

# Looking after ourselves and each other

Macmillan Emotional Health and Wellbeing Support

**MACMILLAN**  
CANCER SUPPORT

# Emotional Wellbeing

- Our ability to look after our emotional needs, understand and appreciate the value of our emotions and use them to move our lives forward in a positive direction. ●

Mental Health Foundation, 2019



The challenges you are facing everyday are enormous, and I know for many of you the physical and emotional effects are hard hitting and long lasting.

Lynda Thomas, Macmillan CEO

# Emotional impact of COVID-19

‘I have been filled with often conflicting emotions as this pandemic has completely turned our lives upside down.’

Theresa Fyffe, RCN Scotland Director, April 2020



## Reflective Practice



## Vicarious Traumatisation



## Macmillan resources

# Group Reflective Practice

# Psychological harms during a pandemic – Guidance

British Psychological Society (2020) The psychological needs of healthcare staff as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Preparation Phase  
Anticipatory Anxiety

Active Phase  
Heroics and surge to solution

Active Phase  
Disillusionment and exhaustion

Recovery Phase  
Recovery and long-term  
psychological impact

Most people will be able to recover using their own preferred style, individual resources and social support

Many people will experience personal development and post-traumatic growth

Some people will experience continuing psychological difficulties from the effects of trauma



Figure 1: Stepped psychological response

# Group Reflective Practice

- Deep thinking about encounters between patients/families and health professionals
- Purpose is to enhance clinical practice
- Restorative models enable health professionals to process difficult emotions
- Facilitation of groups – group members ‘do the reflection’
- Not the same as clinical supervision
- Online models – evidence?



# Impact

“ I think it has highlighted the way my own reflective practice could be improved...I will be more careful in the way I reflect on clinical events...”

“...I have come to the realisation that I am not here to ‘fix’ everything and sometimes that is ok.”

“I really liked the ‘deep dive’ into what people were feeling at the point instead of trying to comfort or fix.”

“being kind to myself more, breaking down my thoughts and feelings into more definable and manageable sections. Clarity and emotional intelligence improved...”

