



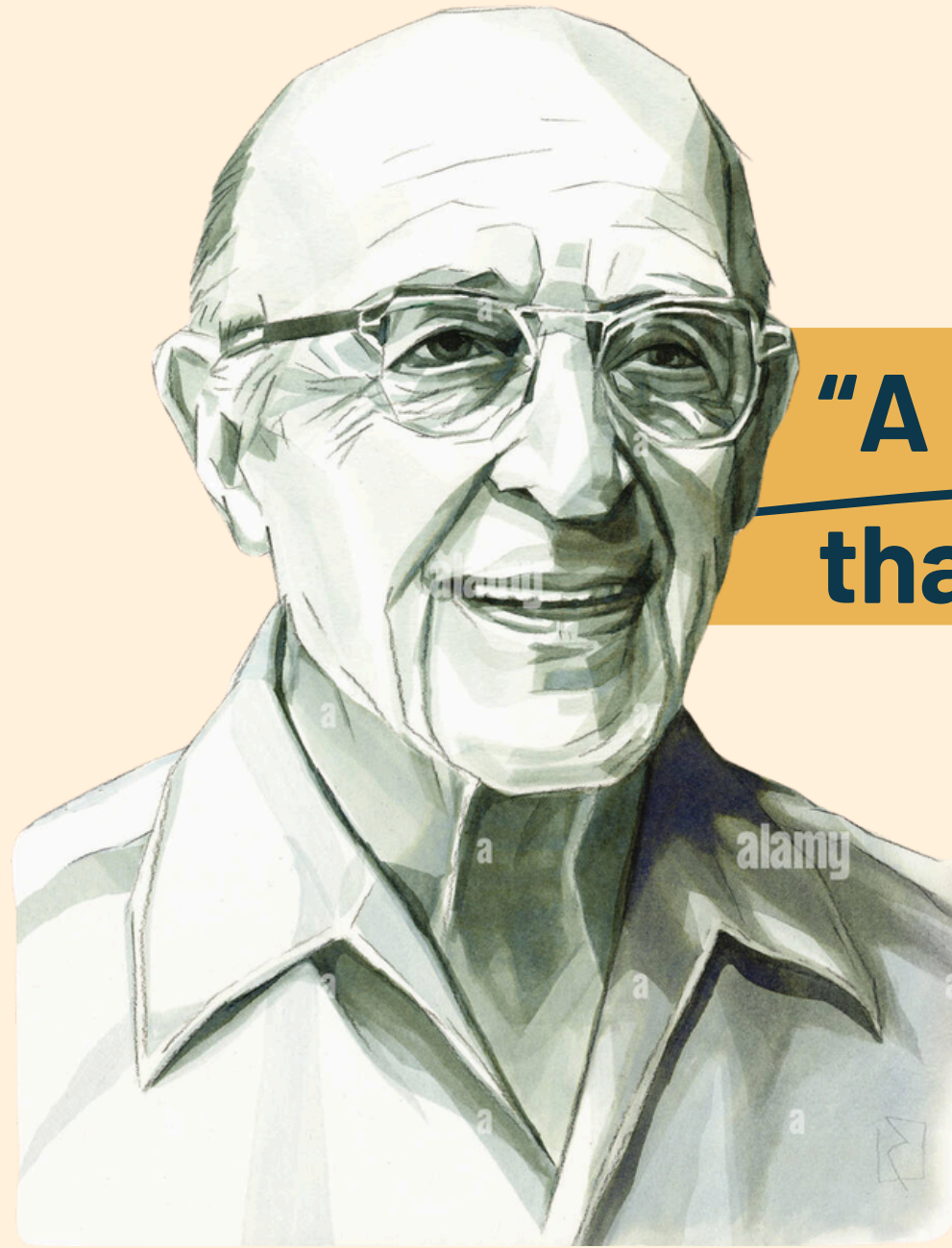


# Belonging Starts with Me

Strategies to Increase Belonging Amongst Staff

Gaelin Elmore | Children's Justice Conference 2026

# What is Belonging actually?

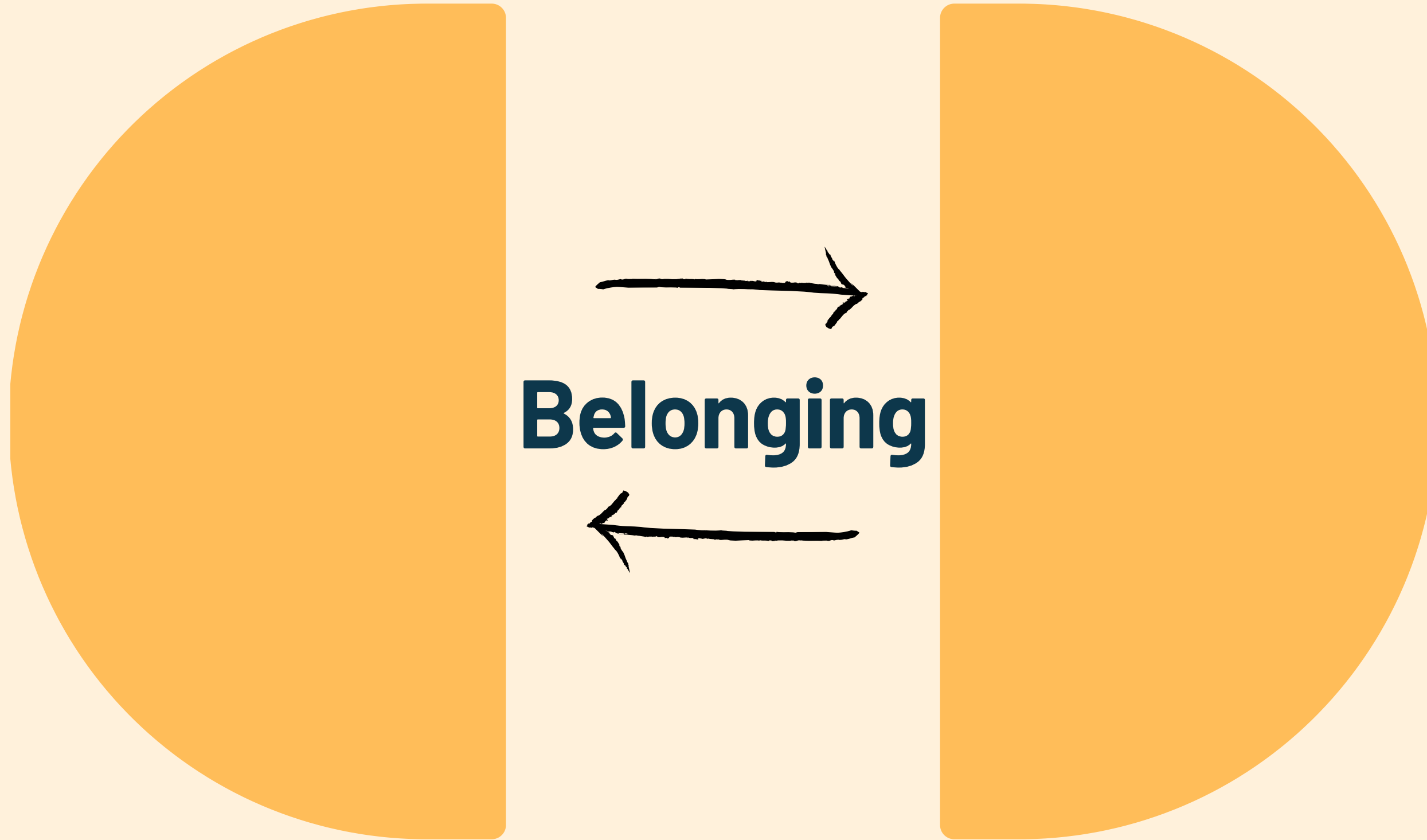


**"A unique and subjective experience that relates to ...."**

- **a YEARNING for connection with others,**
- **a NEED for positive regard,**
- **a DESIRE for personal connection.**

# Safety

# Connection



# Belonging

# Safety



# Connection



# Belonging



# Safety

# Connection



**Belonging**



# Belonging Isn't Optional

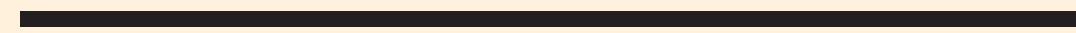


# Belonging Isn't Optional



**BRAINSTEM**

Temperature // Respiration // Cardiac



Am I safe?

# Belonging Isn't Optional



## **DIENCEPHALON**

Arousal // Sleep // Appetite // Movement

## **BRAINSTEM**

Temperature // Respiration // Cardiac

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Am I safe?

# Belonging Isn't Optional

## LIMBIC

Reward // Memory // Bonding // Emotions

Am I loved?  
Am I connected?

## DIENCEPHALON

Arousal // Sleep // Appetite // Movement

## BRAINSTEM

Temperature // Respiration // Cardiac

Am I safe?

# Belonging Isn't Optional

## CORTEX

Creativity // "Thinking" // Language // Values // Time // Hope

What can I learn from  
this?

## LIMBIC

Reward // Memory // Bonding // Emotions

Am I loved?  
Am I connected?

## DIENCEPHALON

Arousal // Sleep // Appetite // Movement

## BRAINSTEM

Temperature // Respiration // Cardiac

Am I safe?



# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs





**Safety**

**Physiological**



**Belonging**

**Safety**

**Physiological**

**Self-Actualization**

**Esteem**

**Belonging**

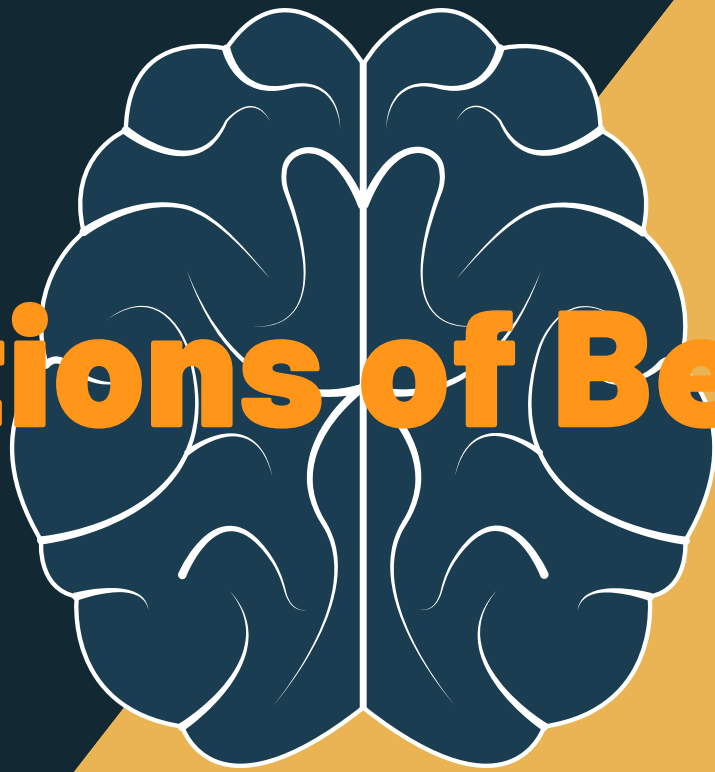
**Safety**

**Physiological**

# 2 Conditions of Belonging

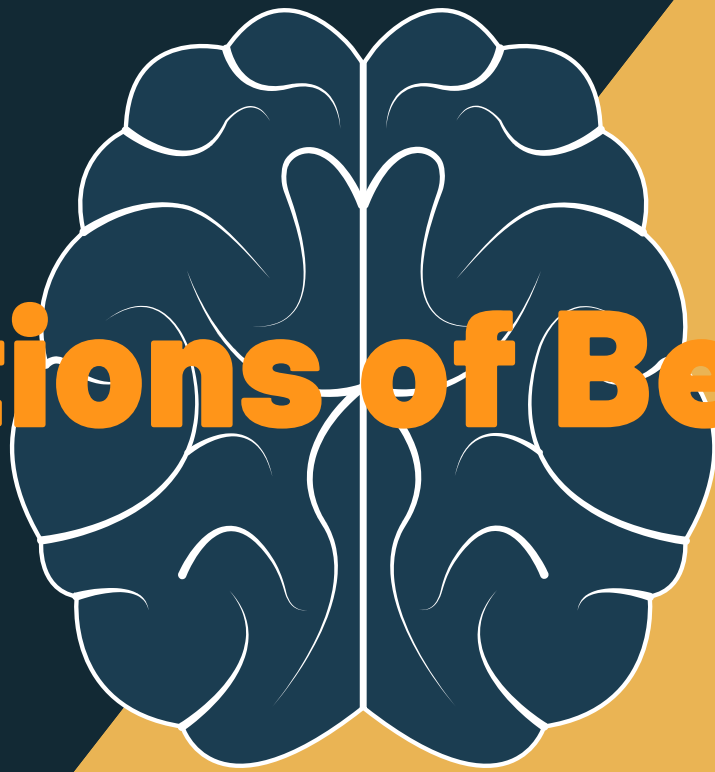


# 2 Conditions of Belonging



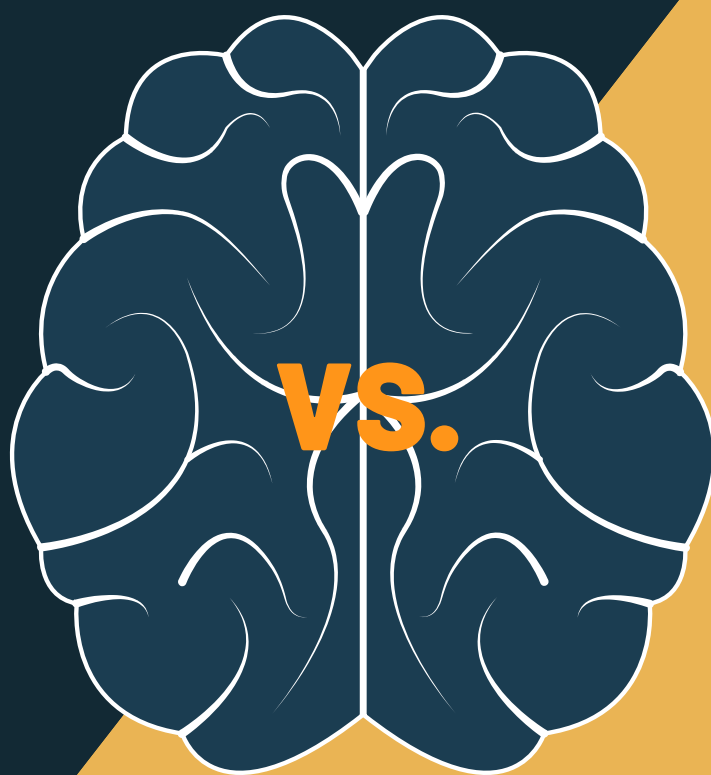
# INDIVIDUAL

**2 Conditions of Belonging**



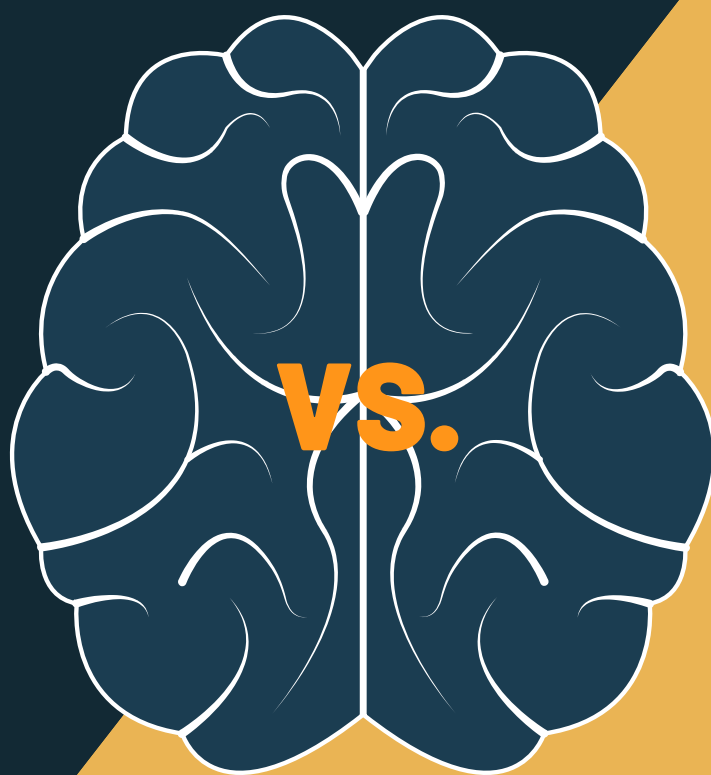
**INDIVIDUAL**

**VULNERABLE  
AUTHENTICITY**



**INDIVIDUAL**

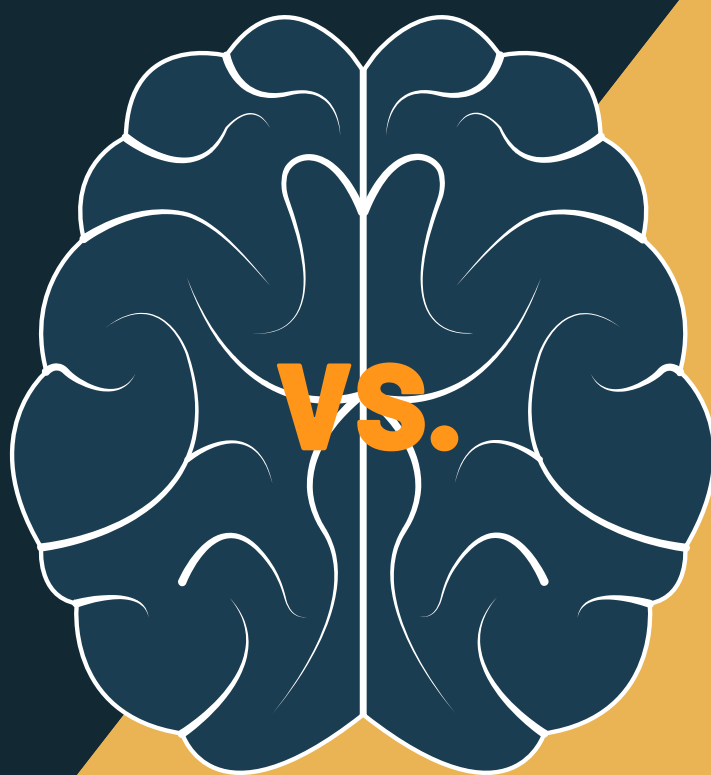
**VULNERABLE  
AUTHENTICITY**



**ENVIRONMENT**

**INDIVIDUAL**

**VULNERABLE  
AUTHENTICITY**



**SUPPORTIVE  
ENVIRONMENT**

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Guarded** (low vulnerability, hostile environment)

**(ambiguity)**

**I don't know where I stand, so I stay small**

Student Consequence:

- Disengagement – quiet removal, not present mentally
- Cognitive Drain – energy focused on safety, not learning
- Low help-seeking – low belief in support leads to unnoticed needs and support
- Inconsistent performance – some glimmers of presence or hope aren't constant
- Social isolation – may be invited but often declined

Faculty Consequence:

- Decision fatigue – overthinking and second-guessing leads to mental strain
- Low Collaboration – highly likely to operate in silos
- Emotional detachment – “Just get through it” “TGIF” mindset
- Quiet Quitting – emotionally, mental check outs, abrupt exits with little/no warning

# Belonging Barometer



**Social Connection**



**Psychological Safety**



**Co-creation**



# **Social Connection**

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refers to the quality and quantity of a person's social relationships, their emotional connections, and the relationship satisfaction.



