

DE-ESCALATING TECHNIQUES FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS

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TODAY'S AGENDA

- The World We're Living In
- The Potential Impact of the SJC Ruling on Your Public Meetings
- Keeping Your Cool When It's Getting Heated
- Responding Verses Reacting
- Timing of Communication
- How We Get in Our Own Way
- Use of Constructive Language
- Strategies for Self-Care



**YOU'RE NOT
ALONE**

95% of Americans say civility is a problem.

70% say that incivility in this country has risen to “crisis” levels, up from 65 percent in 2014.

Uncivil actions, such as name calling, bullying and calls to fisticuffs, seem to take priority over respectful dialogue and the healthy exchange of diverse viewpoints.

JUST WHEN WE FELT WE HAD A HANDLE ON CREATING A CULTURE OF CIVILITY...

The SJC Ruling changes what municipalities can do in response to angry constituents' behaviors in public meetings.

You may very likely be exposed to very difficult exchanges from the public in a public setting.



DISPLACED AGGRESSION





OUTWARD BEHAVIORS

Shouting/yelling

Swearing

Angry tone

Crying

Belittling/Insulting

Sarcasm

Interrupting

Threatening

What else?

WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE- UNIVERSAL EMOTIONS

Fear

Sadness

Anger

Frustration

Embarrassment

Shame

Overwhelmed

Desperate/hopeless

Annoyance



REMEMBER

What drives peoples' behavior is often not obvious

While the behavior turns us off (or makes us angry ourselves), all of us can relate to the universal emotions



THE REAL PROBLEM WITH ANGER IS

IT CAN FEEL CONTAGIOUS.



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JUST WHAT IS
REALLY GOING
ON HERE?



**“I don’t like to be difficult, but
it’s the only thing I’m really good at!”**

THE KEY TO KEEPING OUR COOL

Understand your own psychology
and rise above the situation.

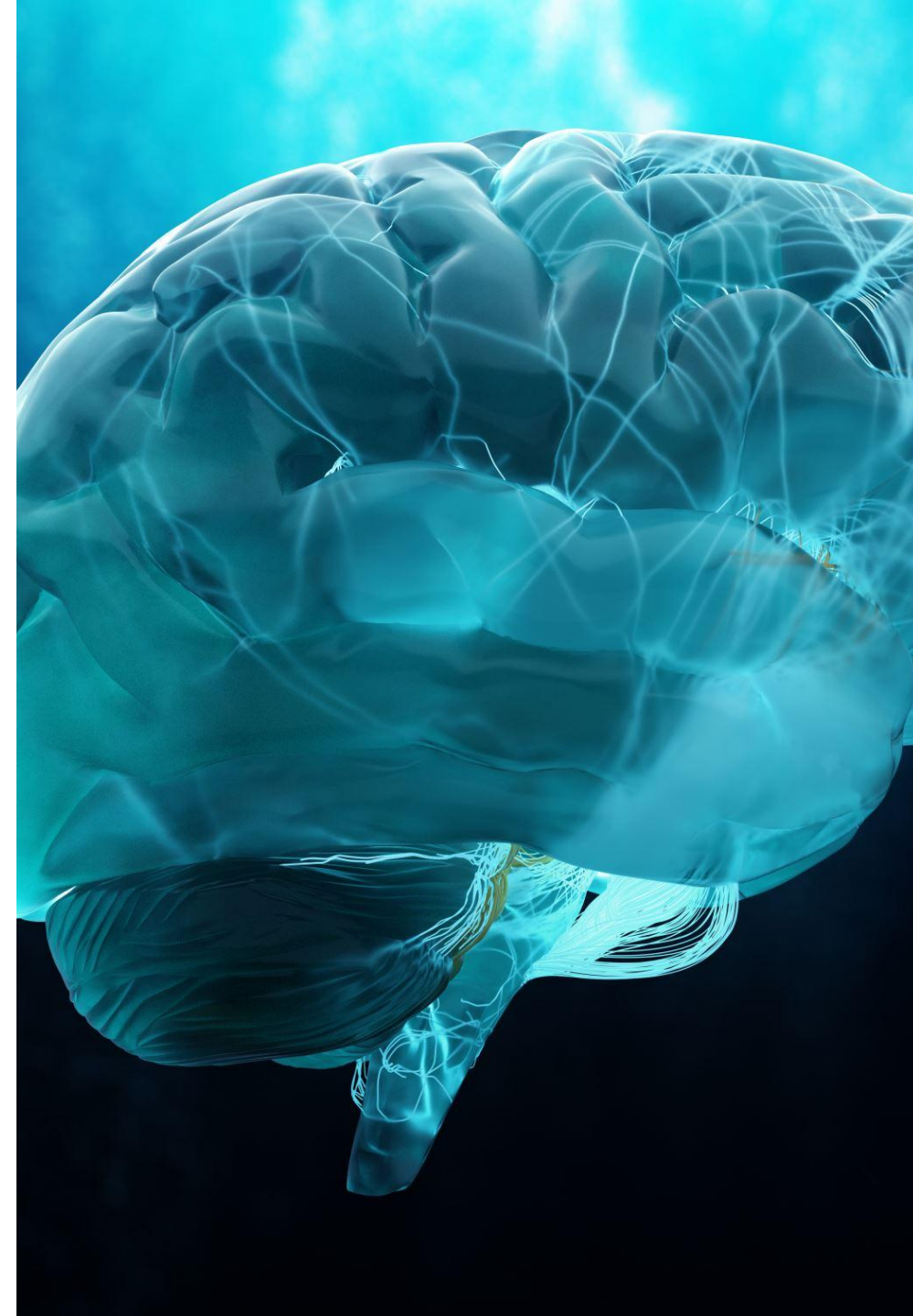
Understand what is really going on
with the person's offensive
behavior.

