

Friendly and Fearless: Combining Kindness and Assertiveness In Important Relationships



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Introduction

Getting Started

How we got interested in this topic

What we'll be doing today

Taking care of yourself

The Sun & the Wind



Towards Self & Others

Our Paradigms

Safety vs. Threat

*“The most important decision we make is whether we believe we live in a **friendly** or **hostile universe**.”*

Albert Einstein

What type of world do you want to help co-create?

Safety within ourselves

Safety: The First Portal

Groups of 3

What helps you feel safe?

How can you be for yourself?

How can you help others feel safe & be for them?

Opening & Closing
Challenging Yourself

Challenges And Resources

Challenges to a Strong Heart

It's straightforward to just be assertive, or to just be kind. Bringing these together is a real art that takes practice.

Challenges such as getting flooded by others, overwhelmed by reactions, feeling undeserving, fear, or just not knowing how.

Someone could be brave physically or in work, but lack **interpersonal courage**.

Balancing Autonomy and Intimacy

Two great themes in life: separating/joining, independence/dependence, autonomy/intimacy, me/we

Often framed in conflict with each other, but actually complementary: autonomy helps us feel safe in the depths of intimacy, and intimacy nurtures the self-worth and “secure base” that foster exploration and self-expression.

When we feel autonomous and strong inside, we are more able to pursue vulnerable needs and manage conflicts from within the “green zone” without going “red” into fear, immobilization, inadequacy, anger, or aggression.

Shaping the Course of a Life

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources

Location of Resources

World

Body

Mind

Some Inner Resources

Mindfulness

Positive Emotions

Compassion, Love

Interpersonal Skills

Patience, Determination, Grit

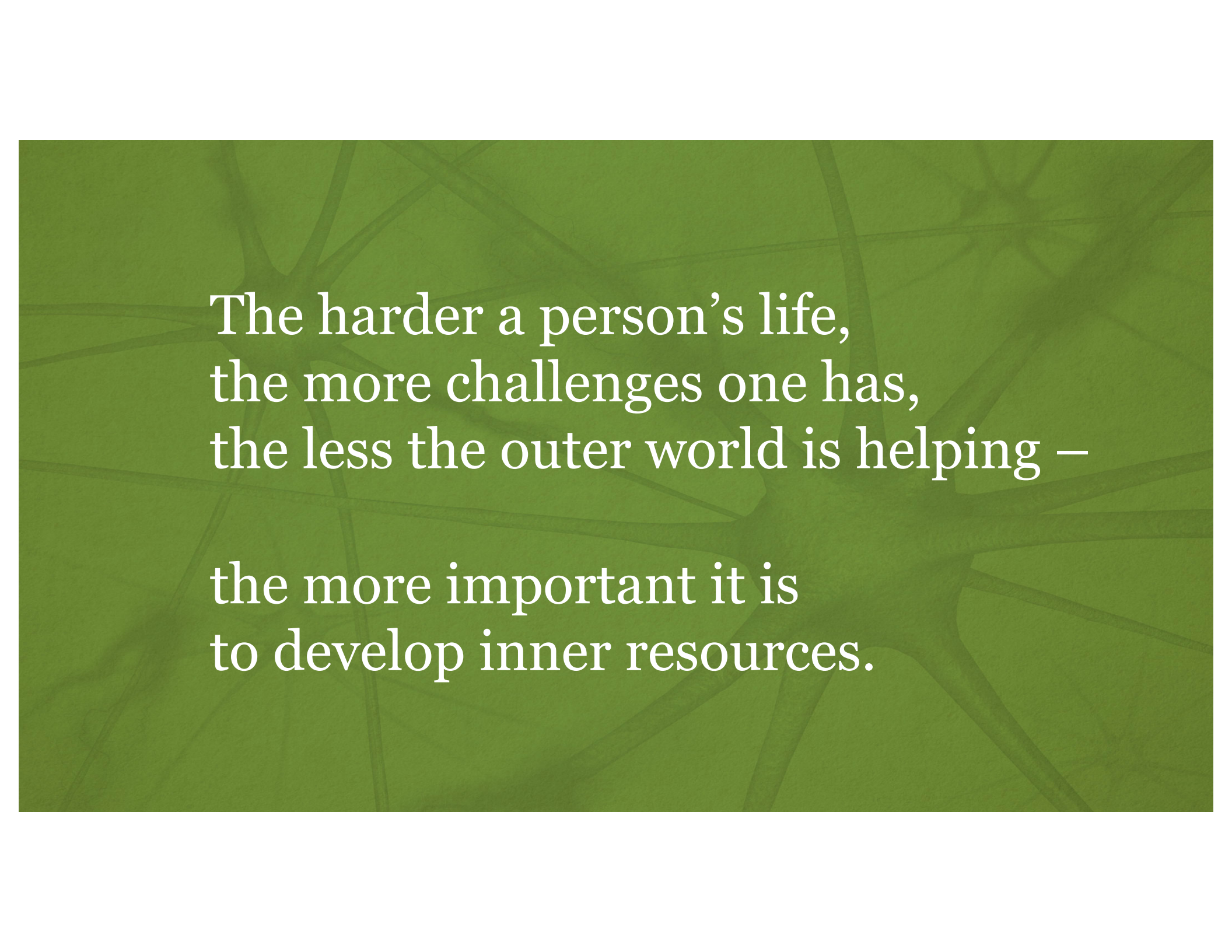
Being for yourself

Being For Yourself

A brief practice . . .

Bringing to mind the feeling of being for another person . . . A sense of their burdens . . . Feeling caring . . . Loyal . . . An ally . . . Not against others but for them . . . Standing up for them . . . Know what it feels like to be on their side . . .

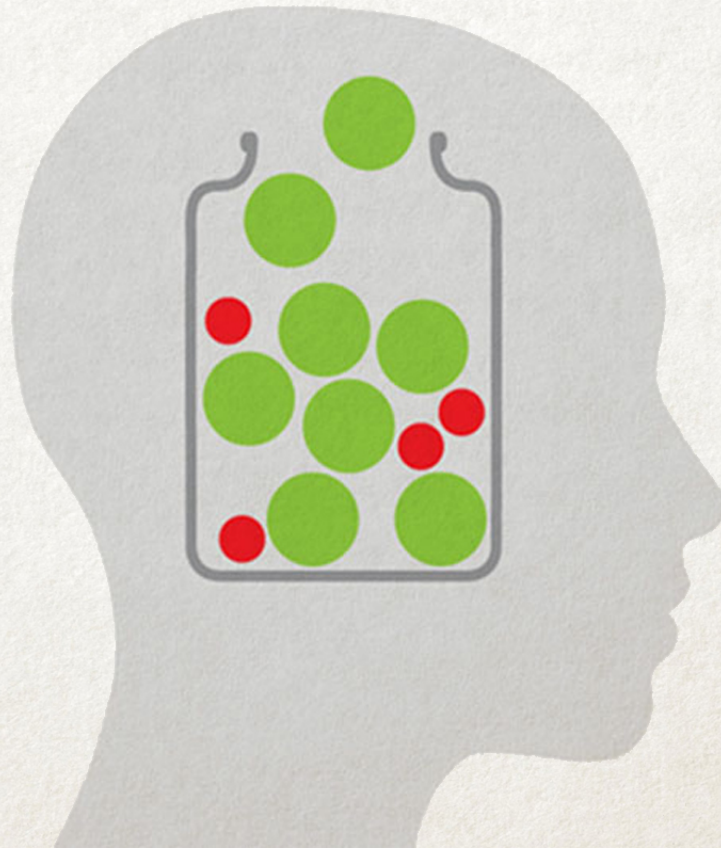
Then apply this feeling, this stance, toward yourself . . . Aware of something you are dealing with . . . Finding a sense of being determined on your own behalf . . . Recognizing what is fair and good for you . . . Warmth for yourself . . . Support . . . Both tender and muscular . . . On your own side . . .



The harder a person's life,
the more challenges one has,
the less the outer world is helping –

the more important it is
to develop inner resources.

Which Means Changing the Brain For the Better



Self-Directed Brain Change

Mental resources are acquired in two stages:

Encoding



Consolidation

Activation



Installation

State



Trait

A network of glowing yellow neurons with a central neuron highlighted in green. The neurons are interconnected by a dense web of thin, yellow, fiber-like structures. The central neuron has a bright green nucleus and is surrounded by a network of yellow fibers. The background is dark, making the glowing neurons stand out.

Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

We become more **compassionate** by repeatedly installing experiences of compassion.

We become more **grateful** by repeatedly installing experiences of gratitude.

We become more **mindful** by repeatedly installing experiences of mindfulness.

Learning
is the strength of strengths,
since it's the one we use
to grow the rest of them.

Knowing how to learn
the things that are important to you
could be the greatest strength of all.

Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias

bad experiences

good experiences

HEAL: Turning States into Traits

Activation

1. **Have** a beneficial experience

Installation

2. **Enrich** the experience
3. **Absorb** the experience
4. **Link** positive and negative material
(Optional)

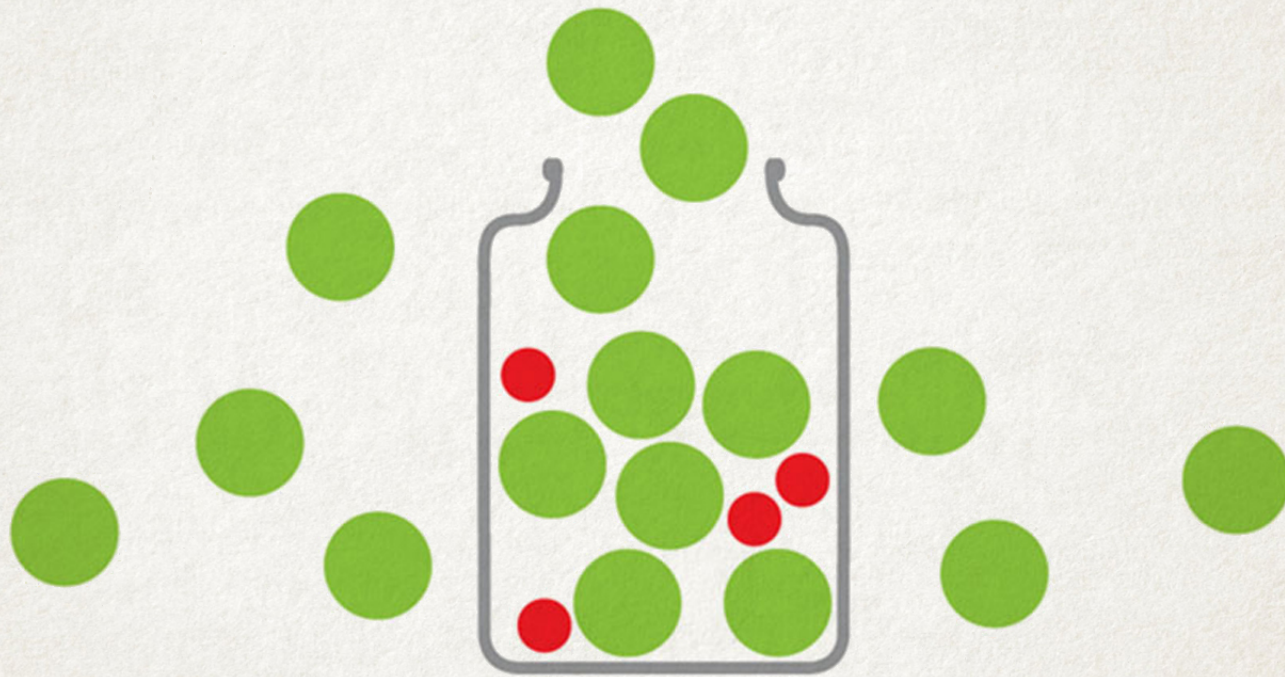
Simple Practices

Look for beneficial experiences to take in.

Stay with them for a breath or longer.

Feel them in your body.

Focus on what feels good or is meaningful.



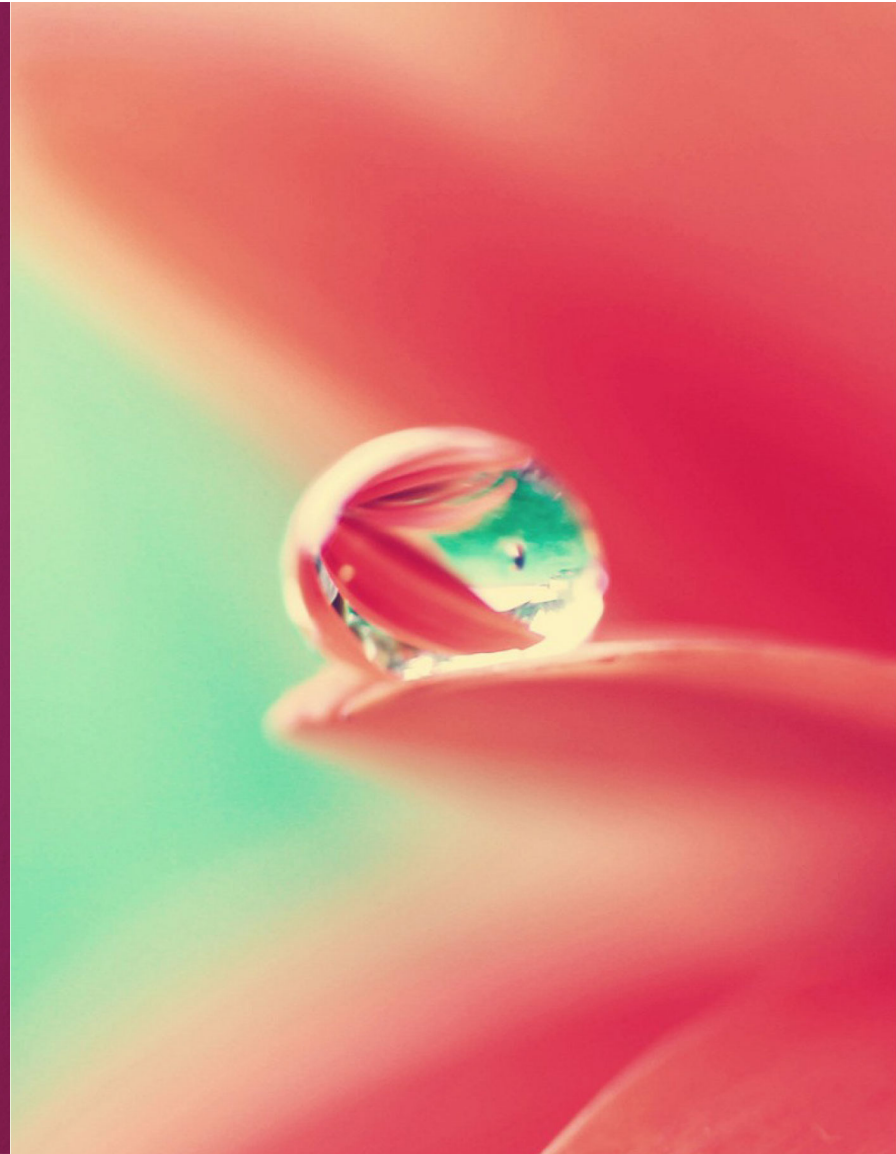
Have It, Enjoy It

*Think not lightly of good,
saying,
“It will not come to me.”*

*Drop by drop is
the water pot filled.*

*Likewise, the wise one,
Gathering it little by little,
Fills oneself with good.*

Dhammapada 9.122



In the beginning, nothing came.

In the middle, nothing stayed.

In the end, nothing left.

Milarepa

Calm Strength

Calming in the body and mind

Feeling strong

What feels good about calm strength?

Calm strength while aware of others

Calm strength with goodwill for others

Break

Meeting Our Three Fundamental Needs



Safety

Avoiding
harms

(threat response)



Satisfaction

Approaching
rewards

(goal pursuit)



Connection

Attaching
to others

(social engagement)

Wired to Connect




**“You shouldn’t care about
what people think about you.”**

Social Brain

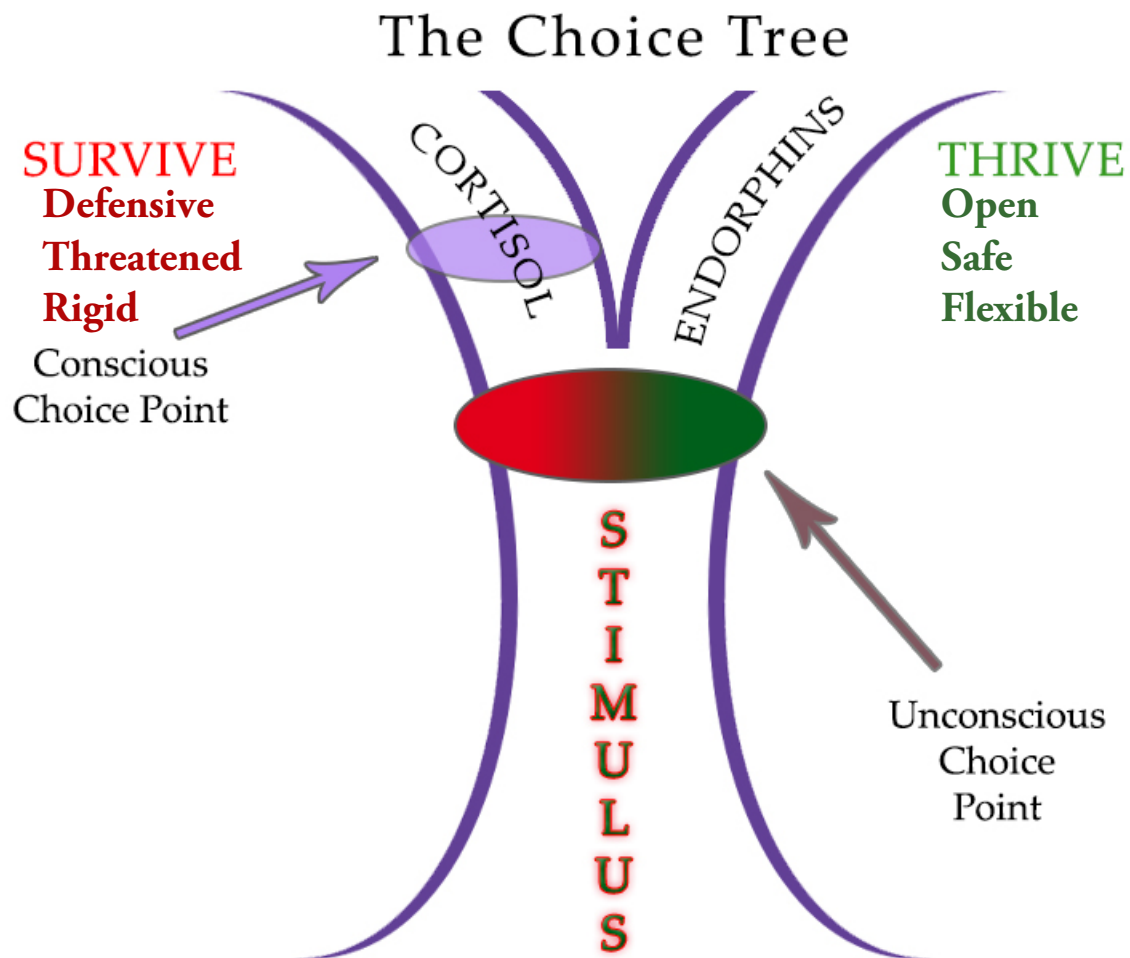
Hidden Questions

Do I really matter to you?
Do you respect me?
Do you regard me as capable?
Do you like/love me?

