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Supporting a Colleague Who's Struggling

Simple, compassionate ways to have supportive conversations at work.



> You don't need to be a counsellor or expert.
>
> *You just need to care enough to ask.*

Listen
Be present and really listen.

Support
Show empathy and offer understanding.

Encourage
Help them explore options and resources.

Connect
Remind them they are not alone.

Stronger together.
Small conversations can make a big difference.

People. Connection. Impact.

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Why This Matters



Sometimes the smallest conversation can make the biggest difference.

Most of us will notice at some point that a colleague doesn't seem quite themselves.

Perhaps they're quieter than usual, making mistakes they wouldn't normally make, or simply don't seem like the person you know.

Knowing what to do can feel difficult.

The good news is that you don't need to be a counsellor or mental health expert to make a positive difference.

Sometimes asking a simple question and listening without judgement is enough to remind someone they don't have to face things alone.

This guide will help you:

Recognise
Spot the signs that someone may be struggling.

Start
Begin supportive conversations with confidence.

Listen
Listen in a way that shows you care and understand.

Encourage
Encourage the right support and explore helpful options.

Protect
Understand your boundaries and look after yourself.

Support isn't about having all the answers.
It's about being willing to listen.

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Understanding the Signs



People don't always say when they're struggling. Sometimes the signs show up in how they think, feel or behave.

You don't need to look for all of these signs. Even a few changes could be an indication that something isn't right.

Trust your instincts. You know your colleague.

Signs to look out for

Changes in behaviour
Acting out of character, withdrawing or seeming less engaged.

Low energy or motivation
Appearing tired, unmotivated or struggling to get things done.

Difficulty concentrating
Making more mistakes, forgetting things or struggling to focus.

Changes in mood
Irritable, tearful, anxious or appearing overwhelmed.

Isolation
Pulling away from colleagues, avoiding social interactions or team activities.

Increased tension or stress
Seeming worried, on edge or easily frustrated.

Changes in sleep patterns
Mentioning poor sleep or appearing tired more than usual.

Changes in habits
Drinking more, changes in appetite or neglecting self-care.

Drop in performance
Work quality or productivity may decline.

Hints or comments
Talking about feeling hopeless, overwhelmed or that things are getting too much.

Notice. Check in. Start a conversation.

You don't need to be certain something is wrong to show you care.

It could make all the difference.

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The Secure Cortex CARE Model

A simple, practical framework to help you have supportive conversations with colleagues.

C
CHECK IN
Notice the change and create a safe space

- ✓ Trust your instincts
- ✓ Choose a private, appropriate moment
- ✓ Show genuine concern

EXAMPLE:
"I've noticed you don't seem yourself recently — is everything OK?"

A
ASK
Open the conversation

- ✓ Use open questions
- ✓ Stay curious
- ✓ Avoid assumptions
- ✓ Give them space to share

EXAMPLE:
"How have things been for you lately?"

R
RESPOND
Listen more than you speak

- ✓ Be present
- ✓ Listen without judgement
- ✓ Validate their experience
- ✓ Avoid trying to fix everything

EXAMPLE:
"That sounds really tough. I can see why you're finding it hard."

E
ENCOURAGE
Help them find the right support

- ✓ Explore helpful options
- ✓ Signpost to support
- ✓ Agree one small next step
- ✓ Keep the door open

EXAMPLE:
"Would it help if we looked at who might be able to support you?"

The CARE model isn't about solving problems.
It's about helping someone feel **seen, heard and supported.**

Top Tips for Supportive Conversations

- ✓ Speak privately
- ✓ Be genuine
- ✓ Keep it simple
- ✓ Focus on listening
- ✓ Respect their choices
- ✓ Know your boundaries
- ✓ Check in again later
- ✓ Look after yourself too

> "You don't have to fix someone's problems. You just have to be willing to *notice.*"

Small conversations. Stronger teams.
Together we create workplaces where everyone feels supported.

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What to Say (and What to Avoid)



The right words can open the door to a supportive conversation. The wrong words, even if well-intentioned, can close it.

Choose your words with care.

