



# Empathy-first conversations during change

A mini guide for line managers



When change happens, emotions often show up before solutions. This guide helps you lead conversations with empathy, clarity and confidence – even when you don't have all the answers.

# Why empathy matters during change

Change often brings uncertainty, loss of control and fear of the unknown. As a line manager, how you **listen and respond** can either increase anxiety - or reduce it.



**Remember:** You don't need to fix everything. Often, being heard is what helps people move forward.

## Before the conversation: prepare your mindset

### Best practice

- Go in curious, not defensive.
- Expect emotion - and allow space for it.
- Remind yourself: this isn't personal, it's human.

### Quick check

- Am I ready to listen without interrupting?
- Can I sit with uncertainty if I don't have an answer?

## Opening the conversation with empathy

**Start by inviting openness, not agreement.**

**Try these opening prompts**



"How are you feeling about the changes right now?"



"What's been on your mind since we shared the update?"



"What feels most uncertain for you at the moment?"



**Tip:** Ask one question - then pause. Silence often gives people permission to speak honestly.

# Understanding what's really behind the concern

**People rarely lead with the real issue. Your role is to gently uncover it.**

## Use these prompts

- ... "Can you tell me a bit more about what's worrying you?"
- ... "What impact do you feel this change might have on you?"
- ... "What part of this feels hardest right now?"

### Best practice

- Listen to tone and body language, not just words.
- Avoid jumping in with reassurance too early.

# Validating feelings (without agreeing or fixing)

**Validation isn't agreement - it's acknowledgement.**

## Helpful phrases

- ... "That makes sense given the uncertainty."
- ... "I can see why that feels frustrating."
- ... "It's completely normal to feel unsettled by this."

## Avoid

- 🚫 "Don't worry, it'll be fine."
- 🚫 "At least it's not as bad as..."
- 🚫 "There's no reason to feel like that."

## Offering support, not solutions

Once someone feels heard, they're more open to next steps.

### Support-focused questions

- “What support would help you most right now?”
- “Is there anything we could adjust to make this transition easier?”
- “Would it help to check in again next week?”

#### Best practice

- Agree one small, practical next step.
- Keep support realistic and within your control.

## Bringing the conversation back to stability

Change conversations shouldn't end in uncertainty.

### Helpful closing prompts

- “Let's focus on what we can control this week.”
- “Here's what stays the same for now.”
- “I'll update you as soon as I know more.”



**Tip:** End with clarity on:

- What happens next
- When you'll reconnect

## After the conversation: follow through

**Empathy builds trust - consistency keeps it.**

### Good practice

- Follow up on anything you said you'd do.
- Share updates, even if nothing has changed.
- Keep regular check-ins going.

### Manager reminder

Your behaviour sets the tone. Calm, consistent leadership helps people feel grounded - even when change is ongoing.

## One-minute empathy reset (keep this handy)

**Before or during a tough conversation, ask yourself:**

- ✓ Am I listening to understand, not reply?
- ✓ Have I acknowledged how this feels?
- ✓ Have I offered support or clarity, not just information?

That's empathy in action.

**Turn empathetic conversations into ongoing support with Breathe.**

Record 1:1s, track actions, and keep check-ins consistent - even as change continues.



[Performance management with Breathe](#)