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This menu allows you to **control**:
- **Raise Hand**
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Video options are not available for participants. Participants can be unmuted by raising their hand and being recognized by the presenter.

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COE Training

Let's Talk About Conflict De-escalation

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Learning Objectives

Attendees will learn to do the following:

1. Identify the dynamics of conflict in SUD care settings.

2. Analyze conflict and the therapeutic alliance.

3. Describe how to avoid escalating a disagreement into a risky conflict.

4. Discuss how to handle conflict as it occurs.

Conflict Dynamics

Addressing Substance Misuse

There is an inherent defensiveness

- Most people experience **defensiveness** when having to examine problematic use of drugs.

- Undertones of addiction being a moral weakness add to barriers to constructively addressing it.

- **Peer services** serve to reduce these dynamics by **meeting people where they are** and emphasizing shared lived experience.

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On Change

What does it feel like to change something difficult?

- Change is not comfortable for any of us.

- People often experience internal conflict – wanting to change and not wanting to change at the same time.

- This is called **ambivalence** and we work with people to resolve it.

- "Punishing" people into recovery does not work.

- We **start where they are** to help them.

(United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012)

What Not to Do

How to Avoid Unnecessary Conflict

Don't:

- Order, direct, or command

- Warn or threaten

- Give advice, make unwanted suggestions

- Provide solutions

- Moralize and preach

- Judge, criticize and blame
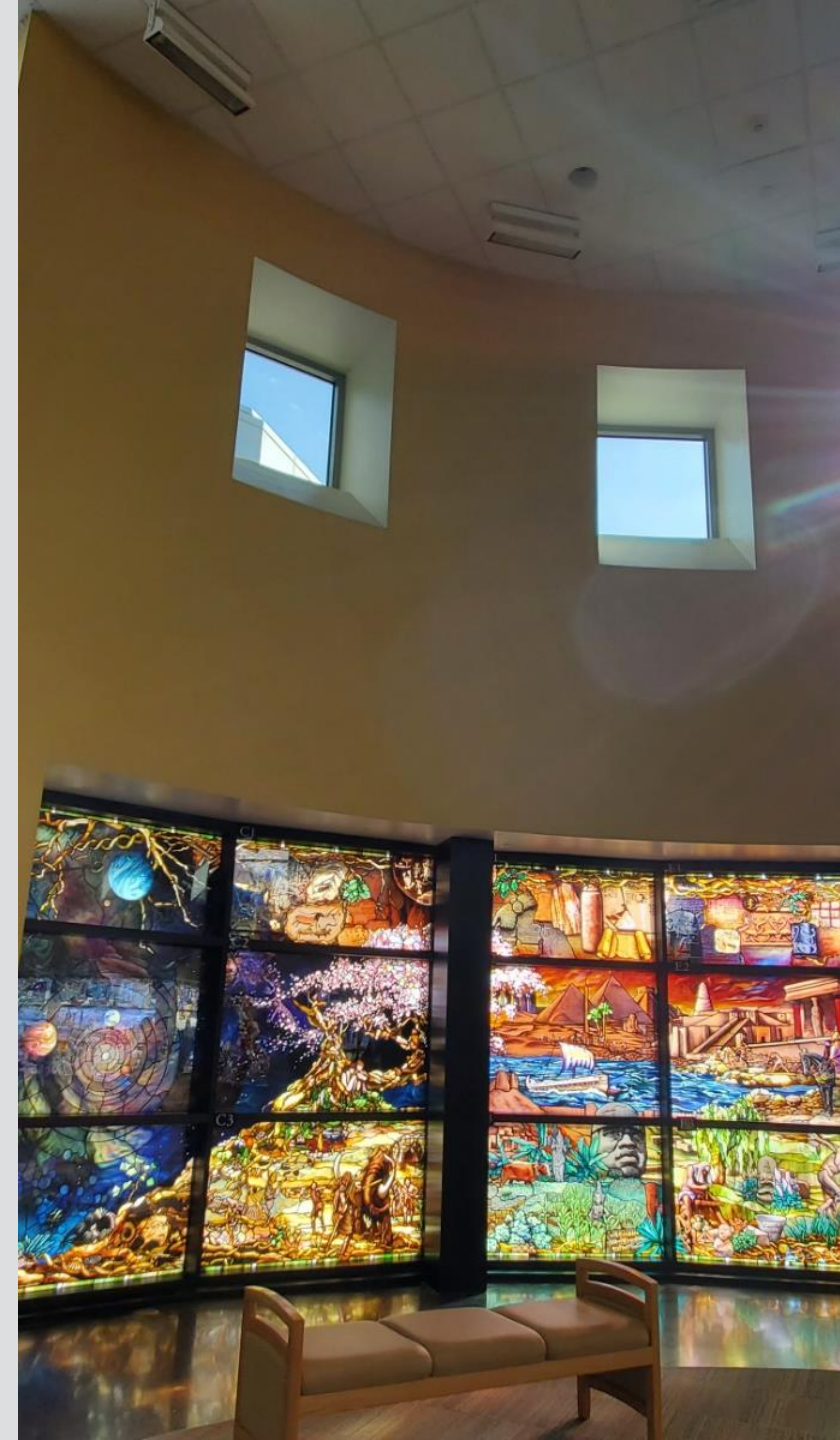
(United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012)

