

SWORD workbook:
Secure base



KFP 1: Secure Base

Making sure social care workers have a secure base from which to operate is critical to organisational resilience and is the first Key Foundational Principle. A secure base provides:

A sense of containment (protection, belonging, safety and being cared for) and fosters a culture of mutual support.

Opportunities for workers to explore fears and threats and to raise constructive challenge to practice and organisational change.

A 'safe space' for workers to gain support, providing them with renewed energy and resources.

Psychological safety is a shared belief that the organisation is safe. It is the foundation of a healthy and productive organisational culture, and workers need to feel psychologically safe at an individual, team and organisational level. Several studies have found that nurturing psychological safety is crucial for effective teams and organisations (Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Frazier et al., 2017; Kessel et al., 2012).

In psychologically safe organisations, members feel accepted and respected, able to express their emotions openly, and empowered to share knowledge freely. They believe they will not be penalised for making a mistake, and errors provide opportunities for learning, creativity and growth. Such organisations recognise that workers need a secure base that offers constructive yet supportive challenge, enabling them to develop and thrive in their roles.

Alexander (2019) found that organisational restructure motivated by cost improvement and streamlining of services could lose focus on the working context of employees. Participants reported experiencing fragmented teams, loss of connection and increased isolation from imposed organisational change. Key to professionals feeling equipped and supported to fulfil their roles was their sense of situational connection; a working context in which collegiate relationship-base practice was valued and facilitated. Situationally connected organisations recognise the value of relationships between colleagues in creating a secure base, the role of teams in providing containment for individuals and the need for teams to feel anchored within the organisational structure to provide psychological safety. Remote working can present challenges for peer support and the functioning of the team as a secure base, reducing opportunities for members to share experiences and feeling understood by others (Cook et al., 2020). This issue is considered in KFP5 Wellbeing.

Box 1.1 provides some examples of questions that you could use in a psychological safety audit in your organisation.

Box 1.1: Conducting a psychological safety audit

The following questions can help you gain insight into the extent to which people feel psychologically safe in your organisation. It can also be used at the team level.

If you make a mistake in this team, will it be held against you?

Do people in this organisation feel able to bring up problems and tough issues?

Do people in this organisation sometimes reject others for being different?

Is it safe to take a risk in this organisation?

Box 1.2 describes ways to enhance psychological safety in your organisation. Psychological safety also links to KFP3 Learning Organisation and KFP5 Wellbeing and illustrates their interconnectedness: strategies that are effective for one KFP can also be used to support others.

Box 1.2: How to make your organisation psychologically safe

Lead by example and use self-disclosure:

Leaders are role models and what they do sets standards for behaviour across the organisation. Ask people for feedback on what you are doing well and not so well; acknowledge your mistakes openly. Be receptive to different opinions; be approachable and encourage people to ask you questions.

Encourage active listening:

This lets people know their opinions matter to you. Make meetings 'phone free' so people can give their full attention to the matter in hand. Demonstrate understanding by repeating what has been said; make sure everyone has a chance to speak, especially those who are more reticent. The section on mindful listening in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation provides in-depth guidance on improving listening skills.

Create a safe environment:

Make sure people feel comfortable voicing their opinions and can speak their mind without being embarrassed or punished. Work alongside employees to develop ground rules for personal interactions – e.g. no interruptions, all ideas are accepted equally, never blame or judge.

Keep an open mind:

Trying to see things from a different perspective can provide solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Encourage teams to share feedback widely and help them respond to input from others without defensiveness; encourage individuals and teams to view feedback as a way of strengthening and expanding their ideas and processes, rather than criticism.

Distinguish between psychological safety and accountability:

Acknowledging personal fallibility and dealing with errors and failure openly and productively are key to a psychologically safe workplace. Nonetheless, it is important to be constructively supportive rather than offer a 'crutch', as organisations that are too psychologically safe can stifle creativity and sanction poor performance.

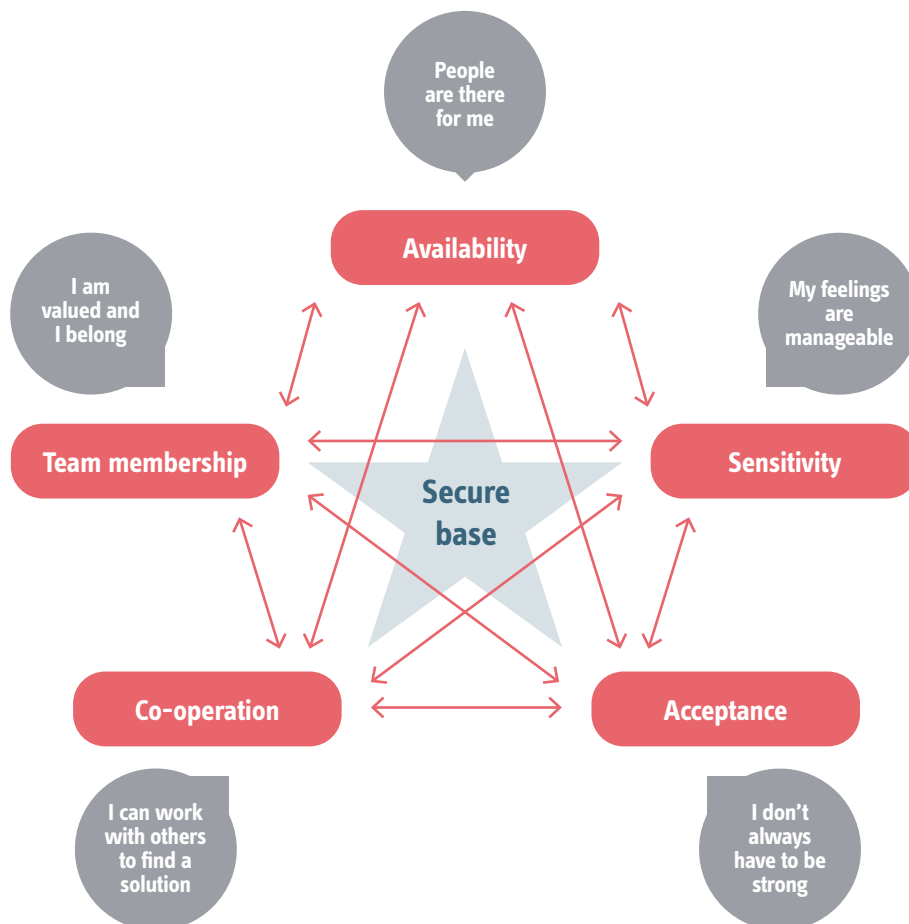
Biggart and colleagues (2017) used Schofield and Beek's (2014) Secure Base model to provide insight into how social care organisations can develop a 'safe haven' in which workers feel supported and able to flourish. They identified five key dimensions for a secure base at the team level: availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and team membership (see Figure 1.1).

