Overview v3.0
January 2025

Better Conversations Course

Who should read this document?

This guide is for people who want to get a quick overview of the Better Conversations Online course design.

If you want more detail, you can find the latest versions of our ‘flight plans’ here: Flight Plans

If you don’t know what a flight plan is yet, or don’t want that detailed level of information, read on!

We will be adding information on the website, including videos if documents aren’t your thing.

We believe in continual innovation. We are always learning, which is fun, and helps us keep going.

On the other hand, we are serious about reflecting on, and applying that learning. We are driven to continually raise the bar, to deliver a better experience for everyone.

We designed this guide and the accompanying video for a broad and diverse audience.

If you have any suggestions on how it can be improved, we’d love to hear from you at:

hello@betterconversations.foundation

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Contents

We put some basic information about the course in this document. The sections are:

1 How to use this guide

2 How we designed this course

3 Basic building blocks

4 The modules

5 How to get in touch

Please let us know if you think something is missing (also if you find this guide useful)

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

How to use this guide

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Structure of this guide

Use this guide to understand how the overall course works.

We've tried to include enough information to make it worthwhile, but not too much to overwhelm.

You might want to keep it handy if you are delivering the course (or want to) as it contains key timings for each module.

We have included some principles of course design, to help it make sense (Section 2). There's more information we can provide if you are interested in this.

We introduce the main building blocks of the course in Section 3. The module overviews are contained in Section 4.

Let us know if this structure works for you.

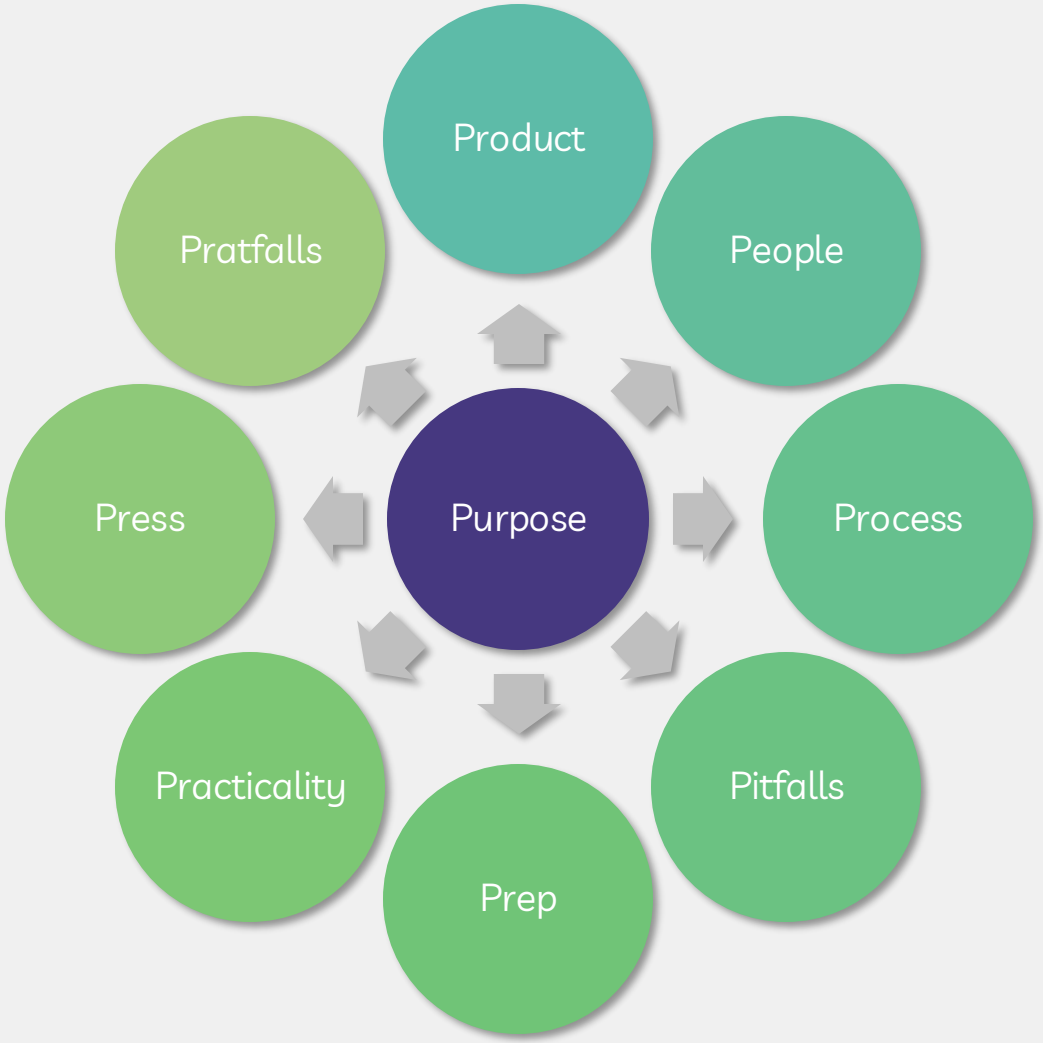
© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

How we designed this course

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

We designed this course to fulfil a purpose



We developed this course to encourage innovation and collaboration in our sister company. And then we realised that we could encode some of what we have learned. That seemed worth sharing.

You can read about one of frameworks that inspired us here 7Ps Framework – Gamestorming.

