

Mental Wellbeing at the Workplace

Mel McElhatton

MA in Gestalt Psychotherapy

BA (hons) in Social Work

Diploma in Life Coaching





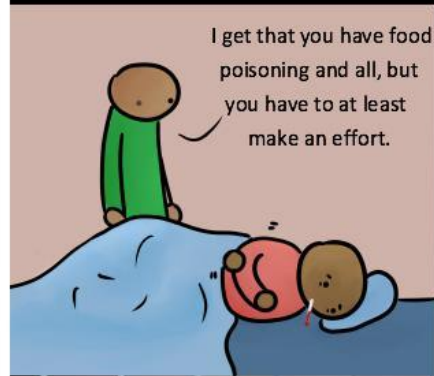
What is Mental Wellbeing?

Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes one's own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to one's community

(World Health Organisation, 2014).



Helpful Advice



Good Mental Health

Mental health affects our capacity to learn, communicate, and form and maintain effective relationships.

Even though work can involve some degree of pressure, as long as it is within individual coping capacity for it, it leads to personal growth and development.

Working well and contributing to a team effort, drives self-esteem, gives a positive sense of community and improves productivity and satisfaction for individuals and the whole team. When mental health is good, everybody benefits.

Some facts...

- 1 in 4
One person in every four will be affected by a mental disorder at some stage of life. Mental disorders can affect everyone, everywhere. But with the removal of barriers such as stigma and lack of awareness, they can most often be treated effectively.
Global economic output loss due to mental disorders US \$16.3 trillion between 2011-2030
- 70 million
Globally, 70 million people suffer from alcohol dependence, often a causative or resultant factor for mental ill-health.
- Leading cause of disability
Globally, major depression is now a leading cause of disability.
- 1 million
Every year there are 1 million deaths by suicide. 10-20 million people attempt it.



**Physical vs Mental
Health? Are they
related?**

**What types of health are
there?**

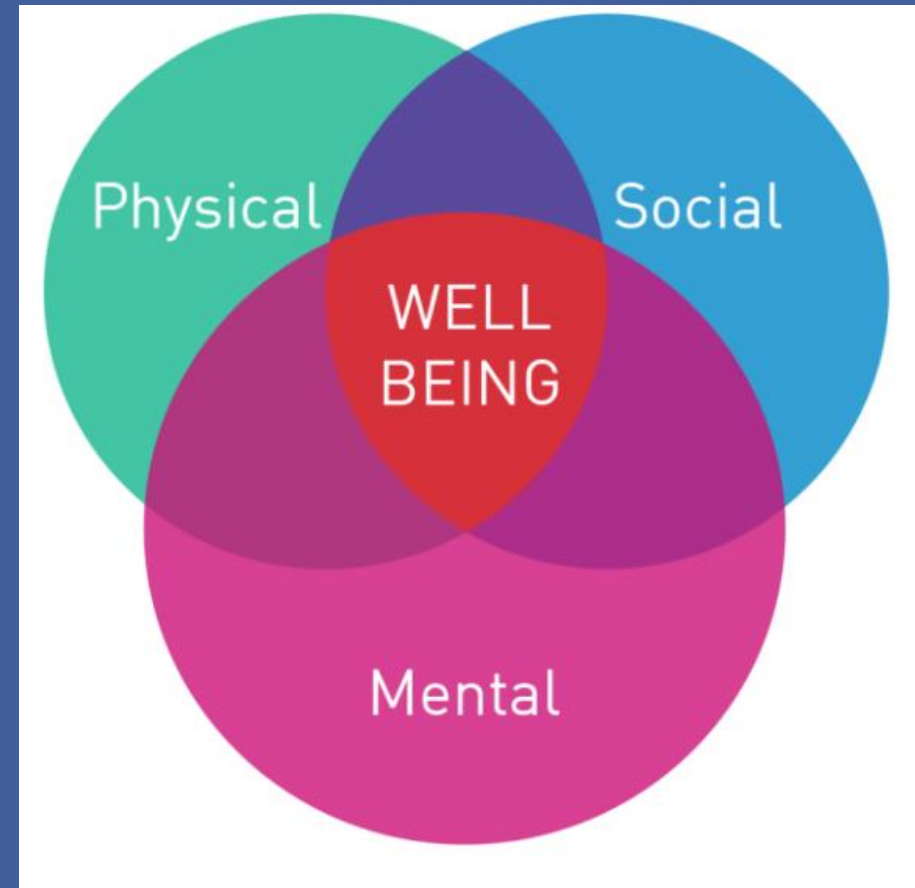


Physical health vs Mental health

The three key dimensions of health, mental, physical and social health (social contacts, family, having hobbies etc) are closely linked.

Our mental health can be positively or negatively affected by our physical health e.g. pain as a result of a physical health problem, can cause a low mood. It works the other way too – when people have low mood their physical health condition can feel more intense.

You can therefore improve mental health by focusing on activities to stay physically healthy.



Wellbeing Framework

Physical

Looking after our health, fitness, diet, sleep, and energy levels

Purpose

What really matters to us and connecting to that as much as possible

Mental

Managing our mental choices and reactions to distractions and competing pressures

Emotional

Finding ways to be positive and confidently face the challenges that life throws at us



