Managing Emotional and Mental Well–Being

Presented by: Michelle McGrath LCSW-C

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Our goal is to help older adults maintain a high quality of life. Our care managers and life enrichment specialists provide counsel, advocacy and coordination of services, engaging activities to meet the older adults' unique physical, emotional, social and financial needs.

Thank you to our Sponsor for these presentations- United Healthcare!

Reminders

- Participation is welcome. We have 1 hour and be mindful to give everyone a chance to speak (or not) if they choose. Keep comments/questions to about 2 minutes to allow for enough time.
- Here to support ourselves and others.
- Acceptance of diverging views and respect for individual differences.

Objectives:

- Learn about what helps in living meaningful lives.
- Factors that get in the way of our well-being.
- Practices that can help get you unstuck.

Pain as Part of Human Experience

- The brain and body evolved for survival, not to be happy. Anxious is expected in face of threat as is a depressive response to loss or rejection.
- Strong societal messages that being happy is the goal and the norm.
- Suffering=internal/external event+reaction/response+belief and ability to choose and act. Can find selves stuck in the suffering.

- "The single most puzzling thing about human beings is our remarkable incapacity to be happy." -Steve Hayes

Emotional & Mental Well-Being

- This can be defined as a state of psychological, emotional, and social health that encompasses how people feel, cope with life, and react to change.
- We all need to feel safe, connected and effectively engaged throughout our lives.
- Spending time to learn and observe your thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations, triggers, what's important to you can help you take action.
- Riding waves of difficult emotions rather than not experiencing them.

Mental Health

Statistics For Older Adults

- Approximately 14% of adults aged 60 and over live with a mental disorder. (2023, World Health Organization)
- The most common mental health conditions for older adults are depression and anxiety. (2023, World Health Organization)
- Loneliness and social isolation are key risk factors for mental health conditions in later life. (2023, World Health Organization)
- About 58% of people aged 65 and older believe that it is "normal" for people to get depressed as they grow older. (2024, Mental Health America)
- If suffering from depression, older adults are more likely than any other group to "handle it themselves." Only 42% would seek help from a health professional. (2024, Mental Health America)

Minorities & Mental Health

- Ethnic/racial minorities often bear a disproportionately high burden of disability resulting from mental disorders
- Although rates of depression are lower in African Americans (24.6%) and Hispanics (19.6%) than in whites (34.7%), depression in blacks and Hispanics is likely to be more persistent due to economic difficulties.
- Lack of cultural understanding by health care providers may contribute to underdiagnosis and/or misdiagnosis of mental illness in people from racially/ethnically diverse populations. (2017, American Psychiatric Association)

Barriers to Care

- Lack of insurance, underinsurance
- Mental illness stigma, often greater among minority populations
- Lack of diversity among mental health care providers
- Lack of culturally competent providers
- Language barriers
- Distrust in the healthcare system
- Inadequate support for mental health service in safety net settings (uninsured, Medicaid, Health Insurance Coverage other vulnerable patients)

Depression & Anxiety

Depression:

- Not a normal part of aging.
- Symptoms can include: Low moods, increased sadness , irritability , crying spells, self-isolation, hopelessness, disturbed sleep and/or thoughts of dying or self harm.
- Causes: Life changes, health decline, medication and chronic illnesses

Anxiety:

- Not a normal part of aging but a common feeling .
- Symptoms: Rapid heartbeat, feeling on edge, restlessness, sweating,trembling, uncontrollable worry.
- Causes: Life changes, health decline, medication and chronic illnesses

Anxiety and Depression are highly treatable!

