

‘BE HUMAN’ Model

Compassionately Supporting Staff
& Difficult Conversations

**LEED**
COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME®
Learning Empathy and Emotional Development

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Introduction

Working in any organisation, particularly working with people in vulnerable positions, requires an empathetic and compassionate approach. In this unprecedented time of COVID-19, staff are having to face unthinkable situations, and deliver sometimes devastating news to people. On top of this, in ways that go against much of what their professional and compassionate practice would normally empower them to do. All this at a time their own personal world feels more fragile. This is none more so than those dealing with bereavement. The psychological impact on staff can be immense.

Emotional awareness, understanding what empathy is and what it isn't, and recognising self compassion, is vitally important for personal psychological well being. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the anxiety and sometimes heartbreaking situation people are finding themselves in professionally and personally, Carolyn has created the 'BE HUMAN' model. This document, including some of the other training models she uses in her workshops and consultancy too from her LEED Communications Programme® (Learning Empathy & Emotional Development) is created to help re-frame destructive thoughts and support long term staff well being.

This document is meant to reflect, the personal, real and honest approach Carolyn takes when training or delivering a conference presentation. Talking to each one of you personally. **So for those who have not met Carolyn, it's time for this document to go out of the third person writing and into the first.**

Carolyn Cleveland Founder of C&C Empathy Training (BSc Hons Open, Cert counselling, PTTLs)



Firstly...hello.

I really hope you and your loved ones and colleagues are coping at this time. If you are anything like me, you will have had such a multitude of emotions and reactions since March 2020. With waves of anxiety and calm!

And any session I deliver I always start with this quote from Daniel Goleman.

*'Emotions they say, guide us into facing predicaments and tasks,
too important to leave to intellect alone'*

Daniel Goleman

That's a really interesting concept. Yet, emotions are the things we so often suppress. Find difficult to handle. Struggle to talk about. Yet are the things that so drive our behaviour, actions and feed into our outcomes.

When I work with professionals in many sectors, NHS, coronial systems and many public, private and government bodies, instead of walking round the 'swimming pool' of multiple situations, driven by policies and procedures, my approach is a little different, as I take them in for a 'little swim'!

For those who don't know me, I have a background in psychology, counselling, and conceived Care & Compassion Empathy Training from my direct experience of a lack of empathy and compassionate communication within an investigation/serious incident and inquest process.

Experiencing the loss of a child (Sophie) when she was 15 years old in a hospital setting, from what was at first a normal childhood illness, I found that many of the systems did not grasp my emotional experience, motivations or needs, following this tragic loss, or those of their staff. This was apparent individually and culturally, feeding into staff behaviour and negatively impacting on outcomes.

Alongside this I was having to manage my own long term well being and that of my still very young family. I was lucky, as I had my counselling training to give me a basis to psychologically support myself and re-frame things in a way that helped me cope. All things that feed into and support the people I work with now.

This, joined together with my academic study, helps me to reach people on a human level and take empathy and emotional development out of the text book and into real honest life, because.....

Whatever our age, race, gender or job title, it's the one thing we all have in common, we are all human.
So let's BE HUMAN

The 'BE HUMAN' model and document does not have all the answers for you. I do not have them all for me!

But it is a guide to help you in whatever way you choose. To acknowledge that you are a human being, doing the best you can. That you have a multitude of skills within you. And to remember to acknowledge your achievements and 'BE HUMAN' because some days it can be like.....

You are running a 20 mile run, and you are 10 miles in. You are tired, and exhausted and all you can think about is the 10 miles left.



You have lost the ability to take 1 mile at a time, but also, you are not acknowledging the fact that you have run 10 miles already.

No wonder you are exhausted.
No wonder you need to 'take 5'.
But look...just look how far you have come.

Turn around for a moment and change your perspective and see how far you have already travelled.

The 'BE HUMAN' Model

One of the difficulties in working in a caring profession is having high expectations of self. And although even when skilled at looking after others, we are not always good at recognising our own limitations, emotional responses and needs.