We've noticed there are two more Ps that are useful:

Press – meaning context, the pressure exerted by the environment

Pratfalls – how not to make an idiot of yourself and your delivery team partners

However, that requires a whole new document to explain it all, or alternatively, a call with us.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Our crew

Delivering this course is team effort, so there are systems and processes in place to ensure that everyone can turn up and perform at their best.

We build in psychological safety for everyone, including our delivery teams. They can ask each other for support and resources if the situation means that they are temporarily knocked off-course.

Our aim is to build a team of teams, to spread this work far and wide.

You might be wondering about the earlier reference to flight plans. It's a term we use because we think of course delivery like flying a plane.

There are key roles like the pilot (here, the facilitator) and air traffic control (the producer in our team).

Co-facilitators are important when the cohort size is large (our equivalent of co-pilots). It's also a good way of training people to facilitate the course. We can co-produce to transfer skills to new producers too.

We also have a team of people – our ground crew - who work to ensure the technology and logistics all work smoothly behind the scenes.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Patterns, chunking, practice

Over the years, we have developed design and delivery patterns. These allow us to standardise the course and make it reliable, which means we have confidence that it will deliver the outcomes we promise. Some of these patterns are presented in this document.

We chunk content down into bite-size pieces. This means simplifying where we can, to remove theory when it gets in the way of learning.

Finally, allowing participants to practise the skills in a safe environment and then ‘out in the field’ helps things stick. We use and develop the skills in our own day jobs to keep it real for ourselves too.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Photo by Lore Schodts on Unsplash

Basic building blocks

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

One chunk at a time

That’s the answer to the question “How do you eat an elephant?”

This section highlights the fundamental building blocks of each module, or how we have chunked up the content.

Once you understand what each block is designed to do, you can stack them, recombine them, knowing that they can be delivered within the allotted time.

Note: no elephants were harmed in the production of this guide.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Photo by Kaffeebart on Unsplash

Why use building blocks?

Better Conversations Foundation

We'll let you in on a secret. We are nerds. We thrive when dealing with complex challenges.

One way of managing complexity is to understand what can be predicted, then standardise it and make it reliable. This frees up people to pay attention to the remaining uncertain, ambiguous and weird stuff.

Another trick is to componentise things so similar functions sit together, and there is only a small crossover between things that are dissimilar. That means you can upgrade parts of the system without too much effect on the rest of the system.

(We are not ordinary nerds, this thinking comes from software engineering, which is nerdery at its best).

There are five sets of building blocks which are colour-coded so you can easily pick them out in later sections.

These are designed to:

1) Settle emotional state
2) Warm people up for learning
3) Inviting curiosity
4) Allow people to learn by doing
5) Embed the learning

The next bit describes these five themes and is detailed, so you might want to pause and grab a drink (and maybe a doughnut) first.

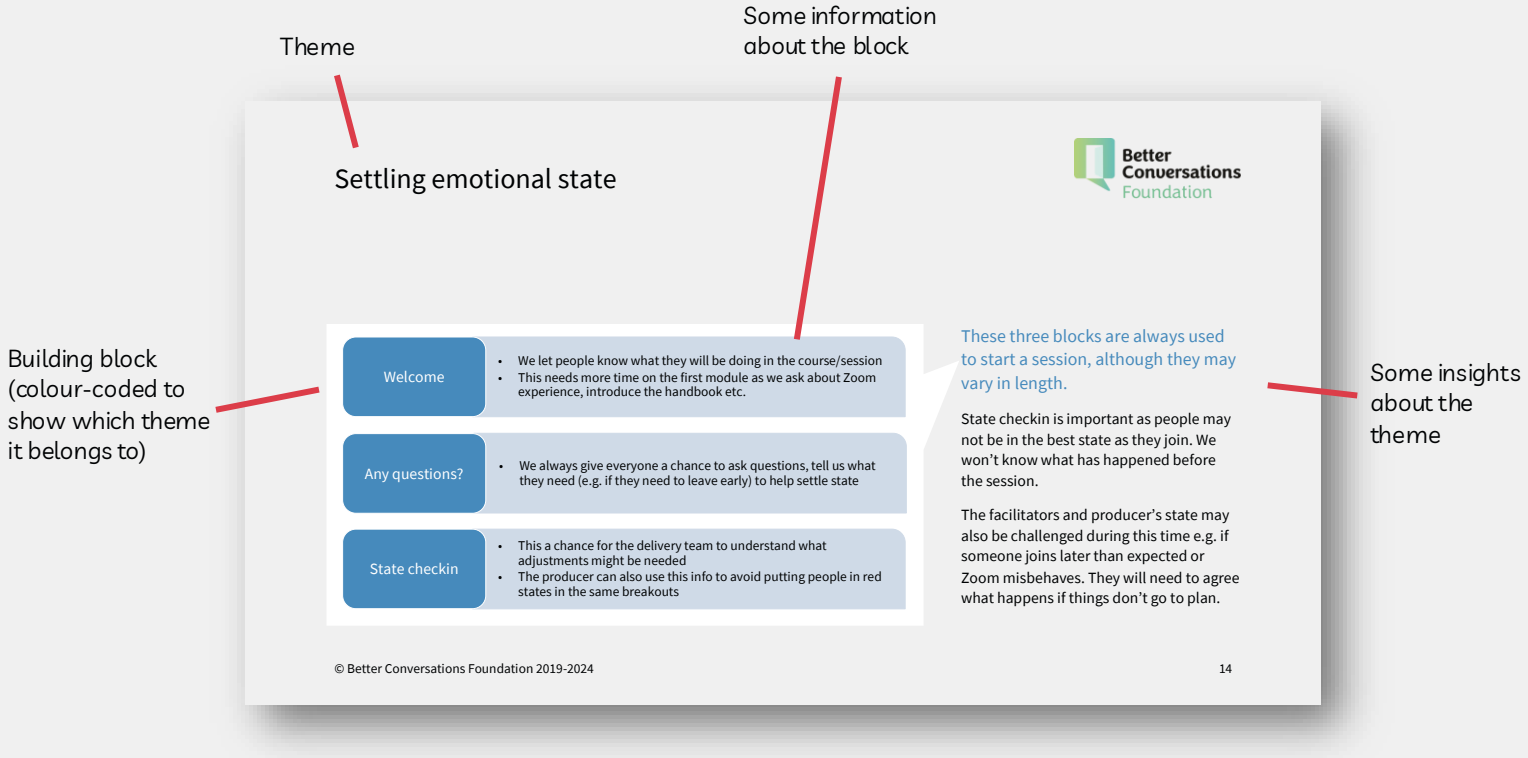
© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

