

# Shame and Self in Psychotherapy: A Relational Developmental Approach

‘Support in the form of connection is the antidote to shame’

*Joanna Hewitt Evans*

2022





# Structure of the Workshop

- **Phenomenology of Shame**
- **Aetiology of Shame**
- **Defences Against Shame**
- **Healthier Ways of Managing Shame**



# References

- Kaufman, G (1983) *Shame: The Power of Caring* Schenkman Books
- Evans, K (1994) Healing Shame: A Gestalt Perspective *Transactional Analysis Journal Vol 24 No.2 103-108*
- Lee, R,G and Wheeler,G Eds ( 1996) *The Voice of Shame: Silence and Connection in Psychotherapy*. Jossey Bass
- Lee, R,G ( 2007) Shame and belonging in childhood: The interaction between relationship and neurobiological development in the early years of life. *British Gestalt Journal Vol16, No 2 38-45*
- Brown, B ( 2007) *I thought it was just me ( but it isn't): making the journey from “what will people think” to “I am enough”* Penguin Books

# The Phenomenology of Shame : Physical Reactions

- heart racing, pounding, breathing shallow,
- body tense, frozen, can't move, rigid,
- feeling hot, blushing, red face,
- feeling cold, going white, blotchy
- nausea, cramped stomach, butterflies
- crying
- looking down, avoiding eye contact
- shrinking into the self, away from the skin, hunching, trying to appear smaller
- trembling, shaking, wobbly legs
- feeling faint, collapse
- throat blocked, constricted, can't speak
- heaviness in chest, heart, stomach.



# The Phenomenology of Shame : Emotions

- **Anxiety, Fear, Terror**
- **Frustration, Anger, Rage**
- **Disappointment**
- **Disgust, Self Disgust, Self Loathing**
- **Embarrassment, Humiliation**
- **Sadness, Hurt, Despair**
- **Loneliness, Pain**
- **Confusion**

# The Phenomenology of Shame: Cognitions

- I'm stupid
- I hate myself
- I'm disgusting
- I can't believe I've done this again
- I wish I could run away
- I wish the floor would open up and swallow me
- I've let everyone down
- I've let myself down
- I wish I was dead
- Everyone will hate me
- Everyone will think I'm stupid
- Everyone is laughing at me
- No-one will like me
- I'll never come here ever again
- I can't think, my mind is blank

# The Aetiology of Shame

---

How shame develops



# The First Year of Life

- **Wired for Connection**
- **Attachment**
- **Attunement**
- **Mirroring**
- **Safety**
- **Soothing**



# The Second Year of Life

- Hearing No!
- Interruption of Mobilisation
- Sympathetic hyper-arousal - blocked by the release of cortico-steroids
- Rupture of the Interpersonal Bridge



# Repairing the Rupture

- Re-forming the interpersonal bridge
- Developing the ability to tolerate disappointment, healthy shame
- Regulating stress
- Ventral vagal
- I am loveable



# Prolonged Rupture: Shame

- Time out
- Naughty chair
- Disconnection
- Dis-regulation
- There's something wrong with me
- I'm not loveable





# Drowning in Corticosteroids



# Shame Binds: Links to Identity

- **Physical attributes- size, shape, skin colour...**
- **Emotions - sad self, angry self, joyful self ...**
- **Thoughts, dreams - you aren't clever enough to be...**
- **Behaviours - singing, dancing, speaking out...**
- **Drives, needs - sex, comfort, food...**
- **Cultural, societal attributes - poverty, religion, difference ...**

# Abuse, Neglect, Developmental Trauma

- Shame in a minor key/ Shame in a major key
- Ground Shame
- Internalised shame
- Shame Based System





