

Compassionate Communication Toolkit for Staff, Faculty and Student Leaders

McMaster Okanagan Mental Health and Well-being Task Force

[Catharine Munn](#) | [Sandra Moll](#) | [Lynn Armstrong](#) | [Maria Bargeman](#) | [Lisa Wolfe](#)



OKANAGAN
COMMITTEE

Compassionate Communication Toolkit

for Staff, Faculty and Student Leaders

What does compassion have to do with communication? Compassion can be defined as the feeling that arises when one is confronted with another's suffering and feels motivated to relieve that suffering. During the pandemic and quarantine, many staff, faculty and students have suffered. While there is reason to be optimistic and hopeful about the return to campus, it is stressful for many to face more change. Clear communication by leaders will continue to be essential. When leaders can also seek to understand their team members' diverse experiences and perspectives and try to help relieve their stress and suffering, people feel heard, valued and are better able to navigate difficult times and transitions. This is compassionate communication.

This Toolkit has been developed to support staff, faculty and student leaders who want to learn more or be reminded about how to communicate effectively and compassionately, with mental health and well-being and psychological health and safety in mind. It builds on best practices and evidence and incorporates suggestions from faculty, staff and students on the McMaster Okanagan Mental Health & Well-being Task Force. Compassion can be cultivated on our campus and can help us to reduce fear, fatigue, isolation and frustration and inspire hope, energy, connection and transformation as we move beyond COVID-19, together.

How to communicate with compassion in mind:

A. Communicate clearly, frequently, and compassionately

B. Communicate to recognize, rejuvenate and reward

C. Communicate about work and school demands
and resources

D. Communicate about mental health and well-being
issues and resources

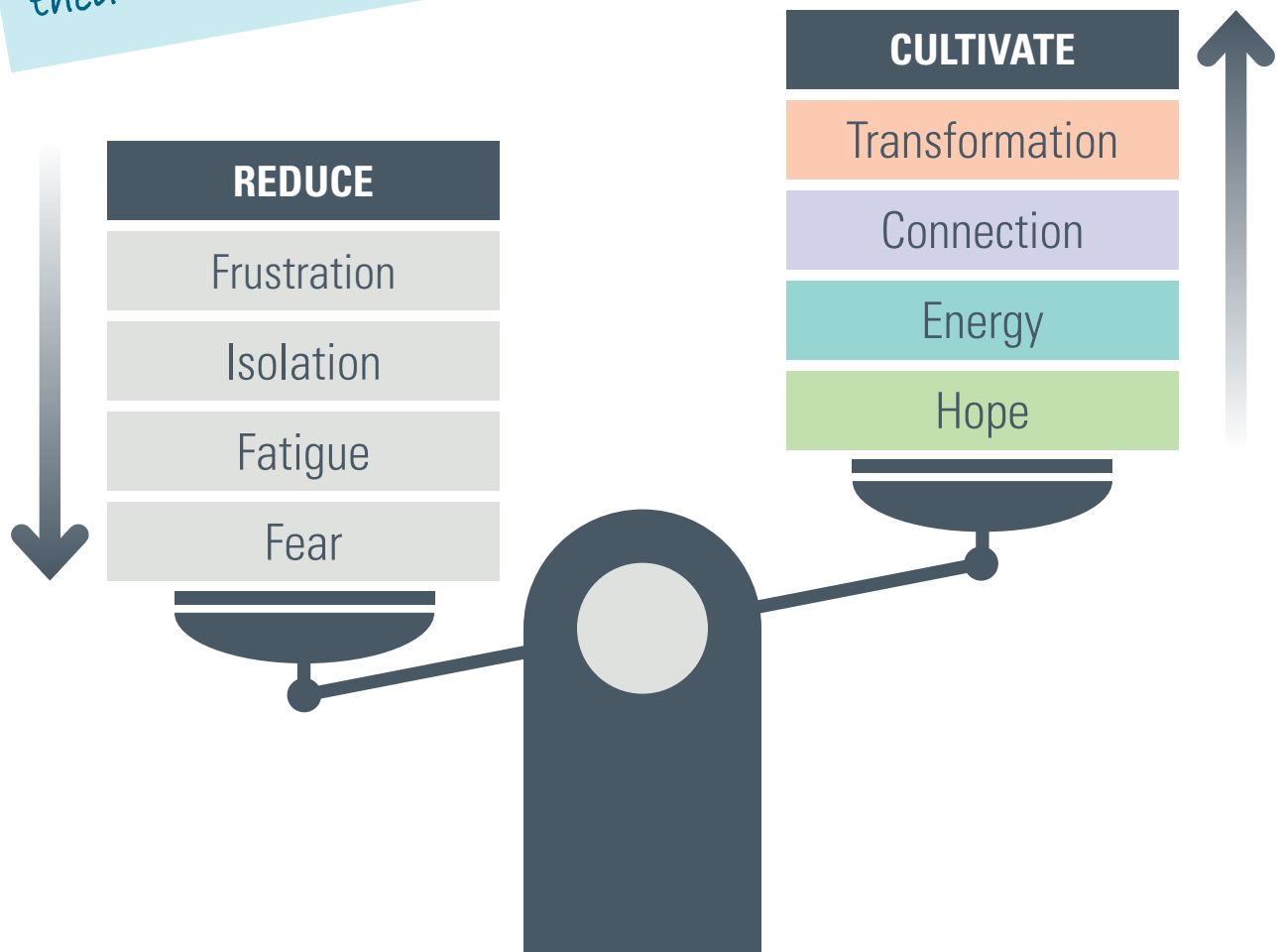
How to use this Toolkit

Questions to ask team members:
Yellow boxes
include questions
leaders might ask
team members.

Reminders for Leaders:

Blue boxes
include questions
for leaders to
consider as they
communicate with
their teams.

Orange and Purple
boxes include direct
quotes from faculty,
staff and student
contributors.



