










As more people face the prospect of several weeks of uncertainty, physical distancing, isolation and possibly quarantine, it is more important than ever to establish ways of preserving your own mental and physical health, and supporting your colleagues in doing the same.

It is sometimes difficult to know how to approach a colleague who may be struggling; however, with a few simple tips, you can feel more comfortable in letting them know you care and want to support them.






This tip sheet provides information and practical suggestions on how to have a conversation with a colleague you are concerned about.

Simple steps you can take to have a supportive conversation with a colleague






-  **Identify a suitable way to connect** - with your colleague – in times of isolation this may mean via other video conference, phone or text message.
-  **Prepare supports** - Before connecting with your colleague, research support services available, e.g. Employee Assistance Program, Human Resources or other community organisations, such as Beyond Blue.
-  **Plan** - how you will approach the situation. Let your colleague know that you are concerned about them and why. Mention that it is completely normal to experience feelings of anxiety, worry and fear during a challenging period of uncertainty and prolonged isolation. Spend time listening to their experience.
-  **Listen** - Ensure that you are in a position to listen carefully to what they are saying, particularly as you may not be able to rely on interpreting other signals such as body language.
-  **Respect and accept** - their decision if they do not want to discuss the matter; however, inform them that you are available to talk and support them should they change their mind.
-  **Manage privacy** - Reassure them that what they tell you is private. Ask them if they have discussed their situation with others, and if they do or do not want you to mention it to anyone else. Ask them how you could help them talking about their situation and accessing support.
-  **Be supportive** - Talk openly about how the challenging period may impact their mental health and discuss resources available to them through work. Alternatively, you can suggest external forms of support such as their GP, their Employee Assistance Program, or Beyond Blue. Offer to assist them in accessing this support.
-  **Be open** - Allow your colleague the space to share as much or as little as they want. Ask open-ended questions to help you understand what they are going through, but tell them that they don't have to talk about it if it makes them feel uncomfortable.
-  **Follow up** - if you can. Let them know you care and would like to check-in with them, e.g. "How about I give you a call again by the end of the week?"

The Do's and Don'ts when having a conversation with a colleague:

Do:

-  **Set time aside** - to discuss their experiences.
-  **Normalise** - Indicate that it is normal to experience feelings of anxiety, worry and fear during a challenging period.
-  **Listen** - attentively and reflect back what they have said, showing your understanding of their experience.
-  **Be open** - about the impact of challenging periods and that you do not have all the answers.
-  **Link** - a colleague to resources at your organisation such as your Employee Assistance Program or other services.

Don't:

-  **Pressure** - them to 'snap out of it', 'get their act together' or 'cheer up'.
-  **Tell them** - they just need to stay busy, and provide them with solutions without permission.
-  **Judge** - Use words that suggest you are making a judgment, such as good or bad.
-  **Ignore** - the fact that they might be struggling and assume the problem will go away.
-  **Keep it to yourself** - If you don't think you can support your colleague, make a plan with them to reach out for assistance.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Remember that speaking openly about the feelings we might be experiencing will reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behaviour