
 **COLORADO**
Office of School Safety
Department of Public Safety

Psychological Safety in Schools


Courage to Risk
January 2026

Presented by:

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graph TD
    A["Office of School Safety  
Chris Harms  
Director (4)"] --> B["CSSRC  
Margaret Ochoa  
(9)"]
    A --> C["Crisis Response Unit  
Kati Garner (4)"]
    A --> D["Grants Unit  
Charli Pringle-North  
(2)"]
  
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Psychological Safety: First thoughts?

- What do you think of when you hear the term "Psychological Safety"?
- Is there a difference between physical safety and psychological safety?
- How do psychological safety and physical safety rely on each other?



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Objectives



Session Objectives:

- Define psychological safety and review frameworks
- Understand and recognize psychological safety among staff and students
- Identify strategies for evaluating and increasing psychological safety in your educational environment



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Grounding Activity

Let's ground ourselves in safety and belonging.

Intentionally and silently state to yourself

- 5 things you see
- 4 things you hear
- 3 things you feel
- 2 things you smell (or like to smell)
- 1 thing you taste (or like to taste)



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Definition of Psychological Safety

The belief in a group that everyone is:

- Safe to take interpersonal risks
- Able to speak up with ideas, questions, concerns and mistakes
- Free from negative social or professional consequences as a result



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“Psychological safety isn't about being nice. It's about giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes, and learning from each other.”

- Dr. Amy Edmondson

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Four Quadrants of Psychological Safety

Learner Safety

- It's safe to:
- Discover
 - Ask questions
 - Experiment
 - Learn from mistakes
 - Look for new opportunities

Challenger Safety

- It's safe to:
- Challenge the status quo
 - Speak up
 - Express ideas
 - Identify changes
 - Expose problems



Collaborator Safety

- It's safe to:
- Engage in an unconstrained way
 - Interact with colleagues
 - Have mutual access
 - Maintain open dialogue
 - Foster constructive debate

Inclusion Safety

- It's safe to:
- Know that you are valued
 - Treat all people fairly
 - Feel your experience, and ideas matter
 - Include others regardless of title/position
 - Openly contribute

[Source for graphic](#)

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Inclusion Quadrant

Inclusion Safety

It's safe to:

- Know that you are valued
- Treat all people fairly
- Feel your experience, and ideas matter
- Include others regardless of title/position
- Openly contribute

How do I help others feel included?

- *Listen and pause*
- *Ask twice as much as you tell*
- *Avoid comparisons and competitions*
- *Express gratitude and appreciation*

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Learner Quadrant

Learner Safety

It's safe to:

- Discover
- Ask Questions
- Experiment
- Learn from mistakes
- Look for new opportunities

How do I help others grow?

- Share what you are learning
- Adopt a student mindset
- Share past mistakes
- Frame problems before solving problems
- Dedicate time and resources to learning



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Collaborator Quadrant

Collaborator Safety

It's safe to:

- Engage in an unconstrained way
- Interact with colleagues
- Maintain open dialogue
- Foster constructive debate

How do I help others contribute and collaborate meaningfully?

- Recognize accomplishment
- Celebrate small wins
- Shift from tell to ask
- Help others see their strengths
- Ask people what they think



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Challenger Quadrant

Challenger Safety

It's safe to:

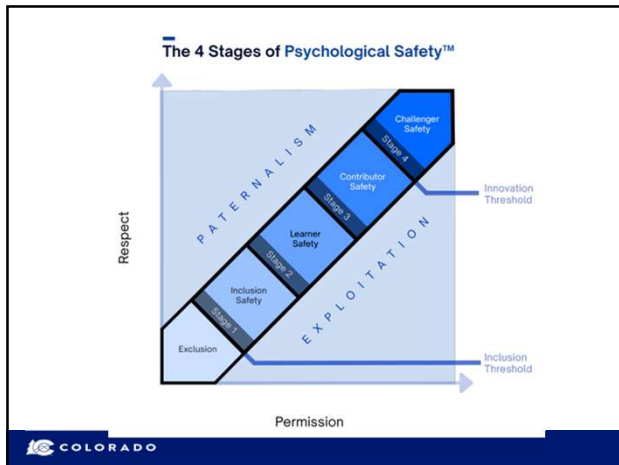
- Challenge the status quo
- Speak up
- Express Ideas
- Identify Changes
- Expose Problems

How do I encourage others to challenge the status quo?

- Engage in discussion related to procedure
- Let go of fear and emotional responses
- Provide opportunities for suggestions



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Research and History

First introduced in the 1960s by Organizational researchers Edgar Schein and Warren Bennis

Renewed Interest in the 1990s by Amy Edmondson

Project Aristotle aimed to understand the factors that impacted team effectiveness across Google

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Why is Psychological Safety important?

