

Personal Hygiene Issues

Guidelines for Managers & Supervisors

Seirbhís Chúnaimh
d'Fhostaithe na Státseirbhíse



www.cseas.per.gov.ie



Just as deteriorating work performance or bad attendance records are issues for local management to address with a staff member, so too is the issue of personal hygiene.

Telling a person they have bad breath or body odour is difficult. A line manager who is in this situation can use these guidelines to address a staff member's personal hygiene problem tactfully and effectively and thereby minimise embarrassment.

On-duty EAO available at 0818 008120

Monday – Thursday: 9am – 5.15pm

Friday: 9am – 5pm

**Appointments are available evening
and weekends if required**

Email: cseas@per.gov.ie

www.cseas.per.gov.ie

A word of caution

What can appear as a personal hygiene problem may be attributable to other causes, e.g. some medical conditions or medicines. Be aware that some synthetic materials, particularly those used in footwear can have a particular odour.

Guidelines for line managers

- This is an issue that must be treated sensitively yet directly. Where possible, it may be more appropriate for a manager of the same gender as the staff member to talk to the individual concerned.
- Think about how you would want to be told about this problem. You may find it helpful to role play with a colleague, supervisor or an Employee Assistance Officer (EAO).
- Hold the meeting late in the day or before the staff member goes home. Telling him/her first thing in the morning may leave the staff member feeling self-conscious all day.
- Quietly and discreetly call the staff member to a meeting in a private place – any such discussion should always be held in private.
- In speaking to the staff member, try to reassure him/her of the positive aspects of his/her work performance. Indicate that this is a difficult issue for you to raise.
- Having done this it is best practice to be direct. Say that you are aware/ have received complaints of an odour coming from the individual. Ask if s/ he is aware of this. (You may be asked who complained, be prepared for this question.)

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- Empathise. Acknowledge that you understand this is difficult for him/her to hear but you would be neglecting your duties as a manager/supervisor to ignore it.
- Stick to the topic of work. Tell the staff member about the negative effects on the work environment. Don't try to guess why s/he has the problem.
- Try not to give the impression that the staff member is guilty of wrongdoing or that this is a disciplinary session. However, be clear that there is a problem which the staff member needs to address.
- Help the staff member to explore possible reasons, e.g. changing clothes frequently, having clothes laundered, showering daily, changing footwear.
- A medical reason may be disclosed.
- Allow time for the staff member to respond – the response might be an angry one. It is unhelpful to get into an argument.
- Recognise that the staff member may be angry, embarrassed or upset. If the conversation ends abruptly, follow up to confirm that the person is ok.
- In concluding the discussion, say that you will review the situation with the staff member in approximately three weeks. Indicate that you are available at any time for a follow-up discussion.
- Ensure to have a review meeting to check for improvement.

Don't forget that the staff member will probably be thankful at being told there is a problem. If it were you who had the problem, you might appreciate being told about it in a sensitive and respectful way.

Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

You can always discuss your handling of the situation confidentially* with an Employee Assistance Officer (EAO). Perhaps practising your approach with an EAO might help.

Should the staff member require the support of the CSEAS, please advise him/her how to make contact with the Service.

*Normal professional standards apply in relation to confidentiality. See the CSEAS website for details on confidentiality and exceptions thereto - www.cseas.per.gov.ie

**Civil Service Employee Assistance Service
(HQ)**

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