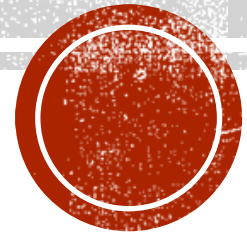


# COMPLETING THE STRESS CYCLE TO MANAGE COLLEGE BURN OUT

Heather Nash, PhD (presenter)

Heather Rist, LPC (presentation developer)

Employee Assistance & Wellness



# OBJECTIVES

- Defining Stress
- What is a healthy response to stress
- Philosophy of “Completing the Stress Cycle”
- 4 Fs of stress
- Thought Errors
- Using the 4 Fs to guide our stress completion

**Lavender Reduces Stress**



# What is Stress?

There is no definition of stress that everyone agrees on, what is stressful for one person may be pleasurable or have little effect on others. We all react to stress differently.



**Stress** is a **perceived** disconnect between a situation and our resources to deal with the situation.

Stress is what happens inside of our bodies in relation to a stressor.

Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) activation

Stress is a spectrum of intensity:

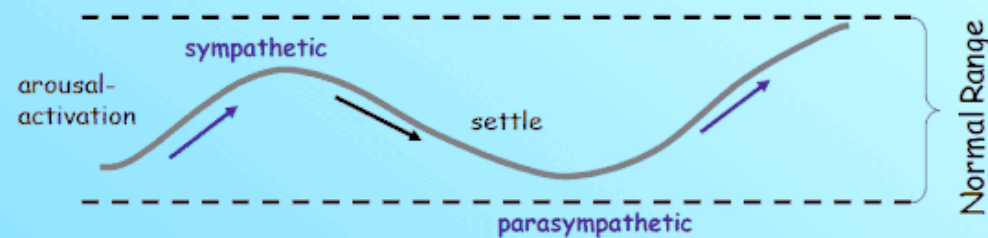
eustress (good stress) → (distress) mild → moderate → severe → traumatic stress





# HEALTHY NERVOUS SYSTEM

## A Healthy Nervous System



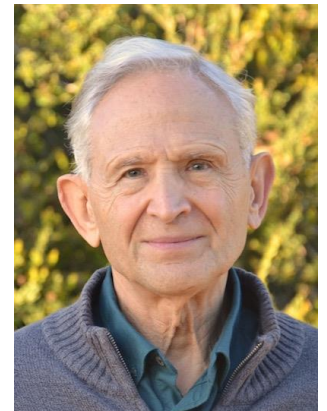
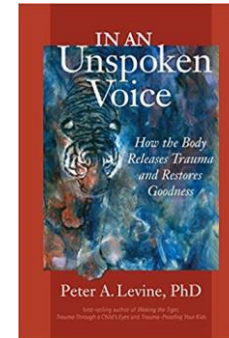
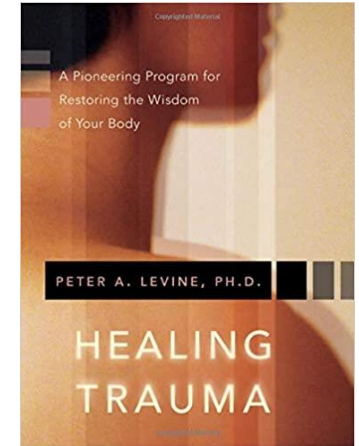
- Activates and deactivates appropriately in the perception of stress.
- Can appropriately identify real vs. perceived threat.
- Parasympathetic Dominant (PNS): calm, rest and digest functions



Peter A Levine, PhD, is the developer of **Somatic Experiencing™**, which is the result of the multidisciplinary study of stress physiology, psychology, ethology, biology, neuroscience, indigenous healing practices, and medical biophysics, with more than 45 years of successful clinical application.

Started with the question: Why don't animals in the wild get traumatized?

Answer: They complete the stress cycle.







