

Assessment Tool: Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

To begin the process of exploring and building psychological safety, teams can use this assessment tool to reflect individually and together about strengths and opportunities for growth. Facilitating an open discussion about assessment findings can, in and of itself, begin to strengthen the building blocks of psychological safety—trust, vulnerability, and accountability.

Use this tool alongside the other resources in the **Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams** series to:

- ▶ Create a shared understanding of current strengths and areas for growth
- ▶ Build a foundation for incorporating psychological safety practices into everyday work
- ▶ Encourage self-reflection
- ▶ Create individual and team goals in support of the psychological safety of all team members

Who Should Use the Tool?

Teams working to strengthen their psychological safety should fill out the tool together for best results. Consider how to support full participation from all team members and leaders, including staff, community partners, families, young people, and others when facilitating assessment activities.

How Can We Use the Tool?

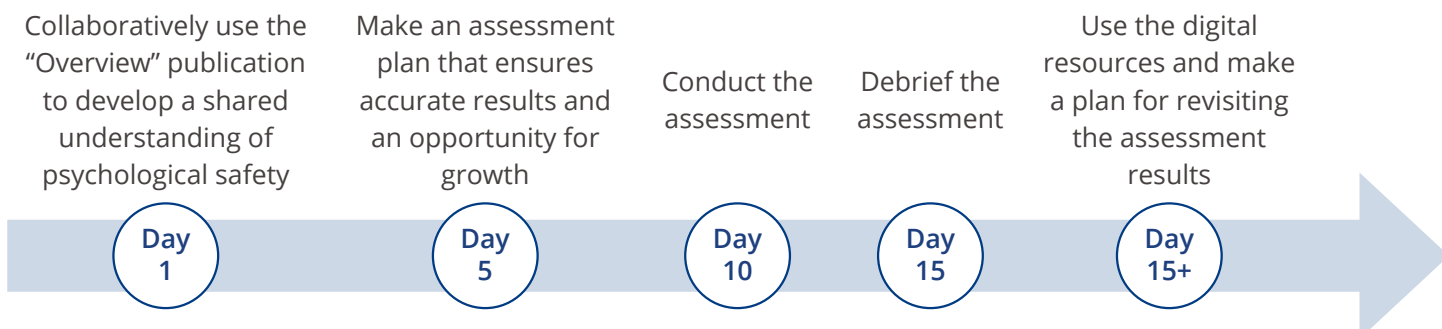
First, discuss the concepts in the “Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams” overview publication to build a shared understanding of terms and concepts and engage in preassessment activities.

Then, review this assessment tool together and make a plan for using it in practice.

Following the assessment and debrief, check out the related psychological safety digital resources to learn more about strategies to build on strengths and areas for growth.

Suggested Timeline

See below for a suggested timeline to use the tool in tandem with the other resources in the Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams series.



Building psychological safety is not a linear process. Consider how your team will revisit resources and reassess psychological safety over time.

Honoring Differences: Psychological safety is rooted in mutual trust and respect among team members. Take time to identify and honor diversity and differences before assessing psychological safety by asking yourselves:

- ▶ How have we built mutual trust to lay the groundwork for creating psychological safety?
- ▶ What essential differences are team members bringing to the assessment?
- ▶ What considerations must be in place to meet all team members' needs?
- ▶ Are any team members not adequately supported or represented before the assessment?
- ▶ What preparation is needed to have a productive completion of the assessment?
- ▶ Is our shared space safe enough for the team members to complete the assessment(s) honestly?

Prepare for Assessment

Use the “Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams” overview publication to:

- ▶ Build a shared understanding of terms and concepts
- ▶ Engage in team activities and individual reflections about practice
- ▶ Facilitate a team discussion about the assessment process and shared goals

After you've read the “Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams” overview publication, explore questions such as:

- ▶ What do we hope to learn from this process?
- ▶ What are our team's goals for fostering a sense of psychological safety?
- ▶ What are our fears about this process?
- ▶ What needs to be in place for a successful assessment process?

Consider what approach will promote honest responses from team members during the assessment and what needs to be in place for transparent team discussion about the findings. Explore questions such as:

- ▶ Who will facilitate the team discussion?
 - ▶ Consider who has the skills to help the group reach consensus and build a shared understanding of strengths and areas for growth.
- ▶ How can team facilitators reinforce a growth mindset and an understanding there will always be room for improvement?
- ▶ How can team leaders and facilitators model vulnerability and humility?
- ▶ Are there any survey technology platforms that could be used to allow team members to anonymously respond to assessment items in real time?
- ▶ How could open and transparent conversations about assessment results, in and of themselves, foster psychological safety?

Tips for Team Discussions

Discussing individual reflections as a team can set the stage for a robust conversation about assessment findings.

Team members may be more likely to speak up if team leaders and facilitators model vulnerability by sharing their reflections first.

To help your team get the most from this activity, complete the assessment within one week of exploring “Overview: Fostering Psychological Safety on Child Welfare Teams” to ensure the content is still fresh in their minds.

