

Clarity and Compassion in Communication

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**Clinical
Neurological
Society of America**

Disclosures

None

Objectives

1. Begin to practice greater clarity of your own mind and communication with others.
2. Apply compassion-based communication skills in clinician and non-clinical conversations to establish mutually agreeable goals, agree on a plan.
3. Access resources to further develop clarity and compassion-based skills.



The Ground Rules

- Recognize your bias >> be open
- Recognize power/authority gradients
- Be present
- Introduce by name and role
- Make a personal connection
- Set agenda
- Deliver news as a Headline
 - information + meaning
- Ask open-ended questions
- Listen without interruption
- Respond to calls for compassion
- Learn what's most important to them
- Find – and articulate - shared goals
- Align recommendations to what's most important to the patient
- Convey information in small doses, clear language, no jargon
- Assure understanding
- Ask “what questions do you have”
- Summarize
- Agree on a plan
 - What, how, by whom, by when
 - Specific follow up plan
- What else?

Clarity: a case study

Me: That was a great visit with a retired ENT surgeon. She was smart and kind, and she appreciated my care for her.

My office: Dr. XX called to cancel her follow up. Said it was the worse visit ever. You didn't respect her and didn't care at all about what she came to see you for.

Me: [*horrified*] Please have her follow up and I'll talk with her.

What I heard: "my legs bother me"

What she said: "my legs hurt"

- She met diagnostic criteria for RLS, but was there for pain, not RLS.
- I focused on what was interesting and important to me.
- I didn't hear what was important to her.

Clarity

You << -- >> Them

Say what you mean. Mean what you say.

Ask what's most important to the other person.



Behfar Ehdai, MD, MPH



*For additional insights:
Dr. Geo Prostate Podcast
interview*



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
CHARLES DUHIGG
Author of *THE POWER OF HABIT*

How to
Unlock the
Secret
Language of
Connection

S
su
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supercom
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supercommunicato
supercommunicator
supercommunicators

Clarity

- Survey of >2000 physicians
 - Communication was cited as the most valued leadership trait.
 - It was also the top leadership skill physicians cited as the area of improvement that would most benefit the organization.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say

Clarity: start with yourself





"BRILLIANT." —Alan Alda

JILLIAN HORTON, M.D.

We
Are All
Perfectly
Fine

*A Memoir of Love,
Medicine and Healing*

A NATIONAL BESTSELLER





Mindful Practice

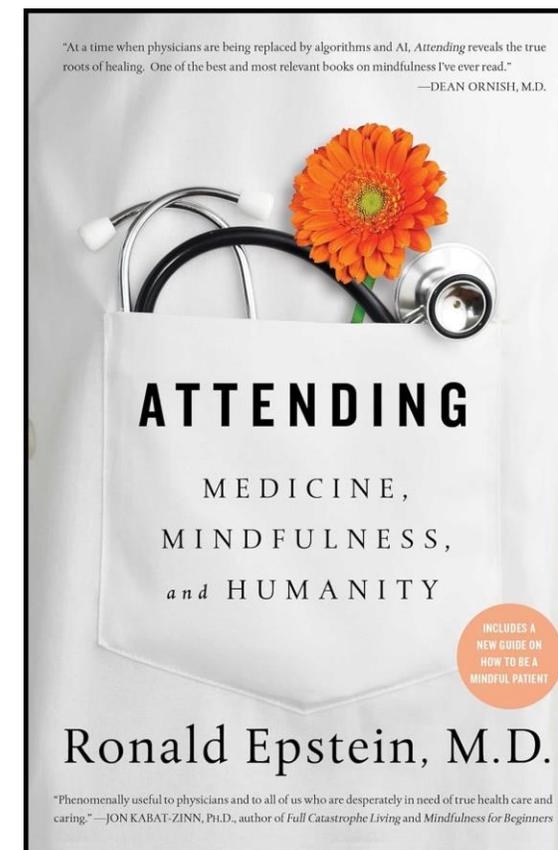
IN MEDICINE

<https://mindfulpracticeinmedicine.com/>

- Gets fewer calls from patients since practicing presence.
- Patients much less often need to repeat or amplify their concerns.

Flourishing in Medicine

Chapin Mill Retreat Center, NY



Mindfulness

- Awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose in the present moment without judgment
- Habituating mindfulness allows us to start an encounter without judgment.
 - If we recognize our natural biases, actively replace them with an openness, we enter into conversation ready to learn. It allows us to have a beginner's mindset. We are open to seeing that person as a whole person.
- Find common ground



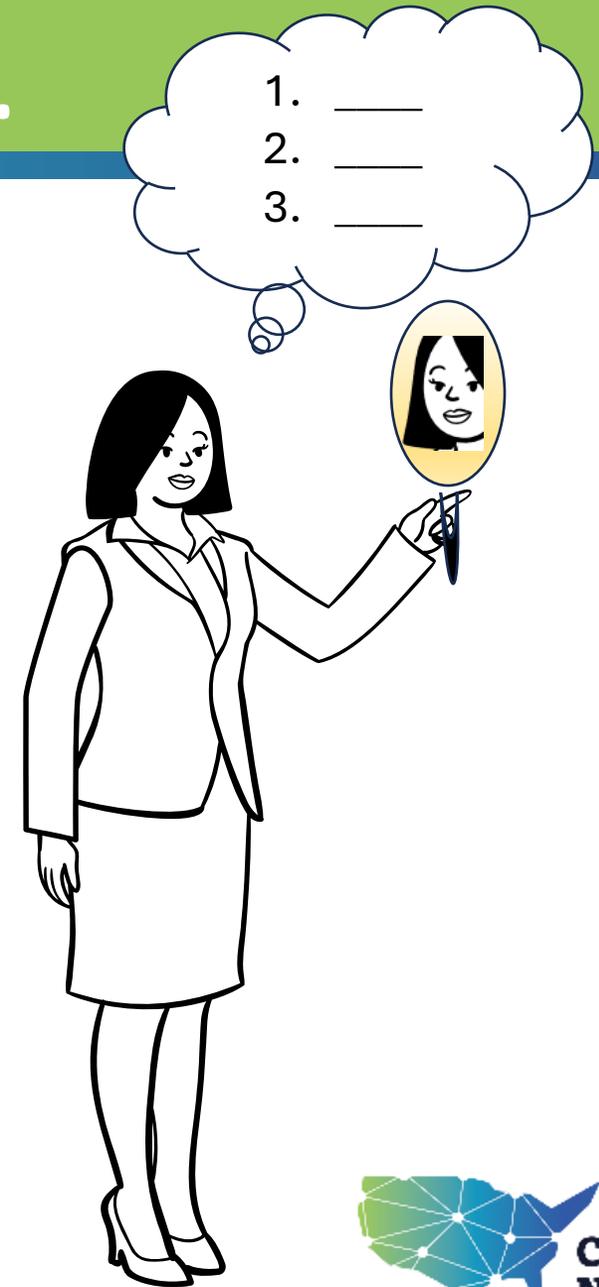
Jon Kabat-Zinn

Masterclass.com



Before every encounter...

- Check in with yourself
 - What's on your mind that might get in the way of your attention to the encounter?



