The UNM HSC
Learning Environment Office Presents

What To Say When You Can't Say Much:

Supervisor Guidance on Communication, Confidentiality, and Conduct During LEO Processes

I. Purpose and Guiding Principles

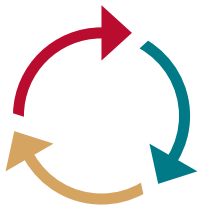
This guidance supports supervisors—including program directors, division chiefs, department chairs, and others—in **navigating communication, confidentiality, and conduct during active Learning Environment Office (LEO) processes.**

This guidance complements LEO fact-finding and investigative processes as well as Anti-Retaliation Plans, No Contact Directives, and Interim or Supportive Measures. The goal is to uphold confidentiality and fairness while maintaining psychological safety, trust, and stability.

Particularly for small environments, silence can create uncertainty or mistrust, and is often interpreted as inaction or concerns "being swept under the rug." Leaders are encouraged to acknowledge that something has occurred, signal that formal processes are underway, reinforce privacy, and assure teams that appropriate action is being taken. Procedural transparency helps to ensure that clarity, containment, and care can, *and must*, coexist with confidentiality.

It is of the utmost importance for leaders to indicate: (1) this is being taken seriously, (2) the correct people/entities are working on this, (3) appropriate actions will be taken, and (4) privacy and professionalism must be maintained. **This can be a tricky balance, which is why LEO has developed this toolkit.**

II. Communicating Amid Confidential Processes



Leaders can use the following 4-part communication framework when addressing teams during confidential situations:

1. **Acknowledge awareness:** “I know there’s been a lot of concern and conversation this week.”

2. **Affirm that processes are underway:** “There are administrative processes in place that are being handled with care and in accordance with University policy.”

3. **Reinforce privacy and fairness:** “Out of respect for everyone involved, I’m not able to discuss details, but please know that privacy, due process, and care are essential parts of how we handle any concern.”

4. **Anchor in care and communication:** “If this situation has impacted you or raised questions, please reach out to me or LEO. Support and transparency are priorities for us, even when we can’t share specifics.”

Confidentiality, Speculation, Retaliation, and Interference

While it is natural for team members to have questions or want to make sense of events, discussing or speculating about what may have occurred can inadvertently interfere with ongoing fact-finding or investigative processes.

Supervisors should remind teams that such speculation including informal discussions, assumptions, or sharing unverified information can compromise fairness, integrity in administrative processes, and may be considered interference under University policy.

UNM's UAP 2200: Reporting Suspected Misconduct and Whistleblower Protection from Retaliation prohibits any act that could be perceived as influencing, deterring, or retaliating against individuals involved in a protected process. This includes attempting to gather information about, or shape perceptions of, an open concern or investigation. This means that if you as a leader care deeply about what occurred, unless you are asked to do so by an appropriate office, you should not undertake a formal or informal investigation, and should refer those with key pieces of information to LEO.

Leaders are encouraged to use neutral framing such as: "Out of respect for everyone and to protect the integrity of the process, we shouldn't discuss what we think happened. What matters is that the appropriate administrative offices are handling it and are actively working to address the situation."

Example Statements:

For a small clinical team: “You may have noticed a change in team dynamics this week. Something occurred that’s being addressed through formal processes. These are confidential, but action is happening. If you have concerns, please reach out to me or LEO.”

For an educational setting: “I understand there’s uncertainty about recent events. I can tell you that things are happening behind the scenes and steps are being taken to address concerns appropriately. Please refrain from speculation and focus on supporting one another.”

For department meetings: “It’s clear people are aware something is happening. Please know administrative processes are underway. Our role is to protect privacy, avoid speculation, and maintain professionalism.”

Follow-up message once the process concludes:

“I know this process has been challenging. I can’t share details, but the matter has been reviewed through our established channels. Thank you for maintaining respect and professionalism through this time.”