How to read the building block diagrams

Before you dive in, here's a guide to understanding the next few diagrams.

We have put details about the blocks on the left, and some general insights on the right.

You will see the colour-coding appear later in this document.



© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Settling emotional state

Welcome	• We let people know what they will be doing in the course/session • This needs more time on the first module as we ask about Zoom experience, introduce the handbook etc.
Any questions?	• We always give everyone a chance to ask questions, tell us what they need (e.g. if they need to leave early) to help settle state
State checkin	• This a chance for the delivery team to understand what adjustments might be needed • The producer can also use this info to avoid putting people in red states in the same breakouts

These three blocks are always used to start a session, although they may vary in length.

State checkin is important as people may not be in the best state as they join. We won't know what has happened before the session.

The facilitators and producer's state may also be challenged during this time e.g. if someone joins later than expected or Zoom misbehaves. They will need to agree what happens if things don't go to plan.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Warming participants up for learning

Motivation	• We ask people to tell us their motivation for being on the course • For a team, this helps us understand whether people are willing participants
Learning Outcomes	• We ask people to think about what they will get out of the course • We can manage expectations in this way
Recap of fieldwork	• We use this to remind people of where they are on the course

The first two blocks are used in Module 1. The third is used for Modules 2-5.

Getting people to speak early on helps build engagement. If people are not willing participants, accept this and be neutral to their objections. Model the skills that are covered in the course by remaining curious and hold your assumptions lightly!

Fieldwork is optional, so encourage people to do it but don't make them wrong for not prioritizing it.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Inviting curiosity

Discuss concept	• Adults learn by relating to their own experience • Sometimes an example really helps to land a concept, so we lead with that
Present model	• All the models are presented in the handbook. • There is space in the handbook to take notes.
Link models	• Our models are nested and developed as the course proceeds. • It makes it easier for people to remember the concepts.

These blocks are kept short, deliberately.

We are not teaching or lecturing. The main learning comes through the discussions people have and the fieldwork.

It is tempting for trainers to demonstrate their theoretical knowledge, however when time is constrained, the more you talk, the more you are taking time away from deep learning.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Learning by doing

Demonstrate exercise	• Demonstrating or running a group exercise before the breakouts helps people understand what we would like them to do in the breakout. • The producer may be asked to participate in these.
Breakout	• Immediate practice helps people understand concepts • This time is also useful for the facilitator and producer to checkin and replan timings if needed.
Unpack learnings	• Discussion in the wider group introduces new information and consolidates learning

The group and breakout activities are the heart of the course.

People generally enjoy these interactions.

The mental load on the facilitator and producer are high here, although at different times during the three blocks.

Interesting things can emerge here, so be prepared to go with the flow and replan the remaining time.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Embedding the learning

Reflect on learning	• We ask people what they know now, at the end of each module to help reinforce the learning • Asking them what they can do differently helps them understand what they can do with this knowledge
Fieldwork	• We encourage people to try the skills out in their day-to-day lives. • Sometimes it is enough to notice or reflect on what's happening in conversations
Close	• We always finish on time. It is our promise to participants. • However, we also recognise some people like to spend more time discussing what has come up for them, so we close the session and hang back for a more informal chat

We are helping people to summarise their experience to take a small piece of learning with them.

Often, people are surprised at how quickly the time has gone.

It's a delight when someone stays back to talk to us about the session. And we often get some immediate and useful insights on their experience.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Better Conversations Foundation

Take-offs and landings

We haven't included here the 'pre-flight' checks and debrief which are essential for the delivery team to manage their state, work well together, and learn fast from the experience. Again, this is something for other documents.

Plan for an extra 15-30 minutes either side of the session for the delivery team to execute a slick process and get an effective outcome.

We've covered the basic blocks. The next section will show how we combine these to create modules.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Photo by María Noel Rabuñal Cantero on Unsplash

The course structure

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Some common features across the modules

Better Conversations Foundation

We have documented some of the patterns for the course in this overview.

These patterns mean we can apply simple rules and heuristics to ensure that the modules run smoothly and are well-paced.

Every module is delivered in one hour. And every module has been tested with real people several times over. We consistently run these sessions to time. That's part of our promise to participants.

Whilst we would like everyone to experience the full hour, we are realistic. We have day jobs too, and we know how busy people are. The first and last 5 minutes of each session are designed to allow participants to join late and leave early.

The middle 50 minutes are designed in chunks of around 10-20 minutes. This helps reduce the mental load on participants as it is difficult to focus for longer (especially on a video call).

