

Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5



Many of us give the very best of who we are every day, yet all too often struggle to feel like our best is good enough. Understanding, and at times challenging our own expectations and perception of others' expectations is key to identifying and transforming unrealistic expectations that compromise our ability to approach others with compassion and extend that compassion to ourselves. In this section, we identify the expectations we have for ourselves and for others and question whether these expectations are helpful for us or holding us back.



[Distribute this document to all participants to explore prior to the following application activities.](#)



Key Activity [Clarifying Expectations \(20-45 minutes\)](#)

The purpose of this activity is to examine whether our individual expectations are aligned with collective understanding.

Wellness Practice [Developing Positive Affirmations](#)

Circle Agenda [Staff Circle Agenda, Section Five](#)

Core Content Visual [Expectations Discussion Prompts – Use this Visual and Display in Staff Break Areas](#)

Posting this visual in common staff areas will serve as a reminder of content covered to staff and perhaps serve as a future conversation started for deeper reflection among staff members.

Supplementary Activities/Handouts [Setting Helpful Expectations \(20-30 minutes\)](#)

Many times, our expectations do not align with our own wants, needs, and values, but rather, represent things that are socially expected of us or things we are conditioned to believe. This exercise helps us set intentional expectations that are rooted in our values.

[Handout with Tips for Clarifying an Expectation Concern](#)

Assists staff in clarifying the what, why, and how of an expectation across different levels of positional power.



For links specifically for leadership and additional resources, please visit the Toolkit online.

Read the following article entitled "[How to communicate employee expectations effectively](#)" and after doing so, answer the following questions:

- What efforts can you undertake to encourage regular and ongoing conversations with staff regarding expectations?
- How can you more clearly communicate expectations to staff?
- How can you affirm what you, others, or your team are doing well to meet expectations?
- How might you encourage mentoring relationships and collaborative relationships among staff at your school?

Additional Resources

To think about some strategies for how to approach managing the expectations of clients, and the importance of communication, consider reading [this article](#).

Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5



INTRODUCTION

Many of us give the very best of who we are every day, yet all too often struggle to feel like our best is good enough. Understanding, and at times challenging our own expectations and perception of others' expectations is key to identifying and transforming unrealistic expectations that compromise our ability to approach others with compassion and extend that compassion to ourselves. In this section, we identify the expectations we have for ourselves and for others and question whether these expectations are helpful for us or holding us back.



INFORMATION

Providers are expected to be available to others, to be healers, to have unfailing expertise or knowledge, and provide universally successful care in a cost-effective manner, all without faltering or experiencing any personal distress. This is a heavy load of expectations we carry with us. These expectations paint a picture of how we think things "should" be and are often informed by our social identities (race, sex, sexual orientation, etc.) and life experiences. They are firmly tied to our needs, desires, values, and beliefs.

As health care providers, we may hold high expectations that all clients should be relieved of all of their suffering. Equally, clients often come to expect that we will relieve them of all of their suffering. In either case, if expectations are not met, we as providers may feel as though we have failed to do our jobs well. But these expectations we hold of ourselves or expectations placed upon us can also drive us to excel. They can be realistic or unrealistic, helpful or hurtful, and when our expectations are made explicit and realistic, they can be the foundation for dreams, ideas, and possibilities. They can feed us, inspire us, and help us to show up in our lives. If we are holding ourselves or someone else to an unrealistic standard, then we can learn to adjust these expectations.

Expectations become problematic, however, when they take us out of the present to solely focus on the future, or fill our heads with how things "should" be and feel and of how the people around us "should" act and feel. Our "shoulds" of ourselves reflect expectations that we feel we are not meeting. When we tell ourselves that we "should" be doing something, we are reinforcing the idea that we are not doing it. If our internal dialogue says *"I should spend more time with clients"* the implicit end to that sentence is *"... but, I am not."* We are reinforcing the negative and this can result in guilt, frustration, or anxiety.

