

Webinar Transcript - Cognitive Skill Building Using Quick Skills

Welcome to the National Criminal Justice Training Center webinar, Cognitive Behavioral Skill Building Using Quick Skills. My name is Greg Brown. And I will be moderating for you today.

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I'm pleased to introduce today's presenter, Dr. Anjali Nandi. Anjali is an associate with the National Criminal Justice Training Center and a human service consultant. She is a member of the International Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, a licensed addictions counselor in the State of Colorado, and a nationally certified Master's Addiction Counselor. Anjali has authored numerous publications, including tribal specific resources for BJA COSSUP tribal grantees. Anjali, the time is now yours.

Thank you so much, Greg. And welcome, everyone. As Greg said, we are here to talk about cognitive skill building or skill building in general. We'll focus on a variety of different things. What are cog skills? How do we do it? How do we do it in a way that people don't even know we're working on skills? How to weave it into any and all conversations, and why really it's so important across the board. So that's really our focus for today.

All right, here we go. So on the screen, you can see our learning objectives, which I just went over. But the place I always like to start is really, when we think about cognitive skill building, what really are we talking about? Because frequently when people hear "cog skill building," they think about CBT, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. And they think, wait, wait, I'm not a therapist, or maybe I'm not a clinician, and so this is not my area, I don't have to do anything related to skill building.

And really, these are about all of us. And all of us can do this work with anybody. It could be the clients, each other, people we know, ourselves for sure. So my hope is that you walk away with something that relates to you, but also something that you can use pretty immediately with your clients.

So let's talk about what that means. When we say "cognitive skill building," what are we talking about? We are talking about this fundamental understanding that in order for us to be able to have productive lives, where we have agency-- and by "agency," I mean some semblance of control over our reactions-- that we need to learn how to build that process, that we are not born knowing how to control some of our impulsive thoughts, feelings, reactions.

And it takes practice and a ton of awareness to be able to manage some of those impulsive ways in which we want to respond or react, and that when we really pay attention to that form of agency or control--

I'm using the word "agency" to mean the ability to control something, that I have the ability to manage, to slow things down, and to manage my reaction, then we know that it's not the event itself that determines my reaction, but my interpretation of the event that determines my reaction, and that it's there in which lies the heart of cognitive skill building. And it lies the heart of the power that we have, the power that we have over our lives and what happens next.

There's this beautiful quote by Viktor Frankl. And the way I think about it is, between something happening to us or us having some kind of stimulus, whether it's an emotion or a thought or a funny feeling in our belly, whatever it is, between that, if we can call that the "stimulus," and our response to it, there's a gap. And if we take responsibility for that gap, if we can really work on that gap, therein lies our power, and as Viktor Frankl says, our freedom, our freedom from reactivity, our freedom from patterned behavior.

So let me give you an example. And perhaps if you're willing, you can pop an example into the chat box. So I'll give you some examples. And then if you can think of examples that are true for you or maybe true for people you know, and can pop them in the chat, that would be great.

So here are examples of where we don't harness the power of that gap. So an example might be-- I've shared this example in some of my other webinars, that when I walk into my daughter's room, and if my daughter's room is messy, I'm not able to catch that gap, and immediately, things fly out of my mouth that are probably not so supportive, not so helpful, et cetera. So there's an example of not minding the gap, paying attention to the gap between seeing a messy room and having a reaction or a response.

So rather than slowing down and saying hi to my daughter first or saying, it looks like you're having fun in here or something, some comment regarding the messiness of her room comes out. So that's just one example. And I'm wondering if you all can pop, in the chat, examples that you have of ways in which we don't always mind this gap.

I'll give you some client examples while you're thinking about it. A client of mine said that he had just relapsed. And asked him to tell me more about his relapse and what was going on. And he said, oh, I was waiting for a bus. And I ran into a friend of mine. And he offered me my drug of choice-- which for this client, was cocaine. And I said yes.

And so that's an example. There's a moment right there, where the friend is making the offer, that we actually have choice. But if we only have a patterned response, then we miss the opportunity to choose. And it takes a lot of work to slow that down and make a choice.

Maybe another example could be in our personal lives, perhaps. We're the kind of people who always say yes when people ask for help. So a friend asks you to take them to the airport, to give them a ride, and your immediate response is yes, even though later on, you feel resentful, you wonder why you even said yes in the first place. But it's a patterned, habitual response. So type into the chat, what are just a couple other examples of maybe what this might look like?

Yeah, so Tracy gives us a great example in there, that there's a medical situation, and a bystander angrily tells you what to do, which in fact is incorrect. They're not even monitoring themselves. Jennifer gives the example of "literally anything with kids." and Jennifer, I'm right there with you-- getting that dreaded email that the kiddo isn't passing or isn't doing their work or something like that, and we just want to immediately react rather than slowing down and getting curious. Another example is when my spouse wants to shop. We have an immediate reaction, right?

And having boundaries is slowing down and getting clear about, wait a second. What is actually happening here? and giving ourselves choice as opposed to going down some patterned responses. These are awesome examples. Thank you so much for throwing them in the chat.

So I was going to talk a little bit about how this happens in the brain. But Greg, you just came on camera. So talk to us.

Oh, I think I knew you were going to go there. I must have had a premonition. But you know, what came up for me is, I often talk about, as a foundation in new relationships, using the four agreements and the assumptions that we make and how natural that is and how we, in these situations, need to guard against that because it's a very natural thing to do, to fill in those blanks when we don't have enough information. And that was the getting curious and I think where you're going also, with how the brain works.

Yeah, yeah, great. And then John just popped into the chat. You make a traffic stop and the driver makes a disrespectful remark, and you immediately have a reaction. You want to exert authority or you want to win the interaction. That's a great example.

So here's what's happening in the brain, is that when we develop certain ways of responding to situations-- for example, if we get stressed, the pattern of response is to get angry or when we get stressed, the pattern of response is to eat cookies or whatever it is.

That's a pattern response-- what happens in our brain is, we have neural connections that relate the input to our reaction. So every time we see a particular thing or a certain thing happens or we feel stressed, we only have these particular neurons or neural pathways that we can go down because we've gone down them over and over and over again.

It's like when we're driving and we choose a particular path and we take the highway. It's fast, things move, and we go down that right-- route over and over and over again. And then if we have to take a completely different route, it's actually really difficult. We have to slow down. We have to think about it. We have to adjust.

And that is what's happening in the brain, that in order for us to slow down and try something differently, that's not habitual, we have to break apart some of these neural connections. There's this expression, neurons that fire together, wire together, meaning, if over and over again, anytime our partner says, hey, let's go shopping, and we have an immediate annoyed reaction, if we have it a few times, that same pattern, that whole reaction gets wired together.

And so now we actually have less choice about it. It's an immediate response. And all of that, when neurons get wired together, in order for us to change our behavior, we have to dismantle that wiring, which is why changing behavior is tough and requires a lot of attention.

