

Compassionate Conversations: Programme Guide

For workshop delegates

Compassionate Conversations: Programme Guide

1. Introduction

Welcome to the *Compassionate Conversations* programme which aims to develop your confidence and capability in having compassionate conversations that are honest and engage with challenging subjects, particularly in relation to practitioner performance.

This guide sets out the ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme for all participants. It is your starting point and ‘North Star’ for the programme. Please return here if you get lost or want to remind yourself of how the different elements fit together.

Enjoy exploring.

2. Why is NHS Resolution offering this programme?

The Practitioner Performance Advice Service at NHS Resolution is a unique resource for those who have roles advising on, or supporting, professional performance. With over twenty years of experience, expertise and data on performance, broadly defined, the Practitioner Performance Advice Service has rich insights and intelligence to offer those who are responsible for discussing performance concerns with practitioners. This programme recognises a theme that recurs in the work of the practitioner performance advice service, namely that there are ways of approaching performance conversations that make those discussions more effective for everyone involved, including the practitioner and ultimately contributes to patient safety and public protection.

This is a programme that is grounded in two types of evidence, both of which are essential. First, it draws on the research on which our understanding of compassion and why it matters in work-based interactions and secondly on what the practitioner performance advice service team has learned about how to maximise the impact and effectiveness of performance conversations with practitioners.

The programme has been developed because the practitioner performance advice service believes that *how* we respond to performance concerns matters as much as the content of what we do. It reflects the service's commitment to being a thoughtful, innovative and values-led organisation that demonstrates what 'being fair' (<https://resolution.nhs.uk/resources/being-fair/>) means in one of the most challenging areas for those who work in the NHS and beyond.

Of course, there are, at least, two parties in any performance conversation and it matters how both or all of them interact. Sometimes, groups may be involved in performance conversations and this programme also explicitly offers materials for those who work in groups. You can find those at pp 11-13 in the Workbook. The *Compassionate Conversations* programme focuses on how those responsible for initiating performance conversations and addressing concerns about a practitioner can enhance their practice, whatever the context within which they are working. It sits alongside NHS Resolution's programmes focused on how practitioners can engaged with any performance conversations and processes"

3. What can I expect to learn?

The *Compassionate Conversations* programme combines self-directed and independent learning about compassion and its application to performance work with interactive sessions and reflective opportunities to ensure that you develop the knowledge, skills and disposition to put what you learn into practice. For those who work with others, perhaps in a training or development role, there are also resources to enable participants to share their learning locally, whether that is within a group, across an organisation or more broadly.

As you'd expect, the *Compassionate Conversations* programme has specific learning outcomes for its participants. By the end of the programme, you will be able to:

- Explain the value and significance of compassionate conversations both to individuals and the wider system;
- Demonstrate the knowledge, skills and disposition to participate in compassionate conversations;

- Integrate compassionate conversations in your own life and practice;
- Model a relational and values-based approach to communication; and
- If applicable to your circumstances, disseminate learning from the *Compassionate Conversations* programme within your own organisation or workplace.

Running throughout the programme are three questions: i) what are compassionate conversations? ii) why do they matter? and iii) how do we have a compassionate conversation?

Different elements of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme have specific learning objectives with some being covered in more than one place. For example, the concepts relating to a particular element of compassionate conversations, such as listening, are described in the programme workbook where you will explore some resources and complete a relevant activity, before you attend the workshop where you will have the opportunity to put what you have learned into practice with a peer in a facilitated setting. You might also support your learning on listening with your own notes in your reflective journal that you are encouraged to keep throughout the programme and discuss any specific questions that arise for you in a *Compassionate Conversations* Discussion Group after completing the workbook and workshop.

Some of the learning objectives will be easier than others for different people. The programme is flexible to allow you time and space to focus on your own priorities and learning needs. The workbook sets out the amount of time you might want to set aside to complete it. The verb used in each objective will give you a sense of the way in which you will demonstrate how you meet that objective and an indication of the depth and level of detail to which you should aspire. Below is a full list of learning objectives and an indication of where they are addressed shown in italics in the brackets:

- Define a compassionate conversation (*workbook and workshop*)
- Describe why compassionate conversations are valuable and significant in working with practitioner performance (*workbook and workshop*)
- Describe drivers and influences relevant to compassionate conversations (*workbook and workshop*)

- Explain the relationship between culture, identity, difference, and compassionate conversations (*reflective journal, workbook, and workshop*)
- Outline the concept of psychological safety and why it is important to compassionate conversations (*workbook and workshop*)
- Offer examples of some models and concepts that underpin compassionate conversations (*workbook and workshop*)
- Explain how the models and concepts explored in the programme relate to compassionate conversations in practice about practitioner performance (*workbook and workshop*)
- Identify an example from one's own life where a compassionate conversation would have been, or might be valuable to explore (*reflective journal and workshop*)
- Identify the barriers and facilitators to compassionate conversations, both in general and in relation to practitioner performance (*reflective journal and workshop*)
- Practise a compassionate conversation about practitioner performance with a peer (*workshop*)
- Suggest ways in which the learning from the programme will inform the participant's future practice in developing and having compassionate conversations about performance (*workbook, workshop and, if attending, group discussion*)
- If relevant, describe and discuss the knowledge, skills and values needed to facilitate the Compassionate Conversations programme workshop and develop capacity within one's own work setting (*Facilitator Guide*)

