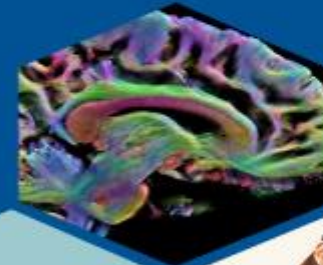


# Facing Prolonged Uncertainty: Rebooting Your Survival Skills



Debbie Snyder, MSW, LCSW-C  
National Institute of Mental Health  
Office of the Clinical Director  
Senior Advisor to Clinical Director



DoD Benefits Symposium – 9/28/2022



National Institute  
of Mental Health

# Track Level of Burnout (Physician Work-Life Study Question)

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**“Overall based on your definition of burnout, how would you rate your level of burnout?”**

1: I enjoy my work. I have no symptoms of burnout

2: Occasionally I am under stress, and I don't always have as much energy as I once did, but I don't feel burned out

3: I am definitely burning out and have one or more symptoms of burnout, such as physical and emotional exhaustion

4: The symptoms of burnout that I'm experiencing won't go away. I think about frustration at work a lot

5: I feel completely burned out and often wonder if I can go on. I am at the point where I may need some change or may need to seek some sort of help.

# NIH Clinical Center



The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent the views of the NIH, DHHS, or any other government agency or official. These are MY views. I have no financial conflicts to disclose.

# Learning Objectives

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How to recognize the signs of anxiety

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Responding to negative feelings

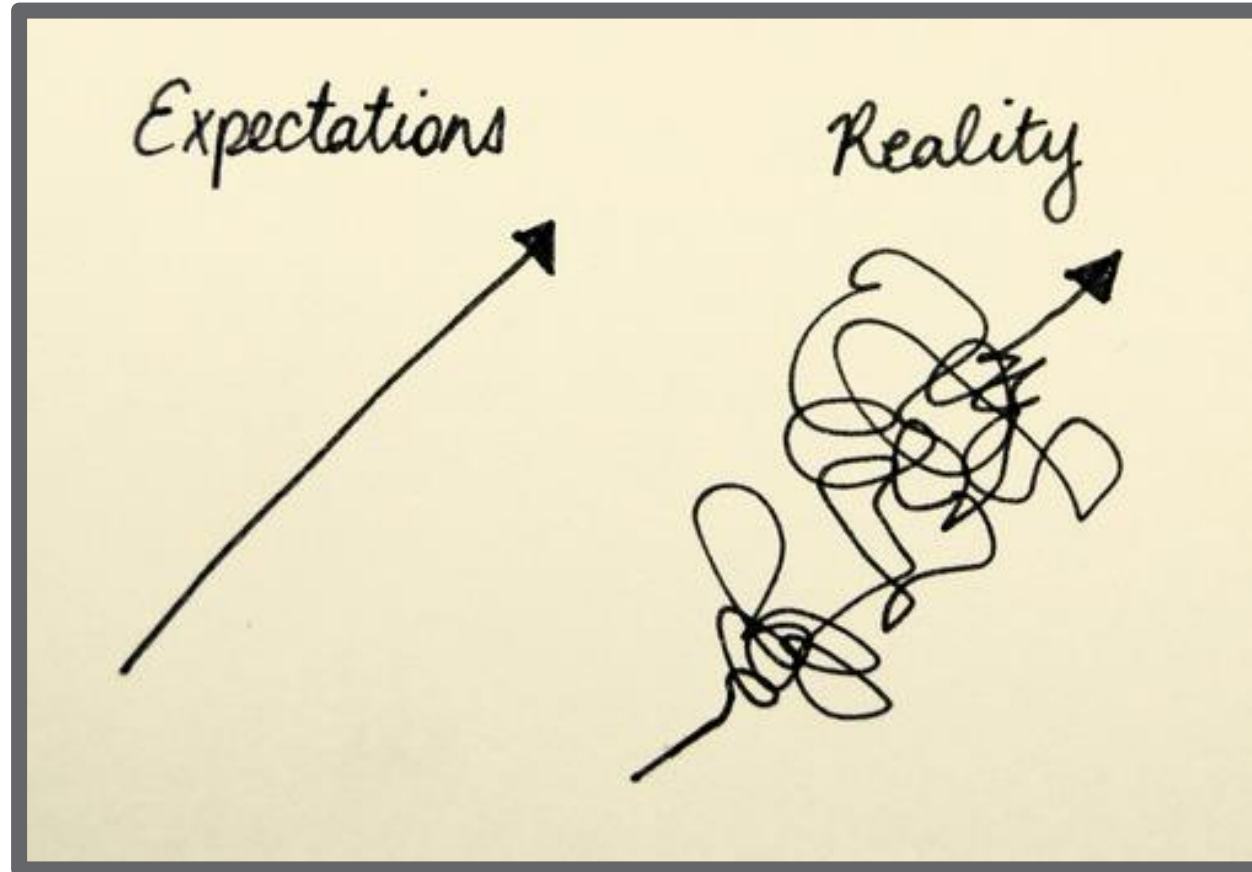
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Coping strategies and resilience

