

An Introduction to Managing Stress, Trauma Exposure & Burnout: Promoting Self-Care & Wellbeing During Times of Recovery & Preparedness

A Facilitated Session for Recovery Workers

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome & Group Connection

- Welcome...establishing 'group connection'
- The aims of today's session; connection, privacy, information, understanding, support, hope
- A framework to support health & wellbeing
- An opportunity to ask questions



Welcome



WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

**1. Supporting in an Era of
Cascading Events & Change**



**2. Examining the Theory of Stress
& Trauma Exposure**



**3. Establishing a Wellbeing
Foundation**



WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

4. Exploring the Importance of Professional Boundaries



5. What is Professional & Personal Preparedness?



1. SUPPORTING IN AN ERA OF CASCADING EVENTS & CHANGE

Do You Remember When Life Was Normal?

A distant memory...what made life 'normal'?

- Constancies, stability & predictability, limited disruption
- Could take many things for granted
- Able to plan for the future & confident it will happen
- A sense of certainty, a stable foundation for living
- Not fatigued, time to rest & recover

And Then A Lot Seemed to Change...

- For community & those working in recovery...
- Black Summer fires...community stress, trauma, disruption
- COVID-19...stressful, tiring, uncertainty, disconnection
- Flooding, La Nina...prolonged period of threat
- Cost of living crisis, housing crisis, interest rate increases, OS war
- Perhaps internal organisational changes, pressure & stress...
- Dual impacted ie, living & working in an effected community

Where is the good news?







Common Effects of Rapid Change & Uncertainty

- Unable to stop, too much to do, constant juggling of tasks
- Working hard to keep a 'normal life'
- Trying to please everyone, support all in community
- Limited time to rest & recover
- But able to feel the tiredness & fatigue underneath
- Many communities thinking about 'the next event'...

What is Trauma?

'An event in a person's life defined by its intensity, the person's incapacity to respond adequately to it, & by the upheaval & long-lasting effects that it brings (mental, physical, emotional, social, spiritual).'

- DSM-5 for clinical assessment & treatment; a set of criteria to apply to adults, adolescents & children (older than 6 yrs)
- Exposure, intrusion, avoidance, & effects on cognition, mood, arousal & reactivity



Vicarious Traumatization

- Exposure to traumatic information can be direct or indirect
- VT is the process by which indirect exposure to trauma causes negative psychological consequences
- Is due to the cumulative effect of exposure over time
- Can be similar to PTSD

❖ Emotional numbing	❖ Reduced sex drive
❖ Social withdrawal	❖ Tiredness & fatigue
❖ Nightmares	❖ Awareness of danger
❖ Cynicism & pessimism	❖ Loss of control
❖ Despair & hopelessness	❖ Low motivation



Burnout

- A state of emotional exhaustion & disconnection from others; lacking a sense of accomplishment from work
- Symptoms include sleep disturbance, fatigue, reduced clarity of thought, reduced appetite
- But it is not specific to working with trauma survivors
- Rather, contributed to by work setting, workload, overload of responsibility, lack of control, interpersonal difficulties

Compassion Fatigue



CF combines elements of VT and burnout



Most common in 'care giving' environments



Results in reduced compassion & empathy in the helper



Increased tendency to blame others, bottle up emotions



More likely to complain, experience low mood



Poor self-care & poor physical health



Is it Possible to Find a Way Through?

- Yes, most definitely...people & communities are inherently adaptable
- And whilst there is always a path of adversity & challenge after disaster...which is now likely to persist into the future
- A pathway of growth, development & change also exists
- But first, there are some important concepts to understand



Important Concepts...

- 1. Acceptance:** that we are living an era of change
- 2. Hope:** that we can take practical action to shape our future
- 3. Replenishment:** active & consistent self-care practices
- 4. Social Connection:** crucial for personal wellbeing but also vital to build more adaptable communities

Acceptance means opening up & making room for painful feelings, sensations, urges & emotions. We stop resisting them, we just allow them to be

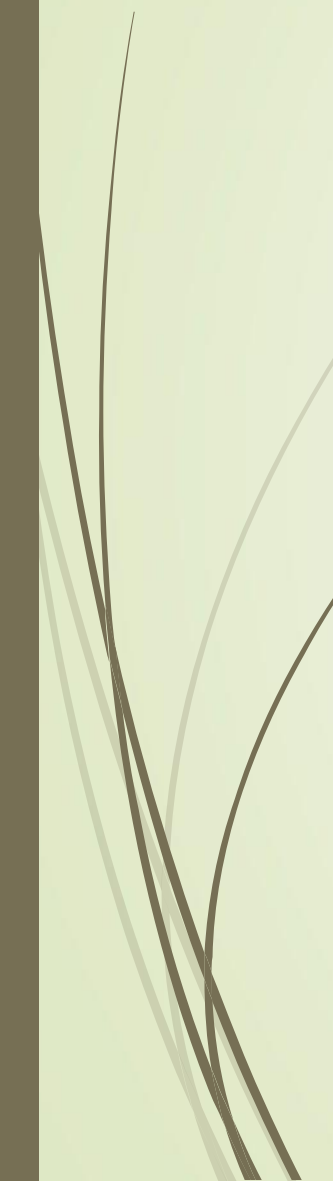


Acceptance of our situation reduces the need to control. It also opens the door to personal growth & growth involves... 'creating a life of purpose & meaning'





HOPE ...Chan Hellman & His Team

- Hope is more than passive wishing
 - It's a way of thinking that can be taught
 - Hope is more than optimism, it involves taking action
 - As a result, hope can be intentionally created
- 



And Did You Know That...

