



Who Do I Want To Be in This Moment?

Navigating volatile situations without compromising values

Monica Smith AUGUST 2026

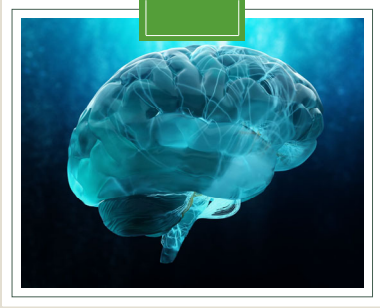
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Objectives

- Recognize signs of emotional escalation
- Learn how to regulate your own response during conflict by using nonviolent communication.
- Explore your strengths and opportunities for growth when navigating conflict.
- Develop strategies to effectively communicate with individuals in distress or experiencing dysregulation



2



YOUR BRAIN BELIEVES WHAT YOU TELL IT

Use this to your advantage.

3

Know Who Is Telling The Story

When Our Brain Is Speaking

- We tend to over-sell the negative – because our brain tells us anxiety will keep us safe
- We tend to under-sell the positives – because our brain tells us the positives are flukes or unsustainable
- We tend to believe we need to prove or defend ourselves because the brain tells us there is danger everywhere

When We Are Speaking

- We can notice what is working, and build on those things.
- We notice what isn't working, and learn from those situations without fear, blame, shame or judgement
- We can lead with curiosity, listening to understand instead of listening to reply, defend and prove.
- Our actions are in line with our values

4

LIST OF VALUES

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Kindness | 19. Respect |
| 2. Integrity | 20. Perseverance |
| 3. Acceptance | 21. Gratitude |
| 4. Focus | 22. Curiosity |
| 5. Responsibility | 23. Blessing |
| 6. Honesty | 24. Compromising |
| 7. Commitment | 25. Adjusting |
| 8. Loyalty | 26. Truth |
| 9. Open-mindedness | 27. Trust |
| 10. Growth | 28. Respectful |
| 11. Friendship | 29. Humility |
| 12. Faith | 30. Being true to yourself |
| 13. Knowledge | 31. Love for family |
| 14. Leadership | 32. Hard work |
| 15. Optimism | 33. Courage |
| 16. Spirituality | 34. Responsibility |
| 17. Sense of community | 35. Generosity |
| 18. Empathy | 36. Justice & fair |
| | 37. Determination |
| | 38. Persistence |
| | 39. Confidence |

Remind Your Brain of Your Values

- Literally tell your brain what you value
- Commit to live within your values
- Stand firm in who you are and who you desire to be.....with compassion for self and others.
- Don't believe what your brain tells you unless you have checked the facts.

5

I'm not paranoid, I'm just exceedingly knowledgeable about all the things that can go catastrophically wrong in life

somecards.com



When brain assumes the worst, most folks think avoiding danger is the goal. Even if there is no danger.

It isn't dangerous to disagree, but...

Fear encourages the brain to make a loose association between disagreement and conflict. If we fear conflict, we are likely to avoid disagreement.

If we can't disagree safely, we perceive every difference as conflict.

Grasp this:
Avoidance. Creates. Conflict.

6



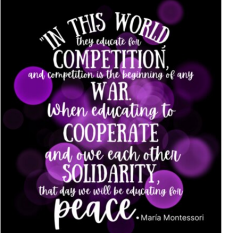
A pyramid diagram illustrating the components of dysfunctional communication based on avoidance. The pyramid is divided into five horizontal layers, each with a label on the left and a corresponding concept on the right. From top to bottom, the layers are: 1. 'Inattention to Results' (left) and 'Status & Ego' (right); 2. 'Avoid Accountability' (left) and 'Low Standards' (right); 3. 'Lack of commitment' (left) and 'Ambiguity' (right); 4. 'Fear of Conflict' (left) and 'Artificial Harmony' (right); 5. 'Absence of Trust' (left) and 'Vulnerability' (right). The pyramid is set against a dark green background.

