

Workshop Wednesday  
**COVID-19 as a Collective and  
Individual Trauma**

**Christine Runyan, PhD, ABPP**

**August 17, 2022**



Mountain Plains (HHS Region 8)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# Disclaimer and Funding Statement

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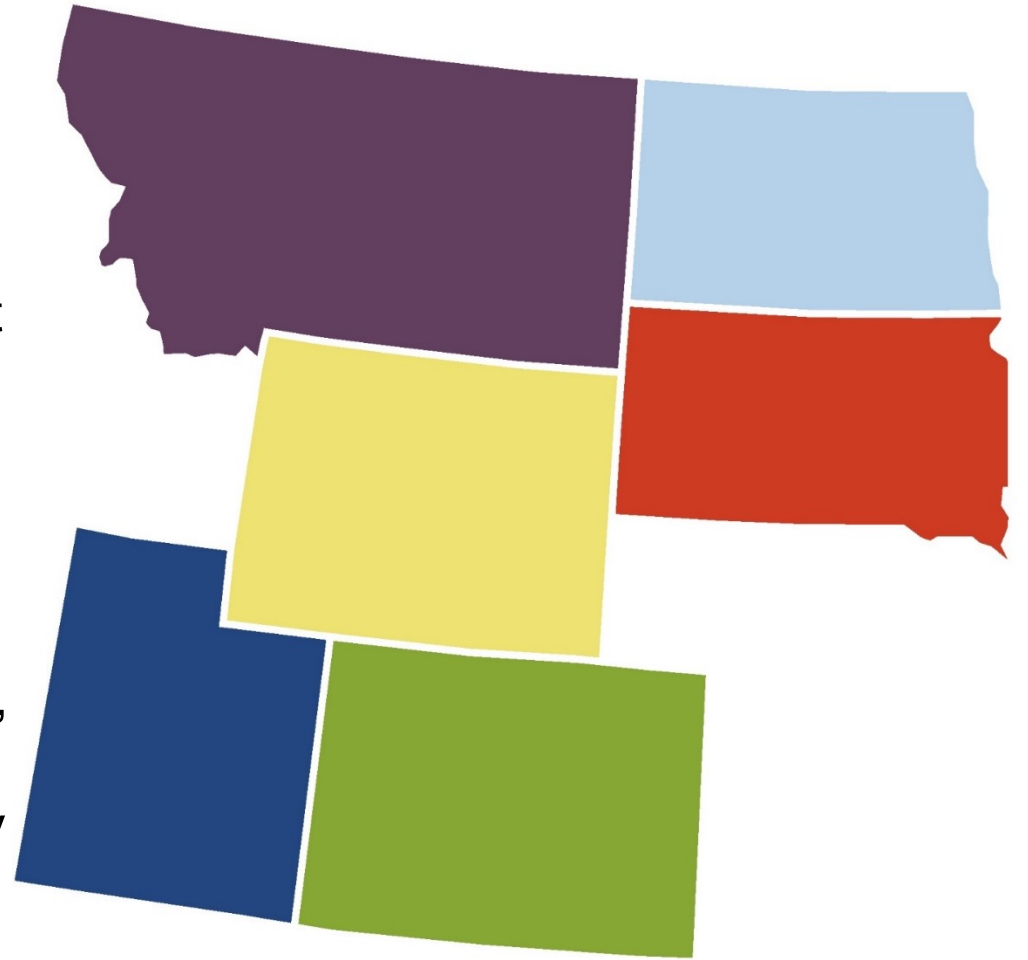
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# The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Mountain Plains MHTTC) provides training and technical assistance to individuals who serve persons with mental health concerns throughout Region 8 (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming).

We belong to the Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network, a national network of training and technical assistance centers serving the needs of mental health, substance use and prevention providers. The work of the TTC Network is under a cooperative agreement by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).



# Land Acknowledgement Statement

Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota. We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.



The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED  
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND  
ACCEPTING OF  
DIVERSE CULTURES,  
GENDERS,  
PERSPECTIVES,  
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND  
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS  
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR  
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND  
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND  
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

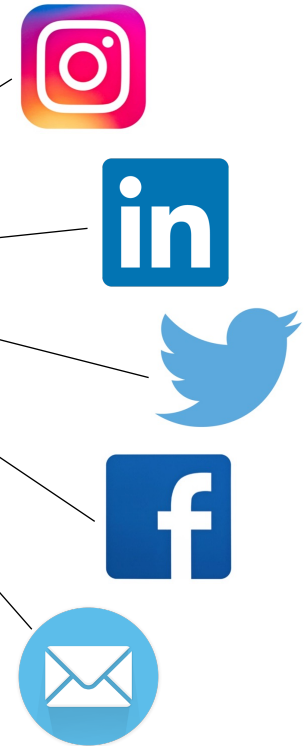
RESPECTFUL, CLEAR  
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH  
OUR ACTIONS,  
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

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# Unpacking COVID as a Caregiver:

## COVID as a Collective and Individual Trauma

Tina Runyan, PhD, ABPP

Co-Founder, [Tend Health](#)

