

MOVING THROUGH HARM & CONFLICT

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Why does this guide exist?

Diversity makes us more effective at our work and strengthens our relationships with community. But sometimes, learning to work across differences can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts or even harm. These interactions may feel uncomfortable, confusing or hurtful, even when the harm was unintentional.

MOVING THROUGH CONFLICT & HARM is a guide to support you to proactively respond when such incidents happen, whether you are the target, witness or instigator. We've drawn from non-violent communication and restorative justice practices, both of which promote arriving at mutual understanding instead of fault-finding. Given the infinite complexity of how people relate to each other, complement this framework with your best judgment.

In general, we abide by these principles to navigate conflict and harm:

- » Centre the needs and perspectives of the person targeted
- » Prioritize confidentiality and the holistic safety of everyone involved
- » Compassion and accountability are not mutually exclusive



Bullying, harassment or discrimination

This guide does not cover bullying, harassment or discrimination. If you experience, witness or suspect bullying, harassment or discrimination, please review the **Just and Ethical Conduct** section in the employee manual for further guidance.



Questions

Your people manager and the P&C team are here to help you understand this guide. Please reach out anytime if you have questions, feedback or concerns.

Conflict vs. Harm: Conflict

Conflict at work typically involves disagreements, misunderstandings or differences in approaches, goals or values. Conflict might cause hurt feelings without causing harm to anyone involved, but may progress to harm if it's severe. Examples of conflict at work include, but is not limited to:



Working and communication styles

Colleagues with different working or communication styles may experience tension or friction from time to time. Someone who prefers structure and order might struggle working with a more flexible or spontaneous colleague. Or someone who feels more comfortable with indirect communication may be offended by a colleague who is still professional, but more direct.

Some of this results from differences in cultural backgrounds, values or generational perspectives, but anyone may have a different communication styles, expectations around work-life balance, or approaches to problem-solving.



Workload imbalance or ambiguity

Unequal distribution of work can lead to some feeling resentment about carrying an unfair share of the workload, while others might feel they're not being challenged enough. As well, conflict can arise when expectations for performance, deadlines, or work quality are unclear or differ between employees and supervisors. If one person expects a certain level of performance that isn't met, conflict may follow. And if employees don't have clearly defined job responsibilities, they may unintentionally step on each other's toes.



Competing expectations or priorities

Conflicting priorities or goals can create tension. For example, one team may prioritize speed in delivering a project, while another may emphasize quality and detail. Teams may also feel they're competing for the same resources, such as budget or staffing, to achieve their objectives.



Resistance to change

While employees are generally expected to adapt to change in the workplace, introducing new processes, tools or leadership can still create conflict if some employees resist change or feel that it threatens their job security, comfort or control over their work.

Conflict vs. Harm: Harm

Harm refers to negative impacts on a person's physical, emotional, professional, or relational well-being. It may be intentional or unintentional, obvious or subtle, but is defined primarily by its impact on the recipient rather than intent behind the action. Even well-meaning actions can result in harm.

We cover this in more detail in the **Just and Ethical Conduct** section of our employee manual. Harm can be:



Physical

Injuries or risks to an employee's physical safety, including accidents, unsafe working conditions or inadequate health and safety protocols.



Emotional, mental or psychological

Actions or circumstances that cause severe stress, anxiety, trauma, or emotional distress. This can include persistent criticism, unfair treatment, exclusion, or exposure to toxic workplace dynamics. It may also arise from an unsupportive or overly demanding work environment. Harm can also arise from burnout, poor leadership, excessive workloads, or high-pressure environments.



Professional

Harm that hinders an employee's career development, opportunities or reputation. This can include withholding promotion opportunities, unfair performance reviews, lack of mentorship or preventing someone from contributing meaningfully.



Relational

Stemming from conflicts or power imbalances, relational harm creates division or feelings of isolation. In turn, this impacts trust, communication, and collaboration within teams or with management.



Institutional or systemic

Exclusion or marginalization based on protected characteristics like race, culture, gender or disability. This can manifest in microaggressions, a lack of inclusivity or systemic biases that prevent employees from feeling safe or valued.

