



Beyond Burnout

Building a Culture of Care in the SHS Workplace

Presented by Horatio O'Shea

I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodian on which on the lands where we gather here today, the Dharawal people.

I wish to pay my respects to their Elders, their culture and connection to their land, skies, and waters. I recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and acknowledge that this always was and will be traditional land.

I honour the resilience of our First Nations peoples, not only since colonisation, but as the strength of the world's oldest living culture. We have much to learn from those who came before us, from those who walk with us, and from those yet to come.



What we'll cover



- Psychosocial legislation and standards
- Touch on the common psychosocial hazards
- Deepening our understanding of Burnout
- Understand the elements of Burnout
- Normalise Stress and
- The importance of coregulation at work
- Prosody at work
- Psychological safety at work
- Create a culture of care
- Operational change and psychosocial support
- Beyond Burnout Triva
- Start an Action Plan

Legislation relating to psychosocial hazards

Workers Compensation Act 1987 (NSW)

Injury Management & Worker's Compensation Act 1998 (NSW)

Fair Work Act 2009 (NSW)

Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)

Work Health Safety Regulations 2017 (NSW)

Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work Code of Practice SafeWork
NSW, May 2021

ISO 45003:2021: Occupational health and safety management —
Psychological health and safety at work — Guidelines for managing
psychosocial risks

Common psychosocial hazards at work



High or Low Job Demands – Excessive workload, unrealistic deadlines...



Poor Support – Inadequate supervision, limited guidance, Insufficient managerial support



Poor Organisational Justice - Perceived unfair treatment, inconsistent policies, lack of transparency in decisions



Poor Role Clarity - Conflicting expectation, unclear responsibilities, constant role changes



Exposure to Traumatic Events – Direct trauma, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue.



Poor Workplace Relationships – Conflict between staff, bullying, harassment, incivility...

ISO 45003 OH&S

Psychological health and safety at work, Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks.

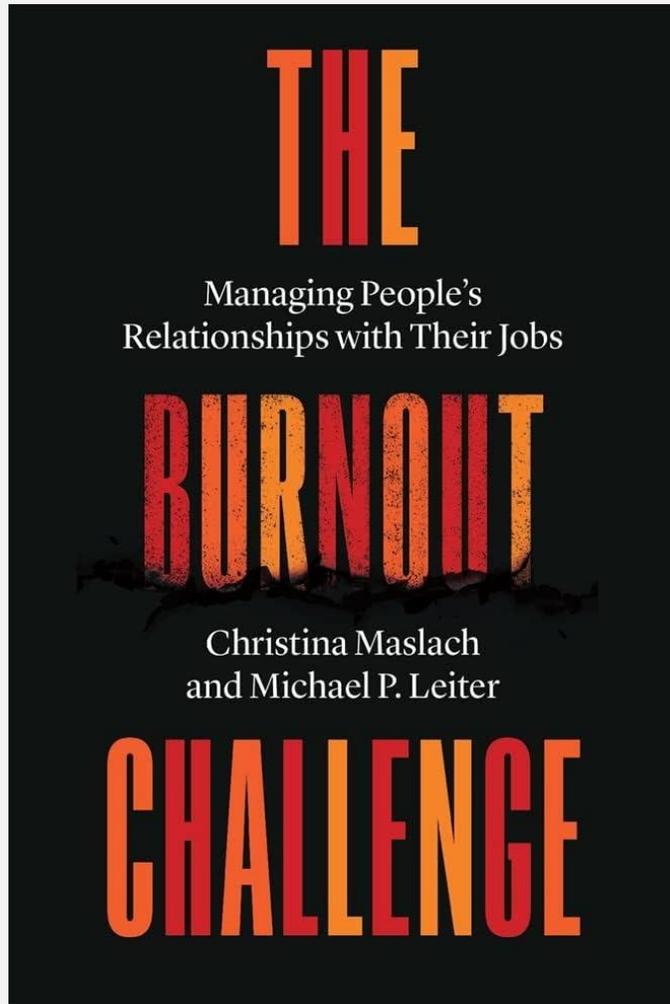
“This document provides guidance on the management of psychosocial risks and promoting well-being at work, as part of an occupational health and safety (OH&S) management system.”

“Organizations are responsible for identifying hazards and minimizing the risks associated with them. The participation of workers, in all stages of the process, is critical to success of managing psychological risks.”

Defining psychological risk & wellbeing

3.1 Psychological risk: Combination of the likelihood of occurrences of exposure to work- related hazard(s) of a psychological nature and the severity of the injury and ill-health that can be caused by these hazards.

3.2 Well-being at work: Fulfilment of the physical, mental, social, and cognitive needs and expectations of a worker related to their work.”



Burnout

- Christine Maslach, a pioneering psychologist in the study of burnout, developed a comprehensive framework for understanding this phenomenon, particularly in the workplace.
- Her work, particularly through the **Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)** (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), has been foundational in identifying the key dimensions of burnout: **emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment.**

Elements of Burnout

Emotional Exhaustion: The Core of Burnout

Emotional exhaustion is characterised by feelings of being overextended and depleted of emotional and physical resources. It is often the first and most prominent sign of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

