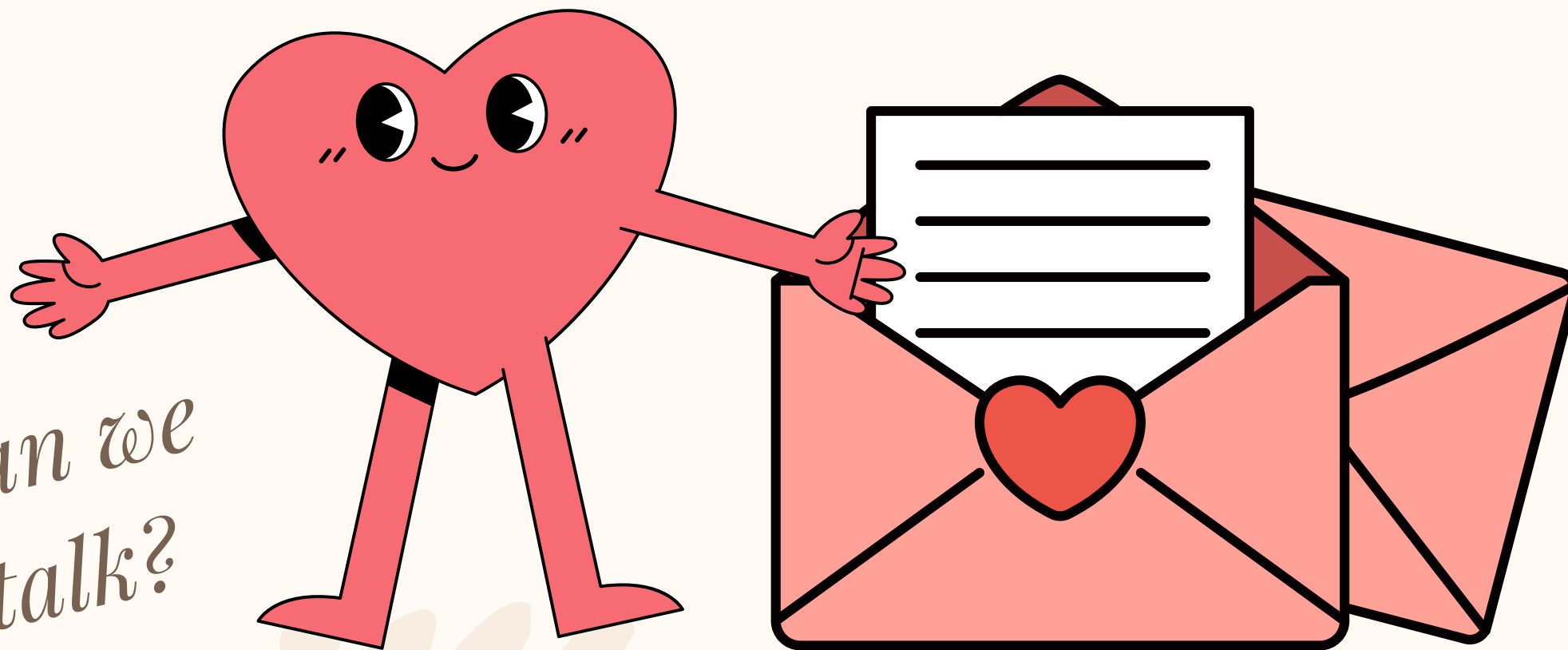




Deep Release
training counselling

UNDERSTANDING STRESS & BURNOUT



*Can we
talk?*

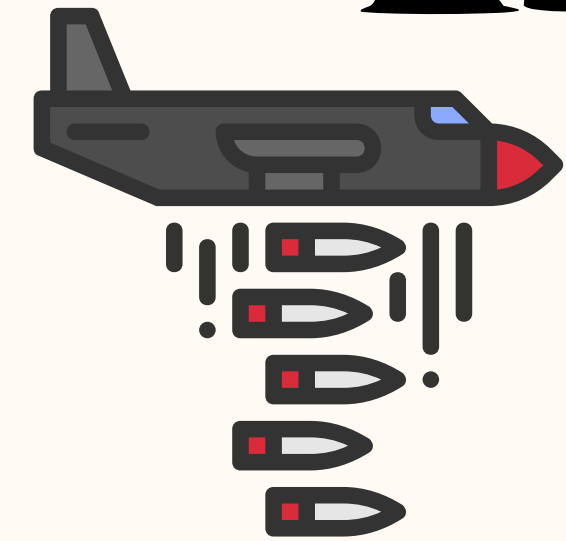
STRESS – AN ANCIENT ISSUE!

- Ancient Egyptian writings reference exhaustion, sadness, and emotional suffering
- Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates believed mental and physical health were connected
- Roman writers complained about the pressures of urban life, constant noise, overwork, and the feeling of being overwhelmed
- Medieval monks wrote about a state of exhaustion, lack of motivation, and emotional emptiness resulting from prolonged spiritual labour
- Industrial Revolution: doctors described conditions such as "nervous exhaustion" due to the demands of life



IS MODERN LIFE MORE STRESSFUL?

- Evidence suggests so, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic
- More war, famine, high infant mortality, dangerous working conditions in previous generations
- But modern society has created new forms of chronic psychological pressure:
 - Constant connectivity - smartphones, email, and messaging mean work can follow us everywhere
 - Information overload - vastly more information to process than previous generations
 - Many jobs now require continuous emotional regulation, attention management, and cognitive effort rather than physical labour
 - Difference in protective factors too, such as community, family support?
- Stress - an ancient human experience that take different forms in different historical periods



WHAT IS STRESS?

- Stress is the body's response to a perceived challenge or threat
- The brain activates the sympathetic nervous system and HPA axis - releasing adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol - fight, flight, freeze
- Short term effects:
 - Increased focus
 - Faster reaction times
 - More energy
 - Greater motivation
- Short term stress might help us survive a crisis, reach a deadline, complete a challenge, grow as a person, achieve something
- The problem comes when stress becomes chronic (lasting weeks or months)... uncontrollable... unpredictable... or inescapable



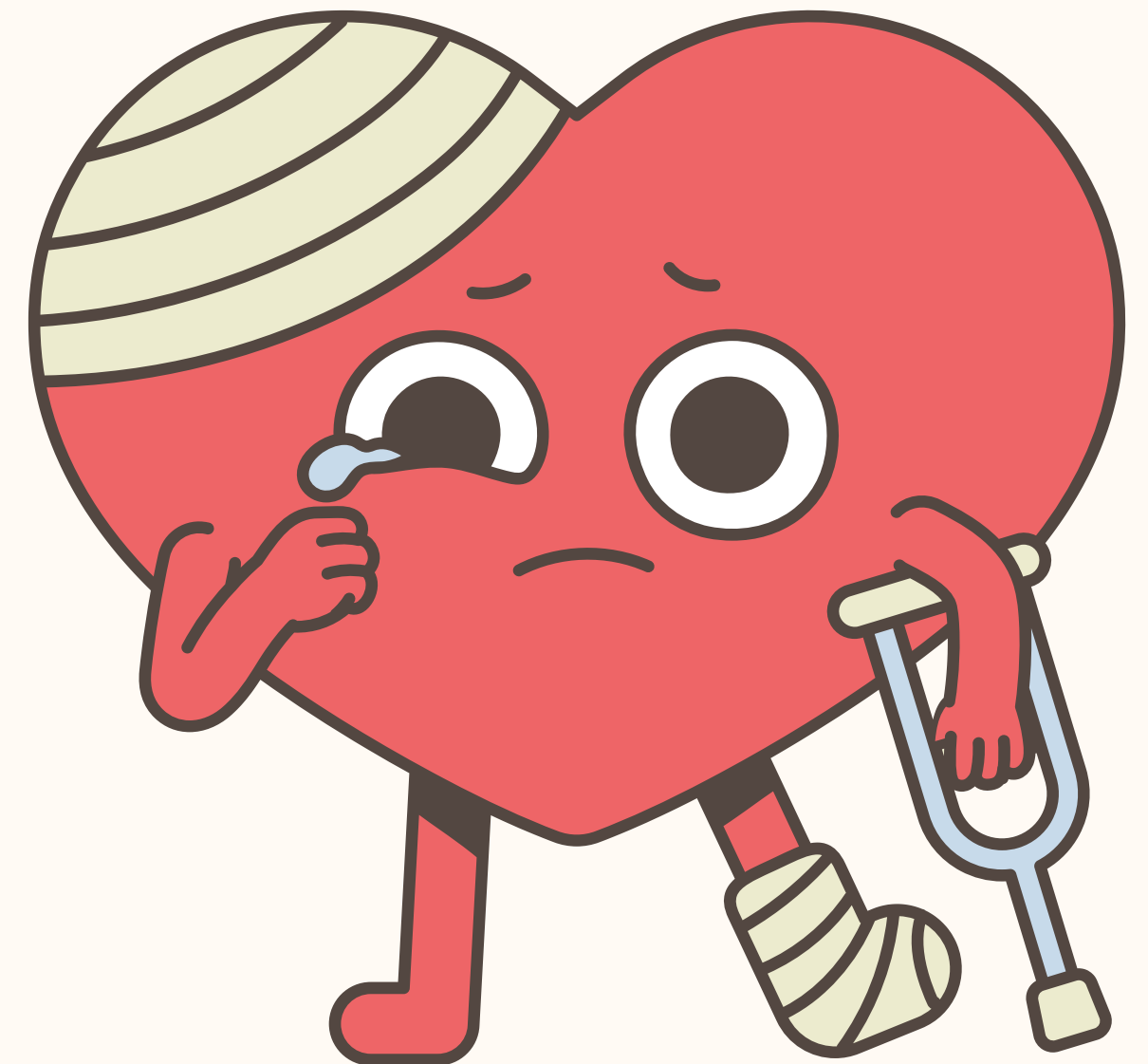
THE IMPACT OF STRESS

Continuing stress response stops being adaptive and starts causing wear and tear on the body and mind (called *allostatic load* - the biological impact of chronic stress)

- Reduced concentration and memory
- Increased anxiety and emotional reactivity
- Poor decision-making and cognitive flexibility
- Elevated blood pressure and heart rate
- Increased inflammation
- Weakened or dysregulated immune function
- Sleep disturbance and fatigue
- Increased risk of obesity, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes

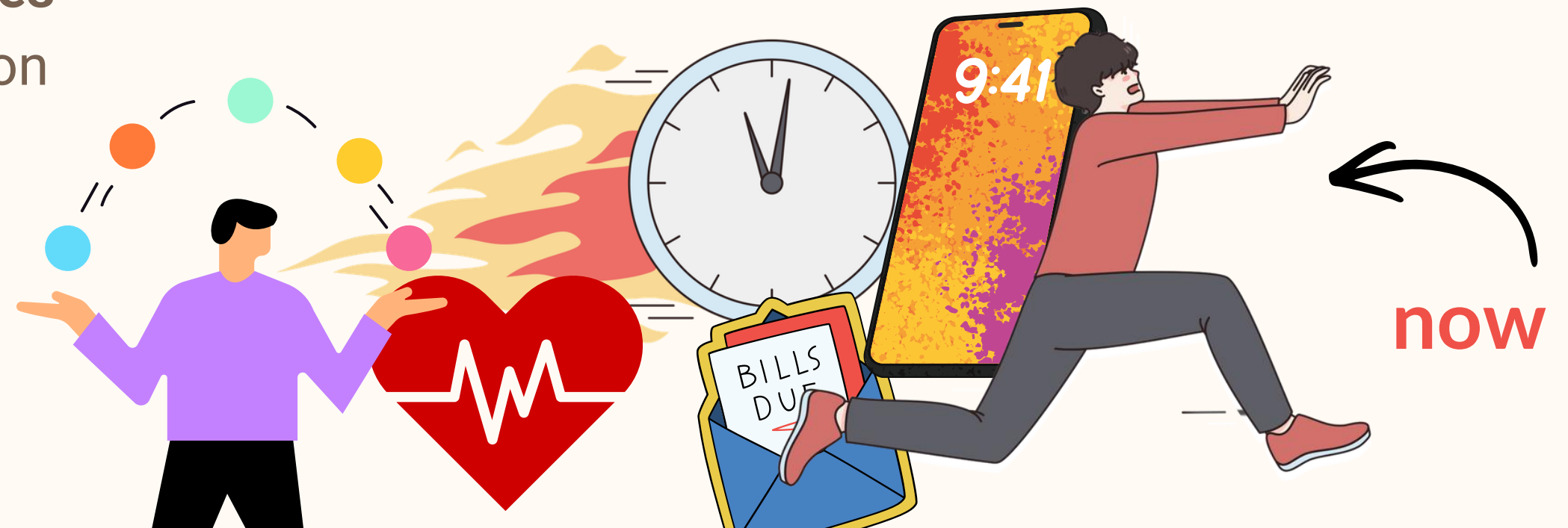
Long-term outcomes

- Higher risk of cardiovascular disease
- Mental health problems (anxiety, depression, burnout)
- Reduced resilience and overall wellbeing