Keep an eye on the learning objectives as they will provide a good basis on which to direct your learning and to evaluate your progress. In the final section of the workbook, you will be asked to assess your level of confidence in relation to each of the learning objectives and may want to use that self-assessment to inform your future development and/or participation in a *Compassionate Conversations* discussion group. That exercise, like many of the activities and the workshop itself, can be completed alone or shared with colleagues.

4. What materials and activities are involved in the Compassionate Conversations programme?

The *Compassionate Conversations* programme has six different elements, three of which are compulsory and two of which are optional for all participants. One element is intended for any participant who has a training or development role and wishes to disseminate the learning from the *Compassionate Conversations* programme locally. The six components of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme are:

- I. The *Programme Guide* (this document) for participants which includes the learning objectives, where those are covered, how the different elements come together and FAQs. All participants are asked to read the Programme Guide before beginning the *Compassionate Conversations* Programme and to use it as a reference throughout;
- II. A *Workbook* containing resources, links to materials, activities and further reading/recommendations which is undertaken in two parts, namely pre- and post-workshop. The workbook indicates where the participants pause to complete the workshop (see page 37). Before the end of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme, all participants should complete the workbook in its entirety via self-directed study. You should allow approximately three hours to complete the workbook. At the back of the workbook there are recommendations and references for participants who want to explore specific subjects or follow up on any aspect of their learning;
- III. A three-hour *Workshop* for participants once they have completed the first part of the workbook. All participants should attend the workshop. If you work with others, you may wish to attend together, and the workshop can be offered to organisations and teams. The workshop may be offered virtually or in person depending on the circumstances;
- IV. The *Reflective Journal* which participants are encouraged to keep as they make their way through the programme and beyond. It is not supplied, and participants can use whatever format they choose e.g. a notebook, an online tool or voice recordings. Keeping a *Reflective Journal* is optional and supplementary to the materials and activities included in the *Compassionate Conversations* programme.
- V. A *Discussion Group Briefing* for those who wish to participate in, or facilitate, an hour-long follow-up discussion group event at which participants of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme can reflect on experiences, explore questions and develop their learning and practice further. This is an optional element offered as part of continuing professional development for participants; and

VI. The *Facilitator Guide* for those participants who have a training responsibility and/or wish to cascade the learning within their own organisation or area of practice. The *Facilitator Guide* provides supporting notes and materials to enable a trainer or adviser to run the workshop within the context of the *Compassionate Conversations* Programme.

5. What is the ethos of the Compassionate Conversations programme?

The *Compassionate Conversations* programme strives to be a learning experience where all participants can thrive. It seeks to model in its approach the compassion it describes and aims to develop in participants. Four values underpin the *Compassionate Conversations* programme and will be reflected in all elements, namely:

- Exploration
- Compassion
- Curiosity
- Inclusion

Participants are invited to build capacity and confidence in a supportive environment. The programme draws on a wide range of materials, activities, and resources, acknowledging that people have different learning styles, preferences, and priorities. The approach is intended to be open, flexible, and generous to others. Participants will be encouraged to share their own resources and suggestions fostering an environment where people speak freely, learn collaboratively, and celebrate difference whilst sharing a common purpose and working together on tasks and activities.

6. How does it all fit together?

The programme has been designed using a spiral structure so that concepts and ideas are introduced and revisited with greater depth and application as a participant progresses. All participants will complete three elements in the following order:

- i) Reading the *Compassionate Conversations* Programme Guide (this document) to familiarise themselves with the programme and prepare for participation the workbook;
- ii) Completing the workbook and the interactive activities within it; and
- iii) Attending the workshop either virtually or in person depending on circumstances.

There are several optional components of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme. All participants are also encouraged to keep a reflective journal during the programme which is private. A discussion group is available to those who wish to attend after completing the *Compassionate Conversations* programme at which participants can raise questions, bring examples or any issues that are on their mind about what they have learned and its application in practice. A briefing document about the discussion group and the way in which it works is included as part of the *Compassionate Conversations* programme materials.

Finally, for those participants with training roles and responsibilities, there is a Facilitator Guide to inform the delivery of the *Compassionate Conversations* workshop. It can also be used for individuals who want to share their learning within their own organisations or locally. The Facilitator Guide is available to everyone, although we recognise that it may not be relevant to all participants.

7. How can I let someone know about adjustments that might facilitate my learning and participation?

We want everyone to be able to engage with, and participate in, the Compassionate Conversations programme. If there is anything that you think the programme facilitators should know about you and your learning needs, please do contact the Education Team in confidence adviceeducation@resolution.nhs.uk. We will strive to make reasonable adjustments and discuss what might be helpful.

