

UVU Play Therapy Conference

June 13, 2026

**Play Therapy and
Selective Mutism**

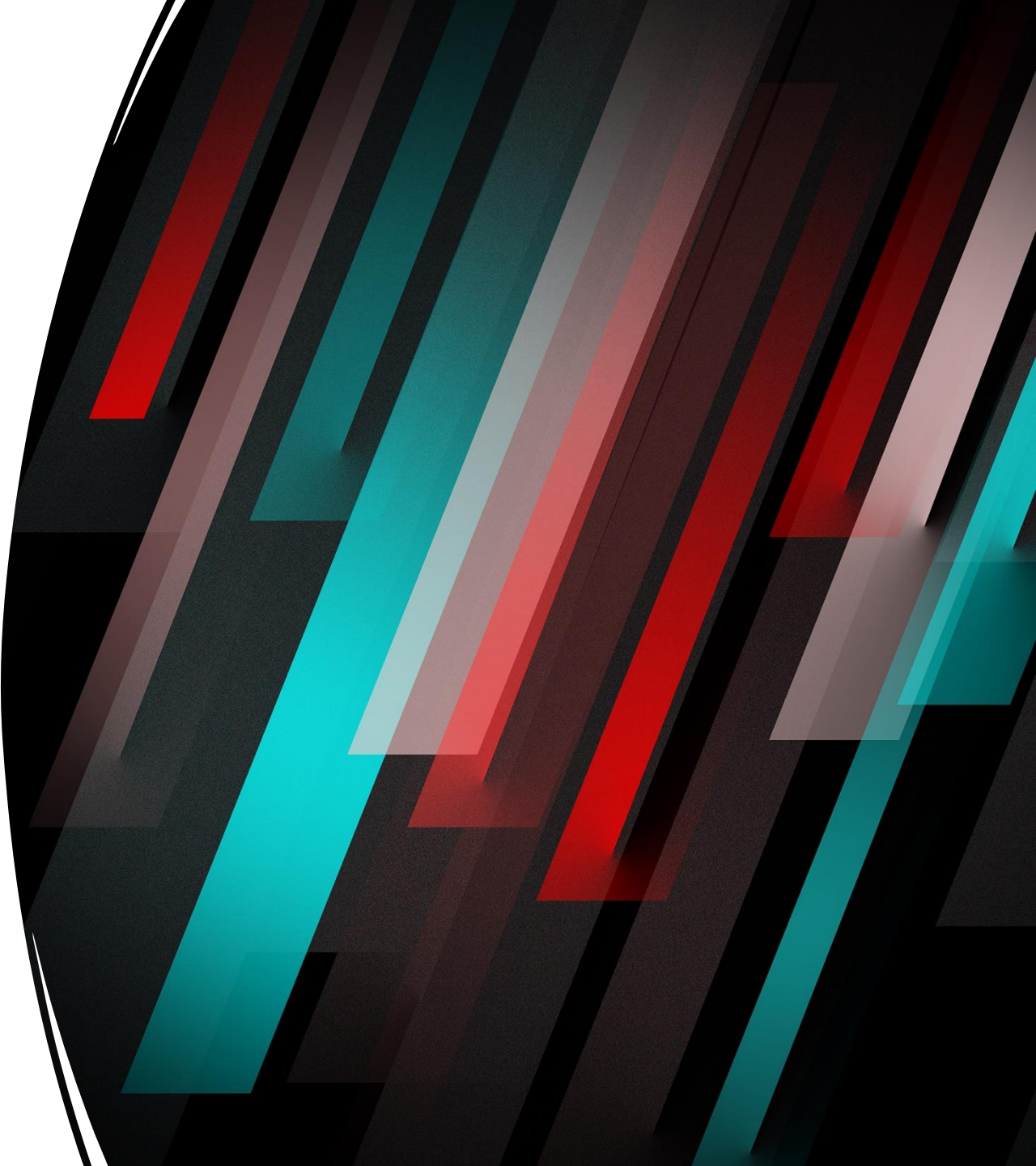
**I Want to See You Be
Brave!**

WELCOME!

The image features a dark blue background with a bokeh effect of light blue and white circular spots. A horizontal band of bright blue, shimmering particles or light trails runs across the lower half of the image, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text 'WELCOME!' is prominently displayed in the center in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

About me



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Introductions



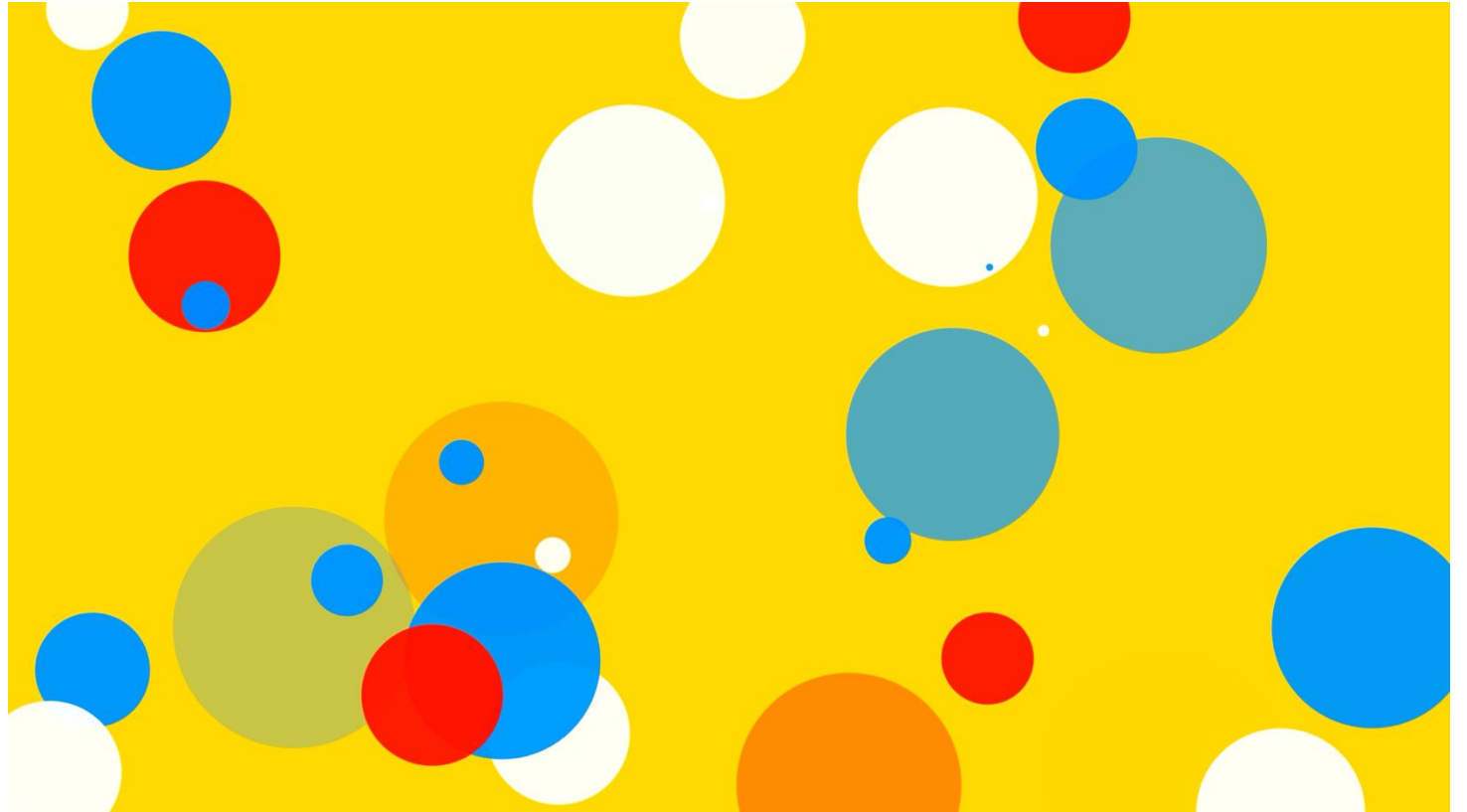


Ice Breakers

- What is the weirdest food you've ever eaten?
- If you could travel anywhere, where would it be?
- What are you reading now?

