Emotional Well-being for Animal Welfare Professionals

Tamsin Durston

CABI

Emotional Well-being for Animal Welfare Professionals

Emotional Well-being for Animal Welfare Professionals

Tamsin Durston

CABI is a trading name of CAB International

CABI
Nosworthy Way
Wallingford
Oxfordshire OX10 8DE
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1491 832111
E-mail: info@cabi.org
Website: www.cabi.org

CABI
WeWork
One Lincoln St
24th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
USA

Tel: +1 (617)682-9015
E-mail: cabi-nao@cabi.org

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library, London, UK.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022938422

References to Internet websites (URLs) were accurate at the time of writing.

ISBN-13: 9781789247794 (paperback)
9781789247800 (ePDF)
9781789247817 (ePub)

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0000

Commissioning Editor: Caroline Makepeace
Editorial Assistant: Emma McCann
Production Editor: Shankari Wilford

Typeset by SPi, Pondicherry, India
Printed and bound in the UK by Severn, Gloucester

Contents

Preface

> The more we learn about ourselves – the better we understand why we behave, think, and feel the way we do – the more accepting we can be of ourselves, and the more enriched our lives, and work, can become.

Although I have dedicated my career to improving animal welfare, this book is born out of my love for people and a desire to share what I have learned about self-care and well-being throughout my experiences within the veterinary, rehoming, training, and behaviour counselling fields, as well as team management. These are life-changing areas of work, and our own lives are simultaneously affected as we strive to positively influence those of others. However, the joy of animal welfare work comes hand in hand with a responsibility that is not carried lightly, and which at times might feel a little too heavy to bear comfortably.

As well as exploring the relationship between animal welfare work and our emotional health, this book brings together many pearls of wisdom I have gleaned while studying applied behavioural science, counselling skills, human psychology, and practical philosophy. It is not intended to be a replacement for professional help, but to provide a broad overview of relevant concepts, theories, and models of behaviour that can help explain why we feel and behave the way we do. We should not seek to excuse behaviour, but to explain it. A greater level of understanding can empower us to be more forgiving of ourselves, especially when we might reflect regretfully over ways in which we have behaved, and indeed kinder to ourselves and each other.

The Heart section explores the emotional side of animal welfare work, the risk factors for us becoming negatively impacted by what we are exposed to professionally, and the need for us to focus on meeting our own needs, just as well as those of the animals for whom we care so deeply.

The Head section examines the psychological aspects of our roles and how our minds try to make sense of our experience, sometimes to detrimental effect. However, it also explores ways in which we might gain control over our conscious experience and develop helpful mind skills to reframe our perspective more positively and form 'good' habits.

The Hands section is designed to provide practical tools for strengthening and maintaining positive well-being in everyday life, for individuals and for teams. These aim to enhance our ability to recover from setbacks and develop healthy ways of coping with the emotional demands of our work.

In a working world where we extend unending kindness to animals, we should feel able to extend that same compassion and kindness to ourselves, removing the barriers of negative self-talk and self-doubt that prevent us from doing so. I hope readers will find something uniquely helpful within these pages; something that helps make sense of experience and enables them to think about things differently.

The concepts introduced within this book may all be studied in much greater detail. I therefore also hope to inspire further reading and learning about these fascinating topics, which help make sense of 'life' and may ripple throughout all our interactions.

I think of everyone endeavouring to improve human and animal lives as 'one big team' with a shared core, and believe that if we consciously open our minds and hearts, we can learn from every encounter we have with another person or animal. This book is dedicated to all my teachers, but particularly 'Team Merton' for the invaluable time and enrichment we shared, and the incredible lessons gifted me by such an amazing group of individuals.

1 Introduction – Why Is This Topic So Important?

'Your job must be so rewarding…'
'I couldn't do what you do!'

Sound familiar? Telling someone you work as an animal welfare professional commonly results in recognition that this must be incredibly fulfilling – which of course it is. Yet at the same time it appears widely accepted that this type of work is a significant emotional undertaking, requiring an extraordinary capability – which of course it does!

The truth is, the work we do changes lives for the better, including our own. We help animals gradually learn to trust and not fear us. We enable traumatized animals to feel positively about life. We give them the gift of safety and pain relief. We tirelessly work to find them loving homes in which they will thrive. We diagnose, treat, and nurse animals through pain, injury, and disease. We help owners understand their animals' communication as well as how to meet their individual needs appropriately, to live the best life possible together. We help owners make positive changes, so no-one need live with fear or frustration. We help people teach their animals to adapt, equipping them with skills to help them take life in their stride. We campaign enduringly, as advocates, for consistent welfare standards. We empower people to connect with the animals they love. We give animals and people the care they deserve. And the relationships we develop with the animals, and people, we work with enrich our lives in such deeply fulfilling ways.

It's this sense of meaning and purpose that keeps us working within the sector, despite times when we're emotionally fatigued and burned out because of difficulties we encounter along the way.