Talking Points for Leaders

	Key Point	Leader Action	Sample Language
1	**Acknowledge uncertainty**	Name that something is being handled	“I know there’s concern and that it may be uncomfortable not to have all the information.”
2	**Contain speculation**	Set norms against gossip or assumptions	“It’s important we don’t fill in blanks with assumptions, as that can cause additional harm.”
3	**Signal action**	Assure that appropriate steps are underway	“This is being actively addressed through the correct administrative channels.”
4	**Invite care & communication**	Open safe channels for conversation	“If this is weighing on you, reach out to me or to LEO for support.”

III. Supervisor Do's and Don'ts

These actions apply throughout any active LEO process, including periods when leaders must balance confidentiality and team wellbeing.

Do's	Rationale
Maintain professionalism, objectivity, and consistency in all interactions with involved parties.	Reinforces neutrality and fairness.
Keep all communications factual, business-related, and within your professional scope.	Prevents perception of retaliation or bias.
Continue normal departmental operations unless directed otherwise by LEO, HR, or UNM Legal.	Stability reduces anxiety and rumor.
Document any performance or professionalism discussions factually and contemporaneously.	Protects all parties by ensuring accuracy.
Coordinate with LEO and program leadership to implement any supportive measures (e.g., separate schedules, alternate evaluators).	Reduces contact and perceived retaliation.
Contact LEO, CEEO, HR, or Ombuds if you are uncertain how to proceed.	Prevents missteps and supports alignment.
Encourage access to Wellness resources including counseling and Ombuds.	Reinforces a culture of care and balance.
Continue to evaluate performance using existing, documented standards, avoid introducing new or ad-hoc criteria.	Prevents retaliatory appearance.
Stay attentive to climate concerns or indirect behaviors (e.g., gossip, exclusion, hostility) and flag them early to LEO.	Early action prevents escalation.

Supervisor Do's and Don'ts

Don't	Why it Matters
Discuss the case, investigation, or parties involved with others outside the designated group (LEO, CEEO, HR).	Protects confidentiality and credibility.
Alter schedules, evaluations, or assignments based on frustration, loyalty, or assumptions about the case.	Even perceived changes can be retaliation.
Act as an investigator or mediator unless formally asked by LEO or other involved University entity.	Maintains impartiality, consistency, and due process.
Remove a learner or faculty from opportunities, committees, or meetings without coordination through LEO.	May appear punitive or discriminatory.
Have informal conversations with involved parties about the process ('How are things going with that complaint?').	Can be seen as coercive or boundary-crossing.
Express disappointment, sympathy, or judgment regarding the case.	Keeps environment emotionally neutral & safe.
Modify department policies, grading, evaluation, or supervision structure without formal review or LEO guidance.	Prevents inconsistent or retaliatory practices.
Presume guilt, innocence, or motive of any party.	Upholds due process and trust.
Discuss, speculate about, or share what you think occurred in a confidential matter, or attempt to gather information from others about it.	Such actions can be seen as interference with an investigation and may violate UNM's Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Retaliation policies.

IV. Quick Reference: What to Say When You Can't Say Much

"Something has occurred that's being addressed through formal processes in accordance with University policy."

"We are prioritizing privacy and professionalism while ensuring appropriate action is being taken."

"If you're feeling uncertain or impacted, please reach out to me or LEO."

"Thank you for focusing on professionalism and supporting one another during this time."

V. LEO Support Channels and Contacts

Leaders are encouraged to contact LEO before addressing their teams if an incident has become known within the environment. LEO can help craft language that protects privacy while maintaining psychological safety.

- **Learning Environment Office (LEO):** Primary contact for guidance: HSC-LEO@salud.unm.edu
- **Compliance, Ethics, and Equal Opportunity (CEEO):** Consultation on retaliation protections and civil rights and equity obligations.
- **Faculty Affairs / GME / HR:** Coordination on evaluations, scheduling, and administrative actions.
- **UNM Ombuds Office:** Confidential, informal, neutral, independent office for consultations.