So shall we put in about the stereotypes? Right. So these patterned responses that we're talking about, they can be related to our own behavior. But they also can be, as Shelly is pointing out, related to our assumptions that we make of other people, these patterned assumptions. And sometimes it comes from the cultural soup that we're all swimming in, media. It doesn't even have to be accurate at all for us to develop these reactions, these immediate ways of thinking about people.

And then as Greg was bringing up, if we're not careful about the assumptions that we're making and we don't ask the questions, "Hey, wait a minute, is this assumption accurate?" we can go down a route that's really problematic. So I love that you're bringing up this, the stereotypical response.

And then Diana put in how sometimes people get aggressive when they're going through security. And our immediate response might be to have an aggressive response towards them. And if we slow down and pay attention to that gap, as Victor Frankl was talking about, then we're able to maybe lighten the tension in some ways. Yeah.

And yes, it's about listening to, to understand versus listening to respond. There's that piece too. And that pause really allows us to bring curiosity as opposed to judgment. It allows flexibility. And let's say nobody else is present, so we're not talking about assumptions, we're just talking about our own behavior. It allows more control over our behavior, more choice about our behavior.

Honestly, for me, the simplest example that I can think of is food related. So there's a patterned way that I will either finish the whole bag of cookies or whatever it is. And if I slow down and actually ask myself whether I'm full or not, whether I want to stop or not, it gives me more choice around my behavior of eating the full bag of cookies. So that pause is really, as Viktor Frankl says, where our freedom is.

So it's about minding this gap that we have between the stimulus and the response. But minding the gap has to do with a lot of things. It has to do with paying attention to our thoughts and emotions in the first place. And we're not always aware of our thoughts and our emotions.

So, the example that Gene just put into the chat is, "I've made a rule for myself that I do not respond to email or text if I feel upset or tense. I take a minute. I exercise the power of pause, take a minute, and then respond when we're more clear headed." So what Gene's-- the example that you're using is, how do I give myself the pause? How do I really mind that gap?

And I'm not saying that your first instinct is not right. It may be right. But it comes from a patterned place as opposed to a place where you can weigh the pros and cons. And all of that, that consequential thinking, happens in our frontal cortex. And when we are stressed or triggered or in a hurry, we tend not to engage our frontal cortex. We tend to come from this impulsive brain, this old brain, this impulsive brain.

So building these cognitive behavioral skills literally is what strengthens our brain. So this is relevant to all of us for a variety of different reasons. This is relevant to humanity in general but it's particularly relevant when we're talking about trauma, when we're talking about poverty, when we're talking about addiction, when we're talking about racism, when we're talking about experiencing adverse childhood events.

All of this becomes particularly more important because what's common about all of the things that I just mentioned? Trauma, addiction, all of it, is that all of these things impact the brain differently. And they impact our frontal cortex more than they impact any other part of the brain, meaning they reduce the mass in the frontal cortex.

When people have experienced trauma, even intergenerational trauma, when people have grown up experiencing adverse childhood events or they've developed an addiction to substances, what happens in our brain is, this frontal cortex is more impaired, it's less developed, we lose mass, we disconnect.

In fact, the connections that happen between our old brain, our impulsive brain, and this frontal cortex-- so the old brain is our limbic system. We can call it the lizard brain. There's a highway or a pathway that connects that system to the frontal cortex. And that highway gets damaged.

So a lot of the folks that you and I work with, their brains are impaired in a way that it's exactly cognitive skill building that will help because we are literally healing them. We're healing their brains, helping them. We're not doing anything. We're helping them heal their brains in exactly the way that they need because trauma, addiction, all of those things, ACEs, have impaired the very part that we need in order to have this agency over our lives. So it literally strengthens and heals the brain in the very way that we need it.

So why is all this important? Why is it important that we talk about cognitive skill building for ourselves, for each other, for the clients that we work with, for the people we serve? Why is it so important for us to be talking about this? And what the research is indicating is, when we have these cognitive skills-- and I know I'm saying "cognitive skills" and I haven't defined it yet.

But I'm talking about these executive functioning skills, the ability to slow down and really think through and make decisions-- it is linked to success, actually, across the lifespan, so not only behavioral issues or lowered involvement with crime, lowered addiction, all of those things, but more success or higher success across the entire lifespan, where we're talking about family, relationships at school or work, fewer behavioral problems.

People will report-- when they report higher executive functioning skills, they report lower emotional symptoms, emotional distress. They report a higher positive well-being, better academic outcomes, better work outcomes.

So we're seeing this across kids and adults, where building these skills, these slow down, let's think and feel our way through this, as opposed to just react, that it's those kinds of skills that allow us to be successful in our world, however we define that.

So it's building these executive functioning skills that really reduce our involvement with public assistance or criminal behavior or addiction. And it reduces the impact of trauma, as well as substance use because it's doing the very things that I just talked about, healing the part of the brain that's most impaired by ACEs or trauma or addiction.

So I'm just going to take a pause here and see if we have any questions or if there's anything I've said that's confusing or-- yeah, any thoughts, questions so far? Type it into the chat. And I'm going to check in with Greg and see if there's anything that he wants me to clarify before I keep moving on.

You might get to this, but how do we know if our clients need cognitive skill building? Or do we all just need that forever, and we should just assume that there's going to be gaps in things and areas that they need to work on?

Yeah, that's a great question. The easy answer is, we all need it. I can tell you that I've been working on cognitive skills for a really, really long time. I've been teaching cog skills. And I still struggle. And what I recognize is, the more stressed I am, the more I struggle, that we all potentially could have great skills when our emotions aren't high or when the stakes are not high. But it's really, when we need these skills most is when the stakes are the highest.

So that's the easy answer. But Greg is asking a really interesting question. How do we know that cog skill building is really where we need to focus? And so here are some giveaways. You will know that the client is struggling with cognitive skill building if they seem impulsive, if they make impulsive decisions, or if something happens and they just react. So that is one giveaway.

Another giveaway is if they have trouble with problem solving. So for example, you ask them, how's your work going? And they say, well, I'm struggling with this particular thing. And you say, well, say more, or what are some ways that you're going to manage it?

And they say, I don't know, I'm just going to quit my job, which, at least with the clients that I've worked with, is a very common response, that impulsive, not even trying to solve the problem. So that's another way in which it's a dead giveaway, when people are not able to slow down and define the problem and talk through what's happening to them in that problem-solving pattern.

A third is if their emotions are dysregulated or they have an inability to tolerate uncomfortable emotion. So we call that "distress tolerance." And I'll cover this in a little bit. But really, what we're trying to help people do is tolerate discomfort because all of us experience discomfort. And we have to be able to manage it or manage it in a pro-social way.

