

IMPERIAL

Emotions in Action

Emotions SIG

Becky Zamora & Anna Goodwin

Student Wellbeing Advisers

23/06/2025

Aims of Today

- Understand our relationship to our thoughts, feelings and behaviours
- Learn ways we can emotionally regulate more effectively
- Opportunity for self and group reflection.
- Tips on supportive conversations with students.
- The role of emotions in the student experience and ways in which we can support with this.
- Knowing when to refer and what students speak with Student Wellbeing Advisers about.

How are you feeling today?



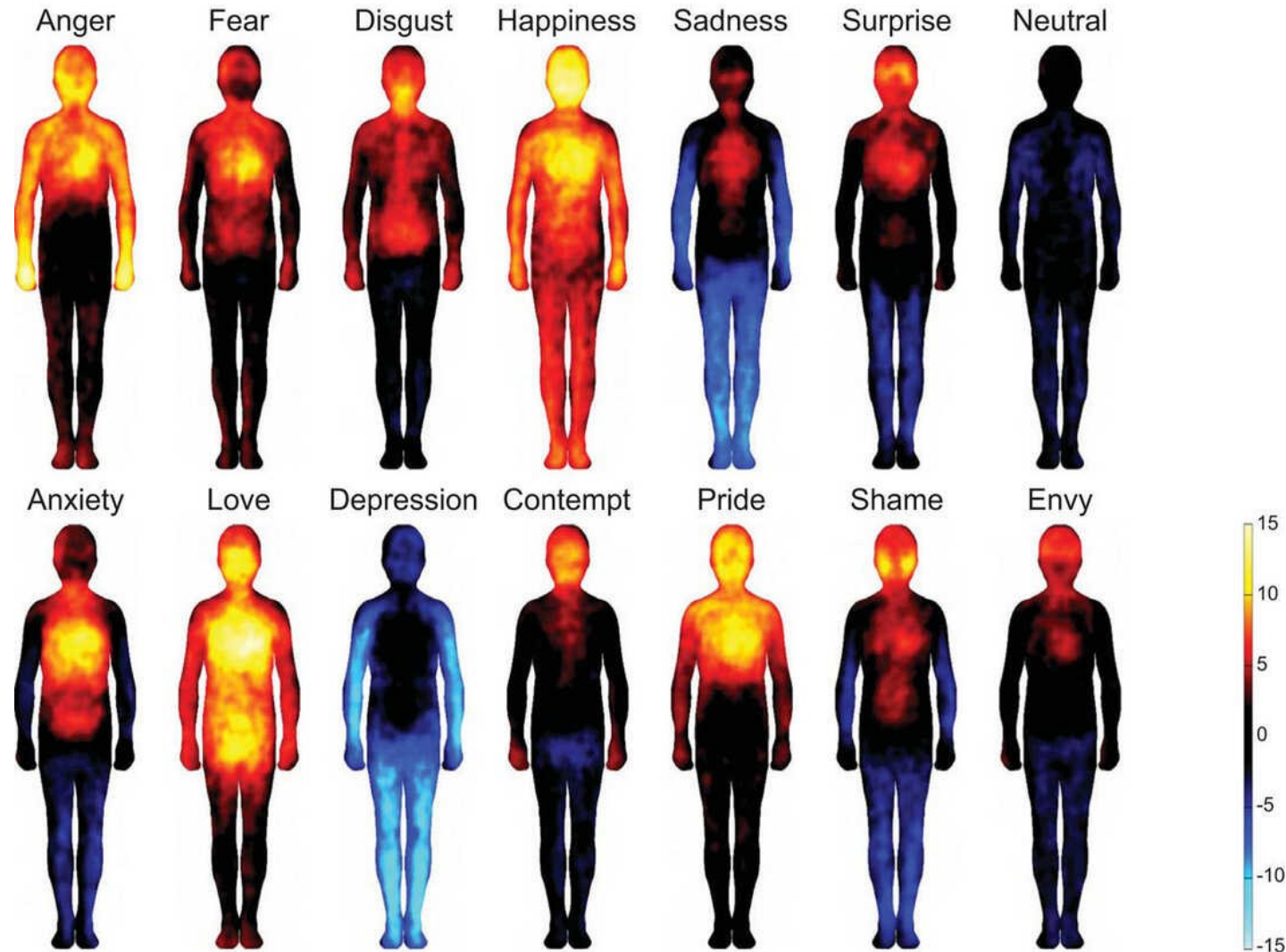
Primary vs Secondary Emotions

Understanding what lies beneath

Primary emotion	Secondary emotion
Are instinctive and natural	Are learned or habitual
Functional, a message to meet the need	Protective
Can be pleasurable or painful (harmful when reacted to)	Defensive and avoidant
Are sensitive and vulnerable	Can numb emotions (motivated by pain reduction)
Are rooted in the deeper parts of the brain	Linger around long after the event has happened
Can help keep us connected with others	Generally, leads to distance and disconnect from our goals, values, and people
Can help guide our actions	They do not listen to what primary emotions are asking ('cover up' with something less sensitive)

