

Dr Jess Bolton & Dr Ange Cooper

Preparing for Crisis

A Healthcare Professionals Guide to Emotional Health

Part 1

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO OVERWHELM*

Breathe

Sigh

Move

*If you aren't in actual
danger right now

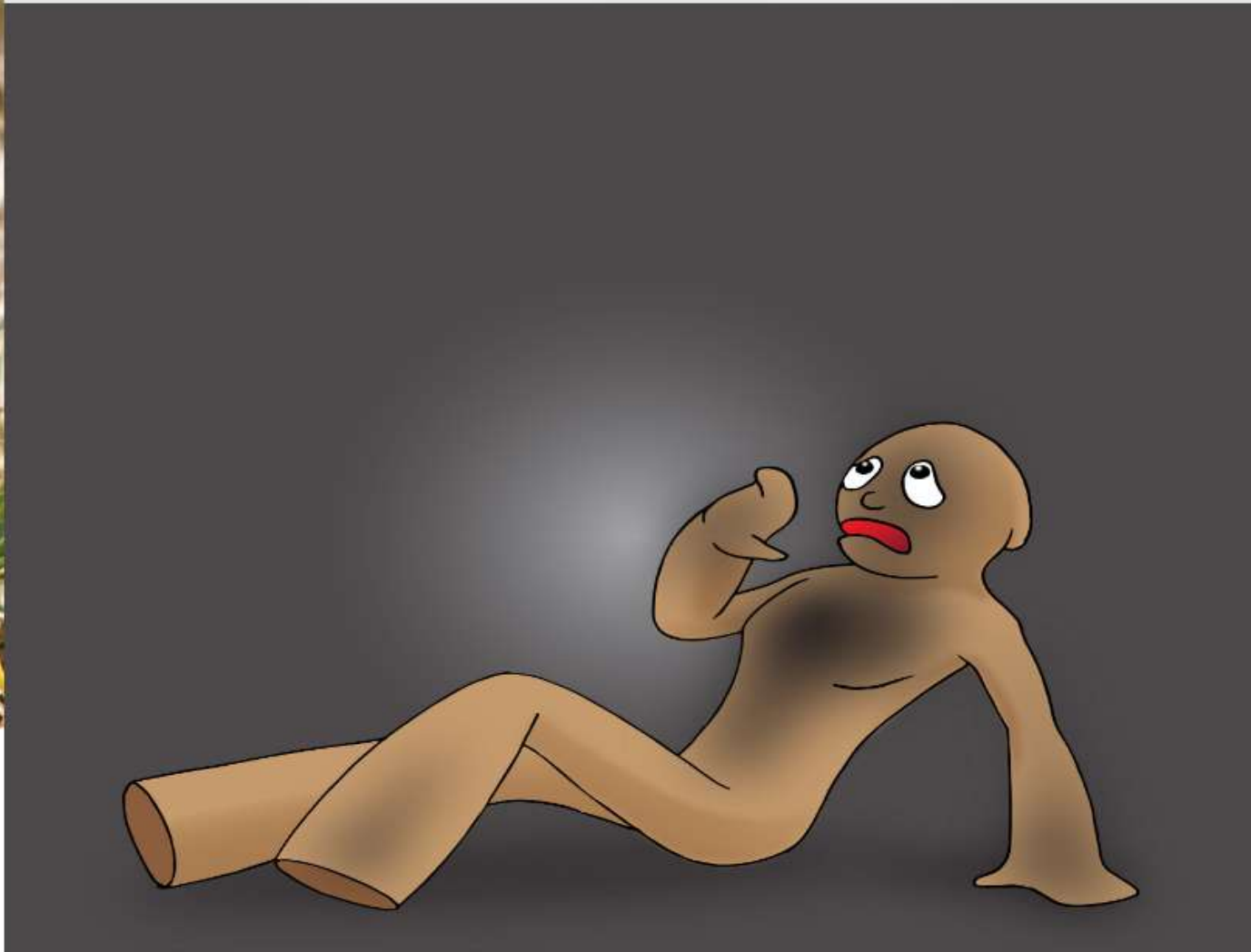
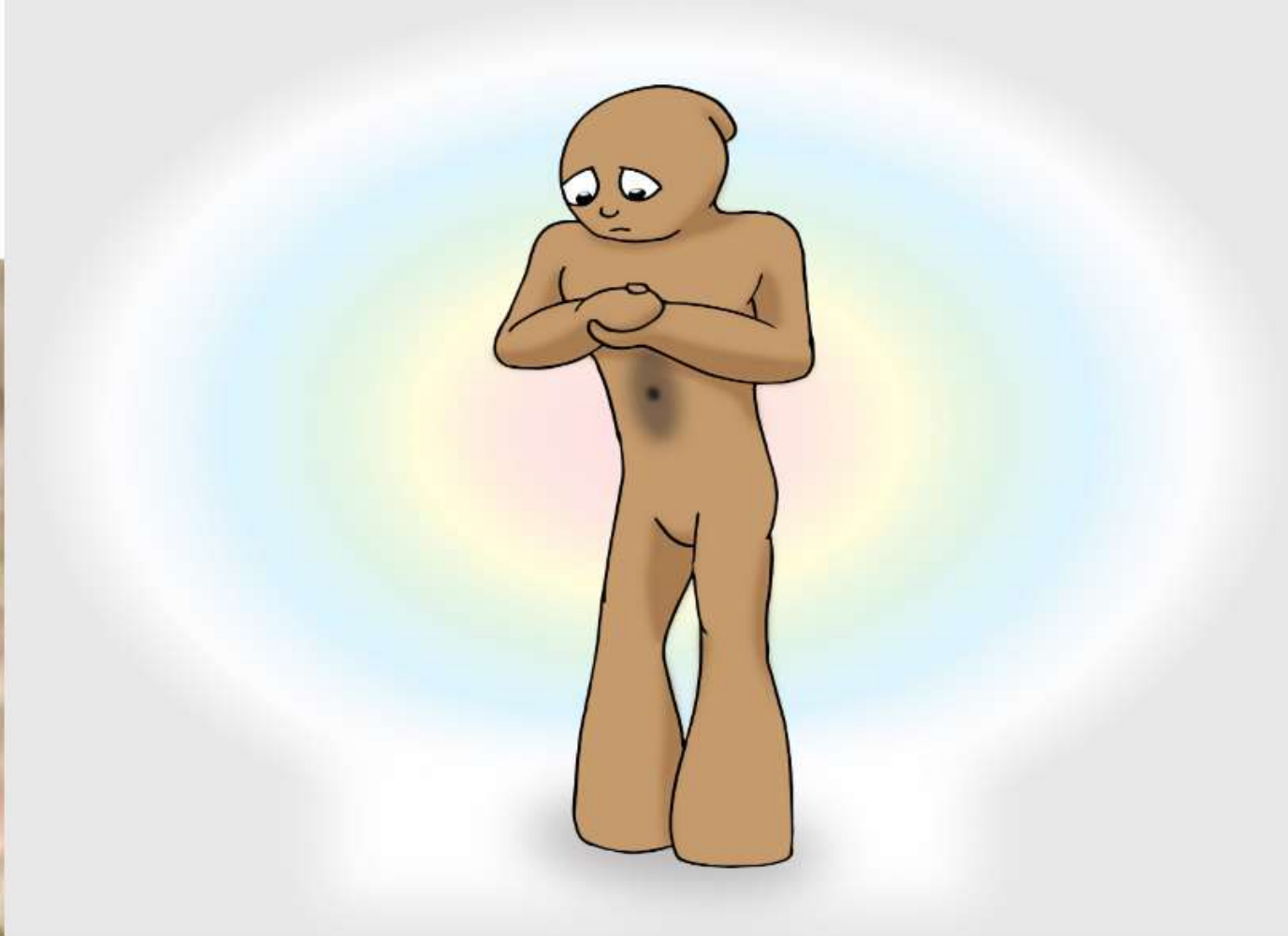
Facing into Fear