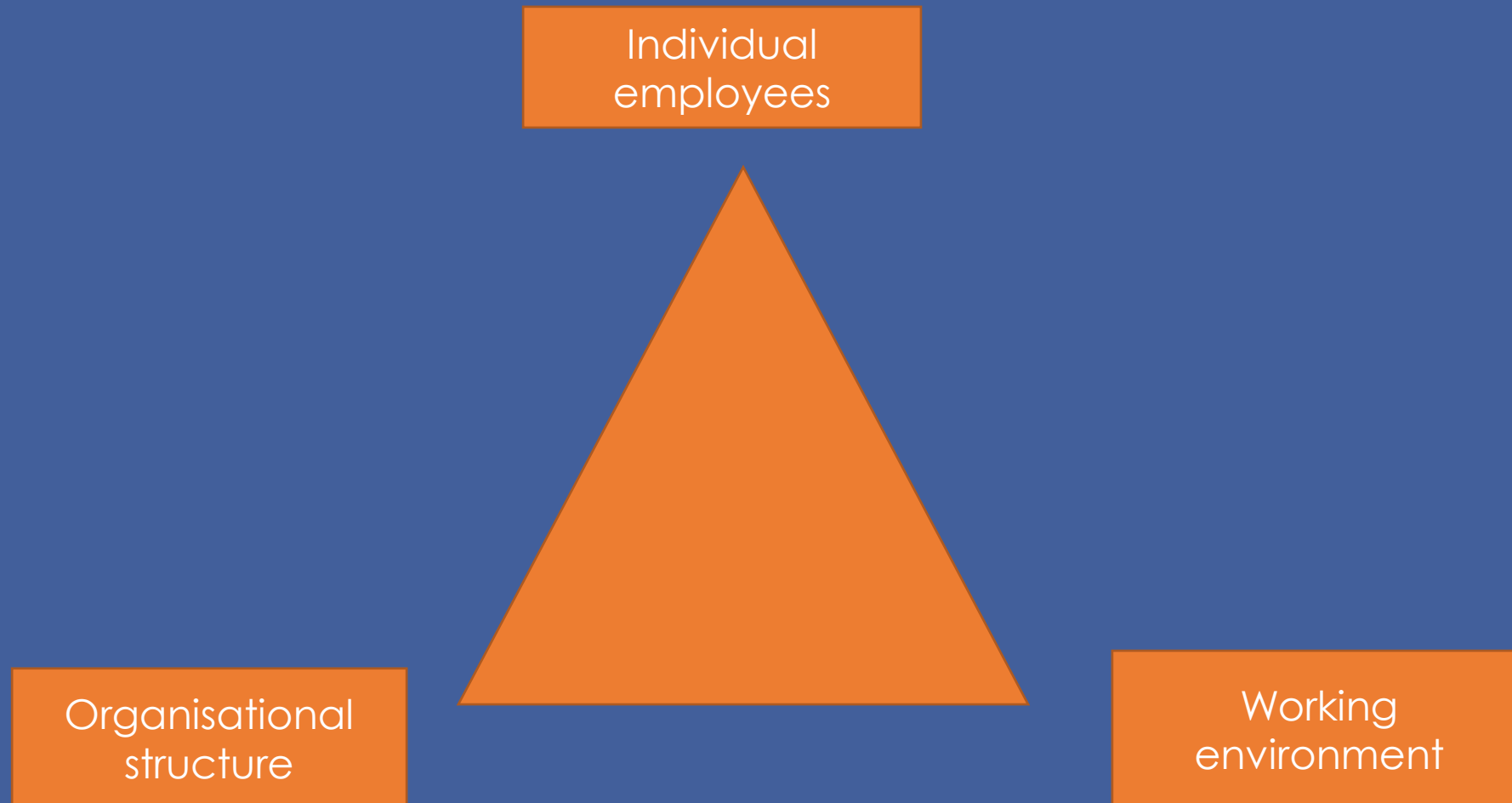
Reflection:

What is your personal purpose?
What is your purpose at work?

Do these align?



Workplace health – 3 interrelated components



You are not there to diagnose

You can offer:

- Awareness
- Empathy
- Support
- Accommodations



- Mental health problems such as depression or anxiety disorders are common.
- Sudden changes in behaviour could indicate that the person is experiencing a mental health problem or a pre-existing mental health condition has resurfaced and requires treatment and support.
- With early and appropriate treatment and support, the majority of people with mental health difficulties recover and can continue to work productively throughout the recovery period.
- Before resorting to disciplinary action against an employee for poor performance at work, it is important to consider the possibility that they may have a mental health problem. In some cases, mental health difficulties may appear suddenly and without prior warning. However, most of the time, these difficulties appear gradually with subtle warning signs.



**What are some
red flags for you?**

Some Warning Signs

An employee starts arriving late at work, appears disorganised and lethargic and becomes withdrawn and less productive.

An employee suddenly spends far more time at the office than before, working at breakneck speed for an extended period of time. S/he seems strangely overconfident about his/her abilities and far less cooperative than s/he used to be.

An employee starts availing oneself of sick leave much more often after years of a regular attendance record. S/he has become quite withdrawn and uncommunicative and is finding it difficult to follow simple instructions.

An employee with young children and a spouse who is very ill is frequently absent and has difficulty meeting performance targets. At the office, s/he is often on the verge of tears and seems incapable of focusing on his/her work.

Two employees have told you that they have smelled alcohol on the breath of one of their co-workers. This person has always behaved responsibly, and there has never been an indication of a drinking problem in the past.

Stress

- People experience stress when they perceive that there is an imbalance between the demands made of them and the resources they have available to cope with those demands.
- Though the experience is psychological, stress also affects a person's physical health.



What is Pressure?
What is Stress?

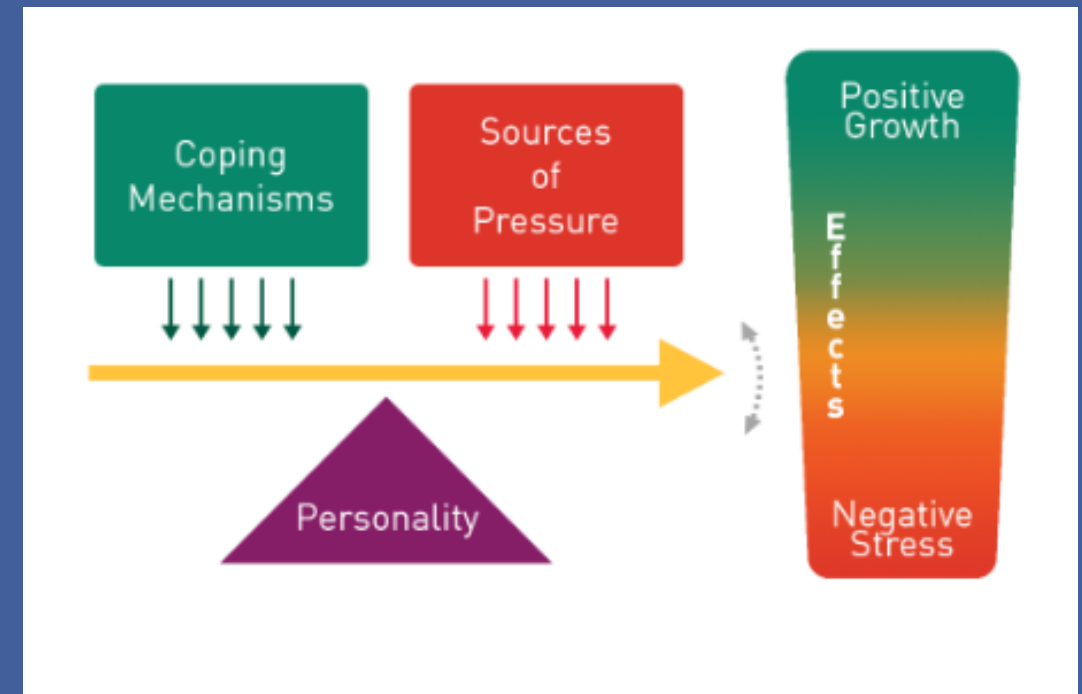


Pressure vs. Stress

The terms 'pressure' and 'stress' are different. If pressures exceed an employee's ability to cope, they may experience feelings of stress.

But pressure can also drive personal growth. Coping habits and their personality are also factors.

Well-designed, organised and managed work is good for us. However, poor job design, workorganisation and communication can easily drive work-related stress.



