

# Communicating With Difficult Clinical Staff

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## Objectives

- Explain why it matters that hospitals maintain a civil environment
- Recognize how the STOP and parallax techniques increase awareness in communication
- Apply the demonstrated tools and approaches to difficult conversations with clinical staff who may need a Performance Improvement Plan



# Format

- Didactics
- Practical techniques and tools
- Wrap-up
- Q and A

# Section I

Why does it matter that hospitals maintain a civil environment?

# What is Civility?

Why does it matter that hospitals maintain a civil environment?

# What is Civility?

- Civility comes from the Latin word civilis, meaning "relating to public life, befitting a citizen."
- Through 16th c: it meant good citizenship or orderly behavior
- After 16th c: sense of politeness, kindness, good manners
- Being respectful, even if you do not like the other person very much

Vocabulary.com, Wikipedia



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeFLcypu8\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeFLcypu8_U)

## Why Is It Hard for Clinicians to Be Civil?

- Increases in workload
- Increases in patient acuity
- Pressures to make patients / administrators happy
  - Surveys
  - Online reviews
  - Performance metrics

# Why Is It Hard for Clinicians to Be Civil?

- Changing expectations
  - Generational differences
  - Norms around social media
  - Cultural differences and assumptions
  - Use of language (terminology, humor)

# Why Is It Hard for Clinicians to Be Civil?

- More diverse workforce
- More diverse patient population
- Increasing awareness of historic exploitation and acceptance of those voices
  - Sexual (#MeToo)
  - Racial, ethnic
  - Other marginalized groups
- What may have been tolerated before is no longer tolerated

## Why Is It Hard for MSSPs to Be Civil?

- Heavy workload
- More complex tasks in healthcare systems
- Bearers of bad news
- Work with a wide variety of personalities
- Work with many new faces due to leadership turnover

## Why Is It Hard for MSSPs to Be Civil?

- Positioned between clinicians and administration—tug of war?
- Must work with people who may not be well trained for their administrative roles—or who may not even want an administrative role
- Need cooperation of very busy people who are not always civil with each other or you
- Power differential: medical and institutional hierarchy

# Why does it matter that hospitals maintain a civil environment?

## Why Does Civility Matter?

- Creates a healthy clinical environment
- Better patient outcomes
- Better patient/family satisfaction
- Reinforces trust
- Creates a healthy learning environment
- Fosters collegial relationships, mentorship
- Reduces burnout

# Why Is Good Communication Important?

Without it, a culture of disrespect can exist. Examples:

- Disruptive behavior
- Demeaning treatment of coworkers, subordinates
- Passive-aggressive behavior
- Passive disrespect (uncooperative, uncollaborative)
- Dismissive treatment of patients

Adapted from A Culture of Respect, Leape, et al

# Why Is Good Communication Important?

Without it, a hostile work environment exists. Examples:

- Lower morale and job performance
- Lack of cooperation; avoidance of certain people or tasks
- Elevated stress in team and patients/families
- Job dissatisfaction
- Self-doubt, fears
- Sense of victimization, feel unsafe
- Poor medical decision-making, role modeling



# Why Is Good Communication Important?

Without it, patient care suffers.

When patient care suffers,  
everyone else suffers, too.

# Why Is It so Hard to Communicate Well?

- Communication involves both a MESSAGE (the meaning of the words) and a META-MESSAGE (what the words say about the relationship between the speakers)
- Unintended impressions occur all the time because of individuals' different conversational styles
- Negative impressions can be triggering

# The Civility-Communication Connection

- A civil atmosphere facilitates good communication
- Productive communication reinforces a civil atmosphere
- Those who model civility and good communication serve as positive role models
- Both a civil atmosphere and productive communication convey respect and empathy

# Just Culture

- An approach to handling errors and accidents
  - A person may be at fault
- BUT
- The system may also be at fault
  - Punishing people without changing the system perpetuates problems
  - A safe reporting structure is necessary

# Just Culture

- Finding a balance between the extremes of punishment and blamelessness (i.e., blaming the system) is the goal of developing a just culture

Boysen PG, Just Culture: A Foundation for Balanced Accountability and Patient Safety

# Just Culture

Without it, everyone suffers

# Just Culture

- A just culture relies on holding individuals accountable for their own actions and for reporting systems problems

BUT

- Some errors do warrant disciplinary action

Boysen PG, Just Culture: A Foundation for Balanced Accountability and Patient Safety

## Example: Workplace Harassment

EEOC definition:

Unwelcome conduct based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age >40, disability, genetic information

## Example: Workplace Harassment

Harassment is unlawful if:

- Enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or
- Conduct creates an intimidating, hostile, offensive, or abusive work environment

Why does it matter that hospitals  
maintain a civil environment?

Medicine is a team sport.

## Medicine Is a Team Sport

- Multi-disciplinary (clinically)
- Requires different mindset regarding (new) role of administration
- Requires cooperation, collegiality, respect
- A paradigm shift for those of a different generation
- A struggle when expectations and standards are not shared among the entire team

## Why does it matter that hospitals maintain a civil environment?

## Creates Institutional Culture

- Builds mutual trust
- Kindness breeds kindness
- Bottom to top, top to bottom
- Everyone can be a role model
- Facilitates the institutional mission

# Civility and Working Remotely

- Working in one's own space may enhance feelings of safety with distance from difficult others

BUT

- Difficult conversations over a virtual platform are suboptimal
- Working remotely prevents opportunities for nearby colleagues to reinforce your work and debrief readily

## Section 2

Our Brain's Response to Stress

Parallax

S.T.O.P technique



# FREEDOM is:

The space between

A Stimulus

&

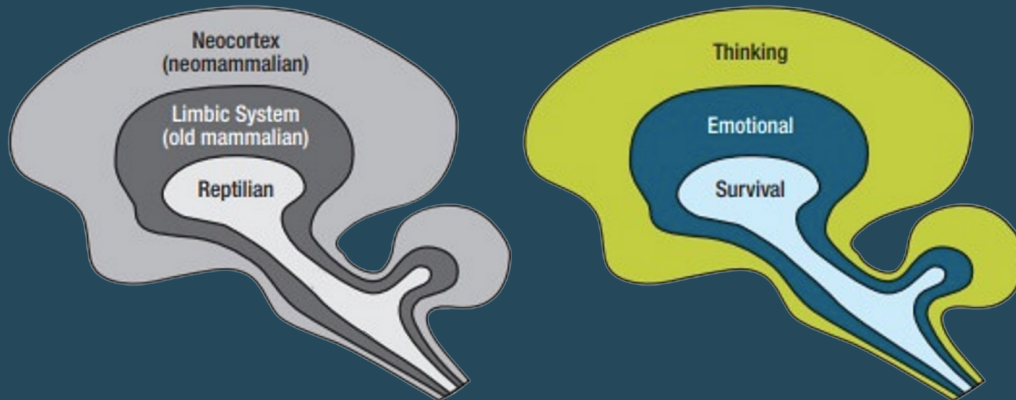
Your Reaction

## A Quick Lesson

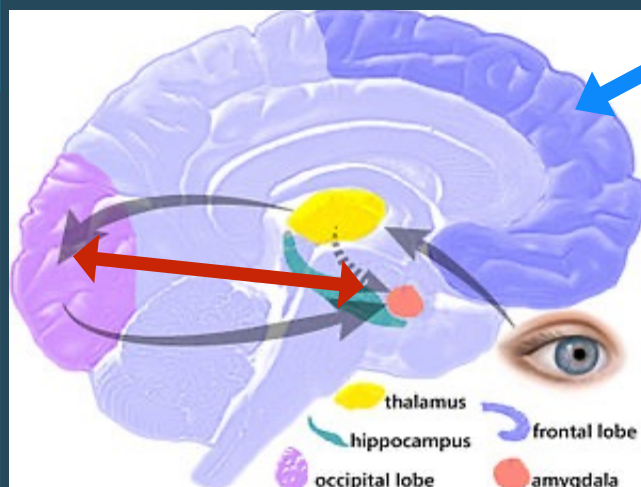


How our brain reacts to stress

# Reptilian vs. Mammalian Brain



# Amygdala Hijack



Reptilian  
Reactive  
—  
“Hot” Emotions  
“Hot Ethics”

Mammalian  
Thoughtful-  
controlled  
—  
“Cold” Emotions  
“Cold Ethics”

# Stress Responses: Fight - Flight - Freeze



Stress Response	Protect Oneself from Threat by:	Belief Underlying Response	Behavioral Manifestations
<b>FIGHT</b>	Conflict	Power over stress leads to security and control <i>"I need to eliminate the stress before it eliminates me."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crying</li> <li>• Hands in fists, desire to punch</li> <li>• Flexed/tight jaw, grinding teeth</li> <li>• Fight in eyes, glaring, fight in voice</li> <li>• Desire to stomp, kick, smash with legs, feet</li> <li>• Feelings of anger/rage</li> <li>• Knotted stomach/nausea, burning stomach</li> </ul>
<b>FLIGHT</b>	Escape	Running away from the situation is good coping <i>"I need to run from the situation before it can hurt me"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restless legs, feet /numbness in legs</li> <li>• Anxiety/shallow breathing</li> <li>• Big/darting eyes</li> <li>• Leg/foot movement</li> <li>• Reported or observed fidgety-ness, restlessness, feeling trapped</li> </ul>
<b>FREEZE</b>	Dissociation	Cope by unconsciously detaching, immobilized <i>"If I don't do anything the threat cannot hurt me."</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling stuck in some part of the body</li> <li>• Feeling cold/frozen, numb, pale skin</li> <li>• Sense of stiffness, heaviness</li> <li>• Holding breath/restricted breathing</li> <li>• Sense of dread, heart pounding</li> <li>• Decreased heart rate (can sometimes increase)</li> </ul>

## A Lesser Known - 4th Stress Response:

Appease (or Fawn- in the new 4 F's)

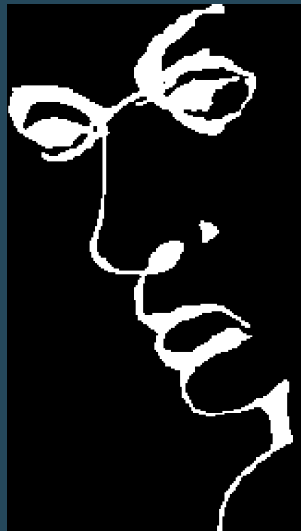
Protecton oneself through	Placation
<b>Belief underlying response</b>	Cope with or avoid conflict by 'people-pleasing' <i>"If I can appease this person, I can be safe from conflict or pain"</i>
<b>Behavioral manifestations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over apologizing to others</li> <li>• Difficulty saying no</li> <li>• Excessive flattering the other person</li> <li>• Going out of the way to please others</li> <li>• Neglecting one's own needs</li> <li>• Pretending to agree with others</li> </ul>



Is what we see and hear reliable?

Is what we see and hear reliable?

What do you see?



