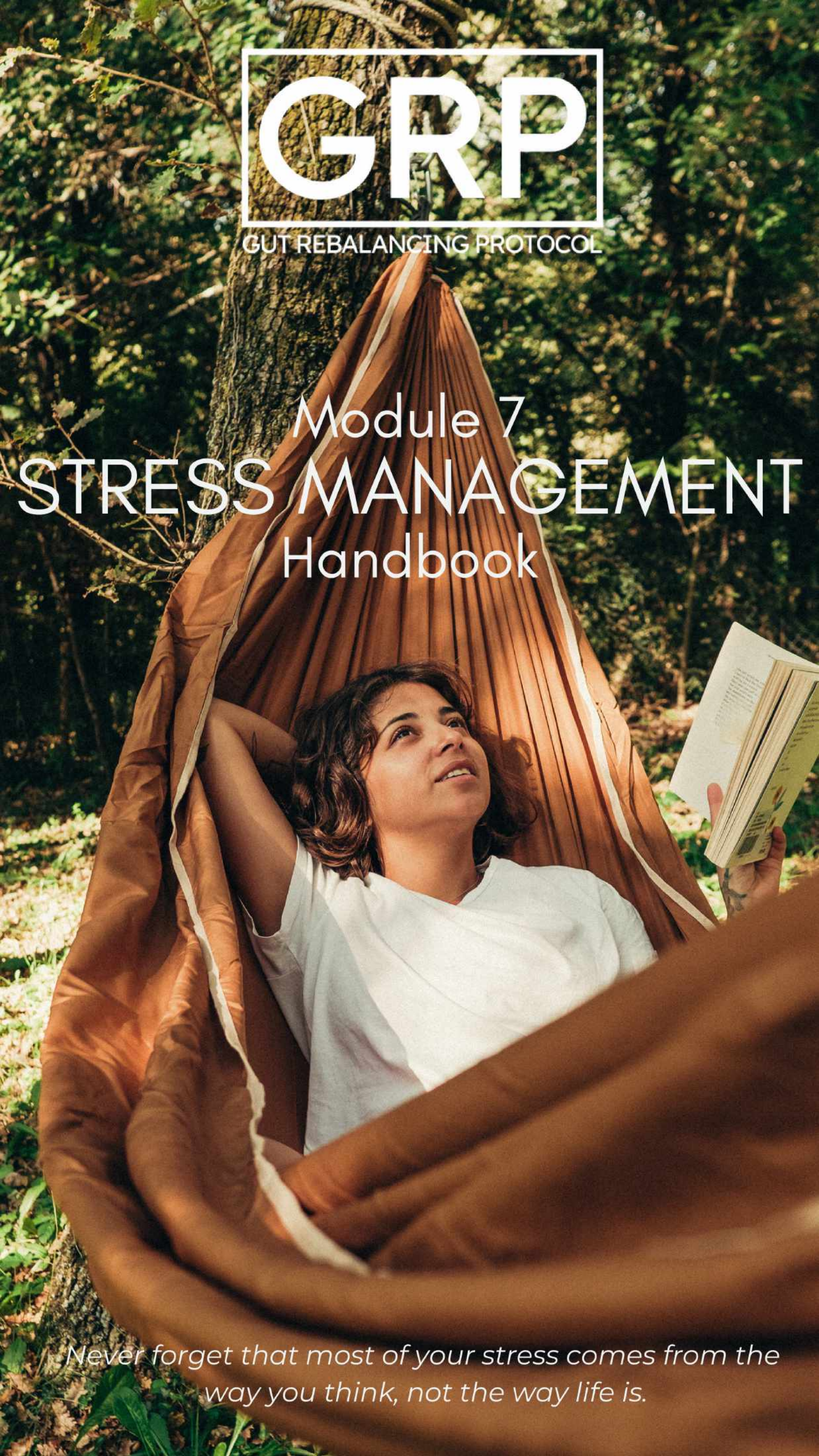

Module 7
STRESS MANAGEMENT
Handbook

Never forget that most of your stress comes from the way you think, not the way life is.

Click each TITLE to go to that section

Welcome!

Cleaning Your Shed

Stress Management Principles

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Neuroception

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The Vagal Brake

Reframing

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The Problem-Solving Framework

...So what are you waiting for?

Boundaries & Assertive Communication

About This Module's Actions

Welcome!

This Stress Management module is the place where your firsthand experience and improved understanding of how stress moves and works is applied to your practical experience of observing to work with, channel and better regulate your own stress responses; to help you to envisage a mappable, manageable stress landscape that will enable you to not only respond more effectively but also to better anticipate and proactively pre-empt stressful activities, events and circumstances.

And regardless of family, friends, colleagues or the community you live in, we humans are by our nature very social animals. So, no stress program that does NOT include this crucial social aspect of our most fundamental nature can claim to be truly effective without addressing that important dimension as well.

"You can't control the wind,
But you can control your sails."

BACK

'Cleaning Your Shed'

A Metaphor

Let's try a useful metaphor here... say you've had enough and decided to clean out your shed. The door's become hard to close, because there's so much clutter in there - you don't even actually know what's in there anymore - and it makes it really tough to get to the tools you need to do other things... so you've decided it's time to do something about it.

And HOWEVER you plan to do it, you'll need to first go inside and have a look... right? To see what's there, so you can sort and divide it all into categories. If there's a lot there, then it may make sense to first take everything outside first, so you can clean cupboards, shelves, containers, etc., and get it ready to re-house the important or useful stuff that you really need or want to keep...

... So you check the weather forecast for the weekend, to make sure it won't rain, you roll up sleeves, grit your teeth... and get to it.

As you're moving and sorting, you'll see more details: some things are no longer relevant or even useful... parts to an old pump that was replaced a few years ago, etc., which you can sell online... or put in the bin if nobody buys it.

You also find broken shards of a vase that you decide you no longer want... but it was your partner's mum's... OK, so a conversation will be needed there...

... And THERE'S that battery for the rechargable hedger (you *swore* your brother had it...!)

... And so on, rinse and repeat, until everything has been removed, conversations had, apologies made, items cleaned, sold or thrown out, and everything that survives this process has been put neatly back, where it belongs...

You now know where everything is, are able to easily locate whatever you need for doing OTHER 'life admin' jobs - and you notice you no longer avoid or have any of that angsty dread whenever you even think about going to the shed!