Well-meaning, but unchecked, expectations can form the bedrock of compassion fatigue. Expectations may operate in the short-term: *"If I spend more time in appointments, all of my clients will be satisfied."* In this example, we create expectations for ourselves (*"If spend more time in appointments..."*), as well as for others (*"all of my clients will be satisfied"*). These expectations may invite shame if we are not living up to our self-expectation, as well as resentment if others do not live up to our expectations of them. Expectations also operate in the long-term and may be evident in the goals we set for ourselves or the metrics that others set for us: *"I will be a great provider if all of my clients show improved clinical outcomes."* As this example shows, our own expectations may be influenced by the expectations others have for us.

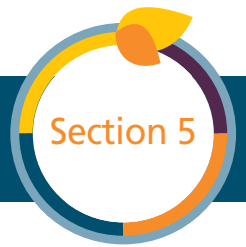
While we can rarely change what other people think or expect of us, by noticing our expectations, we can keep those that fit and are comfortable, while making changes to those that do not serve us. It is only when conscious of our expectations that we can examine how realistic they are. We can increase our compassion resilience by making a conscious effort to notice the "shoulds" in our life and the effect that such expectations may have on us. We must first notice and name our expectations if we are to better align them with reality. Let's take a moment to think about some expectations we carry as health care providers. Try to think of a few expectations in each category.

Developed in partnership with:



compassionresiliencetoolkit.org

Expectations from Self and Others



	Expectations of self	Expectations of clients	Expectations of colleagues	Expectations of clients' families
Example	<i>I should enjoy providing care to all of my clients</i>	<i>Clients should always come on time to appointments</i>	<i>They should always stay on top of their documentation/notes</i>	<i>Families should support clients with their health care needs</i>
My Examples				

Place a star next to those you think are helpful/realistic and an X next to those you think are hurtful/unrealistic.

Let's look at a few examples of how unchecked expectations may lessen our compassion resilience. For each case, we will consider strategies that may be helpful in building our compassion resilience.

CASE 1:

Lisa has been an OB/GYN nurse for seven years. She enjoys being a part of the process of welcoming a new life into the world but is feeling overwhelmed by the ever-increasing documentation demands, new procedures and shorter lengths of stay for her clients, all of which limit personal interactions with clients and their families.

Reflection: Lisa is experiencing multiple systemic drivers of compassion fatigue and external sources of stress, which are then affecting the likelihood she can perform as she has in prior years. Her compassion resilience may suffer if she does not adjust her expectations to these new circumstances.

Strategy: Lisa may find it useful to consider what is influencing her ability to meet her expectation. **In the table above, what system drivers make it difficult to achieve the examples you provided?**



CASE 2:

Todd is a new case manager working in an urban outpatient center. He is discouraged to find that many clients miss appointments or are not following through with the treatment plan they agreed on, resulting in disappointing clinical outcomes. He finds himself blaming the client for not taking the necessary steps to improve their condition and worries that his efforts are not making a difference.

Reflection: Our expectations are often internal, undiscussed, and are informed by our social identities and life experiences. Todd may have found it useful to discuss his expectations with regards to client behavior and follow through with his supervisor and other case managers who have been working in that environment longer and have different identities and life experiences than his own.

Strategy: Making expectations transparent helps us to see if they are aligned with reality. **How might you test the expectations you listed by talking with others? How do your social identities and life experiences shape the expectations you listed in the table?**

Reflection: It is a losing battle to expect outcomes that are not within one's control.

Strategy: Todd may also find it useful to identify expectations that are outside of his control. **Which expectations that you listed relate to outcomes you cannot control?**



Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5



CASE 3:

Mary prides herself on being a supervisor who provides trust, one who offers a safe space for them to discuss their challenges and collaborate to solve problems. This year, there have been more providers than usual seeking out her support, especially with many new providers and the recent loss of one of their colleagues. Mary is struggling with her own feelings surrounding the colleague's death and struggling to provide the same support to providers as in the past.

Mary believes that her feelings should not interfere with her ability to provide mentoring support for staff.

Reflection: Just as unrealized expectations or unrealistic expectations may challenge our compassion resilience, so too can symptoms of compassion fatigue make it more difficult to meet our expectations! Remember: compassion fatigue is a common response to the difficult situations we may encounter.