Check In

- What strategies did you use?
- Who loved the silence?
- Who didn't?
- Where did you notice the discomfort?



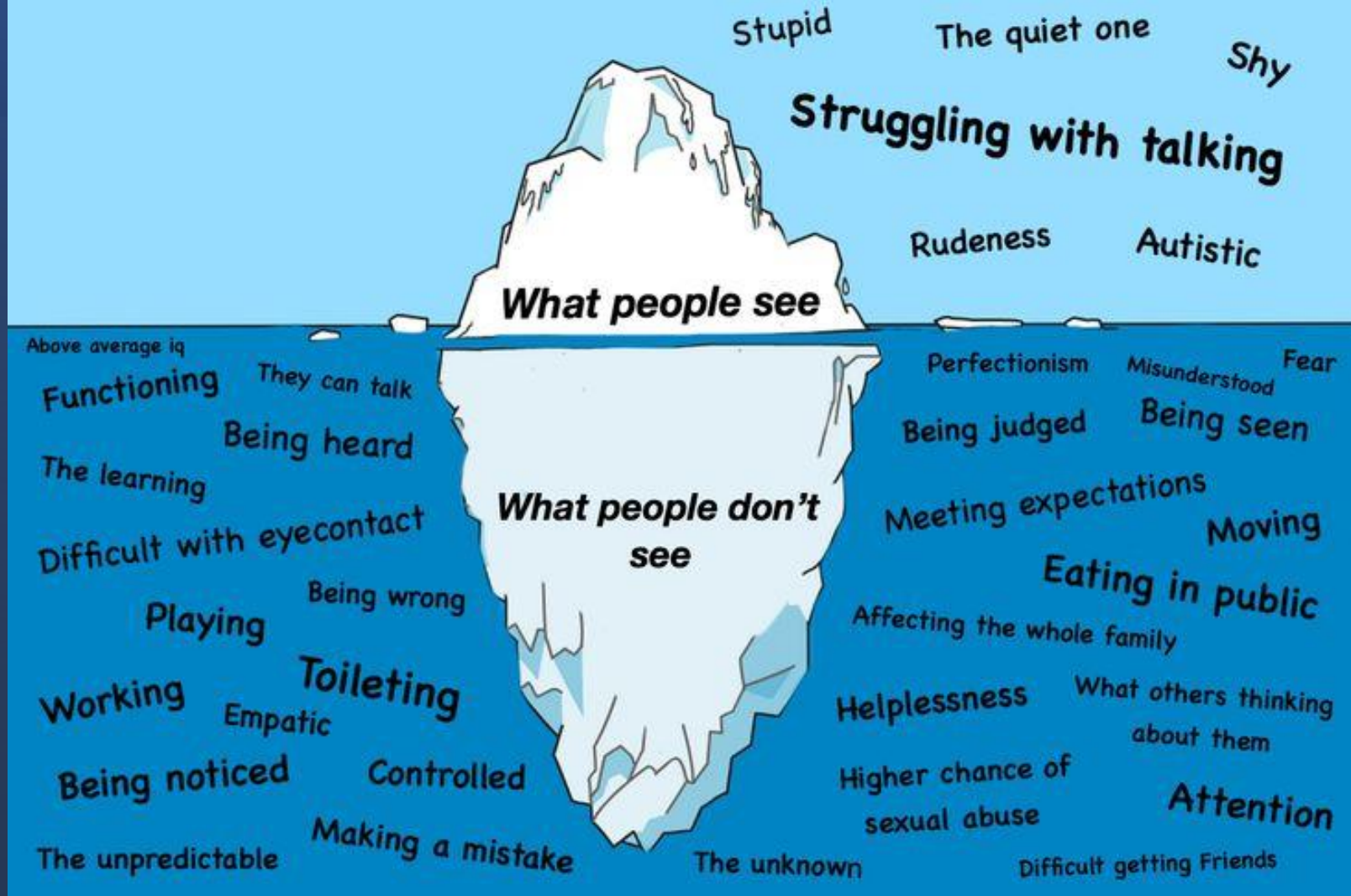
What is SM?

