Staff Culture

INTRODUCTION

"I have seen in any great undertaking it is not enough for a person to depend simply on themselves. Lean on others and invite them to lean on you." – Chief Isna-la-wica, Teton Sioux

INFORMATION

Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to the following application activities.

APPLICATIONS

Key Activity
Create Aspirational Culture Agreements (15-30 minutes in small group and 15-30 minutes in large group)
Example of Staff Culture Agreements

Wellness Practice
Strategy for Self-care – STRENGTH – Stress Resilience
In order to offer a non-anxious presence with our colleagues, students, and their families, we need to be able to recognize the times when we cannot! In other words, we need to be able to recognize when we need either a new perspective or a break. Often our bodies let us know. The first question we might ask ourselves is, what am I telling myself about this situation and what is another possible story? Here's a fascinating TED Talk on making stress our friend (also referenced in Section 10).

And, sometimes we really just need a break! It is helpful to have a plan for what we can do and who can assist us in finding a way to take a break. Of course, all of this is successful only if we allow ourselves the vulnerability of needing a break and, if appropriate, asking for help.

Circle Agenda
Staff Circle Agenda, Section Seven

Core Content Visual to Display in Common Staff Areas
What Do You Want to Say About the Culture of Staff? – Use this Visual and Display in Staff Break Areas
Posting this visual in common staff areas will serve as a reminder of content covered to staff and perhaps serve as a future conversation started for deeper reflection among staff members.

Supplementary Activities/Handouts
Support Begins With Empathy! (10-15 minutes)

LINKS

Links Specifically for Leadership
How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories between Colleagues

Read the information about low impact debriefing strategies and decide how to share with staff.

For links to additional resources, please visit the Toolkit online.

INTRODUCTION

"I have seen in any great undertaking it is not enough for a person to depend simply on themselves. Lean on others and invite them to lean on you." – Chief Isna-la-wica, Teton Sioux

INFORMATION

Supporting each other as colleagues is a parallel process to supporting our clients. Both processes occur within trusted relationships where expectations and boundaries are both clear and flexible.

In this section we will expand on the work we did to identify the Compassionate Boundaries that help us to act with workplace behaviors. We will focus on collegial behaviors and attitudes that generate the culture we choose to work within. We will also consider practices to increase our knowledge and understanding of each other to foster a culture of appreciation and collaboration

To prepare for our work together, consider these questions individually and then bring your ideas to your small team discussion.

1. What are your strengths when it comes to behaviors that support a compassionate workplace culture where all staff feel they belong?
2. Where would you like to see growth in your ability to support a compassionate workplace culture?
3. How has what has happened to you in your life impacted your ability to contribute to a positive workplace culture?
4. Who has modeled behaviors that significantly contributed to a positive, inclusive workplace culture you have experienced?

Part of our being able to be an effective colleague is our ability to discern what our role is within the larger system in our school and the larger system of supports for children and families in our communities. The reality is that, while we might be able to work with a child to address a learning challenge, we may not be able to address a family's need for housing. Yet, the family's need for housing may be what keeps us up at night.

Each of us do best when we realize the limitations of our role and what our colleagues in our school and our colleagues in the community offer to our students and their families. This awareness allows us to function within our role without the burden of the needs that we simply cannot meet. It also fosters respect and gratitude for the various roles of our colleagues and community partners.

Questions for individual staff and teams to consider include:

1. What are my limitations to meet the needs of my clients?
2. What services do my colleagues and community organizations offer that I cannot?
3. What is my belief in the capacity of others on "my team?"
4. What do I need to do to increase my knowledge of and belief in the capacity of others?

These questions can be helpful for teams to address together or individuals to use to discern their level of connection to colleagues and other community services.

