



EFR EMPLOYEE & FAMILY RESOURCES

Communicating in Challenging Situations

Lars Peterson, LISW

Today's Objectives

- Understand your internal alarms and reactions, including what you can do to calm yourself when you are reacting
- Understand how to address difficult situations and challenging personalities
- Recognize “Crucial Conversations” and gain tools to respond skillfully instead of reacting
- Explore how to find common purpose with others by looking for their underlying needs



Systems Model

Important to understand our “wiring.”
We have a built in “threat system” to protect ourselves and a “drive” system to help us meet our needs (and a soothing/content system).

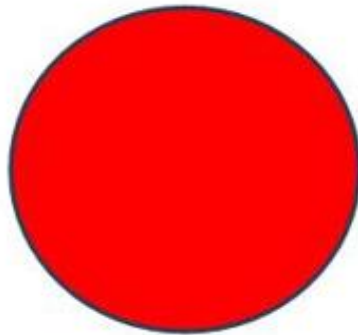


3 CIRCLES EMOTIONAL SYSTEMS

adapted from Paul Gilbert's Compassion-Focussed Therapy

RED

THREAT & SELF-PROTECTION



**NEGATIVE
EMOTIONS**

anxious, angry, depressed,
ashamed, disgusted,
worried, envious & afraid

BLUE

DRIVE & ACHIEVEMENT

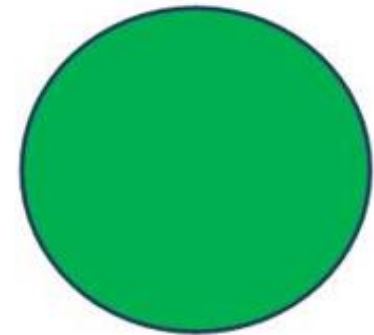


**DYNAMIC POSITIVE
EMOTIONS**

Excited, joyful, achieving,
successful, enthusiastic,
active & ecstatic

GREEN

SOOTHING & CONTENTMENT



**CALM POSITIVE
EMOTIONS**

calm, content,
connected,
safe, secure and warm.

Threat System – Fight, Flight, Freeze



Photo source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/anxiety-fightflight-response-col-sudip-mukerjee/>



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Time to Share in Kahoot!



What do you notice when your threat system is activated or your drive system is thwarted?



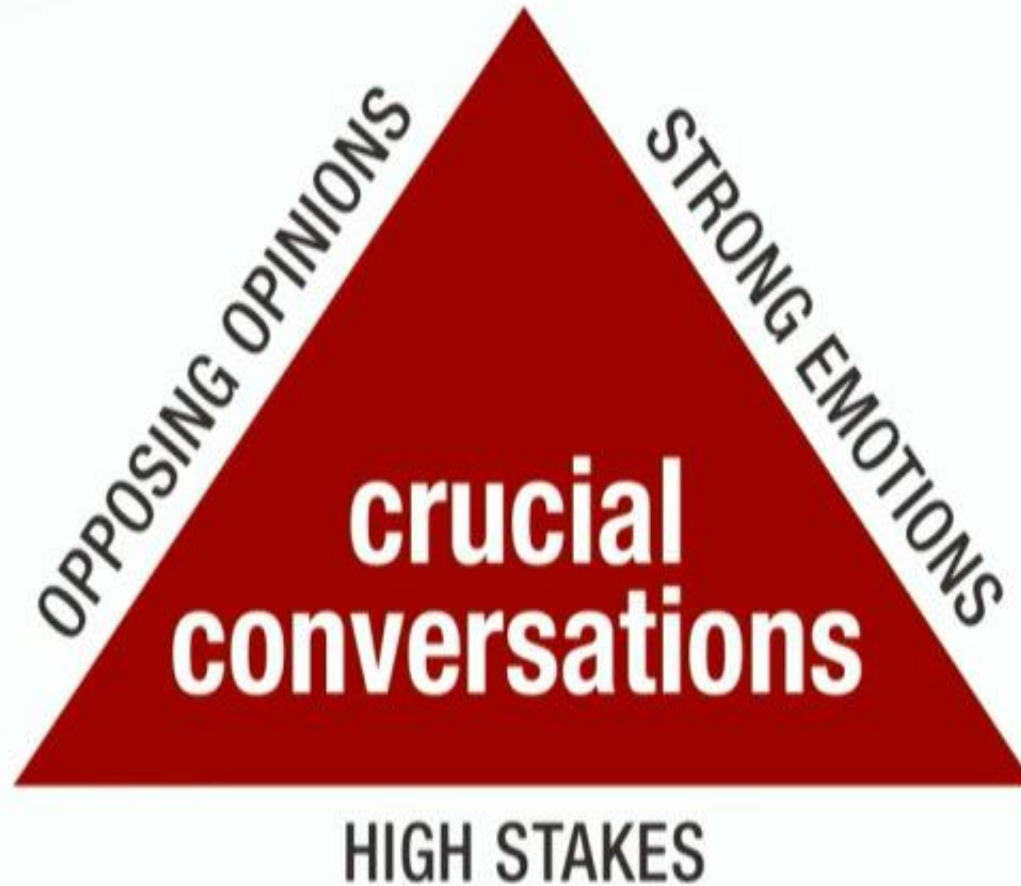
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Applying The 80/20 Rule

