

Hello. I'd like to welcome everyone to today's session today, "Say What You Mean the Right Way: Healthy Forms of Communication." Whenever it is that you are listening in, we're glad that you're joining in, and we trust that you'll come away with some great takeaways.

Before I introduce our presenter, I want to mention just a couple quick items to help you make the most of this time we have.

If you take a look on the left-hand side of your screen, you'll see an FAQ, or Frequently Asked Questions, section. If you have some questions, technical questions, questions about an attendance certificate, those will be answered there on the left, so take a scroll through that.

We also have a couple handouts. We have a copy of the slides that the presenter will be using. We also have an additional confirming and disconfirming resource that we've uploaded. You can find those in the Event Resources on the left.

And then, finally, we have an Ask a Question section that you can type in a question and send. I'll tell you a little bit more about that at the end, but it's if you have a question on the content or anything, we do receive that question via email and we'll get back to you usually within a couple days via email as well. Again, I'll tell you a little bit more about that once we get to the end.

So, we're glad you're here. We're always pleased to have everybody. And, we are especially pleased to have Jeannie Dougherty presenting today's session. I'm going to tell you a little bit about Jeannie here.

Jeannie is an EAP counselor, facilitator, and trainer. She has a Master's degree in Counseling from Ottawa University, and she helps employees resolve their out-of-balance work-life lifestyles and improve relationships.

She has also trained for over ten years, so she's an expert in areas related to today's topic, such as conflict management, communication. She also facilitates a variety of support groups.

And on a personal note, whenever she's not counseling, she's very active. She's dancing, running 5Ks, practicing some different types of yoga, spending time with her loved ones and her Lab, Licorice.

So, we're very pleased to have Jeannie here to walk us through this material today. So Jeannie, I'm going to go ahead and pass it to you.

Thank you, and I am very excited about this topic because this is a good time of year to kind of really focus in on, you know, "How do I want to communicate?" And—and, you know, "What would I like to be seen and heard so I'm not feeling like I'm having the same arguments or worrying about possible arguments during the holidays?" So, okay.

So, today our learning objectives are about identifying the barriers to our—hopefully, to our clear communication. Because many times we're very vague and we're fuzzy. And we don't realize how we always come across.

We want to apply tips for more effective communication.

Assess effective ways for dealing with difficult conflicts or, as I like to say, dealing with difficult family members or difficult coworkers or friends, neighbors. Even people at the grocery store. You know, how do you deal with that?

And discuss ways to maintain successful family relationships.

Okay. So the importance of communication—I love this quote. It says, communication leads to community, that is, understanding, intimacy, and mutual value—valuing, excuse me. That's absolutely true. Communication is a way for us to bridge to get to a place of understanding. It's helping us to clarify when we are confused. It's a way of saying no when we're not in agreement. Communication is really everything.

Communication, of course, is not all done with our words. It's also done with, you know, our gestures, with our eyes. And many times we can sometimes—what I call like an overread, meaning we're reading something in somebody else's nonverbal communication and believing it to be true. And I call it an overread because it's something in your head that you're putting over that person when you're looking at them which may not be true. It may not be what's really going on once you look a little bit closer. Meaning you don't have to look underneath, but just look a little bit closer and realize that this may not be it.

Okay. So, communication factors. So, there is what we call perceived costs and benefits. So, an obvious cost is when we miscommunicate, particularly when we're dealing with family members. What happens? Well, plans often are not executed properly. So, that means like "When were we supposed to be there? What were we supposed to bring? Who was supposed to be there?" That's a—that's a cost that sometimes just gets—you know—"Did

anyone pick up Grandma? Why didn't somebody pick up Grandma sooner?" All those kinds of things. Grandma was worried, you know. That's that perceived cost. And that's just a minor example.

Other costs are, "Well, we didn't think of inviting you." Or, "We didn't think you cared. We didn't think you wanted to know." And those are larger costs when you're excluding people from communication because you've already made up your mind in your head you don't want to deal with them.

Then there is the other perceived benefits. "Well, if I try to include everyone, then, at least I tried to include everyone." Or, "When I include everyone, and I do the group tasks—or text." Or, "I do a group email, I'm at least trying to give everyone the same information. Not everyone may read it the same way, but at least I'm trying to give everyone the same information."

The other piece, of course, to communication is what we call the relational history. Or, depending on where you are at in your family, are you a child, you know, communicating to your parents? Are you a child communicating to a sibling? What is your birth order? So, if you're the youngest versus the oldest, or if you're the middle child. If you're dealing with cousins. If you're dealing with the uncle who has cousins that you don't like. Are we dealing with the aunt that hasn't had any children? These are all considered relational history.

And we get even a little deeper is when we talk about, okay, so, "Here's all the family members, but this year, our aunt, she passed away, so her children are coming over to visit, why I'm in communication with them." That's also a relational history because of that consideration.

And then we have what I call sort of the basics in human survival and how we survive in groups, which is—means that we have a psychological need for approval, to be included, and to control, meaning I want to know where this information is going and why is it going here. I want to know, "Does everyone in this room like me or does no one like me? Do I like everyone in this room, or I don't like anyone in this room." If I try to include everyone, that's going to be stressful, so maybe I don't want to do that. Maybe I want to exclude everybody. Or, "I don't know if you've ever met my family members, they come over, and they tell you nothing about what's going on. And they get really irritated when you try to pry—a little bit like, so, 'I was just wondering how you're doing at work this year? How is your health?'

