

QUICK GUIDE

How to conduct a wellbeing conversation



Instead of just talking to employees about their performance and deliverables, it's also important to check in with them from time to time to see how they're feeling.



Although it might feel a little bit awkward asking employees how they are, most people want their manager to care about them and their wellbeing.

This can also help you to better support them and direct them towards wellbeing services, to prevent sickness absence and resignations.

So how do you go about conducting a wellbeing conversation?
Here are five steps...

Five steps to conducting a wellbeing conversation

Step 1: Prepare Yourself

Before you encourage employees to open up about how they're feeling, make sure you familiarise yourself with the wellbeing services your employer has in place.

Your role in talking to employees shouldn't be to try and give the advice or tell them what you would do in their situation. Instead, it's to listen and guide them towards support.

That way, when they start talking about any emotional or physical worries, you don't have to try to solve their problem for them but can instead let them know about services that might help.

Step 2: Be Proactive

As well as letting employees know you want them to come and talk to you about anything they're concerned about, it's also important to proactively ask them how they are?

Set aside some time to talk to them on an individual basis, somewhere quiet, preferably in person, and be aware they might be wary about opening up about some wellbeing concerns at first.

Tell them you know everyone is going through lots of challenges right now and you want to know if there's anything that they're struggling with at the moment? Then pause until they answer.

Step 3: Really Listen

Making people feel safe opening up is about as much about being a good listener as anything else, because this is easier said than done.

While they're talking, you might want to find yourself offering advice, comparing their situation to something you went through or even judging them or changing the topic.

To avoid these blocks to listening, prioritise listening over speaking and show empathy for any challenges they're facing by asking questions like: *"How are you taking care of yourself?"*

Blocks to Listening

The following blocks to listening will undermine your ability to hold a wellbeing conversation so try to avoid them.

- ✓ **Comparing** – interrupting to talk about something similar that happened to you
- ✓ **Advising** – giving advice on what you would do if you were in their situation
- ✓ **Judging** – forming negative criticism in your mind about what they're saying
- ✓ **Placating** – quickly agreeing and saying 'I see' 'and uh-uh' in a condescending way
- ✓ **Filtering** – letting your mind drift away and getting distracted by your own thoughts
- ✓ **Rehearsing** – focusing so much on what you'll say next that you stop listening
- ✓ **Derailing** – changing the topic or interrupting them so you can speak
- ✓ **Mindreading** – making assumptions and presuming you know what they're saying

Contact us to discuss ways of reducing sickness absence across your organisation this autumn:



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Step 4: Action Plan

Most people know what they need to do to improve their situation, or at least how they feel about their situation. So, after listening to them, ask them, *'What do you think you need to do?'*

Once they start to offer solutions themselves, you can help them create an action plan. For example, if they say, *"I really need to see someone about my back pain, you can then offer to refer them to Occupational Health or encourage them to talk to their GP."*

After helping them to agree some actions, arrange a time to check-in with them again to see how they got on with putting the plan into action. Gently nudge them to action if needed.

Step 5: Suggest Adjustments

Often the culture of the company might have been undermining their physical or mental health. They might have felt too overloaded to take a lunch break or working very late.

Take time to listen to what they're saying and think about what practical things you can do to support them with reasonable adjustments to their working conditions.

For example, if they're struggling with symptoms of menopause, providing them with a desk fan and allowing them to step out of meetings during hot flushes can make a big difference.