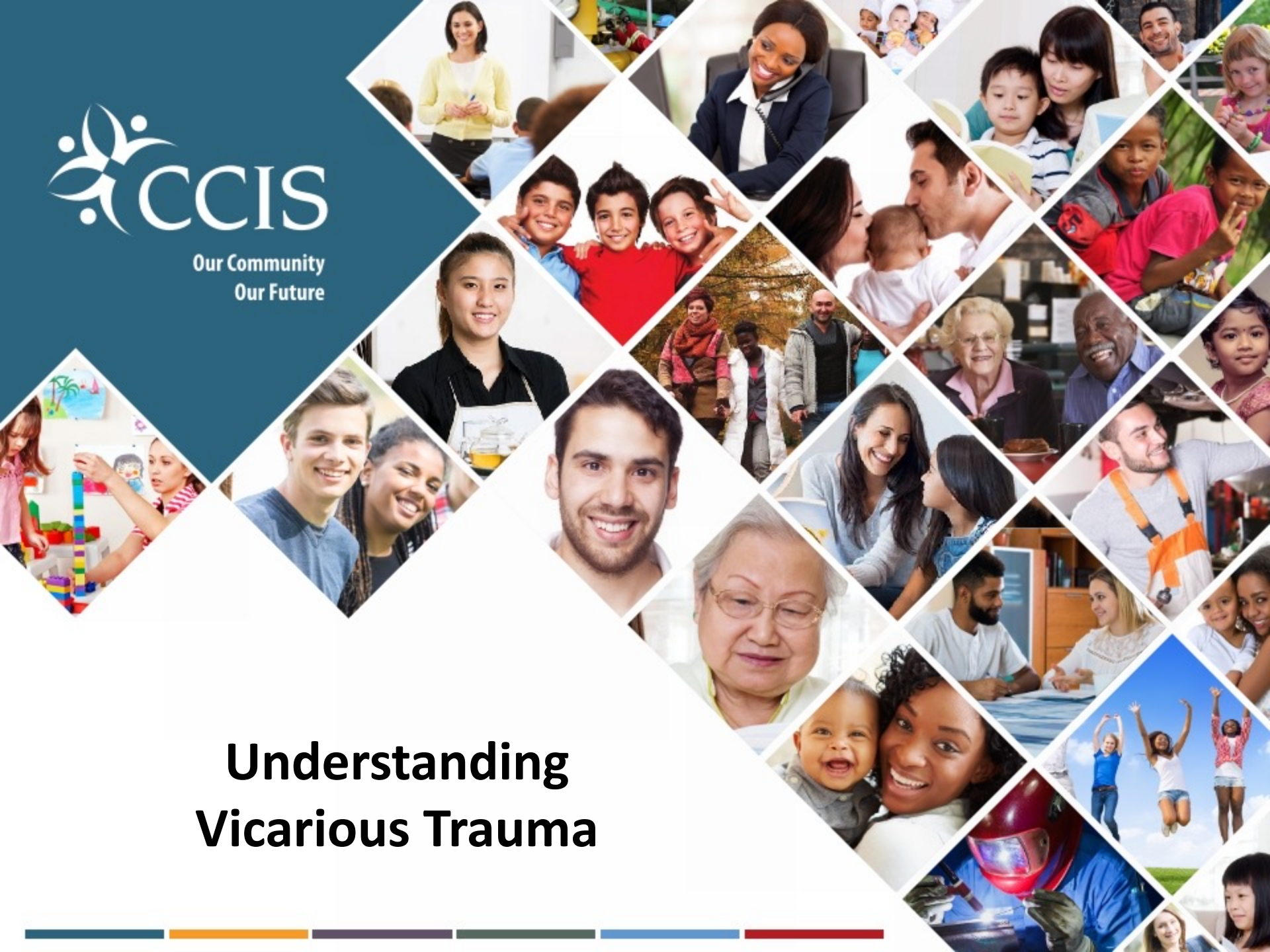




Our Community  
Our Future

# Understanding Vicarious Trauma



# Introduction

**Collins Nwabunike**, MSW, RSW

Child and Youth Clinical Therapist at Centre for Refugee Resilience

**Bethel Abraham**, Refugee Resilience Educator

Topics: Understanding and Identifying signs of Vicarious Trauma  
Self-Care Strategies





A row of five maple leaves is laid out horizontally across the center of the image. From left to right, the leaves show a color progression: dark red, reddish-orange, orange-yellow, bright yellow, and green. They are resting on a light-colored wooden plank background.

