



# Tough Times: Easy Tools to Help You Cope

Kaethe Weingarten, PhD





MIGRANT CLINICIANS NETWORK



**A force for health justice**

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**Somos una fuerza dedicada a la  
justicia en salud**

**Our mission** is to create practical solutions at the intersection of vulnerability, migration, and health.

**We envision** a world based on health justice and equity, where migration is never an impediment to well-being.

# Conflict of Interest Disclosure

We have no real or perceived vested interests that relate to this presentation nor do we have any relationships with pharmaceutical companies, biomedical device manufacturers and/or other corporations whose products or services are related to pertinent therapeutic areas.

THE  
*witness to witness*  
PROGRAM

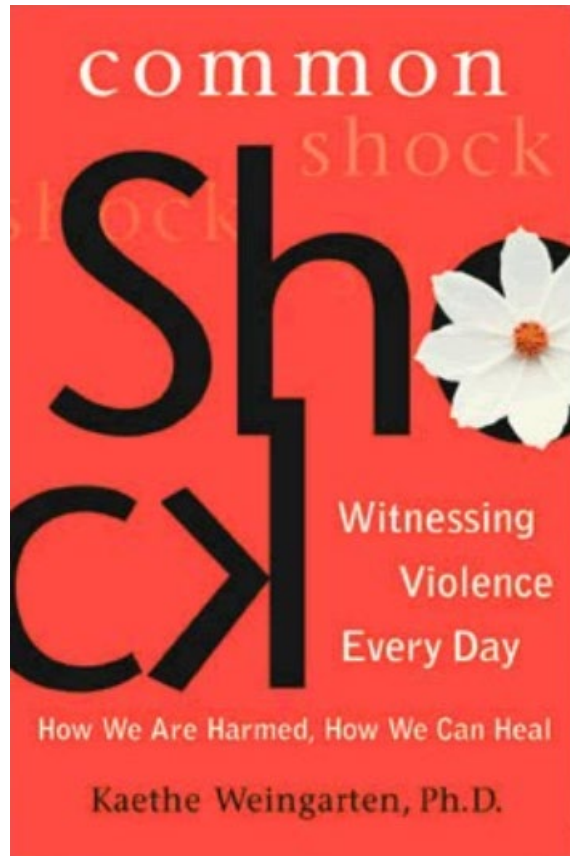


**Kaethe Weingarten, Ph.D.**

Founder and Director of the  
**Witness to Witness Program**

**<https://www.migrantclinician.org/witness-to-witness>**

## Dr. Weingarten's Work



**Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology,  
Harvard Medical School, 1981 - 2017**

**Taught the Program in Families, Trauma and  
Resilience at the Family Institute of Cambridge**

**Author of *Common Shock: Witnessing Violence Every  
Day – How We Are Harmed, How We Can Heal***

TAKE A MOMENT:



WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE  
FOR YOU WHEN YOU HAVE  
BEEN TRULY  
WITNESSED...someone has  
listened to you with  
compassion

WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE  
FOR YOU WHEN YOU HAVE  
FULLY WITNESSED  
SOMEONE?



# Two sides to the witnessing coin:

- One is compassionate witnessing
- The other is toxic witnessing





# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO SET THE STAGE OF OUR CURRENT CONTEXT?

BECAUSE YOU ARE  
WITNESSES TO THE  
SUFFERING AND TROUBLES  
OF THOSE YOU SERVE AND  
YOU HAVE YOUR OWN  
TROUBLES AND SUFFERING



A night sky filled with stars, with the Milky Way galaxy visible as a bright, hazy band of light. The foreground shows the dark silhouettes of a forest of trees. A small, bright light source is visible in the distance, near the center of the tree line.

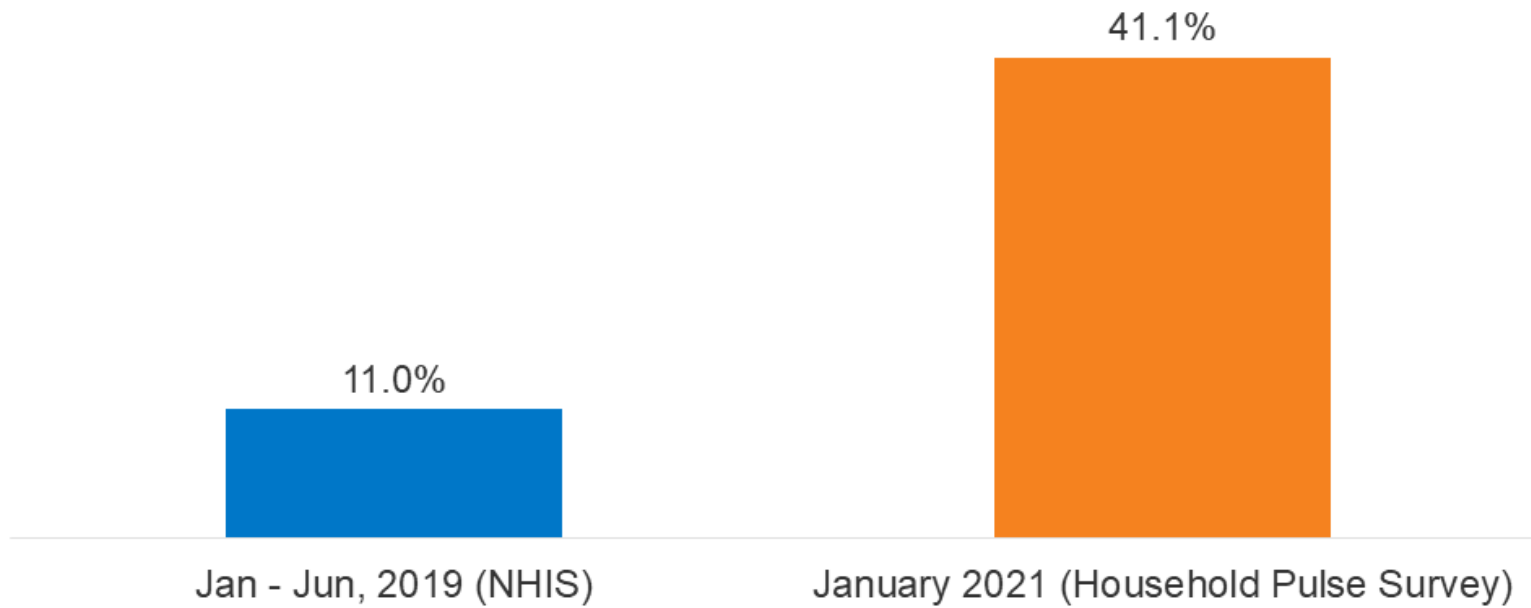
# Overview of Where We are Now

# Phases of Disaster



Figure 1

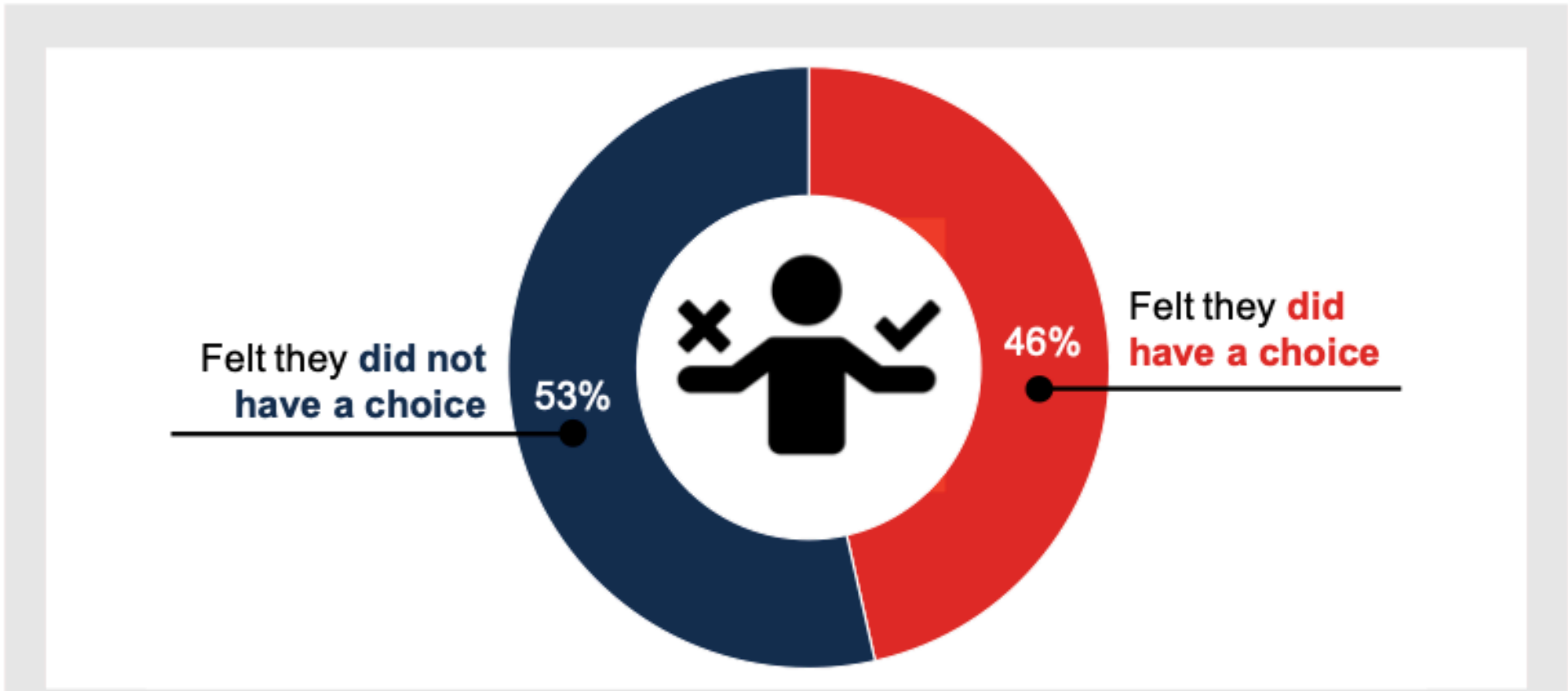
## Average Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder and/or Depressive Disorder, January-June 2019 vs. January 2021



NOTES: Percentages are based on responses to the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 scales. Pulse findings (shown here for January 6 – 18, 2021) have been stable overall since data collection began in April 2020.

