

October 7+8, 2025

# Verbal De-Escalation & Violence Prevention

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Yes,  
and...

A circular logo with a halftone dot pattern. The word "TOWN" is in bold black uppercase letters, and "Fair 25" is in a purple script font.

**TOWN**  
*Fair 25*

# Reactive Violence VS Targeted Violence





**“Violence is the language of the unheard.”**

**- Martin Luther King**

## **Violence Talks**

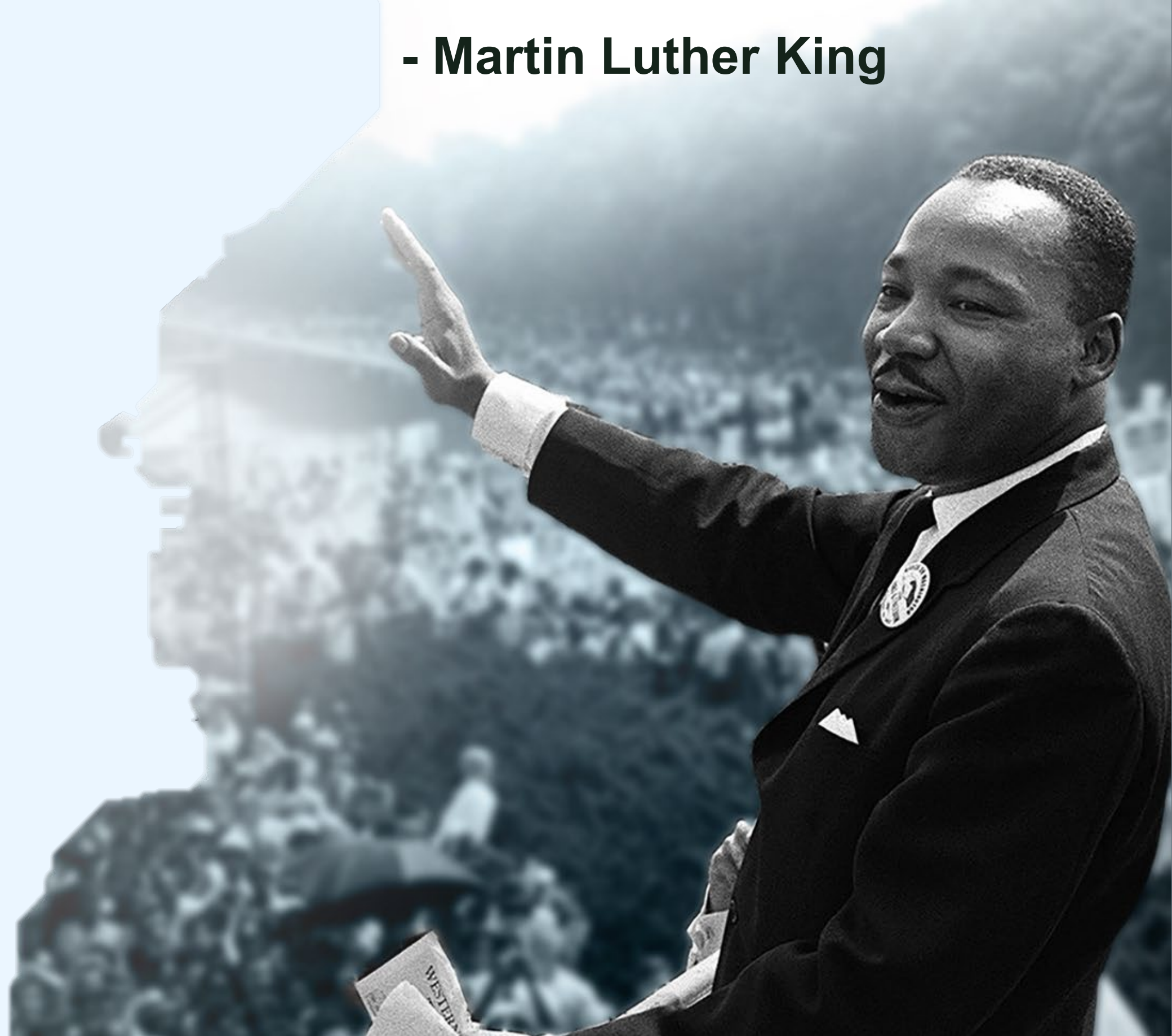
To relieve  
my tension

To help control and  
dominate others

To give me  
a voice

To make me  
feel better

To protect  
myself





# Person in Crisis = Feeling Powerless and Out of Control about Something Important to Them





# Risk Factors for Violence

**CAUTION**

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**CAUTION**

- Age: 17 – 25
- Sex: Male
- Substance Abuse: Alcohol and Stimulants
- Generational Poverty
- Housing Instability
- Food Insecurity

# Predictors of Violence

- Past history of violence
  - Types, frequency
- Significant change in behavior
- Increase in Gross Motor Activity (i.e. large muscle groups)



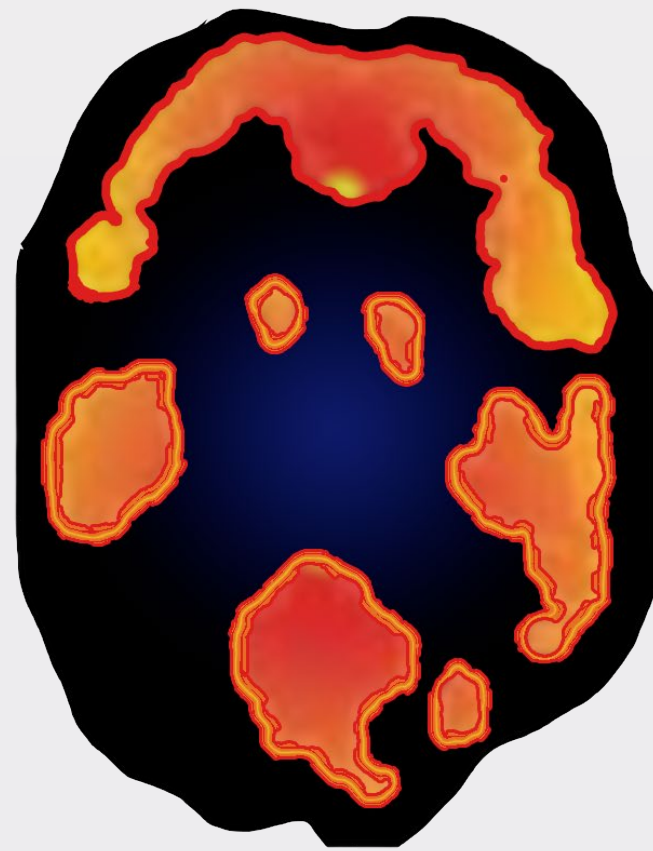


# Psychological Considerations

- Emotion versus Reason
- Takes time to settle down
- Building trust and rapport are essential in creating a safe interaction



# The Physiology of Rage

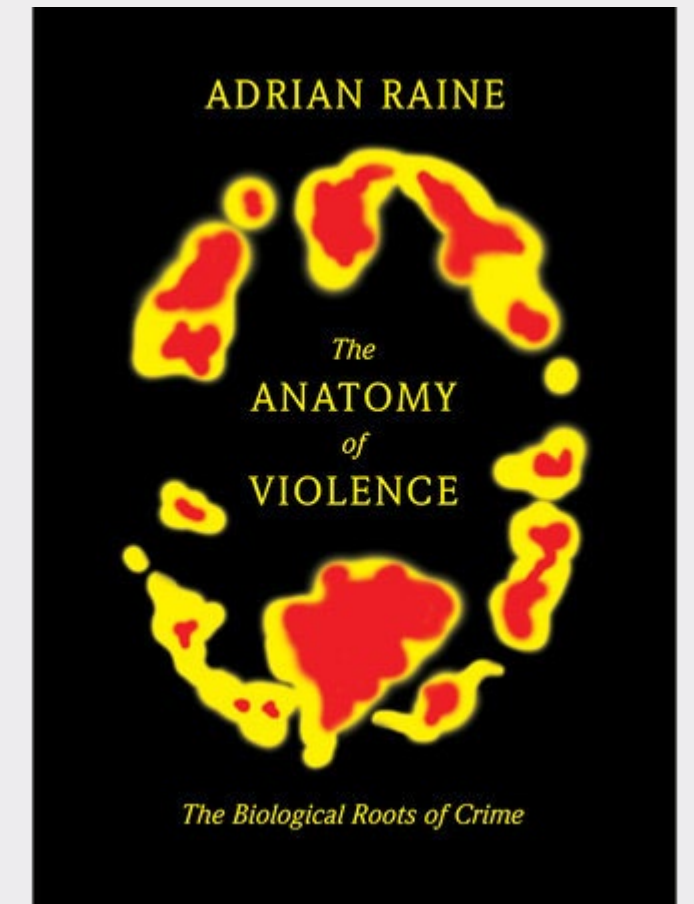


**Control**



**Rage**

PETscan detects glucose metabolism in various parts of the brain illustrating activity/non-activity.