And they're like, 'Why are you bothering me? Why are you asking me all these questions?'" That's an example of some communication factors.

And then you have other family members that seem to have, what we call, no filter. They tell you everything. The most brutal, honest truth, and you've got to deal with that. And so that's another psychological factor.

And then we have what we call age of developmental differences. There has been a rise, I'd say in the last ten years, of children and adults being diagnosed with, what now we call, autism spectrum disorder. And there's been, I would say, a noticeable difference in families dealing with children who might be on the autism spectrum disorder who are, what we call, nonverbal, meaning they don't use words or if they do use words it's very limited. And so you have to find a way to communicate with a child who sometimes, you know, adults, too, may be using like some type of sign board, or using hand signals, or actual sign language, just as a way to communicate. So that's just one example of developmental differences.

The other piece is that I—I know lots of parents, they used to, what they would do, they would sit at—with other adults and they'd spell out the things that they wanted the adults in the room to know about. So, it might have been alcohol, it might have been sexual stuff, but they didn't want their children to know. So children learn how to spell things, but they have no idea what the meaning is.

And then we just have just basic ages. You know, when you're 18, and, you know, you're there at the family meal, and everyone else is 60, this might be kind of a boring meal. It might be kind of exhausting. Or you're like, "Can we hurry up and eat?"

So those are just examples of communications factors. Because when you're 18, you often speak, what we call, more colloquially, like in your own slang, your own lingo. And you might not use, what we consider maybe perhaps, proper English. Or you're trying to, you know, show people you know other words, you know. The acronyms. IDK, you know, those kinds of—for "I don't know." Those kinds of things that kind of are communication practices. Those are things that we have to just be considerate about.

It's not rude or inappropriate to ask your child, or to ask your adult to explain something that you don't know what's going on at the table. So, for instance, I had a family once, they were all doctors at the table, but their children, you know, they were old enough, they were about 12 or 13. But

they didn't, you know, they didn't want to hear about medical terminology all day long. It—they were like, "Can you talk about something else?" And they're like, "Oh, all right. We're not supposed to do that at the table. Not—we're not going to focus on that." But as soon as like dessert was over, it went right back to that medical in-depth conversation. It was the same—I had the issue with another family, and they were all lawyers. And then occasionally I run into engineers and accountants. They seem to be a little bit more adjusted with, you know, not everyone wants to think about engineering, like particularly nuclear waste. It's not, maybe, perhaps everyone's cup of tea during the holidays. So, they try to find other things like sports, sometimes talking about current events, environmental causes, things like that. So, that's just an example.

Okay. Balancing relationships. So I love this slide because it gives us what I call the continuum. It's not always black or white. It's not always like 'yes' or 'no' sometimes when it comes to relationships, which is one of the reasons that sometimes family members, or just as individuals, we get stuck, like how close do I need somebody, you know, to be with me, or to stay connected to me. I can tell you that as a child ages into an adolescent, into their early twenties, with parents—parents sometimes were raised that once a child is 18, that's it. You're done. You cut them off. We've moved on. So they—because they want their child to be more autonomous. They don't want to be the bank. They don't want to be paying for the cell phone. They don't want to be paying for the car insurance. I've met parents like that. Sometimes they still do that. It's—it's less rare nowadays.

You know, and then, we talk about sometimes the overextended with the connectedness, like the helicopter parent. Or the parents that insist that the child still stays and lives at home until they are 40. That's, you know, an example of a balancing relationship.

And then openness versus protectiveness. Meaning, how much do I share with my family? Do I tell them everything? Do I only tell one or two people? Are they able to, you know, maintain my privacy or protect what I'm trying to say, I don't want everything to—to come out?

I can tell you that in very serious situations, if there's been a health problem in families, you know, so, for instance, like substance abuse, perhaps depression or anxiety, in other cases, perhaps a diagnosis of cancer or—excuse me—heart disease, this is when sometimes family members really feel pulled. Well, you know, "My brother's got this, you know, thing, and I

told my husband, but I didn't want to tell anyone else in the family." Yet there could be a problem or an issue over the holidays.

Or, you know, "Cousin Jeff has been in rehab three times. Everyone knows. Except for what? Grandma. Nobody told Grandma. Oh, dear." So, how do we deal with that process?

And then we get into, you know, balancing relationships. Do you like routine, meaning you just like things to be, "Okay, this is what we do every year. Let's not change it. Nothing's broke." To, "We're going to experiment with different foods." Some people are good with that for the holidays or for family meals. Other people do not like that.

But what I do find works is that when you are trying to balance your relationships is that you try to go somewhere not necessarily down the middle, but you're willing to experiment on the continuum. So, maybe one year you're just going to experiment with say, for instance, an ethnic dessert of some kind, that could be Ethiopian that you found that you really just wanted to add to the—to the table. And other times it's like, "No, you know what? We know so-and-so's got some health issues, we're going to have dinner at our house this year. We're going to make it really predictable. We're going to have it really potluck and have people bring food because that's what's going to work, we know, for the next few years. Because that's what's going on in our family. We have a lot of health issues. We have a lot of extended family. We're just going to kind of consolidate and make it work." That's an example of, "Okay, that's as flexible as we've got to be, and we're not going to—we're not going to try to reinvent the wheel."

