

Minding Ourselves and Each Other During the Postgraduate Experience

TCD Student Counselling Service

Ice Breaker

Tell us about how you are finding the postgraduate experience so far:

- Tell us about one thing that you are looking forward to
- Tell us about one thing that you are finding stressful

What is mental health?



Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

It affects how we think, feel, and act.



What is mental health?

Human beings need:

- **Safety:** Physical and emotional.
- **Love:** The capacity to have an authentic, intimate relationship with at least one other person
- **Purpose:** To align our actions with what we value, and to be validated / accepted for who we are.

Our Mental Health is related to how well these needs are met.



What exactly is mental wellbeing cont

According to Sigmund Freud,
mental health is "the ability to
love, work, and

play" (balance?)....the WHO also
emphasizes the ability to "**cope
with the normal stresses of life**"

Wellbeing is thus the kind of thing that
often seems effortless and 'normal'



Difficulties arise when...

- **Our needs are not being met.**
- **The demands in our environment outweigh our available resources.**
- **We feel powerless, under threat and overwhelmed by this to the point where we can no longer make sense of it.**
- **We feel defined by our problems.**
- **We feel alone.**

Resilience

- The ability to face and overcome adversity to “bounce back”
- Postgraduate study can be demanding, and you will face roadblocks and difficult phases
- You are likely much more resilient than you realise, having recovered multiple failures, disappointments, crises, struggles and losses in your life

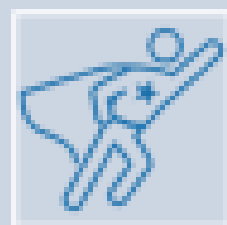
RESILIENCE

means knowing that
rest lets you recharge

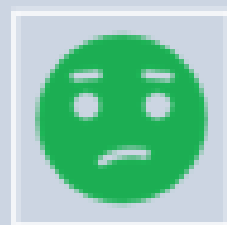


**TAKE THE
BREAKS YOU NEED**

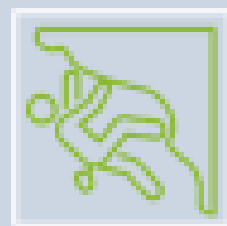
Four Tools for Resilience



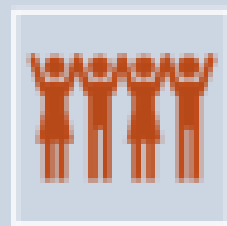
Avoid Avoidance



Manage difficult & painful feelings



Focus on what we can control



Building communities of support

⊘ Avoid Avoidance ⊘

- It's natural to want to avoid pain, and we usually do it through behavioural avoidance (avoiding people or situations likely to cause distress), or emotional avoidance (avoiding our painful feelings).
- Avoidance can be **very effective**, particularly with anxiety, but only in the **short-term**
- When we are constantly running away from difficult feelings and experiences, we become out of touch with ourselves and others. We make decisions based on fear, rather than based on our own needs, goals and values.



