

Managing Challenging Group Dynamics and Conversations

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Training Description

- ▶ This interactive session provides tools to navigate challenging group dynamics in multicultural and multi-sector coalitions. Participants will explore restorative approaches, conflict resolution strategies, ethical leadership, and methods for engaging diverse stakeholders.

Learning Objectives

- ▶ Identify sources of conflict in coalitions and community groups
- ▶ Apply restorative and relationship-centered responses
- ▶ Strengthen skills for difficult conversations
- ▶ Engage diverse perspectives and power sharing
- ▶ Facilitate discussions on sensitive community topics



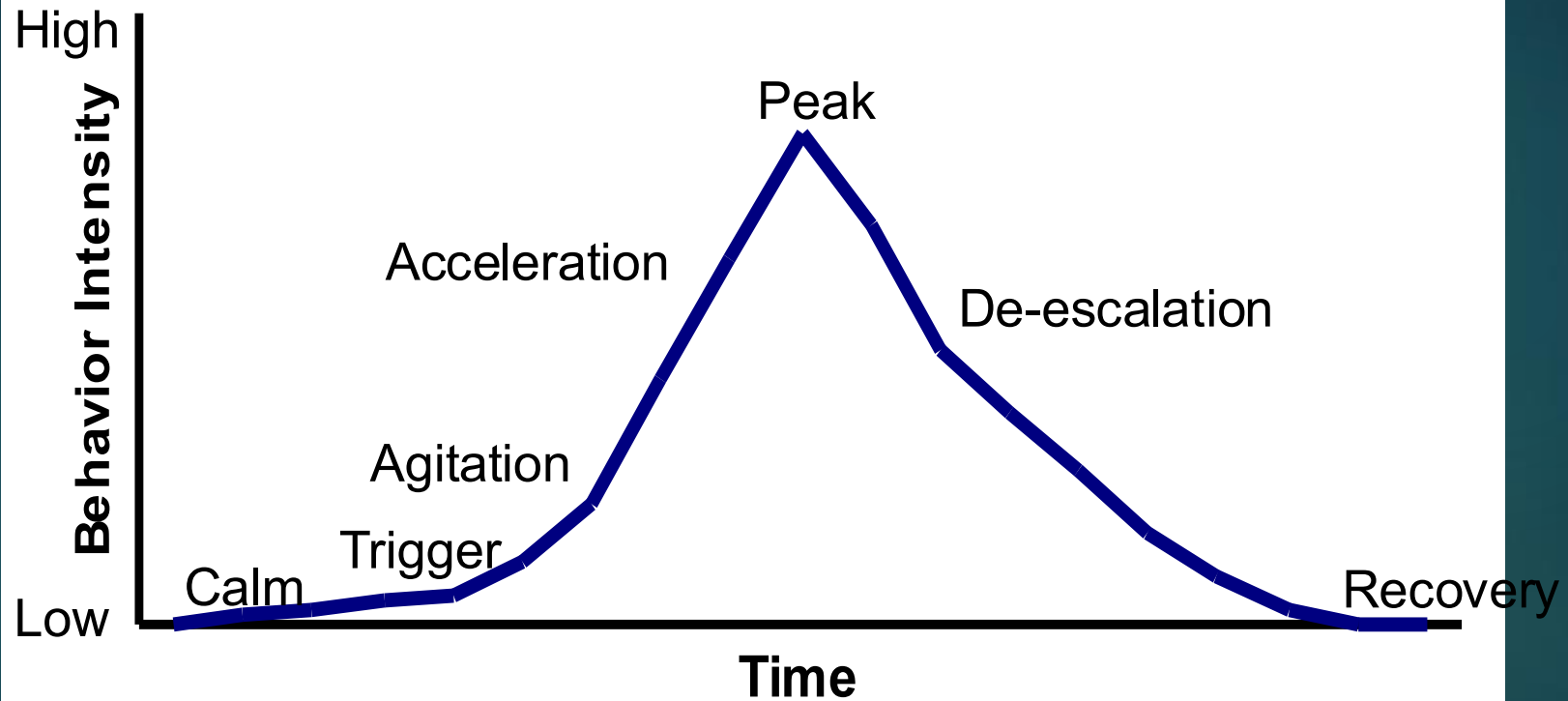
A 3D puzzle with one red piece standing out among white pieces.