SOURCE: NHIS Early Release Program and U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey. For more detail on methods, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/ERmentalhealth-508.pdf>

**Figure 16. Choice in Taking on Caregiver Role**

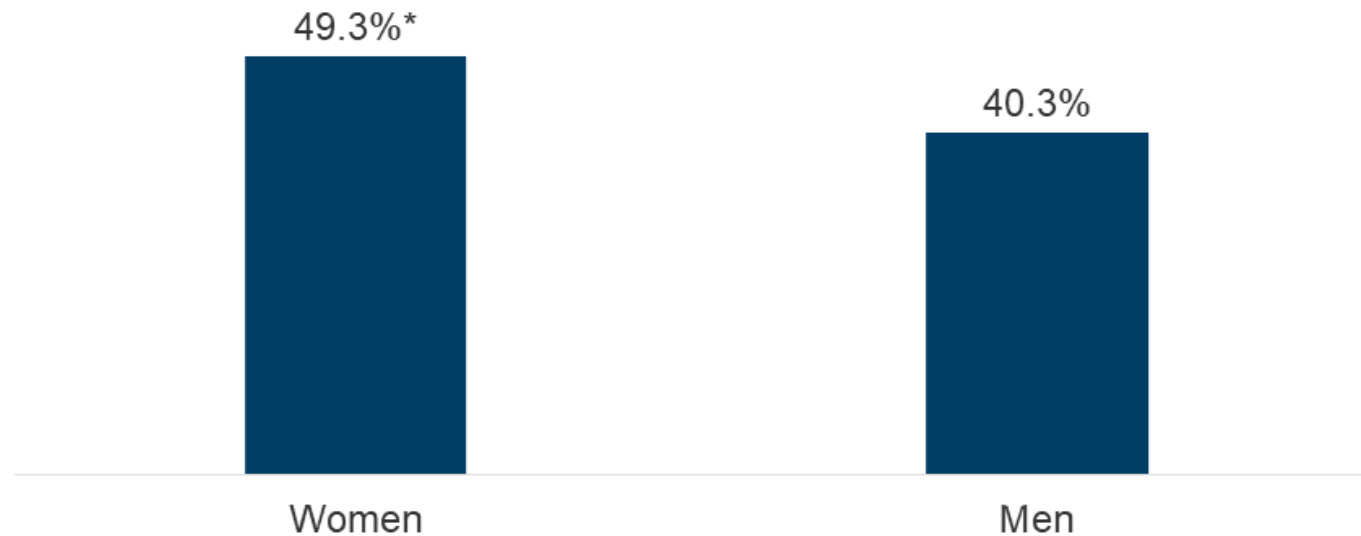


Q39. Do you feel you had a choice in taking on this responsibility for caring for your [relation]?

**2020 Base: Caregivers of Recipient Age 18+ (n=1,392)**

Figure 6

## Share of Adults in Households with Children Under the Age of 18 Who Report Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Gender



NOTES: \*Indicates a statistically significant difference between women in households with children under the age of 18, and men in households with children under the age of 18, at the  $p < 0.05$  level. These women and men, ages 18+, have symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder that generally occur more than half the days or nearly every day. Data shown is for December 9 – 21, 2020.

SOURCE: KFF analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020.



Figure 7

## Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Race/Ethnicity

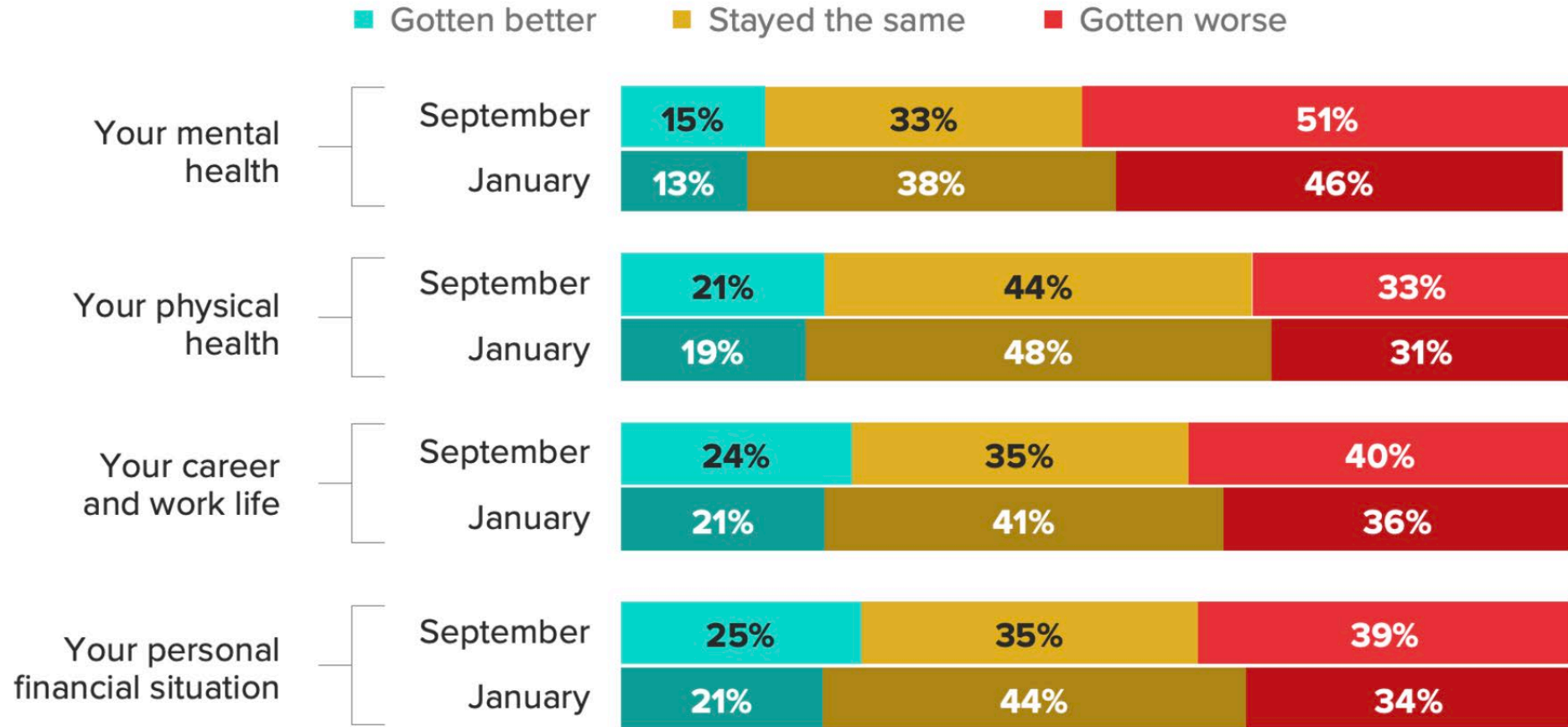


NOTES: \*Indicates a statistically significant difference relative to Non-Hispanic White adults at the  $p < 0.05$  level. These adults (ages 18+) report symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder generally occurring more than half the days or nearly every day. "Other Non-Hispanic" includes people of other races and multiple races. Data shown are for December 9 – 21, 2020.

SOURCE: KFF analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 2020.



**Health care workers were asked how the following parts of their lives have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic:**




“From 'heroes to villains': Why this Covid surge is different for health care workers

“Many were already overworked and nearing their breaking points. Now they are bearing the brunt of patients’ rage, too.”

And they too are angry!

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/health-care-workers-went-heroes-villains-rcna2559>





RESEARCH  
DEMONSTRATES  
MENTAL HEALTH  
SYMPTOMS FOR  
HEALTH CARE  
WORKERS

- insomnia,
- alcohol/ drug misuse,
- PTSD,
- depression,
- anxiety,
- burnout,
- anger,
- perceived stress

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## I will be covering:

- Worry
- Stress

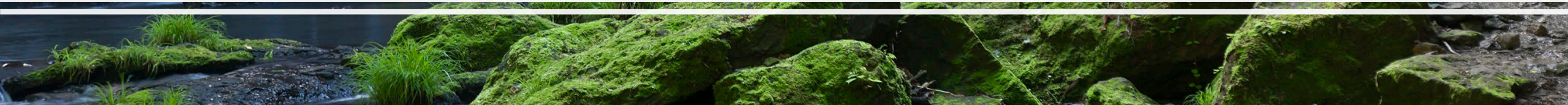
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- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Grief
- Moral Injury
- Anger
- Demoralization
- Languishing





AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THOSE EXPERIENCES






# HOW DO WE TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES?

Simple actions we can take.

**None of this is rocket science!**

A dark silhouette of a person's head and neck is visible on the left side of the image, set against a light blue background. The silhouette is positioned vertically, with the head at the top and the neck extending downwards.

**We do this work  
in our bodies**

# Every Day Witnessing

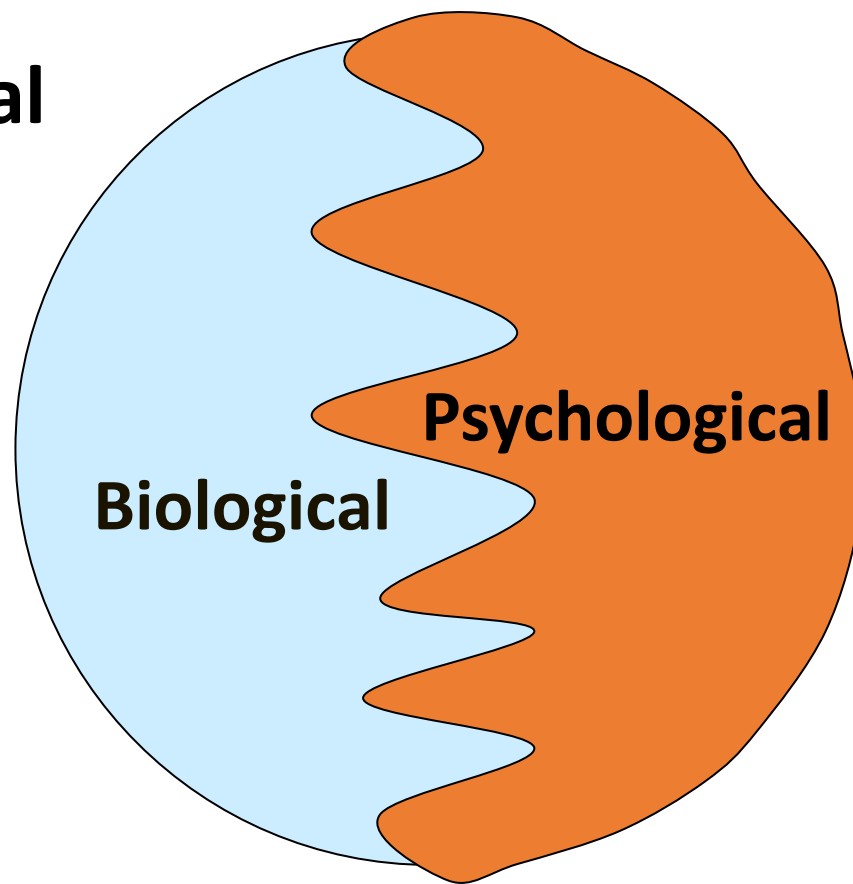


**Ordinary**

**Extraordinary**

**Interpersonal**

**Spiritual**



**The Individual**

## Sensations in the Body

- Clamminess or chilliness
- Exaggerated startle
- Fear responses to non-threatening stimuli
- Hyper-arousal
- Hyper-vigilance
- Lethargy
- Muscle aches and pains
- Numbness
- Poor concentration
- Rapid heartbeat
- Spacey feeling
- Sweating
- Tingling
- Sudden cold or hot



# Psychological Experiences

- Aggression
- Anger
- Disbelief
- Fear
- Grief
- Guilt
- Helplessness
- Memory alterations
- Numbing
- Rage
- Sadness
- Shame
- Vulnerability
- Worry/ Anxiety

