

Medical Education Day  
Island Medical Program

**Maintaining Relationships While  
Having Difficult and Awkward Conversations**

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# Outline

- Group Agreements (Guidelines)
- Check-in
- Review models pertinent to conversations and relationship maintenance
- Self-Reflective timeline exercise
- ABCD Communication template:  
Practice/debrief
- Check-out

# Objectives

- Discuss and define explicit guidelines designed to create safety, inclusion and trust
- Talk about successes and struggles conversations
- ABCD communication template
- Practice using template
- Experience the template as a listener
- Witness template being used by others

# Centre for Practitioner Renewal

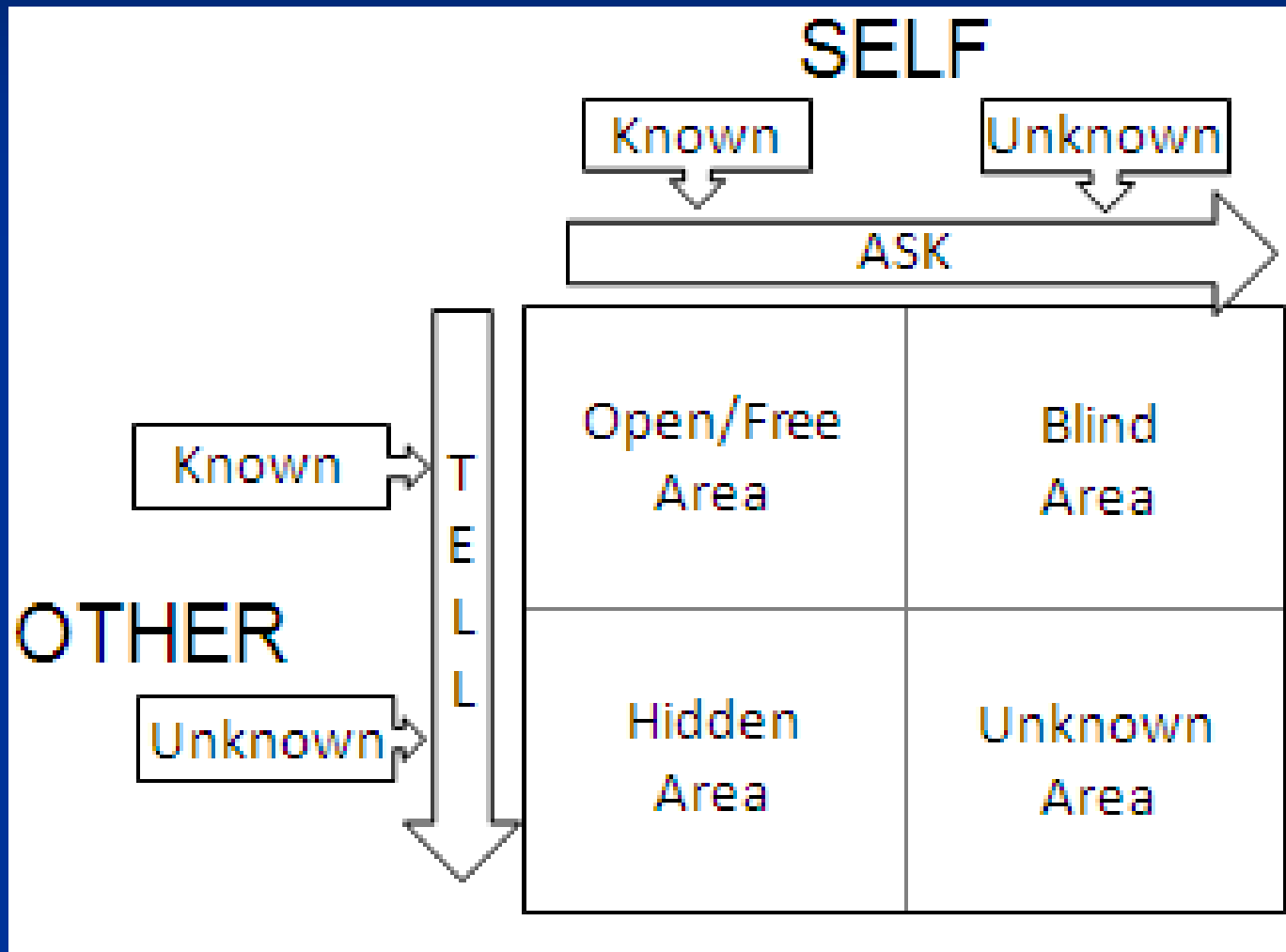
- How do we sustain health care providers in the work place?
- What is the effect of being in the presence of suffering?
- What would be reparative, healing or restore resilience for health care providers?

***Efficiency through relationship***

# Core Messages

- Relationships can sustain if they are maintained (self, other and Other)
- The past is always present
- Self awareness is a key tool

# Johari Window: Expanding Self Knowledge



# Trauma-Informed Care

- Trauma awareness
- Emphasis on safety and trustworthiness
- Opportunity for choice, collaboration and connection
- Strengths-based and skill building

Trauma-informed Practice Guide

[http://bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013\\_TIP-Guide.pdf](http://bccewh.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2013_TIP-Guide.pdf)

# Guidelines for Safer Self Exploration and Expression

- Creating safety makes experience predictable
- Safety comes from predictability
- If we don't establish predictability explicitly, then it will happen implicitly
  
- We are more likely to negotiate ground rules with intimate partners
- We are more likely to apply rules set by family/culture



# Group Agreements Guidelines

**C**onfidentiality

**E**qual airtime

**N**on-judgemental listening

**T**imeliness

**R**ight to pass

**E**ngaged

# Check-in: FIFE myself

1. What am I feeling about ...? (affect)
2. What is my impression (judgement) about myself regarding ...? (cognition)
3. What are the effects of this on my functioning? (behaviour)
4. What expectations do I have? (meaning making)

# Effect on Relationships

- Self -Ego integrity is at risk
- Other - Perceived as nice and likeable are at risk
- Other – Loss of meaning

# PTSD DSM-V Diagnostic Criteria

A. Exposure or witness

B. Re-experiencing

C. Avoidance

D. Negative cognitions and mood

- From a persistent and distorted sense of blame of self or others, to estrangement from others or markedly diminished interest in activities, to an inability to remember key aspects of the event

E. Arousal

- Aggressive or reckless or self-destructive behaviour, sleep disturbance, hypervigilance or related problems

# Iatrogenic Suffering

- Suffering resulting from actions or inactions by healthcare providers that increase distress, anxiety, and mistrust felt by patients and families

