



# PSDP—Resources and Tools: Team as secure base model

## Introduction

The concept of the secure base comes from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) in which our relationships with significant others who are available, sensitive to our needs, and reliable provide us with a safe haven to return to when life is stressful. They also provide us with comforting internal mental models when we are physically away from significant others.

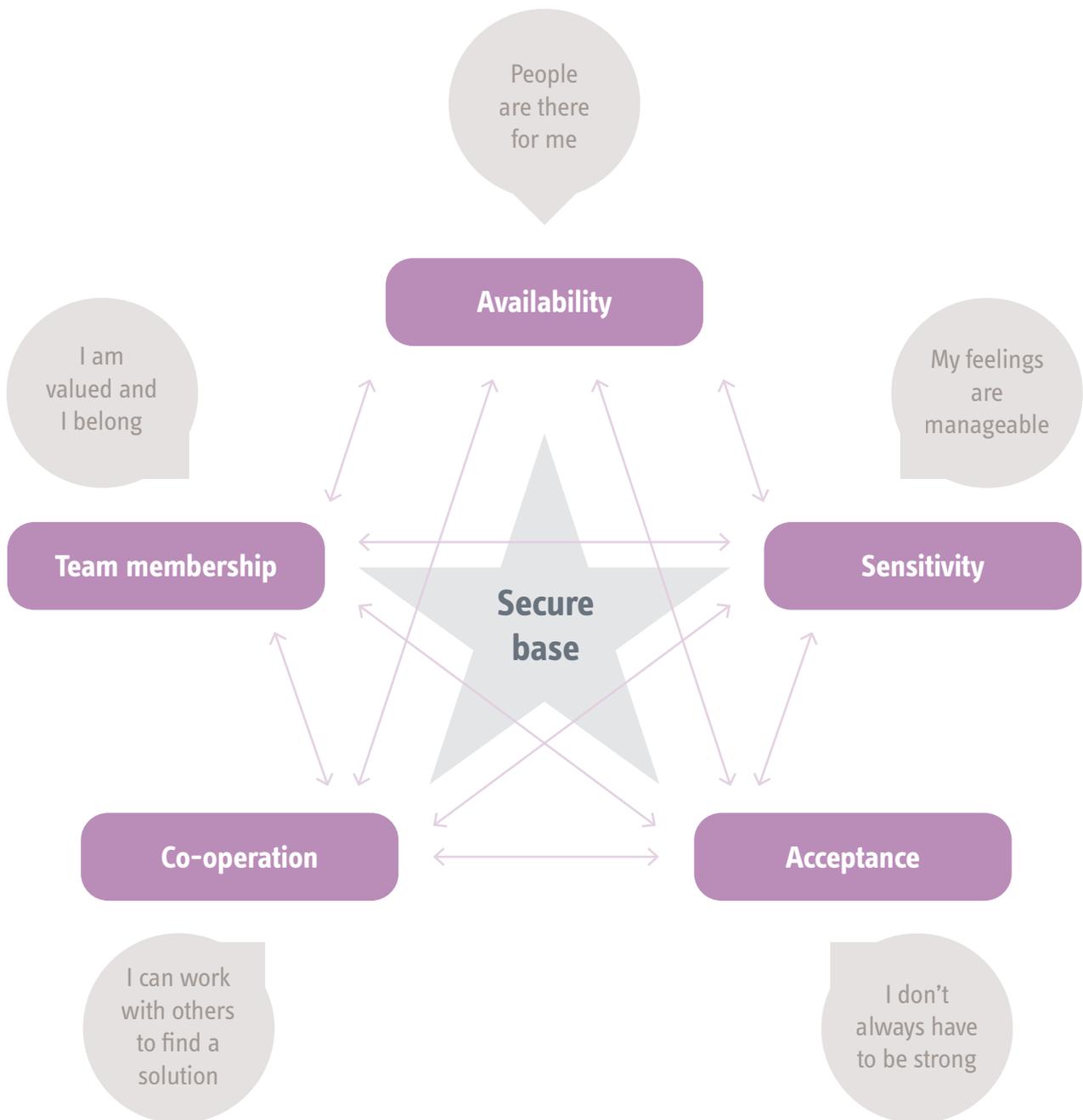
These secure attachments enable us to engage with the world and help us remain resilient when life is stressful. In the context of emotionally-demanding occupations, practice supervisors and their teams often provide a work-related secure base.

