

# Trauma-informed Leadership and Supervision: An Approach to Healing during Times of Unrest

Lladira Aguilar, MSW  
Program Director  
University of Houston

20  
22

NATIONAL  
**RYAN WHITE**  
CONFERENCE  
ON HIV CARE & TREATMENT

# Defining Leadership

## Everyday Leadership:

“an individual who, regardless of formal title or authority, influences others to achieve shared objectives for the good of the collective.”

# Introductions

Lladira Aguilar  
(Ya-di-ra)  
She/Her/Hers



Family

# In the chat box: Introductions

- Name
- Pronouns
- City, State
- Your role
- Name your everyday leadership: Who/what do you lead?

# Group Agreements:

- We are here, so let's be here
- Self-care and Collective Care
- Take Space, Make Space
- Self-reflection is key
- Any others?

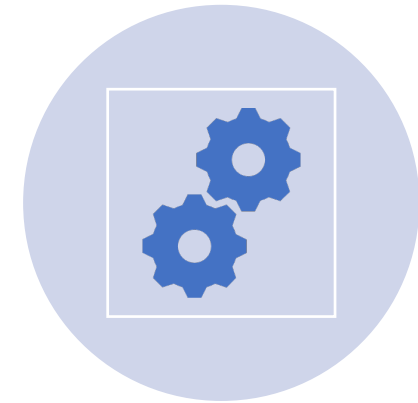
# Presentation Flow



FUNDAMENTALS OF TRAUMA-  
INFORMED LEADERSHIP



TALK ABOUT IT



OPERATIONALIZE IT

# Trauma-informed Care

**TIC is an approach**

**TIC is multi-level  
(TILS is a strategy of TIC)**

**TIC requires a shift in attitude**

**TIC is guided by 6 Principles**

- Safety
- Trust and Transparency
- Collaboration & Mutuality
- Empowerment, Voice & Choice
- Peer Support
- Historical, Cultural, Gender Factors

**TIC is a journey and not a final destination...**

# TILS Fundamental: #1

Realize,  
Recognize,  
Respond and  
Resist

- Trauma-informed leaders have knowledge of trauma and:
  - Realize its pervasiveness
  - Recognize its signs and symptoms
  - Respond to traumatic situations
  - Resists re-traumatization and harmful situations





# Defining Trauma

## Event(s)

- Can be singular or multiple
- To individuals or groups
- Natural or human caused

## Experience(s)

- How a person assigns meaning to an experience or event

## Effect(s)

- Physically and emotionally harmful
- Lasting negative events on functioning and wellbeing (mental, physical, social, emotional, spiritual)

# Trauma can look like...

\*\*\*Any kind of trigger in the present moment can instantaneously transport our minds, bodies, and spirits back to a traumatizing time in the past and cause us to relive that moment with all of the same emotions as well as physical responses.