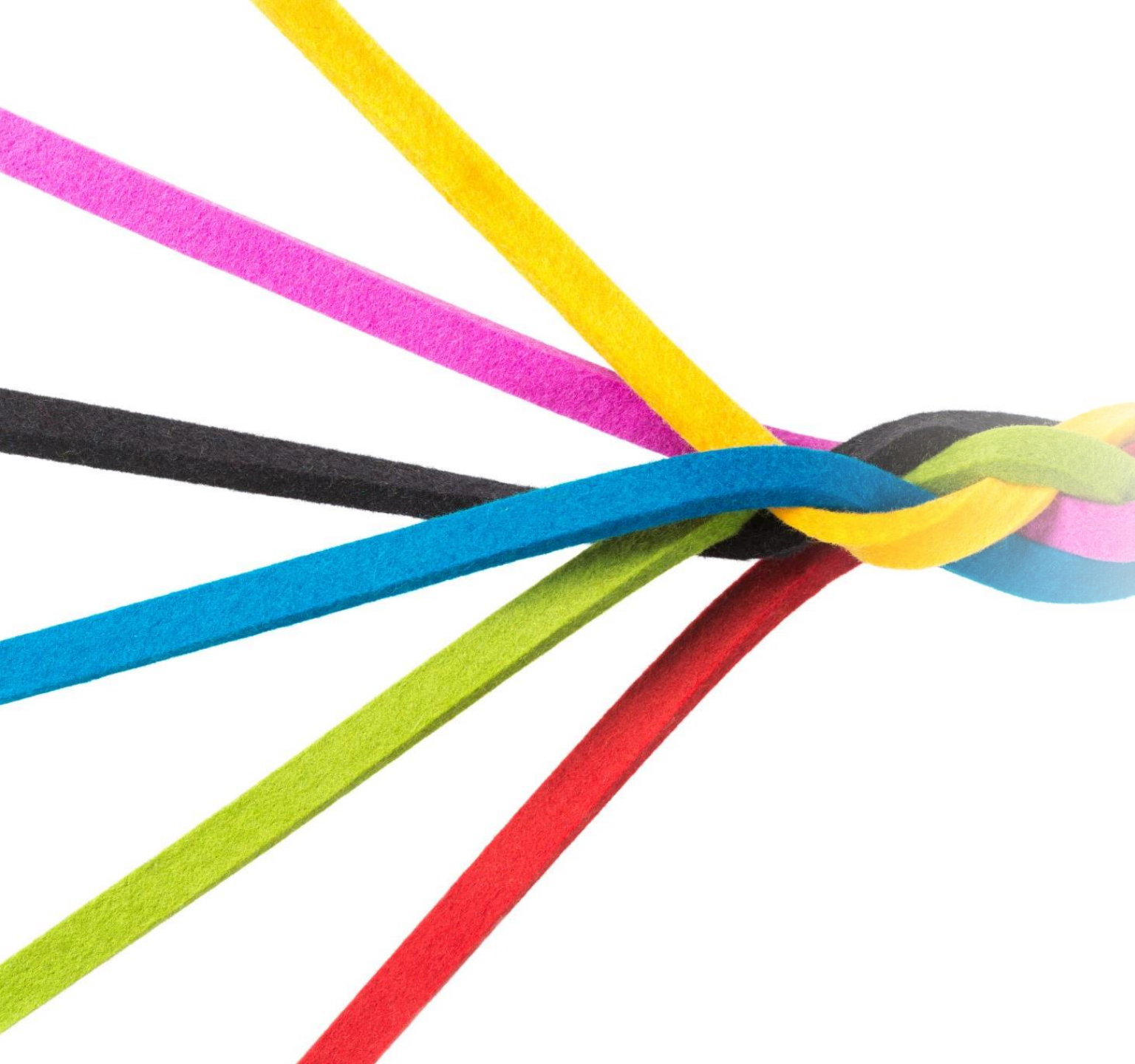
DSM

- Consistent failure to speak when speech is expected despite speaking in other settings.
- Interference in social or academic dimensions
- Lasts at least 1 month (NOT the first month of school)
- Not due to inability to speak the language
- Not due to a communication disorder*



SELECTIVE MUTISM





Top 3 Predictors of Successful SM Treatment

- **Rapport with the therapist**
- **Lack of parental accommodation (rescuing)**
- **Coordination of the treatment team**

TEMENOS



Temenos

- Greek - Sacred, “a piece of cut off land”
- Jungian - physical and psychological space that is protected
- The therapeutic alliance, then, is embodied.
- However, there are important and helpful steps we can take.



To Do



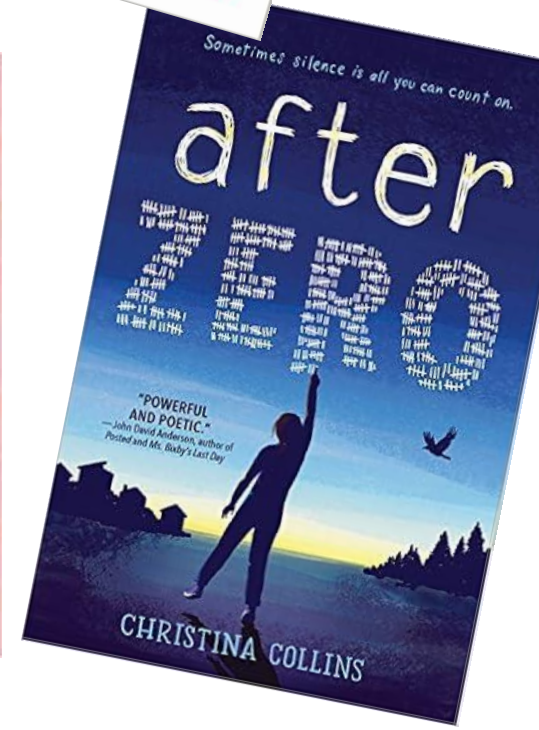
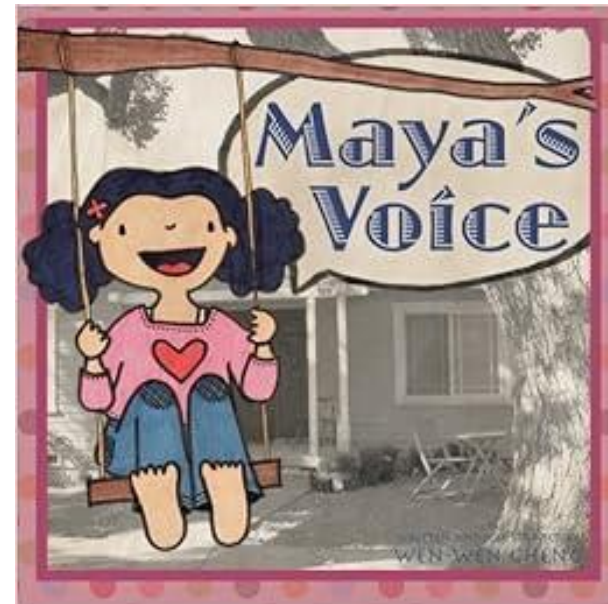
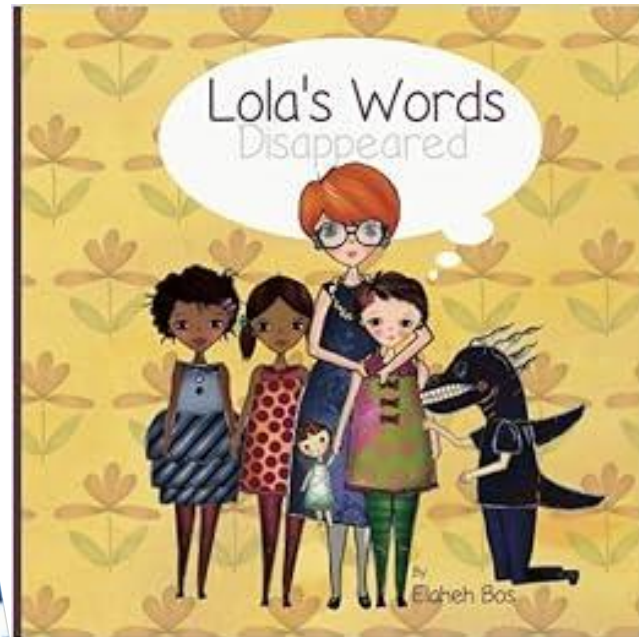
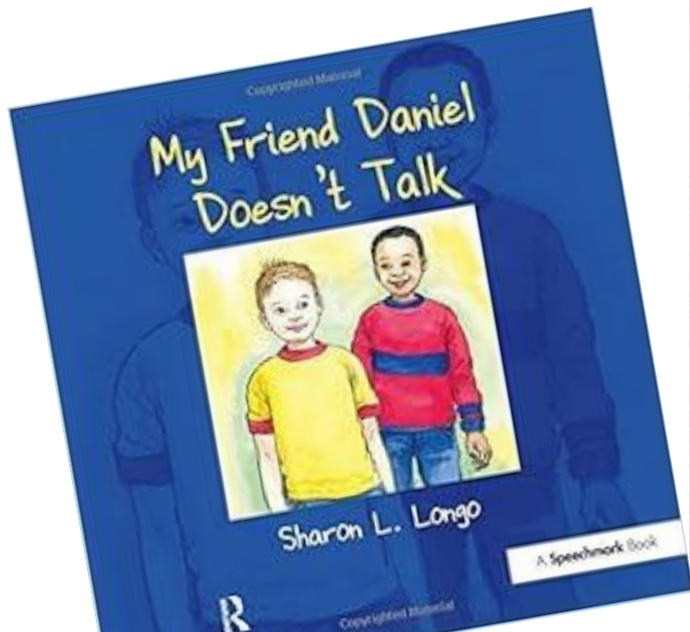
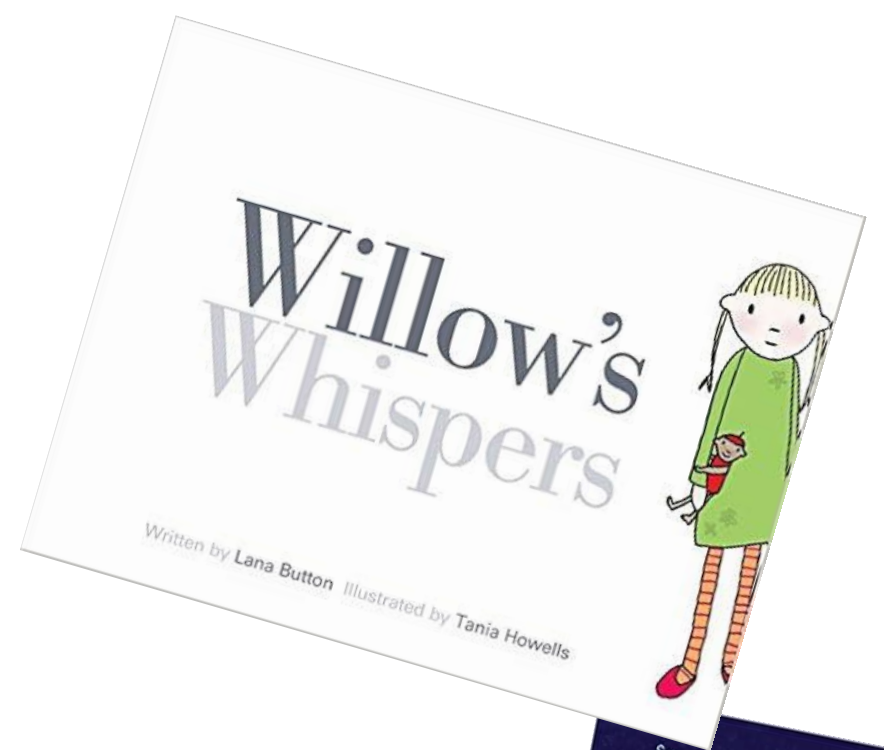
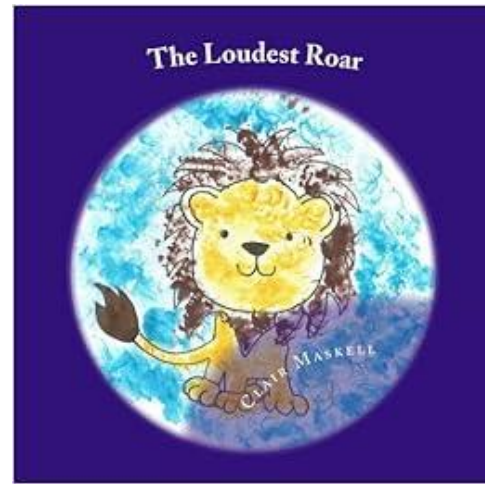
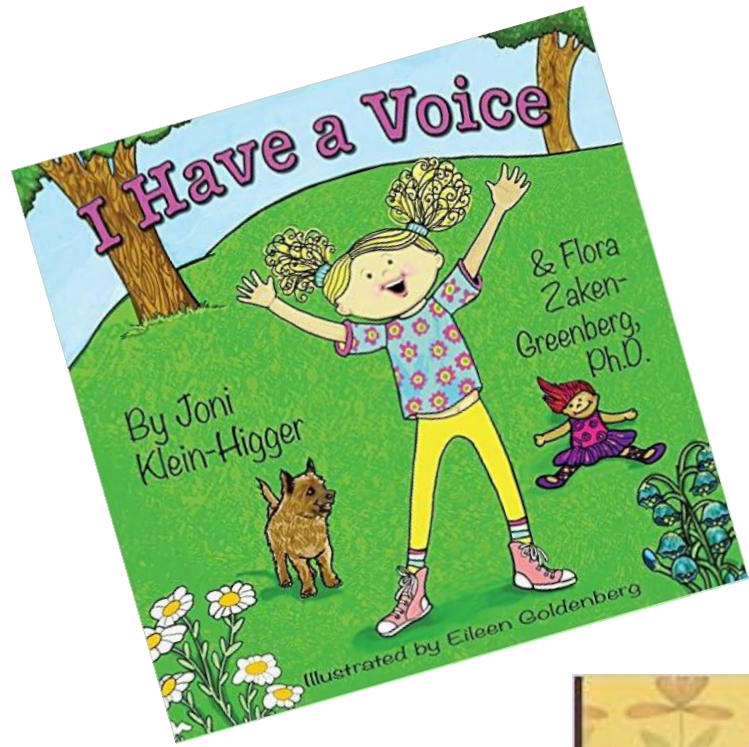