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# The Problem

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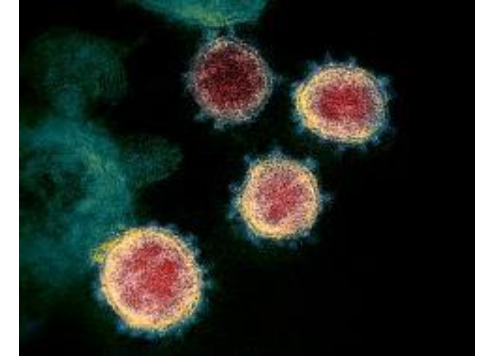


**“You don’t make the timeline. The virus makes the timeline.”**

Dr. Anthony Fauci

# Special Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic: **The Rules Keep Changing**

- **Prolonged** duration of **uncertainty** and **unpredictability**
- **Safety**- staff, personal, family-may be in conflict
- **Rapid continuing changes** to “workplace” activities
- Enormity of **societal problems** (e.g., financial, sociopolitical, cultural etc.)
- **Decision fatigue**
- Progression from **fear/grief to anger/despair/exhaustion**
- Usual coping mechanisms may not work



# Red Flags: How do you know you have been triggered?

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- Feeling loss of control (fight/flight/freeze)
- Feeling it physiologically (rapid breathing, heart pounding)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling ineffective
- Feeling angry / irritable / lack of patience
- Feeling judgmental / blaming
- Feeling regret (should have, could have, would have)

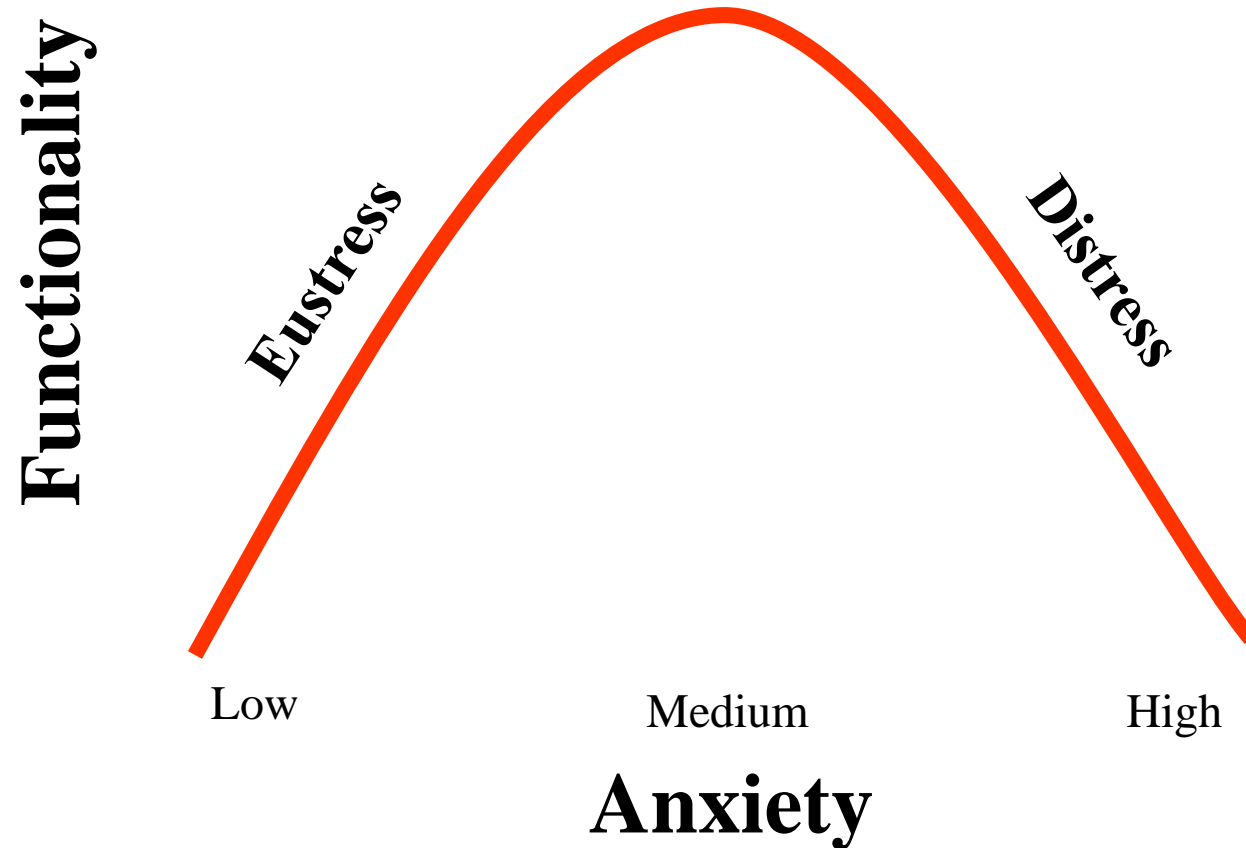
# When our world is out of our control, find ways to...

