



# Inclusion Safety

Excerpt from ***The Four Stages of Psychological Safety*** by Timothy R. Clark, Porchlight Books, 2020.

The first stage of psychological safety is informal admittance to the team—whether it’s the neighborhood book club or the College of Cardinals. In other words, the members of the social collective accept you and grant you a shared identity. You are now destigmatized as an outsider and brought into the fold. But it’s important to understand that inclusion safety isn’t merely tolerance; it’s not an attempt to cover up differences or politely pretend they’re not there. No, inclusion safety is provided by genuinely inviting others into your society based on the sole qualification that they possess flesh and blood. This transcendent connection supersedes all other differences.

As a species, we have both natural instincts and acquired socialization to detect social boundaries as well as gestures of invitation or rejection across those boundaries—to perceive the levels of respect and permission offered to us.

For example, when a new high school student asks her peers, “Can I eat lunch with you guys?” The response to that question extends inclusion safety if the students say yes. If they say no, the individual is not allowed to cross the threshold of inclusion. In a more subtle version of this encounter, the student is simply ignored by her peers as she passes by. In some cases, we ignore each other as a gentle way to pour scorn. Regardless, it hurts when you’re cast off and acceptance is denied. As one poignant example of the acute need for inclusion, an American College Health Association survey of undergraduate college students found that 63 percent of the students surveyed reported feeling “very lonely.” That’s nearly two-thirds of the student population. In spite of our material plenty, we increasingly suffer from social and emotional poverty.

Inclusion safety is created and sustained through renewed admittance to the group and repeated indications of acceptance. In the business world, we are formally admitted to a team when we’re hired, but informal membership is granted or withheld by the people with whom we work. You may be the new hire on the software development team, which gives you official membership status, but you still need the team’s sociocultural acceptance to gain inclusion safety. Giving inclusion safety is a moral imperative.

## DEFINE

### Inclusion Safety:

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### Example:

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# Learner Safety

Excerpt from ***The Four Stages of Psychological Safety*** by Timothy R. Clark, Porchlight Books, 2020.

Learner safety indicates that you feel safe to engage in the discovery process, ask questions, experiment, and even make mistakes—not if, but when, you make them. Without learner safety, you will likely remain passive due to the risk of acting beyond a tacit line of permission. In children, adolescents, and adults, the patterns are the same: We all bring inhibitions and anxiety to the learning process. An environment that grants safe passage to learning opens the buds of potential, cultivating confidence, resilience, and independence.

While individuals can remain relatively passive in the stage of inclusion safety, learner safety requires them to exert themselves and develop self-efficacy. They are no longer spectators. The transition to learner safety means crossing into the anxiety of the unknown. When learner safety is present, the leader and team may even supply some of the confidence that the individual lacks. For instance, days after the French philosopher Albert Camus won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1957, he wrote a letter of gratitude to his elementary school teacher. He said, “Dear Monsieur Germain, Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the small poor child that I was, without your teaching and example, none of this would have happened.”

Learner safety implies activity and participation within defined limits. For example, I observed an apprentice plumber assisting a more experienced master plumber at a job site. The apprentice was given learner safety to observe, ask questions, prepare tools and materials, and contribute in a limited way to the work. As the master plumber responded positively to the apprentice’s questions, the apprentice released more discretionary effort to learn, do, and become.

## DEFINE

**Learner Safety:**

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**Example:**

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# Contributor Safety

Excerpt from *The Four Stages of Psychological Safety* by Timothy R. Clark, Porchlight Books, 2020.

As individual performances climb higher in a nurturing environment that offers respect and permission, we enter the stage of contributor safety, which invites the individual to participate as an active and full fledged member of the team. Contributor safety is an invitation and an expectation to perform work in an assigned role with appropriate boundaries, on the assumption that you can perform competently in your role. If you don't offend the social norms of the team, you're normally granted contributor safety when you gain competency in the required skills and assigned tasks.

The transition to contributor safety may also be tied to credentials, title, position, and the formal conferral of authority. For example, when a coach selects a player on an athletic team to join the starting lineup, there's often an immediate transition to contributor safety. When a hospital hires a well-qualified surgeon, she's formally granted contributor safety. Thus, where formal authority or credentials are prerequisite to a role, they act as partial proxy for psychological safety based on the official or legal right to contribute.

Despite an ability to do the job, an individual may nonetheless be denied contributor safety for illegitimate reasons, including the arrogance or insecurity of the leader, personal or institutional bias, prejudice or discrimination, prevailing team norms that reinforce insensitivity, a lack of empathy, or aloofness. Contributor safety emerges when the individual performs well, but the leader and team must do their part to provide encouragement and appropriate autonomy.

## DEFINE

### Contributor Safety:

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### Example:

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# Challenger Safety

Excerpt from *The Four Stages of Psychological Safety* by Timothy R. Clark, Porchlight Books, 2020.

The final stage of psychological safety allows you to challenge the status quo without retribution, reprisal, or the risk of damaging your personal standing or reputation. It gives you the confidence to speak truth to power when you think something needs to change and it's time to say so. Armed with challenger safety, individuals overcome the pressure to conform and can enlist themselves in the creative process.

Analyzing its massive database of more than fifty thousand skills, LinkedIn conducted a study to identify the most important soft skills. Can you guess what skill was most in demand? Answer: creativity. But creativity is never enough. Only when people feel free and able do they apply their creativity. Each of us protects our creativity under emotional lock and key. We turn the key from the inside out—when it's safe to do so. Without challenger safety, there's little chance of that because threats, judgement, and other limiting beliefs block curiosity in ourselves and others.

A middle manager from a global corporation summed it up this way, "I'm very careful to stick my neck out and challenge the status quo. If I do and don't get my head chopped off, I'll do it again. If I get my head chopped off, you can rest assured I'll keep my ideas to myself."

This statement illustrates the self-censoring instinct all humans possess and the inherent competitive advantage that challenger safety provides. The open climate of challenger safety allows the organization to circulate local knowledge from the bottom of the organization to the top to increase its adaptive capacity. But that's not all: it also empowers people to be curious and creative.

Those that create challenger safety gain a competitive advantage because they are able to accelerate the process of innovation.

## DEFINE

### Challenger Safety:

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### Example:

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