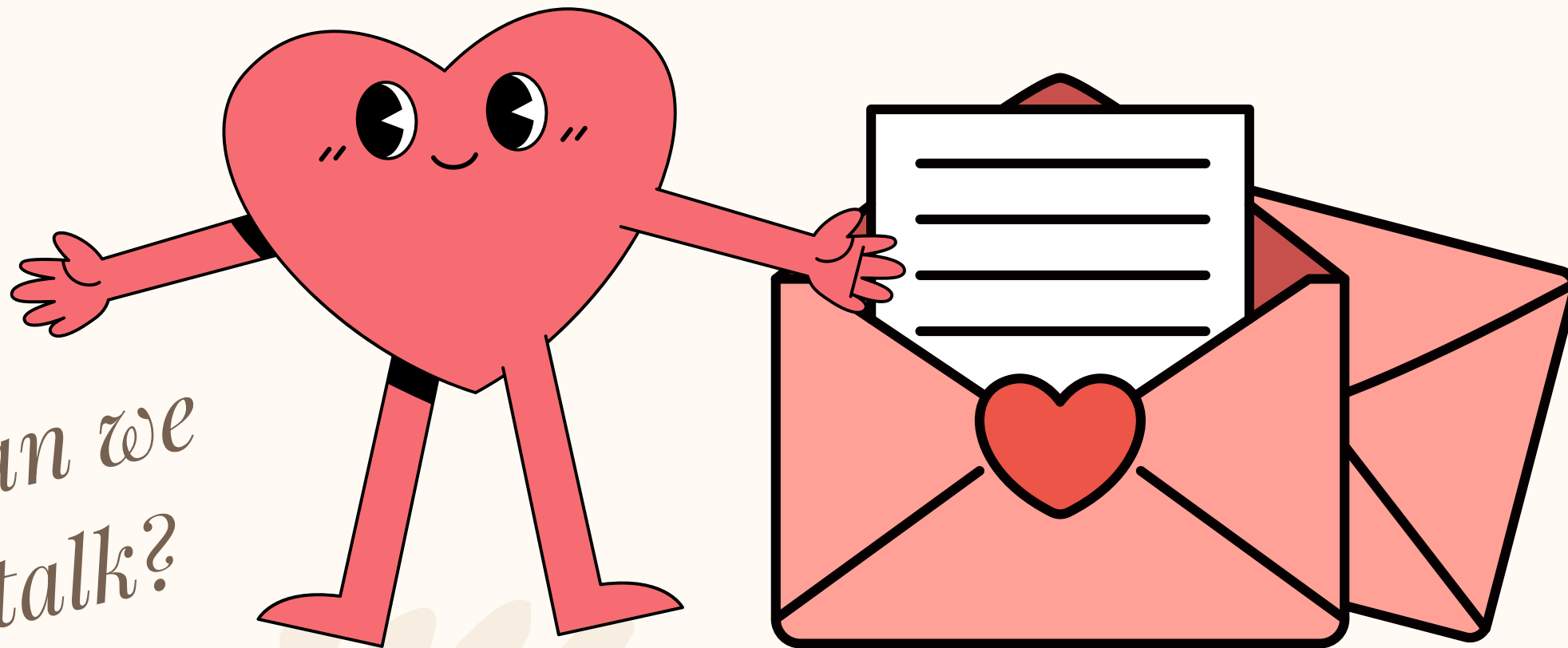


*Counsellors Together*



**WEEKEND**

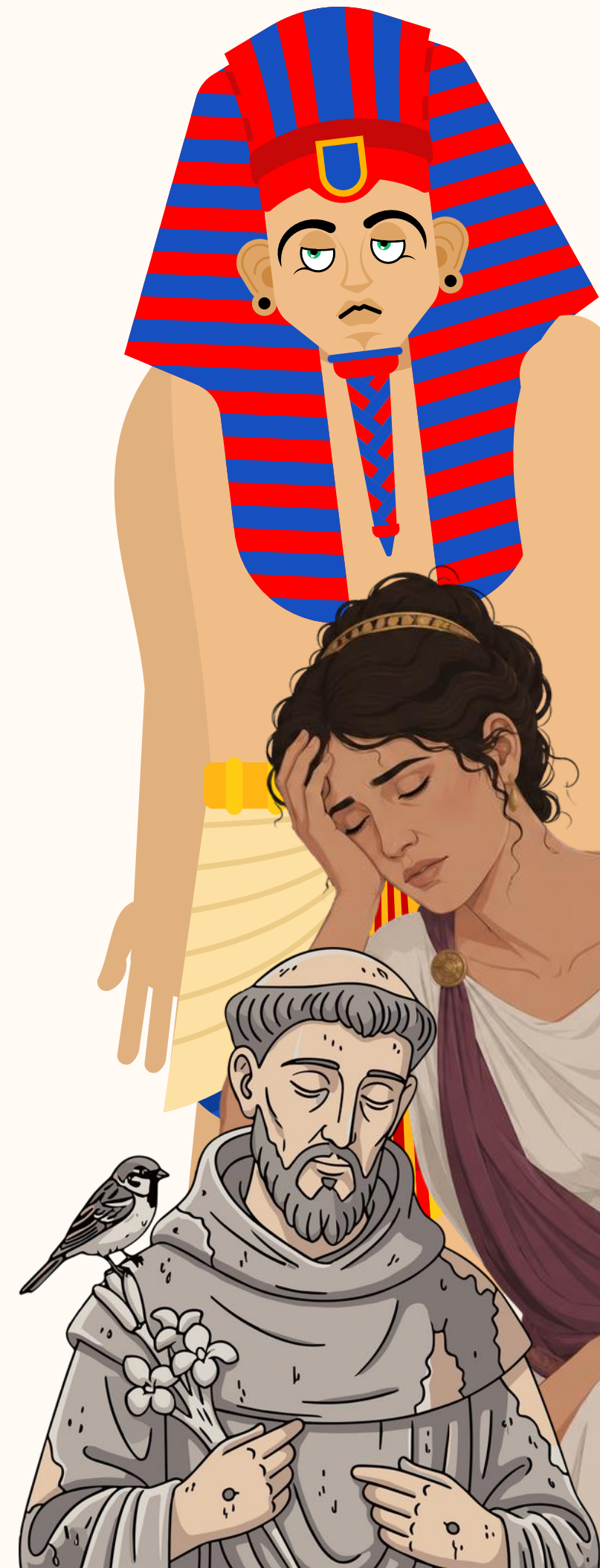
# KEEPING THE FLAME ALIVE



*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
- Mediaeval 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



