

# Creating a psychologically safe environment

Team psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that **it's OK to take risks, to express their ideas and concerns, to speak up with questions, and to admit mistakes** — all without fear of negative consequences.

Positivity	Respectful listening	Constructive dissent	Curiosity and enquiring mindset
Inclusivity	Generating space and time	Acknowledging feelings and emotions	Collaborating rather than competing
	Acting in line with me values	Accepting mistakes as learnings	

## So, how do we actually do it?

Psychological safety can be measured by the willingness of team members to share their vulnerabilities and opinions without fear of persecution. It is the climate the team creates for itself.

**An environment rich with acceptance, respect and inclusion of diversity.**

These **ten principles**<sup>1</sup> are based on ways to enhance psychological safety and create this within team environments:

- 1. Positivity:** This refers to how often positive language and celebration is used compared to negative language or criticism. Aim for 2:1 positive to negative, whether its feedback to individuals, pieces of work, etc. Overall, the positive aspect should always outweigh the negative.
- 2. Respectful listening:** Being truly present and hearing someone. The words, actions and also what's not being said (such as body language) can help make someone feel instantly calmer, safer and valued.
- 3. Constructive dissent:** This involves expressing disagreement openly and clearly and feeling they are safely able to share this within the team for greater good. By challenging and supporting, this avoids team think – where everyone agrees for the sake of it.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Time to Think by Nancy Kline and Roger Steare, and Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Research

4. **Curiosity and enquiring mindset:** Encouraging curious questions and exploration. This can be where great ideas emerge.
5. **Inclusivity:** Promoting inclusion is a huge part of everything we aspire to be in the NHS Confederation. This can be in people and processes, it can even be as small as ensuring everyone has a chance to be listened to and give their opinions.
6. **Generating space and time:** Finding a physical or mental space to think, plan, create, listen and just ‘be’ is one of the kindest things you can do for yourself. It will also help enormously in all aspects of life, not just work.
7. **Acknowledging feelings and emotions:** We all have feelings and emotions, and it’s important to create space to feel what you need to feel in order to manage your own emotions, and help others manage theirs too.
8. **Collaborating rather than competing:** Some competition can be healthy in teams, but too much can cause an unsettling and hostile environment. Working together in collaboration with each other can foster deeper connections, a shared purpose and improved problem solving and innovation.
9. **Acting in line with my values:** Research tells us being able to act in line with our values is one of the key parts of being successful, and happy, in a job. If we are unable to act in line with our personal values (ie making decisions that go against our personal values), this can be one of the top reasons why people leave.
10. **Accepting mistakes as learnings:** This is about rethinking and breaking the mould. Instead of focusing on what went wrong, rethink what success looks like. This helps create a learning culture rather than a blame culture.

## Psychological states

Source: World Economic Forum. (2016). [Is Your Team in ‘Psychological Danger’?](#)

