

Brief tips about self-care and self-help during a formal process

Common reactions to formal proceedings

Being involved in formal proceedings, either as a witness in a formal procedure such as a disciplinary matter, or dignity at work matter, being subject to a formal investigation or bringing concerns forward about another member of staff, can be a worrying and confusing time. You may experience powerful emotions such as anxiety, anger, confusion, frustration, guilt and shame.

Employees often say that the most difficult part of the process is tolerating uncertainty. You want the process to be over quickly and know the outcome. However, it is important for investigations to be conducted thoroughly and this can take time. The following information provides some tips on self-care and self-help during this process.

What can you do to cope?

- **Inform yourself** –knowing what to expect of the process can help you manage the uncertainty. The Human Resources Department, your union representative and the investigating officer assigned to investigate any case under the disciplinary procedure can answer questions and give you more information. Don't be afraid to ask question and ask for updates and information around timescales.
- **Acknowledge the need for formality** – your relationship with your manager, and colleagues may change for the duration of the process. You will have been informed that you cannot discuss the investigation with anyone except the Investigating Officer, your trade union representative or the Human Resources Department. This can make relationships difficult to navigate. Some relationships that may have been friendly and informal may now seem strained and artificial and people with whom you had close working relationships may not now be available to you in the same way. This is not a judgement or a rejection. This is due to the constraints place on people in order to ensure that impartiality can be maintained.
- **Seek support from those around you.** Not speaking about the process you are involved in does not mean that you have to cut off all contact with friends and colleagues. In fact, it's really important to keep in touch with your support network as social isolation can led to low mood and depression.
- **Prepare what to say to people who ask questions.** People are often unsure about what to say to colleagues, friends and family. People around you may be curious and you might worry that there are rumours circulating. This can be frustrating and you might feel the urge to speak up and defend yourself. However, it is important to adhere to the instruction not to talk about the case, as doing so could jeopardise the procedure.. It may help to have a sentence or two prepared, in case you are asked by your colleagues. For example statements such as *“this is a difficult time for me and I would like to*

keep in touch but please understand that I can't speak about certain things" communicates that you want to maintain contact despite the restrictions placed upon you. People who genuinely want to support you will understand. Speak to HR, your trade union representative or the investigating officer about ideas for a standard response.

- **Keep busy.** If you are the subject of a formal investigation, and are subsequently suspended for the duration of the investigation, you may find you have a lot more time on your hands. Having a routine can really help. Finding activities that bring you pleasure can take your mind off the process and help to lift your mood.
- **Practise self-compassion.** Self-compassion involves being aware of your own pain and suffering, and understanding that this is a hard, but normal human experience. When you feel threatened practicing self-compassion can help soothe you.

Self-help resources

Worry and rumination	https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/RuminationWorry.pdf
Unhelpful Thinking Habits	https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/UnhelpfulThinkingHabitsWithAlternatives.pdf
Tolerating Uncertainty	https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/APPLE.pdf
Five Ways to Wellbeing	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/

When should a person seek more help?

If, after some time, you are still experiencing the following difficulties, it is a good idea to visit your GP for advice:

- ◆ Feeling upset and fearful most of the time
- ◆ Having deteriorating relationship difficulties
- ◆ Using drugs or drinking too much
- ◆ Still not being able to stop thinking the allegations
- ◆ Still not being able to enjoy life at all

You may also wish to self-refer to EWS where you will be offered a 1-hour resource appointment with a counsellor. The object of this will be to discuss your wellbeing and explore the options available to you. Email employee.wellbeing@wales.nhs.uk or call 02920744465.

If you are in crisis, experiencing active suicidal thought or at risk of causing harm to self or others you can make an appointment with your GP, or if urgent help is required you can contact the out of hours GP. If you need an emergency service such as an ambulance call 999.