



The Diamond Path: Next-Level Conversational Tools for Leaders & Teams



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What separates those who are
successful from those who aren't?
Great conversations.

C-IQ: one of the top 5 business trends today

In business and in families, success happens through conversations.

Additionally, conversations shape the brain through neuroplasticity and feedback loops.

Choices we make in language and behavior influence our neurochemistry, our emotions, and the way we interpret reality.

There are predictable reasons
why conversations break down.

With awareness of what goes wrong
and through learning new skills, we can
improve the quality of conversations
both for ourselves and for our teams.

My Goals Today

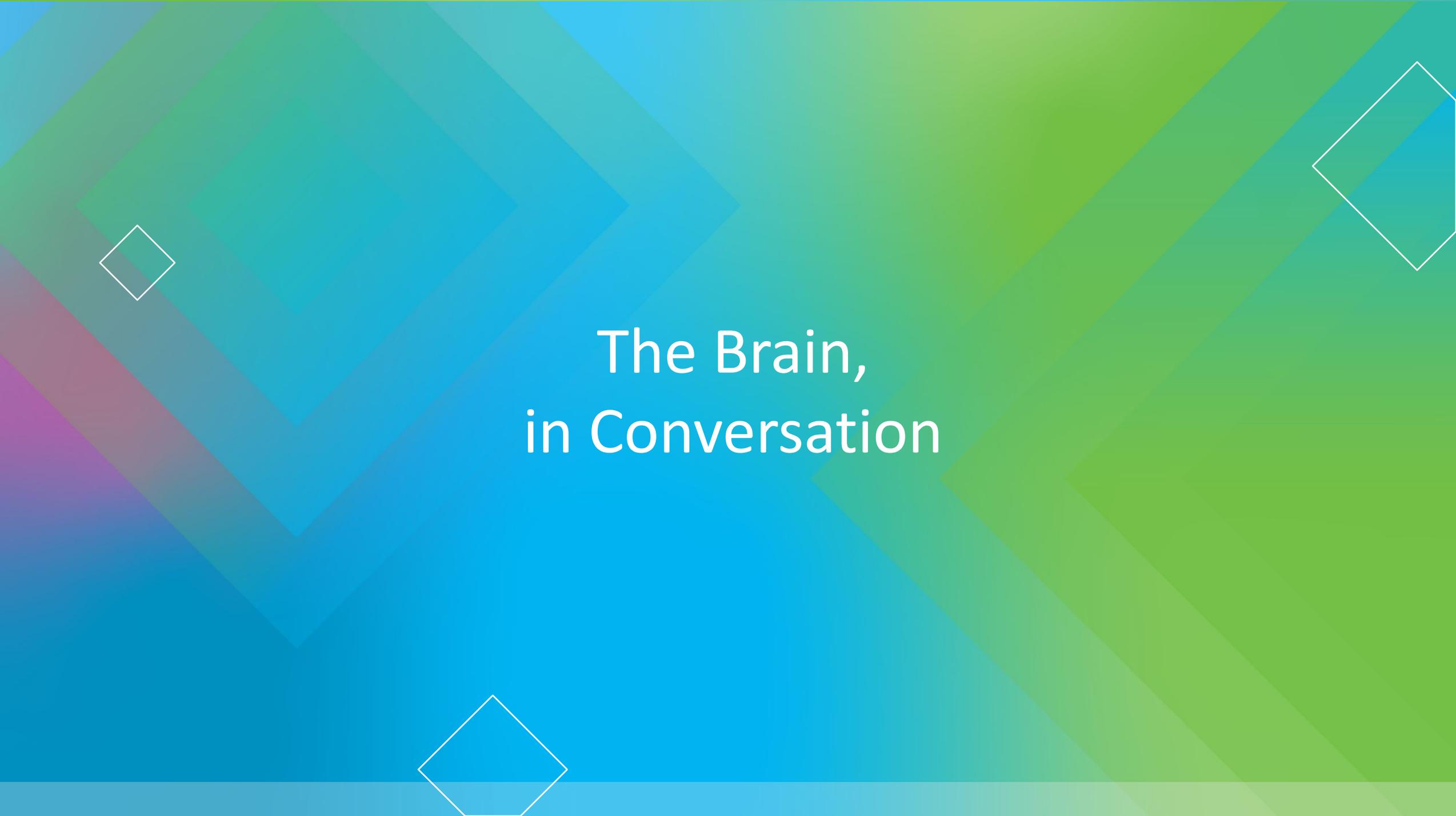
- **Reveal** the hidden and visible elements of successful conversations, as well as how and why conversations break down
- **Show** how conversational practices, inclusion and diversity, and connection, innovation, and creativity are related
- **Teach** practices that will help you have more effective conversations – inside and outside of work



