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Conversations that help people speak up early



Provides prompts for starting early conversations about pressure, support and safer speaking-up pathways.



Reflection statements



4.1 Workers know the pathways available for raising psychosocial safety concerns, including who they can speak to if they are not comfortable raising the concern with their direct manager.



4.2 Concerns about pressure, workload, distress, role clarity, conflict, unsafe behaviour or unsafe systems are listened to, documented and followed up where needed.



A Conversation Starter Pack for Aged Care

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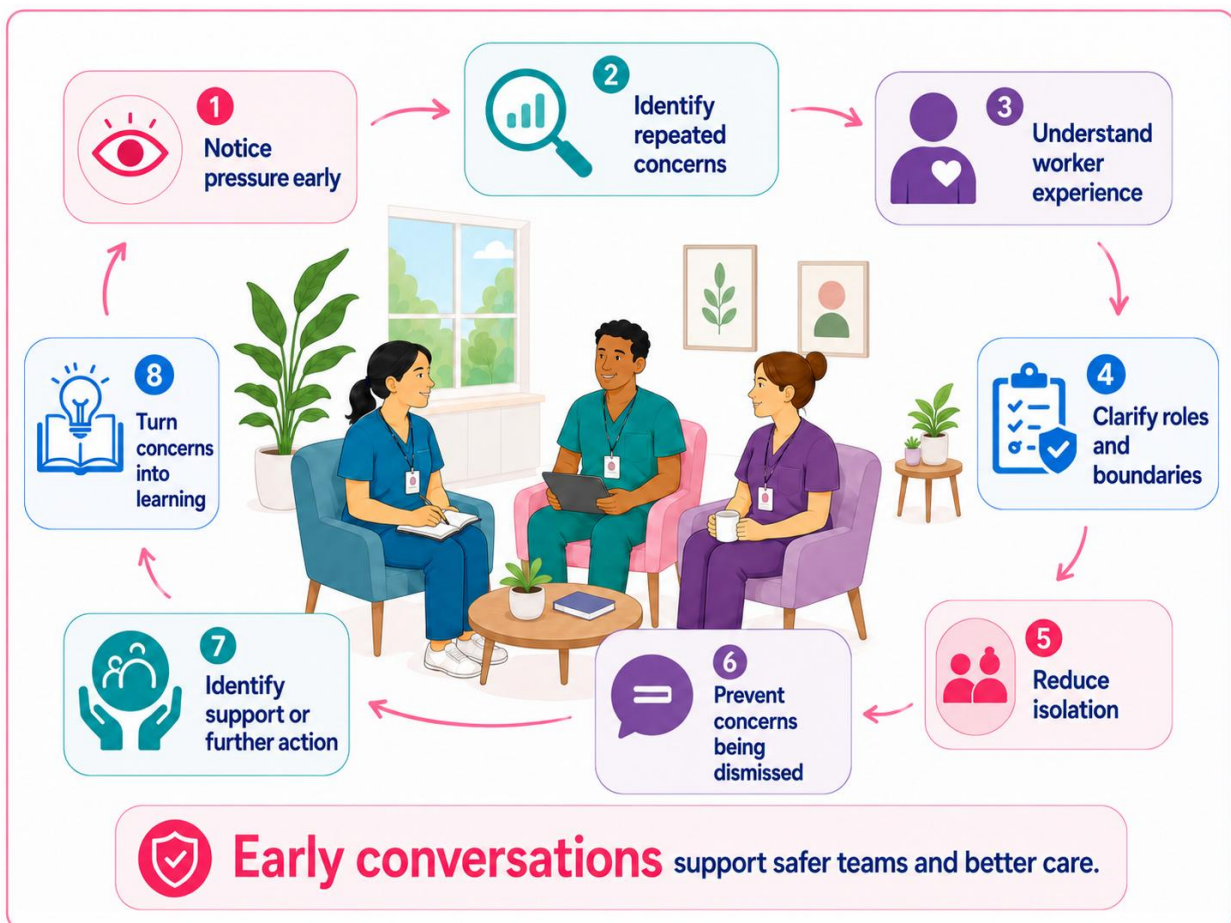
Speaking up before pressure becomes normalised

Early conversations can help workers, teams and leaders notice pressure before it becomes normalised, hidden or unsafe. Speaking up early does not mean someone is failing, complaining or unable to cope. It can be an important part of psychosocial safety and continuous improvement. When workers and teams can raise concerns early, organisations are better placed to identify hazards, notice patterns, improve systems and prevent harm.

Why speaking up early matters

Psychosocial hazards are not always obvious from the outside. Workers may be managing repeated pressure, distress, conflict, uncertainty or unclear expectations before others notice the impact. Speaking up early helps make these pressures visible before they become accepted as “normal” or left for individuals to manage alone.

It gives teams and leaders the chance to notice patterns, understand what support is needed, and act before concerns lead to harm. Early conversations do not need to solve everything immediately. Their value is in opening discussions, clarifying what is happening, and helping concerns move into the right support, review or escalation pathway.



Starting the conversation

A concern does not need to be perfectly explained before it is raised. It is enough to start with what has been noticed, what feels harder to manage safely, or what support may be needed.

Before speaking with a peer, supervisor or leader, it may help to think about what has changed, whether the concern has happened before, what is making the situation harder, and whether the issue may need to be shared, documented or escalated. The purpose is to start the conversation early, not to solve the issue alone.



Making speaking up clear and safe

Workers are more likely to raise concerns when they understand who they can speak to, how concerns will be handled, and what will happen next. Organisations should make sure staff know the available pathways for raising psychosocial safety concerns, including what to do if they do not feel comfortable speaking with their direct manager.

Staff should also understand how concerns are recorded, reviewed and followed up, what consultation processes are available, how confidentiality will be managed where relevant, and how urgent concerns should be escalated.

This should be tailored to the organisation's own policies, procedures, reporting pathways and relevant state or territory requirements.



What this should prompt

Speaking up should lead to listening, follow-up and, where needed, documentation, escalation or review. Concerns should not be left with one worker or treated as a one-off conversation if they are repeated, increasing or pointing to a work-related hazard. Teams and leaders may need to consider whether there are patterns across workers, clients, teams or services, whether existing controls are working, and whether further support, consultation, review, training or action is needed. The aim is not only to respond to the immediate concern, but to learn from it and reduce the likelihood of harm.

This resource is a starting point for recognising common hazards. It does not replace work health and safety advice, psychosocial risk assessment, consultation, supervision, training or organisational processes.