- Hope is positively related to life expectancy & wellbeing
- It helps with improved emotion management
- As well as achievement of goals
- Hope is also related to job satisfaction & reduced burnout
- But, those who are suffering usually have low levels of hope

Three Ingredients of Hope

1. **Goals:** the crucial starting point of hope
2. **Pathways:** the roadmaps to realising goals
3. **Agency:** will power & motivation, need to sustain

Preserving, strengthening & instilling 'Hope' in ourselves & those around us is so important in an era of rapid change & uncertainty




‘Hope is the belief that your future will be better than today and that you have the power to make it so’





Discuss...with the Person Next to You

- *Thinking back to when life seemed 'more normal'. Comparing to life now, what are some of the main 'constancies' that have changed?*
 - *What are the main implications of this on your professional work role, on your personal wellbeing?*
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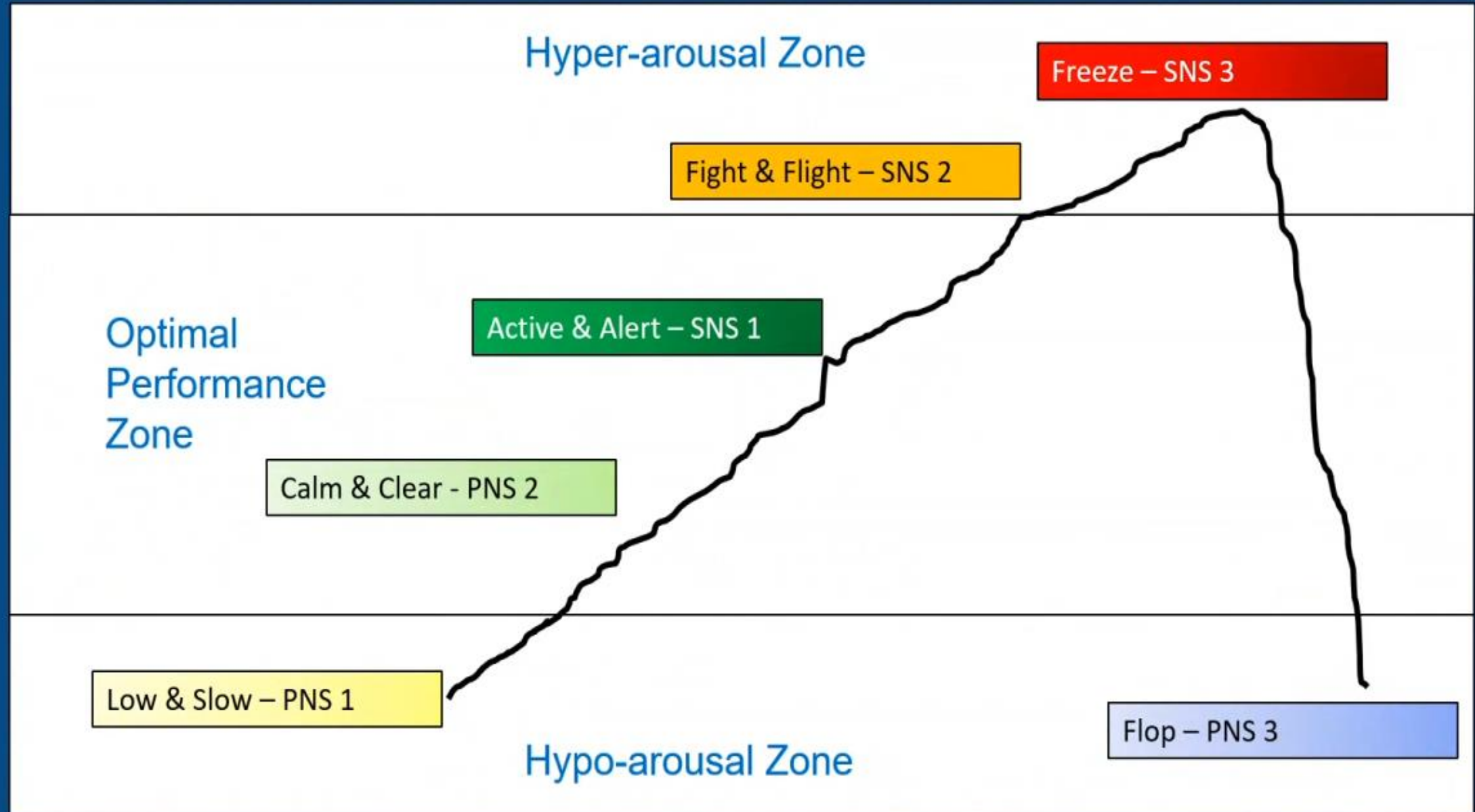
2. EXAMINING THE THEORY OF STRESS & TRAUMA EXPOSURE

