

Mental health conversations

A checklist for managers



Creating an environment where your team feel safe to share how they're feeling is the first step towards better mental health support at work.

Here's a 10-step checklist for asking
"Are you OK?"



01

Make yourself available for regular check-ins with your team

Wellbeing check-ins can be standalone or part of regular 1-to-1s. Let your team know that your door is always open for a chat, work related or not. They may not be ready to talk to you, or may not want to. The most important thing is they realise that support is there if they want or need it.

02

Learn to spot the signs of someone having a tough time

Outside of your regular check-ins, you may want to open a conversation about mental wellbeing if you notice changes in:

- + What they're saying e.g. expressing they can't cope or feel out of control
- + What they're doing e.g. changes in behaviour, lack of interest, low energy
- + Known life events e.g. bereavement, upheaval or major health issue

Signs can be spotted virtually too. Look out for changes. For example, if someone starts becoming less responsive on chat or email, if the tone of their messages changes, or if they start to miss video calls, you may want to check in with them.





03

Be prepared to listen without judgement

Make yourself comfortable, put yourself on “do not disturb” and try to remove the chance of any distractions or interruptions. Try to listen with empathy and reserve judgement, even if it’s an issue you’re not familiar with. If people feel judged, rushed or ashamed, they may not be willing to open up again in future.

04

Create a list of resources you can signpost to

Check what support options are available in your organisation, as well as helpful external resources such as Mind, Mental Health Foundation and Samaritans. Save a list of these should you need to signpost the person to specific services.





05

Start the conversation by asking “how are you?”

If they say everything is fine, but your gut tells you otherwise, you could let them know you’ve noticed a change. For example:

“

You’ve seemed a bit quieter than usual this last week. How are things going?

I know you’ve had lots going on at home recently. Would you like to talk about it?”

”

06

Listen carefully to their response

If they respond openly about what has been going on for them, focus on actively listening to what they are saying. Don’t rush them or interrupt. Let them speak in their own time and avoid the temptation to try and find a solution right away.

Conversations about mental wellbeing can be difficult. The person may become sad, angry or anxious, so stay calm and try not to take anything too personally.





07 Encourage them to take action

You don't have to have all the answers or be able to solve their problems to help. To facilitate action, use questions such as:

“

What do you think is a first step to help you through this?

What's helped if you've felt this way before or faced similar challenges in the past?

What support do you have in place?

”

08 Offer all the support that you

You're not being asked to provide clinical advice. Your role as a manager is to listen, be compassionate and signpost to further support. Encourage them to consider talking to family, a trusted friend, or a health professional.

“

As your manager, how can I best support you?”

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

“It might be useful to speak with someone who can best support you in this situation and I'm happy to help you find the right person to talk to.”

”





09

Respect whatever their response to your question is

If they don't want to talk, you need to respect their decision and reassure them that it is OK. You can ask if there is someone else they'd rather talk to and tell them that you're here to listen if they want to talk in the future.

10

Arrange a time to follow-up and check in again

Pop a follow-up meeting in your diary or set yourself a reminder to speak to them again in a couple of weeks. Sooner if they're really struggling.

You could ask "How have things been since we last chatted?". If they haven't done anything yet, still be encouraging and remember that for now they might just need someone to lend a listening ear.

