Managing for Good Performance:  
A Guide for Managers

The primary objective of these procedures is to assist management to identify and address concerns about an employee’s performance and/or behaviour in order for the employee to reach and maintain a satisfactory standard of performance.
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INTRODUCTION

Education and care services aim to meet the care, education and development needs of children. There are a range of different models of education and care services in New South Wales and most of these are licensed by the NSW Department of Education and Communities. Education and care services are grouped into six broad categories: centre based long day care, family day care, occasional care, preschools, outside school hours care and non-mainstream services such as mobile services and Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services.

Progressing on from best practice principles in the recruitment of staff as outlined in the Recruitment and Selection Guide, the primary objective of these procedures is to assist managers within the various services to identify and address concerns about an employee’s performance and/or behaviour in order for the employee to reach and/or maintain a satisfactory standard of performance. The procedures also aim to promote the professional and personal values and behaviours required of all employees.

‘Managing for good performance’ is a process that commences with the recruitment and induction of an employee and involves an ongoing cycle of planning, coaching and reviewing individual, teamwork and organisational performance within the context of the individual service’s goals and strategies. Where managing employee performance is part of an ongoing process rather than just as an annual performance review, it allows early identification of systemic, environmental or individual factors that may affect the ability of an individual, team or organisation, to achieve results.

These procedures contain detailed information about the process to be followed by management when addressing concerns about an employee’s performance and/or behaviour and include practical tools and tips including templates and example documents. This document and associated training complements information provide under the section Performance Management and Appraisal within The Manual – Managing a Children’s Service’ provided by Community Child Care Co-operative NSW.

In the context of this document the term ‘management’ is used to refer to both managers and supervisors. The procedures cover the following topics:

Managing Performance

- New employees from induction onwards
- Managing existing employees
- Organisational factors to consider when managing employee performance
- Addressing day to day and minor workplace issues

Providing Feedback

- Feedback principles and techniques/workplace counselling techniques
- Managing those difficult conversations
PART 1

Overview

Employees performing to the best of their ability are critical to the ongoing success of any business. On the flip side, poor employee performance can have a significant impact on a business, its customers and other employees and can be felt in terms of low morale, low productivity and high turnover.

The key to managing employee performance is to ensure role clarity for all employees and set and agree on performance standards from the onset of an employee’s engagement.

A simple tool that managers can use as an employee performance management strategy from the engagement of an employee is to follow the steps of a ‘performance cycle’. This process is also relevant for use with existing employees as a part of an ongoing performance review process.

A suggested simple 6 stage self-explanatory performance cycle is shown below.

By communicating and adopting the principles of a performance cycle, everyone is clear on expectations and standards and employees are provided ongoing feedback on their performance at each stage i.e. during orientation/induction and during additional job skills training and coaching and through a formal review process used to discuss work performance and enable appropriate recognition and rewards to be given.

Performance cycle
Benefits of following a performance cycle

For management

- Enables performance expectations, standards and goals to be discussed.
- Provides the opportunity to discuss goals and career development with staff individually and to review performance within clear and agreed guidelines in a structured and planned way.
- Provides a reminder for management of the need to follow an induction/orientation program with all new employees.
- Provides the opportunity for positive and productive communication with all employees on an ongoing basis.
- Provides the capacity to improve the link between individual performance and functions and the organisation’s goals and expectations.
- Demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to ongoing staff development.
- Provides an opportunity to recognise and reward employees.

For employees

- Ensures that employees understand what is expected of them in terms of work performance and the standard of work performance required.
- Provides the opportunity for staff to negotiate their own professional performance and career development.
- Improved motivation and job satisfaction.
- Recognition of achievements and feedback on performance.
- Provides the opportunity for positive and productive communication between management and staff member in a structured way.

The new kid on the block

DESCRIPTION: A new employee who does not know what is expected. They do not have the knowledge to execute the job well.

ACTION: Clarify and teach employees the standards you want them to meet, demonstrate the skills to them and allow them to practice. Give them feedback to reinforce what they do correctly and address what they incorrectly.
Determining and communicating expectations

Under a performance cycle an effective method of determining and communicating expectations between management and employees is to develop an agreed Work Plan at an early stage of the working relationship and using that as a key tool in monitoring performance, providing feedback and for identifying development needs.

A Work Plan template is included as an appendix with these procedures.

Developing an agreed Work Plan

Performance Objectives

Development of Work Plans will involve two aspects, the establishment of Performance Objectives and the negotiation of expected outcomes. Objective setting is the key component of the Work Plan as clear objectives help employees understand what they are expected to do and by when. Objectives provide an opportunity for employees to grow by increasing confidence as competency is achieved and extended. Objectives should be realistic but also provide an opportunity for the employee to grow and develop skills, knowledge and experience.

Objectives should be set during a formal meeting between a manager and an employee. The aim of the meeting is to clarify the objectives of the individual and the relationship these objectives have in contributing to the overall goals and priorities of the company. At this meeting the manager and employee establish clear objectives and determine how and when objectives will be met. This information will come from the Job Description or other organisational standards to be met. Six to eight objectives are generally set with a number of generic objectives that all employees need to meet eg around the organisation’s values, workplace health and safety and communication skills required.

Development Objectives

Once Performance Objectives under the Work Plan have been set, Development Objectives should be established, such as completion of a course of study or on the job training. This will assist the employee in reaching their Performance Objectives and goals.

Coaching may also be provided to support an employee in reaching a goal or gaining a specific skill. Coaching includes proactive action such as providing one on one guidance, advice, encouragement, reviews and feedback and may be provided by the direct manager or another suitably skilled person.

Career Planning

The ultimate responsibility for developing an individual’s career rests with the individual. An agreed Work Plan however, can help employees review their present position, and assess and consider where they would like their career to head in the future. This is also an opportunity for management to plan individual and the organisations succession planning processes. The agreed Work Plan will also provide employees with the opportunity to gain feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. By undertaking activities that provide an opportunity to address weaknesses, employees can identify and
develop competencies in areas that may lead to further career opportunities. Constant and timely reviews and feedback will ensure that the final 12 month review and performance rating will not deliver any unexpected results to the employee.