\*Not all inclusive

# Let's operationalize it!




**Take training courses on trauma**



**Learn about other people's experiences w/trauma**



**Be intentional about creating safer spaces to discuss harmful situations**



**Lean into conversations related to race and gender**



**Shape and advocate for trauma-informed policies and procedures**



**Recognize and acknowledge when harmful situations affect groups of people**



**What are other ways?**

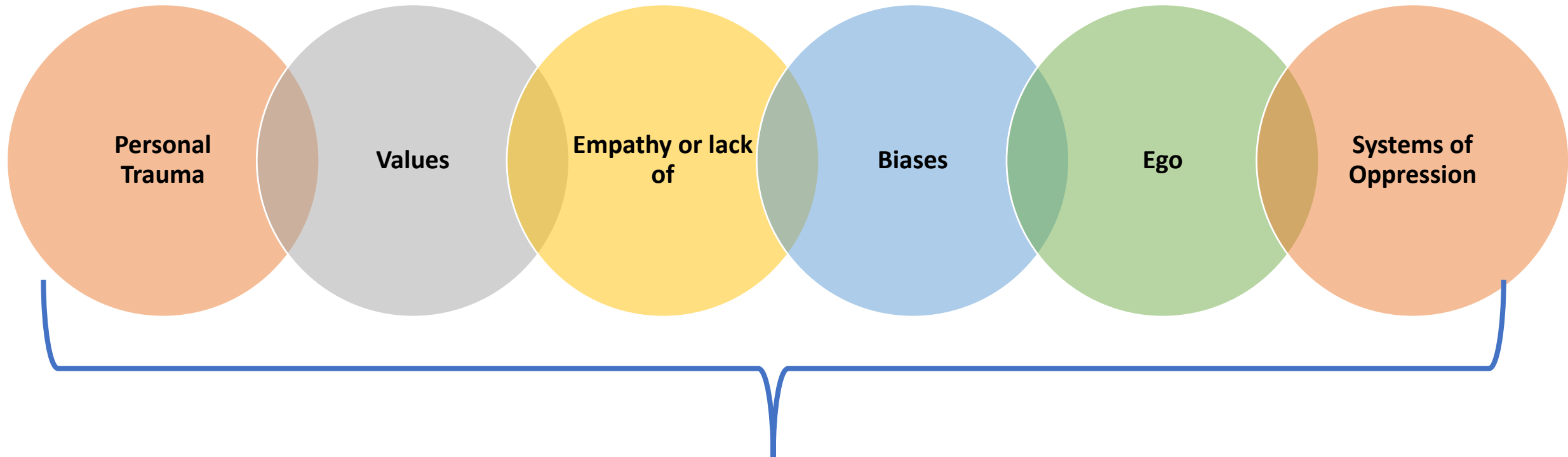
## TILS Fundamental: #2

Self-reflection and radical honesty are key!



- **Trauma-informed leaders use self-reflection as an opportunity to:**
  - Pause amidst the chaos
  - Untangle and sort through observations and experiences
  - Understand how these experiences are affecting them personally and those around them
  - Consider other possible interpretations and perceptions of others
  - Think about what needs to heal (who needs to heal?)
  - Be intentional about how to respond
  - Learn and create meaning= growth

# Radical honesty and leadership



How do these show up in the way you lead?



# What is going on around me?

**Covid- 19 (Then, Now,  
What to expect?)**

**Grief and Loss (Death,  
Layoffs/Job loss,  
Divorce...)**

**Work/Life Balance  
(Frequent changes and  
adjustments)**

**People are re-thinking  
life ('The Great  
Resignation')**

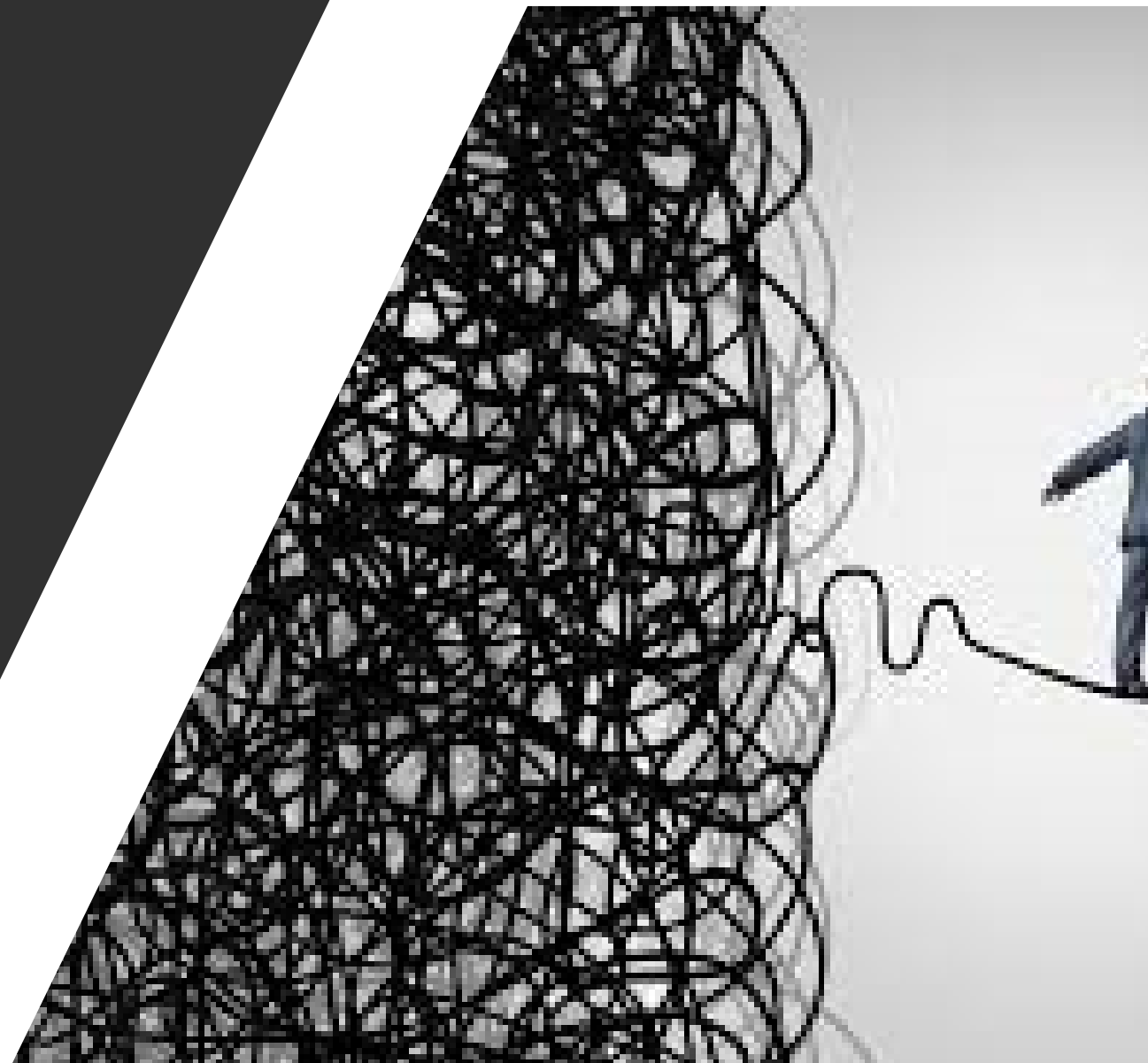
**Violence (War, Mass  
Shootings, Racism,  
Police Brutality)**

