

When Empathy Hurts

Launch of *RecoverMe*

Dublin Castle June 4th 2014

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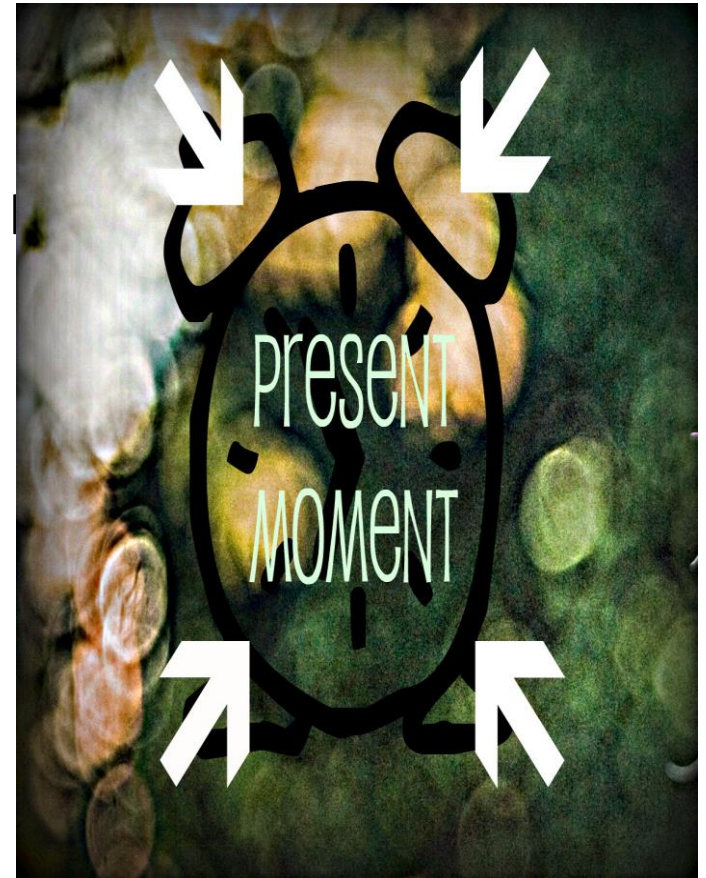
St Vincent's University Hospital & School of Psychology UCD

St. Vincent's University Hospital



The Pause

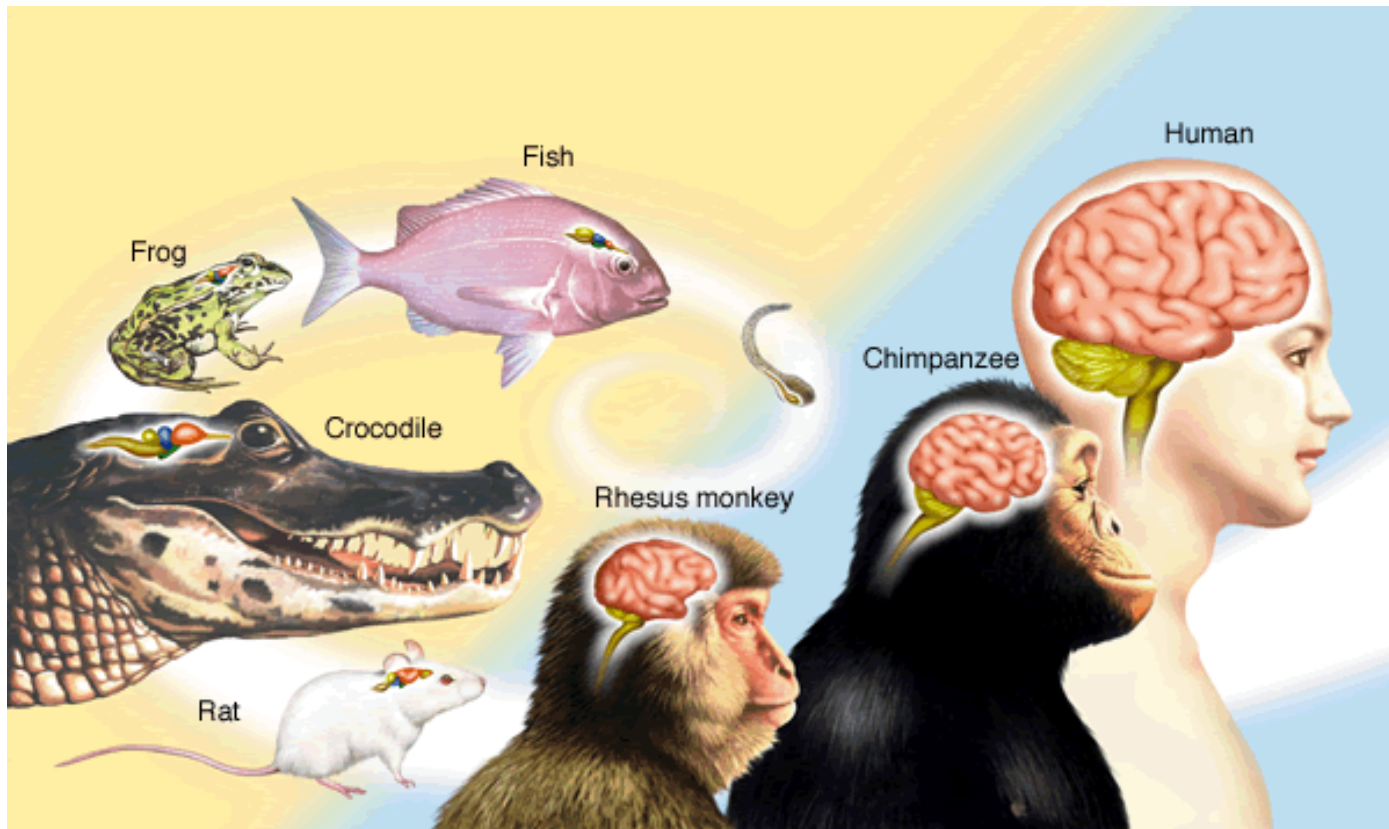
1. **Breath** – (place hand on belly)
2. **Body** – (feel your feet on the floor, and how close your shoulders are to your ears!)
3. **Emotion** – (identify & name)
4. **Breath** – (feel belly expanding and contracting)



