

Wellbeing for the Bush

HEALTHY WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy workplace relationships are not just “nice to have”. They directly impact a team’s functioning, staff retention, and patient care. Built on open communication, mutual respect, and trust, they allow people to feel valued, psychologically safe, and able to work together effectively, especially during challenging times.

In rural and remote settings, these relationships matter even more. Teams are small, roles are broad, and resources are limited. You may navigate professional isolation, dual relationships (such as a colleague who is also a neighbour), and close ties with community members. Healthy connections can be a key source of support, resilience, and job satisfaction.

What do healthy workplace relationships look like?

Healthy Signs



- Respectful, honest communication
- Clear and agreed boundaries
- Feeling heard and acknowledged
- Shared decision-making where appropriate
- Constructive feedback given with care
- Trust and reliability
- Willingness to repair after conflict

Warning Signs



- Frequent conflict or hostility
- Blurred or ignored boundaries
- Dismissiveness or being talked over
- One person dominating decisions
- Criticism that feels personal or harsh
- Gossip, rumours, or exclusion
- Ongoing resentment or avoidance

Creating and maintaining healthy relationships

Communicate openly and kindly

- Check in regularly. Misunderstandings can escalate quickly.
- Use ‘I’ statements instead of blame: “I felt overwhelmed when...” rather than “You always...”
- Listen actively. Give your full attention.
- Confirm understanding: “Can I check we’re on the same page?” and repeat your understanding of the conversation.
- Be mindful of cultural and communication differences.

Establish and respect boundaries

- Clarify roles and expectations early.
- Set shared norms for dual relationships.
- Respect time, energy, and emotional limits, including your own.
- It is ok to say, “I need some time before continuing this conversation.”
- Use supervision or support services to navigate complex situations. (The Bush Support Line is available 24/7 on 1800 805 391).

Build trust over time

- Follow through on commitments. Reliability builds trust.
- Be consistent in how you treat people across settings.
- Acknowledge mistakes. Trust is repaired through accountability.
- Recognise and celebrate team contributions.

Manage conflict constructively

- Address issues early. Tensions grow when things are left unspoken.
- Choose an appropriate time and private space for difficult conversations.
- Focus on the behaviour or situation, not the person.
- Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.
- Involve a third party (e.g. supervisor, EAP) if needed.

Prioritise your wellbeing

- Healthy relationships start with how you relate to yourself. Focus on managing your stress.
- Notice when you're depleted, as it affects how you show up.
- Use peer support, supervision, the Bush Support Line, or other supports.
- Debrief regularly, especially after difficult cases or community incidents.
- Model the self-care you encourage in others.



Unique rural and remote reminders

- In small teams, every relationship matters. Invest where you can.
- Isolation can magnify relationship stress. Talk about it.
- Take time to understand local community expectations and cultural protocols.
- Check in with colleagues who seem withdrawn or overwhelmed.

When things aren't working

- Seek support early (e.g. supervisor, Bush Support Line, EAP).
- Document concerns if needed.
- Remember: addressing issues early supports your wellbeing, team functioning, and patient care.

Quick self-check in

- ✓ Am I listening to understand others?
- ✓ Have I clarified expectations or uncertainties?
- ✓ Is this a one-off issue, or a pattern?

Healthy workplace relationships are everyone's responsibility. You don't need to be a manager to make a difference. Modelling respectful, consistent behaviour is what matters.