There is no doubt that right now, many of you are having to face into some major fears and anxieties as you ready yourself to tackle one of the greatest challenges of our lifetime: caring for those with COVID-19, caring for those who are worried about contracting the virus AND trying to care for yourself.

Here at EmotiHealth, we are deeply aware of the emotional challenges you are going to face over the coming weeks and months, so we felt compelled to offer what we can to try and help our precious healthcare workers emotionally cope during this crisis, using methods we understand to be helpful.

Fear is normal and healthy right now, there is a menacing threat to our health, which we are struggling as a society to contain. Fear triggers your nervous system to respond, to either fight, flight or freeze. We need this systems to keep us safe. However, when this system is constantly turned on and we don't get a break, our immune system suffers and we are less resilient to infection. Fear can also trigger own own unique anxieties, which have their roots in our personal history. Our anxiety often leads to attempts to control the uncontrollable. We are here to help.





Awareness, Acceptance, Action, Gratitude

Emotional wellbeing starts with a pause and an inward look



Awareness

Becoming aware of what you feel and experience right now in this moment can reduce your anxiety.



Acceptance

Accepting what we feel or experience and focusing on what we can control, calms the nervous system



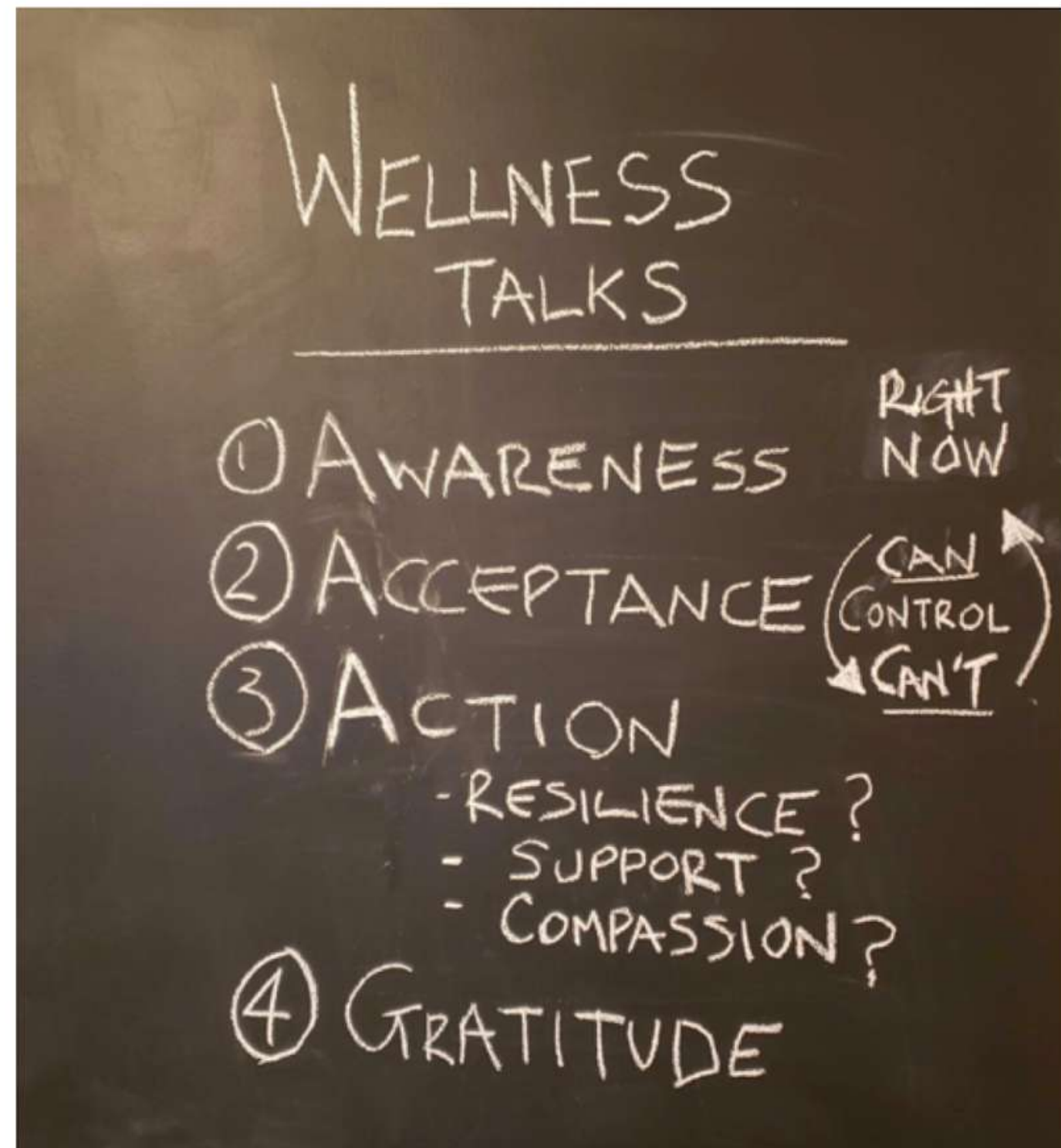
Action

Committed and compassionate action that aligns with your values keeps you resilient and gets you the support you need.