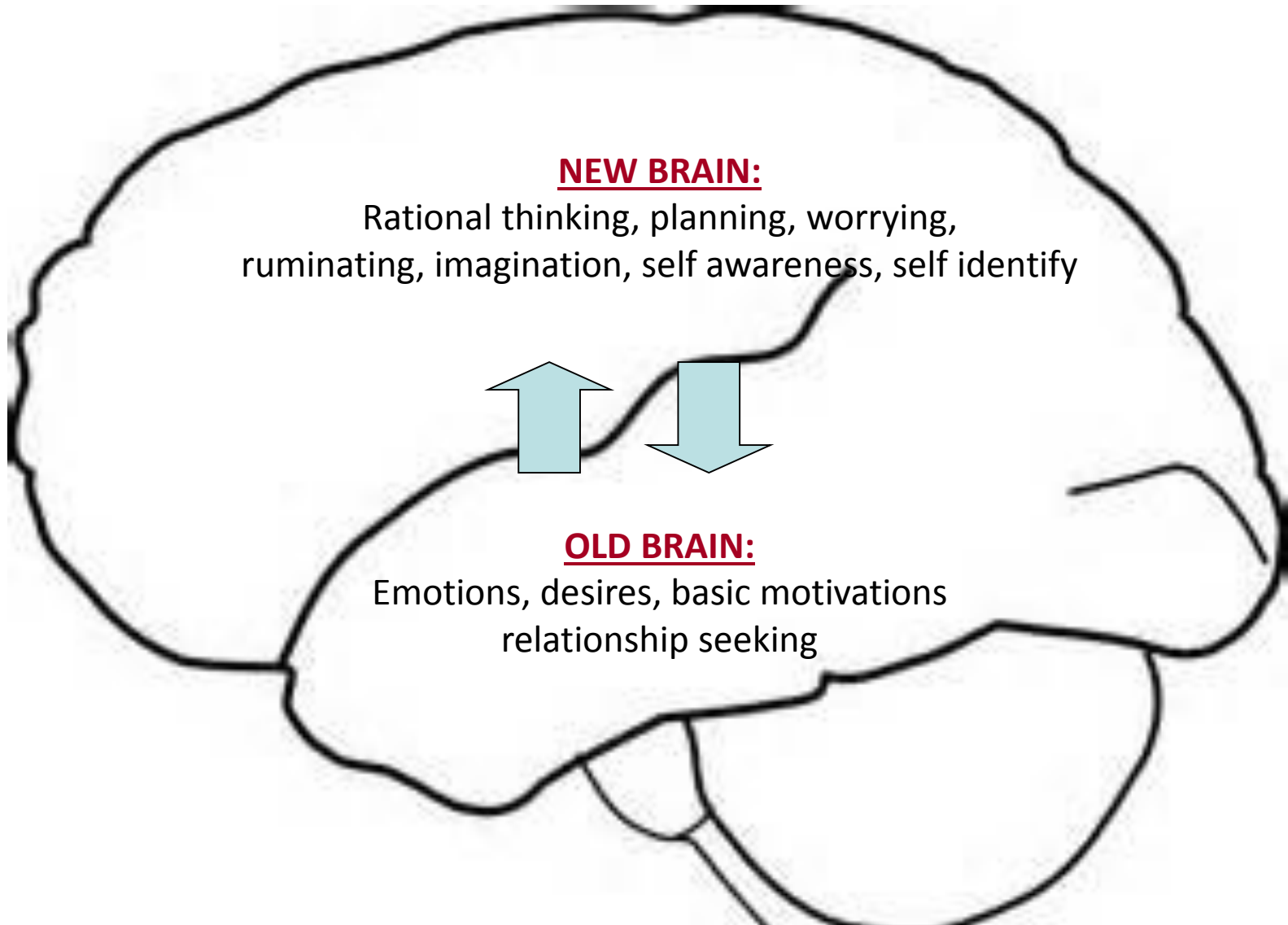
Our biological selves

We have minds, brains and bodies which developed as the result of millions of years of evolution. Much of what goes on in our minds is not of 'our design' and not our fault. We were designed to feel, want and need certain things.

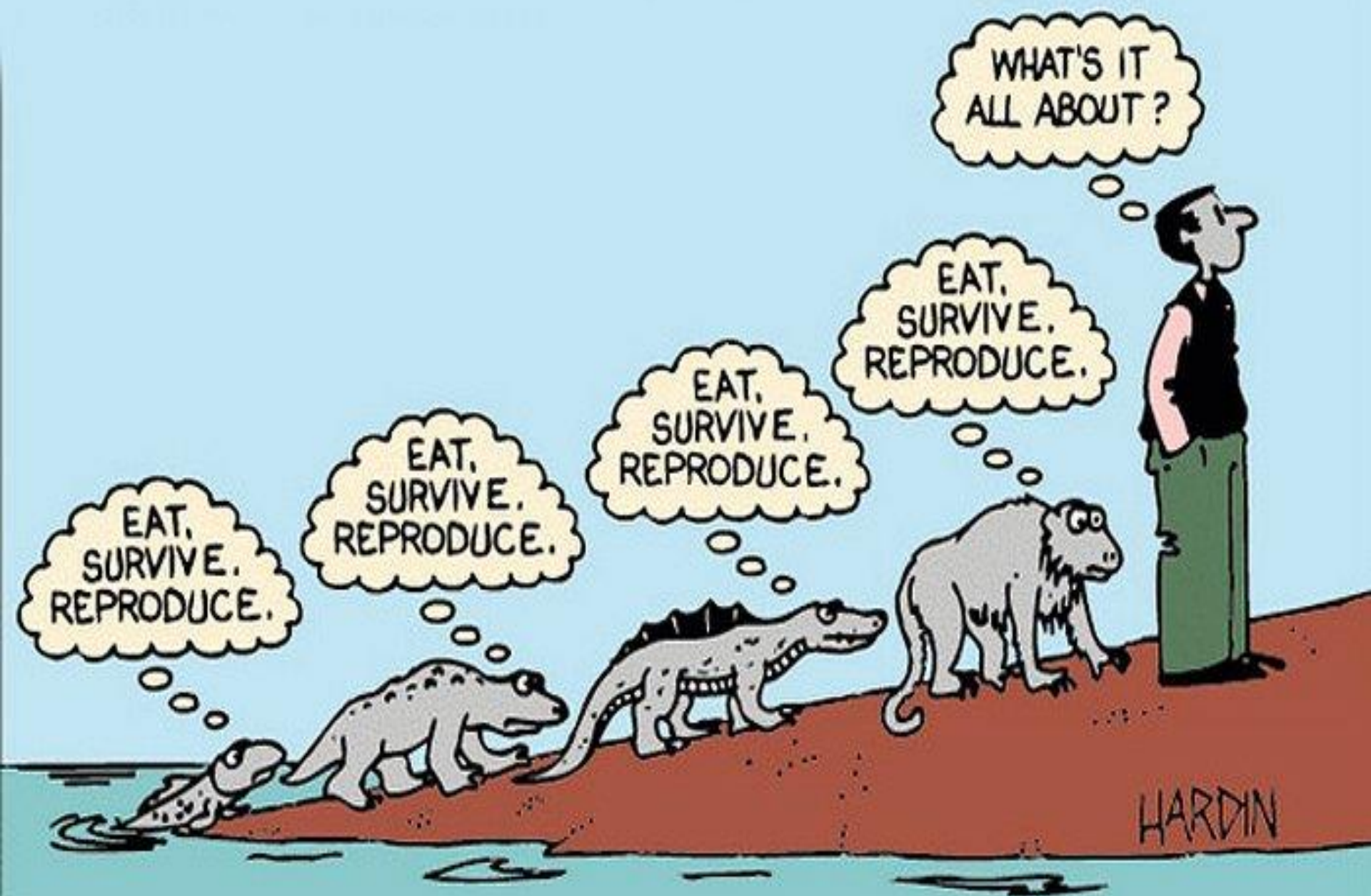
We are designed for survival, not for happiness!



Our Tricky Brains



The interaction between old and new 'minds' can create conflicts within us. It can get us stuck into unhelpful loops.