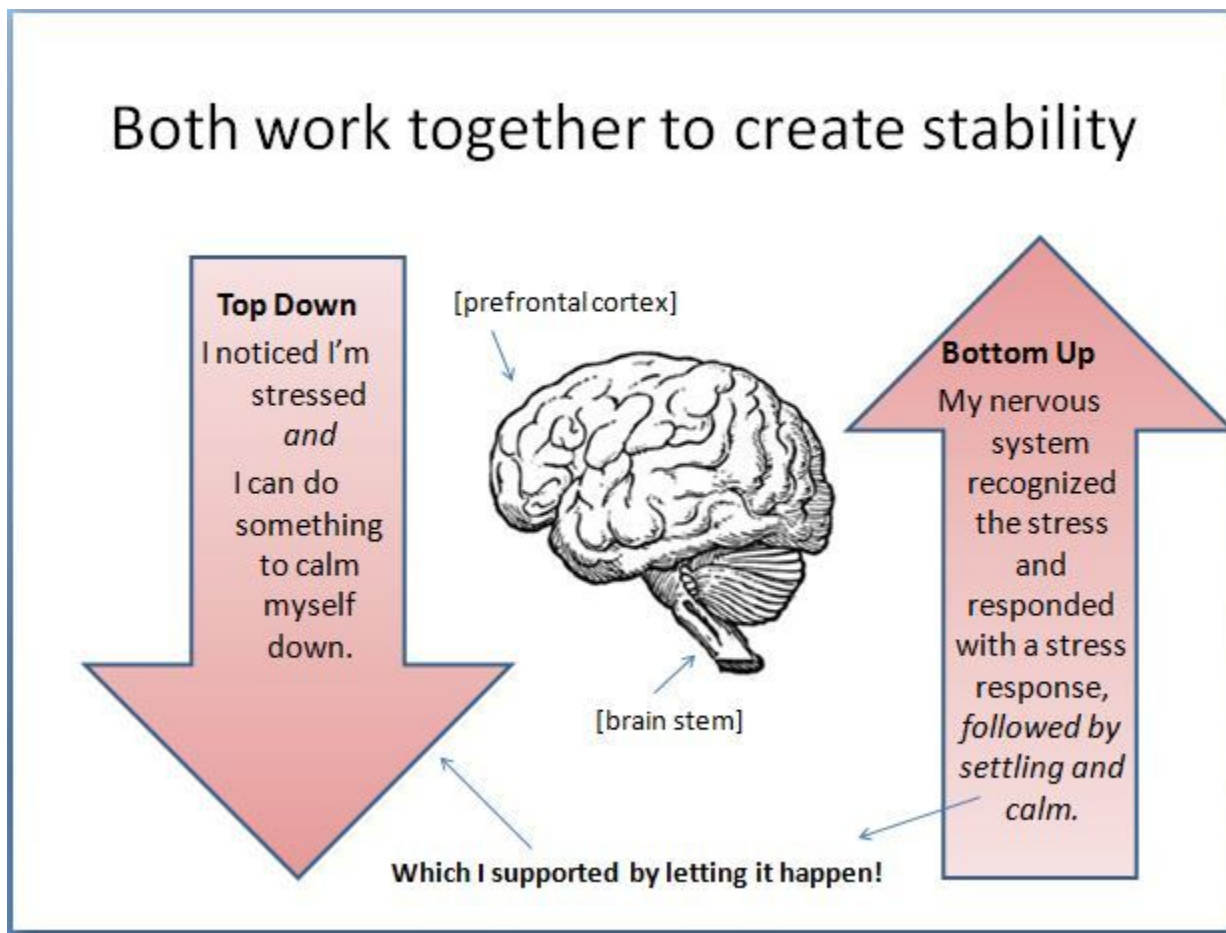# Impacts of Depression and Anxiety

Can affect:

- Appetite
- Sleeping Habits
- Ability to socialize with others
- Increase physical changes such as weight loss or weight gain
- Make chronic illnesses worse

Physical Health, Illness and Functioning Go Hand in Hand with Mental Health

- Root cause of anxiety and depression could be related to illness or disease. Neurological, Endocrine, Cardiac, Chronic Pain impact emotions, thoughts and behaviors.
- Quality of sleep, diet, physical activity help or hinder mental health.
- Genetic and Epigenetic Factors influence mechanisms that predispose us to not just illnesses and diseases but how we respond to stress.
- Neuroplasticity: Brain's ability to change and adapt to new experiences and stimuli.

