

# The employer's guide to suspensions

**Your questions answered**



# Suspending someone is something most small businesses only deal with occasionally.



It's natural to feel unsure about when it's appropriate, what the rules are and how to handle it in a way that protects everyone involved.

Using the ACAS guide to suspensions during a work investigation, we demystify the process and answer the questions business owners regularly ask us so that you can approach suspension safely and confidently.

Let's get stuck in.



## 1. What does suspension actually mean?

Suspension is when an employee is asked to temporarily stop working while you look into a serious concern.

### It's important to remember:

- It is not a disciplinary action
- It does not mean that you think the person has done anything wrong
- It is simply a neutral step to allow an investigation to take place without interference

During suspension, the employee continues to receive their normal pay and contractual benefits. They should also be treated with care and respect throughout.

ACAS emphasises that suspension should only be used when necessary and handled sensitively to avoid unnecessary stress or damage to working relationships.

## 2. When would I ever need to suspend someone?

Most investigations do not require suspension. But there are times when keeping someone at work could make the situation more difficult to manage.

**According to ACAS, suspension may be appropriate if you reasonably believe it's needed to protect:**

- the investigation, for example if there's a risk of evidence being altered or witnesses being influenced
- the business, for example if customers, finances or property could be at risk
- other staff, for example where relationships have broken down or someone feels unsafe
- the person under investigation, if remaining at work would put them under additional pressure

### Examples in small businesses might include:

- an allegation involving safeguarding or customer safety
- concerns about theft or financial irregularities
- a serious complaint involving two people who need to be separated while you gather information

Suspension should never be automatic. It's one possible option, not the default.



### 3. How do I know if suspension is the right decision?

Before making any decision, ACAS recommends getting enough initial information to understand the situation. This isn't the full investigation, just a quick, balanced look at what you know so far.

#### Ask yourself:

- What do I know at this stage?
- Is there a genuine risk if the person remains at work?
- Are there wellbeing or mental health considerations I need to factor in?
- Would another reasonable employer, in my industry, see suspension as appropriate?
- Are there practical adjustments that would avoid the need for suspension?

If suspension would be heavy-handed or disproportionate based on what you know, it may not be reasonable.

If failing to suspend could expose people or the business to risk, it may be the safer option.

**You can also revisit the decision later if circumstances change.**

### 4. Are there safer alternatives I should try first?

Yes. ACAS is clear that suspension should be avoided wherever possible.

There are many practical adjustments that allow the investigation to take place while keeping the person at work.

#### Common alternatives include:

- moving someone to another shift
- relocating them to a different site or team
- asking them to work from home
- temporarily removing access to certain systems, tools or cash handling
- adjusting duties while you gather information
- separating two individuals involved in a complaint

If someone has raised a serious complaint, be careful not to move them unless they've asked for it. Otherwise, it can appear as if they're being penalised.

**Whatever alternative you choose, keep the reason confidential and make sure that it doesn't breach their contract.**

## 5. If I do need to suspend someone, how do I do it properly?

**If suspension is the right step, the way you handle it matters.**

ACAS recommends taking a clear, calm and supportive approach.

### **When you speak to the employee:**

- Explain that the suspension is neutral and not a decision about what happened
- Give a brief, confidential reason for the suspension
- Confirm that they will be on full pay and benefits
- Explain what happens next in the investigation
- Let them know who they can contact with questions or concerns
- Encourage them to access available support if needed
- Check their contact details are up to date

If you can, do this face to face. If not, a phone or video call is fine. Always follow up in writing to avoid misunderstandings.

### **Make sure that they understand any expectations, for example:**

- not discussing the investigation with colleagues
- being available for meetings
- not accessing certain systems or premises without permission

## 6. How do I support them while they're suspended?

**Suspension can be unsettling, even if handled well. ACAS highlights the importance of supporting the employee's wellbeing throughout.**

### **Good practice includes:**

- keeping the suspension as short as possible
- agreeing how often you'll check in
- updating them on the progress of the investigation
- reminding them that no decisions have been made
- encouraging them to use support options such as EAPs or trade union reps
- allowing them to raise concerns if they feel anxious or confused

If they struggle to attend meetings due to stress or health concerns, you can look at reasonable adjustments such as:

- a different meeting location
- a quieter environment
- providing some questions in writing

**The goal is to keep communication open and reduce unnecessary worry.**





## 7. What happens after the suspension is in place?

Once your investigation is complete, you'll need to decide what happens next.

### **If no further action is needed:**

- end the suspension immediately
- agree how and when they'll return
- discuss what colleagues will be told
- put the decision in writing so that everything is clear

If the matter moves into a disciplinary process, you may choose to continue the suspension while that process takes place.

Whatever the outcome, the key is to maintain dignity, fairness and clarity for everyone involved.

## 8. What if I'm unsure about what to do in my situation?

Suspension is a serious decision, and it's completely normal to want reassurance before taking that step.

### **If you're ever unsure, we can help you to:**

- assess whether suspension is appropriate
- explore alternatives
- plan the conversation
- support the employee's wellbeing
- follow the correct process at each stage

You don't have to handle this alone. Getting guidance early helps to protect your business, your team and the fairness of the process.



**If you'd like help with handling a suspension safely and fairly, we can talk you through the best approach for your situation.**

## **Get in touch**

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