Why This Training

Feedback from Survey highlighted needs for:

- ▶ Conflict resolution tools
- ▶ Managing staff tensions and gossip
- ▶ Navigating diverse perspectives
- ▶ Discussing sensitive community issues
- ▶ Youth engagement strategies

Phases of Conflict Model





Phases of Conflict

- ▶ CONFLICT IS DEFINED AS A CLASH BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS ARISING OUT OF A DIFFERENCE IN THOUGHT PROCESS, ATTITUDES, UNDERSTANDING, INTERESTS, REQUIREMENTS AND EVEN SOMETIMES PERCEPTIONS.
- ▶ THERE ARE 7 PHASES OF THE ESCALATION CYCLE. THE CYCLE IS NOT IRREVERSIBLE AND GIVES CREDENCE TO THE FACT THAT NO CONFLICT REMAINS AT THE SAME LEVEL INDEFINITELY AND THAT CONFLICTS CAN BE REVERSED OR STOPPED BEFORE IT ESCALATES.
- ▶ CALM
- ▶ TRIGGER
- ▶ AGITATED
- ▶ ACCELERATION
- ▶ PEAK
- ▶ DE-ESCALATION
- ▶ RECOVERY

Discussion Activity

Small Group Discussion:

- ▶ What are the most common sources of conflict in your coalition or organization?
- ▶ How are they usually addressed?



Common Sources of Conflict in Coalitions

- ▶ Miscommunication
- ▶ Competing priorities or goals
- ▶ Power imbalances
- ▶ Cultural misunderstandings
- ▶ Differing communication styles



Understanding Group Dynamics

Healthy groups require:

- ▶ Psychological safety
- ▶ Clear roles and expectations
- ▶ Respectful communication
- ▶ Shared decision making

CONFLICT



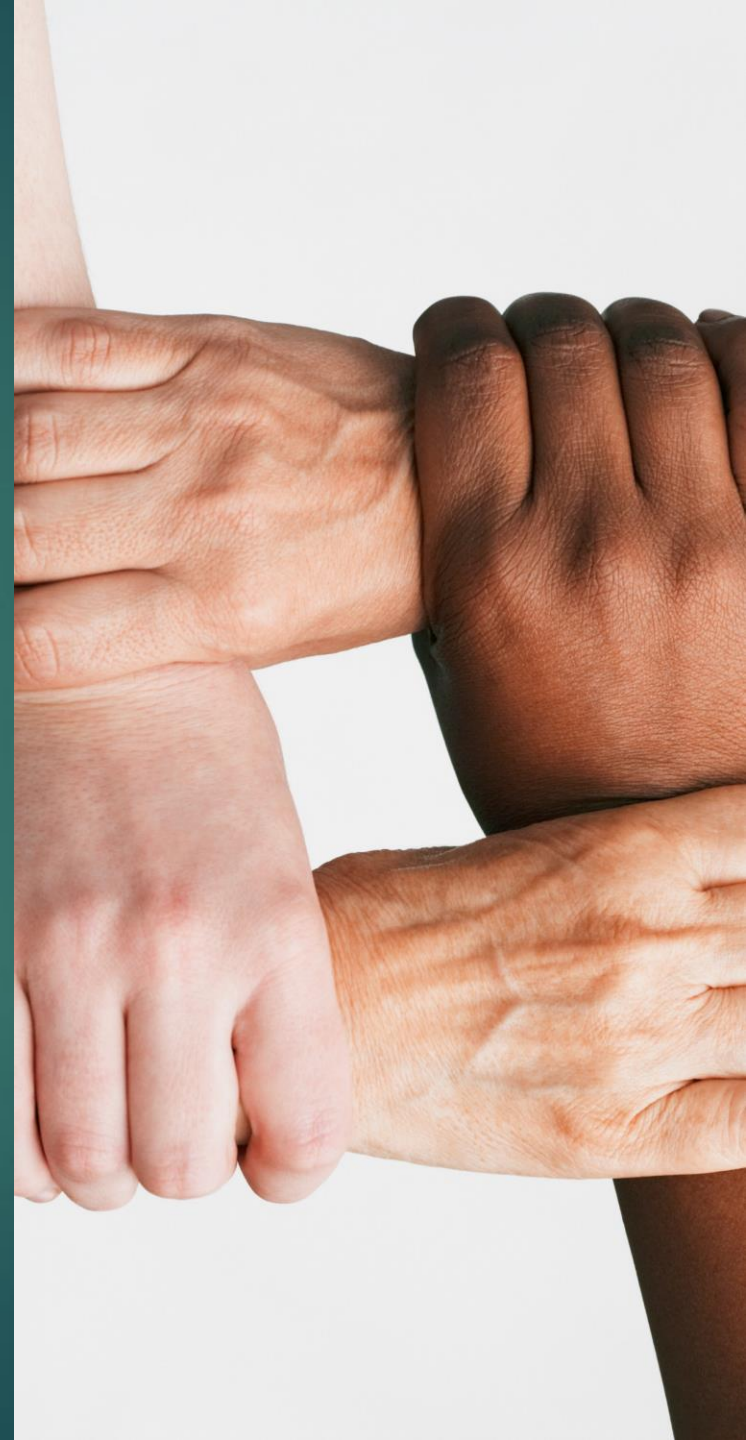
- ▶ Conflict is unavoidable
- ▶ Differences in experiences, culture, motivations, processing, power, goals and expectations will impact interactions and invariably lead to conflict.
- ▶ Conflict by itself does not guarantee harm, often, it is the responses of the participants that exacerbate.
 - ▶ “Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” – Benjamin Franklin

