Trust Building Activity

Team Chemistry Workshops

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Part 1 · About this workshop

Develop psychological safety and vulnerability-based trust

Duration: 25 minutes

Group Size: Small Groups (4-8)

Module: Team Chemistry

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Part 2 · Understanding Vulnerability-Based Trust

Trust in teams isn't built through team-building games or ropes courses. Real trust develops when team members are willing to be vulnerable with one another—to admit mistakes, acknowledge weaknesses, ask for help, and take interpersonal risks without fear of judgment or punishment.

Signs of High Trust

- Team members admit mistakes freely
- People ask for help without hesitation
- Conflicts are addressed directly
- Weaknesses are openly acknowledged
- Feedback is welcomed, not feared

Signs of Low Trust

- Hiding mistakes or deflecting blame
- Reluctance to ask questions
- Passive-aggressive behavior
- Guarded communication
- Avoiding difficult conversations

Key Principle: Trust is built through repeated experiences of vulnerability without negative consequences. This exercise creates a safe container for team members to take small risks and build confidence in the team's supportiveness.

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Part 3 · Facilitator Guide

How to Run This Exercise

1. Set the Stage (2 min)

Explain the purpose: building trust through vulnerability. Emphasize confidentiality and respect

2. Choose Activity (1 min)

Select one of the three activities below based on team readiness

3. Facilitate Sharing (15 min)

Model vulnerability first, then guide each person to share. No crosstalk or advice-giving

4. Reflection & Commitments (7 min)

Process the experience and make specific trust commitments going forward

Critical Facilitator Guidelines

- Model first: Leader goes first to set the tone
- No cross-talk: Listen without responding or fixing
- Start small: Build from easy to harder vulnerability
- Protect safety: Intervene if someone overshares
- Honor confidentiality: What's shared stays in the room

Group Name

e.g., Morning Clinical Team, Outpatient Staff...

Facilitator Notes

Track group dynamics, participation, insights, follow-up needs...

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Part 4 · Activity 1: Personal Risk Share

10 min

Instructions: Each person shares something about themselves that feels slightly risky to share (not traumatic, just vulnerable)

Suggested Prompts:

A mistake I made that taught me something important...

A fear I have about working with this team...

Something I'm not very good at professionally...

A time I needed help but was afraid to ask...

Document Vulnerability Shares

Note: Keep these confidential. Use initials or roles instead of names if documenting.

Share 1 (optional - for facilitator notes only)...

Share 2 (optional - for facilitator notes only)...

Share 3 (optional - for facilitator notes only)...

Share 4 (optional - for facilitator notes only)...

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Part 5 · Activity 2: Trust Falls (Metaphorical)

8 min

Instructions: Share one area where you need to 'trust fall' - rely on the team's support

Suggested Prompts:

An area of weakness where I need team support...

A responsibility I'm struggling with...

A skill I'm trying to develop...

A client situation where I need guidance...

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Part 6 · Activity 3: Commitment Circle

7 min

Instructions: Each person makes one specific commitment to building team trust

Suggested Prompts:

I commit to asking for help when I need it

I commit to assuming positive intent

I commit to addressing concerns directly

I commit to celebrating others' successes

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Part 7 · Group Reflection

1. What made it difficult or easy to be vulnerable with the team?

Document key insights from team discussion...

2. What did you learn about your teammates during this exercise?

Document key insights from team discussion...

3. How can we maintain this level of openness in our daily work?

Document key insights from team discussion...

4. What would make you feel safer being vulnerable in the future?

Document key insights from team discussion...

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Part 8 · Our Trust Commitments

What specific actions will we take to continue building trust?

Example Commitments:

- We will start each team meeting with a brief personal check-in
- We will assume positive intent before jumping to conclusions
- We will address conflicts within 24 hours, directly and respectfully
- We will celebrate vulnerabilities shared as signs of team strength
- We will protect confidentiality of what's shared in this space

List your team's specific commitments to building and maintaining trust...

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Part 9 · Key Takeaways & Next Steps

Remember:

- Trust is earned through consistency, not one-time exercises
- Leaders must model vulnerability first and most often
- One breach of trust can undo months of trust-building
- Psychological safety requires ongoing attention and care

Follow-Up Actions:

- Schedule regular check-ins to assess trust levels
- Reference commitments made during team meetings
- Address trust violations immediately and constructively
- Repeat this exercise quarterly to deepen trust
- Use vulnerability modeling in daily leadership

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Part 10 · Safety Guidelines

Creating a Safe Container

- Confidentiality: What's shared here stays here
- No fixing: Listen without trying to solve or advise
- Right to pass: Anyone can choose not to share
- Equal time: Everyone gets space to be heard
- Assume positive intent: Give grace and assume best intentions

When NOT to Run This Exercise

- Team is in active conflict requiring mediation first
- Recent trust violation hasn't been addressed
- Team members don't feel psychologically safe yet
- Time pressure prevents full processing
- Leadership isn't ready to model vulnerability

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Part 11 · Why Vulnerability-Based Trust Works

Patrick Lencioni's research on team dysfunction identified absence of trust as the foundational problem in dysfunctional teams. When team members don't trust each other, they:

- Conceal weaknesses and mistakes
- Hesitate to ask for help or offer constructive feedback
- Jump to conclusions about others' intentions
- Hold grudges instead of addressing conflicts
- Dread meetings and avoid team interactions

Vulnerability-based trust changes this dynamic. When team members feel safe being vulnerable, they conserve energy otherwise spent on self-protection and redirect it toward collective goals. The team becomes stronger not despite individual weaknesses, but because everyone can acknowledge them and support each other.

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