Professor, Dept of Family Medicine  
Univ. of Massachusetts Medical School

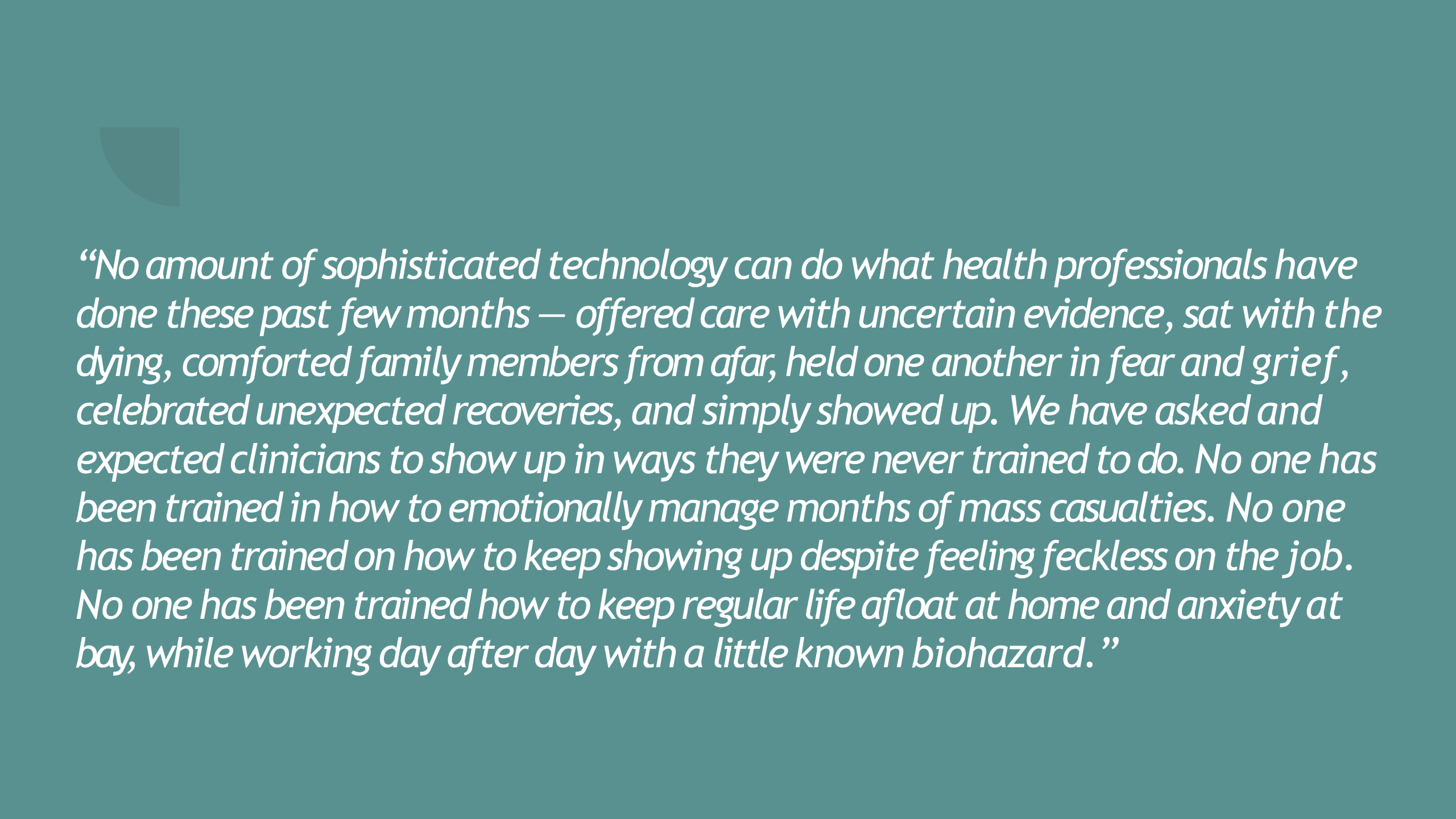


# Disclosures

I am a co-founder and CEO of Tend Health, a company that provides mental health services and educational offerings to healthcare professionals and organizations.

