AGEING WORKFORCE READY PROJECT

The **ageing workforce** has been identified as one of the **six megatrends** in work health and safety and workers' compensation over the next 20 years.

CSIRO

MANAGER CONVERSATION GUIDES

MYTH Mature age workers will cost the business more for their experience

FACT **Mature age employees can save costs to employers and boost the economy**

INCREASE WORKERS OVER 50 BY 10% ADDS $16m SPENDING TO THE ECONOMY

NATIONAL SENIORS AUSTRALIA, 2012

45+ YEARS STAY IN THE ONE JOB DOUBLE THE AVERAGE

Job tenure for workers aged over 45 is double the Australian average

HILDA, 2019

MYTH Older workers have lower performance and productivity

FACT **Experience is a greater predictor of productivity than age**

Respondents report the main advantages of recruiting older workers are the **experience** they bring (76%), and the professional **knowledge** they have acquired (68%)

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, 2018

EXPERIENCE → KNOWLEDGE → PERFORMANCE

INTELLIGENCE PEAKS 60–70 YEARS

Workers continue to accumulate knowledge with crystalised intelligence peaking in our 60's to 70's

HARTSHORNE & GERMINE, 2015

MYTH Mature age workers are prone to health problems

FACT **Mature age workers are less likely to take sick leave and experience work related injuries**

60+ TAKE FEWER SICK DAYS

Workers aged 60+ years take fewer sick days

BUPA, 2012

65+ LOWEST WORK-RELATED INJURY & ILLNESS

People 65 years and over reported the lowest rate of work-related injuries and illnesses

CSIRO, 2018

AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN WARNED FOR MANY YEARS ABOUT LOOMING LABOUR AND SKILL SHORTAGES CAUSED BY AN AGEING POPULATION. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT'S NOT 'RISKY' TO GIVE MATURE AGED WORKERS MORE OPPORTUNITIES—RATHER, IT'S RISKY IF WE DON'T.

BUSINESS AUSTRALIA

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

People are living longer than previous generations. A child born in the West today is more likely than not to live to at least 100 years old, people who are currently 60 have a 50% chance of making it to 90 or more.

We often assume that this increased longevity will contribute to a long and leisurely retirement. However, for many this is not practical at a financial level nor is it good for our wellbeing. A three-stage life (education, employment, retirement) is giving way to multiple stages and multiple transitions, and the trajectories our lives take will be very different to what is normal now.

People of all ages benefit from access to meaningful work in a supportive environment where they can use their skills and knowledge. As we get older, what constitutes 'good work' does start to look a little bit different. **It is important to separate the myths from the facts and use evidence-based practice to create an age-inclusive organisation.**

Organisations that actively seek to engage and support their older workers, will be better positioned for the future of work.

In this booklet you will find four 'conversation guides' that can help you navigate critical ageing workforce related topics. More information and resources, including worksheets and factsheets, and guides on other topics, can be found on the AWR project website: www.awrproject.com.au/resources/.

MYTH Older workers are just counting the days till they can retire

FACT **Older workers are staying in the workforce for longer**

177,500 RETURN TO WORK

Previously retired persons aged 45 years and over were either back at work or planning to go back

ABS DATA 2016-2017

58% EXPECT TO RETIRE OVER 66 YEARS

&

20% EXPECT TO RETIRE OVER 71 YEARS

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, 2018

MYTH Older workers do not like or understand technology

FACT **Older people are the fastest growing users of technology**

77% OVER 55 OWN A SMARTPHONE AND USE APPS

DELOITTE, 2018

73% OVER 65 ARE INTERNET USERS

COMPARED TO **14%** IN 2000

FORBES, 2019

AGEING WORKFORCE READY AWR PROJECT

LATE CAREER CONVERSATIONS

Late career conversations might be initiated by you or an employee, or happen as part of the annual performance cycle. Whatever way the conversation comes up, this 'conversation framework' can help you to feel prepared and capable.

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS → **2. REACH OUT** → **3. RESPOND**

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

Late career starts with a transition from the past (mid-career) and involves developing a new understanding of our career and life goals. Look for signs that people are thinking differently about their job. Maybe they want more time for their hobbies, a greater challenge, to 'give back,' or perhaps they have new priorities such as caring for a family-member.

