

# Conversations for Kindness

Kindness and Psychological Safety  
Speaker: Professor Amy Edmundson

16 November 2023

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# Context - Conversations for Kindness

## About the movement

**Conversations for Kindness** is a monthly virtual meeting that was set up in the summer of 2020 by eight colleagues and friends working in healthcare across Sweden, the UK and the USA: Bob Klaber, Dominique Allwood, Maureen Bisognano, Goran Henriks, Suzie Bailey, Anette Nilsson, Gabby Matthews and James Mountford. The purpose of the meeting was to have some time together to continue some initial conversations around kindness, and its role at the 'business end' of healthcare, and to plan interactive workshops on this topic.

## Conversations for Kindness

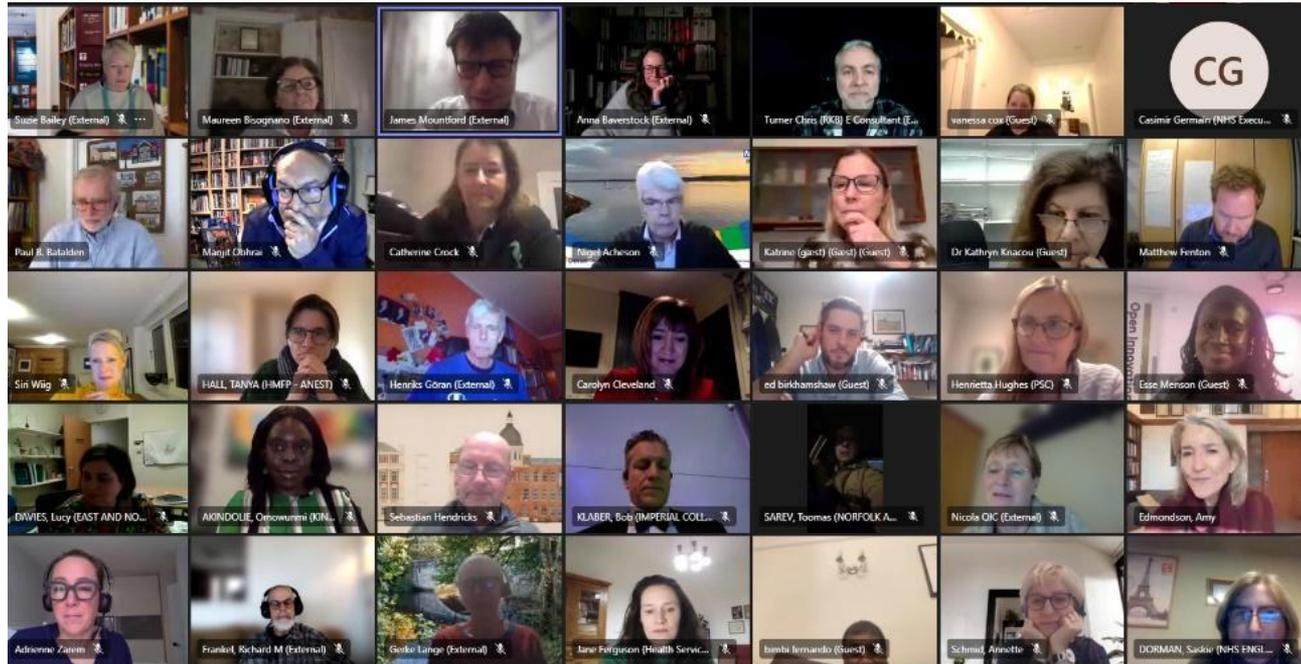
- Monthly Zoom call on the third Thursday of every month (6-7pm GMT)
- A focus on listening, learning, thinking differently and mobilising for action
- An open culture of sharing of resources, energy and ideas

If you would like to join the conversation for kindness, please complete [this contact form](#)

# Joining the Conversation from across the world

More than **120** Kindness in Healthcare community members came together from all over the world for this Conversation for Kindness. Once again, we had new faces join us for the first time!

