



Rising from the ashes

*Breaking the burnout cycle  
for greater  
satisfaction, vitality and meaning  
at work*

# Dr Mendy Neralic



- Clinical psychologist in private practice
- Holistic counselling
- Making the unconscious conscious – self awareness and depth
- Healing and transformation through taking responsibility, changing life-long patterns, connection, creativity and self-empowerment
- Soul work



There's burning that goes with joy,  
and there's burning that goes with annihilation.

One is the fire of transformation,  
the other is the fire of decimation only.

Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estes

# Plan for today

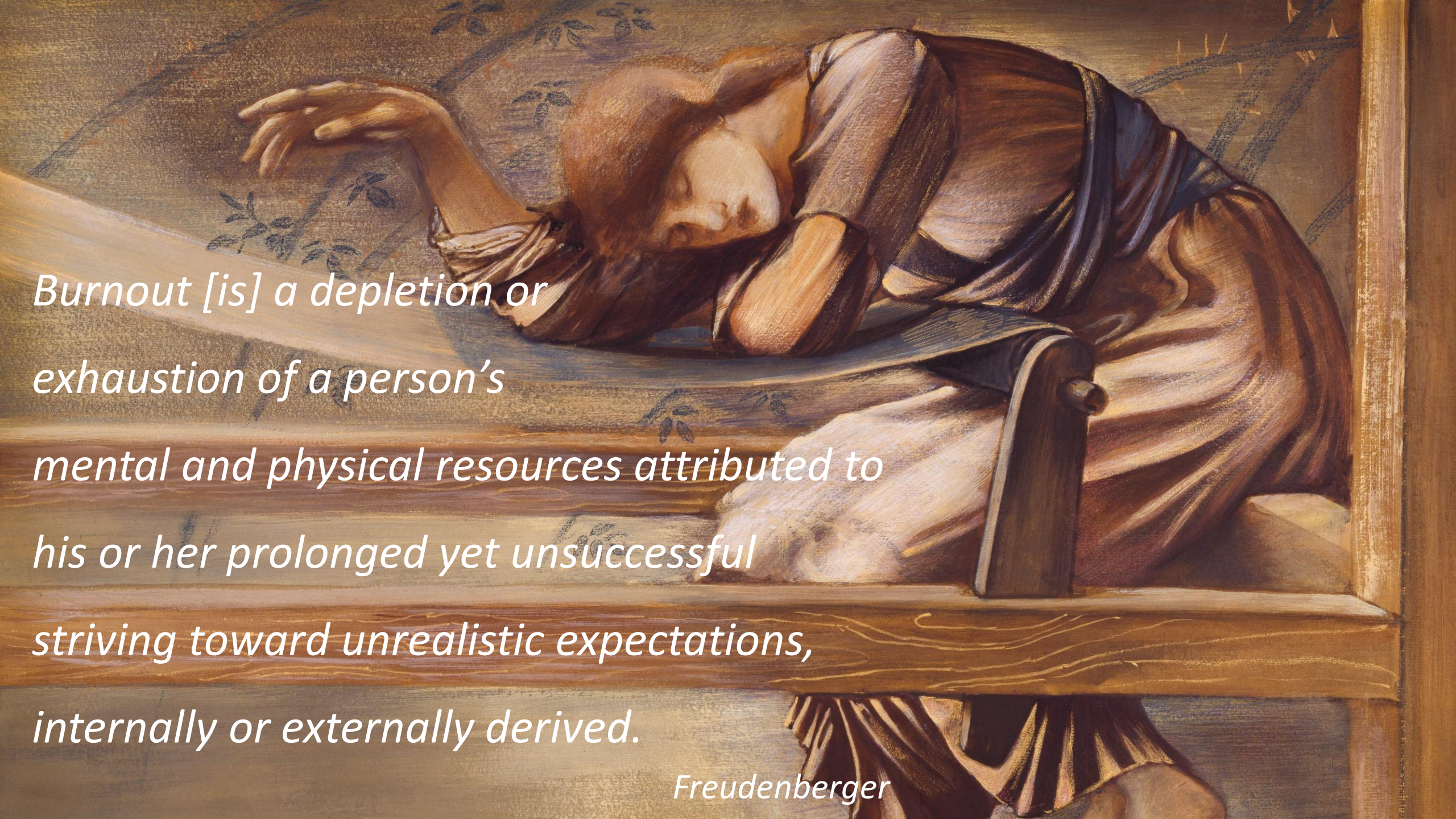
- Compassion fatigue, Burnout & Vicarious trauma
- Systemic factors
- Self awareness as key
- Self care plan
- Reconditioning your mindset
- “Bigger-than-self” goals and values
- Vicarious resilience and growth



