

Supportive Conversations: Best Practices for Managers

Start with Empathy

- Open with care, not conclusions
- E.g.: “I’ve noticed a change and wanted to check in.”

Focus on Observable Behaviors (Do Not Make Assumptions)

- Describe what you’ve seen (missed deadlines, changed tone) without guessing root causes

Create a Safe and Private Setting

- Ensure the conversation occurs in a safe and confidential space
- Ensure confidentiality and communicate that the conversation is about support
- Share with HR on a need-to-know basis; and ensure employee knows if you plan to share the conversation with HR

Listen More Than Talk

- Use open-ended questions
- Let the employee share without pressure
- Make sure you schedule enough time for this conversation (don’t try to squeeze it in at the last 5 minutes of a 1:1 meeting)

Know Your Role and Boundaries

- You’re not a therapist. You do not need to have ongoing, lengthy conversations or feel like you are providing supportive therapy
- It is not your job to “diagnose”
- Your role is to listen, be supportive, and refer them to appropriate resources

Connect to Support Resources

- Offer reminders of well-being resource through the EAP or other external and internal benefits
- Consider mental health services (e.g., counseling) as well as work-life resources to address contributing stressors (parenting, caregiving, financial concerns, social determinants of health, etc.)

Collaborate on a Plan

- Agree on short-term goals and how support can help meet them
- E.g., if the team member has been coming to work late due to reported sleep disturbance, if the role allows, temporality allow a later start time and also refer to well-being coaching to address sleep issues

Follow Up and Stay Consistent

- Follow up and check in as needed
- Don’t let support stop after one conversation