# Witness Positions

Aware

Unaware

Empowered

1

2

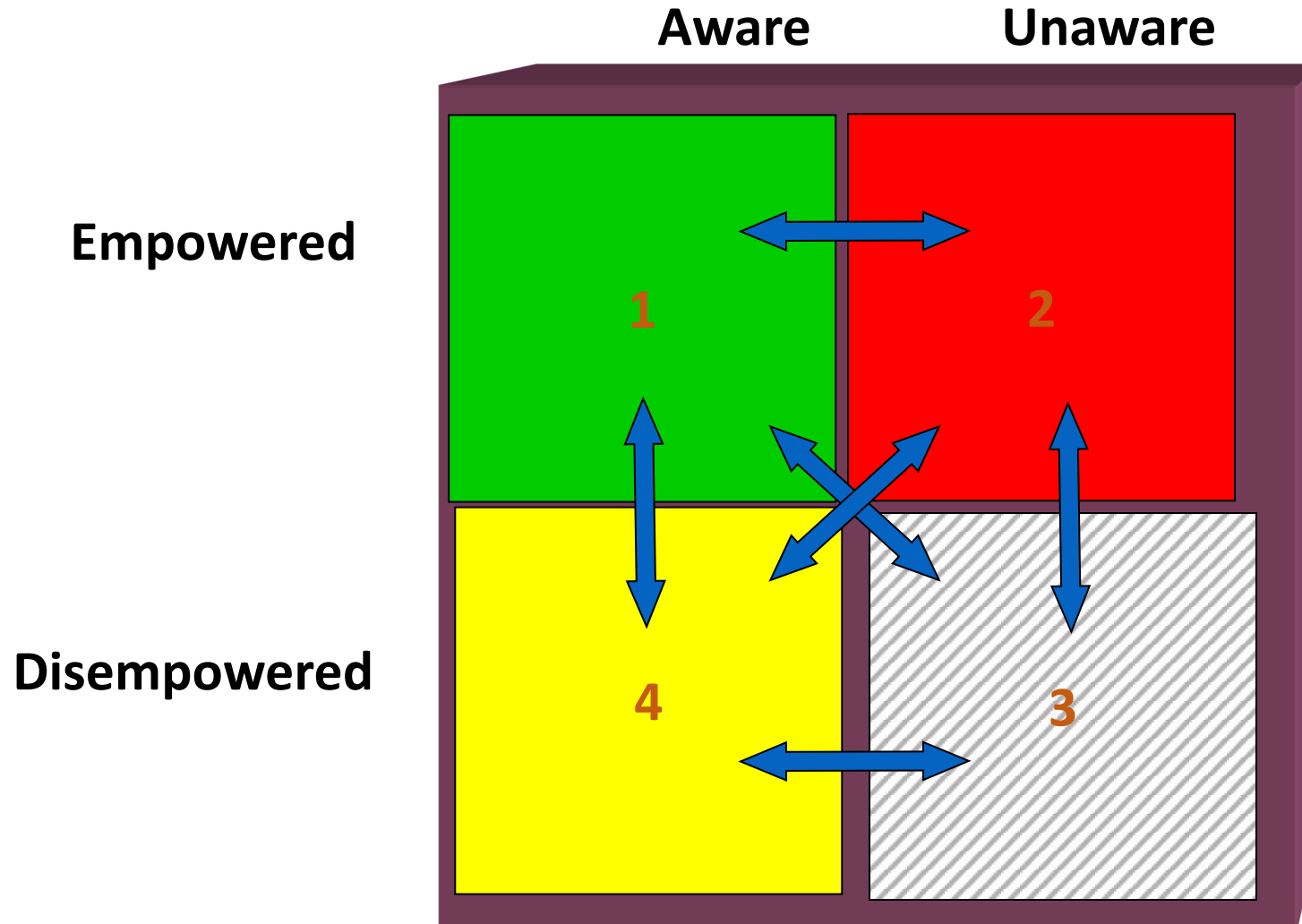
Disempowered

4

3

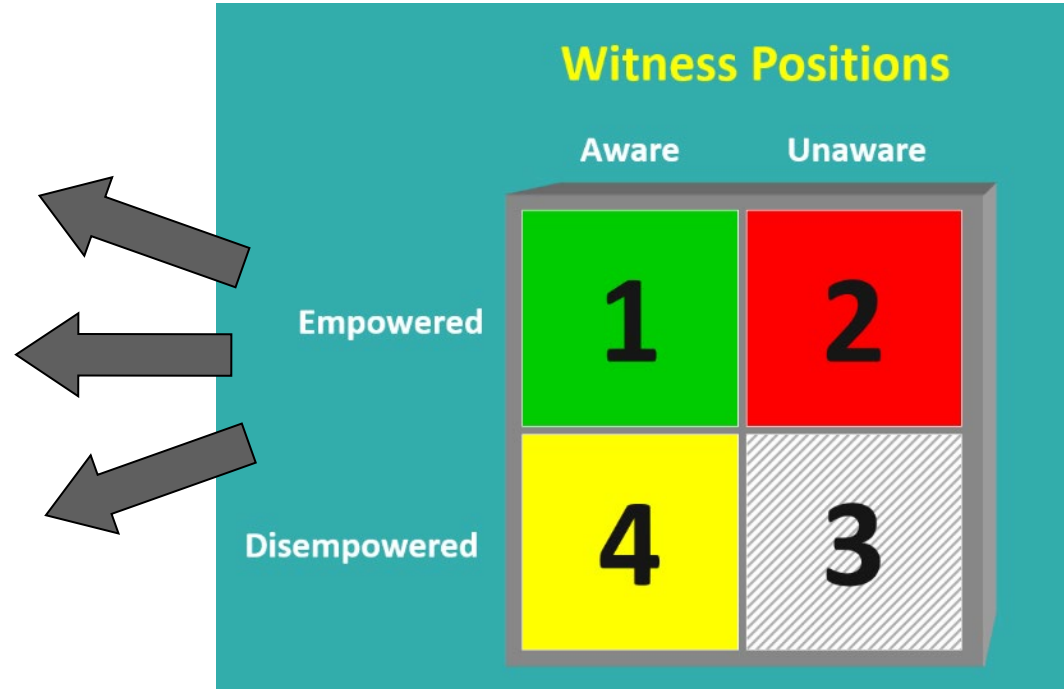


# Changes in Witness Position

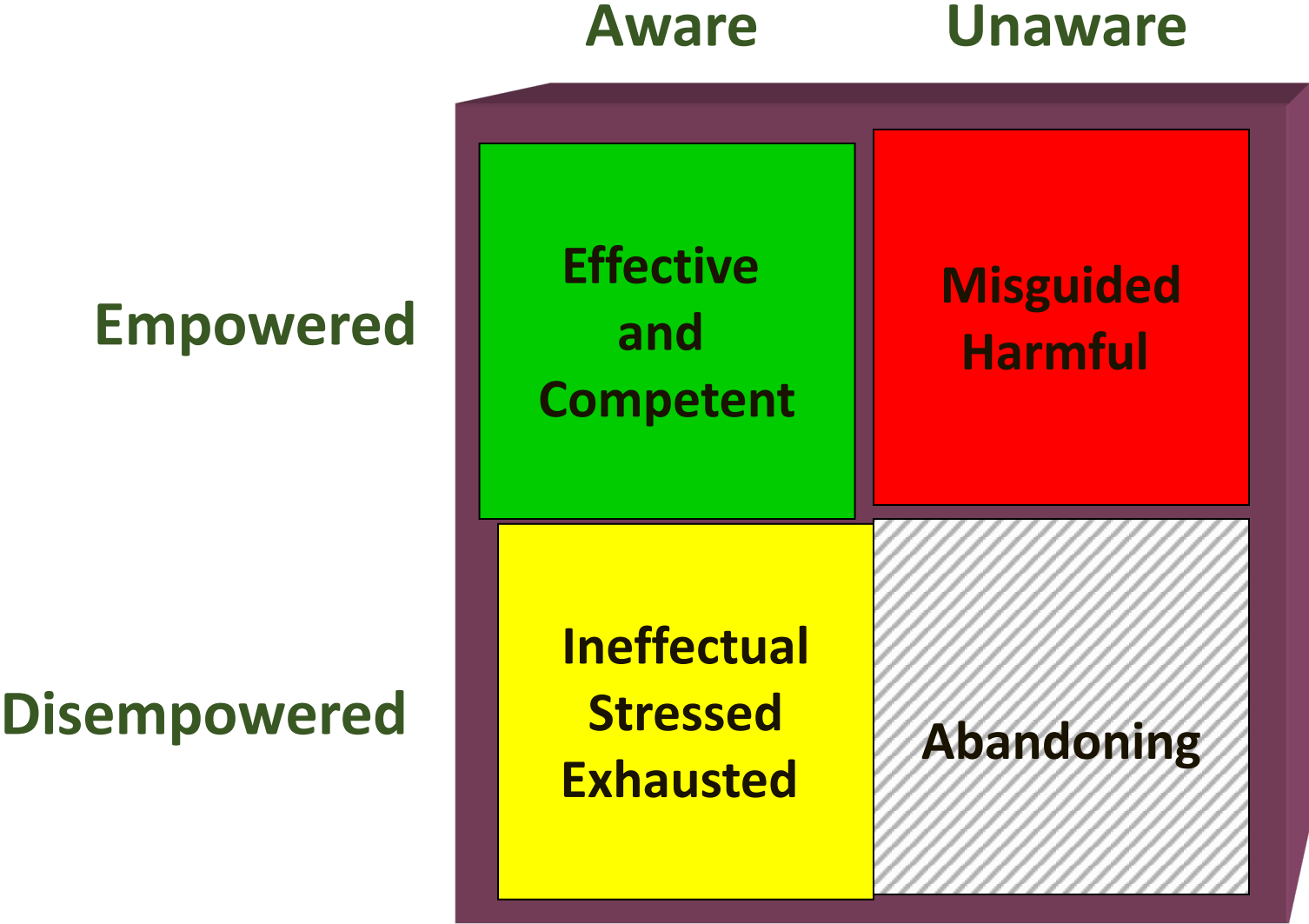


# Each witness position affects:

- Self
- Partner
- Children
- Colleagues
- Friends
- Constituents/Clients
- Institution
- Society