**Other Stressors  
(Mother Nature,  
Politics, Inflation,  
Social Media, New  
diseases...)**

# Emotions at the core of these experiences:



All of that and we  
are still showing  
up!

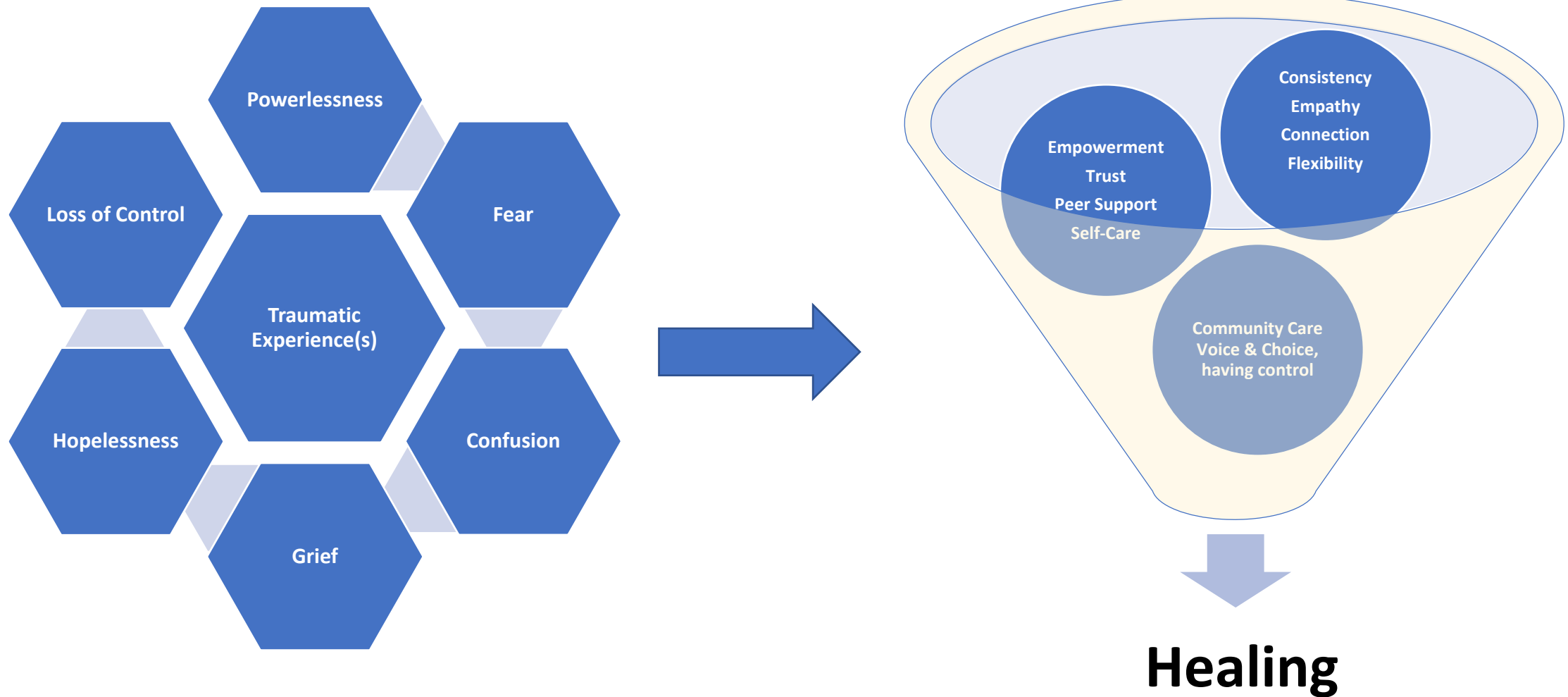




This is not  
business as  
usual!

- We must create effective strategies and interventions to **build healthy, trauma-informed environments that foster healing.**
