

survive & thrive

moving forward from interpersonal trauma

Week 04

Surviving the surviving

Welcome back

- How did you get on?
- Safety issues?
- Getting started?
- Thinking about relationships?
- Sleeping problems?



What we will cover today

- Coping with difficult feelings
- How did feelings get so difficult?
- Safe coping
- ‘Surviving the Surviving’
- Skill practice
- Thought for today

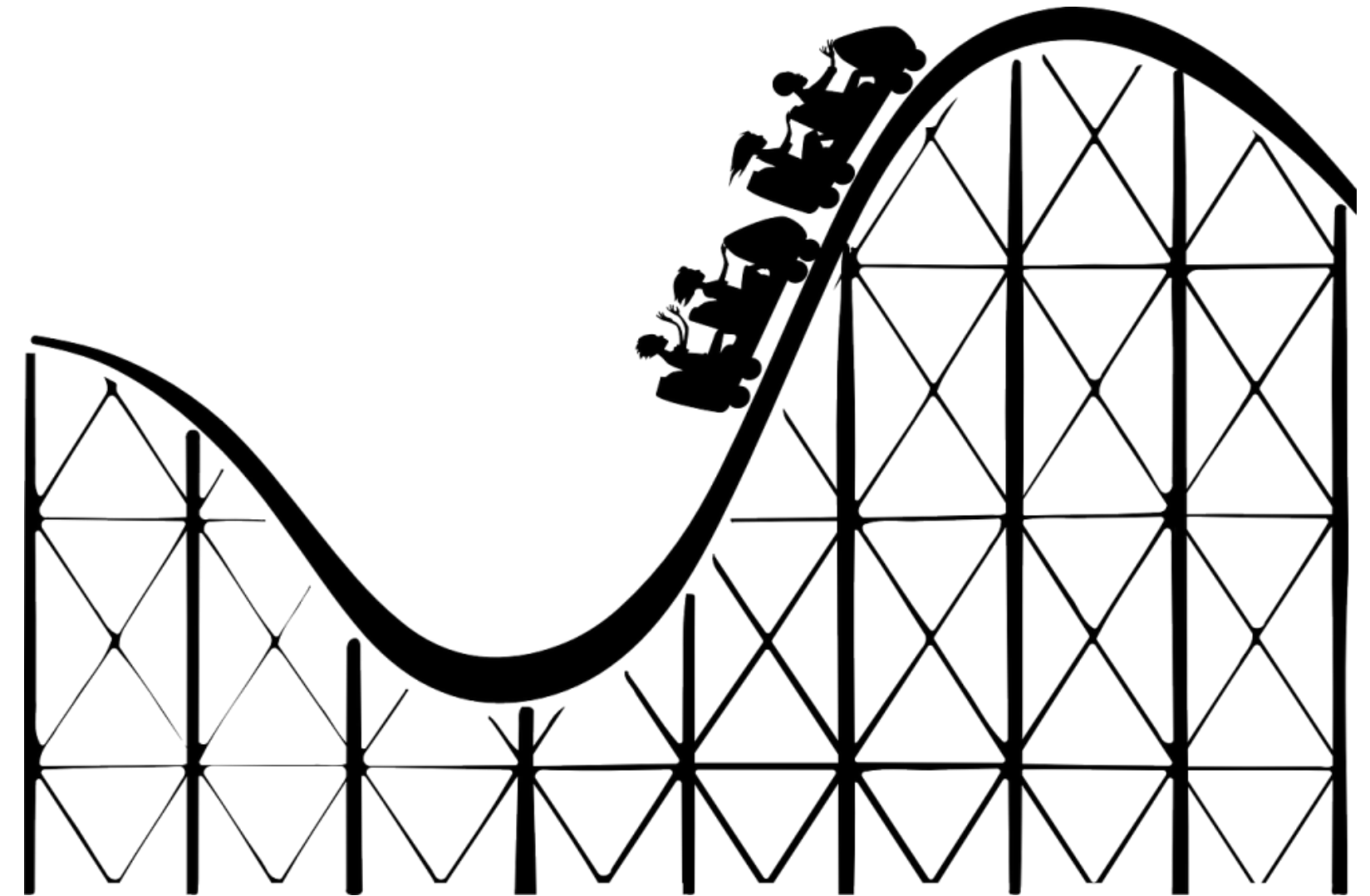
Brief breathing exercise



Coping with difficult feelings

We talked in week 2 about the difficult feelings survivors often experience:

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Anger



Coping with difficult feelings

We talked about when survivors have difficult feelings, they may have found ways of coping with these:

- Self harm
- Eating
- Alcohol
- Risky relationships
- Drugs
- Avoiding feelings generally

Coping with difficult feelings

- We can call this ‘surviving the surviving’.
- These are ways of coping which push the bad feelings away but can lead to even more problems in the longer term.

