Safety huddle

SafeCare BC

Recognizing and managing psychological demands in healthcare

After this huddle, staff should be able to:

- **Identify** common psychological demands present in your specific role.
- **Describe** how emotional demands like grief or responsive behaviours can impact your well-being.
- **Apply** one team-based strategy to better support colleagues facing high emotional demands.

How to run the safety huddle

As the huddle leader, do the following:

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



Definitions

Psychological demands are the emotional and social parts of your job. In healthcare, this includes things like dealing with illness and grief, managing difficult behaviours, or navigating complex relationships with families. When these demands are higher than the support available, it can impact your mental health and well-being.

Scenario for long-term care

Amara is a care aide at Willow Creek Home who has cared for Mr. Henderson for over two years. Mr. Henderson's health is declining rapidly, and he is now receiving end-of-life care. Amara spends much of her shift sitting with him, navigating his physical pain and the quiet sadness of the room.



During her shift, Mr. Henderson's daughter arrives, visibly distraught, and begins questioning Amara about why her father isn't "getting better" today. Amara feels a heavy weight in her chest, trying to balance her own sadness about Mr. Henderson's decline while trying to provide emotional comfort to his daughter. As she leaves the room to start her next task, she feels emotionally exhausted and unsure how to reset for her next resident.

Guiding questions for long-term care

- What specific psychological demands is Amara facing in this moment?
- How might caring through loss affect Amara's ability to finish her shift safely?
- How could Amara ask for support from her team right after this interaction?

Facilitation tip: Acknowledge that exposure to death and dying is one of the toughest parts of the job. If the group focuses only on the work of end-of-life care, redirect them to the emotional toll it takes on the person providing that care.

Scenario for home care

Sanjay is a home health worker visiting Mrs. Gable, who lives with advanced dementia. Mrs. Gable is often confused and, during today's visit, becomes agitated and yells at Sanjay, accusing him of stealing her hairbrush.

Sanjay knows this is a responsive behavior caused by her illness, but the constant verbal aggression is starting to make him feel anxious before every visit. He finds himself bracing for his next visit when he is still blocks away from her home.

Today, the behaviour is more intense than usual, and Sanjay feels his patience wearing thin. He needs to finish providing personal care, but he is worried about his own emotional safety and how to respond without escalating the situation.

Guiding questions for home care

- How does constant exposure to responsive or challenging behaviours impact a worker's mental health over time?

- What strategies can Sanjay use in the moment to protect his own well-being?
- How should Sanjay communicate these emotional demands to his supervisor?

Facilitation tip: Watch for staff who might feel guilty about being bothered by a resident's behaviour. Remind the team that it is normal to find verbal aggression draining, even when you know it's part of a clinical diagnosis.

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.
    - **Team support:** Checking in with a teammate after a tough shift can prevent stress from building up.
    - **Resource awareness:** Remind the team about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and how to access it.
    - **Work-life harmony:** It is important to have energy left for your personal life after a shift.

Additional resources

SafeCare BC | Tools for managing stress and burnout - Webinar

SafeCare BC | Stress management- Webinar

SafeCare BC| Breaking point: The impact of workplace stress on healthcare workers - Article

SafeCare BC | Caring through loss – Silent grief - Safety huddle

SafeCare BC | Caring through loss – Supporting grief in the workplace - Safety huddle

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health | Evidence-based actions for psychological competencies and demands

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health | Putting psychological competencies and demands on the agenda

Safety Huddle | Recognizing and managing psychological demands

Huddle leader: _____

Date: _____

Attendance:

Name:	Initial

Notes