

Live Well

# Resilience – how to fight on when life gets tough

with Deborah Bircham



# Deborah Bircham

Health Coach, Mindfulness Teacher

Holistic and Naturopathic Wellness

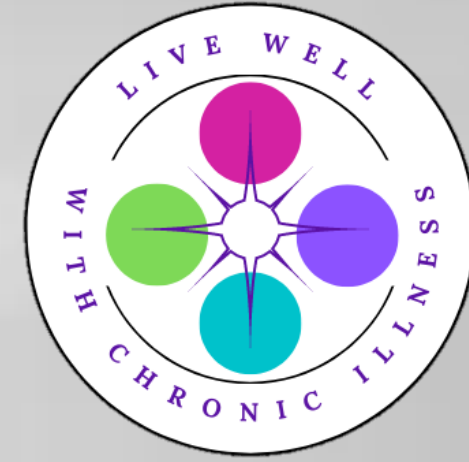


## QUALIFICATIONS:

- ✓ Naturopathic Nutrition and Health Coaching: *Diploma-College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM)*
- ✓ Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy: *Mindworks*
- ✓ Mindfulness Teacher: *Teach 10 Institute*
- ✓ *IEMT Practitioner*

## MEMBERSHIPS:

- ✓ National Council for Integrative Psychotherapists (NCIP)
- ✓ UK & International Health Coaching Association (UKIHCA)
- ✓ The Association of Naturopathic Practitioners (ANP)
- ✓ The Personalised Care Institute
- ✓ Association of IEMT Practitioners



Socials: Live Well With Chronic Illness

Email: [livewellwithchronicillness@outlook.com](mailto:livewellwithchronicillness@outlook.com)

Website: <https://livewellwithchronicillness.co.uk>



Lived Experience of  
Lyme Disease,  
MCAS,  
Dysautonomia and  
Chronic Pain



# My Story

Who am I to talk to you about resilience?  
What do I know about resilience?



# 20s



Image by [Sasin Tipchai](#) from [Pixabay](#)

2 surgeries in my 20s to correct abnormality in my pelvis which was trapping a nerve.

I still had pain from nerve damage

I still had pain in my back

# 30s

Back pain became  
excruciating  
Couldn't stand up at times  
Couldn't walk without a stick  
Unable to work for weeks at a  
time  
Diagnosed with 'mild  
arthritis'



# My Story

Actually 2 spinal discs ruptured all the way across my spinal cord, cauda equina, losing the use of my leg

2 spinal operations and metal plate inserted

Multiple DVT, months of daily warfarin injections



# 20s- 30s



- Degree Ancient and Medieval History
- Began my career in Museums
- PgDip in Museum Studies
- Working for Lincolnshire County Council Heritage Service 18 years



# 30s

- Dad
- Supported me through all of the above
- Driving me to medical appointments all over the country
- Whilst also battling for his life against inoperable prostate cancer
- Died Christmas 2015 aged 71 when I was 38
- I have inherited his attitude of never giving up, always looking for answers, always 'fixing' things!
- My Nan died the year before, Grandad the year after
- (Lost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of my family in 2 years)





# Aged 40 2017



Made Redundant  
Qualified to in adult education (PTTLS)  
Began working for the Woodland Trust



# 40s

But, in March 2018, at the age of 40, on the first day of the job of my dreams, I was in excruciating chest pain.

Over the coming weeks I was just battling to keep going, but the pain got worse and worse.

I was taken to hospital in an ambulance 3 times. Eventually a scan showed inflammation around my heart.

I was misdiagnosed with Pleurisy.



