

LIVING WELL IN THE PRESENCE OF MCAS

IDEAS FROM CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY TO HELP NAVIGATE THE STORM OF MCAS

WITH DR ASHLYN FIRKINS, HCPC REGISTERED CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

1

Explore common emotional responses to MCAS onset

2

Introduce key theoretical ideas from CFT & ACT

3

Explore skills & strategies to support emotional wellbeing

4

Discuss where to go, if you need more support

OVERVIEW: WHAT TO EXPECT

A warm, inclusive,
welcoming space.

A mix of theory and
personal skills-based
practices

A workshop (not just)
about supporting you
to consider how you
respond to MCAS, but
any future challenge.

Around 75minutes of
content, 15minutes of
questions (use of chat
if required)

NB: As I'm not
medically trained, I
can't speak to the
medication side of
things.



How are you arriving into the space?

What do you hope to gain by being here?

ARRIVING

Come into the present moment –
what can I see, hear, feel?

Set your intention – what do I plan to
do here, and what outcome am I
aiming for?

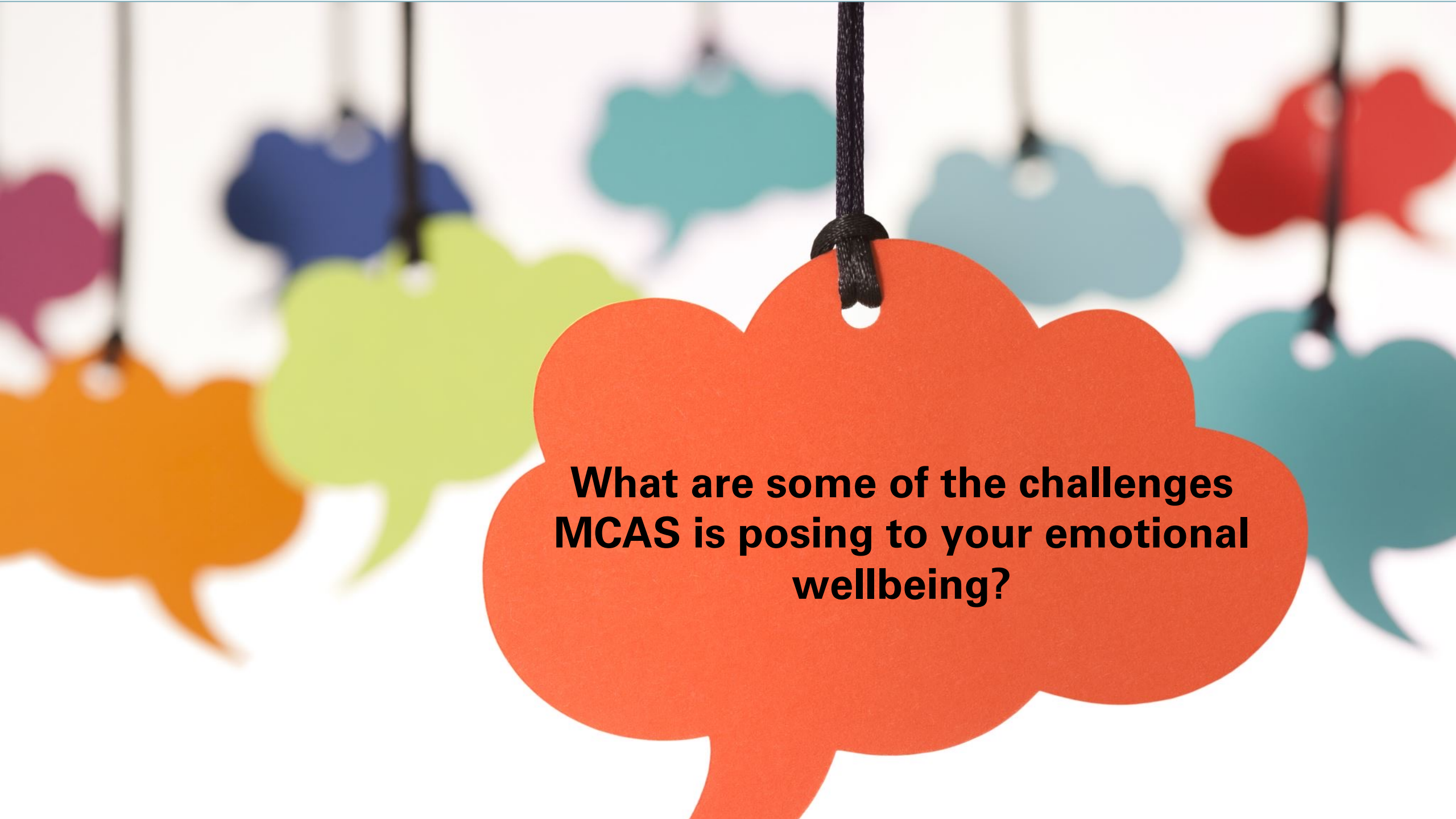
Connect to your values – why does
this matter to me? How do I want to
act in this situation?

Engage willingness - to have difficult
thoughts & feeling if that's what it
takes

1. EXPLORING COMMON EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO MCAS



What does MCAS mean to you?



**What are some of the challenges
MCAS is posing to your emotional
wellbeing?**

A NARROW DEFINITION...

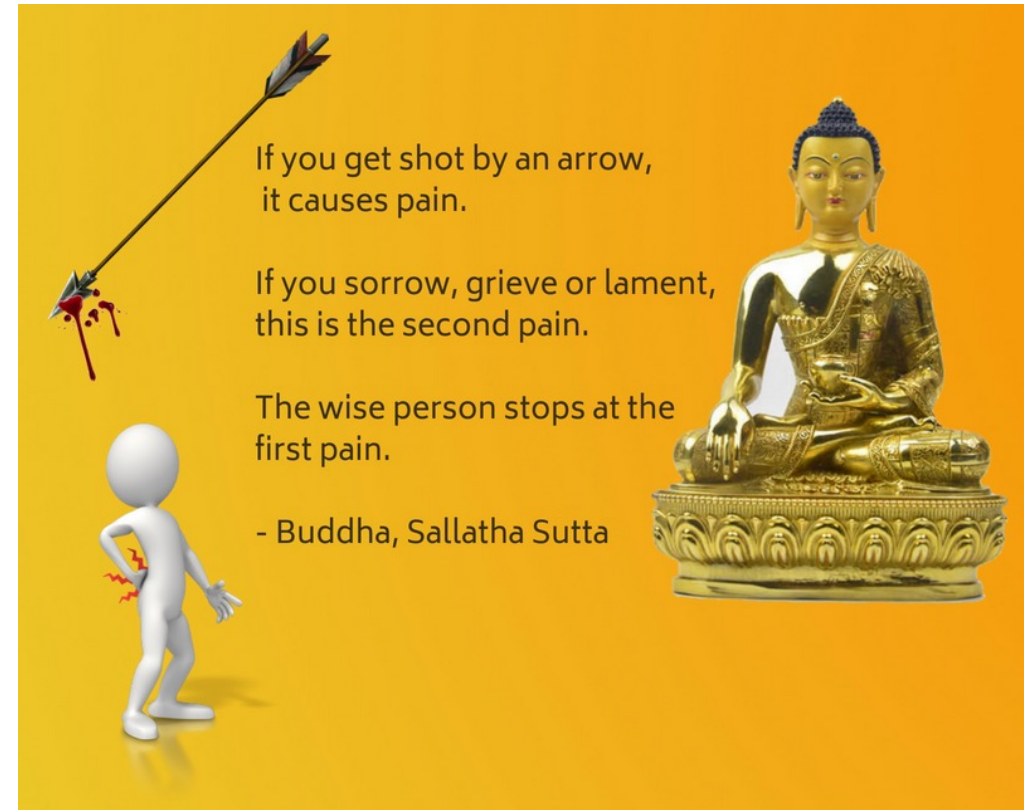
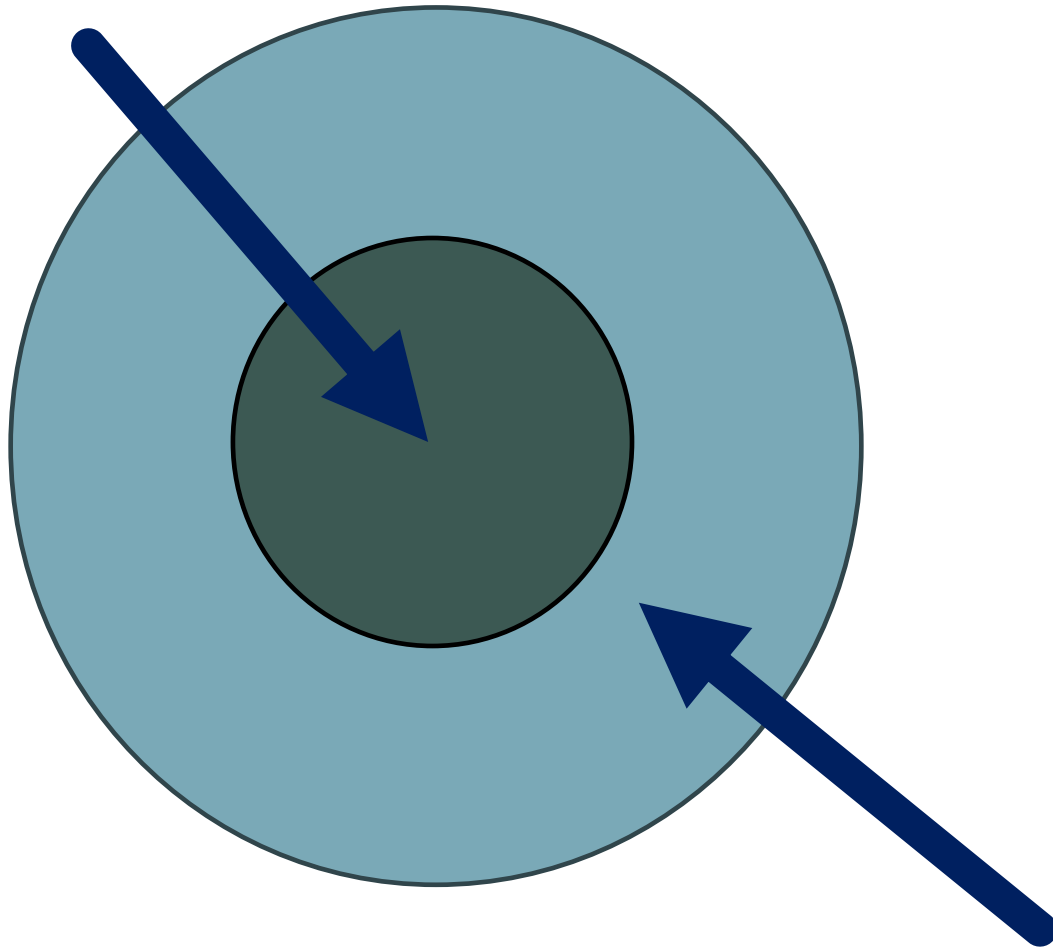
- Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS) is characterised by the excessive and inappropriate activation of mast cells, a type of white blood cell involved in immune responses.
- This leads to the release of inflammatory mediators such as histamine, causing a wide range of symptoms including allergic reactions, gastrointestinal issues, cardiovascular issues, and neurological symptoms.
- These symptoms can vary in severity and can be triggered by various stimuli such as foods, stress, perfume, temperature or environmental factors.

