

A practical structure for supportive, psychologically safe check-ins in community social services settings.

1. Ask staff to help structure check-ins

Tailor your check-in by asking staff about their preferences to ensure each check-in is meaningful.

- **Meeting frequency:** *“How often would you like us to meet?”*
- **Preferred days and times:** *“What day or time tends to work best for you?”*
- **Accessibility:** *“Is there anything that would make these conversations more helpful?”* OR *“Are there any accommodations that would help you participate more fully in these conversations, such as receiving discussion questions ahead of time?”*
- **Document preferences:** Create a simple table to keep each employee’s preferred communication touchpoints may be beneficial.

2. Pause before the meeting

Take a brief moment to reset and arrive fully in the conversation.

- **Cognitive reset:** Write down where you left off, make a note of next steps, or close tabs and documents
- **Physiological reset:** Take a few slow breaths, stretch, or release tension in your body
- **Sensory reset:** Drink water, smell something soothing, briefly change your environment, or listen to a calm sound
- **Intention-setting:** Remind yourself of the purpose of the check-in and how you want to show up for the conversation

3. Set the tone

Help the person settle into the conversation before moving into questions. Create opportunities for them to reset. An example:

“Before we get started, I want to recognize that it may take time to shift from your day into a conversation like this. If you need a moment to settle in, gather your thoughts, or take a breath, please do. This check-in is an opportunity for us to talk about how things have been going for you at work. My goal is to better understand your experience and explore how I can support you within my role and capacity.”

4. Ask questions to identify strain

Prioritize questions depending on where your concern lies.

- **Interpersonal environment (sense of belonging):** *How connected and included do you feel with other staff?*
- **Job design (workload, recovery, and role clarity):** *How do you feel about your workload and your ability to rest and recover? Is there anything that needs clarification regarding expectations or work procedures?*
- **Workplace conditions (safety):** *How safe do you feel in your work environment?*
- **Employer supports (perceived organizational support):** *How supported do you feel by me and the team? Do you feel that your contributions are valued, that people genuinely care about your well-being, and that you’re included in decisions that affect your work?*

5. Listen and validate

Create space for staff to share without judgment.

- Reflect back what you're hearing: *"It sounds like you've been carrying a lot lately."* OR *"I can see why that would feel frustrating."*
- Pay attention to tone, energy level, body language, and changes in behaviour, *"I've noticed you seem a bit quieter than usual today. How have things been going for you lately?"*

6. Remind them of their strengths

When someone is overwhelmed, it is easy to lose sight of their own capabilities. Help them reflect on what is already working. An example:

"I really appreciate you taking on additional workload, and you're doing an amazing job caring for community members. How are you getting by? What has helped?"

7. End with clarity

While employees have internal resources to cope, look into longer-term support or relief and take a moment to acknowledge their openness with you. For example:

"Thank you so much for sharing and being open with me today. I'll set up a meeting with the rest of the team to look at how we can better distribute additional workload. If anything urgent comes up in the meantime, please let me know. I'm here to support you."