



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

Building resilience and wellbeing in clinicians in high-stress environments

Tarli Young

The University of Queensland

 @Tarliyoung

Stressors – Clinicians

Stressors

- Insufficient resources and space
- Staff shortages
 - Long work hours
 - Low clinician to patient ratio
 - Short consultations
 - Reduced patient care
- High pressure
- Lack of organisational support
 - Inadequate systems and procedures
 - Bureaucracy
 - Poor technological support
- Interpersonal tensions:
 - Poor communication
 - Tensions with patients and their families,
 - Colleagues, management
 - Hierarchy

Stress – Clinicians

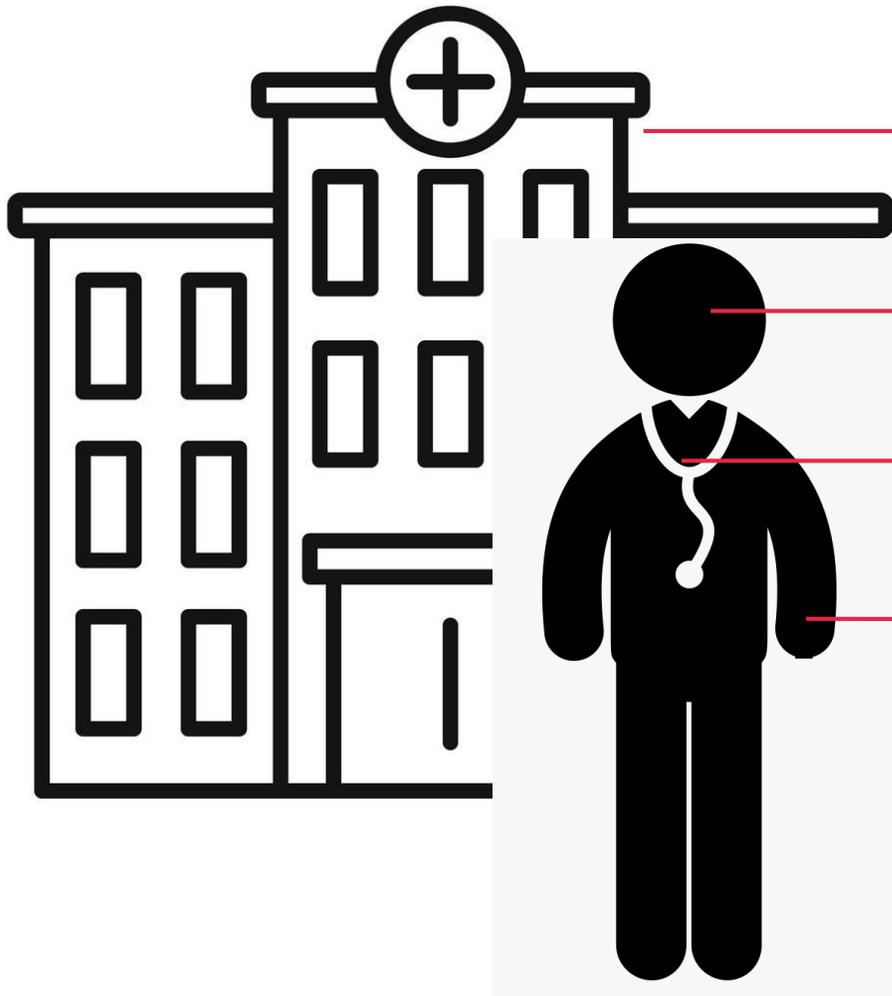
COVID Stress in HK

- Stress ▲ 28.3%
- Anxiety ▲ 42.3%,
- Depression symptoms ▲ 100%

COVID for Health Professionals in HK

- Fear of infection
- 50% mild to moderate depression

Wellbeing strategies



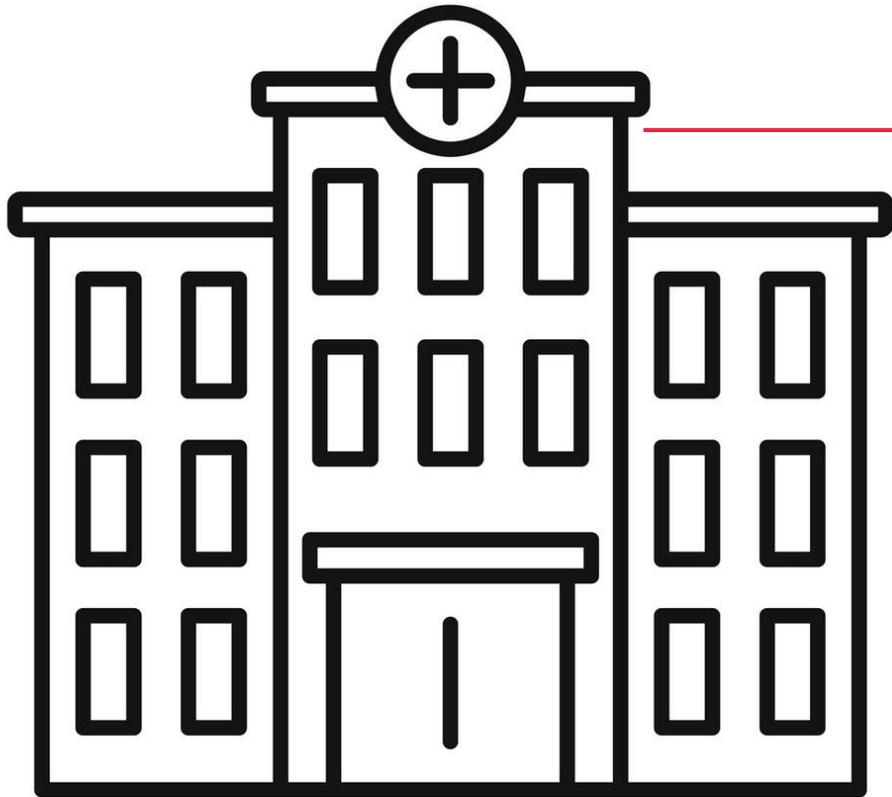
Context: changing the workplace

Thoughts: managing difficult thoughts

Emotions: working with difficult feelings

Actions: valued actions

Wellbeing strategies



Context: changing the workplace

Work outcomes

- Mistakes
- Sick leave, Turnover

Make changes where possible

- Advocate
 - Increased staff levels
 - Reduced hours
 - Better resources
- Small changes
- Staff input and ownership

Support staff wellbeing

- Talk about wellbeing
- Share challenges
- Counselling
- Training

Building a supportive culture

- Prioritise wellbeing
- Help others

Wellbeing strategies



Thoughts: managing difficult thoughts

- Mindfulness
- Defusion
- Gratitude

Wellbeing strategies



Thoughts: managing difficult thoughts

- Mindfulness
- Defusion
- Gratitude

Mindfulness

- Paying **attention** to current experiences: internal and external
- With **attitude** of acceptance, kindness and openness



Mindfulness is **NOT**

- a relaxation technique
- a religion
- only about meditation- can be done less formally
- a way to change or stop thoughts

Mindfulness Promotes

Wellbeing

- Hedonic wellbeing (Brown & Cordon, 2009)
- Eudaimonic wellbeing (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007)
- Self-compassion (Neff, 2003),
- Empathy (Neff, 2003)
- Positive affect (Geschwind, et al., 2011),
- Joy (Davidson et al., 2003)
- Contentment (Davidson et al., 2003)

Reduces:

- Depression,
- Stress,
- Anxiety (Bishop et al., 2004)

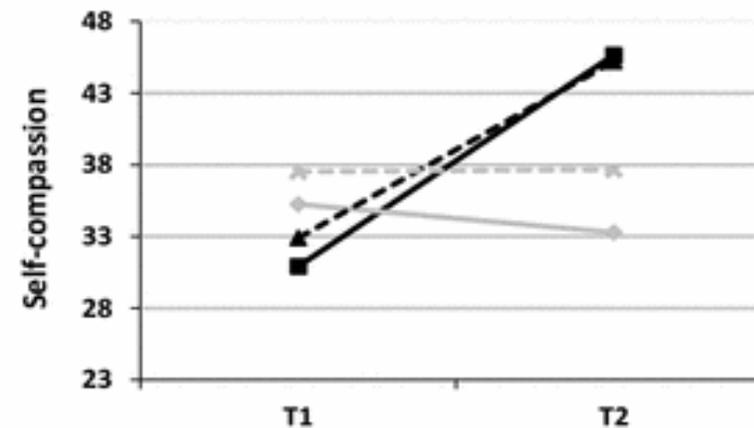
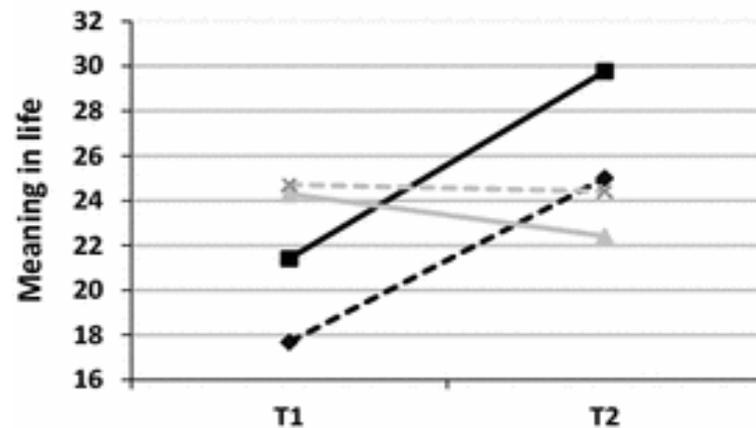
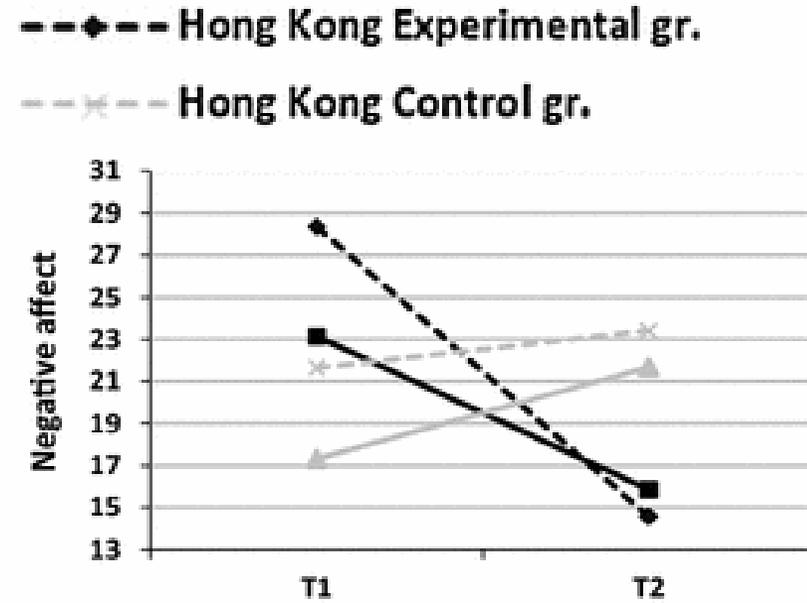
Physiological effects:

- Improved Immune system
- Relaxation response -slowing heart rate and breathing
- Lowered blood pressure
- Assistance for chronic pain

Neurological effects

- Increased grey-matter density in hippocampus; important for learning and memory
- Changes in structures associated with self-awareness, compassion and introspection

Mindfulness Research



Mindfulness Pause

1. Sit in a quiet place in a comfortable position
2. Focus on a sensation to keep you present:
 - your breath, sounds, feelings in your body
3. If you get distracted, just notice it and return to the mindfulness
4. Keep an attitude that is accepting, kind, open and curious



Wellbeing strategies



Thoughts: managing difficult thoughts

- Mindfulness
- Defusion
- Gratitude

Defusion & Fusion

Thoughts are

- mostly made up of words and images
- often automatic & conditioned by life experiences

Trouble is not what we think - but how we relate to our thoughts

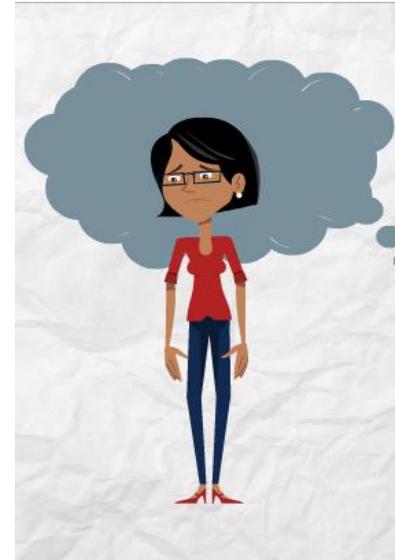
Fusion:

- Getting caught up in the content of thinking – fused with our thoughts
- Completely believe our thoughts; see them as literally true.
- The more we fuse with our thoughts – the more they influence our behaviour
 - e.g. Thought: I can't do this → Behaviour: giving up
- But thoughts are nothing but words and symbols
 - they do not control us
 - It is only when we fuse with thoughts that we become affected



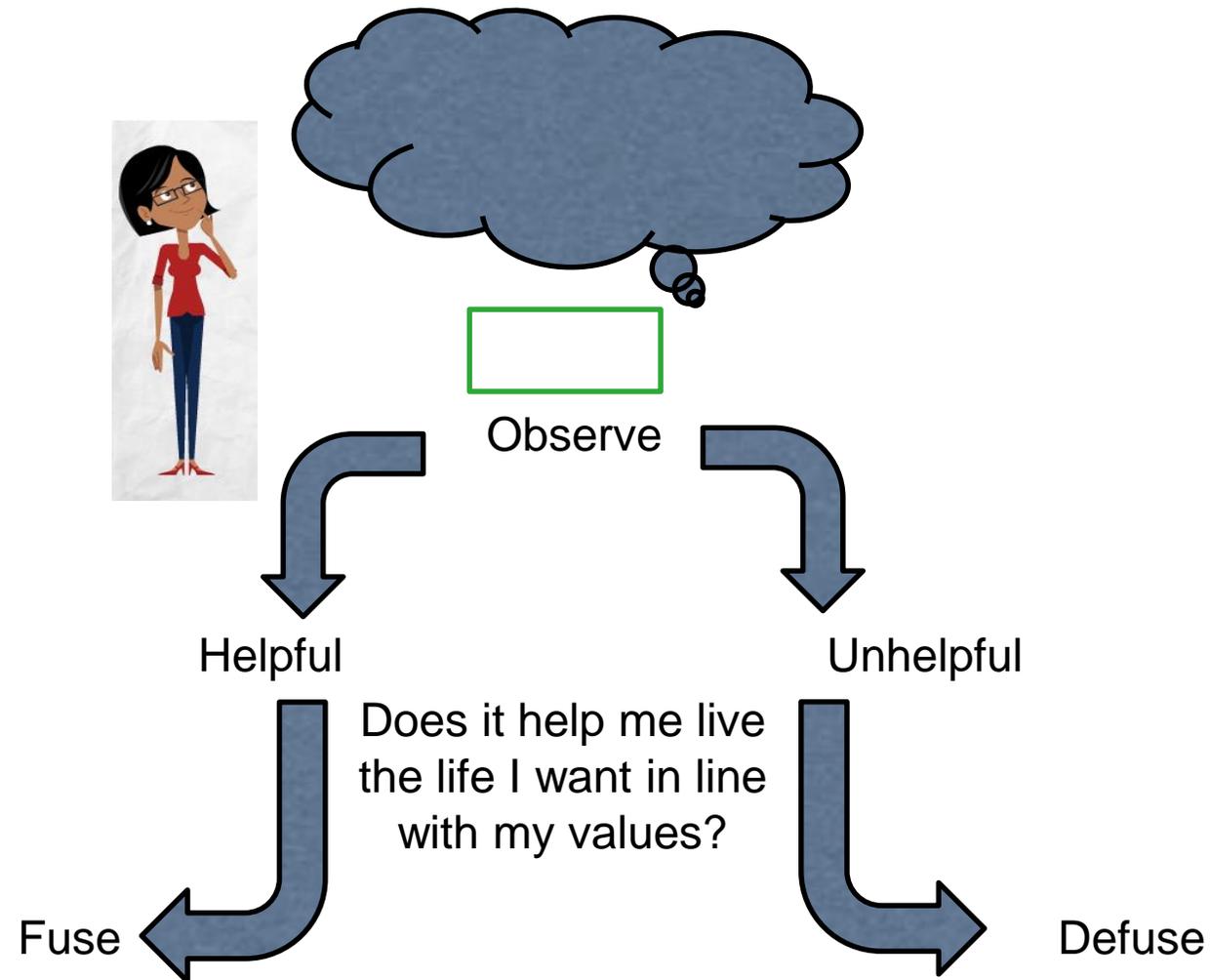
Defusion

Fusion



- Looking at thoughts, rather than from thoughts
- Notice thoughts, rather than being entangled in them
- Not about controlling or stopping thoughts
- Creating space between ourselves and thoughts
- So we can choose which thoughts are helpful

Defusion



Defusion

How?

- Meditation
- Mindfulness
- Acceptance Commitment Therapy
- Helpful phrases:
 - I notice I'm having the thought that
 - My mind is saying....
 - This thought is just a thought
 - Thank you mind for giving me this thought ...



Wellbeing strategies



Thoughts: managing difficult thoughts

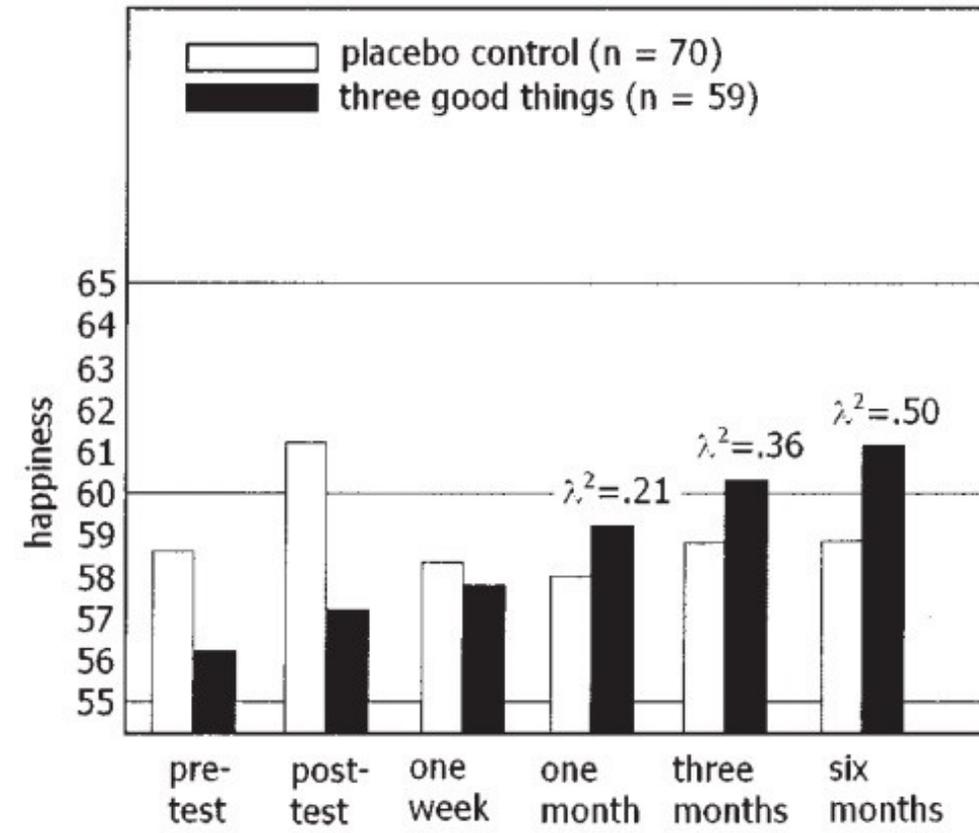
- Mindfulness
- Defusion
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Gratitude

- A sense of thankfulness and joy for an outcome or for another being
- Outcomes of gratitude:
 - optimism, better sleep, alertness, determination, goal progress, helping behavior, life satisfaction, reduced negative emotions, increased positive emotions, connection to others

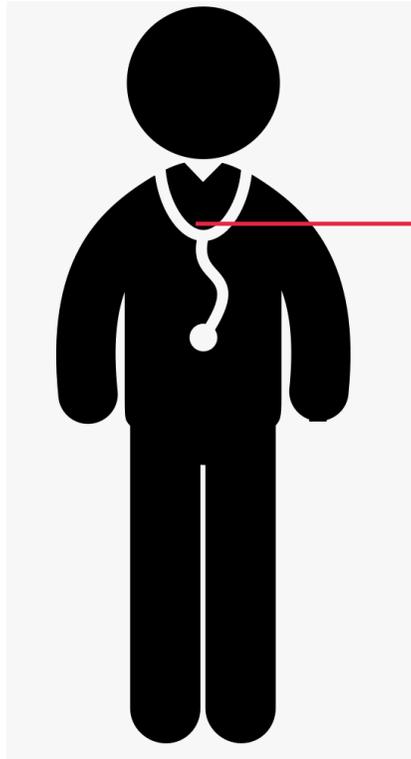
Activities

- Gratitude Letter
- Three Good Things
 - What are you grateful for or appreciative of, today?



Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005).

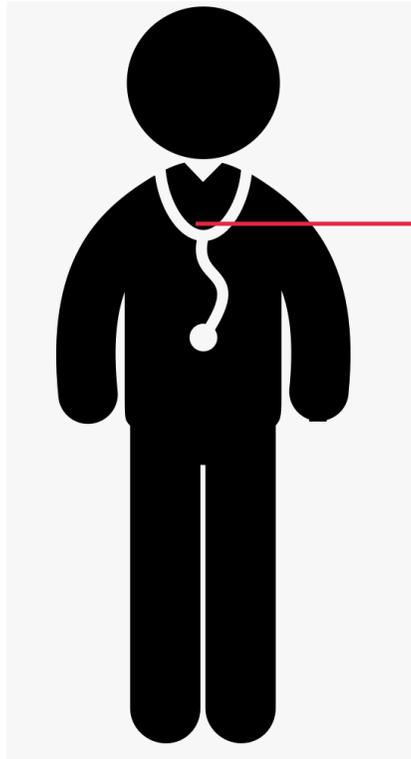
Wellbeing strategies



Emotions: working with difficult feelings

- Self compassion
- Acceptance

Wellbeing strategies



Emotions: working with difficult feelings

- Self compassion
- Acceptance

Self Talk

How do you talk to **yourself** when you:

- make a mistake
- say something foolish
- fail at achieving a task
- feel sad?

How do you talk to a **good friend** when they:

- make a mistake
- say something foolish
- fail at achieving a task
- feel sad?



Self Compassion

Being aware of times when you are struggling with feelings of inadequacy, despair and other forms of distress, and responding with kindness and understanding.

Three components:

1. Mindfulness:

- Experience of bringing accepting attention to challenging emotions and thoughts.
- **How?** Notice your thoughts and emotions without judgement. Try to describe them objectively.

2. Common humanity:

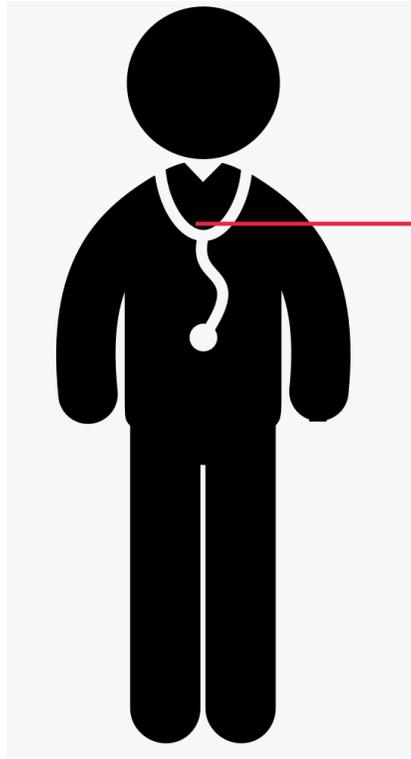
- Understanding you are not alone in your struggles; that discomfort is part of the shared human condition.
- **How?** Remind yourself that others also make mistakes and feel bad; challenges are part of being human.

3. Self-kindness:

- Being gentle and understanding with yourself when experiencing distress
- **How?** Think of how you would treat others

Activities: Self Compassion Pause, Letter to Yourself, Self-Compassion Meditation

