

ACTION BOOKLET

MANAGER CONVERSATIONS FOR WELLBEING

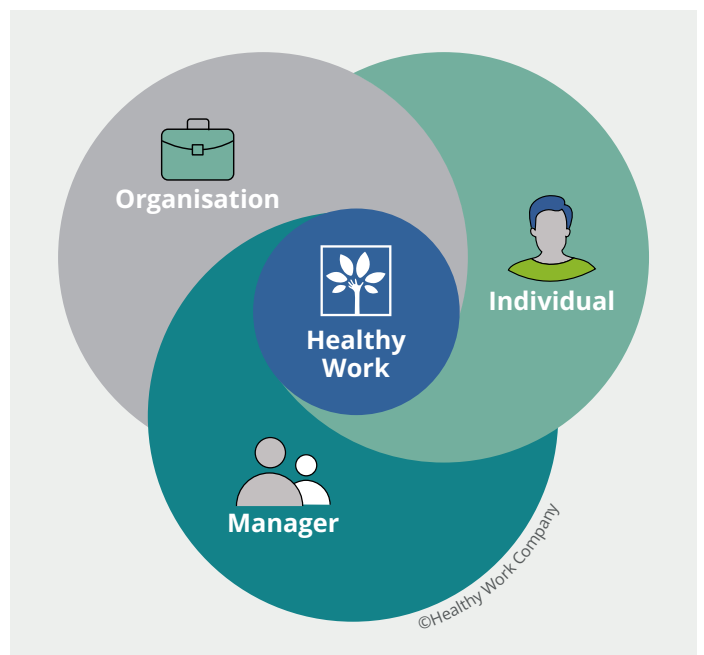
As a manager, we can't fix our people and make them happy. However, we CAN and SHOULD create the conditions in which they can thrive.

This is not one person's responsibility. It belongs to the individual, their manager and the organisation. Managers and organisations both have a duty of care to that individual.



We know that the role of a manager holds special importance. Research from 2023 suggests that 69% of a person's wellbeing at work is down to their relationship with their manager.

We also know that managers should be the first port of call when an individual is struggling in their team and can work with HR to provide reasonable adjustments, or informally work with the individual to provide extra coaching, support with workload and other resources. If your environment is safety critical, then as a manager or supervisor you should be spotting the signs that someone is not safe to work and having those conversations with them - to keep them, and those around them, safe.



MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS

MENTAL HEALTH

We all have mental health. Sometimes it is great and sometimes we are struggling, ill or off work. Life events, our personal circumstances, societal issues or our own predispositions can all cause us to struggle from time to time.

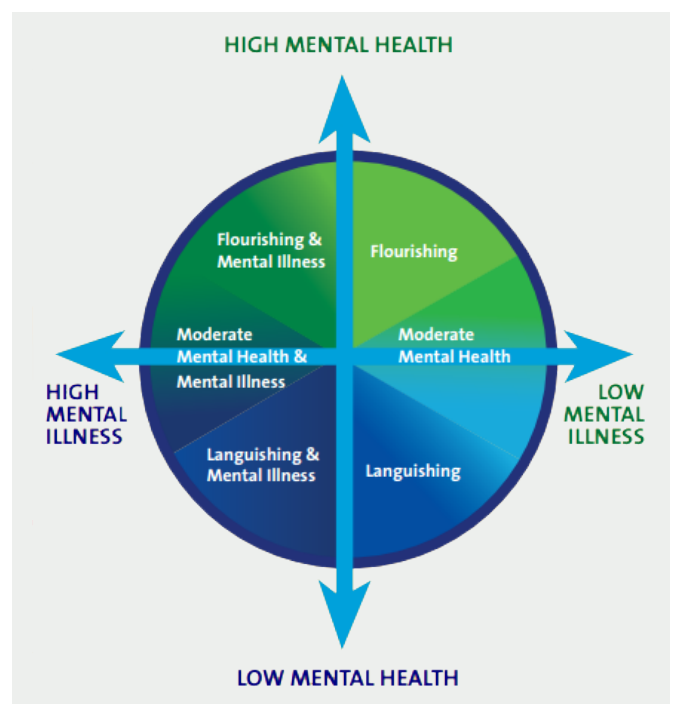
This doesn't necessarily mean we are ill – but it does mean we need to take extra care of ourselves or we may become ill. As managers, we want to be catching people before they tip into mental illness - at the point they are struggling - as well as supporting them when they are actually ill.