... And in case you didn't realise it... your 'shed' , represents the things that have been causing stress in your life... your STRESSORS.

And it is time to 'clean house'...

BACK

Basic Principles of Stress Management

The most basic principle of stress management (as opposed to relief) is that of finding a workable balance between your...

DEMANDS (STRESSORS)... that is, what is causing you to feel stress. This includes all areas of your life, in your health, family, work, relationships, finances - for starters. They might involve multiple, overlapping issues, for example childcare, division of household responsibilities, workplace issues, health challenges or a parent needing more care than they used to.

RESOURCES... whatever you are able to bring to bear to managing these demands and their associated stresses, to better cope, adapt and increase your resilience and robustness. These include natural or personal attributes such as being young or in good health, well-organised, naturally assertive, practically-minded and optimistic, having sufficient income and savings, being in high demand for your skills or abilities. It also includes existing stress management practices, such as yoga, meditation, religious faith, and (of course) any practical education or coursework in this area that has resulted in enhancing your capacity for managing stress.

It also includes more intangible resources such as having a supportive partner or family, a good boss, liking your job, excellent networking skills, and being naturally empathetic towards others.

Effective Stress Management is really a simple equation, that essentially MAXIMISES the range and quality of stress management resources, and/or MINIMISES - through elimination, neutralising or mitigating the number, complexity and intensity of your stressors.

Maximising Stress Management Resources

- Go 'all-in' on whatever you are doing right NOW (eg., reading this handbook!)
- Implement your Lifestyle elements daily.
- Continue your Food Prescriptions
- Understand how your stress response works and strengthen your practice in supporting it.
- Stay accountable to YOU for your health.
- Create time to see friends, even just for coffee or a walk.
- Zoom/WhatsApp etc. with distant friends and family, NOT just 'liking' each others social posts.
- Normalise making time to talk openly about stressors with family and friends - without just complaining. Be resources for each other. Learn more about those you have in common and those unique to each of you.
- Plan fun, pleasant activities. List those you do or might enjoy. Pick a few and schedule them in. Rinse repeat.
- Schedule time to relax, guilt-free. For example, having a bath or reading a book.
- Meditate... just do it (and build your practice)
- Brainstorm a list of your skills, talents and positive qualities, and think about how you can use them to solve specific problems.
- Invest in relationships with people who help you to feel good about yourself and who bring out your better qualities.
- Practice gratitude for the life you have, not resentment for the one you don't have.

- Take regular, long breaks from ALL forms of media - including 'news' - and invest more in human-to-human relationships in your community, a hands- on hobby, read books, listen to music.
- Volunteer somewhere - start by donating blood - the Red Cross really need it!
- Learn to recognise and intervene when you catch yourself engaging in negative self-talk. Just like you would if you saw a bully in a school playground messing with someone you truly love and care for.
- Optimise your Reticular Activating System (RAS). You can start by becoming a "positives hunter", teaching yourself to really notice and appreciate...
- *Natural beauty, like sunset or a flower*
- *Eating or drinking something tasty, refreshing, or textured*
- *How your body feels when you move it*
- *Having a positive interaction with a stranger, e.g.., receiving exemplary customer service*
- *Receiving a compliment (...or try giving one)*
- *Nice human qualities, like kindness, patience and unselfishness*
- *How it feels accomplishing something (even small)*
- *Recognising someone for something about them or something they did*
- *Acknowledging yourself for your GRP work*
- *Making a plan for something in the future and really feel yourself looking forward to it.*

...TRY BRAINSTORMING A FEW MORE!

BACK

MINIMISE DEMANDS on YOUR RESOURCES

- Brainstorm the sources of stress in the areas of health, family, work, relationships, finance and any other
- Identify and eliminate anything that is wasting your energy, time or resources (eg., money) and giving you nothing in return.
- Identify your most impactful stressor, and start on that first, then work down the list.
- Delegate ANY stressful activities you can.
- Outsource! If you can, get professional help (e.g., babysitters, accountants, coaches).
- Evaluate to-dos and remove all but essentials.
- Put the rest on a different list, then get it off your desk.
- Know that 'perfectionism' can be a stalling tactic. Get it done and let it go!
- Stick to a schedule for essential activities (eg., your GRP ME schedule) and don't take on more.
- Refuse longer hours or being delegated to.
- Say no to non-essential tasks or things you don't want to do (see Assertive Communications section).
- Use the Problem-Solving Framework to work out how to better manage, reduce or eliminate individual stressors.
- Weed out people and unnecessary activities that drain your resources and do not serve you.

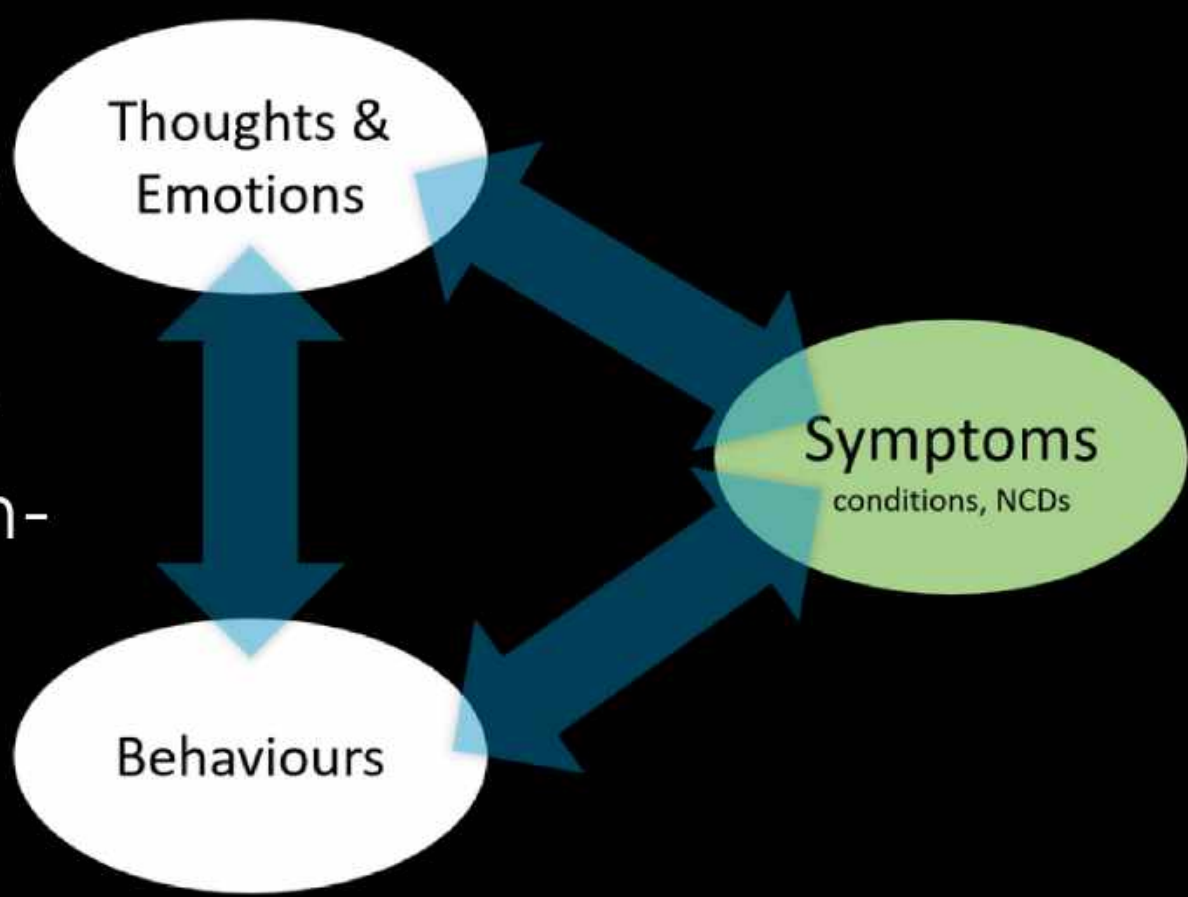
BACK

The Stress Cycle

The Stress Cycle has three components:

1. THOUGHTS & EMOTIONS: what you think about the situation and any self-talk about it
2. BEHAVIOURS - what you do or don't do.
3. SYMPTOMS emotions and physical perturbations, intensifying to unease ...and then disease.

Synergistically, these can combine into a self-reinforcing cycle that without interven-tion can become a downward spiral...



THOUGHTS & EMOTIONS... feeding one another, catastrophising, negativity, "I can't cope!", "Something bad is going to happen...". Diminished self-evaluation, "I'm no good", "People don't like me", "I'm in danger". "I don't know what to do" "My life is out of control" "What if something terrible happens?"

BEHAVIOURS... Avoiding people/situations, staying in bed, procrastinating, compulsive checking, overplanning, comfort eating, reassurance seeking

SYMPTOMS...anxiety, overwhelm, hopelessness, inability to relax, GI upsets, apathy, sleep an and concentration issues.... descending into the hell of chronic conditions and NCDs...

BACK

Active vs. Passive Coping

When it comes to managing stress, it is very helpful to distinguish between helpful and unhelpful coping styles, also called ACTIVE and PASSIVE coping.

ACTIVE COPING involves proactively doing something to directly work towards solving a problem, get extra help, or effectively support yourself through a difficult time - perhaps starting by brainstorming potential solutions.

PASSIVE COPING is a short term response, that might let you feel better in the short-term, but doesn't really help address the problem. For example, procrastinating, hoping it will just go away or improve with time, worrying without taking positive action towards resolution of a problem, or distracting yourself with:

- alcohol and drugs
- entertainment
- social media
- comfort eating
- involvement in political or social movements, that effectively move the definition and focus of 'the issue' into the outer world and society, so as to avoid looking inward to one's own problems.

Needless to say, this Stress Management module emphasises learning and implementing Active Coping strategies and, by doing so, encouraging you to put aside any passive coping styles you identify in yourself as you rocognise and identify them.

BACK

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

A Polyvagal Approach to Stress Management

How we perceive situations and events determines how we respond. We begin to experience this as children, for example, when a moonlit shadow, that seems like a monster waiting to attack us, is revealed to be a shirt draped across a chair when a parent comes in and switches on the light.

The fear the child experienced was very real...but the threat that precipitated it was an illusion. Notice also how we learned of the falseness of the 'threat': by shining a light on the situation and seeing it more as it is, rather than as things seemed to appear when we couldn't see clearly and our brain was a little foggy from sleepiness.

Which is why 'light' is a great metaphor for the power of awareness and is the source of the saying,

"Light is the best antiseptic".

Trauma-trained therapists are taught that, *"perception is more important than reality."* It isn't the actual facts that combined to become "the experience" but our uniquely personal perception of those facts that creates the consequences in terms of any stressful results and any actions we take as a result.

Polyvagal research looks deeply into the three branches of the Vagus Nerve that make up the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), and has

taken it one, very ' important step deeper. It demonstrates that even before the brain makes meaning of an incident, the autonomic nervous system has assessed the environment and initiated an adaptive survival response.

This act, of sweeping our environment for signs of danger at a subconscious level has already been introduced as "neuroception". In our example above, 'monster' is the child's story, that arises in her conscious mind to explain the neuroceptive shock of the uncertain, potentially threatening shadows across the darkened room. Looking deeper at our example: now, what would make a child manufacture a monster in her sleepy imagination...? Maybe that's an opportunity to look closer at what are the 'stories' that made up her day...? Or week...? Or lifetime...?

The important points being made here is that, when it comes to managing stress:

- Truth does not matter.
- Perception is everything.

And this is a double-edged sword, that can open your current view of the world and deliver a kind of freedom of which you've possibly only dreamt ...or it can take you deeper into dark, stressful dreams, based to some lesser or greater extent on imaginative fictions - either your own or in the stories and narratives being fed to you by those you associate with or your sources of news and information. It all depends on how you choose to see it...

Neuroception

"The body will recognise when it feels safe." -
Stephen Porges, MD

What makes neuroception such a challenge to think about is its most definitive property: that it happens below our direct awareness. This means that the results of neuroception - the preconscious stories the ANS is writing for each of us as individuals and as collectives of individuals, sending and receiving these 'invisible' signals to and from each other - actually has a very significant impact upon our moment-to-moment ideas of safety and threat...and all of which has obvious, important flow-on effects to our interpretations of what we see in the world and the meanings we give to things and events in it.