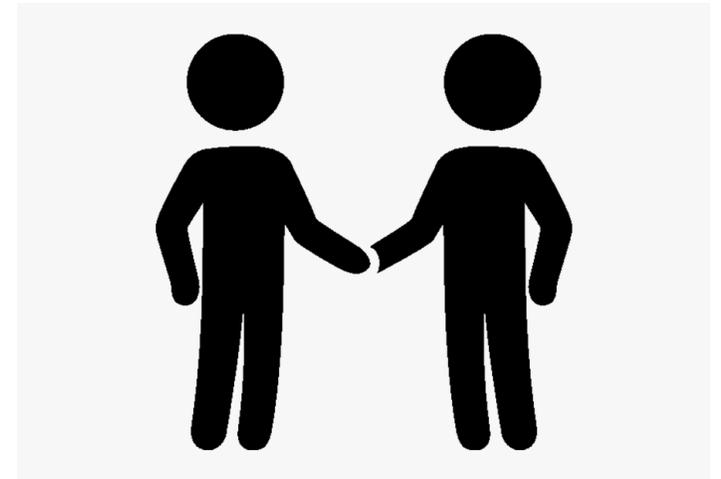
Set your intention for the encounter



I am here in this
moment for this
patient.

Enter every encounter

- With intention
- As if you have something to learn
- With a beginner's mindset



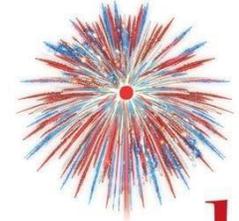
Positive Psychology

- PERMA
 - Positive emotions
 - Engagement – totally absorbed, getting lost in the activity
 - Relationships
 - Meaning
 - Accomplishment

- Doing a kindness produces the single most reliable momentary increase in wellbeing of all the exercises Martin Seligman has tested

"A compelling view of a positive human future, for individuals, corporations, and nations, brilliantly told." —Tony Hsieh, author of *Delivering Happiness* and CEO of Zappos.com, Inc.

A Visionary New Understanding
of Happiness and Well-being



Flourish

MARTIN E.P.
SELIGMAN

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS



Empathy ≠ Compassion

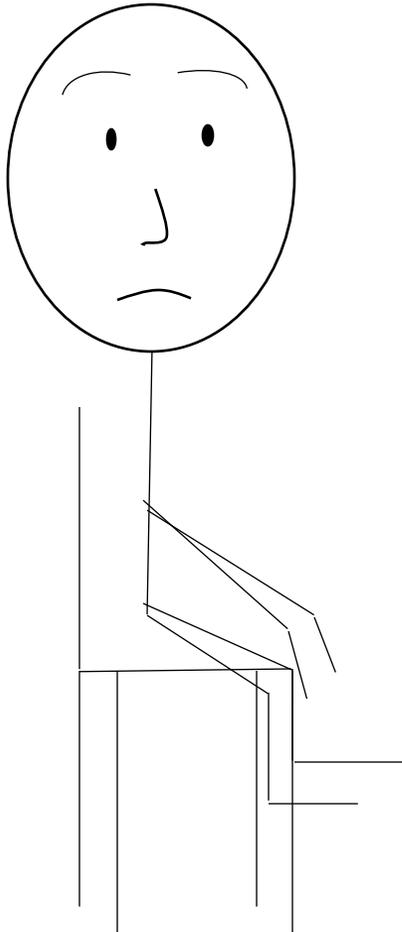
Empathy

- A feeling
 - someone else's suffering

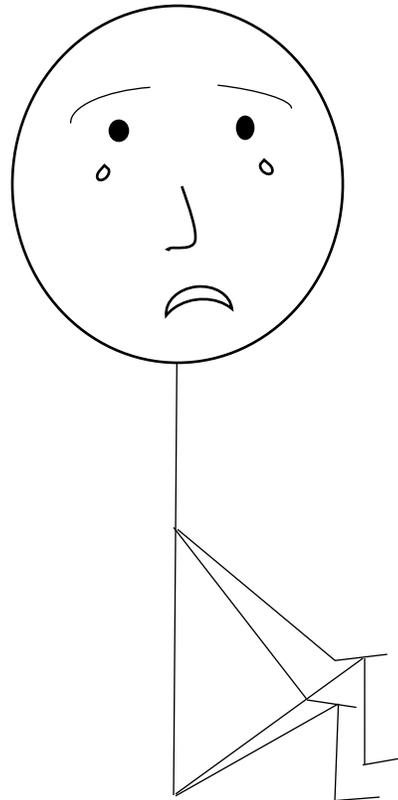
• Compassion

- An urge to take action
 - To relieve someone else's suffering

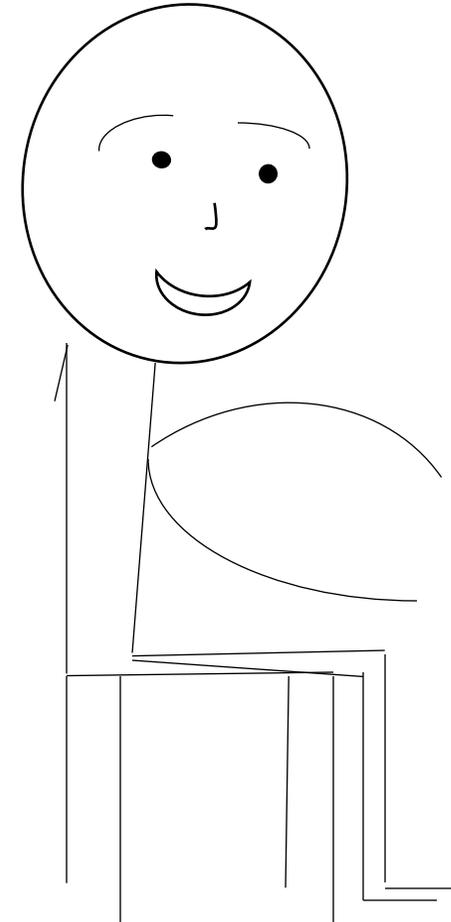
Empathy
(natural)



Empathic pain
(burnout)



Compassion
(helpful)



Compassion

- Has broad benefits to the receiver AND the giver
- Can be learned



Compassion

“We are in a compassion crisis”

~50% of Americans believe our healthcare system and providers are not compassionate

What % of “calls for compassion” do physicians miss?

60-90%

87% of patients rate kindness above wait time, travel distance, and cost of care

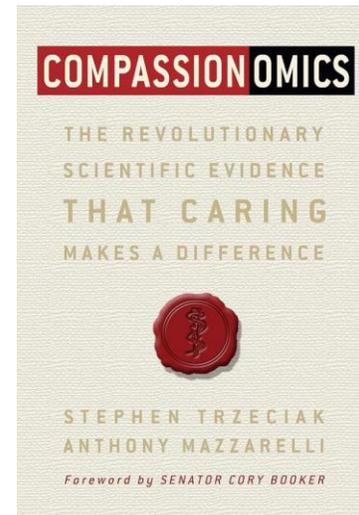
Compassion comprises less than 1% of all physician communication with patients.

2/3 of MDs & RNs have seen a ↓ in compassion in the past 5 years

Compassion matters

It improves patient outcomes, lower costs, and promotes provider resilience and wellbeing and reduces burnout.

FMRI: compassion is the most potent activator of happiness



Compassion Can Be Learned



Compassion as Treatment

- Study #1: Randomized controlled trial:
 - Surgical patients who received routine pre-op care were drowsy, but not calm.
 - Patients who had a compassion-based visit from the anesthesiologist were calm but not drowsy.

- Study #2:
 - Patients who received a compassionate pre-op visit by the anesthesiologist needed 50% less pain medication post-op.
 - Length of stay was significantly shorter than those who received conventional care.

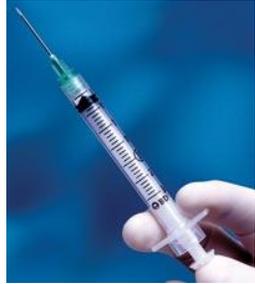


Photo: emcrit.org



Photo: MedicalNewstoday.com

Self Compassion

- Self esteem movement: “Average is not ok.”
 - So, people find ways to feel better about themselves by puffing themselves up compared to others.
 - “epidemic of narcissism”
 - highest levels ever recorded.
- “Welcome to Lake Wobegon. Where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average.”