Leads to:

- Engagement
- Better decision making
- Positive culture and climate

Especially for work requiring creativity, novelty, or true collaboration

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How do staff AND students benefit?



When we feel psychologically safe:

- The brain can regulate and we live in the “learning zone” where creativity and productivity thrive

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Framework Connections

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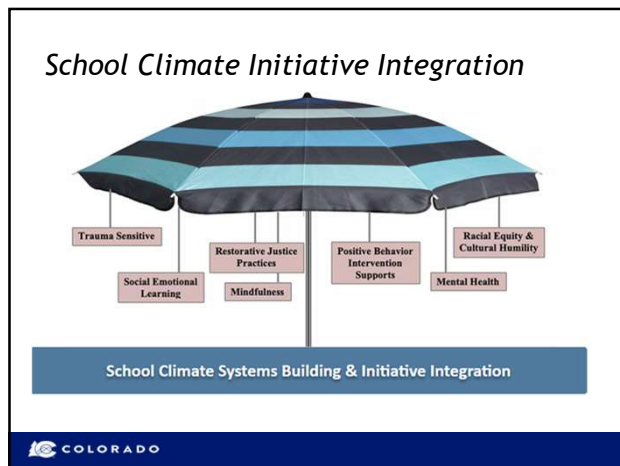
Interconnected Schoolwide Frameworks



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Psychological Safety Indicators




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Per the 2024 Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado survey (comparisons to the 2022 survey):

Staff Indicators




- Our school is a safe place to work.  91% responded favorably, down 1%
- School staff show respect for each other.  86% responded favorably, down 3%
- School staff feel comfortable raising important issues with school leaders.  78% responded favorably, no change
- School leadership works to build trust among staff.  77% responded favorably, down 1%
- This school is a safe place for students to learn.  89% responded favorably, down 1%




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Per the 2024 Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado survey (comparisons to the 2022 survey):

Student Indicators (as perceived by staff)

- Students social and emotional learning is adequately supported in this school.  81% responded favorably, up 2%
- Multilingual learners are adequately supported in this school.  74% responded favorably, down 5%
- Students with disabilities are adequately supported in this school  80% responded favorably, down 1%



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Do we have it? Consider this...

- I can make mistakes without fear that my coworkers will hold it against me.
- My co-workers welcome opinions different from their own.
- I feel safe to take a risk on this team.
- My direct manager values my ideas.
- People keep each other informed about work-related issues within the team.



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Do we have it? Further considerations...

- Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
- People on this team never reject others for being different.
- It is easy to ask other members of this team for help.
- Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized.
- No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts



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Educator Safety Task Force HB 24-1320

- The results of that work can be found on the [Office of School Safety's website](#)
- This includes:
 - Summary of the survey answered by over 1,100 school professionals
 - A video of interviews with task force members
 - Six Roadmaps for Action

Roadmap For Action!



The task force learned that violence against educators is widespread, normalized and leads to both physical and emotional injuries as well as burnout, decreased morale and retention issues.



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My Responsibility



“Psychological safety does not mean that you feel comfortable all the time. Psychological safety means you feel comfortable talking about what makes you uncomfortable.”

- Esther Derby



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Daily Practices



- Promote self-awareness.
- Demonstrate concern for team members as people.
- Be precise with information, expectations and commitments
- Explain reasons for change
- Own up to mistakes



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Break the Stress Cycle



- Prioritize Professional Boundaries
- Foster Peer Support
- Encourage Mindfulness & Relaxation
- Promote Physical Well-being
- Seek Leadership Support



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Positive Indicators

- Structure and predictability
- Clear procedures for staff
- Inclusive school based traditions/mascots/etc
- Consistent procedures and policies such as bullying, attendance, suicide risk, threat assessment, etc.
- Practice and preparation for crisis situations



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Psychological Danger

- That's a terrible idea.
- You should know that by now.
- Whose fault is this?
- Everyone is replaceable.
- Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions.
- Just get it done.
- Not now, I'm too busy.



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Turn and Talk

What are some *challenges* to creating psychological safety in educational settings?



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“No 21st century organization can afford to have a culture of fear. Fear silences all but the most confident voices, and small signals of impending risks are discounted or ignored.”

- Dr. Amy Edmonson, Professor of Leadership at [Harvard Business School](#)



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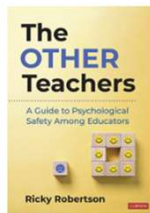
Resources



The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation
By Timothy R. Clark



The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: A Practical Guide to Improve Psychological Safety at Work



The Other Teachers: A Guide to Psychological Safety Among Educators
By Ricky Robertson



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Key Takeaways

- One thing you learned
- One thing you found interesting
- One thing you are still wondering

Please reach out if I can be of support!

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