

THE **Expert Talk**  
WE HELP YOU HELP THEM

# Trauma-Informed Leadership



# Welcome

**01**

## Introduction

- > Who is Kim?
- > Meet your coach
- > Self-care and housekeeping

**02**

## Big Questions

- > What is trauma?
- > What are the foundations of trauma?
- > How does trauma show up at work?

**03**

## Big Ideas

- > Self-regulation & dysregulation
- > Triggers & Twinkles
- > The neurodiversity connection
- > Trauma-informed boundary-setting
- > Post-traumatic growth

# Today's Roadmap

1

Types & Roots  
of Trauma

Plus, what it is and what  
it isn't

2

The Nervous  
System & Window  
of Tolerance

How we evolved and are  
all connected

3

Self-Care &  
Boundary Setting

The foundational  
concepts of trauma-  
informed leadership

4

Creating Safe  
Spaces & Teams

What it is and how it  
empowers teams

# What is Trauma?

Trauma is not what happens to you; it is what happens inside of you as a result of what happens to you  
~Gabor Mate~

## Trauma is:

- ✓ An ongoing nervous system response to an overwhelmingly stressful situation
- ✓ Unique to each person, complex and layered
- ✓ Impacted by personality, culture and current environment

## Trauma is not:

- ✗ The event that caused the ongoing response
- ✗ A feeling, an emotion, a "phase", attention seeking behaviour, something we can "get over", or something we choose
- ✗ Always conscious

# Types of Trauma

Response to acute crisis: accidents, assaults, war, terror, abuse, to name a few

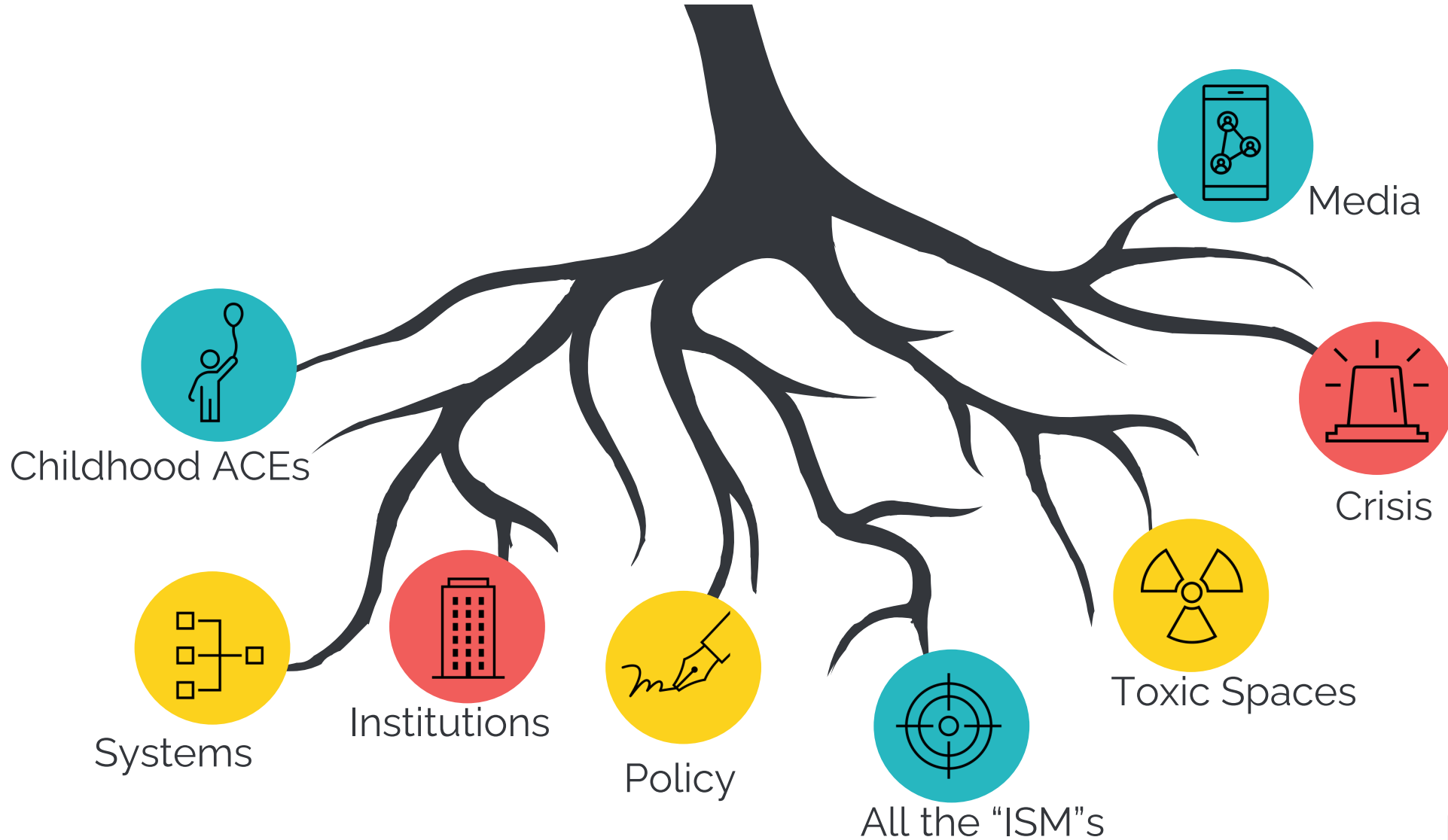
Response to ongoing cultural, racial or intergenerational marginalization and abuses

Sanctuary Trauma & Systems Trauma

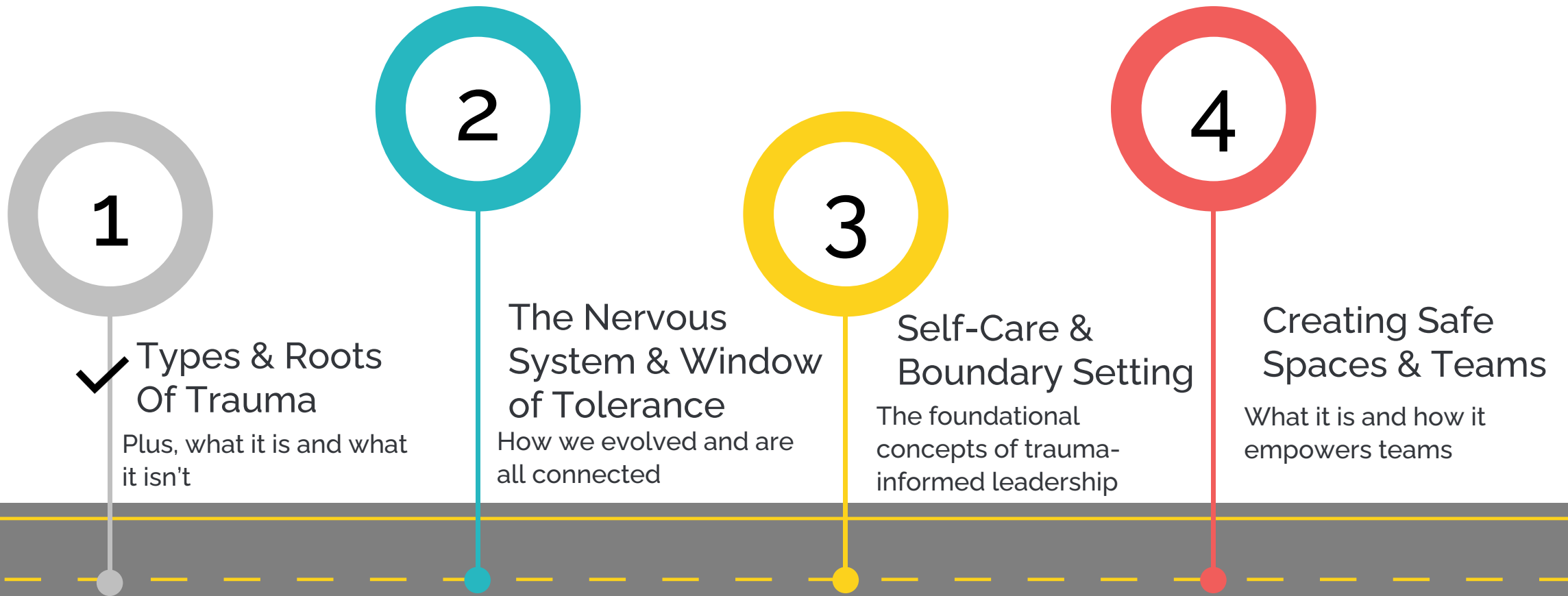
Response to ongoing or chronic life stressors: bullying, domestic unrest, poverty, medical conditions, neurodiversity, caregiving

Response to other overwhelming or chronic situations like surgery, birth trauma, "secondary" trauma, systems and collective trauma = PTSD

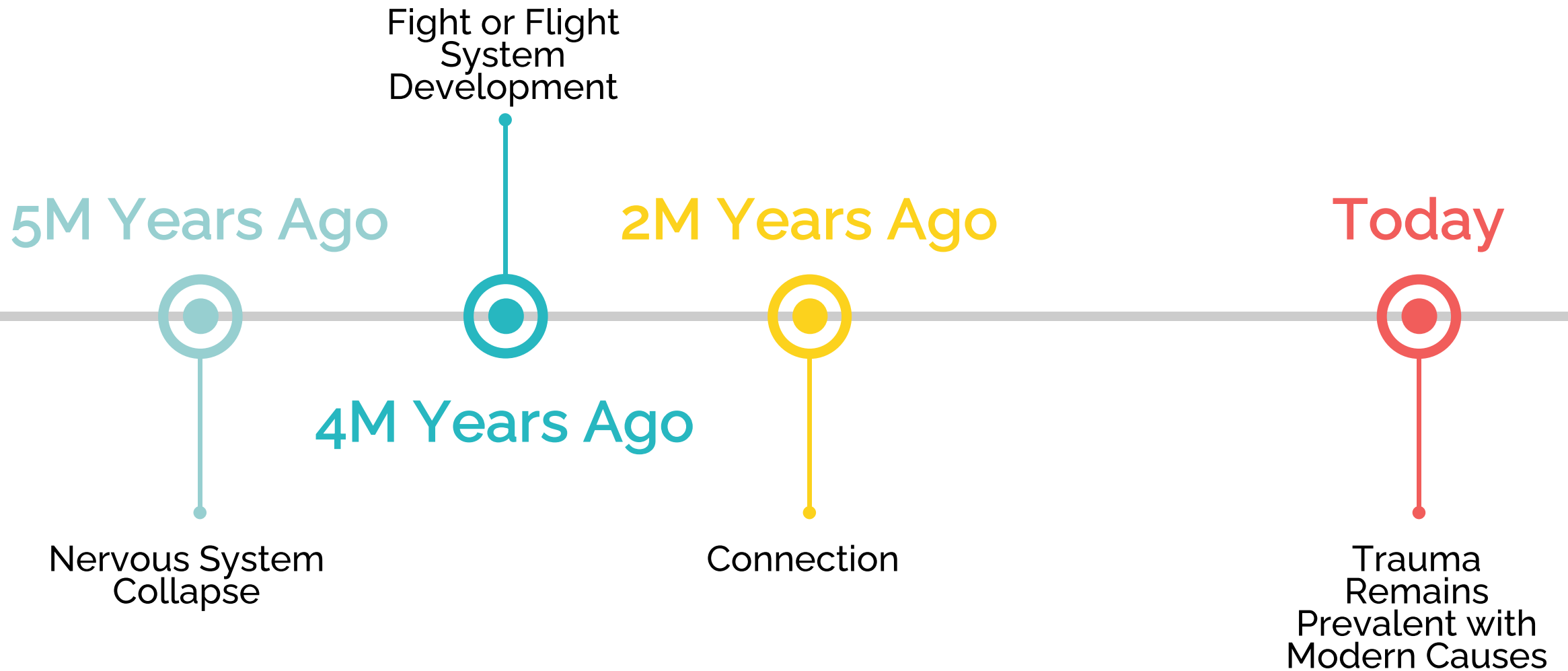
# The Roots of Trauma



# Up Next: The Nervous System & Window of Tolerance



# The Nervous System – A Brief History

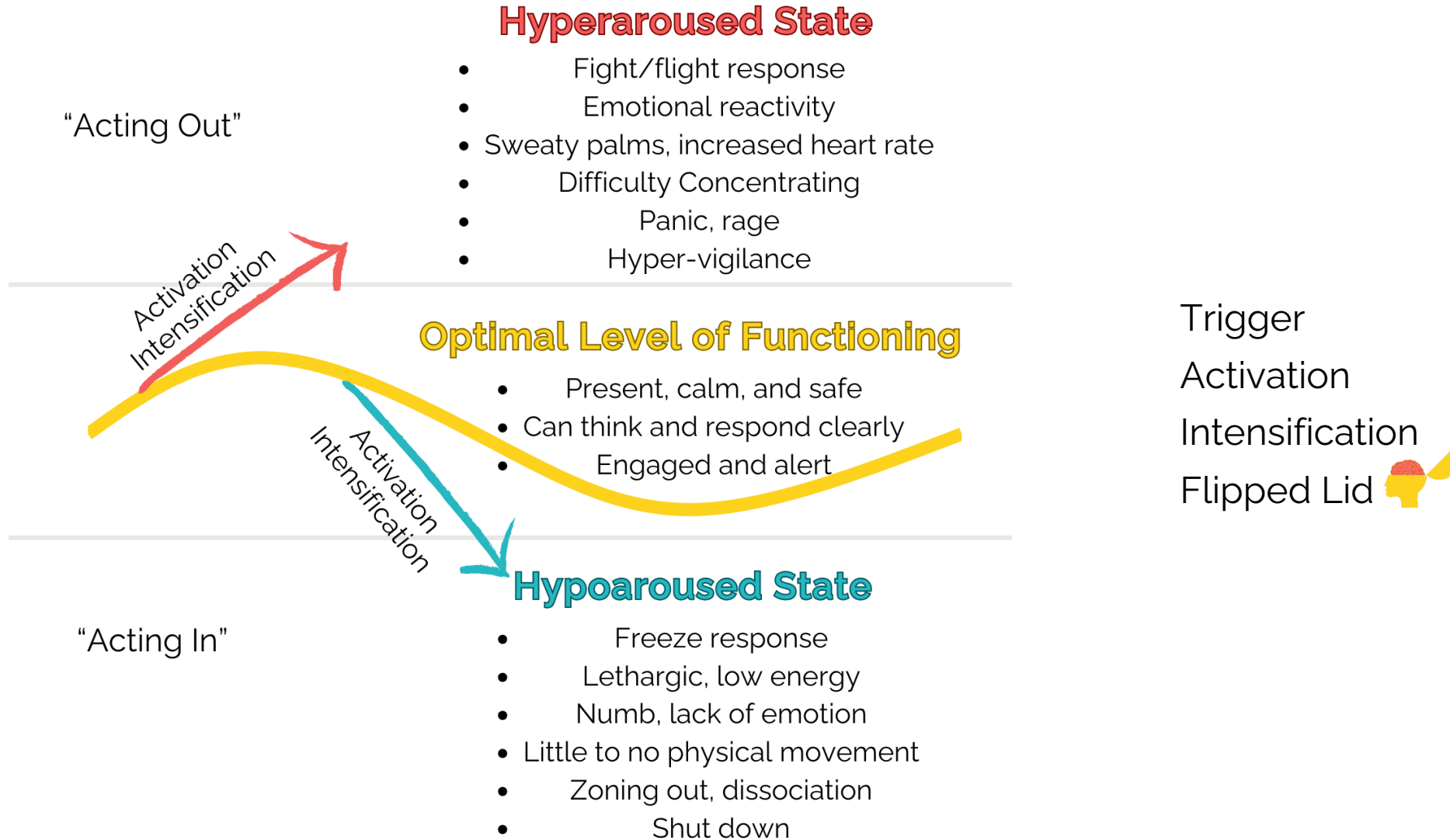


# The Nervous System – Vagus Nerve



- 10th Cranial nerve
- Longest in the human body
- Direct correlation with regulation

# Window of Tolerance



# Dysregulation at Work



## Fight

- Aggressive communication or body language
- Arguing
- Power struggles
- Controlling others
- Micro-managing
- Bullying
- Gossiping / Spreading rumours



## Flight

- Constant breaks smoking, vaping, coffee, eating ...
- "Checking out" of meetings or conversations
- Lateness
- Inconsistency
- Bailing at the last minute
- Lack of follow through



## Fawn

- Perfectionism
- Passive aggressiveness
- Overworking
- Toxic caregiving
- Inability to say "no"
- No personal boundaries
- Victim of bullying / harassment
- Laughing off inappropriate behaviour from others



## Freeze

- Refuses to commit
- "Checked out" in meeting or conversations
- Disassociation
- "Spacey" behaviour
- No drive to set goals or better themselves
- Low insight into self-destructive behaviours
- Low-level communication



## Collapse

- Taking constant time off
- "Quiet quitting"
- Zero communication / ghosting
- Deep depression
- Unable to get out or be without support

# Self-Regulation Practices

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## SELF-REGULATION PRACTICES

For each of the self-regulation practices demonstrated, not all may feel comfortable. Try them out and see which one(s) work best for your body.

<p><b>Sternum rub/taps</b></p> <p>Place knuckles of closed fist on sternum. Gently rub up and down while keeping contact with the skin, but not moving on the skin. Gentle taps with fingertips on and/or around sternum is an alternative.</p>	<p><b>Taps behind ears</b></p> <p>Find the little "divot" above the jawbone, just behind the earlobe. Place one fingertip in that spot and tap or rub gently.</p>
<p><b>Look right and left</b></p> <p>Keeping the head in a fixed, forward-facing position, move eyes only to look to the right. Move them back to center. Move them to look left, and then back to center. Do this several times.</p>	<p><b>Self bear hug</b></p> <p>Wrap arms around the torso as tight as is possible and comfortable. Give a gentle squeeze and hold for several seconds. Reduce pressure and repeat as necessary.</p>
<p><b>Belly breaths</b></p> <p>Take deep breaths in through the nose aiming to fill your lungs right to the bottom. Hold a few seconds before releasing slowly through the mouth. It may be helpful to place a hand on your stomach and aim to feel it rise.</p>	<p><b>5 Senses check-in</b></p> <p>If possible and comfortable, place feet on ground and close your eyes. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth while intentionally paying attention to what you can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel.</p>
<p><b>Other techniques/practices/notes:</b></p>	

Sternum rub/tap  
Taps behind ears  
Look right & left  
Self bear hug  
Belly breaths  
5 Senses Check-In



