

## Topic 1

# Looking after yourself: Vicarious trauma, self-care and supervision



The National Child Safety Training aims to enhance safety for children and strengthen child-safe culture across the education and care sector by introducing shared language, responsibilities, and understanding. The training was developed in partnership between Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) and the Queensland Government on behalf of Australian governments.

The first level of training, Foundations of Child Safety, includes two eLearning courses:

- **Course 1:** Understanding Child Safety
- **Course 2:** Understanding and Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

To complement the mandatory eLearning courses, a suite of non-mandatory Community of Practice resources has been developed to extend learning and support the application of knowledge in education and care settings. Whilst the Community of Practice are a voluntary component of the National Child Safety Training, they provide structured opportunities for discussion, reflection, and shared learning over time, helping staff build confidence and consistency in practice.

These resources contain prompts and suggested activities aligned with each course topic. They are designed to be flexible and may be selected, adapted, shortened, or revisited to suit different service types, team sizes, and meeting formats. The intention is to support practical conversations, not to prescribe a fixed program. There is no expectation that all topics and activities will be used and it is at your discretion how you use these resources.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility in places where children learn and grow. Harm can affect a child's wellbeing, learning, and development throughout childhood, and its impacts can continue into adulthood. When child safe practices are not in place, children are more at risk of harm.

By completing the mandatory eLearning training alongside some non-mandatory Community of Practice activities, you can strengthen your understanding of your role in protecting children, responding to concerns, and supporting a child safe environment in your service.



## Looking after yourself: Vicarious trauma, self-care and supervision

Topic 1 focuses on educator wellbeing and the importance of looking after yourself when working with children and families who have experienced abuse, neglect, or other forms of trauma.

Education and care work can be deeply meaningful, but repeated exposure to distressing stories, behaviours, and situations can take a toll over time. This is known as vicarious trauma.

Vicarious trauma develops gradually and can affect how people feel, think, and function at work and in their personal lives. It can influence a person's sense of safety, trust, emotional regulation, and capacity to stay connected and engaged.

This topic supports participants to:

- Recognise signs and risk factors for vicarious trauma.
- Reflect on personal and workplace protective factors.
- Understand the role of self-care, boundaries, and supervision.
- Normalise help-seeking and shared responsibility for wellbeing.



### Reminder

You **do not** need to run all three activities.

Select, adapt, shorten, or spread activities across sessions or contexts to suit your group and available time.

Activities can also be adapted for one-on-one supervision, mentoring conversations, or team meetings. You may choose to use a single scenario, question, or reflective prompt to guide discussion.

These activities are designed to be flexible and responsive to your service context.

<b>Activity 1: Understanding vicarious trauma</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>This activity supports participants to build awareness of vicarious trauma and reflect on how emotionally demanding work can affect people over time.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand what vicarious trauma is and how it can show up.</li> <li>• Recognise personal and workplace risk factors.</li> <li>• Normalise emotional responses to challenging work.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	20 – 40 minutes
<b>Format</b>	<p>The 'Format' cell contains three circular icons. The first, 'Individual Work', shows a man in a light blue shirt sitting at a desk writing. The second, 'Small Group Activity', shows three people (two women and one man) sitting on the floor and talking, with speech bubbles above them. The third, 'Whole Group Activity', shows a larger group of five people (three women and two men) sitting in a circle on the floor, also with speech bubbles above them.</p>
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding Vicarious Trauma worksheet</li> <li>• Pens</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*“Working with children and families who have experienced harm can affect us, even when we love our job and feel skilled. This activity is about noticing the impact of the work, not judging ourselves or others.”*

### Remind participants:

- You do not need to share personal experiences.
- Reflection can be private.
- It's okay to step out or take a break at any time.

### Step 1: Individual reflection worksheet (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to work independently to complete the reflection worksheet and reflect on prompts.
- Participants may write, think, draw, or simply sit with these questions.

