

The following exercise is intended to help professionals use reflexivity and collaboration skills to examine and enhance how 'safety' is understood in relation to reducing stress responsivity for the children and families immigrating to Canada.

After reading the descriptions for psychological, social, moral, and cultural safety, please select a safety category to reflect on from a specific professional experience you have had with a child or family. You may either work with a group or by yourself to examine the following questions:

- 1) What aspects of the experience demonstrated the safety category you selected?
- 2) In what ways did your practice promote the type of safety you selected?
- 3) Why was it meaningful to promote this kind of safety in the specific context you are reflecting on?
- 4) What were some of the barriers that made it difficult to promote the type of safety you selected?

As a group or by yourself, talk or think about what kinds of things would help promote the safety type you selected that weren't available at the time, and write them down.

Bonus Question: Why might writing down your reflections or talking about them with others be useful for how you regulate your own stress responsivity?

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Exercise developed by Ally Jamieson, MSW, PhD Candidate, 2016.

Review of safety categories written by Ally Jamieson, MSW, PhD Candidate, 2016.

Content for psychological, social, and moral safety adapted from The Sanctuary Model developed by Sandra L. Bloom, Joseph F. Foderara, and Ruth Ann Ryan at the following website link: [www.sanctuaryweb.com](http://www.sanctuaryweb.com)

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The Sanctuary Model, a trauma-informed model developed by Sandra Bloom, PhD., and Joseph Soderaro, LCSW, identifies four essential safety scenarios for a healthy developing, functioning, and/or recovering individual to experience: physical, psychological, social, and moral safety. These safety components were originally developed to reduce instances of traumatic stress responsivity and retraumatization experiences for individuals living in residential and institutional facilities. However, trauma-informed interactions are important for all professionals who interact with people who have experienced adversity and/or those who have traditionally demonstrated symptoms of traumatic stress in recovery. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals of all ages seeking mental health services and help adapting to new environments.

Children and families adapting to new environments and who have emigrated from home countries have a significant amount of change to adapt to in their new home country. Regardless of previous life adversity experienced, the amount of current stress experienced can be quite high. Current stresses are most likely associated with adapting to a new community, including new systems for education, employment, housing, and social commerce. These changes are further complicated by the need to adapt to new sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and geographical climate, among other changes relating to how new environments differ from ones home country and culture.

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## **Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety refers to the ability to be safe with oneself, to rely on one's own ability to self-protect against any destructive impulses coming from within oneself or deriving from other people and to keep oneself out of harm's way. Psychological safety is the ability to direct one's attention and focus, know oneself, to be able to exercise self-control and self-discipline, have a sense of internal authority that is fair and non-abusive, and to be able to express one's sense of humor, creativity and spirituality.

Traumatic stress robs survivors of their sense of personal integrity and childhood traumatic stress prevents the development of a clear and integrated sense of self. The ability to self-protect is one of the most shattering losses that occur as a result of adverse life experience and can manifest as an inability to protect one's boundaries from the trespass of others.

Another loss is a sense of self-efficacy, the basic sense of experiencing oneself as having the ability to relate to the world on one's own terms without abusing power and without being abused by it. A sense of psychological safety is achieved as a child or adult learns how to be effective in protecting themselves from violations of their personal and psychological space. An environment seeking to ensure psychological

safety must gain a healthy respect for the various ways in which behavior that appears to be maladaptive in the present once served as a useful and even life-saving adaptive response in past environments.

An environment that promotes psychological safety will provide opportunities for psycho-education, demystifying what have previously been inaccessible psychological concepts, and making reading materials and other media available for teaching, discussion and understanding.

*To be psychologically safe encourages:*

- Self-protection
- Child protection
- Attention and focus
- Self-knowledge
- Self-efficacy
- Self-esteem
- Self-empowerment
- Self-control
- Self-discipline

*To be psychologically safe means being free of:*

- Exposing ones self to unnecessary dangers, including psychologically damaging relationships.
- Inability to concentrate or focus.
- Loss of control over oneself, physically or emotionally.
- Being helpless in situations that one could control; autonomy.
- Inability to follow rules or fit into a system or structure.
- Being shamed or humiliated.
- Being bullied or bullying others.

## Social Safety

Social safety describes the sense of feeling safe with other people. A socially safe setting is one in which we feel secure, cared for, trusted, free to express our deepest thoughts and feelings without censure, unafraid of being abandoned or misjudged, unrestricted by the constant pressure of interpersonal competition and yet stimulated to be thoughtful, able to solve problems, be creative, and be spontaneous. A socially safe environment will provide non-abusive relationship opportunities and a willingness to tolerate and contain the expression of affect within the social environment. This is the kind of setting that human beings need to maximize their emotional and intellectual

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functioning in an integrated way. The entire community serves as the agent of stress responsivity regulation.