Helpful Phrases

These phrases show you care, open the door to conversation and encourage your colleague to share if they feel comfortable.

- "I've noticed you don't seem yourself lately."
- "I'm here if you want to talk."
- "How are you really doing?"
- "Would it help to talk about it?"
- "Is there anything I can do to help?"
- "You don't have to go through this alone."
- "Take your time. I'm listening."
- "Would you like some information about support that's available?"

Unhelpful Phrases

These phrases can minimise how someone feels, make them feel uncomfortable or shut down the conversation.

- "You don't look that bad."
- "Everyone feels like that sometimes."
- "It could be worse."
- "You just need to cheer up."
- "Why are you so stressed?"
- "I know how you feel."
- "You're overreacting."
- "You should just..."
- "Calm down."

Open Questions Invite Open Conversations

Open questions show genuine interest and encourage your colleague to talk more freely.

- What's been on your mind lately?
- How have you been feeling?
- What's been the hardest part for you?
- What support might help right now?



KEY TAKEAWAY

There is no perfect thing to say.

Say it with care, say it with compassion, and most importantly, say something.

Remember: You Are Not Alone

If you are ever concerned about someone's immediate safety, or if they are at risk of harm, seek professional help straight away.

In an emergency, call 999.

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Practical Guidance: How to Have a Supportive Conversation

Every conversation is different, but these steps can help you feel more confident and prepared.

1 Prepare

Be present and choose the right time.

Find a private, appropriate moment where you won't be interrupted.

TIP: Check in with yourself first. Are you ready to listen without distractions?

2 Start the Conversation

Open the door gently.

Use open, non-judgemental language to show you care and invite them to share.

TIP: A simple question can be enough to get the conversation started.

3 Listen Actively

Give them your full attention.

Listen more than you speak. Let them share their thoughts and feelings without interruption.

TIP: Use eye contact, nod, and reflect back what you hear.

4 Explore Together

Help them explore their feelings and options.

Ask open questions and help them think about what might help. Avoid giving advice unless asked.

TIP: Everyone's situation is unique – respect their perspective and choices.

5 Agree Next Steps

Agree one small next step.

This could be seeking support, making a change, or simply taking some time to reflect.

TIP: Small steps can feel more manageable and build confidence.

Keep in Mind

You are not there to fix the problem.
You are there to support the person.

Respect their boundaries.
They decide what they share.

Keep it confidential.
Only share if there is a risk of harm.

Look after yourself too.
Supporting others can be emotionally demanding.

Conversation Checklist

- Choose the right time and place
- Start with care and curiosity
- Listen without interrupting
- Show empathy and understanding
- Avoid judgement and assumptions
- Help explore options and support
- Agree a small next step
- Follow up and stay connected

You don't need all the answers.
You just need to show up with care.

A few minutes of genuine connection can make a lasting difference.

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Supporting
Beyond the Conversation



A conversation can be the start of positive change. Ongoing support helps people feel valued, connected and empowered.

Here are some ways you can continue to help.

1. Stay Connected

Small check-ins can make a big difference.

- Check in regularly and naturally.
- A simple "How are you doing?" can go a long way.
- Notice when things seem off and ask if they're okay.
- Show genuine interest in how they're doing.

Consistency shows people they matter – not just when things are difficult.

2. Signpost and Support

You don't need all the answers.

- Share information about available support services.
- Offer to help them find the right resources.
- Encourage professional support if needed.
- Respect their choices and their pace.

Knowing where to turn can make a big difference when someone is struggling.

3. Encourage a Supportive Environment

Culture starts with all of us.

- Celebrate small wins and strengths.
- Promote kindness, respect and inclusion.
- Challenge stigma and encourage open conversations.
- Be a role model for positive wellbeing.

A supportive culture helps everyone feel safe, valued and connected.

Everyone Has Good Days and Difficult Days

It's okay to not be okay sometimes. We all have times when we struggle. What matters is knowing we're not alone and that support is available.

You don't have to fix it.
You just have to care.

Look After Yourself Too

Supporting others is important, but so is looking after your own wellbeing.

