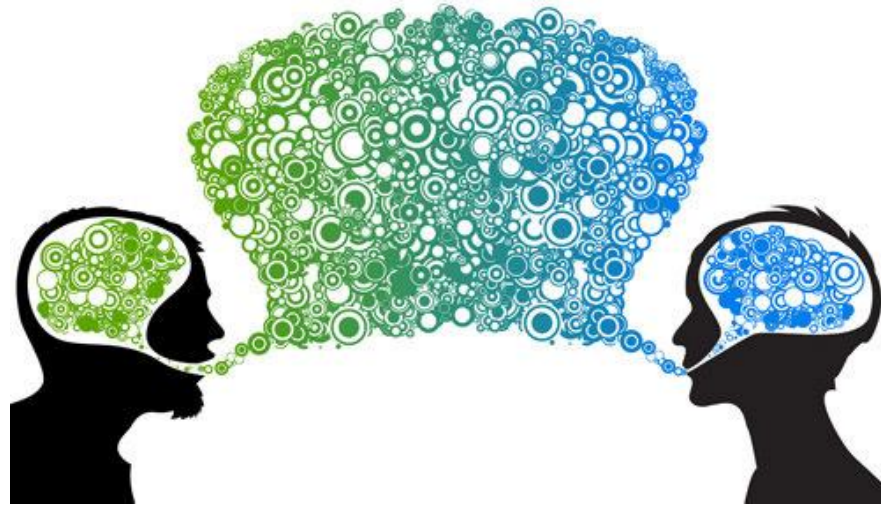


Shifting the Conversation to Calm:

The 5-Step System for Effective Communication & Conflict De-escalation™



The Problem:

1. People will always have problems. There will always be situations that become difficult.
2. People will continue to come to you with their problems.



When people have problems...

1. They have the ability to think through the situation themselves and find their own solution. Not a problem!
2. They come to you with the problem but are calm and rational. Not a problem!
3. They come to you but are emotional and reactive. Yep, this is a problem!



Our Goal Today

1. Review the psychology and brain science behind difficult situations.
2. Learn a 5 step system for enhancing communication, managing conflict, improving problem-solving, and shifting the conversation to calm.



Question:

Can you think of a scenario in the past when you had to talk with someone with a problem who became difficult to deal with? Perhaps a situation that really went wrong?



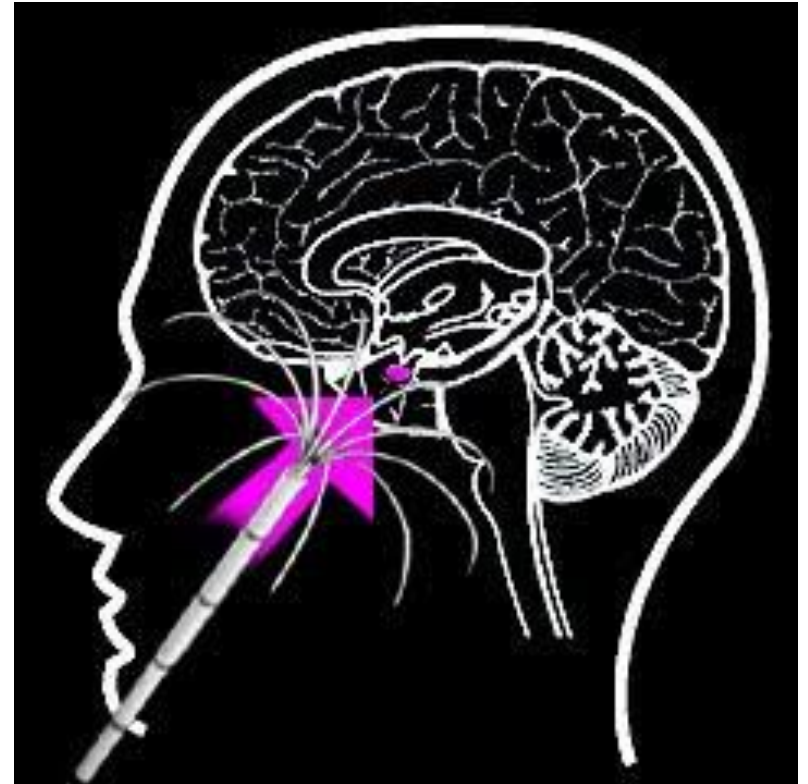
What do these situations have in common?

- The person has “lost their cool” and has become pushy, in your space, overly emotional, angry, argumentative, unreasonable, etc.