Prepare for the conversation:

- Consider what your goals and expectations are for the conversation.
- Choose your mindset; e.g. supportive, curious, a mentor, sounding board.
- Practice how you will open the conversation.
- Have a copy of the Late Career Worksheet with you, and the more detailed Late Career Navigation guide.

Notes:

The purpose of a late career conversation is to give employees a framework and tools to help plan their late career transition. By helping them plan, you will be able to work out what your team member needs to stay engaged or become more engaged with their job.

2. REACH OUT

Tips for opening a conversation:

- Start with an observation; e.g. "I've noticed that...", "I'm curious about...", "I'm interested to know..."
- Get to the point quickly; explain what you hope to achieve in this conversation.
- Acknowledge that transitions are normal and not always easy.

Notes:

3. RESPOND

Use the Late Career Planning framework (as described in the Late Career Worksheet) to structure the conversation. Remember that you are not aiming to create a plan in this meeting; what you are doing is sharing tools so that your team member is better equipped to make a late career plan for themselves.

a. Using the Late Career Worksheet, explain that values are at the core. When we understand what is important to us, it can be easier to make decisions.

b. Encourage them to think about their wealth, **home** and **health** using the questions on the worksheet.

You may like to explore **work** with them in a little more depth, asking questions like:

- Do you feel safe and respected at work?
- How happy are you with the work you do?
- Do you have the flexibility you need?
- Are there skills you want to learn and develop?
- What do you think others can learn from you?
- Is there anything in your job that is getting harder?

Remember that by asking these questions you are not promising answers. It may be that you can meet some of your employee's needs, but they may also want to consider other jobs and employers depending on the specific direction they want to take their late career.

c. Close the conversation:

- Confirm any follow-up actions that either of you have.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting if that would be beneficial.

Notes:

Next Steps:

EMPLOYEE RESOURCES

WORK

- **Policies:** (e.g. flexible work)

WEALTH

- **Super Funds**
- **Moneysmart:** moneysmart.gov.au
- **National Debt Hotline:** ndh.org.au
- **Services Australia**

HOME

- **Interest sites:** (e.g. Volunteering Victoria, University of the Third Age)
- **Social supports**, family and friends

HEALTH

- **Employee Assistance Program**
- **GP** and other health professionals
- **Head to Health:** headtohealth.gov.au

GENERAL

- **Ageing Workforce Ready Project website:** www.awrproject.com.au
- **SuperFriend resources:** superfriend.com.au/resources/retirement-transition-resources/
- **Books:** (e.g. Retire Smart, Retire Happy by Nancy Schlossberg)

AGEING WORKFORCE READY AWR PROJECT

FLEXIBLE WORK CONVERSATIONS

Employees who are 55 or over, and/or have disability/carer's responsibilities, are recognised under the Fair Work Act as a group that may need greater flexibility. Requests for flexibility are more likely to be initiated by an employee, but however the conversation comes up, the 'conversation framework' outlined below can help you to feel more prepared and confident.

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS → **2. REACH OUT** → **3. RESPOND**

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

An employee may well initiate a conversation about flexible work. However, if flexible work is not common in your workplace, then managers' can take a more proactive role in raising flexible work options. Flexible work may also be an appropriate work adjustment when fitness-for-work becomes an issue.

Refer to 'Fitness for Work Conversation Guide' for changes in thinking and behaviour that may indicate the need for a flexible work adjustment. Noticing that your employee is not their usual self can be challenging, but by being on the front foot you can address issues sooner and achieve a better outcome.

Prepare for the conversation:

- Considering what your goals and expectations are for the conversation.
- Being clear about your legal requirements, limitations, relevant policies and Employment Contract.
- Knowing the role and the risks.
- Checking the employees' entitlements.
- Writing down some notes or questions that could help if you get stuck.
- Having a list of resources handy.
- Choosing your mindset; e.g. supportive, curious, a mentor, sounding board.

> "EMPLOYEES WITH FLEXIBILITY HAVE 55% HIGHER ENGAGEMENT, 55% LESS STRESS AND 45% LOWER TURNOVER INTENTION THAN EMPLOYEES WITHOUT ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE WORK.
>
> DIVERSITY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA, 2019

Notes:

2. REACH OUT

Flexible work requests must be put in writing by the employee, and the 'Flexible Work Worksheet' is a template that can assist them to do this. However, best practice goes beyond the paper trail. If an employee requests a flexible work arrangement, especially one that you can't accommodate, don't just send back a written response.

