



Department of

Children's Services

Communicating for Conflict Resolution

Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- be able to define conflict and its potential impact on relationships.
- will understand the importance and role of communication in the prevention and/or resolution of conflict.
- will examine “triggers” and “de-escalation” strategies for intervening in the traumatic response and supporting trauma impacted youth

An opportunity for growth



Underlying Assumptions



Underlying Assumptions

One must believe that human beings would prefer to get along.

One must believe that when people behave poorly, they are taking their best shot at getting their needs met.

A person has the most control over his or her own behavior.

One always has the ability to change something about one's own behavior.

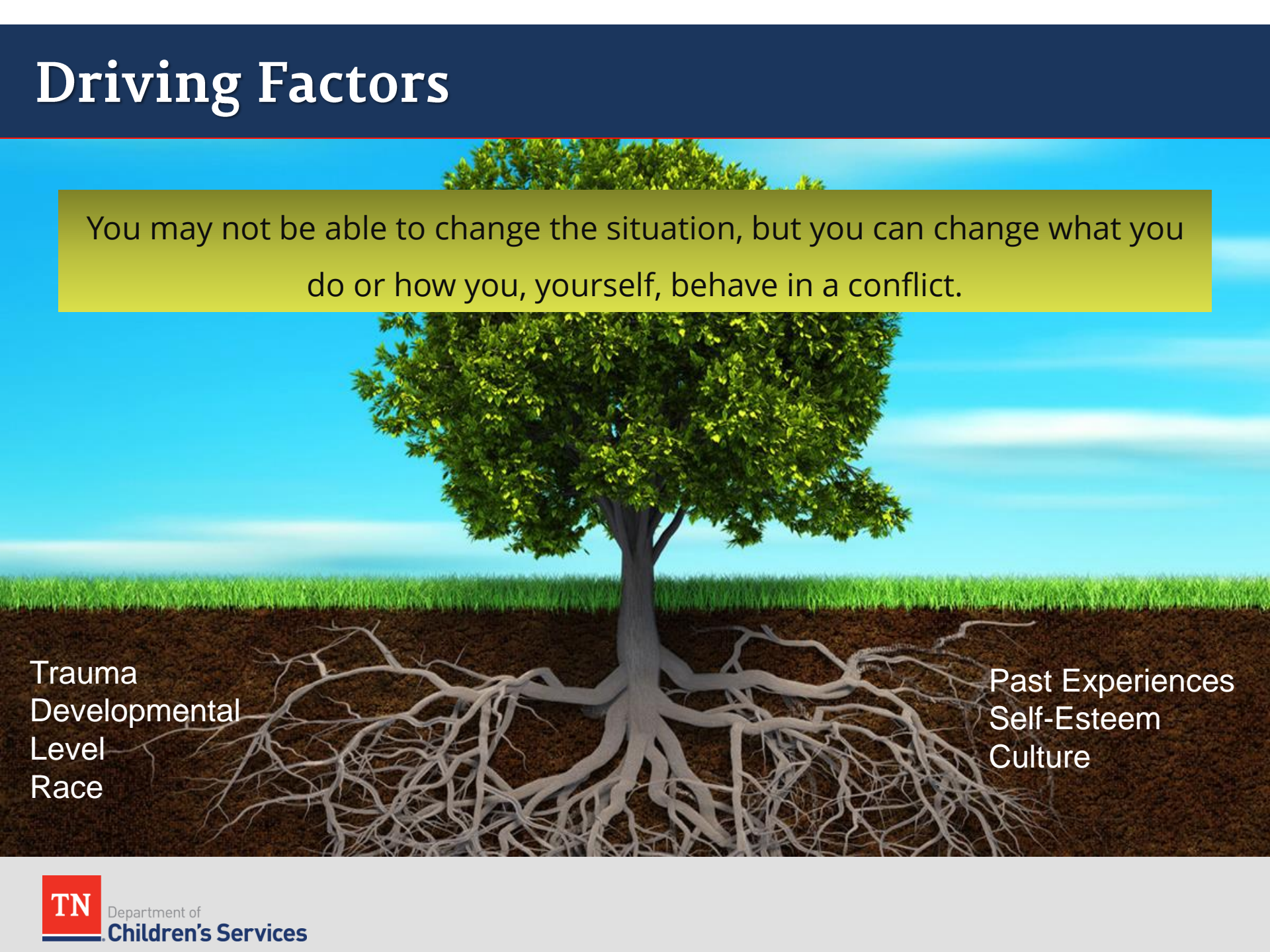
Conflict and Differences

- Conflicts arise when people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires.
- Sometimes the differences may appear trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal or relational need is at the core of the problem.



Driving Factors

You may not be able to change the situation, but you can change what you do or how you, yourself, behave in a conflict.



Trauma
Developmental
Level
Race

Past Experiences
Self-Esteem
Culture

Outcomes

**Outcomes when
Destructive:**

**Outcomes when
Constructive:**

Dimensions



Cognitive

Emotional

Behavioral

Dimensions



Cognitive

What someone perceives



Emotional

How someone feels



Behavioral

Action someone takes

Desire to Win

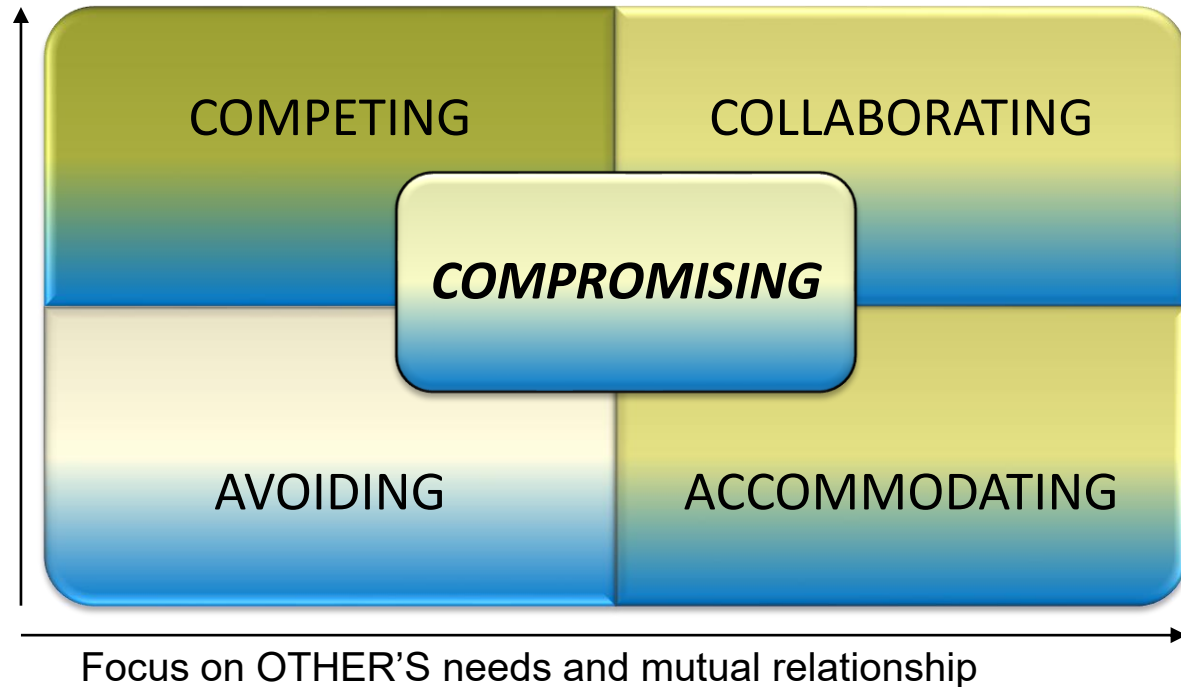
- Instinctive part of human nature
- Often includes attempt to dominate the other person sometimes by the use of force
- The use of force can create resentment and fear in the other person
- Person may withdraw



Conflict Positions

ASSERTIVENESS

Focus on MY needs, desired outcome and agenda. Risk damage to relationship

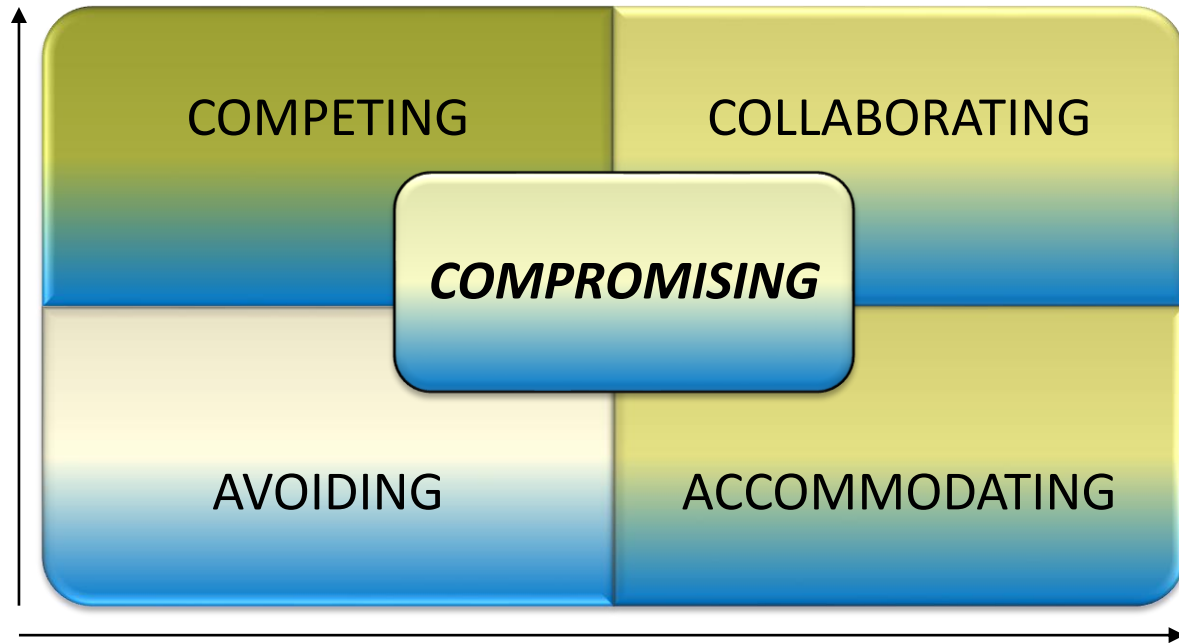


COOPERATIVENESS

Conflict Positions-Avoiding/Withdrawing

ASSERTIVENESS

Focus on MY needs, desired outcome and agenda. Risk damage to relationship



Focus on OTHER'S needs and mutual relationship

COOPERATIVENESS

Avoiding/Withdrawing

An avoiding style is used when:

- Other more important issues are pressing
- When there is not a chance of satisfying individual concerns
- The potential damage of the conflict outweighs the benefits
- Reduce tension to regain perspective and composure
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively

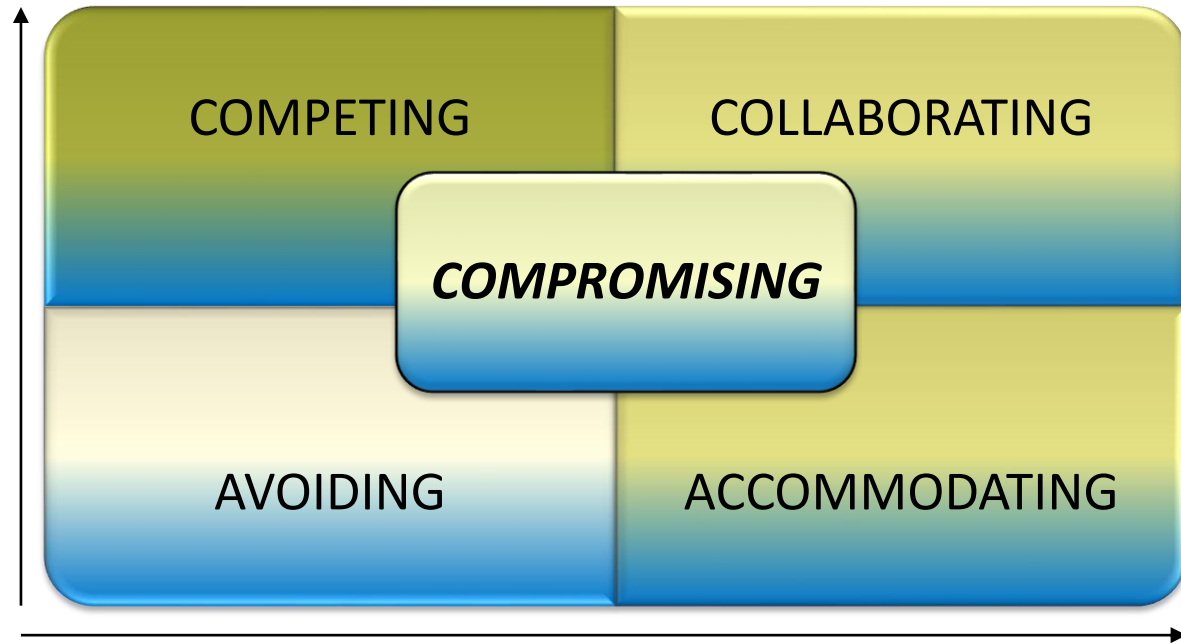


The turtle symbolizes 'withdrawing'

Conflict Positions-Accommodating/Smoothing

ASSERTIVENESS

Focus on MY needs, desired outcome and agenda. Risk damage to relationship



Focus on OTHER'S needs and mutual relationship

COOPERATIVENESS

Accommodating/Smoothing

The accommodating style is used when:

- Allow a better position to be heard when you realize you are wrong.
- The issue is more important to the other person
- Build social credits for later issues
- When continued competition would only damage your cause

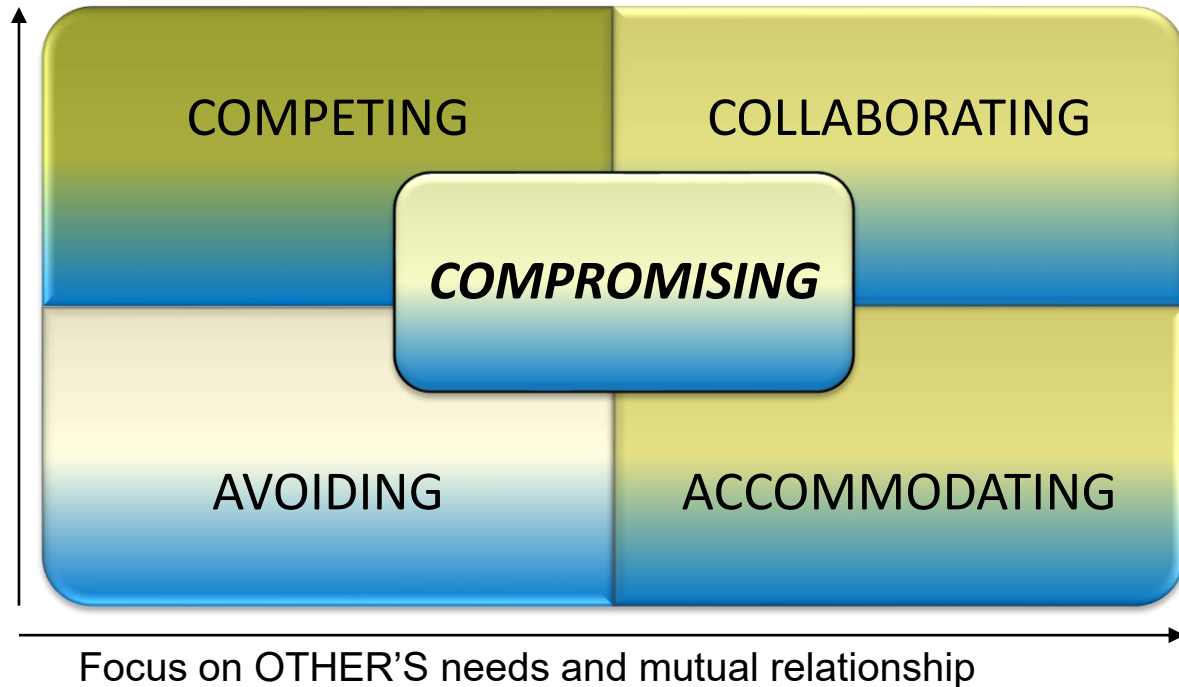


The teddy bear symbolizes 'smoothing'

Conflict Positions-Competing/Forcing

ASSERTIVENESS

Focus on MY needs, desired outcome and agenda. Risk damage to relationship



COOPERATIVENESS

Competing/Forcing

A competing style is used when:

- Decisive action is vital
- Unpopular decisions need implementation
- Disciplinary issues
- Top-down organizational decisions

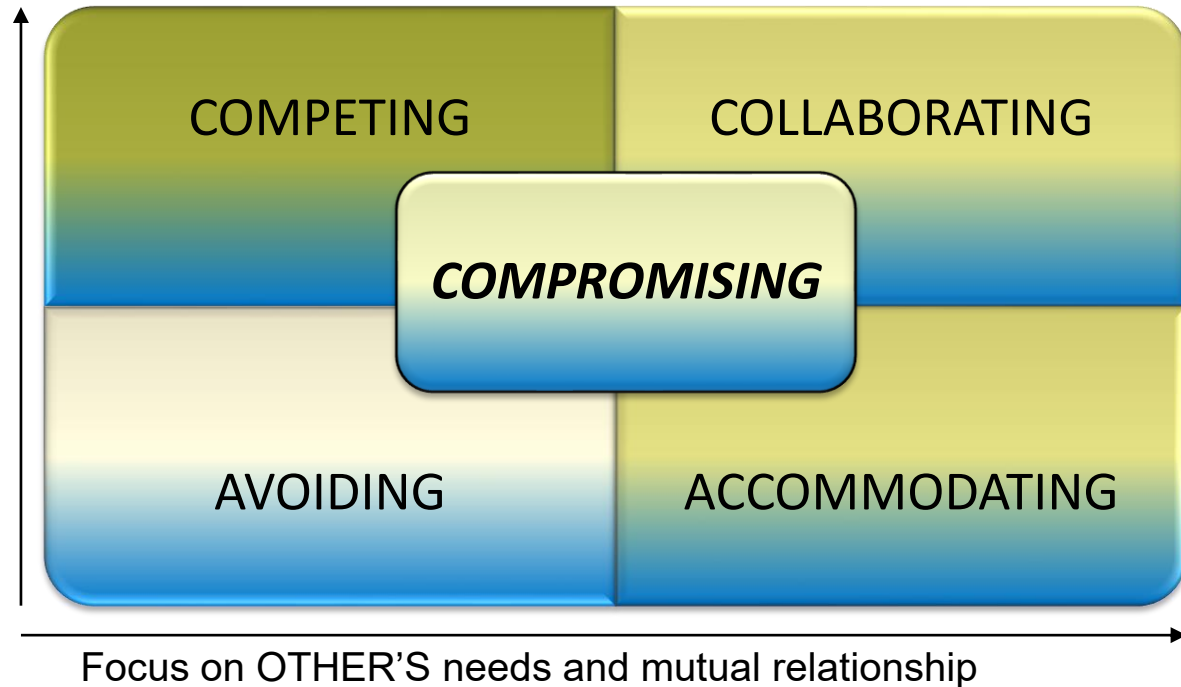


The shark symbolizes 'forcing'

Conflict Positions-Compromising

ASSERTIVENESS

Focus on MY needs, desired outcome and agenda. Risk damage to relationship



COOPERATIVENESS

Compromising

A compromising style is used when:

- Goals are moderately important
- Parties with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals
- Achieve temporary settlements to complex issues
- Expedient solutions under time pressure
- Collaboration or competition fail to be successful

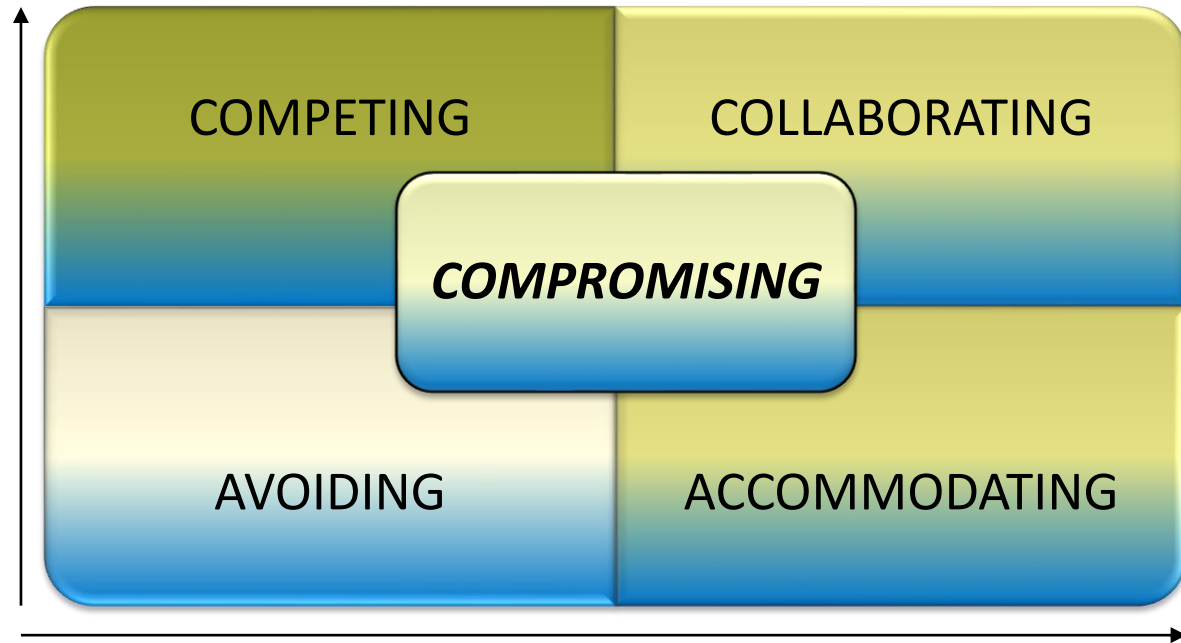


The girafe symbolizes 'compromising'

Conflict Positions-Collaborating/Confronting

ASSERTIVENESS

Focus on MY needs, desired outcome and agenda. Risk damage to relationship



Focus on OTHER'S needs and mutual relationship

COOPERATIVENESS

Collaborating/Confronting

A collaborating style is used when:

- Integrative solutions where both sides are imminent
- Merge insights
- Gain commitment through consensual decision-making
- Interpersonal relationships are at risk

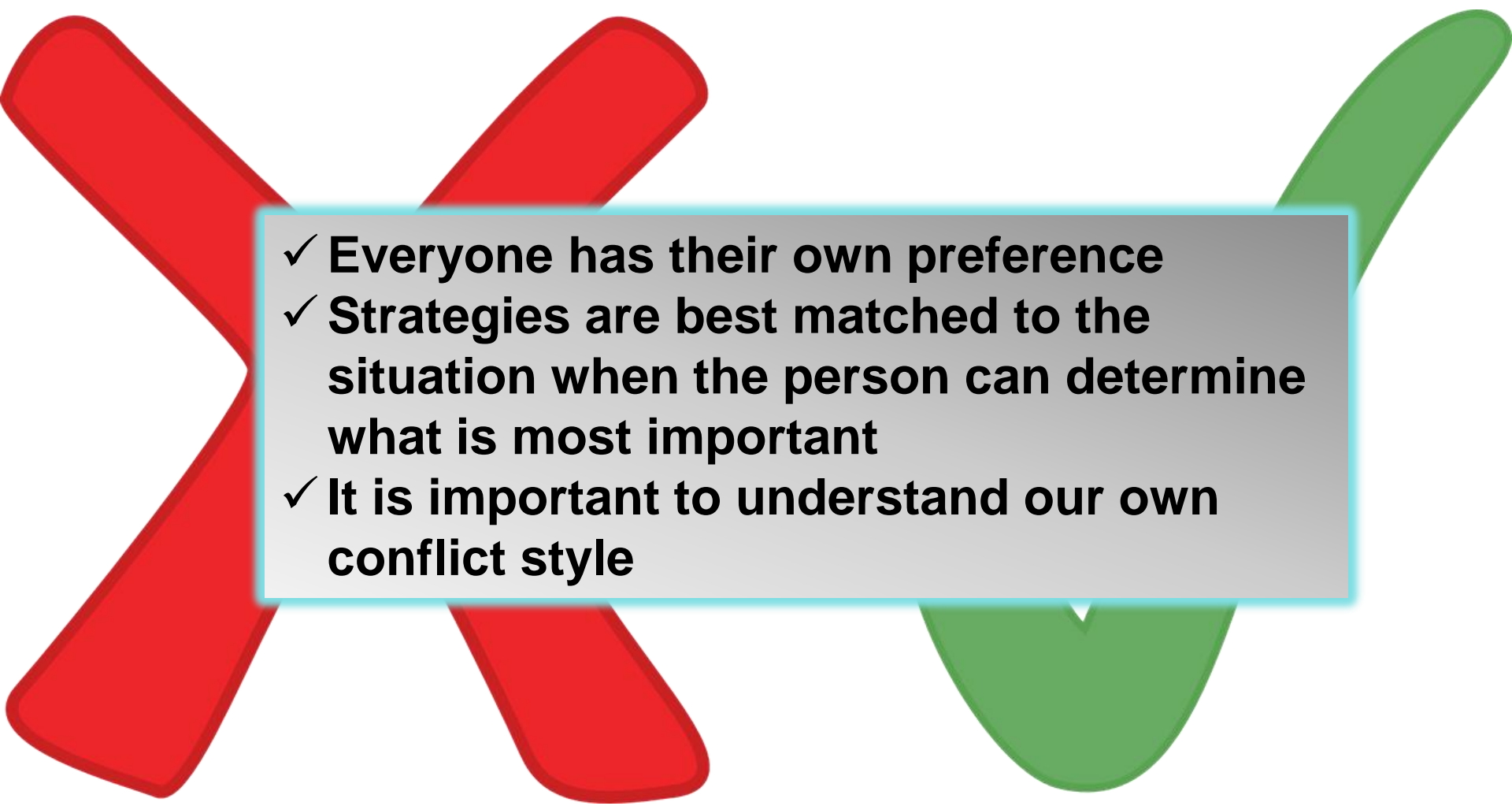


The owl symbolizes
'collaborating/confronting'

How do you react?

- ❑ Johnson and Johnson Five Conflict Positions questionnaire:
“How to Act in a Conflict”
- ❑ The higher the total for each conflict strategy, the more frequently they tend to use that strategy. The lower the total score for each conflict strategy, the less frequently they tend to use this strategy.

No one “Right” Way

- 
- ✓ Everyone has their own preference
 - ✓ Strategies are best matched to the situation when the person can determine what is most important
 - ✓ It is important to understand our own conflict style

What is De-escalation?

de-escalation

Refers to any activity that is meant to diffuse a conflict or intense situation. When children/youth have blow-ups or outbursts, we must respond in a way that diffuses the situation to ensure safety and calm the child/youth while helping them understand and express the underlying reason for their behavior.

BEFORE begins with YOU

The way we help de-escalate a situation starts with our ability to control ourselves and handle stressful situations. Taking care of yourself is **CRITICALLY IMPORTANT** for your well-being.



Take care of ourselves...

Remember these steps:

- Create a routine of self-care.
- Self-assess.
- Practice self-acceptance.



Self-Care is a Skill



Self-Care Tips:

- Get enough sleep most nights; for some people this is six hours a night, for others eight.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet, including breakfast.
- Get some form of regular exercise.
- Visit your doctors and follow their recommendations.
- Take regular breaks from stressful activities.
- Laugh every day.
- Express yourself. If you're feeling frustrated, sad, or angry, be honest about your emotions before they get out of control.
- Nurture your relationships with your partner, family.

Sample Self-Care Plan (Source: NCTSN, 2010)

☑ I promise to make time to take care of myself by doing the following at least . . .