A few of the hellos from around the world...



Katrine Kirk, patient advocate in Denmark.

Hi I am Annette Schmid, dialing in from Cambridge, MA in the US.

Kaidi from Estonia, North Estonian Medical Centre.

# Opening the session: *What is Kindness?*

To open the session, Catherine Crook read a short poem, *What is Kindness* by Samir Heble, a psychiatrist based in western Australia, which came out of the [Gathering of Kindness](#) in Melbourne.

What is kindness

Is it a pretty and exotic concept ,

For tired books in lofty shelves ?

Or is it a virtuous action ,

To be carried out by all our selves ?

Is it an Art ?

Is it a skill ?

Is it a conscious choice ?

Is there need for a will ?

Is kindness science ,

That can be explained by the Mind ,

Or is it spirituality to seek and find ?

Is it inborn ?

Can it be taught ?

Can it be learnt ?

Can it be bought ?

Kindness is all of you ,

Kindness is me ,

Kindness is intrinsic to our Universe

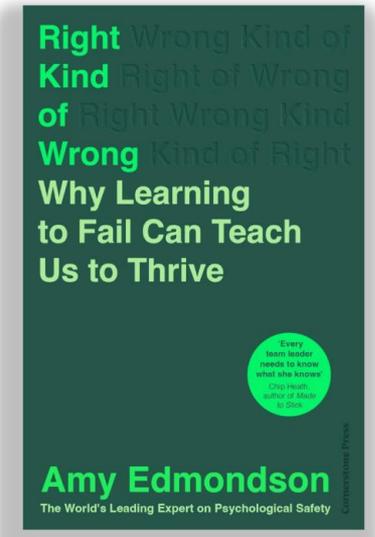
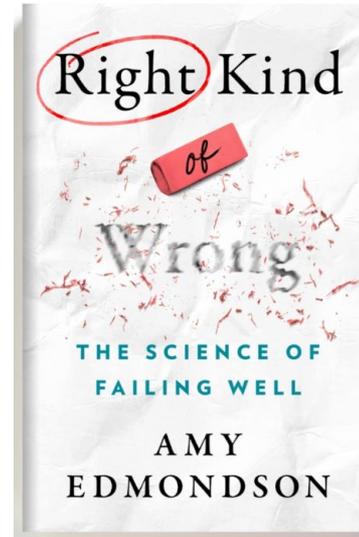
For us all to Be .

# Who did we hear from? Insights from Amy Edmondson

Our speaker today was **Amy Edmondson**, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School renowned for her **world-leading research** into the concept of psychological safety.

Amy is the author of the *The Fearless Organisation*, *Teaming*, and her latest release, *Right Kind of Wrong*.

Her work focuses on the study of **interpersonal relationships**, underpinned by the belief that this has a great impact on organisational development.



This insights pack summarises the session, but you can also [watch the event on YouTube](#)

# What did we hear? Insights from Amy Edmondson

Amy started her talk by defining psychological safety:

*“A belief that your context or environment is safe for interpersonal risks, such as speaking up with an idea, a question, a concern, a mistake, a failure, a dissenting view”*

- It does not necessarily make candour easy, but refers to the belief that it is **welcome, expected, and won't lead to psychological punishment**, such as humiliation
- It is not being nice, and is often uncomfortable.
- It matters because:
  - The work we do in healthcare is **complex** and **uncertain**, which means that **anyones voice could make a crucial difference**.
  - It is a key predictor of team performance, quality improvement success, wellbeing etc.

# What did we hear? Insights from Amy Edmondson

Amy then went on to address the concept of kindness.

