

Centering Survivorship and Fostering Wellness

Pamela Jacobs, JD (she/her)
Chief Executive Officer



National Resource Center
on Domestic Violence



WELCOME


A decorative graphic featuring the word "WELCOME" in a playful, colorful font. Each letter is contained within a circular tag of a different color, and the tags are arranged in a horizontal line. The colors of the tags are: W (pink), E (red), L (orange), C (purple), O (green), M (teal), and E (blue). Each tag is suspended by a thin vertical line of the same color as the tag, giving the impression of a string of hanging ornaments or a banner.

OUR MISSION

To strengthen and transform efforts to end domestic violence

The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence provides a wide range of free, comprehensive, and individualized technical assistance, training, and specialized resource materials.

As a result of this training, participants will be able to:

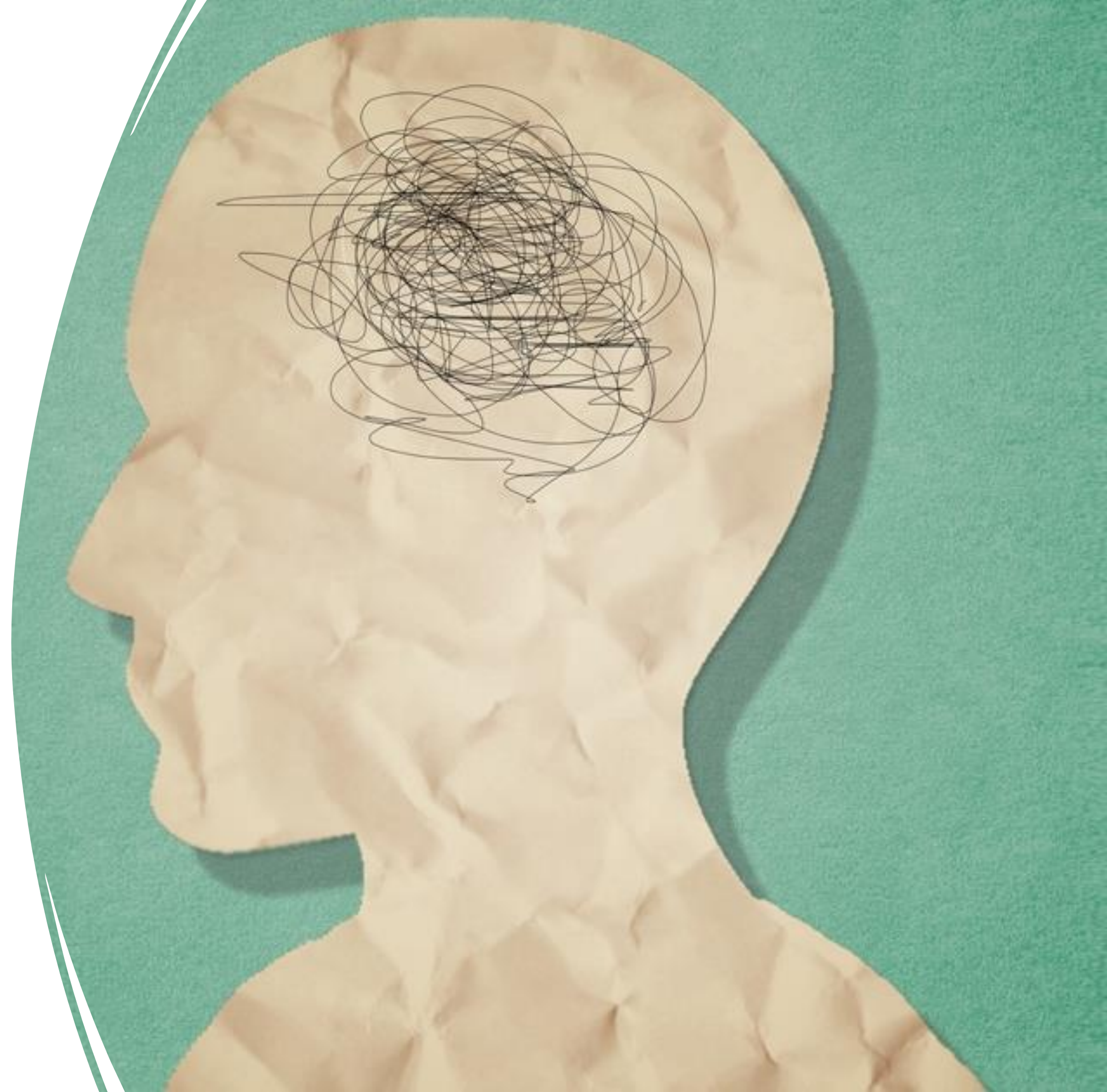
- Identify how trauma shapes the experiences of survivors, advocates, and organizations.
 - Gain an understanding of what resilience is and explore the key factors that support and strengthen it.
 - Explore tools and strategies for fostering resilience in ourselves, our agencies, and our communities.
- ... and hopefully feel a little less alone in this work. 

What We Carry

What is Trauma?

- Overwhelming experiences that exceed our ability to cope
- Not just what happens—but how it lives in the body and mind
- Everyone responds to trauma differently

Trauma isn't just the event – it's the impact. And that impact is shaped by everything—identity, history, support, systems.



What Happened to Us?

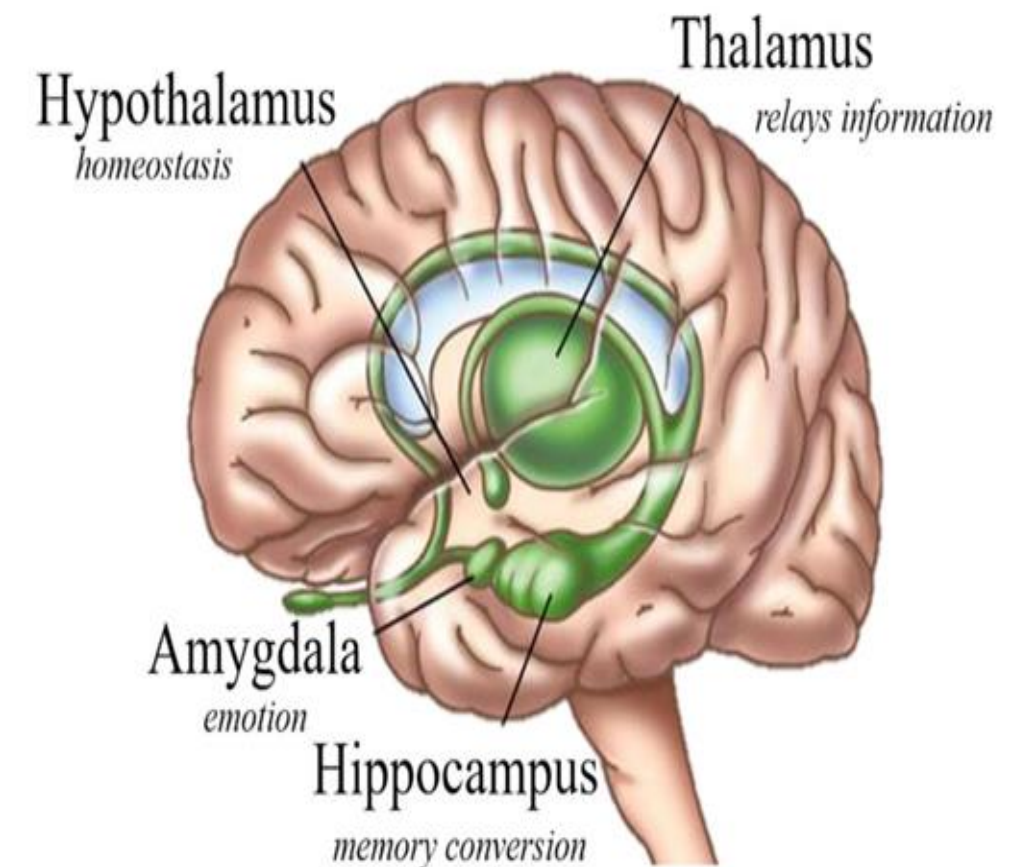
- When a physical danger, like an assault, threatens our control or ability to escape, we enact a **natural instinct for survival**.
- Your body uses a tremendous amount of energy to fight or flee, which can cause it to short circuit.
- The short circuit travels through your body and mind. This can result in shock, dissociation, freezing, and other kinds of involuntary responses.
- Unlike animals, we don't "discharge" the trauma, so this short circuit stays with us long after the violence ends, and can live on in our mind, body, and spirit in many ways.