Mapping emotion to sensations

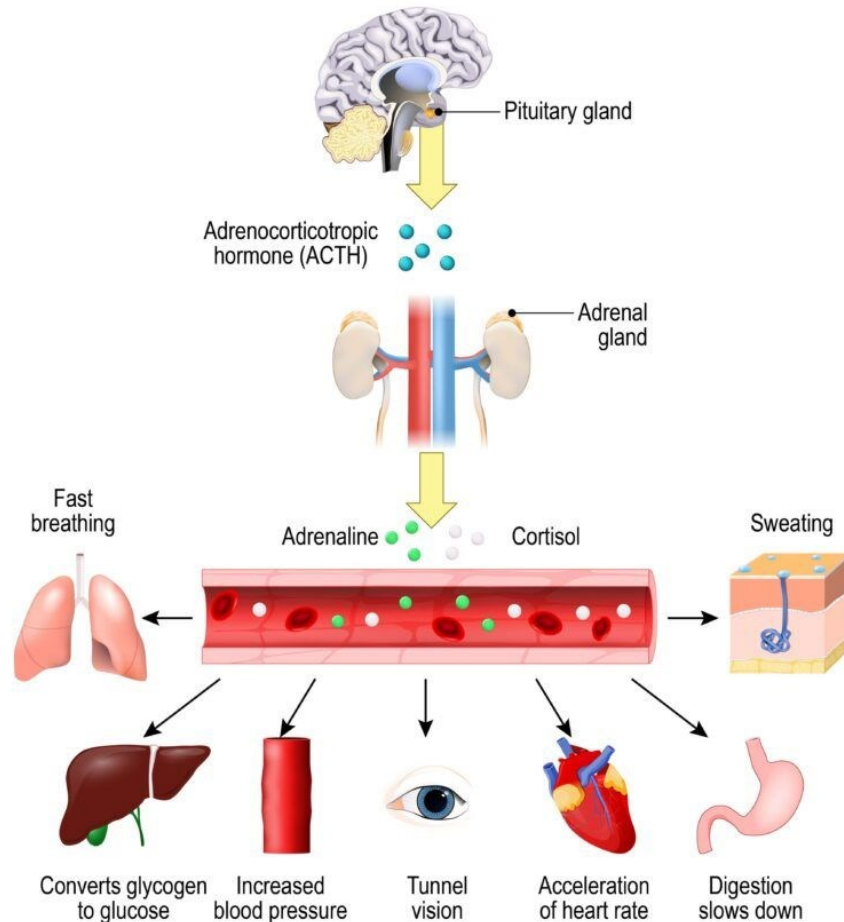
Connecting to the body



Understanding how anxiety manifests in the body

Psycho-education tool

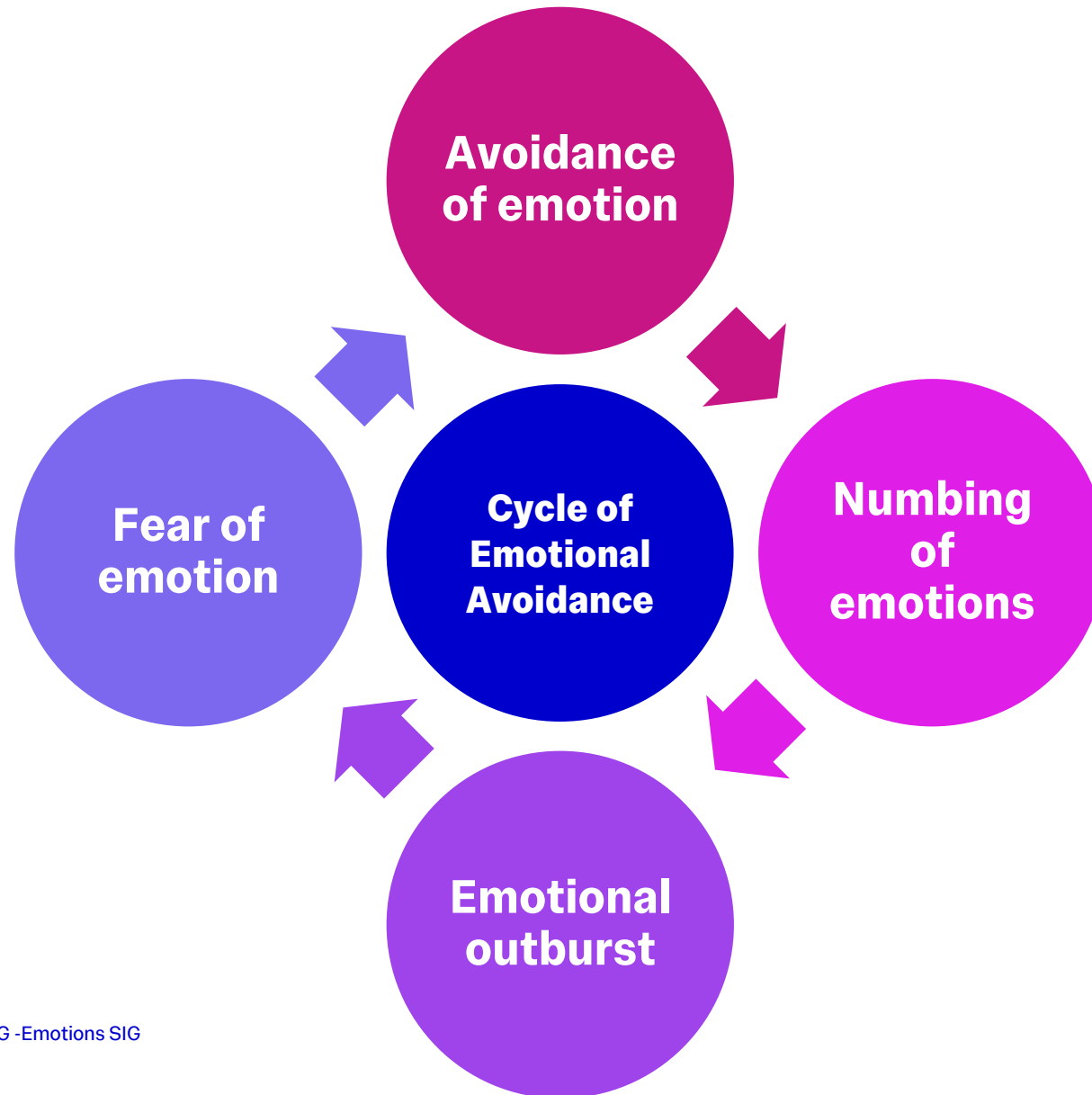
STRESS RESPONSE



- Physiological reaction
- Sympathetic nervous system triggered
- Self-regulating through activating the vagus nerve, which in turn triggers the parasympathetic nervous system:
 - Breathing techniques
 - Humming
 - Singing
 - Gargling
 - Laughing
 - Cold exposure
- Completing the stress cycle