### Step 2: Pair sharing (10-15 minutes)

- Invite participants to partner up to share (only if comfortable):
  - One thing that resonated.
  - One insight about vicarious trauma or wellbeing.
- Remind participants to keep reflections general and practice focused.

### Step 3: Whole-group reflection (10-15 minutes)

- Bring the whole group together and ask them to share and reflect on what they have been speaking about.
- Prompt discussion with:
  - *What surprised you?*
  - *What feels normalised in our sector but may be a sign of vicarious trauma?*
  - *Why is it important to talk about how we are feeling openly?*



#### Facilitator tips

- Keep the focus on awareness, not solutions.
- Normalise mixed emotions.
- Redirect away from personal disclosures as needed.





## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using a shared reflection worksheet, quiet individual reflection time, and optional breakout rooms. The purpose remains the same: to support participants to notice the emotional impact of their work, understand vicarious trauma, and normalise wellbeing conversations in a safe and supportive way.

### Platform preparation (before the session)

- Prepare a simple reflection worksheet on a slide or shared document.
- Create one anonymous poll for the temperature check question (e.g., “How emotionally demanding has your work felt recently?”).
- Prepare a slide listing discussion prompts for breakout rooms so participants can refer to them without needing to remember instructions.
- Set up breakout rooms in advance (3-4 people per group) if you plan to use them. You may need to consider these groups carefully before hand or you can randomly assign.
- Have a visible slide ready that lists support pathways (e.g., supervision, Employee Assistance Pathway (EAP), internal wellbeing contacts) to display at the beginning and end of the activity.
- Have the links ready before the session begins.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that they can step away from the computer if needed.
- Encourage cameras on or off, based on comfort.
- Remind participants of the support pathways available.

### Step 2: Anonymous temperature check

- Use a poll or an anonymous tool.
- Example question: *“How emotionally demanding has your work felt recently?”*
- Display the results and normalise variation.
- This helps to reduce stigma and builds a shared understanding without pressure.

### Step 3: Individual reflection

- Share the reflection worksheet or prompts with participants via:
  - Screen share.
  - Chat.
  - Shared worksheet link.
- Invite participants to work independently to reflect on the questions on the worksheet. Participants may:
  - Write responses into the chat (private to self).
  - Type notes privately into the worksheet.
  - Or simply think through the questions.
- Encourage quiet time. Resist the urge to fill the silence.

### Step 4: Digital reflection board

- Use an anonymous reflection board (e.g., Mentimeter).
- Prompt participants with: *“One thing that helps me stay well in this work is ...”*
- Participants post anonymously.
- Discuss themes together live (e.g., boundaries).

### Step 5: Breakout conversations

- If using breakout rooms:
  - Keep groups small (3-4 people).
  - Provide clear guidance in the chat before sending them out.
- Ask participants to discuss:
  - One insight from their reflection.
  - One protective strategy to support wellbeing.
  - One thing organisations can do to support staff wellbeing.

### Step 6: Whole-group reflection

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Facilitate a short reflective discussion using prompts such as:
  - *What surprised you?*
  - *What feels normalised in our sector but may actually be a sign of strain or vicarious trauma?*
  - *Why is it important to talk about vicarious trauma openly?*
- Acknowledge shared themes and normalise responses.
- Reinforce that noticing impacts early is a protective and professional practice.

### Step 7: Closing reflection

- Ask participants to complete (in the chat or privately): *“One wellbeing practice I will strengthen...”*



## Worksheet: Understanding vicarious trauma

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### Understanding Vicarious Trauma

Working with children and families who have experienced trauma can be meaningful and important work, but it can also affect us in different ways over time. This worksheet invites you to gently reflect on how the work may impact you, and what helps you stay grounded and supported, and what strengthens your wellbeing.

You do not need to share what you write unless you choose to. Take your time. There are no right or wrong answers. You can write, dot-point, draw, or simply think through the questions.