Strategy: The relationship between compassion fatigue and expectations makes it all the more apparent how self-compassion heightens our compassion resilience. Mary's perceived inadequacy could lessen her compassion resilience even further. With self-compassion, Mary is better equipped to recognize her own needs to maintain her physical, emotional, and mental well-being so that she may again show up compassionately for staff. Applying some strategies found in this toolkit, Mary might build her resilience.

While it pays to keep an eye on our own expectations and assumptions, we also have expectations that are heaped upon us. Many of us struggle mightily as we try to fulfill the expectations of others. Expectations placed upon us are often not clearly defined and unexpressed; rather, we make inferences about the expectations people have for us. Uncommunicated expectations cannot be met. Expectations from others may be reasonable or unreasonable. When unreasonable expectations are placed upon us, it may be a quick path to feeling burnt-out. Giving too much of ourselves as we strive to meet or exceed expectations may also lead to burn-out. If we are over-zealous in our pursuit of exceeding expectations, then people eventually presume that we will continue to go over and above at each and every opportunity. When we no longer can go the extra mile, or no longer wish to, then everyone is disappointed. It is not difficult to see how expectations can be a root cause of damaged relationships and compassion fatigue!

We may set more reasonable expectations of ourselves – and build more satisfying relationships with others- when we talk to people to clarify their expectations. Only with open lines of communication can we be clear about what the expectations are and whether we can reasonably meet them. Sometimes, bosses or colleagues who are setting unreasonable expectations may not even be aware they are putting unfair pressure on us. [This resource provides us with ideas](#) as to how we might approach a conversation with bosses whose expectations may be too lofty.

Building positive working relationships rests on the following:

- acknowledging we all have expectations;
- striving to make expectations more transparent;
- and taking responsibility to communicate our own wants and needs (i.e., our own expectations).

Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5

SELF-CARE



STRATEGIES

Self-Care Strategies for the MIND: Developing Positive Affirmations (10-15 minutes)

Reflect on what are you doing when you feel most alive – most like yourself?

This exercise is designed to help identify hurtful self-expectation and transform them into positive affirmations.

Self-Care Strategies for STRENGTH: Putting Yourself on Your Own Schedule

Try this exercise out for a week and see how prioritizing your personal needs and well-being throughout each day makes you feel. If you experience feelings of resistance, remember that this discomfort tends to subside as we incorporate what we learn and our life satisfaction increases!

Schedule essential personal items **before** you schedule work items on your calendar. Your personal schedule may include the number of hours of sleep that are ideal for you, frequency and duration of exercise that you would like to get, downtime strictly for recreation, alone time and time for attention to nutrition. If you cannot do everything on your schedule, consider prioritizing your activities. After a week, notice how it felt putting yourself first. If it made you feel good, try to keep the habit going!



WHAT'S NEXT

Compassionate boundary setting – personal and professional.

Clarifying Expectations



There is often a lack of clarity regarding workplace expectations. As a result, people working in the same organization, department or team may have different understandings of the expectations related to their jobs. This exercise aims to clarify expectations. To begin, think about a work-related expectation about which you are genuinely curious. Perhaps you wonder if you understand the expectation accurately. Perhaps you wonder how others fulfill the expectation. Do not use this as an opportunity to shame people who are not living up to your expectation of them. Use this as an opportunity to learn from your co-workers and supervisors, if they are in the room. Once you have identified an expectation, frame it as a question. For instance, perhaps you wonder how much time to spend with clients during appointments. As a question, you would ask *“How much time do you spend (or expect me to spend) with clients during appointments?”* Use a process that allows everyone in the group to ask one question. As each person asks a question, the rest of the group answers on a piece of paper or 3 x 5 notecard that is then folded up and collected. One by one, address each question by unveiling the answers provided by the rest of the group. Discuss those questions that yield surprising answers or a diversity of opinions. For example:

Perhaps a relatively new provider asks the question about how long to spend with clients during appointments. Responses may be as follows:



Provider 1: *“I schedule appointments for 20 minutes, so each client gets their 20 minutes. This keeps me on schedule.”*

Provider 2: *“I spend a range of time (x minutes - y minutes), depending on the client and the issues we have to discuss. Each situation is unique.”*

Administrator: *“When I was seeing clients I thought I’d spend at least 25 minutes, but with experience, I rarely went over 15 because I learned how to focus conversations on the most important details.”*

Other suggestions of expectations staff may value discussing include how much information they include in documentation, how they choose which interventions to use with clients/patients, how they structure their first appointment with clients/patients, and how much self-disclosure they use with clients/patients.