Factors which may cause stress

Lack of control
over work

Unsuitable
demands made of
workers

Lack of support
from colleagues
and management

Psychological or
physical violence at
work

Conflicts between
our work role and
our role outside of
work

Abusive behaviours

Gossiping

Teasing

Physically
inappropriate
behaviour

Intruding on
interpersonal
space

Swearing

Racist / sexist
comments

Violence

Signs of Stress

An increase in unexplained absences or sick leave

Poor performance

Poor time-keeping

Increased consumption of alcohol, tobacco or caffeine • Frequent headaches or backaches

Withdrawal from social contact

Poor judgement or indecisiveness

Constant tiredness

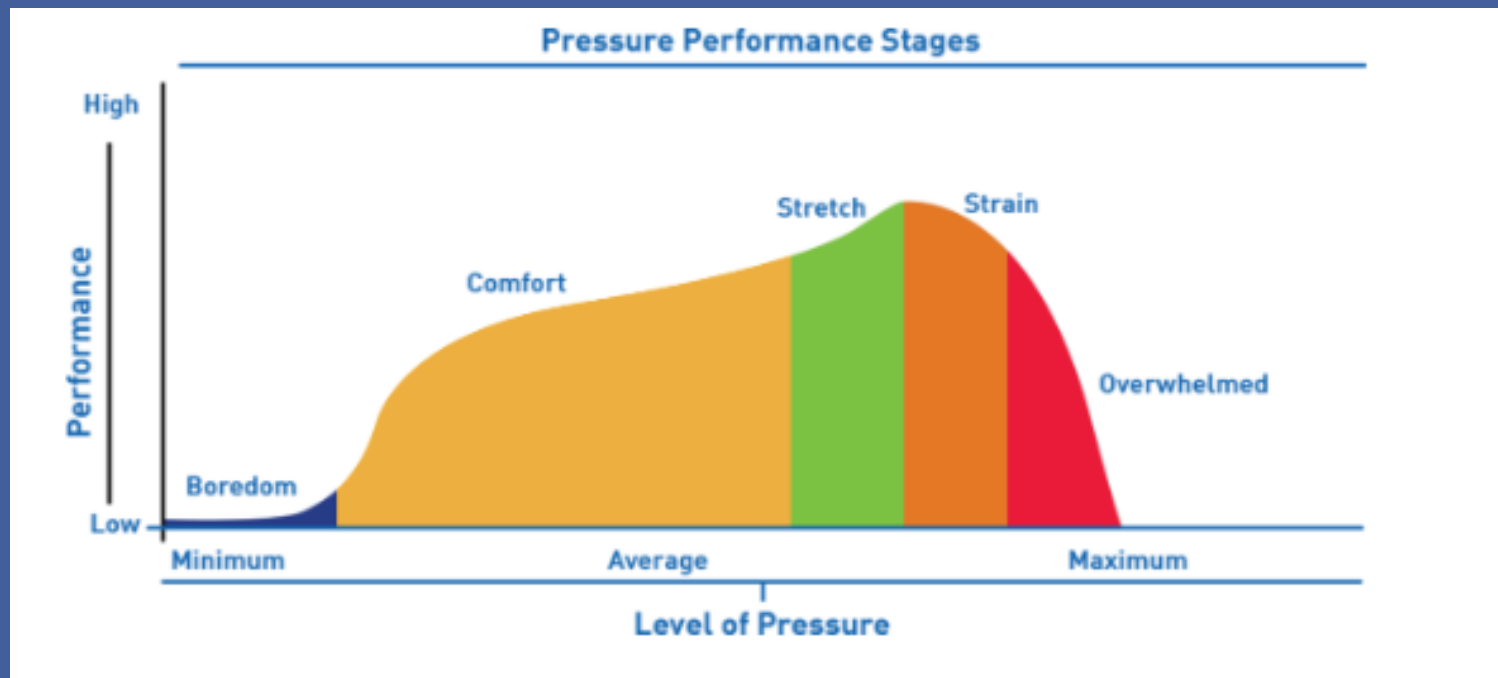
Unusual displays of emotion, such as frequent irritability, anxiety or tearfulness

More Symptoms – Individual Level

- Emotional Reactions: irritability, anxiety, sleep problems, depression, alienation, burnout, family relationship problems
- Cognitive Reactions: difficulty in concentrating, remembering, learning new things, making decisions
- Behavioural Reactions: abuse of drugs/alcohol/tobacco, destructive behaviour
- Physiological Reactions: back problems, weakened immunity, heart problems

Pressure and Employee Performance

Pressure and performance are highly correlated. There are five key pressure/performance phases and ideally you move between comfort and stretch.



Boredom

An employee who is bored may be disengaged, distracted and show some symptoms of stress



Comfort

An employee in their comfort zone is getting things done but probably not performing to their full potential. Time in this zone is however important for sustainability.



Stretch

People perform at their best when they are in the stretch zone. Some pressure is good for your resilience and when an employee is performing at their best, they get satisfaction from their achievements.



Strain

An employee who has crossed into the strain zone may become tired, use poor judgement and make mistakes. It is OK to be in the strain zone for a limited period as long as a return to the stretch or comfort zone can soon be achieved



Overwhelmed

An employee that reaches the overwhelmed to crisis zone is at risk of becoming exhausted, suffering serious health problems, having a breakdown in relationships and mental wellbeing, and experiencing burnout



Burnout

Happens when people who have previously been highly committed to a job lose all interest and motivation.

This is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

Causes of Burnout

Feeling like you have little or no control over your work

Lack of recognition or rewards for good work

Doing work that is monotonous or unchallenging

Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment

Working too much, without enough time for relaxing and socialising

Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others

Not getting enough sleep

Pessimistic view of yourself and the world

**Breakout Room:
How would you identify
stress, pressure, and
burnout in your
colleagues/yourself?**



You may be on the road to burnout if...

- Every day is a bad day
- Caring about your work or home life seems like a waste of energy
- You're exhausted all the time
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated



Protecting yourself from stress

01

Ask for more responsibility in planning your own work

02

Ask to be involved in decision-making about your area of work

03

Talk to your manager, or other supportive colleagues, if you think you are being harassed, and keep a record of what has happened

04

Talk to your manager if your job responsibilities are not clear

05

Ask for training if you feel you need it

06

Talk to your manager, or HR, if you begin to feel like you can't cope



Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. For example, you may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam, or having a medical test or job interview.



Some Anti-Anxiety Techniques

Accept your anxiety

Distract yourself

Visualise peace
(or a peaceful place)

Try relaxation techniques

Question your thoughts

Avoid alcohol and coffee

Exercise

Share your feelings

Put on some music

Depression

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home.



