

Workload, Wellbeing and Holding Difficult Conversations

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Workshop Aims

- Build an understanding around the role of power and workplace hierarchies in shaping workplace culture and relationships.
- Raise your confidence around dealing with difficult and often challenging conversations in the workplace.
- Identify appropriate strategies for dealing with difficult conversations.
- Develop approaches for tackling excessive workload and protect your wellbeing.
- Be aware of where you can seek further support.

Starter Questions

Answer the following questions around the room:

1. Does your establishment have an elected EIS rep?
2. Do you meet as an EIS branch?
3. Has your workload increased over the past 4 years?
4. How much control do you feel you have over your work in your setting?

What are our members saying?

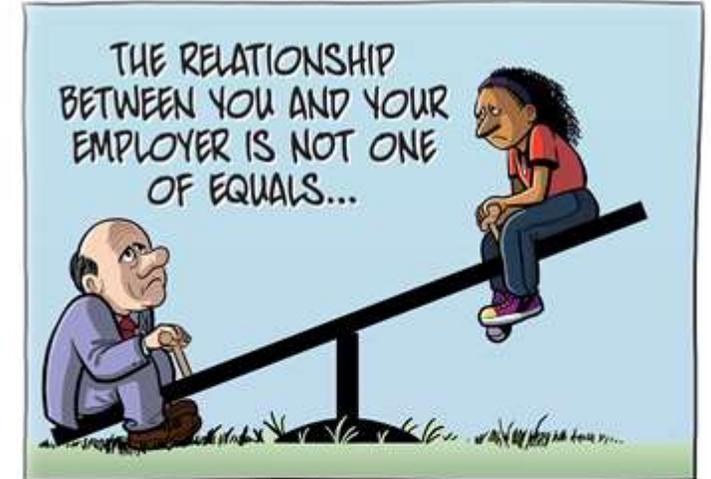
Shared Independent Research Report on Workload Findings

- Teachers on average each week work 11.39 hours, outside contracted hours.
- This is the equivalent to the work of an additional 17,500 teachers.
- Time for elective professional learning was reduced to just 35 minutes during the week, on average, for main grade teachers.

More information can be found here - <https://www.eis.org.uk/teacher-workload/research>.

Workplace Hierarchies and Structures

- In every workplace there is a power imbalance between bosses and workers and management and staff- it's important to recognise and understand that.
- The education system is hierarchical
- What hierarchies and structures exist in a school/early years environment? What do they look like and how are they reinforced?
- Why is having a strong workplace union branch crucial to addressing this imbalance?



Holding Challenging Conversations

What types of conversations are we talking about?

We will specifically explore two types of conversations:

- Staff to Management
- Colleague to Colleague

There are of course various types of conversations which can be difficult to manage.

What Makes a Conversation Between Staff and Management Difficult or More Challenging?

- There are various reasons why people find discussing issues with management more challenging.
- What types of conversations with management that you find most challenging and some of the reasons for this?

What Makes a Conversation Difficult or More Challenging? Staff to Management

When you don't feel confident to say something

When you feel you don't have the knowledge to challenge something

When you fear repercussions of speaking out

When there is a power imbalance between positions

When you've raised issues previously and nothing happened

When things have always been the same and it's hard to be the one who pushes for changes

When you feel isolated and don't want to raise concerns alone

When you are new and are worried about speaking out

When the tone of the conversation disrespectful

When you have a close working relationship with management

When the lines between acceptable/not acceptable are blurred due to existing workplace culture

When the conversation becomes defensive



What Makes a Conversation between Colleague to Colleague Difficult or More Challenging?

- Conversations between colleagues can sometimes pose their own challenges.
- What types of conversations between colleagues you find most challenging and some of the reasons for this?

What Makes a Conversation Difficult or More Challenging? Colleague to Colleague

When you're unsure about how to raise issues with a fellow colleague

When you're not sure if you're overstepping boundaries

When the tone of the conversation is 'off' or confrontational

When a colleague becomes defensive

When the lines between acceptable and not acceptable are blurred because of existing workplace culture

When others don't want to participate in your conversation e.g. too busy

When relationships in the workplace are close and you don't want to fall out with colleagues.

When issues are not shared, and you feel isolated

Scenarios

With a partner, choose one of the following scenarios to role play:

1. Your line manager asks you to attend a number of tracking meetings over the next few weeks. These will take place from 4-5pm and have not been agreed previously. This will give you less time to prepare for the next day's learning and you question the value of the data being collected.
2. A colleague has agreed to take on extra responsibility for a new initiative which can only be undertaken after the working day. They have asked you to help them undertake this task, "as it will benefit us all". You have concerns this will add your already high workload.
3. A new manager has introduced a new planning structure without consultation and expects you to implement this. It is adding to the workload of all in the team and adding to your stress and that of colleagues.

Strategies for Dealing with Difficult Conversations - Staff to Management

Be clear about what you want to speak about.

If asked to a meeting always ask the reason for it. Don't go into a meeting without knowing.

Prepare for your conversation and go over points you want to raise beforehand

Set your own timescales and give yourself time to prepare.

Print and take your policy with you if necessary.

Identify what management might say in response so you are ready.

Take another member with you, if appropriate.

Follow up via email and note all points raised and take a personal note of the meeting/date and time - evidence trail.

You know your own boundaries; identify when they are being broken

Stop the meeting if you feel uncomfortable or feel you're being spoken down to.

If you are the union rep, remind management that you are there representing the branch and not there as a staff member.

Strategies for Dealing with Difficult Conversations - Colleague to Colleague

Always address issues and don't let them fester

Ask for time aside to address issues

Think about the issues you want to discuss beforehand

Find ways to meet as union members in the workplace

Consider whether someone else is better placed to have the conversation

Listening and giving someone else the time to be heard is important and vice versa

Sometimes a softer approach is necessary

Avoid accusation if others aren't participating

Always take it to the issue and not the individual

Think about what made a previous similar conversation effective and learn from it

Why we need to have difficult conversations

- Engaging in difficult conversations breaks barriers
- To effectively resolve issues and concerns, issues need to be raised
- It helps to build members' confidence
- Key to building and strengthening collegiality in the workplace
- Helps to tackle toxic working environments
- Builds healthier and positive workplace relationships
- Gives workers control over their working environment
- Builds workplace solidarity and strengthens the union branch
- **If you do nothing, nothing will change.**

Where can you seek support?

- Teachers' terms and conditions – www.snct.org.uk
- Local Association Secretary & Organisers - <https://www.eis.org.uk/contacts/contacts-home>
- EIS Early Years Network <https://www.eis.org.uk/networks/earlyyearsnetwork>
- Health and Wellbeing resources - <https://www.eis.org.uk/member-support/hwresource>
- EIS Workload advice - <https://www.eis.org.uk/teacher-workload/adviceleaflets>
- Education Support “Setting Boundaries” advice - <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/guides/setting-boundaries-a-guide-for-staff-in-schools/>