The Theory of Stress – Normal Health

- The starting point of good health is homeostasis
- This is stability, balance, equilibrium between the parts
- Homeostasis achieved by making constant adjustments
- All of the parts work together as a 'system
- Balance between self – world awareness
- Balance of attention between past, present & future

Autonomic Nervous System Response

Arousal level



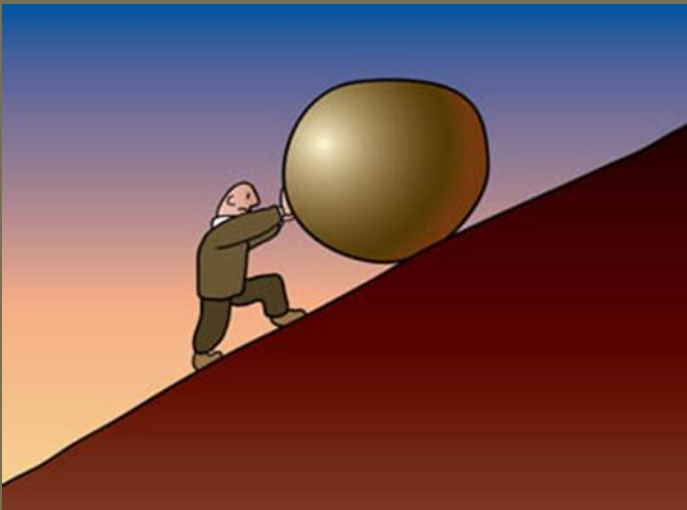
Stage 1: Alarm Stage

- Commonly referred to as 'fight – flight – freeze'
- The adrenalin state or, 'survival mode'
- Specialised response to physical threat
- Car crash, bushfire, robbery, farm accident
- Main purpose, increase chance of survival
- Functioning adapted for a physical crisis



Stage 2: Resistance

- When the threat is gone the body can re-establish healthy balance
- We can return to our 'comfort zone'
- But if the threat does not reduce & persists...
- We move into resistance...cortisol stress
- Cortisol gives us the energy to keep going
- Problem, there isn't an endless supply of energy
- Also, threat is subjectively determined...



Stage 3: Exhaustion

- All energy is used up, the 'fuel tanks' are empty
- The body has no adaptive capabilities remaining
- Where there was once health, illness emerges

❖ Heart disease	❖ Depression & Anxiety
❖ Asthma	❖ Gastrointestinal eg, IBS
❖ Obesity	❖ Auto-immune Illness
❖ Diabetes	❖ Alzheimer's Disease
❖ Headaches	❖ Cancer

How Long Does Survival Mode Last?

- Until the threat ceases
- But note that the 'subjective' aspect of threat may persist for much longer
- Also consider, until no longer dealing with novelty, uncertainty & conflict
- Approximate duration, 1-6 months
- NB 'Survival Mode' is Phase 1

Second Year Challenges & Phase Two

- The overwhelming nature of recovery tasks emerge
- Grief & hardship are experienced
- But there is a necessity to keep functioning
- Can be felt as a 'need to do everything at once'
- Often feel isolated, that others do not understand

Adrenalin stress is a high energy state - short term, physical & unsustainable. Transitions into the second phase – Endurance Mode

Second Phase – Endurance Mode

- Endure the adversity, keep going as long as required
- Exploit unimportant functions to support necessary
- Thinking narrow, problems focus, memory reduced
- Emotional numbness interrupted by instinctive emotions anger, fear, shock, grief
- Reduced feedback to maintain endurance
- Social interactions reduced to bare minimum – but involvement in community focussed on recovery – ‘Fusion’
- **Recovery** is the whole world – “homogenised identity”

How Long Does Endurance Mode Last?

- Until disruption & problems begin to subside
- Requires routines & stability can be reformed
- For some it will be when losses are recouped
- Others, when a confidence in the future is restored
- 6 months to 3 years approximately
- Effects of compounding disaster events?

