

Follow these steps

The following steps give you a useful framework for dealing with challenging conversations. Although all conversations about performance, conduct or personal issues are potentially challenging, the steps below are geared towards the more formal meetings.

If you are having a more informal chat with an employee and just want to sound them out about how they feel, you may wish to use the same basic structure but adopt a more conversational and relaxed approach. For example, it may be more appropriate when you start the meeting to put the employee at ease by asking lots of open questions rather than being overly procedural. This is a judgment call only you can make depending on the nature of the problem.

<p>Introduction – set the right tone</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin the conversation by explaining the purpose of the meeting • Set out the structure of the meeting • Agree standards of behaviour required during the meeting • Adopt a calm and professional manner • Reassure them about confidentiality – both prior to and after the meeting.
<p>CHECK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't be afraid of referring to your pre-prepared script, it will help you stay in control • Remember to focus on the issue and not the person.
<p>State what the issues are and give evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell them what the problem is using your knowledge of the situation • Give specific examples and refer to dates, documents, work or specific interactions • Explain the impact the problem is having on the individual, the team and the organisation.
<p>CHECK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, you should have already spoken to the employee informally about the problem – surprises can be very hard to handle! • If you have been monitoring their behaviour or conduct, this should have been agreed with them earlier • If the meeting is just aimed at giving them a reminder about behaviour or conduct then stick to that – be clear about what you are doing.
<p>Ask for an explanation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to what they have to say – they may need to let off steam • Keep an open mind and don't jump to conclusions • Acknowledge their position and any mitigating circumstances • Introduce your questions and explore the issues together.
<p>CHECK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If new evidence emerges, adjourn the meeting if this feels appropriate • Remember that you are in control. Use your questioning techniques to avoid diversions or too much repetition • You may have to be firm and keep restating your position • Stay clear of emotive language and don't respond to manipulative behaviour.
<p>Agree a way forward</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the employee for proposals to resolve the situation • Discuss the options • MAKE A DECISION – you are in charge! • Arrange a follow up meeting • Monitor and feedback on progress and continue to provide support where agreed.
<p>CHECK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document any agreement and give a copy to the employee. This should set out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agreed outcomes with dates and standards required • any support or training to be provided by the manager • any consequences if the agreement is breached.