

Autonomy Supportive Leadership (ASL) – *Action Checklist*

Overview

As we have embarked on the journey at HCA-GME to transform our culture via the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Jobs Demands-Resources model (JD-R), the most consistent request we have received is to provide more concrete actions and examples that can be put into daily practice.

In response, we have assembled here what we are calling the ASL Checklist: A list of brief, practical and (we hope) effective ways to support basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and belonging, meaning) in your day-to-day work with residents (and everyone else!)

How to Use This Checklist

Below you will find a list of actions you can adopt to support each of the basic needs drawn from SDT. Here is how we recommend you make use of this tool:

- Start by giving the list of activities a quick read, and star/flag those that interest you the most (or feel like the best fit).
- Pick just one to focus on during the upcoming week.
- Jot it down in a place you will see it regularly as a reminder (e.g. a sticky note on your computer monitor). The key is to stay mindful to put this action into practice each day throughout the week.
- At the end of the week, take a moment to reflect on your experiences with this action. How did things go? (BTW – please email us your thoughts!)
- Pick a new action for the next week and repeat the process.

Our hope is this will allow you to build a personal library of actions that work for you, and that over time these will become reflexive practices as you experience the benefits of autonomy-supportive leadership in your day-to-day work.

Please also note that these lists are not meant to be comprehensive! And you may well find that modifications of the suggestions here (or entirely new ideas) work most effectively for you. If so – we want to hear about it! And we fully expect this to be a living/evolving tool as we work together towards implementation of SDT in our culture.

We will also be implementing other support mechanisms, such as the motivationWorks platform and regular support conference calls, to further assist you (and to continue to help us build a stronger support program).

Autonomy Support

“This week I will...”

(Select an autonomy-supportive action you will take this week)

- I will ask “What do you think?” or “What would you like to do?” before offering a trainee my opinion/advice.
- I will reinforce that the resident has ownership of a patient by saying (when appropriate), “if that’s what you’d like to do in this case, then let’s do that.”
- Before correcting a trainee mistake, I will ask “Can you tell me what you were thinking that led you to your decision?,” and listen carefully to their response.
- I will support ownership of patient cases by my trainees by stating clearly they have the lead on the case
 - Example: “I have confidence in you taking the lead on this case. I promise I will make sure the patient is safe of course. Now, how would you like to proceed?”
- I will verbally acknowledge, without judgement, what a trainee is feeling emotionally in response to a situation or experience.
 - Example: “I can see that you are frustrated, which is understandable”
 - Example: “How exciting that must have been to complete that procedure for the first time!”
- I will give a clear explanation of my rationale when giving my trainees direction.
 - Example: “The reason for doing this is...”
 - Example: "The reason we need to complete this EMR documentation is to ensure patient safety and continuity of care."
- Within the bounds of patient safety, I will allow trainees to make their own decisions about how to treat their patients, even if my decision may have been different. (decision latitude)
- When a trainee suggests a course of action that is not one within reasonable standards of care I will point them to evidence that will help them find the right course of action themselves, rather than tell them what to do.
- I will offer each of my trainees a meaningful choice in one area of their work.
 - Example: Choice of didactics topic (eg. They choose their topic for a required didactic)
 - Example: Choice over their schedule (eg. what order to round on patients, when to meet to discuss new cases)
- Choice over treatment options (within reasonable standard of care)
- I will avoid controlling language (“you must do this,” “you should do this”) and instead use supportive language whenever possible (“I suggest you do this,” “I recommend you consider this” “Would you be willing to think about a different way?”)
- I will acknowledge the challenges of my trainees’ job
 - Example: "I understand that being a resident can be demanding. Your efforts are valued and appreciated."
- I will ask my trainee for feedback on my own ability to provide the right amount of autonomy. (e.g. Did I give you enough space today to make your own decisions or did I control too much?)

Competence Support

“This week I will...”

(Select a competence-supportive action you will take this week)

- I will acknowledge a specific area of expertise in each of my trainees
 - Example: "I've noticed you are particularly good at differentials. Nice work."
- I will highlight my trainees progress and accomplishments at least once this week:
 - Example: "Your patient communication skills have really improved since you started your residency last year."
- I will point out how challenges are a valuable part of their growth as a care provider:
 - Example: "I know residency can be tough, but overcoming these challenges will make you a more resilient and compassionate physician."
- I will ask each of my trainees to set a clear and achievable goal they want to accomplish in their training this week, and support them in achieving it.
 - Example: "You would like more direct experience treating GI issues. We'll try to give you ownership when those arise."
 - Example: "You want to practice central line placement. Let's make sure the senior residents and attendings all know that you are looking for that opportunity."
- I will offer at least one of my trainees an extra opportunity for skill development:
 - Example: "Would you like to take the lead on this case presentation?"
- I will focus on giving clear feedback on the specific actions and choices of my trainees ("Let's talk about how you interpreted this test result and some of my recommendations"), and avoid general feedback on performance ("You did that wrong"), which is less useful for their learning/growth.
- I will verbally acknowledge a specific strength of each trainee on my team
 - Example: "You are very good at [this procedure/differential dx/patient interaction]"
- I will more actively invite my trainees to ask questions:
 - Example: "That was a lot of information, do you have any questions? Anything I can clarify further?"
 - Example: "Is it clear why I recommended this course of treatment? Any questions?"
- I will identify and discuss opportunities for my trainees professional growth
 - Example: "There's a conference coming up that I think could be interesting/valuable for you as you think about your career path. Let's plan some research to submit as a poster."
 - Example: "You may want to consider joining this professional organization/group as it may offer interesting opportunities in your specialty"
- I will give my trainees immediate feedback when possible, and offer support in areas that need improvement.
 - Example: "I noticed that you were a bit hesitant during that procedure, and I'd like to help you feel more confident. Can you tell me what you were experiencing there?"

