

Looking Out for Your People

Building Collective Care in the Workplace



School
of Social Work
PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY



Session Focus

Collective Care

Moving from individual self-care to shared practices that sustain teams over time

Relational Practices

Check-ins, noticing, and responding in ways that open connection rather than shut it down

Work Distribution

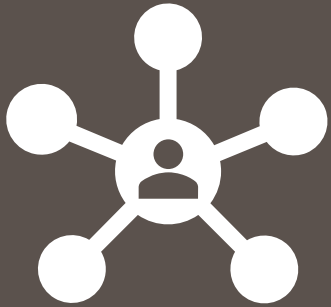
Having honest conversations about load, capacity, and what needs to shift

Advocacy

Speaking up together about conditions, resources, and sustainable expectations



Regulate



Relate



Reason





Regulate

Take a moment to bring your awareness inward. Gently notice what's happening within, without any judgment or expectation.

- **Is your body communicating a need right now? Maybe a stretch, a sip of water, or just a deep breath?**
- **Consider how you might adjust your surroundings or posture to feel more present and at ease. What small change could help you settle into this moment with greater effort?**



Relate

Who's in the Room?

Who's Represented?

Communities served?



Reason: How We'll Work Today

1. Orientation

Ground ourselves in collective care as a framework: what it is, why it matters now

2. Practice Rounds

Move into breakout rooms for structured conversations with consideration from different roles and real time feedback.

3. Skills Application

Work through check-in language, load conversations, and advocacy scenarios

4. Integration

Come back together and share what landed, what surprised you, and what felt hard

5. Take-Away Tools

Leave with a reference sheet of language, practices, and reflection prompts you can use immediately

Working Agreements

Choice

Participation is always by choice. You can pass, listen, or step away at any point.

Confidentiality

What is shared here stays here. Take the learning, leave the stories.

Context

We come from different organizational realities. What works in one setting may need adapting in another.

Practice

We are here to try things, not perfect them. Progress over polish.

Disclaimer: This is Educational

This training is for educational purposes only, and participants should follow their organization's policies, supervision, and professional scope of practice when applying any information presented.

***“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence,
it is self-preservation, and that is an act of
political warfare.”***

- Audre Lorde

The Individualism Trap

The Trap

1. Self-care is your responsibility alone
2. Resilience is a personality trait
3. Burnout means you did not manage well enough
4. Wellbeing is a private matter

The Truth

1. Care is relational: it requires community
2. Resilience is collective: it is built in relationships
3. Burnout is systemic: it reflects conditions
4. Wellbeing is organizational: it belongs to everyone

Community Care as Strategy

Relationships as Infrastructure

Connection is what holds everything else together. When relationships are strong, teams can absorb more.

Sustainable Conditions

We focus on creating conditions that sustain people, rather than asking people to endure what is unsustainable.

Shared Responsibility

Wellbeing is woven into how we organize, how we distribute work, and how we show up for each other.

Mutual Accountability

Looking out means noticing, naming, and acting: not waiting for someone to ask for help.

bell hooks, All About Love

Three Dimensions of Collective Care

Relational Practices

How we check in, how we notice changes, how we respond when someone is struggling. The daily, consistent practices that build trust.

Work Distribution

How load gets shared, how we protect capacity, how we redistribute when someone is carrying too much. The structural practices.

Advocacy and Conditions

How we speak up about what is needed, how we push for sustainable expectations, how we use collective voice. The systemic practices.

Dimension 1: Relational Practices

The daily work of connection



Check-In Practices That Work

1. Be Specific

“How are you holding up with the restructuring?” lands differently than “How’s it going?”

2. Create Real Openings

"I have been thinking about our conversation last week and wanted to follow up."

3. Follow Through

Coming back to what someone shared shows you listened. It builds trust faster than anything.

4. Normalize the Range

"A lot of people are feeling stretched right now" makes it safe to be honest about struggle.

Desmond Tutu

Language for Checking In

Try This

1. "I noticed you seemed quieter in that meeting. How are you doing?"
2. "What is on your plate right now that I could help with?"
3. "I wanted to check in. That project seemed really intense."
4. "How are you really doing?"

What Makes It Work

1. Naming what you observed shows attention
2. Offering concrete help signals you mean it
3. Referencing specific context shows you are paying attention
4. Slowing down and asking with genuine curiosity changes everything

Dimension 2: Work Distribution

Sharing the weight



Having Load Conversations

1. Name What You See

"I see you have been staying late a lot." No judgment. Just observation.

2. Ask About Capacity

"How manageable is your load right now, honestly?" Give them room to be real.

3. Explore What Could Shift

"If we could take one thing off your plate, what would make the biggest difference?"

4. Make Concrete Offers

"I can take on the client calls this week." Specificity shows you mean it.