Reach out, have a conversation, listen to the reasons your employee made the request, and see if there is something that can work for both of you.

THE PURPOSE OF A FLEXIBILITY CONVERSATION IS TO DISCOVER OPTIONS THAT SUPPORT YOUR EMPLOYEE TO WORK SAFELY, THAT PROTECT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING, AND THAT SUSTAIN THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN THEIR JOB.

Notes:

3. RESPOND

One of the most useful things to do in flexible work conversation is **let go of assumptions and listen—ask don't assume!** Stay curious, find out what is going on for your employee, and why they think flexible work is a good option for them.

Ask questions to help you understand them better.

- How will flexible work make life better or easier for you?
- What's the most important part of your job—to you, to me and to the team?
- How do you think I'll be impacted by you working flexibly?
- How do you think the team will be impacted?
- What are some of the issues that might come up and how do we address those?
- What would happen if I refuse this request?
- What other options could help you to meet your needs? For example, are there different types of flexibility, or other work adjustments that would help?
- What are your 'not negotiables'? With whatever solution we come up with, what is the minimum it needs to give you?

Remember that by exploring flexibility options you are not promising to be able to accommodate them. Perhaps what they are asking is reasonable, but if it's not, you need to explain why, and think about alternatives that may work from both a business and personal perspective.

After the conversation:

- Schedule a follow up meeting if the specifics of the flexible work arrangement aren't fully agreed.
- The employee needs to put the flexible work request in writing if they haven't already or if the request has changed.
- As the employer, you need to respond in writing to the flexible work request within 21 days; see Fairwork Ombudsman for response template.
- Monitor the impacts of the flexible work arrangement on the employee and on the team more broadly.
- After a trial period meet with the employee to discuss what has and hasn't worked—consider their perspective as well as sharing the business impact.

Notes:

RESOURCES

Employee Assistance Program
(Manager Help)

Flexible Work Policies

Fair Work Ombudsman:
fairwork.gov.au

Workplace Gender Equality Agency:
wgea.gov.au

Supported by WorkSafe WorkWell
AGEING WORKFORCE READY AWR PROJECT

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FITNESS FOR WORK CONVERSATIONS

Noticing that your employee is not their usual self can be challenging. However, it helps to be on the front foot when you see someone's performance or engagement changing at work. This 'conversation framework' can help you feel prepared and capable when talking to an employee about their fitness for work.

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS → **2. REACH OUT** → **3. RESPOND**

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

Consider mental and physical changes that relate to aging. Look out for changes in thinking and behaviour:

EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Are they more irritable, angry or withdrawn than normal?
- Are they being more negative or giving themselves a hard time (e.g. saying things like "I'm hopeless")?
- Are they taking more personal leave or getting to work late?
- Are they taking longer to perform their normal duties? Has the quality of work decreased?
- Are they less enthusiastic about volunteering for new or additional work tasks?
- Are they more cynical or critical of others?
- Have they appeared more sad or more emotional?

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Are they complaining of having difficulty sleeping or headaches?
- Has there been changes in their personal appearance or hygiene?
- Are they more breathless?
- Have they gained or lost weight recently?
- Have there been any changes in diet quantity or preferences?
- Have there been changes in frequency of toilet breaks?

Trust your gut.

Don't draw conclusions.

Stick to your observations.

> "PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL.
>
> MAYA ANGELOU

Notes:

GET READY FOR A CONVERSATION

Get the facts:

- Be familiar with the legal entitlements relating to Reasonable Work Adjustments.
- Research relevant policies such as Flexible Working policy, Personal and Extended Leave, Reasonable Work Adjustments.
- Review the Award, Enterprise Agreement and/or Employment Contract.
- Check the employees' entitlements.
- Talk to HR about specific questions or concerns.
- Know the role and the risks.

Get in the right headspace:

- Be clear about your role and limitations.
- Know what you hope to achieve by having this conversation.
- Choose your mindset (e.g. supportive, curious, a mentor, sounding board).
- Know that these conversations often feel uncomfortable, but that doesn't mean you don't do it.

Notes:

2. REACH OUT

PUT YOURSELF IN THE EMPLOYEE'S SHOES AND CONSIDER:

When to have the conversation. Do you schedule a meeting, have it as part of a regular catch-up, make it more informal? Does the time of day matter, or the day or the week? Think about how they may react and whether you need to monitor them after the conversation, or if you think they would want some space afterwards to reflect.

