“The only thing we have is one another. The only competitive advantage we have is the culture and values of the company. Anyone can open up a coffee store. We have no technology, we have no patent. All we have is the relationship around the values of the company and what we bring to the customer every day. And we all have to own it.” — Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks

Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to the following application activities

Key Activity
Create Positive Staff Culture Agreements (15-30 minutes in small group and 15-30 min in large group)

Example of Staff Culture Agreements

Wellness Practice
Strategy for Self-care – STRENGTH – Stress Resilience
In order to offer a non-anxious presence with our colleagues, students, and their families, we need to be able to recognize the times when we cannot! In other words, we need to be able to recognize when we need either a new perspective or a break. Often our bodies let us know. The first question we might ask ourselves is, what am I telling myself about this situation and what is another possible story? Here’s a fascinating TED Talk on making stress our friend (also referenced in Section 10).

And, sometimes we really just need a break! It is helpful to have a plan for what we can do and who can assist us in finding a way to take a break. Of course, all of this is successful only if we allow ourselves the vulnerability of needing a break and, if appropriate, asking for help.

Circle Agenda
Staff Circle Agenda, Section Seven

Core Content Visual to Display in Common Staff Areas
What Do You Want to Say About the Culture of Staff? – Use this Visual and Display in Staff Break Areas
Posting this visual in common staff areas will serve as a reminder of content covered to staff and perhaps serve as a future conversation started for deeper reflection among staff members.

Supplementary Activities/Handouts
Support Begins With Empathy! (10-15 min)
Links Specifically for Leadership

**How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories between Colleagues**

Read the information about low impact debriefing strategies and decide how to share with staff.

For links to additional resources, please visit the Toolkit online.
“The only thing we have is one another. The only competitive advantage we have is the culture and values of the company. Anyone can open up a coffee store. We have no technology, we have no patent. All we have is the relationship around the values of the company and what we bring to the customer every day. And we all have to own it.” — Howard Schultz, CEO, Starbucks

Supporting each other as colleagues is a parallel process to supporting our students. Both processes occur within trusted relationships where expectations and boundaries are both clear and flexible.

In this section we will expand on the work we did to identify the Compassionate Boundaries that help us to act with Helpful Adult Behaviors. We will focus on collegial behaviors and attitudes that generate the culture we choose to work within. We will also consider practices to increase our knowledge and understanding of each other to foster a culture of appreciation and collaboration.

To prepare for our work together, consider these questions individually and then bring your ideas to your small team discussion.

1. Describe your vision of the most positive work environment for you to be able to be your best self in your job.
2. What staff behaviors and attitudes would lead to such an environment?
3. Which of these are your top 5-8 priorities for the culture you desire?
4. What are your strengths in regards to these behaviors?
5. Where would you like to see growth in your ability to think and act in these ways?
6. What might help you with that?
7. How has what has happened to you in your life impacted your ability to contribute to a positive work culture?
8. What practices/activities work best for you to enhance connections with your colleagues within these behavior boundaries?

Part of our being able to be an effective colleague is our ability to discern what our role is within the larger system in our school and the larger system of supports for children and families in our communities. The reality is that, while we might be able to work with a child to address a learning challenge, we may not be able to address a family’s need for housing. Yet, the family’s need for housing may be what keeps us up at night.

Each of us do best when we realize the limitations of our role and what our colleagues in our school and our colleagues in the community offer to our students and their families. This awareness allows us to function within our role without the burden of the needs that we simply cannot meet. It also fosters respect and gratitude for the various roles of our colleagues and community partners.

Developed in partnership with:
compassionresiliencetoolkit.org
Questions for individual staff and school teams to consider include:

1. What are my limitations to meet the needs of my students?
2. What services do my colleagues and community organizations offer that I cannot?
3. What is my belief in the capacity of others on "my team?"
4. What do I need to do to increase my knowledge of and belief in the capacity of others?