We see owners struggling with their pets, animals whom they love so much but sometimes find it so difficult to relate to, connect with and provide appropriately for. We see animals suffering or 'let down' by society in some way and, whether this be due to ignorance of their needs or deliberate abuse, this can cause us to doubt people and feel disproportionately disheartened by humanity. We're involved in euthanasia, and although this offers a kind means to end suffering, the responsibility that comes with it, and sometimes

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0001

the sheer volumes we are exposed to, can be overwhelming. We feel frustrated that despite our best efforts to communicate advice we truly believe will be game-changing for owners and animal carers, this is not heeded, and it can be difficult to truly understand the many reasons why someone might not necessarily follow our guidance. Our perceived lack of ability to help when we so desperately want to can affect our confidence, esteem, and self-belief. We might even have received abuse from people frustrated at the constraints within which we work, and their perceived understanding of the extent of our ability to help in the specific ways they want. Have you ever been told by a client, 'You don't care!', when you've dedicated your life to caring? These and many other stressors arising from our work can build up, accumulating a weight hard to bear that preys on our minds.

It appears all too generally accepted that work-related emotional or mental health stressors don't warrant addressing because, right from the start, those of us working or volunteering within animal welfare fields feel that 'taking the rough with the smooth' and 'it's worth the heartache' are simply part of the job. Don't the good moments simply outweigh the bad over time and make it all okay?

No.

It's never okay to accept suffering ourselves as a necessary consequence of difficult work-related situations we sometimes face. If we simply accept that the highs are worth the lows, it's worth asking just what depths of despair we are prepared to bear as an obligatory part of our roles, and whether we're treating ourselves fairly or kindly. Because if we subscribe to the mindset that our work will naturally be debilitating, well, aren't our expectations plainly met when it is? We might not be able to remove the more distressing elements of our work, but we shouldn't simply accept these as a necessary cross to bear. Doing so creates a psychological barrier to seeking effective ways to address their potentially damaging consequences or to preventing these from arising in the first instance.

For example, in comparison with the general population, veterinary surgeons report higher levels of anxiety and depression, increased suicidal ideation, and lower levels of positive mental well-being.[1] Mental health and well-being stressors specific to veterinary practice potentially include frequent contact with dead and dying patients, heavy workload, inconsistencies between clinical approaches to treatment and continuing moral/ethical conflict.[2] However, when surveyed regarding perceived contributors to stress, veterinary surgeons most frequently cited extensive working hours and making professional errors.[3] A total of 78% of recent veterinary graduates believed they had made at least one error within their first year of practice, which resulted in a less than optimal and/or aversive outcome for a patient, as well as a significant negative emotional impact including loss of confidence, guilt, and insomnia.[4] And other professional groups, such as the dog training instructor community, simply haven't been studied.

Table 1.1. Commonly experienced problems relating to mental health.

Prevalence of common mental health problems	
Mixed anxiety and depression	7.8 in 100 people
Generalized anxiety and depression	5.9 in 100 people
Post-traumatic stress disorder	4.4 in 100 people
Depression	3.3 in 100 people
Phobias	2.4 in 100 people
Obsessive compulsive disorder	1.3 in 100 people
Panic disorder	0.6 in 100 people

Our professional experiences feed into a much wider national concern, however. In England, the National Health Service (NHS) measures the number of people reporting different types of commonly experienced mental health problems every 7 years.[5] Results were most recently published in 2016[6] and included the number of people who have self-harmed, had suicidal thoughts, or who have made suicidal attempts over their lifetime. It is currently believed that one in four people in the UK experience mental health problems each year (Table 1.1).

One in eight of those suffering with mental health problems are reportedly receiving treatment, predominately in the form of medication.[7] The mental health charity Mind suggests people are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with challenges to their mental health, highlighting risk factors that include concerns relating to finances, related benefits, and work.[8] However, Mind acknowledges these statistics are taken from studies surveying privately-housed people living in England only; therefore, potentially exclude those experiencing mental health problems in hospitals, prisons, and sheltered housing, as well as those among the homeless. The prevalence of mental health problems nationwide might therefore be significantly underestimated.

The Office for National Statistics also advises that during 2017, the year immediately following the latest NHS report, mental health issues accounted for 15% of sickness absence from work; 95% of this absence was reportedly due to a combination of stress, depression, and anxiety.[9] Sickness absence as a symptom of compromised mental health isn't likely to come as a surprise to anyone working within animal welfare. Many of us will have taken time off work or experienced the unavoidably negative impact of absent colleagues. However, many of us will also have experienced situations in which we, or our colleagues, have been reluctant to take any time off work to address emotional and mental strain. This could be through lack of identification or acceptance that there is a problem; however, many individuals likely continue to present for work because they regard absenteeism as letting animals, owners where applicable, and one's colleagues or organization down. The guilt associated with taking time off might be further intensified by feelings of shame or embarrassment associated with perceived inability

to manage the necessary demands of the role. We don't want to be seen as 'not being able to do our job', especially when our self-esteem might well be tied up in this.

Continuing to work, despite really struggling within the workplace, can be further compounded by the positive impact of meeting animals' needs on our self-esteem. And herein might begin a downward spiral: working to avoid the negative feelings associated with being absent; however, unable to work to our self-imposed standards, due to the persistence of work-related stressors. Even though our desire to work remains strong, the imbalance between how we *hope* to conduct ourselves and what we might *truthfully* manage is likely to result in feelings of inadequacy and reduced self-esteem. We might place so much emphasis on the well-being of the animals within our care, and that of our colleagues too, that we justify prioritizing their needs above our own as the 'right' or moral thing to do.