Workers who feel secure believe:

There are people they can turn to within the team	Their team is emotionally containing	Their team provides an opportunity to help them manage negative feelings caused by stress.
---	--------------------------------------	--

Although this work was based on research at the team level, it can also be applied at the organisational level. A secure base has been found to be particularly important for social care workers when working remotely and this will be discussed further later in this section.

Figure 1.1: Key dimensions for developing the team as a secure base (Biggart et al., 2017)



Trust is one of the golden threads that helps build a resilient organisation. Trust is a critical component of a secure base and crucial for psychological safety, but it can be complex and fragile. There are three different kinds of trust:

<p>Strategic: trust in leaders to make the right decisions, allocate resources effectively, fulfil the organisation’s mission and help the organisation succeed.</p>	<p>Personal: the trust people have in their own managers, the extent to which they treat workers fairly and consider their needs when making decisions.</p>	<p>Organisational: the trust people have in the organisation itself, e.g. that processes are well designed and consistently and fairly applied</p>
--	---	--

These three kinds of trust are distinct but interconnected: for example, if a manager breaches the personal trust of their employees, their trust in the organisation will also be compromised. Trust is particularly important during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and all three types will help people feel safe, remain mentally healthy and able to support people accessing services effectively. The foundations of trust are behaviours such as consistency, clear communication, and a willingness to tackle difficult issues. It is also crucial to be aware of the ‘enemies’ of trust; the factors that can destabilise trust in an organisation. Some examples are:

<p><i>Inconsistent messages</i>, such as telling people what they want to hear rather than carefully considering priorities and how they should be articulated clearly and honestly.</p>	<p><i>Inconsistent standards</i>, where some employees may get preferential treatment or be allowed to ‘bend’ the rules.</p>
<p><i>Misplaced benevolence</i>, where incompetence or inappropriate behaviour is tolerated or even ignored.</p>	<p><i>False feedback</i>, where not being honest about some employees’ shortcomings will devalue praise given to others for genuinely good performance.</p>
<p><i>Failure to trust others</i>, characterised by a reluctance to delegate and help others develop professionally</p>	<p><i>The elephant in the room</i>, where ignoring difficult situations creates assumptions that something is being concealed and, in turn, fuels rumours and gossip.</p>

Rebuilding damaged trust can be a long and arduous process but the following actions can be useful:

Identify what happened, what occurred and whose trust was violated.	Assess the damage, ensuring that you adapt your response to the needs of different groups within the organisation affected by the breach of trust.
Own up quickly, by letting people know that you are aware of the situation and committed to taking remedial action. Make a firm commitment to act within a particular timeframe and provide regular updates on progress.	Identify the remedial actions required, define what repaired trust would look like and focus on the changes needed to organisational systems, people and culture. Then make the changes planned.

See [here](#) for more information.

Also see guidance on ensuring a sense of fairness, justice and equity in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Knowing yourself: enhancing emotional literacy as a leadership trait

To create a secure base, leaders should recognise the importance of managing their own emotions and responding effectively to those of others. Emotionally literate (or emotionally intelligent) leadership is one of the golden threads that underpin organisational resilience. Every leader would like to think of themselves as emotionally literate, but we can all succumb to focusing on process and targets at the expense of relationships and humane response to people's work pressures and personal difficulties. Emotional literacy is a capacity that can be developed, however. Self-awareness is a key step in developing and consolidating emotional literacy: a helpful quick quiz that provides you with feedback on how emotionally literate you are as a leader can be found [here](#). Use the reflective checklist in Box 1.3 to help you assess your emotionally intelligent leadership skills and highlight any areas for development. More information on measuring emotional intelligence can be found [here](#).

Box 1.3: How emotionally intelligent am I?

Is my style participatory?

Do I make sure I get 'buy-in' from workers for new ideas and change? Do I engage with people in a truly participatory manner to inform decision-making processes?

Do I put people at ease?

Do people find me easy to engage with? Am I culturally competent in understanding that I may need to adjust my communication style for different people?

Am I self-aware?

Am I aware of my strengths and limitations, and do I share this information with others, showing that it is OK not to be good at everything and to have 'off days'? Do I ensure there are people around me who are better at things I am not so good at? If not, do I know where to seek help?

