

TIP SHEET #5

MANAGING WHAT IF'S IN A PEER CONVERSATION

During a conversation with someone about mental health issues, difficult moments can sometimes occur. In these circumstances, it is not always easy to know the most helpful and constructive way to respond.

This Tip Sheet 5 “Managing What Ifs in a PEER Conversation” shares some of the most common worries leader’s have when having a mental health conversation, and some tips on how to best deal with them.

What should I do if the person doesn’t want to talk to me?

Just because you want to reach out to someone, it doesn’t mean your support is wanted. If this happens, just let the person know that you don’t want to intrude on their personal life – only that you want to see if you can provide any support and that you are available if they need you. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to provide information to link them to your organisation’s EAP or other support services available such as TIACS on 0488 846 988.

How should I respond if someone becomes upset?

Talking about mental health conditions can be very distressing. If the person becomes upset or very angry, it is best to acknowledge the emotion as you see it and ask how the person would like to proceed. They may feel embarrassed for getting emotional or just feel completely overwhelmed. For example, they may want to be alone for a while, have a glass of water, or take some deep breaths. Let them know it is okay for them to be upset, to take their time and that you are ready when they are to keep talking.

What is the best way to handle someone disclosing they are suicidal?

Remain calm and explore the individual’s suicide intention directly and non-judgmentally. Listen and take all the time it needs. Gain a commitment from them to seek support and provide the details to link them to appropriate services. Always follow-up, or ensure someone follows-up to check on their welfare in the days following the conversation.

If you feel someone is of an imminent threat to themselves because a clear intent and plan have been indicated, call Emergency Services on 000.

Finally, ensure you look after yourself and debrief with someone afterwards.

I’ve tried to reach out to someone but they have dismissed my concern and said they are fine.

Respond by acknowledging that it is great to hear they are doing fine. Respectfully let the person know that if that changes, you are available to provide any practical support that might be needed. Emphasise that you don’t want to intrude on their personal life at all and that you also have information on your organisation’s EAP and other relevant services, such as TIACS, if ever needed.

What if my team member won’t get help or accept the support offered?

Whilst you can encourage someone to get help, direct them to resources and provide practical workplace adjustments, it is always an individual’s choice as to the extent they utilise that support. If a team member does not want to engage in any type of support it can be helpful to say:

“Ok, I appreciate that you don’t want this help right now. Keep in mind that this support is here for you whenever you are ready. If it is okay, I’ll check in with you next week to see how you are going?”

What if I can't stop worrying about my team member?

When a team member discloses their mental health condition and the circumstances around this, it can be confronting or distressing. It is normal to feel concerned or to worry following a PEER conversation, particularly if you are not sure of your team member's state of mind.

Some strategies that you may find helpful are:

- 1 Debrief the conversation with a trusted and confidential peer (in a manner that protects the privacy of the team member).
- 2 Check-in with the team member to reassure yourself that they are okay and that the support measures put in place are making a difference (remember to not overwhelm the team member though – it can feel demeaning if you are checking in too often).
- 3 Remind yourself that you have done everything you can to provide support. Remember that you can't control other people's choices.
- 4 Seek confidential support from your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or contact TIACS on 0488 846 988.

What if my team member feels embarrassed after the conversation?

It takes great courage and vulnerability to share that you are experiencing a mental health condition. Someone may feel embarrassed, regretful, exposed, unsure, and vulnerable after making such a disclosure. If this happens it can be helpful to:

- 1 Provide feedback that you appreciate this is a difficult conversation for them to have and that you respect their courage to share.
- 2 Reassure the team member that their privacy will be respected, they will be supported, and they will be fairly and positively treated.
- 3 Reinforce this privacy, support and fairness through your language and behaviour in subsequent interactions.

What if my team member shares that they have a mental health condition when I am raising concerns about their performance?

Raising performance concerns such as poor attendance or not meeting role expectations with a team member, can sometimes be a catalyst for a team member to disclose they are struggling with their mental health. If this happens, you can say something like:

"Thanks for sharing where you are at right now and some of the things that may be contributing to the concerns I've raised. Is it okay with you if we discuss this further and work through how I can support you?"

Then remember your PEER Conversation training. Refer to the additional resources on having an effective PEER Conversation available in your eToolkit.

Remember, if the employee shares that they have a mental health condition if you raise performance concerns with them, it is not your role to diagnose it, or ignore or dismiss it. It is now your responsibility to provide support for the employee, to help them meet the expectations of their role, and engage your mental health and performance management organisational policies if required. It is also recommended in these situations, if available, to engage human resource support and seek legal advice if required. Alternatively, contact Business Queensland or Fair Work Australia for free and confidential advice.

If you or someone you know needs help contact **TIACS** on 0488 846 988 or your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your GP or call: **LifeLine** on 13 11 14, **Kids Helpline** on 1800 551 800, **MensLine Australia** on 1300 789 978 or the **Suicide Call Back Service** on 1300 659 467.