**New Employees**

The preparation of a Work Plan and establishment of objectives should be part of a new employee’s induction/orientation program and undertaken within the first month of a new employee’s commencement date. The *Recruitment and Selection Guide* previously published by Children’s Services Central included an Induction Checklist to assist managers to facilitate an effective induction program for new employees.

**Fairness and Equity**

Assessments of behaviour must be made against agreed standards and behaviours and assessment of performance must be against clearly defined objectives and expected outcomes. Managers and employees must provide evidence to support the review and comments of an individual’s performance.

**Disagreements**

All endeavours should be made to agree on objectives, timelines and the final performance rating between the manager and employee.

Differences of opinion may form part of the process of gaining clarification and agreement and should not be avoided but used to develop mutual understanding of job responsibilities, expectations and the developmental needs of the employee. Any differences should be fully discussed with the aim of seeking mutual agreement.

**Confidentiality**

Assessment and final review outcomes are confidential and are not discussed with other colleagues. A record of the process will be maintained by management. Original forms are placed on the employee’s personal file.

**Record keeping**

There is no requirement to keep formal records about normal ongoing local supervision and management of employees (a Work Plan would capture this information), however, where a pattern of poor performance and/or behaviour is emerging, a manager should:

- Make a short file note about the performance and/or behavioural issue and the action taken providing a copy to the employee; and
- Keep a copy (in a secure place) of any documents that relate to the poor performance.
What is poor performance and behaviour?

Poor performance and behaviour can be exhibited in the following ways:

- Unsatisfactory work performance, that is, a failure to perform the duties of the position or to perform them to the standard required;
- Non-compliance with workplace policies, rules or procedures;
- Unacceptable behaviour in the workplace; or
- Disruptive or negative behaviour that impacts on co-workers.

Poor performance is not the same as misconduct. Misconduct is very serious behaviour such as theft or assault which may warrant instant dismissal. In cases of misconduct management should seek specific advice about how to proceed before taking any action.

What are the reasons for poor performance and behaviour?

There are many reasons why an employee may perform poorly. Some of the common reasons include:

- An employee doesn’t know what is expected because goals and/or standards or workplace policies and consequences are not clear, have not been set;
- Lack of, or an insufficient induction/orientation process;
- There is a mismatch between an employee’s capabilities and the job they are required to undertake, or the employee does not have the knowledge or skills to do the job expected of them;
- An employee does not know whether they are doing a good job because there is no counselling or feedback on their performance;
- Lack of personal motivation, low morale in the workplace and/or poor work environment;
- Personal issues such as family stress, physical and/or mental health problems or problems with drugs or alcohol;
- Cultural misunderstandings; or
- Workplace bullying.

Managing employees’ performance makes up a significant part of every manager’s Job Description, and this means managers must often deal with poor performance. The provision of guidance, feedback and support to employees is an important part of the normal day to day responsibilities of management and an essential preliminary stage for managing concerns about an employee’s performance and/or behaviour.

Managing poor employee performance should not be a huge event, it should be quick and pain free, for both management and the employee and something that is done incrementally at the first sign of a deviation in ‘expected’ performance and/or behaviour.
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Timely and constructive feedback about performance and/or behaviour ensures the employee is aware of any concerns and has the opportunity to improve with appropriate guidance and support.

Dealing with poor performance can be challenging and confronting for employees and employers alike, but it does need to be addressed.

Most performance and/or behavioural issues can be resolved if they are managed quickly and constructively.

Give praise and recognition regularly

Recognising the work and performance of employees is key to the success of a manager. Even a ‘thank you’ is important. Look for the things that employees do well and praise them. This is an easy strategy and brings big benefits.

Common performance issues and strategies to manage them

The following table provides a summary of common issues faced by management when managing performance and identifies key ways to improve performance in the workplace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>POSSIBLE CAUSES</th>
<th>SUGGESTED ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Employee does not undertake work as required, showing signs of apathy and laziness. Employee does not appear to understand job requirements or directions | • Lack of understanding of Job Description and job requirements  
• Lack of induction  
• Job content and design  
• Inappropriate job fit  
• Personal or external issues | • Begin with informal performance discussion  
• Be clear about the performance requirements and relevance of the role to the functioning of the business  
• Consider further induction/orientation if needed  
• Focus on work tasks, and how they might be improved |
| Employee will not follow directions or perform tasks as required | • Failure to understand what is required  
• Inability to perform tasks  
• Personal issues | • Begin performance improvement process starting with informal discussions around what is required in the position  
• Look at possible options for training and development if a skill deficit is identified  
• Commence formal performance management process if no improvement is forthcoming |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>POSSIBLE CAUSES</th>
<th>SUGGESTED ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Employee fails to acknowledge they are underperforming              | • Performance issues have not been adequately explained  
• Process has not been adequately applied  
• Employee does not accept information on their performance | • Re-establish expected outcomes; use evidence of how performance has failed to meet expected standards; explain the impact of this on the success of the business  
• If necessary, commence a formal performance management process |
| Employee does not complete work tasks to the required standard       | • Lacks the required skills and capabilities                                             | • Identify training and development opportunities  
• If employee fails to develop required skills, progress through a performance management process |
| Employee is cynical of work environment and tasks, bringing negative opinions to the workplace | • Has become disillusioned with work environment  
• Fails to understand value of work being undertaken                                              | • Establish team culture based on respect and support  
• Re-establish role of the position, and the value of outcomes delivered by the organisation |
| Employee is regularly absent                                         | • Job content and design  
• Inappropriate job fit  
• Management style  
• Personal or workplace issues                                                 | • Identify cause behind absenteeism  
• Explore possible strategies for changes to working arrangements  
• Management of health issues  
• Re-establish expectations of attendance |

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Steps to Managing Poor Performance

Step 1 - Identify the Problem
- Identify the problem
- Gather evidence
- Be sure of the facts
- What stage of employment is the employee at eg induction, long term

Step 2 – Assess and Analyse the Problem
- How serious is the problem
- How long has it existed
- Has action been taken previously
- Arrange to meet with the staff member (give prior notice)
- Prepare for the meeting

