

Compassion

Dr. Henri Nouwen says, *“What we see, and like to see, is cure and change. But what we do not see and do not want to see, is care: the participation in the pain, the solidarity in suffering, the sharing in the experience of the brokenness.”*

Compassion in the Greek language means to be moved in the inward parts, in the visceral organs or bowels. It is gut-level sympathy we call empathy.

To show compassion is to care and show care.

The Old Saxon word for care is Kara, which means to lament or mourn or share in another person’s pain—it’s entering into suffering, not taking it away.

The Latin of Kara is compassio—to suffer with.

All forms of care are expressions of compassion. To care is to show compassion and to show compassion is to care.

Cure

We are culture of fixers. We long for cure more than care. But we rightly long for a cure. But there’s a trap in that. There are situations where we can’t cure or fix what’s wrong. We can alleviate, but not take it away. It becomes a burden and frustration when we can’t. We can lose hope.

What if cure is not the goal? What if care is the goal because that requires compassion, which requires empathy.

Care is what we can do. Cure takes something Greater than us.

We have little influence over the cure but great influence over the care we give. We have little influence over what can cure society of its hatred or fear, but we have complete influence over how much we care. That in itself may be a part of the cure.

“Rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection.” ~ Dr. Brené Brown

Because often when people are facing a challenge or dealing with a difficult situation, they aren’t looking for a magic response that will fix everything. They may be looking for someone who can help them feel like they aren’t alone in solving the problem. They may be looking for someone who has been through a process or challenge before. They are definitely looking for a connection, and that’s what empathy is all about.

Capacity: the maximum emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual and even physical ability or power to perform or meet a desired expectation. Capacity overwhelmed by chronic or traumatic stress limits competency, strains character, and challenges connection. (More on this later.)

Our Window

Tend to your window. Step back, redirect, and lean into your own relationality, need for empathy, compassion, and presence.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is similar to burnout. But burnout usually stems from having too much work or too many responsibilities. Compassion fatigue comes from helping others—you want to keep helping, but you're overwhelmed from being exposed to the trauma of others (secondary traumatic stress). Compassion fatigue is more than an emotional state of being, which is why it is so difficult to "snap" or "pull" yourself out of it. It is a brain reality involving your relational attachment centers in the emotional mind and works in concert with your nervous system.

Signs of Compassion Fatigue

- Feeling physical, psychological and emotional exhaustion
- Feeling helpless, hopeless, or powerless
- Feeling irritable, angry, sad, or numb
- A sense of being detached from others
- Experiencing decreased pleasure in activities
- A mental loop (rumination) about the suffering of others and feeling anger towards the events or people causing the suffering
- Blaming yourself and having thoughts of not having done enough to help the people who are suffering
- A decreased sense of personal, relational, and professional accomplishment and competencies
- Surprising shifts in your worldview or spirituality
- Physical symptoms, including appetite and sleep disturbances, nausea and dizziness

Tips To Address Compassion Fatigue

- Tend to your Life Wheel to gauge Capacity and discern between urgent and important. (see below)
- Tend to your Window (see below)
- Engage your Resilience Network (see below)
- Following Person-Centered Care routines (see below)
- Avoiding information overload and pay attention to how information affects you
- Identifying your priorities and engaging in activities that open your window
- Practicing gratitude and being in the present moment
- Examine your tendency to 'cure' and recommit to healthy 'care'
- Remind yourself of your theological worldview of love and hope, pain and suffering in a society of collective trauma
- Focusing on areas that you have direct influence over with realistic expectations, including your thoughts and feelings, and name your unrealistic expectations
- Seeking professional help if you need it