The person has “flipped their lid”

- They are coming from their back brain survival focused system.

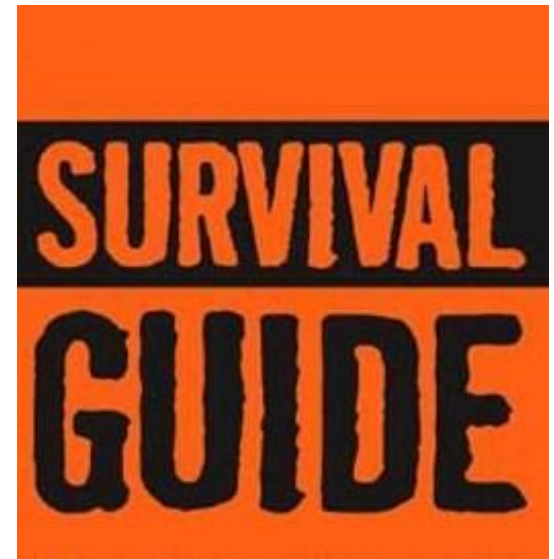


Survival Reactions

Fight - attack and argue with you

Flight – walk away before the issue is resolved

Freeze – zone out, stop paying attention, not make eye contact



When the back brain takes over and overrides the thinking brain:

Stress hormones flood your system, you “flip your lid” and:

- **Reduced problem-solving**
- **Reduced empathy for others**
- **Reduced critical thinking**

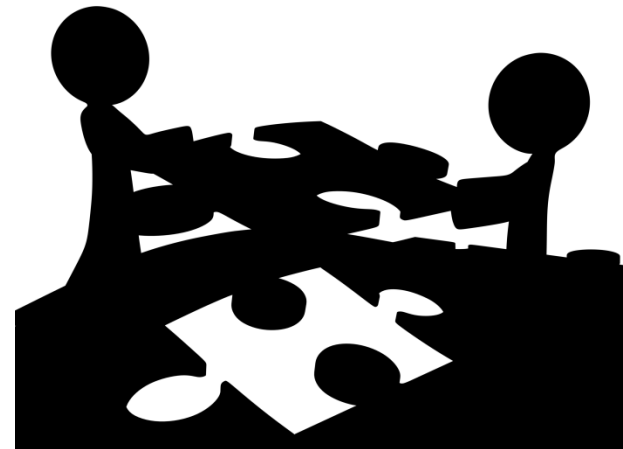
- **Reduced ability to regulate emotions**



The Goal of Conflict De-escalation

To help people shift from the reactivity of their back brain to the thinking brain so they can:

1. Think more clearly and effectively
2. Problem-solve
3. Behave appropriately



This seems like it should be easy,
but...reactivity is contagious

- The most normal thing to do when someone is reactive is to become reactive yourself.
- Bypasses your thinking brain and triggers your back brain survival mechanisms into action.
- You are likely to go into fight, flight, or freeze.



Question

- What do you do typically do when someone is directing their emotional intensity at you?
When your back brain threat response is activated?
- Do you argue, defend, walk away, or zone out?
- **Knowledge about power**



The 5-Step System for Effective Communication and Conflict De-escalation™

1. Practice CALM
2. Actively Listen
3. Ask Questions
4. Problem-Solve
5. Take Action



STEP #1 CALM

Purpose: Stay calm & prepare to engage with the other person.

- a) **Calm** your nervous system – stay in your front brain.
- b) **Accept** the situation – don't attack, defend, or run away.
- c) **Lean** into the other person's agenda
- d) **Mindset** shift – don't take it personally



STEP #2 ACTIVELY LISTEN

- Actively listen and acknowledge what the person is saying.
- Purpose = to drain the person of their emotion and communicate value.
- Show the person empathy. "Em" is a Latin prefix meaning "to see through" and "pathy" is a greek suffix meaning "eye of the other."



5 Types of Active Listening

Type 1: Paraphrasing

Repeat back to them what they said but in your own words to check for clarity and communicate *that you want to understand* what they are saying.

Examples, "*Let me see if I understand what you just said*"

"This is what I heard you say, is this correct?"

If you can get them to say "yes" – that is a calm word and a transition point that might help them calm down faster.

Type 2: Observation

Take a guess as to what the other person is thinking or feeling or how it might affect them personally. Leave room for them to clarify or correct you.

"I notice that..."

"I imagine this has been a really difficult day for you."