Inviting discussion can open the door to learning something from one’s colleagues and perhaps to increasing understanding and empathy for how people manage the many responsibilities and expectations of their jobs. Having administrators/ supervisors in the room encourages clarification too.

As the facilitator, it may be wise to set a few group guidelines:

1. Urge honesty among participants;
2. Make it apparent that no one need engage in the discussion – their answers may remain anonymous;
3. Let the group know that there are no silly questions – people at different stages of their careers naturally may have different questions.



This activity can be done at the start of multiple meetings by reading just one question and the corresponding answers at each meeting.

Self-Care for the MIND: Developing Positive Affirmations

Affirmations are carefully crafted thoughts and emotions that are internalized into your self-concept. The first two steps identify our affirmations; the next steps help plant these affirmations in our mind.



Step 1: Identify some of your unrealistic hurtful self-expectations related to clients, colleagues, and/or the profession. These are akin to negative forms of self-talk and when exposed, often indicate it is impossible to meet the standards we set for ourselves. These often contain words such as always, never, must, should, no one. List some of your primary hurtful self-expectations in column one of the blank table. (See examples in the completed table on the next page.)

Step 2: Take each hurtful self-expectation and change it into an alternative belief that feels right to you. These affirmations should be stated in the positive, be succinct yet specific, stated as if it already exists, and be only about you. (See the completed table for examples.)

 Step 1: Examples of Unrealistic Hurtful Self-expectations	Step 2: Examples of Positive Self-affirmations 

Expectations from Self and Others

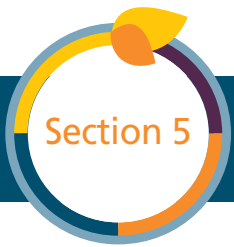
Section 5

 Examples of Unrealistic Hurtful Self-expectations	Examples of Positive Self-affirmations 
<p>No matter how competent I am in my work, it will never be good enough.</p>	<p>I am good enough today as the person I am. While I will strive to do better in my work and life, I try to accept who I am today.</p>
<p>Nobody cares how hard I work, how much I care about my clients.</p>	<p>I am a caring, empathetic, person who is deserving of self-compassion.</p>
<p>I have to be successful with all of my clients all of the time. I must be an outstanding provider, better than other providers I know.</p>	<p>I am doing the best I know how to do, given the person I am today and the situation I am dealing with. When I know a better way and can do it, I will.</p>
<p>I can't feel good about myself unless I am completely successful in alleviating clients' problems.</p>	<p>I accept myself as I am – knowing, that as I do, I feel more secure and confident within myself and with others.</p>

Step 3: Follow one of these recommendations to help your affirmations take root as part of your self-concept:

- Select one affirmation a week for the next month. Or, select one affirmation that is really important to you and that you would like to focus on. Write it down and place it somewhere you will see it multiple times throughout the day.
- Tell someone your affirmation. We are more likely to meet our goals and act on our intentions when we share them with others.
- If you are a practitioner of meditation, choose one affirmation and focus on it with increasing clarity and intention while practicing a breathing or meditation technique. Continue repeating the affirmation to yourself while visualizing what it will be like and feel like when the affirmation has become real.

