

# Lessons from the Classroom: Using Educational Techniques to Improve Tenant Relations

Oregon Housing & Community Services

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# Introduction

- Poor tenant relations have a high
  - Time cost
  - Financial cost
  - Opportunity cost
  - Reputational cost
  - Emotional cost (turnover)
- Creates a cycle and spreads
- We will be talking about some of the things you can do to support front line staff

# Infrastructure You'll Need

- Clear policies and procedures
  - Consistency and transparency lead to fewer issues (prediction)
  - Lessens tenants' ability to answer shop
  - Increases the expectation of resolution (anchoring bias)
  - Provides front line staff the distance to protect themselves from being the target
- Over-communication
- Clear escalation to someone with actual authority
  - Difference between escalation and a lateral handoff
- Follow through
  - If you do not follow through, your problems will entrench

# Thinking Under Stress

- Release of stress hormones (cortisol, adrenaline, etc.)
- Affective Filter: Emotions block executive functions
- Fear Response (Doesn't need to be a 10/10 emergency)
  - Fight
  - Flight
  - Freeze
  - Appease
- Learned Helplessness( Completely overwhelmed)
- May be altered (trauma, illness, injury, substances, circumstances)



The Simpsons is owned by Disney and used under the Fair Use act.

# The Escalation Cycle

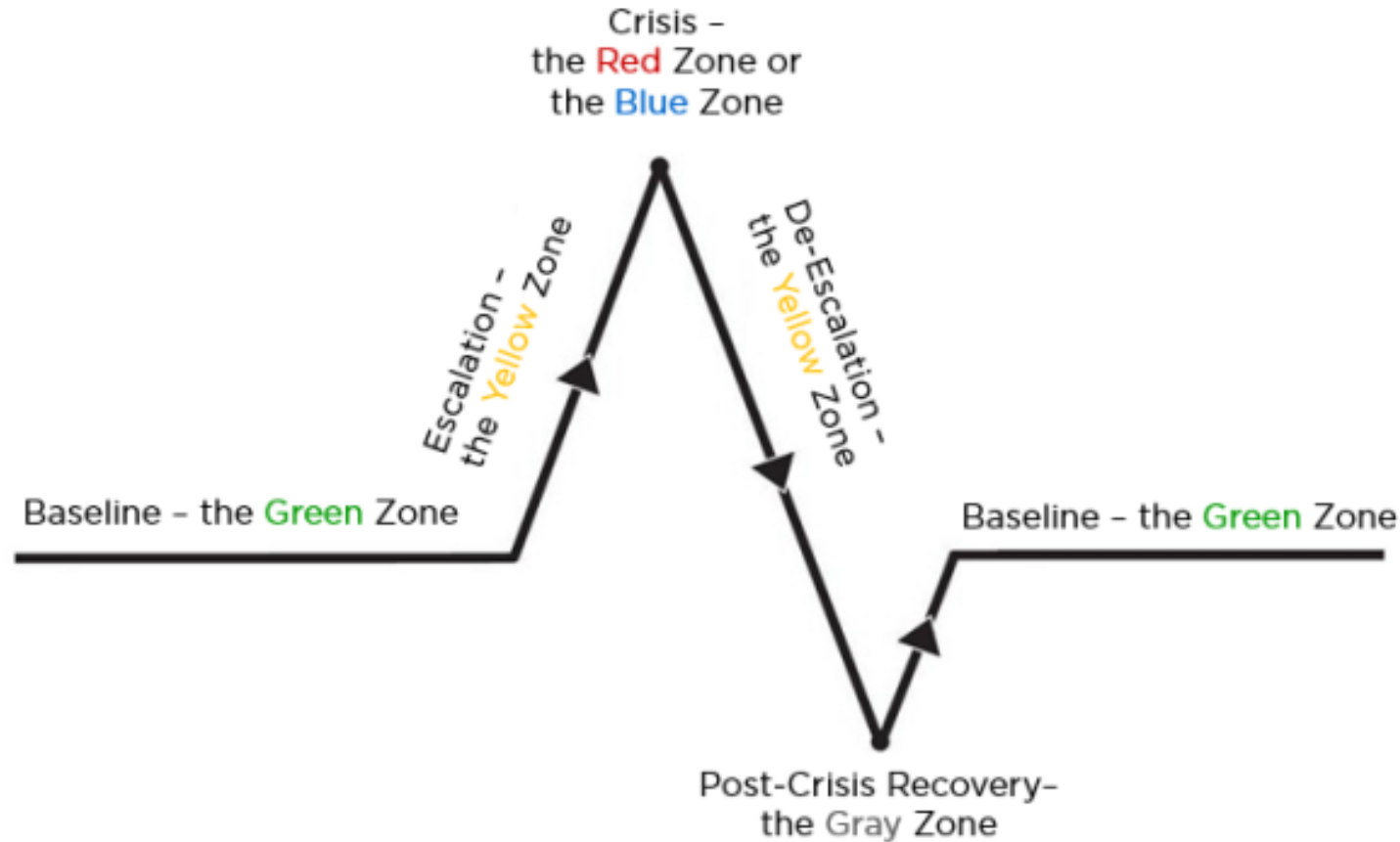


Image: Seattle Children's Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit

# Unaware: Information Gaps

- Tenants do not have the information they need
  - May have “known unknowns” AND “unknown unknowns”
  - May have simplified information and lack nuance
  - May be misapplying information from another situation (their own or others)
  - May have outdated information