# Recap

01

- What trauma is
- Myth-busted what trauma *isn't*

02

- Types & roots of trauma
- Trauma isn't the thing that *happened*, it's the *ongoing reaction* inside the body to that thing that happened
- Understanding *everyone* has experienced some form of trauma

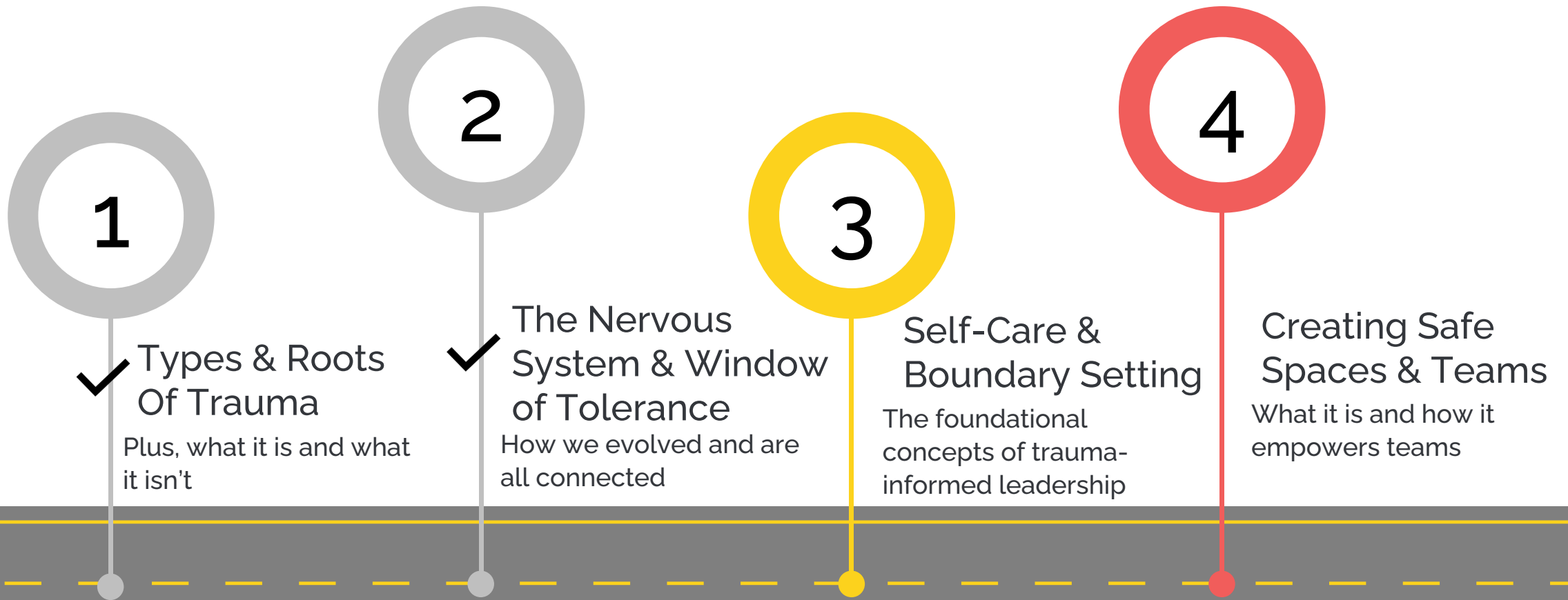
03

- Nervous system reacts in ways we don't control
- Understanding of why we have flight/flight responses
- **Self-regulation exercises** to help bring our nervous systems back to regulation

04

- What dysregulation is and its different states – **Window of Tolerance**
- The more trauma someone has, the narrower their optimal regulation window is

# Up Next: Self-Care & Boundary Setting



# Survival Care vs. Self-Care

## Survival Care

- ✓ Gets you through crisis moments
- ✓ Commercialization has co-opted the term “self-care” to sell us things
- ✓ Short-term impact

## Self-Care

- ✓ Is a practice and a choice
- ✓ Often involves complex decisions – delegating, setting boundaries, putting self first, prioritizing self
- ✓ Long-term impact

# Triggers vs Twinkles



A body and mind reaction to a past trauma or memory. They are uncomfortable and send us on a road away from regulation



A part of life, every human reacts differently according to personality, history, and current environment



Often lead to dysregulation - awareness is required to support a return to regulation



Moments in our lives where we feel grounded, safe, and at home in our bodies



Sometimes spontaneous, and sometimes inspired by us



Exist in a calm and regulated nervous system, and remind us that this state is comfortable and possible. With a regulated nervous system we are in our flow

# Triggers & Twinkles Discussion

Share with a partner:

One trigger at work and how you're  
managing it

One twinkle from your life and why it's  
special

On the star:

Write one Twinkle



# Boundary Setting

Boundaries can be hard to set and hard to keep, and they don't fix things overnight.

They are limits we set to protect our time, and our emotional, mental, and physical well-being



# Boundary Setting – Hard Truths

**Boundaries have a cost** – Telling someone “no” to a request or setting a limit often means disappointing someone which can lead to feelings of guilt.

**Power and status impact the ability to set boundaries** – People in junior roles, caregiving roles, or members of marginalized groups may find setting boundaries difficult, risky, or even impossible. Start small with microboundaries.



# Boundary Setting – Hard Truths

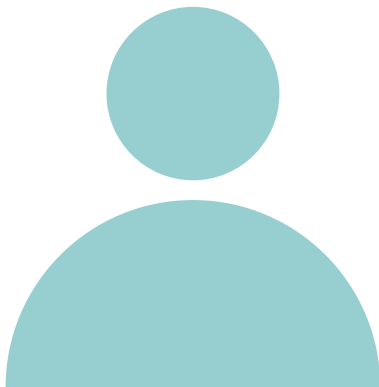
**No one will give permission or approval** – Those who have become dependent on us to act a certain way may be taken aback or even angry when we start saying no. Be prepared for a phase of discomfort and even conflict. Setting boundaries is not selfish.

**We must be willing to let some balls drop** – Consciously decide which obligations & tasks are glass balls, and which are plastic. Give yourself *permission* to turn some balls from glass into plastic when you need to.