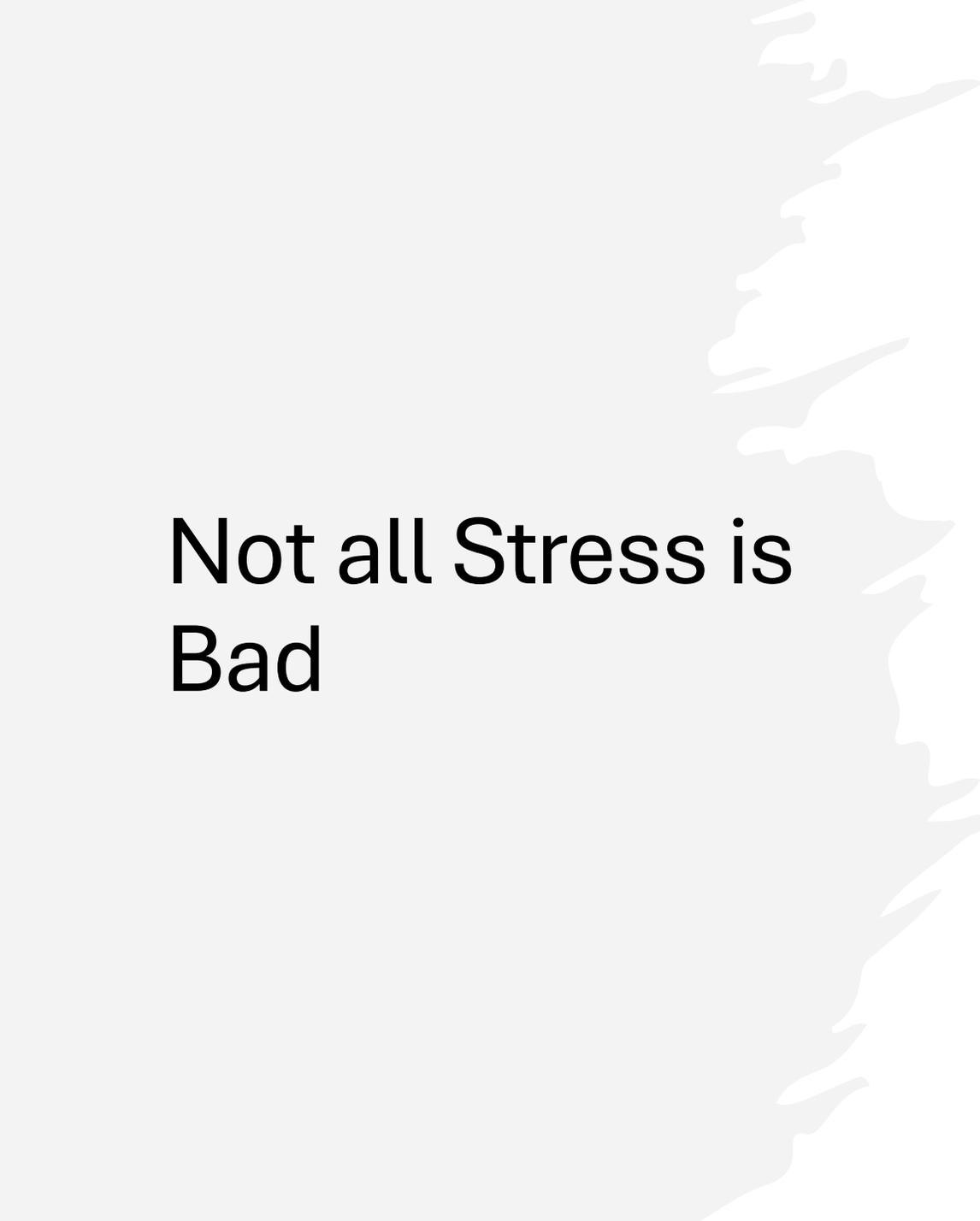
Depersonalisation (Cynicism): The Social Detachment Aspect

Depersonalisation refers to **detachment and cynicism** towards work and people. This often manifests as an **impersonal or negative attitude** toward clients, colleagues, or the job itself (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Reduced Personal Accomplishment: The Self-Efficacy Decline

This element refers to feelings of **ineffectiveness and lack of achievement** at work. Individuals experiencing burnout often perceive **a decline in their competence** and professional efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalisation	Reduced Accomplishment
Signs	Signs	Signs
Somatic complaints Feeling overwhelmed Anger Frustration Cynicism Lack of energy Worried about going to work	Lack of enthusiasm Negative towards others Lacking professionalism Disconnected from work Disconnected from purpose Poor record keeping Disconnection from clients	Feel like giving up Feel like quitting Frequent sick days Projecting onto others Constantly blaming clients Constantly blaming other services
Symptoms	Symptoms	Symptoms
Lack of energy Constantly tired Feeling flat Feeling exhausted at work Relational disturbances Don't want to hear others' problems "FRI-YAY"!!!	Constantly pessimistic Talking derogatory of clients Not feeling connected to the work Avoiding team gatherings Poor rapport with client Poor rapport with colleagues	Want to just do the minimum Don't care about quality of your work Work is just ticking boxes Loss of pride in your work Don't feel aligned to the work Feeling unaccomplished Sub-par clients' outcomes
Influences	Influences	Influences
Personal characteristics Work-related attributes Organisational characteristics Colleagues Lack of awareness No breaks Lack of supports	Personal characteristics Work-related attributes Organisational characteristics Lack of supports Output not Outcome focus Not aligned to organisation Not aligned with team	Personal characteristics Work-related attributes Organisational characteristics Lack of action Lack of supports Lack of mixed workload Not aligning to purpose



