

# Psychological Safety Tip Sheet: Creating an Environment for CRP to Succeed

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## OVERVIEW

- CRP is most effective when it is a reliable practice nested in a culture and climate of psychological safety

## AUDIENCE

- Healthcare Leaders

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS A CULTURAL CLIMATE

- In which candor is expected; speaking up and respecting diverse perspectives is valued
- Where there is the capacity to discuss/consider alternative ways to do things
- Marked by freedom from fear (fear of being wrong, dismissed, punished, ridiculed, or bullied)
- Where talent is unleashed, learning can flourish, value is created and the asymmetry of voice and silence is eliminated
- Psychological safety is a necessary element for a sense of belonging, a major factor in workforce retention and sense of well-being

### *Trust is an antecedent*

**Trust** is an interpersonal connection between and amongst team members. The underpinnings for trust to be established are<sup>1</sup>:

- Do I believe the positive intention of the other?
- Do I believe the competence and skills of the other?
- Do I believe the benevolence/kindness of the other?
- Do I believe they have integrity to do what they say they will do?

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

- Psychological safety is required in high-consequence industries (e.g., nuclear industry, aeronautics/ aviation and healthcare)
- Psychological safety is particularly essential in volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environments
- Psychological safety is foundational for patient safety, quality improvement, innovation, learning, and a sense of workforce belonging

## WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT

- Sacrificing truth to get along with others
- About being nice, lowering standards of performance, or an absence of accountability

1. Source: Timothy Vogus

## LEADERSHIP MATTERS

### *Psychological safety is created by leaders*

- Start with commitment from board room to point of care
- Declare and make the intent visible: this is a non-negotiable characteristic of the organization that is hardwired through strategic planning and management behavior

### *Leadership behaviors*

- **Set the stage:** includes framing the work
  - Emphasize purpose
  - Identify what's at stake, why it matters and for whom
  - Create shared expectations and meaning
- **Invite participation:** through inquiry-based leadership, focus on team, humility, curiosity and empathy
- **Respond productively:** listen, acknowledge and thank; take collective action

## HOW LEADERS MODEL THE WAY

### *Framing, inviting participation and responding in action*

- Share openly when you feel uncomfortable and invite others to do the same, be vulnerable
- Respect others and help them feel safe to be honest with you; build trust
- Don't get defensive, focus on ways to help each other take responsibility and learn from failures
- Respond productively: this delineates orientation towards continuous learning
- When someone comes forward with bad news or mistakes, respond in an appreciative and forward-looking way (e.g., *"Let's see how we can fix this together"*)
- Embrace and leverage failure: look forward, offer help, discuss and brainstorm next steps
- Sanction clear violations (behaviors that are non-team-promoting, unethical, or punitive)

### *Inquiry-based leadership applies the "art of the question"*

When you invite people to speak up, you offer a platform and the opportunity to break the dangerous silence. Shared attributes of a powerful question:

- Inclusive
- Generates curiosity in the listener
- Stimulates reflective conversations
- Is thought-provoking
- Surfaces underlying assumptions
- Invites creativity and new possibilities
- Generates energy and forward movement
- Channels attention and focuses inquiry
- Stays with participants
- Touches a deep meaning
- Evokes more questions

## ***Tips for speaking up against a power gradient***<sup>2</sup>

- Something is troubling me. Do you have a few minutes to talk about it?
- Some of this is not good news. Is this an okay time to dig in?
- I've hit a roadblock. I need help figuring it out
- I mentioned the problem to the team and we've got some ideas
- I've made a mistake and wanted to let you know right away
- Our care didn't go as planned
- There's been an uptick in X, and we can't explain it yet
- What's the best procedure for getting input? Who should I approach?
- How much detail do you like to hear?
- I need another pair of eyes on this. Do you have a minute/hour/day to look at it?
- I don't feel right about this. Can we pause and take a closer look?

## **HOW TO GET STARTED**

<sup>3</sup>

- Guard against naïve realism (work as imagined versus work as actually done)
- Focus on integrity of process, not just outcome
- Engage in inquiry-based leadership practices
  - Take the pulse with listening sessions
  - Begin modeling the way, exposing vulnerabilities and asking for feedback

## ***You can achieve a psychologically safe culture***

- Acknowledge the challenges of our current state (requires grit) while simultaneously inspiring the vision of a future with cultural freedom from fear (requires hope)
- This an enduring commitment; it never ends
- Let a psychologically safe culture become your true north, your moral compass
- Start with seeing and understanding the conditions in which people work, a clear-eyed and unedited state of today—no fairy dust
- Leadership in VUCA requires resilience, and that resides between grit and hope
- Hardwire psychological safety into the entire fabric of the organization
  - Strategy
  - Training
  - Infrastructure
  - Reporting and learning system
  - Monitoring

## **PREPARING AND SUSTAINING LEADERSHIP TO ADVANCE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

- Import new knowledge and expertise
- Study
- Train
- Join a collaborative or network
- Join a community of practice
- Consider an external coach (you do not need to do this alone!)

2. Source: Amy Edmondson; 3. Source: Bright Horizons

## Individual leader practices that make a difference

### Practice Humility

- Assume you don't know what others think and feel
- You can't have all the answers; depend on others
- Assume good intentions from others
- Learn to trust the wisdom of your teams

### Practice Curiosity

- Suspend conviction and certainty to discover new and better ways
- Practice the art of the question
- Mitigate voice/information asymmetry (voice versus silence) and seek to understand
- Listen with appreciation

### Practice Empathy

- Put yourself in others' shoes, you don't know what they are dealing with
- Appreciate vulnerability in others and yourself
- Respond to the emotional context, not just the content of the message

## STRUCTURED PRACTICES THAT CREATE AND SUPPORT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

- Learning versus advocacy orientation
- Listening and communication become valued skills and competencies
- Make it real, using tools such as a compact or commitment to colleagues document
- Create forums for input with guidelines for discussion
- Time outs
- Huddles
- Debriefs
- Escalation protocol
- Stop the Line
- Purposeful rounding and Schwartz Rounds

## PUTTING THE TIPS TOGETHER<sup>4</sup>

Category	Setting the Stage	Inviting Participation	Responding Productively
Leadership tasks	<p><b>Frame the Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set expectations about failure, uncertainty and interdependence to clarify the need for voice</li> </ul> <p><b>Emphasize Purpose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify what's at stake and why it matters</li> </ul>	<p><b>Demonstrate Situational Humility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge gaps</li> </ul> <p><b>Practice Inquiry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask good questions</li> <li>• Model intense listening</li> </ul> <p><b>Set up Structures &amp; Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create forums for input</li> <li>• Provide guidelines for discussion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Express Appreciation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen</li> <li>• Acknowledge and thank</li> </ul> <p><b>Destigmatize Failure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look forward</li> <li>• Offer help</li> <li>• Discuss, consider, and brainstorm next steps</li> </ul> <p><b>Sanction Clear Violations</b></p>
Accomplishes	Shared expectations and meaning	Consider that voice is welcome	Orientation toward continuous learning
Stance	Humility	Curiosity	Empathy

4. Source: Amy Edmondson

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