



Conflict Management and Complex Relationships

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Acknowledgement

I would like to begin my session by acknowledging the traditional owners, the First People's of the Millewa-Mallee, whose country we are on and I would like to extend my respect to their Elders, both past and present.

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Sources and fuel for conflict

Structural

- Relationship between the interests of 2+ people/orgs:
 - Self-interested exchange with accessible alternatives (egoist)
 - Lasting interdependence with mutual gains structure (unitarist)
 - Lasting interdependence with win-lose structure (antagonistic)
 - Lasting interdependence with mixed-motive structure (pluralist)

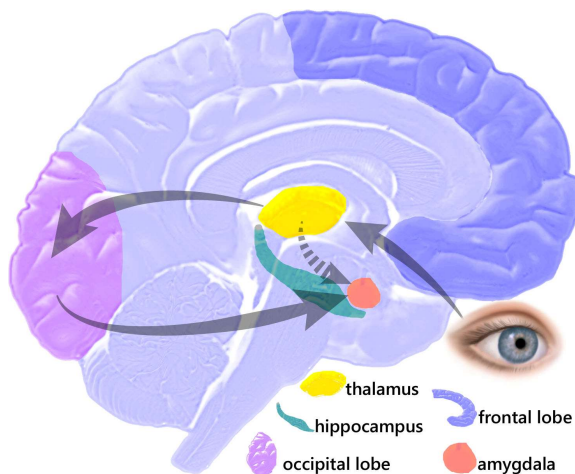
Cognitive

- Frameworks, rules, values and narratives
- (Mis)communication
- Limited/different information processing
- In-out group biases

Psychogenic (magnifies and escalates the prior)

