

***This is a draft version of the workbook
and is subject to further change.
Please do not circulate beyond your
team.***



Compassionate Employers

CHAPTER 4- Stress and resilience

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Introduction

This is a draft version of the workbook and is subject to further change.

Please do not circulate beyond your team.

Disclaimer

While great care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, it is necessarily of a general nature and neither Hospice UK nor the other contributors can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may occur.

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Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is a reflective learning resource for frontline staff whose work may bring them into contact with grief, caring responsibilities, emotional labour, distress, death, dying or bereavement.

It is designed to support individual reflection and team conversation.

It should be used alongside, not instead of, appropriate management support, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR guidance and organisational wellbeing provision.

How to use this workbook

This resource is for reflection and learning. It is not a substitute for clinical, psychological, occupational health, HR or emergency support.

Each chapter can be used as a standalone resource, however, the proposed order of chapters is:

- Compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction
- Burnout
- Professional grief
- Stress and resilience.

Throughout each chapter there are opportunities for individual reflection and group reflection. Below is some guidance on how these activities should be facilitated:

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Group reflection guidance

- Participation is voluntary.
- No one should be expected to disclose personal trauma, bereavement, mental health experiences or private circumstances.
- Confidentiality expectations should be agreed at the start.
- Managers should not use reflective worksheets as performance management evidence.
- Teams should agree what can remain within the group and what may need to be escalated for safety or support.
- A facilitator is identified for more sensitive discussions, especially professional grief and burnout.

Our wider workplace

- Looking after ourselves matters, but wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility.
- Our workplace plays a large role in supporting our wellbeing.
- Workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, psychological safety, fairness and access to support all shape whether people can stay well at work.
- *To access your organisation's support, please contact someone in your organisation for more information - such as your manager or HR team.*

About Compassionate Employers

The Compassionate Employers Programme launched in 2019 to provide organisations with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to effectively support employees and customers through terminal illness, caring responsibilities, and bereavement.

We envision a world where all employers are equipped to advocate for and support employees and customers through significant life moments. Our programme is built around three key pillars: greater visibility, education, and connection.

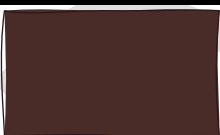
If you would like more information about Compassionate Employers, we would love to invite you to book a meeting with our team here: [Compassionate Employers Intro Chat](#)

About Hospice UK

Hospice care eases the physical and emotional pain of death and dying. Letting people focus on living, right until the end. But too many people miss out on this essential care. Hospice UK fights for hospice care for all who need it, for now and forever.

Membership of Hospice UK is open to UK organisations that provide hospice care. Anyone who works or volunteers for a Hospice UK member organisation can access our member-only services and resources. For more information on how to make the most of your Hospice UK membership, see: <https://www.hospiceuk.org/innovation-hub/membership>

Workbook key

	Lightbulb moment: An interesting fact or extra information.
	Individual reflection: An activity for you to complete (participation is optional).
	Group reflection: An activity to do with your team (participation is optional).
	Important note! Information which is important to note.
	See Glossary: Detailed definitions.
	Tool: You can use this reflection/information outside of the workbook.
	Quote/quotation: Relevant quote/quotation.
	Key term: Important definition.
	Reminder to be kind to yourself: This activity may feel challenging or emotional (participation is optional). Please do take care of yourself and take breaks as needed.

Stress and resilience

'Being conscious in where we are putting our focus can teach us that we have incredible freedom in how we choose to interact with our lives'

van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk¹

Why this matters

Stress is something we all experience at different times in our lives. We can encounter stressors in our personal lives as well as in our working or volunteer roles in the hospice sector.

Particularly when we experience changes in our personal or professional lives, we can experience an increased level of stress.

Stress is not always a bad thing. It can act like a fire alarm and be useful in warning us about problems.

However, too much stress can negatively impact our health and our relationships.



What we will cover

In this chapter we will look at how stress can impact us and our team and ways in which we can recognise stress, regulate and restore. We will cover:

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Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes or urgent support if needed.

Definition: what is stress?

Stress is something that everyone experiences from time to time.

Key term

Stress 'can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation.

Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree².

Stress is not always a bad thing. It can be motivating and productive, particularly in the short term³ and

- Warns us about problems
- Prepares us for action
- Increases focus e.g. when completing a task or meeting a deadline.

Our body has systems in place that respond to stress, one of which is the autonomic nervous system.