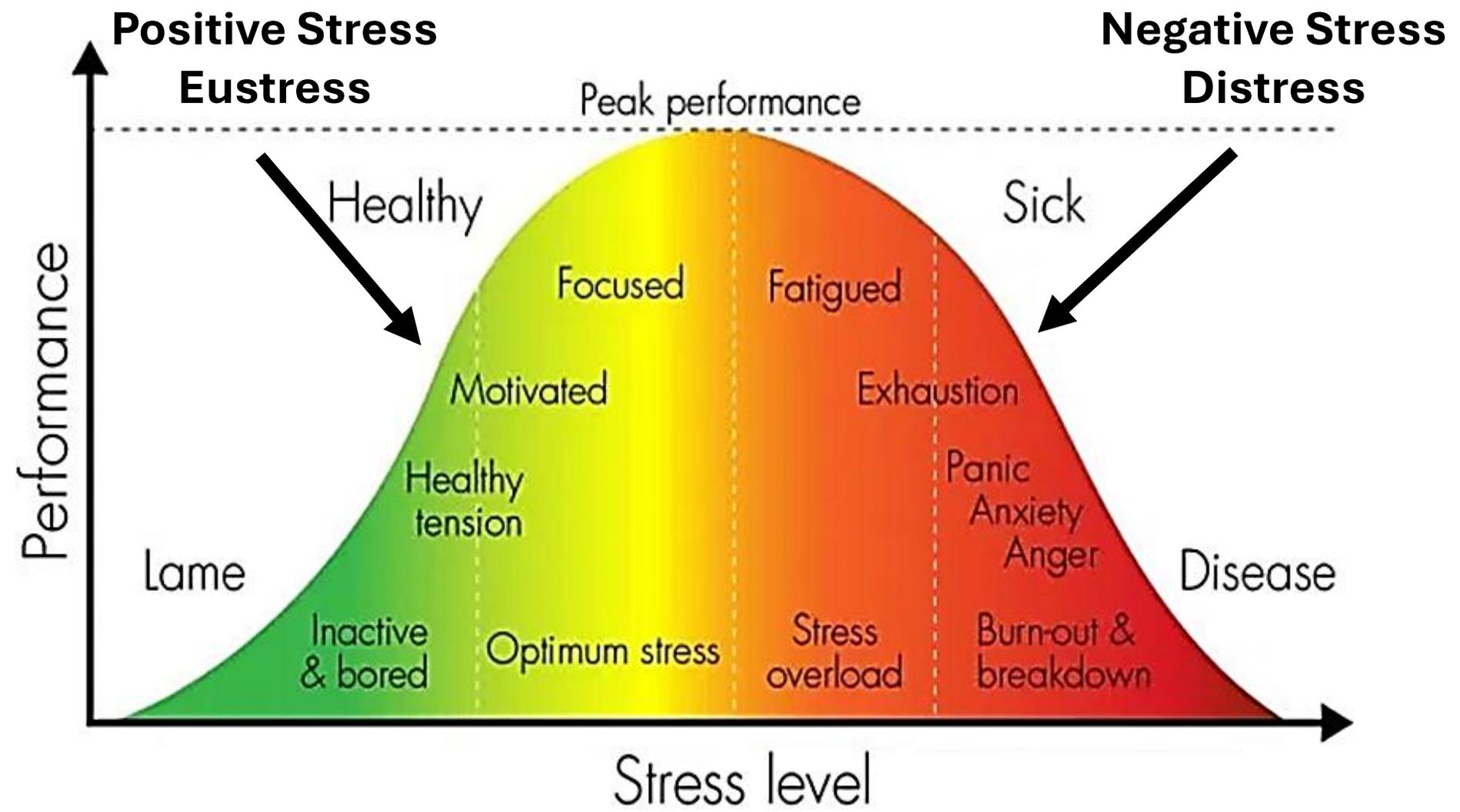
Not all Stress is Bad

- Stress is a normal part of being human.
- Stress is your body and mind's reaction to different situations.
- Stress can be positive or negative.
- Stress is like a hill, if you have too little stress or way too much, your performance drops off.

“...it is a condition, or feeling that is experienced when a person perceives that the demands placed on them are greater than their personal and social resources.

R. S. Lazarus

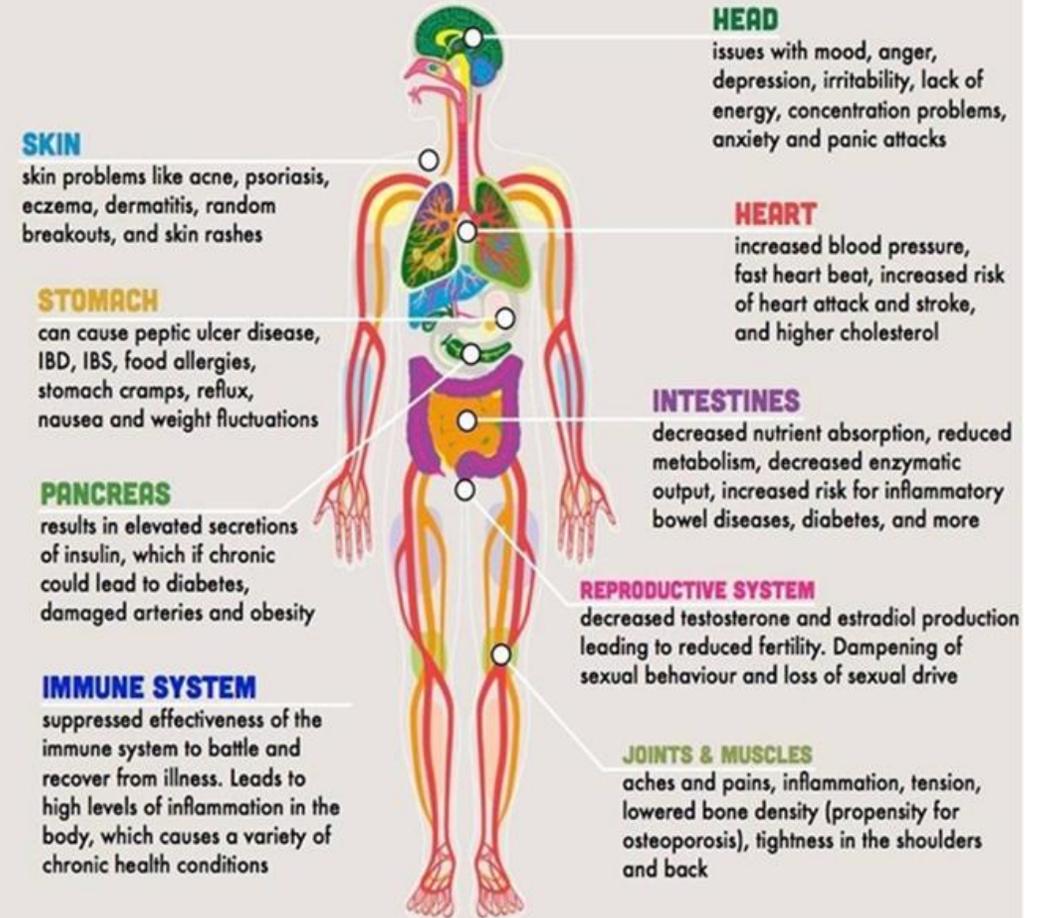
Yerkes-Dodson Curve



Stress and Body Awareness

“Curiosity and awareness help us step out of the stress habit loop.”
Brewer, 2021