Step 3 – Meet with the Employee
- In private
- Be specific (use evidence)
- Listen and respond
- Consider contributing factors
- Regularly summarise and check for understanding

Step 4 – Jointly Devise a Solution
- Explore options
- Keep the discussion on track
- Focus on positive
- Offer assistance where appropriate (eg mentor, training, support)

Step 5 – Monitor Performance
- Monitor performance
- Give regular feedback and encouragement
- Arrange for further training/support if required

Step 6 – Review Meeting
- Arrange a review meeting in agreed timeframe
- Provide feedback
- Use evidence to support feedback
- Clarify the next steps
- On going monitoring and support

Step 7 – More Serious Action
- If no improvement has been made despite action taken, progress to a more formal warning process and/or termination depending on issues identified
PART 2

Steps to Manage Poor Performance

Steps to manage poor performance and/or behaviour are more likely to be successful where effective supervision is already in place eg following a performance cycle as previously described. Effective managers know their employees and their roles, provide information and encourage open and two way communication, are aware (they observe, listen and check) and build trust and respect.

Management is entitled to raise performance and/or behavioural concerns with employees as they arise.

In many cases management is required to raise matters/issues that are a ‘one off’ occurrence eg a late attendance, a children’s daily record not completed, failure to attend to one staff meeting etc. In these instances the matters are usually of a level that can be dealt with on the spot (having regard to privacy of the matter) and require no further follow up action.

Where a manager considers that a pattern of poor performance and/or behaviour may be emerging however, they should work cooperatively with the employee to ensure there is a coordinated approach to managing the concerns.

Using a ‘stepped approach’ as identified in the preceding diagram, to deal with performance and behavioural issues will assist managers to follow an objective and structured process.

Step 1 - Identify and assess the problem

Management needs to consider whether there are organisational factors that may be contributing to, or causing an employee’s poor performance and/or behaviour, and if so should, at the earliest opportunity and where practical, address relevant organisational factors before commencing action.

Examples of organisational factors that may contribute to poor performance and/or behaviour and strategies for managers to address these factors are detailed below.

- **Inadequate Induction Processes**

  If there are performance concerns about a new employee, consider whether anything was/is lacking in their induction to the position, including the explanation of their job role and responsibilities. Ask the employee if there are particular parts of their job they are unsure about, so that you can focus your strategies. If necessary repeat the induction process. Ensure that the employee is provided with, and understands their Job Description and other key documents that relate to their role and that of the whole staff team.

- **Inadequate training or supervision**

  Consider the employee’s training and development needs. Has there been sufficient on the job training provided? Are there any training courses available to address the employee’s skill requirements? Can arrangements be made for a short-term period of more ‘hands on’ supervision, mentoring or coaching by someone with suitable skills and experience? Have there been changes to their role (e.g. has there been a step up from a previous role so more learning is required; has there been an introduction of new technology), that requires specific training or increased guidance and support?
### Behavioural factors

It is important that poor performance be distinguished from unacceptable behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour usually involves deliberate, inappropriate or unethical action on the part of the employee.

Deliberate, inappropriate or unethical actions on the part of an employee will normally be readily identifiable. These can be dealt with through workplace counselling or more formal disciplinary provisions, depending on the seriousness of the action.

### Medical Factors

Some medications and illnesses can impact on an employee’s work performance and management should give due consideration to these factors if an employee has advised he or she is suffering from a medical condition or is taking medication that affects his or her work performance. Under these circumstances it would be appropriate to obtain more information from the employee’s medical practitioner.

Where management considers that an employee’s poor work performance or behaviour arises from medical or stress problems, or, alternatively the employee is taking frequent periods of sick leave, an option management may consider is an assessment by a medical practitioner. This assessment will determine whether the employee is medically fit to perform the duties of his or her job.

It is important to deal with these situations sensitively, as the employee may not accept that his or her poor work performance is the result of a medical condition. It may also be appropriate to pause the performance review process until the outcome of the assessment has been received, as the outcome may impact on the process.

### Family and Personal Factors

Management may find that performance issues arise because of employee's family or personal factors. If an employee is struggling to balance their work and family commitments and this is reflected in their performance at work the manager should take this into account and consider what, if any options are available could be used to support the employee.

### Workplace issues and interpersonal conflict

Workplace issues can sometimes impact on an employee's work performance. Management should take into account how an employee copes with change, whether it arises from changes to positions, working arrangements or introducing new technology. Every effort should be made to ensure lines of communication remain open and the employee is provided with support.

Work performance may also be affected by conflict between employees or conflict between an employee and his or her supervisor. In these instances, even though employees and a manager may not like each other, it is important that professional behaviour is maintained and everyone is treated with respect and courtesy.

It may be useful to refer to a checklist of good practice for dealing with cases of poor performance particularly when identified during the initial stages of employment.
### MANAGING FOR GOOD PERFORMANCE CHECKLIST

#### Clear Position Description/instructions
- Does the employee have a copy of the current Job Description and do they understand the standards of work performance that are expected of them?
- Have performance targets, work standards been discussed and clearly defined?
- Are the same standards of performance being consistently applied for all staff?

#### Adequate training
- Has the employee received appropriate training and assistance to perform the duties required?
- Has new or changed technology or new work practices impacted on the employee?

#### No surprises
- When was the performance/behaviour issue(s) first identified?
- Any significant concerns about the employee’s performance should be drawn to their attention at the time the concern arises rather than waiting until a formal review or annual appraisal time.

#### Communication
- Is the employee aware of the deviation from standards required?
- Has the matter(s) been brought to their attention previously?
- The employee must be given an opportunity to respond to allegations of poor performance or behaviour.
- Ensure that you have evidence to demonstrate to the employee where their performance or behaviour is below the standard expected.
- Determine what will be the goals for improvement and determine what will be the agreed period of monitoring.

### Step 2 - Assess and analyse the problem

Once consideration has been given to whether there are any contributing organisational factors impacting on the employees’ performance and behaviour, consideration then needs to be given to assessing and analysing the performance or behavioural issue.

