

# **Understanding Teenage Mental Health**

**With Paul Spraggs**

# Defining Mental Health

## Self-actualization

desire to become the most that one can be

## Esteem

respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom

## Love and belonging

friendship, intimacy, family, sense of connection

## Safety needs

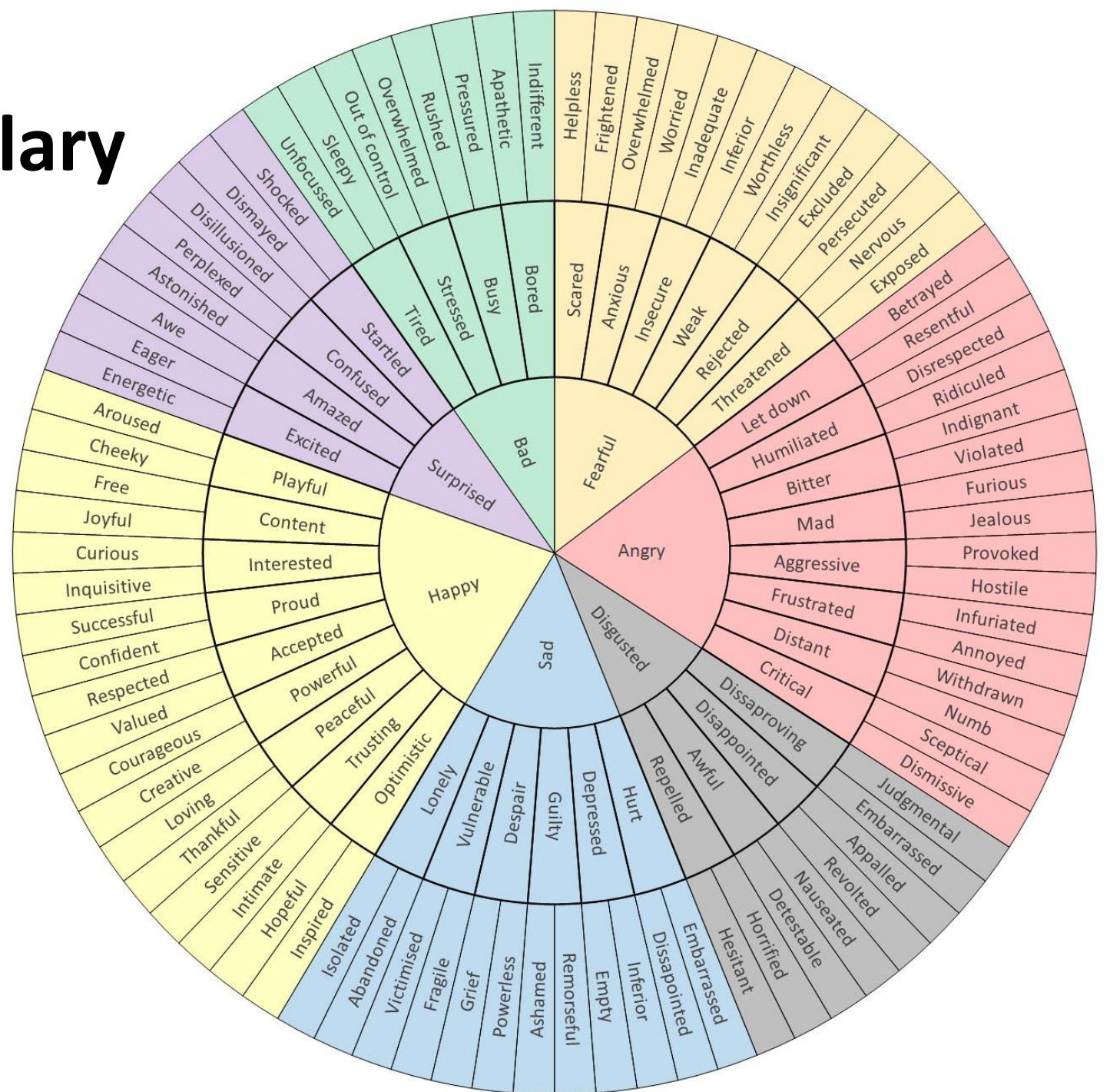
personal security, employment, resources, health, property