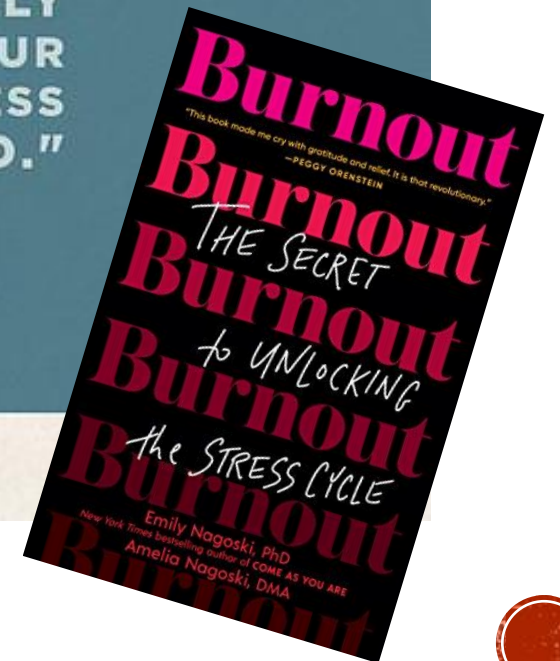
"THE STRESS ITSELF WILL KILL YOU FASTER THAN THE STRESSOR WILL—UNLESS YOU DO SOMETHING TO COMPLETE THE  
**STRESS RESPONSE CYCLE.**

WHILE YOU'RE MANAGING THE DAY'S STRESSORS, YOUR BODY IS MANAGING THE DAY'S STRESS. IT'S ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO YOUR WELL-BEING THAT YOU GIVE YOUR BODY THE RESOURCES IT NEEDS TO COMPLETE THE STRESS RESPONSE CYCLES THAT HAVE BEEN ACTIVATED."

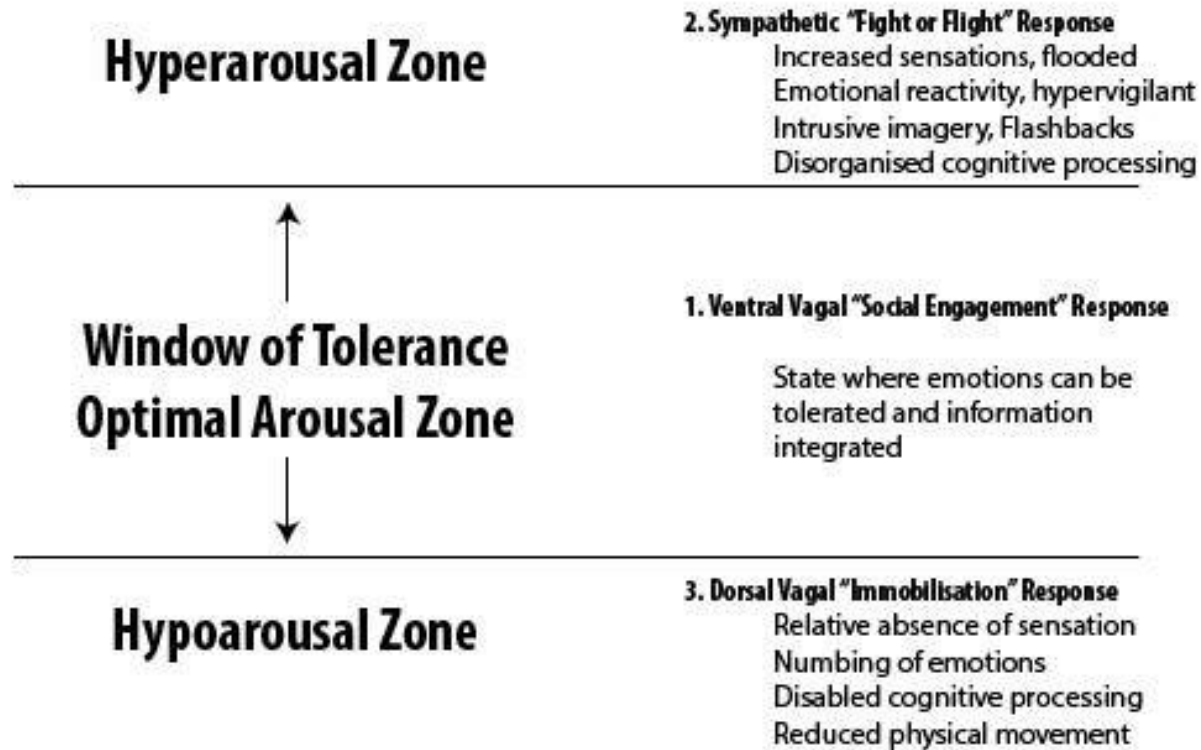
—  
EMILY AND AMELIA NAGOSKI

AUTHORS, *BURNOUT: THE SECRET TO UNLOCKING THE STRESS CYCLE*

UnlockingUs PODCAST WITH BRENÉ BROWN



# Window of Tolerance

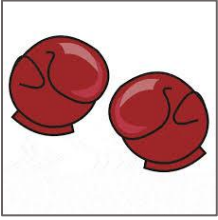


Adapted from Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006, p. 27, 32; Corrigan, Fisher, & Nutt, 2010, p. 2

## WOT & STRESS FACTS

- Stress is cumulative if homeostasis not returned too.
- Stress can be a one-time response, periodic, or chronic and ongoing.
- Our stress responses become habitualized.





