



# Psychological Safety Audit (ND-Focused)

*A diagnostic to identify threat signals, trust ruptures, and cultural barriers.*

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## **Important note**

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

## A clear orientation (for organisations)

This is not an engagement survey.

It is not a culture scorecard.

It is not a way to assess individual resilience or confidence.

This audit exists because **psychological safety is experienced differently by neurodivergent (ND) people...** and because many organisations unintentionally equate safety with politeness, wellbeing messaging, or permission to speak *after* trust has already been eroded.

ND-focused psychological safety is not about how supported people say they feel. It is about **whether the system reliably avoids triggering threat.**

This audit is designed to:

- surface where threat is unintentionally introduced
- identify patterns of silence, masking, or over-compliance
- distinguish surface harmony from genuine safety
- guide structural and behavioural change

Use this audit to **change conditions**, not to label teams or people.

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## 1. Core reframe: psychological safety is a nervous-system state

Psychological safety is often framed as:

- confidence to speak up
- comfort sharing ideas
- willingness to take interpersonal risks

For ND staff, safety is more fundamental.

It shows up as:

- reduced self-monitoring
- ability to ask clarifying questions
- permission to say “I don’t understand yet”
- freedom from constant tone-checking
- predictability under pressure

If people must mask, appease, or over-prepare to survive interactions, safety is low... even if no one is openly hostile.

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## 2. How to use this audit safely

### Who should use it

- Senior leaders
- People / HR teams
- DEI and organisational development
- Clinical or service leaders
- Team facilitators

### How to use it

- Review by team, function, or pathway
- Combine observation, anonymous input, and lived-experience insight
- Look for *patterns*, not isolated incidents
- Revisit periodically

### What not to do

- Do not attach results to performance
- Do not require ND disclosure to interpret findings
- Do not frame outcomes as “mindset issues”

This is a **design diagnostic**, not a blame exercise.

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## 3. What ND threat often looks like (missed by standard audits)

ND staff may respond to threat by:

- becoming hyper-compliant
- over-explaining or justifying
- avoiding meetings or visibility
- withdrawing ideas
- delaying questions
- masking distress

These behaviours are often misread as:

- professionalism
- lack of confidence
- disengagement
- low ambition

In reality, they are **adaptive responses to unsafe systems**.

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## 4. Audit domain 1... Predictability & clarity

*Uncertainty is one of the strongest ND threat activators.*

### Consider:

- Are expectations explicit or implied?
- Do priorities change without re-grounding?
- Are decisions explained or simply announced?
- Are timelines clear and realistic?
- Are “how things really work” rules informal or opaque?

### Threat indicators:

- frequent clarification requests
- anxiety around “getting it wrong”
- people waiting rather than acting
- over-preparation for simple tasks

Safety increases when ambiguity decreases.

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## 5. Audit domain 2... Communication & interpretation load

*ND safety depends on how much meaning people must infer.*

### Consider:

- Is communication direct or heavily coded?
- Are people expected to read tone, subtext, or hierarchy?
- Is feedback concrete or character-based?
- Are mistakes corrected privately and clearly?

### Threat indicators:

- fear of asking questions
- reliance on written follow-up to feel safe
- distress after feedback conversations
- over-explaining to avoid misinterpretation

High interpretation load = low psychological safety.

## 6. Audit domain 3... Power, hierarchy & voice

*Power imbalance amplifies ND threat.*

### Consider:

- Can people disagree without social penalty?
- Are quieter contributions valued equally?
- Is speaking speed confused with competence?
- Are decisions reversible or absolute?
- Do leaders invite input... and act on it?

### Threat indicators:

- silence in meetings
- agreement without discussion
- ideas shared privately but not publicly
- visible relief when meetings are cancelled

Voice without consequence is safety theatre.

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## 7. Audit domain 4... Meetings & group dynamics

*Meetings are where psychological safety is most tested.*

### Consider:

- Are agendas shared in advance?
- Is participation optional and multi-modal?
- Is interruption managed?
- Is silence respected as processing?
- Are meetings sensory-considerate?

### Threat indicators:

- shutdown during meetings
- avoidance of group forums
- reliance on async channels to feel safe
- strong ideas appearing only after meetings

If meetings require masking, safety is low.

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## 8. Audit domain 5... Response to distress, overload & mistakes

*How systems respond under strain reveals true safety.*

**Consider:**

- Are overload signals recognised early?
- Is distress met with curiosity or correction?
- Are mistakes treated as learning or failure?
- Is recovery time respected after high-load periods?

**Threat indicators:**

- people hiding overload
- sudden disengagement after pressure
- fear of “being seen as difficult”
- burnout followed by quiet exit

Punitive calmness requirements destroy safety.

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## **9. Audit domain 6... Change, uncertainty & transitions**

*Transitions are high-risk moments for ND trust rupture.*

**Consider:**

- Are changes announced early?
- Is rationale explained?
- Are “what stays the same” elements named?
- Are timelines realistic during change?

**Threat indicators:**

- increased absenteeism during change
- loss of trust after restructures
- spike in questions framed as “resistance”

Change without containment feels like threat.

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## **10. Audit domain 7... Inclusion vs performance culture**

*ND safety collapses under hidden productivity pressure.*

**Consider:**

- Is output valued over sustainability?
- Is urgency constant or contextual?
- Are rest and pacing morally judged?
- Is over-functioning rewarded?

**Threat indicators:**

- burnout framed as individual weakness
- people working beyond capacity to feel safe
- silence about limits
- attrition of ND talent

Psychological safety cannot coexist with chronic overdrive.

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## 11. Audit domain 8... Trust repair & accountability

*Safety is not the absence of harm, but the presence of repair.*

**Consider:**

- Are missteps acknowledged by leadership?
- Are apologies specific and meaningful?
- Is feedback acted on visibly?
- Are ruptures repaired... or ignored?

**Threat indicators:**

- “nothing changes” sentiment
- cynicism about surveys or listening exercises
- disengagement after raising concerns

Unrepaired rupture is cumulative harm.

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## 12. Gathering ND-safe insight (without spotlighting)

Avoid asking:

- “Do you feel psychologically safe?”

Instead, ask:

- “Where do people hesitate before speaking?”
- “Where does clarification feel risky?”
- “Where do people mask to get through?”
- “Where does silence increase under pressure?”

Patterns matter more than percentages.

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## 13. Interpreting findings responsibly

When reviewing results:

- prioritise **systemic signals**, not individual behaviour
- look for *where* safety breaks down, not *who*
- start with clarity, predictability, and pacing fixes
- communicate changes explicitly

Avoid:

- defensive explanations
- framing harm as misunderstanding
- over-promising

Trust rebuilds through **follow-through**, not intent.

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## 14. A one-page ND psychological safety snapshot (copy–adapt–use)

Highest threat moments:

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Where silence increases:

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Where people over-prepare or over-explain:

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Quick safety improvements we can make now:

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Structural issues to redesign:

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## 15. What this audit must NOT be used for

This audit must not be used to:

- rank teams or leaders
- judge emotional resilience
- pressure disclosure
- dismiss ND experience as perception
- perform “safety branding” without change

If safety language increases scrutiny, it is unsafe.

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## **A closing note for organisations**

Psychological safety for ND people is not about encouraging bravery.

It is about **removing unnecessary threat**.

When systems:

- communicate clearly
- pace realistically
- respond to distress with care
- repair trust when it breaks

ND staff do not need to be courageous to contribute.

They can simply be **present**.

That is what real psychological safety looks like.