Gratitude

Spend a few moments being grateful for what you do have, what you can do and what you appreciate. A powerful technique to change your neurochemicals.





Awareness

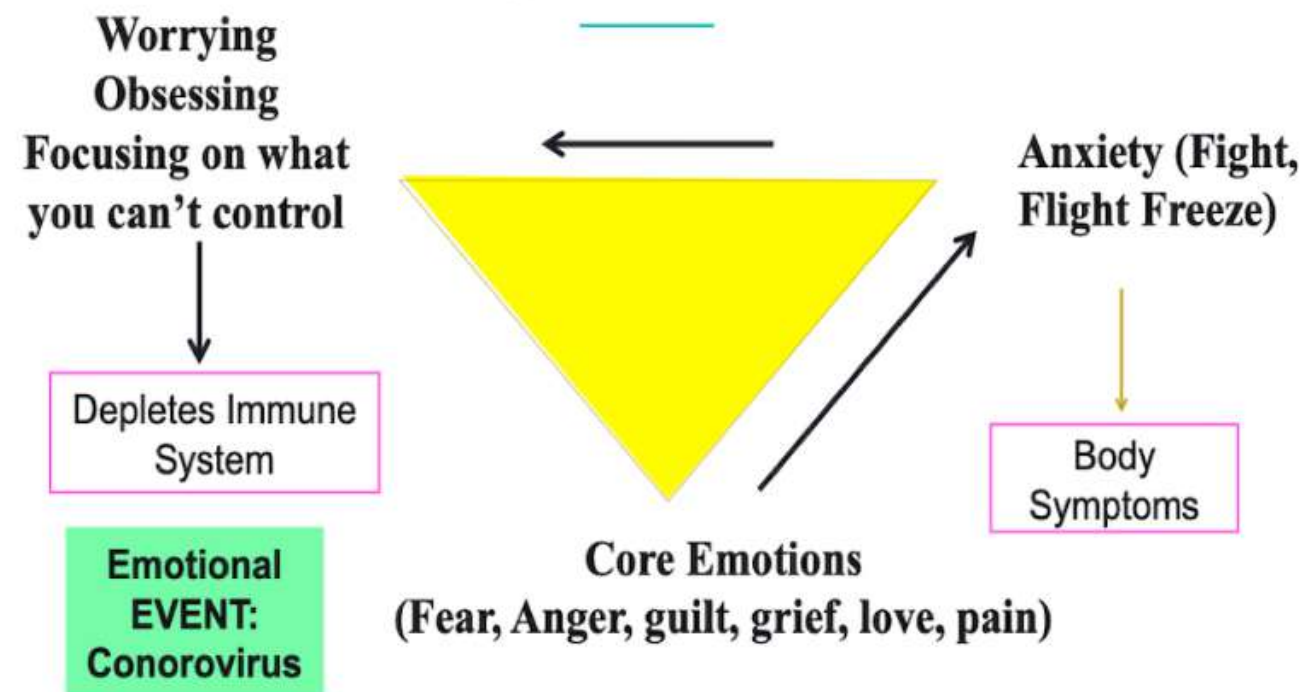
Becoming aware of what you notice inside of your body & mind is the first step in boosting your immunity. If you are not aware of what is happening inside, you can't switch off your fight, flight, freeze system.

Please use the 'Triangle of Awareness' to help yourself become aware of your mind and body. Normally people are able to notice either 1) Anxiety in the body e.g. tension, pain, stomach upset, dizziness or foggy mind or 2) Worrying thoughts that seek to control the uncontrollable.

Now take a pause

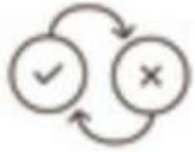
Ask yourself what am I feeling **underneath** the worry, control and the anxiety? i.e. I had a panic attack 2 weeks ago in a restaurant, I couldn't control it so instead I surrendered to it. A flood of deep grief came through for about 20 minutes and my panic dissipated. That moment made me feel more resilient, more able to cope.