Managing Our Emotional and Mental Well-Being

Emotions from the Bottom Up and Top Down

Both work together to create stability

Top Down
I noticed I'm stressed *and*
I can do something to calm myself down.

[prefrontal cortex]

[brain stem]

Bottom Up
My nervous system recognized the stress and responded with a stress response, *followed by settling and calm.*

Which I supported by letting it happen!

When The Pains of Life Come, our brains may derail us

- Understandable response to focus on the pain and get stuck.
- Feeling helpless, overwhelmed, sad, longing, angry, overwhelmed or other unwanted feelings that we want to go away.
- Thoughts we tell ourselves of not being good enough or things should be different are common.
- Thinking more of past and future and having difficulty being in the present moment.
- Narrowing our concept of who we or others are can occur.
- Not knowing what's important to us or acting inconsistently with that.
- **But it is possible to move ahead in a flexible manner is possible with observation, clarification of what's important, self-compassion and action steps.**

Open   Aware   Engaged

- Helpful to come back to contact with present moment by paying attention to what's going on right now.
- Willingness to tolerate the uncomfortable, knowing it will pass and you have the tools.
- Observing your thoughts and feelings with compassion and some distance. Ask self what you're thinking about, feeling, what's going on, what's the history coming up. Watch them as the pass through.
- Notice the story you are telling yourself about yourself? Is it expansive or limiting? Helpful or unhelpful? Are you aware of the context and history?
- Know what's important to you. What are your core values?
- Take actions both within and outside of yourself.
- Notice who are you spending time with and do what impact is it having?

What are your patterns of Getting Stuck in Unhelpful Thoughts, behaviors or unwanted feelings?

- Getting stuck in our heads.
- Buying into the thoughts as true instead of just there.
- Thinking if it feels true or strong, we must act on it.
- Not noticing when we are stuck in a pattern of thinking from the past that's no longer relevant.
- Thinking things can never change or can't do anything about it.
- Feeling like the bad feelings will last forever.

Remember you are not the same as your thoughts and feelings.