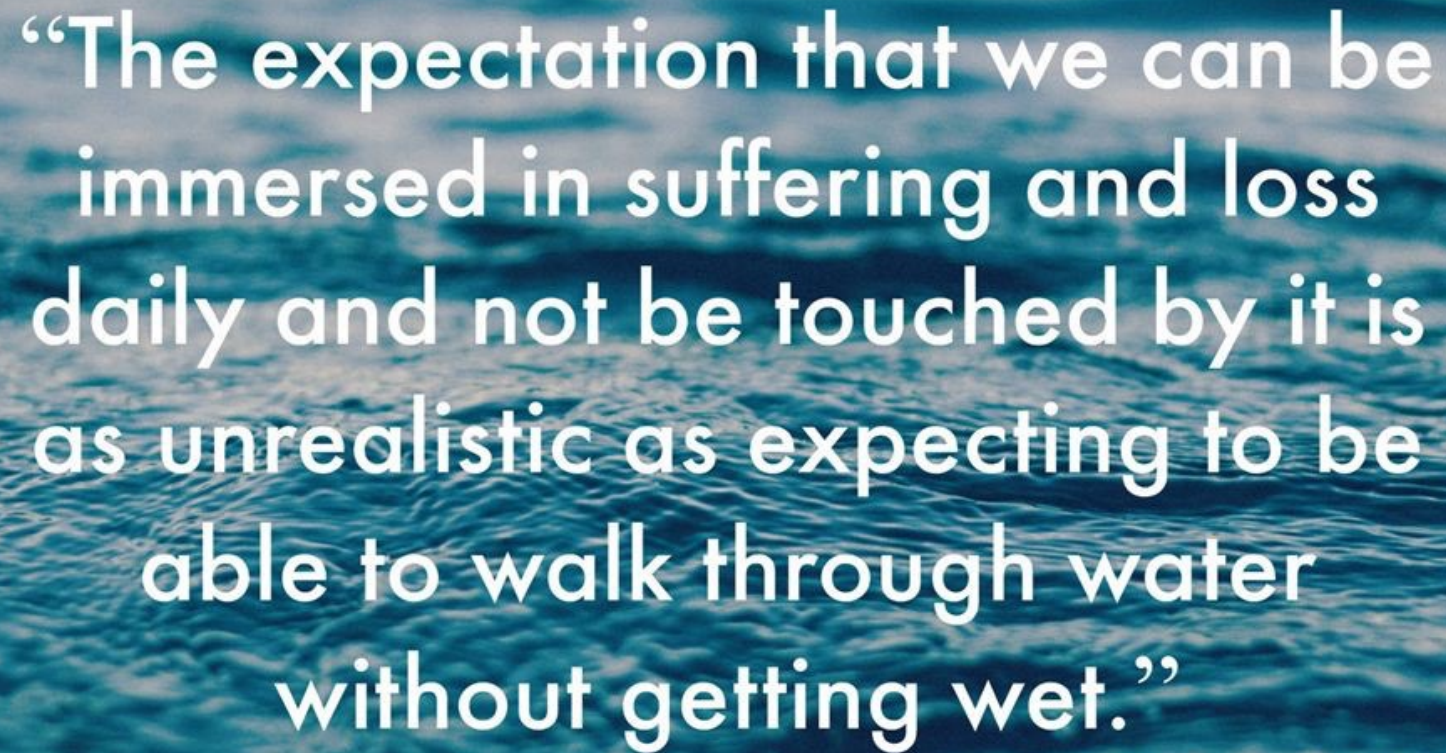

# Learning Objectives

- Analyze the experience of trauma, vicarious trauma, and secondary stress as it relates to being a healthcare provider during the pandemic
- Apply the principles of trauma exposure to understand the personal impact on one's mind, emotions, behaviors, and the body
- Discuss and practice self-regulation techniques to mitigate activation in the body



*“No amount of sophisticated technology can do what health professionals have done these past few months — offered care with uncertain evidence, sat with the dying, comforted family members from afar, held one another in fear and grief, celebrated unexpected recoveries, and simply showed up. We have asked and expected clinicians to show up in ways they were never trained to do. No one has been trained in how to emotionally manage months of mass casualties. No one has been trained on how to keep showing up despite feeling feckless on the job. No one has been trained how to keep regular life afloat at home and anxiety at bay, while working day after day with a little known biohazard.”*

# Risks for Healthcare Professionals



“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Dr. Naomi Rachel Remen

# Terminology



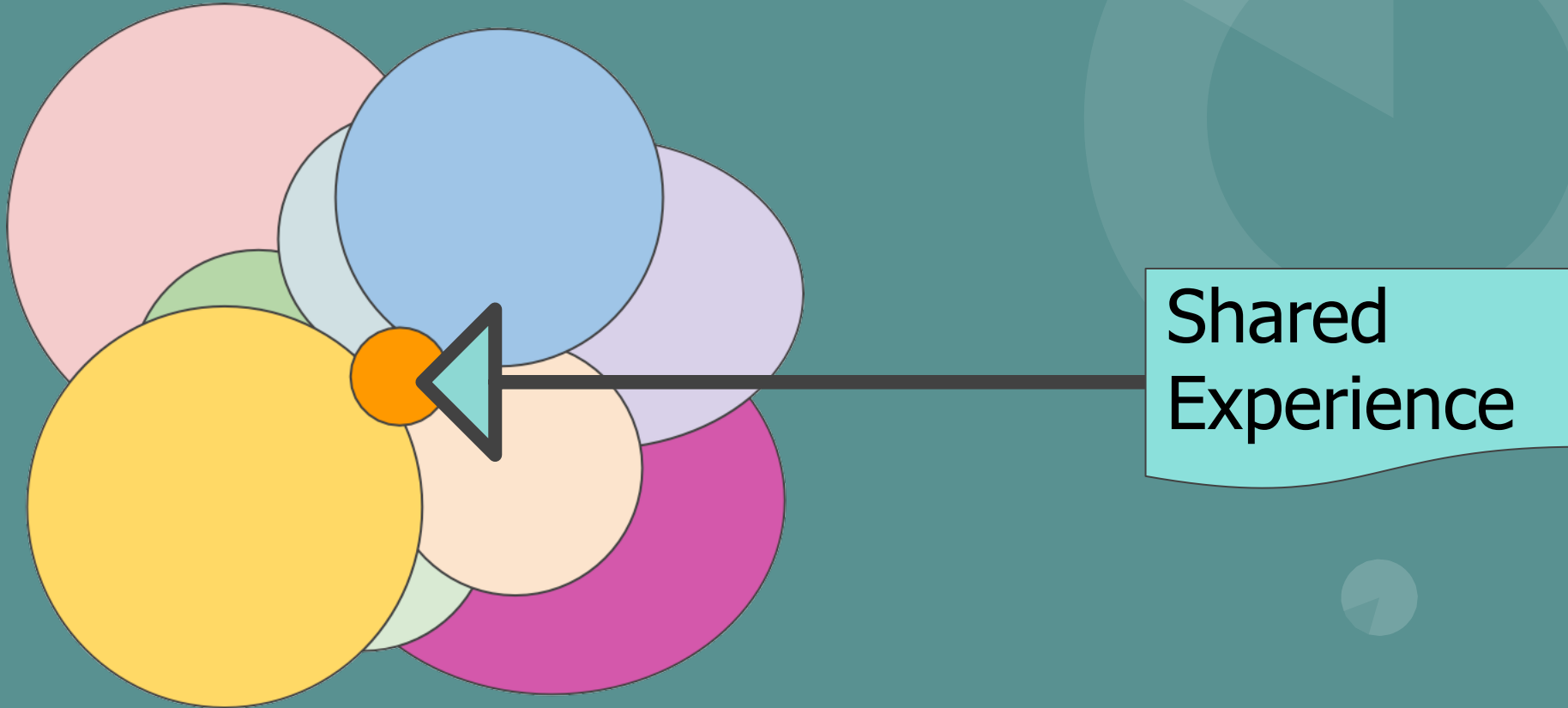
- **Burnout**
- **Vicarious Trauma**
  - Changes in self and perception of others/the world - happens in response to repeated exposures in people you care about
- **Compassion Fatigue / Compassion Satisfaction**
- **Moral Distress / Moral Injury**
- **Secondary Stress**
  - Acute or chronic stress response being activated in work setting

# COVID as a Trauma

**Traumatic Event** – exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on functioning, mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.