- 1. What parts of your work feel most emotionally demanding?** (e.g., hearing difficult stories, managing challenging behaviour, supporting distressed children or families, feeling responsible for safety.)

**2. Are there particular situations or patterns that feel harder over time?** (e.g., repeated exposure to challenging behaviour, busy periods, lack of time, working with complex or high needs children.)

**3. What signs tell you that work might be starting to affect you?** (e.g., tiredness, irritability, withdrawal, difficulty 'switching off'.)

**4. How do these signs usually show up for you?** (e.g., emotionally, physically, in your thinking, or in your relationships.)



**5. What currently helps you cope or recover after a hard day or week?** (e.g., talking to someone, rest, routines, exercise, connecting with culture or faith, time outside, supervision.)

**6. Are there supports you use regularly, sometimes, or not at all?**

You might like to circle or note:

- Personal supports
- Work-based supports
- Supervision
- Time off / boundaries
- Other:

**7. One thing you want to remember about looking after yourself in this work is:** (This might be a reminder, a permission, or a value.)

<b>Activity 2: Mapping protective factors</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>This activity helps participants identify protective factors that reduce the risk of vicarious trauma at personal, team, and organisational levels.</p> <p>It supports participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise existing strengths.</li> <li>• Understand shared responsibility for wellbeing.</li> <li>• See how workplace culture, boundaries, and support reduce harm.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	30 - 50 minutes
<b>Format</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> </div>
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper / notebook</li> <li>• Pens</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*“Vicarious trauma isn’t a personal weakness. It’s influenced by the nature of our work and the environments we work within. This activity explores what supports wellbeing and what can help to prevent vicarious trauma.”*

### Remind participants:

- You do not need to share personal experiences.
- Reflection can be private.
- It’s okay to step out or take a break at any time.

### Step 1: Small-group discussion (15-20 minutes)

- Divide participants into small groups of 3-4 people. You can also let participants to self-select depending on the group.
- Explain to participants what they are asked to do:
  - *“In your group, you will identify protective factors. The things that help reduce the impact of stressful or traumatic work. Think about what helps you stay grounded, supported, and effective in your role.”*
- Ask participants to brainstorm specific examples of what helps them, for example:
  - Personal protective factors (e.g., boundaries, self-care practices, support networks, supervision, knowing limits).
  - Team or workplace protective factors (e.g., peer support, reflective conversations, manageable workloads, supportive leadership).
  - Organisational protective factors (e.g., access to supervision, trauma-informed culture, clear policies, recognition of staff, EAP).

## Step 2: Identify gaps and pressure points (10-15 minutes)

- Explain to participants:
  - *“Now that we’ve identified what protects us, we’re going to gently explore where those protections sometimes weaken. This is not about blame; it’s about noticing patterns so we can strengthen our use of strategies to keep us well and supported.”*
- Ask participants to discuss and note responses to the following prompts:
  - *When does it feel harder to practice good self-care skills or look after ourselves? (e.g., staff shortages, busy periods, high number of children with complex needs).*
  - *When does work feel most overwhelming? (e.g., responding to disclosures, conflict with families).*
- Encourage participants to keep discussions general and professional.

## Step 3: Whole-group share (5-15 minutes)

- Bring the group back together.
- Invite individuals and/or groups to share:
  - One protective factor they want to keep building.
  - One area that could be strengthened.
- Optional reflection prompts:
  - *What small change could make the biggest difference to wellbeing in your role or team?*
  - *How does supervision or peer support help reduce isolation?*



## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms and shared reflection prompts. The purpose remains the same: to help participants recognise protective factors that reduce the risk of vicarious trauma at personal, team, and organisational levels, and to understand wellbeing as a shared responsibility.

