

Relational Safety

Communication is so much more than the words we say or hear. Our non-verbal cues communicate our internal state and our felt sense of safety.

Have you ever noticed how you can feel the energy in the room even when no one is talking? Our nervous systems are always attuning to the non-verbal cues of others – tone of voice, and rhythm of speech, posture, facial expression, muscle tension, and quality of movement.

In order to cultivate a sense of safety for ourselves, our colleagues, and the children in our care, we have to be able to recognize our own internal state.

The following questions are designed to help you to recognize your stress, energy and tension levels and the non-verbals you are communicating. They will also help you to read non-verbal cues in others. We invite you to use this tool at various times of day (both in moments when you are experiencing stress, and in moments of calm).

What are my emotions telling me?

Am I feeling:

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Protective | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> Blamed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritated | <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Judgmental |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happy | <input type="checkbox"/> Hopeful | <input type="checkbox"/> Defensive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compassionate | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

What is my body telling me?

Where am I feeling tension?

- Head
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Stomach
- Other: _____

What is my body language communicating to others?

Posture:

- Am I relaxed and neutral?
- Am I rigid?
- Are my arms crossed?

Facial Expression:

- Are my facial features relaxed and open, or tense, or withdrawn?
- Is my gaze soft or intense?

Voice Tone and Volume:

- Animated
- Monotone
- Irritated
- Kind

Movement:

- Fast
- Sluggish
- Smooth
- Jerky

What is the quality of my energy?

- Wired
- Alert
- Calm
- Tired
- Frozen

How would I rate my stress level overall?

(Low) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (High)

Ways to decrease stress in order to feel and communicate calm and safety:

- Acknowledge your emotional state.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Move your body; do wall push-ups, a stretch or a yoga pose.
- Tighten and relax your muscles.
- Squeeze something.
- Visualize that you are relaxing on purpose.
- Drink a glass of water.
- Fuel your body-have you eaten enough today?
- Get some fresh air (even if only at an open window).
- Is the story you're telling yourself helping? If not, can you reframe the situation?

Content of this worksheet adapted from *Beyond Behaviors* by Mona Delahooke (2019).