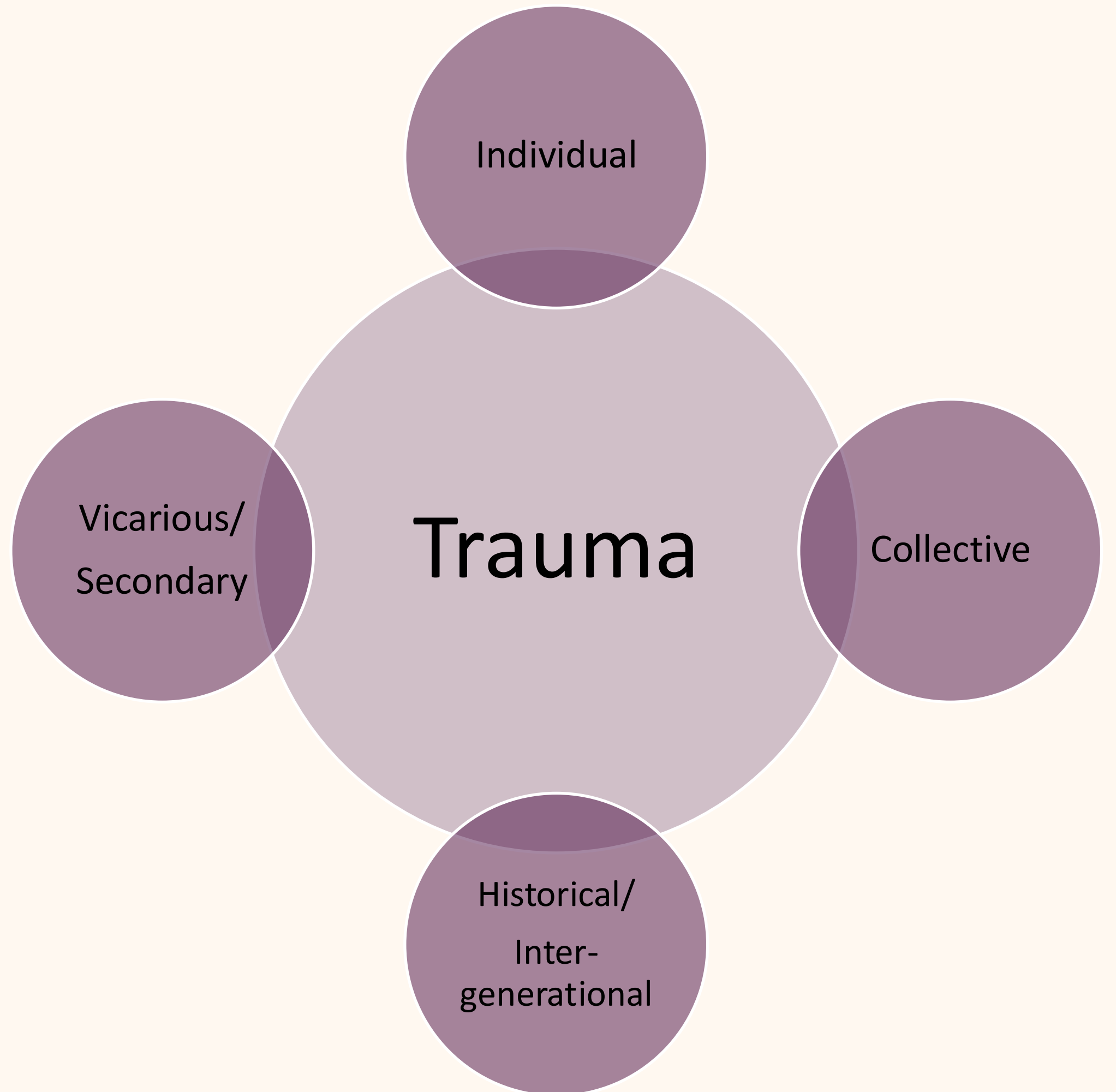
Trauma & the Brain

- Amygdala: stores memories of fearful experiences, regulates heart rate and blood pressure, and monitors incoming stimuli for threats.
- Activates the fight-flight-freeze stress response when it detects danger. Signals release of hormones: adrenaline, cortisol (stress hormone), opiates (dulls pain), oxytocin (happy chemical).
- Rush of chemicals can cause Tonic Immobility (freezing, “rape-induced paralysis”).
- Hippocampus is sensitive to stress hormones; smaller in people with PTSD.
- Difficult for the hippocampus to process the information into memories – so may be fragmented or missing.

The Limbic System

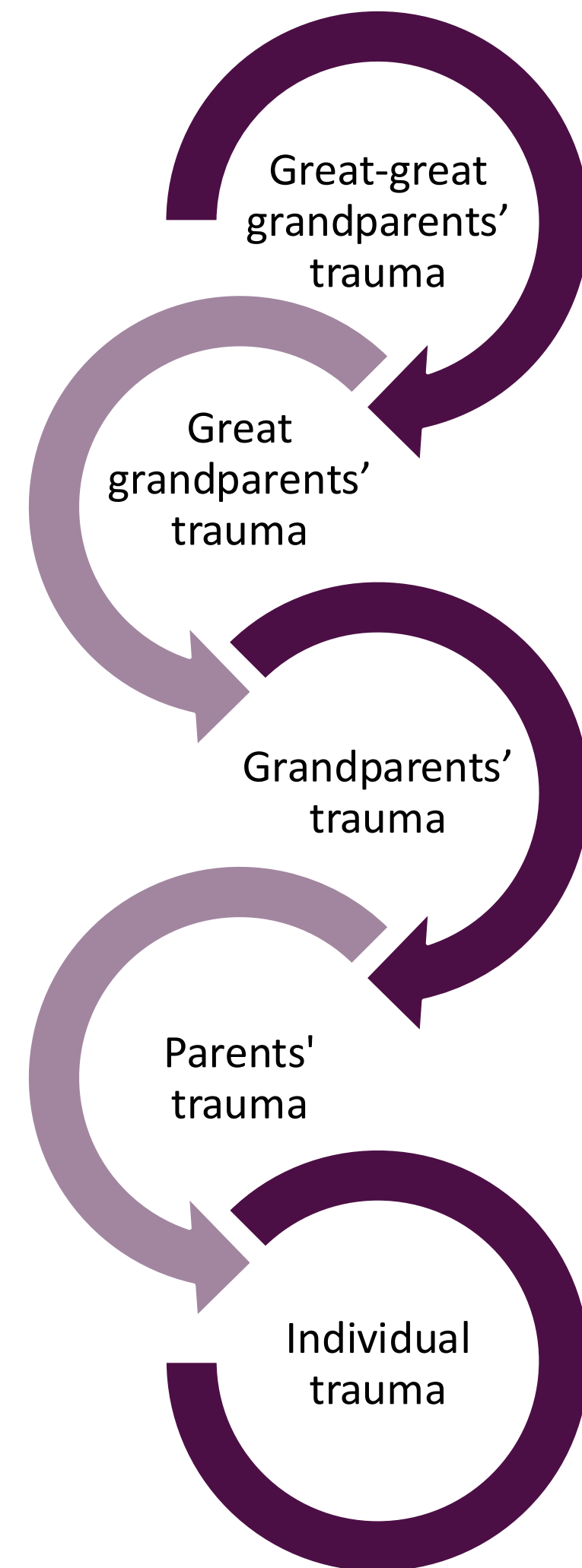


What We Carry: Types of Trauma



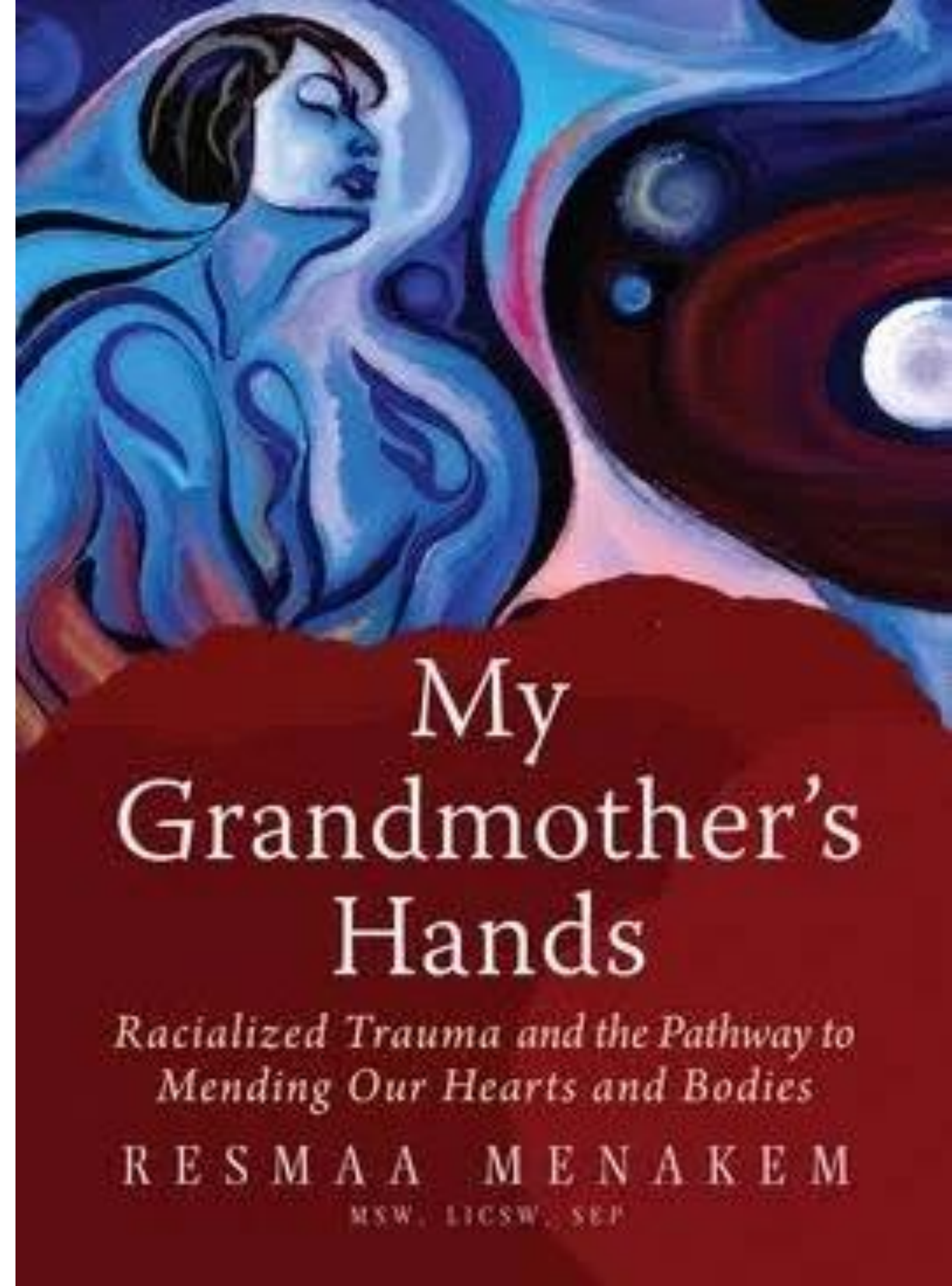
Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

- **Historical**
 - Cumulative trauma existing over a lifespan and across generations. Significant group experiences.
- **Intergenerational**
 - Transferred from one generation to the second and further generations.



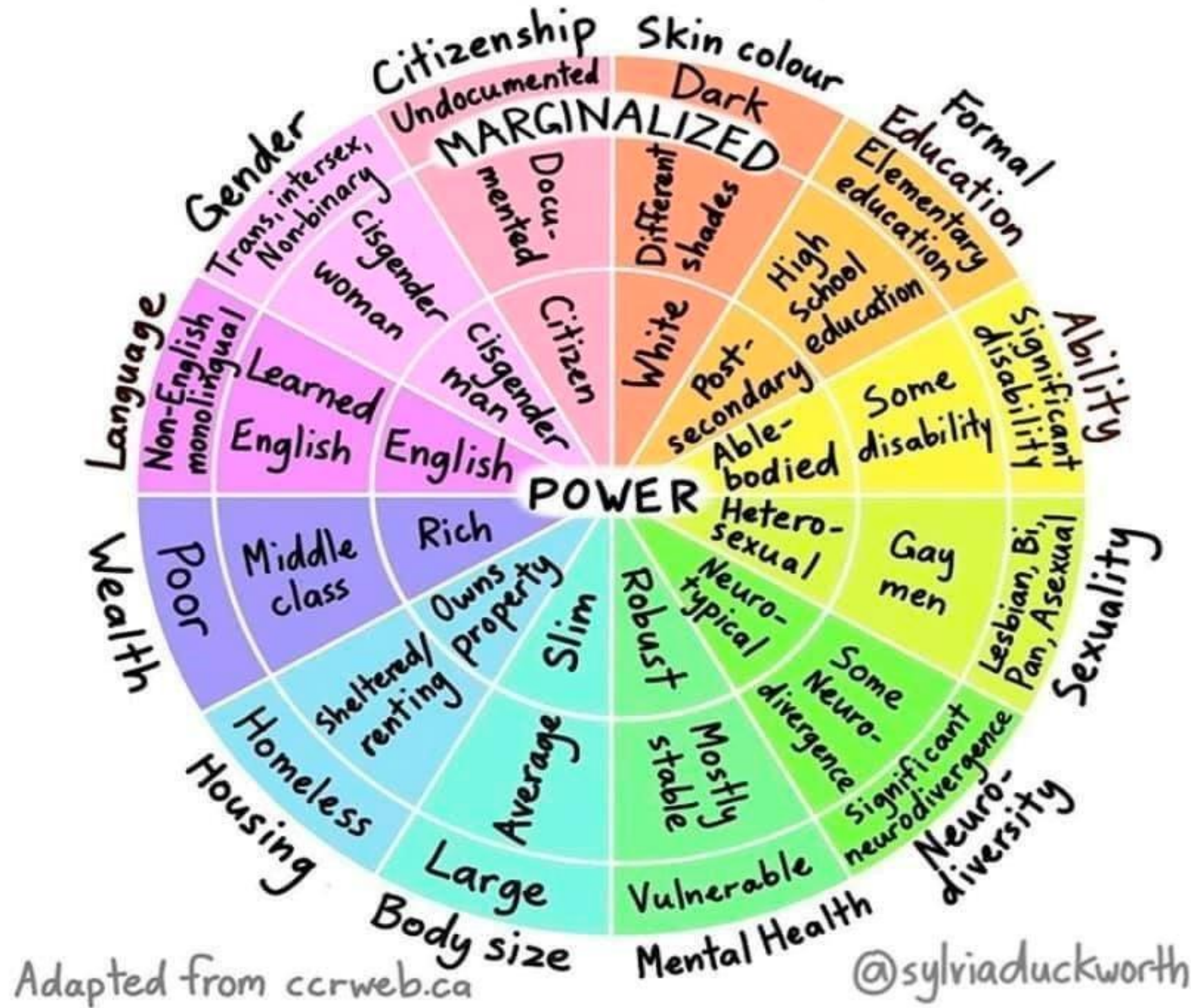
“Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone’s personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become a family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture. But it isn’t culture. It’s a traumatic retention that has lost its context over time.”

- Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands*



WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE

The more identities we hold on the outside of this ring, the more trauma we will experience throughout our lifetime.



Understanding the Impact of Privilege

- Asked less questions.
- Not having to think about your privilege.
- Having more than one story.
- More access to resources.
- Less layers of trauma.
- Privilege does not mean your life has been easy – it means your skin color/gender/ability status, etc. has not made it harder.



got privilege?

Impact of Trauma

Emotional & Cognitive

- Anxiety, fear, guilt, shame
- Depression, mood swings, numbness
- Difficulty concentrating, memory challenges
- Self-blame, negative self-worth
- **Physical**
- Fatigue, sleep disturbances
- Headaches, stomach issues, chronic pain
- Hypervigilance, heightened stress response

Social & Relational

- Difficulty trusting others
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Merging/lack of boundaries
- Conflict, disconnection, or over-dependence

Sense of Self & World

- Feeling unsafe or out of control
- Loss of meaning or purpose
- Expectation of danger or harm
- Reduced joy, creativity, or hope

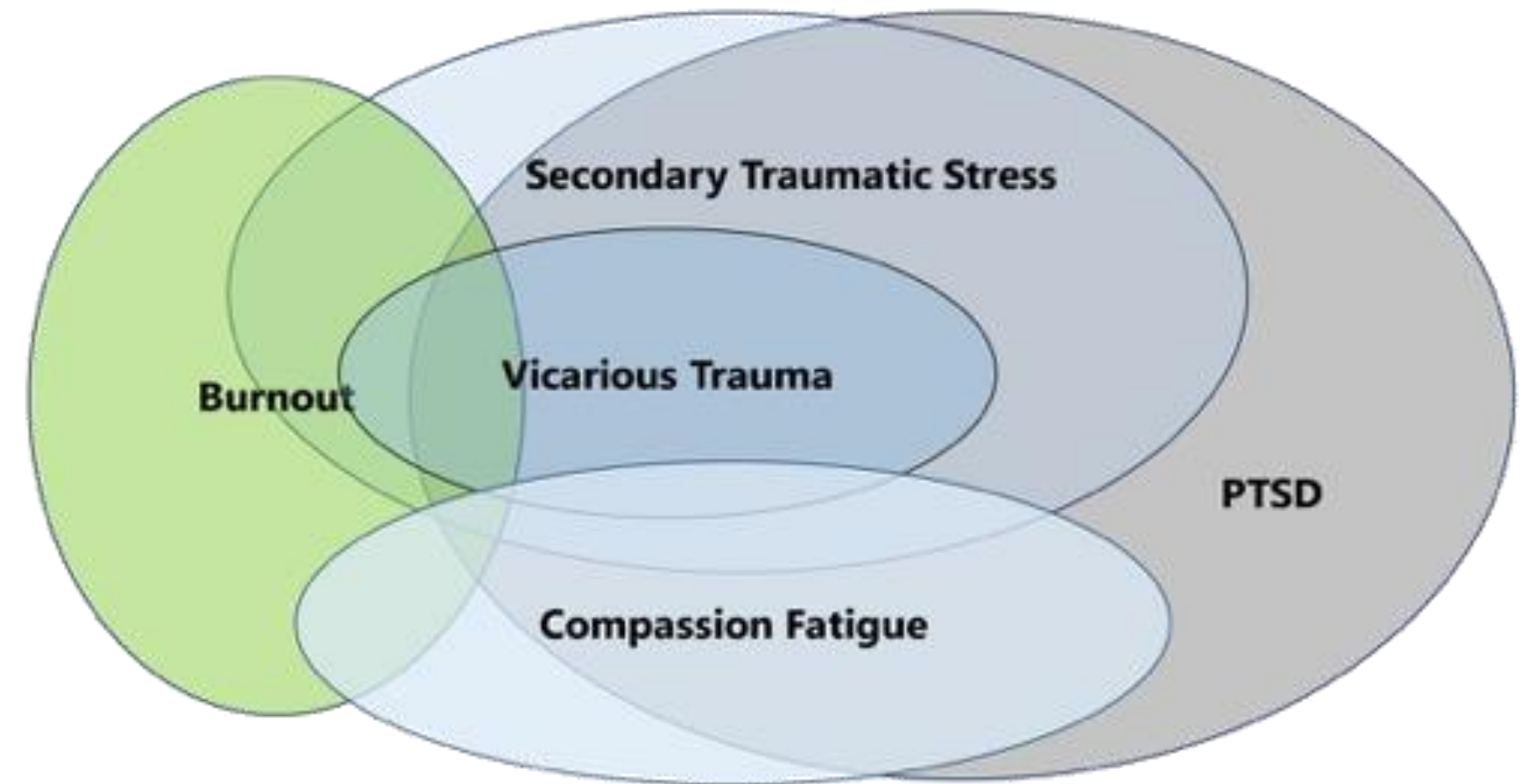


The Cost of Caring

Vicarious Trauma

The emotional residue of exposure from hearing trauma stories and bearing witnesses to the pain, fear, and terror that trauma survivors have endured.

Transformation in the self of a trauma worker or helper that results from empathic engagement with traumatized clients and their reports of traumatic experiences.



(Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 2024)

