



# Critical Conversations: Practical Tools for Navigating Difficult Dialogues

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*She/Her/Hers*

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## Meet Your Facilitator

Kateeka J. Harris has nearly two decades of experience in higher education at four year and two-year colleges and universities including Title IX compliance, student conduct, multicultural program administration, and undergraduate admissions. Kateeka is a nationally recognized expert in Student Conduct and Title IX Administration and has held leadership positions within the Association for Student Conduct Administration, including President. Kateeka received her Master of Arts in Higher Education from Slippery Rock University and anticipates receiving her Doctor of Educational Leadership from Texas Wesleyan University next year.



## Vision

We exist to help create safe and equitable work and educational environments.



## Mission

Bring systemic change to how school districts and institutions of higher education address their Clery Act & Title IX obligations.



## Core Values

- ❖ Responsive Partnership
- ❖ Innovation
- ❖ Accountability
- ❖ Transformation
- ❖ Integrity



# PRINCIPALS OF ENGAGEMENT



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# Creating Curious Spaces

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## Requires Participant Consent to:

- Be fully present
- Listen with an open mind
- Use “I” or “In my experience” statements
- Seek to understand and not just be heard
- Explore intent and acknowledge impact
- Expect discomfort



# Agenda

01 Defining Critical Conversations

02 The Communication System

03 Critical Conversations for Response Toolkit

04 Case Studies: Real Conversations in Real Time





01

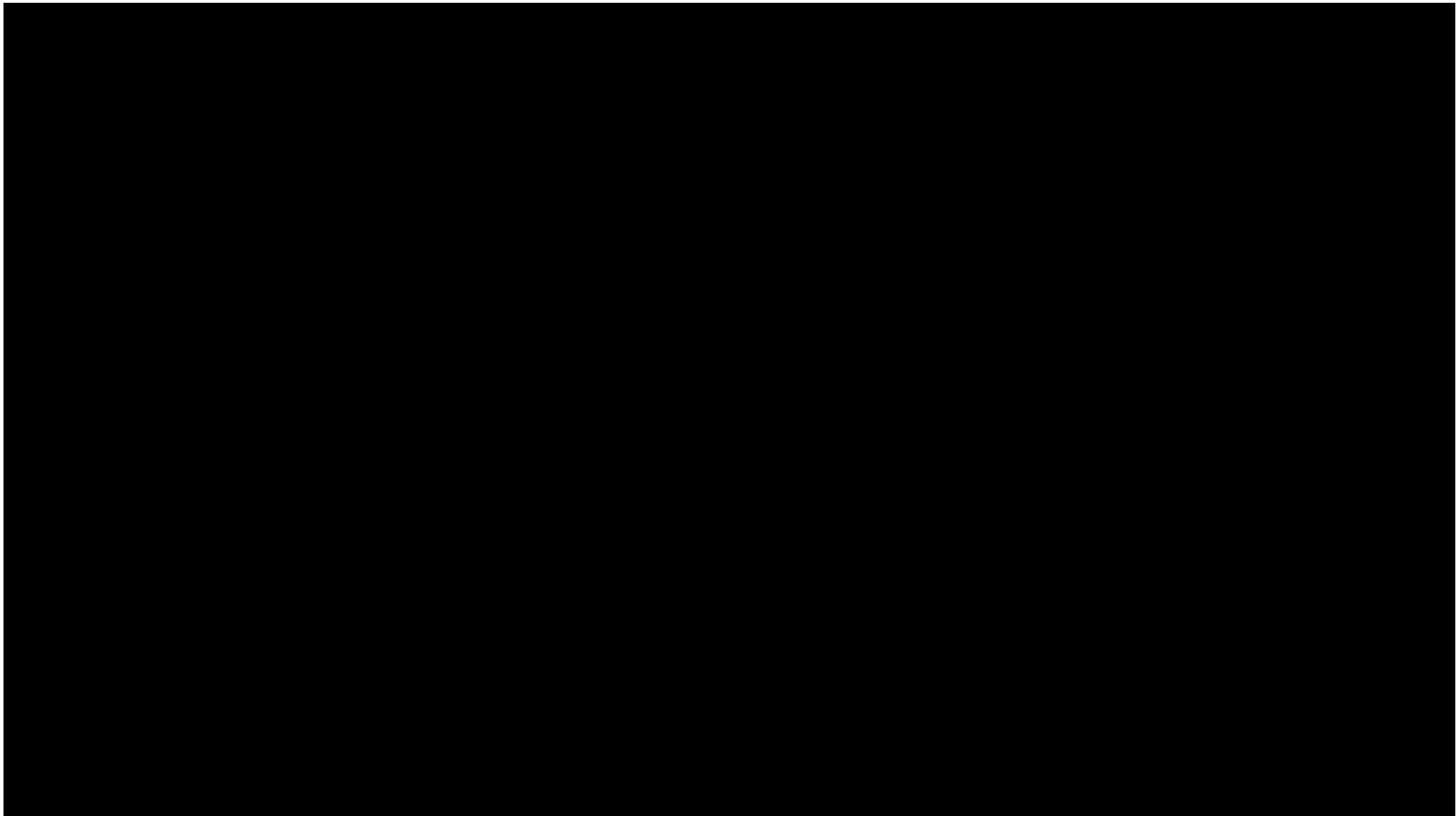
# Defining Critical Conversations

# Defining a Critical Conversation

A discussion between two or more people where:

- Stakes are high
- Opinions vary
- Emotions run strong
- The outcome greatly impacts the lives of the participants

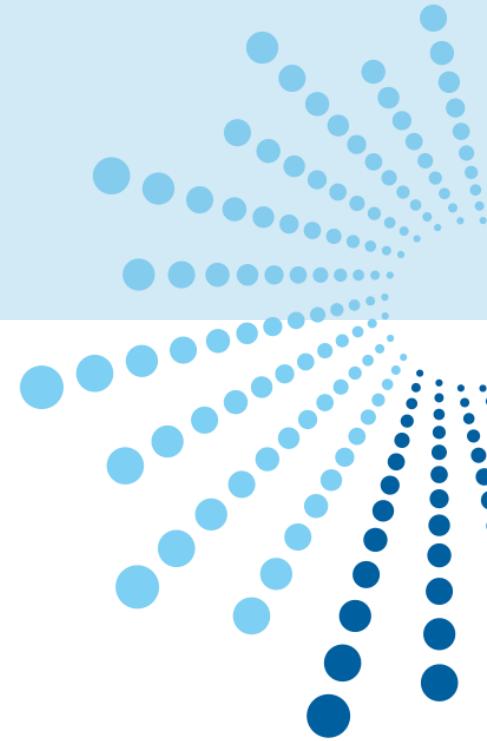






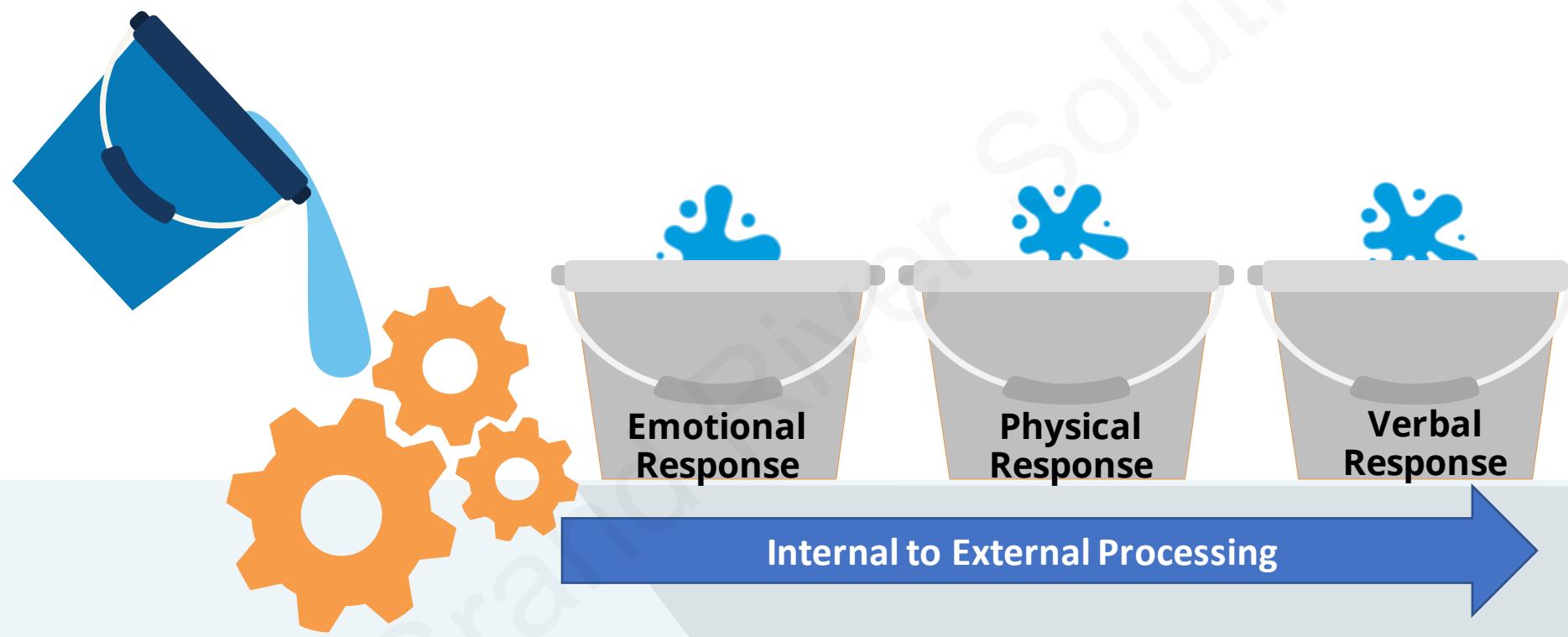
02

# The Communication System



# The Communication System

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# NAME THAT FEELING!



