



Responding to People in Distress

HOW TO RESPOND CLIENTS AND OTHERS WITH OUT TRAUMATIZING THEM OR YOU

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Agenda for today

- ▶ **Introductions and Short Icebreaker**
 - ▶ **Exercises 1 & 2**
- ▶ **What works and what doesn't on distressed people**
 - ▶ **Exercises 3 & 4**
- ▶ **How to avoid (re)traumatizing**
 - ▶ **Questions and Closing**

A man dressed as a bank robber, wearing a black flat cap, a black mask covering his eyes, and a long-sleeved shirt with horizontal black and white stripes. He is running towards the right, holding a white plastic bag with the word 'SWAG' printed on it in his left hand. His right hand is outstretched. The background is a solid dark purple.

A Bank Robber Has Taken Hostages... You get the call

EXERCISE 1

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How Did you Respond?

Appeal to Reason

Appeals to a person's "rational" side...

- ❑ If you come out now, you can avoid a longer jail term
- ❑ Think about this, think about the consequences

Appeal to "Best Self"

Appeals to a hypothetical "best self" present in all of us

- ❑ You are not a killer
- ❑ You don't want to do this

Notice that these responses include judgements about the other person

Appeal to Authority

Close to threats, these appeal to fear of punishment

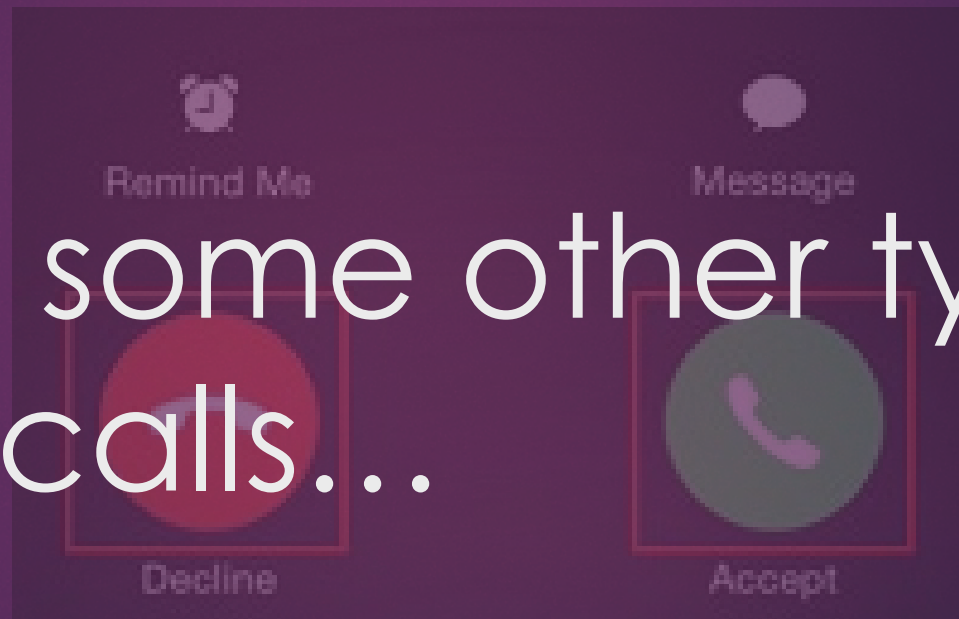
- ❑ If you do this, they will shoot you.
- ❑ You will never leave prison.

Any other responses not listed here?

Why Don't These Responses work?

- ▶ Appeals to reason require a person to be able to access their frontal lobe, where they can assess options, weigh outcomes, and project a future. We are bad at this in the best of times! We are even worse when distress shuts down our frontal lobe. The same is true of appeals to authority.
- ▶ Appeals to authority require not only frontal lobe access, but in addition, a person in distress already feels in pain, already feels punished, asking them to assess future consequences has little to no impact.
- ▶ Appeals to best self have limited and mixed responses. A person in distress can feel connected to that best self, but a change in circumstances or a sudden flood of emotion can make that change quickly.

Let's try some other types of
distress calls...



EXERCISE 2

Two More Calls

- ▶ A person calls with a medical emergency, their parent collapsed on the floor and is unresponsive! They are frantic.

How do you respond?



- ▶ A person calls, sounding like they are in severe emotional distress. They are suggesting they might hurt themselves or others.