# 40s

I kept hoping it would get better, it didn't, it got worse

Gradually, over the space of a few weeks

I lost the ability to fall asleep at all

Began experiencing horrible seizure-like events

Unrelenting tachycardia – heart rate over 100bpm for days at a time

Heart scan showed pericarditis – inflammation of the lining of the heart

Neurological symptoms, buzzing, twitching, jerking

Muscle spasms all over my body which lasted for days

Joint pains migrating all over my body

Constant tinnitus

Visual disturbance and blurring vision

Bowel bleeding

Urinary frequency

Memory loss

Brain fog

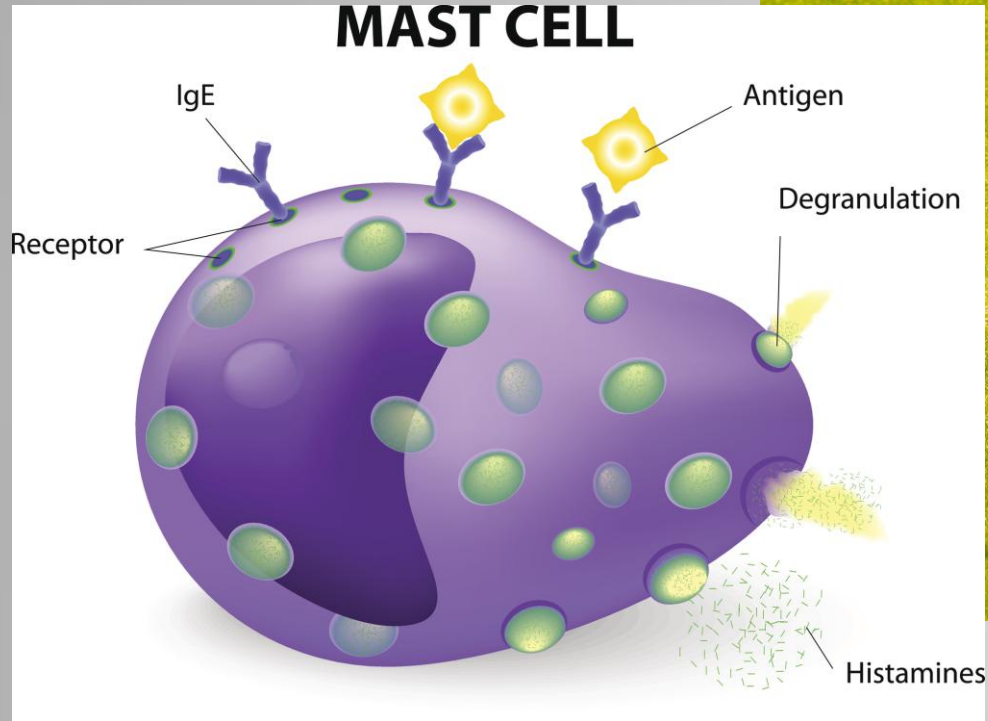
Couldn't concentrate, struggled to read

Couldn't do a jigsaw for an 8 year old

Couldn't drive



# 40s



So far, I've spent all of my 40s battling the daily symptoms of MCAS and Lyme Disease.

# 40s



Deborah Bircham

has successfully completed a Quality Mark certificate course in

**Teach 10: 10 of Zen Mindfulness  
Instructor Training**  
and is now a **certified 10 of Zen Teacher**,  
with the knowledge & skills to deliver short mindfulness  
meditations and teach the core principles of mindfulness to others

Suzanne Laurie  
Academic Director

ISSUED

25/09/2022

Crossfields Institute works with a network of approved centres internationally.  
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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF  
INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

**Certificate**

**of**

**Membership**

This certifies that  
**Deborah Bircham**  
MNCIP (Registered)

has provided satisfactory evidence of good character,  
training, knowledge & professional standards  
& is therefore entered onto  
the Council's Register as a Member

Registration Number 362293  
Valid from 14th February 2023 until 13th February 2024

For The National Council of Integrative Psychotherapists



**CNM**  COLLEGE OF  
NATUROPATHIC  
MEDICINE

**CNM Diploma**  
as a  
**Health Coach**

is awarded to

**Deborah Bircham**

who has successfully completed the  
CNM Health Coach Course

Certified by:

  
Hermann Keppler  
Principal, CNM

Certificate No: 210043



Issued on 2 September 2023

# Resilience Tools



- Sense of Humour
- Meeting Core Needs
- Identifying Resources
- Support Network
- Self-care toolkit
- Reset Your Nervous System
- Allowing difficult emotions
- Self-Compassion
- Reframe – growth mindset
- Focus on taking action
- Being of Service to Others
- Define success on your terms
- Regulate your Amygdala
  - Breathwork/Grounding
  - Mindfulness
  - Reduce Exposure to Stress
  - Cognitive Flexibility
  - Resolving underlying trauma
- Avoid Toxic Positivity
- Cultivate Inner Peace

# Sense of Humour



The first thing I learned about resilience, I learned from my dad  
A sense of humour will get you through anything!