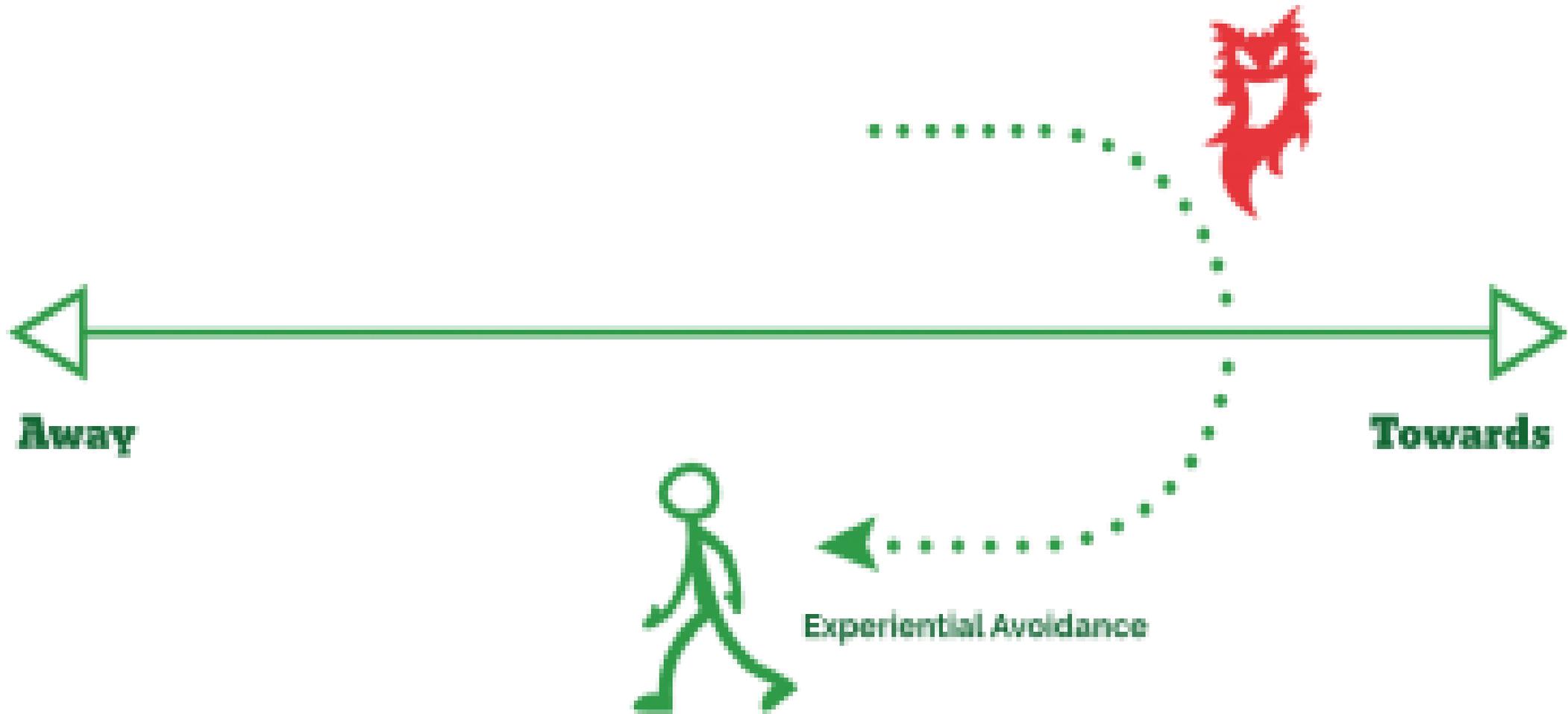
Wellbeing strategies



Emotions: working with difficult feelings

- Self compassion
- Acceptance

Acceptance / Experiential Avoidance



Experiential Avoidance

Struggle Strategies:

- Suppression
- Working harder
- Keeping busy
- Distraction
- Arguing/ using logic
- Avoiding social situations
- Going out/ socialising
- Watching TV
- Spacing out
- Alcohol
- Prescription drugs
- Non-prescription drugs
- Social media
- Over-eating
- Under-eating
- Exercise
- Self-help books
- Therapy
- Meditation
- Avoiding reminders of difficult thoughts/ feelings

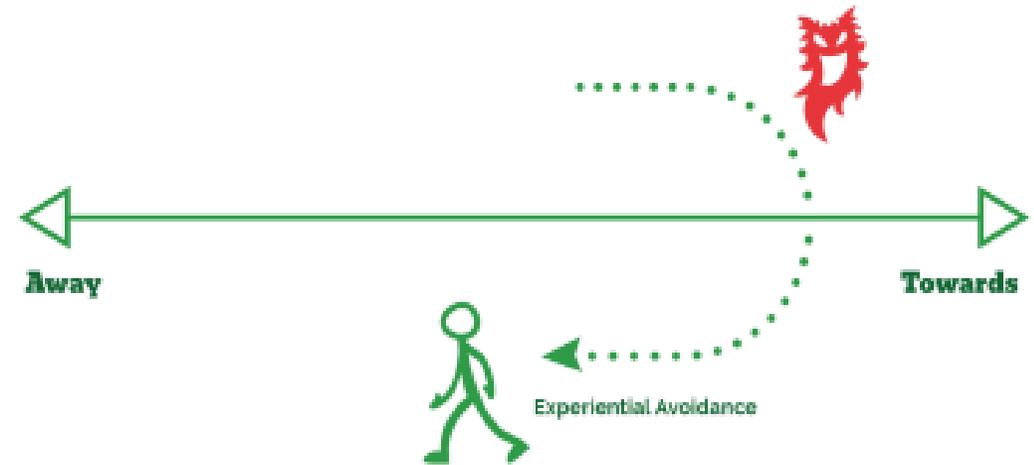


Experiential Avoidance

Three big problems with struggle:

- 1) Takes us away from things we value
- 2) Tends to amplify our pain
 - Emotions– trying to control anxiety tends to evoke anxiety
- 3) Numbs pleasant emotions

Most psychological suffering is caused by 'experiential avoidance'



ANXIETY
IRRITATED
FRUSTRATED
ANXIETY
ANGRY
SAD
GUILT
SAD



Acceptance

An alternative to struggle?