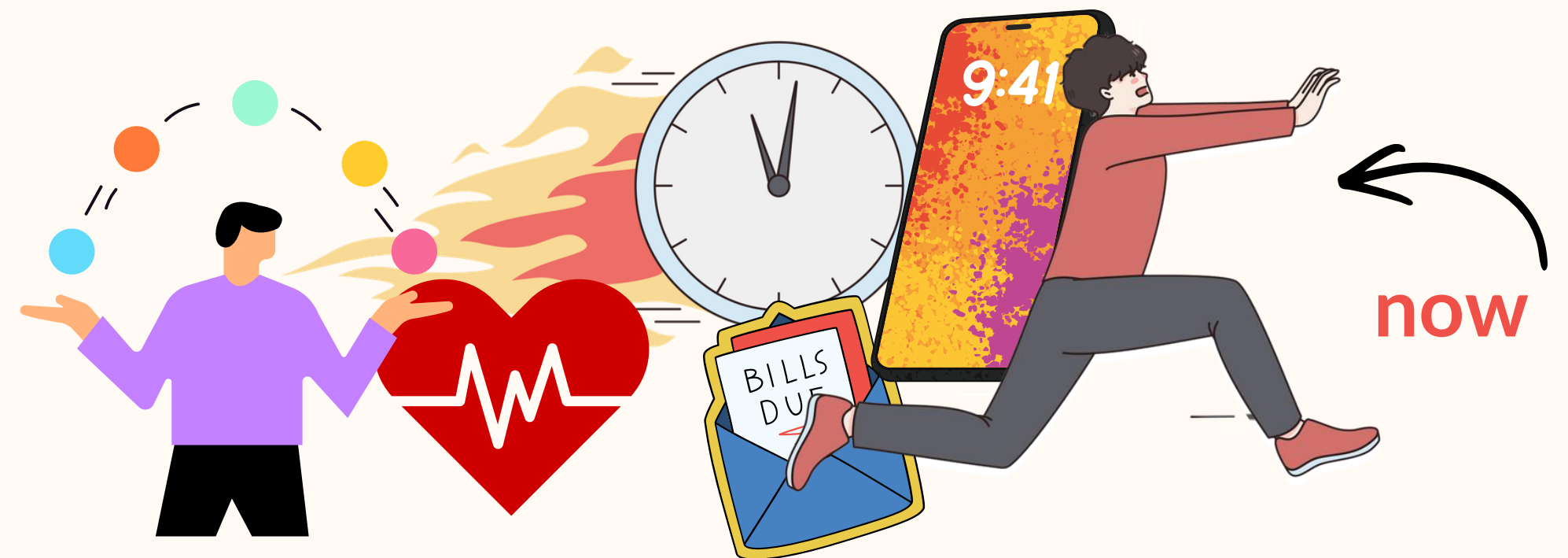
TOP STRESSORS TODAY

- 1) **Financial pressure** - cost of living increases, housing costs, debt, job insecurity, saving for retirement
- 2) **Work and career demands** - heavy workloads, long hours, constant connectivity (email, messaging, notifications), fear of redundancy or automation (will AI take my job?), pressure to continuously learn new skills
- 3) **Health concerns** - chronic illness, caring for aging parents, anxiety and depression fear of serious disease, difficulty accessing healthcare
- 4) **Relationships and family responsibilities** -
 - partner conflict, divorce or separation
 - parenting challenges
 - family disagreements
 - caregiving responsibilities



TOP STRESSORS TODAY

- 5) **Uncertainty about the future** - economic instability... political polarisation... climate change... global conflicts... technological disruption (AI, automation)
- 6) **Information overload and digital life** (a relatively new major stressor) - constant news exposure... social media comparison... endless notifications... fear of missing out (FOMO)... pressure to maintain an online presence
- 7) **Lack of time** - balancing work and family... household management... commuting... personal goals... lack of downtime



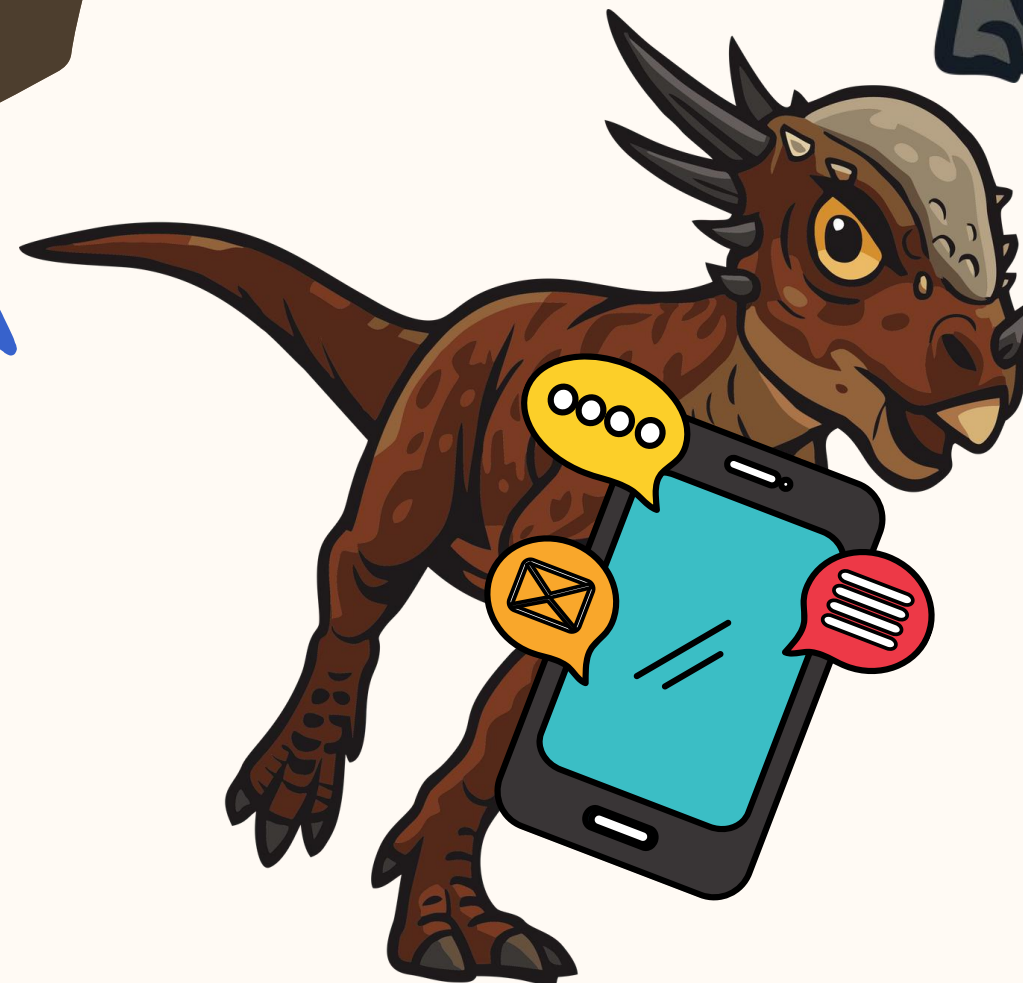
OUR MODERN DINOSAURS...



job
security

world
issues

family
duties



HOW STRESS SHOWS UP

If stress becomes long term (or uncontrollable, unpredictable, inescapable), we might experience the following:

PHYSICAL

- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Digestive problems
- Poor sleep
- Fatigue
- Increased susceptibility to illness

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Rumination

our minds and bodies are drawing attention to something being out of balance



HOW STRESS SHOWS UP

RELATIONAL

- Withdrawal
- Conflict
- Reduced empathy
- Social isolation/loneliness

EXISTENTIAL

- Loss of meaning
- Hopelessness
- Identity disruption - *I don't know who I am anymore, I've lost myself*
- Avoiding life questions - *am I happy, is this relationship working?, do I want this career...?*

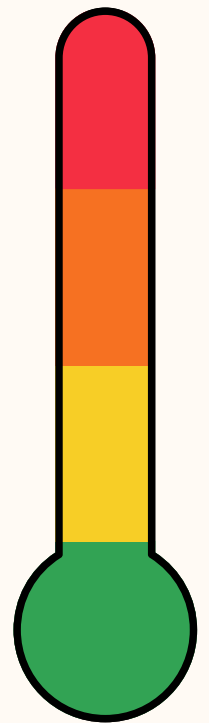


BEHAVIOURAL

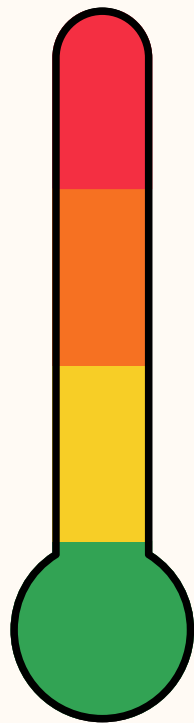
- Overworking
- Avoiding difficult feelings through procrastination... overworking... numbing (scrolling, binge-watching, gaming, shopping, busyness)
- Not making decisions
- Substance use

STRESS TEMPERATURES

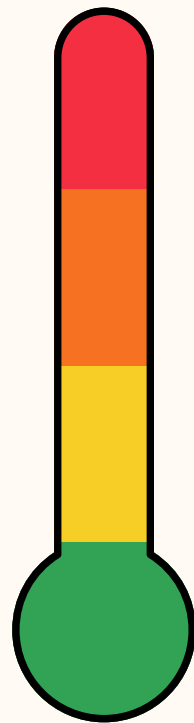
Exercise: What feels stressful today? Draw a line on each thermometer to show how you feel about each area.