Harm can also result from institutional policies, practices, or structures that disadvantage certain groups. For example, inequitable pay, biased hiring practices, or lack of accessible accommodations can create long-term harm for marginalized employees.

Processes

The following four pages illustrate the processes an individual can take to navigate harm and conflict as a:

TARGET

WITNESS & SUPPORTER

INSTIGATOR OR ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER

PEOPLE MANAGER



When an incident happens and you are the target or recipient	<p>Do you want to address it?</p> <p>You may like to use these GUIDING QUESTIONS to decide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is the relationship or issue? • What feelings are coming up for you? • How do you want to feel now and in the future? • What is your capacity and energy levels? • Is there an outcome you want? 	<p>NO Do not address immediately. → Document the situation as soon as possible, detailing who, what, when, where.</p> <p>YES Address immediately. See below tiers for next steps. ↘</p>
Determine if this incident is bullying or harassment. You are legally required to report all cases of bullying and harassment to your employer.	<p>Does the incident rise to the level that reporting is necessary?</p> <p>Review the criteria for bullying and harassment in the Just and Ethical Conduct section of our employee handbook.</p> <p>An employer or supervisor taking reasonable action to manage and direct employees is not bullying and harassment on its own.</p>	<p>YES what happened is bullying or harassment. → Do not use this guide. Instead, reference the Just & Ethical Conduct section in Employee Manual.</p> <p>NO or unsure. → You may address the incident using one of the three options below. ↘</p>

<p>OPTION 1 Address directly with person who started the incident</p> <p>Reach out to schedule a video call or in-person meeting. Keep your message brief as tone can get lost in writing. e.g. "I wanted to follow up about something you said last meeting."</p> <p>Practice the Sharing Perspectives Model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What did you mean when you said X?" • "When you said/did X, I noticed I felt Y because Z." • "I see you didn't mean any harm. In the future, maybe you could X?" <p>Are you satisfied with how things went?</p> <p>YES You're satisfied with how things went ↓ Strengthened relationship & learning</p> <p>NO You're not satisfied with how things went ↓ Use the list of GUIDING QUESTIONS again to decide if you want to pursue an alternative way of addressing the incident.</p>	<p>OPTION 2 Address directly with support</p> <p>INTERNAL SUPPORT</p> <p>Ask for support from any colleague you feel comfortable with. This can be your people manager, another senior leader or a P&C team member.</p> <p>Describe the incident, working from your documented notes.</p> <p>Explain what you need: a listening ear, mediator, advocate, help with escalating or something else?</p> <p>Ensure this person is able and willing to support you in the way you need.</p> <p>EXTERNAL SUPPORT</p> <p>If you would prefer to find external support, these are some options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAP hotline: +1-800-663-1142 • Homewood Health coaching and counselling • More coaching: Reach out to the Director, P&C • Community and Self-Care Resources: J:\Public\PC&E\Self-Care and Community Resources.xlsx • BIPOC therapist directory: https://www.healingincolour.com/directory 	<p>OPTION 3 Address anonymously</p> <p>You may make an anonymous report to the Confidence Line</p> <p>vancouverfoundation.confidenceline.net 1-800-661-9675</p> <p>You will be assigned an anonymous Caller ID or username and password. Confidence Line will send your report to a Vancouver Foundation representative.</p> <p>This representative may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, P&C • VP, Corporate Services • Chair, Governance and People Committee (Compliance Officer) <p>If any of these people are involved in the incident, Confidence Line will not send them the report.</p> <p>Through Confidence Line, you can communicate anonymously with the Vancouver Foundation representative, who will work with you to identify next steps.</p>
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<p>!</p> <p>Escalating to the Compliance Officer</p>	<p>If you have tried to address the incident but continue to be unsatisfied, you may escalate by filing a report with the Compliance Officer, who is also the Chair of the Governance & People Committee.</p> <p>compliance.officer@vancouverfoundation.ca</p>	<p>The Compliance Officer will determine an investigation plan for the incident with the CEO and the Governance & People Committee.</p>	<p>The Compliance Officer is responsible for investigating and resolving all incident reports. Review our Ethical Reporting Policy for details about what the investigation may require from you.</p>
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<p>When you witness harm or conflict</p>	<p><u>Do you want to address the situation now?</u></p> <p>Whether or not you want to address it, document the situation in writing, detailing who, what, when, and where the incident happened.</p> <div> <p>YES → Did the incident happen virtually or in-person?</p> <p>In-person → SUPPORT Ask if they would like support. Go to a private spot to talk.</p> <p>Virtually → SUPPORT Privately message the target and ask if and when they would like support.</p> </div> <div> <p>YES → DESCALATE De-escalation may be needed if the incident of harm is more than a one-off comment. It focuses on the safety of everyone, not addressing the instigator in the moment. This often means creating space between the target and instigator.</p> <p>De-escalation strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divert the conversation to another topic • Find an excuse to move the target to a safer space e.g. "It looks like something urgent has come up, can we reschedule this meeting?" • If in-person and if safe, you might physically put yourself between the target and instigator. </div> <div> <p>NO → DOCUMENT Document the situation in writing, detailing who, what, when, and where the incident happened.</p> </div>
<p>If a Target asks for your support as an active listener</p>	<p><u>Are you able to support?</u></p> <p>Review the Assessing Your Ability to Support checklist.</p> <div> <p>YES I can support → Review the Becoming an Active Listener resource. → Schedule a private conversation, which can be virtual or in-person.</p> <p>NO I can't support → Decline kindly, but directly. e.g. "I'm so sorry to hear this has happened to you. I'm unfortunately not in a position to support you right now." You may like to briefly discuss who the next best person may be for the TARGET to approach for help.</p> </div>
<p>Report any incident that is bullying or harassment. You are legally required to report all cases of bullying and harassment to your employer.</p>	<p><u>Is what happened bullying or harassment?</u></p> <p>After your conversation, review the legal criteria for bullying and harassment in the Just and Ethical Conduct section of our employee handbook.</p> <p>An employer or supervisor taking reasonable action to manage and direct employees is not bullying and harassment on its own.</p> <div> <p>YES what happened is bullying or harassment. → Do not use this guide. Instead, reference the Just and Ethical Conduct section in Employee Manual. → Prepare to be a witness by documenting the incident:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dates and times • Who was involved and present • Specific actions and behaviors, including tone of voice </div> <div> <p>NO or not sure → <u>Do they want to address the incident in another way?</u></p> <p>Discuss how to move forward with the Target. See TARGET flow chart for more options.</p> <div> <p>YES → Discuss your support role moving forward, possibly as an advocate.</p> <p>NO → Discuss how you might still support as an active listener.</p> </div> </div>