Historic Trauma

What are people carrying when they walk through our doors?

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) & SUDs

- Prevalence of trauma

- Feelings about conflict

- Need for a healing environment

(Leza, et. al., 2021)

(https://youtu.be/URiKA7CKtfc)

Healthy Environments for Change

Essential Elements

Establishing Healthy Change Dynamics

- Nonjudgmental and collaborative

- Based on partnership

- Gently persuasive

- More supportive than argumentative

- Listens rather than tells

- Communicates respect for and acceptance for clients and their feelings

(Himelstein, 2018)

Establishing a Safe Environment

The Use of Group Agreements to Support Safe Healing Environments

- Agreements vs. rules

- Develop agreements with your group

- Actually get everyone to agree

- Group agreements can be activated in any moment

(Himelstein, 2018)

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Group Agreement

Possible Elements

- Respect (self and others)

- One mic (not talking when someone is talking)

- Skillful speech

- Skillful listening

- No violence

- Use a group refocusing technique

Conflict and the Therapeutic Alliance

Therapeutic Alliance – Two Stages

Phase 1 -
The Initial
Development
of the Alliance

Phase 2 -
The Use of the Alliance
To Challenge
Dysfunction

Therapeutic Alliance

Why is it Important?

*"The emerging picture suggests that the **quality of alliance** is a reliable predictor of **positive clinical outcome** independent of the variety of psychotherapy approaches and outcome measures."*

(Hersoug et al., 2001)

Therapeutic Engagement – Key Concepts

Attachment Matters!

- **Attachment theory** - The psychological model that describes the dynamics in human relationships.

- Attachment depends on the person's ability to develop basic trust in their caregivers and self.

Relationship Matters!

- The therapeutic relationship contributes **5 to 10 times more** to outcome than the particular model or approach employed.

- Trust, respect, and congruence are major components of a good therapeutic relationship.

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Therapeutic Ruptures

We need to be able to navigate discord

- Understand that healthy relationships may be experienced as challenging.

- Pay attention to **subtle cues** suggesting problems.

- Issues can be difficult to detect and often show up as non-compliance or stopping care.

- Allow people to **express negative feelings**.

- When you make mistakes, admit it.

- Pay attention to **fluctuations in your own feelings** as potential cues about what may be going on in the therapeutic relationship.