Know how to respond and
de-escalate



WHEN THE AMYGDALA GETS IN OUR WAY

- It's just a little part of our brain that processes fearful and threatening stimuli.
- Once it's activated, the reasoning side of the brain shuts down.
- At that point, no one is listening to logic



CALMING OUR AMYGDALA

- Breathe.
- Count to 10
- Self-talk: this is always about the other person, not you.
- Listen to understand. Even when it's hard.
- Do not be in a hurry to respond. Remember, your logical side of your brain is on temporary hold.



WHAT YOU DO NEXT CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE

- If you respond to an angry constituent with logic, the person will at best not listen or worse, become more agitated.



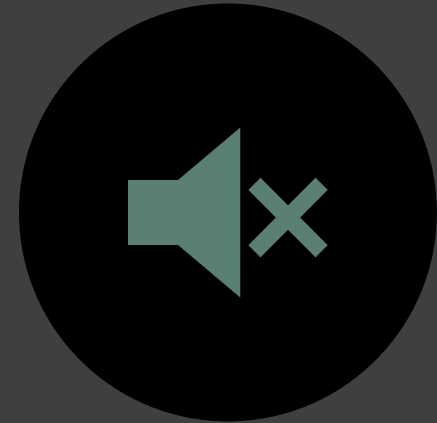
HELPFUL HINT



NEVER ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS AN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED PERSON WITH LOGIC.



GIVE THE PERSON A TIME OUT TO COLLECT THEMSELVES (AND YOURSELF TOO).



ONLY WHEN THE PERSON IS CALMER, WILL THEY BE ABLE TO TAKE IN INFORMATION.

RECOGNIZING WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THE CONSTITUENT

- Are they speaking logically?
- Are they sticking to the issue or intent on insulting?
- What could the emotion be behind their comments?
- What are they hoping for?