These questions can be helpful for teams to address together or individuals to use to discern their level of connection to colleagues and other community services.

**Strategy for Self-care – STRENGTH – Stress Resilience**

In order to offer a non-anxious presence with our colleagues, students, and their families, we need to be able to recognize the times when we cannot! In other words, we need to be able to recognize when we need either a new perspective or a break. Often our bodies let us know. The first question we might ask ourselves is, what am I telling myself about this situation and what is another possible story? Here’s a fascinating TED Talk on making stress our friend.

And, sometimes we really just need a break! It is helpful to have a plan for what we can do and who can assist us in finding a way to take a break. Of course, all of this is successful only if we allow ourselves the vulnerability of needing a break and, if appropriate, asking for help. These activities can help in our relationships with students and in our relationships with colleagues.

**A. Energizer breaks strategy**

1. Energizer Brain Breaks provide some release from stress for the students and teachers at the same time. David Sladkey is the author of books with many ideas.
2. This is a free resource with some good ideas too.

**B. Tapping in and out strategy**

1. Staff work together to develop an understanding about how they might share the responsibility for all students. Specific strategies are defined and practiced.
2. For example: if a staff member can no longer maintain a calm, non-anxious presence with a student who is having behavioral challenges, it is acceptable to ask someone else to take over for a short time. The student may connect with the other staff person in their classroom if they are not teaching or simply sit in the back of the other teacher’s classroom while the student and their teacher return to a calm demeanor.
3. Staff develop a system of communicating when they need to step away from a student.
4. The individual who is tapped in will more likely be successful if they have a relationship with the student. All staff including administrators are considered for the task of tapping in.

The next four sections are Wellness and Resilience Strategies: Mind, Spirit, Strength, and Heart. We will explore specific strategies that work and how to implement them in our lives.
Create Positive Staff Culture Agreements

(This is a continuation of the Helpful Adult Behaviors activity from Section 6 of the toolkit.)

Create an Agreement for Positive Staff Culture by defining behaviors that lead to a positive culture. This activity is best done over two sessions. First in smaller teams, then shared and synthesized before a meeting with the whole staff. Enlarge the visual “What you Want to Say About the Culture of Staff” from the staff activity section and put in staff break areas prior to these sessions to get the conversations going and to gather input.

Directions for small groups:
1. Describe your vision of the most positive work environment for you to be able to be your best self in your job. What staff behaviors and attitudes would lead to such an environment? As you listen to each other, review the list of helpful behaviors and attitudes from the Helpful Adult Behaviors activity in Section 6 of the toolkit. Identify when the helpful behaviors on the list match what staff are saying about staff culture (circle or star them). Expand the list with more behaviors that they believe are important to have a staff culture in which they would want to work.
2. Create a separate consensus list of behaviors and attitudes that support a positive staff culture.
3. Individually reflect, then discuss what boundaries a staff member might want to have to support the helpful behaviors.
4. Discuss how to set these boundaries using the tips from the Compassionate Boundary Setting section of the toolkit. Be sure to discuss the hesitance we have in proactively setting and addressing boundary issues with colleagues.
5. Discuss what has happened to you in your life that has impacted your ability to contribute to a positive work culture.
6. Come prepared to the whole staff meeting with your consensus list of behaviors to support a positive staff culture written on flip chart paper. These will be used to write your school’s Positive Staff Culture Agreements.

Directions for whole staff meeting:

PRIOR TO THE MEETING
1. All ideas from the work groups are displayed on flip chart paper in a staff gathering area. Let staff know that the small group ideas are posted for them to review.
2. Once the staff have time to see what the small groups have done, ask a team of 3-4 to work together to categorize the actions into broader categories removing statements that are repetitious.