# Physical Boundaries

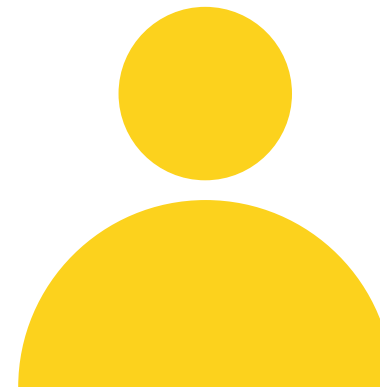
Shaking someone's hand rather than hugging them or fist bump versus handshake



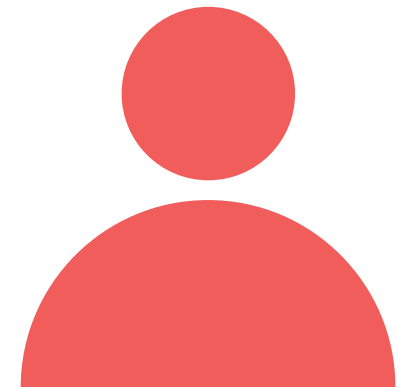
Where you position your chair/where you sit in meetings



Taking a break during lunch on your own

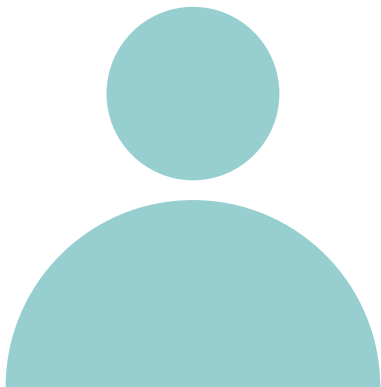


Specifying how long someone can borrow an item from you



# Emotional Boundaries

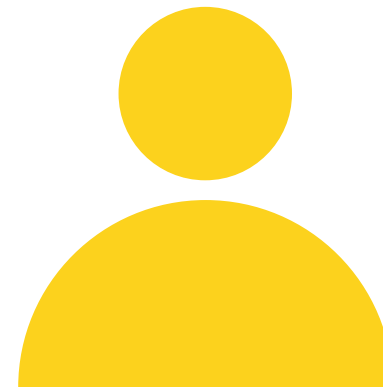
Avoiding being pulled in by someone's bad mood