We are likely to be motivated to avoid things that are unpleasant; therefore, working when we're really struggling could be a way of avoiding unpleasant feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment that we might associate with being off work. Where this is the case, for some, this is something we do more and more of because this *feels better*, outweighing the negative feelings associated with continuing to work – a sort of 'skewed sacrifice'. Others might have a strong desire to appear to be seen as 'super-human', able to cope with anything and everything. We might then behave in ways that support this projection – such as not seeking help – even though this puts us under greater pressure. This behaviour is, of course, misplaced. Rationally, we might all believe that asking for support is a sign of strength but, in reality, how many of us are fully prepared to ask for help without feeling any degree of reticence? We need to work to make help-seeking the accepted norm and can do so by modelling this for others.

In practice, the relatively simple action of requesting assistance, particularly for oneself, appears to carry great complexity. When we feel cognitively and emotionally overburdened, decision making can feel extremely difficult and much harder than when we are feeling happier. We might therefore be much more likely to do what feels like the 'easiest thing to do at the time', even though we'd naturally discourage that specific course of action for anyone else in a similar position.

> 'You can set yourself on fire to keep someone else warm, but eventually, your fire will burn out and they'll be cold again.'
>
> Dr Sarah Penturn, MRCVS[10]

We should treat our own self-care with equal, if not greater, importance to caring for our charges and colleagues. This is exactly the advice we might offer someone else struggling within our field. But we might be so used to dismissing our own needs, and so well-practised in giving precedence to others', that this feels difficult, if not practically impossible, to do for

ourselves. Behavioural science demonstrates that we get better and better at the behaviours we practise. For many of us, neglecting self-care will have become deeply ingrained as simply the 'way we live our lives'. Changing our behaviour to create a new habit of self-care – and believing that it isn't 'wrong' or 'bad' to prioritize our own needs – will demand a great deal of awareness and strength to do. And, first, we need to be in the 'right frame of mind'.

Without doubt many of us will experience some form of psychological barrier to self-care. However, evidence suggests we can improve or enhance our own well-being, through learning to control our thoughts and feelings, to consequentially make better behavioural choices in response to life's natural stressors. For example, do we ever stop to ask ourselves whether the ways in which we are currently dealing with the challenges of our work are going to be healthy for us longer term, or whether our various coping strategies might create greater problems? And, if we *are* aware that we are struggling, are we realistically in a position to introduce helpful measures, or are we simply exhausted with the effort of meeting daily workload demands?

Clearly much more could, and should, be done to equip those of us who dedicate our lives to animal welfare with the skills to process effectively the emotional challenges presented by this work. Some routes into animal welfare work demand higher education, qualifications, and accreditations, while others involve 'on-the-job' training and development. However, due to a lack of standardization across many unregulated fields, the quality of applied development and training within various roles is likely to be inconsistent. Therefore, the extent to which protective self-care education is provided remains unknown. We can hope that practical implementation of appropriate self-care is becoming a welcome addition to relevant academic syllabi and 'in-the-field' induction processes; however, it feels as though, at present, establishing and maintaining emotional well-being remains predominately a reactive, rather than proactive, concept.

This vital education might perhaps begin with the acquisition of greater insight into the risks involved, because if we can recognize why problems develop, we may take preventative, protective action before lasting damage occurs. Examining emotional, philosophical, and practical elements to well-being within the animal care sector, this book focuses on the way we *feel* (heart), *think* (head), and *behave* (hands). It will identify risk factors for the psychological stressors associated with animal welfare work, appropriate considerations for times when our emotional health is at risk and ways to proactively optimize our own well-being, as well as that of our colleagues.

The information presented here aims to put us all in a healthier position from which to deliver the amazing care we desire so much to give and are so very capable of. We deserve, despite the various challenges we might encounter along the way, to reach our true potential.

References

1. Bartram, D.J., Yadegarfar, G. and Baldwin, D.S. (2009a) A cross-sectional study of mental health and well-being and their associations in the UK veterinary profession. *Social Psychiatry and Psychological Epidemiology* 44(12), 1075–1085.
2. Scotney, R.L., McLaughlin, D. and Keates, H.L. (2015) A systematic review of the effects of euthanasia and occupational stress in personnel working with animals in animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and biomedical research facilities. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 247(10), 1121–1130.
3. Bartram, D.J., Yadegarfar, G. and Baldwin, D.S. (2009b) Psychosocial working conditions and work-related stressors among UK veterinary surgeons. *Occupational Medicine* 59(5), 334–341.
4. Mellenby, R. and Herrtage, M. (2005) Survey of mistakes made by recent veterinary graduates. *The Veterinary Record* 155, 761–765.
5. McManus, S., Meltzer, H., Brugha, T.S., Bebbington, P.E. and Jenkins, R. (2009) Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: results of a household survey. The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care, Leeds, UK.
6. NHS Direct (2021) National study of health and wellbeing. Available at: https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/areas-of-interest/public-health/national-study-of-health-and-wellbeing (accessed 31 January 2022).
7. McManus, S., Bebbington, P., Jenkins, R. and Brugha, T. (eds) (2016) Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014. NHS digital, Leeds, UK.
8. Mind (2020) Mental health facts and statistics. Available at: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#.XOVWo25KiM8 (accessed 31 January 2022).
9. Office for National Statistics (2017) Sickness absence in the UK labour market. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/sicknessabsenceinthelabourmarket (accessed 31 January 2022).
10. Personal communication with Dr S.J. Penturn, MRCVS (2018).