Crucial Moments and *Vital Behaviors*: those moments/behaviors that REALLY MATTER

- Push too hard or give up easily when my ideas are not welcomed or accepted at work
- Vent my anger about a coworker who is not present
- Become defensive when my partner/friend criticizes me?





Style Under Stress

- I have put off returning phone calls or emails because I don't want to "deal with it."
- Often when people bring up a touchy issue, I try to change the subject.
- In order to get my point across, I sometimes exaggerate.
- If I get into a heated discussion, I've been known to be tough on the other person.
- I'm pretty good at persuading others by helping them understand the reasoning behind my views.
- When conversations aren't working, I step back from the fray and think about what's happening.



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In really challenging conversations, do you tend to go into “silence” (avoid), “violence” (aggressive), or do you wait until you’re calm & communicate skillfully?



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Conflict: Fear Of Versus Healthy

Fear Of

Healthy

Team meetings are boring	Lively and productive meetings
People go “back channel”	Honest & meaningful dialogue
Decisions suffer	Optimal decisions
Controversial topics are avoided	Important topics are surfaced
Lack of buy-in – no “voice”	Even when they disagree – buy in

The Power of Dialogue

- Goal – the “pool of shared meaning” grows
- More safety/candor → bigger pool
- Less safety/candor → smaller pool

A bigger “pool” means greater understanding and more opportunities to find common ground

Time to Share in Kahoot!



Think about a difficult conversation that you need to have/had: what's the first thing that comes to you regarding what you want? EG: be heard, persuade them to see my perspective, be respected, not look stupid etc.

Time to Share in Kahoot!



Now, ask yourself “What did/do I really want?”

EG: find a solution that works for both of us, maintain the relationship while we work through this difficult situation, be heard AND hear them etc.

What Do I REALLY Want?

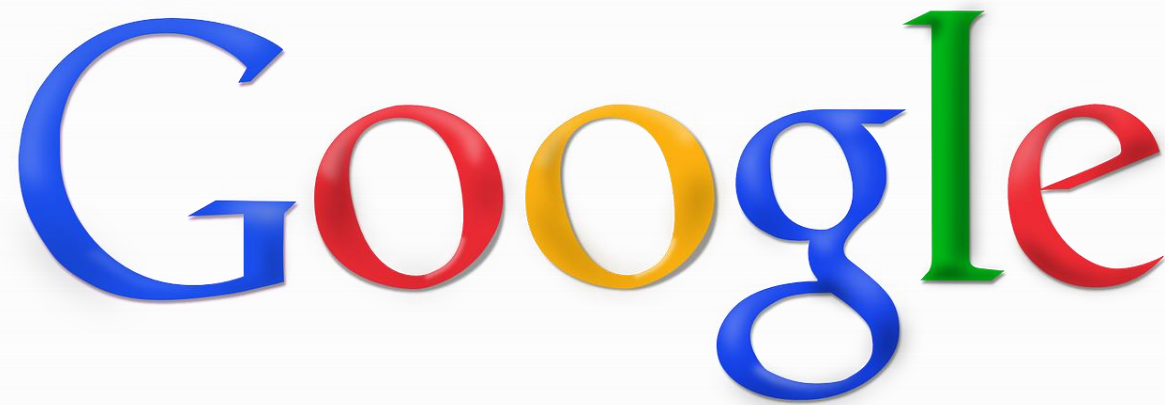
Getting Beneath:

- Win/Lose
- Be heard
- Get my points across
- Convince & “get my way”
- Protect myself (threat system)
 - Not “look stupid”
 - Avoid judgment of others
 - Avoid my own judgment

The Power of Making It Safe

*You can say almost anything to almost anyone **IF** they know you truly care about them and have their best interests in mind*

-Joseph Grenny



Over two years, Google conducted 200+ interviews with employees and looked at more than 250 attributes of 180+ active Google teams:

1 attribute to be a high performing team was **psychological safety**



Make It Safe – Do Not

- Avoid the conversation altogether
- “Sugar coat” – not be direct
- Make passive/aggressive comments
- Blame - “You always/never” etc.
- Attack their character

Most important: self-awareness, know when you get “hooked” and avoid blame!