Do I matter?
Do I respect myself?
Do I feel capable?
Do I love myself?



Vulnerability



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Humanimals

During any interaction, we unconsciously launch into *threat* or *thrive* mode



Humanimal Wiring

“Humans when threatened are similar to other mammals: they shift states to defend, become more reptilian, and lose access to their social communication skills.”

Stephen Porges



Some Threat-Defense Patterns

Lack	Feel	Defend	Do
Love	Sad	Get Angry	Blame
Connection	Scared	Get Numb	Withdraw





Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A's go first).

Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

TIP: If you're alone, reflect or journal.

Talk about a time you stayed “responsive” during a misunderstanding or conflict:

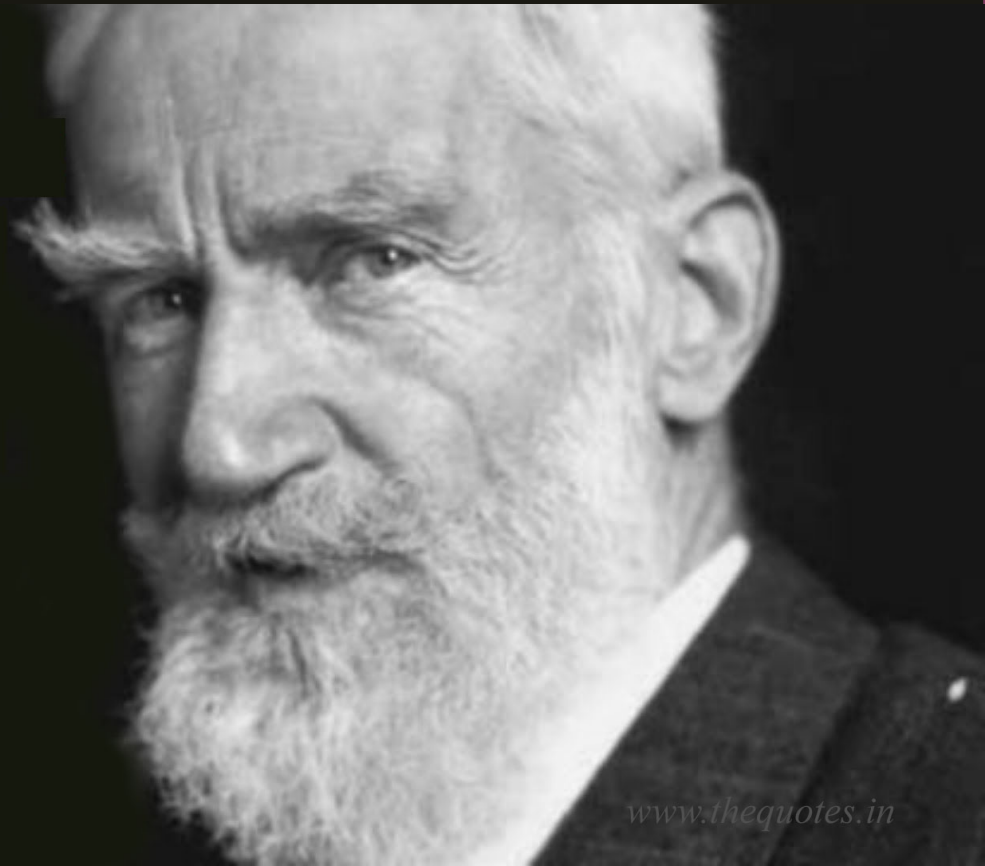
What did that feel like?

What helped you in your mind & body to stay in the thrive/green zone?

What did/can you learn from this?

The single biggest problem in
communication is the illusion that
it has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw



www.thequotes.in

Process of Mis/Understanding



- Initial action (first person)
- Observation of action (second person)
- Interpretation of observation (second person)
- Observer reaction/response (second person)
- Reaction/response of first person

Negativity Bias fuels Negative Attribution

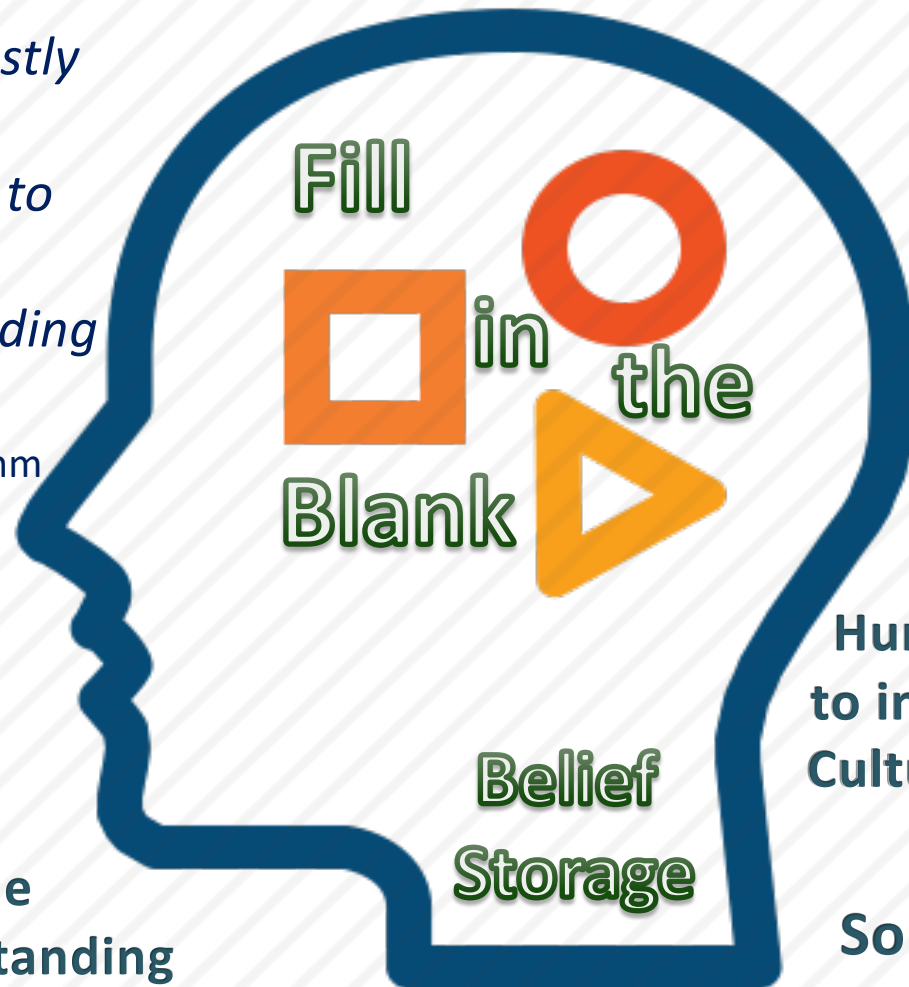


- Assume the worst about people's intentions
- Fail to separate intent from impact
- React defensively to a perceived attack
- Express negative judgements &/or other defensive behaviors (sometimes in the guise of sharing feelings and perceptions)

Assumption Warehouse

“The thing that mostly gets in the way of dialogue is holding to assumptions and opinions and defending them.”

David Bohm



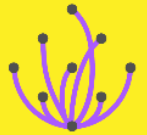
Better to assume
mis/nonunderstanding

Humility & courage
to inquire, not accuse
Cultural anthropology

Son



- What you observed
- The impact on you
- Your assumptions/stories
- Ask for their intentions



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Self-Compassion

Bring to mind beings who care about you . . . Focus on feeling cared about. . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.

Bring to mind beings for whom you have compassion . . . Receive the sense of compassion into yourself . . . Know what compassion feels like.

Be aware of your own burdens, stresses, and suffering – and bring compassion to yourself . . . Get a sense of caring, warmth, support, compassion sinking deeply into you.

