



FLOW MORE & STRESS LESS PERFORMERS

Wicklow artists salon 6 February 2024

Introduction

- The basic mechanisms of stress in the brain and body
- Effective tools to lower stress and increase flow
- Some considerations for artists
- Minding Creative Minds



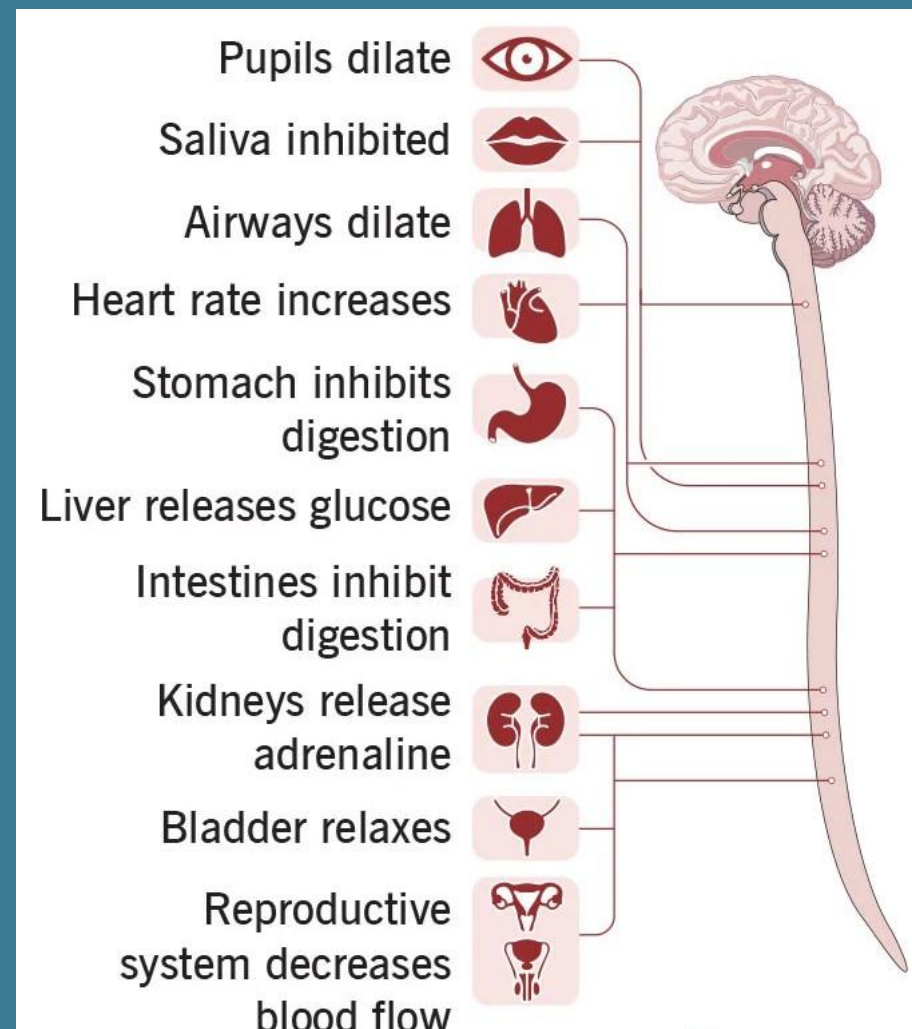
How Stress Works

- What stress looks like
- The autonomic nervous system
- The neuroanatomy of stress response
- Top down stress response
- Bottom up stress response

The Autonomic Nervous System

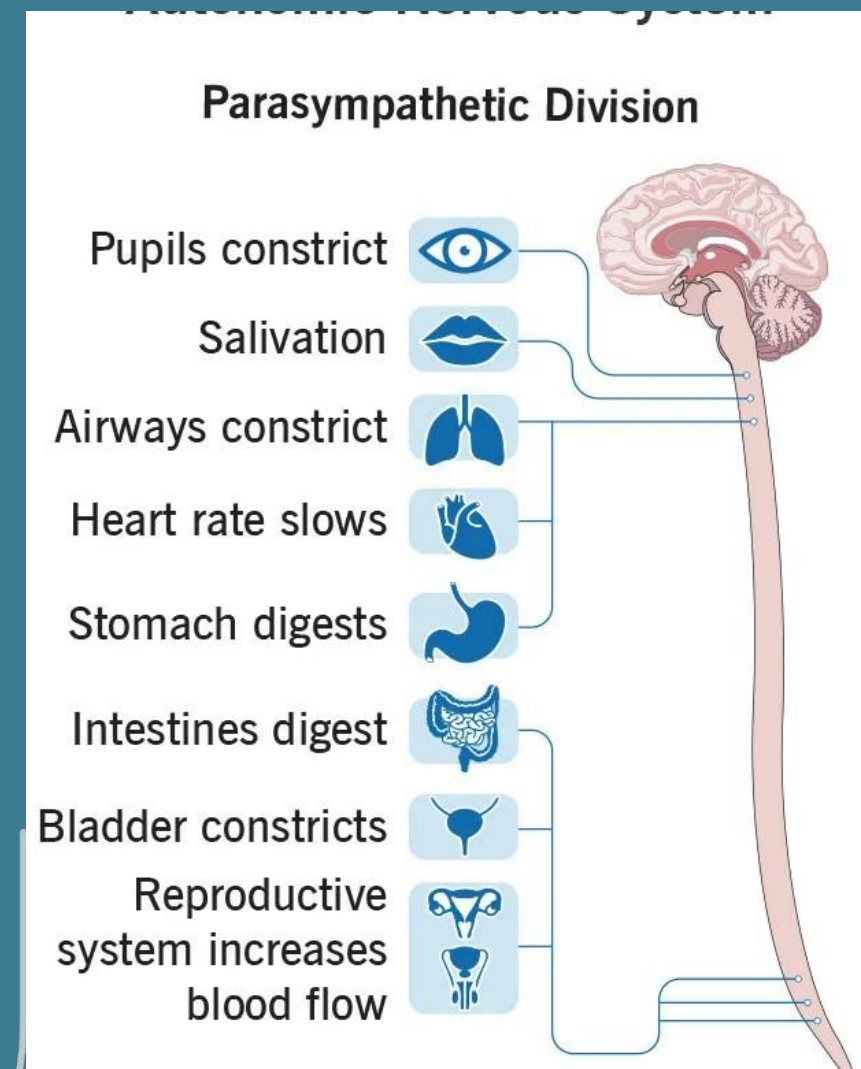
The autonomic nervous system is responsible for many of our bodies unconscious process and because it is autonomic, much stress can go unnoticed!

The Sympathetic Nervous System (The 'Accelerator')



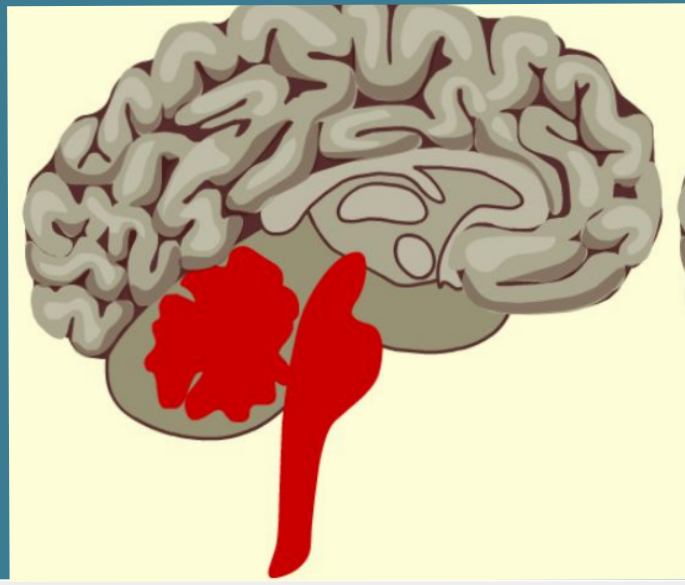
- Responsible for ;
- Mobilisation
- Play
- Motivation
- Task Completion

The Parasympathetic Nervous System



- (The 'Brakes')
- Responsible for
- Safety management
- Social Engagement
- Capacity for Empathy
- Engaging rational thinking