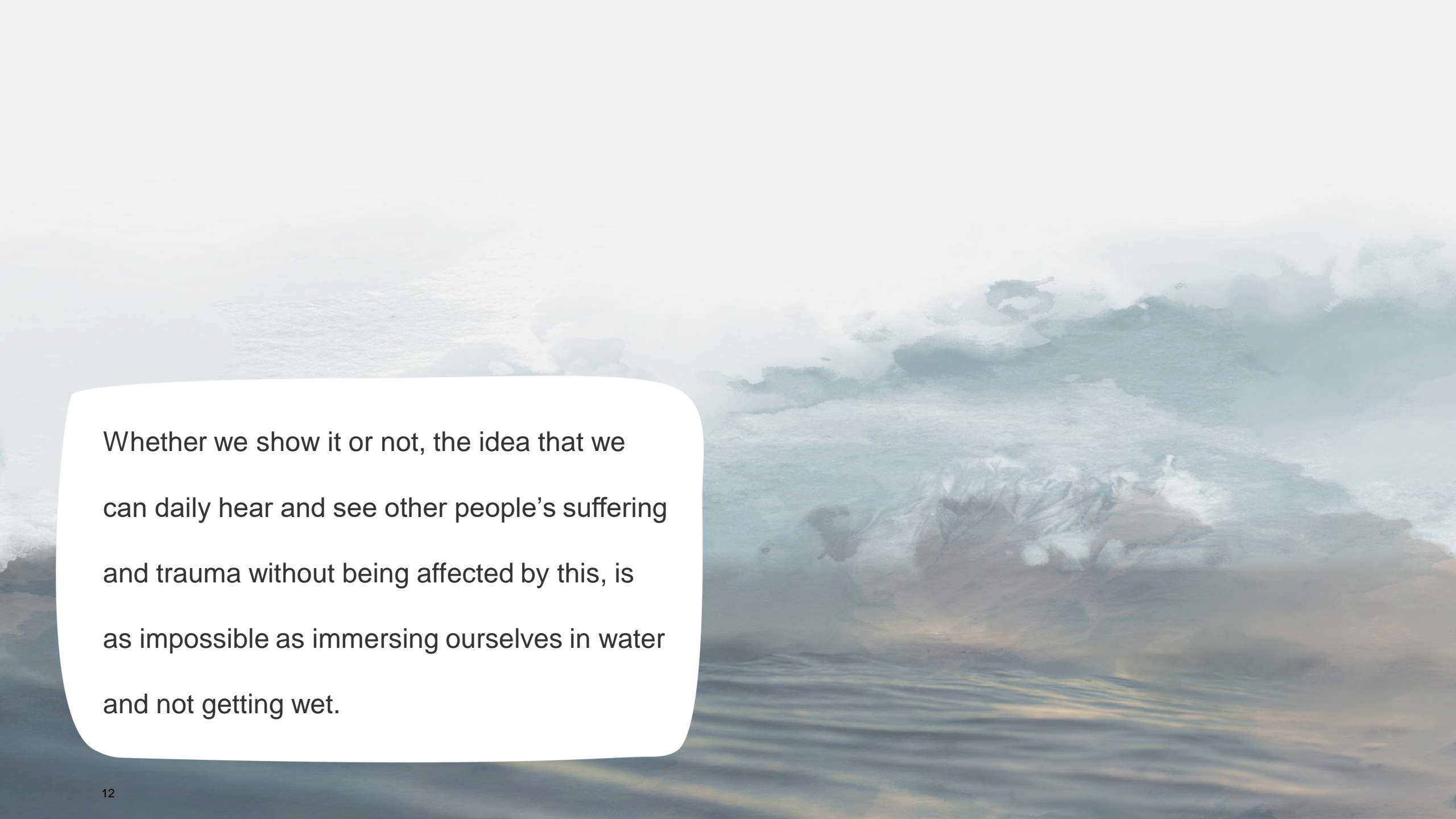
# Vicarious Traumatization

Recognising Vicarious Traumatization and what we can do about it

# Vicarious Traumatisation

- Vicarious Traumatisation (VT) is the process of change that can happen, because you care about other people that have been hurt... and feel committed or responsible to help them. ●

Dr Laurie Anne Pearlman and Lisa McKay, Headington Institute (2008)

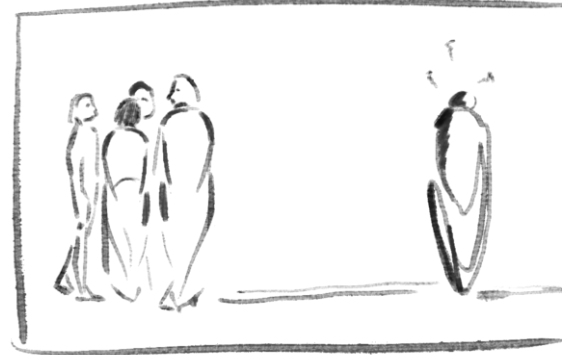


Whether we show it or not, the idea that we can daily hear and see other people's suffering and trauma without being affected by this, is as impossible as immersing ourselves in water and not getting wet.

# Signs of VT

Vicarious Traumatization can be indicated by...

