

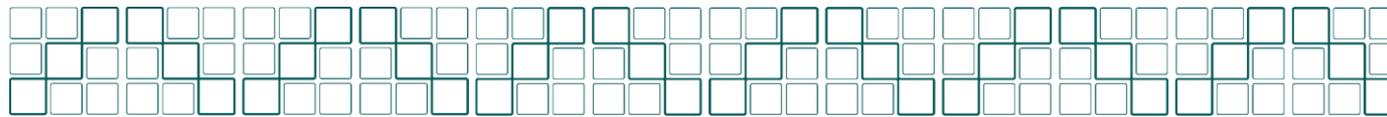
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# Supporting Yourself and Your Trainees During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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Wellness Advisor, NIH-OITE

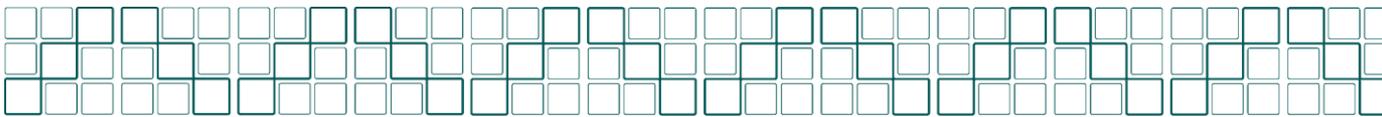


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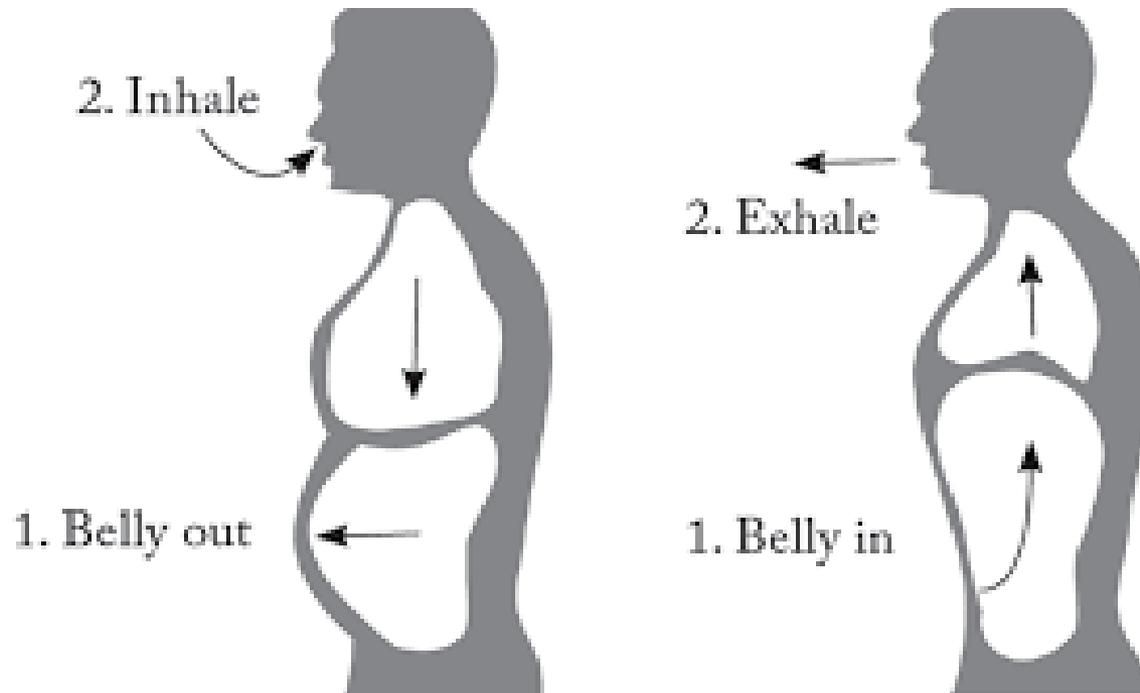


# What We Will Do Today

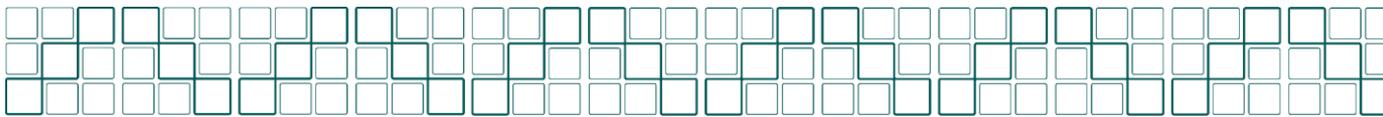
- Breathe and stretch
- Gain some understanding of the challenges of functioning in this time of the pandemic for:
  - Ourselves
  - Our trainees and research staff
- Talk about some helpful strategies for:
  - Ourselves
  - Our trainees and research staff



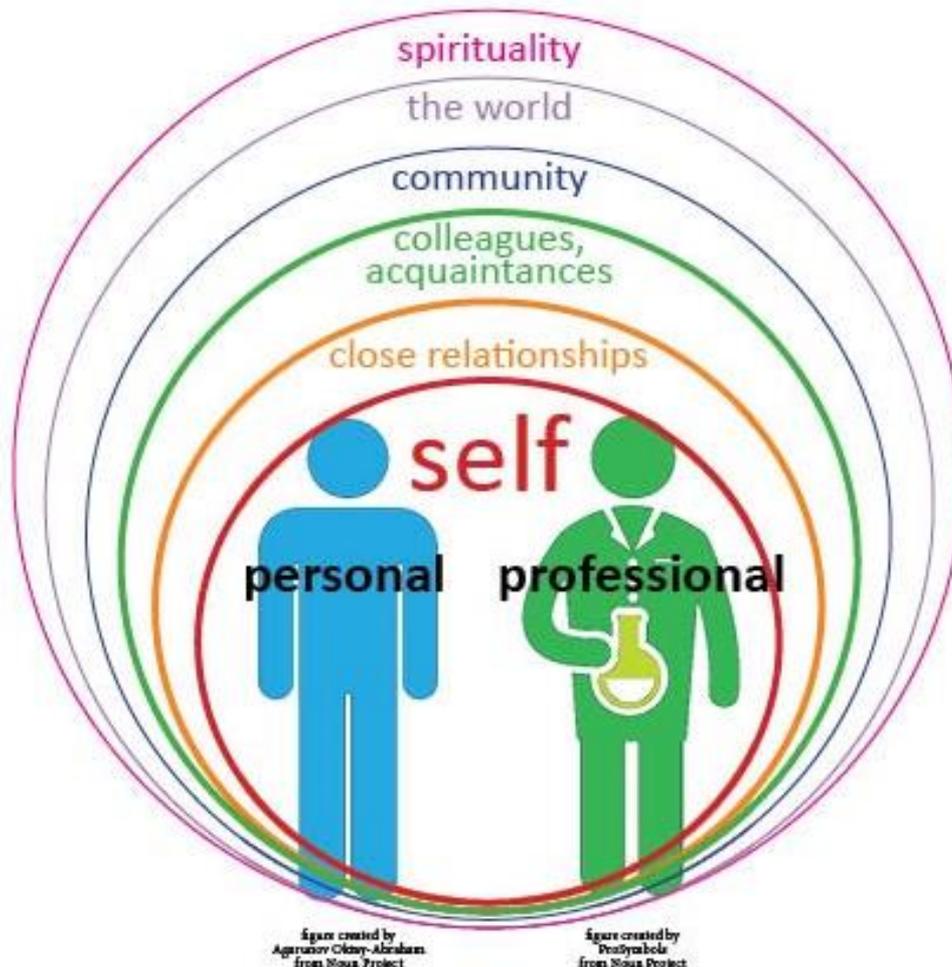
# Diaphragmatic Breathing



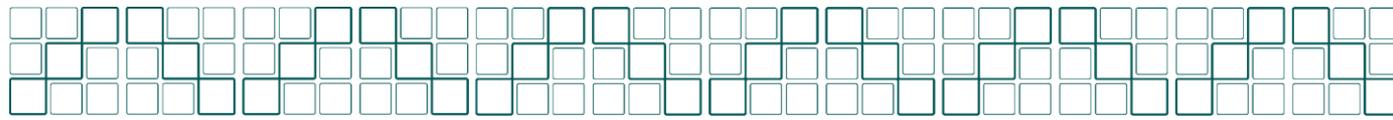
Six deep, diaphragmatic or belly breaths can switch your body from the stress response to the relaxation response.



