

Psychological Safety Cheat Sheet

Psychological safety is the shared belief on a team or in a group that you will not be punished, rejected or humiliated for speaking up, sharing ideas & opinions, disagreeing, admitting mistakes or asking for help. It should not be confused with “positivity” or “harmony” in simple terms. Below is a non-exhaustive list of do and don’t do behaviours that will help promote psychological safety. Remember everyone needs to subscribe to upholding a psychologically safe environment and it takes time to build, and not much to dismantle.

Do	Don't
<p>Listen <i>actively</i> and <i>ostentatiously</i>. Be intentional in your listening and SHOW that you are listening. Listen to understand, rather than to respond. Listen for not is being said. Pay attention to facial/body language cues.</p>	<p>Allow yourself to be distracted by phone / email while in conversation or in meetings. Allowing yourself to be distracted subconsciously signals that this discussion isn't a priority enough for you to be fully engaged, or that the other(s) are not worthy of your attention.</p>
<p>Facilitate open discussion. Invite others into discussion - particularly those who are naturally quiet. Do not take quietness or disengagement. “I’m interested to hear your view/perspective on this” “Where are you at on this / what’s your take on this?” “It’s important we hear from everyone here...” “What have we not discussed or thought of yet?” “What are we missing?” “Let’s be devil's advocate...”</p>	<p>Allow / contribute to one sided discussion. Without open dialogue you may be subject to groupthink - where a team reaches a conclusion without effective analysis of the outcome and their consequences.</p>
<p>Ask for permission. This prevents “psychological hostage taking” particularly on sensitive matters or while in conflict. “Can I share my feedback?” “May I challenge that?” “I understand your PoV, can I offer mine?” “Can I build on that?”</p>	<p>Railroad the other with your ideas/opinions Particularly if you have status/seniority/authority over others and in cultures where others are likely to defer to or accommodate your views.</p>
<p>Offer and reward concessions. “I appreciate your concession / flexibility on this” “What I can offer is...”</p>	<p>Be inflexible or rigid unless absolutely necessary. Adopt a collaborative mindset where you and the other can both get what they need and want.</p>



<p>“This I can’t agree to, but what I can offer instead is...”</p>	
<p>Express gratitude & encouragement. “I appreciate the time you have spent on this” “This is showing great improvement/progress” “Thank you for your time today” “I recognise that might have not been easy to say/share but I’m glad that you did” “I like the point you made about ...” “While we disagree, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss it.”</p>	<p>Be only focussed on what is ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’. While it's important to call out / catch errors, poor performance or behaviour - it is also important to call out / catch the good / positive stuff too, even in the middle of a disagreement.</p>
<p>Be vulnerable and humble. “I’m not an expert in this, so I am trusting/relying on you/your input/judgement” “I’m happy to take your lead on this” “I’m proud of what you/we have achieved” “I admit I’ve made a mistake here” “I’m feeling the pressure too” “I need your help here...”</p>	<p>Be robotic or untouchable. No one is perfect, knows everything or is right all the time. Conveying an all knowing, perfect persona can be alienating and demotivating.</p>
<p>Be clear. To be clear is to be kind. Even when the message may be sensitive, uncomfortable or confronting, being clear in your language and succinct in your messaging is important to maintain a psychologically safe environment even if what is being said isn’t what others want to hear.</p>	<p>Sugar coat or avoid. Sugar coating or avoiding the key message is inefficient and confusing. Don’t rely on others to ‘read between the lines’.</p>
<p>Yes AND ... “And” builds a dialogue and acknowledges the others’ contribution.</p>	<p>Yes BUT ... “But” shuts down dialogue and effectively ignores or diminishes what the other has said.</p>
<p>Check your state, be self-aware. Are you excited, happy, sad, frustrated, angry, distracted, tired? Be aware that your state will be felt by others even if you try to mask it. What can be seen on your face? In your body language?</p>	<p>Lack self awareness. “How” you show up in any setting has an impact on interpersonal and team dynamics. Mature leaders understand this and regulate accordingly. If your state is ‘heightened’ what do you need to bring you back to centre?</p>
<p>Be open minded. Be Empathetic. Assume positive intent</p>	<p>Be biased, judgemental, cynical or dismissive.</p>



<p>Assume a positive outcome is possible Know that you have biases that can get in the way Consider the views, lived experience and perception from the others' point of view.</p>	<p>Being biased and judgemental are part of the human condition. Be aware of them and 'leave them at the door' Having a cynical or dismissive approach erodes trust and psychological safety.</p>
<p>Be curious. Beyond the job description. Show interest in others as humans and individuals. While respecting boundaries and privacy, be curious about people's motivations, hopes and fears.</p>	<p>Be indifferent. Leaders know their people beyond their job titles and job descriptions. They create time and space away from the day-to-day where people can express and be themselves.</p>
<p>Exercise "situational leadership" Different people and situations call on your agility as a leader to adapt to the individual and the situation. Not everyone will respond to your preferred style of leadership.</p>	<p>Be fixed in your style. Being fixed in it guarantees that it is not working in all situations or with all people. Become aware of your natural style and the choices you can make to adjust it accordingly.</p>

