

Psychological Safety in Teams

Building teams where people speak up, learn and perform

Ten practical tools, one for each lesson, to help you assess, build and sustain psychological safety in your team. Print them, share them with your team and use them again and again.

Name

Organisation

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Before you use these tools

This programme is general learning and development content and is not professional advice. Always follow your own organisation's policies, and take specialist advice on legal, HR, health or wellbeing matters. If a concern involves safety, wellbeing or possible misconduct, use your organisation's formal procedures.

Speaking-up observation log

Use this log for a week. Capture moments when people spoke up, and moments when you sensed they held back. Look for patterns rather than single events.

Date / meeting	What happened	Who spoke / who held back	What I noticed

Speaking-up team conversation guide

A simple structure for a 30 minute team conversation about speaking up.

Set up

Explain why you are asking: you want to hear problems and ideas early. Say that there are no wrong answers, and that you will listen rather than defend. Thank people for every contribution.

1. What makes it easy to raise an idea or concern in this team?

2. What makes it harder?

3. Can you think of a time you held something back? What would have helped?

4. What do I do, as your manager, that helps or gets in the way?

5. What is one thing we could change to make speaking up easier?

Close well

Summarise what you heard, name one thing you will do differently and agree when you will report back.

Team pulse check

Ask each team member to rate how far they agree with each statement, anonymously.

1 = strongly disagree · 2 = disagree · 3 = neither · 4 = agree · 5 = strongly agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1. If someone on this team makes a mistake, it tends to be held against them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. People on this team feel able to raise problems and difficult issues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. People here are sometimes put down or dismissed for being different.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. It feels safe to try something new or take a sensible risk on this team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. It is hard to ask colleagues on this team for help.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. No one here would deliberately undermine someone else's efforts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. People's skills and ideas are genuinely valued and used on this team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I can disagree with my manager without worrying about the consequences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scoring

Statements 1, 3, 5 are negatively worded, so reverse the score (1 becomes 5, 2 becomes 4, 3 stays 3). Then add all eight scores and divide by eight to get an average between 1 and 5. Around 4 or above suggests a strong base; around 3 suggests mixed experience; below 3 suggests people do not yet feel safe to take interpersonal risks. Look at individual statements as well as the average.

Running it well

Keep it anonymous, for example with an online form, and only share results for groups of five or more. Share the findings openly, thank people and explore them together. Repeat every three months and track the trend.

Statements adapted from the approach used in Edmondson (1999). This is a conversation starter, not a validated diagnostic.

Leader signals self-check

Rate yourself honestly, then compare your view with feedback from your team.

Behaviour	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually
I ask for others' views before giving my own.	☐	☐	☐
I say, I do not know, or, I might be wrong, when it is true.	☐	☐	☐
I thank people when they raise problems or bad news.	☐	☐	☐
I stay calm and curious when someone disagrees with me.	☐	☐	☐
I give people my full attention when they speak.	☐	☐	☐
I share my own mistakes and what I learned.	☐	☐	☐
I follow up to tell people what happened after they spoke up.	☐	☐	☐
I invite quieter or remote colleagues to contribute.	☐	☐	☐
I address behaviour that belittles or excludes others.	☐	☐	☐
I explain why I have said no to an idea.	☐	☐	☐

Ask for feedback

Ask two team members: What do I do that makes it easier for you to speak up? What do I do that makes it harder? What is one thing I could change?

The behaviour I will change

Team norms builder

Norms created together carry far more weight than rules handed down.

Example norms

- We challenge ideas, not people.
- We raise concerns early, even when we are not sure.
- There are no silly questions.
- We assume good intent and ask before judging.
- When we make a mistake we say so, and we learn from it together.
- Everyone gets heard before we decide.
- Once we decide, we all commit, even if we argued for something else.

Run the session (40 minutes)

1. Explain why norms matter and share your intent (5 minutes).
2. Individually, write down what helps you speak up and do your best work (5 minutes).
3. Share in pairs, then as a group, and cluster the ideas (15 minutes).
4. Agree three norms in plain language, and what each looks like in practice (10 minutes).
5. Agree how you will hold each other to them and set a review date (5 minutes).