Dysfunctional Communication
Based in Avoidance

Avoidance has its own communication style.

It isn't pretty.
It isn't productive.
It isn't safe.

7



A quote by Maria Montessori: "IN THIS WORLD they educate for COMPETITION, and competition is the beginning of any WAR. When educating to COOPERATE and owe each other SOLIDARITY, that day we will be educating for peace." The quote is set against a background of purple circles.

We Need to Disagree

- Conflict has been defined as "an expressed struggle between **interdependent** parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference." In order for conflict to be considered present, there must be opposing goals.
- Disagreement is when both parties have the same goal, but have different ideas about how to reach that goal.
- **Don't confuse disagreement with conflict.**

8



An illustration showing several hands of different colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) holding up glowing lightbulbs. The background is dark blue.

Shift Your Stance From Self Defense to Curiosity

- Expect to disagree. A lot.
- Wonder.....
 - how did this human come to that conclusion
 - what would a compromise would look like...
 - how did I come across...
 - when the last time someone was glad to see this person...
 - what would it be like to be them.....

9



Trauma Survivors

- See the world through the lens of danger – hypervigilant – Ready to flee
- Quickly go from being anxious to being hyperaroused – Ready to fight
- Quickly go from powerless to hypooroused – Ready to freeze
- Conflict is highly possible when communication is derailed by a brain entering the trauma cycle.

10

Your perception of me is a reflection of you;



my reaction to you is an awareness of me.

You Must Create the Sensation of Safety

- The *thought* of the possibility of conflict is enough to activate the trauma response
- There is often no discernment between disagreement, conflict, confrontation and aggression
- You know the trauma response is active when the conversation leads to:
 - Rage (fighting)
 - Silence (freezing)
 - Walking out (fleeing)
- These are indicators that someone doesn't feel safe. Nothing positive can happen until there is safety.

11

5 Guaranteed Ways to Set People Off

Authority – You have power over me, and I have none over you, posturing or bullying

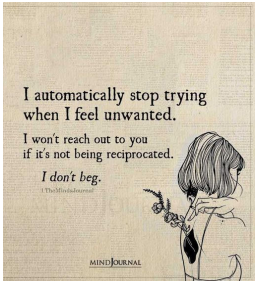
Betrayal – Broken promises, threatening to engage a higher authority figure, you have something I need and will not give it to me.

Being minimized – not taken seriously, told to calm down, talked over, given obvious advice, not consulted in the situation, talked down to, lack of eye contact

Raised voices – or name calling, whispering, harsh tone, condescending tone, bored tone, tone, tone, tone.

Abandonment – walking away, ghosting, not returning calls, being unavailable, switching providers.

12

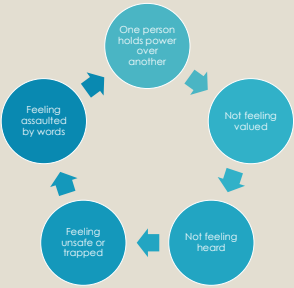


I automatically stop trying
when I feel unwanted.
I won't reach out to you
if it's not being reciprocated.
I don't beg.
© The Mind Journal

Institutional Fear

- Organizations that hold power over others are ripe to perpetuate systems that create institutional fear in those they serve
- Often "unintentional"
- There are benefits to the organization or provider to render the client powerless
- Is the stuff conflict and aggression are made from

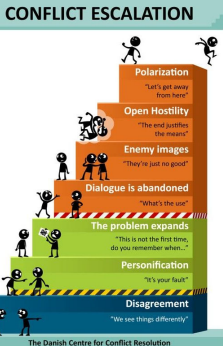
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Escalating From Disagreement to Conflict

The very nature of the clinic environment feeds into this loop. You are beginning from a deficit. Your body language, demeanor and compassion makes it or breaks it.