Developed in partnership with:

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

ROGERS Behavioral Health

wise END STIGMA TOGETHER
one story at a time

compassionresiliencetoolkit.org

Staff Culture

SELF-CARE
STRATEGIES

Strategy for Self-care – STRENGTH – Stress Resilience

In order to offer a non-anxious presence with our colleagues, students, and their families, we need to be able to recognize the times when we cannot! In other words, we need to be able to recognize when we need either a new perspective or a break. Often our bodies let us know. The first question we might ask ourselves is, what am I telling myself about this situation and what is another possible story? Here's a fascinating TED Talk on making stress our friend.

And, sometimes we really just need a break! It is helpful to have a plan for what we can do and who can assist us in finding a way to take a break. Of course, all of this is successful only if we allow ourselves the vulnerability of needing a break and, if appropriate, asking for help. These activities can help in our relationships with students and in our relationships with colleagues

A. Energizer breaks strategy

1. *Energizer Brain Breaks* provide some release from stress for the students and teachers at the same time. David Sladkey is the author of books with many ideas.

2. 2. This is a free resource with some good ideas too.

B. Tapping in and out strategy

1. Staff work together to develop an understanding about how they might share the responsibility for all students. Specific strategies are defined and practiced.

2. For example: if a staff member can no longer maintain a calm, non-anxious presence with a student who is having behavioral challenges, it is acceptable to ask someone else to take over for a short time. The student may connect with the other staff person in their classroom if they are not teaching or simply sit in the back of the other teacher's classroom while the student and their teacher return to a calm demeanor.

3. Staff develop a system of communicating when they need to step away from a student.

4. The individual who is tapped in will more likely be successful if they have a relationship with the student. All staff including administrators are considered for the task of tapping in.

WHAT'S NEXT

The next four sections are **Wellness and Resilience Strategies: Mind, Spirit, Strength, and Heart**. We will explore specific strategies that work and how to implement them in our lives.

Create an Aspirational Culture Contract

(This is a continuation of Helpful Workplace Behaviors activity from Section 6 of the toolkit.)

Create an agreement for compassionate staff culture by defining behaviors that lead to a positive culture. This activity is a continuation of the healthy workplace behaviors activity from section 6. Between section 6 and 7, the facilitation team needs to consolidate the "Yeses" brainstorm from the healthy workplace behaviors activity into themes. A compassionate culture is also one that is trauma-informed and equitable. Where in the themes generated do you see trauma-informed and equity practices? Is more needed in your themes to highlight these two components?

Directions for staff meeting:

1. Share this list from the healthy workplace behavior activity that supports a compassionate staff culture generated in the section 6 healthy workplace behavior activity.

2. To have a truly compassionate culture, you need one that is centered in equity and trauma-informed practices. Ask the group how they see these in the themes generated. What additions do they feel are needed to ensure these two components are incorporated into our list? *Add any additions to the list and support the group in identifying behaviors instead of broad concepts.*

3. If there are more than ten items brainstormed on the list, ask each staff person to put a dot/mark/sticker next to what they see as the five most important items to achieving a compassionate culture.

4. When voting is complete, circle the 10 items that receive the most votes. These will become the base for the Aspirational Culture Agreements generated between Sections 7 & 8.

5. Ask participants to answer the following questions based off the 10 circled items. *Facilitator note, please decide as a facilitation team how you would like your group to respond to the following questions, taking the size, the amount of time you have available, and the psychological safety of your group into consideration. Some options for the group to engage with the questions include use of the go-around, open mic, pair share, and individual journaling formats.*

   - Looking at these ten items, what are your strengths regarding these behaviors?

   - Where would you like to see growth in your ability to think and act in these ways?

   - What help could you use from other team members in fulfilling these behaviors?

After the staff meeting:

1. The actions are written into an aspirational culture agreements document. The document is enlarged and hung in a staff gathering area for all staff to sign.

2. Copies are made available to staff to keep in their room. The individual copies should include four self-reflection questions on the back. The questions are:

   a. What behaviors do I regularly demonstrate as a colleague?

   b. What behaviors might I enhance to be the colleague I want to become?

   c. What steps can I take to maintain my strengths and grow in areas I identified in B?

   d. Who of my colleagues can I talk to about these commitments I have made?

