

What could be stopping you from having an Underperformance conversation — and what to do about it

Managers often hesitate for understandable reasons. This guide normalises those barriers and gives constructive, values-aligned strategies to move forward.

1 Fear of Causing Upset or Emotional Reactions

What might be stopping you

You're worried the person may become upset, cry, get defensive, or go off sick.

What to do

- Prepare factual examples as required by the policy.
- Lead with compassion, grounded in *Showing kindness to others* (Thriving on difference).
- Acknowledge emotion but stay focused:

"It's okay to pause if you need a moment. When you're ready, we'll work through this together."

- Remind yourself that supportive conversations are part of *Taking responsibility for what we say and do* (Thinking freely).

Develop your skills

- Practise regulating your own response in day-to-day conversations.
- Seek guidance from peers who handle emotions well.
- Attend sessions on difficult conversations.

2. Not Wanting to Damage the Relationship

What might be stopping you

You worry they'll lose trust in you or the relationship will suffer.

What to do

- Frame the conversation as supportive, not punitive.
- Reinforce partnership:

"I want us to work together to help you succeed."

- Use behaviours from *Listening, learning and building strong relationships* and *Working together to make good things happen* (Creating connections).

Develop your skills

- Use transparent communication in regular check-ins.

3 Fear of Getting It Wrong

What might be stopping you

You're unsure how to phrase things, or worried you'll say the wrong thing.

What to do

- Anchor yourself in the Performance Management Policy – it expects clarity, fairness and evidence.
- Stick to recent, specific examples.
- Communicate without jargon
- Prepare your key points in advance.

Develop your skills

- Practise articulating concerns in real scenarios.
- Practice with peers.
- Attend formal training on feedback.

4 Avoidance Because the Issue Feels “Small”

What might be stopping you

You hope it will resolve itself, or worry you're “making a big deal out of nothing.”

What to do

- The policy emphasises early, supportive conversations.
- Small issues, left unchecked, become bigger problems.

Develop your skills

- Build regular micro-feedback into everyday work.
- Review relevant policy guidance.

5 Concern About Their Personal Circumstances

What might be stopping you

You worry the timing is bad or their personal life is challenging.

What to do

- Recognise their situation with empathy (
- Still address the performance concerns, as fairness and clarity help everyone.



- Separate the person from the issue and focus on support options.

Develop your skills

- Apply empathy in everyday interactions.
- Seek mentoring from someone experienced in complex cases.
- Access wellbeing training if needed.

6. Fear of Conflict

What might be stopping you

You worry they may challenge your view or disagree strongly.

What to do

- Use evidence, not interpretation – this reduces conflict.
- Draw on the Value of *Disagreeing in a respectful way*
- Stay calm and curious, not defensive.

Develop your skills

- Practise constructive disagreement in team discussions.
- Get peer feedback after tough conversations.
- Attend conflict-management workshops.

7.Lack of Confidence or Experience

What might be stopping you

You don't feel skilled or confident enough.

What to do

- Use the policy as your structure and the V&Bs as your approach.
- Prepare your evidence, questions, and support options.
- Remember you're helping the person move forward, not criticising them.

Develop your skills

- Practise through real conversations.
- Ask for coaching or shadow an experienced manager.
- Attend relevant learning sessions.



8.Uncertainty About Next Steps

What might be stopping you

You're worried about "what comes next" or accidentally escalating things.

What to do

- The Management of Under Performance Policy gives a clear informal → formal flow.
- Start at the informal stage with supportive dialogue.
- Document what was discussed, then review progress as required.

Develop your skills

- Use structured follow-ups.
- Review policy materials