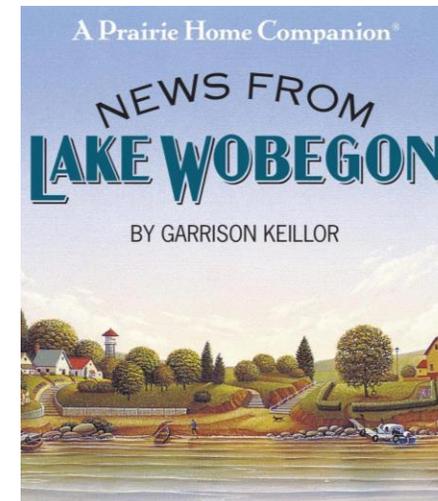


“A TRANSFORMATIVE READ.” —BRENE BROWN

THE PROVEN
POWER OF BEING KIND
TO YOURSELF

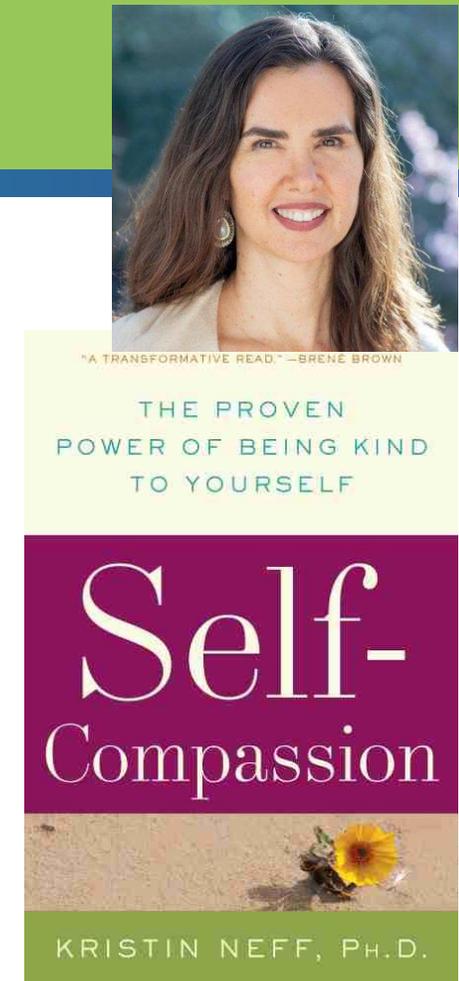
Self-
Compassion

KRISTIN NEFF, PH.D.



Self Compassion

- In related news...
 - there is a bullying epidemic. Build self esteem by feeling more powerful than others.
- Prejudice against those not like us
 - e.g. religious/ethnic/political
 - stems from building self esteem.
- How do we get off this treadmill? Self-compassion to embrace ourselves as we are, flaws and all.
- 3 core components
 - Treat self with kindness, patience, tolerance as we would a good friend
 - Common Humanity – everyone is in the in-group, and we all make mistakes.
 - Mindfulness – recognize and set aside bias. Be open.



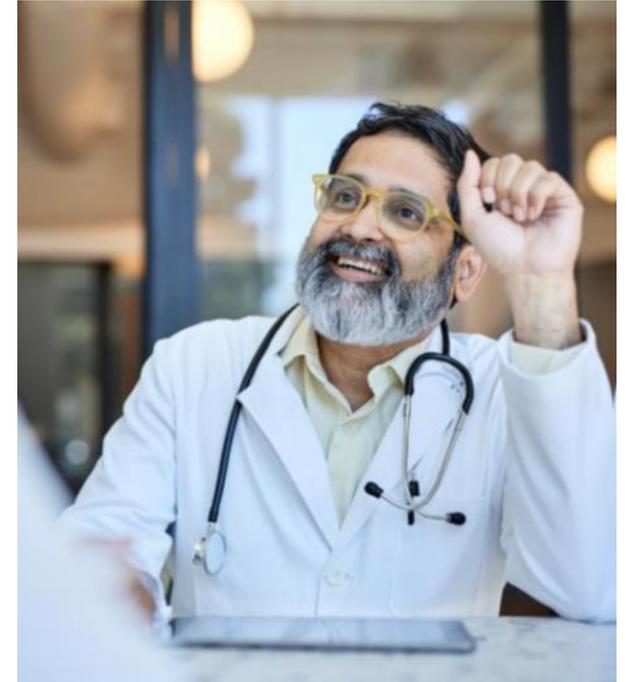
Self Compassion

When we are hard on ourselves it can be hard to be kind to others.



Does Compassion Matter?

- Many clinical benefits for patients – e.g. better outcomes
- Many benefits clinicians – e.g. better patient adherence
- Lower healthcare costs – e.g. reduced readmissions



What gets in the way of compassion?

- Distraction (thus the need for clarity and focus)
- Bias
- Gossip
- The Authority/Power/Knowledge/Access Gradient
- Impatience (physicians are very interruptive in clinical encounters)

Compassion – A Listening Project

Common Insights

- Find Common Ground and Shared Humanity
- Be Present and Listen
- Look Beyond Initial Impressions
- Letting Go of Judgment and Control
- Small Acts of Attention and Respect
- Finding Something to Appreciate
- Forgiveness
- Balance Boundaries with Openness

Compassion – A Listening Project

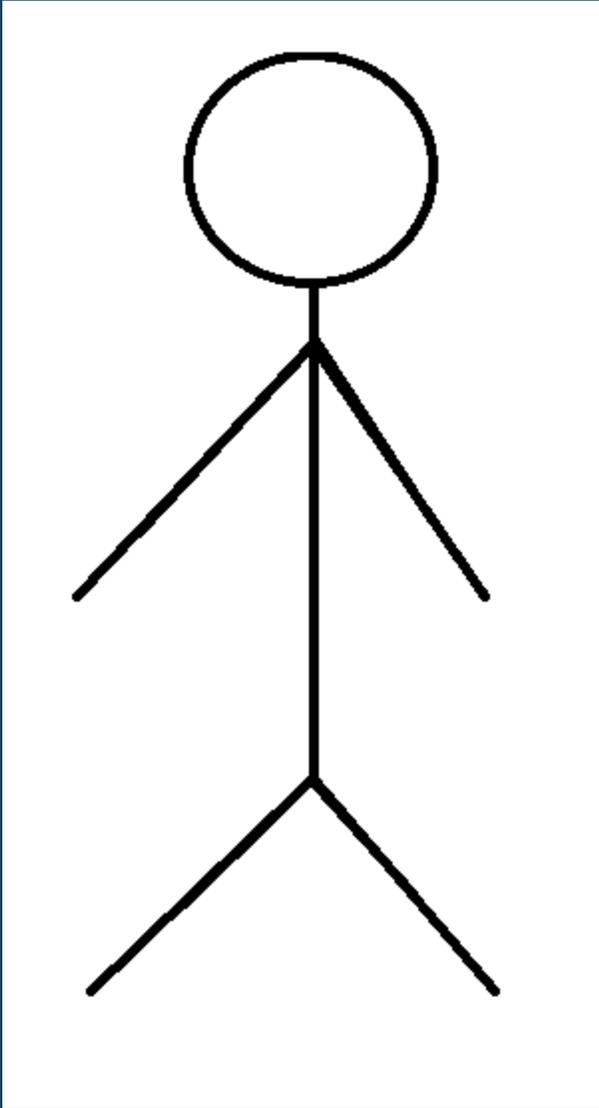
3 key success factors

- Personal Experience with Suffering or Illness
- Intentional Practice and Training in Compassion
- Ability to Recognize and Suspend Judgment

Recognize Your Bias

Prepare to be
Open





Tell us about this person



Tell us about this person



Tell us about
this person



Tell us about
this person

Recognize Your Bias

Tell us about
this patient



HE GOSSIPS HABITUALLY; HE
LACKS THE COMMON WISDOM
TO KEEP STILL THAT DEADLY
ENEMY OF MAN. HIS OWN
TONGUE

MARK TWAIN

ABOUTMARKTWAIN.COM

Those who
gossip with
you will
gossip
about you.

