Managing and supporting well-being in a digital world; Context and practice for staff in higher education

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Clinical Psychologist
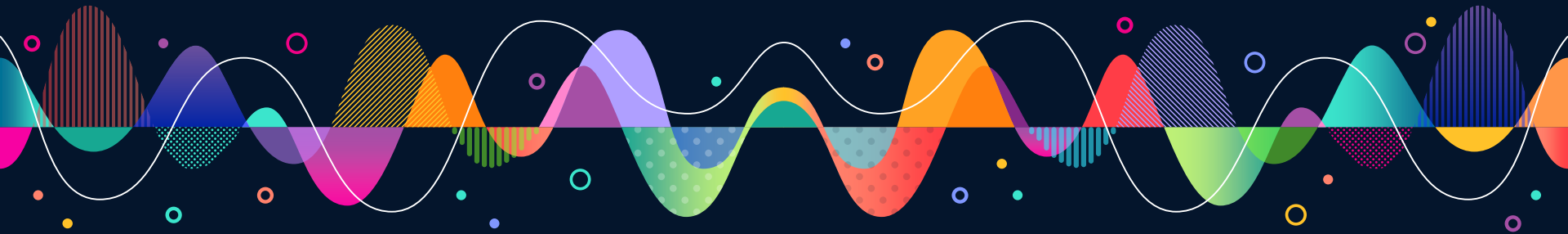
Aims

- To consider the topics of stress and wellbeing within your roles and organisational contexts.
- To think about the additional impact of the pandemic, practically, personally, and professionally.
- To consider ways to approach, adapt to and connect with these challenges and opportunities
- To leave with some ideas to apply to your own life
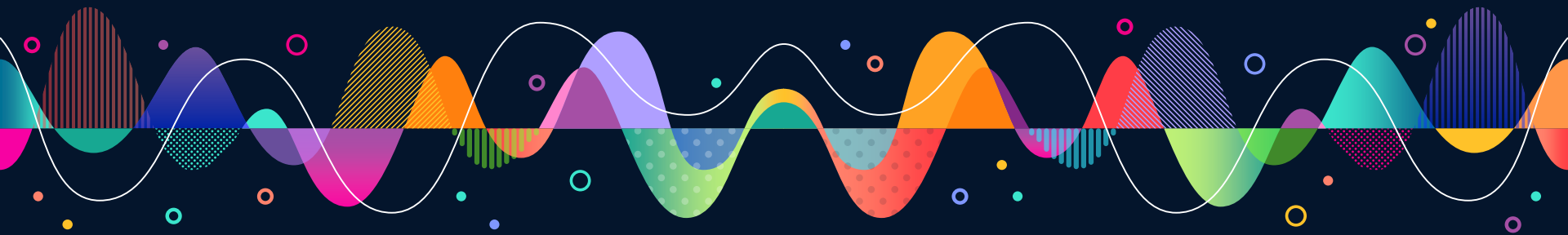- To feel it was an hour well spent (or at least not a waste!)

Cameras

Interaction

Slides

Take care of self

vevox.app

Session ID:

A bit about me

- Clinical Psychologist

- Wellbeing and resilience

- Disclaimer

- Normalising/contextualising human experiences

- My signs of stress

vevox.app

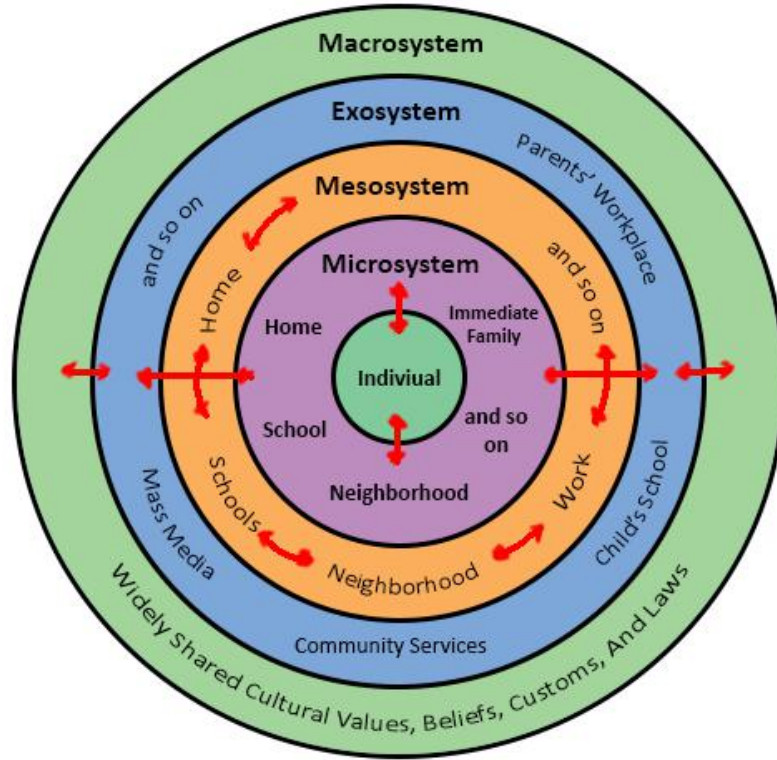# Getting to know you

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Situate and ground yourself

Presenter Notes:

Think about your own personal circumstances for a minute – work, home life etc.

Before we go any further – pull shoulders down from ears, relax jaw, take tongue from roof of your mouth

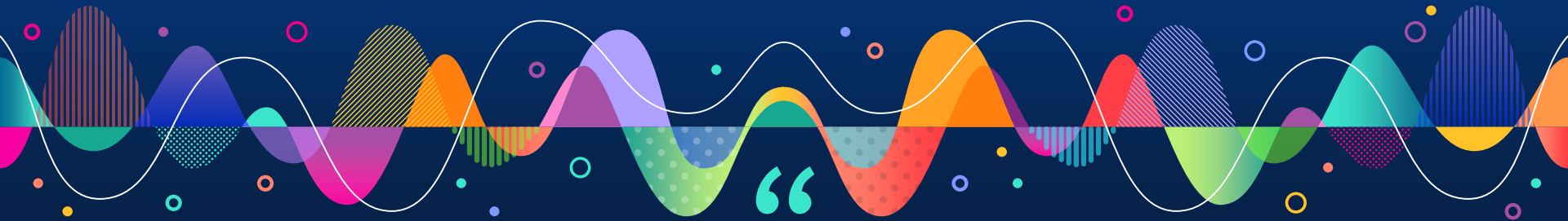**Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory**

"process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity"

(Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011)

Presenter Notes:

Resilience is not an individual trait – it can be enhanced from experience for sure (I've bounced back before and I can again – impact on beliefs)

But capacity is influenced by wider system

Our ancestors and our tricky brains

Limbic System
Cerebral Cortex
Brain Stem
Cerebellum
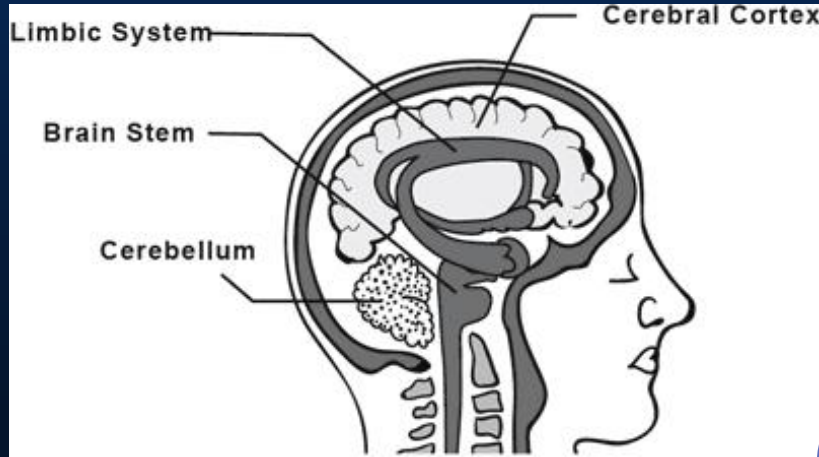
- Thinking, planning, inhibiting & learning
- Relationships, emotions and behaviour
- Motor and sensory input

Presenter Notes:

The way our brains are built has a significant impact on us for better or worse – amazing feats of biology and adaptation but also vulnerable and flawed

Compassion Focussed paper in references for further info
https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/GilbertCFT.pdf