The team as secure base model was developed as part of the Economic and Social Research Council-funded research project 'Emotional Intelligence in Social Work 2012-15', and is a revised version of Schofield and Beek's secure base model used with foster carers.

The model (pictured on the next page) can be used by practice supervisors to reflect on how they can behave in a way to promote a secure base for their team across five different domains: availability, sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation, and team belonging.

Summary information about each of the different domains is provided alongside a series of reflective questions, which prompt you to consider how this model might be relevant to your team.

## Develop the team as a secure base



## Availability

Teams work well as a secure base when members of the team are available, either in real time or virtually, and if members of the team can also rely on other members to be available to them.

### Practice supervisor reflections

Do your team members feel they can call on support from each other and yourself when needed? Have you asked your team directly about this?

How could you create systems and a culture of availability in your team? Can you think of any examples of what you or the team currently do to be available to each other, which you could build on?

How could you involve team members in creating this culture so it becomes a joint responsibility?

How might staff diversity affect availability (e.g. gender, carer status, geographical location, age)? How could this be managed so that each staff member can contribute to creating a sense of psychological availability?

## Sensitivity

Team members who demonstrate empathy (e.g. by noticing other people's feelings, offering advice or opportunities to talk, or sympathy, tea or food) and help each other believe they can manage their feelings.

## Practice supervisor reflections

How well do you know the individuals in your team?

Are you aware when work is going well for your supervisees, and what their successes are? Do you know when your team members are stressed?

Are you aware of their individual needs in relation to managing emotional parts of the job?

How might diversity affect the ways in which team members express and manage their emotions? How could this be acknowledged in the team?

How might power differences affect the extent to which team members feel confident about sharing vulnerability? How can you ensure support in spite of this?

## Acceptance

Team members who can provide constructive help and advice when things go wrong, show an understanding that everyone makes mistakes and that it's unrealistic to expect to be perfect all the time. Beliefs around the need to be seen as 100% competent at work can create unrealistic expectations, which can lead to stress.

### Practice supervisor reflections

How do you react to mistakes made by team members?	What impact do you think your reaction to mistakes has on team members?	How could you provide constructive feedback when things go wrong?
How do you create a learning culture which encourages everyone to use mistakes as an opportunity to learn and improve?	Do you acknowledge or praise staff when things go well?	How might culture, ethnicity and diversity influence the kinds of judgements team members make about each other? How could this be managed?

## Co-operation

Team members who work together to provide direction and give advice help each other feel confident that solutions to problems will be found. This helps alleviate feelings of isolation, which can be a source of stress.

### Practice supervisor reflections

How do you encourage collaborative problem solving?	How do you encourage skills sharing?	How do you encourage team members to share their strengths?	How do you make it clear that diversity in a team can be a strength?
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## Team membership

Shared ownership of work, and recognition of each other as both colleagues and human beings, helps contribute to social workers believing that they're valued and they belong, which helps sustain self-worth.

## Practice supervisor reflections

Do you always welcome new, and say goodbye to old, team members?	Do you provide careful induction?	Do you show an interest in your team members' personal lives (where appropriate)?	Do you acknowledge the different roles in the team?
Are you aware of team members' strengths and weaknesses?	How do you help them to develop skills?	Do you get them together for 'away days' to review work systems?	Do you offer opportunities for staff to contribute to local changes in ways of working or wider organisational issues?
How do you manage change?		How do you celebrate diversity?	

## Other ways you can use this tool

One of the key ways you can start to build a culture which supports the team as a secure base model is by talking directly to your team members about these ideas.



We want to hear more about your experiences of using PSDP resources and tools. Connect via Twitter using #PSDP to share your ideas and hear how other practice supervisors use the resources.

## References

If you are referring to the team as secure base model in any written work please cite:  
Biggart L, Ward E, Cook L, Schofield G (2017)  
'The team as a secure base: Promoting resilience and competence in child and family social work.' *Children and Youth Services Review* 83 (supplement C) 119-130.  
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