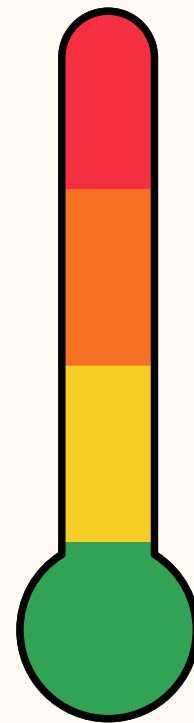
Financial
pressure



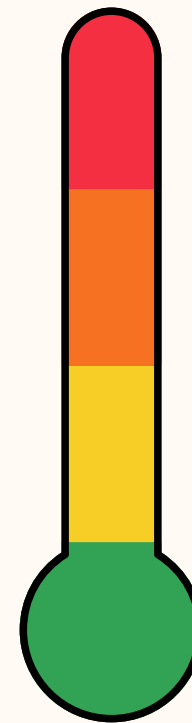
Work/
career
demands



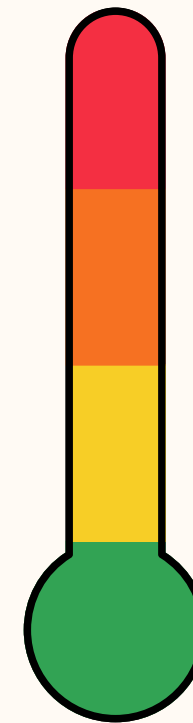
Health
concerns



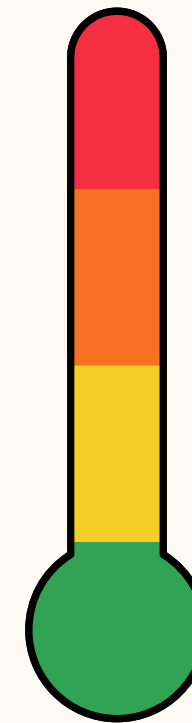
Relationships/
Family
responsibilities



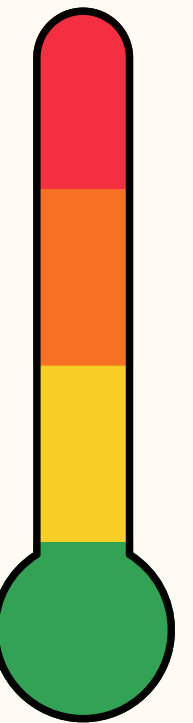
Future
uncertainty



Information
overload

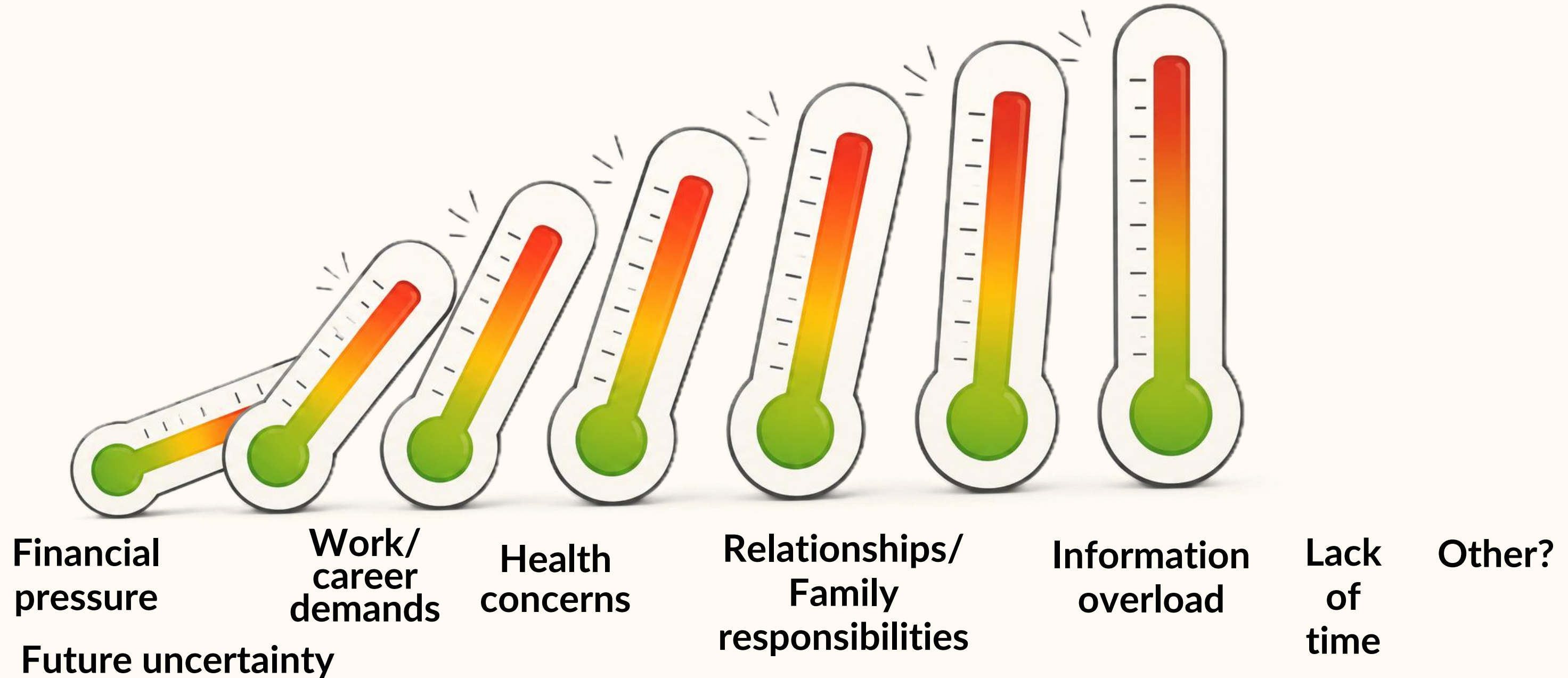


Lack
of
time



Other?

DOMINO EFFECT



Imagine someone who is experiencing financial pressure. They begin to worry about the future and decide to work longer hours to make ends meet. While this may help financially in the short term, it leaves less time for rest, exercise, or managing an existing health condition, which gradually begins to worsen. Feeling exhausted, they have less patience and energy for family life. Relationships begin to feel strained, bringing another source of stress. At the end of the day, they find themselves scrolling on their phone for an hour or two—perhaps trying to reclaim a little time for themselves or simply to switch off. Ironically, this "revenge bedtime procrastination" means they go to bed later, sleep less, and wake up even more tired the next morning.

STRESS SIGNALS

Exercise: What signs are our bodies, emotions or actions giving us?

Physical

- *I can't sleep*
- *I feel tense*
- *My stomach hurts*
- *I'm exhausted*
- *My head hurts*
- *I'm always ill*

Psychological

- *I feel irritable*
- *I am anxious*
- *I feel overwhelmed*
- *I can't concentrate*
- *I can't switch my mind off*

Relational

- *I just want to be alone*
- *People!!!!*
- *I can't see it from your side...I'm too busy surviving*
- *I don't want to see people*
- *I feel alone*

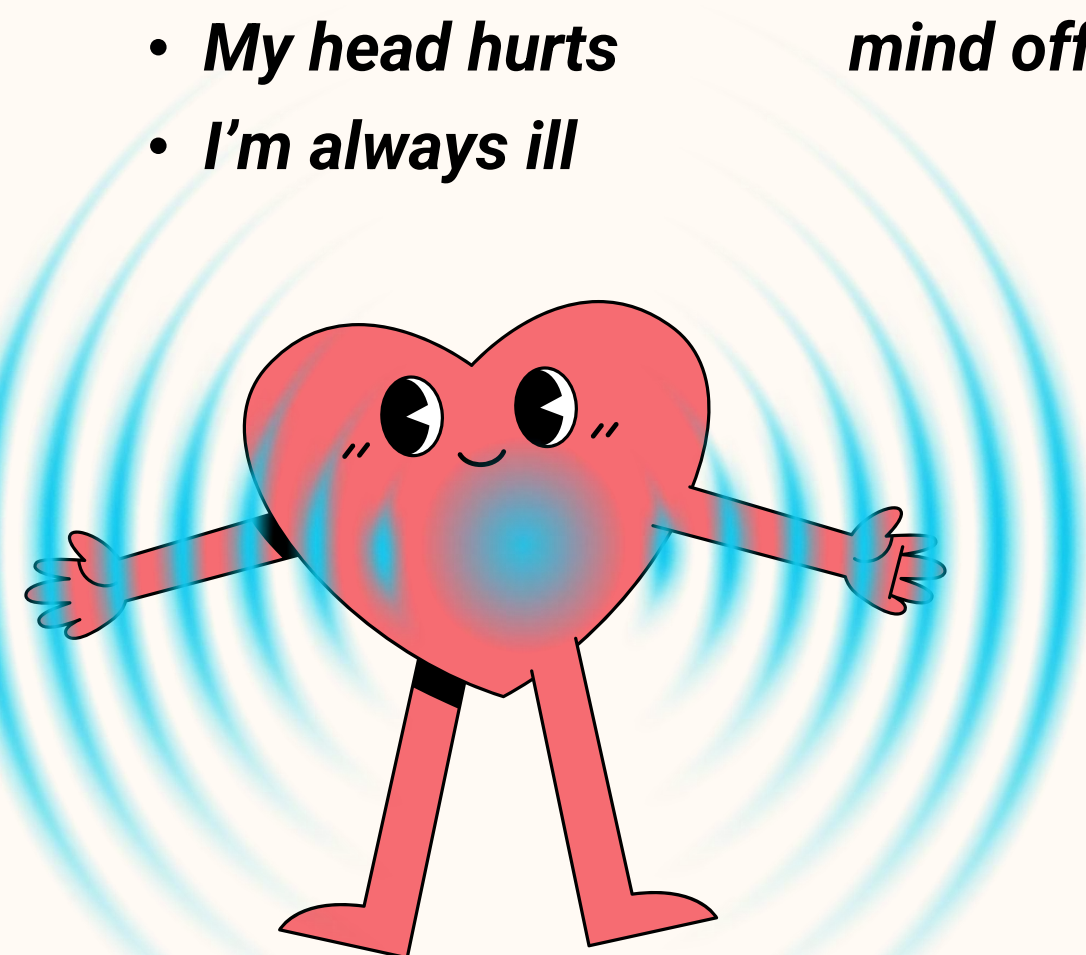
Behavioural

- *I overwork*
- *I distract myself (scrolling, binge-watching, shopping etc)*
- *I procrastinate*
- *I avoid making decisions*
- *I use substances to cope*

Existential

- *I've lost my sense of purpose*
- *I feel hopeless*
- *I don't know who I am anymore*
- *I avoid thinking about what I really want from life*

Other?



BUDDY GROUPS

- Share your own response to the stress temperature and stress signals (if you want to) in breakout rooms
- Or generally discuss what we've learnt so far – what do you see clients struggling with?
- Any 'aha' moments or something that particularly stands out for you?



TIME FOR A

BREAK.



BURNOUT

Burnout is a state of **exhaustion** caused by prolonged stress, when chronic demands exceed the resources, support, recovery time, or control available to a person over an extended period

People with **high stress** may feel:

- over-engaged
- anxious
- hyperactive



People with **burnout** often feel:

- disengaged
- flat
- hopeless
- emotionally depleted



Burnout and depression can look very similar - fatigue, reduced motivation, concentration difficulties, and emotional exhaustion occur in both

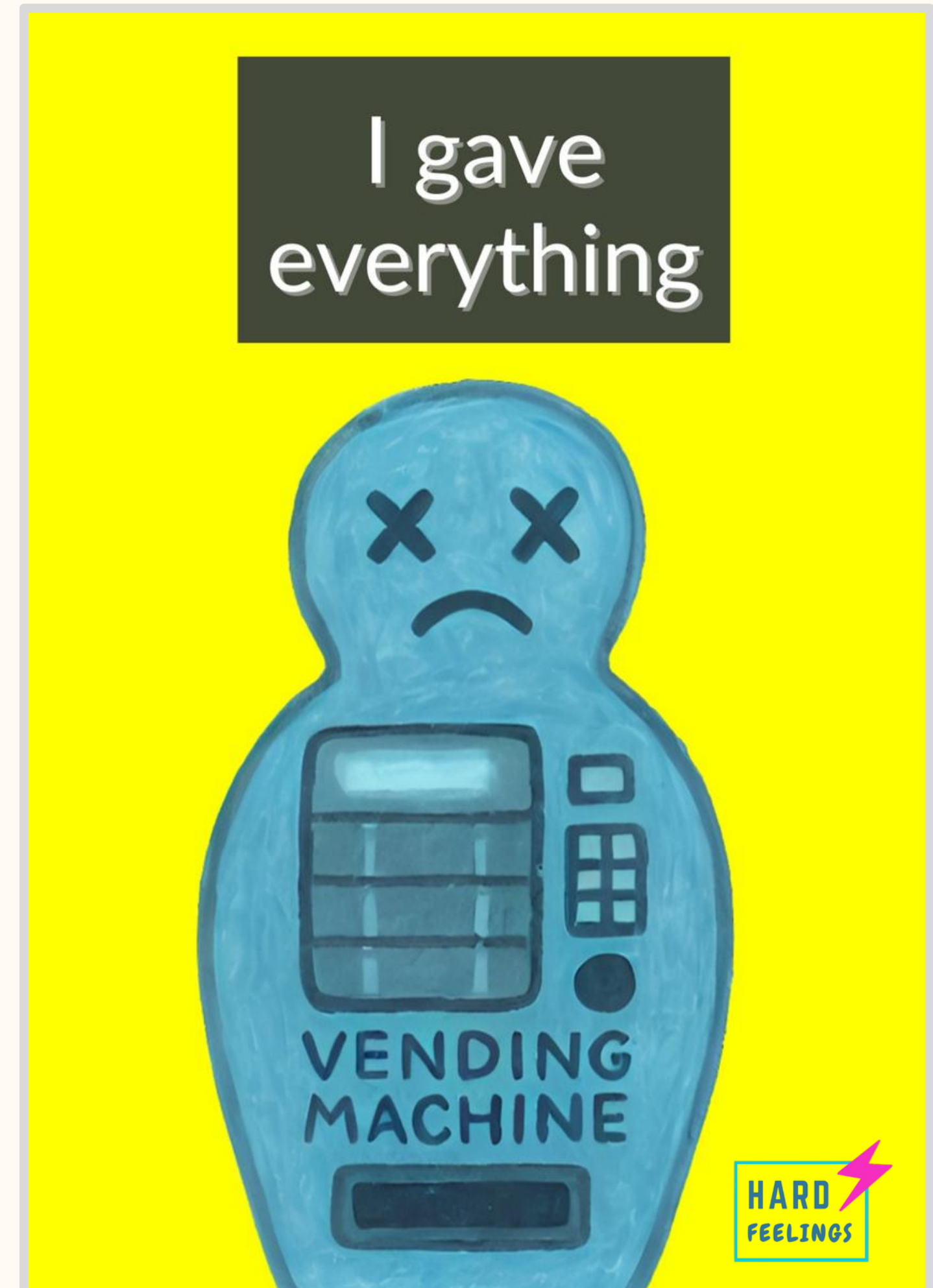
BURNOUT

Psychologist Christina Maslach and colleagues identified three dimension of burnout