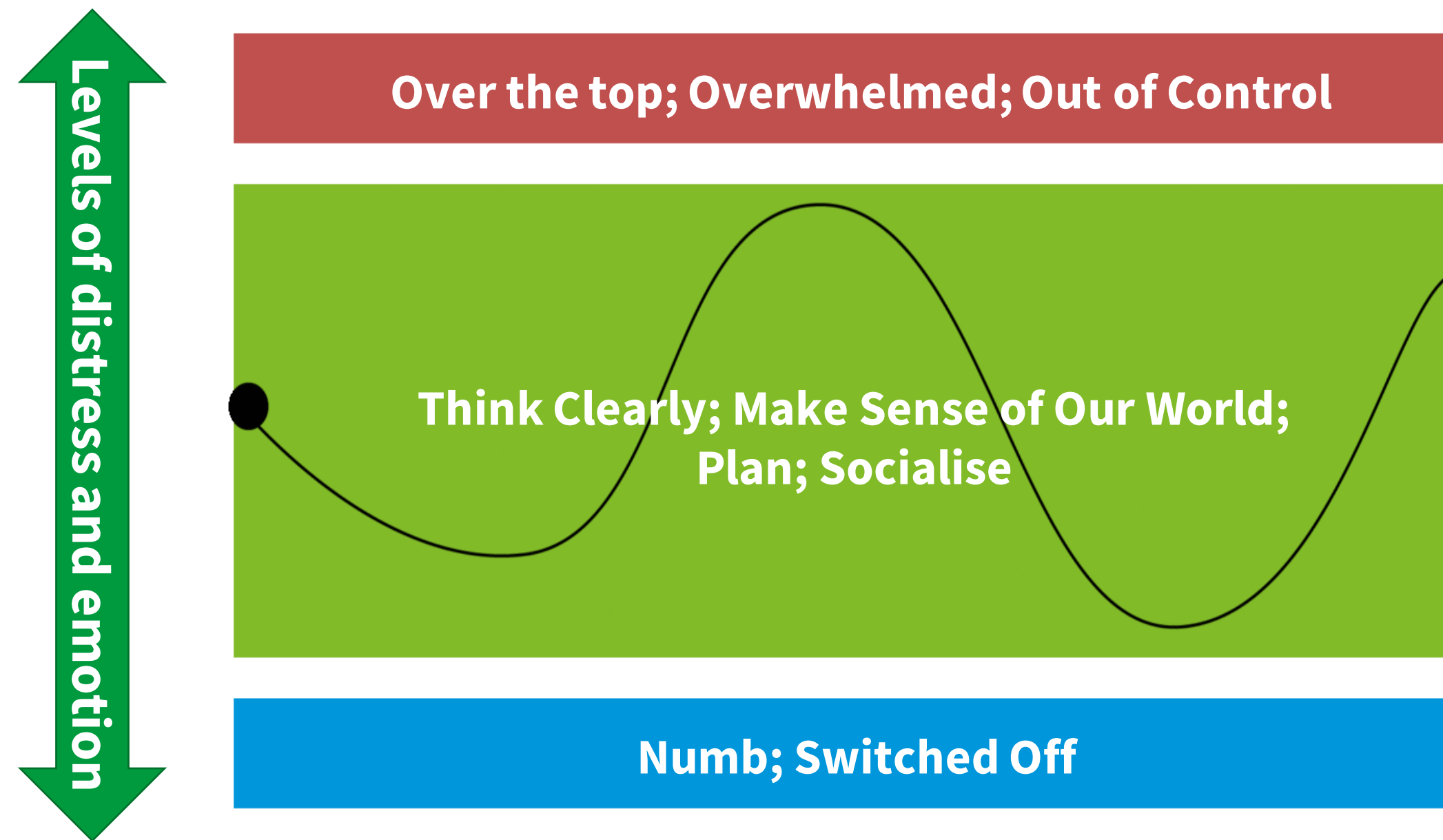


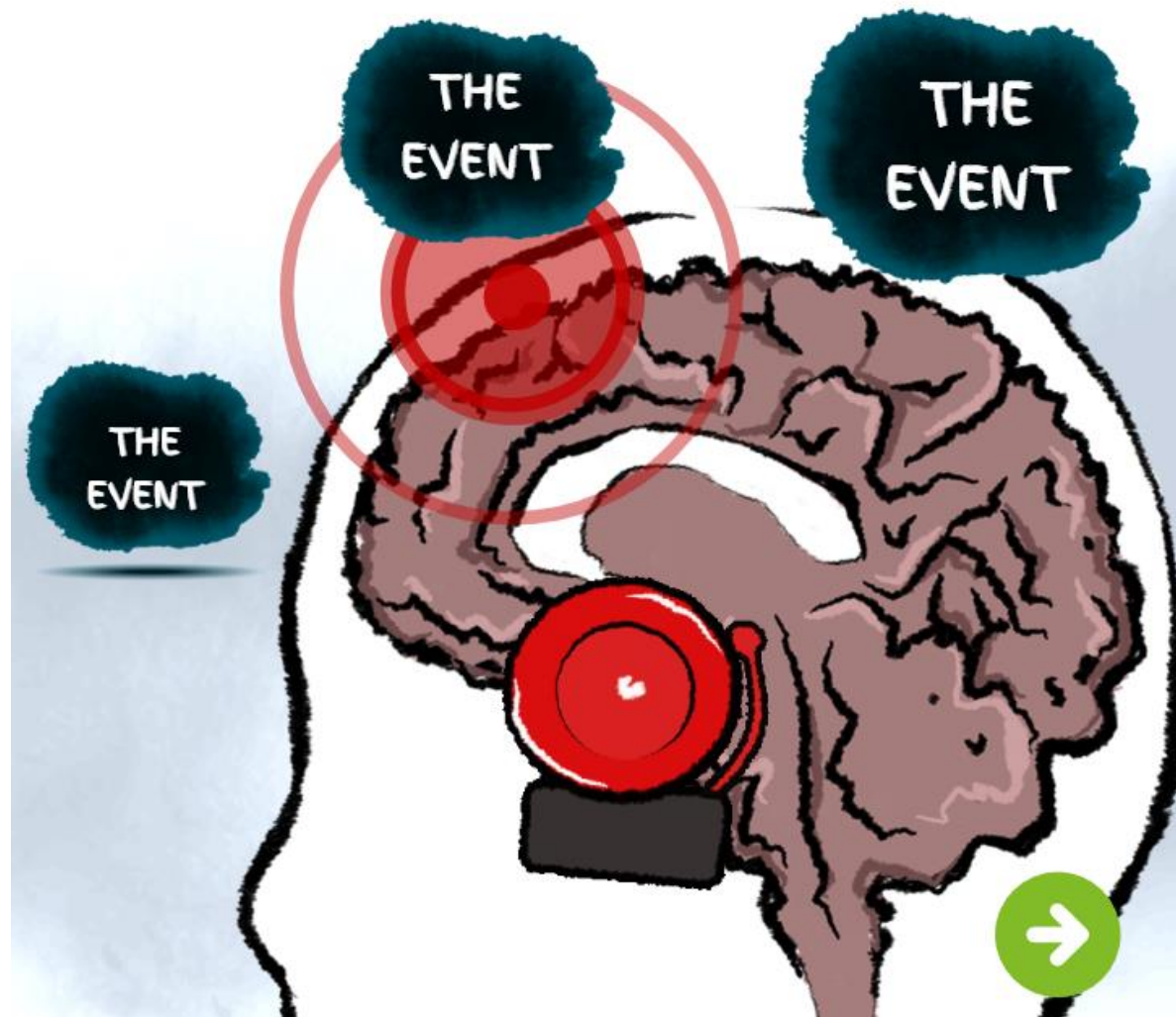
Coping with difficult feelings

- We want to look at ways that will help you to cope with bad feelings without pushing them away.
- It's like finding the brakes on the roller coaster.