Practice Structure

Breakout Rooms: Practice – and/or – Discuss

Each round: Consider this from each perspective *The Individual,
*The Colleague, *The Observer

5 minutes of practice/discussion + feedback

Rotate roles after each round

**Observer focus: What language opened space?
What created safety?**



24 minutes

Scenario 1: Checking In

A colleague has seemed different lately

Quieter in meetings, less engaged in group conversation

Coming in early, leaving late

Quality of work has not dropped, but something has shifted

Your task: check in genuinely. Not to fix, just to connect.



8 minutes

Scenario 2: Load Conversation

A team member is clearly overwhelmed

Multiple competing deadlines, skipping breaks

Has not asked for help

You have some capacity right now

Your task: have a load conversation. Name what you see. Explore what could shift.



8 minutes

The Three Dimensions

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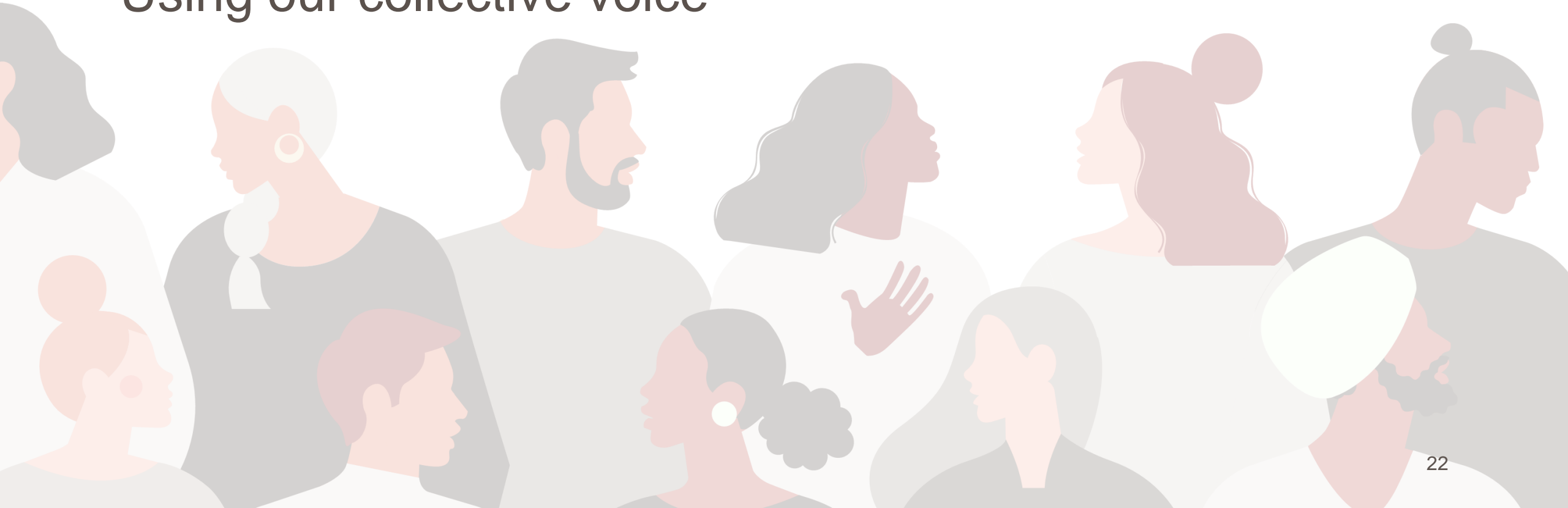
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Advocacy and Conditions

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Dimension 3: Advocacy and Conditions

Using our collective voice



Advocacy Language

Language That Opens Doors

1. "This pace is not sustainable for our team."
2. "We are seeing signs of burnout across the group. What can we change?"
3. "Our people need recovery time built into the schedule, not just permission to take it."

Why It Works

1. Uses "our team" to make it collective, not personal
2. Names the pattern and invites problem-solving
3. Distinguishes between permission and structure
4. Frames it as a resourcing question, not a complaint

Scenario 3: Advocating for Change

Your team is already stretched thin

A new project has just been assigned without additional resources

Morale is dropping, people are canceling time off

Something has to give

Your task: advocate. Name what is true. Explore what needs to change. Propose alternatives.



8 minutes

Building Sustainable Practices

1. Start with One

Pick one relationship where you can practice checking in differently this week. Start small and stay consistent.

2. Build Into Rhythm

Make check-ins part of your team rhythm: stand-ups, huddles, shift changes. Expected, not exceptional.

3. Normalize Load Talk

Make workload conversations regular practice, not crisis response. Ask about capacity before things break.

4. Advocate Together

Collective voice is stronger than individual voice. Find allies. Make requests together.

Your Next Steps

One Check-In

Who needs you to reach out this week?
What specific language will you use?
Name the person and the approach.

One Load Conversation

Who might be silently overwhelmed? What will you say to open the door? When will you do it?

One Advocacy Move

What condition needs to change? Who can you partner with? What is your opening line?

***“Transform yourself to transform the
world.”***

- Grace Lee Boggs

Looking Out for Your People

Thank you

Collective care is strategy. Relationships are infrastructure. We sustain each other.

