



How to have a difficult discussion with your manager

**Know
YOUR
Rights!**



Sometimes you might need to have a difficult conversation with your manager. This could involve disputing your roster; raising concerns around staffing levels and skill mix; discussing a contentious leave application; or discussing an unsatisfactory interaction you have had.

How a conversation should be approached will depend on the manager and the topic to be discussed. However, there are some key principles to assist you in any difficult conversation with a manager.



Be prepared

Before you speak with your manager, it is always helpful to know your rights on any matter. That way you will know where you stand and how to express your concern. Log in to Member Central to access our *Know Your Rights* and *Safer Work Safer Care* resources or contact the Association for advice.

If you are approaching your manager with a problem, try to also prepare options for solutions. If you are making a request, try to anticipate the objections and how you might respond to those. If your request is about workplace rights or professional obligations, be clear on what those are ahead of the conversation and share with your manager any related policy or guidelines.



Speak to your manager in person if you can

If you need to speak to someone about resolving an issue, generally you should approach your manager first. However, if you are unable to resolve the matter with your manager, you can escalate it to a more senior manager. It has been our experience that managers generally appreciate when their staff come to them first with an issue, before speaking with a more senior manager.

By speaking in person, it humanises you, your circumstances, and any concerns you may have. If it is not possible to discuss in person, then a phone call is the next best option. If you are finding it difficult to reach your manager, you could briefly outline the

problem in an email and request a convenient time to discuss it in person or over the phone.



Bring a support person if you need one

Generally, you should not require a support person for an initial discussion with your manager. If you feel unsafe to speak with your manager in person, you can put your concerns to them in an email and seek a response. If you are unable to resolve your matter by email, you have the option of escalating your matter to a more senior manager that you would feel safe to speak with in a private meeting.

You should have a support person present if disciplinary action is a potential consequence of the discussion you are having. If you are unsure, you may ask, prior to attending the meeting, "Is disciplinary action a potential outcome of this meeting?" Make sure you contact the Association for support before entering a disciplinary meeting.

Please note, the Association will generally only provide a support person in circumstances where you are required to respond to allegations and disciplinary action is a potential outcome. If you need to have a difficult discussion with your manager that is not part of a disciplinary process, and you wish to bring a support person, then you could bring an Association branch official, if there is a branch at your workplace, or a colleague. Your support person should be someone not directly involved in the matter to be discussed.

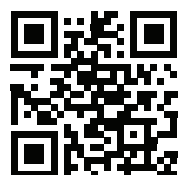
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Approach the conversation in an open and conciliatory manner

Be as focused on a potential resolution as you are on what the problem may be. Whatever you may think of your manager, be aware they are a person too, and subject to various pressures and demands in and outside of the workplace that you may not be aware of. As well as holding criticisms of your manager, of others, or the systems you work in, be open to insights into your own role and responsibilities.

Remember that after the discussion, you will need to continue to work with and under your manager. You should try to have difficult conversations in a way that ensures you can maintain or even improve the professional relationship with your manager.



Use professional, positive language when addressing your concerns

All language in the workplace must be professional. Avoid language that is unnecessarily accusatory; your manager may be in the wrong but if you are professional and compassionate towards them and give them the opportunity to explain, you may get what you want out of the discussion.

Re-read any email or document you may submit as if you were receiving it. Remove any negative or emotive wording.

Be positive and express your willingness to cooperate; to resolve problems; to do what is needed to move forward, to improve or to do what is in the interest of patient care or the organisation. By using language that takes ownership for your role or stake in the problem and the solution, you can encourage others to do the same.



Provide examples

If a problem can be best illustrated by examples, then you should have these at hand, particularly if you are raising a workplace complaint or grievance. Managers may require examples before they can act on an issue. Documenting dates, times, names of witnesses or persons involved, places, and other details of incidents will equip you to report an ongoing issue when the time comes.



Name the issue

When you are naming an issue, stick to the facts and what you know to be accurate.

Be as clear, direct and succinct as you can in relation to a problem. If you avoid addressing the problem directly then you may not be heard in the way you need and the problem could remain unresolved, either because your manager will not clearly understand what the real problem is, or they will have misread the degree of the problem and how it is impacting you or others.



Ask the right questions

Think about the questions you should ask. These will differ for every scenario. For example, some questions you might ask:

What steps have been taken in the past to address this issue?

Which policy or guideline are you relying on to support your position?

What steps will management take today to address the risk to employee health and safety?

Would you please outline what your expectations are of me in this situation?

By planning and asking the right questions, you can hold your manager to account and come closer to a shared understanding.



Confirm the discussion in writing afterwards

For the avoidance of misunderstanding, it always helps to confirm a discussion you have had with a follow up email. Include any agreed actions that may have been discussed. This will give both you and the manager a record of what the issue is, how it will be addressed and who is responsible for the next steps.



Speak to the Association for advice

Your union is available to provide advice, guidance or support. If you are preparing for a difficult conversation with a manager and seeking guidance, you will be better for reaching out to us before the conversation instead of after. The Association can advise you about your rights, as well as provide practical steps to address an issue in your workplace.