Do I model good work-life balance?

Do I make sure people notice that I take time out for myself? This shows I appreciate the importance of self-care and that I can manage my work in a healthy and sustainable way.

Am I able to remain composed?

If I make a mistake, do I remain calm, recover, stay optimistic and learn from the experience?

Can I build and mend relationships?

Am I able to negotiate work-related difficulties without alienating people? Can I agree to differ and respect other people's views, or do I hold a grudge?

Do I show tenacity?

When faced with obstacles, do I take responsibility for leading a plan, while also taking on the views of others?

Am I decisive?

When needed, can I make a decision and stick to it? Am I able to review the effectiveness of my decisions and adapt them if required?

Do I confront difficulties with workers?

Am I able to act with authority if required, without being authoritarian? Do I treat people fairly, even when they disagree with a course of action I endorse?

Can I manage change and uncertainty effectively?

Can I implement change initiatives, reduce anxiety and overcome resistance?

Assessing how employees rate your emotional literacy by using 360-degree feedback is also helpful in assessing self-awareness and key factors such as relationship management, stress tolerance and adaptability, interpersonal sensitivity and empathy, and communication skills and identifying areas for development. A 360-degree tool for social care workers is available [here](#) which could be adapted for different contexts. 360-degree feedback is also discussed in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Supporting and modelling emotion regulation: check your ‘inner chimp’

Dr Steve Peters, author of the best-selling book *The Chimp Paradox* (2012), helps us understand why, even as emotionally intelligent human beings, we are sometimes prone to think or respond in an overly emotional or irrational way. For example:

Jumping to conclusions, or thinking in ‘black and white’ terms	Paranoid thinking	Experiencing a sense of inner turmoil that makes us overreact if we feel threatened or undermined.
--	-------------------	--

Peters distinguishes between the ‘human brain’ (which enables us to be compassionate and to react calmly by using both emotions and rational thinking) and the ‘chimp brain’ (where we react without thinking, say things we do not mean, sulk or ‘lose it’ when faced with opposition). Our chimp is ever-present and reacts five times faster than the human brain, but we can train ourselves to be aware when it is making an appearance. The aim is not to kill your chimp but to tame it – being able to calm the chimp and use logic to reassure it makes us emotionally literate leaders and professionals.

Box 1.4: Learning to tame your 'inner chimp'

We can only regulate our emotions if we also have an opportunity to express them; this can help us process socially inappropriate feelings such as frustration, anger and disgust. So, it is important to vent to allow your inner chimp to have its voice in a safe space. Find people (within and outside the workplace) that you can vent to safely. The section on your Personal Board of Directors (see KFP3 Learning Organisation) will help you with this.

We can then begin to address our emotional reaction calmly and allow the human part of our brain to determine a more rational reaction to the situation.

Remember, being angry is perfectly natural and a logical response to some situations, but not always proportional or functional. Quick Win 1.1 offers some tips on how to manage conflict more effectively.

When we need to divert our inner chimp, it helps to count to ten or to use a breathing technique (see Quick Win 1.2) before we voice our reactions.

Cognitive behavioural techniques (see the KFP5 Wellbeing section) can also be useful in calming our inner chimp. Strategies to help manage inter-personal conflict are also discussed in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

Encouraging practitioners to find an appropriate person to vent to (and recognising their need to do so) is important – although, as a leader, remember that you may not be the appropriate sounding board.

Quick Win 1.1: Managing and resolving conflict

Ask yourself the following questions:

Do I need to get angry about this?

Trying to avoid being angry does not mean suppressing your feelings, as this can result in shame, depression and potentially more anger. Instead, try to change your outlook and ask yourself whether what has just happened is something you need to be angry about.

How does anger affect you?

Think back to previous situations when you have been angry at work and ask yourself how it affects aspects of your life, both good and bad. Identify the impact on you, your relationships with colleagues, your job performance, your wellbeing and energy, how you feel outside work, and your relationships with family and friends.

Was anger an appropriate response?

Did your anger arise from an accurate or logical reading of the situation, or your own interpretation of it? Talk the situation through with somebody you trust who is neutral to the situation (see your Personal Board of Directors in KFP3 Learning Organisation).

Is your anger out of proportion?

Minor things can trigger significant anger. Acknowledging that anger is often a response to something else (e.g. being tired, hungry or angry with someone about something else) can help you contain your feelings.

Am I taking this personally?

We often become stressed and angry in situations that tap into deep-seated feelings of not being good enough or having failed in some way. Be aware of your emotional triggers and challenge your initial reactions.

How can I frame the problem more clearly?

Jot down the relevant details, including the points you and the other person/people made during the encounter, and any misunderstandings you think might have occurred. Read it aloud to try to see the situation more objectively.

How did I feel and what did I want?

How were you feeling before and during the situation? Was your anger triggered by unmet needs? Did you project your anger onto other people because they misinterpreted what it was you wanted?

Identify your objective

What do you want from this situation? Define your goal in a way that other people can understand. Do you wish to resolve it directly, or tackle an underlying problem?

Quick Win 1.1: Managing anger

Be realistic

Having unrealistic expectations of others can set them up to fail, whereas unrealistic expectations of yourself can lead to self-blame and self-punishment.

How can I move on?

Shift your focus from what was done to you to what you can do to fix it. Sometimes the best response is just to chalk it up to experience and let it go. This does not mean you have 'lost' a battle.

Acknowledge and respect differences

Trying to take another person's perspective helps you see issues in a different light.