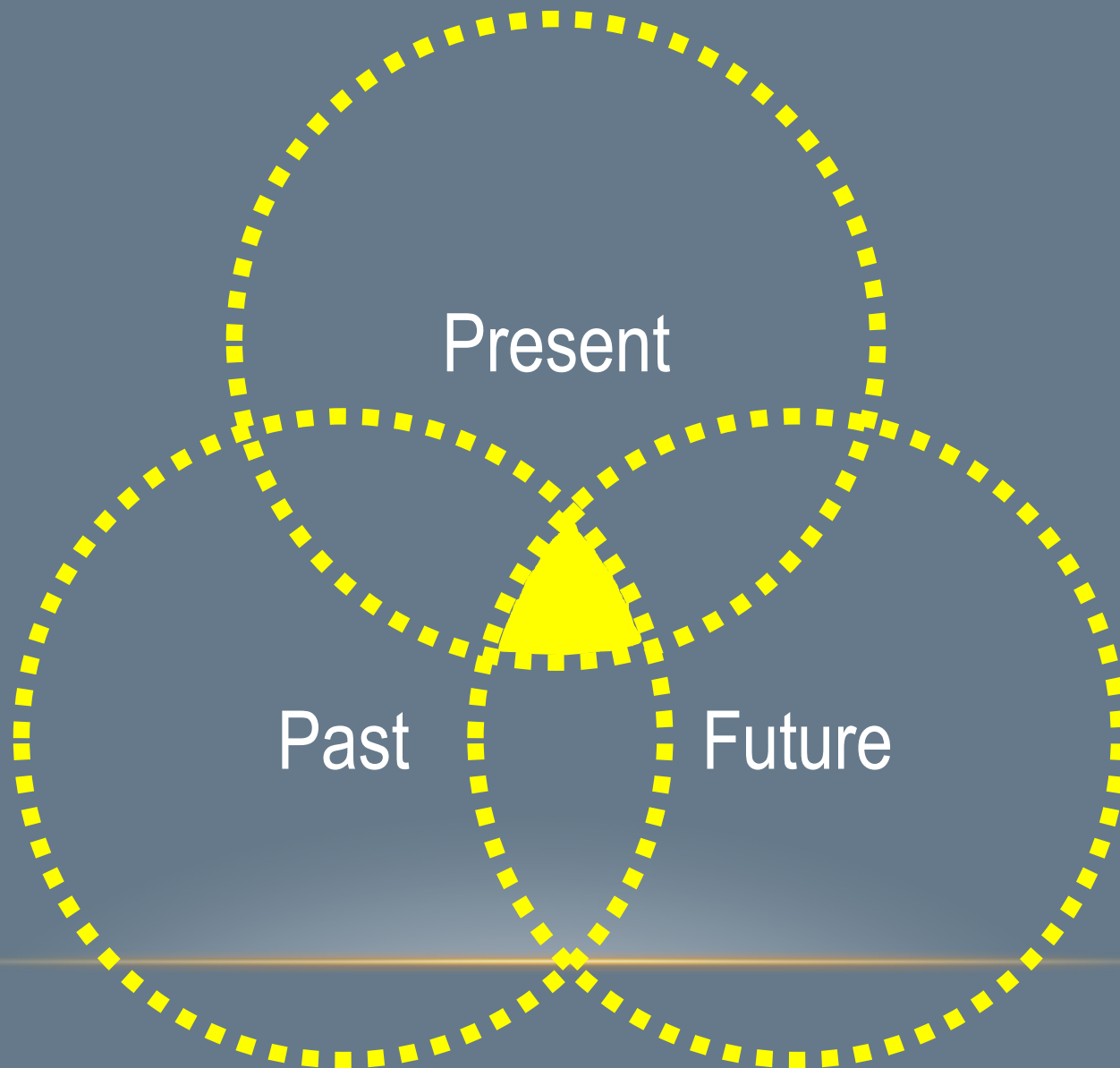


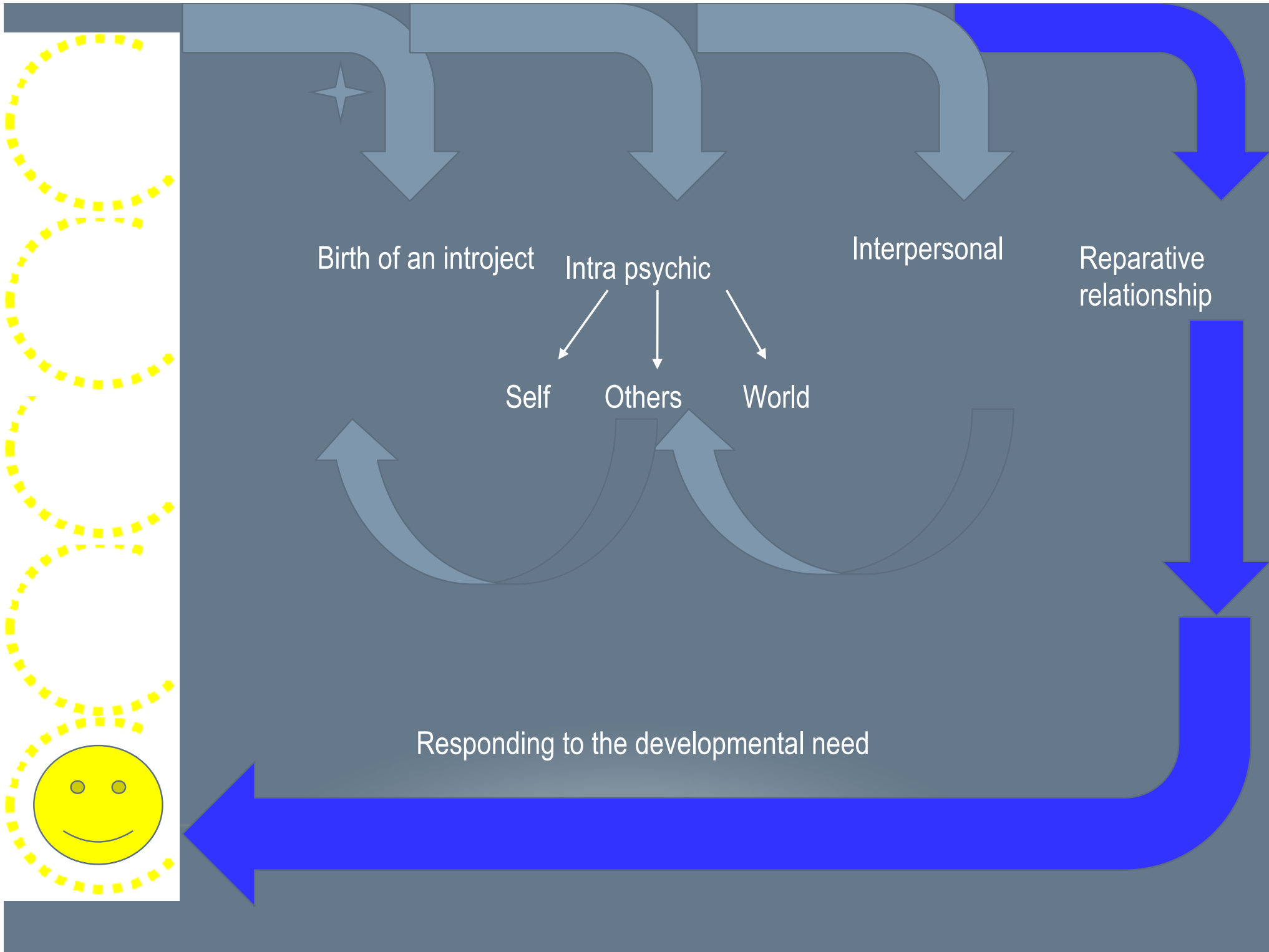
Past

Present

Future

# Here and Now





Birth of an introject

Intra psychic

Interpersonal

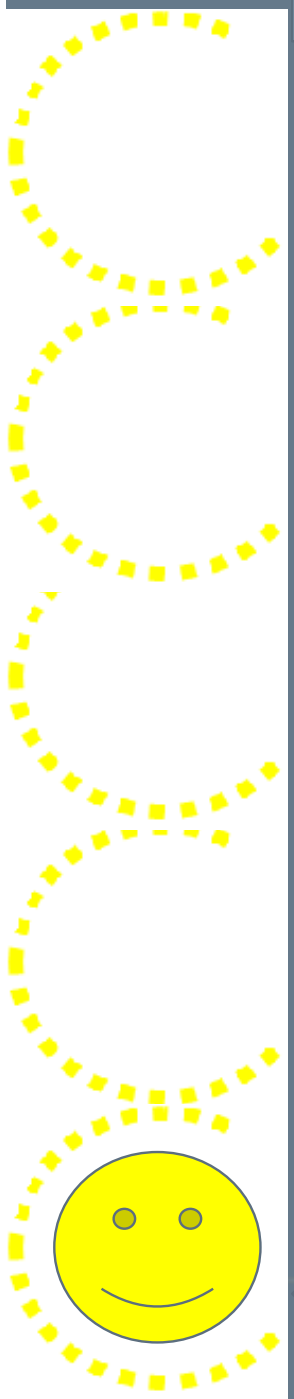
Reparative relationship

Self

Others

World

Responding to the developmental need