HARDIN

What if I can't
cope tomorrow



Animals don't worry about what will happen tomorrow or
what happened yesterday

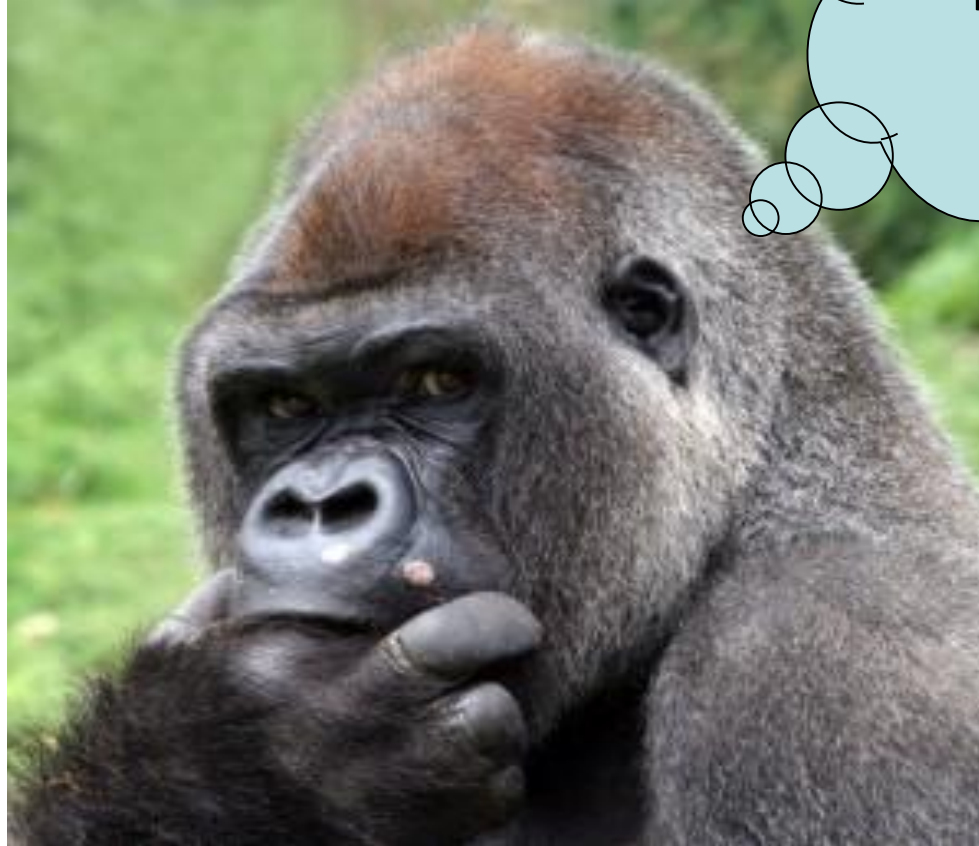


Animals don't worry about their self image



Why am I
getting angry
again? I
shouldn't be
so angry?

Animals don't have 'new brain' areas to question, judge or criticise their own natural responses and experiences



I think she is
upset ...
I feel so bad
for her

Animals don't do courses in Empathy Building We in the caring professions
are at risk of empathy causing us harm

TWO TYPES OF EMPATHY

- ***“AFFECTIVE EMPATHY” REFERS TO THE SENSATIONS AND FEELINGS WE GET IN RESPONSE TO OTHERS’ EMOTIONS; THIS CAN INCLUDE MIRRORING WHAT THAT PERSON IS FEELING, OR JUST FEELING STRESSED WHEN WE DETECT ANOTHER’S FEAR OR ANXIETY.***
- ***“COGNITIVE EMPATHY,” (PERSPECTIVE TAKING) REFERS TO OUR ABILITY TO IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND OTHER PEOPLES’ EMOTIONS.***

Three key dimensions of empathy

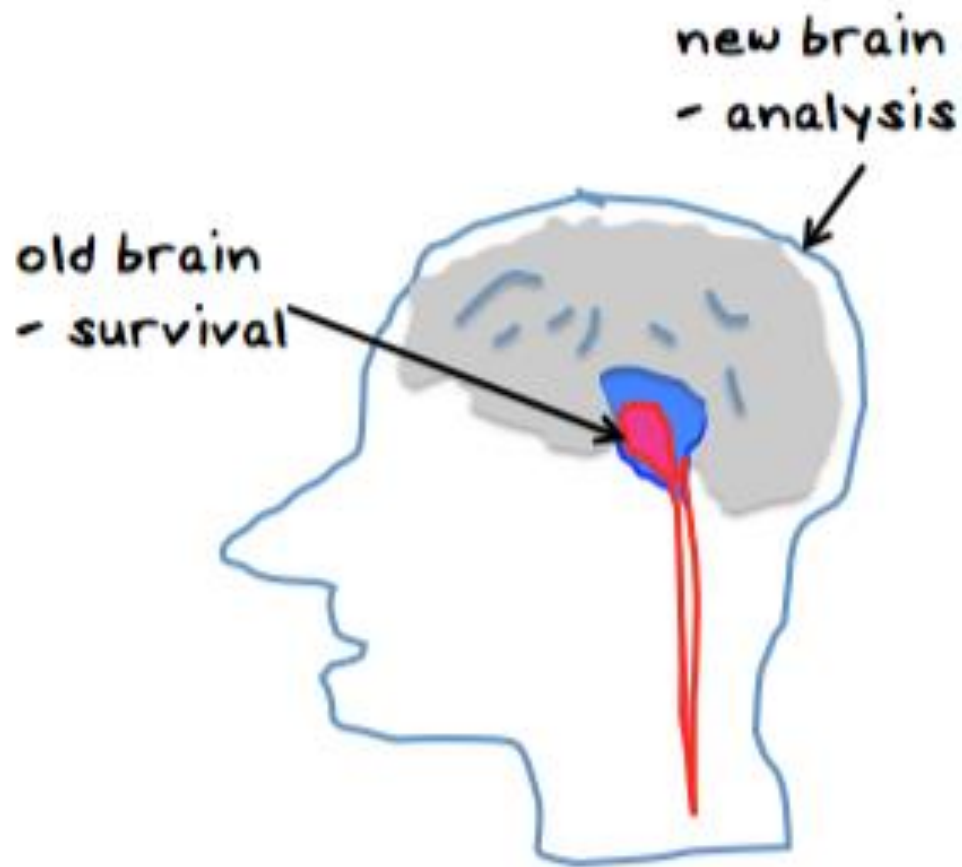
Perspective taking – adopting the perspective of others in interpersonal situations (theory of mind)

Empathic concern – feelings of care & concern for others

Personal distress – reacting with discomfort to the emotional experience of others

(Kingsbury, 2009)

Our brains are trickyand then we add
empathy....



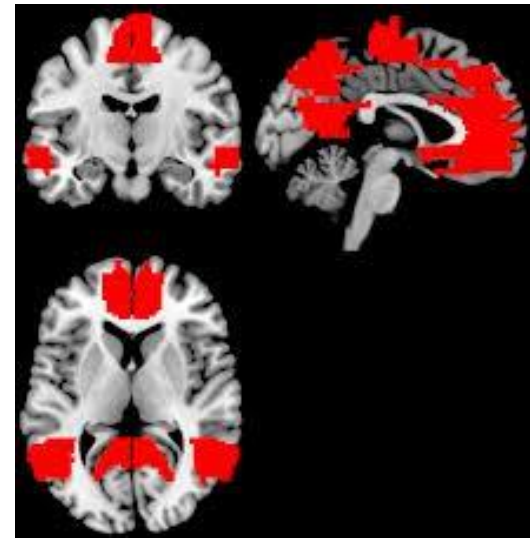
- Our 'new brains' are built by our early relationships and our early environment.