AT THE WHOLE STAFF MEETING
3. Display the small group flip charts and handout the synthesized list for comment and any suggested revisions by the staff.
4. Have the synthesized list on flipchart paper too and make any revisions in the moment for all to see.
5. Ask each staff person to identify the five most important actions. Next to each of those actions the participant puts a dot/mark/sticker.
6. When voting is complete, the 10 actions that are most popular items become the base for the Positive Staff Culture Agreements.
7. Discuss what activities work best for you to enhance connections with your colleagues and receive support from them in your role at the school? (i.e. Tapping In/Out)

AFTER THE STAFF MEETING
8. The actions are written into a Culture Agreements document. The document is enlarged and hung in a staff gathering area for all staff to sign.
9. Copies are made available to staff to keep in their room. The individual copies should include four self-reflection questions on the back. The questions are:
   A. What behaviors do I regularly demonstrate as a colleague?
   B. What behaviors might I enhance to be the colleague I want to become?
   C. What steps can I take to maintain my strengths and grow in areas I identified in B?
   D. Who of my colleagues can I talk to about these commitments I have made?
10. Examples of two staff culture agreements are on the following page. Limiting the agreements to no more than 10 specific behaviors is best.
## A School Staff Culture Agreements Example

The staff at XYZ school seek to consistently behave in these ways towards each other and those we serve:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Be welcoming to all through our words and body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Demonstrate approachability through presence, tone, engaging in active listening, and by seeking and accepting constructive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Seek to understand other’s perspective by setting aside judgments and assuming good intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Connect through our common human feelings, whether we relate to another’s situation or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Speak up when we see problems and bring solution-focused attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Focus on the positives: what is working and the opportunities in our challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Engage each other’s wisdom and strengths during meetings and throughout our workday to empower success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Offer to assist other staff and if able, respond when help is requested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Hold ourselves and each other accountable to our commitments with grace and respond to communication in a timely manner (2 school days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Monitor and care for our well-being with support from our colleagues and school leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An Example of Culture Agreements from a Leadership Team

(Note that these leaders also did a survey to determine the level of perceived importance of each and how the team was currently living up to the agreements. This allowed them to prioritize and focus on bringing a few up to par.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Current State</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1. Represent one another as a unified team and address conflicts with doing so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2. Encourage productive conflict and move forward (with forgiveness) when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3. Hold oneself, others, and the organization accountable to clearly defined expectations and deadlines with understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4. Be strategic about communication methods based upon the situation and individual limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. Respond to emails within 2 business days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. If urgent and requiring response, (1) text or (2) call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. Ensure email communications are clear and concise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. Avoid unnecessary email or BCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. Leverage daily huddles to reduce email communications and increase direct engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5. Engage in proactive communication to identify impact of our work on others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6. Ensure effective collaboration and increase strength-based problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7. Assume good intention and seek clarity when it’s difficult (hard on process, not on people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8. Express viewpoints to individuals directly with kindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9. Acknowledge when struggling and ask for help when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10. Be willing to take risks for innovation and learn from failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Healthy Culture Team Agreements

1. Be welcoming to all through our words and body language.
2. Seek to understand other’s perspective by setting aside judgments and assuming good intentions.
3. Demonstrate approachability through presence, tone, engaging in active listening, and by seeking and accepting constructive feedback.
4. Focus on the positives: what is working and the opportunities in our challenges.
5. Engage in each other’s wisdom and strengths through huddles and throughout our workday to empower success.
6. Offer to assist team members and respond when help is requested.
7. Speak up when we see problems and bring a solution-focused attitude.
8. Hold ourselves and each other accountable to our commitments with grace and respond to communication in a timely manner (2 business days).
9. Monitor and care for our well-being with support from our team and organization.
10. Connect through our common feelings, whether we related to another’s situation or not.
## Staff Culture