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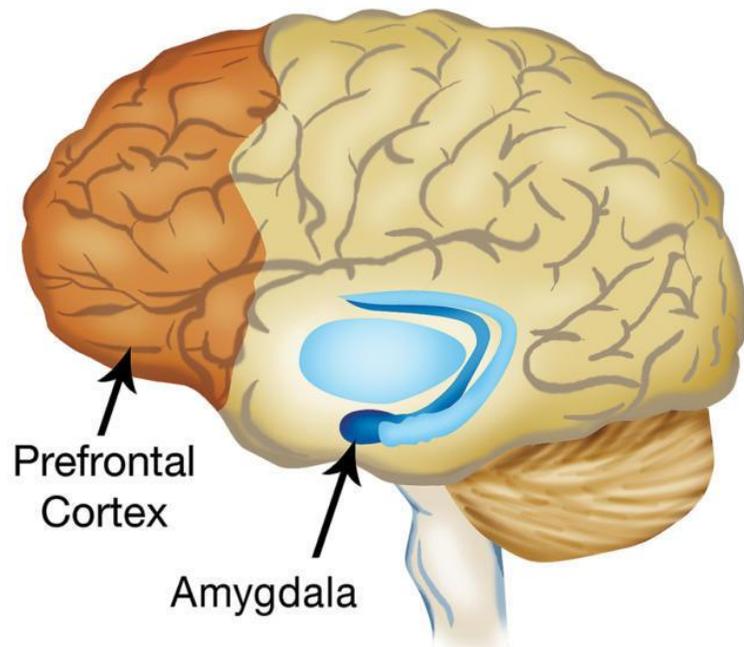
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The Brain, in Conversation

Great conversations are based on
trust.

The Neuroscience of Trust



- Trust and distrust occur in different areas of the brain.
 - Trust occurs in the prefrontal cortex.
 - Distrust is found in the amygdala.
- Trust and distrust overlap in **uncertainty**.
- The role of interpretation is **critical**.

If we interpret through the lens of fear...

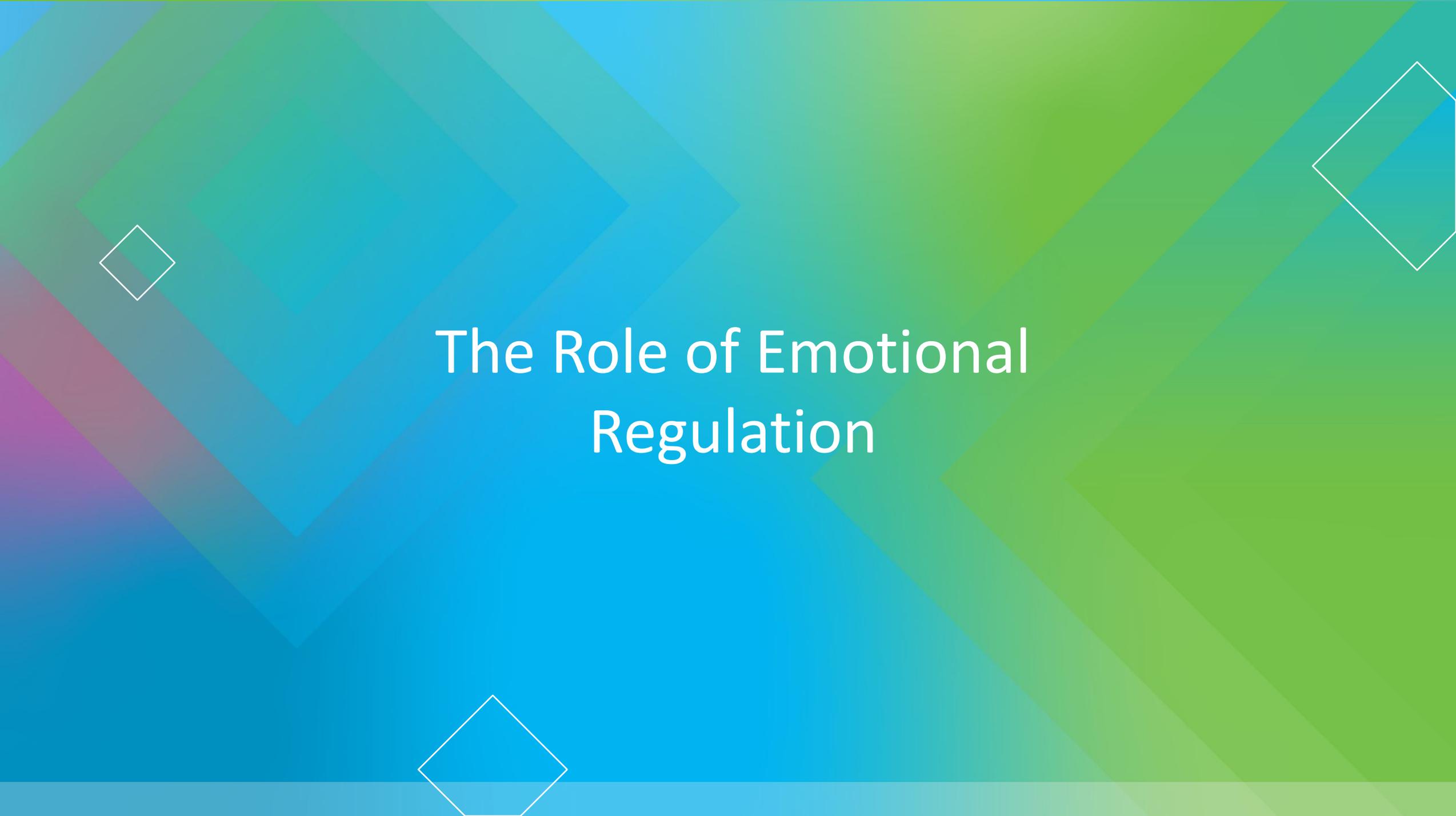
... the conversation breaks down.