“Laugh as much as possible, always laugh. It’s the sweetest thing one can do for oneself & one’s fellow human beings.” –Maya Angelou

Research confirms that laughing is good for you  
– and builds resilience and helps us cope with difficult things.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27439375/>



Image by [Arek Socha](#) from [Pixabay](#)

# Core Needs

Core needs are the essential physical, emotional, and psychological requirements for well-being.

## Human Givens

- Security — safe territory and an environment which allows us to develop fully
- Attention (to give and receive it) — a form of nutrition
- Sense of autonomy and control — having volition to make responsible choices
- Emotional intimacy — to know that at least one other person accepts us totally for who we are, “warts 'n' all”
- Feeling part of a wider community
- Privacy — opportunity to reflect and consolidate experience
- Sense of status within social groupings
- Sense of competence and achievement
- Meaning and purpose — which come from being stretched in what we do and think





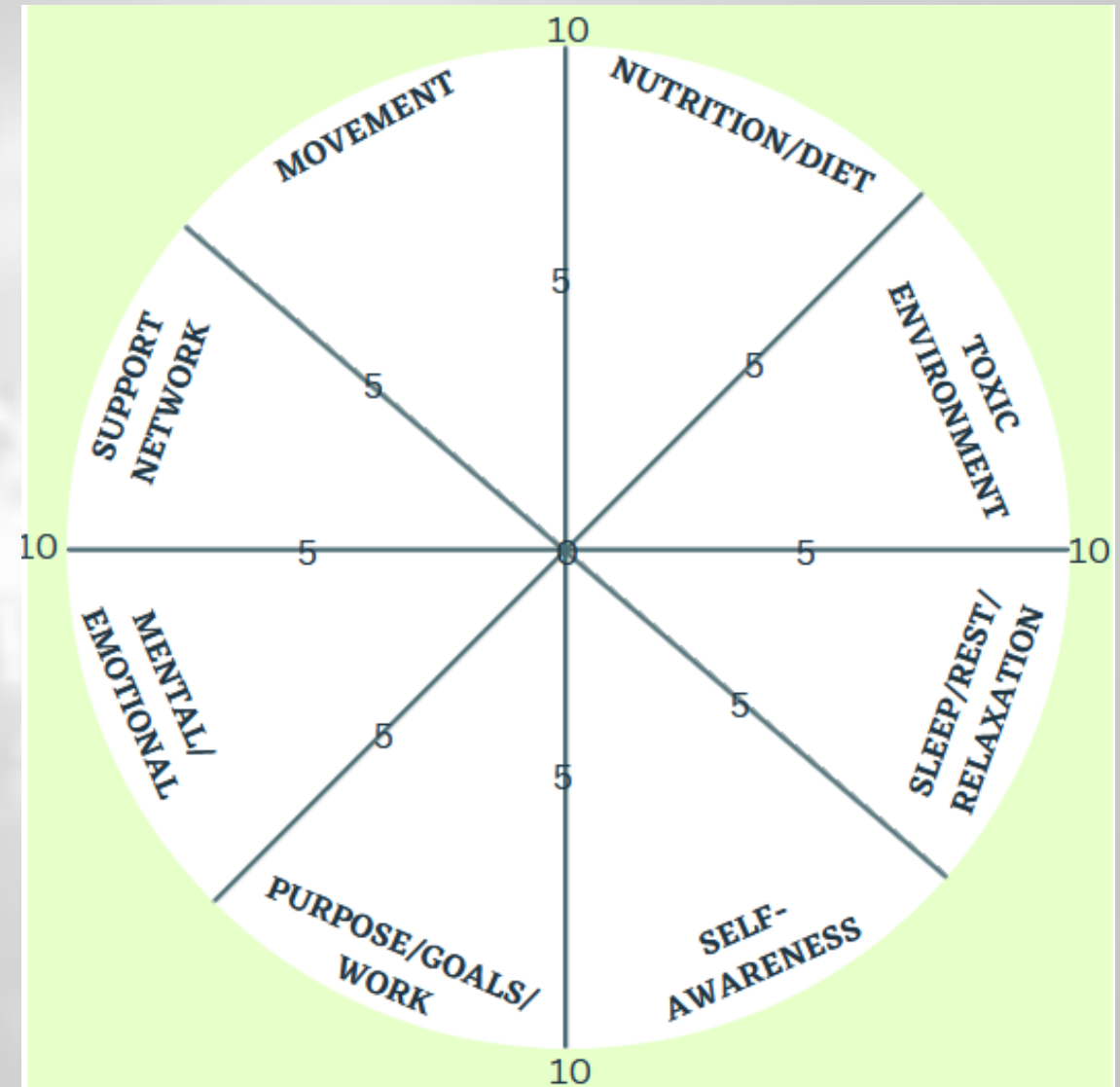
# Self-Care Wheel

Rate your current life in each area  
Are you meeting all your needs?

Are there some areas where you are over-committing

Are there some areas where you need some work?

What can you do to bring these areas up?



# Core Needs



Consider the Human Givens Core Needs, and the Self-Care Wheel

- Evaluate if your basic needs are being satisfied.
- When core needs are unmet, stress increases, and resilience decreases.
- Are there any gaps – are there needs that are unmet?
- Identify any gaps and work to address them, either through self-care, seeking help, or adjusting your environment.

You can meet a missing need in unconventional and creative ways!

Your need for emotional intimacy doesn't need to be with a romantic partner – it can be a friend, or even a pet!

Your need for status can be met through volunteering, not through a job

# Resources

Resources – what are your resources?

Think about a challenge that you have overcome in life, in the past - a time when you were successful at achieving something or overcoming a problem, however big or small.

- Think about the resources that you used to overcome this challenge.
- Internal skills and your internal personality, your qualities, attributes, beliefs, mindset
- Practical skills and abilities. Good at DIY, or good at sports, writing, research
- External resources, the people around you, friends, family – you know someone, contacts, places
- It might involve your material possessions or practical support from any source
- It might include any sources of information or support that you utilised. Internet, CAB, GPs



# Resources

Your success rate at surviving difficult experiences is currently 100%!

What is it about you that has enabled you to survive all that life has thrown at you?

Recognise the resources that you have available to you, and use them to help you!

How can those resources help you with the current challenge you face?

Which of your skills and attributes can you utilise now to get you through this?

What can you do to make things better for yourself – even something small?



# Support Network



We are wired for connection. We can't live alone – we have adapted as a species to be 'tribe' animals.

Ventral Vagal state of safety is one of connection with others

Resilience is strengthened by having a reliable network of supportive people around us.

Connection with others provides emotional comfort, practical help, and a sense of belonging during tough times.

Cultivate relationships that are supportive – surround yourself with helpful people.

Connect with Peers in similar situations

Ask for help - Don't be afraid to seek emotional or practical support when needed.

Reciprocate - Strengthen your network by offering support to others in return, even if only small.

# Self-Care Toolkit

Identify and develop your own set of coping tools that support you in times of difficulty

What nourishes you? What helps you during difficult times?

Make sure you have these available to you and remember to use them

- Mindfulness & meditation
- Walking in nature
- Listening to music
- Creative hobbies
- Journaling
- Spending time with friends
- Spending time with animals

Put these tools in place **before** you need them to be proactive in managing stress.



# Reset

It's not the burden of stress that we are carrying that is the issue

It's how long we are carrying it for

Using these self-care tools for just a few minutes a day allows you to 'put down' the stress, for a few moments.

This has the effect of allowing your nervous system to reset

Check-in with yourself and recognise when your nervous system is feeling under strain

Do some self-care to reset it back to baseline

This allows you to never 'overflow'

You can't pour from an empty cup – spending a bit of time doing something you enjoy 'fills your cup', so you can then keep giving to others.



# Allowing Emotions

## Accepting and Allowing Emotions

It is normal to feel the full spectrum of human emotions

There are no 'bad' or 'wrong' emotions – we can allow ourselves to feel all the emotions that we feel, because that is part of being human.