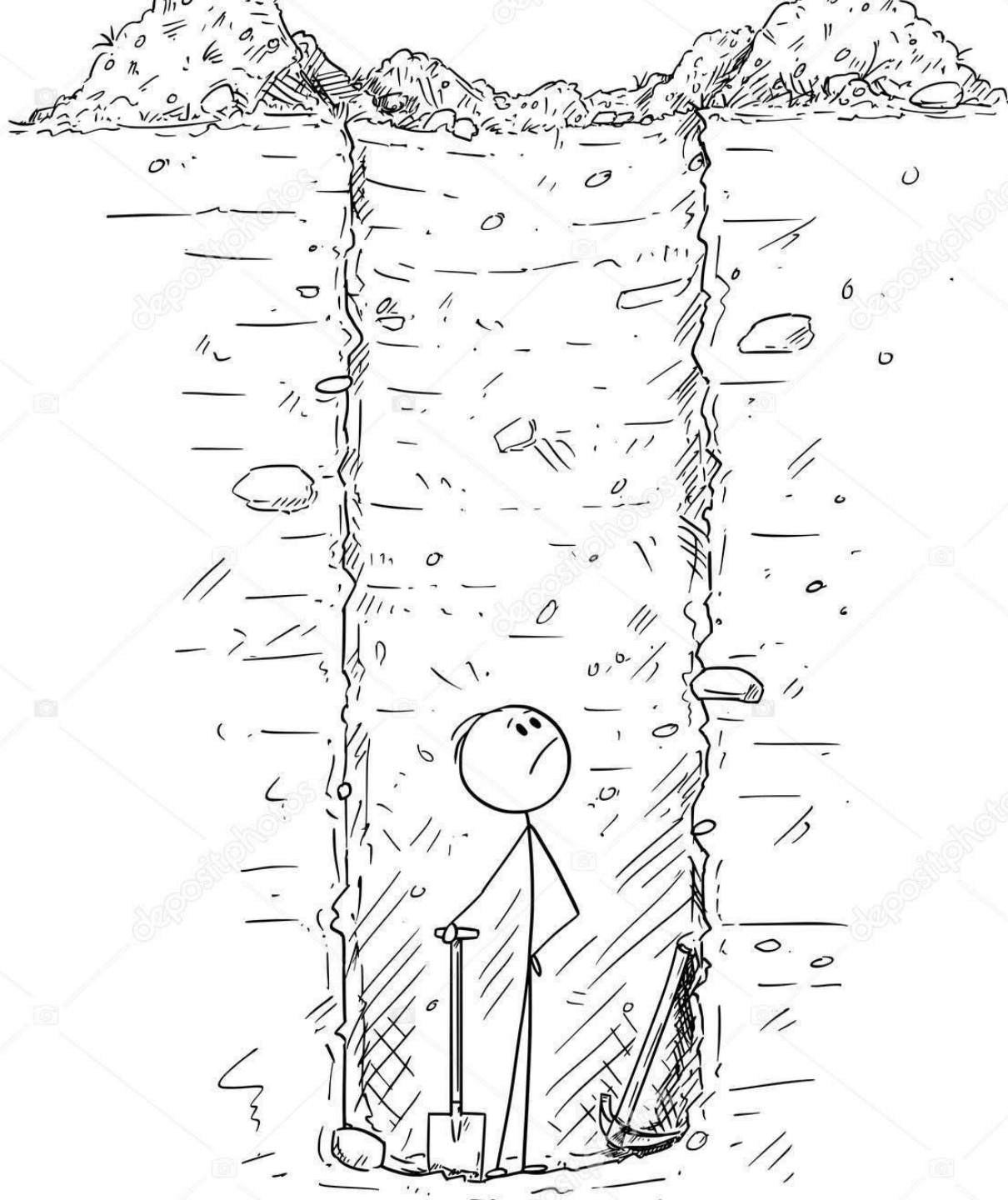
Put simply, the mast cells have become overly sensitive & the immune system is activating against things that it does not need to.

MCAS



PRIMARY & SECONDARY PAIN





MAN IN THE HOLE



DEFINING WELLBEING

*An individual's
resource pool*

Challenges faced



Wellbeing = the balance....

Put simply, when we feel able to adapt & manage life's ups and downs without being overly, adversely affected.

DEFINING WELLBEING

*An individual's
resource pool*

Challenges faced



Wellbeing = the balance....

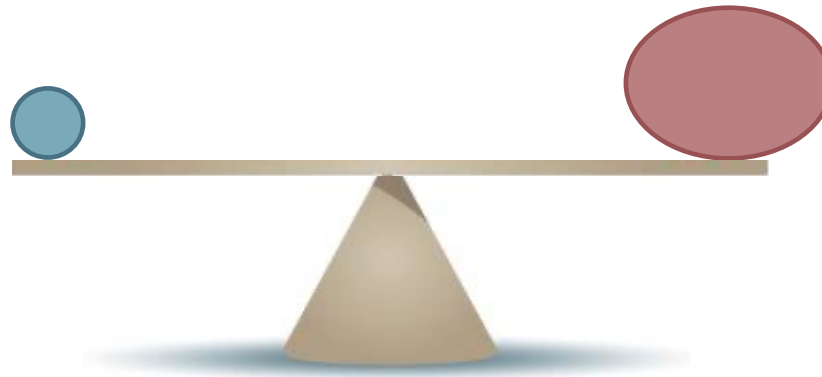
- Increased life satisfaction
- Fulfillment
- Preferred internal states
- Environmental mastery

Put simply, when we feel able to adapt & manage life's ups and downs without being overly, adversely affected.

DEFINING WELLBEING

*An individual's
resource pool*

Challenges faced



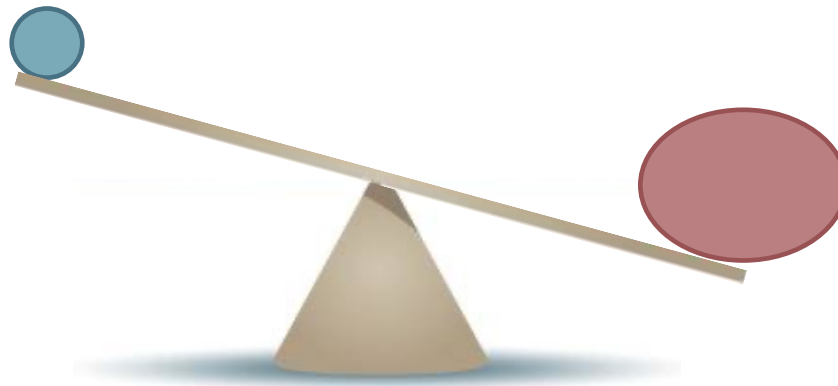
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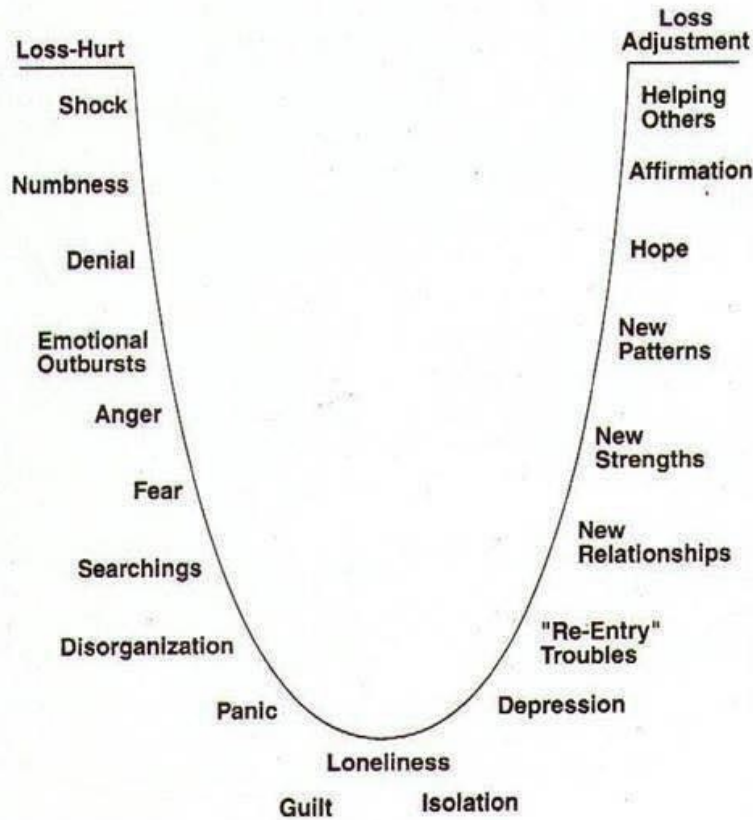


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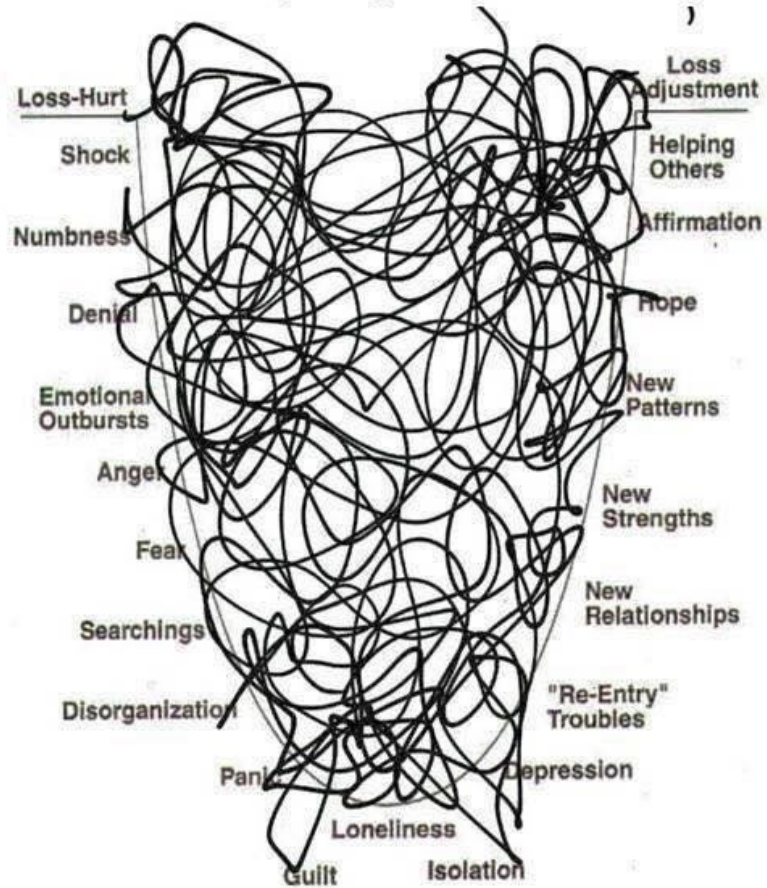
Put simply, when we feel able to adapt & manage life's ups and downs without being overly, adversely affected.

GRIEF

STAGES OF GRIEF



My experience



GRIEF



- Individuals oscillate between being loss-orientated & restoration orientated.
- LO response - overwhelmed with sadness, fear, anxiety, struggling connect with meaningful activities, that were once easily engaged with.
- RO response - attending to your life, restoring a sense of normality (even briefly), getting to appointments, attending social gatherings.
- Overtime the jumps between the modes become less intense, unpredictable & individual start to lean more heavily towards restoration.

I sit with my grief.



I mother it.

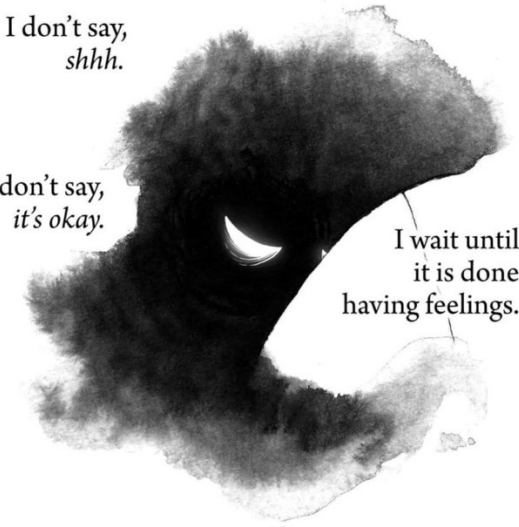
I hold its small,
hot hand.