Review the employee’s performance and/or behaviour with reference to the relevant standards and benchmarks and make an objective assessment as to whether performance and/or behaviour is unsatisfactory. Management need to generally be able to answer the following to make an effective assessment:

- What are the standards and benchmarks that apply to this employee?
- What goals and targets, including set tasks, are to be achieved by the employee?
- Are the purpose, goals and targets of the position identified?
- What goals and targets, including set tasks, are not being achieved? What evidence is there?
- What is the reasonable or agreed timeframe for each goal, target or set task?
- When did the performance issue(s) first arise?
- Has any action been taken previously?
- Has the problem been constant or intermittent?

Also of consideration is the stage of employment the employee is at eg is the employee undergoing induction, subject of a probationary period or a long term employee?

If after the assessment and analysis a manager is satisfied that action is warranted, action needs to be taken to prepare for a meeting with the employee.
Step 3 - Meet with the employee

All managers have their own supervisory and management style and will address initial concerns about performance and/or behaviour in different ways. Managers are encouraged to trust their professional judgement and common sense when addressing concerns with an employee. However, all managers should ensure that feedback about performance and/or behaviour:

- Is timely;
- Is given privately;
- Identifies the standard or benchmark not being achieved by the employee;
- Includes support and guidance; and
- Invites questions or clarification from the employee.

Arranging the meeting

Once the performance or behaviour issues have been identified and a decision to take action has been made it should be undertaken as soon as practicable.

Failure to confront employees immediately is what causes so much angst around the idea of confronting poor performance. When inappropriate actions continue unaddressed for too long before confronting them, the situation can get out of control. Confront immediately, at the first sign of behaviour deviation, and the process of managing poor performance will be painless and generally appreciated by both parties.

No employee is delighted to receive a meeting request to discuss their poor performance or behaviour. A considerate and supportive approach will set the environment for a constructive meeting. A poor approach to the request will inflame any tensions.

How to arrange the meeting

Face to face is best but there may be times where other options can be used eg phone, mail or email if the employee is absent from work. Do not avoid two way communication with the employee.

The exact words you will use to make the request

Ensure the employee is not misled as to the intent of the meeting, but do not discuss the performance issue in detail outside the meeting.

If the matter is one which requires some time and discussion i.e. there is pattern of unsatisfactory performance or behaviour emerging, a more formal meeting is required to discuss the matter(s). Following the below mentioned structure for requesting such a meeting may assist:

“Kim, I wanted to speak to you about a number of matters relating to your performance. They are performance issues that I have raised with you previously/the matters relate to your attendance pattern/the matters relate to your not meeting deadlines for children’s records etc.

To make sure we have both the privacy and time to discuss properly I have arranged to cover your work tomorrow between 10.00 am and 11.00 am. I will provide you with more detail of the matters tomorrow and will also give you an opportunity for you to discuss and respond. Could you please meet in my office at 10.00 am.”
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There will be other situations however where a manager has directly observed a matter or a matter has been brought to their attention that they need to bring to the attention of the employee immediately. The approach in these situations should be less formal but remain objective and factual. A manager’s tone of voice and the language used will be important for maintaining the ongoing professional relationship. As an example, rather that commenting “Joan I noticed you were late this morning what is the reason”, if this is the first instance, the approach may instead be “Joan I noticed that you were late this morning, this is the first time this has happened was there any particular problem?”

- When to make the request for a meeting

There is potential for angst and speculation between your request and the meeting itself, so minimise the time period, but also give the employee time to mentally and physically prepare as necessary. The period of notice for this first meeting will depend on the matter(s) and seriousness of the matters to be discussed.

As indicated above, some matters need immediate addressing (as they occur) in other instances where performance/behaviour has been deteriorating over a period more notice eg 1-2 days may be more appropriate.

Appendix 1 includes a template letter that can be issued to an employee regarding a workplace meeting if a written request is used.

Once you have made arrangements for the meeting you need to take action to prepare.

- Prepare yourself

Know what the performance/behavioural problem is. Review your evidence/examples of any information that is going to assist you during the meeting and have a clear explanation ready for the employee.

Reflect on how the employee may react. Have a plan for the best case, the worst case and the most likely case reaction and your response to it.

Know the outcome you need from the meeting. Make notes of how performance improvement and monitoring can be achieved. Consider the variety of outcomes there may be and include alternate approaches in your notes. That way you’ll have covered all bases.

Jot down key words you will actually use for important messages during the discussion. Make sure you keep the level and tone of your communication right for the employee and the situation.

More complex issues require more detailed planning. You may also need to plan for the impact on other staff indirectly affected by your management of the poor performer.

- Never confront in anger

Do not let the matter become an emotional situation. Whatever you need to do to get your emotions in check before confronting employees, whether it’s walking around the block, counting to ten or having a glass of water, do it.

During discussion be aware of keeping emotions out of the conversation through your tone and language eg, “I realise that you seem angry about me raising this issue with you but I need to understand what has caused this situation and discuss how we can resolve it.” Other useful phrases and questions include: “We are here to work together not against each other so I need to understand what has happened”; “Mistakes are part of learning, and in this instance there were no serious consequences so let’s talk about what additional training would be beneficial to you”; “I see that you are behind on completing your observations,
do you have any questions or is there anything I can do to assist?"; “This morning I saw Mrs Jones walking away angrily after speaking with you. Can you tell me what happened?”

- **Do it in private**

Where counselling is to be undertaken, the discussion should ideally be held in a place which is private and free from distractions. Your office, if you have one, may be appropriate but, in some situations, a more neutral meeting place away from the immediate work area may be preferable.

- **Be factual and specific**

Use evidence and factual information to state your case and focus on the performance or behaviour. When you bring hearsay or impressions into the conversation, you can find yourself squabbling over details, no matter how big or small.

You should focus on measurable performance. Avoid making unsubstantiated judgements. Give tangible, specific examples whenever possible rather than generalising. You should also ensure that any information that you provide, is accurate. e.g. "Louise, I would like to discuss your interactions with some of the parents, this week I have had 3 different parents call me about the abrupt manner you have had with them. Each was on a different day and when asked they all said that this was out of character for you. I would like to know if there is something you would like to discuss or is there something I can assist you with?"; “Casey this is the 3rd month in a row now that I have had to speak with you about the lateness of your daily diary. Can you tell me what action you will take in future to have these done on time?"