Communicate clearly, frequently, and compassionately

"Clear is kind, unclear is unkind" — Brené Brown

Communication is a two-way street. In a pandemic in particular, but at any time when rapid change is occurring, reaching out early and often to people and being as clear as possible can be invaluable and has been shown to reduce negative stress and distress. This needs to be two-way communication – providing information AND providing opportunities to respond and ask questions.

"What is life like for them?" Seeking to understand our team members by attempting to place ourselves in their shoes is key to compassionate communication. This involves expressing curiosity without judgement and trying to answer the questions: "How are they feeling or thinking? Why might they be feeling this way? How did they get there?" In order to facilitate understanding, we must find or create an opportunity to ask and then listen. We should not presume they share our perspective or make other assumptions, particularly as our own experiences and biases can influence our perspectives.

"We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar." — Damian Barr

"I need someone to listen to what I've been through, and then to help me figure out how to proceed."

Questions to ask team members:

What is the biggest challenge you are facing right now?

Reminders for Leaders:

What does my team need from me?
What are my skills?
How can I help?

Tips:

- Clear communication is particularly important during times of change and challenge. Ask questions and listen before advising and talking.
- Adopt communication principles and approaches from [Motivational Interviewing \(MI\)](#), a collaborative, person-centred form of guiding and facilitating change, used in counselling and coaching.
 - **R.U.L.E.:** This acronym summarizes important principles that can be used when communicating with your team about making change or facing challenges
 - **R=Resist** telling them what to do
 - **U=Understand** the motivations and barriers to making change
 - **L=Listen** with empathy and without judgement
 - **E=Empower** them to set goals and overcome barriers
 - **O.A.R.S.:** You can also use the communication techniques outlined in the acronym O.A.R.S., which include use of:
 - **O=Open-ended** questions - questions which invite reflection versus a yes/no response
 - **A=Affirming** the person's strengths and abilities, which can assist them to make change
 - **R=Reflective listening** - repeating back what you hear the person saying, in their own words
 - **S=Summarizing** the issues as you understand them

- Clarify what you know, or don't know, and what you expect in the days, weeks and months ahead
 - This is particularly important in times of transition and uncertainty or when change is happening or needed
 - Reassure and revisit the issues often and offer regular, informal updates
 - Provide a date or approximate date when you will loop back more formally if information is changing frequently
- Learn more about [appreciative inquiry](#) – an approach to transformation and change that can help your team to envision and collectively create a desired future
 - This requires a belief in people and a willingness to trust and acknowledge that **they know best** regarding what needs to be done to transform the workplace
- Invite concerns, feedback and questions. Offer multiple ways to do so in order to identify and address issues. Some strategies include:
 - Emails, Microsoft Teams, social media, newsletters – remembering these are just one-way communication channels and you'll want to invite opportunities for feedback
 - Group or team meetings, town halls
 - Anonymous feedback opportunities
 - When using Zoom invite people to replace their name with "... " so feedback in the chat is less connected to individuals
 - Use an app like Mentimeter to solicit anonymous feedback within regular meetings or classes
 - Conduct a brief survey (e.g., Google forms, LimeSurvey)
 - Bring in a safe third party, such as a mediator, to discuss issues or concerns if you feel you are not hearing the real ones

McMaster offices that can often assist in mediation include:

- [Human Resources Services \(Faculty and Staff members\) - Employee and Labour Relations \(ELR\)](#)
- [Human Rights & Dispute Resolution Program, Equity and Inclusion Office \(All Community Members\)](#)
- [Faculty of Health Sciences \(FHS\) Professionalism Office \(FHS Community Members\)](#)
- [Student Support and Case Management Office, Student Affairs \(Students\)](#)
- Encourage open discussion regarding the challenges team members are facing such as dilemmas, mistakes, "near misses", or receipt of critical feedback
 - Invite open, constructive and difficult feedback about you and your team's performance in order to reflect or act on it
 - Encourage your team to ask each other for help or advice and model this yourself
 - Share stories about challenges or situations you have faced, or are facing, or that other individuals or teams have faced
 - Ensure you have created a safe and supportive environment, with learning and growth in mind (cultivating a [growth mindset](#))
- Make a [sincere apology](#) when you believe you have made a mistake
 - Model a good apology - listen, take responsibility, make amends, reaffirm boundaries, make changes to reduce future mistakes

"Compassionate messaging is needed to help people who are experiencing real fears; fear of losing jobs and fear of having to return to a workplace that may not feel safe."

"Communications regarding back to work policies, procedures and safety measures are needed. The level of uncontrollable uncertainty that COVID-19 has created in our lives has led to an abundance of stress in most faculty and staff. Coming up with clear plans, or even options, and having them clearly communicated is paramount to stress reduction."

Reminders for Leaders:
Are any biases or blind spots influencing the decision I'm about to make? (or the decision I just made)?

Communicate to recognize, rejuvenate and reward

"Brains, like hearts, go where they are appreciated" — **Robert S. McNamara**

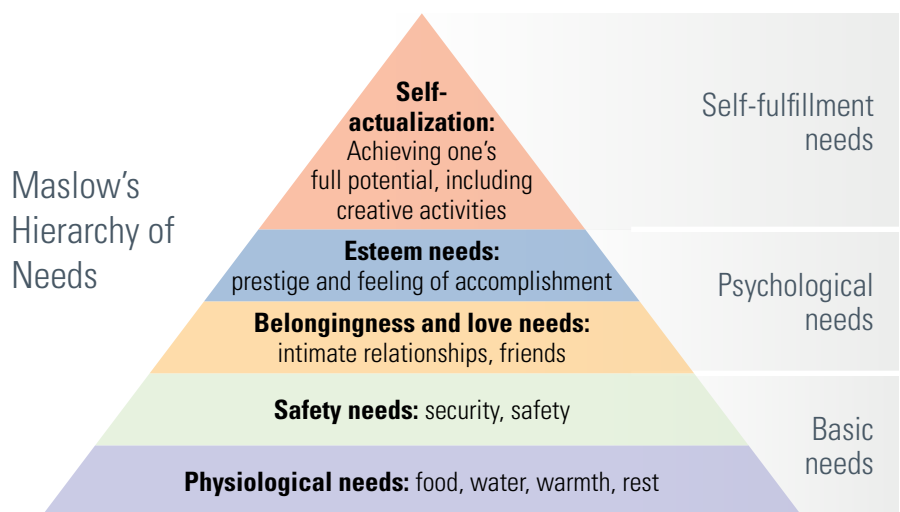
"Positive messages are nice, but I need support and help a lot more - not just empty words."