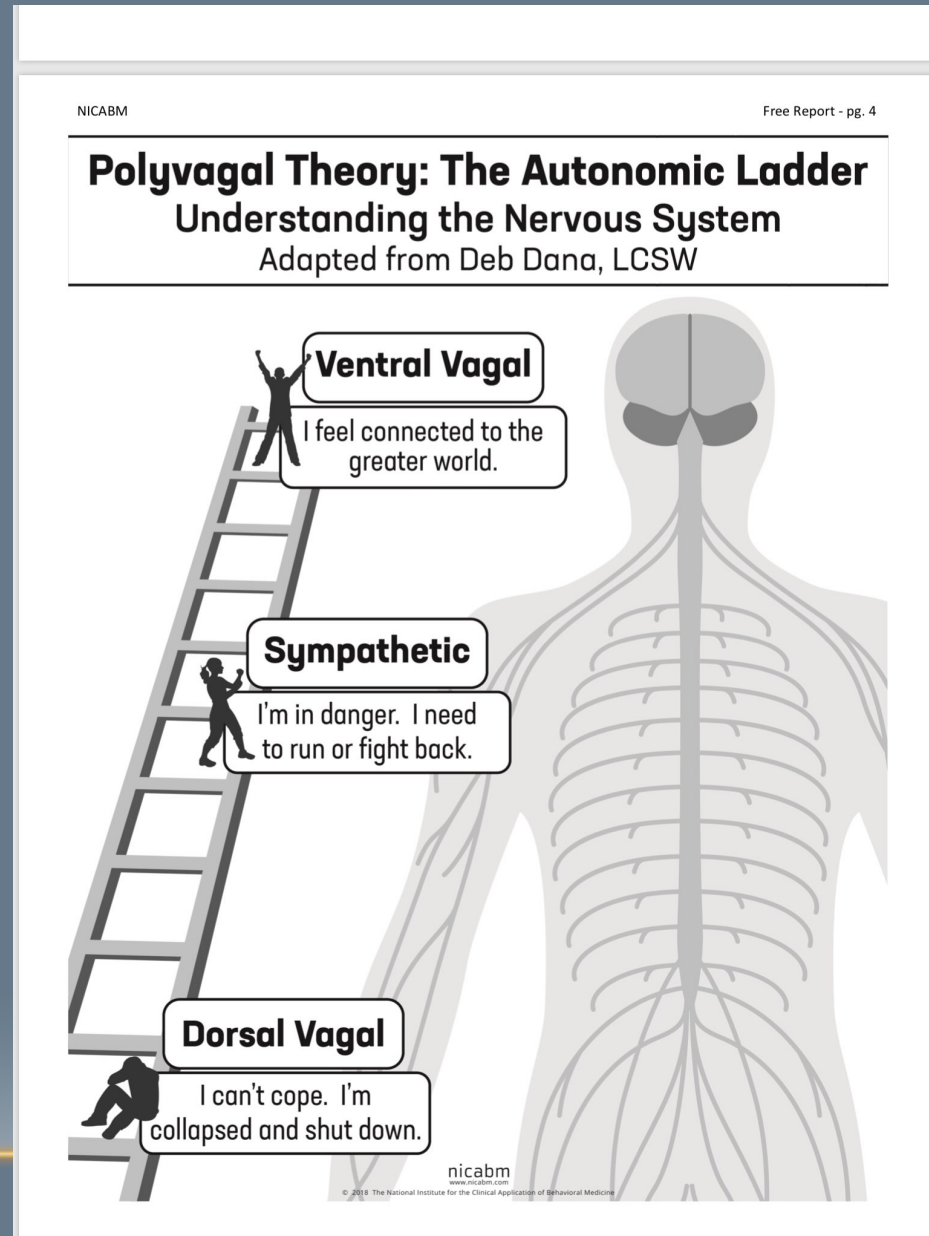


# Polyvagal Theory

**Ventral Vagal:**  
socially engaged,  
connected.

**Sympathetic Arousal:**  
danger, fight or flight

**Dorsal Vagal:**  
life threat, despair,  
shutdown



# Religion



# School





# Media





# Defences against Shame

---

