



From Conflict to Collaboration: Healing Strained Learner Relationships After Conflict

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A blue metal telescope on a pedestal against a backdrop of misty mountains.

Overview of today's session

- Recognize how feedback-related conflicts impact educator-learner relationships and contribute to avoidant behaviors and questioning of trust.
- Identify methods to mend strained relationships, ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment while acknowledging changes in the relationship.
- Apply de-escalating language and conduct after-action debrief to reinforce collaboration and trust, as well as foster mutual understanding





Assumptions

- Feedback has already been conveyed/received
- There is a desire to restore the relationship/there is a longitudinal dynamic
- There is a mutual goal of completing an educational experience
- There are lots of feedback theories and practices. Our lens today is conflict.



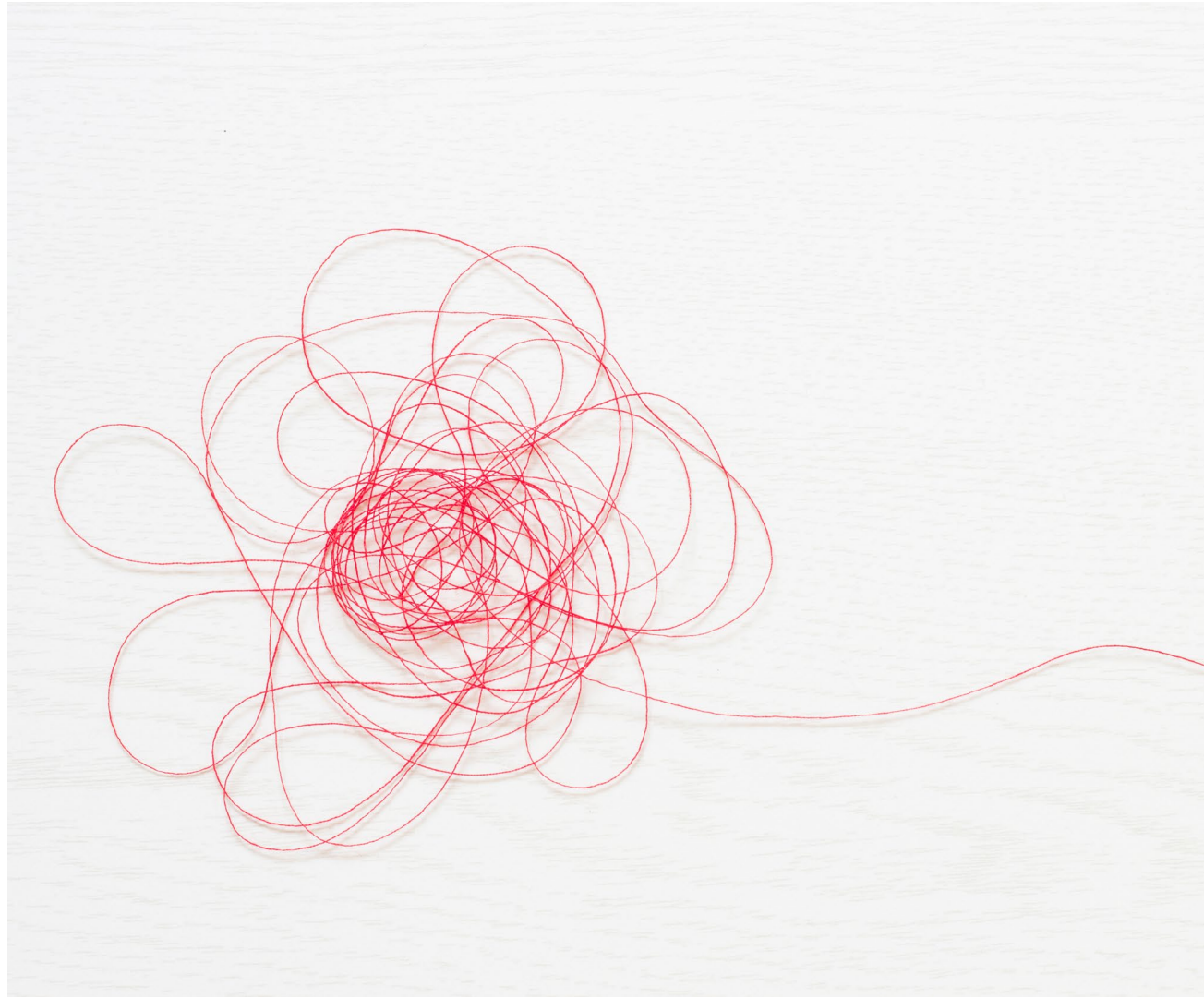


Think about a time that you
got tough feedback

What did you feel?

Describe that first meeting
after with the person who
gave the feedback?





Did the
relationship ever
go back to
“normal”?



Unexpected/uncomfortable feedback
introduces conflict

Conflict operates like unwelcome
surprise; that surprise changes the
relationship

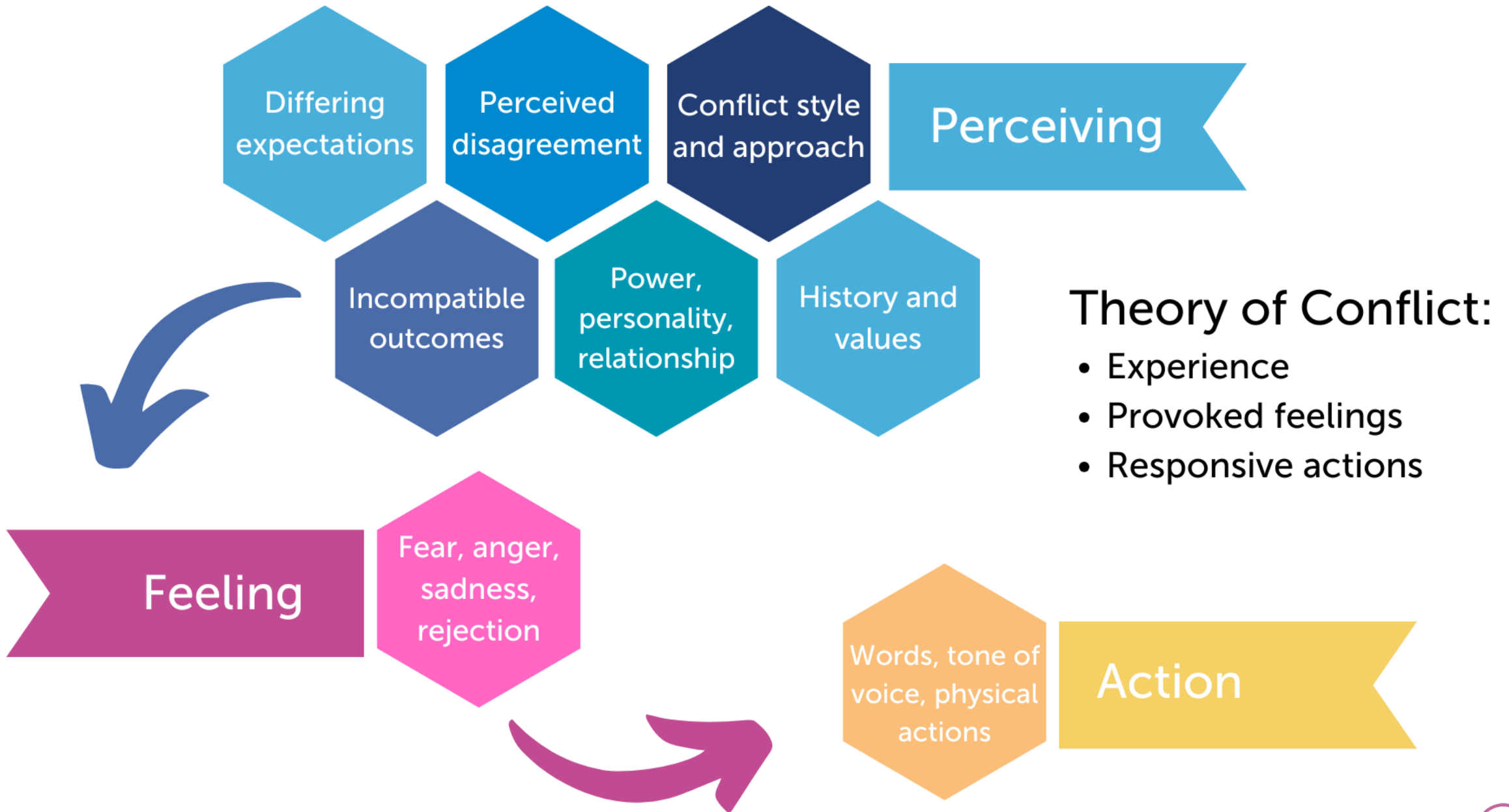
Mitigating the surprise doesn't get you
back to normal, it gets you to something
new

