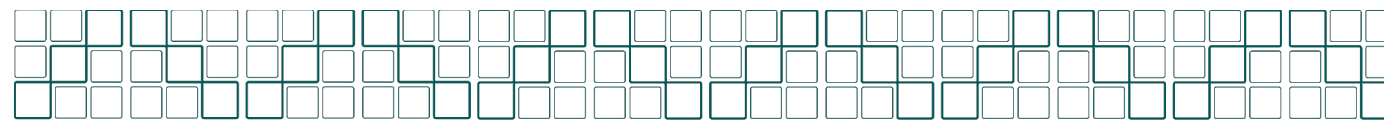

Becoming A Resilient Scientist: Self-advocacy and Assertiveness

Dr. Sharon L. Milgram, Director NIH OITE
milgrams@nih.gov // www.training.nih.gov

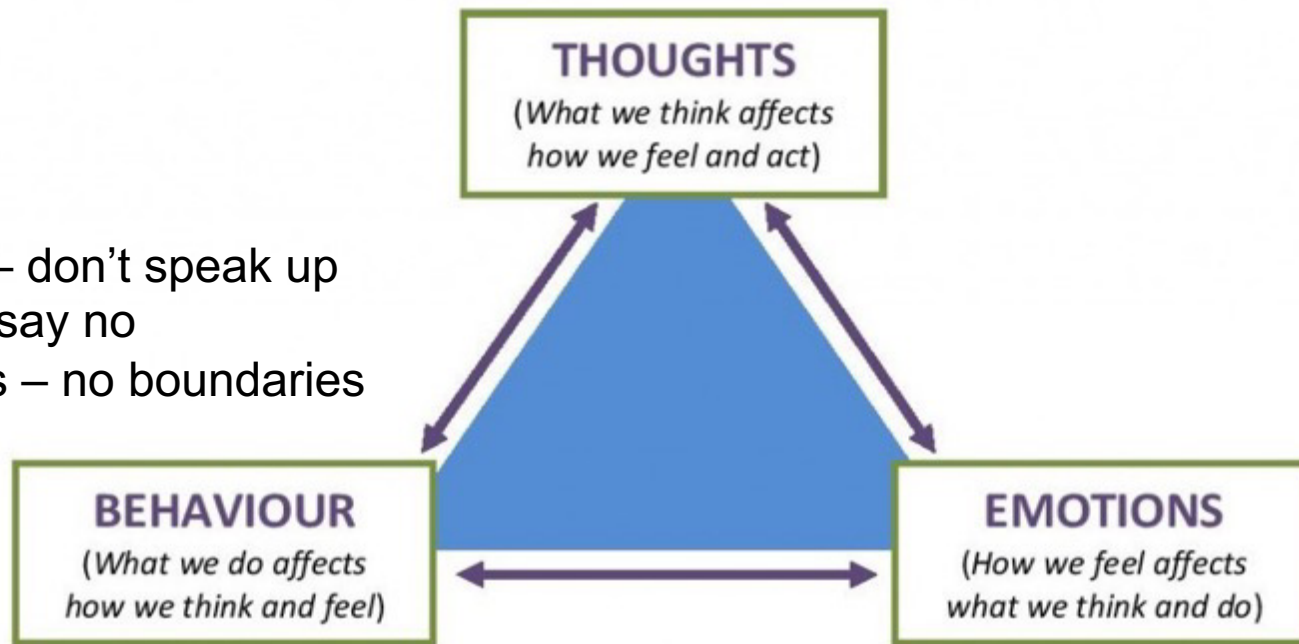
On Twitter [@SHARONMILGRAM](https://twitter.com/SHARONMILGRAM) // [@NIH_OITE](https://twitter.com/NIH_OITE)

On Instagram [@MILGRAM_NIH_OITE](https://www.instagram.com/MILGRAM_NIH_OITE)

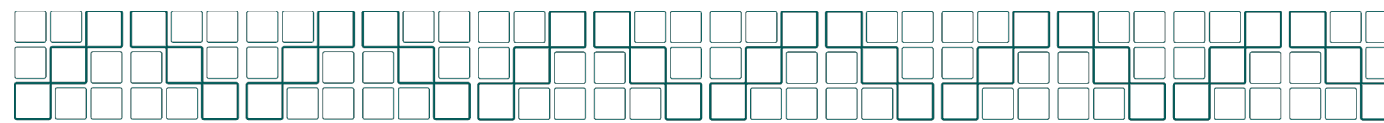




We Seem To Always Start At the Same Place

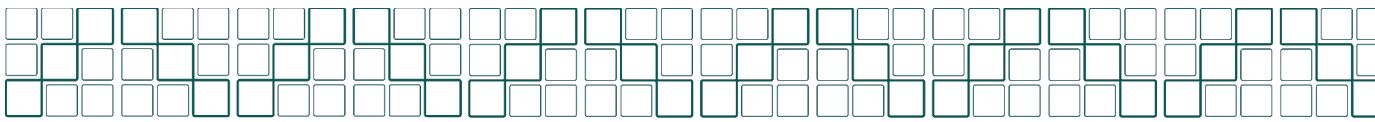


Speak up – don't speak up
Say yes – say no
boundaries – no boundaries



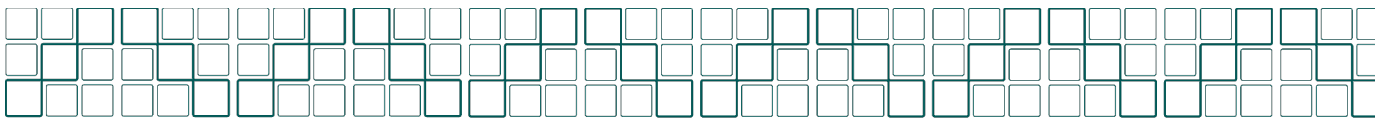
Some Near Universal Truths

- To some degree we all struggle
 - to appropriately voice our wants, needs, concerns, and opinions
 - with when to say “no” and how to say “no”
 - to hear and respond appropriately to feedback we receive
- Different communication, conflict and work styles, coupled with a significant power differential, can greatly complicate workplace interactions
- **THEREFORE:** We need to be proactive and assertive to get what we want from our educational and work experiences (and from life too!)