Addiction

Signs

Deteriorating co-worker relationships

Increased absenteeism

Decreased productivity

Rise in accidents

Change in work patterns and performance

Mood swings

Arriving late

Calling in sick (more than before - and usually on Mondays)

Slurred speech

Not focusing while at work

Blood-shot eyes, long sleeves even in hot weather, needle marks

Dilated pupils

Delayed reactions

Continuous nasal infections

Chills, impaired coordination

Increased perspiration

Commenting about financial problems, or difficulties

Switching off their phone for long periods of time, fear and/or paranoia when the phone rings

Do's for supervisors/managers/HR



Emphasise that you're concerned about work performance / conduct



Use concrete examples of when performance or conduct was problematic



Remember that problems get worse without assistance



Emphasise that conversations with an "assisting agency" are confidential

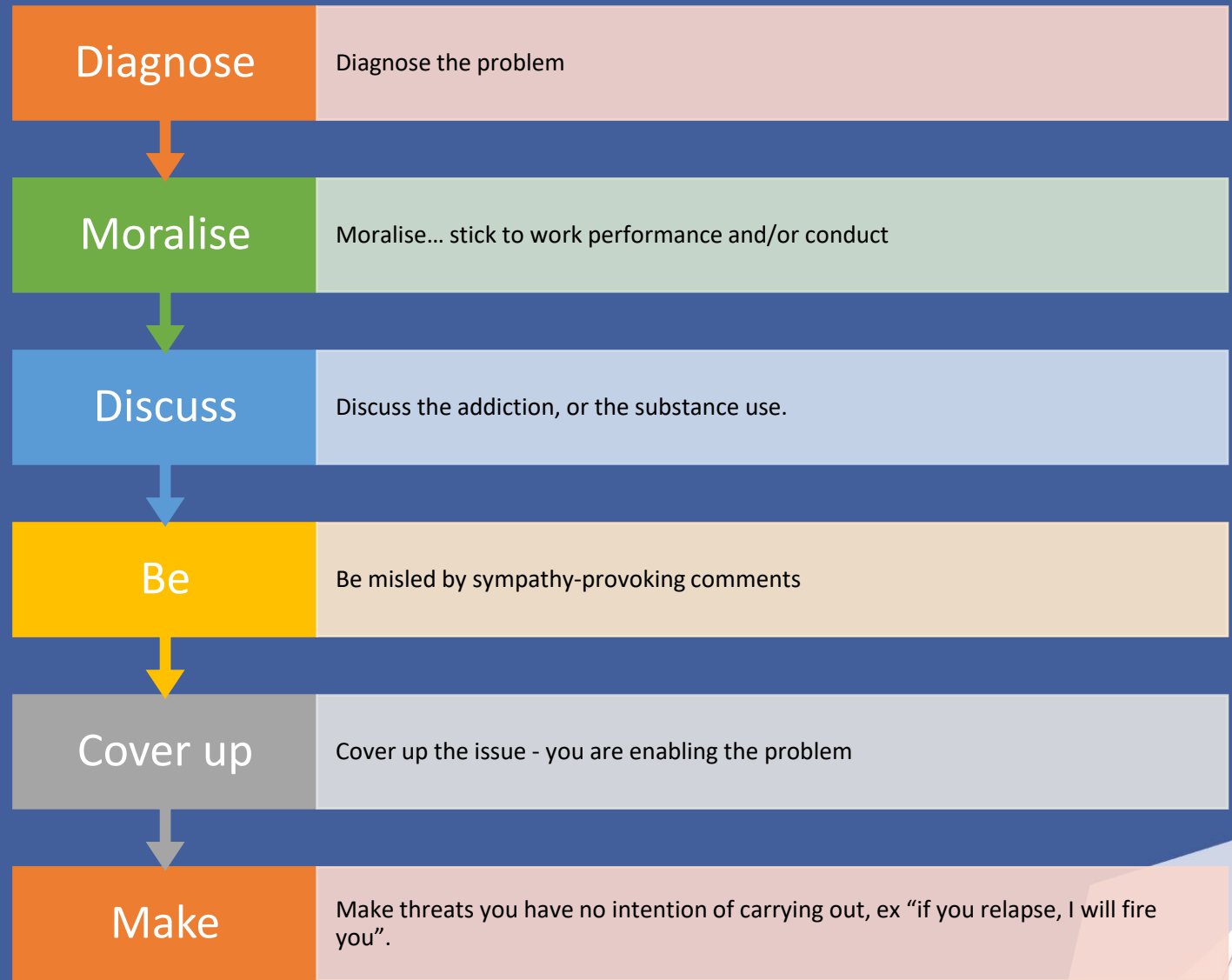


Explain that referrals are voluntary, and the aim is to help the employee



Make contact with an agency related to addiction to discuss how to do the referral

Don't



Approaching someone

How are you
doing, really?

I've noticed...
(identify
behaviours or
physical
changes)

...doesn't
seem like you

How can I
help?

Barriers when confronting: Denial



THE EMPLOYEE DENIES THAT PROBLEMS EXIST AND INSISTS THAT THE SUPERVISOR OR SOMEONE ELSE IN THE COMPANY IS OUT TO GET THEM.



HOW TO RESPOND



STAY CALM. HAVE AT HAND DOCUMENTATION OF THE EMPLOYEE'S JOB PERFORMANCE AND/OR CONDUCT AND KEEP THE CONVERSATION FOCUSED ON PERFORMANCE ISSUES.

Threats

The employee threatens you or the organization. “ If you push me , I’ll go to an attorney ... make a scene... Quit here and now”

How to respond:

Remind the employee that they may do whatever they choose; however, as a supervisor your responsibility is to uphold the organization’s policy and find a solution that will help both the organization and the employee. If you think you are losing your objectivity or need help to resolve a conflict with a defensive employee, seek the help of another supervisor or manager.

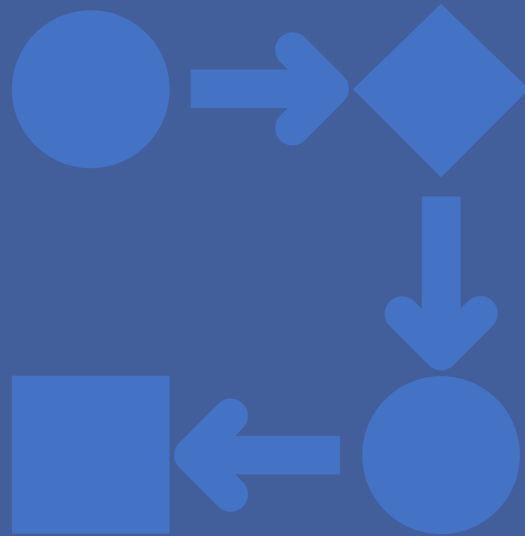


Rationalisation

The employee tries to avoid the issue by making excuses : “if this job wasn’t so stressful, I wouldn’t be making so many mistakes and wouldn’t be late so often”.

How to respond:

Stay focused on work performance. Avoid being distracted by excuses; let the employee know that help is available.



Angry Outburst

The employee becomes angry. They may cry, yell, or scream. This emotional outburst is intended to scare off the supervisor and cause them to drop the whole affair. (In a shouting voice with arms raised) “How dare you accuse me of being late to work and not getting my deliveries made on time!”

How to respond:

Do not react! Wait until the employee has run out of steam and then continue where you left off; keep the focus on performance issues. If the employee continues to carry on, reschedule the meeting.