*I'm Joy.*

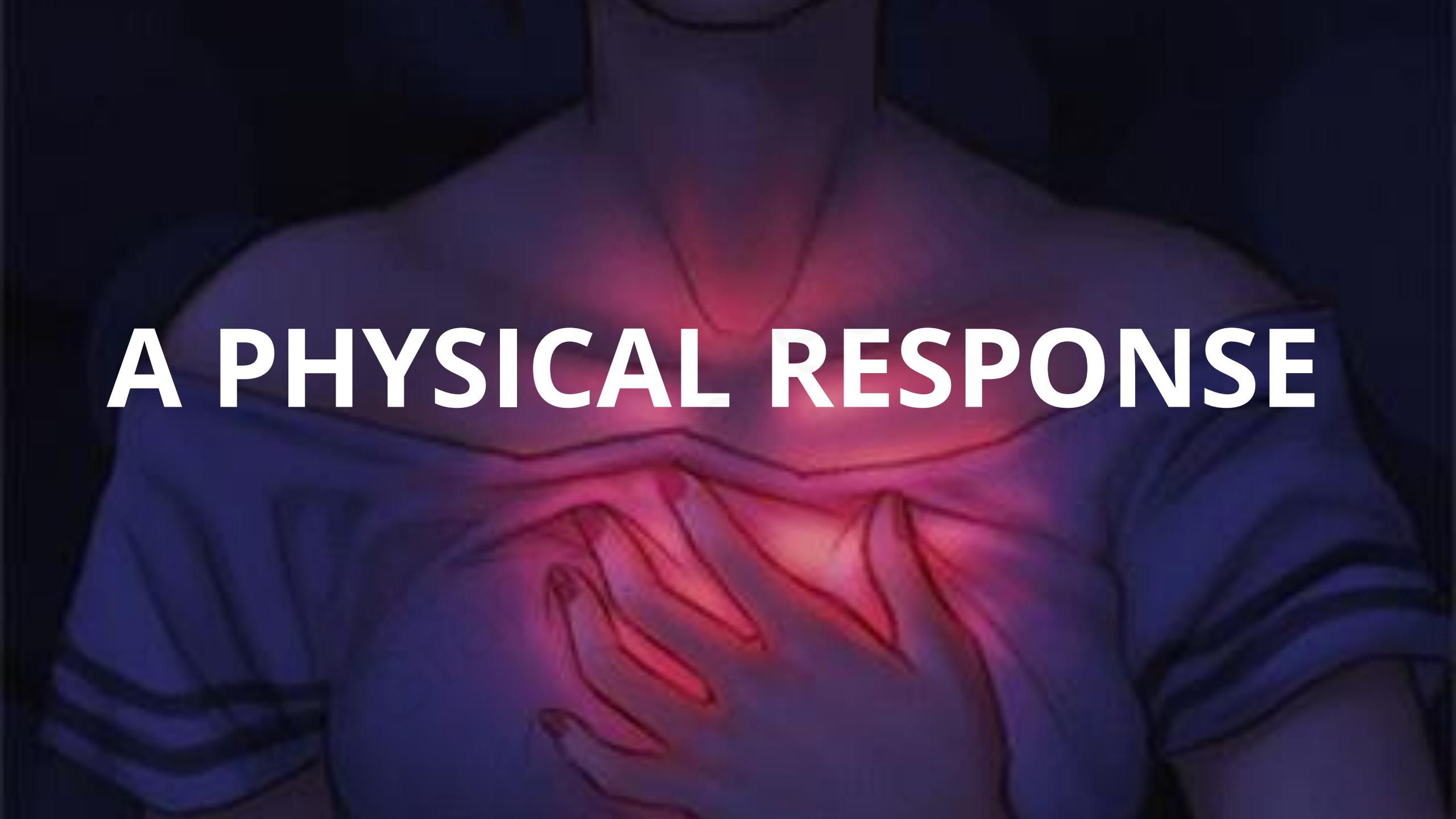




Emotional Response System

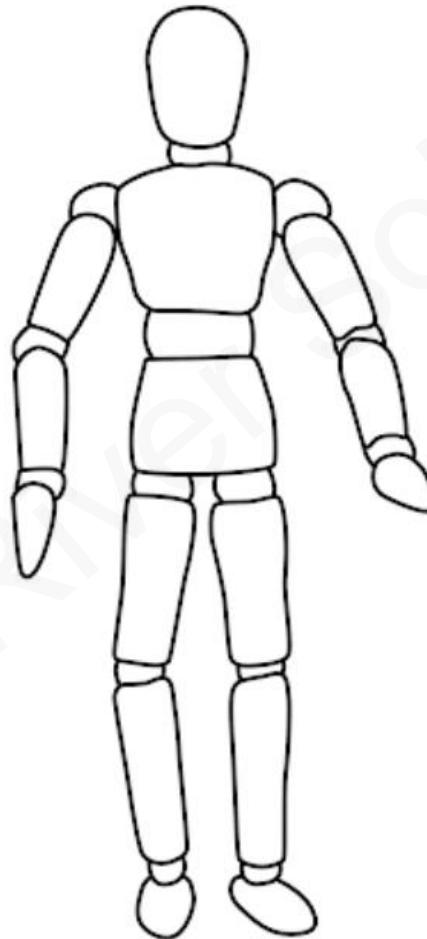


Logical Response System

A close-up photograph of a person's shoulder and upper arm. The skin is a dark, reddish-purple color, with bright red highlights along the contours of the shoulder, arm, and shoulder blade. The background is dark and out of focus.

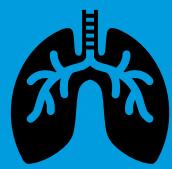
A PHYSICAL RESPONSE

# When you are in distress where do you feel it in your body?



# Physical Responses to Distress

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Breathing  
Quickens



Heart Rate  
increases



Pit in the  
Stomach



Sweaty  
Palms



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# FSB Strategy



## Feel

- Our emotional reactions trigger a physical response.