WWW.LIVELIFEHAPPY.COM



The erosive nature of gossip



Make a personal connection

- Trust
- Compassion
- Speed – you'll get to the goal faster if you find common ground
- Effectiveness
 - Patients are more likely to follow your recommendations
 - Colleagues will be more collaborative
- Fun!

We are social creatures



~ 500,000 years ago our brains doubled in size, perhaps to become a “relationship simulation machine”

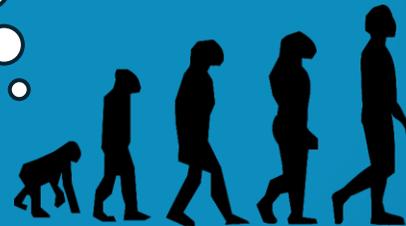
- constantly modeling social situations in the prefrontal cortex and choose the optimal course of action.

(Nick Humphrey, neuropsychologist)



Me,
myself,
and I

I depend on other people to survive. If I help them, and they help me, we all survive.



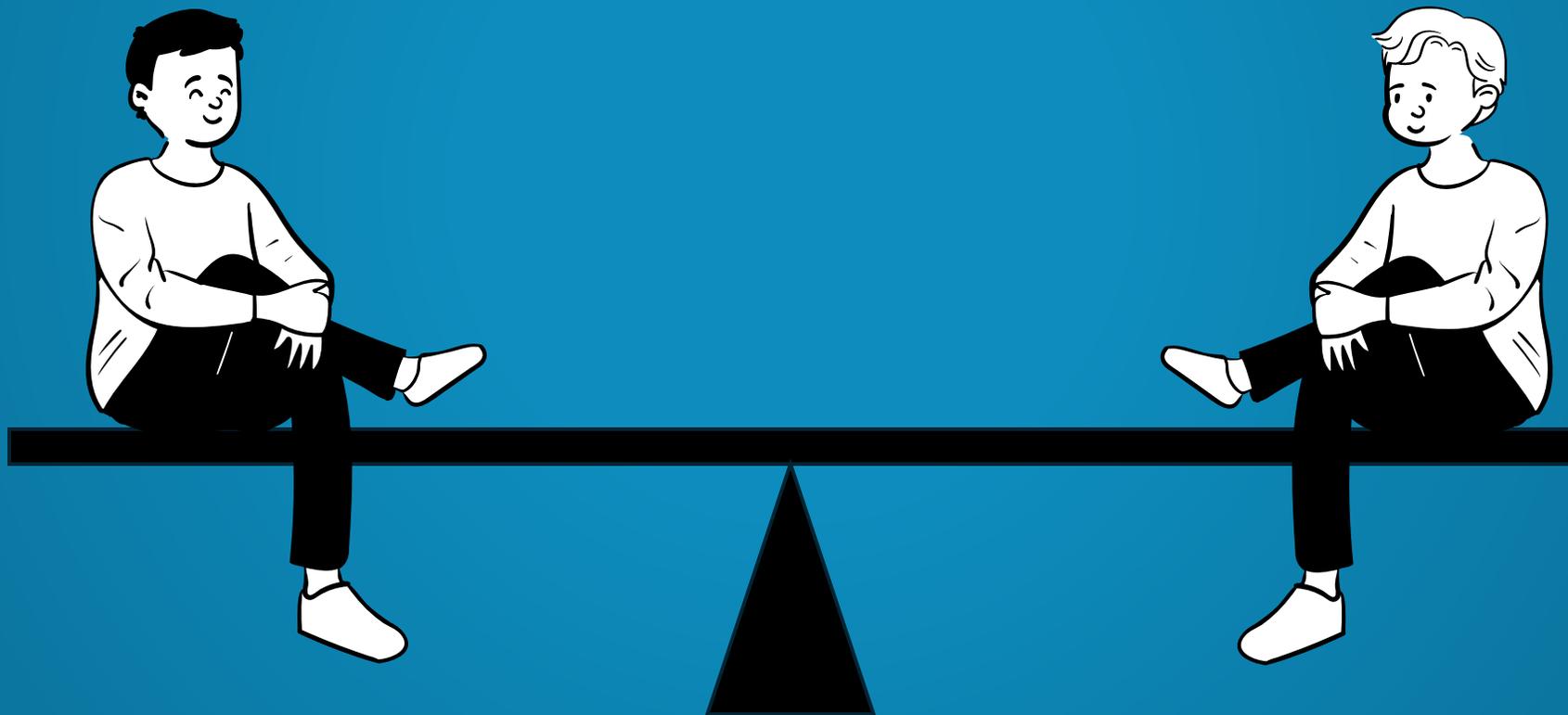
“Group Selection” not just individual.

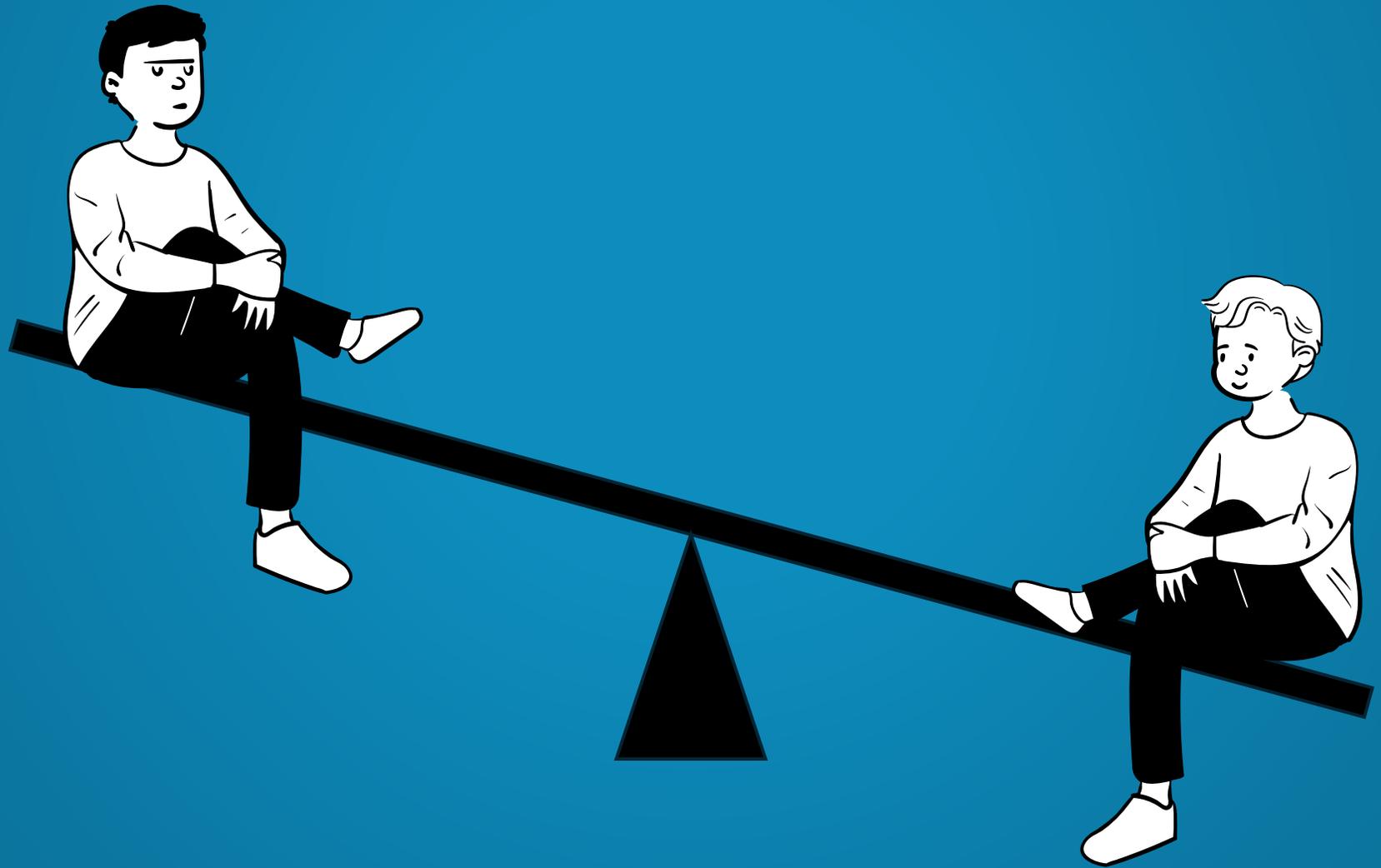
- Being social is the most successful form of higher adaptation known.
- Socially cooperative groups win out over self-motivated groups.



