the areas you've noticed great you can then expand them further. However, if they don't then you may need to lead them a little. For example:

- I've noticed that there seems to be more disagreements around your conversations with others (replace with one of the areas you've noticed), I really want to hear your thoughts on this.
- you mentioned earlier that..... tell me more about that.
- you don't seem yourself recently I've noticed... How are you?

Once you've got them talking, it is helpful at this stage to be curious about what is going on for them. Listen and be empathetic to their situation.

Help them to understand the impact that their wellbeing is having at work – they will probably know but asking them about what effect they think it is having on their behaviour is a useful exploration around getting them to realise the impact themselves.

Helping them to find solutions – This is about empowering your colleague to find solutions that work for them and perhaps providing them with support to help them achieve their aims of the meeting. After they have talked about the things that are happening that are affecting their wellbeing, you can explore with them their thinking about ideas to improve their wellbeing. State your intention at this stage:

"Now you've identified what it is that seems to be negatively impacting on your wellbeing, I'd like to help you find some solutions to help you rebalance your wellbeing."

Questions:

- What ideas have you got about helping your wellbeing?
- What ideas have you got about changing this situation into a more positive one for you?
- If you were giving advice to a friend about this situation, what advice would you give them?
- What have you done in this kind of situation in the past?

For managers – you may want to get your team member to commit to action

After their ideas it's then about helping them decide which ideas would help them given the current context. Of all those great ideas you've just talked about, which one would be most helpful for you now?

The follow-on question, once they identify which ideas they think would be helpful, is to explore with them what exactly they will do and if there is anything that might get in the way of them doing this.

- What exactly are you going to do from (this afternoon, tomorrow)?
- What if anything might get in the way of you doing this?
- What can you do to overcome that barrier?
- Re-cap for me what you are going to do to help improve your wellbeing?

This series of questions gets them to be clear on what they are going to do and if there is anything that might stop them. Through these further questions you help them overcome the barriers so they will be successful at making the changes.

Your input: If at this stage there are things you think you can support them with in connection with your role as a manager, this is the place that you can then make suggestions and ideas.

Follow up and further support

This is about supporting staff further to ensure they are successful in making the changes to positively impact on their wellbeing. It may require further changes and ideas once the initial ideas have been successful, or it may be they need support to continue with the change they have identified.

Behavioural change takes time and is difficult, making new positive habits is challenging as we have to consciously choose to take the new actions rather than follow the paths that we have normally taken. We are making new connections within our brain that are fighting against the well-connected routes we have established over time.

Set up a follow-up conversation, where they can check in with how they are doing with the changes they are making and the impact on their wellbeing.

Tips on what to watch out for

- The individual trying to blame others and not take any responsibility for the changes that they can make
- Them playing the victim so you will try and rescue them
- The individual asking you for your ideas and not doing any thinking themselves – i.e. they play to you being the expert when actually they are the expert on themselves
- Getting you to make false promises about the business that you can't make
- Getting you to make all the changes and they don't make any personally

Manager note:

Talking with your team as a group

Use the check in tool as the basis of a discussion focusing on what you can do collectively to improve your emotional health.

Suggested conversation points

- How would you currently score our team at the moment for each of the workforce factors?
- What ideas have we got to improve the scores?
- Discuss the ideas and decide as a collective what you are going to do
- What does good look like for each element of the workforce factors for us?
- Take one of the areas and discuss 'where are we now' in comparison with the agreed perspective of what good looks like?
- What can we do to work closer towards good?
- As a team discuss what gets in the way, what barriers are there to each of the workforce factors
- Explore as a team what you could do to overcome the barriers
- Agree what you will do to overcome the barriers