Over and over in my empathy and emotional awareness sessions, staff do not realise how empathic they are. Often not understanding their own reactions and struggle with difficult feelings. They shut off to be able to cope, but often apathy then takes over and the emotional experience becomes suppressed, impacting on long term well-being. Feelings like guilt can be consuming and a feeling of failure particularly in end of life care and bereavement can make it hard to manage certain emotional experiences and situations.

This model is to focus on the fact that despite medical expertise and/or professional intellectual knowledge, we all have our own emotional experience. To recognise we are not superheroes, but human.

Brave

Acknowledge the extreme situation you are placed in and that **you are facing it with courage.**

Empathy matters

Know what **empathy is** and what **it isn't** to use it **skilfully** and know that you are actively doing your best to **safeguard** another person's **psychological well being.** Recognise different perspectives and relationships.

Honesty

The **facts** are **hard to say** and uncertain sometimes, but people will be searching for these facts about themselves or someone that they love.

Understand limitations

You **can't 'fix'** everything: it's about reaching an **optimum outcome** from a less than **optimum situation.** Share someone's grief rather than trying to fix.

Meandering conversation

Allow loved ones to **talk,** let the conversation meander how they need. This is a hugely powerful gift to give. Let them feel connected through you.

Acept this will be hard

This **IS** going to feel **very difficult** for you. **Accept** that you will experience emotions that you don't want to. Accept this will feel hard. Show compassion and exercise self compassion too.

Nurture

You **can't** give a hungry person food, if your plate is empty. **Talk, write, share, find laughter.** Find something every day, you did the **very best** you could. And remember, you are **human. Be kind to yourself - be human**

Brave

Acknowledge the extreme situation you are placed in and that **you are facing it with courage**

“ I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear. ”

Nelson Mandela

www.thequotes.in

Bravery and indeed courage are as multi-faceted as every other emotional reaction we have. Courage is part of the 6C's of nursing and something that we find inspirational in life and in leadership in all areas of work and life.

Fear is part of our emotional responses too. We often don't acknowledge our bravery and courage when we feel feelings of fear and anxiety.

Being brave and facing something with courage will not eradicate feelings of fear and worry. These are natural feelings. They will be dynamic and changing. Allow yourself, when you feel overwhelmed by fear, to find something, no matter how small, that you have shown bravery and courage with. Acknowledge your own bravery. Your own courage. Acknowledge too though that your fear and anxiety will sit along side these and are intrinsically connected.

Empathy matters

Know what **empathy is** and what **it isn't** to use it **skilfully** and know that you are actively doing your best to **safeguard** another person's **psychological well being**. Recognise different perspectives and relationships.

Empathy is one of the most powerful attributes you can have as a human being. It is vital for:

- Seeing different perspectives
- Using your imagination to understand how another feels
- Feeling what they may feel, or as close to as you can
- Having the drive to respond with an appropriate action

Empathy underpins compassion, care and true understanding. Those who know my training sessions, know how the presence and absence of empathy is drawn out in my own personal story. How the need for it becomes an embedded part of their thinking and practice. They will often hear me describe my favourite definition:

empathy (noun)

The **power of understanding** and **imaginatively** entering into another person's feelings

Collins English Dictionary

It will be the skill that will help you know those little things that build trust and connection. The skill that will allow you to know diversity, inclusion, and think outside the box. It will help you to see what can be done to support another when it seems like there is nothing open to you.

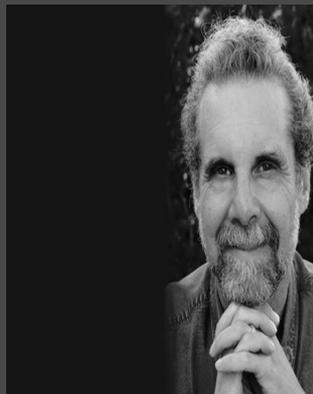
It is also important to remember empathy is not about 'fixing' things. It is about caring for yourself too. In fact the less we care about ourselves, the more burnt out we get and the less we can care for others.

