



The Cup of Coffee Conversation

Good Practice | Little Book of Nudges

We work in fast, pressured environments.
Things get said.
Tones slip.
Moments pass.

Most of the time, no harm is intended.
**But when small things go unspoken,
they don't disappear.**

They settle.
They repeat.
They become normal.

And that's how culture quietly shifts.

Ignoring behaviour sends a message.
So does overreacting.

Between the two is a simple, human option.

A conversation.

Early.

Private.

Intentional.

Before things escalate.

Before lines get crossed.

Before anyone gets labelled.



What is a Cup of Coffee conversation?

It's an early, informal intervention.

It's used when behaviour doesn't align with our expected standards.

It creates space to pause, reflect, and reset.

It's not formal.

It's not disciplinary.

And it's not 'just a chat'.

It's informal but it matters.



A Cup of Coffee conversation
starts with impact.

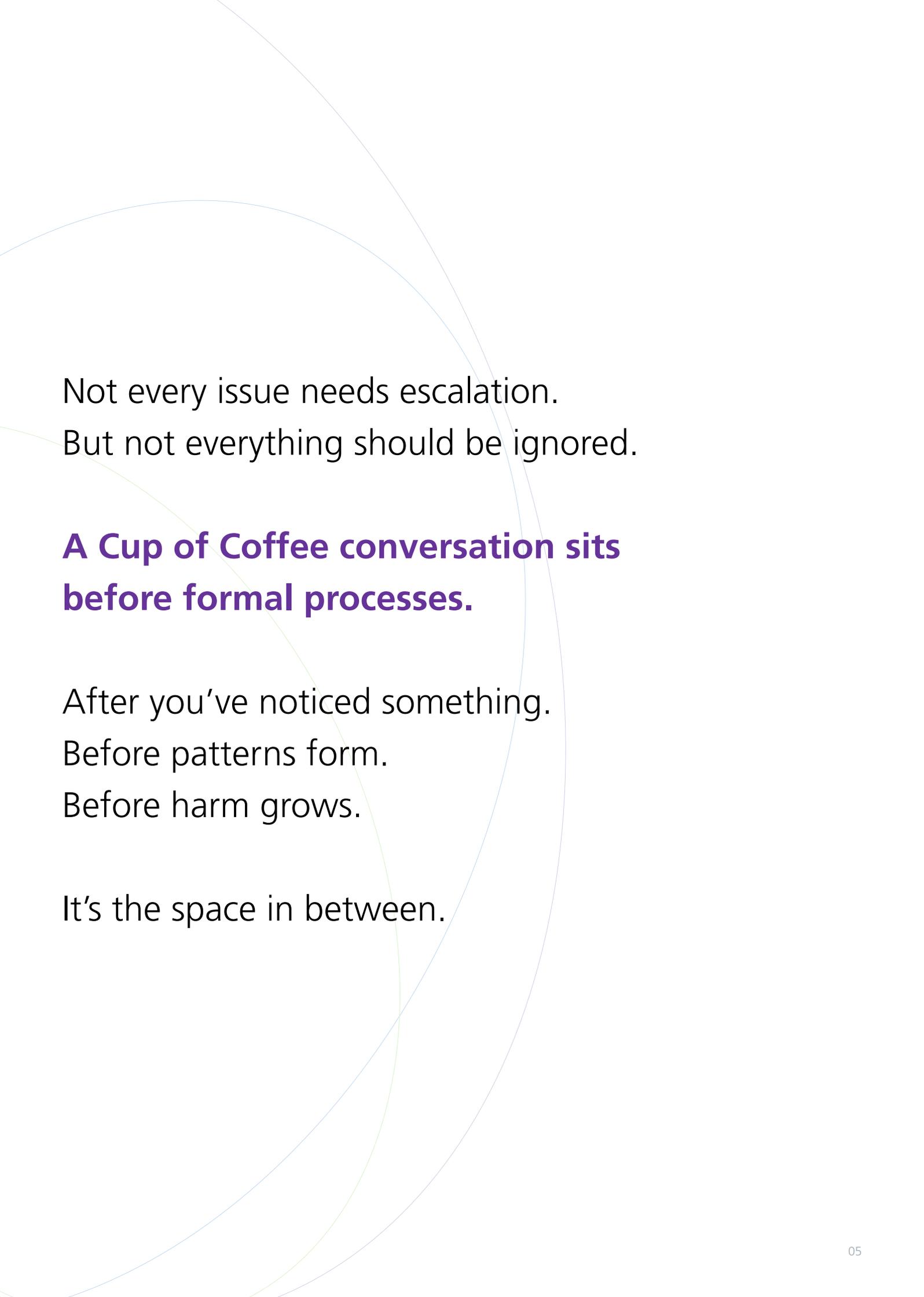
What was said or done.
How it landed.
Why it mattered.