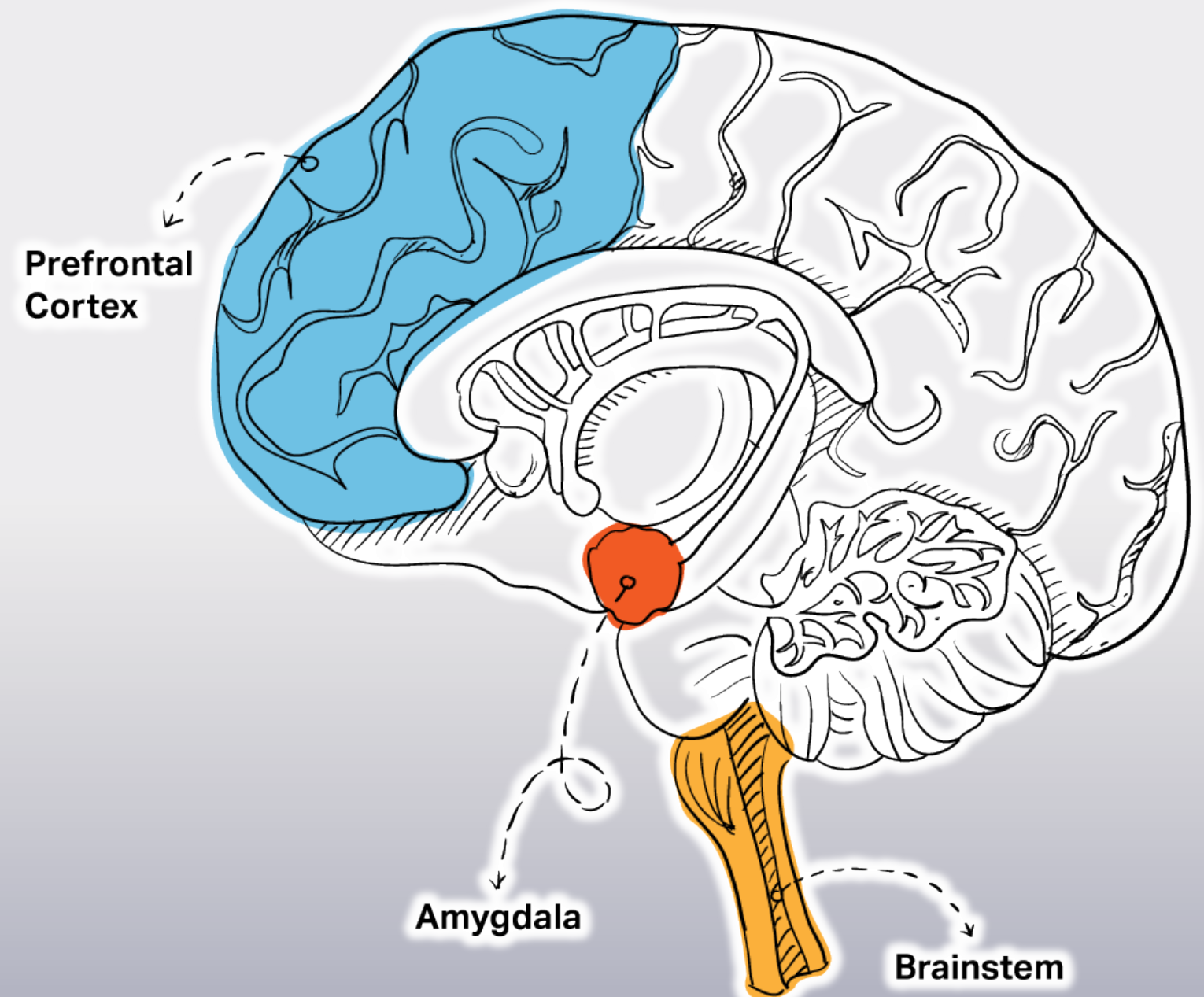


Recommend Reading:  
"The Anatomy of  
Violence" Adrian Raine,  
April 2013.



# Back to the Brain

- When stressed, fearful, angry or enraged, we tend to experience greater activation of our limbic system, also known as the “emotional brain.”
- This can influence:
  - Problem solving
  - Decision making
  - Judgment
  - Logic
  - Reasoning
  - Impulse control
  - Verbal processing
  - All critical functions to resolve a crisis



# It Takes Time to Build a Relationship

- In order to influence someone's behavior you need to have some form of a relationship
- SLOW DOWN, Don't problem solve the wrong problem
- Negotiator vs. SWAT





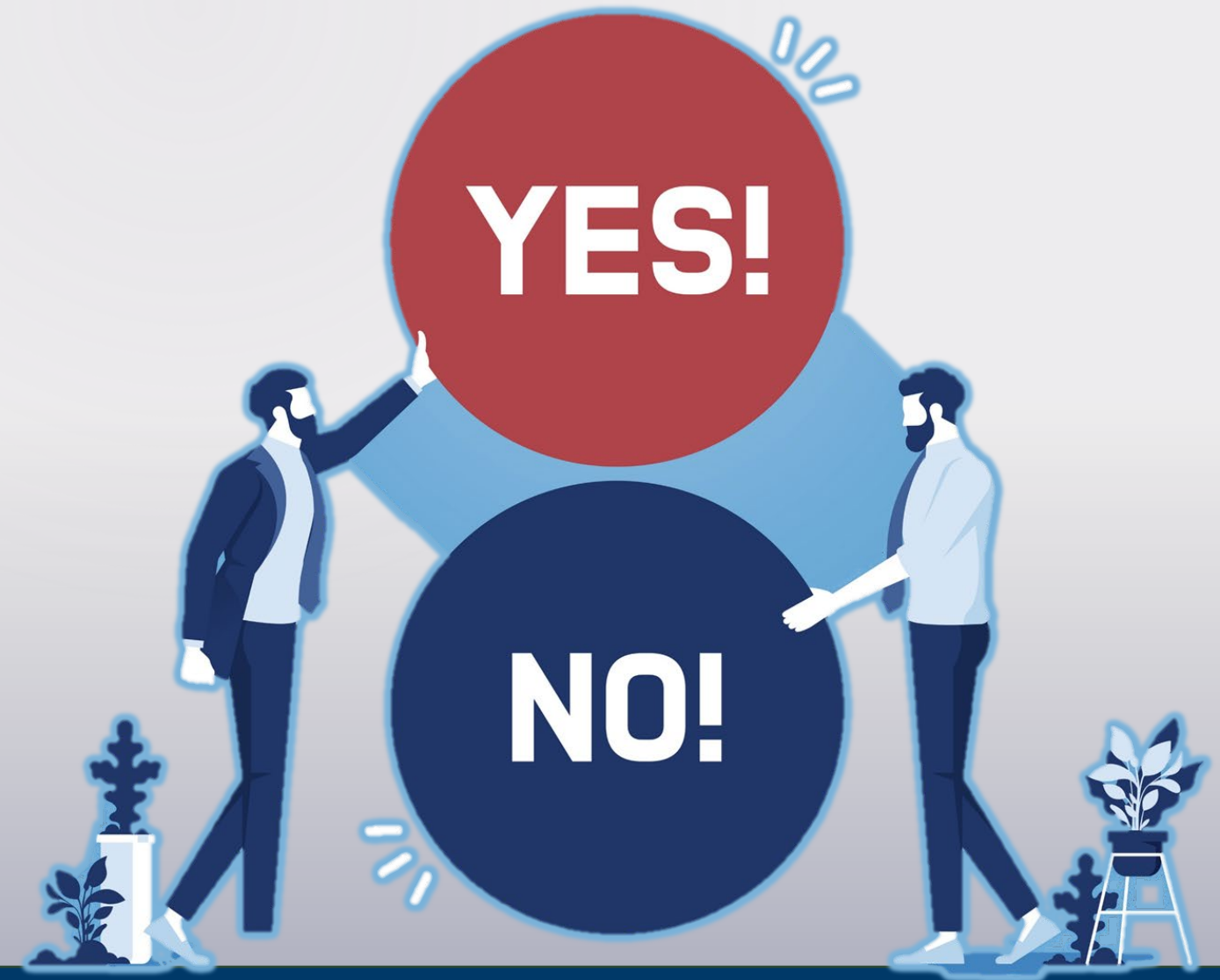
# Active Listening

- “Listen” vs. “Talk”
- 80% Listen --- 20% Talk
- Let the person have the opening words while you LISTEN



# Active Listening Cont.

- Use non-judgmental attitude
- Be accepting.
- Do NOT inject your values into the situation.
- Focus on the person's feelings, values, lifestyles and opinions.