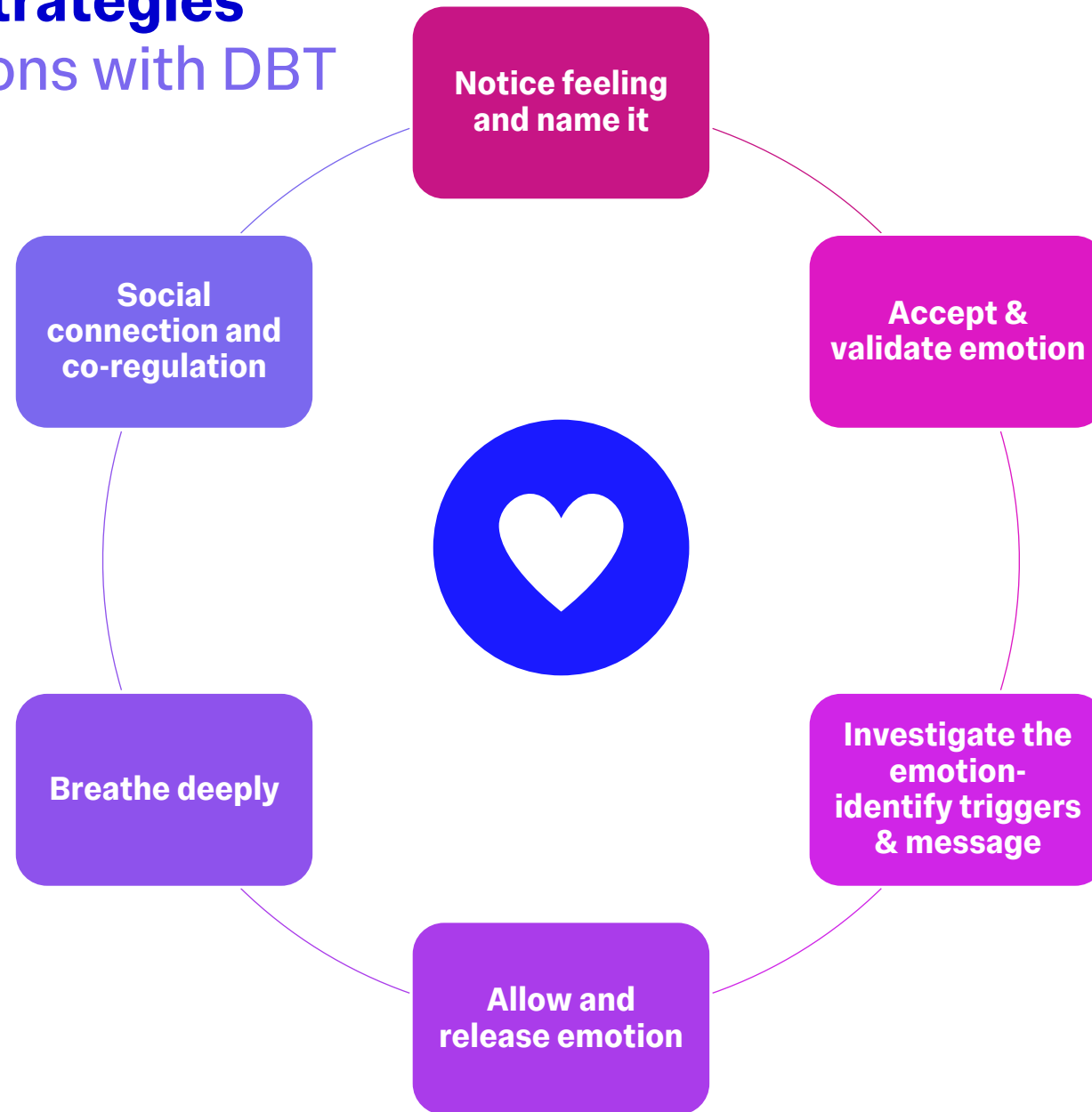
Emotional Avoidance

"What you resist persists. What you accept transforms."- Carl Jung



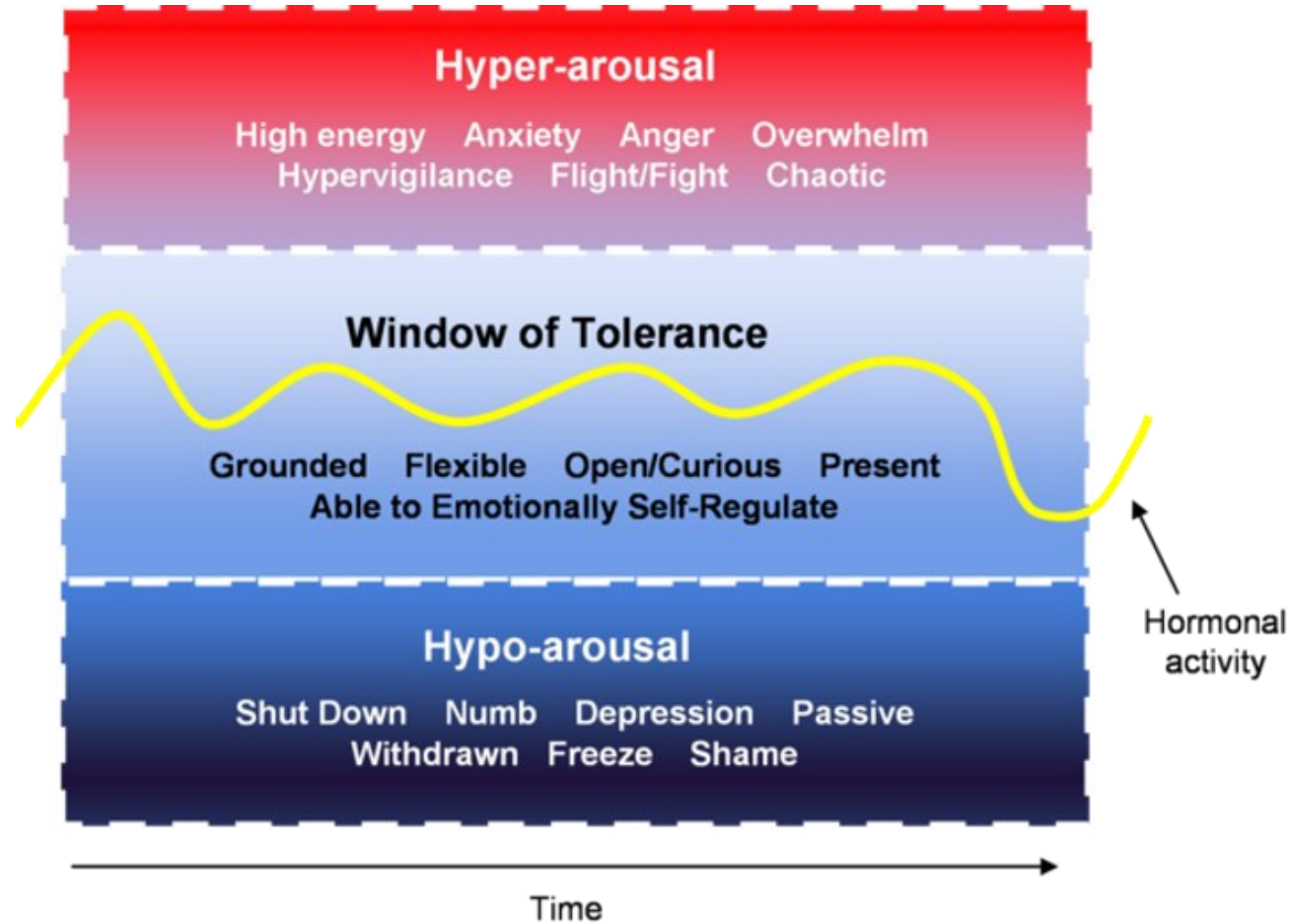
Helpful Coping Strategies

Processing Emotions with DBT



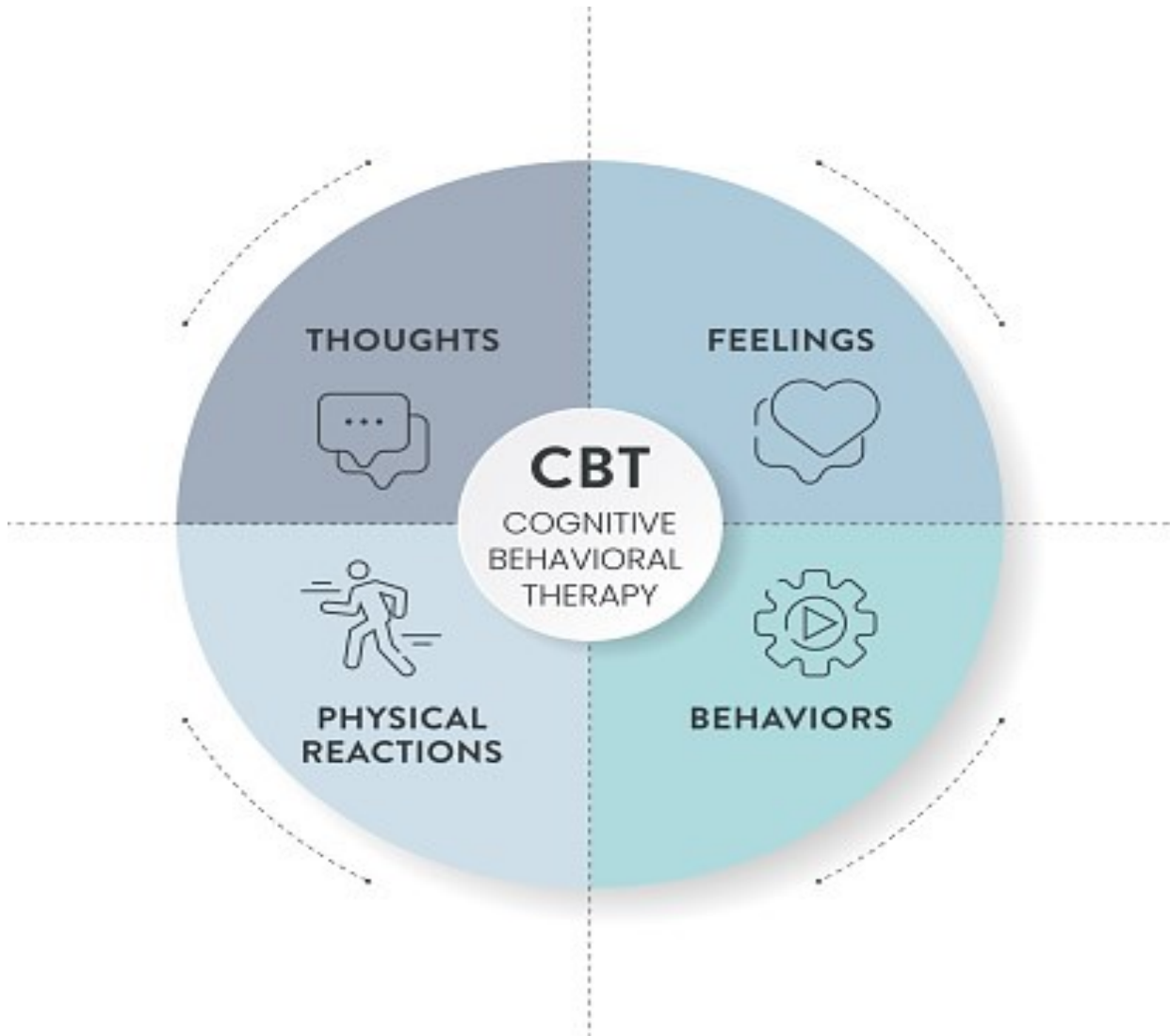
Window of Tolerance

Dan Siegel – Trauma & Optimal Emotion Zone



CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

A Model for Change



- Created by Dr Aaron Beck, 1960s
- How thoughts, feelings, behaviours are connected (physical reactions added in later).
- Each part influences the other, creating a pattern over time.
- Useful for identifying and changing distressing or unhelpful thoughts.
- CBT interrupts feedback loop.
- Can lead to new patterns of behaviour and feeling better.
- Thoughts are not facts, they're likely to be ingrained from a young age.
- Can be outside of awareness.
- A collaborative relationship with therapist is important for treatment.
- Strong evidence base, used widely on own or in conjunction with other therapies.

Discussion Stop 1!

Reflection

Recall a common everyday interaction you have with students.

- What role do emotions play here?
- Do you tend to have a typical approach you use when speaking with a student about emotions in this instance?
- How does this approach work for you/the student?