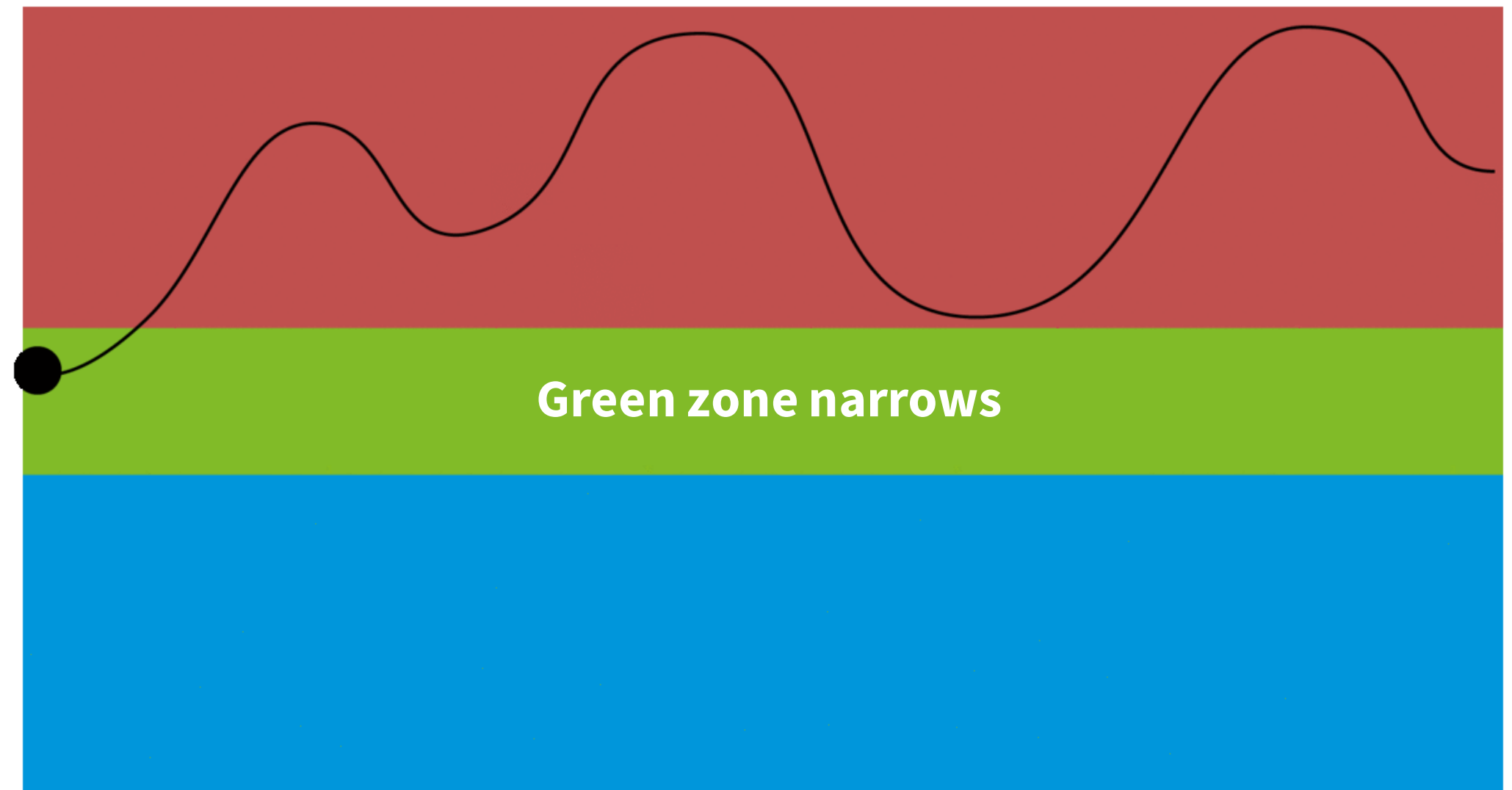
The Window of Tolerance

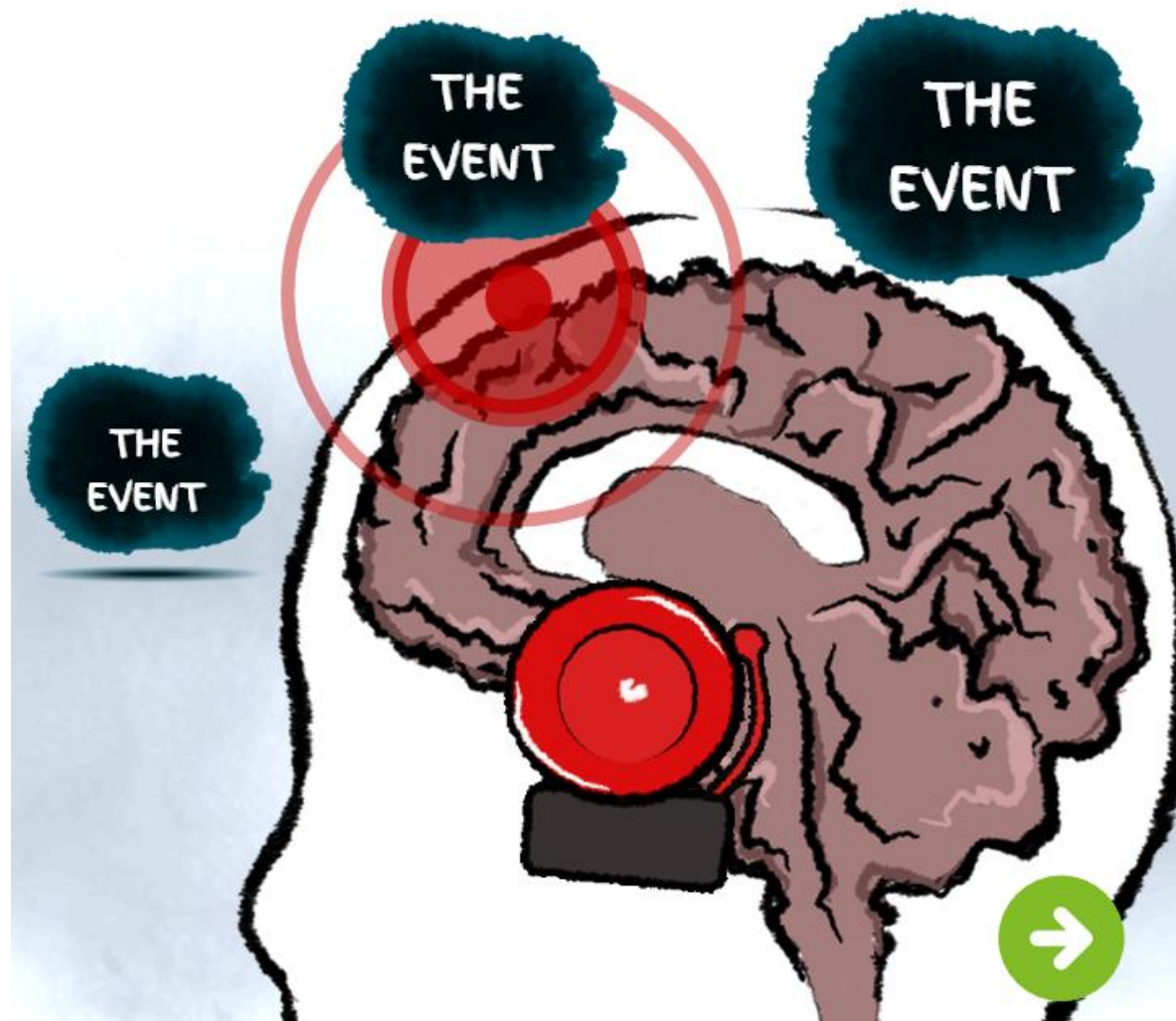
Seigal 1999; Ogden 2000



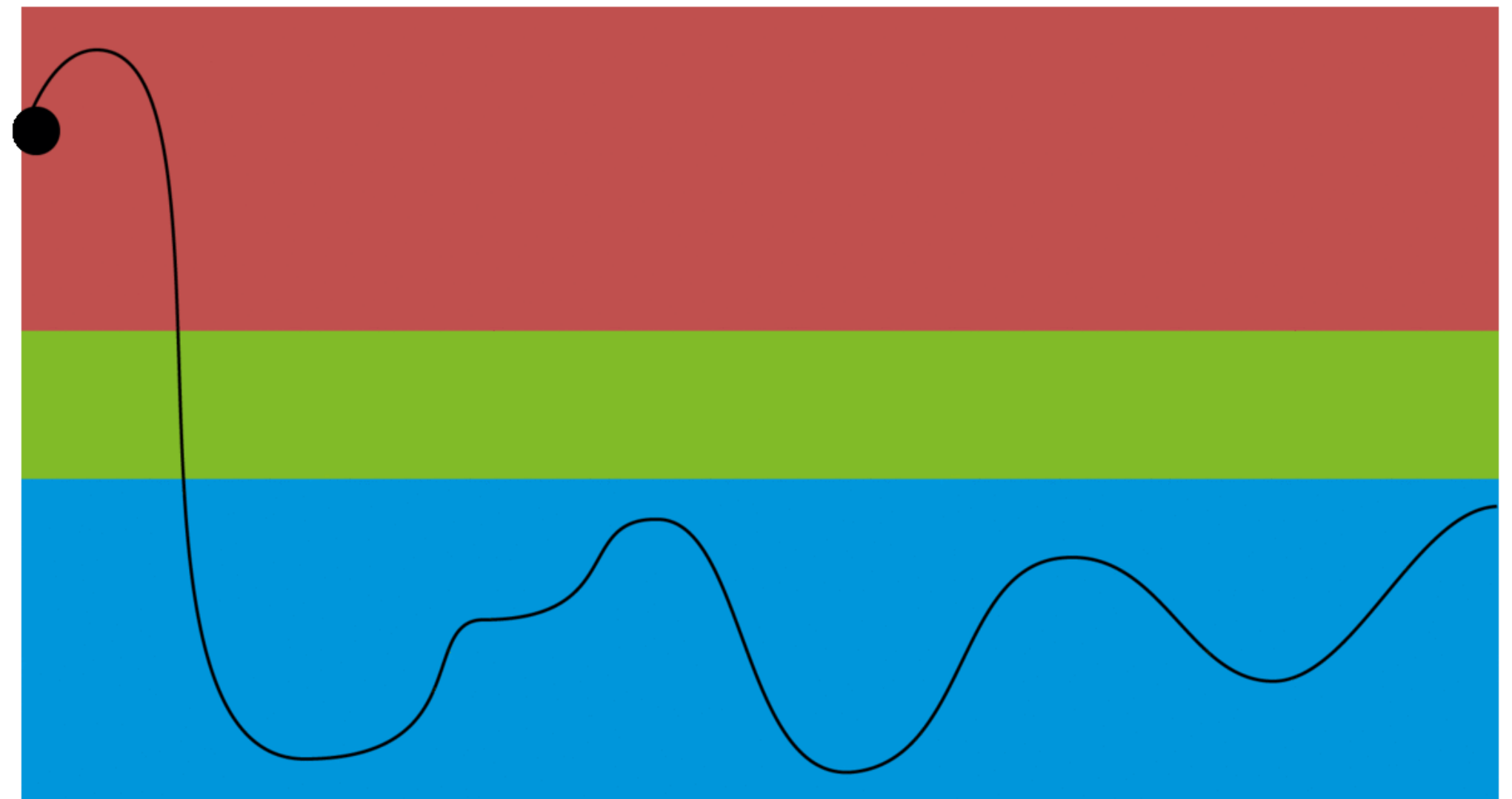


Angry, panicked, super-alert,
focus on avoiding threat at all costs





