

## Quick Guide

# Providing Support At Difficult Times

### Why it matters...

Most of us experience difficulties at some point in our lives, either in or outside of work. It is part of our duty of care as an employer to ensure that there is a supportive environment at work.

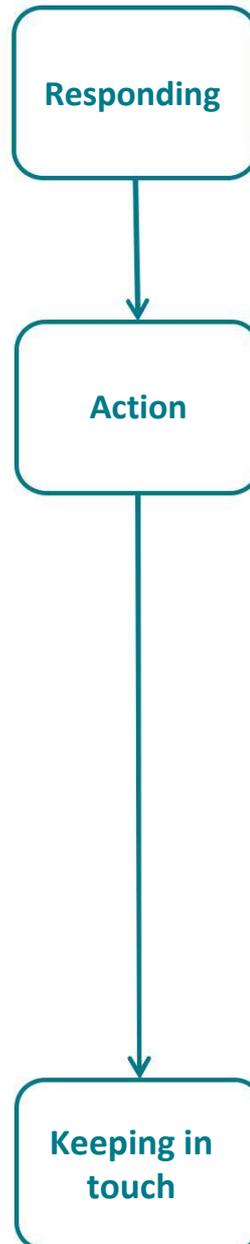
Difficult times can be anything from personal stress, family bereavement, illness and more. It might mean that we encounter colleagues who are upset, distressed or in crisis in the workplace.

Support can be provided in different ways and knowing how to tackle these situations builds confidence in your own abilities and can prevent conversations turning into confrontations.

### What do I need to do?

- Communication is key to providing support. Arrange to talk with the individual in a private place.
- Listen but do not push for someone to reveal personal details.
- Discuss what help and support can be provided at work. For example special leave for employees that have experienced a bereavement.
- But be realistic about what can be done in work. Explain where you cannot help and encourage them to seek help elsewhere. Be careful not to offer advice outside your area of expertise e.g. divorce proceedings.
- Consider and agree with them what will be said, if necessary, to other members of the team.

### How it works



- Early intervention is important. Promptly arrange a private discussion.
- Listen so you understand the issue and what can be done. Don't interrupt to try and sort it out.
- If the issues are work related e.g. a case of bullying, then further action will need to be taken and you may need further advice.
- Advise the individual about sources of help within or outside the University.
- If not work related, you may need to encourage the individual to seek other help e.g. friends, Citizen's Advice.
- Consider any simple adjustments to work, such as allowing someone to work flexibly for a time.
- Actively follow up at reasonable intervals.
- Monitor sickness absence to keep an eye on whether the problem is not being resolved.

## How to support an emotional or upset colleague

- Move to a private space.
- Offer to call a family/friend/ colleague to support them.
- Patience is key - just sitting quietly with someone is offering support.
- Listen to what they have to say.
- Don't ask intrusive questions.
- Don't tell them what to do or push for answers.
- Don't make assumptions based on gossip
- Reassure the employee that you will do your best to support them.
- Make clear the support that is available to help them through this.
- If someone is very distressed, you may need to send them home and register sickness absence – make sure they are in a fit state to get home and arrange to call a friend or relative if necessary.

## Managing work

Part of providing support is considering how to manage work responsibilities. This may be something that is already causing stress or may soon do so.

Go through upcoming deadlines and commitments and consider if and how they can still be met, whether some support is needed, or if another arrangement is possible for the short term.

Consider whether a period of flexible working may help e.g. if there is a ill relative, starting and finishing earlier may make visiting easier.

Make sure you discuss a timeline – when someone is expected to get back to their usual performance.

## Support available

Occupational Health Service provides professional advice on work-related health issues to University staff. Their [website](#) provide advice on health issues.

[Employee assistance programme](#) a confidential, self-referral counselling and information service designed to help you with personal or work-related problems that may be affecting your health, wellbeing or performance.

[Special leave policy](#) covering compassionate leave and care leave.

[Work life balance policy](#) with guidance on flexible working.

If the issue relates to conduct of another member of staff, [contact your HR officer](#) – they will advise if it is a disciplinary issue and next steps.

[Guidelines for dealing with harassment or bullying](#)

### Outside of work:

Friends and family

GP or other medical professional

[Citizens Advice](#)

[Gov.uk](#) provides advice on benefits, immigration, tax and other issues.