



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT!

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND PERSISTENT PAIN

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March 2024



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

HOUSEKEEPING

- Please be respectful and remember confidentiality
- Please silence your phones
- Please do not record the presentation
- You may download or print off the presentation slides at:

panamclinic.org/patient-resources/

OUTLINE

- Pain and Communication
- Communication styles
- Relationships and boundary setting
- Communication Strategies
- Communicating with self and others



VERBAL VS NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Your Body Can Speak!

Verbal	Non-Verbal
The words we say	Eye contact
Sounds we make (e.g.: mhmm, ah, umm)	Facial expressions
Words we write	Body language (e.g.: crossed arms, nodding head)
The tone and volume of voice we use	Gestures (e.g.: using the hands while talking)

PAIN AFFECTS HOW WE COMMUNICATE

- Pain can be distracting and make it hard to focus in a conversation
- Brings up emotions such as anger and frustration that you misdirect at others
- Makes you too tired to interact & communicate with others
- Disrupts routine (e.g., work, hobbies) & makes you feel you have little to share
- Makes you keep silent to avoid “burdening” others

HOW WE COMMUNICATE IMPACTS PAIN

Not appropriately expressing our thoughts & emotions contributes to:

- Stress (e.g., tension)
- Emotions such as anxiety, anger and resentment
- Being misunderstood
- Not getting our needs met
- Estrangement from loved ones
- Confrontation and hurt feelings
- Worsening of pain

COMMON BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION WITH PERSISTENT PAIN

- Acute vs. Persistent pain- others limited understanding of what persistent pain
- Person vs. Diagnosis- people focusing too much on your pain and diagnosis and not on you as a whole person
- Pain and energy levels fluctuate
- No one gets it

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Aggressive

- Reactive
- Disregards others; prioritizes the self

Passive

- Difficulty expressing needs; prioritizes needs of others

Passive Aggressive

- Appears passive, but has underlying message

Assertive

- Responsive
- Respects the needs of others and the self

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNICATION STYLES

Aggressive

Its terrible, why did you give it to me?! You need to fix it now!

Passive

Its ok, I'm sorry I don't know why its not working that well but I will keep trying

Passive Aggressive

Thank you for seeing me, I really appreciate the prescription, I guess I should just keep taking it since you recommended it, I suppose I just need to put up with the side effects

Assertive

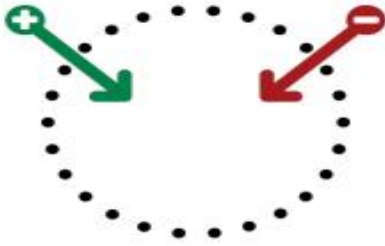
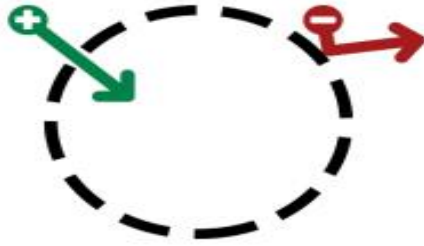
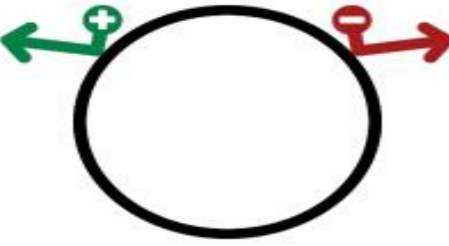
I have been having some side effects and would like to review those with you now.

BOUNDARIES

- Boundaries are limits we set for ourselves and with others.
- Our boundaries may be different depending on the relationship.
- Maintaining boundaries may be challenging if we prioritize the needs of others over ourselves or if we have certain expectations for our behaviours.

