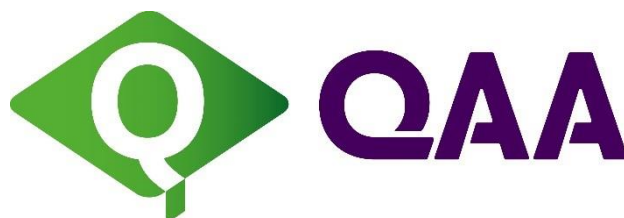


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**UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON**
CENTRE FOR ONLINE &
DISTANCE EDUCATION

Toolkit Proforma

Title of Tool
Creating Psychologically Safe Spaces
Category of content (Planning, Delivery, Evaluation)
Delivery
Summary
This tool provides an approach for cultivating psychologically safe spaces. Peer support, collaborative learning and open communication are actively promoted, fostering inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and heard. The tool encourages co-creation between the educator and students in setting expectations and creates a shared responsibility for establishing and maintaining a safe space. Through collaborative activities like values exploration and skills development, students appreciate different perspectives and build interpersonal and emotional skills necessary for success in diverse workplaces.
Learning For/About/Through
Through
Learning Outcome(s)/What is the change expected?
<p>The approach taken by the educator and the activities in the session will support students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase self-awareness and develop an enhanced sense of self-efficacy as they recognise and articulate their strengths, values, and personal narratives. Contribute to sessions as they share their experiences and ideas to their peers in a positive and supportive environment. Develop a mindset of inclusion and equity, appreciating and the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their peers.

In-Person	Online	Hybrid	Small Cohort (<25)	Medium Cohort (25-75)	Large Cohort (>75)	Fixed learning space	Flexible learning space	Synchronous	Asynchronous
✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

Core Content
<p>Required resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-prepared slide deck tailored to student needs. Tool for recording comments from feed forward exercises for example Padlet or post-it notes. Any materials needed for icebreaker Values cards Skills list (optional) <p>It is recommended that educators should provide accessible format options, print copies and an online option where possible. Learning materials and examples should be chosen to be inclusive and representative of various perspectives and be reflective of your students.</p> <p>Preparation in advance for educator</p> <p>In an educational context, a psychologically safe space is an environment where students feel secure, supported, and free to express themselves without fear of judgment or negative consequences. Creating this space begins at the preparation stage where educators should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on the effect their own experiences, assumptions and biases could have when working with students.

- Review what has and hasn't worked well for them previously.
- Refresh their active listening techniques and facilitation skills.
- Consider the specific needs of their students.
- Check any materials for accessibility and inclusivity.
- Understand the importance of using inclusive language for creating a safe environment for example the use of inclusive pronouns.

Preparation in advance for students

The educator could choose to prepare the students prior to the session but this is optional. Consider prefacing the session by introducing students to skills that might be useful in this session, for example active listening skills.

Step by step approach

When delivered in sequence and in-person, the step-by-step instructions take around 1 hour.

The example session can be edited or adapted according to the needs of the educator and the student group, but to properly create psychologically safe spaces, educators need to establish this from the first-time meeting with students. It is therefore recommended that Parts 1 – 3 are delivered as early as possible into meeting with students.

PART 1: Setting Expectations

- It is recommended that educators co-create a list of expectations with students when they first meet them. Consistency and clear language from the beginning help students feel more secure by reducing uncertainty.
- Collaboration with students is important so that they know from the outset their opinions matter and that this is their learning space, however it is a good idea to come with some initial thoughts to help get students thinking. It can be useful to share what has worked well in the past.
- Expectations can be set against employability skills with each skill having an expectation of students and educators. For example, the skill of organization could be used where students are expected to complete any pre-reading set, and educators are expected to have materials available for students ahead of sessions.
- It is a good idea to include an expectation around being respectful which for both students and educators would include listening to and asking for other people's contributions and being thoughtful about the language used when challenging people's ideas.

N.B: The session that this tool is based on was the first time that students had met the educator. It is recommended that where possible expectations are set at the first meeting and can then be referred to at the start of each following session.

PART 2: Feed Forward

- Following the setting of expectations, it is good to get a greater understanding about how your students are feeling by asking them some questions which they are able to answer anonymously.
- In this session student were asked:
 1. How are you feeling about the module?
 2. What are you looking forward to learning about?
 3. What has helped you feel comfortable contributing in educational settings in the past?
- Educators can use these questions or create their own.
- Students in this session were asked to submit answers to the platform Padlet. The educator could choose to use this or other online options such as Poll Everywhere, or alternatively could choose not to use an online platform and ask for answers on post-it notes.
- Having students be able to answer these questions anonymously encourages engagement and allows them to express any worries without feeling like they could be judged by the educator or their peers. It is recommended that if an anonymous approach is taken on an online platform that educators have settings on that require them to approve posts before they can be viewed by a class.

- Once students have had time to answer the questions, the educator should share some of the feedback in a positive way. Reassure students that any concerns are valid and discuss how you plan to address them. It is a good idea to highlight if any comments came up multiple times to help students realise they are not alone in the way that they are feeling.
- For this activity to be effective educators need to take on board the comments from students and, if necessary/where possible, make changes to reflect student needs.
- If necessary, expectations in Part 1 can be adjusted in light of any comments that arise in this activity.