# 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



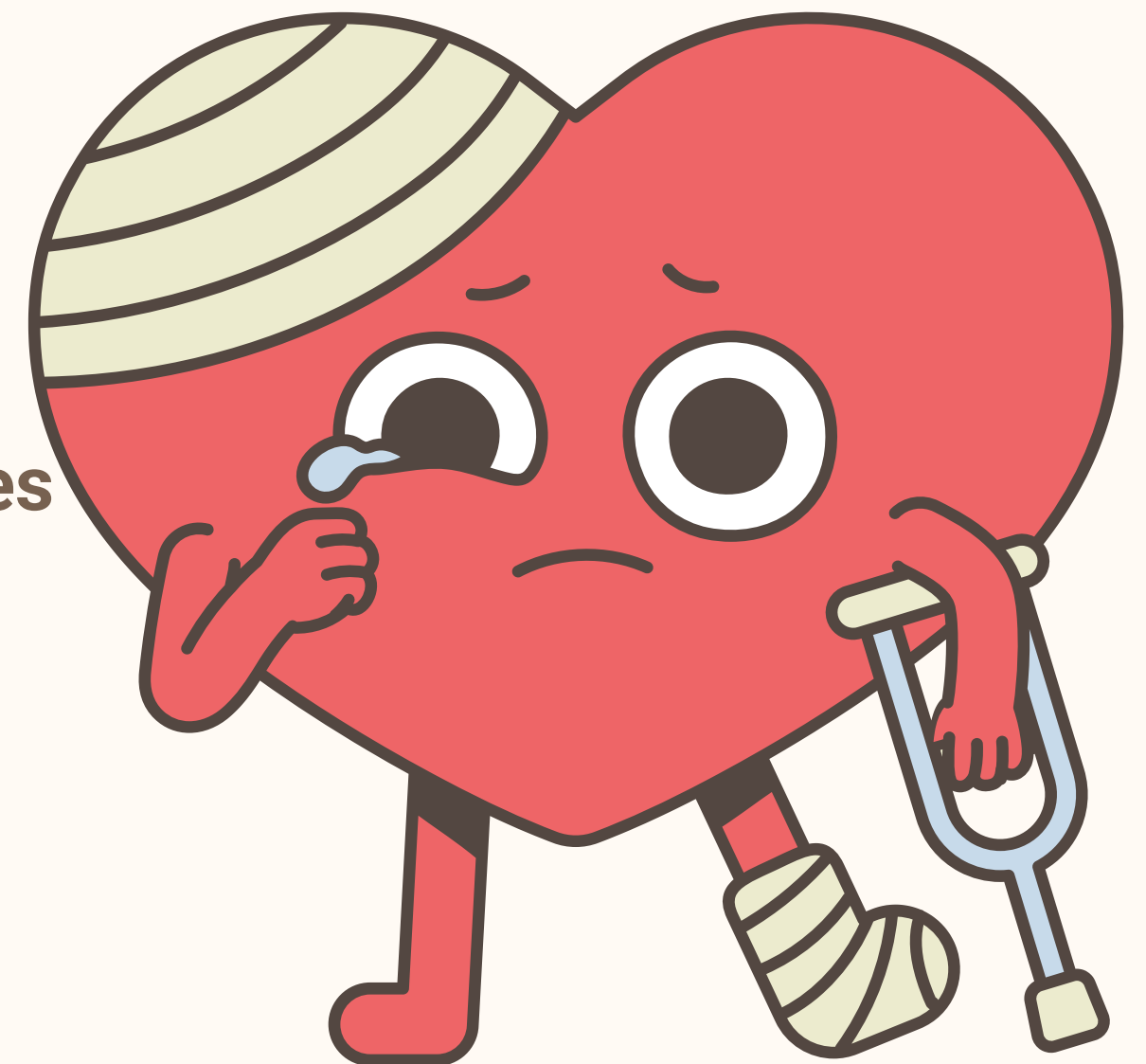
# THE IMPACT OF STRESS

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



# OUR MODERN DINOSAURS...



# 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

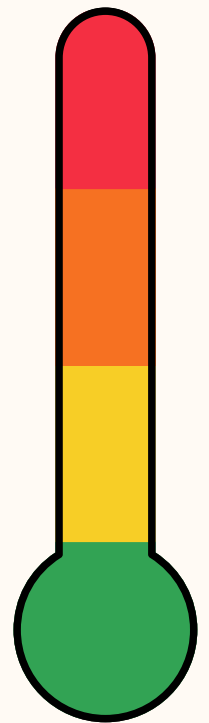
- *I've lost my sense of purpose*
- *I feel hopeless*
- *I don't know who I am anymore*
- *I avoid thinking about what I really want from life*

Other?

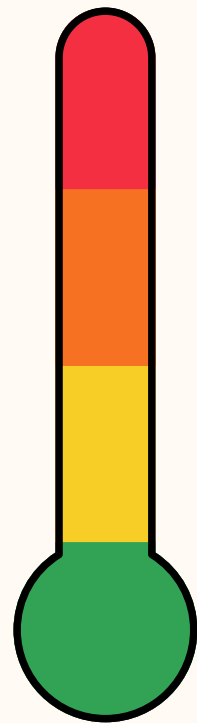


# STRESS TEMPERATURES

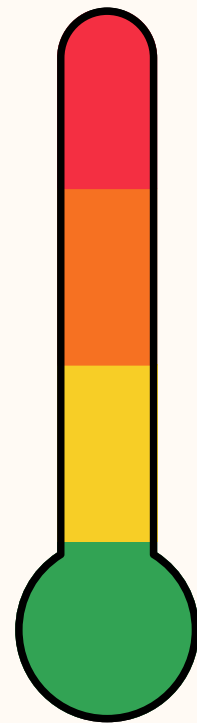
Exercise: What feels stressful today? Draw a line on each thermometer to show how you feel about each area.