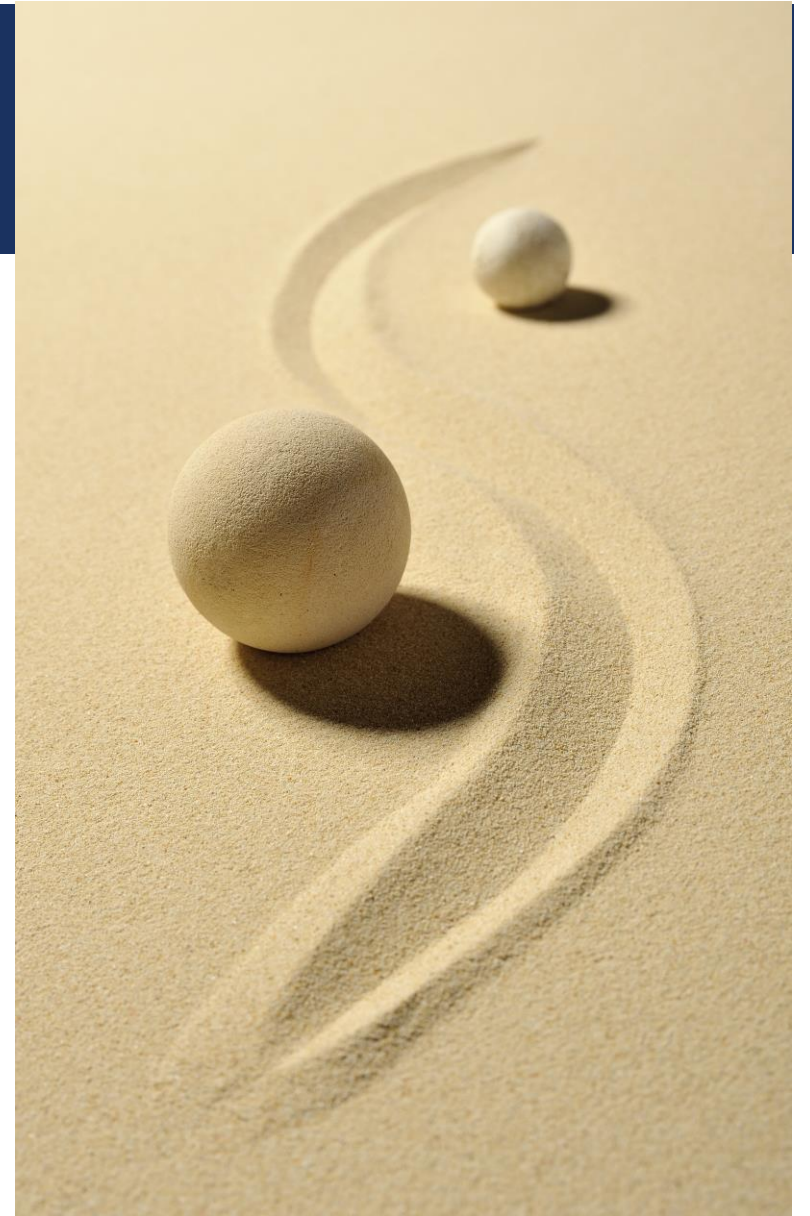
Boundary Styles

Boundaries define what is acceptable, and what is not, in a relationship. It is possible to have different boundary types in different relationships.

Porous Boundaries 	Healthy Boundaries 	Rigid Boundaries 
Lets almost anyone get close to them	Selective about whom to let in and keep out	Keeps most people at a distance
Overly trusting of others, even strangers	Takes time to build trust with others	Very untrusting of others
Overshares personal information	Shares personal information appropriately	Very guarded with personal information
Has difficulty saying "no" to others	Able to say "no" when needed	Says "no" to others most of the time
Overly involved in others' problems	Supports others without being too involved	Detached from others' problems
Quick to adopt others' opinions	Values both own and others' opinions	Tends to ignore others' opinions
Avoids conflict by giving in to others	Accepts conflict as a normal part of life	Avoids conflict by pushing others away
Does not assert personal values	Stands by personal values, but can adapt	Has inflexible personal values
Communicates passively	Communicates assertively	Communicates aggressively

How To Create Healthy Boundaries

- Know your limits
- Know your values
- Listen to your emotions
- Respect yourself and others
- Be assertive
- Think long-term



COMMUNICATION AND BOUNDARIES

- Communication is necessary to maintain boundaries.
- Certain communication styles make it harder to maintain boundaries (e.g.: passive or passive aggressive) OR don't respect the boundaries of others (e.g.: aggressive).
- Setting boundaries are important when living with persistent pain, because boundaries may need to be set on activities to better manage pain (e.g.: pacing of activity).