Helpful Strategies

Supportive 1:1 conversations with students



- Creating a safe, non-judgmental space for students to open up- *'how are you really doing?' (ask twice)*
- Active listening, summarising, giving full attention
- Allowing and being comfortable with silence
- Reassuring- 'thank you for telling me, that sounds really difficult but can support you'
- Giving student agency- *'What can I support you with?'*
- Co-regulation- role-modelling a calm, compassionate, balanced response
- Assist them in building their coping skills – emotional regulation ideas, coaching mindset

Emotional Regulation

Practical tools



Creative activities
e.g. journalling



Breathing techniques



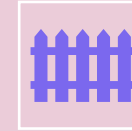
**Considering a
different perspective**



**Talk to someone you
trust**



**Mindfulness and
grounding techniques**



Boundaries



Exercise



Therapy



**Focus on the next
small step you can
take to feel in control**

Controlling the Controllables

Outside my control

In my control

Expectations of others,
including family

The opinion of others

The outcome of my
efforts

The time spent worrying

Rejection

My self-care

My goals

How I spend my time

What others post online

Asking for help

Some life stresses

Setting my own
boundaries

The passing of time

Students' Experience

Trigger Points – outside of control

Performance

- **Performance** – exams, presentations
- **Failure** – results, failure as part of the process
- **High Expectations** – constant pressure, stress response
- **Balancing work and studies** – multiple commitments, fewer resources



Change

- **Transitions** – beginning/finishing a course (grief curve)
- **Academic Year cycle** – keeping up with course demands
- **Uncertainty** – awaiting results, next steps
- **Navigating freedom and self-agency** – overwhelm of choice, real life, direction

Personal

- **Relationships** – managing dynamics with others, relationship breakdown
- **Group Situations and Belonging** – group projects, sense of community
- **Rejection** – unsuccessful job applications, personally
- **Unexpected personal difficulties** – change in finances, bereavements

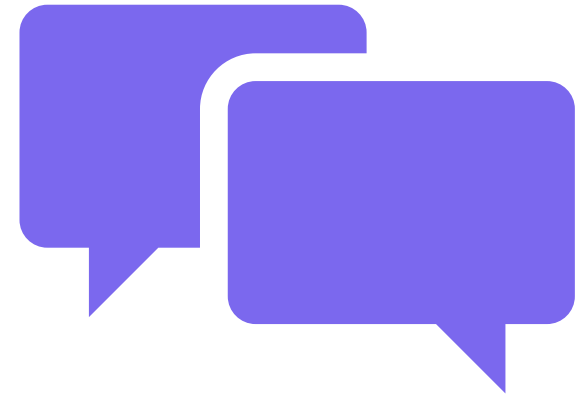


Discussion Stop 2!

Reflection

Bring to mind an instance where a tricky emotion has come up for a student you are working with either in a classroom situation, or during a personal tutor meeting (e.g. confused, anxious, stressed, upset, angry).

- What was their feeling?
- What was it in relation to?
- How did you feel in response?
- How did you respond in the meeting?
- What did you do after?
- Is there anything you might do again or differently next time?