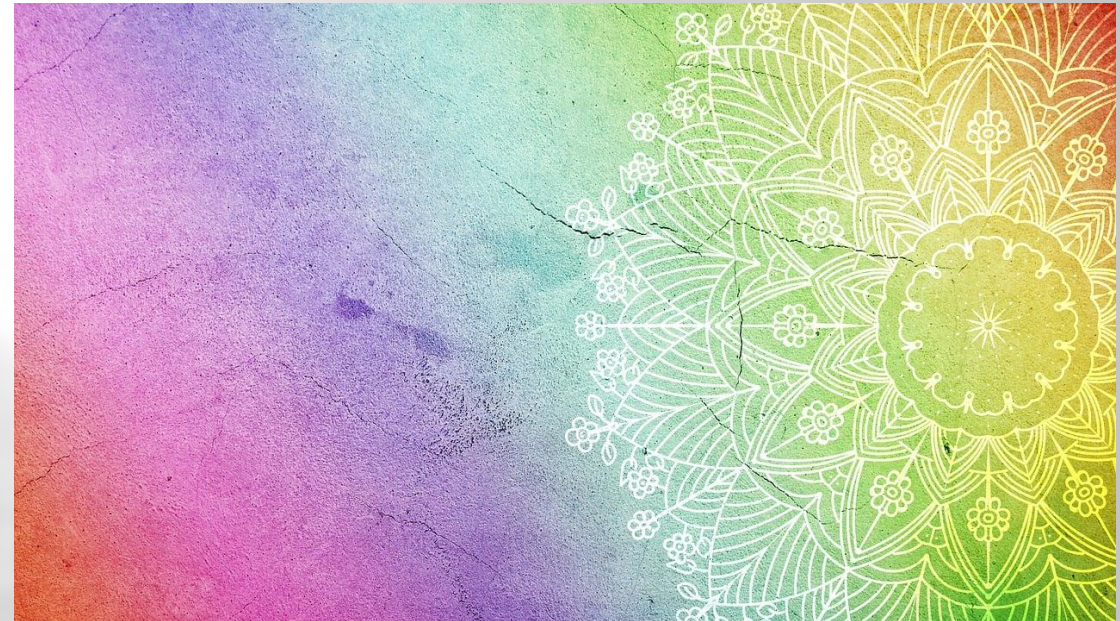
Difficulty becomes greater if we suppress emotions, and push them down.

Accepting emotions means acknowledging them without resistance.

Avoid suppressing emotions - can lead to long-term stress and physical symptoms.

Create space for your feelings without judgment.

Label the emotion that you feel – research shows that those who find it hard to recognise and label their emotions do worse with their mental health





# Allowing Emotions

Labelling our emotions allows us to understand them

It reduces the intensity of the emotion

It creates space between us and the emotion – we are observing the emotion.

