

# LEADING PEOPLE: CREATING & MAINTAINING A SAFE SPACE

*In healthcare, ensuring the physical safety and well-being of our patients is so integral to our practice that it is ingrained in our daily routines. Equally crucial for teams is psychological safety; team members who experience mental and emotional security within the team are more comfortable being themselves, communicate more effectively, and are more engaged and satisfied in their work. As Team Chair, you play an important role in ensuring psychological safety by creating and maintaining a safe space.*

## CREATE A SAFE SPACE, TOGETHER

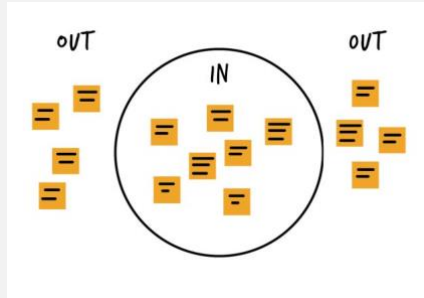
When building your Team Board, conduct the “Circle of Safety” exercise below to generate team values and huddle behaviors as a group.

### Circle of Safety – Activity Instructions

1. Draw a large circle on a whiteboard/chart paper and write ‘IN’ inside the circle. Outside the circle, to the right and left, write ‘OUT’.
2. Set the scene, revisit the definition for Psychological Safety

**“Psychological safety is a shared belief that it’s safe to discuss ideas, experiment, take risks, give feedback, and learn from mistakes. Psychological safety is key to an inclusive team culture. Everyone has a part to play in the psychological safety of the group, and this is the opportunity to state what behaviors we need.”**

3. Ask participants to add examples of behaviors or conditions that the team needs to see or feel for a safe psychological space. And then, outside the circle, add behaviors and conditions that work against psychological safety. (Demonstrate first by writing your own example in the circle).
4. Once all team members have contributed their ideas/post-it notes, take a few minutes for everyone to review all inputs.
5. “How can we make sure that everyone does what is inside the circle and avoids what’s outside the circle?” Identify and address what gets in the way of psychological safety.
6. List concrete behaviors/actions (Team Values) that the team commits to in order to create/maintain a psychological safe space.
7. Establish clear norms and expectations for team Huddles:
  - Make clear that every team member’s voice matters.
  - Retaliation and unproductive responses to others are not allowed (e.g., “that will never work”; talking over one another; rolling eyes or shaking head.)
  - Encourage creativity, experimentation and reasonable risk-taking.
  - Agree on interaction norms during huddles, such as:
    - How will team members communicate their concerns about a process that isn’t working?
    - How can reservations be shared with colleagues in a respectful manner?
    - What are our norms for managing conflicting perspectives?
8. Agree how the team will hold each other accountable. Find a place to post the final product for everyone to see and be reminded of.



## MAINTAINING A SAFE SPACE TOGETHER

Start every huddle with a Team Check-in. This is a simple way to be more present and focused.

### Team Check-in: How it works:

- Have every team member check in one by one.
- Check the “temperature” of the team—does the check in question fit today’s huddle?
- Since time will likely be short, consider using these prompts to keep the check in brief:
  - “In one or two words/sentences...” (pick one below or create your own):
    - Give a shout out to a team member and yourself.
    - What is one thing giving you hope right now?
    - What is something you want to remind yourself of today?
    - What is a value you would like to focus on today?
    - What is one thing you are going to do to take care of yourself today?
    - What are you grateful for?

### Coaching tips:

- Thank everyone after their response.
- Make sure other members do not interrupt the person talking.
- Be aware of your body language.
- If a team member gets emotional, remember to validate their feelings and offer to check in with them following the meeting. This could be saying something like:
  - I’m so sorry to hear things are hard right now. Can we check in after this meeting?
  - That sounds really tough. I am sorry to hear you are going through that. I’d like to follow up with you later to see how we can support you.
- If the team starts going down a rabbit hole with a response, gently remind them that huddle time is intentionally brief. If needed, designate a separate time to address their concerns.

## MAINTAINING A SAFE SPACE AS A LEADER

### Model psychological safety by acknowledging uncertainties and potential failures.

1. Frame the work accurately. EXAMPLE: “This is what we are facing. I’d like to hear everyone’s ideas.”
2. Admit your own fallibility. This makes it safe for others to do the same. EXAMPLE: “Please flag things that I missed or may have misunderstood.”
3. Asking questions models curiosity. Inviting people to speak up with their questions or concerns makes it more difficult for people to remain silent. EXAMPLE: “What are you seeing? What concerns do you have?”
4. Embrace messengers. When people come forward with bad news or mistakes, respond in an appreciative and forward-looking way. EXAMPLE: “Thank you for coming to me. Let’s see how we can fix this together.”

### Encourage open communication and invite input.

1. Don’t assume team members will tell you what they’re thinking, ask them!
2. Avoid (you the leader) sharing your ideas, opinions, perspective first when discussing new opportunities, changes, issues, etc.
3. Explicitly request the input of team members by asking (some variation of) the following:



*What are you seeing?  
What might we have missed?  
What could we be getting wrong?  
What are your thoughts on this?  
Where do you stand on this idea?*

4. Use a framework for idea generation (i.e., Fishbone, Nominal, Stepladder approaches)

### Engage in active listening.

1. Put away all other work and devices that would pull you away from providing your full attention.
2. Check for understanding. Paraphrase – “Let me see if I’m tracking correctly...”

### Respond productively.

People tend to not speak openly or share if they believe or feel they’re being blamed or will be shut down.

1. Aim for curiosity (not blame) → take the stance that you don’t have all the answers, you don’t know all the facts.
2. Encourage team members to first ask questions, not share conclusions, judgments, or attributions.

#### EXAMPLES

*“I’m curious, how did you arrive at your conclusion?”*

*“Can you tell me more about your idea? I would love to better understand your perspective!”*

*“What are you most excited about with this idea?”*

3. Build on the ideas of others.

#### EXAMPLES

*“That’s a great idea, AND what if we included...”*

*“I’m interested how that might work AND what if we also brought in...”*

4. Visualize ideas and walk through a scenario that could come up.
  - Visualizations can highlight how the idea(s) would come to life and translate in your environment.

### Continuously follow-up.

1. Keep testing and evolving your group norms, processes, and execution based on feedback and outcomes.
2. Show appreciation and reward demonstrations of creating psychological safety for the team.
3. Spend time during meetings, huddles, informal conversations to discuss what’s going well and team wins.
  - Set aside time during formal and informal gatherings to celebrate individual and team achievements, progress, and successes (e.g., kudos time, write and personally deliver affirmations, create a physical shout-out board)