

Interactive materials for Step 2:

EXERCISE: Tips and tools for having an open conversation



Here are some important points to help prepare for a sensitive conversation. For more ideas including how to close the conversation see the [Managing conversations pdf on the Time to Change website](#):

- **Find somewhere suitable to talk**- If it's an informal meet up then maybe a quiet café or somewhere away from the office. Otherwise find somewhere quiet and private.
- **Give them your full attention**- Let them do the talking. Avoid interrupting. Leave questions and comments for when they have finished talking.
- **Don't be judgemental**- The employee will be very aware of the stigma that is attached to mental health. They may be worried about being seen as weak or vulnerable. Be understanding about what they are telling you, without passing judgement.
- **Check that you're on the same page**- Try paraphrasing what the employee has told you to check that you completely understand what has been said. Also reflect what they are saying to you e.g. 'I find it hard to cope', use the word 'cope' in your conversation.
- **Be encouraging and use positive language**- This will make the employee feel more at ease and help them to open up. To show you are actively listening, small comments like 'what happened next' and 'I see' will help.
- **Remember to be empathetic**- This conversation might be terrifying for the employee, so remember to show empathy towards them e.g. 'I know this must be really difficult for you'.
- **Don't ask too many questions**- And when you do ask questions, ask open questions rather than questions that can be answered simply using 'yes' or 'no'.
- **Avoid clichés and insensitivity**- Saying things like 'You're just having a bad day' or 'pull yourself together' are not encouraging or helpful.
- **Ensure confidentiality**- Discuss who will have access to the details of your conversation and remember not to share this information with anyone else.

Where to go for further information:

- For more general help on challenging conversations and how to manage them download the [pdf on the acas website](#).