**Collective Trauma** - psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society; it does not merely reflect an historical factor, the recollection of a terrible event that happened to a group of people. It suggests the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of that group. And, like all memory, it includes both a reproduction of the events but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt - a necessity - to make sense and meaning of it.

We have not all had the same pandemic



Can we embrace variable  
reactions?

# Threat to Safety & Belonging

These are the two powerful drivers of human behavior.

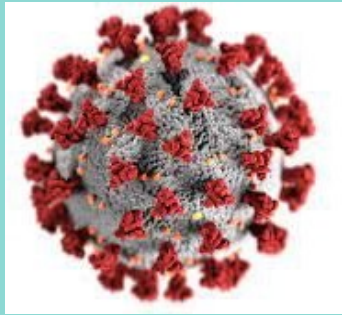
They have been threatened over the past 2+ years by COVID and current socio-political events.

Most stress is associated with one of both





# Stressor + Perception of Threat



- Novel
- Unpredictable
- Uncontrollable



## Stress Activation

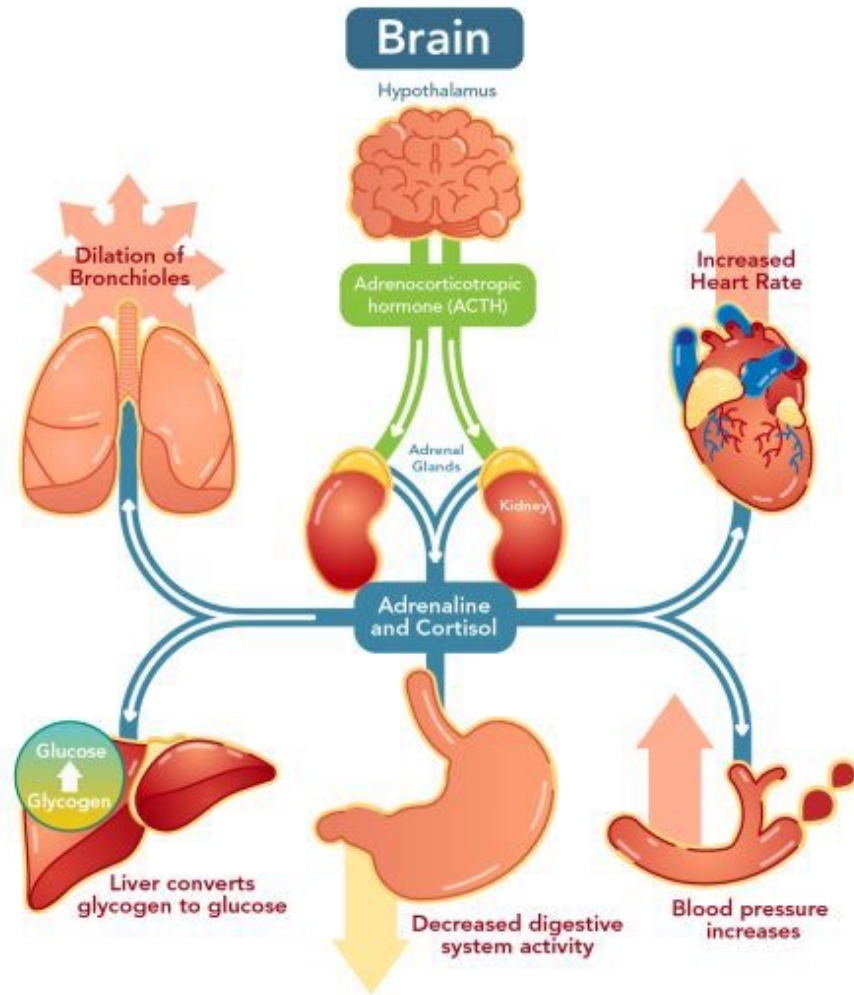
With trauma this whole process is sensitized



# **What happens when we have these experiences?**

**Nervous system activation. Stress response. Survival mode.**

# STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM



**Prefrontal Cortex**  
Thinking/logic/  
what to do/  
evaluation.

Everything is ok.