- ☐ Feeling you are no longer any good at your job
- ☐ Feeling a dark despair, a lack of hope or meaning in what you are doing and in life
- ☐ Feeling increasingly disconnected and isolating yourself from others
- ☐ Feeling a lack of motivation for everyday life and self-care



# Or by...

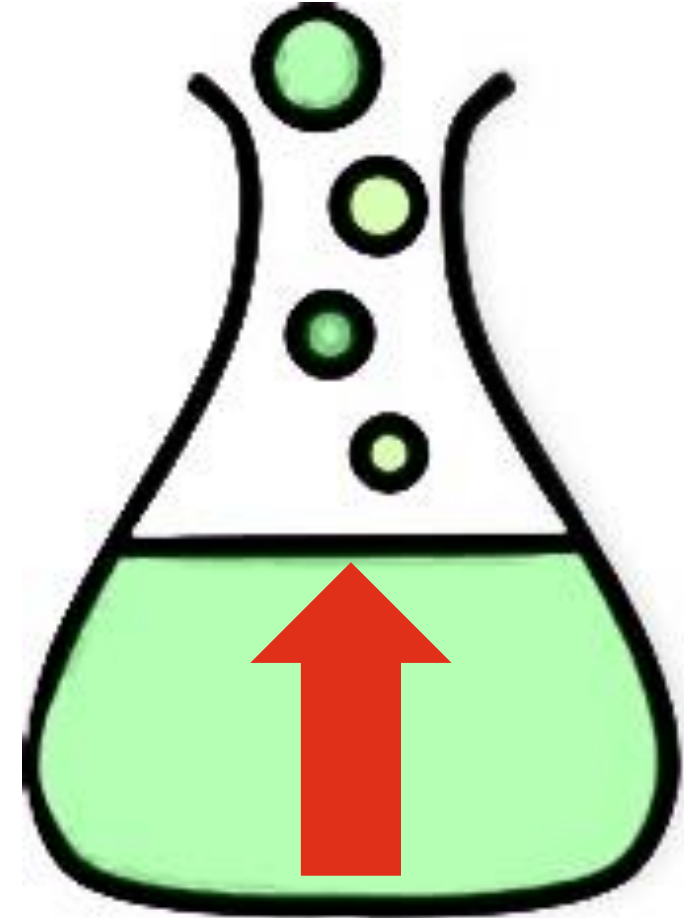
- ☐ Having intrusive thoughts or dreams
- ☐ Feeling obsessed by the person you are helping
- ☐ ... or desperately wanting to avoid them
- ☐ Feeling overly anxious about your own loved ones



# A 'container' view of ourselves *as helpers*

## Factors known to increase the **risk** of VT

- **Unbalanced workload:** too big / insufficient breaks
- Inexperience / **lack of training**
- **Over-identification** with sufferer
- Unprocessed **personal trauma**
- Feeling **unsupported** at work / home
- Being **un-self-aware** (not recognising warning signs)
- Being **un-grounded** (all in your head!)
- Feeling **ineffective** at work
- Feeling **unsafe** with the people you help
- **Neglect** for everyday **self-care** (sleep/food/exercise)
- No regular way to actively **discharge negative energy**
- No regular way to actively **re-charge positive energy**
- Feeling **separate** and **without value**



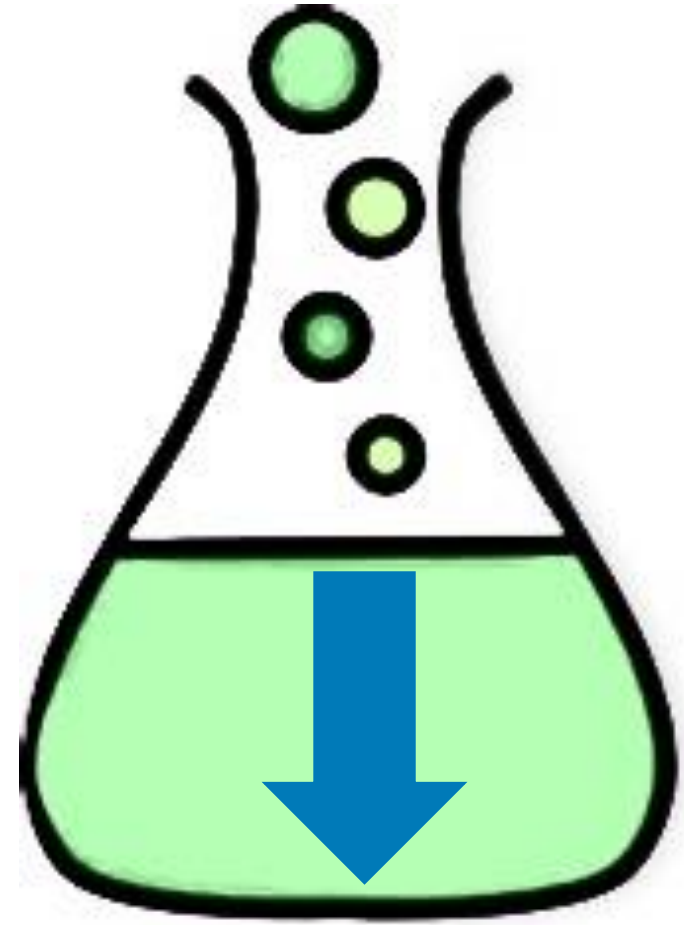
Pearlman, L. and Saakvitne, K. (1997)