- Know your limits
- Take breaks
- Manage stress
- Seek support for yourself

You can't pour from an empty cup. Self-care helps you show up for others.

Together, we build stronger, healthier workplaces.

When we support each other, we create a culture where everyone can thrive.

One conversation. Lasting impact.



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Building a Supportive Team Culture



A supportive culture doesn't happen by chance. It's built through everyday actions, shared values and a commitment to looking after one another.

Here are practical ways to build a workplace where everyone can thrive.

1. Lead by Example

Leaders set the tone for culture. Show you value wellbeing by how you communicate, decide and behave.

- Be open about the importance of wellbeing
- Model healthy behaviours
- Admit it's okay not to be okay
- Listen as much as you speak

2. Encourage Open Conversations

Create safe spaces for people to speak up without fear of judgement.

- Normalise conversations about mental health
- Check in regularly
- Use inclusive, non-judgemental language
- Act on what you hear

3. Build Strong Connections

Good relationships are at the heart of a healthy, high-performing team.

- Encourage collaboration and teamwork
- Celebrate successes together
- Support each other
- Make time for each other

4. Recognise and Appreciate

Recognition boosts morale and reinforces positive behaviour.

- Say thank you
- Acknowledge effort, not just results
- Celebrate small wins
- Make appreciation a habit

5. Support Growth and Development

When people feel supported to grow, they feel valued and motivated.

- Offer learning opportunities
- Support career development
- Encourage strengths
- Give constructive feedback

6. Promote Balance and Wellbeing

A healthy work–life balance leads to happier, more resilient teams.

- Respect boundaries
- Encourage breaks and time off
- Be flexible where possible
- Provide access to support

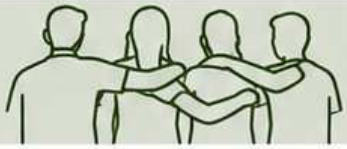
> "A positive culture doesn't just improve wellbeing – it drives engagement, performance and retention."

Small Actions. Big Impact.

- A kind word can lift someone's day
- A quick check-in can prevent a crisis
- A supportive team creates stronger results
- A positive culture attracts great people
- Together, we can create workplaces where everyone thrives

We're Stronger Together

When we support one another, we create a workplace where everyone feels they belong – and everyone can achieve their best.



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Looking After Your Own Wellbeing

You can't pour from an empty cup.
Taking care of your own wellbeing enables you to show up with more patience, empathy and resilience.

Small, consistent actions make a big difference.

1. Be Kind to Yourself

Treat yourself with the same compassion you show to others.

- Speak to yourself with kindness
- Celebrate small wins
- Let go of perfection

2. Set Boundaries

Protect your time, energy and mental space.

- Learn to say no
- Take regular breaks
- Disconnect from work when you can

3. Recharge Regularly

Rest is not a reward, it's a necessity.

- Prioritise sleep
- Take time to do what you enjoy
- Notice what helps you recharge

4. Look After Your Body

Physical wellbeing supports mental resilience.

- Move your body
- Eat nourishing food
- Stay hydrated

5. Stay Connected

Connection is a powerful protective factor.

- Reach out to people you trust
- Talk about how you're feeling
- Build and nurture relationships

6. Practice Mindfulness and Reflection

Take time to pause, reflect and be present.

- Focus on what you can control
- Spend time in the present
- Reflect on what matters most

Remember

It's okay to not be okay. You don't have to have it all together all the time.

Looking after yourself
helps you look after others.

Check In With Yourself

Ask yourself regularly:

- How am I feeling today?
- What do I need right now?
- What is one thing I can do for myself today?
- Who can I talk to if I need support?

Need Support?

If you're struggling, please reach out. Support is available.

- Call your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Talk to a trusted colleague, manager or friend
- Contact a professional service or helpline

You matter. Your wellbeing matters.

When you take care of yourself, you build the strength to make a positive impact on others and your workplace.

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Managing Stress in the Workplace



Stress is a normal part of life, but when it becomes constant, it can affect our wellbeing, relationships and performance.

These practical strategies can help you manage stress and maintain your balance.

