



Change response cheat sheet

How people can respond to change
(and how to support them)



Change affects people differently - and rarely in a straight line. As a line manager, you can use this cheat sheet to help recognise emotional responses to change and respond with empathy, clarity and consistency.

Stage 1: Shock and denial

What this might look like 🙄

- Resistance or pushback
- "This won't happen" or "It'll blow over"
- Withdrawal, silence, frustration

What your team needs 🤝

- Clear, simple information
- Time to process
- Reassurance without false promises

What to say 💬

- "I know this may feel unsettling."
- "Here's what we know right now - and what we don't know yet."

What to avoid 🚫

- Dismissing feelings ("It's not a big deal")
- Over-reassuring when facts aren't clear

Manager best practice ✅

- Repeat key messages calmly and consistently
- Keep explanations short - too much detail can overwhelm
- Expect questions or pushback and don't take it personally

Stage 2: Adjustment and exploration

What this might look like 🙄

- Questions and uncertainty
- Trying to understand personal impact
- Mixed emotions (hope, worry, frustration)

What your team needs 🤝

- Space to ask questions
- Help prioritising work
- Regular check-ins and reassurance

What to say 💬

- “What concerns you most about this change?”
- “Let’s focus on what we can control right now.”

What to avoid 🚫

- Avoid jumping to solutions before concerns are fully understood

Manager best practice ✅

- Ask open questions and listen more than you speak
- Break change into short-term, manageable steps
- Check understanding – don’t assume clarity

Stage 3: Acceptance and adaptation

What this might look like 🙄

- Greater engagement
- Problem-solving mindset
- New routines forming

What your team needs 🤝

- Encouragement and recognition
- Opportunities to build confidence
- A sense of progress

What to say 💬

- “I’ve noticed how you’ve adapted – thank you.”
- “What’s working better now?”

What to avoid 🚫

- Avoid assuming change is “done” – keep checking in

Manager best practice ✅

- Recognise effort, not just outcomes
- Celebrate small wins to build momentum
- Encourage learning and experimentation

A note on movement between stages

People don't move through these stages in order - or at the same pace. Someone may accept change one day and feel frustrated the next.

Quick reminder for managers

Your role isn't to rush people forward. It's to:

Provide clarity

Empathy

Stability...

...while they find their footing.

One-minute manager check

Before reacting to resistance, ask yourself:

- What stage might this person be in right now?
- What do they need most - information, reassurance, or support?
- How can I respond calmly and consistently?

That's supportive change leadership in action.

Next steps

Record conversations in Breathe's performance management system.

Keep a clear record of progress and support your employees' growth with confidence.



[See how Breathe can support you](#)

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