Okay. So the next slide is a survey. And Katie, I'm going to turn this over to you.

Thanks so much, Jeannie. I'm going to go ahead and send out the survey to everyone. And even though you are listening to it, whenever is convenient for you, you're welcome to go ahead and participate, and then in a moment you'll be able to see where everyone else who has listened to this session, kind of what their, you know, what their thoughts are as well.

So, take a look at this screen. Which of the following barriers affects you the most? Misperceptions? Unresolved conflict? One party blaming the other? Or inability to negotiate conflict?

So you can simply select that anonymously, and you'll be able to go ahead and see where others who—who've listened in as well, kind of where they're—where they fall along this, which of the barriers affects them the most.

All right. So, we'll end up that survey, and I'll go ahead and pass it back to you, Jeannie.

Thank you! Okay. Oops—here we are. Barriers to clear communication.

So, again, like the survey said earlier, you know, is it misperception? Is it just a misunderstanding, or is it something else? So, a misunderstanding, I just wanted to kind of give, like, some context. You know, a misunderstanding is you looked at your phone for directions, and you thought it said east and really it was west. Or, so you texted or gave somebody the wrong directions, north versus south. Those are, you know, what I would say are some misunderstandings, miscommunication. You perceived it, but you gave the right information, or you perceived that you were reading the right information, but you did not.

Those are, I think, things that can be, you know, there might be some ruffled feathers, things can—can move on.

Where perceptual misunderstandings are no longer perceptual misunderstandings is there was a pretty serious argument. You know, people were hot under the collar. They were arguing, perhaps a point, you know, maybe something that happened in the past. And you bring it up like, "Well, what happened?" That's no longer really a perceptual misunderstanding unless you're the type of person that chooses—and I say choose—to not really get too involved when there's an argument. You're like, "Oh, people are having a loud discussion, I'm not going to pay attention to it." Well, that's a perceptual misunderstanding perhaps on your part, which is, "I don't like conflict so I'm not going to really—I'm not going to pay much attention." Which often can inflict more pain later when you act like it wasn't that big of a deal and clearly there was a heated discussion.

So, leftover issues from a previous encounter. Boy, I think that's almost every argument, right? "Well, I didn't get to finish my argument." Or, "I didn't get to finish telling you what I think," la, la, la, la. So, what? You're still angry. Right. That's a very common thing.

So, I will give you an example. So, there was a couple. And they were arguing over the in-laws. Which in-law was going to come over at what time. Because they had, what I call—they were, I guess, I guess you could say lucky. They had multiple events happening over the holidays because they have divorces in their family, and so they have just, you know, an extended family. And so they were trying to figure out the best way to do it so it wasn't like, you know, "For Christmas, and for Hanukkah, we always go to your parents' house. I really want to go to my parents' house." That kind of argument.

So, what happens sometimes is that if you don't really come out to a clear understanding, or really hash this out, if you really don't want to go to the same place every year, again getting into that novelty versus predictability, if you don't have that discussion, or you don't finish it, then the next time, like, "Oh, we're going today to so-and-so's house." It's like, "Wait a minute, what are you talking about?" And then, what happens, it continues again.

Another example is if you made a mistake, or somebody else made a mistake. Let's say like they burned the turkey, and it does happen, people do burn turkeys over the holidays. You're not going to let them forget that. And you're going to remind them, "Oh, remember, I even told you three times to go check the oven." Well, that doesn't help, now does it, because it's too late. Turkey is already burned.

Using polarized language. So, this is something that is becoming wide today. We are having more awareness in families. Because as our national dialogue is starting to shift focus, and we're looking at, you know, I'd say the Me Too movement, that's one example. Or we're looking at the intersection of racial and gender inequality. People are noticing that when you say certain things, that that—that can be polarizing.

And I will give what I think is a simple example. And that is, there was a gentleman that I worked with years ago. And he was hard-core military, had a great record. And how he would introduce a lot of friends and things like that is, "So-and-so Jeff is a great man," or "a good," and, you know, shake hands, like, you know, "they should never have any problems and they should never be worried about such-and-such a thing because so-and-so is a good man." Well, he found out a few years later that his friend who was a good man had actually, unfortunately, had been very bad to his wife and to his daughters. And I'll just leave it at that. So, he had other family members that were trying to say, when you say so-and-so is a good person or a good

man, maybe that's not what's going on here, maybe there's another issue. It's okay if you didn't see it or you didn't know it, nobody is blaming you for that. But that mere statement of you are a good man equates like it's a fact. And that was the point of how it was considered polarizing because it turns out they weren't such a good person. They weren't such a good man. They were many other things that this person had done.

So, that's an example of using polarized language.

The concept of being politically correct still can be a bit polarizing. And I just—whether you're pro politically correct or whether you're anti politically correct, using anything that's PC can be polarizing.

Refusing to take responsibility for our role. So, there are some people who like love to walk into family discussions, and they feel it's their job to be, what I call, the provocateur. They like to say things and stir up a lot of trouble and then walk away or go, "Well, don't blame me, I didn't do it." So, an example of this would be is somebody walking in and reminding every person in the room of their past failures for the last year. Or the last Thanksgiving. Or the last Christmas or Hanukah. I've met people who do that. And then go, what, I didn't do anything.