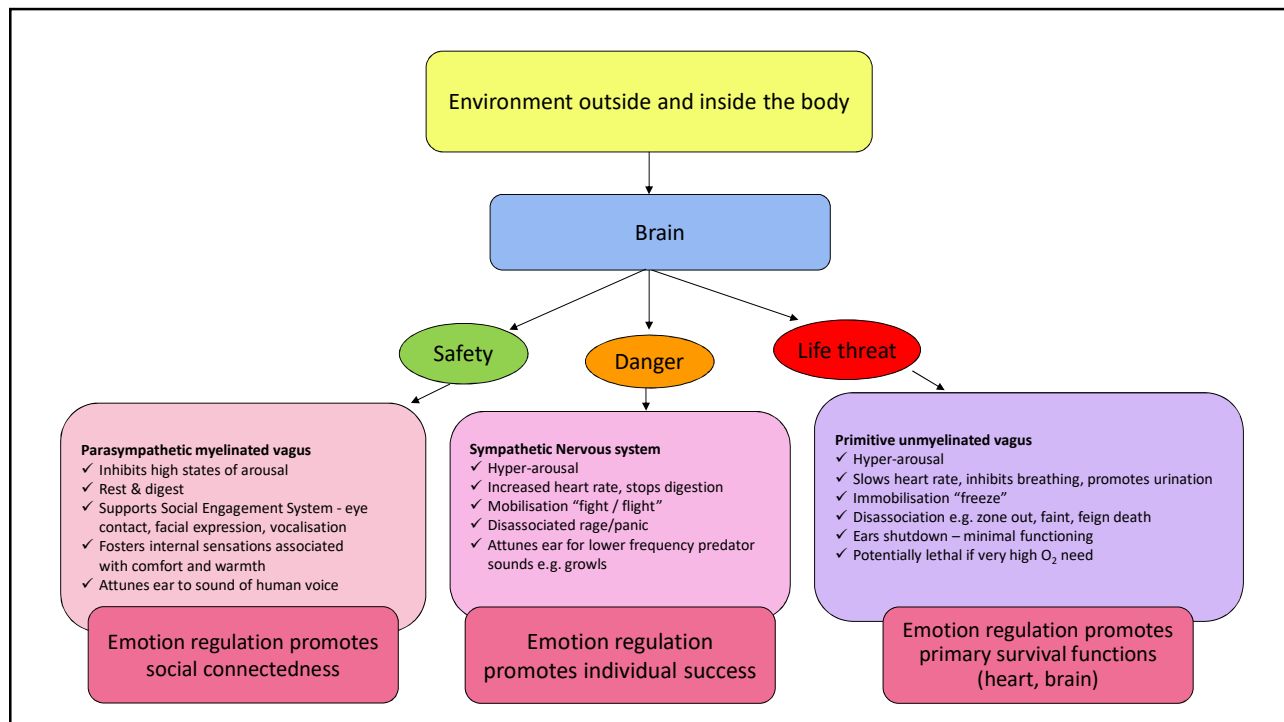
- Emotions
- Moods
- Personality

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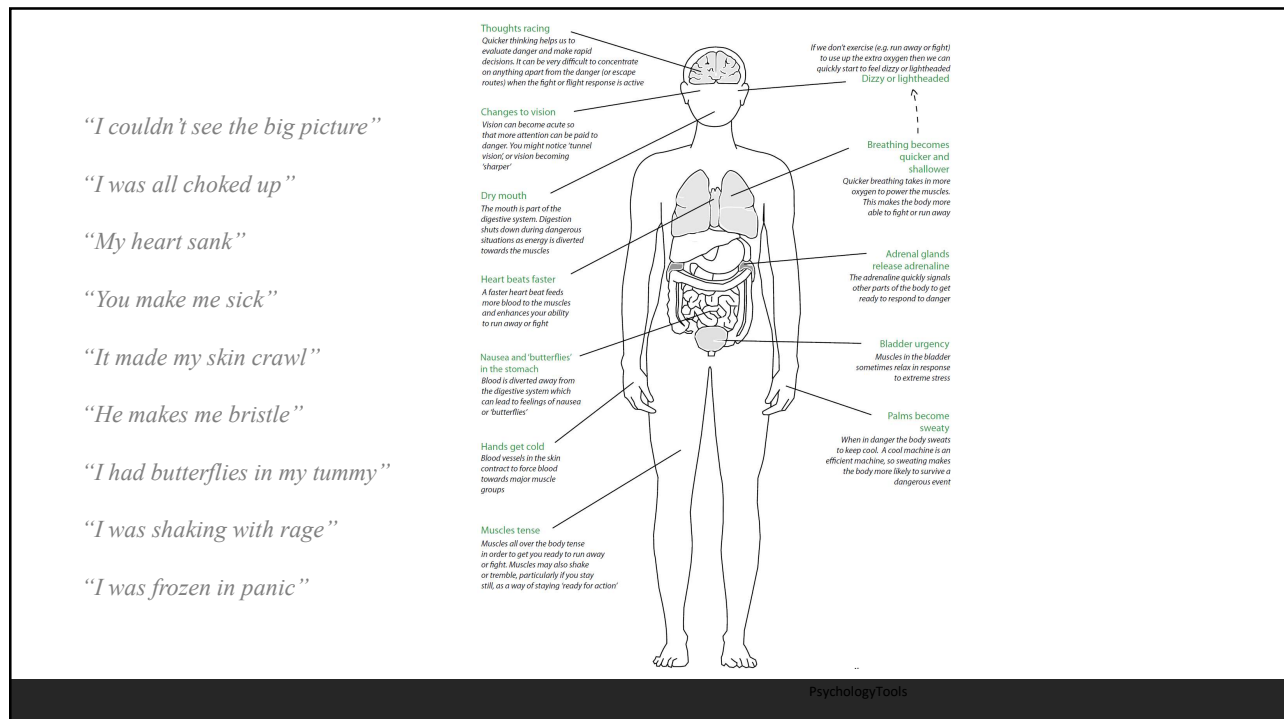


What's going on in a person who is in a conflict situation?

