Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

Workshop series



Participant handout

Psychologically safe interactions

Notes:

Psychologically safe interactions

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, **"It's sometimes hard to know if bullying is happening at the workplace. Many studies acknowledge that there is a 'fine line' between strong management and bullying."**

Many workplace bullies, including those in management or union roles, aren't aware that their behaviour may be experienced as harmful by co-workers or direct reports.

One way to create awareness is to think about our own behaviors and how they might be experienced by others. The goal in this session is to have each individual consider their role in enabling or eliminating psychologically unsafe behaviour and develop norms so that everyone can work together professionally and safely.

Most of us would never intend to psychologically harm or invite someone to harm/bully us, but be open to the idea that we may do it unintentionally. Be as objective and honest as you can be as we reflect on our own behaviours, as well as the impact of others' words and actions on us. You only need to share what you're comfortable sharing. The rest is just for your own reflection.

Please do not make fun of or judge others' answers, and keep the discussions that happen in this session confidential.

Learning objectives

- Feel safe speaking up about legitimate concerns in the workplace
- Effectively resolve most disagreements
- Respectfully intervene when witnessing inappropriate behaviour
- Feel included and valued in the workplace

Psychologically safe discussions

- Offer constructive suggestions for improvement
- Discuss ideas, not individuals
- Give everyone the chance to contribute

Making interactions more safe

What is a psychologically safe interaction?

- Actions or comments that show obvious and genuine mutual respect
- Discussions about alternative ideas are encouraged, safe and productive
- There is a shared language to address negative behaviours immediately and consistently
- There is a shared understanding that this approach is intended to support each person to be their best self

Consider ways to make each of the interactions below psychologically safe.

Someone disagrees by insulting your intelligence

A leader provides negative feedback

Someone takes credit for your work

A client, patient or customer is upset

Perception versus intention

Our first area of exploration is the difference between our intentions and the sometimes unexpected perceptions of others.

What would you see, hear or experience that would indicate someone was weak or strong in character?

> You'll **NOT** be asked to share this answer

Write as many characteristics as you can think of that may indicate someone is weak or strong in character.

Weak in character

Strong in character

When should employees simply follow directions? When should collaboration be part of the process?

Collaboration can be a useful process, but sometimes we just need to be clear about directions and get the job done. Sometimes there is no room for negotiation. It can be challenging when there is uncertainty about which approach will be used.

In your group, record work situations that will absolutely involve collaboration, work situations that will absolutely require following directions, and work situations that could be either.

Follow directions

Invite collaboration

Either

If we can manage expectations by stating when collaboration will be sought and when directions simply need to be followed, we can avoid some of the stress and misunderstanding that comes from mixed messages.

When are you more passionate or animated? What might that look like to others?

Many of us get excited about ideas, or feel righteous about perceived injustices.
What we feel as passion can be interpreted differently by others.

Record what others would see, hear and experience when you're passionate about an idea or an injustice.

For example: "When I get excited about ideas, I might blurt things out or interrupt others.
I see it as passion, but others may see it as rude, dismissive, or aggressive."

Explore how others might misinterpret your passion and what you can do about that.

For example, "If I am not able to always contain myself, I could at least recognize when I have done this and apologize."

How do you interact with others when you're frustrated at work? What would they see or hear?

Record your answers to each of these questions.

Avoid writing or discussing how you feel or think while frustrated. We want to focus on what others would see or hear.

Once everyone has finished recording, share your answers one at a time and ask how the behaviours you describe may be misinterpreted in a way that makes others uncomfortable.

How could you better manage your frustration at work?

Record as many answers to this question as you can in one minute. Go!

Next, compare your answers with others in your groups. For each group, choose two answers to share with the larger group: one that you think is most innovative and one that you think is most practical.

Most innovative approach

Most practical approach

Checking assumptions

We've examined how our behaviours may be perceived by others quite differently than what we had intended. Now we'll look at how we might make assumptions about the way other people behave.

How do you react when your boss or co-worker is frustrated at work?

Think of a time when a co-worker or leader was obviously flustered or overwhelmed. What did they do and how did you react?

Record your answer to this question below.

My reaction to co-worker frustration

My reaction to leader frustration

What do you feel constitutes psychologically unsafe behaviour from a leader?

Leaders must ensure a balance between driving individual and organizational performance and protecting psychological safety.

In terms of providing critical feedback, assigning work and communicating information, when is leader behaviour psychologically unsafe? Record your answer to this question below.

Decide with your group which behaviours create the potential for psychological harm and which are simply not pleasant or annoying.

When do you feel criticism crosses the line to harassment?

While criticism in the workplace is necessary for feedback and quality assurance, there is a difference between constructive criticism and psychologically unsafe interactions.

Record your answer with as much detail as you can.

How do you prefer to receive critical feedback?

Most of us don't like to be criticized or receive harsh criticism. Yet in the workplace, receiving criticism as part of our job is inevitable. By considering how you prefer to receive critical feedback you can explore what works best for you.

Please fill out the feedback preferences form on the next page.

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Feedback preferences

Name:

Choose one from each of the following pairs as your preference:	
○ Tell me what I did wrong. For example: "The report numbers are inaccurate; they need to align with the February sales figures."	○ Tell me what you want instead. For example: "Please adjust report numbers to align with the February sales figures."
○ Give me the opportunity to restate your feedback so we're both on the same page.	○ Assume I usually understand your feedback and I'll ask for more information, if necessary.
○ Provide a lot of detail.	○ Provide less detail. I'll ask for more if I need it.
○ Show appreciation for my efforts.	○ Only show appreciation for exceptional efforts.
○ Give feedback immediately.	○ Give feedback at a set time.
○ Feedback can be provided at any time including in group settings.	○ Feedback should only be given in private.
○ Tone of voice and body language matter.	○ Tone of voice and body language don't matter.
○ I enjoy getting feedback.	○ Getting feedback can be stressful.
○ I prefer to be told how.	○ I prefer to be shown how.
○ I prefer to correct my own errors.	○ I prefer someone to correct the error and share that with me.
○ I like to receive feedback in writing.	○ I appreciate having the feedback discussion first.