### Platform preparation (before the session)

- Prepare one slide that outlines the three levels of protective factors: Personal, Team/Workplace, and Organisational. Include 1-2 simple examples relevant to your context under each to prompt thinking.
- Create a shared slide or document with three visible columns (Personal / Team / Organisational) where key ideas can be captured during whole-group feedback.
- Set up breakout rooms in advance (3-5 participants per group). You may need to consider these groups carefully before hand or you can randomly assign.
- Prepare a slide listing breakout discussion prompt so participants can refer to them while in small groups.
- If using an anonymous tool (e.g., Mentimeter), set up one optional word cloud question in advance: *"When does work feel most overwhelming or emotionally demanding?"*
- Prepare a visible slide with staff wellbeing supports (e.g., supervision pathways, EAP, internal contacts) to display at the beginning and end of the activity.
- Decide in advance how you will capture group feedback (e.g., typing directly onto the shared slide while groups report back).
- Have the links ready before the session begins.

### **Step 1: Create psychological safety**

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that sharing is optional.
- Reflection can remain private.
- Participants can step away from the computer if needed.
- Encourage cameras on or off, based on comfort.
- Remind participants support pathways are available (e.g., EAP, supervision).

### **Step 2: Small-group reflection – mapping protective factors**

- Place participants into breakout rooms (3-5 people).
- Ask groups to identify protective factors that help reduce vicarious trauma at different levels.
- Prompt groups to consider:
  - Personal protective factors (e.g., boundaries, self-care practices, support networks, supervision, knowing limits).
  - Team or workplace protective factors (e.g., peer support, reflective conversations, manageable workloads, supportive leadership).
  - Organisational protective factors (e.g., access to supervision, trauma-informed culture, clear policies, recognition of staff).
- Encourage groups to focus first on what is already working well.

### **Step 3: Whole group share and reflection**

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Invite each group to share:
  - Their group discussion.
  - At least one protective factor.

- Try to ensure that discussion includes all three levels of protective factors and write into the pre prepared slide or document displayed on the screen.

#### **Step 4: Identifying gaps and pressure points**

- In the same breakout rooms, invite participants to reflect on where protections weaken.
- Prompt groups to discuss:
  - *Where and when do protective factors drop away or become harder to maintain?*
  - *When and why does work feel most overwhelming or emotionally demanding?*
  - *What makes it harder to look after ourselves in busy or complex moments?*
- Optional: use a Mentimeter word cloud for these prompts if doing in a larger group.

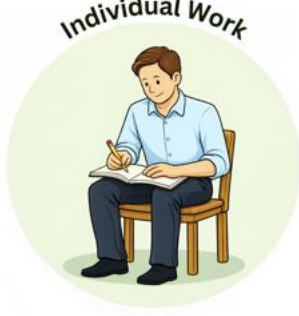




#### **Step 5: Whole group share and reflection**

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Invite each group to share:
  - Their group discussion.
  - One area they would like to strengthen.
- Try to ensure that discussion includes all three levels of protective factors and write into the pre prepared slide or document displayed on the screen.

## Step 6: Closing reflection

- Ask participants these questions to reflect on – using either the chat function, anonymous Mentimeter or open discussion:
  - *What small change could make the biggest difference to wellbeing in your role or team?*
  - *How does supervision or peer support help reduce isolation?*



<b>Activity 3: Supportive conversations with colleagues</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	<p>This activity supports participants to practise how to approach conversations with colleagues when they notice someone may be struggling, overwhelmed, or affected by the work.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build confidence starting supportive, respectful conversations.</li> <li>• Practise language that centres care, not judgement.</li> <li>• Understand the difference between peer support and formal reporting.</li> <li>• Strengthen a culture where wellbeing and help-seeking are normalised.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	50 - 60 minutes
<b>Format</b>	<div style="display: flex; flex-wrap: wrap; justify-content: space-around; text-align: center;"> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><i>Individual Work</i></p>  </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><i>Pair Work</i></p>  </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="width: 30%;"> <p><i>Individual Reflection</i></p>  </div> </div>
<b>Materials needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper / notebook</li> <li>• <i>Supportive conversations with colleagues</i> worksheet</li> <li>• Pens</li> </ul>



## Activity plan

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### Facilitator preamble

*"In emotionally demanding work, we often notice changes in our colleagues before anything is said out loud. This activity is about how we check in with each other in ways that are kind, professional, and supportive. It's not about diagnosing, fixing, or escalating. It's about connection."*

### Remind participants

- This is not about gossip or performance management.
- You are not expected to solve problems or provide counselling.
- Supportive conversations are about listening and showing care, not giving advice.
- You can keep reflections general or hypothetical.
- Step out or take a break if needed.