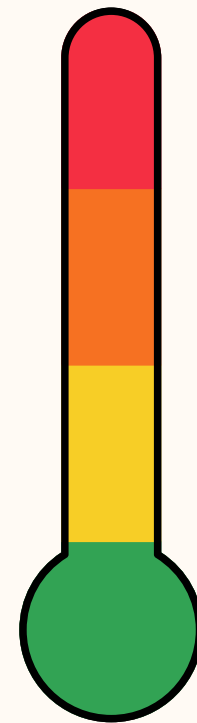
Financial  
pressure



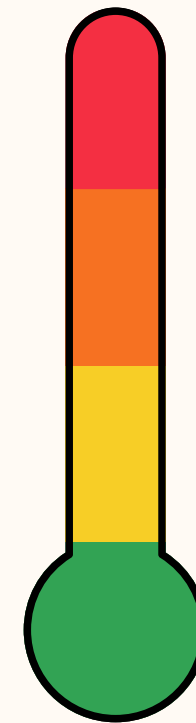
Work/  
career  
demands



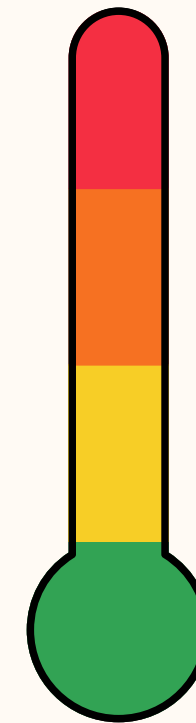
Health  
concerns



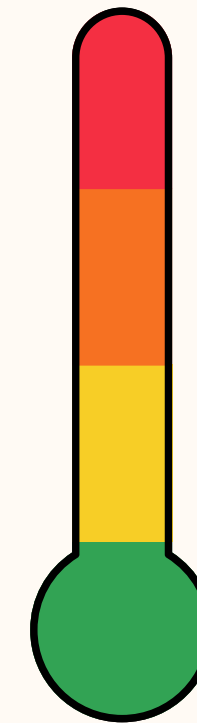
Relationships/  
Family  
responsibilities



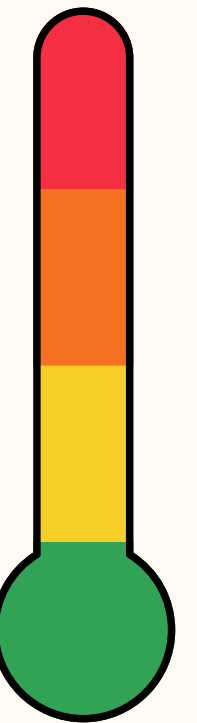
Future  
uncertainty



Information  
overload



Lack  
of  
time



Other?