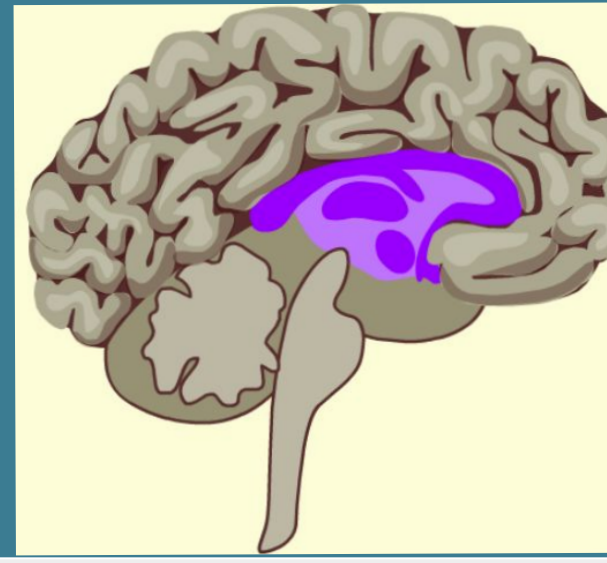
The Triune Brain



Reptilian brain (brainstem)

- Develops in the womb.
- Organizes basic life sustaining functions: eating, sleeping, waking, crying, breathing, awareness of temperature, hunger, wetness, and pain, ridding the body of toxins by urinating and defecating.
- Controls the energy levels of the body: coordinating the functioning of heart and lungs, and of endocrine and immune systems.
- Highly responsive to (perceived) threats

Affects: physical and technical execution of art



Limbic system (mammalian brain)

- Organized mainly during the first six years of life but continues to evolve in a use-dependent manner.
- Seat of emotions, monitor of danger, judge of what is pleasurable or scary, arbiter of what is or isn't important for survival.
- Trauma can have a major impact on its functioning throughout life

Affects: basic colour of emotions, intuition and felt sense of mood



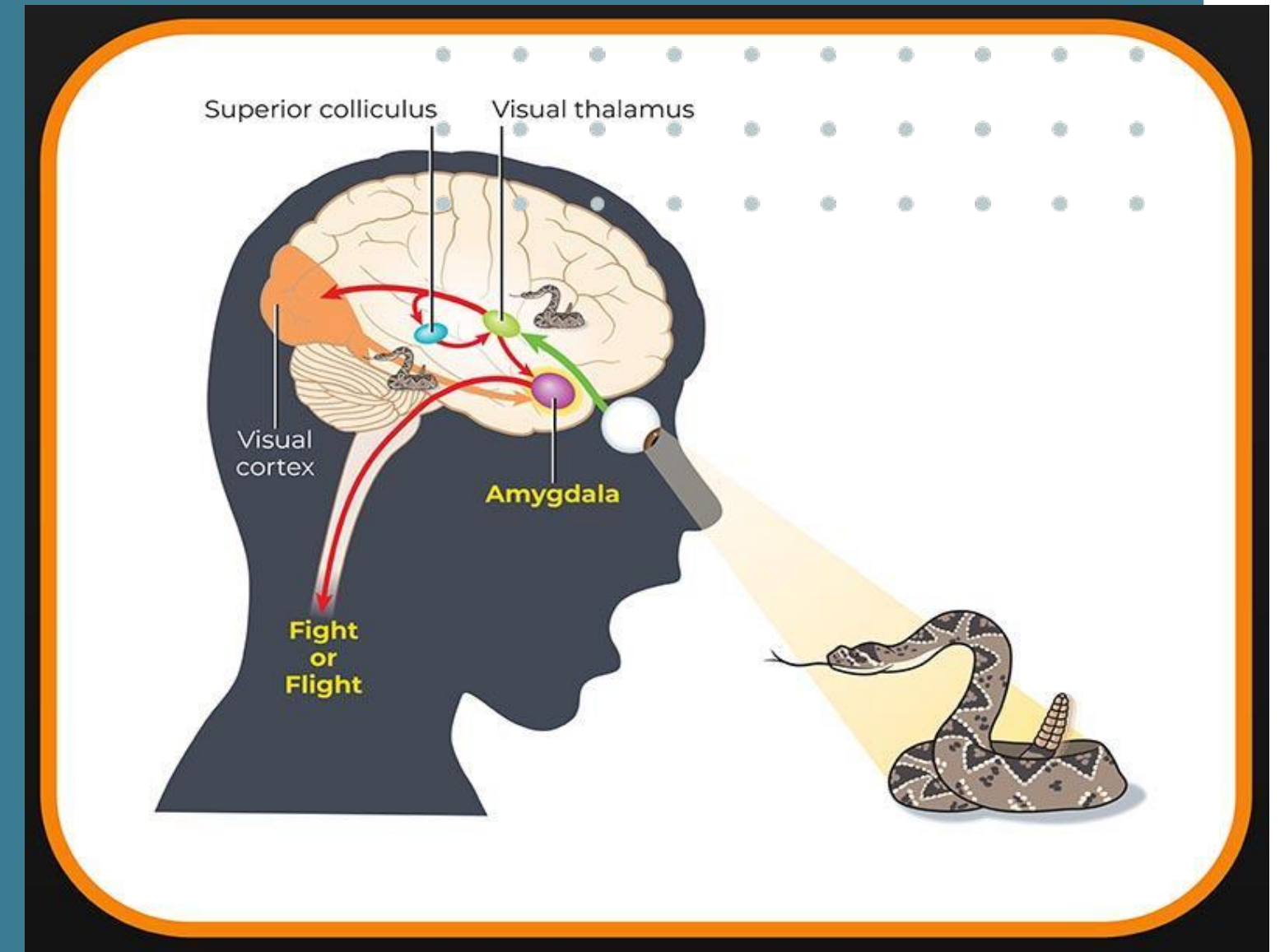
Neocortex (newest evolution of brain)

- Being still, using words rather than acting out, abstraction/symbolism.
- Executive functioning: planning, being in tune with others, reflecting, imagining/predicting the future.
- The seat of empathy, language & the ability to attune to movement, emotion, and intension.
- Trauma affects ability to filter relevant info
- Vulnerable to go offline in response to threat.