A group of business professionals in an office setting. A woman in a grey blazer is pointing at a tablet held by another person. Other people are visible in the background, some holding coffee cups. The scene is brightly lit, likely from a window.

Working with Others

Managing Difficult Work Relationships

1

Discuss your concerns – arrange to speak with them privately

2

Do not get involved in arguments

3

Avoid workplace gossip

4

Find a common interest

5

Keep a professional distance

Bullying

Some bullying is obvious other kinds of bullying can be more subtle

What to do



FIND OUT ABOUT
YOUR WORKPLACE
BULLYING POLICY



TRY TO RESOLVE THE
ISSUE INFORMALLY



DISCUSS IT WITH
SOMEONE YOU FEEL
COMFORTABLE WITH



GET INDEPENDENT
ADVICE



RAISE A FORMAL
COMPLAINT

Breakout Room: What changes can you make to your office to improve mental wellbeing?



Some suggestions...

- Natural air/Window
- View of nature
- Stress relief games if possible (Ex. Billiards table)
- Mandated breaks – encouraging employees to leave the office for their break or have a specific break room
- Paintings
- Team building activities
- Allowing personal items to decorate desks with
- Allowing headphones and other accommodations
- Better chairs



Listening



“I’m fine”



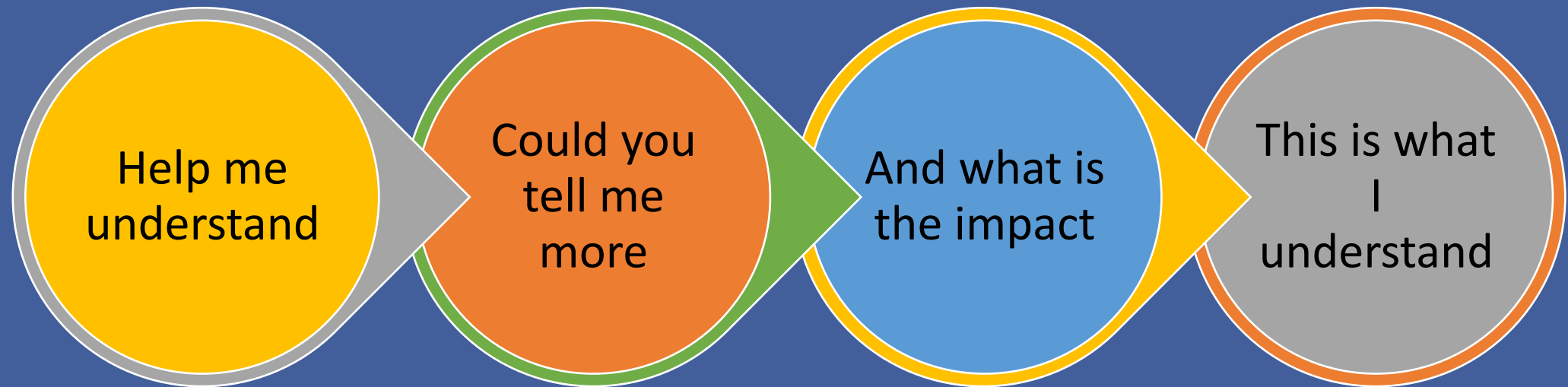
We asked 'How are you feeling?'

Listen to understand

- Gain insight into the perspective of the other person
- Gather information before moving to problem-solving
- Listening with full attention, gain insight, gain trust, help the employee to be heard
- This isn't about problem solving yet – information gathering, listening and hearing, seeking clarification

- Reflect back
- Remain positive, calm





Active Listening

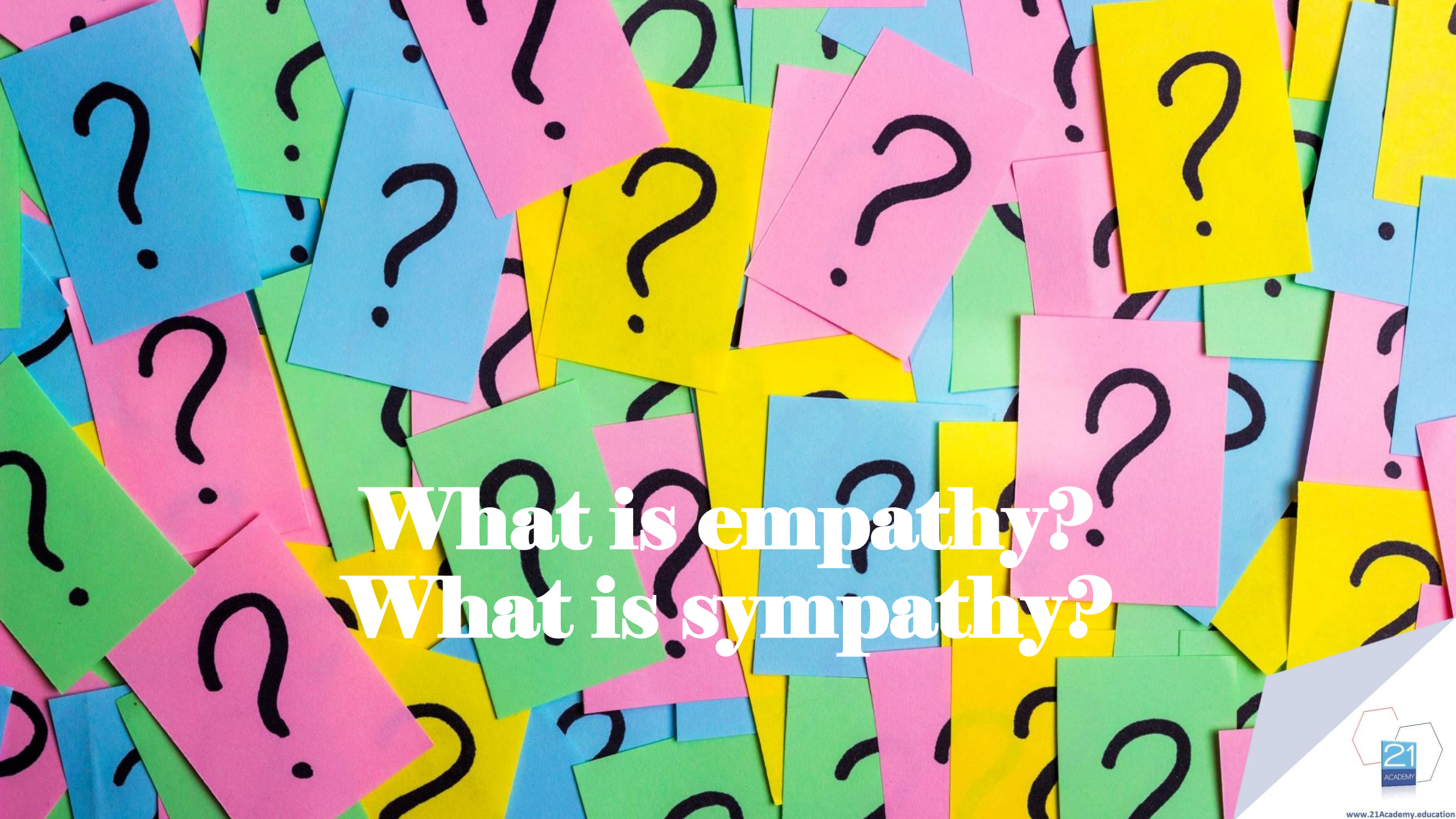
- In interpersonal communication, active listening means the emotional (affective) reaction of a listener to a speaker's message.
- The goals of active listening are multi-layered. At the interpersonal level - especially at the relationship level - mutual trust is to be built up and a dignified approach is to be promoted
 - Reducing misunderstandings
 - Improvement of interpersonal relations
 - Promoting empathy
 - Improvement of problem solutions
 - Easier behaviour correction
 - Learning through feedback