Triangle of Awareness



The triangle of awareness allows you to begin to notice what your inner experiences are (adapted from Malan, 1979)

“If you can allow yourself to feel your emotions through your body, your anxiety and worry will reduce”



Acceptance

You have all heard of the phrase 'accept what you can't control'. But this idea has never been more relevant than right now. You might not be aware of the science behind this.

In addition to the external threat that covid-19 poses, our body has mechanisms to generate a sense of internal threat. When it continues to think threatening thoughts, when it turns anger inwards through self-blame or criticism, when it isolates itself and doesn't seek support, the body's internal threat mechanism stays switched on.

How do I turn my internal threat response off?

It can help to turn your threat response off by accepting your humanness:

About you:

I am a good person.

I can have a horrendous day and still be a good person.

I am trying my hardest at work, I have met my limits, and this is painful for me.

I am working hard to behave responsibly outside work.

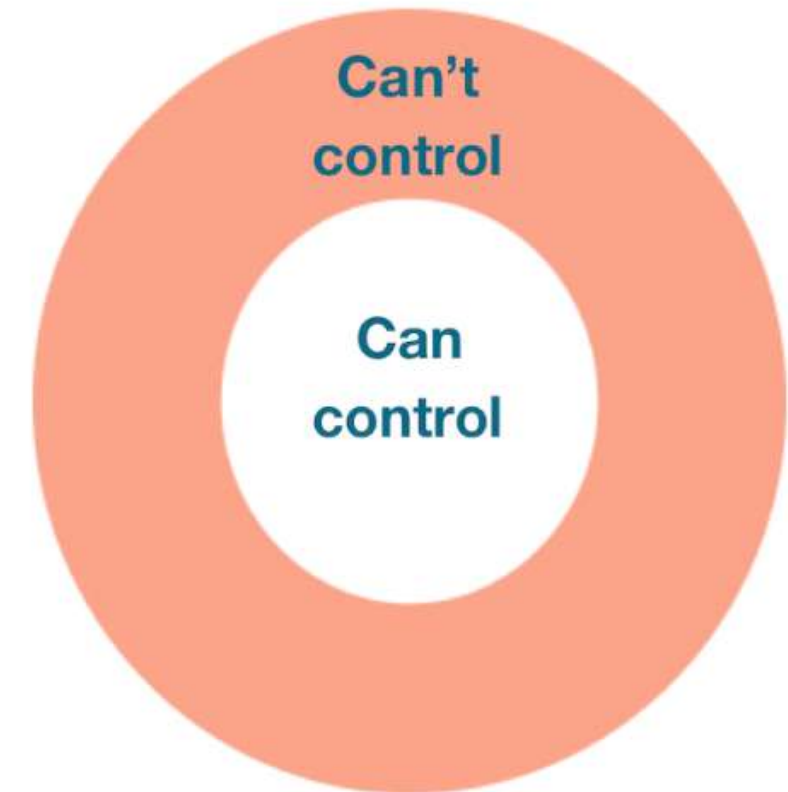
My feelings are held to one side at work for good reason, but they have space to come forwards afterwards and this will protect and help me.

And about others:

People behave irresponsibly and this makes me angry.

I have compassion for those who have suffered and are alone through this.