- **Trauma-informed Leadership is Key!**

# Fostering Healing in the Workplace



# TILS Fundamental #3

Requires a shift  
in attitude

What's wrong with you?

- Reactive attitude
- Implies deficit in the person
- Judgmental

What happened to you?

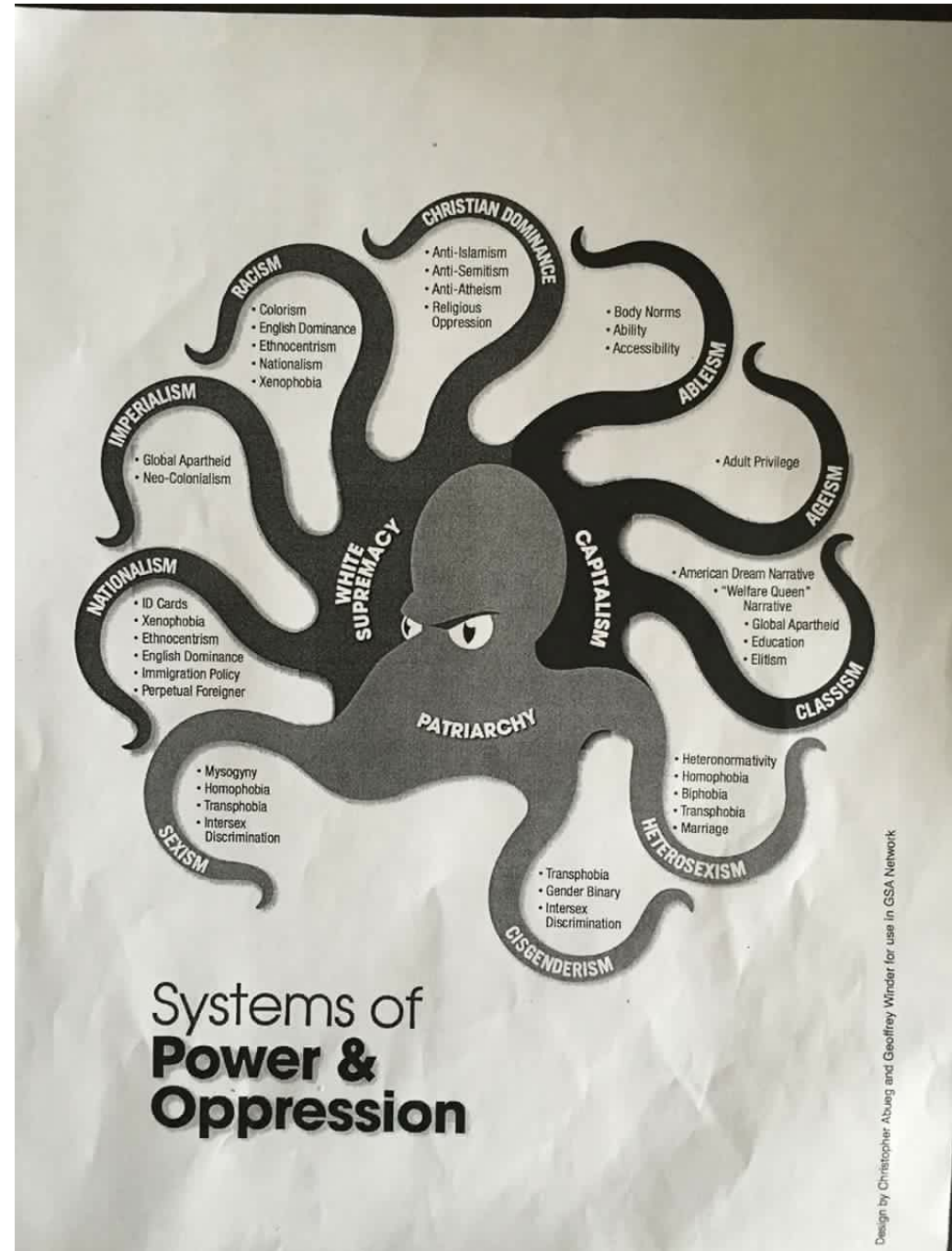
- Leads to a non-reactive attitude
- Non-judgmental
- Allows for curious empathy