Affects: ability to improvise, expressiveness, process complexity

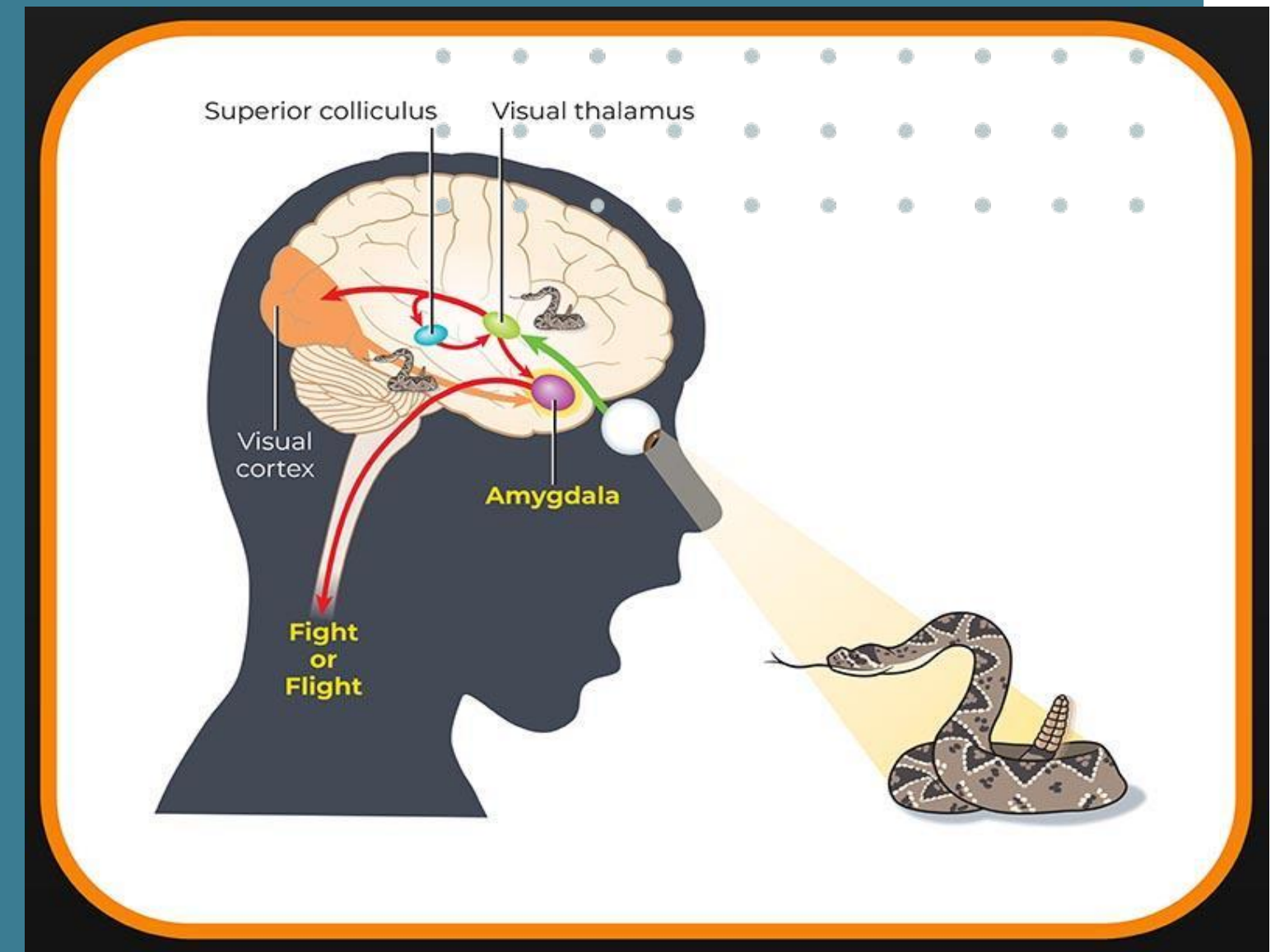
The Amygdala

- Key role in processing emotions and emotional reactions (smoke detector)
- Processes very quickly with input from the hippocampus which relates past and present experience.
- Decides whether the incoming information is a threat to survival even before we are consciously aware.
- Instantly recruits stress-hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) and the ANS to orchestrate a whole-body response: flight-flight, or failing/beyond that freeze.
- Much slower to return to baseline in those who are traumatised or burnt out, spiking quickly and disproportionately in response to mildly stressful stimuli. Constantly elevated stress hormones lead to memory and attention problems, irritability, and sleep disorders.



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Pro tip: snake can be replaced by modern equivalent; e.g. Deadline, workload, public speaking, work being reviewed, Application process etc.

Fight, Flight & Freeze

Despite our modern world and advancements, we're still walking around in the same old body from a few thousand years ago. **Stress** is still appraised, often unconsciously, in terms of the threat to life via anger, frustration, aggression (externally and internally directed)



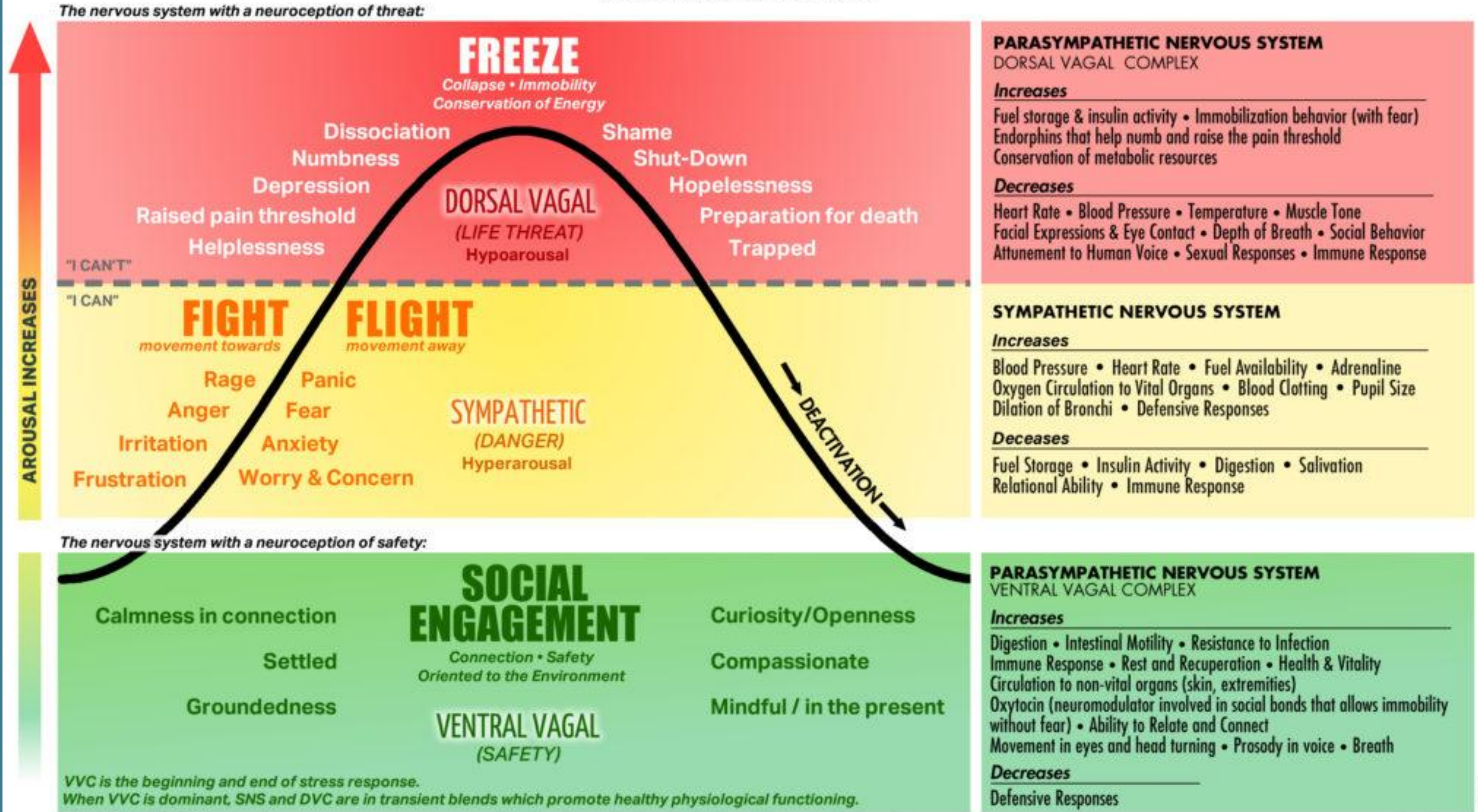
- **Flight** is the sympathetic nervous system responding to escape with emotions such as anxiety, fear, panic, rumination and worry.
- **Freeze** is a third response but by the Parasympathetic nervous system, the idea is shutting down or 'playing dead' may have been evolutionarily advantageous. This is characterised by numbness, powerlessness, depression, shame, apathy, dissociation.

If not in a regulated space, the tasks needed to manage our creative profession can be processed as true threats! And our subsequent response can be in one of these three categories

Recognising Stress

Cognitive	Physiological	Behavioural (avoidance/anxious behaviours)	Distress and/or impairment
Negative thoughts & self-talk	Heart Rate Increase	Shoulder lifting, hunching, minimising presence	Fear of failure
Memory lapses	Perspiration	Pacing, tremoring, fidgeting	Panic
Intrusive thoughts	Nausea/GI Upset	Avoiding situations; e.g. auditions, gigs, networking,	Irritability or Anger
Impaired or frozen concentration	Tension in various body Parts	'Playing safe' in creative output	Feeling 'little' or occupying a younger and/or less confident version of self
Not taking information in	Dizziness, headaches	Avoiding typical engagement with social circle or peers	
	Fatigue	Not contributing feedback or creative ideas	