**We talk about impact before
we talk about intent.**

If you centre intent too early,
people can feel accused.

If you ignore impact,
people can feel unheard.

**Getting the order right keeps
the conversation open.**



Not every issue needs escalation.
But not everything should be ignored.

**A Cup of Coffee conversation sits
before formal processes.**

After you've noticed something.
Before patterns form.
Before harm grows.

It's the space in between.

Why early matters?

Most people don't set out to cause harm. They often don't see the impact of what they've said or done.

Early conversations:

- feel fairer
- feel safer
- reduce defensiveness
- protect dignity

Being told early is very different from being told late.



Private conversations protect trust.
Clear feedback builds awareness.
Respectful dialogue encourages reflection.

When people understand impact, most
adjust.

**That's how small conversations
prevent bigger ones later.**



A Cup of Coffee conversation isn't about:

- catching someone out
- blame
- proving a point
- building a case

It's about:

- **naming what was seen**
- **explaining why it matters**
- **agreeing what 'different' looks like**

Calm.

Clear.

Human.

BEFORE YOU SPEAK

ASK YOURSELF:

- WHAT DID I ACTUALLY OBSERVE?
- WHO WAS AFFECTED?
- WHY DOES THIS MATTER HERE?
- WHAT OUTCOME AM I HOPING FOR?

IF YOU CAN'T ANSWER THOSE, PAUSE.

CLARITY FIRST.

CONVERSATION SECOND.



STARTING THE CONVERSATION

BE UPFRONT.

KIND.

CLEAR.

- 'I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING I NOTICED.'
- 'THIS ISN'T FORMAL, BUT IT IS IMPORTANT.'
- 'CAN I SHARE AN OBSERVATION AND HEAR YOUR VIEW?'

THE FIRST FEW SECONDS

SET THE TONE.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

STICK TO WHAT YOU SAW OR HEARD.

DESCRIBE IMPACT, NOT ASSUMPTIONS.

