

The Art of the Supportive Check-In

Psychological distress, typically experienced as anxiety or depression symptoms, can be high in healthcare professionals and care staff. Studies show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of psychological distress can exceed 50% in those who are surveyed. High and sustained psychological stress can lead to poor job performance, staff turn-over, and a host of physical health problems. Psychological distress can be lowered when supervisors routinely conduct supportive check-in meetings with staff one a one-to-one basis.

Follow these guidelines to successfully support your staff and to exceed in “The Art of the Supportive Check-In.”

Practice Active Listening



- Lean forward and make eye contact.
- Use open-ended questions: *“How are you feeling?”*
- Reflect & repeat back what you heard: *“It sounds like you feel anxious about...”*
- Reframe negatives in a positive light.
- Sum up the conversation by repeating key points and listing next steps.

Create the Supportive Environment



- Ensure that you are both in a space that supports privacy.
- Demonstrate empathy: *“It must feel lonely to be misunderstood.”*
- Validate, rather than invalidate, the other person’s feelings: *“It’s normal to feel lonely when it seems like others don’t understand you.”*
- Assure the person that your conversation is confidential and she or he will not be penalized for sharing their feelings with you.

Establish Healthy Boundaries



- At the beginning, say this is a “quick check-in” and keep the conversation to 10-15 minutes. Remember, check-ins happen more than one time.
- Set an agenda and stick to it. Don’t bring in other topics or performance issues.
- Be supportive, but don’t offer or promise counseling; refer the person to the right professional expert using available resources.
- If the person becomes violent or self-destructive, stop the check-in and seek help.