So for example, all of you are tolerating discomfort right now. Some of you might be bored. Some of you would really rather be focusing on something else. Perhaps some of you really need to go to the restroom or whatever it is. But you're tolerating discomfort. And you're staying here in this engagement, in this webinar that we're having. So we need our clients to be able to tolerate discomfort, particularly if they are addicted to substances or they have frequent police contact.

So for example, there are times where my clients will have police contact, and because they cannot tolerate their anxiety related to being contacted by the police, they react. They say the darndest, stupidest things, and get themselves into further trouble. So the ability to tolerate discomfort is exceptionally important as a skill. And it's part of what we talk about when we're talking about cognitive skill building. So those are some ways in which you can tell that people need to focus on cog skills.

And then someone is asking, is it possible to measure brain health without a brain scan? So yes, it is possible to know about the health of our brain. It's not perfect, but the way we can know the health of our brain is our resilience in the face of stressful situations, meaning, when stress happens, how do we respond? Because really, what we're finding out is, response to stress is related to how well we are taking care of our brain, so that the best proxy for brain health without a brain scan is our resilience to overwhelm and stress.

We also have a variety of different things that we can do to improve our brain health. Some of them are things we've known all along. And then some of them are a little surprising. Cognitive skill building is absolutely one of the things that we can do to improve our brain health. And we'll talk about that more.

But there are other really interesting things that we can do to improve brain health, simple things like hanging out with each other, like community support, community engagement, laughing with each other, social support. That kind of thing improves our brain health, which to me, is just so cool.

Meditation or mindfulness or prayer or whatever activity that you are involved in, where you're present-- which by the way, is also one of the cognitive skills, is the ability to be present in the moment-- increases brain health. Being outside in the sun, exercising, gratitude, those are some. There are a few.

Getting enough sleep-- maybe I mentioned that already. Maybe you all will disconnect from me right now when I say this, but taking a break from social media helps support our brain health. I hope nobody just kicked me out. So those are some examples. Greg, you turned on your video.

Yeah, one thing that comes up that I think is tied to trauma and maybe even some of the things that we see happening, particularly with law enforcement over the last few years, is reactions that are tied to trauma. My family has never had a positive experience with law enforcement. My grandfather talks about being arrested. My father's been arrested and been to prison. Every time they come to our house, people get handcuffed. And how does that-- I know that we're talking about building skills. But is that a different layer that we need to look at with skill development or understanding where individuals are coming from?

Yeah, for sure. It goes both ways. So this tracks both ways. So let's talk about the client or the individual that Greg is talking about. And then let's talk about our responsibility then, either as law enforcement or practitioners or just people in the service world, in the criminal-justice service world.

So when people have had repeated negative encounters with law enforcement-- and let's say this has happened generationally. Even if right now, law enforcement is being perfectly appropriate with me in the moment, if this has been the history for me, the beliefs that I have formed, the information that my parents, my grandparents have given me, and I get triggered in the moment, in standing in front of law enforcement, no matter how perfectly appropriate that officer is being with me, I will still be triggered. And I will respond as if whatever in the past is happening.

So let me break that down for a second. And maybe you all can relate to this. I'm going to use a hand model of the brain. Some of you have seen me do this before. So remember when I was talking about the limbic system and the frontal cortex? Essentially, it looks like this in our brain. So my eyes are here. This is the center part of my brain. This is the lizard brain limbic system. There's a highway that connects the lizard to the wizard.

Now, this part, this lizard part, which is the limbic system, the lizard part, is the first part to receive information from the outside world. And it can only interpret the present using my past experiences as information. So the way it relates to the present is by referencing the past. So that's the first part of my brain that processes anything.

And then there's a highway that goes to the thinking part of our brain, the part that we're trying to develop using cog skills. We call that the wizard, the wizard part of our brain. Now, if we are stressed, if we are triggered, if we're traumatized, if we're addicted to substances, this connection is harmed. And so we flip our lids, and we lose connectivity with this frontal cortex or with the wizard, meaning we get stuck here in the lizard brain.

So let's say I get pulled over by law enforcement or I get contacted by law enforcement. I'm walking on the street. I get contacted by law enforcement. And already, I have trauma. I have some precursors. So let's say the police officer approaches me. I immediately flip my lids because of all this history. And John, I'm going to get to your question, which is an awesome one.

I flip my lid and here I am, triggered. The officer is being perfectly appropriate with me. But because I'm in this part of my brain, the only way I can interpret the present is by focusing on the past. So I start to say, hey, hey, I'm not doing anything. Why are you coming at me? or whatever. I start to be inappropriate or say aggressive things.

Now that unfortunately, is human. But we have a little bit of opportunity here, which is where John's question comes in. What can the law enforcement officer do in order to improve this situation? Because like I said, they're being perfectly appropriate. So what can they do?

So the first thing is to not overreact, which means that the law enforcement officer, the police officer, needs to not flip their lid, which is where, as human beings, we get into trouble because we pick up on each other's emotion and we react to each other. We escalate each other.

So let's say the officer is able to remain calm, and the officer recognizes wow, this person's triggered, they've flipped their lids. Let's say the officer recognizes that. And so the first thing to do is for the officer to remain calm, and then say things that will be supportive or calming of this individual in front of them.

So that might-- it depends on-- you would know better, but it depends. So that might sound like, I can see that I have really upset you right now, and my purpose is to help, or I can see that you're really upset right now, how can I be helpful? So doing, saying things like that, de-escalates the situation, staying calm ourselves, so staying calm and offering help, support, and noticing that the person is upset.

So let's say it doesn't work. The person says, yeah, of course, I'm upset, you're having a conversation-- you're contacting me and there's no reason to or you're going to arrest me because that's always what you all do, and then being really calm and saying, no, that was not my intention at all, whatsoever, I can-- just tell me what's going on, so redirecting in the best possible way.

What brings people's lids back down the fastest is the other person being calm and empathy, which I know is super hard. It is actually impossible for us to express empathy when our lids are flipped. So it becomes so important for the officer to then be able to keep their lid down and find, how can I express empathy?

And empathy is about understanding. It's about compassion. It's not about allowing the person to do whatever they want. That's not the case. It still has boundaries. But it has some level of understanding.

Somebody said this earlier. It's about listening to understand. And it's about prioritizing the other person's truth. So another way of saying that is, really listening for what's true for them as opposed to fighting with them. So not doing this, which I sometimes will end up doing, which is, the person says, hey, you're going to screw my life over, or whatever lovely things they say, and me saying, no, I'm not. Unhelpful. So it's really about de-escalation. Yes. Yeah.

Donald, I don't know if you were being sarcastic over there with your comment or whether you're being serious.

[LAUGHS]

But yeah. And here's the thing. Oftentimes when we're doing these webinars, I think, gosh, some of these things sound so simple and yet they are not. It is so hard to engage calmly and respectfully when we are triggered ourselves. It is so difficult. And yet, I see-- so in our offices, unfortunately, we have to do arrests sometimes. And the way it goes down is not always beautiful.

