

Participant's Workbook



**Psychologically
Safe Interactions**

 Workplace Strategies
for Mental Health
An initiative of the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace
workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

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Introduction

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, it **“is sometimes hard to know if bullying is happening at the workplace. Many studies acknowledge that there is a ‘fine line’ between strong management and bullying.”**

Many workplace bullies, including those in management or union roles, aren’t aware that their behaviour may have been experienced as harmful by co-workers or direct reports.

One approach to create awareness is to think about our own behavior and how it might be experienced by others. The goal in this session is to have each individual consider their role in enabling or eliminating psychologically unsafe behaviour and develop norms where everyone can work together professionally and safely.

Most of us would never intend to psychologically harm or invite someone to harm/bully us, but be open to the idea that we may do it unintentionally. Be as objective and honest as you can be as we reflect on our own behaviours as well as the impact of others’ words and actions on us. You only need to share what you are comfortable sharing. The rest is just for your own reflection.

Please do not make fun of or judge the answers of others, and keep confidential the discussions that happen in this session.

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Slide 2 – What is a psychologically safe interaction?

What is a psychologically safe interaction?

Actions or comments where mutual respect is obvious and genuine.

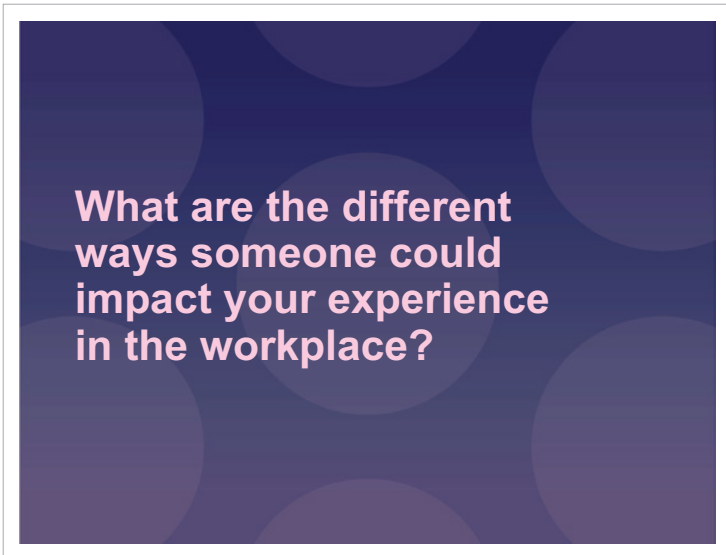
Discussions about alternative ideas are encouraged, safe, and productive.

There is a shared language to address negative behaviours immediately and consistently.

There is a shared understanding that this approach is intended to support each person to be their best self at work.

What else might be necessary for you to feel that interactions are psychologically safe?

Slide 3 – What power could anyone have over you?



Using the space provided, please list positive and negative impacts.

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts

Slide 4 – Improving awareness



Improving Awareness

- Perception vs intention – How we impact others
- Checking Assumptions – How we feel others impact us
- Moral Courage – Intervening respectfully
- Team Agreement – A shared understanding

What is discussed in this session:

- Stays in this session
- Is not made fun of
- Is not judged

Slide 5 – But I never meant it that way... Perception vs Intention



Our first area of exploration is the difference between our almost always good or at least neutral intentions and the sometimes unexpected perceptions of others. With each question, try to answer as if you were an objective observer of your own behaviour – what you actually would see or hear if you were observing – and don't dwell on the thoughts or emotions you might be experiencing at the same time.

Slide 6 – Perception vs Intention



Write as many characteristics as you can think of that may indicate someone is weak or strong in character.

Weak in Character

Strong in Character

Slide 7 – Perception vs Intention



Collaboration can be a useful process, but sometimes we just need to be clear about directions and get the job done. Sometimes there is no room for negotiation. What makes it challenging is when there is uncertainty about which approach will be used. In your group, try to write down work situations that will absolutely involve collaboration, work situations that will absolutely require following directions, and work situations that could be either.