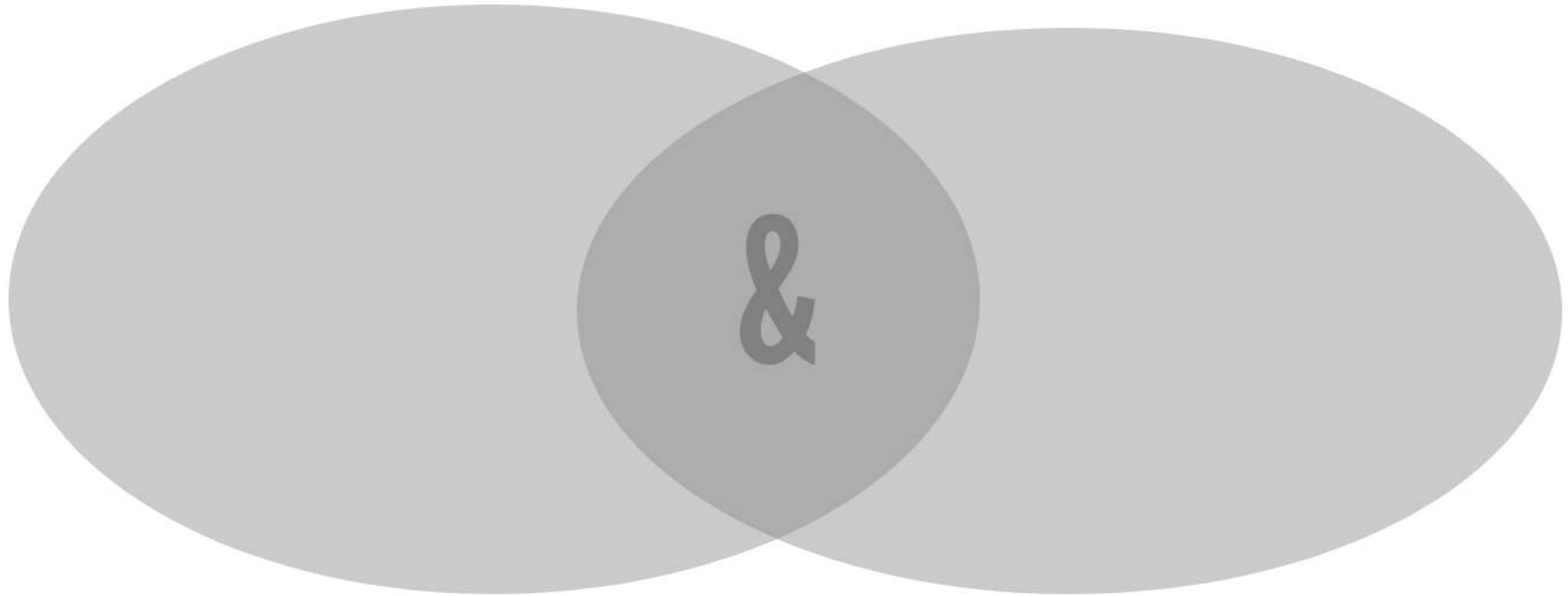
Connecting with reality and yourself is a powerful tool to calm an easily triggered threat response



EXERCISE: Write what you can and can't control onto a piece of paper, the process of transferring thoughts into the written word is a transformative one - it creates a neurological shift. Give it a go.

“You are human, this virus isn't your fault, have compassion for the part of you that is trying your best to care in such difficult circumstances”

The Land of &





Action

What do you want to stand for during this crisis?

Crisis gives us an opportunity to discover what is meaningful to us. Making meaning out of tragedy is part of how we protect our wellbeing.

Once you have an **awareness** of how you feel and you have **accepted** what you can control, it is time for **valued action**.

Actions that are based on values enhance wellness, only you can decide what matters most to you.

How do I want to care for myself and others at this time?

What can I do right now? Wellness is not a passive activity that happens to people, it is an active process that requires you make healthy choices for yourself and find ways to make yourself accountable for these choices.

Values

At this time, some values might become more important to you than others. Your values come from the heart and inspire you to be the person you want to be. To find out, ask yourself the following questions:



1. What do I want to stand for at work/home during this crisis?
2. What kind of person do I want to be at work/home?
3. How do I want to look after my physical and emotional health at this time?
4. How would I want to be remembered after this crisis is over?

Valued Action

Now you can begin to take action that aligns with your values. These actions help you along the path towards your values and your greater sense of purpose.

Here are our top 4 areas of wellness:

- **Support/Connection** – how will you reach out and enlist the support you need?
- **Health** – what actions do you need to take to care for your physical / emotional / mental health? Exercise and meditation could be strong contenders!
- **Play** – this is crucial to wellbeing. What gives you joy? What can you do to totally let go? What takes you into a peaceful/creative space?
- **Sleep** – this is by far one of the biggest predictors of wellbeing. What do you need to do to enhance your chances of a good night's sleep?



Gratitude

Yup dealing with everything you have on your plate and now we are going to suggest you be grateful too! That's right.



