Supervisor conversation guide

A practical two-page guide for the first conversation

1 NOTICE

Use specific, first-hand observations and recorded work concerns. Separate facts from reports and assumptions.

2 ASK

Choose a private setting. Start with care and a clear observation; invite the employee to explain without demanding personal details.

3 LISTEN

Allow the employee to finish. Reflect what you heard. Do not diagnose, lecture, investigate their personal life, or rush to a solution.

4 CONNECT

Identify verified agency resources and the appropriate process. Explain any limits to privacy, authority or confidentiality.

5 FOLLOW UP

Agree on next steps, work expectations and a check-in date. Document objective work matters through approved channels.

TRY THIS OPENING

“I’m concerned by what I’ve observed. I want to understand what’s happening, explain the work expectations, and work through the next step with you.”

Lead with dignity. Keep the standard.

QUESTIONS THAT OPEN THE CONVERSATION

“How are things going?” “What am I missing?” “What is making work difficult right now?”

IF THE EMPLOYEE SAYS “I’M FINE”

Respect the answer and return to facts: “I hear you. I still need to address the lateness and understand what support or work-related steps are appropriate.”

AVOID

Public questioning; “toughen up”; treating rumor as fact; promising secrecy; diagnosing; using a support referral as a substitute for supervision.

KEEP BOTH RESPONSIBILITIES

Support the person while addressing documented conduct, performance and immediate safety concerns through policy and required procedures.

BEFORE YOU END

Name the immediate work expectation, available resource route, who will do what next, and a specific follow-up point.

SUPERVISOR CHECK

Did I use facts? Listen? Explain limits? Connect responsibly? Set a follow-up?

This is leadership guidance, not clinical assessment or legal advice. Use local policies and verified resources.