# **CENTRE FOR REFUGEE RESILIENCE**

*Supporting immigrants on their road from trauma to healing.*

# What is Trauma?



**A normal reaction to  
an abnormal  
situation**

# Definition

Trauma is *“an event, series of events, or a set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful, or life - threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”* –SAMHSA

# Trauma

## 3E's: Event, Exposure, Experience

**Event:** Traumatic, Natural disaster, Car accident, War, Sexual Assault, etc

**Exposure:** to traumatic event in one (or more) of the following ways:

- Directly (Primary Trauma)
- Witnessing (Secondary trauma)

**Experience:** how we experience it

- ***Intrusive thoughts***
- ***Persistence Avoidance***
- ***Negative change*** in thoughts and mood
- ***Hypervigilance***

Impact occurring ***more than 1 month*** and ***affecting overall wellbeing within 3 months*** (or delayed onset is when it is diagnosed).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM–5)

# What is Vicarious Trauma?



The terms  
**Burnout, Compassion  
Fatigue, Vicarious  
Trauma and Secondary  
Trauma** are often used  
interchangeably – but  
they're not the same!



# Definitions



- **Burnout** has to do with stress and frustration caused by the workplace.
- **Compassion fatigue** refers to the deep emotional and physical wearing down that takes place when helping professionals are unable to refuel and renew.
- **Secondary traumatic stress** is the result of being a witness to a traumatic event or series of traumatic events, which can lead to PTSD-like symptoms.
- **Vicarious trauma** describes profound negative changes in our worldview due to the exposure to traumatic content of clients or people we support.



# COVID-19 and Identity

## Identity Based Trauma

In the aftermath of trauma, the identity is constructed through the lens of traumatic experiences, that can shape the understanding of oneself in both negative and positive way

- Isolation through historical and major life challenges
- Online discourse surrounding racism, politics and overall physical and mental wellbeing