Changing activities keeps people's attention from wandering, as does having two facilitators delivering the course.

Discussion in pairs and group work helps people connect the more conceptual stuff back to their own experiences and the real world.

Fieldwork is optional. However, we think it makes the difference in getting learning to stick.

We'll describe learning outcomes and patterns for the modules next.

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

The modules and learning outcomes

Better Conversations Foundation

1. State
- Explain the State Model
- Describe how they know when they are in red, amber, or green state

2. Assumptions
- Explain how assumptions affect conversations
- Describe the link between state and assumptions

3. Context
- Describe the elements of context in conversations
- Describe the link between context, assumptions and state

4. Listening with Curiosity
- Demonstrate listening to accept
- Practice use of questions to understand the other person

5. Intentional Comversations
- Describe why intention is different to impact
- Practice preparing for intentional conversations

6. Applications
- Describe the personal impact of the course
- Explain what they would like to have happen now

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

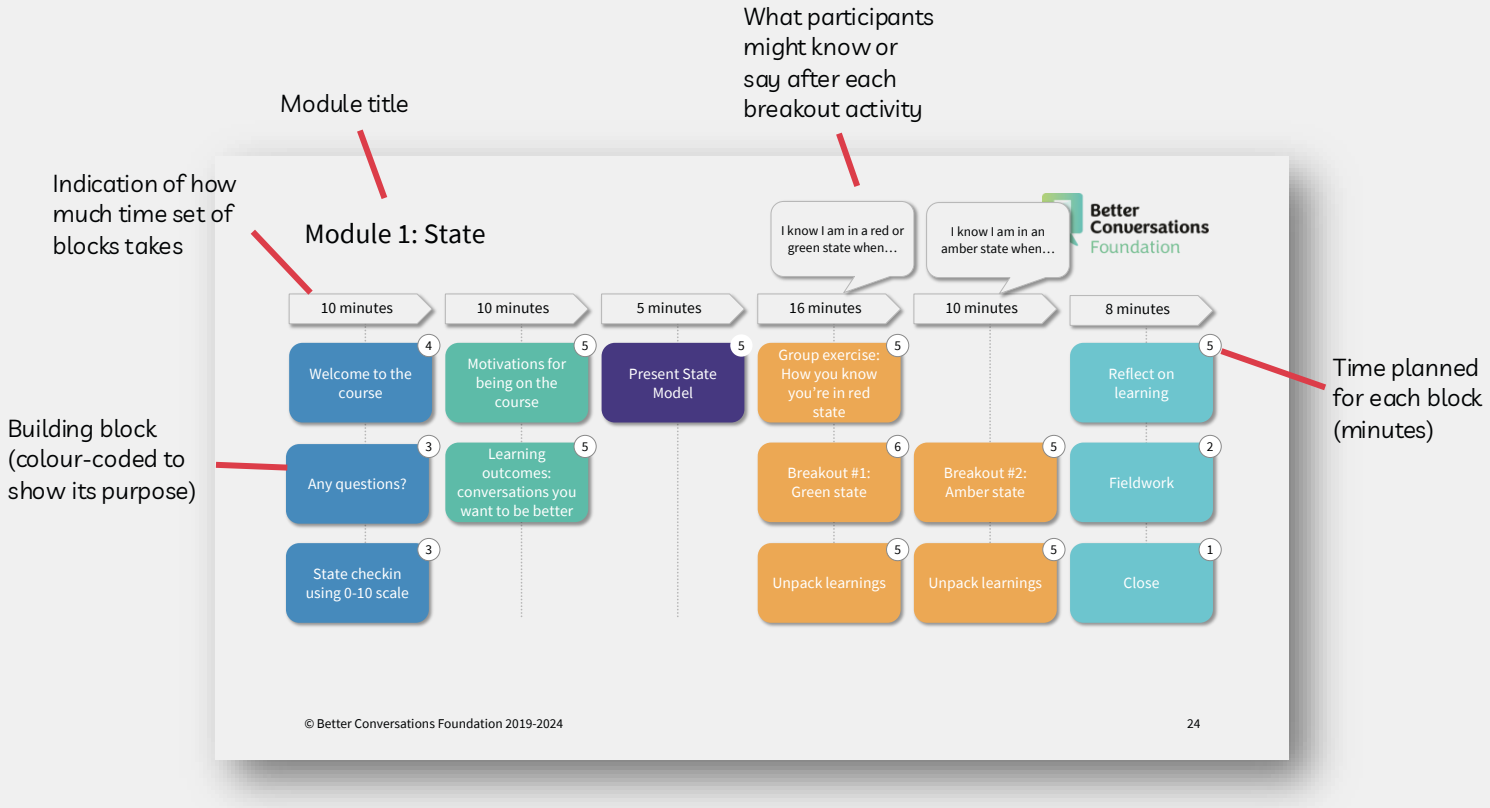
How to read the module overview diagrams

Each diagram summarises a module on a page.

They are not intended as scripts or delivery plans. They may help you see the pattern of each module.