# Let's practice!

Challenging Behavior	Common Judgement (What's wrong with you?)	Curious Empathy (What's happened to you?)
A colleague continues to miss deadlines	-	-
A client gets easily angry and raises their voice at you	-	-
A colleague needing constant validation and approval	-	-
A group declines to work with your organization and states, "We refuse to do any work with you people."	-	-

# TILS Fundamental: #4

Acknowledge and seek to dismantle systems of oppression



# Let's Operationalize It!

- Amplify voices and experiences that aren't heard
  - People of trans experience, people who are of undocumented status, people with disabilities, people who use drugs
- Leverage your power
  - Share your power and allow others to lead
  - Get in good trouble
  - Give up your seat
  - Influence others with power
- Name it and call it out!
  - How am I contributing to this oppressive system?
- Be comfortable with change
- Be open to feedback
  - Exit Surveys

# TILS Fundamental #5

Prioritize and  
model self-care  
and community  
care



Self-care means taking care of yourself so that you can be healthy, you can be well, you can do your job, you can help and care for others, and you can do all the things you need to and want to accomplish in a day.

**Community care** means using our power, privilege, and resources to better the people who are both in and out of our scope of reach.



# Let's Operationalize It!

## Self-care

- Model and prioritize self-care
- Set professional boundaries:
  - Use your PTO and sick time
  - Work your set schedules
  - Remove work email from phone
  - Be okay with having not-so-productive days
  - Eat your meals!
- Sleep and Exercise
- Do things that bring you joy