1) Exhaustion

Physical, mental, and emotional depletion

Feeling like you have nothing left to give

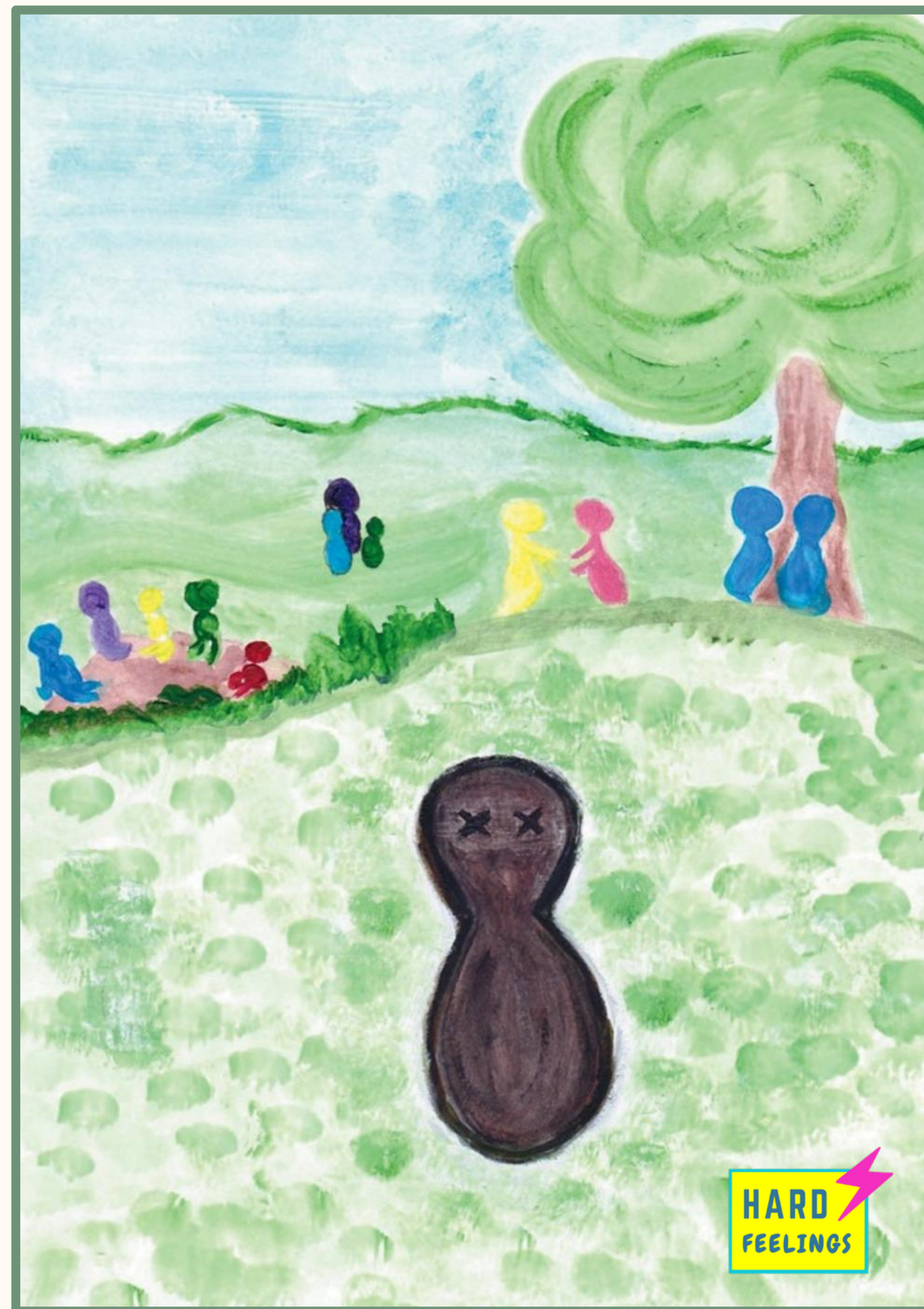


BURNOUT

2) Cynicism or detachment

Becoming emotionally distant from work, people, or responsibilities

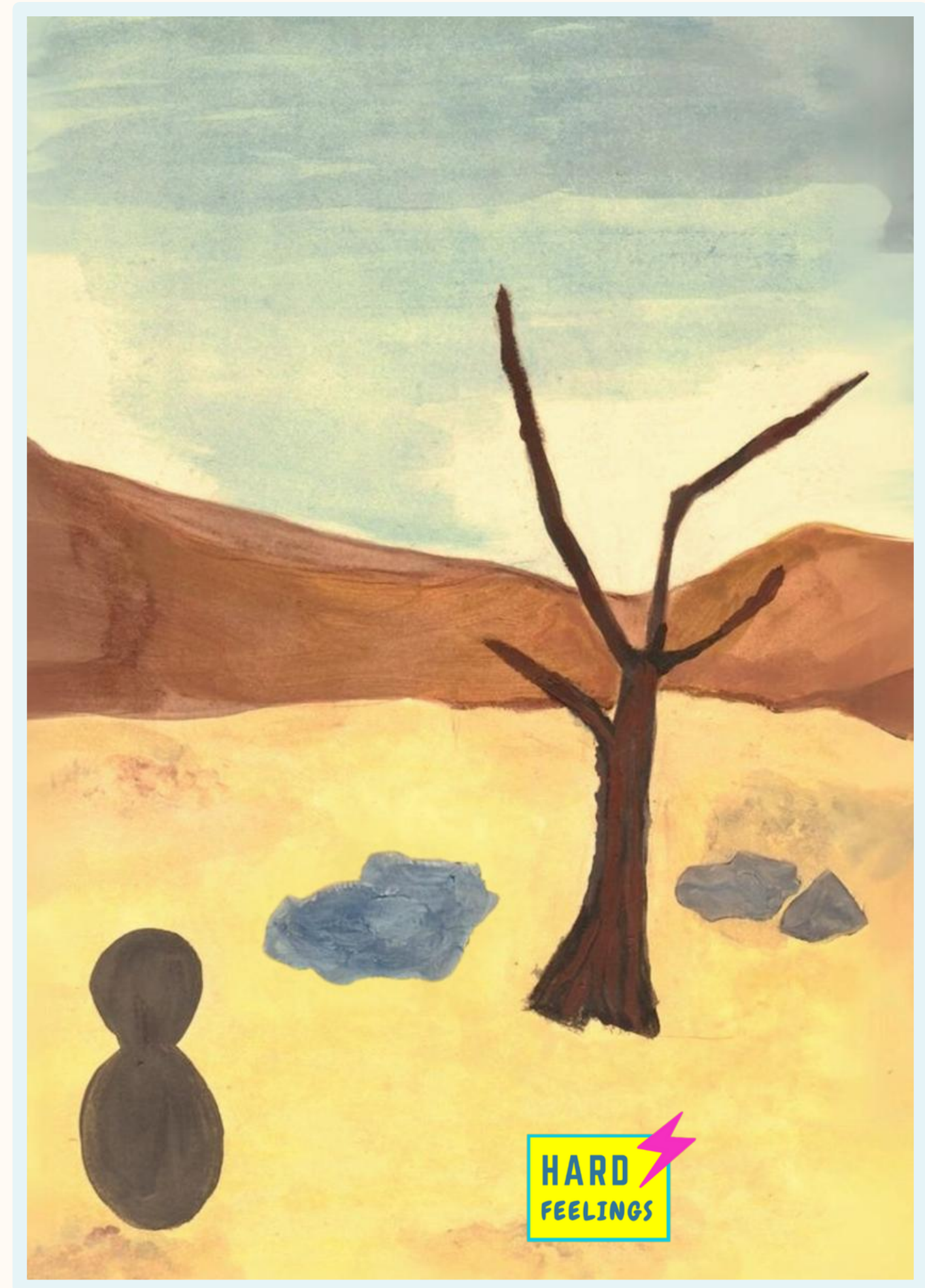
Feeling negative, numb, or disconnected



BURNOUT

3) Reduced sense of effectiveness

Feeling that your efforts don't matter or that you're not accomplishing enough



WHO BURNS OUT?

Age

- Children & adolescents (10–17) High levels: school, exams, peer relationships, and family pressures
- Young adults (18–24) Highest levels of psychological distress - major life transitions and uncertainty
- Adults (25–45) High levels: Work, finances, and family responsibilities
- Older adults (60+) Generally lower stress: greater emotional regulation and life experience

Gender

- Women generally report higher stress levels
- Burnout rates are high in professions where women are over-represented (healthcare, education, social services)
- Men may be less likely to report stress or seek help

Occupation

- Healthcare workers (doctors, nurses, therapists)
- Teachers and educators, Social workers
- Emergency services personnel, Customer-facing workers
- Managers and executives
- Technology workers during periods of intense workload or rapid change



ALSO AT INCREASED RISK

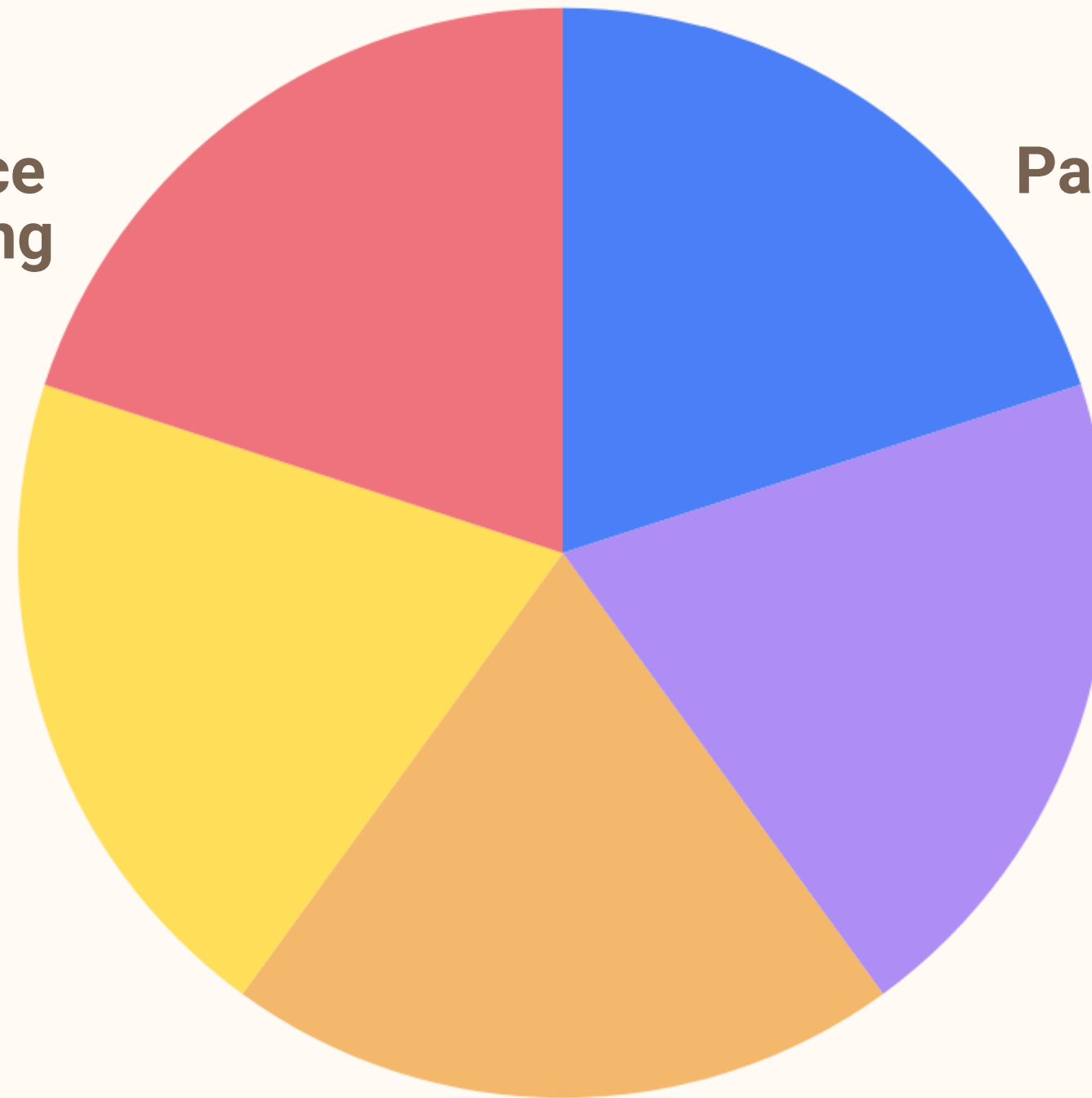
People who experience
perfectionism, worrying

Parents of young children
& caregivers

Minority and
marginalised
groups

People experiencing
financial insecurity

Biological/Neurological difference: e.g. chronic
illness/disability/perimenopause/menopause/
neurodivergence



ONLY A WORKPLACE ISSUE?

