

***This is a draft version of the workbook
and is subject to further change.
Please do not circulate beyond your
team.***



Compassionate Employers

CHAPTER 3- Leading with vulnerability

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Draft issued 8th July 2026

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Introduction

This is a draft version of the workbook and is subject to further change. Please do not circulate beyond your team.

Disclaimer

While great care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, it is necessarily of a general nature and neither Hospice UK nor the other contributors can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may occur.

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Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is a reflective learning resource for managers of staff whose work may bring them into contact with grief, caring responsibilities, emotional labour, distress, death, dying or bereavement. It is designed to support individual reflection and team conversation.

It should be used alongside, not instead of, appropriate management support, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR guidance and organisational wellbeing provision.

How do I use this workbook?

This resource is for reflection and learning. It is not a substitute for clinical, psychological, occupational health, HR or emergency support.

Each chapter can be used as a standalone resource, however, the proposed order of chapters is:

- Team resilience
- Supporting teams with compassion
- Leading with vulnerability
- Managerial burnout.

Throughout each chapter there are opportunities for individual reflection and group reflection. See below for some guidance on how these activities should be facilitated:

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Group reflection guidance

- Participation is voluntary.
- No one should be expected to disclose personal trauma, bereavement, mental health experiences or private circumstances.
- Confidentiality expectations should be agreed at the start.
- Managers should not use reflective worksheets as performance management evidence.
- Teams should agree what can remain within the group and what may need to be escalated for safety or support.
- A facilitator is identified for more sensitive discussions, especially professional grief and burnout.

Our wider workplace

- Looking after ourselves matters, but wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility.
- Our workplace plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.
- Workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, psychological safety, fairness and access to support all shape whether people can stay well at work.
- *To access your organisation's support, please contact someone in your organisation for more information - such as your manager or HR team.*

About Compassionate Employers

The Compassionate Employers Programme launched in 2019 to provide organisations with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to effectively support employees and customers through terminal illness, caring responsibilities, and bereavement.

We envision a world where all employers are equipped to advocate for and support employees and customers through significant life moments. Our programme is built around three key pillars: greater visibility, education, and connection.

If you would like more information about Compassionate Employers, we would love to invite you to book a meeting with our team here: [Compassionate Employers Intro Chat](#)

About Hospice UK

Hospice care eases the physical and emotional pain of death and dying. Letting people focus on living, right until the end. But too many people miss out on this essential care. Hospice UK fights for hospice care for all who need it, for now and forever.

Membership of Hospice UK is open to UK organisations that provide hospice care. Anyone who works or volunteers for a Hospice UK member organisation can access our member-only services and resources. For more information on how to make the most of your Hospice UK membership, see: <https://www.hospiceuk.org/innovation-hub/membership>

Workbook key

	Lightbulb moment: An interesting fact, extra information.
	Individual reflection: An activity for you to complete (participation is optional).
	Group reflection: An activity to do with your team (participation is optional).
	Important note!: Important information.
	See Glossary: Detailed definitions.
	Tool: You can use this reflection/information outside of the workbook.
	Quote/quotation: Relevant quote/quotation.
	Key term: Important definition.
	Reminder to be kind to yourself: This activity may feel challenging or emotional (participation is optional). Please do take care of yourself and take breaks as needed.

Leading with vulnerability

'Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement.'

'Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose.'

Brené Brown¹

Leadership can feel like a daunting topic. There are lots of schools of thought about what 'great leadership' looks like and while often helpful, it can also feel like a lot of pressure.

In truth there is no step-by-step at being a 'perfect manager'. Even if there was, what works well for one person and one team, won't fit what others need.

Instead, what we will look at in this chapter is how we can build trusting, supportive relationships with our teams.

Vulnerability is 'the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome'² which as a leader is something we face day in and day out. We will not get it right every time but if we can be vulnerable, lean into mistakes, connect compassionately with the people we work with, we support our teams the best we can.



What we will cover

This chapter is a space to reflect, make notes, and think about how we can include vulnerability in our leadership.