POLYVAGAL CHART

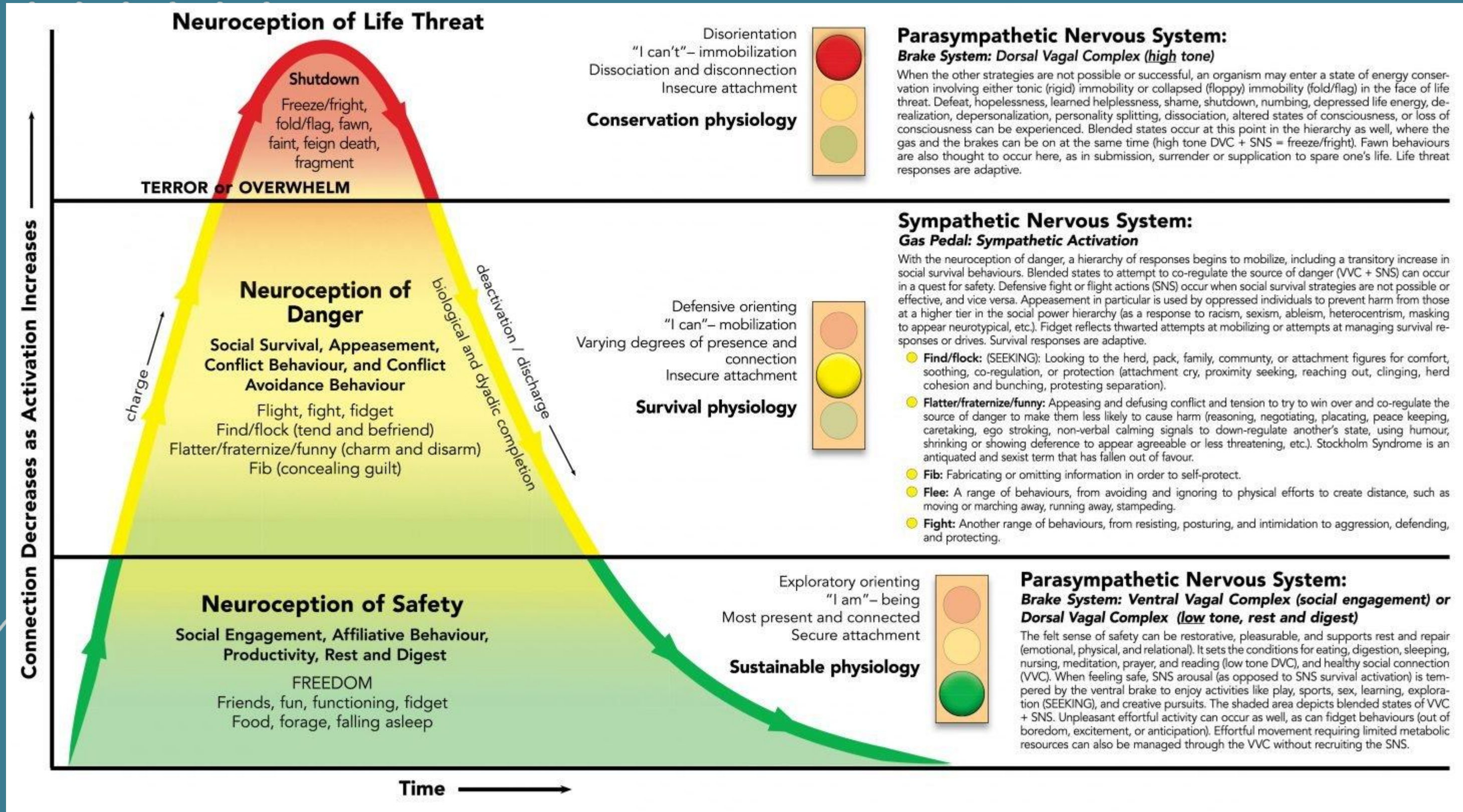


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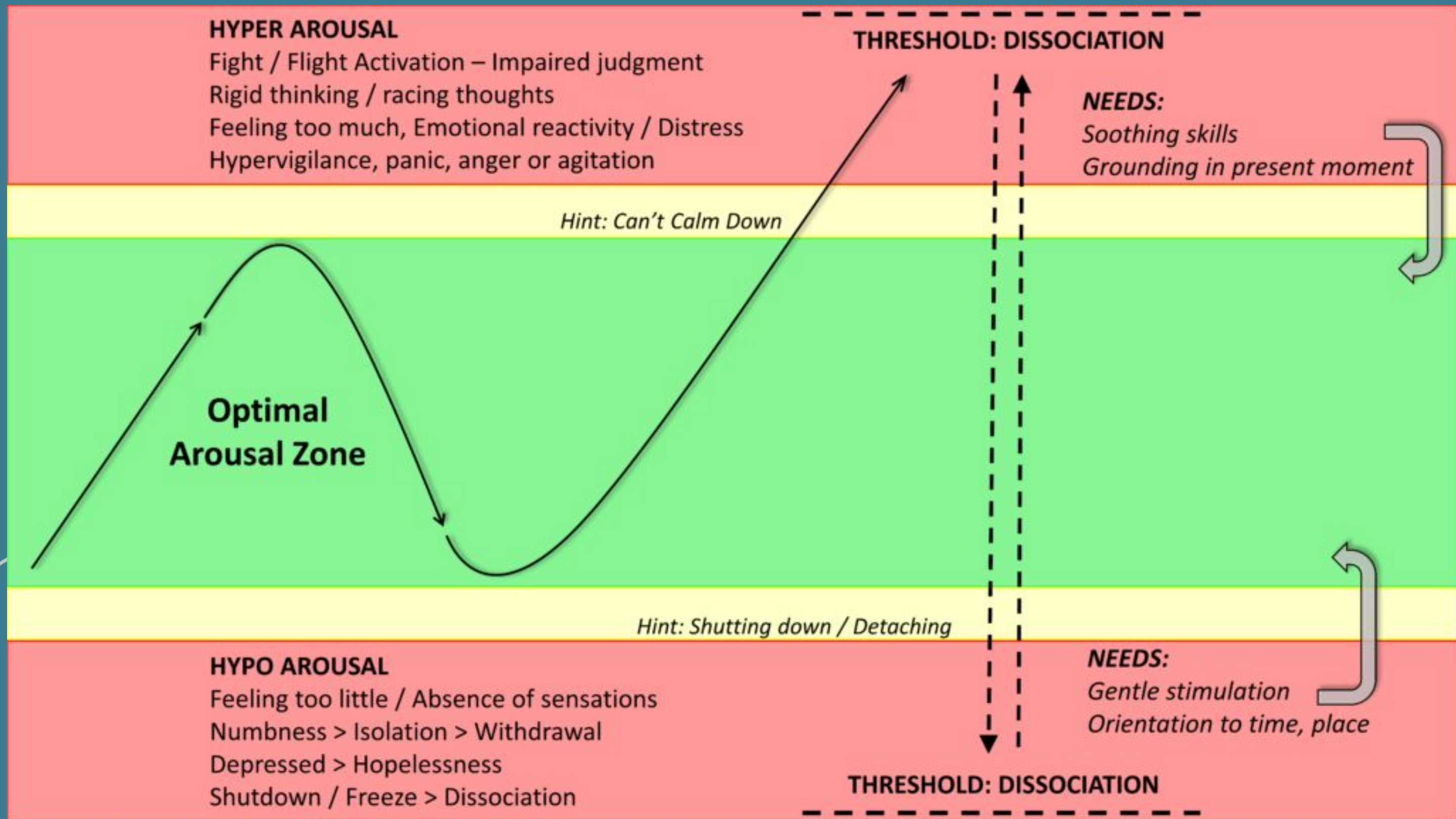
Adapted by Ruby Jo Walker from: Cheryl Sanders, Anthony "Twig" Wheeler, and Steven Porges.

