

Supervisor tool

Someone's raised a concern. Here's how to respond well.

A practical guide for supervisors and leaders on listening, responding and following through when someone speaks up.

Escalate straight away if it involves

- Sexual harassment or assault
- Threats, violence or bullying
- A serious safety risk
- Possible criminal conduct
- A manager or senior leader

If you're unsure, escalate. This guide doesn't replace your organisation's policies.

The conversation, step by step

The first conversation often decides whether someone trusts the process, or ever raises something again.

1 Make time and space

- If you can, stop what you're doing. If you can't talk properly now, agree a time soon, ideally the same day.
- Find somewhere private and recognise that raising a concern can take courage.

You might say

"Thanks for coming to me. Let's find somewhere we can talk properly."

2 Listen properly

- Let them tell it their own way, without interrupting or jumping to judgement.
- Ask open questions, and take notes or say you'll write them up afterwards.

You might say

"Can you tell me what happened?"
 "When and where did this happen? Was anyone else there?"
 "How has this affected you?"

Avoid saying

"Are you sure that's what he meant?"
 "That's just how it is on site."
 "Why didn't you say something earlier?"

3 Ask what they need

- Check whether they feel safe right now.
- Ask what they'd like to happen, while being clear some matters must be acted on regardless.
- Check whether they need support, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

You might say

"Is there anything you need right now to feel safe at work?"

4 Be honest about confidentiality

Don't promise complete confidentiality. You may need to share information to deal with the issue or meet legal and safety obligations.

You might say

"I'll keep this as private as I can. I may need to talk to [name or role], and I'll let you know before I do."

5 Explain what happens next

- Be clear about next steps, who else may be involved and roughly when.
- Make sure they know they won't be treated badly for speaking up.

You might say

"Here's what I'm going to do next. I'll come back to you by [day]."

6 Follow through

- Do what you said, when you said. Escalate where required.
- Keep the person informed, and watch for negative treatment of the person who spoke up.
- Record what was raised, what you did and when.

Quick reference

Do	Don't
Thank them for raising it	Dismiss, minimise or joke about it
Listen without interrupting	Promise total confidentiality
Ask what they need	Confront the other person on the spot without a plan
Explain next steps	Gossip or share details unnecessarily
Follow up when you said you would	Go quiet after the conversation

Conversation record

Keep this with your notes. Store it securely and follow your organisation's record-keeping procedures.

Date

Raised by

Taken by

What was raised

Do they feel safe? What support was offered?

What I did, including who it was escalated to

Next update promised by

Follow-up completed on

Follow-up notes

**Build the habit
before you need it.**

Know who you escalate to, and practise these conversations as a team.