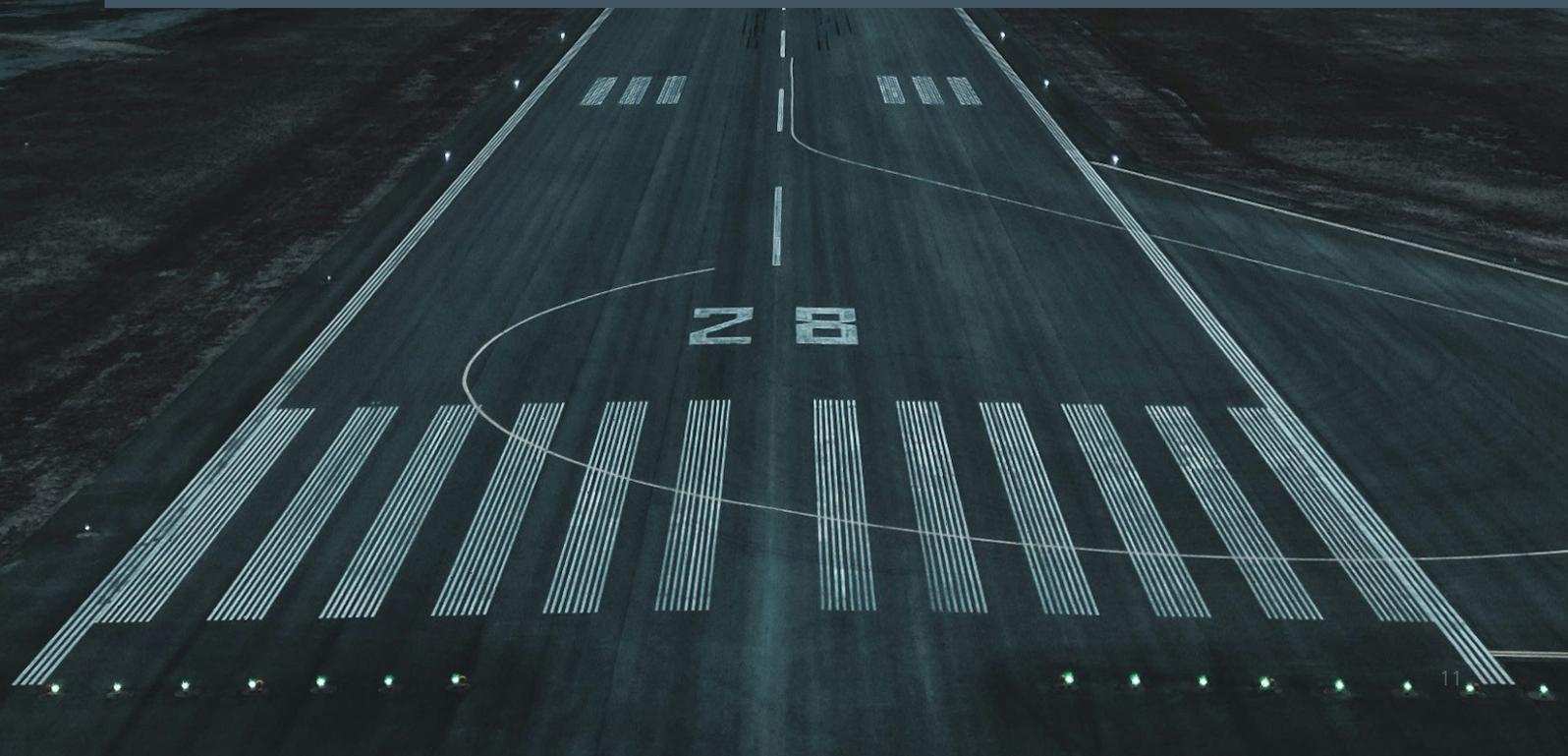
LISTEN PROPERLY.

LET SILENCE DO SOME WORK.

ASK:

- 'HOW DOES THAT LAND WITH YOU?'
- 'IS THAT HOW YOU INTENDED IT TO COME ACROSS?'
- 'WHAT MIGHT YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?'

REFLECTION BEATS INSTRUCTION.



Language that helps
(and language that doesn't)

Helpful:

'I noticed...'

'The impact was...'

'Our expectation here is...'

Less helpful:

'You always...'

'People are saying...'

'This could go formal...'

(unless it genuinely needs to)

Words shape how messages land.

Relationships matter, but don't wait.

Remember The Bridge?

Strong relationships make conversations easier.

Weaker ones make them more necessary.