If we can manage expectations by stating when collaboration will be sought and when there is a need to simply follow directions, we can avoid some of the stress and misunderstanding that come from mixed messages.

Slide 8 – Perception vs Intention



**Perception
vs Intention**

When are you more passionate
or animated?

What might that look like to others?

Many of us get excited about ideas, or feel righteous about perceived injustices. What we feel as passion can be interpreted differently by others. Explore how others might interpret our passion. For example: “When I get excited about ideas, I might blurt things out or interrupt others. I see it as passion, but others may see it as rude, dismissive, or aggressive. If I am not able to always contain myself, I could at least recognize when I have done this and apologize.”

Slide 9 – Perception vs Intention



Perception vs Intention

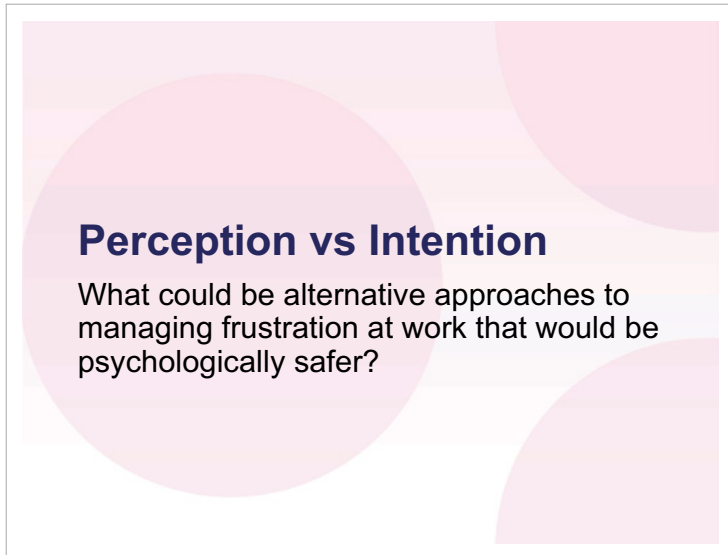
How do you interact with others when you are frustrated at work?

What would they see or hear?

Write out your answers to these two questions. Avoid writing or discussing how you *feel* or *think* while frustrated. **We want to focus on what others would see or hear.**

Once everyone has finished writing, compare your answers with others at your table.

Slide 10 – Perception vs Intention



Write out as many answers to this question as you can in one minute. Go!

Next, compare your answers with others at your table. At each table choose two answers to share with the larger group: one that you think is most innovative and one that you think is most practical.

1.

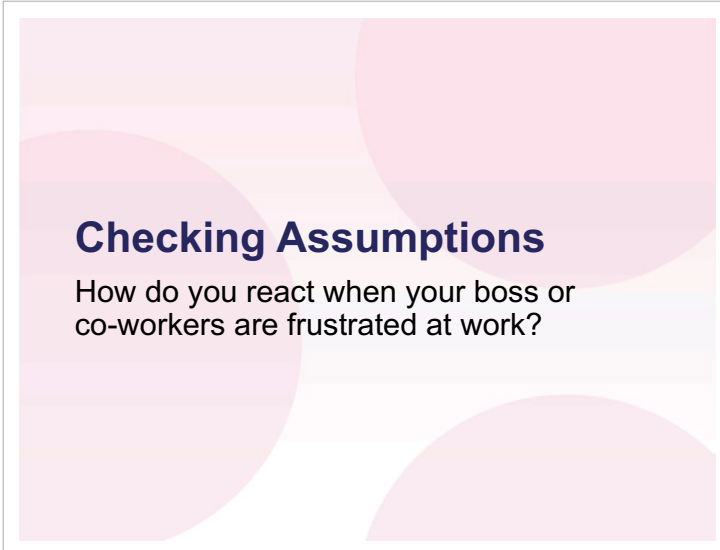
2.

