



RCSI
UNIVERSITY
OF MEDICINE
AND HEALTH
SCIENCES

RCSI HR STAFF LEARNING
AND DEVELOPMENT 2020

CONVERSATION GUIDE

**Talking *about*
wellbeing *with*
your team**

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AND DEVELOPMENT 2020

RCSI WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF COLLEAGUES ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY IS OUR TOP PRIORITY.

As line managers, we have a specific responsibility to consider the health and wellbeing of our teams. Given that many of our teams are now working remotely, it's essential that you check-in with them regularly, and understand how they are doing. This year, both as part of the end of year PDP conversation and as part of your ongoing check ins with your teams, we ask that all Managers include the topic of the individual's wellbeing.

It's good to remember that no special skills are required to talk about wellbeing. You are not expected to have all the answers, or to provide solutions to all the possible challenges they may be facing. However, you can and should be supportive.

You can signpost sources of support, investigate options and follow up regularly. If you can offer solutions that might help, then of course do so but the important thing is to have the conversation.

If you notice a team member is struggling with their wellbeing, don't ignore it.

Be aware that talking about personal struggles can be difficult and they might get emotional or upset. You need to be empathetic, approachable, and willing to listen.

You can and should acknowledge that this is an uncertain time and that even for those least directly impacted by COVID-19, given the rapidly changing way we work, care for relatives, socialise, exercise, shop and live, there will still be an impact on our overall wellbeing.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OUR COLLEAGUES ARE FACING?

Recent studies show that many employees are struggling with a variety of challenges at this time:

- Isolation
- Anxiety, fear, stress
- Feeling overwhelmed by what is happening in their communities and wider society
- The blurring of work and life boundaries, feelings of being 'always on'
- Balancing personal and professional responsibilities
- Mental Exhaustion
- Unwell and self-isolating (themselves or a family member)

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

a. **Be available and approachable.** Try to role model wellbeing and lead with compassion. Talk about how you are looking after your own wellbeing – it will go a long way in encouraging your team to look after themselves.

b. **Listen without judgment.** Provide regular space and time for your team to ask questions and voice their concerns. Acknowledge issues and likely impact. Provide regular updates on changes across the university.

c. **Have each other's backs.** Check in on your team rather than checking up on them. Promote buddy/peer support in your team and partner inexperienced team members with more experienced colleagues.

d. **Pay attention to the basics.** Make wellbeing the focus of your 1:1 check-ins with team members. Ensure your team are taking breaks away from their laptops if they are working from home and that everyone is finding time to do what matters to them to support their wellbeing.

e. **Support your team to do their best.**

As much as possible, support your team to have control over their work where they can. Encourage them to do some of the work/tasks that give them professional and personal satisfaction. Practice gratitude - a thank you goes a long way.

f. **Signpost the support options available to you and your team.** These include the Employee Assistance Programme, Covid-19 Staff Supports and Resources on the portal, Health and Safety team and the HR partners.

BY EXPLICITLY FOCUSING ON WELLBEING YOU ARE HELPING TO:

- **CREATE** a safe environment for team members to raise concerns and challenges
- **PREVENT** burnout and reduce anxiety and fear during this difficult time
- **SIGNPOST** support services such as the Employee Assistance Programme

BEFORE the CONVERSATION

In most cases check in's with your teams are being held on MS Teams or on the phone.

Take a couple of minutes before the conversation to prepare if at all possible:

- a. **Get set up comfortably** – ideally somewhere quiet with good connectivity
- b. **Prepare** – You might find it helpful to make some notes of key points you wish to cover
- c. **More support** – If you need more support, contact your HR Partner or connect with other managers for peer support.

BEFORE YOU START, ASK YOURSELF

- Am I in a good headspace?
- Am I willing to genuinely listen?
- Can I give as much time as is needed?
- How and when am I going to make contact to help the team member feel comfortable and ensure privacy?

HAVING the CONVERSATION

HELP THEM OPEN UP BY ASKING OPEN QUESTIONS LIKE:

- > **“How are you doing?”**
- > **“What’s been happening for you lately?”**
- > **“We haven’t caught up on how things outside of work in a while and I wanted to check in about how you are getting on”**
- > **“How are you/you and your family coping with the latest restrictions?”**

Don’t worry if this isn’t the typical type of conversation you’d have with the individual. If this is the case, then the best approach is simply to acknowledge that straight away.

It will help put you both at ease, and break the ice. Something like: **“Look, I know we don’t normally have these types of conversations, but I just want to check how you’re doing?”**

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS

- Work through the ‘Working from home checklist’ from the Health and Safety team to ensure they can work in a safe and comfortable way
- Caring arrangements – many staff trying to juggle their working hours to support dependents. Discuss how this is going for them and what adjustments they may need to make.
- Balancing ‘work’ and ‘home’ – it can be difficult to separate work and home life while constantly at home. Ask how they are managing this.
- Working from home for periods of time can feel isolating, for both those who live alone and those who live with others. Perhaps you can agree to speak more frequently with your colleagues on the phone. Catch ups throughout the day may be useful to support your own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of your colleagues.
- Talk about how feelings of anxiety and stress may be more likely. Bringing up this topic lets people know they can talk about how they are feeling and seek support when needed.
- Try to ‘look for the good’ – ask what they need in order to do their best work and identify ways in which you can help in creating the conditions that allow them to be at their best.
- Discuss what RCSI has done over this time that has most supported their health and wellbeing
- Explore whether there is more they can do to support their colleagues or our students. Evidence shows that volunteering our time and skills has a great impact on our own sense of wellbeing
- Encourage connecting with colleagues across the university - Inspire, Sports and Social Club, Staff Networks, Coffee Roulette.



HAVING the CONVERSATION

If you notice someone may be struggling, mention specific things that have made you concerned for them, for example:

- > **“You don’t seem yourself lately, is there anything you want to talk to me about or that I can help with?”**
- > **“I noticed you’ve been quiet on team calls this week, are you okay?”**

If a team member confides in you about challenges they are having, ask them questions to explore what’s going on so you can provide support:

- > **“Have you spoken to anyone else about this?”**
- > **“What would help you manage the load?”**
- > **“What else is happening for you at the moment?”**
- > **“What’s the most useful thing I could do to support you?”**

WHAT IF THE PERSON DOESN’T WANT TO TALK?

Not everyone will want to talk. The points below can help if the conversation doesn’t go as well as you had hoped:

- Remain relaxed
- If the person doesn’t want to speak about it, respect their choice, but leave the door open for further dialogue
- Always try to listen non-judgmentally and see the issue from their perspective
- Let them know you’re asking because you’re concerned about them
- Acknowledge the person’s feelings
- If they get angry or upset, stay calm and don’t take it personally. None of us are at our best when we’re under stress and this year people undoubtedly are.

AFTER the CONVERSATION

- Take a moment to think about the conversation and work through any feelings you may be experiencing yourself.
- Summarise any actions you and your team member have agreed
- Schedule reminders to make follow-up phone calls to stay connected with your team member on a regular basis.
- **Keep the conversation open**

YOUR HR TEAM ARE ALWAYS AVAILABLE FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT OR GUIDANCE FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAMS.