

Building Resilience

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Understanding your own risk ...

How have you been travelling in the last 6 -12 months?

Under water 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Walking on water

1. What is your number for:
 - Your work life?
 - Your physical health?
2. Have you ever felt better than this?
3. Have you ever felt worse?

*Its not about being a
"10" all the time.*

*Are moving
forward?*

Change – good or bad?

Change that I want
and I initiate

Change that is
forced upon me



- Organisational structure
- My job and tasks
- Work relationships
- Location
- Technology and tools
- Increased workload
- Uncertain future

The bad news ...

*Change in the workplace
is no longer an occasional
thing – it is now constant*

Common effects of forced change

- **Mental stress**
- **Sense of loss**
- **Role ambiguity** (what am I meant to be doing/prioritising)
- **Increased time away from work**
(longer breaks, late starts and/or early finishes, absenteeism, presenteeism, etc)
- **Loss of motivation / commitment**
- **Drop in productivity**
- **Reduced loyalty**

Jessica's story ...

My institution had a huge restructure last year. A lot of positions were cut and there have been a lot of organisational changes. I get confused about who is doing what after the restructure. I also feel like we have lost many great professional and academic staff members and I have lost the connections and colleagues I used to work closely with. Staff members have become stressed as they are expected to do much more than what was required before. A few staff members had to choose a new role before their previous role became redundant. They are unhappy as the new roles do not fit their interests, skills or expertise.

I am very lucky this time as I got to keep my role. However, now I am de-motivated everyday as I don't feel valued by my institution. I am also worried that my role will become redundant in the next restructure. Who knows when it will come?

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What is resilience ?

Think about the most resilient person you know
or have encountered – someone who has
“bounced back” ...

... from a single negative episode

... or from multiple episodes.

What strengths do they have which make them resilient ?

How did they become resilient ? Born / Made / Both ?

How do WE become more resilient?

What is resilience ?

Is resilience ...

- a personality trait ?
- a state of mind ?
- a process ?

Why is resilience important?

.... My story as an inexperienced presenter...

***“Resilience is the process of
adapting well in the face of adversity”***

... notion of “bouncing back”

... returning to normal ... or better than normal?

... can a person be too resilient?

How resilient are you?

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Not Sure

Agree

Strongly
Agree

1. I'm usually optimistic. I see difficulties as temporary and expect to overcome them.
2. Any feelings of anger, loss and discouragement don't last long.
3. I can tolerate high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty about situations.

How resilient are you?

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Not Sure

Agree

Strongly
Agree

4. I adapt quickly to new developments.
I'm curious. I ask questions.
5. I'm playful. I find the humour in tough situations,
and can laugh at myself.
6. I learn valuable lessons from my experiences and
from the experiences of others.

How resilient are you?

Strongly
Disagree

Disagree

Not Sure

Agree

Strongly
Agree

7. I'm good at solving problems. I'm good at making things work well.
8. I'm strong and durable. I hold up well during tough times.
9. I've converted misfortune into better outcomes and found benefits in bad experiences.

What is the biggest challenge to your Resilience at work?

When I am managing difficult relationships/politics in the workplace

When the volume or pace of my work stretches me to my limits

When I feel I am being personally criticised

When the nature of my work takes me outside my comfort zone

When there are upheavals in my personal life

When juggling work demands with family & non-work responsibilities

When I am challenged on work matters

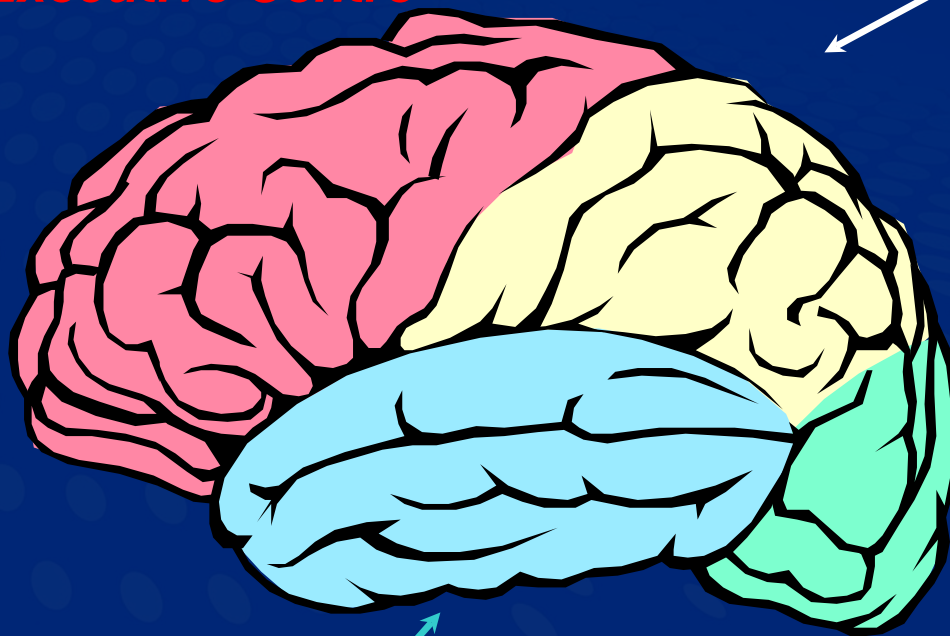
Why can't I just get control of myself ?

