

## Enhancing psychological safety during uncertain times

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### What is Psychological Safety?

People often seek therapy because they are struggling to feel safe, blighted by anxiety and low mood. Often, they wish to feel safe again, or yearn to for the first time. Unresolved trauma can cause us to respond to past threats as if they are current. Creating a safe space is an essential ingredient for [psychological therapy](#) while therapeutic interventions for people who have experienced trauma prioritise a phase of safety and stabilisation in treatment, supporting people to feel safe before traumatic memories are addressed.

### Measuring Psychological Safety

To enhance clinical work and research in this growing field we have developed a standardised measure of psychological safety. In partnership with an international team of psychologists and researchers with expertise in trauma and scale development. The [Neuroception of Psychological Safety Scale \(NPSS\)](#), grounded in The Polyvagal Theory, comprises 29 statement items with three key sub-scales: Social Engagement (e.g. 'I felt accepted by others'), Compassion (e.g., 'I felt like I could comfort a loved one') and Bodily Sensations (e.g., 'My stomach felt settled'). The NPSS can potentially be used in a wide range of settings such as in psychological therapy / counselling or in medical settings to mitigate medical trauma, improve outcomes and promote [Psychologically Informed Medicine](#).

We know that the legacy of the pandemic means that levels of stress, anxiety and trauma have increased among the general population. This is even more marked among [key workers](#), people with [underlying health conditions](#) and pre-existing mental health problems, leading to moral injury, burnout and compromised resilience. Perhaps more than ever, we could benefit from a focus on enhancing feelings of psychological safety to facilitate our collective recovery.

### How to enhance feelings of Psychological Safety

There are many ways to enhance feelings of psychological safety. Different strategies work for different people. Practicing mindfulness, meditation, grounding, yoga, relaxation, breathing techniques and spending time out of doors can help. Coping statements and practicing self-compassion can also work. For children, a cuddly toy, a favourite blanket, or being held, sung to or gently rocked may evoke feelings of safety. Similar strategies can help us in adulthood, such as reassuring touch (hugs), a comfy pillow, a weighted blanket, listening to soothing sounds, songs or smells, patting a pet, hearing a familiar voice, seeking out trusted others and switching off from things that challenge feelings of safety (e.g., news or social media). It is understandable that we may be feeling more on edge just now. We may need to pro-actively seek strategies to enhance feelings of psychological safety to protect our mental health. If these strategies are not enough please remember that you are not alone and seek professional support.

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