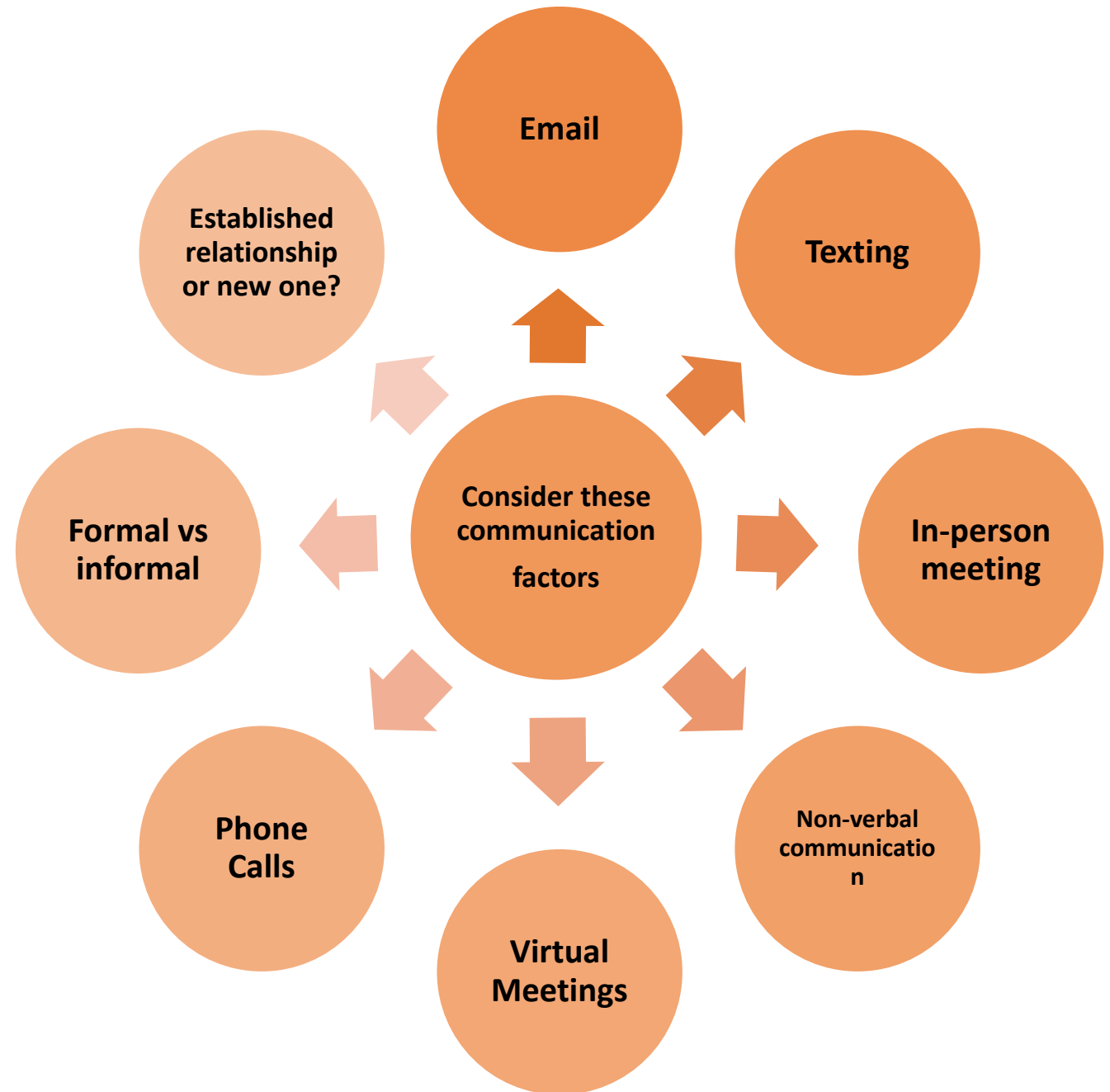
## Community Care

- Share your PTO
- Advocate for change in policies and procedures especially those creating harm to others
- Give up your seat
- Checking in with people and seeing how you can help/support
- Setting or requesting budgets for self-care and staff wellbeing

