



FACT SHEET



THE ROLE OF THE SUPPORT PERSON IN AN INTERVIEW OR MEETING

Introduction

The representative of the department will convene the meeting. They are to inform the person being interviewed (the interviewee) that he or she is entitled to have a support person present. The support person is a person chosen by the person being interviewed and should be 18 years or older.

The support person would usually, but not exclusively, be another member of staff. The role of support person is a voluntary one and an employee requested to undertake this role has a right to decline. The role of the support person is to provide support to a staff member at an interview or meeting with a supervisor/principal/workplace manager. The support person can provide assistance to the interviewee in a situation where they may not be able to think clearly without that assistance. It is not mandatory for the person being interviewed to have a support person or observer present. However, if the person being interviewed chooses to have one present, the person's role is not one of advocate.

The form of support and assistance may vary according to the circumstances of the interview or meeting. This support and assistance could include any of, or all of, the following:

- providing moral or emotional support to the interviewee
- taking of notes
- providing advice about rights and entitlements
- clarifying the process
- suggesting a pause during the interview to assist the person being interviewed
- having a private conversation with the interviewee during the meeting, if either party wishes
- providing clarification or explanation to the interviewee when necessary
- enquiring about options or seeking further advice
- referring any concerns about how the meeting was conducted to a more senior officer

A support person must comply with reasonable meeting dates and times set by the representative of the department. If the support person is unable to attend the meeting, the meeting may be reconvened at a renegotiated time. This should be as soon as possible after the originally intended time of the meeting. However, any deliberate delaying tactics should not be permitted.



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Where the Principal or Workplace Manager has reasonable grounds to believe that the support person is attempting to avoid a meeting, then the Principal or Workplace Manager may schedule the meeting to go ahead without the support person present or arrange for a replacement support person for the interviewee.

The support person cannot be a witness in the same matter. A support person should be independent. It may not be appropriate for the interviewee's supervisor to act as support person. A support person can be a union representative, a colleague or a family member or friend.

It is generally the interviewee's responsibility to organise their support person. The support person should be aware that they, and /or their notes, may subsequently be required in court or disciplinary proceedings.

At the interview:

- If the interviewee has declined for a support person to be present, this should be minuted and advice given to the interviewee that if they change their mind during the meeting, the meeting can be reconvened with a support person present).
- Advise the support person as to their role.
- Advise the interviewee, the support person and any other person present, of the need to maintain confidentiality.
- Explain to the interviewee and the support person how questions will be asked. The Agency representative is advised of the need to remain calm, professional and respectful during the meeting process and recognise the possibility that the interviewee may become upset or distressed during the meeting and plan appropriately for this possibility, utilising the presence of the support person.

After the Interview:

At the conclusion of the meeting, it is usual for the interviewee to sign the minutes as a true and accurate record. If they refuse, the department representative should write: " _____ was requested to sign the record but declined". Both the departmental representative and support person (if relevant) should then sign the minutes and a copy provided to the interviewee.



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General Guidance:

- Where possible, adequate notice should always be provided to the interviewee prior to the interview occurring. As a general rule, there should be at least 24 hours' notice given.
- If the support person is unable to attend a meeting previously convened, the meeting may be reconvened at a later date. However, any deliberate delaying tactics should not be permitted.
- A support person should not be someone otherwise involved in the same matter. They must be independent. It may not be appropriate for the person's supervisor to act as support person. A union representative may be a support person.
- Where the departmental representative also elects to have a support person present, the same guiding principles apply to that support person.