Pre-Frontal Lobes

Executive Centre

Neo-Cortex

Intellect



Emotional Centre

Amygdala

STRESSOR

'Flight or fight' response

Limbic system is activated

Adrenal gland releases adrenaline
and epinephrine (anxiety hormones)

↑ activity in sympathetic nervous system

↑ body metabolism

↑ breathing rate

↑ heart rate

↑ blood pressure

↑ blood flow to muscles

↑ sweating

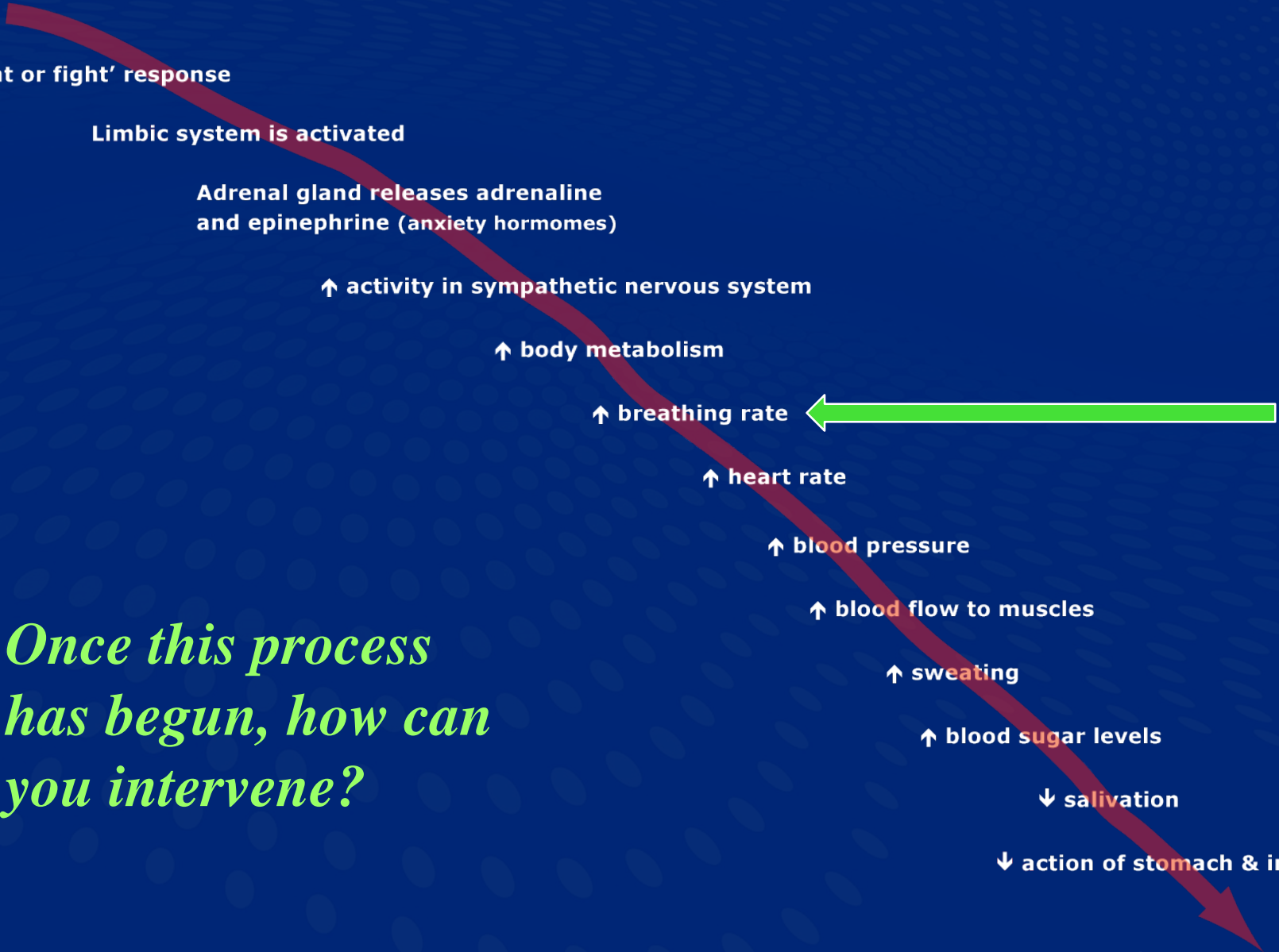
↑ blood sugar levels

↓ salivation

↓ action of stomach & intestines

*Once this process
has begun, how can
you intervene?*

SIGNS OF STRESS



Five Resilience Strategies



1. CULTIVATE OPTIMISM

- **Martin Seligman – father of positive psychology** - *the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive*
- **Optimism is reacting to problems with a sense of confidence and high personal ability**
- **Why cultivate optimism? Live longer, heal faster from physical injury/illness, less anxiety and depression**
- **Who considers themselves an optimist?**
20% people born optimistic ... the rest of us have to learn it!

1. CULTIVATE OPTIMISM

- Optimism is not “rose-coloured glasses”
- See things as they are ... but not worse than they are
- Optimistic people believe that negative events are:
 - **manageable** (*“I can do something about this”*)
 - **temporary** (beware *“always”* and *“never”*)
 - **limited in scope** (instead of pervading every aspect of a person’s life)

A Challenging Situation

You have been working unpaid overtime handling a high volume of cases from young students who are absent from school due to a range of factors: lack of sleep, poor time management, or general health issues.

You are responsible for monitoring attendance, including issuing warning letters. Whenever you meet with these students, they have all sorts of explanations for their attendance problems, and they can get quite emotional. You refer them to the school counsellor, who ends up dealing with a high volume of students with personal and time management issues.

A Challenging Situation

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With person next to you, discuss pessimistic interpretations you could have about this situation across the three dimensions ...

Not Manageable

Always

Everything