# 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

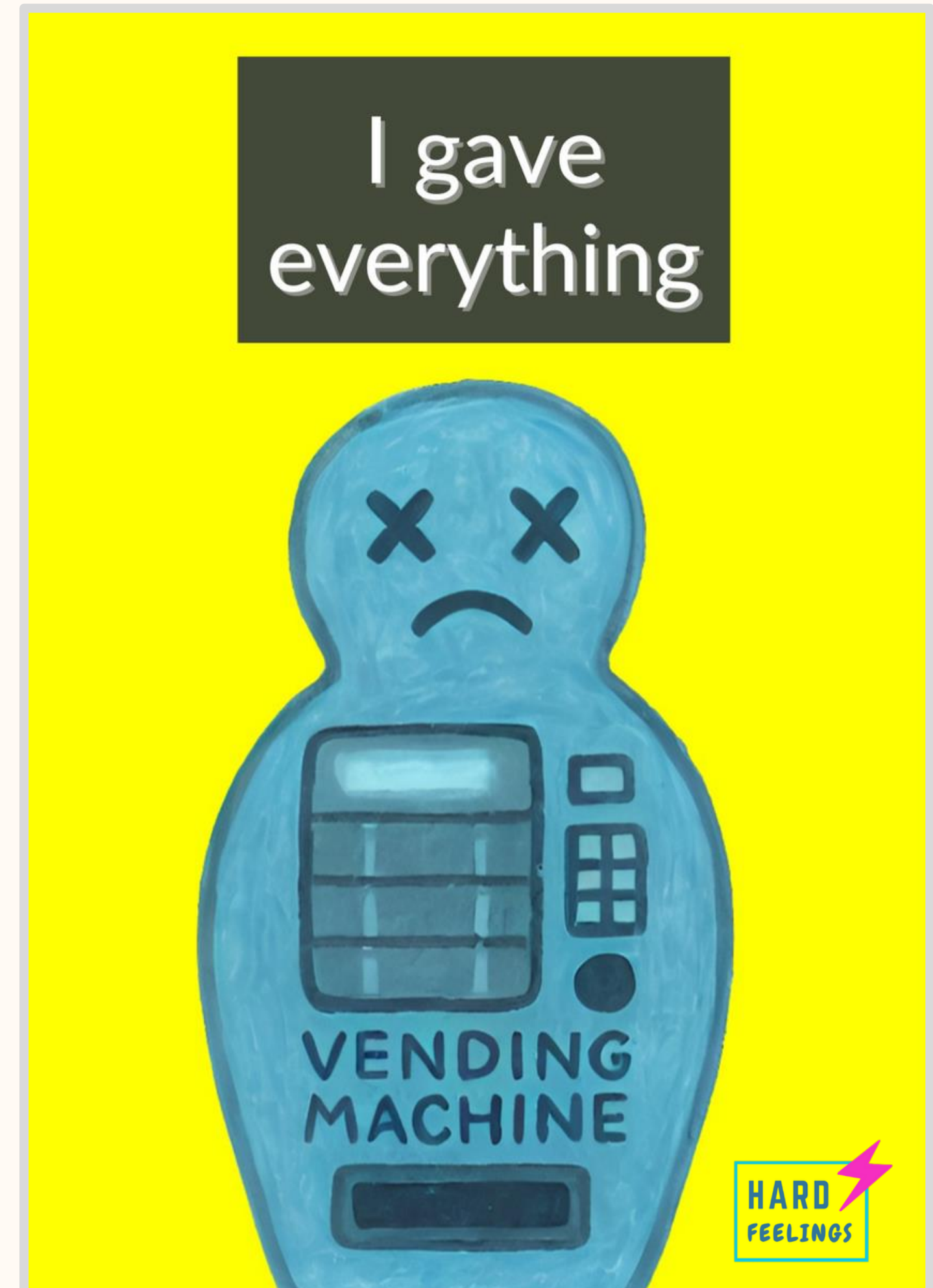
# BURNOUT

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