High Stress Consequences

Adrenalin - Acute Stress

- ▶ Keep going till reserves used up, then collapse
- ▶ Loss of self awareness
- ▶ Narrowed attention
- ▶ Neglect of non-stress priorities
- ▶ Do not feel fatigue until afterwards
- ▶ Reserves take a long time to restock
- ▶ Only recharge when in leisure

Cortisol - Protracted Stress

- ▶ Plodding on
- ▶ Shut down feedback
- ▶ Loss of self awareness
- ▶ Numbing & detachment
- ▶ Degrading of non-stress priorities (health, relationships, leisure, lifestyle)
- ▶ Difficult to make transition out of stress



The Amygdala Hijack

Thoughts, Emotions, Behaviours

- Not aware of what saying or doing
- Unable to think clearly, racing thoughts
- Don't consider consequences
- Primitive emotions; anger, aggression, upset
- Judgmental, jumping to conclusions
- Or become quiet, shut down
- Tense, clenched hands & arms

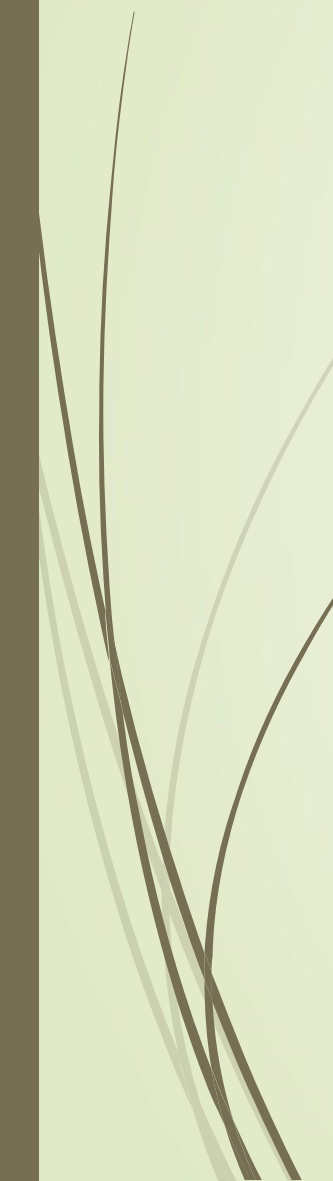


What Does all of this Mean?

- The stress response is responsible for many of the professional & personal challenges being faced..
- It influences community behaviours & your own...
- And as we have talked about, contributed to by many of the cascading challenges faced over the last few years
- We need to learn how to 'turn down' our own stress response
- This is called 'fitting your own oxygen mask first'
- After this we can apply strategies to manage others



Discuss...with the Person Next to You

- *How relevant do the stress states appear to you, your colleagues, others around you?*
 - *Are there other health and wellbeing impacts that you have noticed, become aware of?*
- 



BREAK TIME





3. ESTABLISHING A WELLBEING FOUNDATION

Replenishment through Self-Care

Wellbeing (or being well) is the health & vitality that arises from your thoughts, emotions, actions, & experiences. When we have high levels of wellbeing, we feel happy, health, socially connected, & life has purpose most of the time

Self-Care involves the practices, strategies, habits, routines, that assist in creating & maintain a state of wellbeing

Self-Care Suggestions

- 1. Fit Your Oxygen Mask First:** that is, take good care of yourself as a priority, before others
- 2. Wear Your Protective Space Suit:** this means, remaining in your 'professional role'
- 3. Disconnection:** enjoyable re-energising activities that assist you to 'stop thinking' about work
- 4. Quiet Time:** to allow rest & recovery; boundaries to be maintained
- 5. Relationships:** the importance of connection; family, friends, colleagues; cherish & feed



Fit Your Oxygen Mask First

- In other words, take care of yourself, then others
- Recovery work is stressful & demanding
- Vicarious trauma, burnout, compassion fatigue
- Leisure & pleasure enables rest & recovery
- Identify 2 – 3 self care strategies
- Practice them, embed them in your routines
- You **MUST** replenish your mind & body

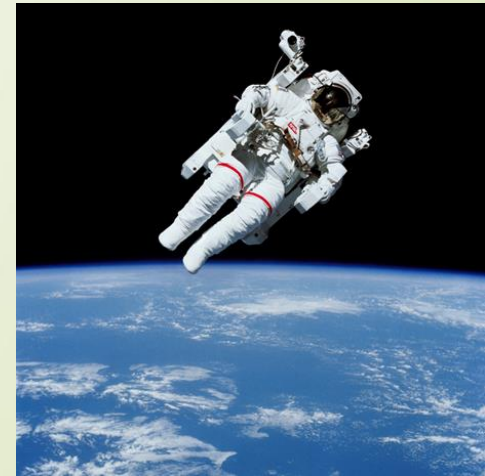


FIT YOUR OWN OXYGEN MASK FIRST

You're no use to anyone if you're running on empty.
Caring for yourself first is often the
best thing you can do, in order to help others.
It isn't selfish, or ego-centric.

Wear Your Protective Space Suit

- The importance of remaining in professional role
- This helps determine what you do and how you do it
- Your professional role acts as a 'protective space suit'
- Keeps you safe in a hostile & challenging environment
- Also, proactive vs reactive for managing stress
- Calm breathing, situational awareness, grounding
- Supports choice of thoughts, feelings, words, actions





Disconnection...

- Activities that help you 'stop thinking'
- About work & other life challenges
- Disconnection supports replenishment of expended energy
- And the processing & digestion of experiences
- 1-3 key activities that you enjoy
- Make them habits & build them into your routines

Quiet Time...