“Anthem”

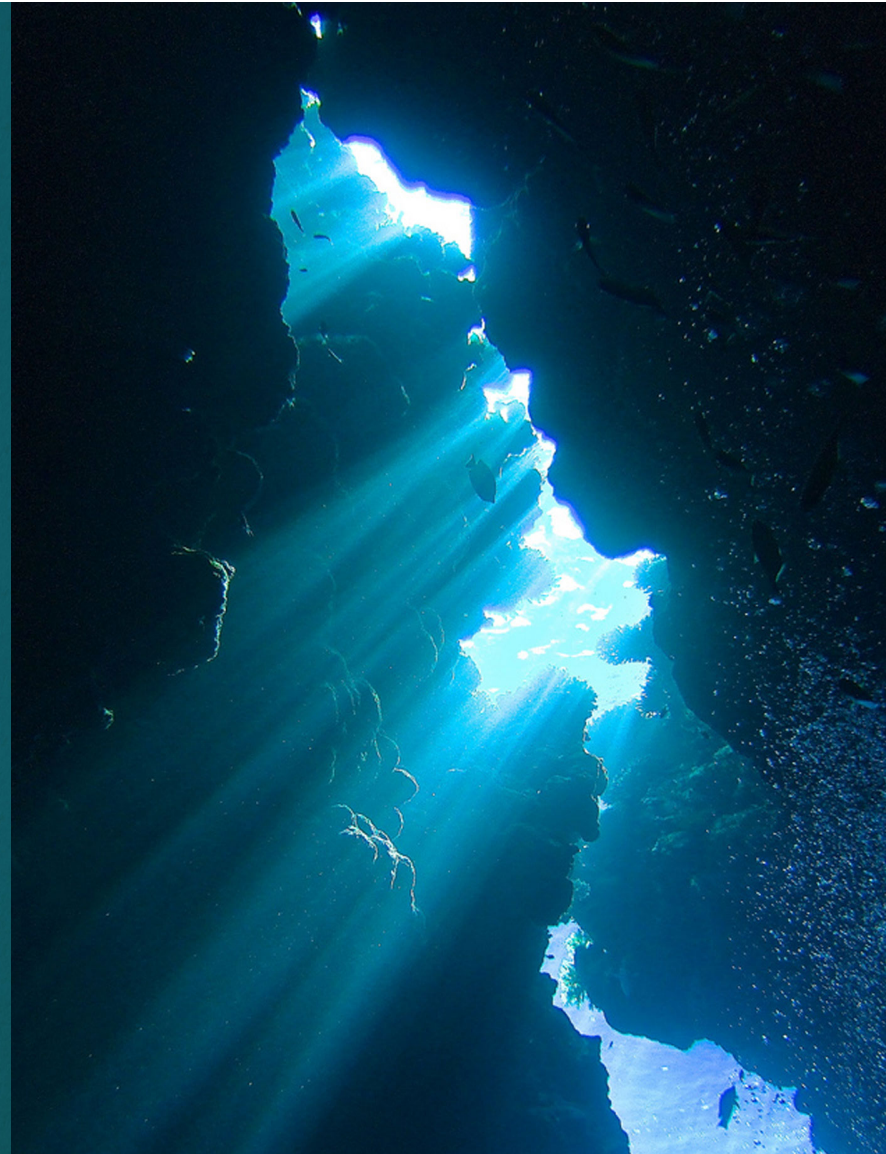
Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in


Leonard Cohen



Curiosity & Openness

“The ability to observe without evaluating is the highest form of intelligence.”

- JIDDHU KRISHNAMURTI



Look at thoughts, not from thoughts
Helps give perspective

It's not personal

*Conscious
Wisdom*

Develop your
Inner Witness

Self-Identification & Emotional Labeling

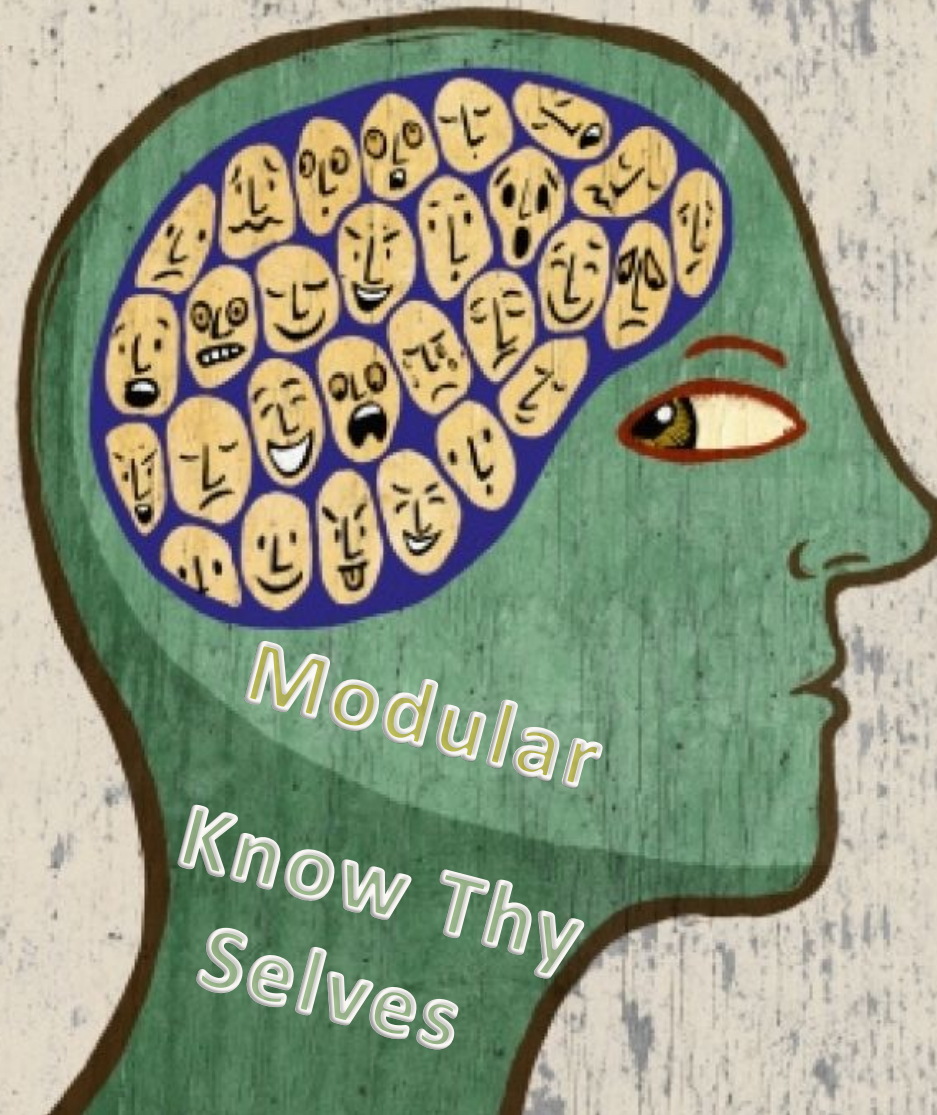
UCLA Researcher Golnaze Tabibnia

Simply labeling an emotional reaction by name...

“activates the prefrontal areas, leading to a decreased response from the amygdala...That’s why emotion-labeling may help reduce emotional responses in the long term.”



Mindfulness &
Disidentification



Writing Exercise
I notice there's a
part of me...
Thoughts as free
radicals

Lunch



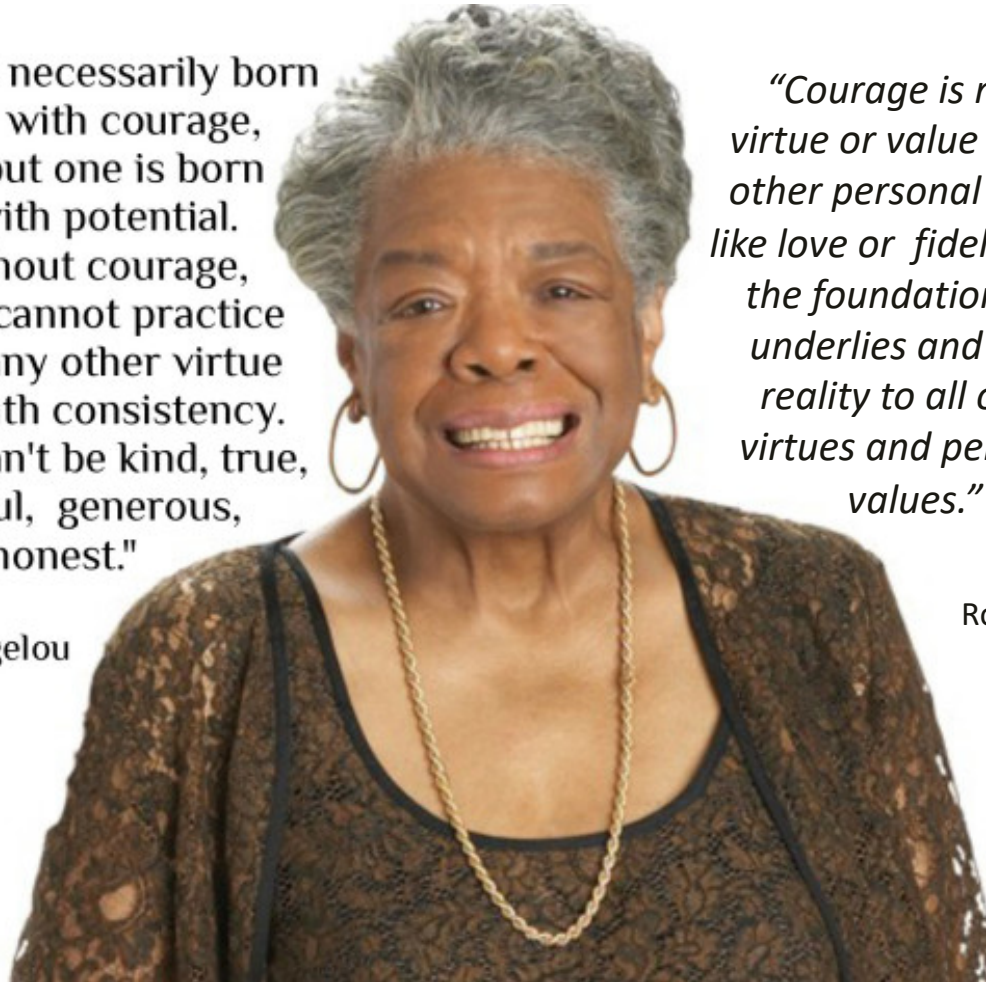
Interpersonal Courage



The Gateway Value

"One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest."

Maya Angelou



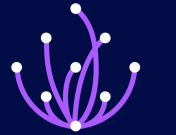
"Courage is not a virtue or value among other personal values like love or fidelity. It is the foundation that underlies and gives reality to all other virtues and personal values."

