



Cyber Kindness

Kindness is a security control

CHALLENGE IDEAS. RESPECT PEOPLE. RAISE STANDARDS.

A CYBER KINDNESS RESOURCE

Conversation Guide for Leaders

Leaders set the tone, and a kinder culture is built one honest conversation at a time.

The way you respond to behaviour, give feedback and check in all shape whether people feel safe to speak, contribute and stay. This guide offers practical ways to handle those conversations well. Use it as a starting point and adapt the wording so it sounds like you.

Principles for These Conversations

- **Prepare.** Know what you want to say and the outcome you are hoping for.
- **Be specific.** Talk about behaviour and its impact, not personality.
- **Listen more than you speak.** Give people room to be heard.
- **Stay calm and kind.** You can be firm and warm at the same time.
- **Follow up.** A single conversation rarely fixes things on its own.

Addressing Behaviour That Crossed a Line

When a comment or conduct has caused harm, name it early and clearly. Letting it pass tells everyone it is acceptable.

Try saying. *"I want to talk about something I noticed earlier. The comment about that landed badly, and I do not think it was fair on the person it was aimed at. Can we talk about it?"*

- I know it may have been meant as a joke, but it had an impact.
- Here is what I need to see from now on.

Try to avoid. Dismissing it as banter, having the conversation in front of others or letting too much time pass.

Checking In With Someone Who Seems Withdrawn

If someone has gone quiet, seems disengaged or is not themselves, a gentle check in shows you have noticed and you care.

Try saying. *"I have noticed you have seemed a bit quiet lately and I wanted to check in. How are you doing, really?"*

- There is no pressure to share, but I am here if you want to.

- Is there anything getting in the way that I can help with?

Try to avoid. Making assumptions, trying to diagnose or pushing for answers. If someone is struggling, gently point them towards appropriate support.

Responding When Someone Reports Being Treated Badly

How you respond to a report shapes whether anyone ever tells you anything again. Take it seriously from the first moment.

Try saying. *"Thank you for telling me. That took courage and I am taking it seriously. Let me explain what happens next."*

- You are not in trouble for raising this.
- I will keep you informed as much as I can.

Try to avoid. Minimising it, promising outcomes you cannot guarantee or leaving the person without a clear next step. Protect them from retaliation.

Building Safety So People Speak Up

People only raise concerns and admit mistakes when it feels safe to do so. You build that safety in everyday moments, not just in a crisis.

Try saying. *"I would rather hear about a problem early than find out about it late. If something is not working, tell me. You will not be blamed for being honest."*

- What is something we are getting wrong that I might not see?
- Thank you for flagging that, it really helps.

Try to avoid. Reacting badly to bad news, which quietly teaches people to stop bringing it to you.

Giving Challenging Feedback Without Humiliation

Honest feedback is a kindness when it is done with respect. Challenge the work, never the worth of the person.

Try saying. *"I want to give you some honest feedback because I think you can do this really well. Here is what is not quite working, and here is what would help."*

- This is about the work, not about you.
- What support would make this easier?

Try to avoid. Feedback in front of others, vague criticism or letting frustration drive the conversation.

Owning It When You Get Something Wrong

Leaders who admit mistakes give everyone else permission to do the same. Modelling accountability is one of the strongest tools you have.

Try saying. *"I got that wrong, and I want to acknowledge it. Here is what I have learned and what I will do differently."*

- Thank you for being patient with me on this.
- Please tell me if I do it again.

Try to avoid. Defensiveness, excuses or quietly moving on as if nothing happened.

Phrases to Keep Handy

- Thank you for telling me.
- How are you doing, really?
- This is about the work, not about you.
- You will not be blamed for being honest.
- Here is what happens next.
- I got that wrong.

A Final Word

None of these conversations need to be perfect. What matters is that they happen, and that people see you trying. That is how a kinder and safer culture takes hold.

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A Cyber Kindness resource. www.cyberkindness.org.uk