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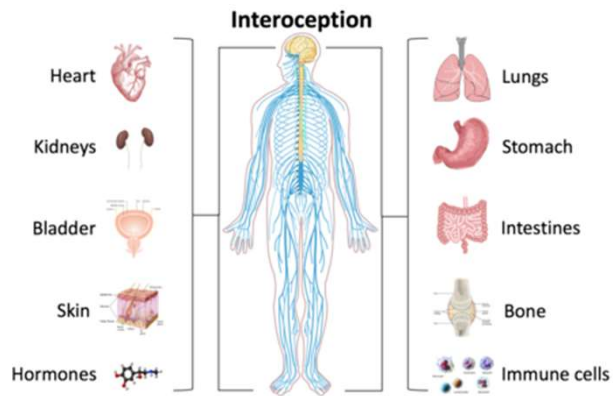


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Interoception



Sensing inside your body

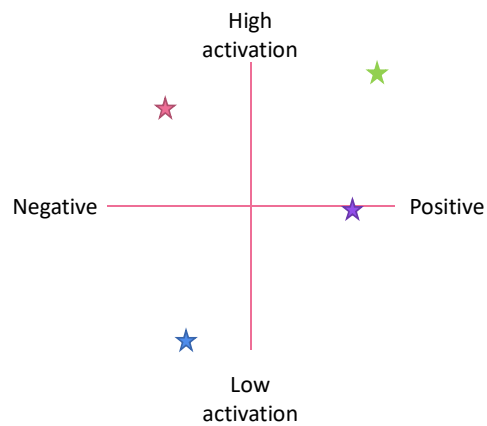
Emotions arise from many sources and share neuroanatomical pathways – degeneracy is king

Your brain is selfish and blunt in its estimations of its own state

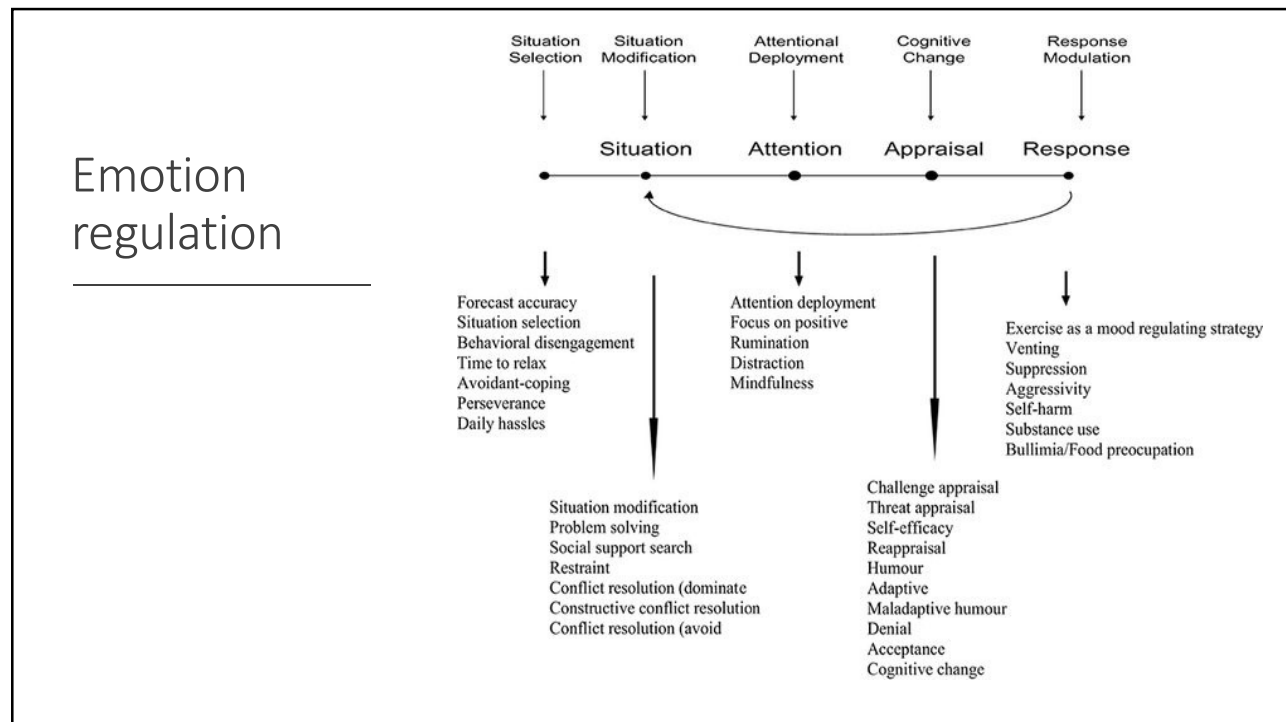
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Emotions

Constructed emotions



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Group Discussion



Which emotion regulation strategies do we like to use?