Rollo May

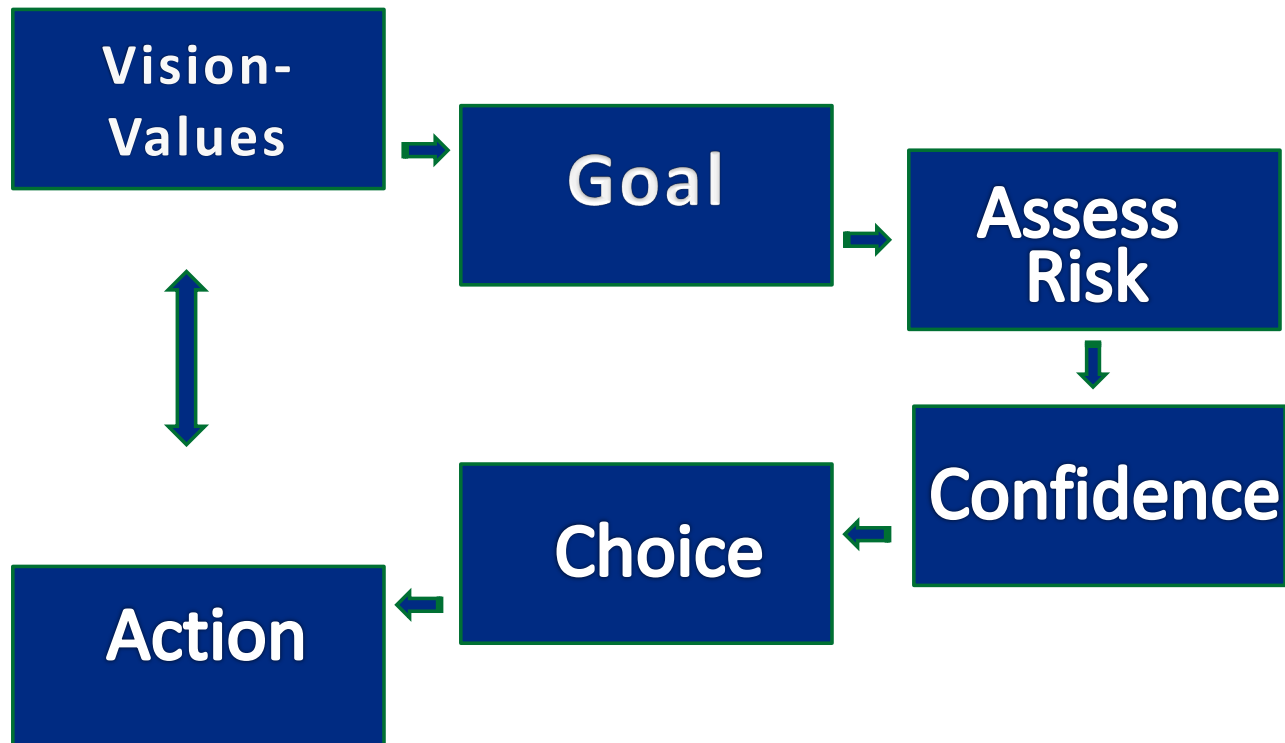
Interpersonal Courage

- ...is the willingness to traverse delicate interpersonal situations and relationships with presence, awareness, intention, commitment, and compassion—all while getting your points across and listening deeply to others. It includes expression of core values with awareness of potential risk in doing so. Both practical and emotional aspects are included.

Interpersonal Courage



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Your Vision-Values

Vision for who you want to be – perhaps who you already are, deep down, in your core . . .

Being authentic, honest, self-respecting?

Generous, helpful, lifting up rather than tearing down?

→ What values do you want to emphasize these days?

Vulnerability as Courage

Courage: To step into a conversation with intention and without knowing how to get back out of it.

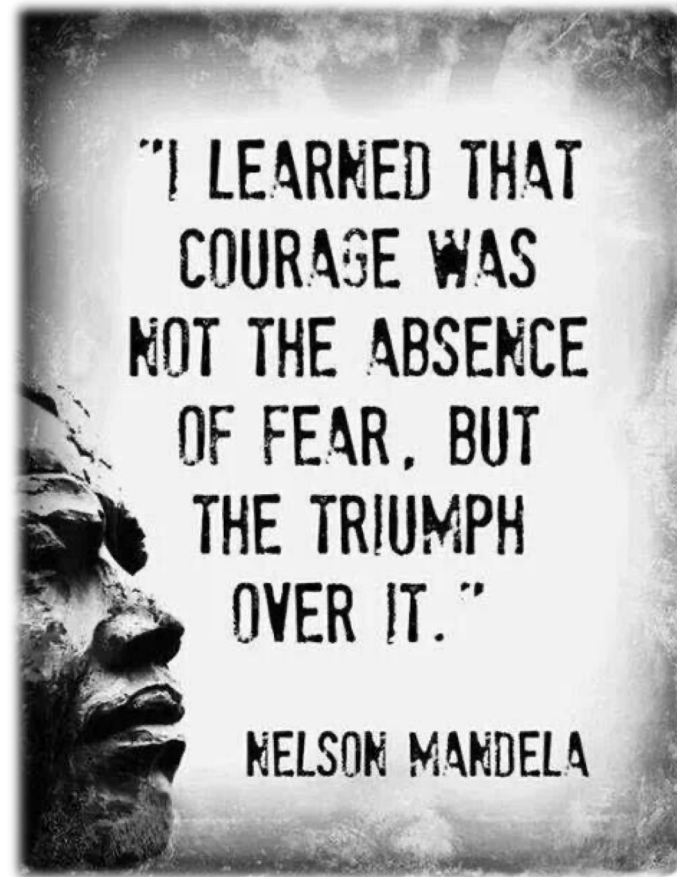
Dwight Frindt

Courage in Relationships

This is a great exercise if you have the courage to do it; is it possible to cut somewhere else?

Form groups of 3-4

- How are you courageous in relationships?
- How could you be more courageous in relationships?



Empathy



What Is Empathy?

It is sensing, feeling, and understanding how it is for the other person. In effect, you *simulate* his or her inner world.

It involves (sometimes subtly) all of these elements:

- Bodily resonance

- Emotional attunement

- Conceptual understanding

Empathy is usually communicated, often tacitly.

We can give empathy, we can receive it, and we can ask for it.

Neural Substrates of Empathy

Three *simulating* systems:

Actions: “mirror” systems; temporal-parietal

Feelings: resonating emotionally; insula

Thoughts: “theory of mind”; prefrontal cortex

These systems interact with each other through association and active inquiry.

Empathy Skills

Pay attention.

Be open.

Read emotion in face and eyes.

Sense beneath the surface.

Drop aversion (judgments, distaste, fear, anger, withdrawal).

Investigate actively.

Express empathic understanding.

Unilateral Virtue

Benefits of Unilateral Virtue

It simplifies things: all you have to do is just live by your own code, and others will do whatever they do.

It feels good in its own right.

It minimizes inflammatory triggers, evokes good treatment, empowers you to ask for it.

It stands you on the moral high ground.

*There are those who do not realize that
one day we all must die.
But those who do realize this
settle their quarrels.*

Dhammapada 6

*If you let go a little,
you will have a little peace.*

*If you let go a lot,
you will have a lot of peace.*

*If you let go completely,
you will be completely peaceful.*

Ajahn Chah

Wise Speech

- Well-intended
- True
- Beneficial
- Timely
- Expressed without harshness
- And - ideally - wanted

Nonviolent Communication

A brief summary . . .

“When X happens . . .”

“I feel Y . . .”

“Because I need Z . . .”

Then, possibly: “So, from now on, I request . . .”



Applying in Relationships

Reflect

- What do you (really) want? (Outcomes)
- What's so important about that
 - Your why or underlying value/s
 - Highest hope or purpose
- What is triggering you?
 - What are your deeper unmet needs (bowling balls)
 - To feel significant, competent, &/or lovable
- What's the worst that can happen?
 - Can you cope with that?
- Is it an issue you can deal with/metabolize alone?



Initiating

- A** Get Agreement
- E** Start with End in mind
- I** Share the Importance
- O** Obstacles: State your concerns
- U** Us: Commitment/s from self;
Hopes from other



WISH

- When you do X (behavior)
 - I experience Y (your experience)
 - Sensations
 - I notice that my body feels tight
 - Metaphor
 - It seems to me that you're casting me out
 - Emotional experience
 - I feel hurt
 - I notice myself feeling angry and restraining myself
 - Name experience w/out acting out
 - Story I tell myself is that...
 - you don't care about me
 - you think I'm incompetent
 - Can you understand me?
- Help me better understand you.



Rewire
LEADERSHIP



Let's talk about it.

Break

Healthy Assertiveness

Healthy Assertiveness

What it is:

Speaking your truth
and pursuing your aims
in the context of relationships.

Healthy Assertiveness

What supports it:

Being on your own side

Self-compassion

Naming the truth to yourself

Refuges: Inner strengths, sense of justice, reason, love, awareness, practice

Taking care of big things so you don't grumble about little ones

Health and vitality

Healthy Assertiveness: Foundations

Know your aims; stay focused on the prize

Ground in empathy, compassion, and love

Practice unilateral virtue

Wise Speech; be especially mindful of tone

NVC: “When X happens, I feel Y because I need Z.”

Communicate for yourself, not to change others

Dignity and gravity

Distinguish empathy building (“Y”) from policy-making

Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It

If appropriate, negotiate solutions.

Establish facts as best you can (“X”)

Find the deepest wants (“Z”)

Focus mainly on “from now on”

Make clear plans, agreements

Scale relationships to their actual foundations



Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A's go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

TIP: If you're alone, reflect or journal.

Reflect on a challenging relationship, and what it would look to approach it in these “healthy assertiveness” ways.



Let's talk about it.



Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A's go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

TIP: If you're alone, reflect or journal.

What are your takeaways so far?

What do you want to grow in yourself?

What do you want to apply in your life?



Let's talk about it.

Hug the Monkey



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Suggested Books

See **RickHanson.net** for other good books.

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Supplemental Materials



An Overview of Current Research

Much research on people that psychological practices lead to psychological benefits, presumably via changing their brains.

Much research on other animals that various stimuli lead to many kinds of changes in their brains.

Some research that psychological practices change people's brains.

Scattered research on deliberate internal mental factors that lead to individual differences in gains from experiences.

“The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

Key Mechanisms of Neuroplasticity

- (De)Sensitizing existing synapses
- Building new synapses between neurons
- Altered gene expression inside neurons
- Building and integrating new neurons
- Altered activity in a region
- Altered connectivity among regions
- Changes in neurochemical activity (e.g., dopamine)
- Changes in neurotrophic factors
- Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
- Slow wave and REM sleep
- Information transfer from hippocampus to cortex

BUT: Experiencing doesn't equal learning.

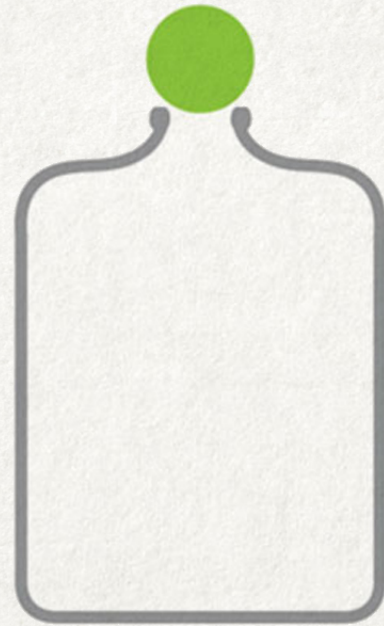
**Activation without installation
may be pleasant,
but no trait resources are acquired.**

What fraction of our
beneficial mental states lead to lasting
changes in neural structure or function?

The Negativity Bias

As the nervous system evolved, **avoiding “sticks”** was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Turn it quickly into (implicit) memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.



Have a Beneficial Experience

The Two Ways To Have a Beneficial Experience

① Notice one you are already having.

- In the foreground of awareness
- In the background

② Create one.

Two Aspects of Installation

Enriching

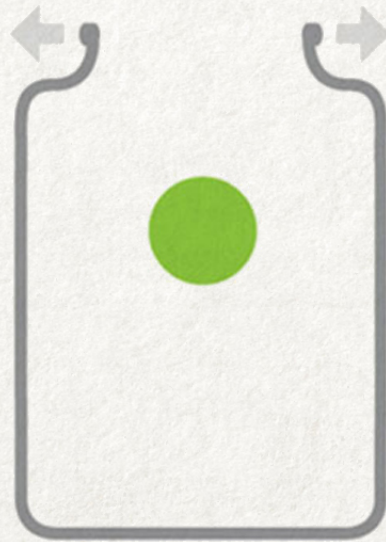
Mind – big, rich, protected experience

Brain – intensifying and maintaining neural activity

Absorbing

Mind – intending and sensing that the experience is received into oneself, with related rewards

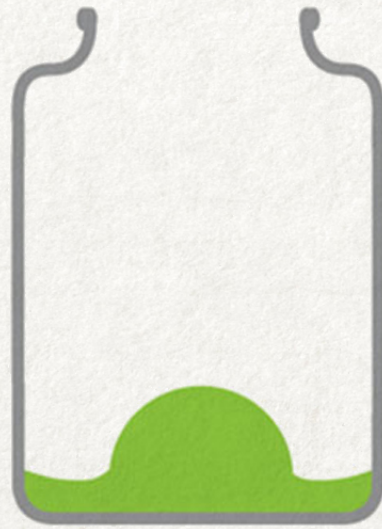
Brain – priming, sensitizing, and promoting more effective encoding and consolidation



Enrich It

Enriching an Experience

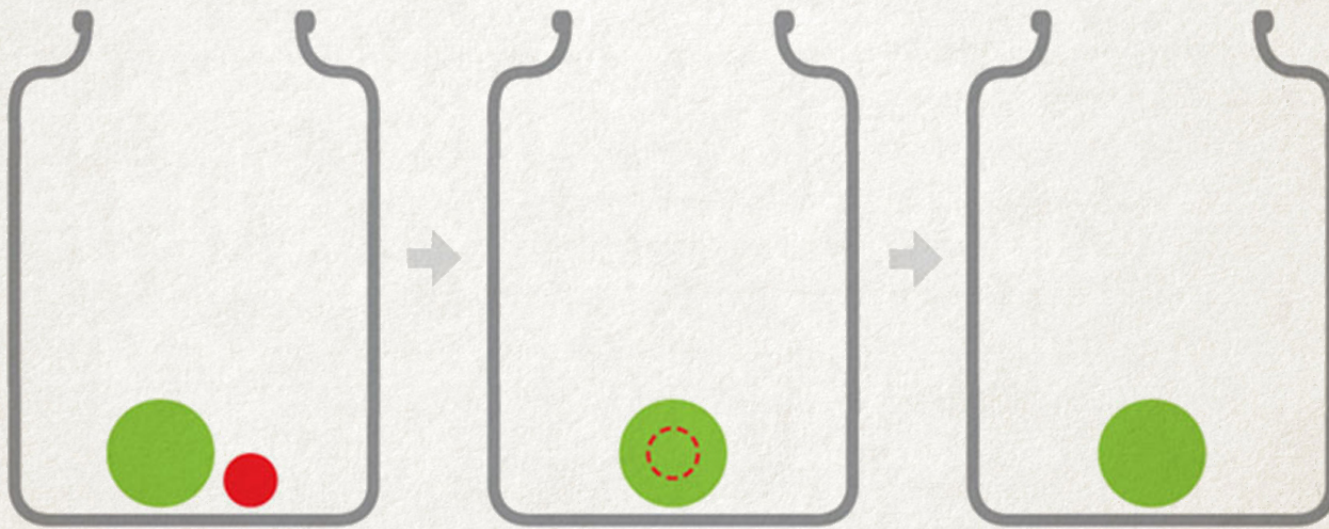
- **Duration** – 5+ seconds; protecting it; keeping it going
- **Intensity** – opening to it in the mind; helping it get big
- **Multimodality** – engaging multiple aspects of experience, especially perception and emotion
- **Novelty** – seeing what is fresh; “don’t know mind”
- **Saliency** – seeing why this is personally relevant



Absorb It

Absorbing an Experience

- Intend to receive the experience into yourself.
- Sense the experience sinking into you.
 - Imagery – Water into a sponge; golden dust sifting down; a jewel into the treasure chest of the heart
 - Sensation – Warm soothing balm
 - Give over to it; let it change you.
- Be aware of ways the experience is rewarding.



Link Positive & Negative Material

Four Ways to Use HEAL with Others

- Doing it implicitly
- Teaching it and leaving it up to people
- Doing it explicitly with people
- Asking people to do it on their own

HEAL in Classes and Trainings

- Take a few minutes to explain it and teach it.
- In the flow, encourage Enriching and Absorbing, using natural language.
- Encourage people to use HEAL on their own.
- Do HEAL on regular occasions (e.g., at end of a therapy session, at end of mindfulness practice)

Implicit HEAL in Therapy

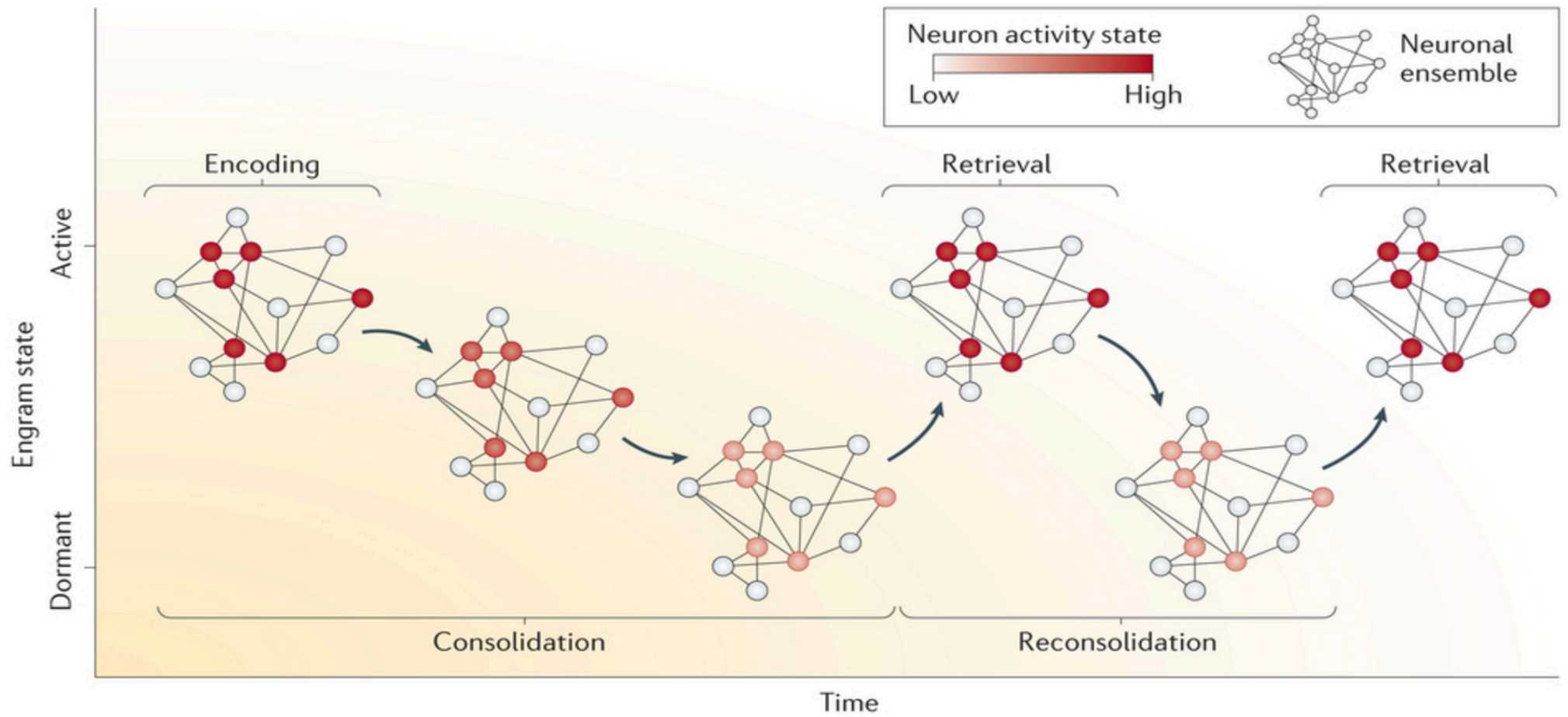
- Creating space for beneficial experiences
- Drawing attention to beneficial facts
- Encouraging positive experience of beneficial fact
- Drawing attention to key aspects of an experience
- Slowing the client down; not moving on
- Modeling taking in the good oneself