- **Assuming** negative intent or **interpreting** the situation through fear
- **Fear** causes amygdala activation: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn
- **Amygdala activation** causes us to be defensive, exclusive, judgmental, or closed-minded – closing us off from creativity, connection, and innovation

If we interpret positive intent

... we move into the prefrontal cortex and rational thought.

- We can access abstract thinking, planning, empathy, and decision-making
- We remain at choice about how to respond
- We can be present to our emotions without flooding
- We can experience emotions like inclusivity, enthusiasm, and generosity



The Role of Emotional Regulation

Where Emotions Come From

Classical view of emotions

- Essentially 6 emotions that all people experience
- Blend together to create more complex emotions
- All emotions believed to be felt the same way by everyone
- Emotions as instinctual

Neoclassical view of emotions

- Constructed by the brain from a set of "ingredients"
- Able to learn new emotions
- People don't all experience emotions in the same ways
- Emotional experiences are constructed through choice

The Brain and The Body

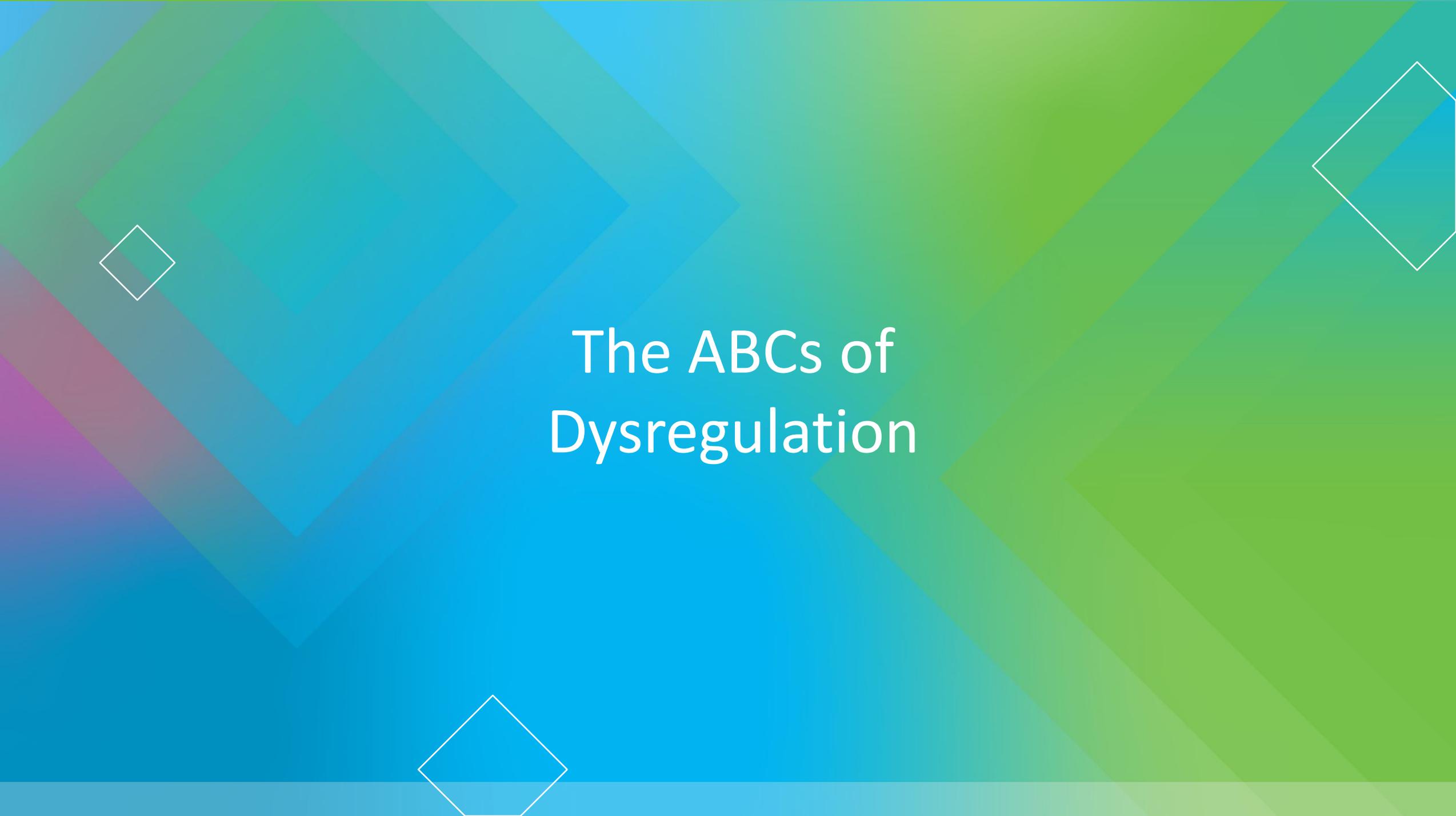
- Neuroscience says: interplay between the mind and body
- Brain waves and neural symphonies
- Mirror neurons: the foundation for empathy?
- The Vagus Nerve

