

# Psychological Safety

"Psychological safety, in the context of clinical education, is a shared belief that the [educator-learner relationship] is safe for interpersonal risk taking which creates a sense of confidence that the [educator] will not embarrass, reject or punish the [learner] due to mutual respect and trust. "

Johnson et al. (2020)



## PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS



A climate in which people are comfortable expressing themselves

Comfort sharing concerns and mistakes without fear of blame, embarrassment, humiliation, retribution or being ignored

Present when colleagues trust and respect each other and feel obligated to be candid

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IS NOT

About being nice

A personality factor

Just another word for trust

About lowering performance standards

## Three Team Leader Behaviors that Promote Safety In the Clinical Learning Environment

### Set the Stage:

Building relatedness and setting them up for success in learning

- Build relatedness
- Frame the work
- Emphasize the purpose
- Have clear work expectations and the expected level of mastery
- State a team focus on learning
- Build belonging

### Invite Participation:

Encouraging students' engagement in learning

- Model humility and growth mindset
- Provide autonomy
- Use inquiry to build knowledge, not highlight gaps
- Seek input from junior team members
- Model life-long learning
- Give roles on the patient care teams

### Respond Productively:

Reinforcing every effort as a learning opportunity

- Express appreciation
- Destigmatize failure
- Respond productively
- Provide frequent feedback
- Emphasize learning, rather than shaming or ignoring
- Reinforce a sense of competence in students' learning



Learn more at  
<https://cme.smhs.gwu.edu/smhs-center-for-faculty-excellence>

**References:** Johnson, C.E., Keating, J.L., Molloy, E.K. (2020). Psychological safety in feedback: What does it look like and how can educators work with learners to foster it? *Medical Education*, 54: 559-570.  
McClintock, Kim, S., & Chung, E. K. (2022). Bridging the Gap Between Educator and Learner: The Role of Psychological Safety in Medical Education. *Pediatrics (Evanston)*, 149(1), 1-.<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-055028>.