- Can you name a time you handled a conflict well

Restorative Approaches to Conflict

Restorative principles focus on:

- ▶ Repairing relationships
- ▶ Listening to understand
- ▶ Accountability without shame
- ▶ Collaborative problem solving



Communication Skills for Difficult Conversations

Key Strategies:

- ▶ Active listening
- ▶ Curiosity instead of judgment
- ▶ Using neutral language
- ▶ Acknowledging emotions
- ▶ Be Aware of Yourself and Your Triggers





Group Discussion

De-escalation-Turn and Talk

- ▶ Think of a time when a conversation escalated into conflict.
- ▶ What do you struggle most with during conflict?
- ▶ How important is maintaining the power dynamics and power differential for managing behaviors during the conflict?
- ▶ What communication approaches do you automatically choose?
- ▶ What communication approach might have helped de-escalate the situation?



Managing Staff Conflict & Gossip

Strategies:

- ▶ Address issues early
- ▶ Reinforce professional expectations
- ▶ Encourage direct communication
- ▶ Use supervision to clarify roles and accountability

Case Study

- ▶ Two coalition staff members are speaking negatively about each other to other coworkers instead of addressing the issue directly. This tension is beginning to affect meetings and collaboration.





Case Discussion-Turn and Talk

- ▶ What risks does this situation create for the coalition?
- ▶ How should a supervisor respond?
- ▶ What restorative approach could help repair the relationship?

Engaging Diverse Perspectives

Coalitions often include partners from different sectors:

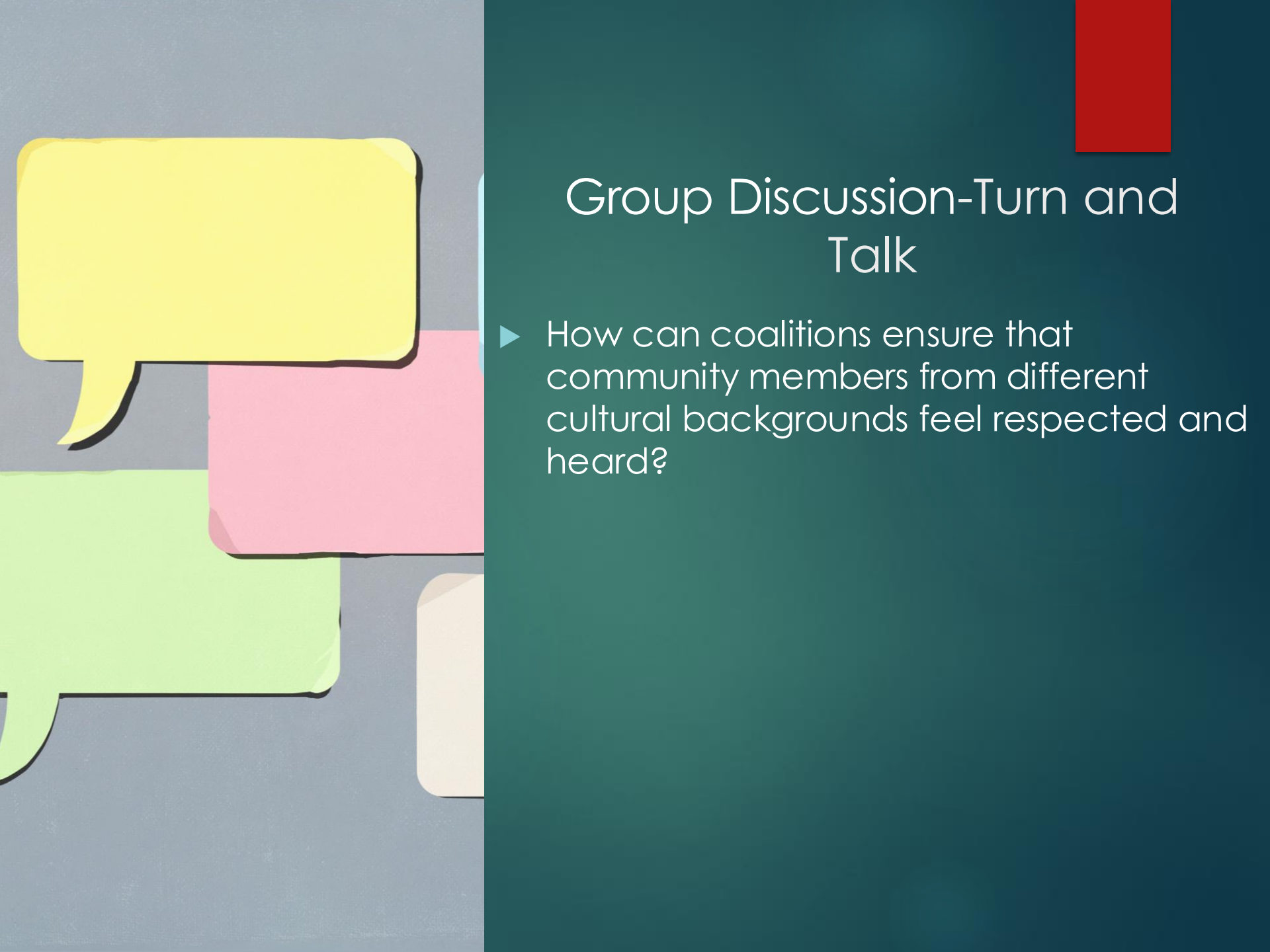
- ▶ Public health
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Law enforcement
- ▶ Youth leaders
- ▶ Community members

