

MANAGER GUIDE: How to Address Changes in Employee Behavior

Purpose

“To equip managers with practical strategies to compassionately support employees who show noticeable changes in behavior. This guidance helps managers lead respectful, behavior-focused conversations that honor privacy standards — without making assumptions or asking about mental health or diagnostic conditions.

Key Guidelines

- **Be empathetic, not diagnostic.**
- **Focus on observable behavior.**
- **Offer support resources like PAS (Personal Assistance Service)**
- **Respect privacy and boundaries.**

Observable Behaviors Examples

Focus on specific, non-judgmental observations such as:

- Noticeable withdrawal from team interactions
- Reduced participation in meetings.
- Changes in tone or mood (e.g., appearing more subdued or irritable)
- Decline in energy or enthusiasm.
- Missed deadlines or reduced productivity.
- Increased absenteeism or tardiness

Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Use compassionate, non-judgmental language.
- Refer to observable changes in behavior.
- Offer resources like PAS.
- Keep the conversation focused on support and performance, not diagnosis.
- Consult manager resources.

Don't:

- Ask: “What illness do you have?” or “What medications are you on?”
- Pressure the employee to disclose personal details.
- Imply or assume mental health or disability.
- Assume a Fitness for Duty evaluation is needed.
- Immediately send them home.
- Immediately place them on administrative leave.

Conversation Checklist for Managers

Before the conversation:	During the conversation:	After the conversation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Review of recent observable behaviors○ Prepare to speak with empathy and discretion.○ Have PAS contact information ready.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use non-diagnostic language.○ Refer to specific behaviors (not assumptions)○ Express concern and support○ Offer Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Document the interaction factually.○ Monitor for continued changes in behavior.○ Follow up if needed with EOH and/or Human Resources

Sample Talking Points

- **Check in personally:** “Hi [Employee Name], I have noticed you have seemed quieter or less engaged lately. I just want to make sure you are doing okay.”
- **Express concern:** “We care about your well-being and value your contributions.”
- **Offer resources:** “If you would like to talk or need support, PAS is a confidential option. I can help connect you if you want.”

When to Escalate

If behavioral changes begin to affect job performance:

- Document observable objective behaviors.
- Request a **manager consult** with PAS.
- Consult with Human Resources
- Consult with Employee Occupational Health

If employee voluntarily discloses a health problem limiting their performance:

- Should not engage in discussing the condition.
- Express supportive concern
- Supervisor should advise employees of Resources.

Resources

- **PAS:** Phone: 919-416-1727. Website: pas.duke.edu
- Employee Occupational Health & Wellness (EOHW) website: hr.duke.edu/wellness/eohw/
- Your Human Resources Representative
- Duke Access and Accommodation Services website: (access.duke.edu)