Recovery from mental illness or life struggles can be a courageous and transformative journey that requires resilience, support, and self-discovery. It is a process of healing that encompasses both the mind and spirit, often marked by small victories and gradual progress. Individuals on this path learn to navigate their inner landscapes, confront challenges, and develop coping mechanisms that empower them to face adversity.

Relationships, whether from friends, family, mental health professionals, and feeling supported by the organisation, play a pivotal role in this recovery, offering understanding and encouragement. Ultimately, recovery is a unique and ongoing process.

The diagram opposite, from Professor Corey Keyes, shows the mental health continuum.



STRESS

The relationship between stress and mental illness is intricate and well-documented. Chronic or overwhelming stress can act as a significant catalyst for the development, exacerbation, or recurrence of mental health conditions.

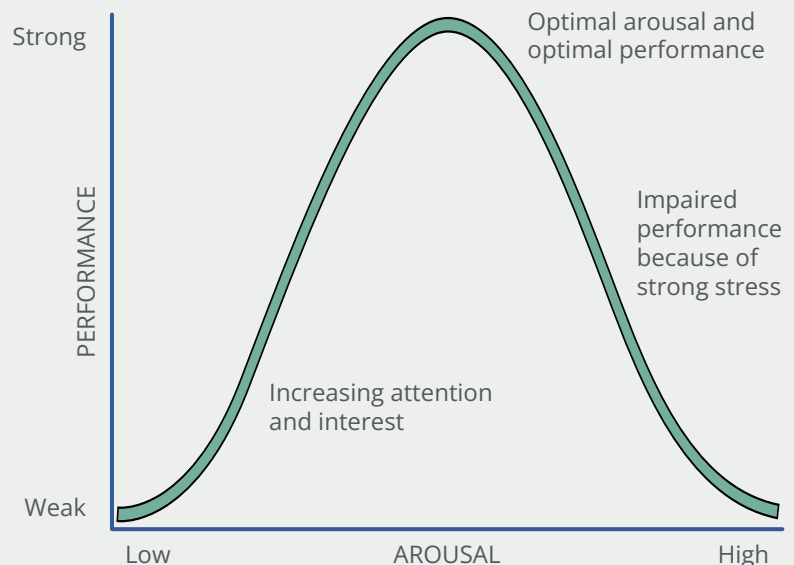
Prolonged exposure to stress, triggers physiological responses in the body, impacting neurotransmitter levels, hormonal balance, and brain function. This, in turn, can contribute to the onset of conditions like anxiety disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Furthermore, stress can worsen the symptoms of existing mental health issues, making it a crucial factor to address.



Some pressure or challenge, however, is good for us (also called good stress or eustress) – but we need to be aware of how we are reacting to stressors in order to ensure we don't end up dealing with too many and succumb to overwhelm or stress and become ill.

What is sure is that long-term or chronic stress is bad for you and your team – it can cause physical sickness, anxiety, depression and burnout. Catching a person early when they are struggling is so important because we may prevent them going off sick for a lengthy amount of time.