Now devise more optimistic explanations for your situation.

Manageable

Temporary

Limited in scope

2. SHIFT FOCUS



***“ [We are] not disturbed by events, but
by the view [we] take of them”***

(Epictetus 55 - 135 AD)

2. SHIFT FOCUS

- ***Selective abstraction*** - look at one part of reality & assume it depicts the total reality
- ***Selective abstraction*** tends to have a bias – why?
- Tigers can become all-pervasive – overactive amygdala
- Need to work at reversing the bias
- Strategies for retuning your radar – gratitude journal, end of day review, replace each negative thought/experience with 3 positive ones, develop your personal Performance Enhancing Thoughts (PETs) to tackle your common thinking traps, review the effectiveness of your main coping strategies, etc



"This too shall pass"

3. PROCESS DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

- Resilience is not about shoving negative feelings and experiences under the carpet
- Find a way to express what is going on for you
 - Talk to someone – a friend, a trusted colleague, the EAP, etc
 - Expressive writing re a troublesome issue – 15 minutes for 3-4 days
 - w Not a diary ... don't save it
 - w Express deepest feelings/thoughts ... don't censure
 - w What is making me so angry/upset?
 - w What do I need to do to feel better?
 - w If nothing I can do, how to I sooth myself?
- The one-question approach –
“What have I learnt about myself that I didn't know before?”

On a Friday afternoon you receive a phone call about a student that has been reported by the lecturer as being abusive to classmates and the lecturer.

You follow up and invite the student to meet with you. In the meeting, the student denies using insulting language or behaviours. Instead, the student complains of sexual harassment from the lecturer. Your sense is that the student is mentally unwell and is not absorbing any information from you. You make an appointment for the student to Counselling Services.

The student attends the session, however, the counsellor reports that they had very difficult communication with each other, suspecting a language barrier. The counsellor organises another meeting with the student and a phone interpreter. However the student still does not open up to the counsellor.

