

From Toxic to Trustworthy

**Creating Psychologically Safe Work
Environments**

Room Code: 3003

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A group of colorful wooden human figures standing in a line, with a white banner overlaid on the left side. The figures are in various colors including blue, yellow, green, red, and brown. The banner is white and contains the word 'Welcome!' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A thin horizontal line is positioned below the text.

Welcome!

Agenda

The Lead On Program at THC

Research Overview

Psychological Safety Resources

Q & A

The Harris Center for Mental Health & IDD

About Us

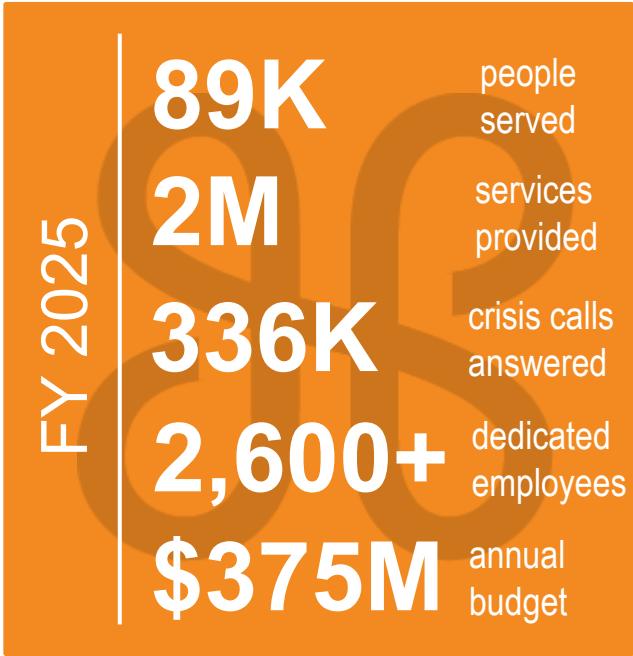
The Harris Center is the largest provider of community-based behavioral health and IDD services in the State of Texas. Located in Houston, Texas, The Harris Center provides a full continuum of services to better serve one of the most diverse and multi-cultural communities in the nation.

Our Mission

To transform the lives of people with behavioral health and IDD needs.

Our Vision

To empower people with behavioral health and IDD needs to improve their lives through an accessible, integrated, and comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care.



Mental
Health
Treatment



Intellectual and
Developmental
Disabilities Services



Comprehensive
Psychiatric
Emergency Program



Justice
Involved
Services



Crisis and
Access
Line 24/7



Integrated
Primary
Care

Our Standards of Behavior

We trust that teamwork and working together toward shared goals are essential to our success

Collaboration

1

We strive to make every encounter an opportunity to show care and kindness

Compassion

2

We exhibit professionalism and exceed expectations by continuously improving our performance

Excellence

3

We demonstrate honesty, trust, and sound moral and ethical principles

Integrity

4

We inspire, take responsibility, and lead by example

Leadership

5

We create an environment for high quality care and continuously enhance our performance standards

Quality

6

We communicate clearly, effectively, professionally, and in a timely manner

Responsiveness

7

We think safe, act safe, and stay safe

Safety

8

The Lead On Program

- Established in 2023 with the goal of empowering individuals who are transitioning from being individual contributors to leading teams
- Comprised of five classes that support the development of 'power skills' for leaders
 - Power skills are "habits and behaviors that strengthen trust, connection and impact." (Gotian 2026)
- Provide access to (optional) opportunities to hone leadership skills – in person classes, webinars, etc.

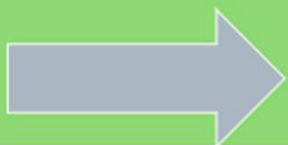


Lead On Series Classes



Leadership 101 (9-2pm)

- Focus on the leadership role, qualities, and impact on team performance.
- Access to managerial tools.
- Foundation for future leadership development topics.
- Concentration on emotional intelligence.



ConnectDynamics: Enhancing Communication & Strengthening Bonds 9-12

- Effective communication techniques
- Building rapport & trust with team members
- Conflict resolution and handling difficult conversations



TeamLead: Inspiring and Guiding 9-12

- Creating a positive and inclusive work environment
- Motivating and inspiring team members
- Setting clear expectations and providing constructive feedback.
- Review of psychological safety
- Languages of appreciation at work



TeamSync: Teamwork, Change and Learning 9-12

- Building cohesive and high-performing teams
- Promoting collaboration and fostering a positive team culture
- Facilitating effective team meetings and problem-solving sessions
- Review of ADKAR Change Management model



SkillBoost: Coaching, Performance and Efficiency 9-12

- Goal-setting and performance planning
- Conducting performance evaluations and providing recognition
- Addressing performance issues and implementing improvement plans
- Review of PerformancePro

Research Overview



What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological Safety is broadly defined as a climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves. [People] feel comfortable sharing concerns and mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution. They are confident they can speak up and will not be humiliated, ignored, or blamed. They can ask questions when they are unsure about something. They tend to trust and respect their colleagues.