# Vicarious Trauma: Signs and Symptoms

## Physical

- Physical Exhaustion, Insomnia
- Headaches or Migraines

## Behavioral

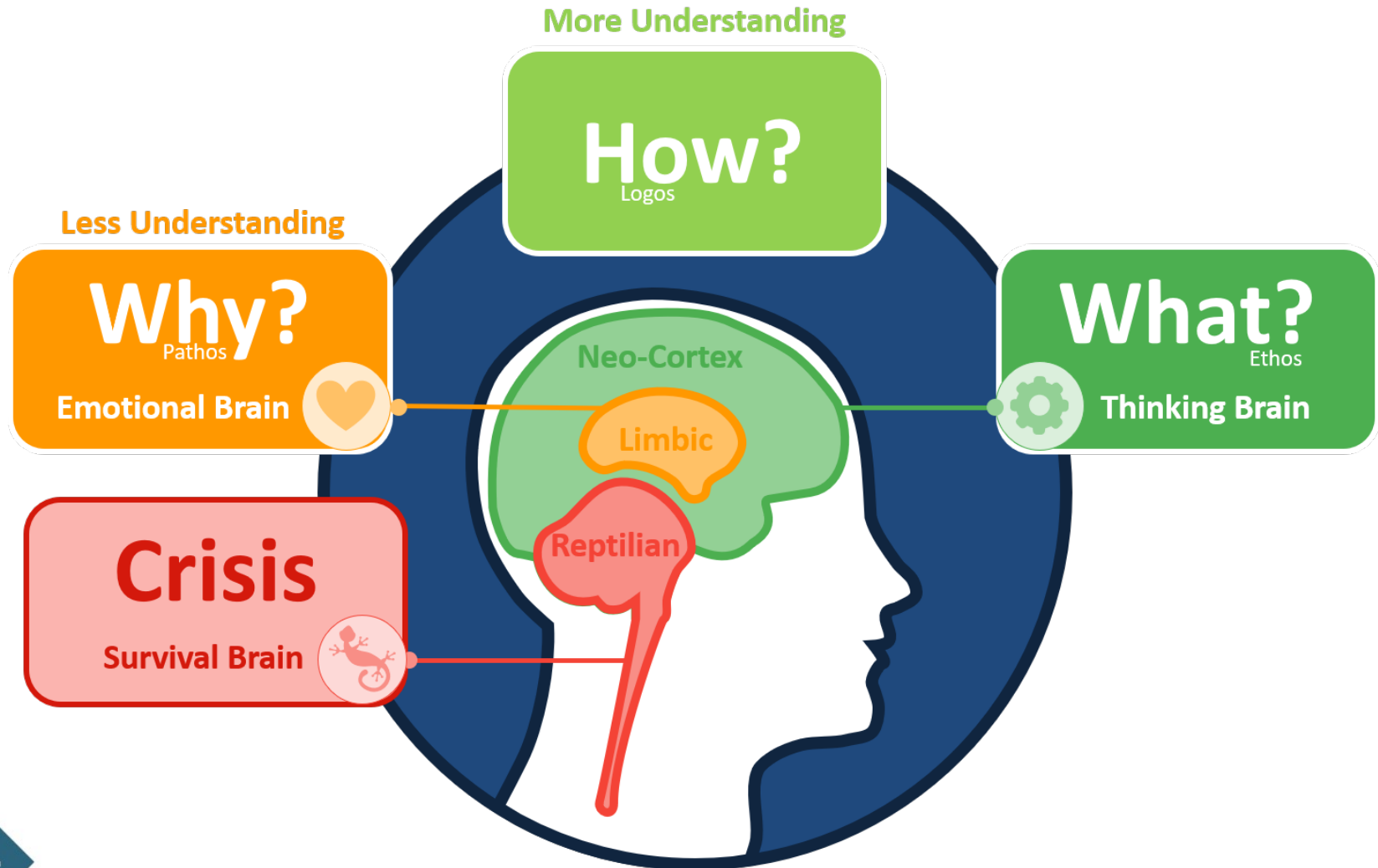
- Anger, irritability, increased use of alcohol or substances
- Distancing, detachment, forgetfulness
- Avoiding listening to stories of traumatic experiences
- Compromised care giving, feeling exaggerated sense of responsibility

## Psychological

- Lack of empathy, emotional exhaustion, resentment, hopelessness, feeling numb
- Feeling unable to help or support, dissociating, changing of world view, reduced intimacy in relationships