Daily

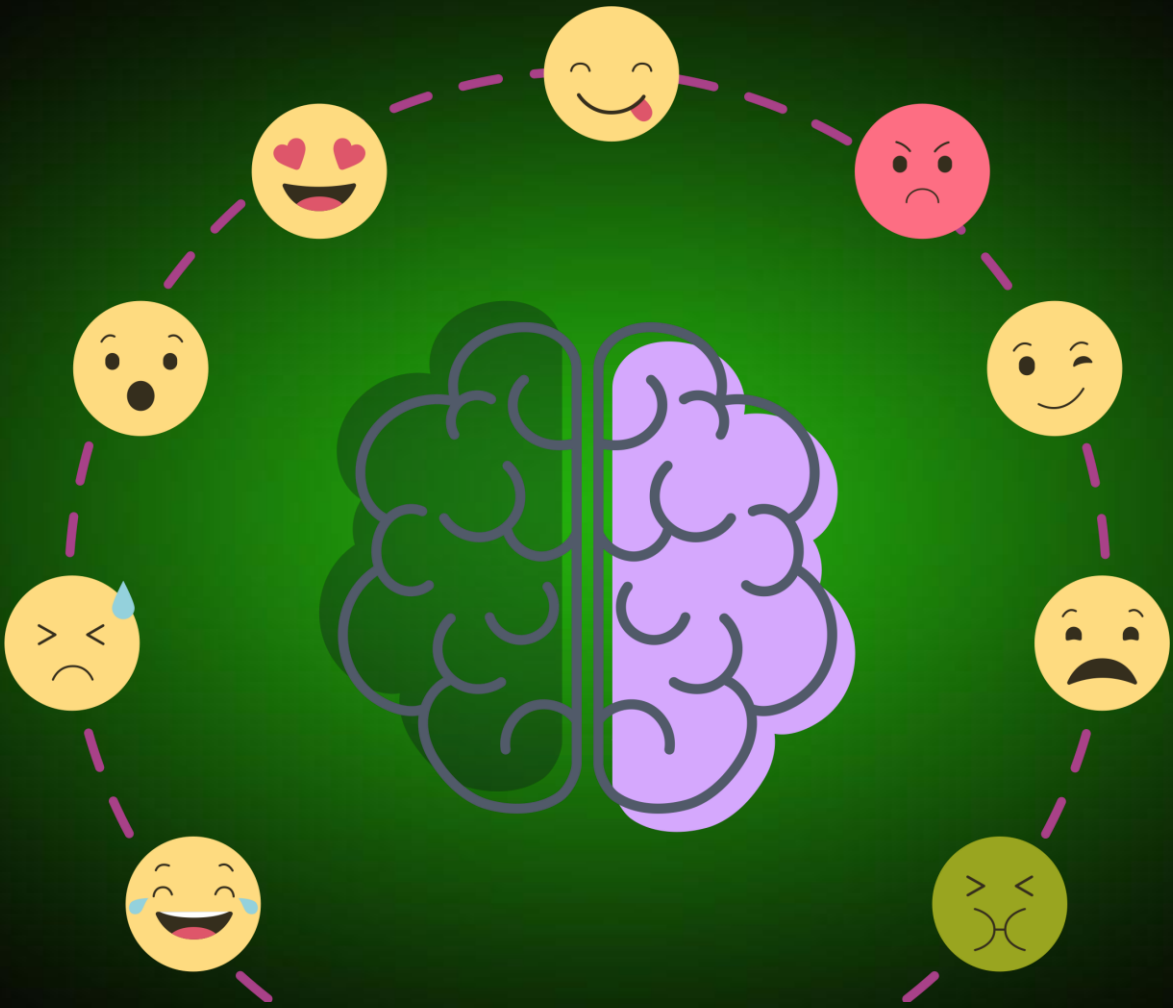
- walk the dog
- play with the cat
- exercise
- pray/meditate
- read a book for pleasure
- write in journal
- listen to music in the car

Weekly/Monthly

- go bowling
- nice dinner out with my partner
- get a manicure, pedicure, etc.
- go out with a group of friends
- attend a support group meeting
- go to the movies
- attend religious services

Note: Your plan should include a few items in the daily and weekly/monthly categories—not too many!

Why Self-Assess?

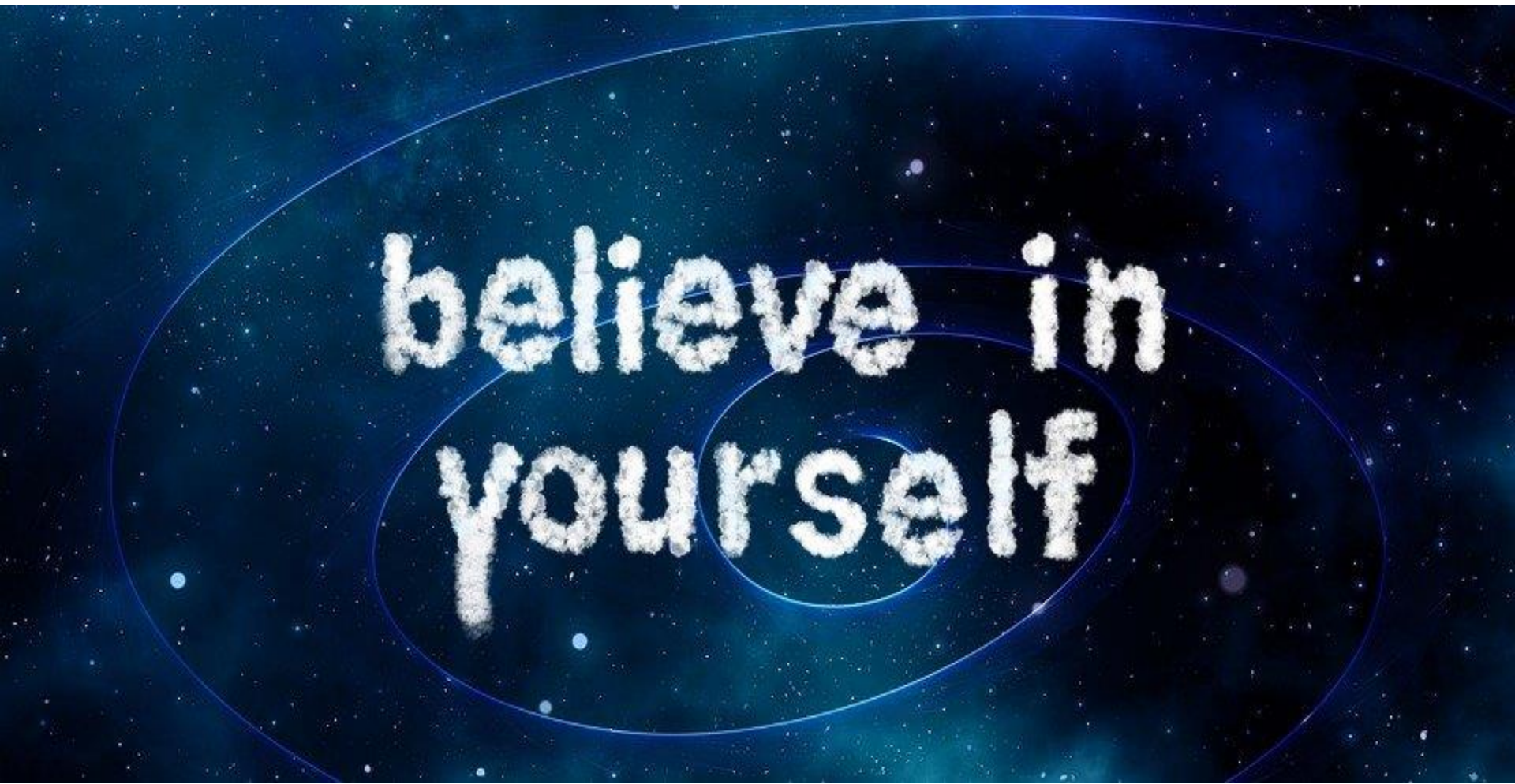


Remember...



It is difficult to support children/youth who have experienced trauma if you are not well yourself.

Self-Acceptance



believe in
yourself

Conflict Management...

- ❖ What to do **BEFORE** behavior escalates
- ❖ What to do **DURING** the escalation, and...
- ❖ What to do **AFTER** de-escalation of behavior.

Before Escalation of Behavior



Before

Before Behaviors Escalate...Connect!

Connection is an important tool in decreasing the escalation of negative behaviors. We are “wired” to CONNECT with others and without that closeness to others, fears and insecurities grow. Because fear drives negative behaviors, we can see the importance of working on ways to connect with children/youth so they can begin to feel safe.



What are some ways to connect with children/youth?

Ways To Connect With Children/Youth:

- **Listen:** Learn to stop what you are doing and really listen to your child.
- **Eye Contact:** Children from hard places have a tough time making eye contact, so this will take time
- **Safe, Healthy Touch:** Research proves over and over that touch is vital to healthy development in humans.



Ways To Connect With Children/Youth:

- **Play**: Play communicates safety to a child and disarms fear. Allow the youth to take the lead in play which offers control to their world. Examples: Card games such as Uno, Spades, Wizard, Spoons. Board games like Pictionary, Monopoly.



Ways To Connect With Children/Youth:

- **Calm Voice:** Always use a calm and reassuring tone with the children/youth especially when situations are tense. Learning to do this with every interaction with a child/youth, will help you remain calm when behaviors escalate.
- **Mimic:** Think of close connections you have with others, and mimic how that closeness developed. (Keeping promises, kindness, respect, trust, having fun) Treat the children/youth in the same manner, even when they can not return the gesture.

Pointers For Foster Parents

- Identify what typically sets the child/youth off. It's important to recognize patterns.
- Set up clear rules.
- Develop a safe, caring relationship.
- Communicate requests or directions to the child/youth in ways that are the calmest and least provocative to them.
- Recognize and reward even the smallest steps toward good behavior.
- Note what a child/youth has said or how he/she has reacted emotionally and verbally to learn the child/youth's point of view.
- Don't try to solve the problem for the child/youth, but work with them to solve the problem and build awareness of the outburst.
- Help the child/youth interpret the behavior, possibly by drawing pictures and translating them into words.

How we respond



Recognize how we are feeling and
control our reactions

Breathing Technique: 4 – 7 – 8

The numbers in the name -- 4-7-8 -- refer to the counts when breathing in, holding your breath and exhaling.