- Life is extremely busy, constantly turned on
- Quiet time is not sleeping...although good sleep is crucial
- It involves allowing & training yourself to slow down
- So that you can return to your 'comfort zone'
- Changing the rhythm of your life
- Continuing to firmly hold boundaries

Relationships...

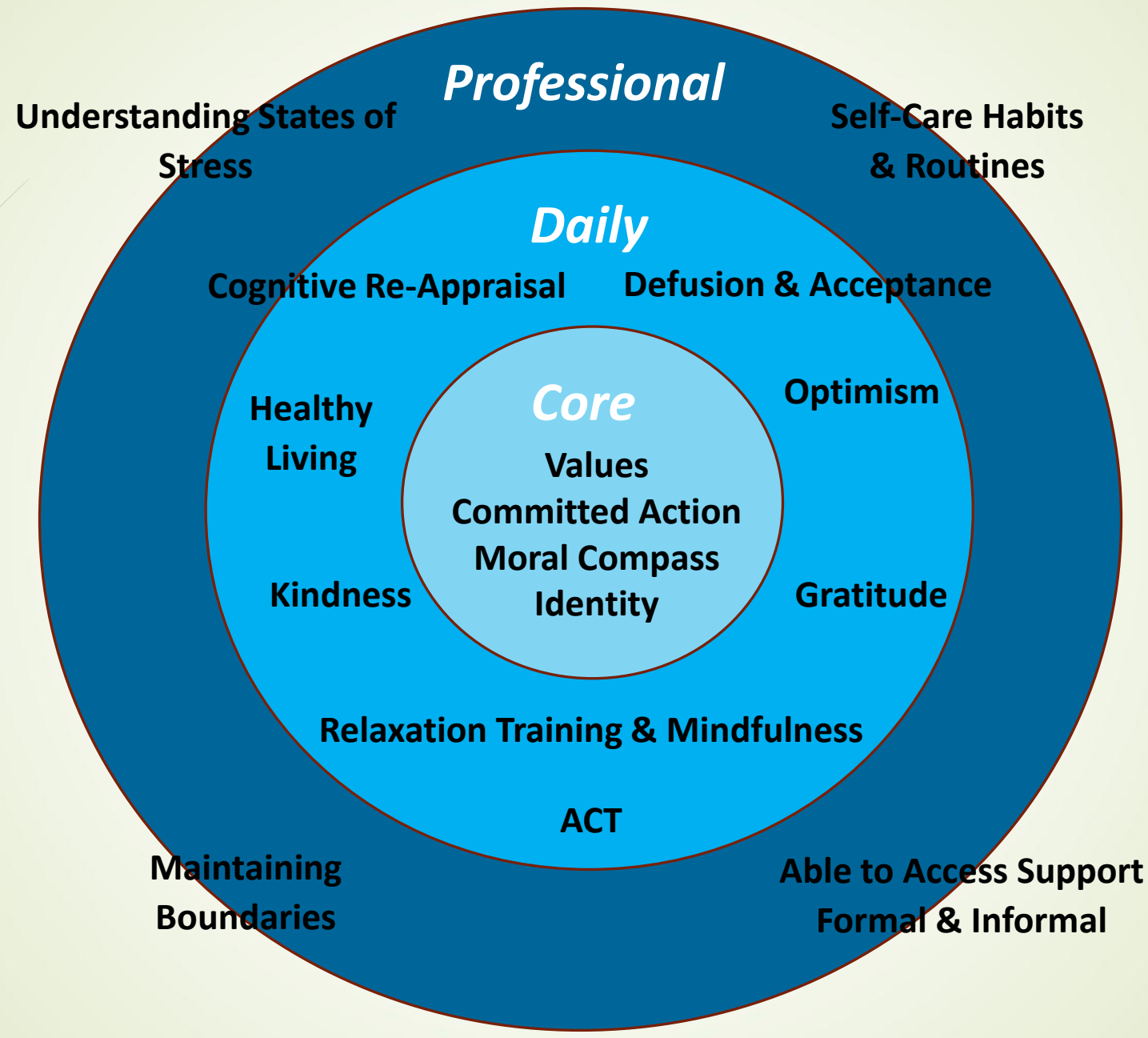
- The importance of remaining connected
- Healthy relationships promote wellbeing
- Prioritise relationships, cherish them, feed them
- If you feed them, you will be fed yourself
- Communicate, plan, follow through



Examples of Self-Care Activities

- There are many different types of self-care activities
- Should be enjoyable, easy & not take a lot of time
- Important to feel better afterward; rewarding & motivating

Physical exercise	Practicing optimism
Relaxation strategies	Applying outlook of gratitude
Mindful awareness	Healthy diet
Group social activities	Limiting alcohol
Reading, watching a good movie	Good quality sleep
Time with companion animals	Maintaining work boundaries
Connecting with nature	Remain aware of stress levels



Top Tips for Self-Care



Set realistic achievable goals, start small



Ensure there is a clearly identifiable positive 'reward'



Make a commitment to yourself, others



Be prepared to adjust existing routines, adapt



Set realistic timeframes, not 21 days ☹️



More likely 2 – 8 months (40)



Perfection is not necessary, mistakes are ok 😊



Leisure and pleasure is the aim!

