



Mental Health Impacts for Leaders During the Pandemic

Part One of a Workshop Series
for Durham Region NFP Leaders

Family Services Durham

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Welcome!

Housekeeping

- Cameras and microphones can be left on (participants will be asked to turn off if needed, such as if bandwidth issues occur).
- As this is only a 1.5-hour workshop and we have lots to discuss, we will not have a structured break. Please take breaks if/as you need.
- This is Part One of a 3-part workshop series. Those participating in this session are invited to attend Part Two (The Benefits of Self-Reflection and Self-Care for Leaders) on November 16/21 and Part Three (Self-Compassion for Leaders and Strategies for Fostering Resiliency) on December 7/21.



Confidentiality

- Any personal details or stories that are shared stay in the “room”:
 - What is confidentiality?
 - What does it mean to you?
 - What’s important to you around confidentiality?
 - What might make this a challenge?
 - How would you navigate this?
- Share only what you are comfortable sharing (it’s up to you).



Survey Results

23 respondents (thank you!)

Challenges: 1) Juggling personal and professional commitments; 2) Concerns about how best to support staff; 3) Concerns about own health (physical and mental)

What helps: 1) Engaging in regularly self care practices; 2) Talking with colleagues/receiving peer mentorship; 3) Taking time off

Hopes: All applied!

Most referenced: gaining knowledge, tools and ideas; validation from colleagues; and considering leadership practices and directions that fit for my organization.

What else stood out to us?

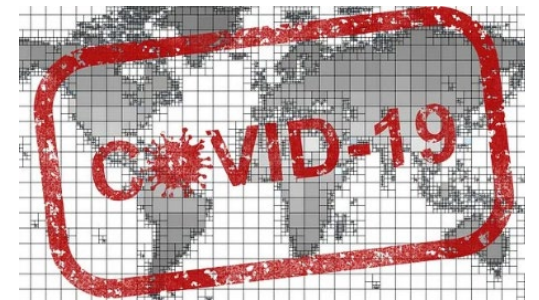
Workshop Goals



- Identify and explore the pressures and stressors faced by NFP leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Discuss the mental health impacts for leaders: how stress, burnout and compassion fatigue can present for leaders in the current climate, and the impacts of isolation.
- Review factors associated with increased (and reduced) resilience.
- Increase awareness of stress and distress: a continuum approach to recognizing “warning signs”.
- Provide an opportunity to reflect/discuss/debrief and engage in mutual sharing and support.
- Identify relevant resources that may support coping and resilience moving forward.

The Pandemic Has Huge Impacts

- The pandemic is testing the resilience of leaders in all sectors, but particularly in those that serve society's most vulnerable.
- NFP's have faced many stressors as a result of COVID-19:
 - Sudden shifts in service delivery (virtual, rigorous safety protocols).
 - Constantly shifting expectations, guidelines, protocols.
 - Ongoing, sustained state of crisis/uncertainty.
 - Huge drop in volunteerism (65%).
 - Increase in demand for services (ie: mental health, IPV).
 - Anxiety/stress in staff (related to impacts of COVID-19 at work and home).
 - Increased financial/funding challenges.



The Ontario Nonprofit Network Survey (2020)

- NFPs traditionally face financial challenges, which have been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic in many cases.
- As a result:
 - 35% have had to access their financial reserves.
 - 30% have had to lay off staff.
 - 22% were forced to cut pay.
 - 1 in 5 worry they won't survive 6 more months.



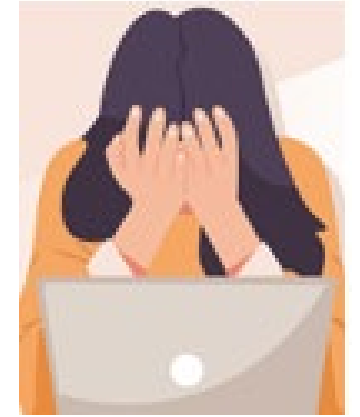
This creates an additional source of great stress and worry for NFP leaders.

NFP Leaders are Facing Unprecedented Challenges in their Roles

- Ongoing, constant state of greatly increased stress and uncertainty.
- Anxiety and worry.
- Frustration and anger (on behalf of self, staff, clients, community).
- Feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.
- Self-blame and guilt.
- Scrutiny/criticism for performance (actual or anticipated/perceived).
- Decision/moral fatigue.
- Physical and emotional exhaustion.
- Little support (isolated in work role, focus on “being there for others”).