What being empathic doesn't mean.....

"Adopting other people's emotions as our own and trying to please everyone. That would be a nightmare – It would make action impossible.

Rather empathy means thoughtfully considering people's feelings along with other factors – in the process of making intelligent decisions"

Daniel Goleman



Apathy (disinterest) goes up and empathy can deplete when we are very overwhelmed for a long time.

Daniel Goleman here describes what being empathic isn't, while still validating its importance.

The following sections are going to be covered together, as the fact that we are human, means we can not easily compartmentalise our thoughts, emotions and behaviours, and nor should we. They are all connected. As we are in our humanity.



So the supportive information and models used in my training and that I am sharing can be embedded throughout each section to promote healthy, self aware and compassionate thinking and empathic communication and practice.

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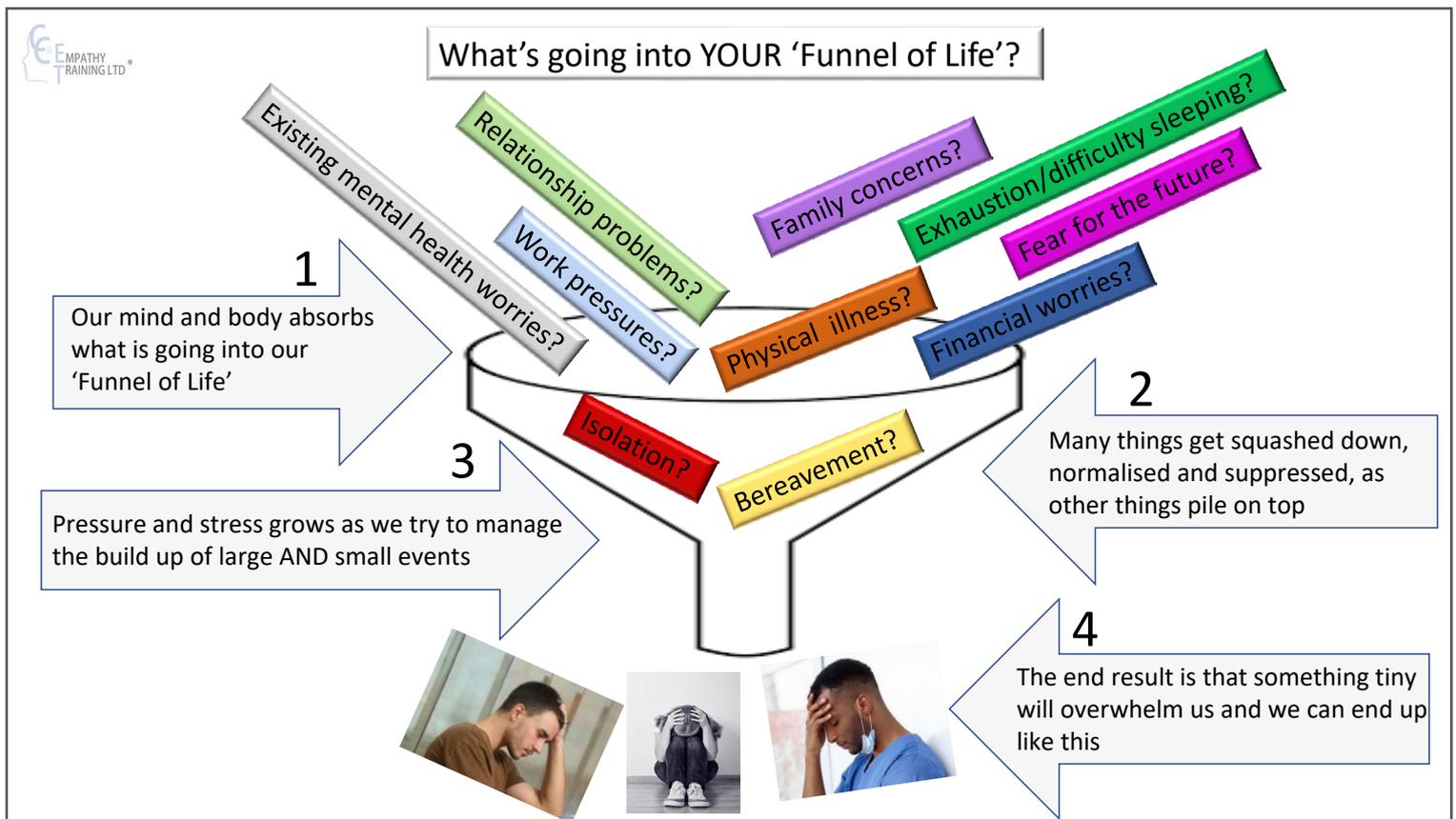
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My 'Funnel of Life' model, that is brought to life dynamically in my training sessions, is a powerful demonstration of how life can impact us. Below is the static version included in training workbooks for those attending, to start recognising other people's 'Funnel of Life' in practising empathy and compassion, but also their own 'Funnel of Life', in developing their own emotional awareness.