It has two parts that work in tandem: **sympathetic** and **parasympathetic** systems⁴.

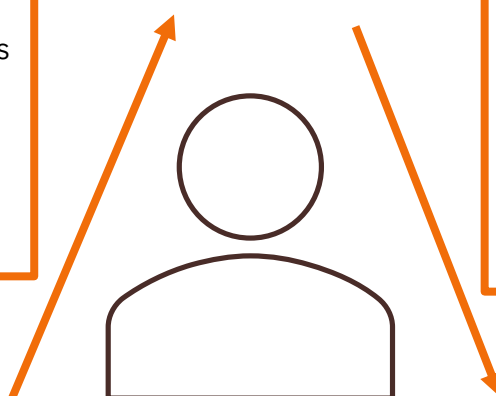
Stress and the body

1. **Sympathetic** system prepares us for action⁴:

- heart pounding
- muscles tense
- breathing increase

2. **Parasympathetic** returns us to a calm state⁴:

- heart rate slows
- muscles relax
- breathing slows



Spotting the signs

However, when stress becomes very high, it is no longer helpful to us. We can find it hard to think clearly and it makes it difficult for us to solve problems⁵.

Overtime if we are functioning at high levels of stress, it can impact our physical and mental health.

Our body and mind give us distress signals when we are no longer coping well. Everyone is different, but some common distress signals are:

Physical

- Insomnia
 - Migraines / headaches
 - Stomach problems
 - Muscle pains
 - High blood pressure
 - Increased heart rate
 - Associate with increase in symptoms of chronic health conditions (e.g. skin conditions)
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Emotional

- Worry
 - Anxiety
 - Low mood
 - Increase irritability / aggression
 - Upset/ tearful
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Cognitive

- Difficulties concentrating
 - Change in thinking (negative thought patterns)
 - Difficulties making decisions
 - Forgetfulness
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Behavioural

- Withdrawing from friends and family
 - Change in eating habits
 - Increase in unhealthy coping mechanism (drinking alcohol/smoking)
 - Avoiding situations which may bring up anxiety
- 

Signs identified in McLoughlin, Arnold and Moore⁶ and NHS.UK⁷

Self-awareness

When we are busy, it can be easy for us to miss signs that we are experiencing stress. We can forget to check in with ourselves and keep going without listening to our mind's and body's signs (distress signals).

Self-awareness is important therefore to help us keep on top of our distress signals.

Key term

Self-awareness is awareness of:

- our **internal state** (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses) which drives our **behaviours** (beliefs, values and motivations)
- how we **impact and influence others**⁸.

If we are more aware of what stress looks like for us, we can identify signs early and access support before becoming overwhelmed.

However, self-awareness is not about judging ourselves or being really critical. It is about being curious and compassionate and trying to understand ourselves a bit better.



Lightbulb moment: Self-awareness isn't always easy. Many of us are our own harshest critics and judge ourselves unfairly.

We can fall into a trap of focussing only on the 'negative' aspects of ourselves, rumination or unhelpful thoughts.

Be kind to yourself. If you are experiencing unhelpful thoughts, there are ways to challenge them. Please see:

Every Mind Matters. Reframing unhelpful thoughts. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/self-help-cbt-techniques/reframing-unhelpful-thoughts/>.

Pause and reflect

Be kind to yourself in these reflections! You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.



Individual reflection: How do you know that you are experiencing stress? What are your distress signals?

E.g. physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural signals

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Individual reflection: Who can you speak to when you are feeling stressed?

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Important note! If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Self awareness: sources of stress

When we are more aware of how we are managing day to day and what stress feels like to us, we can identify the warning signs early and access support.

Further, if we can identify what's causing our stress, it may be easier to find ways to manage it.

What causes high levels of stress can vary - everyone is different. However, causes often fall into two categories:

External stressors:

- Financial worries
- Family
- Work
- Bereavement
- Relationships/social
- Academic
- Environmental

Internal stressors:

- High to unrealistic expectations
- Doubting ourselves
- Comparing ourselves to others
- Viewing stress as very threatening to us
- Difficulties managing our rigid attitudes/beliefs

McLoughlin, Arnold and Moore⁶ and Butler, Grey and Hope⁵.

We all have internal stressors and put pressure on ourselves sometimes. However, when/if they combine with particular external stressors, it can result in high unwanted stress⁵.

It can be hard to know or explain to others why you are feeling stressed and that is OK - it is not always clear. We can also experience stress during positive big life events.