Visualisation  
practice to  
ground and  
centre

# Compassion fatigue

- Burnout + Vicarious trauma
- Cumulative outcome of helping many people in extreme or challenging circumstances
- *A progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of the conditions of their work.* Daniel Lancaster
- Broad reaching effects
  - Physical, cognitive, emotional, relational, sexual, spiritual changes
  - Attitude and behaviour toward work/job changes
    - eg cynical, dispirited, preoccupation, less invested, over work, absenteeism, leave the field, retire
- Complex and multifaceted contributing factors

A painting of a woman in a dark, draped dress slumped over a wooden desk, her head resting on her hand, symbolizing exhaustion or burnout. The background is a textured, brownish-grey with faint blue floral patterns. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her face and the folds of her dress.

*Burnout [is] a depletion or exhaustion of a person's mental and physical resources attributed to his or her prolonged yet unsuccessful striving toward unrealistic expectations, internally or externally derived.*

*Freudenberger*

# Burnout

Over working, over doing, pushing beyond limits


*“When the meaning goes out of what we are doing but we’re too invested to notice” Dina Glouberman*

- Exhausted, worn out, loss of energy – emotional, mental, physical – **not remedied by sleep**
- Frustration, anger, depression, unhappiness, hopelessness, numb, disillusioned, loss of passion – **joylessness**
- Increase in addictive-type behaviours
- Social withdrawal
- Feeling disconnected / cut off from others and from self - *“loss of soul”*  
*“spiritual crisis” “dark night of the soul”*



# Burnout

- Physical problems/pain
  - back, heart problems, chronic fatigue, IBS, adrenal and thyroid problems, viral susceptibility
- Feel you can't do your work effectively (as you have done in the past)
- Continuum of severity
- Recognise the signals before they become annihilating



*[Vicarious trauma refers to] a transformation of a [trauma workers] inner experience resulting from empathetic engagement with the clients trauma material.*

Perlman (in Berthold)

# Vicarious Trauma

- Vicarious exposure to trauma is natural and inevitable when working with traumatised clients
- Secondary exposure to trauma via empathetic engagement with client's trauma stories
- Cumulative effect of this work on the feelings, memories, self esteem, cognitive schemas, and sense of safety in the professional – similar to PTSD
  - Fear, anxiety, depression, despair, pain, loss of energy, nightmares, sleep issues
  - Experience aspects of the trauma – intrusive images and thoughts
  - Change behaviours, attitudes and beliefs – eg. avoidance of triggers/associated activities
  - Boundaries between personal and professional hard to maintain - leaky

# Vicarious Trauma

- Higher risk if
  - there's a personal history of post traumatic stress reaction - countertransference
  - work longer hours with trauma survivors
- Transference and counter transference
  - The “baggage” the you and your client bring into the relationship that impacts the present
- Empath or highly sensitive person? – highly attuned to others experiences

# Vicarious Trauma

## **Empathy**

- Interpersonal phenomena of imitation, resonance and simulation
- Our capacity to experience what another person is experiencing
- Builds connection, trust, and meaningful relationships – seen, heard, understood
- Sense and feel and experience another person just by being with them – emotional contagion

# Vicarious Trauma

“Empathetic strain”, “feeling too much”, “infected” by clients trauma

- exacerbated by counter transference
- react with either
  - empathetic withdrawal - avoidance, detachment, intellectualising, denial, hostility or blame
  - over identification – rescuing, enmeshment, co-dependency?