8. Other Frequently Asked Questions

Why has NHS Resolution and the Practitioner Advice Service set up the Compassionate Conversations Programme?

The Compassionate Conversations programme was commissioned by NHS Resolution as part of its commitment to a “Being Fair”. Some years ago, Dr Peter Old published a piece in the BMJ entitled ‘The Savvy Doctor’ (see <https://www.bmj.com/content/332/7535/gp35>) which recognised that there were ways of engaging with a performance conversation for a practitioner that were preferable and likely to lead to better outcomes. This work recognises that there are ways in

which advisors and those who have responsibility for practitioner performance can interact which are more likely to facilitate engagement and enhance effectiveness. Performance conversations are always an interaction between people and therefore *how we are* matters as much as *what we say and do*. The programme recognises that the Practitioner Performance Advice service, and those who work with the service, have unique expertise, experience and credibility in the domain of practitioner performance. The *Compassionate Conversations* programme reflects a thoughtful, relational, innovative and values-led approach that is committed to open, inclusive and evolving ways of working in a fast-changing system where there are many complex demands and expectations.

Who wrote the programme and what are their credentials and experience?

Professor Deborah Bowman was commissioned by NHS Resolution to develop the *Compassionate Conversations* programme via an open tendering process. She has worked in partnership and collaboratively with the team at the Practitioner Advice Service in NHS Resolution to create and pilot materials that meet the needs of the organisation, its advisers and those they serve.

Professor Bowman is an internationally recognised Professor Emerita of Clinical Ethics, Bioethics and Medical Law who has specialised in regulation, practitioners in difficulty and professional standards for over twenty-five years. She has combined a successful academic career with effective and values-based senior leadership in Higher Education and health and social care. Much of her work has been concerned with values-based practice in a range of settings, including how we define it, facilitate it in others and address concerns when they arise. She combines experience as a leader and expertise in ethics with training in psychodynamic approaches to organisational consulting, mediation, and leadership coaching, bringing an understanding of a range of evidence-based approaches to compassionate conversations in different settings, including the theoretical underpinnings of how people, organisations and cultures interact. In 2016, Professor Bowman was recognised in the New Year's Honours List for service to medical ethics. In 2019, she was named as *Mentor of the Year* in the *Women of the Future Awards* and in 2020, she was named by the *Financial Times* as one of *50 Leading Lights* for her work on kindness and leadership.

Who would benefit from joining the Compassionate Conversations Programme?

The *Compassionate Conversations* programme has been developed with a wide potential audience in mind. Many of those who participate will have a formal role in performance work, perhaps as an advisor working for NHS Resolution or as a Medical Director or Human Resources Director. However, the programme is suitable for anyone who wants to enhance their effectiveness at work. Everyone, at some stage, will have difficult conversations with a colleague and this programme will build confidence skills and capability in bringing compassion to one's work whilst never avoiding or 'dodging' the difficult or the uncomfortable. Indeed, this programme will enable participants to see that compassion requires us to face and address that which is difficult and foster the skills to do that effectively in a range of circumstances.

How can I access the resources for the programme?

All the resources for the programme will be given to participants at the relevant stage e.g. the workshop slides will be shared when participants attend rather than at the beginning. The *Compassionate Conversations* programme is self-contained, and you don't need to buy any books or be granted permission to access any specialist journals or publications.

The workbook contains all the materials and information you will need, and those materials have been chosen because they are accessible provided one has access to a computer and the internet. You can click on the hyperlinks that are embedded in the workbook to be taken directly to the relevant resource.

At the end of the workbook, there are some references and suggestions for further reading if something particularly interests you, but these are not compulsory.

Participants are also encouraged to suggest their own resources and recommend any reading, articles, radio programmes, podcasts etc. that they have found interesting or helpful.

What size is the cohort for each run of the programme?

The maximum size for each cohort is 20 participants, although there may be fewer in a particular run of *Compassionate Conversations*. The groups are deliberately capped in size to allow for effective learning, especially in the workshop where you will work in smaller groups at different points.

Do I need to buy any materials or invest in any special equipment?

No. As described above, *Compassionate Conversations* is self-contained and all you need is a computer or tablet and access to the internet. The only item you may want to buy or find is a notebook or alternate method for keeping a reflective journal throughout the programme.

How can I give feedback about my experience on the Compassionate Conversations programme?

You will be asked to assess your skills and knowledge level prior to the start of the programme and again immediately following completion of the workshop via an electronic survey. The link to complete the survey will be sent to you. Three months after the end of the programme we will contact you again by electronic survey when other elements will be evaluated. If you have specific feedback that you'd like to share during the programme, you can do so via email to adviceeducation@resolution.nhs.uk

My question isn't answered, who can I contact?

If you have any questions that haven't been answered in this programme guide, please contact adviceeducation@resolution.nhs.uk

We hope you enjoy exploring the materials and taking part in the Compassionate Conversations programme. We are looking forward to working with you.