

**Conducting an effective wellbeing conversation**

Wellbeing conversations are intended to be regular, supportive, coaching-style one to one conversations that focus on the wellbeing of an individual with the overall aim of creating a culture where people feel valued, heard, and respected. They provide space for staff to explore their wellbeing and focus on what is important to them. The provide an opportunity for managers to ask questions, show they care, actively listen, withhold judgement, and then establish what support may be appropriate and signpost accordingly.

These conversations should consider the whole wellbeing of a colleague, such as physical; mental; emotional; social; safety and lifestyle.

They help to identify areas where colleagues may need additional support and signpost them appropriately and ensure the wellbeing is monitored. Where necessary, a Wellness Action Plan (WAP) can be put in place to help managers and colleagues continue to have supportive conversations.

**When to have a wellbeing conversation**

Health and wellbeing should be regularly discussed by managers and specific wellbeing conversations can be incorporated into normal 1:1’s or may be implemented as a standalone conversation. Ideally, they should form part of regular 1:1’s to allow them to become normal practice with both parties feeling comfortable having them. In this context, you should have a wellbeing conversation with employees who are transitioning from home working to returning to work on campus.

It is important to remember that you are not expected to provide counselling support, your role is to hold a conversation, actively listen, be compassionate and if appropriate, signpost to the most appropriate support, whether this is through HR, Health and Safety or Wellbeing resources.

**Preparing for the conversation**

* You should reflect on any personal considerations that may be relevant, for example if a colleague has recently experienced a bereavement, you could consider the relevant support that is available.
* Ensure you have a confidential space to hold the conversation (whether virtual or in person) which can be standalone or incorporated into an existing conversation, such as a regular 1:1.
* Familiarising yourself with the University and external support options will help you signpost the member of staff to any specific services that may be appropriate for them.

**Approaching the conversation**

Reassure the staff member that this confidential conversation is there to support them. You could start the conversation by simply asking them how they are and how they are feeling about returning to campus. Allow them to reflect and respond. Very often a colleague will reply with *“I’m fine”* and if you don’t think that’s the case you could follow up with a further question like, “*are there any areas that you have concerns about?”.* Be present, actively listen with empathy and allow the conversation to flow.

Ask further open questions if needed, such as *“is there anything that is currently having an impact on your health and wellbeing?”* or *“how can I best support you?”.* Don’t be tempted to rush to a solution or action, find out as much as possible before you get to this stage.If you already have concerns for a member of staff, broach these sensitively. Share your observations carefully and allow time to listen for the response.

If the colleague is not comfortable talking about their health and wellbeing, then you can reassure them that this is okay and ensure that they are aware that you are always open to having a conversation with hem at a future 1:1 or that they are welcome to follow up at a different time or with someone else.

**Wellbeing conversations - Key skills**

One of the most important skills you can adopt when speaking with your team is listening and this is especially important to facilitate an effective and supportive wellbeing conversation. It is important for you to understand the objectives for a productive wellbeing conversation before undertaking one otherwise it can be counterproductive and can possibly make a situation worse.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **A positive Health & Wellbeing conversation is** | **A Health & Wellbeing conversation is not;** |
| Caring and compassionate. You use strong listening skills and allow the employee to explore their wellbeing. | A counselling or therapy session. You are not expected to cross the boundaries and should signpost appropriately to University resources and tools. |
| Employee led which means you should give ample opportunity to the employee to focus the conversation where they feel comfortable. This may require a few conversations to allow the employee to feel comfortable sharing information with you. | Judgemental or performance related. You can instigate a wellbeing conversation by saying that you are worried about a change in approach to work, but it should not be used to judge the quality of work. A wellbeing conversation is used to establish if there are health and wellbeing concerns affecting work to help get to the root problem so that support can be provided. |
| Supportive and regular. You should be prepared to signpost to the most appropriate support and to have regular wellbeing conversations. | A formal mental health assessment as these should be carried out by a trained professional. You should access support via the HR team or signpost the employee to the most relevant support. |

**Wellbeing Conversation Starters**

As stated above, reassure the staff member that this confidential conversation is there to support them as we transition back to campus after working from home for an extended period.

You could start the conversation by simply asking them how they are and how they are feeling about returning to campus. Allow them to reflect and respond. Very often a colleague will reply with *“I’m fine”* and if you don’t think that’s the case you could follow up with a further question like, “*are there any areas that you have concerns about?”.* Be present, actively listen with empathy and allow the conversation to flow.

Ask further open questions if needed, such as *“is there anything that is currently having an impact on your health and wellbeing?”* or *“how can I best support you?”.* Don’t be tempted to rush to a solution or action, find out as much as possible before you get to this stage.If you already have concerns for a member of staff, broach these sensitively. Share your observations carefully and allow time to listen for the response.

**Suggested phrases;**

As a Line Manager you will know your direct reports best and what phrases are best suited to each individual to have that initial wellbeing conversation. Here are some suggested phrases;

* *How are you? (if you receive a vague reply and feel there is more, ask How are you really?)*
* *I thought it might be helpful for you and I to have a conversation about how you are feeling about the return to campus/office*
* *Have you any particular concerns about returning to campus/office?*
* *How best can I support the transition from working from home to a return to the campus/office?*
* *What can I do to help you feel supported?*
* *I’ve noticed a few things that seem out of character as we talk about a return to campus/office… I thought it might be helpful to talk about them and see how we can work together to help change them.*

After the initial wellbeing conversations, it is important to ensure these wellbeing conversations continue as part of the regular 1:1 conversations/catch ups and at MyContribution meetings. This will allow wellbeing to be discussed regularly and openly giving the opportunity for issues to be picked up and addressed to stop the opportunity of issues escalating.

Here are some suggested conversation starters to continue the process;

|  |
| --- |
| Conversation starters;   1. How are you? (if you receive a vague reply and feel there is more, ask How are you really?) 2. Has there been a change to your work or home life? 3. I thought it might be helpful for you and I to have a conversation about your wellbeing and how you are feeling at the moment 4. I’ve noticed you’re not yourself at the moment and thought it might be helpful for us to have a conversation about it, what are your thoughts? 5. I’ve noticed a few things that seem out of character… I thought it might be helpful to talk about them and see how we can work together to help change them. 6. I have noticed you don’t seem yourself at the moment, let’s talk about it? 7. Tell me about your current work life balance? Is this manageable? |
| Objectives;   1. I know we set your objectives at your last My Contribution meeting, do you feel content and confident with your objectives? **OR** 2. Its important we are both happy with your objectives, will we talk about them? 3. I need to fulfil my role as a Line Manager and to do that, I need to make sure you are clear about your objectives and priorities. Have I explained these well enough? |
| Feeling Supported;   1. What can I do to help you feel supported? **OR** 2. Do you feel connected and supported by me (your line manager)? Is there more I could be doing? 3. Do you have any adjustments that I need to consider? (e.g. preference for regular catch-ups, flexible work pattern, temporary reasonable adjustments, anything else?) 4. What would be helpful for you to achieve by the end of the conversation? 5. I am happy to discuss training and development opportunities, will we do this today? |
| Team Culture;   1. What does the team culture feel like? **OR** 2. How connected and engaged do you feel with your colleagues? 3. I have noticed a bit of tension within the team, can you tell me about this? 4. As a Line Manager, what can I do to help the team become more engaged? |
| Follow Up;   1. What ideas have you got about helping your wellbeing? **OR** 2. What ideas have you got about changing this situation into a more positive one for you? 3. What exactly are you going to do from (this afternoon, tomorrow)? 4. It may help to complete a Wellness Action Plan, are you familiar with the content of one? |