"I don't necessarily need praise for doing my job, but it is nice to occasionally hear that what I am doing is valued, and validation for the effort and outcomes. I think we have high standards for ourselves, and sometimes need to know that what we are doing is sufficient."

Questions to ask team members:
What do you most enjoy about your work?
What really matters to you?

Reminders for Leaders:
Ask yourself as you send an email or start a conversation:
Why am I saying this?
How will it be perceived?
Will it lead to positive improvement or change?
If not, reconsider your approach

People have needs. It is clear when we examine [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) that the pandemic has threatened our ability to have our needs met - not only our **basic needs** for health and safety, but also our **psychological needs** for achievement and belonging and our **self-fulfillment needs** for experiences and creative activities. Many of our needs are met through work – by making money to care for ourselves and our families, by achieving at work, and through the relationships we form and experiences we have in the work environment. Recognizing this and ensuring people's basic needs for safety and security are considered first is key. For example, offering an experience (e.g., leadership workshop) can be very helpful, but may not feel that way if people's safety and security needs (e.g., facilitating PPE, vaccines and providing information on mental health resources) have not been sufficiently addressed.



We all need to feel seen and valued, even leaders. It is essential to recognize, repeatedly and often, the efforts people are making at work. This is particularly important when team members have met or exceeded expectations, pushed or challenged themselves in the process, or prioritized work in a way that has impacted them or their families. Ideally, ask a few trusted team members what they need or what form of reward or recognition might be appreciated.

Rewards are not just things. Right now, many who have been working through the pandemic are experiencing some level of burnout or may be [languishing](#). Many have been working long hours under stressful conditions and in ways that will have influenced their personal lives. Some have been facing risk as a result of COVID-19. Many of the intrinsic rewards (i.e., accomplishing tasks, achieving success at work) and the fun or joy in work (i.e., relationships and experiences) may be missing. Reminders of the meaning, importance and value of an individual's work is often the most important 'reward'.

Tips:

- **Recognize often** the efforts and successes of your team members. This is essential and should be done frequently
 - Evidence suggests that providing about 5 times as much praise over criticism helps individuals and teams perform better (a 5:1 [praise:criticism ratio](#))
- **Recognize specifically** what has been noticed rather than a generic “good job.” Provide a reward with context by detailing what the reward is for
 - Indicate specifically what it is you have noticed or are grateful for about efforts, individually and collectively
 - Let team members know the positive impact their efforts or actions have had
 - With permission, include positive feedback received from others - about the team member or team
 - Ask team members or peers to indicate the strengths of their colleagues and what they appreciate about them
 - Nominate someone for an award or ask them about an award they hope to receive
- **Reward meaningfully** – invite ideas about what may be meaningful and helpful to rejuvenate and reward* team members
 - Write personal messages or cards with comments about the importance, meaning and value of individuals’ work
 - Provide small gift certificates
 - Meal service gift certificate
 - Gift card for groceries, a bookstore or online store
 - Initiate group gatherings (virtual or in-person) – be intentional about the gathering by finding ways to make individuals or the team feel appreciated and rejuvenated
 - Learn more about the “[art of gathering](#)” both virtually and in-person
 - Create new and novel activities or themes to co-design [an inspired meeting](#), retreat or event
 - Create opportunities for programming that individuals or the team have requested (i.e., yoga session, mindfulness meditation, massage therapy)
- **Encourage taking “time off” from both in-person and virtual work** – our minds and bodies require this
 - Remind and help individuals to plan and take breaks, protect against working on weekends and utilize vacation entitlements
 - Reduce or remove barriers (practical and emotional) to taking time off
 - Reassign workload or reduce expectations
 - Reassure and reduce pressure and guilt a person may feel about taking time off
 - Discuss any expectations for work during vacation, including online or virtual work
 - Encourage individuals to be fully ‘offline’ when on vacation or establish clear expectations and boundaries regarding work if away
 - Clearly outline what is considered an urgent matter or emergency when on vacation or weekends
 - Encourage [time blocking](#) and other strategies before leaving for vacation including a return-to-work plan regarding how to “catch up”
 - Limit and discourage work-related communications during time off
- **Reward more than the outcome** – reward [grit](#) and persistence, the process, commitment, skills and values demonstrated
 - Resilience, risk-taking, vulnerability and facing fears should be recognized and rewarded, even if a project “fails”

“Sometimes the units and departments that are a little off the focus of the university, get missed or passed over in terms of recognition of accomplishments.”

“Spontaneous, off the cuff comments mean a lot, like – “thanks for making this meeting a fun one, thanks for your excellent comments and questions today, this is such good work you’re doing”. “These words of encouragement and praise are more powerful to me than any material gift because they provide the emotional and mental support during very isolating times.”

Questions to ask team members:

- What did you learn from this experience?
- What did you enjoy about the experience?
- What worked well?
- How might you do things differently next time?

* **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](#).

Communicate about work & school demands and resources

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" — Helen Keller

- **Set clear expectations:** When there are ongoing changes and challenges, it is important to initiate or continue communication regarding how expectations will be addressed over time. Often people will want to know when they will have a chance to communicate and problem solve about management and distribution of workload.
- **Offer choices:** In COVID-19, many adjustments have been made quickly. It is likely that some time will be needed to determine which of these adjustments will remain as the new normal and what can or will revert to pre-pandemic ways. People need to understand and revisit expectations often and repeatedly. Providing as many choices and as much flexibility as possible helps people feel more in control and autonomous.