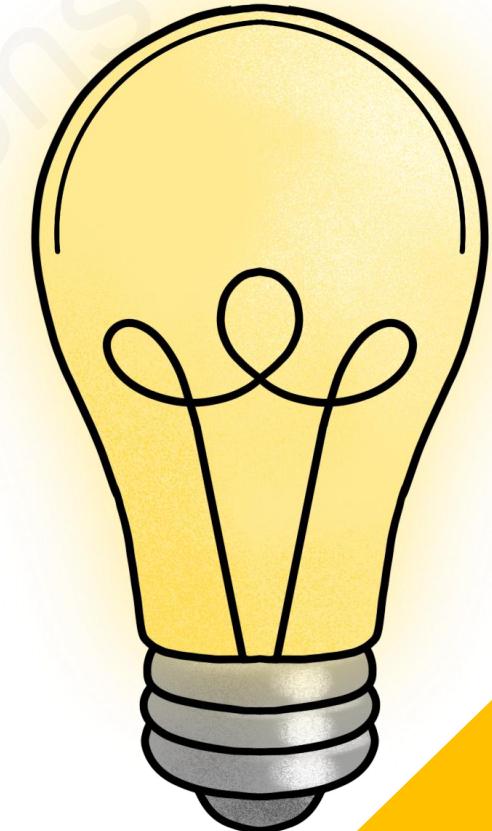
## Stop

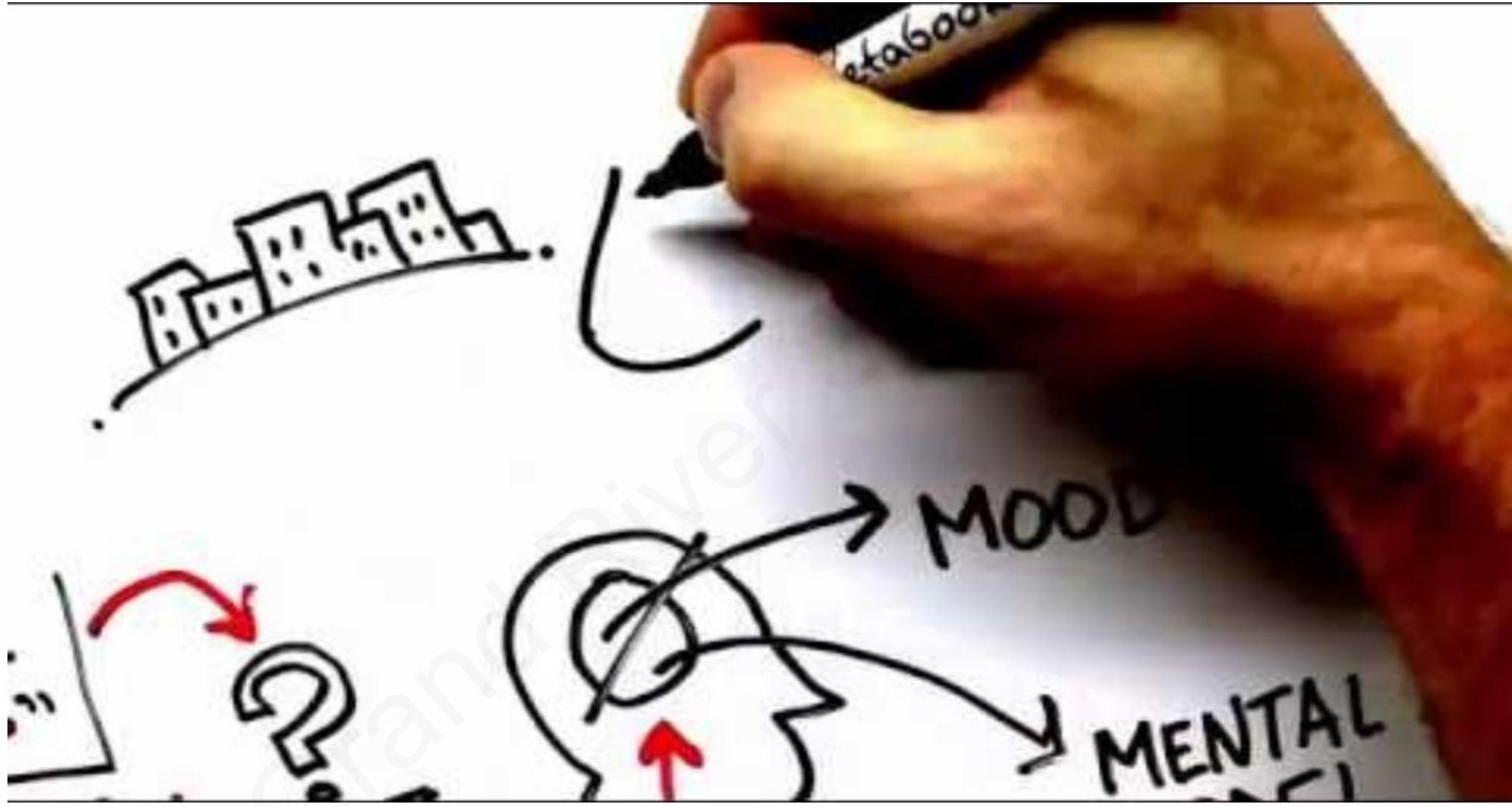
- Naming your feeling bridges the gap between your thoughts and feelings.



