Resilience for the Fall Reset

Effective Strategies for Managing Life's Stressors

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Session Objectives

- Understand the importance of building resilience to effectively manage life's stressors and optimize our health and wellbeing.
- Explore practical strategies to help strengthen our ability to learn from and recover more easily from life's challenges.

We Are All Jugglers

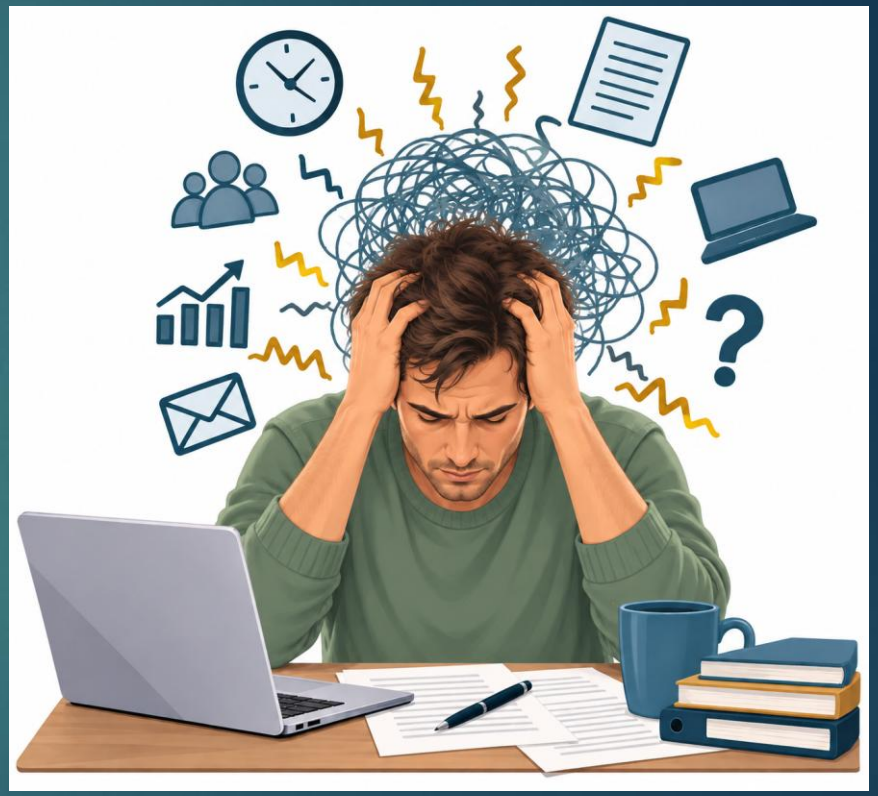
Acute vs. Chronic Stress

Acute Stress Response

The body's immediate, automatic response to an internal or external threat (real or perceived).

Chronic Stress

A continuous state of alert that persists for weeks, months or years.



Our Nervous System Responds to Life's Stressors

Higher Activation

More Regulation

Lower Activation

Sympathetic – Fight or Flight

- Anxious, restless, or on edge
- Increased heart rate, muscle tension, rapid breathing

"Get moving and respond!"

Parasympathetic – Regulated, Peace and Calm

- Calm, grounded, present and able to think clearly
- Breathing is steady, heart rate is balanced, body feels at ease
- This is the state where we can best navigate life's challenges, connect with others, be resilient and access our inner resources

"Connected, at ease and in balance."

Parasympathetic – Freeze or Shut Down

- Numb, exhausted, shut down or disconnected
- Low energy, slowed thinking, feeling "stuck"
- Can be a protective response, but when we stay here it can feel difficult to engage in daily life

"Conserve energy and protect."