Slide 11 – They are out to get me ... Checking Assumptions



We have examined how our behaviours may be perceived by others quite differently than what we had intended. Now we will look at how we might make assumptions about the way other people behave.

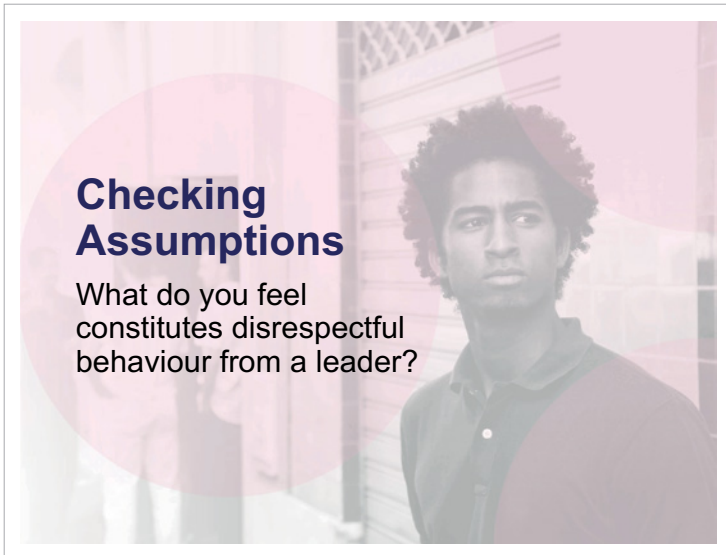
Slide 12 – Checking Assumptions



Checking Assumptions
How do you react when your boss or co-workers are frustrated at work?

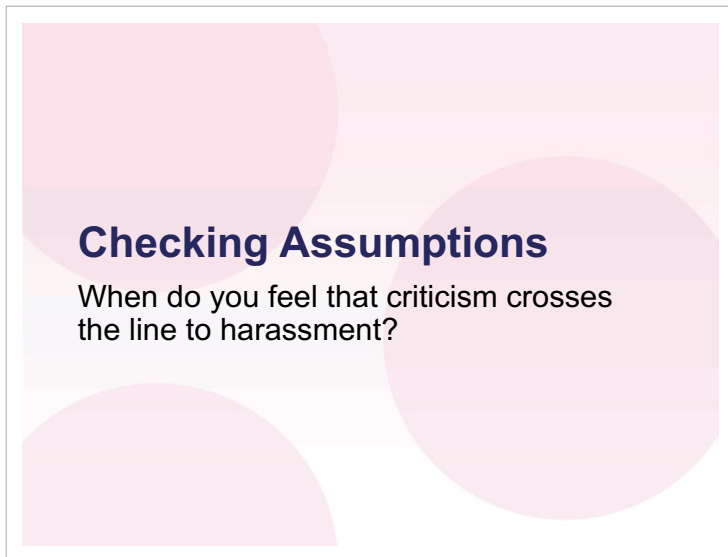
Think of a time when a co-worker or your boss was obviously flustered or overwhelmed. What did they do and how did you react? Write your answer to this question below.

