



# **The hidden hazard:** Recognising and preventing burnout.

# Spotting burnout in your team: A guide for managers and leaders

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Founder of Balanceology



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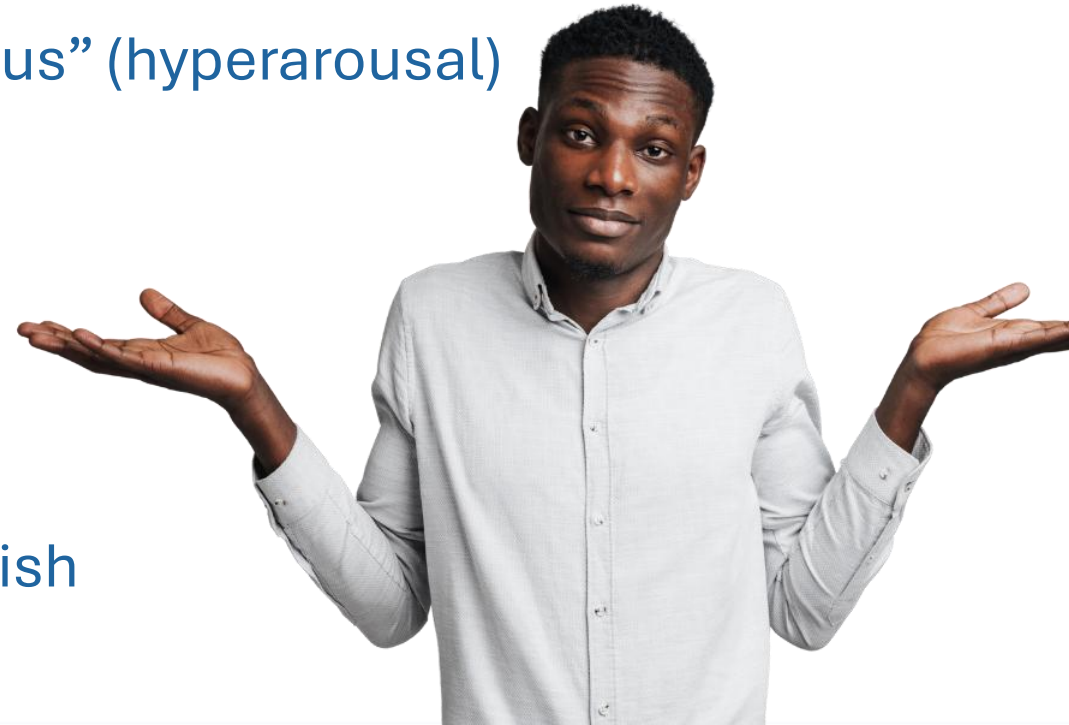
# Welcome

- Founder of Balanceology™
- Author of Burnout to Brilliance
- ICF MCC Executive Coach
- ICF UK Associate Board Member
- ICF Bath & Bristol Group Lead
- Post-Graduate Tutor
- Coach Supervisor
- Psychologies Contributor
- BBC Radio & TV spokesperson



# Stress or Burnout?

- **Stress is a natural response to pressure**
  - Often short term and situational
  - Energy feels heightened: “fight, flight or focus” (hyperarousal)
  - You can usually see the finish line
  - Rest and recovery tend to restore balance
- **Burnout is the cumulative outcome of prolonged stress**
  - Energy feels drained, depleted or absent
  - Motivation, confidence and capacity diminish
  - Rest alone may not feel enough