There are many different types of stress such as acute or environmental⁹.

See Glossary for further definitions on types of stress.

Practical tool: what is the problem?



Stress can show up in our work or volunteer roles. This activity helps you to pause, identify the cause of stress, and put together a plan.

			Notes
1.	Stop, think, assess the situation	Stress can make it difficult to think clearly. Take time to identify the problem	
2.	What is the goal?	Working backwards from the outcome you want can help you prioritise the next steps.	
3.	Reduce external stressors	What external challenges are you facing? Are there any that you can reduce, deprioritise or delegate?	
4.	Reduce internal stressors	What pressure are you putting on yourself? How can you challenge this?	
5.	Prioritise your basic needs	Don't forget you! Water, food, sleep, relationships, movement, interests/hobbies.	

Headings adapted from McLoughlin, Arnold and Moore⁶

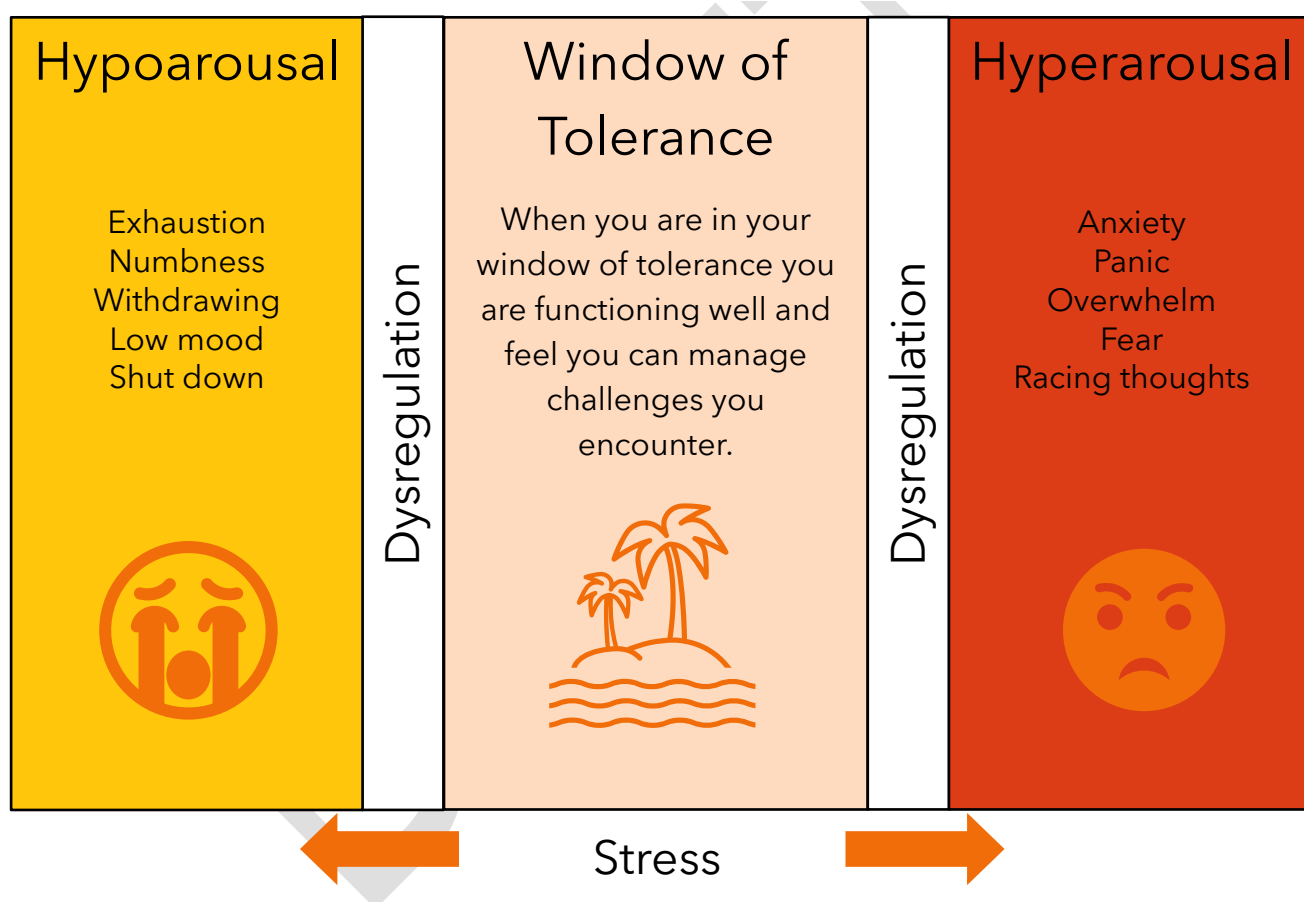
Regulate: the Window of Tolerance model

Now we have identified the cause of stress, what do we do next?

