

HEALTH **AND** WELLNESS SUMMIT



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Mindful Communication with Liz Chamberlain, PhD

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Today we are going to talk about:

1. How stress impacts effective communication
2. Mindfulness strategies for stress management
3. Strategies and practice to increase mindful, effective communication



Got Stress?

- Thinking of things that are stressful for you right now...what are your own personal stressors?
- *It could be home stress, work/training stress, family/pet stress, stress of world events, caregiving stress...*
- *How do you know, physically, when stress is coming (or has arrived)? Where do you feel it in your body?*



Stress Reactions: Fight or Flight/Freeze

Autonomic Nervous System

- Sympathetic (fight/flight – spurring to action)
 - *Chain of neurochemical reactions to stressors*
- Parasympathetic (rest/digest – shutting down/reserving energy)
 - *Can activate it with extended exhale & belly breathing*

Our brains don't distinguish between physiological and psychological danger

Chronic exposure to stress can make our bucket overflow, and lead to us feeling....



Are You **FLOODED?**

Signs of **Diffuse Physiological Arousal**

- Heart speeds up to more than 100 bpm
- Adrenaline starts to pump
- Unable to focus on the issue
- Non-responsive to your partner's questions or commentary
- Attention becomes very focused with tunnel-vision and tunnel-hearing
- Breathing becomes rapid and shallow
- Either/or thinking
- Muscles tense up, such as a clenched jaw or tightness in shoulders or stomach
- Feeling hot, flushed, dry mouth, shaky or sweaty

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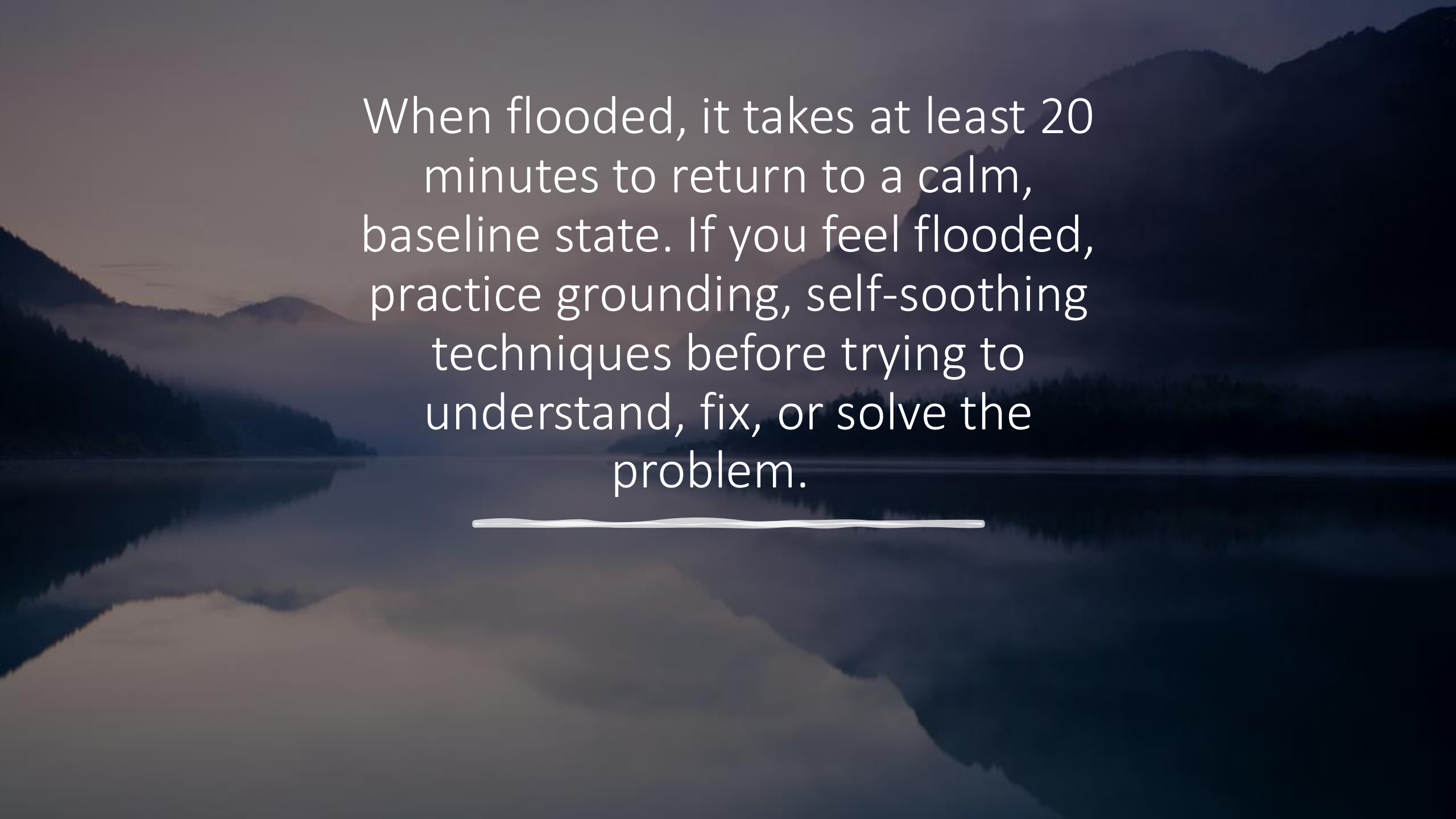
Flooding

(n) 1. A sensation of feeling psychologically and physically overwhelmed during conflict, making it virtually impossible to have a productive, problem-solving discussion.

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When flooded, it takes at least 20 minutes to return to a calm, baseline state. If you feel flooded, practice grounding, self-soothing techniques before trying to understand, fix, or solve the problem.

Quick Mindful Soothing Strategies: *Self-Soothe for Better Listening*

- 3x2x1 (*describe* 3 things you see, 2 things you hear, 1 thing you can touch/feel). Most effective if you can get outside.
- Mindful Check-In
- Belly breathing
- Grounding stone (Worry stone)
- Soothing touch (hand over heart, invoke care/compassion)





How Does Mindfulness Reduce Stress, Flooding, and Reactivity?

- *Pause, Soothe, Respond (vs. React) BEFORE becoming flooded*
- *Notice subtle physiological cues*
- *Practice makes present*





Feeling Something? Name It to Tame It!

- Anger, Frustration? Is something unfair?
- Worry, Fear?
- Sadness, Loneliness?
- Shame, Guilt, Regret?
- Joy, Love, Happiness?

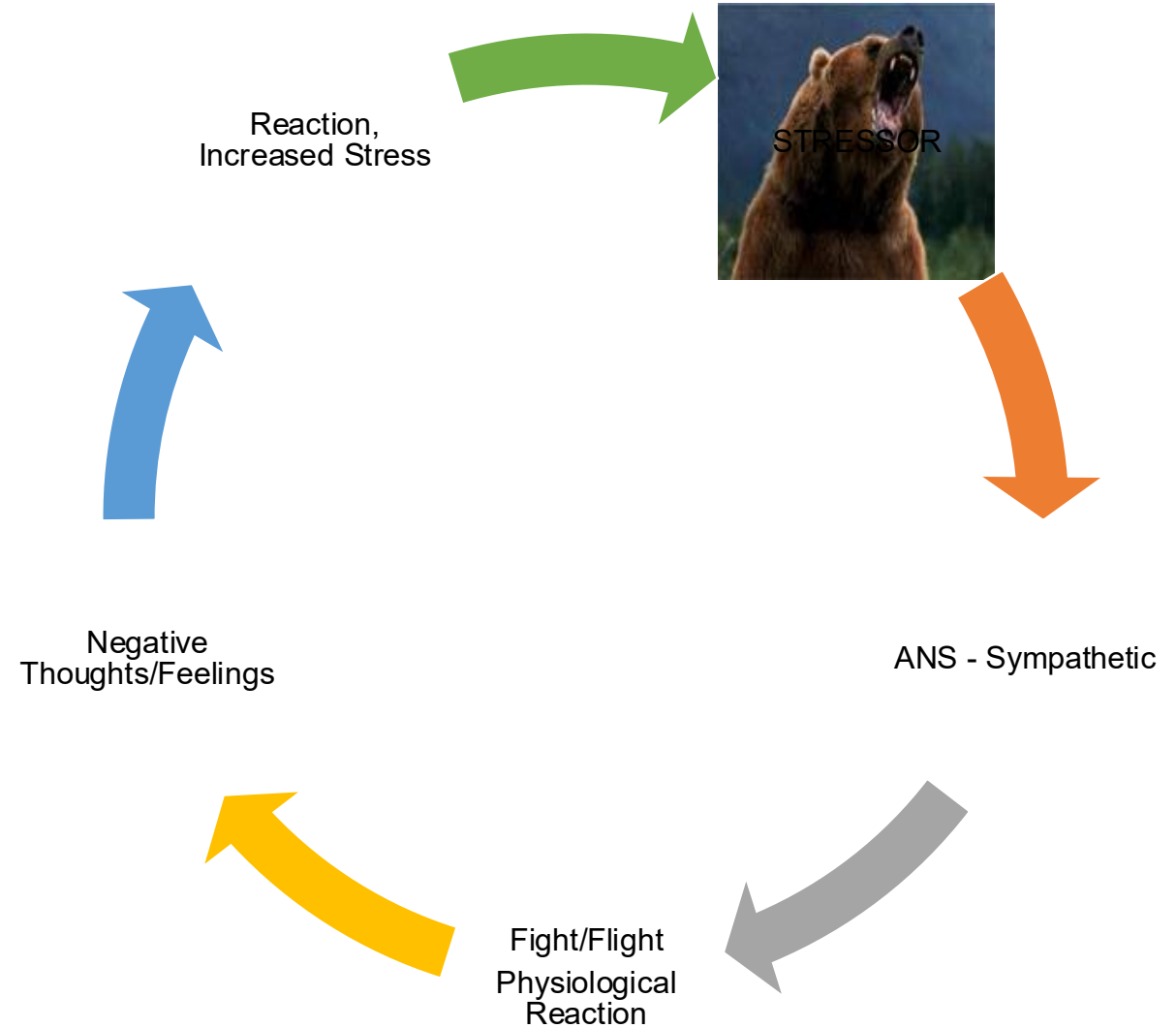
Most of our suffering comes from how we relate to our feelings

*Once you better understand your own feelings about a situation,
you can soothe them and engage in more productive conversation.*

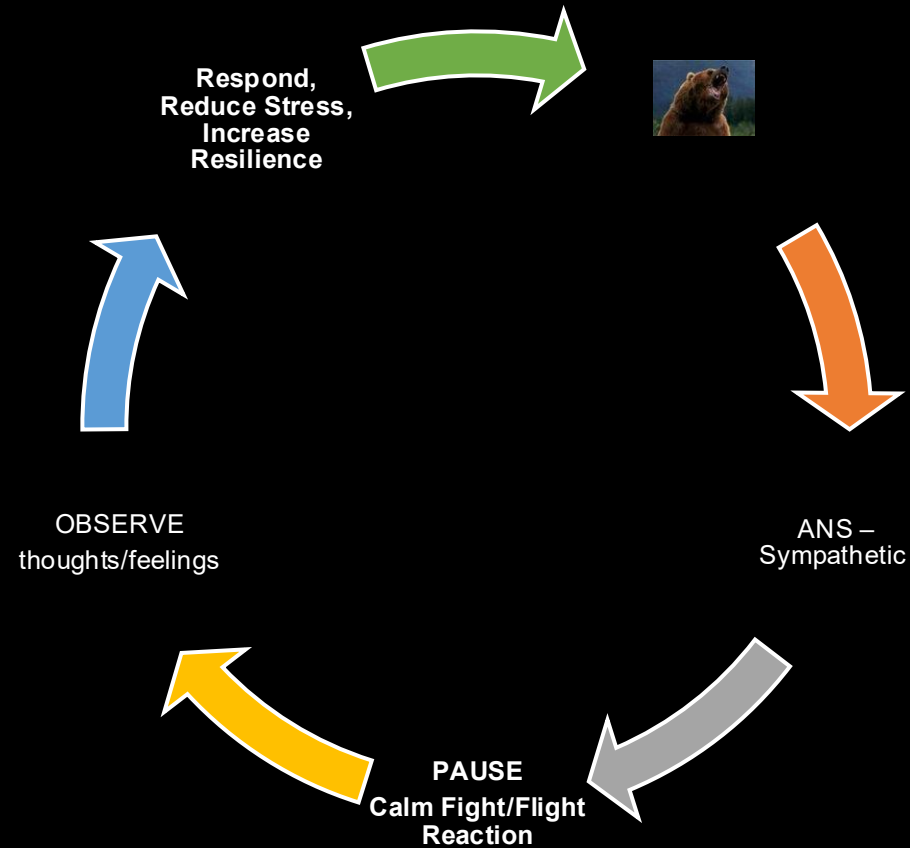
Mindfulness is...

- A qualitatively different way to *relate rather than react* to our thoughts, sensations, and emotions as they arise:
 1. Observing like a scientist, using our senses to describe thoughts, feelings and sensations while experiencing them.
 2. Approaching and acknowledging whatever is happening in the present moment, rather than avoiding it or needing to fix it – *acceptance* of the experience without putting a narrative to it.

Stress Cycle without Mindfulness = Reactive, Continuous Loop



Stress Cycle With Mindfulness = Response



How Can We Manage Unhelpful Thoughts?

How We Think Things Happen:

Event  Feeling

How Things Really Happen:

Event  Thoughts  Feeling

When we acknowledge and accept feelings, we can get curious about our thoughts, and can identify...



...Mind Traps!

- *We all engage in these styles of thinking – and recognizing them helps us explore if the thought is really true, and what other possibilities exist:*
- Catastrophizing
- Exaggerating the negative/discounting the positive
- Either-or thinking
- Mind reading
- Being the expert
- Shoulds and Musts - inner rules or judgments
- Blaming

Mind Traps and Miscommunication

"Most of the trouble in life comes from misunderstanding – it's dreadful what little things lead people to misunderstand each other."

~ L.M. Montgomery

Often, our assumptions, mind traps, and our own interpretations can lead to miscommunication.



Workplace Emotional Communication Game

To play the game, we will all **silently** read each of the items and their three available interpretations.

We will choose a speaker for each of the prompts.

Speaker's Job:

Silently choose which interpretation you will convey to the group.

The Speaker will say the item aloud with the meaning they wish to convey.

Listeners' Job:

Try to guess which of the three meanings the speaker is trying to convey.



Prompt #1 (of 5)

Speaker: Silently choose which interpretation you will convey to the group.

Listeners: try to guess which of the three meanings the speaker is trying to convey.

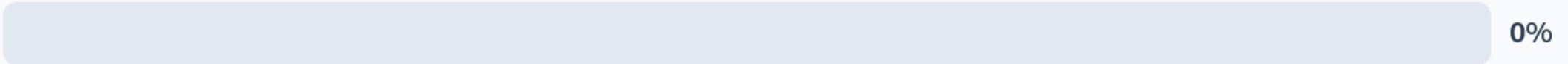
1. Did you get it done?

- a) You're pleasantly surprised that the task seems to be finally completed.
- b) You're worried that your colleague didn't do what he or she promised to do.
- c) You're just asking for information.

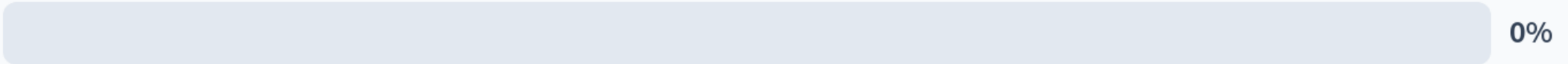


Mindful Communication Prompt #1: "Did you get it done?"