The Impact of Empathetic Engagements

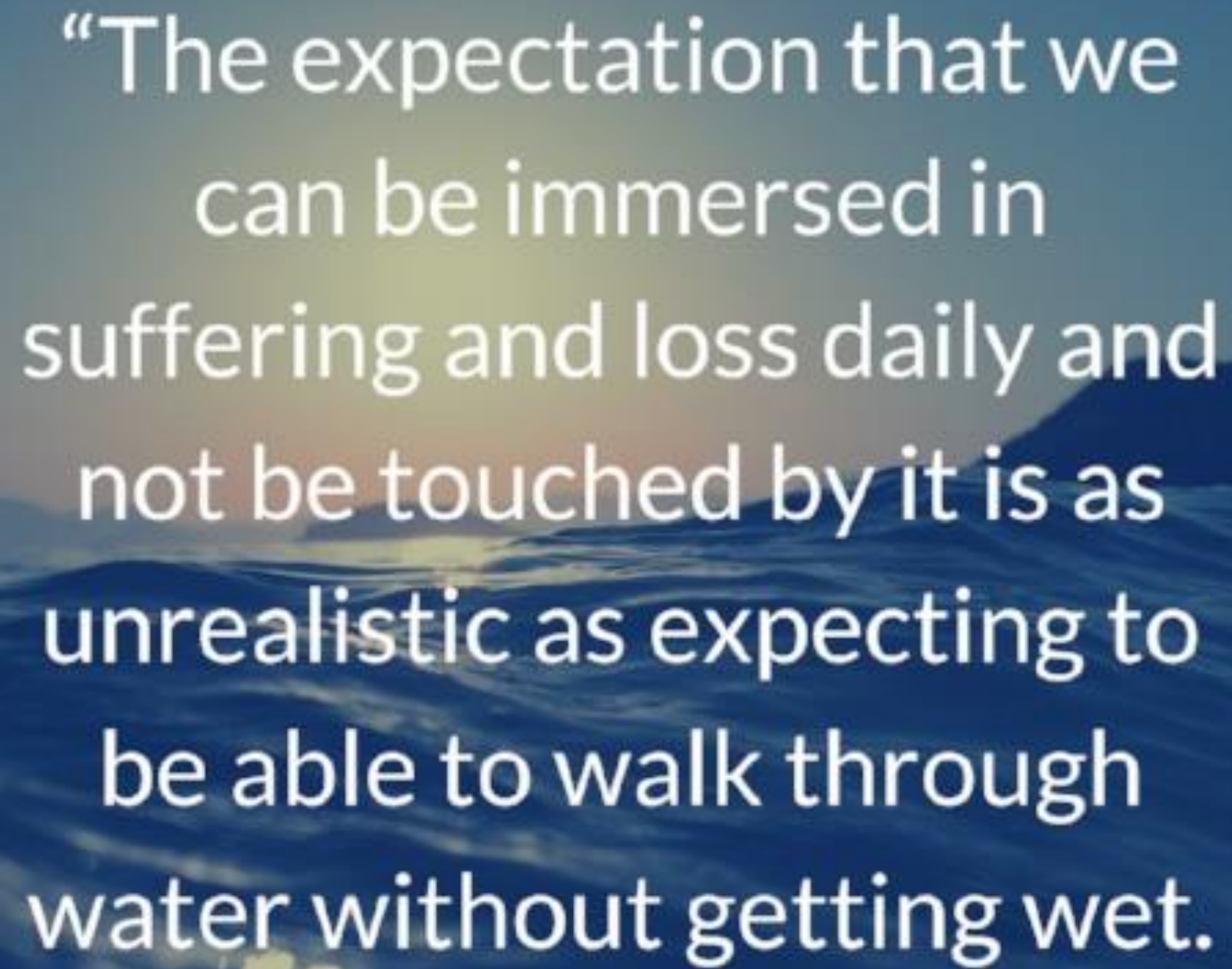
- Empathy is *feeling with* someone.
- Because you are human (and because you care), it is difficult to respond to trauma in other people's lives without:
 - Absorbing some of the feelings.
 - Feeling the other person's sense of loss.
 - Experiencing some of the trauma.

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“Trauma affects us. It affects us directly, and it affects us as witnesses, too.”

- [Caring for Yourself to Care for Others, 2020](#)



“The expectation that we
can be immersed in
suffering and loss daily and
not be touched by it is as
unrealistic as expecting to
be able to walk through
water without getting wet.

- Rachel Remen

Possible Workplace Symptoms of Vicarious Trauma

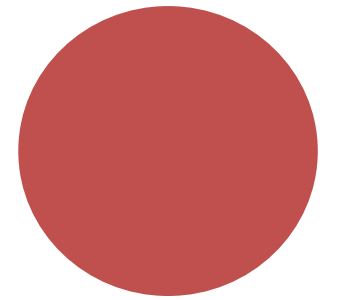
(Adapted from The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit)

Performance	Morale	Relational	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decrease in quality/quantity of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decrease in confidence and interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detached/withdrawn from co-workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calling out
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negative attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arriving late
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Task avoidance or obsession with detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduced compassion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overwork
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working too hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disconnected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sense of being the “only one who can do the job”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhaustion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forgetfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling undervalued and unappreciated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impatience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor follow-through

Look Familiar?

Vicarious Trauma can also cause a gradual lessening of compassion over time (compassion fatigue).

- Makes us numb to trauma and pain.
- Causes lack of empathy, hopelessness, less fun, constant stress and anxiety, sleeplessness, and a persistent negative attitude.



Red Flags of Vicarious Trauma

- Increased annoyance with victims
- Disbelief/doubt of victims
- Short temper or moodiness
- Avoiding phone calls, meetings
- Lack of compassion/empathy
- Sleeplessness, nightmares
- Intrusive thoughts
- Hyper-vigilance
- Anxiety
- Irritability & depression
- Cynicism, negativity & apathy
- Lack of reaction to horrific events
- Feeling vulnerable or unsafe
- Physical discomfort, such as digestive issues and headaches

Trauma symptoms!



Ever worked with someone who was

irritable or hostile

yelling/easily upset

avoiding appointments

struggling with constant health issues (headaches, digestive issues)

confused or couldn't remember things

stoic and reluctant to admit to problems, or extremely needy and/or demanding

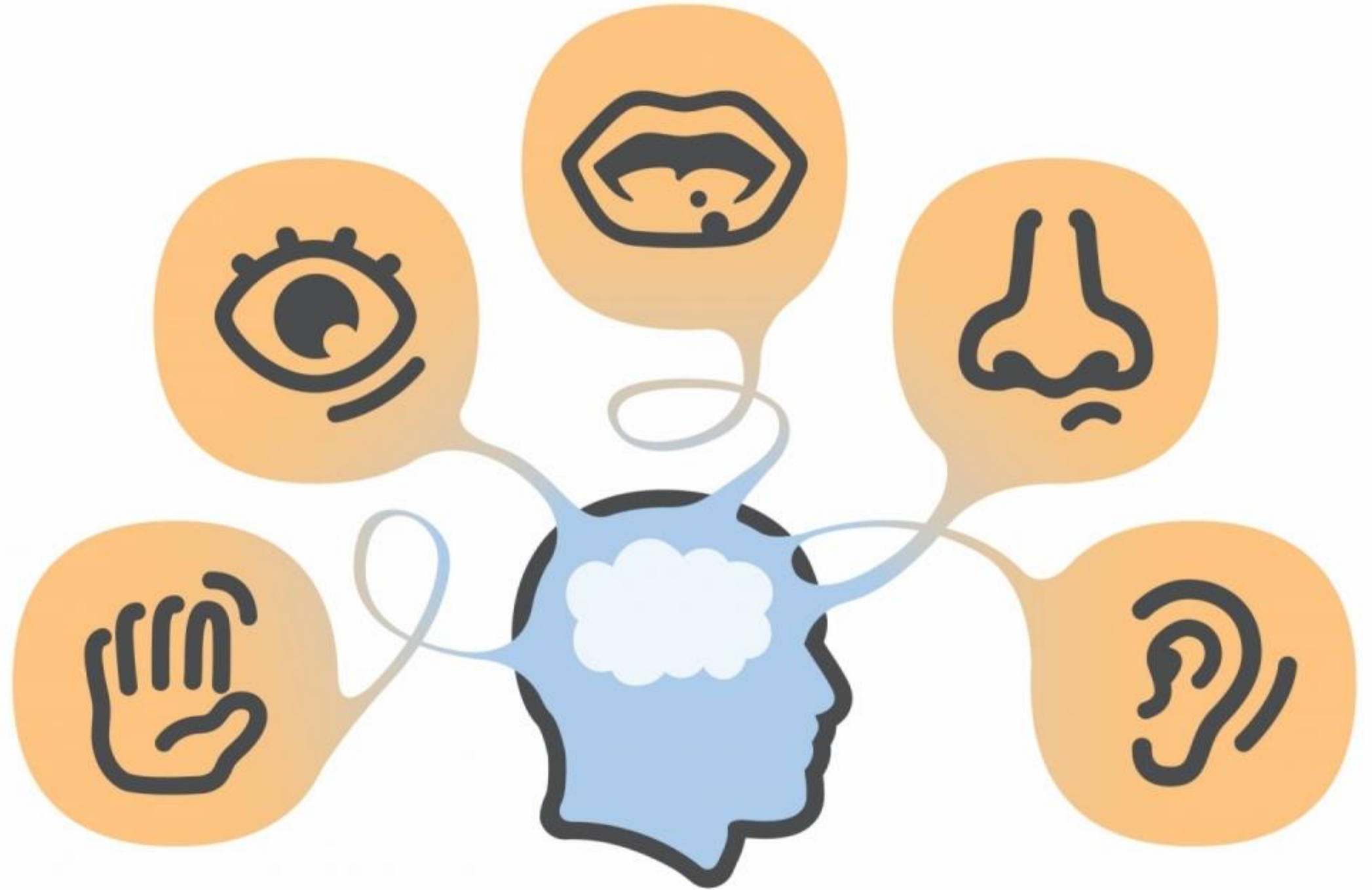
struggling with alcohol/substance abuse, depressive symptoms, chronic relationship difficulties

experiencing problems with pain perception, pain tolerance and chronic pain syndromes



Triggers

- Sights
- Smells
- Sounds
- Feelings/sensations
- Physical touch
- Feeling unsafe
- Abandonment
- Helplessness



Trauma Boxes





How do we (temporarily) numb trauma?

- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Sugar
- Social Media
- Gossip
- Drama
- Work/perfectionism
- “Helping” (co-dependency)

ABCs of Vicarious Trauma Prevention

Awareness – being attuned to one’s needs, limits, emotions and resources; practice self-acceptance.

Balance – maintaining balance among activities, especially work, play and rest.

Connection – maintaining supportive relationships; communication is part of connection and breaks the silence of unacknowledged pain; these connections help prevent isolation and increase validation and hope.

Boundaries

- It is essential that advocates maintain healthy boundaries with the people we serve, and our teammates.
- This means being willing and able to set limits on what to do for survivors and when we are available.
- Being a good advocate does not mean doing anything asked of you at any time; rather, it means being able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate assistance.
- A lack of boundaries hurts those we serve (and co-workers, families, friends, etc.) too.





Protective Factors

- Awareness
- Support system
- Adherence to personal values
- Cultivating a full life
- Focusing on strength, resilience
- Self-care

Resilience

Resilience Is...

“The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma or significant sources of stress.”

-The APA





Building Capacity for Resilience

- Internal support: Abilities and skills such as communication, problem-solving, behavioral and emotional regulation, hope, and a positive view of yourself.
- External support: Caring supportive relationships with friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, etc.
- Existential support: Cultural values and faith/belief systems.

Read more about resilience in this TAQ: [How can I support survivors in building resilience?](#)





Mindfulness



Boundaries



Awareness



Relationships

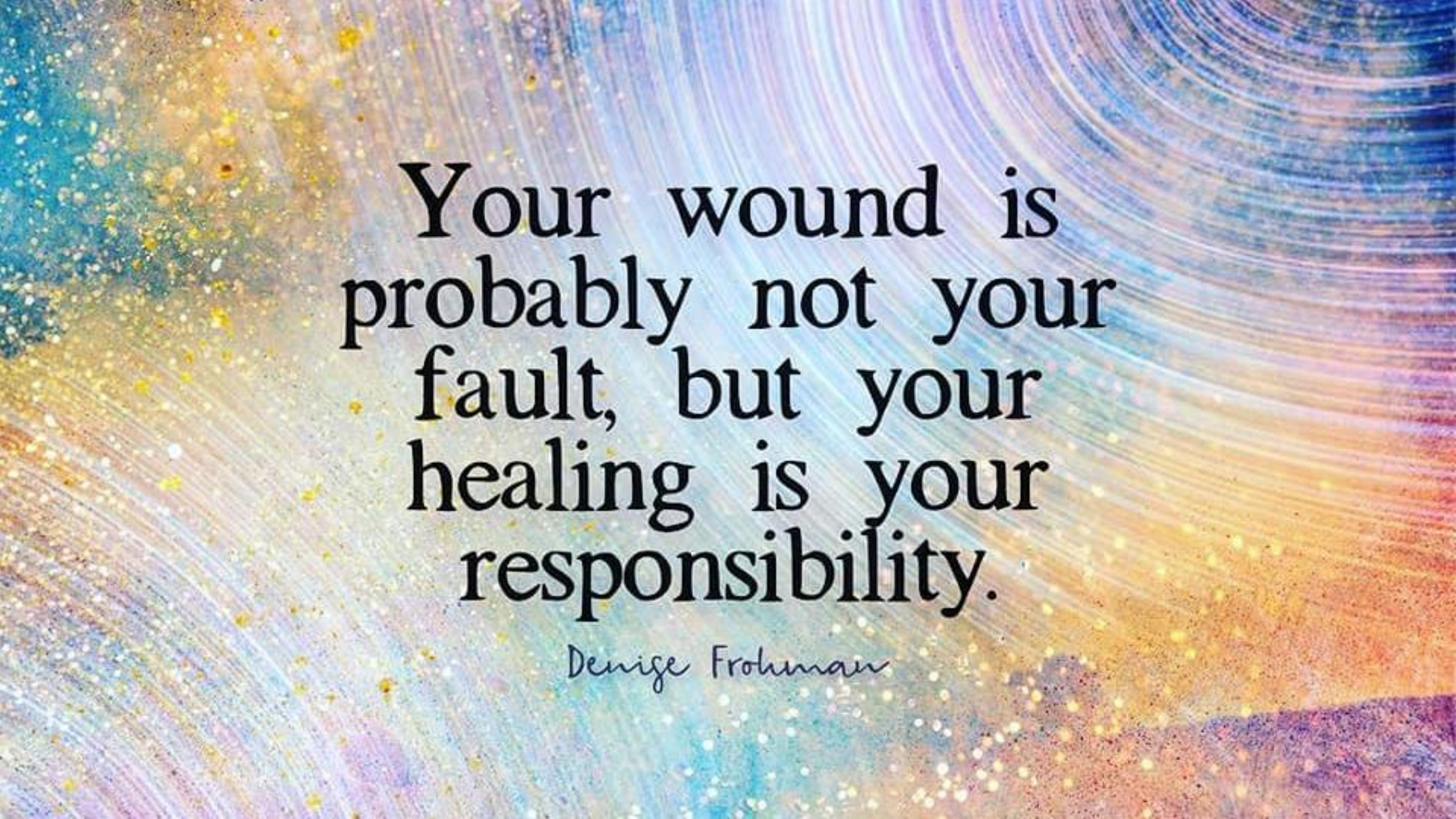


Purpose



Self-Care
routine

Creating
Resilience through
Practice



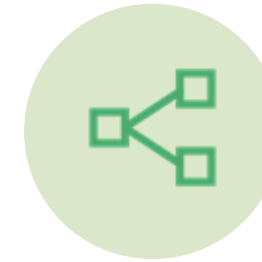
Your wound is
probably not your
fault, but your
healing is your
responsibility.