Knowing What Matters to You

- Values simply mean how you want to treat yourself and others, ways you want to behave in the world, legacy you want to leave.
- Differ from goals which are finite and result oriented. Values can fuel the hard work in attaining a goal.
- Values are not situation dependant, involve actions and lifelong.
- Examples are: giving, being kind, accepting, appreciating nature, authenticity, thriftiness, courageous, adventurous, grateful, being humble, being powerful, being organized, appreciating fun/being funny, being forgiving, being helpful, being fair, fitness, curiosity, generosity, excitement, challenging self, being creative.
- No values are inherently better than others, just what resonates with you.
- Can't focus on all values so choosing 5-10 core ones helpful.
- Free resources to help find your core values: Values Workbook
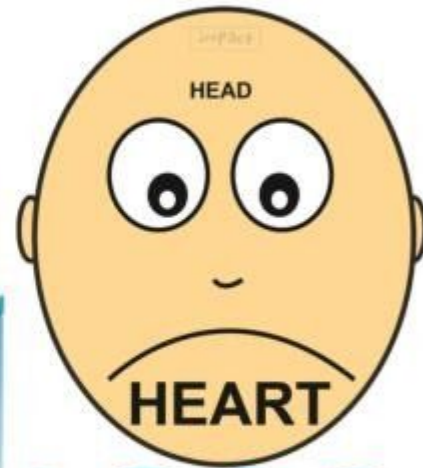
Checking in on your Emotional State
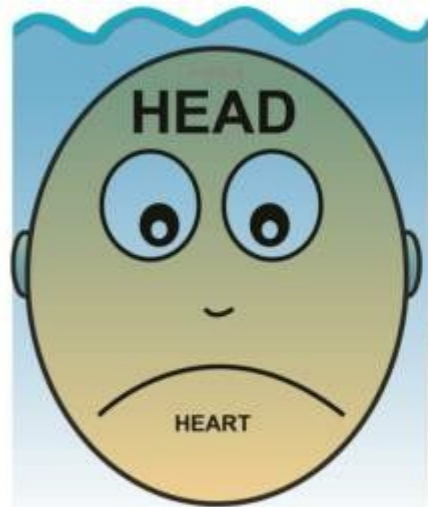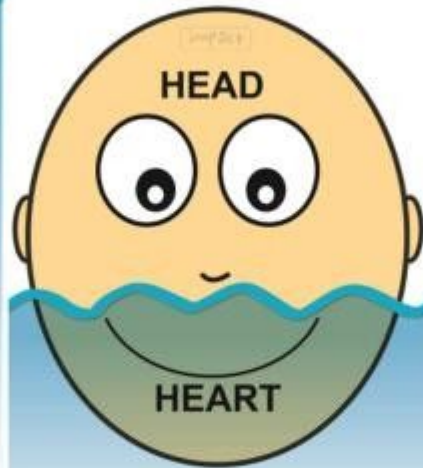
Practice Riding the Emotional Wave
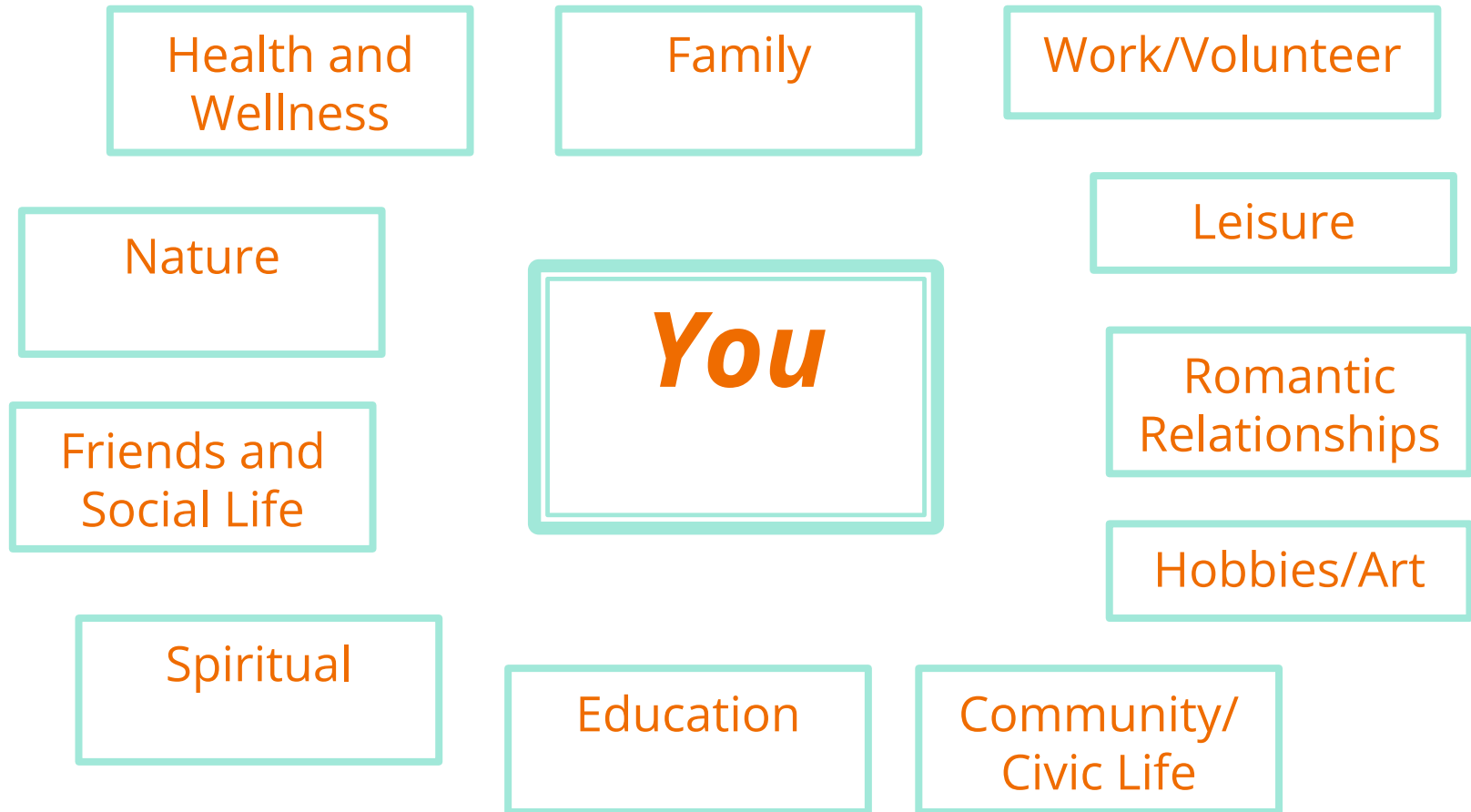