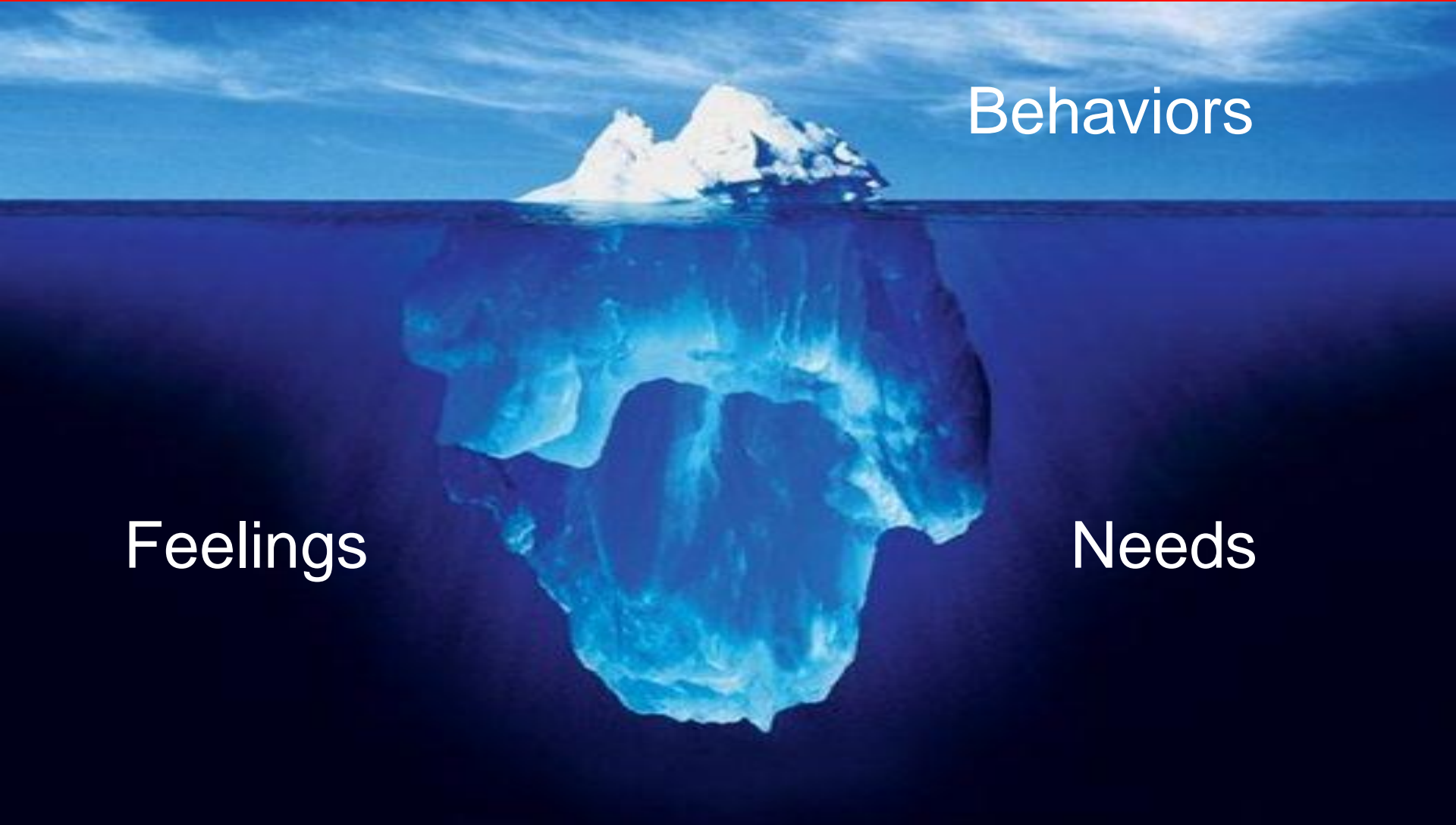
- Start by sitting up straight in a comfortable position.
- Next, place the tip of your tongue on the ridge of your gums, just behind your upper front teeth.
- Expand your diaphragm and slowly inhale through your nose for a count of 4.
- Hold your breath for another count of 7.
- Open your mouth slightly, keeping your tongue in place, and exhale for 8 counts.
- Repeat this cycle 3 times.

During Escalation of Behavior



During

Behavior IS Communication



Behaviors

Feelings

Needs

Trauma Based Behaviors

Trauma based behaviors occur when a child/youth feels unsafe and has a need to protect themselves. Some behaviors we might see are:

- **Impulsive outbursts**
- **Aggression**
- **Running away**
- **Self-harm**

- **Defiant behavior**
- **Inability to regulate emotions**
- **Trauma re-enactment**

The Bear



- Body reacts
- Brain's fight, flight, or freeze response is activated
- Once safe-emotions are regulated

Children's Response System

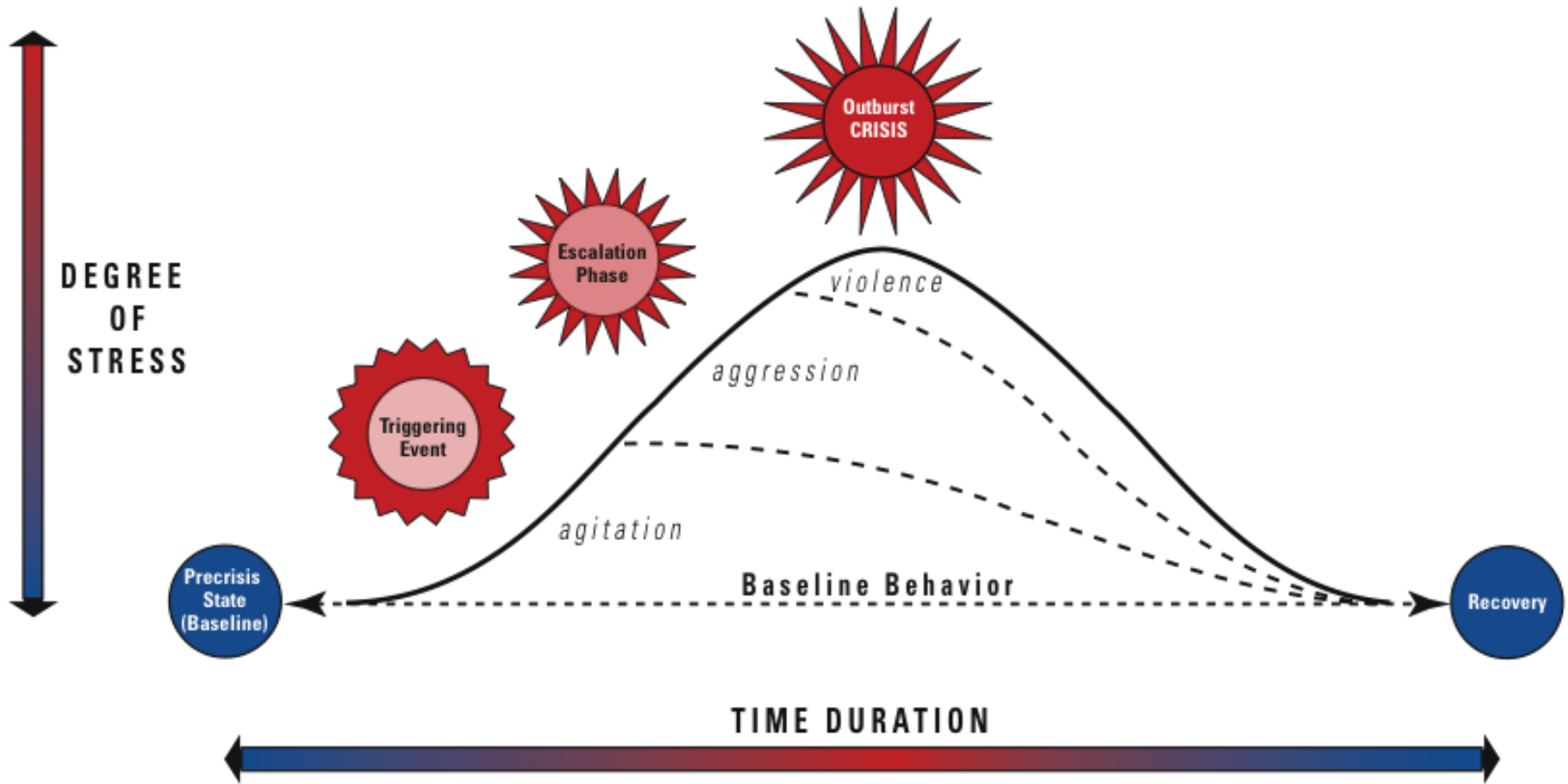


A Crisis...

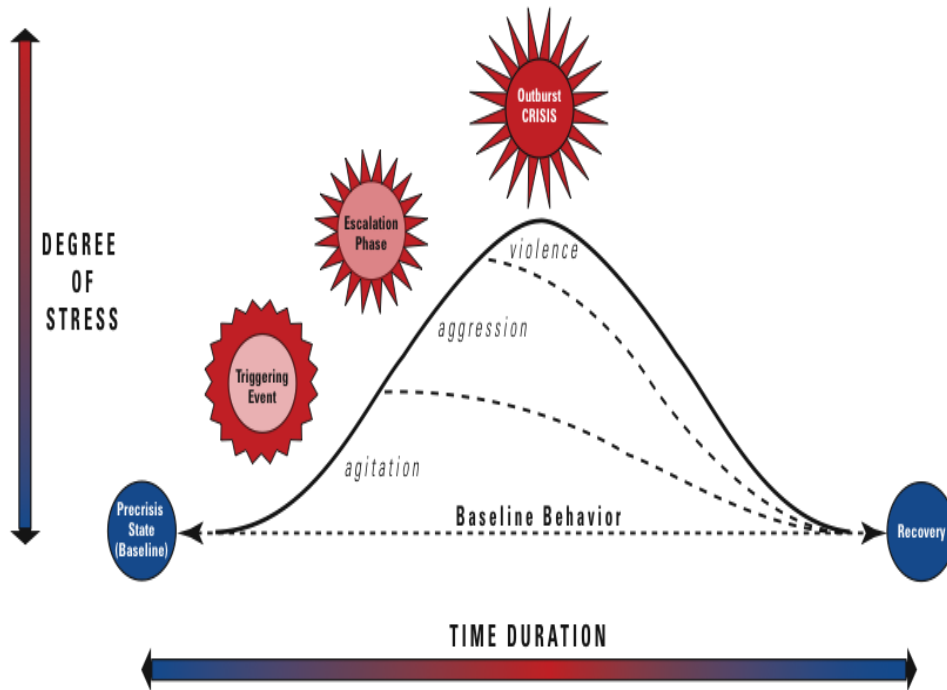


is a state of feeling; an internal experience of confusion and anxiety to the degree that formerly successful coping mechanisms fail us, and ineffective decisions and behaviors take their place.

