

Topic: Psychological Safety and Mindful Organizing

How to use this guide: Spaced Education tests recall of job-related knowledge using weekly quiz questions. A child welfare professional/professionals in your unit has received six quiz questions related to themes of psychological safety and mindful organizing. This guide is intended to be used to support one-on-one or team discussions to promote critical thinking and more in-depth analysis about the topic.

**With each repetition, practice carves pathways in the mind,
transforming knowledge into instinct and skill into second nature.**

Increase Psychological Safety at Work

Child welfare work is high-risk and interdependent within a network of public and private helping systems. It is work that's centered on safety, and child welfare involvements inevitably change the course of families' lives – for better or worse. Children and families often come to the attention of child welfare during chaotic and vulnerable times, and discerning how to best help is hard and sometimes without clear solutions. Child welfare professionals choose this work with a passion to help children and families safely thrive. In life-changing fields like child welfare, how teams coordinate and experience their broader work culture has a relationship with outcomes for children and families. We need child welfare workspaces to be innovative, collaborative, resilient spaces where teams monitor and respond to one another. A place where leaders listen, collaborate, model psychological safety and commit resources to system improvement.

To draw on the wisdom of Harvard's Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management [Amy Edmondson](#), psychological safety is "permission for candor." It describes a team's shared perception that with candor and respect as a precondition, anyone can:

- ... Ask questions without looking stupid.
- ... Ask for feedback without looking incompetent.
- ... Be critical without appearing negative.
- ... Suggest improvements without being appearing disruptive.

Psychological safety is a key component to problem-solving. Our decisions in child welfare work matter. Making the best decisions is not easy or obvious at times. Cultivating intentionally psychologically safe space is paramount.

Moral distress is a common experience in public child welfare work. It happens when a professional thinks they know what a child or family needs but also thinks they cannot meet that need due to personal or systemic constraints.

According to the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute's (NCWWI) [studies](#), low psychological safety is the main factor associated with moral distress. Creating team-based cultures with a shared

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sense of accountability and constant mindfulness to make the workplace more accessible and safer to “speak up” with concerns of moral distress is paramount to engaging in child welfare practices that both professionals and families agree can help them safely thrive.

Build the Habits of Mindful Organizing with Concrete Team-Based Strategies

Resilience lives in context. For children, resilience lives in the context of family and community. For child welfare professionals, resilience lives in the context of teams and agencies that adaptively and intentionally organize to prevent under-resourcing or overtaxing one another.

Mindful organizing refers to how teams behave, particularly how they anticipate and respond to risks and unmet needs. These practices impact how we assess and team to support children and families during the course of child welfare involvement. Mindful organizing both builds and draws upon psychological safety.

Mindful organizing is built through a series of prosocial habits. One way to build habits is to simply try out strategies in support of those habits. Over time, the strategies become hardwired and intuitive – in other words, a habit!

Senior directors and direct care supervisors are key leaders to advance mindful organizing. Habits can be hard to cultivate, and it can be easy to turn away from a new strategy just due to discomfort or it being outside the normal routine. Mindful organizing promotes shared accountability across a team and requires candid disclosures about intentions, concerns and needs. When the strategies are newly applied, they can feel hard at first. The encouragement, candor and consistency of supervisors are a key to success.

The six teamwork habits to build and sustain mindful organizing and psychological safety are:

Six Habits for Mindful Organizing and Psychological Safety



Spend time identifying **what could go wrong**



Develop an understanding of **who knows what** and **communicate**



Talk about **mistakes** and **ways to learn** from them



Appreciate **colleagues** and their **unique skills**



Test change in everyday work activities



Make **candor** and **respect** a precondition

In other words, teams plan forward, reflect back, test change, communicate clearly, appreciate their colleagues, and manage professionalism.

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Activities

[This guide](#) includes a series of concrete strategies that can be used to cultivate the 6 habits of mindful organizing in your team. Identify and try out one or more of these strategies with your team in a team meeting, in supervision, or by modeling in your professional practice.

[Click here](#) to view the Spaced Education questions and answers on psychology safety and mindful organizing to discuss them further with your team.

Resources

- [Spaced Education Questions on Psychological Safety and Mindful Organizing](#)
- [Psychological Safety One-pager](#)
- Video: [What is Psychological Safety?](#)
- Video: [Building Psychological Safety](#)
- [How Psychological Safety Relates to Performance Standards](#)
- [What is Psychological Safety? Harvard Business Review](#)
- [Applied Learning Communities Team First Field Guide Mindful Organizing Strategies](#)
- [Mindful Organizing One-pager](#)
- [Moral Distress One-pager](#)