The World Health Organisation defines burnout as an occupational phenomenon (not a standalone psychiatric diagnosis) resulting from chronic, unmanageable workplace stress

BUT...!



BURNOUT

- Many of the same stressors occur in unpaid caregiving:
 - Caring for children 24/7
 - Caring for a disabled partner
 - Supporting an elderly parent with dementia or chronic illness
 - Supporting other family members
- Also managing a household under financial pressure. And there are probably many other responsibilities we can think of
- In reality, many people work in an occupation, and/or carry out unpaid work



WHAT ABOUT “NERVOUS BREAKDOWN”?

- Not an official diagnosis, but we still might hear ‘nervous breakdown’.
- It is usually used to describe a period of overwhelming psychological distress in which a person temporarily struggles to function in everyday life
- May struggle to sleep, get out of bed, parent, work, socialise, eat etc

Healthy challenge



Chronic stress



Exhaustion



Burnout



Severe burnout, major depression, anxiety disorder, panic disorder or collapse in functioning ("nervous breakdown")

If a client uses the terms ‘burnout’ or ‘nervous breakdown’ we of course seek to understand what this uniquely means to them

THE SLOW BURN OF BURNOUT

Burnout develops gradually

Early stage

- Working harder to keep up
- Feeling under pressure
- Reduced recovery between demands

Middle stage

- Emotional exhaustion
- Increasing irritability
- Loss of motivation
- Sleep disruption

Later stage

- Cynicism (detached, negative, indifferent)
- Emotional numbness
- Feeling detached from work or life
- Difficulty functioning normally



BURNOUT RISKS

Research has found several conditions that make burnout more likely

1. Demands exceed resources

When the workload, emotional demands, or responsibilities consistently exceed the time, energy, support, or skills available to meet them

- Too much work, constant interruptions, caregiving responsibilities
- *Emotional labour* - term coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild to describe jobs where people are expected to display certain emotions regardless of how they actually feel
- For example, flight attendant remaining cheerful with a difficult passenger; therapist staying present and compassionate despite feeling tired



2. Lack of control

Humans tolerate stress much better when they have some autonomy. Burnout risk rises when people feel trapped or powerless

- Micromanagement
- Unpredictable schedules
- No say in priorities



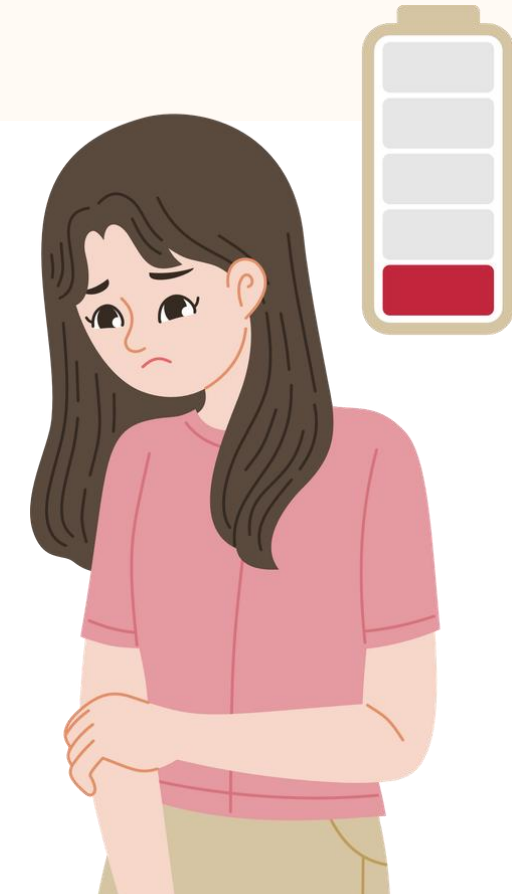
BURNOUT

3. Insufficient recovery

Stress itself is not necessarily the problem. The problem is stress without adequate recovery

Recovery involves:

- Sleep
- Leisure
- Social connection
- Psychological detachment from work



4. Mismatch between values and reality

People burn out faster when they care deeply about something but repeatedly can't do it the way they believe it should be done

- Teachers unable to teach effectively because of bureaucracy
- Healthcare workers unable to provide the care they believe patients deserve
- Employees pressured to sacrifice quality for speed



BURNOUT

5. Lack of recognition or fairness

- People handle difficult work better when they feel respected, appreciated, and treated fairly
- The same workload can feel different depending on whether someone feels valued



6. Social isolation

- We are social creatures. Supportive relationships act as a buffer against stress. Isolation removes that protection.



COUNSELLORS

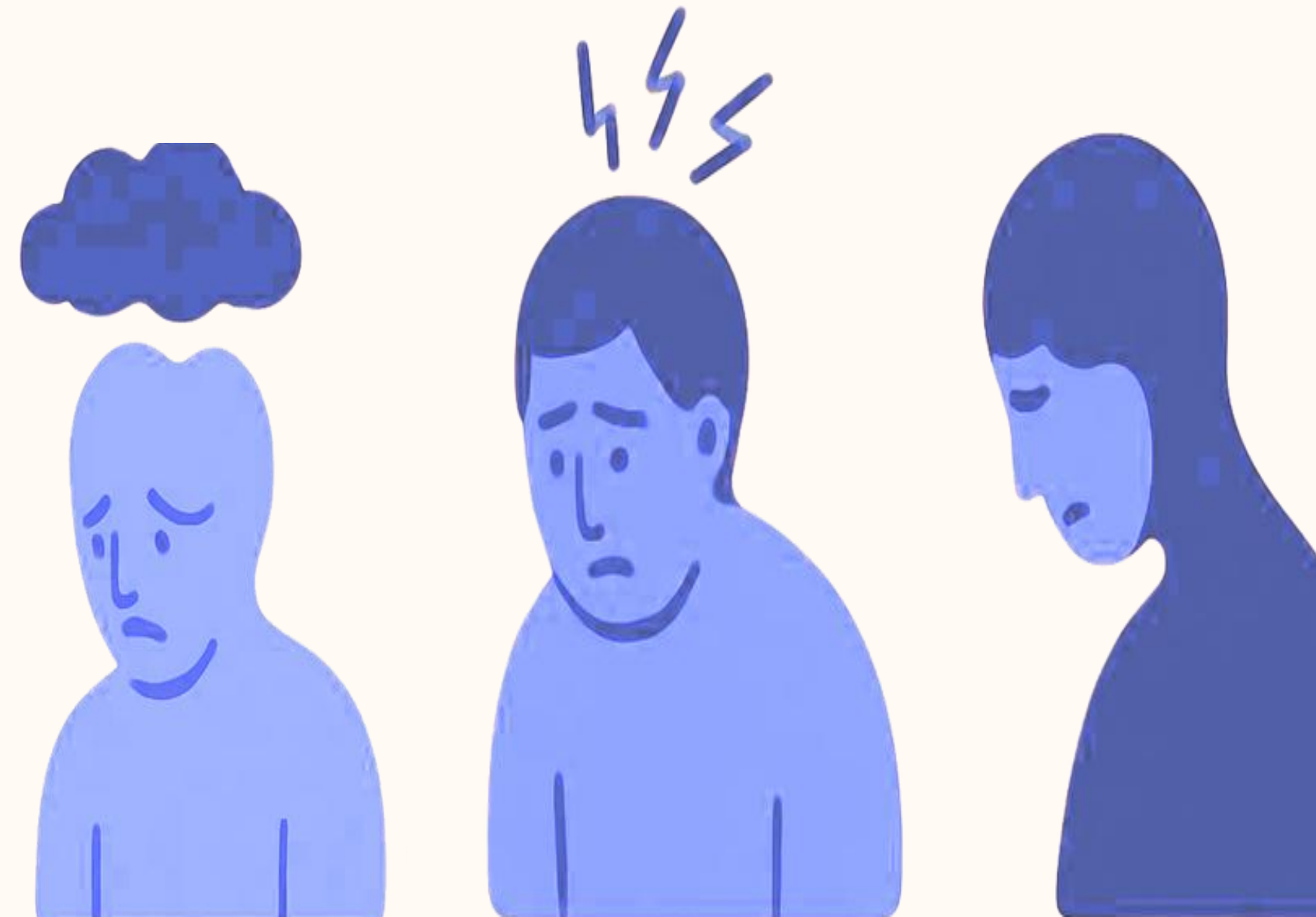
- Counsellors and psychotherapists face elevated risks of stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress.
- Burnout can negatively affect practitioner wellbeing, therapeutic relationships, empathy, and client outcomes

Main signs of burnout

- Emotional exhaustion (most common symptom)
- Feeling drained after sessions
- Reduced empathy or increased detachment
- Lower sense of professional accomplishment

Key risk factors

- High caseloads and workload
- Exposure to client trauma/distress
- Administrative demands
- Lack of supervision (we might include poor supervision)
- Lack of peer support
- Poor work–life boundaries
- Isolation and limited autonomy
- Personal stressors or mental health difficulties

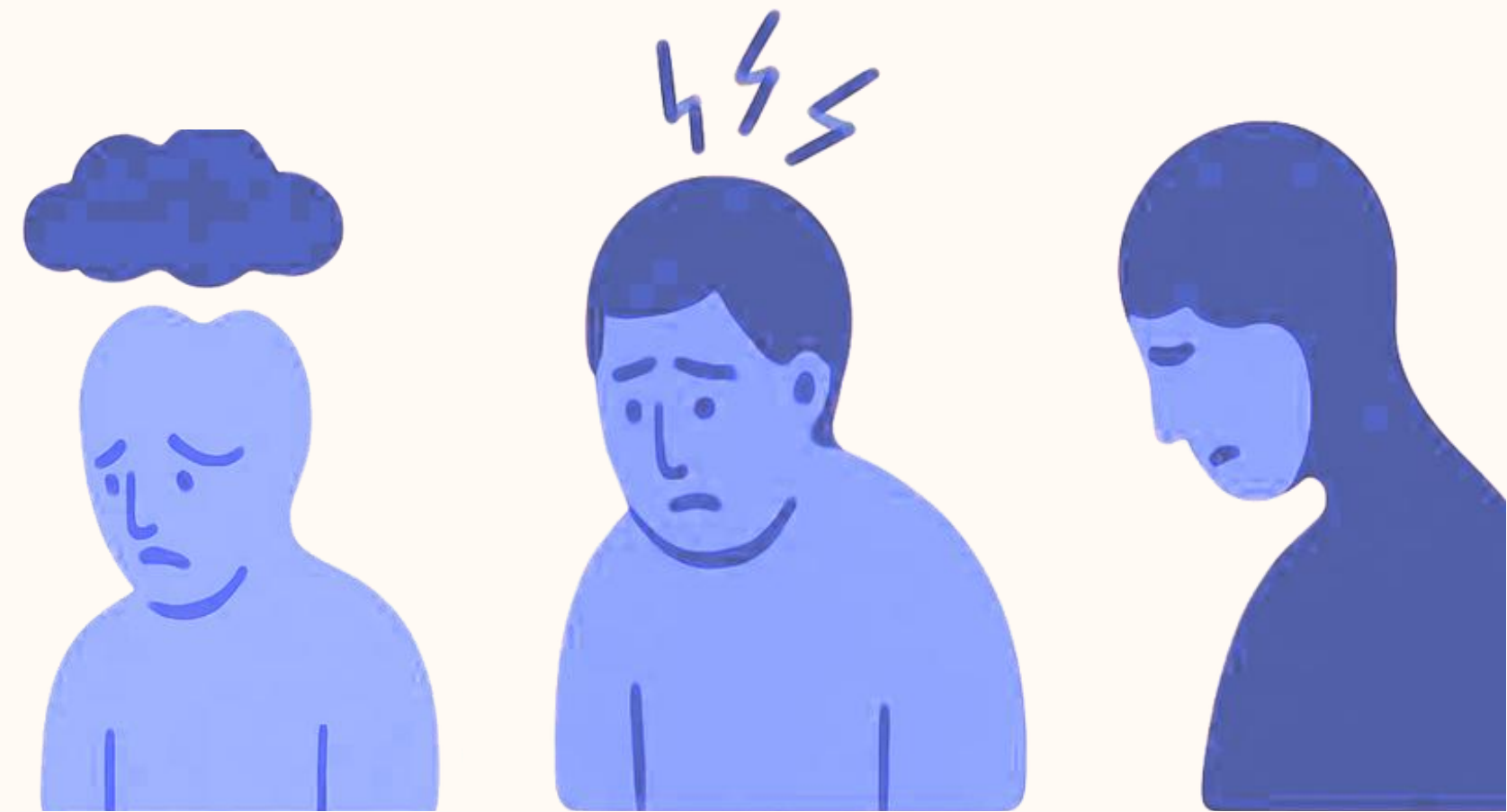


COUNSELLORS

Newly qualified counsellors often experience higher stress while building confidence, skills, and professional boundaries.