Do we choose differently:

- At work
- At home
- With friends
- With family

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Integrative Regulation



Emotions are neither good nor bad, just information



Built-in feedback providing physiological, cognitive, and motivational signals that inform behaviors and goals to satisfy basic psychological needs



Nuanced emotions + Ability to express them = self-acceptance, personal growth, interpersonal intimacy, good functioning in many domains

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Emotional mirroring

Be wary of emotional mirroring anger/fear

- Notice other and own language/stance/pitch
- Lower volume
- Slow body movements
- Pauses in speech
- Non-threatening eye contact
- Do not defend self verbally



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Emotional Contagion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Le9Isb03RY8>



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Emotional contagion



NOTICE OWN FEELINGS – IF YOU
DON'T FEEL GOOD AROUND
SOMEONE, INSPECT WHY THEN SOLVE



BE AN EMOTIONAL BOOSTER SHOT
FOR OTHERS (3:1)



SMILE, NOTICE STRENGTHS AND BE
GRATEFUL, IT SPREADS

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Observe Your Mind

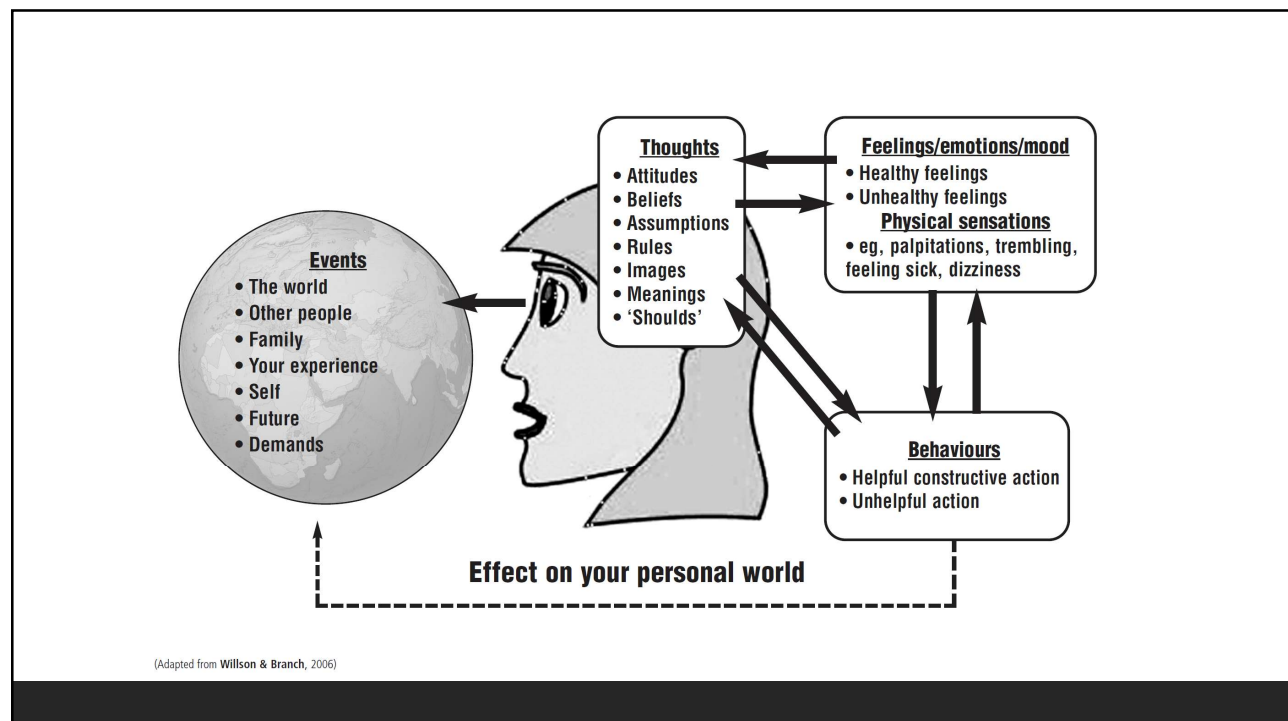


Brain is cognisant and imaginative, with predictive algorithms running all the time