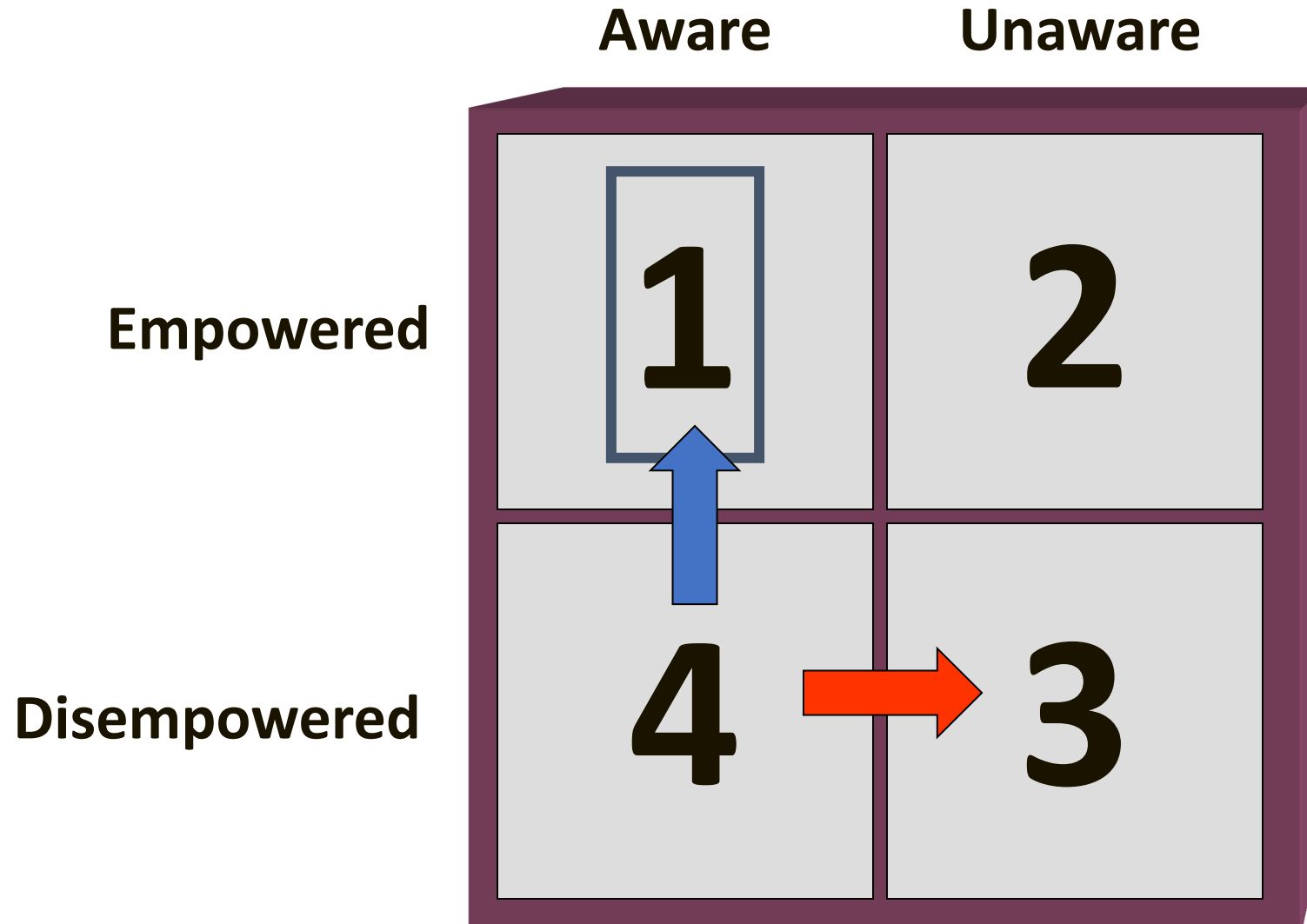
# Witness Positions



# Witness Positions

	Aware	Unaware
Empowered	Attuned Thoughtful Helpful	Critical Hurtful Cruel
Disempowered	Confused Uncertain Inept	Withdrawn Passive Deny Opt out

# Options from Position 4





# HOW DO WE TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES?

FIRST, WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS  
GOING ON FOR US.



These are the kinds of questions people have who are feeling stressed, anxious, or even traumatized.

The following questions are common:

Why don't I feel like myself?

Why do those pictures keep popping into my mind?

Why can't I sleep?

Why am I having stomach problems?

Why is my heart racing all the time?

Why do I feel like something bad is always going to happen?

Why do I feel numb and depressed?

Why do I feel so disconnected from everyone?

# Worry



Helps you to get what you want

Leaves you feeling demoralized,  
upset, or exhausted

Helps you to solve problems in  
your life

Gets in the way of living the life  
you want to lead

# Worry Gap

**More women** than men are worried about the impact of the coronavirus on their families' lives.

**And as result, more women than men have taken precautions**

# Three things to help your worries

- **Give yourself a worry “budget,”** an amount of time in which you allow yourself to worry about a problem. When that time is up (start with 20 minutes), consciously redirect your thoughts.
- **When you notice that you’re worried** about something, push yourself to come up with a next step or to take action.
- **Write your worries down.** Research has shown that just eight to 10 minutes of writing can help calm obsessive thoughts.
- *Remember: Worry is helpful only if it leads to change, not if it turns into obsessive thoughts.*

From Emma Pattee

# What is Stress?

- Stress is a physiological response connected to an external event.
- In order for the cycle of stress to begin, there must be a stressor. This is usually some kind of external circumstance, like a work deadline or a scary medical test.
- Stress is defined as a reaction to environmental changes or forces that exceed the individual's resources

**When the very  
meaningfulness  
of the job  
contributes to  
stress**

We do these behaviors because we want to help, but these behaviors can also contribute to stress

- Staying late
- Working overtime without pay
- Accepting larger caseloads
- Widening responsibilities
- Making do with insufficient resources
- Absorbing cutbacks

# Acute and Chronic Stress

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Stress prompts a behavioral response, firing up the limbic system and releasing adrenaline and cortisol, which help activate the brain and body to deal with the threat

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Symptoms of stress include a rapid heart rate, clammy palms and shallow breath. Stress might feel good at first and prepare you to take action

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Chronic stress, staying in fight/flight mode, has negative health consequences

# Three things to Manage Stress

- Exercise: This helps with discharging increases in adrenaline and cortisol
- Get clear on what is and is not in your control
- Don't compare yourself with others





# What is Anxiety?

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- We experience anxiety in both our mind (Worry) and our body (Stress).
- Anxiety is what happens when we're dealing with a lot of worry and a lot of stress.
- **Uncertainty makes anxiety stronger.**

## Three things to help your anxiety

- **Limit your sugar, alcohol and caffeine intake.** Because anxiety is physiological, stimulants may have a significant impact.
- **Check in with your toes.** How do they feel? Wiggle them. This kind of refocusing can calm you and break the anxiety loop.
- **When you're in the middle of an anxiety episode,** talking or thinking about it will not help you. Try to distract yourself with your senses: Listen to music, jump rope for five minutes, or rub a piece of Velcro or velvet.

*Anxiety happens in your mind **and** your body so trying to think your way out of it won't help.*

# The Goldilocks Phenomenon

Adversity causes stress but in moderation may be helpful for overall adaptation and functioning in a complex world.

Evidence and theory suggest that exposure to moderate levels of adversity can predict better mental health and well-being than exposure to either a high level of adversity or no adversity.

# Moral Injury

# Moral Outrage

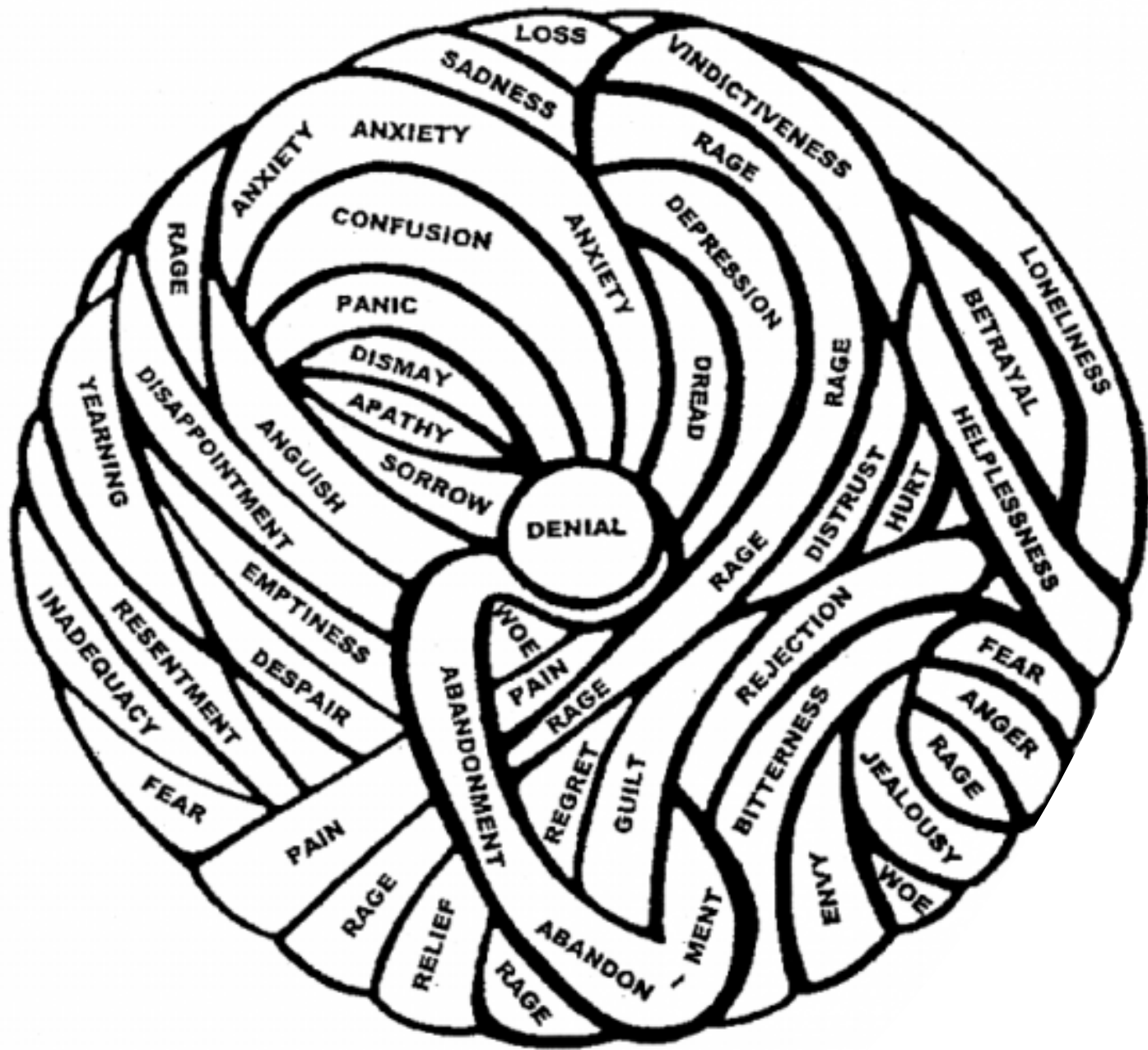
# Moral Apathy

- When we are continuously exposed to conditions that violate our values and beliefs about what is right, we can experience moral injury or outrage.
- When we can no longer tolerate those feelings, we may become numb or feel apathy, that is we have no feelings at all.



## **Moral Injury at this Time**

Failing to meet the needs of the people we believe we should be able to take care of- including ourselves - due to conditions that are beyond our control.