1. Understand Your Triggers

Awareness is the first step in managing stress.

- Notice what causes stress for you
- Identify patterns and warning signs
- Reflect on your thoughts and reactions

2. Pause and Take a Breath

A moment of pause can help reset your mind.

- Use slow, deep breathing
- Try the 4-4-4 breathing technique
- Step away when you feel overwhelmed

3. Prioritise and Plan

Clear priorities reduce pressure and increase focus.

- Focus on what you can control
- Break tasks into smaller steps
- Let go of non-essentials

4. Move Your Body

Physical activity is a powerful stress reliever.

- Go for a walk
- Stretch or try gentle exercise
- Stand and move regularly

5. Connect with Others

Talking and sharing can help lift the burden.

- Reach out to someone you trust
- Listen and be present
- Don't be afraid to ask for help

6. Look After Yourself

Self-care is not selfish. It is essential.

- Get enough sleep
- Enjoy activities that recharge you
- Be kind to yourself

Quick Stress Reset

Breathe
Take 3 slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Notice
Look around and name 5 things you can see.

Refocus
Bring your attention back to what matters most.

Small pauses. Big impact.

Stress Awareness Checklist

- Am I feeling more tired than usual?
- Am I finding it hard to concentrate?
- Am I feeling irritable or impatient?
- Am I neglecting self-care?
- Am I working long hours with little breaks?
- Am I feeling overwhelmed?

If you answered yes to any of these, it may be time to pause and take care of you.

Need Support?

- Talk to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines
- Seek professional support if you need it

Support is a sign of strength.

You don't have to manage stress alone.

By looking after your wellbeing, you show up stronger for yourself and for others.



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Having Meaningful Conversations



Conversations have the power to build trust, strengthen relationships and support wellbeing. It's not about having all the answers. It's about showing up, listening and caring.

Here are some ways to have conversations that make a real difference.

1. Listen Actively

Listening shows you value the person and what they say.

- Give your full attention
- Avoid interrupting
- Reflect back what you hear
- Show empathy and understanding

2. Ask Open Questions

Open questions encourage honest and meaningful conversations.

- Use who, what, how, when, why
- Invite them to share more
- Be curious, not critical
- Avoid yes or no questions

3. Show Empathy

Empathy builds trust and connection.

- Acknowledge their feelings
- Put yourself in their shoes
- Use kind and supportive words
- Let them know it's okay to feel that way

4. Create a Safe Space

People open up when they feel safe and respected.

- Keep conversations private
- Respect their experiences
- Avoid judgement
- Be calm, patient and present

5. Offer Support, Not Solutions

Sometimes, people just need to be heard.

- Ask what they need
- Offer support, not advice
- Empower them to find their own way
- Be there, not in charge

6. Follow Up

Checking in shows you care.

- Ask how they're doing
- Keep the door open
- Celebrate progress
- Be consistent and reliable

Conversation Starters

- How are you really doing?
- What's been on your mind lately?
- How can I best support you?

Small questions. Big impact.

Good conversations don't just happen.

- **They build trust**
- **They strengthen relationships**
- **They support wellbeing and performance**

Start the conversation. See the difference.

Need Support?

- Speak to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines

Support is available.

You're not alone. We're here for you.

Real conversations. Real connections. Real impact.

When we talk, listen and support each other, we create a workplace where everyone can thrive.



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Supporting Others During Change

Change is a part of every workplace. How we support each other through it can make all the difference.

Here are practical ways to support your colleagues during times of change.

1. Acknowledge Their Experience

People need to feel seen and understood.

- Recognise that change can be challenging
- Validate how they feel
- Say "It's okay to find this difficult"

2. Communicate Clearly

Clear and honest information reduces uncertainty.

- Share what is known
- Be honest about what is not known
- Keep people updated regularly

3. Listen and Involve

Involvement builds trust and commitment.

- Ask for input and ideas
- Listen to concerns
- Show how feedback makes a difference

4. Provide Reassurance

Reassurance helps people feel more secure.