"It would be great to hear
- "You're doing enough; let's
review everything you are
working on and prioritize
so you can cut back on your
hours."

"Responses like "We are all
busy" aren't helpful. Ongoing
expectations to do the things
we always did, but also all
the new things related to the
pandemic, aren't realistic."

"The more clear and
upfront leaders can be about
expectations, to allow for
planning and flexibility in
timelines, deadlines, and due
dates, the better things go."

Reminders for Leaders:

Is the way I am
or we are using
technology (e.g.,
social media, email,
virtual meetings)
joining us or
dividing us as a
team?

DECREASE WORK DEMANDS

Reduce cognitive,
physical and emotional
demands.
Relieve administrative,
technological, teaching,
clinical or other burdens.

Balance

INCREASE WORK RESOURCES

Increase practical
and social support,
information, sense of
control or autonomy,
and feedback.

To reduce the risk of [burnout](#), it is important to talk about how to:

- **Provide as much choice, control, independence, and flexibility** as possible in the way work is accomplished
- **Reduce the demands** of the job or school – small changes can make a big difference!
 - Talk about what processes or strategies are, or are not, working well day-to-day
 - Generate ideas about how tasks can be better managed with individuals and teams
 - Collectively review priorities and timelines and make adjustments
 - Review and reduce meetings - identify what meeting format is working well and which meetings should be virtual versus in person (or which can be a phone call)
- **Reduce the communication and technology burden or demand**
Check out the ideas of [Cal Newport](#) from Georgetown University.
 - E-mail practices are important to examine. Consider the following ground rules:
 - When addressing an email, only include people who need to take action in the To: line
 - Individuals who are copied (cc'd) on an email are expected to review but not respond
 - Ensure your team understands the expectations of being in the To: line versus cc'd
 - Use subject lines effectively and clearly to signal importance and priority
 - Use the email scheduling tool so that messages are only sent during regular business hours
- **Increase access to potentially helpful resources to aid with work or school**
 - Identify and discuss resources which could help lift the burden (e.g., training, technology, additional staff) even temporarily
 - Invite team members to identify 1 or 2 small changes that can be considered to make their day-to-day work life easier
- **Build a sense of teamwork and belonging** – people are each other's biggest resource – both practically and emotionally!
 - Provide time during work to connect with groups or colleagues outside usual teams or meetings
 - Establish work buddies or "[pandemic pals](#)" for mutual support within a team or across several teams or units (e.g., in different units or programs who have shared responsibilities or challenges to ensure mutual understanding and collective problem-solving)
- **Discover or rediscover the "[joy in work](#)"** by tapping into positive, internal resources.
 - Find out and reinforce what it is that people value or what provides them with meaning regarding their work
 - Discuss these values and visions to reclaim fun and joy at work for individuals and teams

“Being told that I can step away from my desk if I am having a difficult day and being unproductive; having an “emotional check-in” with my supervisor when we didn’t have much to update on in our regular weekly check-in; understanding that my best during a pandemic does not look the same as my best before a pandemic.”

“Regular staff check-ins where we do not discuss work, perhaps highlighting people’s lives and challenges, and providing a more social time to interact apart from work pressures. We need some team building done virtually to build our teams back up again.”

Questions to ask team members:

Do you have the mental and physical capacity to complete this task right now?

What needs to change for you to have this capacity?

Reminders for Leaders:

Before you hit send, consider...

- 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?

Communicate about mental health and well-being issues and resources

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." – Epictetus

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.

We are not the same as we were before. COVID-19, and the resulting quarantine, has challenged all of us in different ways and has affected our mental and physical health. We all have a state of mental or emotional health, just as we do a state of physical health. Our mental health shifts over time and with events in our lives. Some are languishing - people who have never struggled before may be struggling now with their emotions, thoughts, behaviours and relationships. Rates of mental health and substance use disorders have increased in COVID-19. Others may be flourishing. Don't presume or assume that you know how someone is doing. Ask them.

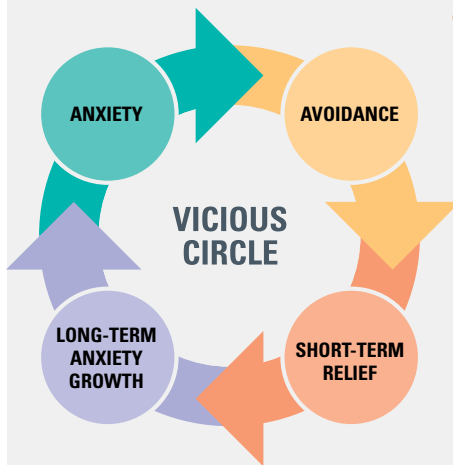
There is not just one experience of the pandemic. It is important to acknowledge that experiences of the pandemic can be as unique and diverse as each individual on our campus. It is also important to recognize that equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ peoples, people with disabilities and women, as well as parents of young children, teenagers and young adults, are struggling more overall with their mental health in the pandemic. Additionally, some of us will have faced significant fears and challenges on the front lines and may be fatigued or experiencing symptoms of work-related burnout. Others will have been sequestered, working from home, caring for children and elders, balancing many priorities while in isolation, or not working at all. Some have welcomed aspects of these new arrangements and may wish certain things could continue, while others can't wait to "get back to normal." Finances may be a significant concern. During the pandemic many have experienced grief and loss such as deaths or disability related to COVID-19 or other illnesses, the inability to attend or participate in significant events including graduations, awards ceremonies, retirement celebrations, weddings and funerals, and other missed opportunities. Returning to campus may be positive for many, but can also be a reminder of what has been lost during the pandemic.

Our university is not the same as it was before. Change, even positive change, can be difficult. [Re-entry](#) to the university, in whatever form that takes, may be a reason to celebrate for some and might be something to dread for others. For those with mental health and substance use disorders, these transitions can be particularly difficult. Even though our campus may look the same, it is not the same. People are likely to be worried about what all these changes mean for them and how this might affect the type of work they are expected to continue doing.