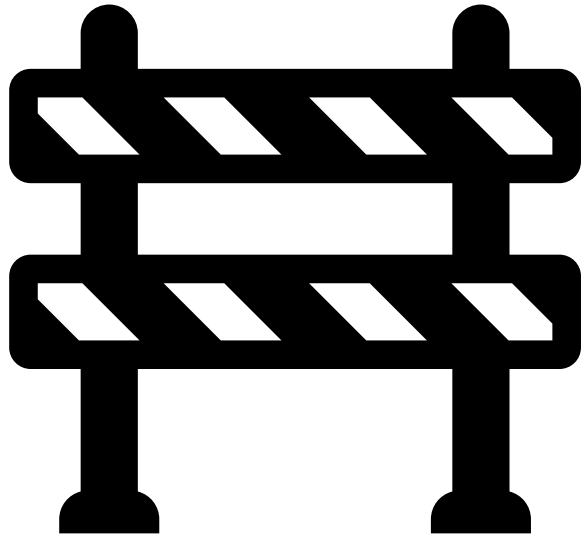
COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS

- An important skill for communicating our needs and setting boundaries
- Others can't know what we are thinking or feeling unless we say something
- This is especially important when living with persistent pain, as the pain experience may not be visible





BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



- Fear of conflict
- Time
- Expectations
- Pain
- Communication skills
- Possible Reactions from others

Communicating Effectively With Others

Relationships

Family

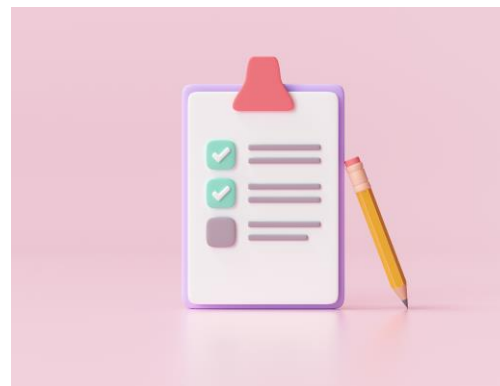
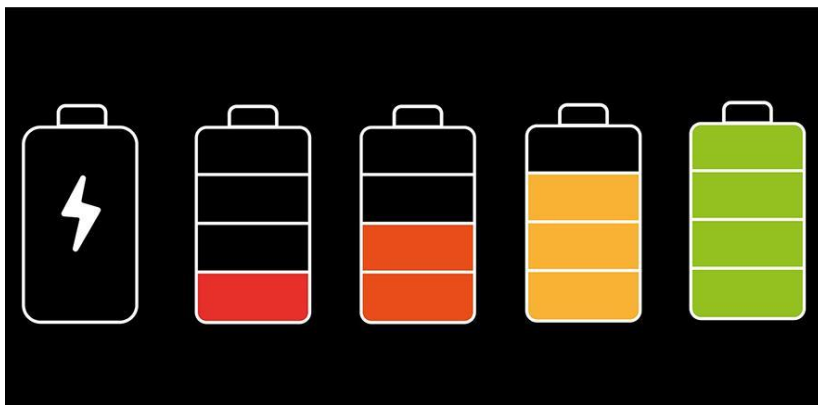
Friends

Coworkers or
peers

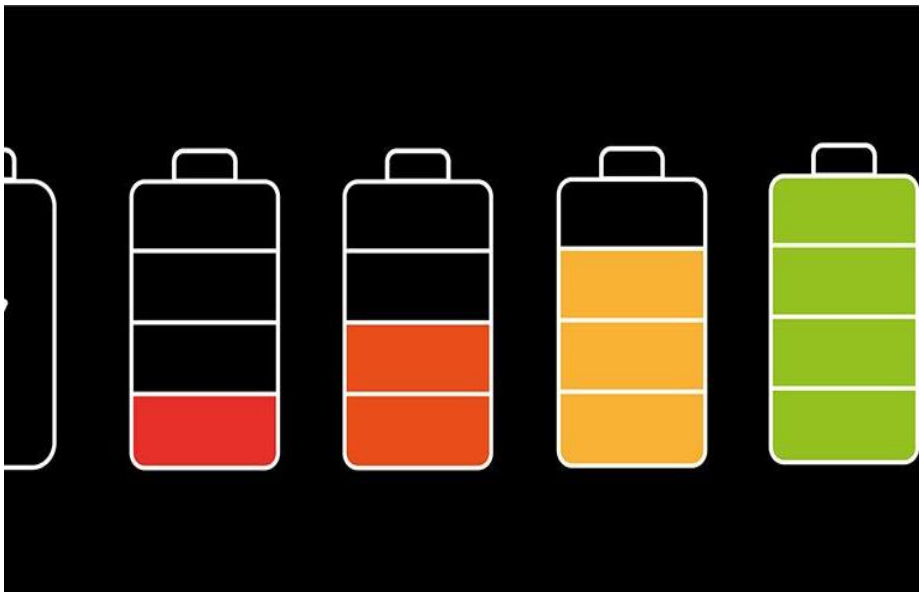
Healthcare
Team

Acquaintances

Strangers



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY: FAMILY AND CLOSE SUPPORTS



- Be honest and communicate clearly about how you are and what can you do
- Let them know how much you can participate today (25%, 50% 75%etc)
- Make a flexible plan or a Plan A, B and C
- Encourage flexibility in others and let them know how they can help you (delegate, listen,)
- Attend to your basic personal needs, before the needs of others

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY : HEALTHCARE

■ **Barriers:**

- Time-feeling rushed
- Lack of understanding
- Anxiety around appointment
- Previous experiences with providers

■ **Strategies:**

- Prepare
- Bring a friend
- Take notes
- Be honest
- Ask questions to clarify
- Leave with a plan

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY: STRANGERS AND ACQUAINTANCE

-
- Only share what you want
 - Say no
 - Have ready excuses for turning down invitations

SELF RESPECT EFFECTIVENESS-FAST

- **F**- Fair. Be Fair. To others, and to yourself
- **A**-Apologies- Do not apologize unless its warranted. Do not apologize for making requests or having an opinion.
- **S**-Stick to your values. Don't compromise your values to make someone like you or to get what you want. Stand up for what you believe in
- **T**-Truthful-Avoid dishonesty such as exaggeration, acting helpless as a form of manipulation, or outright lying

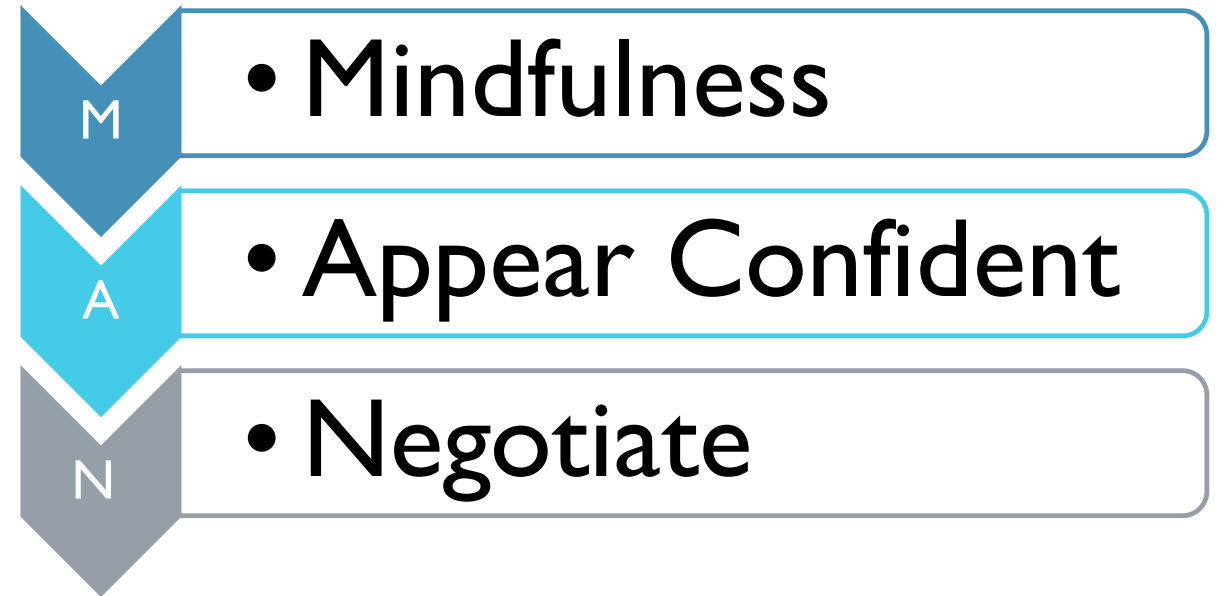
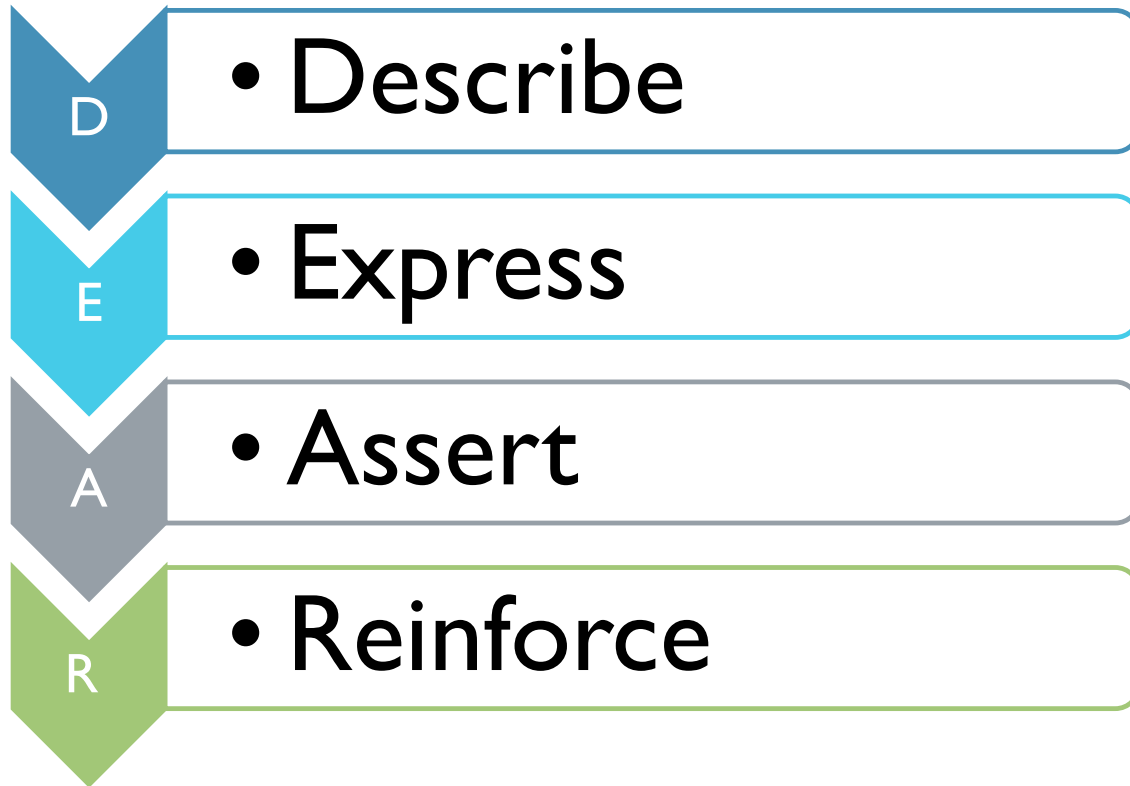
COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