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1. Recognize what is happening in our minds & bodies when we are stressed.
2. Increase level of control and manage responses to danger or fear.
3. Observe and understand our own experiences of uncertainty so we can:
  - decrease distress
  - increase feelings of well-being

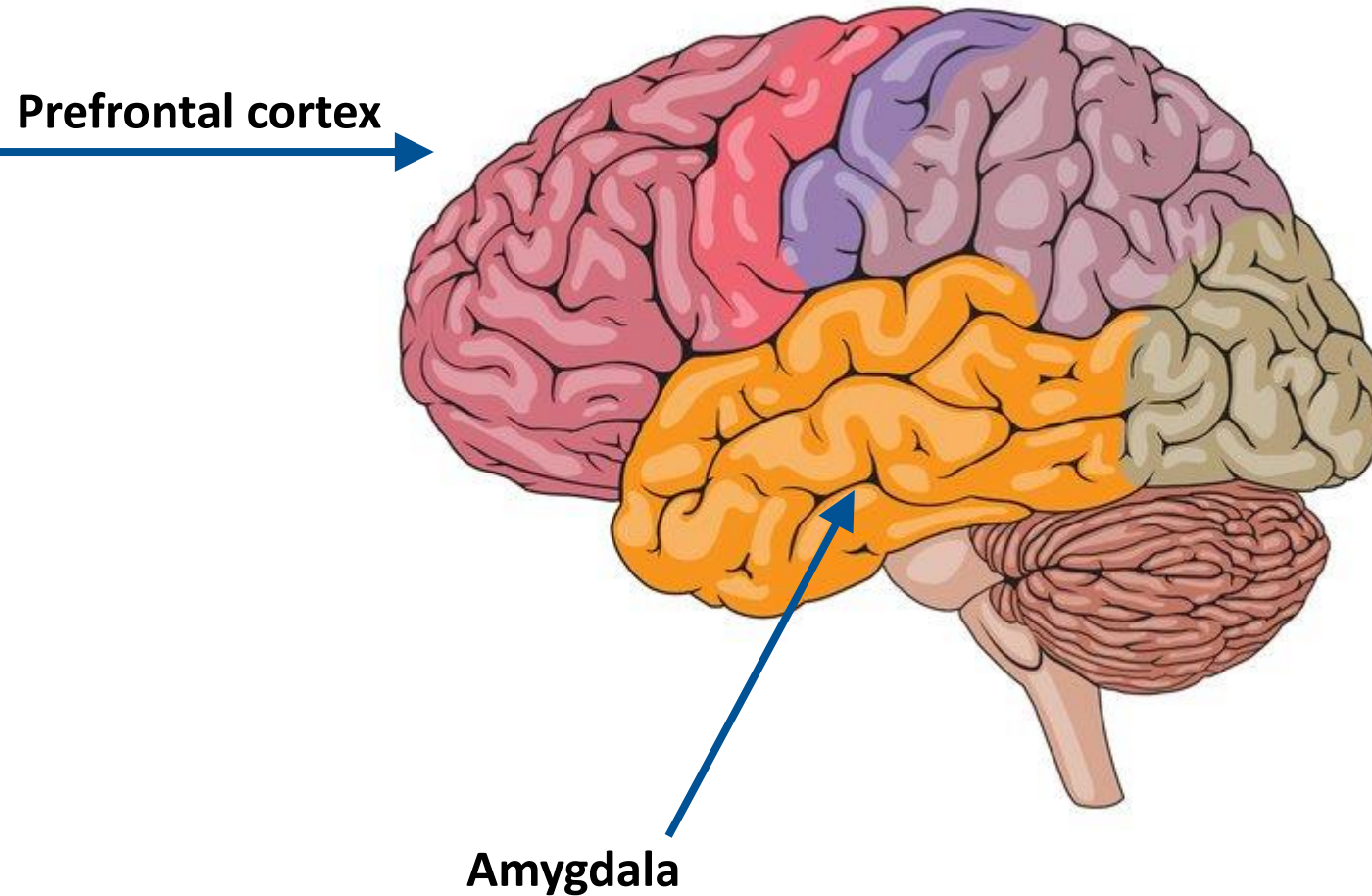


# Yerkes-Dodson Principle



# Pre-Frontal Cortex & Amygdala

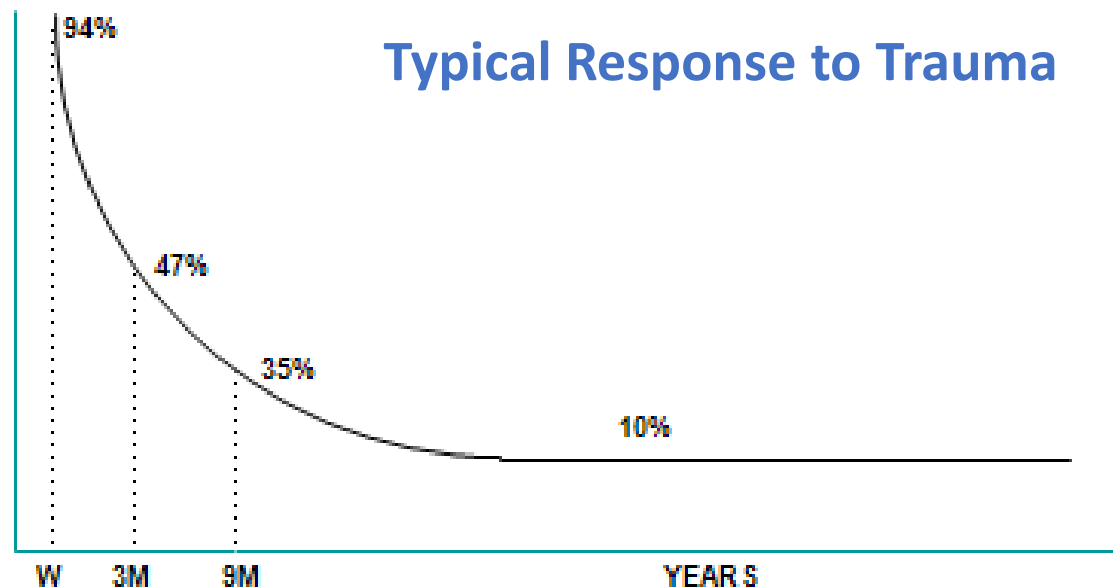
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# Typical Reactions After Trauma

Most people have intense responses immediately following, and sometimes for months after a traumatic event

- Feeling anxious, sad, or angry
- Trouble concentrating and sleeping
- Continually thinking about what happened

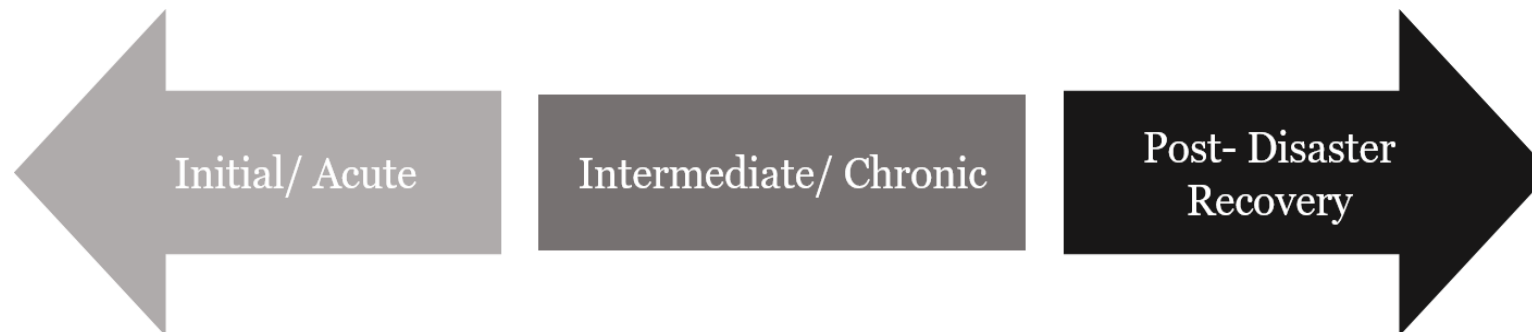


# Spectrum of Mental Health Coverage Needs In an Institution During COVID-19 Pandemic

**For staff:**



**Needs will evolve:**



# Spectrum of Clinical Concerns

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**Normal** ↔ **Developmental Variation** ↔ **Problematic** ↔ **Disorder**

**Behaviors**

**Frequency and Duration**

**Severity**

# MENTAL HEALTH



# Controlling What We Can...

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## Cannot Control

- The way others are responding and the speed at which a vaccine is made
- Duration of self-isolation

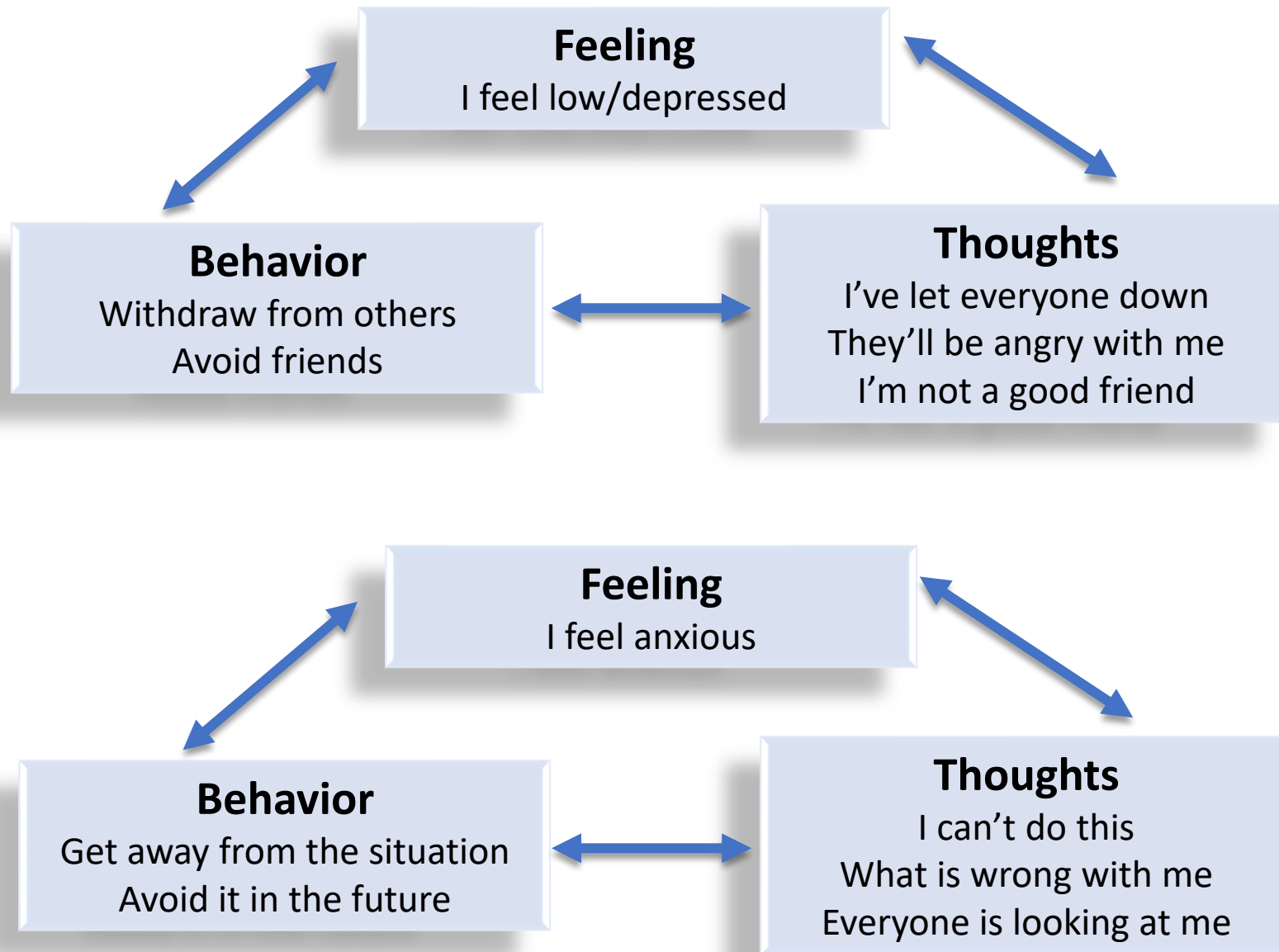
## Wish to Control

- Behavior of others
- Interactions with others
- Length of self-isolation
- Items from your red circle

## Can Control

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

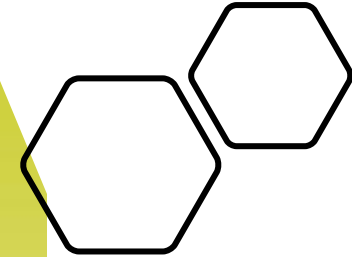
Modified from Kelly Donahue, Ph.D.





# Cognitive distortions

- **All or nothing thinking** (black & white thinking) “If I don’t get it 100% right then I’ve failed”
- **Over-generalisation** “I never get things right - typical!” (signals: ‘never’ & ‘always’)
- **Mental filter** only seeing what is wrong, ignoring positives “Sure I won but when I slipped over at the end I really made a fool of myself”
- **Disqualifying the positive** “Yes, I did succeed, but it was a fluke” (positives ‘don’t count because...’)
- **Mind reading** “He didn’t even acknowledge me, so he must think I’m rubbish”
- **Fortune telling** – treating future as if already fact - ‘I’ll never be happy!’