I don't say,
shhh.

I don't say,
it's okay.

I wait until
it is done
having feelings.



Then we stand



and we go wash
the dishes.

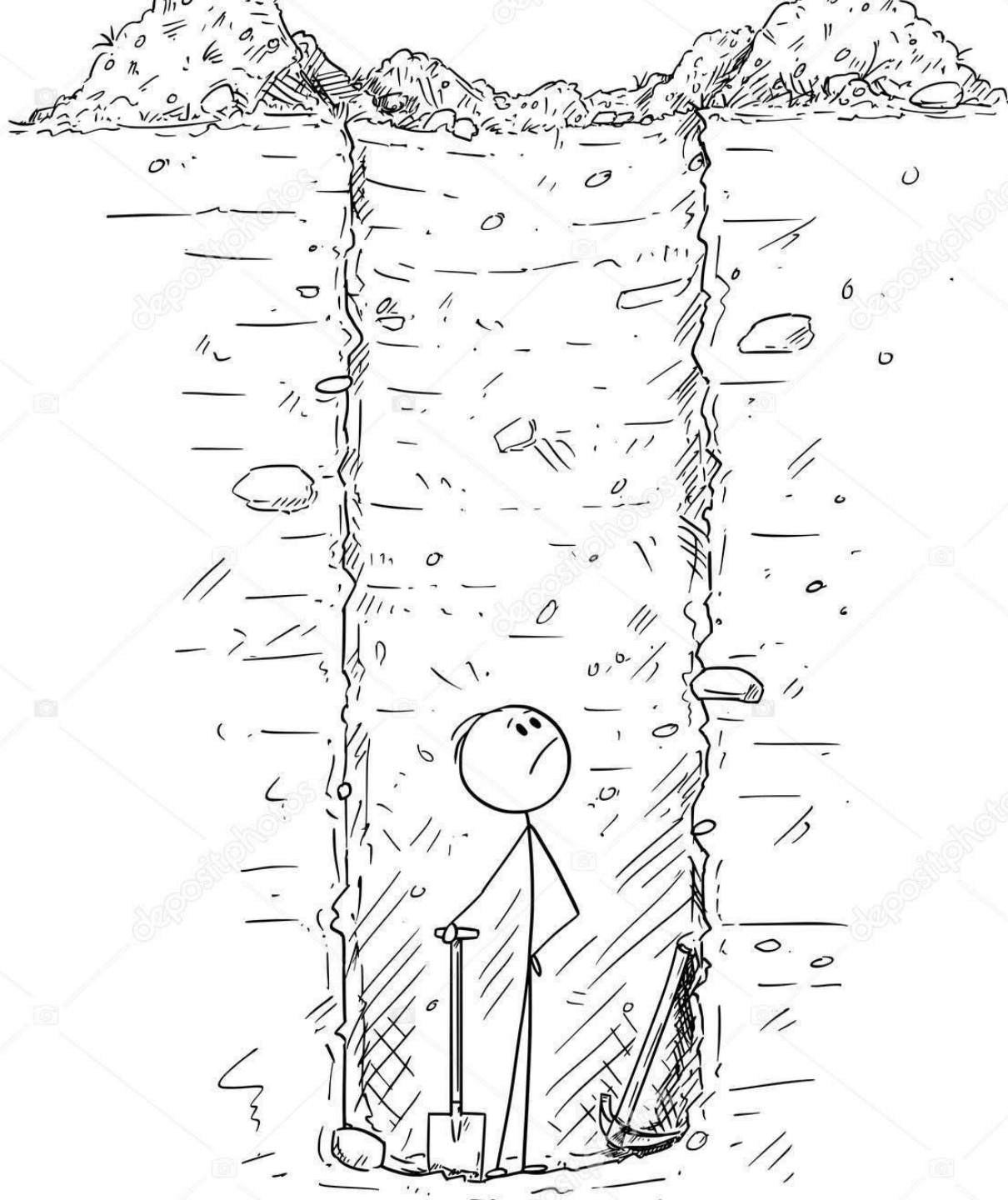


BEACHBALL METAPHOR



- Not trying to get rid of unhelpful thoughts
- Looking to reduce the extent to which they have an unhelpful influence over our behaviour
- Increase our ability to utilize personal values as a more prominent guide to our actions





MAN IN THE HOLE



2. INTERWOVEN THEORETICAL IDEAS & SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES

“Compassion is the courage to
descend into the reality of human
experience”

Professor Paul Gilbert- founder of CFT



Engagement

First Psychology

The ability to notice, engage with tolerate and understand distress and difficulties



“A sensitivity to suffering of self and others, with a commitment to relieve and prevent it”



Action

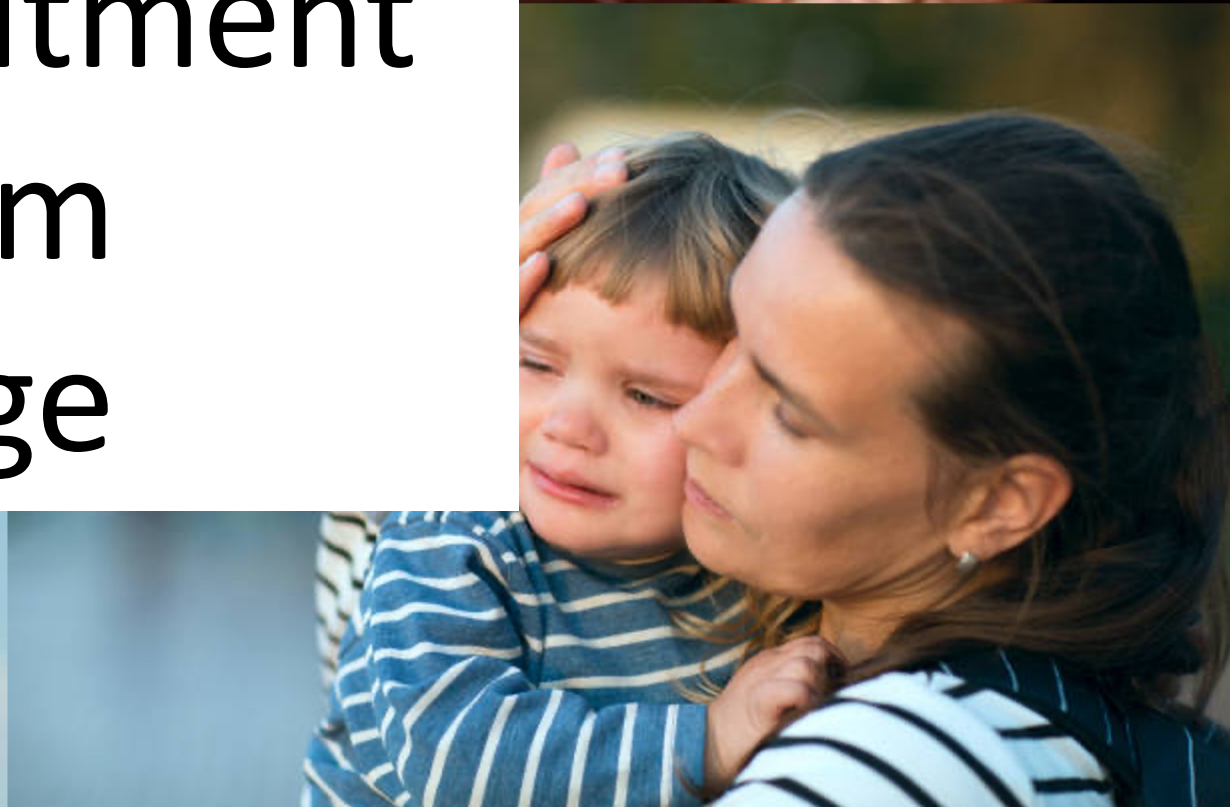
Second Psychology

The ability to engage in wise action to reduce or prevent distress & difficulties





- Caring
- Commitment
- Wisdom
- Courage



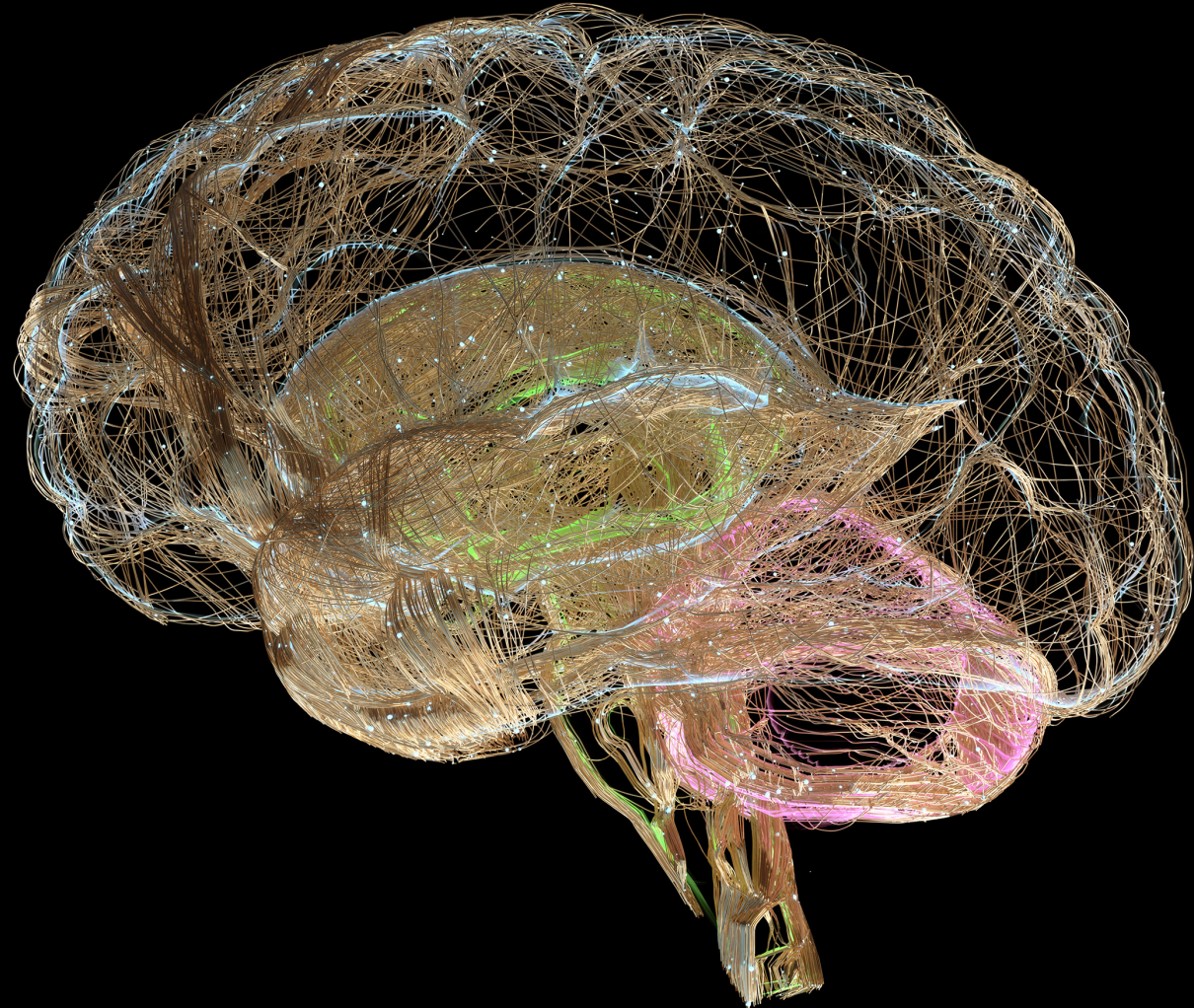
OUR TRICKY BRAINS

Old brain competencies:

- Survival
- Threat focussed
- Better safe than sorry

New brain competencies:

- Imagination
- Rumination
- Planning
- Self-monitoring





...IT'S NOT OUR FAULT

Key differences:

- Physical, emotional & social threats
- Internal as well as external sources
- Focus on others' perceptions





SOCIAL CONTEXT

- Research shows that some of the biggest fears of those with persistent health difficulties include....