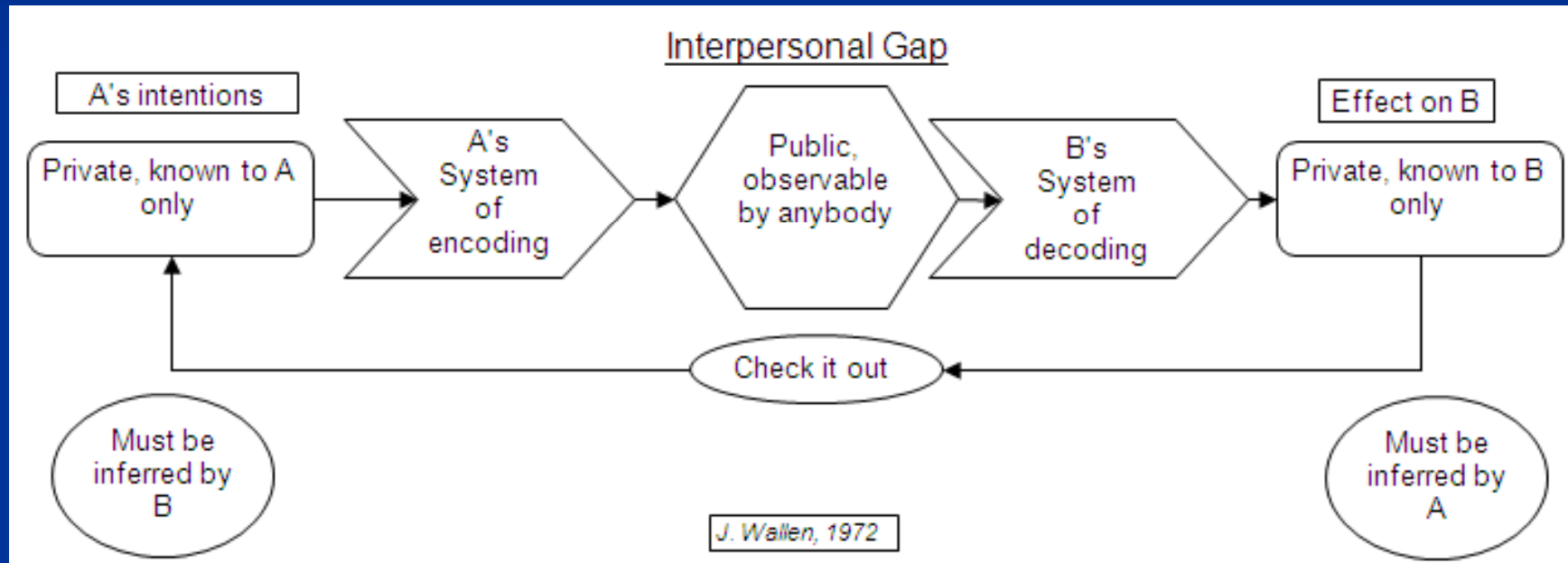
# Iatrogenic Suffering and Burnout

Iatrogenic Suffering seen relationship with burnout Sx:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Depersonalization
  - A negative attitude towards patients/clients
  - Personal detachment
  - Loss of ideals
- Reduced sense of personal accomplishment and commitment to the profession.

Maslach, 1993

# Interpersonal Gap



# Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is ability to pay attention on purpose in the present moment and without judgement (Krazner, 2009)
- Being in touch with and aware of the present moment, with a just notice approach to your experience



# Mindfulness

- Informs all types of professionally relevant knowledge, including facts, personal experiences, processes, and know-how, each of which may be tacit or explicit

## Explicit knowledge:

- readily taught
- accessible to awareness
- quantifiable
- easily translated into evidence-based guidelines

## Tacit knowledge:

- learned during observation and practice
- includes prior experiences theories-in-action, and deeply held values
- usually applied more inductively