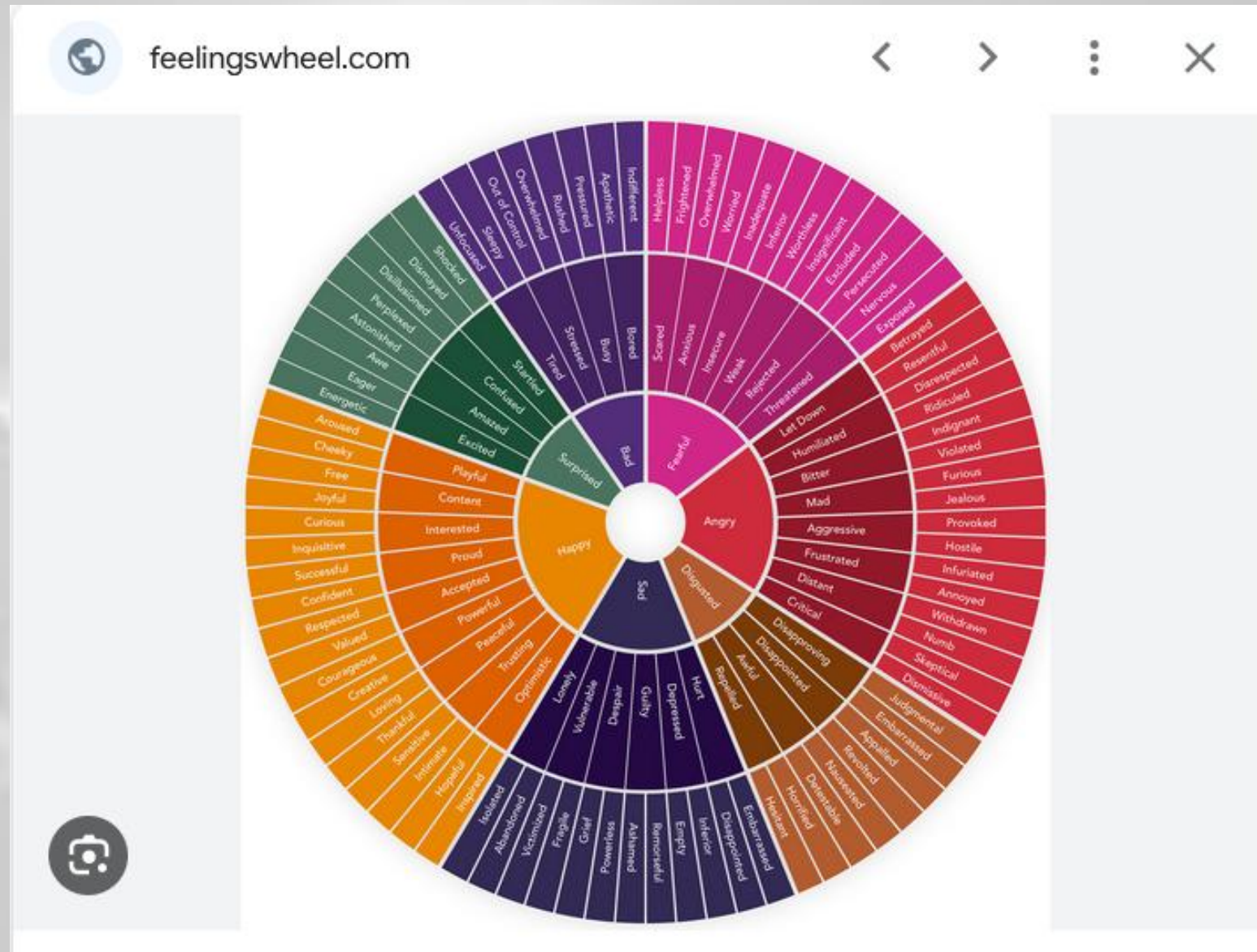
Some people struggle with this

Use a "Feelings Wheel" to help identify specific emotions.

Emotional Resilience starts with becoming aware of our emotions

Recognizing emotions as temporary experiences that are normal for human beings helps us manage them rather than being overwhelmed by them.

<https://feelingswheel.com/>



# Self-Compassion

Treat yourself with the same level of kindness, care and understanding that everyone else is deserving of, especially in difficult times.

When things are hard, we tend to become our own worst enemy, and become critical and unkind to ourselves.

Practice self-talk that is supportive rather than critical.

Ask yourself – what would I say to someone else? How would I support them? Then offer those words and actions to yourself.

Self-compassion builds resilience by reducing self-blame and encouraging healing.

Self-compassion reduces self-blame and increases emotional recovery from setbacks.



# Self-Compassion

## How to Practice

Acknowledge - Acknowledge your difficulty without over-identifying with it. (This is really hard. I'm feeling XXXX right now)

Shared Humanity - Recognize that suffering is a shared human experience. (Everyone suffers, you are not being singled out for punishment – you don't 'deserve' this)

Self-Kindness - Replace self-criticism with supportive inner dialogue. (You can do this. It's going to be ok, we will get through this)

Studies show that people who forgive themselves for making mistakes are less likely to make the mistake again!

Nourish yourself –  
don't punish yourself!



# Reframe



Look at difficult situations as opportunities

Challenges provide us with chances for personal growth and development.

Ask yourself, "What can this teach me?" during difficult situations.

What can I learn from this?

Embrace adversity as an opportunity for learning and transformation.

Where there is challenge, there is opportunity for change

Implement a growth mindset to turn challenges into positive change.

Celebrate effort and progress rather than just outcomes.

Remind yourself that skills, abilities, and resilience can be cultivated with time and practice.

Cultivating a growth mindset promotes long-term resilience by encouraging adaptability, creativity, and a positive approach to setbacks.

# Growth Mindset

Based on the work of Carol Dweck

Fixed Mindset – we fear failure, we don't want to look stupid, we beat ourselves up for failing, we don't try anything new for fear of failing

Growth Mindset – sees challenges as an opportunity for growth. Is not afraid of challenge and of trying, is not fearful of failure or looking stupid, understands that doing difficult things leads to growth and development. Challenge is an opportunity to learn and grow

A growth mindset is the belief that challenges and setbacks are opportunities for learning and development, and not failures.

People with a growth mindset are more likely to persist through difficulties, adapt to change, and ultimately grow from adversity.

I can't do it **YET**



# Focus on taking action

Focus on what is in your control, and taking action, however small.

Focus on the next actionable step rather than worrying about the distant future. What can you do NOW to help?

Take action to change your situation – a sense of power and control is essential for wellbeing.