If you want a visual analogy of many ANSs acting in co-regulation, then think of birds flocking in massive formations, or fish in huge shoals and schools, tuned into the delicate bio-electric signals emanating from and between each member, nudging the behaviours of each individual and dramatically visible in the seeming synchronised movements of the whole.

- A primary role of ANS is surveillance - always alert and asking, “Is it safe?", scanning for signs of safety, danger and life-threat.
- It reacts to stimuli and regulates our responses.

- Its goal is to protect us by sensing and responding appropriately and proportionally to cues of safety and risk.
- **IMPORTANTLY**...it responds to demands placed on it by either catalysing the mind-body system in response to a threat, **OR** maintaining homeostatic balance during which rest, repair and growth are possible.

IT CANNOT DO BOTH AT ONCE.

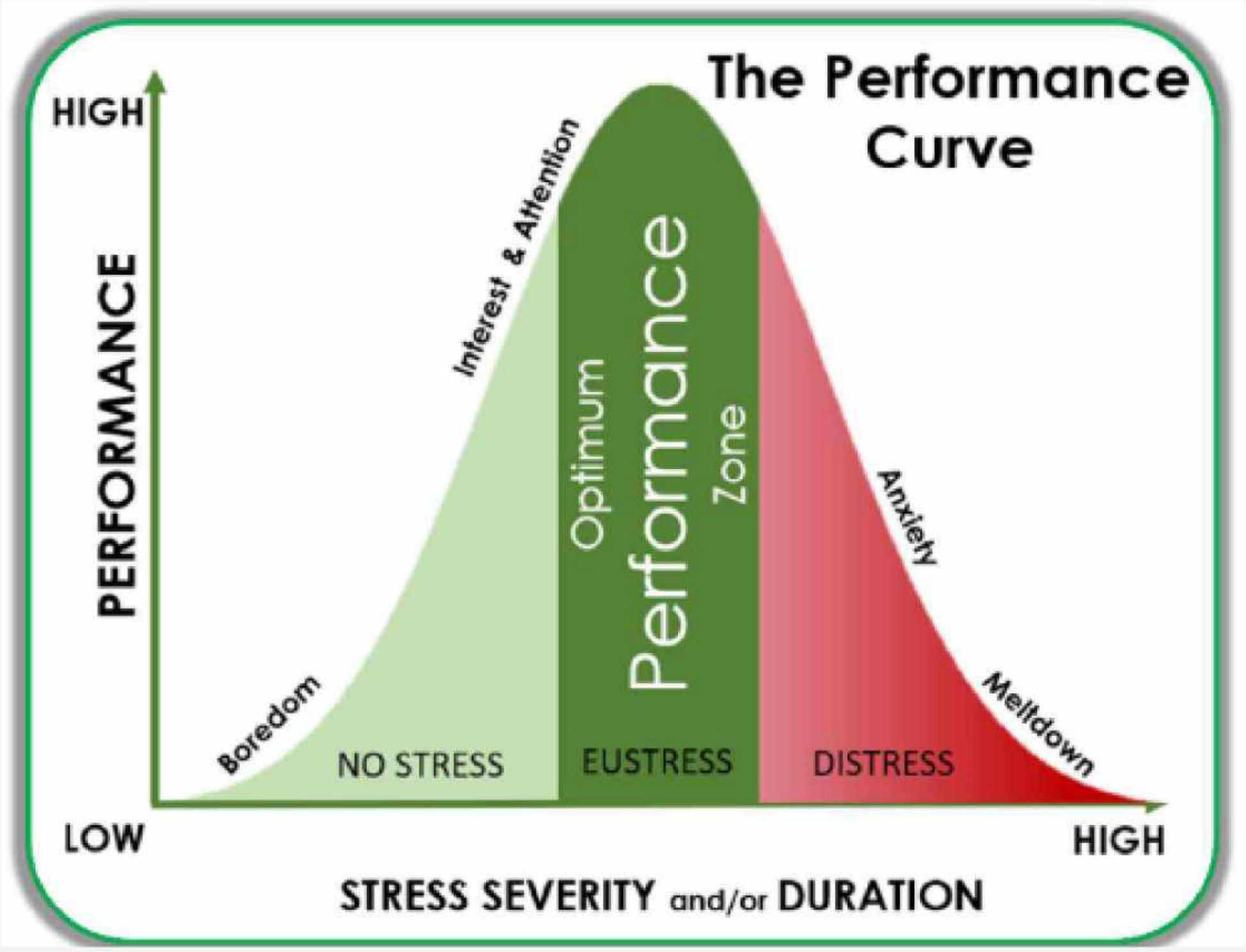
- And it's because of this last point that having your stress response mechanisms 'on' most or even all the time has such dire health consequences.
- Think about it: if your stress response is - constantly activated... often or even always on 'high alert'... then your body's other critical repair and rejuvenation systems have been taken effectively 'offline' while your ANS tries to deal with what is neureceptively perceived as a 'life threat'.
- Your ability to make appropriate food choices as well as properly digest food and eliminate waste; to metabolise fats from your cortisol-flooded biochemistry; to resist disease and aging; to accurately read social cues without exaggerating or erring on the side of seeing threat where none exists; to settle down to sleep at night... so many other homeostatic and social functions are negatively impacted or even compromised by your stress levels.

Distress & Eustress

It is critical to our progressively fuller understanding of what stress is to know that NOT all stress has negative effects. When the body is tolerating stress, without becoming overwhelmed, and is using it to overcome lethargy or enhance performance, the stress is POSITIVE, HEALTHY and CHALLENGING.

Hans Selye, one of the pioneers of the modern study of stress, termed this 'EUSTRESS'. Stress is positive when it forces us to adapt and thus to increase the strength of our adaptation mechanisms.

If you are paying the kind of attention this course is advocating, stress also very kindly warns us when we are not coping well and that a change is needed if we are to maintain optimal health. This action-enhancing stress



gives the athlete the competitive edge and the public speaker the enthusiasm to project optimally.

Stress is NEGATIVE when it exceeds our ability to cope, fatigues our body and its functions and causes emotional, behavioural or physical problems, such as those mentioned previously, as well as ongoing anxiety. This harmful stress is called DISTRESS and it produces over-reaction, confusion, poor concentration and performance anxiety and results in sub-par performance.

