

# Empathic Strain (Compassion Fatigue)



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
Waterloo Wellington

Association canadienne  
pour la santé mentale  
Waterloo Wellington

# Land Acknowledgement

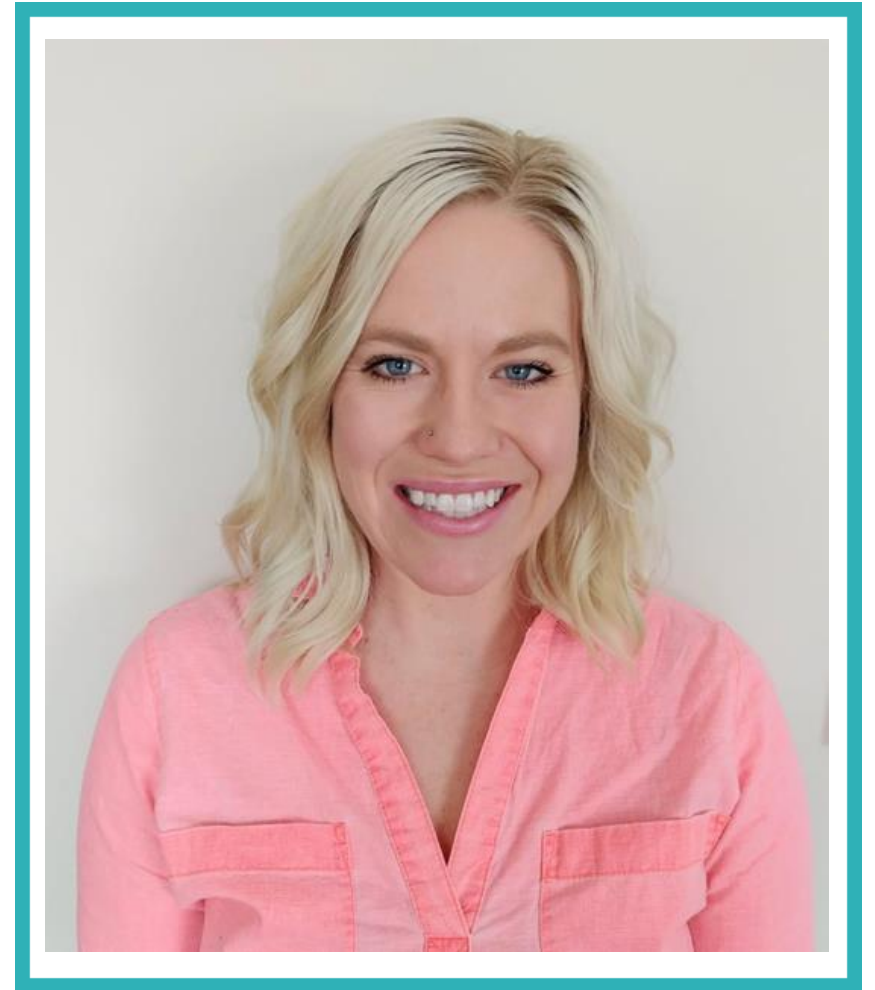


# About the Presenter

Jessica Schumacher

- Mental Health Promotion & Education Services Team
- Volunteer and Student Coordinator
- safeTALK, Living Life to the Full, Empathic Strain (CF) Trainer

[jschumacher@cmhaww.ca](mailto:jschumacher@cmhaww.ca)



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# Content

1

## Aware

What is Empathic Strain and other important definitions.

2

## Explore

How compassion fatigue and other concerns can affect us.

3

## Act

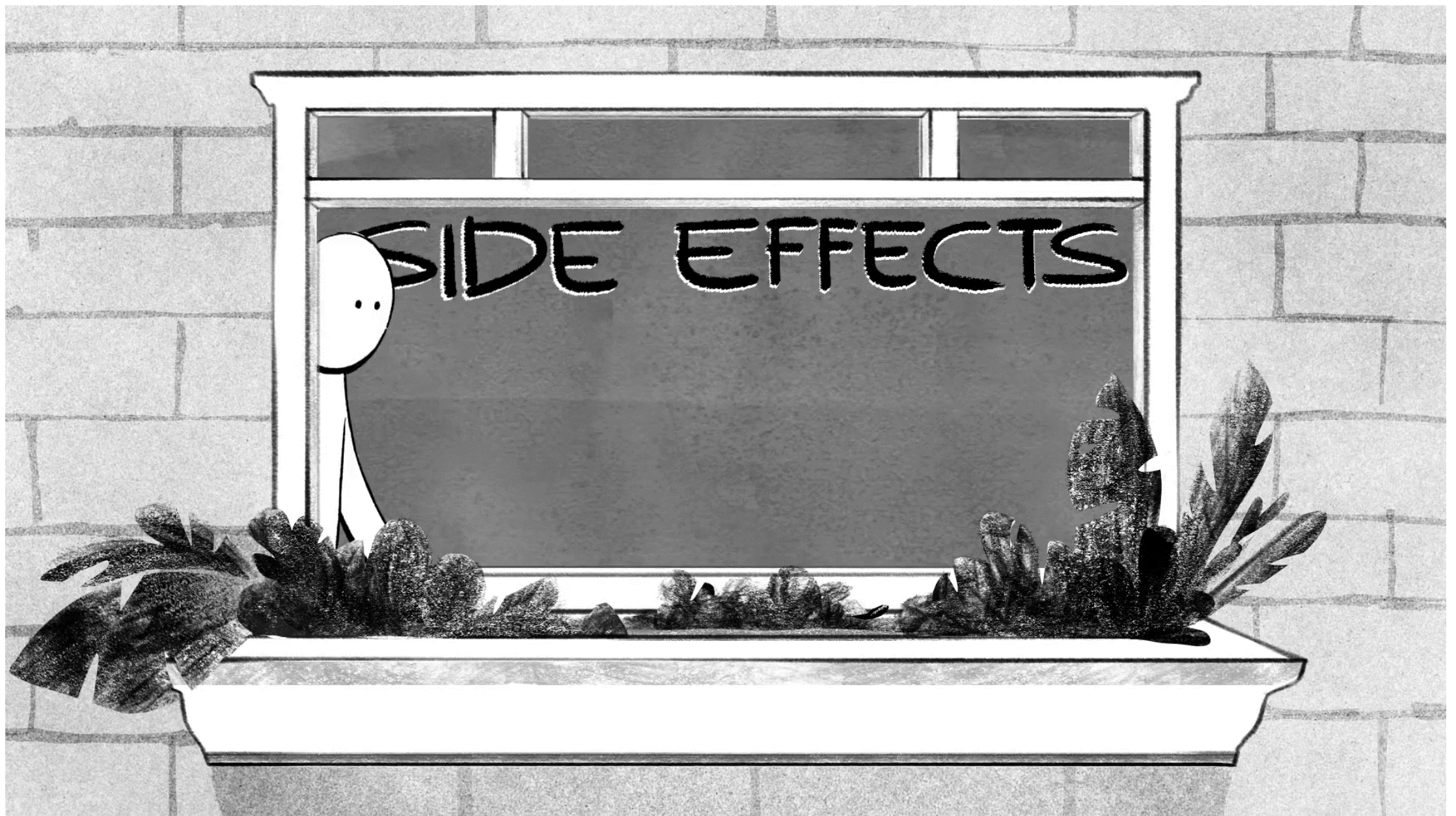
How we can mitigate empathic strain and bring balance to our lives.