Before we look at some different strategies, it can be helpful to consider how we respond physically and emotionally to things that cause us stress and what calm looks like for us.

One way of illustrating this process is called the 'Window of Tolerance' model:

Adapted from Daniel J. Siegel¹⁰ and National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine¹¹



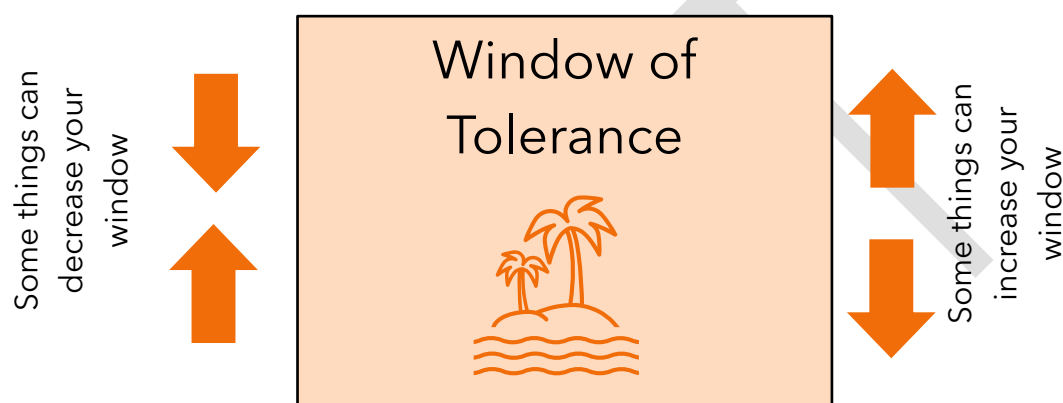
When we are in the 'Window of Tolerance' we feel present and alert. However, when we face situations that cause us stress, we can be pushed into dysregulation.

This is when we start to find it hard to process the world around us and our emotions become consuming. If we cannot re-regulate, we can become completely overwhelmed and experience hyperarousal and hypoarousal.

Regulate: how big is my window?

The bigger the 'window of tolerance', the better we are able to cope and the less likely we are to be pushed into hyper- or hypo- arousal.

However, our 'window of tolerance' may be bigger or smaller depending on the situation we are in or the type of stress we are experiencing.



For example, if we are hungry and tired we may have less capacity to cope with a challenging email at work.

Equally, personal experiences and trauma can also reduce the size of someone's window of tolerance¹².



Important note!

Our wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility. Many things contribute to our ability to cope with stressors.

Our workplace, workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, fairness, psychological safety and access to support influences the stress we may be experiencing.

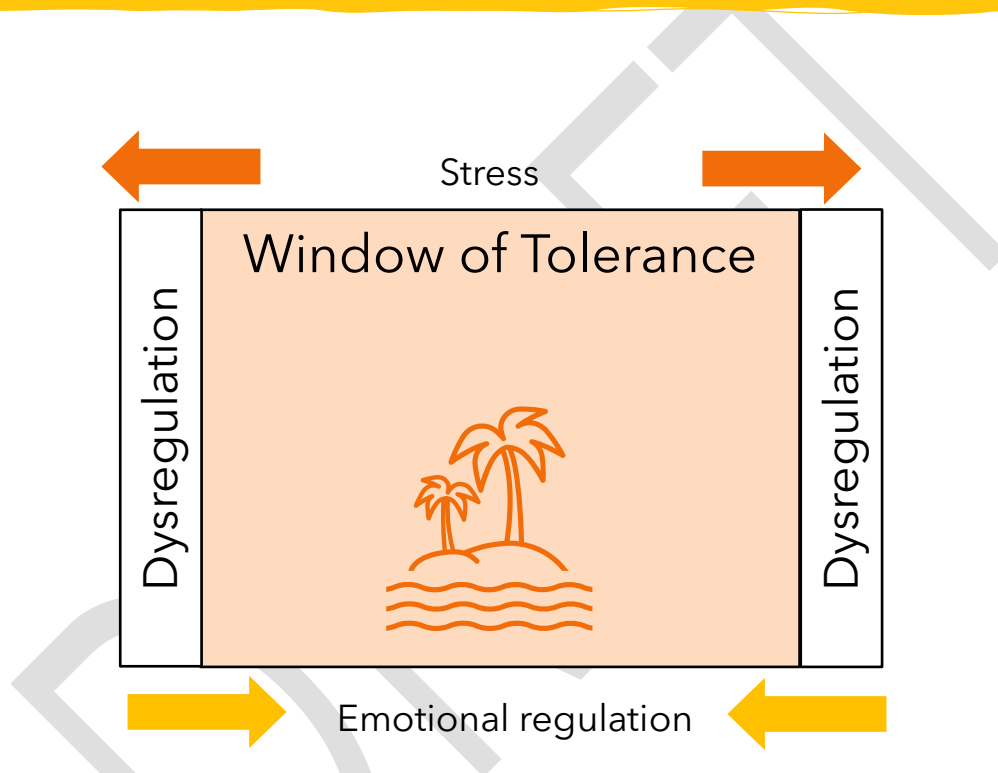
If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Regulate: emotional regulation

Stress can cause us to feel completely overwhelmed. However emotional regulation can help to feel calm and bring us back to the present moment.

Key term

Emotional regulation refers to the conscious and unconscious strategies someone uses in responding to, experiencing and expressing an emotional experience¹³.



When we feel present and calm we are better able to face stressors we experience are facing⁴, e.g. respond well to the challenging email at work.

These emotional regulation strategies are sometimes known as *grounding techniques.



See Glossary for definition of *grounding technique

Practical tool: 5,4,3,2,1 method

Grounding techniques are tools we can use alongside other organisational and individual strategies.

There are many different types of grounding techniques. Below are two examples you can try.

Be kind to yourself, everyone is different, they may not work or they may take some practice.



Tool: Have a go at these two techniques and see if they work for you. For more examples please see worksheet on grounding techniques.

5,4,3,2,1 method

Find a comfortable position. Focus on the details of your surroundings. Now think about each sense and name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

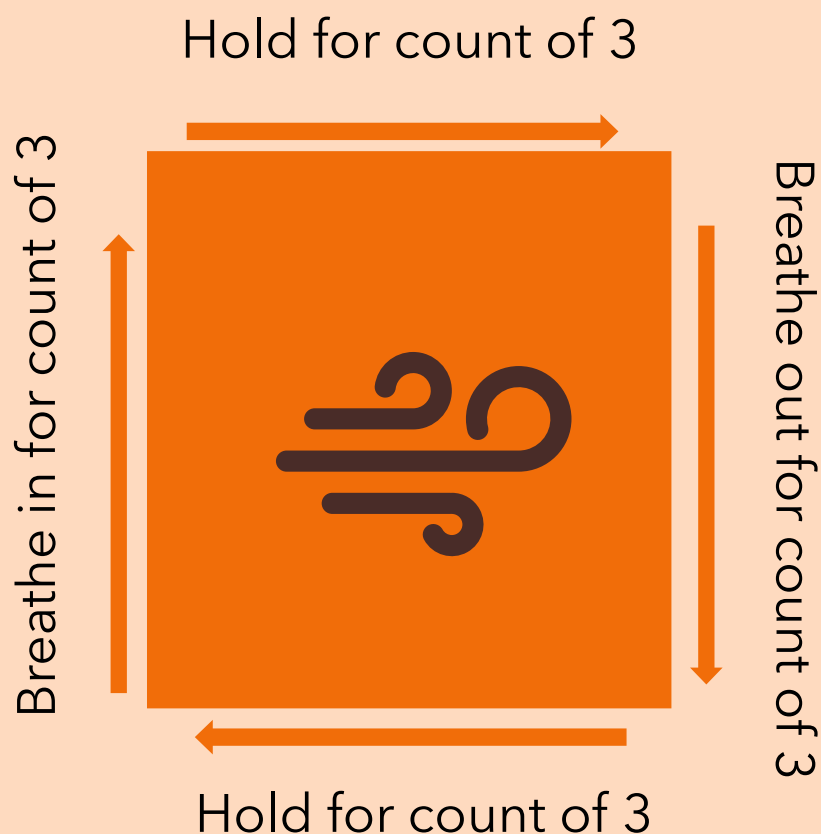


Technique adapted from Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust ¹⁴

Practical tool: square/box breathing

Square/box breathing

Controlling your breathing by slowing your breath.