3. Examples of two staff aspirational culture agreements are on the following page. Limiting the agreements to no more than 10 specific behaviors is best.

Aspirational Culture Agreements Example

The staff at XYZ school seek to consistently behave in these ways towards each other and those we serve:

1. Be open and welcoming to all through our presence, tone, words, and body language.
   - Work to minimize the impact personal biases have on your treatment of others.
   - Respect various cultural values surrounding communication.

Practice mindful presence with colleagues.

2. Speak up when we see problems or conflict in the workplace with a solution-focused, strength-based perspective.
3. Seek to understand and value diverse perspectives.
   - Pause to set aside judgments. Be curious. Embrace discomfort.
   - Assume positive intentions.
   - Practice active listening.

Determine if broader understanding needs to lead to consensus on action or not.

4. Work together as a team to accomplish goals.
   - Take responsibility for contributing to team and share credit for positive results.
   - Identify and engage team members' strengths.
   - Seek out the voices of colleagues traditionally not included.
   - Set and ask for clear expectations and boundaries.
5. Seek support when needed, respond to requests for help, and offer to assist team members when possible.
6. Prioritize and support work life balance and individual well-being.
   - Consider balance when scheduling, setting expectations, and making requests.
7. Use transparent and direct communication.
   - Practice two-way, proactive, respectful, clear, and concise communication.
   - Choose language that is equity-focused, respectful of diversity of all people.
   - Be strategic about communication methods based on the individual situation (face-to-face, email, phone, text, and Teams chat).
8. Practice effective use of communication technology.
   - Respond to email in a timely manner (teams determine maximum response time).
   - If urgent and requiring response, text or call as appropriate.
   - Avoid unnecessary and lengthy emails and blind copying (Bcc).
   - Leverage daily huddles to reduce email and increase direct communication.
   - We uphold these agreements and other commitments through individual responsibility and in respectful conversations with our colleagues. Address concerns early and directly with the person involved. Start with self-reflection and compassion for self and others.
   - Encourage healthy dialogue, then, if possible, move forward and let it go.
   - Seek and accept constructive feedback.
   - Allow space for growth – self and others.

Staff Culture

An Example of Culture Agreements from a Leadership Team

(Note that these leaders also did a survey to determine the level of perceived importance of each and how the team was currently living up to the agreements. This allowed them to prioritize and focus on bringing a few up to par.)

Importance	Current State	Gap	My Behavior
108	79	29	1. Represent one another as a unified team and address conflicts with doing so.
104	66	38	2. Encourage productive conflict and move forward (with forgiveness) when needed.
102	64	38	3. Hold oneself, others, and the organization accountable to clearly defined expectations and deadlines with understanding.

101	69	32	4. Be strategic about communication methods based upon the situation and individual limits
			    a. Respond to emails within 2 business days
			    b. If urgent and requiring response, (1) text or (2) call
			    c. Ensure email communications are clear and concise
			    d. Avoid unnecessary email or BCC
			    e. Leverage daily huddles to reduce email communications and increase direct engagement

100	64	36	5. Engage in proactive communication to identify impact of our work on others
98	72	26	6. Ensure effective collaboration and increase strength-based problem solving
97	78	19	7. Assume good intention and seek clarity when it's difficult (hard on process, not on people).
97	81	16	8. Express viewpoints to individuals directly with kindness.
92	64	28	9. Acknowledge when struggling and ask for help when needed.
92	66	26	10. Be willing to take risks for innovation and learn from failure.