5 Types of Active Listening

Type 3: Validation

Communicate that the person's feelings are valid – that other people have these feelings too

"It makes sense to me why you feel so strongly about this."

"I hear you."

Type 4: Normalizing

Communicate that the other person isn't alone in their experience. Communicates that you have experience with the situation and instills confidence in them.

"I've seen this happen before."

"This is a very common error that people often make."

5 Types of Active Listening

Type 5: Identification

Share what you have in common with the person.

"I feel the same way."

"I would be upset if that happened to me too."

"I reacted exactly the same way when this happened to me."

Summary

1. Paraphrasing
2. Observation
3. Validating
4. Normalizing
5. Identification

Step 2 Tip: Pause before responding



1. Let the other person finish
2. Show them you are considering what they said
3. Show them you were really listening

Why: This communicates that you value them and starts to build trust in the relationship.

Everyone wants to feel important. Listening helps people feel important.

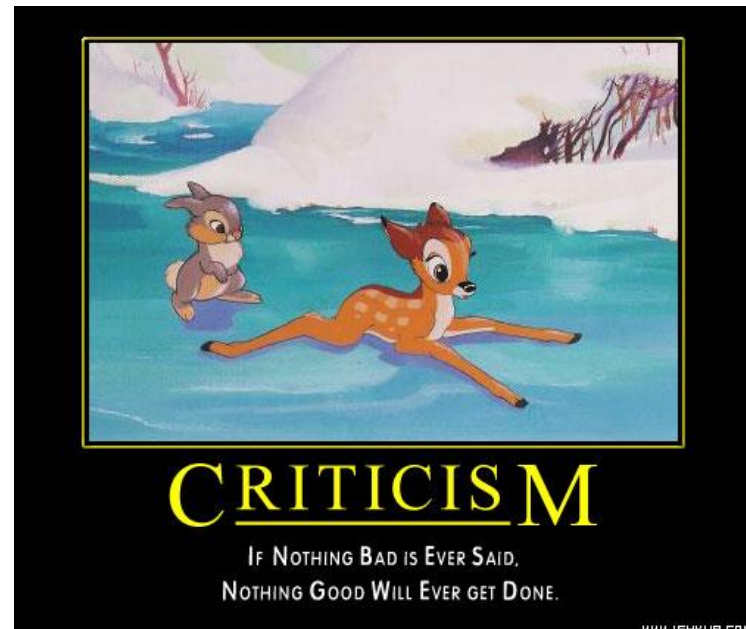
Step 2 Tip: The Magic of Naming Emotions

When people put words to their emotions (“frustrated,” “angry,” “overwhelmed,” etc) the back brain cools down almost immediately. Words speak to the thinking brain which then inhibits emotional responses.



Step 2 Tip: Lean into Criticism

When people criticize you or your organization: "Lean into the criticism": Do your best to understand what they are communicating to you by staying with the criticism rather than making excuses or deflecting it.



STEP #3 ASK QUESTIONS

Be curious and ask open-ended questions



Purpose:

1. Continue to drain the emotion.

Use the “*tell me more*” technique:

“Tell me more” or “Walk me through what happened.”

2. Start the shift from feelings to facts...

Ask “thought-based” questions. *“What do you think contributed to this happening?”*



STEP #4 PROBLEM-SOLVE

Purpose: Negotiate a solution with the other person.

Focus on **what you can do**, not what you can't do. Try for a "win-win" solution.

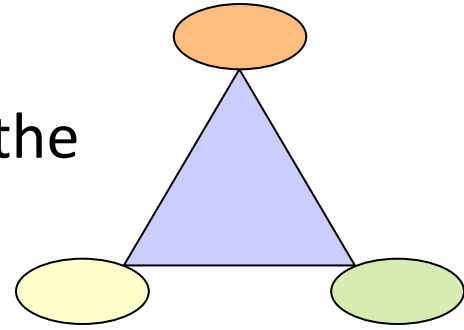
“This is what I can do to help you.”

Find a “YES” to say to them.



Step 4 Tip: Become their advocate

This is the step where you create a subtle shift in the relational dynamics.



You do this by shifting from “you vs me” to “you and me vs the problem.”

You started the conversation with a triangle where the other person was on the inside with their problem and you were on the outside...to a triangle where you and the other person are on the inside while the problem has been pushed to the outside.

You are now perceived as an advocate for this person.



STEP #5 TAKE ACTION

Purpose: Take action as quickly as possible to resolve the situation.