- **Rehearse - but only a little**

The impulse to memorise exactly what you’re going to say is understandable but scripting the entire discussion will make you seem insincere. It's a good idea to develop a structure for the interview to follow and keep reference notes to clarify, but the meeting should be a two way communication process and should flow easily and naturally.

- **Use data**

Just as you should be specific with factual information, support your assertions with data whenever possible. e.g. “These are some examples of your observations that I have found errors in when reviewing them, let’s have a closer look at them”; “As you know this is the 4th occasion you have been late for work this month.”

- **Be clear**

Do not confuse people by watering down the fact that this is a reprimand. Because they feel uncomfortable, managers will often end a confrontation with something like, “But overall, you’ve been doing a really great job.” The problem is people choose to hear what they want to hear, so employees latch onto such comments and leave the meeting thinking they just got praised.

- **Remind yourself that you are not the bad guy**

The truth is, you don’t want to hurt anyone, nor did you cause the situation. You are addressing a performance/behaviour issue(s) and are trying to keep it from becoming worse.
Keep the process positive

Some managers may tend to focus on the negative aspects of feedback. While it is important to encourage improved performance in those not functioning to the required standard, you should try to adopt a balanced approach by also recognising and rewarding good performance.

Formal performance appraisal schemes provide an opportunity to recognise and reward good performance however there are many other informal opportunities where good performance can be acknowledged such taking a few moments at a meeting to acknowledge someone's good work; allowing an individual to take on more challenging and responsible tasks; or praising good work in the presence of others. eg “I like the way you handled the situation with…”; “I’m impressed with the creativity you showed on this new activity. I’d like you to share it with the other Room Leaders.”; “I received a glowing compliment from Mrs Smith about you, keep up the great work”.

Demonstrate empathy

For someone who is visibly crushed or sobbing hysterically, acknowledging your role in his/her distress (“I’m really sorry this is making you so upset”) lets him/her know you care despite the circumstances. If there are tears, offer tissues or a glass of water, and ask if he/she would like a few minutes of privacy.

Let the employee react

Uncomfortable as this can be, keep in mind that most people wind down after an initial outburst. Remaining conscious of your breathing, keep it slow and steady will go a long way in helping you stay calm.

Try not to interrupt or respond emotionally to the other person’s upset. If their anger escalates and makes you feel unsafe, announce that you are providing some time to cool down, and leave the room for a brief period for them to settle down.

Tone and listening skills

Watch your language and tone. Don’t unnecessarily put someone in a defensive mode. Defensiveness shuts down listening.
Follow up and be committed

Be prepared to put aside the necessary time and commitment required to follow the process through to completion. Little will be achieved if feedback is not followed up. Managers need to continually monitor and evaluate the performance of employees.

When, following up a feedback discussion, you need to review the status of the agreed course of action to improve an employee’s performance, eg if you agreed to investigate the possibility of providing further training or coaching, did this occur and if not why not. It is equally important for employees to be committed to improvement and to follow up the actions to which they have agreed.

STARTING THOSE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

There will be times that managers need to take action immediately. Other times there may be a number of issues that have built up that needs to be addressed. When considering the approach to take with the conversation think about:

1. Content
2. Pattern
3. Relationship

Content
The first time a problem comes up talk about the content of what just happened. The content of a problem typically deals with a single event – the here and now. For example:

“You did not properly complete the children’s observations yesterday.”
“You were late by 20 minutes for your shift yesterday.”
“The language and tone you used in speaking with James’s parents was inappropriate for the workplace.”
“It was your job to tidy the main room this week and you did not do it Monday or yesterday.”

Pattern
The next time the problem occurs talk about the pattern of behaviour eg what has been happening over time. For example:

“This is the second time this has occurred. You agreed it wouldn’t happen again and I am now concerned that I can’t count on you to follow procedures/ keep your word/do the right thing.”

Relationship
As the problem continues talk about the impact on your professional relationship, it is the string of disappointments that has caused you to lose trust in them – you start to doubt their competency, you start to doubt their trust or promises and this is affecting the way you work together. For example:

“This is starting to put a strain on how we work together/how you work within the team. I feel that I have to remind you constantly to keep you in line and I don’t like to nor should I have to do that. The way things are progressing I can’t trust you to keep the agreement you made.”
Step 4 - Jointly devise a solution

Do not withhold feedback from an employee. Managers can be more uncomfortable giving negative feedback than employee’s are in receiving it. It is considered employees generally feel that it is better to get negative/corrective feedback than none whatsoever.

Management is encouraged to be candid in their feedback. Begin all feedback sessions with the message that you are trying to help the employee. Ensure that feedback is positive and constructive and related to their performance in the job, not the employee as a person.

Balance positive and corrective feedback. Giving an employee positive feedback helps build their confidence and makes it easier for them to accept corrective feedback. When giving feedback select the key areas which require the most change and where change is most achievable.

Reinforce the desired behaviour. As a guide, positive feedback encourages desired behaviour and negative feedback represses behaviour. Therefore, in order to change behaviour, people need both positive feedback (reinforces good behaviour) and negative feedback (stops undesired behaviour).

Avoid using only generalities when giving feedback. Saying, ‘good job’ or ‘bad job’ does not have any reinforcing or corrective value. Employees need to understand specifically what on-the-job performance or behaviour is viewed as good or bad. They must have specific instructions and information on what is expected.

To achieve the best results feedback should be based on open, two-way communication.

You should work with a person to generate an agreed plan of action, establishing and articulating the needs of both the management and the staff member. Focus on future outcomes rather than dwelling too much on what has happened in the past. Your aim is to produce an improvement in the person's performance or conduct and for this to happen you should, first, agree that an improvement is required and, secondly, agree on the steps which should be taken to achieve it. It is also important that you establish a time frame to achieve your agreed goals and to review the success of your strategy.

Attempt to give feedback on a regular basis. Build giving feedback into your daily routine. Ask the employee for feedback on your working relationship with the employee and areas where you could assist them make improvements or changes.