(Safran et al., 2001)
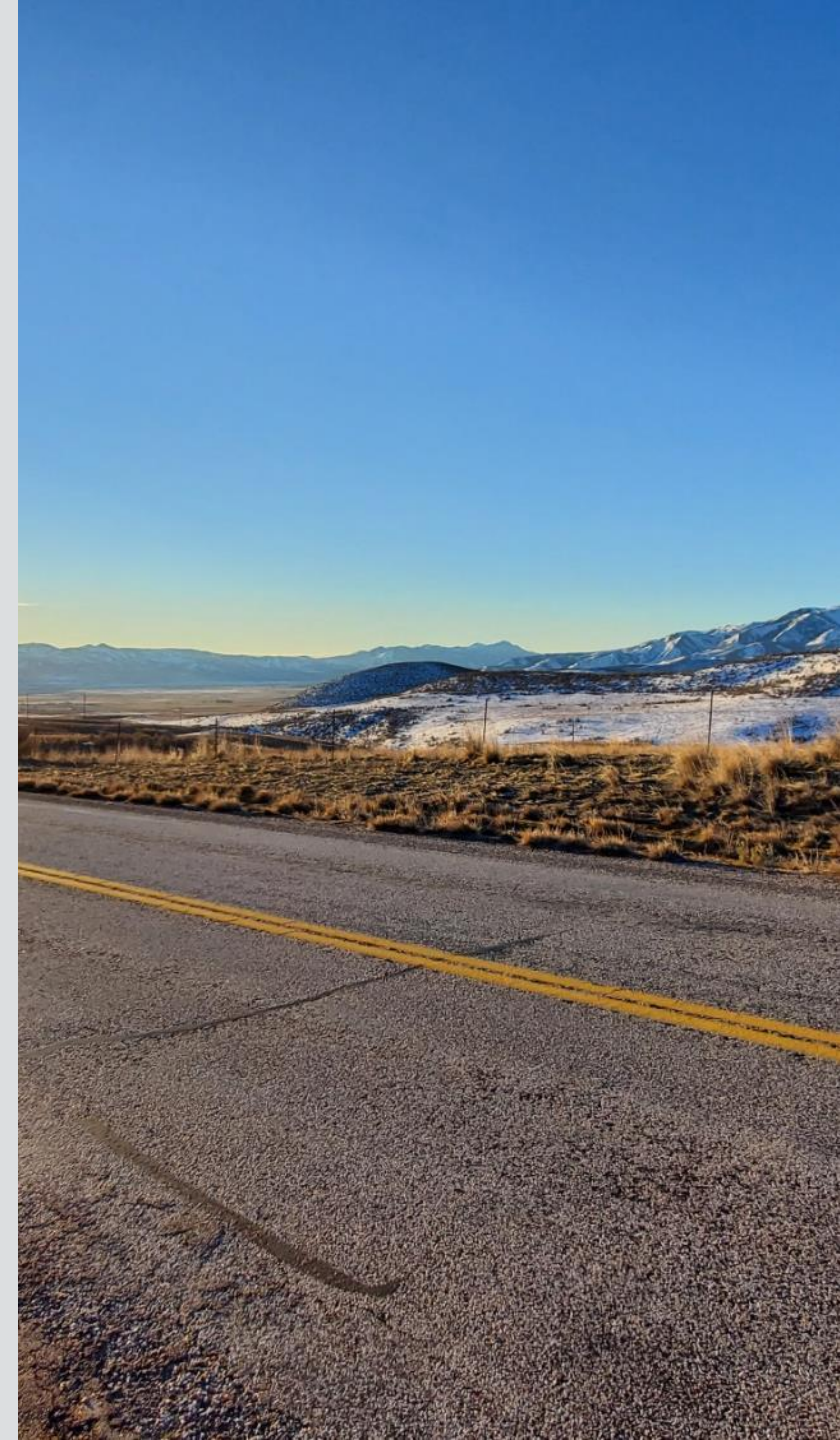
Supporting Healthy Responses

Help people learn how to respond to discomfort

- Practice **pausing** before responding.

- Practice breathing techniques.

- Remind participants of the **agreements**.

- Discuss how to handle discomfort and conflict regularly so people know what to do.

- **Validate** that it can and will happen and we are practicing how to handle it better.

(Beyond Intractability Project, n.d.)

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Use of Self

How we hold ourselves matters

- It is important for us to sustain a high level of self awareness as we support the people we work with.

- We need to **reflect on our own life situations, histories, and perspectives** so that we understand how it influences our work.

- We should seek feedback from supervisors and co-workers to assist us in increasing insight into our use of self in our work.