Creating reality from limited sensations and perceptions with a primary drive to survive

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Cognitive change



NEGATIVE BELIEFS ARE
MAGNETIC AND MEAN
"I CAN'T BEAR CONFLICT"



AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE
THOUGHTS
E.G., WHEN FACED WITH A
DIFFICULT INTERACTION
"HERE WE GO AGAIN "



IDENTIFY ORIGINS OF
THOUGHTS/BELIEFS/RULES,
NOTICE WHEN BRAIN WANTS TO
APPLY THEM



RULES ARE USEFUL WHEN
THEY'RE TIME-SPECIFIC, KIND
AND REASONABLE TO SELF AND
OTHERS, AND PRACTICAL
RATHER THAN PUNITIVE

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Pic from Pixabay

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Discussion – perspective

Take turns to describe a conflict situation currently active in your life and answer these questions (5 mins each)



What assumptions about the other person have I made?

What information might I be missing that would help me understand this person's behavior?

What pressures might they be under?

What systems or structures might be influencing this behavior or causing the conflict?

What's another way of explaining the other person's actions?

How might the other person describe the situation?

What was my role in creating the situation?

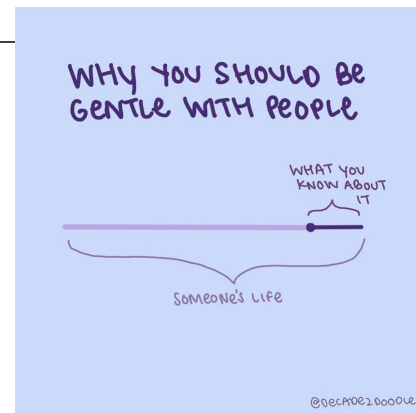
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Crucial Conversations

*"When under attack, our heart can take a similarly sudden and unconscious turn. When faced with pressure and strong opinions, we often stop worrying about the goal of adding to the pool of meaning and start looking for ways to **win, punish, or keep the peace.**"*



Patterson, Crucial Conversations, 2011

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Questions to ask yourself in the heat of the moment

What do I *really* want here for myself, the other person, and the relationship?

How would I be behaving differently if I was aiming for what I *really* want?

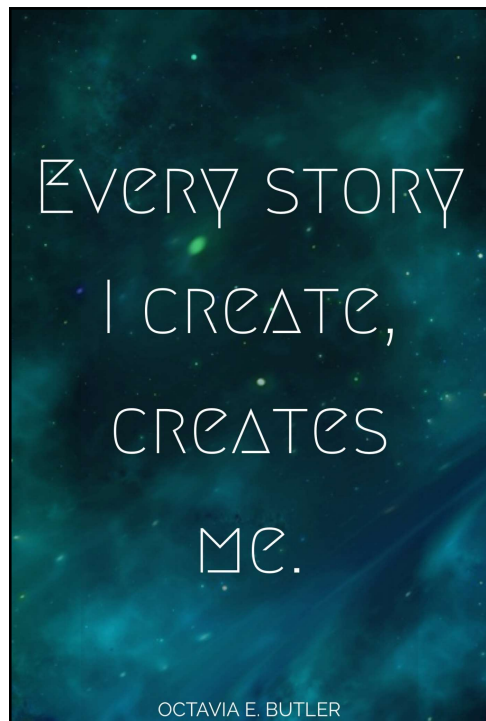
Patterson, Crucial Conversations, 2011

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Managing and resolving conflict

1. Make the relationship your priority
2. Focus on the present
3. Pick your battles
4. Be willing to forgive
5. Know when to let something go

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Successful conflict resolution

- Manage stress while remaining alert and calm
- Be purposeful with your stories, emotions and behaviour
- Pay attention to the feelings being expressed as well as the spoken words of others
- Be aware of and respectful of differences

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Opinions are like Belly-Buttons.
Just because everyone
has one... doesn't mean
they are useful
for anything.

someecards
user card



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Opinions

What opinion do you have about someone with whom you have a conflict and is annoying you?