## **FIGHT**

Self-preserving, explosive temper and outbursts, aggressive, bully behavior, rigid, demanding, dictatorial, directive, perfection from others, anxiety.



## **FLIGHT**

Feelings of panic and anxiety, obsessive thinking, rushing, worry, workaholic behavior, hard to sit still and relax, micromanaging, over-achiever, perfection from self, avoidance, addictions.

# The 4 Fs of Stress



## **FREEZE**

Spacey, disconnected, brain fog, difficulty making decisions, hides, isolates, difficulty motivating, flies under radar.



## **FAWN**

People-pleasing, scared to share their thoughts, talks about others not themselves, flatters, over-caring, poor self-care boundaries, “Yes” person.





# WE INADVERTENTLY MAKE IT WORSE

“It is your resistance to ‘what is’ that causes your suffering.”

Buddha



Made with ♥ by recitethis.com

We focus on solving the external stressor vs. regulating the internal stress in our bodies.

We magnify the stress experience with our thoughts, resistance, and wrong focus.



# COMMON THINKING ERRORS

- **Fortune Telling:** Thinking you know what will happen in the future and it will be bad.
- **Blowing things Up:** Making a big deal out of something small or making something slightly bad into the worst thing ever.
- **Ignoring the Good:** Only paying attention to the bad and ignoring when good things happen.
- **Negative Labeling:** Having a negative belief about yourself and thinking it applies to everything you do.
- **Setting the Bar Too High:** Thinking you must be perfect in everything otherwise you are no good.
- **Self-Blaming:** Blaming yourself for anything that goes wrong around you even if it had nothing to do with you.
- **Feelings as Facts:** Believing that if you feel something, it must be true.
- **Should statements:** Believing things should be a certain way.
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** Thinking in absolutes such as “always,” “never,” or “every.”



It's not stress  
that kills us,  
it's our reaction  
to it.  
-Hans Selye

# CIRCULAR & LINEAR THOUGHT

- Circular = “Rumination”: Builds emotion, goes no where, spins on the “what ifs”
- Linear: Gathers data, maintains observer perspective, leads to decision/direction





# CHALLENGING THINKING ERRORS

Explore/Challenge your thoughts with the following questions:

*Is it probable or possible?*

*If the worst outcome happens, then what?*

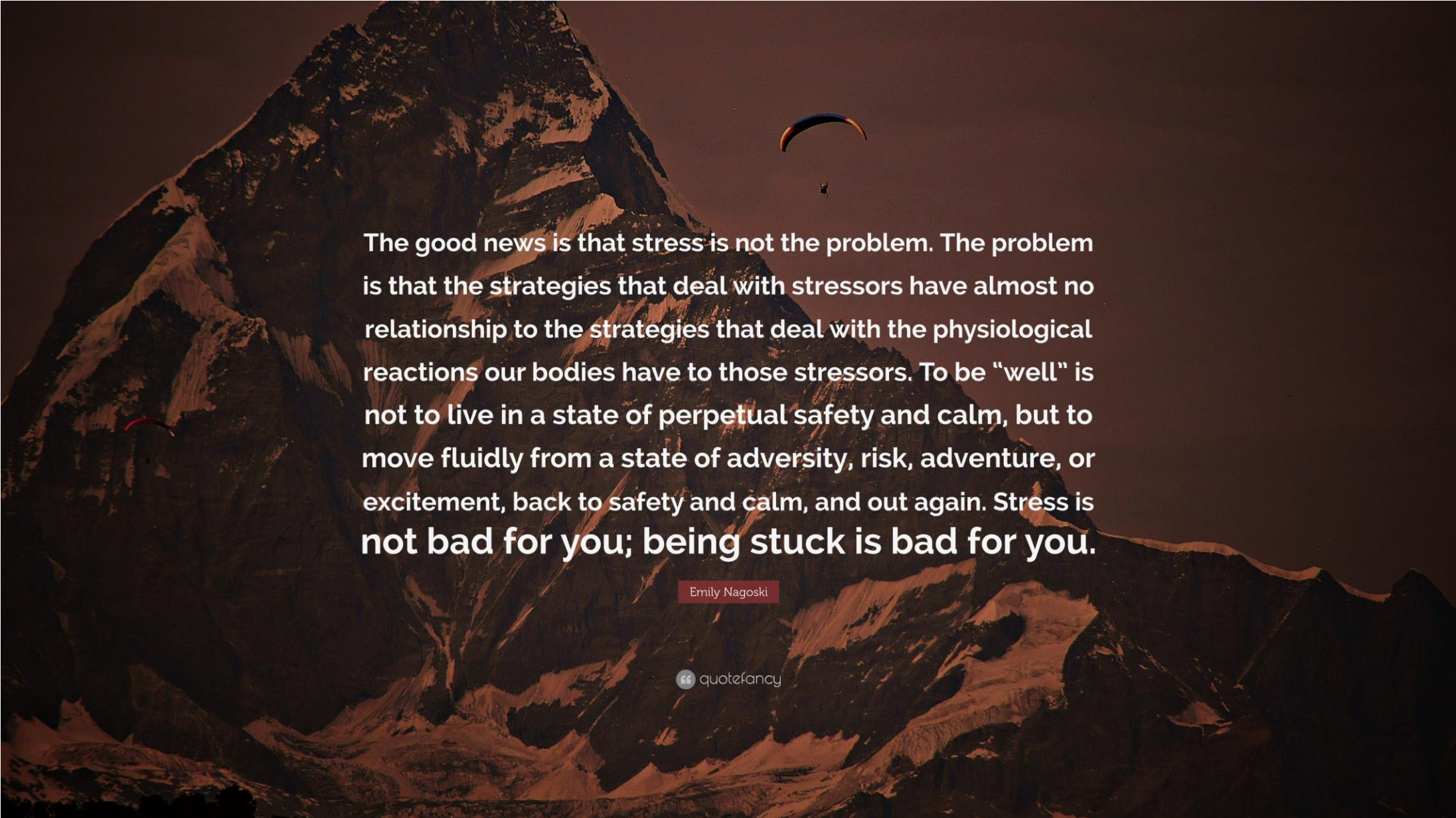
*What is the evidence for/against this thought?*

