

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY and WHY IT MATTERS

A practical guide for School Association Committees



WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

Psychological safety refers to an environment where every member:

- is trusted and feels safe
- can be honest with other association members and in conversations
- is able to speak up when they need to
- has the freedom and security to try new things and make mistakes
- feels safe enough to be creative and take risks.

In short: When people feel safe to bring their whole selves, ideas, concerns, feedback and mistakes, the group performs better, learns, innovates, and maintains wellbeing.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR SCHOOL ASSOCIATION COMMITTEES

As members of a School Association or committee under a Tasmanian State school's arrangement, you hold an important role in working together with school leadership, staff, families and the broader community. Establishing psychological safety in your meetings and interactions means:

- Everyone's voice (parents, caregivers, staff, community representatives) can be heard without fear.
- Constructive challenge, innovation and honest discussion are welcomed (not shut down).
- The committee fosters a positive environment and builds trust with the school.
- Potential risks (unhealthy culture, disengagement, fear of speaking up) are reduced.
- You align with broader DECYP policy expectations about safe, inclusive, respectful partnerships.



LINK TO DECYP POLICY FRAMEWORK

The DECYP "Policies, legislation and data" page includes key policy clusters such as:

- "Wellbeing, behaviour and safety" (behaviour management, general health & safety)
- "Families and school community" (which includes School Associations for Tasmanian Government schools)
- It is vital that your committee's culture and operations reflect these policy expectations; in how you engage, how decisions are made, how conversations are held, and how all members feel safe to contribute.

BUILDING A SAFE CULTURE – FIVE KEY BEHAVIOURS

1. Open leadership and facilitation

- Committee chairs model honesty and create a safe environment.
- Let members know they are trusted and their contributions matter.
- Create meeting agendas that allow time for reflection, concerns and “what’s working / what’s not”.

2. Encourage speaking up and safe conversations

- Explicitly invite input, questions, dissenting views.
- Make it safe for someone to say, “I don’t understand this”, “I’m worried about this”, or “Could we try this differently?”.
- Respond constructively when issues are raised; avoid shutting down ideas or concerns.

3. Set clear norms, working together agreements and/or code of conducts

- Agree on behaviour expectations for committee interactions: respectful listening, no blame, one-person speaks at a time, confidentiality where needed.
- Define how decisions are made, how feedback will be received and acted upon.
- Ensure meeting minutes / actions reflect that voices were heard, and what follow-up will occur.

4. Focus on relationships and trust

- Invest time in getting to know each other: parents, school staff, community reps.
- Recognise contributions and show appreciation regularly.
- Acknowledge mistakes and learn from them openly; share “lessons learnt” and “growing”.

5. Embed wellbeing and continuous improvement

- Build agenda items or informal check-ins about how people are going: “Is there anything stopping people from speaking up?”
- Review meeting culture and conduct periodically: what’s working, what could improve.
- Offer opportunities for training or discussion around respectful behaviours, inclusive engagement, managing conflict.

SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEM: “PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY CHECK”

Example:

At the start of each meeting, spend 5 minutes on a quick round:

- One thing I appreciated since last meeting.
- One thing I’m cautious about / need help with.
- One idea I’d like to try differently.

This helps surface issues and keeps the culture healthy.



WHAT TO DO IF THINGS GO OFF TRACK?

- If someone feels unable to speak up or you notice a pattern of people staying silent: pause and ask “What might we be missing? Is there any view not being heard?”
- If a conversation becomes unsafe (e.g., person dominates, dismisses others, personal attacks): remind the group of the agreed norms, and refocus on facts and shared goals.
- If there is a serious concern (bullying, harassment, discrimination): refer to the relevant DECYP policy (e.g., the “Wellbeing behaviour and safety” policy cluster) and act accordingly.



YOUR ROLE AS COMMITTEE + SCHOOL PARTNER

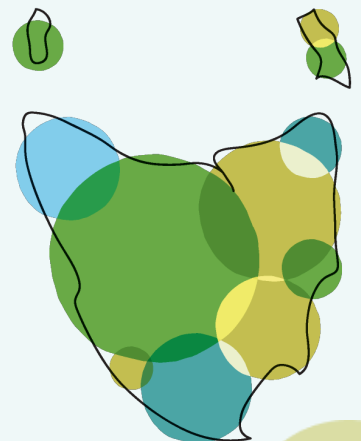
- You are a community voice, partner and advocate. Psychological safety matters for your own committee culture and for how you partner with the school.
- Ensure your committee operations reflect the expectations of DECYP policies around safety, community engagement and partnerships.
- When you are negotiating issues, planning events, supporting school leadership or contributing to strategic discussions; apply these psychological safety principles.

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For further support contact

Email: info@tasso.org.au

Phone: (03) 6243 7718



Inspired by the ACT “Psychological Safety in Schools” guide (Education Support UK) and aligned with DECYP policy framework.



(03) 6243 7718



www.tasso.org.au



info@tasso.org.au