

HOLDING THE LINE

Role-Play Scenarios for School Leaders

(Principals, Deputy Principals & Kindergarten Directors)



Purpose of this Handout

These scenarios are designed to help school leaders practise holding the line through clear, respectful and confident conversations when behaviour, performance or accountability is not meeting expectations.

Many leaders hesitate to hold the line because they value relationships, want to avoid conflict, or hope issues will resolve themselves.

Practising these scenarios will help you:

- Build confidence in difficult conversations
- Maintain psychological safety while being clear and firm
- Strengthen accountability and consistency
- Address issues early before escalation

How to Use These Scenarios

Work in groups of three:

1. **Leader** – holds the line
2. **Staff member** – responds
3. **Observer** – watches and reflects

Rotate roles so everyone practises.

Role-play guidelines:

- Keep the conversation realistic
- Focus on behaviours, not personality
- Aim for clarity and accountability (not just agreement)

SCENARIO 1: AVOIDING ACCOUNTABILITY

CONTEXT

A teacher has repeatedly not followed through on agreed actions (e.g. behaviour plans, parent communication, documentation), despite previous conversations.

THE CHALLENGE

The leader has already raised this before and is now frustrated. The staff member tends to agree in the moment but does not follow through.

PRACTICE FOCUS

- Holding the line without over-explaining
- Naming the pattern
- Clarifying expectations and consequences

ROLE-PLAY PROMPT (LEADER)

"I want to come back to something we've discussed a few times now. We agreed that [specific action] would happen, and I'm noticing it's still not happening consistently.

This is important because it impacts [students/team/safety].

I need this to be followed through. What's getting in the way—and what needs to change moving forward?"

SCENARIO 2: “NOT COACHABLE” STAFF MEMBER

CONTEXT

A staff member dismisses feedback, justifies their behaviour, or pushes back with “that’s just how I do things.”

THE CHALLENGE

The leader feels stuck and is unsure how to move forward when the person resists feedback.

PRACTICE FOCUS

- Staying grounded and not getting pulled into debate
- Refocusing on expectations, not opinions
- Holding boundaries

ROLE-PLAY PROMPT (LEADER)

“I hear that you have your own way of doing this, and I respect your experience.

At the same time, as a site we have agreed expectations around this.

This isn’t optional—it’s part of your role.

Let’s focus on what this needs to look like going forward.”



SCENARIO 3: KINDERGARTEN CONTEXT – LEADING WHILE “ON THE FLOOR”

CONTEXT

A kindergarten director works alongside staff daily. A team member is not following routines or expectations, but addressing it feels awkward due to the close working environment.

THE CHALLENGE

Blurring of roles (colleague vs leader), lack of privacy, and fear of damaging relationships.

PRACTICE FOCUS

- Stepping into leadership identity
- Creating a respectful but clear boundary
- Choosing the right moment and tone

ROLE-PLAY PROMPT (LEADER)

“I want to step into my director role for a moment. I’ve noticed that [specific behaviour] is happening, and it’s not aligned with what we’ve agreed as a team.

I know we work closely together, and that matters—but I also need to be clear about expectations.

Let’s talk about how we get this back on track.”

SCENARIO 4: STRONG PERFORMER, POOR BEHAVIOUR

CONTEXT

A highly capable teacher delivers strong results but undermines colleagues, resists direction or creates tension in the team.

THE CHALLENGE

The leader doesn't want to lose performance but cannot ignore the cultural impact.

PRACTICE FOCUS

- Addressing behaviour, not just results
- Linking behaviour to team impact
- Holding standards consistently

ROLE-PLAY PROMPT (LEADER)

"I want to acknowledge the strong outcomes you're achieving in your classroom.

At the same time, I need to address how some interactions are impacting the team.

We value both performance and how we work together—and both matter.

Let's talk about what this needs to look like going forward."

SCENARIO 5: REPEATED LOW-LEVEL BEHAVIOUR

CONTEXT

A staff member regularly arrives late to meetings, does not engage, or makes dismissive comments—but nothing “serious” enough to formally escalate.

THE CHALLENGE

The behaviour has been tolerated, but it is eroding standards and culture.

PRACTICE FOCUS

- Addressing patterns early
- Not minimising “low-level” behaviour
- Reinforcing expectations

ROLE-PLAY PROMPT (LEADER)

“I want to raise something I’ve noticed over time. There have been a few occasions where [specific behaviour].

On their own they might seem small, but together they impact the team and the standard we’re setting.

I want to reset expectations so we’re aligned going forward.”



OBSERVER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After each role-play, the observer reflects on:

- What helped the leader hold the line clearly?
- What language reduced defensiveness?
- Where did the leader soften or over-explain?
- What could be said differently next time?

KEY REMINDER

Holding the line is not about being harsh.

It is about being clear, consistent and fair.

Avoiding these conversations doesn't protect relationships.

It slowly erodes trust, standards and culture.

*This handout is intended for professional learning purposes.