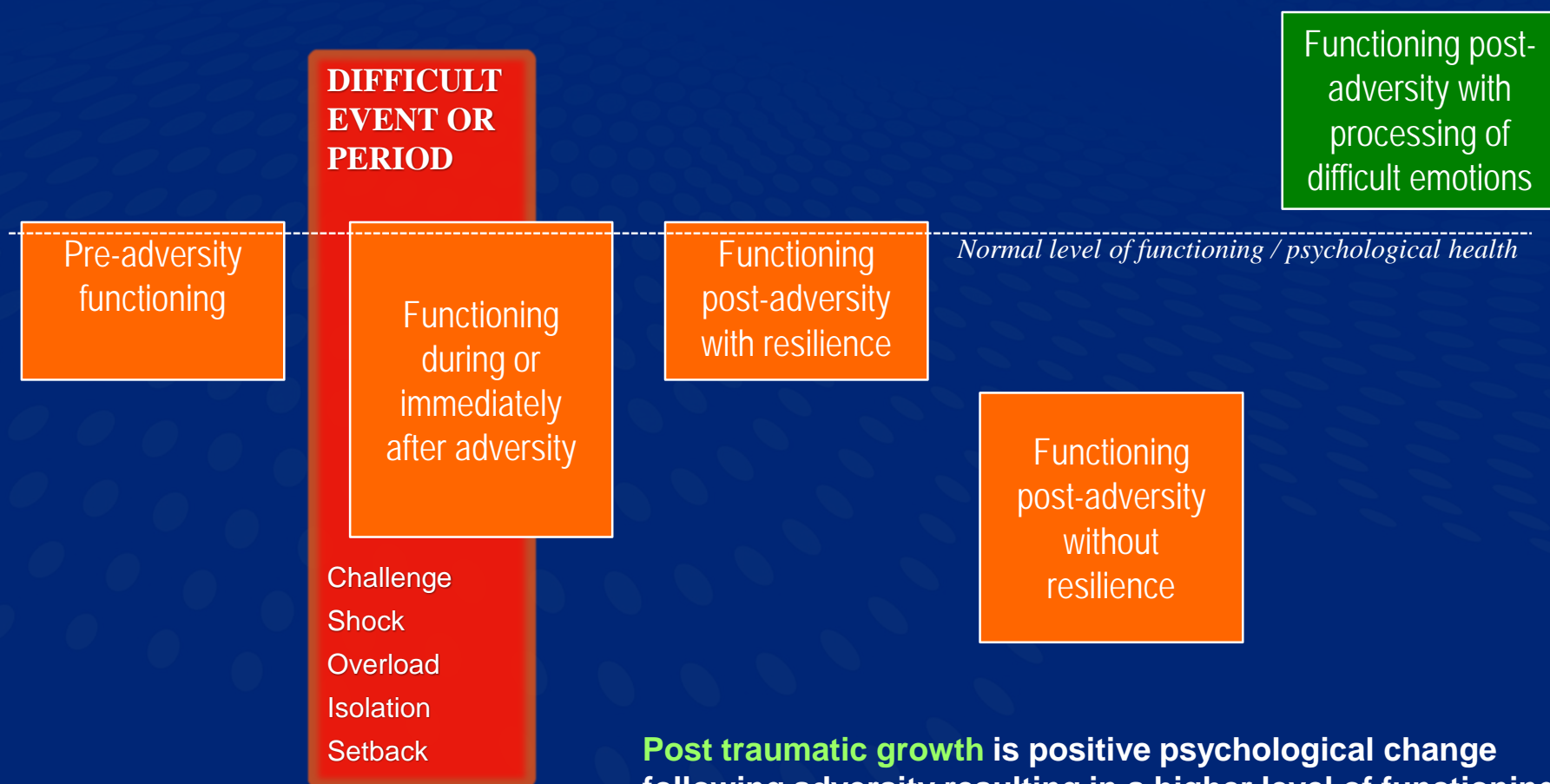
A week later, you receive a phone call from your supervisor. This same student has carried a large kitchen knife into class and threatened to kill classmates and him/herself. Luckily, security came in and no one got hurt. Now this student has been sent to the psychiatric unit and has been diagnosed with severe bipolar disorder. The student may get excluded from the course.

You feel so sorry for the student and also feel guilty in your heart. You wish you could have done a better job as an international student support officer and maybe this student would not have been sent to the psychiatric unit. You cannot sleep at night and can't stop thinking about the student.

