



Tips for Managers in Helping Carer-Employees

These guidelines for how to navigate discussions with carer-employees are only useful if your employees feel comfortable enough to approach you. Building a supportive work environment takes time and is determined by the attitudes, language, and priorities of one's immediate team and supervisors, more so than upper management.

The language you unconsciously use conveys messages to your employees on how they should behave, and which struggles, or weaknesses are “acceptable” to show at work. Employees who perceive an unsupportive supervisor or work environment are more likely to be dissatisfied with their job and leave. To promote a supportive work environment, where work-life balance is seen as a positive thing, consider the following approaches.

What to do if an employee approaches you with family care issues

- Thank them for coming forward and sharing
- Ask them the type of support that would be most useful to them in their situation
- Suggest accommodations based on their situation (ex. flextime, compressed work week, short term leave, reduced hours)
- Suggest counselling, support services or other services offered through EAP if necessary
- Refer to P&O for additional resources
- Refer to We Care Network
- Suggest other services from the community or organizations to check in with
- Use personal examples where appropriate (ex. “my aunt used X service when her father was palliative, and she found it really useful”)
- Follow up conversation with email with resources linked, using compassionate language

Safe things to say

“Thank you for sharing your concerns. I understand and appreciate the difficult burden you are managing.”

“Your personal health and wellbeing are important as well, not just work or caregiving.”

“You’re doing a great job in a very difficult situation. How can I alleviate burden from your situation?”

“Would it be helpful if we did X, Y, or Z at work?”

“How have you been feeling, balancing work and care in the last X weeks?”

“I’m sorry that you are experiencing this. Do you need a listening ear at the moment?”

“Unfortunately at this time, I don’t have the ability to offer X, but I can offer Y instead?”

Tips from psychotherapy

Express empathy

Requires reflecting listening and attention to your employee. Matching facial expressions, affect vocal tone, inflection and energy levels are basic ways for supervisors and coworkers to demonstrate empathy and respect towards others in difficult situations. Other suggestions include: not interrupting someone's talking, not being judgemental, not dismissing someone's belief, and not talking too much in general.

Avoid argumentation

Argumentation results in individuals not truly hearing each other and often can devolve into power struggles and demotivation. Adjust to employee resistance instead of direct opposition, using roll with resistance techniques

Roll with resistance

Recognize that attacking or confronting someone or an issue head-on is often ineffective. In order to elicit change in behavior, employees must feel heard and respected. Common techniques involve making factual or neutral statements ("you are unhappy with your situation"), to help legitimize feelings and move employees out of patterns of argumentation, frustration, and denial.

Develop discrepancy

Focus attention on how employee's current situation is different from their ideal in order to build a goal. Separate the person from their behaviors to foster constructive discussions on how to elicit change.

Support self-efficacy

Employers need to develop sense of self-efficacy in their employees to keep them motivated. This often involves fostering feelings of hope, support but also feasibility in accomplishing and maintaining changes. Unless employees believe what they want/are doing is possible, their behavior will revert to denial.