“You can't stop the waves, but  
you can learn to surf.”

- *Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD*



Please circle or pick a number (0-10) from the drop down box that best describes how much distress you have been experiencing in the past week including today.

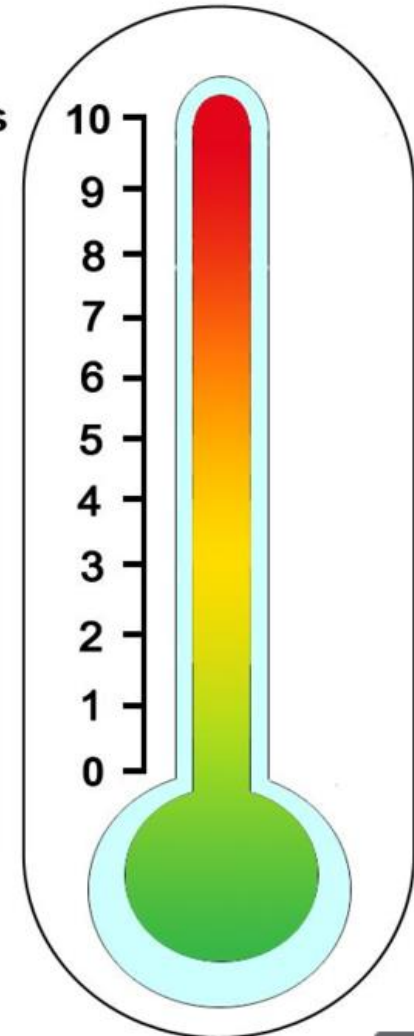
Pick a number

# GOT EMOTIONAL or EXISTENTIAL DISTRESS?

## Take Your "Temperature"

Extreme Distress

No Distress



# Our State of Mind Significantly Affects Our Work



# Potential Drivers of Burnout

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- Workload
- Efficiency
- Flexibility/Control
- Culture/Values
- Work-Life Integration
- Community at Work
- Meaning in Work
- Professional Development



# Potential Drivers of Burnout

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## Internal Factors

- Anxiety about competency
- Loss of positive connection in workplace
- Loss of meaning in the work
- High level of work/life conflict
- Sleep deprivation, depression, regular use of alcohol/drugs