Edmondson (2019)

Stages of Psychological Safety – Timothy R. Clark

The 4 stages of psychological safety

STAGE ONE

Feeling included



"To what extent do I feel included?"

- You feel accepted for who you are
- You believe you matter
- You have a shared sense of identity with others in the team or group

STAGE TWO

Safe to learn



"To what extent am I growing?"

You're able to:

- Ask questions
- Give and receive feedback
- Experiment
- Make mistakes

STAGE THREE

Safe to contribute



"To what extent am I making a difference?"

- It's safe for me to contribute fully, using my skills, abilities, and experience.
- I have energy and enthusiasm.
- There is a natural desire to use what I've learned to contribute in meaningful ways.

STAGE FOUR

Safe to challenge



"To what extent am I safe to challenge the status quo?"

- There is respect and permission to disagree when something needs to change.
- There isn't pressure to conform.
- There is freedom to innovate and be creative.

Why is Psychological Safety Important?



Employee engagement is enhanced

Fosters an inclusive workplace culture

Inspires creativity and innovation

Improves employee well-being

Creates brand ambassadors

Reduces employee turnover

Boosts team performance

Psychological Safety is NOT...

**Agreement for the sake of
being 'nice'**

Associated with personality type

**Another word for
'trust'**

**Lowering performance
standards**



APA Psychological Safety in the Changing Workplace - 2024

Workers determined to have elevated levels of Psychological Safety reported:

- overall job satisfaction
- positive relationships with co-workers and managers
- the presence of non-monetary rewards for achievements and contributions
- finding meaning, pride and engagement at work

Psychological Safety as an Enduring Resource - 2024

Responses from over 27,000 healthcare workers found:

- ensuring the psychological safety of employees is key to avoiding burnout and staff turnover in times of turmoil
- psychological safety is *as important* to staff welfare and retention as providing added material resources



Psychological Safety Resources



Ready Resource:

The Oxytocin Leadership Checklist (ATD)

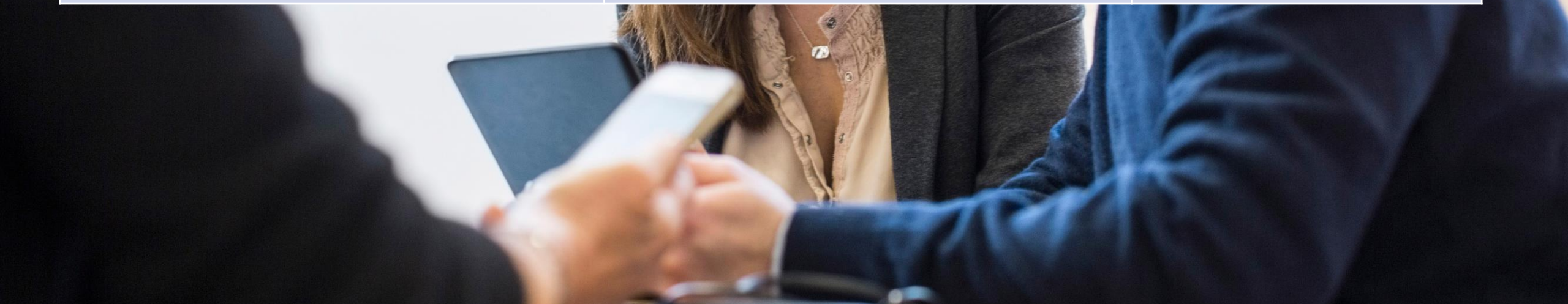
Eight leadership practices build interpersonal trust and psychological safety to create a positive team culture. These practices form the acronym OXYTOCIN and enable leaders to evaluate where to intervene to improve performance.