Acceptance

Dropping the struggle and let the feelings and thoughts just be there.

Making room for unwanted feelings, sensations and thoughts instead of trying to control them.



Acceptance

- Choose to feel whatever arises – even feelings we don't like
- Stop struggling with difficult emotion to set it free
 - Watch it objectively.
 - It might get bigger or smaller.
 - It may go away quickly or stay where it is.

Benefits

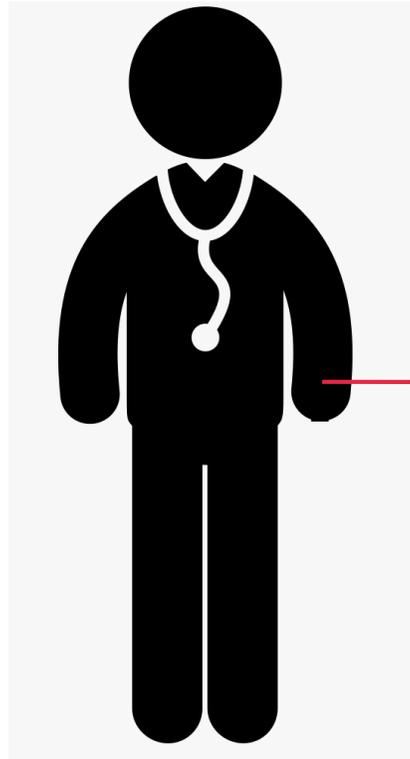
- We do not amplify the emotion
- We can move towards our values
- We are better at feeling all emotions

How

- **Informally:** practice watching your emotions with kindness
 - Drop the tension around difficult feelings
- **Formally:** body scans, meditations



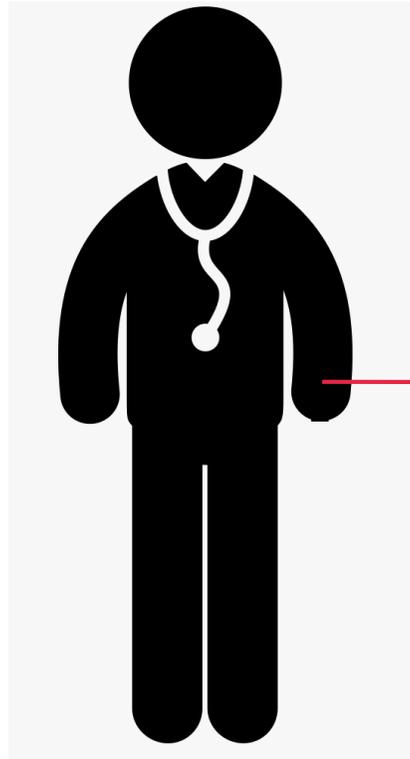
Wellbeing strategies



Actions: valued actions

- Social connection
- Wellbeing hygiene

Wellbeing strategies



Actions: valued actions

- Social connection
- Wellbeing hygiene

Never smoking

Doing exercise

Not being overweight

Being physically active

Quitting smoking

Taking appropriate medicine

Getting the Flu vaccination

Avoiding air pollution

Reducing alcohol

Social integration

Social support

Social support

Social integration

Never smoking

Quitting smoking

Reducing alcohol

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Doing exercise

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Connecting Socially

Helpful social groups provide psychological resources

Connect with groups that:

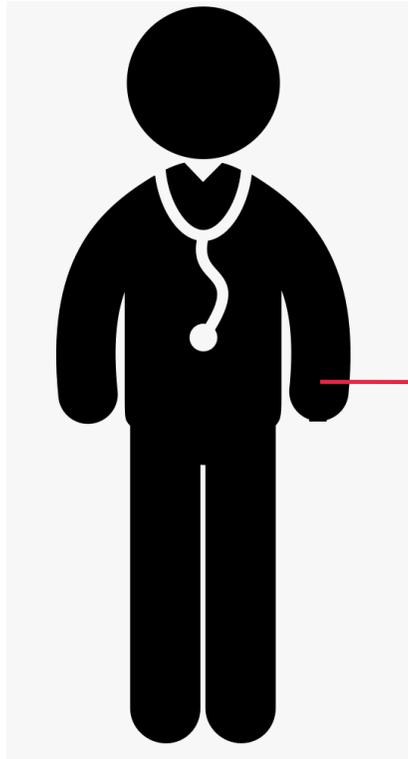
- Provide support
- Align with your values/ goals
- Provide a positive experience
- Are enduring



Social Plan

- Re-connect with existing groups
- Join new groups
- First small step?
- Work through the discomfort and challenges