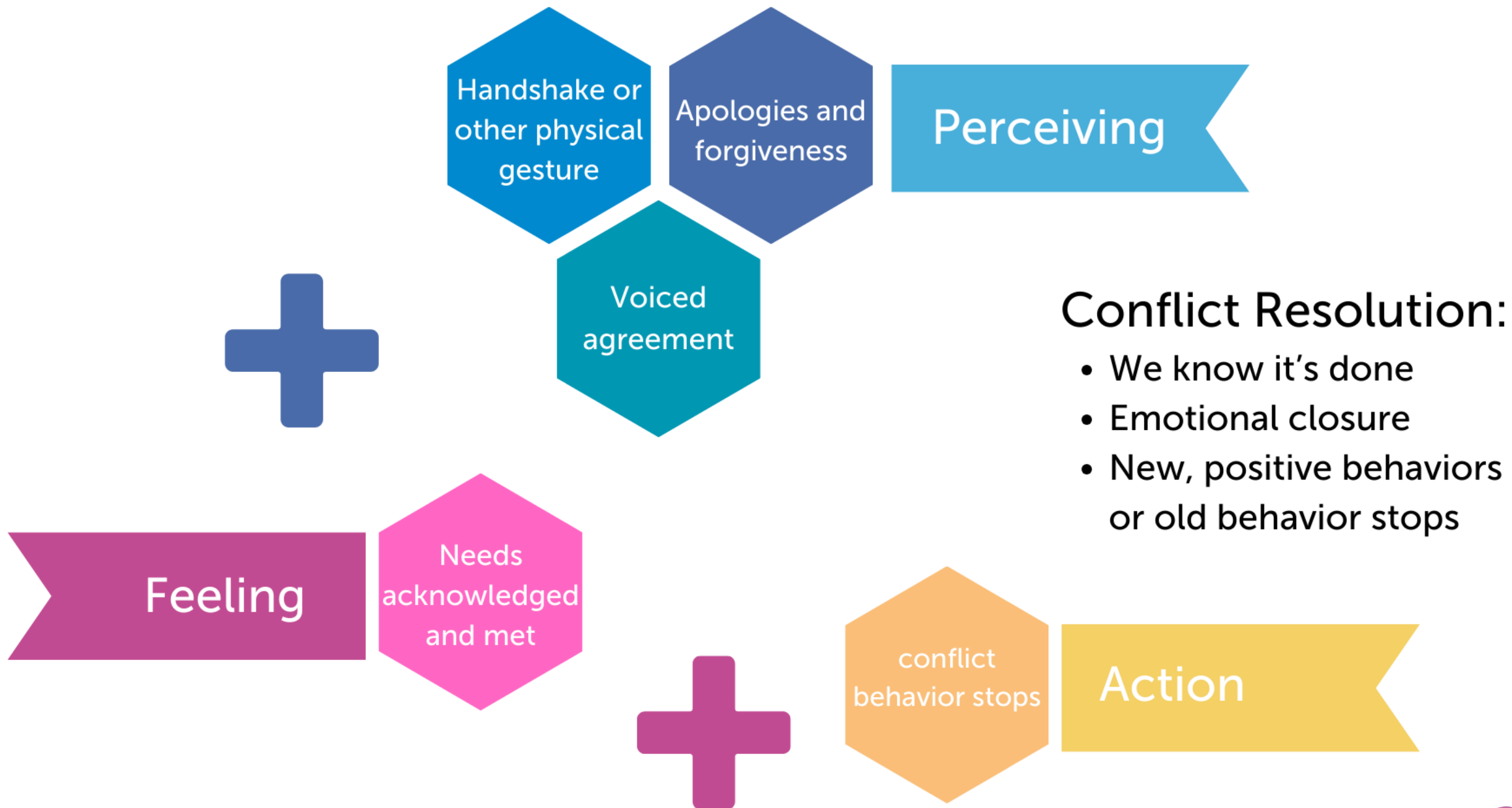
Getting to something new requires (1)
stabilizing and rebuilding trust; (2) re-
establishing shared goals; (3) resetting
expectations