Stress Model of Crisis



Stress Model of Crisis



- Your **ENCOUNTER** with the child can either **ENGAGE OR ENRAGE** - If you engage, the youth can return to pre-crisis (baseline) phase; if you **ENRAGE**, the youth continues to Escalation (Aggression) phase.
- The first goal is to decrease the stressor and secondly, teach coping skills to youth.

4 Questions We Ask Ourselves In A Crisis



1. What am I feeling now?
2. What does the child feel, need or want?
3. How is the environment affecting the young person?
4. How do I best respond?

When To De-Escalate

De-escalation techniques are most successful when used early, before the child/youth becomes physically aggressive. To do this, it is necessary to be aware of and spot early signs of agitation.



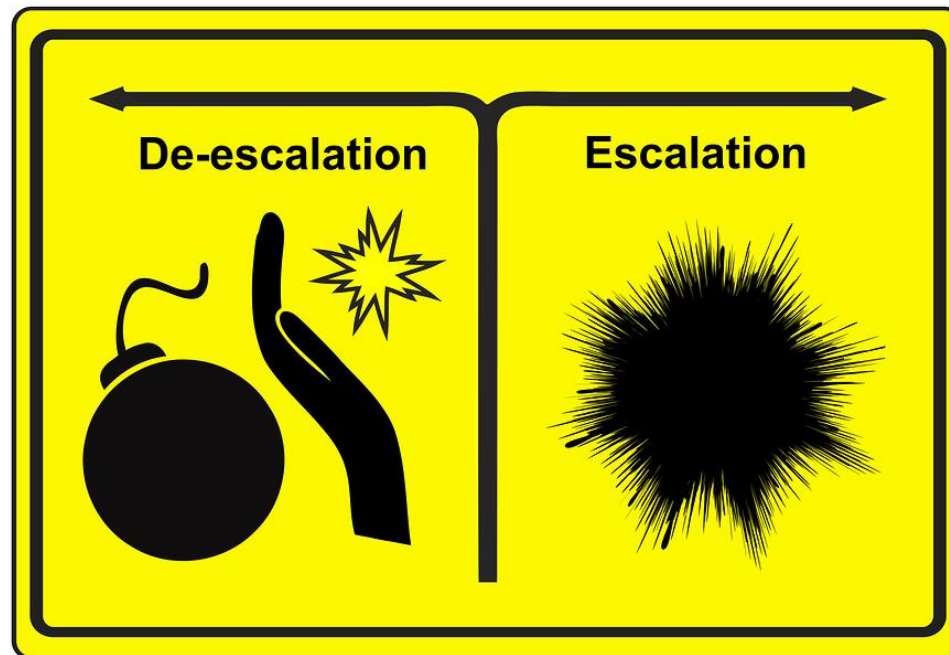
What are early signs of agitation?

De-Escalating The Crisis

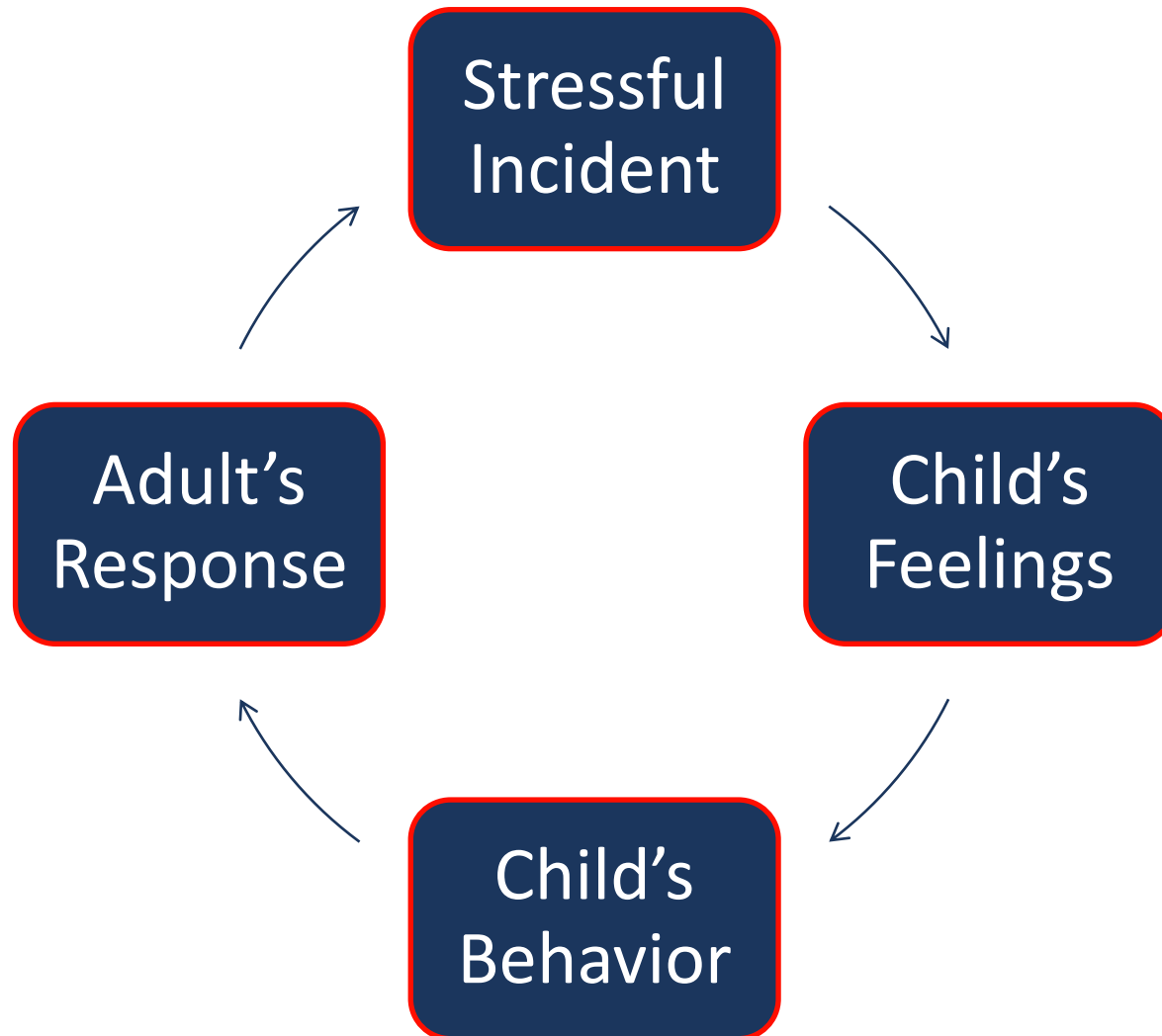
- **Active Listening:** Communicating that you understand the child by being respectful, empathetic, and validating their feelings. Active listening allows and encourages young people to talk out rather act out.
- **Understanding Responses:** Reflective responses mirror what the child is saying or feeling, for example: “I would be upset too if my visit had been canceled.”
- **Summarization:** This helps the child/youth understand the meaning of what has been said. “So, let me get this right, your visit has been canceled again and this is why you are upset?”

De-Escalating The Crisis

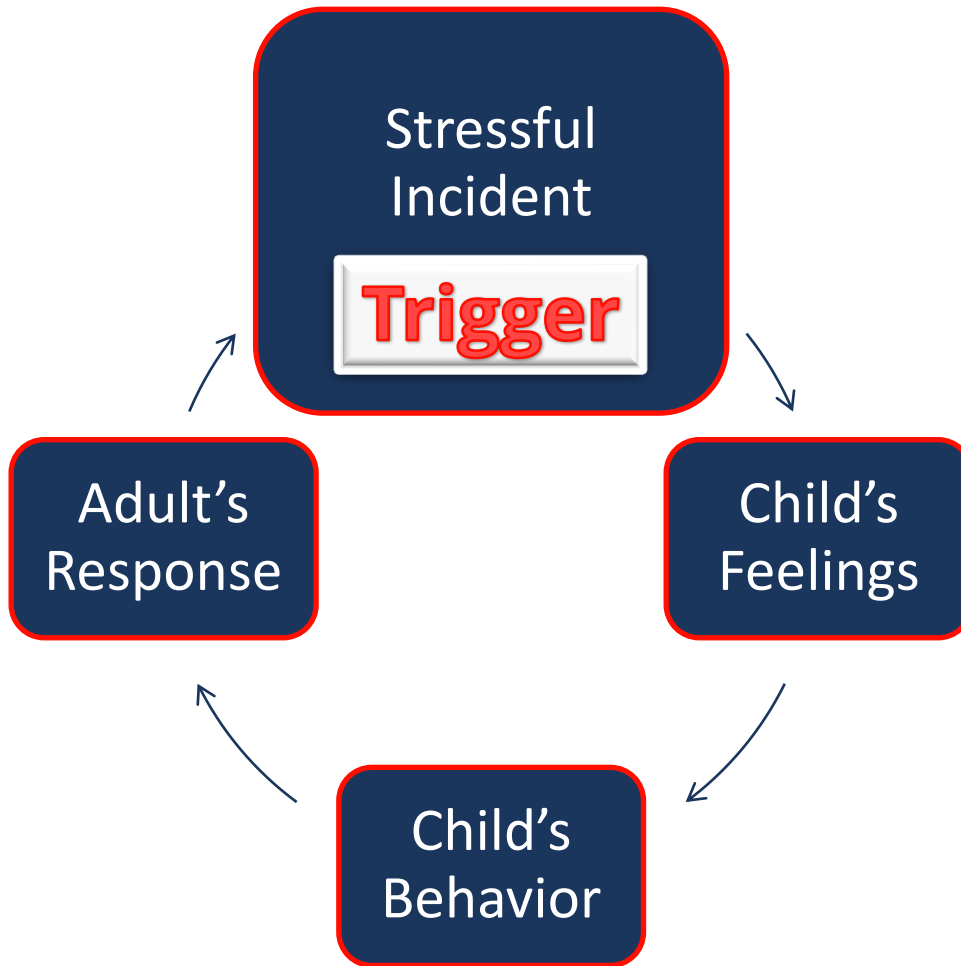
- Understanding responses help young people sort out what is happening to them and help de-escalate potential crisis: “I’m sorry you feel upset” or “I can see you are really angry.”



