

Conversations for Kindness

Psychological safety and kindness: ways to foster
psychological safety in the workplace

October 2024

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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

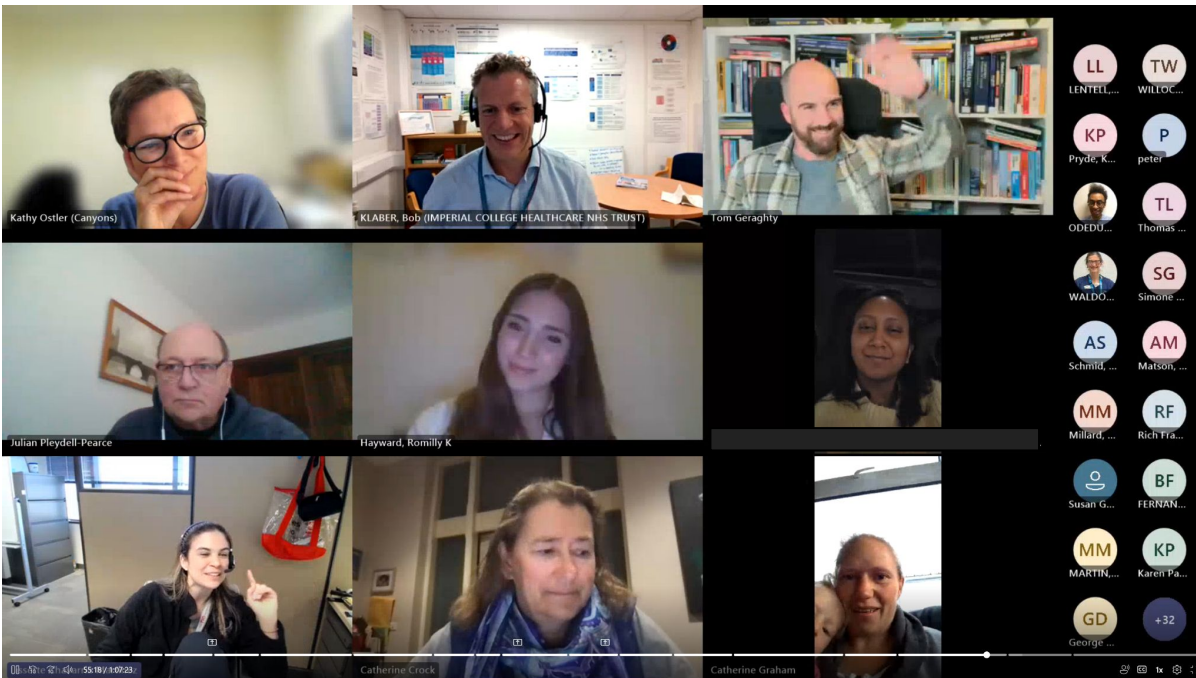
- Monthly Zoom call on the third Thursday of every month (6-7pm UK time)
- A focus on listening, learning, thinking differently and mobilising for action
- An open culture of sharing of resources, energy and ideas

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

Joining the Conversation from across the world

More than 58 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!

Where were
our
participants?



Dallas USA



Liverpool, UK



New Zealand

Who did we hear from? Tom Geraghty

This month we continued to learn about psychological safety and were lucky to have Tom Geraghty, founder of [Iterum Ltd](#) and guru of all things psychological safety. Tom has a background in ecology, with a current career focus on consulting and researching psychological safety. He states that his mission is to make workplaces safer, more inclusive, and higher-performing, by creating psychologically safe environments where teams and individuals can thrive.



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

What did we hear? 10 ways to foster psychological safety in the workplace

Tom kicked off by talking about [Iterum Ltd](#)'s learnings on their top ten ways for fostering psychological safety

- 1. Reducing Power Gradient:** The presence of someone who holds a lot of power can negatively impact psychological safety. Ways to reduce this include using first names and avoiding job titles.
- 2. Establishing shared norms:** Social contracts, team charters, and team agreements can help set expectations and create a safe space.
- 3. Listening effectively and giving space:** Allowing everyone to speak and be heard.
- 4. Communicating with empathy:** making communicating clearly, intelligently and compassionately the norm.
- 5. Rewarding speaking up:** Positively reacting to people who share ideas, questions, mistakes, or concerns. Emphasise the value it adds.
- 6. Framing work as experiments:** Emphasising that the only experiment that fails is the one from which we don't learn.
- 7. Using retrospectives and future perspectives:** Learning from past work and imagining future scenarios to improve.
- 8. Addressing problematic behavior:** Defining and addressing unacceptable behavior.
- 9. Embracing differences:** Recognising that psychological safety looks different to everyone and respecting those differences.
- 10. Accepting human error as normal:** Viewing errors as system problems rather than individual problems.

What did we hear? Some practices

Three initial potential practices we talked about are the Andon Cord, PACE and the Pac-Man Rule

The Andon Cord

The Andon Cord embodies psychological safety by empowering every worker to stop production without fear, demonstrating that quality improvements outweigh temporary disruptions.



PACE

PACE (Probe, Alert, Challenge, Emergency) is a graded assertiveness framework that enables speaking up across power gradients, promoting psychological safety through structured communication.