© CBTandFeelingGood.com

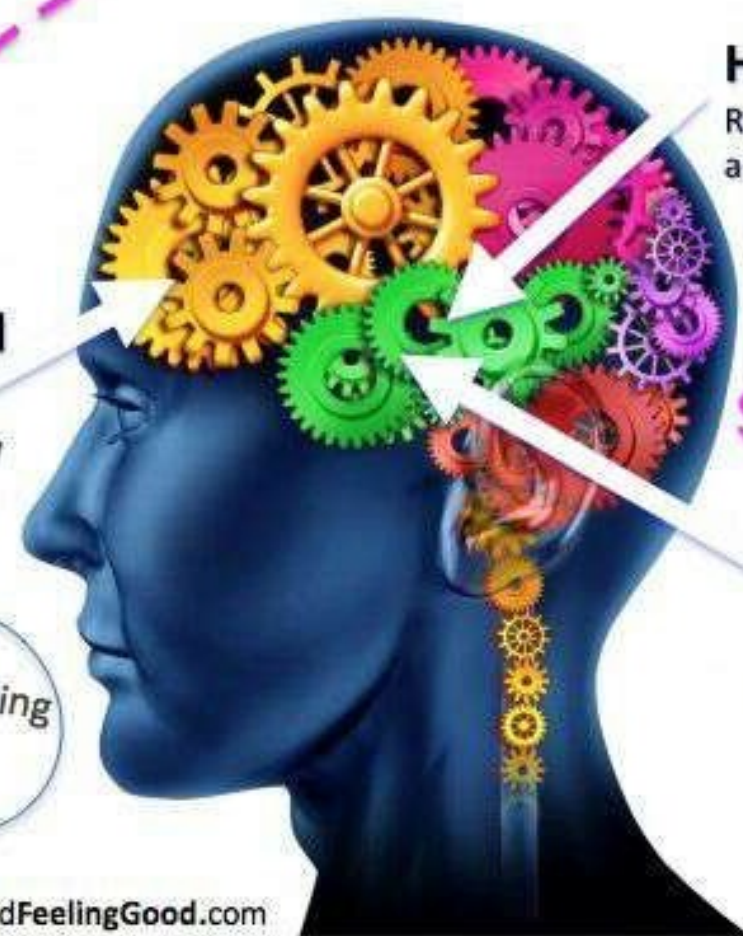
WEAK

**Hippocampus**  
Regulates memory  
and emotions.

STRONG

**Amygdala**  
Turns on fight or  
flight, and stores  
memories of the  
event.

Aargh!



**Body**

**Mind**

Fatigue  
Headaches  
Taut Muscles  
Skin Irritations  
Frequent Infections  
Constricted Breathing

Worrying  
Indecision  
Negativity  
Foggy Thinking  
Hasty Decisions  
Impaired Judgement

# Stress

**Emotions**

**Behavior**

Loss of Confidence  
Apprehension  
Indifference  
Depression  
Irritability  
Insomnia

Substance Abuse  
Loss of Appetite  
Accident Prone  
Restlessness  
Loneliness  
Insomnia

## **HYPERAROUSAL ZONE**

### **SIGNS YOU ARE HERE:**

- Tension, Shaking
  - Emotional reactivity
  - Defensiveness
  - Racing thoughts
  - Intrusive images
  - Emotional overwhelm
  - Feeling unsafe
  - Obsessive or Cynical thoughts
  - Hypervigilance
  - Impulsivity
  - Anger/Rage
- 

## **OPTIMAL AROUSAL ZONE**

### **“WINDOW OF TOLERANCE”**

### **SIGNS YOU ARE HERE:**

- Feel and think simultaneously
  - Experience empathy
  - Feelings are tolerable
  - Present moment awareness
  - Open and curious
  - Awareness of and can set boundaries
  - Reactions adapt to the circumstances
  - Feel safe
- 