Get moving

Physical activity can help deal with anger, so take time out by going for a brisk walk away from the working environment.

Quick win 1.2: A breathing exercise for reducing feelings of stress

Paying attention to your breathing is an effective way of calming yourself at times of stress. It only takes a few minutes and can be done anywhere, without other people noticing. Practising this technique regularly will help you get the most out of it, so try to build it into your daily routine.

As you are likely to be doing this at work, it is best to practise by sitting in a chair that supports your back. Make yourself as comfortable as you can with your feet flat, roughly a hip-width apart so you feel grounded.

Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable without forcing it. Try breathing in gently through your nose and out through your mouth. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.

Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.

Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

Based on NHS advice (full details can be found [here](#)).

Availability of support

As discussed earlier in this workbook, feeling supported provides workers with a secure base and is an important component of organisational resilience. An effective leader is available to offer support and encourage open, reflective communication, feedback and discussion. Nonetheless, making yourself available at any time to discuss any topic is clearly not feasible. Quick Win 1.3 outlines how a 'boundaried' open-door policy can help workers feel more supported and enhance their sense of security.

Quick Win 1.3: Making open-door policies work

An 'open-door policy' implies that leaders encourage workers to come into their office at any time to discuss any issues or concerns. This can be effective, as the leader will be seen as accessible and an open flow of communication will be encouraged. You will also be more aware of day-to-day problems and able to resolve minor issues before they escalate. Nonetheless, an open-door policy must be well defined, otherwise you may spend a lot of your time listening to concerns without people reaching solutions autonomously. Without boundaries and guidelines, you may also unwittingly develop a culture of dependency, where workers are reluctant to solve problems themselves. Alternatively, they may be reluctant to bother you with their problems – especially if they think you are busy. The steps provided below should help you reap the benefits of open communication while minimising the disadvantages:

Set boundaries by managing expectations of your availability:

For example, an open door means people are free to drop in, a closed door means you are unavailable. Before they come to you with a problem, you could ask people to work through some preliminary issues. For example: a) How would they express the problem in a few sentences? b) Does it affect only them, or others too? c) Can they think of two or three options that might solve the problem?

Listen carefully:

Let people speak without being interrupted by phones, email or others dropping in. Use mindful listening techniques (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation). To make sure you have fully understood the problem, summarise what you think the worker has said. Drive the conversation from a problem focus to a solution that is generated by the employee themselves (see c above); if necessary, schedule a follow-up meeting rather than a vague request to 'stop by at any time'.

Be aware of time:

If possible, try to solve any issue the first time to avoid affecting your own productivity. More complex problems, and those involving other people, will probably need you to schedule a meeting.

Flexible and ‘agile’ working

‘Agile’ working has become common in some areas of social care. People may work at home, in public areas such as libraries and coffee shops, or even in their car. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant proportion of the UK population were forced to work at home with little preparation or support. Remote working is popular but, although it has benefits such as increased flexibility for workers and financial savings for organisations, not having a physical ‘base’ or having to share a workspace (e.g. hot-desking) can threaten psychological safety and a sense of belonging to the team and the organisation. It can even increase the risk of work-related stress and burnout (Stone et al., 2018). While most organisations recognise the need to provide remote workers with guidance on ergonomic and technical issues, most do not offer support to help them manage the psychosocial risks of agile working, or even recognise the need to do so (McDowall & Kinman, 2017).

As restrictions eased, many organisations continued with homeworking, with a ‘hybrid’ approach that alternates between working remotely and on site being particularly popular. Leaders are advised to think carefully about the downside as well as the advantages of introducing new working patterns for the wellbeing of the workforce and consider how they will provide support. When developing policies and practices for homeworking, the implications for the team as well as individuals should be considered and ways to support collective as well as individual wellbeing and productivity identified.

There is little research on the implications of agile working for social care workers, but a study by Jeyasingham (2018) used several data sources (diaries, photographs and interviews) to explore practitioners’ experiences when working away from office spaces. The findings highlighted a sense of ambivalence: while agile working offered practitioners a ‘superficial’ sense of control, concerns were raised about data security, the risks of working in public spaces, and a lack of opportunity to interact with others. As discussed earlier in the workbook, research has highlighted the creative methods that social care workers have used to engage remotely with people who access services during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pink et al., 2021). The authors conclude that social care work is likely to remain a ‘hybrid digital practice’ with benefits for workers and families but argue that it is crucial to identify optimum ways of using technologies to support workers’ practice and judgements. This ongoing research focuses on the role played by digital social work practices in child protection work during the COVID-19 pandemic. More information can be found [here](#). Other research that has examined the impact of the pandemic has highlighted the need to consult people who access services about their experiences of virtual social care practice to guide future policies and practices (Cook & Zschomler, 2020).

When introducing flexible working, it is crucial to ensure that practitioners have opportunities to communicate with managers and engage with colleagues on a regular basis – whether this is face to face or online. All too often, insufficient attention is given to what happens at the end of the working day, when people are unable to return to a physical base or may come back to the office to find there is no one to check in with. Social care workers need a sense of community and as highlighted above, value the secure base provided by their team, particularly during stressful times. They may need an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, debrief or just have a chat before finishing work for the day, which can be an effective way to maintain boundaries between work and personal life. Informal as well as formal opportunities for communication are also needed. Quick Win 1.4 offers guidance on how to use technology to ‘check in’ with colleagues when working remotely.