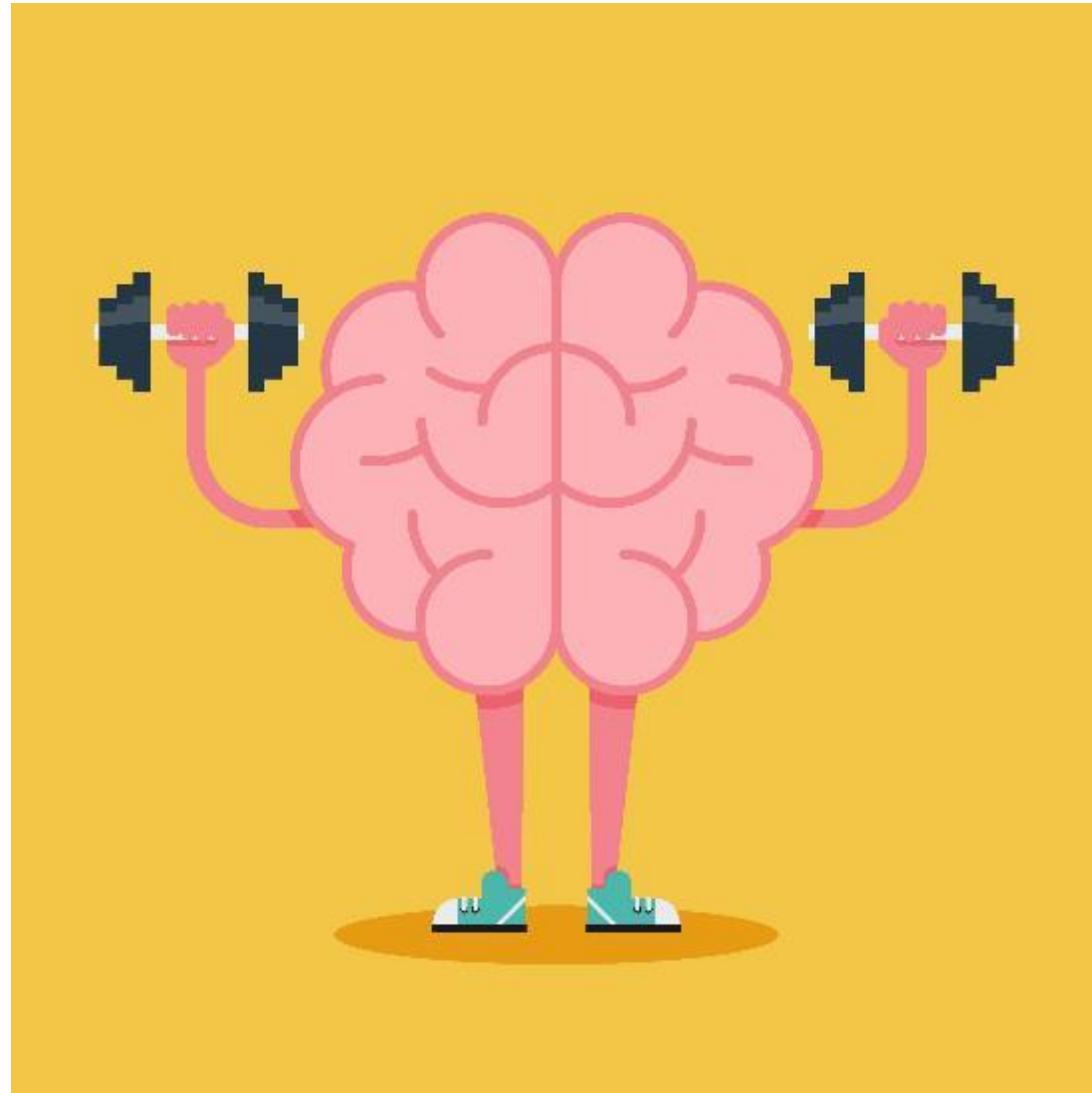
## External Factors

- Administrative inefficiencies
- Unrealistic workload
- Lack of appropriate rewards
- Excessive hours, fatigue
- Challenges in institutional culture









# PPE for the Soul

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# Types of Self Care

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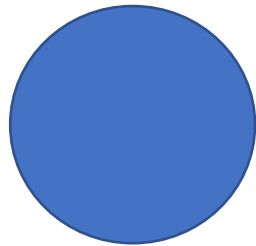
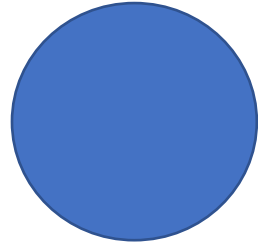
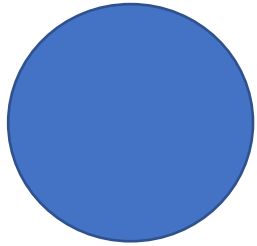
# Tips on Managing Distress

- Set realistic expectations
- Establish healthy boundaries
- Reduce information overload
- Rest, relax, rejuvenate
- Reach out to others; you are not alone
- Tolerate uncertainty















# Positive Psychology & Mirror Neurons

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# Seven C's of Resilience

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1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Connection
4. Character
5. Contribution
6. Coping
7. Control



# Where there is ... , resilience allows for ....

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- Anxiety ... curiosity
- Resignation ... engagement
- Overwhelm ... composure
- Grief ... compassion
- Fear ... courage

# How to ask about “emotional things” without it feeling weird in the workplace?

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- “We have all been touched by COVID-19 in different ways. Stress is a natural byproduct right now for all of us. But, it’s important to reflect on the fact that stress can be positive: it can help to fuel our resourcefulness. Most of us will emerge naturally resilient, even during this time of uncertainty, particularly when empowered through extra support, education and linkages to resources.
- For some, the stress will impact your work in new and challenging ways. This is where supervisors and peers can play a critical role in helping: to listen and direct you to resources. Therefore, it is important now more than ever to monitor your emotional health as we ride together on the roller coaster that COVID-19 has put us on.”



# Consider asking these questions...

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- 1) How are you doing?
- 2) Are you feeling overwhelmed in a way that makes you unable to do your job?
- 3) Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, are you feeling adequately psychologically supported that you can perform your work?
- 4) If no, have you reached out to other resources?

# MASTER STRESS

**M**aintain healthy eating

**A**void isolation

**S**tay informed, not obsessed

**T**alk to others

**E**ngage in mindfulness

**R**elax, play, exercise

**S**tart journaling

**T**ake deep breaths

**R**est and sleep well

**E**ngage in gratitude

**S**tep outside into nature

**S**eek support from friends,  
family, and professionals

# Techniques to Enhance Self-Management

## In the moment

- Pause. Breathe.
- Get up from desk. Stretch.
- Take a walk.
- Ask a question.
- Rub your fingers together.
- Listen to sounds / music
- Write your reaction down.

## Ongoing

- Anticipate stressful situations.
- Exercise.
- Mindfulness practice.
- Healthy eating.
- Sleep hygiene.
- Become aware of triggers – body and emotional scan.