Many NFP Leaders Also Face Increased Stressors Related to Gender



- Women report more pandemic-related stressors:
 - Are overrepresented in hardest-hit sectors.
 - Are disproportionately responsible for unpaid domestic/care work which has increased during the pandemic.
 - Large numbers have left the workforce in response to competing demands and limited resources.
 - Canadian women have reported lower levels of emotional health and higher levels of stress since the pandemic began, compared to men.



Most NFP leaders are women likely facing more personal stressors on top of unprecedented work demands.

Employees' Need for Support has also Increased

- NFP staff are also facing increased personal and workplace stressors.
- This results in increased demands on NFP leaders to support their staff (at a time they may have fewer resources themselves).
- This may also be more relevant for leaders who are women.
- Research has shown that, overall, female leaders tend to do more to support employees emotionally and professionally, and to foster workplace well-being. Includes:
 - checking in more regularly.
 - providing more emotional support.
 - **this likely varies by sector
- This “emotional leadership” goes largely unrecognized.



The Rewards of Helping: Compassion Satisfaction

- Having compassion and working to help others can impact us in positive *and* negative ways.
- The rewards of helping are referred to as **Compassion Satisfaction**:
 - The positive aspects of helping/supporting others.
 - The the aspects of our work we feel good about.
 - Pleasant feelings (satisfaction, fulfillment, pride, sense of purpose).
 - The “energizers” (that parts of our work that fill us up, rather than drain us).



- These are often the things that draw individuals to roles in the NFP sector in the first place.

The Costs of Helping

- There is also a very real risk of negative impacts from this work.
- This is true even at “the best of times” (often related to the demands of one’s role, and exposure to those in distress).
- Even more likely when increased demands and scarce resources lead to more stress and less compassion satisfaction.
- The costs of helping often include chronic stress and anxiety.
- May also involve **burnout** and **compassion fatigue** (types of Occupational Stress).





Burnout

- Usually has a gradual onset (“slow burn”).
- Arises from the sense your efforts make no difference.
- Risk increases further with a very high workload and lack of resources and support.
- Characterized by:
 - Feeling overwhelmed, ineffective, frustrated, and hopeless.
 - Feeling physically and emotionally “worn out” and depleted.
 - Reduced sense of competence and achievement.
 - “Loss of self/soul”, loss of positive energy and passion/enthusiasm for work.
 - General lack of satisfaction in your professional role.
- Among leaders, women are more likely to develop burnout than men.
- Increases the risk of developing Compassion Fatigue.



Compassion Fatigue

- Results from exposure to others' suffering.
- A form of secondary traumatic stress.
- Quite often “hits with a wallop” (sudden onset).
- Arises from the same factors that often lead those into the NFP sector (empathy and compassion, caring and dedication).
- Symptoms commonly include:
 - Physical and emotional exhaustion, physical problems, sleep issues.
 - Reduced sense of empathy and compassion (for others, and self).
 - Anger, irritability, increased cynicism, depression, anxiety, substance use.
 - Shift in core assumptions.
 - Lack of separation between work and home.
 - “Dread” about going to work, absenteeism.
- Good self-care is key to preventing and addressing it.





Anxiety

- The most common mental health issue.
- Usually occurs with Compassion Fatigue.
- Often co-occurs with depression.
- A very common response to uncertainty and threat.
- When we perceive/anticipate danger, “fight-flight-freeze” is triggered:
 - The part of the brain that controls this response believes danger is imminent.
 - It creates various changes to help you survive a physical threat.
 - These include increased heart rate and respiration, muscle tension, changes in blood flow, hyperalertness, suspended digestion, increased physical energy, racing thoughts about the feared situation, and a sense of impending doom.
 - Can affect our physical well-being, mood, and behaviour.

Breakout Discussion

What have you noticed as the most common stressors impacting your work environments during the past few months?

How capable do you feel tuning into where you and your staff are on the compassion-fatigue and/or burnout continuum(s)?

When have you felt compassion satisfaction and/or positively impactful in your role during the past few months?

Resilience

- Persisting in the face of adversity.
- “Bouncing back” after a period of high stress.
- Regaining balance (physical, emotional, social).