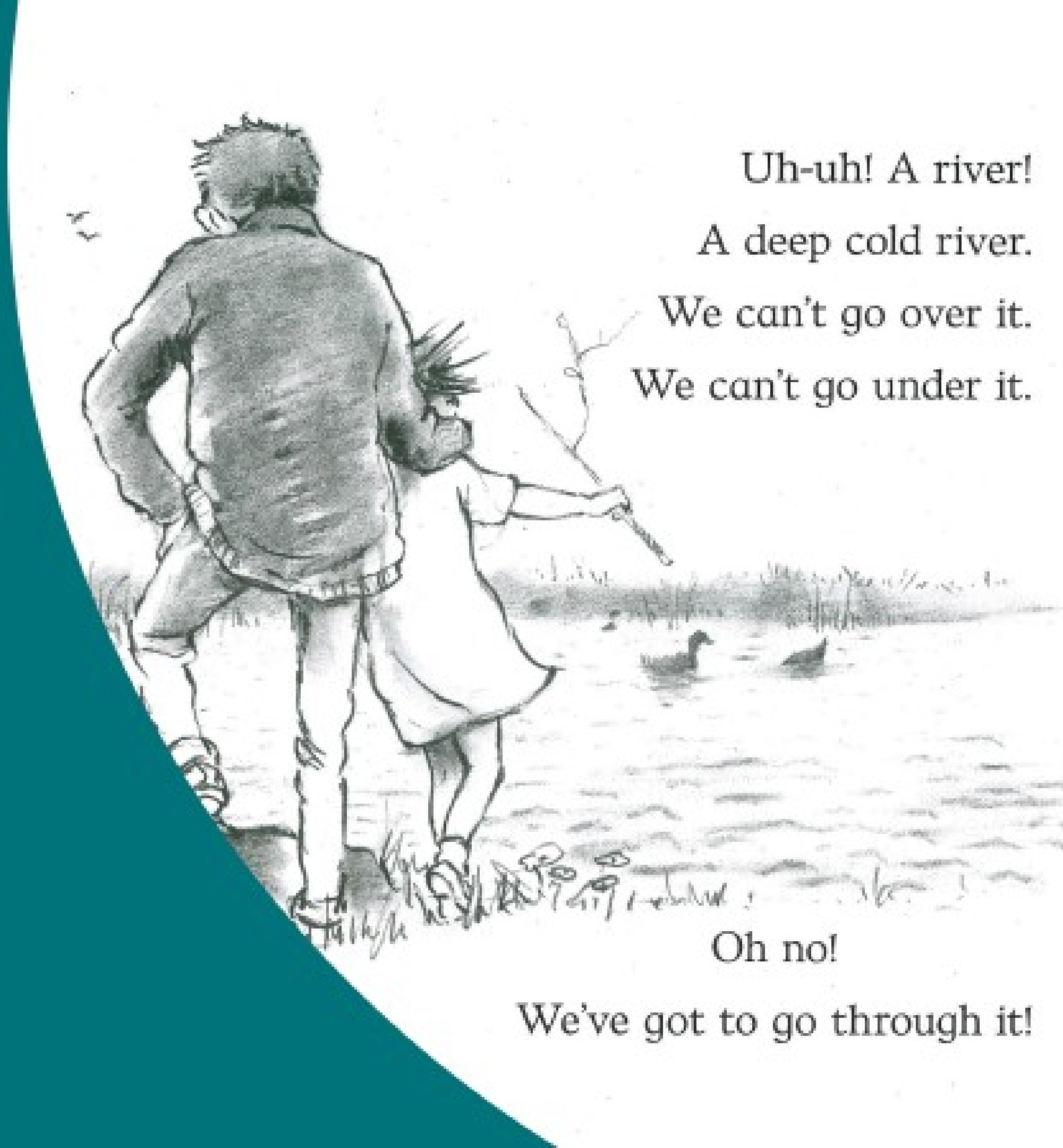
What avoidance do I
engage in?



Beware the comfort zone

Avoidance easily becomes a habit, and can quickly become part of our identity – we believe ourselves unable to tolerate fear or solve problems.

Learning to tolerate distress and face into our problems takes a lot of courage.



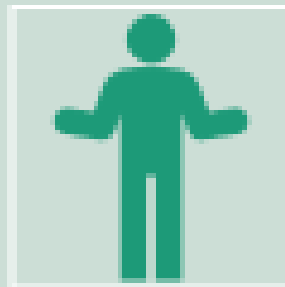
Uh-uh! A river!
A deep cold river.
We can't go over it.
We can't go under it.

Oh no!
We've got to go through it!

Accepting Difficult Feelings



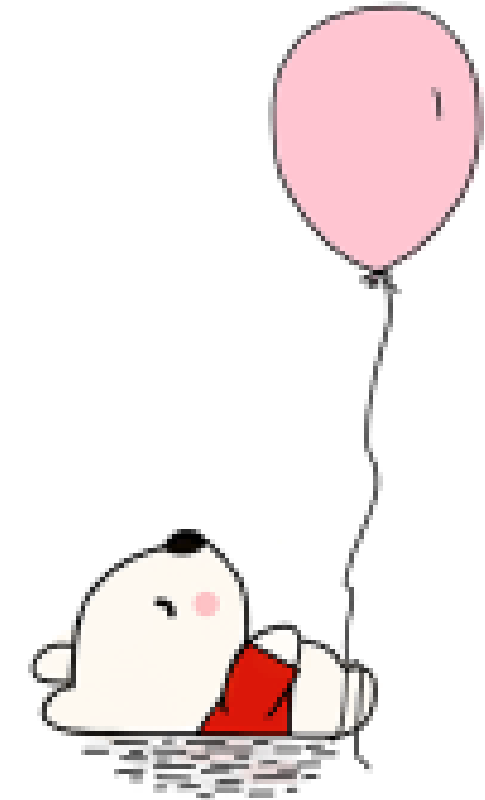
Too often we set aside our greatest goals and ambitions to avoid unpleasant feelings which are ultimately *tolerable*



