



# Personal Resilience Workbook

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Safe and Secure

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Feeling safe, secure and well supported in the workplace is crucial for building personal resilience. While your employer is largely responsible for supporting your wellbeing, it is also crucial to nurture your personal sense of safety and security. The following characteristics are particularly important:

- Having a supportive network of people around you to help you explore your fears and anxieties.
- Having a safe space where you can draw renewed energy and resources from trusted people.
- Ensuring there are people to offer you useful help and advice, to provide diverse perspectives and to challenge you.
- Feeling that you belong and that you are respected and valued.

| <b>Safe and Secure Questions</b>   |
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| 1. I feel safe and secure in my work role.   |
| 2. I know where to access individual support to help me manage the emotional demands of my work.           |
| 3. I am able to reflect on my professional practice with my supervisor, line manager or practice educator. |
| 4. I have a 'safe space' at work to share my experiences and raise issues of concern.                      |
| 5. I have a wide network of colleagues who I can turn to for help.   |
| 6. I can usually manage my emotional reactions to work effectively.  |

7. I feel I can work with others to find solutions to difficulties.

8. I have a sense of belonging and commitment to my organisation.

9. I feel respected and supported by my colleagues.

10. I would feel able to raise issues of bullying and harassment and speak up if necessary.

11. At my workplace, I feel able to have difficult conversations about racism and discrimination without fear of repercussions.

12. I don't always feel the need to be strong.

# Safe and Secure - Core Actions



## Core Action 1: Supporting Emotional 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 sometimes think or react in an overly emotional or irrational way. The notion of the '*chimp brain*' stems from psychological theory, illustrating how our evolutionary history has influenced our responses to environmental challenges. For example:

- Jumping to conclusions or thinking in absolute terms.
- Engaging in paranoid thinking.
- Experiencing inner turmoil, making us overreact when we feel threatened or undermined.

Peters distinguishes between the '*human brain*', which allows us to respond with compassion and calmness by using both emotions and rational thinking, and the '*chimp brain*', characterised by impulsive reactions, saying things we do not mean, sulking, or losing control in the face of opposition. Although our chimp brain operates much faster than the human brain, we can train ourselves to recognise when it is taking over. The goal is not to kill our chimp brain but to tame it – to calm ourselves and use logic to reassure it. This cultivates emotional literacy, enhancing our effectiveness as professionals.

### Learning to tame your '*inner chimp*'

- We can only regulate our emotions if we have the opportunity to express them; this process helps us manage socially inappropriate feelings such as frustration, anger and disgust. Therefore, it is crucial to vent – to provide a safe space for your inner chimp to have its voice in a safe space. Seek out individuals (within and outside the workplace) with whom you can safely share and release these feelings. Core Action 1.5, your Personal Board of Directors, will help you with this.

- Having a safe space to vent our feelings enables us to start addressing our emotional reactions calmly, giving the rational part of our brain to determine a more reasoned response to the situation.
- Remember, being angry is perfectly natural and a logical response to some situations but is not always proportional or functional. Quick Win 1.1 provides some tips on how to manage anger 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.
- Techniques to challenge unproductive thinking (see Core Action 5.2) can also help us calm our inner chimp.

### Reflective Pause

*What situations typically trigger my inner chimp and how do I usually react when this happens, both mentally and physically?*

The following exercises can help you develop a deeper understanding of your emotional responses and work towards managing your inner Chimp more effectively:

- Describe a recent situation in which you allowed your emotions to control your reaction to something that someone else said or did. How did their words or actions trigger you, and how did you respond?
- How did you feel afterward? Did you get the result you wanted from your reaction? Why or why not?
- How could you have managed your Chimp better to allow your Human (your rational brain) to stay in control?

If you speak to someone else using your Chimp (*emotional side*), they will most likely respond with their Chimp. Try to speak to other people from your Human (rational side) to their Human, leaving your Chimps out of the conversation.

- Think of a recent conversation that you had in which your Chimp drove your words or actions. When you addressed the other person with your Chimp, how did their Chimp respond?
- How did your Chimp respond when their Chimp spoke to you? Were you able to prevent it from doing so? Why or why not?

- How could you have used your Human to better respond to the other person's Chimp when it addressed you?

## Core Action 2: Knowing Yourself - Developing Emotional Literacy

Being able to manage our emotional reactions and those of others, often in challenging environments, is central to professional practice, personal resilience and feeling safe and secure at work.

We all like to think of ourselves as self-aware and emotionally literate, understanding the importance of understanding and managing both our own emotions and those of others, particularly in professions that aid and support others. However, in busy and stressful settings, it is easy to succumb to less relational ways of working with others, or to become overly involved or invested in certain situations. Cultivating self-awareness is crucial for enhancing emotional literacy. A helpful quick quiz that tells you how emotionally intelligent you are can be found [here](#). Use the reflective checklist below to help you assess your emotional intelligence and highlight any areas for development.

### How emotionally intelligent am I?

Ask yourself the following questions and reflect on how you might enhance your emotional intelligence in any areas if required:

Can I regulate my own feelings?

- If I notice myself reacting strongly to a situation, can I recognise this and ensure that I remain composed in the moment, either through self-regulation or by seeking support to manage my reaction?

Do I put people at ease?

- Do people find me easy to engage with? Am I culturally competent, understanding the need to adjust my communication style when necessary?

Am I self-aware?