14



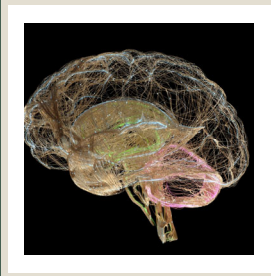
CONFLICT ESCALATION

The Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution

So Predictable

- As soon as the other is dehumanized or vilified, the race to conflict has begun.
- Curiosity is protective.
- Instead of trying to shut it down, open it up.
 - Tell me more.
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
 - What would be different if you considered.....?
 - How can I meet you halfway?
 - I never thought of it like that. I was thinking like this.....

15



Hypervigilance & the Environment

- The traumatized brain is endlessly scanning the environment for danger
- Physical space is the first indication of perceived safety
- Reduce hypervigilance by creating safe physical space, and the client's baseline tolerance will be expanded.

Kausche Et Al 2022

16

10 Domains of De-escalation

1. Respect Personal Space
2. Do Not Be Provocative
3. Establish Verbal Contact
4. Be Concise
5. Identify Wants and Feelings
6. Active Listening
7. Agree or Agree to Disagree
8. Set Clear Limits
9. Offer Choices and Optimism
10. Debrief with Individual and Staff

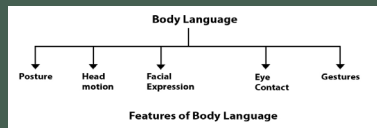
Richmond, Et. Al 2012



17

Master Non-Verbals

- 70% of all communication is body language and tone.
- How you say it matters more than what you say in many instances.
- Pay attention to your non-verbals and to theirs.

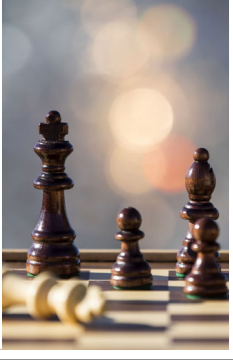


Chin 2024

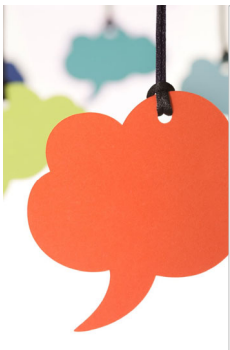
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Ditch Power Stance

- Your words and body language must match
- Choose a position, don't walk the middle way. Ambiguity feels like manipulation and apathy to a traumatized brain. I see it like this.....vs Well, I don't know about that
 - Would you like me to _____ vs I'll see what I can do
- Your anger is scaring me vs STOP!
- Exaggerate what you want to convey instead of "lightly touching" the subject.



19

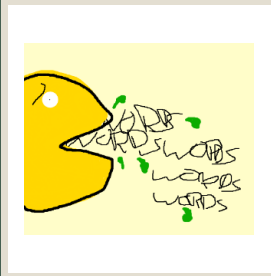


Verbal Communication

- Acknowledge – be the first to speak and offer introduction "Welcome, I'm Monica. May I have your name?"
- Greet in a genuine way – "Hi there, come on in" vs "Please have a seat."
- Be concise -
 - Ask as few questions as possible.
 - Give information in small bites.
 - Make requests one at a time, ask for input