Stress tolerance improves and increases when we don't stray excessively (in distance or duration) beyond the green zone (see above diagram), into the red zone. This is called 'resilience' and it improves by close attention and learning (through education, trial and error) to skilfully manage what's happening, keeping forays into that red zone well-moderated, while paying close attention to recovery, results and further performance.

As a counterpoint to learning to manage stress, when internal or external pressures continue unabated (eg., because of an unrealistic deadline, or too big task), without actively intervening, this failure to curb or channel stress into helpful, productive avenues and thereby adapt and increase your resilience instead DECREASES your resilience, and progressively weakens your ability to respond altogether.

So the heuristic ('rule-of-thumb') is, if your performance is being enhanced by the stressors then you are generally in the EUSTRESS, peak perfomance zone.

But DO NOT KID YOURSELF about your current resilience or ability to manage stress! If you were already a 'master'... would you even be here...?

Eminent educationist Jiddu Krishnamurti wrote, *"it is no sign of health to be well-adjusted to a sick society"*. Understand that our species did not evolve for the kind of stress we place ourselves (and each other) under, so there is NO SHAME (and every reason!) for taking the time to suspend judgment and REGULARLY revisit your assumptions about how effectively you are coping.

Another heuristic is: if you are suffering the kind of health conditions that bring most to the GRP, then your homeostatic functions are already being compromised by ineffectual stress management, with chances being that you're already in Autonomic DISTRESS - and your current health state IS THE SIGN that, if you continue as you have been doing, without serious reflection, then it is at your own peril, with all of the worsening costs to your health and wellbeing.

And, in that case, the stress management tools available in this course are (and will continue to be) of life-changing benefit to you.

The Vagal Brake

Learning how to "pump the vagal brake" gives you greater control over your subsequent responses to stressors. It increases your neuro-ceptive (pre-conscious) sense of safety through proactive control, allowing you to respond instead of react.

And simple breathwork is always one of the most efficient ways to do this, with many variations on Resonant Breathing. Dr. Porges insists there is no need to complicate things, the principles are very basic:

- Begin with a long outward breath
- Rest briefly with lungs empty
- Using your diaphragm, breathe into your belly until comfortably full
- Rinse and repeat.
- Some therapists recommend pairing a mental image with movement to help drive home the function of this action. Create a metaphor which works for you, such as:
- Holding both hands in front of you, bent from the elbow.
- As you breathe out (slightly longer), slowly open your hands, thinking of release, let go, let flow, imagine your blood vessels opening
- In the rest point, relax your fingers and wrists
- As you breathe in, gently squeeze your hands into loose fists, imagining your blood vessels constricting.

Reframing

aka, "changing the script"

Information is sent though the autonomic path-ways from the body back to the brain where it is translated into beliefs that shape daily living. These beliefs feed back forward to the body.

The stories we tell ourselves about who we are, how the world works and what's going on around us begin, as mentioned in the opening section, in the ANS, telling the body that the environment can be viewed as SAFE or UNSAFE, and interpreted accordingly. This process creates a feedback loop that, left completely on 'auto-pilot', is what leads to the kind of perpetual, highly-stressed state so much of our world seems to be in, so much of the time.

The brain uses this autonomic information to narrate a story that tries to make sense of the state your body is already in.

...In other words, like the child's nightmare, it creates the story that justifies the state., ie., if you are in an anxious state, then working with your imagination's 'best guess' - or something you have been told - your brain will try to 'help' you by manufacturing a story that makes you being anxious make total sense...

So, if you want to change your story, you need to start by changing your state.

And STRESS RELIEF, starting with, say. Resonant Breathing, is the beginning of a solution.

And STRESS MANAGEMENT can start with putting a more helpful frame around the situation, so that your story might be more helpful than it is.

... And getting back to the story, it can’t just be any story - this is not magic, it's science.

You can't just wish or hope things to go away; it is a process of changing the boundaries of the problem in such a way as to maximise your available resources and minimise demands on those resources, such that you maximise the possibility of circumstances working to your advantage - instead of keeping you pinned down as a source of pernicious, persistent stress.

Develop a personal toolkit of helpful questions, tailored to the specifics of your life. Useful reframing questions might include:

- How can I make this work?
- How can this benefit me?
- What's the lesson from this?
- What am I grateful for in this?
- How could this motivate me in a positive direction?
- What's a cool way of seeing this I've not recognised?
- What factor(s) am I excluding that could change the way I'm seeing this?
- What factor(s) am I including that aren't helping me find solutions?
- What's blocking me here?

You see, your reframing of a situation has to be something you (and your ANS) can actually BELIEVE in!

THE STRESS MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The function of activities in this module is to apply the elements of AWARENESS and RELIEF into a problem-solving framework that empowers you to prioritise and then systematically work down and resolve the things you've identified as ongoing or recurring sources of stress.

WHY...? Because not doing so has been - and is still - negatively impacting your health ...and doesn't it just make simple common sense to do something about it...?

In this phase you will learn (by doing) how to actively apply simple, practical steps towards addressing, rather than ignoring, avoiding, suppressing or passively waiting for the future to deliver 'magical solutions' whilst paying attention to the impacts and implementing your targeted relief strategies along the way.

The Stress Inventory

...take a deep breath...

This activity can seem threatening. If you're feeling that, try thinking of it this way...

"The journey of a 1000 miles begins with a single step."

Well...THIS is that first, real step - and you're about to take it... so really let yourself feel good about that - because the Stress Inventory is actually about HOPE, rooted firmly in systematic ACTION and small.but.meaningful.steps.

The Stress Inventory is a detailed snapshot of WHAT you are finding stressful in your life. The reason for doing it is so you can order and prioritise them... and then use the Stress Management tools you're learning about here to begin strategically reducing, restructuring or eliminating their impacts on your life.