There's other times like—I gave the example of, you know, the gentleman who was a hard-core military guy, who would say, you know, "Well, so-and-so is a good man, I don't know what happened at home." You know, well, if you state that as a fact, and then don't want to own it as a fact, then that might be part of the issue that people are getting angry with you about. That's another example.

And, whoo, this last one. I think this is a life-long skill. And this is also we get into, you know, those barriers about, you know, conflict, you know, or I should say communication factors. Like, well, what helps us, you know. The inability to negotiate conflict in a mutually-beneficial fashion. I will give you an example. Are you able to communicate without screaming and yelling, wanting to throw things at people? Oh, you're not? Okay. Or, are you the type of person that you shut down and try to avoid, even though you're seething inside? You're so upset, you're so angry. Well, that's an inability to negotiate conflict in a mutually-beneficial fashion.

The hope is by the time we all become adults, which is roughly age 18, maybe 21 if you want to consider that, is that we're going to be able to negotiate our—our grievances, or our complaints, or our concerns without

having to erupt, without having to what looks like you're having a meltdown. Or avoiding everything and then having a lot of physical pain, physical health issues and never being able to address problems.

We hope that we're always going to be assertive. And assertive communication skills, it gets, again, into that predictability piece of like, "Well, I try to use them as often as possible. Not every time." Maybe sometimes you don't need to be assertive. Sometimes you need to be silent.

But those are examples of like, "I'd rather practice those skills if I want to be more assertive, so I know how to try, at least, to have a mutually-beneficial, you know, conversation."

I will tell you that there is definitely training specifically on that. But every person I know that does any type of assertive communication skills gets better when it comes to dealing with family conflict and work conflict.

Okay. Next slide. Oops. Oops. There we go. Now it's working. Okay.

Confirming versus disconfirming. So I want to explain about the concept of validation. Validation is nothing to do with that you are 100% on board. And I will explain. It's about confirming. About saying, "Oh, I—I see and hear what you're saying." Meaning, "I just heard the message. And I can respect that that's how you see and hear. I can see and hear, and even when you're telling me 'No,' I can at least understand your—your perspective."

Disconfirming. Dismisses, ridicules, or attacks the other party. So, that is when people have the big arguments. This is when people really go after each other, and particularly when it's—when you're under stress, or dealing with family members, or whatever is going on for today. That is when people get hurt. That is when you have, what I call, those leftover arguments and they don't get finished because people are still stewing. And I am not kidding, there are adults out there that are still angry 40 years after an argument. Forty years! They're still stewing. Because they're—they're at a place of like it doesn't, you know, nobody listens, "I don't like them," blah, blah. It just continues on and on and on.

So, validation is a very healthy assertive skill. You can—"I see your point by saying so-and-so is a good man." Or "I see your point in saying you had no idea that this occurred. I see your point when you're saying I burned the

turkey. I did. But this year is different. I got a different timer." Whatever. Like, that's an example of it. Okay.

So, dealing with difficult situations. So, again, when it comes to the tug-of-war planning, or extended family, or in divorce situations, you're going to have to be flexible. I find with some families, first and second years of trying to make these adjustments, particularly if it's divorced parents, is really challenging because the parents may not have previous experience, or they're what? They're going back to their childhood memories which haven't been resolved. When my parents were divorced, I had to go to three Thanksgivings because I had to deal with this and this person, and then we had other in-laws you had to deal with. And I hated it. And I just want to have one Thanksgiving, and I don't, you know, I want only one day, and I don't want to share. Well, that may not actually happen. You might have to find a way to do this.

I know some people have, you know, Thanksgiving at noon, and then 4:00, and then there's dessert at 9:00. I'm not joking. And these are all different homes.

And then we have to deal with relational dynamics, getting together during these family holidays. I will say this, I have not met a single person who hasn't had a family member, whether it's in your, what we call, your actually family of origin unit, meaning just your parents, your siblings, and you, or grandparents, that when they're dealing with a family member, that they might be the one that seems to be challenging or difficult. And they have to find a way to deal with that. Like, how do you deal with a grandparent that maybe now has signs of dementia and Alzheimer's, and they're asking constantly, "What time is it? What are we doing today? Who's that? I don't know them." And you're having to explain maybe 15 times in, you know, in a 15-minute period. And, you know, if you're younger, a lot of times kids do not have those skills of being really patient and kind because they don't—they've never seen anything like this. They didn't realize they're going to have to do this. They've never maybe necessarily raised children. You know, it's different with babies. You can kind of distract them. Or toddlers. You can get them focused. But somebody who has got dementia may not—have forgotten a lot of these things. So, that's just one example of dealing with a health issue.

Conflicts during vacation and special outings. "Well, we're off to see, you know, we're going to go to certain family members and we're going to travel

three hours, and, you know, we're going to have to go through, you know, terrible traffic, and, you know, hopefully we're not going to be in the cold bedroom this time when we stay at your sister's house." Those are examples of dealing with those conflicts and dealing, you know, with a special outing. "How is this going to work?"