Switch to blue zone to mentally escape; feel numb; tuned out; detached; dissociated

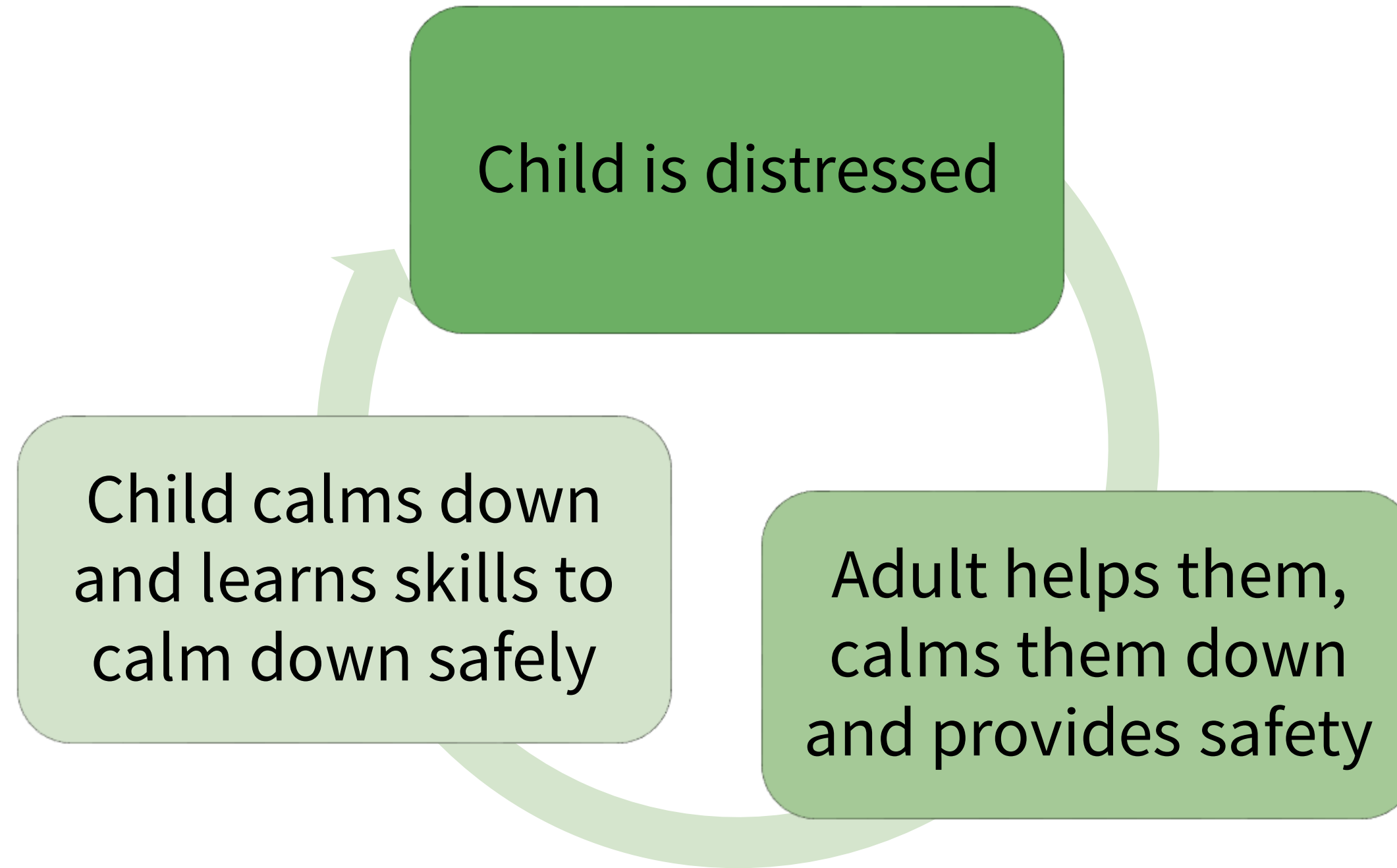


Safe coping

We could learn safe coping if we have been lucky enough to have adults around when we were kids, who knew what to do when we were upset and how to calm us down.