Because you are a human being, these stressors will be found in the places you'd expect:

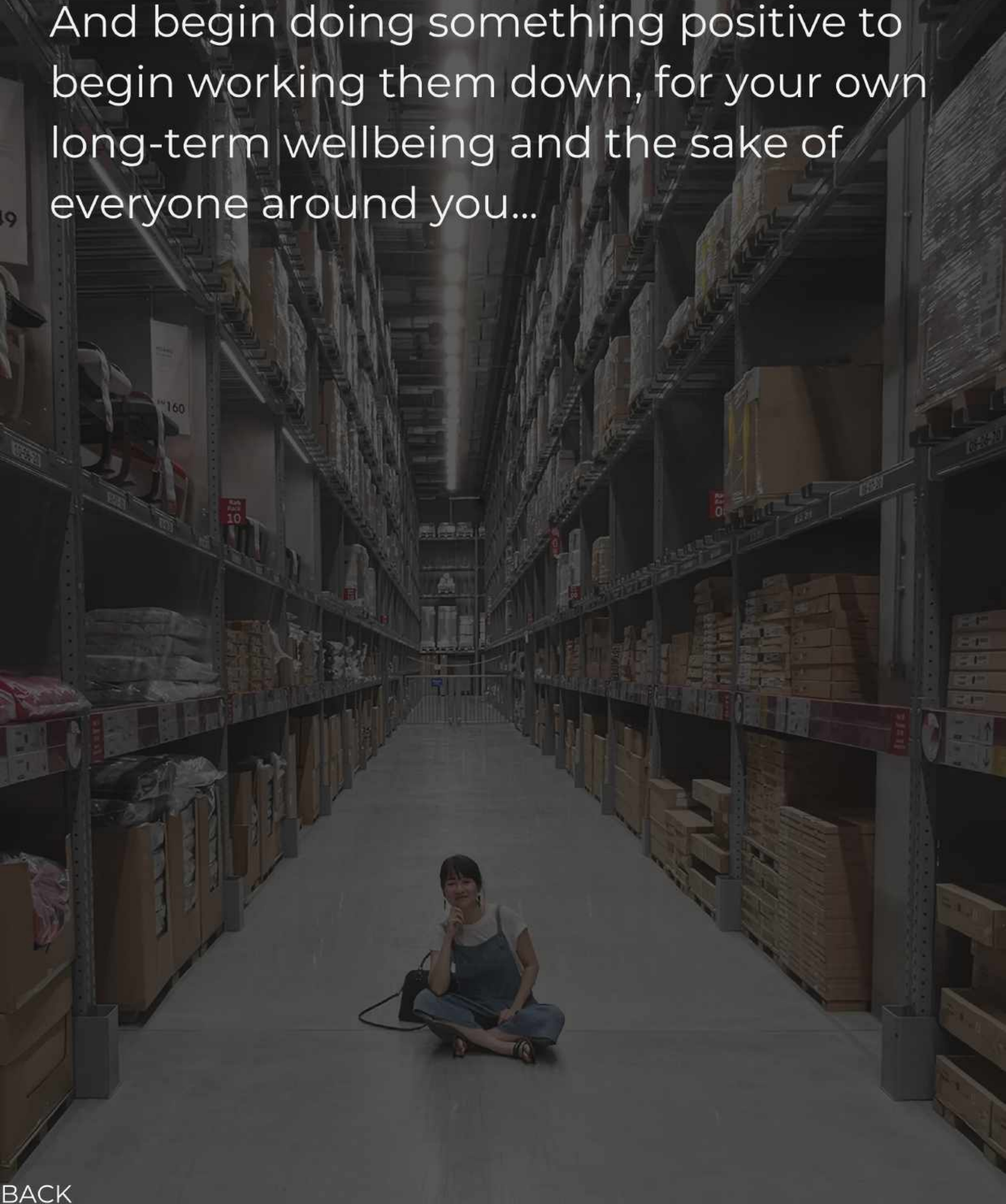
- work (bosses, colleagues, subordinates),
- family (kids, grandkids, parents and siblings)
- ...yes, in your primary domestic relationship...
- close friendships also often include stressful aspects (for example, people get sick and die)...
- finances, markets and economics...
- news, social and political situations.

Not all of these will be impacting your life, but some most certainly are.

The function of the Stress Inventory is to...

1. get them out where you can see them
2. identify them and put them all down in a place where you can see them.
3. help you to keep breathing as you work through it..

And begin doing something positive to begin working them down, for your own long-term wellbeing and the sake of everyone around you...



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The Problem-Solving Framework

Use the following steps in conjunction with your Problem- Solving Framework.

STEP 1: Name the problem... Select ONE stress-related problem that you would like to (and are willing to at least begin to) address. The more specific you are in describing it, the more specifically you can address it and evaluate the quality of your result.

If other problems arise as you're thinking, jot them down and set them aside for their own process and continue, but avoid the error of trying to manage a bundle of stressors all at once.

REMEMBER: the key here is more about getting a feel for the process itself than developing a super complex or elegant plan to resolve it. AND don't try to actually solve the problem you're working on NOW either.

STEP 2: Drill down and get clear on WHY this is a problem for you...for the same reason that it's important to understand why stress management itself is important - because it provides the motivation to want to do something about it!

Step 3: Your IDEAL solution. Forget about 'being realistic'... it's important to get clear about what you want - and therefore able to assess what and how much you are willing/unwilling to do or compromise to make it happen.

STEP 4: Brainstorm potential solutions. Briefly weigh the pros & cons of each potential solution. Perhaps no solution will be ideal, or tick every box - we're talking progress over perfect here, ok? Every good idea will have some faults. So choose the best - or "least-worst" - and keep moving!

Remember: Ridiculous ideas might help you generate better, less obvious solutions. So, don't evaluate the solutions at this stage - just list them.

