

Six Necessary Safety Categories

The Sanctuary Model, a trauma-informed model developed by Sandra Bloom, PhD., and Joseph Soderaro, LCSW, identifies four essential safety scenarios for a healthy developing, functioning, and/or recovering individual to experience: physical, psychological, social, and moral safety. These safety components strive to reduce instances of trauma and retraumatization experiences for individuals residing in residential and institutional facilities. However, trauma-informed interactions are important for all counselors, staff, and volunteers interacting with people who have experienced trauma and/or those who have traditionally demonstrated symptoms of trauma in recovery. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals of all ages seeking mental health services.

The Positive Human Development model in recovery from trauma promotes principles from the Sanctuary Model and endorses the four safety categories identified by Bloom and Soderaro. However, the Positive Human Development model identifies two additional necessary safety categories that are important in the successful delivery of trauma-informed services, interactions, and programs designed to promote psychological recovery and positive lifespan human development. Ally Jamieson, MSW, has identified medical and cultural safety as categories imperative for recovery and resiliency.

Cultural safety is oftentimes overlooked or viewed as an experience that would be ‘ideal’ but not ‘necessary’ for safe development and/or resiliency. As a result, thousands of children enter the foster care system every year who are deprived from living in a home that speaks their language, promotes their cultural values and traditions, and deprived from foster homes that honor the importance for the child to actively interact with members from their culture in regular events and functions. For example, a child might be placed in a foster home that provides physical, psychological, social, moral, and medical safe experiences. But if this foster home fails to honor and promote positive and consistent cultural experiences, the child is in danger of losing their heritage and in essence, losing a core component of their identity.

Additionally, without specific advocacy for medical safety, an individual’s physical and psychological safeties could be in direct danger. For example, a child whose symptoms are rooted in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) might be misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and prescribed medication accordingly. Without sufficient and consistent monitoring of the medical influence/necessity of the prescribed medications, a child might experience detrimental side effects on their

developing brain and a reduced ability to recover from the direct cause of their PTSD symptomology.

Striving to emphasize program objectives around obtaining the following six safety categories can result in recovery from trauma, resiliency, and the opportunity to thrive in communities through continual positive human development.

Physical Safety

Physical safety is defined by an absence of any kind of violence – physical, emotional, sexual, or verbal - including suicidality and self-destructive behavior; freedom from substance abuse and other addictions; healthy, safe, relational sexual behavior; the avoidance of unnecessary risks; and maintaining good health practices.

Physical safety is the easiest aspect of safety to describe, largely because it relies on tangible and concrete factors. Physical safety is usually what people think of when describing the sense of being safe, since without it, other forms of safety are difficult to achieve. Locked doors, bars on windows, straitjackets, seclusion and restraints, weapons of increasingly lethal force - have all been used – and misused – in the service of physical safety.

Unfortunately, however, an exclusive focus on the maintenance of physical safety tends to result in the creation of environments more like prisons than therapeutic spaces. Physical safety alone does not constitute a safe environment for growth. Likewise, breaches in physical safety generally do not occur until the other forms of safety have already been violated.

To Be Physically Safe Means Being Free of:

- ◆ Violence toward others in any form: physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual
- ◆ Being a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, verbal abuse or coercion
- ◆ Substance abuse
- ◆ Thoughts, desires, or acts of deliberately harming oneself
- ◆ Exposing oneself to risky sexual behavior
- ◆ Dangerous risk-taking behavior
- ◆ Exposing oneself to physical hazards (i.e., not using seatbelts, problematic sleep arrangements)
- ◆ Failing to get adequate medical care
- ◆ Being threatened or threatening others

- ◆ Occupational insecurity
- ◆ Poor financial management

To be Physically Safe Permits and Encourages:

- ◆ Provision for basic needs
- ◆ Commitment to non-violence to self and others
- ◆ Being able to recognize and avoid danger
- ◆ Healthy, safe, relational sexual behavior
- ◆ Good health practices
- ◆ Healthy expression of anger = assertiveness
- ◆ Safe, reliable relationships
- ◆ Opportunities for safe mastery experiences
- ◆ Occupational exploration
- ◆ Good financial management
- ◆ Clear, firm, but flexible interpersonal boundaries
- ◆ Healthy, nonviolent disciplinary practices with children
- ◆ Able to perceive and avoid danger

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to the ability to be safe with oneself, to rely on one's own ability to self-protect against any destructive impulses coming from within oneself or deriving from other people and to keep oneself out of harm's way. Psychological safety is the ability to direct one's attention and focus, know oneself, to be able to exercise self-control and self-discipline, have a sense of internal authority that is fair and non-abusive, and to be able to express one's sense of humor, creativity and spirituality.