THE YERKES-DODSON LAW - HOW STRESS AFFECTS PERFORMANCE

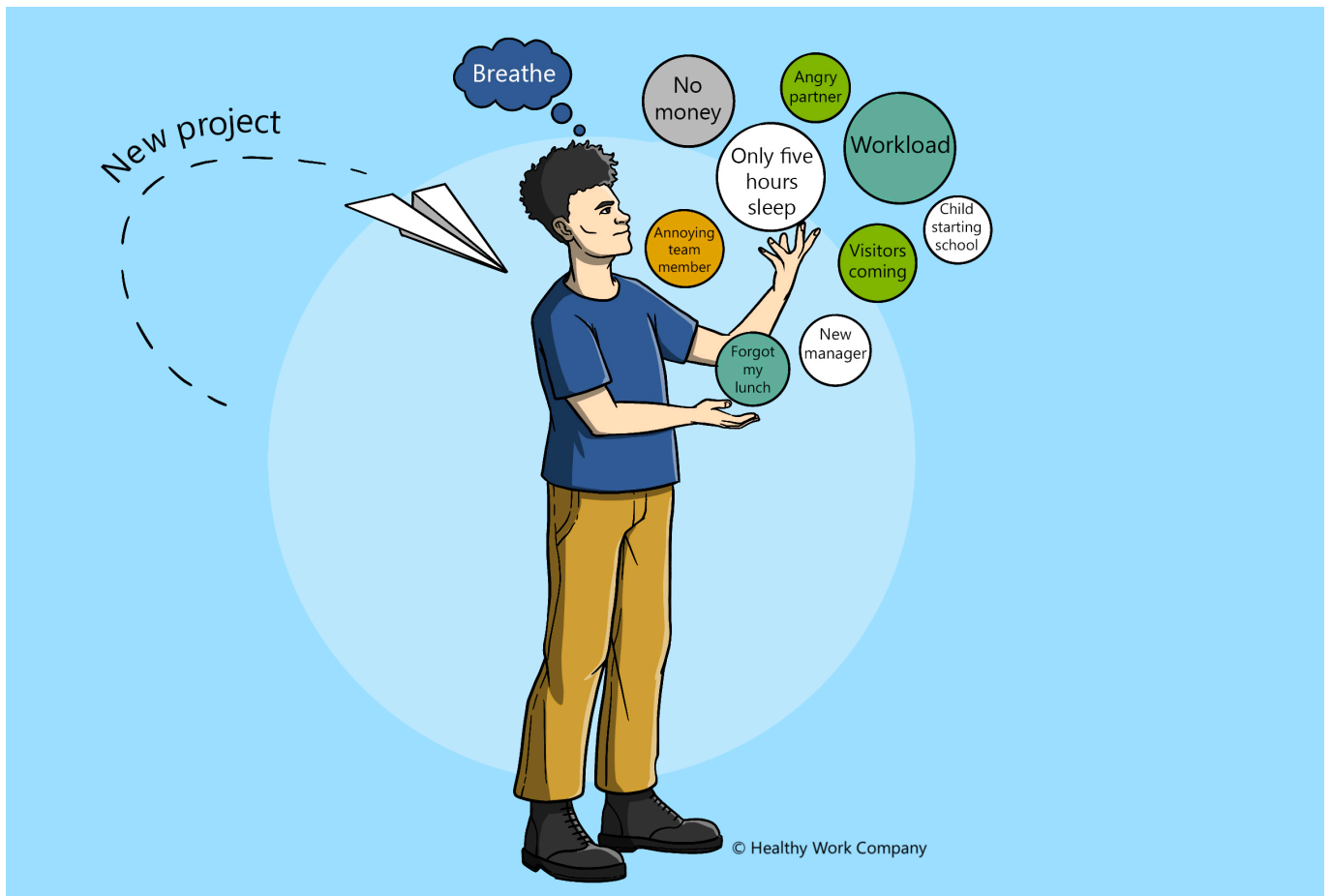


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Demands can come from many competing sources! Work pressures are high in most organisations with workload a particular issue, driven by technology, economic uncertainty and globalisation.

Perhaps your organisation doesn't manage change well, or has not invested in its managers, or perhaps job roles are not clear, or resources are missing.

However just as our work bleeds into our home life, sometimes our home life can impact our work too. Stress might come from family life, money worries, housing, our own or a family member's poor health... from many areas of life.



TOP TIPS TO PREVENT STRESS

- ✓ Ensuring we look after ourselves well. We can do this by topping up our resources and noticing when we are starting to feel that we are getting overwhelmed
- ✓ Creating some strategies to simplify and do less
- ✓ Understanding what makes us drive ourselves too hard can also be a helpful strategy. We discuss this more in the section *Looking After Yourself As A Manager* on Page 10

MANAGER CONVERSATIONS FOR WELLBEING



Being a manager can be tough. Not only are we expected to deliver, but to do so with empathy! We know that long term, leading in a way which really looks after our people pays dividends in terms of staff retention and engagement AND can keep a team member from going off sick... but short term it can call on all our reserves of emotion regulation!