Slide 13 – Checking Assumptions



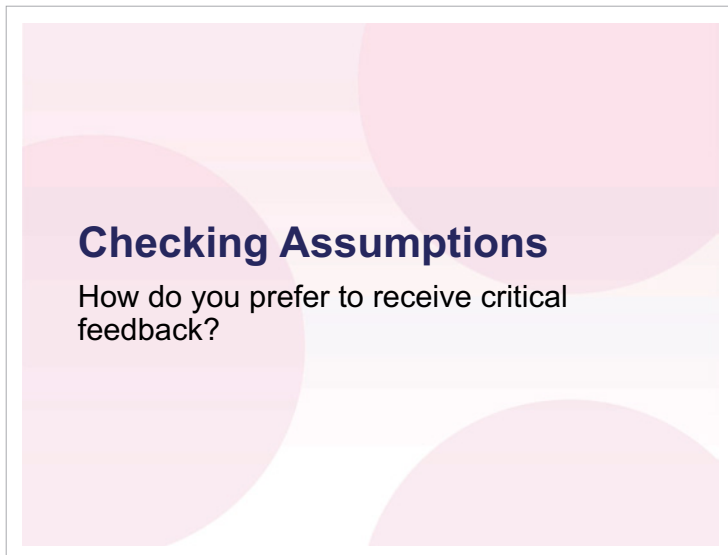
Leaders must constantly walk the line between doing their job effectively and offending their direct reports. Write your answer to this question below.

Slide 14 – Checking Assumptions



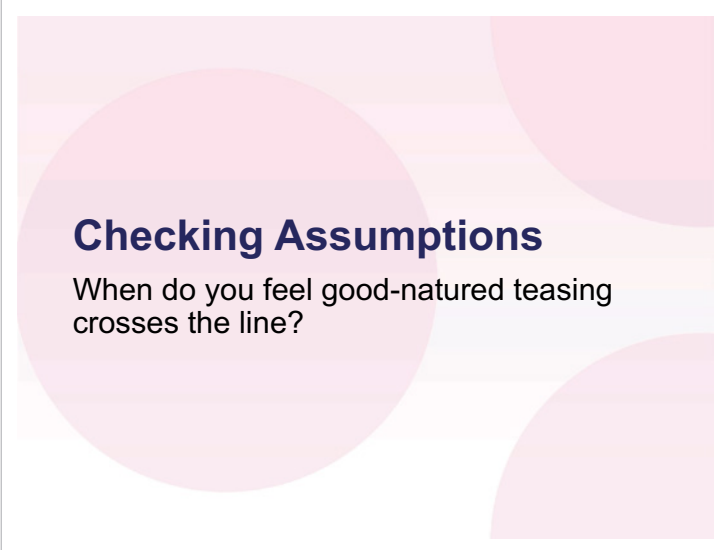
While criticism in the workplace is necessary for feedback and quality assurance, there is a difference between constructive criticism and psychologically unsafe interactions. Write your answer with as much detail as you can.

Slide 15 – Checking Assumptions



Many of us do not like to be criticized and almost all of us do not like harsh or unfair criticism. Yet in the workplace, it is inevitable that we will receive criticism as part of our job. By considering how you prefer to receive critical feedback you can explore what would work best for you. Record your answer in a manner that is so specific anyone could provide you with critical feedback successfully, with no fear of you becoming defensive.

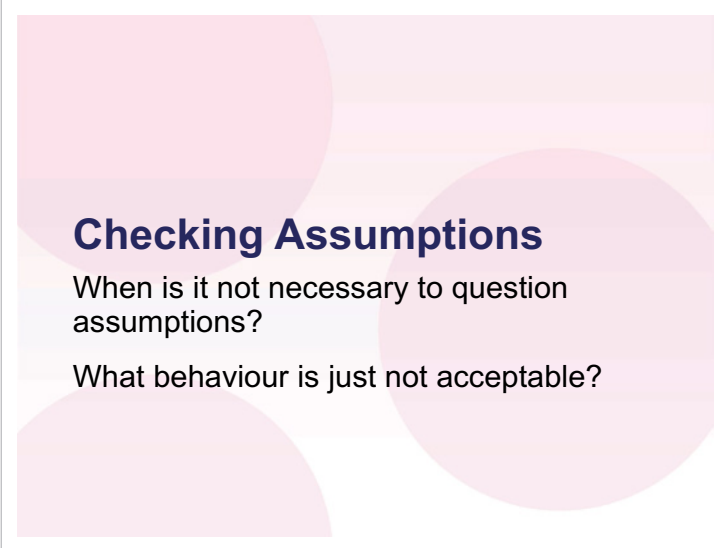
Slide 16 – Checking Assumptions



Checking Assumptions
When do you feel good-natured teasing crosses the line?