# Systemic and cultural factors

Contribute to / intersect with / amplify burnout and vicarious trauma

- You don't feel qualified or that you have enough expertise or skill
- Excessive workload and unrealistic expectations
- Most of your work is frontline / high load of traumatised or vulnerable clients
- Sense of powerlessness (no choice)
- Bureaucracy
- Poorly resourced work places – understaffed, underfunded, inexperienced staff,
- Lack of opportunities for reward, professional growth
- Inadequate supervision, training
- Interpersonal issues with work colleagues
- Workplace culture that encourages “toughness” and discourages vulnerability and openness
- Isolation from family/friends due to the nature of work
- Patriarchy – embedded systems of inequality and power imbalance, cultural rules and expectations

# POLL

Based off what's just been described, have you ever experienced, or are experiencing now ...

1. Burnout?
2. Vicarious trauma?
3. Compassion fatigue (burnout + vicarious trauma)?
4. Not sure
5. No



# Self awareness as Foundation

- Become aware of and understand what is going on in your nervous system – incl body, mind, energy, behaviour
- Commit to building your resources for nervous system regulation
  - Build your skills to notice and name your inner experiences
  - Transform how energy/emotions move within you
  - Sense of agency
  - Nervous system synchronicity – your N.S can affect your client's N.S. positively
- High risk of compassion fatigue =
  - lack of awareness of body-mind
  - misread or ignore cues of stress/discomfort
  - overfocus on the distress of others at your expense

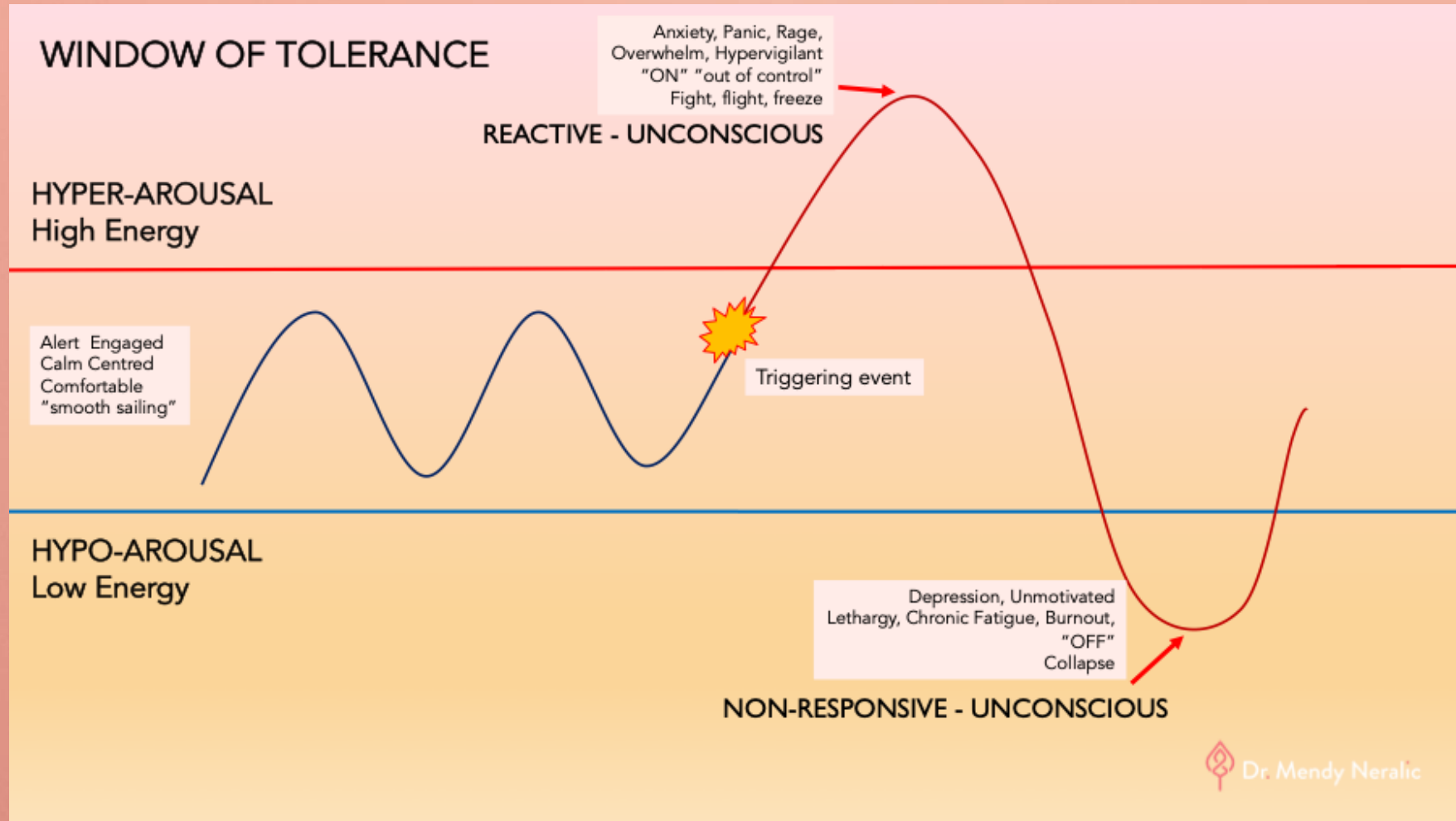
A close-up photograph of a tree trunk covered in vibrant green moss. The tree trunk is on the left side of the frame, and the moss is thick and textured. In the foreground, a single blue feather lies on the ground among some dry twigs and more moss. The background is a blurred forest scene with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Micro  
CHECK-IN  
awareness  
practice