rubyjowalker.com

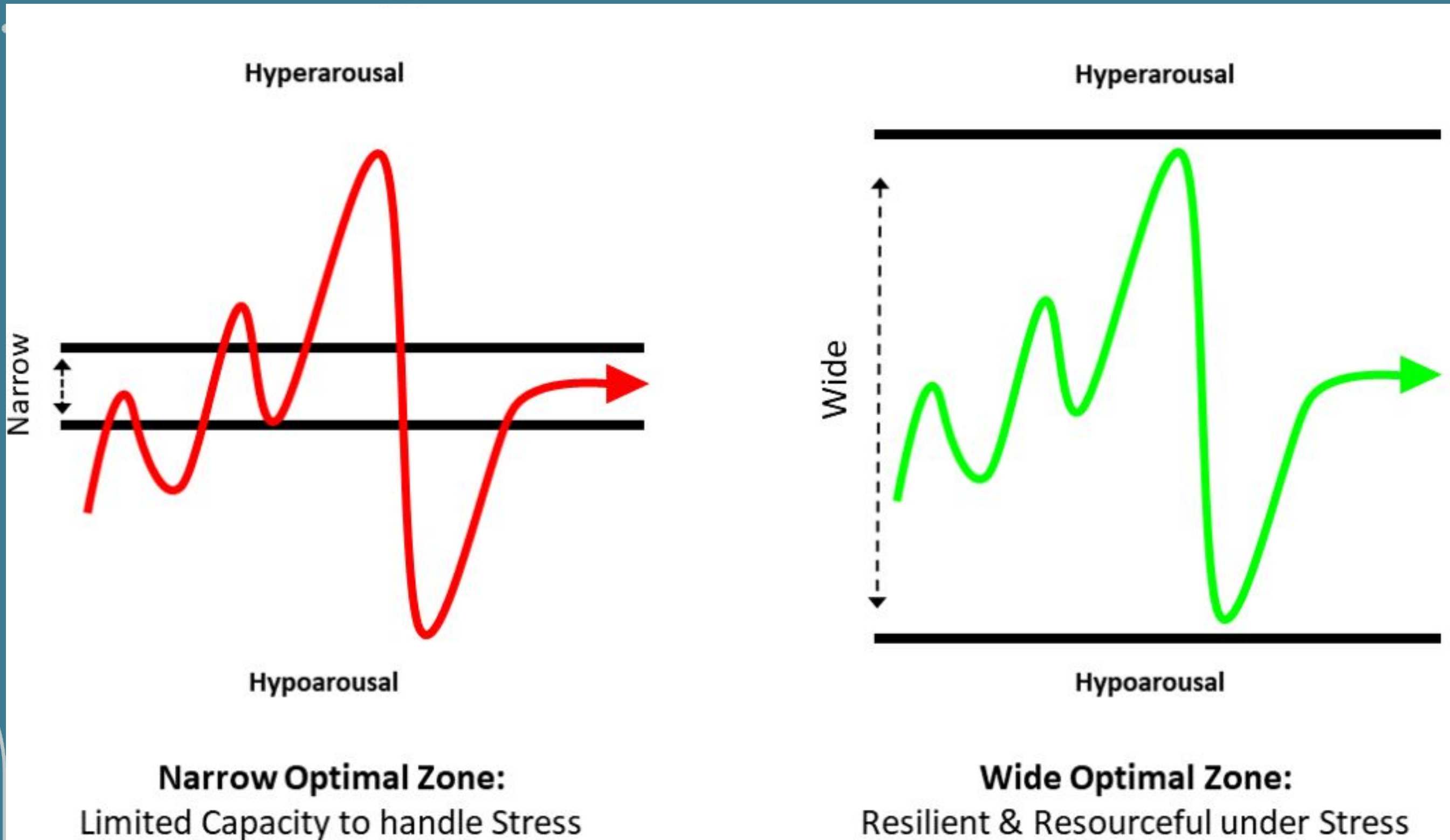
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The Window Of Tolerance (Porges,



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Vagal Toning

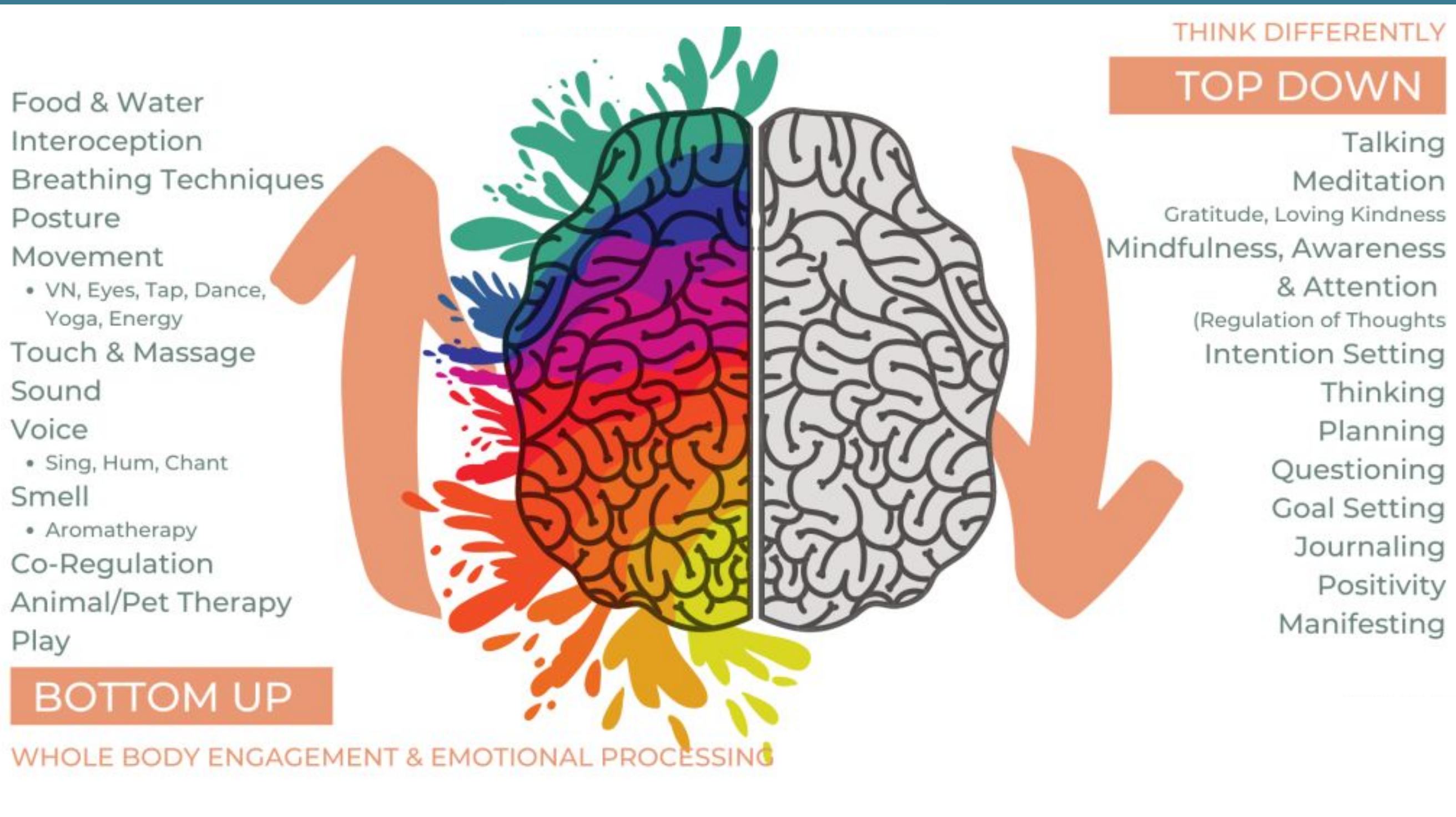
75% of the autonomic nervous system is comprised of the Vagus nerve; through conscious relaxation and mindfulness techniques. The neurons can be strengthened like a muscle; meaning when a perceived threat comes in, we have improved response time to allow our grey matter to assess this and decide if we truly need to activate our fight, flight or freeze OR respond rationally

A widened window of tolerance means;

- If we fight or flight we can do so with appropriate assertiveness (instead of aggression, internal or external) and work to bolster our own boundaries and express grievances
- By not exceeding our sympathetic response we do not 'crash' into freeze or depressive state
- If we do activate a freeze or overly parasympathetic state, its duration is much shorter and we can return to healthy baseline much sooner