If your body is stressed, your mind
will be stressed and vice versa.

Emotional vs Rational Thinking

Emotions are not separate from decision-making. Without them, we get stuck.

- Over 90% of our behavior is unconscious
- Somatics, emotions, and intuition provide a means to understand implicitly stored, unconscious data and neural patterns which are generated by our biology
- Logic is slow and comes last



The ABCs of Dysregulation

Amygdala reactions, Blind spots,
and **Cognitive distortions** can derail
us. Overcoming them is the key to
mindful leadership and great
conversations.

Amygdala reactions look like:

- Avoiding responsibility
- Taking feedback as criticism
- Feeling closed and defensive
- Always believing our way of doing things is the best
- Pointing the finger at others
- Assuming negative intent
- Feeling unwilling to change
- Clinging to opinion, denial, blame, and rationalization
- Believing your perspective is the only correct one
- Feeling committed to being right and wanting to win

Blind Spots in Conversation

Failing to account for the neurological impact of fear is a meta blind spot.

1. Assuming that others see, think, or feel as we do.
2. The inability to stand in another's shoes.
3. Assuming that we are fully present.
4. Assuming you already know.

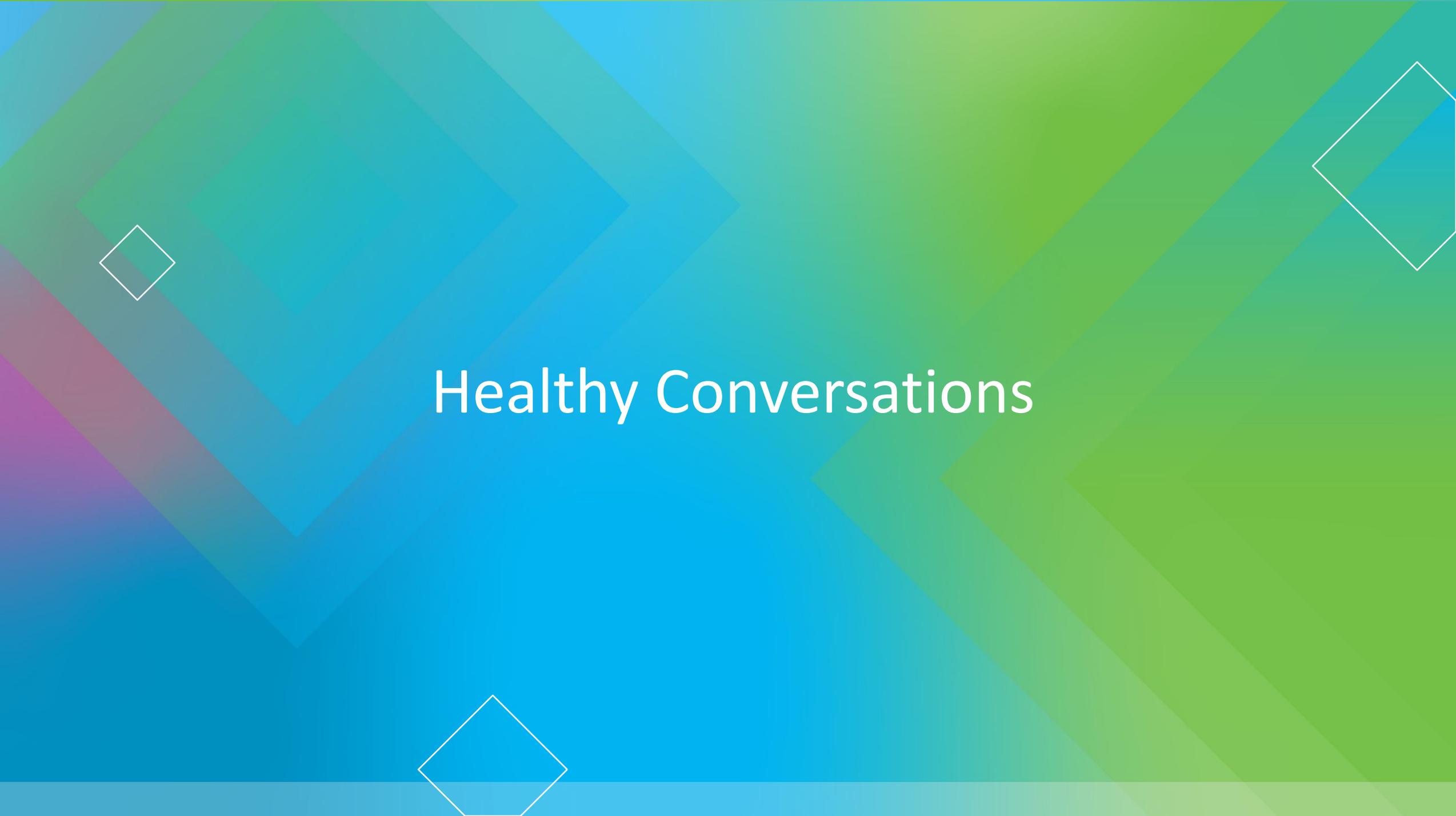
Cognitive Distortions

- Personalizing
- Filtering
- Catastrophizing
- “Should’s”
- Emotional Reasoning
- Polarizing
- Overgeneralization
- Mind Reading
- Blaming
- Always Being Right

Self-Assessment

What does it look like when you're dysregulated?

1. I freeze or want to run away
2. I deny the neurological impact of fear
3. I get overly attached to my point of view
4. I take everything personally
5. I expect the worst
6. I stop being fully present
7. I think I already know everything



Healthy Conversations

In a healthy conversation, there is room for everyone. We stay open and positive, “above the line.”

“Above the line,” we:

- Are open, curious, and committed to learn
- Believe we always have something to learn
- Ask for help and clarification
- Empower others
- Avoid exaggeration
- Speak without arguing
- Question our beliefs
- Look for solutions instead of labeling where the problem came from
- Know no one has it all figured out and we can't do it all ourselves