2 Emotions, Stress, and Stressor Stacking

> 'Always remember you're a human being first, and an animal welfare professional second.'
>
> Marion Jolliffe, RVN, in the role of Head Veterinary Nurse, Blue Cross Animal Welfare Charity[1]

This rings so true and is incredibly useful to bear in mind during times when we are feeling overwhelmed with what our work exposes us to. Experiencing these natural, valid feelings doesn't make us any less of a professional or any less able to do our jobs well. We will feel how we feel. It's how we *behave* in response to our feelings that can make a difference to our well-being.

Whenever we wear our uniform or enter our workplace, the duties we're required to perform are ones we should be as best prepared as possible to undertake. However, the extremely unpredictable nature of animal welfare work might suddenly expose us to a situation we aren't prepared or resourced for. It might also be difficult to assess whether we are indeed ready to experience conditions such as euthanasia, evidence of neglect, positive punishment, or chronic suffering.

We will naturally respond to whatever we are exposed to throughout the course of our professional lives in an individually experienced, emotional way. For example, we might professionally encounter an animal who has clearly been suffering for some time, or a dog wearing a prong collar. In response, we might feel immediately dismayed, upset, frustrated, or angry, and desire to bring the owner to account, yet our professional roles require us to put our feelings aside and not permit them to influence our behaviour. There is good reason for this, as our immediate judgements might be unfair. This might create a barrier to the owner following our advice, and their animal to receiving our help.

However, beneath the outwardly professional presentation we might need to project and maintain, we remain uniquely human. We might not be able to help feeling the way we do, but we can help the way we behave in response.

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0002

So, why do we feel the way we do, and what are emotions for?

We experience both how our bodies feel and function, and the world we live in, in a unique way – differently to everyone else! Our brains receive sensory information from inside and outside our bodies simultaneously, and our behaviour changes according to our interpretation of this information. Sometimes we're consciously aware of this, and able to exert a choice over our behaviour, but sometimes – perhaps more commonly than not – we're not aware at all, and automatically behave in well-practised patterns.

The incredible amount of information our brains must filter when making 'sense' of what's happening within and around us has resulted in the development of sensory bias. This is where we naturally pay attention to those things to which we've attached greater meaning, in relation to ourselves. We're also drawn to background activity which suddenly stands out from that which we are 'used to'. This makes sense, because such information can help to keep us safe and make us feel good too. This type of natural filtering and attentional processing is why we might each form a different view of one unique situation.[2]

N or Z? It depends on which way you're looking at it!

As we learn through experiences, our brains recognize patterns and form associations between different things which happen closely enough together that they 'appear' to be connected. Over time, through repeated exposure to such patterns, we might come to expect certain things to happen in specific ways. So, when things don't happen as we expect, we might feel confused, anxious, and/or frustrated. Our outlook on life will relate to the significance each of us places upon various situations and events. This is how behavioural tendencies develop – ways in which we could be expected to respond to specific situations, because of the emotions arising from them and our practised responses.

Emotions have survival value, enabling us to adapt to changing environments by helping us to act very quickly to avoid danger when we feel threatened and make decisions that promote safety and security. Positive emotions motivate us towards rewarding situations, while negative emotions encourage avoidance of harm and distress. But the way we might behave in response to our emotions is flexible, so we can learn many new and different responses to feeling a particular way, within different settings.[3]

Emotional expression, through our behaviour and communications, helps us connect with each other. However, there are times when we might try to keep our feelings hidden. This could make it difficult for others to understand us, and vice versa. And when we feel this necessary for work, we might also feel conflicted and compromised.

Thankfully, emotions are not permanent, pervasive 'states' of being and could be better thought of as interconnecting networks. Emotions are not

always experienced with the same degree of intensity every time – we can have different levels of feeling; for example, from mild worry through to complete panic. We might also experience more than one emotion simultaneously, causing us to feel conflicted about what to do. For example, we might feel deeply saddened by an animal's condition, yet frustrated or angered at feeling helpless to help them. Or we might feel upset and hurt at the way we've been professionally treated, yet also frustrated and angry if we're unable to raise this concern effectively.

We can feel emotionally about ourselves; for example, scolding ourselves for having behaved in a particular way, or feeling guilty or ashamed about our feelings or behaviour. Feeling saddened or angry at ourselves might lead us to treat ourselves unkindly and could become a barrier to us finding peace with and accepting ourselves. We can also compare ourselves with others, resulting in complex comparative feelings such as envy and jealousy. For example, professional jealousy might play a significant role in negatively impacting well-being within the workplace, for teams as well as individuals. But our feelings about ourselves might also set us apart from others if we consider ourselves as somehow superior or elevated. This can prevent us from connecting with everyone we interact with, dismissing what they might teach us. Learning to step aside from our egos will stand us in good stead in being able to acknowledge our emotions and bring responses within our conscious grasp.