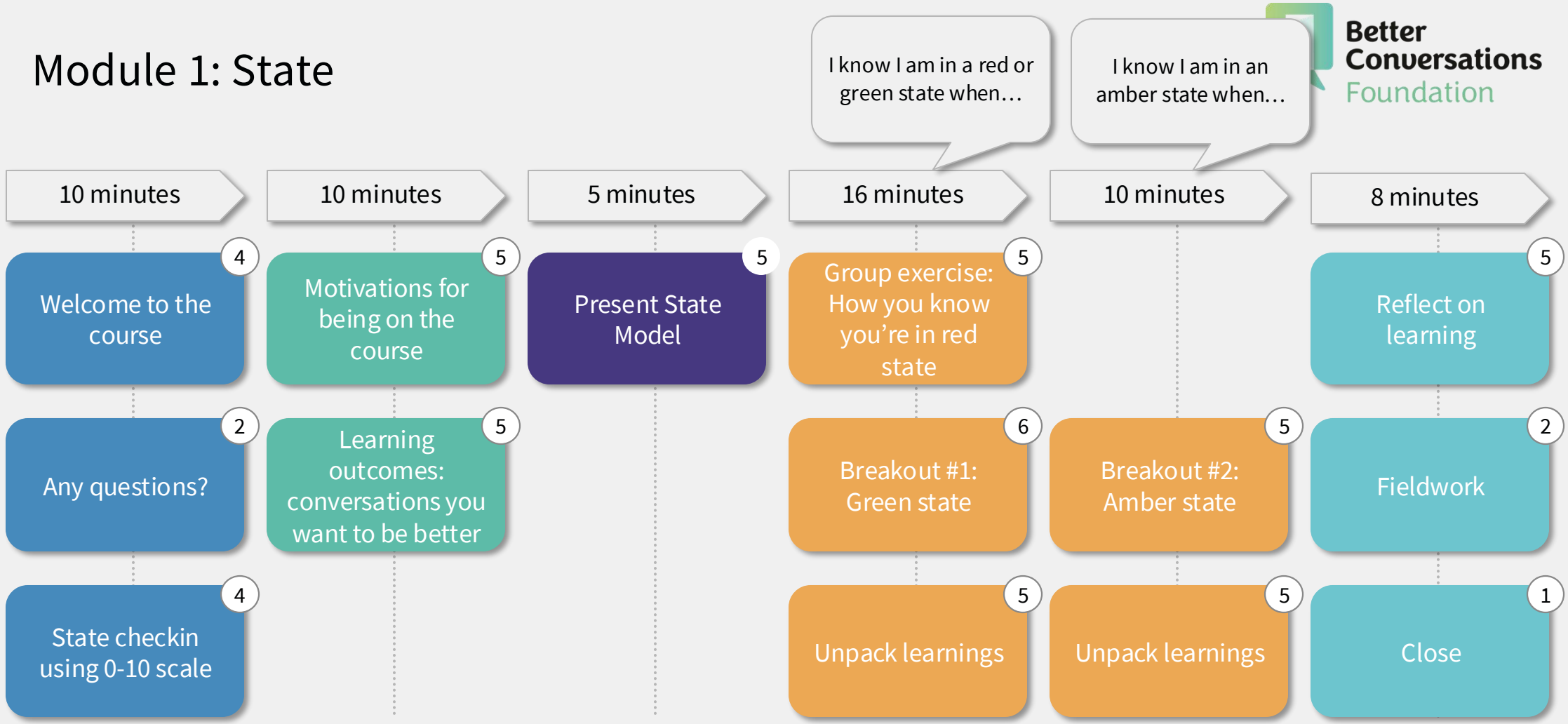
Once you've delivered these to a few groups, it starts to become clear what you can or can't vary to achieve the same learning outcomes in the scheduled hour.

Please contact us any questions you have about these.



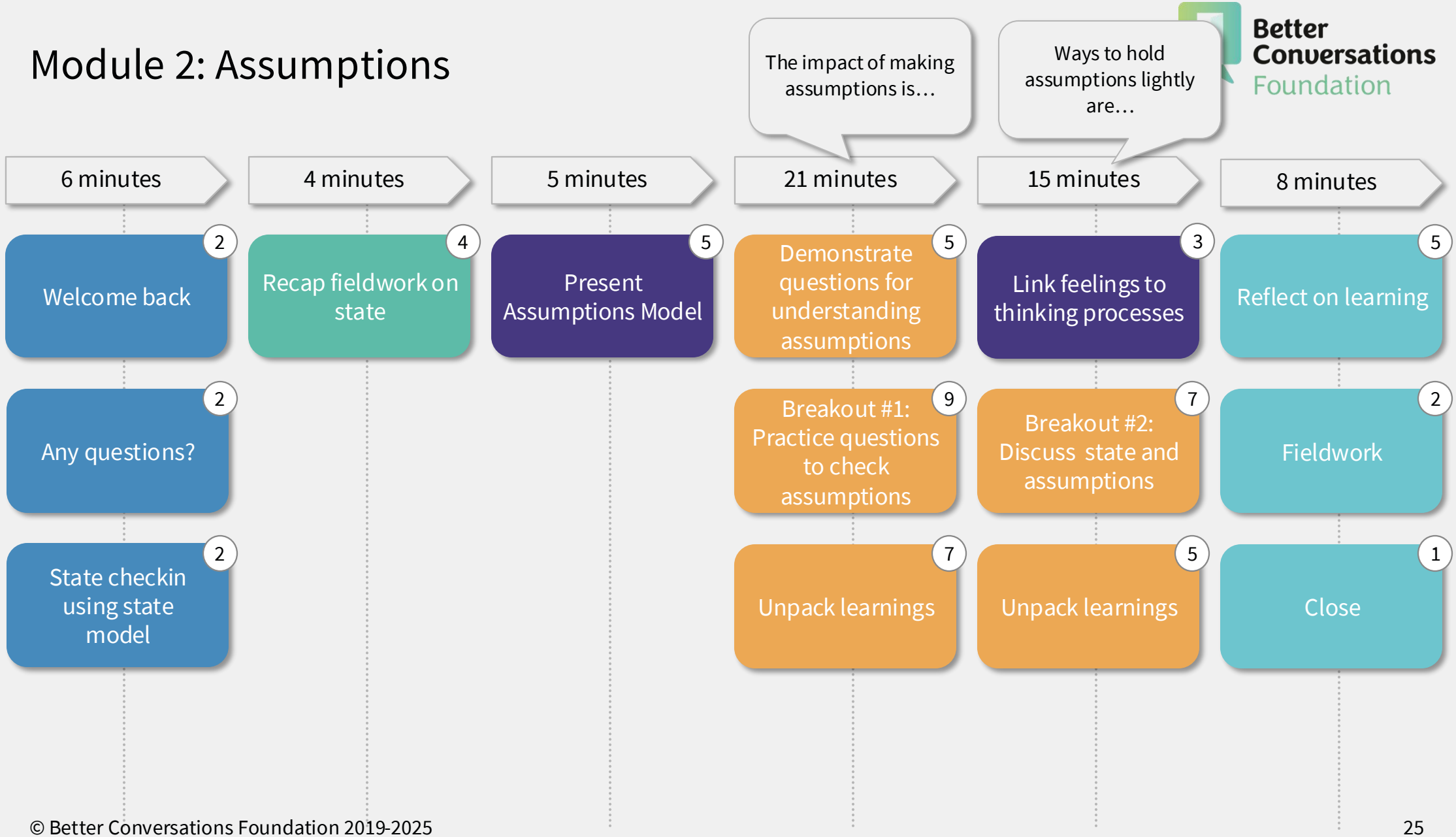
© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Module 1: State