Fight-or-flight response

EYE
Tunnel vision

BRAIN
Signal to adrenal glands

EAR
Auditory exclusion

LUNGS
Fast breathing

HEART
Acceleration

MUSCLES
Tense

STOMACH
Slow digestion

LIVER
Converts glycogen to glucose

ADRENAL glands
Produces hormones

BLADDER
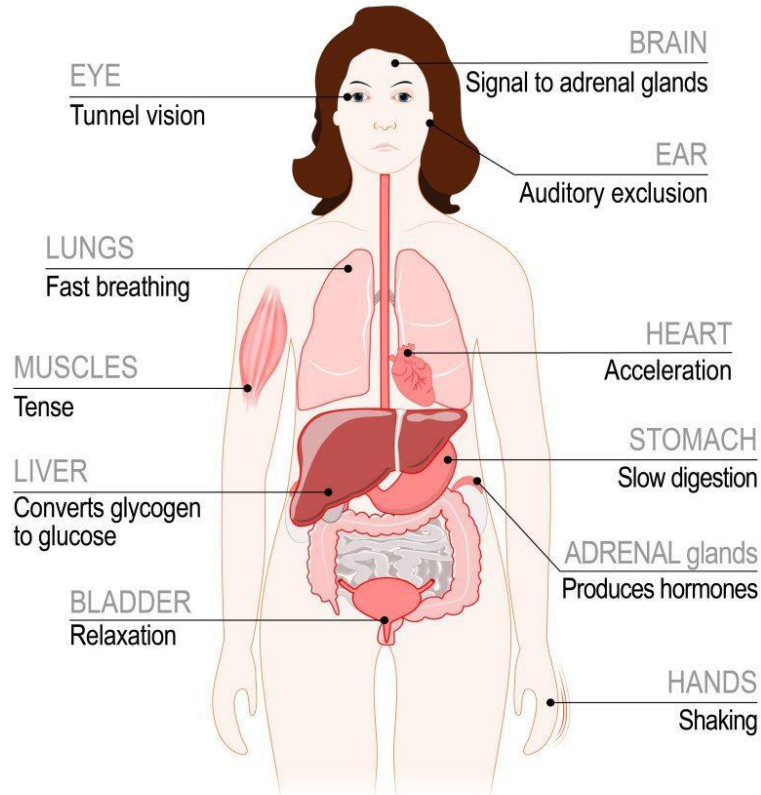Relaxation

HANDS
Shaking

Presenter Notes:

Fight or flight response is essential to survival
However it no longer faces the challenges/stressors that it previously faced (The trials and tribulations of cave man life – high likelihood of being killed and eaten)
We now live in a world where stressors can be less tangible, less immediate and often exist not in physical terms but in our mental experiences (to do lists, anticipation of events, rumination on past experiences)

Work of Hans Selye (1976) and General Adaptation Syndrome may be interesting to some

Image from
https://stephensoncoaching.com/public-speaking-and-the-fight-or-flight-response/

Presenter Notes:

https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/GilbertCFT.pdf

" We got smart, learnt to speak and use symbols and abstractions and, could solve many adaptive problems by 'thinking of solutions' and built technologies. A down side though is that we still have old brain emotions and motives. Moreover, we can stimulate these systems with our new cognitive processing capacities and distort them for good or ill. For example, a zebra running away from a lion will settle down quite quickly after it has escaped, whereas a human can remain traumatized by imagining what might have happened if they had got caught (imagining being eaten alive and dying in agony), what might happen tomorrow if there are two lions, the 'what will happen if…' thinking and so on. Our capacity for such 'reflecting' can stimulate threat emotions and maintain these physiological systems in a state of activation in the body – giving rise to both mental health and physical health problems (Sapolsky, 1994)"
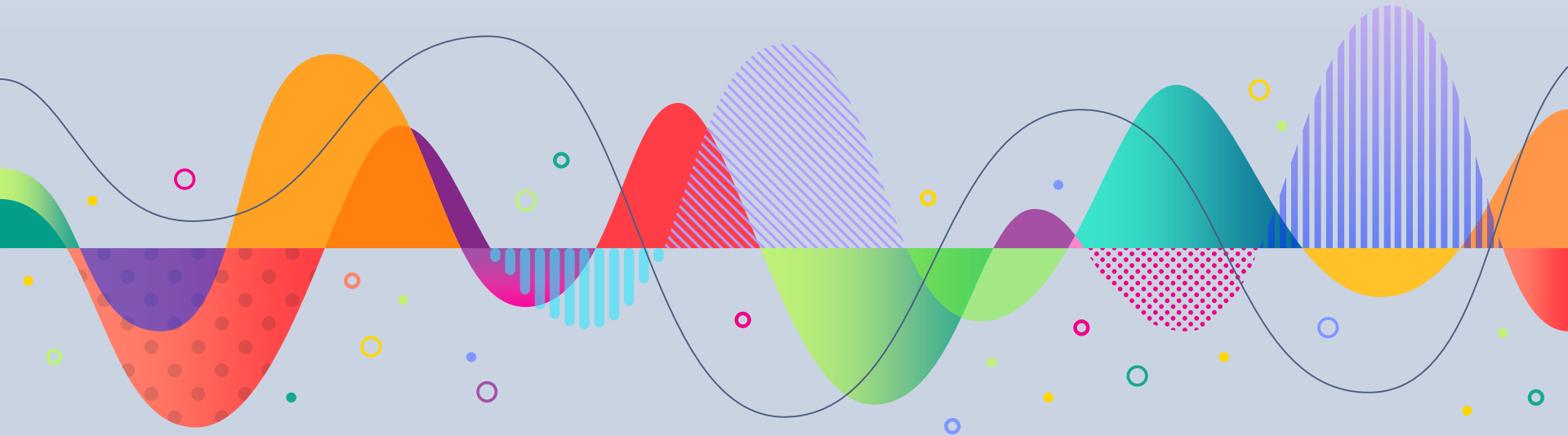
Technology and working from home
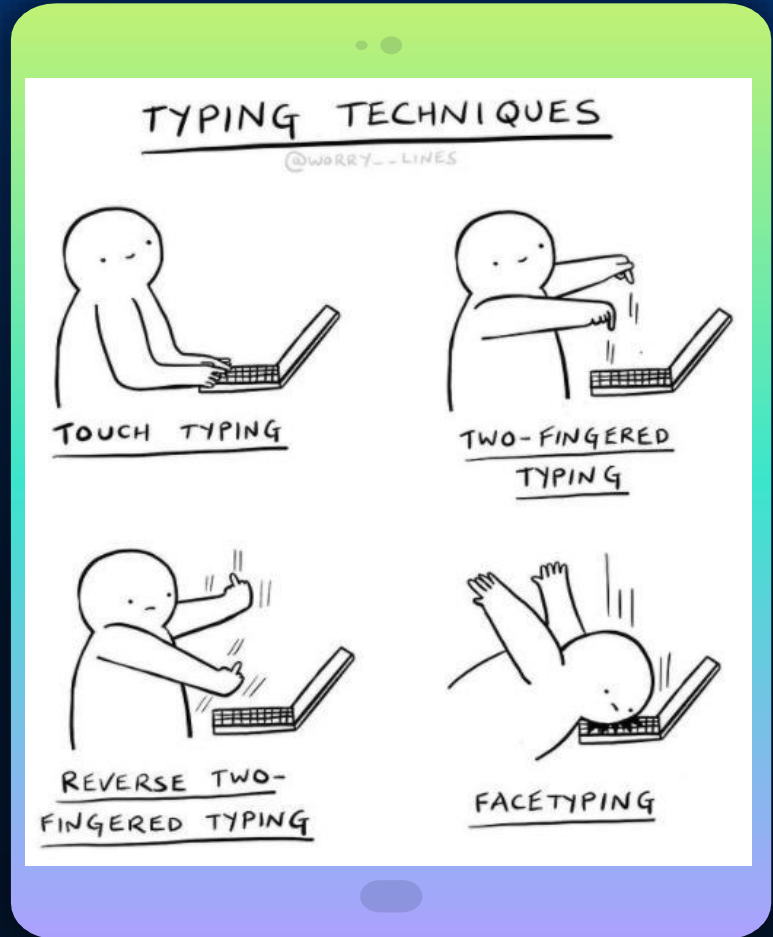
Additional demands?

One word - Additional demands in life at present? (add more detail in 👥 30 the Zoom chat box if you'd like)

Threat

Drive

Soothe

Presenter Notes:

https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/resources/videos

The threat-focused system is about protection, safety seeking, and fight/flight. Emotions connected to this system include, anger, disgust, fear, and anxiety. The Red Circle is essential for survival. However, it can easily take over without our realising.

The drive system is incentive and resource-focused. It activates us to work towards things that we want, desire, or seek to achieve. Emotions connected to this circle are drive, excitement and vitality. Often we use the drive system to help us manage the threat system.