## The Shame Spiral

# Hiding, Withdrawing



# Deflections:

Humour

Talking too much

Interrupting

Changing the subject

Intellectualisation

Asking questions



# Attack

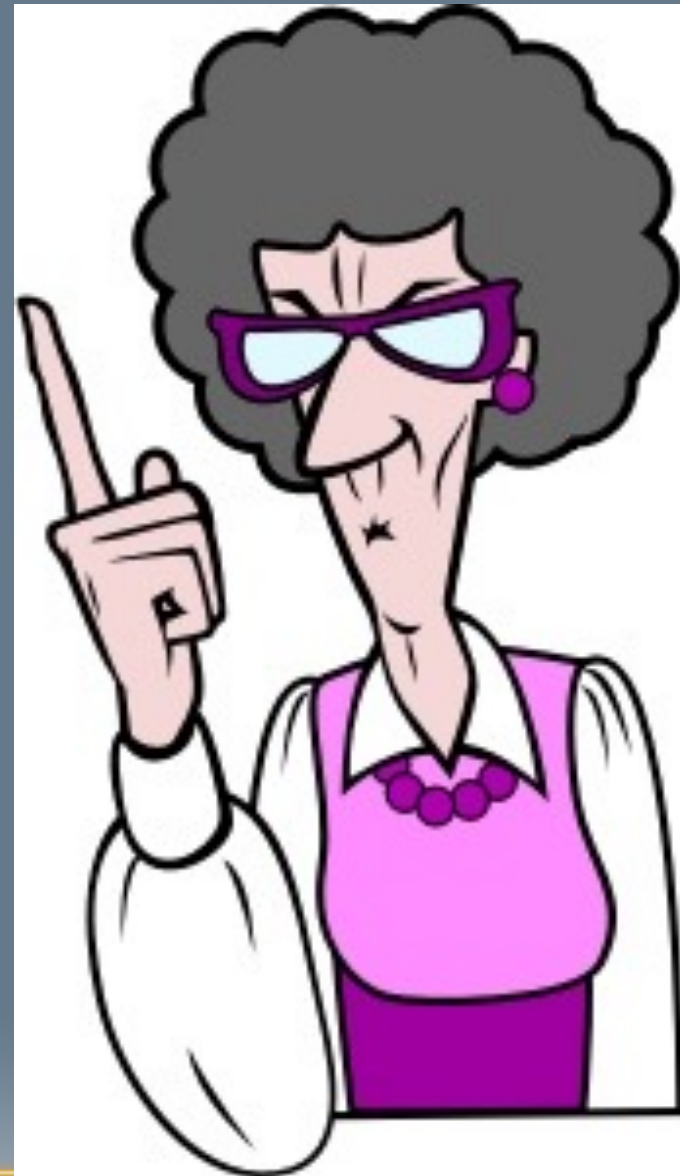
Criticism

Self righteousness

Blame