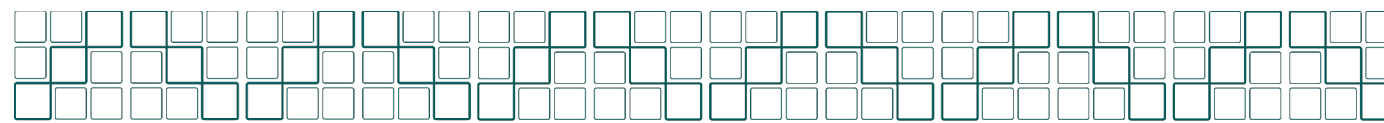
Two Important Definitions

- Self-advocacy is....
 - The action of representing oneself and one's views/interests with the goal of meeting one's needs
 - One of two types of advocacy – for oneself and for others; for many of us it is easier to advocate for others
- Assertiveness is the ability to...
 - express one's feelings and assert one's rights and needs while respecting the feelings, rights and needs of others
 - use communication that is direct, open and honest to address situations that concern you
 - set appropriate **boundaries** that feel right given the context and situation



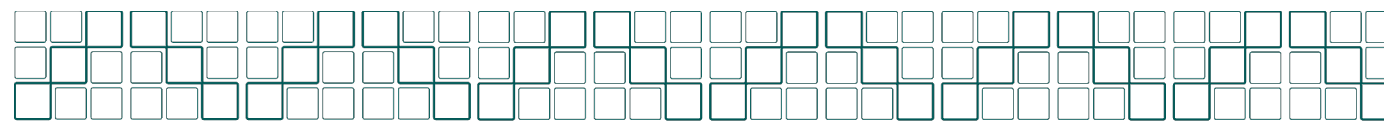
Some Thoughts on Boundaries (I)

- A boundary is a demarcation between two things
 - personal boundaries are between yourself and others
 - you can think of boundaries as your personal limits
- There are many types of boundaries
 - physical
 - mental
 - emotional
 - time and energy
 - material
- And in two directions
 - what we allow others to say/do
 - what we share/say/do



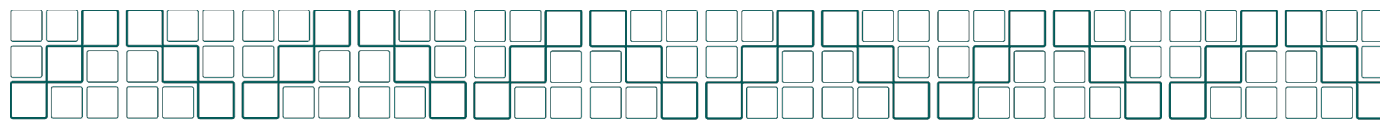
Some Thoughts On Boundaries (II)

- When we set boundaries, we determine
 - what actions, statements and behaviors we will accept from others and what we will not
 - what we will share and not share with others
- Setting boundaries help us avoid
 - over-work
 - taking on someone else's emotions and/or thoughts
 - violating personal or professional ethics
 - input that is incorrect and unwarranted
 - doing something we do not want to do



Some Thing About Boundaries

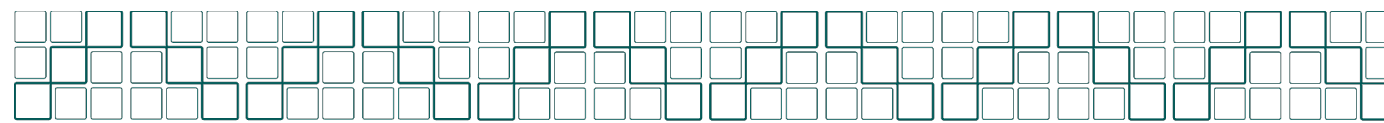
- Boundaries are learned in childhood, from our families, cultures and prior experiences
 - Adjusting our views of boundaries is a life-long process
- Boundaries should be viewed as porous and context-specific
 - depends on the person (people) involved AND the situation
- Things that get in the way of boundary setting
 - cognitive distortions (HATS)
 - gaps in our emotional literacy (AIR/RABBITS)
 - a lack of self-confidence
 - a lack of assertiveness skills
 - our views of hierarchy



Some Self-Awareness On Setting Boundaries

Is it harder for you to set boundaries in your educational/professional life or in your personal life?

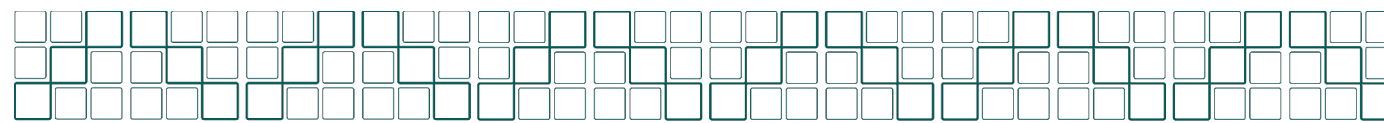
POLL



Important Journaling Prompt

- How is my current understanding of boundaries shaped by my families and cultures?
 - What learning is often (or mostly) helpful to me?
 - What learning is not always (or ever?) helpful to me?
- Are there situations now where I wish to set boundaries or set different boundaries?
 - What actions do I need to take to begin putting helpful boundaries into place now?

Assertive Communication Is the Foundation of Boundary Setting

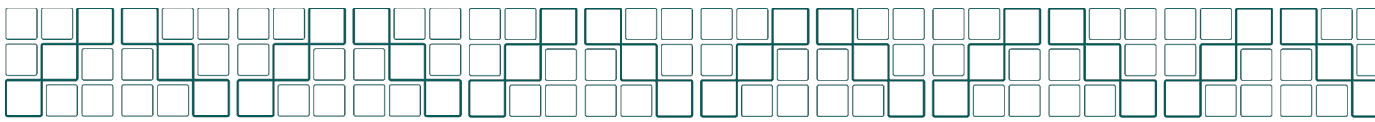


Some Important Questions for Journaling

What did you learn about being assertive and about difficult conversations from your families and cultures?

Which messages are generally helpful to you now and which are not?

KEY CONCEPT: Letting go of unhelpful behaviors takes commitment and practice, but it can be done!



Two Constructs of Self

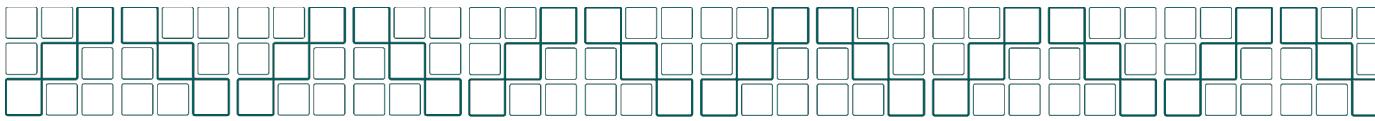
■ Independent self = ME

- we view ourselves as separate from others
- our primary focus is on our own needs, desire to be heard and reaching our own goals

■ Interdependent self = WE

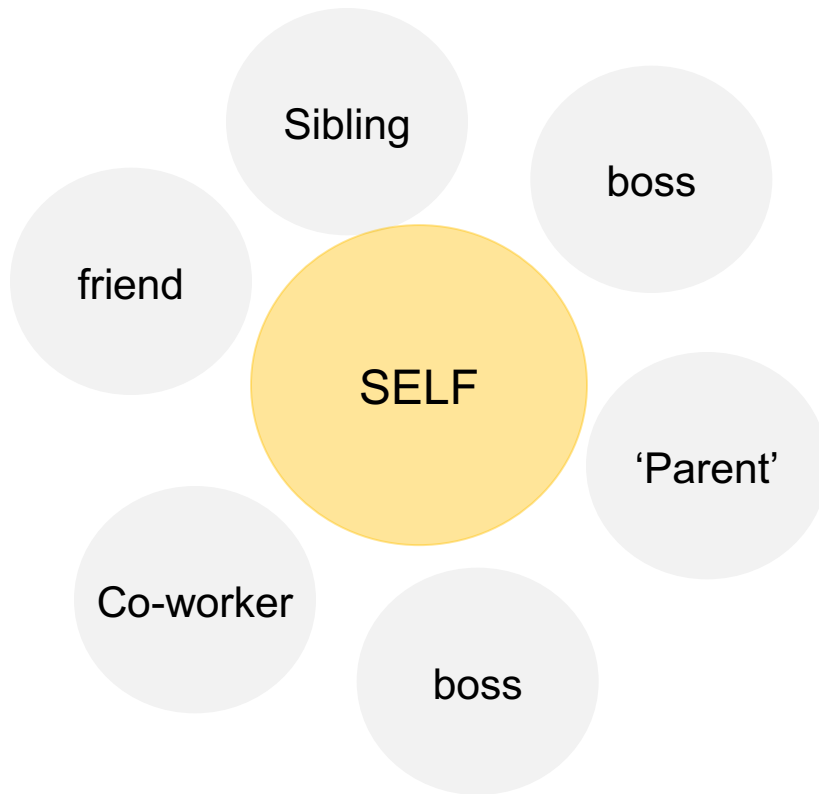
- we view ourself as connected to others and responsible for their welfare
- our primary focus is on supporting the group/collective, maintaining tradition, and respecting authority