Emotional associations can drive empathy, but occasionally kick it into overdrive. For example, we might watch a TV drama, which isn't real, yet feel extremely uncomfortable should a character we empathize with be humiliated as part of the drama. The show is not real, but the way we feel about it is. Words alone can be transformative, moving us out of our comfort zones and into another's experience, and another's pain. Have you ever read anything or listened to a song that has moved you to tears?

We might also extend empathic feelings to inanimate objects, such as feeling sorry for an abandoned pile of books we're still intending to read. This phenomenon was given the term 'pathetic fallacy' in the mid-19th century[4] but might date as far back as we've been able to extend compassion outwardly. Although empathy can develop from a wide range of experiences, whether real or imagined, it can be amplified further when the situation we're responding to *is* real.

Empathy has therefore been described as our most important attribute.[5]

Life is a series of decisions – we're constantly deciding what to do, but are our decisions under our conscious control or are we sometimes on 'autopilot'? How often do we make rational or logical decisions or those based in emotion? Are we head over heart, or heart over head? Opportunity costs – once we've decided something, we essentially rule out all other available options. And despite being happy with our choice, there's still an emotional and mental consequence to foregoing things, because we're often niggled by thoughts of 'But what if I'd done that instead?'

We might still rely on our initial, emotional response to a situation to inform our behaviour, especially at times when we feel under pressure. This could become a habit, however, so it pays to reflect about the way we tend to behave. Can you think of any times when you've wished you hadn't reacted so quickly to something? Acting in response to, and in accordance with, our emotions isn't always necessarily the wrong, or worst, thing to do, but when we do find ourselves wishing we'd behaved differently it's important we forgive ourselves for simply 'being human'. We can treat every experience as an opportunity to learn, helping us respond differently to a similar situation in future. We will still have our emotional 'reactions', but we can remember we have a choice in how we respond.

Studies have shown that people who like to 'make the best possible choice' tend to spend so much time making decisions that this deliberation makes them unhappier than those content with a 'good enough' choice.[6] Think about how long you might spend trying to choose a film to watch, flicking through all the options to find the 'best one' but becoming disillusioned because none of them *feels* right, while others will have watched the first film that jumped out. They might not have watched an Oscar-winner, but they'll have enjoyed a film at least. The concept of choice is worth reflecting over, because while we might associate being able to make choices over elements of our lives with a degree of freedom, and quality of life, for some 'too much choice' creates debilitating, emotional conflict.[7]

Researchers have found that some people tend to think more rationally and others more emotionally,[8] and what might be an acceptable level of risk and reward for some will be very different for others.

However, biases can be very difficult to overcome because we are often so used to acting on them without realizing – often termed *unconscious* biases (Table 2.1).

We've all done things we might look back on and feel we'd do differently if we had the chance. Whether private or public, feelings of humiliation and shame over our behaviour can persist and continue to negatively affect us even years later. With strong associations, being in the same type of location or situation again, or even in the company of someone who was present at the time, might trigger a similar physiological response, such as your heart beating faster, sweating, or blushing. Admitting 'I was wrong' also tends to be accompanied by unpleasant emotions, making us feel uncomfortable. Whether we're aware of this or not, a desire to avoid unpleasant feelings can be a reason why many of us avoid accepting blame for those things we are accountable for. On the other hand, many of us might all too readily feel responsible and blame ourselves unnecessarily, and unkindly, for things that really are beyond our control. In this way we unconsciously punish ourselves through painful feelings, for simply not having been able to do anything about a situation.

Pain is not just about a physical feeling, but how you feel in yourself; for example, vulnerable or trapped. It is those unpleasant feelings, often

Table 2.1. Common mental biases.

We are all vulnerable to the influence of certain mental biases, such as:	
Prospect theory[9]	We are mostly loss-averse, so respond better to things that we feel are more likely to help us gain or achieve, rather than risk losing anything. This is because we try to avoid the panic and grief associated with loss. This can help us when framing things for ourselves and our clients; for example, presenting options for owners in such a way that they or their animal might lose out if they don't follow our advice
Confirmation bias[10]	We seek things that support and confirm our suspicions, rather than test ourselves. This avoids us experiencing the negative emotions associated with being wrong
Sunk-cost fallacy[11]	We're keen to justify the things we've already invested in, whether financially, emotionally or in terms of effort and time. Hence why many dog owners will be so reluctant to ditch the choke chain they've always used and feel invested in. Letting something go that we've previously invested in both feels wasteful and means acknowledging we might have been misjudged something
Hindsight bias[12]	Our tendency to believe that things were much more obvious at the time they happened than they really were, given what we now know. How often have you said to yourself, 'I *knew* it!' or 'I should have done something about it at the time; all the signs were there', when actually, they weren't because had they been, you would. We tend to really beat ourselves up over hindsight bias, and incredibly unfairly

prolonged, which cause the *suffering* we associate with pain. It is a uniquely individual experience in humans and animals, which makes it hard to appreciate how individuals feel when in pain. The official definition of pain by the International Association for the Study of Pain is 'an unpleasant sensory and *emotional experience*, associated with actual or *potential* tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage',[13] so you needn't be experiencing actual bodily damage to be hurting. The way we remember feeling when in pain can also influence our behaviour in future, especially in situations that we are expecting to be painful, when our feelings about pain might make it feel worse.