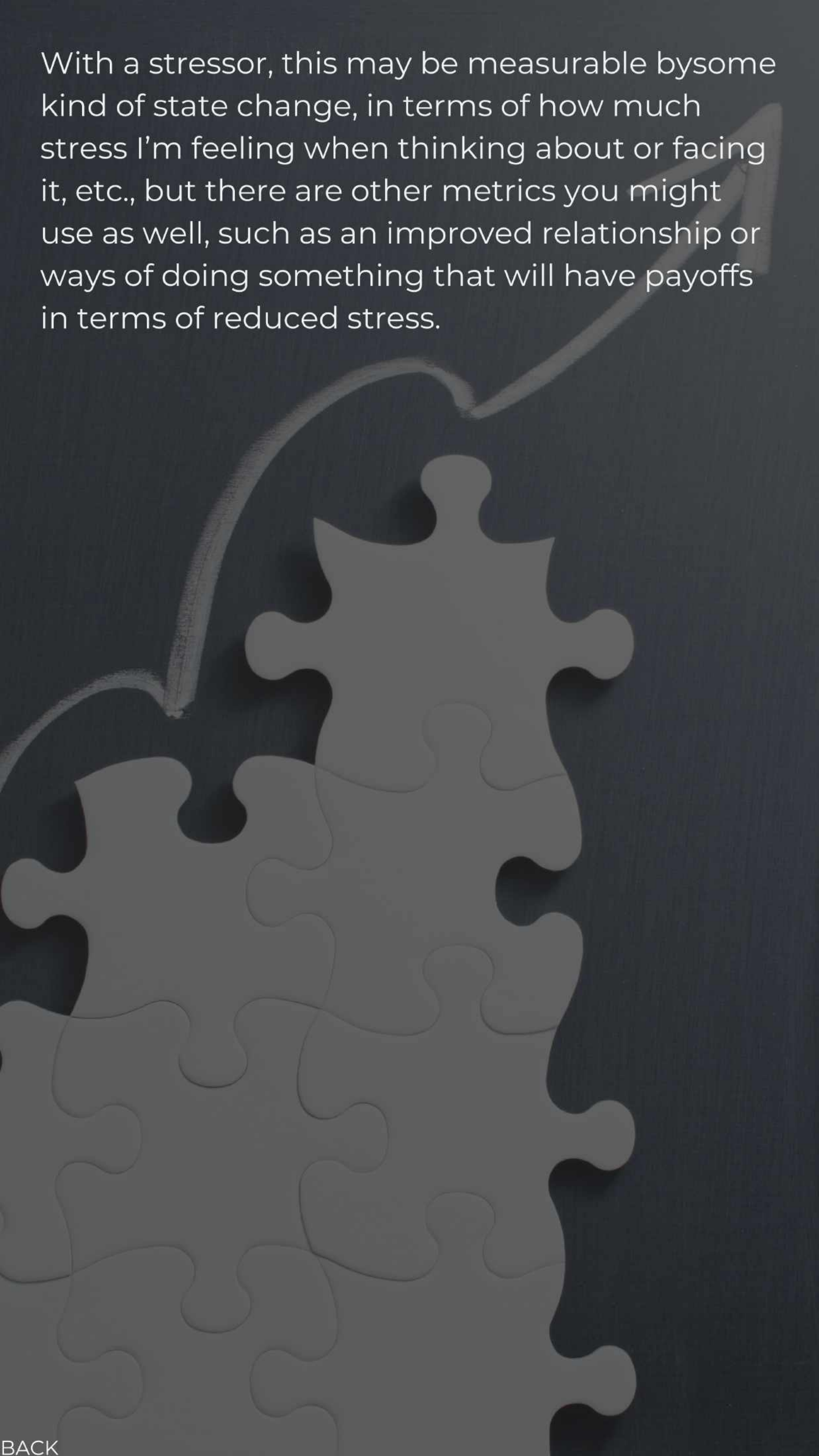
STEP 5: Choose a solution - or a combination of solutions which will at least begin to address the problem. Often, it's better to choose a solution that can be readily and easily applied, even if it's not the ideal solution, rather than choose an overly ambitious solution.

STEP 6: Create a step-by-step plan... If you make a detailed action plan, in 'doable small' steps, then you are more likely to put your solution into practice (and therefore, address the problem). Plan out step-by- step how you will carry out your solution, and when you will do it.

STEP 7: Implement your plan.

STEP 8: Evaluate... How will you measure progress? If you don't know how you're doing, then how can you tell when you're done?

With a stressor, this may be measurable bysome kind of state change, in terms of how much stress I'm feeling when thinking about or facing it, etc., but there are other metrics you might use as well, such as an improved relationship or ways of doing something that will have payoffs in terms of reduced stress.



So, what are you waiting for...?

Now make your plan, break it into manageable steps and get started!

Even just starting to implement a solution can deliver positive feelings of strength and empowerment and a better sense of control over your situation.

When you're first learning to systematically problem solve and addressing complex problems, developing and using a well thought out plan greatly increases your chance of positive results.

So give this a shot - with all the work you're already doing on your health and wellbeing, you might be surprised by how much writing it all down helps to both clarify what's really going on, what you can really do to address it - and thereby really help motivate you to do something about it!

A HUGE challenge for many who take this road are the uncomfortable conversations it requires along the way, as OTHER PEOPLE'S comfort zones become impacted by us asserting our own needs ... which is why the final section of this handbook is devoted to a very important aspect of personal change ...

Boundaries & Assertive Communication

You may have heard the old saying that *"good fences make good neighbours"* end there's a lot to that, isn't there?

Between nations, between governments and religions, between employers and employees, teachers and pupils, parents and children, between your practitioners and yourself... right down to the boundary you maintain between yourself and the people next door, both the fence itself and the relationship between you.

Why is it important that the boundaries between you and others are clear? Because where

things are clear there can be no dispute, no fuzziness, no confusion about where anything sits for those who share those boundaries.

And because confusion, fuzziness and disputes all have negative impact upon your peace of mind - and, regardless of how 'sociable' any of us are or feels at a given time, we are nonetheless an extremely social species.

Which is why it is imperative that you are able to clearly observe and - even better - articulate and clarify the boundaries between you and everyone else you interact with, from your partner to your boss to your subordinates, kids - even your cat.

Some of us hold unrealistic beliefs about assertiveness, without even realising it. It's important to remember that:

- Your needs are as important as other people's needs
- You don't have to always agree with your friends to be a good friend
- You don't have an obligation to agree with or say "Yes" to people
- Everyone has the right to say "No"
- You don't have to supply reasons or 'excuses' for saying "No"
- Saying "No" to something means saying "Yes" to something else (like prioritising your health)
- You are allowed to say, "I don't care", "I don't want to", and "I don't know"
- People can't read minds so they won't know what you are thinking unless you tell them
- Being passive is not the same as being humble
- Being assertive doesn't necessarily mean you are confident, but can choose nonetheless
- Saying "No" does not make you hurtful or selfish.

Here is a simple guide for communicating assertively...

1. Say what the problem is and how you feel about it, using “I statements” to keep it specific to yourself, to prevent generalising beyond your own experience and to not put others on the defensive.
2. Say what you would like the other to do going forward.
3. Describe the preferred outcome you hope to result.