But what we do is, we inform the officer during the arrest that the client has some mental-health issues or the client's really escalated or whatever. And the officers are incredible. So they'll come in and they'll start just chatting with the individual. They'll really work to de-escalate the situation.

And it doesn't get much more complex than that because as human beings, we have basic needs, to feel safe and to feel understood, feel safe, to feel understood. And if we can meet that, the lid comes back down. It is remarkable how we're able to deescalate some crazy situations with just those skills. Greg?

I was just going to say, Donald definitely gets it. What's always interesting to me is that we practice, depending on our profession, re-entry, probation, law enforcement, we practice lots of skills a lot. We practice how to arrest people because it becomes muscle memory. We practice how to shoot accurately. We practice how to do assessments. We practice how to communicate in court.

But we don't often practice how to interact with clients or to debrief when something doesn't go well, which is always scary. Oh, that didn't go well, let's just move on, as opposed to debriefing it. What skills could I have used? What were my different opportunities to intervene? What cognitive skill could we have practiced here?

And that happens with probation a lot. We know what they're learning in their skill-building classes. How do we get them to use those skills in the moment when it really counts, I think is, one of the things. But Don's point about using-- we know these skills. It's practicing them and making them second nature so they happen regularly and we don't get escalated and get those situations.

Yeah, I think sometimes that's the hard part is, these skills are easy when the situation is easy. And then when the situation is hard is when it gets really difficult, and we resort to our old stuff. We resort to using the highway instead of the tough roads.

And sometimes the ways in which we try and regain control over the situation, or one of you put it, we try and win the situation, is not pretty. It's power over. It's taking the other person's choice away. And power over and taking somebody else's choice away actually causes their lid to flip even further. So we get into this mess right with each other.

And I'm saying this and kind of laughing because even though we know all this and even though I know all this, this happens repeatedly, more often than I care to admit, maybe less so with clients over time. I feel like I've gotten a ton better. But at home or in my personal life, it's very easy for me to flip my lid and to fall into some of these patterns.

And I know that I've fallen into some kind of a problem pattern when I use words like "you always" or "you never." That black-and-white thinking is very lizard-brain thinking because the lizard brain not only is focusing on the past, it also cannot see complexity. It has a really hard time with the gray zone, so to speak.

All right, I hope that made sense. And please add to the chat if you want me to expand on something. Or you're just having a thought or an epiphany or anything, put it into the chat. OK, we've talked about skill, needing to build these skills. We haven't defined what all these skills are. And I'll cover that here, in the next slide.

But first, what are the steps involved in skill building? Because regardless of the skills, we need to remember they happen sequentially. The steps happen sequentially. And the very first is to identify the gap or the issue.

So what is happening right now? What's the gap? So an example actually, of a gap or an issue Diana just put into the chat is that there are times where as law enforcement, you might make contact with people with mental-health issues. So when people have mental-health issues, their mental-health issues fall into a variety of different buckets.

Oftentimes, when we think of mental-health issues, we're thinking of people with psychotic disorders. We're thinking of people who have hallucinations or delusions or those kinds of things, who are a little unpredictable. So there's that bucket.

And then there's the bucket that you will very commonly see, people with trauma, people with anxiety, people with mood disorders like depression or bipolar disorder. And then you'll also see people with addiction stuff, addiction issues. And people don't come in these classifications. They get all muddled together. And sometimes you'll have all of it. You'll have people with a psychotic disorder who also has anxiety and PTSD and by the way, they're addicted to substances. And that's who you're coming in contact with.

So it's never simple. And yes, Veronica, a ton of motivational interviewing, for sure. And motivational interviewing fits so beautifully, I think, with some of these skill-building steps that we're talking about.

So we identify the gap first or the issue. So is the issue right now that somebody is having a psychotic break? Or is the issue perhaps that they're Maybe hallucinating or that they are feeling really anxious or that they are having a trauma response? What's the issue? So that's the first piece. What is the gap or what's the issue?

So that could be it. Or like we were talking earlier, maybe you identify that they're not able to problem solve or they're not able to think about the consequences or whatever it is.

So you identify the issue. And then the next step is to name the skill. So let's say you have somebody who's pretty escalated, they're super anxious, they're having a trauma response, and they are being really aggressive with you verbally, et cetera. In that situation, you're trying to identify, what's the issue? And if the issue is anxiety and your goal is to help them calm down, your goal is to help them regulate-- and "regulate" is a way better way of thinking about it.

So your goal then is to get them more regulated. And part of the way people regulate is actually on the backs of your nervous system, meaning the more regulated you are, the easier it is to regulate them. You've probably noticed this, that there are people who just, when they walk into the room, the whole room calms down.

And there are other people who walk into the room and everything gets more anxious or more crazy. It's because we pick up on each other's nervous systems. And so part of it is managing your own nervous system and managing how triggered or reactive you are. So naming the skill, really important.

If we're talking really practical skills like problem solving or those kinds of things, then ideally, we have the opportunity to practice skills, give them feedback, and then share, where else can you use some of these skills? So that's really just the pattern that we're following.

Diana points out that even with the best of intentions sometimes, people continue to escalate and you might need assistance. Absolutely, yes. And knowing when, when you're of your depth, is so incredibly, incredibly helpful. Judith is talking about DBT. And DBT is Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, which yes, has a ton of research support for both trauma but also borderline personality disorder.

And actually, cog skill building has a lot of research with it, as well, to work with not just personality disorders in general, but there's some lovely research on using cognitive skill building with people with antisocial personality disorder, which is pretty exciting.

So the question then you're asking, Judith, is, "what are some protocols that exist to incorporate specific skill-building practices to address aggression and impulse when people are experiencing borderline personality disorder?" Excellent question. So a lot of what you're asking about has to do with emotional regulation. And we have a slide on that.

But emotional regulation is about the ability to really simply, name the emotion, sit with it, and get perspective around it. So that's the three-step process, again, very similar to DBT, three-step process, name the emotion, sit with it, get perspective. And then Shelley shares, "using breathing techniques." Yeah, absolutely with somebody who's super anxious, and sometimes just even modeling that, you doing it yourself, is really helpful.

OK, so let's break down then the components of CBT, with the ways in which we think about CBT. So it often falls into 3 buckets, maybe 3 and 1/2. So let me just explain that the half piece. When we talk about cognitive skill building, we're talking about thinking skills, emotion regulation skills, and social skills. Those are the three buckets. And then the half is, there's also this component of life skills in general, which are really important. But perhaps-- how do I put this?

So when I'm talking about life skills, I'm talking about budgeting and finance or how do I manage my finances? and how do I pay my bills? and how do I remember to check my calendar about where I'm going next? et cetera. So all of those kinds of life skills, nutrition, taking care of myself, basic wellness, all of those are great, but if I don't have some of these three buckets of skills, I'll really struggle with the life piece.