Most of us now recognize when teasing crosses the line to discrimination based on gender, race, or religion, but consider when it may be less obvious. For example, someone may think it is just kidding around when they punch your arm or joke about crazy people. Think about when and how actions or words could be potentially harmful or unwelcome to you or others. Write your answer to this question below in as much detail as you can.

Slide 17 – Checking Assumptions



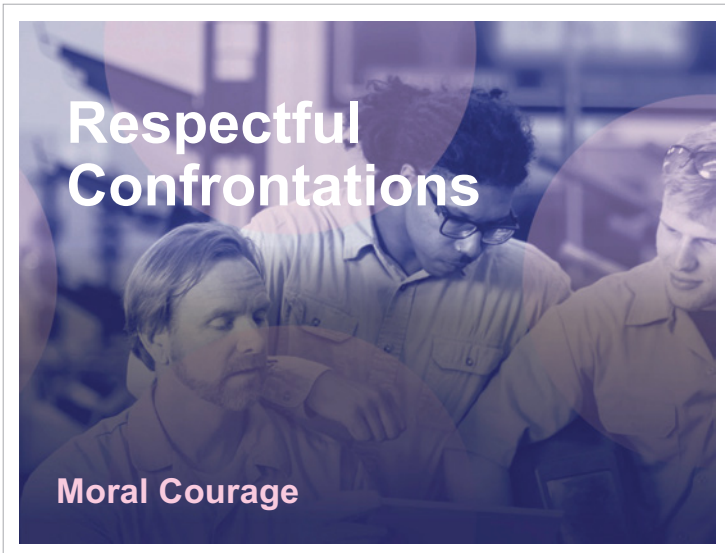
Checking Assumptions

When is it not necessary to question assumptions?

What behaviour is just not acceptable?

Write down behaviours that you would report or stop immediately without any hesitation or reflection on what might be motivating the behaviour. Write your answer to this question below in as much detail as you can.

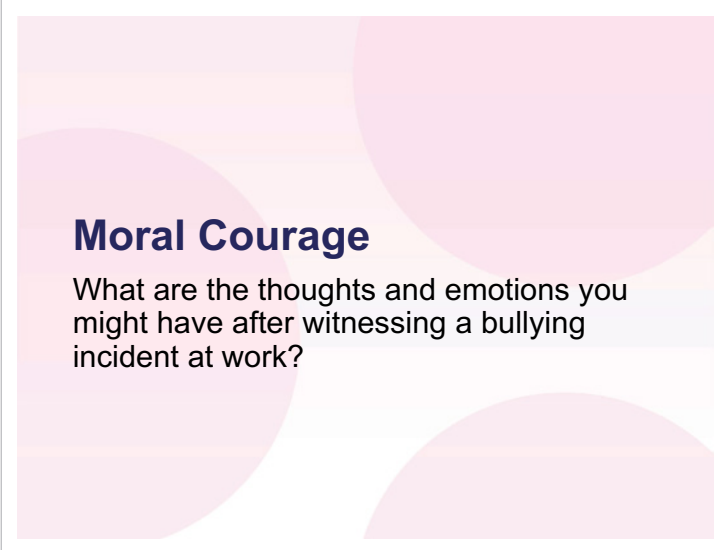
Slide 18 – Respectful Confrontations ... Moral Courage



We have now looked at how our intentions may be misinterpreted and how we might make assumptions about the behaviour of others. This awareness can help us to improve our working relationships. But what about when you are witnessing someone else's behaviour and the impact it is having on the person they are interacting with? Are you able to speak up? Do you end up getting angry and confrontational yourself, thereby engaging in the same negative behaviours you're trying to stop? Or do you just remain silent? Either of these reactions may allow the negative or harmful behaviours to continue or even worsen.