Expectations from Self and Others



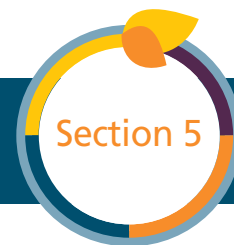
Staff Support



Circle Agenda

Circle Topic	CR Session 5: Expectations from Self and Others
<p>Planning</p>	<p>Send the introduction document from Section 5 in the online toolkit at least 4 days prior to the circle to all participants.</p> <p>Hold a meeting with leadership to prepare for this section and invite the leader(s) to consider the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look back at the list of the drivers of fatigue and resilience the team brainstormed in Section 4. Notice how many relate to a sense of unclear, unreasonable, conflicting, or assumed expectations. 2. Expectations include a why, what, and how. Effective leaders engage people in conversations to ensure clarity on all three of these components of an expectation. They also encourage employees to ask questions if such clarity does not exist. 3. If you participate in the group, as unclear expectations are discussed, resist the pull to give explanations during the meeting. Thank the participants for describing unclear expectations and offer to work to remove such barriers with your leadership team. If you are not participating in the group, the facilitators may share the unclear or unrealistic expectations that the group uncovered with you. 4. As you explore expectation communication, keep in mind the clarifying the why tips in this handout. <p>For the full leadership preparation document, please visit this page.</p>
<p>Purpose of Circle/ Learning Objectives</p>	<p>We are learning to identify the expectations we have for ourselves and for others and whether these expectations are helpful or holding us back.</p>

Expectations from Self and Others



Circle Topic	CR Session 5: Expectations from Self and Others
Materials/ Preparation/Time	<p>Time: 45-50 minutes</p> <p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Circle kit <input type="checkbox"/> Values and shared agreements created in first session <input type="checkbox"/> 3x5 cards <input type="checkbox"/> Pens <input type="checkbox"/> If doing the bonus activity, make copies of Setting Helpful Expectations handout <p>Set-up: Up to 15 chairs arranged in a circle without furniture in the middle.</p> <p>To consider: Understanding Your Social Location as a Facilitator – Active Bystander Intervention: Training and Facilitation Guide</p>
Welcome/Check-In (5 minutes)	<p><i>"Our expectations of ourselves and the expectations placed upon us can be realistic or unrealistic, helpful or hurtful. They can feed us and inspire us and help us to show up in our lives. If we are holding ourselves or someone else to an unrealistic standard, then we can learn to adjust these expectations."</i> – CR Toolkit</p> <p>(Go-around) Name a small thing you did today that is an example of living up to an expectation you or someone else has for you. (Each person tries to say something quick and different than what has been said already.)</p>
Grounding/Wellness Practice (5 minutes)	<p>Share: Please place both feet on the floor, hands comfortably in your lap and take three slow deep breaths. Think of a place that brings you peace and calm. What do you see when you are thinking about this place? What do you hear as you think of this place? What do you smell? Take another moment to really visualize yourself in this place. When you are ready, open your eyes or bring your gaze back to the circle.</p> <p>If you would like to consider a different grounding practice, please review the mindfulness appendix for additional suggestions.</p>
Review (5 minutes)	<p>Last circle we completed a system drivers exercise looking at drivers of our fatigue and resilience. Today we are going to look at the impact of the expectations we have of ourselves, those we have of others, and the expectations others have of us. If unclear or unrealistic expectations at work arise, we will decide as a group if we want the facilitation team to anonymously share these with leadership for future clarification.</p>