Optimum outcome/self in less than optimum situations

What do you think about when you see yourself reaching an optimum outcome/self in professional and personal life?

- Feeling positive all day?
- Not finding anything hard?
- Always being able to feel empathy and compassion?
- Always staying in control of your emotions?

The stumbling block to these kind of thoughts is that we do not operate at the same level every day. Our optimum self and outcome can look very different at different times. In fact, even throughout just one day, we will vary in our capabilities and our resilience. However as humans, we often measure ourselves and successes, on what we can do when we are in 'conquer the world' mode. When our 'Funnel of Life' is not too overwhelmed.

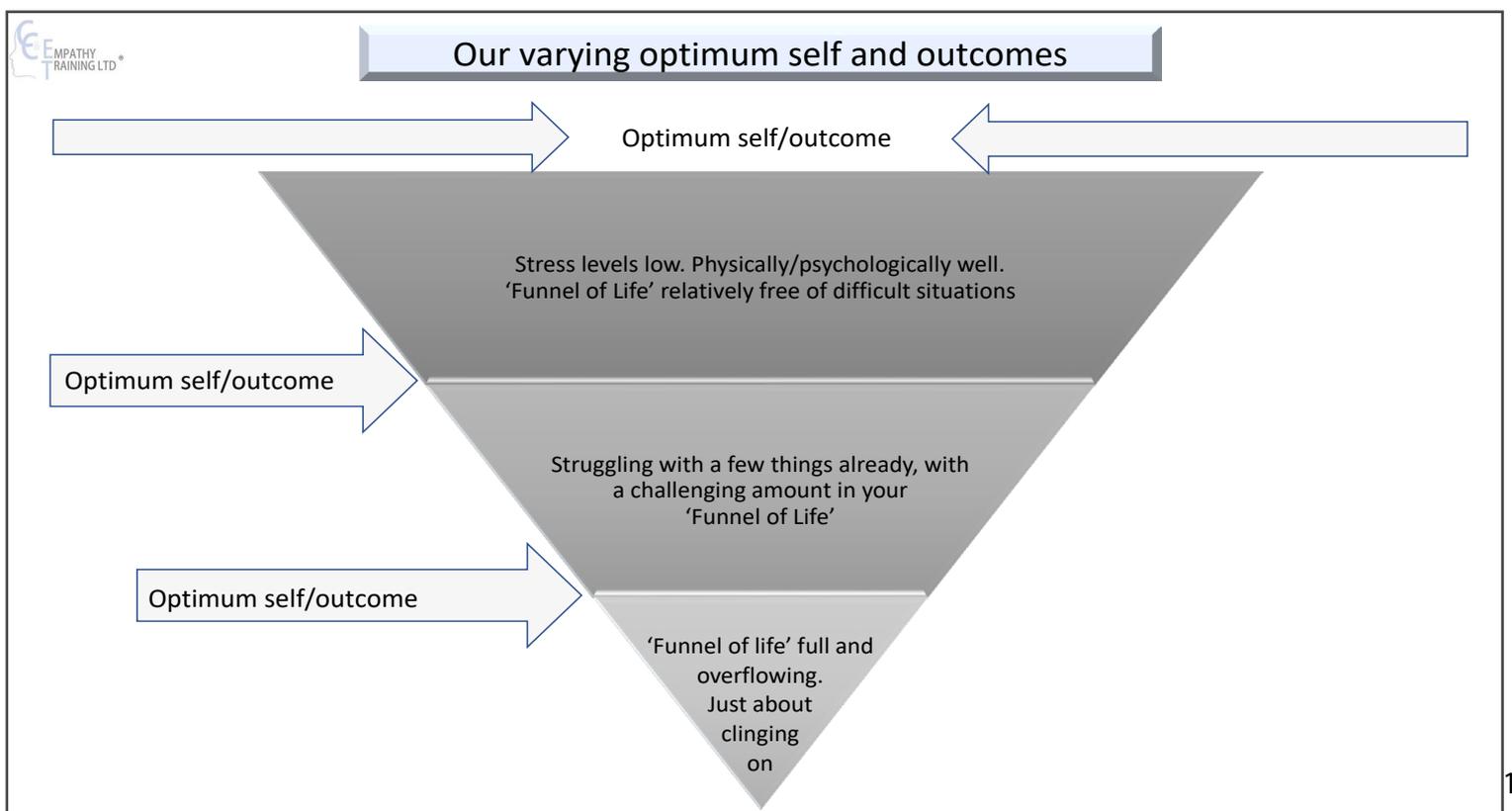
When we measure ourselves like this and don't take into account the full picture and the conditions we can become self critical, as a result our well being suffers. We can become despondent, or angry sometimes internally, and this can play out in our interactions with others as well as erode our mental health.

