

Communications and conversations tool kit

Effective communication requires clarity and collaboration when an employee is dealing with life or work stressors. It is important to use communication that promotes a safe psychological environment. The following strategies can help:

How to effectively communicate with an emotional employee

- **Listen to understand** – understanding the employee's perspective and emotional state is key to starting the process.
- **Engage the employee to focus on solutions** – that support them in the work environment and in doing their job well. The role of a leader is to ensure job goals are met in a safe environment.
- **Choose the most effective communication style** – being adept in choosing a variety of styles can help you change if needed to get the most out of the conversation.
- **Prevent triggering when giving negative feedback** – learn to provide negative feedback constructively. This can help reduce the intensity of their reaction. Do not place blame; remain positive.
- **Use specific approaches** – such as resolving conflict, managing performance or responding to issues like burnout, biases and violence.

Five steps in having a mental health conversation

1. Prepare the conversation

- Plan on what you are going to say.
- Review the plan with someone else, HR for example.
- Choose a suitable time and location that will allow for privacy and confidentiality and be free from interruptions.
- Allow enough time so the conversation is not rushed.

2. Initiate the conversation

- Start the conversation by acknowledging the worker's good qualities.
- Assure the worker's confidentiality will be respected.
- Begin from a place of concern.
- Be specific about behaviors that have been noticed.

3. Explore and broaden the conversation

- Be curious, ask open ended questions.
- Use active listening skills.
- Define important issues and the impact on work and co-workers.

4. Generate options and offer support

- Collaborate for the desired outcome and solution.
- Consider any adjustments that can be made for the employer and employee.
- Consider any accommodations that are needed.

5. Create an action plan

- Define actions to be taken by both parties.
- Review the action plan together.
- Follow up at an agreed time.

Resources

[Having a conversation: discussing mental health in the workplace -- Sarah's story \(YouTube link\)](#)

[How to Talk About Mental Health \(YouTube link\)](#)

[Workplace Strategies for Mental Health – Canada Life](#)

[Return to Work Workplace – University of Melbourne](#)

