THE HUMAN SIDE OF SAFETY

Safety in Mind

What if safety's next breakthrough isn't another system?



Drawing on The Science of the Mind

Scottish Housebuilders Federation | 4 November 2026

www.woodsalternative.co.uk

DELIVERY OVERVIEW

Systems matter. People bring them to life.

Safety systems are strong, and people bring them to life through the way they notice, decide, speak and respond.

Drawing on The Science of the Mind, this session reflects on attention, habits, communication and everyday decisions, ideas that can complement existing practice.

It explores how supportive leadership and meaningful contact points continue to build care, trust and shared responsibility.

Community may be the next step. The way people support one another today can help shape the safety culture of the future.



INTENDED AUDIENCE

Leaders and safety professionals who want to strengthen the human side of workplace safety debate.



COURSE THEME

The human side of safety and shaping the future.



DELIVERY

70 minutes 4 November 2026
Facilitator – Eddie Woods

AREAS FOR REFLECTION

What this session invites you to explore

How attention, stress, fatigue and competing demands may influence safe decisions

How repetition and experience can shape habits and attitudes towards safety

How communication and everyday behaviour may affect trust and willingness to speak up

The contact points that turn safety expectations into daily experience

Leadership behaviours that support psychological safety, shared responsibility and learning

How community building today could help shape the safety culture of the future

Caring responses to signs of distress, including boundaries and routes to support

My hope is you reflect and consider.