Chronic Stress Changes the Brain

Amygdala (the alarm centre)

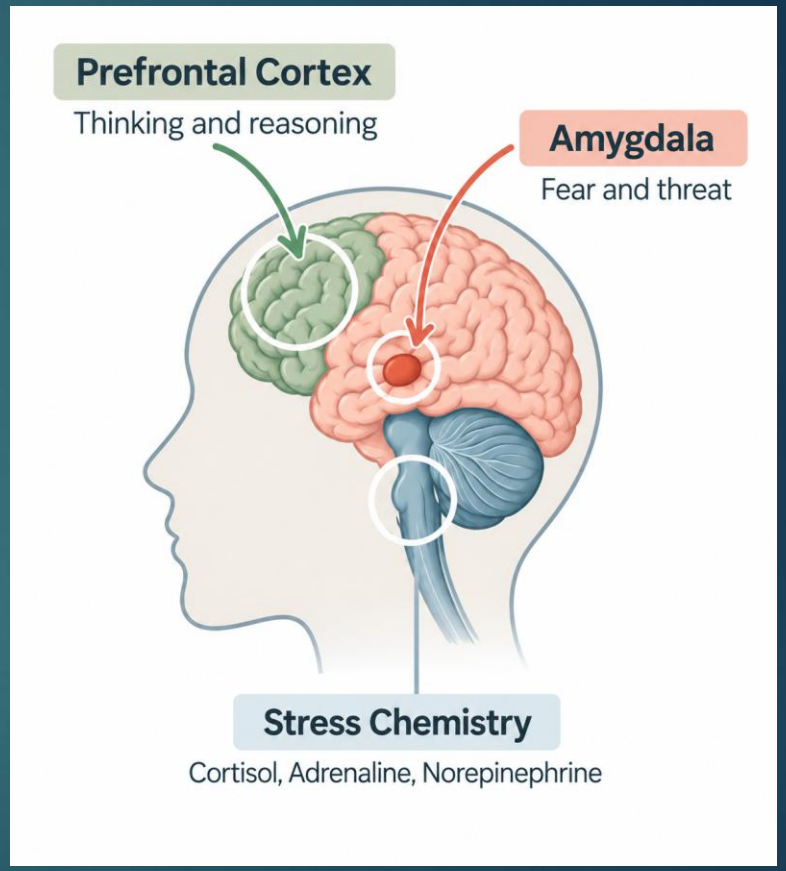
Becomes more sensitive to potential threats and can get stuck in negative looping pathways. ((fight/flight/freeze).

Prefrontal cortex (thinking/reasoning centre)

Reduced perspective, focus and decision making.

Stress Hormones

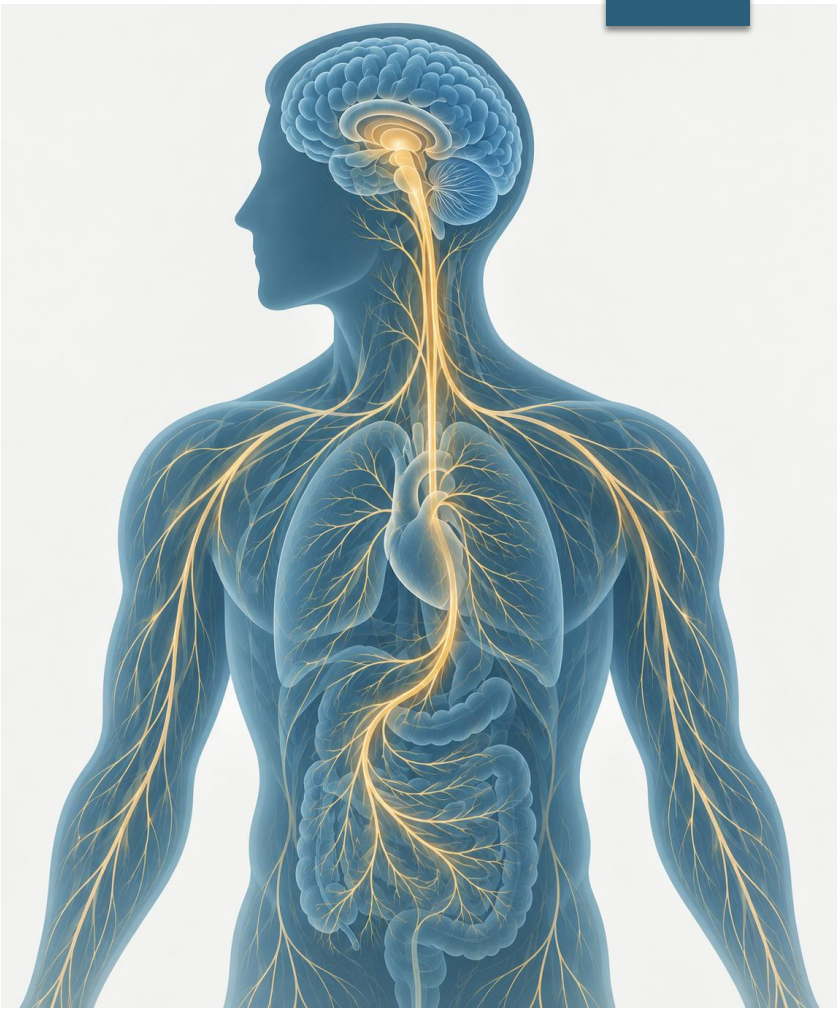
Increased cortisol and other stress hormones interfere with emotional and physical wellbeing.