# Illusion of Transparency

- Bias where someone misjudges how clear and unambiguous information is based on their OWN understanding rather than the listener's
- “Curse of Knowledge”
  - Common knowledge ain't so common...
  - What you think is clear absolutely IS NOT
- Tappers Experiment: Elizabeth Newton (1990, Stanford University)



# Illusion of Transparency

- Particularly problematic when you explain the information a lot (reinforces the bias)
- ASK: Am I unfairly assuming they should know because I do?
- Empathize: I didn't understand this either the first time I went through it



# Receptive vs. Productive Memory

- Multiple introductions are required for every new piece of information (7-12 times)
- Timing matters
  - Adults tend to disregard things they
    - do not see as immediately useful
    - haven't used in the very recent past
    - Are not viewed as necessary to retain long-term



# What do I do?

- Be patient (Not trying to be difficult)
- Be **Equals**
- Give lots of lead time
- Provide detailed steps
- If possible, provide multi-modal information (video, audio, step-by-step instructions)



# Need for the Novel

- Evolutionary
- Known (old) information is considered “managed”
- New can represent the most dangerous/most in need of exploration
- Repeating the same messages may not be enough because it is processed as known information
- Use different words, grammar, and approaches



# Motivated Ignorance

- Also known as active information avoidance
- The information is freely available and access is easy
- Some people actively refuse to know information
  - Could be hiding from negative consequences
  - They know what they need in vague terms, which is enough to avoid it (known unknown)
  
- We will return to this later.

# Unable: Something Else is Missing

- Unaware: missing information
- Unable: Tenants are missing what they need to complete the task
  - Skill
  - Equipment
  - Paperwork
  - Time
  - Etc.



# Unable: Something Else is Missing

- Deceptively simple; “Well, get them what they need...”
- You must resolve the cause not the symptom
- We must stop pulling people out of the river. Instead, we must go upstream and find out why they are falling in.
  - Attributed to Desmond Tutu (much older part of African oral tradition)



# Root Cause Analysis: The 5 Whys

- Ask yourself “Why” 5 times
- I was late for work this morning.
- Why #1: The traffic was much heavier than I normally experience.
- Why #2: I left my house late and hit the heaviest part of traffic.
- Why #3: I overslept when I didn't hear my alarm.
- Why #4: I got into bed much later than usual last night.
- Why #5: I ended up bingeing the whole season rather than watching 1 episode like I said I would...



# Root Cause Analysis: The 5 Whys

- They may reduce symptoms but won't fix the issue
  - Building a new road won't resolve the root
  - Getting a new alarm clock won't resolve the root
  - Feeling guilty won't resolve the root (but could spur desire to change)



# Scenario

- A tenant comes into the front office. He has an apartment on the fourth floor. He is angry and begins yelling at the front desk staff about a leak in his shower.
- Why is he having such an over-reaction to such a small issue?

# Setting an Expectation

- Unmet expectations are extraordinarily frustrating
  - Expect resolution but receive additional problems
  - Amplifies the negative reaction
  - “Slapping a sunburn”
- Resolving symptom rather than the root can actually escalate the conflict when another issue appears



# The Messenger Who Gets Shot

- Very real for frontline staff
- 2019 Harvard study two nurses
  - One gave negative results of a medical test
  - One made the follow-up appointment
- Inability can lead to irrational reactions
  - Power dynamics
  - You are the representative and that is enough (They can't get to the real power)
  - Worse when unexpected



# What do I do?

- Identify potential bottleneck points to offer support
  - Resources you know to be relevant
- Be concise and honest
- Be very clear about what you can and cannot provide
- Provide lots of lead time
- Consistently follow through on what you can



# Unwilling: Just No

- Unaware: Lack Information
- Unable: Lack a skill, equipment, or resource
- Unwilling: lack the desire
  - Distraction: wish to do other things
  - Dependence: wish to have you do it
  - Defiance: wish to have power
- Often gets mirrored in the interaction
  - Leads to a power struggle
  - Motivated ignorance shows up



