

## Managing underperformance in the Probationary Period Guide

Underperformance should be dealt with fairly and promptly as Caregivers are often unaware that there is an issue with their performance/conduct. An unresolved issue will often become more serious over time. This is likely to have a causal effect on patients/clients and affect the productivity and performance of the entire workplace.

It is imperative that procedural fairness and due process underpin any performance management process to reduce the risk of Industrial action against the organisation and reflect the Mission and Values of St John of God Health Care.

The checklist provides managers with the necessary steps to take when managing a Caregiver who is underperforming in the probationary period.

### Common reasons for underperformance

- The Caregiver doesn't fully comprehend what is required of them because the performance expectations of the role may not be clear or have not been set (lack of clear process and procedures).
- Caregiver does not undertake work as required, showing signs of apathy and laziness. This may be due to personal or external issues.
- The Caregiver is unsure of how to perform a task or a series of tasks and may be too afraid to ask questions for fear of appearing incompetent.
- There may be a gap between the knowledge and skill set required in the role and the capabilities of the Caregiver. Is there potential for the Caregiver to develop these capabilities over time? This may indicate the need to review the recruitment process and selection decision for this Caregiver.
- Unreasonable expectations of a new graduate caregiver. Some professional positions may require more support than other professions.
- Overseas Health Professional new to working within Australian practice standards.
- Behaviour that is not conducive to the Mission and Values of SJGHC, Code of Conduct, workplace policies and procedures.
- Lack of training and support.
- Family issues or health problems (including alcohol and drugs).
- Cultural misunderstandings.
- Interpersonal differences.

### Serious Misconduct

There is a difference between **underperformance** and **serious misconduct**.

Serious misconduct occurs when a Caregiver:

- causes serious and imminent risk to the **health and safety** of another person or the reputation of the organisation or;
- deliberately behaves in a way that is inconsistent with continuing their employment. Examples of serious misconduct include:

- Theft
- Fraud
- Assault
  - Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at work
- Refusing to carry out work duties

Escalate any behaviour that may constitute serious misconduct to your Director/CEO and Industrial Relations. The Caregiver may need to be stood down pending an investigation. The organisation may also be required to report the behaviour to external agencies.

### Steps to managing underperformance

#### Step 1: Identify the issue

##### What, when, why, who and how

- ✓ Start by writing down specific **examples** of the Caregiver's performance or behaviour that is causing an issue, and **when** it is occurring. Gather any documents that highlight the issue (e.g., work examples, complaints/feedback or performance statistics).
- ✓ Write down **why** the behaviour is an issue – consider how this issues may be **impacting** on patients/clients, the department or other Caregivers.
- ✓ Write down **how** the behaviour needs to change and what the expected outcomes should look like.

#### Step 2: Assess the issue

##### How will I approach the situation?

- ✓ Discuss the issues with the Caregiver as soon as possible. It is only fair and reasonable that a Caregiver is aware they are not meeting performance/conduct expectations to provide them with an opportunity to achieve the expected standard.
- ✓ Think about the possible cause of the issue – potential underlying factors, lack of training, procedures or support etc.
- ✓ An informal discussion may suffice in order to resolve the issue. The conversation should be documented in case the behaviour persists.
- ✓ If a simple conversation has not resolved the issue look to assess how wide the gap is between what you expect of the Caregiver and how they are performing. Use the position description to assist you in identifying these gaps.
- ✓ You can either seek to address the issues by having a further informal conversation with the caregiver or

proceed to meet with the caregiver to formalise a plan to help them achieve expected performance outcomes.

**Step 3: Meet with the Caregiver**  
**Seek to address the issues in a supportive and constructive manner**

- ✓ Arrange to meet with the Caregiver at a time and in a place where you won't be interrupted, overheard or rushed. Let the Caregiver know in advance what the discussion will be about so they can also be prepared for the meeting.
- ✓ Be clear and succinct about what the performance issues are and describe the expected standard using real examples to support this. Ensure the Caregiver understands the gap between the performance expectations of the role and their current performance standard.
- ✓ Explore possible reasons that may be impacting their ability to complete tasks. Is the Caregiver experiencing anything outside of work that may be affecting their ability complete the required tasks?
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions and invite the Caregiver to provide input and suggestions on what they can do to meet the required performance expectations.
- ✓ Explore what additional training or support that you may be able to provide the Caregiver to assist them in achieving performance expectations.
- ✓ Ensure verbal and non-verbal communications are delivered in a supportive and constructive manner. This will ensure the Caregiver will be more open to receiving feedback while encouraging them to meet performance expectations.
- ✓ Let the Caregiver know what they are doing well as this will show them that you also recognise and appreciate their strengths.
- ✓ Advise the Caregiver that you will follow up the meeting in an email to confirm the discussed performance issues, expected performance outcomes, timeframes for improvement and any additional training or support you may be able to provide them. Include a meeting schedule to review the Caregiver's progress. **Alternatively** you may wish to implement a [Performance Improvement Plan \(PIP\)](#) at this stage depending on the number and scale of the performance issues. The PIP is a useful tool for the manager to clearly identify and describe the performance issues/behaviours, using examples to support these; clear expectations and measurable outcomes; set timeframes for performance improvement and review; record any specific training support that may be required; and outline how the progress will be monitored. The timeframe for a PIP should take into account the amount of time needed for the Caregiver to acquire and demonstrate the provided capacity or level of competency, taking into account the complexity of the task, training required etc. **Please contact**

**Recruitment and HR Services on 08 9274 9049 for advice and support.**

**Step 5: Monitor performance**  
**Provide regular feedback**

- ✓ Meet regularly with the Caregiver throughout the probationary period to provide them with an update on their progress and identify what performance outcomes have been reached and any actions that still require improvement.
- ✓ Follow through on any additional training or support measures that you advised would be provided to the Caregiver.
- ✓ Throughout the entire process, keep notes of your discussions and meetings you have with the Caregiver.
- ✓ If the Caregiver's performance has improved, acknowledge that the issue has been resolved and discuss how to maintain the improvements. You may still wish to extend the probationary period to ensure the behaviour remains consistent.

**Confirmation/extension of probationary period**

**The probation review meeting**

- ✓ You will receive an email reminder two weeks before the end of the probationary period where you can either confirm ongoing employment or request to extend the probationary period. You will need to meet with the Caregiver to complete and sign off on the [Probationary Performance Review Form](#).
- ✓ The probation period should be extended for up to a further three months if the Caregiver's performance hasn't improved to the expected standard before the end of the probationary period. It is also recommended that the manager implements a formal [Performance Improvement Plan \(PIP\)](#) at this stage of the process. A formal letter will be issued by Recruitment and HR for the manager to provide to the caregiver at the probationary review meeting.

**The Recruitment and HR Services Centre will assist the manager with this process.**

**Termination of Employment**

**When all avenues have been exhausted**

- ✓ If you wish to terminate employment during the probationary period, it will be considered that all efforts have been made to support the Caregiver to reach the expected performance required in the role. The Industrial Relations Centre will need to authorise any request to terminate employment to ensure we do not place the organisation at potential Industrial risk.