Chronic Stress Also Changes the Nervous System

The Nervous System:

Stays in high-alert mode making it harder to fully recover between periods of stress



Impact of Chronic Stress

Physical Changes

- Aches and pains, headaches, weakness
- Exhaustion
- Sleep disturbances, insomnia
- High blood pressure
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching
- Stomach and digestive problems
- Low libido
- Weakened immune system

Psychological Changes

- Irritability
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Heightened or flat mood
- Panic Attacks

Behavioural Changes

- Compulsive habits – social media, gambling, alcohol, shopping, smoking
- Disordered Eating
- Avoidance of tasks, social interactions, hobbies and interests

The Negativity Bias: Your Brain's Alarm System

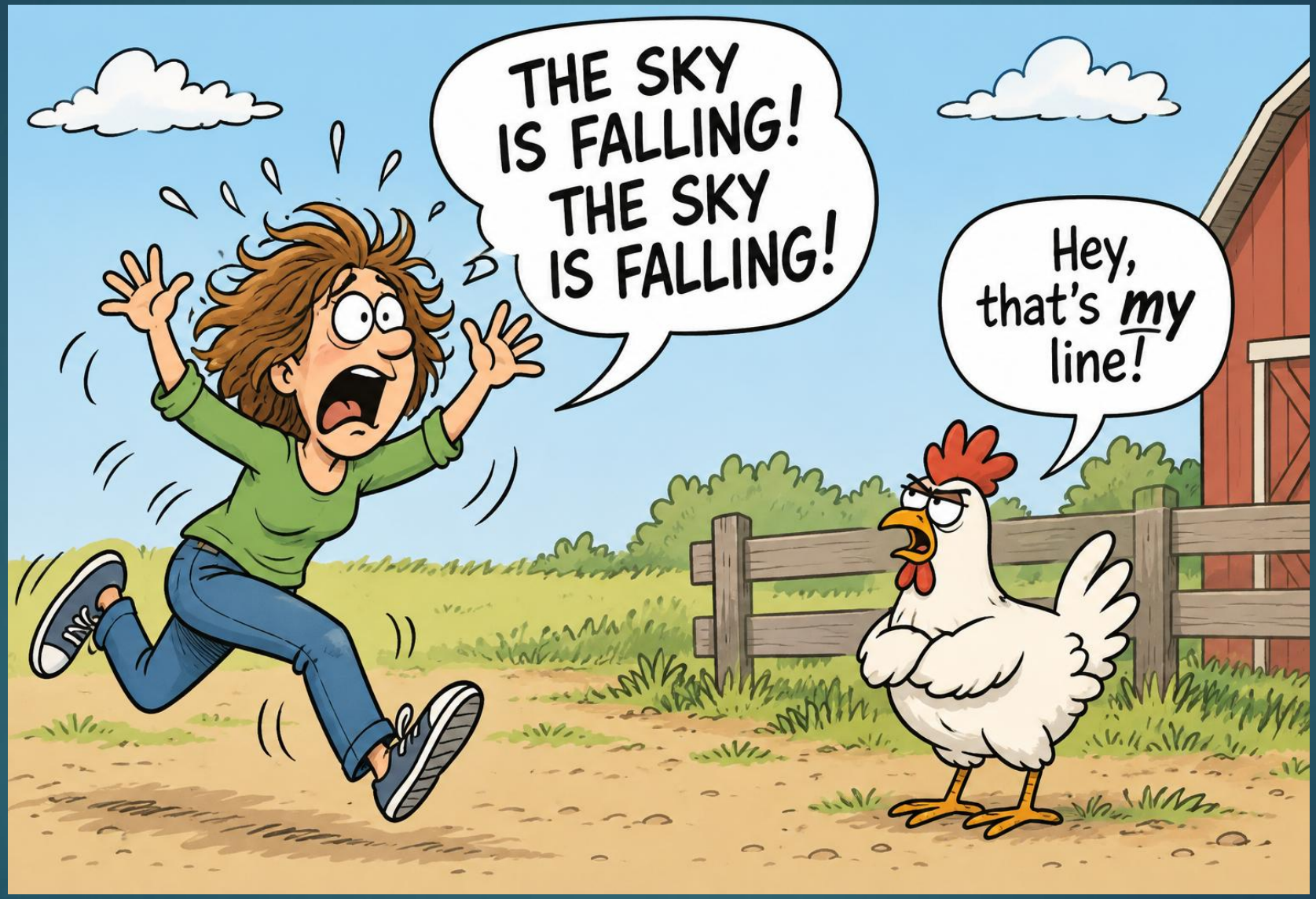
- Our brains were designed to **notice potential threats**.
- **Chronic stress amplifies this bias**
- **Threat becomes the focus**
- **Executive function and logic decrease**

As a result, the brain gives **more weight to negative or threatening information than to neutral or positive information**.

“I’ve suffered a great many catastrophes in my life. Most of them never happened.”

Mark Twain

Opticrectosis


THE SKY IS FALLING! THE SKY IS FALLING!
Hey, that's my line!

My Brain, The Storyteller

Challenge The Story

Stress turns uncertainty into worst-case stories.

"My boss called me in. **I'm being fired!**"

"My friend hasn't texted back. **They're upset with me.**"

Ask: What else could be true?

My Brain, The Storyteller

Soften Future Predictions

Notice when your brain predicts the worst.

"The tickets **will be sold out.**"
"I **won't get** the promotion."

Ask: Is this thought fact-based, or fear-based?

Choose AND over OR

Move from all-or-nothing thinking to a more balanced story.

"I like these parts of my work **AND** I struggle with other parts."

Not: "I like my work **OR** I hate my work."