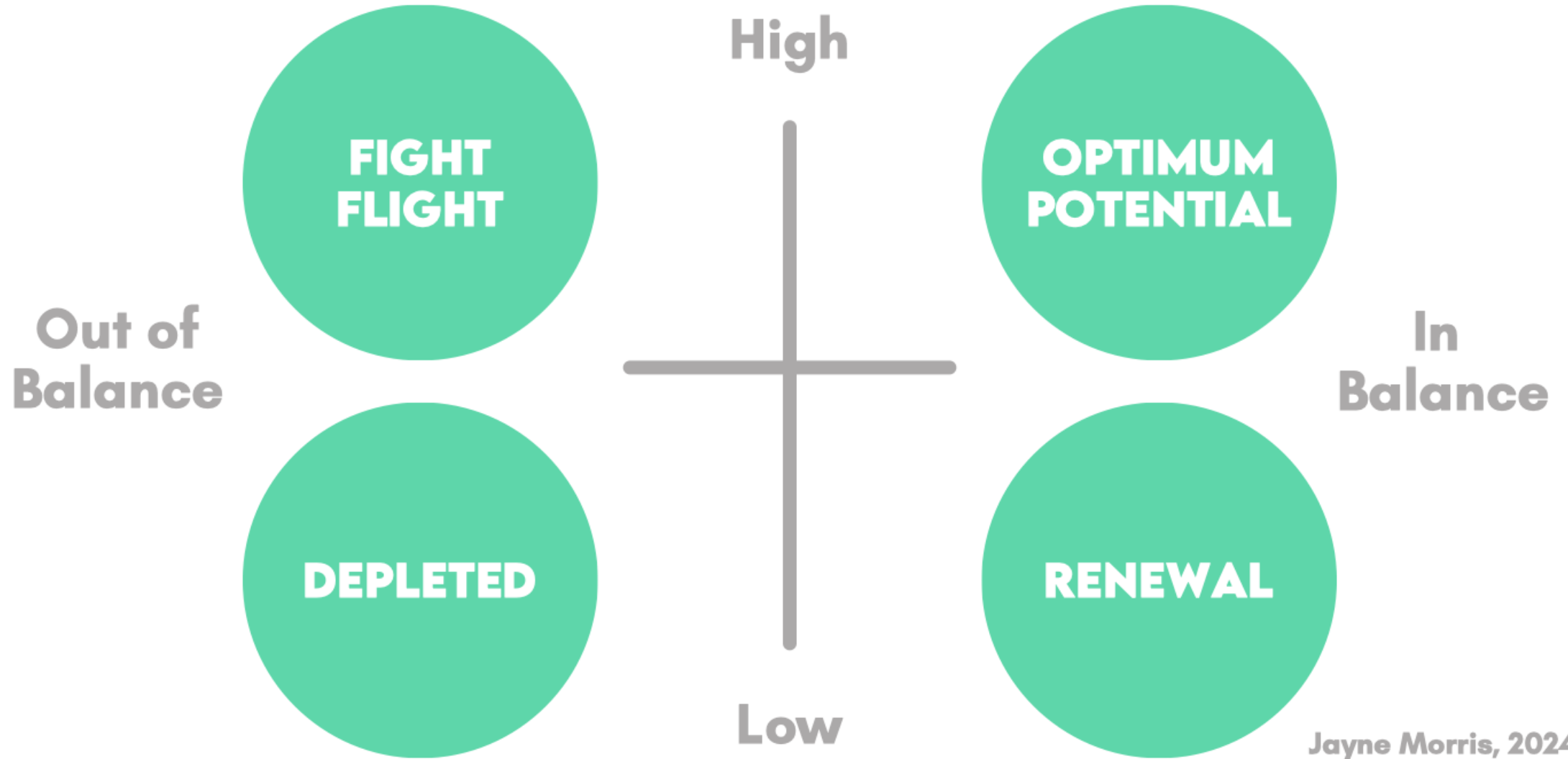


# Hidden Stress Responses

- **Freeze – hypoarousal**
  - Overwhelm leads to shutting down
  - Mind feels foggy, decision-making slows
  - Tasks stall, avoidance increases
  - Looks like disengagement, but is actually self-protection
- **Fawn - hypoarousal**
  - Stress triggers people pleasing and over-accommodating
  - Difficulty saying no; taking on too much to avoid conflict
  - High compliance on surface, rising exhaustion underneath
  - Often masked as “being helpful”







Jayne Morris, 2024



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# The Challenge

- Both internal and external stressors contribute (Review Session 1 – Contributing Factors)
- Combination of personal, professional, societal and cultural
- Stigma still exists
- People mask extremely well
- Burnout creeps up on us



*“We are often so generous, especially with ourselves, that we give little pieces of ourselves away, to almost anyone who asks. At the time, we hardly notice. Sometimes the pieces we give away are so minuscule that they really seem unimportant.... we are unaware of the cumulative effect of years of giving away little bits and pieces of ourselves.”*

