



Manager's Toolkit

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Introduction

This toolkit for managers has been designed by the Human Resources Business Partnering Team and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. It has been produced in response to requests from managers to have clear and simple frameworks for addressing concerns that arise in the context of managing people and teams.

The actions and framework provided are not an exhaustive list of approaches, but intended to provide transferable frameworks that may be applied to challenging situations.

This guidance will be reviewed on an annual basis, and it will hopefully act as a helpful starting point or quick reference guide as you carry out your day-to-day roles at UCL.

Working with HR and the Business Partnering Team

HR Business Partners (HRBP) work one-to-one with managers to help to resolve a range of employee relations issues including allegations of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct. Your HRBP can give advice and guidance on what your options are after you receive a disclosure. Getting in touch with HR does not mean that the issue then has to be dealt with formally; your HRBP can also talk you through a range of informal options if appropriate.

Your HRBP is also able to direct you towards both internal and external sources of support for both you and the individual who made the disclosure.

The contact details for the HR Business Partner for your department can be found here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/about-hr/contacting-hr/people-hr#business-partnering>

Training available

- [Leading on Diversity](#)
- [Resolving Conflict](#)
- [Where do you draw the line](#)
- [Taking the lead](#)

Further information on training can be found here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/learning-and-development>.

Guidance on managing difficult conversations

Why is it challenging?

It is challenging because it is a conversation where you have to manage information and/or emotions in a sensitive way.

Talking face-to-face with an employee about personal issues or problems will take many managers out of their comfort zone. As a manager, you may be worried that the meeting will turn into a confrontation or that it will not go as planned. The following has been prepared to help you manage any concern or anxiety about responding to a challenging situation.

Plan the meeting in advance

Prepare for your conversation by establishing the facts, sources of support available, and ensure that you have checked the relevant policies. Allow sufficient time for the meeting, including breaks, as well as after the meeting when you may find yourself emotionally drained.

It may also be worth thinking about what you know about the individual. Having a close working relationship with someone can sometimes make it harder to broach a sensitive subject as personal feelings may get in the way. Conversely, having a good rapport with an employee does mean that you will probably have some insight into their psychological make-up, and may help you to anticipate how they may react. Having a script can help keep you on track and in control of the meeting.

Key actions

- The key to managing challenging conversations is control. This means that you decide if and when you need to adjourn for a break, what approach is working, and whether you need to change your style.
- At the start, put clear boundaries in place about what you will and will not be able to do
- Ensure you leave your own feelings and emotions out of the conversation
- Allow sufficient time for the member of staff to fully discuss their concerns
- Conclude with an agreement on what action (if any) you will take

Responding to disclosures

What is a disclosure?

A disclosure involves an affected person ('complainant') sharing an incident or experience of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. This may be a recent incident, or it may have occurred in the past.

Every experience and disclosure will be different, and there is no one way to respond.

You may not recognise a disclosure at first, and the complainant may not use terms such as 'bullying', 'harassment', 'assault', or 'misconduct' to describe their experience. However, it is important to listen and enable them to describe their experience in their own words.

Receiving a disclosure

Sharing an experience of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct is an act of trust and it is important that you affirm that the complainant is not to blame.

Consider the following when receiving a disclosure:

- Encourage them to talk without putting words in their mouth. Be prepared for pauses or long silences.
- Reassure them that it is not their fault; and that they are not alone.
- Focus on listening rather than asking questions. If you do ask questions ensure they are open, and avoid 'why?'.
- Assure them that they have options about what to do next – this is important in establishing their agency.
- Provide support options available that may assist in helping determine their next steps.
- Be clear regarding obligations of confidence and duty of care you may have.
- Respect the complainant's decision as to next steps.

How should I respond?

You may not be a counsellor or trained professional, but how you respond may influence how the complainant deals with their experience. Remember that people who have experienced bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct, have had their decision-making and control taken away from them. Try to enable them to regain control and make their own decision about how they want to proceed.

- Show empathy
- Ask open questions and avoid 'why?'
- Provide options

The following lines may be helpful:

'Thanks for sharing this experience with me...' or 'Thank you for trusting me with that information/ your experience'

'I can hear that this has made you feel (use their words)'

'Would you like me to provide information about specialist support?'

'Do you currently feel safe?'

'It is because of experiences like yours that this organisation is involved in this work...'

Know your role and practice self-care

The most important thing you can do is listen to the person and take their disclosure seriously.

If you are concerned for someone's wellbeing then you may help them to act, without forcing them to do so. Sometimes it may be enough to acknowledge that they have shared the experience with you.