Quick win 1.4: Keeping in touch using technology

'Checking in' is a challenge when people are working remotely, so using technology to create opportunities to interact online can be helpful. For example, 'virtual coffee breaks' using Zoom, Teams or similar applications can work well. The 'Fika' approach (see below) and other techniques such as Schwartz rounds (see KFP5 Wellbeing) can also be adapted for online use to help people feel connected.

It is important to schedule the break, as colleagues are not going to bump into each other accidentally. A strong internet connection and a quiet background (or a headset) will help you hear each other. Bringing your own coffee is essential. And consider the creative use of icebreakers to help get conversations started. But remember, the use of virtual technology for communication is most effective if people have previously met face to face. Many people started new jobs during the pandemic and may not have met their fellow team members face to face for some considerable time. Leaders should ensure that systems are in place to ensure they are well integrated into the team and receive appropriate emotional (as well as informational) support. Guidance on signs of struggle for people who are working remotely can be found in KFP5 Wellbeing).

Although working at home can be beneficial, it can be a challenge for both organisations and employees. Employers have the same health and safety responsibilities for home workers as for any other workers, so risks should be recognised, assessed, and managed. The following issues should be considered:

Which roles can and cannot be done remotely?	Who may or may not want to work remotely? How would this impact on other team members and people who are being supported?
What work activities will they be doing (and for how long)?	Can these activities be done safely (paying particular attention to psychosocial risks)?
How will any concerns be identified and managed?	How will leaders keep in touch with workers?
Are any groups of people at greater risk of the negative effects of homeworking?	Do you need to put control measures in place to protect them?

Box 1.5 sets out tips for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of people working at home. More guidance on this issue can be found in a resource to help leaders in social care organisations support homeworking recently published by Research in Practice **Supporting wellbeing remotely: Leaders' Briefing (2021)**.

Box 1.5: Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of homeworkers

Organisations should:

Promote safe and healthy working practices.

Manage stress and mental health, identifying specific risk factors.

Provide support and regular check-ins.

Encourage routine and structure.

Review and, if necessary, revise goals and targets; involve employees in this process.

Trust employees and avoid excessive monitoring and measuring of productivity such as remote tracking.

Be aware of 'Zoom fatigue' and place limitations on online meetings where possible.

Promote informal support mechanisms, such as virtual coffee mornings, book clubs, etc.

Provide guidance on setting physical and psychological boundaries between 'work' and 'home'.

Discourage 'e-presenteeism', as the pressure to be 'present' can be greater when working at home.

Role model healthy behaviours, such as switching off from technology and avoiding presenteeism.

A range of useful resources is available to help organisations support the wellbeing of homeworkers. A **toolkit** provided by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) offers guidance on key issues such as stress and mental health and lone working without supervision, the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) provides a questionnaire and **guide** to help support people to continue working from home. The HSE Management Standards **framework** and associated '**Talking Toolkit**' can also help employers assess the psychosocial risks of homeworking relating to key issues, such as demands, support, control and role, and inform interventions. Wellness Action Plans are discussed in KFP5 Wellbeing, but one is available **here** to help identify the individual behaviours, thoughts and actions that may affect the wellbeing of homeworkers and the support that their manager and colleagues can put in place. Further guidance on homeworking for leaders and employees can be found **here**.

Hot-desking is a form of agile working but can be a major source of dissatisfaction for employees. A survey of more than 2,400 social workers (Stevenson, 2019) found more than eight out of ten (86%) felt hot-desking was not compatible with the work they do. More than six out of ten who were currently hot-desking said their experience was 'entirely' or 'largely' negative. Most also said they had not been properly equipped or supported to hot desk and 45% indicated that it had a negative impact on their enjoyment of their jobs and their effectiveness.

As highlighted above, leaders may be considering introducing hot-desking as part of a hybrid work model, where people may work at home for part of the week and share office space for the rest of the time. At the time of writing this resource, organisations are advised to avoid the use of hot-desking wherever possible (CIPD, 2021) but, if this practice continues, steps must be taken to ensure that desks are COVID secure. More generally, hot-desking can be effective if managed carefully, but losing a familiar workspace and being separated from team members can make people feel isolated and demotivated, and their wellbeing and performance can suffer (Ayoko & Ashkanasy, 2019; Morrison & Macky, 2017; Webber, 2019). So, introducing hot-desking requires more than simply providing workers with laptops and asking them to share desks. Quick Win 1.5 addresses issues that should be considered before you introduce hot-desking. In organisations that are already using hot-desking, Quick Win 1.5 can be used to check that conditions are optimal.

Quick Win 1.5: How to make hot-desking work in your organisation

Planning:

Consider carefully how long it will take to move to hot-desking, the resources you need and the budget you have. Identify your desired outcome and how you will measure its success or failure. Ensure you assess the impact at the team level, as well as the individual level.

Enhance buy-in:

Involve workers in developing your hot-desking policy from the start. Asking for feedback and ideas will increase acceptability and minimise resistance. A steering group can provide creative ideas to inform hot-desking policy and help you monitor progress over time.

Manage the change:

Explain the reasons for introducing hot-desking. Highlight the benefits but acknowledge potential disadvantages. Listen to concerns – e.g. about how hot-desking might impact on working relationships, workforce wellbeing and job performance. Consider how it may impact on people's sense of belonging and commitment and how this might be addressed.

Expect disruption:

Even if people have been working remotely, hot-desking will be a major change, and will take a while to bed in. Policies may need to be revisited and adapted.

Confidentiality:

Emphasise the need for privacy of data by never leaving computers unattended when email or confidential documents are open.