3. PROCESS DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

- What advice would we have for our Student Advisor?
 - Expressive writing ... *What am I feeling? What thoughts are behind the feelings?*
Do not censure and do not keep the written material
 - Share his/her story with other Advisors – this is not gossip!
 - Talk to the EAP / Counselling Services
 - Ask self ... *What have I learnt about myself that I didn't know before?*

3. PROCESS DIFFICULT EMOTIONS



Post traumatic growth is positive psychological change following adversity resulting in a higher level of functioning

4. SOCIAL CONNECTION

- 10 times less likely to be depressed if you connect with one other person in your life
- People with social support live longer – stronger determinant of mortality than smoking or poor diet
- Why? Social connection stimulates the para-sympathetic nervous system – lowers cortisol & stress hormones
- Find / create your social support network – both at work and outside of work

4. SOCIAL CONNECTION

- **Not necessarily a bummer for introverts!**
- **Research has shown beneficial effects from as little as connecting with one other person every three weeks**
 - In person
 - Social media / email
 - With animals
 - Nature

5. BE PRESENT

- We spend a great deal of time in the future... or the past
- Too much time in the future predisposes you to?
>>> anxiety and stress
- Too much time in the past predisposes you to?
>>> guilt and resentment
- How do you know you are in the present moment?

5. BE PRESENT

- **Key strategy is Mindfulness**
 - Focusing on what is going on for you right now, with purpose & intent
 - Without assessing and judging
 - Without becoming fused with the thought/emotion
- **Simple, but not easy, and takes practice**
- **Research examples**
 - **Greater brain activity in the left pre-frontal cortex of Buddhist monks**
(f MRI studies have found the left pre-frontal cortex is very active when we feel happiness whereas right pre-frontal cortex active when we feel sad)
 - **Medical students reduced their anxiety & depression levels by 50% after 8 weeks of meditation**
 - **Harvard study found just 10 mins daily meditation resulted in positive changes in the brain after one week**

5. BE PRESENT

- The more you can keep your mind in *this* moment ...
 - the less depression and anxiety,
 - more calm,
 - issues “don’t stick”,
 - in the face of adversity you can remain in a state that allows you to process the situation

... all of which means an increased likelihood of not just bounce-back but growth to higher levels of functioning