Aspirational Culture Team Agreements Example

1. Be open and welcoming to all through our presence, tone, words, and body language.

2. Speak up when we see problems or conflict in the workplace with a solution-focused, strength-based perspective.

3. Seek to understand and value diverse perspectives.

4. Work together as a team to accomplish goals.

5. Seek support when needed, respond to requests for help, and offer to assist team members when possible.

6. Prioritize and support work life balance and individual well-being.

7. Use transparent and direct communication.

8. Practice effective use of communication technology.

9. We uphold these agreements and other commitments through individual responsibility and in respectful conversations with our colleagues.
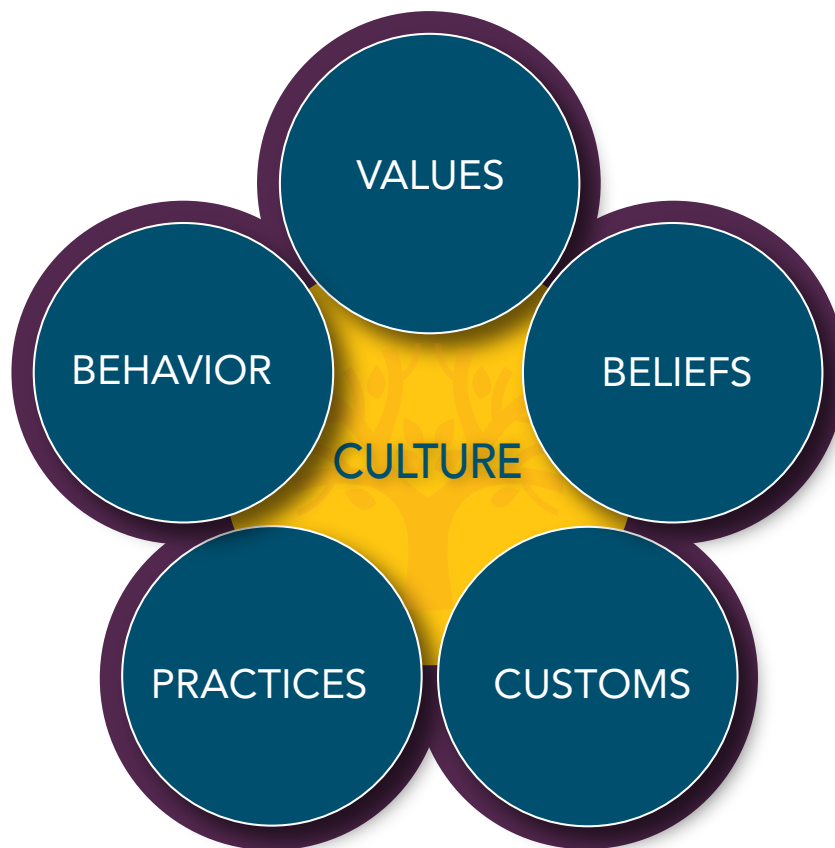
Staff Culture

Staff Support

Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Section 7: Staff Culture
Planning	Send the introduction document from Section 7 in the online toolkit at least 4 days prior to the circle to all participants.
	Hold a meeting with leadership to prepare for this section and invite the leader(s) to consider the following:
	1. The list created in Section 6 of behaviors that the group believe would lead to a healthy culture, are condensed and prioritized to create agreements that the team aspires to fulfill with each other in order to share accountability for the desired culture.
	2. How you and the facilitation team plan to support the consistent messaging of the culture agreements and to keep them in the forefront of all employees from orientation to regular team meetings to 1:1 coaching, will determine the impact on your organizational culture.
	3. These provide ongoing opportunities to learn together how to act according to the agreements. The creation and use of the culture agreements is most pointed to as a tangible and impactful outcome of the compassion resilience work.
	For additional leadership applications, please visit this page.
Purpose of Circle/ Learning Objectives	We are learning how our collegial behaviors and attitudes generate the culture we work within and what practices will increase our knowledge and understanding of each other that will foster a culture of appreciation and collaboration.