The soothing system is about settling, grounding, not being in pursuit of anything and safeness. Emotions connected to this circle include being calm and content. It helps us rest and digest and have open attention. The soothing system can be restorative and regenerative.

Adapted from https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/content/uploads/the-3-circlescompassion-focused-therapy-2.pdf

Survive, threat focus, danger, fear and anxiety, +++ aroused, fight/flight

Take care, empathy to distress, nurture, safeness, calm

Achieve, win, goals, motivated, focussed, + aroused

Threat

Drive

Soothe

Presenter Notes:

Chronic stress
irritability
fatigue
headaches
difficulty concentrating, or an inability to do so
rapid, disorganized thoughts
difficulty sleeping
digestive problems
changes in appetite
feeling helpless
a perceived loss of control
low self-esteem
loss of sexual desire
nervousness
frequent infections or illnesses
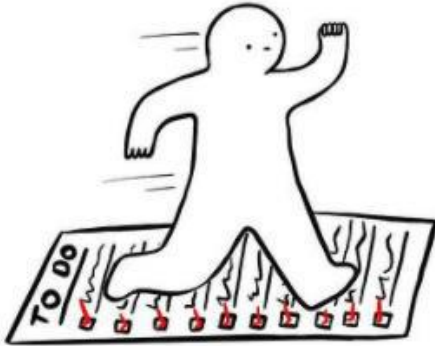
Threat

Drive

Soothe

Presenter Notes:

Constantly on
Working non stop
Pushing driving striving
Deadlines
Goal focussed
Channeling energy into "the next thing"

Ever find yourself stuck in "Next week will be quieter" mode

FEEL THE BURNOUT

Threat

Drive

Soothe
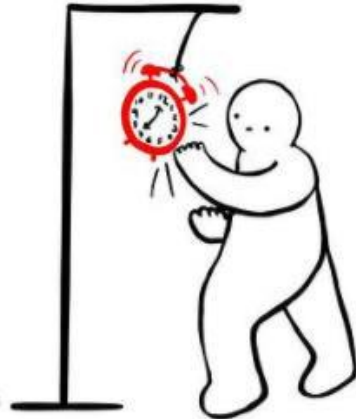
Presenter Notes:

Balanced emotion systems – ability to think clearly, respond to difficult emotions, approach goals

Compassionate approach is not always to just "make things better" or "chill" (not just simply enlarging soothing system) it can be choosing to do a difficult thing (tackling a task you have put off), in recognition that this is causing stress or is helpful to you in the longer term.