### Staff Support Circle Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle Topic</th>
<th>CR Section 7: Staff Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td>Send the <a href="#">introduction document</a> from Section 7 in the online toolkit at least 4 days prior to the circle to all participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose of Circle/ Learning Objectives</strong></td>
<td>We are learning how our collegial behaviors and attitudes generate the culture we work within and what practices will increase our knowledge and understanding of each other that will foster a culture of appreciation and collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials/Preparation/Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>Time:</strong> 45-50 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Materials:
- Circle kit
- Shared agreements created in first session
- Note cards
- Markers
- Flipchart paper
- Write questions A and B from section four of guiding questions on flipchart
- Copies of the following for all participants: Helpful Behaviors from Session #6, [Healthy Break Activities](#), and if doing bonus activity, [How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories Among Colleagues](#) article

#### Set-up:
- Up to 15 chairs arranged in a circle without furniture in the middle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welcome/Check-In (10 minutes)</th>
<th>Welcome participants and complete check-in.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Talking piece) How are you doing on a scale of 1-5 and what is a hashtag that would describe your (upcoming or last) week?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Staff Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle Topic</th>
<th>CR Section 7: Staff Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grounding/Wellness Practice</strong> <em>(5 minutes)</em></td>
<td>Distribute, discuss and practice Healthy Break Activities. Explain that the url offers an option to have tips emailed to you daily. Pick one for the whole group to practice or divide group into smaller groups and have small groups select one behavior to practice. Review list ahead of time, some of the behaviors will not be appropriate for your setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review</strong> <em>(5 minutes)</em></td>
<td>“The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” — Phil Jackson Review the boundaries work from last session by handing out the Healthy Behaviors list they generated and use two behaviors to demonstrate saying “no” to support a “yes.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Guiding Questions** 1-3: *(10 minutes)* | Designing our staff culture agreements: 1. **Share:** Take a moment to reflect (shut your eyes if that would be helpful) on your vision of the most positive work environment for you to be able to be your best self in your job. After a few minutes of reflection, review the list generated in Session #6.  
2. (Talking piece) **What would you like to add to the Healthy Behaviors list based on your reflection?**  
3. (Have participants circle on their handout and give to facilitators) Which of these are your top 5-8 priorities for staff behaviors to build and maintain the culture you desire?  
4. While the lists are being tallied by one facilitator, other facilitator leads the following: **Working within my lane while supporting my colleagues also is crucial to a healthy culture to support compassion resilience.** These questions can be helpful for teams to discern their level of connection to colleagues and other community services. A & B for personal reflection and/or journaling and C for group discussion. a. What are my school’s/organization’s limitations to meet the needs of our students/clients and what other organizations are you aware of that meet those needs? b. Do I know enough about other organizations’ services to confidently refer students and families to them? c. (Talking piece) **Pulling from your reflections, what does my school/organization need to do to increase my understanding of and belief in other organizations’ ability to serve our students/clients and families?** |
## Staff Culture

**Circle Topic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grounding/Wellness Practice (5 minutes)</th>
<th>CR Section 7: Staff Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Share** the prioritized 8-12 behaviors list.  
(Pair share) What are your strengths regarding these behaviors? Where would you like to see growth in your ability to think and act in these ways? What might help you with that? |

**Closing**

| Closing (5 minutes) | Share: The science of gratitude points to our ability to alter our brains predisposition to be in threat assessment mode, which limits our ability to see the good in front of us.  
(Talking piece) Share a word of gratitude for the group and pass a high five around the circle. (Use high five as the way to pass the speaking rather than the talking piece.)  
**Bonus Activity:** In our work we often hear tough stories. How we decide to share those stories for our own support can impact our overall work culture. This article can help you think about a healthy balance from getting what you need while caring for your coworkers in the process. Hand out *How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories Among Colleagues* article. |

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*How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories Among Colleagues* article.
What do you want to be able to say about the culture of the adults in this building?
Support for Colleagues Begins With Empathy!

If you haven’t used this video earlier in the toolkit activities, this is another great time to share it with staff. You could end the whole staff activity on the staff culture contract with this or email the link with description as follow-up.