# A 'container' view of ourselves *as helpers*

## Building VT **resilience** as a team

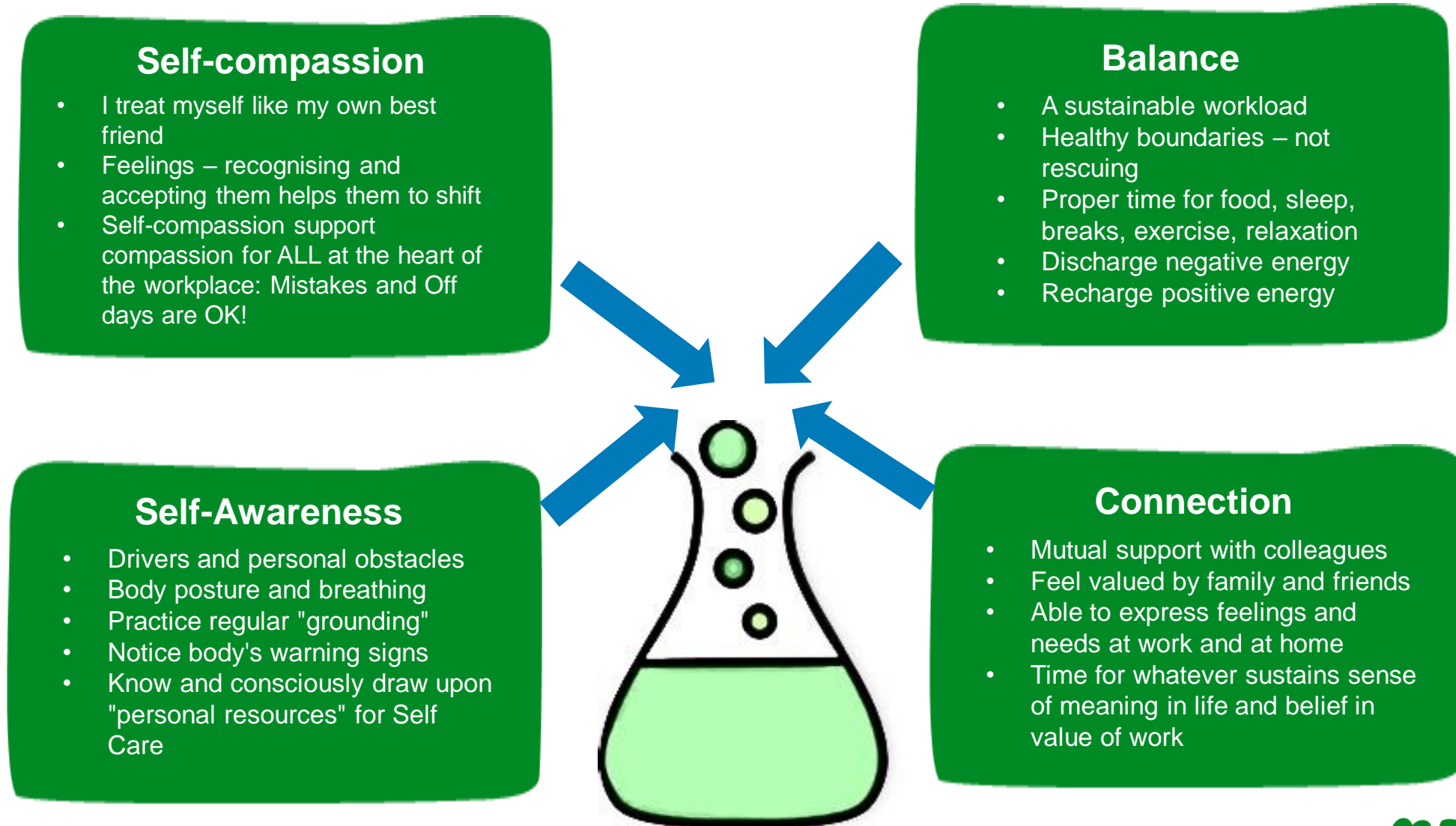
- Monitoring **caseloads**
- Taking sufficient **breaks**
- Effective and supportive **supervision**
- **Safe** space to **express feelings**
- Access to adequate **training** and CPD
- Use of **buddy system** for new and isolated workers
- VT training as part of Induction programme
- Individual **everyday self-care**
- **Awareness** of signs of VT