(Blake-Beard, Shapiro, & Ingols, 2021)
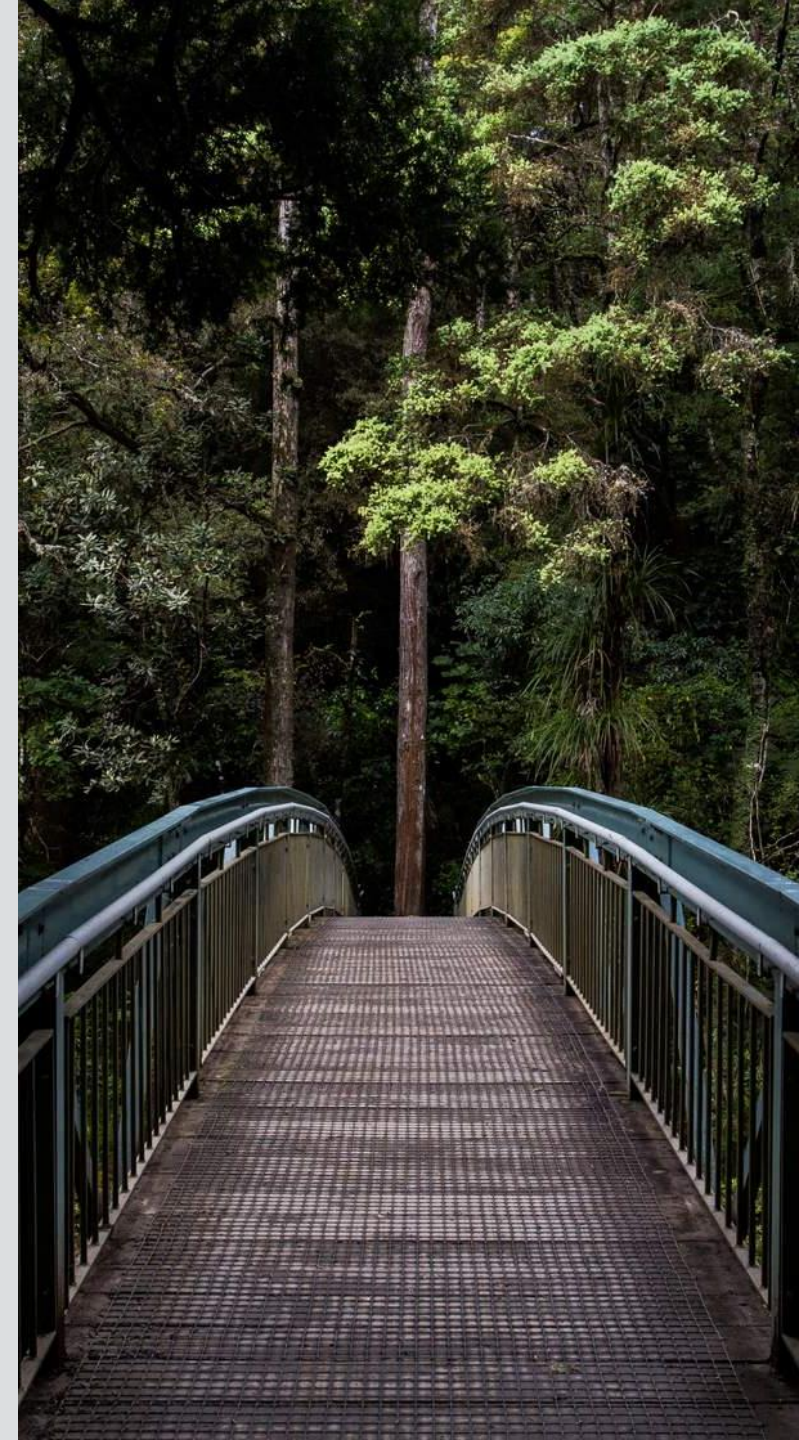
Overview

How do conflicts start?

- Person A says or does something that person B **perceives as a threat**.

- Person B **responds** in a way that person A perceives as a threat and responds in a reciprocal fashion.

- Person A responds in the same **perception-anger-behavior pattern** that person B used.

Note that either party has opportunity to de-escalate what is occurring.

What is Conflict Escalation?

- Escalation is an **increase in the intensity** of a conflict and in the **severity** of the tactics used in pursuing it.