As we build a compassionate culture among staff, our goal is to build skills to provide effective support, not solve anyone’s problem. Support can mean many things and always includes listening or “being with” the colleague. That requires empathy.

Brené Brown’s YouTube video on empathy provides a foundational understanding of what empathy looks like and doesn’t look like when someone shares their pain with us. It includes some helpful “words to say” such as: “I really don’t know what to say but I am glad you told me.”

As an individual, small group or whole staff, brainstorm sentence prompts for staff to use when talking with a colleague who has been through a difficult time or difficult incident.
How to Avoid the Contagion Effect of Sharing Tough Stories between Colleagues

Adapted from The Compassion Fatigue Workbook by Francoise Mathieu. Chapter 5. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group. 2012

Helpers who bear witness to many stories of abuse and violence notice that their own beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by repeatedly being exposed to traumatic material. Karen Saakvitne and Laurie Anne Pearlman, Transforming the Pain, p. 49

Sharing graphic details of trauma stories can spread vicarious trauma to other helpers and perpetuate a climate of cynicism and hopelessness in the workplace. Laurie Pearlman and Karen Saakvitne put forward the concept of “limited disclosure” which can be a strategy to mitigate the contamination effect of helpers (educators) informally debriefing one another during the normal course of a day. Almost all helpers acknowledge that they have, in the past, knowingly and unknowingly traumatized their colleagues, friends and families with stories that were probably unnecessarily graphic. Over time, limited disclosure was renamed to Low Impact Disclosure (L.I.D.). Low impact disclosure suggests that we conceptualize our tough story as being contained inside a tap. We then decide, via the process described below, how much information we will release and at what pace.

The process of L.I.D. involves four key steps:

1. Increased Self Awareness – How do you debrief when you have heard or seen hard things? Take a survey of a typical work week and note all of the ways in which you formally and informally debrief yourself with your colleagues. Note the amount of detail you provide them with (and they you), and the manner in which this is done: do you do it in formal way, at a peer meeting, or in the hall by your classroom door? What is most helpful to you in dealing with difficult stories?

2. Fair Warning – Before you tell anyone around you a difficult story, you must give them fair warning. This is the key difference between formal debriefs and ad hoc ones: If I am your supervisor, and I know that you are coming to tell me a traumatic story, I will be prepared to hear this information.

3. Consent – Once you have given warning, you need to ask for consent. This can be as simple as saying: “I need to debrief something with you, is this a good time?” or “I heard something really hard today, and I could really use a debrief, could I talk to you about it?” The listener then has a chance to decline, or to qualify what they are able/ready to hear. For example, if you are my work colleague I may say to you: “I have 15 minutes and I can hear some of your story, but would you be able to tell me what happened without any of the gory details?”

4. Low Impact Disclosure – Now that you have received consent from your colleague, you can decide how much to release from the Tap. Imagine that you are telling a story starting with the outer circle of the story (ie., the least traumatic information) and you are slowly moving in toward the core (the very traumatic information) at a gradual pace. You may, in the end, need to tell the graphic details, or you may not, depending on how disturbing the story has been for you.
Questions to ask yourself before you share graphic details:


Is the listener: Aware that you are about to share graphic details? Able to control the flow of what you are about to share with them?

If it is a consultation or a debriefing: Has the listener been informed that it is a debriefing, or are you sitting in their office chatting about your day? Have you given them fair warning? How much detail is enough? How much is too much? If this is a staff meeting or a case conference, is sharing the graphic detail necessary to the discussion? Sometimes it is, often it is not. Eg: discussing a child being removed from the home, you may need to say “The child suffered severe neglect and some physical abuse at the hands of his mother” and that may be enough. Don’t assume you need to disclose all the details right away.

Some additional suggestions: Experiment with Low Impact Disclosure (LID) and see whether you can still feel properly debriefed without giving all the tough details. You may find that at times you do need to disclose all the details which is an important process in staying healthy as helpers. And at other times you may find that you did not need this.