## Same Neural Inputs

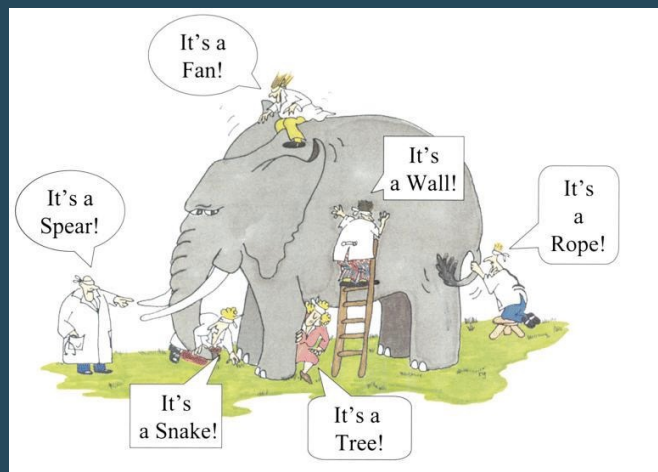
Is the dress  
white and gold –  
or is it blue and black?

Various Perceptions



## Parallax

What part of the  
whole do you know?



# S. T. O. P. Exercise

Freedom: The space between  
Your Stimulus                      &                      Your Reaction



## S. T. O. P. Exercise

### S - State/Say What You Are Feeling

Name the emotion.

And to help you

“name it to tame it”...

## Words for Feelings

Angry	Hostile	Loathing	Sensitive
Aggressive	Empty	Afraid	Clear
Covetous	Withdrawn	Shocked	Open
Critical	Inferior	Rejected	Thankful
Disappointed	Bored	Worried	Fulfilled
Distant	Guilty	Terrified	Isolated
Hurt	Meek	Overwhelmed	Vulnerable
Mad	Excited	Helpless	Worthless
Jealous	Secure	Powerful	Tired
Selfish	Serene	Awful	Sleepy
Skeptical	Curious	Exposed	Lonely
Irate	Calm	Hurt	Surprised
Sad	Confident	Ignored	Awed
Abandoned	Proud	Hidden	Faithful

## S. T. O. P. Exercise

### T - Take a Breath

Take 3 deep breaths (I will count)  
in through your nose - and out through your mouth

Breathe another 5 breaths at normal rate  
feel the breath move through your nose and chest.

## S. T. O. P. Exercise

### O - Observe What Is Happening (x 3)

1. ... In your **body**?

*Where do you feel tension / Are you aware of bodily sensations*

2. ... With your **emotions**?

*Can you name what emotions are going on / Has it changed after the breaths*

3. ... In your **mind / thoughts**?

*What are your thoughts / What story or conclusions are you telling yourself?*

## S. T. O. P. Exercise

### P- Proceed With Intention

*What action will you take to facilitate your goals?*

- Question your options - do you want to act?
- Do you need to take care of yourself - eat, sleep, step back?
- Do you want to move forward with an action - because it will help your goals?
- Do you have other ways to react to the stressors by changing your mindset?



## A Question for You:

Is stress good or bad  
for your long-term health?

## Is Stress Good or Bad for Your Long-Term Health?

It depends!

[https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly\\_mcgonigal\\_how\\_to\\_make\\_stress\\_your\\_friend](https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend)

# Mindset Shifts

*The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It*  
by Kelly McGonigal PhD

**FIGHT** → Turn a Threat into a Challenge

- *Allows you to collaborate/ problem solve/ use your skills proactively*

**FLIGHT** → Tend and Befriend

- *We need connection to thrive. Leaning into others helps you and helps them. In greatest stress - we do lean into others*

**FREEZE** → Turn “Self-Focus” into “Bigger-than Self Goals”

- *Dips into our need to have meaning / purpose / spirituality*

## Section 3

### 3 a. Tools for Specific Situations

# Tools for Specific Situations

- Difficult conversations with someone who needs a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)
- A Model PIP

## Difficult conversations with someone who needs a PIP

- Prepare yourself
  - What are your expectations?
  - What are you feeling?
  - Have you grounded yourself?