External resources for WITNESSES & SUPPORTERS

Support or advocate through other ways of reporting the incident.

WITNESSES & SUPPORTERS may access the same resources as **TARGETS**.

- EAP hotline: +1.800.663.1142
- Homewood Health coaching and counselling:
- More coaching: Reach out to the Director, P&C
- Community and Self-Care Resources: J:\Public\PC&E\Self-Care and Community Resources.xlsx
- BIPOC therapist directory: <https://www.healingincolour.com/directory>

An incident of harm happens, and you are the instigator

You may find out in one of a few ways that you've caused hurt or harm:

- You may notice you've made a misstep in the moment
- The Target addressed it with you directly
- Your people manager, or someone from the P&C team, advises you of the incident

Are you ready to respond?

YES

→ You're ready to respond and repair

→ Go to **OPTION 1: Address directly**

NO

→ You're not sure how to respond yet

→ Take time for self-reflection. You may like to say "Thanks for bringing this up with me. I need some time to think about this, can we connect on X date?"

-OR-

Go to **OPTION 2: Reflect with an Accountability Partner**, communicating to the Target that you may need some time as well.

OPTION 1

Address directly

Use the **Repairing Relationships** resource to guide you in addressing the situation constructively through a conversation.

Does conversation lead to resolution for both sides?

YES

→ Strengthened relationship & mutual understanding

NO

→ You may not get the outcome you want, such as forgiveness. That's okay. Don't apologize more (centering the other person means to not over-apologize). This is non-closure and that's okay. Instead, focus on committing to change with an accountability partner (next step).

Taking accountability means taking responsibility for how your actions and the impact they have. It is not only learning from a mistake but changing how we behave so it doesn't happen again.