- 100% of strategies we will discuss today are **FREE!** And things you can do with little time.

## Goals:

- **increasing** your self awareness about what is going on in your life
- **identifying** what you can change and
- **deciding** where to begin
- **creating** habits through micro-practices





**“The expectation that we  
can be immersed in suffering  
and loss daily and not be  
touched by it, is as unrealistic  
as expecting to be able to  
walk through water  
without getting wet.”**

Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* 1996



**“We are not all in the same boat  
but definitely in the same storm.”**

Diana Tikasz – Tend Academy

# Understanding Definitions

**We will be going over some important meanings:**

- ☐ Empathic Strain/Compassion Fatigue
- ☐ Vicarious Trauma /Secondary Traumatic Stress
- ☐ Burnout
- ☐ Moral Distress
- ☐ Moral Residue
- ☐ Compassion Satisfaction

# Compassion Fatigue

## Empathic Strain

- Deep physical and emotional exhaustion and a pronounced change in the helper's ability to feel empathy for their patients, loved ones and co-workers.
- Eventually can lead to depression, secondary traumatic stress, and stress related illness.
- The worst part is that it attacks the part of us that brought us into this line of work.

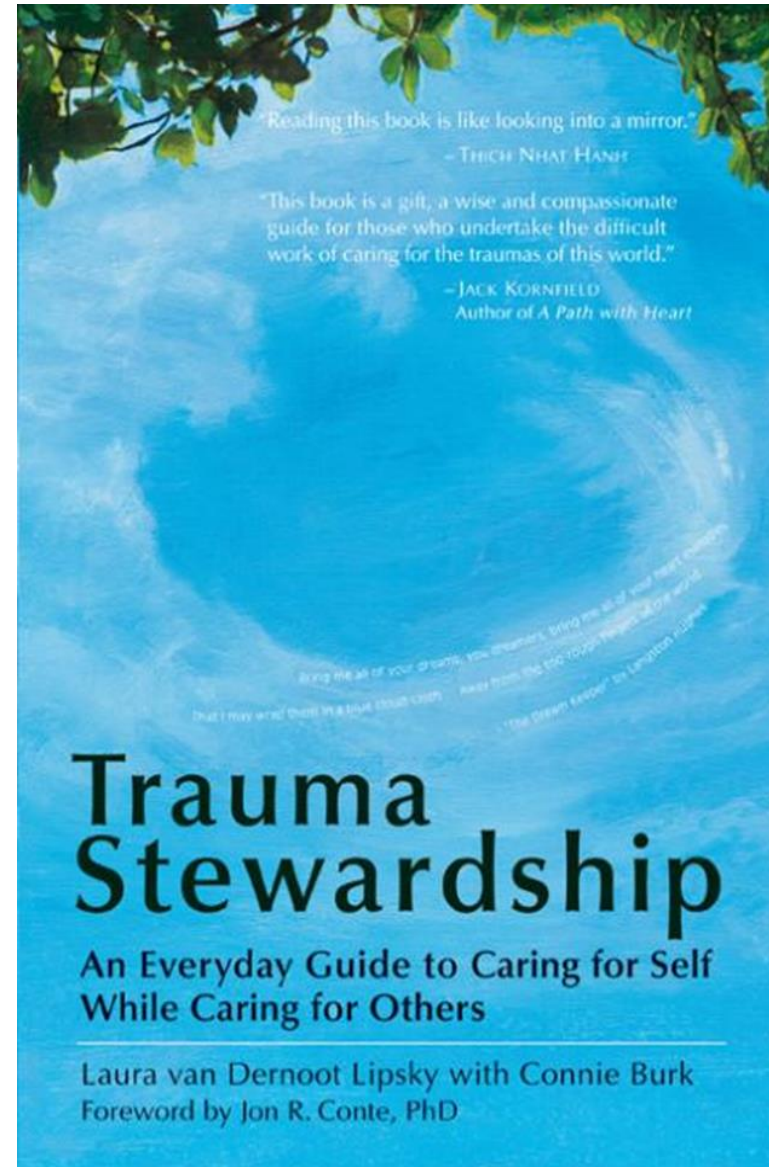
# Vicarious Trauma

## Secondary Traumatic Stress

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- The profound shift that workers experience in their world view when they work with clients who have experienced trauma.
- Helpers will notice their fundamental beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged by being repeatedly exposed to traumatic material.
- This is accompanied by intrusive thoughts and imagery and difficulty ridding ourselves of the traumatic experiences recounted by our clients.

# Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky



# Burnout

## Workplace Related

- The physical and emotions exhaustion workers can experience when they have low job satisfaction, feel powerless, are overwhelmed at work, had a heavy workload, there is poor management, and more.
- It does not mean that our world view has changed or that we have lost the ability to feel compassion or others.
- It can happen at any job.



# Stress vs Burnout

## Over engagement

Reactive or over reactive emotions

Sense of urgency and hyperactivity

Lost or diminished energy

Leads to anxiety

Physical toll



## Disengagement

Blunted or distant emotions

Sense of helplessness

Motivation is lost or diminished

Leads to feeling depressed

Emotional toll

# Moral Distress

## Emotional State

- Comes from the field of medical ethics. Defined as something that occurs when policies or routines conflict with beliefs about patient care.
- It occurs when we are told to do things that we fundamentally disagree with or to which we are morally opposed.
- Over time moral distress can be a significant contributing factor to empathic strain.

# Moral Residue

## Distress that Remains

- The distress that remains when the situation generating the moral distress ends.
- The lingering feelings and personal discord from the moral distress that continue after the event is over.
- Can cause so much damage over time, especially when the person is repeatedly exposed to morally distressing events.

# Compassion Satisfaction

## Role Happiness

- The pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well.
- Satisfaction related to your ability to be an effective caregiver in your job.
- Being able to come home and feel good and satisfied and have the time and energy to enjoy the rest of your life
- The ultimate goal of this training and our workshops.

# What types of helpers develop Compassion Fatigue



All studies come to the same conclusions:

**01**

Affects the most caring

**02**

The more traumatic the work= higher incidence

**03**

Full time vs part time

**04**

Availability of social support is protective

**05**

Helper's own trauma history

**06**

Adequate training is protective

# Signs

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

## Physical

- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Somatization and hypochondria

## Behavioural

- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Anger and irritability
- Avoidance
- Relationship conflict
- Absenteeism or Presenteeism



# Signs

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

## Psychological

- Distancing
- Negative self-image
- Depression
- Dread of work with certain people
- Feeling professional helplessness

## Psychological

- Disruption of world view
- Intrusive imagery
- Heightened anxiety or fears
- Hypersensitivity to stimuli
- Increased sense of personal vulnerability



# Mental Fitness Continuum



Optimum  
Talent

13

THRIVING	DOING WELL	STRUGGLING	IN CRISIS
Confident Cheerful, joyful and energetic High performing with good flow and concentration Contributing to community Supporting others	Positive and calm Performs well at work Sleeps and eats normally Normal social activity Manages normal life stressors	Worried, anxious, and/or depressed Tired, sad, Irritable and/or angry Exhausted and overwhelmed Distracted and/or withdrawn Poor sleep and appetite	Excessive anxiety, angers easily Depressed or numb Exhausted with low concentration, focus and memory Trouble getting to, or staying, asleep Significant weight changes

## HELPFUL STRATEGIES

Focus on tasks at hand Break problems into manageable chunks Identify and nurture support systems Maintain healthy lifestyle	Recognize limits Get proper food, rest, and exercise Focus on your self-care Identify and minimize stressors	Identify and understand your signs of distress Talk with someone Seek help Seek social support instead of withdrawing	Seek formal supports Connect with the wellness team Follow healthcare provider recommendations
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How are you  
feeling today?

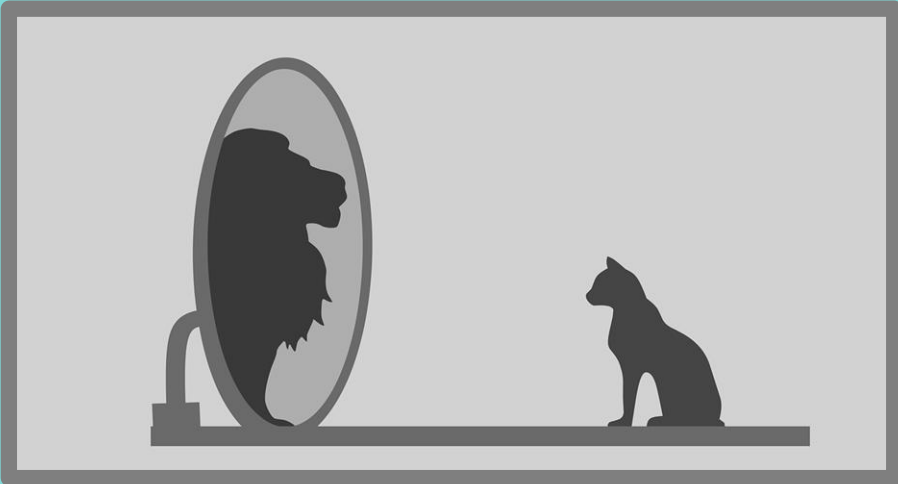
How are you  
feeling most  
days?

# Reflections

- Signs and symptoms checklist
- These are your WARNING SIGNS

## ASK YOURSELF:

- What stand out most?
- What do I bring home with me the most?
- What do I experience at work?
- What do I have to lose if I don't deal with this?
- What do I stand to gain?
- Who will be my biggest supporters?



