

Engaging with Civility: A Conversation Model

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What we'll cover:

- A look at our brains during conflict
- Recognizing needs during conflict
- Explore tools to settle ourselves and engage with civility at times of high emotion.

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 **Bear = Threat!**

 **Escape**

Defend

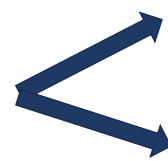
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To survive in a world with bears, our brains learned we needed to be connected to other humans.



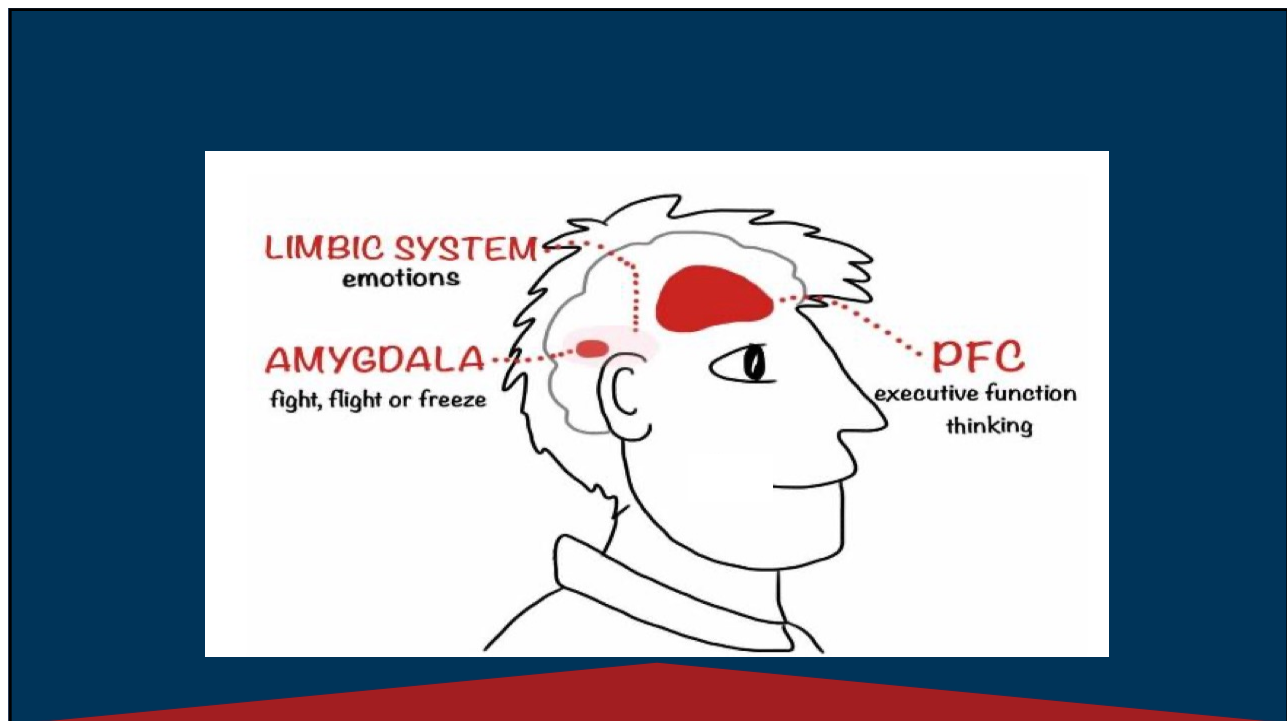
Neuroscientists have established that our brains react to perceived social threats the same way they do to perceived physical threats.



Escape

Defend

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So we experience these situations as social threats...and often as threats to our sense of who we are, too.



The image shows a man in a dark suit and light shirt leaning forward over a wooden table. He has a frustrated or angry expression, with his mouth open as if shouting. Overlaid on the bottom of the image are three icons: a red fist, a green stick figure running, and a blue snowflake.

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We get activated when we feel that our needs aren't being met.

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Exploring Needs



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Your Turn – Thinking about Needs



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Needs the resident at the mic may have:



- To be heard and seen
- To be recognized as a part of the community
- To be recognized as having a view and voice that matters
- To share their passion
- To express anger (often safer than expressing fear) about something that is impacting/will impact them, their home, and/or their loved ones.

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Needs you have as you sit on (or in front of) the dais:

- Appear competent and professional
- Affirm that it was wise to put you in the role you hold
- Represent constituents (commission)
- Represent city administration and what can actually be done (CAO)
- Appear fair
- Not look like a doofus on TV



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Another universal need:

the need for dignity –
to feel seen and respected by those
around us.

We'll return to this point later.

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We get activated when we feel that our needs aren't being met.



How can we meet our own needs?



What can we do to help meet theirs?



