

Reflecting on the Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum refers to the informal messages, values, behaviours, expectations, and cultural norms that learners and professionals observe within learning and work environments. These messages are communicated through everyday interactions, institutional structures, organizational culture, policies, role modeling, and team dynamics – often outside the formal curriculum.

The hidden curriculum may reinforce or undermine stated institutional values related to wellbeing, professionalism, inclusion, psychological safety, collaboration, and patient care.

Examples may include:

- How mistakes or uncertainty are treated.
- Attitudes toward help-seeking, rest, or work-life boundaries.
- How hierarchy and questioning are managed.
- How respect, professionalism, and teamwork are modeled.
- Which behaviours, values, or priorities are implicitly rewarded within the organization.

Reflection Questions

- What behaviours or attitudes are normalized within this environment?
- What messages do learners receive about asking for help, making mistakes, or setting boundaries?
- How do leaders, educators, and teams model professionalism, inclusion, and respectful communication?
- Are there gaps between stated institutional values and everyday experiences?
- What aspects of the hidden curriculum may unintentionally contribute to fear, shame, exclusion, or inequity?

Recognizing and reflecting on the hidden curriculum may help individuals and institutions better understand how culture is experienced in practice and identify opportunities to strengthen more supportive, respectful, and health-promoting learning and work environments.

Informed by literature on the hidden curriculum in medical education, including Canadian resources developed by [Queen's University Health Sciences](#) and the [University of Toronto Department of Family and Community Medicine](#).