Being disbelieved

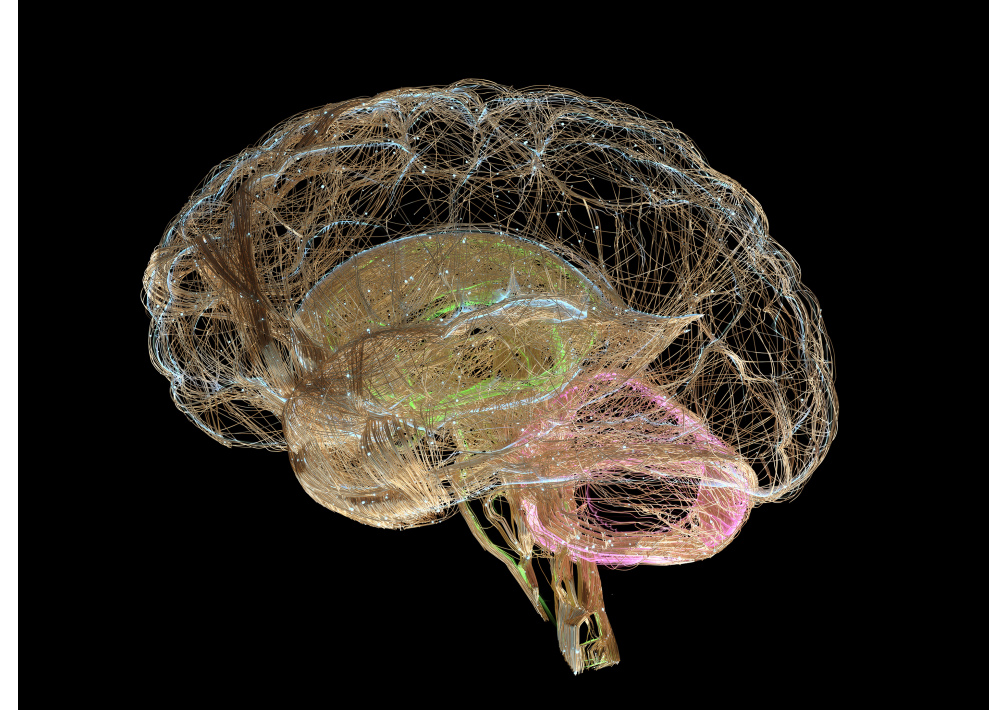
Being seen as unproductive

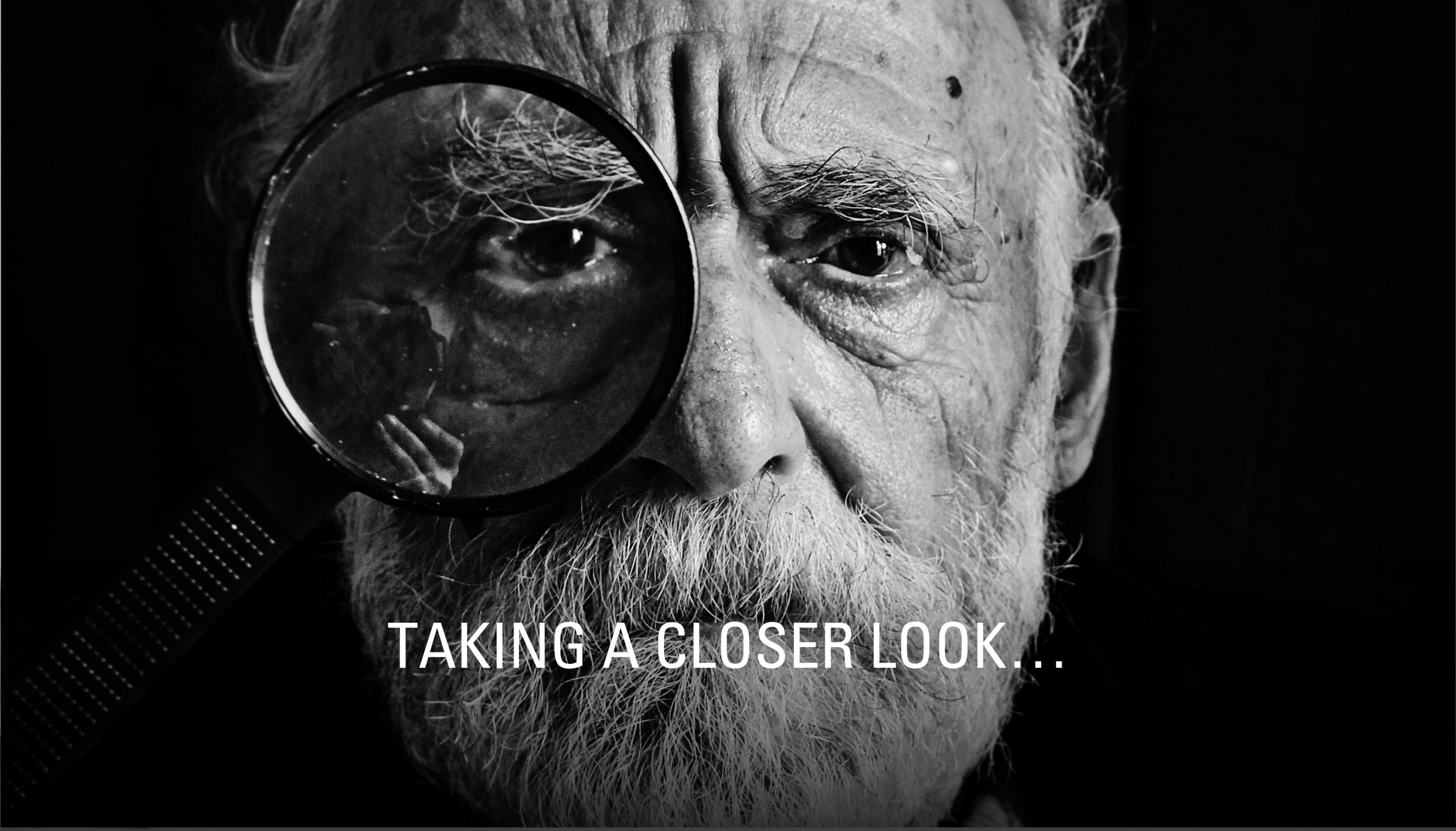
Being viewed as a burden on society and to loved ones

- Individuals report high rates of being...

Ignored, humiliated, embarrassed and devalued by others

- Such discrediting encounters + the physical and psychological consequences often lead to a strong negative self-view.





TAKING A CLOSER LOOK...