Clash! How to Thrive in a Multicultural World; Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner; See <http://www.cultureclashes.org/> for information

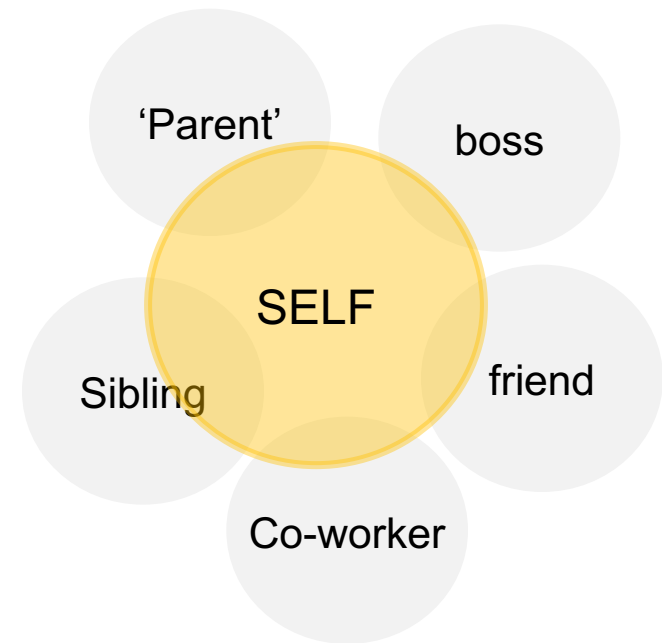


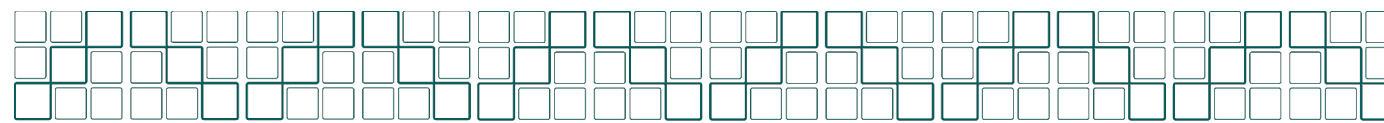
Two Constructs of Self

INDEPENDENT SELF SYSTEM



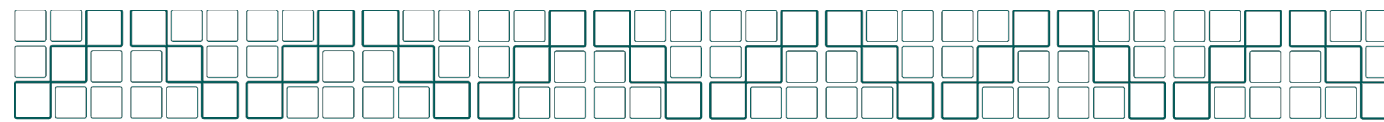
INTERDEPENDENT SELF SYSTEM





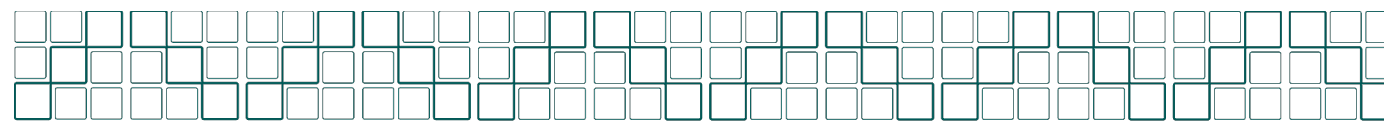
An Example

- You are taking a class that involves a presentation. The teacher makes a mistake on the schedule and therefore asks for a volunteer to give their first presentation with only one week notice.
 - If you see the world largely through an independent lens, you might say..
 - No way, I want to do a great job and one week is not enough. I am not going to volunteer for this.
 - I think the teacher is wrong to ask so I am not going to agree to this even if they ask me to go first.
 - If you see the world largely through an interdependent lens, you might say...
 - Oh no! The teacher asked and I should volunteer if nobody else does so quickly.
 - My friends are all stressed; if I say yes, they won't have to do it.



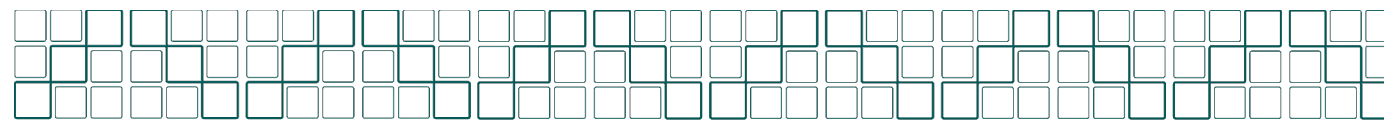
How This Might Impact Communication

	INDEPENDENT	INTERDEPENDENT
Relationship with boss and other colleagues	More equal and fluid	Unequal and fixed
Willingness to be assertive	High	Low
Focus of exchange	Clarity in the message, getting work done and meeting individual needs	Group needs, saving face, preventing embarrassment, harmony and agreement
Style of communication	Direct	Indirect



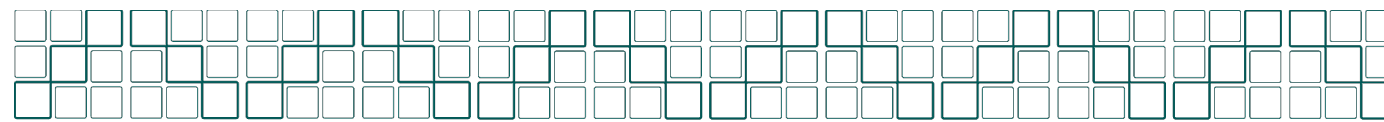
Direct vs. Indirect Communication

- You want to let your PI know you will be taking a three-day weekend
 - Direct: I want to let you know that I will be out this Friday for a three-day weekend.
 - Indirect: I wonder if it would me OK for me to take some time away? Maybe this Friday?
- Your friend missed the appointment you made to study together on Sunday. They call later and ask if that was a problem for you.
 - Direct: I was disappointed because I really wanted to study together; can we reschedule for tomorrow?
 - Indirect: You sigh, then say maybe it would be nice to try to reschedule.