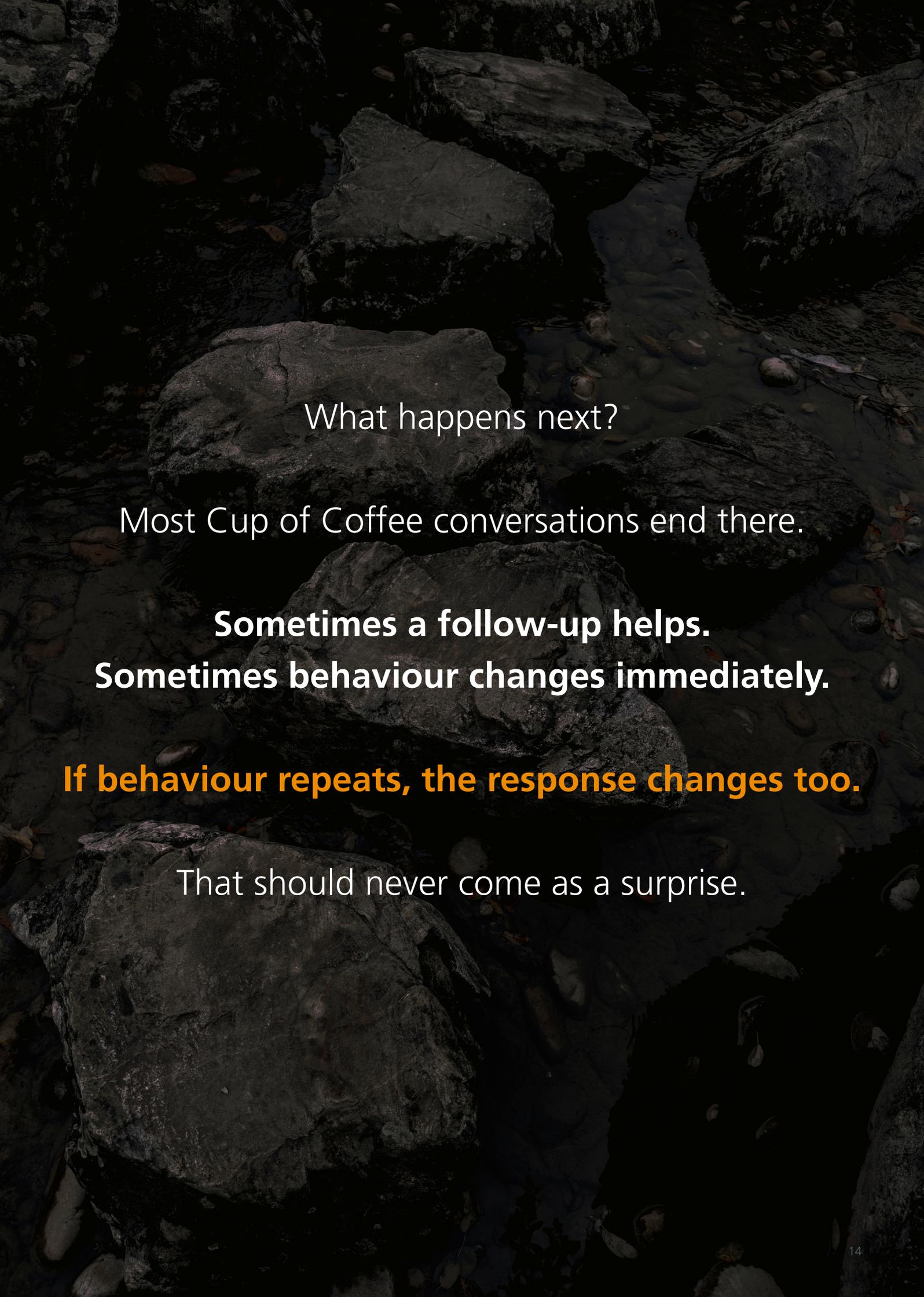
You don't need a perfect relationship
to have a Cup of Coffee conversation.

You just need:

- respect
- calm
- a willingness to listen

**Waiting for 'the right moment'
often means waiting too long.**





What happens next?

Most Cup of Coffee conversations end there.

Sometimes a follow-up helps.

Sometimes behaviour changes immediately.

If behaviour repeats, the response changes too.

That should never come as a surprise.

A quick self-check: am I ready?

Before you have the conversation, ask:

- **Can I describe the behaviour clearly?**
- **Am I calm enough to listen?**
- **Am I open to their perspective?**
- **Am I clear this is informal but important?**
- **Do I know what 'better' would look like?**

If the answer is mostly yes, you're ready.



A final thought

Culture isn't built in policies.
It's built in moments.

A Cup of Coffee conversation says:

'I noticed.'

'I care.'

'And I'm prepared to act.'

**Small conversations, done early, protect teams,
patients, and each other.**