3 SYSTEM MODEL

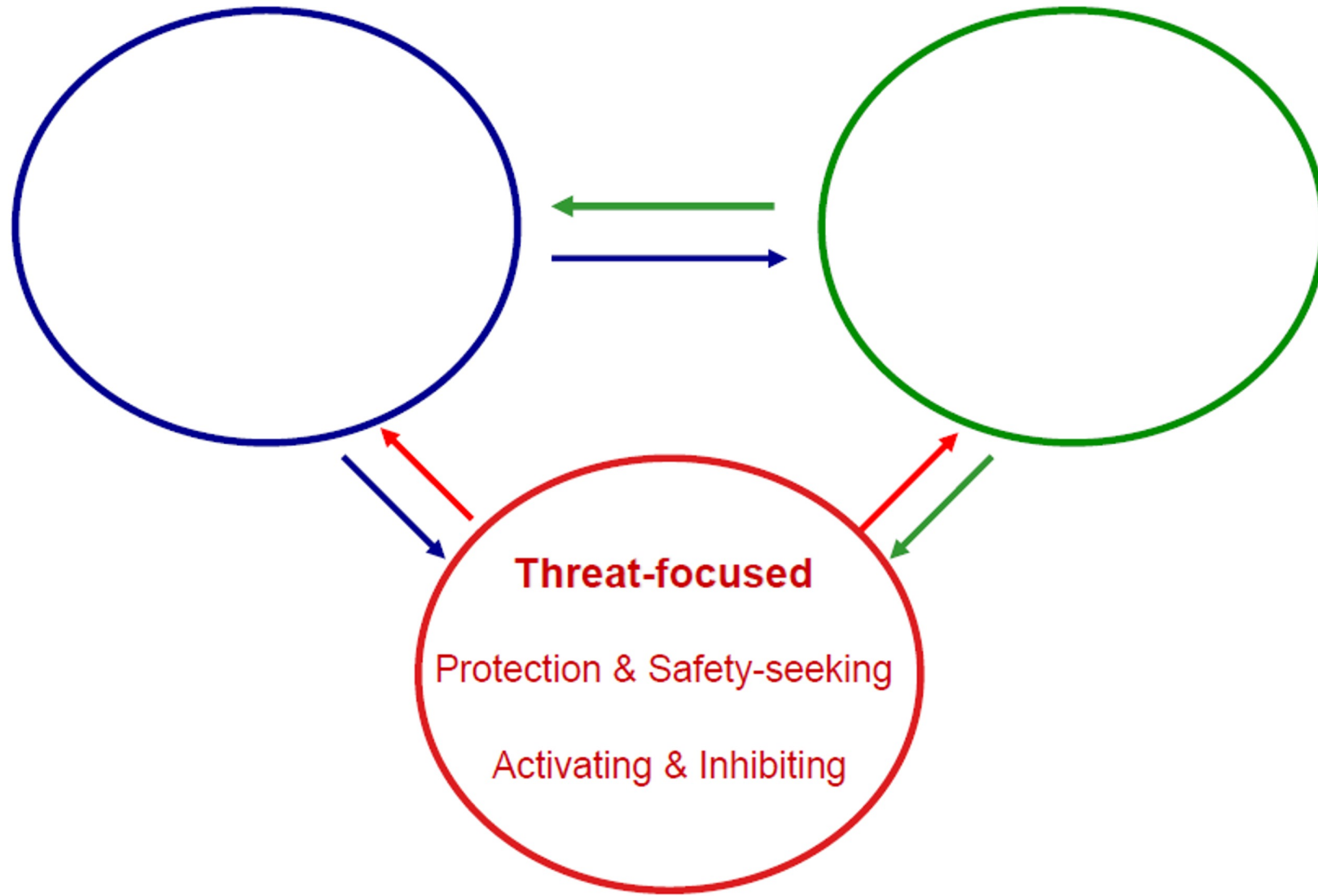
Drive, Excite, Vitality



Content, Safe, Soothed



Anger, Anxiety, Disgust



Anger, Anxiety, Disgust

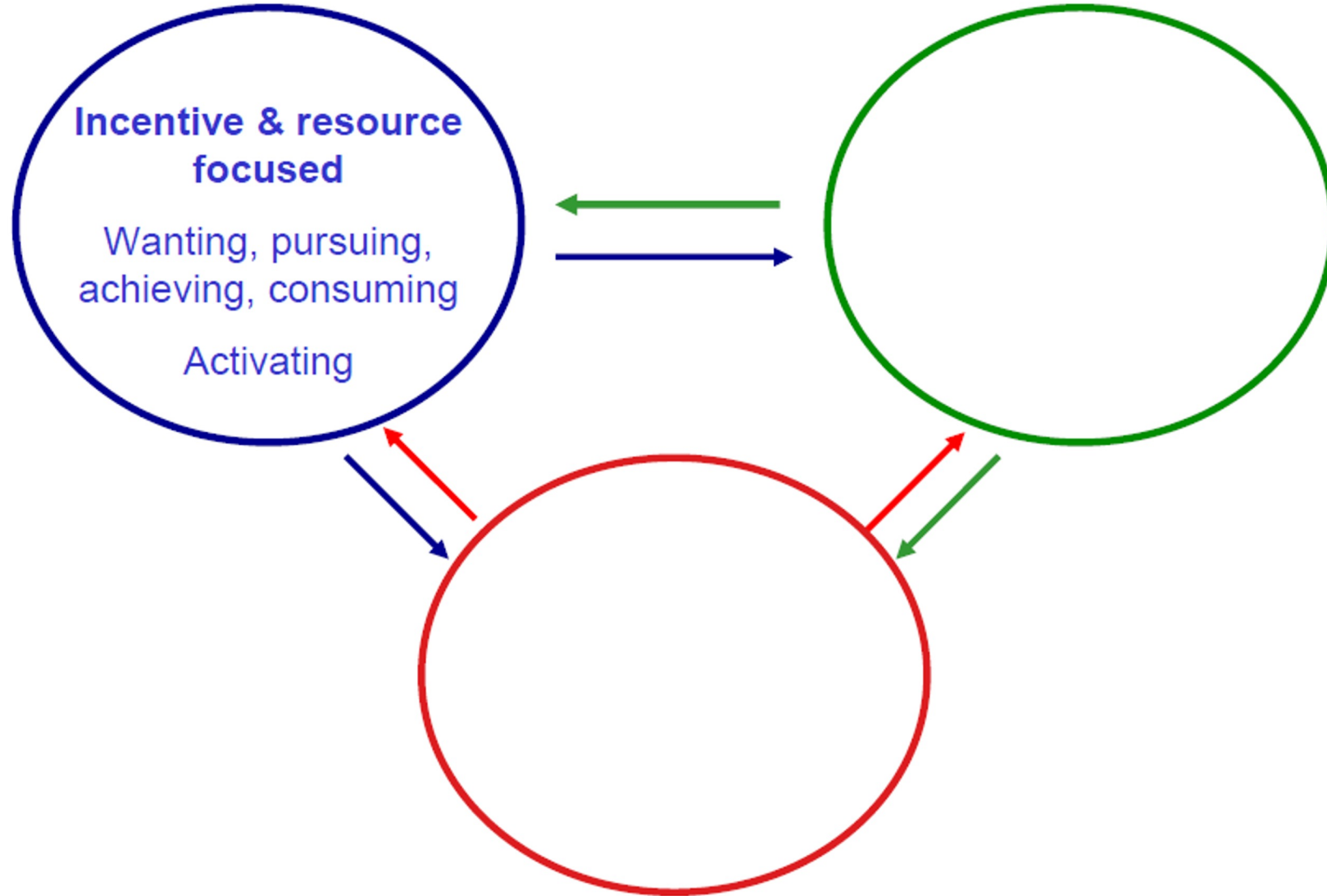


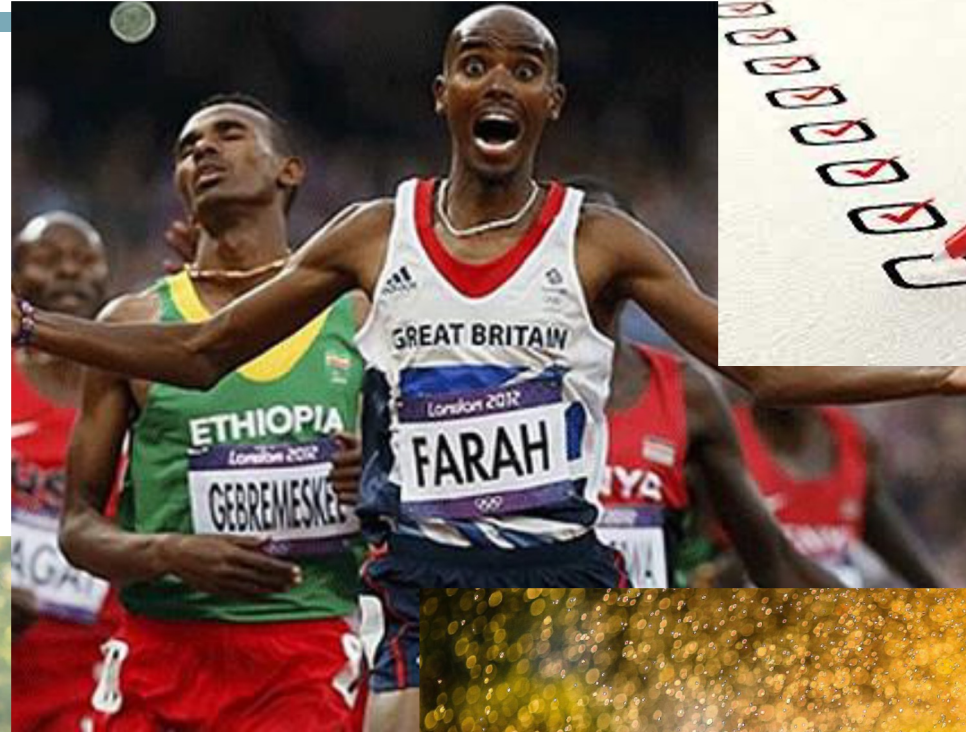
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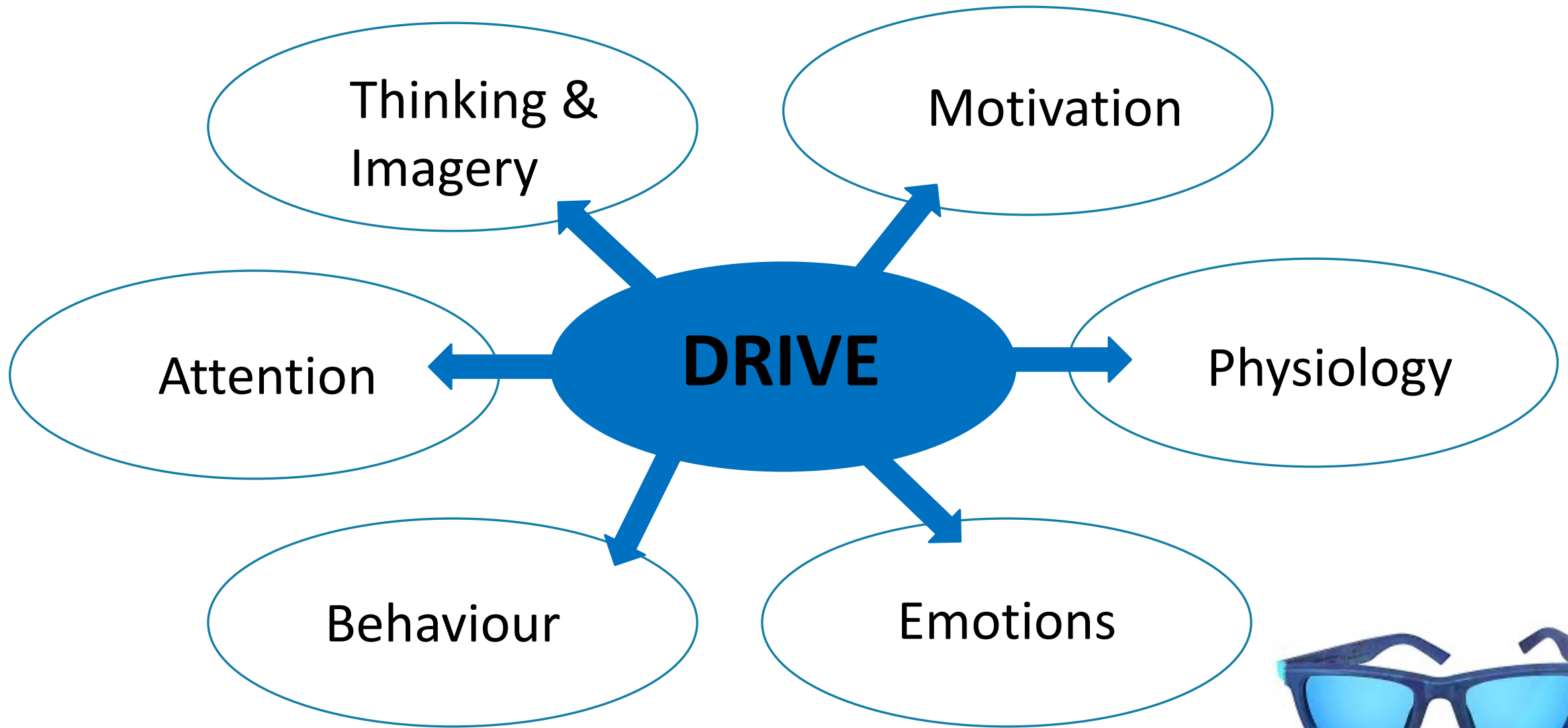