"It is more helpful if someone listens carefully to me or provides one, timely idea or resource that could help me, than all of the lists and workshops in the world."

Common Mental Health Challenges

- **Name them to tame them!** Talk about the “elephants” (or hippos) in the room. This includes acknowledging difficult emotions or challenges, like the **6 A’s** below, that may be present as the pandemic continues and as we return to campus.
- **Awkwardness** – When facing the prospect of returning to campus, some of us might be feeling socially awkward or out of practice. Many of us haven’t had much opportunity to practice our [social skills](#) during COVID-19 and will need to rebuild our social skill “muscles” again. Here are some suggested conversation starters: “wow, it feels a bit weird to be back face-to-face, doesn’t it?”, “It feels like we’ve forgotten how to have face to face meetings.”
- **Anxiety** – Many have experienced increased stress, [anxiety](#) and worry during COVID-19. This may temporarily increase as we transition back to work and school or face other changes in our lives. Here are some suggested conversation starters to address anxiety: “Stress is running high right now with everyone coming back to school and work”, “I wonder if it will feel different when we are back together.” “I think it will be awkward and stressful at first.”



- **Avoidance** – When we avoid stressful or anxiety-provoking situations, it can help us to feel better in the short term, but can make anxiety worse in the long term. A vicious cycle can be created if we continue to avoid certain situations, people or places, which many have been forced to do in COVID-19. We typically need to face or expose ourselves to our fears in order to reduce the anxiety. Sometimes this has to be done gradually - like coming back to campus on a quiet, weekend day before coming on a busy weekday if crowds feel overwhelming. Over time and with repetition, anxiety and fear usually lessen if we keep practicing. If anxiety is severe or not getting better, professional support may be required. Returning to work and school can be stressful and provoke anxiety, even if it is welcomed. Even just acknowledging as a leader that you recognize this can be extremely helpful.
- **Apathy** or [motivation](#) issues have been commonly reported during COVID-19. Some suggested conversation starters include: “It’s hard to get going again after all that’s happened”, “I suspect people may be feeling worn out – what could help rejuvenate us?”
- **Attention** and memory may not feel as sharp as they once were. Multi-tasking has become a necessity and a habit during the pandemic as many have encountered added and competing responsibilities. It is important to recognize, however, that multi-tasking does not help with productivity - it actually hinders it. This capacity may also need rebuilding, just like social skills. Some suggested conversation starters: “We’re all used to the pandemic pulling us in so many directions. How can we adjust back to focusing on one task at a time?”
- **Affect** – emotions like sadness and [grief](#) are common. Suggested conversation starters: “So much has happened in our lives during COVID-19. Would it be helpful to make time to catch up with each other?” If significant losses such as deaths have occurred on your team, consider checking in with those members regarding if or how they wish to discuss these losses; find ways to revisit [pandemic loss](#) and grief if your team has identified this would be helpful and connect these conversations to acknowledge the [resilience](#) and perseverance your team has demonstrated.

Take a look at these two guide books, containing some practical and helpful tips and strategies to cope with the above issues and with the pandemic.

- [Psychological First Aid](#)
- [Coronavirus anxiety workbook](#)



Tips:

“Often there seems to be a lack of actionable knowledge on the mental health supports on campus. Even if people know of a resource, they don’t always know how to actually use that resource, like - who to call, what to expect when you reach out). That’s what I’m looking for.”

“We need better communication and a clearer understanding of who we can talk to when we’re struggling. It feels like we can never find the right person to talk to. Where can I find it online? Who can I call to ask for help if I don’t understand?”

“Please don’t talk to me about self-help or self-care for mental health unless you are also willing to talk about workplace issues.”

Questions to ask team members:
What would be helpful to know or to hear about right now, given what’s going on?

- **Anticipate** and ask your team whether they need additional support or services as they return to work or school. Consider whether any of the following would be helpful:
 - **Re-orientation**, re-entry sessions or town halls for groups could be considered before or soon after the return-to-the office date
 - **Modifications** to the work setting such as more flexible hours, a mix of in-person and virtual work, and a staggered or gradual return may be helpful, if possible, to allow for more incremental adjustment and to meet the needs of many individuals and teams
 - Temporary or permanent **accommodations** may be required if individuals are experiencing mental health symptoms, disorders or disability. Students, staff and faculty do NOT need to disclose the nature of the disability to you, as a supervisor or educator, but they will need to inform you of functional limitations and provide medical documentation in order to be granted ongoing accommodations.
 - **Workplace Accommodations:** Staff, faculty or student employees can contact [Employee Health Services](#)
 - Leaders should refer to the new [Workplace Accommodation Procedures](#)
 - **Academic Accommodations:** Students can contact [Student Accessibility Services](#)
- **Avoid placing all responsibility on individuals for their well-being at work** (e.g., “you really should start taking care of yourself”, “you should work on your mental health, you know”).
 - Resilience, well-being and recovery are not just individual efforts, they require social and [collective](#) effort
 - It is often best to start with discussion about the workplace, or academic issues and workload, before or at the same time as making recommendations about what individuals can do to support themselves. [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#) have some good suggestions regarding this
 - Suggested conversation starters include - “we are in this together”, “how can we help one another?”, “what might help our team get through this stressful time?”
- **Be selective in the mental health resources you suggest**
 - Too much information (e.g., an “info dump”), poor timing of information (e.g., “too little, too late”), or information that is too simplistic or lacks credibility (e.g., “all you need to do is give yourself a break”) can cause added negative stress, anger and distrust
 - Initiate discussion about what team members are looking for and invite them to share their knowledge and experiences alongside a recognized expert or source of evidence