Staff Experience

Connecting with what is happening for you

- Observe, respond not react
- Notice if you are attaching a meaning to how you are feeling
- Ok for you to have feelings too
- Self-compassion (observing feeling/thought, choosing acceptance)
- Critical compassion (empathy with distance)
- When too much empathy is not helpful (over-relating)
- Self-awareness – what's yours/ what is the student's?
- Rescuing, fixing (undermines coping)



- What other behaviours would be helpful here?
- Coaching mindset
- Remaining in adult mode, not pulled into child or parent- attachment and counter transference. Aware, adaptive
- Sometimes the dynamic reminds us (perhaps subconsciously) of another relationship in our lives
- Maintaining boundaries
- We can be busy and stressed too, managing lots of priorities

Coaching Questions

Student-centered, they have the answers

- Open questions, motivational interviewing
- Pauses are ok if they are reflecting on a question
- Encourages a growth mindset, they retain autonomy, opportunity to slow down and connect
- Explore the issue – What would you like to bring today?
- Look at options – What else could you do?
- Outcomes – What will you take as a next step?
- Can be useful to set goals – What would you like to achieve and when by?



Helpful Strategies

Supporting in a group setting

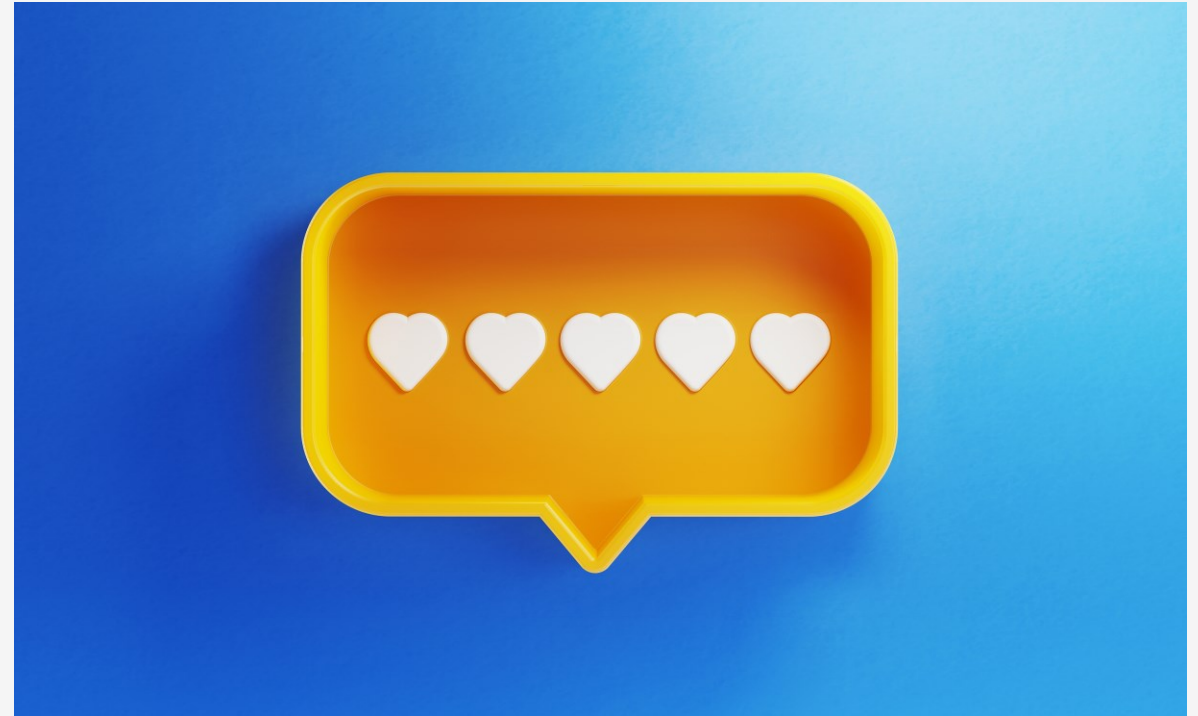
- Check-in/out at beginning and end of session
- Quick team building exercise.
- Encouraging transparent communication of needs between each other.
- Keep an eye on students' reactions- has someone left the room abruptly and needs support?
- Giving students opportunity to speak with you privately- *'If anyone doesn't want to xxx, email me'* instead of in the moment.
- Trigger warnings with sensitive content as we as signposting to support.
- Being pro-active with particularly difficult topics and putting adjustments in place such as drop ins or reiterating support.