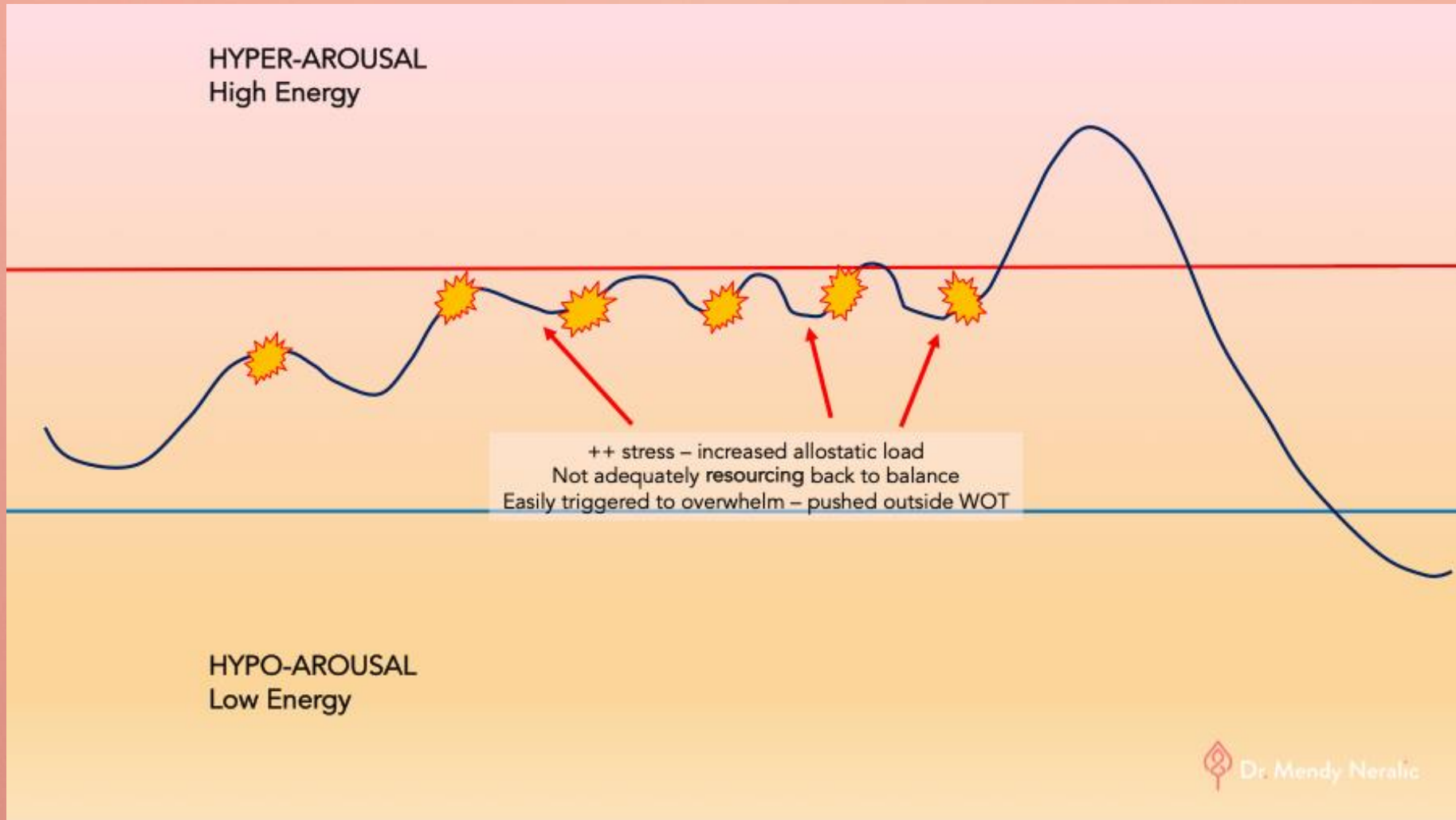
# Self awareness as Foundation

- CHECK IN practice – ***what is happening in my inner world right now?***
- Track and scan through out the body and notice and name sensations
  - tight, soft, tingle, throb, stabbing, temperature (hot, warm, cool, cold), weight (heavy, light, spacious, dense, pressure), movement (pulling, twisting, squeezing, swirling, pulsing, shooting)
- Notice the quality of breath
  - fast /slow, deep/shallow, smooth/jagged, constricted/expansive ...
- Become aware of the quality/nature of thoughts
  - Judging, analysing, problem solving, worrying, in the future, in the past
  - "I'm having the thought that .."*I'm making a fool of myself*" "*She stupid*" "
- Name the emotion and the sensation in the body that goes with it
- Name where you are energetically
  - in your WOT or high/low/fast/slow/heavy/floaty etc

# Window of Tolerance



# Window of Tolerance



# Resourcing yourself

Polyvagal theory – science of connection

- Map onto the Window of Tolerance
- Our N.S. takes us through 3 states through out the day – hierarchy
  - Disconnection - disappearing, withdrawn, collapsed, slow moving
    - Dorsal vagal (lower end of the WOT)
    - Body is soft and energy is slow moving, breath is slow and deep, heart rate is slow, digestion increases
  - Mobilisation - high, driven energy, fast moving, agitation, pushy, loud
    - Sympathetic (Upper end of the WOT)
