## Rambu-tips

## Ellie's top tips on psychological safety

### 1 Before we start

**What's it all about?**

These top tips will help you understand what psychological safety is and isn't, what problems and opportunities it can throw up, and why it's particularly relevant now (e.g. prolific uncertainty, wellbeing and hybrid working)

**Our philosophy on...**

Taking inspiration from Dr Amy Edmondson's definition, we believe psychological safety is about not being punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes, or just being yourself. When people hear the term 'safety', they often think of health and safety practices and procedures, but psychological safety is just as important, impacting people's day-to-day thoughts, feelings and behaviours

**Who will benefit?**

Anyone who wants to look after themselves and anyone who looks after others, from leaders in organisations to teachers in schools and everyone in between!

### 2 The stages of psychological safety
**Broken down into four straightforward stages**

**Why four stages?**

Dr Timothy Clark, author of 'The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation', identifies four stages of psychological safety. Whilst these stages are numbered, they aren't necessarily linear; they act as a useful way to show the different degrees and elements involved in psychological safety

**Stages one and two**

1. Inclusion safety. This makes sure you feel welcome, accepted and that you belong. 2. Learner safety. This is where (much like a positive school or work experience) you feel comfortable to ask questions, take risks and make mistakes to help you learn. You become comfortable with both seeking out and receiving feedback, as there's no fear of punishment or humiliation

**Stages three and four**

3. Contributor safety. You feel safe to make your voice heard, contributing ideas and participating in conversations and activities. 4. Challenger safety. You feel safe to question and challenge others and the status quo, being more innovative in suggesting alternatives

### 3 The benefits of psychological safety
**Being your authentic self in other's company, free from judgement**

**Improving equality, diversity and inclusion, and wellbeing**

We all like to feel included. As part of the evolution of our species, our brain rewards us with a hormone called oxytocin (the so-called 'friendship hormone') when we engage with others because, thousands of years ago, being in a tribe helped our survival... and in a different way it probably still does today. Oxytocin makes us feel warm, accepted and safe. It's also one of the body's antidotes to some of the hormones created by stress and anxiety

**Driving quality and innovation, and reducing risk**

Being able to ask questions and make mistakes without being punished or ridiculed drives learning and creativity in organisations. Questioning and challenging of current processes and procedures drives continuous improvement. Challenging the status quo also leads to innovation which in turn drives quality and value

**Dealing with and managing change**

For some, change can be difficult and uncomfortable; for others, they're happy to 'go with the flow' and ride the wave. Having a psychologically safe environment to accompany change can help you deal with and manage it. By feeling comfortable with expressing your true emotions and reactions to the change, you become more vulnerable, recognising that perhaps others feel the same way and that you're not alone, or that you can offer support to someone who's finding the change more challenging

### 4 Achieving and maintaining psychological safety
**How do you know if there's psychological safety or not?**

**Measure it**

Gathering views through a team assessment or engagement survey can be a useful indicator of the current level of psychological safety in an organisation. Also consider seeking some qualitative input, asking people to share ideas of how they think psychological safety could be improved in their environment. As always when you gather data and people's ideas, what's critical is that you act upon what you discover
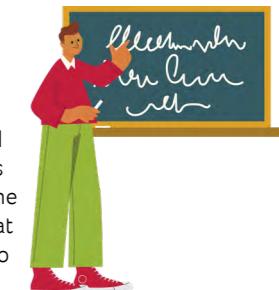
**Be vulnerable, open and honest**

Acknowledge your own fallibility. Being aware of when you've made a mistake or are wrong, and openly admitting to it, helps build trust as others can see and experience your vulnerability. Role-modelling this behaviour and encouraging others to do the same can help to develop a culture of psychological safety and build trust

**Focus on 'learning', not 'blaming'**

Be curious and ask lots of open questions to help people learn from mistakes. Listen to understand, not to respond. Invite challenge and feedback and respond with grace. Practise using techniques such as active listening to make others feel heard, and radical candor (see the 'books that will help' section) which involves you showing others that you care personally when you offer direct feedback to help people to learn

### 5 Keep on learning

**Watch these TED Talks:**

**10 ways to have a better conversation by Celeste Headlee** – a talk that shares some useful, practical tips to help improve your listening and develop the art of conversation

**Why good leaders make you feel safe by Simon Sinek** – a talk that explores the importance of building trust to create an environment where you feel safe

**Why it's time to forget the pecking order at work by Margaret Heffernan** – a talk that reveals how being empathetic and creating space for others to talk can drive success and productivity

**Books that will help:**

**The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth** by **Dr Amy Edmondson** – this book, based on decades of research, delves into more detail on psychological safety in the workplace, brought to life with practical examples

**The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation** by **Dr Timothy Clark** – this book goes into greater detail around the different stages, exploring the framework to help you develop psychological safety

**Radical Candor** by **Kim Scott** – a book about the importance of finding the radical candor sweet spot when inviting challenge and sharing feedback with others