

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The text is centered in the white space between these shapes.

**Difficult Conversations with  
Students (And Faculty):  
We Could Write a Movie Script**

# Disclosure Statements

Kenn Apel	Crystal Murphree-Holden	Danielle Varnedoe
Employed by the University of South Carolina	Employed by the University of South Carolina	Employed by the University of South Carolina
None to report	None to report	None to report

# Learning Objectives

- ▶ Identify the characteristics of a difficult conversation
- ▶ Describe how to prepare for a difficult conversation
- ▶ Apply strategies to promote successful conversations

# Quote of the Day

“Saying what needs to be said at the right time, to the right person, in the right manner is managerial courage.”

Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger, “FYI for Your Improvement: A Guide for Developing and Coaching”

# I know - but ....



- ▶ Student in the 1<sup>st</sup> summer practicum
  - ▶ Intensive practicum in public school “speech camp” setting
  - ▶ Incomplete practicum - ended before last week
  - ▶ Student repeating incomplete practicum
- ▶ Communication with site supervisors and faculty clinical administrator
  - ▶ Different “stories” to different people
  - ▶ Increasingly Argumentative
- ▶ Suspected mental/behavioral health issues
  - ▶ Inconsistent responses to situation / Revised explanations
  - ▶ Social / behavioral concerns - Argumentative, increased agitation
- ▶ Meetings
  - ▶ Initial site visit (supervisors & student)
  - ▶ Multiple phone conferences (student & supervisors)

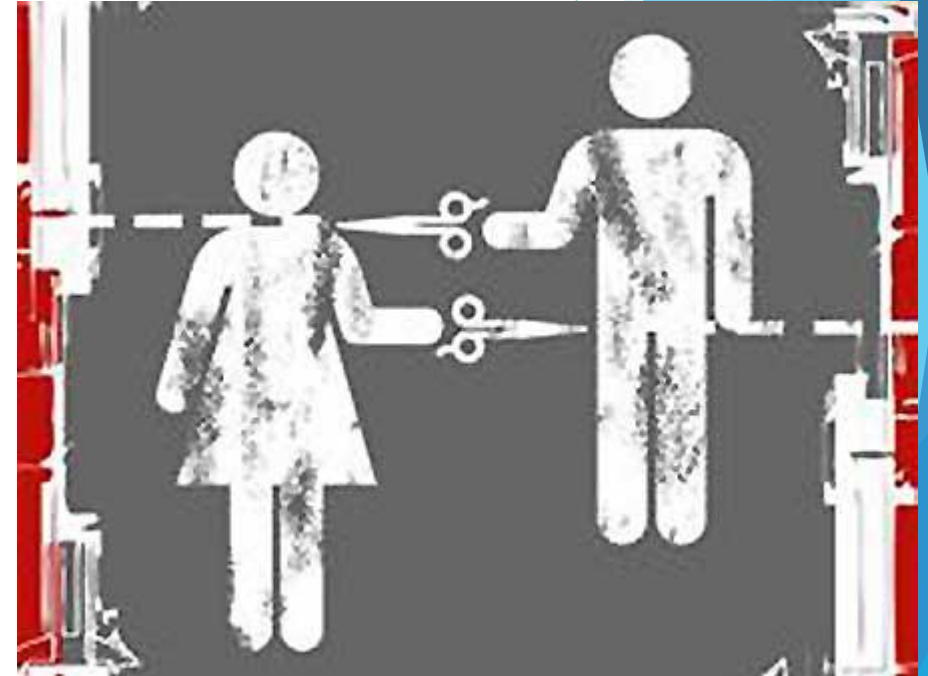
# Bath Time

- ▶ Student in her last clinical experience (final externship)
  - ▶ Externship ended a bit over a week before classes were over
- ▶ Skilled nursing facility called and asked that student not continue to visit the facility
  - ▶ Student was visiting one of the patients she had seen during her externship
  - ▶ Student kept the door closed while visiting
- ▶ Student called in and asked about the situation
  - ▶ Student believed male patient was lonely (no family to visit)
  - ▶ Student helped patient eat some meals
  - ▶ Student occasionally bathed the patient



# The Power Struggle

- ▶ Five (5) member IPCC Team
- ▶ Monthly meetings to discuss cases
- ▶ Need to briefly meet on cases throughout week
- ▶ Two (2) members frequently at odds
  - ▶ Strong personalities
  - ▶ Body language
- ▶ Deterioration in communication
- ▶ Initial meeting
  - ▶ Both admitted a great dislike for one another
  - ▶ Both stated it was because of the other that they 1) did not want to come into work; 2) avoided the other at all cost during the week and 3) wanted to quit



# What is a difficult conversation? Why do we not like them?

- ▶ Characteristics
  - ▶ Stakes are often high
  - ▶ Opinions vary
  - ▶ Emotional
  - ▶ Uncomfortable
    - ▶ Conflict