Having the courage to speak up is only half of the skill set needed here. The other half is to speak up or confront the situation in a respectful way. If we realize that we may be making assumptions about what is going on and that the intention of either party may not be what you are perceiving, we are better equipped to be objective and respond in a supportive, firm manner to help change the situation from potentially harmful to one that can reinforce good working relationships.


Slide 19 – Moral Courage



Moral Courage
What are the thoughts and emotions you might have after witnessing a bullying incident at work?

Write your answer to this question as honestly and objectively as you can. Include your reaction, if you were able to intervene, as well as your reaction if you were not able to intervene.

Slide 20 – Moral Courage

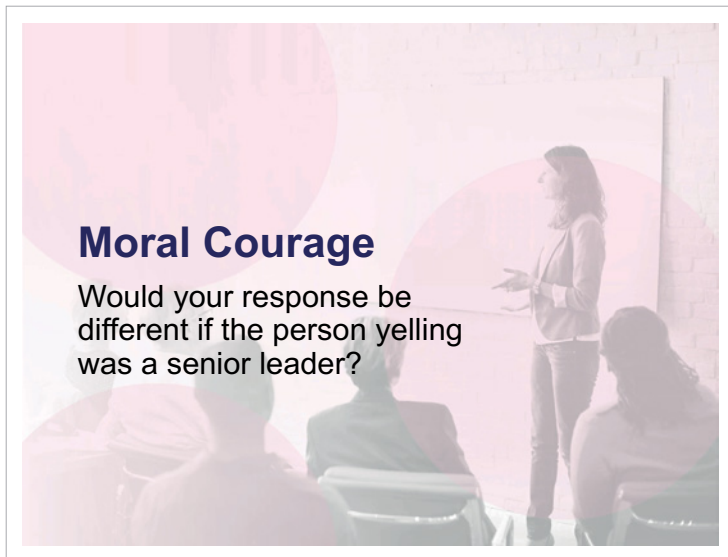


Moral Courage

When you see someone yelling at a co-worker do you intervene, ignore it, or just stand there?

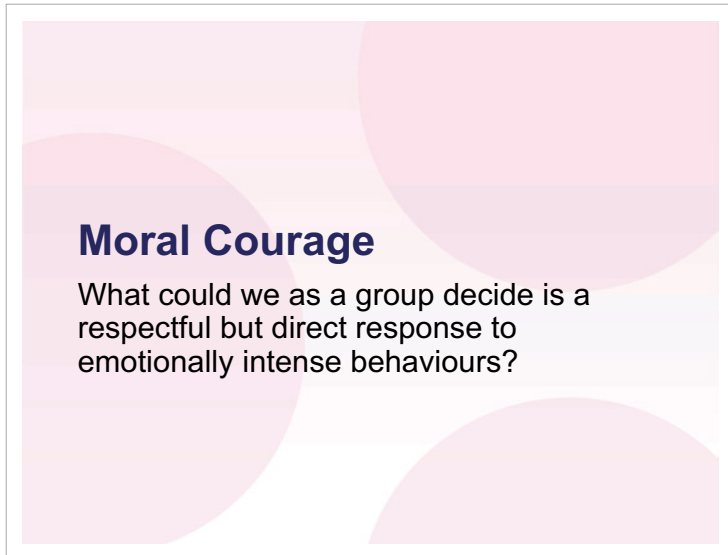
Be honest and objective about what happens most of the time when you are witnessing this type of behaviour. Write your answer to this question below.

Slide 21 – Moral Courage



Write your answer to this question below as honestly and objectively as you can.