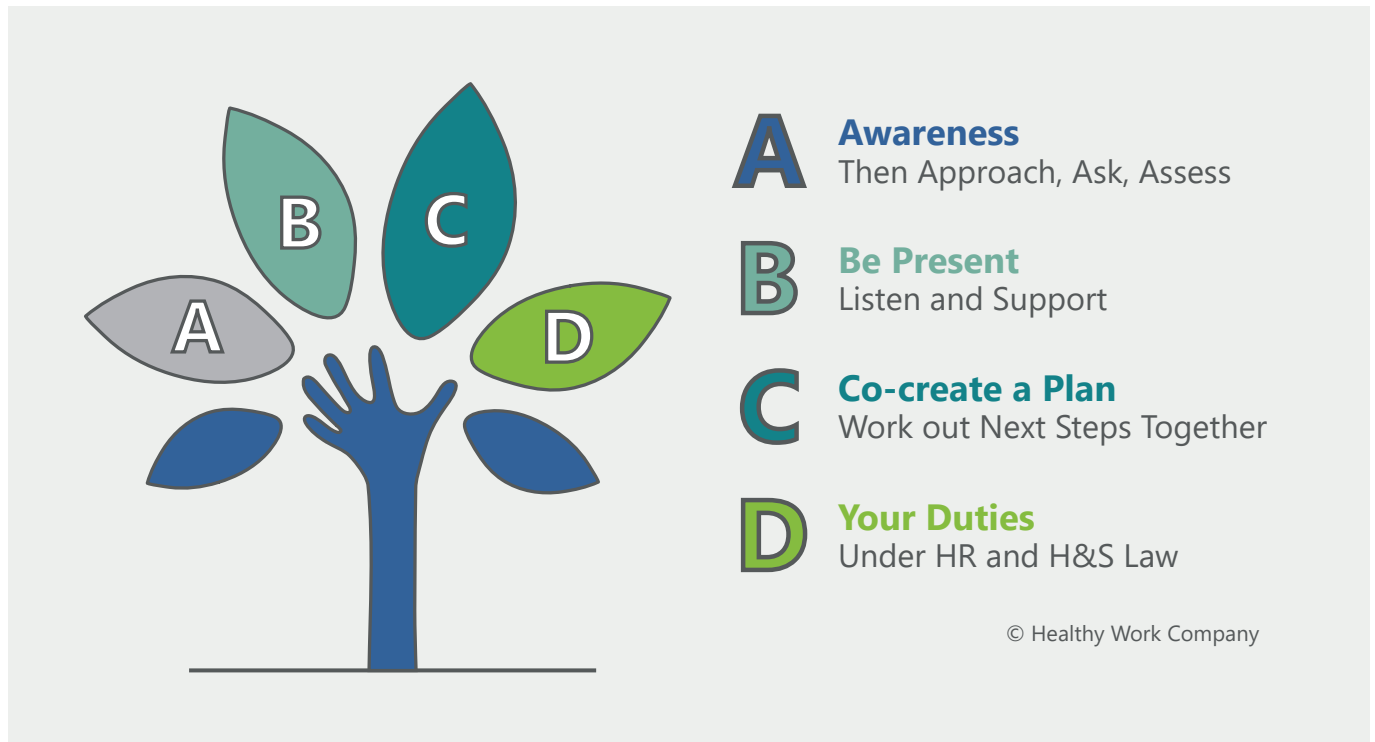
You may be dealing with people who have a diagnosed mental health issue such as depression, anxiety or stress, or you may know that they are just struggling with a life/work issue – such as grief, divorce, moving house, feeling undervalued, not enjoying their work, feeling overloaded...

WE CAN WORRY ABOUT:

- Saying the right thing
- Having answers
- Landing up in a tribunal
- Being intrusive

THINK A B C D

Our job as managers is to notice that someone needs support and to work out how we can best provide that. When we first notice someone struggling our job in this first conversation, is not to solve the person's issue for them, but to ensure that they feel heard, understood and acknowledged and that they have told you everything they need to, in order for you to understand the challenges they have. These may be work or home related challenges (where their home life is having an impact on their capacity at work).



A AWARENESS

Make time to get to know your team member so that you know what normal behaviour looks like for them and can better judge when they are not 'themselves'.