### Step 1: Individual work (20 minutes)

- Ask participants to work independently.
- Invite them to review and answer the questions on the *Supportive conversations with colleagues* worksheet.
- Participants can write, think, draw, or simply reflect. They do not need to share what they write or draw.

### Step 2: Pair sharing (10-15 minutes)

- Invite participants to pair up.
- Ask pairs to discuss:
  - One sign they might notice in a colleague who is struggling emotionally.
  - One way they could gently check in.

- What language feels supportive rather than confronting.
- Encourage pairs to:
  - Focus on tone and intention.
  - Avoid giving advice.
  - Listen more than they speak.

### Step 3: Small-group reflection (10-15 minutes)

- Ask each pair to join with another pair to form groups of 4.
- Ask groups to discuss and note brief responses to the following:
  - *What helps these conversations feel safe?*
  - *What language might shut a conversation down?*
  - *How do we avoid taking on responsibility that isn't ours?*
  - *When might it be appropriate to encourage professional support or supervision?*
- Prompt groups to consider:
  - The role of boundaries.
    - The difference between peer support and escalation.
  - How to gently guide someone towards help without pressure.

### Step 4: Whole group discussion (10-15 minutes)

- Bring the groups back together.
- Ask participants to share with the group and reflect on some key messages which they just spoke about.
- You may ask:
  - *What do supportive conversations have in common?*
  - *What makes them easier or harder in busy workplaces?*
  - *How does this connect to wellbeing and child-safe culture?*
- Additional conversation prompts:
  - *What helps create a culture where checking in feels normal?*

- *How do supportive conversations protect wellbeing and practice?*
- *What role does supervision play alongside peer support?*

### Step 5: Closing reflection (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to individually complete one sentence: *“One phrase or approach I can use to check in with a colleague is...”*
- Invite volunteers to share their responses verbally.



#### Facilitator tips

- Keep the focus on everyday peer support.
- Gently redirect if discussion turns into diagnosing or venting.
- Acknowledge that these conversations take courage and care.
- Be cautious of varying levels of line management and hierarchy that may be in the room.



## Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

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This activity can be delivered online using a shared reflection worksheet and breakout rooms. The purpose remains the same: to help participants practise how to notice, approach, and respond supportively to colleagues.

### Platform preparation (before the session)

- Prepare a Supportive conversations with colleagues' worksheet for online use (slide, PDF, or shared document) with clear, practical prompts.
- Create one slide outlining the simple conversation structure (Notice, check in, listen, encourage support) so participants have a clear reference point.
- Prepare a shared slide or document where groups can type one supportive phrase before returning from breakout rooms.
- Set up breakout rooms in advance (2-3 participants per group). You may need to consider these groups carefully before hand or you can randomly assign.
- Prepare a visible slide listing staff wellbeing supports (e.g., supervision pathways, Employee Assistance Program, leadership contacts) to display at the beginning and end of the activity.
- Decide in advance how participants can respond during whole-group reflection (chat, verbal, or both). Keep the process simple.
- Have a neutral holding slide ready for quiet reflection time (e.g., "Private reflection – 2 minutes") to reduce pressure to speak.
- Have the links ready before the session begins.

### Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that sharing is optional.
- Reflection can remain private.
- Participants can step away from the computer if needed.
- Encourage cameras on or off, based on comfort.
- Remind participants support pathways are available (e.g., Employee Assistance Program, supervision).