# One Self, Many Connections



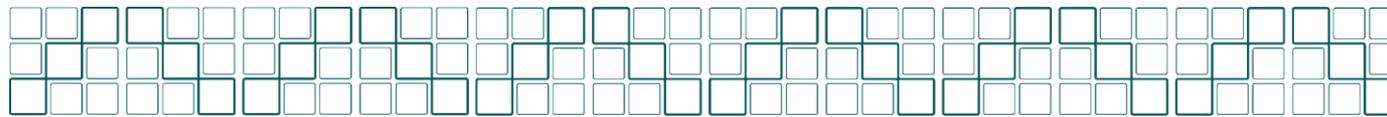
- It may be difficult at times to know where the boundaries and balance belong between our professional and personal selves
- It may be difficult at times to know where the boundaries belong between our professional and personal relationships
- Some of your mentees, trainees, or staff may be in your green circle, while you are in their orange one. Or vice versa
- At different times, we may have different levels of relationship with the same person



# This is an Unprecedented Time

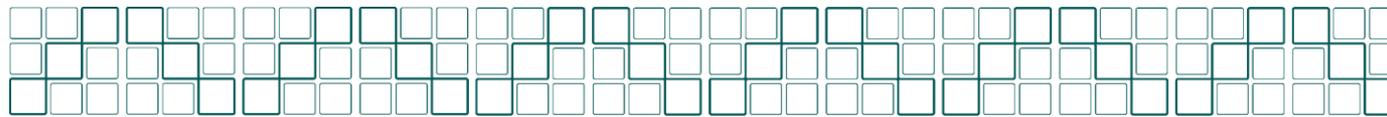
It is difficult to function as one normally does,  
or even as one has historically done in past crises.





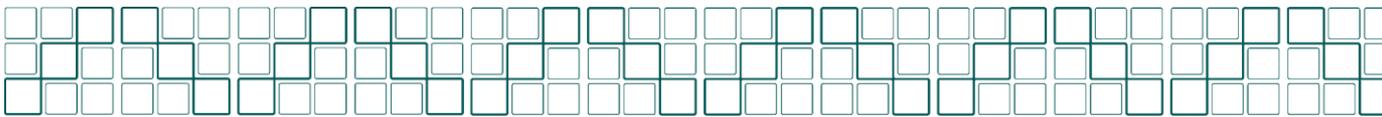
# the Pandemic

- The stakes are extremely high – personally, professionally, globally
- There are so many variables and unknowns around SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19, and the pandemic
- And so many players
- A pervasive sense of danger and urgency exists
- We all have overwhelmed moments
- We are experiencing stress, decision fatigue and loss of productivity
- It is a hard time for all of us, but harder for some

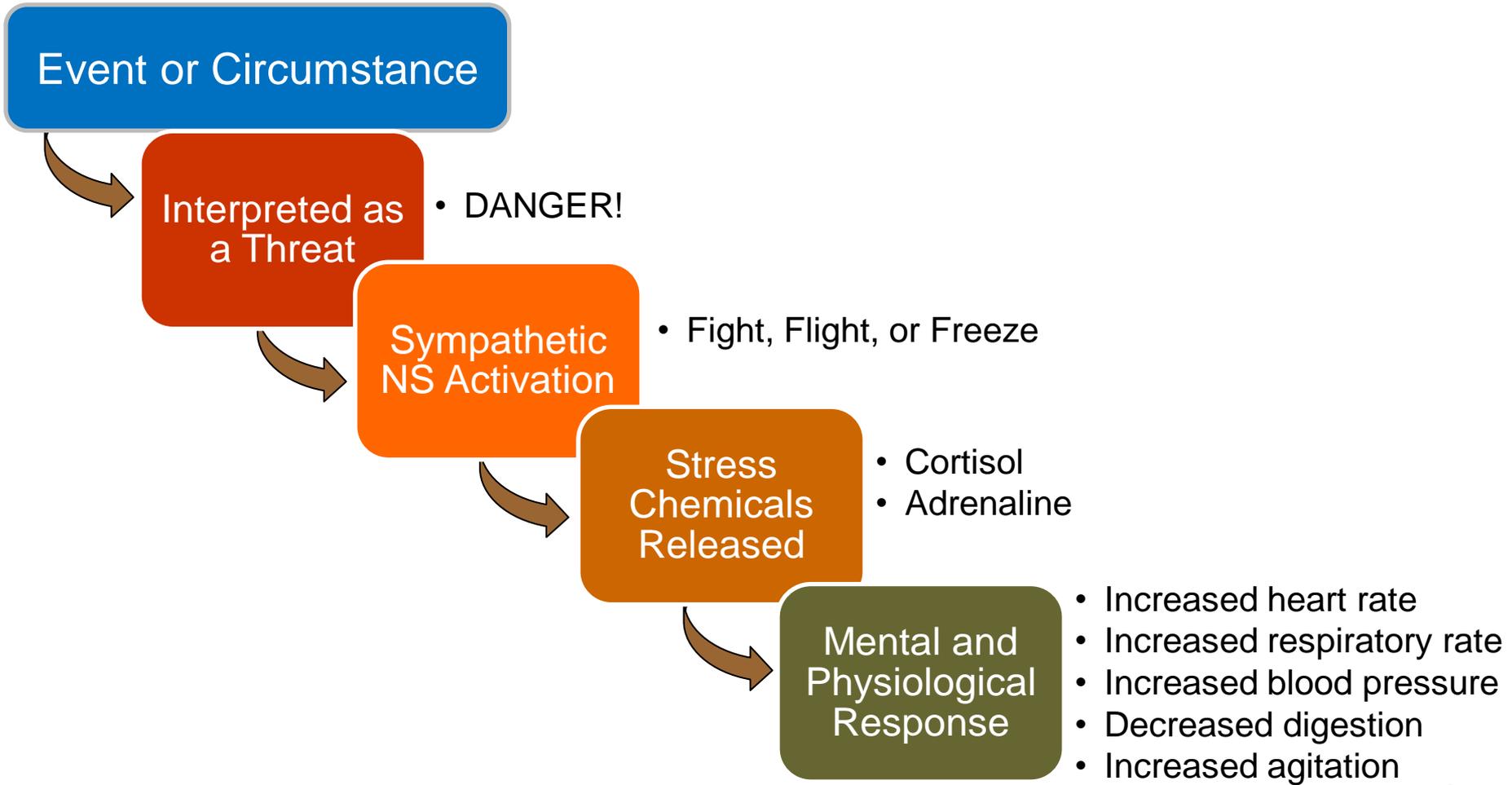


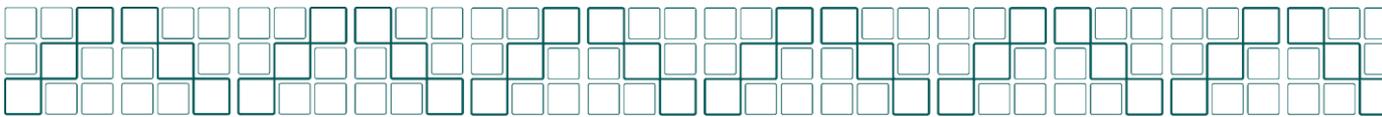
# Stress

- Physical, mental or emotional pressure or tension
- **DISTRESS** is negative stress
  - Can be short- or long-term – feels unpleasant
  - Causes anxiety or concern and can lead to mental and physical problems
  - Perceived as outside of one's coping abilities
  - Decreases performance
- **EUSTRESS** is positive stress
  - Short-term, moderate – can feel exciting
  - Motivates, focuses energy
  - Perceived as within one's coping abilities
  - Can improve performance



# Physiological Response to Stress

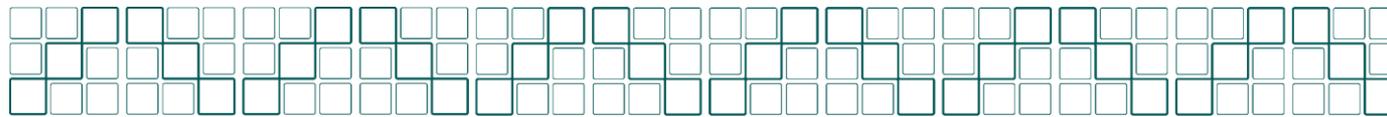




# Recognizing Distress

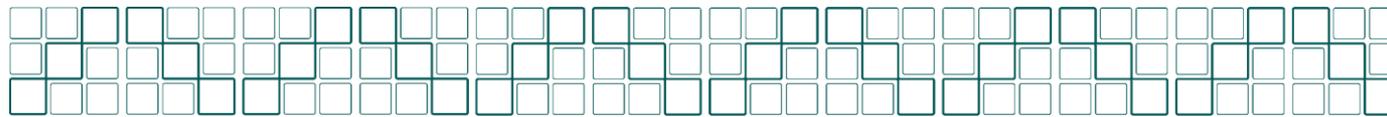


- Where in your **body** do you feel distress?
- What **emotions** does stress bring up for you?
- Where do your **thoughts** go when you are distressed?
- How does it show up in your **behavior**?