One way of learning safe coping

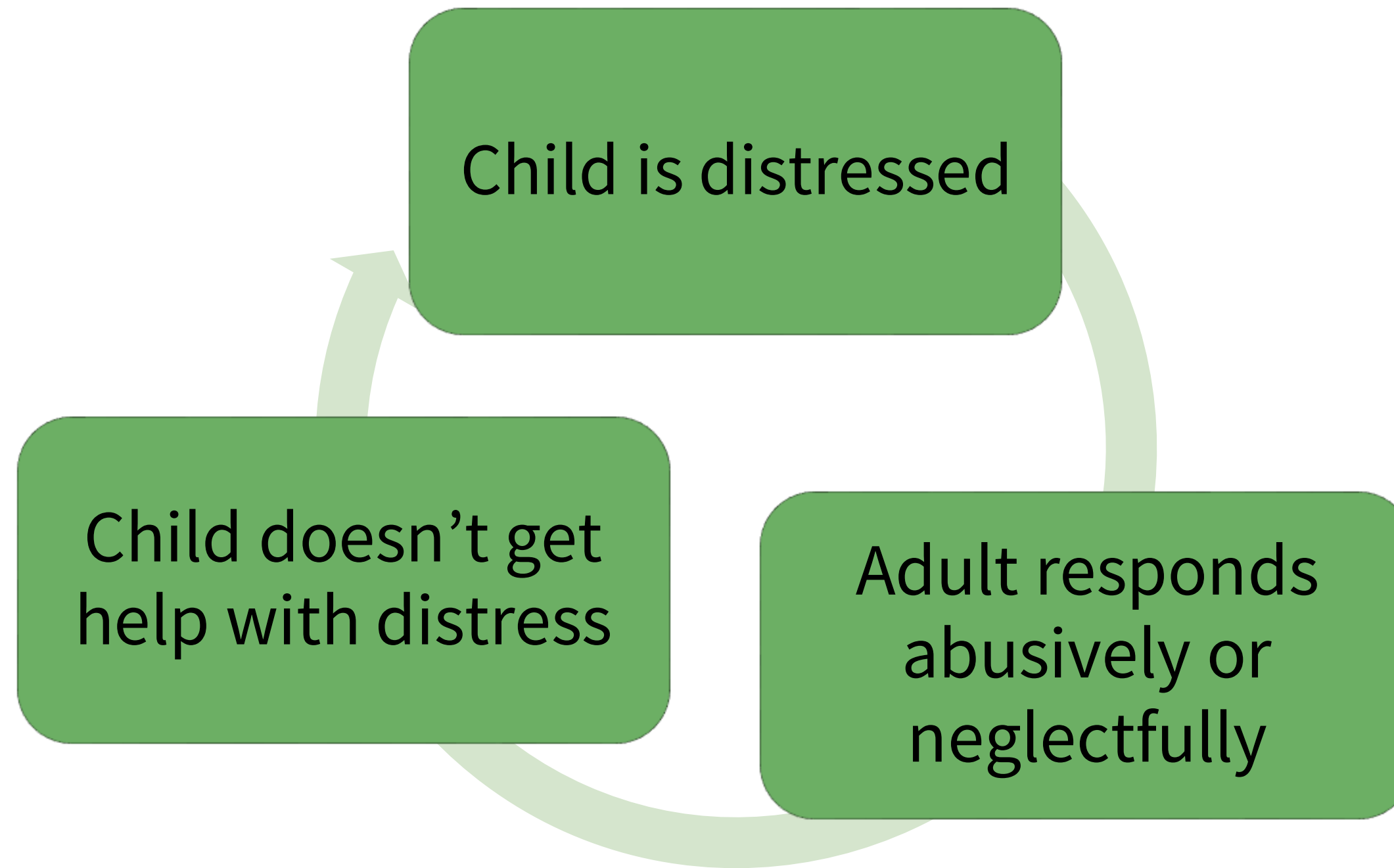


What we learn...

That we can get emotions under control (get off the rollercoaster) by either:

- Calming ourselves down, by using 'safe coping' skills **and/or**
- Going to other people for support
- This builds the green part of the 'Window of Tolerance'

One way of learning unsafe coping

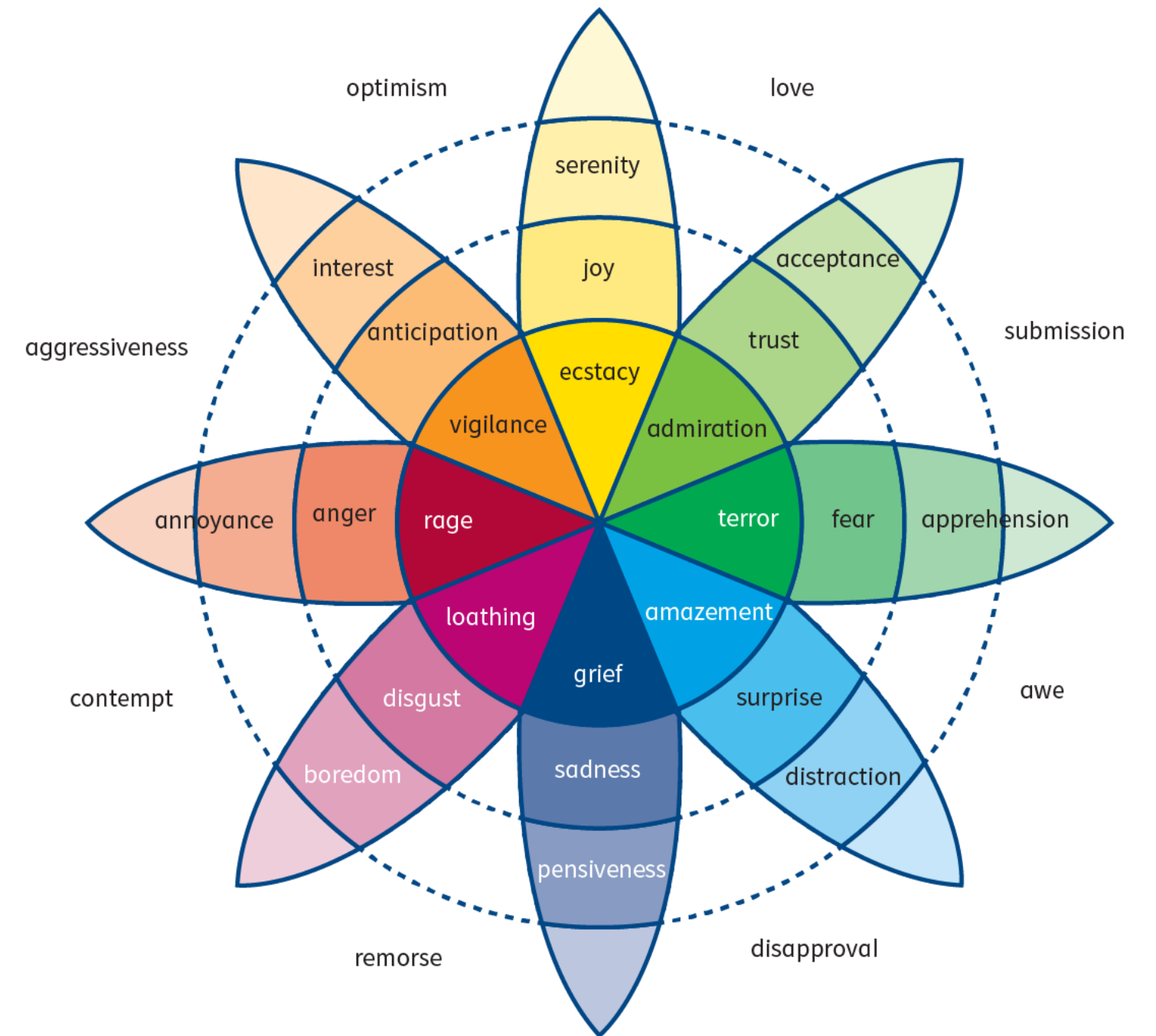


What we learn...

- That bad feelings don't go away—they get worse (this is like building the scaffolding of the rollercoaster).
- That going to other people for help is a waste of time.
- That you need to have some other way of stopping these bad feelings. You learn to **avoid** bad feelings.