I will say that for every super-amazing planner that there are in families that are really good at handling everything, it's not uncommon that, you know, as much as you plan, there is those hiccups, those things that are unexpected, unavoidable, like traffic, car accidents, you know, changes in sales, if you will. You know, so you thought you were going to get all this cool stuff, but you couldn't get it. I've known parents who will purposely buy the smaller version of an outfit and say, "Look, I got what you wanted. I don't think it's going to fit, but we're going to go tomorrow and we're going to exchange that." And you know what? The kid's like, "Oh, okay." So the kid feels validated, again, that they got the right size. Or [inaudible] the wrong size, we're going tomorrow. Yeah. So, parent and kids feel better. That's one example, trying to handle those special outings [inaudible] special times for shopping, and special times for eating, you know, special meals, all kinds of stuff. So that's an example of it.

Okay. So back to our survey. Katie, please take it away.

Absolutely. Let me go ahead and send the next survey out about setting—setting some boundaries. So, I'm going to go ahead and send that out. Again, when do you find it personally the hardest to set boundaries? During the holidays. Dealing with in-laws. Dealing with friends. Dealing with your partner. Or dealing with children. So, if you had to pick one, which of those situations would be when you find it the hardest to set boundaries?

So, again, take a moment. Ring in anonymously. And then you'll be able to see some results of where other participants have participated as well.

All right. I'll go ahead and close that survey, and give it back to you, Jeannie.

Okay. Next is setting boundaries. So, let me explain by—what I mean by interpersonal boundaries. Like, as we had in the last survey, like is it your colleagues? Is it, you know, your—your—is it kids? Is it, you know, certain family members? Like, what—what are we dealing with here?

So, an interpersonal boundary is keeping the good in and the bad out. It's knowing where you end and someone else begins. Which is why it may look flexible to some people. Or it may look specialized or customized with other people. So, I will give an example.

If you have an adult brother that might have a developmental delay, you might be much more willing to do a lot more caregiving, you know, to help them along, particularly during the holidays, and spend extra quality time with them knowing that they don't really have a lot of extra friends. They go and do the same thing almost every day, and so having something different makes them happy.

But, at the same time, dealing with your, you know, your adolescent children, you're like, "Ah, no! No, no. You have to come along when you see, you know, Uncle Billy, and we just need to do this." I mean, you're not going to have that flexibility because you want to teach them the value of—of caring for a family member that needs it. So, that's an example of it.

It may be that, you know, sometimes we have family members that are challenging and they're difficult all year round. And so you have to learn, you know, "Do I want to engage in an argument? Or do I want to say, 'I'm going to let this go.'" So, an easy example would be politics or religion. Those are popular topics that people will sometimes talk and argue about. And so, sometimes you just let it go for the holidays. You're like, "No, not for the holidays. I'm not going to have a discussion about that." Or, "I'm not going to argue about that." Or, just go "Okay, sure, yeah, all right." That's an example of it.

Now that doesn't mean that when you set these boundaries, that you're going to allow yourself to be a target, or that, you know, if somebody is angry or hostile towards you, that you're just not going to be able to, you know, physically remove yourself from the room, or leave early, or, you know, ask for help from another family member.

Sometimes, you know, setting boundaries, if you want to think about keeping the good in, is also looking for, "Where are my resources? Where are my allies? Where are my friends? Where are my families? Where are my—where is my support to help me in case there is difficult situation?"

So, boundaries [inaudible] being clear on what your needs are. So, if you're the type of person that, you know, in order to get a holiday dinner done correctly you need everyone to really arrive within 15 minutes so everyone

can hopefully wash their hands quickly and sit down, then they can start talking. But, you know, a lot of times families are what? Casual. And they'll come when they come. They'll, you know, do what they want, or they're like, "Well, I don't mind if it's a bit cold." But for you as the hostess, that drives you crazy. So sometimes letting people know, like, "Hey, I really need to have everyone seated at the table in 15 minutes. I'm just going to keep, you know, plugging you all along and just having you do that because that's what makes me happy. And then the rest of the night, I don't really care." Sometimes people are like, "Oh, is that your thing? Your thing is that we all sit down at a certain time at the table so the food is hot? Okay. Okay, we'll deal with that."

Other times being clear on, "Well, I thought you said when we were going to get together this holiday season that we were going to pick a date and time, right?" So, right, that's a critical piece, right?

Politely but firmly stating your case. "This is what I would like", using, you know, clear language. Not by like, um, um, yeah, maybe, okay.

Avoid over explaining your decision. "So, the reason I want everyone to sit at the table is, I just need that because", you know, you feel terrible if people get cold food. You just want to say, "This is when dinner is being served. This is what I like. This is my house. Let's do that. Oh, okay. Great."

Anticipating possible objections and how you can confidently respond. There are some people who are practicing those assertive skills. This is a great thing to practice. This is instead of worrying and panicking over that you'll just be yelled at, or chewed out, or somebody is going to make a comment, you're going to be—it's going to ruin your day, this is how you handle it.

And like I said before, seeking support from your partner when communicating with your in-laws, or with your children, other family members, those kinds of things. So, it's—it's good. Yeah. It's absolutely helpful.

