

# Good Work Design: Supporting your team



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## We all have times when things aren't going well

We may be caring for a loved one, having financial issues, managing ill health or struggling with a looming deadline.

A change in behaviour or mood can be a sign that someone isn't coping.

If you are concerned that someone you work with is not behaving as usual, they may need extra support. You don't need to be an expert in mental health to provide support, you just need to have a conversation.

## Why it matters

People who feel supported by their workplace are likely to cope better with life's challenges. Getting to know your team members and being aware of what is happening in their lives will help you to know when and how to support them.

The right support helps people maintain their wellbeing and continue to perform at work.

**'We all need support, in the workplace and beyond it. When we both give and receive, we stand a much better chance of survival.'**

*Gary Chapman*

## How it's done

Providing support involves listening to your employee, encouraging access to workplace or other supports, or making changes at work to improve their health and wellbeing.

Supportive people remember to be CLEAR by showing Compassion, Listening to others, Empathising, and being Accepting and Real.

[CLEAR framework courtesy of I Am Here](#)





# Changes in mood or behaviour can be a sign that someone is struggling



## 1 Recognise the signs

The first step involves recognising that someone is behaving differently.

- Look out for signs that someone needs help. This can look like:
  - reduced performance
  - unplanned absence
  - withdrawal
  - disengagement
  - low morale
  - forgetfulness
  - a very high level of conscientiousness.
- Watch for physical symptoms and emotional responses, including:
  - looking tired
  - appearing stressed or overwhelmed
  - mood swings
  - being easily upset.
- Consider your own behaviour and feelings. Emotions are contagious and you may notice that you or others in the team pick up on the emotional tone when someone is feeling disturbed.

Recognising signs can be harder to do if people are working remotely, so have regular phone or video catch-ups with your team members to check in and look for any changes.

Great managers know their people, which helps them to recognise when someone is struggling and to offer support.

Great managers are self-aware.

## 2 Prepare to talk

When you notice a change, talk to the person openly and respectfully about your concerns, before taking any other action.

Before you start a conversation, plan for it.

- Think about what you will say, and where and when you will say it.
- Have the conversation in person, if possible. If it's not, consider a phone call rather than a screen-based meeting. A phone call can help you to focus on the person's voice and pick up cues about how they are feeling.
- Choose a private place to talk. Consider privacy before and after the meeting and ideally choose a room away from the team.
- If you work remotely from your employee, set up a time that is convenient for them to have this conversation, ideally when they can chat in private away from colleagues, house mates or family.
- Make sure you have enough time in case the conversation is long.
- Remember that you can seek support to prepare for this conversation from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), manager support service or Human Resources Team.



When



Where

# Listen and show empathy



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## 3 Listen with empathy

When you are ready to talk to your team member you should:

- Let them know that you are concerned about them and describe what you've noticed. For example, you might say something like 'I've noticed you seem distracted, is everything ok?'
- Be objective and focus on their behaviour, without trying to interpret what it might mean.
- Encourage them to do the talking, by asking open questions, and listening carefully. Give them your undivided attention and seek to understand them before you respond.
- Avoid offering opinions or solutions but do validate what they have to say. For example, 'I'm really sorry to hear that, it sounds like you are having a difficult time.'
- Focus on connecting with the person by showing compassion and empathy.
- Guide them towards available support and follow up with them on how they're going.

This conversation will be easier if you have a good relationship. If there are issues you may need to find someone the person trusts and is comfortable with to have the conversation.

For more guidance on how to have this type of conversation see [RU OK?](#)

**'If a colleague or someone in your team is struggling and you think they need support, it's important to take action.'**

## 4 Make adjustments at work

Sometimes having you listen and empathise is all the support your worker wants from you. Other times, more support is needed and you can provide adjustments to help them manage their wellbeing.

- Ask questions and listen to understand what will help.
- Think creatively about solutions – there are many possible ways to give support.
- Offer adjustments. This can include:
  - implementing flexible working arrangements
  - reviewing work demands and adjusting deadlines
  - modifying tasks and responsibilities
  - facilitating a more self-paced workload.

In some cases, it can be helpful to involve the person's treating health practitioner in a discussion about how the workplace can support their health and continued work participation. If your employee gives permission, consider setting up a meeting for the three of you to talk about options.

It's important to get agreement on next steps, including follow-up conversations. For example, you could ask 'Is it okay if I check in with you in a couple of days and ask how that went?'





## Provide adjustments

### 5 Enable access to other support

Not everyone will want to discuss their wellbeing with you. In this case, you must respect their decision not to disclose, but you can still be CLEAR and offer support.

Make sure you understand what support services are available. Workplace services and programs may include the EAP, Early Intervention Service or NewAccess. [Beyond Blue](#) can also help workers access mental health support.

- Have a list of help on hand that you can give to your team member immediately and encourage them to access support services.
- Let them know that you are available to talk if they decide they want to.

**High performing teams** are those where everyone supports each other. Remember to recognise, respond and support your team.