Denise Frohman

Self-Care Redefined



Taking care of yourself physically and emotionally



Releasing toxic relationships



Reflecting on how you have coped in the past



Accepting change and being flexible

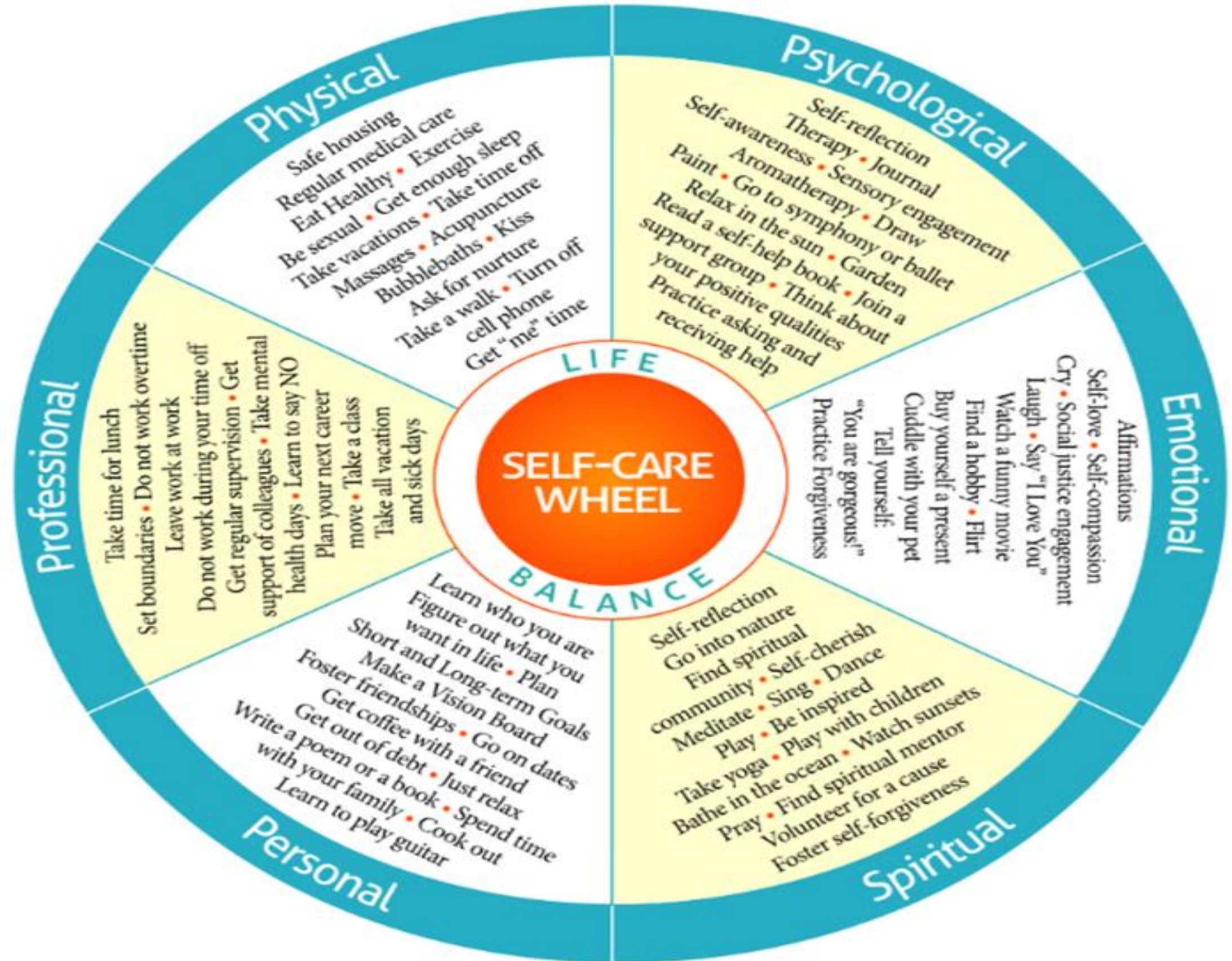


Working towards goals



Continuous self-exploration and growth

SELF-CARE WHEEL



Psychological
 Physical
 Emotional
 Professional
 Personal
 Spiritual

Importance of Mindfulness

Extensive research has shown that mindful awareness is an effective way to:

- reduce stress
- improve attention
- boost the immune system
- reduce emotional reactivity
- promote a general sense of health and well-being
- improve resilience!



Self-Care and Healing: Double Benefit!

- Meditation
- Animal companionship
- Gardening
- Art/Music
- Writing/Journaling
- Physical activity
- Yoga



**Wellness is
Our Work**

What does it mean to focus on **resilience**?

- Believing that everyone can thrive.
- Focusing on strengths and accomplishments.
- Encouraging creativity and learning (not perfection).
- Helping people establish goals.
- Believing in the value of one another as *people*, not only as clients/coworkers, etc.



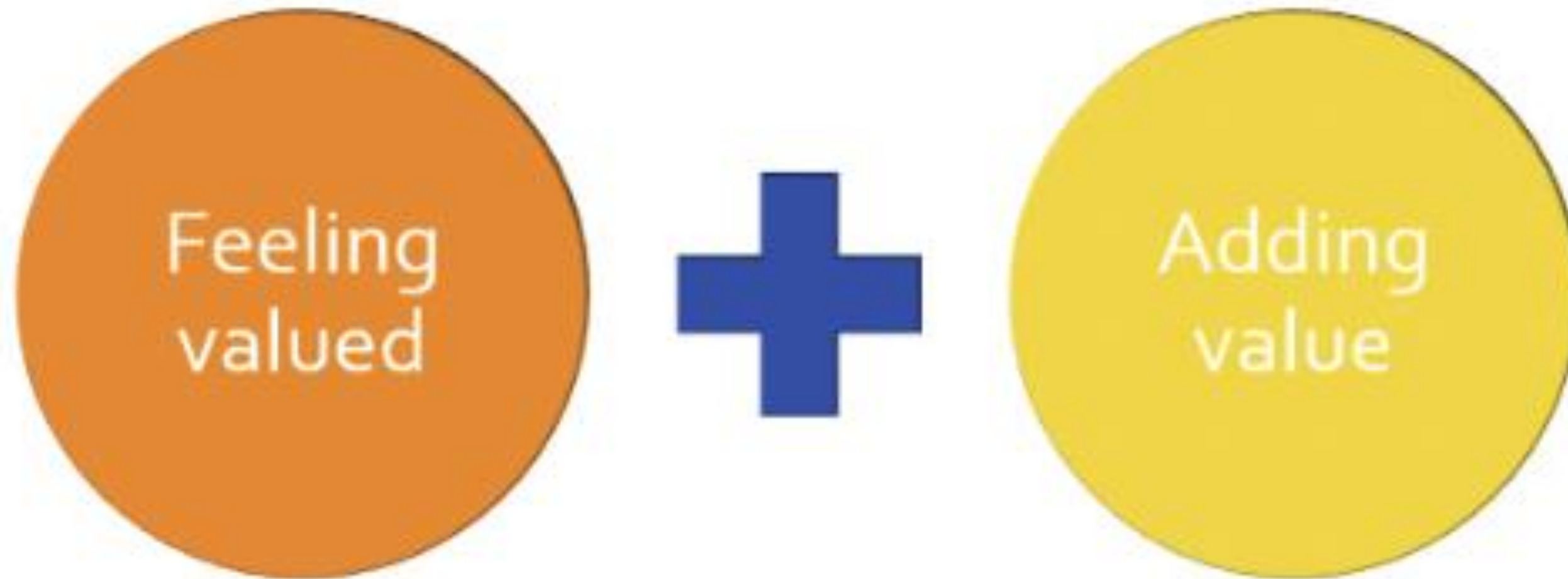
Team and Community Care

- Self-care is what we do as individuals, but it can be hard to sustain when the systems around us don't support it.
- Community care looks like providing childcare, skill sharing and resources, mutual aid, fundraising for people in crisis, community gatherings, among many other things.
- *We always* need community care alongside self-care.
- Building supportive networks and social connections is crucial for collective healing.