Realistically, sometimes 'optimum' will look and feel like we are unstoppable. 'On top of our game', a saying we all will be familiar with, and we feel full of energy and motivation. Sometimes though optimum, at times of stress or maybe illness, will look and feel somewhat different. And we can think we really have not done well, but let's re-frame things.

Let's look at an example (narrative based learning):

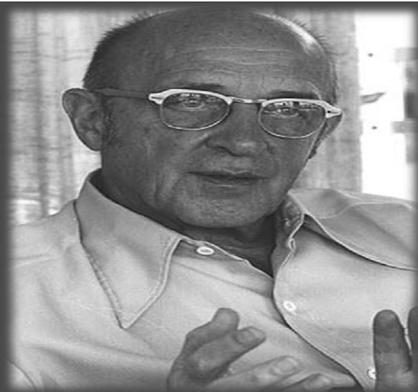
There are many times my sense of self has been measured harshly by my own critical voice. On bringing up my still young family (9 year old and 4 year old twins) following the death of my eldest child when she was 15 years old , I would look at my outcomes and feel a failure. You see, what my ideal self wanted was a long way from my reality, and this knowledge would impact strongly on my well-being. As I got further away from deep grief, this critical voice berated me more, because of course, as I healed, that optimum self could do so much better.

Through my own honest emotional development and self compassion, I started to look at what the realities of that optimum outcome/self was at that time? I was a 33 years old, suddenly bringing up 3 traumatised young children in what I could only describe as an emotional hurricane. Clinging on emotionally with my finger nails. Unable to even smile. As I looked back and analysed, I realised that my optimum self at that time was still there, but looked very different, as my 'Funnel of Life' was overwhelmed. My emotional self needed some honest re-framing and self compassion.



Meaningful Connections

'It's good to talk' is a phrase commonly used with all matters to do with well being and mental health. However listening is often hard. It can be uncomfortable, especially with bereavement. We can feel powerless in our ability to help and to make a difference. We underestimate the enduring power that empathic and compassionate listening has on another human being.