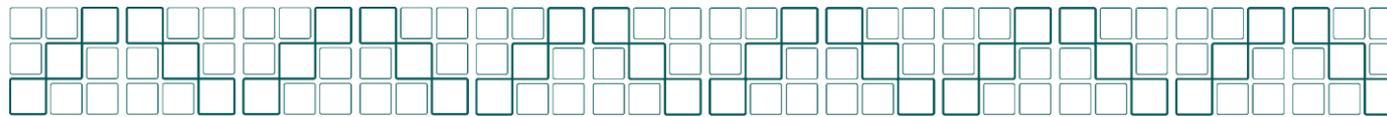
# Frequent Fallout from Stress

- Significant decline in work performance, productivity
- Working excessively, at the cost of other things
- Lack of motivation
- Difficulty performing normal tasks
- Avoidance, not dealing with responsibilities
- Engaging in self-medicating behaviors, such as
  - Drugs, alcohol, electronics, gambling, sex
- Isolation, withdrawal



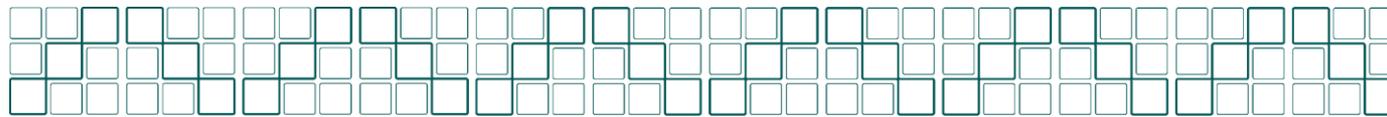
We don't act  
in accordance  
with what  
we know.

We act in  
accordance  
with our  
baseline level  
of stress.



# Anxiety

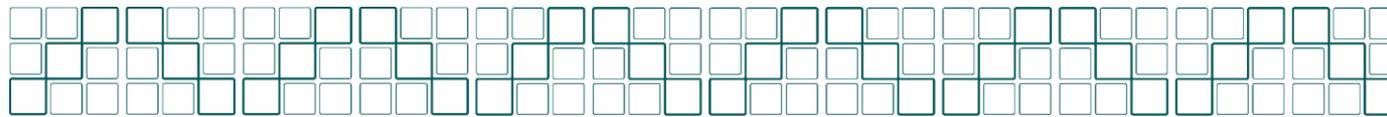
- Persistent or extreme worries or fears that can be overwhelming
- The fear is disproportionate to the reality and the anxious person has difficulty having perspective
- Anxiety impedes normal functioning



# Types of Anxiety

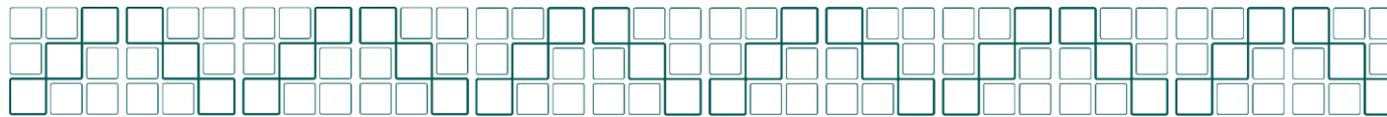
Anxiety can be generalized or very specific in nature

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** excessive, recurring worry about life routines and situations including health, work, and social interactions
- **Phobias:** intense fear of or aversion to specific objects or situations
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:** repetitive, unwanted, intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and irrational, excessive urges to do certain actions (compulsions) to stave off imagined harms
- **Panic Disorder:** recurrent, unexpected and sudden periods of intense fear accompanied by physical and psychological symptoms
- **Social Anxiety Disorder:** fear of social or performance situations



# Depression

- A common, serious mood disorder that can interfere in the ability to work, eat, sleep, socialize, or otherwise participate in one's life
- Episodic periods of a decrease in energy or happiness levels from typical or baseline
- Negative thoughts and perspective on self and the world
- Persistent feelings of sadness and worthlessness
- A lack of desire to engage in formerly pleasurable activities often leading to withdrawal
- Exhibiting helplessness or hopelessness



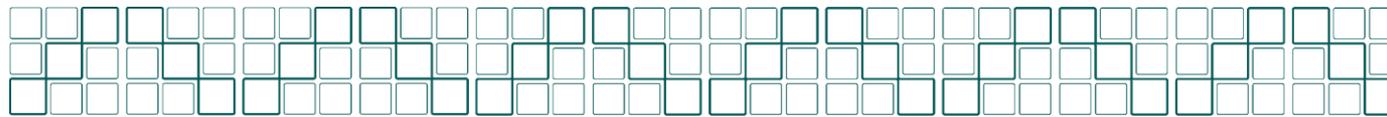
# Trauma

## Trauma

- An emotional response to a terrible event like a death, accident, rape, natural disaster or pandemic. Immediately after the event, shock or denial are typical.
- Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and physical symptoms
- While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives.

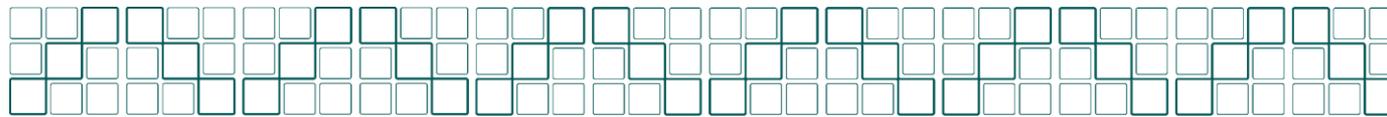
## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Symptoms begin after the event and may persist for months or years
- Symptom categories:
  - **Re-experiencing:** flashbacks, bad dreams or bad thoughts
  - **Avoidance:** avoiding triggers - people, places, events, thoughts, feelings
  - **Arousal and reactivity:** startle, on edge, anger, insomnia
  - **Cognition and mood:** difficulty remembering the event, negative thoughts, distorted thinking, loss of interest



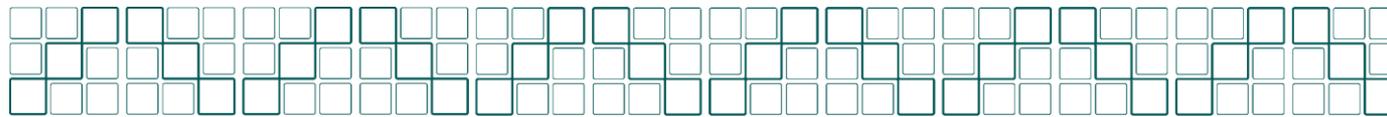
# Loss and Grief

- Grief is the natural response to loss, when someone or something one loves is taken away
- One can feel overwhelming pain, shock, disbelief, anger, guilt, profound sadness
- Grief can disrupt functioning and impact physical health
- Emotions may be close to the surface and easily triggered
- Ignoring the pain does not make it go away
- Feeling sad, frightened or lonely is normal and not a sign of weakness