# Psychological Safety

is a shared belief held by members of a team (or community) that others on the team (or community), will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for speaking up with ideas, questions, and concerns, or for admitting mistakes.



# Co-creation

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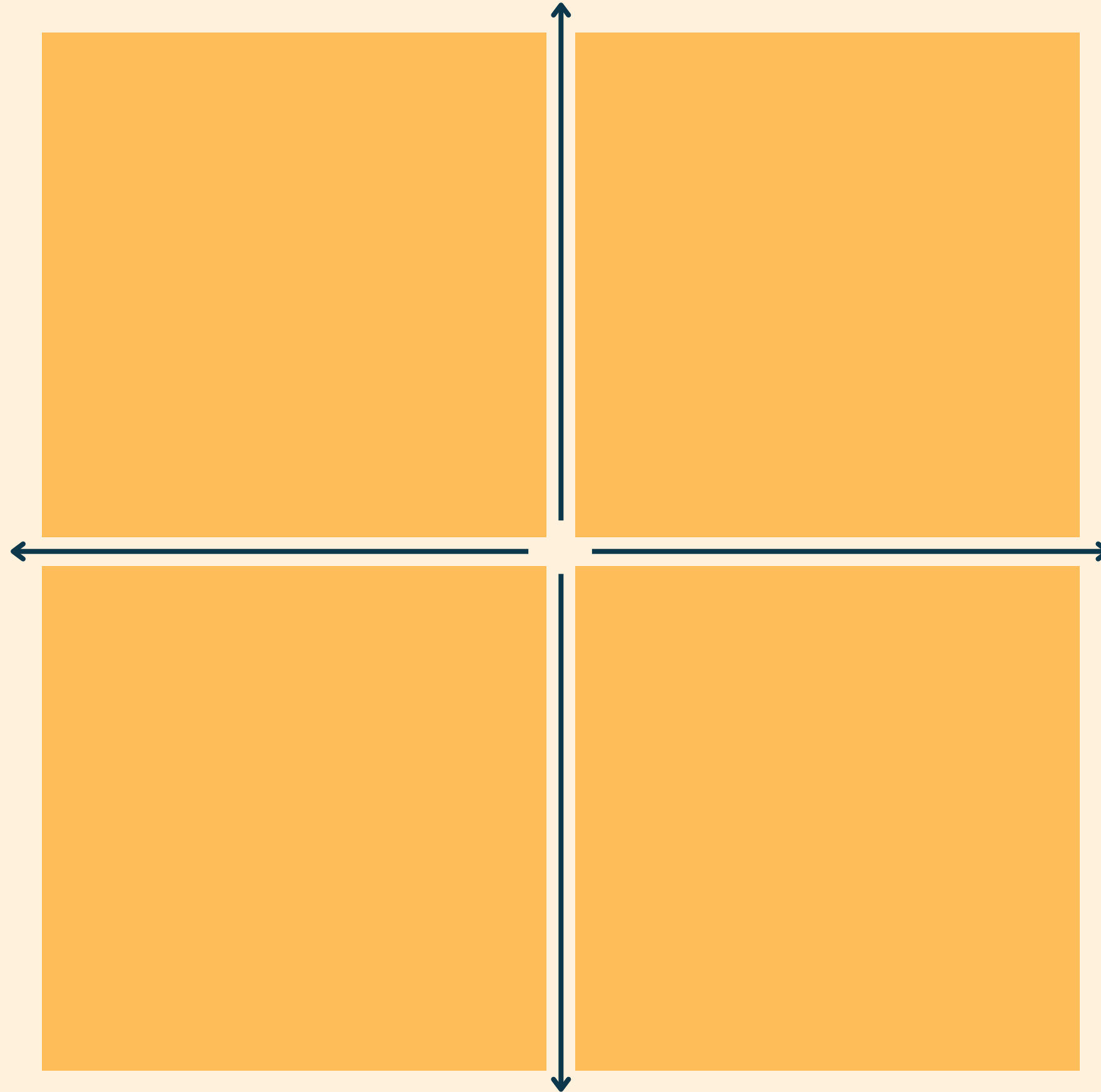
the ability to have agency in the organizations, systems, and structures that shape one's future, if desired. The right to have a say and make demands upon a society.

