



Cultivating Psychological Safety in Clinical Learning Environments



Promote curiosity and shared continuous learning

- Ask clarifying questions
- Be mindful of assumptions → try to avoid them
- Ask for feedback
- Express **gratitude** when you receive feedback
- Frame the work as a **learning problem**, NOT an execution or individual problem



Encourage diverse input and healthy debate

- Ask others to **share a different opinion**
- Ask everyone to share one possible benefit and one possible concern with a decision or course of action
- Ask for solutions
- Approach each conversation as a collaborator
- Shift goals from reaching agreement to **reaching understanding**
- Recognize a continuum of ideas: **resist the tendency to split into polarizing camps**. Remove binary language (e.g., good vs. bad, right vs. wrong)



Be mindful of your response, as it is carefully evaluated by others

Learners are watching how leaders/educators respond to positive and disappointing news. If they sense that your reaction might jeopardize their self-esteem or put them on the defense, they will contemplate whether it is worth taking the risk to speak up in the future



Foster a no-blame culture

- Assume good intentions
- Use **factual, neutral language** to state the problem as an observation
- Focus on the “why” and not the “who”
- Avoid assigning blame to a single individual or single cause
- Acknowledge that adverse events or suboptimal results typically happen from a result of **several failures** along the way
- Ask questions to enhance clarity and understanding of the underlying problem



Don't jump to conclusions

Your initial viewpoint may not be an accurate representation of the full picture



Model openness and emotional vulnerability

- Share your **own mistakes and concerns**
- Admit when you don't know something
- Normalize that **vulnerability is hard!** (even for educators and leaders)
- Highlight how to use new information gained from vulnerability to learn and improve



Asking a question is a risk

It means acknowledging that you don't have all the answers. Affirming the question helps ensure learners' professional and personal identity remains intact



How to affirm the question

- This is a good question!
- I was also wondering about this!
- I don't think I ever thought of that and I'm glad you asked it!

- If someone first responds with a more negative or curt response: **be the second speaker** and make it clear that you also had the same question and you are glad it was raised



Build empathy and connection

- We are often quick to judge and it is easy to forget when listening to others what it feels like to be in their shoes
- Listen with **intent to understand**, not with an intent to respond



If you catch yourself starting to formulate a response while someone is still talking, **PAUSE**

- Focus on personal connections and **relationship building**
- Use the “Just Like Me” exercise

Just Like Me Exercise

The “Just Like Me” exercise is a simple yet impactful practice that fosters empathy and compassion for others. When a relationship or conversation feels difficult or contentious, it helps to take a step back and remember that the other individual is a human, just like you. Acknowledging our shared humanity can shift your perspective, opening the door to greater kindness, patience, and understanding. By focusing on our commonalities, we create space for more compassionate interactions and meaningful connections.

The exercise: (2 minutes) Can be done anywhere as long as you are able to draw your attention inward. Take three deep breaths. Think of someone with whom you are experiencing a conflict. While visualizing the individual, read (either silently or aloud) the statements below. In between each statement, pause and take a deep breath.

- This person is a human being – Just like me.
- This person has feelings, thoughts, and emotions – Just like me.
- This person has opinions, perspectives, and beliefs – Just like me.
- This person is imperfect and learning about life – Just like me.
- This person is sometimes scared and worried – Just like me.
- This person has friends, family, and maybe even children – Just like me.
- This person wants to feel competent, respected, and valued – Just like me.
- This person wants to feel seen and heard – Just like me.
- This person wants to belong – Just like me.
- This person wants to be happy – Just like me.

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