Setting the stage

- Website
- Video
- Short visit
- Social Stories



ALL
BEHAVIOR
IS
COMMUNICATION



Child
Centered

- PRIDE
- Play to strengths

Verbally
Directed

- Forced Choice Qs
- Open Ended Qs

PRAISE



REFLECTION
REFLECTION

Imitate!



DESCRIBE

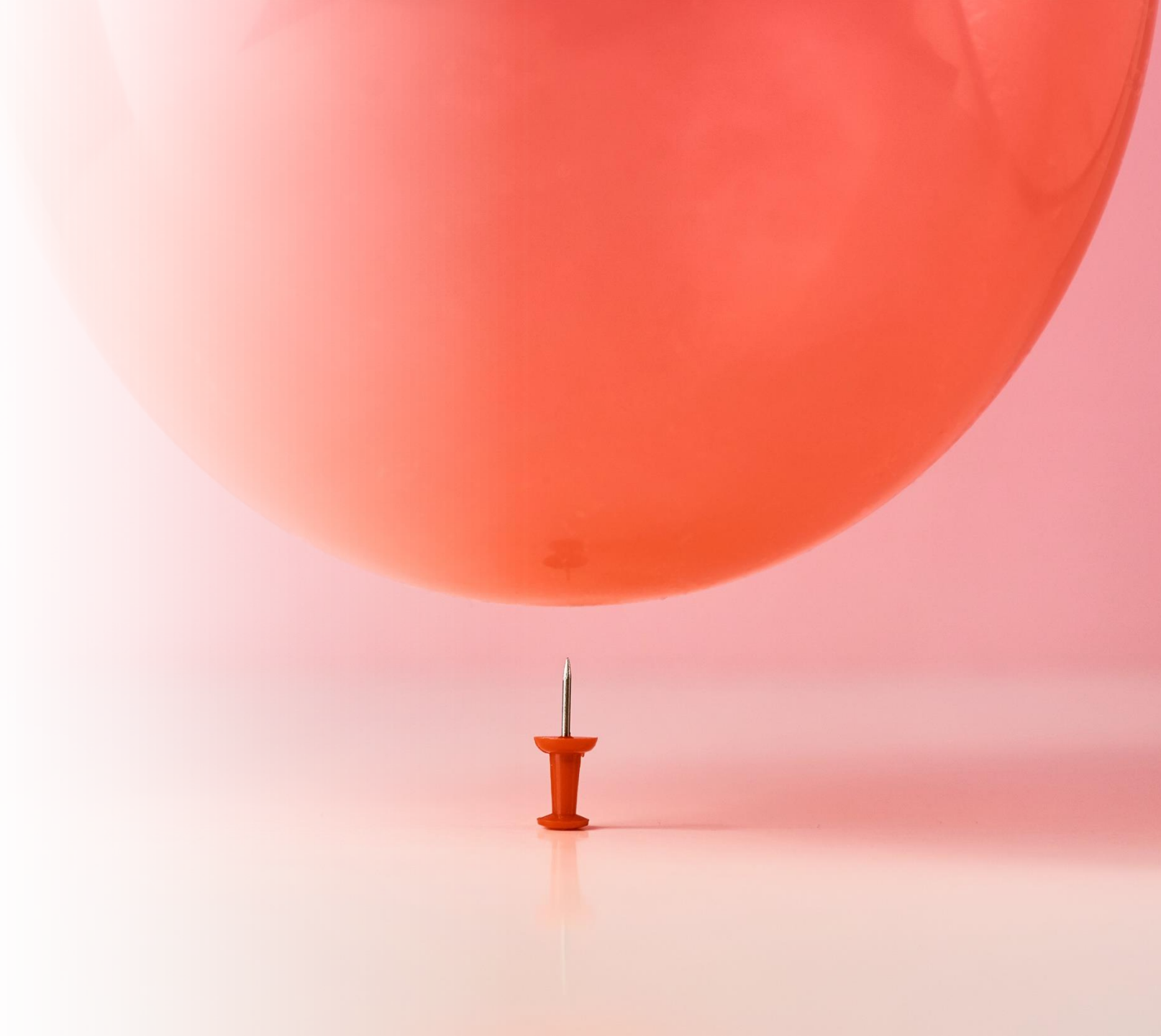


Enthusiasm



Avoid

- Mind reading
- Asking questions
- Commands to talk
- Negative talk





- Open Ended Questions
 - Wait 5-10 seconds
 - If the child responds, provide labeled praise
 - If no response, reformat the question