Protective factors

- ✓ Regular supervision
- ✓ Strong peer support networks
- ✓ Clear work–life boundaries
- ✓ Exercise and leisure activities
- ✓ Mindfulness and self-awareness practices
- ✓ Ongoing professional development
- ✓ Adequate rest and time away from client work



Van Hoy & Rzeszutek, 2022; Lee et al., 2020; McCormack et al., 2018; Duncan & Pond, 2025).

PAUSE AND REFLECT

DRAW YOURSELF AS A PLANT

- HOW'S IT DOING?
- DOES IT NEED MORE LIGHT?
- SOME WATER?
- A DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT?
- A LARGER POT?
- FEEDING?
- A LITTLE SUPPORT?
- IS ONE LEAF THRIVING WHILE ANOTHER LOOKS TIRED?
- DOES IT SIMPLY NEED TIME TO RECOVER?



BUDDY GROUPS

- Share your own response to the plant drawing
- Or generally discuss what we've learnt so far - what do you see clients struggling with?
- Any 'aha' moments or something that particularly stands out for you?



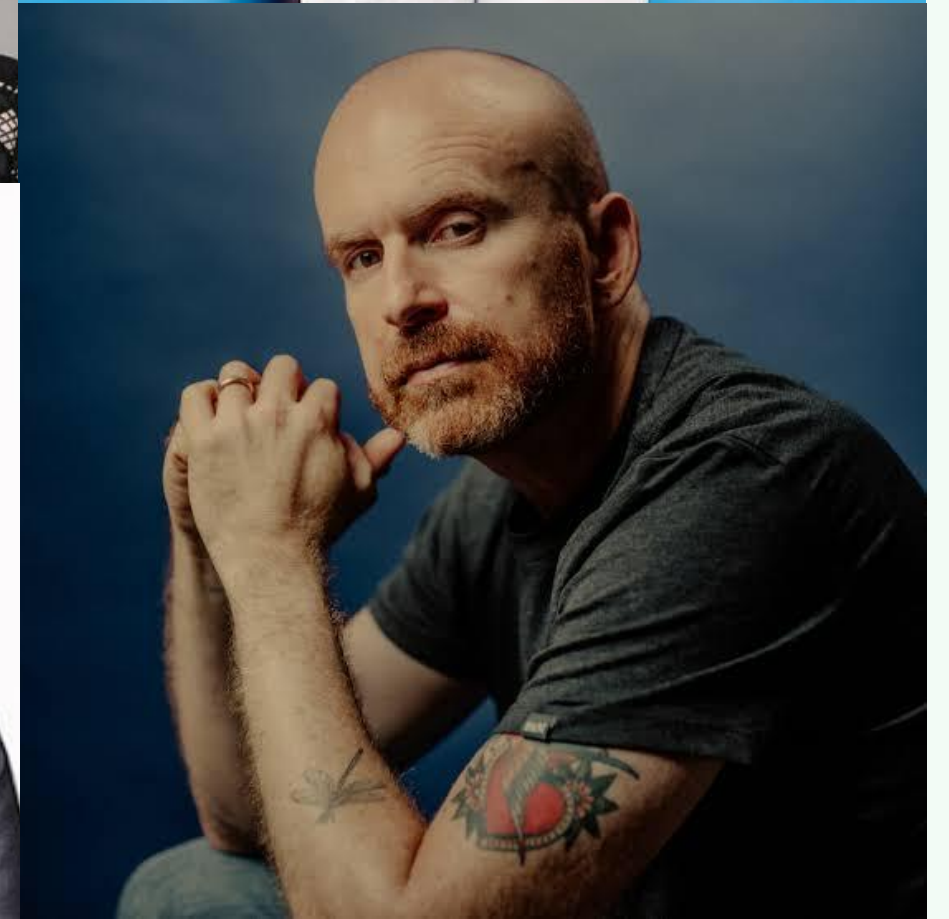
TIME FOR A

BREAK.



RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

- Arianna Huffington – The Collapse That Changed Everything
- Brené Brown – When Emotional Exhaustion Became Unsustainable
- Simone Biles – Choosing Mental Health Over Medals
- Emma Thompson – Learning to Say No to Constant Work
- Matt Haig – Breaking Down Before Finding a Way Forward



WHAT IS SHOWN TO HELP

- Recovery usually takes longer than might be expected (months not days)
- Recovery often comes in stages (small shifts and not always linear)
- Depends on addressing both recovery (sleep, stress reduction, psychological recovery time) and the causes (workload, lack of control, values conflict, insufficient support)



1) Prioritise recovery

Adequate sleep, genuine breaks, and enjoyable activities that allow **mental detachment** from work and responsibilities

2) Address the source of stress

Identify recurring stressors and reduce, delegate, postpone, or renegotiate them where possible

3) Protect sleep

Consistent, sufficient sleep is one of the most effective ways to recover

WHAT IS SHOWN TO HELP

4) Move regularly

Moderate exercise such as walking, cycling, or strength training

5) Practice mindfulness or relaxation

Regular mindfulness, meditation, or similar practices

6) Maintain social support

Connection with supportive friends, family, or colleagues is associated with better stress recovery and lower burnout risk

7) Temporarily lower overall demands

Reducing commitments and avoiding additional responsibilities can create the space needed for recovery



BUT SELF-CARE IS OFTEN NOT SIMPLE...

We may have two (or more) conflicting, internal voices:

"Work is exhausting me... but I should be able to cope."

"I matter too... but everyone else comes first."

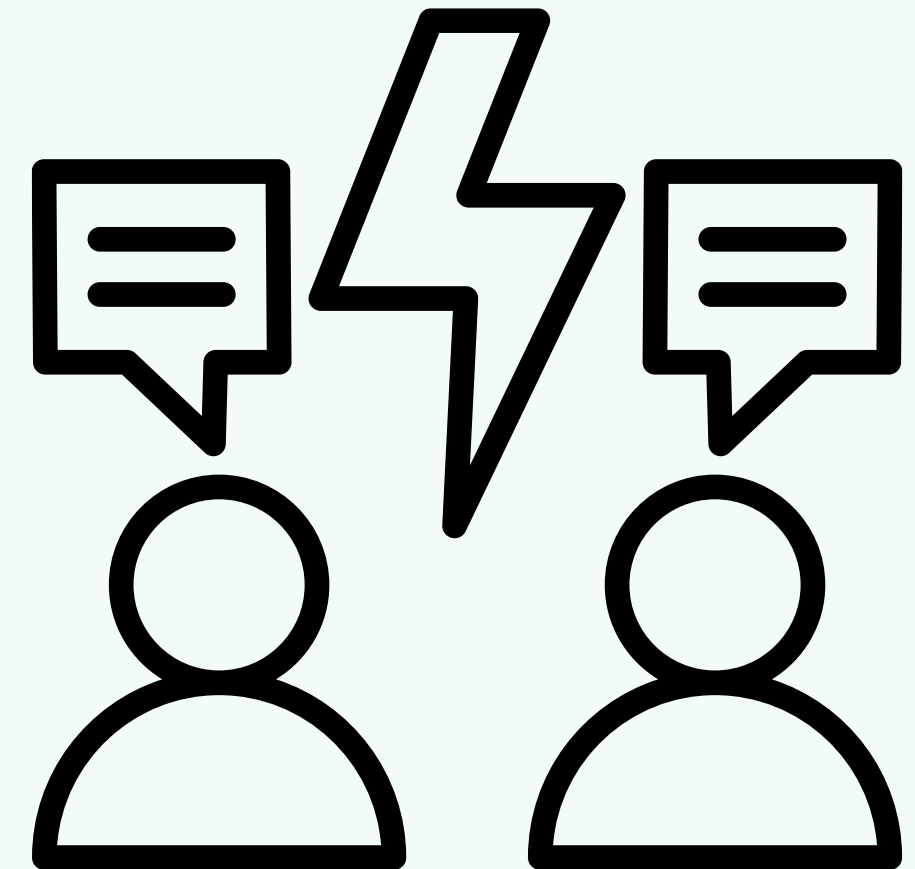
"I know I need to slow down... but that would be letting people down."

"I'm overwhelmed... but asking for help feels like failure."

"I need rest... but I haven't earned it."

"I can't carry on like this... but I don't know who I'd be if I stopped."

"If I know what to do and I'm still not doing it, there must be something wrong with me."



LISTENING TO BURNOUT - A PERSON-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE

INNER COMPASS (ORGANISMIC VALUING PROCESS)

Work is exhausting me...

I matter too...

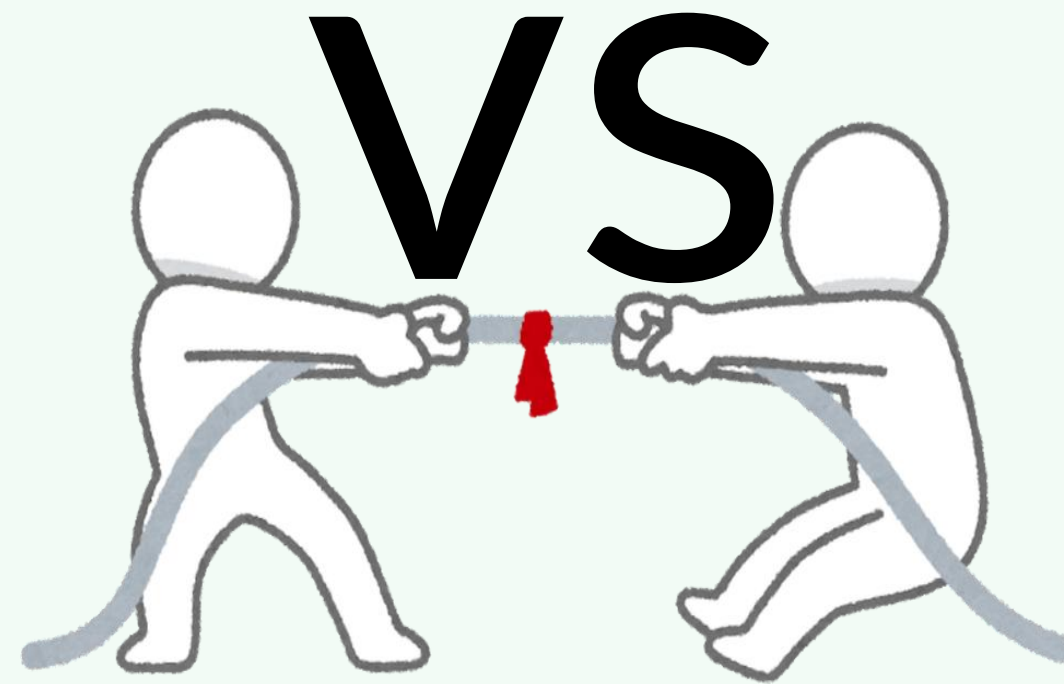
I know I need to slow down...

I'm overwhelmed...

I need rest...

I can't carry on like this...