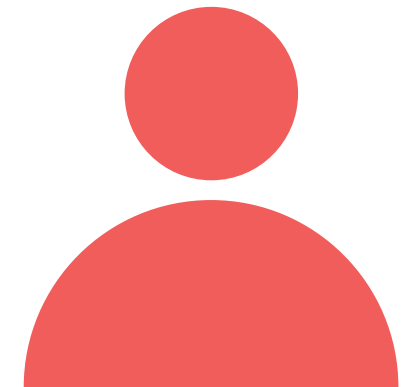
Delegating work to others appropriately



Closing your door to work on tasks that need full attention

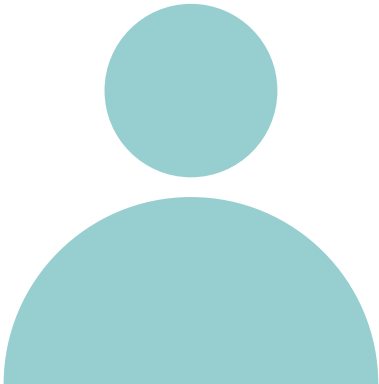


Talking to your manager about how you prefer to receive feedback

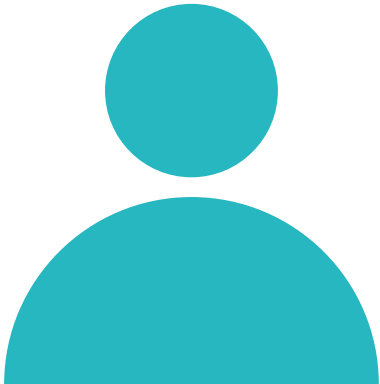


# Mental Boundaries

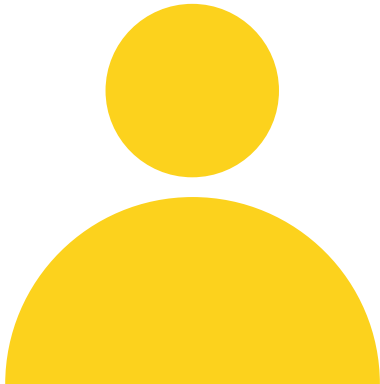
Managing your time and workload



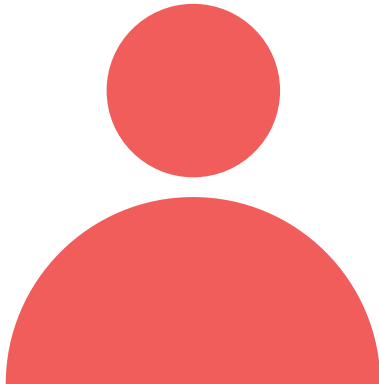
Not gossiping with colleagues at work



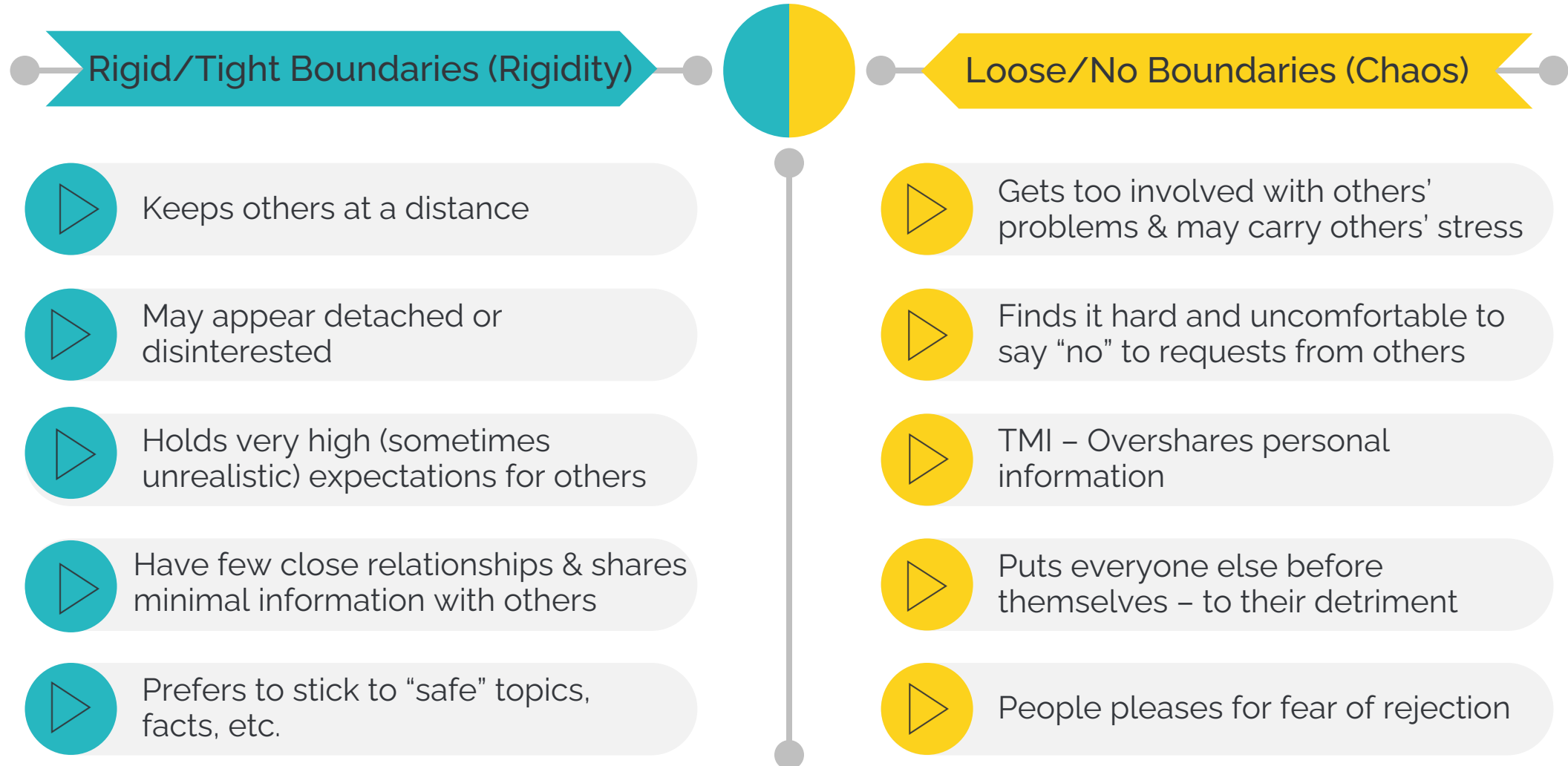
Turning on auto-replies to let people know when you're unavailable



Checking email at intervals.  
Turning off push notifications on phone



# Rigid vs. Loose Boundaries



# Boundary Setting – “Microboundaries”

Strategies we put in place to limit the negative effects of boundary cross-overs, and to feel more in control *(Cecchinato, 2015)*

Examples:

Turning off push notifications for email

Declining to answer calls when in the middle of a task

Putting phone away when with others



# Microboundaries Worksheet



## MICROBOUNDARIES

In small groups, share and discuss microboundaries you already practice, and ones you'd like to start using to protect your time, and your mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Microboundaries to implement:

What balls can you *give yourself permission* to turn into plastic?  
(At work or elsewhere!)



# WINN Method

When setting boundaries, use the WINN approach:

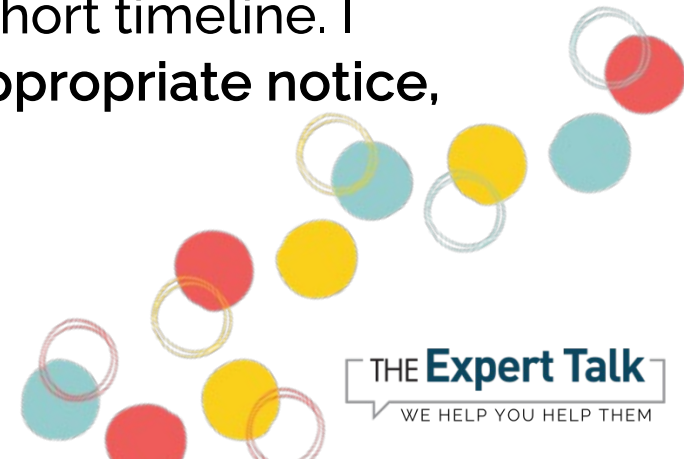
**When** \_\_\_\_\_ (what happens/event)

**I** \_\_\_\_\_ (feel/notice/observe/find myself being)

**Need** \_\_\_\_\_ (what would help/what you need)

**Natural outcome** \_\_\_\_\_ (what could happen if boundary is not respected)

Example: “**When** you come to me at the last minute, I find myself feeling torn. I want to help you, and I sometimes can’t work with such a short timeline. I **need** more notice to be able to support you. **If I don’t get appropriate notice, I can’t book in the time to help.**” (Natural outcome)



# Boundary-Setting Basics

1. Determine your priorities to know when a limit or boundary is important
2. Delegate tasks where possible and if appropriate
3. Start with easier and more comfortable boundaries - don't jump into ninja-level boundary setting right away!
4. Set boundaries as early as possible
5. Be consistent so there are no mixed messages
6. Don't set a boundary unless you're 100% committed to following through
7. Keep the focus on feelings and needs - use "I" messages instead of "YOU" messages
8. Be clear and specific & use a neutral tone of voice
9. Choose the right time and place for the conversation
10. Don't get dragged in to explaining, justifying, and/or modifying your boundary - stick with your WINN statement
11. A boundary is *not* an ultimatum



# Setting Boundaries Worksheet

## WINN Method

**When** \_\_\_\_\_ (what happens/event)

**I** \_\_\_\_\_ (feel/notice/observe/find myself being)

**Need** \_\_\_\_\_ (what would help/what you need)

**Natural outcome** \_\_\_\_\_ (what could happen if boundary is not respected)



## SETTING BOUNDARIES

Boundary-setting basics:

1. Determine your priorities to know when a limit or boundary is important
2. Delegate tasks where possible and if appropriate
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### WINN Statement Formula

**When** \_\_\_\_\_ (what happens/event)

**I** \_\_\_\_\_ (feel/notice/observe/find myself being)

**Need** \_\_\_\_\_ (what would help/what you need)

**Natural outcome** \_\_\_\_\_ (what could happen if boundary is not respected)

Think of a situation that's either happened or that you're anticipating (your triggers may offer clues).