# Grief...A tangled "Ball" of Emotions

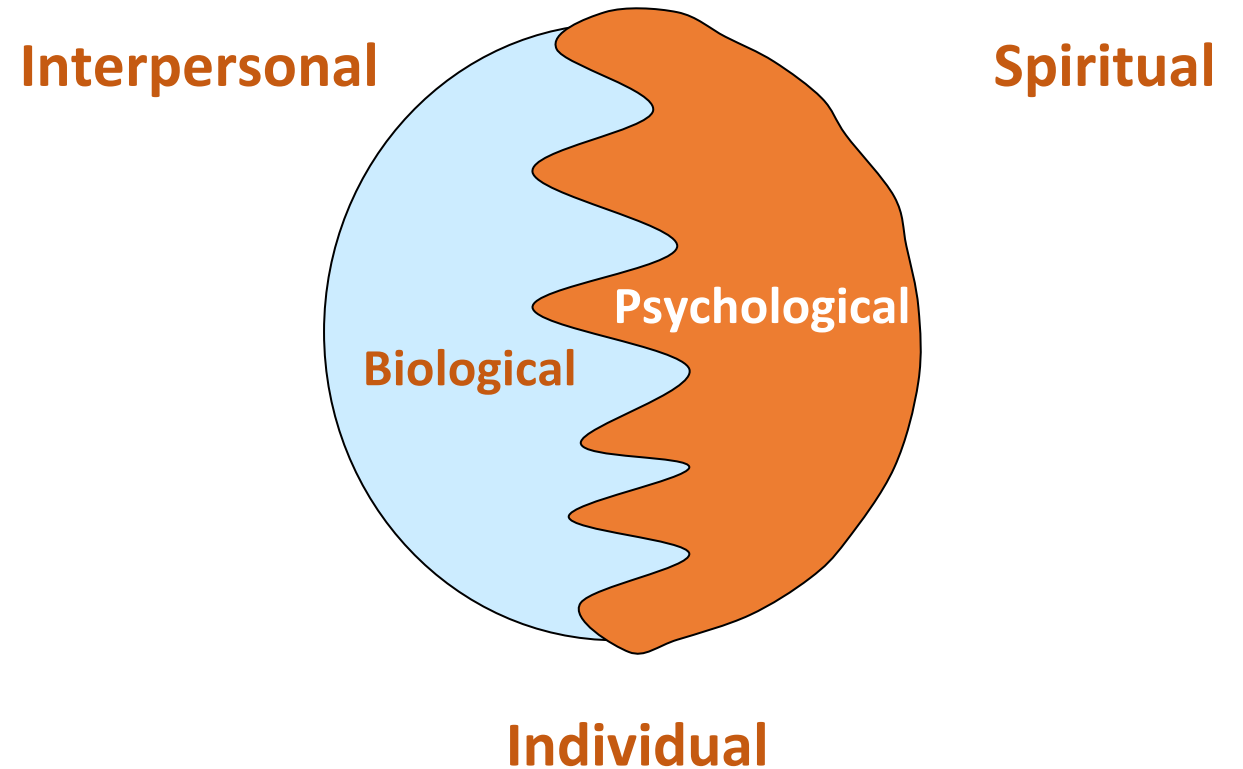
H. Norman Wright

# Living with Grief

There may be disturbances of:

- Sleep
- Appetite
- Energy level
- Mood
- Dreams

Our physical experience affects our psychological experience and vice versa.

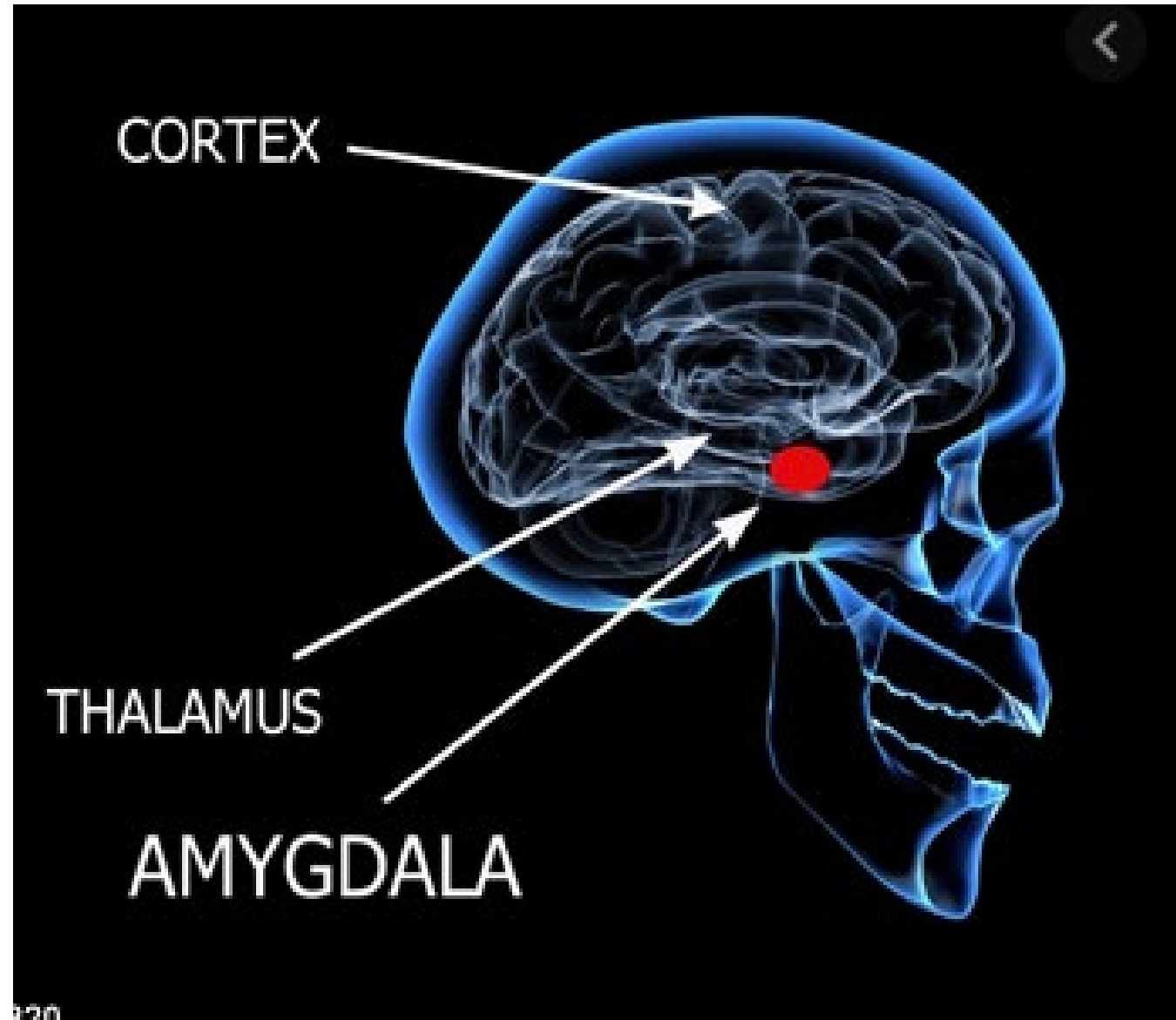


# Emotion and Thought are connected to:



- Different parts of the brain
  - Relate to the context we are currently in
  - Relate to our past experience
  - Our culture
  - The language we speak





# What is a trigger?

You need to *have* a trigger for someone to pull it, and we all have different triggers.

From Sam Killermann and Meg Bolger

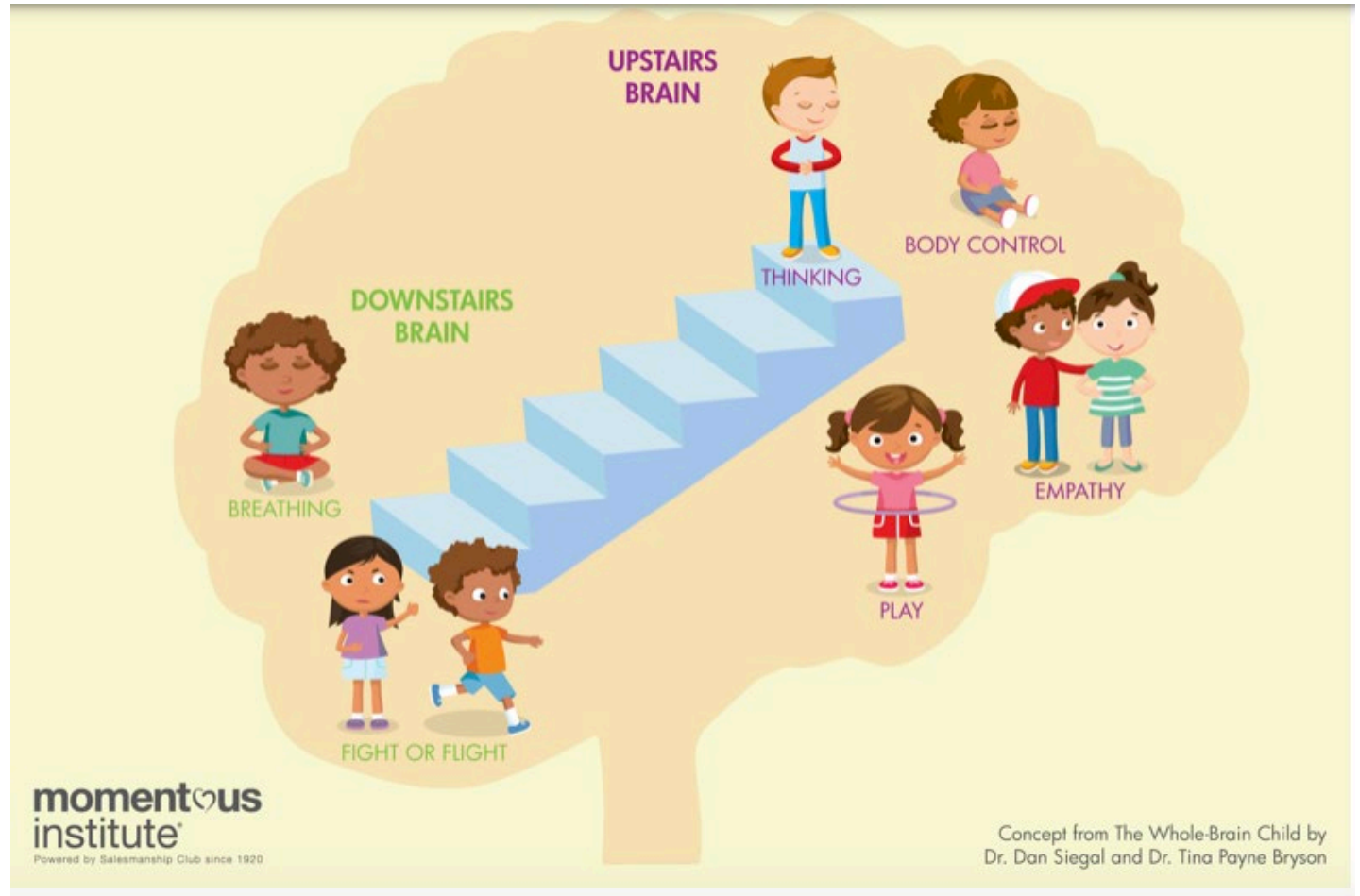
**a trigger is a stimulus that invokes a disproportionately negative response.**

And that's it. A trigger doesn't have to be extreme or something that resurfaces PTSD or a traumatic experience.

