CLEARHEAD

How to be a Supportive Manager

One of the most challenging parts of being a manager is supporting people through stress, performance pressure, conflict, and overwhelm while also keeping operations running smoothly.

This resource has been designed to help managers respond supportively and confidently in common workplace scenarios.

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

Overwhelm & Workload Stress



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Take responsibility** where appropriate if workload or competing demands may have contributed. Statements like "It looks like we may have put too much on your plate" can help reduce shame and increase psychological safety.

Tip 2 • **Collaborate on prioritisation**—ask what feels most urgent versus what can wait. This builds clarity and reduces perceived pressure.

Tip 3 • **Encourage** short pauses or grounding techniques to regulate stress before problem-solving.

DOs

- **Do** validate feelings of overwhelm without immediately jumping to solutions.
- **Do** focus on one step at a time.
- **Do** ask open-ended, non-judgmental questions.

DON'Ts

- **Don't** dismiss concerns with "it's not that much."
- **Don't** overload them further with new tasks in the moment.

Frustration with a Colleague

3 Tips for Managers:



Tip 1 • **Help the employee separate observations from judgments.** For example, they didn't complete the agreed task on time instead of "they're lazy".

Tip 2 • **Encourage perspective-taking to reduce assumptions and emotional reactivity.** For example, "what could have gotten in the way of them completing the task?"

Tip 3 • **Take action or escalate when needed.** In some cases, such as a complaint, you may need to follow a process or procedure.

DOs

- **Do** help reframe from blame to specific behaviours.
- **Do** encourage calm, direct conversations.
- **Do** model neutral, non-judgmental language.

DON'Ts

- **Don't** take sides prematurely.
- **Don't** ignore ongoing interpersonal tension.

Burnout & Exhaustion



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Gently check in using non-judgemental observations**, rather than assumptions about what's going on for the person.

Tip 2 • **Explore** workload, boundaries, and recovery time, support realistic adjustments.

Tip 3 • **Reinforce** that rest and sustainable pacing improve long-term performance.

DOs

- **Do** normalise conversations about fatigue and burnout.
- **Do** encourage breaks and time off where possible.
- **Do** listen without rushing to fix.

DON'Ts

- **Don't** equate exhaustion with lack of commitment.
- **Don't** ignore early warning signs.

Anxiety About Performance



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Help challenge unhelpful thoughts** by focusing on evidence of past successes.

Tip 2 • **Provide clear, balanced feedback** so the employee understands both their strengths and next steps.

Tip 3 • **Encourage grounding techniques,** such as deep breathing, to manage immediate anxiety.

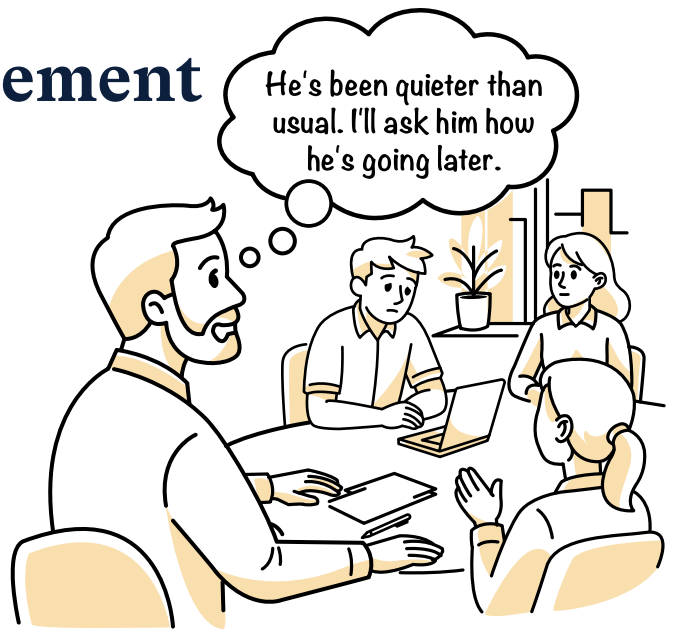
DOs

- **Do** reinforce strengths alongside development areas.
- **Do** clarify expectations and next steps.
- **Do** encourage realistic thinking.

DON'Ts

- **Don't** give vague or ambiguous feedback.
- **Don't** dismiss anxiety with "you're fine."

Withdrawal & Low Engagement



3 Tips for Managers:

Tip 1 • **Use gentle, curious check-ins** rather than assumptions, fostering psychological safety.

Tip 2 • **Practise active listening**, reflect back what you hear to show understanding.

Tip 3 • **Encourage small, manageable re-engagement steps** rather than immediate full participation.

DOs

- **Do** approach privately and respectfully.
- **Do** validate their experience.
- **Do** allow space for them to share at their own pace.

DON'Ts

- **Don't** call them out publicly.
- **Don't** assume disengagement equals lack of interest.

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.