## **HYPOAROUSAL ZONE**

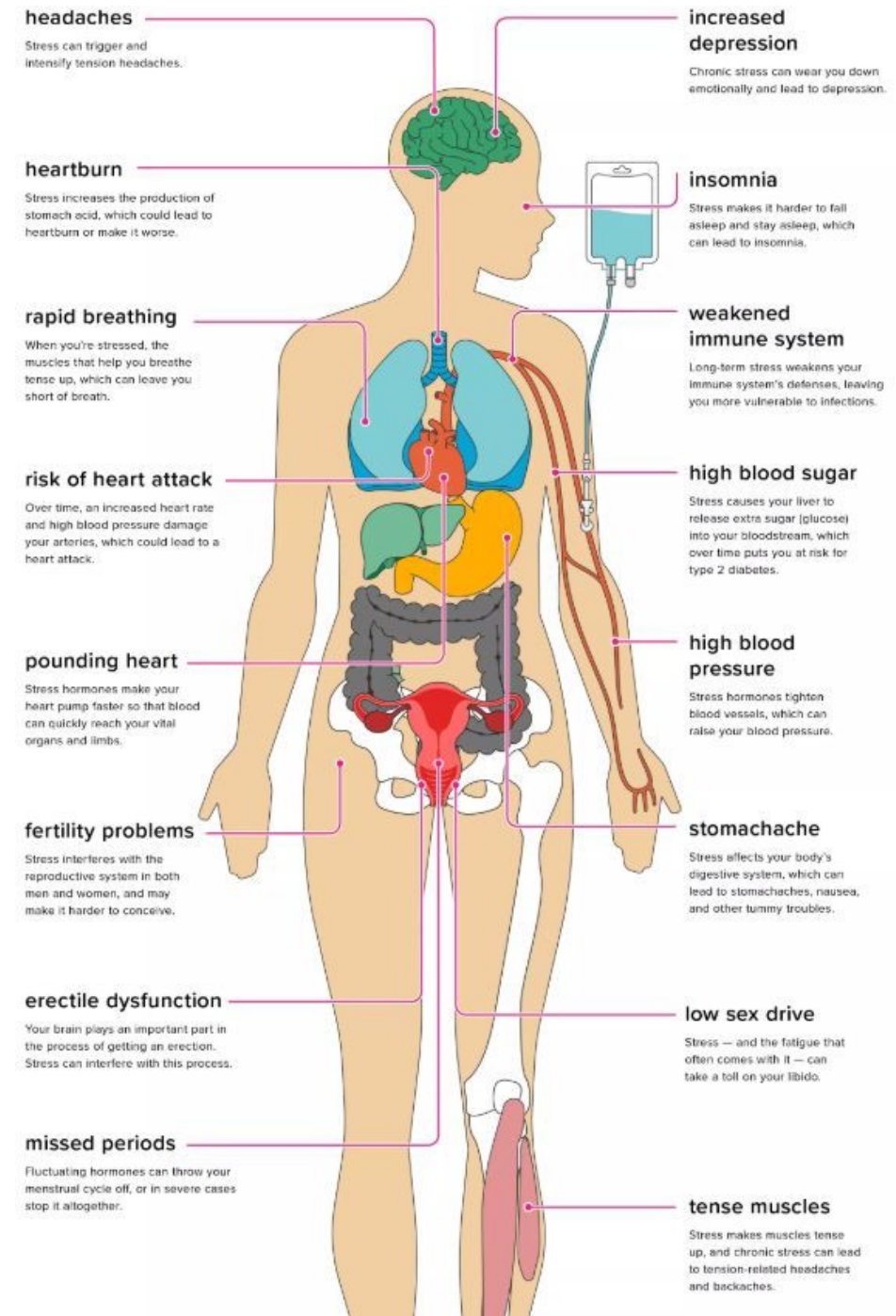
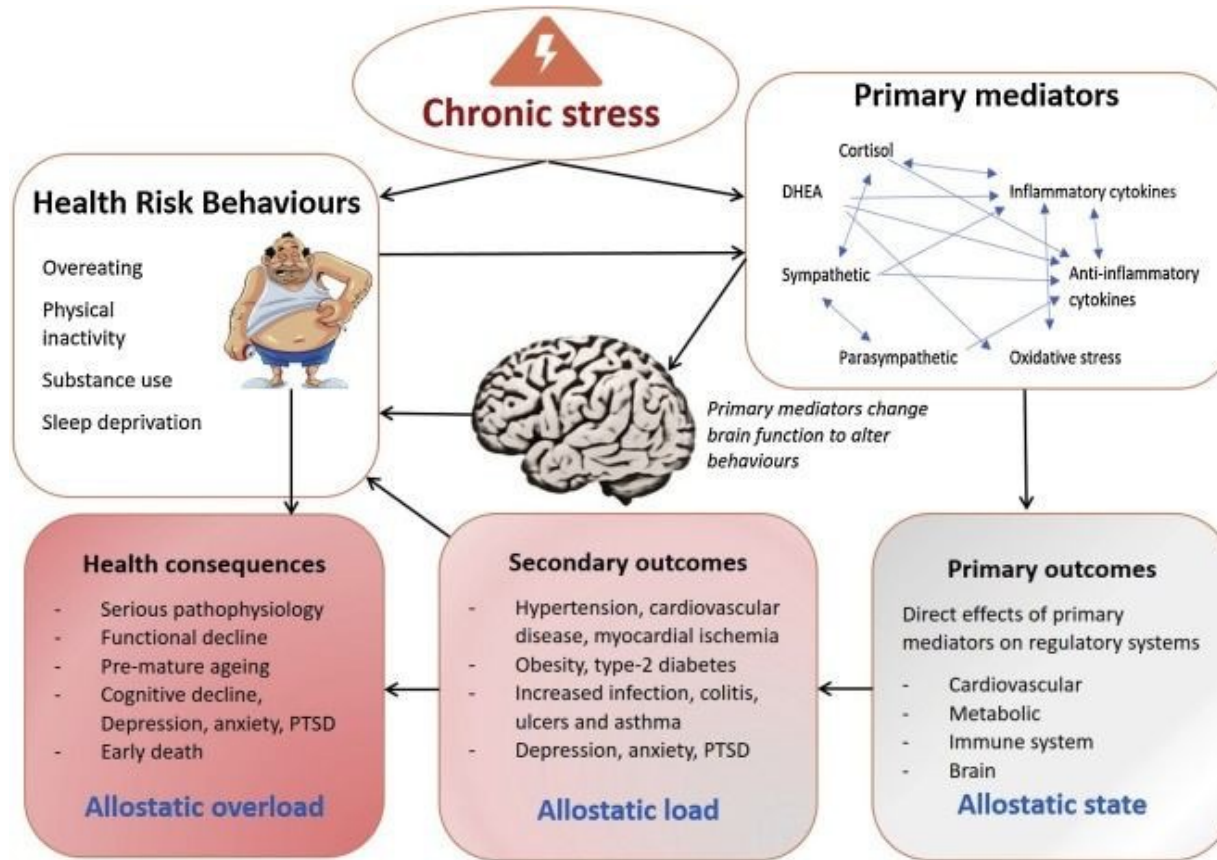
### **SIGNS YOU ARE HERE:**

- Absence of sensation
- No energy/Shut Down
- Passive
- “Not there”
- Can’t defend oneself
- Can’t think or say no
- Numbing of emotions
- Disconnected
- Ashamed
- Flat Affect

# Chronic Stress and Allostatic Load



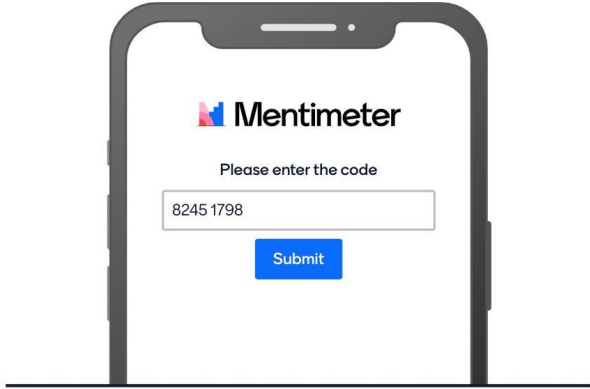
# Allostatic Load



**Allostatic load** ~"wear and tear on the body"  
 accumulated with exposure to repeated/chronic stress

# What is a sign that you are activated?

Go to  
[www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com)