How do you respond?



Why these calls?

While you may not be taking hostage negotiation calls or responding to emergency calls, you deal with clients in distress all the time!

The tips and techniques we're about to teach you work in hostage negotiation, suicide hotline, and medical emergency calls—they'll work for you too.

What Not To Do

Offer to “help” or to “talk”

Push them to “check boxes”

Tell them to “calm down”

Yelling

Appeal to rationality

Appeal to better self

Appeal to authority or threats

*Your project is not fix, or ensure that you complete a form...

What works!

Remember it isn't about you

Reflecting

Reframing/Refocusing

Highlight interests

Ask good questions

Repeat

Make concrete, simple to complete requests

Your project is to make it easier for them to make the choice to comply!

More about what works!

The R's

- ▶ Remember, it ain't about you
- ▶ Reflecting
- ▶ Reframing/refocusing
- ▶ Repetitive persistence

The Rest

- ▶ Highlight Interests
- ▶ Ask good questions
- ▶ Make concrete requests

A man dressed as a bank robber is running towards the right. He is wearing a black flat cap, a black mask covering his eyes, a long-sleeved shirt with horizontal black and white stripes, black trousers, and black shoes. He is holding a white plastic bag in his left hand, which has the word "SWAG" printed on it in black capital letters. His right hand is outstretched, palm facing forward, in a gesture of surrender or warning. The background is a solid dark purple color. In the top right corner, there is a small, solid magenta rectangle.