- We might have chosen a very different 'script' for ourselves

Brain Default Mode Network

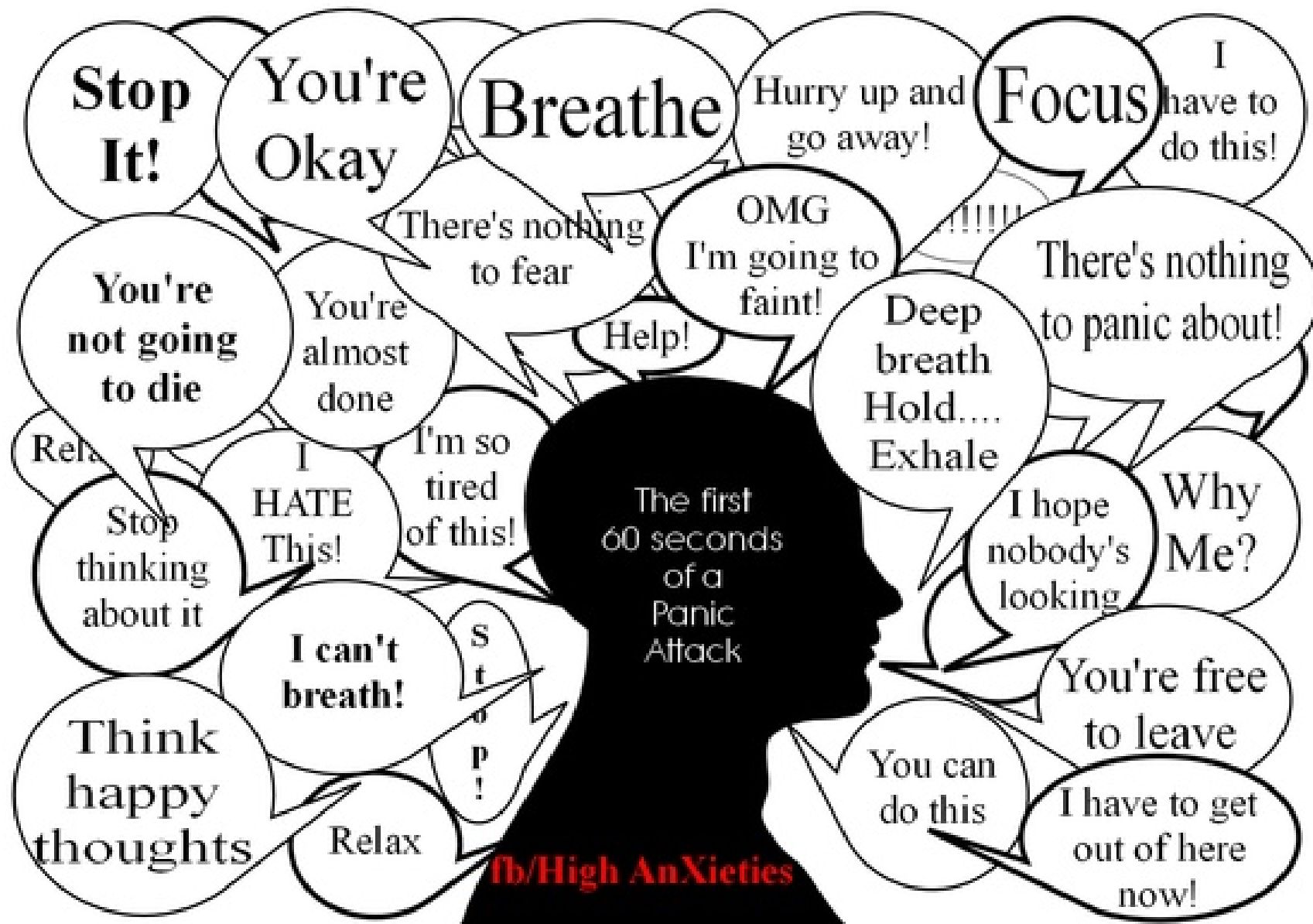
- The brain's capacity/tendency to wander
- Happens whenever we are not actively focusing our attention
- Keeps us on our toes... Tells us what we should be attending to... better safe than sorry ...
- Stimulates areas of our brain...
Over time increasing these circuits



Better safe than sorry



ANXIETY GIRL!
able to jump to the worst conclusion
in a single bound!



Our new brains leave us vulnerable to overloading on comparisons, judgements, plans and evaluations.

How we react and respond

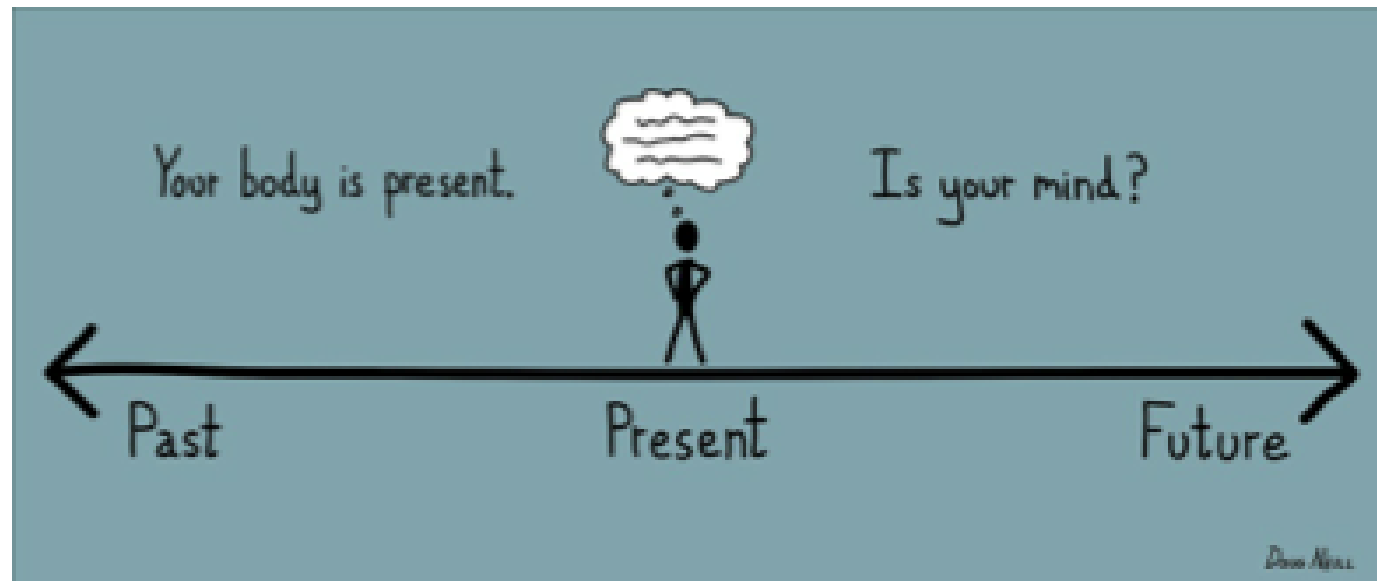
The way we see, appraise and evaluate our
problems

=

Key to our experience of distress (and this
implies a critical factor of control!)

“Fight or Flight” System





Stuck in Reactivity

- Automatic reactivity prevents us from seeing clearly, solving problems creatively, and expressing emotion constructively. Ultimately, it hinders from attaining peace of mind.
- Unconscious reactivity detracts deeply from peace of mind.
- Unconscious reactivity often results in us being on high alert or in 'alarm reaction' – Cannon's fight or flight reaction (e.g., the cat response)

What we can do...

This model is based on Lazarus' transactional model of coping which emphasized that our coping behaviour is

active and open to change.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) emphasizes our awareness of options, and ability to come out of 'automatic pilot'.