It can be challenging to hear of such experiences and it is important to acknowledge how you are feeling, practice self-care and seek support if necessary. You may have feelings about the incident or opinions about what the person should do – these are important to acknowledge for your own self-care. Remember that you can still seek support following a disclosure without breaching obligations of confidence.

Difference between a manager and investigative manager

When responding to an initial concern raised by a staff or student, please bear in mind what 'hat' you are wearing. Although you may have previously been involved in the investigations process, it is important at this stage to ensure that you are responding to the person's direct concern, and focusing on resolution, rather than collecting evidence and establishing proof. Taking the latter approach may undermine an informal resolution and have a detrimental impact on the staff or students involved.

There may be a time where you will be asked to be an investigating manager, and there is formal guidance and support from HR when this occurs.

Overview of Informal Options

Informal resolution

The following is guidance on balancing different considerations when engaging in informal resolution. This is not exhaustive, but is intended to provide a framework and principles for approaching challenges in the workplace.

- Be supportive; actively listen; be impartial.
- Do not make promises about confidentiality. UCL has a Duty of Care, and you can refer to the confidentiality note and escalation criteria in the appendices for further guidance.
- Explain that the informal process is about resolution – not proof or substantiation.
- The aim is to prevent the issues reoccurring, not ‘punishing’ the respondent
- Explain the options: i.e. addressing the matter directly with the respondent, or more subtle interventions.
- Explain that a formal complaint can be made at any time: seeking informal resolution is not a barrier to a formal complaint later.
- Be clear about when you think informal resolution is inappropriate.
- Do not guarantee a result – investigations can be difficult and multi-faceted
- Follow up the meeting in writing. For example...

Follow-Up Email

- “I confirm we met yesterday...”
- “We discussed options for resolution of this issue, and you indicated that you would like to pursue an informal resolution.”
- “We agreed that I/we/you would speak to your colleague, etc.”
- “Following this, if the matter hasn’t been resolved you can make a formal complaint at any time.” (including link to relevant [policy](#))
- “You may wish to find out more about support information, this can be accessed via the [Report + Support](#) site.”
- “I am available to discuss the matter further at any time.”

Responding to reports guidance

Anonymous

If the complainant wants to remain anonymous, you should protect their identity and only address them in very general terms, either individually or in larger groups.

For example:

- “I’ve been made aware that there have been complaints about bullying in your team/research group. I cannot go into specifics. What is your perspective on this?”

- “Does everyone in your team understand the definition of harassment and bullying and its impact?”
- “Are you / they aware of UCL policy and the standard expected of employees, are you advised of the consequences if a complaint is investigated and upheld?”

If not anonymous, when addressing the complaint with others use the **DESC** model:

- **D**escribe the behaviour – say what, when, who, where – be specific
- **E**xplain the effect on others
- **S**ay what you want to happen – be clear and polite, but firm that action is needed
- **C**ontract/consequences – aim for agreement, but if not willing be honest about consequences

Victimisation

Victimisation is defined under the Equality Act (2010) as treating someone badly because they have done a ‘protected act’, or because you believe that a person is going to do a protected act.

A ‘protected act’ is:

- Making a claim or complaint of discrimination (under the Equality Act).
- Helping someone else to make a claim by giving evidence or information.
- Making an allegation that you or someone else has breached the Act.
- Doing anything else in connection with the Act.

If someone does treat a staff member or student less favourably because they have taken such action then this will be classed as unlawful victimisation. There must be a link between what the staff member or student did, and the person’s treatment of them. The less favourable treatment does not need to be linked to a protected characteristic.

Explain that victimisation is serious misconduct for anonymous or identifiable reports.

Escalation and formal procedures

Allegations of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct can be investigated formally through UCL’s policies and procedures. Most concerns are resolved informally through discussions within the department, division or faculty. However, if an employee considers that their concerns have not been addressed adequately, or that the allegations are sufficiently serious, they may raise a formal complaint under UCL Policy.

If the investigation determines that there is a case to answer, the perpetrator may then be disciplined using UCL’s Disciplinary procedure.

Examples of intervention initiatives

- Training ('Where do you draw the line?' and 'Taking the Lead' workshops, and bespoke arrangements)
- Email Charter
- Displaying posters or agreed principles for working
- Agreements between PhD Students and Supervisors
- Including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion regularly within team and committee meetings to discuss key issues, changes and promote inclusion
- Engaging with the 'Full Stop' campaign, and calls to action
- Liaising with HRBP supported by the EDI team to develop specific interventions

Support for you

Line Manager

You may wish to speak with your line manager at first instance to seek guidance, or further support when addressing behavioural concerns.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – highlight key management programs

EAP is a free employee support service. Call **0800 197 4510** to speak to a professional counsellor or information specialist in confidence. The EAP can provide information on support services in your local area, and short term, face-to-face counselling to help get you back on track.