The process of leaning into small gratitudes, even in the most desperate times, has a meaningful impact on your neurochemicals and over time on your neurophysiology. Want to increase the size of your hippocampus and reduce the size of your amygdala? Meditation, gratitude, play, all does it's part to help with this.

But in a crisis, really? From personal experience of being in the midst of terror as my daughter was almost lost at 8 days old, and my husband developed ARDS 6 years later, I can honestly say that **gratitude** and **being present** with what I had, allowing it to be, **in this moment**, enough...well it saved my **sanity** and kept me **grounded**. And having done it from the perspective of a carer, I now practice this daily from the perspective of a health professional.

Gratitude isn't a one off event, it is best practiced over and over again.

Gratitude journaling can help turn this idea into a habit. This might feel difficult to do during a crisis. Yet, the act of writing just a few words or sentences can make a significant impact. Habits come from repetitive behaviours and can be kickstarted by a strong emotional experience. This isn't about forcing gratitude but about gently and purposefully leaning into. You can try by saying to yourself:

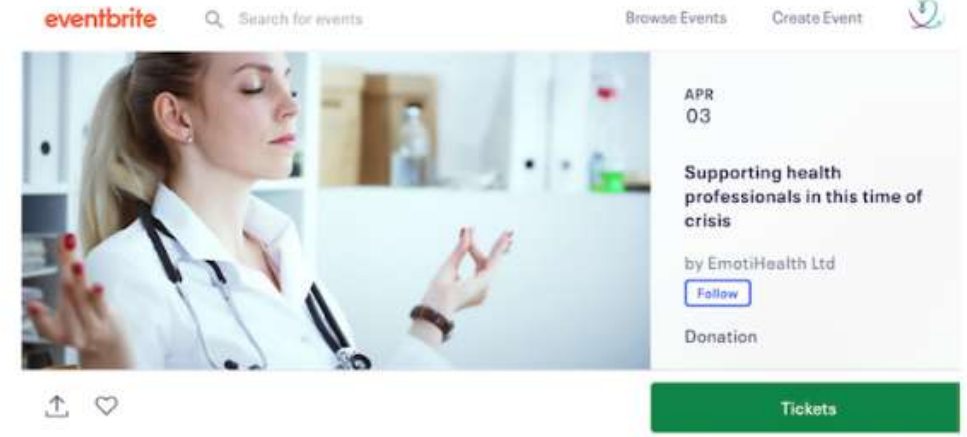
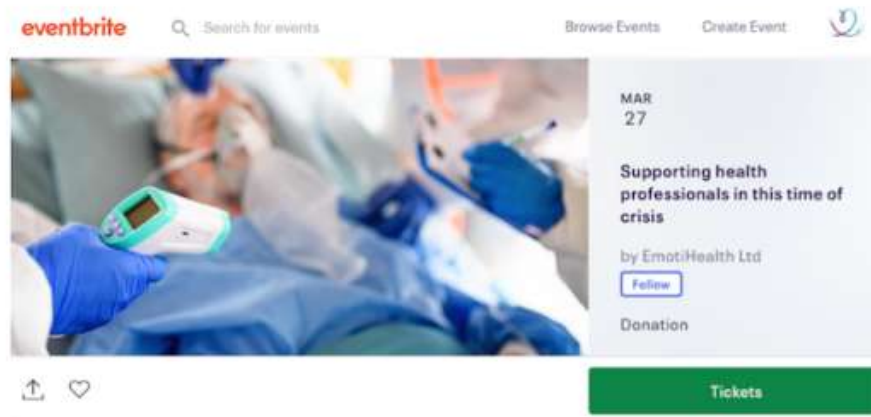
**"What I have is enough,
What I have is valuable,
What I have is meaningful
to me"**

In the context of trauma, the gift that authentic gratitude gives us is by helping us move to a place of **traumatic resilience** and away from **post traumatic stress**.



**5 minutes can make
all the difference.**

Join us



Supporting Health Professionals and frontline Healthcare Workers

in this time of crisis:

Facing into Fear Effectively

27th March 2020

4-5pm UTC

<https://bit.ly/HCPwebinar1>

Supporting Health Professionals and frontline Healthcare Workers

in this time of crisis:

Staying Well in a Crisis

3rd April 2020

4-5pm UTC

<https://bit.ly/HCPwebinar>