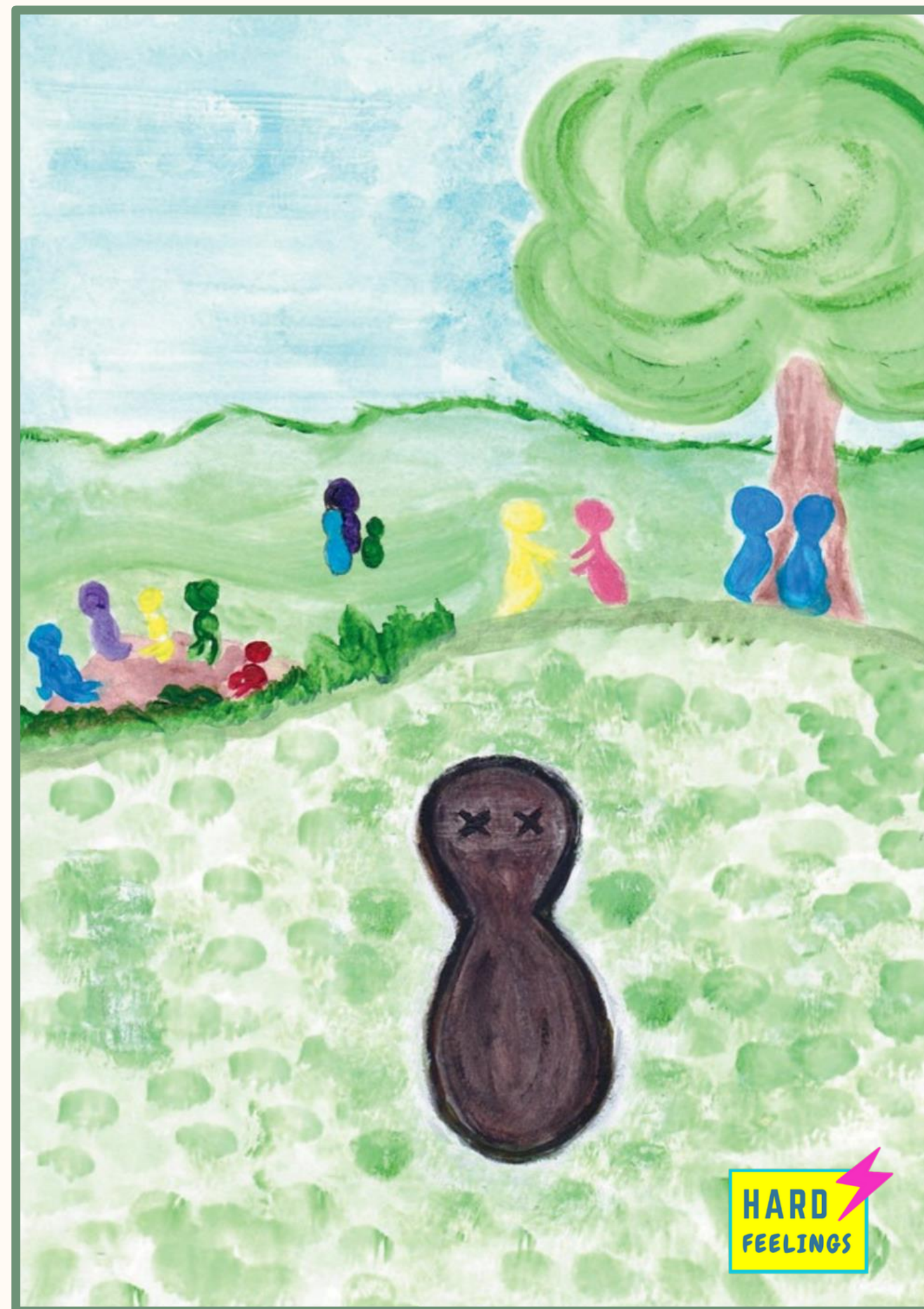


# BURNOUT

## 2) Cynicism or detachment

Becoming emotionally distant  