# Be Aware of Values

- Values are what people think are important.
- Try to clarify what the person's values are.
- Values influence behaviors!



## Active Listening Cont.

# Emotional Labeling

- The intent of emotional labeling is to respond to the emotion heard in the person's VOICE rather than the content
- For example use phrases like: "You seem" or "You sound..", "You look to me..." or "I hear you are ..."
- Use the same terminology as the person

John, you seem angry right now.



# Active Listening | Emotional Labeling Cont.

- Avoid telling a person how they feel and focus on how they seem or sound
- Don't worry if you label the emotion incorrectly, it's your own perception
- Be aware of YOUR own emotions and what emotions you are conveying





## Active Listening Cont.

# Paraphrasing

- Summarize in your words as to what they have told you
- Creates empathy, it shows you're listening, and you are trying to understand
- For example: "I want to make sure I have this right, are you telling me...?" or "Are you saying...?"
- Clarifies statements and themes



## Active Listening Cont.

# Effective Pauses (Silence)

- An effective pause is silence
- Most people are uncomfortable with silence and will fill it with talk (12 seconds!)
- Remember, if they talk we get more information, with information comes the ability to resolve a conflict



## Active Listening Cont.

# Reflecting/Mirroring

- Simply repeat the last word or phrase the person said and say it in the form of a question
- Provides the person with exact feedback that you are listening
- Guides the person to further explain and gives us more details





## Active Listening Cont.

# Minimal Encouragers

- Encouragers are sounds made to let the person know you are listening and interested
- For example: “Oh” and “Really?” and “Ok”
- Encourages the person to continue talking
- Is natural in conversations



## Active Listening Cont.

# Use open-ended questions

- These questions cannot be answered with a yes or no response
- Usually begins with words like “How” “When” “What” or “Where”
- It helps to get the person talking
- It focuses the discussion on the person’s feelings



## Active Listening Cont.

# “Behavior” Messages

- Used to confront the person about a behavior that is counterproductive, without being accusatory
  - You want the behavior to change, not them
  - You own your feelings, not blaming
  - Non-threatening

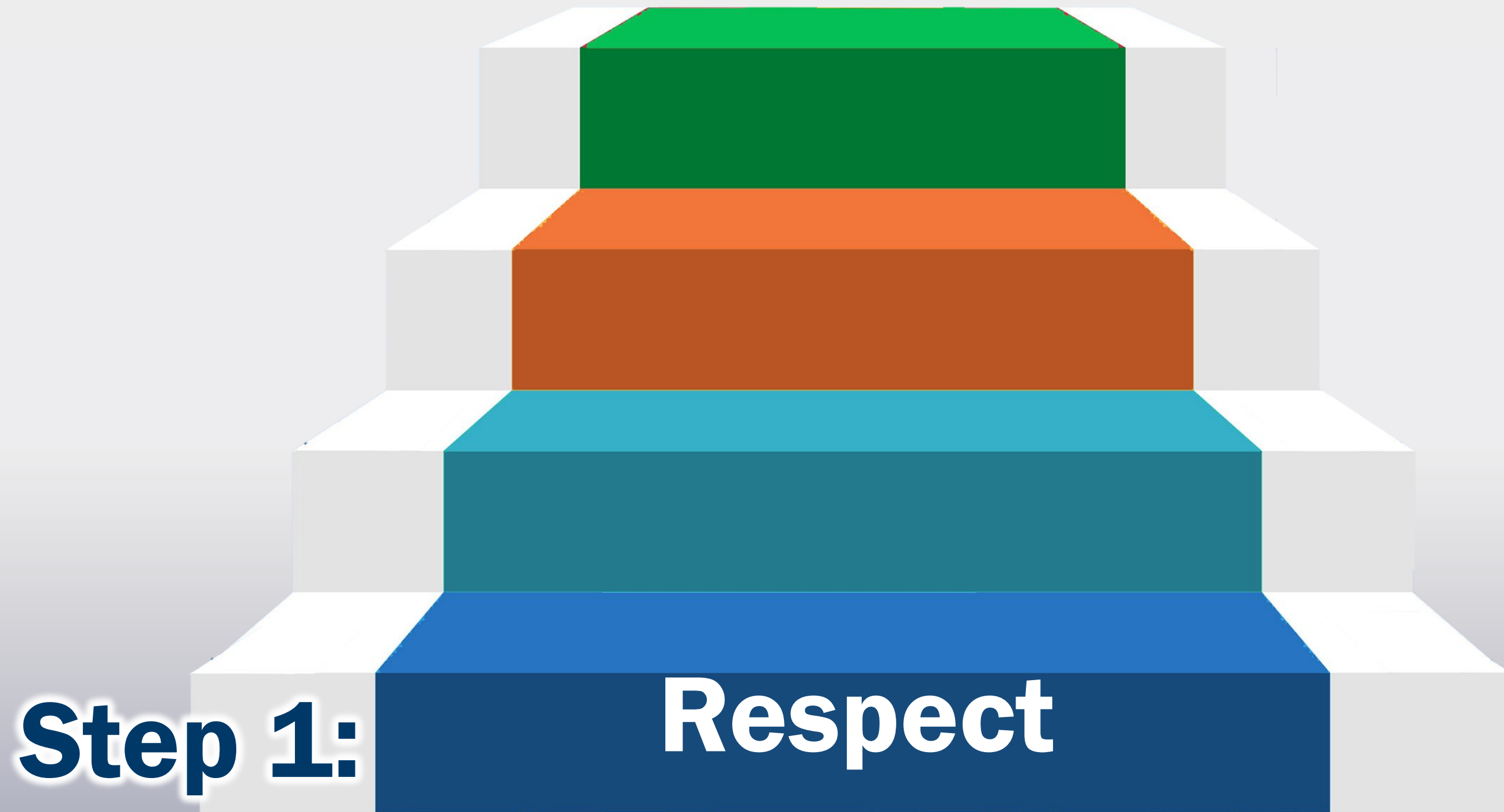


## Active Listening

# Use of “Behavior” Messages to Confront

- Use the formula: “With the (behavior) I am worried because (your reason) and I would like you to (behavior).”
- For example: “With the (yelling) I am worried because (I am afraid I will miss something that is important to you) and I would like to talk with you over here so we can resolve this together.”

# Behavioral Change Stairway



# Behavioral Change Stairway

**Step 2:**

**Rapport**

**Respect**



# Rapport

- This is the foundation of every relationship



# Phrases That Damage Rapport

- “Calm Down” – can be perceived as an order which may provoke intense anger
- “Why” – feels accusatory, creates defensiveness
- “I understand” – Often used to jump to problem solving; well intentioned but counter-productive
- “You should(n’t)” – a judgmental statement, implies superiority of the advice giver and may cause receiver to feel inadequate

**Never**  
in the history of  
**CALM DOWN**  
has anyone  
**CALMED DOWN**  
by being told to  
**CALM DOWN**

# Phrases that Help Build Rapport

“Calm down”

- “I can see (hear) how angry you are.”

“I Understand”

- “Help me to understand.”

You should /  
shouldn't

- “What are your options at this point?”