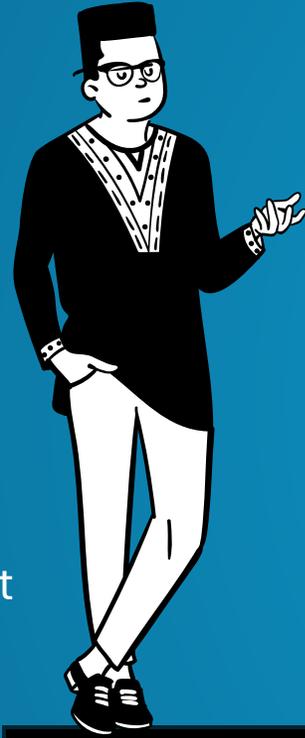
Introducing...

The Authority Gradient

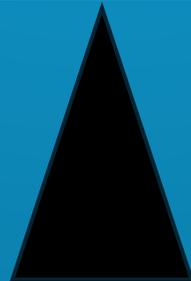
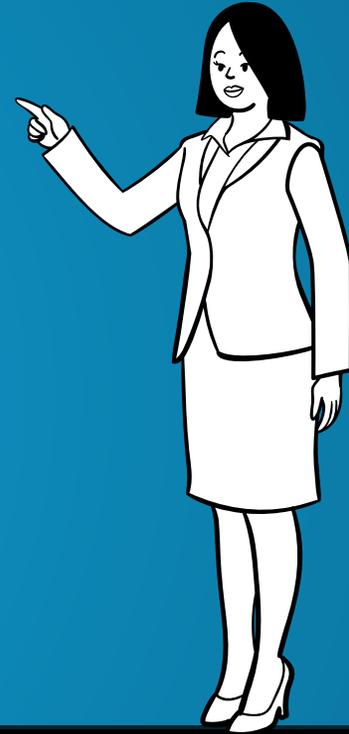




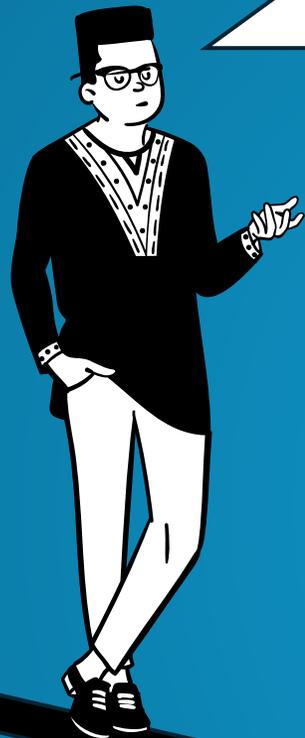
Hospitalist



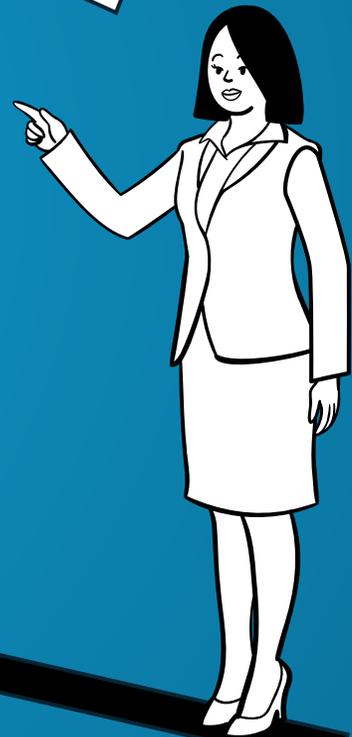
Neurologist



Hospitalist



I'm not sure
about that



Neurologist

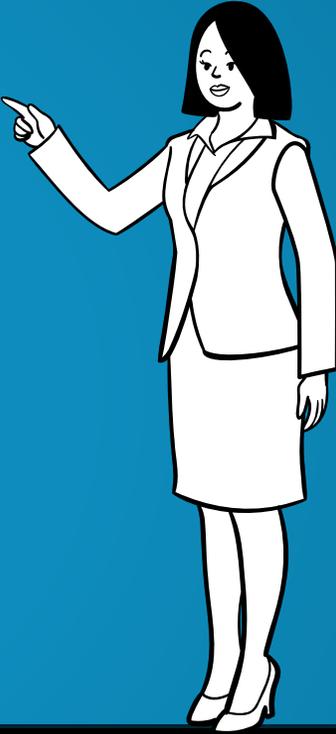
What can she do to level the gradient?



Yeah, we're getting slammed.



Hospitalist

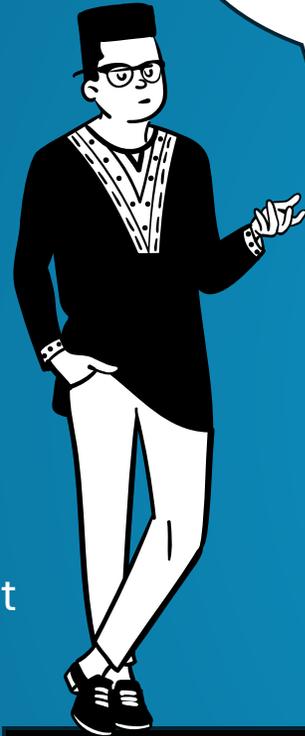


Neurologist

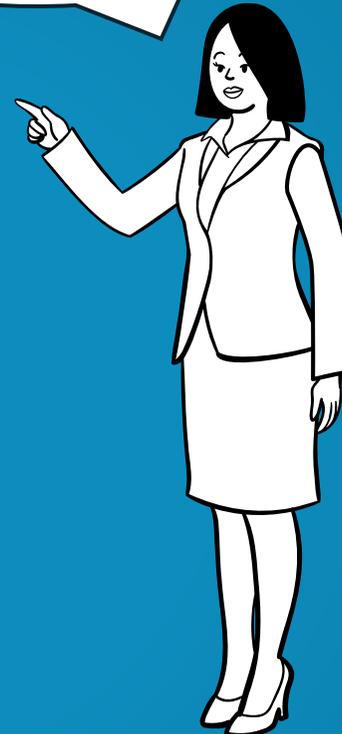


Yeah, we're getting slammed.

Sorry about the rough week. Been there.



Hospitalist



Neurologist



Would it be okay
if we do the MRI
as an outpatient?