Explicit HEAL in Therapy

- Teach the method
- Do HEAL during the session
- Encourage HEAL between sessions

HEAL and Trauma

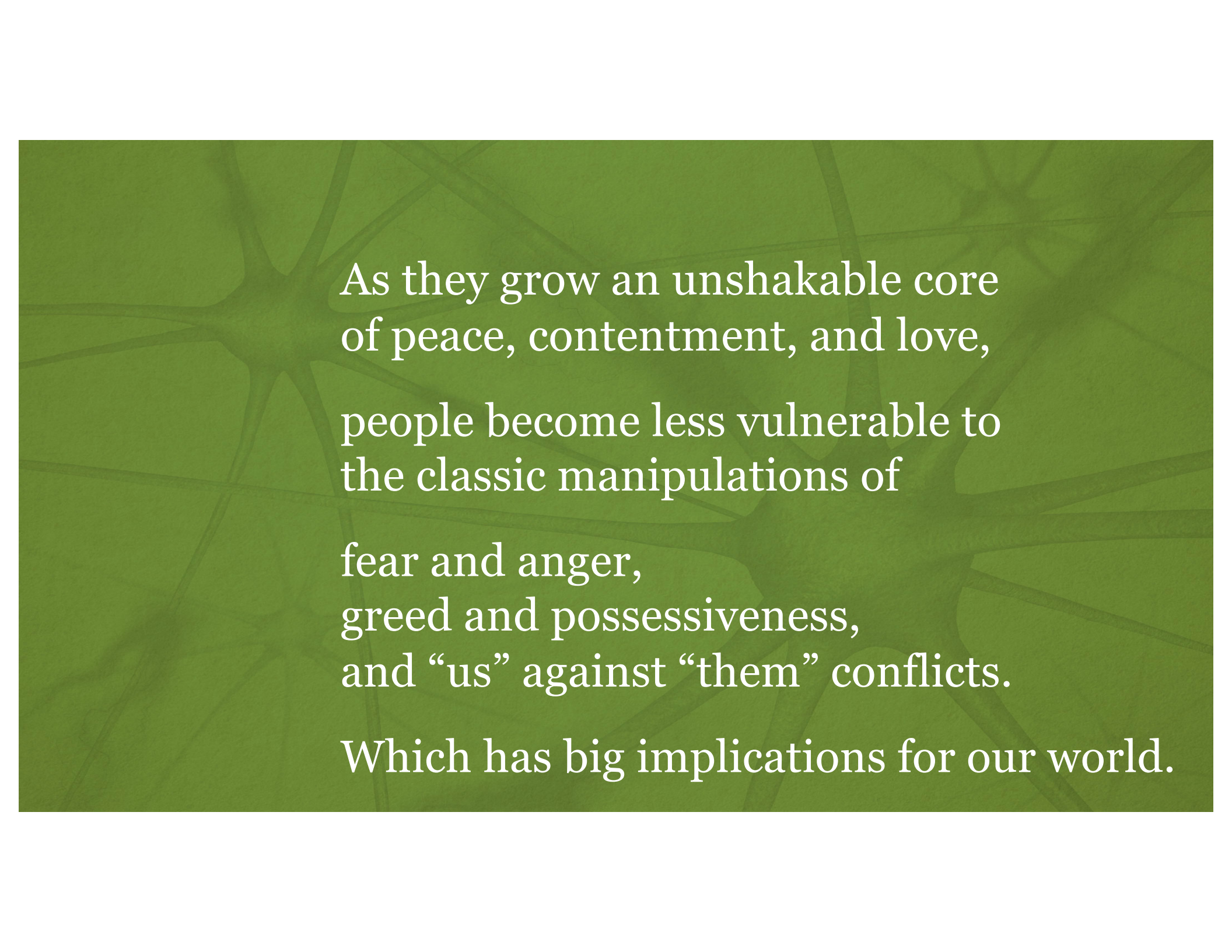
- **General considerations:**
 - People vary in their resources and their traumas.
 - Often the major action is with “failed protectors.”
 - Respect “yellow lights” and the client’s pace.
- The first three steps of HEAL are generally safe. Use them to build resources for tackling the trauma directly.
- Use the Link step to address peripheral features and themes of the trauma.
- With care, use Link to get at the heart of the trauma.



Josselyn et al., 2015. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16, 521-524.

Uses for Children

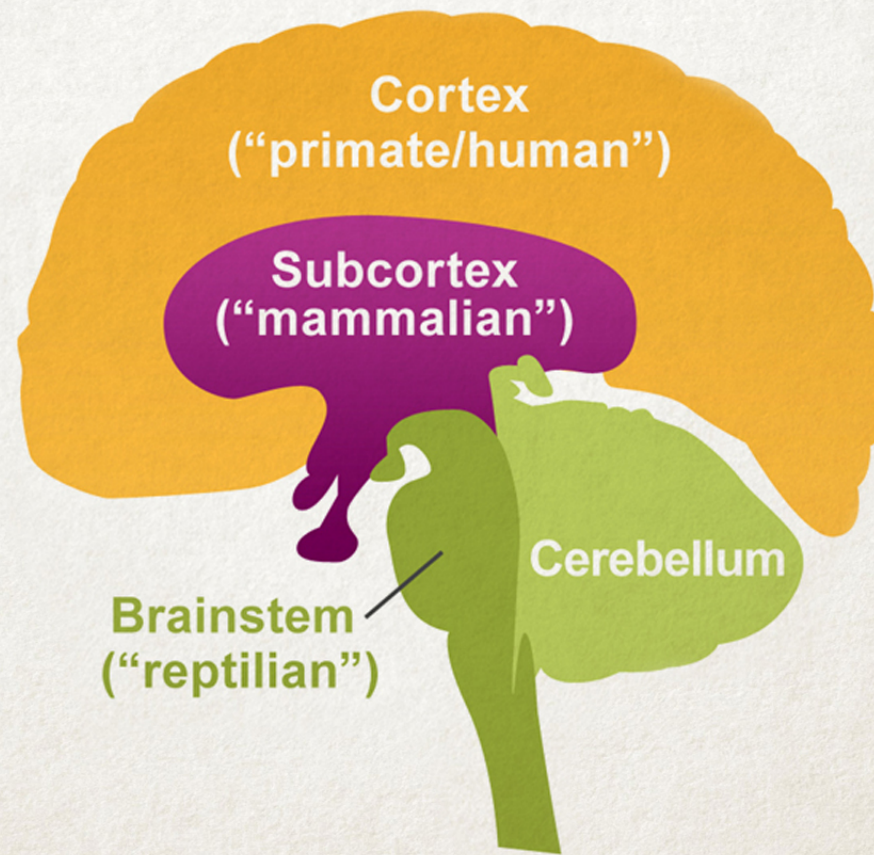
- Registering curricular skills and other resources
- Motivation for learning; associating rewards
- Seeing the good in the world, others, and oneself – and in the past, present, and future
- Seeing life as opportunity
- Feeling like an active learner
- Developing child-specific inner strengths



As they grow an unshakable core
of peace, contentment, and love,
people become less vulnerable to
the classic manipulations of
fear and anger,
greed and possessiveness,
and “us” against “them” conflicts.

Which has big implications for our world.

