

# Keep it going – sustaining an emotionally well workplace

## Be brave, be constructive and be solution focused

Sometimes we face the challenge of managing a conversation with people who have or are currently exhibiting signs of stress.

When picking up with someone on issues that suggest they are in a very negative emotional space, or really struggling to cope, we can worry about how our approach to the conversation could impact their wellbeing. Whether there is an issue or not, it is important to start the conversation with the expectation that you can work with the person to support them. In doing so you'll be able to influence three things:

- **the level of pressure they experience at work** – you may be able to understand and reduce the demands placed on them
- **the way in which they cope** – you can provide them with advice and information from our personal resilience worksheets on how they can use coping mechanisms and support systems to cope with the pressure they face
- **their attitude to dealing with their pressure and taking responsibility for this** – these issues are not yours to solve, you can only advise, support and influence your staff member and their environment.

## Aim of the conversation

It is important that this conversation starts from a position of positive intent – it is not your job to 'fix' the person's emotional reactions or mental health problems. By focusing on understanding and influencing the factors that impact your team member's wellbeing, you will be better able to impact these factors and also their performance at work.

Your input should build an expectation that you will both take responsibility to ensure you are paying attention to the things that can impact on their wellbeing.

It is worth supporting your team member in considering how they get clarity of priorities in their role as they begin to navigate pressure, by paying attention to the things that are important to us in the workplace – such as goals and targets – we can better focus on key priorities and make informed decisions about things such as support requirement and work environment adjustments.

## Understanding your colleagues' pressures

Working with your team member to get past their emotional reaction in order to start a constructive conversation about what it is in their working environment that is making them feel overwhelmed or stressed is important. The three pillars of wellbeing within the NHS give a great framework to look constructively at the pressures they face as a basis of giving you both an indication of what you can each influence to reduce the pressures they feel they face.

Using the action planning sheet from the toolkit will give you a structure to base a factual conversation around. It may be you ask your team member to complete this form or a draft of the more detailed action plan in preparation for your conversation with them.

It can be provided as pre-work for your colleague to allow them to think through the issues they face as well.

**Action plan**  
Impacting the pressures faced by my team or individual

Factors I need to influence immediately	Action to be taken
Factors I can use to support my actions	Action to be taken
Factors causing pressure that I cannot directly influence	Action to be taken to buffer the negative impact of these

### 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?

**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?

**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.

## Holding the conversation

Use the worksheet from this toolkit on holding and managing a wellbeing conversation to help you plan and structure your approach.

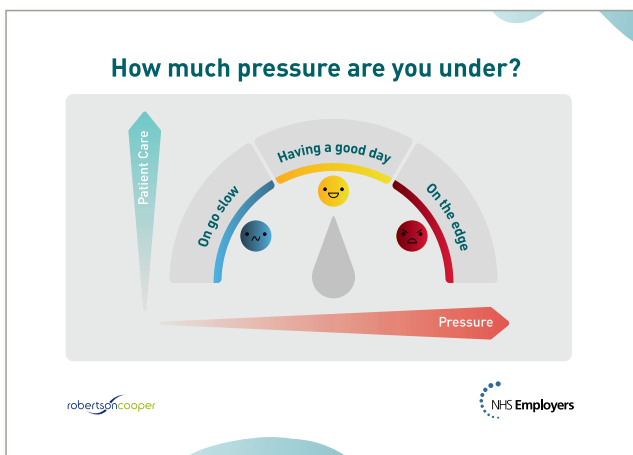
It gives some great starters for ten and open questions to help you move the discussion forward.

Using that in partnership with the pressure checklist provides the basis for you really understanding what is creating pressure for your team member.

## Support versus challenge

As a manager you can provide either challenge or support to your team members. To instill positive wellbeing in your team members must experience some positive pressure. However, if you or the environment creates too much pressure, this can lead to burn out, while if you buffer things and support them too much, you can create a situation of rust out.

In this conversation as you agree options for moving forward, think about how the terms you agree with the team member allow them to be challenged enough to thrive, without being so challenged they return to a position of feeling overwhelmed or stressed.



## Creating and delivering on a wellbeing passport

To support management of your team member's wellbeing moving forward, the creation of a formal agreement on how you will support them and what they will do to actively manage their pressures and reaction to these is a helpful way to formalise the support you'll be expected to provide.

It also forms the basis for further check-in conversations and evaluation of how they are coping with the pressure they face.

- Use the conversation between you to identify and understand what the factors impacting their wellbeing are
- Agree what can be influenced by you or by your team member to change their experience of work
- Explore solutions and ways to do this
- Agree who is responsible for putting the solutions into place
- Use the conversation to complete the action plan and agree next steps and responsibilities in a structured way.