About that MRI I
ordered...

Hospitalist

Neurologist

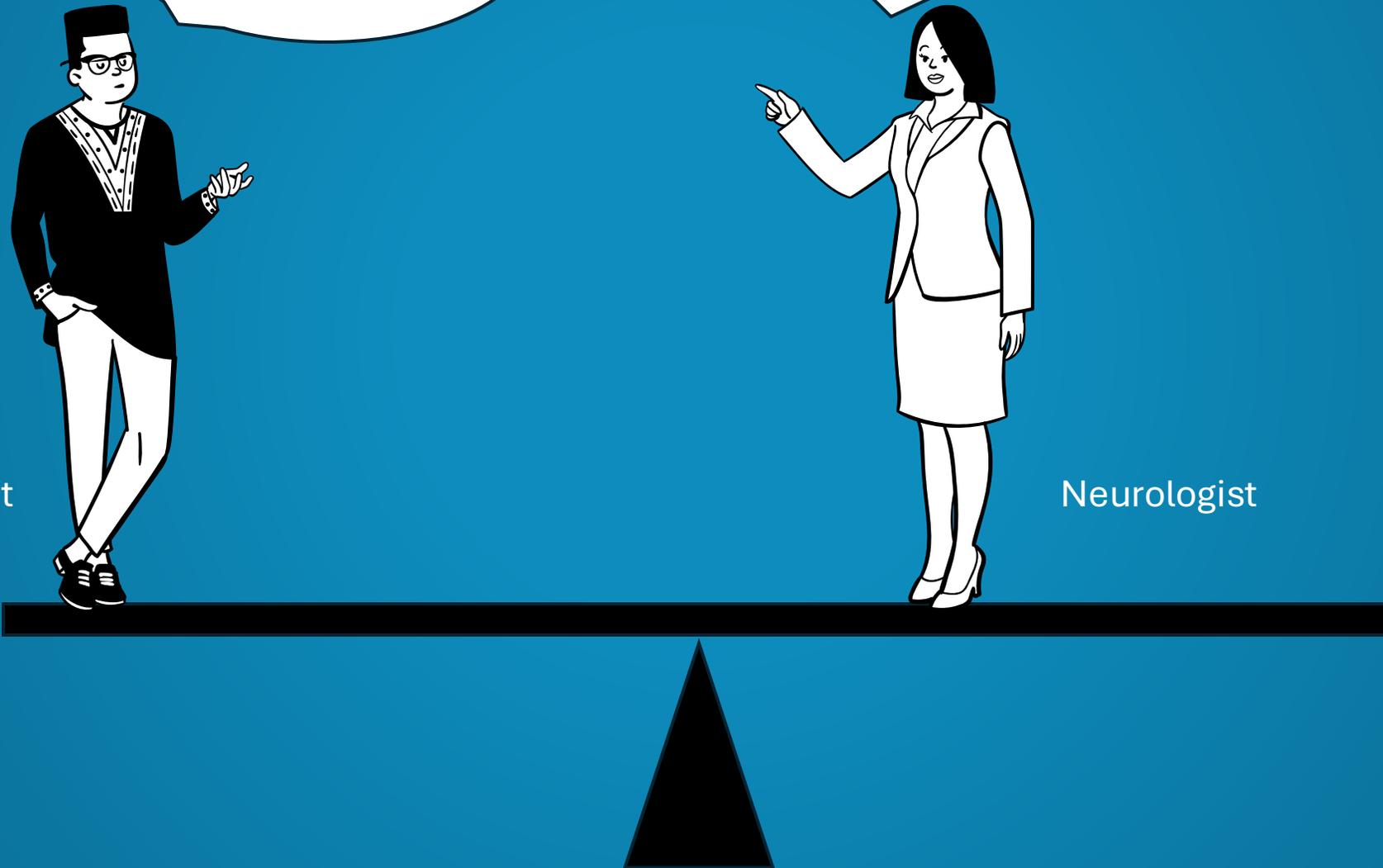


Ok, we can do that.

Actually, I need it to make a decision about his care while he's here.

Hospitalist

Neurologist



Say what
you mean.
Mean what
you say.

Clarity

Ask more
questions

Ask
better
questions



**Clinical
Neurological
Society of America**

Clarity: Less is more

- We often explain things in many more words than are actually necessary to get our point across, and sometimes we use words that are unnecessarily complicated or redundant so that it takes much more time to convey what we want to say and also can be circuitous and confusing in the delivery, so that in the end the recipient has no idea what we said.
- We often say more, and use more complex words, than we need.

Headline

- Deliver message as a headline
 - Information + meaning
- Pause. Ask if they are ready for more.
- Deliver the rest of the “article” after that, if/when they are ready for it.

"All the News That's Fit to Print" **The New York Times** LATE CITY EDITION
VOL. CXVIII, No. 40,721 © 1969 The New York Times Company NEW YORK, MONDAY, JULY 21, 1969 10 CENTS

MEN WALK ON MOON

ASTRONAUTS LAND ON PLAIN; COLLECT ROCKS, PLANT FLAG

**Voice From Moon:
'Eagle Has Landed'**

**A Powdery Surface
Is Closely Explored**

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD
Special to The New York Times

HOUSTON, Monday, July 21—Men have landed and walked on the moon.

Two American astronauts of Apollo 11, aimed while fragile four-legged lunar module safely and smoothly to the historic landing yesterday at 4:17:40 P.M., Eastern daylight time.

Neil A. Armstrong, the 38-year-old civilian commander, radioed to earth and the mission control room here: "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed."

The first man to reach the moon—Mr. Armstrong and his co-pilot, Col. Edwin E. Aldrin Jr., of the Air Force—kept their ship to rest on a level, rock-strewn plain near the southwestern shore of the arid Sea of Tranquility.

About six and a half hours later, Mr. Armstrong opened the landing craft's hatch, stepped slowly down the ladder and declared as he planted the first human footprint on the lunar surface:

"That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

His first step on the moon came at 10:56:23 P.M., as a television camera outside the craft transmitted live every move to an awed and excited audience of hundreds of millions of people on earth.

Tentative Step Test Soil



Which of these is a Headline?

1. Based on everything you've told me, plus your exam and all of your testing, it's definitely not MS or a brain tumor. You have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which is a progressive disease that we don't have a cure for.
2. First let's go over all your test results.
3. I wish I had better news, but it's ALS, also called Lou Gehrig's disease, which is the diagnosis we were most worried about.



Which of these is a Headline?

1. Based on everything you've told me, plus your exam and all of your testing, it's definitely not MS or a brain tumor. You have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which is a progressive disease that we don't have a cure for.
2. First let's go over all your test results.
3. I wish I had better news, but it's ALS, also called Lou Gehrig's disease, which is the diagnosis we were most worried about.



Avoid interruption

- When given an open-ended question, guess how long a patient will talk before pausing?

90 seconds

- After asking an open-ended question, guess how long it takes a physician to interrupt?