Carl Rogers

Father of the humanistic movement in psychotherapy

“Being listened to by someone who understands makes it possible for a person to listen more accurately to themselves...”

“When you are in psychological distress and someone really hears you without passing judgement on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, **it feels damn good!**”

If you are communicating with someone who is bereaved, it can feel particularly difficult. 'What if I say the wrong thing?' can almost be debilitating. Almost everyone is reluctant to communicate bad news. The reluctance to communicate bad news is so general that it has been given its own name: the MUM effect ("Mum's the word") and I will look a little more at this in a while. As someone who specialised in bereavement and vulnerability during my counselling study, I can tell you now, I still feel these things too. You are not alone!

As someone who suddenly lost a 15 year old from supposedly a non fatal virus, I also know the feeling of how the loss of a loved one can consume you. Not everyone will want to talk, many will, and creating opportunity for someone to talk freely can be one of the most compassionate acts you can provide in your professional role.

I still remember the Intensive Care nurse who attended Sophie's funeral, why? Well, Sophie's death became part of her life, part of mine, and talking to someone so connected with that time, was a connection to Sophie. Talking to a stranger about what happened, was a connection - a validation. Validation of my loss. Validation of a life, not just a death.

During COVID-19, as professionals, particularly in the health service, so much of what would normally be classed as compassionate practice is having to be suppressed (such as having to not let loved ones visit someone). This guide, and that is what it is, a guide for you, not to be perfect, as none of us are, but to BE HUMAN. So the next few ideas are to help you value your role, value what you give and help you understand how you can achieve that optimum outcome in a less than optimum situation.



Meandering Conversations

(Adapted from Words Can Change Your Brain, Andrew Newberg MD and Mark Robert Waldman)

Try and find a balance between an agenda and the flow with a conversation. Let it meander the way someone needs it to. Allowing the moment to moment aspect and natural twists and turns of someone needing to express. Someone needing to tell you their story.

Research shows that letting a conversation flow the way someone in distress needs, can help relaxation in the other person.

Remember a meandering flow to conversations is important for your colleagues too and for YOU. Allow your conversation to flow when you need!

As someone is sharing information with you, or hearing information from you, particularly for those working in the health or coronial system, you may represent a vital link between them and their loved one. That is a connection. People often want to discuss someone in detail, but also seek detail too. Honest information about the person who they had a relationship with. Honest information, may feel very uncertain at times, but most people can handle difficult truths, it is the lack of validation of feelings and feeling in the dark, that can cause extra distress.

I remember very clearly feeling that just as I had been interested in and concerned with each aspect of Sophie's life, death did not extinguish this and I was equally interested and concerned with each aspect of her world in hospital. Talking about her was the most natural thing in the world to me.

Through conversations and allowing your empathy and compassion to be interested, can give you a valuable and powerful gift that can profoundly impact someone's experience positively. The challenge comes for us in understanding the power of that gift, as we so often we feel such difficult emotions.

This is where 'accepting it will be hard' comes into the BE HUMAN model.

Accept it will be hard

So remember the MUM affect, well, let's look a little further into this. Why do we find it so hard?

- People are concerned about the potential recipient
- People are concerned about their own well-being
- People might be guided by 'situation norms' or what they understand is the right thing to do. During COVID-19 much of recommended compassionate practice is being prohibited which will be a heavy burden for many professionals having to restrict human to human contact.

As you enter into this difficult task, remember...

As the messenger of bad news, expect to have some negative feelings, or to feel sadness or even responsibility.

Accepting this can help you embrace the positive difference you CAN make.
You won't get it right all the time.
None of us do. Be human.

Responding to someone's emotions, is one of the most difficult challenges in breaking bad news.

Give the person as much time as you can. Just by letting them know they don't have to rush, can provide an unspoken connection, care and support

When I was training as a young counsellor in my early 20's, one of the most profound things I remember learning that has stayed with me.....

'If you can find the courage to stay with someone's distress, which is not always easy, you not only validate their experience, you can often be validating their entire life.'