from work, people, or  
responsibilities

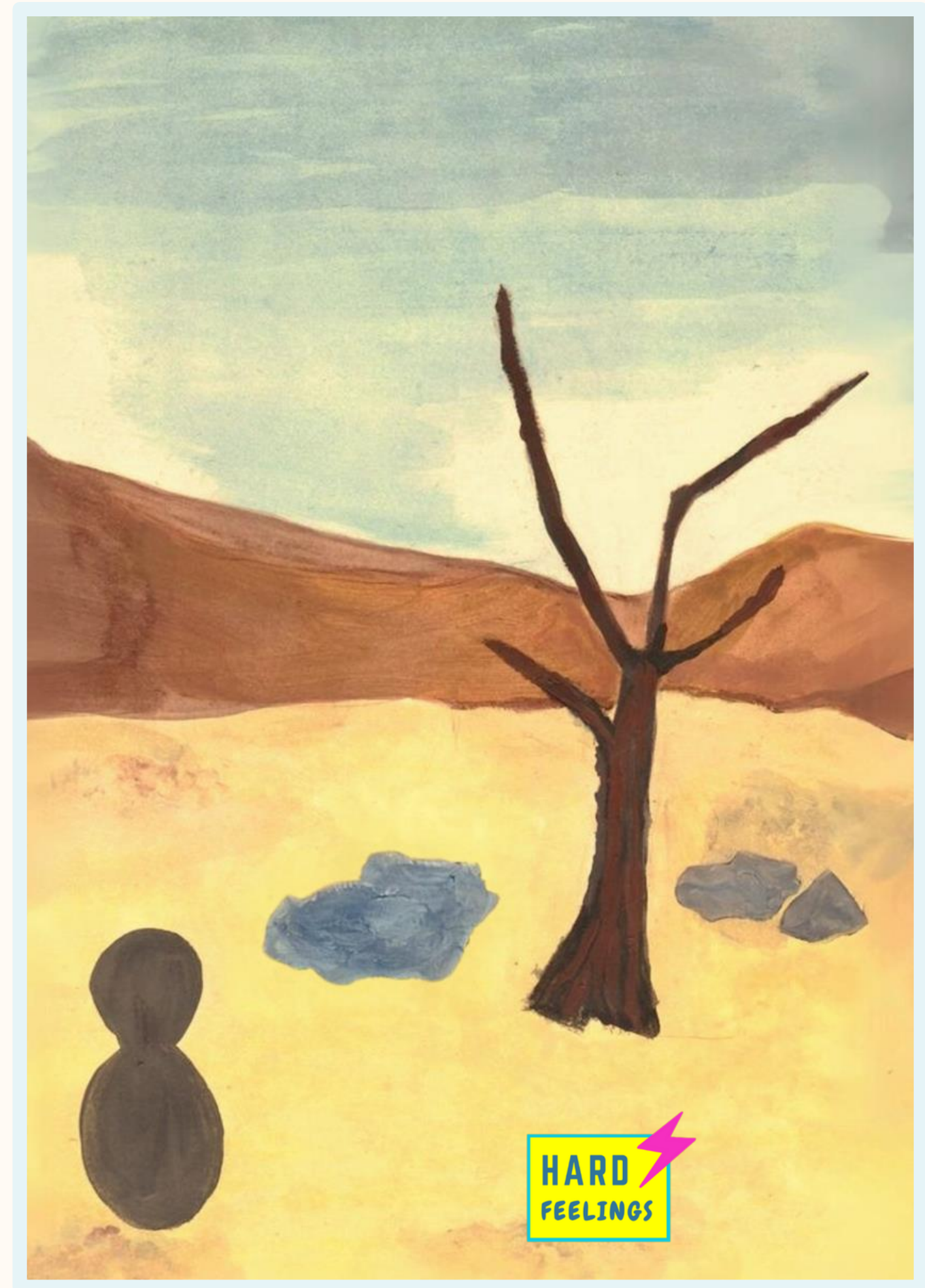
Feeling negative, numb, or  
disconnected