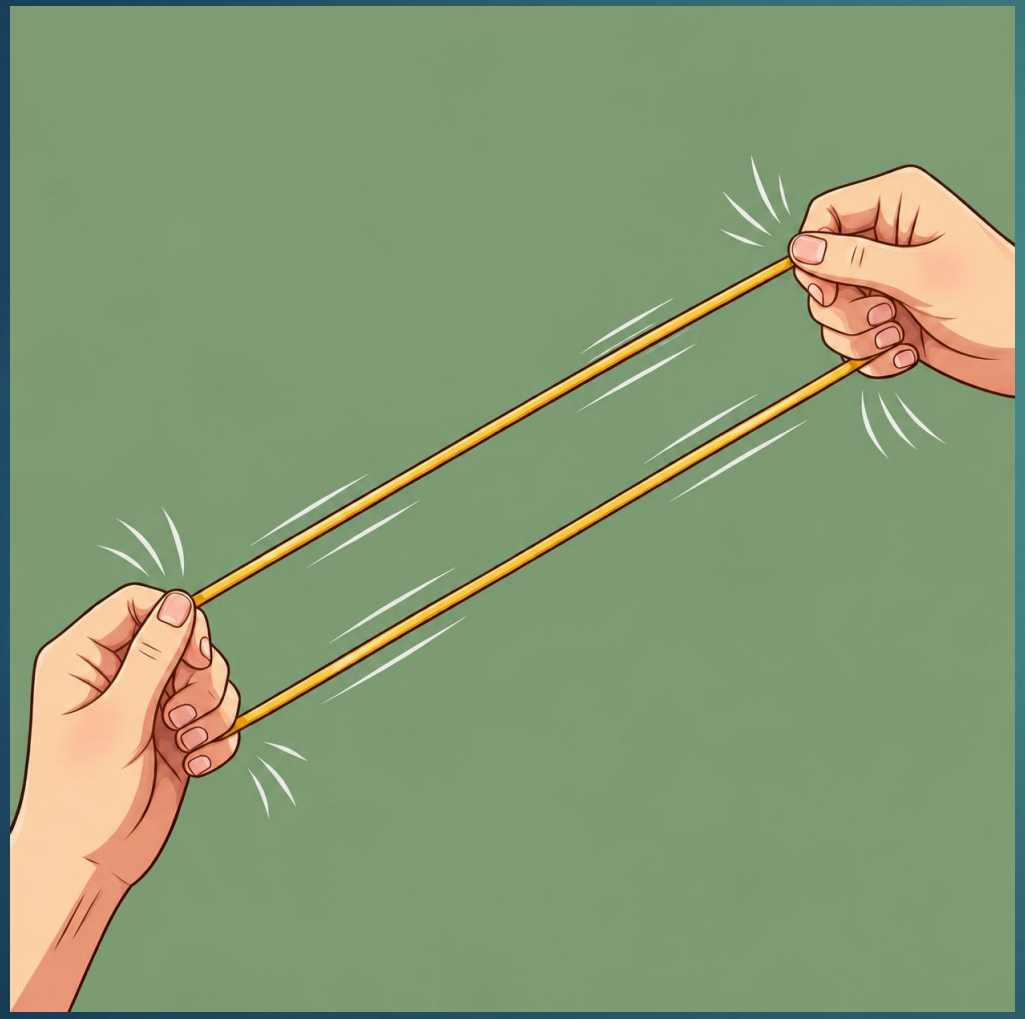
ANTS
AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE THOUGHTS
Should've
Would've
Could've
PERFECTIONISM
ALL OR NOTHING
SELF-CRITICISM
THREATS EVERYWHERE
REPLAYING SCENARIOS
Stuck in the past
Holding yourself and others to rigid standards
Lack of self-compassion
Hypervigilance
Overthinking and ruminating

Neuroplasticity: The Brain's Ability to Change

- Your brain is not fixed.
- It becomes more efficient at whatever is repeated, including rapid threat detection.
- You can directly impact how your brain and body respond to stress and build habits that create resilience.

" ***Neurons that fire together, wire together"***
Donald Hebb

Resilience



The ability to adapt and recover from adversity, setbacks, life stressors.

The Benefits of Incorporating Resilience Strategies

Research shows that these practices can help:

Calm the brain
Reduce threat activation and create greater mental clarity.

Regulate the body
Improve breathing and heart rate, and reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and chronic pain.

Strengthen attention
Improve focus and create space to respond rather than react.

Build positive resources
Increase awareness of positive experiences and strengthen what supports well-being.

Build resilience
Develop greater capacity to navigate stress, recover and adapt.

