

Practical Tool 1:

A 'How To' Guide - behaviour that builds psychological safety in schools:



Actively show your staff you're engaged and interested.

If your staff/team members don't feel you pay attention when they speak, or that you don't value their thoughts and opinions, they'll shut down. We know time is tight - but pay attention and listen actively. Ask questions to make sure you understand the ideas or opinions you're hearing. By doing this you are creating an environment where people feel that speaking up is encouraged.



Approach every conversation as a learning-point.

You learn more from being wrong. Be sure to balance curiosity against interrogation: curiosity builds knowledge but interrogation builds barriers.



Let your team see you understand.

When your people know you care enough to understand and consider their point of view they experience psychological safety. You can also show understanding with body language. Nod your head and lean forward to show engagement. Be aware of your facial expressions - if you look tired, bored, or unhappy, employees notice.



Build trust by avoiding blaming and shaming.

To build and maintain psychological safety in schools, focus on solutions. Instead of "What happened and why?" ask "How can we make sure this goes better next time?" Notice the focus on the collaborative language: How can we make sure this goes smoothly next time? We statements turn the responsibility into a group effort, rather than singling out an individual for a mistake.



Be self-aware and demand it from staff too

People bring their whole self to work—their personalities, preferences, and styles. Build self-awareness by sharing how you work best, how you like to communicate, and how you like to be recognised. Encourage others to do the same.



Nip negativity in the bud

If you have a team member who speaks negatively about peers, talk to them about it. Be clear; let them know that you work together as a team and negativity will not be tolerated. When you allow negativity to stand, it can become contagious and spread to others.



Include your team in decision making

When making decisions, consult your team/whole staff. Ask for their input, thoughts, and feedback. Not only will this help them feel included in the decision-making process, but it will build psychological safety and lead to better outcomes. Once a decision is made, explain the reasoning behind your decision. How did their feedback factor into the decision? What other considerations were made? Even if your staff don't agree, they'll appreciate the honesty and transparency behind how the decision was made.



Recognise other points of view and be open to feedback

If you're a senior leader it's your responsibility to make the final judgment call on a number of decisions. Your staff need to know that you are confident in this responsibility, but also that you're flexible in approach and open to their feedback. When employees feel psychologically safe, they feel empowered to give feedback—up, down, and across. Invite your team to challenge your perspective. While this may be uncomfortable at first, healthy conflict leads to better decisions and greater accountability. You might also lead by example by taking interpersonal risks and sharing failures. Try getting up at the next all staff meeting and talking about a time you took a risk and it didn't pay off.



Champion your staff and school

Finally, it's important to support and represent your team / school. Let them know you're on their side by supporting their personal and professional development. Be sure to share successes across the school, and give credit where it's due.