Education, learning, understanding, action = empowerment

Break down larger challenges into smaller, manageable tasks.

Reduces overwhelm, increases focus, and helps maintain progress in the face of adversity.

You only ever have to take the next step

You only ever have to drive forwards over the next 10 yards.



# Being of Service to Others

Feeling that we are of service to others, even when we are struggling ourselves, is tied up with self-identity and self-esteem

Human beings have a fundamental need to serve others

Much research shows that caring for others and being of service is essential for our own wellbeing.

Studies associated helping others with lower stress levels, lower blood pressure, and even reduced mortality rates.

In addition, the act of helping others releases oxytocin, a hormone that reduces stress and improves our physical health.

Other studies show that feeling compassion for others also has physical and mental health benefits.

By focussing on helping others, taking our focus away from ourselves and our own problems, is helpful.



<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103110000934>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235667763\\_Volunteering\\_by\\_Older\\_Adults\\_and\\_Risk\\_of\\_Mortality\\_A\\_Meta-Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235667763_Volunteering_by_Older_Adults_and_Risk_of_Mortality_A_Meta-Analysis)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/vitality/201404/the-neuroscience-giving>

# Define Success on Your Terms

Your Define your own Success

Success is personal and doesn't need to match society's standards.

Reflect on what success means to you and set goals that align with your values.

If life is challenging and you can't achieve something that you previously wanted, or which feels 'essential' – this creates an imaginary distress

We can choose what success means for us – and that can be whatever is available to us currently

Reduces pressure to conform and promotes authentic, fulfilling life choices.

Is it possible for someone to be unable to achieve their original goals, but for them to still lead a happy and fulfilling life?





# Regulate Your Amygdala

The amygdala is the brain's fear center, and calming it can reduce stress and anxiety. When our Amygdala is activated, we are less resilient, and feel overwhelmed and stressed more easily.

Things that help regulate the Amygdala

Breathing Exercises

Grounding exercises

Hypnosis

Visualization and Meditation

Mindfulness.

Cognitive Flexibility

Reduce exposure to stress

Trauma Therapy



Image credit janulla :  
Istockphoto.com



# Breathwork and Grounding

Simple breathing exercises and grounding techniques help regulate the limbic brain and nervous system during high stress or anxiety.

Calming the body through breath slows the heart rate, reduces cortisol levels, and signals to the brain that it's safe to relax.

Deep breathing - Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts.

Grounding - Focus on physical sensations like your feet on the ground, or name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, etc.

Breathing and grounding techniques can quickly reduce stress, clear the mind, and promote emotional stability by regulating the amygdala.



# Mindfulness

Regularly practicing Mindfulness builds resilience and regulates the amygdala



Mindfulness is the practice of focusing your attention on the present moment without judgment.

It helps reduce rumination and anxiety by grounding you in the "now," rather than worrying about the past or future.

Regularly take time to notice your surroundings, thoughts, and emotions with curiosity rather than judgment.

Observe what is happening in this moment, with curiosity

Practice engaging with your present experience using all your senses

Mindful chores – anything can be done mindfully. Washing up, taking a shower, drinking a cup of tea, putting the bins out!

Fully immerse yourself in that experience, don't let your mind wander. Feel what you feel, hear what you hear, smell what you smell, taste what you taste, see everything around you.

Explore the experience as though it were entirely new to you.

# Reduce Exposure to Stress

It might sound impossible – life is full of stress

However, we do have some control over the stresses that we expose ourselves to.

The brain can't tell the difference between what we imagine, and what is real, and this drains our resilience and makes us feel under more threat than we really are. This upregulates the amygdala.

- Avoid watching frightening or stressful films or TV, including the news.
- Avoid 'drama' on social media – if it is negative or confrontation, unfollow! Seek our nurturing social media sites and follow them.
- Set boundaries around time spent on social media or watching news.
  - Limit contact with negative people or environments.
  - Prioritize activities that bring you joy and relaxation.

Managing your stress exposure allows you to conserve mental energy and protect your emotional well-being from unnecessary strain.



# Cognitive Flexibility

Cultivating flexible thinking – there is no ‘one way’ of seeing any situation.

This involves identifying and challenging unhelpful or negative thought patterns that may distort our view of situations.

We all have a negativity bias, which means our brains always focus on bad things, and tell us that things are worse than they are.

This saps our resilience over time

Becoming aware of this and spotting it happening can help us to become more resilient.

