

I'm concerned that a team member will get aggressive during our underperformance conversation what can I do?

It's completely understandable to feel concerned, especially when you're preparing for a potentially challenging under-performance conversation. You're doing the right thing by planning ahead. Below is a structured, practical approach grounded in the Management of Underperformance Policy and supported by Warwick's Value and Behaviours.

1. Prepare in Advance

Good preparation helps you stay calm, consistent and fair.

Consider:

- **A clear agenda:** what the conversation is about, what evidence you need to share, and what outcomes you're working toward.
- **Review of policy:** ensure the steps you take align with the stages outlined in the under-performance policy.
- **Neutral meeting space:** choose a private, quiet location with seating arranged so neither party feels "blocked in".

You might also reflect on:

- **Triggers:** which parts of the conversation are most likely to cause defensiveness?
- **Your own regulation:** what helps *you* remain steady if they become agitated?

2. Establish a Respectful and Calm Tone

Set expectations at the start of the meeting:

- Explain the purpose of the conversation.
- Acknowledge their contribution and their perspective.
- Share that you want to hold the conversation respectfully and constructively.

3. Use De-escalation Techniques

Practical techniques you can use in the moment include:

- **Slow your pace and tone** if they become elevated
- **Acknowledge their emotion** without agreeing/disagreeing:
"I can hear that this feels frustrating for you."

- **Reground the conversation:**
“Let’s take a moment — I’d like us to continue this productively.”
- **Offer a brief pause** if needed

These help create psychological safety.

4. Know When to Pause or Stop the Meeting

Under the policy, you maintain responsibility for ensuring meetings remain respectful and safe. You might say:

- “I’m happy to continue if we can have a constructive conversation.”
- “Let’s take five minutes.”
- “I’m going to bring this meeting to a close today and we’ll reconvene”

5. Consider Having Another Person Present

If you have reasonable grounds to believe aggression may occur, the policy allows you to:

- Invite an People Partner or senior colleague to support the meeting, ensuring fairness and safety
- Let the employee know in advance who will be there and why

6. After the Meeting

Once the conversation ends:

- **Document factually** what happened in line with the policy
- **Seek support** from your People Partner if the behaviour was unprofessional or breached standards
- **Reflect** on what worked and what you’d adjust next time