# Strategies

- ☐ Low Impact Debriefing
- ☐ Take Stock: Track your Stress
- ☐ Enhancing Self Care & Improving Work/Life Integration
- ☐ Developing resiliency through relaxation training & stress reduction techniques
- ☐ Making a Commitment to Change

# Low Impact Debriefing



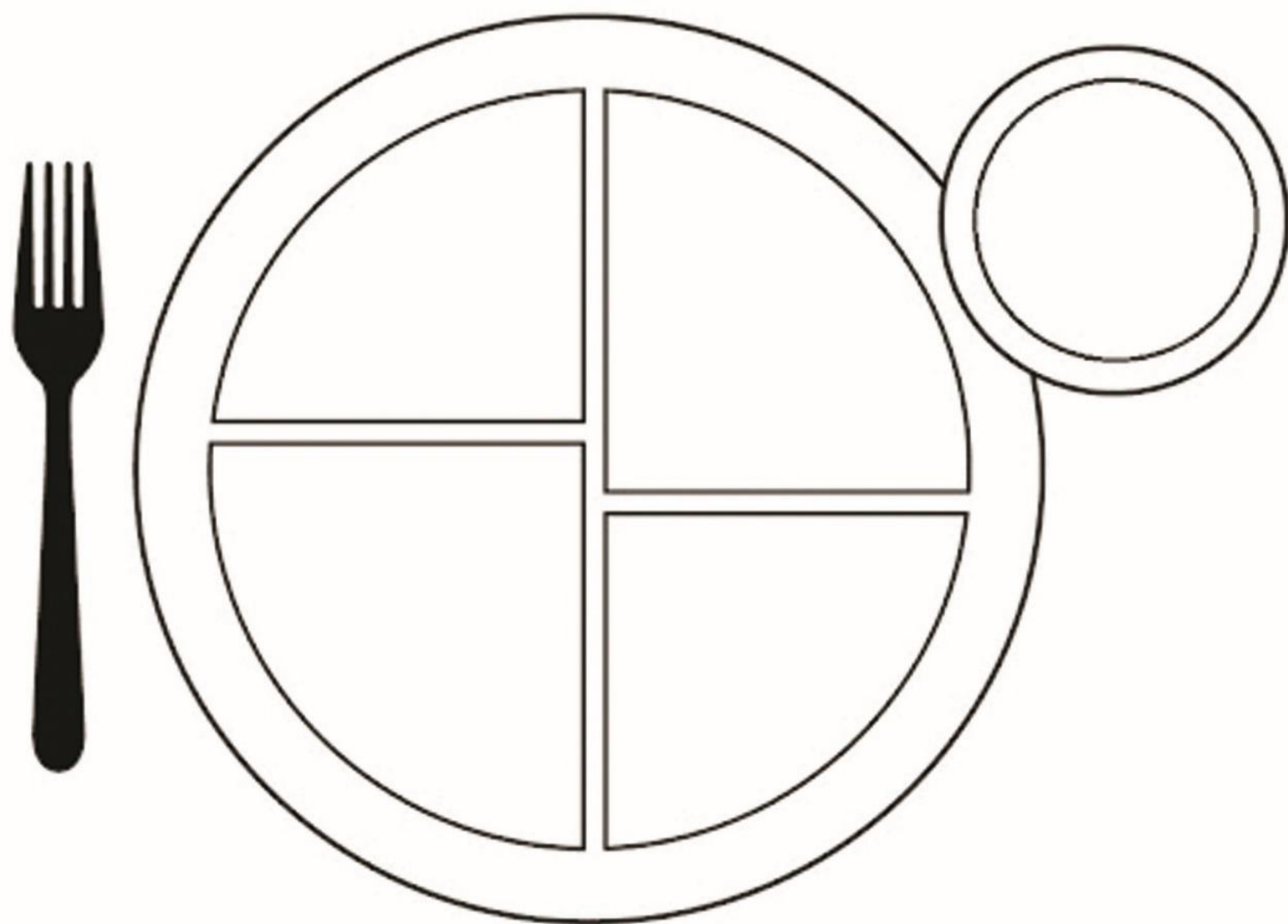
- Anti-sliming strategy
- Four Key Strategies
  - 1) Increased Self Awareness
  - 2) Fair Warning
  - 3) Consent
  - 4) Low Impact Disclosure

# Take Stock



- Track your stress (at home and work)
- Activities
  - 1) What is draining you?
  - 2) My Plate
  - 3) Stress Assessment
- What we say





# What we say-

## Bargaining

- 01 “I’ll slow down when:  
I retire...  
When the kids leave...  
When I have enough money...”
- 02 “This is just a bad spell, it  
won’t be this awful in a month...”