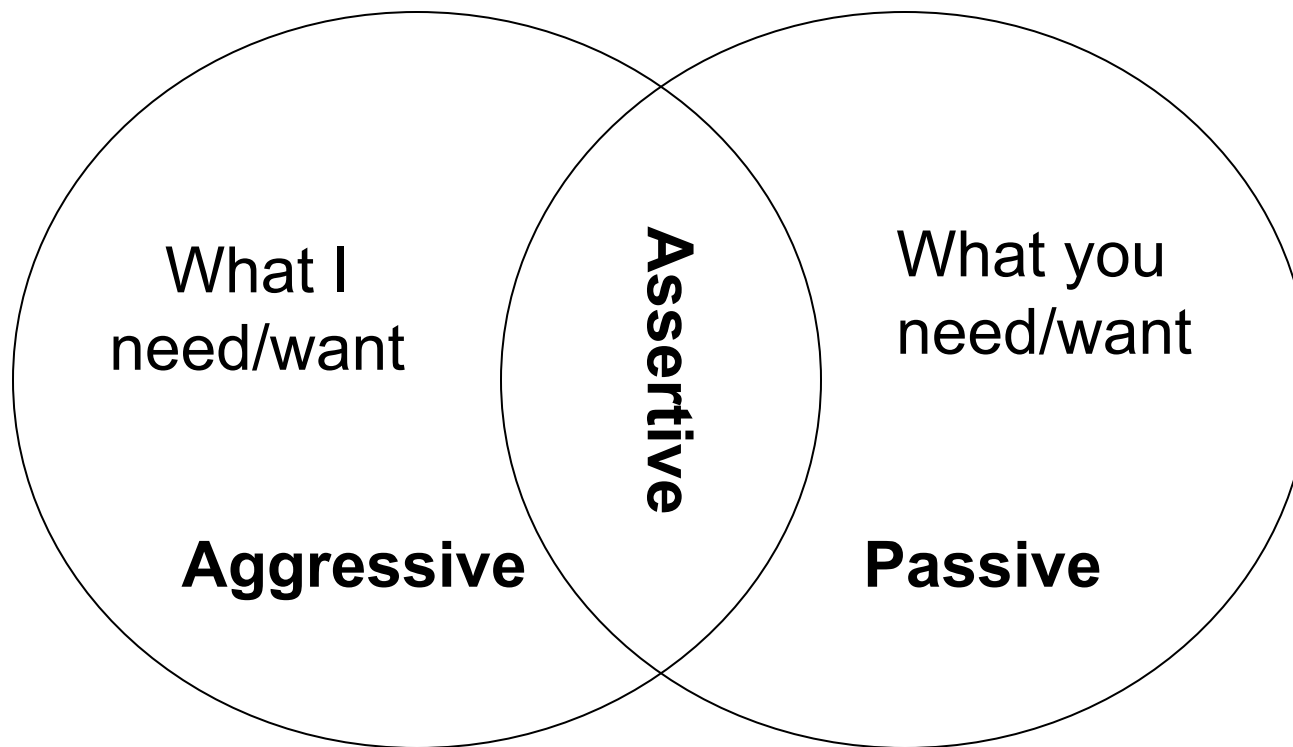


Range of Communication Styles

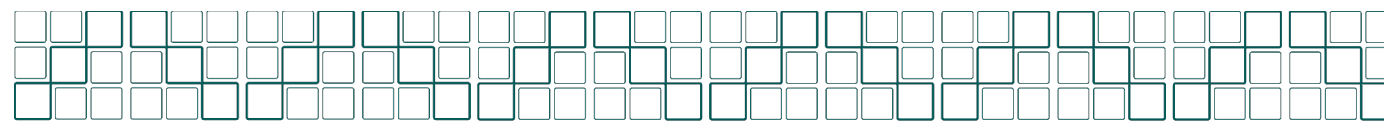
- **Passive** (indirect): accepting or allowing what happens or what others do without active response or resistance
- **Aggressive** (direct): pursuing one's aims and interests forcefully, and without care about the long-term consequences to the other or the relationship
- **Assertive** (direct): having or showing a confident and clear approach to meeting your needs
- **Passive-Aggressive** (direct/indirect): Indirectly pursuing one's aims by saying one thing and doing another



And Presented Another Way



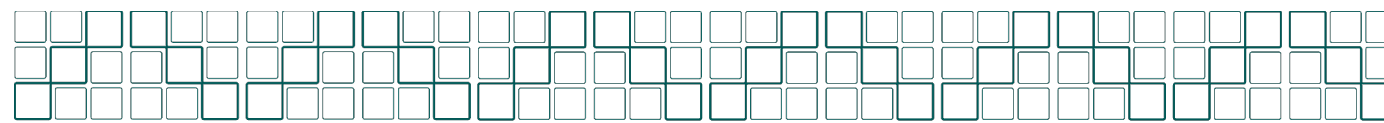
RESPECT is a key element of assertive communication



What They Look and Sound Like

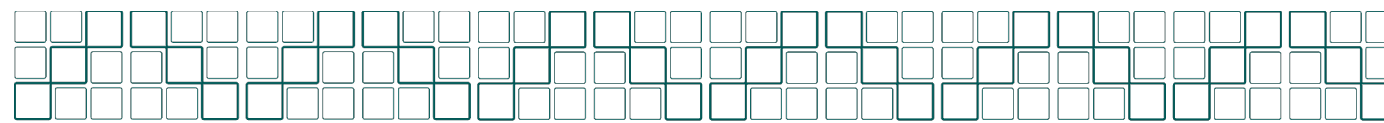
- You and a colleague have a report due at the end of the week. You also have another project and are very busy. You meet with your colleague to go over the report and the two of you realize you need to redo some of the sections and add others. Your colleague tells you they cannot do much because they have family visiting this whole week.
- What would you do and/or say?

POLL



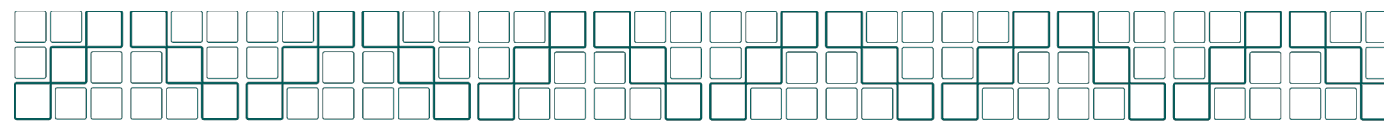
What They Look and Sound Like

- You and a colleague have a report due at the end of the week. You also have another project and are very busy. You meet with your colleague to go over the report and the two of you realize you need to redo some of the sections and add others. Your colleague tells you they cannot do much because they have family visiting this whole week.
 - Passive: you say nothing and agree to make the changes.
 - Aggressive: you get angry and say you won't do it and remind them that your PI is expecting this and that you already did more than you wanted to do.
 - Assertive: you share that you are really busy and ask if the two of you can strategize about ways to get the work done together.
 - Passive-aggressive: You say you will make the changes, and then email your PI later asking them to reschedule. You don't tell your partner about this in advance.



