

Handling Misunderstandings

TL;DR · QUICK SUMMARY

- Miscommunication between ND and non-ND colleagues is common and rarely anyone's fault alone.
- Clarifying calmly and early usually prevents small misunderstandings becoming bigger issues.
- It's okay to explain your communication style without over-apologising for it.
- Repeated, serious misunderstandings may be worth raising with a manager or HR.

A Note Before You Read On

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Why This Matters

Different communication styles (directness, literal interpretation, tone, timing) can create friction even when everyone means well. Addressing this early and calmly usually resolves it quickly.

What This Might Look Like

- Being seen as “blunt” for direct communication that wasn't intended that way.
- Missing an unspoken social cue and being seen as rude, when nothing rude was intended.
- A colleague misreading your tone in a message or email.

In the Moment

- Clarify calmly: “I think that came across differently to how I meant it. Can I explain?”
- Ask directly if you're unsure whether something landed badly: “Did that come across okay?”
- Give the other person the benefit of the doubt too; misunderstandings usually go both ways.

Preventing Repeat Misunderstandings

- Where relevant, explain your communication style upfront: “I tend to be quite direct; it's not meant as harsh.”
- Use written follow-ups after important conversations to confirm what was meant.
- Ask trusted colleagues for honest feedback on how things are landing, if that feels useful.

If It Keeps Happening

- A pattern of repeated, serious misunderstandings may be worth raising with your manager or HR.
- Consider whether a team communication norms conversation (see our Workplace ND Audit Checklist) could help everyone.

Helpful Phrases You Can Borrow

You don't have to use these exact words. Take what fits and leave the rest.

“I think that came across differently to how I meant it. Can I explain what I was trying to say?”

“I tend to communicate quite directly; it's not meant as blunt, just how my brain gets to the point.”

Quick Tips

- Most misunderstandings aren't anyone's fault, different styles, not bad intentions.
- Clarifying early usually prevents things escalating.

- It's okay to ask directly whether something you said landed badly.
- Written follow-ups can help avoid repeat misunderstandings on important topics.
- You don't need to over-apologise for a genuine difference in communication style.
- Persistent, serious issues are worth raising formally rather than absorbing repeatedly.

Want to Know More?

- See our companion guide: "Workplace ND Audit Checklist" for team-wide communication norms.
- ACAS ([acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)) has guidance if workplace conflict becomes a more serious, ongoing issue.

Before You Go

A different communication style isn't a flaw to fix; it's just different, and worth explaining rather than hiding.

Most misunderstandings are far more fixable than they feel in the moment.