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Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes or urgent support if needed.

Definitions

Management can be a hugely rewarding role. We get to see our team change and develop and we can make a fundamental difference to both the performance and wellbeing of our staff.

However, management is often something we have learnt on the job, without much prior knowledge or training. There can feel like a lot pressure to 'get it right' even though we may have had no training or support as to what 'right' looks like in the context of a hospice setting.

But what do we even mean by a 'good manager'?

Suggestions taken from Goens and Giannotti³ and Robinson and Hayday⁴

Individual reflection: What makes a good manager?

Good effective communicators. Understanding in sensitive conversations.

Remain calm in a crisis.

Ability to motivate and inspire the team, encouraging and open to their ideas.

Can balance wider organisational aims and team needs in decision making.

Understand how to manage resources, allocate them appropriately.

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Management and leadership

Some of us may feel really confident in our leadership, however, for those of us less sure, we are not alone. Yet we know that effective leadership is vital in a successful team. Particularly in hospice and healthcare settings, effective leadership plays a role in patient satisfaction, quality of care, staff wellbeing and absenteeism⁴.

One way of looking at leadership is through leadership styles. They can be useful for us to get ideas of what types of leadership skills may work for us.

Two styles that are highlighted by West et al⁵ are authentic leadership and transformational leadership.

Key term

Authentic leadership models an expectation of upholding ethical and moral conduct. It supports transparency and openness, a balanced input of perspectives and being trustworthy and fair in decision-making.

It aims to create hope, optimism and resilience and prioritises building a trusting, open work environment⁶.

Key term

Transformational leadership has been argued to be the most effective style for healthcare settings and has been linked to improved patient safety and care satisfaction⁶.

It aims to improve team morale and prioritises building trust across the team, encouraging a sense of purpose in the work with opportunities for professional growth and a focus on the personal needs of each individual³.



See glossary definition for more detailed definitions

Pause and reflect

Both authentic and transformational leadership prioritise empowering staff to participate in decision-making processes, responding to staff needs, supporting team hope and purpose in the work.



Be kind to yourself in these reflections. Often, we don't have capacity to think about own leadership style. You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.



Individual reflection: What three words would you use to describe your leadership?

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Individual reflection: Whose leadership do you admire and why?

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Individual reflection: What have you learnt about yourself since becoming a manager?

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Trust and vulnerability

Trust is a term that often comes up in leadership styles and is fundamental to both transformation and authentic leadership styles^{5,8}.

Key term

Trust is defined by Rousseau et al. as a 'willingness to be vulnerable'⁷ whilst there is risk and whilst there is a level of interdependence⁷.

In this definition, trust and vulnerability are interconnected and foundational to building meaningful relationships in our teams.

Key term

Vulnerability is according to Brown²: 'the emotions we experience during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure'².

There can be many misconceptions about vulnerability. While it can feel uncomfortable, vulnerability does not mean:

- weakness
- un-bounded oversharing
- leaving you open to 'betrayal'².



Vulnerability is 'the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome'².

It involves us showing up acknowledging that we may not always have all the answers but being present and committed to our work and our team anyway.

It is something as managers we do every day.

Including vulnerability in leadership

But what does vulnerability in leadership look like?



Courage to be imperfect

People who lead with courage aren't afraid of the errors that they may make along the way. They are open to learning about what they can do better and about adapting to meet the needs of their teams.



Self-compassion and compassion for others

We can often find it hardest to be compassionate to ourselves. However, if we are kind to ourselves, we can lead by example. To do this we may need additional support ourselves so that we can show up for our teams and for the people around us and give them compassion throughout their employment.



Authentic connection

We need to be able to let go of the idea of who we THINK we have to be. By letting go of the pressure to respond in a certain way because we are a manager or leader, we can better connect with our teams as people. We remove barriers and can better understand and advocate for their needs, making them seem feel seen and heard.



See Glossary for detailed definition of self -compassion.

Shame and vulnerability – Brené Brown

One of the biggest barriers to vulnerability is shame.