So that's why I call it 3 and 1/2 buckets. So I'm not I don't want to diminish that piece. It's very important. But we really do need to focus. We get the most bang for our buck with our type of clientele, involved in the criminal justice system, involved in addiction or trauma, those with mental health issues, we get the most bang for our buck when we focus on these three buckets. And again, the three buckets are thinking skills, sometimes known as cognitive skills, I suppose, and then emotional-regulation skills and social skills. So those are the main buckets that we'll be talking about.

It all starts, though, with awareness, with developing awareness. And so the way we think about it is, how do I develop internal awareness about myself? How do I develop awareness about other people around me? How do I regulate myself and manage that? And then how do I manage the relationship with others?

So when we're talking about skills regarding self, what we're talking about is building an awareness of my internal workings, so being more self-aware, being able to identify the thought, being able to identify feelings, being able to manage my stuff internally. And we need a mindset that believes that we can actually change.

And this, I struggle with so much with some clients, where they will say things like, this is the way I always am or I'm never going to be able to change. Or I had somebody who just recently relapsed, lost his job, et cetera, so many of our clients who had multiple things happen all at the same time.

And so he's sitting in my office, just really, really sad about all of these things, and says-- he uses more colorful language than I'm going to use with you. But he essentially says, I'm a mess, I'm a screw up, why don't I just get that that's always the way I'm going to be? And that's the opposite of a growth mindset. And it's a dangerous mindset to think, I'm never going to be able to change, I can never be better than I am.

There's some research on desistance, which is long-term staying away from problem behavior, antisocial behavior. And one of the things we know in that research is, when we change the narrative about ourselves, it actually helps us in the long run. And the narrative is the story that we tell about ourselves. So if the story that I tell is, I'm a screw up, then that's a self-fulfilling prophecy. And so we have to shift that narrative. And that's about that awareness regarding self and a growth mindset.

So how do we then help people work on that internal stuff, which is about thinking and our emotions? Not always easy. In fact, I would say that even you and I struggle with believing everything we think. So an example might be that your supervisor sends you an email or an IM saying, hey, can I talk to you? What's your immediate thought? Just pop it into the chat. Your supervisor says, I need to talk to you. What's your immediate thought?

[LAUGHS]

Thanks, Shelly. Yes. uh-huh. Exactly, ugh, uh-oh, something's wrong, dread, oh, boy, oh, no, what happened? Right. Exactly. Yes, there's stress. Am I going to get fired? What excuse can I use to say no? There's anxiety. Right. Of all the things that I did, which one can they fire me for? Which one would they have found out about? all of those thoughts that go through our brains. And those are immediate thoughts.

Now, those immediate thoughts are normal. They are human. And they come from experience. They come from in the past, maybe the only time your supervisor maybe, has said something is when there's a problem, perhaps. So those kinds of immediate thoughts, super normal. That's not the problem.

The problem is, if we have those thoughts, uh-oh, something's wrong, we have anxiety, all of these things, and then we react to that, and we react by walking off the job, as so many of my clients have done, or we react by storming into the supervisor's office and saying, you're always out to get me or whatever, that's the issue. It's not the problem thought or the feeling. That's normal human stuff.

And ideally, we develop just a whole amount of respect for that reaction because it's a human reaction. Sometimes it's a really young reaction. It's a scared reaction. And rather than shame that part of ourselves, it's important to say, thank you, OK, I feel that. And herein lies our choice.

So the steps, whenever we have some of these reactions, is to first identify it, whether it's an emotion or a thought. And so the identification is, oh, here I am, catastrophizing that something really bad's going to happen. That's the identification of the thought. Because if we don't pause it right there, the thoughts come with buddies. And maybe some of you can relate.

But the thought brings another thought and then a whole other thought. And now you have a whole story built. And they have a whole family. And then they have a village. And then they've set up an entire ecosystem in your brain. Maybe some of you can relate. Or maybe it's just me, whose brain is a bit nuts.

But there are times, let's say, for example, I'm driving and I'm thinking about something. And if I'm not on it, I have now-- that thought has brought in a ton of other negative thoughts. And my emotion is having-- I am now experiencing emotional reaction based on all of these thoughts. And it's not even real. It's just stuff that is in my head.

So it's really important for us to be able to increase our awareness of those thoughts and then pause them. And it could be internal or external. Sure, Diana. That's very true. So we have our thoughts. I'm not saying our thoughts are wrong. It's just information. But we don't have to believe everything we think.

So when your supervisor says, hey, I need to talk to you, and your thought is, uh-oh, I'm going to get fired, we don't have to believe that thought. We notice the thought or the feeling, whatever, anxiety or the thought, I'm going to get fired. And then we pause the thought. So thought stopping is one of the most powerful cognitive skills there are, the pausing of the thought before it goes and brings a friend.

So the friend would be, and I'm going to get fired because they just fired somebody else, or I'm going to get fired because they have given me an overwhelming amount of work and they don't treat us well, and then more thoughts come in. Right? So it's really important that we pause the thought before other friends come in to support that thought. And instead, we challenge the thought or we replace the thought.

So Diana's response--

[LAUGHS]

So funny. "What issue has someone reported incorrectly about me?" Oh, my gosh. So as supervisors, so often, clients will call to complain about officers. And routinely, I'll get calls from angry clients, saying, oh, this particular officer, blabbity blah. And I still have to talk with the officer about it. But so often, like you said, Diana, it's inaccurate information. That's always a bigger story that we have to clear up.

And then, yes, putting the thought on trial, which is challenging the thought to try and prove your case to the judge, challenging it and replacing it, replacing it with a counter thought, and then developing that emotional tolerance for whatever the anxiety is because when your supervisor calls you to their office and your normal reaction is anxiety, the issue is not to get rid of your anxiety, but to be able to tolerate it and still have choice in your behavior or your reaction to your supervisor. So really, ultimately, it's about choice.

So what are some ways in which we can stop our thoughts or pause our thoughts? Because that's really where the most of the bang for the buck can come from. So here are some ideas that I've developed over the years. And many of these are from clients. So I've had clients say that they visualize a stop sign. Some of them will literally say out loud, stop.

Some of them will stand up and turn around sometimes or move their bodies or exhale, breathing, really, really helpful. Using a rubber band-- I'm not sure if you have had clients who will have a rubber band around their wrist and then snap it or make some kind of a distracting technique. Those are some examples. And if you have other thought-stopping examples, definitely put those in the chat because the more we have, I think, the better.

I've also recently-- I had a client. We were talking about, how do we disconnect from our thoughts? And how do we let some of these thoughts or emotions go? And he said, one of the visualizations that he does is, he imagines that he puts it on a train and he watches the train leave. So whether it's the thought or the emotion, he puts it on the train and he watches it leave. So I just thought that was a great visual. So those are some examples. Visualizing water is also a great example of-- putting the thought on a little paper boat and letting it go.