# Difficult conversations with someone who needs a PIP

- Framing the conversation

Create a safe space for both of you

- Your office
- Time of day—consider office traffic, normal business hours
- Private and confidential—but open the door if you feel threatened

# Difficult conversations with someone who needs a PIP

- Framing the conversation

Create a safe space for both of you

- If virtual, physical safety is easier
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality on both ends
- During normal business hours
- Keep what is visible at your end professional; avoid personal items
- Dress professionally

## Difficult conversations with someone who needs a PIP

- Framing the conversation

Tone of voice, language

Be collegial, not buddies—you are fellow workers, fellow professionals

Any previous interactions? Positive/negative?

But for the fact that you work together, you would not have a relationship with this person

## Difficult conversations with someone who needs a PIP

- Framing the conversation

Show respect through empathy

- Do not interrupt them
- “I can see you are surprised / upset / frustrated / confused / perplexed”
- “Help me understand why you feel this way”
- This helps them name (and tame) their emotions
- Avoid being overly sympathetic (appearance of taking sides)

## Difficult conversations with someone who needs a PIP

- Framing the conversation

Establish your neutrality

“I am a link between you and administration”

Remember that trust has likely been lost on both sides

Their receptivity may be position dependent (theirs or yours)—remember parallax

Don't get caught up in institutional politics

Assure them you are applying the rules consistently

## 3b. Key Elements for an Effective PIP

### Description of reason for the PIP

- History, series of events,
- Previous interventions,
- Description of complaints,
- Action(s) already taken by the organization/institution

### Goal of the PIP and the expected outcome of intervention(s)

- What the clinician needs to achieve, demonstrate, or improve to successfully complete the PIP

# Key Elements for an Effective PIP

## Course details and expectations

- Course name/provider
- Course length (number of hours)
- Course completion deadline
- Who will bear the financial responsibility for course

# Key Elements for an Effective PIP

## Course details and expectations

- Expectations of course participation: Compliance with all course requirements including pre-course assignments, provide copy of PIP to the course provider upon request, sign release form to allow the institution to communicate with the course provider regarding adherence to course requirements, passing grade
- Proof of completion

## Key Elements for an Effective PIP

Course details and expectations (optional)

- Written report from course faculty needed? (Release form signed)
- Post-Course Follow-up (longitudinal course, supervision, mentoring, coaching)

## Key Elements for an Effective PIP

Concurrent interventions, requirements, and expectations

- Mentorship/Oversight meetings
- Chaperone
- Counseling
- Anger management
- Adhering to hospital code of conduct
- PHP involvement



# Key Elements for an Effective PIP

Consequences of non-compliance with PIP

Information outlining additional support or resources available

## Section 3c.

Humility

Self-Compassion

Putting It All Together

# A Question for You:

What does humility mean to you?

## Humility

DEFINITION: A modest or low view of one's own importance; humbleness

REALITY: A balanced view of ourselves.

- We are neither above OR below another.
- We don't have ego-inflation OR ego-deflation.



# Humility

- See ourselves in the other
- Be ok with NOT having the answer
- Have empathy for the fear the professional feels
- Do not need to fix it

We are only human.

# Self-Compassion

- Is a gift you give to yourself and others you care about
- Is associated with greater wellness and greater happiness for you
- Leads to more compassion for others

# Self-Compassion

## Step 1: Common Humanity

Common humanity is the ability to see ourselves in the other... and to know that every human makes mistakes and suffers

**while suspending judgment!**

# Self-Compassion

## Step 2: Being Mindful

Can you slow down your reactivity to be present in the moment?

Can you take a pause between the stimulus and reaction?

DO you know your emotions / bodily sensations / and thoughts?

JUST NOTICE what is going on in yourself

**while suspending judgment!**

# Self-Compassion

## Step 3: Kindness

We all want kindness. Are you being kind to yourself?

Are you soothing yourself – the way you would a friend?

What action– no matter how small, of kindness towards yourself can you take?

Can you ease your own discomfort / suffering?

## Putting It All Together

- We never have the whole story - we don't know what others have experienced or seen
- Others only see our actions, not our intentions
- Everyone struggles and falls
- Everyone needs and deserves kindness

# Thank You

## Q & A

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