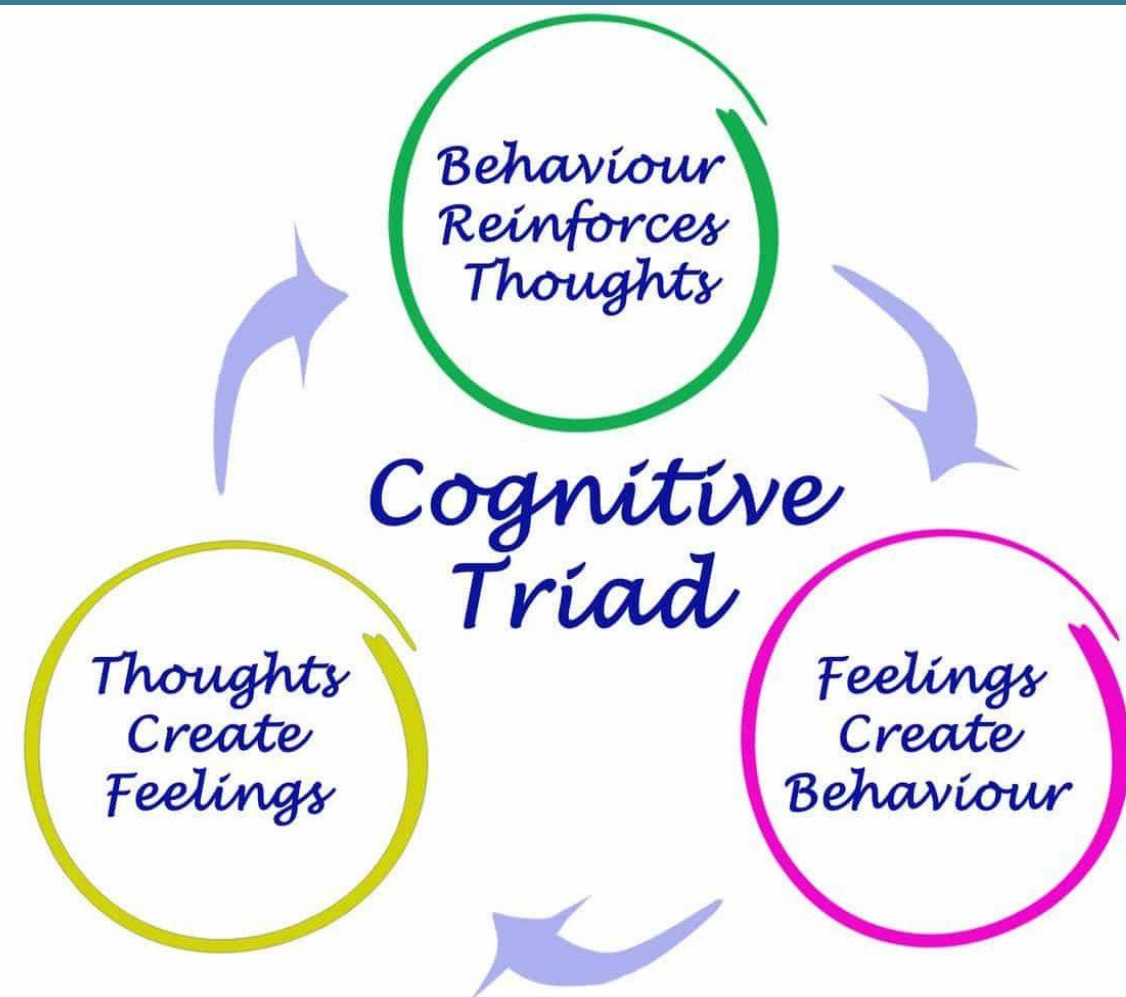


Top-Down & Bottom-Up Stress Management



Top-Down: CBT

- A tool to manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave. It's most commonly used to treat anxiety and depression, but can be useful for other mental and physical health problems. Thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions are interconnected, and that negative thoughts and feelings can trap you in a negative cycle. CBT helps you deal with overwhelming problems by breaking them down into smaller parts. Quite popular with professional creatives as it is systematic and practice focused.



- Cognitive Triad
- By challenging thoughts we can strengthen feelings > to encourage enact new behaviours > which create more positive feelings/thoughts

A
Adversity



B
Beliefs about
adversity



C
Emotional
consequences



D
Disputations
to challenge **B**

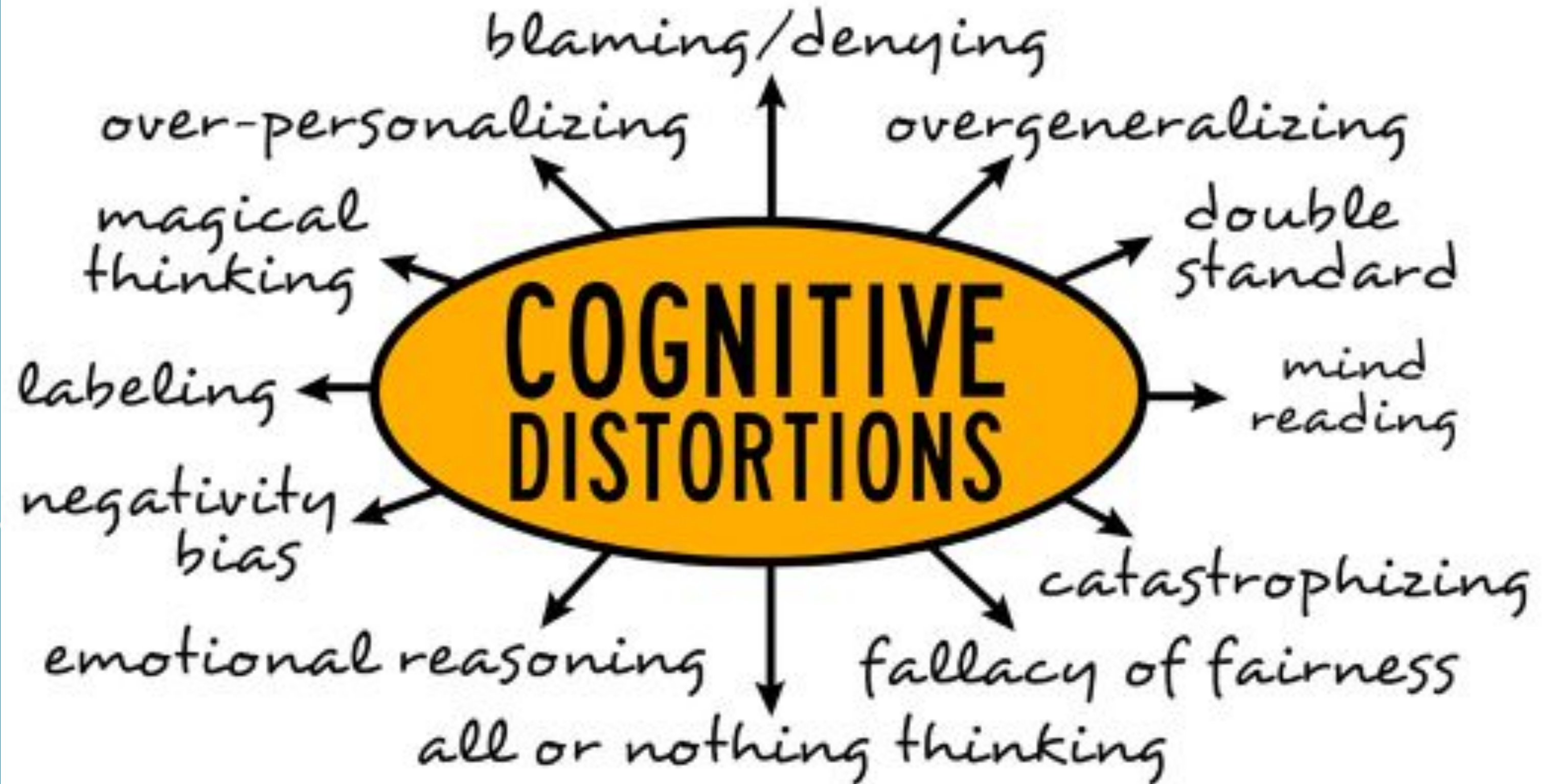


E
Effective new
rational beliefs



F
New feelings

Top-Down: CBT



Common Cognitive Distortions

All or nothing thinking



Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

If I'm not perfect I have failed

Either I do it right or not at all

Over-generalising

"everything is always rubbish"
"nothing good ever happens"

Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw

Mental filter



Only paying attention to certain types of evidence.

Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes

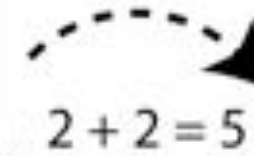
Disqualifying the positive



Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done for some reason or another

That doesn't count

Jumping to conclusions



There are two key types of jumping to conclusions:

- **Mind reading** (imagining we know what others are thinking)
- **Fortune telling** (predicting the future)

Magnification (catastrophising) & minimisation



Blowing things out of proportion (catastrophising), or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning



Assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

I feel embarrassed so I must be an idiot

should must

Using critical words like 'should', 'must', or 'ought' can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed

if we apply 'shoulds' to other people the result is often frustration

Labelling



Assigning labels to ourselves or other people

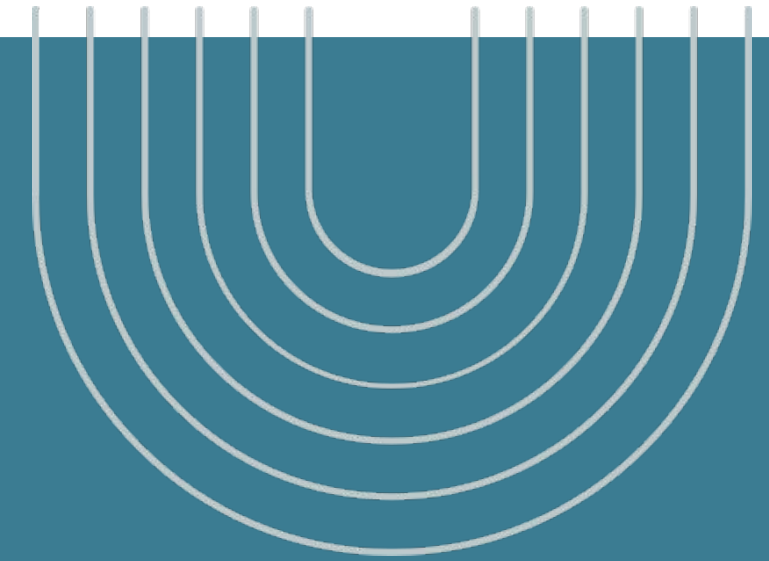
I'm a loser
I'm completely useless
They're such an idiot

Personalisation

"this is my fault"

Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming other people for something that was your fault.

How to work with stress



Stress cues and effects vary for each person, but we can work to manage it by:

- 1) Recognising Thinking Patterns which trigger or exacerbate stressors
- 2) Recognising how stress shows up in the body (everyone is different!)
- 3) Monitoring thoughts, emotions and physical sensations
- 4) Engaging a stress management plan

Bottom-up approaches to stress

Momentary Grounding Techniques (IN THE MOMENT)	Mid-term stress response techniques (CLOSE TO MPA TRIGGER)	Long-form relaxation (STRESS RESILIENCE PRACTICE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diaphragm Breathing• Box Breathing (Measures)• 4-7-8 Breathing• Autonomic Sigh• 3-3-3 Technique• Senses (strong flavour, strong smell, cooling sensation)• Humming• Conscious Stimming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-havening*• Abbreviated• Soles Of The Feet Mediation*• Gentle cardio (running, dancing, walking etc.)• Yoga, Pilates, Stretching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progressive Muscular Relaxation• Body Scan*• Autogenic Relaxation*• Transcendental Meditation*

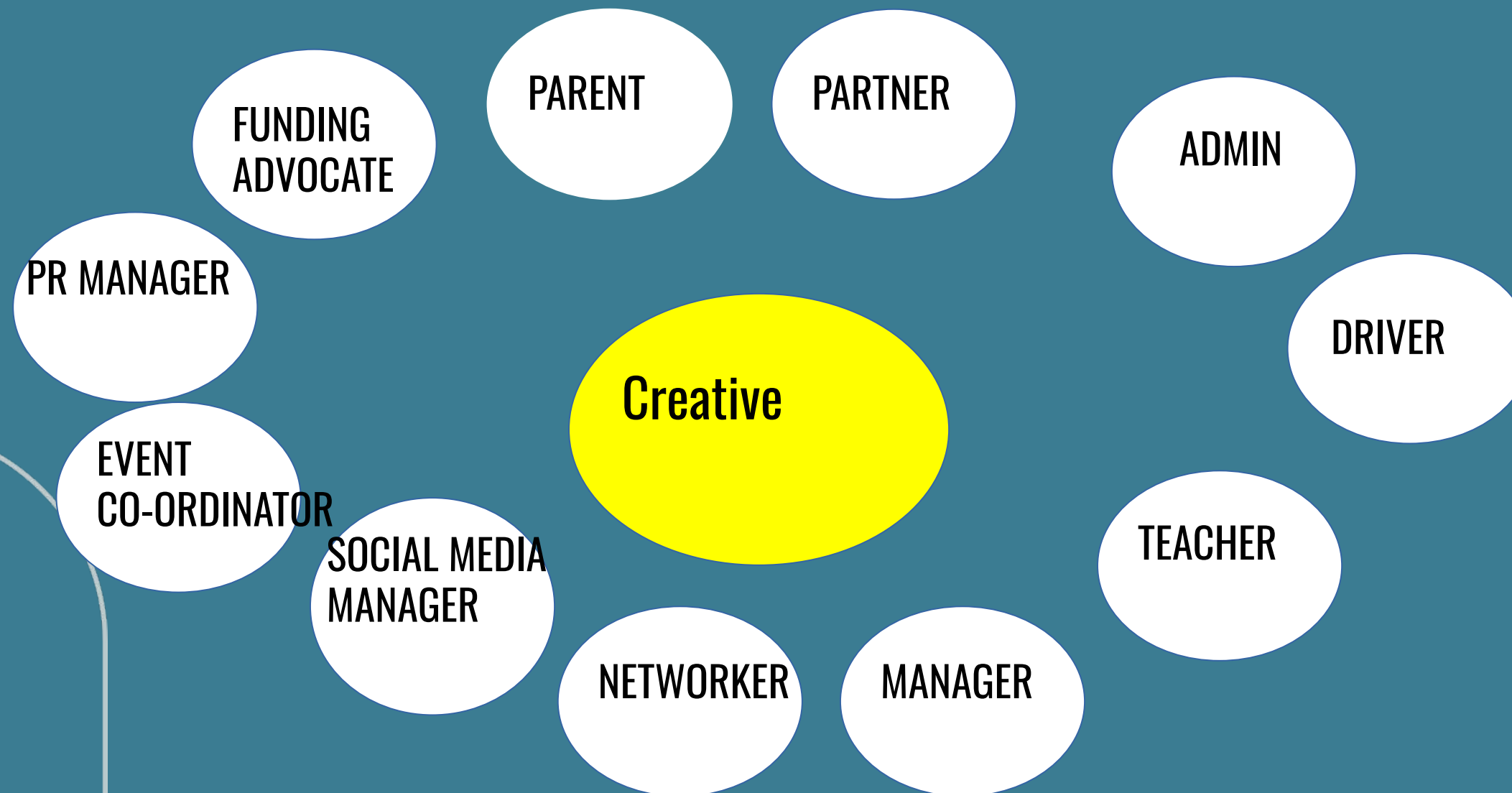
Some considerations around stress

Flow and creativity are resource heavy states which require a certain level of homeostasis;

- emphasis on preventative stress response, re-framing it as insurance policy against flow disruptors and stress related illness which reduce output and opportunity in the long run
- Consider personal identity and sense of meaning is often inextricably linked with creative profession, making one more predisposed to stress and unhelpful thinking patterns
- Our body and brain have a reciprocal relationship, feeding into one another
- Burnout comes on slowly and cannot be reduced overnight, being aware of one's own physical and mental stressors can alert us when we're approaching it (think, yellow-amber-red zone).