- Ideally, review the [resources](#) you are suggesting to ensure they are suitable and helpful and invite discussion
 - Share the resource during work or school hours. Utilize resources and links that are free or at minimal cost and are acknowledged as reputable or endorsed by people they know and trust (such as a trusted friend or a subject matter expert)
 - Gently explore if staff, faculty or a relevant representative are willing to speak about their experiences using a specific resource to address stress (e.g., [Wellness Together Canada](#), [Bounce Back Ontario](#)) or their experience accessing benefits such as the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#), or [Employee Health Services](#). This can be more helpful than hearing from leaders or providers alone
 - Similarly, some students may be willing to discuss their experiences with support or counselling services covered through their student fees like [We Speak Student](#) for undergraduates or [Empower Me](#) for graduate students, or use of [Student Wellness Centre services](#), or [Student Accessibility Services](#) if they have an accommodation, disability or accessibility concern
 - Peer recommendations of resources can normalize and encourage proactive help-seeking and resource-utilization
- **Explain what the resource is, who it is for, and how it can be accessed.**
Consider who can help answer the following questions:
 - How might this resource be helpful?
 - What can be expected if the resource is accessed?
 - Is it free or low cost?
 - Is there someone who can speak to their own experience of using the resource?
 - Is there someone you can bring in who is knowledgeable about the resource and can facilitate a short discussion as well as answer some questions?

It is important to link resources to the challenges or issues identified by your team. Some common issues related to the pandemic and the University setting include: anxiety and stress, boundaries, burnout, distress and depression, care-giver responsibilities, conflict management, compassion fatigue or moral injury, financial stress, mistreatment, and work/school-life balance. We have compiled a comprehensive list of available resources on the [McMaster Okanagan website](#).

On the following two pages are some key McMaster resources which leaders can recommend to faculty/staff or students. Additional resources can be found here:
<https://okanagan.mcmaster.ca/communications-toolkit/>



Resources for Leaders to Recommend to Faculty/Staff and Students

CRISIS SUPPORT – if you feel the person needs immediate support

McMaster Campus Crisis Support

Student Wellness Crisis Support

McMaster Faculty/Staff Mental Health Supports

- [Key Person Advice Line](#) (Homewood Health, for managers, supervisors, leaders seeking advice re: employees)
- [Mental Health Resources, Employee Health and Safety](#)
- [FHS Resources: Professionalism Office](#)
- [Employee and Family Assistance Plan](#) (Extended Benefits including counselling and coaching):
- [Employee Benefits](#): See all benefits plans by employee group which can be used for private counselling
 - For some employee groups: MUFA, TMG, UNIFOR: **Expanded Mental Health Benefits** – Maximum coverage of \$3,000 per person (including eligible dependents) per benefit year, in total for services received by registered psychologists, social workers and psychotherapists (Nov 2019).

Medical Residents and Fellows:

- [Wellness Support, Resident Affairs](#)
- [Benefits \(FHS\)](#)
- [McMaster HR - Mental Health Resources - for Staff and Faculty](#)
- [McMaster HR - Resources for Managers and Leaders](#)

Hamilton/Ontario Resources:

Find a family doctor:

- [Hamilton Academy of Medicine](#)
- [Health Care Connect](#)
- [Mental Health and Addiction Referrals](#)

McMaster Student Mental Health Supports

- [Responding to Students in Distress and Difficulty Protocol](#)
- [Student Support and Case Management](#)
- [Student Wellness Centre](#)
- [Indigenous Student Services](#)
- [Student Accessibility Services](#)
- [Medical Students – Wellness Support, Student Affairs](#)
- Online counselling services for undergrads and grads (free):
 - [Undergrads](#)
 - [Grads](#)
- [Student Benefits](#) (up to \$300/year for FT students)

Resources for building a mental health-positive campus

- [Manager Resources](#) (health and safety resources)
- [FHS Education & Training](#)
- [Accessibility Hub](#) (links and information about accessibility at McMaster)
- [Mental Health First Aid Training](#) (in-person, 2 day)
– free for current staff and faculty
- [Program for faculty development](#): FHS

Education & Training:

- [Professor Hippo-on-Campus Student Mental Health Education Program for Educators and Navigators](#) (training is currently online, register via MOSAIC)
- [McMaster Student Union Services](#)

- [Equity and Inclusion Office](#) (for faculty/staff and students)
 - McMaster's Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Process
 - Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office

COVID-19 related resources for building a mental health-positive campus

- [Transition/COVID-19 environment - Back to Mac](#)
- [Resources for Staff and Faculty](#)
- [Oversight Committee Report \(May 2021\)](#)
- [Department of Psychiatry Collated Resources](#)
- [Resources for teaching remotely](#)
- [Transition back to campus for students](#)
- [Professor Hippo-on-Campus Student Mental Health Education Program](#): Curated list of COVID-19 Mental Health Resources

Compassionate Reminders for Leaders:
It's ok to ask yourself the question:
What do I need right now?
And then to seek what you need &
ask others to help you

Compassionate Reminders for Leaders:
Self-compassion can be defined as:
Extending warmth and
understanding to ourselves when
we are suffering or have feelings of
inadequacy or failure.
Self-criticism is the opposite of
self-compassion.

Thank you for the work you do, and let's keep practicing!
"life is practice, practice is life."

Acknowledgments

This toolkit was developed in response to a request by the Provost, Dr. Susan Tighe, and as part of the activities of the McMaster Okanagan Mental Health and Well-being Task Force.

Dr. Catharine Munn, M.Sc., M.D., F.R.C.P.(C)

Chair, Okanagan Mental Health and Well-being Task Force

Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences

Lead, Professor Hippo-on-Campus Student Mental Health Education Program

Dr. Sandra Moll, OT(Reg), PhD

Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science

Lynn Armstrong, M.Ed.

Administrator, McMaster Okanagan Committee

Dr. Maria Bargeman, PhD, BScN.