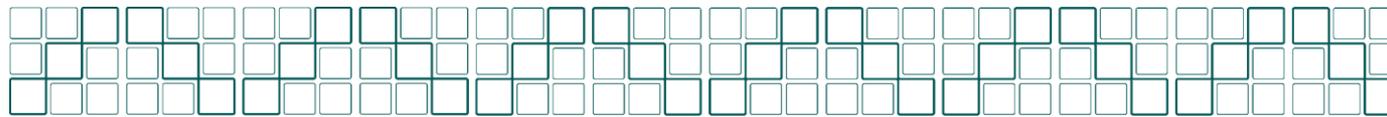
# Grief

- Emotional symptoms of grief
  - Shock, disbelief, anger
  - Sadness, despair, fear
  - Guilt
  - Feelings will wax and wane
  
- Physical symptoms of grief
  - Fatigue, nausea, aches and pains
  - Lowered immunity
  - Appetite changes, weight loss or gain
  - Sleep changes, such as insomnia



# Supporting Others in Grief

- Listen
- Be there for them, let them know you are thinking of them
- Be patient
- Accept that you may feel awkward and inadequate
- Don't offer false comfort
- Do offer practical help
- Encourage professional help when needed



# Control and Lack of Control



Cannot  
Control

- The way others are responding
- SARS-CoV-2 research
- Duration of self-isolation
- When we will return to 'normal'



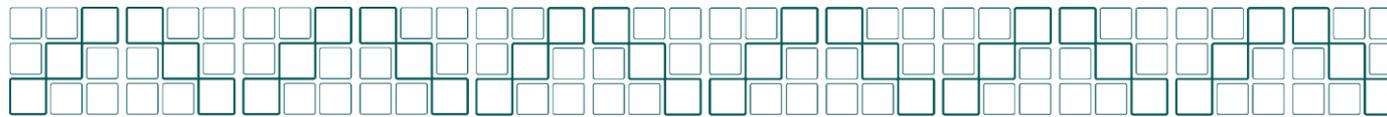
Wish to  
Control

- Behavior of others
- Interactions with others
- Length of self-isolation
- A million other things



Can  
Control

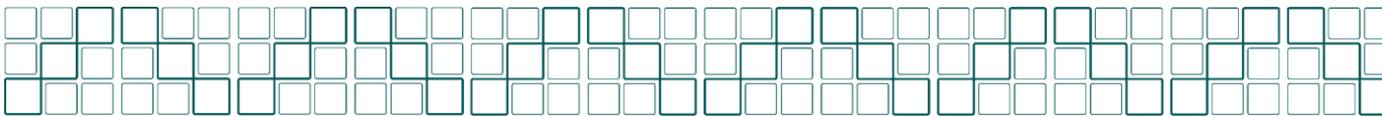
- Things we have a realistic shot of managing
- Our own thoughts and behaviors
- Our own reactions to others
- Routines/  
Boundaries



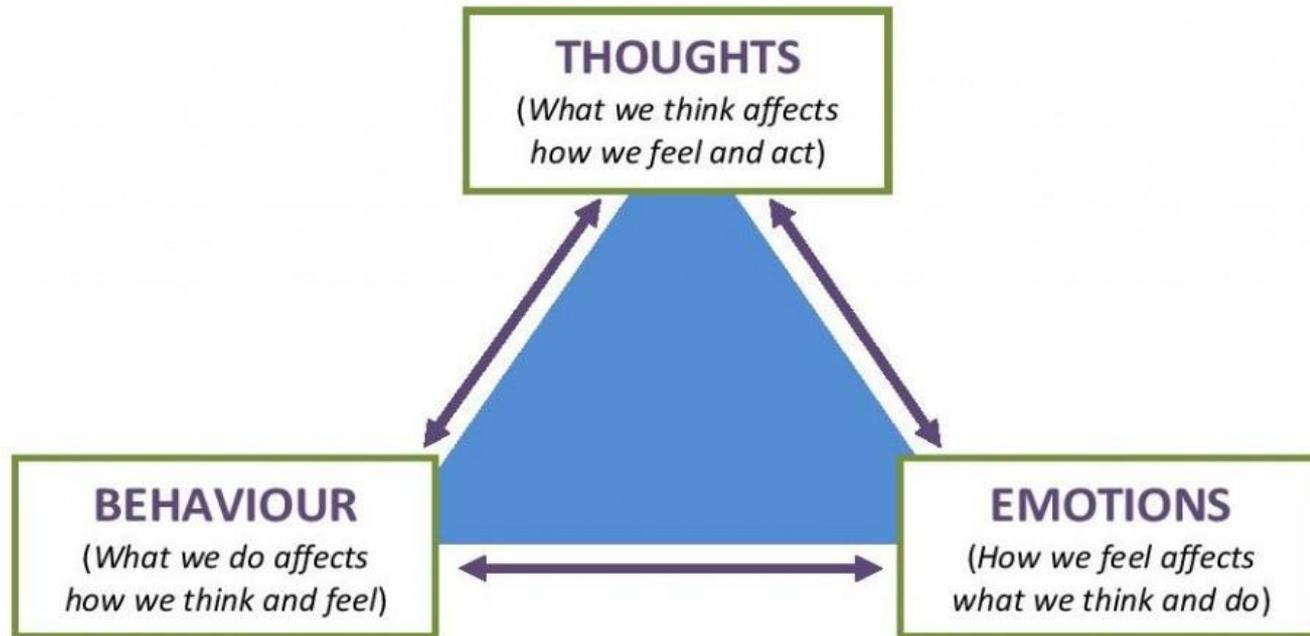
# Controlling What You Can

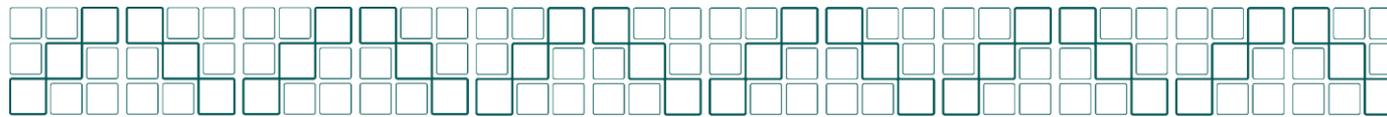
- Be aware that the things you wish you could control (but can't) are often the areas that tend to increase anxiety and may even cause you to feel helpless or hopeless.
- There are going to be things, for everyone, that we can't control or predict, or solve. There are risks we cannot eliminate.
- There also are many things you CAN control, risks you can minimize, and outcomes you can influence.

Learning the difference and spending your limited energy, focus and time on things within your sphere of control is an integral part of managing your anxiety.



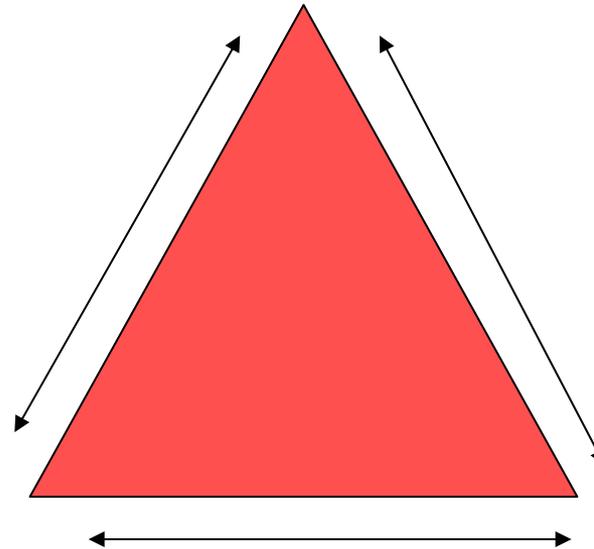
# Our Thoughts Impact Our Feelings and Our Actions