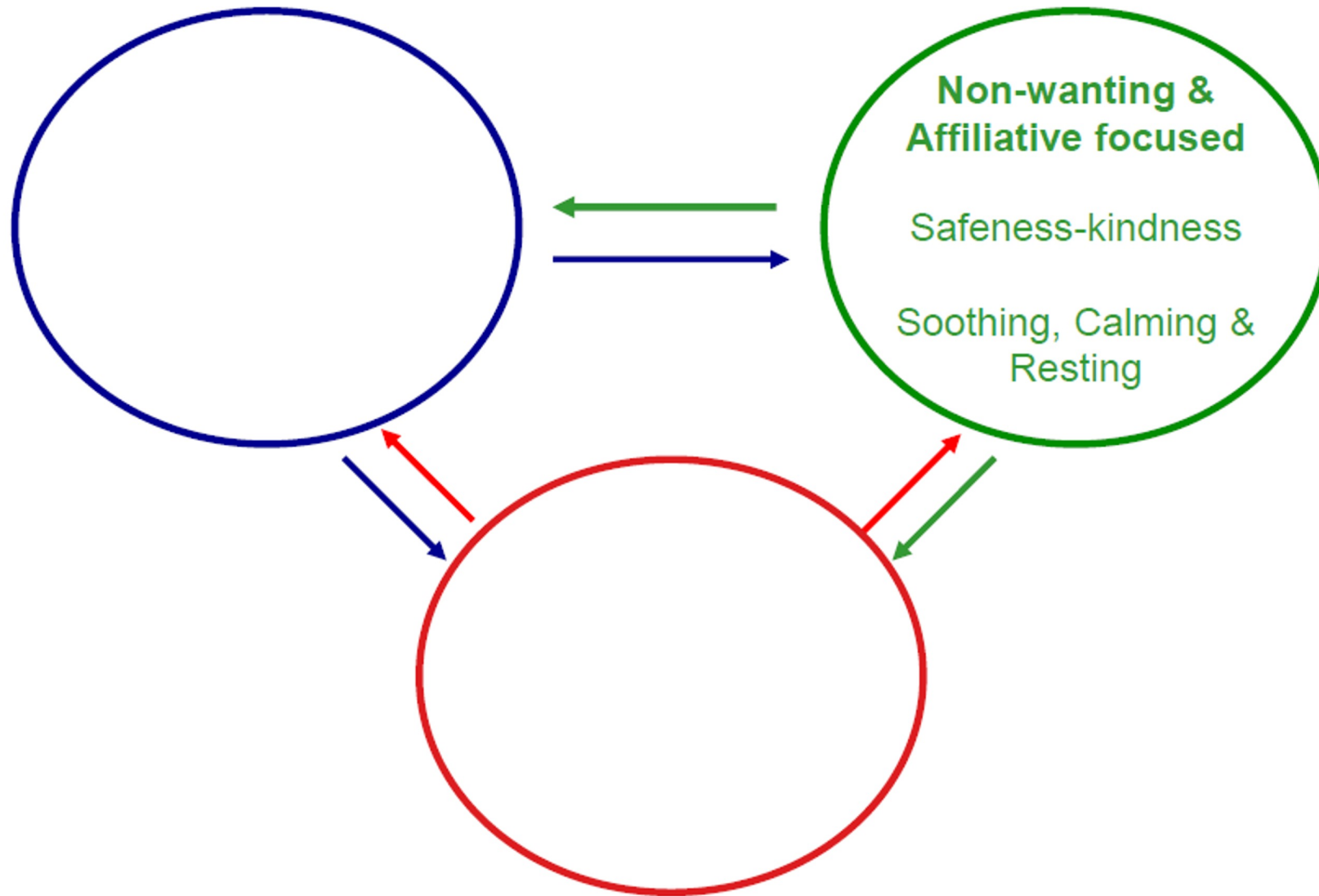
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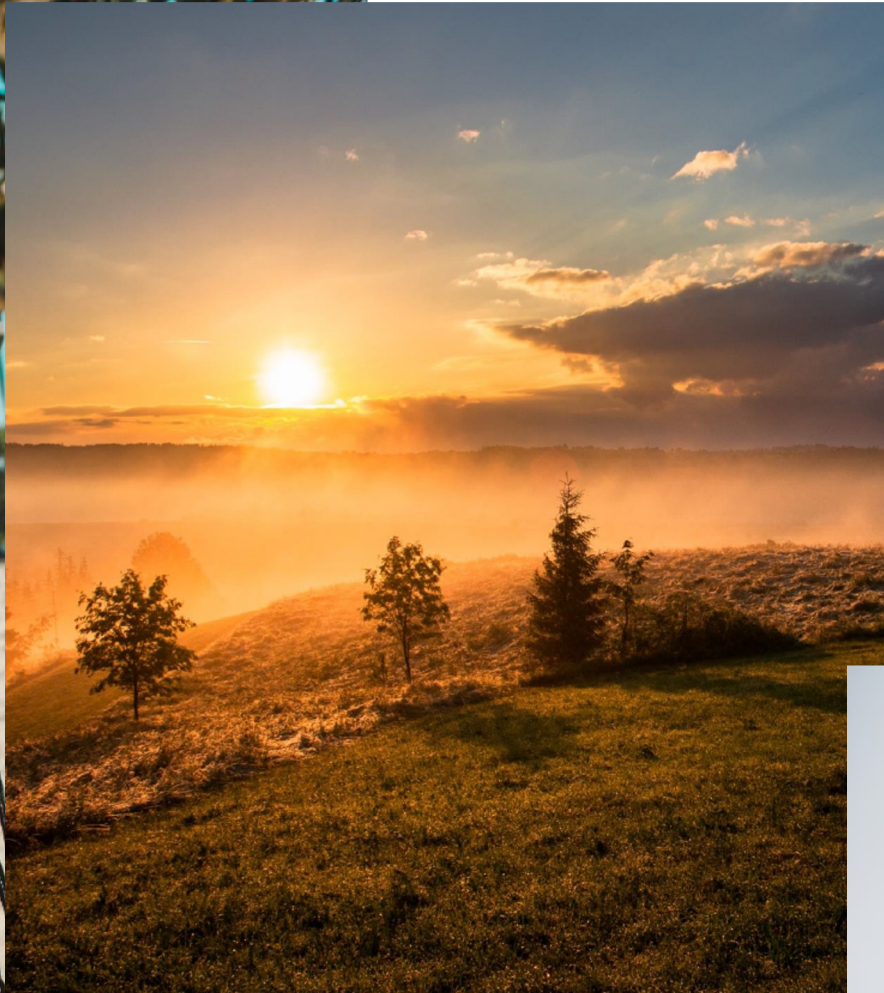


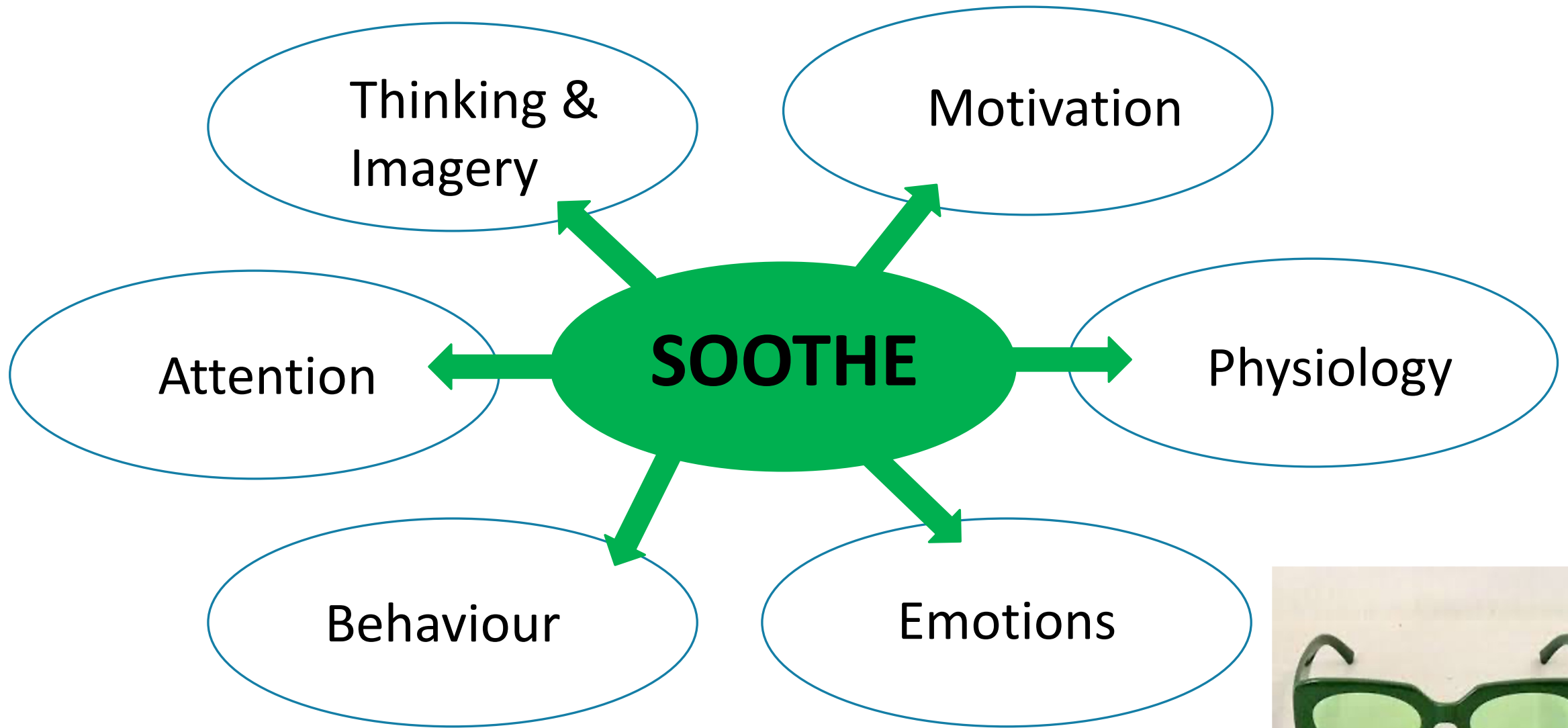




Content, Safe, Soothed



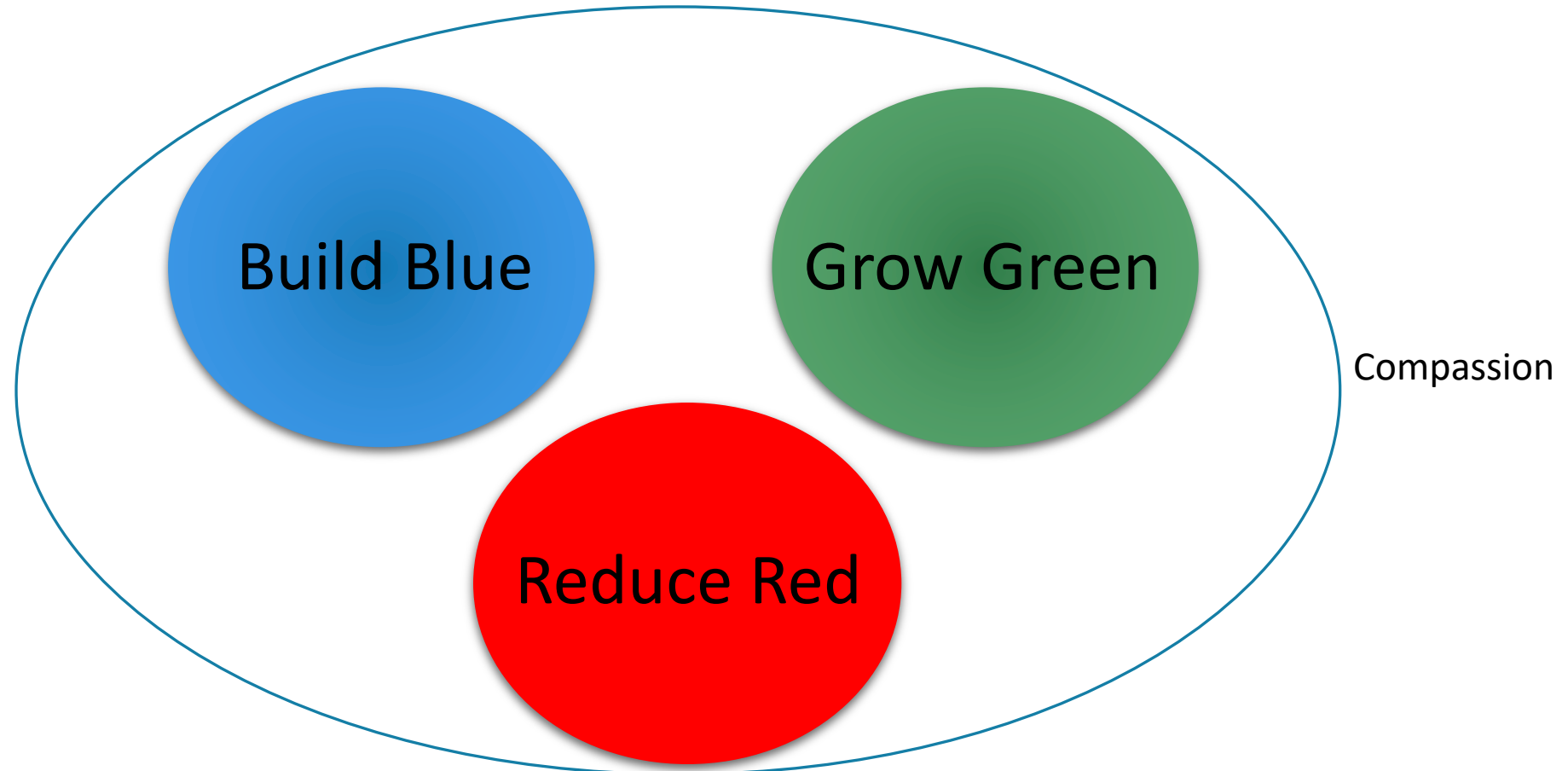




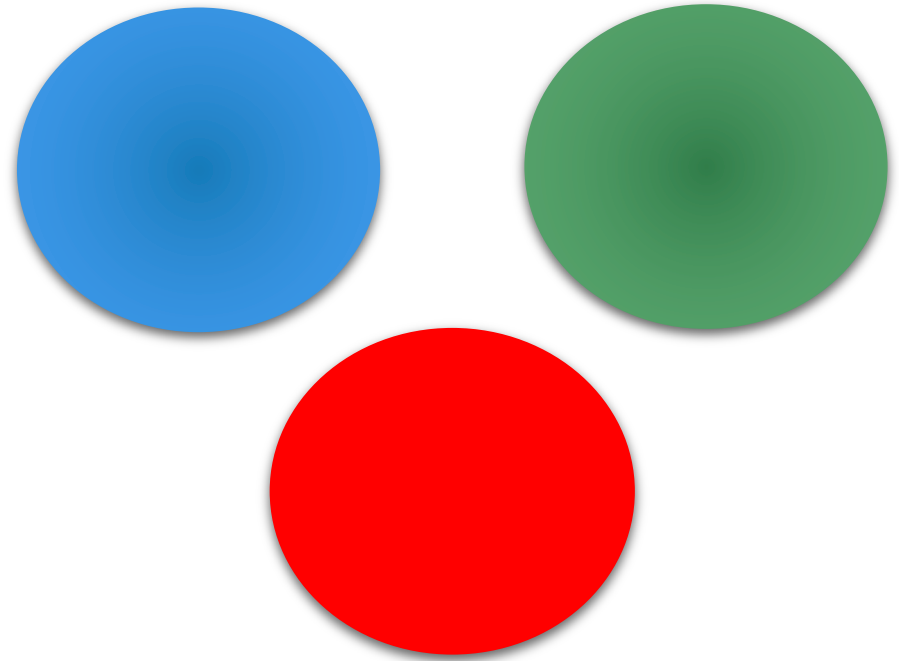
HOW DO WE CULTIVATE COMPASSION



> The propensity for compassion is greatest when these 3 emotion regulation systems are balanced.