Belonging Support

“This week I will...”

(Select a belonging-supportive action you will take this week)

- I will directly express my appreciation to each of my trainees for being part of my team
 - Example: "We're so fortunate to have you as a resident."
- I will identify one thing – however small – that I can do to provide more resources or better working conditions for my trainees
 - Is something not working (the light in the break room, the flickering computer monitor) that can facilitate getting fixed?
 - Ask: "Is there one thing we can do to make your life a bit easier?"
- I will show empathy and understanding when my trainee encounters a challenge or difficult situation
 - Example: "I know this case was emotionally challenging. How are you feeling?"
- I will encourage teamwork and collaboration
 - Example: "Let's discuss as a team what might be the best process for setting the schedule."
- I will make myself available and approachable to my trainees
 - Example: "If you need to talk, my door is always open."
- I will find a time to offer personal encouragement and support directly to each of my trainees:
 - Example: "You're doing a great job. Keep up the good work!"
- I will share personal experiences that directly show understanding for what my trainees are experiencing:
 - Example: "When I was a resident, I remember facing a similar case. Here's what helped me."
- I will directly offer support to each of my trainees
 - Example: "What can I do this week to better support you."
- I will acknowledge to my trainees an area in which I personally want to improve as their supervisor/mentor:
 - Example: "I want to support you better by improving the feedback I give so that it is most helpful to your training."
- I will recognize and celebrate team accomplishments
 - Example: "Our team did an excellent job on this project. Let's celebrate our success!"
- I will support work-life balance and self-care:
 - Example: "I whole-heartedly support you taking care of yourself and taking time outside of work to do the things that bring you joy and fulfillment. In fact – taking that time is an important part of becoming a great doctor."
- I will ask the team what went well this week and point out growth, competence, and the important impact of their work.

Meaning Support

“This week I will...”

(Select a meaning-supportive action you will take this week)

- I will point out pro-social meaning to my trainees at least once this week
 - Example: “Your diagnosis of a pulmonary embolism may have saved her life.”
- I will note the broader positive benefits of my trainees’ work:
 - Example: "By diagnosing sleep apnea, you not only helped your patient, but helped ensure she will have more energy to be there for her kids."
- I will share an inspiring story or case that gives my residents a broader perspective:
 - Example: "I remember how frustrated I was trying to get the right diagnosis, but a month later the patient wrote me to tell me how my commitment to seeing it through changed their life."
- I will schedule time during didactics/team meeting to ask my trainees to reflect on their work this week and identify one way in which it reflects their values/goals:
 - Example: "Take a moment to think about what you value personally. What brought you into medicine. Now think about how one of your cases or actions this week helped you realize that value. Who'd like to share?"
- I will point out the long-term benefits of their training, even when making mistakes:
 - Example: "Every learning experience you have – whether positive or negative – is contributing to your ability to save lives and improve patient outcomes in the years ahead."
- I will highlight the importance of my trainees’ work to the mission and success of our facility:
 - Example: "Your work is essential to our facility’s mission to provide the best care for our patients. Simply put, we couldn’t succeed without you."
- I will call out at least one exceptional moment of contribution by a trainee to the greater mission:
 - Example: "Your presentation to other trainees on that was outstanding and I believe will have a broad impact on the quality of care for patients with that diagnosis."
- I will facilitate a mentorship opportunity for one of my trainees
 - Example: "I'd like to connect you with a new resident who shares your interests as I believe you can really help this person grow and understand the importance of their work."
- I will ask a patient or patient’s family if they would be willing to share with the residents the positive impact of what the residents/fellows are doing for them personally.

Suggestions and Reflections

We are confident developing the habits of autonomy-supportive leadership will be fulfilling and meaningful (for you and your trainees). But as with all habits, it does take practice. Here are a few suggestions as you undertake your ASL actions each week:

- Find a way to remind yourself of your chosen action throughout the day. Jotting it down and putting it where you can see it throughout the day (on your desk, taped to your monitor) can be a good reminder and prompt to keep it front of mind
- Each time you put your action into practice, take an extra moment to reflect on the experience:
 - How did the person react?
 - How did it impact their energy/engagement/mood?
 - How did it feel for you?

You may not see or feel a strong impact from an action immediately, but by reflecting on its impact over time, we anticipate you will see positive shifts in communication, relationships, and the quality of care.

We are eager to hear about your experiences and to also assist in answering questions and providing support in your efforts. Feel free to contact Greg Guldner or Scott Rigby via email. We'll also be bringing more support resources online in the coming months.