Hot-desking in practice:

Ensure you have the appropriate technology and sufficient workspaces. People can waste precious time searching for a workstation or getting to grips with unfamiliar or unreliable technology (this can also be a source of anxiety). Decide whether desks will be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis, through an informal desk-sharing system, or via apps to formally book desks and rooms.

Quick Win 1.5: How to make hot-desking work in your organisation

Try zoning:

Consider providing larger office space where team members can hot-desk alongside their leaders (rather than in undesignated areas). This will encourage discussion of work issues and enable leaders to provide updates and offer support.

Inclusivity:

Chairs and computer monitors need to be easily adjustable to accommodate people's individual needs and preferences. Consider the needs of those who require specialised equipment, such as adapted keyboards and chairs.

Create a variety of spaces:

Wherever possible, offer workspaces for different tasks, such as breakout rooms, cubicles for one-to-one meetings or private phone calls, and quiet areas to facilitate deep concentration.

Personalising space:

Studies show that an inability to personalise our working areas with things that define our identity can be stressful. Think of ways to provide people with a sense of ownership by encouraging them to add personal touches to their workspace. They could bring personal items that are small and portable, vote on a choice of pictures for the walls, or put personal photographs on a noticeboard.

Clean desk policy:

Workspaces and computers should be kept free of personal or confidential material. People may be less inclined to keep shared desks clean and tidy than their own personal workspaces. As mentioned above, COVID-19 safety procedures must be strictly enforced. Provide wipes for them to clean up at the end of the day and a shared space where they can eat lunch away from their desk.

Accept that hot-desking may not work:

People often gravitate to the same spaces and some workers may stake out their territory by 'adopting' a desk as 'theirs'. As well as causing resentment, this means that a hot-desking space can easily revert to the traditional arrangement of employees having permanent desks.

Some guidance on introducing flexible working practices is provided [here](#).

There is also evidence that working remotely can threaten employees' work-life balance, by extending working hours and allowing the job to 'invade' their home environments (Kelliher et al., 2019). Guidance on how to support work-life balance for remote workers as well as people on-site is provided in KFP5 Wellbeing. People working with traumatic material (such as traumatising conversations, images and written or auditory testimony) may experience particular difficulties working at home. **Guidance** is available to help employers assess the risks and fulfil their duty of care.

Fostering a sense of belonging

Feeling that we belong at work is essential to our sense of security and commitment to an organisation, so creating a sense of belonging among workers is crucial to building a resilient organisational culture. It is especially important to encourage a sense of belonging among newly recruited colleagues, those who have changed teams, and those who have returned to work after sickness, a career break, or parental leave. People who have been working remotely during the COVID-19 crisis, especially those who have started a new job or joined a new team, may have particular difficulties in generating a sense of belonging to their team and to the organisation in general. Letting new people know about work etiquette and ‘how we do things around here’ in an open and kindly way encourages a sense of belonging. As a leader, consider assigning a ‘buddy’ to new recruits to advise them on basic issues, such as where to get lunch or where the loo is, as overlooking these simple things can cause anxiety. For new starters who are working remotely, introducing virtual mentoring and shadowing can offer opportunities for the incidental learning that is often overlooked when people are not on site.

As social care workers, our professional identity protects our wellbeing and resilience, even during times of stress and trauma. Feeling we belong helps maintain identity, as well as helping us feel psychologically safe and engaged. Box 1.6 uses findings from research (adapted for social work) to identify factors that can help build a culture of belonging in the workplace.

Box 1.6: How to foster a sense of belonging

Check out how people feel about working in your organisation

As a leader, it is tempting to believe everyone loves working under your leadership or to become defensive if indicators suggest otherwise. But being open to listening about people’s experiences of work is crucial to making them feel heard and understood. The SWORD Tool will provide insight into the extent to which people feel that they belong in your organisation and will help you identify priorities for change. It is important to remember, however, that listening without taking action can alienate people, which is the antithesis of fostering a culture of belonging.

Getting employees to speak freely can be a challenge. They may be wary of authority figures or may tell you what they think you want to hear. So, to learn what people really think, begin by identifying issues that seem to cause silence, then invite employees to lunch or other informal settings to discuss them in a neutral space. You might also consider using employment engagement surveys to identify the feelings of different groups of employees, particularly those that are under-represented.

Develop trusting work-based relationships

The importance of trust in developing a secure base is highlighted earlier in this section. To develop trust, people need to feel truly appreciated for what they bring to an organisation; KFP2 Sense of Appreciation has tips on how to achieve this. Simply put, if people are to feel that they belong then they must believe that their abilities and contribution are recognised and valued. An employer who invests in employees’ professional development will be repaid by increased commitment and loyalty, as well as improved performance. Workers who have a trusting relationship with a mentor are better able to take advantage of critical feedback and learning from their practice. KFP3 Learning Organisation outlines the features of a peer coaching/mentoring scheme that can be used to develop relationships characterised by trust, with minimal cost and set-up time, to encourage a solution focus to workplace issues.

Box 1.6: How to foster a sense of belonging

Take action on inclusion

Studies in different occupational settings show that retention is enhanced by ensuring that people feel valued for who they are. When workers see leaders and co-workers who 'look like them', they are more likely to feel they fit in. It is therefore important to ensure your workplace represents the community you serve. Excluding people may be unintentional but can profoundly undermine a sense of belonging. Being culturally competent is an important leadership capability. Guidance on enhancing culturally competent leadership is in KFP4 Mission and Vision.