# BURNOUT

## 3) Reduced sense of effectiveness

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



# 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



# COUNSELLORS

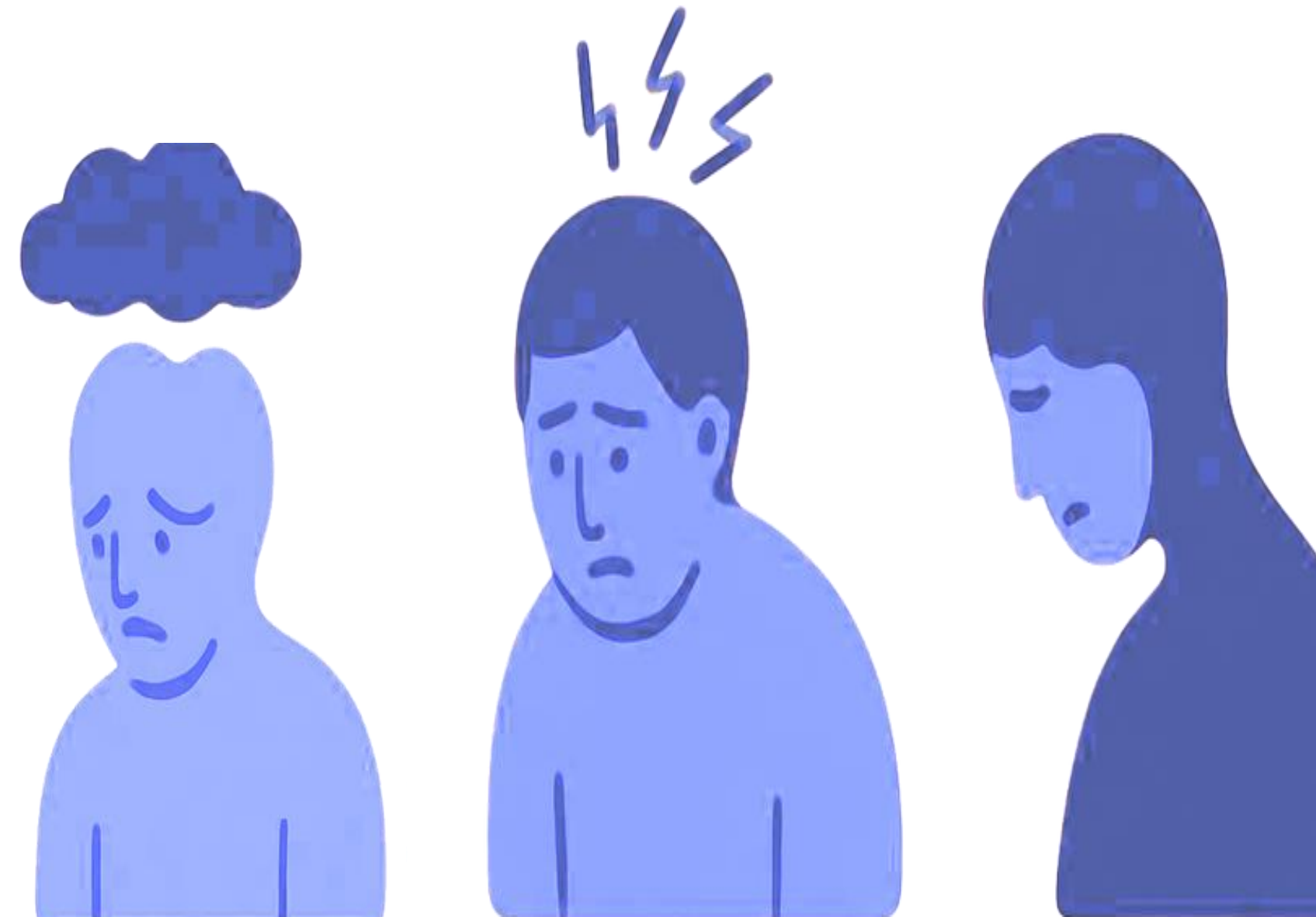
- Counsellors and psychotherapists face elevated risks of stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress.
- Burnout can negatively affect practitioner wellbeing, therapeutic relationships, empathy, and client outcomes