Project Coordinator, McMaster Okanagan Mental Health & Well-being Task Force

Lisa Wolfe, BSc

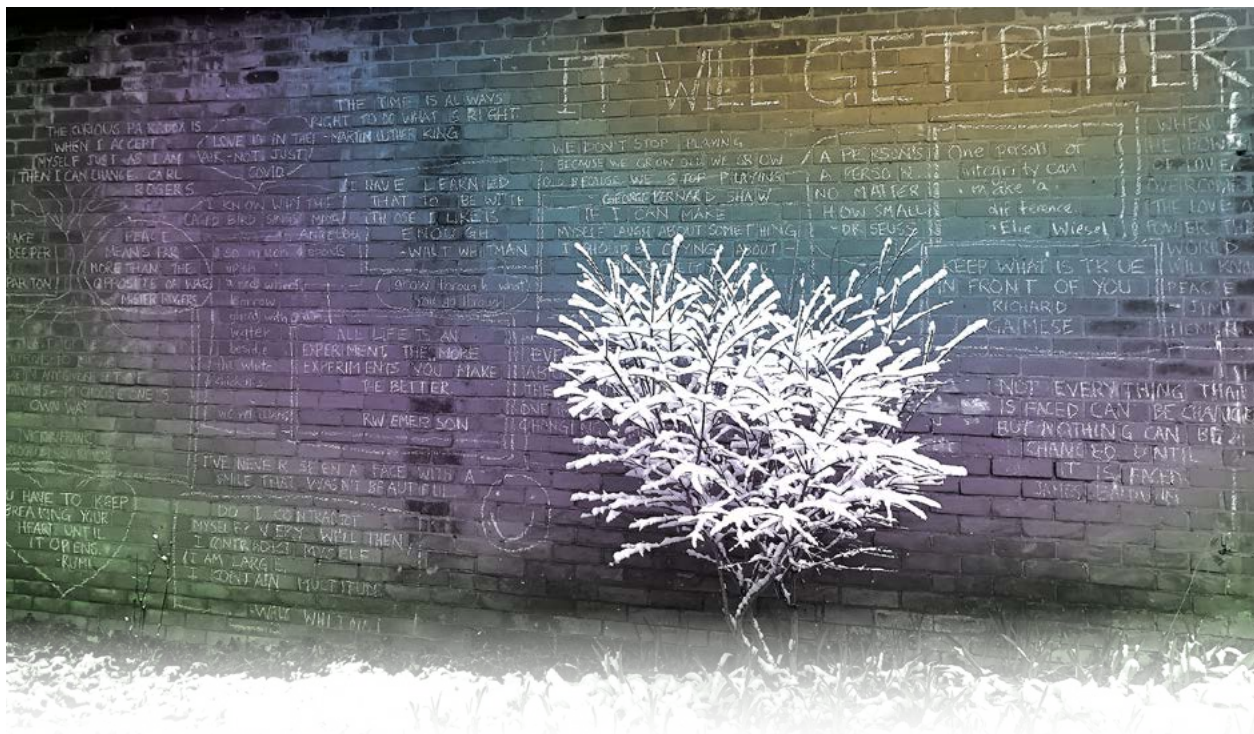
Research Coordinator, School of Rehabilitation Science

We'd like to thank Maggie Pooran, Deb Garland and Dr. Maureen MacDonald for their helpful feedback on an early version of this toolkit.

If you have any questions or comments about the toolkit, please contact Okanagan@mcmaster.ca.

© 2021. Dr. Catharine Munn. McMaster University. All rights reserved. The Compassionate Communication Toolkit is provided for educational and personal use only. Any other use is strictly prohibited without permission. Your use of the Compassionate Communication Toolkit is at your own risk as it is provided as-is. The author of the Compassionate Communication Toolkit and McMaster University make no warranties, either express or implied, including without limitation any implied warranty of merchantability or fitness or a particular purpose. If you have any questions about the copyright or reproducing the content, you may contact: munnnc@mcmaster.ca.

June 2021



MHTF Communication Toolkit References

- Abblett, M. (2019). Tame Reactive Emotions by Naming Them. *Mindful*. [from https://www.mindful.org/labels-help-tame-reactive-emotions-naming/](https://www.mindful.org/labels-help-tame-reactive-emotions-naming/)
- Barr, D. (2021). *We are not all in the same boat*. Retrieved May 30, 2020, from <https://www.damianbarr.com/latest/https/we-are-not-all-in-the-same-boat>
- Berinato, S. (2020). That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief>
- Bilotta, I., Cheng, S., Davenport, M. K., & King, E. (2021). Using the job demands-resources model to understand and address employee well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 14(1-2), 267-273. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2021.43>
- BounceBack Ontario. (2021). BounceBack, Reclaim your Health. *BounceBack Ontario*. <https://bouncebackontario.ca/>
- Brown, B., & Parker, P. (2020). Brené with Priya Parker on The Art of Gathering In *Unlocking Us with Brené Brown*. C.13. <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-priya-parker-on-the-art-of-gathering/#close-popup>
- Caron, C. (2021). How to Start Healing During a Season of Grief. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/well/mind/grief-loss-mourning-covid.html>
- Carter, N. A (n.d.) Practical Evidence-Based Self-Help Program for COVID-19-Related Worry and Anxiety-Session One: On Anxiety. <https://valleycentreforcounselling.com/onanxiety>
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2021). Mental Illness & Addiction Index. from <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index>
- Centre for Clinical Interventions. (2021). Information Sheet: The vicious cycle of anxiety. CCI. from <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/CCI/Mental-Health-Professionals/Panic/Panic---Information-Sheets/Panic-Information-Sheet---03---The-Vicious-Cycle-of-Anxiety.pdf>
- Chan, T., Carter, N., Moll, S., Ayari, S. & Gouhary, E., & Menezes, N. (2021). Peer Support with Pandemic Pals (Special II) - Drs. Menezes / el Gouhary / Ayari / Moll / Carter In *MacPFD Spark Podcast*. <https://soundcloud.com/macpfd/macpfd-spark-podcast-pandemic-pals-special-ii-nh2>
- Chan, T., Risdon, C., & Profetto, J. (2020). Bringing New Life to Meeting with Dr. Ridson | Leadership Development with Dr. Profetto In *MacPFD Spark Podcast*. <https://soundcloud.com/macpfd/bringing-new-life-to-meetings-with-dr-risdon-leadership-development-with-dr-profetto>
- Cherry, K. (2020). How Multitasking Affects Productivity and Brain Health. *VeryWellMind* from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/multitasking-2795003>
- Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. M. (2008). *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook For Leaders of Change* (2nd ed.). Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Cuncic, A. (2021). How to Cope With Social Awkwardness After COVID-19. *Very well mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-cope-with-social-awkwardness-after-covid-19-5180279>