The way our bodies respond empathetically to others' painful feelings has been examined using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology. One study looked at the brains of wives observing their husbands receiving electric shocks. Their ratings of the painfulness experienced by their husbands correlated with standard pain responses in their own brains.[14] In a similar way, although currently unsubstantiated, animal care workers might physically experience the emotional lives of the animals they care for – which we all know can be emotionally painful.

A very real risk with animal welfare, though, is that when we experience so much 'real-life' horror during the course of our work, the way we emotionally respond can become habitual, automatic. For example, when working in dog kennels, we will soon acclimatize to the sound of barking, which might have initially startled us. It can be the same with what we're seeing too. For example, if we see too many images of animals suffering, the initial, dramatic effect of these can be dampened. This might be why some of us switch off to the news – we're either avoiding the unpleasant feelings evoked by what we're presented with, or we're simply no longer emotionally connecting to the scenes because we've been oversaturated.

We can use emotional association to our advantage, however, to improve our own situations. We can be creative in the way we bind healthier, positive emotions with the more difficult or mundane areas of our lives. For example, we can pair a task we're not keen on – such as report-writing – with something we enjoy – such as putting on a fancy outfit and listening to our favourite music – to help us feel differently about doing it!

> All the world's a stage
> and all the men and women merely players;
> they have their exits and their entrances;
> and one man in his time has many parts.
>
> William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*[15]

We can think of our lives as requiring us to play many roles, wear many costumes and create many different alternative presentations of ourselves, in various circumstances. We could think of 'going backstage in between scenes' as a chance to get back to our true selves, removing necessary professionalism and various role requirements to allow ourselves to express and experience our true feelings. But although 'backstage', having stripped away all our various costumes, is where we might finally be able to completely relax, it's also where we must prepare for our next 'performance'. This replenishment of strength will take a different form for each of us.

Our various roles, including our careers and circles of influence and helpfulness, might call upon us to bring our immediate emotional responses to things we're seeing or being told about under our conscious control. The effort required could become exhausting. If we're already feeling run down, we might all too easily lose control, even momentarily. This is when we might say or do things that we then look back on and feel ashamed of, or sorry for, and wish we could turn back the clock.

Well-being isn't about trying to stop emotions, but about learning to recognize, accept, and not allow them to take over our behavioural choices – but importantly to also forgive ourselves for the times when we do.

Emotional contagion

Naturally social, humans may influence how others feel and behave through our emotional expression. As well as our words and tone of voice, we use body language, including a range of micro facial expressions, to interpret how we perceive each other to be feeling at any moment in time. 'Contagion' is when we interpret someone else's emotions and subsequently adopt a mood that reflects them. This can be helpful; for example, if you can recognize that a client is trying to cover up their sadness or fear, you can adapt your interaction with them accordingly, to provide them with the support they need. We might all have had that feeling when you happily walk into a room, looking forward to sharing something exciting, but very quickly realize something's not right and it's not the right time to share – that's emotional contagion in action.

But it can have ill-effects too. Because it affects our mood, it can bring us down in a way that could be considered unfair, especially among teams. Research has found that negative emotions are perceived stronger and quicker than positive emotions, perhaps because this could ultimately help to keep us safe.[16] Someone very visibly displaying negative emotions can be very challenging to be around, and it can take a lot of effort not to be affected by their feelings and join them in mood (Box 2.1).

It's worth regularly checking whether your feelings match your thoughts, and so are true to *you*, or whether you're succumbing to the moods of others.

When we're experiencing a generally low mood, we can 'fake it' by forcing ourselves to smile and laugh. This sounds far-fetched, but research has shown that our facial muscles recognize the movements involved in smiling and laughter, and these can trigger happy memories associated with these gestures.[17] That might take some practice though, depending on the reason behind your feelings. If you generally struggle with a low mood, it's worth booking an appointment with your GP as a starting point to sourcing appropriate help.

Crying

Crying remains a bit of a mystery; however, many of us will have cried at, during, or certainly over work!

Most people report that crying tends to help them feel better, supporting a popular idea that crying serves a cathartic, cleansing function.[18] However, when tear-jerker films that evoked crying were studied in a laboratory setting, people reported experiencing little benefit.[19] This suggests that crying is only beneficial when you *need* it. However, perhaps within a less clinical and more comfortable setting such as our home, those tear-jerker films might create a gateway to that beneficial cry; perhaps we might start crying due to

Box 2.1

When one of us had worked overnight, someone from one of the other branches would cover their shift the next day. One person from the other branch found this particularly difficult. You could play a game by guessing how long before they said something like 'You guys keep your kennel charts in the wrong place' or 'This place is so unorganized; nothing's logical'. The real issue was that they only worked here sporadically, so by the time they were back again they couldn't remember where things were or hadn't bothered to learn because it didn't seem worth it.