How **STRESS** Affects The **BODY**



Ventral Vagal – Safety & Connection				
Window of tolerance	Fight	Flight	Freeze	Fawn
	Engaged	Impartial	Peace	Love
	Self-advocacy	Healthy retreat	Mindfulness	Faithful
	Grit	Know-how	Presence	Listening
	Courage	Hardworking	Focus	Fairness
	Leadership	Perseverance	Acute awareness	Peacemaking
	Assertiveness	Diligent	Caution	Compromise
Sympathetic – Action & Movement				
Fight & Flight	Frustration		Driven	
	Irritation		Rushed	
	Entitled		Obsessive	
	Authoritarian		Micromanager	
	Controlling		Anxious	
	Explosive		Panicked	
Dorsal Vagal – Stop & Shutdown				
Freeze & Fawn	Inactive		People-pleaser	
	Shrink		Obedient	
	Hide		Servitude	
	Fear of achieving		Loss of self	
	Zone out		Co-dependent	
	Dissociate		Give up	

Resonant Breathing

“Practicing slow breathing for even a few minutes a day can recalibrate the autonomic nervous system, making it easier to stay calm and focused under stress.” Nestor, 2020



The Breathing App 4+

Breathing App, LLC

Designed for iPad



Coregulating Workplace



Regulation is fundamentally **relational**. Humans are biologically wired to seek safety and stability through social connection, making co-regulation a prerequisite, not a byproduct, of effective collaboration

Coregulation is a relational process in which people affect each other's emotional and physical state. It is fundamental for psychological safety, builds relational trust, and supports effective teamwork and collaboration.

Prosody in the Workplace

Prosody is how your voice sounds when you speak, not the words, but the tone, pace, pitch, and volume.

- **Pitch** – how high or low your voice is
- **Volume** – how loud or quiet you are
- **Speed** – how fast or slow you speak
- **Tone** – the feeling in your voice (calm, tense, warm, sharp)
- **Rhythm** – the flow and pauses in your speech

Vocal Response	Prosodic Characteristics	Regulation Methods	Example
FIGHT	Loud, sharp, fast.	Slow down. Lower your voice. Breathe out longer than you breathe in.	I TOLD you we needed that done!
FLIGHT	Rushed, breathy, avoids pauses	Pause for 3 seconds. Take one slow breath before speaking.	“Okay-let’s-just-move-on...”
FREEZE	Very quiet, flat, long pauses	Sit up, hum or sigh slowly, take a longer exhale.	Long silence... “Okay.”
FAWN	Extra nice, overly agreeable	Speak from your chest voice. End sentences firmly.	“Yes-absolutely-that’s-fine!”

Why Prosody Matters at Work



People respond to your tone before they fully process your words.



Your voice can help others feel safe - or increase stress.



Calm, steady prosody supports psychological safety and trust.



Fast, sharp, or flat prosody can signal stress in the nervous system.

“I’d like to talk about this.”

- Rushed – Calm
- Frustrated – Compromise
- Give up – Perseverance



Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.

Domain	Key Signs
Voice	Speaking up, asking questions, raising concerns
Risk-Taking	Asking for help, challenging decisions
Errors	Admitting mistakes, reporting near-misses
Learning	Feedback, reflection, knowledge sharing
Respect	Listening, inclusion, trust
Conflict	Productive disagreement
Innovation	Experimentation without fear
Leadership	Calm, inclusive, responsive
Fear	Low fear of embarrassment or punishment
Team Climate	Shared openness over time



Psychological Safety

Speaking Up

Psychological safety most strongly predicts voice: people speaking up with ideas, concerns, questions, and respectfully disagree.

- People raise concerns early, not only after failure
- Ideas are offered without excessive hedging or fear
- Questions are asked openly
- Silence is reduced and shared more evenly across the team

(Strongest and most consistent indicator across all studies)



Psychological Safety

Willingness to Take Interpersonal Risks

People feel able to take risks that could affect how they are seen by others.

- Asking for help without embarrassment
- Admitting uncertainty or lack of knowledge
- Challenging assumptions or decisions respectfully
- Speaking up to authority figures



Psychological Safety

Openness About Mistakes & Errors

Psychological safety enables learning by reducing fear of blame.

- Errors and near-misses are reported
- Mistakes are discussed to improve systems
- People admit errors without defensiveness
- Leaders acknowledge their own mistakes



Psychological Safety

Learning Behaviours

Psychological safety enables *learning behaviours*, which enables performance and innovation.

- Feedback is actively sought and given
- Knowledge is shared freely
- Reflection and review are normalised
- Teams adapt after setbacks



Psychological Safety

Respectful Interpersonal Climate

Psychological safety is underpinned by interpersonal respect and trust.

- People listen without interrupting or dismissing
- Differences are treated as assets
- Disagreement does not lead to exclusion
- Interactions remain respectful under pressure



Psychological Safety

Constructive Conflict

Psychological safety does **not** eliminate conflict, it makes it productive.

- Disagreements focus on ideas, not people
- Difficult conversations happen earlier, not later
- Tension is addressed rather than avoided
- Conflict leads to better decisions



Psychological Safety

Support for Experimentation & Innovation

Psychological safety supports innovation by reducing fear of failure.