# Some Common Difficult Conversations

- ▶ Faculty-student
  - ▶ Poor academic or clinical performance
  - ▶ Dress code violations
  - ▶ Odd behavior
- ▶ Faculty-faculty
  - ▶ Unacceptable/offensive behavior
  - ▶ Poor communication/teamwork
- ▶ Chair-faculty
  - ▶ Difficulty meeting T & P requirements
  - ▶ Difficulty being part of a team

# How to prepare for a difficult conversation

- ▶ Don't delay
- ▶ Ask yourself “what do I want to accomplish?”
- ▶ Decide if a third person needs to be there
- ▶ Prepare for all possible scenarios
- ▶ Know what you want to say
- ▶ Practice what you want to communicate
- ▶ Relax



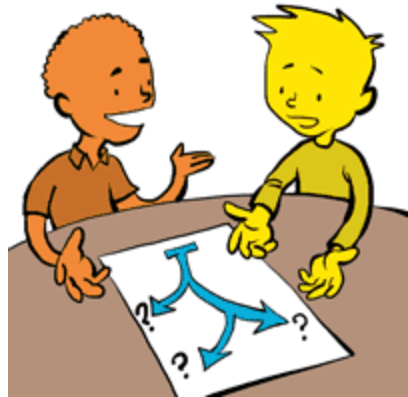
# Tips for having a successful conversation

## ▶ Use the FUSION Method

- ▶ F - Focus on the issue at hand
- ▶ U - Understand the other's perspective and point of view
- ▶ S - Be specific about what you think and want
- ▶ I - Use "I" statements
- ▶ O - Be open to options to handling disagreement
- ▶ N - No "hot-button" language (e.g. "you always do this" and other types of you statements)

# Remember: It's a learning conversation

- ▶ Concept of “learning conversation”
  - ▶ Multiple viewpoints and multiple responsible parties
  - ▶ Problem resolution through joint efforts
  - ▶ Leadership responsibility must include creating atmosphere and supporting environment for difficult conversations
  - ▶ Joint decision-making process is key to “learning conversation”
  - ▶ Address feelings and/or emotions in the conversation



# Additional tips for having a successful conversation

- ▶ Approach with purpose, not judgement
  - ▶ Stick to the facts; be objective
  - ▶ Listen without bias
- ▶ Outline the impact of the behavior
- ▶ Communicate with GRIT (generosity, respect, integrity, truth)
- ▶ Be mindful of your body language/facial expressions
- ▶ Keep emotions in check
- ▶ Repeat back your understanding of the issues

# Constructive Confrontation



- ▶ Keep in mind:
  - ▶ A relationship is larger than one or two confrontations
  - ▶ Your confrontation may not be viewed as such in another's mind
  - ▶ Confrontation can lead to positive clarification and increased understanding
  - ▶ If it is right for you to confront, it is right for another to do the same
  - ▶ People do this more than one thinks; constructive confrontation can be VERY helpful

# Constructive Confrontation

Constructive	Destructive
<b>Use of I statements</b>	<b>Use of you statements</b>
<u>I</u> feel like you're angry at me	Why are you mad?
<u>I</u> 'm upset that you arrived late	You are late again
<u>I</u> understand that you don't intend it that way, but I feel .....	You make me feel....
<u>I</u> am thinking that your duties/responsibilities aren't completed regularly	You never do what I ask
I'm feeling confused because...	You aren't helping me understand.

Key here is to use "I" statements and talk about what you are thinking/feeling

# “Yay! Boy am I glad THAT is over!”



## ▶ The next steps:

- ▶ Acknowledge the conversation occurred
- ▶ Document key points, next steps, agreements, etc.
- ▶ Have follow up conversations
- ▶ Avoid avoidance behavior
- ▶ Consider team building events



# Revisiting the Scenarios

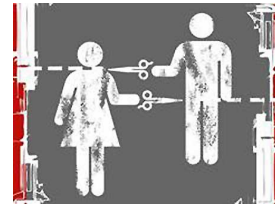
▶ #1 “I know - but.....”



▶ #2 “Bath Time”



▶ #3 “The Power Struggle”



Which is the real one?

What would you do?

## Quote ....

“The stories you tell yourself about your life are essential to your self-image. A good supervisor makes it easier for someone to tell herself a good story. A great supervisor makes it easier for someone to tell herself a good story even when she’s being fired.”

Douglas Stone, Sheila Heen and Bruce Patton, “Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most”

# Selected References

- ▶ Lombardo, M., & Eichinger, R. (2006). *FYI: For your improvement, a guide for development and coaching*. Minneapolis: Lominger Ltd Inc.
- ▶ McNichol, J. (2015). The Crossroads Conversation: It's never easy to let a supervisee go. But how you deliver the difficult news can make a big difference to that employee's response and next moves. *The ASHA Leader*, 20(2), 34-35.
- ▶ Schober-Peterson, D., & Whitelaw, G. M. (2012). Administration: Leadership Challenges: Difficult Conversations. *Perspectives on Administration and Supervision*, 22(1), 40-44.
- ▶ Stone, D., Heen, S., & Patton, B. (2010). *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most*. New York: Penguin Books.