

Psychological Safety Guideposts

In the workplace, psychological safety means “the belief that one can speak up without risk of punishment or humiliation” ([Harvard Business Review](#)). Some key strategies for fostering psychological safety include the following:

- ✓ **COMMUNICATE AND OVER-COMMUNICATE**—Prioritize check-ins and avoid canceling them; follow through; be honest but kind; and send a weekly email that includes an update, a plan, and a source of gratitude.
- ✓ **BE TRANSPARENT**—Share why staff are being asked to do something; share the organization’s strategic plan; share the meeting agenda ahead of time, and so on.
- ✓ **ENGAGE IN SWIFT CONFLICT RESOLUTION**—Listen actively and reflect what you’re hearing. You want to understand where the person is coming from. This will ensure you’re hearing what they intended to communicate and will let them know this is important. Find something about the person’s position with which you can agree. You can agree with the truth (“Yes, it’s been a long day for you.”) or agree in principle (“Yes, everyone needs a break from time to time.”) or agree with the odds (“Yes, there are probably others that feel this way, too.”). Agreeing can help the other person feel heard and more open to resolution.
- ✓ **CONSIDER POSITIONALITY**—Positionality is the social and political context that creates one’s identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. This shapes the way we see the world and interact with others. Understanding our own positionality can help us confront our biases. By acknowledging the limitations of our own perspectives and experiences, we can help create space for the inclusion of other perspectives and experiences that may be very different from our own.
- ✓ **MITIGATE MICROAGGRESSIONS**—A [microaggression](#) is defined as “the everyday, subtle, intentional—and oftentimes unintentional—interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups.” People engaging in microaggressions are often unaware that what they say or do may be offensive. Examples include comments about how well an Asian American person speaks English or the act of turning away or crossing the street to avoid a Black man. Recognize the impact of microaggressions on your employees and address transgressions. Help staff use “I” statements (“I feel. . .” “That comment made me feel. . .”). If you make a hurtful comment, apologize.

This information is provided by Advocates for Human Potential, Inc. (AHP) and supported wholly or in part through an Emergency COVID-19 grant to the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (FG-000268).