Team Chemistry & Cohesion

Team Chemistry Workshops

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Part 1 · Overview

Building Strong Teams in SUD Treatment

A comprehensive toolkit for enhancing team chemistry and cohesion

Team chemistry and cohesion are fundamental to effective substance use disorder treatment. When teams work well together, they create environments that promote healing, reduce staff burnout, and ultimately lead to better client outcomes.

Better Outcomes

Teams with high cohesion show significantly improved client recovery rates

Lower Turnover

Strong team bonds dramatically reduce staff burnout and departure

Higher Satisfaction

Team members report greater job satisfaction in cohesive environments

Core Components of Team Chemistry

Communication & Collaboration

Open dialogue, effective information sharing, and coordinated care delivery

Trust & Psychological Safety

Mutual respect, vulnerability, and support during challenging cases

Diversity & Inclusion

Valuing different perspectives, experiences, and approaches to treatment

Shared Purpose & Values

Unified commitment to client recovery and evidence-based practices

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Part 2 · Assessment

Team Unity & Cohesion Assessment

Evaluate your team's current strengths and opportunities for growth across key dimensions of team effectiveness.

Communication & Collaboration

Team members communicate openly and honestly

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Information flows smoothly between shifts and departments

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Team meetings are productive and inclusive

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Conflicts are addressed constructively

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Trust & Support

Team members trust each other's clinical judgment

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Staff feel supported during challenging cases

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Team members can be vulnerable about struggles

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

There's psychological safety to admit mistakes

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Diversity & Inclusion

All voices are valued regardless of role or seniority

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Diverse perspectives are actively sought

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Cultural differences are respected and celebrated

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Lived experience is valued alongside clinical expertise

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

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Integrated Care

Treatment planning is truly collaborative

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Care is well-coordinated across disciplines

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Team presents unified approach to clients

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Handoffs between providers are seamless

Strongly Disagree ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 Strongly Agree

Scoring guide

Each area's score is the average of its statements, out of 5.

Score: 4.0–5.0 — Strong: This area is a team strength

Score: 3.0–3.9 — Developing: Good foundation with room to grow

Score: 2.0–2.9 — Emerging: Significant improvement needed

Score: below 2.0 — Critical: Urgent attention required

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Part 3 · Activities

Team Building Activities

Purposeful activities designed specifically for SUD treatment teams to strengthen relationships while developing skills directly applicable to clinical work.

The Counseling Maze

45-60 minutes

Purpose: Build trust and communication

Instructions:

- Create pairs with one "guide" and one "traveler"
- Traveler is blindfolded, guide provides verbal directions
- Navigate through physical or metaphorical obstacles
- Switch roles and repeat
- Debrief on communication challenges and trust

Clinical Connection: Mirrors guiding clients through recovery journey

Recovery Story Mapping

60-90 minutes

Purpose: Perspective-taking and empathy

Instructions:

- Create composite client journey maps
- Each team member adds different perspective
- Include setbacks, successes, and turning points
- Discuss different professional viewpoints
- Identify team strengths in supporting journey

Clinical Connection: Enhances holistic client understanding

Values Auction

45 minutes

Purpose: Clarify team priorities

Instructions:

- List treatment values and approaches
- Teams bid on most important values
- Limited resources force prioritization
- Discuss choices and trade-offs
- Create unified value statement

Clinical Connection: Aligns team on core treatment philosophy

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Part 4 · Modules

Understanding Team Dynamics in SUD Treatment

Strong team dynamics are essential for effective SUD treatment. Teams that work well together provide better client care, experience less burnout, and create more positive work environments.

Unique Challenges in SUD Treatment Teams

- High emotional demands and secondary trauma
- Working with clients in various stages of change
- Managing relapse as part of the recovery process
- Balancing empathy with professional boundaries
- Coordinating care across multiple disciplines
- Addressing stigma both internally and externally

Impact of Team Cohesion on Treatment

- Consistent messaging improves client trust
- Coordinated care reduces treatment gaps
- Team support prevents burnout and turnover
- Diverse perspectives enhance treatment planning
- Unified approach models healthy relationships
- Collective resilience in challenging cases

Common Barriers to Unity

- Professional hierarchies and role confusion
- Communication breakdowns across shifts
- Differing treatment philosophies
- Limited time for team building
- High turnover disrupting relationships
- Compassion fatigue affecting morale

Cross-Generational Mentorship Program

A structured mentorship program leverages the diverse experiences and skills across team members, fostering mutual learning and stronger relationships.

Traditional Mentorship

- Veteran staff share clinical wisdom and experience
- Guidance on complex case management
- Support for professional development
- Historical perspective on treatment evolution
- Modeling professional boundaries
- Career advancement guidance

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Reverse Mentorship

- Younger staff teach technology skills
- Fresh perspectives on engagement strategies
- Social media literacy for outreach
- New evidence-based practices from recent training
- Contemporary understanding of client demographics
- Innovation in treatment approaches

Peer Mentorship

- Lateral support among colleagues
- Shared problem-solving for difficult cases
- Emotional support and debriefing
- Skill exchange across specialties
- Accountability partnerships
- Collaborative professional growth

Program Structure

How will mentorship pairs be formed in your team?