- Focus on the positives
- Highlight support available
- Remind people of their strengths and past successes

5. Offer Practical Support

Practical support helps people manage change more easily.

- Provide training and resources
- Offer time to adjust
- Check in and offer help when needed

6. Be Patient and Kind

Adjustment takes time for everyone.

- Be patient with reactions and behaviour
- Offer encouragement
- Celebrate small wins together

Change is a Journey

Everyone experiences change differently. Support, understanding and kindness help us move forward together.

Together, we can make change positive.

How People May Feel During Change

- Uncertain
- Worried or anxious
- Overwhelmed
- Frustrated or resistant
- Hopeful and motivated

All feelings are normal. Support makes a difference.

Need Support?

- Talk to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines
- Support is available. *You're not alone.*

When we support each other through change, we create a stronger, more resilient workplace.
Small actions. Big difference.



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Promoting Wellbeing Every Day



Wellbeing is not just a programme or policy.
It is something we build into our everyday ways of working.
When wellbeing is prioritised, everyone benefits.

Small, consistent actions can create a healthier, happier and more productive workplace.

1. Make Wellbeing a Priority

When leaders prioritise wellbeing, it sends a clear message that people matter.

- Talk about wellbeing openly
- Include wellbeing in plans
- Lead by example
- Show that it is valued

2. Create Supportive Environments

A positive environment helps people feel safe, respected and included.

- Encourage respect and kindness
- Promote inclusion and diversity
- Listen and act on feedback
- Celebrate successes together

3. Encourage Healthy Habits

Healthy habits support physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

- Encourage regular breaks
- Promote movement
- Support healthy eating
- Encourage good sleep habits

4. Provide Resources

Access to the right resources helps people manage challenges.

- Share wellbeing resources
- Offer training and workshops
- Provide access to support
- Signpost help when needed

5. Build Strong Connections

Positive connections reduce stress and increase engagement.

- Encourage teamwork
- Create opportunities to connect
- Support peer to peer support
- Check in with each other

6. Review and Keep Improving

Wellbeing is an ongoing journey. Keep learning and adapting.

- Ask for feedback
- Review what is working
- Make improvements
- Keep wellbeing on the agenda

Wellbeing at Work Means:

- Happier, healthier people
- Better engagement and performance
- Lower absence and turnover
- A positive workplace culture

When people thrive, organisations thrive.

Wellbeing starts with all of us

- **Look after yourself**
- **Support your colleagues**
- **Create a positive environment**
- **Make wellbeing part of everyday work**

Small actions. Lasting impact.

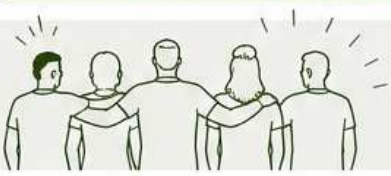
Need Support?

- Talk to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines
- Support is available. You are not alone.

Reach out. We are here for you.

Wellbeing is everyone's responsibility.

When we care for ourselves and each other, we create a workplace where everyone can thrive.



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The Power of Kindness



Small acts of kindness make a big difference.
A kinder workplace is a healthier, happier and more productive place for everyone.

Let's make kindness part of everyday work.

1. Be Kind in Your Words

A few kind words can brighten someone's day.

- Speak with respect
- Choose encouragement
- Be thoughtful and positive

2. Notice and Acknowledge

People feel valued when they are seen and heard.

- Say thank you
- Recognise effort and progress
- Celebrate small wins

3. Offer Help

A little support can make a big difference.

- Be there for your colleagues
- Share your knowledge
- Lend a hand when you can

4. Be Inclusive

Kindness means making everyone feel they belong.

- Welcome different views
- Include others
- Treat everyone with respect

5. Check In

A simple "How are you?" can mean more than you think.

- Take time to ask
- Really listen
- Show you care

6. Lead by Example

Kindness creates a positive culture for all.

- Be the change you want to see
- Encourage others to be kind
- Make kindness part of everyday work

Kindness Matters

- Builds better working relationships
- Reduces stress and improves wellbeing
- Increases engagement and performance
- Creates a positive workplace culture

Small actions. Big impact.