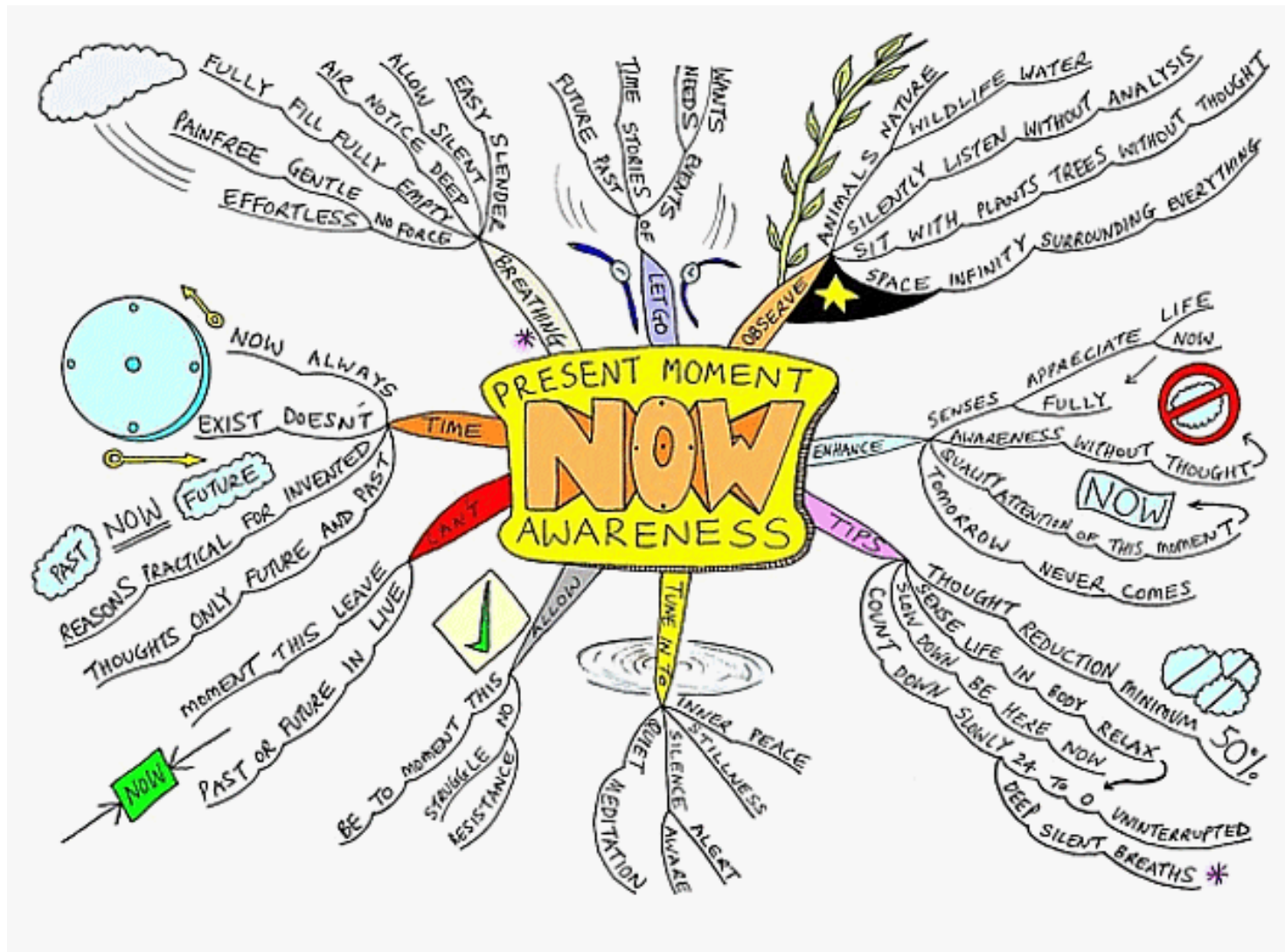
Origins of Mindfulness

- 1970s: Westerners return home from travelling Asia with a new set of tools and techniques from Buddhist tradition of meditation.
- Jon Kabat-Zinn, a young clinical researcher in mental health, and keen meditator, wondered why these mental practices should be limited to Buddhists only?
- Jon Kabat-Zinn introduced this knowledge to western integrative medicine by pioneering the translation of insight meditation into the clinical setting for use with mental health and chronic illness.
- He designed the original 8-week *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)* Programme at University of Massachusetts
- Centre is over 30 years old: Over 19,000 individuals have taken the programme.



What is Mindfulness?

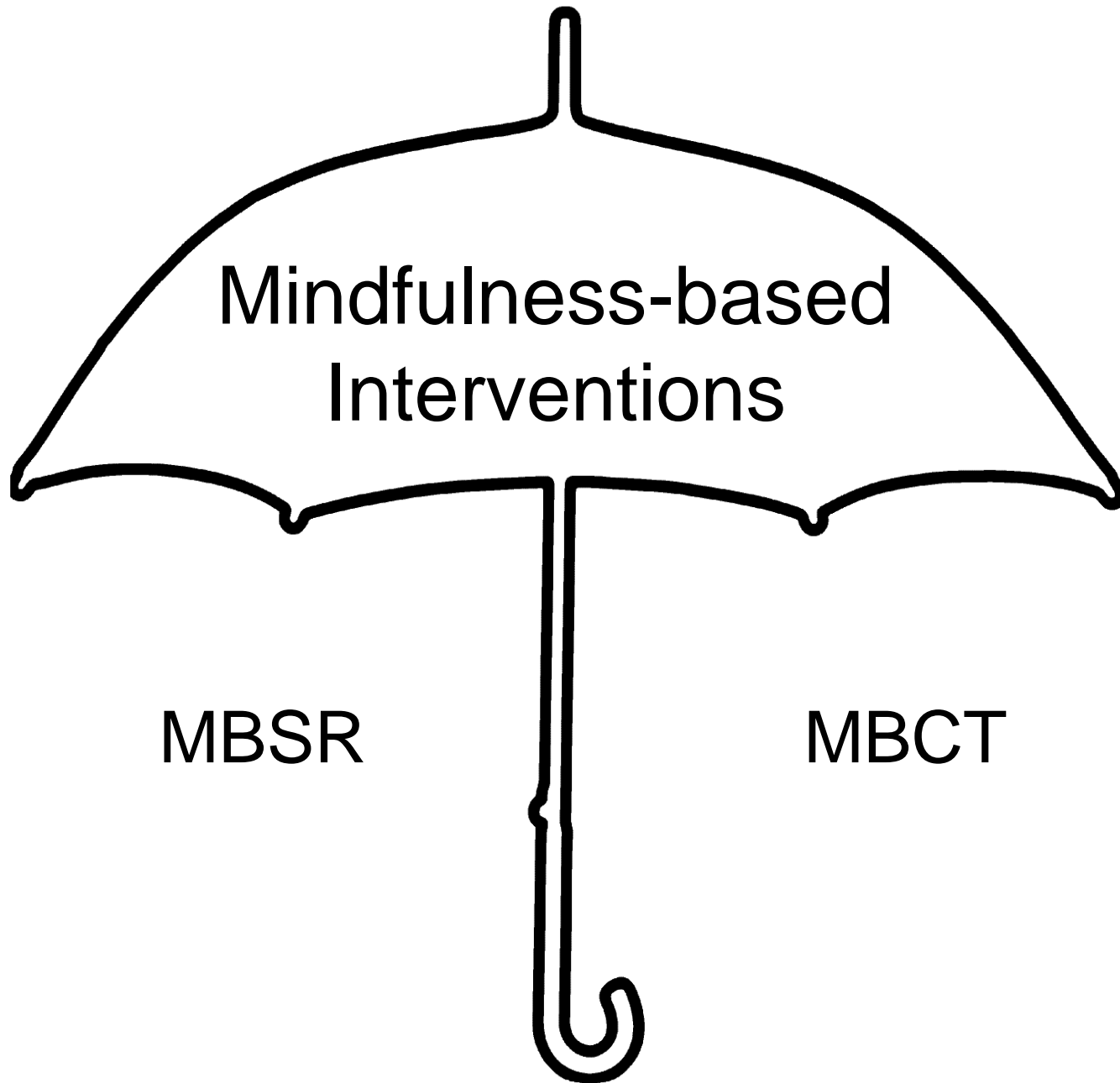
Learning to pay attention, moment by moment, intentionally, with curiosity & compassion.