It is a display of humility and courage to admit you made a mistake and commit to not doing it again. Having an accountability partner can help you more deeply understand the situation, the mistake, and what to do differently next time.

OPTION 2

Reflect with an Accountability Partner first before addressing

Identify someone you trust to be your Accountability Partner. They can support you by discussing the incident from your perspective, coaching, mentorship or finding learning resources.

An external coach can also be an Accountability Partner.

See our **Finding a Coach** resource for recommendations.

Is an Accountability Partner available?

If you have been asked to be an Accountability Partner: Review the **Assessing Your Ability to Support** checklist to help you determine if you can support in this way.

YES

→ You are the **Instigator**

- Explain to your accountability partner what you need: this could be a listening ear, making sense of the situation, behaviour change, or resources
- Reflect on the incident from your perspective
- Discuss potential ways to move forward with the Target or proactively address the situation
- Schedule at least one follow-up with the accountability partner to discuss progress on next steps
- Proactively seek out learning and support resources, you may like to discuss the merits of each with your accountability partner.
- Reach out to the Director, P&C to be connected with an external coach. You do not need to say why.

YES

→ You are the **Accountability Partner**

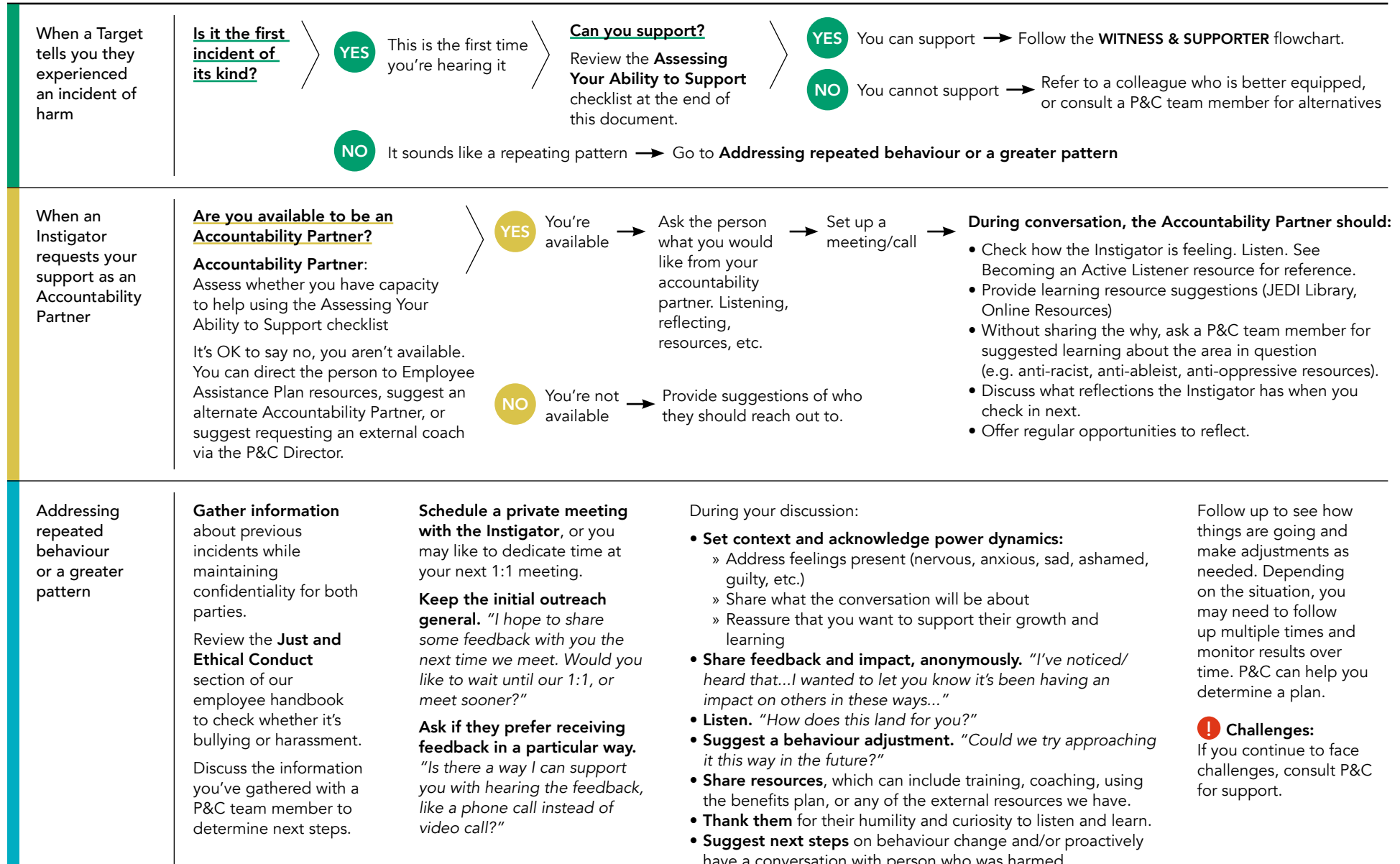
- Listen, and ask questions to help you understand how the Instigator is feeling
- Provide learning resource suggestions, which may be from the JEDI Library. You may like to consult a P&C team member (you do not need to share why).
- Discuss any reflections the Instigator and progress made towards next steps during a follow-up session.
- Offer an ongoing line of communication to support the Instigator's learning and growth.