A wide-angle photograph of a modern cable-stayed bridge with a red deck and white towers, spanning a deep, rocky canyon. The bridge is divided into four sections by three towers. Above the bridge, four communication stages are labeled: '0. Noncommunicative' (under the first span), '1. Non-verbal' (under the second span), '2. Transitional' (under the third span), and '3. Verbal' (under the fourth span). The canyon walls are steep and rocky, with some greenery. The sky is clear and blue.

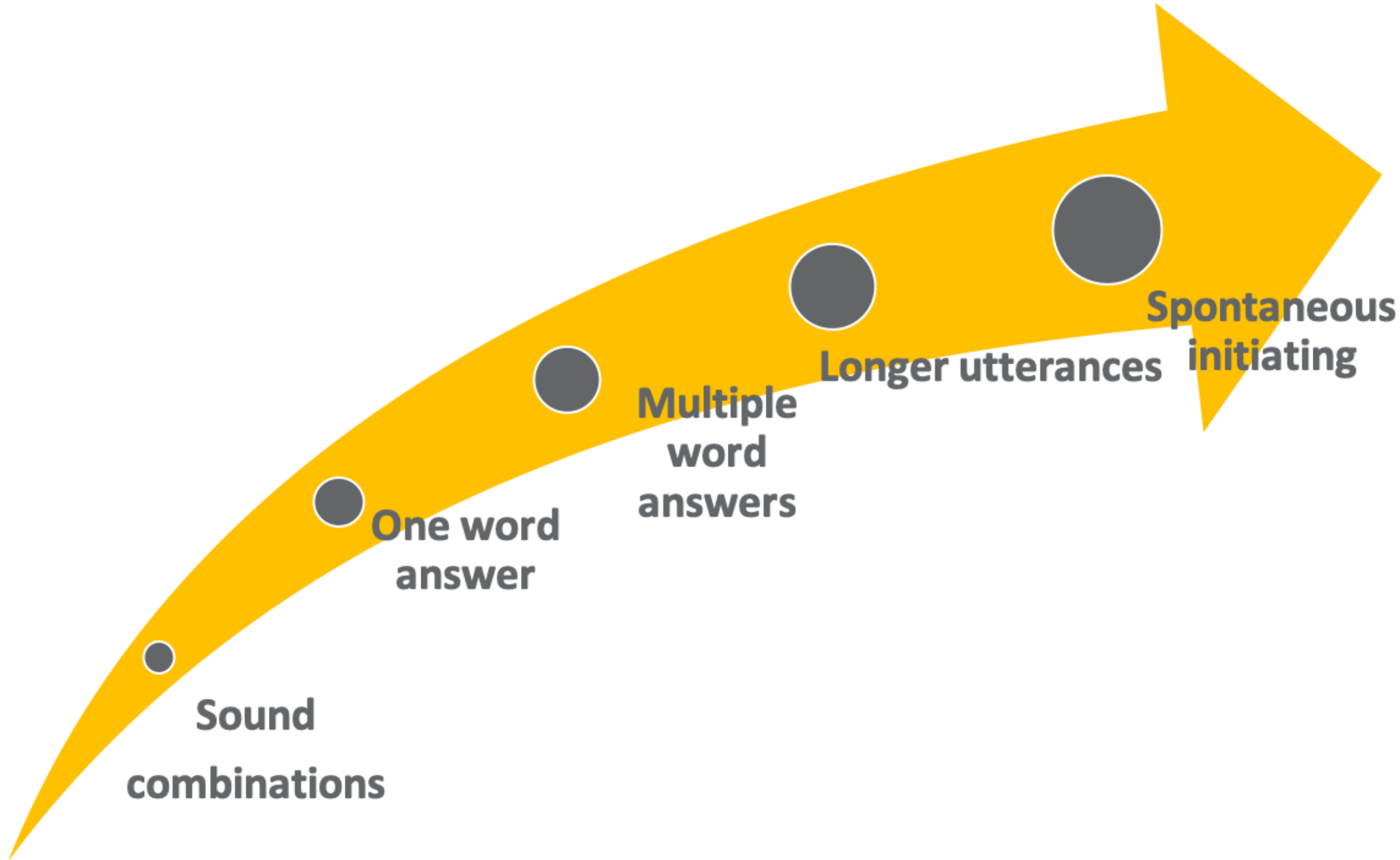
0. Noncommunicative

1. Non-verbal

