

Why is trust important in a team?

Establishing trust among team members can transform efforts of inclusion into strong partnerships. Trust is important because it:

- **Reduces** the chances of conflict and improves teams' ability to work through conflict when it occurs
- **Encourages** team members to share their honest opinions and allow others to influence their decisions and actions
- **Increases** team members' willingness to invest in another person's project or vision

What can all team members do to establish and maintain trust with each other?

1 Build relationships with your teammates. The first step in building trust with your teammates is to understand who they are. Start and engage in conversations to learn about your teammates' backgrounds, interests, and goals for the project. If you see a teammate struggling with something, offer extra support.

Try this: set a goal of learning about another teammate's background each month.

Try this: reach out to a teammate who seemed to struggle with participation in a recent meeting and express your appreciation for their input and effort. Consider actions you can take to make it easier for your teammate to participate.

2 Communicate with clarity and honesty. Share truthfully with your teammates and use language that everyone can understand. If something goes wrong, don't try to cover it up – embrace it as an opportunity to make positive changes.

Try this: communicate openly, honestly, and often about:

- Intentions and interests
- Changes in schedules and plans
- How well processes are working
- Successes and failures
- Concerns about trust

3 Be consistent and reliable. Small, consistent actions performed over time builds trust, for example, keeping the promises that you make. If something stops you from keeping those promises, let your teammates know why as early as possible.

Try this: keep a list of the things you promise to do and review it before each team meeting. Acknowledge things you have not done yet during the meeting.

4 Explain the reasons behind decisions. Explaining the reasons behind difficult choices or decisions improves trust. Your teammates are more likely to react positively when they understand how a decision was made.

Try this: ask yourself, and your team, if you or they feel tension about a choice or decision you are talking about with your team. Remember that the physical signs of discomfort may include more speech errors or hesitations, and less smiling, visual contact, and impromptu comments. Make sure to include your reasons behind decisions and choices and ask if others have additional or different considerations they would like to raise.

Try this: schedule a time during each meeting to report how feedback from previous meetings was used.