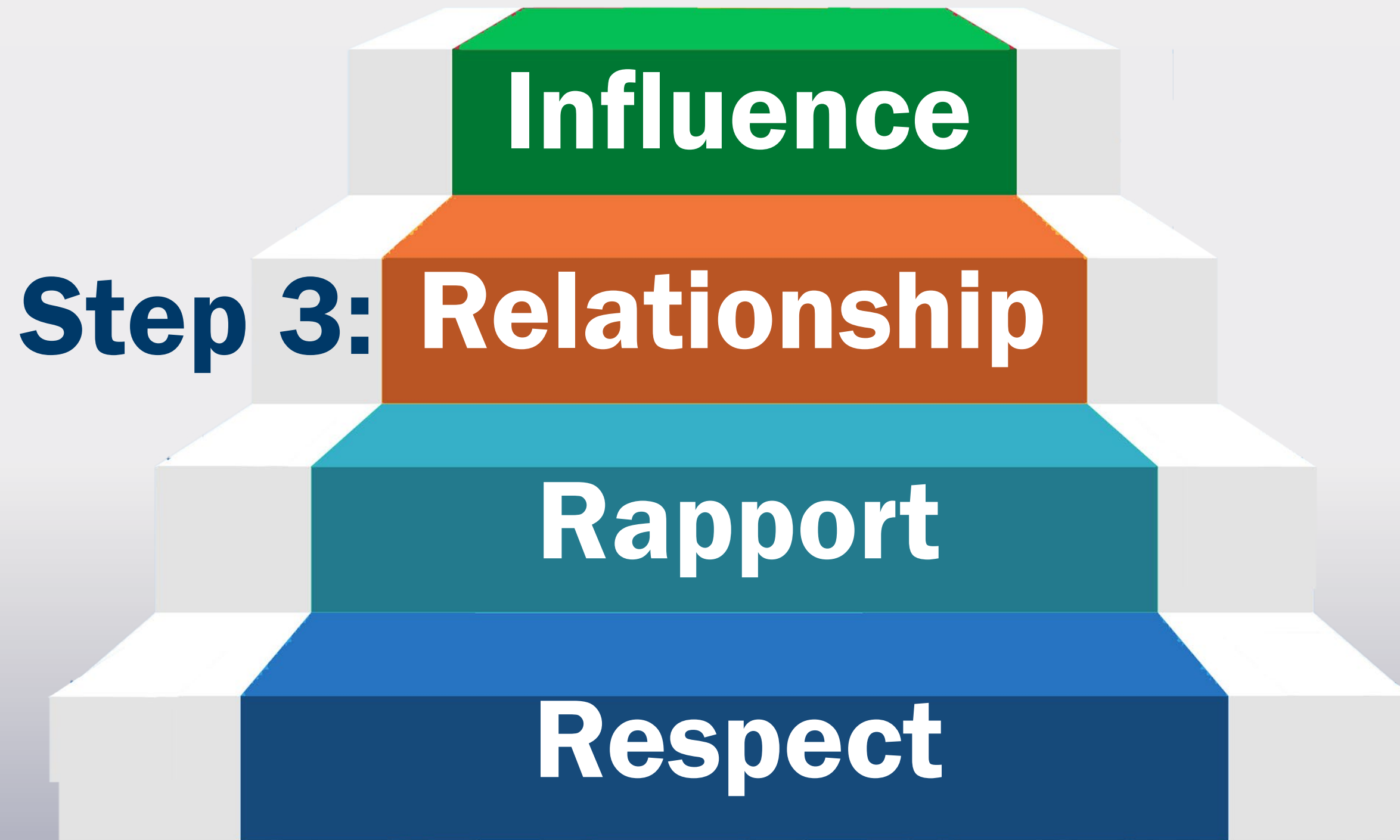


# Strengthening Rapport

- Inherent Power Differential –  
It is our responsibility to even  
the playing field and yield  
some perceived power and  
control.