Research article

# What Predicts the Mood of Athletes Involved in Preparations for Tokyo 2020/2021 Olympic Games During the Covid – 19 Pandemic? The Role of Sense of Coherence, Hope for Success and Coping Strategies

Marta Szczypińska ✉, Aleksandra Samelko and Monika Guskowska  
Jozef Pilsudski University of Physical Education, Warsaw, Poland

## Abstract

The aim of the study was to identify coherence, hope for success and coping strategies as predictors of mood among this year's Olympians in the context of coronavirus events. The relationships between the above variables and the mood of athletes were analysed. The study group consisted of 57 athletes – women (29) and men (28) between 18 and 30 years of age, representing various

resulting from special restrictions. Such groups include athletes who had to cease organized daily training almost overnight (Lim and Pranata, 2020). Athletes are just as vulnerable as the general population to the negative psychological consequences of COVID-19 – such as stress, anxiety and depression (AIS, 2020). Isolation at home, limitation of previous physical activity, isolation from members

**3 Things  
The Doubler  
Fun 15  
Conscious Acts of Kindness**





# Resources



# Learn more about mental health topics

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## NIMH

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help>

## National Organizations

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

[Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#)

[Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#)

[Mental Health America](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

# NIMH Stress and COVID-19 Web Resources

## Resource

[Director's Message on Coping with Coronavirus: Managing Stress, Fear, and Anxiety](#)

[Coping with COVID-19 Shareable Resources](#)

[Coping with Traumatic Events Health Topics](#)

[Supporting Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic - Science News Update](#)

[I'm So Stressed Out! Fact Sheet](#)

[Director's Message on Coping with Coronavirus: Support for the Autism Community](#)

[I'm So Stressed Out! Infographic](#)

[Director's Message on The Kindness of Strangers: Supporting Each Other During COVID-19](#)

[Digital Mental Health: Innovating in a Time of High Anxiety - Science News Update](#)

# Substance Use Resources

Organization	Notes
<a href="#">Narcotics Anonymous (online)</a>	NA is a nonprofit Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem.
<a href="#">US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Finder</a>	The service is open 24/7, 365 days a year. English and Spanish. <a href="#">1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)</a>
<a href="#">SmartRecovery</a>	Global community of mutual-support groups. At meetings, participants help one another resolve problems with any addiction (to drugs or alcohol or to activities such as gambling or over-eating).
<a href="#">Alcoholics Anonymous (online)</a>	Fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.
<a href="#">Connections App</a>	This is a free smartphone app that is scientifically proven to support individuals in recovery by reducing relapse and promoting pro-social engagement.
<a href="#">Unity Recovery + Weconnect + SOS Recovery + Alano Club</a>	Online recovery support groups that are available daily. They are open to anyone who is dealing with substance use, mental health concerns, disordered eating, as well as any other quality of life concerns.
<a href="#">In The Rooms</a>	Free online recovery tool that offers 130 weekly online meetings for those recovering from addiction and related issues. In The Rooms embraces multiple pathways to recovery, including all 12 Step, non-12 Step, Wellness and Mental Health modalities.
<a href="#">Marijuana Anonymous</a>	Online fellowship of people who share their experience, strength, and hope with one another to solve common problems and help others to recover from pot addiction.
<a href="#">Help for Problem Gambling</a>	Offered by the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling (Center) remains open and committed to providing real-time support, help, and hope to all Maryland residents.

# Resources/National

## Disaster Distress Helpline

PHONE: 1-800-985-5990

TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746

WEB: [disasterdistress.samhsa.gov](https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov)



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

NATIONAL  
**SUICIDE PREVENTION  
LIFELINE**<sup>TM</sup>  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)



# An Antidote to Distress?



**Love**  
**Beauty**  
**Awe**  
**Humor**



# Gandhi's Top 10 Rules to Live By

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## 1. Change yourself.

*"You must be the change you want to see in the world."*

## 2. You are in control.

*"Nobody can hurt me without my permission."*

## 3. Forgive and let it go.

*"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." "An eye for eye only ends up making the whole world blind."*

## 4. Without action you aren't going anywhere.

*"An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching."*

## 5. Take care of this moment.

*"I do not want to foresee the future, I am concerned with taking care of the present. God has given me no control over the moment following."*

# Gandhi's Top 10 Rules to Live By

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## 6. Everyone is human.

*"It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err."*

## 7. Persist.

*"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."*

## 8. See the good in people and help them.

*"I look only to the good qualities of men. Not being faultless myself, I won't presume to probe into the faults of others."*

## 9. Be congruent, be authentic, be your true self.

*"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."*

## 10. Continue to grow and evolve.

*"Constant development is the law of life, and a man who always tries to maintain his dogmas in order to appear consistent drives himself into a false position."*

# Questions & Answers