Anne Wilson Sheaf



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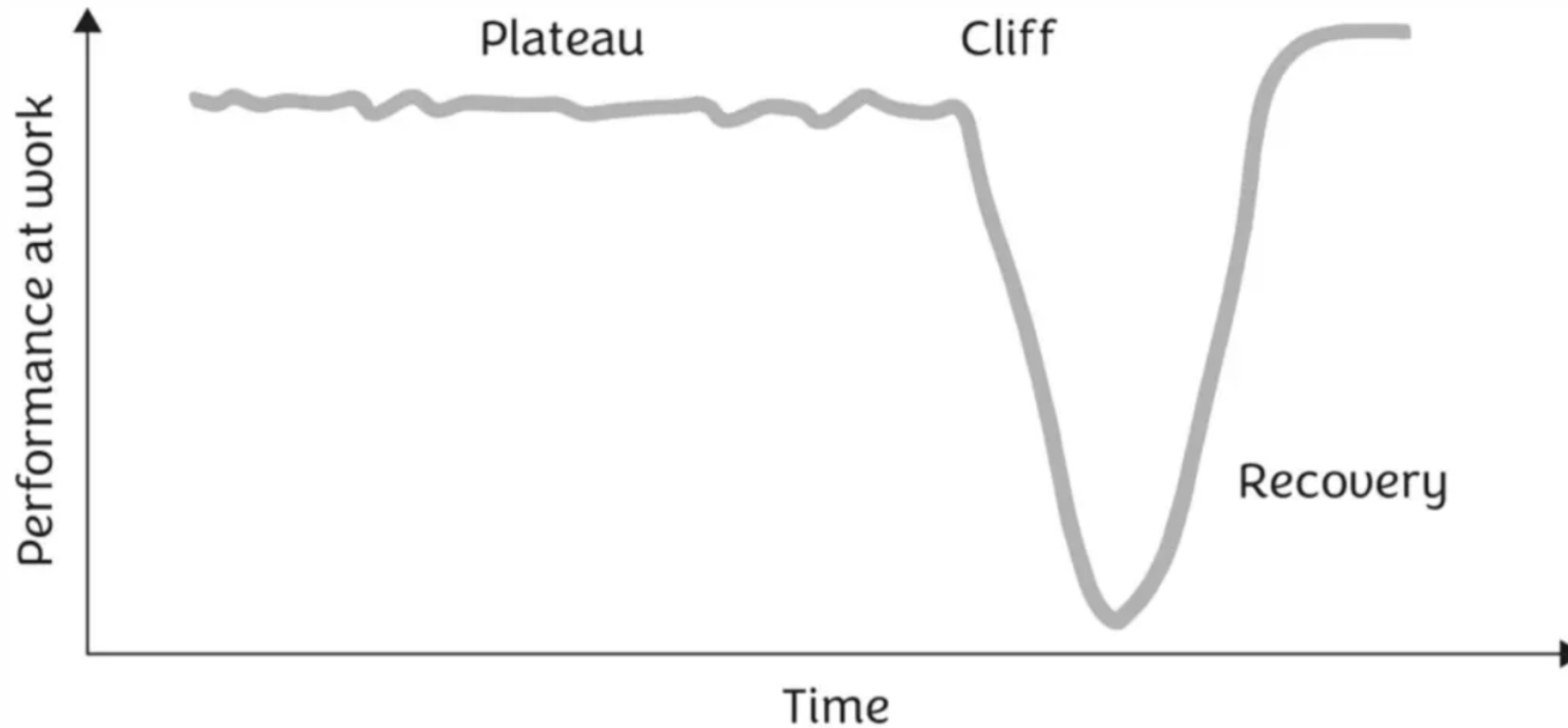


# WHO Definition (recap)

- Included Burnout in 11<sup>th</sup> Revision of International Classification of Diseases
- Described as ‘Occupational Phenomenon’
- Conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress
- Characterised by three dimensions:  
**Exhaustion – Job Cynicism – Reduced efficacy**



# Burnout Cliff



Source: Duggins (2025)