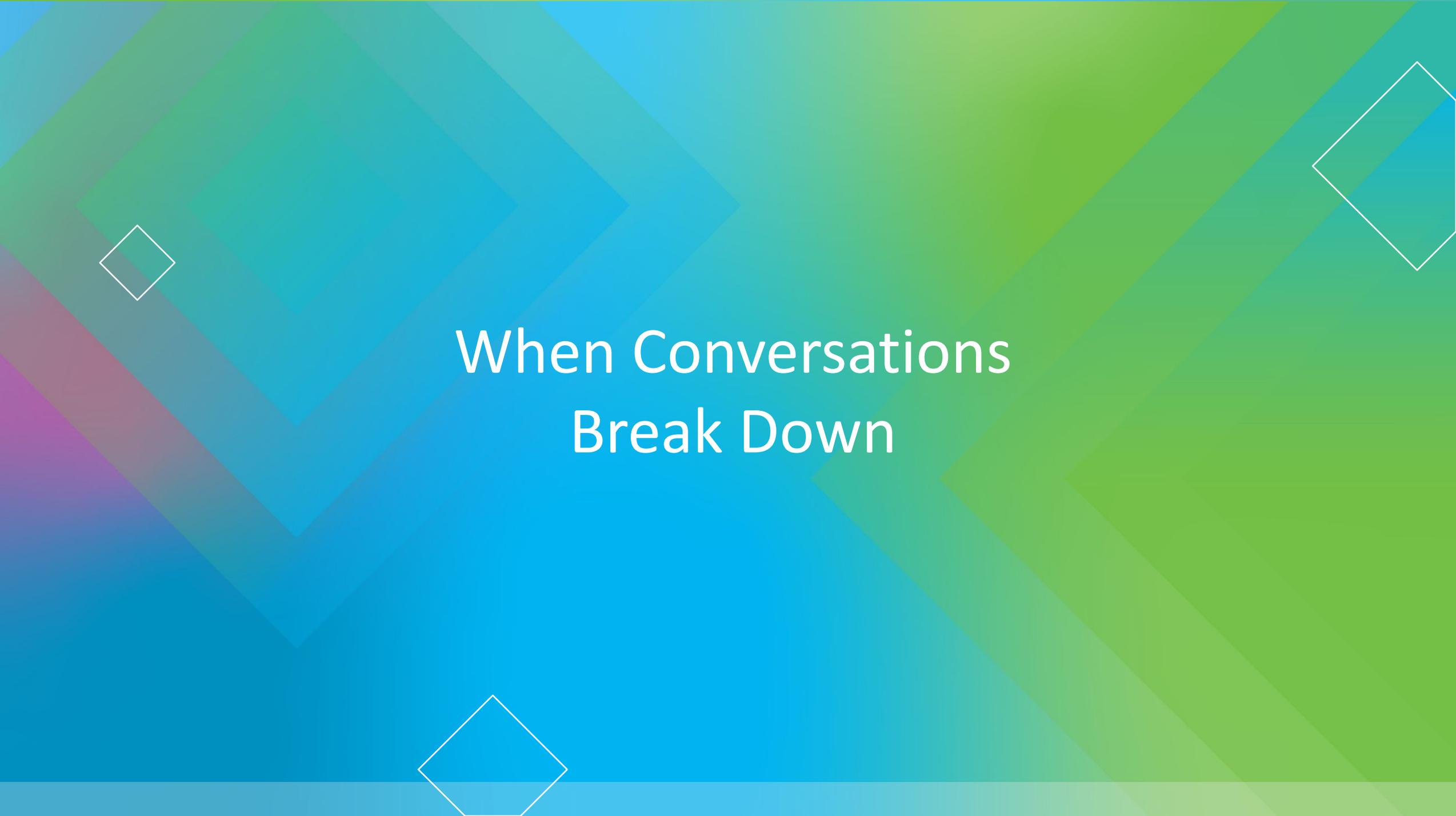
Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the freedom to express yourself without fear of negative consequences.

- **Connection.** Strong relationships of respect, caring, & appreciation. Treating others as valuable. Giving credit for other's contributions.
- **Involvement.** Solicit input and feedback from others, honoring communication styles. Everyone feeling that they can contribute.
- **Support.** Having the tools you need to reach performance goals. Prioritizing team rather than personal advancement.

Decentering

- Stepping outside of one's own mental experience, instead taking an objective and non-judging stance
- First seen in Piaget's Concrete Operational stage, ages 7-12
- We learn that all people are not having the same experience as we are
- Allows us to make space for and hear the other voices at the table

The background features a complex pattern of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in shades of blue, green, and purple. Three white-outlined diamond shapes are positioned at the top-left, top-right, and bottom-center of the frame.

When Conversations Break Down

Polarization Causes Impasses

It also reduces creativity, innovation, and problem-solving.

- Taking a position which one defends
- Believing you are “right”, and there is no margin for error
- Seeing those who disagree with you as “wrong” or “in denial”

