

# The five-minute manager conversation

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For the first time an employee tells you they're struggling with symptoms. You do not need to be a clinician. You need to listen, offer options, and follow up.

## Before the conversation

- Book a private room or a walking meeting. Not a glass office.
- Turn off notifications. Put your phone away.
- Have your calendar open so you can offer concrete adjustments in the moment.

## Openers that work

*"Thanks for telling me. What would be most helpful right now?"*

*"I don't need details. I just need to know what would make this week easier."*

*"You're the expert on your body. I'm here to make work flex around what you need."*

## Things to avoid

- "Have you tried..." — no unsolicited advice, ever.
- "My wife/mother/sister had it and..." — their experience is not the template.
- "Is it really that bad?" — believe them.
- Any comment on their appearance, weight, mood, or age.

## Offer options, not diagnoses

Have three or four ready adjustments you can offer on the spot. Examples:

- Flex start/finish for the next [2] weeks — no explanation needed.
- Camera-off in internal meetings.
- A desk fan and a cooler workspace.
- Paid time to attend medical appointments.
- A quiet room they can use when needed.

## Close the loop

- Agree what happens next and by when.
- Confirm what will and won't be shared with HR.
- Send a short written follow-up: what you agreed, what you'll do, who else knows.

- Book a 15-minute check-in two weeks out.

### **If they cry**

Pass the tissues. Wait. Do not fill the silence. Then say: "Take your time. There's no rush." Grief, rage, and relief all show up in these conversations. Your job is not to fix the feeling — it's to make the person feel heard.

### **If they mention discrimination or a hostile environment**

Stop, listen, and document. Tell them their options for formal escalation, and that you will support the route they choose. Do not promise confidentiality you cannot keep.

### **One question to end with**

*"What would make this week 10 percent easier?"*

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Unbranded script. Adapt freely for internal use. Not legal advice.