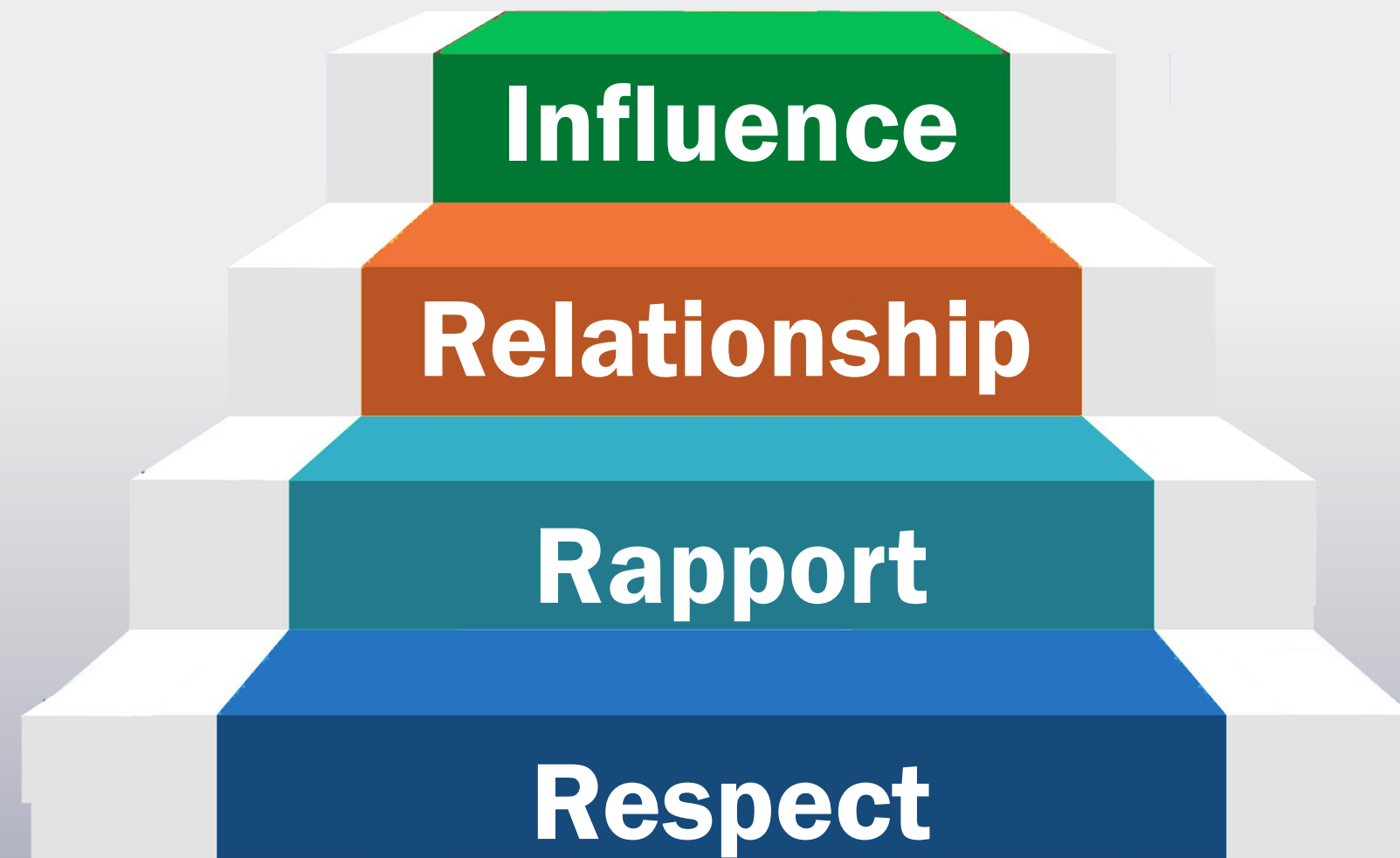


# Behavioral Change Stairway



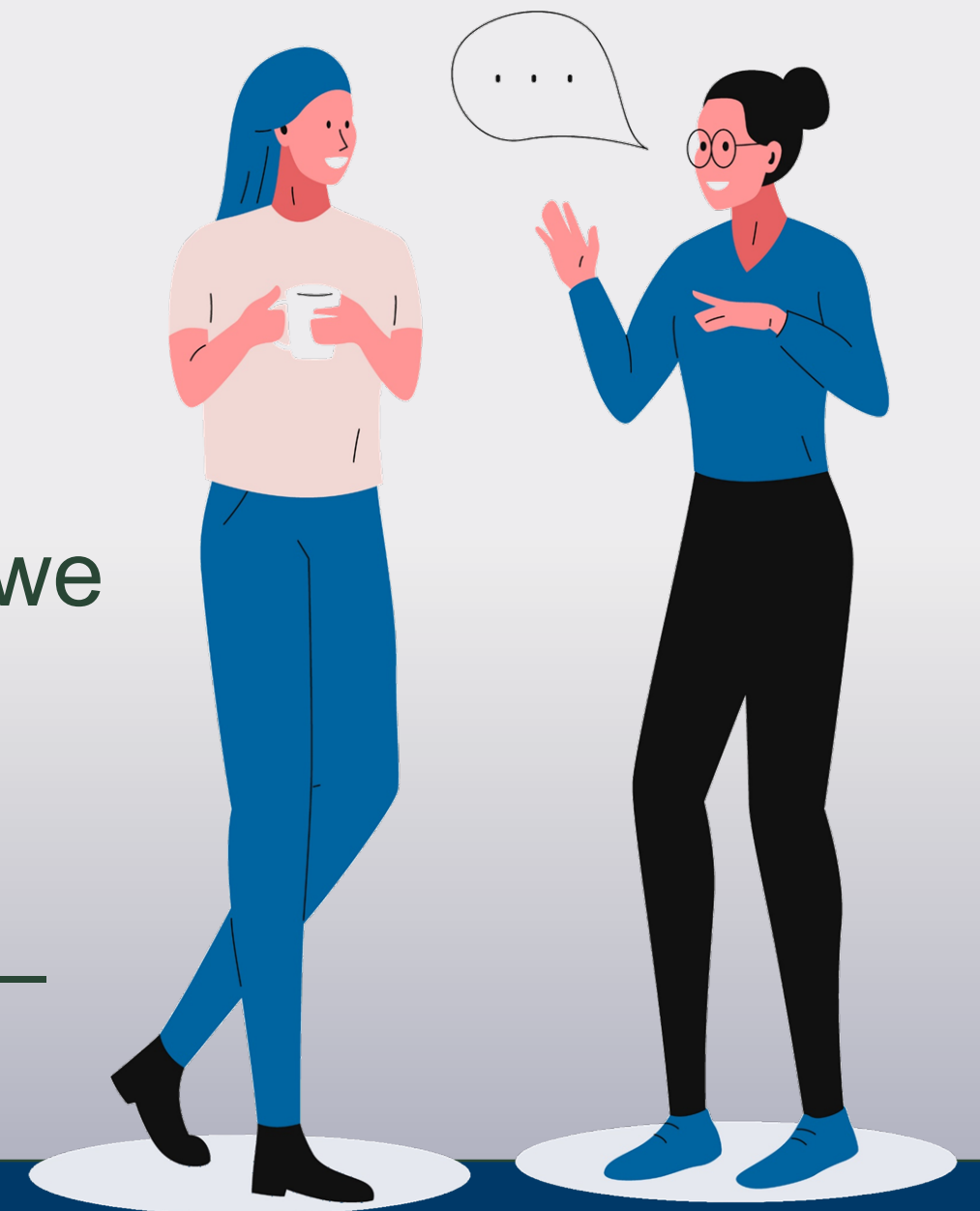
# Influence

- The power or capacity to cause a change in thought or action



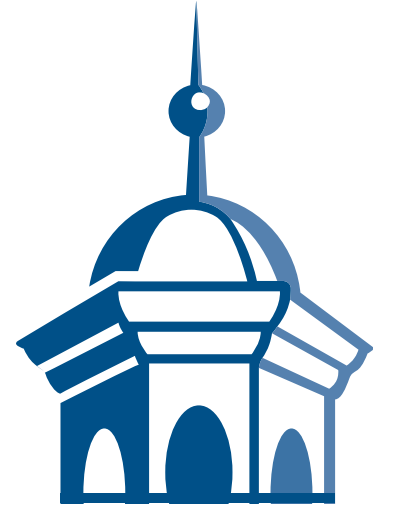
# Points to Remember

- Your voice may be your strongest tool.
- Respecting others' values is neither opposition nor agreement.
- When called for, confrontation should be non-threatening and non-judgmental.
- Through respect we build rapport, through rapport we build relationship, through relationship comes influence which helps us get to successful resolutions.
- Active Listening gains information & builds rapport – it is a perishable skill!





# THANK YOU!



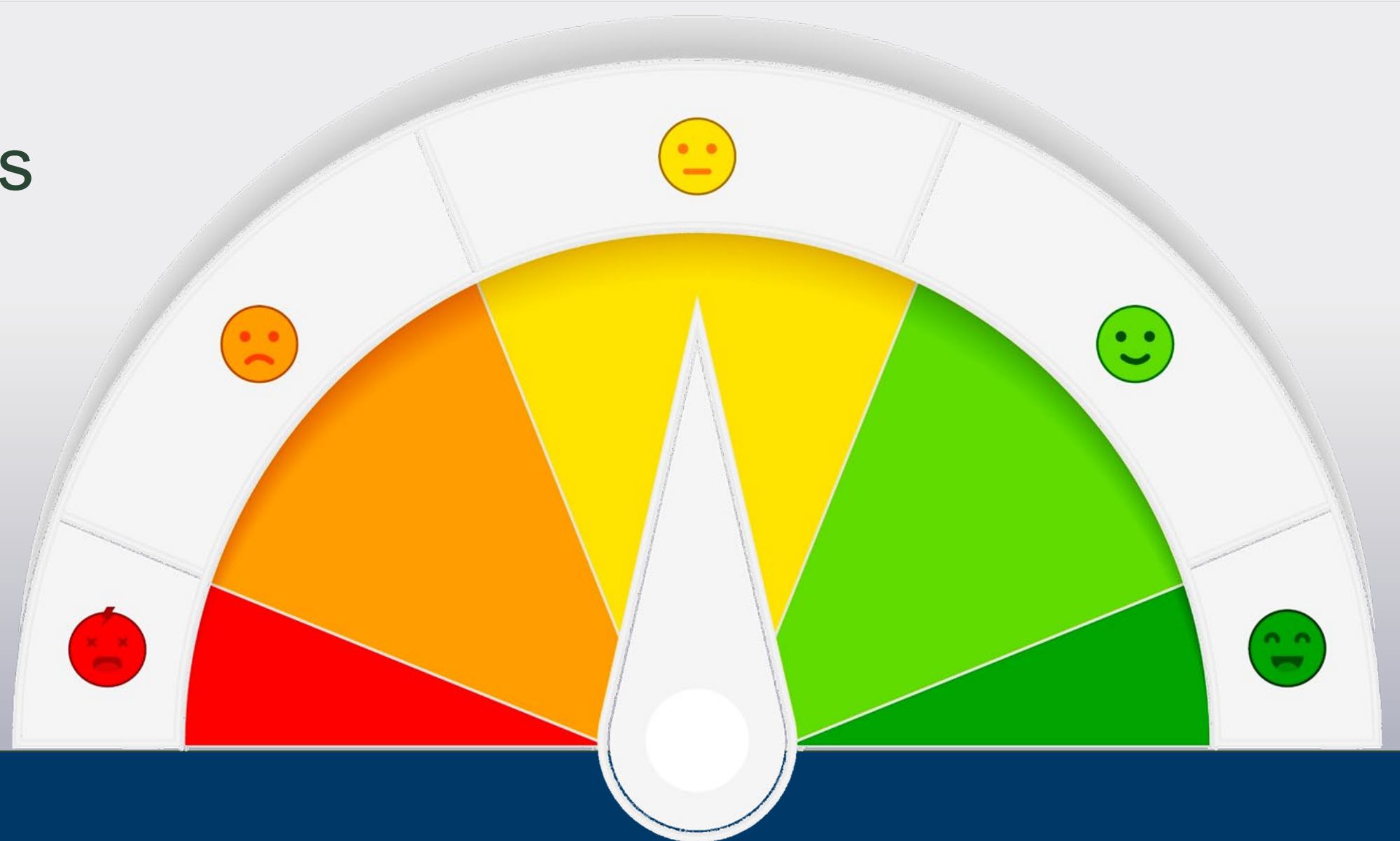
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Vermont League of Cities and Towns

# De-Escalation

- Helps calm a situation
- Builds Rapport
- Uses Active Listening Skills



# Stages of De-Escalation

- Recognize and Assess the Situation
- Respond Calmly
- Listen with Empathy
- Validate and Show Respect

Remember: You always have permission to retreat if you don't feel safe.