Promoting Multicultural & Multiracial Power Sharing



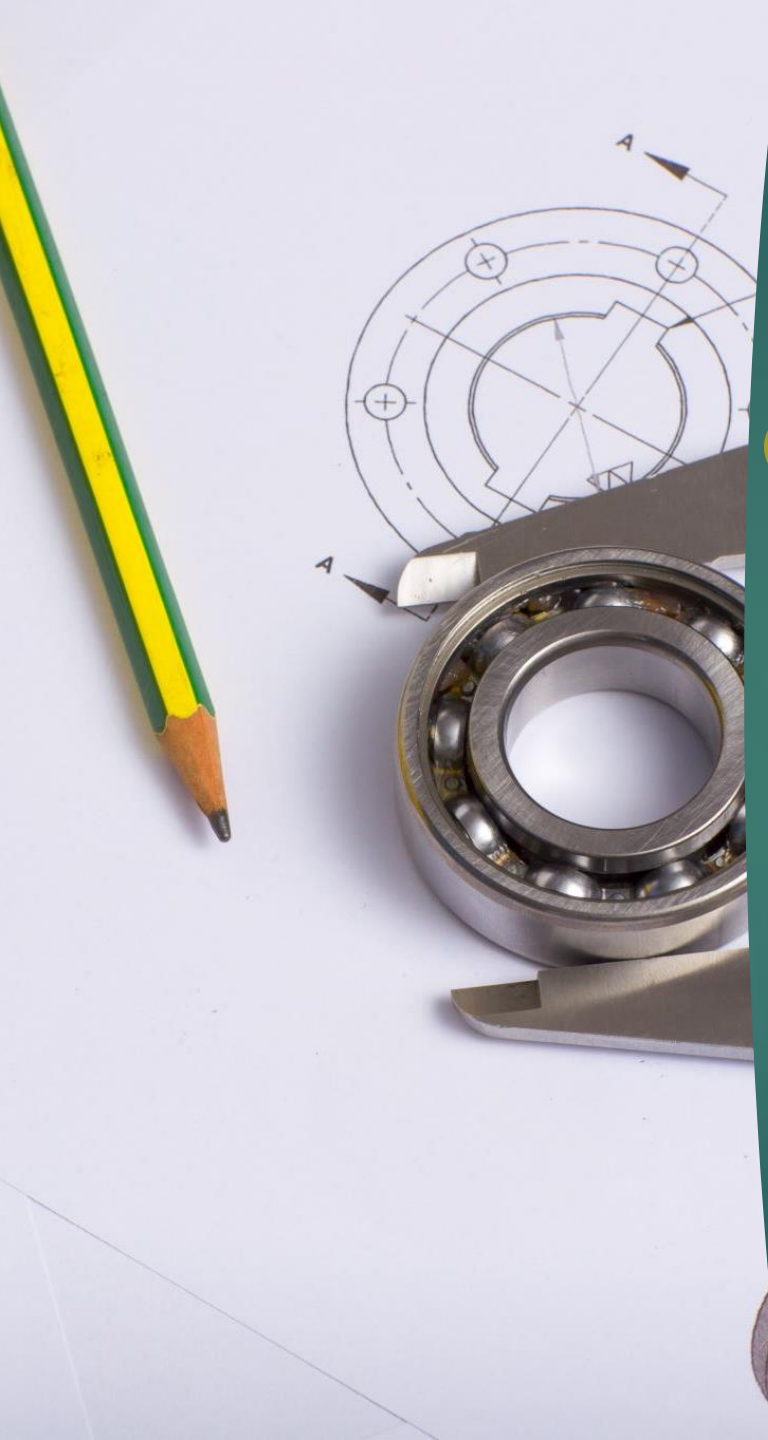
Effective practices:

- ▶ Invite diverse voices into decision making
- ▶ Recognize historical inequities
- ▶ Share leadership opportunities
- ▶ Create inclusive meeting spaces



Group Discussion-Turn and Talk

- ▶ How can coalitions ensure that community members from different cultural backgrounds feel respected and heard?



Navigating Polarizing Community Topics

- ▶ Examples include:
- ▶ Marijuana policy
- ▶ Public health initiatives
- ▶ Youth substance use prevention