What meeting frequency would work best?

What specific goals would you set for mentorship?

What topics/skills would be most valuable to exchange?

Shared Experience Workshops

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Creating safe spaces for team members to share personal experiences with addiction and recovery builds empathy, understanding, and stronger bonds.

Creating Safety for Sharing

- Establish clear confidentiality agreements
- Make sharing voluntary, never mandatory
- Provide multiple formats (verbal, written, anonymous)
- Set ground rules for respectful listening
- Have support available for triggered emotions
- Honor all forms of experience (personal, family, professional)

Types of Experiences to Share

- Personal recovery journeys (if comfortable)
- Family member addiction experiences
- Professional experiences that shaped practice
- Cultural perspectives on addiction and recovery
- Transformative client interactions
- Lessons learned from challenging cases

Integration into Practice

- Use insights to inform treatment approaches
- Develop team agreements based on shared values
- Create peer support networks within team
- Enhance empathy and reduce judgment
- Build collective wisdom repository
- Strengthen team identity and purpose

Workshop Planning

What format would feel safest for your team?

What experiences would be most valuable to explore?

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Who could facilitate these sessions effectively?

How often should these workshops occur?

Interdisciplinary Skill Sharing

Regular skill-sharing sessions leverage each team member's unique expertise, creating a learning organization that continuously improves its collective capabilities.

Monthly Skill Spotlights

- One team member presents for 30-60 minutes
- Focus on practical, applicable skills
- Include hands-on practice opportunities
- Provide takeaway resources
- Allow time for Q&A and discussion
- Rotate through all team members

Cross-Training Initiatives

- Basic medical knowledge for non-medical staff
- Counseling techniques for support staff
- Case management skills for clinicians
- Cultural competence from diverse team members
- Technology skills across generations
- Specialized interventions (DBT, EMDR, etc.)

Collaborative Learning Projects

- Develop integrated treatment protocols together
- Create shared resource libraries
- Design team-specific assessment tools
- Build referral networks collaboratively
- Research and present on emerging practices
- Develop quality improvement initiatives

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Team Skills Inventory

What unique skills exist within your team?

What skills would the team benefit from learning?

What learning formats work best for your team?

How can participation be encouraged/rewarded?

Communication Enhancement Strategies

Effective communication is the foundation of team cohesion. These strategies address both formal and informal communication channels.

Structured Communication Tools

- SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) for handoffs
- Daily huddles with structured agenda
- Shared documentation standards
- Clear escalation pathways
- Regular case conferencing schedule
- Feedback loops for process improvement

Conflict Resolution Framework

- Early identification of tensions
- Safe space for expressing concerns
- Active listening protocols
- Collaborative problem-solving approach
- Follow-up to ensure resolution

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- Learn from conflicts to prevent recurrence

Crisis Communication

- Clear roles during client crises
- Rapid response communication tree
- Post-crisis debriefing structure
- Support for affected team members
- Documentation and learning capture
- Stress management resources

Leveraging Diversity for Team Strength

Diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives strengthens teams when actively leveraged and valued.

Types of Diversity to Leverage

- Professional backgrounds and training
- Cultural and ethnic perspectives
- Generational viewpoints and experiences
- Recovery status and lived experience
- Socioeconomic backgrounds
- Gender and sexual orientation perspectives

Creating Inclusive Environments

- Rotate meeting leadership
- Ensure all voices are heard in discussions
- Challenge dominant narratives respectfully
- Create affinity groups for support
- Address microaggressions promptly
- Celebrate diverse holidays and traditions

Diversity in Action

- Match clients with culturally congruent providers
- Use diverse perspectives in treatment planning
- Develop culturally adapted interventions
- Create multilingual resources
- Address treatment barriers for all populations
- Build community partnerships reflecting diversity

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Part 5 · Action Plan

Your Personalized Action Plan

Based on your assessment results, here's a prioritized plan to strengthen your team chemistry and cohesion.

Priority Recommendations

Action Items

Action Item #1

Priority Area

Deadline

Specific Action

What specific action will you take?

Owner/Responsible Person

Who will lead this initiative?

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Part 6 · Resources

Implementation Resources

Quick Start Guide

- Complete team assessment
- Select 2-3 priority areas
- Choose appropriate activities
- Schedule regular check-ins
- Track progress quarterly

Workshop Templates

- 4-hour comprehensive workshop
- 2-hour focused sessions
- 6-week development series
- Monthly team meetings
- Quick team activities (15 min)

Measurement Tools

- Team cohesion surveys
- Communication audits
- Trust assessments
- Progress tracking sheets
- Success metrics dashboard

Support Materials

- Facilitation guides
- Handout templates
- Presentation slides
- Video resources
- External training links

Recommended Reading

- "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" by Patrick Lencioni
- "Teaming" by Amy Edmondson
- "The Culture Code" by Daniel Coyle
- "Crucial Conversations" by Kerry Patterson et al.
- SAMHSA Team-Based Care Implementation Guide

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