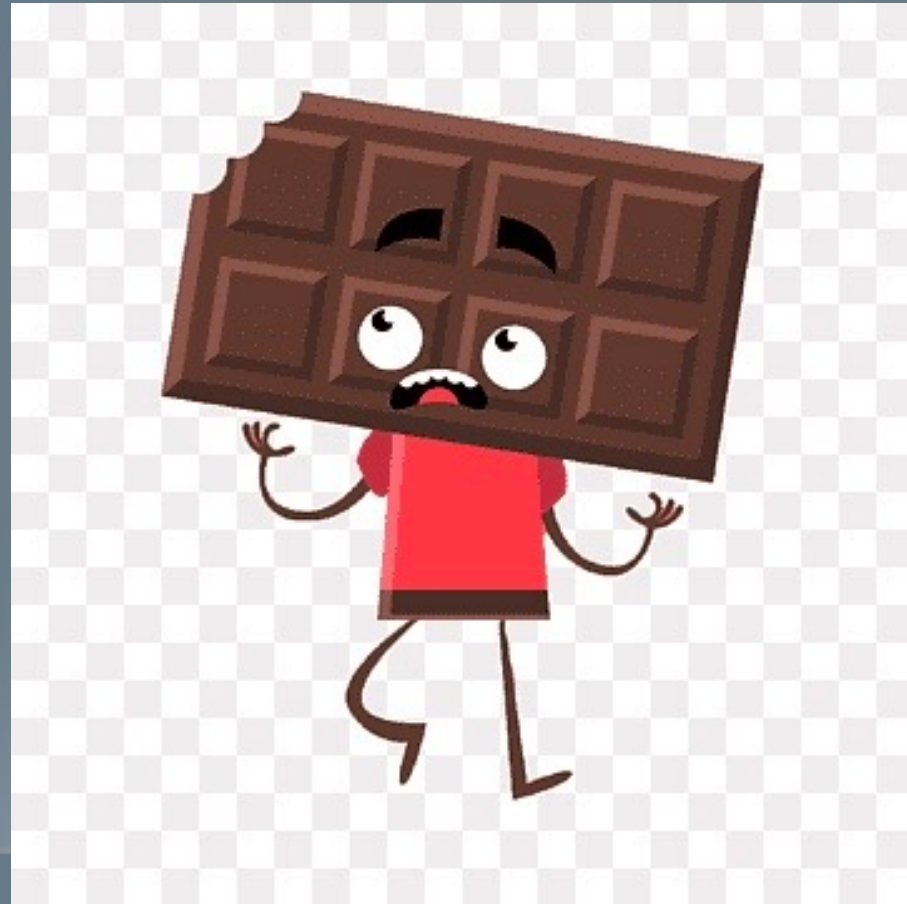
Anger

Rage



# Addictions

Food  
Work  
Exercise  
Alcohol  
Drugs  
Shopping  
Self harm



# Perfectionism



# Roles and Rules : Another Way of Hiding

Teacher

Parent

Doctor

Therapist





# Envy



# Somatisation



A

TTENTION

D

EFICIT

H