- Tackle issues when they arise. The longer you leave it the worse the problem may become
- Ask "how are you?" in a way which shows you are genuinely interested – perhaps asking about a specific aspect of their life or sharing something of your own
- Self-awareness – ensuring that you are in a good place yourself to have that conversation

B BE PRESENT

We don't need to have all the answers for someone. Whilst we may offer suggestions, it is better if people can work out their own solutions (and we certainly can't solve their problem for them) so the more we ask good questions, give them time and space to reflect and just show we are listening, the more they will feel heard and comfortable to move to co-creating a plan.

WE CAN USE TOOLS SUCH AS:

- ✓ Summarising what they say using their words
- ✓ Using open clarifying questions
- ✓ Using body language and sounds, short phrases to show that we understand e.g. Got it
- ✓ Using comfortable eye contact

C CO-CREATE A PLAN

Co-creating a plan involves asking clarifying questions to dig deeper, as well as making suggestions that will depend entirely upon what the person says their problem is. The plan may involve more formal support such as the Doctor/Occ Health/HR/EAP or it may involve informal self-help such as getting more rest.



A WORK PLAN

When someone is struggling, they may need a break from work. However, prevention is the best approach so we need to look at how we can ensure that work doesn't make them worse but is actually supportive. This is where Reasonable Adjustments may come in. In many countries around the world the requirement for reasonable adjustments in cases where mental ill health is considered a disability, sit under Disability Discrimination laws.

Providing these short term 'reasonable adjustments' with reviews in place:

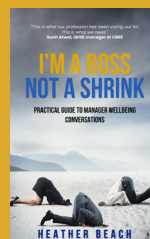
- ✓ Changing hours/days of work/shifts
- ✓ Providing more days at home/in the office/changing desk locations
- ✓ Changing the work they do so that it fits more with their current strengths and capacity
- ✓ Involve HR in these decisions and ensure they are appropriately documented and reviewed

D DUTIES AS A MANAGER

We do have a duty of care to people within our team so we need to consider:

- Showing that we are considering reasonable adjustments
- Making a note that we had the conversation, the date, and what the outcome was (ensuring that we are happy that note could be made public)
- Working with specialists such as HR and Occupational Health
- Being careful about offering confidentiality (as we may want to share concerns with HR or our manager – but not with the team)
- Always keeping in touch when someone is off sick - either yourself or through HR. Always have a catchup or return to work interview when they come back in. Are they well enough? Are there adjustments to be made to the role temporarily? What happened whilst they were off?
- Remember that performance conversations may still take place when someone is struggling. Ensure we have offered them support first
- Organisations have a duty to prevent work related stress under health and safety laws

Heather is the author of bestselling book *I'm a Boss Not a Shrink*. She brings her experience of people management to show some of the challenges for managers in the modern wellbeing landscape and to supply some honest and straightforward guidance.



BALANCING ACT: MANAGERIAL BOUNDARIES FOR EMPLOYEE WELLBEING



Navigating the tightrope

Dealing with boundaries during wellbeing issues at work is one of the trickiest aspects of being a manager



1 POWER DYNAMICS

Balancing the scale

Remember there is a power imbalance between you and your team members



2 THE DILEMMA

Head meets heart

It can be a challenge balancing business needs with the needs of the person



3 AUTONOMY vs RULES

Consider ground rules

Allowing for autonomy to be balanced with the need to think about certain tram lines you all agree you operate within



4 CULTIVATING CONFIDENTIALITY

Trust but verify

Be careful about who you share with, but support may involve discussing with others



5 MINDFUL SHARING

Keeping it professional

Be mindful of oversharing yourself and of inappropriate behaviours



6 SIGNPOST TO EXPERTS

Suggest professionals

Recognise your limitations and direct the person towards professional help



7 SET BOUNDARIES

Balancing time

You don't have to offer unrestricted availability



8 DELICATELY BALANCE

The art of wellbeing management

To manage your team for wellbeing you need a delicate balance of empathy, authenticity, adaptability, and professionalism.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AS A MANAGER