    - Body is tense, sensations /energy is moving fast, breath and heart rate rate is faster, digestion slows
  - Connection - open, engaged, present, safe, empathetic, centred, playful, excited, stillness, grounded
    - Ventral vagal (middle of the WOT)
    - Body is relaxed and supple, energy is balance, breath is even, HR steady



Vagal  
Brake  
Practice

# Radical Selfcare

Create a **self care plan** for prevention and return to balance – it's a **collective concern**

- Make time to meet your needs and develop an attitude of taking your own needs and longings seriously

*How do I treat my body? Nutrition? Rest? Sleep? Movement and physical activity?*

*Do I make time for fun, play and recreation?*

*How do I meet my needs for connection with family, friends, community?*

*Am I creatively satisfied?*

*Are there personal projects, dreams, ideas I keep putting off for “later” or “not yet”?*

*Am I accessing the support I need? Both personal and professional?*



# Radical Selfcare

**Rituals for leaving work** - Facilitate the transition from work to home -  
Healthy boundaries

- Take 5-15 minutes to consciously close off at the end of the day
- Showering and changing out of work clothes immediately on getting home
- Going for a walk, ride, run, swim, dance
- Spend time in your garden /park/ nature
- Symbolic beginning and end to each day – light a candle, Tibetan bell, 3 deep breathes, prayer
- On your way home read a book/listen to music/podcast (vs check emails, text, scroll ...)