Staff Culture

Circle Topic	CR Section 7: Staff Culture
Materials/ Preparation/Time	**Time:** 45-50 minutes **Materials:** ☐ Circle kit ☐ Shared agreements created in first session ☐ Note cards ☐ Markers ☐ Flipchart paper ☐ Write questions A and B from section four of guiding questions on flipchart ☐ Copies of the following for all participants: Helpful Behaviors from Session #6, Healthy Break Activities, and if doing bonus activity, How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories Among Colleagues article **Set-up:** Up to 15 chairs arranged in a circle without furniture in the middle. **To consider:** Understanding Your Social Location as a Facilitator – Active Bystander Intervention: Training and Facilitation Guide.

Welcome/Check-In (10 minutes)	Welcome participants and complete check-in. (Go-around) How are you doing on a scale of 1-5 and what is a hashtag that would describe your (upcoming or last) week?

Grounding/Wellness Practice (5 minutes)	Distribute, discuss, and practice Healthy Break Activities. Explain that the URL offers an option to have tips emailed to you daily. Pick one for the whole group to practice or divide group into smaller groups and have small groups select one behavior to practice. Review list ahead of time, some of the behaviors will not be appropriate for your setting. If you would like to consider a different grounding practice, please review the mindfulness appendix for additional suggestions.

Review (5 minutes)	*"The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team."* – Phil Jackson Review the boundaries work from last session by handing out the Healthy Behaviors list they generated and use two behaviors to demonstrate saying "no" to support a "yes."

Circle Topic	CR Section 7: Staff Culture

Guiding Questions (25 minutes)	Designing our staff culture agreements:
	
	1. **Share:** Take a moment to reflect (shut your eyes if that would be helpful) on your vision of the most positive work environment for you to be able to be your best self in your job. After a few minutes of reflection, review the list generated in Session #6.
	
	2. (Go-around) What would you like to add to the Healthy Behaviors list based on your reflection?
	
	3. (Have participants circle on their handout and give to facilitators) Which of these are your top 5-8 priorities for staff behaviors to build and maintain the culture you desire?
	
	4. While the lists are being tallied by one facilitator, other facilitator leads the following:
	
	Working within my lane while supporting my colleagues also is crucial to a healthy culture to support compassion resilience.
	
	These questions can be helpful for teams to discern their level of connection to colleagues and other community services. A & B for personal reflection and/or journaling and C for group discussion.
	
	   a. What are my school's/organization's limitations to meet the needs of our students/clients and what other organizations are you aware of that meet those needs?
	
	   b. Do I know enough about other organizations' services to confidently refer students and families to them?
	
	   c. (Go-around) Pulling from your reflections, what does my school/organization need to do to increase my understanding of and belief in other organizations' ability to serve our students/clients and families?
	
	Share the prioritized 8-12 behaviors list.
	
	(Pair share) *What are your strengths regarding these behaviors? Where would you like to see growth in your ability to think and act in these ways? What might help you with that?*

| Closing (5 minutes) | **Share:** The science of gratitude points to our ability to alter our brains predisposition to be in threat assessment mode, which limits our ability to see the good in front of us.

(Go-around) *Share a word of gratitude for the group and pass a high five around the circle.* (Use high five as the way to pass the speaking rather than the go-around.)

Bonus Activity: In our work we often hear tough stories. How we decide to share those stories for our own support can impact our overall work culture. This article can help you think about a healthy balance from getting what you need while caring for your coworkers in the process. Hand out How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories Among Colleagues article. |

Staff Culture

What do you want to be able to say about
the culture of the staff in this organization?

VALUES

BEHAVIOR

BELIEFS

CULTURE

PRACTICES

CUSTOMS

Staff Culture

Support for Colleagues Begins With Empathy!

If you haven't used this video earlier in the toolkit activities, this is another great time to share it with staff. You could end the whole staff activity on the staff culture contract with this or email the link with description as follow-up.

As we build a compassionate culture among staff, our goal is to build skills to provide effective support, not solve anyone's problem. Support can mean many things and always includes listening or "being with" the colleague. That requires empathy.

