WORKSHOPSKILL · FACILITATION KIT

# The Safety Check — Facilitator Run Sheet

Folder: `the-safety-check` · Category: trust · 4–12 people · 20 min · offline + online · print props · tool pack

License: CC BY 4.0

CONTENTS


Objectives
Setup
The card
Variations
Put it on the wall
Agent version
Read the shape
Failure modes of the debrief
When to use this activity
How to run it
Failure modes
Facilitation notes
Props in this folder
How to run this debrief
The six debrief questions


| 20 | 4–12 | print props |
|---|---|---|
| MINUTES | PEOPLE | SETTING |

# The Safety Check — Facilitator Guide

A 20-minute, 4–12 person trust tool. Psychological safety isn't a mood — it shows up in four concrete questions, and teams almost always have one that scores far below the rest. Everyone privately rates those four, the team reveals together, and the lowest-scoring one becomes the target: name a single behavior that would raise it, and commit to try it before you check again.

**How this relates to the other trust folders:** The Safety Check is the trust folder that *measures* — four questions, dot-rated, one visible lowest bar. Step In If… shows shared experience without numbers; The Reliability Ledger writes promises down; The Trust Timeline maps past ruptures. Run this when the question is "where exactly are we holding back?" — then follow with whichever repair tool the answer points to.

## Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Privately rated the team's real 1–5 score on all four safety statements — ask a dumb question, admit a mistake, disagree with the decision-maker, take a risk without it being used against me.
2. Revealed the four bars side by side and agreed out loud which single one is lowest — without averaging it away.
3. Committed to one concrete behavior anyone could start this week to raise that bar, with a re-check date attached.

## When to use this activity

- A team where things feel fine in meetings and quietly don't between them — unreported problems, unasked questions.
- After something went wrong and nobody said so at the time; a lagging "I can't admit a mistake" bar is usually why.
- On a rhythm (quarterly pulse) to watch the four bars move — or to prove they won't move by themselves.

## Setup

**Clock:** twenty minutes end to end. The rating is fast; the argument about the lowest bar is the activity — don't let it get squeezed out by the reveal.

**Space:** a wall or shared board with four columns, one per statement, and a spot for **The lowest one**. Online, the columns live on a shared board and dots become anonymous votes.

**Materials per person:**

| Item | Source |
|---|---|
| 4 × private 1–5 dots (sticky notes or markers, no names) | your own |
| The four statement cards — Ask a dumb question · Admit a mistake · Disagree with the decision-maker · Take a risk without it being used against me | `the-safety-check-prop-cards.pdf` |
| 1 × "The lowest one" card + 1 × "One behavior to raise it" card + blank | `the-safety-check-prop-cards.pdf` |
| Optional: the poster with the two rules in view | `the-safety-check-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) on the wall |

**Grouping:** 4–12 people who work together and share decisions — a team, a pod, a leadership group. Below 4 the anonymity dies; above 12, keep the reveal to the shape, not the count.

**Roles:** everyone rates privately and un-names their dots; you run the reveal without commentary, refuse the average, and force the close — one behavior, who does it, which day, and the re-check date. No projector, no account, no online form required.

## How to run it

| Time | Phase | Facilitator does | Participants do |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0–4 | Mark | Read the four statements aloud, exactly as worded. "1 = definitely not safe here, 5 = completely safe. No names on the dots." | Privately place a 1–5 dot on each of the four statements |
| 4–8 | Reveal | Count the dots per statement together, no commentary. Let the shape of the four bars land before anyone speaks. | Watch one bar clearly lag while the others hold up |
| 8–12 | Find the lowest | Circle **The lowest one**. Refuse "but our average is fine" — the lowest bar is where people actually hold back | Agree out loud which single statement is the problem, and what it cost recently |
| 12–20 | Raise it | Ask for one concrete behavior anyone could start this week that would raise that bar. Push from "everyone should" to "I will, from Tuesday". Commit, and set the re-check date | Name the behavior, who starts it, and what the first visible proof would look like |

Then run the debrief — see `the-safety-check-debrief.md`.

## The card

The four statement cards are the instrument — fixed wording, because the whole readout depends on comparing the same four bars every time you run it. The labels are deliberately in first person ("I can admit a mistake"), so each dot is about the room, not about someone's leadership style. **The lowest one** and **One behavior to raise it** keep the check from ending in a score: the tool's product is a dated behavior, not a chart.

## Failure modes

1. **Everyone rates 5s.** The check itself feels unsafe — a classic sign. Rescue: switch to anonymous written dots, or ask "what would have to be true for a 3 to be safe to say?"
2. **The team wants to fix all four.** Rescue: you'll fix none. Force the single lowest bar; one raised bar lifts the others faster than four half-efforts.
3. **A leader explains why the low score is wrong.** Rescue: that explanation is the data. Thank them, park it, and keep the anonymous result — the check measures the room, not the org chart.