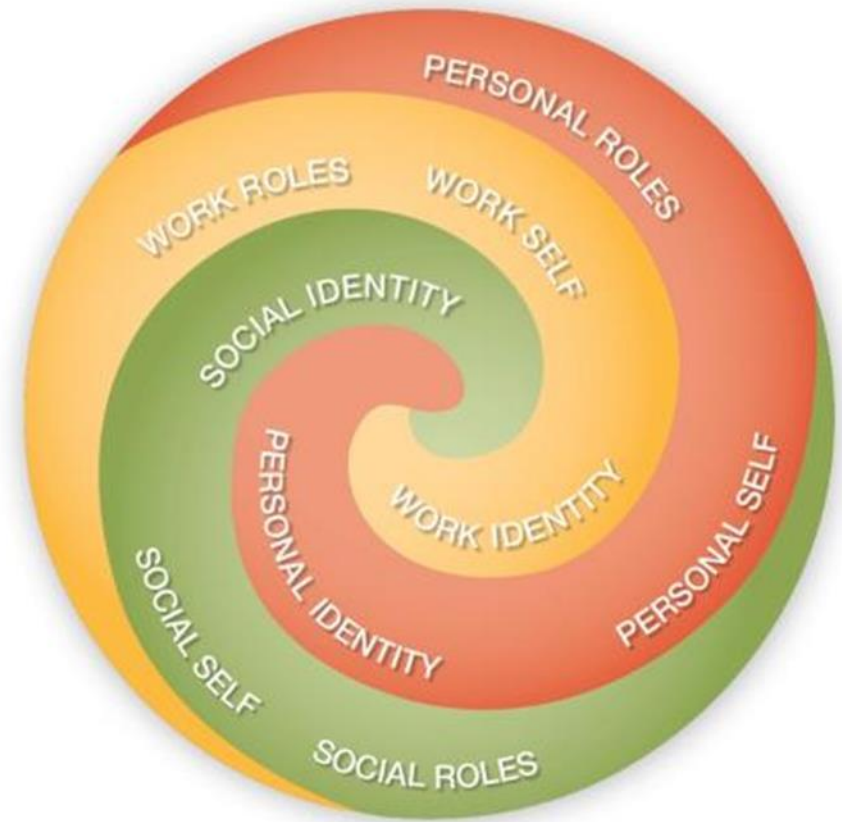
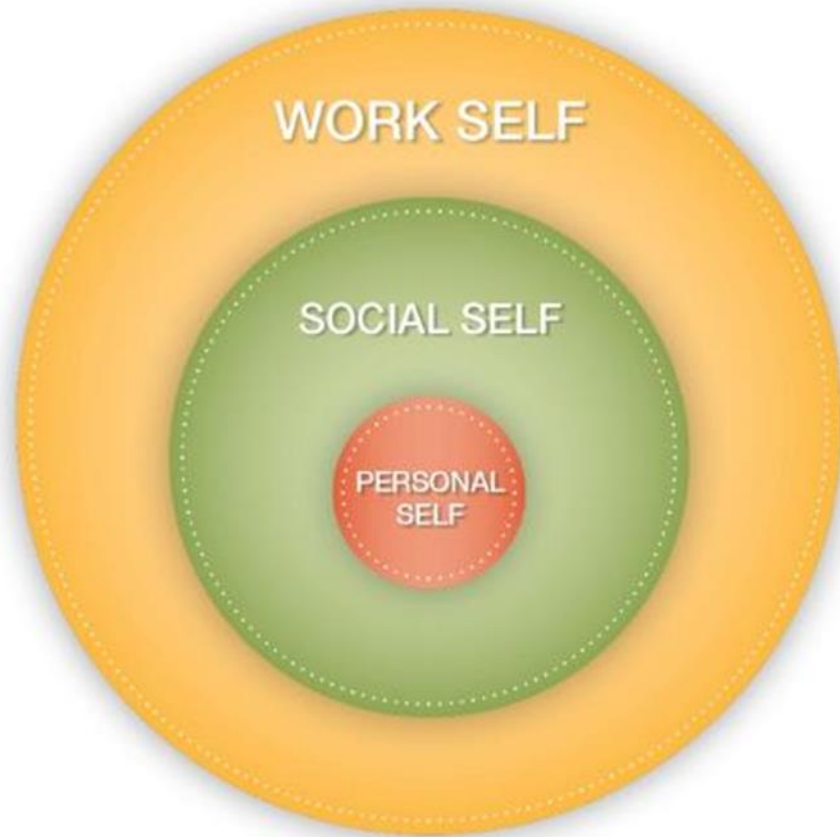