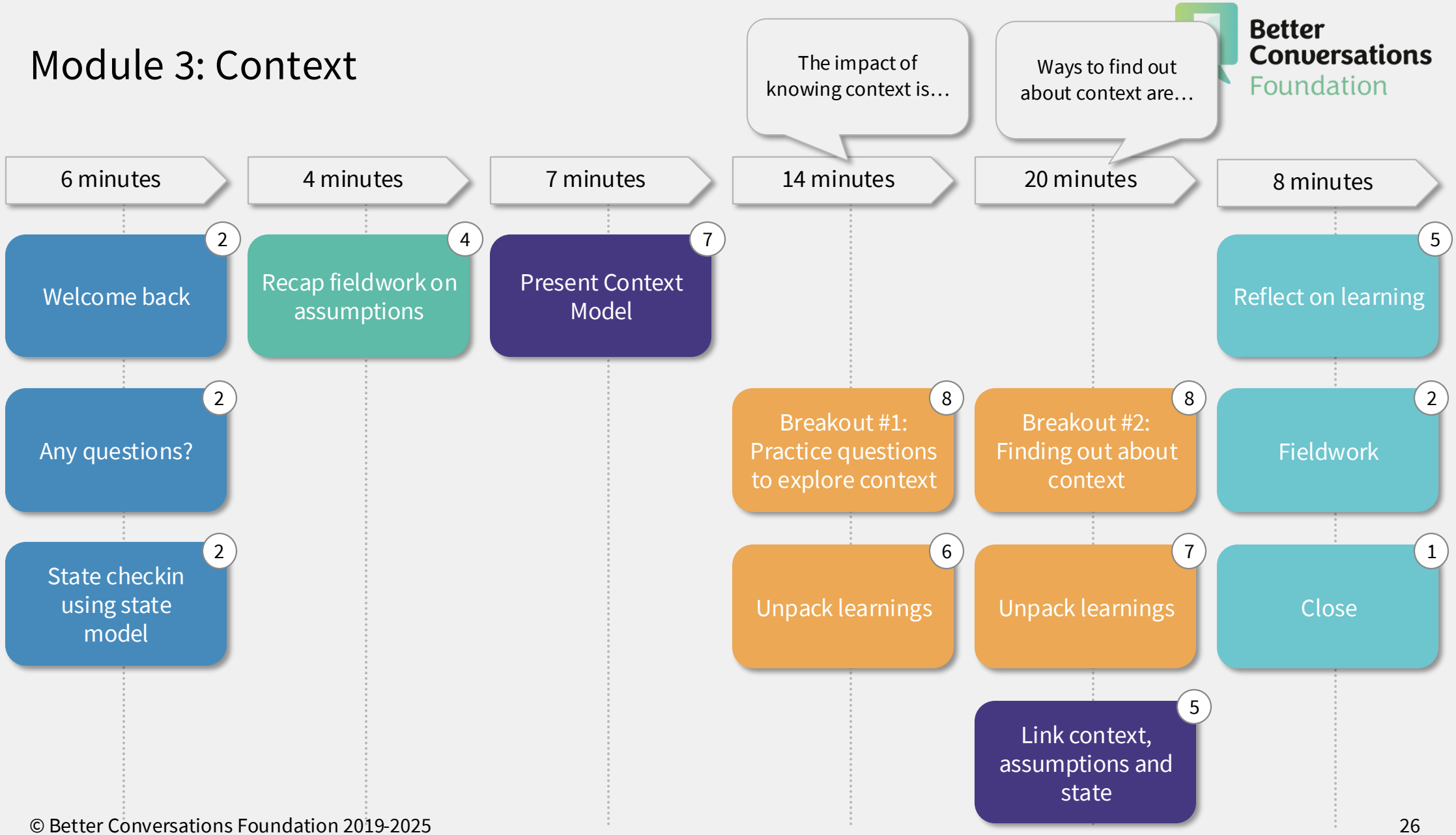
© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Module 2: Assumptions