Barriers to Active Listening

- Noise, interruptions and physical discomfort
- Response rehearsal – following the script
- Worrying, panicking
- Fact-finding
- Judging
- Problem solving
- Imposing personal views



The background consists of a dense, overlapping collection of colorful sticky notes in shades of blue, green, pink, and yellow. Each sticky note features a large, bold, black question mark. The notes are scattered across the entire frame, creating a vibrant and curious atmosphere.

What is empathy?
What is sympathy?

Empathy



Empathy

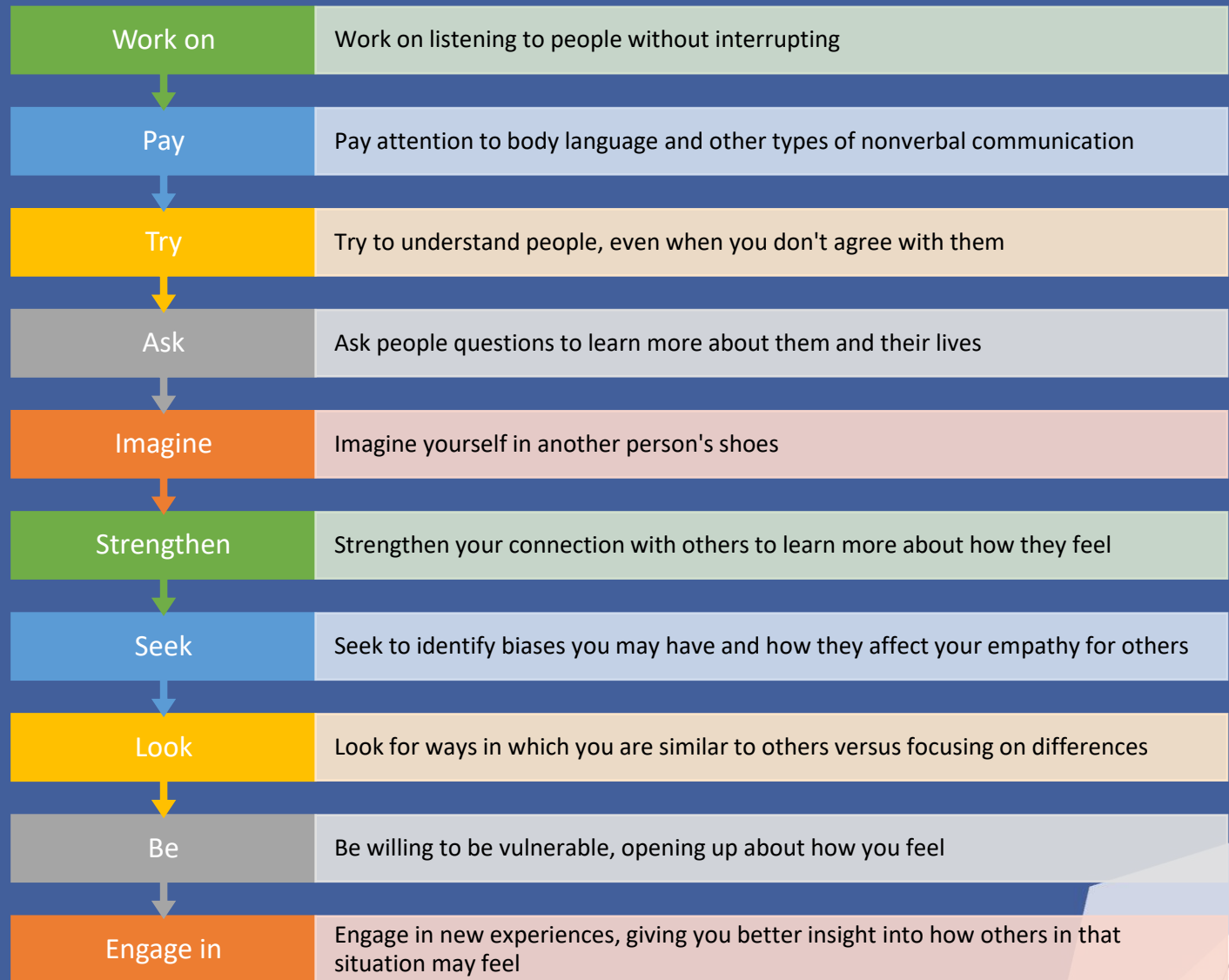
- Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place. Essentially, it is putting yourself in someone else's position and feeling what they are feeling.

Three types of Empathy

- Affective empathy involves the ability to understand another person's emotions and respond appropriately. Such emotional understanding may lead to someone feeling concerned for another person's well-being, or it may lead to feelings of personal distress.
- Somatic empathy involves having a physical reaction in response to what someone else is experiencing. People sometimes physically experience what another person is feeling. When you see someone else feeling embarrassed, for example, you might start to blush or have an upset stomach.
- Cognitive empathy involves being able to understand another person's mental state and what they might be thinking in response to the situation. This is related to what psychologists refer to as the theory of mind or thinking about what other people are thinking.



Tips on how to be empathetic



Empathetic or Not?

**It sounds like
you did
everything you
could**



**It's natural that
you would feel
that way**



**I don't see why
you're
overreacting**



**It has to be
difficult to deal
with this**



**At least you got
that big
promotion**



Breakout room:

**How comfortable are you
to talk about mental
health at work?**

Why/Why not?

What can be changed?



Talking to your employer about mental health...