What They Look and Sound Like

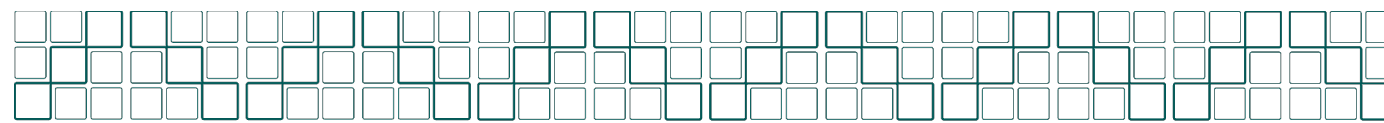
	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
General	Vague, submissive, unclear message	Firm but polite; clear message; respectful communication	Forceful and unkind; clear message but often missed; disrespectful
Eyes	Averted, looking down	Eye contact	Narrow, emotionless
Posture	Stooped, tense, closed; makes body smaller	Relaxed, open, welcoming	Leaning forward; body made bigger
Hands	Clenched, together, rigid	Open, friendly gestures	Pointing, hands on hips, clenched fists
Outcome	May not get what you want since it may not be easily understood through your message	Better chance of getting what you want and feeling heard	May alienate people even if you get what you want



What Holds Us Back From Being Assertive

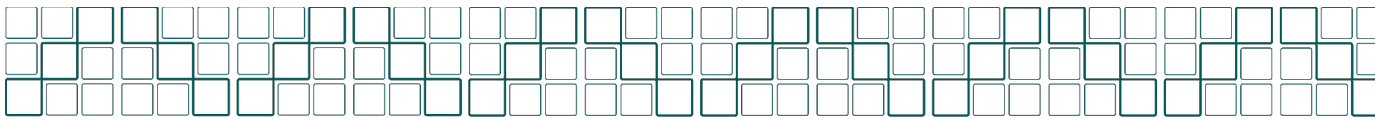
- We don't believe we have the right to be assertive
- We are not sure of what we want or need
- We are afraid of displeasing others or of not being liked
- We lack discomfort tolerance, in general or in that situation
- Cognitive distortions lead us to tell ourselves stories that hold us back
- We struggle in situations that involve hierarchy
- We lack the skills we need to effectively be assertive

WHICH OF THESE OFTEN APPLY TO YOU?



Self-Reflection – Journaling Exercise

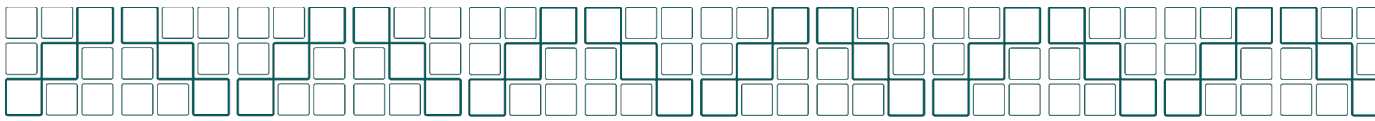
- Think about some important relationships at work or at home.....
 - Consider a time you were assertive and communicated your needs effectively. Focus on what happened, why it happened, how it made you feel and anything you wish had gone differently.
 - Consider a time when you struggled to be assertive and communicate your needs effectively. Focus on what happened, why it happened, how it made you feel and anything you wish had gone differently.



Question for the Group

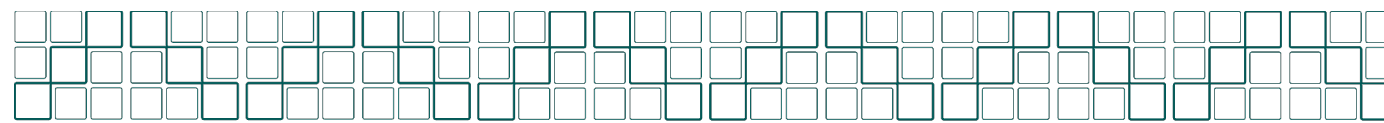
- What are some things that make it easier for you to be assertive?

POLL



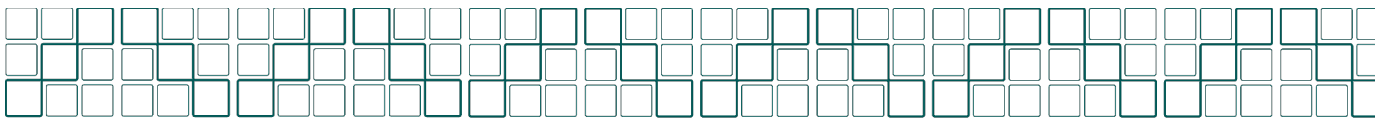
Strategies For Assertive Communication

- Self-awareness
- A willingness to work hard to change
- An understanding of communication and conflict styles
- Communication tools for being assertive
- Resilience strategies and tools for managing stress and discomfort tolerance



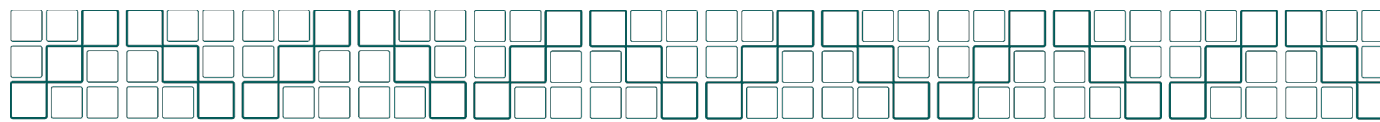
Some Thoughts On Stress Around Being Assertive

- Comes from our concerns about personal safety and educational/career safety
- Comes from our cognitive distortions – catastrophizing, mind reading, fortune telling....
- We need to weigh the risks and rewards when deciding a way forward. Helpful to ask ourselves:
 - how important is this to me?
 - how important is this relationship to me?
 - is this situation part of a pattern; if so, could choosing not to take action have unintended long-term consequences?
 - is my fear of taking action fully warranted?



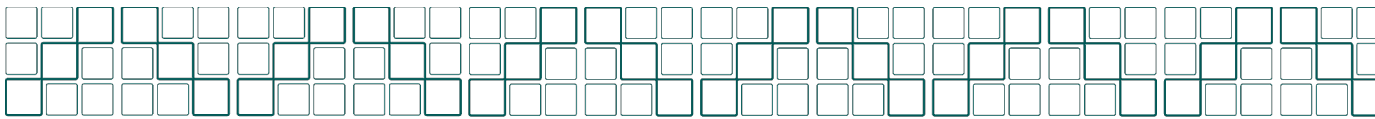
Assertiveness Toolkit

- Decision-making questions:
 - ☐ What approach is appropriate for the situation?
 - ☐ What are the options available to me?
 - ☐ What is the **best** possible outcome for me?
 - ☐ What is the **worst** possible outcome for me?
 - ☐ Are there some **middle** outcomes I can be happy with?
 - ☐ What questions do I need answered to make a good decision?
 - ☐ Are there things I can offer to mitigate the concerns and address the needs of the other party?
- Who can help me prepare?
- And when necessary.... who can add to my safety?