- Am I aware of my strengths and limitations, and do I communicate this openly with others? Do I demonstrate that it is OK not to excel at everything and to have days when I am not at my best?
- Do I make sure there are people around me who excel in areas where I may not be as strong? If not, do I know where to seek assistance when needed?

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, or do I hold a grudge?

Do I show tenacity?

- When encountering obstacles, do I take responsibility for moving forward while also considering the perspectives of others?

Am I decisive?

- When necessary, am I capable of making a decision and sticking to it? Can I evaluate the effectiveness of my decisions and make adjustments if required?

Can I cope with change and uncertainty?

- Am I able to effectively manage any anxiety that arises from change or uncertainty?

### Core Action 3: Fostering A Sense Of Belonging

Feeling that we belong at work is vital for our sense of security and commitment. There are steps you can take to enhance your own sense of belonging and cultivate a team environment where you feel safe and supported. Especially when starting a new job, building connections with your new team and integrating into the organisational culture are important steps. Asking people around you about work etiquette and 'how they do things around here' in an open and respectful way will help you to understand how things operate and nurture a sense of belonging within the organisation. Consider requesting a 'buddy' who can assist you in navigating basic issues, such as where to get lunch or locate the loo.

Feeling a sense of belonging not only helps maintain our identity as a professional, but also contributes to our wellbeing and engagement. Hybrid working has become increasingly popular, with many organisations providing employees with the option to combine face-to-face and remote working depending on the nature of their role.

This approach can enhance employee wellbeing by providing opportunities for social connections and collaboration, alongside offering increased flexibility and autonomy. Nonetheless, hybrid working can present many challenges (Felstead, 2022; Chan & Kinman, 2024).

To allow for more efficient use of office space and resources, employees frequently do not have assigned desks but choose from a pool of available workspaces whenever they are on-site.

While this 'hot-desking' model can lead to more efficient use of space, being separated from team members can make people feel isolated and the lack of a dedicated workspace can impact on people's sense of belonging, especially newcomers to the organisation, if not managed effectively (Ayoko & Ashkanasy, 2019).

If you have a *hot-desking* policy at work it is worth considering how you can still make your workstation your own – albeit on a temporary basis. Studies show that an inability to personalise our working areas with things that define our identity can be stressful and diminish our sense of professional identity (Hirst, 2011). Personalising your workspace to meet your individual preferences and needs can help create a sense of security, ownership and comfort in a shared environment. You could bring along personal items that are small and portable and store them in a caddy. This way, when you arrive at your workspace, you will have familiar items nearby that help create a sense of belonging. Some tips on how to make the best of hot-desking more generally are included below.

### **Making hot-desking work for you**

The following tips will help you get the best from hot-desking:

- **Confidentiality:** Ensure confidentiality by maintaining the privacy of data when hot-desking. Never leave computers unattended when email or confidential documents are open.
- **Create your own personal "nest":** If you need a day free of distractions, locate a hot desk that is secluded from others, or find a side room you can occupy
- **Do not disturb:** Indicate your preference for uninterrupted work in an open-plan environment by wearing noise-cancelling headphones. Even if you are not listening to music, this signals to others that you are focused on an important task and prefer not to be disturbed
- **Consider your personal safety:** Ensure that chairs and computer monitors are adjusted to allow you to be comfortable and protect your posture. If you require additional equipment, such as adapted keyboards or chairs, make sure to request a workstation assessment.
- **Personalise your space:** Consider bringing personal items and adding touches of your personality, even if you have to pack them away each evening. Discuss with colleagues the idea of voting on choices for pictures on the walls or displaying personal photographs on a noticeboard. This initiative can help create a more personalised and welcoming environment in the workplace.



- **Observe a clean desk policy:** Take responsibility for keeping shared desks clean and tidy. Have a supply of wet wipes to clean and sanitise shared desks before and after use. Avoid eating lunch at a shared desk - going elsewhere not only gives you a break but also demonstrates respect for the shared workspace to colleagues.

#### Core Action 4: Feeling Psychologically Safe

Psychological safety refers to the belief that we will not be penalised or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. In a psychologically safe environment, individuals feel able to take interpersonal risks, share their thoughts openly, and contribute without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career. Psychologically safe working environments promote personal resilience by encouraging open discussions about personal challenges, prioritising self-care and maintaining a healthy work-life balance free from pressure or judgement.

You can take proactive steps to cultivate psychological safety in your working environment, enhancing your ability to manage stress and thrive professionally. The following steps are particularly important:

- **Open communication:** Encourage open communication channels with your colleagues and supervisors, where thoughts, concerns and ideas can be freely expressed without fear of judgment.
- **Set boundaries:** Maintain clear boundaries between your work and personal life to protect your wellbeing and prevent burnout. Clearly communicating these boundaries to your colleagues and supervisors will help establish mutual respect and understanding.
- **Seek support:** Seek assistance from trusted colleagues, mentors, or mental health professionals if needed. Building a robust support network can offer reassurance and validation during challenging times.
- **Practice self-care:** Make activities such as exercise, meditation, hobbies, and spending time with loved ones a priority. These practices support both physical and emotional wellbeing, fostering resilience and promoting psychological safety.
- **Continuous learning:** Adopt a growth mindset, viewing difficulties as opportunities for learning and growth. Commit to ongoing learning and skill development to build your confidence and adaptability when navigating challenges.

- ***Be a champion for change:*** Advocate for changes in the working environment that foster psychological safety, such as inclusive policies, supportive leadership, and opportunities for personal development.