And then someone said, "I literally remove myself, if able, until I'm able to control and respond appropriately." Yeah, yeah, really, really helpful. Shelley said, "putting my mind at the beach." Yes. Yes. And maybe we visualize different things, right? Yeah, Greg, we take a timeout. Sometimes I'll visualize my dog.

So where I'm looking at you all right now, obviously, is my computer. But in front of that, or-- chair is usually where my clients sit or staff sit. And then behind that, where they can't see, I have some photographs. And one of the photographs is of my dog's face. And it helps me so much. It's just the sweetest, most common thing, and sometimes helps me stop my thoughts.

Diana, yes, doing anything physical, standing push-ups at the front wall. Yes, anything physical. Our bodies are incredible. They can be incredibly helpful for us managing our thoughts. And it's way easier, actually, to manage our thoughts than it is to manage emotion because emotion involves so much chemical stuff that takes a little while. OK, sorry. Let's talk about emotion.

So one of the most important things related to emotion is to develop what we call an emotional vocabulary. So many times, people will struggle with naming their emotion. And naming the emotion is knowing, what is it that I'm experiencing? and to use the appropriate word for it.

Unfortunately, for many of the people that we work with, they have a very limited vocabulary. I'm pissed or I'm mad or I'm fine. For a lot of my clients, those are their-- the emotions, I'm fine or I'm pissed or I'm mad. And there's nothing in between.

And they are complex emotional beings. There's tons of stuff. But they just are not able to use whatever the vocabulary is. And this is really important because imagine if they are trying to communicate with a partner and they're slightly annoyed. But if they don't have that vocabulary, then they'll say, I'm mad. And the partner might have a reaction like, oh, my god, why are you mad about this little thing? So being able to know, where on the spectrum of emotion am I? is incredibly helpful.

So there are lots of different ways in which you can develop emotional vocabulary. One is, you help the person name it. The person says, I'm really mad about this. And you say, on a scale from 1 to 10, how mad are you? And they say, well, a 2. Got it. So maybe that's being annoyed. How do you-- what's the difference between being annoyed and being mad? et cetera. So just piecing that apart, it's really helpful.

You can also obviously have emotion cards. I'm not sure if you have-- we have this little chart, this emotion chart, that has different faces and then the names of those emotions. And oftentimes, when somebody is struggling to name their emotion, I'll hand them the chart and I'll say, which one of these best represents how you're feeling right now? So really, really helpful.

And then also asking people, what emotion are you having right now? What are you feeling right now? Many times, when you ask them that, they will actually give you a thought. They'll say, well, I feel like I want to leave or I feel like I want to punch somebody out. And you know those are not feelings. Those are all thoughts. So being able to separate thoughts and emotions, really, really helpful. Emotions are usually one-word responses.

OK, so I'm just going to catch up on the chat here. Ways of distraction, body tapping, hugely helpful. You can even do a little bit of EMDR for yourself or a butterfly hug sometimes or tapping different places, imagining a ray of golden light. Yes, so lots of fun and progressive ways. Love it. Some of you have phone alarms with positive-sounding alerts.

We have somebody, a coworker, who every so often, at random times, their phone will do a chime. And it's just lovely. It's just a pretty little chime. And it makes us all breathe. Every time we hear that chime, we just exhale. We take a minute. And it's just a beautiful way of coming back to the present. So I love that.

And Diana's saying, "we all have bad days." Yes, yes, we do. And we have to give ourselves a ton of grace for that, that we are also human and that we need all of these skills and tools just as much as the next person and that walking away is absolutely OK. Yeah.

Going off and making loud noises. Yes. Oh, my gosh, there's research related to laughing, loud noises, or even just exhaling or shaking our bodies and how it reduces the amount of cortisol that we have in our body. So cortisol is a stress hormone. Anytime we shake, shake your whole body, laugh, all of that reduces the amount of cortisol we have pretty immediately. Yeah.

And then some alarms to just check in with just a couple of questions. Do I need anything? Do I want anything?

[LAUGHS]

Yeah, screaming in the office, screaming in the car as you're leaving the office. Yes, and then somebody knocks on your window, and says, are you OK? Yeah. Yes, the screaming room. Yes Greg, we still have that. Singing really loudly in the car. I love these. These are amazing. OK.

So some other emotional management techniques-- again, developing emotional awareness, it's the first thing while I'm experiencing an emotion. Now, our emotions are not good or bad. They're just information. And we don't all, again, have to believe our emotion. But they are helpful information. They give us helpful information if we just stay curious.

So let's say-- maybe you all have had this experience. There are times in which I'm going about my day and suddenly I start getting worried about something. And I have learned not to dismiss that. So I notice, whoa, I'm getting worried about something. And then I slow down. What am I worried about?

Because our emotions come from a variety of different places. And sometimes it's our unconscious brain that's picked up something, that's trying to give us a message. But we haven't caught it consciously, meaning I'm not conscious of receiving the information, but my emotion is.

So they did this research, which is incredible research. So hang with me for a second. I hope can explain this properly. They gave people a set of both red and blue playing cards. And the folks were asked to bet on whether they were going to, as they turned over the card, whether that card was going to beat a particular other card or not.

And the way it was set up was, the red cards were the winning cards and the blue cards were the losing cards. But they didn't know that. So they shuffled up the cards together. They were also checking people's heart rates, sweaty palms, those kinds of things.

So they do this activity and tell the person, when you've figured it out, you can let us know. So they'd keep going. And then at some point, the person would figure out, wait, wait, the reds are the winning ones and the blues are not. And they'd say something out loud like, oh, wait, I know this patt-- I've figured it out. So nothing too complex yet.

But here's what they noticed. Their heart rate, their sweaty palms, actually had a response to the blue cards way before they named that their blue cards were the problem. So consciously, they caught it here. But their bodies caught the pattern way earlier. Isn't that fascinating? I hope I've explained that well, Greg.

Am I explaining this all right? Are you getting what I'm talking about? that our bodies pick up, something is amiss, way before our cognitive, conscious brain is picking things up.

Yeah, it reminds me of your discussion about gut reaction and how there really is science that supports gut reaction, that we're picking things up, we have to label them. It speaks to the importance of identifying what it is and recognizing it. But I think that is really fascinating to me, when you talk about that gut reaction, that there's science behind it.

Yeah, and some of you are putting in intuition. So we are able to pick things up. And we don't always consciously know it. Now, where we can get into trouble sometimes is if we have a bias. And please hang with me. Let's say I walk into the experiment with a bias against blue cards because my parents taught me that blue cards are bad or I had several bad experiences with blue cards. Then it gets a little complicated because is that based on information that I'm receiving in the present moment? Or is it based on information that may not be accurate?