# Vicarious Trauma on The Brain

## Narrative: Tale of the Three Kingdoms

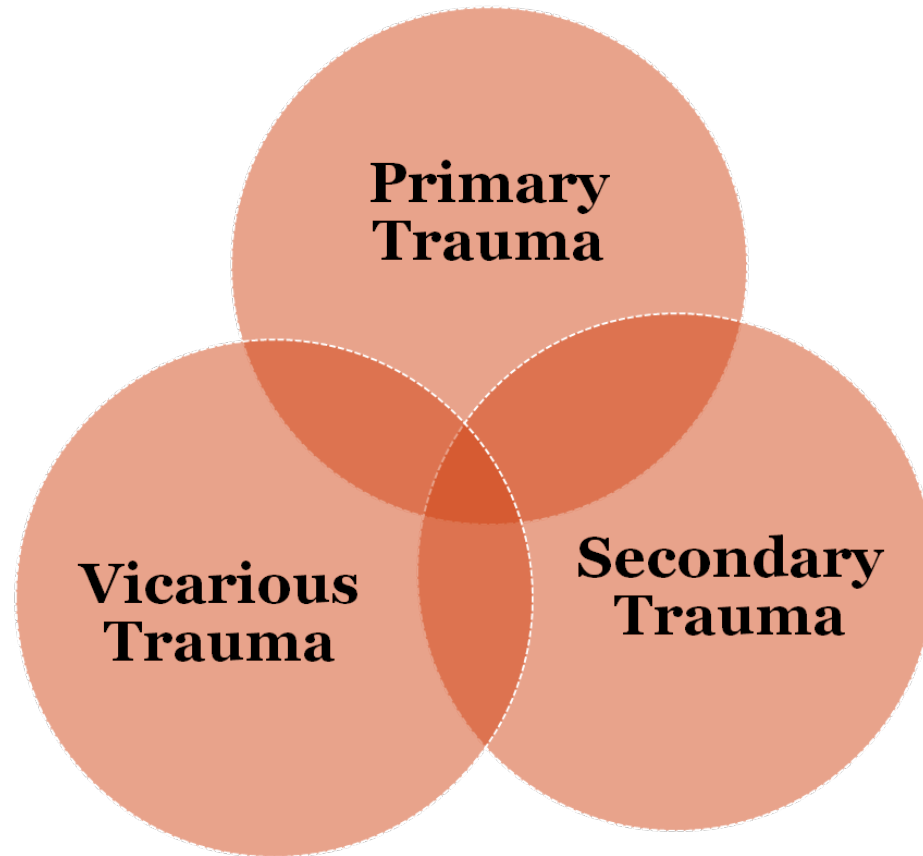


# Vicarious Trauma on the Brain





# As a Helper...This Can Affect You





# Discussion

**Question:**

**How does hearing about  
someone else's traumatic  
experience impact you?**



# Vicarious Growth



**Also... the benefit of caring too much and too often**



# SELF-CARE



# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

## STEP ONE: AWARENESS

---

- Recognize your own particular signs
- What does your *alarm* sound or feel like?
- Be proactive to assess health in many levels
  - Individual
  - Workplace
  - Community & Culture
  - Societal pressures

# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

## STEP TWO: TURN OFF THE ALARM

---

- Practice paying attention to your body's signals.
- Build in rhythms of regulation
- Recognize your boundary
- Move, breathe, rest
- Nourishment, water, stretch
- Practice regularly, practice often

# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

## STEP THREE: APPROACH MODE

---

Building **safety** *internally* and *externally*.

Attending to how we use our efforts of **control**.

*When do you over-extend your influence or power?*

*When do you give up power too easily?*

# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

## STEP FOUR: EXPAND RESILIENCE

---





# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

## BUILDING ESTEEM AND SELF CARE

---

- Do you treat yourself with respect, care & sincere kindness?
- Create the state of compassion.
- Enrich and absorb it.

# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

INTIMACY – DO YOU LET OTHERS IN?

---

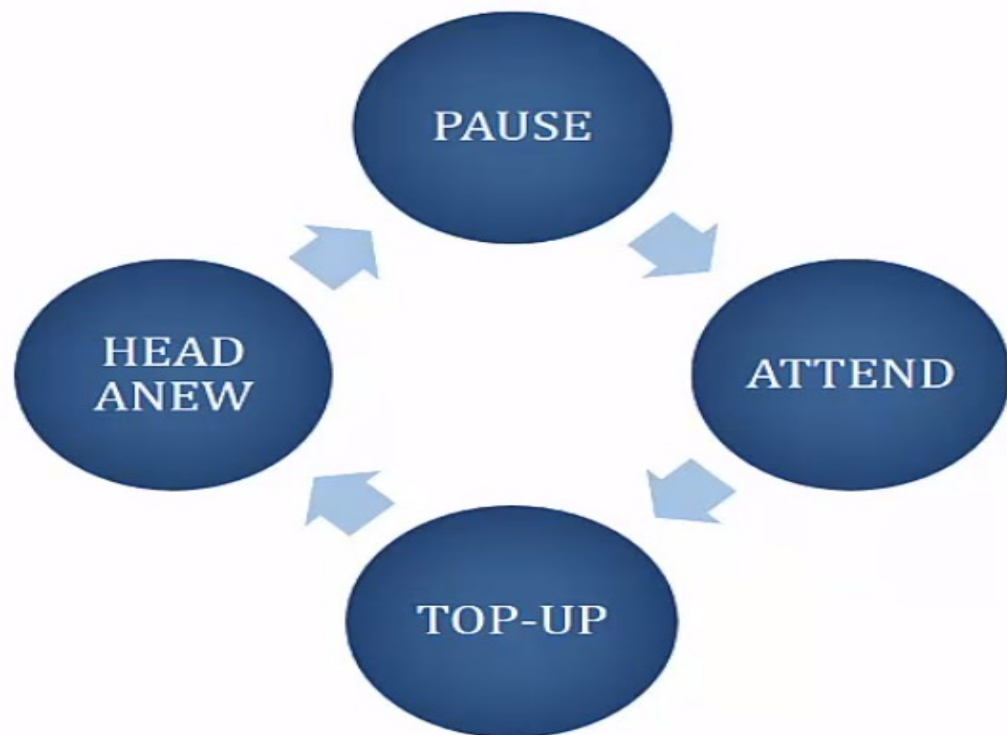
## **Personally**

- Do you have a social net?
- Who is in your inner circle?
- Do you nurture these relationships?
- Are there some that are toxic and need to be adjusted?

