THINK SMARTER LEAD BETTER

WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

Strengthening Attorney-Client Relationships

NEXTIONS

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Crossroads for Florida Kids
September 30, 2026

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WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

Input. Memory. Knowledge

INPUT



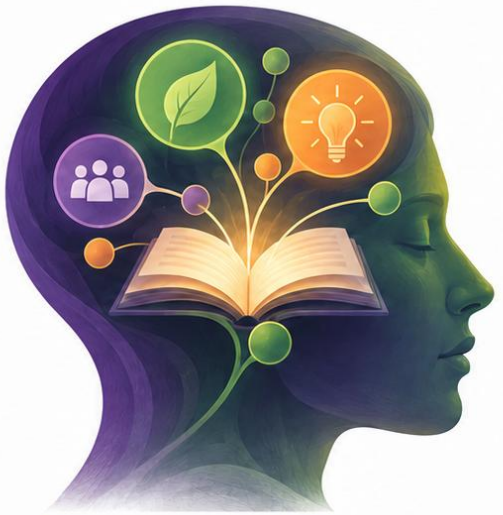
What we take in

MEMORY



What we recall

KNOWLEDGE



What we understand

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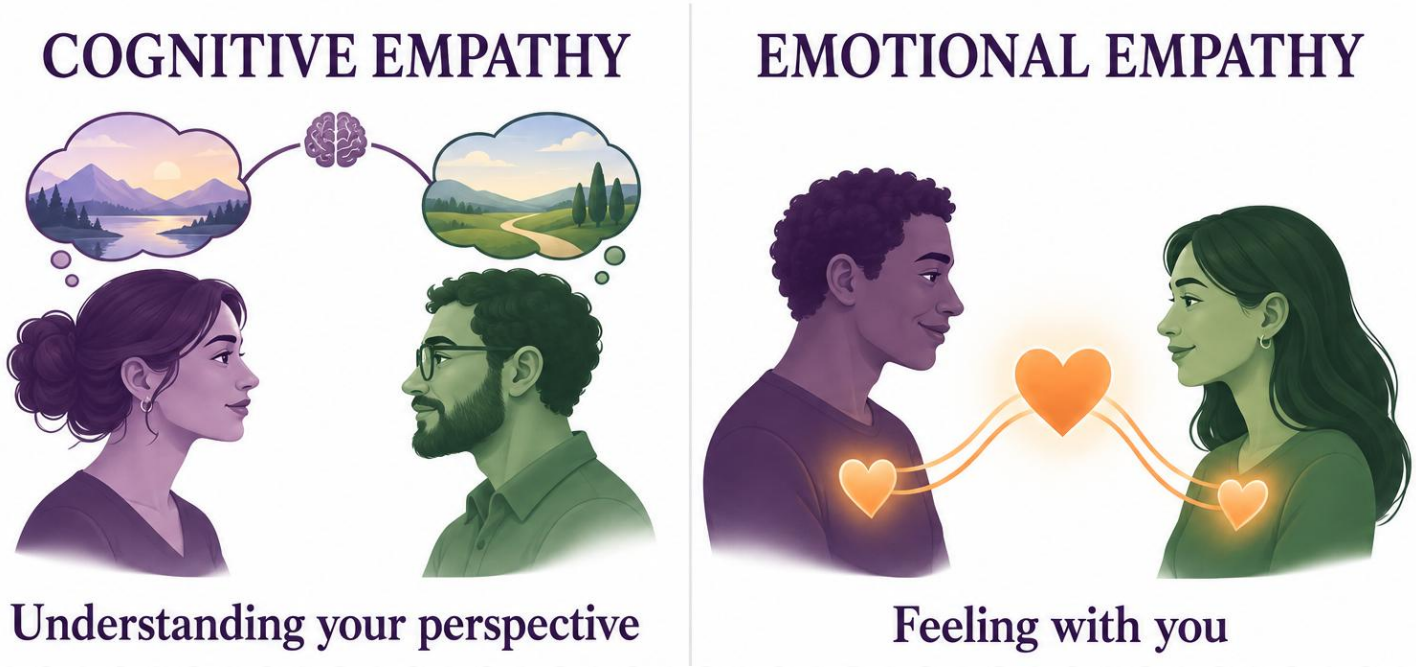
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Cognitive Bias & The Intentions-Actions Gap



WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

The Importance of Cognitive Empathy & Connection



Both can support connection. Cognitive empathy helps us check our assumptions. Move from "How would I feel?" to "How does this person experience this, and what am I still missing?"

Curiosity helps us understand the client's world. "*Tell me about your auntie and the role she plays in your life.*" Ask what family, home, safety, freedom, or support means to them.