Ovation	Acknowledge effort and accomplishments
Expectation	Set and communicate achievable goals; foster a growth mindset
Yield	Model flexibility and foster independence
Transfer	Encourage self-management
Openness	Keep staff informed; solicit and value input from others
Caring	Encouraging collaboration; demonstrating consideration of others' feelings
Invest	Seek opportunities to identify and deploy strengths
Natural	Be genuine and approachable; model vulnerability

OXYTOCIN Leadership Practice	Leadership Toolkit	In Practice
Ovation <i>Praising, acknowledging, and recognizing others' efforts and accomplishments</i>	☐ Publicly acknowledge and praise others for efforts and accomplishments ☐ Provide immediate feedback on tasks and activities ☐ Share success stories with others within the company ☐ Provide incentives and rewards for high-quality work	☐ Teams chat/email ☐ Pingboard messages
Expectation <i>Setting and communicating challenging but achievable goals; providing ongoing goal feedback; fostering a growth mindset</i>	☐ Clearly establish and communicate performance goals and outcomes ☐ Seek and reward talent for ongoing learning and those seeking challenges (growth mindset) ☐ Set and express high-performance expectations and standards and realistic deadlines on assigned tasks, projects, and assignments	☐ Performance evaluation tools
Yield <i>Empowering decision latitude for others; supporting flexibility; fostering independence; demonstrating a tolerance for others' mistakes</i>	☐ Allow talent to push back, challenge the status quo, and introduce improvements and/or changes ☐ Use colleagues' skills, knowledge, and experiences by delegating appropriate tasks and assignments to them ☐ Encourage, support, and reinforce prudent risk-taking, experimentation, innovation, and change	☐ Braintrust discussions that are solution-focused

OXYTOCIN Leadership Practice	Leadership Toolkit	In Practice
Transfer <i>Supporting autonomy; encouraging self-management; facilitating mastery of skill development</i>	❑ Establish how colleagues' work is linked to team and organizational goals ❑ Trust and empower team members to make changes, implement decisions, and solve problems on their own ❑ Involve colleagues in organizational decision-making, planning, and problem-solving processes	❑ Working on fiscal year and/or strategic plan goals together
Openness <i>Communicating vision, goals, and progress; demonstrating candor to internal and external stakeholders; keeping others informed; soliciting and valuing input from others</i>	❑ Provide colleagues with direct and timely feedback about work performance and progress ❑ Focus on "feedforward" communication with your team members (what can be vs. what was) ❑ Support challenges to one's own ideas	❑ Debriefing meetings ❑ Transparent decision-making
Caring <i>Developing collaborative relationships; fostering teamwork; supporting others; demonstrating consideration for others' feelings</i>	❑ Be empathic: Take others' points of view before expressing your own ❑ Show a personal interest in others ❑ Intentionally build relationships with work colleagues as human beings, not human capital ❑ Make the time to socialize with colleagues	❑ Check ins at the beginning of group meetings ❑ Sponsoring lunch, off-site activities, team-building exercises ❑ Using one-on-one meetings to check in on a personal as well as a professional level

OXYTOCIN Leadership Practice	Leadership Toolkit	In Practice
Invest <i>Seek opportunities to identify and deploy team members' strengths</i>	☐ Conduct periodic career growth meetings ☐ Provide access to resources to promote professional and personal growth	☐ Establish opportunities for mentorship within and outside of the group ☐ Connect employees to resources (training opportunities, etc.)
Natural <i>Be genuine and approachable in your interactions with colleagues; model vulnerability</i>	☐ Maintain high standards regarding personal and professional integrity ☐ Be consistent in your actions and your words	☐ Admit when you've made a mistake and apologize when necessary ☐ Ask for help when you need it



Ready Resource: Create a Braintrust

A Braintrust is a group discussion that promotes candor in a psychologically safe environment. Follow these three rules:

1

Be Constructive

Feedback should be centered on the **issue**, never directed at a **person**. Keep criticism focused on improving the work itself.

2

Suggest, Don't Prescribe

Comments should be framed as **suggestions**, not **prescriptions**. Offer ideas and possibilities rather than mandating solutions.

3

Lead with Empathy

Candid feedback is not a "gotcha." It should always come from a place of **empathy** and genuine care for the outcome.

"When people feel psychologically safe enough to contribute insight, opinion or suggestion, the knowledge in the room thereby increases exponentially."

— Edmondson, 2018

Ready Resource: Team Psychological Safety Survey (ATD)

Ask members of your team to complete the 20-item survey to evaluate their personal level of psychological safety as it relates to four areas: Communication, Recognition, Support and Caring. Scores will range from 20 to 100.

Sample items:

- ☐ My colleagues engage in constructive conflict or confrontation.
- ☐ My colleagues meaningfully recognize my individual efforts and achievements in a timely and appropriate manner.
- ☐ My colleagues make it easy for me to speak up and share my genuine thoughts and feelings.
- ☐ My colleagues rarely or never deliberately act in a way to undermine my efforts.



Ready Resource: Team Psychological Safety Exercise (ATD)

At a team meeting, pose the following questions for people to answer in a round-robin format:

- ☐ What can we count on each other for?
- ☐ How would we describe our team's purpose?
- ☐ What is the reputation we aspire to have?
- ☐ Is there anything we need to do differently to achieve that reputation and fulfill our purpose?
- ☐ To create a culture where risk-taking is safe, what needs to change?



