# PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY FOR TEAM LEADERS

## **WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?**

Psychological safetyexists when there is interpersonal trust and mutual respect within a team, and staff feel free to express their views and contribute to discussions. Staff also feel they can make mistakes or take risks in their work without fear of judgement or humiliation.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

In teams with high psychological safety, staff:

* feel comfortable being themselves
* feel their skills and talents are utilised and valued
* see mistakes or failures as an opportunity to learn
* invite others to give feedback and ask for help, and
* show respect for each other’s opinions and ideas.

## **BENEFITS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

High psychological safety:

* improves team collaboration, innovation and performance
* increases job satisfaction and staff retention, and
* contributes to reduced stress and higher levels of wellbeing.

Two people sitting on a couch having a conversation

**“Psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.”**

Dr Amy Edmondson (Harvard Business School)

## **HOW TO FOSTER PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

Psychological safety is about uniting your team and creating an environment that sets everyone up for success.

### **Include your team in decision-making**

* Ask them for their thoughts and feedback before making a decision.
* Staff appreciate leaders who are honest and transparent about how a decision is made. Explain:
  + how their feedback factored into the decision, and
  + what other factors you considered.



### **Foster respectful debate**

* Promote open, thoughtful and respectful conversations.
* Encourage, listen to and empathise with different perspectives.
* Encourage contributions from all team members.

### **Create trust**

Have open conversations with the team and give staff the chance to talk. To foster trust:

* tell the truth, explain your thought processes
* admit when you are wrong, and
* if you say you will do something, do it.

### **Develop a strong team identity**

* Communicate team goals and how the group works together for success.
* Encourage members to share and manage risks as a team.
* Acknowledge individual and team effort, in addition to success.

### **Set clear expectations**

* Staff feel more confident when they know what they are doing and why.
* Communicate clear and realistic expectations.

### **Adopt a growth mindset**

* Do not punish mistakes. Instead, view them as an opportunity to learn and grow.
* Be curious by asking open questions, seeking to understand.

### **Practice emotional regulation**

* Manage your stress response and remain positive, open and approachable.

## **REFERENCES**

* Page, L., Boysen, S., & Arya, T. (2019). Creating a culture that thrives: Fostering respect, trust, and psychological safety in the workplace. *OD Practitioner, 51*(1), 28-35.

## **FOR SUPPORT**

Discussions around mental health and wellbeing can be emotionally impactful. If you need support at any time, you can contact the following confidential services, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

* [**Beyond Blue Support Service**](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/)– Provides immediate, short-term counselling, advice and referral services.

Phone 1300 224 636, [webchat](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/support-service/chat), or search their [forum](https://forums.beyondblue.org.au/) for free.

* [**Lifeline Crisis Support**](https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/)– This is a confidential service providing you with support for when you feel overwhelmed, for when you have difficulty coping, or are thinking about suicide.

Phone 13 11 14 or chat to a [crisis supporter online](https://www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat/).

* [**13YARN**](https://www.13yarn.org.au/) – Provides crisis support for First Nations people.

Phone 13 92 76 or view their services online at <https://www.13yarn.org.au>.

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