The problem was this person was so vocal that their negative vibe soon spread out amongst our team, who were normally very cheery. It got to the point where it was becoming a bit of a joke that whenever people saw this person's name on the rota, they would begin to get grumpy about it, expecting them to arrive and be in a bad mood – which inevitably happened. It really felt unfair for our team to repeatedly hear someone moaning about what a bad place it was to work, and how they felt things could be laid out in a much better way and that we should change the way we did things. It made people feel embarrassed, upset, unfairly treated, and frustrated because they felt as though the amazing work they were doing wasn't appreciated at all. There tended to be a general low team spirit whenever this person was over, despite the fact they were good at their job, respected professionally, and most people did get on well with them outside of work.

As the team leader, I felt as though I had to say something, I really didn't feel it fair for people to feel frustrated about the way they organized their work from someone who never had anything positive to say about the quality of the work they witnessed. It was almost like it was a total habit they got into whenever they were here. Maybe they just didn't like the extra journey or getting home later, cos our place was a bit further than their normal branch, but it didn't feel fair that our team were being punished for that, or for whatever their problem was.

I planned what to say and waited for a moment when it was just the two of us and, typically, they had already been vocally upsetting people. I asked if it would be okay to question, because I was generally interested to find out, if they realized that every time they worked here, they would very quickly say negative things about the place, and what impact did they think that might be having on our team? Although my heart was pounding, I spoke calmly, genuinely interested and trying not to sound accusatory or scolding. They looked genuinely surprised; they really were not aware they were doing this, or of the effect it was having on other people's moods. I asked them how they might feel if this were the other way around. And how that might make them feel and behave when they saw that person's name on the list to come over. We had a really beneficial chat about the value in being aware of how you are feeling and behaving affects both yourself and others, and especially that it would be

Continued

Box 2.1 Continued.

unfair to contribute to others' bad moods or make them feel threatened and become unnecessarily defensive.

I really respected the way they responded. They didn't get worked up but listened – testament to what a cool person they were, they just didn't realize they were redirecting their personal frustrations unfairly, and they had options to prevent them feeling this way too. They could talk to their manager about sharing cover duties with more people on the rota to reduce the stress this caused them, or take steps to recognize that their bad mood was having an unhealthy effect next time they were here.

People kept asking me where my magic wand was, because they became like a different person after that – the person we all knew they really were. And about a month or so later they thanked me too; they were feeling much better because the team were now responding better to them too.

the film's content, but continue to meet our own needs because we feel safer and less exposed here?

The mismatch between lab conditions and real life could arise from social context. In real life, a person crying will often be comforted by those around them, so crying potentially has a social role in communicating our distress to others. Even though we might be saying, 'No, I'm fine, honestly', our body language gives us away!

Research has also examined whether some people benefit from crying more than others. For example, although women report crying *more* than men, it isn't thought that they benefit any more from doing so. People with 'alexithymia' – difficulty understanding the source and meaning behind their emotions – appeared to benefit least from crying.[20]

Psychologists have identified at least three kinds of crying:[21]

- loud, protest crying;
- subdued, sad crying; and
- detached, tearless crying – the sort provoked by hopelessness.

But what about crying with joy? Or in frustration? Or empathetically, in response to witnessing someone else's pain, whether a person or animal? Why have we evolved to cry and other animals not necessarily so, or do some other animal species cry? Perhaps crying for animals just has a different set of behaviours associated with it and just isn't done the way we do it?

Bonobos will stop screaming after receiving an injury when they are comforted and consoled, as we would describe comforting and consoling, by another bonobo.[22] This type of behaviour has also been observed in dogs.

Animal research highlights the importance of being raised within a loving environment.[23] When traumatized, orphaned monkeys are placed with other individuals who comfort and console them, as we might describe being comforted and consoled, they quickly start to catch up with their peer group socially.[24]

The fact that we cry, with loud crying detectable from some distance, suggests an evolutionary or survival benefit, perhaps helping us to bond or access help or support. Crying does appear to have positive benefits in terms of us releasing emotions and feeling relieved for having done so. Indeed, some of us might know when 'we just need a good old cry' to feel a bit better.

Although we still have much to find out, crying is certainly functional and purposeful. There should be no stigma or shame attached to crying within the workplace, because it forms part of normal human behaviour.

Stress

In engineering terms, stress describes force applied to an object. In human terms, it's the application of physical or psychological challenges to a person, resulting in powerful emotions,[25] with the challenge termed the 'stressor'. Our 'stress response' is the combination of physiological, emotional, and behavioural ways in which we react to the stressor. This means that not all stressors should necessarily be considered as 'bad', because we can of course respond very well when challenged, by flourishing and achieving goals.

