



## Getting the best from your support people.

At Ea [AUT's employee advisory and resolutions service], we encourage you to have support during any meeting with us or one we facilitate that involves other parties.

Supporting people is important because their presence can comfort you. They are also an extra set of ears so you can debrief the experience afterwards. Sometimes, support people help you by reframing challenging information and by helping you hear things in ways that help you make sense of the other person's issues and interests.

### **Ea works through a series of consensual processes.**

Our approach at Ea is to foster a consensual process. This means that when we bring people together, it's important that everyone is there by choice. In some cases, individuals may choose to bring a friend, family member, or colleague to provide a sense of safety and support. As part of this consensual process, it's essential that everyone in the room is aware of who will be present. Therefore, we kindly request that you inform us in advance of any support person you plan to bring.

### **The ideal support person.**

... is someone you know well and trust. If you choose a friend, they must keep the information confidential. Coordinating meetings around everyone's schedule is usually challenging, so picking someone with some flexibility is important.

#### *The Colleague:*

When considering a colleague as a support person, it's important to remember the consensual nature of this process. We may inquire about the potential impact your colleague could have on the other parties involved. For instance, if your chosen support person happens to be their line manager, this could pose a challenge. While it's not a deal-breaker for Ea, it could be for the other parties. Therefore, it's crucial to consider these dynamics when selecting a colleague as your support person.

#### *A Relative:*

Because relatives are well-known to you, having them there adds a helpful dimension of accountability for everyone at the meeting. Relatives know you well, so when it comes to ongoing support on the issue, you have them on tap into the future. For the other people in the room, it conveys that because they know you so well, your strengths and weaknesses add to your accountability. This happens when relatives chip in with more personal commentary. This can add strength to your story and any plans for finding a remedy for the problem. At Ea, we are also in tune with the secondary conflict that work issues bring to the home. We encourage people to think carefully about this when asking a relative to support them in a meeting and to seek help via AUT's employee assistance programme.

#### *Union Delegate:*

Union delegates and fellow union members make excellent support people. Everyone should consider whether a delegate represents the interests of everyone in the room. Are they neglecting their responsibility to the other person by attending with you? Without understanding this, the union's presence can be very powerful. We will work with everyone involved so that this power is not weaponised to the detriment of participants.

## **The less ideal support person.**

### *The avenging angel:*

Anyone who will smite all negative commentary about you may damage the process and even strengthen the notion that you don't want the issue resolved. [Don't bring an avenging angel].

### *Line manager:*

It's good to realise that while the conversations in our processes are confidential, informal, independent, and impartial, anything a line manager hears cannot be unheard, so you might not like your line manager involved. For this reason, asking the other person's line manager to be involved can be a major turn-off for them.

However, that's not to say you shouldn't have them. It's good to discuss it in advance to negotiate how and when line managers are best involved in the process.

As an aside, many disputes have relevant implications for line managers. This means they may already be involved, so their presence in a meeting means they could not then act as support for anyone, as they are already involved with their own experience of what happened. Most often, managers in this situation would attend as an additional party with issues and interests of their own.

### *Advocates, Lawyers, Barristers:*

Legal counsel fulfils a very special role in dispute resolution. They act as advocates and sometimes do the talking for their clients. If you are bringing a lawyer, this changes the style of the meeting. That's ok. We must know this to let the other people know, as they may need their lawyer. If your lawyer support person merely accompanies you, not as counsel, it's good for us to know this. Choose wisely, as some of our processes may preclude them from acting for you later.

### *Power figures [Red flag!!]:*

Picking someone based on their public reputation or stature in the community can be a powerful attribute for you. However, it may also contribute to insecurity for other people. We will work with everyone to ensure the support people are an asset to the process, not a distraction to the meeting's aims.

## **Changing your mind and maintaining the no surprises.**

If you had previously declined the opportunity to have support but then changed your mind, that's okay. Just inform us of this so we can let the other participants know. Surprises at the meeting can signal that you cannot be trusted. This is not foundational to finding peace and remedies to the challenges you are bringing to the table. If you change the support person, this can disrupt the meeting, too. Keeping us in the loop is paramount.

Meeting protocol. Support people are generally silent. This is because the issues belong to the participants. If the support person has any skin in the game, they can become a party to the issues discussed. This change to the dynamic of the meeting can affect the meeting and be detrimental to your effort to find a remedy. Someone who will have skin-in-the-game is a witness to any behaviour you want to challenge. If you want to bring a witness, talk to us about that. It may be important to have them there, but let's not confuse things by attempting to have them as support people.

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For questions and further information, please contact:

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Code of Ethics for the Organisational Ombuds:

[IOA Standards of Practice & Code of Ethics \(ombudsassociation.org\)](https://ombudsassociation.org)

AUT's employee assistance programme [EAP]

[EAP | Employee Assistance Programme \(sharepoint.com\)](#)