It can be really difficult to be assertive, if you are not used to it and, for example, the other person is being irrational or aggressive. If so, you could try:

- **BE A BROKEN RECORD...** Repeat yourself over and over, until the other person accepts your answer. Don’t give explanations or excuses, just repeat yourself (this is useful for when a friend repeatedly asks something inappropriate of you).
- **TAKE A TIME OUT...** It’s hard to communicate when you’re angry. If either of you are angry, pause the conversation until you are both in a better place to listen.
- **SELECTIVE LISTENING...** Ignore inappropriate comments or requests, and respond to what you are interested in engaging in. If someone is criticising or saying something inappropriate, they will get bored if you don’t respond.

- **SEPARATE IMPORTANT ISSUES...** Sometimes people conflate two separate issues. If so, focus on the important issue. For example, if someone says, “If you won’t go to X with me that means you don’t care about me” you could say “I do care about you, I just don’t have time to go to X today.”
- **DON'T APOLOGISE...** if you haven’t done anything wrong. Sometimes we can feel guilty because another person feels sad or disappointed, even if we haven’t done anything wrong. For example, a parent might feel guilty if their child is disappointed from not being allowed to do something. Let go of irrational guilt - and don’t apologise.

Sometimes, it's okay for others to feel bad.

You are not responsible for managing other people's feelings.

ABOUT THIS MODULE'S ACTIONS

The main function of the actions in this module is to apply the elements of AWARENESS and RELIEF within a problem-solving framework that empowers you to prioritise and then systematically work down and resolve the things you've identified as ongoing or recurring sources of stress.

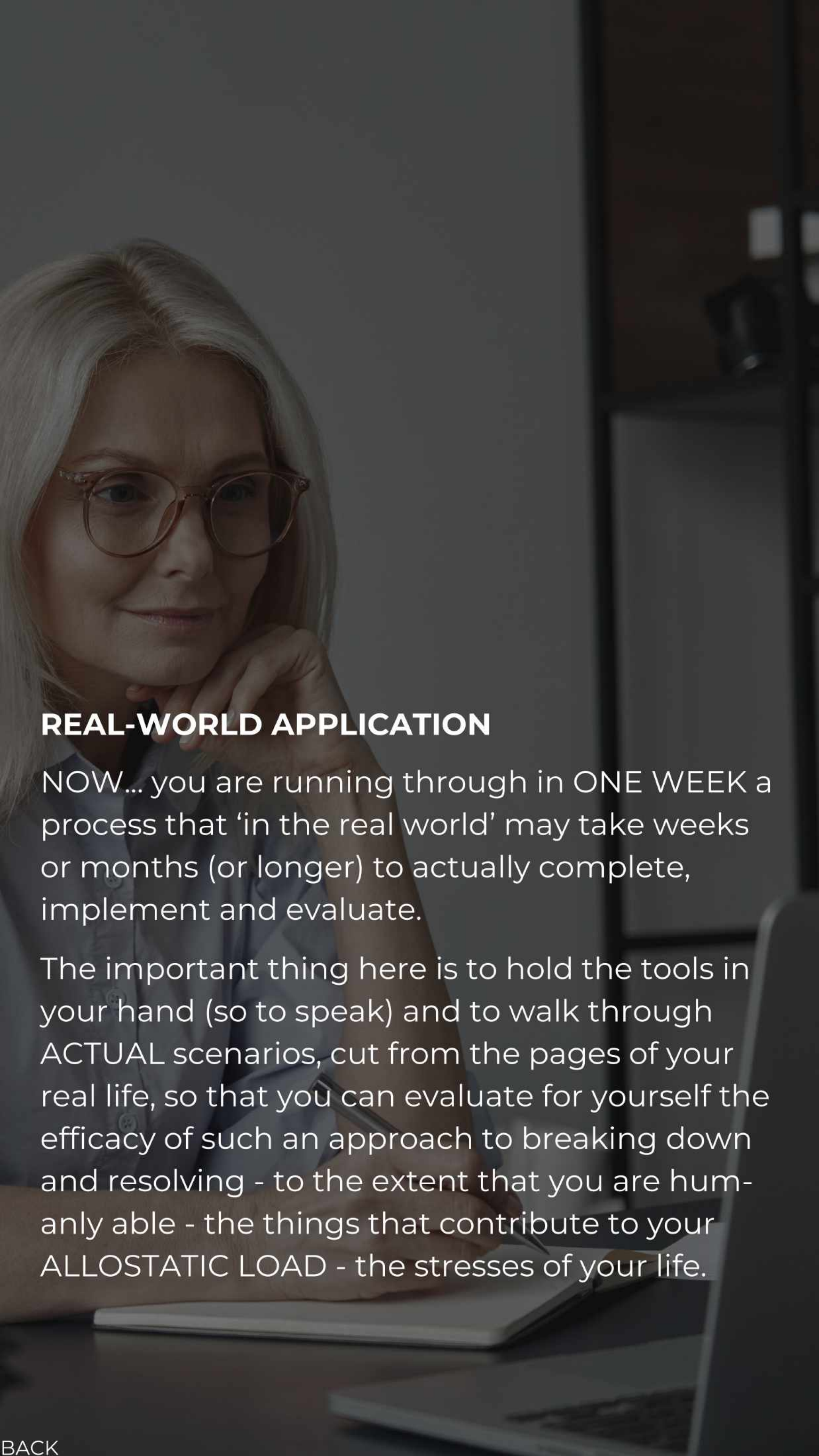
WHY...? Because not doing so is negatively impacting your health and it makes simple common sense to do something about it.

You will learn (by the doing) how to actively apply simple, practical steps towards addressing, rather than ignoring, avoiding, suppressing or passively waiting for the future to deliver 'magical solutions' whilst paying attention to the impacts and implementing your targeted relief strategies along the way.

Because it's important to begin looking more deeply at the things you've been logging and, as you transcribe...

- reflect on how far you have come... e.g., what things/ kind of things are no longer stressful for you... ?
- note the items that are 'a thing' for you - either ongoing or recurring sources of stress.

...but, luckily... YOU ARE WORTH IT!



REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

NOW... you are running through in ONE WEEK a process that 'in the real world' may take weeks or months (or longer) to actually complete, implement and evaluate.

The important thing here is to hold the tools in your hand (so to speak) and to walk through ACTUAL scenarios, cut from the pages of your real life, so that you can evaluate for yourself the efficacy of such an approach to breaking down and resolving - to the extent that you are humanly able - the things that contribute to your ALLOSTATIC LOAD - the stresses of your life.

Stress Management Handbook
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