# Why This Isn't Obvious



## Exhaustion

- Has become widely accepted and normalised
- Everyone feels tired, exhaustion often hides in plain sight

## Job Cynicism

- Disconnection, frustration or emotional distancing are quietly masked
- People keep staying “professional” - might not surface until they are at ‘the cliff’ of at all

## Reduced Efficacy

- Drop in performance may be invisible externally
- Many high achievers maintain performance until the point of collapse. The inability to perform at all is a sudden, dramatic drop in performance = off work completely

# How Then Do We Spot It?

- Starts with us developing more self-awareness
- Noticing the subtle signs in others
- Creating space for real conversations
- Leading with empathy and emotional awareness
- Spotting patterns that signal systemic stress



# Developing Self-Awareness

- Recognise how your own stress responses show up
- Notice early signals of overload
- Pay attention to when your capacity feels depleted, stretched or compressed
- Make space for reflection, not just reaction
- Self-awareness builds empathy and helps prevent reactive leadership



# Self-Reflection

When under strain, which stress response are you most aware of?

- Fight (irritability, urgency, pushing harder)
- Flight (avoiding tasks, withdrawing)
- Freeze (slowing, foggy thinking, stalled action)
- Fawn (over-helping, over-accommodating, difficulty saying no)
- Not sure / varies



# Noticing Subtle Signs In Others

- Observe behavioural changes
- Look for patterns: withdrawn behaviour, over-accommodation, emotional flatness
- Notice energy shifts: vibrant to distant, urgent to avoidant
- Be mindful of those who mask well, high performers may still be struggling
- Use what you see as an invitation to check-in not a reason to diagnose



# Creating Space for Real Conversations

- Use of metaphors can support naming what's sitting beneath the surface
- Ask with curiosity and vulnerability, not assumption  
“how are things really feeling for you?”
- Listen beyond words and let people speak.
- Consistent relational listening builds trust
- Check-ins need trust. Trust deepens with vulnerability



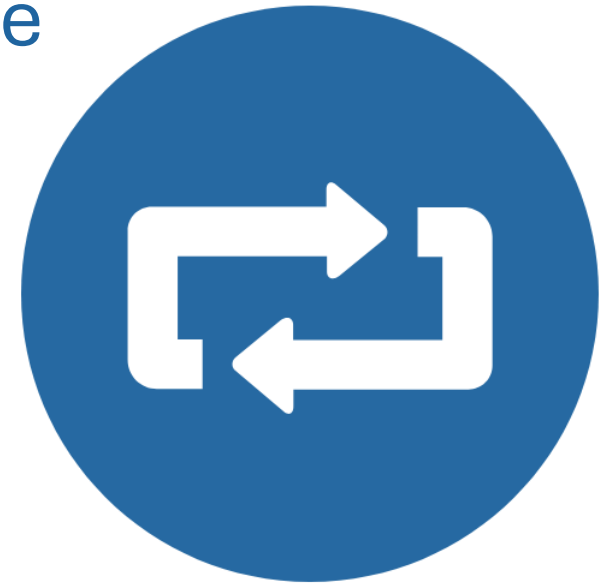
# Leading With Empathy and Emotional Awareness

- Tune into the emotional undercurrent
- Be present with what is unsaid (silence, tension, withdrawal)
- Regulate your own nervous system to create a grounded presence
- Emotional attunement fosters psychological safety and trust



# Spotting Repeating Patterns

- Stay curious about what behaviours you notice repeating across individuals or teams
- Notice if particular dynamics emerge during certain times or pressures
- Repetition often points to a systemic issue
- Patterns of overwork, conflict or absenteeism can reveal hidden burnout
- Curiosity cultivates insights and insights create space for change





# Burnout: A Team Barometer

When one person begins to burnout, it's often a sign that the wider system is under strain too

- Burnout rarely shows up in just one individual
- Early individual signs usually point to systemic stress patterns
- Teams share workload, pressure, emotional tone and culture
- Stress behaviours can ripple through relationships and routines
- When someone's capacity drops, others compensate which increases their load



