

Raising concerns in your workplace: A toolkit for team discussions

This toolkit is designed to assist you in discussing the importance of raising concerns (whistleblowing) within your team or place of work. It consists of:

- a framework for preparing and implementing a team discussion
- four case studies for discussion.

Purpose of the team discussion

Guidance or policies on raising and escalating concerns are only useful if staff understand what they mean in their daily working lives. It is helpful to set aside some time to meet and discuss these in order to give all staff and managers the opportunity to:

- identify and manage risks (either actual or theoretical) that could put someone at risk of harm
- seek views from staff about how those risks should be managed
- discuss the value of an open and accountable workplace
- identify who is the nominated person within your local team or workplace to lead on the implementation of raising concerns guidance
- make all staff feel comfortable and confident to raise a concern about the safety of those in their care or other risks
- identify the designated person within your organisation to whom staff can raise or escalate a concern
- commit to managing concerns fairly and professionally and to protecting and supporting staff who raise a genuine concern
- understand the importance of what action to take and where to go when the usual channels of communication do not work for whatever reason.

Preparing for a team discussion

To prepare for the team discussion, you should:

- read your employer's raising concerns or whistleblowing policy
- read the NMC guidance and the case studies included in this toolkit
- if you have local staff-side representation, tell them what you are working on, and invite them to attend the meeting
- find out who is the designated person for staff within your organisation to whom concerns can be raised and invite them to attend
- ask all attendees to read your employer's raising concerns or whistleblowing policy and the NMC guidance.

Using the case studies

Choose a case study and work through it, allowing sufficient time for discussion between each stage. Questions which might be useful to consider throughout the case study discussion are:

- What went wrong?
- Why?
- What could or should have been done differently?
- How would a pre-existing policy, on how and to whom a concern can be raised, have helped?

Questions for general discussion

The following questions may help you guide the overall discussion:

- To what extent do you think your colleagues (for example receptionists, nurses, midwives, nursing associate, students or other health care professionals) would be prepared to speak up if they were concerned about the likelihood of something going wrong in their workplace or an actual incident?
- Why is it important to raise concerns early?
- Why might someone initially want to speak in private about a concern?
- What difficulties may arise for your workplace or for staff when a concern is not raised openly?
- What difficulties may arise for your workplace or for staff if a concern is raised, but not addressed?

- Why is it important to feed back to the person who has raised the concern about what action has been taken?
- Why is it important for staff to know they can contact the designated person in the organisation?
- Why is it important to tell staff they can seek independent confidential advice from Public Concern at Work, their professional body or trade union?
- Where is the best place for the poster to be displayed?

Agreeing your policy and briefing staff

Review your raising concerns (whistleblowing) policy and ensure employment contracts do not send a contrary message. Staff may have identified particular risks worth incorporating but remember not to be too prescriptive as you may not yet know what risks your practice area faces.

- Select a range of staff to read the policy. Ask them if it is clear and if they know what to do. Do they have any suggestions to make?
- Ensure that contact details for the designated person in your organisation are correct.
- Consider how to regularly convey the simple messages of acceptable conduct, good practice, and early and open communication.
- Agree the final policy, set action points and review them at each team meeting.

Promoting the importance of raising concerns

- Display the poster prominently.
- Make raising concerns part of staff induction and ensure new staff see the poster.
- Confirm your organisation's commitment to a culture where raising and escalating concerns is openly encouraged.
- Review arrangements for raising concerns at least once a year.