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Tools to Get Out of Flight/Fight/Freeze and Move Toward Meeting Needs



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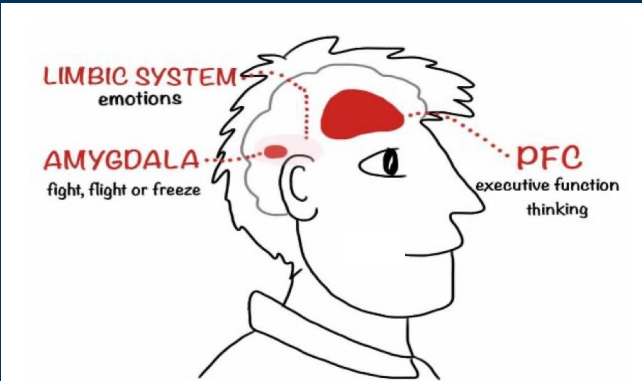
**Tool #1:
Regulate**

**Settle the FFF response
and get back into the
thinking brain.**



Two red chevrons pointing right are on the left side of the dark blue box. Two red chevrons pointing right are on the bottom right side of the dark blue box.

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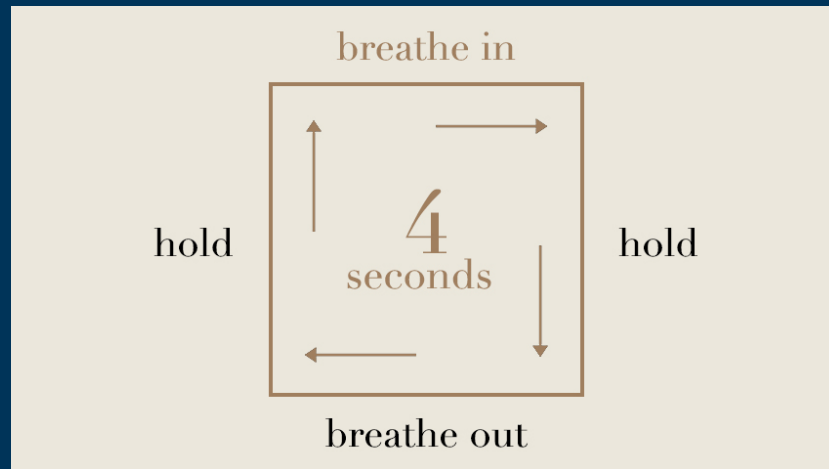


Regulate

→ *Pause and breathe.*

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Regulate: Box Breathing



→ *Once settled, remember: "It's just about needs."*

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Tool #2:
Listen, Focus, Paraphrase
and Acknowledge



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A challenge: while a conversation is an exchange of ideas, we often focus on broadcasting rather than listening.



*Here we need to lean into the **listening** part.*

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Then, **focus** and **paraphrase** to re-engage your thinking brain.

“Our property taxes are too high and now you’re talking about raising them again! You’re pricing people out of this town!”

“It sounds like you see a real hit to your budget when your property taxes come due.”

They may agree or they may correct you; either way their emotions will likely remain high. So we continue a cycle of listening and paraphrasing until they calm a bit because we’re hearing them right.

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Next, **acknowledge** what we hear.

PRO TIP #1: Don't make it about you.

John: "I had a rough day."

Vanessa: "Yeah, me too."

"Ugh, I'm sorry."

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PRO TIP #2: Acknowledging is not minimizing.

Carla: "I'm really worried about the new work groups. I hate that we won't be working on the same team."

Jose: "It really stinks. But I'm sure we'll get used to it."

"Yeah, it really stinks. It's a hard change after so many years working together."

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PRO TIP #3: Acknowledging is not agreeing.

Carla: “I’m really worried about the new work groups. I hate that we won’t be working on the same team.”

Jose: “It really stinks. ~~But~~ I’m sure we’ll get used to it.”

~~“Yeah, it really stinks. It’s a big change after so many years working together.”~~

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Let’s Practice!

Acknowledge what the world looks/feels like to the other person.

HOT TIP: Don’t say “but”.



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PAIR UP & PRACTICE

“I’m so stressed about getting my history project done, plus I have that chemistry test on Tuesday!”

“I can’t believe you voted against the funding increase for the food bank. This is a basic need for so many in our community.”

OR try using a commonly heard issue of your own!

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Tool #3:
If/when you decide
to engage in
the conversation,
approach it as a
learning conversation.



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*In a learning conversation
the goal is **to learn**, not convince.*

Stay Curious!