Where to have the conversation. Think about privacy, comfort, what their peers may say if they see you talking.

What resources to bring. Are there other AWR Project resources that would be helpful, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) contact details, information about how to access other resources.

Bring a 'cheat sheet' if that helps you feel more comfortable.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU WILL START THE CONVERSATION:

- Start with an observation:
  - Usually you are <strength>, but recently I've noticed...
  - I saw you do <...>. That's out of character for you, can we talk about what happened?
- Get to the point quickly, don't leave them wondering why they are there.
- Let them know you are committed to helping them get the help they need so they can be safe and productive and enjoy their work.
- Practice your opening out loud.

Notes:

3. RESPOND

- Listen carefully.
- Ask open questions.
- Check body language.
- Provide reassurance.
- Share experience, insight, resources.

REMEMBER:

- You are their manager, not their friend or advisor.
- Show support and direct them to resources and experts as and if required.
- Don't offer financial, medical, psychological or other advice or try to be HR.
- Don't try to 'fix it' for them—help them come up with their own solutions.
- Avoid offering advice or making rushed decisions.
- If in doubt, take an action to look into it and talk to a trusted person for advice.

CLOSING THE CONVERSATION:

To move the conversation toward agreed action you might ask:

- "Where do you want to go from here?"
- "What are you thinking are the next steps?"
- "What do you need from me?"

Expect that more than one conversation is likely to be needed.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Follow up with an email and agree on your next meeting time.
- Schedule a reminder to call them in a couple of weeks. If they are really struggling, follow up with them sooner.
- Follow through on your commitments and keep them updated on progress.
- Remember that the first conversation is just the beginning.
- Makes notes about the meeting for your records and future reference if needed.

Notes:

RESOURCES

Policies and guidelines

Manager or HR

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Manager help

'Investing in Experience Tool Kit'
www.dese.gov.au/mature-age-hub

AWR resources: awrproject.com.au

AGEING WORKFORCE READY PROJECT

RETIREMENT CONVERSATIONS

There are plenty of myths about retirement out there. Having informative conversations about retirement, as employees plan their transition out of the workforce, can help dispel common myths, whilst also helping prepare for life beyond work.

This conversation guide provides some pointers and questions based on the key elements of the 'retirement planning framework'. By using these questions along with the conversation framework, managers can be better prepared and more confident in having retirement discussions with their employees.

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS → 2. REACH OUT → 3. RESPOND

1. RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

These are all potential signs, and the presence of them does not automatically mean someone is thinking of retiring.

We need to use our judgment to handle these conversations respectfully.

- Age (not the only factor, but can still be a sign).
- Changes in demeanor or behavior.
- Requests for flexible work or extended leave (or hoarding leave).
- Comments about winding down.
- Purchasing 'retirement toys'.
- Lifestyle changes, such as a spouse retiring.

Remember that retirement transitions can be either anticipated or unanticipated.

Anticipated retirement occurs at one's preferred time, is planned and is mostly within their control. Conversely, unanticipated retirement occurs not at one's preferred time, is unplanned and often not in their control.

Unanticipated retirement may occur due to declining health, redundancy, or caring responsibilities and is often more difficult to come to terms with and plan for.

Either way, having conversations about retirement will help make the transition to retirement more manageable for employees.

Notes:

2. REACH OUT

The purpose of a retirement conversation is not to get older employees 'out the door,' or to impose your own ideas about retirement onto them.

Rather the purpose of the conversation is to provide the framework and tools for employees to plan their own retirement.

When preparing for a retirement conversation, carefully consider your assumptions and mindset going into it. If you seem genuinely interested in your team members' plans and goals the conversation will be more productive.

If you feel awkward about having the conversation, or think your employee might take it the wrong way, consider ways to normalise it. Perhaps organise a retirement related event for the team, such as a seminar by the organisation's default super fund, or a Retiring Well presentation from SuperFriend. In addition, make 'checking in' the norm—having career conversations with all your people helps make retirement conversations less confronting.

See the 'Late Career' resources for tips on how to have more general career conversations.

Notes:

3. RESPOND

EMOTIONS FIRST

Retirement can be an emotional time for people. They can be excited, worried, exhausted, relieved, scared, angry, sad, or something else!

They can even be feeling a mixture of positive and negative emotions. A retirement conversation needs to start with the emotions, because generally people aren't in the headspace to plan anything until their feelings are acknowledged.