ANGER V. ABUSE

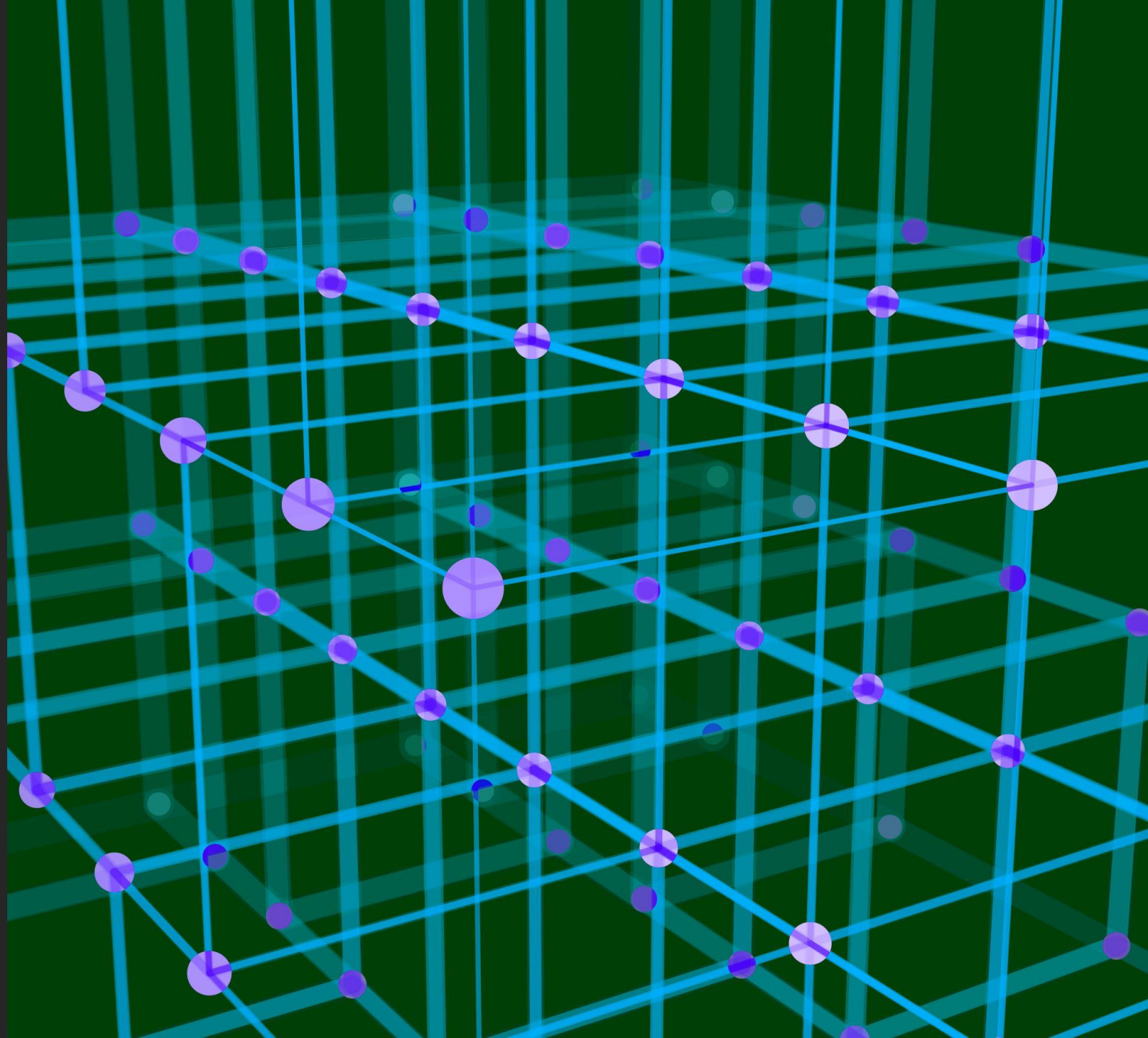
WHERE'S THE LINE?

VOICE LEVEL
HARASSMENT
DEMEANING TONE
PHYSICALLY,
PSYCHOLOGICALLY
THREATENING

SHIFT FROM *THE PROBLEM* TO
AN INDICTMENT OF *YOU* AS A
PERSON



BOUNDARIES



The background of the slide features several colorful, stylized speech bubbles in shades of purple, blue, green, orange, and red, arranged in a vertical line on the left side. The main content is contained within a white rectangular box on the right.

HOW TO SET INTERNAL BOUNDARIES

- Listen from a place of curiosity.
- Refuse to be pulled into an illogical discussion. Just listen.
- Use supporting language: “I am listening”. “I want to understand your concerns”. “I can tell this is very important to you.” “I will look into this further and you can expect a response within -----”