Make it Safe - Do

- Stress mutual purpose – “we both want _____”
- Let them know what it’s not about – “this isn’t about how well you do your job, it’s about how others feel when you _____”
- Avoid blame and criticism – use “you” very carefully!

Conversations end the way they start 96% of the time!



NV Communication/Gottman

- What I observe ... with no judgement or criticism
- What I'm feeling ... hurt, scared, joyful, amused
- My need(s) in this situation
- What requests can I make ... in practical language and not as a demand



Example With Colleague

- *Can we talk about what happened on Monday?*
- *It's clear to me that we both want what's best for ____.*
- *When you started yelling and said that my idea was stupid*
- *I felt surprised, disappointed and angry*
- *When we disagree, I would really like it (need) for both of us to stay calm or walk away until we can discuss the situation skilfully*
- *I'm willing to commit to this. Would you be willing to do the same?*



Crucial Conversations

- Identify the conversations that you have found to be most difficult
- Was their emotional safety? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Did you get triggered into “threat mode”
- What worked for you? What didn’t work?
- What could you do differently next time to communicate more effectively?

Time to Share in Kahoot!



What “Crucial Conversation” do you need to hold?

“Difficult People”

- Sherman Tanks
- Negativists & Complainers
- Super Agreeables
- Other “types”?

Coping with Difficult People, Robert Bramson



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What's Your Mindset with “Your Difficult Person”?

- “He/she is a ____” OR “I wonder if they are struggling with something?”
- I can grow stronger by facing this difficult situation OR do you do everything possible to avoid thinking about it?
- How do you view him/her? How do you view the situation itself?



General Strategies

Assess the situation

- Are they really a difficult person or just having a bad day?
- Do they remind you of someone else?

Stop wishing they were different

- Has wishing ever worked in the past?

Distance yourself – take a detached, impersonal view

- How can you view this less as a personal attack against you and their response being about THEM?



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The Expectation Effect

- We tend to “get what we expect” ...
 - Placebos and nocebos
 - Hotel employees & fitness
 - Anxiety: + arousal or - inhibitor
- Mental framing of stressful events can powerfully influence the impact & our actions



Invisible Suitcase



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How can you apply the concept of the “Invisible Suitcase”?

What if We Need to Live With More Balance and Be More Present?

Can we be at our best when interacting with difficult people when our mind is “going a million miles an hour?”

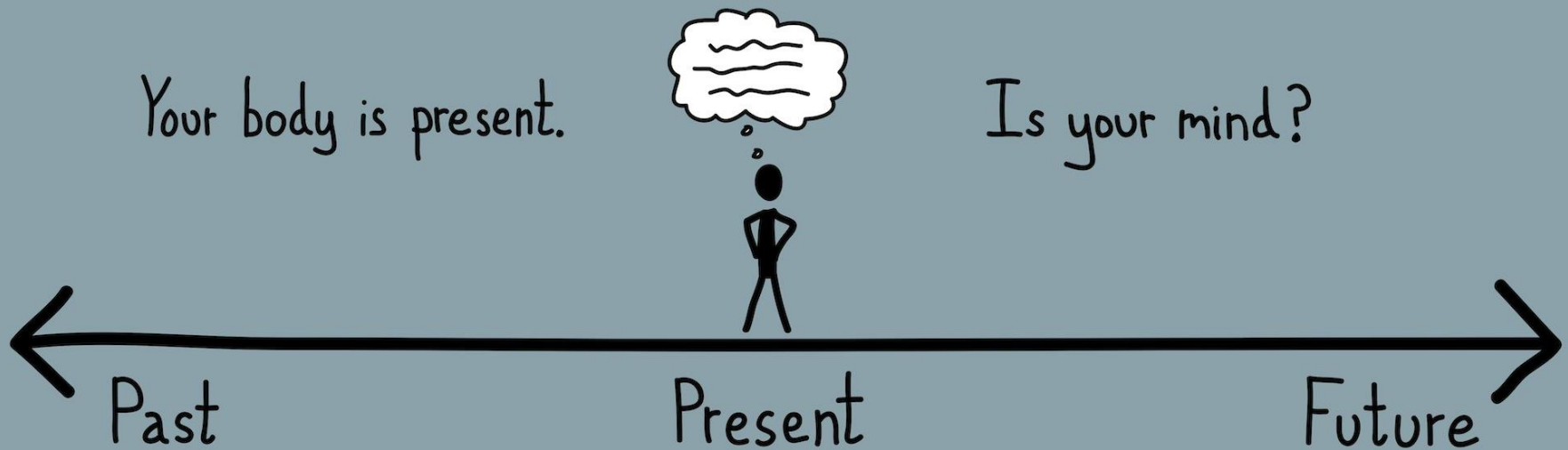
What if developing a calm and focused mind will help us “be at our best” in difficult situations?