And boundaries are sometimes helpful because sometimes you're the first person, or one of the few people in your family that's trying to communicate. Sometimes other family members don't hear or see you. You don't have any control over that. All you do is have control over yourself. So

sometimes people are going to say and do what they want, but you're going to say and do what you absolutely need to do.

Okay. So, dealing with holidays and special occasions. So, again, it's trying to strike as much of a balance between the, you know, the feeling of independence—autonomy and the connectedness. It's—it's maintaining a positive attitude. Not a—a worrisome, or what I call, an Eeyore, kind of attitude, from Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore. And it's anticipating some family dynamics and then staying focused.

I find the people who are happiest during the holidays are the ones who are flexible. So, if X people show, or if people can't make it, they've got enough food; they've got things prepared. They have enough, you know, whatever it is in terms of like, you know, the—the cookware, or making do. And, you know, "Oh, I guess we ran out of those extra special spoons; we're just going to use the regular spoons." This is moving on with what they have.

I find that when people are able to sit down when they are ready to have a meal, or sit down and have a conversation even if it's nothing to really do with food; it might be expressing a moment of gratitude. "I am so grateful to see you this year, because... ." That's an example of having a positive attitude.

And, you know, if you've got a family member that's not doing well, what's Plan B? So I'll give an example. This is a bit of an extreme one, but it does happen in families, and sometimes families feel so embarrassed and ashamed, they don't know what to say.

So, sometimes you do plan the family meal. You know you've got a family member that's struggling with recovery. You make options to have them come over, or eat, and let's say it's going to be an alcohol-free party, for instance. Or you're going to do everything you can. This person never shows up. They're okay, but they've never shown up, you know, for this party. There's only so much you can do, right?

I have had other family members who will say like, "We tried really hard. This person is, you know, dealing with some mental health issues, and we offered them to come over, but they got angry, and so what we did is we said, 'All right, we totally understand. This is what we're going to do. We're going to offer, you know, that maybe you can come by at a later time. Or, if it's a really serious situation we'll come to you at a hospital. But we're going to see you a little bit later because we're going to have our Thanksgiving

first, and then we'll come out and see you.' Meaning we're not going to disrupt all of the family planning because somebody was hospitalized. Again, you know, it's—we're going to make adjustments." That's an example of it.

Okay. Saying no. So, the reason why most people find it hard to say no is that sometimes in families they're taught that you only say no out of anger. It's the same thing with the concept of discipline. Discipline is only done out of absolute anger and disgust.

Well, no. The reason that a no is given is because it's like maybe you really can't physically do that. Or you're not able to follow through with this. Or, no, you don't understand.

But the reasons that sometimes people, you know, stay stuck in this I should just say yes, meaning I'm going to be a yes person, they fear, you know, the retribution and rejection. If I say no, nobody will invite me over or it won't happen.

There's societal norms. There's still people, you know, in certain parts of the world, particularly but even here in our Western culture, that, you know, they feel like they better say yes, they better be a yes person. If you stand out, where is the support, you know.

I've met many people who come from families that consider themselves a black sheep because they didn't go along with everyone else. And going along with everyone else just for the record, it wasn't necessarily that they were bad, but they had – they came from a family of athletes and this was like the artist. So, they didn't really want to stand out too much. But, you know, they didn't really want to play football outside in the cold, but they felt like they kind of had to because that was the family tradition even though they were terrible at it. That's an example.

And then the fear of confrontation. If you say no, then somebody who might be, what I consider, perhaps a more dominant, perhaps aggressive, communicator, might be like, "I need to find out all the reasons why you're saying no and we're going to fix this right now." Why? Hmm. That's a—that's a good question to ask. Why—why do we need to go down this road? Let's—let's just stick with the no.

And that's just great. As you get older, typically family members, if you, you know, ask for their support, they'll say, "Yeah, that's okay for them to say no. Let them do that."

The different types of no. I love this. Hmm, the pleasant no. Hmm, which is like sometimes we smile, and like turn our heads, and we go, "No, no thank you."

The conditional no. "Well, you know, I wasn't really sure, until I have all the information, am I going to say yes. So, I'm going to say no unless I see things are changing." So, I'll give a simple example. If your kids ask to go and leave the house because they want some time with their friends after a family event, you might be like, "No, I don't think that's a good idea you go over to so-and-so's house right now." Because maybe you were in a conversation with the family, and they were like, "No, we're just doing straight family time right now, but tomorrow – tomorrow we're good." So it might be like, "No, I don't think so. You can ask but I'm pretty sure it's a no."

The sleep-on-it no. "I haven't thought of it, I'm not sure."

The alternative solution, I always like that. "No, I don't think I have enough information", so it sounds a lot like the conditional no. So, "I think we're just going to pause here and say no for right now because I don't think we have enough information."

And I love this last one. The secret weapon of no. Sometimes in the family, you know, particularly a family member that's always a yes person, when they say no, it may be rare, but it's like, whoo, everyone immediately jumps and stops. They have to, it follows, because, you know, this person is almost always a yes, [inaudible], oops, they changed.

How to say an effective no. How to say no effectively, I should say. You just say no. You can be brief. Hopefully you're going to be honest and respectful, and be ready to repeat. No, thank you. No.