2. Transitional

3. Verbal

Adapted from Dr.
Elisa Shipon-Blum



**Sound
combinations**

**One word
answer**

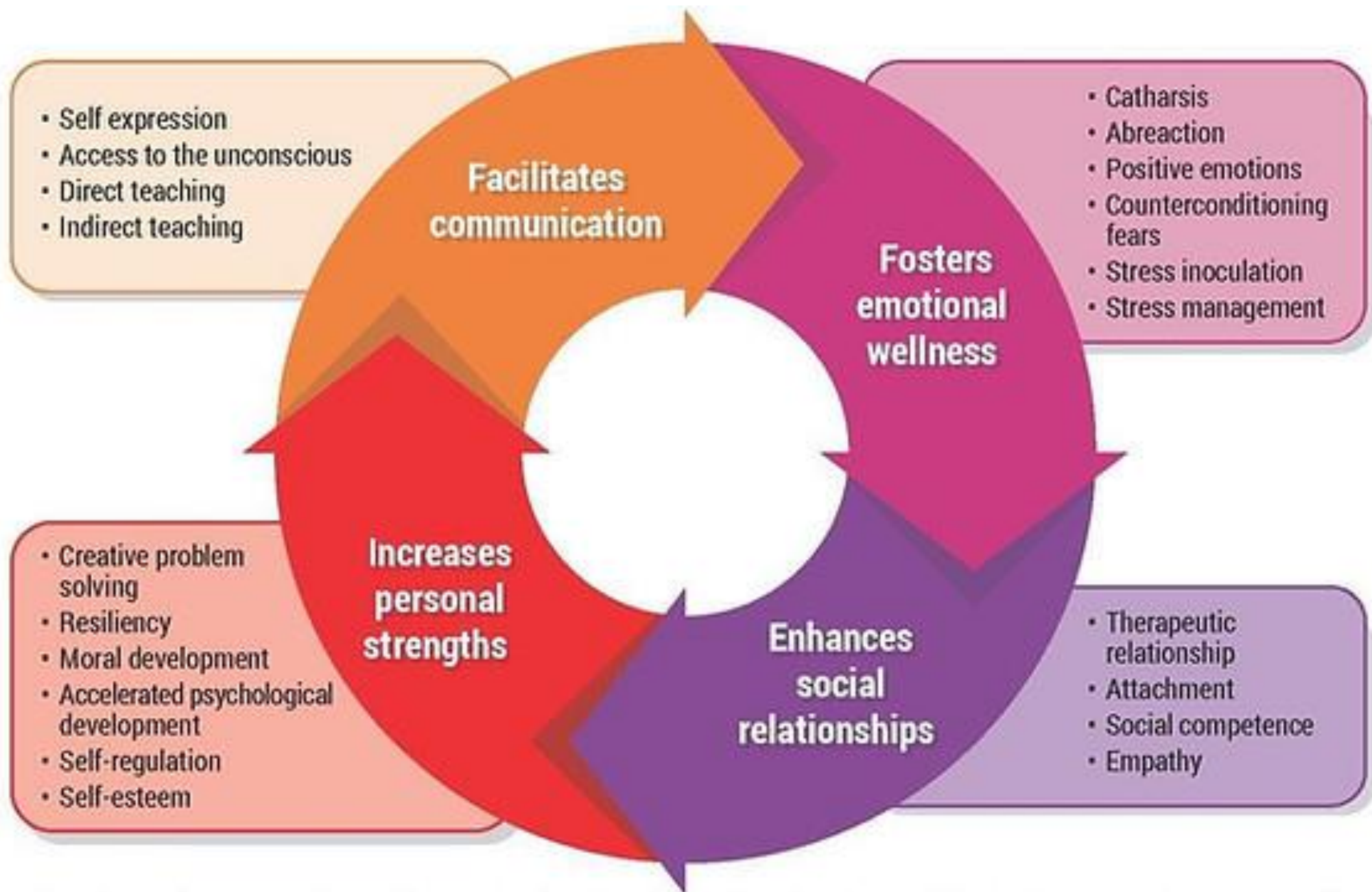
**Multiple
word
answers**

Longer utterances

**Spontaneous
initiating**

Why Play?





unoccupied



solitary



onlooker



parallel



associative



cooperative





Types of Attention

- Silly/Exaggerated
- Imitation/Copying
- Physical
- Negative
- Admiration
- Quiet/Calm
- Conversational



My Fear





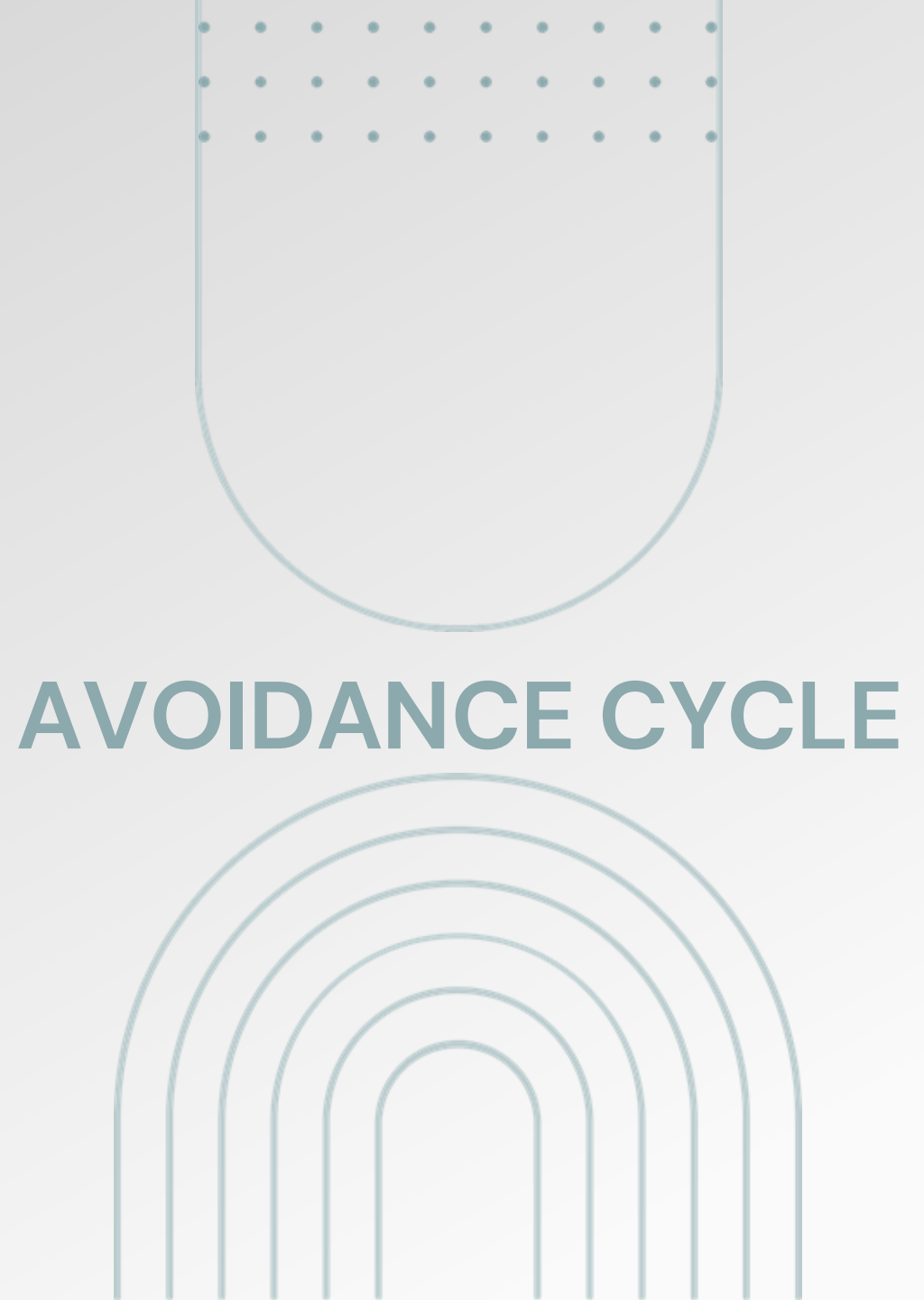
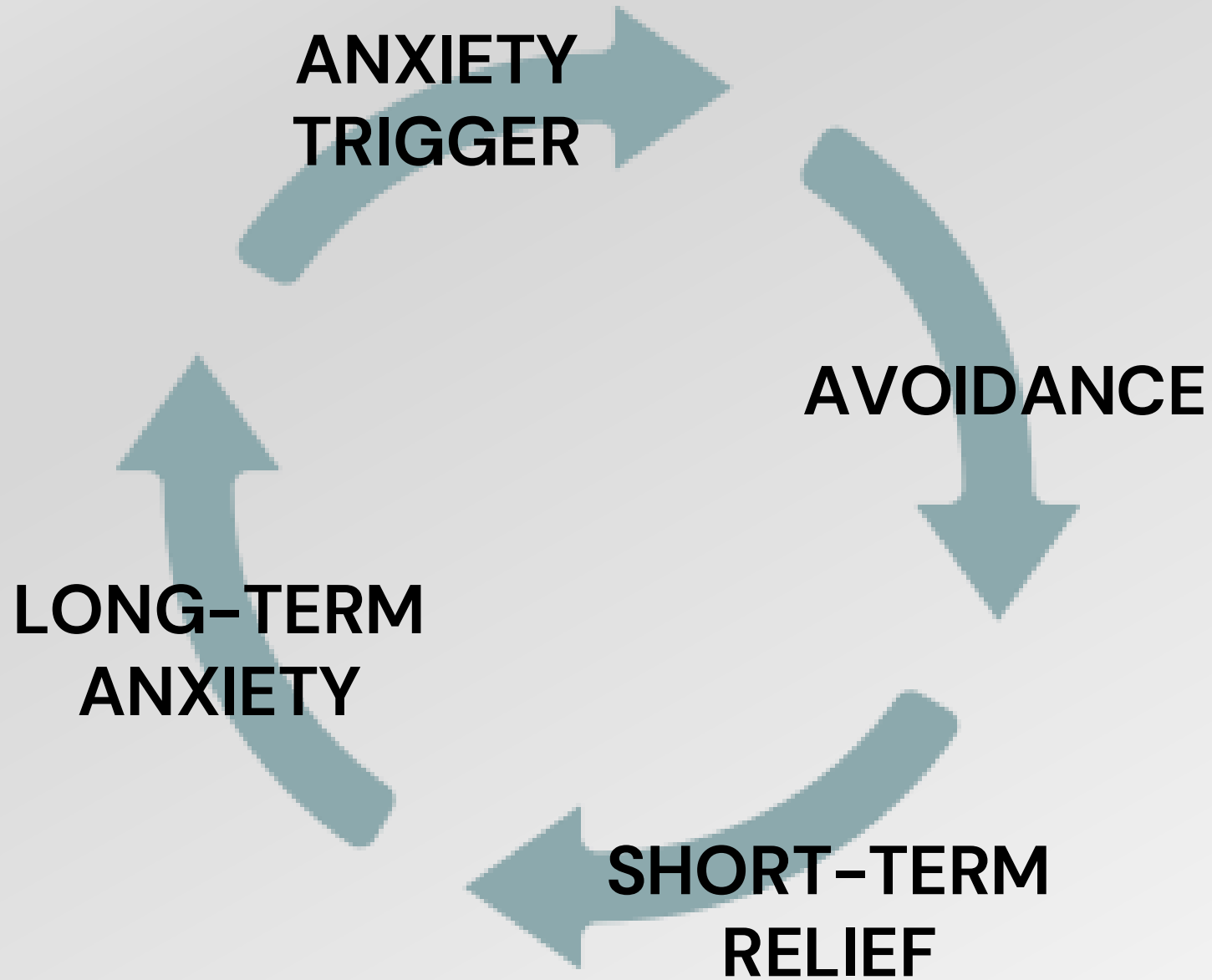
**WHAT ARE YOU
AFRAID OF?**





