Compassionate Communication Toolkit
for Staff, Faculty and Student Leaders
Quick Reference Version

REMINDERS FOR LEADERS:
You are a leader, not a counsellor, but being attuned to and mindful of the emotional tone, mental health and well-being of your team (and yourself) and building positive relationships with your team will make you a more effective and emotionally intelligent leader.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY, FREQUENTLY, AND COMPASSIONATELY

Reminders
- Communication is a two-way street
- Try to understand what it's like for others by placing yourself in their shoes (express curiosity without judgement)
- *Ask yourself*:
  - What does my team need from me?
  - What are my skills?
  - How can I help?
  - Are there any blind spots influencing the decision I'm about to make (or the decision I just made)?

Questions to ask your team
- What is the biggest challenge you are facing right now in your work?

> **TIPS**
> - Ask questions first before advising and talking
> - Listen first and ask questions to make sure you understand
> - Be very clear about your expectations and timelines
> - Invite open and honest feedback (and offer feedback opportunities in as many ways possible)
> - Apologize when you believe you have made a mistake

COMMUNICATE TO RECOGNIZE, REJUVENATE AND REWARD

Reminders
- All people have needs - basic needs (i.e., physiologic, safety and security) must be considered before higher level needs (i.e., esteem, self-actualization) – consider what is most important right now to your team
- Remember that everyone wants and needs to feel seen and valued
- Rewards are not just things
  - Rewards can be intrinsic, like recognition
  - Remind your team of the importance and value of their work
- *Ask yourself as a leader*:
  - Why am I saying or asking this right now?
  - How will what I'm saying be perceived?
  - Will what I'm saying lead to positive improvement or change?
  - *If not, reconsider your approach*

Questions to ask your team
- What would help you to feel recognized, rejuvenated or rewarded as a team?
- What can I do to help you feel this?
- What can we do as a team to help each other feel this?

> **TIPS**
> - Recognize the work of your team (remember you need to give 5x more praise than criticism for teams to perform better)
> - Be specific in your recognition – tell them exactly what you are recognizing them for vs a generic "good job"
> - Reward meaningfully – remember that not every reward is equal. Find out what is meaningful to your team. NOTE: *Check out the McMaster HR Recognition Toolkit. Please refer to the Employee Recognition and Rewards website and relevant collective agreements or employment contracts and consult Human Resources Services for further guidance and advice. Rewards must be consistent with the McMaster Gifts and Awards Policy.*
> - Encourage your team to take time off (breaks and vacation) and help them prepare for these times off through developing "catch up" strategies

Visit **https://okanagan.mcmaster.ca/communications-toolkit/** for the full version of this toolkit and additional resources.

COMMUNICATE ABOUT WORK AND SCHOOL DEMANDS AND RESOURCES

Reminders

- Be clear about your expectations
- Keep communication lines open for continuous dialogue
- Provide people with choices when possible
- *Ask yourself as a leader*:
    - Is the way I am/we are using technology (e.g., social media, email, virtual meetings) joining us or dividing us as a team?
- Before you hit send on an email consider the following:
    - How will this communication be received?
    - How might I feel if this were sent to me?
    - Who might feel excluded by this message?
    - Would this message be better received in person or on the phone?

Questions to ask your team

- Do you have the mental and physical capacity to complete this task right now?
- What needs to change for you to have this capacity?

TIPS

- Whenever possible provide your team with choice, control, independence, and flexibility
- Work together to generate ideas on how to reduce demands
- Review priorities and timelines often and adjust as needed
- Reduce communication and technology burden with practices such as using an email scheduling tool, so emails are only sent during regular business hours
- Ask your team what additional resources and / or changes to their day-to-day work that they feel might be helpful. Provide access to those resources or make those changes when possible.
- Build a sense of teamwork or belonging by providing time to connect with each other outside of usual work meetings

---

COMMUNICATE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ISSUES AND RESOURCES

Reminders

- We are not the same as we were before the pandemic – don't expect your team will be the same
    - Many of your team have had experiences over the past 18 months that will have affected them.
    - Don't presume you know what they are going through – **ask them!**
- Make yourself aware of the common mental health challenges in COVID – the 6 A's – awkwardness, anxiety, avoidance, apathy, attention, affect
- There is no one way to have experienced the pandemic
- Modifications and accommodations may be necessary in the workplace if people are experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties

Questions to ask your team

- What would be helpful to know, hear or learn more about right now, given what is going on?
- How can we help each other?
- What might help our get team through this stressful time?

TIPS

- Ask your team whether they need additional support or services when returning to campus.
- Avoid placing responsibility on individuals for their well-being at work – office well-being is a collective effort.
- Temporary or permanent accommodations may be required if individuals are experiencing mental health symptoms, disorders, or disability
- There are many resources available to help; try to be specific to the issue (i.e. burnout vs sleep issues). The [McMaster Okanagan website](#) has compiled a list of available mental health resources by topic.
- Be selective in the resources you suggest. Be careful about the amount (can be overwhelming) as well as the timing of suggesting resources as it can backfire and lead to increased stress, anger and distrust
- If possible, review the resources yourself or talk to someone who has used the resource for feedback (peer recommendations of resources can normalize or encourage usage)
- When recommending a resource to anyone, explain the **what** it is, **who** it is for, and **how** it can be accessed.

McMaster University | OKANAGAN COMMITTEE