Complete each of the following:

Feedback that demotivates me includes:

Feedback that helps me grow and develop includes:

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health recognizes that no one can give perfect feedback to everyone, every time. Sharing your preferences can help provide information to make this easier. Either party can remind the other of this information at the time of feedback.

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When do you feel so-called “good-natured” teasing crosses the line?

Most of us recognize when teasing crosses the line to discrimination based on gender, race, or religion, but take some time to consider when it may be less obvious.

For example, someone who likes to punch your arm or joke about crazy people. Think about when and how actions or words could be potentially harmful or unwelcome to you or others.

Record your answers below.

Topic of teasing / joking	How it could be offensive
Old people	If an elderly person that we care about is struggling or has recently passed.

What behaviours are not acceptable no matter what?

Record behaviours you would report or stop immediately without any hesitation or reflection on what might be motivating the behaviour.

Record your answers to this question below in as much detail as you can.

With the group, decide which of all the behaviours should never be excusable for any reason.

Moral courage

We have now looked at how our intentions may be misinterpreted and how we might make assumptions about the behaviour of others. This awareness can help us to improve our working relationships.

But what about when you witness someone else's behaviour and the impact it has on the person they're interacting with? Do you speak up? Do you end up getting angry and confrontational yourself, thereby engaging in the same negative behaviours you're trying to stop? Or do you just remain silent? Any of these reactions may allow the negative or harmful behaviours to continue or even worsen.

Having the courage to speak up is only half of the skill set needed here. The other half is to confront the situation in a respectful way.

If we realize we may be making assumptions about what's happening and that the intention of either party may not be what we perceive, we are better equipped to be objective and respond in a supportive, firm manner so that we can change the situation from potentially harmful to one that can reinforce good working relationships.

What thoughts and emotions might you have after witnessing a bullying incident at work?

You'll **NOT** be asked to share this answer

Record answer to this question as honestly and objectively as you can. Include your reaction, if you were able to intervene, as well as your reaction if you were not able to intervene.

When you hear someone yelling at a co-worker do you intervene, ignore it or just stand there?

You'll **NOT** be asked to share this answer

Be honest and objective about what happens most of the time when you're witnessing this type of behaviour. Record your answer to this question below.

Would your response be different if the person yelling was a leader?

You'll **NOT** be asked to share this answer

Record your answer to this question below as honestly and objectively as you can. Include what you would do differently, as well as what you wouldn't do, if it's a leader.

Your group **WILL** be asked to share this answer

How do you think a leader should intervene if they witness one co-worker yelling at another? Be as specific as possible about what you would expect them to say and how you would expect them to act in terms of body language and level of intensity.

What do you think is a morally courageous approach to intervening when you or your co-workers witness emotionally intense or inappropriate behaviour?

Record as many answers as you wish to this question. Think about how you would respond to someone saying those words to you. Would you feel supported or like you were being attacked?

Your group's responses that are unlikely to trigger defensiveness:

Responses from other groups that are unlikely to trigger defensiveness:

Our chosen response

Write your chosen response below.

Rules of engagement

Here are the rules of engagement for using this approach going forward:

- We must be consistent and immediate in using this response every time we witness behaviour that may be inappropriate.
- We must agree that our intention in using this is to support psychologically safe interactions for everyone.
- Our approach must be to give someone the benefit of the doubt and allow them to try again by restating what they were trying to say.
- It's important that our approach sounds and feels supportive and respectful rather than accusatory.
- We should avoid becoming defensive when someone uses this approach with us and recongnize that they have our back. In other words, they are trying to save us from having our intentions misinterpreted. We should respond with, "Thank you, let me try that again."

What will you do differently?

Please record at least one thing that you'll do differently at work as a result of what we have discussed today in addition to the approach we have just chosen. We will take up the answers when you're done.

Notes:

Notes:

Notes:

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Workplace Strategies for Mental Health resources are:

- For all employers, people leaders and employees
- Available in English and French
- Evidence- or practice-based
- Available to anyone at no cost

Examples of the resources available at clwsmh.ca/materials include:

Before you say no, ask why

Discover the need behind the request before saying no. You may be able to meet the need without agreeing to the original request.

Being a mindful employer

Help employees understand their responsibility and opportunities to contribute to a mentally healthy workplace as described in the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety.

Burnout response

Learn the steps that can help you identify, prevent or reduce the impact of burnout for employees or yourself.

Employee resources

Use the many tools and resources provided to help employees at work with personal well-being and in their support of family and friends.

Helping troubled coworkers

This article discusses how employees can support co-workers through any life stressors, including mental health problems, without becoming stressed themselves.

Ideas for resolving conflict at work

Use these ideas to help individuals resolve their own conflicts at work.

Protecting ourselves against bullying

People targeted by bullying need to cope until the issue is resolved. These strategies can reduce stress, improve perceptions and increase self-care.

Significant life stressors

Use this practical resource for coping with significant life stressors including divorce, finances, being a caregiver and experiencing abuse.

Stress management tool

Help identify and address the source of your stress with Stress strategies – a free online tool with practical, problem-solving methods.

Why blame and shame don't work

Learn to avoid blame and shame to reduce negativity and conflict.

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We’d love to hear how you used this free resource!

Contact us through social media or at clwsmh.com

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