# De-Escalation Techniques

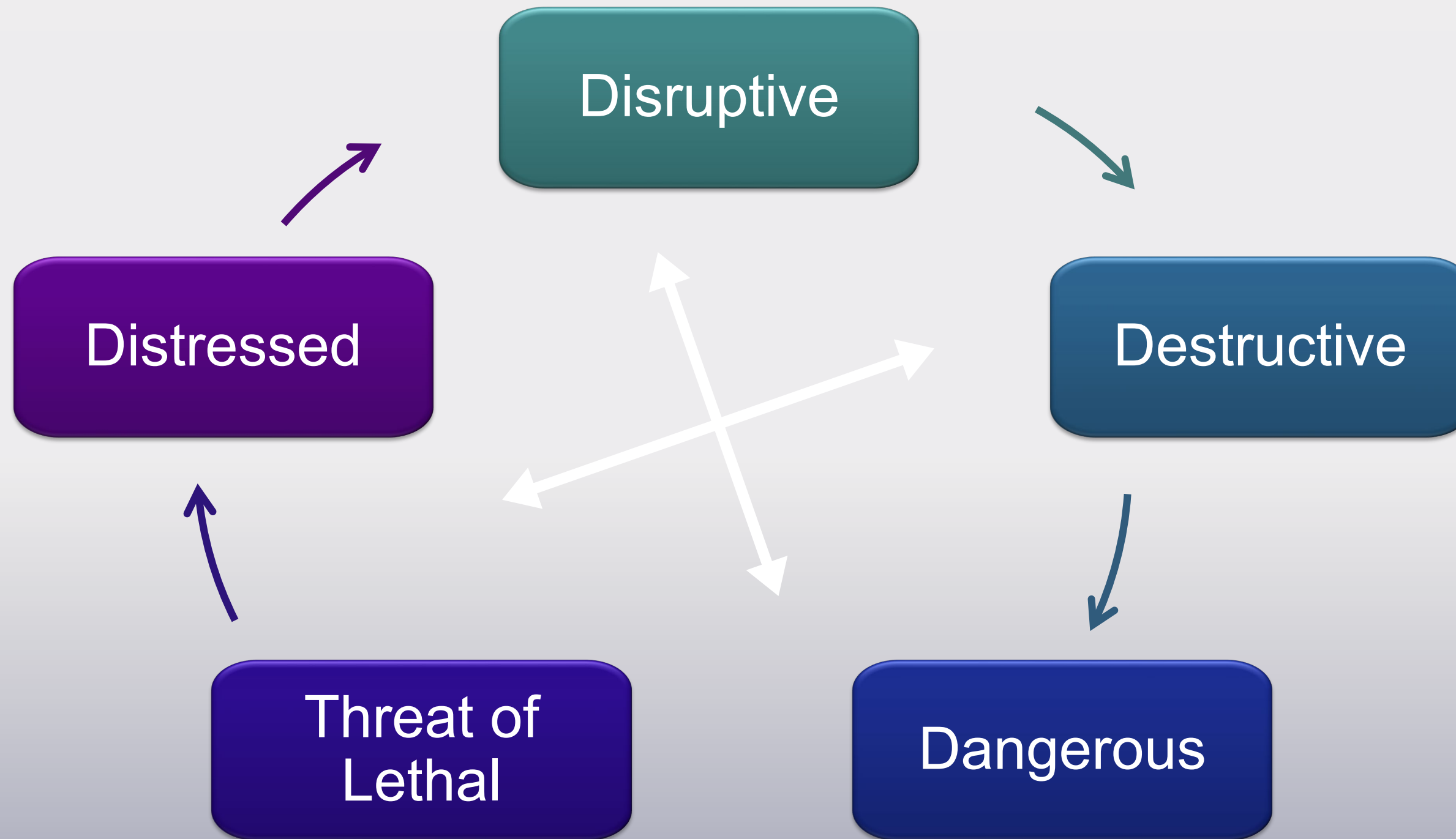
Validate the feeling	“You have every right to feel what you are feeling.” *****
Match the intensity of volume	Use similar tone to match and bring it down...think crowded restaurant
Physical Labeling	“Mr. Jones, I noticed you are pacing a lot?”
Derailments	Non-sequiturs; Referring to someone you know by the wrong name
Soft Shock	Purposeful MISS interpretation

# Stress

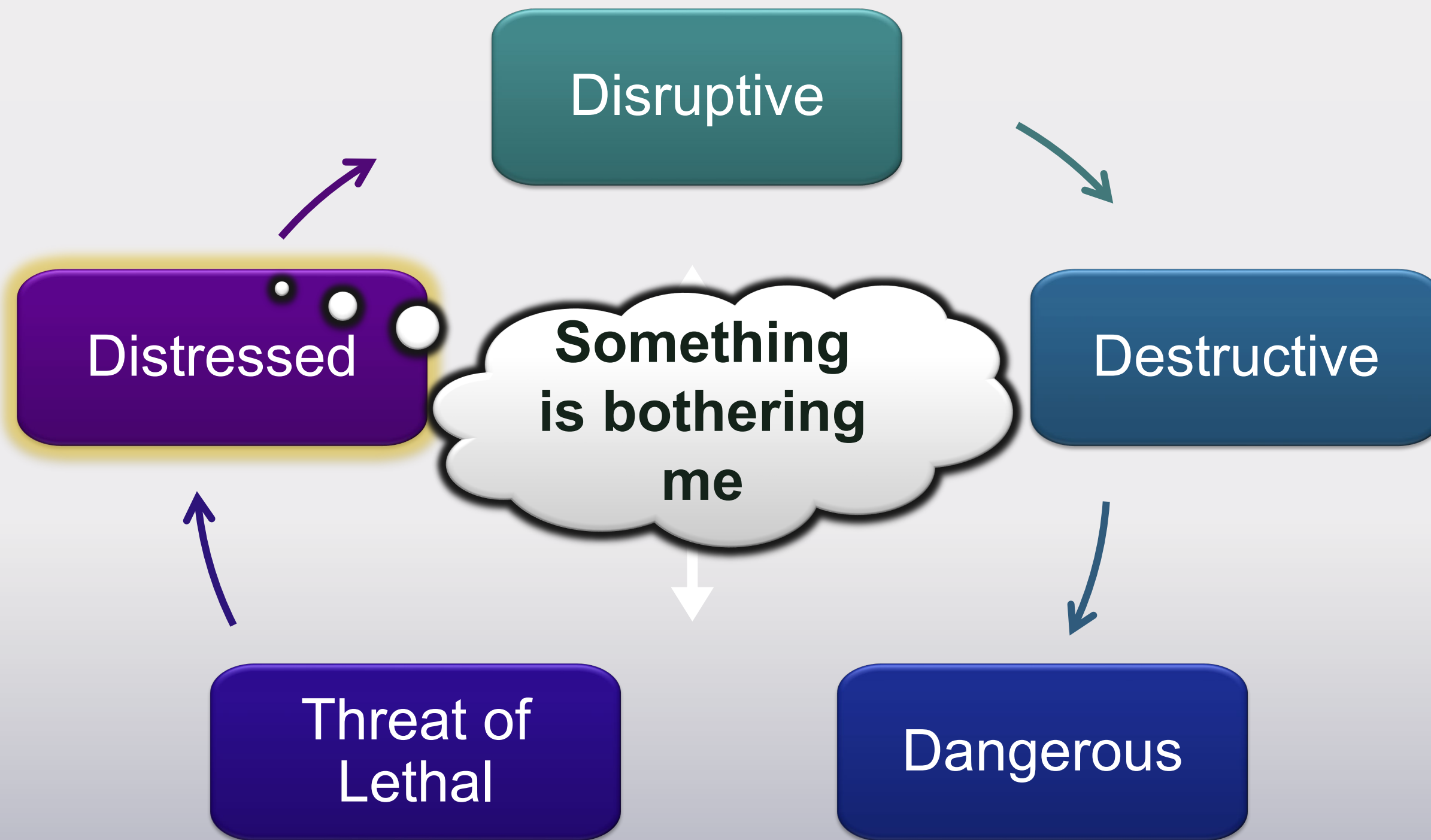
Stress: Difficulty that causes worry or emotional tension