You can't stop the waves from coming, but you can learn how to surf.
John Kabat-Zinn
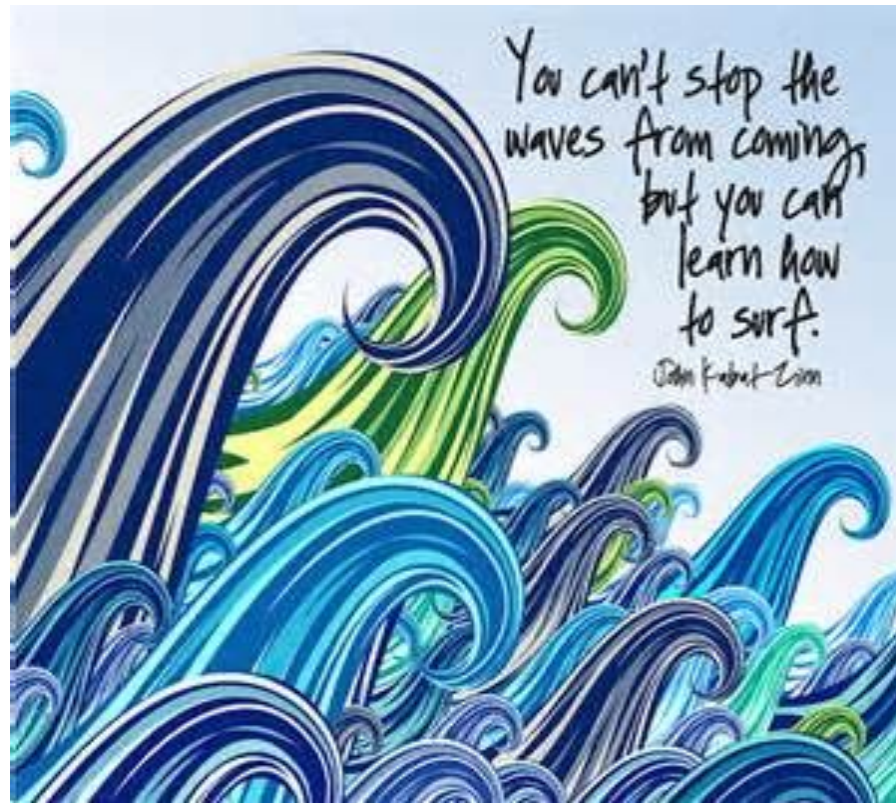
Riding the Emotional Waves