Ready Resource: Mood Check

Purpose

- Cultivate a climate of trust and openness

Materials

- In person: printed emojis or cell phones
- Online: MS Teams or poll software

Method

- Ask each attendee to choose an emoji that expresses their current emotional state. Follow-up discussion questions could include:
 - How do we increase awareness of our moods?
 - How might our moods contribute to workplace tension or conflict?



Ready Resource: Team Norming Activity

Purpose

- Build a shared understanding of norms that foster a psychologically safe workplace

Materials

- Large sheets of chart paper and markers, or a shared digital document

Method

- A facilitator divides the group into teams, each generating norms for a specific topic (e.g., respectful communication). Teams then share their results with the larger group.

Commitment

- As a group, discuss how to reinforce an ongoing commitment to these shared norms



Ready Resource: Strategies for Connecting

Engage team members in discussion using Hero Questions:

- Tell me about a time this week that you felt particularly energized by the work you are doing, and why.
- What have you learned about yourself from working on this team?
- Recall a recent compliment you received in the workplace – why was it impactful?
- Who have you helped recently, and what difference did it make in their work and yours?

Hirsch (2020)



Ready Resource: Collaborating with Care

Collaboration Killers	Skills Required
Talking more than you are listening	Listening to understand, NOT to respond
Snap judgments and opinions	Suspending judgment temporarily
Not acknowledging others' contributions	Acknowledging and recognizing ideas
Punishing honesty	Appreciating honesty
Defensively clinging to ideas	Let go of your ideas
Refusing risk-taking or experimentation	Openness to novel approaches
Blaming, shaming, or attacking	Disagree without being disagreeable

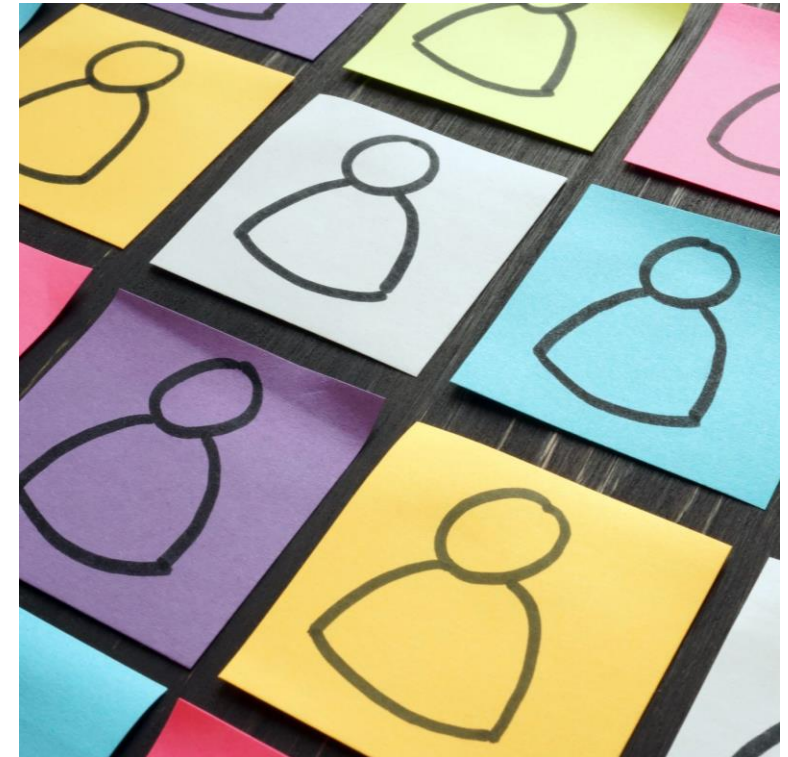
Strategies for Communicating and Collaborating

- Try On – consider another person's thoughts/feelings/actions to understand why they think/feel/behave differently from you.
- Be Trustworthy – be honest and transparent. Follow through on your commitments.
- Practice Self-Focus – reflect on *why* you react a certain way in response to someone's actions. Communicate using "I" statements.



Strategies for Communicating and Collaborating

- Prioritize Relationships— be sure you are attending to interpersonal dynamics when collaborating with others
- Practice Stepping Up/Stepping Back - if you tend to refrain from speaking up in meetings, challenge yourself to step up. If you tend to dominate discussions, step back.



Recommended Resources

The Fearless Organization by Amy C. Edmondson

The Psychological Safety Playbook by Karolin Helbeig and Minette Norman

Strong Ground by Brene Brown

The Power of Mattering by Zach Mercurio

Halo Psychology blog – Hayley Lewis



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What Questions/ Thoughts/Feedback Do You Have?

Thank You!