**High Vulnerability**

**Hostile  
Environment**

**Supportive  
Environment**

**Low Vulnerability**



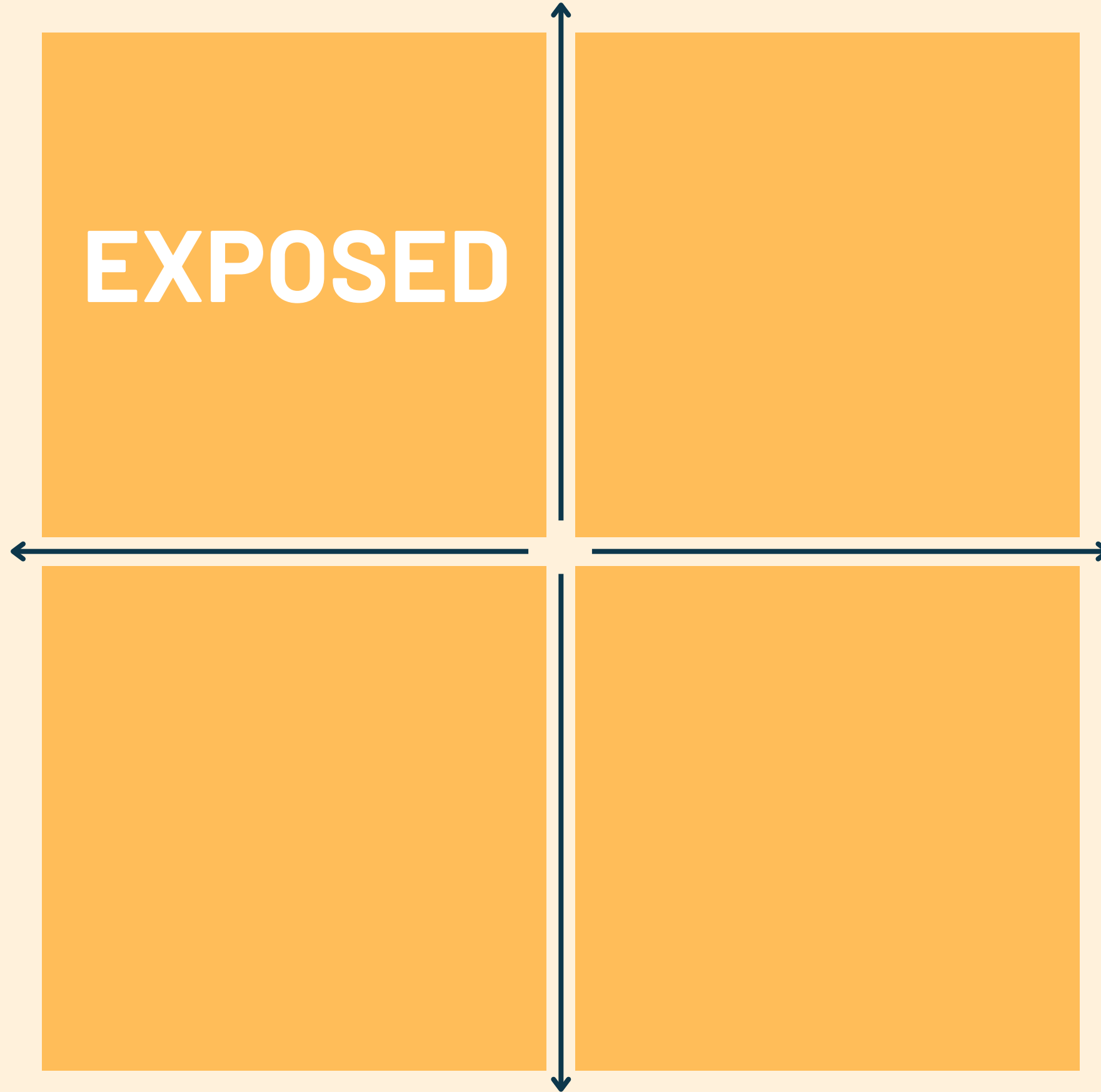
**High Vulnerability**

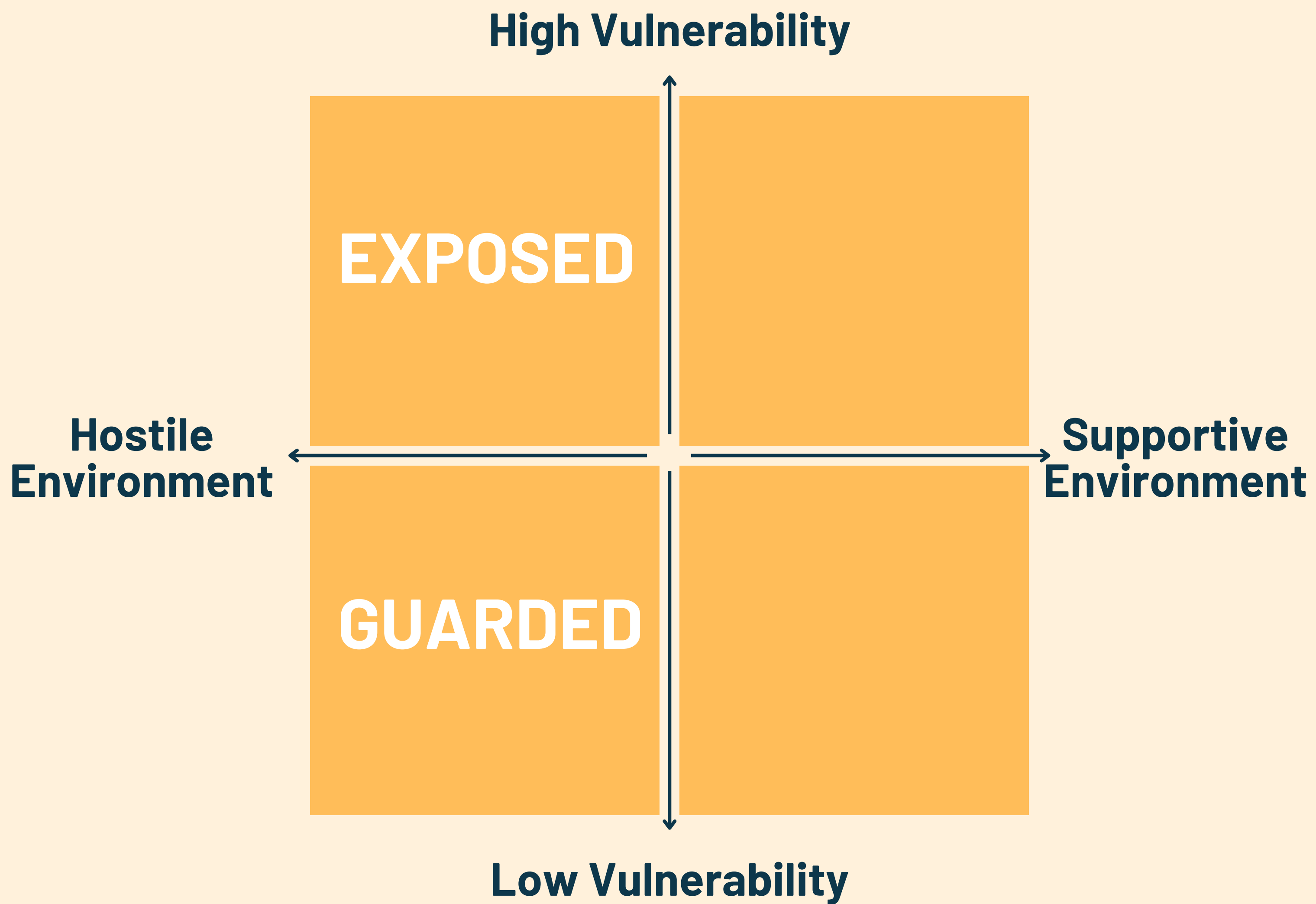