# Agitation Cycle

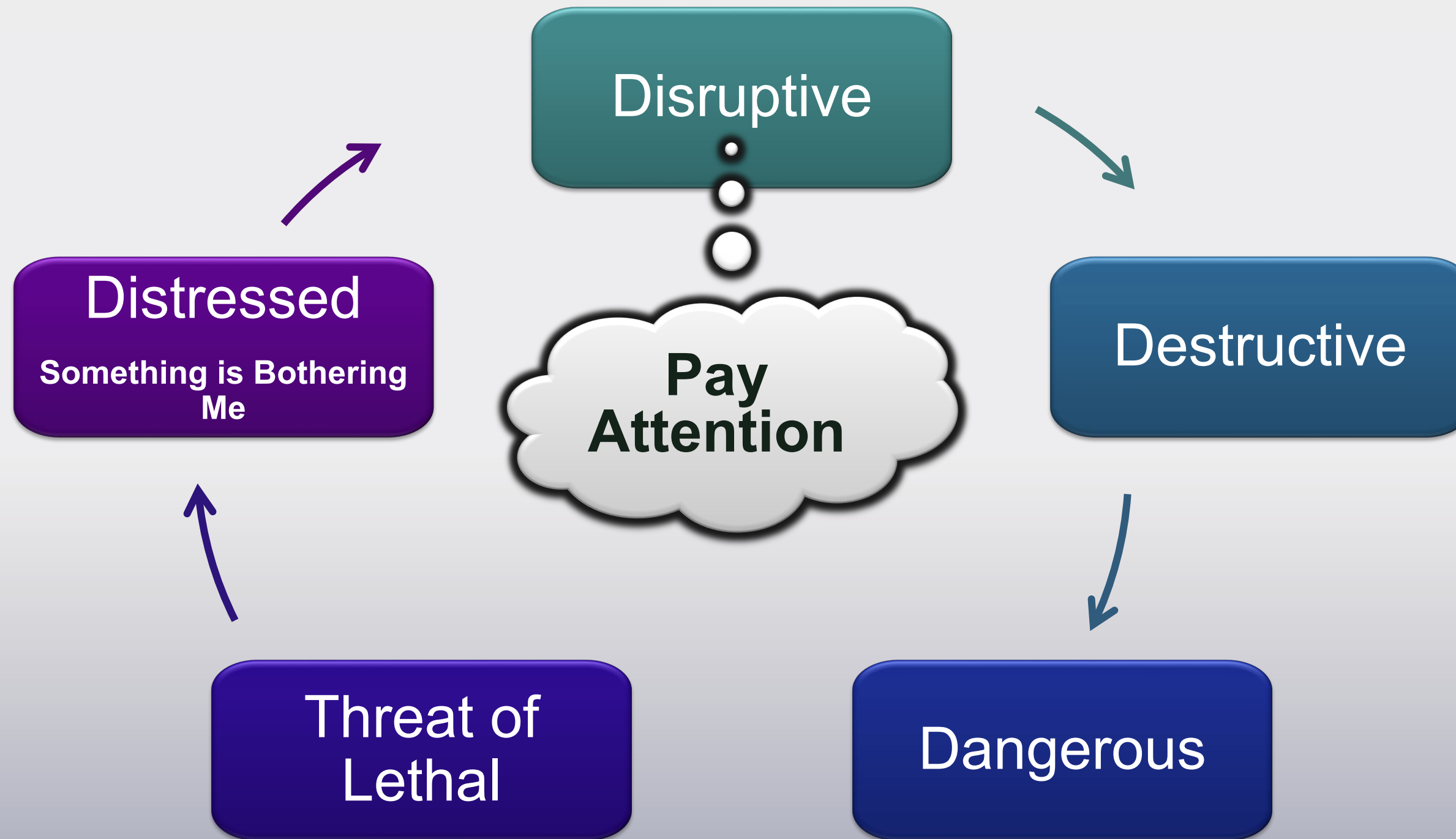


# Agitation Cycle

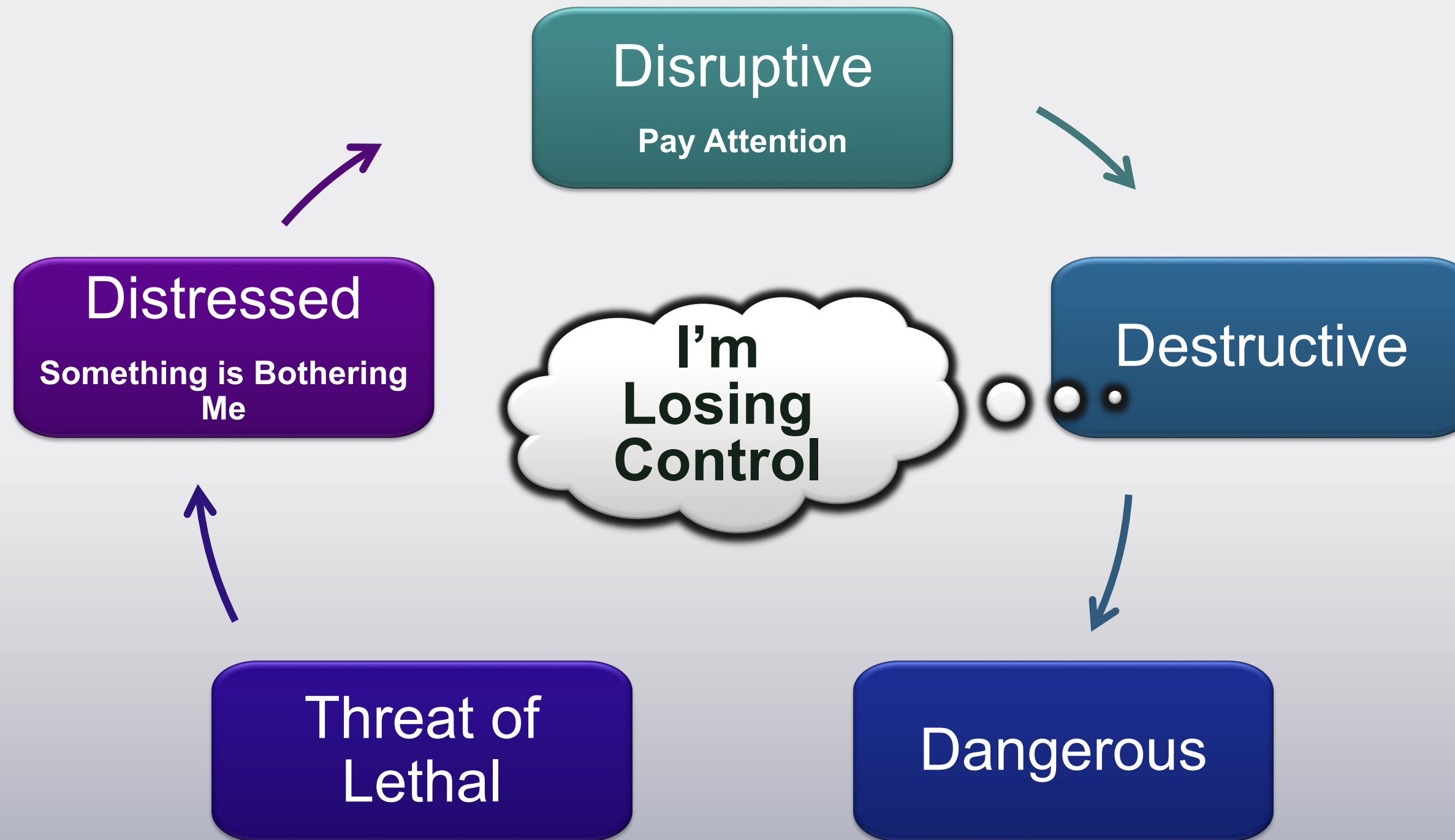




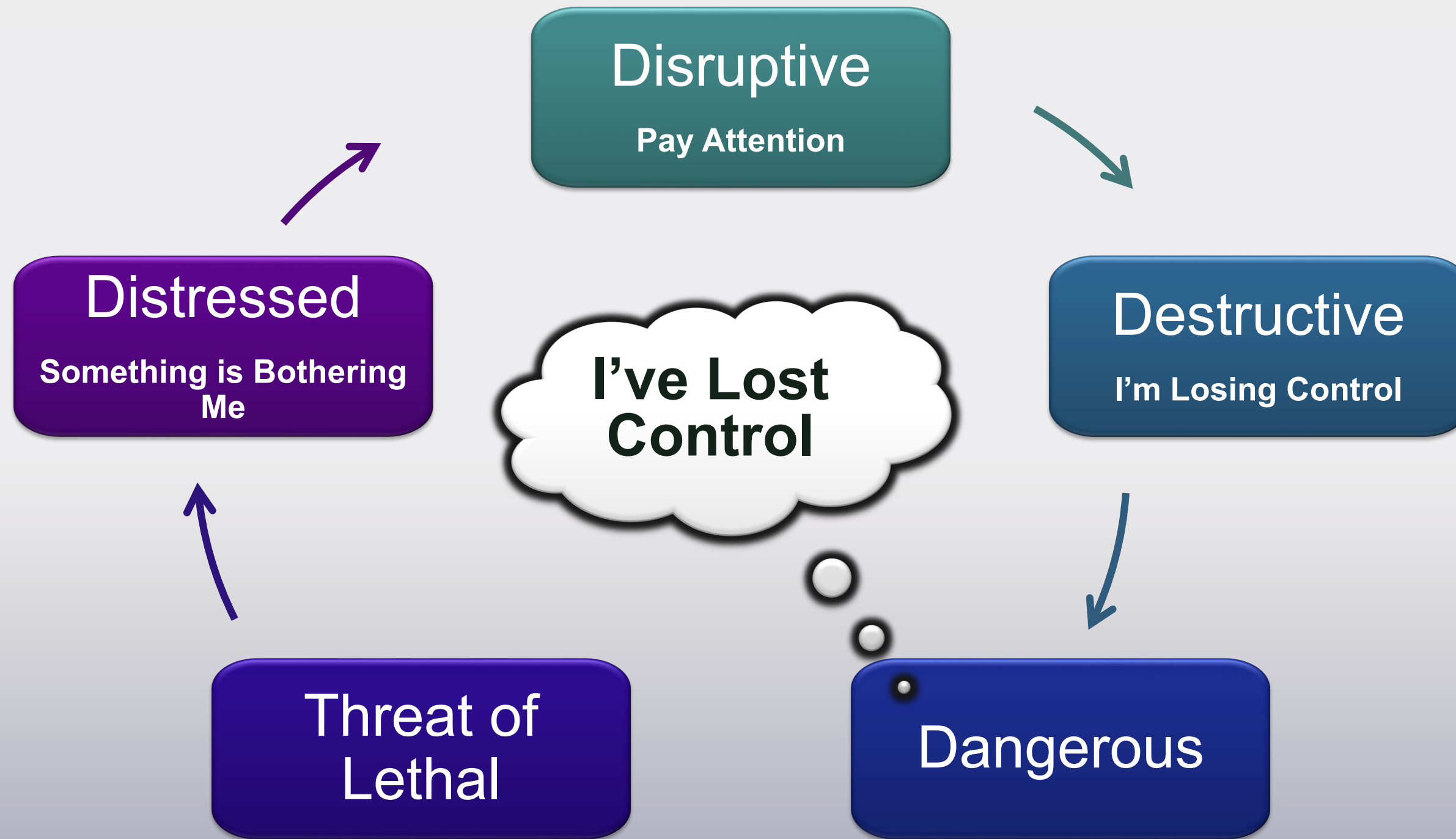
# Agitation Cycle



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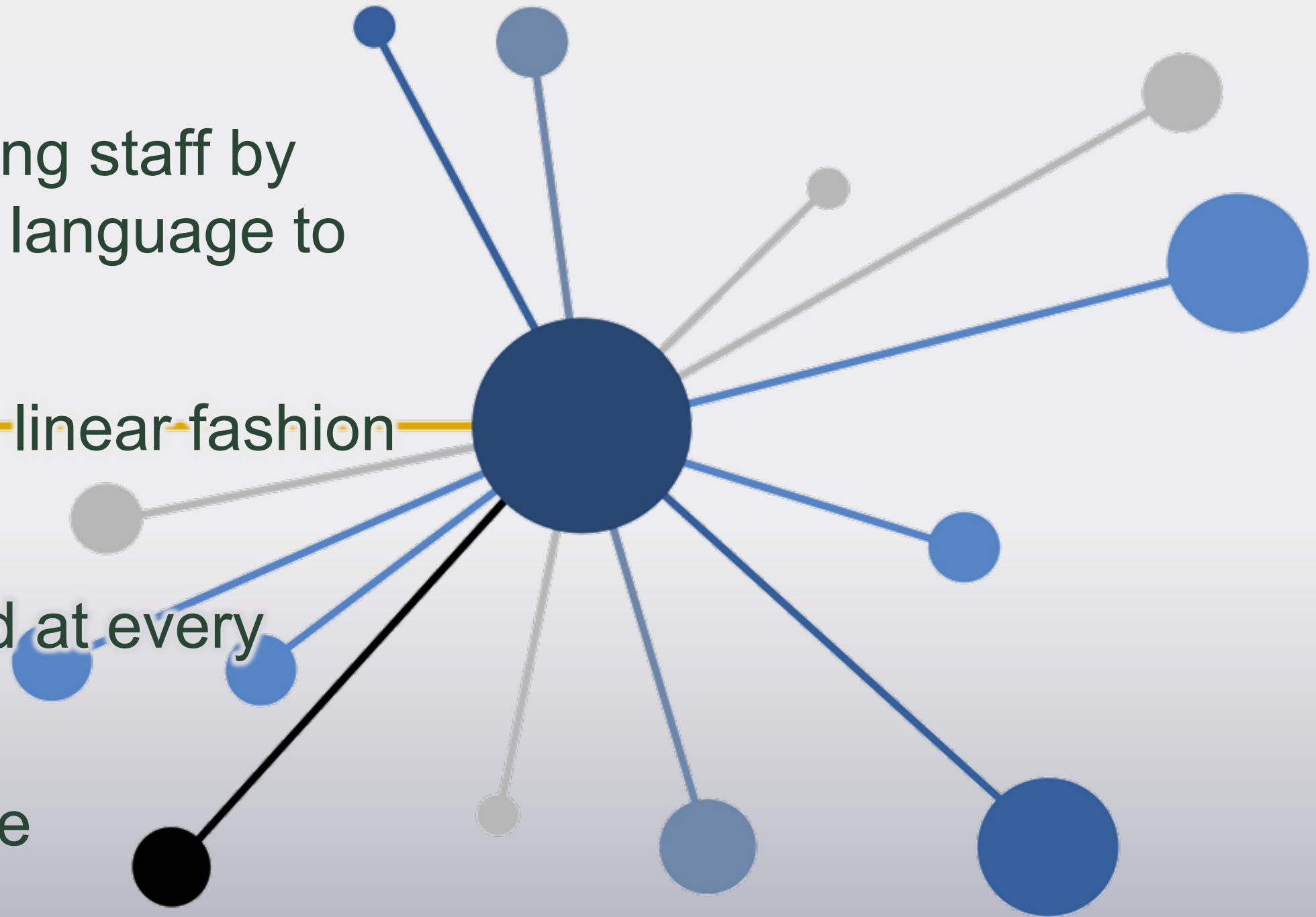
# Agitation Cycle





# Agitation Cycle

- Improves communication among staff by providing staff with a common language to describe behaviors
- Does NOT likely progress in a linear fashion from agitated to dangerous
- Listening and Talking are used at every level on the Agitation Scale
- Aids in determining appropriate interventions



# What Else Helps...

- Assist the person by remaining calm.
- Talk in a clear, concise way.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Speak quietly in a nonthreatening tone at a moderate pace.
- Answer questions calmly.
- Comply with reasonable requests.
- Maintain your safety and access to an exit.
- Do not do anything to further agitate the person.



# THANK YOU!



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