Conflict theory and feedback







Is it really resolved?

- Most conflict resolution is incomplete in the sense that it doesn't have experience, action, and feeling resolution.
- When resolution has been incomplete, what parts are most likely to be missing? (observation, feeling, action)



Discuss: Incomplete resolution

No understanding/belief that the conflict is over can show up like ...

- No discussion/acknowledgement of feedback situation
- Perceived or real negative relationship alteration
- Learner or educator withdraws

Needs are not acknowledged/met can show up like ...

- Impact of feedback not discussed or explored
- Options about next steps are not discussed in terms of meaningful choice or partnership
- Lack of acknowledgement of impact of feedback
- Lack of shared experience/educator's own experience with feedback

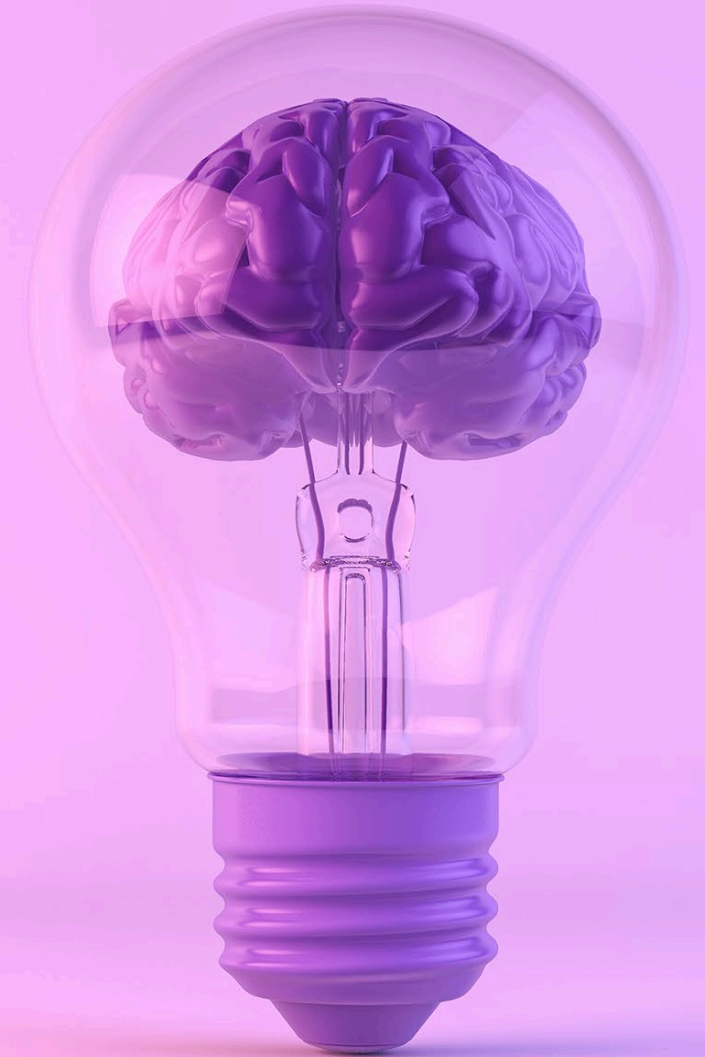
New actions/change in actions can show up like ...

