



# How to Deal with People in Conflict

---

- Malinda Fasol-Leewright,  
PhD, LPC-S

December 1, 2022

# Quotations

- “Whenever you are conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.” –William James
- “People who are prone to anxiety are nearly always people-pleasers who fear conflict and negative feelings like anger. When you feel upset, you sweep your problems under the rug because you don’t want to upset anyone. You do this so quickly and automatically that you’re not even aware you’re doing it.” –David Burns
- “The message sent is not always the message received.” –Virginia Satir



## Conflict often caused by

---

- Inaccurate or incomplete information
- Differing viewpoints
- Limited resources
- Stress

# University of Gumption



This diploma certifies that  
you are perfectly capable of using  
both  
Google and Wikipedia

  
Dr. J. J. J.  
  
Internet 2.0  
  
William F. Flanders

DOGHOUSE DIARIES

# ALTERNATIVE Google University

*having mastered the technique of Google searching until  
finding one hit that confirms what she/he already believes  
is hereby awarded this diploma and declared an*

**Expert in Everything**  
*with all rights, honors and ridicule pertaining thereto.*



Lawrence Page

**DEGREE** CEO



# Iceberg Theory: Satir Model

---

- Feelings—about self, others
- Worldview—framework
- Perceptions—beliefs, mindset
- Expectations
- Thoughts
- Culture
- Trauma, grief
- Spirituality