## Breathe

- Blood flow helps us enter our logical response space.



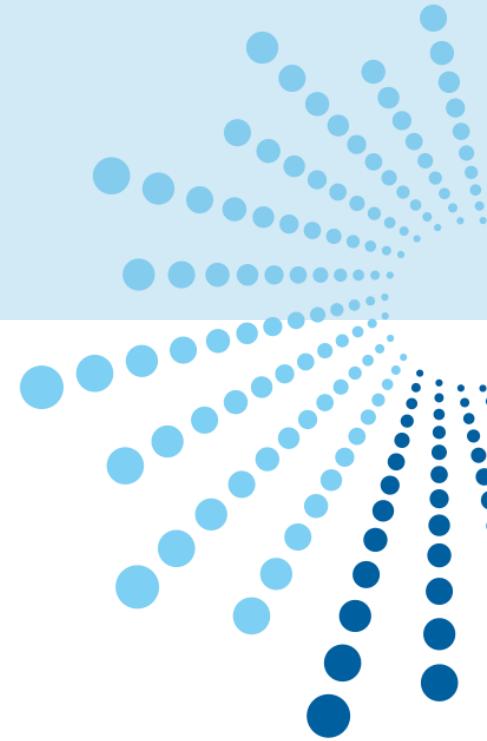




03

# Critical Conversation Response Toolkit

Strategies to improve our responses.



# Preparing For Your Conversation

1. Clearly identify conversation goals.
  - Why would they oppose?
  - Why would they agree?
  - What questions might they have for you?
  - What questions do you have for them?
2. Think through “if-then” scenarios.
  - Ex. “If they respond emotionally, I will slow down the conversation for clarity.”
3. Assess your commonalities.
  - What do you both want from this exchange?



# Ineffective Conversation Goals

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I want to be right/win!



I want to look good or save face!



I want to avoid conflict!



I want to find fault, punish, or blame!



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# Effective Conversation Goals

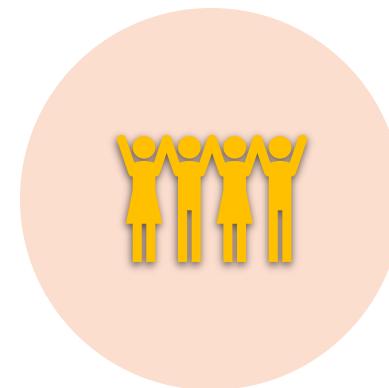
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INFLUENCE



INFORM



IMPROVE



# 5 Change Superpowers



The Power of Stories



The Power of Variety



The Power of Emotions



The Power of Resistance



The Power of Support

# Are you the right MESSENGER?

Does it take a lot for you  
and the stakeholder to  
get on the same page?

Have you significantly  
contributed or impacted  
the decision-making  
process of this  
stakeholder in the past?

Have you proven to this  
stakeholder you care  
about their success?

# Stakeholder Buy-In



Building Trust



Preferred  
Communication  
Channels

Phone  
Email  
In-Person  
Text



Stakeholder Priorities



Connect Common Goals

# Signs you are TRUSTED

You are not  
micromanaged

You are a  
sounding board

Your opinion is  
highly valued

You are given or  
mentioned for  
new opportunities

You are included  
in confidential  
discussions

People are not  
afraid to ask for  
your help

# Active Listening Techniques



Ask questions to clarify what is said.



Check your understanding by repeating or paraphrasing what you think you heard.



Listen to the entire point without interrupting.



Give the speaker time to think as well as talk.



Give yourself time to think before responding.