- It is driven by changes within each of the parties, new patterns of interaction between them, and the involvement of new parties in the struggle.
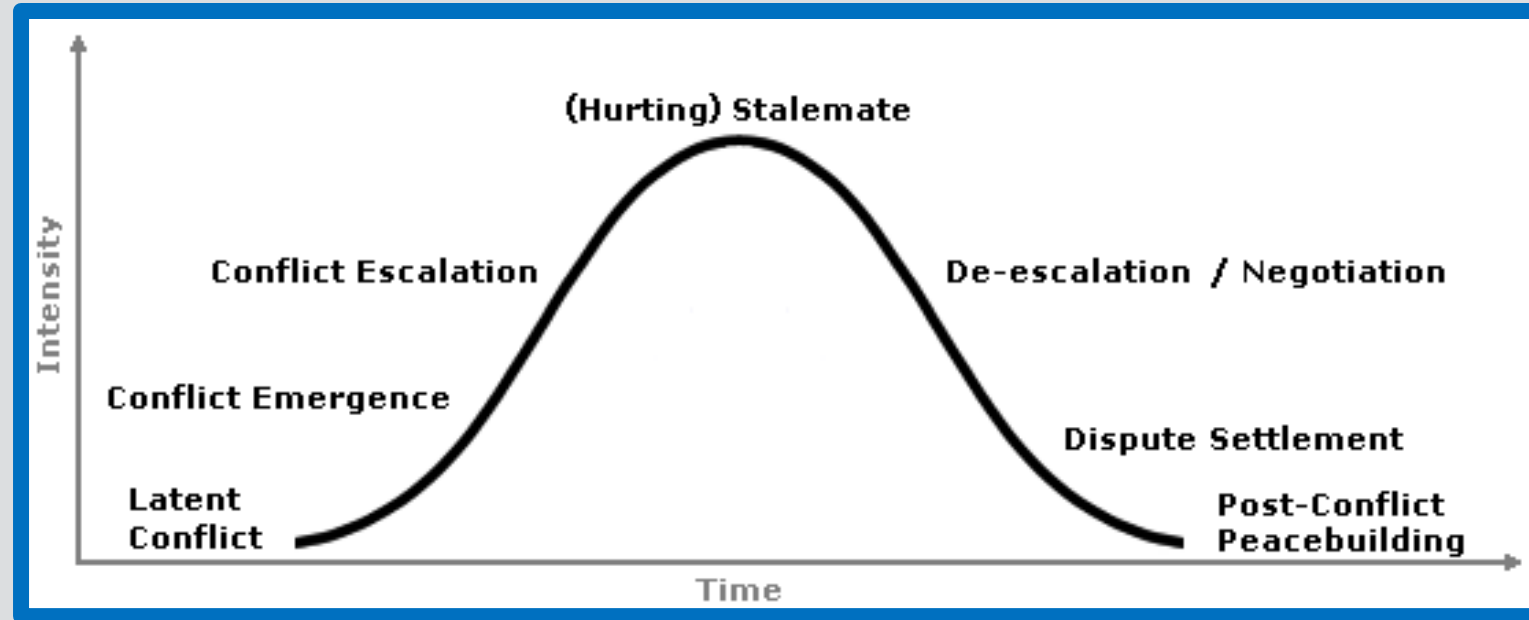
(Maiese, 2003)

Responding to Conflict

When instincts may not serve us well

- **Fight response** – acting aggressively to what is occurring can be an instinctual response that leads to further escalation.

- **Flight response** – fleeing or withdrawing may be perceived as not caring or being unwilling to engage and lead to more hostility.

So what do we do?

How we respond matters

If at risk for physical harm, safety comes first!

- Each party has an opportunity to de-escalate the situation.

- We often have the opportunity to model de-escalation and sustain engagement with the people we serve.

Strategy One

Use your active listening skills!

- Often, **conflict stems from a misperception** or something that may have not been stated precisely.

- Listening is a powerful tool.

- Everyone wants to be heard, and so active listening is key.

- Use your listening skills to acknowledge a person's feelings and to **clarify misunderstandings** when they occur.

(Harris, 2013)

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Strategy Two

Acknowledge and accept their emotions/feelings

- Strategy One is **foundational** for Strategy Two.

- When listening, acknowledge and accept the other person's feelings without passing judgement on them.

- Don't tell them how they feel.

- You can use **"I hear" statements** to reflect what you are hearing, which also allows for further clarification if you have heard something wrong.