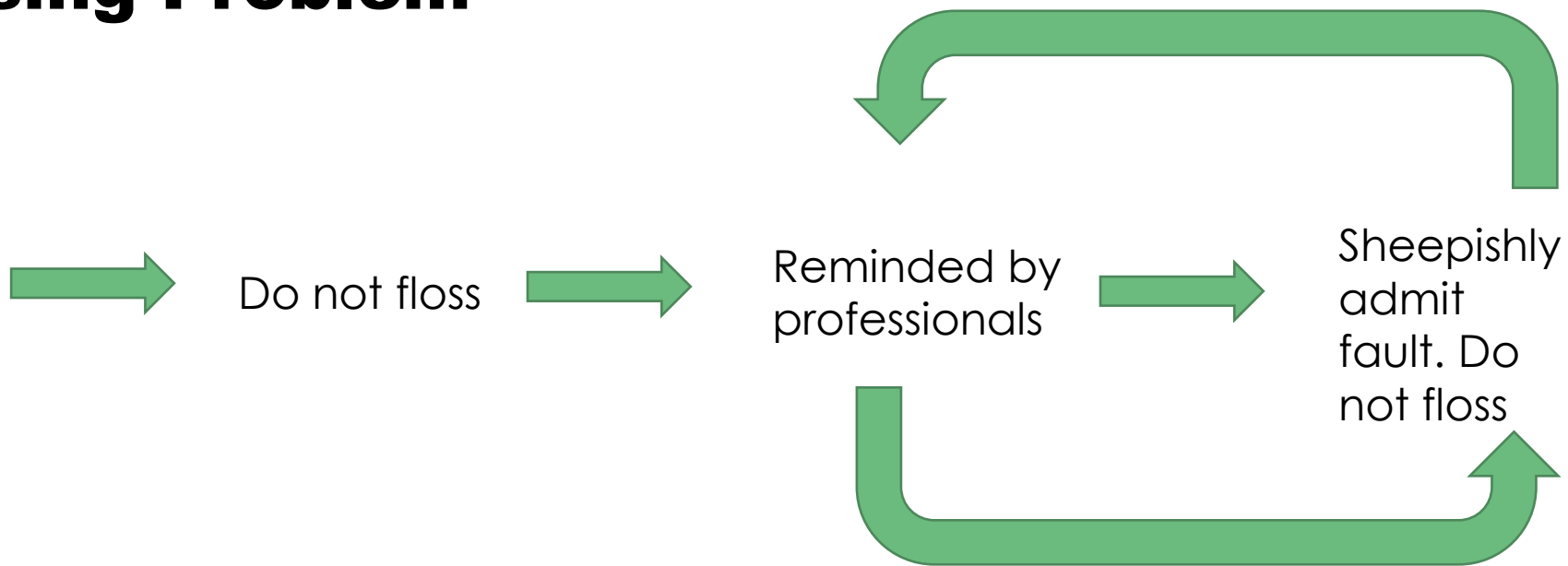
# The Theory/Practice Gap

- Definition: The phenomenon where people intellectually know the concept being taught but are unwilling (or unable) to apply that information

## The Flossing Problem

Learn about flossing:  
how and why (usually as a child)

\*Concept is understood



# Reasons for the Theory/Practice Gap

\*Not a comprehensive list!

- Complacency
  - “Done it! My home is already safe, so this won’t happen to me.”
- Irrelevance
  - “I’m not the one responsible for this. My \*\*\*\*\* takes care of all that. I’m sure they have it under control.”
- Desensitization/Overexposure
  - “I’ve heard this information about smoke alarms a million times, so I have politely already stopped listening to you speak.” (Nagging)

# Reasons for the Theory/Practice Gap

\*Not a comprehensive list!

- Statistical Awareness
  - “Odds are pretty low that a fire will ever start in my home. I’ll take my chances.”
- Nuisance
  - “The stupid thing kept going off when it clearly shouldn’t, so I removed the problem.”
- Oblivion
  - “What? Smoke alarms? Ummm, yeah, I guess so...”
- Habituated Action
  - “Smoke alarms aren’t part of my daily routine, so I just...don’t think about it.”

# Reasons for the Theory/Practice Gap

\*Not a comprehensive list!

- Lack of Control
  - “If a fire is really bad enough to set off the alarm, I have probably already died of smoke inhalation, so why should I bother worrying about it?”
- Immediacy
  - “I know smoke alarms are important, but I have things going on RIGHT NOW that are my priority. So, unless there is actual smoke happening, I will deal with smoke alarms when I am not so busy.”

# Paradox of Reduced Variance

- Repetition is positive:
1. Reduced error rate
  2. Greater understanding
  3. Greater efficiency

## Tipping Point



- Repetition is negative:
1. Procedural memory is more powerful than critical thinking
  2. Lack of attention
  3. Slowed reaction to out of the ordinary occurrence

# Power Dynamics

- Usually, unwillingness is about power
- Adults expect a certain level of autonomy over their own situation
- Consistent application of policy is the best avenue.
  - Defiance is often looking for
    - Information and rationale
    - Real boundaries
    - **Choice and dignity**



# Questions?

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