



Emotional side of investigations

Dealing with the emotional side of workplace investigations can be challenging. Here are some strategies and advice to help you manage situations where individuals become upset or angry.

Prepare in advance:

Understand the process: Ensure you have read the investigation process. This will help you handle the situation confidently and calmly.

Anticipate reactions: Consider the potential emotional responses from employees and prepare for how you will address them.

Create a safe environment:

Private setting: Conduct meetings in a private, neutral location where employees feel safe to express their emotions.

Comfortable atmosphere: Ensure the environment is comfortable and free from interruptions.

Communicate effectively:

Be Clear and Direct: Clearly explain the purpose of the investigation and the process involved. Avoid using jargon or complex language.

Listen Actively: Show that you are listening by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and summarising what the employee has said. This demonstrates empathy and understanding.

Manage emotional reactions:

Stay Calm: Remain calm and composed, even if the employee becomes upset or angry. Your demeanour can help de-escalate the situation.

Acknowledge Emotions: Validate the employee's feelings by acknowledging their emotions. For example, "I can see that this situation is very upsetting for you."

Allow Venting: Give the employee space to express their emotions without interruption. Sometimes, allowing them to vent can help them calm down.

Provide support

Offer Resources: Inform the employee about available support resources, such as the University Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

Consider reasonable adjustments and OH support should the employee have a known underlying health condition that may be exacerbated by an investigation. Reasonable adjustments could include scheduling rest breaks in advance of the meeting and sticking to them.

Follow-Up: Check in with the employee after the meeting to see how they are coping and if they need further support.

Maintain professionalism

Set Boundaries: While it's important to be empathetic, maintain professional boundaries. Ensure the conversation stays focused on the investigation.

Avoid Personal Opinions: Refrain from sharing personal opinions or making judgments about the situation.

Self-care

Reflect and Decompress: After dealing with an emotional situation, take time to reflect and decompress. This can help you maintain your own well-being.

Seek Support: If you find the emotional aspects of investigations challenging, consider seeking support from your line manager.

Example scenario

Situation:

An employee becomes visibly upset and starts crying during the investigation meeting.

Response:

Acknowledge the Emotion

- **Empathy:** Show empathy and understanding by acknowledging the employee's feelings. This helps to validate their emotions and demonstrates that you care about their well-being.
- **Example:** "I can see that this is very upsetting for you, and I appreciate you sharing your feelings. It's important to me that you feel heard and supported."

Pause the Meeting

- **Offer a Break:** Suggest taking a short break to allow the employee to gather their thoughts and emotions. This can help them regain composure and feel more comfortable continuing the conversation.
- **Example:** "Would you like to take a short break to gather your thoughts? We can pause for a few minutes and resume when you're ready."

Provide Support

- **Offer Resources:** Inform the employee about available support resources, such as counselling services through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This shows that you are proactive in providing help and care for their emotional well-being.
- **Example:** "If you need someone to talk to, we have counselling services available through our Employee Assistance Program. They can provide support and help you navigate this difficult time."

Resume Calmly

- **Calm and Composed:** After the break, resume the meeting calmly and continue with the investigation. Maintain a composed demeanour to help the employee feel more at ease.
- **Example:** "Thank you for taking a moment. Let's continue with the investigation. If at any point you need another break or support, please let me know."

Example scenario

Situation:

An employee becomes visibly irate during the investigation meeting.

Response:

Stay Calm and Professional

- Maintain a neutral tone and body language.
- Avoid reacting emotionally, even if the employee becomes aggressive or accusatory.
- **Example** "I understand this is a difficult situation. I'm here to listen and work through this with you."

Listen Actively

- Let the employee express their concerns without interruption.
- **Example:** "I understand this is upsetting for you" or "I want to make sure I hear you clearly."

Set Boundaries

- If the behaviour becomes disruptive or abusive, calmly set limits:
Example: "I want to continue this conversation, but I need us to speak respectfully."

Focus on Facts, Not Emotions

- Redirect the conversation to specific incidents, evidence, and timelines and avoid getting drawn into personal grievances or unrelated issues.
- **Example:** "Let's focus on the specific events so we can understand what occurred."

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