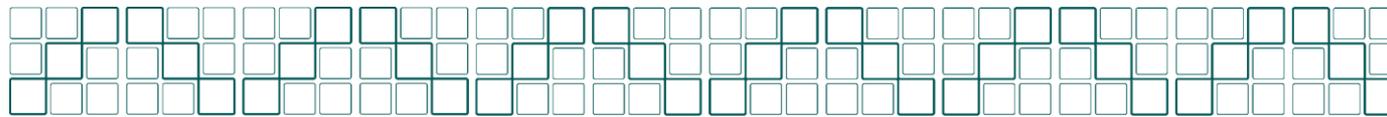
# Unhelpful, Anxious Thoughts

**Thought:** No one in my lab is being productive. We will be years behind in our research.



**Behavior:** micromanage, pressure trainees, endlessly read about others being productive or worst case scenarios

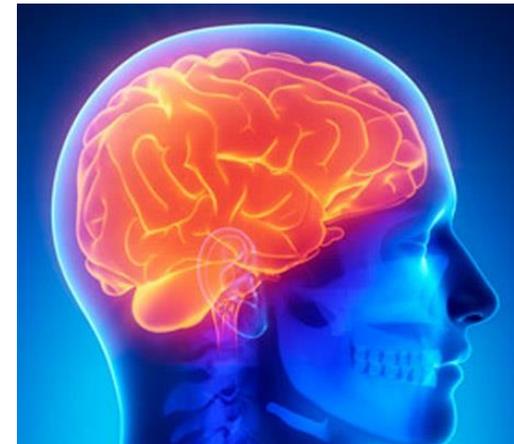
**Feel:** Panicked, stressed, worried, sad, angry, overwhelmed,

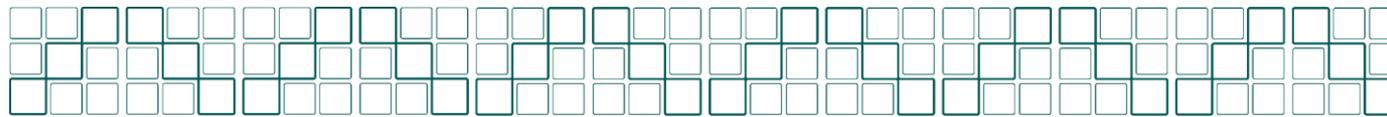


# Cognitive Distortions

## Automatic Negative Thoughts

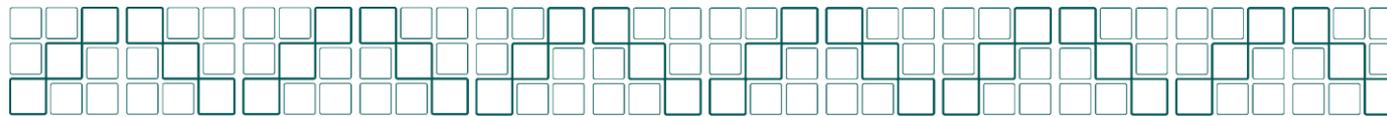
- Characteristic ways that our mind convinces us of something that really is not true
- Reinforces negative thinking or emotions and keeps us feeling bad about ourselves
- Can lead us to feeling very anxious and pessimistic
- Our brain has a built-in negativity bias that makes sense from an evolutionary biology perspective





# Common Cognitive Distortions

- **All-or-nothing thinking:** our performance is either perfect or a complete failure
- **Catastrophizing:** Believe that the worst will happen, exaggerate the implications of a setback or mistake
- **Mind reading:** make assumption about what someone else is thinking, usually in negative ways about ourselves
- **Fortune telling:** predict a negative outcome in advance
- **Discounting the positive:** focus on the negatives and disregard the positives
- **Over-generalizing:** take one negative event and see other events through that lens

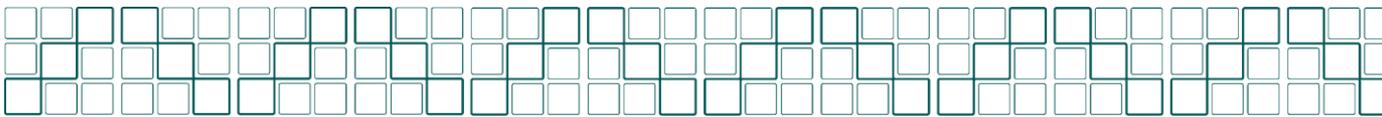


# Imposter Fears

The feeling of phoniness in people who believe that they are not intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement

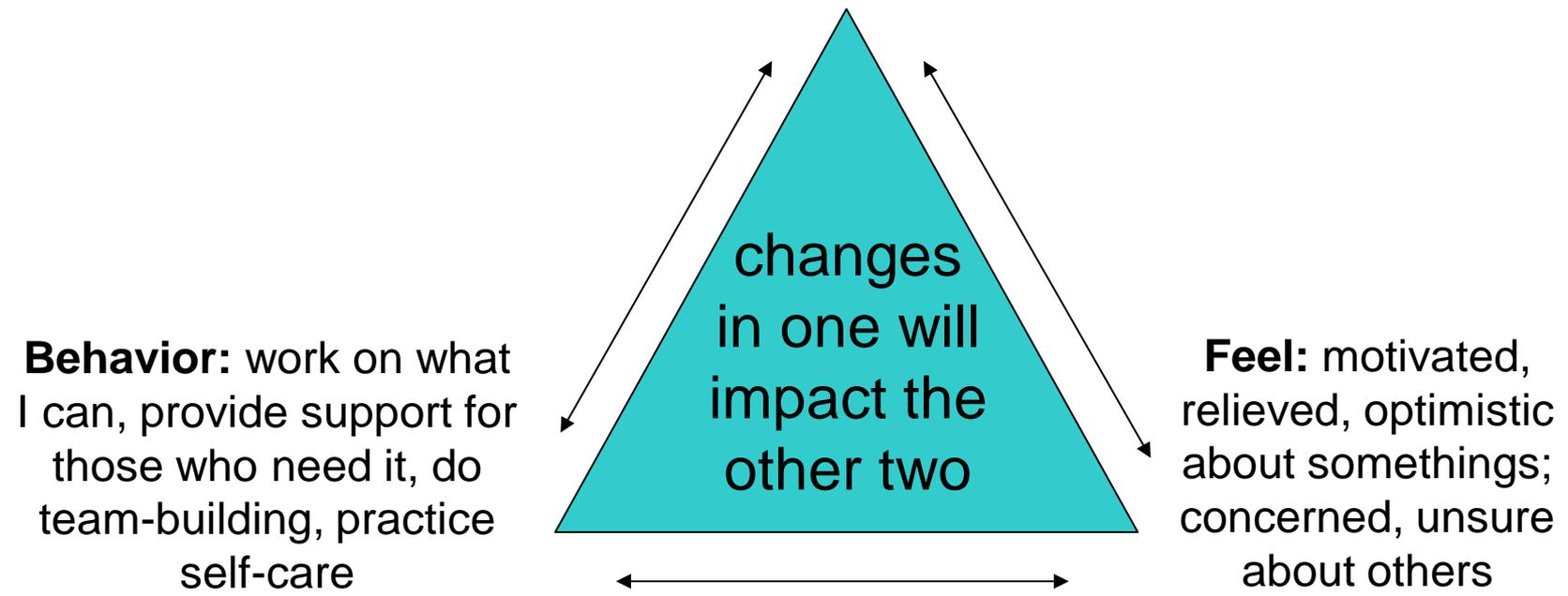
- The cognitive distortion most associated with imposter fears is minimizing
- Lead us to discount our successes or attribute them to luck
- Very common in individuals working in artistic and high knowledge environments

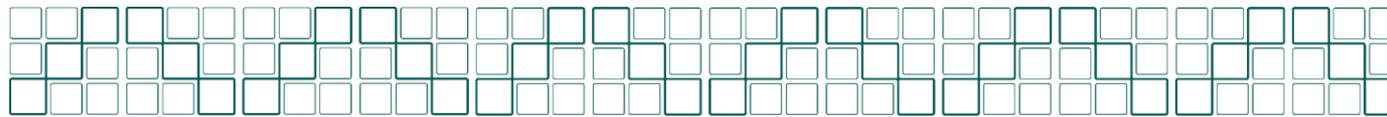




# Helpful Thoughts

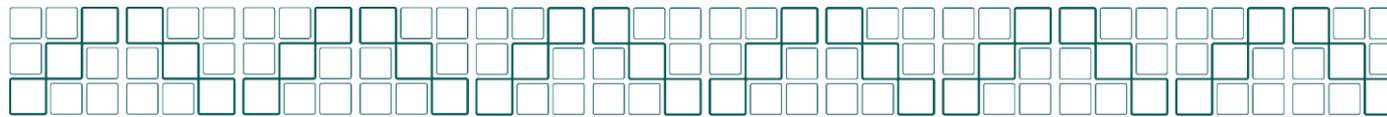
**Thought:** This is a unique time. We are experienced problem-solvers and will figure out ways to move forward from here. Everyone is doing what they can.





