Safety Circle Creator Workshop

Building Trust & Belonging in Treatment Teams

Psychological Safety

CONTENTS

- Part 1 · Introduction
- Part 2 · 7 Foundations
- Part 3 · Assessment
- Part 4 · Exercises
- Part 5 · Action Plan
- Part 6 · Resources

© The Recovery Files

Part 1 · Introduction

What is a Circle of Safety?

A circle of safety is a protective boundary of mutual support that team members create for one another—a psychological and emotional space where vulnerabilities are met with understanding, mistakes become learning opportunities, and struggles receive collective support.

- Authentic vulnerability without fear of professional consequences
- Help-seeking when overwhelmed without appearing incompetent
- Creative idea sharing without fear of ridicule
- Processing emotional impacts without being seen as weak

Creating Safe Space Together

- Practice vulnerability by being honest in your reflections
- Extend compassion to yourself as you explore these concepts
- Consider completing this with your team for shared growth
- Remember: building safety takes time and consistent practice

© The Recovery Files

Part 2 · 7 Foundations

1. Trust Foundation

The fundamental belief that team members genuinely care about one another's welfare

Key Elements:

- Consistent supportive behavior
- Following through on commitments
- Acting with integrity
- Protecting colleague interests
- Being reliable in difficult times

Reflection Question:

When have you felt most trusted by a colleague? What created that trust?

2. Appropriate Vulnerability

The courage to show authentic human experience including uncertainty and need for support

Key Elements:

- Admitting mistakes openly
- Asking for help when needed
- Sharing appropriate struggles
- Showing authentic emotions
- Acknowledging limitations

Reflection Question:

What makes it safe or unsafe for you to be vulnerable with your team?

3. Empathy & Compassion

Understanding and responding compassionately to colleagues' experiences and challenges

Key Elements:

- Active listening without judgment
- Validating colleague experiences
- Offering comfort during struggles

© The Recovery Files

- Showing genuine concern
- Responding with kindness

Reflection Question:

Describe a time when a colleague's empathy made a difference for you.

4. Reliable Consistency

Building confidence through predictable support rather than mood-dependent assistance

Key Elements:

- Stable supportive behavior
- Predictable responses
- Sustained commitment
- Following through reliably
- Maintaining support during stress

Reflection Question:

How does inconsistent support from colleagues affect your sense of safety?

5. Open Communication

Creating channels for sharing concerns and feedback that strengthen relationships

Key Elements:

- Speaking with care and respect
- Listening to understand
- Sharing concerns constructively
- Being transparent appropriately
- Encouraging dialogue

Reflection Question:

What communication patterns make you feel most safe or unsafe?

© The Recovery Files

6. Shared Purpose

Unity through common values that transcends individual differences

Key Elements:

- Commitment to patient welfare
- Shared professional values
- Common mission focus
- Collective goal alignment
- Team over individual success

Reflection Question:

How does shared purpose help your team navigate difficulties together?

7. Mutual Protection

Active commitment to shield colleagues from unnecessary harm or criticism

Key Elements:

- Defending colleagues appropriately
- Shielding during vulnerable moments
- Advocating for team needs
- Standing up against unfairness
- Creating safe spaces

Reflection Question:

When have you felt protected by your team? How did it impact you?

© The Recovery Files

Part 3 · Assessment

Instructions: Rate each statement based on your current experience:
1 = Never · 2 = Rarely · 3 = Sometimes · 4 = Often · 5 = Always

Awareness Questions 1-5

Trust Foundation

1. I recognize when I feel genuinely trusted by team members versus when I feel suspected or doubted.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

2. I notice the specific behaviors and actions that build versus undermine my trust in colleagues.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

3. I understand how trust affects my willingness to seek help, share concerns, or admit uncertainties.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

4. I see patterns in what team dynamics create versus destroy trustworthy professional relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

5. I acknowledge both strong and fragile aspects of trust within my current team relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Awareness Questions 6-10