# Seven Domains of Burnout

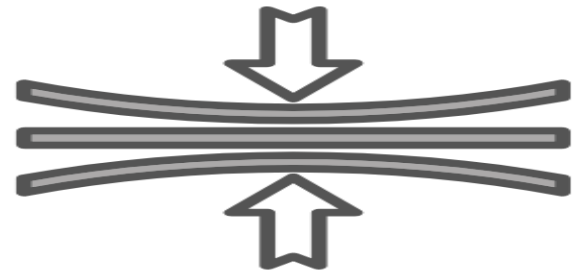
- Cognitive
- Behavioural
- Emotional
- Physical
- Environmental
- Energetic
- Intuitive



# Cognitive

When the brain is under chronic stress, its executive and creative capacities begin to shut down. You might notice:

- Difficulty finding solutions or seeing new perspectives
- Trouble retaining facts and figures that once came easily
- Decision fatigue with even small choices feeling draining
- Reduced access to creativity
- Memory lapses or misplaced information
- Persistent brain fog or slowed thinking



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# Behavioural

As capacity reduces, coping becomes about survival.  
You might notice:

- Working longer hours
- Withdrawing from colleagues or social contact
- Procrastination or avoidance of complex tasks
- Reduced engagement in hobbies or self-care
- Diminishing ability to set boundaries or say “no”
- Increased reliance on caffeine, alcohol or quick fixes



# Emotional

When emotional reserves are depleted, empathy and resilience begin to wane. You might notice:

- Feeling detached, irritable or emotionally flat
- Diminished empathy or compassion fatigue
- Heightened sensitivity to criticism or conflict
- Increased cynicism or loss of hope
- Emotional overwhelm or tearfulness
- A growing sense of “I just don’t care anymore”

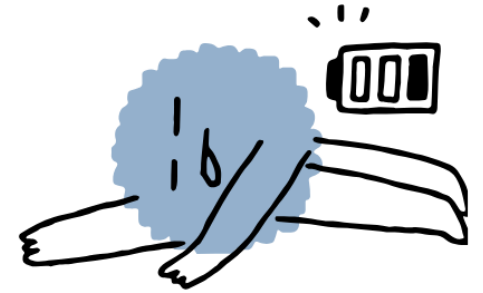




# Physical

When the body remains in a prolonged stress response, it begins to show signs of depletion. You might notice:

- Persistent fatigue, even after rest
- Muscle tension, headaches or migraines
- Frequent colds, infections or slower recovery
- Digestive discomfort or appetite changes
- Disrupted sleep – difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Heart palpitations or shortness of breath under pressure



# Environmental

When our inner world feels depleted, our outer world often mirrors it. You might notice:

- Dead plants, clutter or disorganisation creeping in
- Unfinished tasks that once felt manageable
- Stacks of paperwork
- Digital disorder with overflowing inboxes
- Appliances breaking down or car problems piling up
- Overdue house maintenance or neglected repairs



# Energetic

When energy reserves are chronically depleted, vitality and presence begin to fade. You might notice:

- Feeling constantly fatigued or unable to recharge
- Moving through the day feeling zombie or ghost-like
- Anhedonia – loss of pleasure or joy in things you once loved
- Sense of being ungrounded or disconnected from your body
- Feeling drained by other people, places or things – especially other's emotional energy



# Intuitive

When burnout disconnects us from our internal compass, clarity and confidence begin to fade. You might notice:

- Being unable to access ‘gut feelings’ or inner knowing
- Overthinking and second guessing when making decisions
- Loss of sense of self or diminished sense of purpose
- Reduced ability to connect at a deeper level
- Feeling out of sync with yourself, your values and the flow of life



# Self-Reflection

What's standing out to you the most right now?

What does that mean for you as a manager or leader?

What does that mean for your team?

What might you do about that?





# Pathology-Specific Drivers

- Rising clinical demand with static workforce capacity
- Administrative overload and digital infrastructure gaps
- Insufficient time for CPD and reflective practice
- Disconnection between departmental and organisational support



# We Manage, Until We Don't

- Viral illness
- Traumatic incident
- Death, divorce, house move, new baby
- Ongoing period of uncertainty
- Unexpected crisis or change
- Taking on additional workload



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# What is Needed

- Shared accountability - individuals are not the problem; the system design is.
- Prevention requires **organisational regulation** as much as nervous system regulation.
- Empathy can only be extended when there is capacity from which to pour.