# Testing the Usefulness of Your Thoughts

- Are these thoughts helping or hurting me?
- Are they useful?
- Would I say this thought aloud to a good friend?



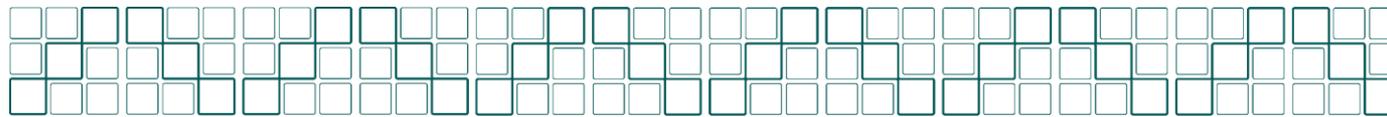
# An Acronym To Help - HATS

**H**ear your negative self-talk/inner critic

**A**ppreciate you have a choice

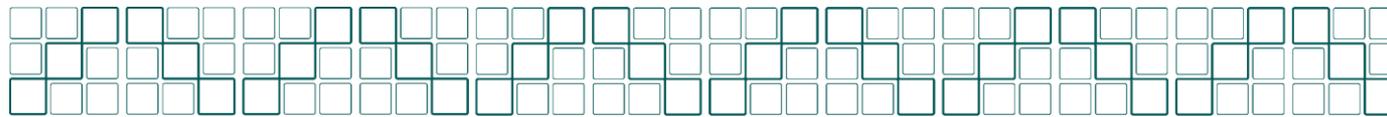
**T**alk back to the negative voice in your head

**S**eek help and access resources



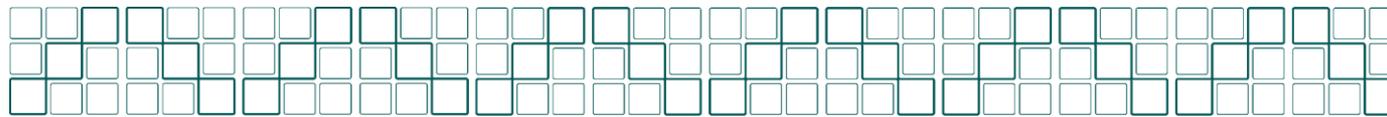
# Uncertainty

- Stress of uncertainty is to be expected
  - Be mindful if uncertainty overwhelms you and gets in the way of doing things you want or need to do
- Be curious about what you don't know
- Focus on what you know or what you can do
  - Create and follow daily routines
  - Do at least something each day that helps you feel calm
  - Do something that helps you feel productive
  - Talk to others, volunteer, or help someone else
  - Know that this will pass



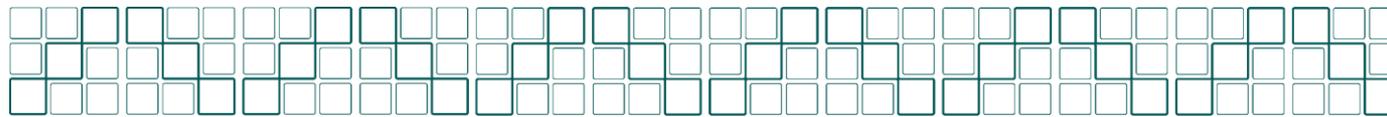
# What You Might See From Your Trainees

- Decreased levels of productivity
- Confusion or uncertainty about what they should be doing or how to do it
- Radio silence or constantly reaching out
- Fallout from changes in educational and training programs
- Stresses that remote communication put on mentor/mentee and other relationships
- Anxiety, depression, grief or other mental health concerns



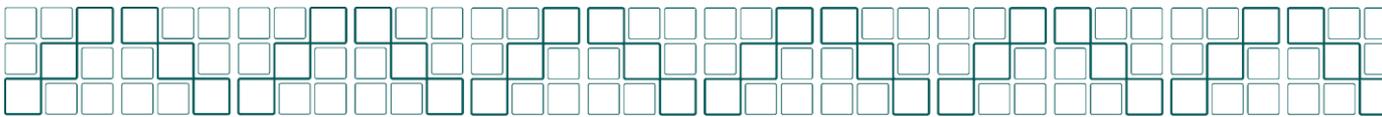
# Resilience

- The ability to:
  - adapt and grow through adversity
  - navigate difficult challenges with awareness, intention, skill
  - find a constructive way forward during challenging times
- A set of attitudes and behaviors that can be learned and developed through education, self-reflection, and practice.
- To be resilient we must learn from previous experiences, both good and bad
- Invests in the future. What things can be done now that help us move forward?
- A group is only as resilient as the individuals that make up that group and **resilience starts at the top**

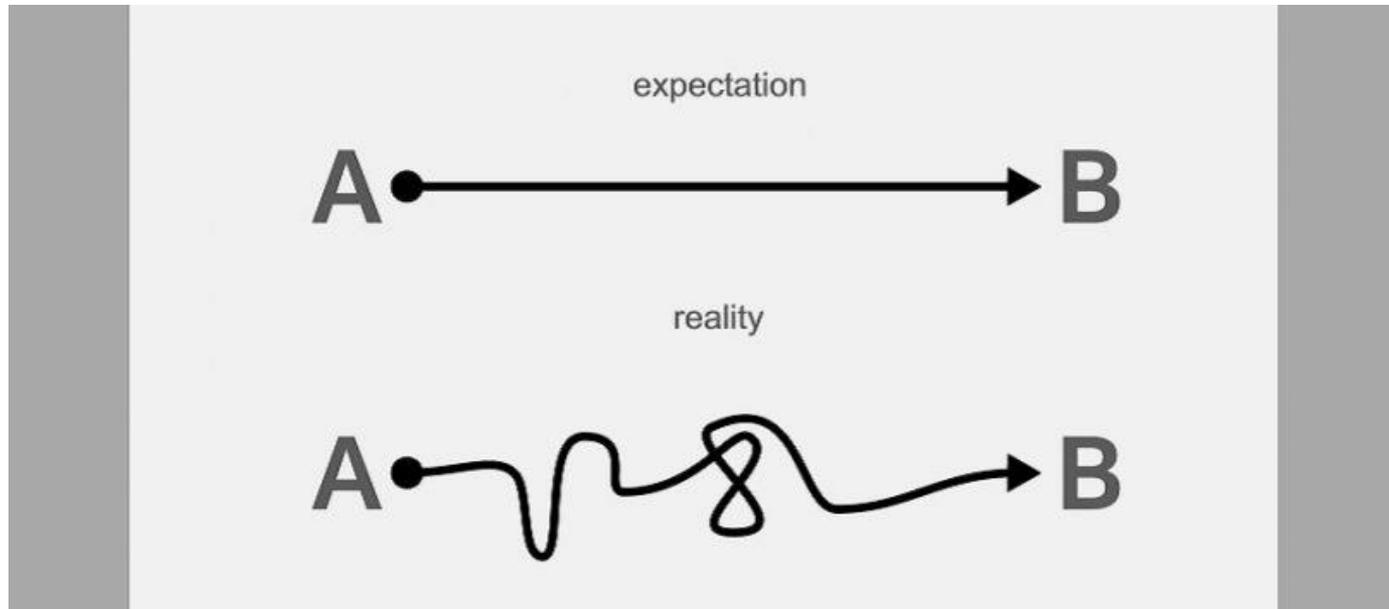


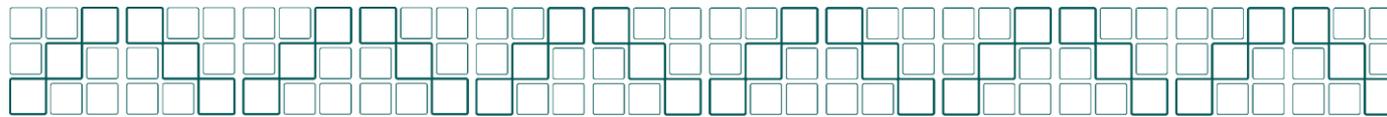
# Resilience Skills

- Self-awareness
  - Acknowledging and validating negative emotions
  - Accessing positive emotions
  - Realistic expectations
  