Our social system is created to produce human beings who will fit into a highly industrialized, competitive, often cutthroat capitalist environment that still prepares at least half of us for mortal combat. Our social system is not designed to maximize the human potential for growth, self-exploration, mutual co-operation, nurturing of the young, artistic endeavors, or creative expression and exploration. Further, if an individual is carrying distress associated with feeling or being 'different' than those around them, they may experience heightened feelings of isolation. Feeling 'different' and not part of the community one lives in perpetuates high levels of stress responsivity that contribute to physical and mental health distress. Communities that offer multiple different avenues for individuals to participate in social exchanges that could serve to help co-regulate stress responsivity and decrease rates of physical and mental health distress.

*To be socially safe encourages:*

- Caring and supportive relationships
- Safety in a group
- Social responsibility and advocacy
- Sustaining friendships
- Clear boundaries
- Healthy assertiveness
- Empathy for self and others
- Direct communication with others
- Ability to resolve conflicts
- Healthy exercise of responsible authority
- Ability to follow rules
- Ability to make safe rules

*To be socially safe means being free of:*

- Abusive interactions with others
- Social Isolation
- Social anxiety and awkwardness
- Poor boundaries between self and others
- Lack of empathy for self and others
- Inclinations to gossip and spread rumors
- Bigotry and hatred
- Constant conflicts with others

## Moral Safety

Moral safety is a subject that is even more difficult to describe. It is both a search for understanding and a process of acceptance. It is an attempt to reduce the hypocrisy that is present, both explicitly and implicitly, in our social systems. A morally safe environment is one that permits an ongoing ethical dialogue and search for higher meaning and purpose. Such a setting articulates and manifests in practice the values that it represents – honesty, compassion, a search for integrity, kindness, courage, justice, an honoring of the past, and hope for the future.

A health-promoting, morally safe environment therefore, is one that wrestles constantly with the issue of power and how power can be utilized in ways that promote health and healing instead of sickness, abuse and decay. Safe environments must be able to thoroughly analyze and address abuses of power on the part of both clients and staff in ways that promote learning, growth, and change. A morally safe environment engages in an on-going struggle with the issues of honesty and integrity. In any environment this means beginning with a self-evaluative look at our presumptions, our training, our rationalizations, our fixed beliefs, and our practice. Routine anonymous feedback from the people we serve is helpful to monitoring moral safety and for incorporating ideas from those we serve for how to improve moral safety.

Each system must look at its own issues with authority and become willing to participate in, not just manage, the relational web that forms the structure of the program. Each system must be willing to ask questions like “What is it that we are actually doing, and what are we trying to achieve?”, “Do the activities we are promoting lead to autonomy, connectedness, and empowerment?”.

*To be morally safe encourages:*

- Honesty and trust
- Ethical dialogue
- Acceptance of differences; embracing differences
- Courage
- Respect
- Reliability
- Compassion
- Commitment to human rights

*To be morally safe means being free of:*

- Violence
- Dishonesty
- Unjust treatment of others and/or oneself
- Denial of hypocrisy
- Discrimination and hatred
- Abusive use of power

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## Cultural Safety

Cultural safety refers to the overall experience of an individual's ability to live, promote, honor, and explore their family's cultural heritage. An individual/family is in the best position to experience resiliency, recovery, and an overall ability to thrive when they are in an environment that promotes and values their cultural heritage and when they are in an environment that strives to respect the cultural heritage of others. Resolution of traumatic stress and resiliency requires one's personal culture to be respected, acknowledged, and invited to the table for program planning and development on a regular basis.

Cultural heritage affords us the ability to make sense of many life experiences, which can enhance our experiences of self-identity. Without awareness of where we come from we have little understanding of who we are. And without these implicit and explicit understandings we are at a loss to understand how to heal from psychological wounds, as well as who we would like to strive to become. Furthermore, without cultural continuity, our biological stress responsivity systems can become difficult to regulate. Cultural safety provides comfort through familiarity in a manner that provides us with socio-emotional well-being, behavioral regulation, and physical health.

*To be culturally safe encourages:*

- Use of language in both written and verbal forms
- Inclusion of music, dance, and art in common community areas
- The smelling and tasting of culture-specific foods
- Expression of culture through clothing
- Social celebrations of culture
- Respect for oral and written histories

*To be culturally safe means being free of:*

- Cultural isolation
- Tokenism
- Asking for permission to practice cultural traditions
- Being stared at by others outside one's culture
- Discrimination and bigotry
- Forgetting or not learning about one's culture