So, I will say sometimes, not always, but sometimes, as women, or sometimes when you're younger, you have to be more assertive with your—with your ability to say no. I can't tell you how many times, like when I want to get my car fixed, or I wanted to go buy a car, how many times I have to deal with multiple sales people that will keep asking, well, "Are you sure you're a no? Are you sure you're a no? Like, I really think you need this." The answer is no. And so, it doesn't have to be that forceful. It doesn't

have to be that firm. But sometimes you just be like, "No, thank you. Yeah, thank you for letting me know. No, thank you." Real simple. Real—real respectful. And I'm ready to repeat. Sometimes what we call that is a broken record. "I'm just going to keep telling you no. This is not what I want to do. This is not what I'm asking for. This is not where I'm at."

Okay.

Staying cool when it's getting hot. So, if there is, you know, the no, if you will, the no scenario is becoming a little more heated, and people are wanting to get more information. Sometimes you can distract or delay and say, "Oh, let me check on this. Oh, I need to take this call. Let me respond to this text." Or "I need to—I need to use the facilities", meaning the restroom, "I'll be right back", is a way of trying to stay cool, you know, calmer, talking to other family members, moving along. And then hopefully you can come back and, what we call, reengage and have a conversation about truly understanding and using some collaborative language.

But in cases where maybe where you're irritated or frustrated, sometimes you just need to maintain quiet. You're just like, you know, "I've already said no. Let me think about it and maybe I'll get back to you on this but I'm still feeling like it's a no." Honest, sometimes that's the way to do it. Not being pushed around, not going further and further.

Okay. Being a responsible communicator means that you're going to use confirming responses. So it's usually yes, but sometimes it's a clear no. It's also seeing the situation from another person's viewpoint. Identifying the core needs, so you're trying to figure out what—"What is going on here? Do we need to go to your aunt's for the holidays or are we going to have three different places this week that we're going to, you know, see family members?" Or is it like, "Hey, you know, we're feeling a little tired. Our throats are getting sore. I—I think I'm coming down with a cold. Maybe, you might want to go, but I'm going to stay home and start taking care of myself."

And then when you're planning, hopefully you're moving from a much more reactive way to a caring but also sort of like, "Yeah, I think that works better for us. Yeah, you're right, a lot of things have changed." And that's how you begin to develop, what we call, a mutually-benefit mindset. It's not my way versus your way. It's what is it that works for best—what works best for all of us.

So, enhancing clarity is using "I" statements. And so "I" statements are simply, "I think, I feel, I want, I need, I desire, I believe, I know, I don't know." Those are examples of "I" statements. It's not, "well you are", or "you always say", or "you meant it." It's not starting it that way.

It's okay to say "I thought I heard you say." Or "I—I believed that this was what we were going to do."

Paraphrasing is to ensure understanding. And, again, it's just trying to clarify the message. It's not validation. It's just saying, "Are you asking me to show up at 4:00 instead of 3:00?" "Oh, yeah, that's what I'm really asking you. Sorry, I guess I was getting confused. Yeah, yeah, that's fine." That's paraphrasing. Or, "I think I heard you say, is that right?" Or, "You seem like you're trying to tell me this", that's perhaps a little longer way of saying it. But paraphrasing is, "Did I get the message? Did I receive it correctly?" Because in the very beginning we talked about miscommunication and misperception, and that happens because people don't always hear the full message. Because they're not listening.

Often barriers to communication, the number one thing is that people are already filling in the answer, meaning they haven't heard the whole statement but they've already got it. It's like they're playing Jeopardy. Like, so before Alex Trebek can even get the question out, like, "Who is the"—you know, they've already got the answer. "I know it's Queen Elizabeth. I know it's Queen Elizabeth." It's like, "Oh, man, that wasn't the question. That's the wrong who."

It's also explaining your reasoning behind a particular action when appropriate. "Well, so, well, can I ask why you're saying no?" "Well, I already spoke to, you know, Jamie's mom, and she said that, you know, today was just all family at her house but that tomorrow maybe in the afternoon she'd like you to go over to her house. That's why I'm saying, I'm pretty sure this is going to be a no. That's my conditional no."

And recognizing that sometimes you have a personal bias that may cloud your response. And a personal bias may be that you think you can't have this conversation. You know, you don't like having conflict so you avoid, avoid, avoid, avoid. Well, that's a personal bias, because I can guaranty you anybody can learn how to communicate and be more assertive. It's not like only certain types of people can do that and you're not part of the certain type of people.

Okay. So, when there are real serious issues going on in families—so, this is not where you try to go in there and be a counselor, social worker, doctor. If there's substance abuse; there's actual concerns about, what we call, intimate partner abuse or domestic violence; harassment or bullying, whether it's online or offline; a trauma history that you are aware of or just recently made aware of, like, again, the Me Too movement. Lots of people—lots of women, I should say, some men, too, came forward. They—they disclosed that they had been abused, and harassed, or very serious things have happened.

And then mental illness. Well, if you're dealing with somebody who's not on their medication. Or they're on their medication but you're not sure if it's the right kind. Or there's cognitive impairment. So, it could be a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or dementia or, what we call, a TBI, a traumatic brain injury event. Or you're dealing with somebody who might have a developmental delay. That's when you might want to think about getting professional support. Or, if you've got other family members to kind of help you get through maybe the holiday season or get through a holiday event, you know, that you're not all alone trying to cope with this and trying to fix it.