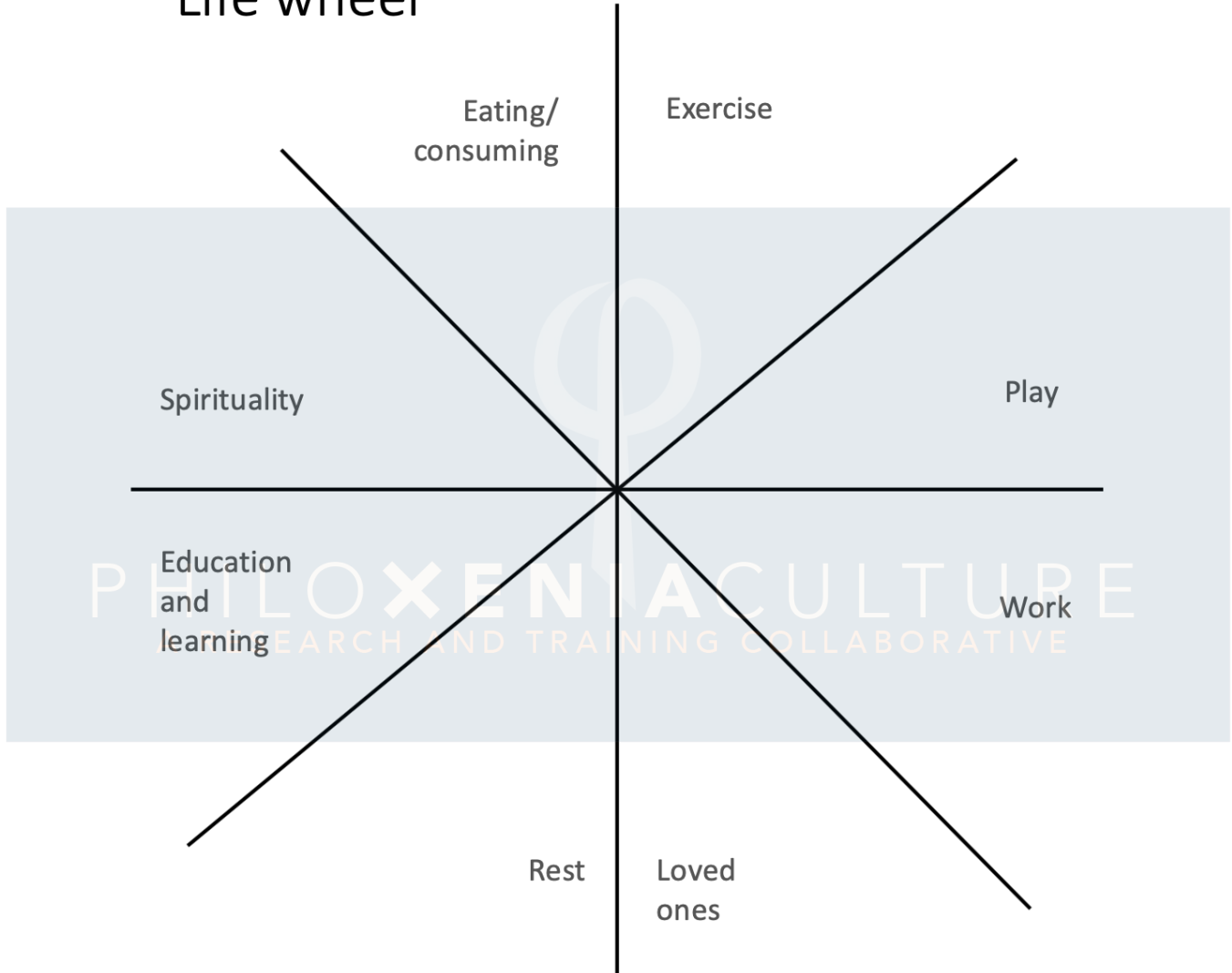
A Word About Person-Centered Care

Person-centered Care is what some may call, "Self-care." In our view what is missing in the language of "self-care" is the reality that we can't care for ourselves on our own or independent of a resilience network. Sure, there are things we can and must do on our own, but it doesn't mean we do it alone. Sometimes we need the help of others to make "self-care" happen. A single parent may need someone to watch her children so she can tend to herself. A person may need their employer to understand their need for a day off or time away, or someone in their life to love them enough to encourage a day off or time away. So we prefer the language of "person-centered care" because it gets everyone's individuality and personhood without suggesting that we can do it alone for ourselves. We need others.

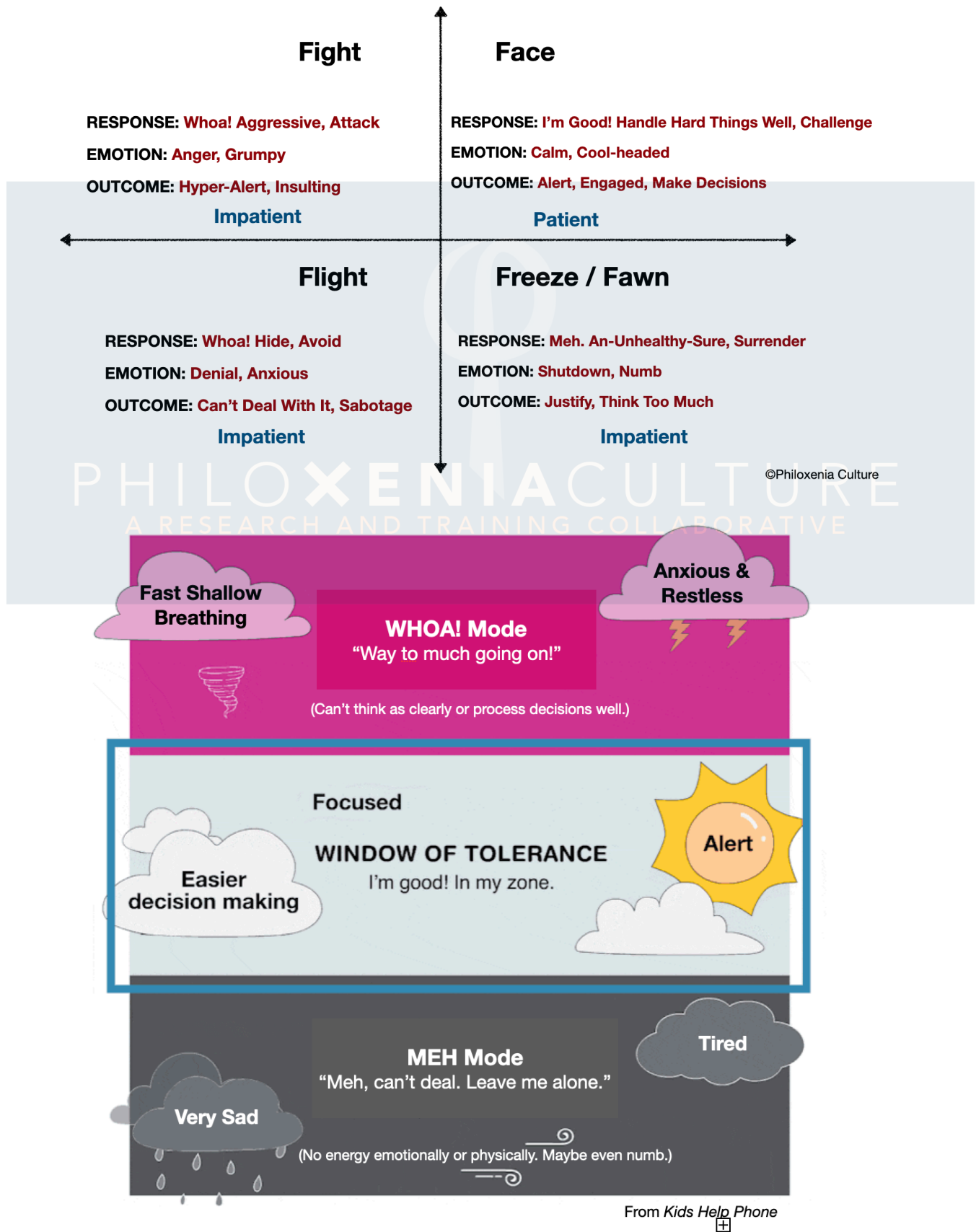
Person-centered care is not self-indulgence, it is self-respect.