Resilience is achieved by using a range of qualities and resources that promote and sustain well-being:



- Physical
- Emotional
- Social
- Cultural

Factors that Decrease Resilience



- Very high degree of empathy.
- Multiple concurrent stressors, especially if long-term.
- Minimal support system and isolation.
- Habitual self-criticism.
- Difficulty accepting and tolerating distress.
- Unhelpful coping behaviours, such as increased substance use.
- Personal unresolved trauma (recent or historical).
- Frequent exposure to others' trauma.

Factors that Increase Resilience

- Problem-solving
- Assertiveness
- Strong support system, and willing to access it
- Balancing expectations and obligations
- Rational/realistic thinking
- Optimistic and hopeful perspective
- Self-compassion
- Able to tolerate and manage painful emotions
- Feeling connected to and rewarded/valued by your work
- Excellent, consistent self-care
- A “toolbox” of active coping strategies

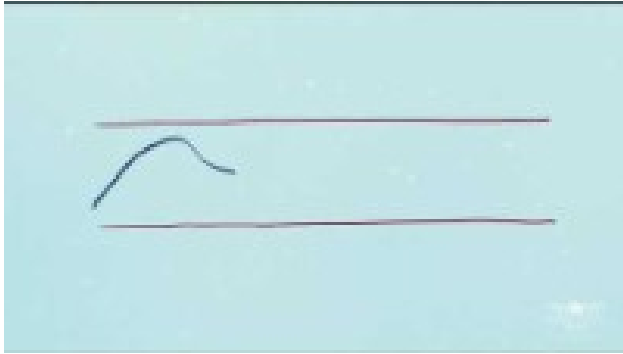


Self-Awareness is the First Step

- Recognizing when and how we're being impacted is key to coping.
- This involves:
 - Engaging in self-reflection purposefully and frequently.
 - Being aware of the signs/symptoms of decreasing wellness.
- Two tools can be used to help assess our physical, emotional, and cognitive states:
 - The Window of Tolerance Framework (our state in-the-moment)
 - The Mental Health Continuum (our overall well-being)



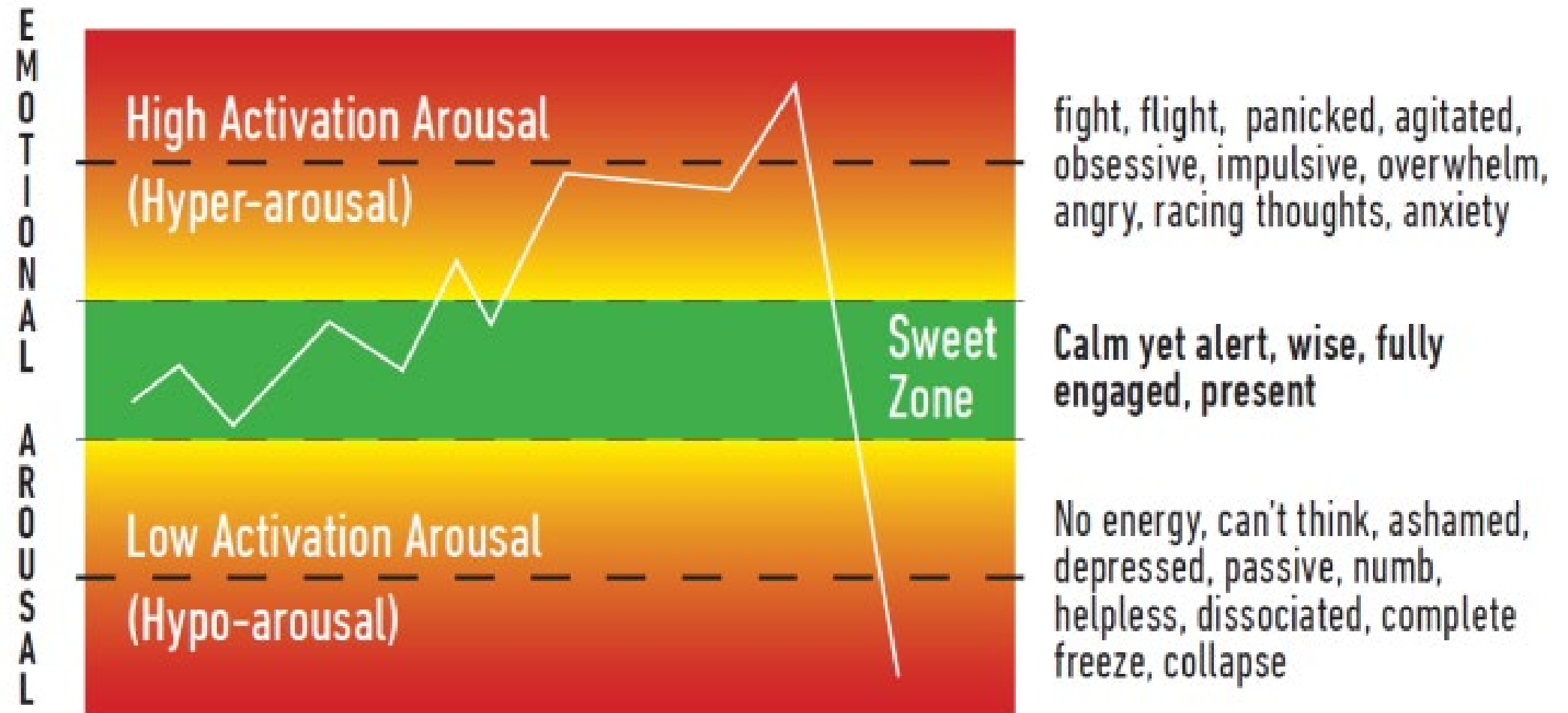
When we notice we're outside the Window of Tolerance in a specific moment or our mental health is declining overall, we can purposefully use strategies to calm and reset the nervous system, improve overall self-care, and build resilience.