Recognising and acknowledging emotions doesn't need to be hard. Listen carefully and with genuine care to what they say. You can even ask them how they're feeling.

The trick is not to comfort them or rationalise with them, simply name the emotion. Say something like:

- "You sound a bit worried about what might happen."
- "Wow, there's a lot going on for you, how does that make you feel?"
- "I can hear how excited you are about your retirement."

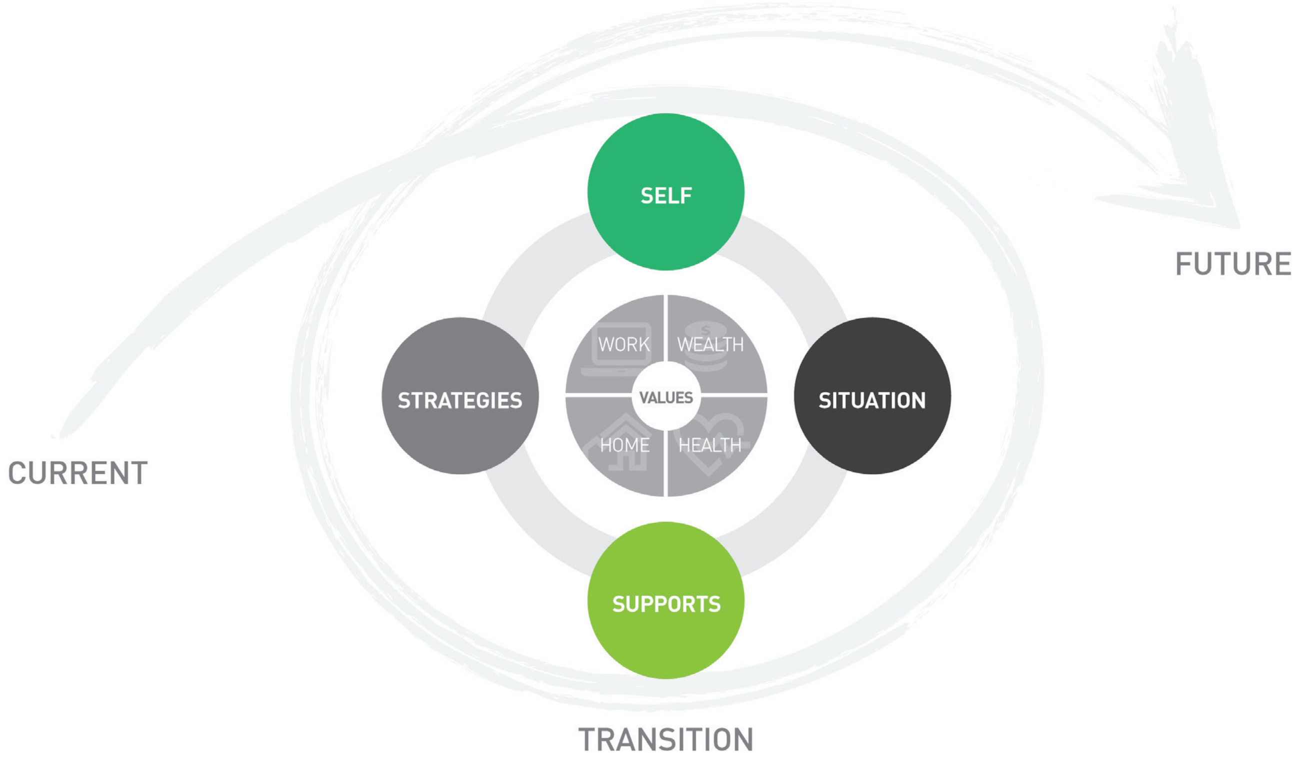
Notes:

THEN PLAN

Once your employee feels that you really hear them and appreciate how they're feeling, you can move to the planning part of the conversation.

Transitioning to retirement requires consideration of numerous factors across different areas of an employee's life and is best navigated with a plan. As a manager, you can provide your people with the confidence and tools to develop a transition to retirement plan.

The diagram below depicts the key elements of a retirement plan that are useful to consider throughout the transition.



WELLBEING

At the centre of this diagram is Work, Wealth, Home and Health—these are factors which need to be anchored in Values.

Helping people to find what's important to them in each of these areas helps them make decisions about how long to stay in the workforce and also provide a bridge to retirement.