# Self- Care for Vicarious & Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

PATH TO RESILIENCE

---



# Discussion

## Question:

**How do you recognize when your cup is empty and needs to be refilled?**

**What are stress management strategies you currently use?**



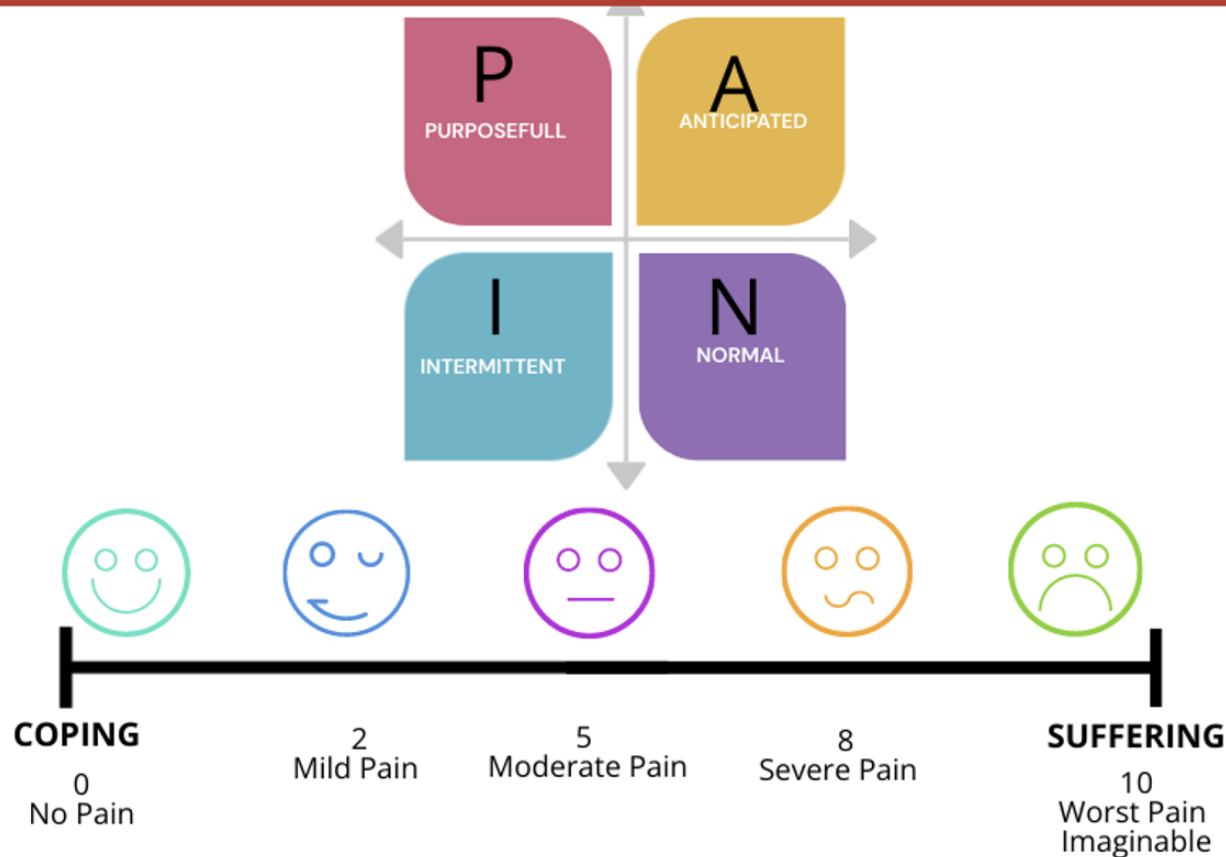


# Stress Management and Strategies

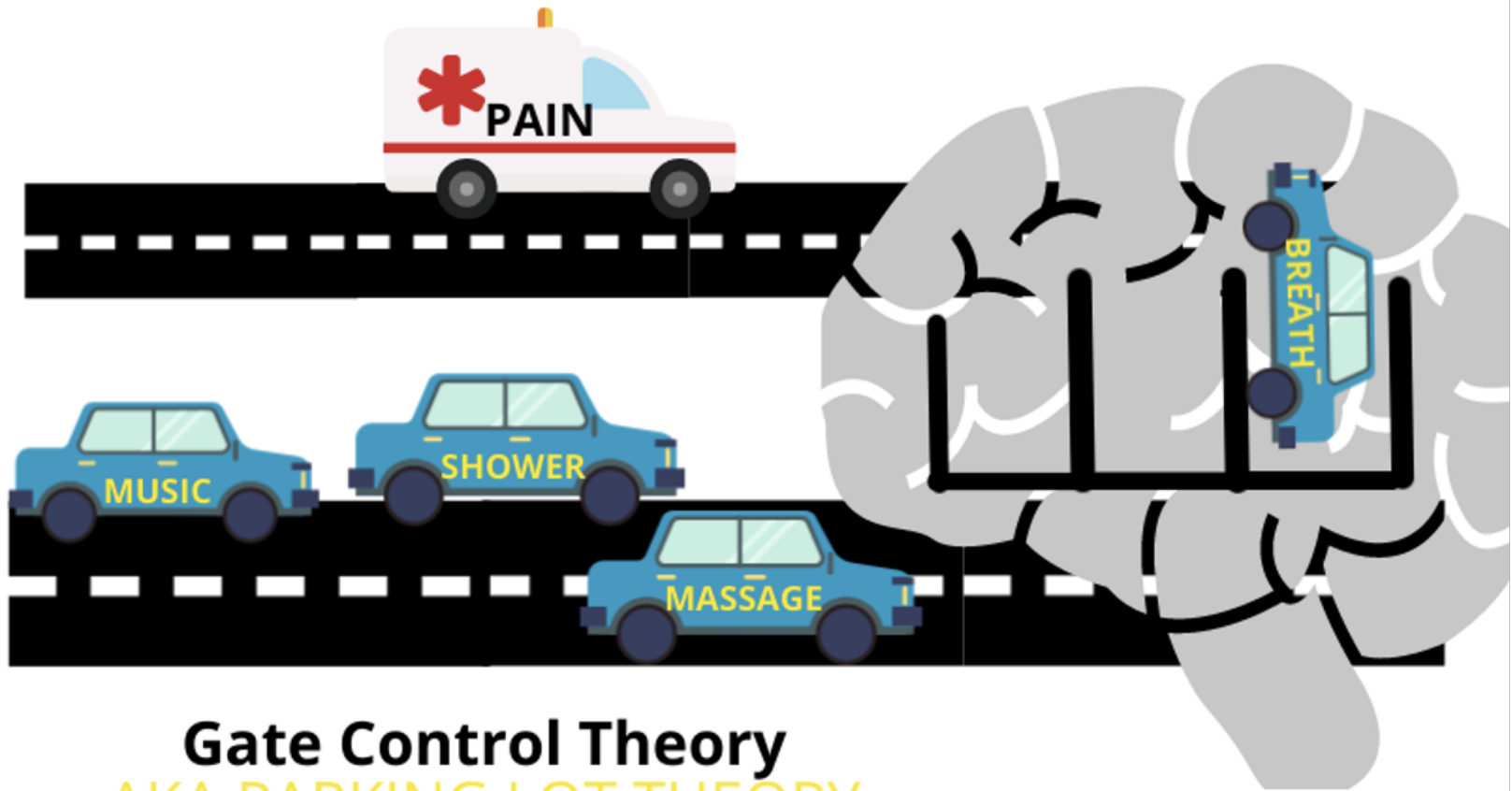
## PAIN VS SUFFERING

PAIN = PHYSICAL