# Radical Selfcare



***Is there anything that you do that helps you leave work at work?***

***Can you begin to experiment by trying a ritual and reflect on its effect? Adapt and change it. Talk and compare rituals with colleagues.***

***Draw a representation of how you spend your time and direct your energy right now. Work, Study, Physical activity, Leisure time, creative projects, connection with family friends community.***

***Does anything need adjusting? What would need to change or be sacrificed to allow more of your needs to be met and greater balance?***

# Dismantle your conditioning

## What is driving the striving ? and perpetuating the fire to burn out of control?

- Become aware of your unhelpful/dysfunctional /toxic beliefs, attitudes, that drive behaviour – operate in the background
  - About work, giving, receiving, success, failure, boundaries, discipline, emotional expression, sense of self and self worth
- Tendency toward
  - self sacrifice
  - control and unrelenting standards/competition
  - approval seeking/people pleasing
  - judgement and criticism
  - mistrust

# Dismantle your conditioning

- List the rules you live by - ***shoulds, oughts, musts and have tos***
- Can be attached and blind to these - righteousness
  - *unconscious and unchallenged* rules and expectations for behaviour
  - impressed upon us by our family, culture, experiences - **CONDITIONING**
  - may not be an accurate representation of TRUTH or USEFUL in the present
  - **Take small conscious 'risks' that challenge the rules**
- Become aware and be willing to **START** working with unresolved or unprocessed hurts and traumas
- Learn to listen to your inner guidance and knowing and intuition –  
***“Misbehave with integrity”***

# “Bigger-than-self” goals

Guiding principles – **ATTITUDES** to help orient you toward conscious choices that guide your actions and how to “be”

- Things you **WANT** to live by, not what you think you **SHOULD** do - **INNER GUIDANCE vs conditioning**
- Arrive at through **intuition, imagination and listening to soul - creative thinking** vs analytic thought
- Deep connection to what is important vs fear-based striving and competition and proving yourself
- **VALUES** - Hold them lightly (vs righteousness, fixed)

# “Bigger-than-self” goals

*How do I want to represent myself in the area of \_\_\_\_\_ ?*

*What’s so important about \_\_\_\_\_ ?*

*Deep down, what really matters to me?*

*What makes me feel alive, inspired and energised?*

*What do I want my life [in the area of \_\_\_\_\_ ] to be about?*

*What kind of positive impact do I want to have with my colleagues/clients/workspace?*

*How do I want to contribute to my workplace /community / the world?*

*What change do I want to create?*

# “Bigger-than-self” goals

Role redesign

***If you could rewrite your job description from a “bigger than self” perspective, how would that look?***

***What would the people your work with or serve say (or would you like them to say) about how your role helps them?***

- Connect to a sense of *why*
- Creative process – requires imagination
- Visualise / Reimagine your role in this way – what do you see?
- Articulate and **practice a small change in your behaviour, or change in your environment** that supports this as an attitude and goal
- Frequently **CHECK IN if you’re in alignment** with these “bigger than self” goals or acting from a place of ego

Acceptance  
Accountability  
Adventure  
Athletics  
Animals  
Art  
Authenticity  
Celebration  
Challenge  
Collaboration  
Commitment  
Compassion  
Competence  
Courage  
Creativity  
Curiosity

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Discipline  
Efficiency  
Enthusiasm  
Equality  
Ethics  
Fairness  
Faith  
Family  
Freedom  
Friendship  
Fun  
Generosity  
Gratitude  
Harmony  
Health  
Helping