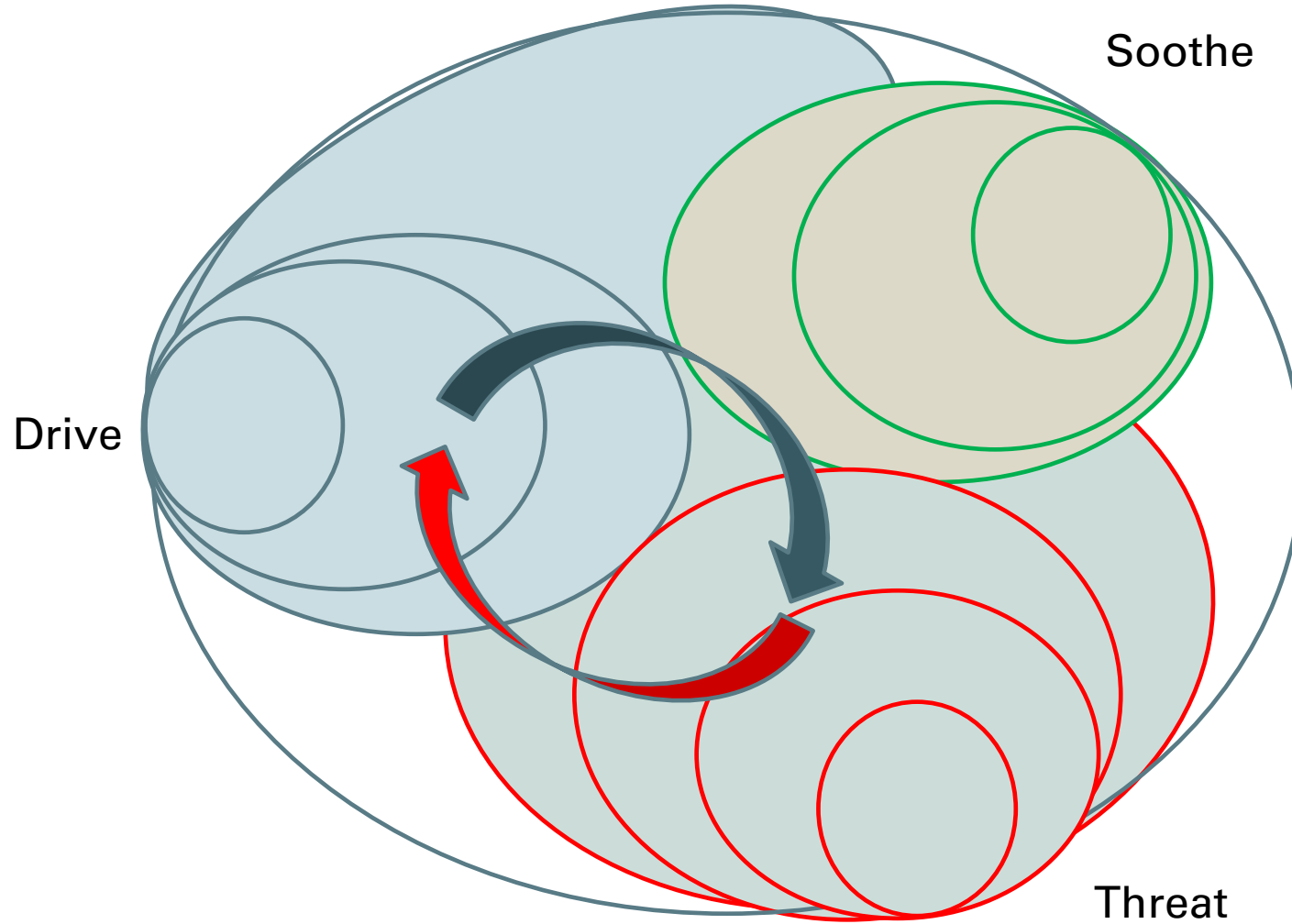


AN INVITATION TO MAP OUT YOUR CIRCLES...





CFT 3 SYSTEMS MODEL



>The threat based social context of living with poorly understood physical health difficulties, has crippling LT consequences.

>Bodies feel constantly under threat, becoming more hypervigilant.

>People work tirelessly to solve the problem of MCAS.

>Individuals often boom & bust trying to fight on/ gain control over difficulties.

WE LOOK TO GROW THE GREEN!



Grow Green

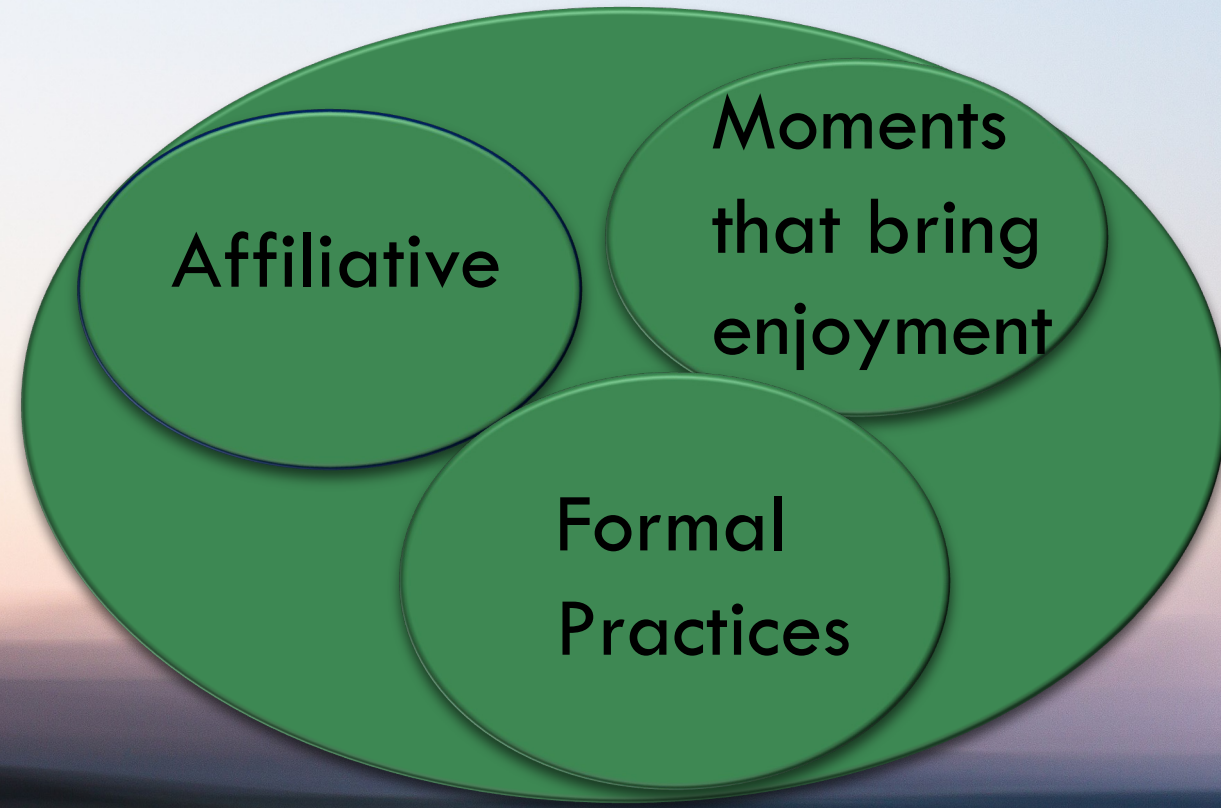
Grow Green

Grow Green

Grow Green



THE SOOTHING SYSTEM



Research has shown that:

- There is a physiological basis to feeling soothed
- We can train the system to become stronger
- The soothing system is **not** about relaxing and switching off.
- We use our bodies to help our minds so as to bring down the immediate threat arousal, in order that we can access our new brain competencies.



SOOTHING BREATHING RHYTHM

COMPASSIONATE GESTURES

A MOMENT OF REFLECTION?



What small acts bring you real enjoyment? Is there anything that you want to start doing again, or do a little bit more of?

- And....what difficult thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations will you need to make a bit of room for if you take this forward?

Who in your life do you feel the strongest sense of connection with? What small steps could you take to claim more moments of connection?