The Window of Tolerance Framework (WTF)

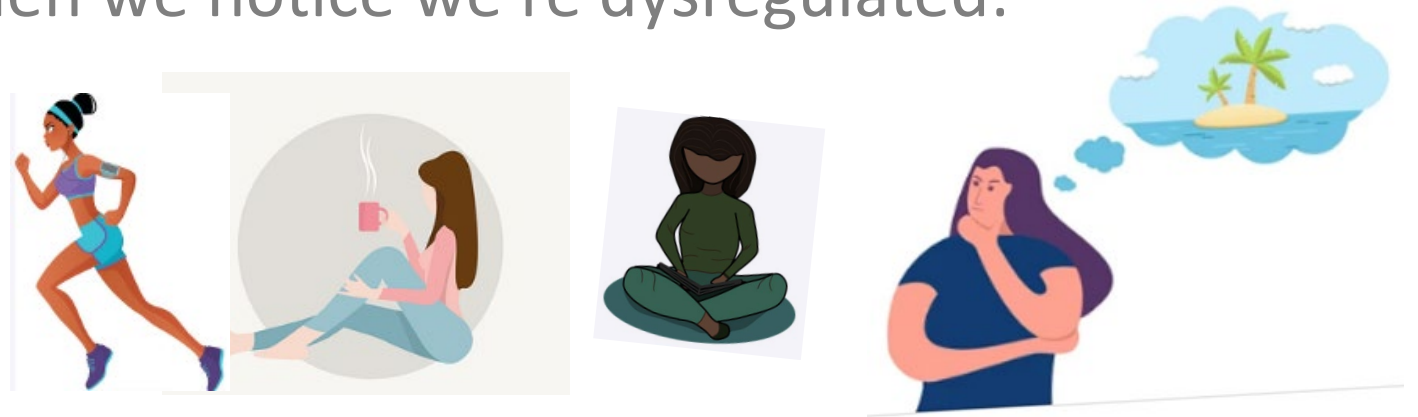
The Window of Tolerance Framework (WTF)