Conflict Cycle



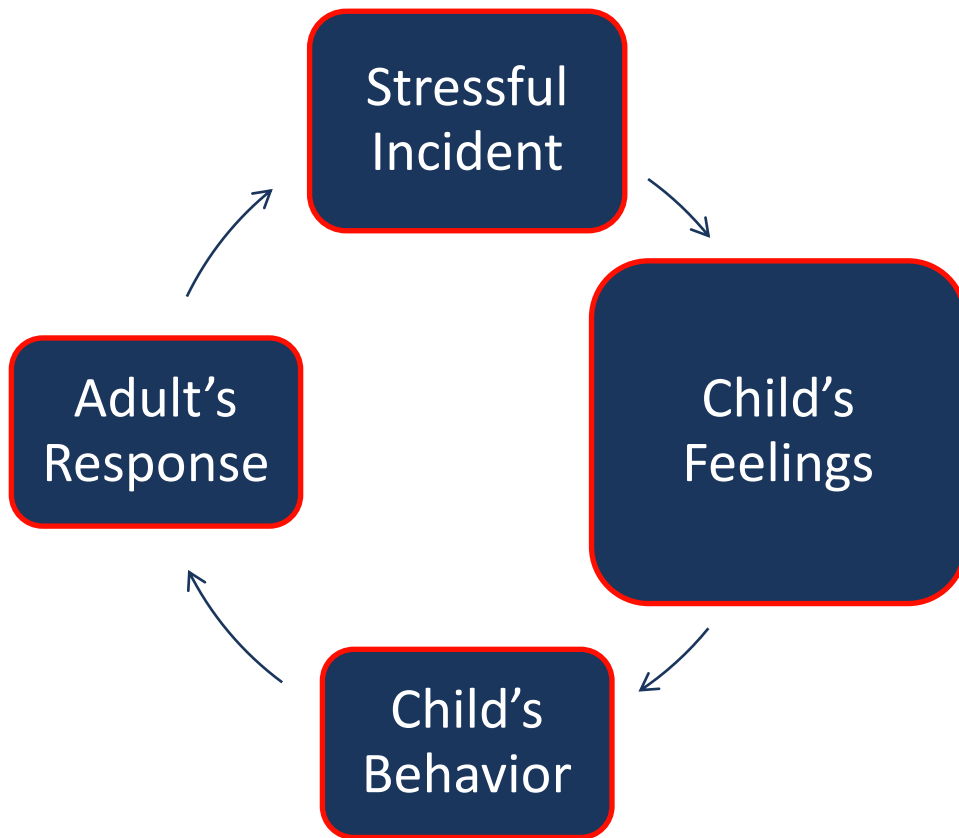
Conflict Cycle



Stressful Incident (Trigger):

- Uncertainty in placement
- Canceled visit with birth parent
- Lack of control
- Smoking/Using Alcohol
- Uncertainty of rules
- Loud noises or yelling
- Colors/Smells

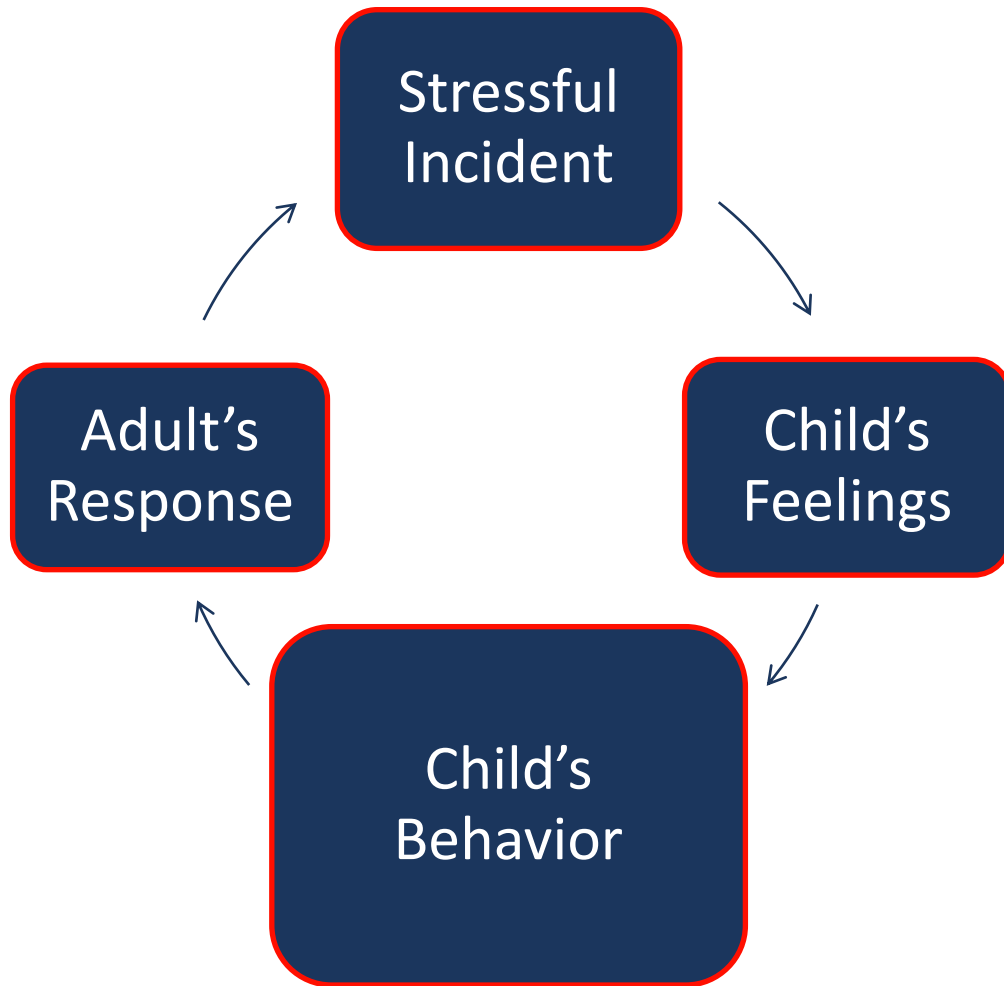
Conflict Cycle



Child's Feelings:

- Uncertainty of placement: **Child feels scared and alone**
- Canceled visit with birth parent: **Child feels frustrated**
- Lack of control: **Child feels enraged**
- Smoking/Using Alcohol: **Child feels unable to cope**
- Uncertainty of rules: **Child feels afraid of messing up**
- Loud noises or yelling: **Child is afraid that they will be harmed**

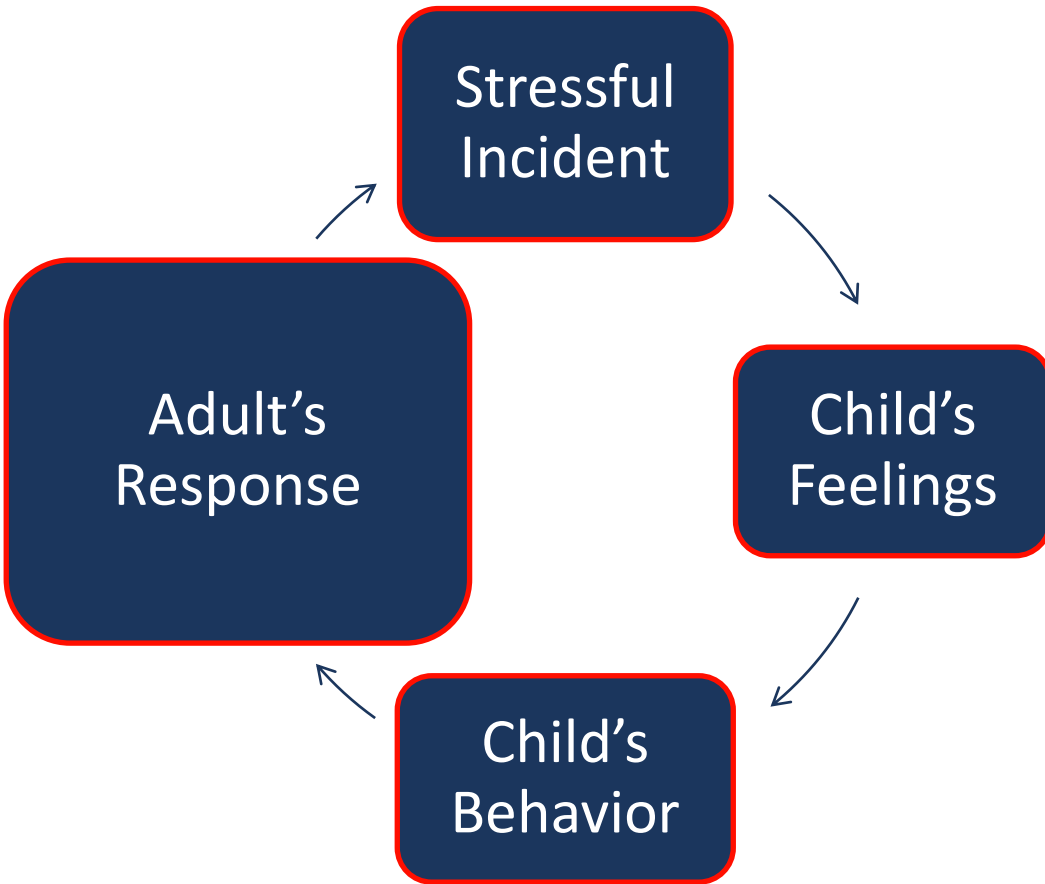
Conflict Cycle



Child's Behavior:

- Returns to survival behaviors to cope with feelings
- Fear driven and reactive, reminders of the trauma received at birth home
- Attempts to escalate us to validate his/her own feelings and gives child control over the outcome

Conflict Cycle

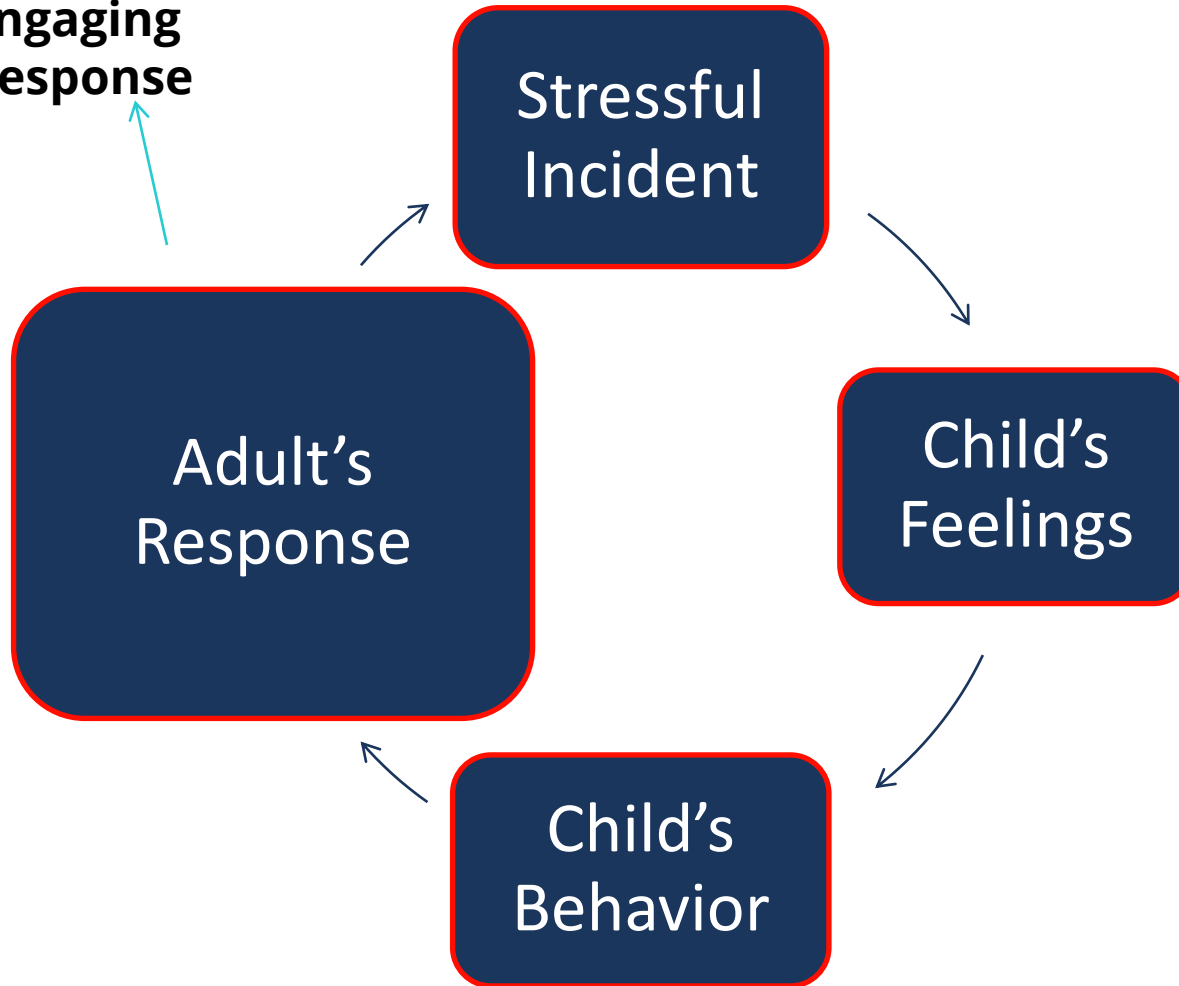


Adults Response:

- Either “enraging or engaging”
- Sets the tone for the escalation
- Enraging Responses: yelling, backing child/youth into a corner, scolding, giving consequences, not listening, moving into the child/youth’s space, arguing etc.
- Enraging responses keep the crisis cycle going

Conflict Cycle

Engaging
Response



Engaging Response:

- The following slides discuss engaging responses that help de-escalate behaviors.
- Remember, safety is the most important factor during a crisis situation.

Start with being Calm

De-Escalation starts with remaining calm. Calm can be just as contagious as fear and must be communicated to the child.



Meaning = Facial Expression + Tone of Voice + Words
55% 38% 7%

Modeling Behaviors

- **Appear calm and self-assured**
- **Maintain a neutral facial expression**
- **Allow space**
- **Control your breathing**
- **Lower your voice and keep your tone even**
- **Distraction and diversion**
- **Focus on safety**
- **Model emotional regulation**
- **Be prepared, they will keep trying to engage you**
- **Don't bargain or bribe during an outburst**
- **Communicate one thought or idea at a time**
- **Don't discipline**
- **Try relaxation techniques**



Your Responses are YOUR Responses

Children are not responsible for adult's responses

It is our job to maintain control of our emotions and responses

We must be self-aware

After the Escalation of Behavior



After

After Escalation

How can we assist the child/ youth in reaching and staying at baseline?

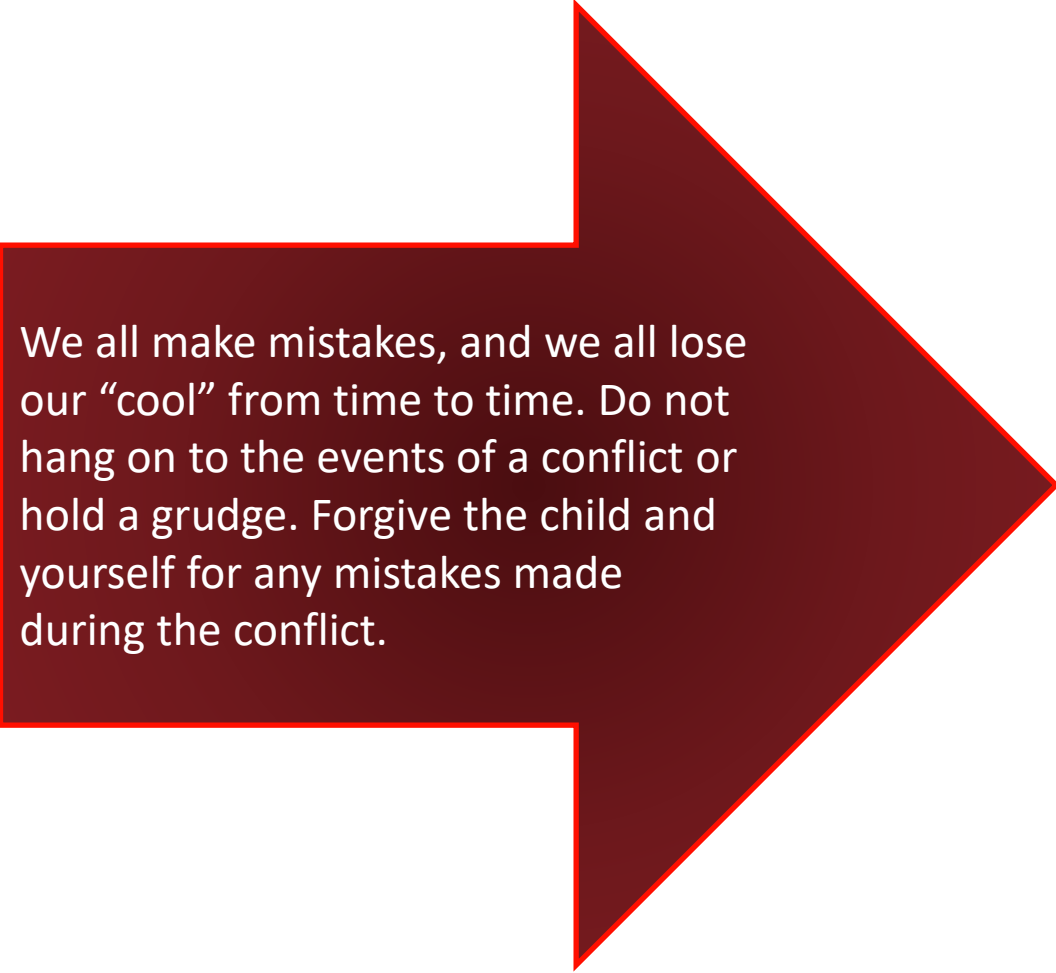


The “After” Is Important Too

After a conflict/crisis arises, what happens next can assist in decreasing the chances of future outbursts.

- ***Give the child space and time to “drain off energy”***
- ***Ask the right questions***
- ***Reframe the results and move on***

Let Go: Keep Moving Forward



We all make mistakes, and we all lose our “cool” from time to time. Do not hang on to the events of a conflict or hold a grudge. Forgive the child and yourself for any mistakes made during the conflict.

- Return the child to the baseline
- Clarify the events
- Repair and restore the relationship
- Teach new coping skills and practice with child
- Return the young person back to the normal routines of the home

Wrap-Up

- Listen for what is felt as well as said
- Make conflict resolution the priority rather than the winning or “being right”
- Focus on the present
- Pick your battles
- Be willing to forgive
- Know when to let something go



Thank You!