Occasionally, there are times when there is no positive feedback that is realistic. Do not lie to people. Do not say, “You’re doing a good job, but...” and then proceed with a string of examples of poor performance.

Step 5 - Monitor performance

Management should monitor the employee’s performance and continue to provide feedback and encouragement. A meeting to review and discuss the employee’s performance should be held even if there is no longer an issue. This enables both parties to acknowledge that the issue has been resolved. Management should provide both positive and negative feedback to the employee and should work with the employee to ensure that performance improvements are sustained.

Step 6 - Review meeting

At the end of the predetermined review period the manager should confirm the time, place and purpose of the final review meeting at least two days before the meeting. This confirmation can be in person, by phone or by email. The date for the final review meeting can be brought forward if a serious matter occurs during the monitoring period or if performance and/or behaviour deteriorates.
The final review meeting must be held in a private place (e.g., manager’s office). During the review meeting, the manager should:

- Explain the purpose of the review meeting;
- Discuss the expectations and standards that have been achieved;
- Identify any aspect that has not been achieved and/or any further performance behavioural concerns; and
- Where the manager is of the view that there has been a satisfactory improvement in performance and/or behaviour, the manager should:
  
  - Acknowledge the employee’s efforts and confirm that no further formal action is currently required; and
  - Confirm that the standard supervisory and performance management processes will recommence e.g., routine supervision.

If the manager is satisfied that the employee’s performance and/or conduct is satisfactory then formal written advice to that effect should be provided to the employee.

*A template is included in Appendix 1.*

Where management is of the view that there has not been a satisfactory improvement in performance and/or behaviour, the manager should inform the employee that further formal action is to be taken and/or the employee’s services are to be terminated. More serious action needs to be in accordance with company policy and Industrial Relations processes in relation to more serious conduct and performance issues.
1. Beginning Phase

Ensure:

- Private venue;
- Purpose kept confidential;
- You and the employee are comfortable with the venue;
- Interview location will be free from interruption and other distractions; and
- Any electronic devices such as mobile telephones are switched off where practical.

If the employee has requested that a Support Person attend, confirm that their role at the meeting is to observe discussions and provide support to the employee.

Outline that the purpose of the workplace counselling meeting is to deal with unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour.

Advise the employee that:

- The discussion will cover the standards expected and where their actual performance and/or behaviour is not meeting those standards;
- They will be given an opportunity to comment and agree or disagree with your observations and concerns and the standards to be achieved;
- You will work in cooperation with them to identify and discuss any relevant organisational, personal or external factors which may be impacting on their performance and/or behaviour;
- You will work in cooperation to develop and implement strategies to address any factors identified i.e. training and development; and
- You will finalise an agreed Action Plan after your discussions if this is decided as a course of action.

If an Action Plan is to be implemented the employee is to be advised that they will be provided with a copy of the Action Plan and a copy will be retained by management and stored in a confidential location.

2. Discussion Phase

Detail each (appropriate) performance and/or behaviour standard to be achieved and explain how the employee’s performance and/or behaviour has differed from those standards.

Make sure you explain the standard that has to be met. Don’t make the standard your personal expectation by saying “I expect….” instead state, “the organisation expects you to…..”

Detail the impact that the unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour has on the team, work objectives and/or on other employees.

Provide an opportunity for the employee to respond to each of the specific performance issues and try and seek their agreement that the matter needs to be addressed by them.
Provide examples of any specific incidents or copies of documents that support your concerns with their performance and/or behaviour.

It may be helpful to provide documents that detail expectations and standards to be met by the employee e.g. Job Description.

If there is disagreement between you and the employee on any expectation and/or standard, you should note the area of disagreement and confirm verbally, and afterwards in writing, the work performance and/or behavioural issues requiring improvement, the standards/targets to be achieved and any relevant timeframes.

Identify and agree on any special activities to monitor performance and/or behaviour or record incidents/activities during the review period. Options include:

- Daily/weekly/fortnightly reports prepared by either management or employee on what was achieved or not achieved; or
- Where appropriate, other employees to provide confirmation of tasks and activities completed or not completed.

An employee may raise other matters during the counselling session. Remind them the purpose of the current discussion is to discuss performance and make another time to discuss the other matters. Be firm and do not be diverted from the purpose of the session.

3. Conclusion Phase

Establish dates when matters will be reviewed and a further discussion will be held. Review dates should be realistic and the person given sufficient time to demonstrate an improvement.

Advise the employee that:

- If a serious matter occurs during the monitoring period or deterioration in performance or behaviour occurs, the review date may be brought forward;
- Records will be made i.e. the Action Plan, a meeting counselling form, Review Form; and
- The matter may progress to more serious action which may include termination of employment if the agreed performance standards are not met within the review period. Make sure these consequences are fully explained.

Ask the employee whether they agree that the conclusions made are the results of a fair process and they have been given adequate opportunity to make comment.
PART 3

Case Studies

Case 1

Three months ago Robyn commenced as an educator. Last week feedback from the Room Leaders advised that Robyn’s progress has been slow. The Room Leaders have identified that they have had to remind Robyn on a number of occasions to tidy the rooms, pack away toys, books etc and that she is reluctant to take the initiative in her work.

Robyn seems to relate well to the children, however is less confident in her interactions with parents and the Room Leaders. Robyn is undertaking her Certificate 3 and her results thus far seem to be quite good.

Now that Robyn’s slow progress and the concerns by the Room Leaders has been brought to your attention what do you propose to do?
Case 2

Anne works as a Room Leader. With over 10 years’ experience, Anne is one of the more experienced educators at the Centre. The standard of Anne’s performance borders on unsatisfactory. Anne regularly demonstrates an abrupt and aggressive manner with other educators and is reluctant to take on any additional tasks to help progress the QIP. Anne’s work with the children and her interaction with families is good and no concerns have been raised. Anne has been overheard complaining to others about the lack of opportunities and the fact that just because she has a lengthy period of service everyone expects her to do more and carry the rest of the team.