Adapted from Siegel, Ogden and Minton



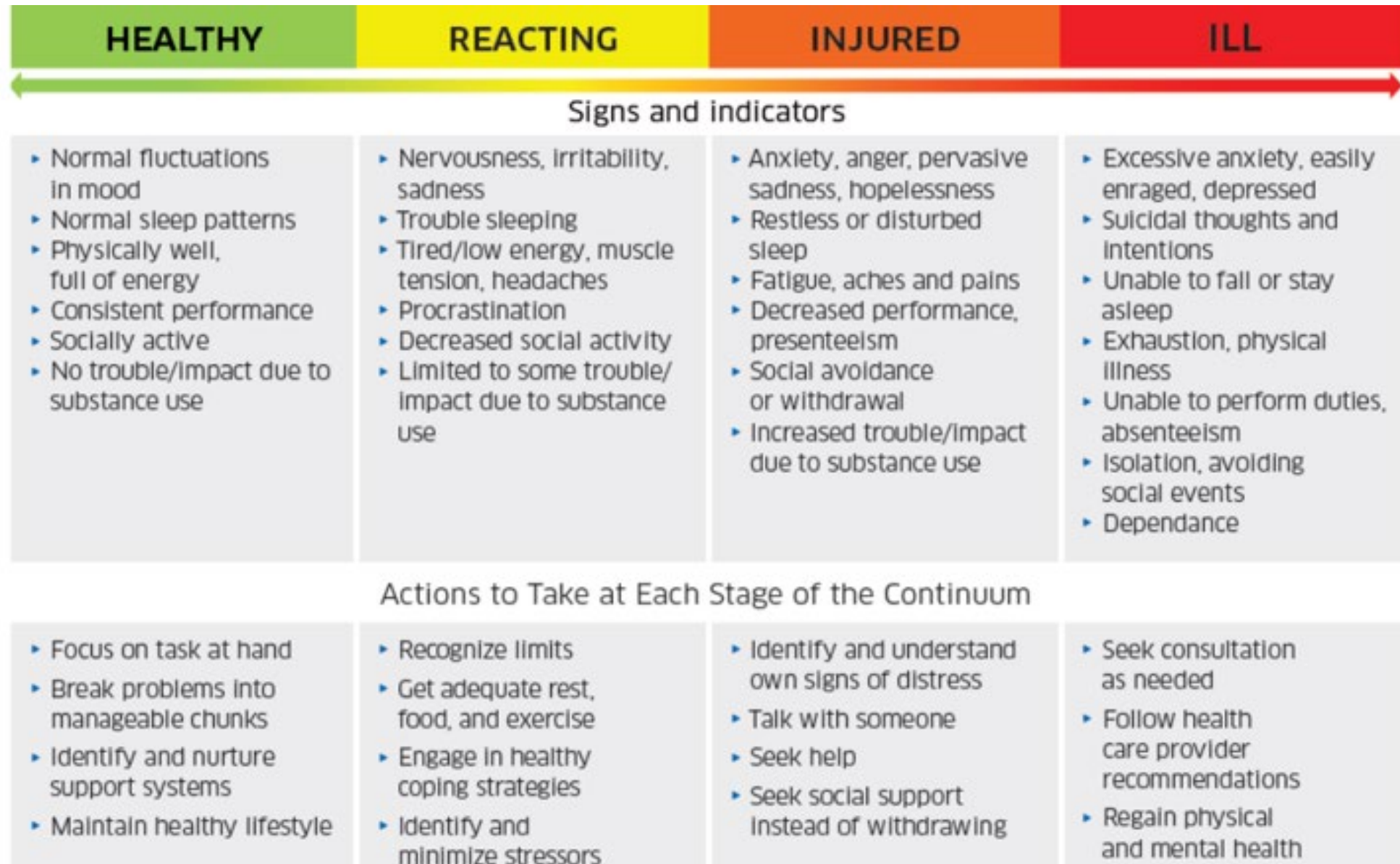
Strategies to Return to the Window of Tolerance

- There are various things we can do to help ourselves return to the Window of Tolerance when we notice we're dysregulated:
 - Grounding
 - Breathing
 - Mindfulness
 - Self-soothing
 - Physical activity
 - Coping thoughts
- Doing these things regularly (even when not distressed/“shut down”) can improve overall wellness and strengthen our ability to remain in the zone of optimal arousal in challenging situations.



These and other strategies for self-regulation will be explored in more detail during Part Two of this workshop series.

Mental Health Continuum Model



The Importance of Self-Care

- Self-care is key for all aspects of physical and emotional wellness.
- We may be least likely to practice good self-care and do other things to cope and nurture ourselves when we need to most.
- During busy, chaotic times it can be difficult to prioritize ourselves:
 - Competing demands and minimal time.
 - Fear of judgment (ie: “lazy” or “selfish”).
 - Thoughts that can lead to guilt (ie: “should”).
 - Values/beliefs that prioritize caring for others over meeting own needs (often gender-based).