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Honesty  
Humour  
Independence  
Inner strength  
Innovation  
Integrity  
Joy  
Leadership  
Learning  
Love  
Loyalty  
Mindfulness  
Nature  
Openness  
Patience  
Peace

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Personal growth  
Politics  
Pragmatism  
Problem solving  
Reliability  
Resourcefulness  
Self compassion  
Simplicity  
Strong  
Teaching  
Tradition  
Trust  
Unique  
Willingness  
Wisdom

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# Vicarious Resilience & Growth

- Post traumatic growth associated with connecting with your clients stories
  - Because of the stressful and traumatic event there has been growth; a sense of inner strength, compassion, appreciation for life, stronger spiritual or faith connection, establishment of a new life path
- Being inspired by your clients resilience and recovery
- Requires empathetic engagement and attunement
- Find hope and meaning + recognise your own capacity for coping and resilience + giving

# Vicarious Resilience & Growth

## HOW?

- Genuine empathy NOT pity
  - Pity keeps you safe but over protective
- "strong back – soft front" *Roshi Joan Halifax*
  - Being open and willing to feel your clients distress and imagine yourself in their experience – resonance - touched by their suffering
  - Objective, engaged and open observer vs passive observer
  - "tend and befriend" – stress activating prosocial behaviour
  - Feel seen heard and valued
  - If you cut off and numb the "negative" you also cut off the "positive"
  - Allow grief, loss, emotions to move through – **soft front**
  - Not be attached to outcome

# Vicarious Resilience & Growth

## HOW?

- Am I over identifying with my clients story?
- You are not helpless to resist being induced to feel others emotions and experiences
- Boundaries + Connection - Titrate
  - move in and out of the physical, energetic and mental pace
  - Step back and shift position – physically and mentally/ energetically
  - Ground and centre – **strong back**
- Temporarily (or permanently) switching roles, populations
- Expand your role to include other tasks, responsibilities, projects

# Vicarious Resilience & Growth

- Sharing your experiences of vicarious resilience can amplify their effect and be “contagious” – peer support, supervision, teaching, writing, art
- What is the “restorative narrative”? – retell stories that reflects strength, courage, compassion, and resilience

***What are my own stories/direct experience of being inspired by my clients?***

***Which client stories inspire hope and meaning?***

***What changes in my attitude, beliefs, behaviour have occurred as a result of this experience? Could telling my story of vicarious resilience inspire/help others?***



*When we burnout, its our old  
personality that burns itself out.  
Then our soul fire begins to light  
our way and bring us joy*

Dina Glouberman

# Take home

Firstly ....

CHANGE IS HARD

JUST BEGIN

LITTLE AND OFTEN



# Take home

## **Pick 1 thing you can start paying attention to or doing differently**

- Do regular check-ins with how you are relating to your work, clients, colleagues, and impact on other areas of your life – is there balance?
- Develop a self care plan – what is essential/ not essential?
- Practice noticing and naming body /breath sensations in various situations with various people throughout your day – name where you are in your WOT
- Practice a new self regulation technique and learn/ add a new ones regularly
- Start a leaving work ritual – experiment and adapt over the next month



# Take home

- Become aware of your unconscious belief and rules – experiment with dismantling them through your actions – PARADIGM SHIFT
- Start to identify and take action based off your “bigger than self” principles – pay more attention to the quiet inner voice of intuition vs conditioning
- Advocate for regular peer supervision – mindfulness + regular check ins + share stories of vicarious resilience and strength + talk about how you apply your “bigger than self” ideas + advocate or diversity in your role
- Start tweaking your “pie” to bring more energy balance to all aspects of your life – make one conscious change this week (based off your “bigger than self” ideas

# Resources and references

Roshi Joan Halifax on TED

[https://www.ted.com/talks/joan\\_halifax\\_compassion\\_and\\_the\\_true\\_meaning\\_of\\_empathy?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/joan_halifax_compassion_and_the_true_meaning_of_empathy?language=en)

Window of tolerance – blog on my website

<https://www.drmendyneralic.com.au/blog/2021/3/15/window-of-tolerance>

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