What Mindfulness Is Not

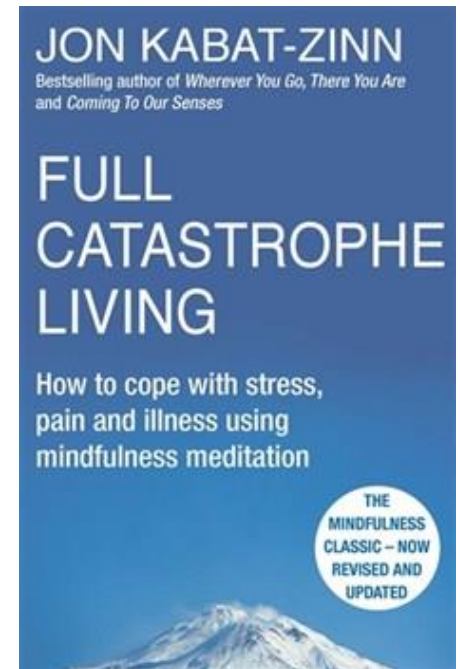
- **Mindfulness is not trying to relax:** When we become aware of what's happening in our lives, it can be anything but relaxing, especially if we're stuck in a difficult situation. What can sometimes happen is that we become less reactive.
- **Mindfulness is not a religion:** Although mindfulness has been practiced by Buddhist nuns and monks for over 2,500 years, any purposeful activity that increases awareness of moment-to-moment experience is a mindfulness exercise.
- **Mindfulness is not about transcending ordinary life:** Mindfulness is making intimate contact with each moment of our lives, no matter how trivial or mundane.
- **Mindfulness is not emptying the mind of thoughts:** The brain will always produce thoughts – that's what it does. Mindfulness allows us to develop a more harmonious relationship with our thoughts and feelings.
- **Mindfulness is not difficult:** You shouldn't feel disheartened when you discover that your mind wanders incessantly. That's the nature of the mind. It's also the nature of the mind to eventually become aware of its wandering. Ironically, it's in the very moment when you despair that you're not mindful that you've become mindful.
- **Mindfulness is not escape from pain:** Think of pain as an angry bull: When it's confined to a tight stall, it will be wild and try to escape. When it's in a wide-open field, it will calm down. Mindfulness makes emotional space for pain.





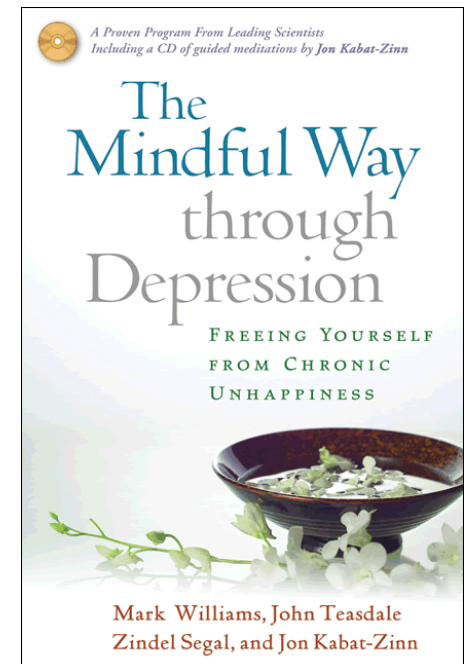
Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

- Developed as an 8-week programme at the Stress Reduction Clinic at UMass, USA by Kabat-Zinn in 1979
- Participants come weekly for ~2.5hrs and complete daily mindfulness meditations at home
- The principle of MBSR is mindfulness, for which Kabat-Zinn offers a working definition of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally”. Individuals learn to:
 1. *Live more fully, with appreciation in the present moment*
 2. *Reduce the physical effects of long-term stress on the body*
 3. *Identify habitual, maladaptive ways of handling stress and choose healthy alternatives*
 4. *Improve emotional reactivity and learn to handle our responses better (e.g. anger)*
 5. *Become more sensitive to one's own and others' needs*
 6. *Communicate more effectively and with compassionate*



Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

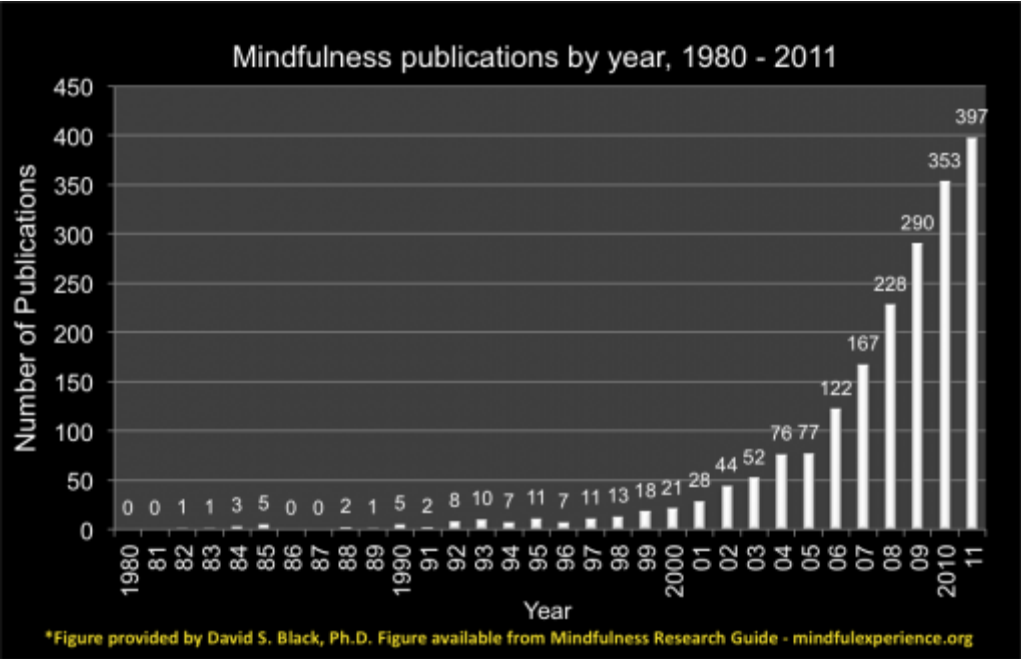
- Synthesis of mindfulness techniques and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Designed for individuals with chronic depression
- Developed by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale, but based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's MBSR programme.



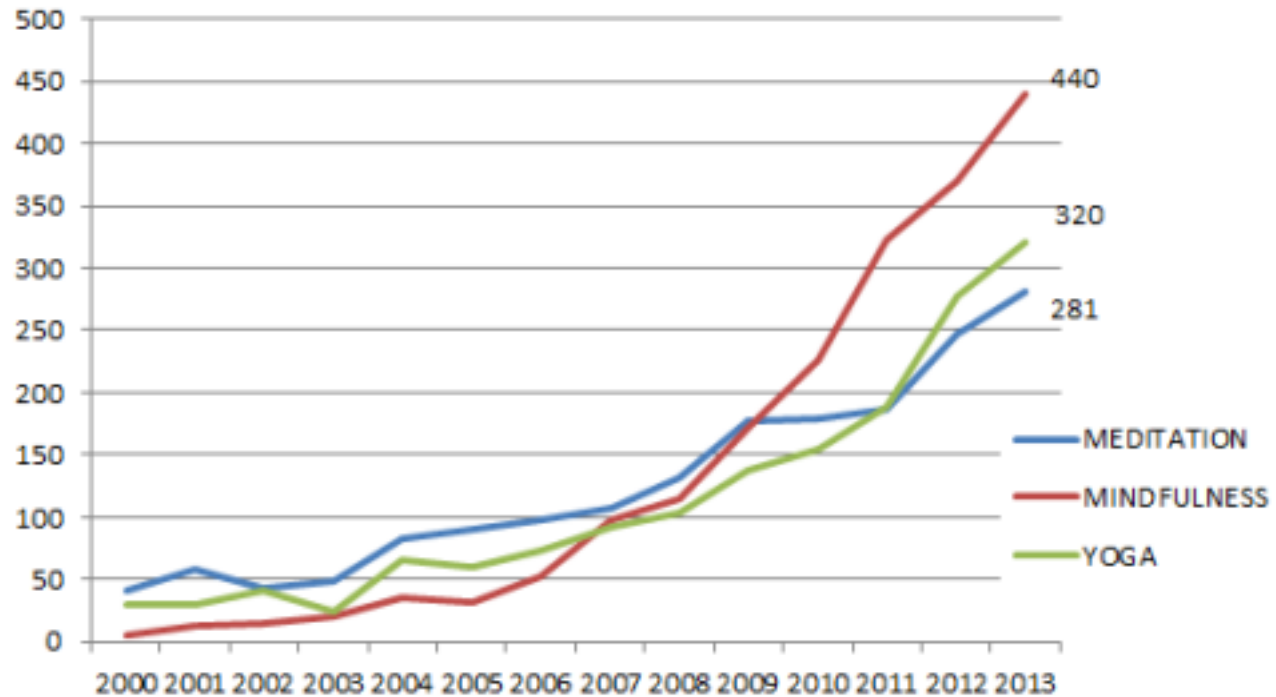
Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

- The U.K. National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) has endorsed MBCT as an “effective treatment for prevention of relapse.”
- Since 2004, it is the NHS UK’s recommended treatment for the prevention of recurrent depression.

