Creating Psychological Safety in Teams

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Psychological safety is the degree to which team members feel that their environment is supportive of asking for help, trying new ways of doing things, and learning from mistakes. Care teams may be less likely to take the risks involved in implementing new evidence without some assurance that they won't be blamed for the missteps that are an inevitable part of the change process.

Team leaders and members can promote psychological safety by:

- Inviting input from all team members.
- Encouraging team members to contribute.
- Promoting active listening and learning from each other.
- Acknowledging the limits of their own knowledge.
- Celebrating failures, providing positive reinforcement for innovations even though they don't always work.

Simple phrases that help create psychological safety that anyone on the team can use during team meetings include things like:

- "Let's go around and hear everyone's reaction."
- "It's fine to disagree. That's why we're talking about this together."
- "If you see anything amiss, please speak up. We're a team and we have to have each other's backs."
- "Let's call each other by our first names. That might help everyone to feel free to speak their mind."
- "Maybe someone has a different perspective. I'd really like to hear some other views."
- "Is anyone concerned about anything we just talked about? If you have concerns, we'd really like to hear them."
- "What a great observation! I never noticed that. Let's think as a team about how we can solve this problem."
- "Brainstorming is about throwing out a lot of ideas. We're not judging now whether they're good or not. Let's just get all the ideas out there."
- "We can't do this without everyone being on the same page. Everyone's input is essential."
- "We're not here to find fault. We're here to see how we can do better next time."
- "Just like they say for homeland security – 'If you see something, say something.'"

Psychological safety can also be fostered one-on-one by saying things like:

- "I'm not sure I've done this right. Can someone check me?"
- "Thanks for pointing out my mistake. You just saved me from a big blunder."
- "I'm not sure we're following the protocol correctly. Let's check."
- "That's a great point. I think the whole team needs to hear that. Can you bring it up at our huddle tomorrow morning?"
- "As long as I'm not with a patient, feel free to grab me anytime. Remember, there's no such thing as a stupid question."

It is also important to address behaviors that undermine psychological safety. Act quickly, and respectfully, to re-establish psychological safety if a team member:

- Blames other team members for making mistakes.
- Discourages others from speaking up.
- Speaks rudely to or is otherwise disrespectful of other team members.
- Belittles another team member's idea.
- Ignores what other team members say.

References:

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