

## Workshops:

1. Behaviour

2. Emotions

3. Anxiety

4. Assertiveness

5. Worrying

6. Thinking 1

7. Thinking 2

# Anxiety



# Let's start with a quote...

“This is the place where the Ghost Wagon rolls by on its great and heavy wheels. You can hear its rumble from afar but no one's ever seen the driver...”

...Oh no! the whomper interrupted himself. Suddenly he felt cold and afraid, from his stomach upwards. A moment ago the Ghost Wagon hadn't existed. Nobody had ever heard of it. Then he thought it up, and there it was. Somewhere far away, waiting for the darkness to start rolling along.”

[Tove Jansson – “*Tales from Moominvalley*”]

# Anxiety

- I think this quote by Tove Jansson nicely captures the essence of fear.
- It shows the physiological changes associated with anxiety - *“from his stomach upwards”*.
- And it illustrates the powerful role played by the mind – *“Then he thought it up, and there it was”*.
- How often is it the case that our anxiety is often about the future, the unseen and the unknown? [We look at this in more detail in Session 5 about *Worry*]
- This has to be distinguished from fear triggered by immediate physical danger.

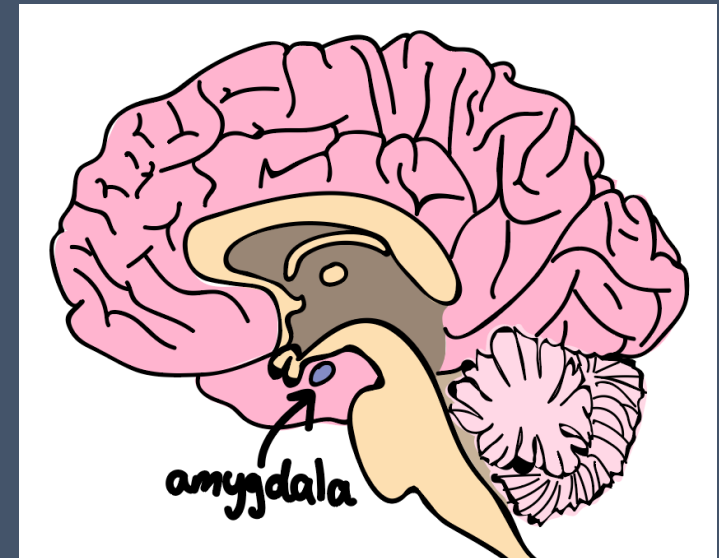


# The Amazing Amygdala - I

The amygdala plays a central role in the processing and management of emotions.

It is like the conductor of a large symphony orchestra.

It is an almond-shaped body in the limbic system of the brain, as shown in the diagram.



{Image credit: Ilse Lee}

# The Amazing Amygdala - II

It can also be seen as an early warning system, like an emotional smoke detector.

It scans the environment for signs of threat or danger.

For some people, it can be oversensitive, so that it reacts to things that pose a low threat or danger.

This can happen to all of us when we feel stressed or soon after we have experienced something bad.



# Fight or Flight Response - I

- This response prepares our bodies to fight or run away from danger.
- It is triggered automatically by threats of danger and is clearly important for our survival.
- Adrenaline is released to increase our heart rate and rate of breathing so more oxygen gets pumped to our muscles.
- Glucose and glycogen are released to fuel our muscles.
- Our pupils dilate to take in more light in order to see better.
- We are motivated to empty our bowels and bladders to make our bodies lighter, so we can move or run faster.



# Fight or Flight Response - II

It is not surprising that the signs and symptoms of anxiety are as they are, given this automatic response. These are outlined in the following slide.



## Freeze Response

It is often overlooked that there is another adaptive response to danger and that is to freeze. As with fight or flight, activation of this is automatic - it is beyond our conscious control. We do not *choose* our responses, our brains do this on our behalf.

Survivors of trauma often feel guilty if they ran away or froze. Remember – these are not choices.



# Anxiety – Signs and Symptoms



## Physiological

- Increased heart rate and/or palpitations
- Increased respiration, hyperventilation, difficulty breathing
- Muscle tension
- Uncomfortable sensations in stomach and bowels, “butterflies”
- Feeling cold and clammy, or feeling hot and sweaty.



## Cognitive

- Thinking or believing something bad will happen.
- Thoughts about trying to avoid or escape the situation.



## Emotional

- Feeling worried, anxious, fearful or afraid.

# Coping with Anxiety

## 1. Change our behaviour

- Learn to relax
- Overcome avoidance



## 2. Change our thinking [More of this in Sessions 6 & &]

- Recognise and challenge our tendency to always think the worst will happen.
- If you have to imagine the worst, think about how you would cope with this.
- Just because something bad could happen, it doesn't mean it will happen – there is a big difference between what is possible and what is likely.
- Use distraction techniques to disrupt unhelpful worrying and ruminating.

