CLEARHEAD

How to be a Supportive Manager

One of the most challenging parts of being a manager is supporting people through stress, conflict, frustration, and emotional pressure while also keeping operations running safely and efficiently.

This resource provides practical examples for responding to common psychosocial situations in ‘hands-on’ workplaces.

The guidance is informed by evidence-based approaches including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Nonviolent Communication (NVC).

Employee is Crying



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Stay calm and allow space for emotion without rushing to stop the tears.** A calm, grounded presence can help reduce emotional intensity and support regulation in the moment.

Tip 2 • **Use reflective listening** such as “It sounds like things have been building up for you lately.” This helps the employee feel heard and validated rather than judged or dismissed.

Tip 3 • **Offer small, manageable next steps** such as taking a short break, having a cup of tea, or discussing one immediate priority at a time. This can help reduce overwhelm and support clearer thinking.

DOs

- **Do** offer tissues, a drink, or a quieter space.
- **Do** validate distress without trying to immediately “fix” it.
- **Do** keep your tone calm and non-judgmental.

DON’Ts

- **Don’t** say “don’t cry” or “you need to calm down.”
- **Don’t** pressure them to return to work before they are ready.

Employee is Angry

3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Focus on understanding the issue underneath** the anger rather than reacting to the emotion itself. Anger is often linked to feeling unheard, stressed, sad, or being treated unfairly.

Tip 2 • **Acknowledge the emotion without escalating the situation.** Statements like “I can hear that you’re frustrated” can help the employee feel understood and reduce defensiveness.

Tip 3 • **Maintain calm body language and suggest pausing or moving to a quieter space** if emotions are running high. This can help support emotional regulation before problem-solving.



DOs

- **Do** keep listening, even if the emotion is strong.
- **Do** reflect back the valid concern underneath the anger
- **Do** model calm and steady body language.

DON’Ts

- **Don’t** tell them to “calm down.”
- **Don’t** respond with frustration or anger yourself.

Overwhelm on the Job



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Break tasks into manageable steps.** Help the employee prioritize what’s urgent vs. what can wait, this reduces cognitive overload.

Tip 2 • **Acknowledge the stress before solving.** A simple validation like “That looks like a lot” can lower emotional intensity.

Tip 3 • **Take responsibility where appropriate** if workload, pressure, or workplace factors may have contributed. Statements such as “It looks like we’ve put too much on your plate lately” can help employees feel supported rather than blamed.

- **Encourage brief pauses.** Even short resets (a few deep breaths or 5 minutes off task) can improve focus and prevent burnout.

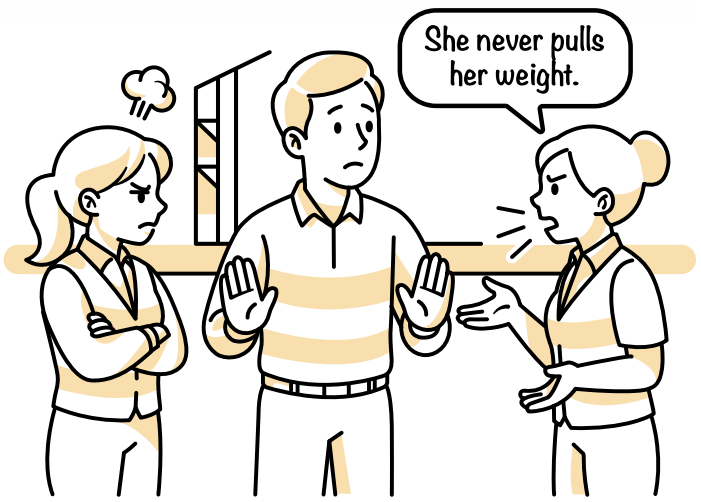
DOs

- **Do** help clarify priorities together.
- **Do** check what support they need instead of assuming.

DON’Ts

- **Don’t** say “just push through it.”
- **Don’t** pile on more tasks without context.

Conflict Between Colleagues



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Focus on observable behaviour, not character.** Guide both parties to describe facts instead of blame.

Tip 2 • **Facilitate each person being heard.** Let each speak without interruption to reduce defensiveness.

Tip 3 • **Reframe toward shared goals.** Bring the conversation back to teamwork and safety.

DOs

- **Do** stay neutral and curious.
- **Do** encourage "I" statements ("I feel… when…").

DON'Ts

- **Don't** take sides prematurely.
- **Don't** ignore tension hoping it resolves itself.

Employee Making Repeated Mistakes

3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Normalize mistakes as part of learning.** This reduces shame and supports problem-solving.

Tip 2 • **Explore what's behind the errors.** Is it fatigue, unclear instructions, or skill gaps?

Tip 3 • **Focus on solutions collaboratively.** Ask what might help them succeed next time.



DOs

- **Do** give clear, specific feedback.
- **Do** ask questions before giving directives.

DON'Ts

- **Don't** label the employee as careless.
- **Don't** correct in a way that humiliates.

Remember, Clearhead is here to support both managers and employees. Support can be accessed through your Clearhead account or by calling:

0800 CLR HED / 0800 257 433 (NZ) • 1800 CLR HED / 1800 257 433 (AU)

Press #1 for 24/7 help with accessing therapy or clinical workplace services.

Press #2 for all other inquiries.