SESSION JOURNEY

Six sections, one thread: from noticing to community

1

Attention and Safe Decisions

15 min

2

Habits and Automatic Responses

10 min

3

The BEAB Model

10 min

4

Everyday Contact Points

5 min

5

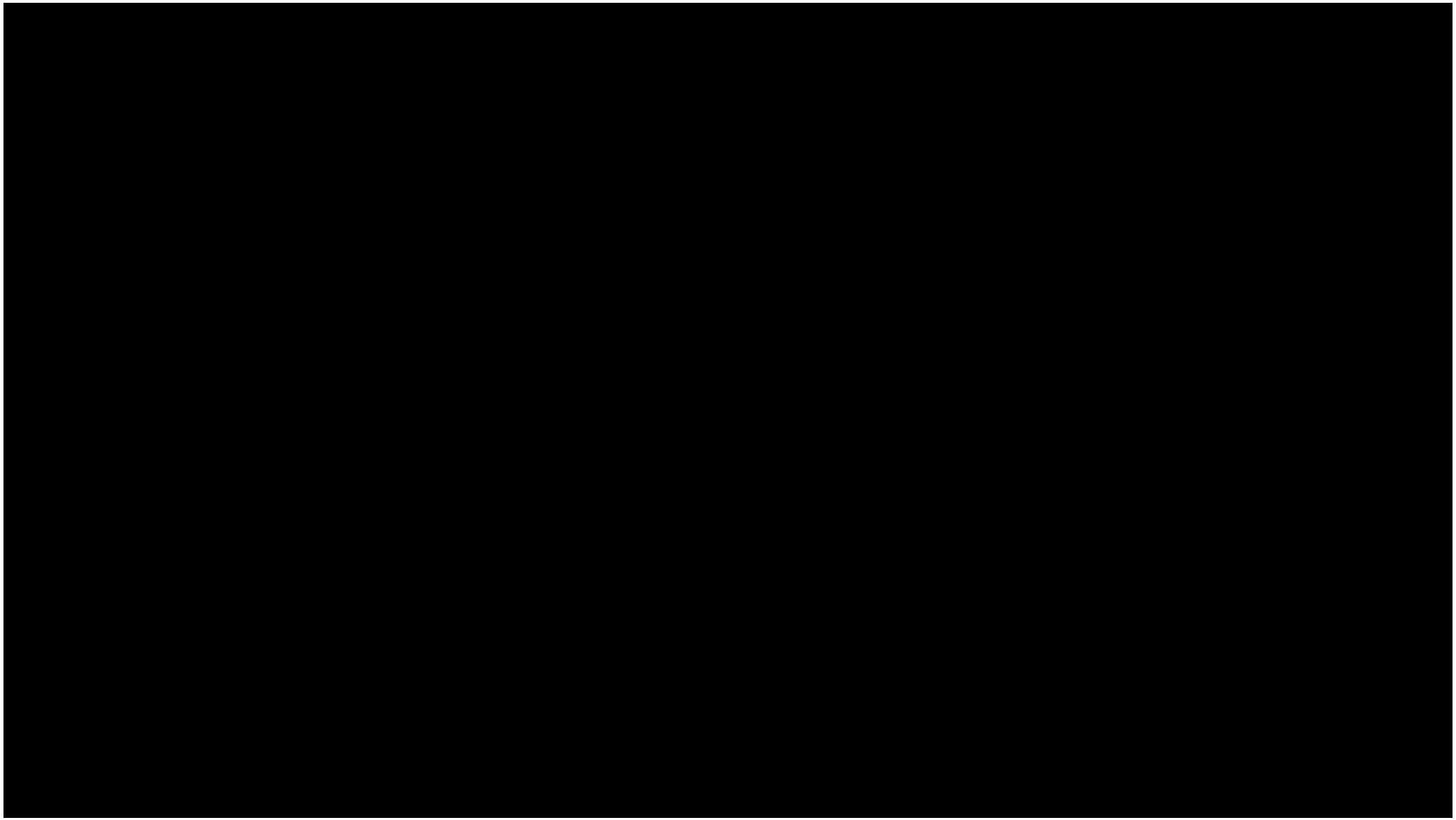
Leadership, Culture and Community

15 min

6

Mental Health and Silent Voices

15 min



Attention is limited and easily overloaded

HOW PEOPLE HANDLE INFORMATION

Receive

Information arrives continuously from the work and surroundings

Filter

Only some of it is attended to; the rest passes by

Prioritise

What matters most is weighed against everything else

Ideas from George Miller's work on working memory and Claude Shannon's work on information processing.

WHAT CAN NARROW WHAT A PERSON NOTICES

- **Stress**
- **Fatigue**
- **Time pressure**
- **Competing demands**

When attention is overloaded, **what we notice narrows** and so can the decisions we make.

Trust senses - The human detection layer



Sight

Unusual movement



Hearing

An unusual sound



Touch

Vibration, temperature or resistance that feels different



Smell

An unfamiliar odour

THE SYSTEM AND THE SENSES

Procedures, risk assessments and controls describe the expected safe state.

The senses help people notice when reality begins to differ, and what they notice is useful information.

Sensory awareness does not replace the system. It works alongside it.

Personal SOS (Sense of Safety)

Pause
Stop and take a moment

Check
Find out what has changed

Correct
Put it right.

Ask for support
Bring others in early

A calm and timely response helps people take safe action and stops an unusual condition from becoming accepted as normal.

Care and curiosity in response to concerns make people more likely to share what they notice. This helps everyone work more safely.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When stress, fatigue or competing demands narrow attention, how can I encourage people to use their Personal SOS and all five senses to notice change, pause and check that the situation remains safe?

The subconscious: when routine runs on autopilot

1

Driving trances

On a familiar route the mind can run on autopilot, and we arrive with little memory of the journey. Routine tasks on site can work the same way.

2

Meeting the amygdala

The brain's fast alarm system. It can trigger a rapid emotional response before deliberate thought, especially under stress.

3

Pattern interrupts

A deliberate break in routine that brings attention back: rumble packs, reversing beeps, rotating lights, safety reminders.

4

Skilled and automatic

The more skilled we become, the more automatic the task. Hands and body keep working while the mind drifts elsewhere: two places at once.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Where might routine put me, or my team, on autopilot, and what simple pattern interrupt could bring attention back before it matters?

The trip step: how castle soldiers built automatic habits

THE DEFENDERS

Practised until automatic

THE ATTACKERS

Unfamiliar, so they trip

The story goes that castle stairways had an uneven “trip step”. What happened next shows how repetition builds automatic responses:

Repetition builds automatics

Soldiers went up and down the stairs again and again.

Over time the uneven step no longer needed thought. Their bodies simply knew it, so they could flee upstairs at lightning speed.

Unfamiliar means unprepared

Attackers had no learned pattern to rely on.

Without that built-in knowledge, they tripped on the steps. Familiarity is protective, but only for those who have practised it.

The psychology of selling.

SAFETY ASSOCIATED WITH

Delay or bad feeling

SAFETY ASSOCIATED WITH

Care, confidence, quality and successful work

HOW OUR DAYS ACTUALLY GO

99% of days are good results

1% of days are less than positive

WHERE OUR TIME GOES

1% of our time praising the good

99% of our time on the less than positives

These links can influence feelings and responses before deliberate thought begins. Two simple processes help explain how the mind forms viewpoints:

Contiguity

Experiences that repeatedly occur together become mentally linked.

Presenting safety alongside support, respect and collaborative problem solving helps create a constructive association.

Frequency

Repeated language, responses and leadership behaviour strengthen an association.

Recognising safe decisions and responding positively when concerns are raised helps safety feel normal, worthwhile and professionally valued.