NO

Accountability Partner is not available

External resources for **ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER**
INSTIGATORS and **ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERS** may access the same resources as **TARGETS**.

- EAP hotline: +1.800.663.1142
- Homewood Health coaching and counselling:
- More coaching: Reach out to the Director, P&C
- Community and Self-Care Resources: J:\Public\PC&E\Self-Care and Community Resources.xlsx
- BIPOC therapist directory: <https://www.healingincolour.com/directory>



Whatever role in the incident you play as a **PEOPLE MANAGER**, you may make use of the following external resources:

- EAP hotline: +1.800.663.1142
- Homewood Health coaching and counselling
- More coaching: Reach out to the Director, P&C

- Community and Self-Care Resources: J:\Public\PC&E\Self-Care and Community Resources.xlsx
- BIPOC therapist directory: <https://www.healingincolour.com/directory>

Assessing Your Ability to Support

Resource for potential Witnesses, Supporters and Accountability Partners

When an incident of harm happens, you may be asked to support the target or instigator to resolve the situation. Generally, you want to be able to offer most of the following qualities as a source of support.

- ☐ I will be able to give them my undivided attention.
- ☐ I will be able to show up in a timely fashion, and be responsive to their needs.
- ☐ I have the emotional capacity to listen actively, validate feelings and perspectives, and convey care and compassion, even if I do not fully agree with how someone feels about their situation.
- ☐ I have the emotional capacity to be curious and empathetic about the reasons behind someone's behaviour, without compromising my own values and boundaries.
- ☐ I have a plan for what to do if I start feeling negatively affected by discussing the incident, and how to communicate this with the person requesting support.
- ☐ I have received positive feedback from others that I am a good active listener, or otherwise being a source of support for people with situations of similar complexity.
- ☐ I have received positive feedback from others about my ability to encourage and guide people to solve their own problems, as opposed to solving it for them.
- ☐ I believe in people's ability to grow and learn from their mistakes.

If you cannot support at this time

It's OK to say no, you aren't available. You can direct the person to Employee Assistance Plan resources, suggest an alternate Accountability Partner, or suggest requesting an external coach via the Director, P&C.

Becoming an Active Listener

Resource for confirmed Witnesses, Supporters and Accountability Partners.

Thank you for taking on a role in resolving an incident of harm. Listening helps people feel safe, heard, and become more open to new ideas and change. At the same time, it's hard work and requires focus and parsing out a speaker's content, intent, and feelings, which can seem to contradict each other at times.

Guiding principles of active listening

PAY ATTENTION. Look at the speaker (or the screen they're on), instead of looking off to another screen. Turn off distractions like notifications. Focus on what the person is saying, instead of how you want to respond. Let them finish what they need to say before responding.

SHOW YOU'RE ENGAGED, WITHOUT INTERRUPTING. Use open and interested body language, which may include nodding from time to time or offer short verbal encouragement ("uh huh" "yeah").