Enter the code  
**8245 1798**

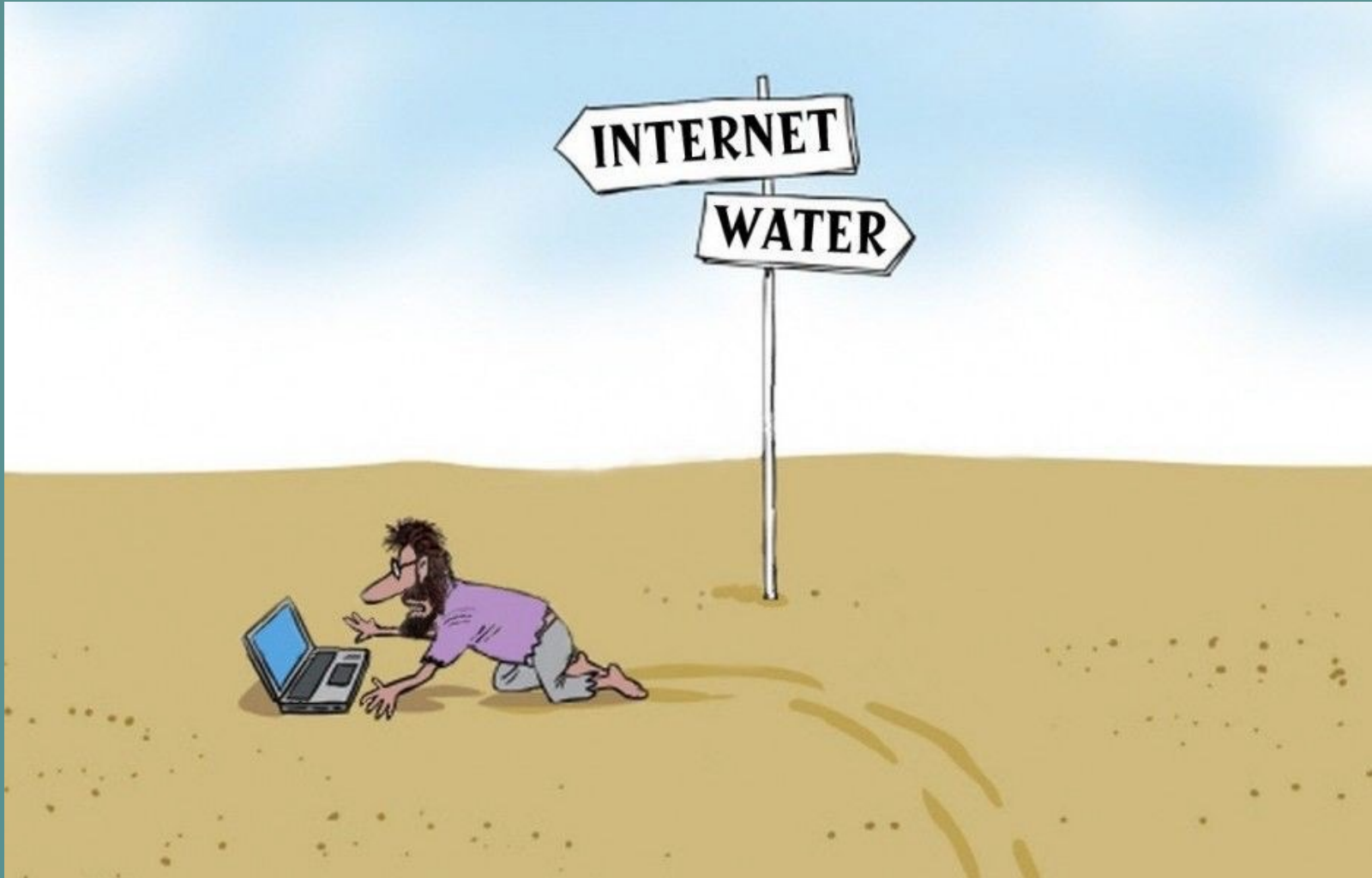


Or use QR code

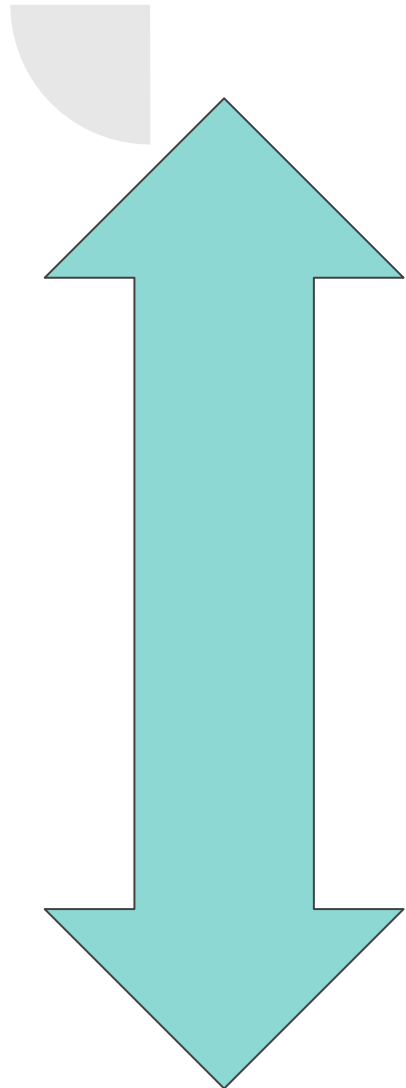




# When we are suffering ...



# What do you reach for when you are struggling?



What I Need

- Awareness and reflective practices, mindfulness, attentional focus, loving kindness
- Sleep, exercise, diet, hydration
- Quiet time in nature
- Talking with friend/colleague
- Massage
- Hobbies
- Reading
- Music
- Shopping
- Habitual eating/Junk food
- Social media/Web surfing
- Binge watching TV
- Caffeine, Sugar, Tobacco, Alcohol, drugs
- Adrenaline seeking or self-harming behaviors