YPERACTIVITY

D

ISORDER



# Shame: a defence against non-existence?

Self harm

Mental Health

Suicide

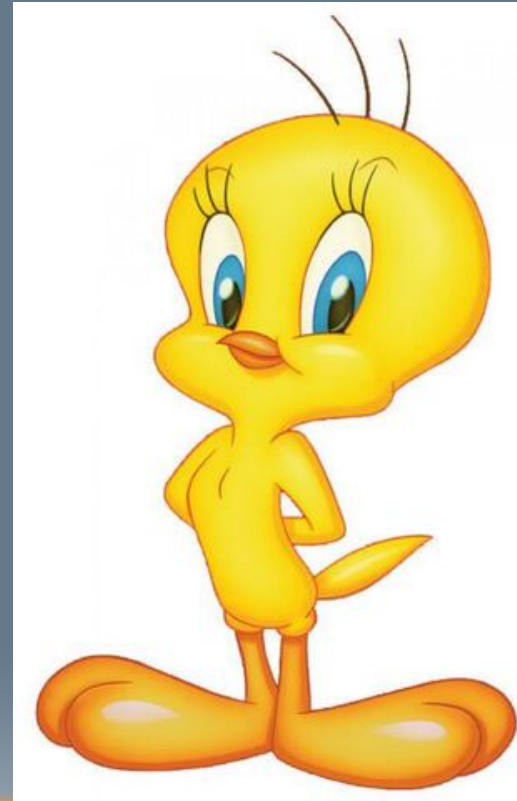


# Healthier Ways of Managing Shame





# Name the Enemy: Tame the Shame

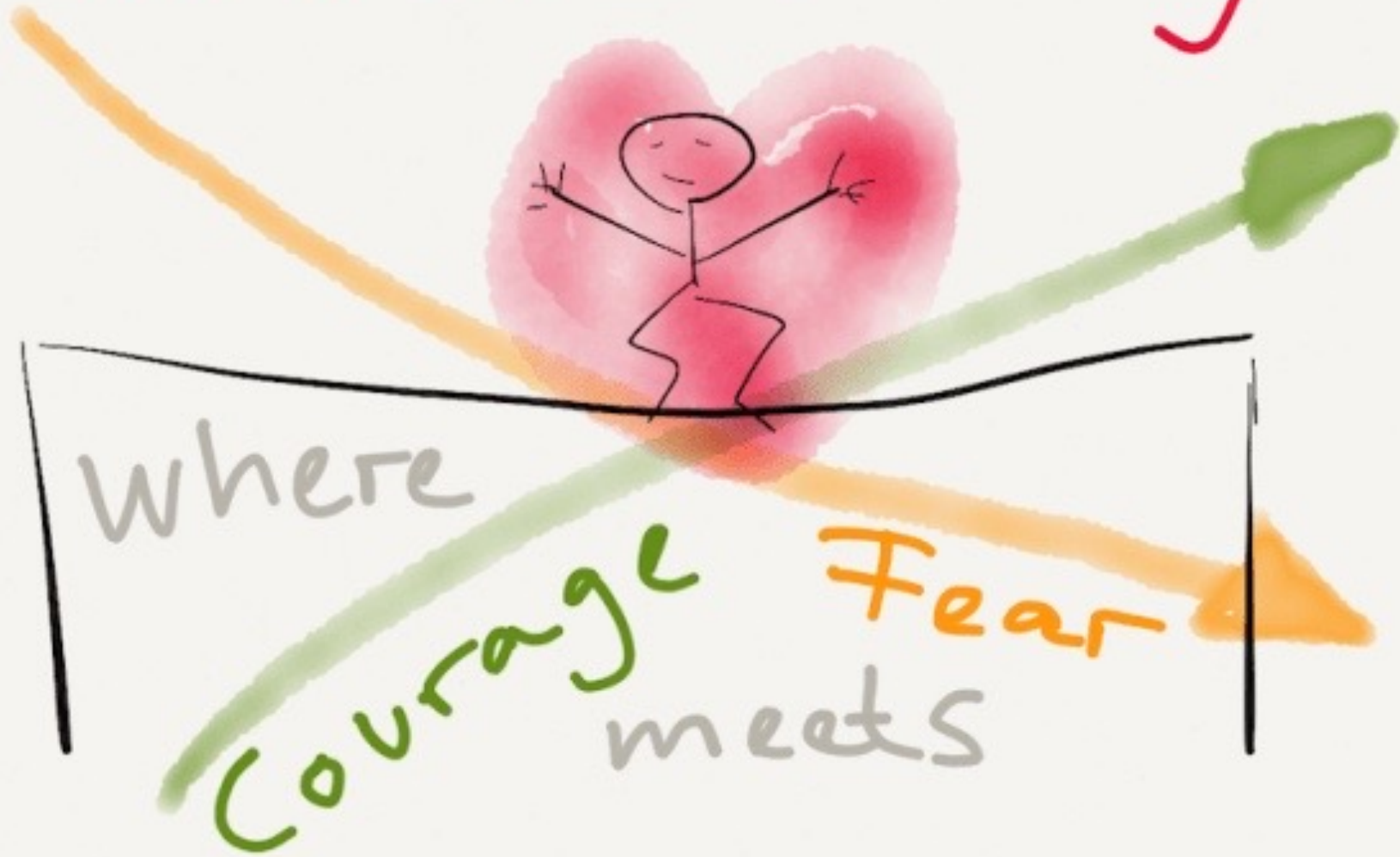


# Support and Connection





# vulnerability



where

Courage meets Fear

# Compassion: Courage, Kindness, Presence, Common Humanity



# Conclusion

**Connection and support, sharing vulnerability, practising compassion aren't simply the antidote to shame but a way of moving beyond shame and embracing life**