**Two types  
of thinking  
for  
responding  
to conflicts**

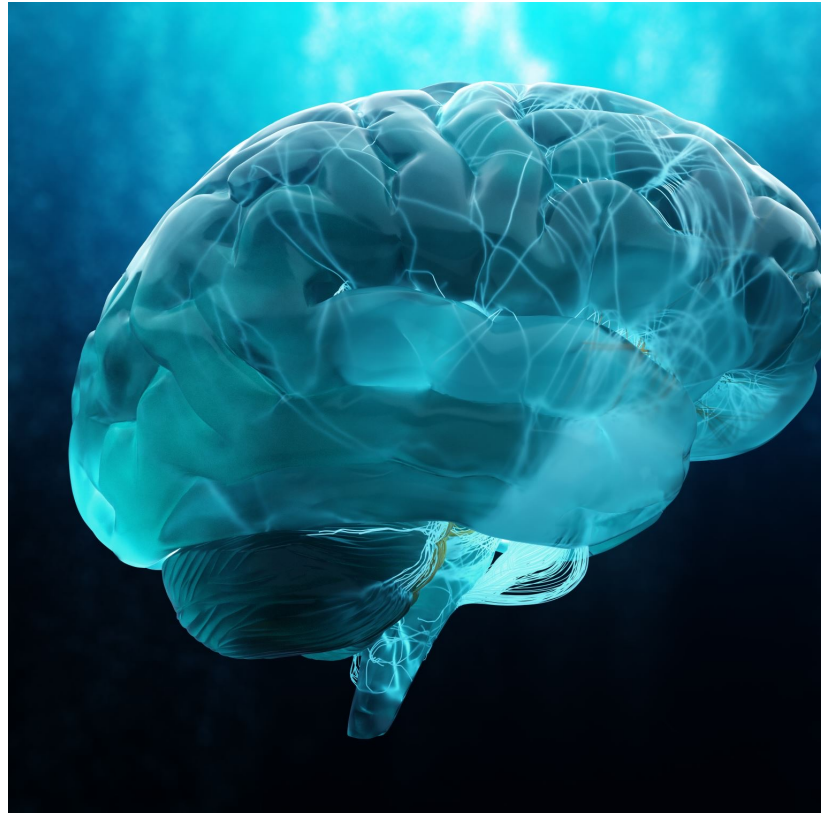
One when we are relaxed/calm

Another when we are in crisis

Different parts of our brain  
respond depending on  
circumstances

# Brain Basics





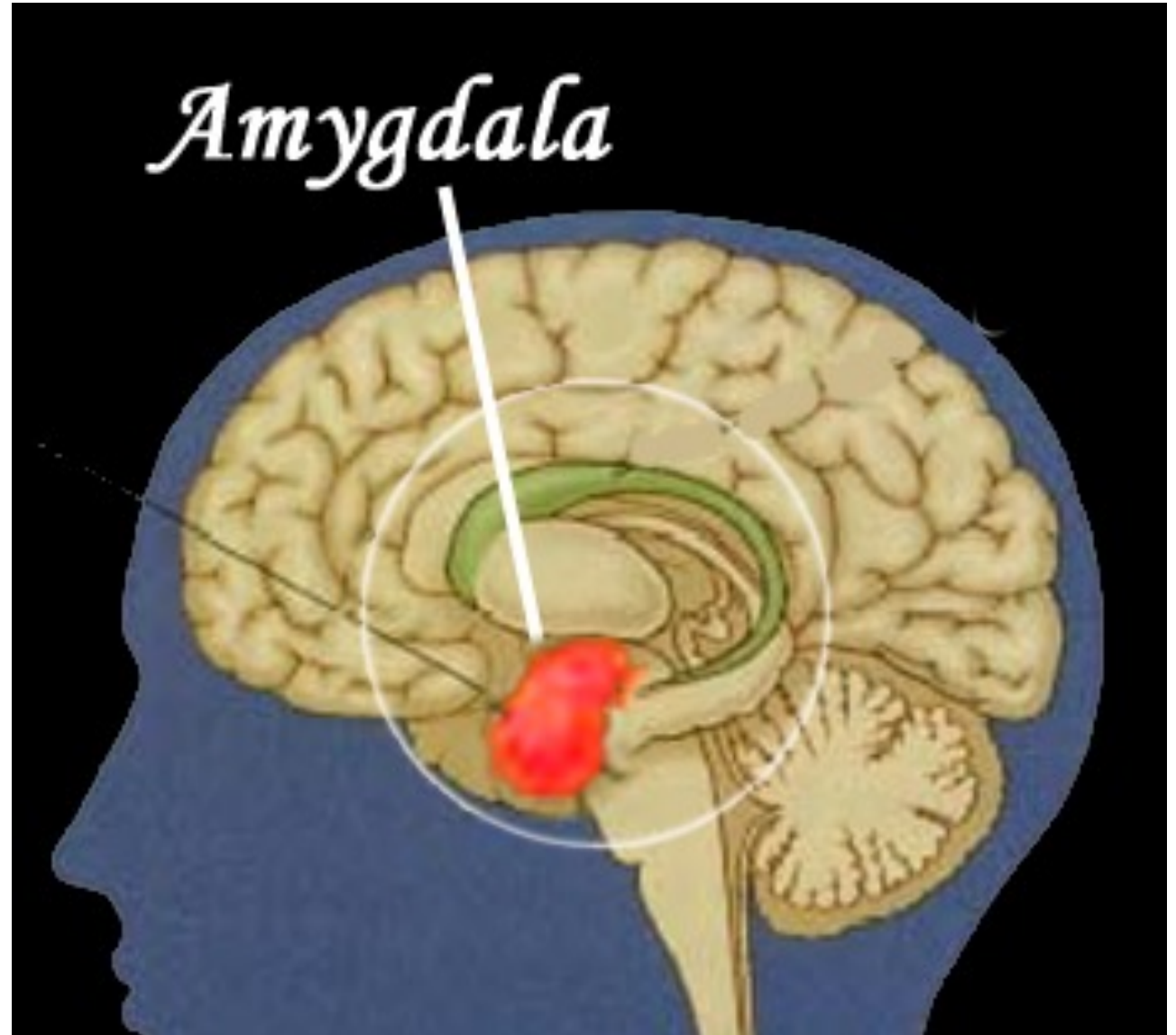
## What happens to the brain during conflict?

---

- Limbic System (amygdala)
- Prefrontal Cortex—decision making, planning
- Thalamus—relay and integrate a variety of motor and sensory signals between the higher centers of the brain and the peripheries.

## Amygdala

- Almond-shape
- Located near the center of each hemisphere of the brain
- Linked to fear responses
- Capacity to register, perceive, and analyze sensory data
- Elicit fight, flight, or freeze response



# Crisis shuts down logic

---

- The amygdala shuts down logical problem-solving in times of crisis
- This shut down occurs in less than a second

# Amygdala's defensive response

---

- Switch to defensive reacting
- Sweaty palms, clenched teeth, rosy cheeks to heart pumping, yelling, fighting, running: all before you realize you're doing these things
- Defensive reacting may save your life: flood, fire, violent person, etc.
- The right amygdala signals the body: heart beats faster, adrenaline and cortisol pump through the body, muscles tighten, visual focus narrows

## Downside of the amygdala

- Some situations require problem-solving (prefrontal cortex)
- Amygdala Hijacking—can no longer access the prefrontal cortex
- Can trigger someone else's defensive reaction



# Defensive reacting is contagious

---

- Easy for others to get upset when we're upset
- When one starts defensive reacting then others might join
- Logical problem solving is also contagious
- When the person in charge can tell the group to stay calm then typically the upset emotions will calm down and problem solving can take over
- When people are too upset, they may not be able to shift to problem solving for a long time—30 minutes or sometimes several days



# Techniques to Manage Conflict



“trouble  
comes  
from the  
mouth”  
Chinese  
proverb

- Disengage from the urge to confront
- Remind yourself: it's not about me
- I'm not responsible for the outcome, just the process
- This person lacks skills to have insight right now
- I'm talking to the wrong side of the brain
- Avoid feeling responsible for the person's feelings

# Keep your cool

---

- Helps you maintain self control
- Avoid escalation of problem
- The less reactive you are, the more you can use your better judgment to handle the situation



**Shift from  
being  
reactive  
to  
proactive**



Minimize misinterpretations  
and misunderstandings



Try to put yourself in that  
person's shoes



# Techniques

---

- Listen—reflect what you heard
- Stay calm
- Be mindful of internal and external noise
- Model neutral language
- Separate the person from the problem
- Awareness

# Techniques Continued

Set limits and  
boundaries

Debrief

Release your  
stress

## Techniques Continued



**Avoid saying “I understand”**



**Avoid returning anger with  
anger**



**Avoid acting defensively**

# EAR

- **Empathy**
- **Attention**
- **Respect**

- @Bill Eddy

- I can sense how frustrating this situation might be for you
- I'd like to help you
- I know this process can be confusing
- I regret making this decision. I'm required to do so by the rules or laws.
- Focus on how they feel rather than criticize how they feel/act
- Avoid "you" language: you should, you'd better, you ought to know...



## Let it go

---

- Tell yourself: I know I can't control their behavior, but I can control my response to their behavior.
- Remain calm
- Pay attention to your body language and tone of voice



## Use appropriate humor

---

- Disarms unreasonable and difficult behavior
- Powerful communication tool
- Timing



# Thank you!

---

Contact information:

Malinda Fasol-Leewright

drmleewright@gmail.com

# Resources

---

- Bill Eddy, LCSW, Lawyer: High Conflict People
- Dr. Daniel Amen: Change your Brain, Change your Life
- Dr. Earl Henslin: This is your Brain on Joy
- Dr. Barbara Markway: Tactics for Dealing with Difficult People