Technique adapted from NHS inform¹⁵



Important note! Grounding techniques are not always enough.

If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Restore: our wellbeing

So far in this workbook we have looked at how we can cope with stress in the moment. However, we also need to look at wellbeing as a whole.

Key term

Wellbeing 'is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies.

Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is **determined by social, economic and environmental conditions**¹⁶.

How we are able to cope with challenges (*resilience) is dependent on many factors and is 'shaped by the availability of supportive environments'¹⁶.

This includes our workplace which is fundamental in supporting our wellbeing¹⁷. Our workload, staffing, supervision, leadership, culture, fairness, psychological safety and access to support all influence the stress we may be experiencing and how we cope.

What has been shown to be particularly vital in supporting our resilience is:



Demonstrated in Rao et.al¹⁸

Our wellbeing is not only an individual responsibility, it involves us and our communities including our hospice teams.



See Glossary for full definitions of resilience.

Pause and reflect

We are not resilient alone. We need people and resources around us to lean on when things are challenging.



Often when we are struggling it can be really hard to reach out. This activity can remind us who we can turn to for support in those moments.

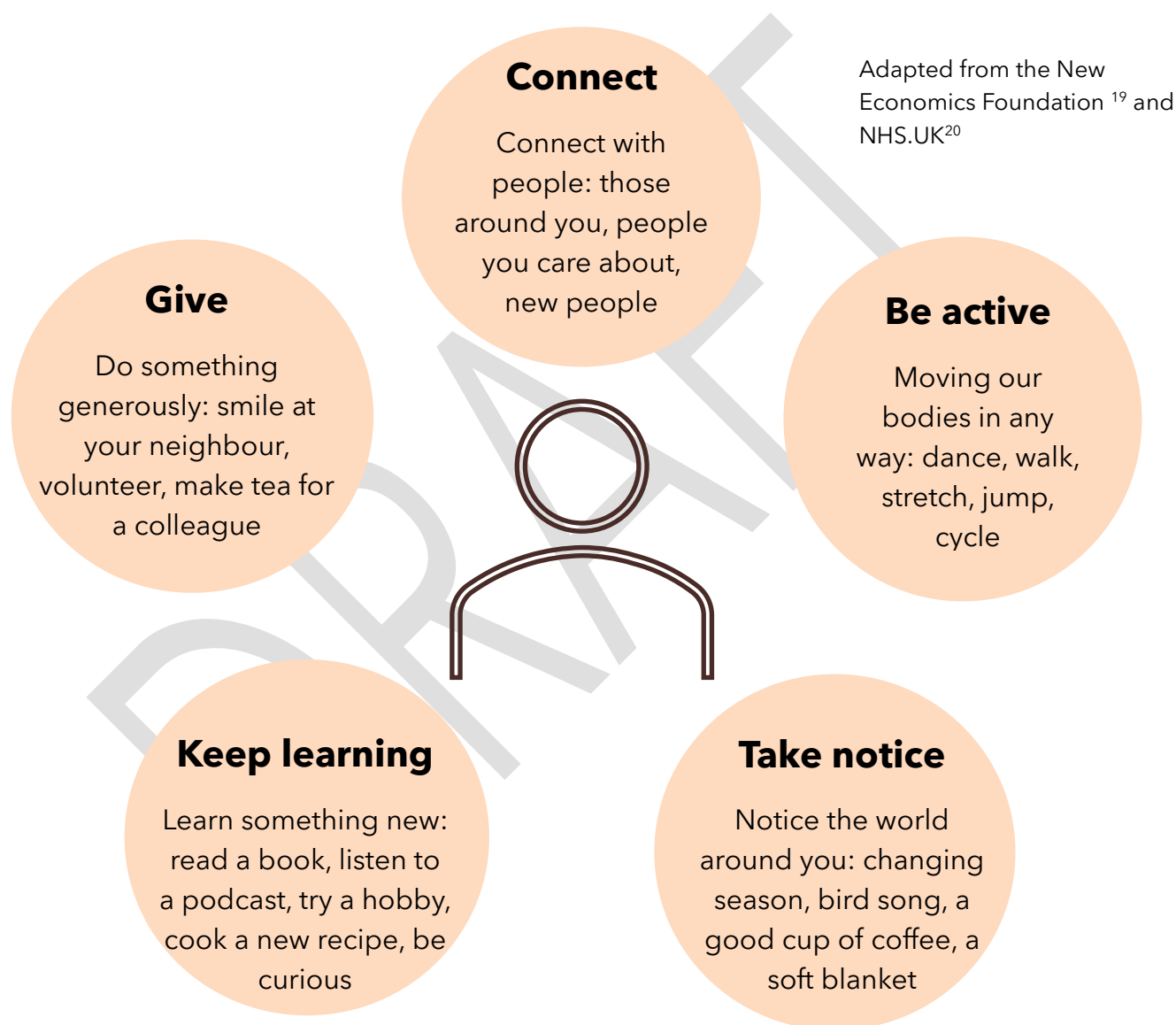
Individual reflection:

- Who can support me in my role?
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- Who can support me outside of work/volunteering?
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- What other support is available to me right now?
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- What can I do today to support future me?
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- What small thing can I do that makes me feel good?
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Practical tool: 'The Five Ways to Wellbeing'

Support is key to our wellbeing and there are other things we can do to support ourselves in our day to day.

The New Economics Foundation¹⁹ identified five keyways we can support our mental health and wellbeing.



Tool: If it feels safe for you to do so, try and introduce one new activity in one of the above categories today.

Supporting our teams

Resilience as a team and community does not mean we will never face challenges or experience stress and worry.

Instead, resilience means we have the 'processes and skills'¹⁶, organisational structures and support in place that enable us all to continue the great work we do.

Our organisation plays a key role in our support. If you are not sure what support is available please contact someone in your organisation for more information - such as your manager or HR team.



Individual reflection: What support structures or process are available to you in your hospice?

Make a note of what support is available to you in your hospice:

-
-
-
-



Important note! Personal strategies are helpful but are not always enough.

If you are experiencing high levels of stress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Worksheet: team conversation

HALT framework

When working in busy hospice settings, we are often really great at supporting others. So much so it can be hard to find time to think about our own needs or even know what we need ourselves.

HALT is a simple way to check in our basic needs. Originating in substance abuse recovery programmes²¹, HALT helps us to stop before we act, ask ourselves what it is we need right now and prioritise listening to that need.

Consider if this is a model that could be used across your teams.

Important note!

Group reflection guidance

To facilitate this activity safely ensure that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- No one is expected to disclose personal trauma, bereavement, mental health experiences or private circumstances.
- Confidentiality expectations are agreed at the start.
- Managers do not use reflective worksheets as performance management evidence.
- Teams agree what can remain within the group and what may need to be escalated for safety or support.
- A facilitator is identified for more sensitive discussions.



Group reflection: Take a moment to pause and think...

H	Hungry Am I hungry? When did I last eat? How can I prevent myself becoming too hungry next time?
A	Angry How am I feeling? What am I finding frustrating? Where is this feeling coming from? How can I healthily express and respond to this feeling?
L	Lonely Am I feeling disconnected? When did I last speak to someone I care about? Who can I speak to who feels safe?
T	Tired Am I too tired? How well did I sleep? When did I last sleep? How can I prioritise rest?

Adapted from TIP #65: Counselling Approaches to Promote Recovery from Problematic Substance Use and Related Issues²¹

Notes:

.....

Worksheet: individual reflection

Applying the Five Ways to Wellbeing

The New Economics Foundation¹⁹ identified ways of improving mental health and wellbeing in the UK.

They identified five key actions that we can incorporate into our day-to-day lives. It can be difficult to find the time to prioritise our own needs, however, trying these things could help you feel more positive.

This activity is designed to help us think holistically about the five ways to wellbeing.

Important note!

Individual reflection guidance

- You do not need to answer any questions that feel too personal, unsafe or difficult.
- Pause at any point.
- If this content brings up distress, speak to someone you trust and access your organisation's support routes, such as your manager, supervision, occupational health, Employee Assistance Programme, HR, GP or urgent support if needed.

Be kind to yourself. These are some ideas of things for you to reflect on, not a strict 'to-do' list.



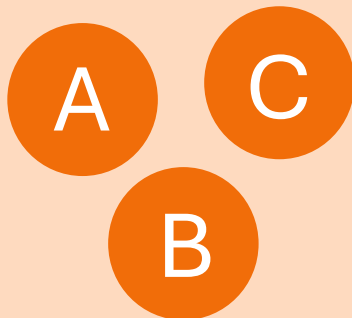
Individual reflection: Consider some examples of how we can support our wellbeing at work or elsewhere. The examples can be really small!