That was the moment that I remember understanding the positive power we hold, within the times we often feel most powerless. That in validating feelings and experiences, as I can remember those who did that for me when Sophie died, very often validate entire lives. No living soul could 'fix' my loss, no matter what their professional skills, but those that found that courage, even if inside they felt inadequate and uncomfortable, validated my experience. By validating my feelings and experience surrounding her death, they validated the importance of her life.

So we come back to the first part of the BE HUMAN model 'Brave'. Recognising your bravery; of thought and deed. Recognising your courage.

Of course, there is one section in the BE HUMAN model that has been embedded in all the rest, but really must have time dedicated to it. 'Nurture': Perhaps the most important of all. Because as well as our own psychological health being very important, without our ability to nurture ourselves - to look after ourselves - our ability to nurture and look after another can become compromised.

Nurture

You **can't** give a hungry person food, if your plate is empty. **Talk, write, share, find laughter.** Find something every day you did the **very best** you could at. And remember you are **human. Be kind to yourself - be human**

During the first 2 years after losing Sophie, I wrote many diary entries, and furthermore, I went back over them to analyse how I felt and what maybe I needed. This became an important account for me, but it was primarily something I did for my own well being and coping strategy.

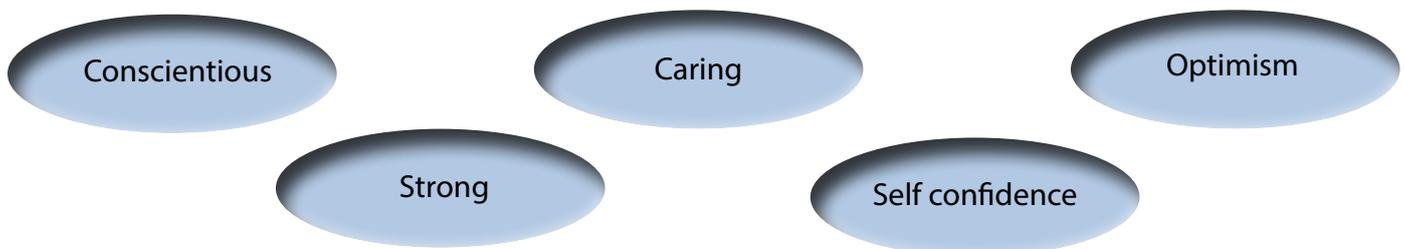
Through the process of writing, people can experience their emotional reactions to a difficult, challenging, or indeed traumatic event, becomes more manageable and they may be less troubled by unwanted and long-lasting introspection. Research has shown that expressive writing, in particular about emotive and/or traumatic events, has many benefits to physical and emotional health.

James Pennebaker and colleagues found that individuals who occasionally write about their emotions and thoughts experienced several benefits including: increased feelings of well-being, reduced GP visits, reduced absenteeism from work, improved academic grades and enhanced immune system function (Lepore & Smith, 2002; Pennebaker, 1997, 2004.)



Self Compassion

We often find compassion for others better than we do for ourselves. Often, we are our harshest critiques. However, showing care and concern when confronted with things we have done wrong, our failure or shortcomings, or wish we had done differently is vital for showing self-compassion and looking after ourselves and long-term well-being.



Look at all those words above, all great qualities right? All things that make us successful? We are not robots and we do not feel those things constantly. Feelings and thoughts are dynamic and changing. In having empathy and compassion for others is to recognise the difference between unskilled behaviour/character, or moments of sadness, stress, grief etc and having empathy and compassion for ourselves too.

When you are struggling, and you will sometimes, you are human, try to recognise and acknowledge something in your day that you have found really hard, and why? Why did it really impact you, what did you feel, how do you feel now? Don't suppress it, write or talk about it. **BUT ALSO....**

Recognise something in your day that was good, that you did well, or are grateful for. Talk or write about that too. Maybe look back at how many miles you have run?