Write a script for setting a boundary or limit using the WINN method.

Share with a partner if it feels comfortable.

# Boundary-Setting – Remember the Pebble



# Recap

01

- Survival care gets us through to the next day – has been co-opted by the Wellness industry and is often sold to us as “self-care”
- **Self-care** is an *intentional process* – requires action to set boundaries, to delegate, and to say “no”

02

- **Triggers** – awareness of our triggers helps us identify where we are in the Window of Tolerance, and if there’s something that needs addressing with someone else, or with ourselves
- **Twinkles** – people, moments, and places we can think of to remind ourselves that we can exist in a calm and regulated state

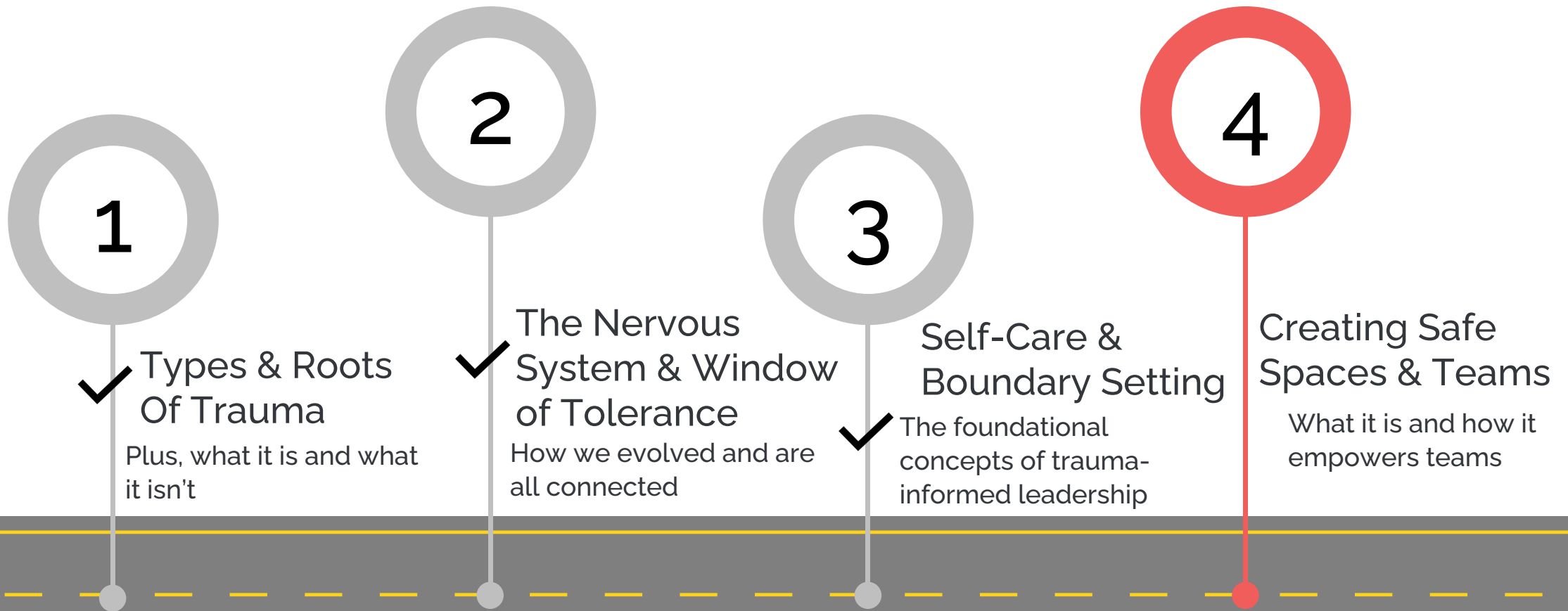
03

- Why **boundary-setting** is a crucial part of self-care
- Boundaries are limits we set to protect our time, and our emotional, mental, and physical well-being
- Boundary-setting can be *hard*

04

- **Microboundaries**
- **WINN Method** for setting boundaries with others

# Up Next: Creating Safe Spaces & Teams



# Trauma-Informed Leadership is...



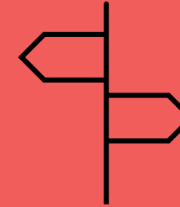
Cognizant of  
the pervasive  
nature of  
trauma



Self-aware;  
built with  
practice



Based on  
trust; a  
relational  
process



Built on  
empowerment,  
voice, and  
choice



Co-creating  
safe spaces  
and mindsets

# Acts of Safety

An Act of Safety is something we do (an action) to create trust in relationships

What an Act of Safety is:	What an Act of Safety is not:
A trauma-informed practice	Something we will get "right" every time
An intentional act	Being "nice"
Being self-regulated or self-aware – or taking time to become so before challenging conversations, discussing sensitive topics, delivering feedback	Rushing into challenging conversations, discussing sensitive topics, or delivering feedback without preparation and thought
Entering a room/interaction with an open & curious mindset	Being closed off, having phone in hand, or not willing to engage with others
Recognizing power structures & practicing inclusivity and belonging	Only engaging with people who can "benefit you"; relying on social power structures to gain control or situations; working in silos
Practicing active listening skills	Talking over others or non-stop to keep control of a situation; dictating or ordering
Transparent & authentic communication	Gossip; breaching confidentiality
Setting boundaries ("clear is kind") so people know what to expect	Having boundaries that are too loose or too rigid and that cause others to feel like they don't know what to expect
Inclusion- and belonging-motivated - going above accessibility standards to co-create accommodations, modifications, and a sense of belonging for everyone	Adhering only to the basic accessibility requirements

# Acts of Safety Worksheet



## ACTS OF SAFETY

For the three scenarios listed below, what Acts of Safety can you do to increase trust and comfort for yourself and others.

Suggestion: Think of a manager/leader/coach/teacher/mentor who's made you feel safe. What was it about them and how you worked together that created that sense?

General day-to-day workplace interactions:

One-on-one meeting/conversation:

Team meeting or multi-person conversation:

# Practice Makes Permanent



# Trauma-Informed Ideas Are Counterculture

Instead of asking:

“What’s **WRONG** with you?”,

We shift to:

“What **HAPPENED** to you?”