Optimism bias: “It won’t happen to me”

Other people
It happens to others

I’m careful
Care keeps me safe

It’ll be alright
It usually turns out OK

Just this once
One shortcut won’t matter

Optimism bias is the belief that we are less likely than others to be harmed. It is a normal thinking habit, not carelessness, and it grows each time a shortcut goes unnoticed.

A shortcut that works is not a safe shortcut. Each “just this once” that gets away with it feels more acceptable, until the one time it does not.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Where might I be telling myself “it won’t happen to me”, and what would I say to a colleague who said it to me?

Progression Optimism bias makes familiar risks feel acceptable. Next: how repetition turns shortcuts into normal practice.

Normalisation of deviance: practice makes habit

Shortcut › **Nothing happens** › **Repeat** › **Normal**

REPETITION, NOT PERFECTION

Practice does not make perfect. It makes habit, and we get better at whatever we repeat.

THE NEW STANDARD

“That’s just how we do it here.”

How repetition creates normalisation Each time a shortcut is repeated without harm, the mind records it as proof that it is safe. The risk feels smaller, the standard slips a little, and the deviation becomes the way the job is done, then gets passed on to new starters.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Which shortcuts on my site have been repeated so often that nobody questions them, and what would a fresh pair of eyes notice?

Progression Repeated shortcuts quietly become the norm. Next: how beliefs and expectations shape behaviour.

Beliefs, Expectations, Attitudes and Behaviour

Beliefs › **Expectations** › **Attitudes** › **Behaviour**

INNER VIEWS

A simple way to reflect on how inner views may appear in what people do.

OBSERVABLE

Words, tone, body language, facial expression and everyday choices.

Understanding avoidance Difficult conversations and challenging tasks can feel uncomfortable, so stepping back brings short-term relief. With patient support, reassurance and practice, people build confidence and feel more able to act next time.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What might my words, tone, body language and choices reveal about my beliefs and expectations, and how can I respond in ways that make speaking up easier?

Progression Behaviour influences others through regular contact. Next: the everyday moments where safety is communicated.

Mind Yourself: a trigger word that eases the approach

A quick, straightforward way to look out for each other. We all spot things that do not look quite right, like a loose board, a hand too close to danger or a setup that makes you pause. Mind Yourself lets us speak up without making a scene.

TRIGGER WORD

MIND YOURSELF

Something's caught my eye.

This is the signal to pause for a moment. It does not mean "I'm right and you're wrong". It means something has got your attention and you care enough to mention it.

AGREED RESPONSE

WHAT HAVE YOU SPOTTED?

Tell me what you're seeing.

If somebody says "Mind yourself", give them a chance to explain. No defensiveness. No embarrassment. Just listen.

NEXT

LET'S HAVE A LOOK

No blame. Let's work it out.

You might agree straight away. You might need to check. Either way, look at it together and decide what needs doing.

FINALLY

CHEERS FOR SAYING

Looking out for each other is welcome.

This matters. It tells the other person they did the right thing by speaking. Nobody loses face, and both of you carry on.



THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

You don't have to be right to say "Mind yourself". You only have to care enough to say it.

Progression Mind Yourself is not a script, a telling-off or another bit of safety paperwork. Use your own words, and keep it short and respectful.

What it sounds like: a few seconds, no lecture

A loose board

Person 1: Mind yourself, mate.
Person 2: What have you spotted?
Person 1: That board looks loose.
Person 2: Aye, good shout. I'll sort it.
Person 1: Cheers.

A hand in the wrong place

Person 1: Mind yourself.
Person 2: What have you spotted?
Person 1: Your hand.
Person 2: Ah, shit. Aye.
Person 1: That's all, mate.
Person 2: Good shout.

When you are not sure

Person 1: Mind yourself, mate.
Person 2: What have you spotted?
Person 1: Not sure about that setup. What do you think?
Person 2: Let's have a look.
Person 1: Something doesn't look right to me.
Person 2: Aye. Let's sort it.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING EVERYONE TO DO

Say "Mind yourself"
Speak calmly and say what caught your attention.

Ask "What have you spotted?"
Hear them out before reacting.

Look at it together
If it needs sorting, sort it. If it is fine, no harm done.

Say "Cheers for saying"
It makes it easier for everyone to speak next time.

Remember Notice something. Say something kindly. Look at it together. Quick. Kind. No performance. Just people looking out for people.

Where people hear, see and experience safety

Supervision

Toolbox talks

Safety meetings

Routine conversations

Supervisors are especially influential

Their regular words and actions shape daily priorities, standards and responses to concerns.

Consistent, supportive supervision connects safety with professionalism, trust and successful delivery.

When messages are unclear or inconsistent, a caring conversation can help restore clarity and reinforce the shared importance of safety.

Does each contact point make a useful difference?