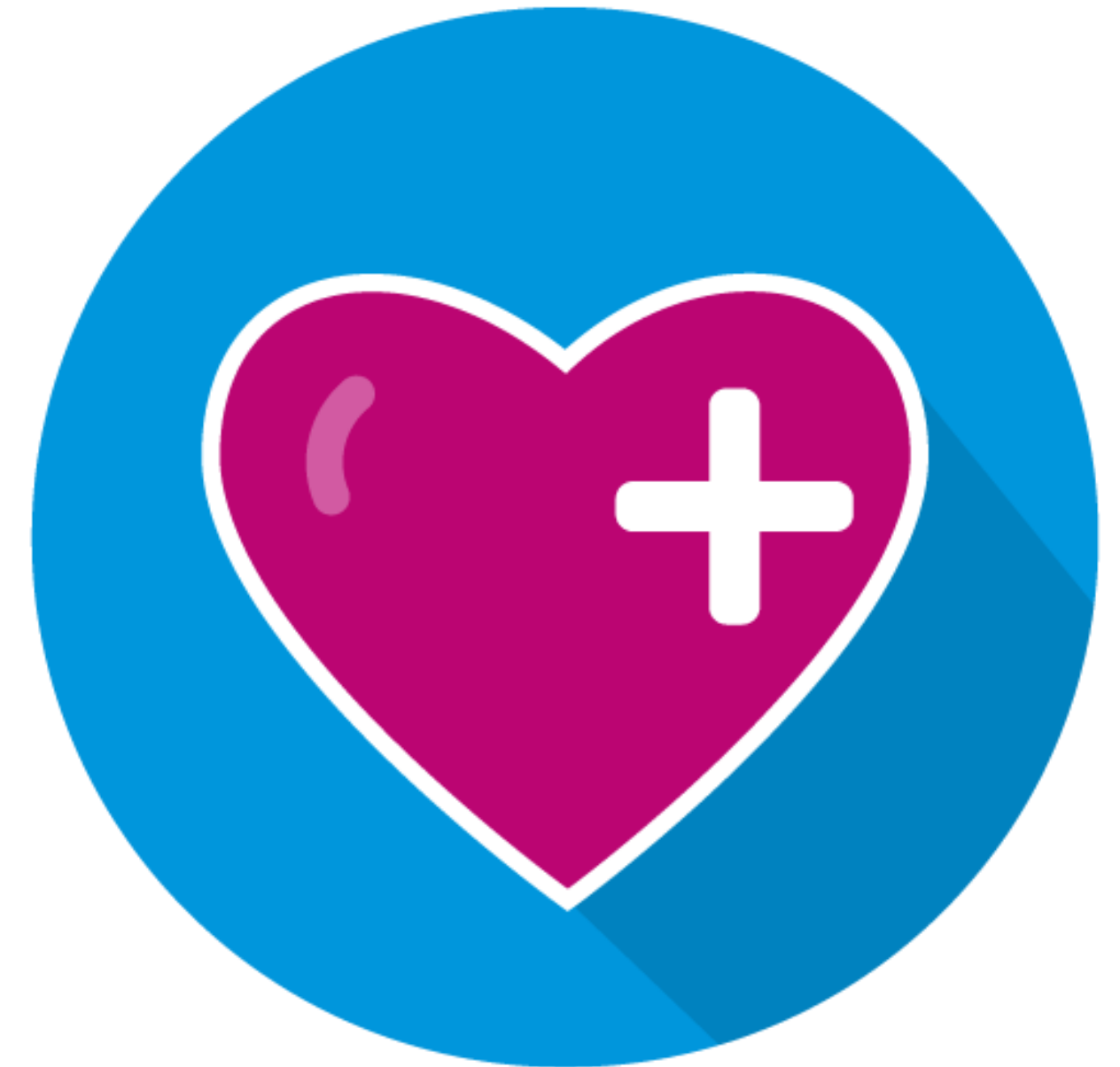
Coping with difficult feelings

- It is really helpful to try **not** to block out or avoid bad feelings but to find safe ways to cope with them and accept that feelings are part of life.
- Blocking out bad feelings often leaves us feeling numb as ‘all feelings’ get blocked out.



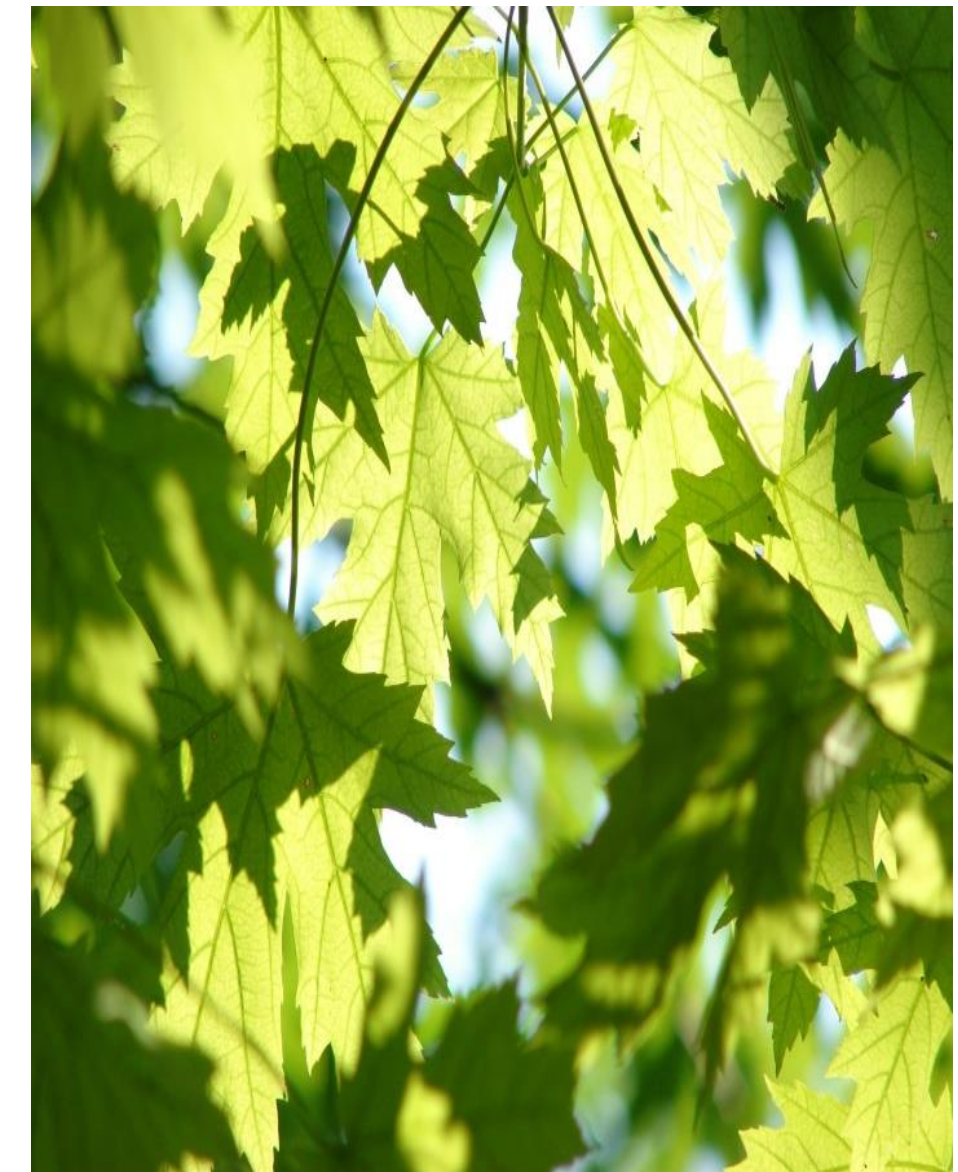
Some safe coping ideas...

- Listen to music
- Talk to a (safe) friend
- Go for a walk or do any exercise you like. Moving around releases 'calming' chemicals in your brain



Some safe coping ideas...

- Breathe slowly
- Ground yourself
- Learn to be mindful:
 - Focussing on the present moment
 - Learning to 'notice' thoughts and feelings without judging, being 'curious' about why we are feeling this rather than overwhelmed
 - We will practice this in the course



Some safe coping ideas...

- Listen to music
- Get in touch with your green side; garden or walk in a park
- What makes you feel calmer and more in control...?
- What have you tried before to get 'safely' into the 'green' zone?



Some safe coping ideas...

- Get creative:
 - Write
 - Draw
 - Decorate the house
- Get support:
 - Friends
 - Support group
 - Safe family



Some safe coping ideas...