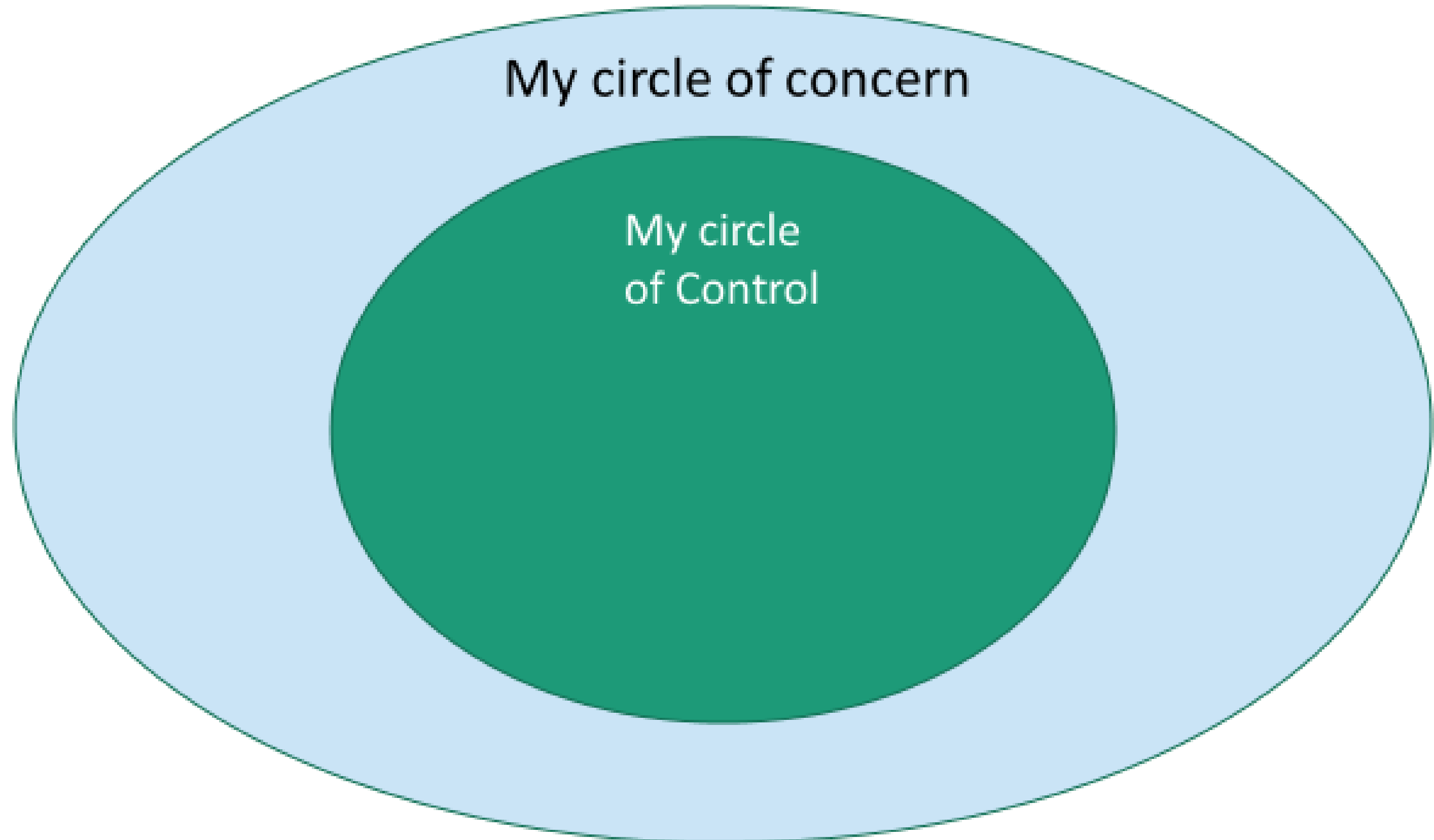
Instead of giving away all our time to avoidance, we need to challenge ourselves to tolerate increasing levels of discomfort/awkwardness/irritation/embarrassment to get where we want to go

Accepting difficult feelings

- Emotional pain is like physical pain – it can act as a **warning system**, telling us something is wrong
- Our challenge when we have a strong emotional response is to slow down, recognise we are having strong feelings, identify what they are and approach with **curiosity**.
- Make space for our unpleasant thoughts and feelings without trying to get rid of them or deny them. Without the struggle, our emotions unfreeze.
- Trust that our emotions are telling us something important.



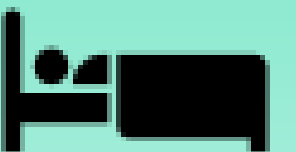
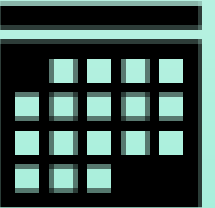
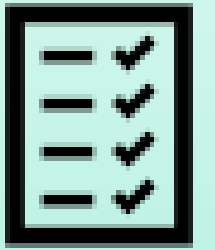
What I can control/influence and what I can't



Why is routine important?

- Autonomy
- Agency
- Predictability
- Control

This is about helping you to feel normal, not about making you extra productive. Enjoy the reduced pressure to be constantly busy.