Our norm	What it looks like in practice

Review date

Participation techniques menu

Choose a technique that suits the meeting and the purpose.

Technique	How it works	Best for
Round	Go round the group so that everyone speaks once before open discussion. Offer a pass option.	Checking views on a decision; making sure quieter voices are heard.
Think, write, share	Give two or three minutes of silent thinking and writing before anyone speaks.	Avoiding anchoring on the first or loudest view.
1-2-4-all	Think alone, then discuss in pairs, then fours, then share key points with the whole group.	Larger groups; generating ideas quickly.
Pre-mortem	Imagine it is a year from now and the project has failed. Ask: what went wrong?	Surfacing risks before a launch or major decision.
Check-in	Start the meeting with a short question, such as: what is on your mind today?	Building connection and reading the mood of the team.
Retrospective	Ask: what went well, what did not, what will we change? Agree one or two actions.	Regular team learning, at the end of a sprint or project.
Devil's advocate rota	Rotate someone each meeting whose job is to challenge the preferred option.	Making challenge normal and impersonal.
Remote first	In hybrid meetings, invite remote participants to speak first and use the chat actively.	Hybrid teams, where remote voices are easily lost.

Better questions to ask

- What are we missing?
- What worries you about this plan?
- What would you do differently?
- Who sees this differently? Help me understand.
- What would have to be true for this to work?

Productive response guide

Every response teaches the whole team what is safe. Use three steps: thank, explore and act, close the loop.

When someone raises	1. Thank	2. Explore and act	3. Close the loop
An idea	Thank you, tell me more about how that would work.	Ask a follow-up question; explain your decision and reasons.	Tell them what happened and why.
A concern or bad news	Thank you for raising this, I am glad I know.	Ask what happened and what we can do now; avoid asking who.	Share what action was taken.
A mistake	Thank you for telling me straight away.	Focus on fixing it and learning from it; separate honest error from misconduct.	Recognise their honesty publicly where appropriate.
A challenge to you	That is a fair challenge, say more.	Stay curious; look for what is right in it.	Say what you have changed, or why not.
When you reacted badly	I reacted badly earlier, and I am sorry.	Thank them again and re-open the conversation.	Show the change in your next response.

Close-the-loop tracker

Who	What they raised	What happened	Date I told them

Blame-free review template

Use after an incident, a setback or the end of a project. Allow 30 to 45 minutes.

Ground rules

We are here to learn, not to blame. We focus on processes, decisions and conditions, not on individuals. Everyone's view is welcome. What we learn, we share.

1. What did we expect to happen?

2. What actually happened?

3. Why was there a difference?

4. What will we do differently next time?

Type of failure

- ☐ Basic (preventable, familiar work)
- ☐ Complex (several factors combined)
- ☐ Intelligent (thoughtful experiment in new territory)

Agreed change, owner and date

Candid feedback planner

Psychological safety and high standards work together. Use this planner before a feedback or performance conversation.

Apathy zone

Low safety, low standards. People do the minimum and keep quiet.

Learning zone

High safety, high standards. People stretch, speak up and improve together.

Comfort zone

High safety, low standards. People enjoy working together but are not stretched.

Anxiety zone

Low safety, high standards. People fear failure and hide problems.

Learning zone model based on Edmondson (2018). Where is your team today? Mark it on the grid.

Plan your conversation

Step	My notes
Purpose Why this matters, for them and the team	
Specific behaviour What I saw or heard, without labels	
Impact The effect on the work, the team or customers	
Their view Questions I will ask to understand	
Agreement and support What will change, and what help I will give	
Follow-up When we will review	

90-day psychological safety plan

Build openness into the rhythm of your team, and track progress over time. Use alongside the plan in your workbook.

Routine	How often	Owner	Started?
Check-in at the start of team meetings			☐
Concerns and risks on every agenda			☐
Retrospective or learning review			☐
Blame-free review after incidents			☐
Team pulse check			☐
Revisit team norms			☐
One-to-one question: what is getting in your way?			☐
			☐

Pulse check tracker

Date	Average score	Highest statement	Lowest statement	Action agreed