AVOIDANCE CYCLE

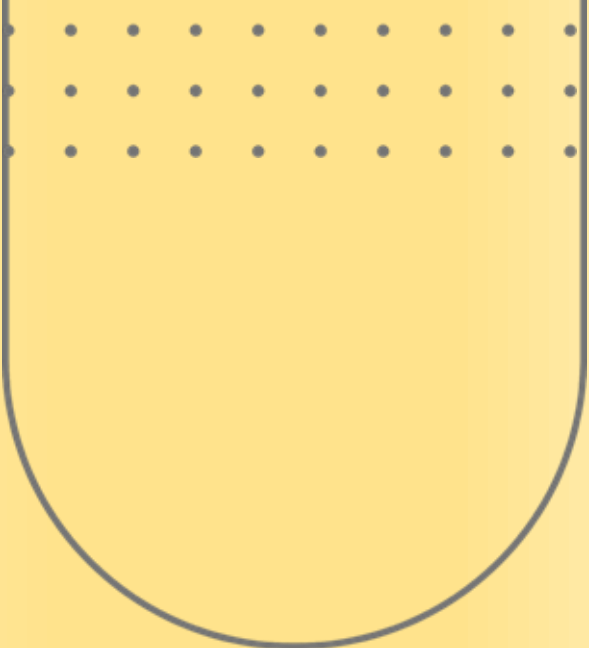






THE BRAVE CYCLE





THE BRAVE CYCLE

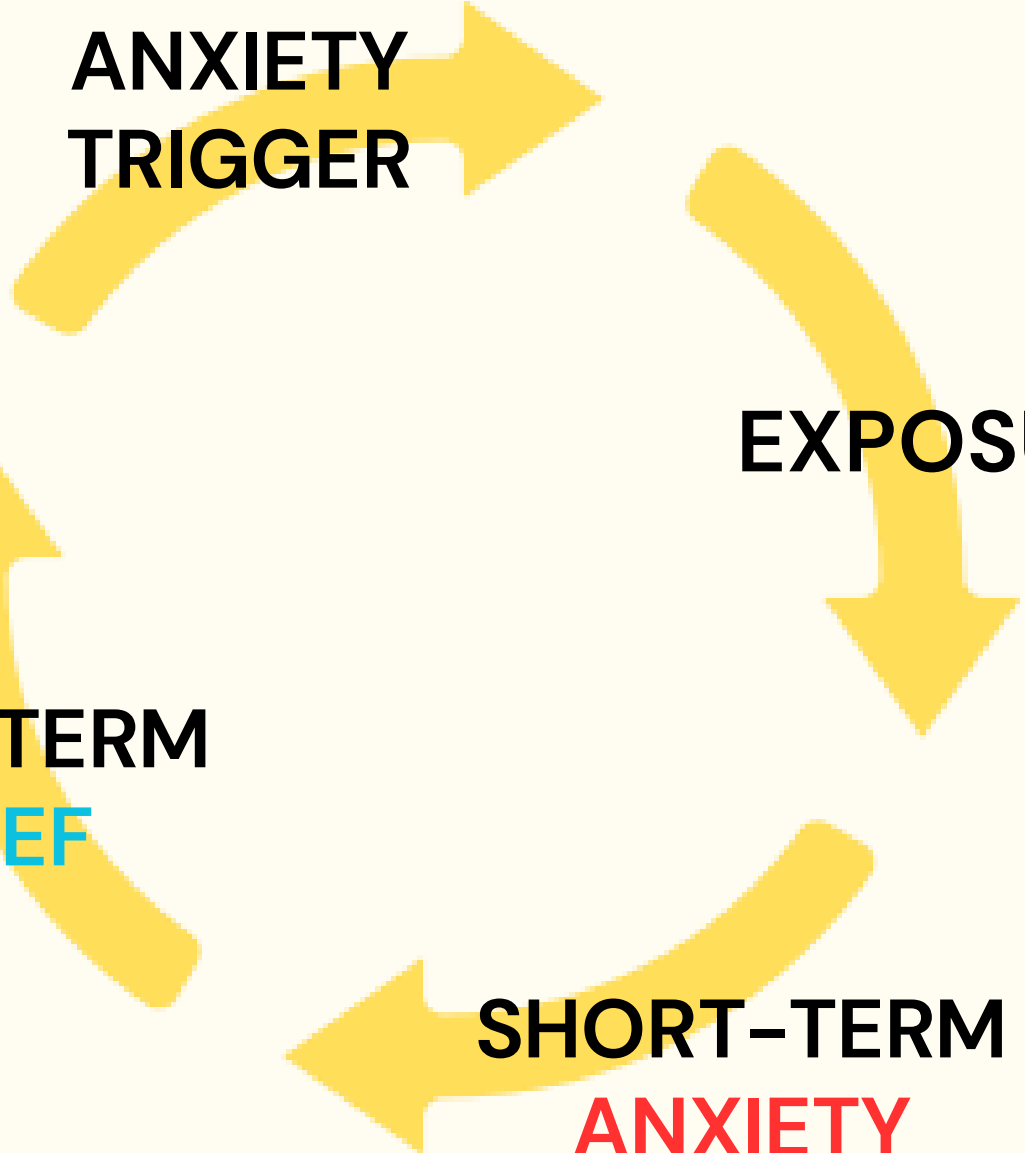


**ANXIETY
TRIGGER**

EXPOSURE

**LONG-TERM
RELIEF**

**SHORT-TERM
ANXIETY**



Communication Ladder



A wide-angle photograph of a modern cable-stayed bridge with a red deck and white towers, spanning a deep, rocky canyon. The bridge is divided into four sections by two tall towers. The sky is clear and blue. The canyon walls are steep and covered in green vegetation.