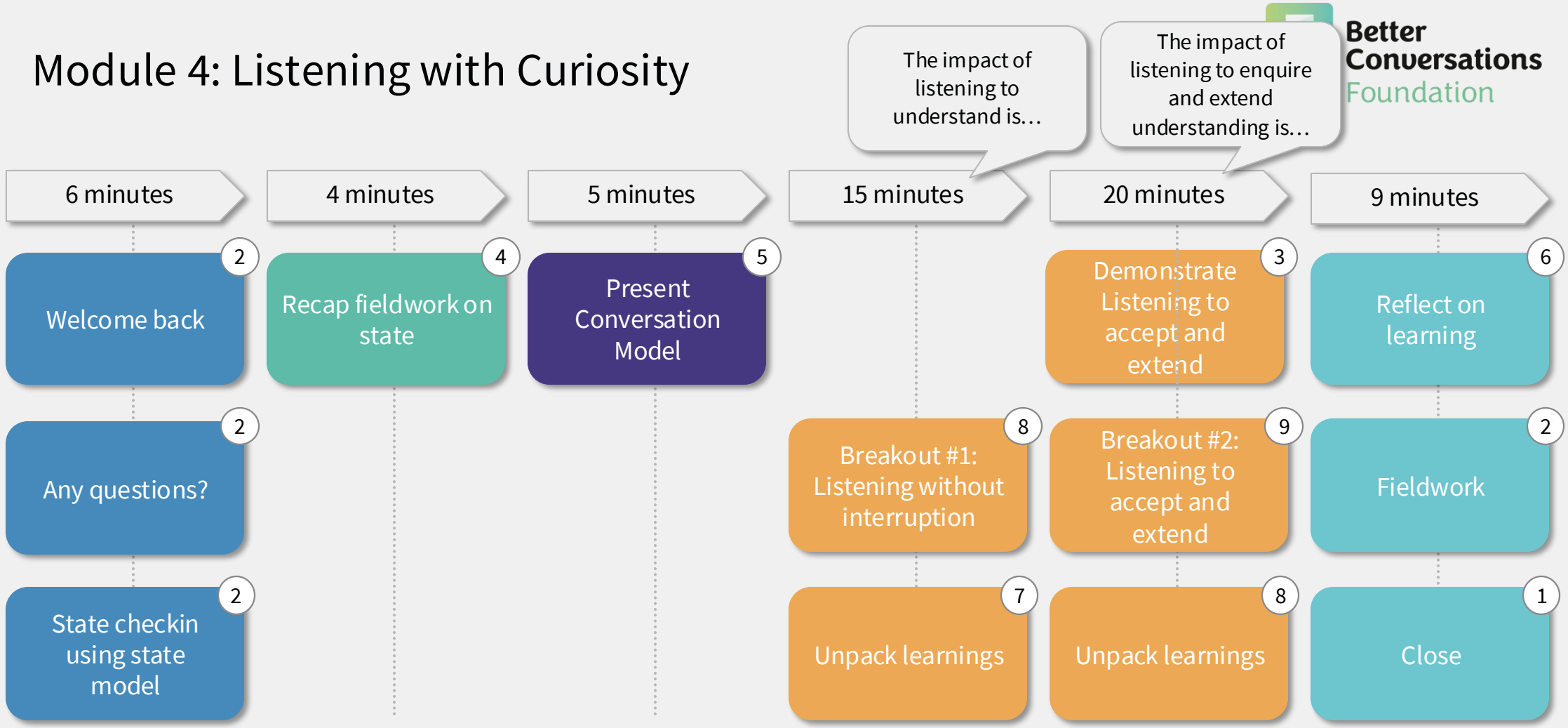
© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Module 3: Context



© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Module 4: Listening with Curiosity



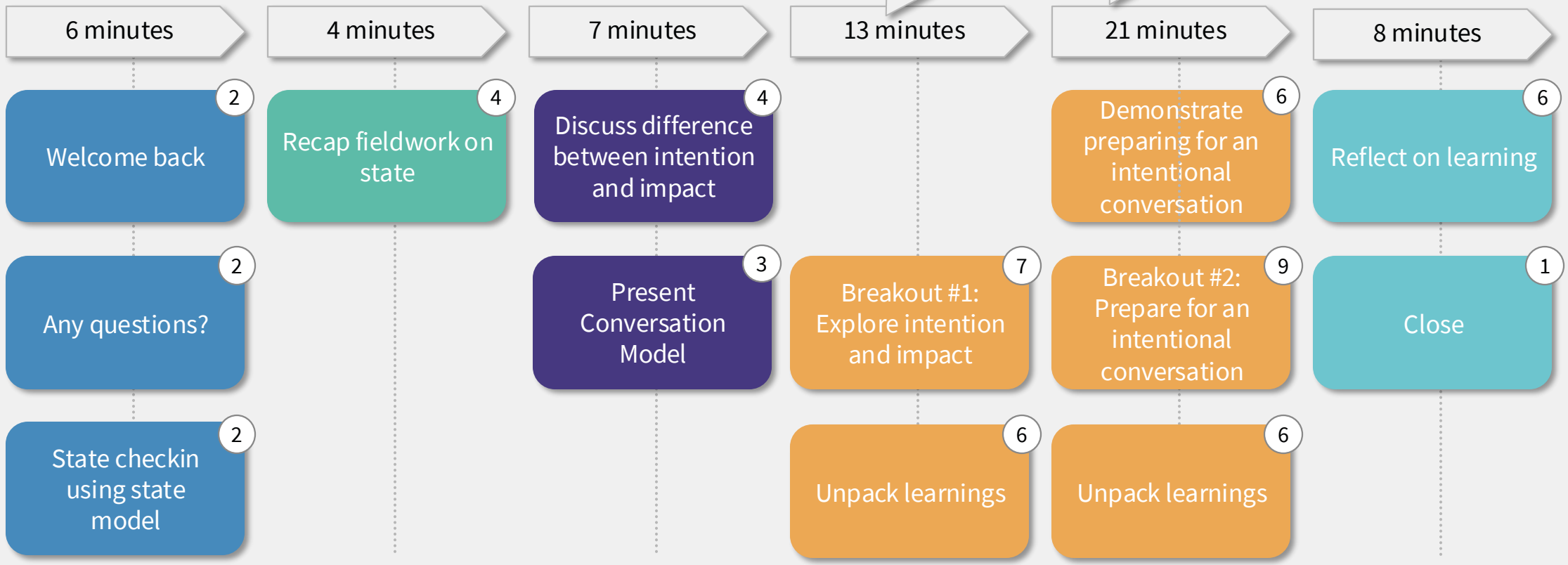
© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Module 5: Intentional Conversations