## Physiological needs

air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction



# Key Terms: Our Emotional Vocabulary



# Warning signs

## Physical signs:

- Low energy
- Headaches
- Upset stomach
- Aches, pains, and tense muscles
- Chest pain and rapid heartbeat
- Insomnia

## Behavioral signs:

- Changes in appetite -- either not eating or eating too much
- Procrastinating and avoiding responsibilities
- Exhibiting more nervous behaviors (nail biting, fidgeting, pacing)

## Cognitive signs:

- Constant worrying and racing thoughts
- Forgetfulness, disorganization and an inability to focus
- Being pessimistic or seeing only the negative side



# Responding (and avoiding conflict!)

## **1. CONGRUENCE (GENUINENESS)**

Congruence refers to being real, authentic, and genuine. In being authentic we show we are trustworthy and we model this behaviour for the young person, encouraging them to be their true selves expressing their thoughts and feelings without any sort of false front.

## **2. ACCEPTANCE**

To not evaluate or judge their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors as good or bad. Being accepted and valued for who they are, as they are, without stipulation. Avoid the young person fearing judgment or rejection.

## **3. UNDERSTANDING**

Understanding the young person's experience and feelings in an accurate and compassionate way. Recognising that each person's experience contains a unique perspective.



**“What’s wrong?”**

**“Nothing”**

**“I’m fine”**

**“I’m just tired”**

# Healthy Work/Life Balance

## Managing the stress bucket

1. Think of this as a stress container. Inside it are all the things in life that create stress (in school, at home, etc.)
2. Notice the tap at the bottom. 'opening the tap' can release some of the pressures, rather than letting the container overflow.



## 3 common reasons I see young people becoming overwhelmed

1. Comparing their problems to others
2. Trying to uphold an image of strength/composure
3. A lack of introspection

Note: these can be learnt behaviours. Parents are constantly modelling a response to stress/different emotions that their child could potentially adapt as their own.



# Encouraging Young people to manage their well being

- **how to let something go**
  - it will be okay, the feelings will pass. It can be helpful to describe the feelings as a wave to ride or surf that gets smaller after it peaks.
- **Talk through problems, put them into perspective and prioritise them**
  - (See handout of worry tree)
- **Encourage healthy coping mechanisms (And discourage unhealthy coping mechanisms!)**
  1. Reframing the negative
  2. Acknowledging the positive!
  3. Visualising the best parts of a day
  4. Successive Approximation Mindset
  5. Journaling – does not have to be a literal journal just keeping track of what's going on. Encourage more introspection.
    - a. How's my week been? When was I feeling particularly low? Why was this?
  6. Breathing exercises

## Anxiety and stress of A level study and exams

- Parents can play the important role of offering support, rather than pressure.
  - Pressure from parents can result in a child stopping work. We notice that added parental pressure can make a young person feel so worried about disappointing their parents that they find it hard to 'own' things for themselves and, as a result, they become disheartened about their studies.
- For some, a '*fear of failure*' really can be paralysing. It's worth remembering that although hard work and commitment to A Level studies are essential, there are a number of additional hurdles to go through at this stage of a young person's life.
  - Help your child to take each step as it comes and to see each step as an achievement in its own right.



# Points (AKA stuff I tend to repeat a lot!)

- Focus on what you *can* control.
- If you have a problem and you completely lose your head over it, you now have 2 problems.
- Be organised in your approach to your well being.
- Ask yourself more questions. Recognise the way you talk to yourself.
  - *Compare this to the way you would talk to a close friend.*
- Do not compare your reality to another person's highlight reel!
- It's okay to not be okay.
  - Even the Dalai Lama has bad days!

# Q&A

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