Student Wellbeing Advisers

Conversations with Students

- We use the content and approaches as per previous slides
- A range of tools to support students, to offer flexible support for a variety of needs
- Having informed conversations
- Space for feelings to be voiced, for a student to re-connect with themselves
- Help identify the issue or concern
- Explore options
- Leave with a plan & follow-up actions
- Strategies the student can implement
- Signposting or referrals to support
- Review



Further Support

Signposting

- Further support with debilitating emotions, exploring deeply in safe space
- Stuck in CBT cycle- talking therapy (different approaches). A process with trained professionals
- Wellbeing Advice
- Specialist Therapy
- SMHIOs
- Imperial Counselling - Psycho-educational workshops to build skills
- Imperial College Health Centre – Personal Development workshops
- Support for you as staff member – colleague, manager, confidential care



Next Steps

Your reflections

- What will you take away from today?
- Feedback from you
- Resources (as a group follow-up exercise) –
Producing guidance on having conversations
about how feeling



IMPERIAL

Thank you

Emotions in Teaching & Learning
22/05/2025

IMPERIAL

Resources

Emotions in Teaching & Learning
22/05/2025

9 Emotional Needs

Human Givens Project



Security

a safe environment which allows us to develop fully



Attention

giving as well as receiving it



Control

having a sense of autonomy and control



Community

feeling connected to a wider community



Intimacy

somebody who accepts us "warts 'n' all"



Status

sense of status within social groupings



Achievement

a sense of our competence and abilities



Privacy

opportunity to reflect and consolidate experience



Meaning & Purpose

"At its heart is the understanding that we are all born with essential physical and emotional needs and, if we are born healthy, the innate 'resources' to help us get those needs met. These are the human 'givens' – the ingredients for wellbeing.

If our emotional needs aren't being met well enough in our lives, we suffer considerable emotional distress and become vulnerable to developing mental health problems."

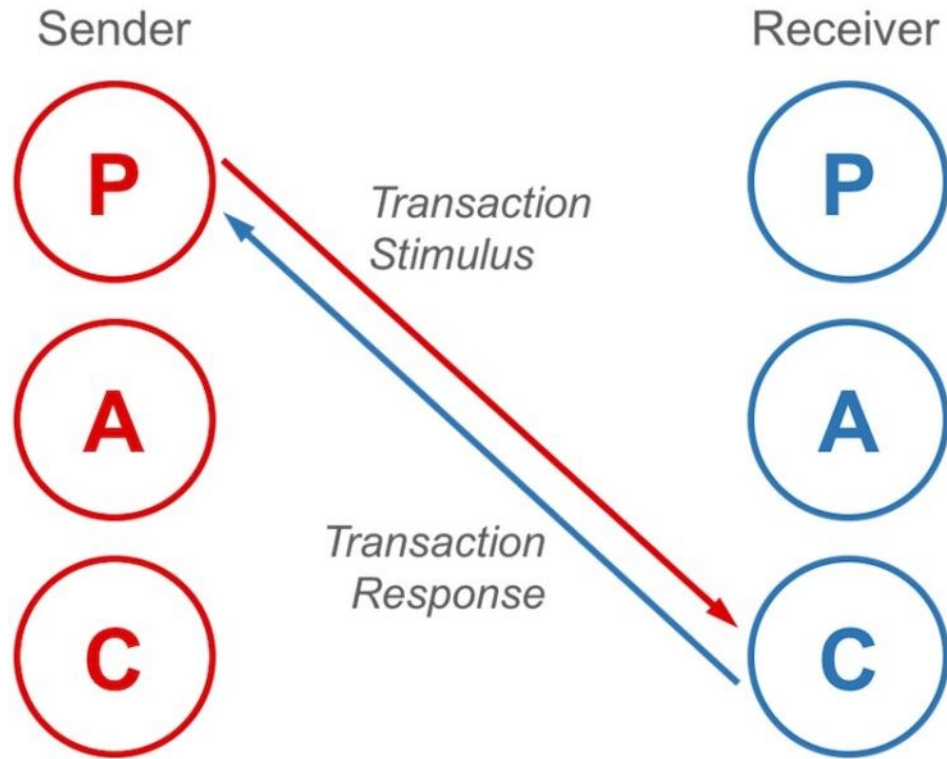
(Human Givens Project, 2025)

Imperial College London



Human Psychology of Relationships

Eric Berne – Transactional Analysis



A Basic Parent-Child Interaction
Transactional Analysis
Originated by Eric Berne

- Book, 1964 – [Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships](#). Looks at the ego states and interactions between them:
- Parent (critical or nurturing) - Taught/Opinions
- Child (free or adaptive) - Felt/Internalised
- Adult – Learnt, Aware, adaptive
- [Example 1 \(Balanced Response\)](#):
 - Adult: What's the time?
 - Adult: Half past 11. Shall we check-in about that deadline??
- [Example 2](#):
 - Stimulus: What's the time?
 - Parent: You are always so late!
 - Child: Why do you care?
- How might this apply in your context? What might a student project onto you (transference)? Who might a student remind you of (countertransference)?
- Consider the tone, energy, equality, and power balance of your conversations to meet your ideal outcome.