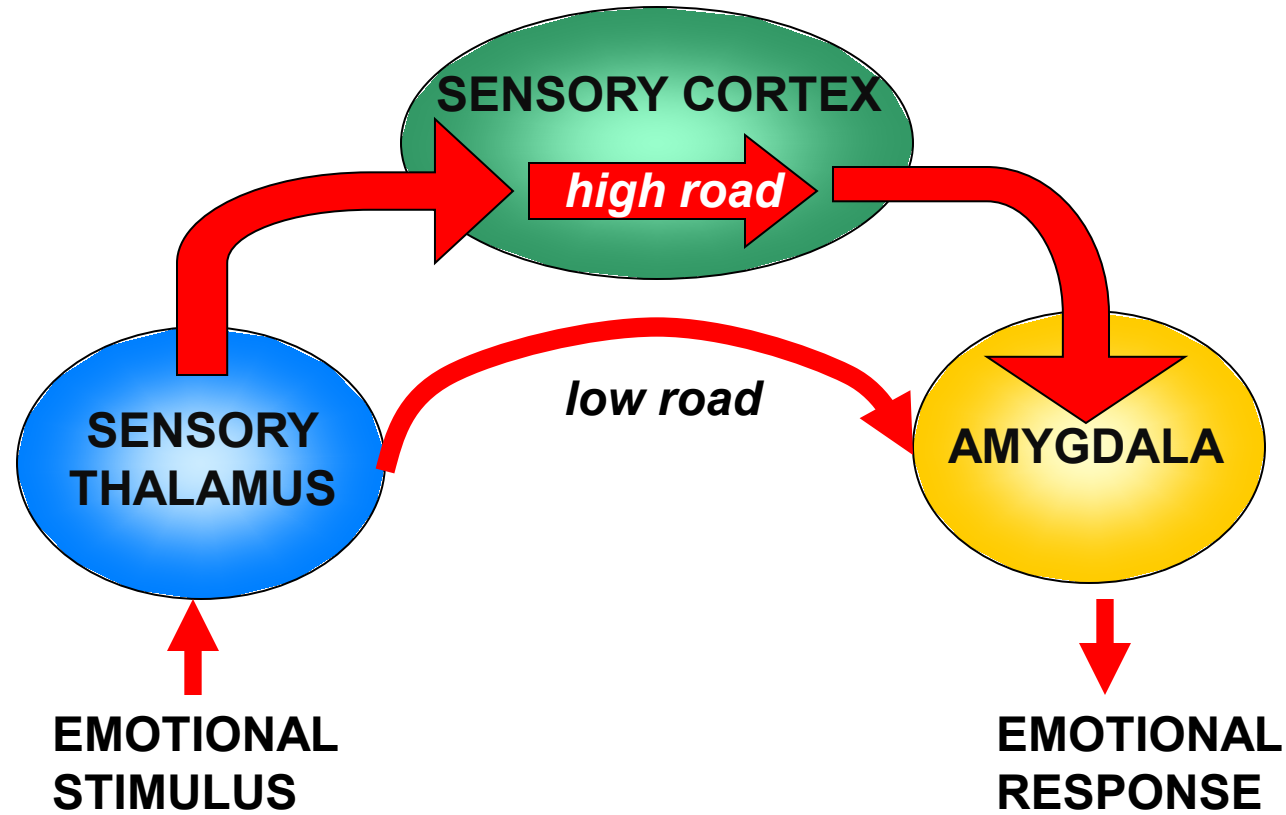
It can also be something as comparatively minor as an eye-roll, a sarcastic comment, or someone saying, "I don't care."

No one stimulus is universally triggering.

Triggered responses (highly distressed reactions) come from the downstairs not the upstairs brain



# High and Low Roads to the Amygdala



from LeDoux, 1996

# Our Brains

- High road processing leads to the upstairs brain

- Low road processing leads to the downstairs brain

## Outcome of Low Road Processing

- Intense emotion: rage, terror, shame
- Impairment of thinking, response flexibility, modulation,
- Aggressive, frightening or fearful behavior

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## Why am I irritated and angry all of the time?

Because you have experienced physical violence, verbal abuse, demands for alternative treatment that are not acceptable or approved.

Because you are frustrated with those who propagate misinformation that is costing people their lives.

Because you are exhausted!

From research study: High anxiety made controlling anger harder, but HCWs were generally successful at doing this.



FIGHT/FLIGHT/FREEZE

## **WHAT LEADS TO PTSD?**

(POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER?)

**When there is no real threat any more and our body and mind react as if there is, this can be understood as a kind of hijacking of the Nervous System.**

**Chronically being in fight/flight/freeze/ can lead to PTSD**



# HEAD OFF PTSD

Current conditions of the pandemic lend themselves to forming the ground out of which people may develop PTSD

Leading trauma expert, Bessel van der Kolk, MD, says we can take action now to mitigate that risk.



# FIVE MAJOR TAKE-AWAYS

- ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS
- ACTIVATE YOUR BODY
- SELF-COMPASSION
- MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS
- SLEEP

# Demoralization

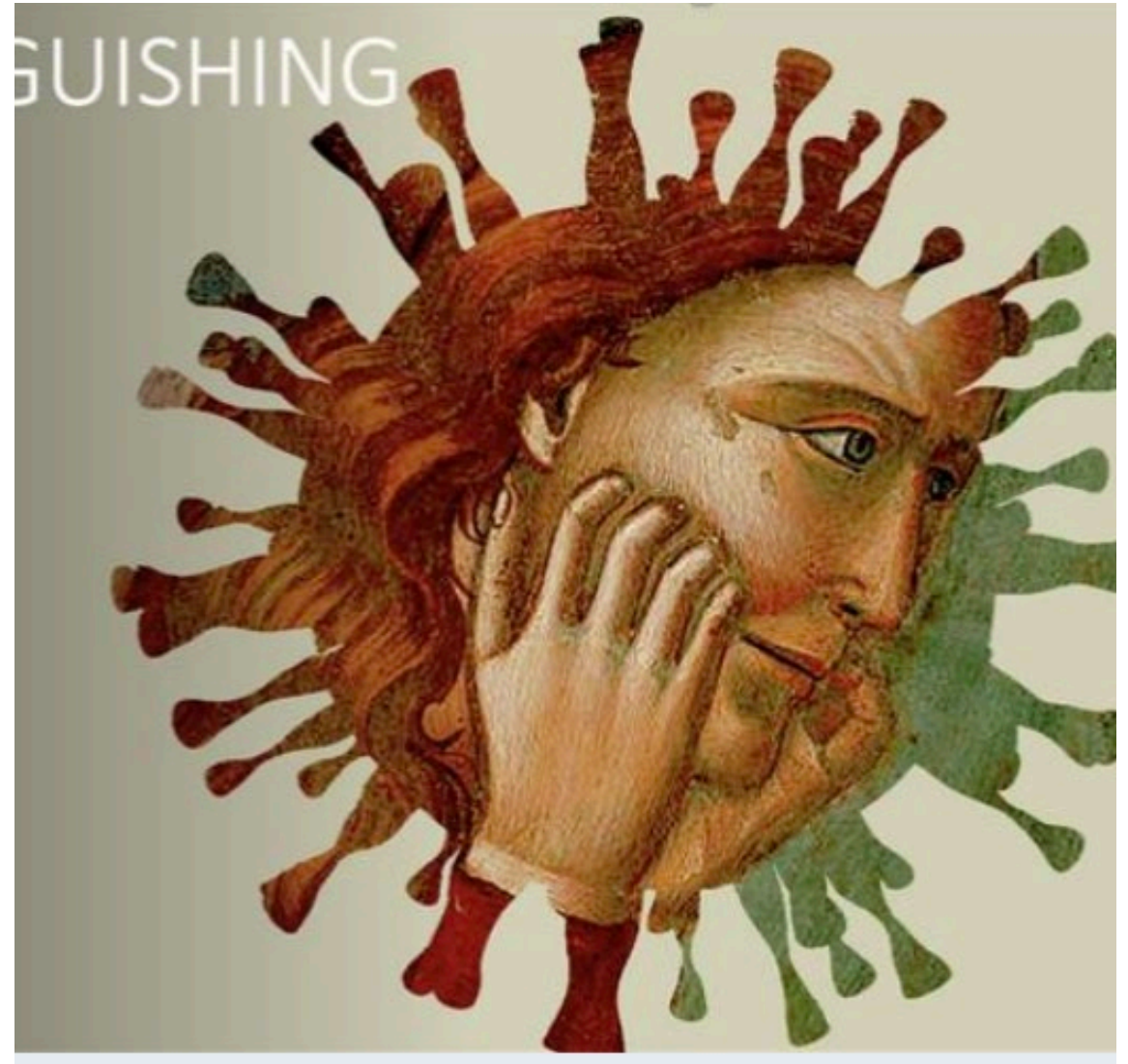
- Demoralization is a normal reaction to overwhelming circumstances when the way to solve the problem is unclear or hard to do.
- If you are demoralized, when the situation changes, you will feel better.
- Many people are demoralized now and will feel better when the coronavirus danger has passed



# Languishing

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- Feeling blah
- Lacking in focus and energy
- Joyless
- Aimless
- Muddling through life
- Indifferent to your indifference
- The absence of well-being



# Approach to Languishing

Get into **FLOW**: a state of absorption in a meaningful challenge or a momentary bond where your sense of time, place and self melts away.

**SMALL GOALS**: Your brain can't tell the difference between, for example, solving word hunger or telling yourself in the morning you are going to make dinner at night and then doing it.



# HOW DO WE TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES?

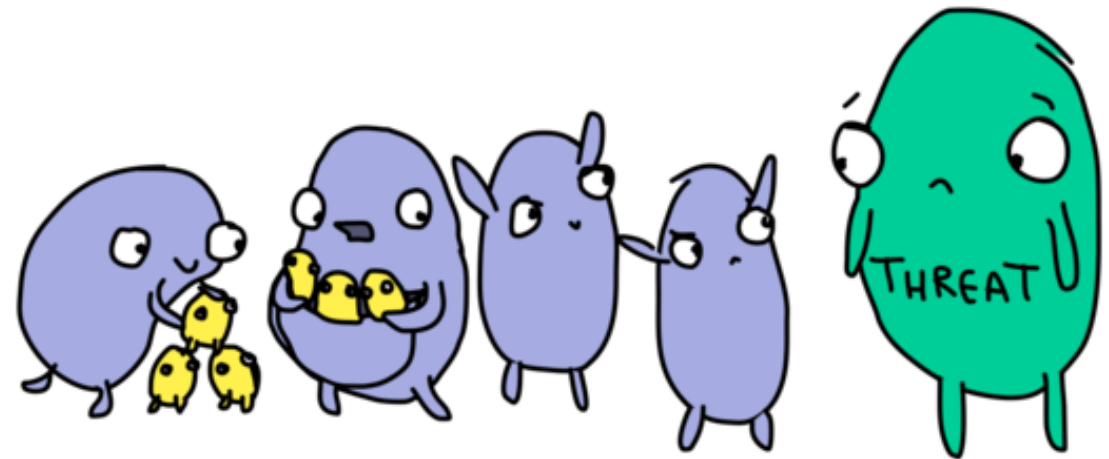
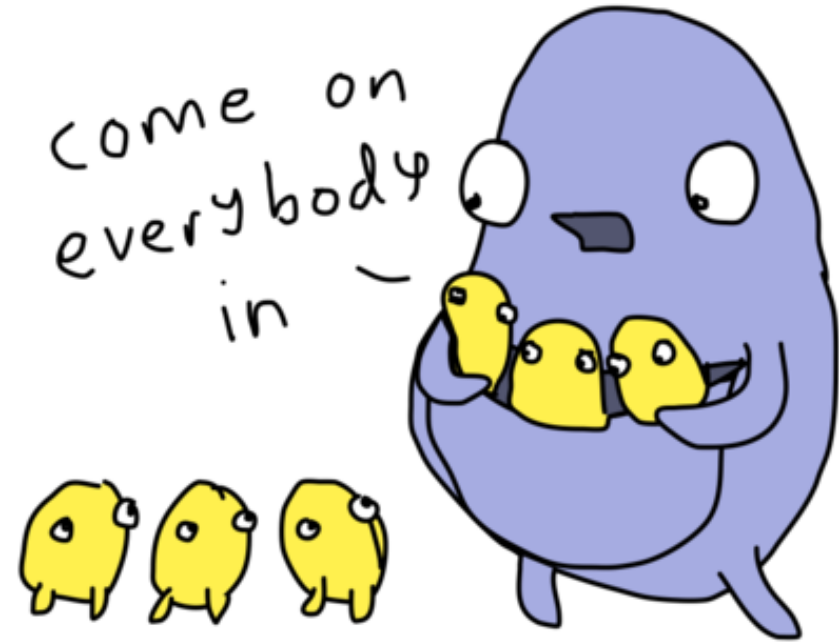
Simple actions we can take.