## Variations

- **New team, week one:** run it to set expectations out loud — "here's what we want to be safe for, and we're not there yet."
- **After something went wrong:** a spike in "I can't admit a mistake" is usually why things stopped being reported. Check that bar first.
- **Quarterly pulse:** re-run on a rhythm; the four bars over time are the truest health readout a team has.

- **Two teams that hand off:** run it once per team; the bars that differ are where the inter-team trust leaks.

## Facilitation notes

- Dots carry no names. The moment someone's score is traced to them, the ratings turn safe and useless — protect the anonymity harder than you protect any other rule here.
- The lowest score is the target, not the average. A team averaging 4 with one statement at 2 has a real problem in that one place.
- "One behavior" means observable: if a stranger couldn't spot it happening, it isn't one yet.

## Put it on the wall

Print `the-safety-check-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to keep the four statements and the two rules — name the lowest, not the average; anonymous dots — in view during the reveal.

## Props in this folder

- `the-safety-check-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): four statement cards, the lowest one, one behavior to raise it, blank card, branded backs
- `the-safety-check-guide.md` — this run sheet
- `the-safety-check-debrief.md` — the debrief questions and the failure modes of the debrief
- `the-safety-check-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks
- `the-safety-check-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole tool on one A3 wall sheet: the four bars, the flow, the watch-outs
- `the-safety-check-start-here.md` — one page, thirty seconds, then print and go
- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `*-Letter.pdf` — US Letter editions of the print documents

## Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the cards, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs nothing but four statements on a wall and anonymous dots.

# The Safety Check — Debrief

> Four bars are a diagnosis, not a verdict — the debrief is where the lowest one turns into one dated behavior.
>
> Use with `the-safety-check-guide.md`. The raise-it phase at minute 12 is the compressed version; this sheet is the full one.

## How to run this debrief

- Keep the four bars visible on the wall. This debrief argues with a picture the team just drew; folded away, it becomes opinion again.

- Stay on the lowest bar. Curiosity about the other three is how teams dilute the one finding they have.
- Close on behavior, owner, start day, re-check date. A debrief that ends at “we should be more open” measured nothing.

## Read the shape

- Look at the four bars side by side. Which one is the outlier — clearly lower than the rest?
- Did the shape surprise anyone? A leader who thought “we’re totally open” and sees “disagree with the decision-maker” at a 2 has learned something.
- Are any two bars linked? Low “admit a mistake” and low “take a risk” usually travel together — one silence causes both.

## The six debrief questions

**1. The outlier.**

“Which bar is clearly lower than the rest — and who was unsurprised by it? Unsurprised people know where it comes from.”

→ Targets: reading the shape before feelings; the unsurprised are your first witnesses, not your enemies.

**2. The last test.**

“For the lowest statement: when was the last time someone tested it here and it went badly?”

→ Targets: the incident behind the score — usually one, recent enough, and known by more people than will say so.

**3. Rule or signal.**

“Is the low score about a rule (punishment is real) or a signal (nobody has seen it go well)? What would a person have to believe to keep their question, mistake or disagreement to themselves?”

→ Targets: the diagnosis the fix depends on — a rule needs changing, a signal needs one visible good outcome. Name the belief, not the person.

**4. The signal-maker.**

“Who is most able to change that signal — and are they in the room?”

→ Targets: whether the behavior can come from today’s seats; if not, the ask becomes a conversation with someone who isn’t here.

**5. The first proof.**

“What’s the first visible proof that it’s safe now — the small thing that, if it happened, would move the next dot up? And what happens to the person who tests the new behavior and it goes badly?”

→ Targets: making safety observable and the retry protected; otherwise you accidentally confirm the old fear.

**6. The owner and the date.**

“The behavior you picked: who will do it, starting which day — and when is the re-check? What will you do if the bar hasn’t moved?”

→ Targets: “’everyone should’ means no one will”; the re-check plan is what makes this a measurement, not a mood.

## Failure modes of the debrief

| Failure mode | Why it happens | The rescue |
|---|---|---|
| Everyone rated 5s | The check itself felt unsafe — a classic sign | Redo the marking anonymously in writing, or ask “what would have to be true for a 3 to be safe to say?” |
| The team insists on fixing all four | The average feels safer than the outlier | Force the single lowest bar; one raised bar lifts the others faster than four half-efforts. |
| A leader argues the score away | The check measured the room, and the org chart objects | That explanation is the data. Thank them, park it, keep the anonymous result. |