What I Want



# Common Mental Health Manifestations

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Obsessive Thinking or Compulsive Doing
- Irritability/Anger/Lashing Out
- Alcohol / Substance Use
- Numbing Out Behaviors (TV, Internet, Social Media)
- Distress Secondary to Relationship Strain
- Somatic Manifestations



$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Stress} \\ & + \\ & \text{Recovery} \\ & = \\ & \text{Resilience} \end{aligned}$$



# The Nervous System is a Source of Information and Healing

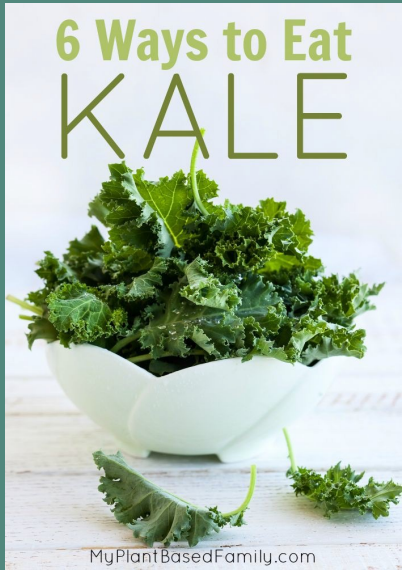
## Organizational

- Opportunities to build community
- Reduce stigma for asking for help
- Offer benefits to assist with basic needs
- Reduce administrative burden when in high volume episodes (COVID surge)
- Promote, support, invite, and offer time for restoration
- Opportunities to be creative

## Individual

- Self-compassion
- Moral resilience
- Social connection
- Find practices that regulate your nervous system (micro & macro)
- Practice gratitude at work
- Learn your process for completing emotions
- Take time away from work for restoration

# What we are told...



# What moves us towards recovery...

**Self-awareness & self-regulation.**

**Completing the stress response.**

**Social connection.**

**Self-compassion.**

**Restoration & Rest.**

**Gratitude.**

# Evidenced Based Strategies for Completing the Stress Response

- Move!
- New sensory stimuli for nervous system
- Breath Techniques
- Prayer, Chanting, Ritual
- Talk to people
- Laugh
- Speak to loved ones (receive and give affection)
- Do something creative
- Cry



**The most widely researched protective factor in the face of trauma and chronic stress is social support, provided by family, friends, and supervisors.**



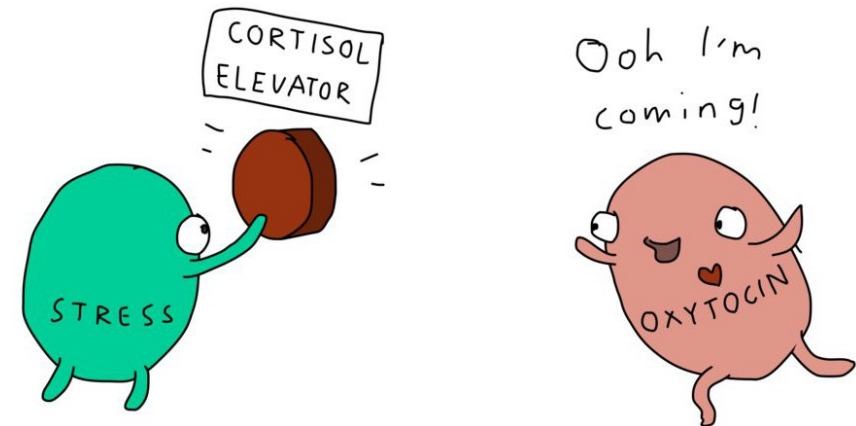
# **Tend and Befriend Response**

**Mediated by oxytocin and endogenous opioids**

**Oxytocin Decreases ACTH, Cortisol, SNS**

# Practical Tips for Regulating Yourself and Accepting Others

- Pause. One deep breath, LONG exhale - Cardiac Coherence Breathing (5/5)
- Mindfulness - Where are you putting your focus?
- Elevate your WHY into your day
- “Just Like Me”
  - Strategies are about unmet needs
- Tend and Befriend OURSELVES
  - Soothing touch
  - Hand on Heart, Hug



# When to Consider Additional Resources/Supports



- Your work is being moderately or substantially impacted
- Your sleep, eating, hygiene, have changed
- Your relationships are being impacted - other people notice
- You are isolating, or not talking to “your people”
- Your use of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco/vaping, food, gambling, TV/video games has increased
- You find yourself thinking about being gone, better off dead, or wanting to die

**Hear...  
Protect...  
Prepare...  
Support...  
Care for...  
Honor...**

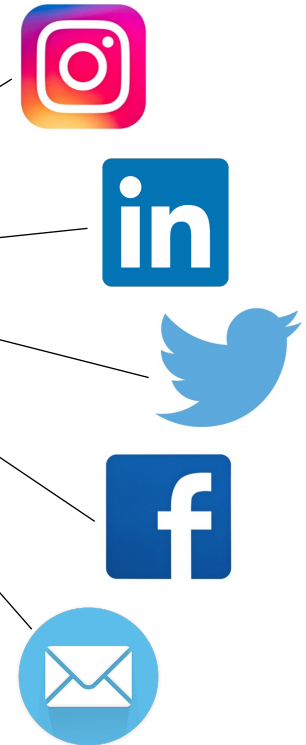
**ME**



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**THANK YOU!**



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