By reframing these thoughts, you can develop a more balanced, constructive outlook.

Identify the negative thought ("I can't cope with this").

Challenge it ("Is that true? What evidence do I have?").

Reframe it ("This is hard, but I've overcome challenges before and I can find ways to cope")

Cognitive flexibility helps reduce the negativity bias and enhances your ability to approach challenges with optimism and a problem-solving mind-set.



# Cognitive Flexibility

Identify the negative thought ("I can't cope with this").

Challenge it ("Is that true? What evidence do I have?").

Reframe it ("This is hard, but I've overcome challenges before and I can find ways to cope").

Cognitive restructuring helps reduce the negativity bias and enhances your ability to approach challenges with optimism and a problem-solving mind-set.

“Oh no, someone’s had an accident, how awful. I hate seeing the air ambulance, because I know someone is in trouble”



“Oh no, someone’s had an accident, how awful. I love seeing the air ambulance take off, because it reminds me that there are wonderful, brave people in the world. It restores my faith in humanity.”

Both are ‘true’ – no ‘right or ‘wrong’. But one focusses on negative, fearful thoughts, where the world is full of danger, one focusses on positive thoughts, where the world is safe and full of good people. Over time, enhances your ability to approach challenges with optimism and problem-solving. **There is no ‘one way’ of seeing any situation**

Practicing ‘Cognitive Flexibility’ regularly helps regulate the amygdala



# Cognitive Flexibility

Robinson Crusoe

Washed up on the island.

Lying half dead on the beach

Thinks to himself.....

This is terrible. I'm alone, I've got no food, no water, no shelter. I can't survive this. It's hopeless, I'm going to die here. Lies down on the beach, dies.



Image by [Elias](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Practicing 'Cognitive Flexibility' regularly helps regulate the amygdala



This is terrible, I'm alone, I've got no food, no water, no shelter.

But maybe if I drag myself to the trees, I'll get some shelter.

Maybe I could eat some of that fruit.

Maybe I could build a little shelter

**He acknowledges the situation is awful. But he takes one small step forward. He uses his resources, however meagre, he uses his skills, and he stays calm and takes action. And he survives. He keeps surviving, long enough to be rescued.**

# Deal with Trauma

Dealing with Trauma helps to regulate the amygdala



Dealing with Trauma makes us more resilient

If we have any past traumas, they 'take up space' in our nervous system.

The more 'trauma' our nervous system is carrying, the less 'bandwidth' it has to carry anything else.

Wounded leg analogy

There are a number of different therapy modalities that can help resolve historic trauma and emotional distress

IEMT (Integral Eye Movement Therapy) helps to process traumatic memories.

Somatic Trauma Therapy

Talking Therapies





# Avoid Toxic Positivity



## Avoid Toxic Positivity

Toxic positivity minimizes real feelings by forcing positivity.

It's not about denying that there is a problem – pretending that everything is ok.

Pretending to enjoy whatever is happening to us

It's okay to not be okay sometimes.

Acknowledge pain and discomfort while also seeking solutions when appropriate.

Find a middle ground between positivity and authenticity.

You are allowed to acknowledge your situation and how you are feeling.

Not over-focussing on the negative, but not denying it either



# Inner Peace

Peace of Mind is not the absence of conflict or difficulty

It's the ability to be ok in spite of conflict or difficulty

We cannot avoid difficulty

We can't know what tomorrow will bring

How we respond to difficulty is the key

'This, too, shall pass'

'All Shall Be Well' Julian of Norwich

All things are temporary

Focussing on our own inner wellbeing, taking one small step at a time



# Contacts



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## Contacts



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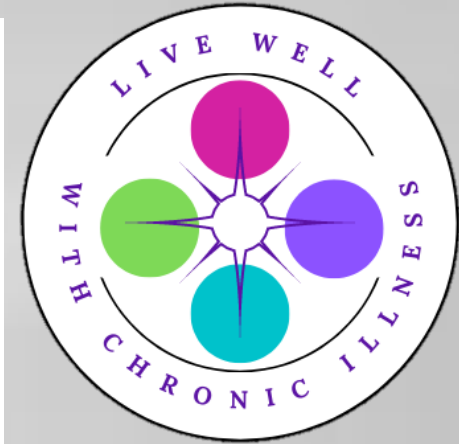
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The End

Thank you for Listening

Any Questions?

