Having Difficult Conversations
Initiating, Redirecting and Engaging
Who is in the room?

- **Aviva**: PhD, LMSW, Director of Program Quality, Fieldstone Farm TRC, Chagrin Falls, OH
- **Maggee**: Adaptive Horsemanship Program Director/ Center rep, Eagle Mount, Bozeman, MT
- **Kim**: Program/ Education Director, Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center, Augusta, MI
- **Sara**: Chief Operating Officer, Ride On Therapeutic Horsemanship, Los Angeles, CA
- **Meghan**: LCSW, LAC, PATH Intl. CTRI with Miracles Therapeutic Riding Center, Lafayette, CO
- **Bret**: Director of Credentialing, PATH Intl.
Consistency

All the messages

Your message
With whom are you talking?

- Staff
  - Program staff
- Volunteers
  - Core team
  - At-risk
  - Non-believers
- Participants
  - Those who are back
  - Those who can come back
  - Those who are not ready to come back
  - Those who the center does not feel ready to support
  - Caretakers of participants
- Donors/Community partners
- Board members
- Major donors and board members who have clients in the program
Initiating Conversations

- Expectations
- Procedures
- Plan A-Z

- Breathe
- If you do not have the time, do not open the door to a conversation
- Listen, reflect, ask
- Ask open ended questions
  - “What I hear you say is...”
    - “Can you say more about...”
  - “I want to make sure I understand what you are saying...”
  - “I may not be understanding, can you say that again in a different way...”
  - “That is an interesting perspective...”
Redirecting Conversations

- Stay on message
- Stay grounded in the facts
- Maintain neutral opinion (even if you’re not)
- Don’t take “it” personal
Engaging in Conversations

- Conversation starters
- Have talking points
- Don’t wait for the conversation - start it
- Stay neutral
- Find the positive

The best defense in a difficult conversation is to be able to say the same thing to all parties (staff, volunteers, riders and donors). Set a policy that is true to your organization and say it (loudly) to all. Inconsistency causes problems.
Discussions with Staff

- Check in on stress level
- The why’s for procedure
  - and the NO
- Available support
- Awareness of staff concerns/fears
- Weekly meetings (even if nothing is new)
- Procedures including the why
- Updated facts
- Changes that need to happen
- Scheduling
Addressing the Nonbeliever

- Breathe
- Ground yourself in what you know and believe, acknowledge your bias
- Breathe again

- Hold to current facts/laws
- Refer to CDC and local guidelines
- Be firm and consistent
  - Do NOT rely on a volunteer to manage difficult conversations
- Acknowledge where they are
- Refer to liabilities

- Breathe, stretch, take a walk
Practice Framework

- Modalities of conversation:
  - text, email, conversation in person, phone, Zoom
- Conversations best in person (face mask on)
  - or on the phone
- It is very easy to become angry and confrontational via social media or text:
  - people become very brave when not in person
- Do not be tempted to engage in arguments via social media unless you can use the opportunity to construct a positive response:
  - which might answer questions that others were afraid to ask
Feeling the Feels

- Anger
- Fear
- Frustration
- Guilt
- Avoidance
- Confusion
- Disbelief
Rapidly Changing Environment

- United States COVID-19 tracker: [https://www.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases](https://www.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases)
- State mandates (e.g. masks, quarantine)
- School in person or virtual
Tools & Resources

- Imbedded support → mental health providers on hand for staff and center conversations
- Practice saying, “No.” Ready..... “No!”
- Online
  - Jessica Dolce: COVID-19, Self-Care webinar
  - Kathy Alm: Before During and After
  - Ride On/Joy Ride: Risk Benefit Form
  - PATH Intl Website: COVID reopening plans
Tools & Resources

- Check out a special recorded message from PATH Intl. CEO Kathy Alm: [https://conta.cc/3eGvmg](https://conta.cc/3eGvmg)
Break Out Rooms

- Conversations