

Below is an example blog post that could be used to make staff feel more confident in speaking up. Note that the evidence base for this topic is fairly limited, there are a range of possible techniques and this just represents a few of them, it is intended as a few small hints and tips rather than a step-by-step guidance.

### Helping to say if it's not okay

One of the four key messages of the Office's new social distancing campaign is to '**Say if it's not okay**'. While speaking up is essential in helping to maintain a safe work environment, many of us can find it a challenging and uncomfortable thing to do. It can be difficult to know how to speak colleagues we are not familiar with, and some of us may be concerned with potentially annoying or angering others. Nevertheless, we all owe it to each other to speak up when necessary, and the purpose of this blog is to give some hints and tips for helping to say if it's not okay.

One of the most common reasons for not wanting to speak up is that we fear the other person may become confrontational or defensive. In order to decrease the chance of this, and to maximise the chance of the person changing what they are doing, focus on providing feedback on the **impact** of the person's behaviour not their **intention**. For instance, if someone is standing too close to you in the line for the coffee shop you could say: '*I feel quite uncomfortable with you standing this close, I know this was not your intention, but please could you move back?*'. If you don't feel comfortable explaining how you are being personally impacted, you can also speak up using the social-distancing guidelines. For example, you could say: '*Could you have your conversation outside the tea-point? I know you didn't mean to, but it does go against the social-distancing advice in the office*'. This way of speaking up can help make it clear how you are feeling, makes it clear you are not judging or making assumptions about the other person, and can help provide the other person a clear way of addressing the situation.

While knowing what to say when speaking up can be helpful, this doesn't necessarily give us the confidence to speak up in the first place. Confidence is mainly gained through experience – but that doesn't really help us if we haven't done something yet! To help feel more confident when speaking up, you can try using what psychologists call **if-then plans**. If-then plans are ways of planning to deal with problems before they happen (If X happens then I will do Y). They work by reducing the uncertainty of what to do in a new situation and have been demonstrated to lead to higher levels of confidence on new and challenging tasks. The first stage of if-then plans is to come up with your 'ifs' – try to think of one or two situations that might require you to speak to colleagues (e.g. people blocking a corridor, or too many people in a lift). Next, think of what you could say to them (remember to focus on the impact of the behaviour not the intention). The last stage is to combine them together and write them down or say them out loud. An example if-then plan could be: **If** there is a group of people blocking the corridor **then** I will ask them to move by saying that I can't pass safely. Despite how simple if-then plans seem, psychologists have demonstrated that they can powerful impacts in helping us act differently in the future.

Despite having plans on what to say and when to say it, we may at times still avoid speaking up. This is of course okay, no one is perfect, but to help prevent it happening again in the future we should try to pay close attention to how we rationalise not speaking up. *'It's not such a big deal - I don't need to say anything'* and *'Someone else will say something I'm sure'* are examples of how we might go about rationalising. While these rationalisations can help us feel better in the short-term, they aren't going to help in the long-term as they don't actually change what is actually making us uncomfortable. Take a moment now to think of any times you've rationalised not speaking up – what did you say yourself? After becoming aware of what rationalisations you might use, the next step is to try and challenge them. For instance, thinking *'It's not such a big deal'* could be challenged by thinking *'It is a big deal – there is a whole campaign about it'*. Challenging your rationalisations is a bit like debating a point, your goal is to find the flaws in the logic. Go back to the rationalisation you thought of a moment ago, can you find a way to challenge it? Becoming aware and challenging the rationalisations we have for not speaking up can help make sure we don't just default to them in the future, making it more likely we'll continue to speak up.

While this combination of focusing on impact not intent, using if-then plans, and challenging our rationalisations can help us speak up, it's also important to think about how we react if challenged by a colleague. Being challenged can be uncomfortable, especially if we don't think what we are doing is a problem. We might feel that a colleague is being overly concerned or that they are taking things too seriously - but remember that each of us will be going through our own difficulties and battles with the current situation. You do not necessarily know what your colleague has been or is experiencing in their personal life, and so the best thing you can do is treat that person with kindness and respect. If a colleague does challenge you, be ready to apologise for the issue, acknowledge what happened (e.g. I'm sorry for sitting too close to you in the meeting), and look to adapt your behaviour in the future.

Being willing to say if it's not okay, but also being willing to listen to our colleagues, are two actions we can all do to help ensure our office is, and continues to be, a safe and supportive environment for all staff.