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Mindfulness

Paying attention to the present moment with curiosity and openness



DOUG NEILL

Mindfulness – Gap Between Stimulus & Response

- Not just for stress reduction and greater enjoyment of present moment
- Watch for signs that you are becoming activated
- Watch for signs the other person is activated
- Notice your desire to avoid or steamroll
- With awareness, intention, and practice you can choose skillful responses



Staying Grounded During Difficult Conversations

- Mindful check-in (before, possibly during)
- Notice feet “rooted” into the floor or breath in belly?
- 5-2-5
- Breath – 4-4-6-2 or ?
- Notice the other person’s facial expressions, voice tone, volume

Be curious and practice!



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Time to Share Your Last Kahoots!



Based on today's
presentation, I
will _____

Time to Share Your Last Kahoots!



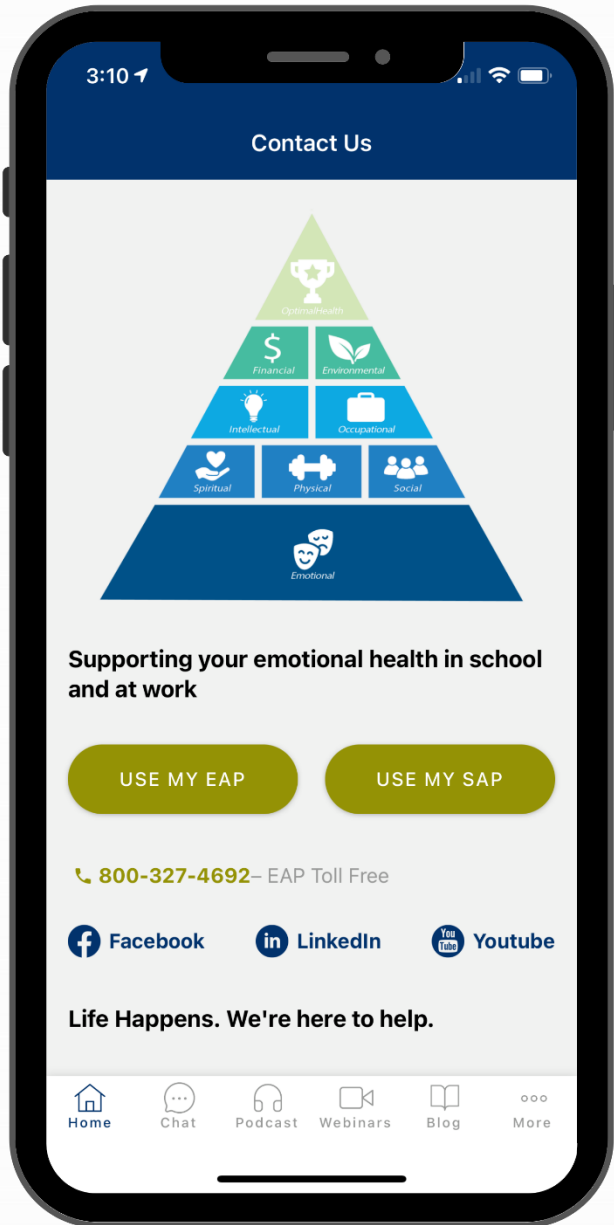
Before the week's out,
I will _____

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Your Feedback Matters!

Difficult Conversations with Difficult People



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