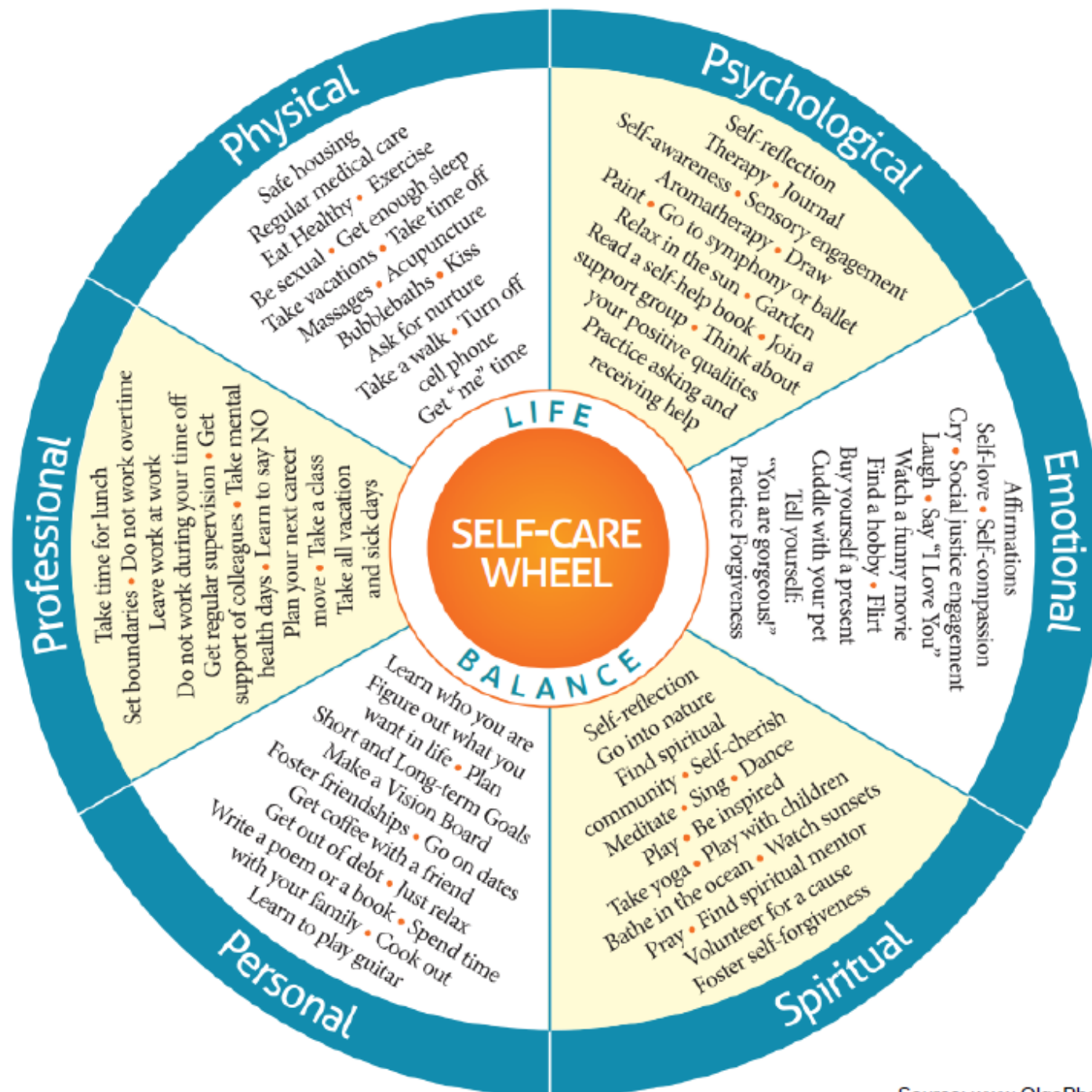
# Enhancing Self Care



- Improving work/life integration
- Back to basics
- Renewal or energy
- Activities that replenish you
- Altering hours if possible
- Nourishing activities every day
- Debriefing process