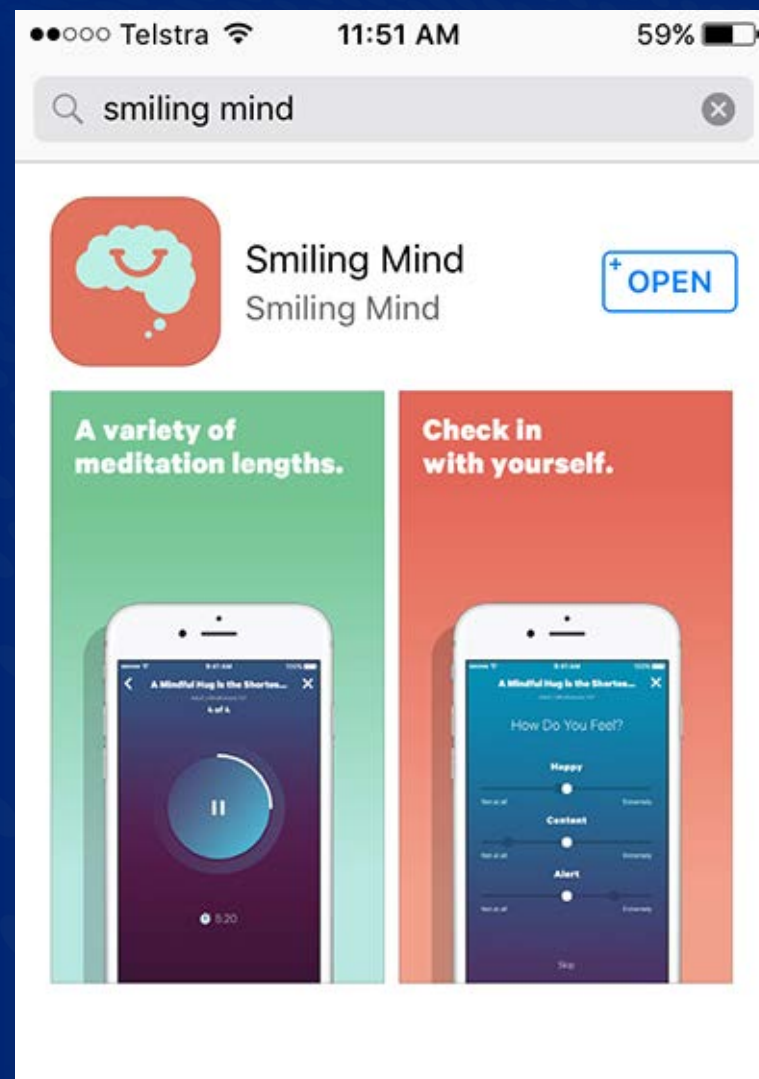
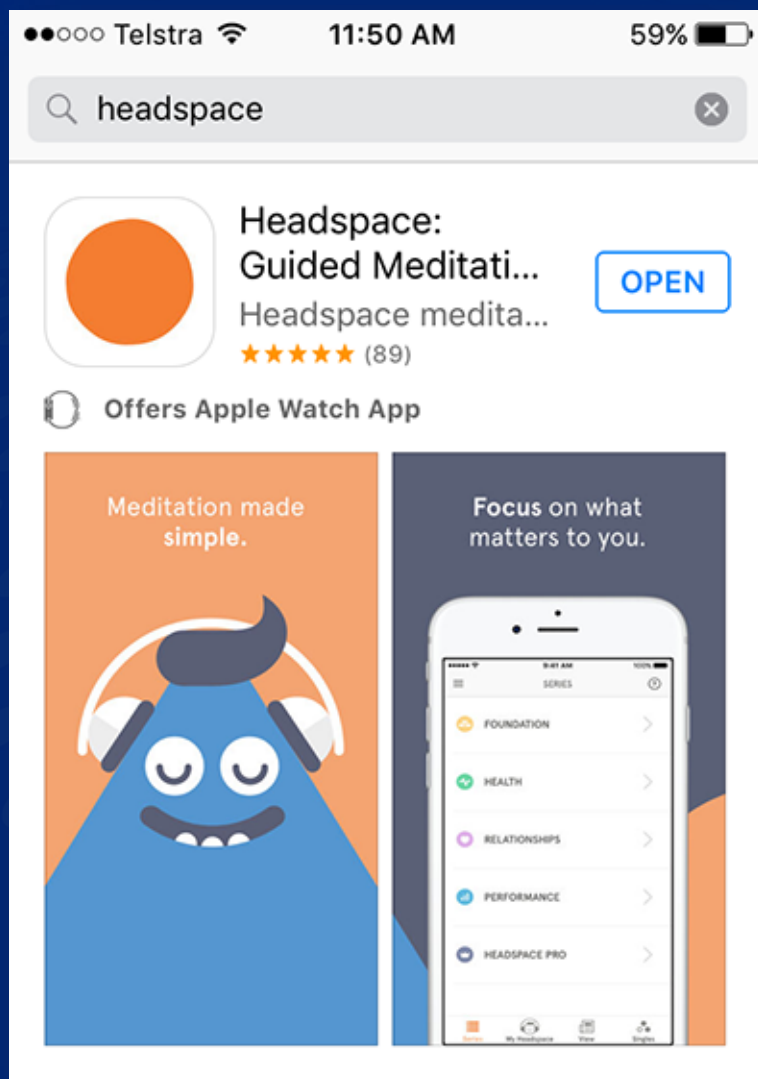
- Lets practice mindfulness, but first ...

5. BE PRESENT

- 2-3 minute mindfulness exercise

5. BE PRESENT

- What was that like?
- You have started mindfulness training! – the act of noticing your thoughts & bringing them back to the present focus
- Goal is not to stop thinking – but to notice when you drift to the past or the future ... and come back to the present
- Equivalent to training your physical body – but here the muscle you are training is your focus and attention
- And if you would like a bit more help ...



Resilience Action Plan

- what will you do differently from now on?

- How will you cultivate more optimism?
- Shift your focus to more positive aspects/events in your life
- Process difficult emotions – what have I learnt about myself?
- Connect with people, nature, animals
- Practice staying in the present moment as much as possible

A couple of other Resilience Strategies

6. Exercise

7. Adequate quality sleep

*We will all fall down ... experience setback ...
hardship ... distress ... sadness.*

*Resilience is having the skills and knowledge
to get back up and move forward again.*

*And if we do it well, we won't just bounce
back ... but even grow from the experience.*