Better Conversations Foundation

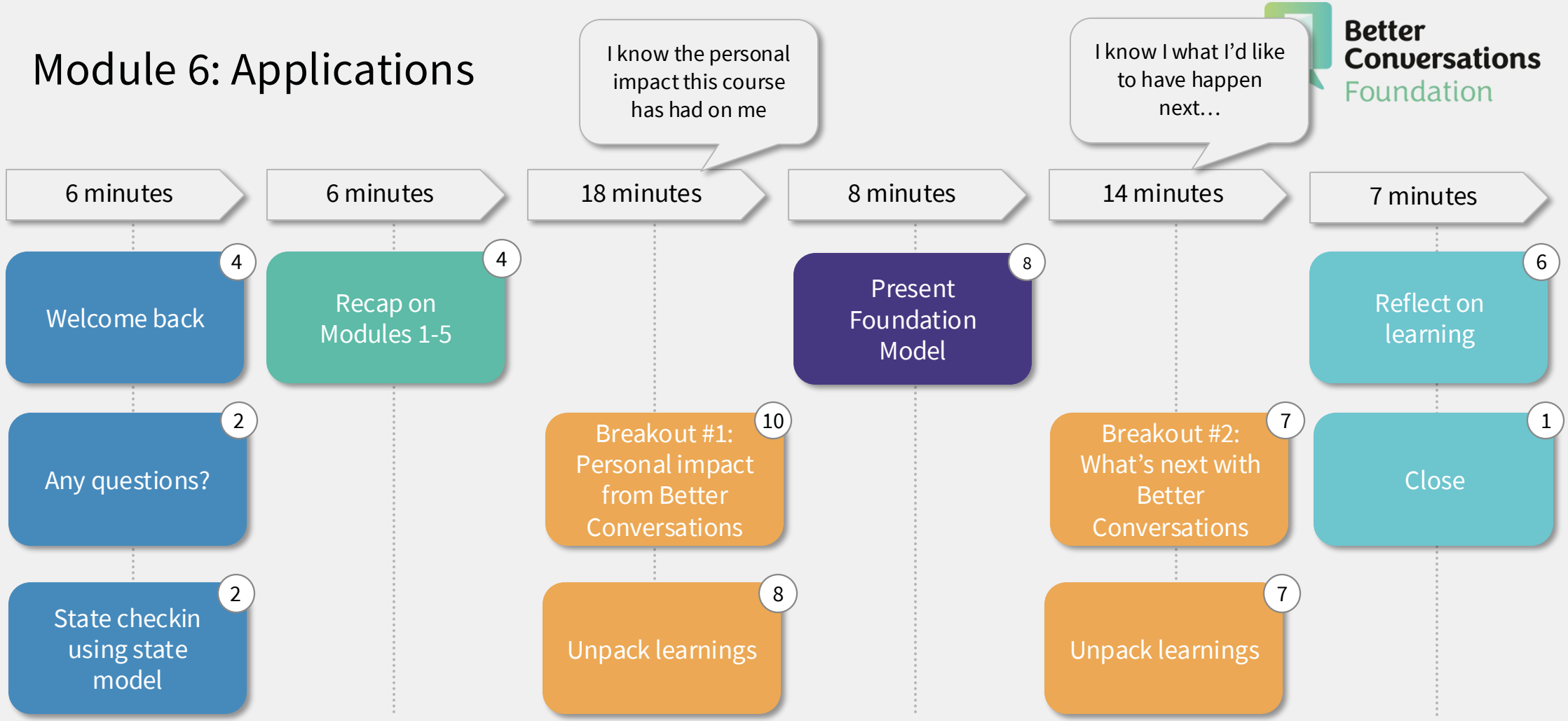
I know intention is different to impact

I can prepare for an intentional conversation



© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Module 6: Applications



© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

How to get in touch

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Interested in knowing more?

Yay! You've made it this far…

Thank you for your time and interest.

We are always happy to discuss the course and how you can work with us over a virtual coffee (or beverage of your choice).

Chandima and Simon

hello@betterconversations.foundation

© Better Conversations Foundation 2019-2025

Photo by Matt Hoffman on Unsplash