- Cushing, E. (2021). Late-Stage Pandemic is Messing With Your Brain. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/03/what-pandemic-doing-our-brains/618221/?fbclid=IwAR3qhtYqQ4srFXQwbQAsNqqgzJ57s5mUk0opHV6OS8lSPslx0FMbf6pe_DI
- DiMarco, I. (2021). Dreading post-pandemic crowds and social situations? Exposure therapy can help. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/after-covid-social-anxiety-crowd/2021/04/06/901c552e-93d1-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948_story.html
- Dollard, C. (2018). Emotional Intelligence Is Key to Successful Leadership. *The Gottman Institute*. from <https://www.gottman.com/blog/emotional-intelligence-key-successful-leadership/>
- Dweck, C. (2016). What Having a “Growth Mindset” Actually Means. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2016/01/what-having-a-growth-mindset-actually-means>
- Eyl, E. (2020). COVID-19, Maslow’s hierarchy, and how to engage employees right now. *Start it Up*. from <https://medium.com/swlh/covid-19-maslows-hierarchy-and-how-to-engage-employees-right-e696ba01079a>
- Graduate Student Association. *Empower Me*. McMaster University. <https://gsa.mcmaster.ca/services/empower-me/>
- Grant, A. (2021). There’s a Name for the Blah You’re Feeling: It’s Called Languishing. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>
- Greater Good Science Center. (2021). *Compassion Definition | What Is Compassion*. Retrieved May 26, 2021, from <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/compassion/definition>
- Hall, K., Gibbie, T., & Lubman, D. I. (2012). Motivational interviewing techniques: Facilitating behaviour change in the general practice setting. *Australian Family Physician*, 41(9), 660–667. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.737035419857450>
- Human Resources Services. (2020). *McMaster University: Recognition Toolkit for Leaders*. McMaster University. <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2020/05/Recognition-Toolkit-for-Leaders.pdf>
- Human Resources Services. (2021). *Compensation, Benefits & Retirement Plans*. McMaster University. <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/employees/total-rewards/>
- Human Resources Services. (2021). *Employee and Family Assistance Program*. McMaster University. https://hr.mcmaster.ca/employees/health_safety_well-being/my-well-being/employee-and-family-assistance-program/
- Human Resources Services, (2021). *Employee Health Services*. McMaster University. <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/about-us/our-services/employee-health-services/>
- Joanisse, M. (2020). *Psychological First Aid for Frontline Health Care Providers During COVID-19*. Joanisse, Mélanie. https://cpa.ca/docs/File/COVID/Psychological_FirstAid_HealthCare_COVID-19_Workbook_Final_April82020.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3qhtYqQ4srFXQwbQAsNqqgzJ57s5mUk0opHV6OS8lSPslx0FMbf6pe_DI
- Jones, T. (2020). After coronavirus, the penny has dropped that wellbeing isn’t individual but social. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/12/after-coronavirus-the-penny-has-dropped-that-wellbeing-isnt-individual-but-social>
- Kininmonth, C. (2019). Brené Brown: 4 reasons being Unclear is Unkind. *The Growth Factory*. from <https://www.thegrowthfaculty.com/blog/BrenBrown4reasonsbeingUnclearisUnkind>

- Lee, T. H., & Duckworth, A. L. (2018). Organizational Grit. *The Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2018/09/organizational-grit>
- Lyall, S. (2021). We Have All Hit a Wall: Confronting late-stage pandemic burnout, with everything from edibles to Exodus. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/03/business/pandemic-burnout-productivity.html>
- McMaster University. (n.d.). *We Speak Student*. McMaster University. <https://wespeakstudent.com/home/8-mcmaster-university#/category-4>
- Mervosh, S. A Year of Trauma and Resilience: How the Pandemic Changed Everything. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/us/covid-pandemic-anniversary.html>
- Moss, J. (2021). Beyond Burned Out. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/02/beyond-burned-out>
- Motivational Interviewing of Network Trainers (2019). *Understanding Motivational Interviewing*. Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT). <https://motivationalinterviewing.org/understanding-motivational-interviewing>
- Murphy, K. (2020). We're All Socially Awkward Now. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/01/sunday-review/coronavirus-socially-awkward.html>
- Nature @ McMaster. (2021). Home - *Nature @ McMaster*. McMaster University, <https://nature.mcmaster.ca/>
- Parker-Pope, T. (2021). Disenfranchised Grief in a Year of Pandemic Losses. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/well/mind/grief-pandemic-losses.html>
- Perlo J, B. B., Swensen S, Kabcenell A, Landsman J, Feeley D. (2017). *IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work*. <http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/IHIWhitePapers/Framework-Improving-Joy-in-Work.aspx>
- Scott, E. (2020). How to Apologize More Sincerely. *Very Well Mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-apologize-more-sincerely-3144467>
- Scroggs, L. (n.d). Time Blocking. *Todoist*. <https://todoist.com/productivity-methods/time-blocking>
- Smith, W. (2021). The psychology of post-pandemic life – why you might feel anxious about re-entry. *CBC Radio*. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/the-psychology-of-post-pandemic-life-why-you-might-feel-anxious-about-re-entry-1.6032607>
- Student Accessibility Services. (2021). *Student Accessibility Services*. McMaster University. <https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>
- Student Wellness Centre. (2021). *Student Wellness Centre*. McMaster University. <https://wellness.mcmaster.ca/>
- Wellness Together Canada. (2021). *About Wellness Together Canada*. Wellness Together Canada. <https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>
- Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. (2021). *Referring employees to resources*. Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/referring-employees-to-resources>
- Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2013). The Ideal Praise-to-Criticism Ratio. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2013/03/the-ideal-praise-to-criticism>