Trauma robs victims of their sense of personal integrity and childhood trauma prevents the development of a clear and integrated sense of self. The ability to self-protect is one of the most shattering losses that occur as a result of traumatic experience and it manifests as an inability to protect one's boundaries from the trespass of other people.

Another loss is a sense of self-efficacy, the basic sense of experiencing oneself as having the ability to relate to the world on one's own terms without abusing power and *without being abused by it*. A sense of personal safety is achieved as the injured individual learns how to be effective in protecting themselves from violations of their personal and psychological space. An environment seeking to ensure psychological safety must gain a healthy respect for the various ways in which behavior that appears to be maladaptive in

the present once served as a useful and even life-saving adaptive response in past environments. Normalizing what has been seen by the rest of the trauma survivor's world as abnormal, even "crazy" behavior helps reduce the shame associated with a psychiatric diagnosis and helps to motivate the person towards the possibility of change, of substituting relationships for the problematic behaviors including substance abuse.

An environment that promotes psychological safety will provide opportunities for psychoeducation, demystifying what have previously been inaccessible psychological concepts, and making reading materials and other media available for teaching, discussion and understanding. Treatment thus becomes an intensive educational experience.

To achieve psychological safety, we must ***make sense out of*** what has happened to us or our reality is not, and won't be, bearable.

To Be Psychologically Safe Means Being Free of:

- ◆ Exposing yourself to unnecessary dangers including psychologically damaging relationships
- ◆ Inability to concentrate or focus
- ◆ Loss of control over oneself
- ◆ Not being able to stay organized
- ◆ Being helpless in situations that you could control
- ◆ Inability to follow rules, structure
- ◆ Being shamed or humiliated
- ◆ Repeated failure
- ◆ Being bullied or bullying others

To Be Psychologically Safe Permits and Encourages:

- ◆ Self-protection
- ◆ Child protection
- ◆ Attention and focus
- ◆ Self-knowledge
- ◆ Self-efficacy
- ◆ Self-esteem
- ◆ Self-empowerment
- ◆ Self-control
- ◆ Self-discipline

Social Safety

Social safety describes the sense of feeling safe with other people. A socially safe setting is one in which we feel secure, cared for, trusted, free to express our deepest thoughts and feelings without censure, unafraid of being abandoned or misjudged, unfettered by the constant pressure of interpersonal competition and yet stimulated to be thoughtful, solve problems, be creative, and be spontaneous. A socially safe environment will provide non-abusive attachment opportunities and a willingness to tolerate and contain the expression of affect within the social environment. This is the kind of setting that human beings need to maximize their emotional and intellectual functioning in an integrated way.

The entire community serves as the agent of change.

Our social system is created to produce human beings who will fit into a highly industrialized, competitive, often cutthroat capitalist environment that still prepares at least half of us for mortal combat. Our social system is not designed to maximize the human potential for growth, self-exploration, mutual co-operation, nurturing of the young, artistic endeavor, or creative expression and exploration.

People who have been interpersonally violated might have an unclear sense of socially “normal” individual ...They may have been exposed to abusive authority and therefore the social environment must model responsible authority at every level of the staff. Victims of trauma- particularly interpersonal trauma - have serious difficulties in their ability and willingness to trust other people for good reason.

To Be Socially Safe Means Being Free of:

- ◆ Abusive interactions with others
- ◆ Social Isolation
- ◆ Social anxiety and awkwardness
- ◆ Poor boundaries between self and others
- ◆ Lack of empathy for self and others
- ◆ Inclinations to gossip and spread rumors
- ◆ Bigotry and hatred
- ◆ Constant conflicts with others

To Be Socially Safe Permits and Encourages:

- ◆ Safe attachments
- ◆ Safety in a group
- ◆ Social responsibility
- ◆ Healthy and supportive relationships
- ◆ Sustaining friendships
- ◆ Clear boundaries
- ◆ Healthy assertiveness
- ◆ Empathy for self and others
- ◆ Direct communication with others
- ◆ Ability to forgive, forget, move on
- ◆ Ability to resolve conflicts
- ◆ Healthy exercise of responsible authority
- ◆ Ability to follow rules
- ◆ Ability to make safe rules

Moral Safety

Moral safety is a subject that is even more difficult to describe. It is a search and a process. It is an attempt to reduce the hypocrisy that is present, both explicitly and implicitly, in our social systems. A morally safe environment is one that permits an ongoing ethical dialogue, a search for higher meaning and purpose.

Such a setting articulates and manifests in practice the values that it represents – honesty, compassion, a search for integrity, kindness, courage, justice, an honoring of the past and hope for the future. Exposure to interpersonal violence is fundamentally about the abuse of power and it shakes the very foundations of meaning and moral purpose, the very deepest spiritual and philosophical beliefs.

A health-promoting, morally safe environment therefore, is one that wrestles constantly with the issue of power and how power can be utilized in ways that promote health and healing instead of sickness, abuse and decay.