DEFUSING TIPS

Use their name

Use power words: *“Let’s”, “We”, “Together”*

Provide options, when feasible

Use a calm, compassionate response

Acknowledge their feelings

ENDING AN ABUSIVE CONVERSATION

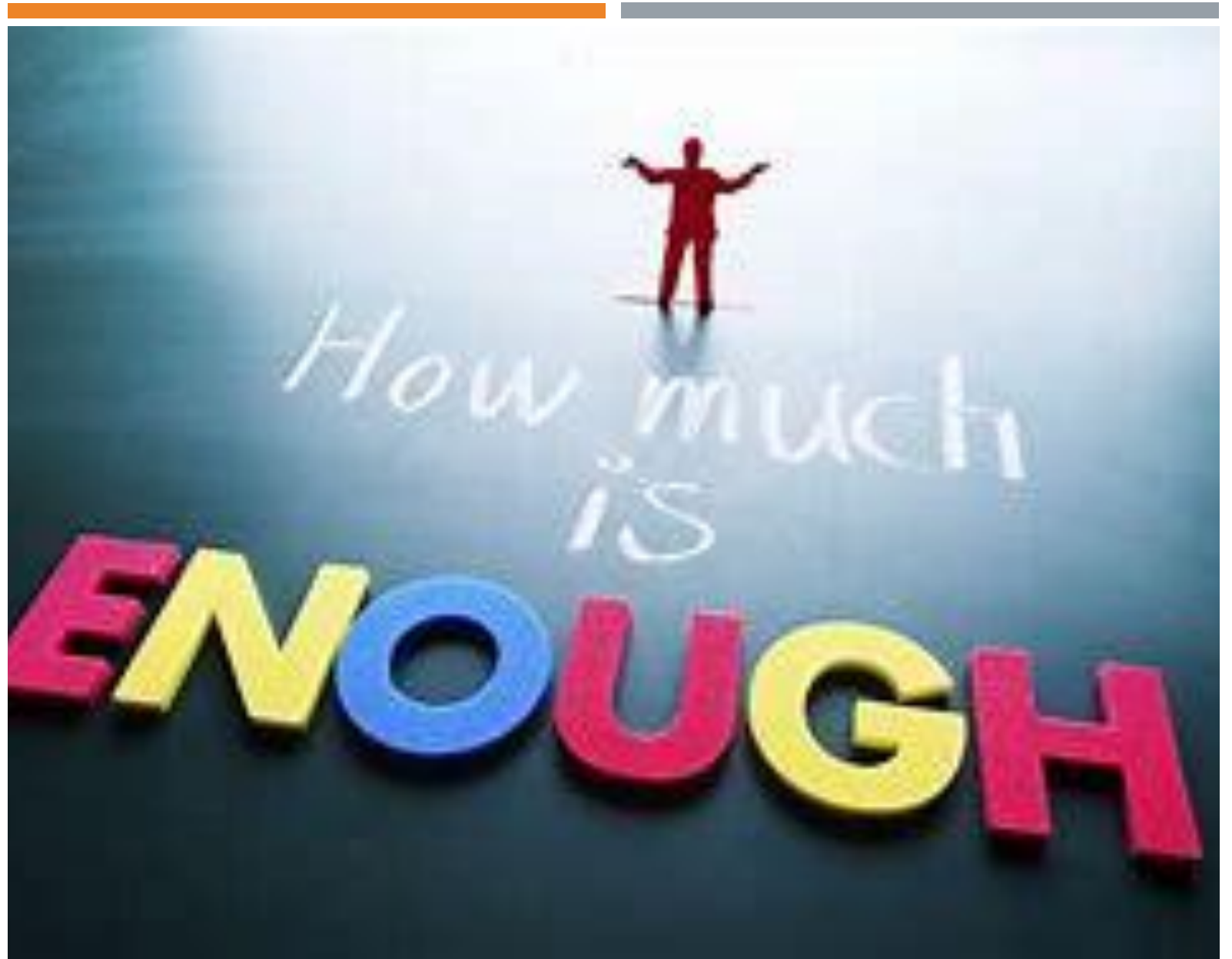
This becomes more challenging with the new ruling.

You may have to stop the conversation by simply not participating if they are being abusive. Disengage.



WHAT TO SAY WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

- ❑ “I truly want to hear what you have to say. Unfortunately, I have difficulty listening when I am being yelled at. Could we lower our voices so we can hear better?”
- ❑ If a person is rambling, you can say” There is a lot here to take in. What do you think is most important for us to know?”



MORE TECHNIQUES

- Broken record: you basically repeat the same thing in different ways over and over.
- Ask what they would consider a good outcome, when appropriate.
- Pay attention to physical safety for yourself and others.
- Time out to revisit the topic, when feasible.
- Silence



WHAT IS THE
IMPACT ON *YOU*?

Burnt out?

Angry?