12 seconds



leaderstat.com

Continuing phrases and gestures

- What indicates you're listening and want to hear more?
 - Nodding
 - Leaning in



Vanessa Van Edwards

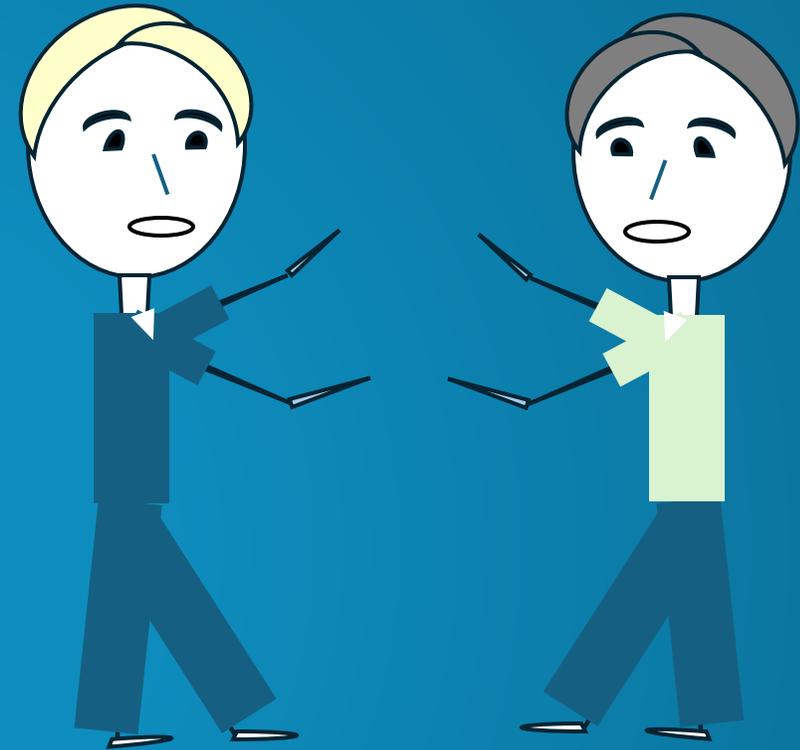
Continuing phrases and gestures

- What indicates you're listening and want to hear more?
 - Nodding
 - Leaning in
 - Tell me more...
 - Mirroring



Mirroring

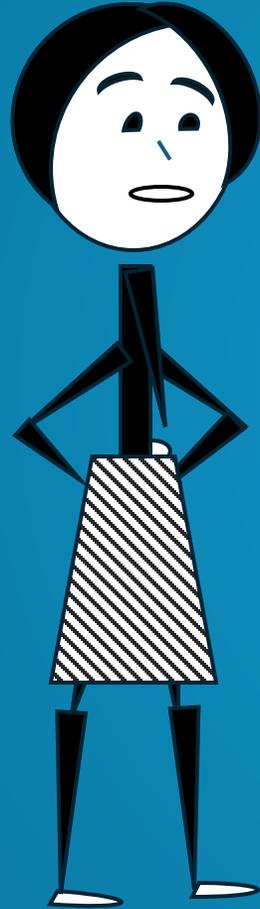
- Engenders trust
- Prompts more conversation and increases information exchange



Body Movement Synchrony Predicts Degrees of Information Exchange in a Natural Conversation

Ayaka Tsuchiya¹, Hiroki Ora^{1}, Qiao Hao¹, Yumi Ono¹, Hikari Sato¹, Kohei Kameda² and Yoshihiro Miyake¹*

You, practice leader



Your younger associate

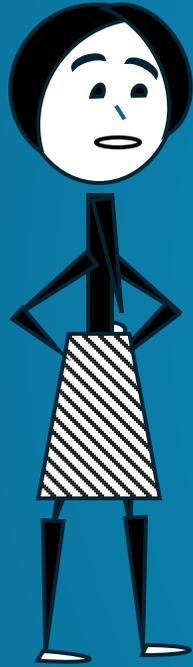


I had no idea! I have twins myself. Did you know that? Twins are the best. It's so hard when they're babies and then it's so much fun. Are there any twins in your family?



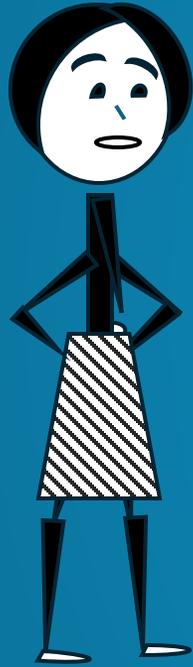
“Dr. Zimmerman told me this morning that his wife, who’s pregnant with twins – I’m not sure if you knew that –





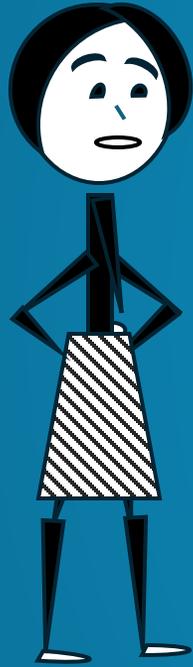
“Dr. Zimmerman told me this morning that his wife, who’s pregnant with twins – I’m not sure if you knew that – has stage 4 ovarian cancer. He said he’s fine and is just going to keep working and take things as they come, but I’m pretty worried about him. I don’t know how he’s going to get through this. He doesn’t have any family here. And they already have 2 little kids. I’m sad and it’s not even my wife.”





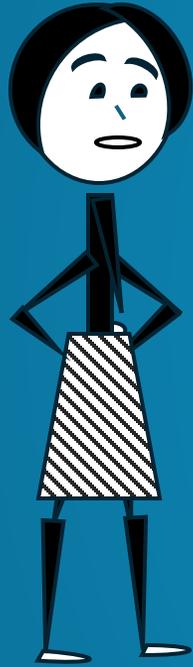
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“Dr. Zimmerman told me this morning that his wife, who’s **pregnant with twins** – I’m not sure if you knew that – has **stage 4 ovarian cancer**. He said he’s fine and is just going to keep working and take things as they come, but I’m pretty worried about him. I don’t know how he’s going to get through this. He doesn’t have any family here. And they already have 2 little kids.
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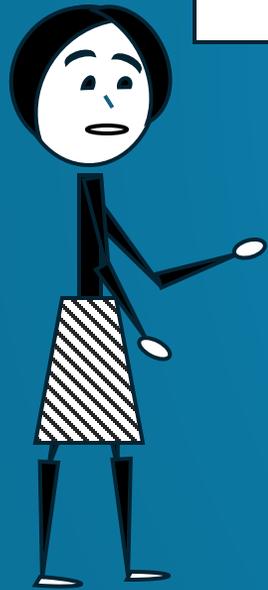




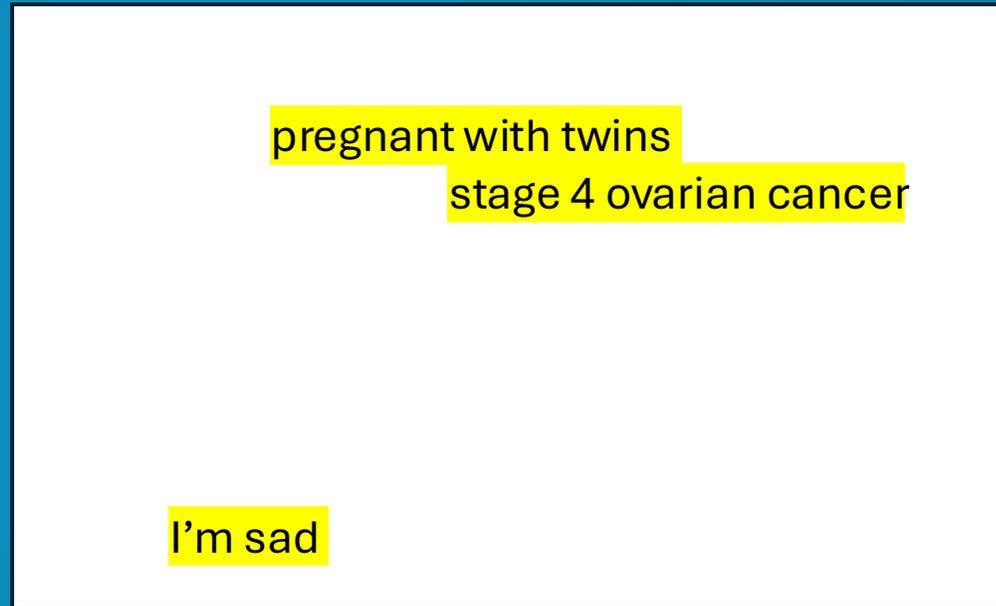
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How could she respond...?