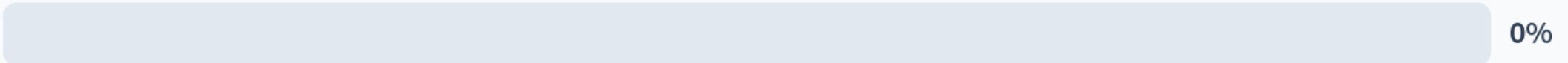
A: You're pleasantly surprised that the task seems to be finally completed.



B: You're worried that your colleague didn't do what he or she promised to do.



C: You're just asking for information.



Prompt #2 (of 5)

Speaker: Silently choose which interpretation you will convey to the group.

Listeners: try to guess which of the three meanings the speaker is trying to convey.

2. Are you going to the team retreat?

- a) You're not sure if you're going to go and are trying to decide.
- b) You think your colleague should go and not be so isolated from other people at work.
- c) You're simply asking for information.



Mindful Communication Prompt #2: "Are you going to the team retreat?"

A: You're not sure if you're going to go and are trying to decide.

0%

B: You think your colleague should go and not be so isolated from other people at work.

0%

C: You're simply asking for information.

0%

Prompt #3 (of 5)

Speaker: Silently choose which interpretation you will convey to the group.

Listeners: try to guess which of the three meanings the speaker is trying to convey.

3. I completed seven reports yesterday by myself.

- a) You're proud of the amount of work you've accomplished on your own and you'd like to be acknowledged.
- b) You're angry that you didn't get more help from your coworker.
- c) You're not feeling one way or another about the workload; you're just giving a tally of what you accomplished.



Mindful Communication Prompt #3: "I completed seven reports yesterday by myself."

A: You're proud of the amount of work you've accomplished on your own and you'd like to be acknowledged.

0%

B: You're angry that you didn't get more help from your coworker.

0%

C: You're not feeling one way or another about the workload; you're just giving a tally of what you accomplished.

0%

Prompt #4 (of 5)

To play the game, let's all **silently** read the item below and its three available interpretations. We will choose a speaker for each of the prompts.

Speaker: Silently choose which interpretation you will convey to the group.

Listeners: try to guess which of the three meanings the speaker is trying to convey.

4. Who's going to take responsibility for this project?

- a) You're tired of taking the lead on projects you do together, and you want your colleague to do it for a change.
- b) You're just asking for information about whose turn it is.
- c) Your colleague just naturally takes over. But this time you'd like to have a chance to show what you can do when you're in charge.



Mindful Communication Prompt #4: "Who's going to take responsibility for this project?"

A: You're tired of taking the lead on projects you do together, and you want your colleague to do it for a change.

0%

B: You're just asking for information about whose turn it is.

0%

C: Your colleague just naturally takes over. But this time you'd like to have a chance to show what you can do when you're in charge.

0%

Prompt #5 (of 5)

To play the game, let's all **silently** read the item below and its three available interpretations. We will choose a speaker for each of the prompts.

Speaker: Silently choose which interpretation you will convey to the group.

Listeners: try to guess which of the three meanings the speaker is trying to convey.

5. What should we do about including Jane on this project?

- a) The two of you want to do the project alone together without having to think about the composition of the work team.
- b) Jane is not very competent and is dragging down your team's performance.
- c) Jane would be a real asset, and you'd very much like to have her on the team.



Mindful Communication Prompt #5: "What should we do about including Jane on this project?"

A: The two of you want to do the project alone together without having to think about the composition of the work team.

0%

B: Jane is not very competent and is dragging down your team's performance.

0%

C:) Jane would be a real asset, and you'd very much like to have her on the team.

0%

Communication Game Process



How easy was it to misinterpret or misread nonverbal cues?

What did you notice?

What kinds of subtle shifts changed the interpretation of the message?

What made it easier to understand each other?



Speaking to Listen vs. Listening to Speak

Speak with awareness

By speaking with awareness, the speaker chooses words mindfully and avoids making the listening partner feel cornered or defensive. This then helps the listening partner open up to understanding because they are not under attack.