Kindness Starts with You

- Be kind in your words
- Notice others
- Offer your support
- Make kindness a daily habit

A kinder workplace is a stronger workplace.

Need Support?

- Talk to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines
- Support is available. You are not alone.

Kindness makes a difference.

Let's make kindness part of everyday work.
Better for you. Better for your colleagues.
Better for our workplace.

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Building Resilience Together



Resilient teams are better equipped to handle challenges, adapt to change and achieve success. Resilience is not about avoiding stress, it is about growing through it.

Here are some ways to build resilience in yourself and your team.

1. Develop a Positive Mindset

A positive mindset helps you stay focused and hopeful.

- Focus on what you can control
- Look for the opportunities
- Practice gratitude daily

2. Set Realistic Goals

Small, achievable goals build confidence and motivation.

- Break goals into smaller steps
- Celebrate progress
- Adjust when needed

3. Build Strong Relationships

Supportive relationships help us through tough times.

- Connect with your colleagues
- Offer and ask for support
- Value different perspectives

4. Look After Your Wellbeing

Taking care of yourself builds inner strength.

- Get enough sleep
- Eat well and stay active
- Take regular breaks

5. Learn and Adapt

Learning from experiences helps you grow stronger.

- Reflect on what you learn
- Be open to change
- Keep developing new skills

6. Stay Calm and Focused

Managing stress helps you think clearly and act wisely.

- Use breathing or grounding techniques
- Take one step at a time
- Focus on the present moment

Resilience in Action

- We face challenges with confidence
- We learn, adapt and keep growing
- We support each other and stay connected
- We achieve more together

Stronger together.

Signs of a Resilient Team

- **They communicate openly**
- **They stay positive and solution focused**
- **They support each other**
- **They adapt well to change**
- **They celebrate progress and learn from setbacks**

Resilience is a team strength.

Need Support?

- Talk to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines
- Support is available. You are not alone.

It's okay to ask for help.

Resilience is built together.

When we support each other, we create a workplace where everyone can thrive, no matter what challenges come our way.



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Final Thoughts



Meaningful conversations, small acts of kindness and supportive behaviours create a workplace where everyone can feel valued, motivated and empowered.

We all have a role to play in building a positive, supportive and thriving workplace.

Six ways we can make a lasting impact together

1. Start Conversations

Reach out, listen and create space for open dialogue.

- Ask how someone is really doing
- Be present and give your full attention
- Check in, even if it's just a quick hello

2. Show You Care

Small gestures can have a powerful impact.

- Offer support when needed
- Notice the little things
- A kind word can go a long way

3. Work Together

Collaboration and connection help teams thrive.

- Share ideas and celebrate wins
- Support each other's success
- We're stronger when we work together

4. Create a Positive Culture

Our culture is shaped by everyone, every day.

- Treat others with respect
- Be inclusive and value differences
- Help create a safe space for everyone

5. Keep Growing

Learning and feedback help us all improve.

- Be open to new ideas
- Learn from feedback
- Keep developing yourself and others

6. Make Wellbeing a Priority

When we look after ourselves and others, we all benefit.

- Take care of your wellbeing
- Encourage balance and boundaries
- Look out for your colleagues and offer support

Everyday Kindness Ideas

- Say thank you
- Offer a genuine compliment
- Check in with a colleague
- Celebrate others' achievements
- Show appreciation

Kindness is free. Impact is priceless.

Keep These in Mind

- We never know what someone else is going through
- A listening ear can make a world of difference
- Small actions create big impact
- You have the power to make someone's day better
- Together, we build a workplace where everyone can thrive

Be the reason someone feels seen, supported and valued.

Need Support?

- Talk to your manager or a trusted colleague
- Use your organisation's Employee Assistance Programme
- Access mental health resources and helplines
- Support is available. You are not alone.

Help is here. You matter.

Let's continue to support, inspire and uplift each other.

When we connect with compassion, communicate with respect and act with kindness, we create a workplace where everyone can do their best work and feel proud to be part of.

People. Connection. Impact. *That's the Secure Cortex way.*