FIRST, THE BASICS

- Food
- Water (other beverages?)
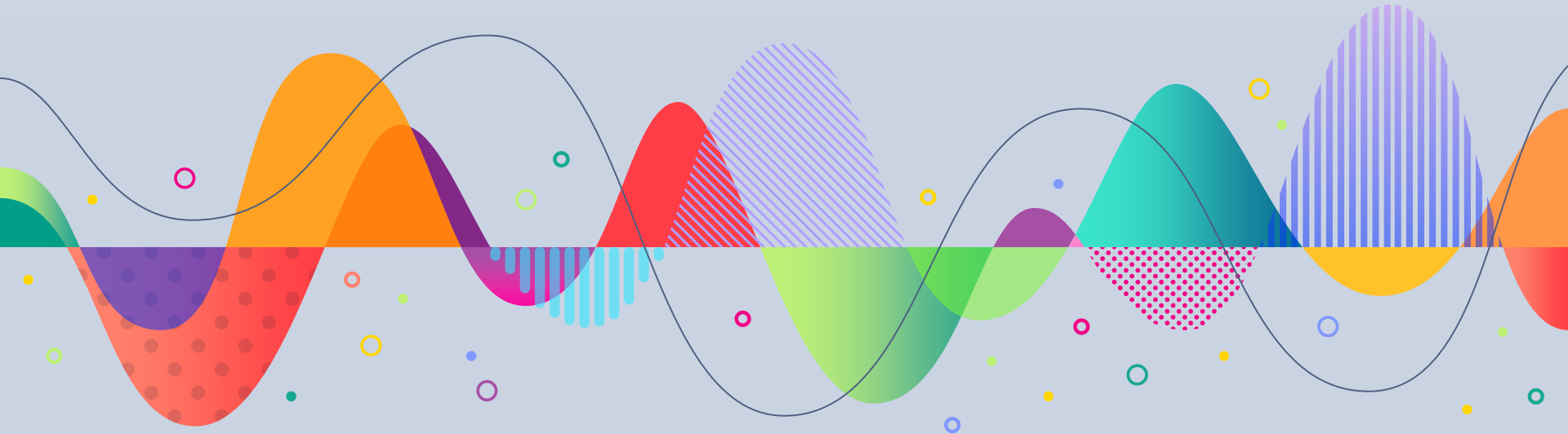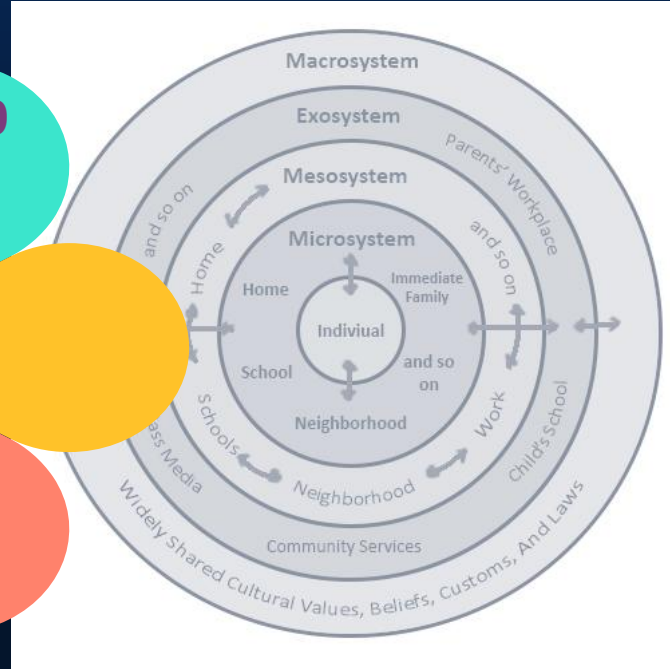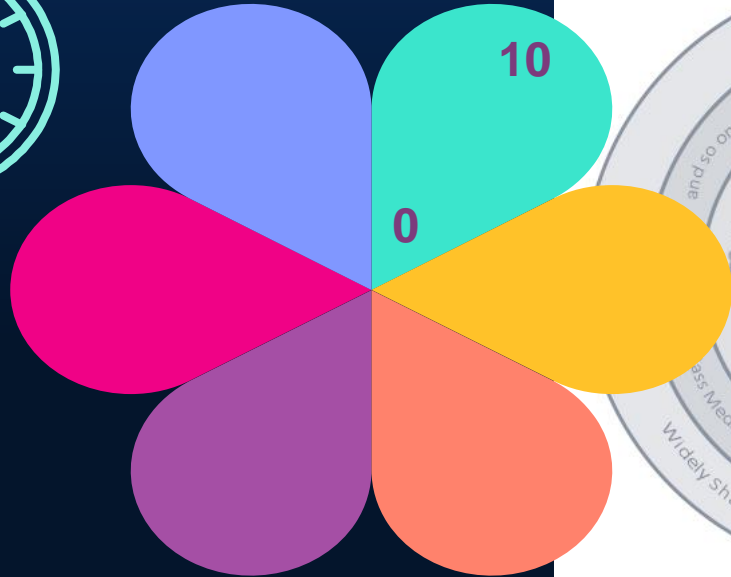- Routine
- Sunlight
- Movement

Time and Values

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Time and Values

Presenter Notes:

How close 0-10 are you towards your key values?

A helpful discussion of values from https://workingwithact.com/2011/03/26/getting-clear-about-values/

Some tips Russ Harris gave at a recent Happiness Trap workshop.

1. Values are 'desired qualities of behaviour'. They are about who we want to be in the world. What sort of employee, manager, co-worker, friend, partner etc.
2. Values are not goals. Goals can be achieved whereas values are moment to moment choices. In this moment now, I can be curious but I can never achieve 'curious'.
3. Values are not rules. They are qualities we choose freely. As soon as we start to feel we have to follow a value, it loses all it's vitality. It stops being a value and starts to be a rule. In vital workplaces, people are happy to sign up for the organisational values. In workplaces lacking vitality, staff members follow the organisational 'values' because they will get into trouble if they don't.
4. Values are about *my* behaviour not what I want to get from others. In a recent moving post, Rob gave an example of a 'value' that lacked vitality:

'I value my family, for the love and support they offer me.'