# Satir Iceberg



**BEHAVIOUR** (action, storyline)

**COPING** (stances)

**FEELINGS** (joy, excitement, anger hurt, fear, sadness)

**FEELINGS ABOUT FEELINGS**  
(decisions about feelings)

**PERCEPTIONS** (beliefs, assumptions, mind-set,  
subjective reality)

**EXPECTATIONS** (of self, of others, from others)

**YEARNINGS** (loved, lovable, accepted, validated,  
purposeful, meaning, freedom)

**SELF: I AM** (life force, spirit, soul, essence)

# Your Timeline

Birth ----- X ----- Death

Your Name

1

1

2

2

3

3

4

4

5

5

As I complete this time line I feel \_\_\_\_\_

# Life Altering Event

Birth-----X----- Death

Your Name

1

1

2

2

3

3

4

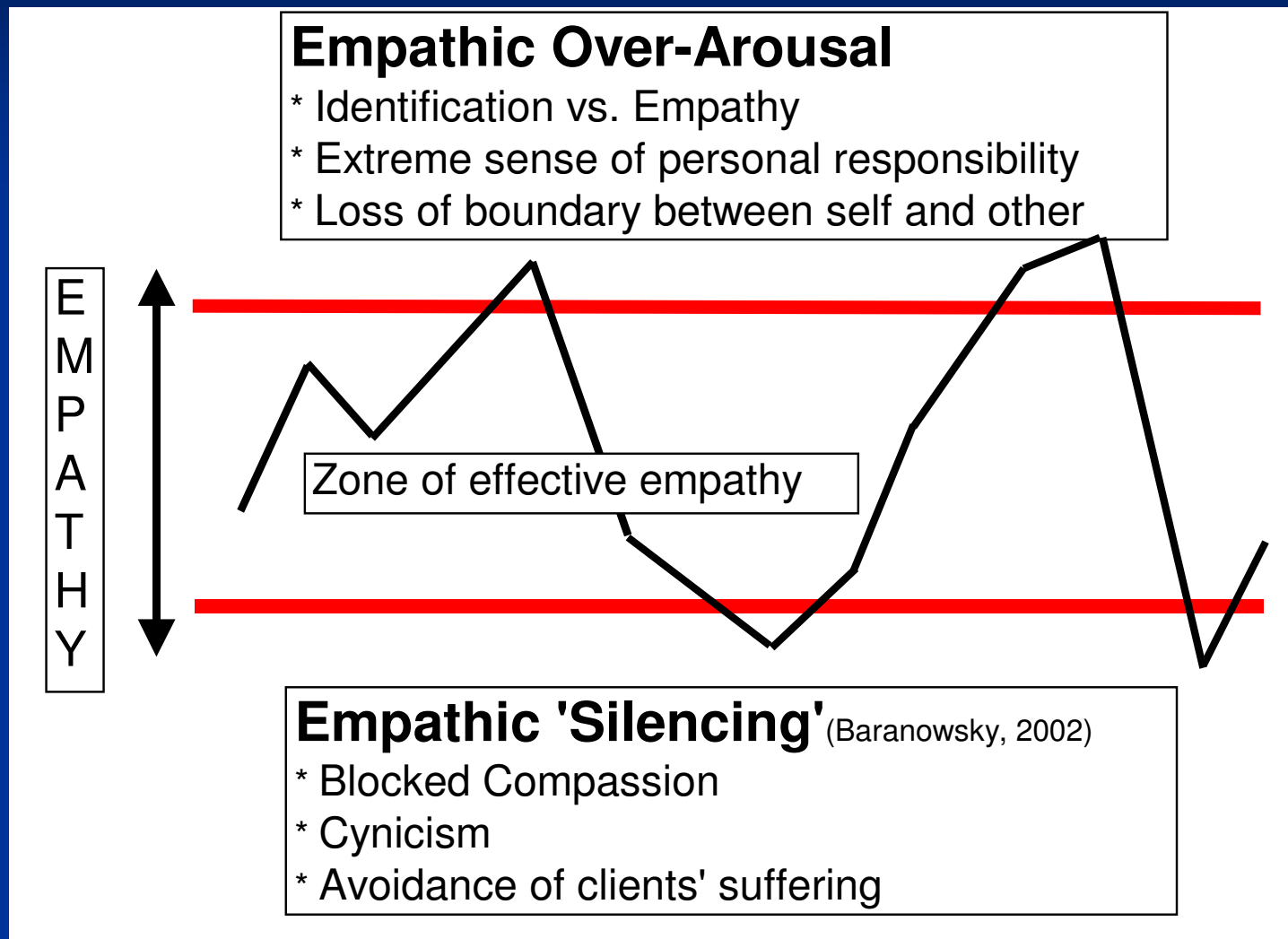
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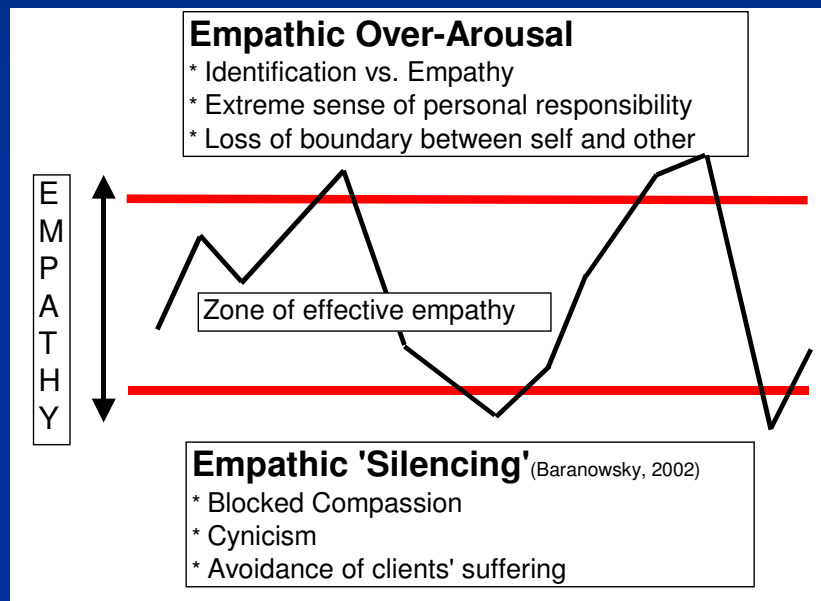
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As I complete this time line I feel \_\_\_\_\_