Area	What am I doing now?	What else could I try?
Connect Connect with people: those around you, people you care about, new people		
Be active Moving our bodies in any way: dance, walk, stretch, jump, cycle		
Keep learning Learn something new: read a book, listen to a podcast, try a hobby, cook a new recipe, be curious		
Take notice Notice the world around you: changing season, bird song, a good cup of coffee, a soft blanket		
Give Do something generously: smile at your neighbour, volunteer, make tea for a colleague		

Adapted from the New Economics Foundation: 5 Ways to Wellbeing¹⁹

Grounding techniques

- Breath in for 3 seconds - Hold for 3 seconds - Breathe out for 3 seconds - Hold for 3 seconds 	Create a change in temperature - eat an ice cube, put cold water on hands, sip hot drink 	Hold an item in your hand. Notice the texture. 
Hug yourself! 	Smell a strong smell e.g. perfume, coffee, candle 	Say one thing that has been 'OK' today 
Taste a strong flavour e.g. mint, coffee, juice 	Full body shake /stretch 	Count backwards from 20. 

Listen to your favourite song – concentrate on the lyrics 	Count the number of colours/shapes/objects in the room 	Sway or move body side to side 
Clap hands or rub hands together 	Recite a mantra 'I can get through this' 'I am OK' 'I don't have to do everything' 	Recite the alphabet backwards 
Imagine a relaxing image 	Pause and notice how you feel in your body 	Stamp or press feet into the floor 

Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust ¹⁴, NHS inform¹⁵, PTSD UK²²

Glossary

We weren't able to include all the different types of stress someone might experience in this chapter.

Below are some further clarifications which may be of help.

- **Stress** can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation.
Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree².
- **Environmental stress** is defined as resulting from the negative psychological response of an individual to their surroundings e.g. unstable housing, noise pollution, unhygienic conditions. The nature of what conditions are adverse is subjective. Impact can vary from causing discomfort to compromised physical/emotional safety and can impact mental and physical health⁹.
- **Acute stress** is defined as short term intense stress caused by an event/situation. Activates automatic survival reactions (fight, flight, freeze, fawn, flop). Causes release of adrenaline, temporary increase in heart rate, shallow breathing, sweating, reduced digestion⁹.
- **Chronic stress** is defined as long term exposure to stressor/s e.g. financial, work, caring responsibilities. Effects are cumulative. Can increase risk of physiological (health challenges e.g. cardiovascular disease) and psychological (mental health challenges - low mood, anxiety) effects⁹.
- **Traumatic stress** is defined as resulting from exposure to traumatic events e.g. abuse, violence, natural disasters. It's a normal response to an abnormal event, however, if unsupported the impact can lead to mental health concerns. Psychological impacts can include feeling emotionally numb, hyperarousal, flash backs⁹.
- **Physiological stress** is the experience of stress in the body in response to internal or external stressors e.g. lack of sleep, ill-health, injury, extreme temperature, lack of nutrition. Impacts biological function as homeostasis (balance in the body) is disrupted⁹.

- **Episodic acute stress** is defined as regular instances of acute stress e.g. deadlines, relationship conflicts, exams. As it occurs frequently, it can mean an individual does not have sufficient time to recover. Can worsen physical health and mental health issues⁹.
- **Self-awareness** is our awareness of our internal state (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses), which drive our behaviours (beliefs, values and motivations) and an awareness of how we impact and influence others⁸.
- **Individual resilience** is the ability of an individual to maintain 'a stable equilibrium' under adverse conditions²³.
- **Resilience as a community** refers to 'Processes and skills that result in good individual and community health outcomes in the face of negative events, serious threats and hazards. [...] Resilience is also shaped by the availability of supportive environments'¹⁶.
- **Vicarious resilience** is a term developed by Hernandez, Gangsei, and Engstrom in 2007. It describes the positive impact on clinicians from exposure to their patients' resilience. It refers to a positive transformation through empathising with their patients and learning about overcoming adversity from their patients²⁴.
- **Emotional regulation** relates to the conscious and unconscious strategies someone uses in responding to, experiencing and expressing an emotional experience¹³.
- **Grounding techniques** are widely used therapeutic tools which support individuals in regulating their emotions and regain calm by focusing on the present moment in different ways²⁵.
- **Wellbeing** 'is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions'¹⁶.

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