

# Deconstructing Safety



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# Learning Objectives

- ❑ Participants will be able to identify at least 3 common expectations for safety in training contexts, including supervision.
- ❑ Participants will be able to name at least 2 potential barriers to effective training and supervision posed by the assumption of “safety.”
- ❑ Participants will gain at least 2 examples of activities and/or strategies for deconstructing safety with their interns and reconstructing expectations for self-reflection and engagement in courageous conversations.



**Warning**  

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**Deep  
water**

**SAFETY**  
**BEGINS HERE**

## Opening Activity

As we approach this time of learning together, please consider the following questions with 1 or 2 colleagues sitting near you and be prepared to share some of your thoughts with the group.

When it comes to clinical training and supervision...

- What is “safety?”
- What elements are necessary for a learning/training environment to feel “safe?”

# Notes from Activity - What is Safety?

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Respect, Being heard, Developmental in nature

Separate ideas from the person,

Relationships as the foundation

Not necessarily comfortable

A “firm” container; stability

“Good enough” participant idea

Receptivity, Openness

Support/challenge

No judgment, Accepted

# Safety in Training & Supervision: Definitions & Expectations

- ❑ **Strong supervisory alliance** = positive relationship, characterized by mutual trust, liking, and a strong emotional bond (Bordin, 1983)
- ❑ Related to a “supervisee’s perceived safety, trust and alliance” (Wong, Wong & Ishiyama, 2013)
- ❑ Facilitates an open supervisory climate where the supervisee can be vulnerable and take risks
- ❑ Unspoken social processes, power differentials, and racial dynamics, can cause interns to feel a lack of trust and psychological safety



# Safety in Training & Supervision: Definitions & Expectations

- ❑ **Multiculturally competent supervisors** are “crucial catalysts” in facilitating interns’ awareness of racial and cultural issues.  
(Proctor & Rogers, 2013)
- ❑ Explicit conversations about power, privilege, oppression, and the dynamics of the supervision relationship can create “liberating training spaces” for interns.
- ❑ Supervisors “make the invisible visible” by encouraging interns to consider their underlying cultural assumptions and blind spots, to challenge their biases, and to ask awkward questions rather than be silent.

# Safety in Training & Supervision: Definitions & Expectations



- ❑ **Mentoring = “intensive caring”**
- ❑ “What sets mentoring apart... is that the focus is on *how supervisees are treated* rather than on how they are trained.” (Wong, Wong & Ishiyama, 2013)
  - ❑ Supervisors mentor when they willingly serve as role models beyond formal supervision responsibilities
  - ❑ Empathy, genuineness, and openness to feedback about their own style of relating builds a climate of personal safety and trust
  - ❑ These conditions can give supervisees a voice and facilitate self-evaluation and self-actualization.

## Another Activity



Let's consider another aspect of this conversation. When it comes to clinical training and supervision...

- ❑ How do we define “comfort” and “discomfort?”
- ❑ What elements are necessary for a learning/training environment to feel “comfortable?”
- ❑ What can make a learning/training environment feel “uncomfortable?”



# Notes from Activity - What is Comfort?

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Radical acceptance / tolerance

“screw up...please”

Getting a “pass”

Finding the “sweet spot”

Difference between discomfort and pain

A little “danger” is necessary

I’m not perfect – “Wow, that was messed up, huh?”

Metaphors for intern being in control of what’s shared, e.g. “can I help you with your coat?”

# Barriers to Training & Supervision

- ❑ Safety, when it becomes synonymous with comfort, begs the question:
  - ❑ “What can we actually promise within a training setting?”
  - ❑ “Or, within a supervision relationship?”
- ❑ Is our framework for approaching the situation congruent with our intended outcome?
  - ❑ Who is asking to be safe?



