

Abstract: Keynote presentation: Susan Gillis Chapman

That's Not How The Story Ends, interrupting aggressive narratives

In this presentation I will tell the story of a woman, Antoinette Tuff, who disarmed a gunman who entered a school with the intention to kill and be killed by police. Her story is an example of how to 'positively interrupt' the escalation of violence. To analyze this, I will introduce instructions for mindful communication that are based upon the principles of contemplative psychology.

- **The symbol of green light** is the view that human nature is basically good, peaceful, intrinsically healthy. We are fundamentally interdependent, selfless and 'wired for connection' with each other. This primary openness is always available. This natural communication system is represented as a green light, a balanced two-way flow of information, giving and receiving.
- **What does it feel like to be open?**
- ***When the light is green, Go:*** There are three pathways we can follow to reconnect with our natural intelligence of the present moment.
 1. ***Awake body:*** Our inborn capacity to attune to our sense perceptions, both within our body and with the environment of the present moment.
 2. ***Tender heart:*** Our inborn capacity to attune to the emotional intelligence of empathy which is naturally selfless, like a 'mixing zone' of two rivers. We gain intuitive information about how to respond to situations.
 3. ***Open mind:*** Our inborn capacity to be curious, to learn from experience and feedback comes from being flexible, reality testing information.
- All communication begins within ourselves. Meditation is the way we train to "positively interrupt" our inner stories and reconnect to the present moment. This enables us to be present with others in our everyday conversations.

Antoinette's response to the gunman was studied by survival experts. First they saw that she was able to have an inner calmness in spite of being terrified. She attributes this to a practice of silent prayer that she does every morning. "For the same amount of time I talk to God, I also listen silently."

- **The symbol of the red light** indicates that aggression—or heartlessness-- is a secondary reaction. Closing our heart is a self-defeating effort to resist pain, fear or discomfort. This and other secondary reactions depend on shutting down our connection to the present moment, convincing ourselves that we have to defend our territorial barriers in spite of self-defeating results.

- **What does it feel like when communication closes down?**
- Hatred and cruelty are red light processes created by “heartless mind”, a set of inner stories and external conversations that use false logic to persuade us to go forward. This logic is ‘negative negativity’, or ‘toxic certainty’. We use this to suppress our innate intelligence and turn other people into objects. We also put a barrier up within ourselves, suppressing the wakefulness of our body, the empathy, or tenderness of our heart and openness of our mind.
- Here we will identify four stages of red light conversation that escalate from the starting point of resisting pain all the way to giving ourselves permission to hurt others.
- *The second way that Antoinette responded to the gunman was as a loving mother. demonstrated that the power of compassion is the key to interrupting the escalation of hatred. She did this by bringing her attention back to the gunman’s original pain rather than reacting to the barrier between them.*

When the light is red, Stop. Training in compassionate communication

1. Recognize when the light is red, when communication is closed
2. Create space, “stop”. Don’t push forward.
3. Feel the underlying pain.

- **The symbol of the yellow light** points to the fear of vulnerability that triggers us to shut down. But if we bring compassionate insight to this fear we can become skilful in helping others. This background anxiety can be the pathway back to openness.

When we feel groundless, fearful and cut off from others, it’s time to bring compassionate insight to our self-doubts. Do we listen to the inner bully voice that tells us we’re basically bad, unlovable, unworthy? Or can we comfort ourselves and each other.

The third way that Antoinette responded to the gunman was to seize control of his story, confidently interrupting him by saying “No, this is not how the story will end”. Her personal experience of despair was her bridge to the gunman. It was only because she’d made her own journey through hopelessness that she could positively interrupt the gunman’s storyline.

- **When the light is yellow, take care.** Training to interrupt negative stories
 1. Recognize when the light is yellow, feeling groundless and uncertain
 2. Protect vulnerability.
 3. Engage in a ‘restorative dialogue’: interrupt aggressive storylines with compassionate inquiry.

Interrupting heartlessness:

Red light: four 'heartless mind' conversations that escalate hatred :

- Complaint: 'this suffering should not be happening'
- Divisiveness: seeking a target for blame.
- Blame: projecting onto the target person or group
- Retaliation: "making them suffer will give me relief"

Green light: four steps in resolving conflicts

- Pacifying: using 'the green light power of 'awake body' to become grounded in the facts. (what did you see, hear, touch etc): identify the core problem.
- Enriching: using the green light power of 'tender heart' as a bridge, deep listening, encouragement, appreciating differences, brainstorming ideas from shared perspective.
- Magnetizing: using the green light power of 'open mind', bringing clarity, gentle speech, dialogue that is co-created.
- Seizing Control: 'taking the car keys'; the confidence of skilful action, saying 'no' to harm, infusing with mercy and forgiveness.

Yellow light: Antoinette's example of how relating through fear and vulnerability allowed the power of compassion to interrupt the gunman's red light narrative and bring the crisis to resolution without causing harm.