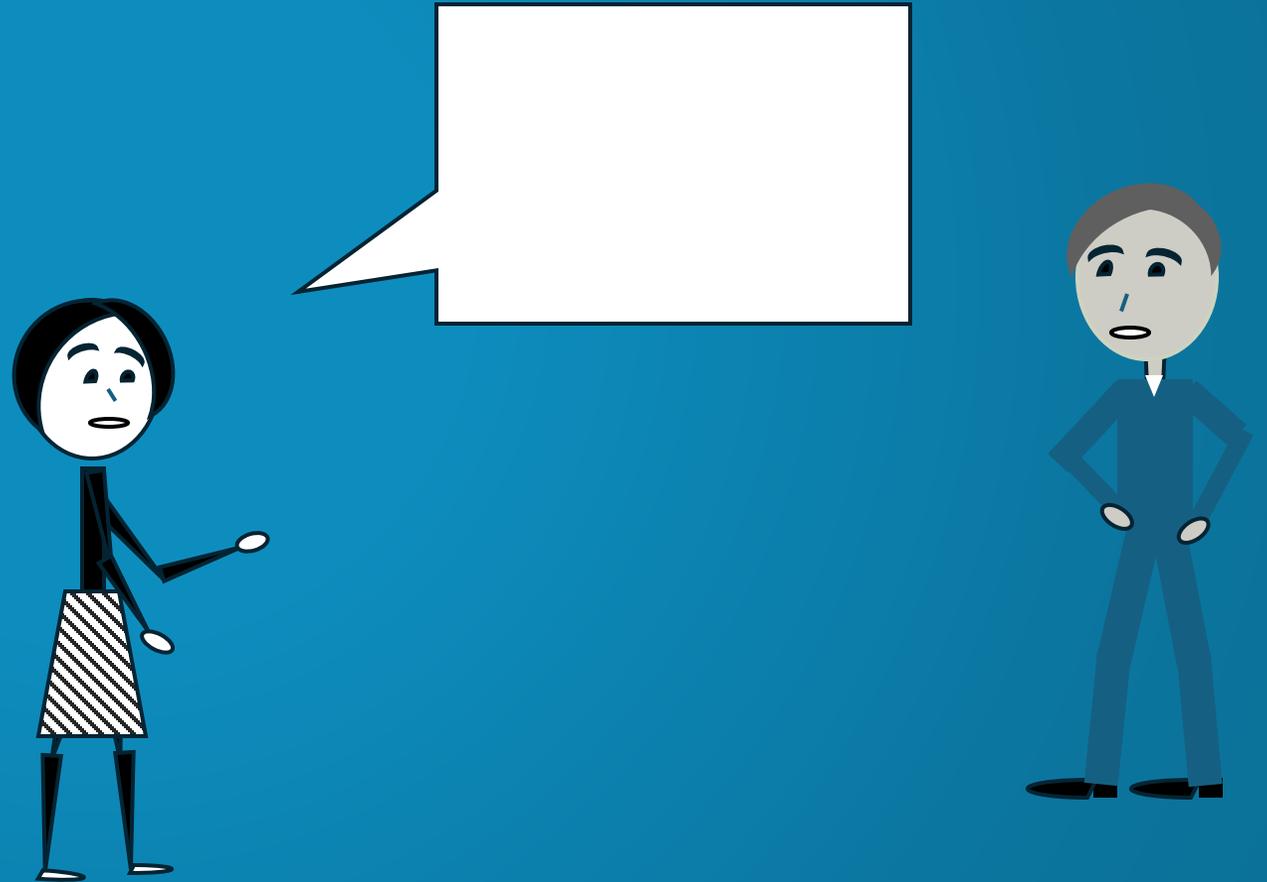


These are
“calls for compassion”



Summarize the conversation

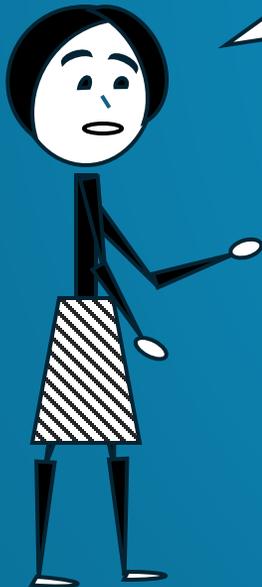
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Summarize the conversation

Thank you for telling me about Dr. Zimmerman. Supporting him personally professionally, and supporting the team, will be important.

We talked about EAP. Your ideas about a buddy system, and getting coverage if he takes a leave, are all really good.



Thank you for telling me about Dr. Zimmerman. Supporting him personally professionally, and support the team, is going to be important. We talked about EAP. Your ideas about a buddy system, and getting coverage if he takes a leave are all really good.

What else?

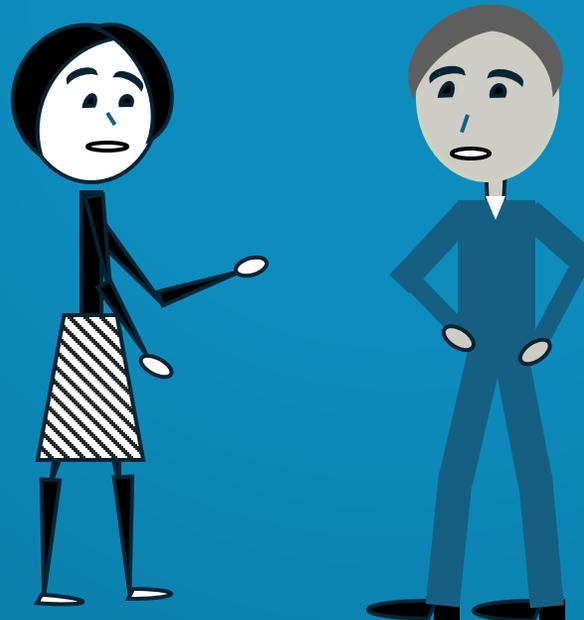


I think that's good.



The plan

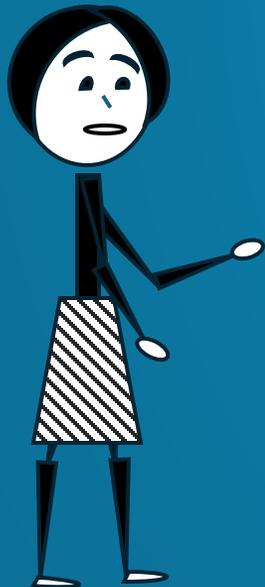
- What will be done
- By whom
- By when
- Follow up plan
 - Where
 - When



Let's agree on a plan.

How about this?:

1. You'll talk to him about EAP this week.
2. I'll check in with him at least once a week. Grab lunch or coffee, starting this week.
3. You'll look into the coverage options in next week in case we need it.
4. Let's meet again at 9 on Friday in 2 weeks.



Does this pass the test?

- What
- Who is responsible
- By when
- Follow up plan

Summary – your toolbox

- Recognize bias, prepare to be open.
- Beware of gossip.
- Set your intention before each encounter.
- Compassion can be learned.
- Make a personal connection. Trust and compassion follow.
- Doing kind gestures increases your own wellbeing.
- Narrow the authority gradient.
- Communicate with clarity.
 - Say what you mean. Mean what you say.
- Ask open ended questions. Listen without interrupting.
- Use continuing gestures: nod, lean in, mirror
- Respond to calls for compassion.
- Summarize and agree on a plan.