*Trust that simply listening/learning
is **NOT** a threat to our identity or values.*

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Leaning into a Learning Conversation

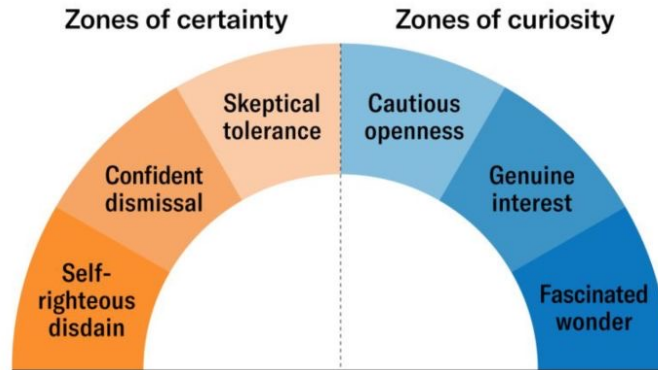
1. **Focus and breathe.**
 - Reassure yourself that you can learn about someone's views and values without it threatening your own.
2. **Be curious about who they are.**
 - Ask questions about their time in the community, their family, neighborhood, etc. *Stay focused on them.*
3. **Listen for values.**
 - What values do you share?
4. **If appropriate—after a lot of listening—share a story about shared values.**



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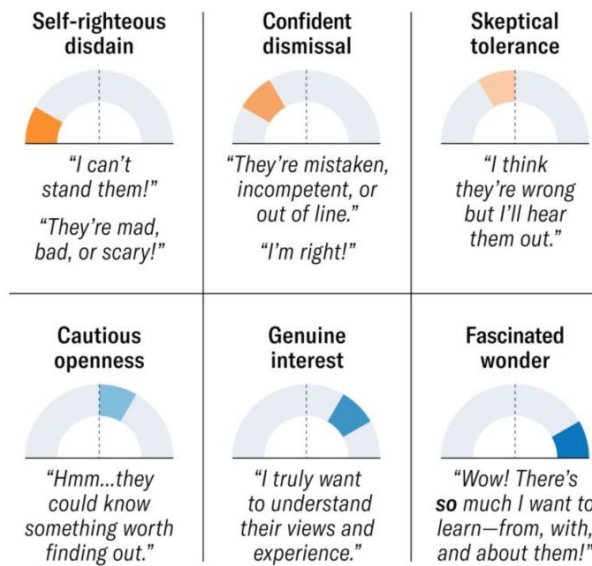
The Curiosity Curve

Before high-stakes conversations, gauge whether you're actually open to vital new information from your counterpart.




Source: Jeff Wetzler, inspired by Braver Angels' "The Emotional and Intellectual Transformation of De-Polarization"

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Remember that we all have a need for **dignity**:

to feel seen and respected by those around us.

*Engaging in a **learning conversation** indicates that I see and value you as a member of this community.*

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THE DIGNITY INDEX <https://www.dignity.us/>

— CONTEMPT DIGNITY —

<div style="background-color: #f96; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 4 <p><i>“We’re better than those people. They don’t really belong. They’re not one of us.”</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #f06; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 3 <p><i>“We’re the good people and they’re the bad people. It’s us vs. them.”</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #e66; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 2 <p><i>“Those people are evil and they’re going to ruin our <u>community</u> if we let them. It’s us or them.”</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #d66; padding: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 1 <p><i>“They’re not even human. It’s our moral duty to destroy them before they destroy us.”</i></p> </div>	<div style="background-color: #00a0e3; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 8 <p><i>“Each one of us is born with inherent worth, so we treat everyone with dignity—no matter what.”</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #00c0b3; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 7 <p><i>“We fully engage with the other side, discussing even values and interests we don’t share, open to admitting mistakes or changing our minds.”</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #00d080; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 6 <p><i>“We always talk to the other side, searching for the values and interests we share.”</i></p> </div> <div style="background-color: #90e040; padding: 10px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> 5 <p><i>“The other side has a right to be here and a right to be heard. It’s their <u>community</u>, too.”</i></p> </div>
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Skills for Dignified Disagreement

- 
Be curious, not furious
 When there is a disagreement, approach it with curiosity, using language that invites dialogue.
- 
Regulate then debate
 When you start to get upset, pause and take a breath before speaking.
- 
Listen to hear, not to respond
 Really listen to the other person and consider summarizing briefly what you heard.
- 
Challenge ideas, don't attack people
 Speak your truth but do it with dignity.
- 
Acknowledge knowledge
 When someone else makes a logical or interesting point, acknowledge their point.
- 
Build up rather than tear down
 Advocate, explain, and build up your idea rather than just attacking others' ideas and/or dehumanizing people.

THE DIGNITY INDEX

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Your toolbox

(for having more civility and understanding in your conversations):

Consider a scenario you face.
Prepare for a future conversation using the tools we practiced today.

- 1. Regulate & Consider Needs**
- 2. Paraphrase & Acknowledge**
- 3. Lean into Learning** (stay curious & extend dignity)





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