By reflecting more wholistically on these elements, people can work out what things they want to be doing now and into retirement.

See the employee worksheets on each of 'work', 'wealth', 'home', 'health' and 'values' for additional support in considering these elements of life and wellbeing.

Notes:

The next layer in the retirement diagram is: self, situation, supports and coping strategies. According to transition expert Nancy Schlossberg, they are central to a transition plan.

As a manager, your job isn't to coach your people through this planning exercise, but to help raise their awareness and provide tools to support them. Employees can use the 'Retirement Worksheet' for further guidance on creating a transition plan.

SELF

When having a conversation about transitioning to retirement, encourage them to think about their values.

Our values reflect who we want to be as a person, what we want our lives to look like and what is important to us.

This can be a very personal thing, so there is no expectation that they share their values with you. But hopefully, by introducing the concept of values into the conversation, they feel able to think about this by themselves or with a friend or partner.

Questions to ask to encourage a reflection of **values** include:

- What does retirement mean to you?
- Why are you thinking about retirement?
- What are some of your hopes for retirement?

SITUATION

In a retirement conversation, you want to encourage employees to consider their situation—including their work, wealth, home, and health—factors that will influence their decision on remaining in the workforce as well as help them plan what their retirement could look like.

Questions related to **work** include:

- When/ what date would you want to retire?
- What needs to happen to prepare you to leave work?
- What do you need if you continue to work?

Questions related to **wealth** include:

- Have you reviewed your financial position?
- Have you created a retirement budget?
- Do you have access to financial knowledge specific to retirement (e.g. Government websites related to pension eligibility and concession cards).

Note that finances are a personal topic, and it is not the job of a manager to provide financial advice. It may be within a managers capacity to direct employees to relevant financial services (e.g. Moneysmart.gov.au).

Questions related to **home** include:

- Have you considered your hobbies and the lifestyle you would like to have in retirement?
- Have you considered your family situation?
- Have you discussed your retirement ideas and intentions with significant others?

Questions related to **health** include:

- Have you considered your physical and mental wellbeing?
- Have you booked in a check-up with your GP?
- Have you thought about ways to maintain/ improve your health and wellbeing during retirement?

Notes:

SUPPORTS

When undertaking a big life transition, it is important to have an awareness of our support networks.

That way, we can ensure that we get the right kind of support from the right kind of people. Sometimes a lot of support comes from work, so as a manager you want to encourage employees to think about their bigger support network.

Again, you do not need answers to these questions, but it can be useful to think about:

- Relationships with family and close friends.
- Friends in the neighbourhood or through social activities (e.g. sport, clubs).
- Wider networks of family and friends.
- Professionals that provide specific support (e.g. doctors, lawyers).

COPING STRATEGIES

When having a conversation about retirement, it is important to note that the transition can be a difficult time for some, as they let go of their former work-identity and adapt to a new way of life.

Discussing previous life transitions, and the coping strategies that assisted in getting through previously difficult times, can help to reduce stress associated with retirement.

Questions related to **coping strategies**:

- Think about a previous life transition—what did you do to get through?
- Can you change your current or future situation, can you make it better?
- Can you change the way you see your retirement; can you reframe the transition?
- What can you do to reduce stress?

Notes:

RESOURCES

After having a conversation about retirement with employees it may be appropriate to share informative resources so they can do some research.

Alternatively, you may wish to consult these resources yourself in order to be better informed of the information and services out there on retirement.

These are some resources that you may find helpful:

The **AWR website** is full of useful articles, blogs and resources on helping employees navigate late-career and retirement.

See what services your organisations EAP offer.

The Fair Work Australia website has useful information and resources regarding workplace rights and obligations

Talking to a psychologist can help people navigate uncertainty and overcome challenges. If you or your employee wants to speak to a professional, contact a GP or use the **APS find a psychologist website**.

Moneysmart.gov.au has useful and unbiased information about money and finances.

Overwhelmed: Coping with life's ups and downs by Nancy Schlossberg explains the 4S transition model in detail.

Do you have older workers in your team?

Does their safety, productivity or wellbeing concern you?

Do you know how to talk about your concerns with them?

In this booklet you will find critical 'conversation guides' that can help you navigate important topics with your older workers.

Go to our website for more information and resources, including worksheets and factsheets, and conversation guides on other topics.

www.awrproject.com.au/resources/

AGEING WORKFORCE READY PROJECT

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