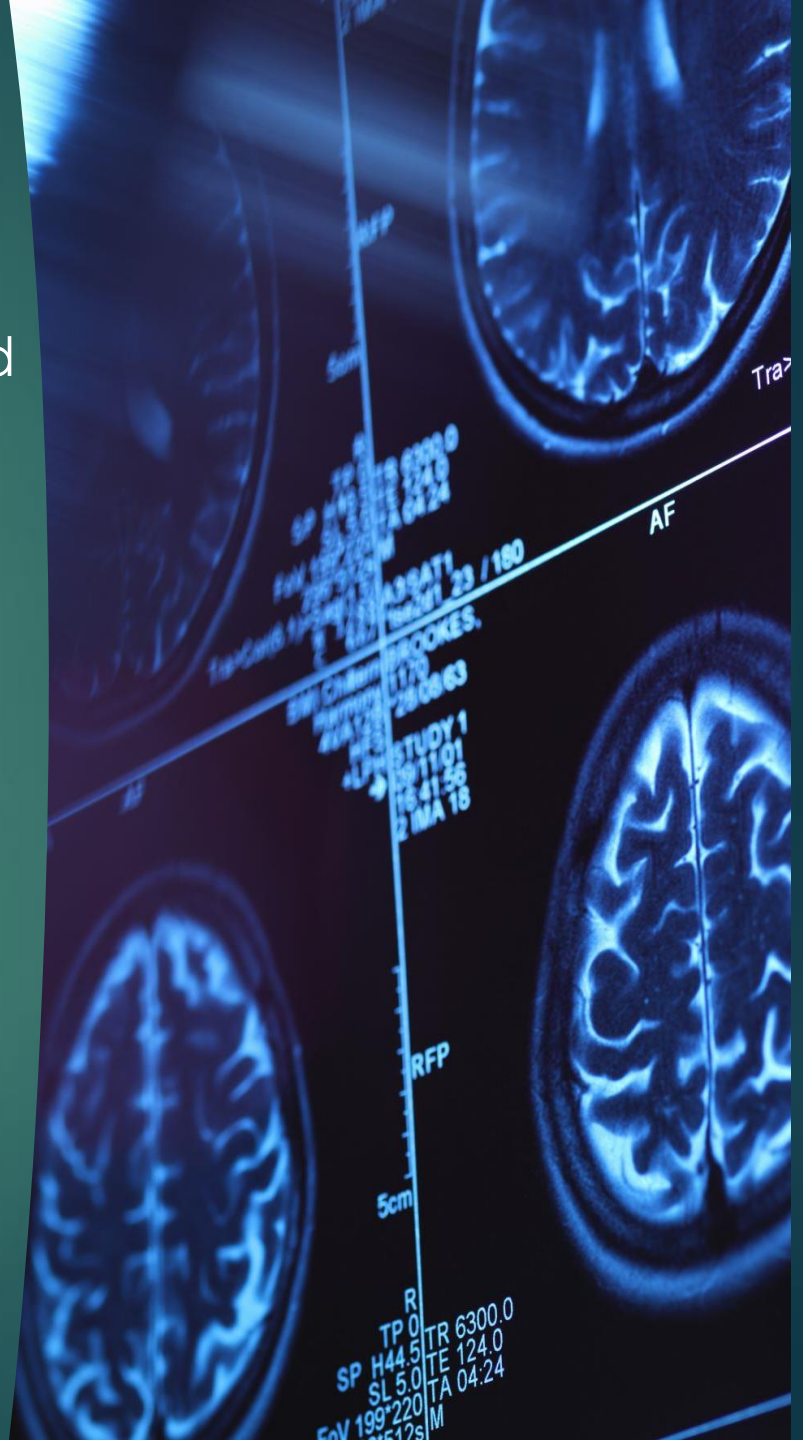
Whose Voices are Represented?

Strategies for Sensitive Conversations

- ▶ Focus on shared goals
- ▶ Use evidence rather than opinions
- ▶ Allow space for differing perspectives
- ▶ Keep conversations respectful
- ▶ Use “I STATEMENTS”
- ▶ Practice reflecting and Reframing

Case Study

- ▶ During a coalition meeting, a heated disagreement emerges about marijuana policy. Some members feel prevention messaging is too strict, while others believe the community must take a stronger stance.





Case Discussion

- ▶ How should a facilitator guide this conversation?
- ▶ What strategies help prevent polarization?
- ▶ How can the group stay focused on shared goals?



Engaging Youth in Coalition Work

- ▶ Youth engagement strategies:
- ▶ Social media outreach
- ▶ Youth advisory boards
- ▶ Peer leadership opportunities
- ▶ Youth-led campaigns