*Am I making any assumptions?*

*What are other explanations?*







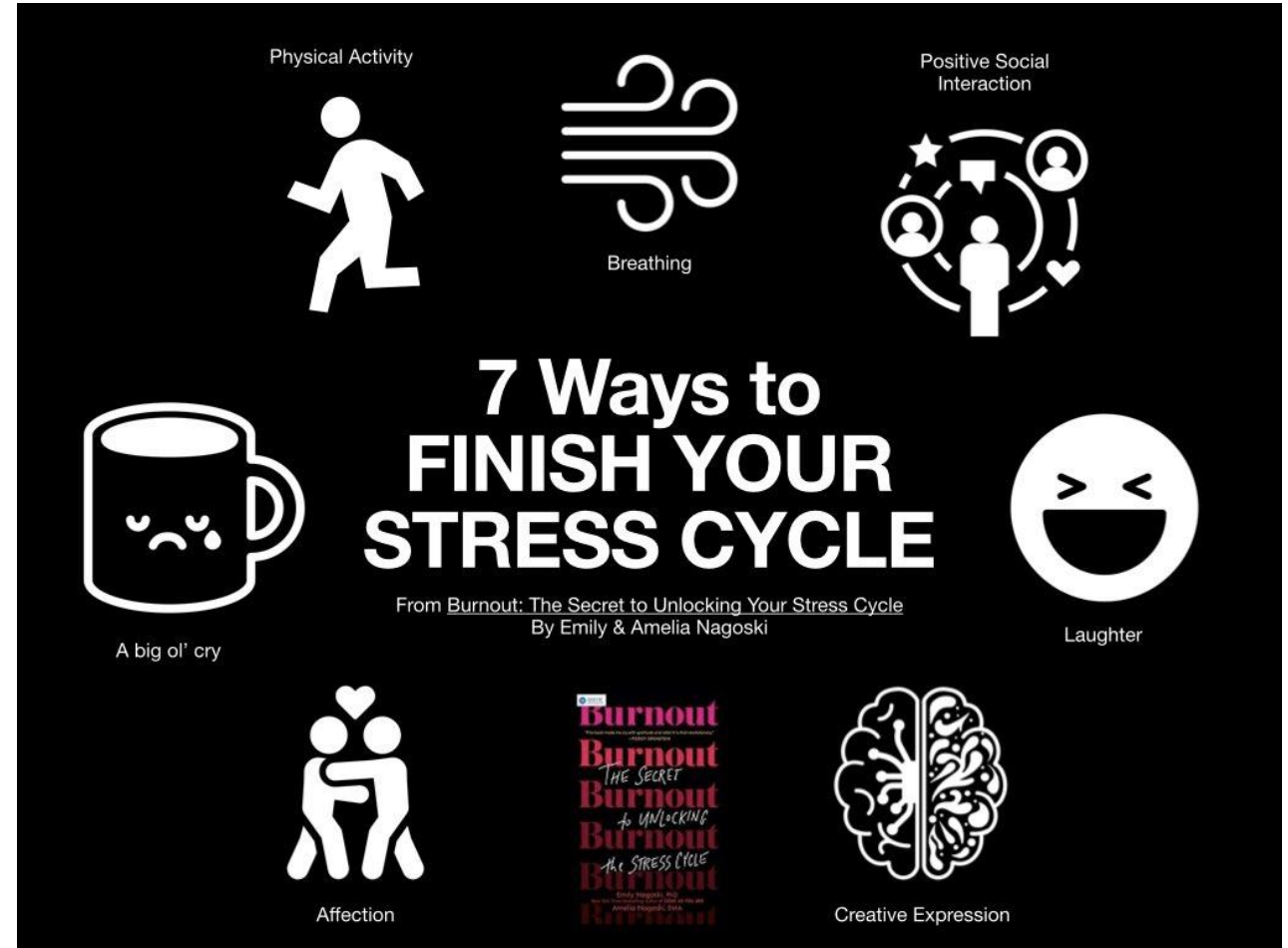
The good news is that stress is not the problem. The problem is that the strategies that deal with stressors have almost no relationship to the strategies that deal with the physiological reactions our bodies have to those stressors. To be “well” is not to live in a state of perpetual safety and calm, but to move fluidly from a state of adversity, risk, adventure, or excitement, back to safety and calm, and out again. Stress is **not bad for you; being stuck is bad for you.**