So this is, I think, as human beings, where it gets a bit confusing. But we have to just check ourselves a little bit, which is why I say emotion is so important. Your gut reaction, your sixth sense, yes it's so incredibly important.

And-- and again, don't throw anything at me-- we can't trust it 100% all of the time because sometimes it's influenced by stereotypes, culture, bias, what our ancestors have told us about the way in which to be in the world, which may or may not be relevant today. So yes, it's important to pay attention, but then also to get curious.

And ultimately, I think what I hope you walk away with, one, is how cool and powerful we are as human beings, but also the importance of curiosity, the importance of not believing everything we think and feel, and just getting curious, which, is there an alternative explanation? Is there something else going on? So just that piece. So I hope that makes sense.

So naming the emotion and then tolerating it, being able, being OK with the discomfort, whatever that discomfort is. And how is the emotion going to inform my reaction? And yes, being able to live in the gray, it's so incredibly, incredibly important. Yeah.

And then self-regulating. I worry a ton. I get anxious really easily. And I have had to learn how to manage that because if I'm not managing it, if I'm not able to regulate some of the worry or anxiety, I miss the present moment because at least for me, I'm so focused on the worry or whatever's going on in my brain that if I don't regulate, I'm missing what's happening right in front of me. So that self-regulation piece is so incredibly important.

And yes, unfortunately, we encounter so many folks who think in these black-and-white ways. And that actually is a young way of thinking. It's a limbic-system way of thinking, for sure. And it can be really scary for some people. Navigating the world sometimes can be really scary.

So we've talked about thinking skills and restructuring thinking. We've talked about emotional-regulation stuff. Let's talk about social skills. Social skills are about being aware of the person in front of me, but then also being aware of how I need to respond or react. So it's about empathy, which we talked about earlier. And I'm going to divide it or explain it as two different things, empathy.

One is cognitively understanding what the other person is saying. And cognitively understanding is one thing. But cognitive empathy doesn't actually bring the lid down terribly quickly. It's expressing the emotional piece, the emotional connection about it, that helps bring the other person's lid back down. And we call that "affective empathy," affect as an emotion. So affective empathy is being able to understand and pick up on the emotion that the other person is experiencing, so connecting at that level.

So you may have had this experience where you're sitting with a friend and you're sharing something really sad. They don't say a word. But you know they get it. And you know they get it based on the emotional reaction that they had or the emotional connection, maybe not reaction, but the emotional connection that you're feeling. So that's affective empathy.

Now, I think to-- I think it was Deanna who said this, maybe, that we're all human. And so sometimes all we can do is cognitive empathy. We've got no affective empathy for whatever reason. Maybe we are burnt out. Maybe we are fatigued.

Maybe we're meeting with a frequent flyer, this person who we've seen, again, we've made contact with over and over and over again. And so just give yourself some grace when you dig in the affective empathy bucket and nothing comes up, where you're all out, you're tapped out.

So how do we then manage some of these relational pieces? A lot of these have to do with skills that you and I may take for granted, but that our clients have missed. The ability to have a conversation-- some of my clients have missed that when we have a conversation, we have to take turns. It's basic social skills. But it's something they've missed.

And so I'll start talking and they'll interrupt me. And I have to say something like, I really want to hear what you have to say, so hang tight, let me finish, and then you can talk. And do it in a very respectful way. But I'm really helping them learn this pattern.

And while they're waiting for me to talk, they're also developing an emotional-regulation skill because they are anxious. They're like, oh, my gosh, I want to say this thing but can't talk until she finishes. So we're working actually, on two skills at the same time, emotional tolerance and how to have a conversation.

I have some people who struggle with this. They're neurodivergent. They're on the spectrum and struggle with some of these social skills. And so I sometimes literally have, and will use, a circle that says "talk" on it. And we slide it back and forth so it's really clear whose turn it is to talk, so being really overt about that, so conversation skills, conflict resolution, like, how do I engage in a conflict?

Receiving feedback, giving feedback, how do I do it in a way that the other person can hear me? How do I express my need and not my opinion? Here's what I think we should do or here's what I want as opposed to, this is the thing that I need, so need versus position.

How do we have clear boundaries? What's OK? What's not OK? How do we manage social pressure or peer pressure? These are all examples of relational skills that you and I might take for granted, but not always do our clients come in with these.

So let's see what is going on in the chat. So Diana's asking if other people encounter folks with issues with comprehension. So you can add things into the chat to answer that question. You said, "this is an issue that we have extensive problem with." Maybe you can break things down. Yeah. So sometimes it has to be super basic, simple words, really clear, and short sentences.

This is the same recommendation for folks who are either on the spectrum or have cognitive issues, developmental issues, or folks with traumatic brain injuries, Really breaking things down and keeping it extremely simple, and then also asking them what they've understood.

So you say something, the pattern is called chunk, check, chunk. You give them a small chunk of information. You check with them what they've understood. You then chunk out the next, check with them what they've understood. This chunk, check, chunk is a strategy for people who struggle with comprehension. And then Greg added that in restorative practices, a talking stick is really helpful.

OK, we covered this a little bit already. But how do you support skill development? Is about naming the skill when you see it. So if you see somebody doing it right, say something because when you praise behavior as soon as it's done-- so as soon as the behavior happens and you praise it immediately, you reinforce, you strengthen the neural pathways of that behavior. You actually heal the brain. You help that behavior get stronger when you catch it immediately.

You may have seen this in sports, in coaching, where a coach will ask somebody to do it again and again and again. And as soon as they get it, they say, yes, that's it, that's beautiful, or that's it. So really, really helpful to name the skill as soon as it happens and praise it.

It's also helpful for you to model the skills. So if you are asking people to be patient or you're asking people to use a reduced volume or something like that, it's really important that we model the skill, as well for them, exploring where else they can use the skill and then really practicing it to the best of their ability.

And then, Diana, you had an example in there. "A female with a child enter, asking about child support. And enforcement is another courthouse close by, but the family court is on the second floor." Got it. So helping people understand what they need and where they're going.

And unfortunately, our system is not the most easy to navigate. Maybe your system is easier. But we do not set up good social systems. We make really complex things even more complicated.

So if somebody is struggling then, cognitively, they're going to have an even harder time. So oftentimes, the first step, before we think we know what they need, is really trying to make sure we understand what they need because you ask the question and they continue to say, state child support, and actually, what they're looking for is something different.

Yeah, I've spent way more time than I care to admit telling people something that they don't even need because I misunderstood what they're actually asking for. OK, so what are ways in which we can practice without people feeling like we're practicing? So it could be in-the-moment role plays.

And we don't even call them role plays. It could be something like-- I do this a lot with folks. I'll say, so one of the things that you've talked about, client, is asking a boss for some vacation time. Let's just pretend like I'm your boss. What are you going to say to me? So that's an in-the-moment role play.