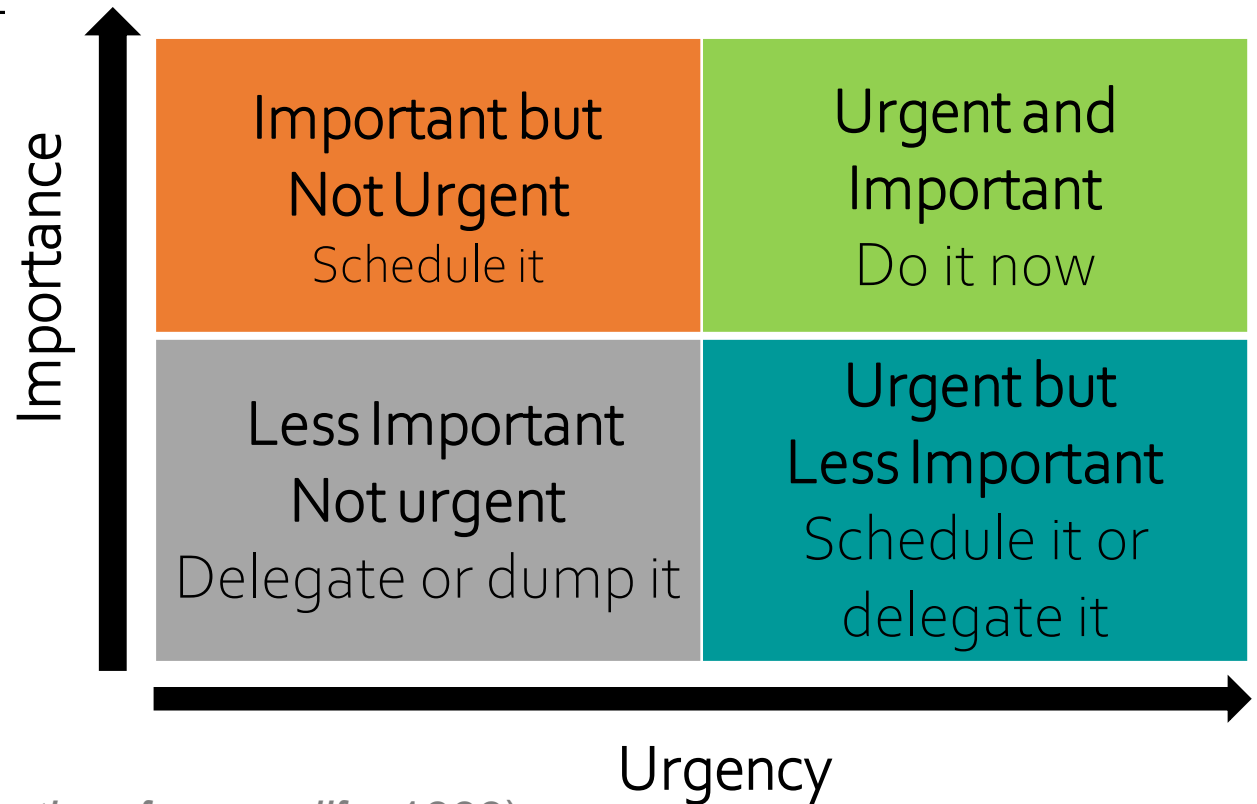
# Personal Check List

- ☒ Did you eat?
- ☒ Did you sleep?
- ☒ How is the space around you?
- ☒ Is your to-do list too long?
- ☒ Did you drink water?
- ☒ Did you shower?
- ☒ Did you go out?
- ☒ Have you talked to someone?



# Making a Commitment to Self Care

- Could you protect 1 hour or 1 night a week?
- Prioritize and make time for yourself.
- Is there anything you could:
  - delegate?
  - trade your time for?
  - look ahead 2 weeks and plan



(This idea comes from Cheryl Richardson, *Take time for your life*, 1999)





A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping circles. The left circle is light green and contains the text 'Self Care'. The right circle is light blue and contains the text 'Coping'. The overlapping area in the center is a darker shade of green.

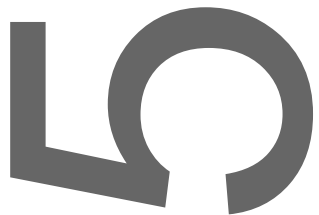
Self  
Care

Coping

# Develop Resiliency



- By building your relaxation training and stress reduction techniques
  - 1) Guided meditation or imagery
  - 2) Progressive muscle relaxation
  - 3) Visualization
  - 4) Yoga/Thai Chi
  - 5) Breathing



1

Sit in a comfortable position with both feet on the floor and your hands resting in your lap

2

Close your eyes or find a spot on the floor or in your lap where you can rest your eyes when you get distracted

3

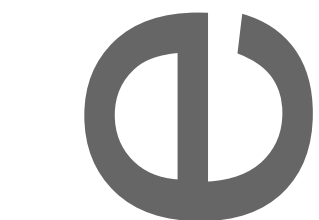
Turn one palm so that it is facing the ceiling. You'll use this hand for counting

4

Gently inhale through your nose until your lungs are full and then slowly exhale through your mouth

5

Tuck your finger into your palm and continue with breathing until all five fingers are folded in