1

1. Understand where you are mentally

2

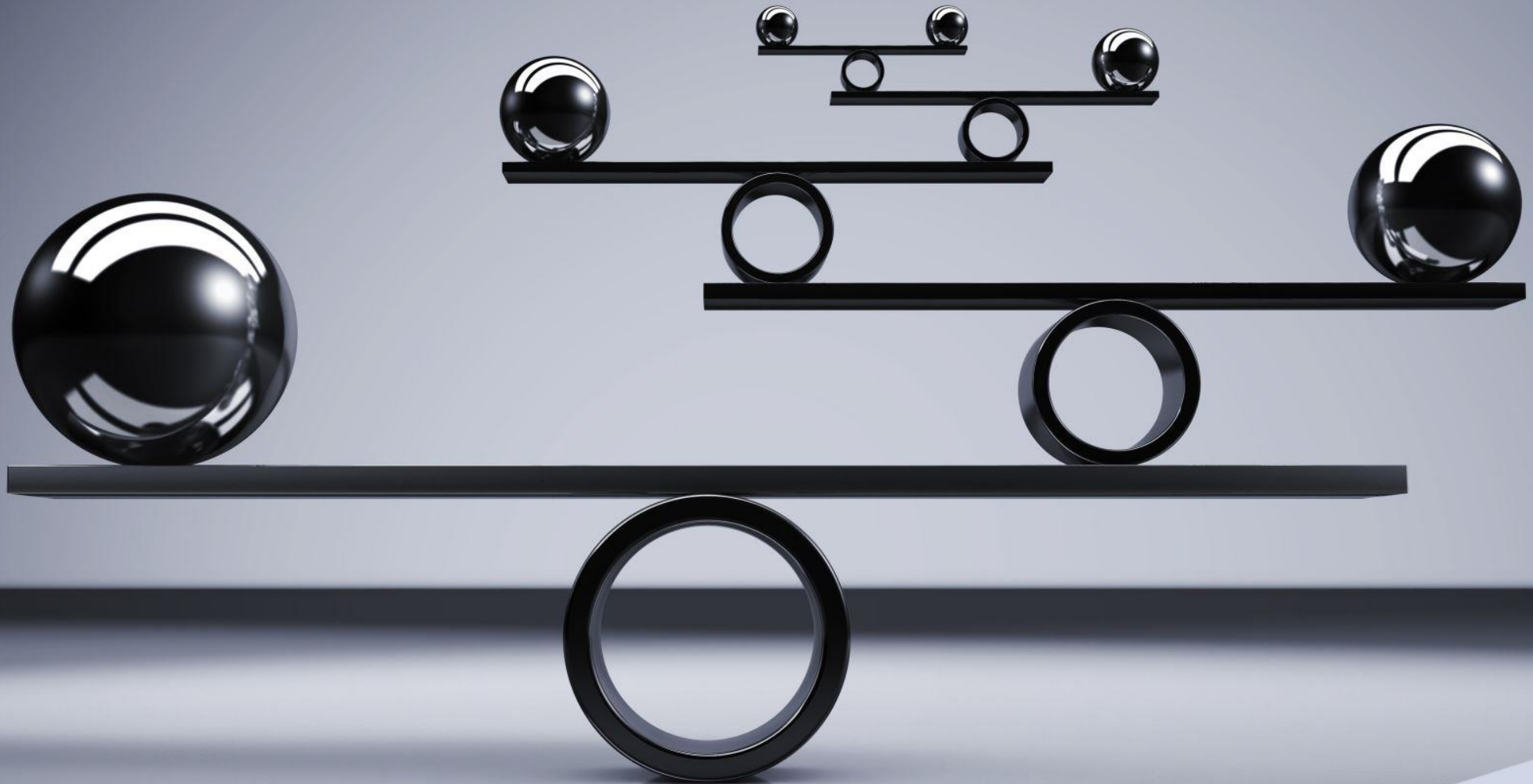
2. Plan for Progress

3

3. Decide who to speak to

4

4. Explain your situation



Work-Life Balance?



Self-Care

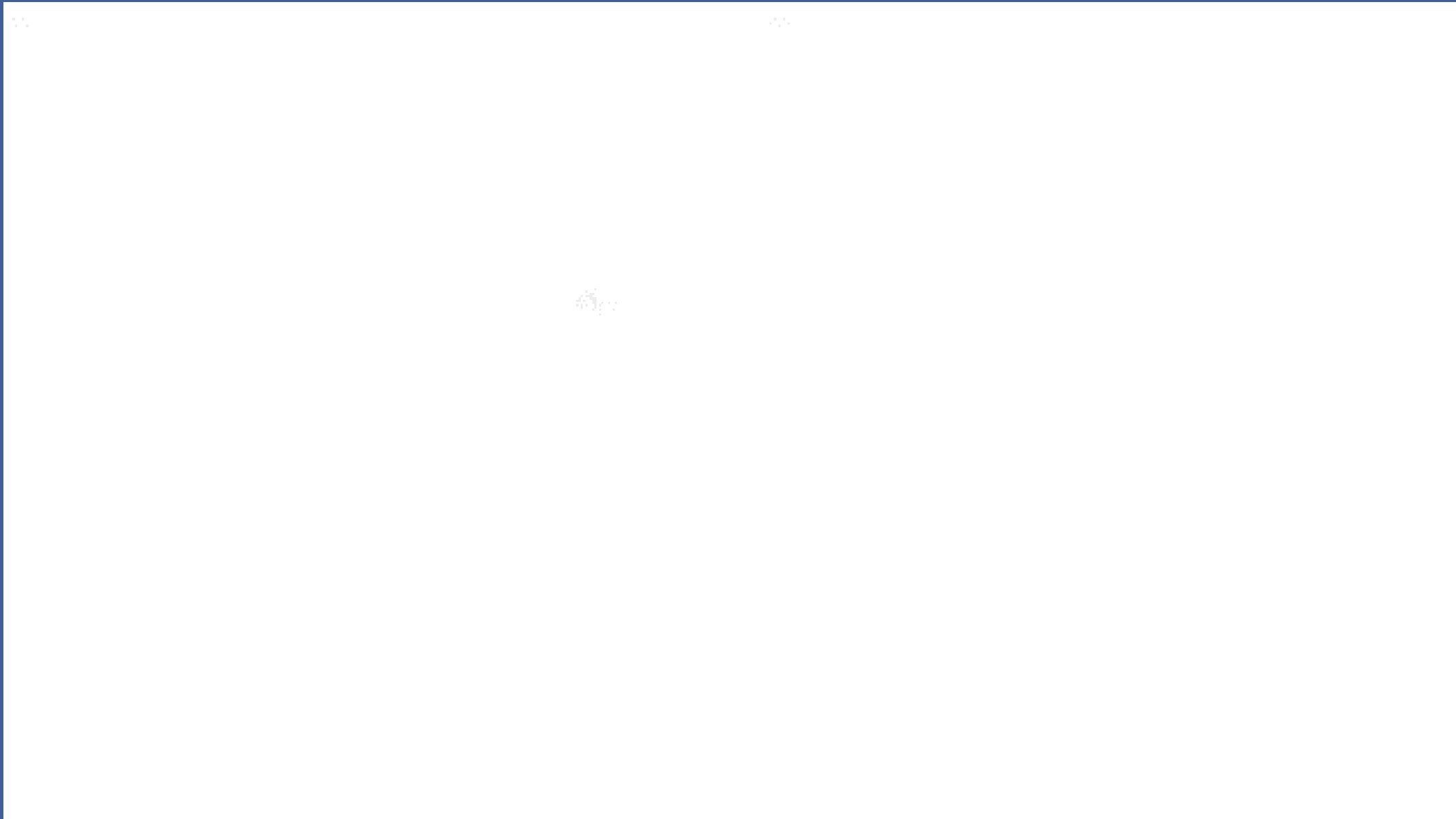


**What is your
self-care?**



Spoon Theory





Tips for better mental wellbeing

Talk about feelings

Keep active

Eat well

Drink water

Socialise

Ask for help

Take breaks

Do something you're good at

Accept who you are

Care for others

How talking about feelings boosts mental wellbeing

- Feelings don't disappear because you ignore them
- It's validating to talk about feelings
- It reduces the intensity of the feeling
- You can be better supported and understood
- Helps you stay in the present
- Can gain new perspectives on situations or feelings
- Can realise that you're not alone in the feeling
- Avoids the situation/feeling becoming more intense
- It normalises mental health