# Window of Tolerance



# Window of Empathic Engagement



## Over-Arousal

- Activation of personal trauma history
- Transfer of intensity/anxiety from self to other

## Silencing Response

- Minimizing others' distress
- Avoiding the topic/Fearing what the other person has to say
- Blaming others for their experiences
- Feeling numb

# Window of Effective Empathic Engagement: Mediating Factors

## Self

- Life stage
- Current personal stressors
- Stress Hardiness
- Spiritual Connection
- Resolution of personal trauma history

## Work

- Supervision: Skill based/Support based
- Role: Degree of isolation/Agency
- Experience: History/Training/Skill Level
- Quality of working relationships
- Ecological context

# Physicians Dealing with Patient

## Death (Whitehead, 2012)

Key Theme: Action versus Presence

### Action Mode

- Acute situations – Life or Death
- Focus on pre-established protocols or pathways
- Reduced personal/emotional experience

### Presence Mode

- Calmer situations – No immediate intervention needed
- Focus on mindful awareness of self and other
- Greater receptivity to new information/connection



# The Functional Disconnect

(Whitehead, 2012)

- Emotional Disconnect – a part of
  - Burnout
  - Compassion Fatigue
  - Vicarious / Secondary traumatic stress
- Functional Disconnect
  - *Functional* because of a balancing “emotional re-connect”
  - Allows emotional distance as a tool to remain functional
  - Disconnect can be generated by focusing on protocols
  - Reconnect can be generated by focusing on mindfulness

# Intentional Connection and Disconnection

Intentional disconnect for safety from harmful effects of difficult event.

1. Understand (empathy) experience of listener
2. Understand (self compassion) own triggers
3. Disconnect from the personal emotional relationship
4. Reconnect with your compassionate and empathetic self

# Debriefing

- Prior to event create agreement about how to debrief
- Focus is impact rather than content

# End of Day Ritual

- Leaving work and reconnecting to yourself

# Communication Template

**A**ttend

**B**ridge

**C**omment

**D**evelop Agreements

# Communication Template

## A ttend

- Self: What am I experiencing? What am I aware of?
- Other: What is the other person experiencing?

## B ridge

- Introduce topic (broadly)
- Introduce subject (specifically)
- Relationship awareness (dr/pt, colleagues, etc.)

## C omment:

- Say message
- Ask for what you need
- Check for understanding

## D evelop Contract:

- Acknowledge impact on patient (includes feelings, experiences and behaviours)
- Establish timeline/follow-up
- Immediate Plans (safety)

# ABCD template

## Highly Transferable

- Smoking cessation
- Sex and sexuality
- Obesity
- Collegial conversations
- Resident conversations
- Out-of-work conversations
- Others?

# Difficult and Awkward Conversations

What are the most challenging to have? (patients, their families, colleagues in same profession, different, within your own family)

What makes it challenging?



# Role Rehearsal

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- What surprised you?

# Practice in Pairs

- What did you do well? (how do you know?)
- What would you do differently next time?

# Closing

- What I take from today's session is...

# Centre for Practitioner Renewal

[www.practitionerrenewal.ca](http://www.practitionerrenewal.ca)