Ethical Leadership in Coalitions



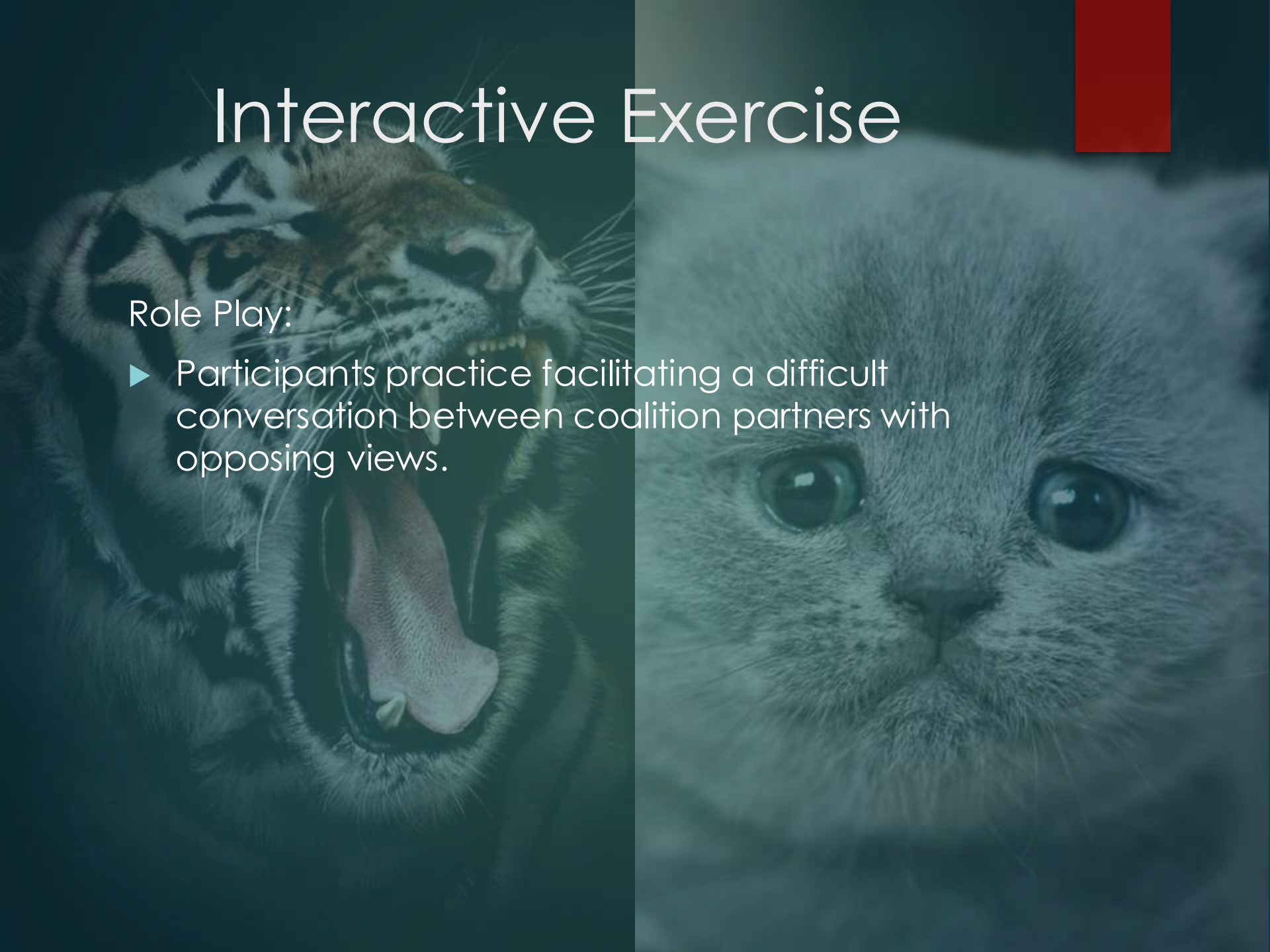
Effective leaders:

- ▶ Model respect and transparency
- ▶ Address conflict constructively
- ▶ Share power and credit
- ▶ Encourage collaboration

Interactive Exercise

Role Play:

- ▶ Participants practice facilitating a difficult conversation between coalition partners with opposing views.



Reflection Discussion

- ▶ What strategies from today feel most useful?
- ▶ What challenges do you anticipate applying them?
- ▶ What support do coalitions need moving forward?



Key Takeaways

- ▶ Conflict is normal in collaborative work
- ▶ Skilled communication reduces escalation
- ▶ Inclusion strengthens coalitions
- ▶ Restorative approaches build stronger relationships



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