- Functioning
  - Attention and focus
  - Finding purpose
  - Engaging with others
  - Being proactive and using resources
  - Letting go
  - Self-care



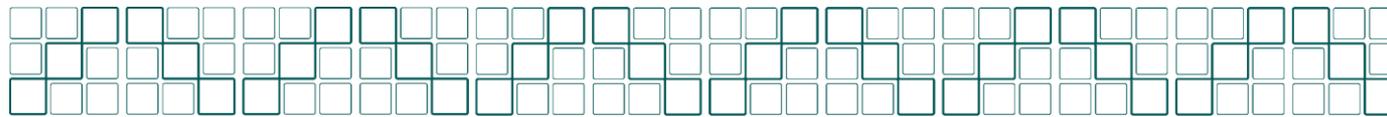
# Setting Reasonable and Realistic Expectations





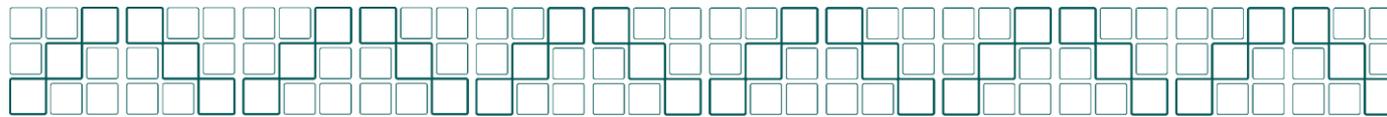
# Reasonable, Realistic Expectations

- It is **NOT** reasonable to expect of ourselves or our trainees that:
  - We will be as productive as we usually are
  - We will be handling everything easily or completely
  - All will suddenly go back to 'normal' one day soon
  
- It is **REALISTIC** to expect that:
  - Everyone will struggle in some way
  - Some people will face extreme medical, physical or emotional challenges
  - You will have multiple conflicting demands on your time and attention that cannot all be met as you would like



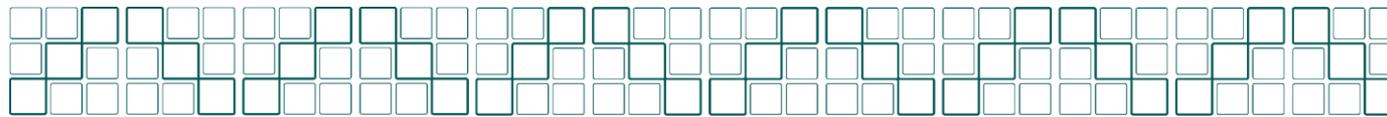
# Setting Expectations for Myself

- We are at the beginning of the learning curve on all this
- I can not realistically do everything; I can only do so much
- I will not do many things as well as I would like
- My research will almost certainly be impacted
- Worry, anxiety or grief may impact my functioning
- I may struggle with isolation and loneliness and/or too much time with others and not enough time alone
- Childcare and other family responsibilities may have to take precedence all – or some – of the time
- I need to attend to other aspects of myself and my life besides work, including self-care and relationships.



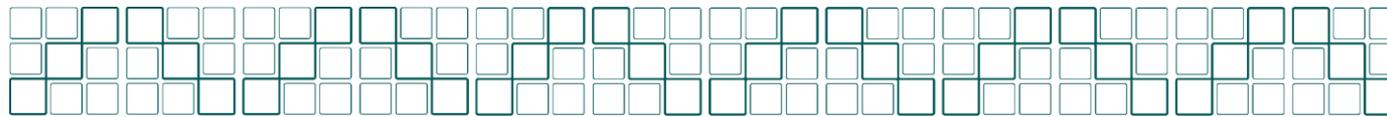
# An Aside on Teleworking

- Physical
  - Set up a workstation reflecting the current circumstance
  - Commute to work – literally and figuratively
- Logistical
  - Create routines. Hold onto your previous morning routine
  - Pay attention to your kinesthetic needs
  - Schedule wellness breaks – a lot more than you used to do
  - Embrace single-tasking
- Supports
  - Start the day with a victory and incentivize throughout the day
  - Close apps and notifications on apps that distract you
  - Track your cognitive distortions and work to debunk them
  - Pay attention to your rhythms of more and less productivity



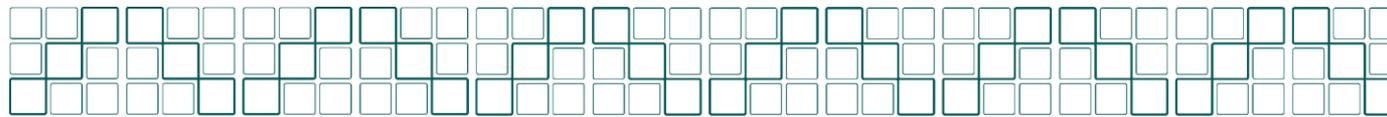
# Setting Expectations re Trainees

- How much work can my trainee reasonably accomplish?
- Have they teleworked before?
- Do they have supports in their living situation?
- Were they already struggling? Do they have pre-existing challenges?
- Do they have other new burdens and concerns?
- Are they able to continue on their project(s) or do they need something else to do?
- What might be supportive, respectful accountability?
- What levels and frequency of communication would be helpful and reasonable?



# Supporting Trainee Growth

- Make sure they have enough to do — but not too much
- Notice what's working, what went well, and tell them
- Believe that they can learn and grow, whether something comes easily to them or not
- Focus on process as well as outcome
- Communicate regularly and reliably; be available
- Be open to their ideas and suggestions
- Embrace mistakes, yours and theirs, as learning opportunities
- Problem-solve together when practical
- Give and receive feedback

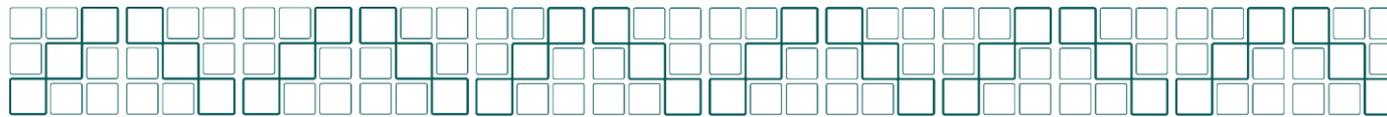


# Setting Boundaries re Your Trainees

- Model healthy boundaries, work habits and work life balance
- Mentor their science and their development as scientists, doctors, etc.
- Pay attention to how they are doing and where they are struggling
- Work with OITE and other institutional resources if you have concerns
- Encourage them to seek out help if needed
- Respect their privacy and boundaries