# Grounding Techniques

- Observe the room using your senses (e.g. objects, sounds, colors, smells, temperature)
- Use counting or other tools for distraction
- Ask yourself, what is the month? What is the date? What is the year? How old am I?
- Use somatosensory techniques, such as toe-wiggling, gripping a table, clenching fists, planting feet on the ground
- Use breathing techniques
- Get a drink of water
- Change the environment by moving into a different room

TEND  
TO YOUNG & MOST  
VULNERABLE

BEFRIEND:  
TURN TO SOCIAL GROUP  
FOR SUPPORT



Mediated by a hormone: oxytocin



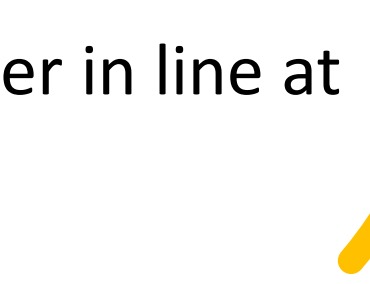


# Gratitude

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- Gratitude occurs when we recognize that there is goodness in our lives that makes a difference to us.
- Often other people have contributed to that goodness.
- It turns out that 1. recognizing the goodness in our lives and 2. expressing appreciation to the people who are or have been part of that goodness has significant health benefits:
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Spiritual

# Gratitude Practices

- Write down something for which you are grateful every day
  - Say something before you go to bed at night
  - Start your day with gratitude
  - Express appreciation to a friend
  - Express appreciation to a family member
  - Express appreciation to a co-worker
  - Express appreciation to a a stranger in line at the grocery store
  - Etc!
- 

# Resilience



No one is resilient all of the time.



# Everyone Has Strengths in a Crisis

**What is your strength?**

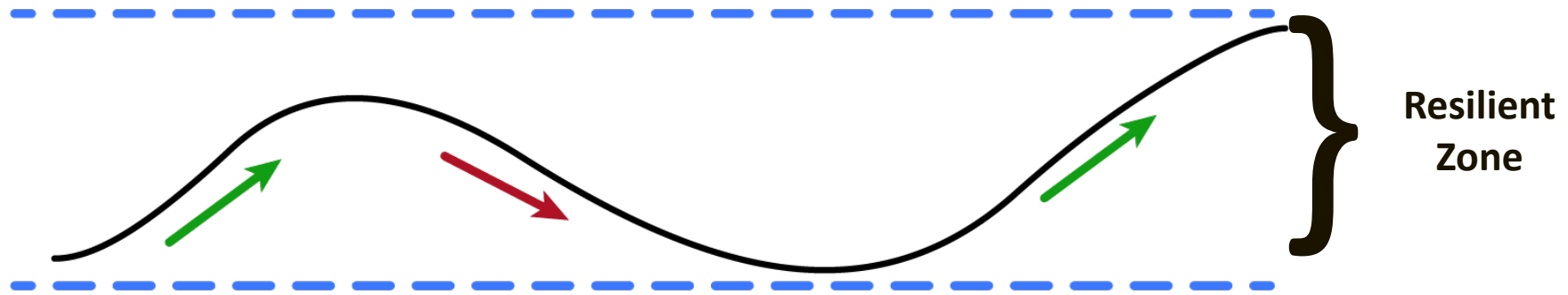
**Here are some examples:**

Planning, Responsive to others,  
Compassion, Spirituality, Faith, Caring,  
Resistance, Altruism, Mindfulness, Humor,  
Good Communication, Self-Awareness,  
Creativity, Finding meaning, Sense of  
purpose, Flexibility, Resourcefulness,  
Empathy, Insight, Logical thinking,  
Imagination, Writing, Solitude...other

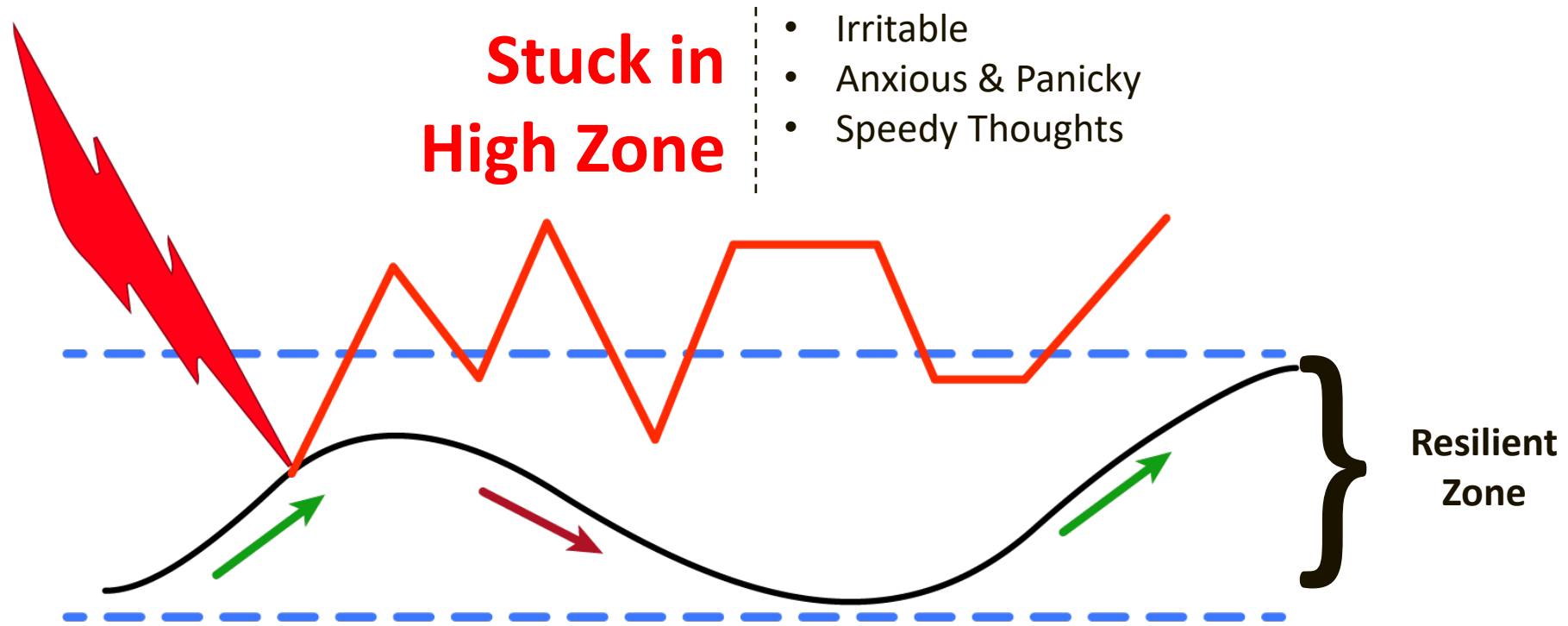
# Traumatic / Stressful Event



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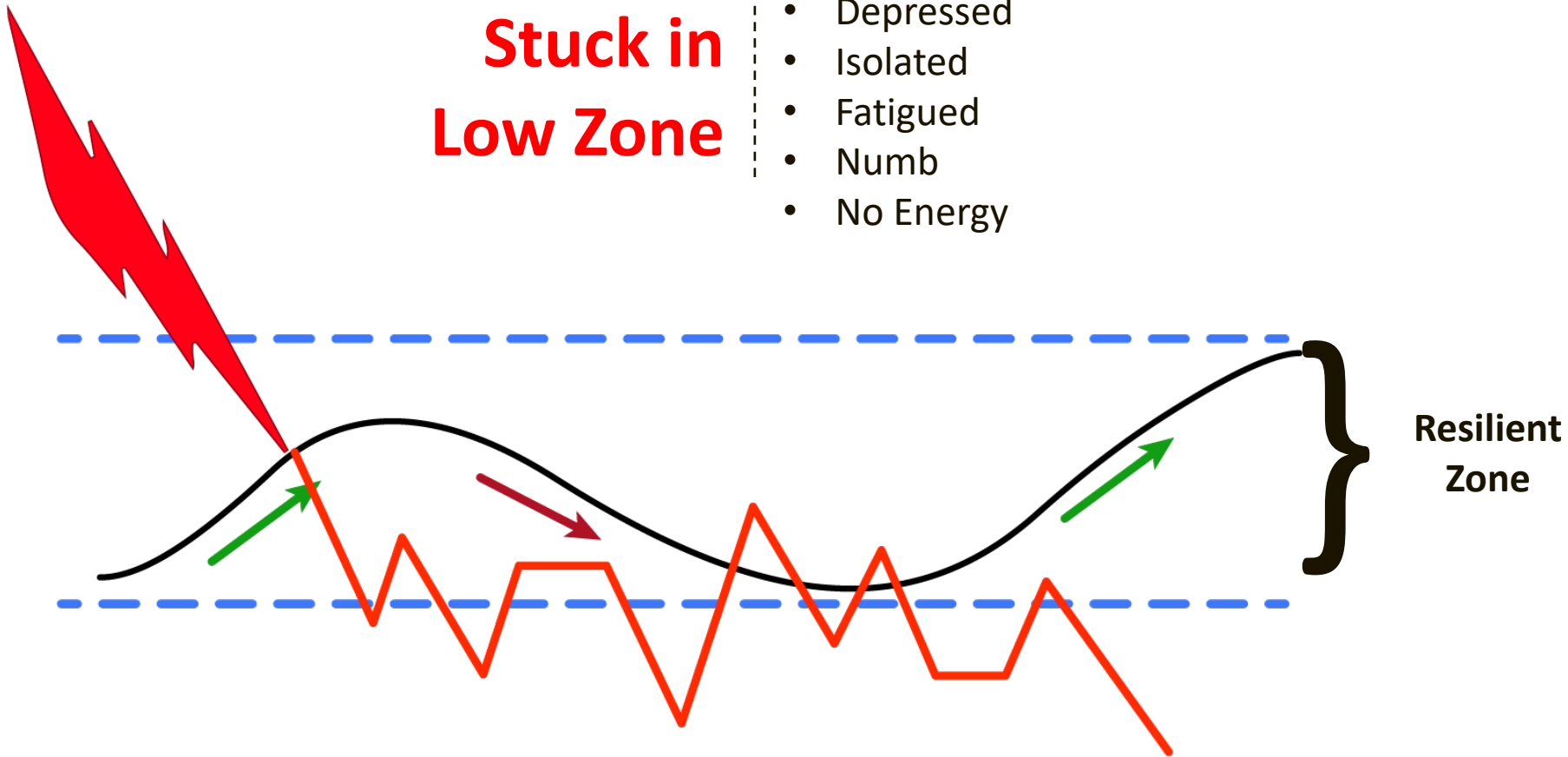