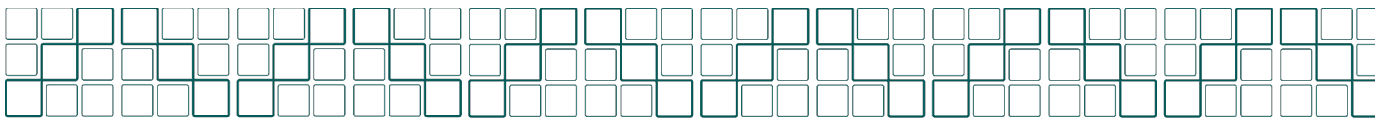
Strategies for Assertive Communications

- **I statements:** Taking responsibility for your feelings, wants, and needs AND expressing them clearly



I Statement Structure

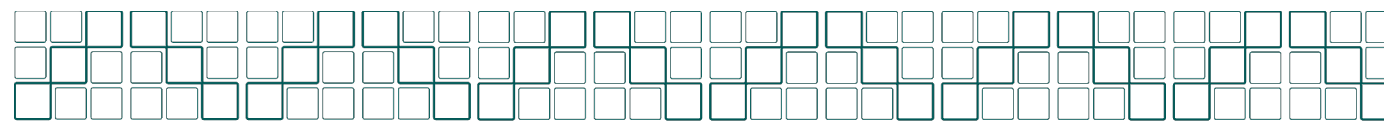
- I feel....
 - When.....
 - Because.....
 - I would like.....
-
- You may not always use all four parts



I Statement Example

- You are working on a group project and one of your team members is not responding to you with comments about the presentation draft you submitted last week. They also did not respond to an updated draft you emailed this week.

I feel frustrated (____), **when I'm working on a project and my emails aren't responded to** because I really want to finish the project without too much stress right now. **I would appreciate** if you can make this a priority and give me a sense of when I can expect to hear from you with your input.

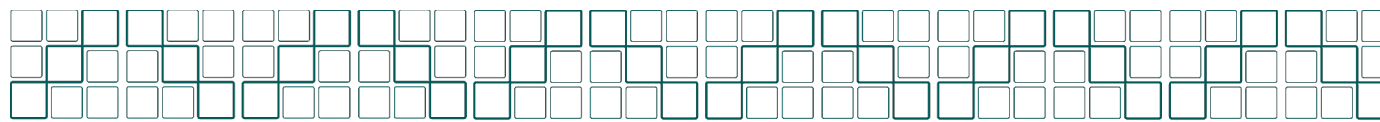


I Statement Example III

- Microaggressions from someone are making you/others feel unwelcome and upset.

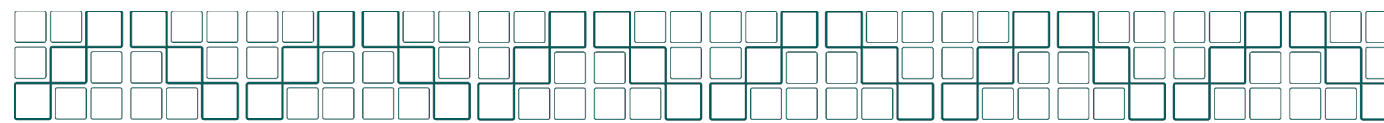
I feel hurt/angry/disrespected/unwelcome **when** I hear comments about _____.
I would like for you to stop making these comments.

I believe that some of our colleagues **feel** hurt/angry/disrespected/unwelcome **when they hear** make comments about _____. **I would like** for you to stop making these comments.



Strategies for Assertive Communications

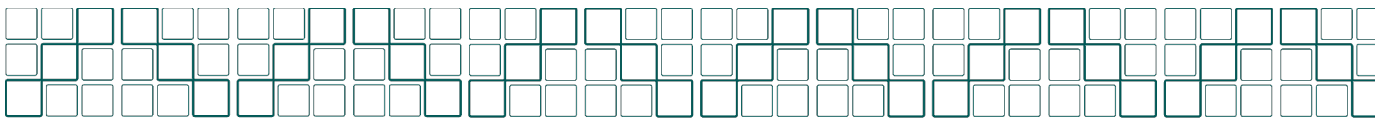
- **I statements:** Taking responsibility for your feelings, wants, and needs AND expressing them clearly
- **Empathic listening:** periodically summarizing what we think the communicator thinks, feels, means and needs – without necessarily agreeing. Asking clarifying questions that could lead to a solution that works for all parties.



Empathic Listening Example

- A friend is disappointed that you were not available for a Zoom chat twice this week. You want to be a good friend, but have work due at school and need to set strong boundaries until you turn it in next week.

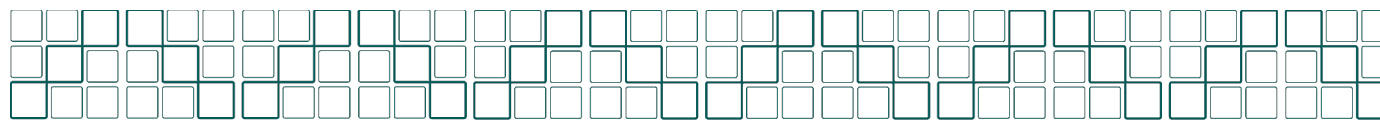
I hear that you are disappointed that I did not make time for the two Zoom sessions you invited me to this week. If I understand, you feel that I let you down and that you really need a friend right now? Can we talk about it so I can be a good friend and also take care of my work deadline right now?



Strategies for Assertive Communications

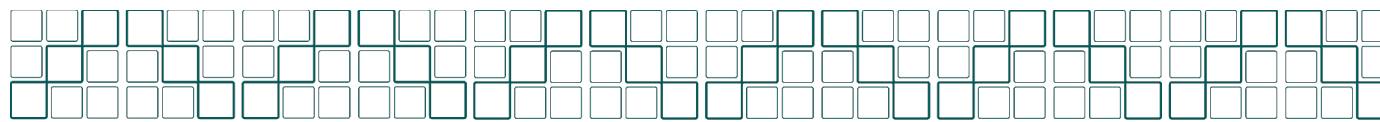
- **I statements:** Taking responsibility for your feelings, wants, and needs AND expressing them clearly
- **Empathic listening:** periodically summarizing what we think the communicator thinks, feels, means and needs – without necessarily agreeing.
- **Negative/Positive Inquiry:** Using questions to probe the meaning of feedback when you want/need more information to facilitate your learning

<http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness-techniques.html#ixzz4GAPdadCi>



Negative and Positive Inquiry Examples

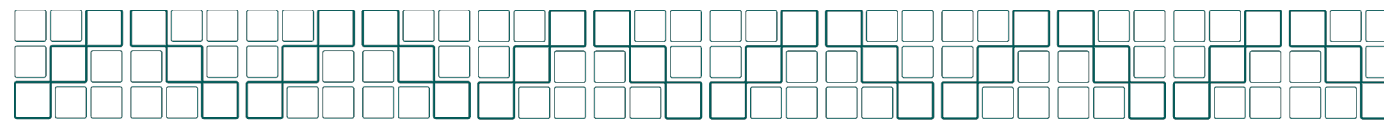
- You presented a practice seminar for a job interview and got the following feedback from a faculty member – “good job; keep it up”. You wonder what part you should keep up.
 - Thanks; I am glad you liked it. So I can learn from this, and continue to improve, would you mind talking in a bit more detail? What did you think about the introduction....?
- Or you got the following negative feedback – “you might not be cut out for this”. This is not at all helpful to you.
 - Oh, that is disappointing to hear; I am hoping to start my job search soon, and I would like to learn from the experience. Would you mind going over the slides and talking in more detail?