Unless she is complaining about something Anne tends to keep to herself and her overall behaviour is not conducive to good team building. Over a period of time Anne’s colleagues have expressed their concern about her attitude and behaviour is getting progressively worse.

Following an outburst from Anne aimed at another employee, the employee has approached you about Anne’s behaviour.

What do you propose to do?
Case 3

Jane has been working in the service for a number of years and her attendance pattern has always been satisfactory. Jane works part time and on occasions works additional days when staff are on leave. Jane’s starting and finishing times have always been consistent following a regular routine of commencing at 7.30 am and leaving at 3.30 pm most days.

Of the last 2 months or so you have noticed that Jane is progressively starting a few minutes later each day. She has also been leaving exactly at 3.30 pm each day regardless of what may be happening in the service.

As part of your regular fortnightly timesheet monitoring of staff, Jane is one of the educators whose time sheets you are reviewing.

The first thing you notice is that Jane’s time sheet indicates that she has commenced work consistently between 7.15 am and 7.30 am and her time of departure is shown as 3.30 pm on all days. You know that this is inaccurate as you have observed Jane coming in later. You are concerned about the discrepancy in the recording of attendance as well as Jane’s sudden behaviour relating to her attendance pattern.

What do you propose to do?

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PART 4

Taking more formal action

Step 7 – Where more serious action is required – Stage 2 action

More serious action may need to be taken if the employee’s performance does not improve including: further counselling, issuing formal warnings and ultimately if the issue cannot be resolved, termination of employment.

Using a staged process to manage performance and/or behaviour where more formal action is required

If action taken at the initial stages of poor performance and behaviour does not resolve the issues then more formal action is required. Following a staged process after the initial action has been taken can be described as Stage 2.

This stage in managing unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour can commence when, despite active management at the initial stage (potentially for up to three months), an employee’s performance does not improve or a pattern of unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour emerges.

Stage 2 involves an employee participating in a more formal performance improvement program, which may include:

- Workplace counselling;
- The development of an agreed ‘Action Plan’;
- A predetermined performance monitoring period; and
- A formal review at the conclusion of the improvement program.

Assess the employee’s performance

In reviewing an employee’s performance and/or behaviour with reference to the relevant standards and benchmarks managements need to review the action taken to that point and be able to make an effective assessment of that previous action. For example:

- Has the employee been referred to the specific work standard and benchmarks e.g. Job Description;
- Does the employee have a clear understanding of the expected work standards;
- Has there been adequate supervision, feedback and opportunities to improve;
- Have organisational factors been considered and, if necessary, adequately addressed;
- What support has been provided to assist the employee to improve performance; and
- What records are available to provide evidence of the poor performance?

If the deficiencies identified are confirmed, management should proceed through the following steps of the more formal action stage.
Applying relevant standards and benchmarks consistently

Consider whether the performance and/or behaviour standards and benchmarks against which performance and/or behaviour are to be measured are being consistently applied within the workplace. It may be that all employees need to be reminded about expected work standards or job requirements, before raising concerns with individual employees.

Stage 2 Workplace counselling

Stage 2 workplace counselling is a more formal meeting between management and the employee where the manager aims to clarify the standards of performance and/or behaviour required; explore the cause of the employee’s unsatisfactory performance; identify opportunities for improvement and outline the process for monitoring and reviewing performance and/or behaviour.

Notice of Stage 2 workplace counselling

Management needs to formally advise the employee outlining details of the time, place and purpose of the workplace counselling meeting. A template letter to attend workplace counselling is included with these procedures at Appendix 1. The employee should be provided with the letter at least 1-2 working days before the workplace counselling meeting. A shorter notice period is acceptable where the performance and/or behaviour concerns to be urgent or there is another compelling reason.

Using a support person

At this stage of the process you may want to allow the employee to be accompanied by a support person at the workplace counselling meeting, such as a colleague. Their role is to observe and provide support to the employee.

Monitoring period and draft Action Plan

Before the workplace counselling meeting, the manager should determine a performance monitoring period. As a general rule, up to three months is required to properly assess performance and/or behaviour and to allow sufficient opportunity for improvement. However, the nature and complexity of the performance and behavioural issues and the employee’s circumstances may require a shorter or longer period of monitoring.

Management may decide that an Action Plan will assist the employee to focus on the performance/behaviour that needs to be addressed. If so the manager may draft an initial Action Plan to be discussed and further developed during the workplace counselling meeting.

The workplace counselling meeting (Stage 2)

As with all workplace counselling meetings they should be held in a private place (e.g. manager’s office, meeting room) and follow the principles previously identified. During a workplace counselling meeting, the manager should:

- Cover the standards expected and outline where the employee’s actual performance and/or behaviour is not meeting those standards;
• Detail the impact of the unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour on work objectives and other employees;
• Provide the employee with the opportunity to comment and agree or disagree with their observations and concerns and the standards to be achieved;
• Confirm what previous action has been taken to address the performance and or behavioural issues;
• Work in cooperation with the employee to identify and discuss any relevant organisational, personal or other factors which may be impacting on their performance and/or behaviour;
• Work in cooperation with the employee to develop and implement strategies to address any factors identified, i.e. further training and development, mentoring;
• Confirm that an Action Plan, setting out the performance and/or behavioural issues to be addressed, the goals, targets and/or standards to be achieved and the timeframes for review of performance and/or behaviour, will be finalised following the discussion;
• Confirm that records will be made throughout the process i.e. workplace counselling Form, the Action Plan, Review Form etc;
• Outline the process and time for monitoring performance and behaviour under the Action Plan, including whether the employee is required to provide update reports during the monitoring period;
• Confirm that weekly, fortnightly, monthly (as determined) progress reviews will take place and that a decision about whether performance and/or behaviour has satisfactorily improved will be made at a final review meeting, at the end of the monitoring period;
• Note that if other instances of unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour arise or if it further deteriorates during the monitoring period, the monthly reviews or the final review meeting may be brought forward and/or the Action Plan may be amended.

Finalising the Stage 2 Action Plan

After the workplace counselling, management should finalise the Action Plan, which is then signed by the manager and the employee. A copy of the Action Plan is then given to the employee and the original is held by management in a confidential location.