The Evolving Brain



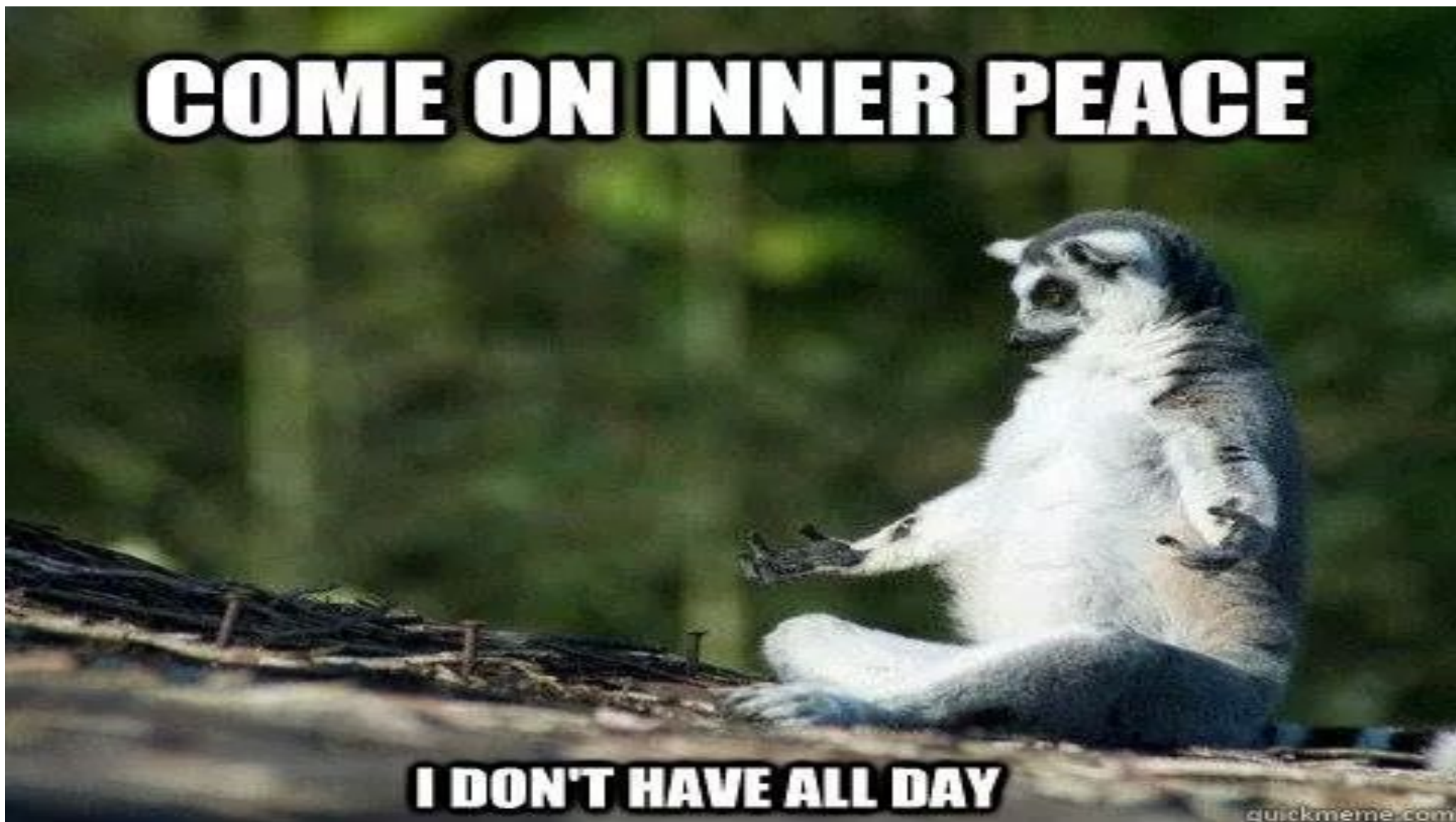
Calming the Visceral Core

- A brief explanation of heartrate variability
- Relax.
- Gently lengthen exhalations . . . As long as or longer than inhalations . . . Then letting breathing be soft and natural.
- Bring attention into the chest and area of the heart.
- Be aware of heartfelt feelings . . . Perhaps love flowing in and flowing out in rhythm with the breath.

Feeling Alright Right Now

- Aware of the body going on being . . . Enough air to breathe . . . The heart beating fine . . . Basically alright . . . Now
- You may not have been basically alright in the past and you may not be basically alright in the future . . . But now you are OK . . . Still basically OK . . . Now
- Letting go of unnecessary anxiety, guarding, bracing
- Reassurance, relief, calming is sinking into you . . . Still basically alright . . . Now

COME ON INNER PEACE



I DON'T HAVE ALL DAY

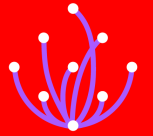
Problems with Defenses

“The thing that mostly gets in the way of dialogue is holding to assumptions and opinions and defending them.”

David Bohm

“The instinct to judge and defend, embedded in the self-defense mechanisms of our biological heritage, is the source of incoherence.”

Peter Senge



Rewire
LEADERSHIP

Transforming Self-Negation



Self-compassion is key because when we're able to be gentle with ourselves in the midst of shame, we're more likely to reach out, connect, and experience empathy.

— Brené Brown —

AZ QUOTES

Antidote to shame

Individual Defense Contract

Commit to be your best:

- I know that I have become defensive when I ...
- When I become aware of this, I commit to ...



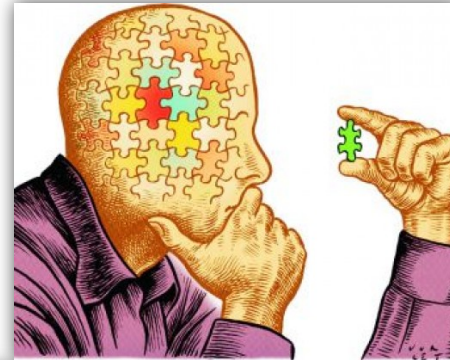
- When I am successful, I will take credit or celebrate by...
- If I go off track, my inner coach will remind me to get back on the thrive path by...
- Then I commit to...

Pair Defense Contracts

How to get back on track and work as a team

Intrapersonal

- I know that I have become defensive when ...
- When I become aware of this, I commit to ...



Interpersonal

- You know I'm becoming defensive when you notice me ...
- If you become aware of my defensiveness before I do, I would like you to ...
- Then I commit to...



Rewire
LEADERSHIP

Prefrontal Cortex

Empathy	Creativity
Insight	Attuned Communication
Emotional Regulation	Anxiety Reduction
Response Flexibility	Ease



A quote by Christopher Germer about self-compassion. The text is white and centered within a rectangular box that has a colorful, abstract background of red, orange, yellow, and blue. The box is set against a solid teal background.

A moment of self-compassion
can change your entire day.
A string of such moments can
change the course of your life.

- Christopher Germer

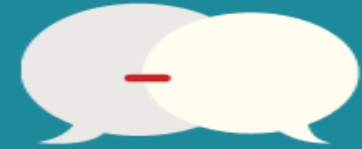
WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?



Mindfulness



Self-Kindness



Connectedness

Notice moment of suffering
“Ouch, this hurts”

Comfort yourself
“How can I be kind to myself?”

Take larger perspective
“I’m not the only one; other people suffer”

“Together they comprise a state of warmhearted, connected presence during difficult moments in our lives.”

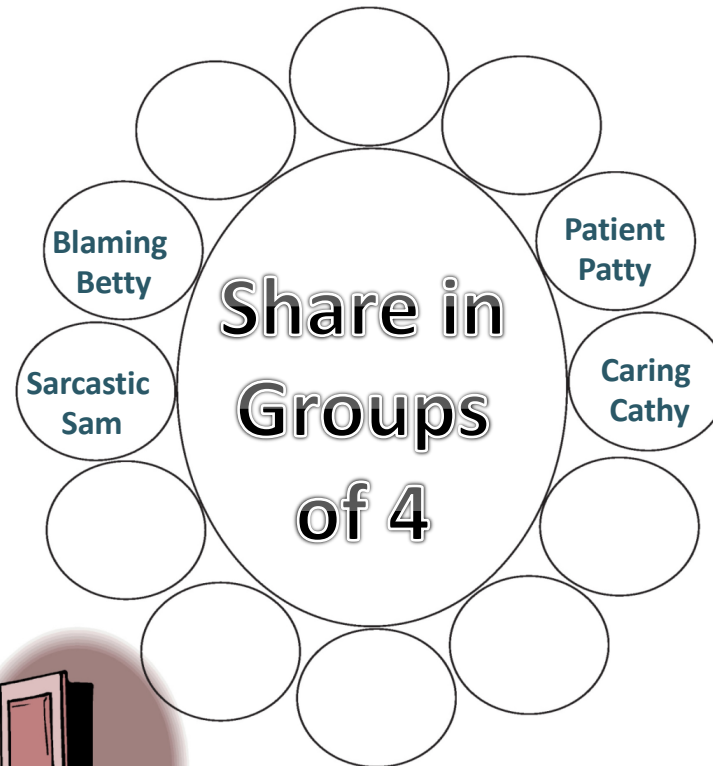
Chris Germer

KNOW THY SELVES

- Reflect on a few characters or parts who affect your important conversations:
- Survive oriented
 - Traitors
- Thrive oriented
 - Angels

Awareness + Openness

No shame to name



Responsible for parts even
if parts aren't responsible

Assessing Yourself

What are your strengths in relationships?

How are you on your own side?

What are your edges?

What will expanding beyond your edges do for you?

How does that connect with your core values and/or vision?

Us and Them

- Within-group cooperation, and between-group aggression.
- Our biological nature is much more inclined toward cooperative sociability than toward aggression and indifference or cruelty. We are just very reactive to social distinctions and threats.
- That reactivity is intensified and often exploited by economic, cultural, and religious factors.
- Two wolves in your heart:
 - Love sees a vast circle in which all beings are “us.”
 - Hate sees a small circle of “us,” even only the self.

Which one will you feed?

*In between-family fights, the baboon's 'I'
expands to include all of her close kin;
in within-family fights,
it contracts to include only herself.*

*This explanation serves for baboons
as much as for the Montagues and Capulets.*

~ Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth

Feeding the Wolf of Love

- Don't over-identify with "us."
- Release aversion to others.
- Focus on similarities between "us" and "them."
- Recognize and have compassion for the suffering of "them."
- Consider "them" as young children.
- Recognize good things about "them."
- Keep extending out the sense of "us" to include everyone.