# Dimensions of Response

## Call Out

- When you want to fight
- Showcases someone's flaws
- Can cause folks to shutdown
- Creates competition (who is more right)
- Inhibits learning and behavior change

## Call In

- When you want to talk
- Person must stay curious
- Invite folks into the conversation
- Remain humble (you might be wrong)
- Lead with empathy (learned skill)

## Call On

- When you challenge folks to be better
- Calling on people asks them to be better
- Slows things down for reflection
- Asks folks to consider their values
- Is this the next version of you?

# Calling In Statements

I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?

How might the impact of your words/actions differ from your intent?

What sort of impact do you think your decision/comment/action might have?

How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone might misinterpret your words/actions?

Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?

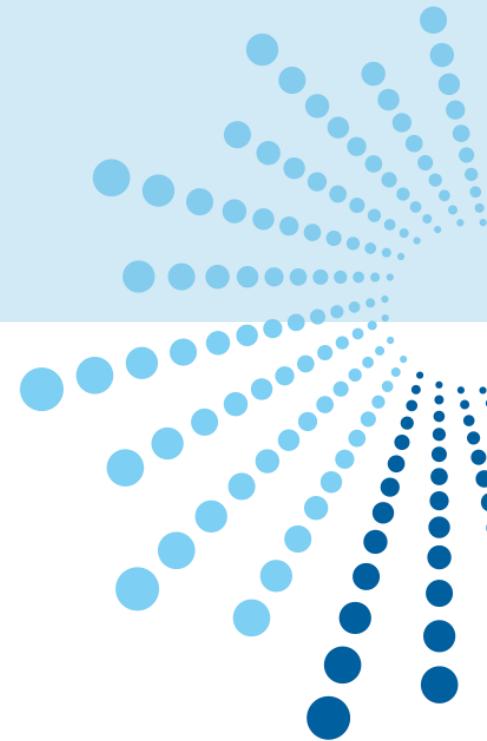
Why did the result or response cause a problem for you?



04

## Case Studies:

*Real conversations in real time*



# *Conversations With People Who Hate Me*

## Podcast

- Dylan Marron began a podcast to speak to people who left him hateful comments on YouTube.
- His goal was to understand their perspectives and have meaningful conversations with them.
- As we listen write down any phrases you view as helpful for conducting critical conversations.



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# Facts Over Feelings

CONVERSATIONS  
WITH PEOPLE WHO  
**HATE ME**



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# Engaging in a Critical Conversation

- What are your initial reactions?
- What are your observations of the caller's responses?
- What are your observations of the podcaster's responses?



**'WORLDS APART'**

# Engaging in a Critical Conversation

- What are your initial reactions?
- What worked in getting them to communicate?
- Why do you think they stayed?
- What makes this difficult to do in the real world?



# Find Your P.A.C.E



# If It All Goes Left!

Don't jump back in. Reminder - Pause for Pain

Admit when you are wrong.

Acknowledge negative impact and apologize.

Don't beat yourself up.

Commit to trying again.

# Reflection Guide for Critical Conversations

What I Heard	What I Believe	What I Know	What I Learned	How I Feel
What were things that stood out to you during the discussion?	Describe what you believe about this topic and the person you spoke to.	What evidence do you have or need to assert your beliefs about this topic and person?	What is something new you learned during the discussion?	How did you feel during the discussion?

# WE ALL NEED TO



H EALTHY  
E XCHANGES  
A MEND  
LOSS

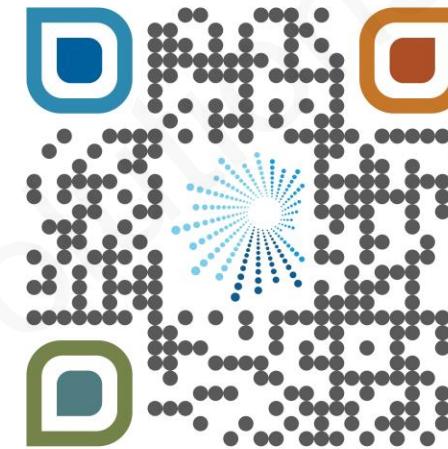
Respect  
Value  
Humanity

Consequence  
Credibility  
Dignity

# Questions?



Leave Us Feedback:



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