I will also say when I'm just, you know, looking at these bullet points, a lot of times family members won't say anything until you arrive, you know, for the holidays, to this holiday event. Why? Because they don't know how to talk about it. Or, they think you're going to be much better at solving the issue. Or, you know, they thought like you knew. This is another misperception. "I thought you knew all about this stuff." No. So, sometimes that's when the holidays, these things come to light and people are furious, and they're angry because now they're hearing about it. "Well, now you're hearing about it. Whoa, what's next?" Again, validating that you received the information. Yes, yes, yes, I got the information.

Some people are ready to move into, "All right, well this is what we're doing. We've got a plan of action." That may not be your role, again, having those boundaries. Just because someone is getting injured or is hurting, that doesn't necessarily mean you have the right to come in there and try to control the outcome. Sometimes what you have to do is listen and go like, "Well, I'm really concerned about, you know, some counseling, and maybe this is something we need to think about doing together" So, family counseling is usually much more helpful, or couples counseling, if you have the concern about helping the family member.

Now I just want to put on a little highlight here. If there is actual intimate partner abuse, counseling may not be appropriate right away in terms of couples counseling. But individual counseling sometimes is recommended if you are a victim. So, it just, again, depends on what people are willing to do.

So, when you make your relationships a priority, meaning you know it's not always going to be easy, not every time you're always going to get along. But things usually work out, right, because it's a priority. It's, again, one of those boundaries. Well, I don't treat, like, you know, like work and your – and your spouse is kind of in the same category. That's not really making a priority, now is it?

So, scheduling mutually-beneficial time together. Doing things that you both like. So, sometimes it's harder during the colder months sometimes, you know, couples just want to hang out on the couch. Or they have a lot of kids and that's all they've got energy for. But when they can plan an actual date, that's—it's good.

It's the same thing with your kids. You know, some kids like to have more, you know, mommy time or daddy time. You know, how do you try to plan that out?

And developing a communication frequency that is comfortable for both parties, meaning if you're both trying to aim for assertive, instead of one is passive and the other one is passive-aggressive, then not a lot of things are going to be really addressed. It's going to turn into really stressful and harder.

And then state when an event has a special meaning for you and you want the other to attend. So, if you have a special work party, for instance, or you've actually done something that's been great at work and you're going to get some—some kudos, and that person's like, "I'm going to make you a special dinner tonight", that's an example of getting that, oh, it's a special meeting. It's—it's a great day for both of you.

Okay. And another thing to remember when we talk about stop keeping score. We call it tit versus tat. That's a—that's a—an example of a communication barrier, it's actually a bias. An example of like, "Well, that's how," you know, "we handle things. It's win versus lose here at this house." You know, either you're winning or you're losing. Well, that's obviously how a lot of family members deal with communication problems. It's that "Well,

I'm either going to win it or I'm going to lose it. So, I only know how to win." Well, there you go. There's an argument happening right now.

So, when you back off or say, "Oh, okay, yeah, you're right," then they won, and you can move on to something else. And you're choosing to avoid or kind of minimize the—the challenges.

And, if you're really having a conflict, sometimes just having a discussion, I really don't recommend that people wait more than 48 hours, and sometimes you don't always have that luxury, but, you know, if you can try to get a conflict handled within 24 hours, usually things are much easier and much better for you.

And then when you focus on what's right, what brings you together, that's exactly it. That's what—that—that's where hopefully the focus is on the communication. It's again on that connectedness, not necessarily the autonomy.

Okay. So, I'm going to have Katie speak again about contacting your Employee Assistance.

Thank you, Jeannie. And before I pass it back to Jeannie to wrap us up, I do want to mention a couple of things. I certainly want to thank Jeannie very much for her time and expertise and also sharing some—some good real-life examples and suggestions for—for everyone listening in. So, we appreciate that very much.

I do want to remind everybody that your EAP is here for you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. So, no holidays there. So, we're here for you. Whether it's something related to relationships, or communication, or counseling, or even assistance with child care, elder care issues. Perhaps there's a financial or a legal situation. So, there's a whole lot more that we can help you with, and we encourage you. It's at no cost to you. Reach out to us 24/7. If you don't have your EAP contact information, your HR department, Human Resources, will have that contact information for you.

And then just a reminder that on the left-hand side of your screen we do have two things. We have the Event Resources for you. We've got a copy of the slide deck and then an additional resource about the confirming and disconfirming responses that Jeannie spoke about.

And then we also have the Ask a Question button, a send button within the Ask a Question section. If you have a question on this topic, you are welcome to use that. It does come to us via email, and we will reply to you via email usually within a couple days, depending on the nature of your question. But, again, just know that your EAP is here 24/7, so any questions you can get answered in real time there as well.

So, thank you so much. Thank you for joining. Thank you, Jeannie, for presenting. I will pass it back to you to close us out.

I just want to say thank you, everyone. And, you know, since we are in the middle of the holiday season, or if you're going to catch this, you know, a little bit later after the holidays, [inaudible] because this is really when problems will start, which sometimes happens, too, please feel free to always reach out to your EAP. We have a lot of expertise, a wealth of knowledge, and we're always here to assist you. And it's my pleasure to— to provide this webinar for you. And thank you.