1. Be Honest and Gentle with Yourself
2. Resist your Need to Cure / Fix
3. Re-examine your relational and *emotional* boundaries.
4. Re-examine your "yes" and "no," why you said it and when to you should now.
5. Go back to your resilience network
6. Re-examine your rhythms (routines, sleep habits, eating habits, etc)
7. Keep Your Window Open

Life wheel

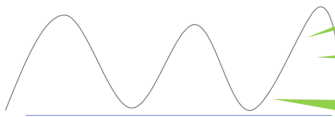


Consider each category in the wheel. How much time and effort do you put into each area? How satisfied are you with the way you address each need in your life? How much pleasure do you get out of each? Put a dot in each section representing your level of satisfaction with the attention each gets in your life and how complete you feel in addressing those needs. Place the dot closer to the center if you are less satisfied and nearer the outer edge if you are more satisfied.



What happens...

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
When my window is wide open



You say I'm wrong?
Tell me more...

Change of plans?
That's ok!

I'm tired... I think
I'll take a nap

FIGHT OR FLIGHT
When my window is closing
and I get activated



You say I'm wrong? I'll
tell YOU who's wrong!

More disappointment!
People just don't know
how to keep
commitments.

Tired, sure. As if I could sleep,
though...and what kind of coddled
person takes naps??

FREEZE/COLLAPSE
When my window is closing
and I get overwhelmed

I'm wrong again.
Worthless.

I will never have
plans again.

What else is there
besides tired?

Resources:
Practices and people
that/who help me
open my window of
tolerance



PHILOXENIA CULTURE A RESEARCH AND TRAINING COLLABORATIVE

Window of tolerance* worksheet

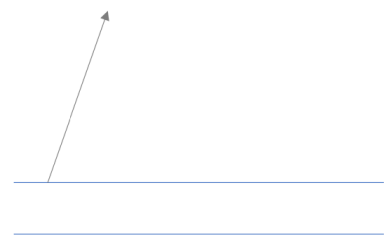
When my window is wide open (I'm feeling well and safe physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually), I....



When my window is closing and I get overwhelmed (demobilized physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually), I....



When my window is closing and I get activated (hyper-alert/in danger physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually), I....



Resources
Practices and people that/who help me open my window of tolerance:

* "Window of tolerance" language draws on the work of Pat Ogden, Stephen Porges, and Dan Siegel.



About Resilience

Resilience is often described as the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt, survive, and bounce back in the midst of or after hardship and adversity. Resilience can also be defined as possessing healthy power in the midst of vulnerability and uncertainty. Persons who have experienced traumagenic events often continue - or are forced to continue - to function (going to school, work, and relationships). Even so, we may still carry "frozen" grief and unaddressed needs that can fuel harmful behavior. Indicators of well-being and trauma transformation may include the absence of post-traumatic reactions or the ability to continue functioning.

A key to understanding resilience is that it is most deeply cultivated in community. Just as it is true that we can harm one another, we can heal one another. We need to intentionally recognize those in our lives whose presence is life-giving. These are the people that make up our "Resilience Network."*

Who is in your Resilience Network?

Great listener(s):

Inspiring person(s)/visionary(ies):

Very practical person(s):

Someone who encourages my soul:

Someone who can put me in touch with my sensuality and beauty:

Mentor(s)/elder(s) - someone who's been through it all:

**Credit: Mark Walsh at the Embodying Resilience Conference April 30, 2020*