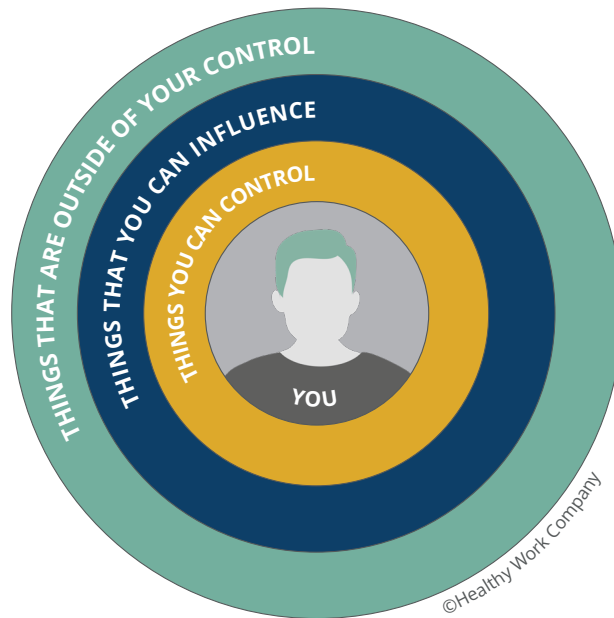
SELF-AWARENESS

- Noticing our reactions and triggers
- Noticing feelings in our bodies and asking ourselves questions when we are physically sick. Could this be related to an issue which is causing me stress or anxiety?, particularly sickness
- Are we doing things which feel helpful in the short term but will give us longer-term problems (smoking, eating things which are not good for us, drinking too much)?

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN WE NOTICE WE ARE STRUGGLING:

- 1 Write it all down or talk to someone non judgemental – a friend, family member, coach, mentor, therapist, colleague
- 2 What helpful coping mechanisms can we use?
- 3 What unhelpful coping mechanisms are we prone to using?
- 4 What about that situation is in our control? Are there elements we can influence?
- 5 Could we re-frame the situation as e.g. this too shall pass/what can I learn?

WHERE DO YOU HAVE INFLUENCE AND CONTROL?



CIRCLE OF CONTROL

- My boundaries
- Communicating my needs
- Time I carve out for self-care
- What I eat
- Exercise I do
- My perspective
- My approach to learning
- Words I use
- Voting and campaigning

CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

- My working hours and priorities
- My relationships
- My family
- The general 'mood'
- My health

OUTSIDE OF CONTROL

- Politics
- The weather
- The economy
- What others think about me
- What others do and say
- Social media
- The news

Adapted from Steven Covey Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (1989).
This helps us think about where to focus our energy and improves our resilience.