- What is the basis for your opinion?
- How does your opinion of this person impact your relationship with them?
- What information or actions, if any, may change your current opinion?
- What opinion do you have of yourself in this relationship?
- How would you be different with or around this person if you did not have this opinion?

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Fight, flight, flow



FIGHT: Aggressive Behaviour (I win/You lose)

Expressing your feelings, needs and ideas at the expense of others; standing up for your rights but ignoring the rights of others; trying to dominate, even humiliate, others.

- Hostile and self-defeating.
- Results in anger, self-righteousness, possible guilt later.

Belief: You don't matter.

Payoff: Vents anger and achieves goals in the short term.

Problem: Alienation from others; feelings of frustration, bitterness and isolation.

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Fight, flight, flow



FLIGHT: Passive Behaviour (I lose/You win)

Not expressing your own feelings, needs, ideas; ignoring your own rights; allowing others to infringe upon them.

- Inhibited and self-denying.
- Results in anxiety, disappointment, anger and resentment.

Belief: I don't matter.

Payoff: Avoids unpleasant situations.

Problem: Needs are not met; anger builds up; feelings arise of low self-worth.

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Fight, flight, flow



FLOW: Assertive Behaviour (I win/You win)

Expressing your feelings, needs and ideas. Standing up in ways that do not violate the rights of others.

- Expressive and self-enhancing.
- Results in confidence, self-esteem.

Belief: We both matter.

Payoff: Achieves goals mostly. If this does not occur, there are feelings of self-worth which result from being straightforward. Self-confidence improves and relationships become open and honest.

Problem: You still may feel distant from others who don't handle open relationships well or who have great difficulty expressing their needs or those who wish to dominate.

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Will you react or respond?

When I am about to react in *fight* mode...

- Physical reaction:
- Thought reaction:

When I am about to react in *flight* mode...

- Physical reaction:
- Thought reaction:

Ways I could turn these into a *flow* response are:

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Coping after conflict



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Move

Relax your facial muscles – tongue, cheeks, jaw, nose, eyebrows, forehead

Yoga – shown to increase bodies recovery speed after being stressed

- A 5 minute lie-down in corpse pose can assist swift re-balance

Get some exercise – if environment of activity is natural and calming, then stress reduces more, so go outside to move whenever you can

Regular is great, but using it acutely is also useful (just not as useful as a regular practice)



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Eat

"recovery of the SNS/HPA-response is not sufficient to let the mood return to normal (quickly). The reestablishment of cerebral energy homeostasis is also necessary to regain a balanced emotional state."

Your Selfish Brain needs and will engineer extra energy for itself after a stressful event.

Comfort eating is on purpose, but we end up habituated to it, and often to unhealthy quick-access carbs (junk food).

Feed yourself something nourishing – healthy carbohydrates on purpose – to give your brain some extra energy so it can recover from the HPA stress response faster (e.g., dried fruit, nuts, banana, trail mix with dark choc buds mixed through)



Peters, Kubera, Hubold & Langemann (2011). The selfish brain: stress and eating behavior. Frontiers in Neuroscience.

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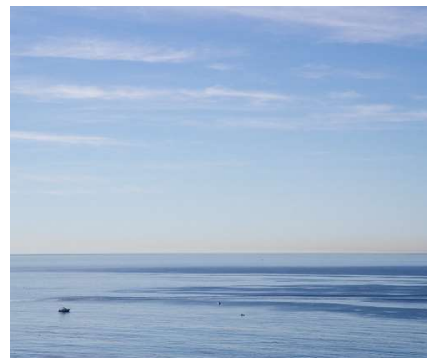
Visualise

Think of a place you've been that you can imagine richly, a place that is associated with feelings of loving calm.

Close your eyes and take yourself there, go through the sights, smells, sounds, physical sensations and tastes you'd be experiencing if you were there.

Imagine someone who loves you is also there, loving you.

Bring your awareness to how it feels in your core to be loved so well and stay in those feelings for a while, breathing regularly and relaxing your face and upper body.