## Kindness

The harder route

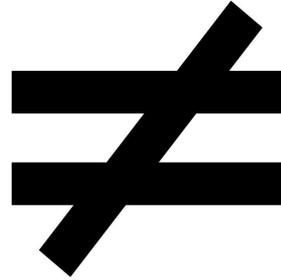
Candour is kind

Connected with respecting your authentic self and your potential

Supports other's growth

Requires courage

Both a value and a skill



## Niceness

The easy way out

A way to avoid engaging

Supports someone staying stuck

# What did we hear? Insights from Amy Edmondson



- Amy talked about how psychological safety research and practice has paid **inadequate attention** to interpersonal skills required to act with kindness and to practice candour.
- Some of these skills include:
  - Learning to pause before responding
  - Challenging your instinctive response
  - Choosing to respond with kindness, instead of niceness, even if more difficult

Amy then moved on to discuss how kindness can support **a better workplace**:

- If there is more kindness, we are better able to cope with the discomfort of candour and the hard work of quality improvement or performance feedback
- Makes work more engaging and meaningful

# Group discussion

After smaller groups discussions in breakout rooms, we came back together to reflect on our conversations:

## **Toomas:**

Culture (values + behaviour) cannot be changed with a mandate, but needs to be collectively co-created.

This is challenging when we work in a context where we are constantly fire-fighting.

## **Kirsty:**

Psychological safety relies on relationships and trust. It is difficult to form those relationships in an organisation which is under pressure and has high turnover of staff.

## **James asked:**

What can we do to establish psychological safety in the high-pressure environments?

## **Amy:**

1. Call attention to how important our voice/speaking up is to the work we do
2. Be curious and ask people questions
3. Focus on giving thoughtful and considered responses

*Kindness in  
healthcare*

# Group discussion

**Maureen asked:**

Is kindness something that can be taught?

**Amy:**

Yes, but people have to be willing to learn.

**Kirsty:**

Psychological safety it is not the same for everyone on the team – one person's psychological safety is not the same experience for another.

**Sally:**

Mistakes are more likely to go unacknowledged (and be repeated) in teams which prioritise niceness and comfort.

**Ann:**

To challenge without being unkind, it is a skill. It is not easy, it is not a given, but it absolutely essential.

**Mary:**

You can have kindness without psychological safety, but you can't have psychological safety without kindness. You have to be really really courageous to show kindness without psychological safety .

# Group discussion

Participants also shared their reflections in the chat:

ed birkhamshaw (Guest) 7:52 am

**EB** Definitely agree kindness/psych safety is a learnable trait - I don't think I started off as a kind doctor (difficult thing to admit!) - but I realised the impact that changing my approach could have on patient care. I think Kindness/psych safety needs to be actively taught/trained

SHANMUGALINGAM, Shanthi (ROYAL ... 7

**SS** True that psychological safety is everyone's job to ask for but presence of rigid hierarchy makes this more challenging to do if you are not in a leadership role

 1  1

SHANMUGALINGAM, Shanthi (ROYAL ... 7

**SS** Do we know if the introduction of speaking up champions has had any impact on culture/ psychological safety in an organisation?

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 New mes

# Further resources to check out

A number of recommended readings and resources were shared in the chat during the Conversation. They are listed below:

- [Kindness and Leadership: 50 Leading Lights](#) - a campaign seeking to shine a spotlight on leaders who are impacting others through kindness. Our own Suzie Bailey was selected as one of the 50 Leading Lights this year!
- [Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade](#) by Robert Cialdini - a book which discusses ways to establish an organisational environment, which is requisite for psychological safety.
- [Creating a Culture of Compassion using Appreciative Enquiry](#) - a webinar introducing appreciative enquiry, a great technique for fostering psychological safety within teams.

[See resources from our previous sessions on our website](#)

Our next session is on 21 December 2023. We are very lucky to have **Professor Michael West**, a leading mind in the area of compassionate leadership, who will speak to compassionate leadership and the link to kindness.

# Acknowledgements

This insights pack has been co-produced by  
**Nicki Macklin** and the team at **Kaleidoscope Health and Care**

For all enquiries please contact us [via the Kindness in Healthcare website.](#)

Thank you for joining, thank you for reading.

We'll see you next month!