Recognising we are not alone

- We often compare our insides to everyone else's outsides. Our backstage footage to their highlights reel.
- This makes us feel abnormal and alone
- Recognise that suffering and personal inadequacy are part of what it means to be human
- **Common Humanity:** Our flaws and mistakes are what connect us to everyone around us, rather than what isolates us


Enhancing a sense of belonging

- Join or create communities of solidarity
- Actively ensure that everyone is included. Look for those on the margins, and seek to include them.
- Now we need each other more than ever and we need to be more creative and more proactive in staying connected
- Always remember that everyone is doing the best that they can in any given moment.



Harsh Self-Criticism

- A harsh and punishing inner critic can turn a bad day into something much worse.
- Think about how you speak to yourself in your worst moments
- Imagine that self-critic stepping outside of you

A close-up photograph of a lit matchstick writing on a spiral-bound notebook. The matchstick is positioned in the bottom right corner, with its glowing tip touching the paper. The notebook's spiral binding is visible at the top. The text written on the page is in a bold, hand-drawn style.

YOU ARE NOT
GOOD
ENOUGH!

Four questions about my self- critic

1) How do I feel when I speak to myself that way?

2) What is the cost of speaking to myself this way?

3) What is the purpose of the self-critic? (and is it working? – Spoiler alert - it isn't)

4) What do I fear if I were to let the self-criticism go?

Your Self-Talk Matters



"Don't believe everything your mind is telling you"

It really matters if your inner voice is constantly criticising you or constantly scaring you.

This is a long-practised habit, so we can't change it overnight, but we CAN change it

The first step is to become aware of it, so it can help to start writing down what your thoughts are during times of high emotion


Positive Self-Talk


Positive self-talk can reduce anxiety, increase effort, and enhance self-confidence


TALK TO
YOURSELF
LIKE YOU
WOULD TO
SOMEONE
YOU LOVE.


BRENÉ BROWN

Self-Compassionate Letter: Guidelines

 Imagine that there is someone who loves and accepts you unconditionally for who you are. What would that person say to you about this part of yourself?

 Think about how many other people in the world are struggling with the same thing that you're struggling with.

 Consider the ways in which events that have happened in your life, the family environment you grew up in, or even your genes may have contributed to this negative aspect of yourself.

 In a compassionate way, ask yourself whether there are things that you could do to improve or better cope with this negative aspect. Focus on how constructive changes could make you feel happier, healthier, or more fulfilled, and avoid judging yourself.

After writing the letter, put it down for a little while. Then come back to it later and read it again. It may be

1

**Recognize your
expertise**


2

**Remember what you
do well**

3

**Realize there is no
such thing as
"Perfection"**

**Acknowledge and Accept your
strengths**



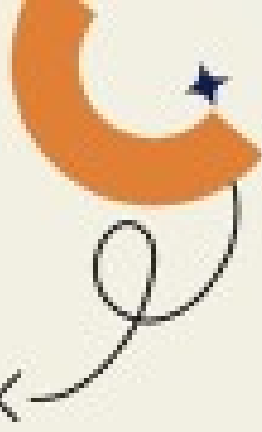
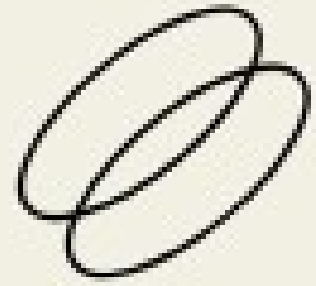
Re-frame the way you

Situations to discuss: respond to failure.

- Your application for funding has been rejected.
- You receive negative feedback from reviewer 2 on your journal article
- Your supervisor highlights issues with your research methodology

**Breako
ut
room
questi**

What is a way to
reframe these
situations
compassionately?



HERE FOR YOU

IN TRINITY

STUDENT
COUNSELLING

STUDENT 2 STUDENT

STUDENT-COUNSELLING@TCD.IE

STUDENT2STUDENT@TCD.IE

STUDENT LEARNING
DEVELOPMENT

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A SERVICE FOR
EVERY SUPPORT

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<https://www.tcd.ie/seniortutor/>

PG support:
01-8961417
pgsupp@tcd.ie

Students' Union:
www.tcdsu.org

Graduate Students'
Union www.tcdgsu.ie

College Health
Centre:

Ph: 8961556/
8961591



9 pm- 2:30 am every
night of term -Ph: 1
800 793 793 /
IM service on their
website



Ph: 116 123,
call in to
Marlborough Street
during the day for in-
person support



Local GP
DUBDOC - Ph:
454 5604

**Out of
Hours
Support**



3 Minute

Relaxation

Rate current stress level out of 10

- Engage in simple breathing exercise
- Rate stress level again

Thank You!