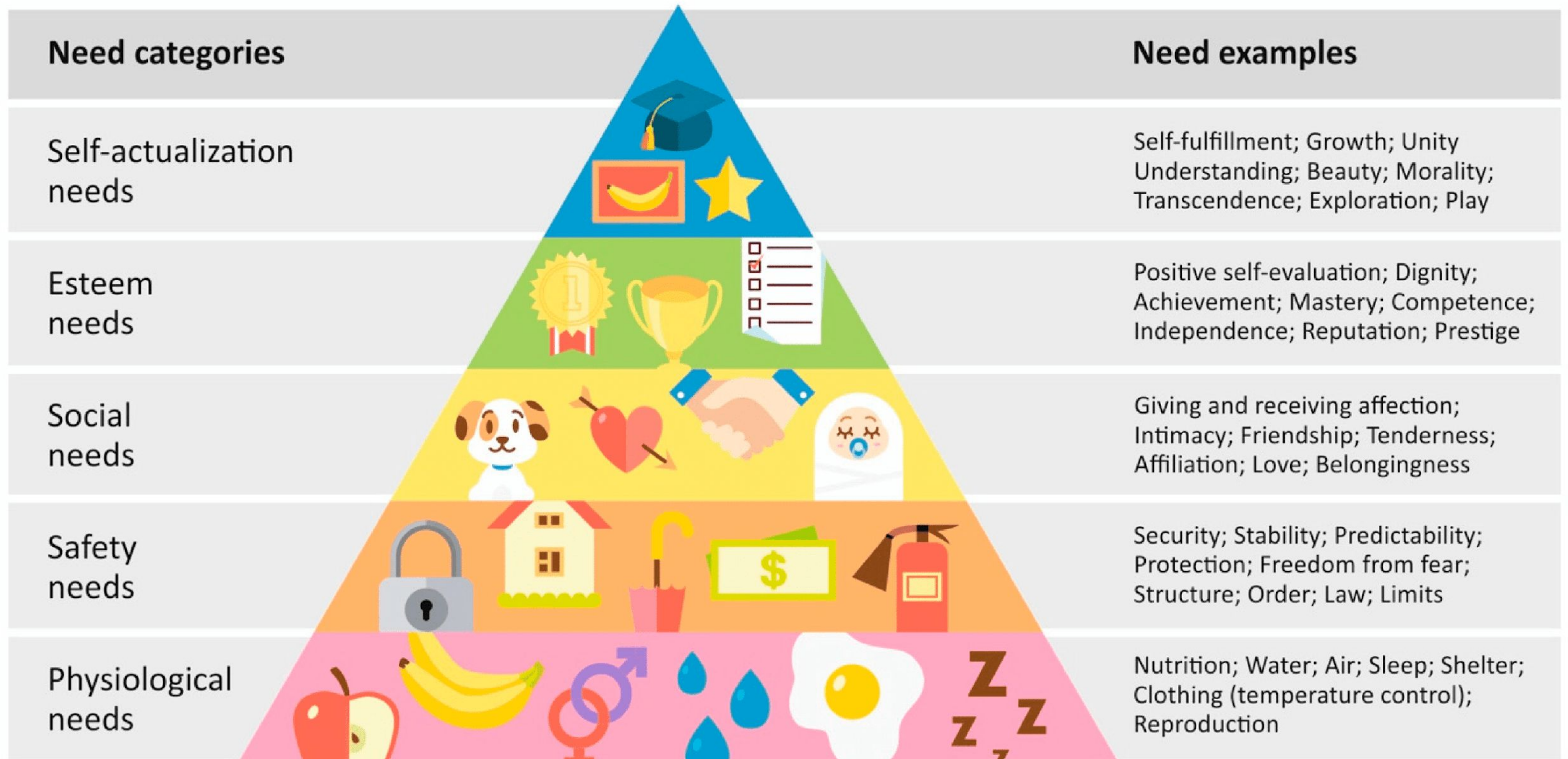
Stress and Professional Creatives

Unlike many conventional jobs, being a professional creative often entails taking on and managing many roles that may traditionally be delegated to other departments or persons. Additionally, income may need to come from various roles and often peripatetic working circumstances and requires a lot of admin and planning. THIS IS ALL BEFORE WE EVEN GET CREATIVE!



*add roles to taste
/ad nauseum

Maslow's Hierarchy

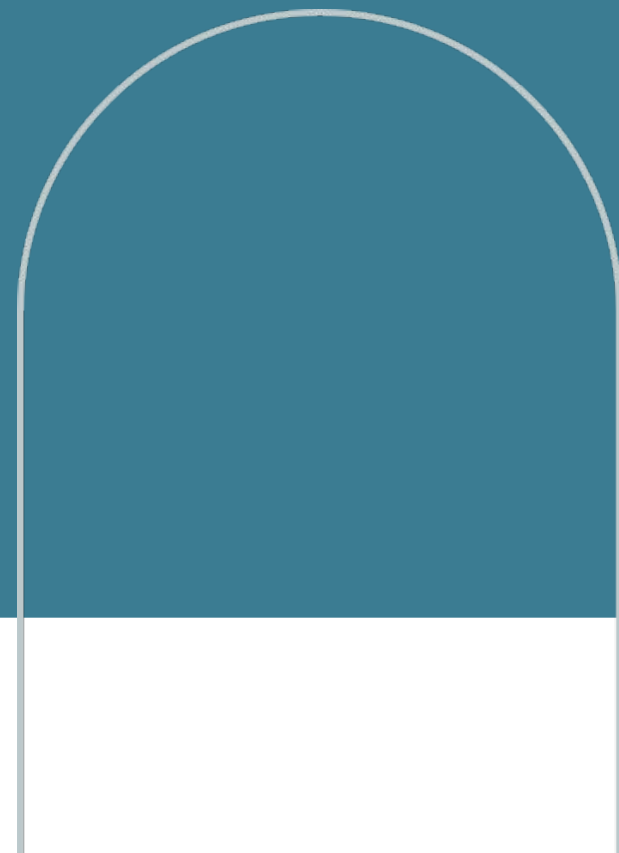


Benefits of Stress Response

- **Less physical stress**, less likelihood of illness and reduction of symptom severity in many conditions.
- **Less reliance on unhelpful resources**; e.g. alcohol, caffeine, painkillers, food, unhelpful behaviour.
- **Clearer focus** means more accurate memory, more mindfulness in the moment and more RAM for creativity
- **Improved executive functioning**; for improvisation, career decisions, interpersonal interactions, less rumination.
- **Clearer overview** to process self-directed or externally provided feedback.
- **Co-regulation** Not just self-regulation but part of an overall ecosystem; bandmates, partners, students, clients etc.
- **Bottom line**: all of this leads to BETTER FLOW! managing stress helps every aspect of interpersonal and professional life!



Minding
Creative
Minds.



Overview

Is an organisation established to offer a free 24/7 wellbeing & support programme for the Irish Creative Sector.

Musicians Actors Producers Writers Designers Arts
Administrators Film Crew Street Artists Visual Artists
Photographers Painters Sculptors Dancers Poets Spoken
Word Artists Comedians Arts Journalists/TV Personnel Arts
Venue Employees Performance Artists Circus Performers



Services Available

- Workshops for professional creatives
 - Advisory sessions
 - Creative industry mentorship programme
 - Monthly meet & greet networking programmes
 - Free counselling service
 - Creative arts therapy service
 - Legal consultation service
- 

Examples Of Work

Minding Creative Minds Workshops during 2023 included these title areas and more

Social Media for Creatives	Funding 101	Essentials of Sync
Developing a positive Mindset	Business essentials for Creatives	Stage craft for Musicians
Agility Awards Funding	Insurance for Creatives	Branding & Authenticity
Arts Council Agility Awards Basics	Empowering female writers in the Industry	Playwright - 3 part workshop series



- **In 2023** we achieved significant growth in creatives engaging our 24/7 counselling services and facilitated over 2000 counselling hours.
- We expanded our service to include specialist trauma counselling for the sector.
- In 2023 our mentoring programme resulted in more than 1000 hours of 1:1 mentorship
- We hosted more than 50 online and in-person masterclasses which were attended by over 1400 people during 2023
- We hosted the first ever Creative Careers Summit in May 2023

Our plans for 2024 include introducing

- Free Creative Art therapy for the sector offering music / drama & art therapy
- The introduction of a Specialist advisory panel offering consultations in legal / financial and HR matters



ONLINE CAREER CLINIC FOR CREATIVES

Short meetings for questions/queries

Applications
& Funding **Support**

Playwriting & Theatre
Film & TV

Business essentials
Start-up advice
Publishing
Sync

Music Management
Resilience
Screenwriting
Wellbeing



Register on
www.mindingcreativeminds.ie



Getting In Touch



Is an organisation established to offer a free 24/7 wellbeing & support programme for the Irish Creative Sector.



www.mindingcreativeminds.ie

Dedicated 24/7 Helpline

in association with Spectrum Life

ROI: 1800 814 244

NI/UK: 0800 0903677

International: +353 1 518
0277

Or Text/WhatsApp "Hi" to
087 369 0010

(when you receive a response please
mention "Minding Creative Minds" or
that you are in contact from the
Creative Sector)