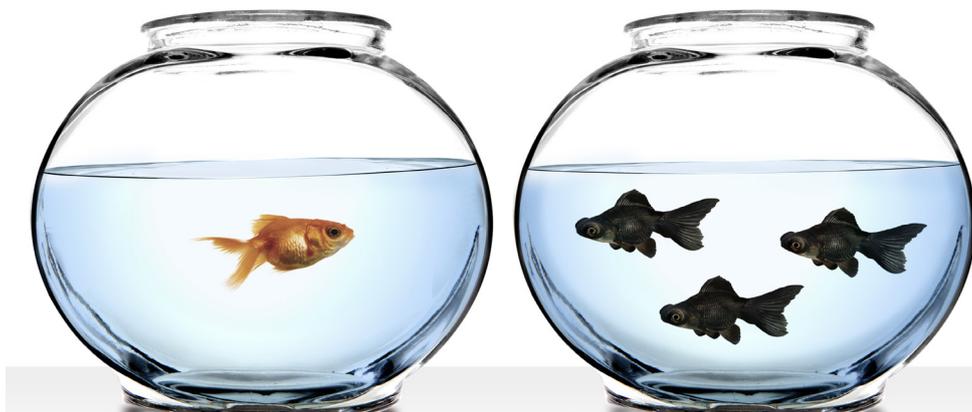
Changing Perspectives (re-frame what you see)

Are there thoughts you need to re-frame to make something really hard that you are struggling to cope with, more manageable in your mind? For those who know my training, will know how honest it is. For those who don't, you may have a little glimpse from this document, my open style, my approach, my character. So, I am going to share a difficult event that I had to re-frame.

It was the first Christmas after Sophie died. I had three young children all wanting to go on their normal tradition of visiting the place we saw Father Christmas every year. The evening before, I went into meltdown. Mentally debilitated from the idea of this. Unable to see the 'why'. Unable to see the joy. My husband supported me with the need to do this even though Sophie was the first child we had gone with, and I got up the next morning and we all piled into our car.

As we travelled (and don't ask me how or why this happened) this thought came to my head asking me a question. 'So Carolyn, let's just say that next year something happens to you, or one of the other children, and you don't get to have this Christmas that you have right now, just as it is. What would you give to have what you have right now back?' I looked at my boys and I knew instantly, I would give ANYTHING. I would fight for it. I would in fact fight for something that in that moment felt so wrong.

Did that re-framing make the day I faced any less wrong? No. Did it make Sophie's death any more tolerable to me? Absolutely not. But it enabled me to shift my perspective just enough to re-frame the day. Not to pretend, but to find the joy that still remained in the darkness that my life had in it. To feel proud that I was being a 'good enough mum', when I felt that my abilities to keep my children safe, was rock bottom. It helped me to change my outlook and re-frame what I saw.



Laughter

Despite some of the sensitive and difficult subject matter that I cover when I work with organisations and their staff, humour is an integral part of the session. Whether a one hour keynote talk, or a full days training, laughter is embedded throughout. The importance of catching happy emotions, and how we need to balance that sometimes very full 'Funnel of Life'.

And with laughter releasing endorphins (the natural 'happy' drug), it makes us feel good, and helps those around us to feel happy too, as laughing is one of the most contagious human behaviours. Not only is it good for our mental well being, it helps our physical self too.

Just some of the things laughter helps with:

- Stimulates many internal organs (enhancing intake of oxygen-rich air)
- Activates and relieves your stress response
- Relieves tension
- Relieves pain (producing natural pain killers)
- Helps you cope and connect with life
- Supports a healthy immune system



We really do need to laugh and to feel hope and joy even in the most difficult times. And to help you along, I hope these happy, hopeful, silly and funny images remind each and everyone one of you to catch some happy emotions too and fill up that plate!



Even if you just glance at the BE HUMAN model every now and again to support you, by writing this to you, from me, in the way I have, I hope it helps you to remember YOUR well-being and that in the darkest moments, there is light.

BE HUMAN! It is our commonality.

Carolyn Cleveland

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