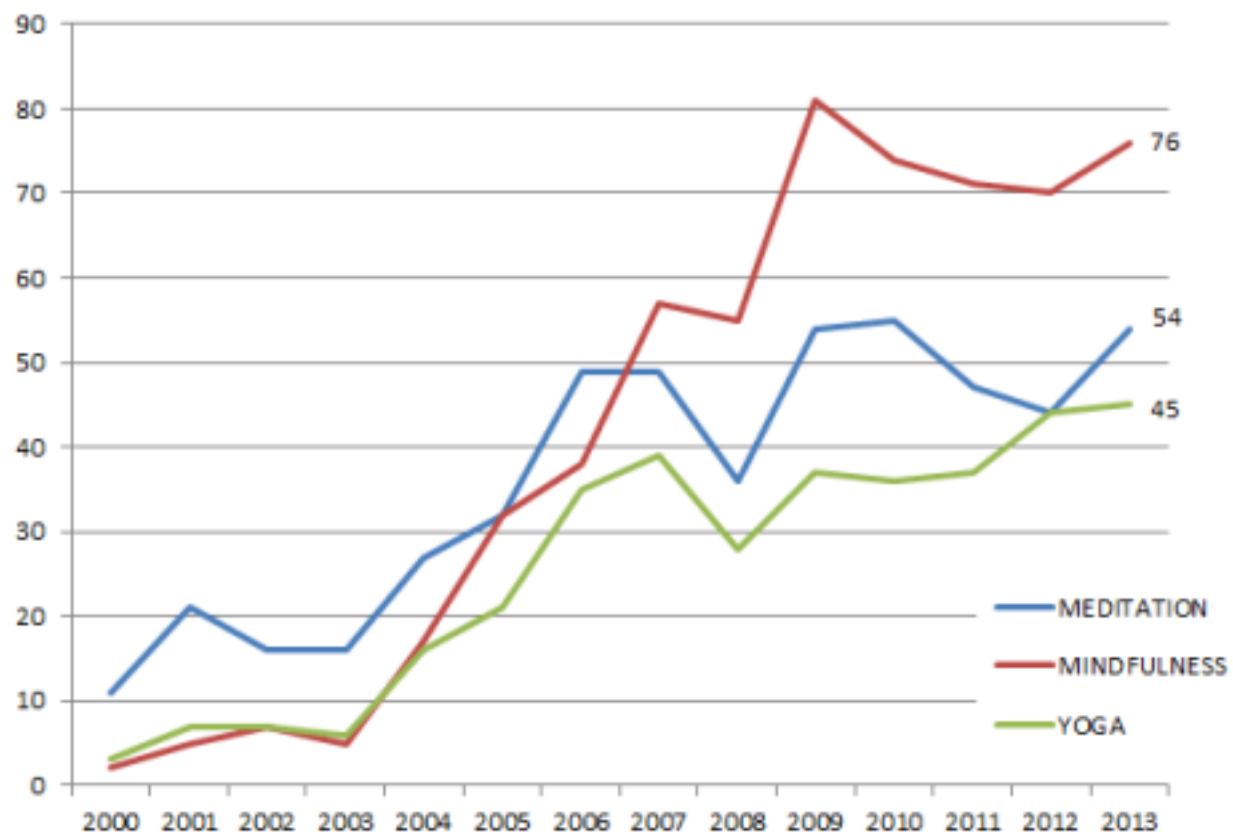




Peer-reviewed publications (pub-med) 2000 to 2013



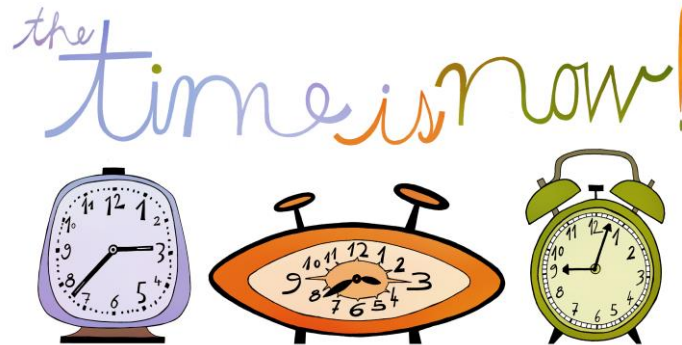
Grants awarded (NIH) 2000 to 2013



MEDITATION



Why Bother?



Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) emphasizes that, **during mindfulness, we develop an awareness of our options and the ability to *come out of 'automatic pilot'***: i.e. our general state of high alertness that helps us to manage with the many challenges of modern living, but often prevents us from seeing clearly.

'Coming to terms with things as they are' results in healing (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Metacognition





A note of caution

- **Attention training alone?** In a memorable phrase, the Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot once suggested that: “humankind cannot bear too much reality”.
- Science / evidence base catching up with practice / popularity
- Compassion as indicated variable mediating change

- The Dalai Lama (Berger, 2006) said ‘empathy is really what we are describing when we talk about compassion fatigue...
- A state of psychological, emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, occupational exhaustion that occurs as the counselors' own wounds are revisited by their clients' life stories of chronic illness, disability, grief, trauma and loss, (Stebnicki, 2008)



From the Latin 'com' and 'pati'

to suffer with

“a deep awareness of suffering coupled
with the desire and effort to relieve it”

Paul Gilbert (2009)

- Compassion has two key psychologies: (1) the ability to open up to, tolerate and understand our suffering; and (2) the psychology of knowing how to alleviate suffering and uproot its causes
(Gilbert & Choden, 2013)

Compassion

Compassion is the acknowledgment that not all pain can be 'fixed' or 'solved' but all suffering is made more approachable in a landscape of compassion.

(Feldman & Kuyken, 2011)