# Barriers to Training & Supervision

**! SAFETY FIRST !**

- ❑ Training and supervision contexts are challenged by the false security of “safety,” resulting in:
  - ❑ Pulling back from the challenge.
  - ❑ Getting “stuck” in the privilege.
  - ❑ Limiting the learning that can occur.
  - ❑ Compounding injury.
  - ❑ Identifying challenges to ideas/beliefs as personal attacks. (Arao & Clemens, 2013)
  - ❑ Expressions that these dynamics “shouldn’t happen” in learning environments. (Redmond, 2010)



# Barriers to Training & Supervision



# Barriers to Training & Supervision

COURAGE IS  
WHAT IT TAKES  
TO STAND UP  
AND SPEAK;  
COURAGE IS ALSO  
WHAT IT TAKES  
TO SIT DOWN  
AND LISTEN.

# Barriers to Training & Supervision

- ❑ “Safety” may give the illusion of protection from evaluation, judgment, challenge, acknowledging mistakes and being held accountable.



# Barriers to Training & Supervision

- ❑ Relational safety does not equal blind validation or unequivocal emotional support.

(Hernandez & Rankin, 2008; Hernandez & McDowell, 2010)

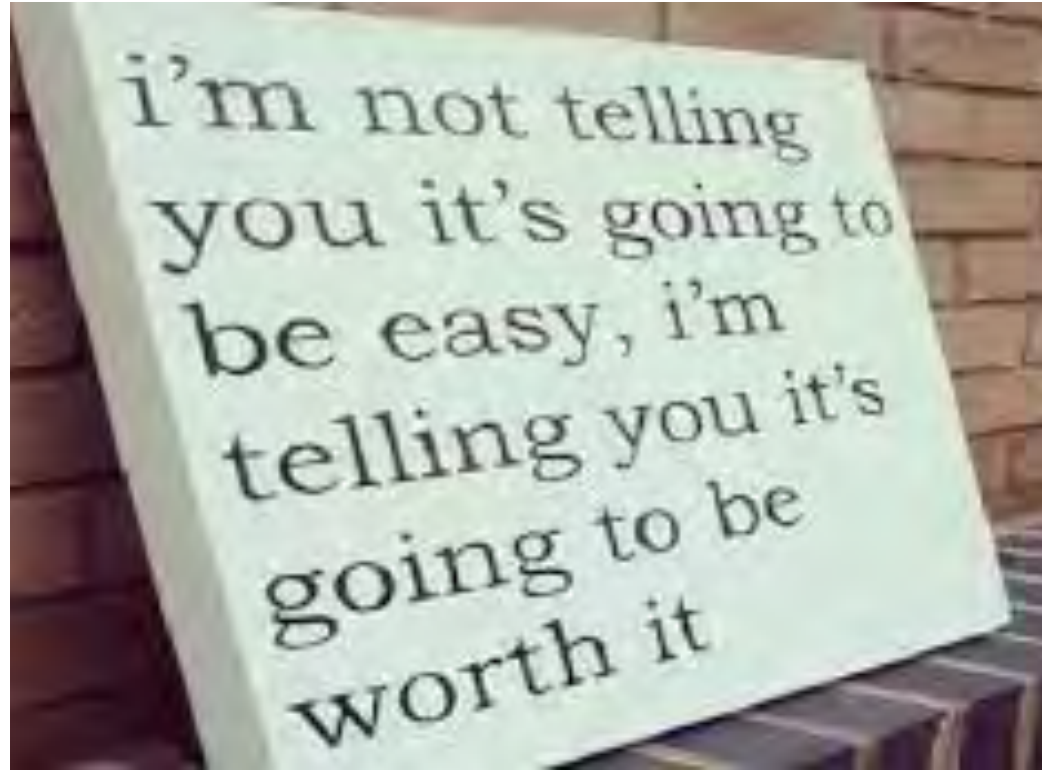


# Strategies for Deconstructing Safety

- ❑ Relational safety refers to developing critical thinking skills in a caring environment.
- ❑ Not a result of discrete events, it evolves over time through dialogue and reflection.
- ❑ Not always relationally or emotionally comfortable.