The Neurochemistry of Well-Being

D — DOPAMINE

REWARD & MOTIVATION

- Complete a task
- Try something new
- Enjoy a favourite food
- Keep a journal of small wins

O — OXYTOCIN

CONNECTION & BONDING

- Hug a loved one
- Play with a pet
- Hold a baby
- Do an act of kindness
- Socialize with a friend

S — SERONTONIN

MOOD & REGULATION

- Spend time in nature
- Get sunlight
- Go for a walk
- Practice breathing exercises
- Meditate

E — ENDORPHINS

PAIN & PLEASURE

- Watch a funny video
- Laugh
- Listen to music
- Exercise

Within my control?

Able to influence?

Out of my control?

GRATITUDE: A Simple Practice

Recognizing the good and appreciating what is valuable and meaningful

- **Keep a gratitude journal:** write down things from your day you are grateful for
- **Set a daily reminder:** pause in the moment and name 3–5 things you're grateful for
- **Create a mealtime ritual:** ask, *"What went well for you today?"*
- **Express appreciation** — tell someone specifically what you value about them
- **End the day with gratitude** — name one thing you're thankful for

Gratitude helps us notice what is good.
Savouring helps us take it in.

Notice a specific positive experience — recall or imagine a moment that feels good, meaningful, or nourishing.

Stay with it — give the experience your attention for **10 seconds or longer** and consider why it matters to you.

Deepen the experience — close your eyes. Notice how it **looks, sounds, feels, smells, or tastes**.

Let it sink in — allow yourself to fully experience the positive emotions and sensations rather than rushing on to the next thing.

Share or reflect — tell someone about the experience or write about it.

Breathe Based Practices

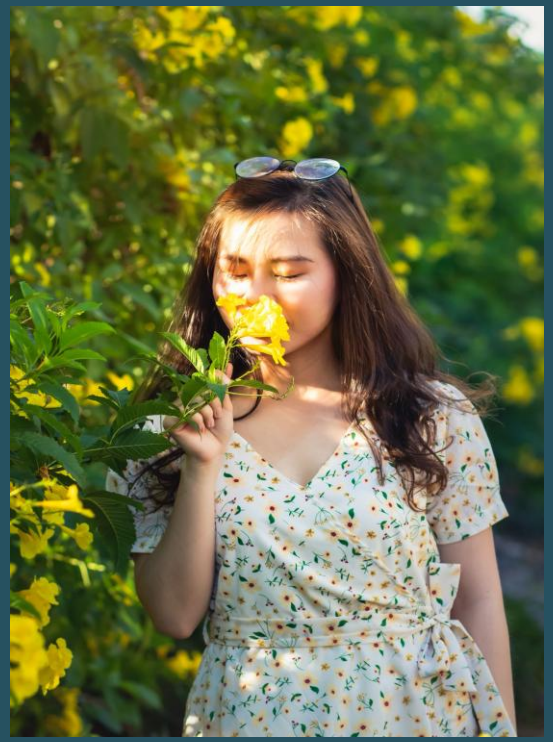
“Sitting still and noticing your breath can be life-changing.”