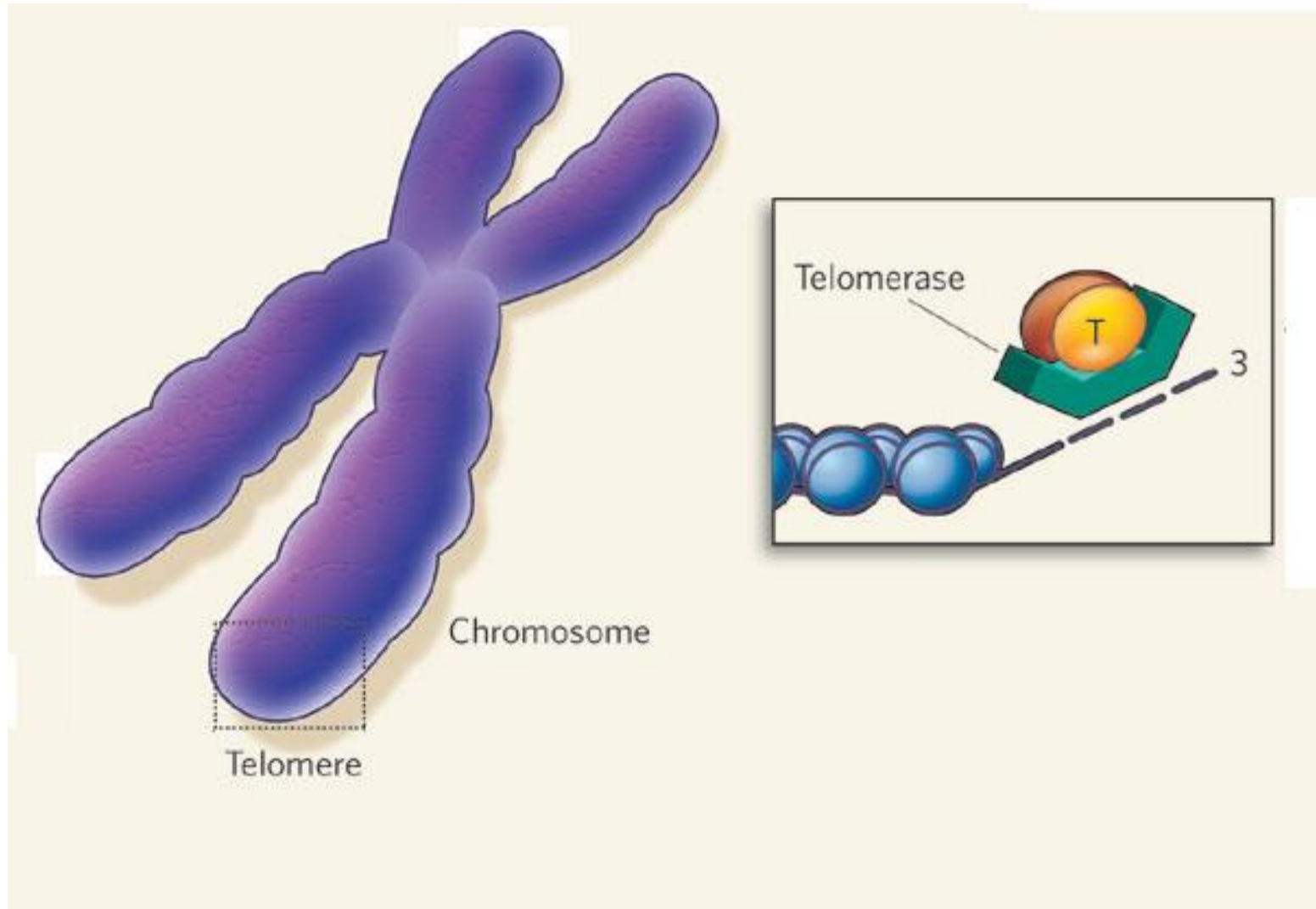
‘Tsewa’

“if your compassion
does not include
yourself it is not
complete”

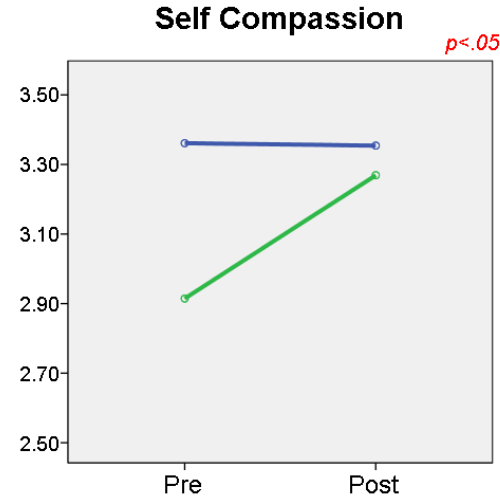
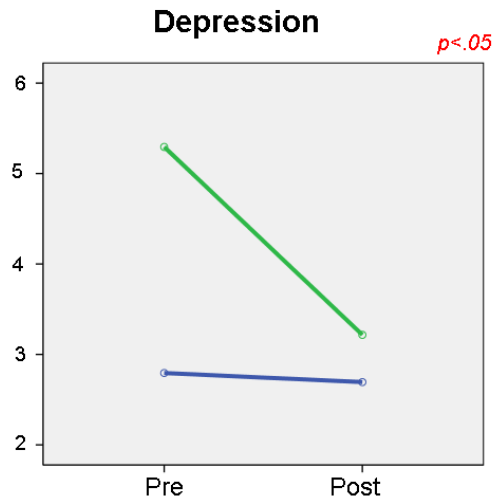
Self-compassion is made up of three interrelated components:

- (1)common humanity vs isolation:** seeing one's experience as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separate and isolating
- (2)self-kindness vs self-judgement:** extending kindness and understanding to oneself rather than harsh judgement and self-criticism
- (3)mindfulness vs overidentification:** holding one's thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over identifying with them.

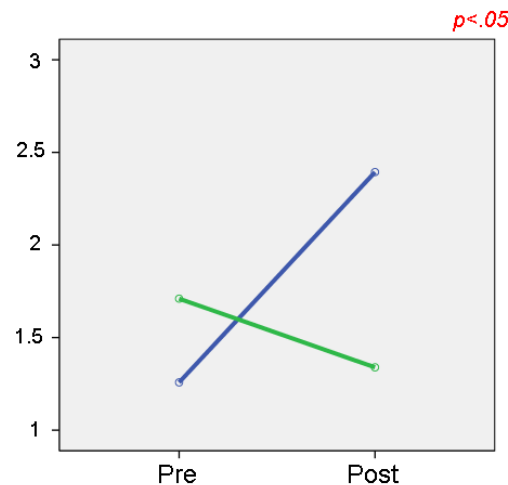
Linking our Biology to our Experience



Linking our Biology to our Experience



PBMC Telomerase Activity



— Control
— MBCT

The second (and third) arrows.....

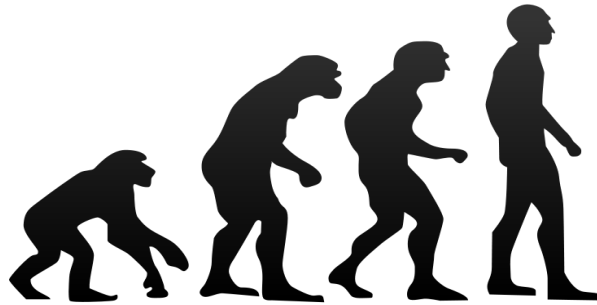


Self-compassion correlates positively with...

- Psychological well being and fulfilment
- Emotional intelligence and positive emotions
- Mindfulness
- Better coping with psychosocial stressors
- Social connectedness
- Better immune response; healthier eating; less smoking

The Flow of Life

- We just 'find ourselves here'

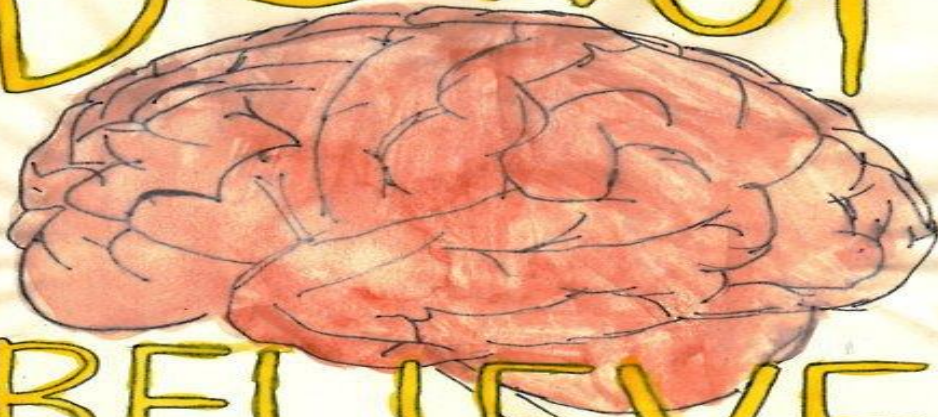


- We didn't chose to be born, nor choose the genes that made us
- We didn't choose our emotions
- We didn't chose our basic temperaments
- We didn't choose our body and how it works
- We didn't choose our basic human desires and needs
- We didn't choose the time in history we were born.

Self-compassion is very different
from self-indulgence!



DO NOT



BELIEVE
EVERYTHING
YOU THINK