PART 3: Icebreaker

- Part 3 aims to get the students engaging in the session early on.
- The educator can decide what kind of icebreaker is most appropriate for their students, but there should be no pressure attached to the activity; ideally there is no right or wrong answer.
- In this session students were provided with 16 pictures and asked to put them into 4 groups of 4. They were given no other information, so they had to make up their own rules.
- During the icebreaker, the educator should walk around and encourage discussions in the group so that all students get to be heard.
- At the end of the activity groups shared with the rest of the cohort what they had decided and why. The educator should encourage the cohort to reflect on other approaches they could have taken and can share what they like about each groups approach.

PART 4: Skills Activity

- A psychologically safe space embraces and celebrates the diversity of students, acknowledging their varied backgrounds, experiences, and identities, therefore it is important to introduce Part 4 by explaining to students that skills can be gained from a wide range of places. Explaining to students that skills gained from, for example, caring for a relative or volunteering are as valid as skills gained from paid work experience ensures that all students feel comfortable to share.
- Students will remain in the same groups from the icebreaker activity and will take turns to introduce themselves and share some information about their story so far. Students can talk about anything they like, for example they could talk about subjects they liked at school, any societies they are part of, languages they speak, countries they have travelled to, volunteering they have done etc.
- The rest of the group should give the student speaking their full attention and identify a skill that the student has based on the information they have shared.
- Groups can ask the student questions about what they share, but it should be made clear to them that the idea is to identify the strengths of their peers and not to judge experiences. If necessary, refer back to the expectations that were created in Part 1.
- To assist students, they can be provided with a list of skills. Educators could also create a prompt sheet for students with a list of experiences and skills that a student might gain through each experience.
- Each member of the group should identify a different skill they believe the person speaking has. Each student can reflect on their peers' comments and share their thoughts.
- During the activity, the educator should walk around groups and facilitate the discussions and encourage open communication.
- A collaborative activity like this based on peer-to-peer interactions where students actively listen to each other, appreciate different perspectives and reflect on the strengths of others fosters a sense of community and contributes to a positive and inclusive atmosphere.

PART 5: Values Activity

- Begin Part 5 by providing a short explanation of what values are and stress the importance of respecting those with different values.
- Explain that taking the time to appreciate people's individual experiences and values helps to build stronger relationships at work and can highlight points of connection and potential sources of conflict.
- For this activity students remained in the same groups
- Each group was given a set of 20 cards with values on them as well as 5 blank cards. Educators can adapt the number of values used depending on time available for activity and size of groups.

- Each value card was accompanied by a short description to aid students' understanding.
- Students were given a few minutes to read through the different values and then were asked to take it in turns selecting their top 5 values. They had the option to fill out one of the blank cards if a core value of theirs was not included. Students would then hold onto their top 5 values.
- Each time a new student selected their top values, they had the option to select from the values remaining on the table, 'steal' from the students who had gone before them or a combination of both.
- The activity continues until everyone in the group has selected their top values.
- As the activity is in progress, the educator should walk around groups and facilitate the discussions. If students are struggling to select their top values, encourage their group to ask questions to support them make a decision.
- Once every student has selected their values, encourage groups to reflect on their choices and their shared and different values. This is easy to do visually as groups that held a diverse range of values will have little to no cards left on the table, whereas groups with more similar values will find that individual people may only be holding one or two values but there will be lots of values that weren't chosen.
- Time permitting, it can also be beneficial to open this up to a wider discussion so that students can appreciate diversity in the entire cohort.
- Peer-to-peer interactions like this activity provide opportunities for students to connect on a personal level, creating a supportive network within the class. This fosters a sense of community by building interpersonal connections.

Post-Session Reflection:

- Ongoing commitment to creating a psychologically safe place is important so educators are encouraged to reflect on what went well and what could be improved.
- It is important to follow through on expectations set in ground rules during Part 1. As an educator, don't be afraid to admit to when you have fallen short of an expectation, for example if you did not arrive on time to a session, don't just ignore the fact, explain to the students why.
- If students are not meeting expectations, decide an appropriate way to address this. Challenging students does not stop a space from being psychologically safe. Providing feedback in a constructive and supportive manner, emphasizing areas of improvement with sensitivity will help students feel supported rather than criticised.
- Keep referring back to Part 2 to ensure that you adapt your approach when necessary.
- Offer ongoing opportunities for students to provide feedback and where necessary adapt your approach to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

Graphic - what image is being associated with this tool, if applicable

Links to Relevant Resources (both within the toolkit and outside)

[Psychological Safety – Amy C. Edmondson \(amycedmondson.com\)](https://amycedmondson.com/)

[Education for Mental Health Toolkit - Psychologically safe learning environment | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](https://advance-he.ac.uk/)

[How to use Icebreakers to Create Psychological Safety – Psychological Safety \(psychsafety.co.uk\)](https://psychsafety.co.uk/)