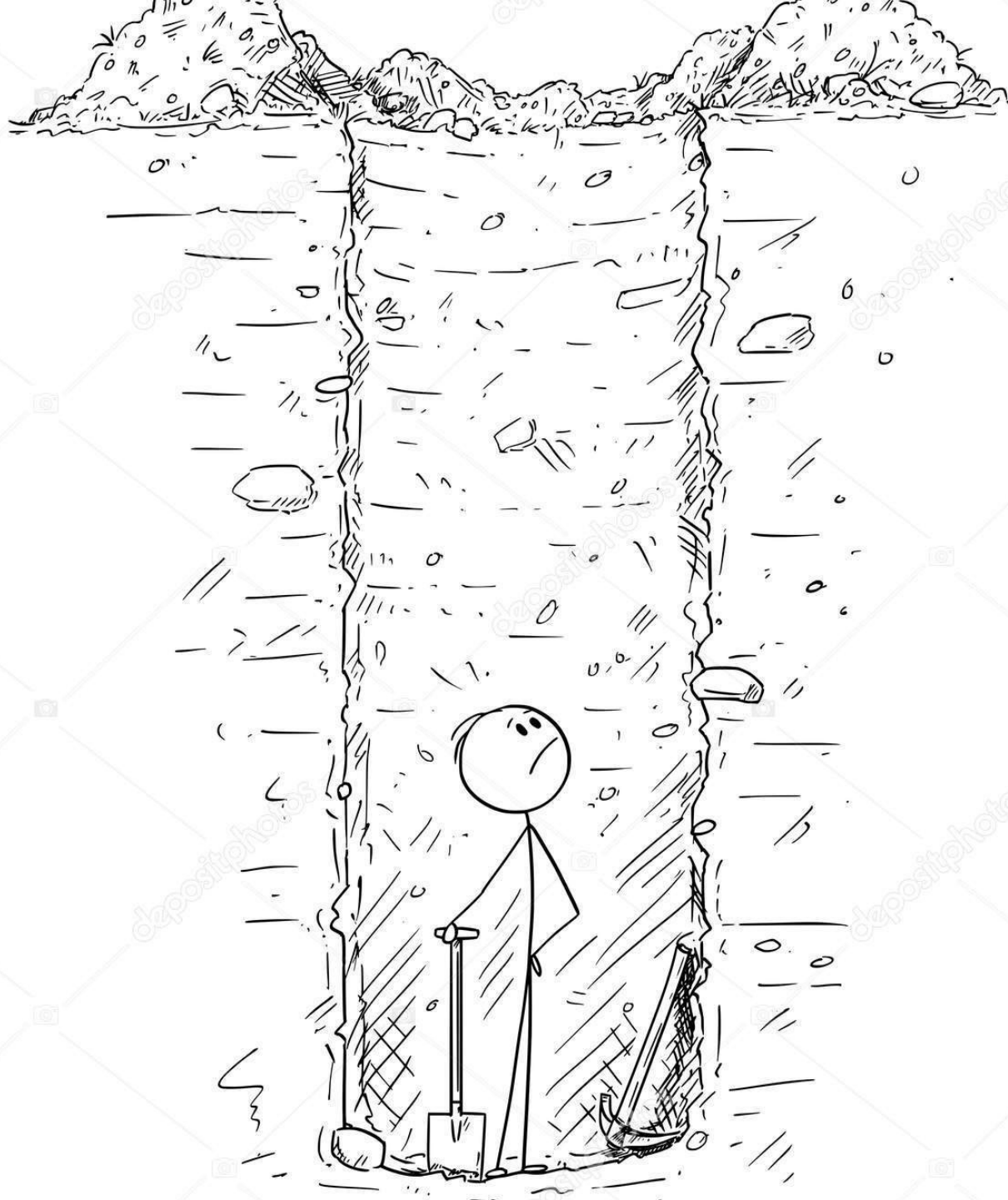
And.....what difficult thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations will you need to make a bit of room for if you take this forward?

COMMITTING TO WHAT MATTERS MOST

- In a world where you could make & keep a commitment related to the personal qualities you most want to show as you support yourself with MCAS, what commitment(s), would you make & keep?
- What would be a major commitment you'd like to make and keep?
- What would be a really small and still meaningful commitment (perhaps so small that only you might notice it)?
- What feels realistic and possible to take forward from this moment right now?

COMMITTING TO WHAT MATTERS MOST

- In what scenarios are you most likely to lose contact with the personal value you identified in pursuing these changes? What thoughts, feelings and urges are likely to hook you and what do you do under their influence?
- When you notice yourself turning away from these value-guided commitments, can you gently return to them? What does that look like for you?



MAN IN THE HOLE



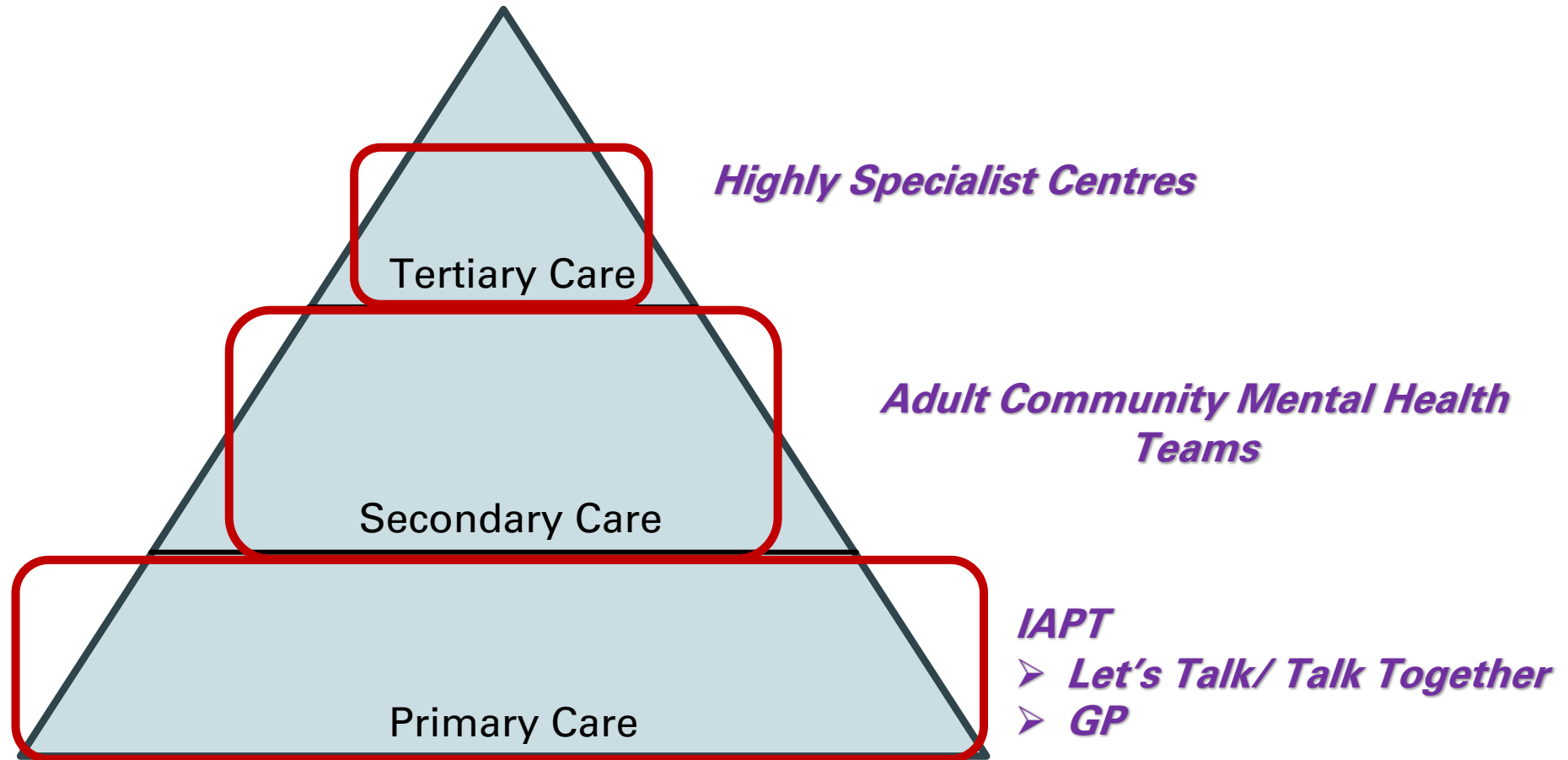
2. NEED MORE?



SIGN POSTING

Potential sources of support inside
and outside of the NHS

STEPPED CARE MODEL



URGENT HELP

Samaritans - 116 123, call free 24/7, 365 years to speak to a trained volunteer.

The logo for Samaritans, featuring the word "SAMARITANS" in white, bold, uppercase letters on a green rectangular background.

SHOUT - 24/7 text service for anyone in crisis. Text 85258 for immediate help.

The logo for Shout, featuring the word "shout" in white, lowercase letters above the number "85258" in white, uppercase letters, all within a dark blue speech bubble shape.

Stay Alive App- A suicide prevention resource available to download from Apple Store or Google Play for those considering suicide or concerned about someone else.

If you require urgent mental health support you can contact the **Gloucestershire crisis team** on 0800 169 0398 and If you feel unable to keep yourself safe (i.e. are considering suicide or serious acts of self-harm) then please **call 999** or go to your **nearest A&E department**.

THIRD SECTOR SUPPORT



- Registration & Initial Aux £20
- Subsequent sessions £55
- 50min sessions, weekly
- Stroud, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury, Cirencester



Cogwheel Counselling

Registered Charity 1157141

Affordable help when life slips out of gear

- Cambridge, Sawston & Ely
- Sliding scale – minimum contribution of £27- £65, up to 20 sessions
- In person & remote sessions offered

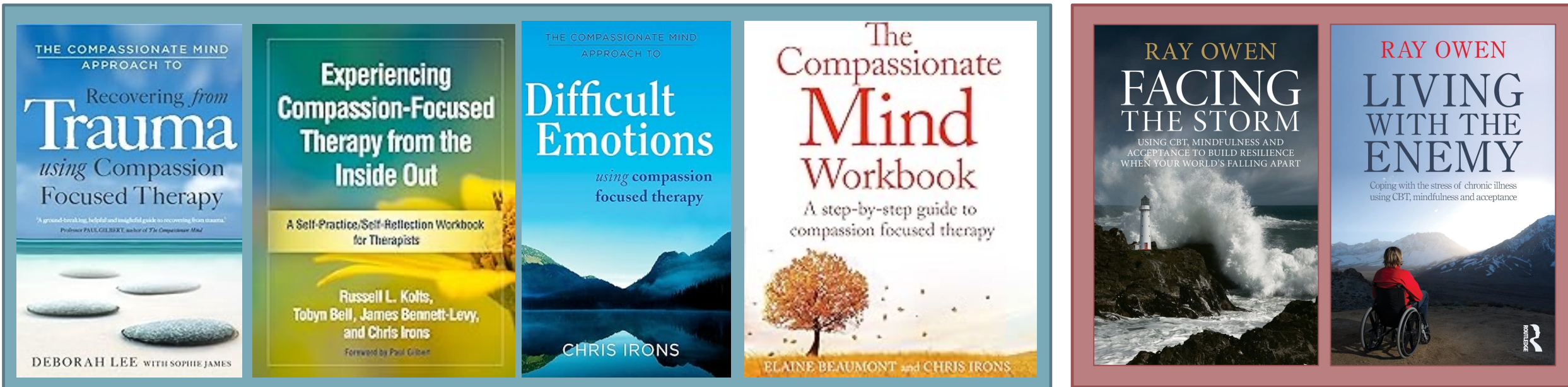
OTHER PRIVATELY FUNDED OPPORTUNITIES

- Clinical & Counselling Psychologists
- HCPC Registered
- Most offer 15min free consultations
- Many are approved by BUPA, AXA, Aviva etc.
- Self funding typically starts at £90 per session

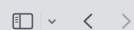
Counselling Directory

Psychology Today

EXTENDING THE THREAD...



AUDIOS



holdinghopetherapies.co.uk



Compassionate Mind Training Practices

Soothing Rhythm Breathing



Safe Place Imagery



The Compassionate Self



The Compassionate Self: Directing Compassion to Others



A Memory of Receiving Compassion from Another



A Moment of Self C.A.R.E



As with many things in life, when it comes to learning a new skill the audios have been created to help individuals develop skills in mindful scripts of Compassionate Mind Trainers Dr Chris Irons and Dr Charlie therapists working at the Bath Centre for Pain Services. I hope you en

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness of Sound



A wide-angle landscape photograph of a calm body of water, likely a fjord or a large lake, reflecting the surrounding environment. The water is exceptionally still, acting as a perfect mirror for the sky and the mountains. In the background, dark, forested mountains rise steeply from the water's edge. A thick layer of mist or low-lying clouds fills the valleys between the mountains, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The sky is a pale, hazy blue with a soft, warm glow on the left side, suggesting the sun is either rising or setting. The overall color palette is dominated by cool blues, greys, and soft whites, with the dark silhouettes of the mountains providing a strong contrast.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

GENTLE REMINDERS

- Living well alongside MCAS is incredibly tough
- It is easy to get hooked by unhelpful inner experiences when faced with the very real physical health symptoms of MCAS that exacerbate the suffering experienced
- The practices shared today can help you to become more aware in each moment and support you to make value-guided choices, which tend to serve individuals better
- These skills (associated with having increased psychological flexibility) take time & commitment to cultivate
- Be gentle with yourselves, as you practice relating in these ways and embedding any ideas you found valuable from today





THE END