- Feedback given the same way as before
- Don't experience "deep devotion + high standards"
- Needs may have been acknowledged, but no change in behavior

Restoration traps we'll talk about later

- Time pressure/moving too quickly
- Mistaking whether the conflict has resolved
- Engaging with an indifferent learner; disliking/not having a connection with the learner
- Emotional dysregulation, defensiveness, unkindness from the learner

In the educator/learner relationship, there must be a sense that the conflict is over before repair/restoration can occur



Short-term learner/educator alliances: mitigating unwelcome surprise



Putting mitigation efforts in place beforehand can make restoration work easier

(and early mitigation efforts may be all that you have in short-term educational alliance)



Mitigate unwelcome surprise with the 4Cs: Clarity, Consistency, Care, and Create

Set expectations
around feedback
and follow them

Show deep
devotion

Be clear about
high standards

Create
opportunities for
later connection



Creating safe educational alliance

These strategies reduce defensiveness and increase psychological safety in learning environments:

- Educators sharing what they're learning—promote a learning environment at all stages
- Create problem-solving partnerships: frame before you solve
- Share what is being unlearned
- Make learning a priority
- Share past mistakes



Mitigation success in action

It's the start of shift. How can you ...

- Be clear about what to expect about feedback
- Show genuine investment in learner success?
- Show that you are genuinely interested in the learner as a person?
- Be clear and consistent about expectations?
- Level power where appropriate?



Framing for a debrief



The after: framing a debrief

Engage

- Reassure and reassert
 - “My goal is to prepare you as well as possible and to support you in completing this educational experience.”
 - “Feedback can be hard. I know I’ve gotten difficult feedback in the past”
 - “My feedback was about your handling of the task, not you as a person.”
- Get learner’s perspective
 - What was the experience like?
 - What does it feel like right now?
 - What are you hoping will happen next?

Explore

- Find appropriate partnership and give meaningful choice
 - “Feedback will occur again. What would you like me to keep in mind?”
 - “What would you like to do with the feedback that’s been given/how can I support you in activating these feedback?”



Strategies for re-building trust following unexpected feedback



Mitigating restoration traps

- Time pressure/moving too quickly
 - This may require creatively breaking up the process
 - Loop back and lean into transparency, genuine regard, and consistency
- Engaging with an indifferent learner; disliking/not having a connection with the learner
 - Zooming out to where you can find common ground
 - Focusing on curiosity to disrupt assumption and judgment
 - Evaluate whether it makes more sense to move on
- Emotional dysregulation, defensiveness, unkindness from the learner
 - Don't take the bait - separate people from the problem
 - Lean into curiosity



Relationship restoration while the relationship is ongoing has three phases:

- Completion of current conflict
 - belief, needs met, experience
- A period of stabilization
 - re-establishing trust with transparency, genuine regard, and consistency
- The emergence of a new relationship



The 4Cs still apply in stabilizing: Clarity, Consistency, Care, and Create

Set expectations
around feedback
and follow them

Show deep
devotion

Be clear about
high standards

Create
opportunities for
later connection



The Triangle of Trust as part of stabilizing and emergence



From: "Begin with Trust," by Frances Frei and Anne Morriss, May-June 2020



Restoration success

- Stabilization may come quickly, but true emergence will take time.
- Stabilize through genuine belief in ability
- Commitment to support
- Consistent, transparent, reliable action
- Sharing experiences and your own growth
- Finding appropriate ways to partner and otherwise level the experience of power



Reflection questions

- What will be hard about restoring relationships?
- What is something we've talked about today that you wish had been part of your learning environment?
- What is something we've talked about today that you had as part of your learning environment and you'd like use?