I know what to do



CONDITIONS OF WORTH

I should be able to cope

Everyone else comes first

I would be letting people down

Asking for help feels like failure

I haven't earned rest

I don't know who I'd be if I stopped

There must be something wrong with me

THE ACTUALISING TENDENCY IS OUR INNATE DRIVE TO GROW AND FLOURISH. THE OVP IS THE INNER COMPASS THAT GUIDES THIS DRIVE, HELPING US RECOGNISE WHAT NURTURES OUR WELLBEING AND WHAT TAKES US FURTHER FROM OUR AUTHENTIC SELVES.

CONDITIONS OF WORTH - THE EXTERNAL EXPECTATIONS, APPROVAL, AND CRITICISM THAT DISTORT THE COMPASSES' DIRECTION - LIKE MAGNETIC INTERFERENCE

CONDITIONS OF WORTH

- Like a soup we swim in, made up of past and present conditioning (and there are potentially always new 'ingredients' being added):
- Parents and caregivers
- Teachers and authority figures
- Peers
- Culture and society
- Media and advertising
- Social media
- Workplaces



LISTENING TO BURNOUT

- So the challenge is often not a lack of knowledge, but deeply ingrained beliefs that make self-care or change feel selfish, unsafe, undeserved or even impossible
- We find similar ideas across approaches (TA's scripts, drivers and injunctions, Gestalt's introjects and 'shoulds' - all disrupt authentic living and can lead to burnout)
- Trying to grow and then encountering our conditioning has been likened to the discomfort of hitting our head on a ceiling

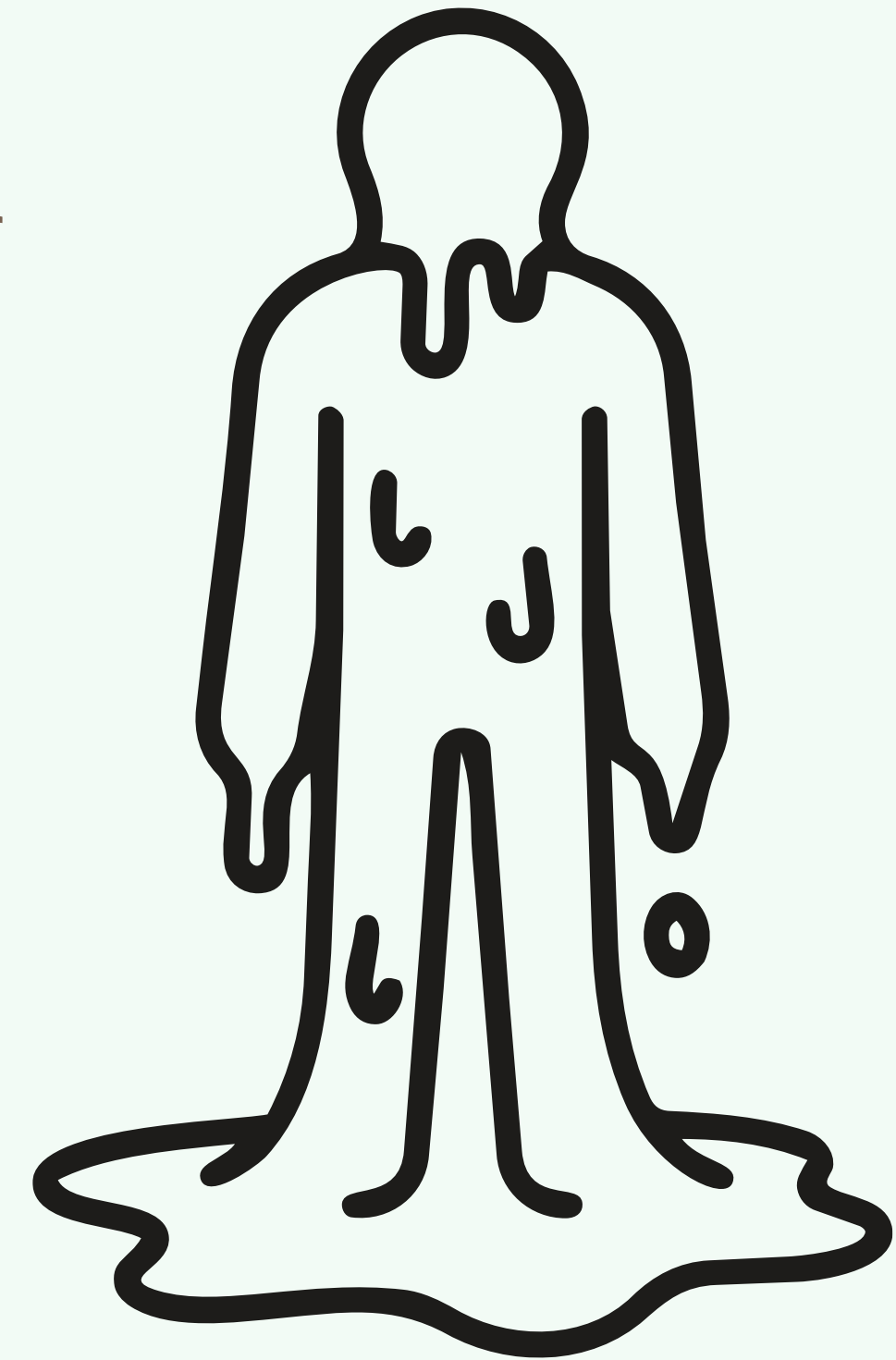


"The process of the good life (following the actualising tendency) is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be."

- Carl Rogers - On Becoming a Person (1961)

DISSOLVING CONDITIONS OF WORTH

- We are potentially asking people to challenge deeply held beliefs about their identity, purpose, relationships, careers - the very structures of their life
- Empathy for the struggle - and potential pain - (patience with the 'yes...buts!') Small changes, two steps forward, one step back...
- Unconditional Positive Regard
- Congruence
- Potentiality, Post Traumatic Growth, Natural growth and dissolving of conditions of worth



DISSOLVING CONDITIONS OF WORTH

Rather than being directed towards change, clients are empowered to listen to their stress and burnout to:

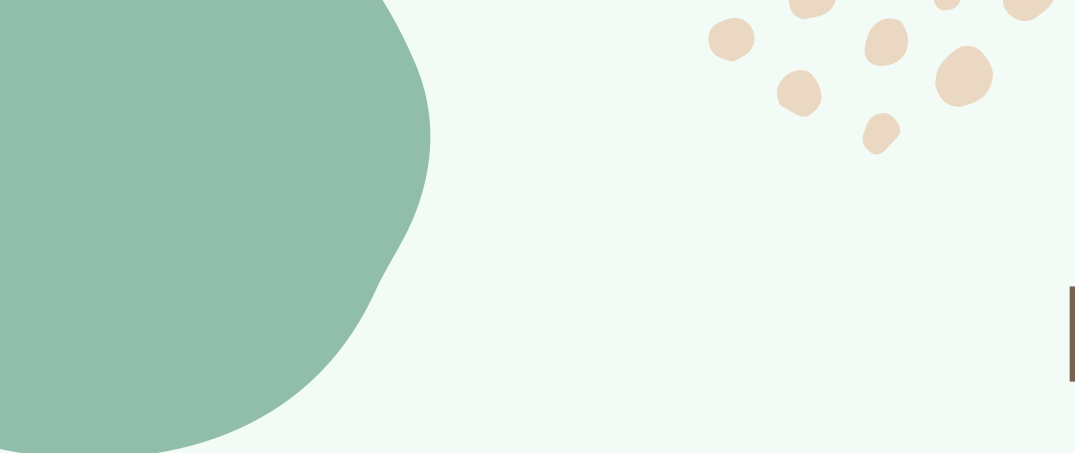
- Reconnect with their authentic feelings, needs and values
- Develop greater self-acceptance and self-compassion
- Trust their own capacity to make choices that promote wellbeing
- The aim is not simply recovery from burnout, but facilitating personal growth by helping clients to give themselves permission to rest and practise self-care
- Live more congruently with their own values rather than external expectations or conditions of worth (connect to their own internal locus of evaluation, or inner compass)
- A note about our own conditions of worth around helping clients change



TIME FOR A

BREAK.



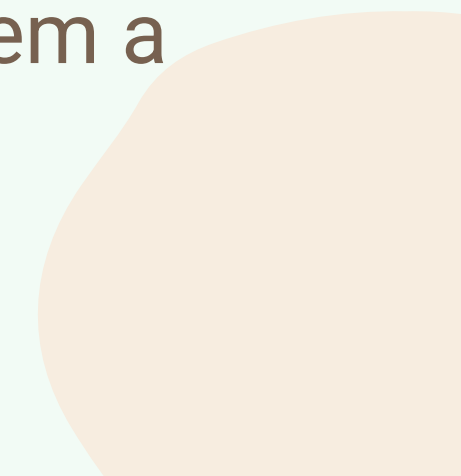


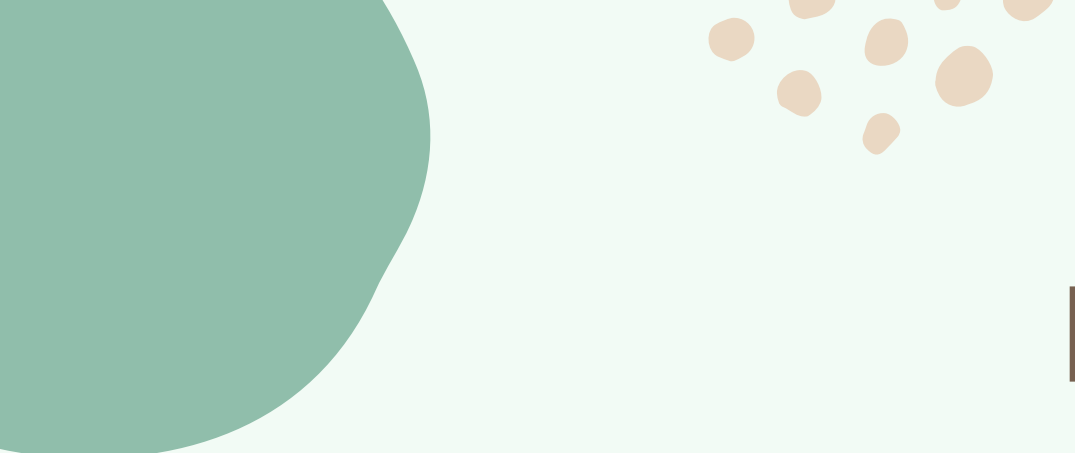
LISTENING TO OUR BODY

Draw it out

- Draw an outline of a body (front and back) or use a body template
- Colour in the different areas on the body that 'spoke' to you during the body scan

You may have noticed feelings of tension or pain, discomfort or achiness, or pleasure and relaxation.

- Which colours, shapes or strokes best represent the different sensations that you became aware of?
 - If these areas could speak, what would they be saying?
 - Draw a speech bubble from each one and using your non-dominant hand give them a voice/and or note any feelings attached to them.
- 



LISTENING TO OUR BODY

Have a chat

Select the body part/sensation that is speaking the loudest or that grabs your curiosity the most and have a conversation with it.

With your dominant hand ask the following questions:

- Who or what are you?
- How do you feel?
- What is causing you to feel this way?
- What can I do to help you?
- What are you here to teach or tell me?

Allow the body part/sensation to have a voice by answering with your non-dominant hand. Stay open to the process – try not to ‘think’ too hard about it, rather feel your way and see what comes up – you may be surprised!

After you’ve finished the exercise tune in to your body and notice any shifts or changes.



BUDDY GROUPS

- Share your own response to body dialogue exercise
- Or generally discuss what we've learnt so far - what do you see clients struggling with?
- Any 'aha' moments or something that particularly stands out for you?