4. EXPLORING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

First...Work Attachment & Identity

- A general assumption of maintaining 'concrete' boundaries between different parts of self & life - but is this realistic?
- When empathy, commitment, identification are present in a recovery context...increased chance of 'spill over'
- Amount of spill over depends on various features
- But at the core an awareness of attachment, boundaries & self-care is crucial



Work Attachment - Identity & Boundaries

Defining Professional Boundaries

- A sense of **professional identity** & **self-definition** that has consistency & cohesion over time
- The **framework** within which the recovery support worker (RSW) – ‘client’ relationship occurs
- The **line between** the self of the RSW & self of ‘client’
- Prescribes a **system of limits & expectations**





Importance of Boundaries

- Creates safety for RSW & 'client'
- Reduces RSW/client uncertainty/anxiety as rules & roles clear
- Lays the foundation for a partnership
- Increases likelihood of effective supporting
- Reduces chance of ill-being
- Increases chance of well-being

The Zone of Helpfulness



- Distance self to not get close
- Lack of attunement to client experience
- Unable to relate, feels like a process
- Lack of a human connection
- Does not provide benefit

- Stepping outside of professional role
- Too much sharing of personal experience
- Boundaries drop away
- Going over & above
- Undermines independence



What Compromises Boundaries

- Dual relationship with clients
- Resilience/personal vulnerability
- Unprocessed/undigested personal disaster experiences
- Capacity of RSW/client to understand the nature of the relationship
- Lack of training & support



Brining it all Together....

- 1. Know Your Role:** do you know your RSW role intimately, can you describe it?
- 2. Know Your Clients:** always try to obtain information about your client inc. their disaster experience & community recovery involvement
- 3. Attunement:** the RSW/client relationship is held by being attuned to their experience; show them that you hear & understand eg, questions, clarify, non-verbals



Brining it all Together....

- 4. Empathy vs Sympathy:** 'If I understand what you are telling me correctly...' vs 'I know, so many people in recovery have that experience' or 'At least you didn't have to...'
- 5. Dependence:** adopt a strengths-based approach that works to instill self-efficacy & independence; if you 'rescue' or try to prevent too much hardship you may create dependence
- 6. Grief:** expect emotions related to your own personal experience to surface; you may need to grieve not being able to do for your clients as much as you would like

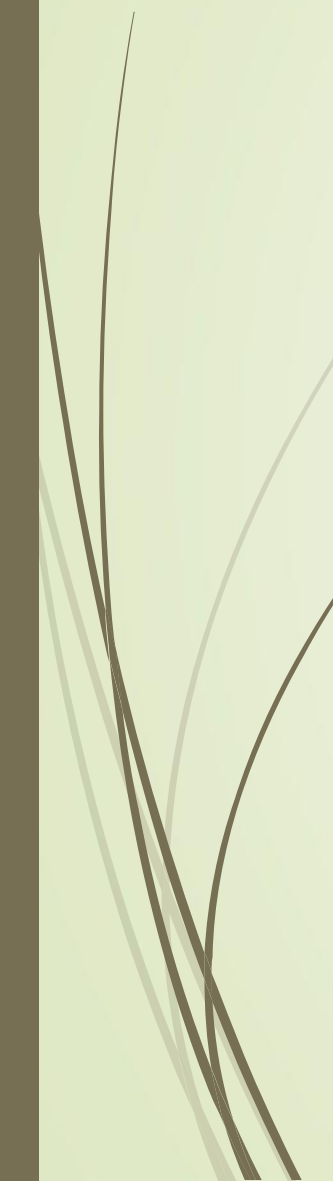


Brining it all Together....

- 7. Recovery System Failures:** don't get too caught up in identifying with and/or trying to fix failure in the recovery system; validate & focus on self-efficacy
- 8. Self-Care & Boundaries:** practice self-care daily & ensure that you reflect regularly regarding boundary maintenance
- 9. Know Your Red Flags:** these are the signs that there is too much spill over & wellbeing is affected eg, over thinking, sleeplessness, anxiety, anger, fatigue, thoughts of ceasing supporting