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Listening: Gottman's ATTUNE Model

DR. GOTTMAN'S STATE OF THE UNION MEETING

SPEAKER'S ROLE

A = Awareness

T = Tolerance

T = Transforming criticisms into
wishes and positive needs

LISTENER'S ROLE

U = Understanding

N = Non-Defensive Listening

E = Empathy

Use mindfulness skills to listen non-defensively, increase being heard when you speak

Be aware of your own triggers, thoughts, reactions to "hooks"

Check mind traps (am I Personalizing or Shoulding?)

PAUSE

Self-soothe, decrease fight or flight/flooding

- Have your own soothing strategies/kit at the ready
- Practice soothing skills daily to increase muscle memory when you need them
- Go slow, pay attention to the breath

Focus on the other person, notice when you begin to formulate your response

- check whether you are listening to speak or fully listening

Give yourself permission to hit PAUSE – permission not to give an answer right away

- Have phrases ready: *"I'd like to think about it – can I get back to you [tomorrow, at X time today, etc?]"*
- *"This is important to me, too, can we schedule time to talk more about it?"*



3 Tools for Better Communication:

- 1) Identify and Describe the Problem Using Softened Startup
- 2) Use "I" Statements
- 3) Ask for What You'd Like (or Need) Instead

Softened Startup

Say, perhaps, you fell behind at work and your manager comes to you and says: “Hey - I noticed the work we agreed to complete isn’t finished. I remember we agreed yesterday would be the deadline. Could you please get it to me as soon as you can?”

That’s a softened start-up. Compare that to this harsh start-up:

“Where are the reports you said you’d file? Could you, for once, get something done on time?”

See the difference? Try saying both examples out loud to yourself. Do you hear and feel the difference in tone and approach?

Use "I" Statements to Express Needs

Look for the exceptions – things that are going well, things that you would like to see increase

Ex: *"I feel [supported] when you share feedback with me when something needs to be corrected in the moment."*

Or: *"I feel [frustrated] when I don't know how to fix a mistake."*

Avoid *"You always/you never"* statements

Important caveat: be careful of turning "I" statements into "you" statements

(ex: *"I feel you are a jerk!"*)