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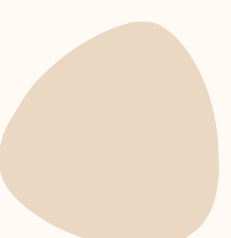
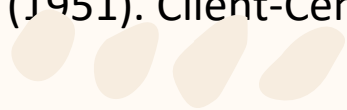
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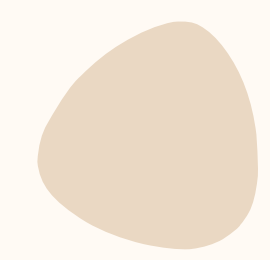
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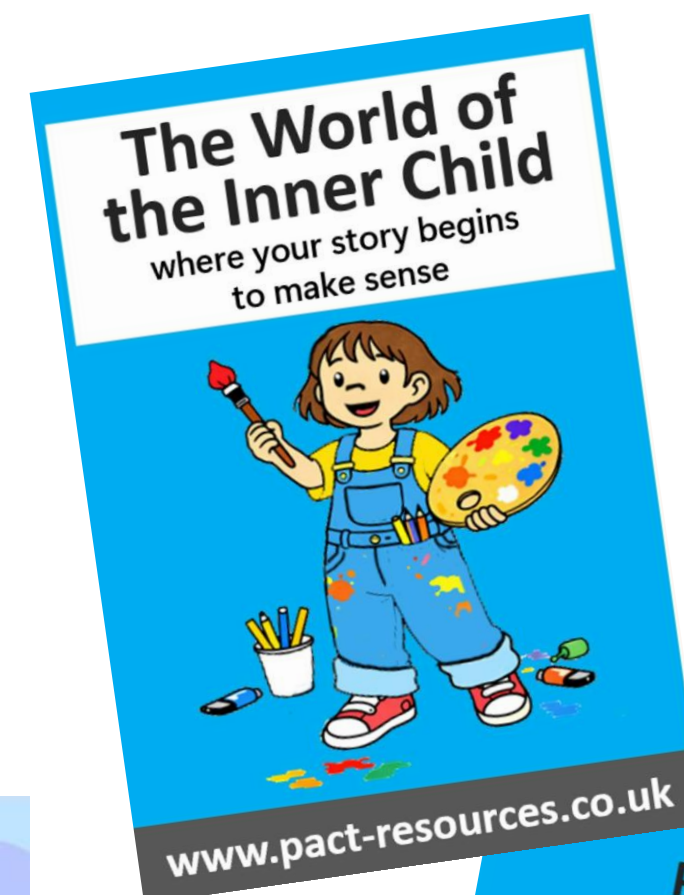
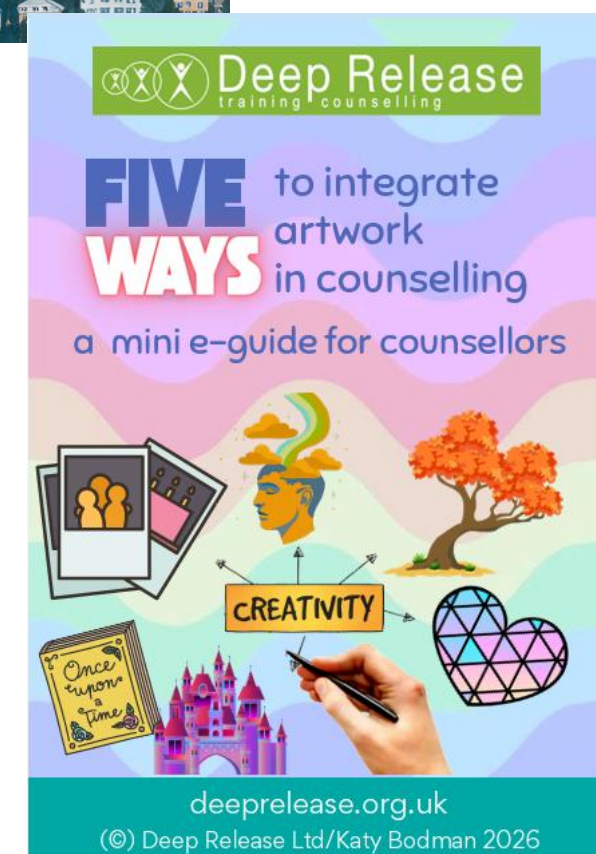
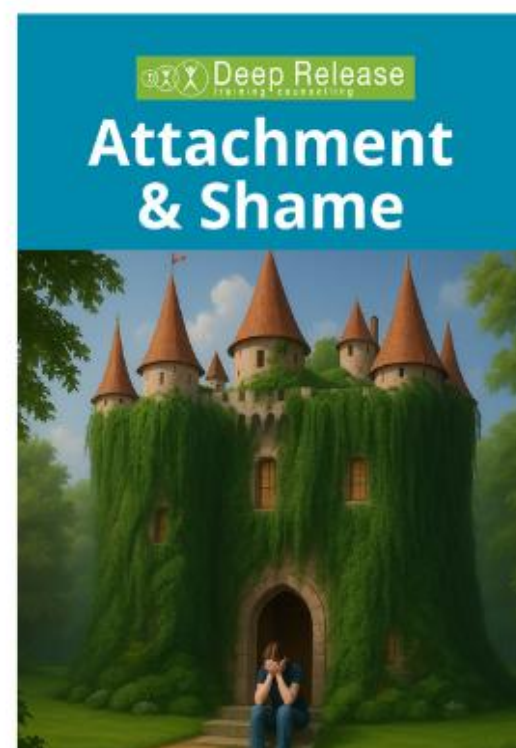
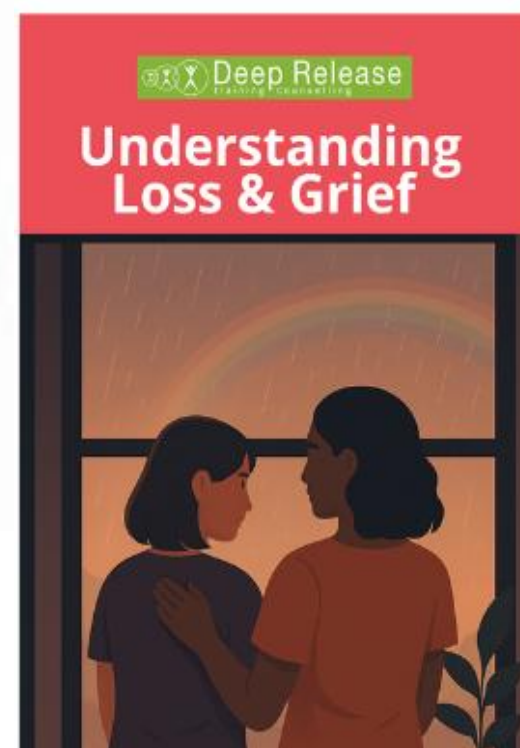


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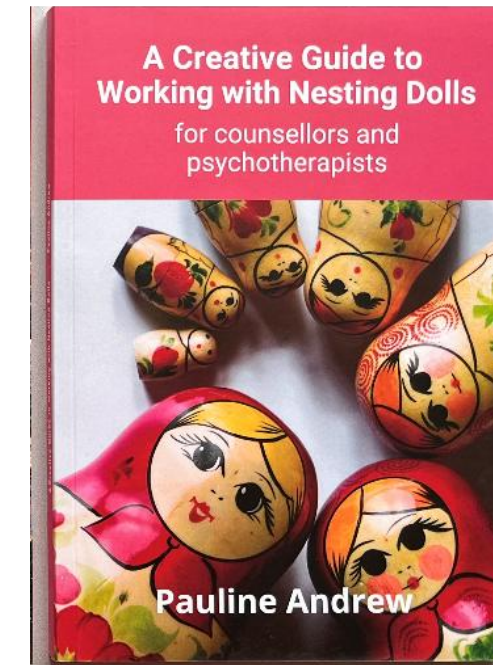


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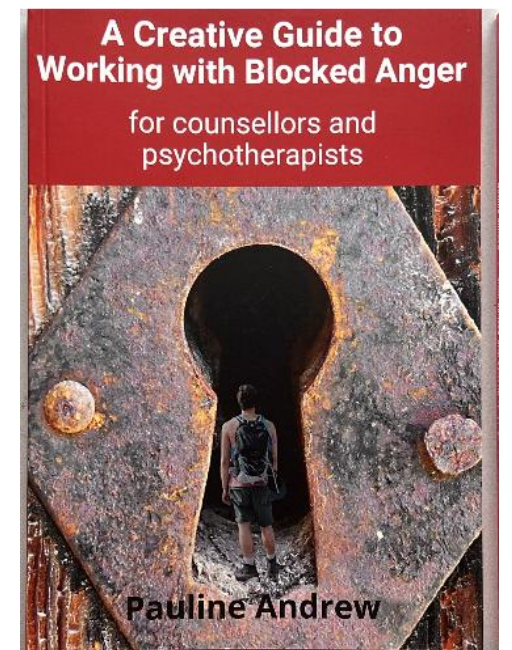
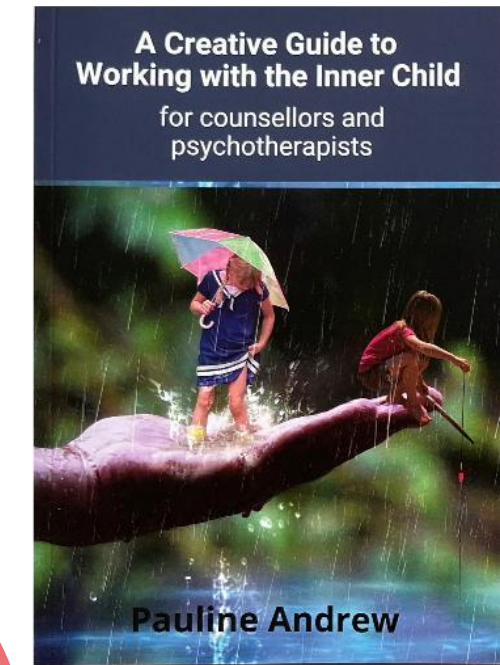
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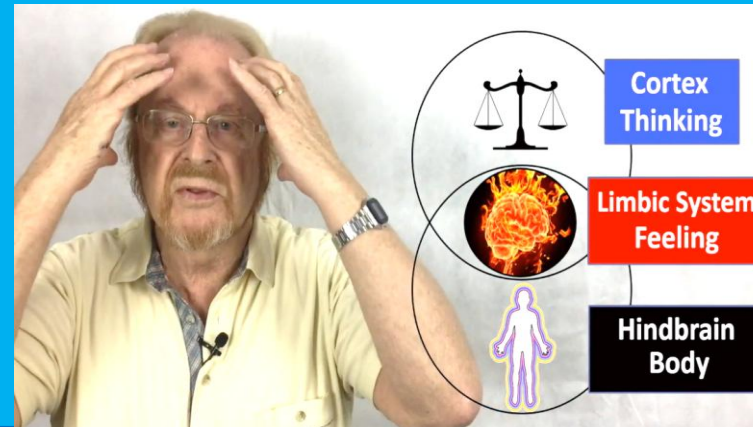


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Left and Right Brain



The Top Down Brain



Catch Up



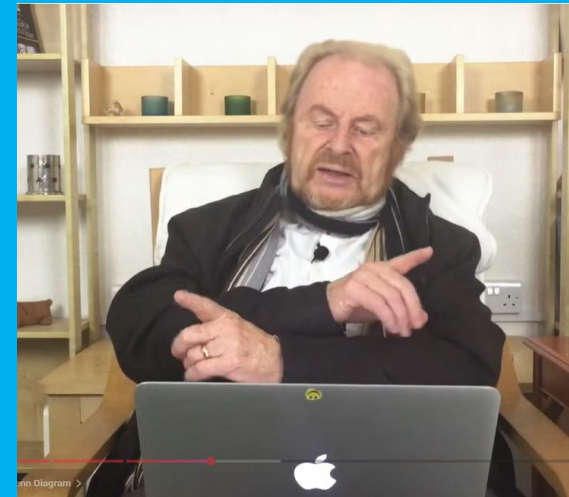
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Objective
Prose
Particular
Analyse
By the book
Hardware
Law
Quantitative
Zoom in

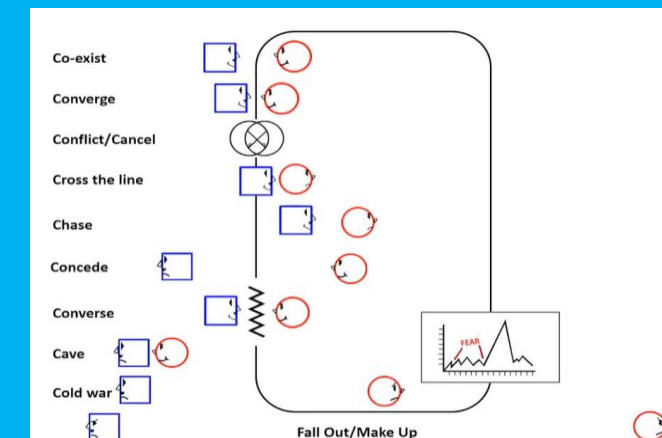


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