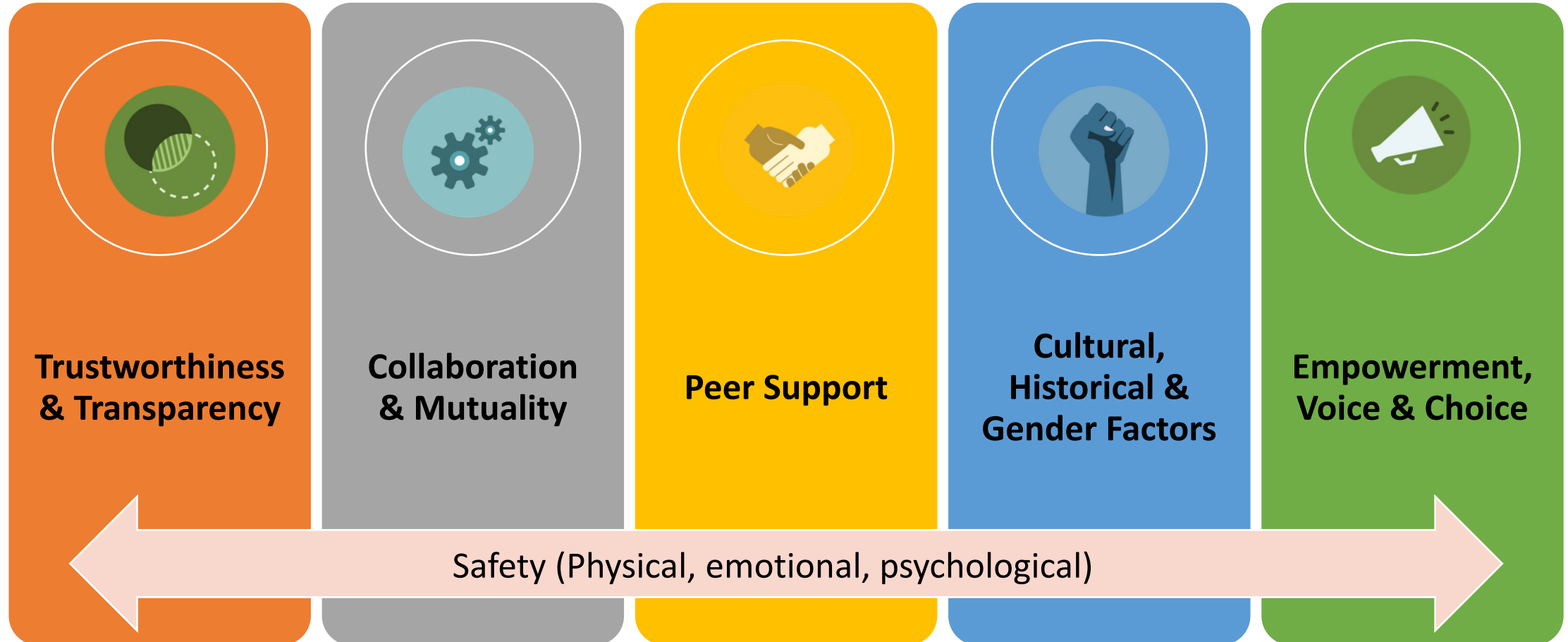


## TILS Fundamental: #6

Use a trauma-informed approach to communication guided by TIC principles



# How are these principles guiding your communication?



# Let's Practice!

Good afternoon,

Thank you for all of your hard work this weekend. I also wanted to bring to your attention something that has me concerned.

This weekend the therapist who was scheduled to work in C building units was in an auto accident on the way to work and was taken to the hospital. Thankfully, she is okay but she never made it to work this weekend. She notified me via my work email late Saturday night. If it is an emergency, please call or text me do not send me an email.

I have always asked that you all check on one another to see if your peers may need some help. It is disconcerting to me that no one checked on this therapist or their units because I feel confident that if you had you would have discovered that they weren't there and notified me. As a result, the patients went without therapy, no paperwork, nor family therapy sessions were completed, and the work was not completed on time. Now I have to meet with leadership and explain what happened.

I am grateful for those who stepped up today to help out and get the unit back on track. It is very much appreciated!

Sincerely,

John Doe  
Director of Clinical Services

- What are your initial thoughts upon reading this email?
- What tone does this email present?
- What are some missed opportunities? (Think about the TIC principles).
- Curious empathy: Think about the person in this leadership position. What could be happening on their end?

## TILS Fundamental #7

Understand that  
trauma-informed  
leadership is  
relational

- Trauma-informed leadership fosters healing through relationships with individuals, groups, and communities
  - We are moving away from having full control to sharing power and control
  - We connect with one another through safer spaces and cultural humility
  - We are moving away from not showing emotion to being okay with vulnerability
  - We assume that everyone is doing the best they can



# Overview: TILS Fundamentals

- #1- Realize, Recognize, Respond and Resist
- #2- Self-reflection and radical honesty are key!
- #3- Requires a shift in attitude
- #4- Acknowledge and seek to dismantle systems of oppression
- #5- Prioritize and model self-care and community care
- #6- Use a trauma-informed approach to communication guided by TIC principles
- #7- Understand that trauma-informed leadership is relational

# Thank you!

Lladira Aguilar, MSW  
SUSTAIN Wellbeing COMPASS Coordinating Center  
University of Houston  
[laguila9@central.uh.edu](mailto:laguila9@central.uh.edu)  
Find me on LinkedIn! 😊

# References

- Riggio, R.E., Liu, Z., Reichard, R., & Walker, D.O.\* (2020). Everyday leadership: Engaged followership at its finest. In Z. Jaser (Ed.), *The connecting leader: Serving concurrently as a leader and a follower*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Press.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.