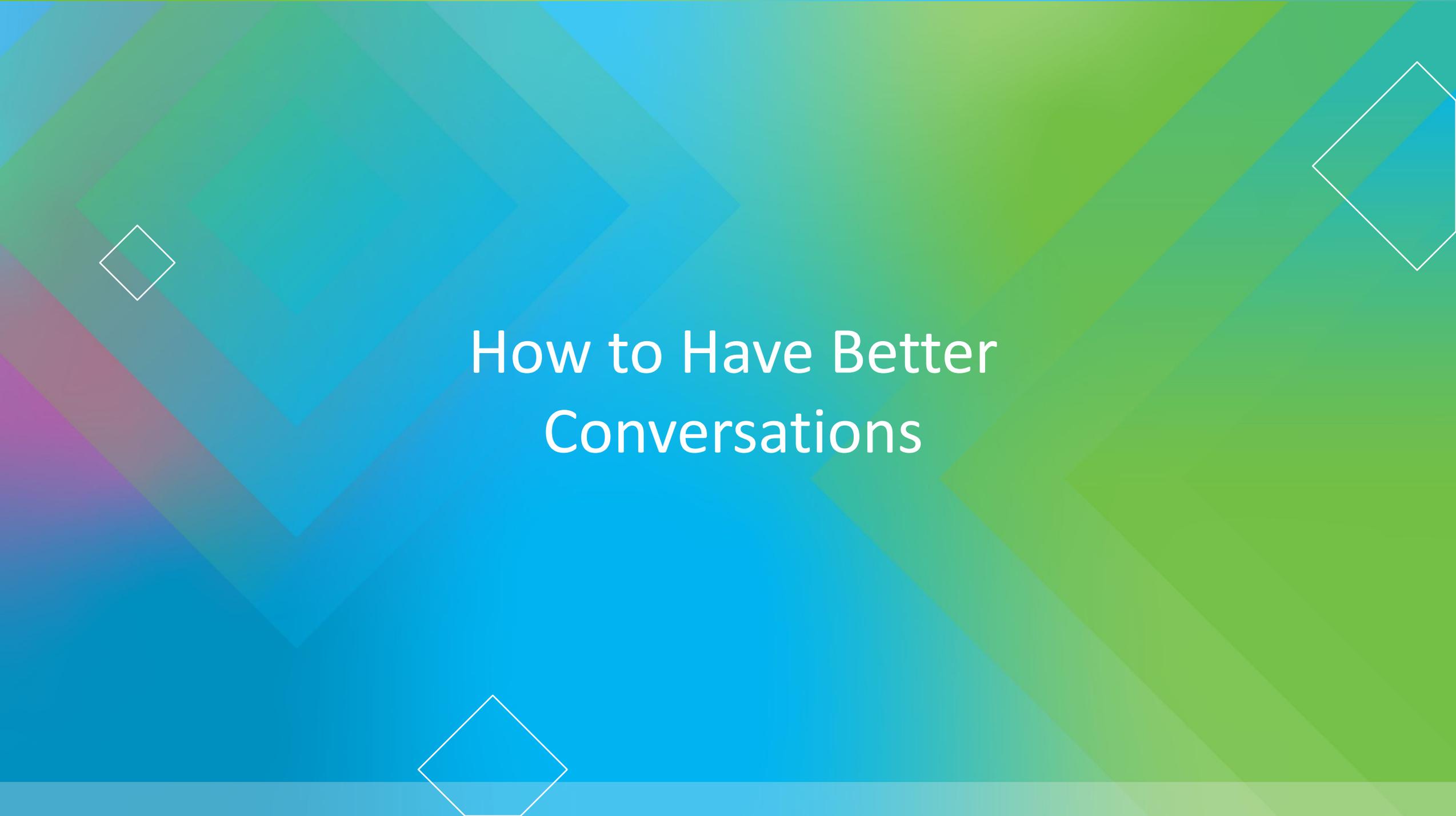
After Polarization: Breakdown

- We are polarized into our corners or positions
- We are trying to persuade others that we are right
- Someone feels shut down, upset, or that they aren't being heard
- Someone is withholding their point of view
- We cannot make space for the other's perspective
- Someone in the group is acting like a devil's advocate
- We don't yet see a viable solution

Will you stay in breakdown, or will
you have a breakthrough?

Breakthroughs look like this:

- We have taken the time to share and discover
- We all feel like we've been heard
- We have worked together to create a shared vision of mutual success
- We have discussed common threats and objectives
- We have told the truth and tested assumptions
- We feel rapport, openness, empathy, caring, and non-judgment from each other



How to Have Better Conversations

Better emotional regulation will
produce better conversations!

To have great conversations, start with your body.

Build resilience by reducing biological stressors.

- **Pay attention** to your shoulders, breath, and spine. Look for tightness, shallow breathing, faster heart rate, sweat, etc.
- **Leverage your body** to relax your mind
- **Activate your vagus nerve** with slow breathing, humming, exercising, laughing, or meditation
- **Develop a "felt sense"** of the contrast between rigidity and fluidity

When you relax your shoulders
and deepen your breath, you
create the conditions in which your
mind can move from defending to
exploring.

Then, bring your attention to your prefrontal cortex.

This will help you have a better conversation and experience more innovation, connection, and creativity!

- **Assume the best** intentions from others
- **Acknowledge your choice** in uncertainty to stay curious or constrict into fear
- **Lean into positive emotions** such as gratitude, happiness, and enthusiasm
- **Practice courage:** face life as an exciting challenge; be willing to try new things

Bring Safety to the Conversation

*This fosters a high level
of creativity,
innovation, and
relational connection.*

- Stop blaming
- Stop complaining
- Not take anything personally
- Share your wins, excellence, and when you're having a great day
- Exhibit a positive, growth-oriented mindset
- Know that you are entitled to express yourself

Practice Decentering

- Remember that your interpretations and assumptions are not universal
- Witness yourself as distinct from your thinking and feeling states
- Notice the difference between your thoughts/feelings and your interpretations of what is occurring
- Acknowledge thoughts and feelings as temporary events

Reduce Polarization

- Be genuinely curious and mindful
- Stay open to learning and discovery
- Maintain a respectful attitude
- Shift to Both-And thinking
- Ask “what if...?”
- Look for common ground