Express your feelings safely:

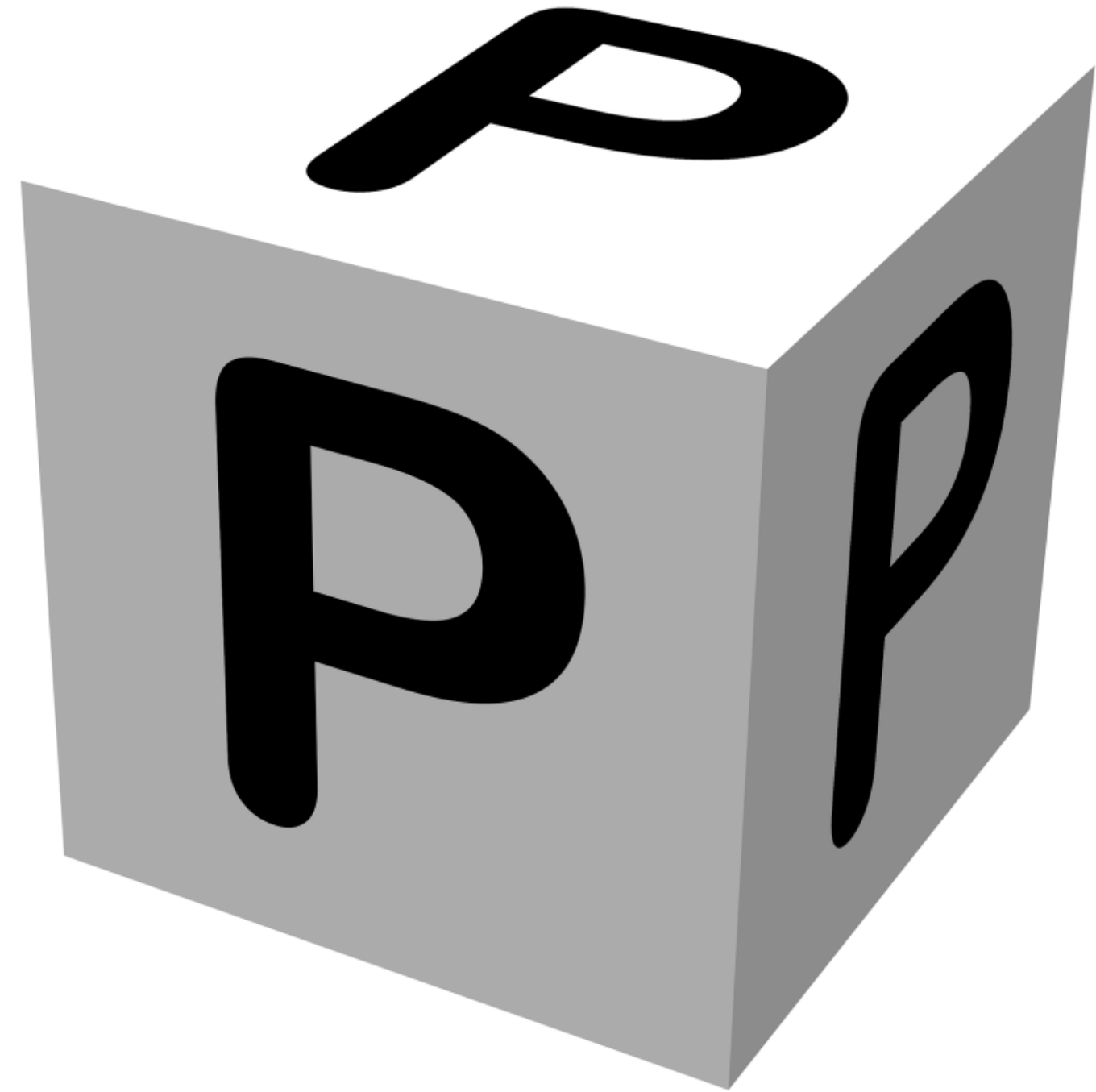
- Write it out/draw it
- Tear up a magazine/old phone book
- Throw ice cubes at a brick wall or in your shower cubicle
- Punch pillows/ scream into pillows
- Just notice the feelings and let them go.

Group blether

- We are all individuals and many of you will have developed ways of coping that works for you. Or you may have tried some of the ones here.
- Can you share some of your experiences and successes?

The 3 Ps

- Preparation
- Practice
- Patience



Surviving the surviving —self harm

If you do not want to reduce your self harm.
Think about safer self harm:

- Using clean things to cut
- Cleaning and dressing wounds
- Getting help for severe wounds or wounds which are not healing
- Try not to self harm whilst under the influence of substances

Surviving the surviving —self harm

If you want to reduce your self harm:

- Keep a diary. Track how you were feeling, what was happening just before, what happened afterwards
- Try some of the safe coping strategies
- Try to wait a few minutes
- Try something less harmful:
 - Ice cubes against the skin can be one idea
 - Drawing in red

Surviving the surviving —alcohol

Answer these questions in your head.

How many yeses?

If more than two, you should think more about this.

- Have you ever felt the need to cut down your drinking?
- Have you got annoyed because someone criticised your drinking?
- Have you felt guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink in the morning to steady yourself?

Surviving the surviving —alcohol

- Keep a diary—how much, where and when—be honest!
- Try to drink lower alcohol alternatives
- Have non-alcoholic drinks as spacers
- Drink more slowly—take small sips
- Plan some alcohol-free days per week
- Set your self a limit when you drink

Surviving the surviving —alcohol

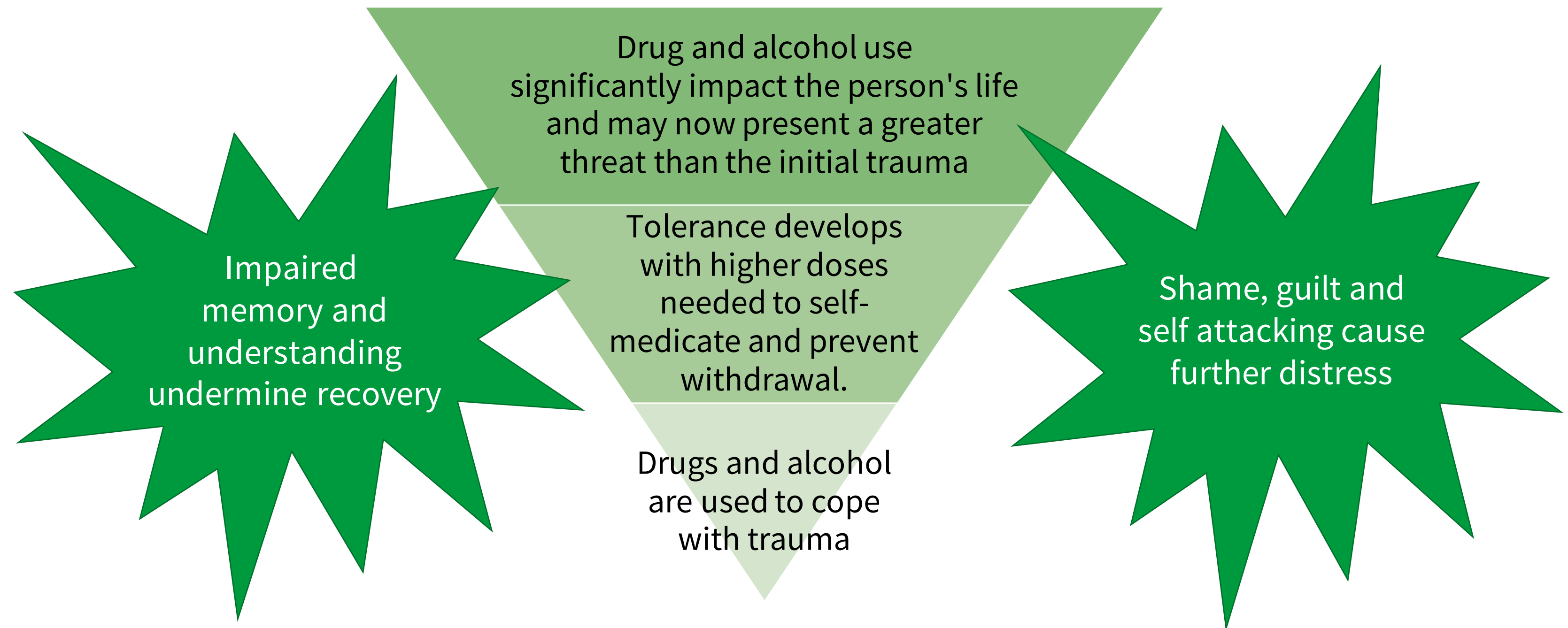
If you feel you need more specialist support:

- Talk to your G.P/ support worker /CPN about a referral
- Ask the course leaders for information

Surviving the surviving —drugs

- If you are worried about your drug use, try keeping a diary and using the safe coping skills as alternatives
- Ask for information about specialist services.

What starts as coping



Surviving the surviving —how substances help

- Reduce fear and sense of danger
- Help you cope with social situations
- Enable you to say what you think
- Help you sleep
- Numb the pain
- Help you forget
- Help you feel things
- Help you feel better about yourself

Surviving the surviving —impact of substances

- Dependence
- Physical health problems/shortened life expectancy
- Mental health problems
- Damage to relationships
- Job loss
- Financial problems
- Involvement in crime
- Vulnerability to abuse
- You become convinced that you can't cope without substances
- Guilt/shame/low self esteem

Surviving the surviving —drugs and alcohol

If you can't stop at the moment, reduce the risks:

- Try not to mix drugs and alcohol
- Know what you're taking
- Use with people you trust
- Get Naloxone training and ask your friends to go too
- Reduce risks of infection by using clean equipment
- Learn how to inject safely from harm reduction services
- Keep in touch with services and those trying to support you

Surviving the surviving —drugs and alcohol

Cutting down or stopping:

- **Do not** suddenly stop drinking if you are physically dependent as you may experience severe withdrawals that are very risky (get advice from a professional if you are not sure if you are)
- Get support: AA/NA/CA, Drugs and Alcohol Services, your GP, family, friends

Surviving the surviving —drugs and alcohol

- Give yourself rewards to work towards and to keep yourself motivated
- Look at how you spend your time, and who you spend time with
- Think ahead and have a plan to manage urges and risks to staying in control
- Don't give up if you have a slip, try to see it as an opportunity to look at what triggered it and develop strategies for dealing with the trigger

Surviving the surviving —binge eating

- Do you often try to restrict your food and then find yourself overeating?
- This is a binge eating pattern

Surviving the surviving —binge eating

- Try to eat little and often
- Keep a diary of what, where and when you overeat
—can you find a pattern and change it?
- Focus on your strengths and try to make yourself feel good
- Try the safe coping strategies
- Get support and a specialist referral if you need this.

Vicious cycle of shame and guilt



Safe coping...how it feels

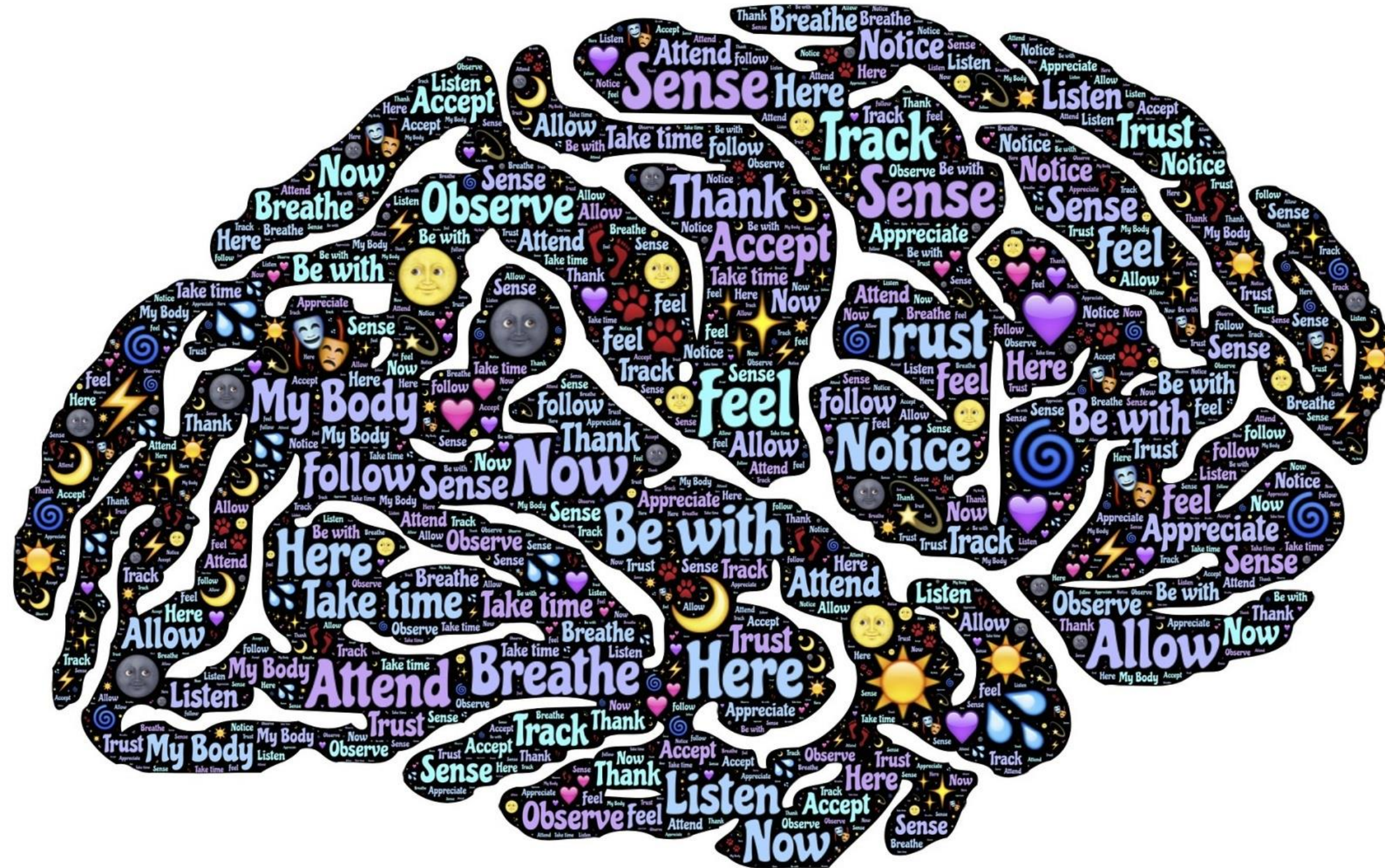
- Safe coping will **not** have the effect of immediately numbing your feelings.
- Safe coping will **not** take bad feelings away.
- Safe coping should feel like being able to slow down the rollercoaster, until it feels a lot less scary.
- Safe coping should take us back to the green in the 'Window of Tolerance'.

The 3 Ps

- Preparation
- Practice
- Patience



One-minute mindmap



Safe coping practice



A final thought

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old but building the new.”

Socrates