

THE SANCTUARY MODEL: FOUR PILLARS

The Sanctuary Model is an evidence-supported, trauma-informed, evolving, whole system organizational change process that is comprised of a number of components that we organize around "Four Pillars". These four pillars are essential for what experience tells us is required to actually "create community": shared knowledge, shared values, shared language, and a shared practice. Together they have to envision together what they want to achieve as a whole group.



Knowledge about what makes human beings "tick" and what stress, adversity and trauma do to us as individuals and when we are in groups - all of this is the provides the scientific underpinning for the Sanctuary Model.

The Sanctuary Commitments provide the anchoring values and are tied directly to developmentally grounded, trauma-informed treatment goals as well as the overall health of the organizational culture.

[The Seven Sanctuary Commitments](#)

- [Commitment to Nonviolence](#)
- [Commitment to Emotional Intelligence](#)
- [Commitment to Social Learning](#)
- [Commitment to Open Communication](#)
- [Commitment to Democracy](#)
- [Commitment to Social Responsibility](#)
- [Commitment to Growth and Change](#)

S.E.L.F. is a simple and easy-to-use conceptual framework that provides a “compass” that allows everyone to navigate the challenges of complex interventions.

S=Safety

E=Emotions

L=Loss

F=Future

The Sanctuary Toolkit offers practical, grounded tasks that support implementation. “Creating Sanctuary” refers to the shared experience of creating and maintaining physical, psychological, social, and moral safety within a social environment—any social environment—and thus reducing systemic violence and counteracting the destructive parallel processes that are a result of chronic and unrelenting stress in a vulnerable species.

A SHARED VISION - USING IMAGINATION TO GUIDE OUR OUTCOMES

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In the Sanctuary Model, we believe it is impossible to get where you want to go unless you have a vision of where you want to go. So now, before we move into describing the structural and practical aspects of the Sanctuary Model we hope that you will pause, suspend a cynical perspective for a moment and imagine that things could be different in the world we live in, in the places where we work, than they are today. They could be, you know. One of the most important revelations that trauma theory has to offer is that most of the problems that consistently make life on Earth more like Hell for a substantial proportion of the world’s population, are entirely or at least mostly preventable. Hurt people hurt people – it’s really as simple as that. But we have been living with an acceptance of violence for so long that most of the time we dare not even dream about a world that is different from our own.

We feel a bit urgent about the importance of creating a different shared vision because with each passing day, more lives are being bent by the viral infection that is violence and it’s literally killing us. So take a few minutes and just let the following questions run through your mind as “What if?” ideas. If you find the vision you begin creating in answering those questions attractive, then read on. We can tell you at least some of the things that you need to know in order to begin moving yourself and your organization in a different direction.

WHAT IF VIOLENCE WERE NO LONGER ATTRACTIVE?

- What if parents and all adults stopped hitting, humiliating, and disrespecting children?
- What if bullies were taught how not to bully others beginning in kindergarten?
- What if all religions forbade any sort of violence to anyone for any reason?
- What if violence were accurately defined for what it really is - deliberate harm to body, self, social group, sentient beings, all life?
- What if the media stopped slinging gratuitous violence at us through every possible venue?
- What if there were no glorification of people hurting other people?
- What if “they” called for a war and nobody came?
- What if we recognized theoretically and practically that for any of us to be safe we all must feel safe?

WHAT IF WE DEVOTED OURSELVES TO BECOMING EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT?

- What if all children have a safe, secure, reliable and loving attachment figure(s) to help them learn how to manage their emotions?
- What if children were taught from the very beginning not to control, suppress, or express their emotions but to manage all of their emotions
- What if everyone learned the ways in which their emotions could be manipulated and played upon from their earliest years?
- What would happen if every person who experience disrupted attachment were helped to heal that attachment disruption through helping, safe, meaningful relationship?
- What if people’s feelings mattered as much as property?
- What if we learned individually and collectively how to manage fear without giving in to violence?
- What if emotions were an honored part of solving problems, individually and collectively?
- What if anyone’s loss of emotional management was viewed as a problem of and for the entire group to solve?
- What if the work of emotional labor were honored and rewarded as much as other forms of work?
- What if we had emotionally intelligent leaders?