- Teams try new approaches
- Failure is framed as learning
- Risk-taking is encouraged within boundaries
- People aren't punished for thoughtful experimentation

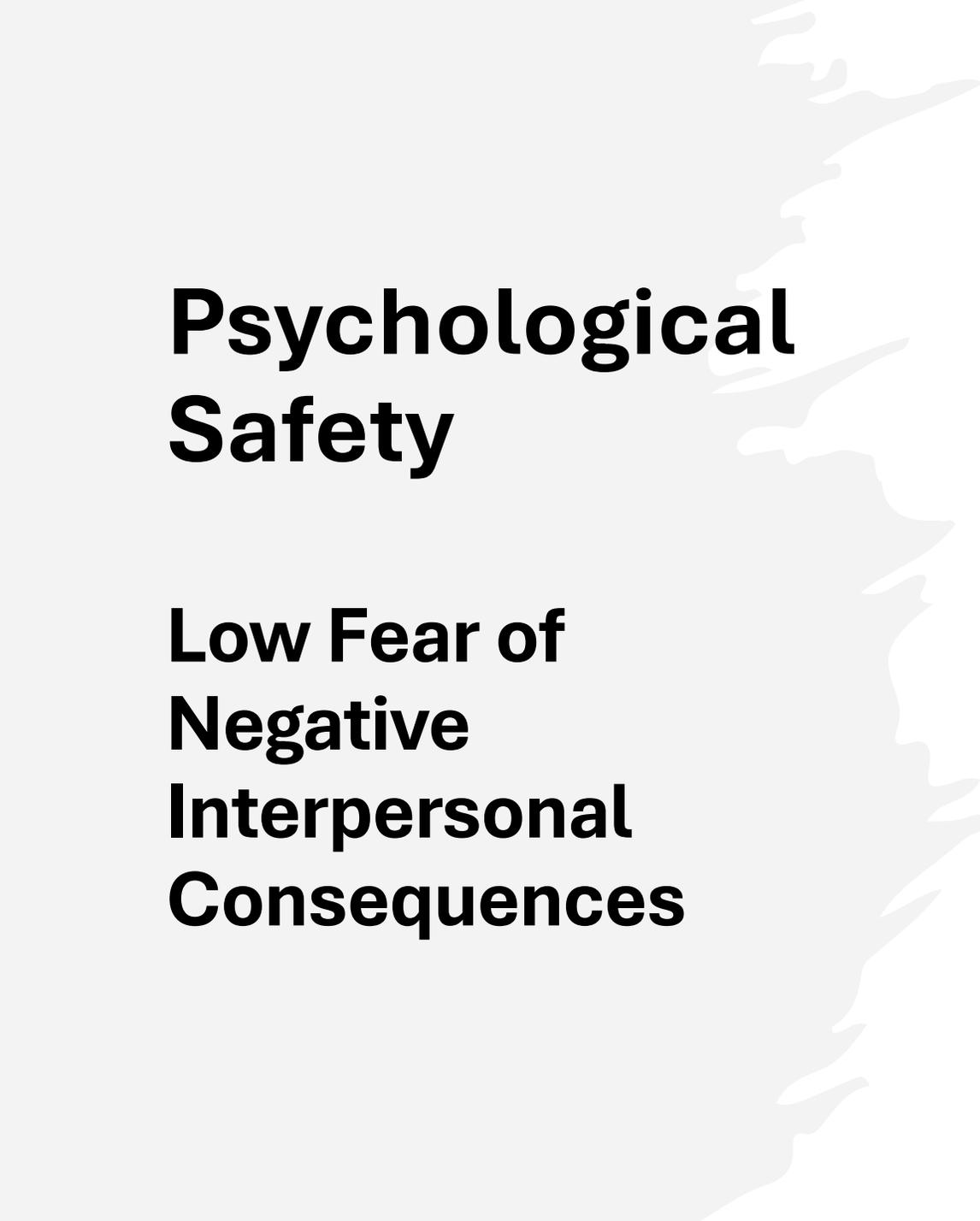


Psychological Safety

Supportive Leadership Behaviour

Leadership behaviour is a *primary antecedent* of psychological safety.

- Leaders invite input from everyone
- Leaders respond calmly to bad news
- Leaders thank people for speaking up
- Leaders follow through on concerns raised