Pearlman, L. and Saakvitne, K. (1997)



# The four cornerstones of VT resilience and support





Do things that feed and re-charge your connection to the meaning you feel in life and to something bigger than yourself

# Three elements of active self-care which strengthen resilience in Helpers

Active self-care for VT is linked to what we do with our energy

*It is important to plan and protect time to regularly do ALL three of these different types of activity:*

- **Grounding our energy**
- **Releasing stored negative energy**
- **Re-charging positive energy**



# **Macmillan Emotional Health and Wellbeing Support**

# MACMILLAN'S WELLBEING HUB

[www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/healthcare-professionals/wellbeing](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/healthcare-professionals/wellbeing)

## Emotional wellbeing

Positivity

Being present

Mindfulness

## Resilience

Self kindness

Building  
resilience

Vicarious  
Traumatisation

Managing stress

## Personal growth and Meaning

Knowing yourself

Value based living

Appreciating  
successes

Making changes  
that work

## Connection

Feeling  
connected

Spirituality

People: Social  
Connectivity

Nature

## Physical wellbeing

Physical activity

Healthy eating

Sleep

Relaxation



# Virtual Classroom



**Introduction to Emotional Health & Wellbeing**  
(from March 2021)

**<https://learnzone.org.uk/macprofs/>**

# TOP TIPS

## Top Tips and Resources to support your wellbeing

Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland. MAC14531\_TT9

**1 Be alert for signs of stress:** staying self-aware at this time and noticing the symptoms, whether emotional or physical, is key. These can include: reduced concentration; less able to complete tasks; body aches; headaches, trouble sleeping or digestive problems. Mood changes may manifest as feeling more irritable, anxious or even angry. Talk about how you are feeling with friends, family, peers, colleagues - whoever you feel comfortable talking with - and ask them to be honest about any changes they might notice in you

**2 Understanding and recognising the impact of Vicarious Traumatization (VT).** New understanding of how trauma affects the mind and body has highlighted how the repeated empathic connection with people who are in pain or distress, can recreate symptoms very similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the helper. To find out more about VT visit our Emotional Health and Wellbeing Hub.

**3** An important step in self-care is to 'acknowledge your thoughts and feelings and open up'. This is discussed as part of the FACE COVID approach [FACE-COVID-by-Russ-Harris.pdf](#). FACE COVID forms part of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. Being supportive and caring towards yourself is important and enables you to show compassion to others. You can find more information on this on our [website](#).