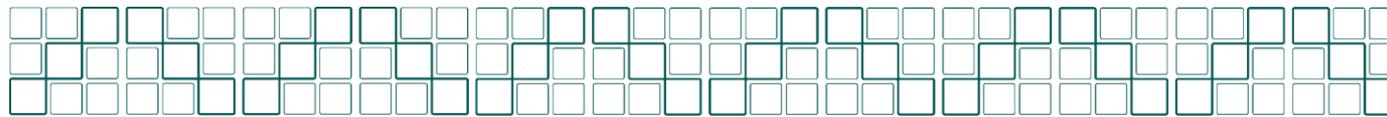


Remember, you are not their parent or grandparent



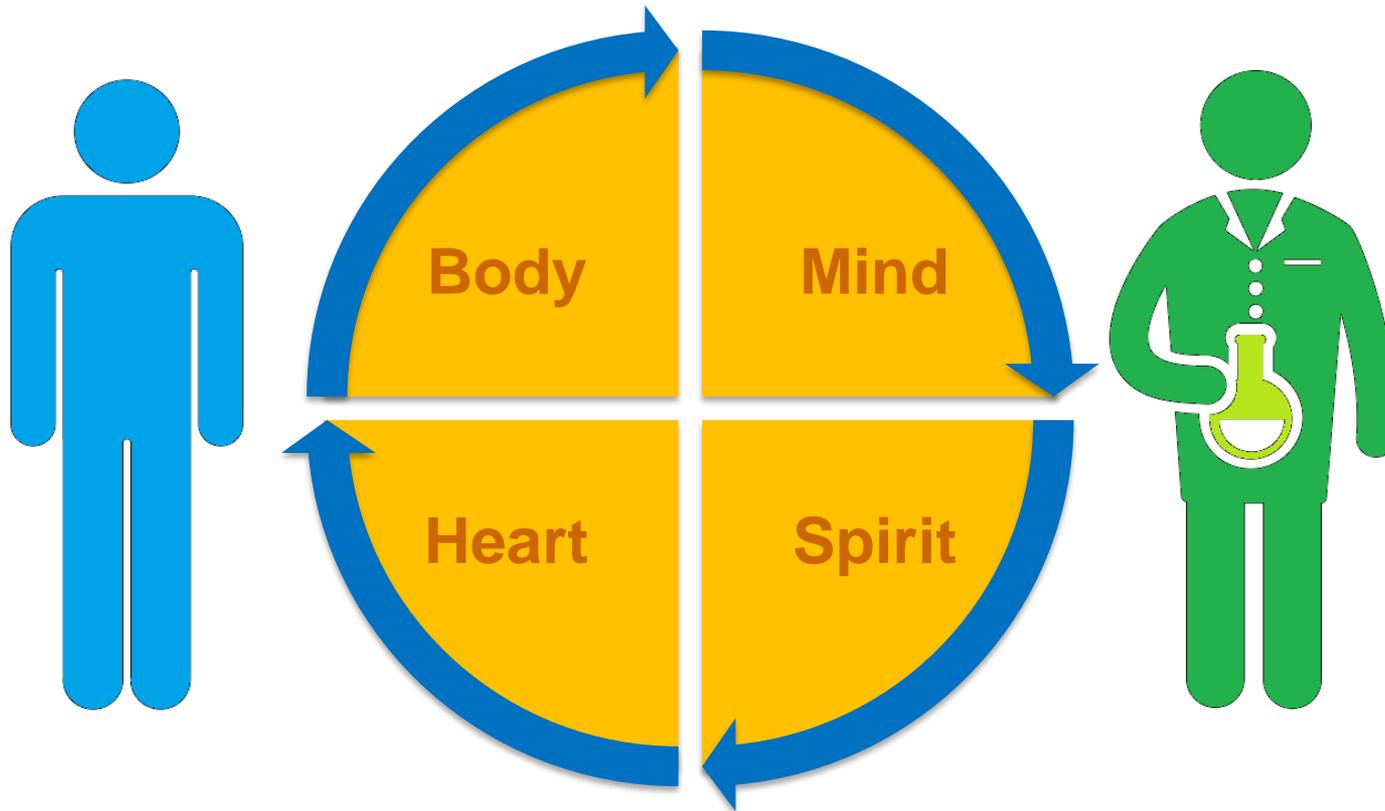
# Communicating

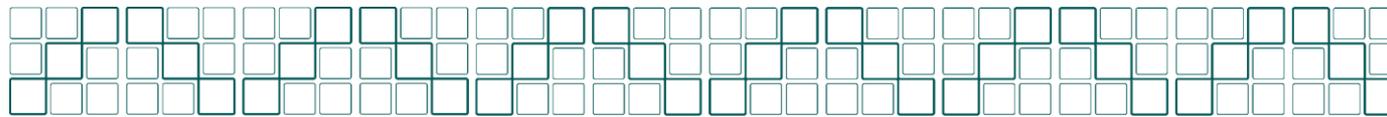
- You may have different personal or cultural communication styles than your trainees
- Telecommunicating, when we can't be together
  - It becomes even more important to listen more deeply to what trainees are saying and not rush to solve or dismiss
  - Videoconferencing is not the same as talking in person, but is often better than email and certainly more in depth than text
- Scheduling
  - Set up frequent, regular, reliable contacts with the trainees individually and, also as a group
  - Start work meetings with a brief check-in on how everyone is doing – you share as well
  - Set up regular, recurring connections among lab members that don't require your presence or participation
  - Frequency and extent of contact may vary between your trainees depending on the needs of the individuals



# To Do Well, We Have To Be Well

And take care of our...

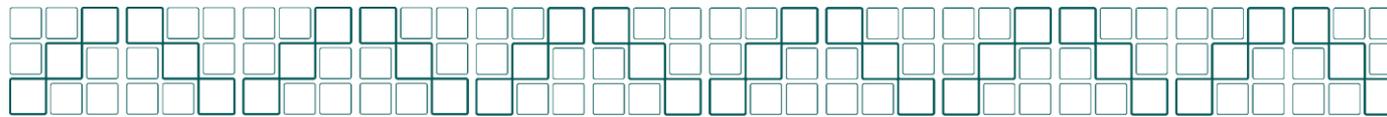




Focus on what you can control:

# MASTER STRESS

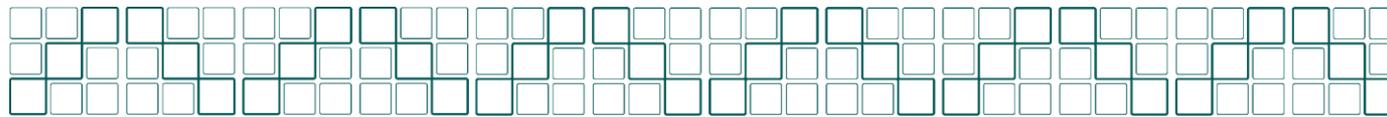
- **M**aintain Healthy Eating
- **A**void Isolation
- **S**tay Informed but not Obsessed
- **T**alk to Others
- **E**ngage any and all help you need
- **R**elax and Play



# MASTER STRESS

- **S**tep Outside
- **T**ake a Deep Breath
- **R**emember to Wash Your Hands
- **E**ngage in Gratitude
- **S**ustain Routines
- **S**leep

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8393043251587009293>



# We will Get Through This Together

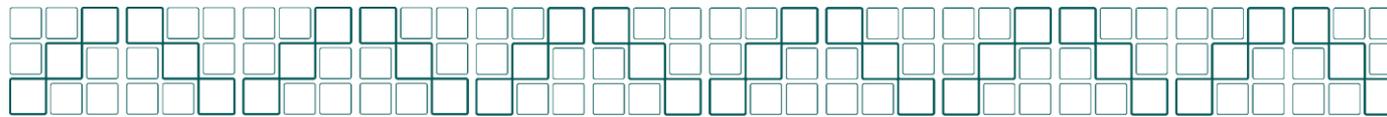
“Follow your heart, but take your brain with you.”

— Dr. Alfred Adler

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things on the news, my mother would say to me, ‘*Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.*’”

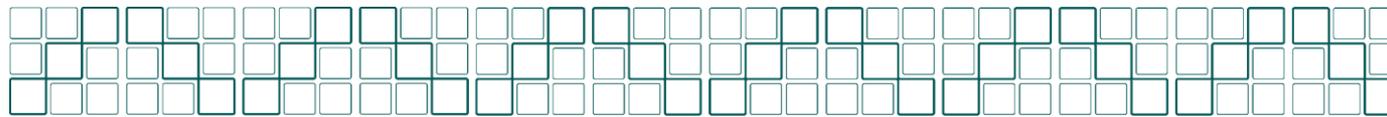
— Mr. Fred Rogers

You are one of the wise, caring helpers your trainees look to, and you are just the person for the task. But you don't have to go it alone, as we all support each other through this.



# OITE Resources For Your Trainees

- Individual career counseling, grad school and pre-med advising
- Individual consultations related to visa issues, trainee appointments, workplace issues, telework, etc
- Daily wellness and resilience resources
  - Guided meditations
  - facilitated small group discussions
  - small group wellness advising
  - referrals to community support
  - affinity group lunches and other remote activities
- Several workshops each week with a focus on leadership, career development, science skills development, etc.



# OITE Resources For Supervisors

- Individual consultations regarding trainee issues
  - related to their termination dates and appointments
  - relationship issues in your group
  - wellness/resilience
- Participation in Branch meetings and retreats
- On-line resources for supporting distressed trainees at [https://www.training.nih.gov/assisting\\_the\\_distressed\\_trainee](https://www.training.nih.gov/assisting_the_distressed_trainee)
- reach out to us anytime!