**EXPOSED**

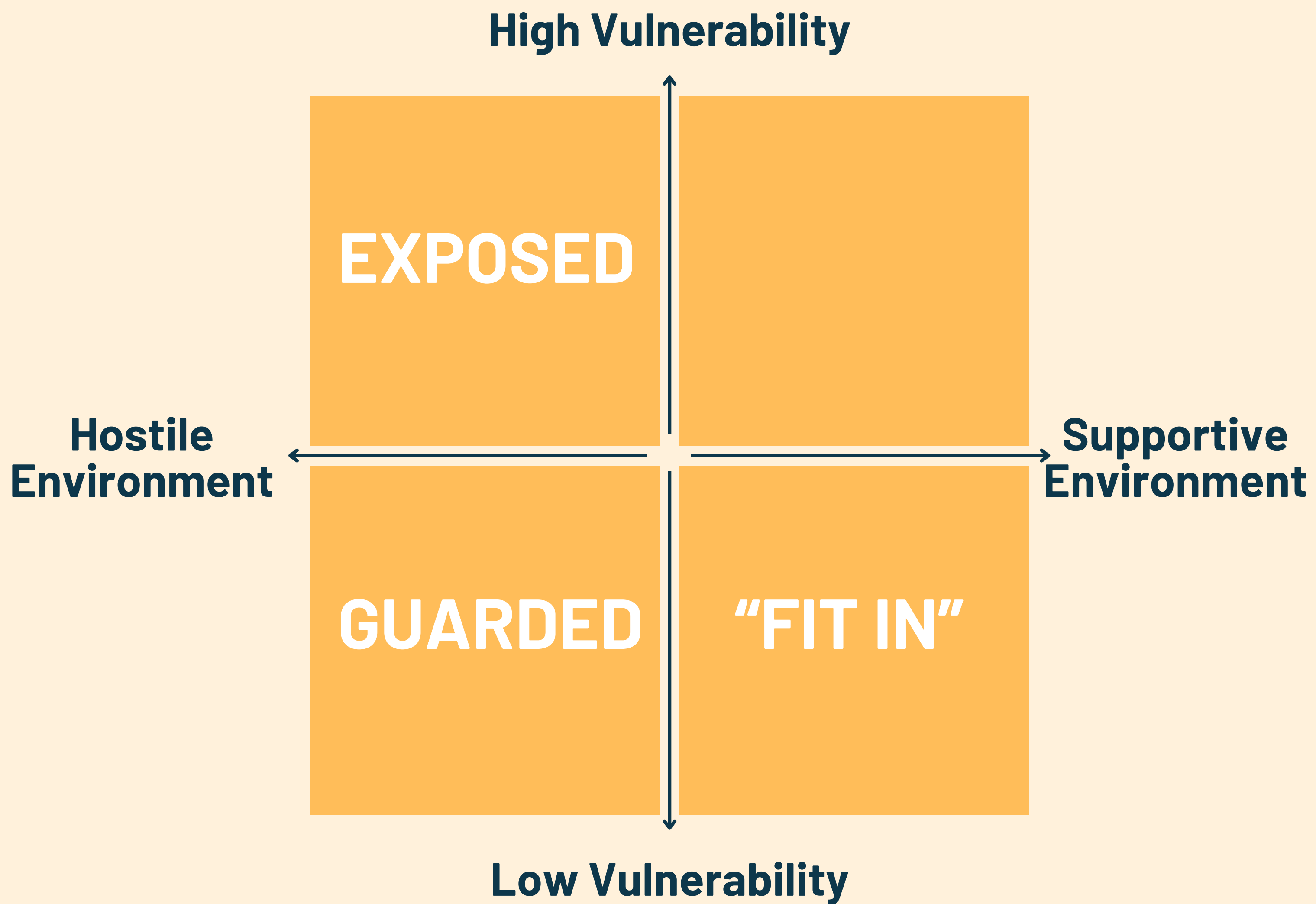
**Hostile  
Environment**

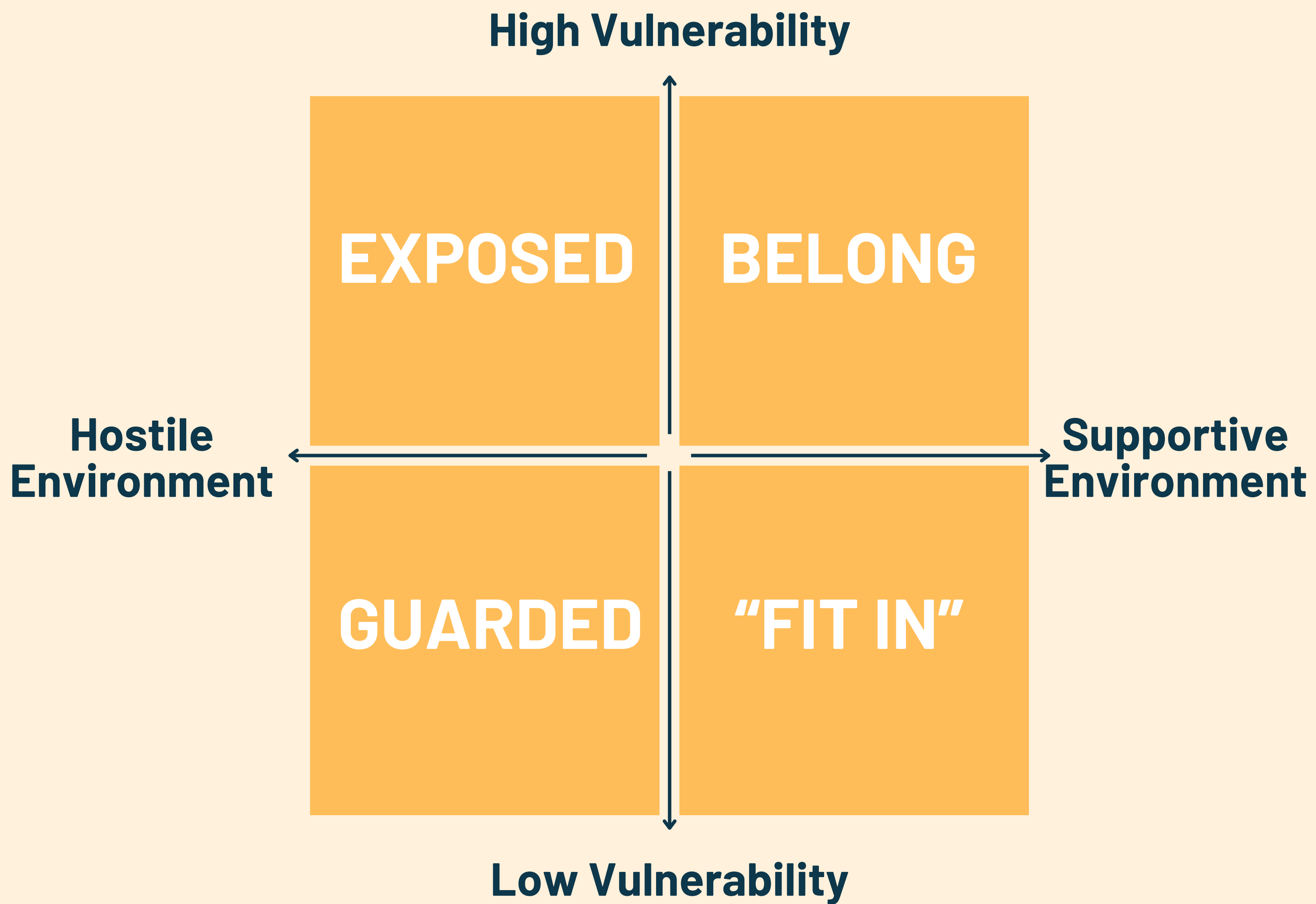
**Supportive  
Environment**

**Low Vulnerability**











**This Assessment  
will stay active  
until 5/8/2026**

# BE THE DIFFERENCE



**Code:  
TALK**

**YOUR FEEDBACK**

**LET'S STAY CONNECTED**



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