

Management Guidelines on Informal Counselling meetings for unacceptable conduct or behaviour at Work

The objective throughout this procedure is to improve the conduct or behaviour of an individual at work (e.g. frequent lateness, inappropriate manner of communication to customers or colleagues, or minor breaches of School procedures). Serious cases of misconduct should be handled through the formal disciplinary procedure. Managers should bear in mind that any failure to conduct informal counselling will be taken into account during any formal disciplinary procedure. Further advice on informal counselling meetings, the formal disciplinary procedure and the appropriate level of action, can be obtained from your designated HR Manager.

Remember that this meeting should focus on how conduct can be improved and you should try to put this across in a positive manner. Changing behaviour can be achieved by discussing the problem with the individual, encouraging them to agree that a problem exists, to take ownership of the problem and suggest improvements. Standards and objectives imposed unilaterally are easily ignored.

This is not a disciplinary hearing and therefore representatives and witnesses will not be included in the process. Some disabled staff may need to be accompanied by a support worker (i.e. signer etc) in order for them to participate in any meeting.

As stated in 2 below, It must be made clear to the employee that this action is informal and if at any time during the discussions the employee feels that the actions taken have gone into the formal stage then the meeting can be stopped to enable them to consult with a trade union representative or a work colleague. If an employee does not wish to attend an informal meeting without a trade union representative or work colleague, it may not be possible for informal action to be taken unless there is agreement from all parties about such representation. In such cases, you should consult your designated HR Manager about initiating formal disciplinary action.

1. **Collect your evidence** in an appropriate manner and ensure that you raise the matter with the member of staff (in private) as problems occur – it is not appropriate to save them up for the annual staff development review (appraisal). Keep a note of your discussion and any action taken. If you do not take prompt action to let the employee know their conduct is unacceptable, this may lead the employee to assume that their conduct is satisfactory and could make it harder for you to tackle their behaviour in the longer term.
2. **Set up the meeting.** Once the problem is evident, inform the member of staff that you want to see them in connection with their conduct or behaviour. Explain that the meeting will be informal and as such, they will not be entitled to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative unless it is felt by both parties that representation will be helpful in facilitating a resolution. Set aside at least an hour for the meeting and ensure you have a private room.
3. **Prepare for the meeting.** Be familiar with the person's job description, any relevant policies, the evidence you have and what support you can make available. Review your expectations of the person – are job requirements or expectations of their conduct or behaviour (e.g. what do you expect in terms of punctuality and attendance at work)

reasonable and realistic? Could the person's conduct have been affected by inadequate support, direction, lack of awareness of School policies/procedures or unclear objectives/standards? Additional advice on reasonable expectations can be obtained from a senior member of the Human Resources Department.

4. **At the meeting.** Tell the person why you have asked to see them – “We have spoken before about and I am concerned that the situation has not improved sufficiently. We are here to discuss this problem and improve things, set the standards of conduct at work that I expect from you and determine any support you may need to achieve this”.
5. **Establish if any problems exist** that are hampering their behaviour at work. Take any mitigating circumstances on board. Are there any interpersonal difficulties at work which may be affecting their conduct? However, whilst they may be experiencing difficulties outside of the workplace it is still important to carry on with the interview and clarify standards etc.
6. **Establish that the person knows what is expected of them in terms of conduct or behaviour.** For example, if the person has been failing to comply with School or departmental procedures, have copies of these documents to hand. Ask them what they think of their conduct/behaviour in relation to these rules. Do your perceptions match? If not, tell the person how you expect them to behave at work and discuss whether or not this is realistic. If there is no acceptance of a problem then you will need to define what you think is acceptable and give evidence and specific examples to show where they are not meeting required standards of conduct or behaviour at work.
7. **Agree objectives and standards of conduct or behaviour at work,** how they will be measured, over what time frame and how they will be appropriately monitored. Ensure that the standards of conduct that are set are specific, realistic, measurable and have timescales. The time frame should be sufficient to allow for improvement to be made and will vary according to the circumstances of the post (e.g. over three months with fortnightly monitoring meetings).
8. **Where appropriate, agree any support mechanisms** and when they should be put in place (i.e. training course on communications skills or mentoring etc). Ask the person – “what do you need in order to achieve these standards?” “What do you want from me as a manager in terms of support?” You too should make suggestions. You will need to determine what support is realistic. If no information is forthcoming, you will need to say what you think would be helpful.
9. **Warn** the individual that if their conduct or behaviour does not meet the required standards, the formal disciplinary procedure may have to be initiated. Ensure that you explicitly inform the person of the consequences of failure to improve their conduct so that the individual is fully aware of any possible outcomes.
10. **End the meeting** by recapping what has been agreed and try to part on a positive note.
11. **Record** the meeting including the outcome of stages 7, 8 and 9 above. The individual should be provided with a copy of this record normally within three working days. The record should be stored confidentially in a secure manner.

Repeat this process with shortened **but realistic** time scales until the desired improvement has been achieved and sustained. In cases where there has been no improvement despite informal counselling, the formal disciplinary procedure will have to be instigated. In the latter situation you will need to consult your designated Human Resources Manager to commence disciplinary proceedings.

Bear in mind, after formal disciplinary proceedings are instigated, you will need to continue monitoring and encouraging improvement in conduct or behaviour.