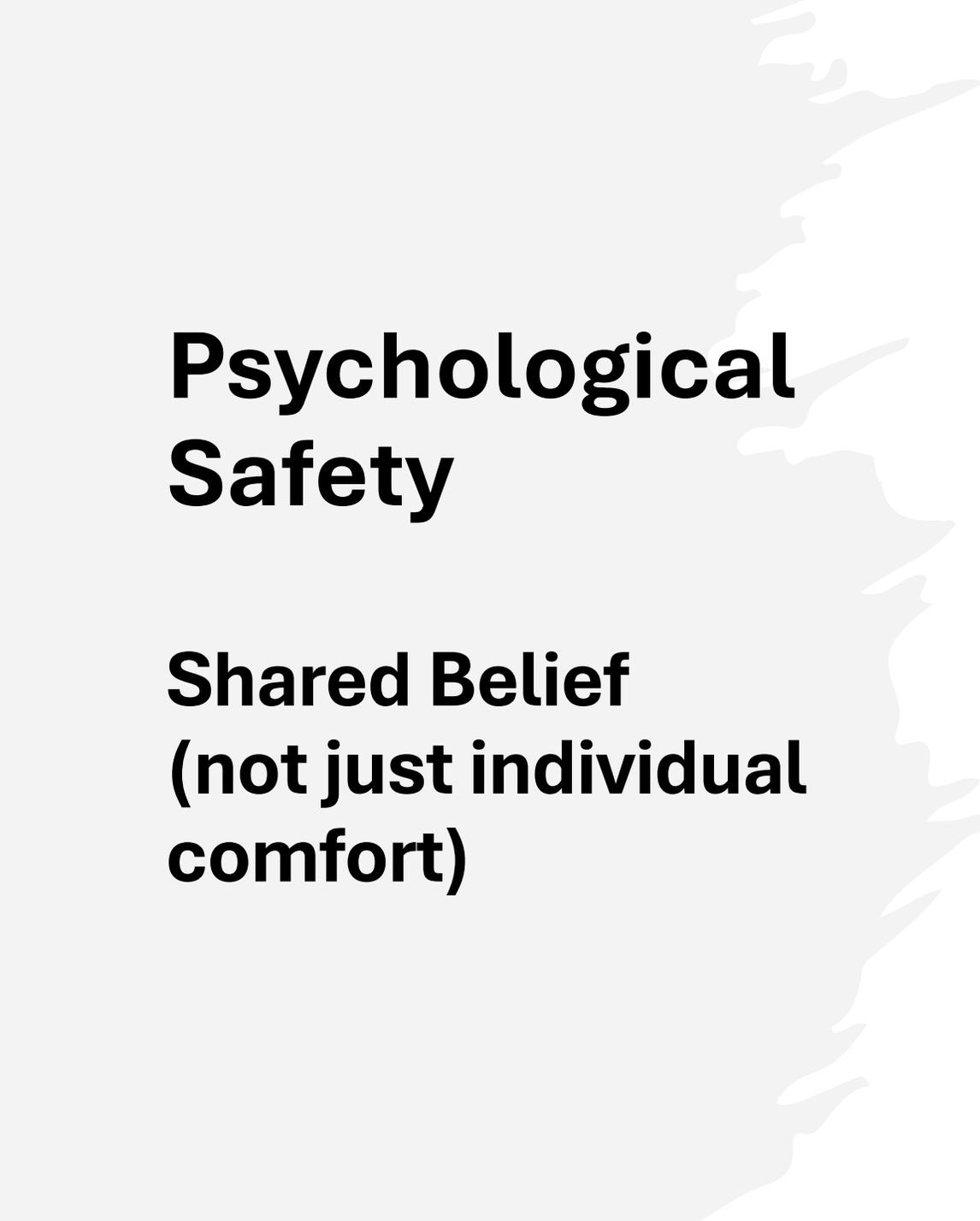


Psychological Safety

Low Fear of Negative Interpersonal Consequences

At its core, psychological safety is about *reduced fear*.

- Low fear of embarrassment or rejection
- Low fear of punishment for honesty
- Confidence that others have positive intent
- Willingness to be authentic at work



Psychological Safety

**Shared Belief
(not just individual
comfort)**

Psychological safety is a **team-level experience**, not just individual confidence.

- Patterns of openness across the team
- Consistent behaviour over time
- New members speak up relatively quickly
- Safety persists even during stress or change



Psychological Safety

The Bottom Line

A psychologically safe workplace is one where people:

- Speak honestly
- Learn openly
- Disagree respectfully
- Admit mistakes
- Take interpersonal risks without fear

And leaders:

- Respond constructively
- Model vulnerability
- Create conditions for learning, not blame

Creating a Culture of Care

Scenario 1: Output-Driven Manager

Setting: Women's homelessness shelter

Scenario 2: Caring Manager

Setting: Homelessness outreach & community housing

Scenario 3: Forlorn Colleague

Setting: Youth crisis accommodation

Scenario 4: System Strain

Setting: Emergency Housing Service

Questions

1. What are the signs of psychological safety, (present and/or absent)?
2. What are the signs of burnout?

Psychological Safety	Burnout
Speaking up (voice shut down)	Wavering efficacy
Leadership not calm and exclusive	Fatigue about the work

Emotional Exhaustion: The Core of Burnout

Emotional exhaustion is characterised by feelings of being overextended and depleted of emotional and physical resources. It is often the first and most prominent sign of burnout

Depersonalisation (Cynicism): The Social Detachment Aspect

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Creating a Culture of Care

Scenario 1:
Output-Driven Manager

Setting:
Women's homelessness
shelter

Questions

1. What are the signs of psychological safety, (present and/or absent)?
2. What are the signs of burnout?
3. **Voice & learning**
What would need to change in the meeting structure so concerns about client safety are treated as useful information, not delays?
4. **Leadership & Tone**
What small changes in pace, tone, or body language could the manager make to signal it is safe to pause and speak, even under pressure?
5. **System Reset**
How could leadership respond earlier to rising workload pressure, so fear and silence don't become the team's default response?

Creating a Culture of Care

Scenario 2: Caring Manager

Setting: Homelessness outreach & community housing

Questions

1. What are the signs of psychological safety, (present and/or absent)?
2. What are the signs of burnout?
3. **Meaning & Purpose**
How could the manager gently name the loss of meaning the team is expressing, without blaming or shutting it down?
4. **Constructive Challenge**
What would help the team talk openly about frustration and doubt in a way that leads to learning rather than quiet resignation?
5. **Re-energising Learning**
What small, realistic review or reflection practice could be introduced to rebuild curiosity and shared purpose?

Creating a Culture of Care

Scenario 3: Forlorn Colleague

Setting:

Youth crisis accommodation

Questions

1. What are the signs of psychological safety, (present and/or absent)?
2. What are the signs of burnout?
3. **Early support & safety**
What signals might tell the team or leader that this worker needs support before withdrawal becomes isolation?
4. **Shared responsibility**
How could the team respond in a way that supports this colleague without silently redistributing emotional and practical load?
5. **Re-recruitment into the team**
What would help this worker feel safe enough to re-engage, ask for help, and be included in shared work again?

Creating a Culture of Care

Scenario 4:
System Strain

Setting:
Emergency Housing Service

Questions

1. What are the signs of psychological safety, (present and/or absent)?
2. What are the signs of burnout?
3. **Interrupting the pattern**
What would it look like to address the behaviour early, clearly, and respectfully before it affects shifts, workload, and morale?
4. **Leadership containment**
How could the manager provide firmer structure and boundaries while still maintaining fairness and psychological safety?
5. **Team repair**
What conversations or agreements would help rebuild trust and willingness to work together across the team?

From Awareness to Action

Burnout is not itself a “**social system,**” but is widely understood as a **systemic product** of social systems.

Overload + Misalignment + Chronic Imbalance = **Burnout**

Organisational and **operational changes** are **more effective** at reducing burnout than individual coping programs alone. Interventions that adjust workload, improve fairness, clarify roles, and strengthen feedback systems significantly lower emotional exhaustion.