S. Salzberg

Simple Breathing Exercise

BREATHE IN

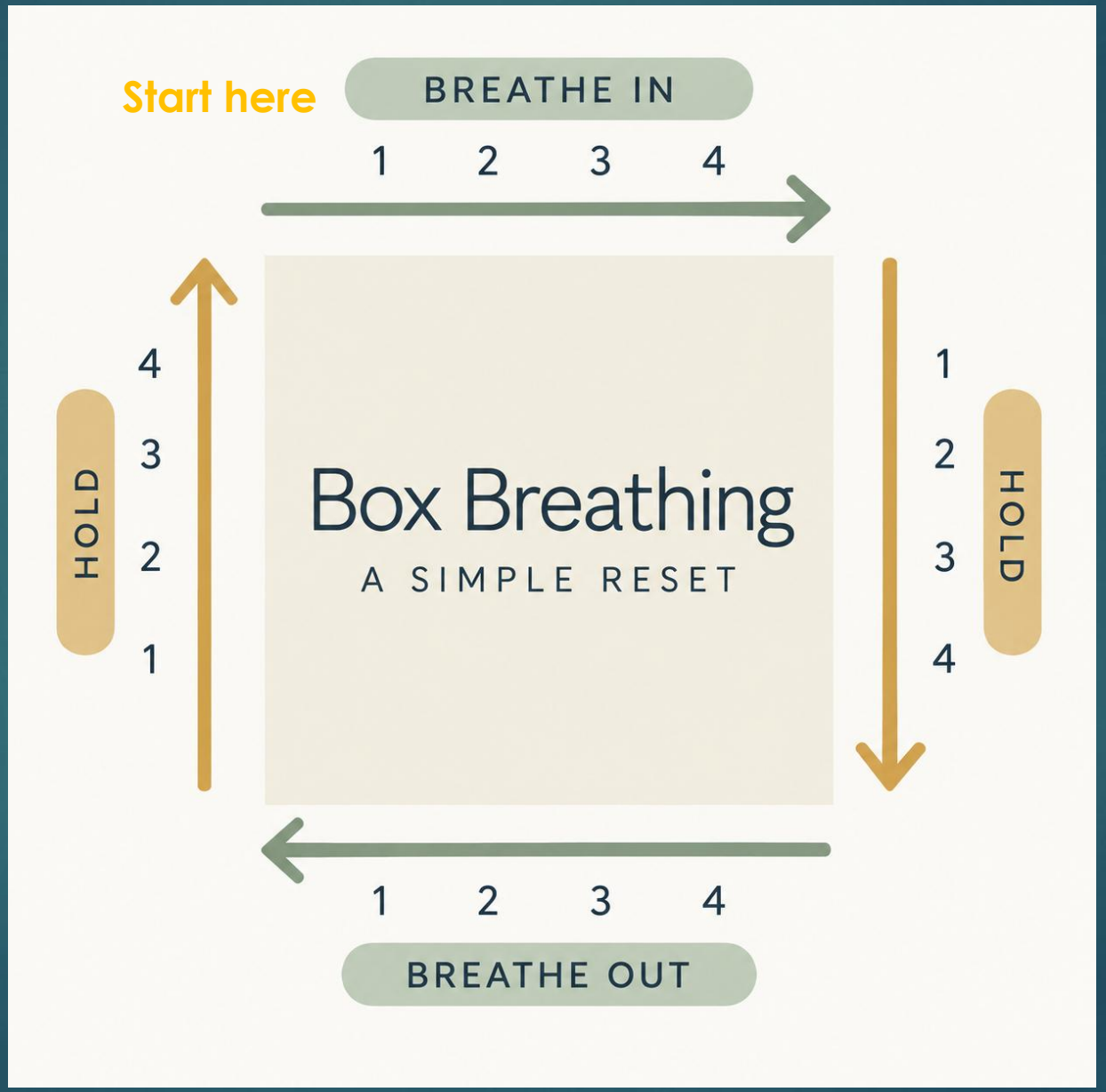
Imagine taking a deep inhale to savour the fragrance of a flower.



BREATHE OUT

Imagine a long exhale as you blow out the candles on a cake.

Box Breathing



Protect Your Attention in a Digital World

- Constant digital stimulation keeps us seeking the next quick reward (dopamine hit) and makes focused attention more difficult.
- Turn off notifications to protect your focus.
- Limit the scroll and set boundaries around social media and recreational screen time.
- Create regular phone/screen free time.
  Ask yourself, "*Would I invite my phone to …*"
- Protect your sleep: Avoid screens right before bed (and upon waking).

Other activities that support well-being and resilience:

- meditation (breath-focused, or APP- Calm/Headspace)
- positive social connection
- time in nature, walks
- daily rituals and activities that bring joy and relaxation
- exercise, yoga, other physical activities
- healthy nutritional habits
- listening to music, dancing
- small acts of kindness

"All or something instead of all or nothing."

Support is Available

Online/in-person counselling available

Contact CPA Assist

1.855.596.4222 or https://cpa-assist.ca/

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