Slide 22 – Moral Courage

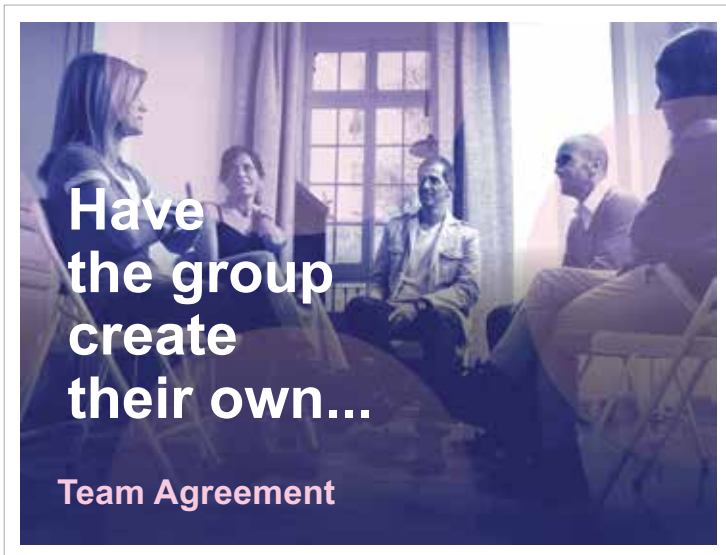


Write your answers to this question and then discuss everyone's answers with your group. Decide which words from the discussion anyone could use to intervene when someone is behaving in an emotionally intense or inappropriate way.

Best answer from the group:

Think also about how you would respond to someone saying those words to you. Would it feel supportive or like you were being attacked?

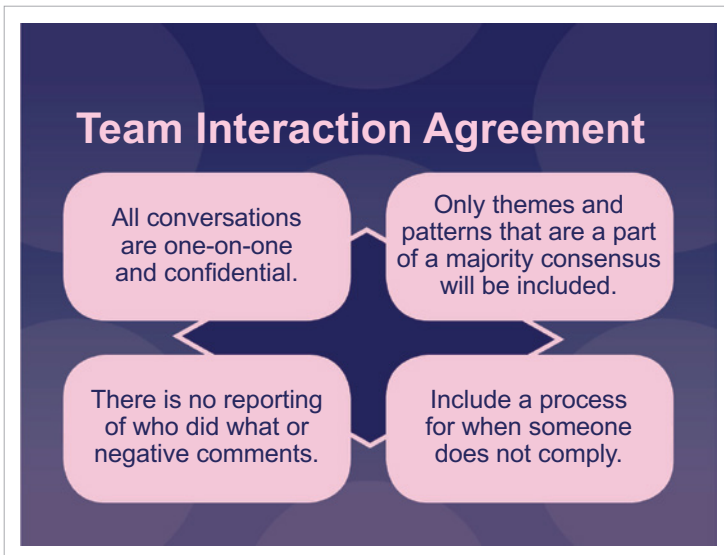
Slide 23 – Have the group create their own ... Team Agreement



Next we will discuss the outline for a process that can result in our own working agreement. This helps define how we agree to interact with each other on a daily basis. It will guide us on how to recognize when we may be having a negative effect on others, how to question our own assumptions about the behaviour of others, and how to use moral courage and respect to help those who may be at risk of violating the agreement we develop. It really is an agreement about how team members will interact going forward for the purpose of us having the best working environment we can have.

No two groups are the same. The dynamics of any group depend on the members in it and how they interact. As a result, no two team agreements are usually the same.

Slide 24 – Team Interaction Agreement



There are four key principles of this process to keep in mind:

- All conversations to gather feedback are one-on-one and confidential. No one will be identified with the comments they have made even if those comments end up in the agreement.
- The agreement includes only themes and patterns that are part of a majority decision. If one person has an idea that is not shared with the majority, such as serving chocolate for breakfast each morning, it will not make the report. This also helps team members to see which of the points that they brought up were also shared by many of your co-workers. These will be the ones included in the final agreement.
- There is no reporting of who did what or negative statements. While you are free to share your concerns and observations in the conversation, what gets written up is only the agreed-upon positive actions going forward. This is not an investigation.
- We will develop and include a process for when someone does not comply with the team agreement. It is important that we all know and agree on how this will be dealt with and that there is someone with both the authority and will to act if this happens.