(Harris, 2013)
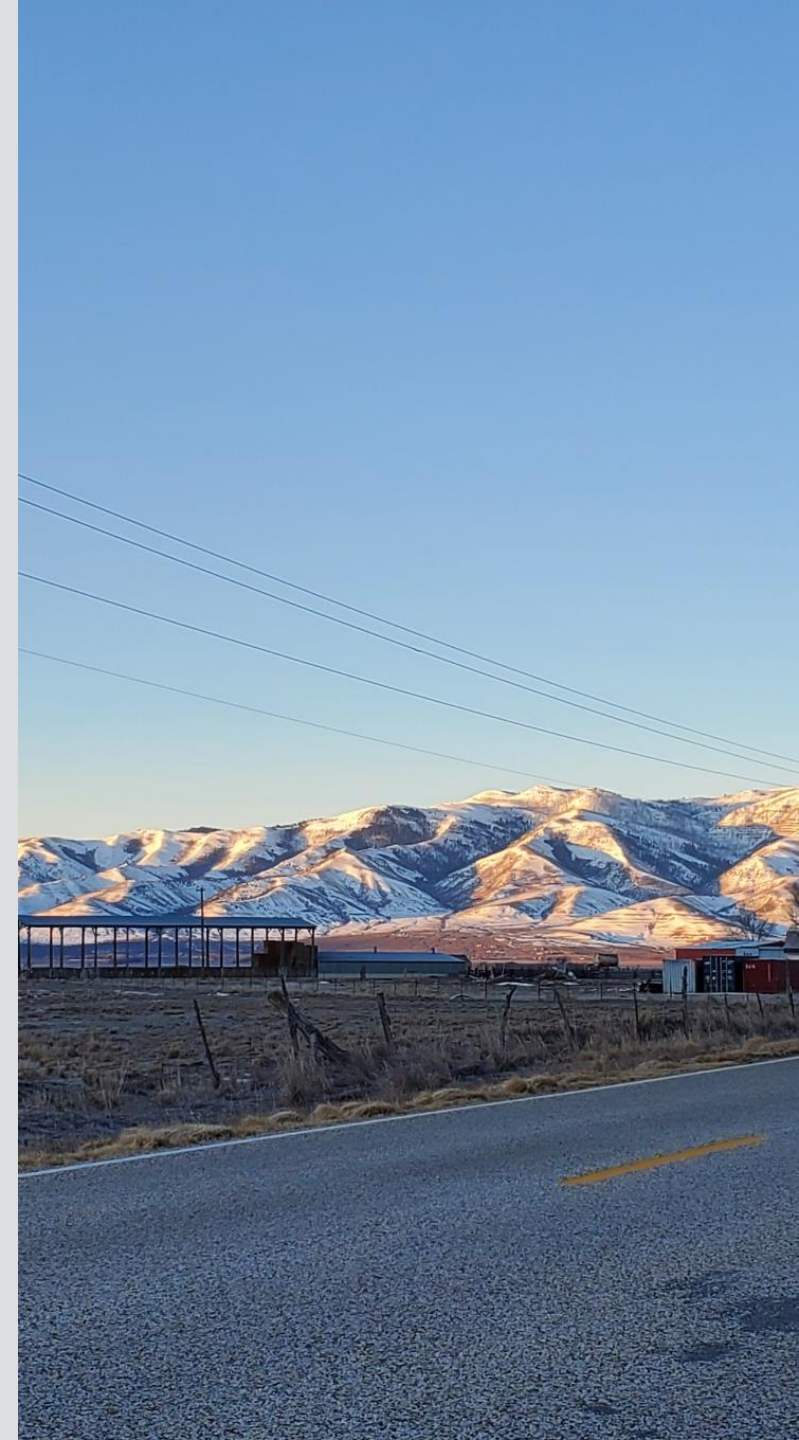
Strategy Three

Apologize for your contribution

- We are all human and make mistakes! If we have done or heard something incorrectly, apologize to repair ruptures.

- Very few conflicts are entirely the fault or responsibility of only one party. There is almost always something that you have done to make the conflict worse.

- To de-escalate the conflict, **accept responsibility for your contribution and apologize for it**.

(Harris, 2013)

Strategy Four

Watch your tone and body language

- A lot of our communication is conveyed through **body language** and **voice tone**.

- If you look threatening, you are threatening.

- If you want to de-escalate a conflict, remember to control your tone and body language.

- It may make sense to acknowledge if something is going on with you to avoid persons around you improperly attributing your body language.