Operational Alignment + Fair Systems + Balanced Workload + Effective Feedback Loops = **Burnout Reduction**

Civility and Burnout

Christine Maslach highlights that a civil work environment is essential for reducing stress and preventing burnout. When people are dismissive, rude, or unkind, it can damage morale and increase emotional exhaustion.

Civility in the workplace means treating colleagues with respect, courtesy, and professionalism.

Stephen Carter – Civility

“...a shared moral understanding to sacrifice for each other.”

“The illusion that we travel this life alone is ruining us all. The proper name for the illusion is incivility.”



Organisational & Operational Change

Harbour Way Community Services

Harbour Way Community Services is a large NGO delivering a range of homelessness services, including adult, family and youth refuges, rough sleeper outreach, and supported accommodation casework. The organisation has a strong mission and committed staff, but it is experiencing higher-than-usual turnover, increased absenteeism and presenteeism, and a noticeable rise in psychological injury across the organisation. Across services, different patterns are emerging:

- some teams operate at high pace with strong compliance but reduced speaking up and learning,
- others show growing cynicism as effort feels disconnected from outcomes,
- youth teams are carrying heavy client trauma histories, with some staff withdrawing and becoming less recruited into teamwork,
- and one outreach team has become strained by unaddressed negativity, leading to avoidance, increased workload for others, and managers stepping in to cover shifts.

Despite this, the Organisation remains strong, including respectful relationships, focused care for clients, and leaders who want to improve. Senior leadership recognises these issues as systemic rather than individual and have asked teams to strengthen key operational areas, so that everyday work better supports psychological safety, early learning, and workforce sustainability without lowering standards or increasing risk. Four focus areas have been identified:

1. Job design and recruitment,
2. Induction,
3. Supervision, and
4. Team Meetings and Connection Practices.



Harbour Way Community Services

Focus area – 1 Manager Role and Recruitment

Position Description Focus & Interview Questions

Design the position description (**1 paragraph + 5 Key Attributes**) to clearly define the leadership, relational, and psychological safety competencies required to manage safely and effectively within the SHS sector.

Develop **5 structured, behaviour-based interview questions** that assess a candidate's ability to lead safely and effectively in the SHS sector.



Harbour Way Community Services

Focus area - 2 Induction

Psychological Safety Induction Process

Design induction process for the first week tasks, (**at least 6**) and a weekly plan so new staff don't have to *guess* how to stay safe, ask for help, or speak up.

Induction must explicitly show new workers what psychological safety looks like in this organisation, especially under pressure.

Do not rely on informal learning, observation, or the idea that “you’ll work it out over time.”



Harbour Way Community Services

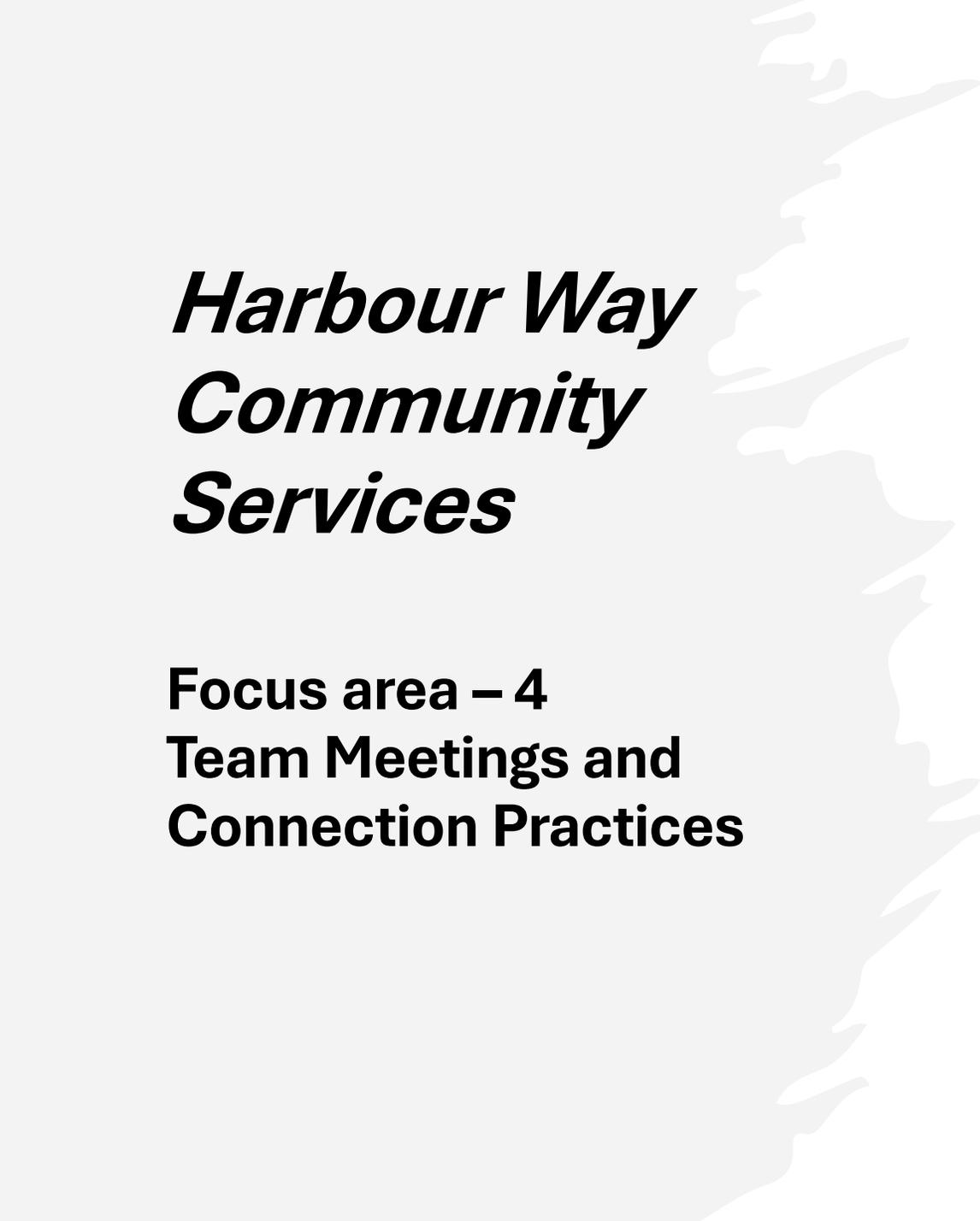
Focus area – 3 Supervision

Balanced-Psychological Safe Supervision

Design supervision template (**8 – 10 questions**) where the *impact of the work* is discussed, not just the work itself.