### Step 2: Individual reflection

- Share the *Supportive conversations with colleagues* worksheet via:
  - Screen share.
  - Chat link (PDF, shared document, or editable form).
  - Or paste prompts directly into the chat.
- Invite participants to work independently through the worksheet prompts.
- Encourage participants to:
  - Write or draw notes.
  - Reflect privately.
  - Or simply think through the questions.

### Step 3: Pair or small group sharing

- Place participants into breakout rooms (2-3 people).
- Display discussion prompts on the screen before sending them out.
- Ask groups to discuss:
  - One sign they might notice in a colleague who is struggling emotionally.
  - One way they could gently check in.

- What language feels supportive rather than confronting.
- Encourage groups to:
  - Focus on tone and intention.
  - Avoid giving advice.
  - Listen more than they speak.
- Invite groups to write one helpful phrase in a shared document or collaborative slide before returning to the main room.

#### **Step 4: Whole-group reflection and meaning-making**

- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Invite volunteers to share verbally or via the chat:
  - A phrase they found helpful.
  - An insight about supporting colleagues.
  - Something they want to try in practice.
- Further prompts:
  - *What helps create a culture where checking in feels normal?*
  - *How do supportive conversations protect wellbeing and practice?*
  - *What role does supervision play alongside peer support?*

#### **Step 5: Closing reflection**

- Ask participants to complete privately or in chat: *"One thing I can do to support a colleague is..."*



## Worksheet: Supportive conversations with colleagues

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### Supportive conversations with colleagues

This worksheet is for your own reflection. You do not need to share what you write unless you choose to.

#### Part 1: Noticing - *What am I seeing?*

Think about a time (real, general or hypothetical) when you noticed a colleague might have been struggling.

1. What signs might tell me a colleague is struggling?

2. How do I usually respond when I notice these signs? (e.g., check in, avoid, minimise, take on too much, say nothing).

3. What makes it harder for me to check in or start a conversation? (e.g., time pressure, fear of saying the wrong thing, role boundaries)

**Part 2: Preparing - *How could I approach this?***

Supportive conversations don't need to be perfect. They need to be kind and respectful.

4. What helps me feel safe having supportive conversations with colleagues? (e.g., trust, privacy, shared understanding, clear boundaries)

What do I want the *purpose* of the conversation to be? (circle or note one)

- To show care
- To listen
- To check in
- To encourage support
- To keep connection
- Something else \_\_\_\_\_

### Part 3: Language - *How might I start?*

Below are some optional sentence starters. You can adapt these to suit your role, personality, and workplace.

#### Gentle check-in phrases:

- *"I've noticed you seem a bit flat lately. How are you going?"*
- *"This work can be heavy. I just wanted to check in."*
- *"You don't have to talk if you don't want to, I just wanted you to know I'm here."*
- *"How are you feeling about work at the moment?"*

5. Which phrase feels most natural to you?

6. Write your own version in your own words:

**Part 4: Boundaries - *Support, not fixing***

Supportive conversations are **not** about solving problems, giving advice, or becoming someone's main support.

7. What helps me stay in a supportive role without trying to fix things?

8. If a colleague shared something heavy, what could I say to keep boundaries clear? (e.g., acknowledging, listening, encouraging supervision or support).

Examples: *"That sounds really hard. Have you had a chance to talk to your supervisor about it?"* and *"I'm really glad you told me. You don't have to go through this alone. Let's think about who else could help."*

### Part 5: Knowing when to encourage support

Sometimes the most supportive step is helping someone connect with formal support, such as supervision or professional help.

9. What are some respectful ways to encourage further support without pressure?

Examples *"Would it feel okay to talk this through with your supervisor or someone you trust?"* and *"You deserve proper support with this. Have you thought about talking to your supervisor or EAP?"*

**Final reflection - Practice anchor**

10. Complete these sentences:

*“One thing I can do to support a colleague is...”*

*“One phrase or approach I can use to check in with a colleague is...”*