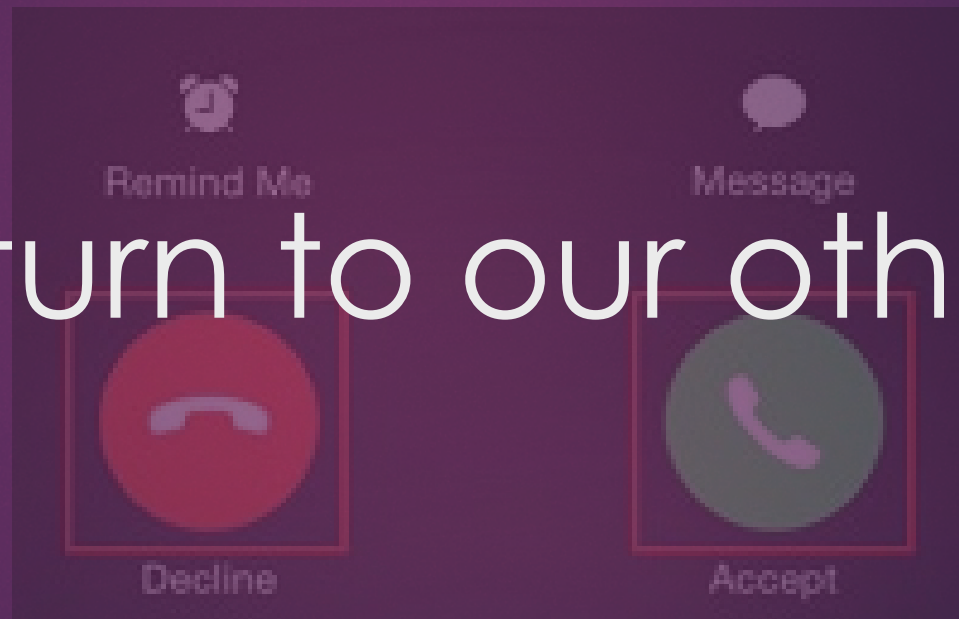
Return to Our Bank Robber

EXERCISE 3

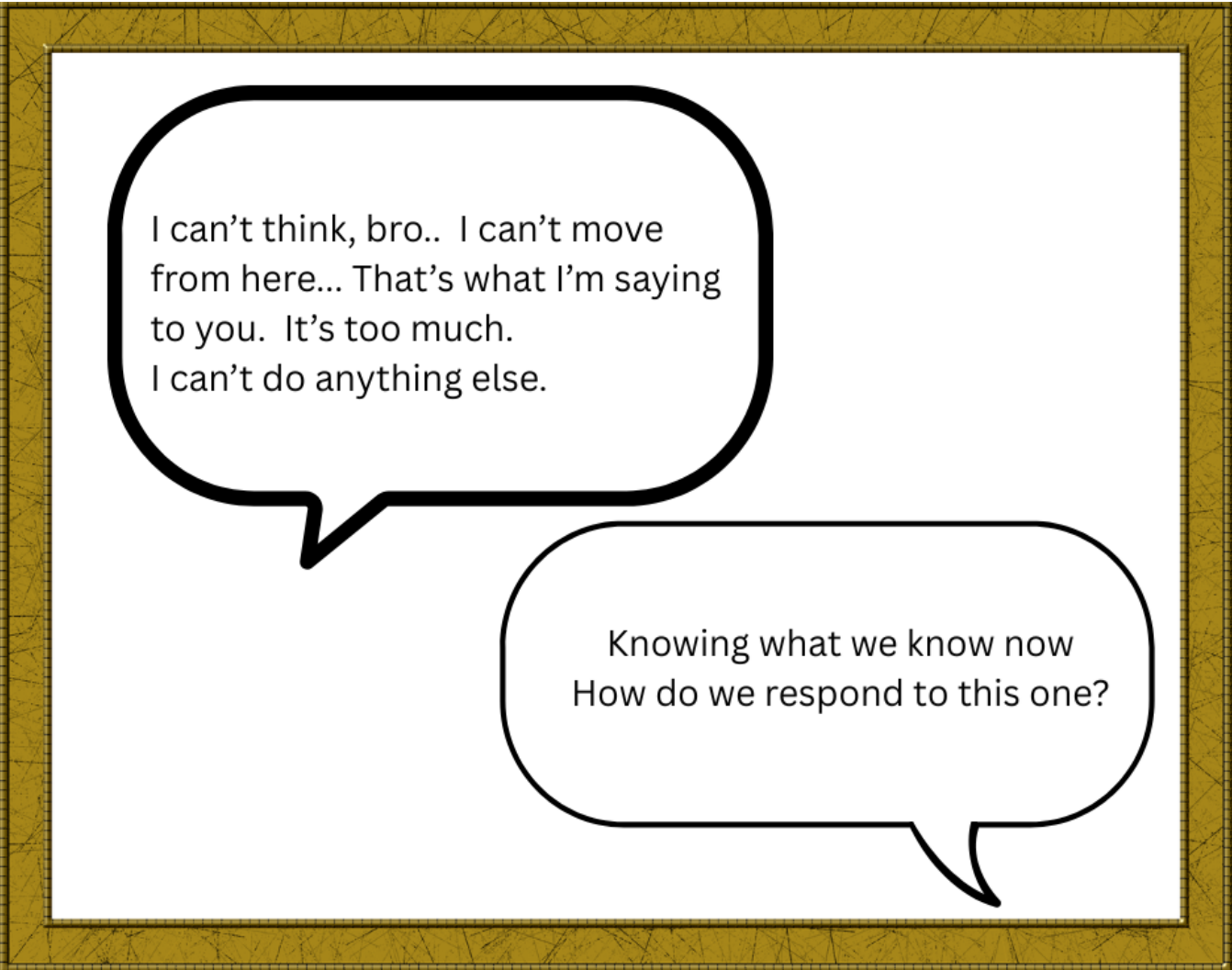
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Let's return to our other calls

EXERCISE 4



Actual Emergency Call Example



I can't think, bro.. I can't move
from here... That's what I'm saying
to you. It's too much.
I can't do anything else.

Knowing what we know now
How do we respond to this one?



How This Relates to Trauma

Trauma Informed Care and Practice

Trauma Informed Environment

- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Choice
- ▶ Empowerment
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Trustworthiness

These skills offer

- ▶ Safety by giving the distressed person the freedom to share as needed
- ▶ Choice through giving them options
- ▶ Empowerment by making complying up to them
- ▶ Collaboration because it isn't you helping but both working through
- ▶ Trustworthiness built through rapport, empowerment and collaboration.

Additionally

- ▶ These skills prevent traumatizing you by:
- ▶ Giving you the space to only cognitively empathize with your partner, creating safety
- ▶ Reducing the pressure on you to “save” or deescalate, empowering the other person
- ▶ Empowering you to be present
- ▶ Allowing you to collaborate

The background of the image is a repeating pattern of light purple speech bubbles, each containing a dark purple question mark. The bubbles are scattered across the entire frame, creating a textured, thematic backdrop.

Questions? Answers?