**Shared joy is a double joy; shared
sorrow is half sorrow**

- Swedish Proverb



Sleep Hygiene



Sleep Hygiene



A good night's sleep refuels, revitalises and re-energises you, making you feel refreshed, positive and equipped to cope with the stresses of a normal day.



However, most people experience sleeping problems at some point in their life. It tends to be more common in women and more likely to occur with age.

Improving Sleep Hygiene

- avoiding caffeine later in the day – post 4pm
- avoiding heavy meals late at night – post 8pm
- setting regular times to wake up and sticking to a morning and bedtime routine
- using thick curtains or blackout blinds, an eye mask and earplugs to stop you being woken up by light and noise
- only go to bed when you are tired. If you can't sleep, don't lie awake worrying – get up – go back to bed when you are tired
- if worries are keeping you awake – write them down and make a plan to address them the next day
- don't work, eat or watch TV (laptops / tablets / smartphones) in bed
- try and increase your level of day time exercise (don't exercise at night as it can be detrimental to sleep), keep hydrated during the day and try to make healthy food choices

Keeping a sleep journal

- As part of improving your sleep hygiene, you should keep a sleep diary for a minimum of two weeks, and record information such as:
 - the time you go to bed
 - the time it takes to get to sleep
 - the number of times you wake up during the night and at what time
 - number of daytime naps
 - times of meals, alcohol consumption, exercise and stress
 - how awake and functional you feel the next day
 - rating each component, will allow you to monitor your sleep and notice the helpful and unhelpful activities.



Mental health and Working from Home



Breakout Room: How can we improve mental health when working from home?



Get into a morning routine



WAKING UP – TRY TO WAKE UP
AT THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY



GETTING READY – SHOWER
AND GET DRESSED

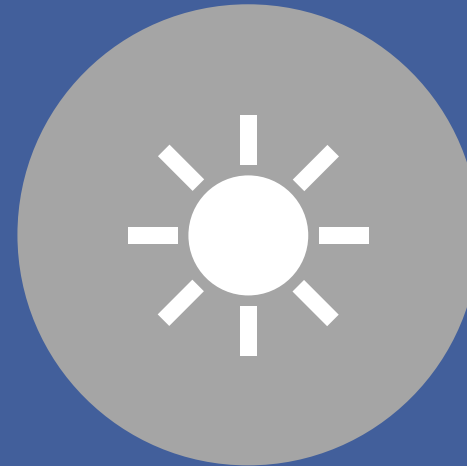


SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

Get moving



OUTDOORS - GO FOR A QUICK WALK BEFORE THE START OF THE DAY, AND AT THE END OF THE DAY TO “SWITCH OFF” FROM WORK.

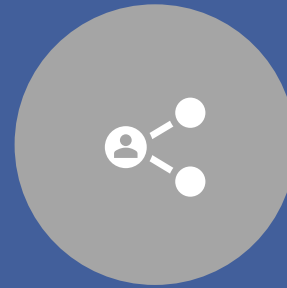


INDOORS – EXERCISES, YOGA, ETC.

Get connected



Video calls instead of emailing



Short check-ins between managers and their teams, at the start and end of the workday



Leaving time for Q&A



Virtual social sessions

Get support



LOOK AFTER YOURSELF AND
SET TIME ASIDE FOR SELF-CARE



KEEP IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS
AND FAMILY

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.



Types of Mindfulness Practices

1. Seated, walking, standing, and moving meditation (it's also possible lying down but often leads to sleep);
2. Short pauses we insert into everyday life;
3. Merging meditation practice with other activities, such as yoga or sports.





Mindfulness begins and ends in the body. It involves taking the time to pay attention to where we are and what's going on, and that starts with being aware of our body



**What is
resilience?**



Resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back in times of stress.



Building Resilience

1

Develop and maintain strong relationships

2

Change how you respond to situations

3

Turn setbacks into opportunities for growth

4

Develop a positive outlook

5

Maintain a healthy perspective

6

Take care of yourself

7

Find ways to help others

Natural Resilience

- Natural resilience is that resilience you are born with and the resilience that comes naturally.
- Those with natural resilience are enthusiastic about life's experiences and they are happy to play and learn and explore. Natural resilience allows you to go forth and do your best even if you get knocked down and taken off track.
- One example of natural resilience is that of young children under the age of seven. Assuming they have not had any major trauma in life, children of this age typically have an abundant and inspiring approach to life.



Adaptive Resilience

- Trial by fire
- This occurs when challenging circumstances force you to learn and change and adapt. Learning how to roll with life's punches can help you build resilience and grow stronger as a result.



Restored Resilience

- Learned resilience
- You can learn techniques that help build resilience, and, as a result, restore that natural resilience you had as a child.



4-Factor Approach (Dr Deborah Serani)



1. State the Facts



2. Place blame where it belongs



3. Reframe



4. Give yourself time



Case Examples

- We will separate into groups to discuss a case.
- What would you do in this situation? What would you look out for? What would you advise or recommend (if anything)?
- How would you approach the person (if you would)?



Case 1 - Pauline

- Pauline is a 40-year-old lady, she is married with 2 children, and has been working with the company for 10 years. She is known to be punctual and very polite, but in the last month or so you noticed that she is always punching in late. She frequently takes Mondays as sick leave. Her colleagues have come to you because they are fed up with picking up the slack when she comes in late.



Case 2 - Joseph

- Joseph is 20 years old, and has only been with the company for 6 months. He was always known to be quiet, but recently he is avoiding his colleagues and other social situations. He used to have lunch with two of his work friends, but recently has started to give excuses by saying that he has tasks to finish. However, tasks are not being completed on time. He sometimes comes in late saying that he overslept, and colleagues have complained about his body smell.



Case 3 - Cettina

- Cettina is 30 years old and has been with the company for 5 years. This is her first job experience, and due to her enthusiasm and hard work she got promoted quickly. However, recently she has started to take out her frustrations on her teammates, frequently shouting at them for the slightest of mistakes. She apologises after this has happened but the cycle keeps repeating itself. One time, you found her crying in the bathroom.





Thank you!

lotustherapymalta@gmail.com

+356 99723475