(Harris, 2013)
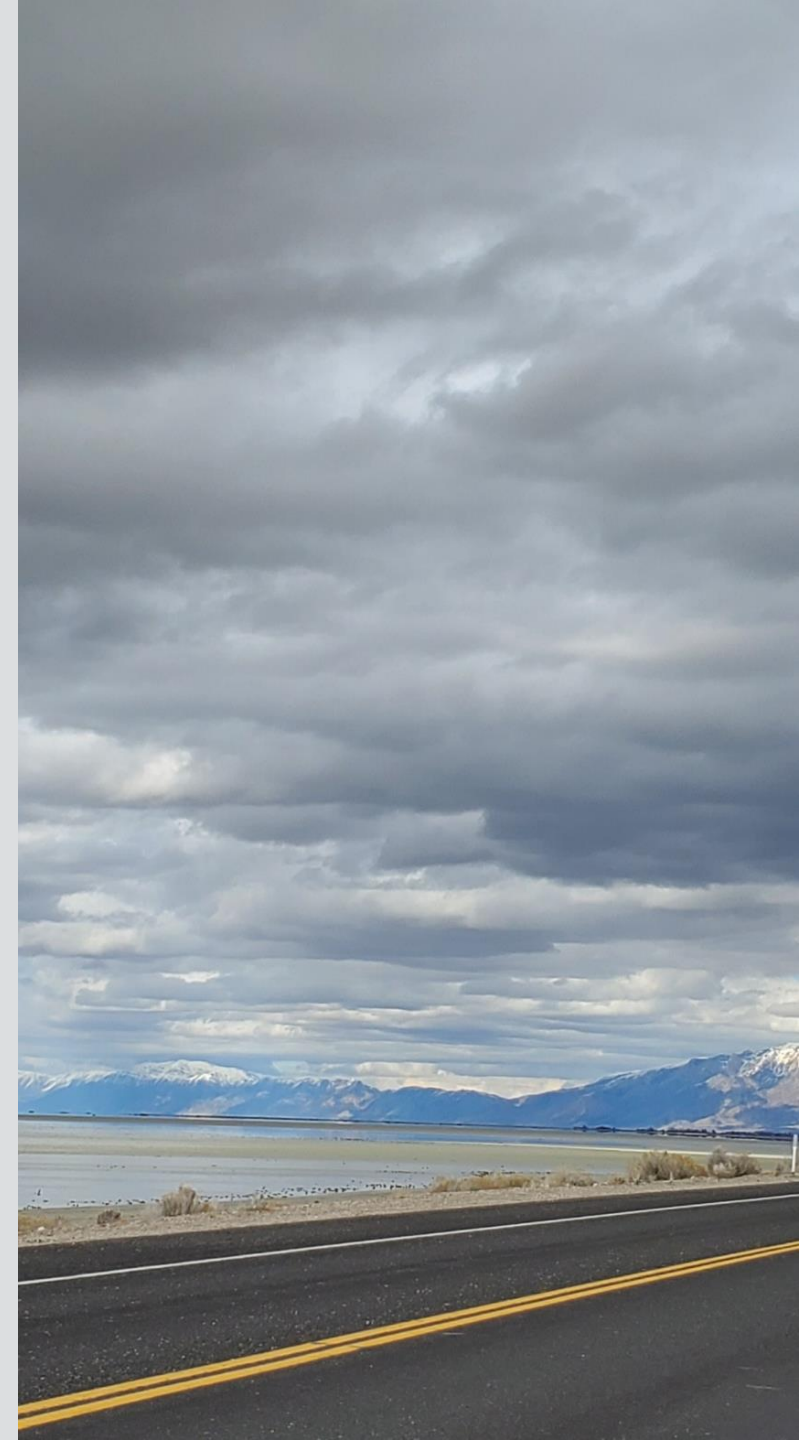
Strategy Five

Stay future focused

- Don't stay stuck on what happened once processed.

- Keep oriented on where we hope things go rather than fault finding.

- One of the foundations of recovery support is **collaborative problem solving**.

- Solution focus helps keep us on that path!

(Harris, 2013)

Use of Supervision

The Key To Improving Conflict Resolution

- Supervision is key to our growth as peer support workers.

- We should use supervision to improve our understanding of our **own weak spots** and improve our capacity to be effective at de-escalation.

Revisiting the Therapeutic Alliance

- The therapeutic alliance is what we have to **help people heal**.

- Ruptures in relationships are commonplace. People we work with may have long histories of broken and conflictual relationships.

- **How we handle such dynamics** as helpers – and modeling how to do this – is one of the most effective things we can do to help the people we serve to learn how to do so in other areas of their lives.

- Let's make the most of this opportunity!

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THANK YOU

Questions?

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