Assess Psychological Safety

Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

- ▶ Strongly Agree: This statement usually reflects my feelings or my team's behavior.
- ▶ Partially Agree: This statement sometimes reflects my feelings or my team's behavior.
- ▶ Disagree: This statement does not reflect my feelings or my team's behavior.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
I feel a strong sense of belonging on our team.			
Our team is inclusive and honors differences among members.			
I can contribute openly in team meetings without fear of retaliation or alienation.			
Our team routinely engages in open and transparent conversations about difficult topics.			
Our team is aware of, and openly discusses, hierarchies and power differentials on our team.			
Our team members hold themselves and each other accountable for their words and actions.			
I can disagree and share honest feedback with my team members, even during times of crisis.			
Our team is encouraged to explore our own biases and assumptions about individuals, groups, and issues.			
Our team frequently holds "temperature checks" to see how people are feeling.			

Use this space to write notes about your ratings in preparation for a team discussion.

Notes for Discussion

Reflect on and respond to each statement.

Statement	Open Response
Describe a time when you felt that your input was valued. Have you ever felt that your input wasn't valued? What was the situation?	

Describe how your team encourages conversation, risk-taking, and accountability.	
Describe what you think are the primary strengths in your team's psychological safety.	
Describe what you think are the primary areas of growth for your team's psychological safety.	

Debrief Assessment Results

As soon as possible, but not more than a week after the assessment, bring your team together for a discussion about individual reflections and assessment results. Before getting started, identify a facilitator who can keep the group focused on strengths and ideas for moving forward. Consider how to:

- ▶ Share the combined results of the assessment while maintaining anonymity for individual responses
 - Consider a neutral third party (such as the facilitator) who could synthesize and present findings for discussion or the use of a survey technology platform that allows for real-time, anonymous responses and immediate debriefing.
- ▶ Focus the conversation on growth and change
- ▶ Work together to identify some initial team goals to build on strengths and address areas for growth
- ▶ Offer the opportunity for each team member to share one thing they will continue doing and one thing they will do differently to help foster team goals

Use the following discussion prompts to encourage your team to focus on opportunities for growth:

- ▶ What are your reactions to our team's areas of strength? What tools and strategies could we use to build on our strengths?
- ▶ What are your reactions to our team's areas for growth? What tools and strategies could we use to learn and grow stronger in these areas?
- ▶ Where were the results mixed? Why might there have been disagreement?

Remember

Team members may be more likely to speak up if team leaders and facilitators model vulnerability by sharing their reflections first.

A team and its dynamics are just as unique as individual people. Discussions will vary, but there is an opportunity to build on the team's unique strengths through those conversations. Take the opportunity to build on your team's strengths and be responsive to preferences to allow for growth. For example, some teams may prefer writing their thoughts down before sharing them aloud.

Revisit the conditions of psychological safety addressed in the overview publication and remind team members that discussions about findings are opportunities to foster psychological safety.

Discussions will be more productive if they are open and focused on brainstorming ideas for moving forward. Try to move the group away from too much focus on a specific rating. Avoid discussions that begin to assign blame for particular findings.

Team leaders should lean into listening to the team's feedback and away from defensiveness about a particular rating. Avoid the temptation to explain or make excuses for findings.

Plan for Growth

To sustain and build psychologically safe conditions over time, make a plan with your team to address assessment findings, incorporate informal checks, and resurvey.

Address Assessment Findings

Work together to identify what concrete actions your team and individual team members will take to build on strengths and address areas for growth. Revisit the overview publication and use the microlearning videos to get tangible ideas for action.

Incorporate Informal Checks

Establish day-to-day reinforcements, outside of regular assessment activities, to sustain or build a psychologically safe team. Some examples of reinforcement activities include:

- ▶ Temperature Checks
 - Take the opportunity to regularly check in with team members to get a sense of team culture, individual experiences, and other potential areas of focus.
- ▶ Communication Surveys
 - Understanding how different team members communicate is critical to building strong teams. Various communication surveys can give insight into how members think and engage.
- ▶ Individual Check-Ins
 - Individual check-ins will allow for ongoing communication around psychological safety, especially on large teams or teams with power differentials.

Revisit the Assessment

In addition to informal daily practice, make a plan for reassessment with your team. There is no concrete timeline for resurveying, but formally assessing using this tool is recommended at least once a year. If significant team culture or environment changes occur, reassessing can be a building block to identify and address challenges quickly.

See additional resources on [psychological safety](#) and [teaming](#) on the Center for States website.

The Capacity Building Center for States

[The Capacity Building Center for States](#) helps build the capacity of public child welfare agencies and their partners to deliver services that are grounded in racial equity, engage people with lived experience and expertise in child welfare, follow evidence-based processes and practices, and keep children, young people, and families safe and thriving.

To learn how the Center can support you in building psychological safety on your team, working through a [change and implementation process](#), or with other services, please visit the Center's [Contact Us webpage](#) for contact information or email the Center at capacityinfo@icfi.com.

This product was created by the Capacity Building Center for States under Contract No. HHSP2332015000711, funded by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Suggested citation: Capacity Building Center for States. (2024). *Assessment tool: Fostering psychological safety on child welfare teams*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

