

I'm concerned a team member will go off sick if I have a performance conversation

It's completely understandable to feel concerned that a team member might go off sick when you initiate a performance conversation. These situations can feel high stakes, and your awareness shows care and responsibility. -

Below is guidance grounded in the **Management of Underperformance Policy**

How to approach the situation constructively

1. Prepare well and stay within the policy

The policy expects managers to have early, clear, supportive conversations based on evidence. Being proactive rather than avoiding the issue is a role of an effective manager. A well-planned conversation helps reduce anxiety for both of you.

What helps:

- Have your examples and impacts ready.
- Create a calm, private environment.
- Plan for pauses if emotions arise.

2. Acknowledge the possibility of stress without assuming the outcome

It's important not to pre-judge whether the individual will become unwell. Instead, prepare to respond with compassion while maintaining boundaries.

What you can say if they appear overwhelmed:

"I can see this feels difficult. It's okay to take a moment — I want to work through this with you."

3. Focus on clarity, fairness, and support

People are more likely to feel anxious or unwell when conversations feel vague, punitive or unexpected.

What helps:

- State the purpose: supporting improvement, not punishment.
- Stick to facts, not assumptions.
- Explain that support options are available.

4. Use the Values and Behaviours to frame the conversation kindly and constructively

This improves the chance that the individual stays engaged rather than withdrawing.

Examples:

- *Looking for different perspectives to solve problems and find solutions* — invite their view.
- *Working together to make good things happen* — emphasise collaboration.
- *Doing what we can to help others thrive* — make support visible.

5. Co-create support options that feel doable

When people feel involved, they're less likely to feel cornered or overwhelmed.

Discuss possible options that could include:

adjusting tasks, workload, priorities

coaching, buddying, check-ins

formal training if needed

6. Plan for the possibility of sickness absence without making it the focus

If the team member does go off sick, the Performance Management Policy outlines that performance concerns do not disappear — they are simply paused.

Important:

- You should not avoid the conversation because of what *might* happen.
- If sickness occurs, you return to the concerns sensitively when they are fit to engage.

7. Maintain compassion *and* expectations

You can be both supportive and clear. Boundaries help prevent stress spirals.

You could say:

“I’m committed to supporting you fully. And we do need to work together on improving these specific areas.”

Practical phrases you can use

Here are some scripts:



If you're worried they may feel overwhelmed:

"I want this to be a supportive conversation, not a difficult one. My goal is to understand what's going on and work with you on a clear way forward."

If they show signs of distress:

"It's completely okay to pause for a moment. When you're ready, we can talk through this together."

If they express fear about not coping:

"We can look at what support will help you succeed — including changes to tasks, more check-ins, or development options."