**4** Consider ways of switching off from work at the end of a shift, this might include reflecting on the day, what went well, what didn't, if possible, talk to other people and de-brief before you leave. Some people find it helpful to have clear boundaries between work and home life, switching off computers, not taking work home as well as showering and changing into non-work clothes when at home. Try to stick to daily routines at home which can help you feel more in control and bring some normality and balance to your day. Make sure your routine includes time for you to relax in a way that works for you. Finding things you're grateful for and making a note of them every day, is known to enhance wellbeing.

**5 Mindful moments:** taking a few moments to pause and reset throughout your day, at work or at home, can make a real difference to feeling calmer and more centred. Try the STOP practice when you're feeling overwhelmed or need to take time out: This can take just a few seconds

- Stop what you are doing
- Take 3 deep breathes
- Observe – what you're feeling in your body, emotions, thoughts; relaxing or softening as you need
- Proceed with what you are doing

There are also some popular Mindfulness apps that you might find helpful such as [Headspace](#), [Insight Timer](#), [Pause Mindful moments](#) and [Calm](#)

**6 Exercise and Mental Health:** Find out how everyone can look after their mental health using exercise. This podcast is narrated by Dr Jonty Heaversedge, one of the BBC's Street Doctors. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/exercise-and-mental-health>

**7** Sleeping well and eating healthily are essential elements of wellbeing and resilience. Good sleep helps with clarity of thought, overall mood and decision-making. The [Sleep Charity](#) has many excellent suggestions for improved sleep at: <https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/>. Eating regularly and healthily helps our mood, energy levels and overall wellbeing. The [Eatwell Guide](#) on the NHS website has advice to help you achieve a healthy, balanced diet.

**8** Make the most of your downtime to nourish yourself outside the workplace. Even on the darkest of days try to find some enjoyable activity, such as physically distanced connection with others, spending time in nature or finding the joy in creating something new

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## MY SELF CARE PLAN

Self-care is not self-ish! We'd be crazy to expect someone to run a marathon without ongoing rigorous training and getting regular sleep, food and rest that build the strength and stamina to run 26 miles! So, how do we expect ourselves to keep on supporting other people, frequently in pain and distress... week, month and year on year, yet often running on 'empty'?

Looking after your own health and wellbeing is always important but especially during times of stress. While putting our wellbeing first feels even more challenging at this time, it is so important that we invest in our health and wellbeing to enable us to strengthen our resilience. We hope that you'll be able to use this planning tool and the broader resources available through the [Wellbeing Hub](#) to implement a 'do-able' plan to improve your health and wellbeing through effective self-care.

What do I do if I'm feeling stuck, alone or overwhelmed?

When faced with enough stress and demands, everybody will reach their coping limits, that's just how it is. If you are feeling overwhelmed or finding it difficult to cope, that may mean asking for help, and sometimes professional help. We're only human and it's a sign of strength to ask for help if and when you need it. This helps to avoid becoming overwhelmed, stuck in distress and feeling alone.

Write down in the box the name of someone you feel you'd be able to trust, if/when you need someone to listen and support you. On the last page you will also find the number of the Macmillan safeguarding team, as well as other numbers to contact if you feel distressed and want to talk. These numbers are available 24/7 all year around.

# "IT'S OK TO NOT FEEL OK"

Are you looking for practical tips and tools to support your wellbeing?

We know that things are tough right now. We can't be on the front line with you but we're here to support your wellbeing and resilience with a range of easily accessible resources.



Visit the wellbeing hub on our healthcare professionals page  
[www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/healthcare-professionals/wellbeing](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/healthcare-professionals/wellbeing)  
 or scan the QR code below.



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**THANK YOU  
AND TAKE CARE**

[https://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/healthcare  
-professionals/wellbeing](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/healthcare-professionals/wellbeing)