Wellbeing strategies

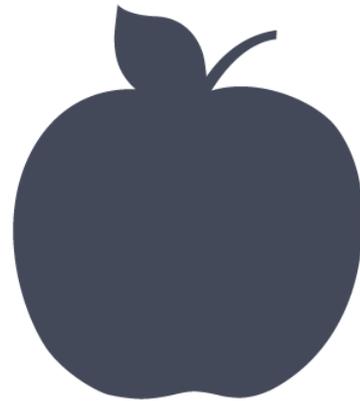


Actions: valued actions

- Social connection
- Wellbeing hygiene

Wellbeing Hygiene

- Diet/nutrition
- Good sleep
- Physical activity
- Nature- getting outside



DIET

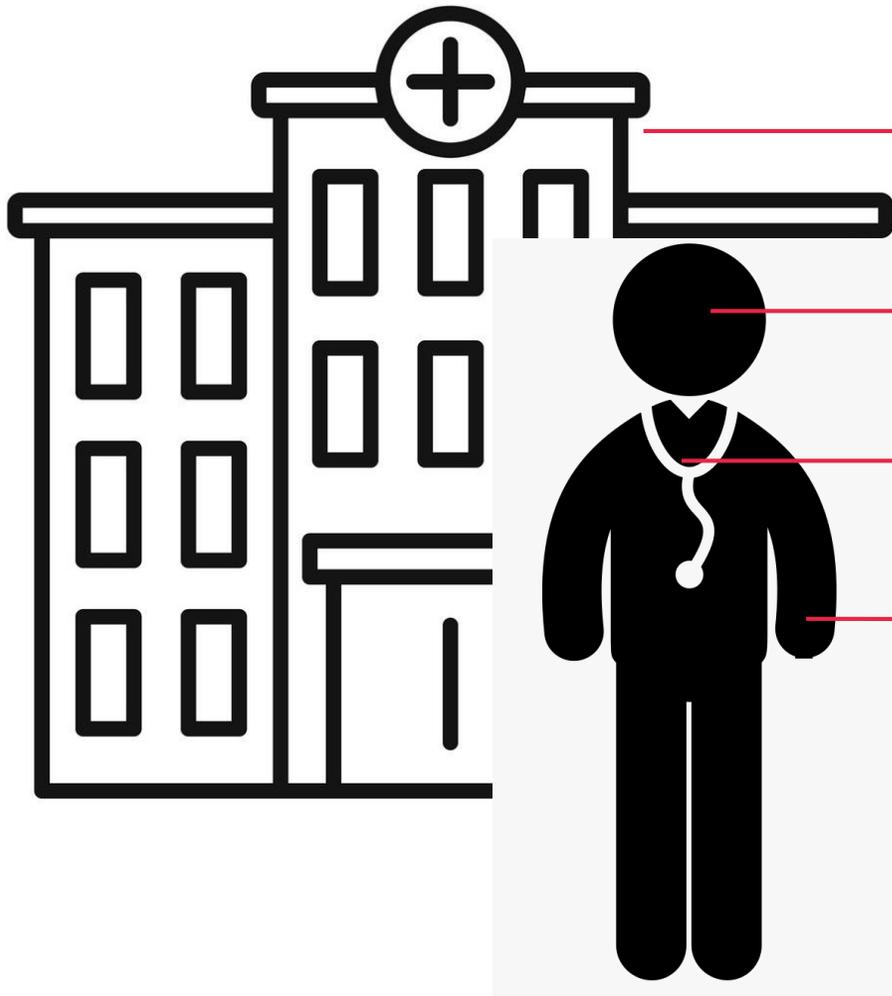


REST



EXERCISE

Wellbeing strategies



Context: changing the workplace

Thoughts: managing difficult thoughts

Emotions: working with difficult feelings

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Resources- Activities & Research

Mindfulness

- Insight Timer: <https://insighttimer.com/>
- Online Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction: <http://palousemindfulness.com/>
- UCLA Free meditations: <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>
- Tara Brach's meditations: <https://www.tarabrach.com/guided-meditations/>
- Research: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_state_of_mindfulness_science

Defusion and Acceptance

- Free short course <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/communication/>
- Defusion videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3vhXQy48jo>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzUoXJVl0wo&t=3s>
- Defusion meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fqtj6pFw-UE>
- Willingness videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cFhhUuMEW8>
- Research: <https://contextualscience.org/publications>

Resources- Activities & Research

Gratitude

- A Grateful day video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSt7k_q_qRU
- Three good things activity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOGAp9dw8Ac>
- 41 Gratitude activities: <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-messages-letters-lists/>
- Research: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain

Self Compassion

- Compassionate letter activity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XvHcnMpsOI>
- Self-compassion break: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ax8Y741rxA>
- Research: <https://self-compassion.org/the-research/>

Resources- Activities & Research

Social Connection

- Social Cure Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEOqiuuMB3c>
- Research: <https://sign.centre.uq.edu.au/health-well-being>

Wellbeing Hygiene

Research:

- Diet: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1566105838?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar>
- Sleep <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/16/12/2079>
- Physical Activity: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/public-health-nutrition/article/cluster-analysis-of-patterns-of-objectively-measured-physical-activity-in-hong-kong/7BE6E3732446168165937C70A600DF5F>



**Put on your own
oxygen mask
before helping
those around you.**



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CREATE CHANGE

Thank you

Tarli Young | Postdoctoral Research Fellow
School of Psychology
t.young@uq.edu.au



@Tarliyoung

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