

Choosing curiosity over judgment

After this huddle, staff should be able to:

- **Identify** the difference between a judgment and a curious question.
- **Discuss** how assuming positive intent can reduce workplace tension.
- Have resources ready, such as policies, employee assistance programs, or SafeCare BC resources.
- Choose a scenario that fits your workplace and read it aloud.
- Use the guiding questions to lead the discussion.
- Use huddle leader notes as support while leading the discussion.
- Keep the discussion short to about 5-10 minutes.

How to run the safety huddle

As the huddle leader, do the following:

- Before the huddle, review the huddle content and huddle leader notes.



Definitions

Language is not neutral; the words we choose directly set the tone for our workplaces. When we reach for quick labels or judgments about why someone is doing something, it often creates a culture of “watching and whispering” that makes people feel unsafe. Choosing curiosity means pausing to ask what else might be going on before we jump to conclusions about behaviours.

Scenario for long-term care

Maryam is a highly experienced care aide who has worked at Pine Grove Village for 18 years. Lately, she has noticed that a newer staff member, Chloe, consistently leaves the floor exactly when her shift ends, even if the morning routine is still slightly behind. Maryam feels frustrated, thinking, “Chloe just doesn’t care about the team. She’s only here for the paycheque and leaves us to clean up the mess.”

One afternoon, Maryam is about to make a sharp comment to Chloe about her “lack of commitment” just as Chloe is grabbing her coat. Maryam pauses, remembering that she doesn’t really know why Chloe leaves so abruptly. She can either deliver the criticism or ask a question.

Guiding questions for long-term care

- What is the “judgment” Maryam has already made about Chloe, and how might that affect how they work together?
- If Maryam says, “You never stay a minute late to help us,” how is Chloe likely to respond?
- What are some “unseen” reasons a colleague might need to leave exactly on time?
- How could Maryam rephrase her frustration into a curious question instead?

Scenario for home care

Mai is a home health care aide who often feels the pressure of travelling between clients. She frequently checks in with her coordinator,

Maria, via a messaging app. Lately, Maria’s responses have been very short. Sometimes they are just one-word answers or a “thumbs up” emoji.

Mai starts to feel like Maria is being dismissive or annoyed with her questions. She thinks, “Maria is so impatient. She clearly thinks I’m incompetent because I’m asking for clarification.” Mai finds herself wanting to stop reaching out altogether to avoid feeling judged.



Guiding questions for home care

- How does Mai’s internal “label” of Maria as “impatient” change her willingness to communicate?
- In a busy home care organization, what might be happening on Maria’s end that Mai can’t see?
- How could Mai use an “I statement” to clear the air without sounding like she is accusing Maria?

Huddle leader notes

1. Create a safe space:
 - Listen, respect all views, and be mindful of others' challenges.
 - Guide the discussion to focus on what participants can control.
 - Move the conversation from complaints to solutions, strengths, and helpful actions.
 - Invite anyone with specific concerns to talk with you after the huddle.
2. Key discussion points: Use the objectives and key discussion points below to guide the huddle if needed.
 - **Judgment shuts doors:** Labelling a colleague (e.g., “lazy,” “unprofessional”) usually makes them defensive and stops real communication.
 - **Curiosity opens them:** Asking “I wonder what’s going on?” shifts the energy from resentment to understanding.
 - **Generosity is a choice:** When we talk about people generously, we create a space where they are more likely to be generous toward us.
 - **Unseen burdens:** We often don’t know the full story of our colleagues’ lives (second jobs, childcare, eldercare).

Additional resources

SafeCare BC | *Using “I” statements to build team trust:* Learn how “I” statements can reduce conflict, build trust, and support better teamwork.

SafeCare BC | *The power of “I” statements:* Use this info sheet to learn how “I” statements

can be used to shift your workplace communication from blame to connection.

SafeCare BC | *Psychological health and safety policy template:* This ready-to-use template provides a customizable framework that promotes well-being, prevents psychological harm, and outlines roles and responsibilities across all levels of your organization.

SafeCare BC | *Words matter:* This info sheet offers four practical tools you can use to help build health workplace relationships.

SafeCare BC | *Organizational culture:* This safety huddle explains how strong organizational culture fosters employee engagement, collaboration, and productivity, while a weak or toxic culture can lead to dissatisfaction and high turnover.

SafeCare BC | *Psychological health and safety in my workplace:* This safety huddle helps staff describe why psychological health and safety in the workplace matters.

SafeCare BC | *Workplace civility and respect: Building a positive team culture:* This safety huddle aims to foster a positive work environment for healthcare workers by promoting civility and respect.

SafeCare BC | *Civility Matters toolkit:* This toolkit provides practice-based scenarios, strategies and resources for addressing workplace (in)civility and supportive workplace relationships.