Key term

Shame is a universal human emotion. It is intensely painful and causes us to believe we are worthless, unable to access love or belonging ².

We may experience feelings of shame in the workplace when facing situations or conversations that challenge us; that bring about feelings of fear, discomfort or anxiety. Some examples that can bring up shame may be:

- Providing tough feedback to team members
- Discussing challenges that team members may be facing - including mental health, bereavement, or other health concerns.
- Conversations around redundancies.

Because of this discomfort, we often try to avoid the feeling of shame. In *'Dare to lead: brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts'*², Brené Brown describes how this occurs through 'shame shields'.

Brown suggests there are there 'shame shields' that we use:

Concept adapted from Brown²



Moving away

Retreating into silence, avoiding addressing the topic.

Moving towards

Overcompensating or oversharing personal experience in an effort to relate to the person.

Moving against

Feeling defensive, or pushing people away before their experiences trigger our own.

Self-awareness

Often when we experience shame, we automatically try to avoid it without even realising. We can use 'shame shields'² to ease our discomfort which is understandable. However, if we do this we can erode the relationship between a manager and an employee, or further the organisation. It damages trust.

Therefore, it is important we notice if this is happening. Self-awareness plays a part in noticing when we may be responding from a place of shame.

Key term

Self-awareness is our awareness of:

- our **internal state** (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses) which drive our **behaviours** (beliefs, values and motivations)
- how these behaviours then **impact and influence others**⁹.

Self-awareness is multi-layered. It requires an understanding of our internal experiences as well understanding the external impact on others¹⁰.

As a manager, self-awareness means taking the time to reflect on our own management skills and ways in which we can better contribute to a positive work environment.

By understanding ourselves better, we can better notice when we feel shame, understand what causes it and support ourselves without 'shame shields'².



Lightbulb moment: Self-awareness is not the same as rumination. It should not be used to be overly self-critical.

Focusing only on negative aspects of yourself or experiences is not beneficial, instead it becomes self-defeatist and reduces your ability to problem solve¹¹.

Practical tool: shame awareness

Be kind to yourself in these reflections. You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.

Shame can feel deeply painful but if we manage these feelings, we can learn from our experiences.



Individual reflection: Before going into experiences or conversations with others where we may feel shame, consider:

When do I feel shame as a manager? What causes it?

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How does shame show up for me? What does it feel like?

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How can I show up with authenticity and with empathy even if I feel uncomfortable and challenged?

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Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, GP or urgent support if needed.

Increasing self-awareness

Self-awareness is not always easy. When we are going about our busy day, we can often react to situations without giving it much thought.

We may go into discussions with judgment or respond to an employee's questions without really listening. We can find our actions may not be aligned with the manager we want to be.

Carden⁹ argues that the ways to improve self-awareness are through three areas. These are listed below with some example activities you could try:

1. Introspective activities and reflection:

- Journaling
- Drawing your feelings
- Mindfulness
- Identifying personal goals and values

2. Observations and perspectives of others:

- Management supervision/peer discussion groups
- Ask colleagues for feedback
- Practice active listening- notice how your team responds to you

3. Self-observation

- Look back on journal entries
- Observe yourself from others' perspectives
- Identify your strengths and weaknesses
- Write a letter to your future/past self



Be kind to yourself. We are all trying our best in often challenging situations. These are some ideas of things for you to reflect on, not a strict 'to do' list.

Practical tool: mindfulness

Sometimes we may struggle to know how we feel in the first place. Mindfulness is one key way we can become aware of how we feel, understand ourselves and respond more intentionally.



Individual reflection: Take care of yourself. This activity is optional and is for reflection and learning. It is not a substitute for clinical, psychological, occupational health, HR or emergency support.

Adapted from Rothschild¹²



What sensations you are experiencing in your **body**?

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What thoughts/images are coming into your **mind**?

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What can you do right now to help you feel **calm**?

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See Glossary for definition of mindfulness.

Support

When we are thinking about supporting our management skills, we don't have to do it alone.

It can be helpful for us to identify who or what can support us when we are finding challenging things as managers or are not sure what to do.