Yu et al 2021
Zakari et al 2020

20

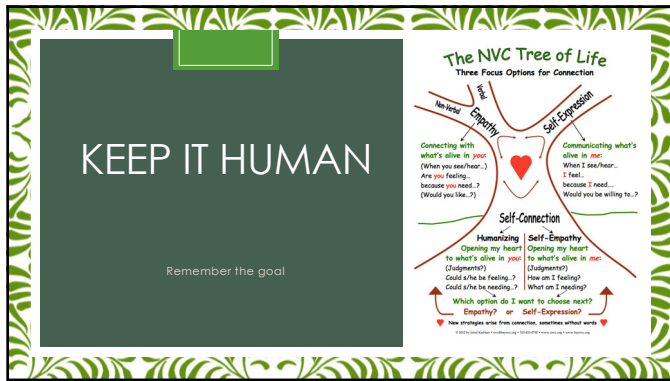


Use Non-Violent Communication

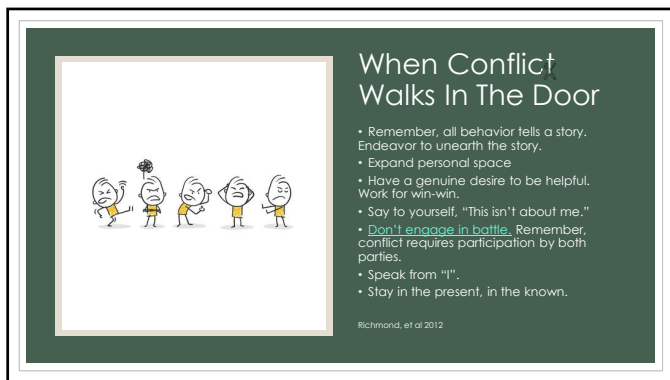
- Ever felt slapped by someone's words?
- Have you been struck by someone's assumptions or perhaps outright untruths?
- How do you feel when you have been told what to do or given an ultimatum?

Adrian et al. AJ 2024

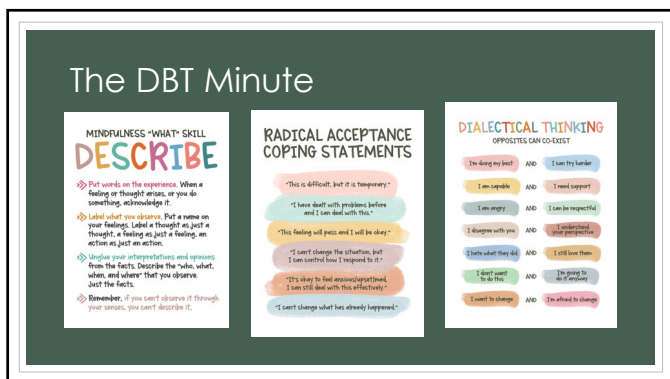
21



22



23



24

- Disagree more, fight less, be less silent, check resentment, notice frustration and question expectations
- Verbalize differences, get new perspective and knowledge
- "Pick disagreements" with no intention of winning
- Approach disagreements with curiosity, use stock responses

Homework: Practice Disagreeing

- "May I tell you how I see it? I am not asking you to change your mind, I just want to offer a different perspective."
- "When you said _____, it made me realize _____"
- "I've never thought of that, now I understand how you came to that conclusion"
- Avoid asking why. Try asking how or what instead.

25

Homework – Self Nurture

Talk to someone you trust or sit for a bit with your journal. Consider exploring these questions.

How am I Really?

What, if anything, am I having trouble letting go of?

Describe the last time you were your #1 priority.

What am I resentful of?

What triggers me to the moon at work? What is that about?

Who do I dread to see? What's that about?

Am I burned out? Burnout self-test

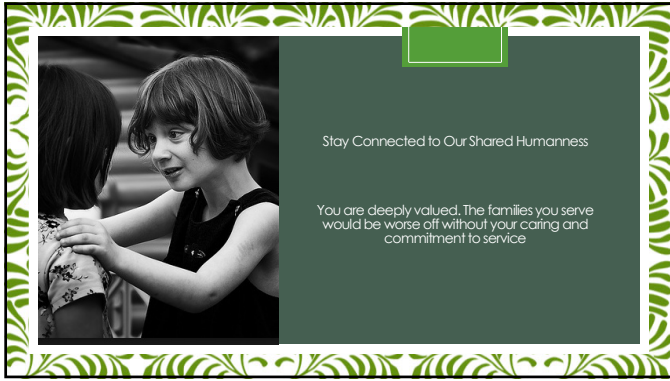
If there were no barriers to getting my needs met, my #1 need would be _____ and I would do _____ to get that need met.

26

Stay in Your Values Stay in Your Power

- Be your own safe space
- Be the safe space for others
 - Environmentally
 - Non-Verbally
 - Verbally

27



28



29