You may also wish to access the comprehensive resources available on the Care First website here: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/occ_health/eap.php

HRBP

Please refer to the above section on 'Working with your HR business partner' for link.

SilverCloud

UCL are offering SilverCloud, an online Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) tool available to staff and PhD students to target stress, depression, anxiety and negative body image. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/silvercloud>

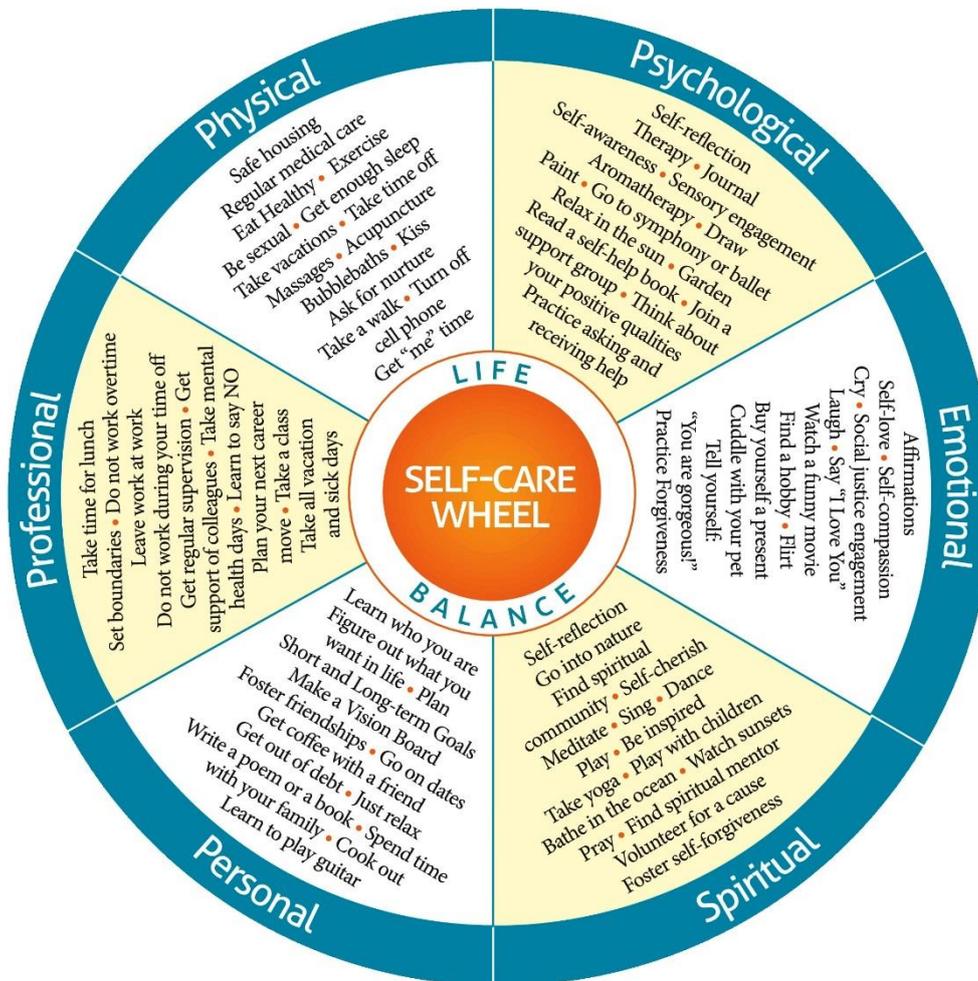
Report + Support

The [Report + Support site](#) for UCL students and staff provides a summary of all UCL student and staff support available, and lists external specialist providers. You may refer staff or students to 'contact an advisor' through the website, where they can seek more detailed information on their support options.

Self-Care

The graphic below may provide helpful guidance on the number of ways you can engage in self-care. This list is by no means exhaustive, but may prompt you to try different self-care techniques.

SELF-CARE WHEEL



This Self-Care Wheel was inspired by and adapted from "Self-Care Assessment Worksheet" from *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization* by Saakvitne, Pearlman & Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton, 1996). Created by Olga Phoenix Project: Healing for Social Change (2013).

Dedicated to all trauma professionals worldwide.

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