

Tips to having a conversation about mental health

Every conversation a manager has with a team member who may be experiencing mental ill health will be different.

Sometimes, a team member may feel able to be very open with their manager from the very first meeting. In other situations, it may be difficult for the team member to open up and might take several conversations.

Below are a few tips and considerations for a manager to think about when approaching a conversation with a team member.

Before the conversation takes place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose an appropriate place; this could be off site. It should be in private and usually be one-to-one • Consider what you have observed that concerns you and note examples of this • Keep the meeting as informal and relaxed as possible • Make it clear anything discussed will be kept confidential unless agreed otherwise
At the start of the conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach the conversation in a sensitive and calm manner, and manage emotions carefully • Ask how they are doing • Explain the reason for the conversation • Remember to ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions
During the conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully and don't make assumptions • Reassure them that you are there to try to help • Be patient and don't try to force them into talking if they do not want to <p>If they disclose they are experiencing mental ill health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check if they have been to the GP and if so, what they recommended and whether any medication has been prescribed that may affect their performance or make it unsafe for them to perform certain duties • Discuss whether there are any parts of their role they are struggling with or feel unable to do • Adjourn for a break if emotions take over or to think through what has been discussed if the seriously unexpected arises <p>If they become angry or distressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm • Reassure them, that you are only trying to help them and as their manager you are responsible for ensuring they are coping • Adjourn for a break if necessary
At the end of the conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check if they think anything else should be discussed <p>If they have disclosed they are experiencing mental ill health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the team member to talk to their GP to get an expert opinion (if not done already)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight sources of support within the organisation such as the Employee Assistance Programme and outside the organisation such as mental health charities • Agree what will happen next, such as whether they will be referred to occupational health or if a further meeting will be arranged to discuss support options <p>If they have stated that there is no problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect their position • Make clear you are available at any time if they ever want to talk <p>If they are/have been absent from work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss what they would like their colleagues to know about the reason for their absence • Agree what information can be shared and what must stay confidential
<p>After the conversation</p>	<p>If they have disclosed they are experiencing mental ill health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about potential support or adaptations that may help • Arrange a further meeting to discuss support options • Document what was discussed and agreed <p>If they have stated that there is no problem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the situation, and if you still have concerns consider seeking advice from sources such as HR, the Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health • Be available and approachable in case they want to talk to you at a later point about their health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document your discussion and what was agreed

Adapted from ACAS guidance on approaching a sensitive conversation regarding mental ill health