DEARMAN

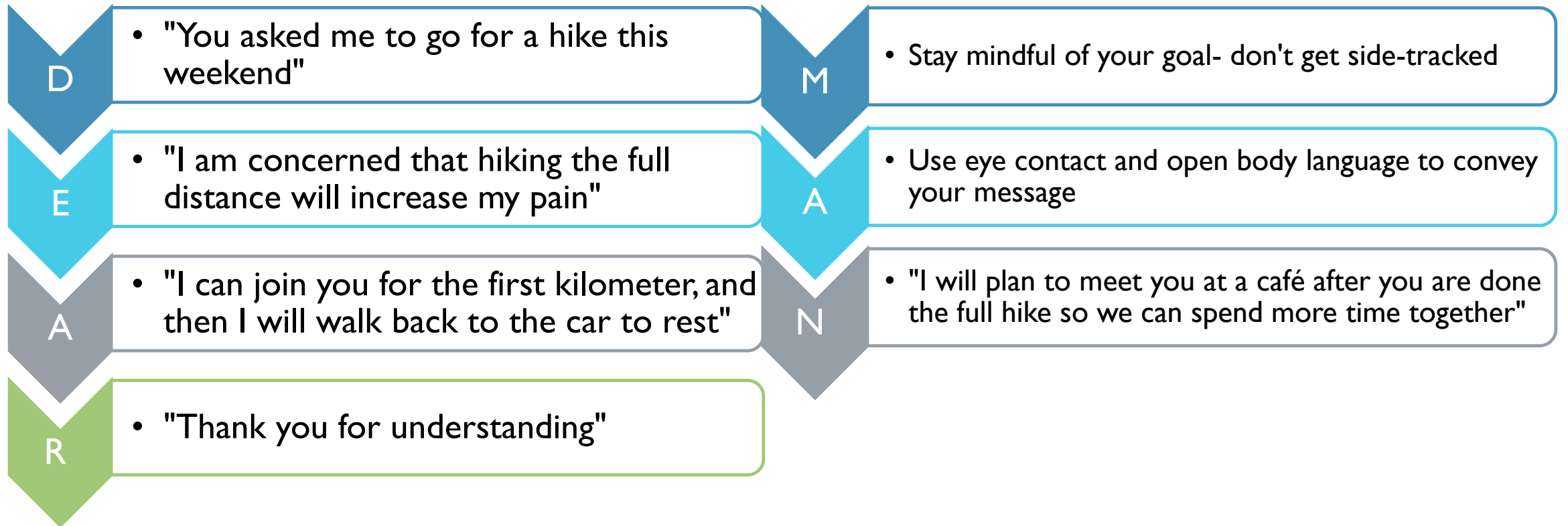
"I" or "WIN" Statements

Broken Record Technique

DEARMAN STRATEGY



DEARMAN STRATEGY



"I" STATEMENTS OR "WIN" STATEMENTS

"I feel _____ when _____"

Emotion *Explanation*

"**W**hen you _____ **I** feel _____ **I Need** _____"

BROKEN RECORD TECHNIQUE- MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES



- Repeating what we want to say, in a concise way, without further justification or explanation.
- This is a helpful strategy for maintaining boundaries when we are concerned someone may not listen.
- E.g.: "I'm sorry, but I can't go out tonight."
- This can be combined with a strategy called *fogging*, where we acknowledge what the person is saying without agreeing to what they want us to do.
- E.g.: "I understand that you would like me to come to the party with you, but I can't go out tonight."