If there are any areas of disagreement, the employee may outline their concerns in a separate document which is attached to the Action Plan. However, the employee must still comply with the Plan.

Monitoring performance

The employee’s performance and/or behaviour is monitored and measured against the Action Plan throughout the monitoring period.

If the employee takes leave, the monitoring period should be extended to ensure performance and/or behaviour is monitored for the required period.

The systems used to monitor and record performance and/or behaviour will depend on the employee’s role and the particular performance and/or behavioural concerns and may include:
• The regular review of work undertaken by the employee;
• Direct assessment of the employee’s performance and behaviour in the workplace;
• Confirmation of the successful completion of any arranged training;
• Feedback from other team members; and
• Consideration of any complaints or compliments about the employee received during the monitoring period.

Management should continue to provide feedback and direction to the employee throughout the monitoring period, as well as conduct monthly progress meetings.

Records of what has been achieved and what was not achieved during the monitoring period should be kept.
TEMPLATES

- **Draft Letter 1** - Notification to attend formal workplace counselling
- **Workplace Counselling Record Form**
- **Performance Review Form**
- **Draft Letter 2** - Satisfactory improvement of performance and/or behaviour
- **Draft Letter 3** - Serious action being considered and invitation to make a submission to outline and extenuating circumstances to be considered
- **Agreed Work Plan**
Notification to attend formal workplace counselling

<Insert Name>

Dear <Insert Name>

I am concerned that you are not performing the duties of your position in a satisfactory manner and I propose to discuss these issues with you in a formal workplace counselling meeting. The meeting will be held on <insert details> at <insert details>.

The unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour issues to be discussed are:

<Insert details>

At the meeting I would also like to address whether there are any barriers or factors that may be contributing to the situation. I would also like to discuss any possible strategies we can develop and implement so you can achieve the performance and/or behaviour standards expected. You will also be given an opportunity to comment on and agree or disagree with my observations, concerns and the performance and/or behaviour standards I consider relevant.

At the meeting it is intended that we work cooperatively to reach agreement on whether I will require you to be placed on an Action Plan.

The purpose of an Action Plan is to provide you with formal, written advice on the following:

• The work performance and/or behaviour issues to be addressed;
• The goals and targets to be achieved;
• The agreed dates for progress reviews; and
• The timeframes for reviewing your performance and/or behaviour.

If you fail to attend the meeting without any reasonable explanation, this will be regarded as a serious matter. Also if you are required to be monitored under an Action Plan you are advised that failure to comply with the Action Plan may result in further action being taken in relation to your continued employment.

If you wish, a support person may accompany you to the workplace counselling meeting, such as a colleague, family member. Their role at the meeting is to observe the discussions and provide support to you.  
(Optional)

If you arrange for a support person to be present, I would appreciate you letting me know their name as soon as possible prior to the meeting.

Yours sincerely

<InsertName>
# Template: Workplace Counselling Record Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee’s name:</th>
<th>Position:</th>
<th>Date discussion conducted:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People in attendance:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Expectations and standards communicated to the employee**

**Employee’s response**

**Documents given to employee where appropriate (attach copies)**

**Strategies to be Implemented to assist employee**

**Period of monitoring**

**Review date/s**

Signed: __________________________________________________________

Signed: __________________________________________________________
### TEMPLATE - PERFORMANCE REVIEW FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee’s name</th>
<th>Position:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date review conducted</td>
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<tr>
<td>People in attendance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Details of what has been achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Details of what has not been achieved</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory improvement in performance (Yes/No)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposed action</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Signed: ___________________________________________________________  
Signed: ___________________________________________________________
Satisfactory improvement of performance and/or behaviour

Dear <Insert Name>

I refer to our meeting on <insert date> during which I conducted a review of your performance and/or behaviour.

I would like to confirm advice already given to you that there has been a satisfactory improvement in your performance and/or and acknowledge your efforts over the last <insert monitoring period>.

There is no current requirement for your performance and/or behaviour to be further managed at this time. However, if similar concerns about your performance and/or behaviour arise in the future, your performance may be progressed to the taking or more serious action.

Standard supervisory arrangements now apply.

Once again I acknowledge your efforts in responding to my concerns about your performance, which has demonstrated your commitment to our organisation.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

<Insert Name>
TEMPLATE - DRAFT LETTER 3

Serious action being considered and invitation to make a submission to outline and extenuating circumstances to be considered

Insert Name>  

Dear <Insert Name>  

Review of performance and/or behaviour - serious action may be required  

I refer to my letter <insert date> regarding my opinion that your performance and/or behaviour remains unsatisfactory despite the provision of reasonable opportunities to you to improve. I am now considering taking serious action in response to your unsatisfactory performance and/or behaviour.  

The most serious action I would conceivably take is <insert details of the most serious action being considered. In particular the employee must be advised if dismissal is being considered>.  

Before I make a final decision, I invite you to make a written submission in relation to the serious action being considered within 7 days of the date of this letter. Your submission should outline any information you consider relevant, including any extenuating and mitigating circumstances.  

I will consider the information you provide prior to making a final decision in relation to action proposed.  

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this matter.  

Yours sincerely  

<Insert Name>
**TEMPLATE - AGREED WORK PLAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME:</th>
<th>POSITION:</th>
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<tr>
<td>SUPERVISOR/MANAGER:</td>
<td>PERIOD OF PLAN:</td>
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</table>

**Part 1 – Agreed Objectives** – agreed key performance objectives and behaviour measures the employee will be assessed against

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>BEHAVIOUR MEASURES</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Promoting and working within the organisation’s vision, mission and values.</td>
<td>How is the employee promoting and undertaking the following (provide examples that reflect):</td>
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PART 2 - DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES – to assist the employee in achieving the performance objectives

Discuss training and development activities that will be undertaken to assist in achieving the Performance Objectives. This may include mentoring, on the job training and development, management development, formal training short courses or programs, local or other work assignments, research, reading programs etc.

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Employee’s signature:  
Manager’s signature:  
Date:

Both the employee and the manager/supervisor should retain a copy of this form and update progressively for discussion at the agreed review date or as required.