Supervision must routinely explore emotional load, moral tension, client impact, and team dynamics alongside performance expectations.

Supervisors should be trained to notice changes in tone, energy, engagement, or withdrawal and to respond early.



Harbour Way Community Services

Focus area – 4 Team Meetings and Connection Practices

Meaningful Team Meetings and Connection

Design team meeting agenda so they do more than move information quickly.

Meetings must support task coordination *and* psychological safety, especially when pressure is high.

Leaders are responsible for setting the tone, pace, and structure so staff can raise concerns before they turn into silence, cynicism, or disengagement.

Create at least agenda **6 items and considerations**, to address the issues and promote team cohesion.

Balancing Supervision

1. How are you?

- Response “Good.” - explore what’s good?
- Where have you exhibited your two main values this month?

2. How's your workload

- How have you felt your workload has been the past month? Heavy, ok, light etc?
- How much administration do have you this month and what type?
- Do you have any difficult meetings or conversations coming up?
- How can we support your workload? (Team support, managers support, org support)

3. How's the team

- How do you feel the team’s going?
- What’s been working?
- Do you feel you can reach out to the team for support at the moment?
- Have you been able to seek support from the team?
- Has the team reached out to you this past month?
- What could we/you do to keep our team connected?

- If not in the team, is there someone in the organisation you feel comfortable talking to and have you been able to connect? (explore barriers)

4. Any WHS issues

- General WHS issues
- How many critical incidents have you been involved with the past month?
- How may incident reports have you lodged this month?
- Any COVID concerns this last month?
- How’s your daily movements/screen time? Are you getting regular breaks?

5. Training/professional development

- Professional development plan review
- What training do you want to attend?
- How are we going about attending the training you’d like?
- What training have you attended?
- Sharing training with the team?
- Have you accessed a mentor?

6. Leave planned for the next month

- When do you have a regular break planned

- How have you been building a third space in your week?

7. 180 Feedback - “Have I been perfect?”

- When could I have communicated more clearly?
- How can my priorities help the team stay focused?
- Do you feel safe challenging my ideas?
- Where could I have shown more humility this past month?
- What would better leadership support from me look like?

Weekly Check-in – Resource in the Room

1

Step 1. Gather the team in a circle.

2

Step 2. Take turns sharing your most challenging interaction this past week

3

Step 3. Ask the person what they feel will be their most challenging event the next week and offer support.

4

Step 4. Repeat steps 1-3 for each person, including yourself.

Beyond Burnout Trivia



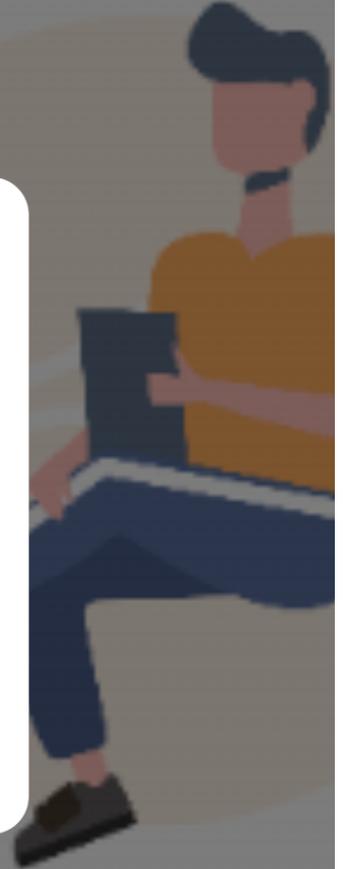
Action Plan

This Workforce Action Plan strengthens Harbour Way’s operational foundations to better support staff wellbeing, service quality, and the prevention of burnout. It focuses on sustainable job design and recruitment, supervision, and stronger team connection. Through these targeted actions, the organisation aims to reduce burnout risks, improve retention, and build a resilient, high-performing workforce.

ID	Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Priority	Dependencies	Outcomes	Resources
1	Strengthen job design and recruitment	CEO (sponsor); HR Manager (lead); Service Managers (implementation); WHS Advisor (risk review)	0–3 months (design); 6 months full implementation	High	Workload analysis; consultation with teams; updated position descriptions; budget review	Reduced turnover by 10% within 12 months; improved engagement survey results;	HR time; workforce planning tools; potential recruitment budget adjustment
2	Standardise supervision across all services	Service Managers (lead); Clinical Lead (framework); HR (monitoring compliance)	Framework within 3 months; embed over 6–9 months	High	Supervision COP, Supervisor capability training; calendar scheduling	Reduction in psych injury claims; 90% supervision compliance;	Supervisor training budget; protected supervision time; supervision templates
3	Strengthen team connection	Team Leaders (lead); Service Managers (oversight); WHS Advisor (psychological safety input)	Pilot within 2 months; review at 6 months	Medium–High	Clear meeting templates; leadership modelling; team consultation	25% reduction in absenteeism; improved teamwork scores in engagement survey + 80% feedback	Facilitator guides; meeting templates; leadership coaching support

Your feedback

Beyond Burnout Workshop –
Feedback Survey



Thank you

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CCWT

Building Resilience, Wellbeing
Vicarious Trauma for staff

Building Resilience, Wellbeing
Vicarious Trauma for managers