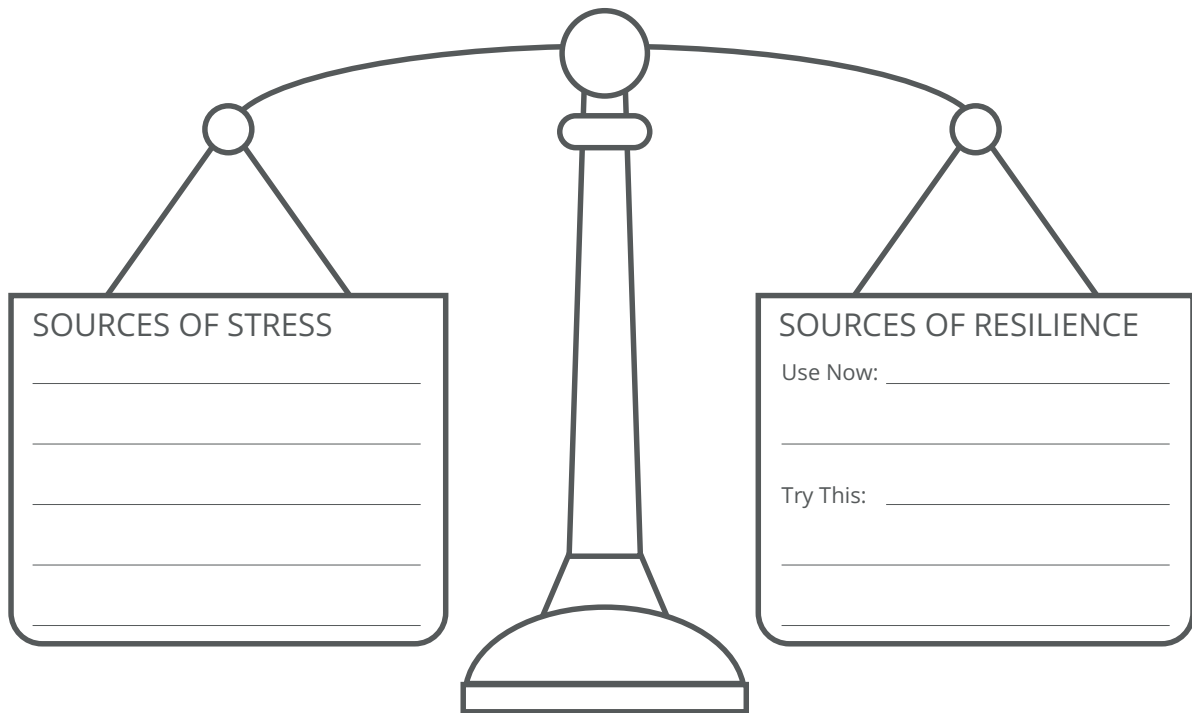


TOP TIP

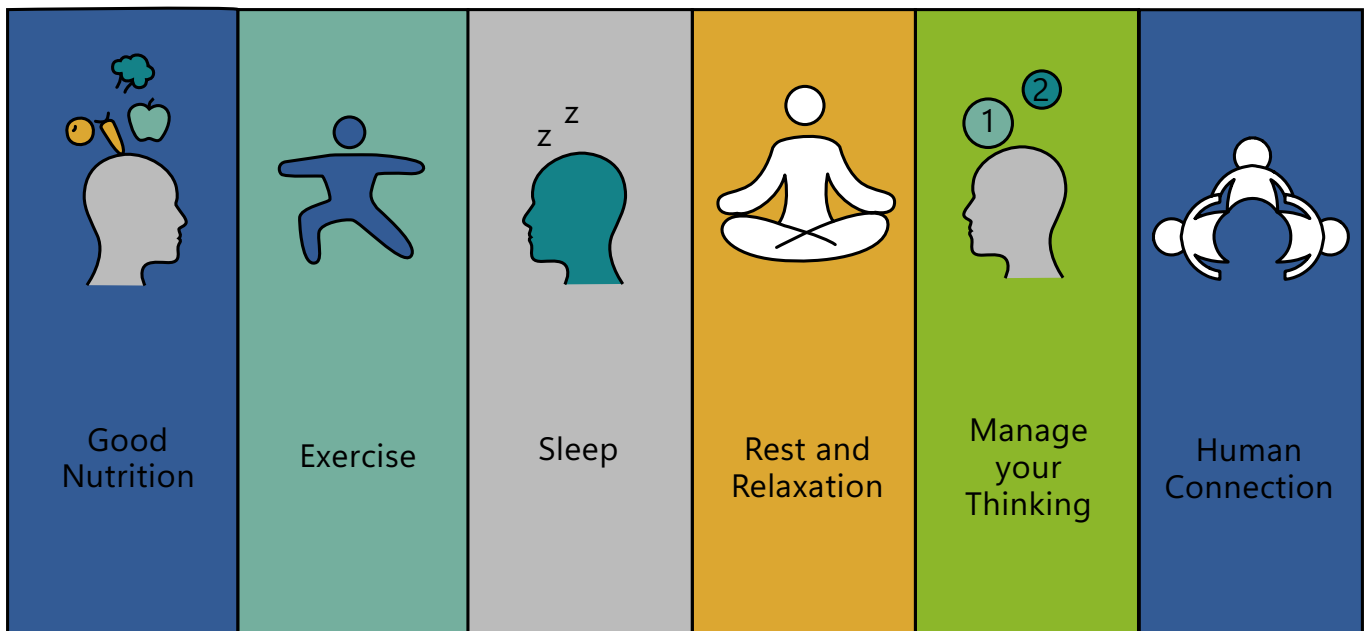
Think about what recharges us, and make sure we prioritise those things – remember, we can't pour from an empty cup and we need to put our own oxygen mask on first.

Looking after ourselves well means we have more of ourselves to give to others, we can deal with more stressors, are more creative, connected, productive and... happy!

Research shows that there are tools you can use to improve your resilience.



PILLARS OF WELLBEING



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