Safe environments must be able to thoroughly analyze and address abuses of power on the part of both clients and staff in ways that promote learning, growth, and change. A morally safe environment engages in an on-going struggle with the issues of honesty and integrity. In any environment *this means beginning with a self-evaluative look* at our therapeutic presumptions, our training, our rationalizations, our fixed beliefs, and our practice.

Each system must look at its own issues with authority and become willing to participate in, not just manage, the relational web that forms the structure of the program, willing to ask questions like, “What is it that we are actually doing, and what are we trying to achieve?” “Do the means *justify* the ends?” “Do the activities we are prescribing lead to autonomy, connectedness, and empowerment **or** dependence, alienation and helplessness?”

To Be Morally Safe Means Being Free of:

- ◆ Violence
- ◆ Dishonesty
- ◆ Unjust treatment of others and/or oneself
- ◆ Hypocrisy and self-delusion
- ◆ Discrimination and hatred
- ◆ Abusive use of power and arrogance
- ◆ Cruelty

To Be Morally Safe Permits and Encourages:

- ◆ Honesty
- ◆ Ethical dialogue
- ◆ Tolerance
- ◆ Courage
- ◆ Respect
- ◆ Integrity
- ◆ Compassion
- ◆ Commitment to human rights
- ◆ Commitment to life

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety refers to the overall experience of an individual's ability to live, promote, honor, and explore their family's cultural heritage. An individual/family is in the best position to experience resiliency, recovery, and an overall ability to thrive when they are in an environment that promotes and values their cultural heritage and when they are in an environment that strives to respect the cultural heritage of others. Recovery from trauma and resiliency requires one's personal culture to be respected and acknowledged on a regular basis, with active participation in cultural events and activities.

When an individual loses their cultural heritage they lose the ability to make sense of many life experiences which can lead to a loss of self identity. This can result in unsafe psychological, physical, social, and moral experiences, whether the cultural loss is conscious or not. Without awareness of where we come from we have little understanding of who we are. Without this comprehensive understanding we are at a loss to understand how to heal from psychological wounds, as well as who we would like to strive to become.

An old Buddhist adage says the best way to understand our present is to look to our past, and the best way to foresee our future is to look to our present. If we remove cultural safety from an individual's experience in life, we are not only devastating that individual's ability to find safety of personal identity in the present, but we are robbing an entire culture of people who can enable the culture itself to survive in the future. Once a culture is forgotten, entire generations are left to grieve a great loss with little insight into how to move forward. This unconscious trauma is one of the most under recognized and underestimated causes of individual and social suffering.

Medical Safety

Medical safety describes an overall experience of honesty, integrity, the Hippocratic Oath, participation and consent, and accountability for all individuals receiving medical, psychiatric, and behavioral healthcare. This means that medical, psychological, and behavioral intervention negative side effects never outweigh or cancel out intervention benefits and always include consumer participation in determining efficacy of intervention.

Accountability is paramount in medical safety. While it is imperative that consumers be given full disclosure about medication, interventions, and procedures, it is not their responsibility or expertise to have all knowledge necessary to make a sole judgments

about the multiple variables that could result from said medication, intervention, or procedure. Therefore, it is up to the practitioner to responsibly and consistently monitor each consumer for any side effects resulting from intervention. This affords the practitioner the ability to discern effectiveness of intervention in relation to unintended effects while enabling the consumer to participate in the monitoring process.

Medical safety also describes the responsible medical response to psychiatric and biological experiences. It is important that new psychiatric and biological symptoms be evaluated in relation to medication changes and discussed with the consumer until the consumer experiences resolve and until the practitioner has exhausted alternative medication options if deemed necessary.

Medical safety is the overall well-being associated with taking medications that reduce negative psychiatric and biological symptoms. If a medical intervention is available that will reduce suffering, it is the obligation of the practitioner to provide such medication to the consumer and afford the consumer with sufficient information that will demonstrate the benefits of taking the medication. Full disclosure to the consumer will afford informed consent to take place for both benefits and potential negative side effects.

Many people believe medical safety is a “yes” or “no” philosophy – you either “believe” in psychiatric medication benefits or you “don’t believe” in psychiatric medication benefits. This debate serves no function in the category of medication safety and diligent attention must be paid to identify how this debate might be influencing personal views.

Medical safety describes medical well-being, which can result from medication in some instances, switched up medication in other instances, and withdrawal of medication in other instances. Each individual has different medical needs and to use a black and white, yes or no, moral belief system to decide a medical decision is irresponsible, unethical, and dangerous. Medical safety supposes that a person has the right to receive medical care that affords them peace of mind that whatever medical or psychological intervention is taking place is in their best interest and will promote recovery and well-being; Anything less compromises medical safety.