FOCUS ON WHAT THEY NEED FROM YOU. Ask at the start what they are looking for from you, and re-affirm this as needed. If they only need a listening ear, do not interject with possible solutions.

Techniques for better active listening

MIRROR. Repeating what someone has said back to them is one of the most powerful ways to make someone feel like you've really heard them, without necessarily agreeing with them. You're fact-finding, and confirming that you've got the right information.

- » One version of this technique is to repeat back the last few words they said as a way to prompting for more information.
- » Another version is to summarize or paraphrase what they've just said. This is a good way to make someone feel heard, even.
- » You might start a mirroring statement with saying "What I am hearing is..." or "It sounds like you're saying/feeling..."

VALIDATE. Affirming statements help people feel more connected to others, and they usually focus on the person's humanity instead of right and wrong. These can sound like:

- » *I'm here for you.*
- » *I'm so glad you reached out.*
- » *You deserve to feel respected.*
(or heard, seen, acknowledged, etc...)
- » *What happened was not your fault.*
- » *It's normal to feel what you're feeling in your position.*

DEFLECT FOCUS ON YOU. Active listening is about de-centring yourself. Keep the focus on the person you're supporting.

- » If the person asks you "What should I do?", you might reply with "I'm not sure. What have you thought about doing so far?"
- » If the person asks you "What would you have done?", you might reply with "I don't think I can answer that well, because I wasn't there. Are you concerned with how you reacted in the moment?"

Next Steps

At the end of the conversation, check in on whether a follow-up meeting would be supportive. Schedule the follow-up.

External resources available to all employees

If the person you are supporting is looking for external support, these are some options:

- EAP hotline: +1.800.663.1142
- Homewood Health coaching and counselling:
- More coaching: Reach out to the Director, P&C
- Community and Self-Care Resources: J:\Public\PC&E\Self-Care and Community Resources.xlsx
- BIPOC therapist directory: <https://www.healingincolour.com/directory>

Finding a Coach

Coaches are external contractors who work with clients that are looking to grow or change in some way professionally. They focus on your present situation and how to get to your future goals.

Finding the right coach

Most coaches offer a free discovery call to make sure it's a good fit. You should feel confident in their ability to help you, and made you feel heard and like your answers and concerns were answered.

Consider asking these questions to find out more about their approach.

- » What is your personal philosophy or approach to coaching?
- » What can I expect a session to be like? What is a first session typically like?
- » How much experience do you have working with people with [your area of concerns]?
- » How do you work with people across difference, or with identities different from your own?
- » What informs your analysis of people's 'problems' in their careers?

Recommended Coaches:

Multiple people working at Vancouver Foundation have worked with and recommended one of these coaches.

- » Tara Robertson: <https://tararobertson.ca/coaching/>
- » Bina M. Patel: <https://www.saathiimpact.com/coaching>
- » Lynda Gerty: <https://www.lyndagerty.com/>

Repairing a Relationship

Repairing a relationship starts with an apology and ends with changed behaviour. You do not complete all steps at the same time. It's OK for anyone involved in the repair to take time to cool off or reflect on the situation in between each step.

If you are the Instigator

Learn why your action was hurtful to someone, so that you can begin to take responsibility. Do as much research and reflecting on this on your own first, before asking the Target. You may like to consult an Accountability Partner to help you think this through.

- 1 Own up to the action that hurt the Target.
"You're right, I did say that and I understand that it was very hurtful."
- 2 Apologize, and demonstrate you understand why your action was hurtful. It's OK to say that it was unintentional, while also addressing the impact.
"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. I didn't know what I said was offensive at the time, but I see it is now."
- 3 Commit to changing.
"I won't be saying that word again in the future."
- 4 Offer repair, respecting whatever the other person chooses.
"What else can I do to make things right?"
- 5 Prepare to accept non-closure. Sometimes, an incident can't be resolved to the satisfaction of the Target. They may not accept your apology, or offer forgiveness.
- 6 Follow through on your commitment to change, anyway. Showing consistently that you're behaving differently can rebuild trust over time. Proof that you are self-aware and have changed is what helps people feel your apology was sincere and strengthens relationships. An Accountability Partner can support you in building a plan and creating conditions for change.



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