Or I could even say, give me an example of what you might say to your boss. Or I might say, so imagine if your boss came to you and said, hey, we have this huge project and nobody can be taking time off in the next few weeks. What are you going to do then?

I give people redos a lot. I'll say, what would you say? They'll say, blabbity blah. I say, OK, so let's try that again, and here's why that won't work or whatever. So give people redos. There are times where I'll say to folks, well, convince me that you've got this taken care of or convince me that you're going to be able to figure out the weekend without relapsing. Help me understand how this is going to work. And what if your friends come in and do and say blabbity blah.

So those are some ways of helping people practice. And Diana, ultimately, you're right that it's so frequent that clients do not know what exactly they are asking for because they're using phrases that in our minds mean something, but in the client's mind means something else. And so sometimes I have to give examples or go down the path even further.

So are you looking for a courtroom or are you looking for a person to talk with about blabbity blah. And inevitably, 50% of the time, I still get it wrong even though I've asked all the right questions. So like you said earlier, super frustrating. Yeah.

So if you want to go down the route of actual skill practice and skill building, there are lots of different curricula that are out there. You can do this with individuals in your conversations. You can do this with people even as you're meeting them in the waiting room or as you're walking them from one place to another place. But if you wanted to look at a curriculum, here are some ideas of what you can take a look at.

And on the next slide, I have links to some of these. So Quick Skills, Carey Guides. Carey Guides, they do cost. But it's a list of all of the cognitive skills and some examples of how to practice them.

The probation and parole treatment planner has a ton of information in it about all of the different issues that our clients come in with, and then what skills we can use to support them, how to develop their skills, obviously strategies for self-improvement and change with the CBT curriculum, just like Thinking for a Change or MRT, which is at the bottom. Mind over Mood is a wonderful curriculum, more focused on mental-health issues anxiety, mood disorders, those kinds of things.

And then on this slide-- and again, you have the link to this. But if you click on any of these links, it'll take you to some free resources that you can use if you want to delve into this material a little bit more. All right, Greg, we are open for questions. Look at that. We have enough time for questions and your wrap up.

Nice job. Do I need to give you the four to one? Nice Job. Really great job, Anjali. Thank you for getting up there?

No, we're out of time.

No, no, no. I don't need to do that with you? OK, good. While people are putting questions in-- and if there are any, you have a few minutes for questions-- what about substance-- I think you touched on this, substances and alcohol and our client's ability to build skills. Can they immediately start doing that? Does there need to be a period of time when they need to be sober or that we're trying to decide, are they getting it or not? What do we do with that?

Yeah, that's a great question. So unfortunately, when people are addicted to substances, one of the chemicals that's most impacted is dopamine. And dopamine is one of the neurotransmitters that's necessary to remember things and to build new skills. So it's a bit of a pickle that when we have folks who are addicted and most need these skills, they are missing the very chemical that helps them remember these skills.

It doesn't mean we don't do it. We still work on these skills. But we have to have a ton of patience around how to support people who are addicted to substances. So we make the skills a lot easier and we have a ton of repetition, a ton of practice.

And I know you talked about proximal and distal. How does that relate to, are we making any progress? Is this person being resistant to doing things differently? Or is this just part of a process for them, to really go from having the ability to do that versus the distal, maybe still not having the skills, ability, and experience to do that?

Yeah, I'm definitely going to answer that question. And so sweet. Thank you all for the comments that you're putting in the chat. I just really appreciate it. So when Greg says proximal and distal, what he's talking about is behaviors that we can expect from them right now and behaviors-- so that's proximal-- and then distal, behaviors that we might need to wait a little bit before we can expect from them.

And so it's really helpful then, to think about, what skills do we need to build right now? And what skills can we wait on? So the waiting on skills might be the more complex ones, like boundaries perhaps, or conflict management, or those kinds of things. Perhaps we wait on those. And right now, the things that we work on are just pausing, just stop and think, right.

I know that I'm making it sound so simple. But it is so brutally hard. For you and me, it's hard. When somebody misbehaves while we're driving, somebody cuts me off or something, it's very hard for me to stop and think in that moment. I want to have a reaction immediately and show them one of my fingers. But I have to pause that. And that's the stop and think that's so incredibly difficult, that we're trying to build with our clients.

What about clients-- can we expect everyone to be able to develop skills? Or is it possible for people to actually do permanent damage, like it isn't going to get any better than it is? Is that possible? And what do you do?

Good question. And Shelly, I love it. Throw your hands up and say, serenity now. Right? Yes. So Greg's asking a tough question. Are there people who are too far gone? A few. Sometimes there are certain brain injuries that we can get where really, it's not possible to rebuild. But these are rare.

So we recently did an evaluation for somebody whose frontal cortex was injured so badly that it's probably going to take, I don't know, years and years and years for his brain to be able to rebuild. And it was injured because of a particular car accident that he was involved in. So there are situations like that.

There's also, with addiction, the syndrome called Wernicke's syndrome, where the brain has been damaged enough that it's very, very hard to come back from. So those are some rare instances. But it's rare. And we don't expect people to be A students. Greg, I think this is one of the things that you are famous for saying.

Essentially, you don't have to be an A student. Even Cs get degrees and even Ds get degrees. So it's perfectly fine for probationers or clients or whoever to not be perfect to some of this. But they just have to be good enough to not get into trouble.

And I just want to add a couple of things that people have said. Shelly said, "if somebody flips you off, just smile and say, thank you, I know I'm number one." Yeah. And then Donald is asking, "what about somebody who's so emotionally broken or damaged from trauma?" So we can resolve brain impact of trauma. It just takes so much time if it's so incredibly damaging, whatever has happened.

And sometimes it'll come with other stuff too. It'll come with anxiety or it'll come with a personality disorder or something else. So it just takes time. And most trauma is relational trauma. And so it has to be healed relationally, not obviously in the same relationship that the trauma happened, but it has to be healed relationally. So the better social support that we can give people with extremely damaging trauma, the better their healing process is.

It's interesting that--

Definitely these tips.

It's interesting that you say that about trauma because I think some of my experience with brainspotting and EMDR is how quickly people can integrate trauma, six, eight weeks, they seem to be like a completely different person at times. So there's that whole range of trauma that can respond very quickly to some of the therapies that are out there. And then there's trauma that is so profound that it may take years. Is that what you're saying?

Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And I know we're out of time, Greg.

Yeah, so thanks for the questions throughout. It makes these webinars so much better when you all ask questions. So thank you for that. For additional information on general technical assistance services, links to featured offerings, and to request TAs, please visit our website. This is going to conclude our webinar for today. I want to thank Dr. Nandi for sharing your time and knowledge with us. And thank you all for your attendance, participation, and great questions. We hope to see you in future webinars. Thanks, everybody.