- Know this is only an emotion with a beginning, middle and end. Won't last forever. Practice flexibility.
- Know what triggers you and see this as practicing responses.
- Be open and compassionate versus self judgement.
- Notice body sensations and label.
- Notice thought and is it helpful? Familiar?
- Label emotions. How intense? Willing to feel it?
- Pause, decide what matters and act.
- *If you say or do something you regret at height of wave, know it's part of being human and can try to repair.*
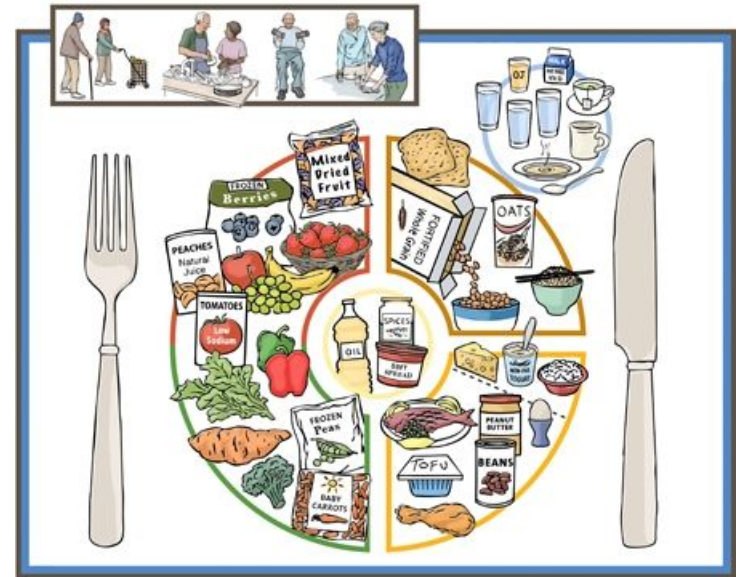
Notice all the Domains in Your Life

Health and Wellness

Family

Work/Volunteer

Nature

Leisure

You

Friends and Social Life

Romantic Relationships

Hobbies/Art

Spiritual

Education

Community/ Civic Life

Maintain your physical health

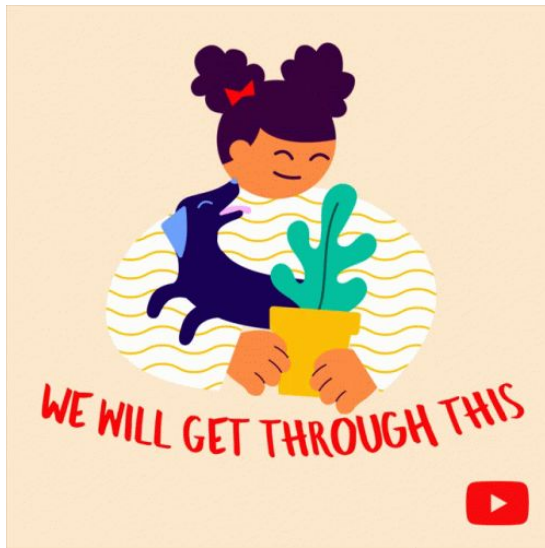MyPlate for Older Adults

Exercise & Be Active

Laughter is the best Medicine!

Socialize with Others

Utilize your coping skills and know that everything keeps moving.

"Just Keep Swimming" Dory, Finding Nemo

Some Exercises and Tools to Build Flexibility

- Sing your worries
- 5, 4, 3,2,1 Senses
- Walking Meditation
- Name your Story
- Flashlight
- Breathing exercises
- Practice compassion for self and others.
- Acknowledge the common humanity
- Take a long term or historical perspective
- Holding it tight and lightly
- Find helpful metaphors
- Be mindful of what you watch, listen to and who you are with (social contagion)
- When going to bed, list 5 things grateful for.
- Writing it down/journaling

Review

- Importance of managing your emotional and mental well-being.
- How your mood can impact your physical health.
- Ways to manage emotional and mental well-being.
- Practicing psychological flexibilty

Next Session

Safety Behind the Wheel: Assessing and addressing how to remain safe as we age and when to retire from driving.

April 8th 12-1pm

*Virtual Session

No cost and Open to the public

Q&A

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