Discuss...with the Person Next to You

- *Let's be open & honest with each other. How consistently & proactively are you currently practicing self-care?*
 - *How are you going to enhance your own self-care after today?*
 - *What about professional boundaries? How might you strengthen your ability to maintain boundaries with clients?*
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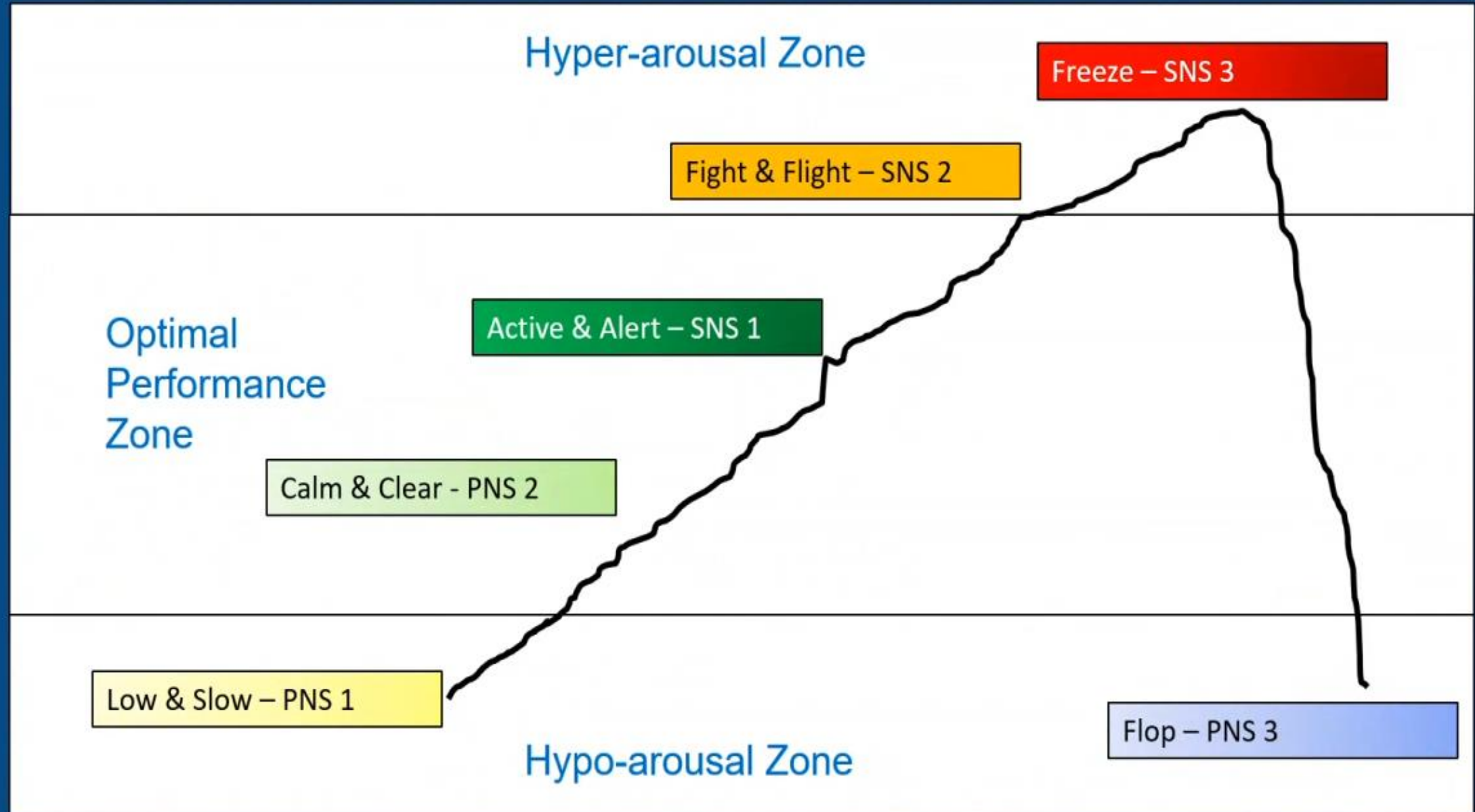
5. PREPAREDNESS: PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL

Strengthen Your Self-Care Toolkit

1. **Preparedness** is usually considered through the lens of 'physical' preparation for disaster ie, a family clears around the house
2. **Emotional preparedness** refers to being aware of the heightened stress state, being able to down regulate, & maintain the ability to function ie, a family rehearses defending
3. **Professional Preparedness** can be thought of as applying the principles of emotional preparedness via good self-care both in the lead up to (peace times), during & after activations

Autonomic Nervous System Response

Arousal level



Emotional Preparedness



A = Anticipate – triggering of the stress response



I = Identify – thoughts, feelings, physical sensations



M = Manage – calm breathing, positive self-talk, be supported, rehearsal/drills



Groups & Teams...

- Cannot assume that usual workplace supports are enough
- The entire system needs to adapt to accommodate needs
- Need to distinguish between operational & non-operational

Reflective practice	Employee assistance program
Peer focus groups	Flexible workplace arrangements
External professional consultation	Written health information
Small group debrief/conversations	Time in lieu



Four Trauma Informed Principles...

- 1. Trauma Aware:** awareness of the nature of traumatic injury; awareness of recovery pathways in a disaster context; recognise the role of psychosocial support services; awareness of vicarious trauma & self-care; opportunities for reflective practices
- 2. Safety & Trust:** healing environments are founded on the establishment of safety & trust; physical, emotional, spiritual & cultural safety; clarity, consistency & boundaries



Four Trauma Informed Principles...

- 3. Choice, Collaboration, Connection:** an approach of collaboration with all people of all backgrounds; collaboration across the organisation; opportunities for choice & connection; evaluation
- 4. Empowerment, Skill Building:** recognises individual & community resilient capabilities; promotes resilient responding; organisational culture promotes reflective practices



The End



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