Peters, Kubera, Hubold & Langemann (2011). The selfish brain: stress and eating behavior. Frontiers in Neuroscience.

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Connect deeply

Authenticity of emotions (in the workplace especially) helps people cope with stress and reduces risk of burnout

- Connect with workmates
- Connect with peers/mentor/therapist/coach/supervisor
- Connect with family
- Connect with friends



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Amuse

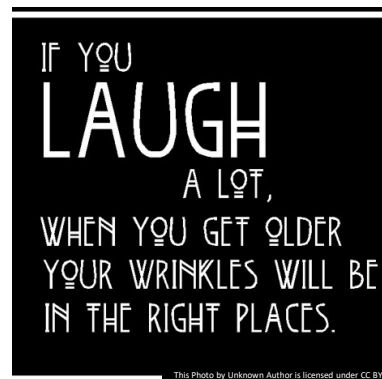
Give your poor brain a burst of pleasure

Laughter – jokes, YouTube comedy

Looking at photos that bring joy

Reading letters of appreciation you've received

Playing a game



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Meditate & Reflect

Practice focusing attention and letting your thoughts come and go – attentional flexibility

Yoga – shown to increase body's ability to rebalance after a stressor

A regular breathing practice – hack your SNS response (4-7-8, 5-5-5, palm-breathing)

Prayer

Written reflection on the situation, your thoughts and feelings and the impact it's had on you (positive and negative)



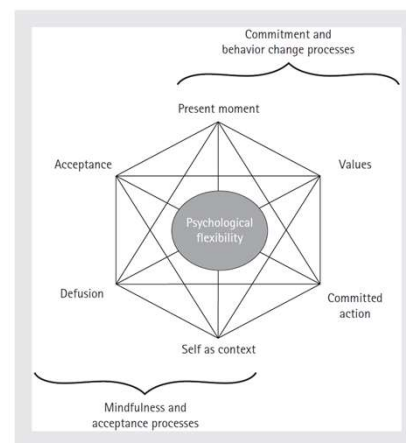
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Accept

Notice, Name, Defuse, Accept, choose committed actions with Values in mind

Regular practices of soothing, co-regulating, noticing, naming, accepting, moving, compassion, connection, flow and mindful observing awareness

“The Happiness Trap” Russ Harris



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Activity



Which coping methods do you use after high stress situations?

Share something that works particularly well for you.

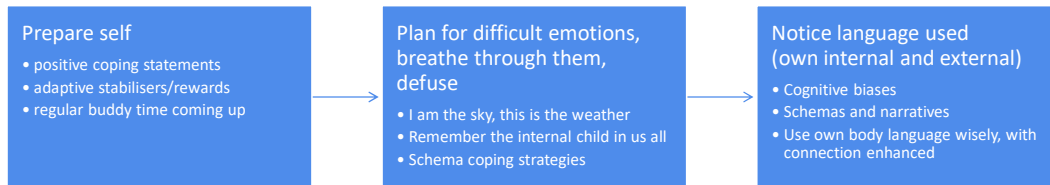
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Plan and
practice to
stay safe

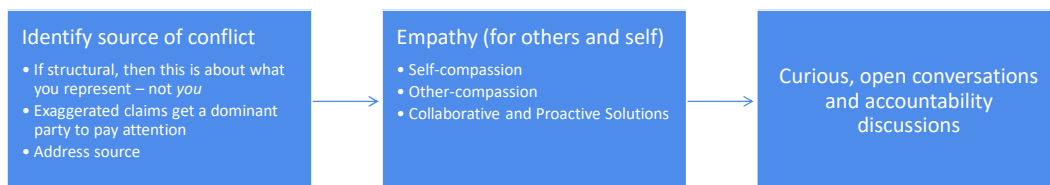
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Planned coping



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Planned coping



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Practice - planning



As much as possible, have plans and processes in place so that severe conflict is minimised environmentally.

Experiment with helpful strategies by planning to try things out.

E.g. Next time I feel agitated after a meeting, I'll go for a walk around the school outside for 5 minutes. During that time, I will ground myself in my senses and provide myself some brain space right after the event so as to calm my nervous system.

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Professional support – in-person and online

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