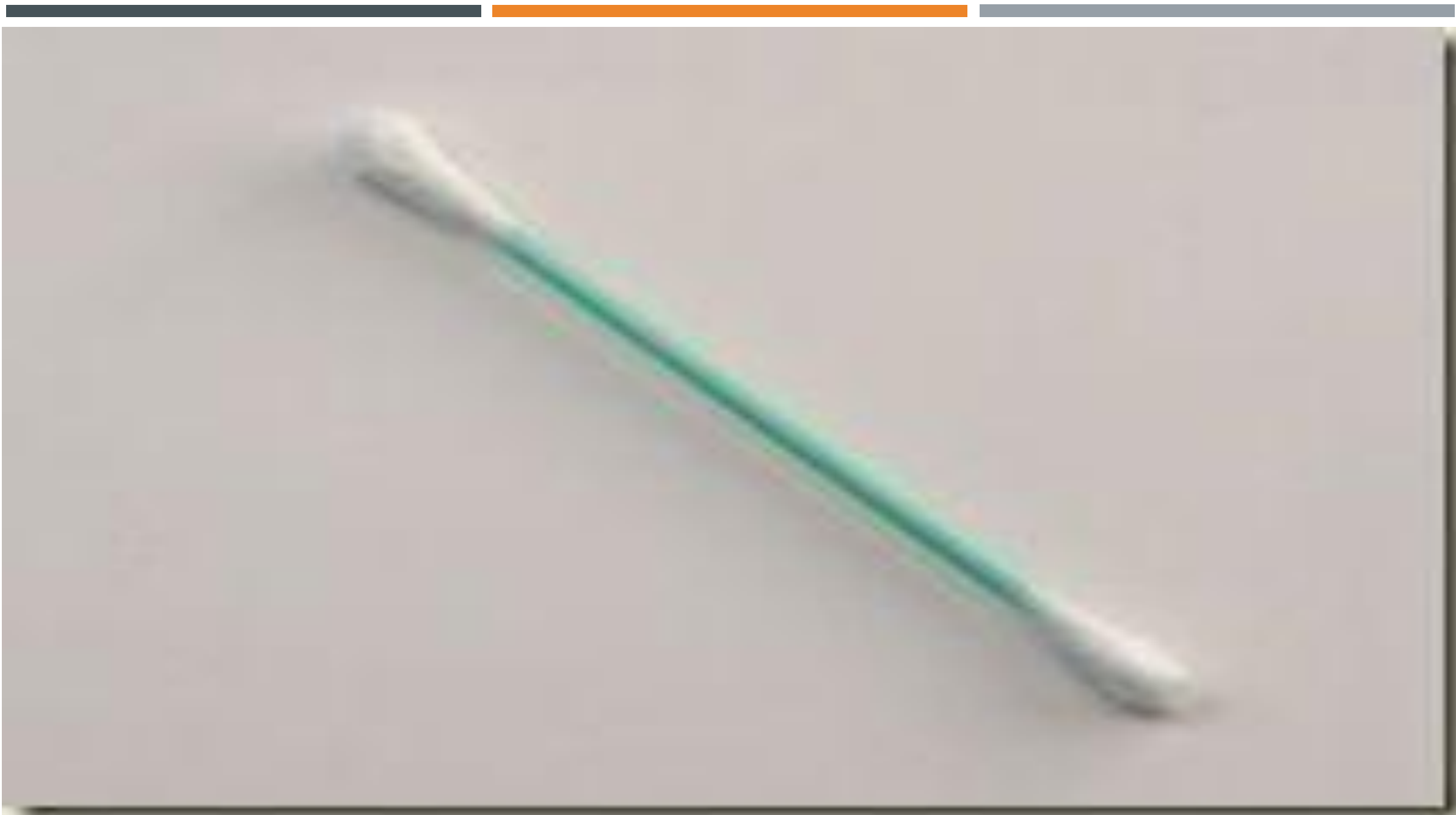
Hurt?

Just
exhausted?





TIPS, STRATEGIES,
SOLUTIONS



Strategies for Self-Care & Resilience

Stop

- wishing they were different

Take

- care of you

Don't try

- to change them

Keep

- an eye on your internal stress barometer

Gain

- distance from, and perspective on, the situation

Seek out

- support



WHAT HELPS
YOU?

**EMPOWERMENT
TIPS**

Debrief with a colleague afterwards

Ask for feedback from others

Mental health break

Communicating your needs

Being resilient and remembering the Big
Picture



CLOSING PRINCIPALS TO KEEP IN MIND

It's normal to
feel defensive,
annoyed
sometimes.

We can't
change people.
We can only
control
ourselves

We never really
know what's
going on with
people.

Take Care Of
You

WHAT THIS
RULING DOESN'T
CHANGE

Municipalities can set a standard for acceptable behavior in the workplace from the general public, employees and vendors.

Creating and enforcing core values, expectations for civility and respect, and a code of conduct in the workplace are still important tools for confronting inappropriate behaviors.

EXTERNAL MINDFULNESS RESOURCES

- ❑ Breethe -- <https://breethe.com>
- ❑ Buddhify -- <https://buddhify.com>
- ❑ Calm -- <https://www.calm.com>
- ❑ Headspace -- <https://www.headspace.com>
- ❑ [U Mass Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction \(MSBR\) Program](https://www.umhealth.org/center-mindfulness)
www.umhealth.org/center-mindfulness



WRAP UP



What's 1 nugget you can put into action when dealing with challenging situations/people?



We're Here To Help

Mental Health Counseling
Coaching (Life, Professional)
Work/Life Services
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Consultation

800.451.1834