The goal is to provide an agreement that works for your team, helps to allow everyone to enjoy coming to work, and supports everyone to do work effectively.

Slide 25 – Process for developing an agreement about team interaction



The first question you would be asked in your private meeting would be, “What is already positive about how people interact in this workplace?” We don’t want to inadvertently get rid of what we value, so we make sure to identify what we would rather not change.

Slide 26 – Process for developing an agreement about team interaction

Process for developing an agreement about team interaction

What needs to happen differently to make this a place where you are supported to do your best work every day?

This is your chance to provide as many creative solutions as possible. Here we are looking for answers that are specific, reasonable in our work context, and measurable so that we can know if they are happening or not. For example, we would not want to include a statement such as, “Everyone should be nice.” Who knows what nice means to me or you, or how to measure it? Instead, we might include a statement such as, “We will acknowledge people who walk into a room we are currently occupying.” This is something that is specific and measurable.

Slide 27 – Process for developing an agreement about team interaction



Process for developing an agreement about team interaction

What are you personally willing to continue doing or do differently to contribute to great working relationships with everyone?

This is intended to identify the personal contribution each of us can make to improved working relationships. Some of you will say that you already do all you can do, and that's okay. You will be asked to identify those things that you currently do. Like the other questions, this one will seek answers that are specific, reasonable in our workplace, and measurable. It will be important that this question applies to everyone you work with, not just those who are currently in your circle of friends.

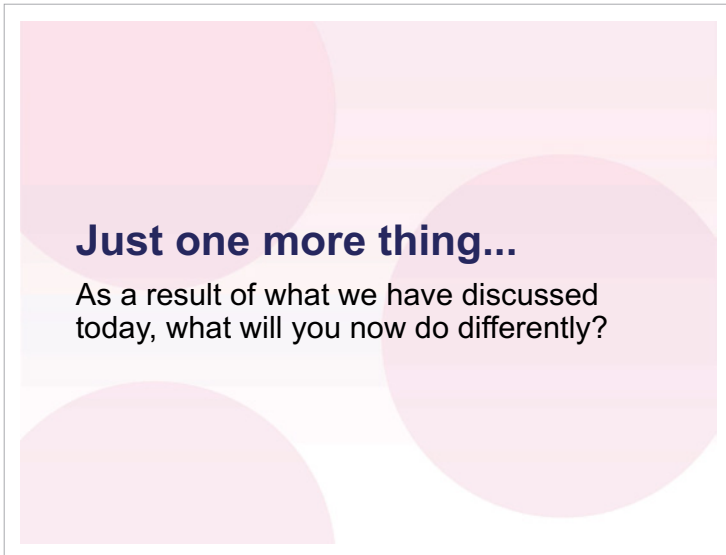
Slide 28 – Process for developing an agreement about team interaction



This is intended to develop a process that is understood by everyone in advance in case someone violates the agreement. This approach can range from a gentle reminder to progressive discipline.

The point is to be clear, so that no one is surprised by the response. Everyone should know there will be a response and that behaviours that are harmful will not be allowed to continue. Of course we will respect all labour laws and collective agreements where they apply, but this level of intervention is focused on helping the team stay on the track they have chosen for themselves.

Slide 29 – Just one more thing...



Please write down at least one thing that you will do differently at work as a result of what we have discussed today. We will take up the answers when you are done.

Slide 30 – Creating awareness about psychologically safe interactions



**Creating awareness
about psychologically
safe interactions**

Want to learn more?

**For free tools and printable resources, visit:
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If you want more information about responding to bullying and harassment or other resources related to workplace mental health or psychological health and safety, check out this www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com, the site where today's material can be found.



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