Look for How to Grow

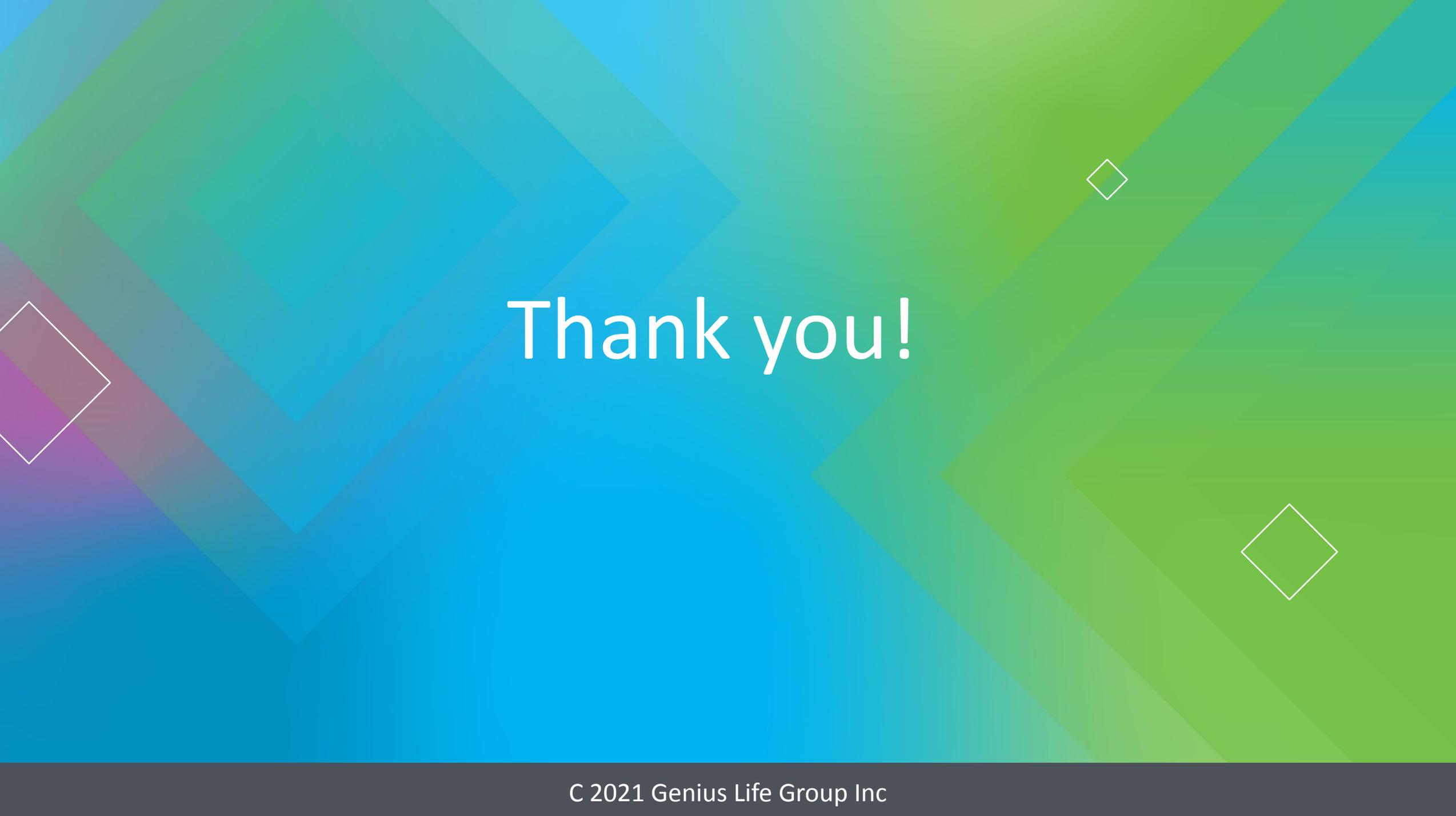
- Give others the benefit of the doubt
- Accept that you may be doing something that is hurtful to others
- Identify and address your cognitive distortions
- Remember that we all have blind spots and do the work to remove yours
- Use feedback to make changes, grow, develop, and improve

Return to Trust

If you're in a breakdown, don't set up camp. Keep going!

- Modulate your energy, emotions, and fear response.
- Be courageous and willing to start over.
- Explore reality gaps and brainstorm how to close them.
- Release shame and give permission for others to do the same.
- Ask authentically curious questions that start with "how could we" and "what if."

Most importantly, remind each other of our common ground and purpose. ***Embody trust*** by staying in the conversation, knowing we all want to get to a good result.



Thank you!