CONSIDERATIONS

- Right place, right person, right time
- High risk vs low risk
- Tone of voice
- Be direct, be specific
- Prepare ahead of time
- Be aware of body language
- Use of "and" instead of "but"
- Anticipate barriers

FOUR GATES OF SPEECH

True

- Is what I'm saying true?

Necessary

- Is it necessary to speak?

Timing

- Is this the right time?

Kind

- Is what I'm saying kind?

COMMUNICATING WITH SELF



- What you say to yourself, in your thoughts or out loud, matter
- We tend to believe our thoughts
- What we tell ourselves may increase feelings of distress and may increase pain

NOTICE YOUR THOUGHT PATTERNS



All or nothing thinking



Should statements



Disqualifying the positive
and/or emphasizing the negative



Mind-reading
and/or emotional reasoning



Is there a re-occurring pattern or story to the thoughts

CREATE SPACE FROM THE THOUGHT

Put thoughts on clouds

- Imagine your thoughts on clouds drifting across the sky

Use a silly voice

- Say the thought in a silly voice

"I'm having the thought..."

- Say "I'm having the thought that..."

Name the story

- Notice the repetitive thoughts and name the story they are telling you

FIND YOUR COMPASSIONATE VOICE



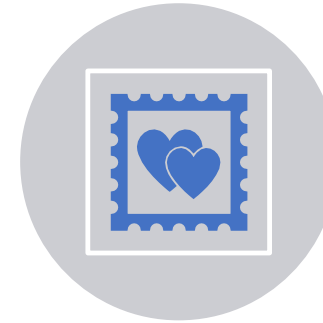
NOTICE CRITICAL SELF-
STATEMENTS

"I can't do
anything right"



ACKNOWLEDGE AND
SOFTEN THE CRITICAL
VOICE

"I can see I'm
upset that didn't
go like I planned."



USE A COMPASSIONATE
SELF-STATEMENT

"I did the best I
could today. I'm
glad I tried."

SELF-COMPASSION

- “With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we’d give to a good friend.”
- -Dr. Kristin Neff



Image taken from: online article by Lori and Monte Dube 2020

Upcoming Workshops

- **Reframing Exercise and Persistent Pain**
 - Thursday, October 16th from 1:00-2:30 pm
- **Low Energy and Persistent Pain**
 - Thursday, October 30th from 1:00-2:30 pm
- **Stress You Can! Strategies to Manage and Live with Stress**
 - Thursday, November 6th from 1:00-2:30 p.m.
- **ACTing on Persistent Pain**
 - Thursday, November 20th from 1:00-2:30 pm

OPTIONAL NEXT STEPS

- Practice the Strategies discussed today
- Access these Online Resources

TAPMI Communication Module:

[Communication Principles | Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute \(TAPMI\)](#)

- Power over Pain Webinars:

Navigating Healthcare: Communicate with Confidence

<https://vimeo.com/1096047867?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Pain Speak: Empowering Voices in Chronic Pain

<https://vimeo.com/1096047914?fl=pl&fe=sh>

Let's Talk About Chronic Pain: Communication & Chronic Pain

<https://vimeo.com/917294048?fl=pl&fe=sh>

- Request individual referral

A large, 3D white question mark is centered on the right side of the image. It has a thick, rounded design with a drop shadow on the light blue background. The word "QUESTIONS" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font across the middle of the question mark's stem.

QUESTIONS



REFERENCES AND CREDITS

- Living Well With Persistent Pain Series by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
- Therapist Aid 2024 Therapy Worksheets, Tools, and Handouts | Therapist Aid
- Dr. Kristin Neff Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff: Join the Community Now
- Communication Principles | Toronto Academic Pain Medicine Institute (TAPMI) (tapmipain.ca)
- McNamara, Mary, Straathof, Theresa, Coping Strategies to Promote Occupational Engagement and Recovery 2017
- Ward, Susan, Navigating Healthcare: Communicate with Confidence June 11, 2025 Webinar-accessed July 28, 2025