Brené Brown's YouTube video on Empathy provides a foundational understanding of what empathy looks like and doesn't look like when someone shares their pain with us. It includes some helpful "words to say" such as: *"I really don't know what to say but I am glad you told me."*

Click to watch

As an individual, small group, or whole staff, brainstorm sentence prompts for staff to use when talking with a colleague who has been through a difficult time or difficult incident.

How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories between Colleagues

Adapted from *The Compassion Fatigue Workbook* by Francoise Mathieu. Chapter 5. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group. 2012.

Helpers who bear witness to many stories of abuse and violence notice that their own beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by repeatedly being exposed to traumatic material. – Karen Saakvitne and Laurie Anne Pearlman, T*ransforming the Pain*, p. 49

Sharing graphic details of trauma stories can spread vicarious trauma to other helpers and perpetuate a climate of cynicism and hopelessness in the workplace. Laurie Pearlman and Karen Saakvitne put forward the concept of "limited disclosure" which can be a strategy to mitigate the contamination effect of helpers *(educators)* informally debriefing one another during the normal course of a day. Almost all helpers acknowledge that they have, in the past, knowingly and unknowingly traumatized their colleagues, friends and families with stories that were probably unnecessarily graphic. Over time, limited disclosure was renamed to Low Impact Disclosure (L.I.D.). Low impact disclosure suggests that we conceptualize our tough story as being contained inside a tap. We then decide, via the process described below, how much information we will release and at what pace.

The process of L.I.D. involves four key steps:

1. **Increased Self Awareness** – How do you debrief when you have heard or seen hard things? Take a survey of a typical work week and note all of the ways in which you formally and informally debrief yourself with your colleagues. Note the amount of detail you provide them with (and they you), and the manner in which this is done: do you do it in formal way, at a peer meeting, or in the hall by your classroom door? What is most helpful to you in dealing with difficult stories?

2. **Fair Warning** – Before you tell anyone around you a difficult story, you must give them fair warning. This is the key difference between formal debriefs and ad hoc ones: If I am your supervisor, and I know that you are coming to tell me a traumatic story, I will be prepared to hear this information.

3. **Consent** – Once you have given warning, you need to ask for consent. This can be as simple as saying: *"I need to debrief something with you, is this a good time?"* or *"I heard something really hard today, and I could really use a debrief, could I talk to you about it?"* The listener then has a chance to decline, or to qualify what they are able/ready to hear. For example, if you are my work colleague I may say to you: *"I have 15 minutes and I can hear some of your story, but would you be able to tell me what happened without any of the gory details?"*

4. **Low Impact Disclosure** – Now that you have received consent from your colleague, you can decide how much to release from the Tap. Imagine that you are telling a story starting with the outer circle of the story (ie., the least traumatic information) and you are slowly moving in toward the core (the very traumatic information) at a gradual pace. You may, in the end, need to tell the graphic details, or you may not, depending on how disturbing the story has been for you.

Questions to ask yourself before you share graphic details:

- **Is this conversation a: Debriefing? Consultation? Work lunch? Parking lot chat? A social event? Pillow talk? Other…**

- **Is the listener: Aware that you are about to share graphic details? Able to control the flow of what you are about to share with them?**

- **If it is a consultation or a debriefing: Has the listener been informed that it is a debriefing, or are you sitting in their office chatting about your day? Have you given them fair warning? How much detail is enough? How much is too much? If this is a staff meeting or a case conference, is sharing the graphic detail necessary to the discussion?** Sometimes it is, often it is not. For example, discussing a child being removed from the home, you may need to say, *"The child suffered severe neglect and some physical abuse at the hands of his mother"* and that may be enough. Don't assume you need to disclose all the details right away

Some additional suggestions: Experiment with Low Impact Disclosure (L.I.D.) and see whether you can still feel properly debriefed without giving all the tough details. You may find that at times you do need to disclose all the details which is an important process in staying healthy as helpers. And at other times you may find that you did not need this.