This could include working with a mentor (whose management style you admire), attending management training or managerial supervision.



Individual reflection: Who/what can support you to be the manager you want to be?

Make a note of what support is available to you in your hospice:

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Important note! Personal strategies are helpful but are not always enough. If we are really struggling at work, it is important we get the right support.

Speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Worksheet: individual activity

'Being the manager I want to be' activity

Often, we don't have capacity to think about own leadership style. However, it can be helpful to take some time reflect on our values as a manager and who we want to be.

This can help inform our actions and how we want to show up for our team whilst acknowledging the barriers we may face.

Important note!

Individual activity guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme , HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Be kind to yourself! Take your time when reflecting on these questions. It is ok if you don't know.



What do I want to be known for as a leader?

e.g. compassion, reliability, drive

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How can I move towards these aims?

e.g. reflection, selfcare, mindfulness

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What can interfere with these aims?

e.g. lack of focus, burnout, distractions, conflicting priorities

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How might this show up in my leadership?

e.g. too busy, lack of strategy, avoidant, unapproachable

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Worksheet: individual reflection

Preparing for vulnerable conversations: CALMER

When facing vulnerability (managing conflict or sharing difficult news), we can experience a lot of emotions.

Being conscious of these experiences and responding to them is a useful skill in management where we may need to make considered decisions without being ruled by frustration or fear.

Many situations at work can make us feel vulnerable. From performance chats, difficult updates, or supporting distressed team members. These conversations matter, and the best managers genuinely care about how they show up in them.

We often care so much about getting these moments right that the pressure becomes intense. We created CALMER can help remind us to take a moment for ourselves before stepping into situations that make us feel vulnerable.

Important note!

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Be kind to yourself. It is OK if it doesn't work for you or takes some practice. These are some ideas to reflect on.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom"

ascribed to Viktor Frankl¹³

C

Collect your thoughts - Take a moment to pause and plan. What do I want to say, how do I want to show up, what does this person need from me right now? How many of us are guilty of running from one meeting to the next without any time to think?

A

Actionable tasks - Sometimes these conversations feel overwhelming because everything else in our life feels busy too. Completing a few small things on your list can create mental space, and it helps if you're not worried about the workload that might follow a difficult conversation.

L

Listen - Notice what your body is telling you: hunger, tiredness, tension. What do you need so that you can be as present as possible?

M

Movement - Shake it out, step away from the desk, or take a short walk to bring yourself back into your body.

E

Exhale - Take some deep slow breaths. When we feel anxious we can feel our shoulders rise and our chest tighten. We can forget to really breathe.

R

Rituals - Do something that brings you comfort. Whatever soothes you: make a cuppa, listen to your favourite music, get outside in the fresh air.

Glossary

- **Authentic Leadership** models an expectation of upholding of ethical and moral conduct. It supports transparency and openness, a balanced input of perspectives and being trustworthy and fair in decision making⁶.
- **Transformational Leadership** has been argued to be the most effective style for healthcare settings and has been linked to improved patient safety and care satisfaction⁶.
- **Trust** is defined by Rousseau et al. as a 'willingness to be vulnerable'⁷ whilst there is risk and where there is a level of interdependence⁷.
- **Vulnerability** refers to 'the emotions we experience during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure'².
- **Shame** is a universal human emotion. It is intensely painful and causes us to believe we are worthless, unable to access love or belonging².
- **Shame resilience** is the ability to 'practice authenticity when we experience shame [...] to come out of the shame experience with more courage, compassion and connection'².
- **Self-awareness** is our awareness of our 'internal state (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses), which drive our behaviours (beliefs, values and motivations) and an awareness of how these behaviours then impact and influence others'⁹.
- **Mindfulness** is about paying attention to the present moment. It helps us in noticing the automatic patterns and habits which may be unhelpful and allows us to be more present and behave in a more informed way¹³.
- **Emotional regulation** refers to the conscious and unconscious strategies someone uses in responding to, experiencing and expressing an emotional experience¹⁴.

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