1. Noncommunicative

2. Non-verbal

3. Transitional

4. Verbal

Adapted from Dr.
Elisa Shipon-Blum

Stage 0: Noncommunicative

- Not responding
- Not initiating



Stage 1: Nonverbal

- Nonverbally responsive
- Nonverbally initiative



Stage 2: Transitional

- Responds via sounds (grunts, animal sounds, sound combinations/letters, etc.) or a transitional object
- Initiating with sounds, transitional object, or AAC





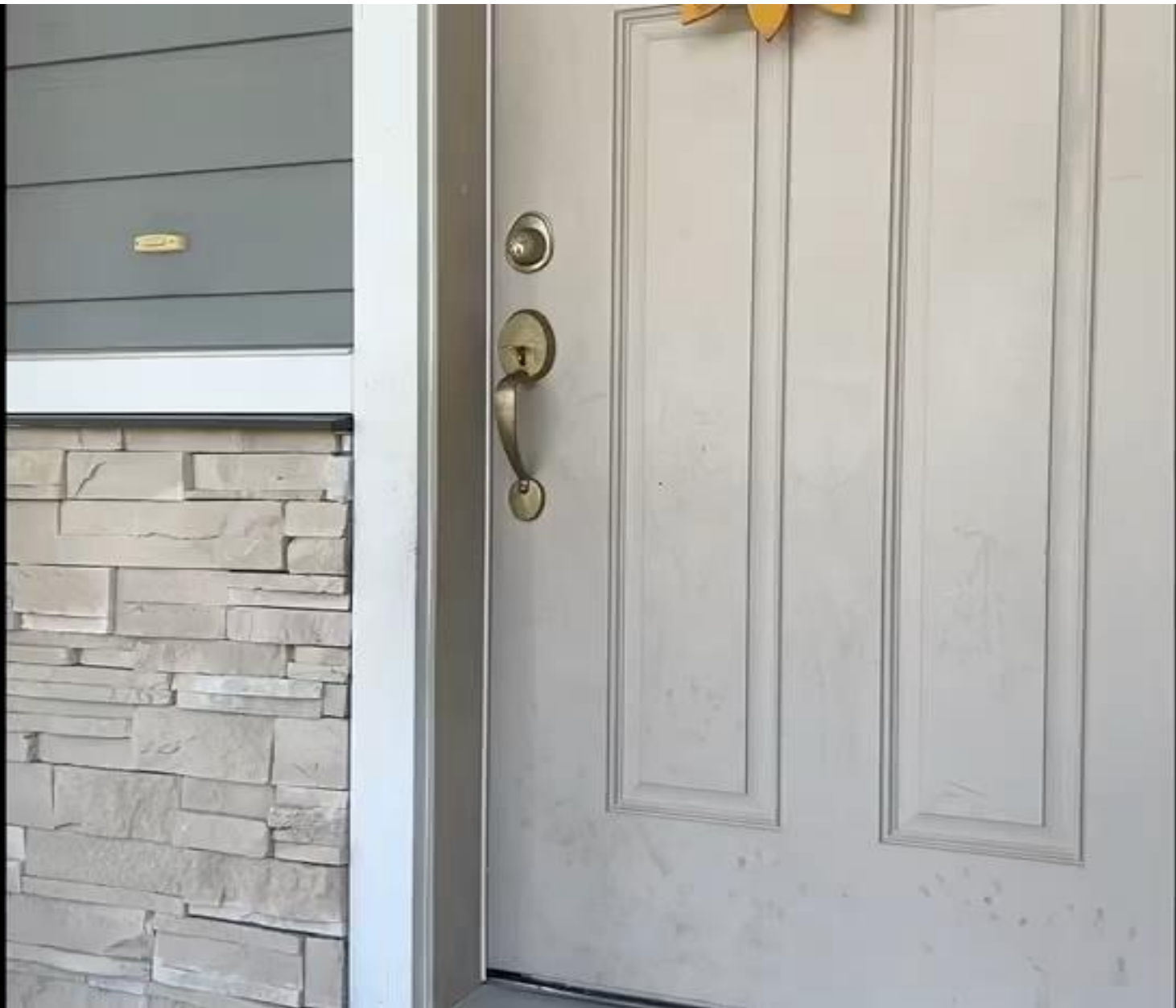
Stage 3: Verbal

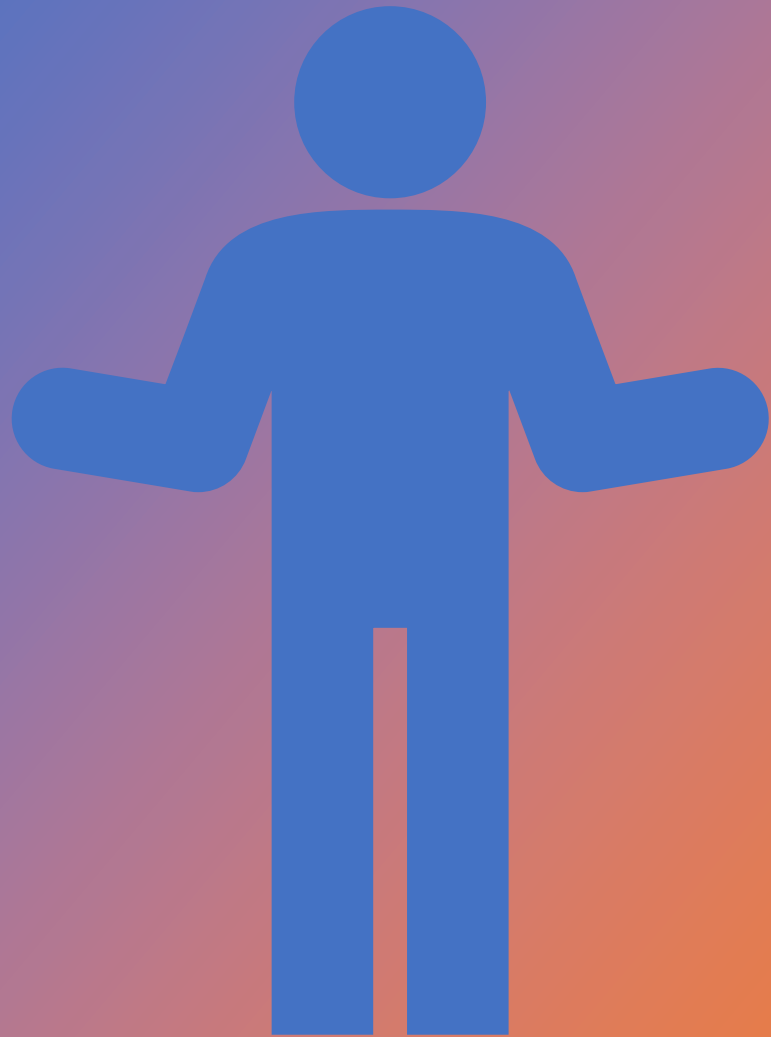
- Approximate speech/direct speech (altered/invented language, baby talk, scripted, soft whisper, speaking)

"Most of the old moles
I know wish they had
listened less to their fears and
more to their dreams."



Do Children
Want This??





What Did You
Notice?





Learning to Love Silence



BRAVE

SARA BAREILLES



Questions?



References

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