(Hernandez & Rankin, 2008;

Hernandez & McDowell, 2010)





# Strategies for Deconstructing Safety

- ❑ Establishing rules for community engagement.
- ❑ Remember that we do not intend to harm one another
- ❑ We all are participants in a process involving mutual comfort and discomfort.
- ❑ An ongoing dialogue in which we articulate ideas, raise questions, challenge points of view, ponder issues, and express concerns

(Hernandez & Rankin, 2008;

Hernandez & McDowell, 2010)



# Strategies for Deconstructing Safety

- ❑ Transparency early in the process and repeated throughout.
  - ❑ Brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013)
  - ❑ Calling in (Tran, 2013)
- ❑ Building a sense of belonging and value within the group or supervisory relationship (Emerson, 1996).
- ❑ Finding points of overlap
- ❑ Modeling and engaging as the facilitator
- ❑ Addressing issues of silence and silencing



Catching Bullets  
& processing them

# Safety

Communitarian  
Model of  
Professionalism  
& Ethics

Caring  
↳

Support

↑ Constructive Feedback

⊗ Fear

attack  
judgment  
bashed  
put down

Respect

Take the  
lead in creating  
a culture of  
safety

Give Benefit  
of the doubt

↑ Listening

⊗ Assumptions

Joining  
↳

How was that for you?

Discomfort  
Uncomfortable

Inviting  
Creating opportunities

Taking of  
your seat

Exposure

Chosen  
not

Vulnerability

Imposed

Normalizing  
Modeling

Transparency

ritual  
↳

Shoring Weaknesses

"Confessing Sins" "One Another"

tied together (3 legged race)

Where  
the magic  
happens

...

Your  
Comfort  
Zone



# Strategies for Deconstructing Safety

## ❑ PROCESS

- ❑ Participate
- ❑ Respect
- ❑ Openness
- ❑ Civility
- ❑ Empathy
- ❑ Seek to understand others
- ❑ Self-care



# Strategies for Deconstructing Safety

- ❑ Other ideas?
- ❑ Your experiences?



# Group Brainstorm on Deconstructing Safety w/Interns

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We all use a variety of metaphors

We don't talk about "safe sex," we talk about "safer sex."

We don't talk about this being a "safe environment" we talk about this being "a learning environment."

Tell interns they are going to "get woke" and invite them to share their "awake moments"

Acknowledge the larger systems in which we exist, and what may be modeled or not. Our staff are some of the best models of what not to do.

# Group Brainstorm on Deconstructing Safety w/Interns

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Suggest to interns that as emerging professional, they will witness various ways of behaving, and they can choose what to incorporate into their own professional identity and what they will use to “line the birdcage.” Talk about Intent vs. Impact, when we accidentally hurt someone, whether we intended to or not, we apologize (example of stepping on someone’s foot).

Talk about the virtues of Curiosity – “I wonder?” and Humility – “I don’t know” in both training and therapy.



# Group Brainstorm on Deconstructing Safety w/Interns

When interns get entrenched? Point out that they might be trying to paddle to the island of agreement rather than the island of understanding, and as trainers/the captain, it is our job to help them paddle to the right island.

Examine from a clinical perspective, too - if this is what we do with each other, what do we do with clients? Supervisees? Ask, if this was your client, how would you navigate this?

We can respect the person's right to have an opinion even if we may not respect the opinion itself.

# Group Brainstorm on Deconstructing Safety w/Interns

“I may not respect your opinion, but I understand it is important to you.”

Do our interns have the cognitive flexibility to have strong feelings without imposing those feelings onto someone else or allowing others to have their own strong feelings?

We need to expect and accept non-closure, closure is often a myth

Practice self-compassion and radical acceptance for our own internalized stuff.

# Group Brainstorm on Deconstructing Safety w/Interns

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Trainers need to show transparency, model and talk about the nature of social justice work, about aspects of power dynamics and politics, choosing battles and voice how we show up differently in different contexts.

Ask our interns to “go to wherever your edge is,” to always do your best, stay engaged, talk about discomfort, speak your truth, say “ouch, that hurt me.”

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