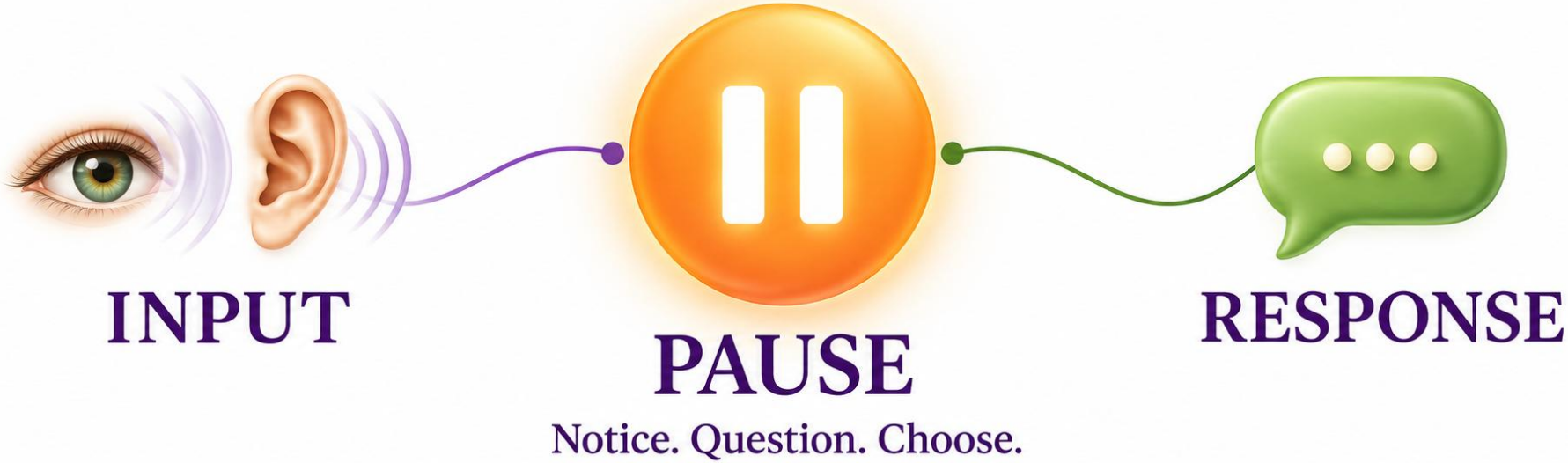
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WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES
Mutuality and A Shared Path



We do not have to share similar life experiences to identify one goal worth working toward together, one path that we walk together. Mutuality helps us neutralize biases…for that path.

WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES
Observation and Interpretation



Inputs
- A client does not communicate, is not forthcoming in their responses, misses a meeting.
- A client says you won't understand, nothing will help, it's never going to work.
- A client is constantly late, has excuses for behavior, acts nonchalantly arrogant.

Pause
- Ask what is fact. What do you know to be actually true?
- Ask the client to imagine the opposite. *What do you think will work in this situation? What is one thing that would have helped you get back to me, to get here on time?*

WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

The Path of Connected Communiction

1. **Start with what you know.**
   Separate facts from interpretations.
2. **Identify your shared path.**
   Agree on a goal worth pursuing together.
3. **Agree on communication.**
   Find workable times, places, and methods.
4. **Understand the situation.**
   Clarify options, constraints, and meanings.
5. **Make a workable plan.**
   Agree on next steps and address barriers.
6. **Define realistic progress.**
   Decide together what improvement looks like.
7. **Revisit setbacks.**
   Ask what got in the way. Adjust together.
8. **Follow through and reassess.**
   Keep commitments. Review what has changed.

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Working Across Differences
The Path of Connected Communiction

Start With What You Know
- Identify the client's age, what has happened, the current circumstances, and any upcoming deadlines.
- Separate confirmed facts, information someone reported, and your interpretations.
- Describe behavior specifically: "missed two meetings" instead of "doesn't care."
- Identify what you still need to learn from the client.

Identify the Path You Share
- Ask what the client wants to happen and what concerns them most.
- Explain your role, how you can help, and the limits of what you can promise.
- Identify a goal you can work toward together, even where other priorities differ.
- Put that shared goal into words you both understand.
- Clarify words like "deal," "risk," "best option," and "cooperation."

Agree on How You Will Communicate
- Find workable times, places, and methods for communicating.
- Ask about privacy, phone access, schedules, and preferences.
- Agree on response expectations, reminders, and what to do when contact breaks down.
- Choose a format that gives the client room to ask questions and understand the answers.
- Remember that brevity and silence require context. Ask questions.

Working Across Differences
The Path of Connected Communiction

Build a Shared Understanding of the Situation

- Ask how the client understands what has happened and what comes next.
- Explain the current situation, available options, and relevant constraints in plain language.
- Clarify words such as “risk,” “deal,” “cooperation,” and “best option.”
- Check your explanation by asking the client to describe their understanding.
- Ask about transportation, phone access, food, clothing, or personal-care supplies without assuming a need. *“Would transportation, a reminder, or something else make getting to the appointment easier?”*

Define Realistic Progress Together

- Ask what improvement would look like to the client.
- Distinguish the larger goal from the next achievable milestone.
- Account for the client’s circumstances and what neither of you controls.
- Recognize changes such as more consistent contact, less family conflict, or movement toward education or employment.

Working Across Differences
The Path of Connected Communiction

Respond to Setbacks With Curiosity

- When a meeting is missed or a plan stalls, pause before assigning intention.
- Ask what happened and what you may have misunderstood.
- Revisit the practical barriers, the communication agreement, and whether the plan remains workable.
- Adjust the next step while keeping expectations clear.

WORKING ACROSS DIFFERENCES
Working Through Each Conversation