# Trauma-Informed Leadership is...



*Credit: Conflictish, YouTube*

# 13 Factors Of Psychological Health & Safety

- Organizational Culture
- Psychological and Social Support
- Clear Leadership & Expectations
- Civility & Respect
- Psychological Demands
- Growth & Development
- Recognition & Reward
- Involvement & Influence
- Workload Management
- Engagement
- Balance
- Psychological Protection
- Protection of Physical Safety



# Practice Steps of Trauma-Informed Leaders



1

## Self-Awareness

- Where am I in the Window of Tolerance?
- What's bothering me about this behaviour?
- Is this something I need to address with the person or with myself?

2

## Self-Regulation

- What are my go-to physical regulation strategies? (sternum rub, belly breaths ...)
- What are my go-to mental regulation strategies? (Recall a Twinkle, 5 senses check-in...)

3

## Curious Questions

- Start with, "What *happened* to you?" instead of, "what's wrong with you?"
- Go slow
- Give yourself and the other person space to respond

4

## Acts of Safety

- What Acts of Safety can you do before and during the conversation to establish and maintain trust?

5

## Debrief & Feedback

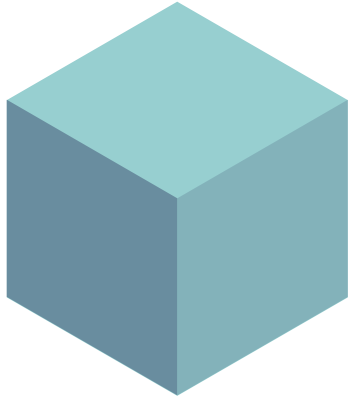
- Recap the conversation and any agreed-upon outcomes & follow-up steps
- Check in to see how the conversation could be conducted better next time

# Connection to Neurodiversity



# Post-Traumatic Growth

How to be with discomfort



## Witness

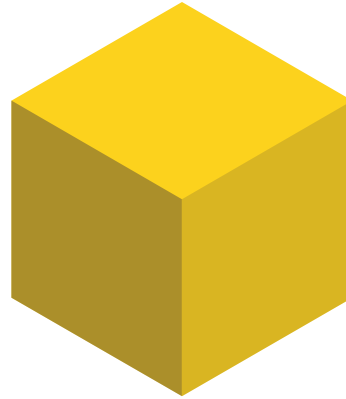
Start by acknowledging there's something uncomfortable in your body.

Where is it? How does it feel? What do you sense about this feeling?



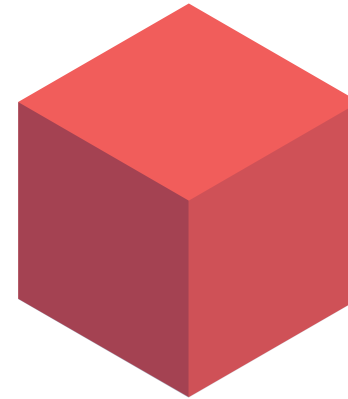
## Feel It

Let your body and mind feel the feelings in a safe place. Ask for support if you need someone to sit with you.



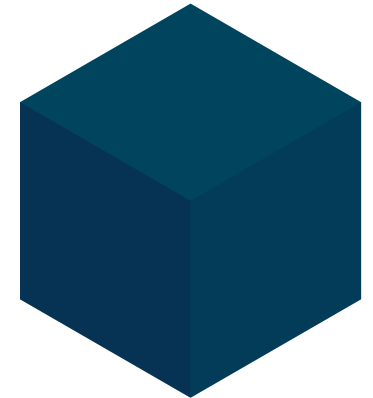
## Write it Out

Write. Journal. Voice memo. Speech to text. Draw. Illustrate. Get it out.



## Move

Walk. Dance. Go to the gym. Go for a run. Do yoga. Clean the house.



## Twinkle

Consciously bring twinkle moments to mind. Find safe thoughts and sit with them too.

# The Power of YET

The power of *yet* is not the unknown. It is the anticipatory attitude we have towards ideas, skills, dreams, and integrations we have on our journey.

“*Yet*” is not a destination, it is a place we will pass through on the path of our growing edges.

-KVR



# Recap

01

- **Acts of Safety** are actions we take to develop and maintain trust
- They are intentional and enable people to have consistent expectations
- They empower others by inviting choice, communication, and context

02

- **Practice makes permanent** – we won't always get it "right"
- **Follow-up & Debrief** after interactions to ensure everyone's on the same page and to rebuild/maintain trust

03

- Trauma-informed leaders ask, "**What's happened to you?**", rather than, "What's wrong with you?" – this mindset changes the game
- Intention is to recognize we play a part in bringing out the best in others
- We ask how we may be contributing to the issue, and how we can help them

04

- Trauma-informed leadership helps build psychological safety and trust
- It allows us to *cover* our team rather than *criticize* them

# Where We've Gone & What's Next

1

✓ Types & Roots  
Of Trauma  
Plus, what it is and what it  
isn't

2

✓ The Nervous  
System & Window  
of Tolerance  
How we evolved and are all  
connected

3

✓ Self-Care &  
Boundary Setting  
The foundational concepts of  
trauma-informed leadership

4

✓ Creating Safe  
Spaces & Teams  
What it is and how it  
empowers teams



# Strategies to Start Practicing Today

01

## Self-regulation exercises

- Physical
- 5 Senses check-in, Twinkles

05

WINN Method for setting boundaries with others

02

Window of Tolerance & “Flipped Lid” understanding – where are you in it, and where may the other person be

06

Acts of Safety – actions that develop and maintain trust in relationships & teams

03

Triggers – understand what’s causing our reaction so we can proceed intentionally

07

Be curious – start with, “What happened to you?”, rather than, “What’s wrong with you?”

04

Microboundaries – to protect your time, and your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing

08

Practice Makes Permanent – commit to doing your best to follow trauma-informed practices, even after “slip-ups”

# Words to Remember

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief.

Do justly *now*.

Love mercy *now*.

Walk humbly *now*.

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

- *The Talmud*



# Thank you!



## Recommended Resources:

- Downloadable 5 Senses check-in recording
- Downloadable worksheets & training session slide deck
- Books for further reading
- Links to fidget toys & fidget pens



Additional Questions?  
[hello@TheExpertTalk.com](mailto:hello@TheExpertTalk.com)