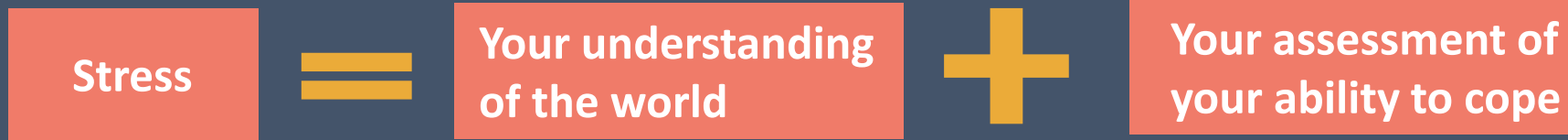


# Stress and Anxiety

These terms are often used interchangeably.

**Stress** occurs when it feels that the demands being made of you exceed the resources you have to meet those demands.

**Stress** is thus a function of the interaction between your understanding of the world and your assessment of your ability to cope.



**Anxiety** is often the result of being stressed.

Prolonged stress can also lead to harmful physiological changes that increase the risk of becoming physically ill.

# Stress

We experience stress when we judge that the demands made of us exceed the **resources** we have to meet them.

## **Resources**

- **Temporal** - *never enough time*
- **Financial** - *never enough money*
- **Emotional** – *not enough resilience or reserves*
- **Physical** – *not enough strength or energy*
- **Knowledge and skills** – *not knowing what to do*

# Coping with Stress

## 1. Change our behaviour

- Organise our time better
- Get used to saying “no” to unreasonable demands [See Session 4 on *Assertiveness*]
- Take care of our diets
- Proper exercise, fresh air and relaxation time
- Be careful with use of alcohol and drugs



## 2. Change our thinking

- Be less demanding of ourselves – we don’t have to be perfect, we don’t have to do everything.
- Learn to recognise our inner resources, we may be able to cope better than we imagine
- Improve our problem-solving skills - there may be other ways to reach the goal.
- Make sure we understand the demands in the right way – sometimes we are not good at making judgements.



# Distraction Techniques

## Behavioural

- Going for a walk
- Calling a friend
- Cleaning and tidying (but not excessively!)
- Reading a magazine
- Looking at photos
- Listening to music
- Planning something nice

## Cognitive

- Alphabet games – thinking of trees, animals, actors or bands beginning with A, B, C.....
- Soap operas – thinking of the characters and their relationships in your favourite soaps or dramas
- Mental arithmetic
- Focusing on an object and think how you would describe it to someone on the phone. Often our attention is focused inwardly on how we feel when anxious, so focusing outwards can be helpful.

