

**National Guardian**  
Freedom to Speak Up

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Self-reflective template

## Freedom to Speak Up

When things go wrong, we need to make sure that lessons are learnt and things are improved. If we think something might go wrong, it's important that we all feel able to speak up so that potential harm is prevented. Even when things are good, but could be even better, we should feel able to say something and should expect that our suggestion is listened to and used as an opportunity for improvement. **Speaking up is about all of these things.**

We know that speaking up can be difficult and that, when it doesn't happen, patients and workers suffer. The experience of patients and workers in Mid-Staffordshire hospital trust was an example of that. More recently, the findings of the Gosport inquiry are another stark example of how untold harm can occur when the voices of workers and families are not heard.

When he wrote the "Freedom to Speak Up" review report, Sir Robert Francis QC set out a simple five step model of what a good speaking up process should look like. You can find that here:



In practice, each step can be fraught with difficulties, particularly when you consider that, someone who is speaking up is often in a highly stressful situation. As well as speaking up yourself, you may be in a role where people want to speak up to you. Below is a table with each step and some of the factors that need to be considered. This exercise can help to identify some of the barriers to speaking up and how you might mitigate these for your team.

**If you were speaking up, what would you want to see that would encourage you? How do you foster the environment so that your team feel encouraged to speak up to you?**

Step	Factors to consider	What would encourage you to speak up?
<b>Identify that something might be wrong</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New starters may be seeing things in practice for the first time.</li> <li>• Everyone is busy and under pressure and sometimes it is difficult to take a step back and see things with fresh eyes.</li> </ul>	
<b>Raising a concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You might not know who to raise a concern with or the process to use.</li> <li>• How do you find the time to speak up when you are constantly busy?</li> <li>• What if it is one of your best friends who has done something that you think might be wrong?</li> <li>• What if someone more senior than you is doing something you don't agree with?</li> </ul>	
<b>Examining the facts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes things are a matter of opinion</li> <li>• It can take a long time to properly understand a situation and many factors might be a at play.</li> </ul>	
<b>Outcomes and feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you preserve someone's confidentiality?</li> <li>• What if there isn't a simple response to a situation?</li> </ul>	
<b>Reflecting and moving forward</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If an error has occurred should someone be blamed?</li> <li>• What if I damage the organisation's reputation by admitting that something has gone wrong?</li> </ul>	

Sir Robert Francis QC recommended that NHS trusts and Foundation Trusts should appoint a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are there to support workers to speak up and work throughout the organisation to tackle barriers to speaking up. They provide an alternative route for speaking up for

workers who might find it difficult to raise a matter through normal channels, such as by speaking to their line manager.

You can find the details of your Guardian in this [directory](#)

**Now you have learned a bit more about speaking up, what reflections do you have on how you encourage speaking up, and whether you might change your practice? Do you know how to speak up yourself and where to escalate concerns?**

For more information visit our [website](#) or follow [@NatGuardianFTSU](#).