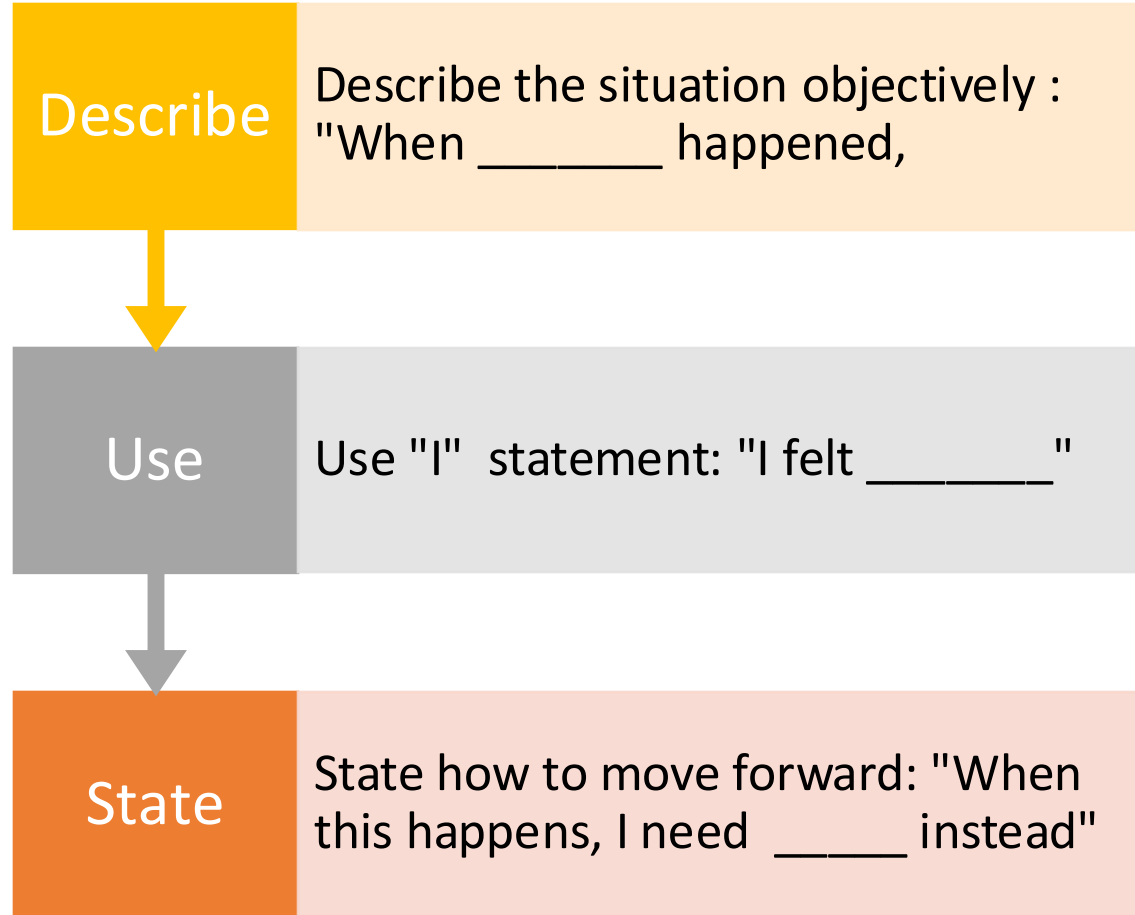
Expressing needs effectively

What are **Positive** Needs?

A positive need is an active want or replacement behavior—what you would like to happen, rather than what you would like to stop.



3 Steps to Manage Conflict



Use Curiosity or "Not Knowing" to Expand Conversation

- Validating or understanding before disagreeing, fixing, or solving
 - Validation does not equal agreement – can just validate other's stance/feeling/need
- "Not-knowing" stance: not having to know or be the expert
- Inviting collaboration and compromise by "*yielding to win*"
- Starting conversations with "*I wonder...*" or "*I'm curious whether...*" Or "*What would you think about...*"
- Keeping the conversation going by using improv tools: "*Yes, and...*" rather than "*Yes, but...*"
 - Or open-ended questions
- Explore and discover what outside problem you can join against together – *focus on the situation, not the other person.*





Thank You!

Questions?

References

Germer, C., & Neff, K. (2019). *Teaching the mindful self-compassion program: A guide for professionals*. Guilford Publications.

Gottman, J. M., & Gottman, J. S. (2008). Gottman method couple therapy. In A. S. Gurman (Ed.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy*. The Guilford Press.

Stahl, B., & Goldstein, E. (2010). *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook*. New Harbinger Publications.

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Resources

CU System:

CU Advantage - Employee Perks (system wide)

advantage.cu.edu

CU Employee Services

www.cu.edu/employee-services

CU Boulder:

CU Boulder Health & Wellness Services

colorado.edu/health

CU Boulder Employee Wellness

colorado.edu/health/WorkWell

CU Boulder Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC)

colorado.edu/oiec

CU Boulder Benefits, Perks, and Resources

colorado.edu/hr/faculty-and-staff-perks

UCCS:

UCCS Gallogly Recreation & Wellness Center

recwellness.uccs.edu

UCCS HealthCircle Clinics

healthcircle.uccs.edu

UCCS Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience

resilience.uccs.edu

UCCS Office of Institutional Equity

equity.uccs.edu

CU Denver:

CU Denver Wellness & Recreation

ucdenver.edu/wellness

CU Denver Counseling Center

ucdenver.edu/counseling-center

CU Denver & Anschutz Office of Equity

ucdenver.edu/offices/equity

CU Denver HR

ucdenver.edu/offices/human-resources/current-faculty-staff

Anschutz:

Anschutz Health & Wellness Center

medschool.cuanschutz.edu/health-and-wellness

Anschutz Student Health & Wellness

www.cuanschutz.edu/student/health-wellness

CU Denver & Anschutz Office of Equity

ucdenver.edu/offices/equity

Anschutz HR

cuanschutz.edu/offices/human-resources/current-faculty-and-staff

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING **WELLABLE APP**

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