WHAT IF WE LEARNED FROM OUR MISTAKES?

- What if everyone expected to continue learning and growing, all the time, throughout their lives?
- What if everyone worked in a place that expected us to learn, and grow and change all of the time?
- What if we were safe enough to challenge all of our underlying assumptions?
- What if we were safe enough to challenge the assumptions from the past?
- What if we remembered what we have forgotten?
- What if we were able to identify recurring patterns and change the ones we didn’t want?

- What if we were able to retain the knowledge we wanted to keep and throw away the ideas that are useless or harmful?
- What if we found much better methods for making far better decisions?
- What if we were even able to make good decisions under stress?
- What if we had opportunities to teach each other and learn from each other as part of our daily routine?

WHAT IF WE COULD REALLY COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER?

- What if people said what they meant to say and meant what they said?
- What if we played “telephone” or “whisper-down-the-lane” and an accurate message made it through?
- What if secrecy was seen as more of a threat than being open?
- What if we learned to talk to each other without hurting each other?
- What if we learned to enjoy conflict as sport instead of conflict as war?
- What if we could talk about the things that we can’t talk about?
- What if we could figure out what we are saying that is conscious and obvious and what it is that remains in the shadows?

WHAT IF WE REALLY CARED ABOUT DEMOCRACY?

- What if children were taught from their earliest years to think for themselves, to express their opinions, to respect the opinions of others, and to work towards a shared vision respecting all life?
- What if what was normal were democratic families, democratic schools, and democratic workplaces?
- What if everyone fully recognized the benefits of diverse opinions and participatory environments?
- What if everyone agreed that power must be distributed and always kept in balance?
- What if the goal of every meeting of minds was to create an opportunity for the emergence of something new?
- What if everyone recognized the fragile nature of democratic processes under stress and how easily autocracy can pretend to be strength?
- What if leaders always led through moral authority and creating a positive vision for the future, rather than through bullying and coercion?
- What if followers developed sufficient social immunity to authoritarianism that deception, bullying and coercion had no room to grow?
- What if dissent was honored?
- What if workers were truly empowered to create healthy, sustainable, effective, profitable, and contributing workplaces?

WHAT IF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WAS THE NORM FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, ORGANIZATION AND SOCIETY?

- What if we recognized that our desire to punish is largely a desire for vengeance, not justice?
- What if we redefined justice as restoring wholeness to a divided whole?
- What if we helped each other effectively manage our desire for revenge and transform it into something of mutual benefit instead?
- What if we understood and cared about ethical dilemmas, moral distress, and moral integrity in our homes, our offices, and our society?
- What if we recognized fully that we are all – all the time – either part of the solution or part of the problem – there are no bystanders?
- What if we all learned to recognize that injustice to one is injustice to all, that human rights are a critical determinant of human survival?
- What if we recognized that the only thing that sets humanity apart from the other forms of life we share this planet with is the power that we have to decide whether to be part of the problem or part of the solution?

WHAT IF WE WERE ABLE TO HONOR OUR LOSSES WHILE STILL INTENTIONALLY CREATING OUR FUTURE?

- What if we grappled with the tragic nature of human existence instead of always looking for someone or something to blame?
- What if we were able to see how we cling to the past as a way of never really saying goodbye?
- What if we recognized that our resistance to change isn't really that at all but a resistance to losing more than we have already lost?
- What if we really learned to let go and move with the flow of life?
- What if we learned that change doesn't mean failure?
- What if we learned to manage from the future so that we use then to create now?
- What if we actively sought out joy, love, fulfillment and contentment as the goals of life?