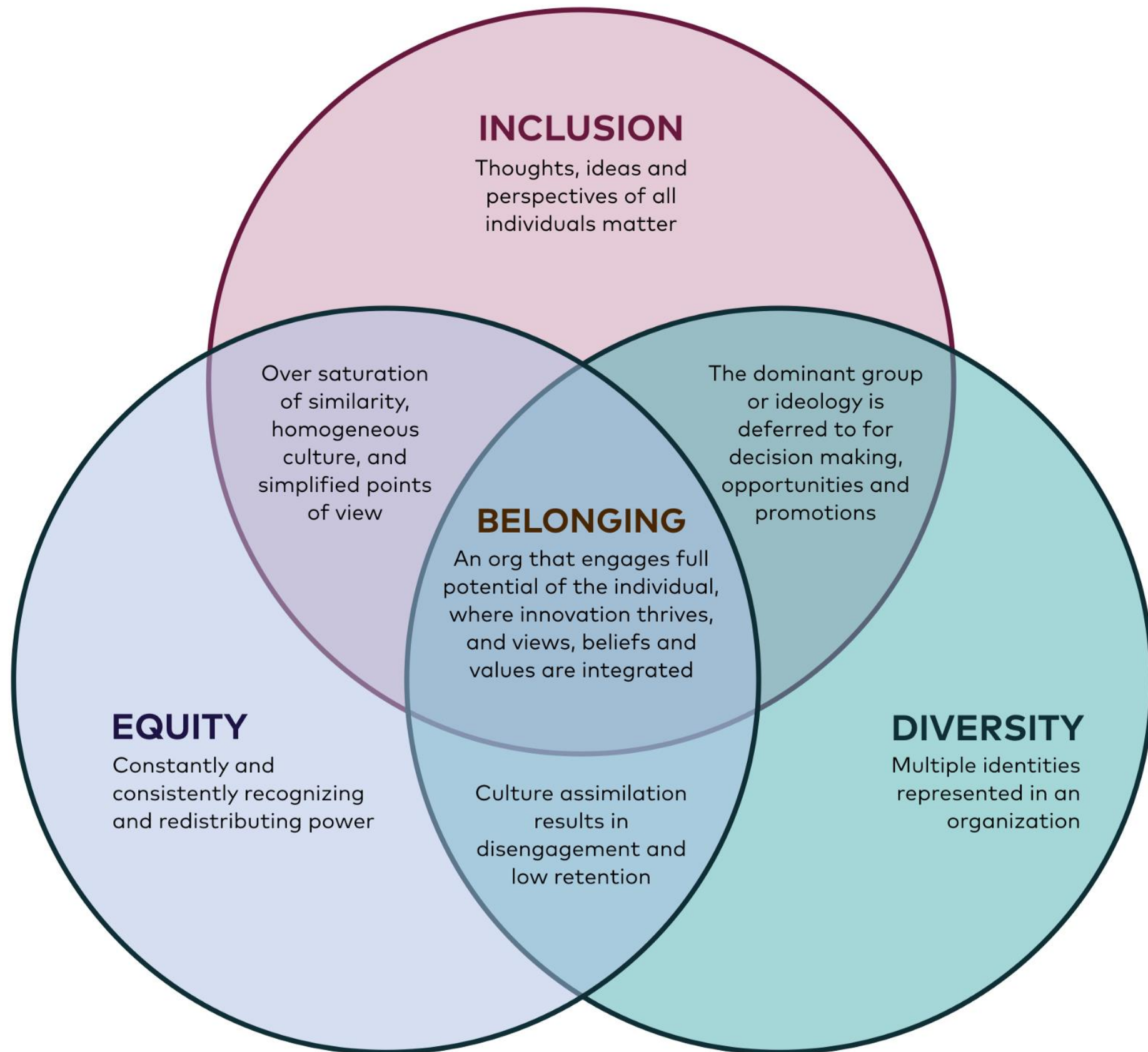


Mattering

We come to feel that we matter through our experiences of both deriving value from, and adding value to ourselves, our relationships, and our community.



Belonging

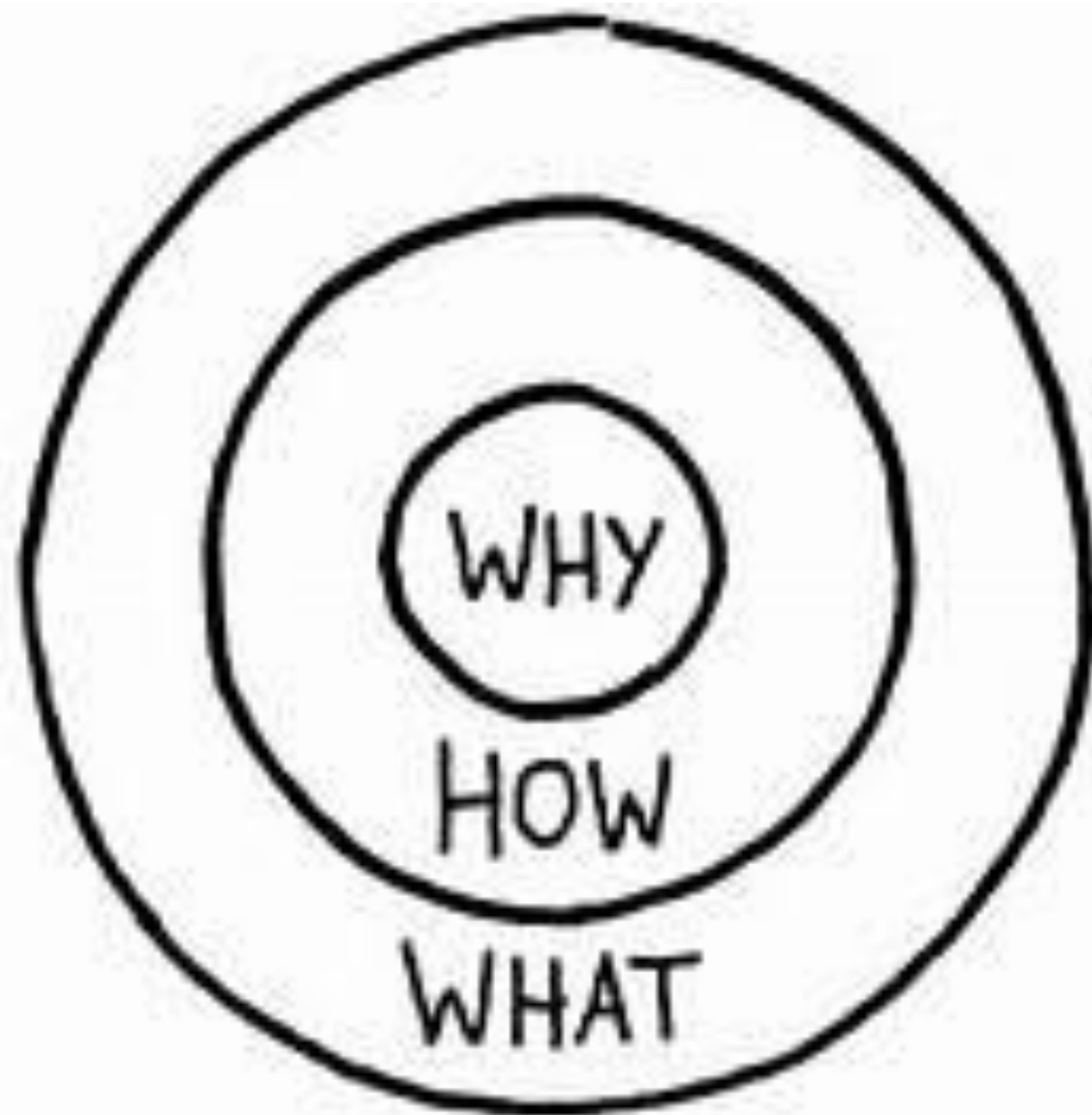


Creating belonging engages the full potential of everyone on our team. This is where innovation thrives. Each of our beliefs and views are fully integrated into our work.

When we BELONG, each aspect
of WHO we are is CELEBRATED.



What is your WHY?



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The success of an intervention
depends on the interior
condition of the intervenor.

Bill O'Brien



You can never give more
than you have.

YOU
MATTER.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a blue pen, poised to write on a spiral-bound notebook. The scene is softly lit, and the background is blurred. The text 'I WILL' is overlaid in a bold, white, sans-serif font on the left side of the image, with a thin white horizontal line underneath it.

I WILL

Connect with us!



1-800-537-2238



nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org



@NRCDV



[instagram.com/nrcdv/](https://www.instagram.com/nrcdv/)

Pamela Jacobs
pjacobs@nrcdv.org

thank

you



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