SUFFERING = EMOTIONAL



# Stress Management and Strategies

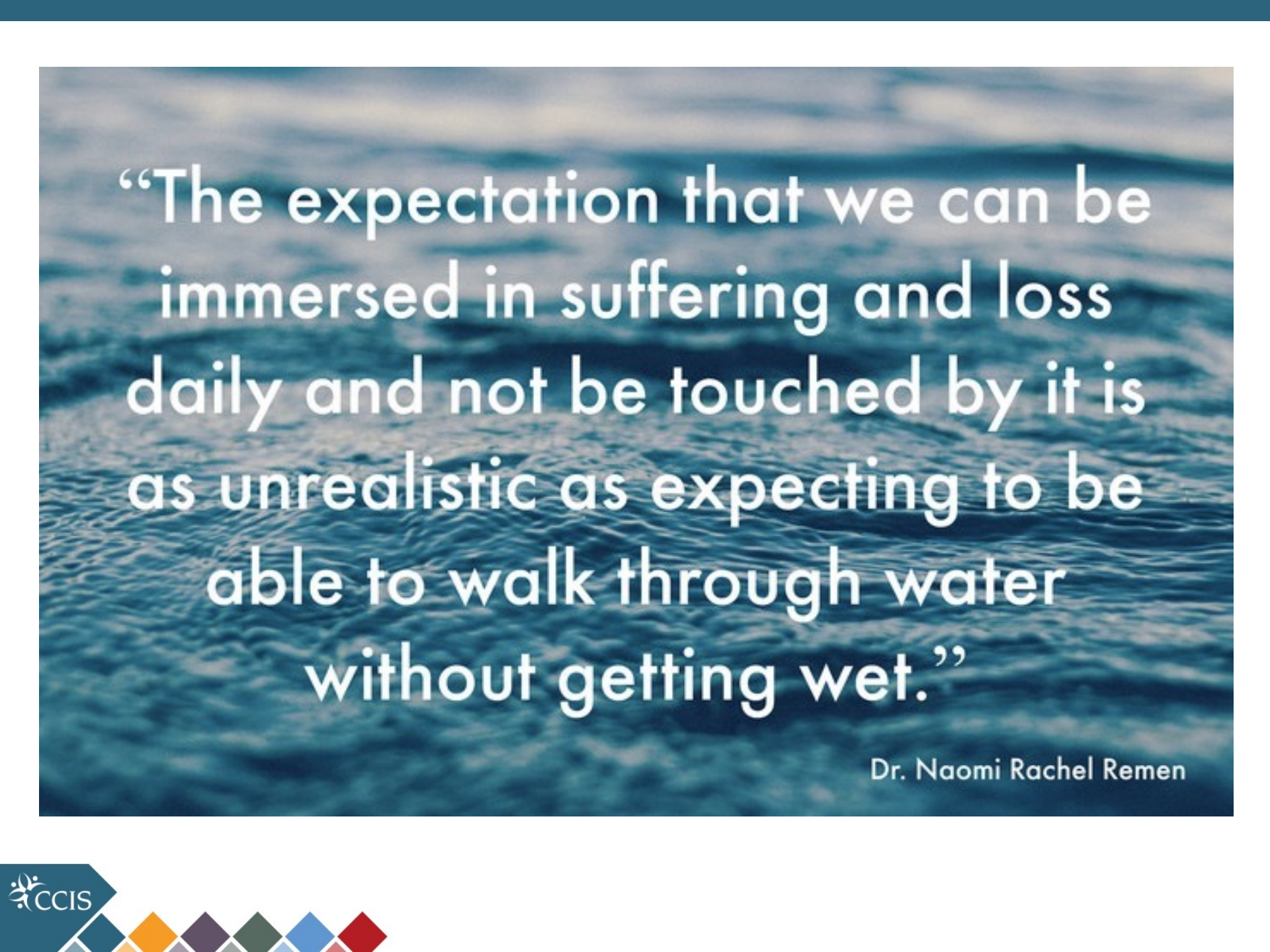


**Gate Control Theory**  
AKA PARKING LOT THEORY

The background of the slide is a close-up, high-resolution image of numerous lemon slices. The slices are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern, filling the entire frame. They are bright yellow with visible white pith and dark seeds. The lighting is even, highlighting the texture of the fruit.

# The Lemon Exercise





“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Dr. Naomi Rachel Remen



# Taking Care of Yourself

- **Question to reflect on: Am I ok carrying on with the day with what I have heard and experienced?**
- **Do something intentional to take care of yourself**
- **Connect and reach out to family/friends/co-workers for more support and debrief**



# Questions