Vulnerability & Authenticity

6. I recognize my comfort level with showing appropriate vulnerability and authenticity with colleagues.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

7. I notice when I feel safe versus unsafe to admit mistakes, limitations, or need for support.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

8. I understand how my ability to be vulnerable affects the depth and quality of team relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

9. I see patterns in what team environments encourage versus discourage authentic professional sharing.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

10. I acknowledge both comfortable and defensive aspects of my vulnerability expression at work.

© The Recovery Files

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Awareness Questions 11-15

Belonging & Acceptance

11. I recognize when I feel genuinely accepted and valued versus merely tolerated within my team.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

12. I notice how belonging experiences affect my motivation, creativity, and professional engagement.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

13. I understand the difference between surface inclusion and deep acceptance within professional relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

14. I see patterns in what team behaviors create versus undermine my sense of belonging and value.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

15. I acknowledge both fulfilled and unmet aspects of my belonging needs within team relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Awareness Questions 16-20

Empathy & Compassion

16. I recognize when colleagues demonstrate genuine empathy versus superficial or absent compassion.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

17. I notice how empathetic responses from team members affect my willingness to share struggles or concerns.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

18. I understand the impact of empathy on team cohesion and individual resilience.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

19. I see patterns in what supports versus interferes with empathetic responses during difficult situations.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

20. I acknowledge both empathetic and unsympathetic aspects of team member responses to struggle.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

© The Recovery Files

Awareness Questions 21-25

Communication Safety

21. I recognize when communication feels safe and constructive versus threatening or destructive.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

22. I notice how open versus guarded communication affects team effectiveness and individual satisfaction.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

23. I understand what makes feedback feel supportive versus critical or punitive.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

24. I see patterns in what communication approaches build versus damage professional relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

25. I acknowledge both safe and unsafe aspects of communication within my team environment.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Awareness Questions 26-30

Consistency & Reliability

26. I recognize when team members demonstrate consistent support versus unpredictable or conditional assistance.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

27. I notice how reliability in colleague behavior affects my sense of security and trust.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

28. I understand the importance of consistency for maintaining psychological safety over time.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

29. I see patterns in what supports versus undermines reliable team member behavior.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

30. I acknowledge both dependable and unreliable aspects of team member support and interaction.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Awareness Questions 31-35

Shared Purpose & Values

31. I recognize when team members demonstrate shared commitment to common values and purposes.

© The Recovery Files

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

32. I notice how shared purpose affects team unity and individual sense of meaning.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

33. I understand how common values create foundation for mutual support and collaboration.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

34. I see patterns in what strengthens versus weakens shared purpose within team dynamics.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

35. I acknowledge both aligned and disconnected aspects of team values and purpose commitment.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Development Questions 36-40

Trust Foundation

36. I actively work to demonstrate reliability and trustworthiness through consistent supportive behavior.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

37. I develop practices that build rather than undermine colleague trust in my professional character.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

38. I build capacity for following through on commitments and promises to team members.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

39. I create approaches for rebuilding trust when it has been damaged through mistakes or misunderstandings.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

40. I practice behaviors that inspire confidence in my commitment to team welfare and colleague support.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Development Questions 41-45

Vulnerability & Authenticity

41. I actively practice appropriate vulnerability that deepens rather than compromises professional relationships.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

42. I develop courage for admitting mistakes, uncertainties, and limitations when appropriate for team learning.

© The Recovery Files

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

43. I build capacity for authentic self-expression while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

44. I create opportunities for meaningful sharing that strengthens team connections and mutual understanding.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

45. I practice modeling vulnerability that encourages rather than discourages colleague authenticity and openness.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Development Questions 46-50

Belonging & Acceptance

46. I actively cultivate empathy and compassion for colleagues facing challenges or struggles.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

47. I develop skills for recognizing and responding supportively to colleague emotional needs.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

48. I build capacity for offering comfort and understanding during difficult professional situations.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

49. I create empathetic responses that validate rather than dismiss colleague experiences and concerns.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

50. I practice demonstrating genuine care for colleague wellbeing beyond just professional performance.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