Strategies for Assertive Communications

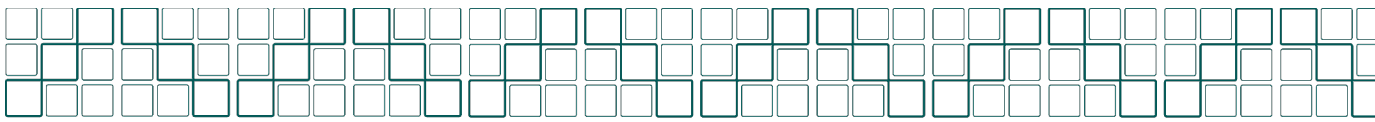
- I statements
- Empathic listening
- Negative inquiry
- Positive inquiry

- And two strategies when the conversations gets increasingly complex
 - fogging
 - broken record



A Few Other Things To Keep In Mind

- It takes preparation and practice
 - it is an iterative process
 - best to start in safe places
- Time can be a great tool
 - In advance, to practice and prepare when the stakes are high
 - pause before responding to collect your thoughts in the moment
 - say you will think about it (or ask for time to get back to them)
 - suggest everyone take time and meet again if emotions are high and things seem to be getting derailed
- You want to make a clear ask



Making a Clear Ask

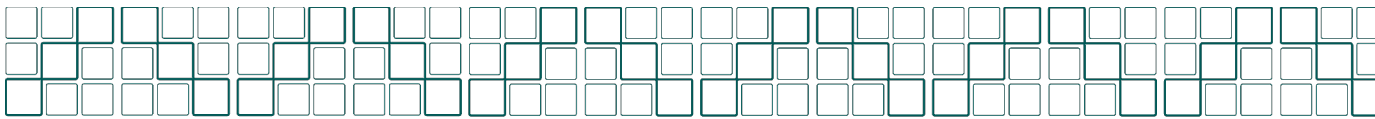
- Being specific about what you are asking for (both internally and in your communication)

I need to meet more often for individual meetings with my lab mentor (or teacher, boss, etc)

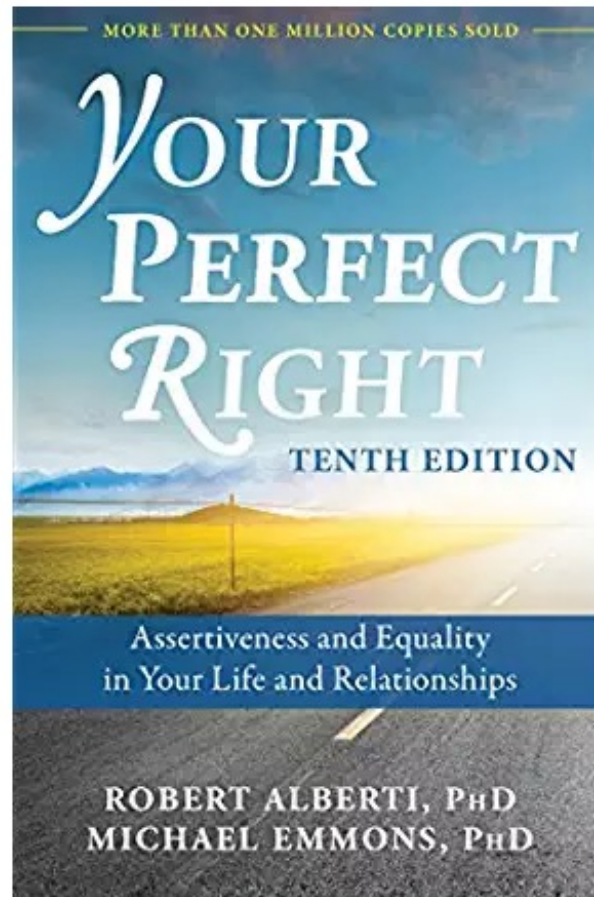
I feel that I need more input from you.

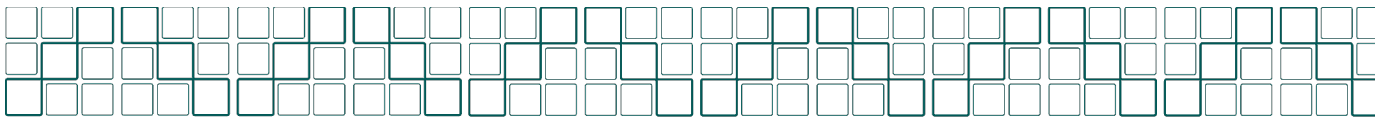
OR

I would appreciate if we could schedule a weekly meeting to talk about.....



Great Resource





Saying 'No'

I'll feel guilty if I say "no"

It's my friend/family member/boss so I can't say "no"

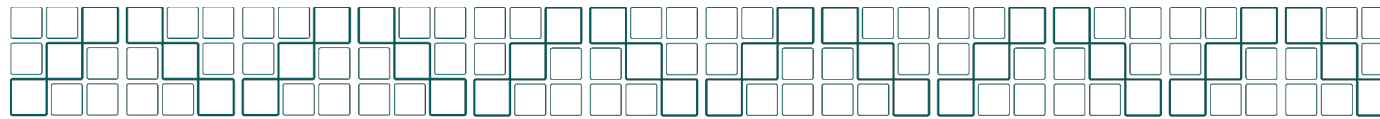


Agree, say "yes" even when you don't want to



Your own needs are not met

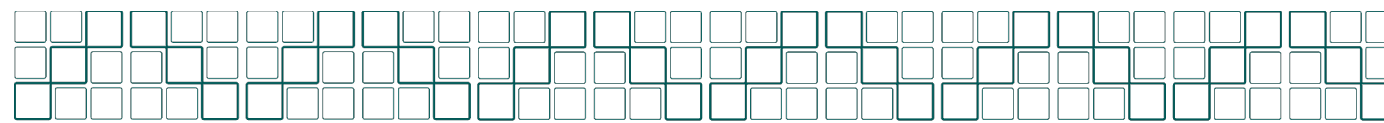
You feel resentful, tired, and used



Saying 'No' and Making Requests

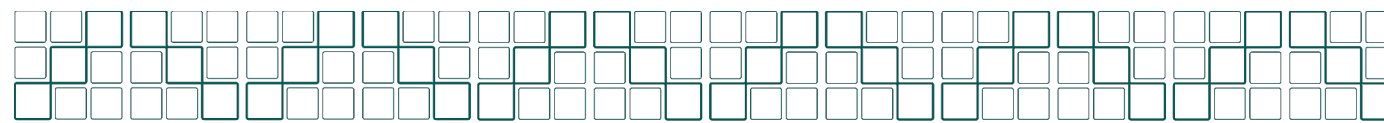
What did you recently say yes to that
you wished you had said no to?