# Filling Your Own Cup

- All starts with you, looking after you
- Leading by example
- Saying what you mean and meaning what you say
- Noticing what is out of balance and committing to doing something about that - internally and externally
- Advocating for positive change

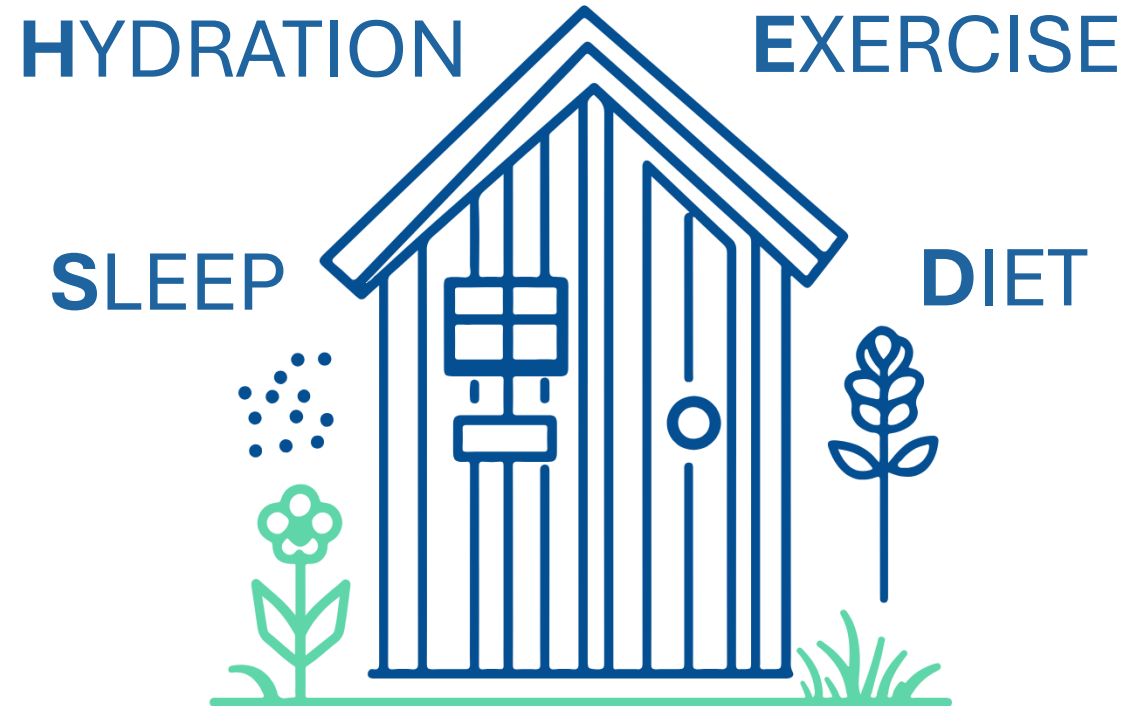


# Imagine Yourself as a Shed

- What does your shed look like?
- Notice the roof
- How about the sides?
- Does it have a door?
- What kind of base does it have?
- Is there anything inside your shed?
- How about around your shed?



# S.H.E.D



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# Seeking Support

- Employee Assistance Programmes
- Self-help books and publications
- Coaching
- Counselling & psychotherapy
- Peer support, community support groups
- Specialist support with finances, clutter clearing, addictions, personal training



*You Are*  
**Not Alone**  
*Reach Out, Seek Support*

# How Do We Address The Issue Systemically?

- Taking responsibility
- Role modelling
- Shifting stigma
- Deepening understanding
- Putting support plans in place
- Creating communities of care



A word cloud featuring the phrase "Thank you" in numerous languages. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with "thank you" being the largest and most central. Other visible words include "tusen tak", "dziękuję", "merci", "baie dankie", "धन्यवाद", "molte grazie", "mahalo", "teşekkür ederim", "tack så mycket", "gracias", "obrigado", "takk", "gràcies", "tānan", "danke", "suksema", "ngiyabonga", "dakujem vám", "謝謝", and "ありがとう". The colors of the words vary, including shades of blue, orange, green, and grey.

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