# **Breathing Exercise**

<https://www.connectedbreath.co/>

# What works to address compassion fatigue?

5 Key Areas:

**01**

Resiliency Skills

**02**

Skills Acquisition

**03**

Self Care

**04**

Internal Conflicts

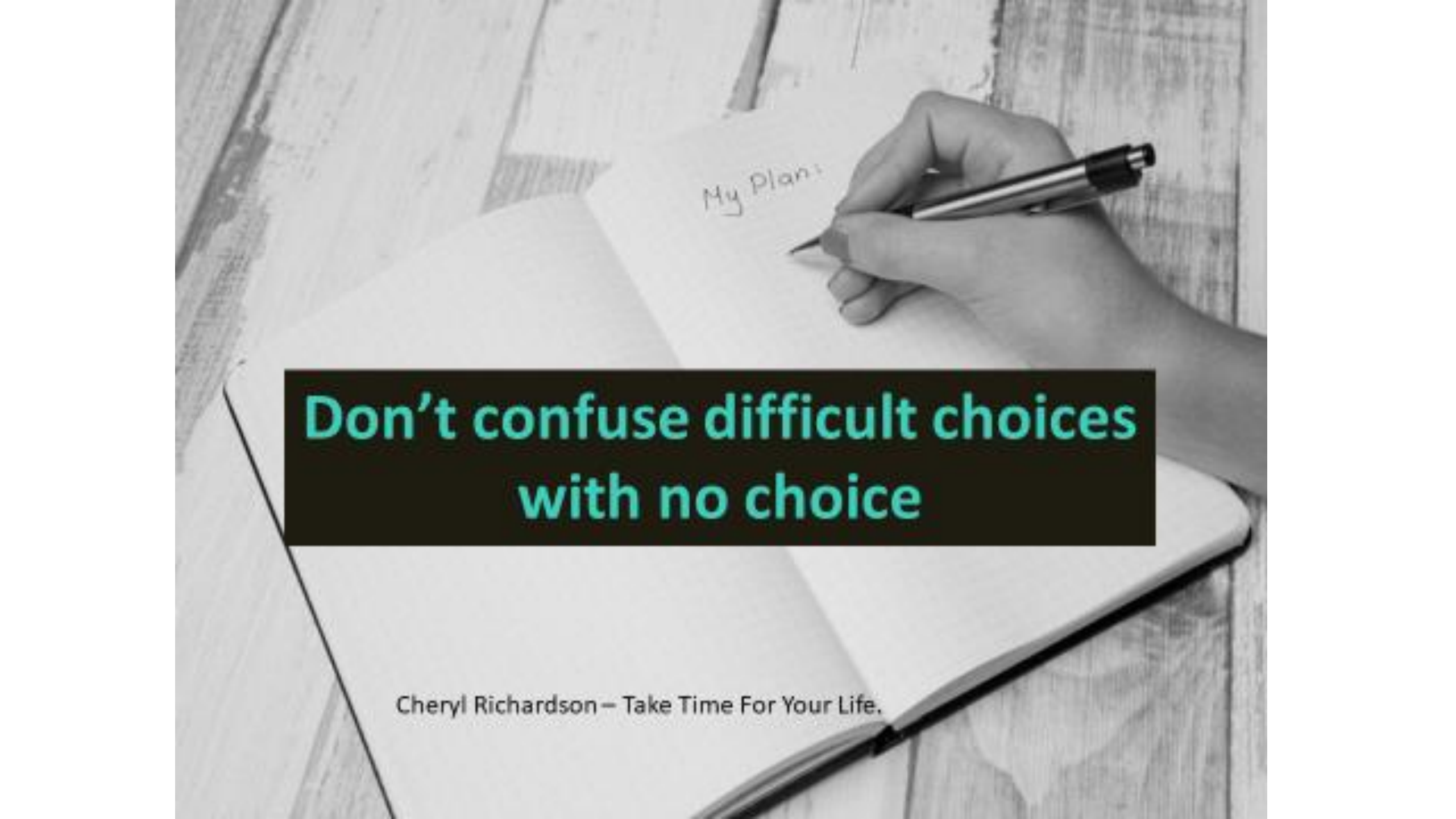
**05**

Connection with others

# Commit to Change



- What is 1 change I could make-
  - next week?
  - next month?
  - in the next year?
- What do I need to help make this happen?
- Dig where the ground is soft

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a pen, writing the words "My Plans" on a piece of paper. The paper is resting on a wooden surface. The hand is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame, and the pen is angled towards the bottom left. The words "My Plans" are written in a cursive, handwritten style.

My Plans

**Don't confuse difficult choices  
with no choice**

Cheryl Richardson – Take Time For Your Life.



<https://www.tendacademy.ca/>





**1 844 437 3247**  
(HERE247)

**Call anytime to access**  
**Addictions, Mental Health**  
**& Crisis Services**

Waterloo-Wellington



# COVID-19: HERE4HELP

- **Here4Help.ca**

- Resources, information, and guidance to support mental health as we navigate this new and temporary normal
- Sections specific to children, youth, parents, and guardians, adults, seniors and caregivers, employees and employers, and healthcare workers.

 **BounceBack**®  
reclaim your health

A free program to help  
you tackle depression  
and anxiety.

**bouncebackontario.ca**  
**1.866.345.0224**







- **Free**, guided, self-help program, grounded in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help **adults and youth 15+** learn skills to better manage low mood, mild to moderate depression and anxiety, stress or worry
- Offers two forms of support:
  1. **Telephone coaching using skill-building workbooks** (referral needed by a primary care provider or self-referral with primary care information)
  2. **Online videos** provide practical tips at: [bouncebackvideo.ca](https://bouncebackvideo.ca) (access code: [bbtodayon](https://bbtodayon)) (no referral needed)
- Participants are contacted within **5 business days** of referral being submitted
- Telephone coaching available in **multiple languages**
- **No travelling required**. Participants receive support in the comfort of their home at a time that's convenient for them

For more information, visit: [bouncebackontario.ca](https://bouncebackontario.ca).

If you're a healthcare professional seeking resources, email:

[bounceback@ontario.cmha.ca](mailto:bounceback@ontario.cmha.ca)



# Helpful Apps

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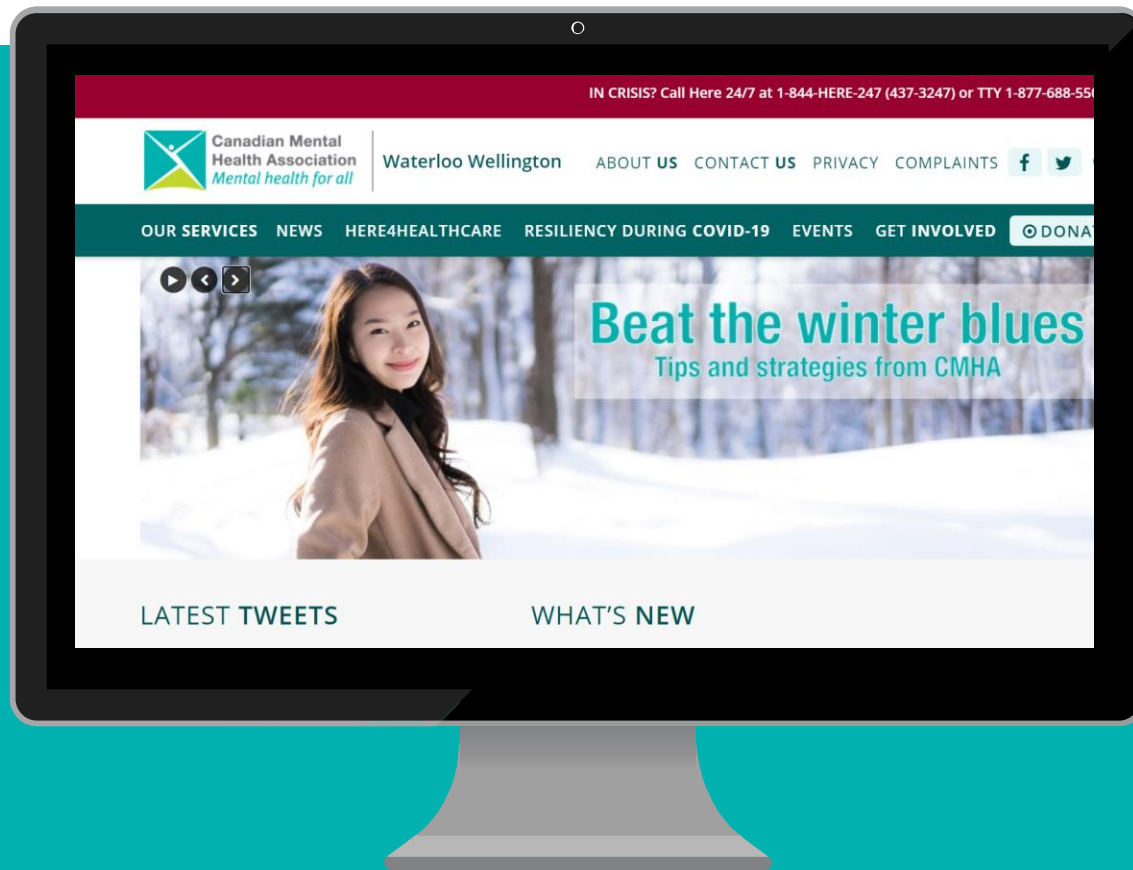
- Calm
- Insight Timer
- Down Dog
- Headspace
- Mindshift
- Stop. Breathe. Think.
- Breethe meditation
- Gratitude Journal 365
- 10% Happier