- Summarize your action plan.
- “This is our plan to deal with this situation.”
- Talk to the necessary people. Find the information. Resolve the situation as quickly as possible.
- Follow up: with a phone call or email (if appropriate).

Step 5 Tip: Don't forget to say "Thank you"

Showing the other person appreciation is a key step towards building a positive relationship.

Communicates that you see them as important



Return to Step 2 (Actively Listen) if...

The person gives you more information or continues to express emotion.

Then return to Step 4 (Problem-Solve) and focus on what you can do for this person.

Communicates Boundaries!!!

Additional Information

1. Phrases to Avoid
2. Exceptions: Difficult People
3. The Personal Attack
4. Dangerous Situations



Phrases to avoid

- Never criticize the person
- Don't give them orders
- "No"
- "I don't know"
- "We can't do that"
- "It's our policy"
- "I understand"
- "I'm sorry"



Exceptions: Unusually difficult people

A quick 3 step process when dealing with very difficult people who try to push your boundaries:

- This is for those people who have an exaggerated sense of importance and think they should immediately be at the top of your priorities.
1. **Validate and acknowledge them** - their feelings, their sense of important - whatever they give you. This isn't the same as giving into them or agreeing with them.
 2. **Focus on their agenda and self-importance while maintaining your boundaries.**

"You shouldn't be kept waiting. Let me deal with these two people here and I will get right on that for you so you can move on with your day."

This gives the message that the other person's anger or boundary violations aren't affecting you.

- **3. Repeat** - be a broken record with step two

Personal Attack – Try



- If the person is personally attacking you, you could try to use some humor to *deflect* the situation and show them that they aren't upsetting you.
- Phrases like:
 - "I never thought about it that way"*
 - "My husband might agree with you"*
 - "I see your point."*



Communicates that you can engage them without aggression.

The Situation may become dangerous when

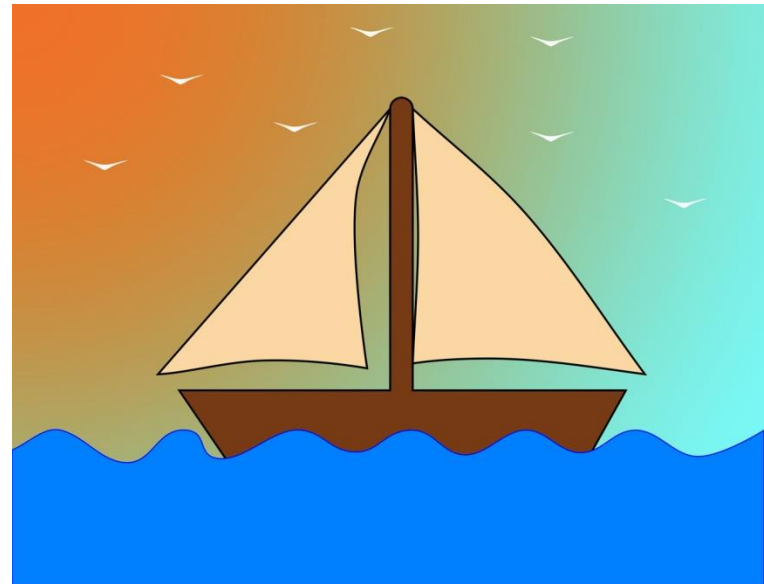
- Visible agitation or distress
- Avoiding eye contact or trying to stay invisible
- A disregard for the rules or norms of the school
- Talking incoherently or suspiciously
- A stated or unstated sense of powerlessness
- Situations with major consequences for the customer
- A group of people who appear to be threatening or confrontational
- Fight or flight body movements

What to do in this situation

1. Make your presence known - greeting them, making eye contact, or doing something to let them know you are aware of them
2. Bring in backup - safety in numbers - lessens the possibility that the person will become physical and brings in more staff to handle the situation
3. Maintain physical space - keeps safe space for yourself and stays out of their space
4. Know your escape routes - be aware of where to run to safety if you need to
5. Speak to the other's interests - try to image what they are feeling and wanting and speak to them about their interests

Reminder

- “An entire sea of water can’t sink a ship unless it gets inside the ship. Similarly, the negativity of the world can’t put you down unless you allow it to get inside you.”
- -Goi Nasu



Summary: The 5 Step System

1. Practice CALM

a) Calm yourself

b) Accept the situation

c) Lean into their agenda

d) Mindset shift for not taking it personally

2. Actively Listen

3. Ask Questions

4. Problem-Solve

5. Take Action

Questions

Conclusion: Now you know how to shift the conversation to calm.