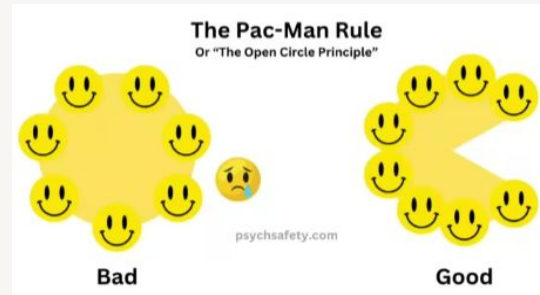
Graded Assertiveness:
P.A.C.E. (Probe, Alert, Challenge, Emergency)

Probe – “Are you feeling rested enough to do this journey?”
Alert – “I’m concerned that you might be too tired to complete this journey safely.”
Challenge – “I don’t think this is safe. You should rest first.”
Emergency – “STOP. You’re not safe to drive.”

psychsafety.com

The Pac-Man Rule

The Pac-Man rule is about creating open, inclusive spaces in group settings, leaving room for others to join conversations and sending an implicit message to those around us that they are invited and welcome to join.



What did we hear? A tool/practice

Lean Coffee

Lean Coffee is a psychologically safe meeting practice. The agenda is not run by the most senior, instead it is a democratic, psychologically safe and lean way of running the meeting. The platform that enabled our activity was

<https://www.leancoffetable.com/>

The screenshot displays the Lean Coffee app interface, which is organized into several vertical panels. On the far left is a dark sidebar with icons for a coffee cup, a book, an envelope, and a calendar. The main area is divided into five vertical sections: 1. 'ACTIONS & LEARNINGS' with orange and red buttons for 'Create Action' and 'Add Learning'. 2. 'TO DISCUSS' containing two topic cards. The first card, by Meg #15, is about giving voice to quiet people. The second card, by Vanessa #20, is about remaining assertive without being perceived as lacking kindness. 3. 'DISCUSSING' showing a timer at 0:00 and a topic card 'Dealing with Micro behaviours - the eye roller' by Kate #7, with a comment input field below. 4. 'DISCUSSED' (empty). 5. 'CONVERSATIONS FOR KINDNESS' which lists attendees: Tom Geraghty (Board Owner and Facilitator, Offline) and Henry (Online).

ACTIONS & LEARNINGS

Create Action Add Learning

TO DISCUSS

Add More Topics

how to give voice to those who are quiet

Meg #15

How to remain assertive without being perceived as lacking kindness

Vanessa #20

DISCUSSING

0:00 ▼

Dealing with Micro behaviours - the eye roller

Kate #7

Add a new comment to this topic

DISCUSSED

CONVERSATIONS FOR KINDNESS

Facilitated by Tom Geraghty

Attendees ^

Tom Geraghty (Board Owner and Facilitator) Offline

henry Online

Group discussion

The question for our breakout discussion was:

“What stood out from Tom’s presentation? What is your experience with some of the things we saw today?”

“I think the Pac-Man Rule is a brilliant way of ensuring you are mindful of inclusivity and really captures that feeling of uncertainty with regard to how you might go about joining a team or enabling someone to feel secure and involved.”

“From experience, reducing power gradients seems so crucial to the ability for people to feel safe and heard. I feel a weight and tension leave my body the moment someone tells me to call them by their first name.”

“It is truly so interesting how minute ways of fostering safety manifest as truly meaningful events for us. Once again on that point about power gradients. In Ireland I experienced senior consultants treating their juniors to coffee in a way that might seem kind, however likely only instilled a greater feeling of inferiority. Whereas in New Zealand we all take turns buying the coffee, which I think helps us feel safe and like peers”

Group discussion

The question for our breakout discussion was:

We talked about dealing with micro behaviours - the eye roller

“We acknowledged that at times the disproportionate reactions that people get when you might call out a behavior are likely triggers of some sort from the person. We understood that perhaps the best approach is not to read into the behavior and its motivation but instead maintain objectivity and ask for help from the person. It might be best to put the responsibility of the eye roll on your own deficiencies to meet their needs.”

“It's about inviting an honest conversation that enables genuine understanding. It is about listening to the needs of others and not focusing on your own interpretations.”

Closing reflections

To close out the session, we heard

10 Ways to Foster Psychological Safety: Create environments where speaking up is safe and valued by reducing power differences, establishing shared expectations, listening effectively, communicating compassionately, and viewing mistakes as opportunities to learn rather than occasions for blame.

Practical Tools:

- **The Andon Cord** - Empowering everyone to stop processes when needed
- **PACE Framework** - Structured communication (Probe, Alert, Challenge, Emergency)
- **Pac-Man Rule** - Creating inclusive conversation spaces
- **Lean Coffee** - Democratic meeting format that flattens hierarchies

Recommendation from the chat:



Don't call people out -- call them in

https://www.ted.com/talks/loretta_j_ross_don_t_call_people_out_call_them_in?language=en

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](#) or email
bob.klaber@nhs.net

See you next month for another great conversation.

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

Thank you for joining, thank you for reading.

We'll see you next month!