

# Employee Challenges Part 1



**DECAL  
Thriving Child Care  
Business Academy**

## Learn how to support improvement in difficult employees

---

Even with your best efforts to motivate employees, there may be times when conflict and challenges are unavoidable. When conflicts do arise, dealing with them swiftly and clearly can lead to better outcomes for you, your employees, and your business. In this tool, we take you through how to effectively work through employee challenges.

### How do I deal with a difficult employee?

Dealing with a difficult employee can be a challenging task. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help you navigate difficult or uncomfortable dynamics:

- 1) Make a record of problem behavior and how it was handled;
- 2) Speak with the employee; and
- 3) Develop a plan for improvement.

### Why is it important to document problem behavior?

Before taking any action, look to identify the specific behavior that is causing difficulty to help you address the issue more effectively. Record the problem behavior and all steps that are taken to address it. Examples of problem behavior with employees may include chronic absenteeism, insubordination, harassment, excessive tardiness, or consistently failing to meet performance expectations. When documenting behavior, specificity is your friend — be sure to provide clarity about what issues you are concerned about, provide examples, and include key details such as date, time, and involved parties. Your documentation provides you with a solid record of what is going on, gives written proof to help you and the employee better understand the situation, and will help you make fair decisions. Additionally, this record will be useful if you need to take further disciplinary action. Once you have a record of problem behavior documented, it's worth taking the time to carefully review it for patterns, severity, and potential underlying causes. Compare the incidents to the language outlined in employee contracts, agreements, or handbooks to ensure consistency with established policies and expectations. This analysis will help you determine if further disciplinary measures, additional training, or other interventions may be necessary.

### How should I structure the conversation with the employee?

Structuring the conversation with the difficult employee is crucial to ensure that you address the issue effectively and professionally. Here are seven tips on how to structure the conversation:

**Tip 1:** Begin on a positive note. Start the conversation by acknowledging the employee's strengths and contributions to the team. This can help to establish a positive tone for the conversation and make the employee more receptive to feedback. Be careful — you don't want to overstate the positive if the employee isn't demonstrating it. That could confuse the employee (“If I do everything well, what's the issue?”).

**Tip 2:** Describe the behavior or issue. Be specific and clear about the behavior or issue that is causing the problem. Use objective language and avoid making assumptions or accusations. Be specific about when it happens and any circumstances you have seen that may contribute to it. For example, rather than saying “You can use inappropriate language with families” you might say “Over the past two weeks, I noticed at child pick up that you've said a number of words to parents that are inappropriate.”

**Tip 3:** Listen to the employee. Allow the employee to express their perspective and listen to their concerns. This can help you to understand the root cause of the problem and identify potential solutions. This can be very hard; likely you're anxious about the conversation, so you may need to make an extra effort to hear what they are saying. It can help to take notes while they talk because that can focus your concentration on their side of the story.

**Tip 4:** Explain the impact. Describe how the behavior or issue is impacting the team or organization. Be specific about the consequences of the behavior and how it is affecting productivity or morale. Be careful about exaggeration. For example, if it is not true you would not want to say “everyone was upset by this action” when it was really a few people who approached you.

**Tip 5:** Set expectations. Be clear about what you expect from the employee going forward. Provide specific examples of what behaviors or actions are acceptable and unacceptable.

**Tip 6:** Offer support. If the behavior is due to personal or work-related issues, offer support and resources to help the employee address those issues. This can include counseling, training, or coaching.

**Tip 7:** Follow up. Schedule a follow-up meeting to check in with the employee and monitor their progress. This can help to ensure that the behavior has improved and that the issue has been resolved. Though it may be difficult, be ready to help the employee get back on track as soon as possible if there is another issue. For example, if you are holding meetings every three weeks with them and there's another issue, you may want to schedule a meeting that day rather than waiting for the next scheduled one.

Remember to be professional, objective, and respectful throughout the conversation. Avoid becoming defensive or emotional and focus on finding a solution to the problem.

## **What can I do if an Employee reacts poorly to the conversation?**

When confronted by their employer, a challenging employee may react defensively, deny wrongdoing, or become confrontational. It is essential to remain calm and empathetic during the conversation and highlight the irresponsibility of potential reactionary measures the employee may take. Explain how the behaviors they exemplified violate company policy and have potential to negatively impact the company's reputation. Offer support and guidance for improvement and review your employee handbook together to provide clarity and a shared understanding of expectations and limitations. At the forefront should be the protection of your business' reputation. Swift action, decisiveness and adherence to company policy will assist you in protecting the reputation and success of your business.

Once the opportunity has been had for discussion, there is room for action. Set clear expectations for the employee going forward. Think about a boundary that needs to be set and what specific behaviors should be exemplified or avoided. This discussion is about making room for growth and should be a first step in improving their performance. If their behavior does not improve, a record of this meeting may serve as a marker for decline. Take the time to keep a record of all discussion and actions taken regarding the employee's behavior, this may be important if further action is required.