# Traumatic / Stressful Event

**Stuck in  
Low Zone**

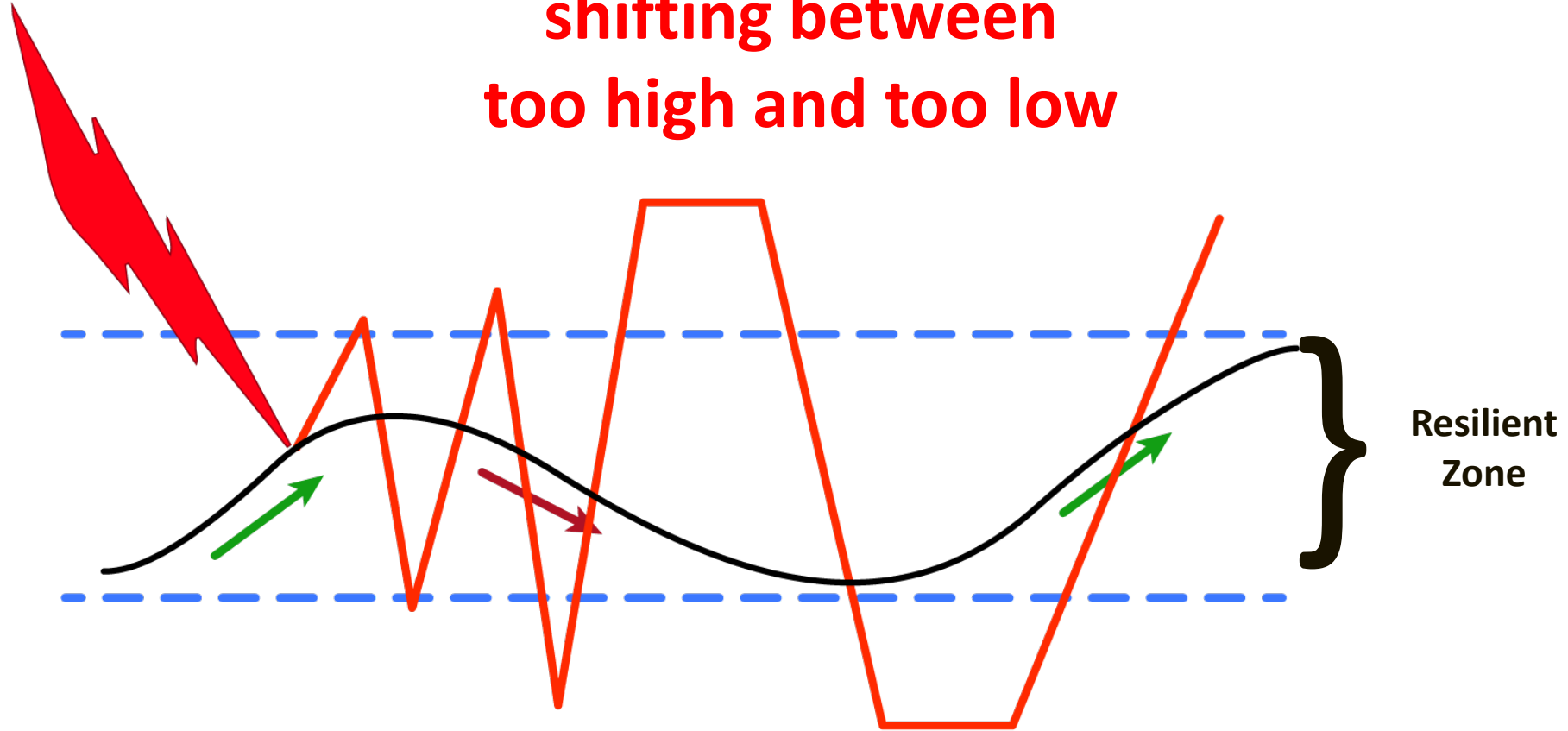
- Depressed
- Isolated
- Fatigued
- Numb
- No Energy



Resilient  
Zone

# Traumatic / Stressful Event

shifting between  
too high and too low





## Resource List

- Breathing
- Butterfly hug
- Call someone
- Music
- Nature, running water
- Healthy comfort food
- Prayer



# Resource List

- Breathing
- Kicking a ball
- Exercise
- Music
- Healthy comfort food
- Call someone
- Prayer



# Resource List

- Breathing
- Meditate
- Call someone
- Yoga
- Nature
- Cook
- Nap



# SOURCES OF RESILIENCE

- INDIVIDUAL
- FAMILY
- FRIENDS
- COMMUNITY
- CULTURAL
- RELIGIOUS
- SPIRITUAL
- NATURE
- ANCESTORS

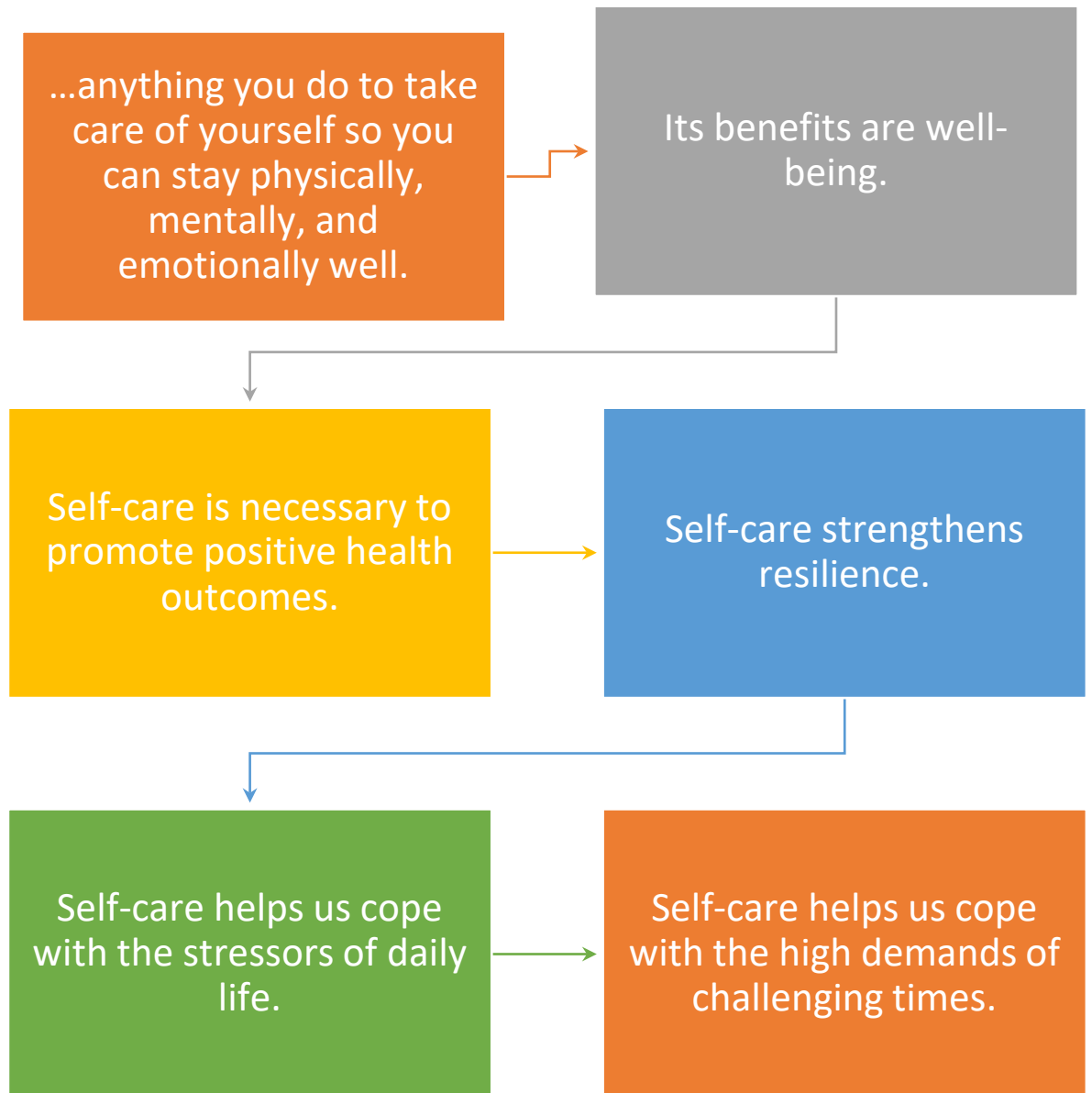
# VICARIOUS RESILIENCE

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- The inspiration and strength that comes from noticing other people's capacity to withstand hardship or their way of just putting one foot in front of the other.
- "Drafting" on another's resilience



# Self-care is:





**WHAT  
SELF-CARE  
IS NOT**



**IT IS NOT  
SELFISH**



**IT DOES NOT  
TAKE A LOT OF  
TIME**

## WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?

---

Being kind to yourself in the presence of your own suffering.

---

Self-compassion is like being your own best friend.

---

“What am I experiencing?  
What do I need to feel better?”

## Research on self-compassion shows:

- Reduces depression, anxiety and shame
- Increases happiness and life satisfaction
- Reduces social comparison
- Associated with healthier body image and less disordered eating
- Reduces caregiver burnout
- Associated with better physical health and immune function
- Associated with better sleep quality

# How to practice self-compassion

Be compassionate to others

Practice

Ask yourself these three questions:

- How would I treat a friend in this situation?
- What do I need to comfort myself?
- How do I care for myself already?



# Quick Ways to Feel Better Right Away

- Help someone
- Set a goal and plan for it
- Laugh
- Write down 2 things you are grateful for
- Notice something beautiful
- Jump in place
- Nap
- Give, get or watch a hug



## **A DAILY PRACTICE TO RESTORE EQUANIMITY**

**Kaethe Weingarten, Ph.D.**

*The Witness to Witness Program*

<https://www.migrantclinician.org/witness-to-witness>

- 1. Start each day by remembering that your intention is to offer compassionate, competent care to those you serve.**
- 2. Notice sensations in the body that are signaling that you are in distress. Pause and take a few, full breaths.**
- 3. If possible, create a buddy system so that you are able to check in with someone about what is challenging for you.**
- 4. Take a moment at a specified time each day – brushing your teeth in the morning, at lunch –to think about how much a loved one cares for you.**
- 5. Recognize that circumstances, not you, may produce harms.**
- 6. Repeat: Everyone, including you, is just doing the best that one can do.**
- 7. Be kind to others and yourself whenever possible.**
- 8. Find one thing that one person did that day and offer a verbal, brief appreciation. It's particularly good if this acknowledgment and appreciation can be observed by at least one other person.**
- 9. When you leave work, take good care of your body, mind and spirit. Take a moment of silence to allow your soul to catch up with you.**



# Evaluation



[https://mcn.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_4YJxh2wBEtmeeW2](https://mcn.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4YJxh2wBEtmeeW2)