

How can I help build a psychologically safe space and advocate for myself?

One way to think about psychological safety is in terms of cost. In a psychologically unsafe environment, the cost of taking a stand on an issue or even doing something as simple as asking for guidance is perceived to be too high.

In an environment like this, people may dread coming to the office, whether it's in-person or virtual, and no team can run smoothly or efficiently if fear or discomfort rule the workplace. Even if you perceive that you and your colleagues are in a psychologically safe environment, know that this may change depending on workplace and life events.

There are ways, however, for you to address potential conflicts and feel comfortable enough to genuinely participate in meetings, share ideas freely, ask questions and even make a mistake without fear.

We've outlined a series of questions and actions that individuals, supervisors and teams can take to develop safe spaces for themselves and one another.

What you can do as an employee

To advocate for yourself:

First, have an honest check-in with yourself to unpack your feelings and consider whether you feel psychologically safe at work. Safety often comes in the form of support, so we've outlined some questions to determine if you are getting the support you need.

You can use these questions as [conversation starters](#) during a one-on-one with your supervisor. If you're not ready to take that step or fear retaliation, reach out to a close friend, family member or therapist who can help you work through a game plan to get the support you need.

- Am I heard and listened to during meetings and one-on-one conversations?
- Do I feel understood by my colleagues? By my boss?
- Do I feel informed about what's expected of me?
- Do I have the tools, guidance and emotional support to do my job successfully?
- Does my manager trust me to do my job with excellence?
- Am I given opportunities to lead?
- Are my thoughts and opinions considered and valued?
- When I make observations or share concerns, are my comments downplayed or dismissed?
- Can I have honest conversations about barriers I face at work and seek help to work through those issues?
- Am I recognized for the talents and contributions I bring to the workplace?



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To foster safe environments:

Ensure that hierarchy does not define interpersonal relationships. This means that it should not be only junior employees learning from senior employees, but a collaborative environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions.

Control your behavior. As a manager, you set the tone for your team. Although it is often impossible to dictate others' behavior, you can always control your own tendencies and reactions. Lead by example and create a friendly, open, non-judgmental environment.

Listen more than you talk. As a manager, you need to be able to hear the concerns of those working for you. Only then can you address them. If you meet with someone for 30 minutes, for instance, then listen for 20.

What teams can do

It starts with respect. Creating an environment where team members and their talents and perspectives are valued and respected is key. Respect also cultivates an environment where individuals feel empowered and have permission to take action.

Here are some questions for team members to consider both collectively and individually. Maybe you're not sure if your colleagues feel psychologically safe. Try asking them. These questions can also make for a substantive group discussion.

Respect:

- Do you ask questions and listen to the answers? Do you have a "growth mindset?"
- Do you celebrate small wins?
- Do you lean into your teammates' strengths? Do you accept bad news?

Permission:

- Do you accommodate needs and challenges?
- Do you ask teammates for help?
- Do you celebrate failures?
- Do you ask people what they think?
- Do you challenge your own decisions?

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