Rob wrote about the importance of exploring the feelings underneath this statement to get to something a little more vital. He made an important point. I would also like to add that this 'value' is actually a statement of a want or need. And mixing values and needs is problematic. What if my family get preoccupied with their own problems and don't give me the support I need? Do I then stop valuing them? Whereas, if I can convert this statement into a **quality of my own behaviour** then it becomes completely in my control. Each moment I can choose to act on the value or not. Perhaps it is:

'I value my family. I show this by being affectionate and caring in my interactions with them'

This means that values can be incredibly empowering. They are about how I choose to behave. They aren't dependent on how others respond to me. I do need to add a rider here, values need to be flexible. The context determines which values I act upon in any given moment. With a bullying boss, I may choose to act on my values around assertiveness and justice. With an unhappy client, I may choose to act on my values around kindness and compassion. But because it is always about me, I have the power to choose.

Regulate your brain (and body)

Bottom up (Repetitive, Rewarding, Rhythmic ,Relational)

MANAGABLE
Use all the senses
Dance, run, walk, drum,
Music, comforting smells, tastes, sounds,
Time with others

Top down (Use the powerful cortext to best effect)

Write it down, break it down, think it through, make a plan, then put it down and take a step back
Improve awareness
Use of diary/worksheets (CBT based)
Small steps towards values – then recognise the small steps

Regulate your brain (and body)

Presenter Notes:

We can work with the levels of our brains (earlier slides) in many ways and use them flexibly depending on our situation/needs.

Importantly, a brain and body cannot feel regulated if it does not have the building blocks (well fueled, enough water, sunlight etc.)

Once these basics are covered we can work from the "bottom" of our brain up. That is, engaging in a range of activities that regulate our brainstem. These activities are often (Repetitive, Rewarding, Rhythmic ,Relational). Think of the core things we do with small children when they are upset. We rock them, we talk gently to them, we give them time to run, move, play with slime, jump on trampolines. All of these things can be important for adults too! Find ways that you can do these kinds of activities in your own life. Movement breaks at your desk, spin on your office chair,drum, listen to music, do some belly breathing (or blow some bubbles!).

We can also use our thinking brains (drive) to work to help our brains feel regulated. We can write things down, we can make to-do lists to help things feel more manageable, we can write down our thoughts, feelings and behaviours to track them and see if we can change them. We can take small steps towards our values.

Reflection and Questions

Resources

○ What's in your system (family ,friends, institution resources)

○ Physical movement https://www.iscp.ie/page/working-from-home

○ Compassionate Mind website https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/

○ Background to CFT/ biological perspective
        https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/GilbertCFT.pdf

○ Background Mental Health Matters- Mapping Best Practices in Higher Education

    https://ahead.ie/userfiles/files/shop/free/Mental-Health-Matters-%20Online.pdff

 HE specific resource for digital well-being of learners that is applicable to all staff too:
    https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/digital-wellbeing-of-learners

Resources

○ Self help resources   https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/

○ Self help guide   https://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/pdfGuides/Stress.pdf

○ Tricky brain habits https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/UnhelpfulThinkingHabitsWithAlternatives.pdf

○ HSE wellbeing resources
          https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/covid-19/minding-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.html

○ HSE CBT videos

https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/news/general/health-and-wellbeing-managing-stress-and-anxiety.html?utm_ source=broadcast&utm_ medium=email&utm_ campaign=staff_ campaign&utm_ content=health_ wellbeing_ managing_ stress_ and_ anxiety

Resources for families

https://www.cypsc.ie/children-young-people.170.html

https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/18747b-neps-advice-resources-for-keeping-children-and-young-people-well-dur/

https://solihullapproachparenting.com/free-downloads/

https://www.facebook.com/HighlandCAMHS/

https://www.facebook.com/Scottish-Borders-CAMHS-111540140477678

https://www.facebook.com/CYPOTNHSBorders/

https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/parents-and-carers/coronavirus-wellbeing-activity-ideas-for-families/

THANK YOU!

Any questions?
You can find me at ceara.bergin@newcastle.ac.uk and on Linkedin

References

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2007). The bioecological model of human development. *Handbook of child psychology*, *1*.

Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *53*(1), 6-41.

Windle, G., Bennett, K. M., & Noyes, J. (2011). A methodological review of resilience measurement scales. *Health and quality of life outcomes*, *9*(1), 1-18.