Expectations from Self and Others



Section 5

Circle Topic	CR Session 5: Expectations from Self and Others
<p>Guiding Questions (20 minutes)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (Go-around) Share an example of an expectation that someone had for you that was “aspirational” – just far enough in front of what you were currently doing to allow you to stretch and find new strengths within yourself. 2. (Partner discussion) Share an expectation you have for yourself in your organization or personally that you think might be unrealistic. What is the impact of that on you and your relationships? 3. (Go-around) Share an example of an unstated expectation that you think someone else has for you. 4. Ask the group to answer one or both of the following two questions anonymously on a notecard. These thoughts will be shared with leadership. Explain that clear expectations state the why, the what, and the how. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What expectations need to be clarified to offer consistent and effective care to our patients? One that needs to be clarified. – What is one expectation that might be getting in the way of the best patient safety and care? One that is a barrier. 5. Share Tips for Clarifying an Expectation Concern. 6. (Go-around) As you think about your comments you wrote on your notecard, the unrealistic expectation you stated in the last Go-around, and our conversation last week about your level of control in your work environment, what is one step you could take towards better clarifying the expectations that are troubling to you? What might you need to know or communicate about the why, what, and/or how of the expectation?
<p>Putting it into Practice (5 minutes)</p>	<p>(Go-around) Name a small thing you did today that is an example of living up to an expectation you or someone else has for you. (Each person tries to say something quick and different than what has been said already.)</p>
<p>Closing (10 minutes)</p>	<p>Turning Unrealistic Expectations into Affirmations</p> <p>Share: As our closing, we are going to do a practice from the information document from this section that helps us turn an unrealistic expectation into an affirmation. For example:</p> <p>An unrealistic expectation: I should keep working at a task until it’s at 100%. Affirmation: Don’t let perfect be the enemy of good.</p> <p>(Write on 3x5 card) <i>What is an affirmation you can tell yourself that would counter an unrealistic expectation you have for yourself in your role at your organization?</i></p> <p>Facilitator will collect and read out anonymously.</p> <p>If you so choose, facilitators can compile affirmations into one document and distribute to participants in Section 6.</p> <p>Bonus Activity: Handout Setting Helpful Expectations for personal reflection between sessions.</p>

Expectations from Self and Others

Clear and reachable expectations help us take steps towards success.

What expectations can you help clarify or adjust for others? What expectations do you need clarified or adjusted for you?



Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5





Setting Helpful Expectations



Unhelpful expectations may create negative feelings when our goals seem constantly out of reach or they leave us feeling like we are not “good enough.” Expectations rooted in the future (e.g., “I should get a promotion next year”) can keep us from being present. In this exercise, practice setting expectations that are helpful, by identifying expectations that do the following:

- Stem from how we want to live, act, and show up in the world
- Are focused on the present
- Are within our control
- Can serve as a guide to daily living

Expectations such as these can help us align our purpose and values with actions. Take time to write down realistic expectations you have for yourself in each sector of the wellness compass. Refer back to Section 2 of the toolkit if you need a refresher on the sectors. Examples are provided, but try to think of at least one helpful, realistic expectation for each area of the compass:

	HEART Relationships: ex: I will connect with my colleagues. Emotions: ex: I will ask for help when I need it.
	SPIRIT Core Values: ex: I will use my values to guide my decisions. Rest & Play: ex: I will seek work-life balance.
	STRENGTH Stress Resilience: ex: I will respond, rather than react, to stress. Care for My Body: ex: I will recognize signs of physical fatigue.
	MIND School/Work: I will be present while at work. Organization: ex: I will say “no” at times so that I do not overcommit myself.

If you completed this exercise as a group, take turns sharing your examples with one another. You might also use flip chart paper, one for each area of the compass, and have everyone write down their examples in each area. As a group, discuss what you found difficult and rewarding about the exercise. Was there one sector that was most difficult for you?

Expectations from Self and Others

Section 5



Tips for a Dialogue about Expectation Concerns: Clarifying the Why, What, and How

For those with:

More positional power communicating with those with less positional power:

- **Ask about others' ideas** (positive and negative) before you give yours. Repeatedly invite concerns, questions, and ideas.
- **Explain the rationale** for the expectation relative to how it fits with the vision. Be clear whether flexibility is possible or not.
- **Disclose your own fallibility, mistakes, and need for advice.** Ask permission to offer advice on how to meet expectation.
- **Over-communicate your intentions** for the type of relationship you want to build (your True North/vision).
- **Summarize and repeat** back what is decided.

Less positional power communicating with those with more positional power:

- **Avoid triangulation**, always give feedback directly. If needed, get advice and help from others to prepare for a direct conversation.
- **Ask questions to seek the rationale** for the expectation and to clarify what success in meeting the expectation will look like.
- **Assert personal views** and need for support to meet the expectation with "I statements".
- **Ask permission** to give positive and negative reactions.
- **Connect your ideas** about modifying expectations to how they help with their goals and challenges.