Adequate Support is Vital

- Support is fundamental to resilience, stress-management and self-care.
- Inadequate social support increases risk of stress, anxiety, burnout, and compassion fatigue and decreases coping overall.
- Isolation and lack of support greatly increase the risk of depression.
- Connections to others reduces stress hormones.
- Need a solid support system inside and outside of work.
- Leaders may have limited support in their role, due the nature of their position (may need to create opportunities to share support).
- May face additional stigma around help-seeking (“supposed to be a helper, not ask for help”).
- Don’t hesitate to access professional support if you are struggling.



Some Initial Ideas

In Part Two we'll explore various strategies for self-care (including micro self-care), emotional regulation, coping, and resilience in detail.

In the meantime, here are some things you can try when you notice you are dysregulated or your mental health is declining:

- Take 10 deep breaths, focusing on the sensations as you inhale/exhale.
- Try a short mindfulness meditation video/audio (You Tube has lots!).
- Pause and repeat some positive affirmations (ie: *"I'm doing my best"*).
- Do something to pleasantly engage your senses (smell, taste, touch).
- Look around identify 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel (touch), 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste.
- Do something to move your body (walk, dance, stretch).
- Acknowledge and name your feelings, then visualize them "floating away".
- Take five minutes to write about how you feel.

Reflection: Next Steps



How can you apply the Window of Tolerance Framework and the Mental Health Continuum moving forward?

Consider:

- What will you pay attention to?
- What might you notice that may indicate you're outside the window of tolerance, and/or your wellness is declining overall?
- What is something you can do to increase your self-care or otherwise foster coping, wellness, and resilience?

Both these tools are available online:

- [The WTF Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [The Mental Health Continuum Model](#)

Counselling and Mental Health Resources

- If you or someone else is at risk of harm at any time, call 911 or go to an ER.
- Durham Mental Health Services (DMHS) provides 24/7 support to those 16+ experiencing crisis (905-666-0483 or 1-800-742-1890).
- Canada Suicide Prevention Service offers 24/7 crisis support (1-833-456-4566).
- MindBeacon and AbilitiCBT offer internet-based CBT for anxiety and depression.
- Wellness Together Canada: Mental Health and Substance Use Support provides various supports including immediate phone counselling 24/7 (1-866-585-0445).
- BounceBack is a free phone-based program to address stress, anxiety, and depression (go to website or call 1-877-767-9642).
- ConnexOntario helps find mental health and addiction support (1-866-531-2600).
- Family Services Durham provides counselling for a wide range of issues (call 905-666-6240 ext 1 or 1 866 840-6697 ext 1 to request service).



Online Resources

Leader-Specific:

- [How Self-Reflection Can Make You a Better Leader](#)
- [Self-Care Strategies for Effective Leadership During COVID-19](#)
- [Avoiding COVID-19 Burnout: Self-Care and Resiliency for Public Health Leaders \(WEBINAR\)](#)
- [Covid-19: Why Compassionate Leadership Matters in a Crisis](#)
- [Resilient Leadership: Responding to COVID-19](#)
- [Cultivating Compassionate Leadership During Covid-19](#)

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue:

- [Burnout vs Compassion Fatigue: 7 Ways to Tell the Difference](#)
- [Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue: Tips for Frontline Workers](#)
- [WEBINAR: Alleviating Compassion Fatigue When Caring Becomes Difficult](#)

Online Resources (cont'd)

General Stress/Anxiety Management, Coping, Resilience:

- [The Window of Tolerance Framework \(WTF\) Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [Doing What Matters in Times of Stress](#)
- [Self-Care and Resilience Guide \(The Working Mind\)](#)
- [Stress-Related Growth and Thriving Through Coping](#)
- [Anxiety Canada](#)
- [Coping with Anticipatory Anxiety](#)
- [Top 10 Simple Tools to Reduce Anxiety](#)
- [Information and Tools for Self-Compassion](#)
- [Abdominal Breathing Tools](#)
- [Mindfulness Toolkit](#)
- [Mindfulness Exercises, Techniques, and Activities](#)
- [The Benefits of Progressive Muscle Relaxation and How to Do It](#)
- [Headspace App](#)

We Want to Hear From You

- What felt most useful for you today?
- Suggestions for future workshops (anything you would like to see change/different)?
- Please use chat or come on mic to share

Questions and Comments





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