If the difficult behavior is due to personal or work-related issues, try to offer support and resources to help the employee address those issues, if possible. As the process unfolds, be sure to check in with the employee to monitor their progress and ensure they are meeting the expectations set for them.

## **What's the best way to improve employee performance?**

Improving employee performance is a continuous process and it requires a focused and proactive approach for setting clear expectations. This ensures that employees understand their job responsibilities and the performance expectations of their roles. Such expectations can be set through a detailed job description, setting performance goals with the employee through a Personal Improvement Plan and providing regular feedback. Staying in touch with your employees aids in understanding their performance and identifying areas for improvement.

You may also consider offering training and professional development opportunities for your employees. This can include workshops, conferences, online courses, or mentoring programs that improve employee skills and knowledge. Providing necessary tools and equipment and support systems like IT support or HR is key to finding mutual success for your employees and your business.

## **What should I include in a performance improvement plan?**

A performance improvement plan (PIP) is a tool that can be used to help a struggling employee improve their performance. Here are six elements that you should include in a PIP:

1. **Specific performance expectations:** The PIP should clearly outline the specific performance expectations that the employee needs to meet. These expectations should be measurable and achievable.
2. **Timeline:** The PIP should include a timeline for the employee to meet the performance expectations. This timeline should take into account any necessary training or resources and provide realistic milestones for achievement.
3. **Support and resources:** The PIP should identify any support or resources that will be provided to the employee to help them meet the performance expectations. This can include training, coaching, or mentoring.
4. **Consequences:** The PIP should clearly outline the consequences if the employee does not meet the performance expectations within the timeline. This can include disciplinary action, termination, or other consequences.
5. **Monitoring and feedback:** The PIP should include a plan for monitoring the employees' progress and providing feedback. This can include regular check-ins with the employee, performance reviews, or other monitoring methods.
6. **Signatures:** The PIP should be signed by both the employee and their supervisor. This ensures that both parties understand the expectations and consequences outlined in the PIP.

It's important to remember that a PIP should be used as a tool to help the employee improve their performance, not as a disciplinary measure. The goal should be to support the employee in reaching their potential and meeting the expectations of their role.

Above all, it is crucial to create and maintain a positive work environment to help boost employee performance. This can include providing opportunities for social interaction, promoting work-life balance, and creating a culture of open communication and collaboration. You may also recognize and reward good performance. This can be done through formal recognition programs, such as Employee of the Month, or through informal recognition, such as a simple thank you note or verbal praise.

Should no improvement come from these steps, further action may need to be considered. This too can be done on a sliding scale, from implementing a **performance improvement plan**, to **disciplinary action**, or **termination**, based on the severity of behavior or lack of improvement. It is important to follow your business's own best practices here, keeping in mind what policies and procedures may be outlined in the employee handbook to avoid a larger HR issue.

Remember that improving employee performance is an ongoing process that requires consistent effort and attention. By setting clear expectations, providing feedback and support, and creating a positive work environment, you can help employees perform at their best. For instances when further action is needed and there is no measurable improvement in behavior, see Part 2 of this guide for how to effectively implement disciplinary action.

## Additional Resources

If you have questions or need help, assistance is available.

[GaPDS Website](#)

[DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy Website](#)

**To Find Other Study Guides:** Click on [Resources](#) on the Academy home page

**To Find Training:** Click on [Trainings](#) on the Academy home page

**To Register for Training:** Click on [Schedules & Registration](#) on the Academy home page

**To Sign Up for Study Groups:** Fill out the [Intake Assessment](#)

**For questions about coaching or study groups:** Email [GAcoaching@civstrat.com](mailto:GAcoaching@civstrat.com)

**To Find Other ECE Resources:** Visit the [DECAL Website](#)

**For General Questions about the Academy:** Email [thriving@decals.ga.gov](mailto:thriving@decals.ga.gov)

**For More Information:**

[Family Child Care Learning Home Rules and Regulations](#)

[Child Care Learning Center Rules and Regulations](#)

### DEVELOPED AND DESIGNED BY CIVITAS STRATEGIES

**Disclaimer:** *The information contained here has been prepared by Civitas Strategies and is not intended to constitute legal, tax, or financial advice. The Civitas Strategies team has used reasonable efforts in collecting, preparing, and providing this information, but does not guarantee its accuracy, completeness, adequacy, or currency. The publication and distribution of this information are not intended to create, and receipt does not constitute, an attorney-client or any other advisory relationship. Reproduction of this information is expressly prohibited. Only noncommercial uses of this work are permitted.*

Copyright © 2024 Civitas Strategies, LLC