## 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

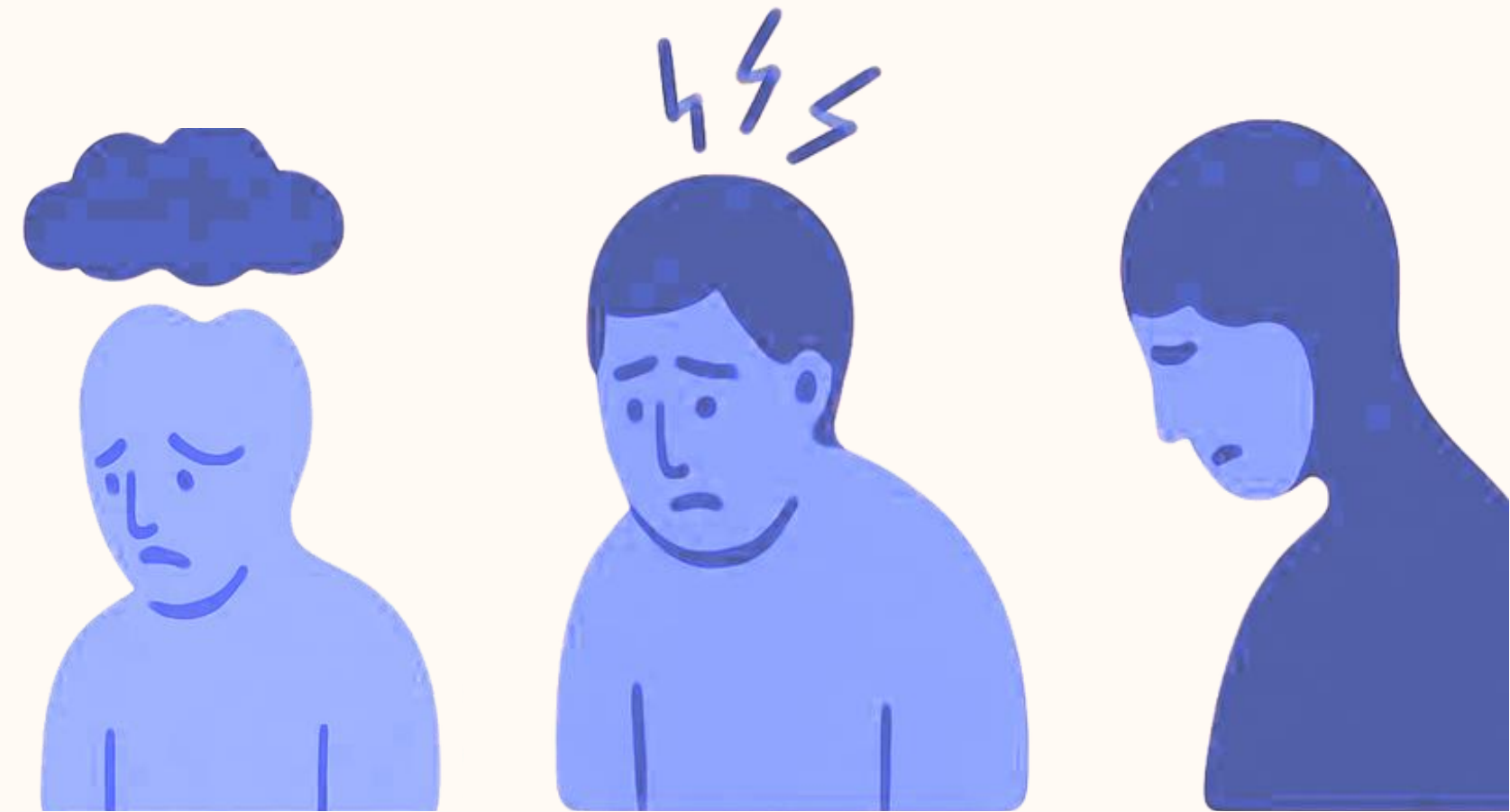


# COUNSELLORS

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).

# WORKSHOP EXERCISE

## 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?