One option is to review each contact point for:

Regularity

Honest two-way discussion

Timely responses to concerns

Conversations that support the message

WHERE PERCENTAGES ARE USEFUL

They support learning rather than judge people or create a single headline score.

Their value lies in showing the difference between completing an activity and creating a meaningful experience.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Which everyday contact point can I improve so that safety expectations are clear, discussion is genuinely two-way and concerns receive a timely response?

Leadership shows up in everyday signals

LEADERSHIP IS SHOWN THROUGH

- Tone
- Body language
- Listening
- Reactions
- Follow-through

As well as formal decisions. These everyday signals affect trust, confidence and willingness to act.

Authority gradient

The effect that differences in status, experience or responsibility can have on a person's confidence to question a decision or raise a concern.

In practice Invite different views, ask open questions, respond with respect.

Psychological safety

A workplace where people feel respected and able to admit uncertainty, report mistakes, offer ideas and speak about risk.

In practice Accountability still matters - fair, focused on learning, backed by timely action.

Transactional analysis

A way to notice whether communication feels directive, reactive or calm and collaborative.

In practice Helps leaders choose clear, respectful responses and keep conversations constructive.

The 20-60-20 rule: the middle decides the culture

IN ANY GROUP

- 20% The dependables
- 60% The calibrators
- 20% The sceptical

Culture is rarely changed by persuading everyone. It shifts when leaders back the 20% and give the 60% good examples to follow.

The dependables (20%)

Already value safety and speak up without being asked. They are dependable, reliable and problem solvers.

In practice Recognise them, listen to them and use them to show what good looks like.

The calibrators (60%)

Neither for nor against. They take their cue from what is rewarded, tolerated and repeated by the strongest group around them.

In practice Focus here. Consistent signals from leaders move the middle most.

The sceptical (20%)

Unconvinced by new expectations and may resist or hold back on fullest efforts. If it was raining gold coins they would complain about the weight of the buckets.

In practice They may have historic reasons, so they are often reciprocating rather than resisting. Listen, seek to understand why, and stay fair and consistent.

Culture and community, working together

Culture

A shared understanding of what matters and how work is done.

+

Community

Brings that understanding to life through support, speaking up and shared responsibility.

Together

They turn stated values into everyday experience.



PERSONAL APPLICATION

- How does my communication affect trust?
- Do my responses make it easier for others to speak up?
- Which behaviours might further strengthen collaboration?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

How do my everyday reactions influence trust and the authority gradient, and what can I do to invite questions, respond respectfully and strengthen shared responsibility?

Progression Trust helps people speak about physical risk and personal wellbeing. Next: the same care and listening applied to mental health.

silent voices



507 construction workers take their own lives each year,
equivalent to **two workers every day.** And this number is rising each year.
Will you help us make it stop?

www.thesilentvoices.co.uk

Silent Voices: making it easier to ask for help

THE HOPE

Every construction worker should feel valued and able to ask for help without shame.

Talking about mental health is becoming easier, but seeking help can still feel difficult.

SILENT VOICES AIMS TO

- **Make conversations about mental health easier**
- **Reduce stigma**
- **Encourage early support**

The Sentinel approach: trusted peers, clear boundaries

Sentinels are trusted peers who can

- Notice signs that someone may be struggling
- Listen without judgement
- Help them find appropriate support
- Respect privacy and work within clear boundaries
- Seek urgent help when there is an immediate risk

SENTINELS DO NOT

Diagnose

Counsel

Provide clinical treatment

They help people reach the right support.

From awareness to action

1

Notice a change

In someone you work with

2

Find a calm moment

To talk, respectfully

3

Listen

Without rushing to solve everything

4

Connect to support

Professional, workplace or emergency

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Human connection and dependable systems are strongest when they support each other.

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Leaders and employers remain responsible for safe working conditions, supportive supervision and clear routes to help.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

If I notice a change in someone, how can I start a respectful conversation, listen without judgement and help them reach appropriate support while staying within clear boundaries?

CLOSING MESSAGE

Systems matter, and people bring safety to life.

The way we notice, listen, speak and support one another shapes the workplace we share. By reflecting on what already works and considering what else may add value, community today can help shape a future culture rooted in care, trust and shared responsibility.



Care



Trust



Shared responsibility



GET IN TOUCH

Let’s keep the conversation going.

Thank you, Scottish Housebuilders Federation. If any of today’s ideas sparked a question or a conversation, I would be glad to hear from you.

CALL ME
07415 823399

EMAIL ME
Eddie@woodsalternative.co.uk

VISIT
www.woodsalternative.co.uk

JOIN ME ON LINKEDIN
Eddie Woods