Emily Nagoski

quote fancy



# COMPLETING THE STRESS CYCLE





# STEPS TO COMPLETING THE STRESS CYCLE



1. Identify your stress symptoms (anxious, restless, sad and tearful, feeling isolated and withdrawn)



2. Identify actions you can take to complete the stress cycle and allow your body to return to homeostasis.



3. MATCH intervention with symptoms.



# EXAMPLES OF MATCHING

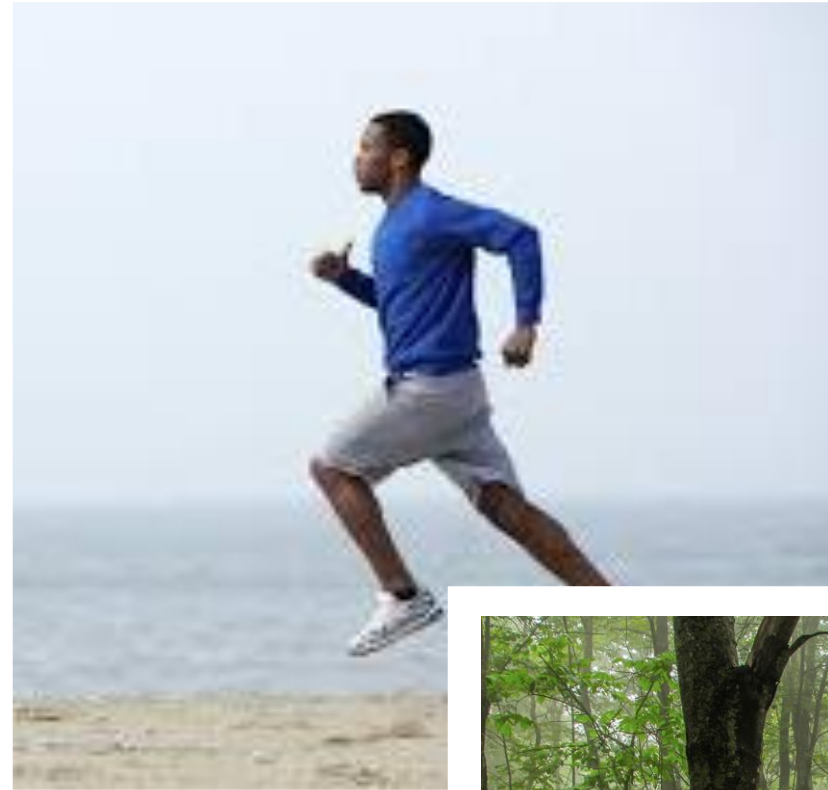
	Fawn	Fight	Flight	Freeze
<b>Symptoms</b>	People-pleasing, scared to share their thoughts, talks about others not themselves, flatters, over-caring, poor self-care boundaries, “Yes” person, anxious.	Self-preserving, explosive temper and outbursts, aggressive, bully behavior, rigid, demanding, dictatorial, directive, perfection from others.	Feelings of panic and anxiety, obsessive thinking, rushing, worry, workaholic behavior, hard to sit still and relax, micromanaging, over-achiever, perfection from self, avoidance, addictions.	Spacey, disconnected, brain fog, difficulty making decisions, hides, isolates, difficulty motivating, flies under radar.
<b>Need/Goal</b>	Discharge anxiety, connect with self. Allow emotions to complete.	Discharge stress energy and regulate nervous system. Allow emotions to complete.	Discharge stress energy and regulate nervous system. Allow emotions to complete.	Thaw. Movement. Connect to self and others.
<b>Intervention Ideas</b>	Creative expression, journal, self-care, boundaries, emote.	Exercise (push-ups, weights). Emote anger. Self-regulate.	Exercise (run, walk, squats). Emote anxiety. Self-regulate.	Creative expression, gentle exercise – yoga, tai chi, journal, talk to a friend.



# SELF-REGULATION:

HELPING BODY GET BACK INTO NORMAL RHYTHM OF SNS-PNS CYCLES WITH PNS DOMINANT.

- Exercise: “You have to find a way to metabolize the (stress) you are exposed to.” LvDNL
- Nature: “Getting outside is the most efficient way to re-regulate the nervous system.” LvDNL
- Breathing exercises, relaxation, mindfulness, meditation





# EMOTE: PROCESS, FEEL, EXPRESS EMOTIONS

Cry

Laugh

Lean into Discomfort

Express feelings – allow them to complete

“Feelings are like tunnels. You have to go all the way through them to get to the light at the other end.” ~  
Emily Nagoski



# CONNECT TO SELF OR OTHERS

- Affection:
    - 20 second hug, 6 second kiss
  - Positive Social Interaction
  - Creative Expression
- 
- There is not a more effective neurobiological intervention than a safe relationship. ~ Bruce Perry





# HOW DO I KNOW WHEN MY STRESS CYCLE IS COMPLETE?

Stress cycles typically take about 20-30 minutes to complete for one time stressor-stress cycle.

Your body will give you clues:

- deep sigh
- feeling of relief in chest
- openness
- restlessness relieved
- calm in body
- peace and ease restored
- thoughts more logical, linear, rational





# TAKE AWAYS

Stress is what we experience in our bodies.

We can't always control the stressor, but we can help our bodies complete the stress cycle.

Match intervention to symptoms.

The more you practice, the better you get and the sooner you will intervene.

Stress cycles typically take about 20-30 minutes to complete for a one-time stress.

Get to know yourself, your habituated stress responses, and create a self-compassionate relationship around stress.

## What is Self-Compassion?



### Self-Kindness

Stop being so critical of yourself.  
Embrace yourself as you are.  
Treat and talk to yourself  
as you would a good friend.



### Common Humanity

We are all imperfect, and this  
is a shared human experience.  
You're not abnormal...maybe "special,"  
but not alone :-)



### Mindfulness

Recognize when are being  
hard on yourself or self-critical...  
then, let it f\*cking go



# THANK YOU!

Comments? Questions? Concerns? Discussion?

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Office of Employee Assistance & Wellness