A sense of belonging is underpinned by encouraging everyone in the organisation to have a voice and being aware that there are people who may be reluctant to come forward with ideas. Actively encouraging inclusion is more than inviting people to meetings to share their views; it means sharing documents beforehand and providing opportunities for people to contribute, even if this takes more time and effort. Writing down ideas on Post-it notes, for example, can encourage contributions from people

Tailored listening

Another way to show employees that their contributions are valued is simply to listen, respectfully and attentively (Heathfield, 2019). How this is done should be tailored to a team member's personality: quieter people prefer someone who 'pauses, listens and creates a space', while those who are more outspoken value the opportunity to bring their thoughts to the here and now.

Encourage people to bring their 'whole selves' to work

For someone to feel they belong, they must be their authentic self at work. This means accepting that social care practitioners (like all human beings) are vulnerable and will need extra support and compassion from time to time. The importance of leaders 'role modelling' self-care and self-compassion is outlined in the KFP5 Wellbeing. It also helps if leaders can role-model humility and ask for help when required.

A shared vision makes all the difference

If employees find their work meaningful and have a collective sense of purpose, they will feel they belong. Ensuring that the organisation's mission and vision and shared values and behaviours are discussed during the induction of new employees is emphasised in KFP3. Helping more experienced workers reconnect with why they came into social care work in the first place, and how their own values match those of the organisation, can be developed through exercises in Appreciative Inquiry, which are outlined in KFP2 Sense of Appreciation.

One way to foster a sense of belongingness, psychological safety and security in organisations is to encourage people to become active bystanders. Box 1.7 below provides some guidance on how this can be accomplished.

Box 1.7: Becoming an Active Bystander

There is a growing movement that encourages us all to be active bystanders. Originating from work in preventing sexual violence, it is now widely used to urge us all to not sit back but to call out inappropriate behaviour to ensure we all feel safe and secure in our workplace.

In organisations we are all bystanders; situations unfold around us and it is often easy to let things pass us by, even if they make us feel uncomfortable or uneasy. The occasional unacceptable comment can subsequently become normalised and before we know it a culture where people feel excluded or unsafe is established.

Becoming an active bystander (as a leader, a colleague or a member of the communities we live in) means not letting something that has made us feel uneasy pass us by without taking action. By doing so we can create a culture where unacceptable behaviour or attitudes are challenged and a safer more inclusive structure is encouraged.

To become an active bystander means that we need to safely intervene. This can involve actions such as not laughing at a sexist or inappropriate joke, pointing out that while a person's behaviour was not intentional it was experienced as being a micro-aggression, and talking to colleagues about how their behaviour impacts on others.

Quick Win 1.6: Building social connectedness using Fika

Fika, or sharing coffee and sweet treats with colleagues, is an important everyday activity in Sweden that encourages team building, peer-to-peer support and develops the capacities that underpin emotional resilience. It is a retreat from the stress of the day and an opportunity to bond with colleagues (Uusimaki, 2020).

Evidence suggests that developing a working culture that acknowledges the importance of regular breaks away from the desk can make a real difference to wellbeing and performance (Trogakos & Hideg, 2009). So, work with employees to identify opportunities to bring groups together for a Fika break. If coffee and cake are not appropriate, a group walk would also embody the spirit of Fika. The important thing is to enable people to connect and refrain from talking about work. All you need is a space where people feel comfortable to gather and chat. Fika can be done online as well as face to face; tips can be found [here](#).

Remember work is not just what we do behind our desks: problem-solving, reflective conversations and peer-to-peer learning can all be gained from informal conversations about something completely different. This is likely to happen during a Fika break.

Building a secure base by enhancing team resilience

Building an effective network of teams helps to consolidate organisational resilience. When individuals can openly discuss their strengths and concerns, collective resilience is strengthened and team members also feel empowered to share emotionally distressing experiences.