Development Questions 51-55

Empathy & Compassion

51. I actively practice communication approaches that create rather than threaten psychological safety.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

52. I develop skills for providing feedback that feels supportive rather than critical or threatening.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

53. I build capacity for listening actively and responding empathetically during difficult conversations.

© The Recovery Files

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

54. I create communication approaches that encourage rather than discourage colleague sharing and vulnerability.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

55. I practice speaking in ways that build up rather than tear down colleague confidence and security.

Never ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Always

© The Recovery Files

Part 4 · Exercises

These exercises help you practice building safety in realistic scenarios. Choose one to explore deeply.

Trust Repair Exercise

Rebuilding After Breach

Scenario:
A colleague, Marcus, promised to cover your group while you attended mandatory training. You later discovered he forgot and the group had to be canceled, disappointing several patients. Marcus apologizes profusely, explaining he's been overwhelmed with a family crisis.

What feelings arise for you in this situation?

How would you approach rebuilding trust with Marcus?

What would you need from Marcus to feel safe relying on him again?

Guidance for This Scenario

- Acknowledge both the impact and the human context
- Be specific about what rebuilding trust requires
- Create incremental opportunities to rebuild reliability

Vulnerability Practice

Appropriate Professional Sharing

Scenario:

© The Recovery Files

During a team meeting, your supervisor asks how everyone is managing the recent increase in overdose deaths among patients. You've been deeply affected, having nightmares and questioning your effectiveness. Others share surface-level responses.

What fears arise about sharing your true experience?

How might appropriate vulnerability serve the team?

How could you share while maintaining professional boundaries?

Guidance for This Scenario

- Start with "I" statements about your experience
- Share the struggle without overwhelming details
- Connect your vulnerability to professional growth

Empathy in Action

Supporting a Struggling Colleague

Scenario:
Your colleague Sarah, usually energetic and engaged, has been withdrawn and irritable. Today she snapped at a patient and later you find her crying in the break room. She says "I can't do this anymore. I'm failing everyone."

What would authentic empathy look like in this moment?

How can you validate her experience without agreeing she should quit?

© The Recovery Files

What support could you offer while respecting boundaries?

Guidance for This Scenario

- Validate feelings before offering solutions
- Share similar struggles if appropriate
- Offer specific, practical support

© The Recovery Files

Part 5 · Action Plan

Transform insights into action. Create a concrete plan for strengthening your team's circle of safety over the next 90 days.

Your Current Safety Experience

Where do you currently feel most safe in your team?

Describe people, situations, or practices that create safety for you...

Where do you feel least safe or most guarded?

Identify situations where you feel need to protect yourself...

Choose Your Foundation Focus

☐ Trust Foundation

The fundamental belief that team members genuinely care about one another's welfare

☐ Appropriate Vulnerability

The courage to show authentic human experience including uncertainty and need for support

☐ Empathy & Compassion

Understanding and responding compassionately to colleagues' experiences and challenges

☐ Reliable Consistency

Building confidence through predictable support rather than mood-dependent assistance

☐ Open Communication

Creating channels for sharing concerns and feedback that strengthen relationships

☐ Shared Purpose

Unity through common values that transcends individual differences

☐ Mutual Protection

Active commitment to shield colleagues from unnecessary harm or criticism

My Circle of Safety Commitment

© The Recovery Files

I commit to creating a circle of safety by...

© The Recovery Files

Part 6 · Resources

Daily Safety-Building Practices

Morning Intention

"How will I create safety for someone today?"

Midday Check-In

"Who might need support right now?"

Evening Reflection

"How did I contribute to or detract from safety?"

Gratitude Practice

"Who made me feel safe today?"

Deeper Learning Resources

- Leaders Eat Last

by Simon Sinek

- The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

by Patrick Lencioni

- Rising Strong

by Brené Brown

"A circle of safety is not built in a day, but every act of trust, every moment of vulnerability, and every gesture of protection adds another stone to the foundation."

© The Recovery Files