POLL



Deciding Whether to Say 'No'

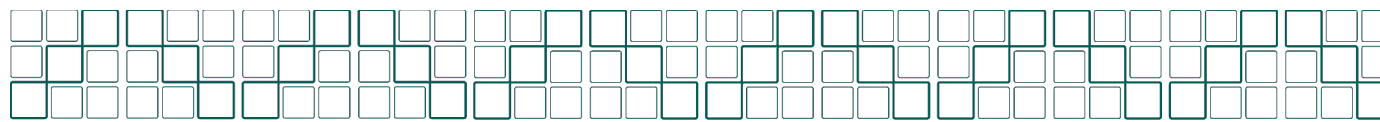
- Some questions to ask yourself about the activity:
 - ☐ Will it help me reach one of my important goals?
 - ☐ Does it provide an intangible benefit important to me right now?
 - ☐ Do I need to do it now or can this wait?
 - ☐ What else is going on? Where does this rank in my priorities?
 - ☐ Is it a request from someone I can not ignore?
 - ☐ Is it a request from someone I really care about?
 - ☐ Will it matter a week/month/year from now?
 - ☐ Will it matter if I don't do it?



Effective Ways to Say No

- I am sorry, but I have a lot going on and really can't take on anything new right now.
- I am sorry but my current situation makes it difficult (impossible) for me to
- I am sorry but I can't participate in this. Perhaps another time?
- I would like to help with this, but this is a very busy time for me. Is there another time I can help with this?

KEY POINTS: 1) do not over-apologize; 2) do not say "ask again", unless you mean it.



Assertiveness Toolkit

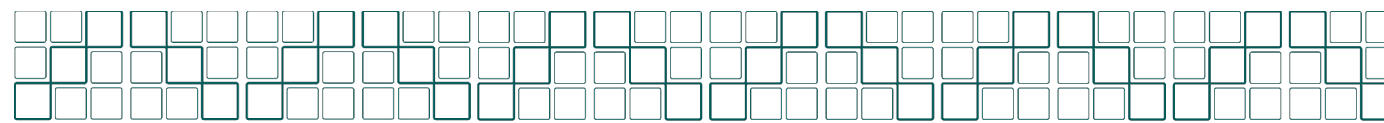
■ Decision-making questions:

- ☐ What are the options available to me? Are there ways to expand on the options I see?
- ☐ What is the **best** possible outcome for me?
- ☐ What is the **worst** possible outcome for me?
- ☐ Are there some **middle** outcomes I can be happy with?
- ☐ What questions do I need answered to make a good decision?
- ☐ Are there things I can offer to mitigate the concerns and address the needs of the other party?

■ Who can help me prepare?

■ Who can give me realistic and knowledgeable advice?

■ And when necessary.... who can add to my safety?

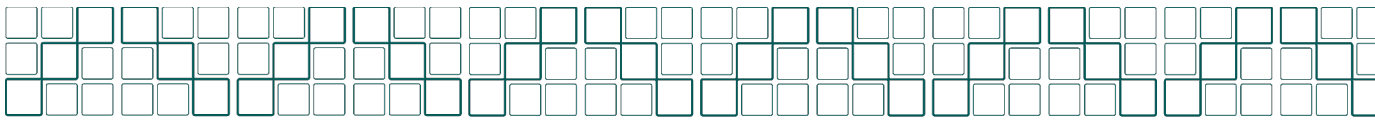


A Framework for Decision Making

- Decide whether to address the issue/share the information

There is a lot going on at home that is affecting my stress level and sleep which is affecting the quality and quantity of my work.

- ☐ do I talk with my boss/teacher/mentor about it or not?
- ☐ if I decide to talk with them, how much information do I share?



A Risk/Reward Scaffold

Share?

Risk

It is embarrassing to share this
My 'boss' says something and makes me feel worse
My 'boss' doesn't want me in their group

Reward

My 'boss' is supportive
My stress level decreases
My 'boss' might offer support and ideas
It feels good to be honest
My 'boss' has correct information

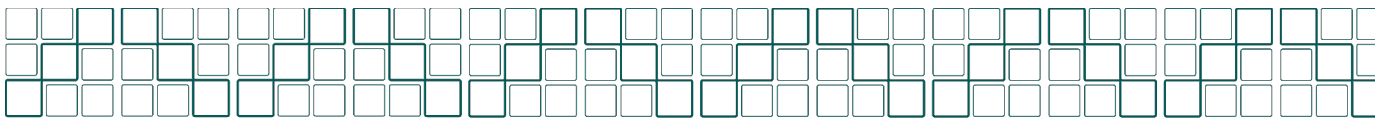
Don't Share?

Risk

My 'boss' makes incorrect assumptions
Potential for bad will if they find out later

Reward

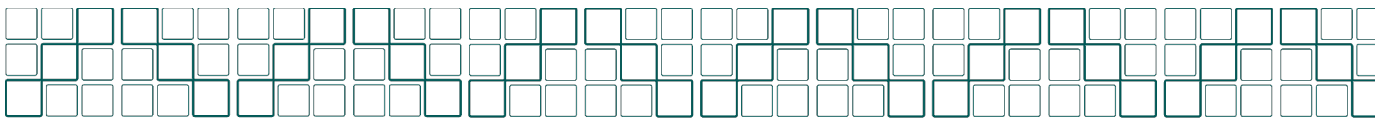
I avoid the discomfort of sharing
I feel more independent
Safety from a difficult 'boss'



Four Final Points

- You cannot make anyone do anything they do not want to do
- the only person's behavior you can control is yours
- Developing assertiveness skills and using them is a win – even if you do not get the outcome you had hoped for
- It is impossible to eliminate all risk; the key questions are
 - what are the risks?
 - how high are they?
 - what resources are available to help me prepare and if the worst-case scenario comes to pass?

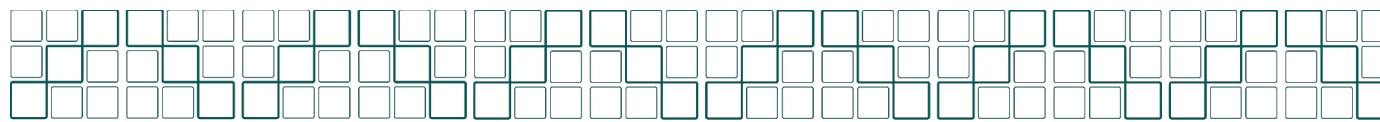
REMEMBER AIR: awareness, accurate assessment, regulation



And Some Fun

- **C**lear asks and assertiveness strategies
- **A**ssess risks and rewards
- **T**ry to expand options
- **S**often distorted thinking
- **D**on't go unprepared
- **O**ffer or ask for time as needed
- **G**rowth mindset – this is a learned skill and it is hard
- **S**eek advice and support when the stakes are high





Journaling Prompt for You At the End

- Having spent the time listening to this workshop, what do I want to learn more about, do next, consider, etc....?
- Join the discussion groups next week – this is a great place to practice
- Our mental health series launches soon – coming first....
Stigma and culture