

Chapter 11: Worker Safety and Well-Being

Section 1: Definitions of Staff Safety

The intention of the Workforce Safety and Well-being Chapter is to build an equitable, consistent, and informed Oregon Child Welfare workforce. While the potential harm from the “nature of the job” is present, every precaution and opportunity should be taken to identify, define and protect the safety of our staff. This requires multiple levels of responsibility and accountability from individuals, supervisors, policy makers and leadership. This shared responsibility will lead to safer conditions for our workforce and better outcomes for the children and families and families we serve. This chapter was co-created alongside staff of every role across every district in the state. Revisions and changes are expected to be made as our agency’s safety culture shifts.

“Safety” to be described as a state to which protection from hazards, conditions, danger, risk, or injury are controlled to preserve the health and well-being of the Oregon Child Welfare Workforce. Safety is to be further defined and experienced in various aspects:

- I. **Physical Safety:** Protection in the visible world from hazards, conditions, danger, or injury to the physical body.
- II. **Psychological Safety:** The belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999).
- III. **Emotional Safety:** Security and protection from circumstances which elicit reactive feelings, emotions, and environments that negatively impact mental health.
- IV. **Worksite/Occupational Safety:** Proactive worksite protection from office and community environmental hazards.
- V. **Financial Safety:** Protection from fiscal instability to provide security in agency funding, staff stability in position and compensation.
- VI. **Social Safety:** Protection from identity-based discrimination and prejudice including, but not limited to: race, gender, sexuality, sex, disability, caste, language, country of origin, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic standing.

Other terminology related to workforce safety:

- I. **Workforce Well-being:** The simultaneous and holistic supports for ongoing individual and organizational care related to health, happiness, stability and overall life satisfaction.
- II. **Safety Culture:** A culture in which values, attitudes and behaviors support a safe, engaged workforce and reliable, consistent leadership and operational support. (Vogus, Sutcliffe & Weick, 2010). Safety cultures strive to balance individual accountability with system accountability and value open communication, feedback, and continuous learning and improvement (Chassin & Loeb, 2012).
- III. **Equity:** Distinguished from equality, equity refers to fairness and justice by acknowledging adjustments needed to minimize bias, systemic imbalances and barriers.
- IV. **Unsafe:** An imminent harmful action or environmental condition, which could lead to physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual, or emotional impact.
- V. **Uncomfortable:** The feelings associated with being ill-equipped or incompatible. This could present as an experiential disadvantage or cognitive dissonance that threatens previously adopted beliefs.

Understanding and having awareness of the difference between being uncomfortable and unsafe can assist in navigating new experiences; ones that do not compromise an aspect of safety. Using this Venn Diagram below can assist in determining which you are experiencing.

Unsafe or Uncomfortable Venn Diagram

Unsafe Vs. Uncomfortable