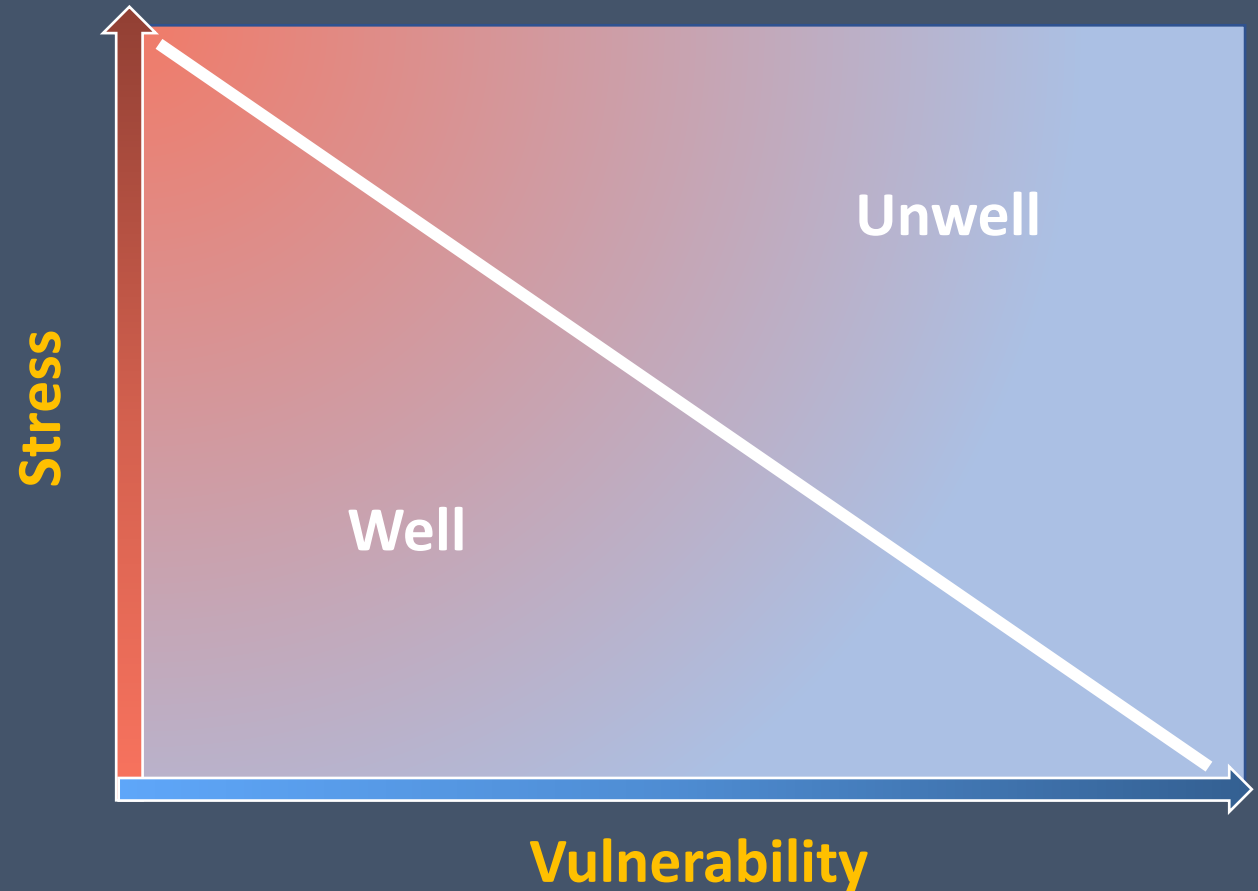
# Stress-Vulnerability Model - I

## Stress

Sources of stress in our everyday lives e.g. high workload, disagreement with a friend, negative events.

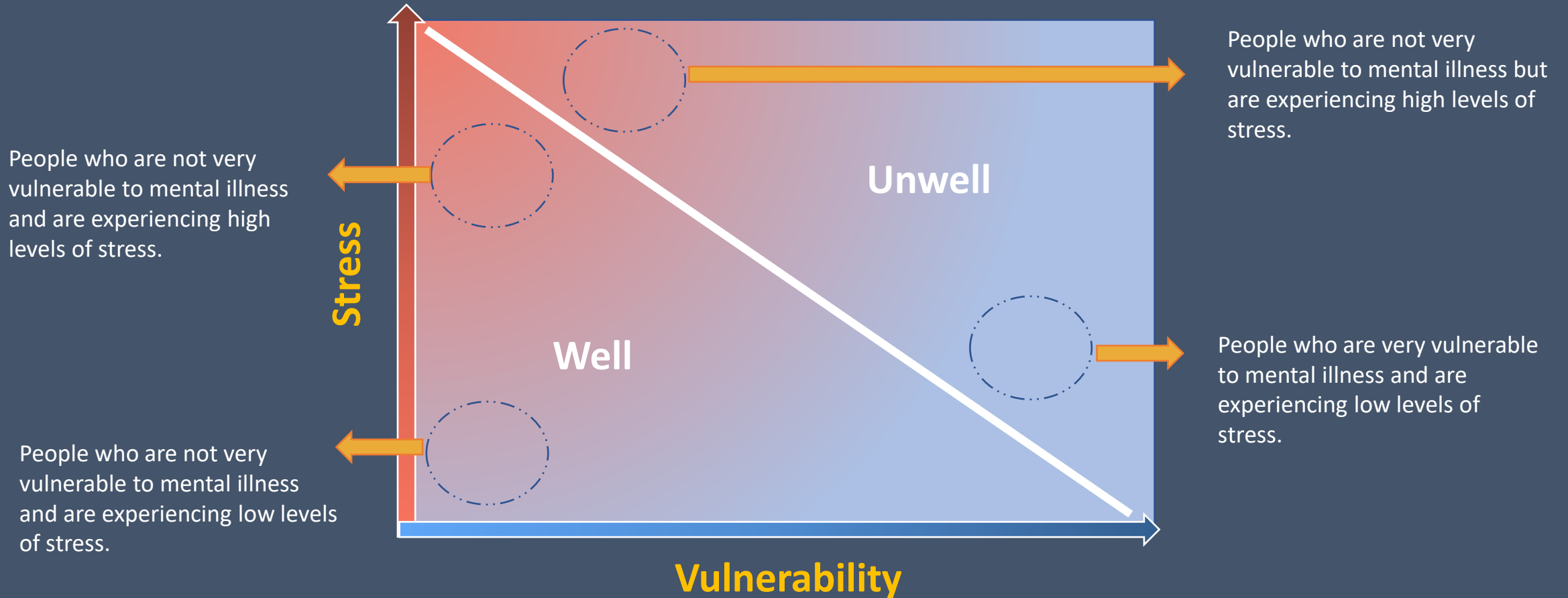
## Vulnerability

Our vulnerability comes from what nature has given us and how we are subsequently exposed to and cope with life itself. The proportions attributed to each will vary between people and within people over time.



Let's look at this closer...

# Stress-Vulnerability Model - I







**‘Supposing a tree fell down, Pooh, when we were underneath it?’**

**‘Supposing it didn’t’, said Pooh after careful thought.**

**Piglet was comforted by this.**

[A.A. Milne]

[understandyourselfbetter.com](https://understandyourselfbetter.com)