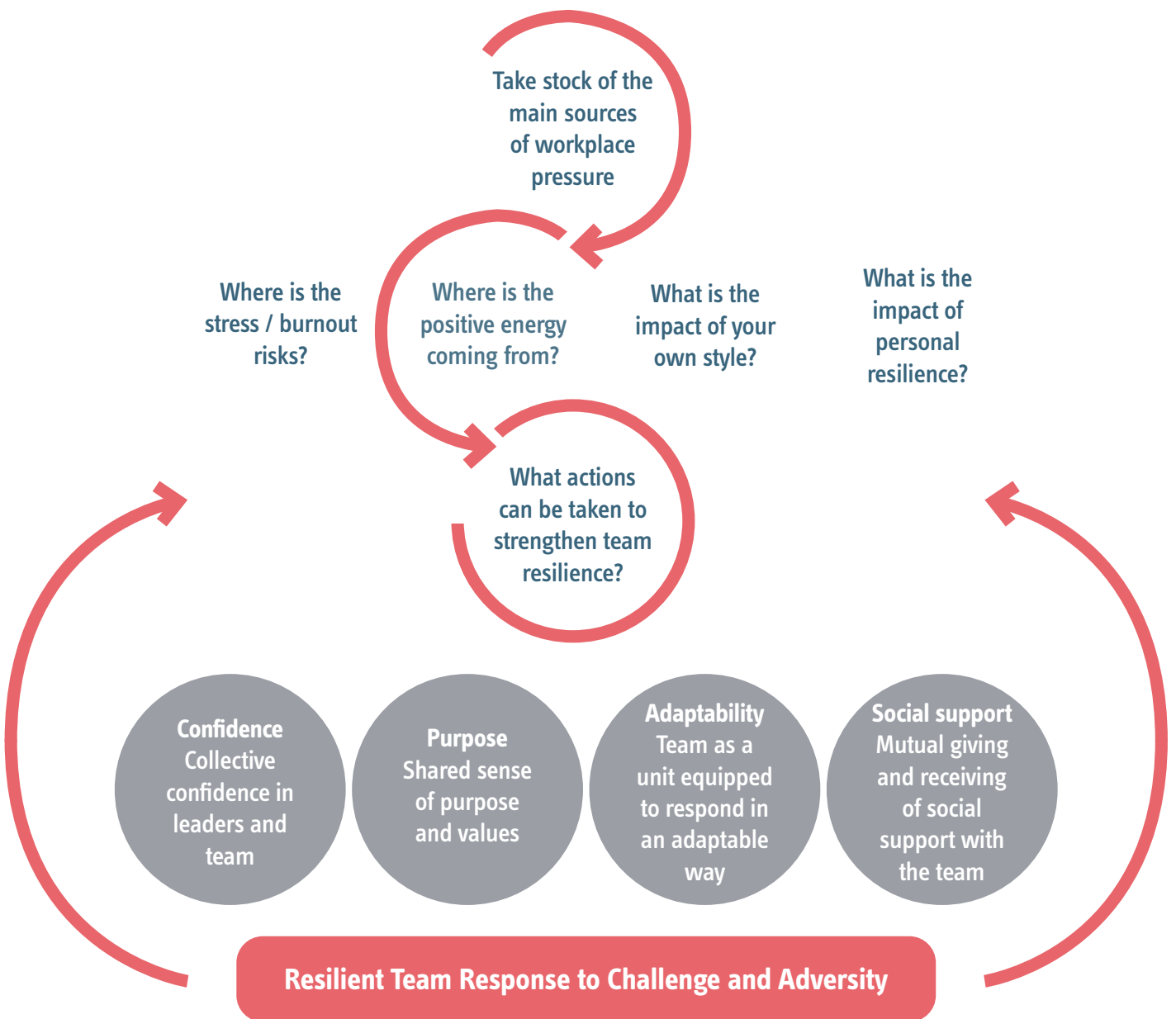


Figure 1.2: Enhancing team resilience

The characteristics of a resilient team are discussed in the section on understanding resilience earlier in the workbook. Figure 1.2 shows a helpful framework for building team resilience which was developed by Cooper and colleagues (2013). The in-depth strategies and Quick Wins included throughout this workbook will help you apply this framework to your own organisation. To use it effectively, it is important to consider the following questions:

Where are the stressors / burnout risks in my organisation?

While a formal wellbeing audit can identify the key psychosocial stressors in an organisation (see KFP5 Wellbeing for further information), research suggests that for social care workers, high workloads, low control and support, and bureaucracy are much more stressful than the type of work that is done (See Grant and Kinman, 2014). As a leader, it is crucial to identify ways to minimise these hazards as, over the long term, they will drastically increase the risk of health problems, sickness absence and poor retention among your workforce. Providing support, security and a sense of purpose can help workers manage demands and remain healthy and motivated.

What is the impact of my leadership style?

Flexibility is a key aspect of resilience and leaders should develop a flexible leadership style. Remember that it is possible to overuse your strengths: for example, as leaders are powerful role models for expected behaviour in an organisation, being overly conscientious and working long hours may encourage others to do the same. Similarly, being excessively sympathetic to everyone may encourage employees to see you as a 'soft touch'. Coaching and 360 Degree Feedback (see KFP4 Mission and Vision) can help you gain insight into your leadership style and reflect on how it could be developed.

What is the impact of personal resilience on team resilience?

Helping people to enhance their individual resilience can increase the resilience of the team and the whole organisation. KFP5 Wellbeing offers some ideas for how you can improve the personal resilience of those with whom you work.

Some further guidance on how to build effective teams to provide a sense of security is set out in Box 1.8.

Box 1.8: Building a secure base through teams

How do we build a sense of trust within a team? How will we know trust exists within that team?

The importance of trust and how it can be destabilised and rebuilt was highlighted earlier in this section. The collective learning that can be gained from when people make a mistake and when they are successful should be considered and shared. Trust is evident when people readily ask for help, admit to errors and skill gaps, and are prepared to disagree with the views of others. You will know trust when you see it: people will help each other proactively, be prepared to show vulnerability and support each other spontaneously when there are temporary spikes in workload. They will also provide mutual support during organisational and personal crises.

How do we build a culture of shared responsibilities?

Stress is often triggered when people have a lot of responsibility but feel they lack autonomy over how they do their work. Responsibility without authority is an acknowledged source of stress, so engaging the team in considering how problems can be shared and resolved collaboratively can enhance a sense of autonomy. Opportunities to increase autonomy can be explored using Appreciative Inquiry and World Café approaches (see KFP2 Sense of Appreciation, KFP4 Mission and Vision and KFP5 Wellbeing).

How do we build commitment?

For teams to work effectively, people should be aware of how their role contributes to the mission and vision of the wider organisation (see KFP4 Mission and Vision). In other words, they must be able to identify where their contribution fits into the wider endeavour. So, leaders at the team level should – preferably with the input of their team – develop a strategy, with goals and objectives that is linked explicitly to that wider enterprise.

How do we build a team that recognises individual strengths?

To be effective, a team needs a wide range of skills and experience. Building a culture in which people ask for a second opinion or for someone to help them with a piece of work will ensure that people are recognised for their individual skills and strengths, while increasing the expertise and resilience of the team as a whole.