# Other Websites

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- [camh.net](http://camh.net)
- [wrspsc.ca](http://wrspsc.ca)
- [mentalhealthhelpline.ca](http://mentalhealthhelpline.ca)
- [mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://mentalhealthcommission.ca)
- [211Ontario.ca](http://211Ontario.ca)
- [ccohs.ca](http://ccohs.ca)
- [www.isfglobal.org](http://www.isfglobal.org)
- Wellness Together Canada | Home ([portal.gs](http://portal.gs))



Visit us online  
[cmhaww.ca/events](https://cmhaww.ca/events)

# Promoting Wellness at Work

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To book a training or webinar on topics related to mental health for your organization or place of work, including Mental Health in the Workplace, or for consultation on implementing Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace Standards contact:

[education@cmhaww.ca](mailto:education@cmhaww.ca)

If you have questions for me around the information presented today please contact me directly at:

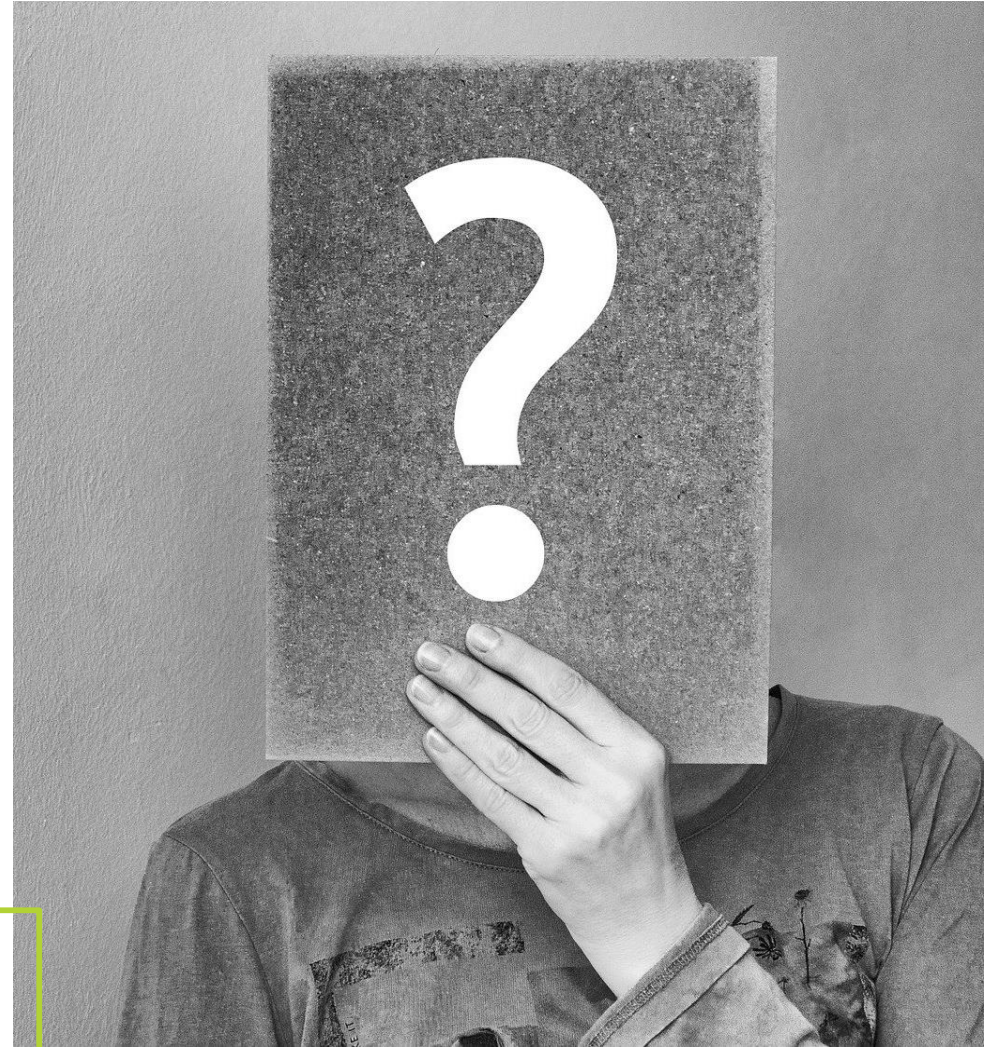
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# Questions?

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# References

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- © Françoise Mathieu 2010
- [www.tendacademy.com](http://www.tendacademy.com)
- Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* 1996
- Cheryl Richardson, *Take time for your life*, 1999
- Baranowsky and Gentry, ARP training manual (1999)

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