In fact, research has revealed that there is a 'just right' amount of stress, resulting in a response that optimizes our behaviour, body, and emotions at that exact moment in time. The Yerkes–Dodson Law states that mild stress improves our performance – but only up until a certain point, at which it will begin, then continue, to decline.[26]

So, a 'healthy' amount of stress, technically described as 'eustress', will result in us thriving, performing well, and rising to the challenge! The trouble is, this amount will be different for everybody, and is changeable depending on the specific situation. When the size of the stressor, or challenge, we are facing exceeds our 'healthy' amount, it becomes 'distress' and our stress response becomes increasingly unhealthy.

How quickly this might happen, or if it happens at all, is likely to depend on a variety of factors including:

- the type and number of stressors present, either at the same time or occurring quickly after each other;
- the intensity of the stressor/s, or how deeply we are affected;
- how long we are exposed to the stressor/s for;
- whether we can predict when it/they will happen, as we're likely to feel better prepared if we can;
- the amount of control we might have over the stressor/s; and
- what happened to us the last time/s we experienced the same stressor/s.

When we're exposed to stressors, our bodies prepare for any action that might be necessary to address immediate problems and threats. We're primed to react quickly and, when we're performing well under pressure, we're in a state of balance, able to use our preparedness to make sound decisions and smart actions.

However, once we tip beyond this point our brains and bodies become overwhelmed by the situation and we begin to feel and behave differently. What was initially considered a healthy response now becomes unhealthy. A commonly applied theory in the study of occupational stress and stress management is the Demand–Perception–Response Perspective, with stress directly related to an individual's perception of their capability to meet the demands placed upon them.[27] A mismatch results in an individual's stress threshold being exceeded, triggering a stress response.

Where stressors persist without us having the opportunity to recover from them, we're likely to develop physical symptoms such as increased blood pressure and blood sugar, gastric problems ranging from diarrhoea to stomach ulcers, inability to sleep, changes in appetite and general fatigue. We might also experience emotional distress and our behaviour, towards ourselves and others, is likely to reflect this, whether irritable and frustrated or weepy and dejected.

Stressor stacking

Stressor stacking is a common phenomenon, depicted by the phrase 'the straw that broke the camel's back', implying that we might cope with a small number of stressors; however, should these build up until just one more is one too many, we'd suddenly collapse under their crushing burden. These events need not necessarily be experienced negatively: you may be fortunate enough to experience many positive stressors in quick succession, resulting in eustress, excitement, and exhilaration. However, you might still find this overwhelming and be unable to respond in a constructive way. The amount of 'stacking' one might manage successfully will be different for everyone. For some, even a longer period, such as overnight, between stressful experiences will not offer enough time for brain and body to return to a resting, and indeed rested, state before the next stressor occurs.

Also known as trigger stacking, this concept is likewise observed in the field of animal behaviour.[28] You might be familiar with it in the animals you care for, yet may not have considered its application to yourself or others before. However, once you begin to look for examples of this in yourself and others you might find them very quickly!

We are *all* vulnerable to the effects of stressor stacking, but certain situations are likely to push us closer towards our 'threshold for coping', particularly persistent stressors such as ill-health, pain, and, for some of us, elements of our working environments or duties (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2

In a staff meeting our manager brought up trigger stacking using a 'bathtub' analogy as a way we could describe the topic to owners we might be helping, as well as ourselves.

We had to think of our natural 'stress levels' as a bathtub of water. If you're really lucky, your bath is completely empty – but most of us have an amount of 'stress', or water, naturally sitting in our bathtub at all times, some higher than others! Looking around the staff room I could immediately think of a few people for whom that rang true.

Life will 'turn on the taps' for all of us in many ways, each time adding water to the bath, and of course at some point your bath would completely overflow. The trick is to be able to recognize what situations open those taps, and which remove the plug, so you can control water levels. You'll become more aware when you're at risk of reaching your spill-over point, as well as how to lower the water level in your bath to get it back to normal, or even emptier than usual.

For me, there are tonnes of things that turn those taps on, but just spending time thinking about this made me see patterns as to when this was more likely to happen, including specific situations and people. I wasn't particularly able to avoid these at work, but even just knowing I was at risk made me take stock a little bit and do a few things differently, not allow myself to get so wound up about things. Being prepared to be frustrated or pushed a bit towards my limits, now that I knew to expect it, almost helped me cope better with that.

To let water out for me is going to the gym or for a long run, with headphones listening to an audiobook. I know this always makes me feel really good, especially when it's been one of those days and the water level's high! Even just looking forward to that, planning where I'll run and what I'll listen to, can help me feel a bit better.

The good thing about discussing this in the meeting was that, even to this day, we'll still say to each other, 'Sorry, my bath's almost full', if we've snapped or are a bit off form, so everyone knows we're under pressure, but we don't have to explain exactly why – as it might be something personal. We can just talk about our baths – however weird that sounds! – and we all know exactly what we mean and how close we are to losing control. It's helped us be a bit more caring towards each other too, a bit more understanding and tolerant, whereas before I might just have thought someone was being offhand. Now I think I'm more aware of the effect of different circumstances on all of us; it's made me a bit more forgiving and nicer to other people maybe.

References

1. M. Jolliffe, RVN, personal communication (2015).
2. Eagleman, D. (2015) *The Brain: The Story of You*. Canongate, Edinburgh, UK.
3. Adolphs, R. and Anderson, D.J. (2018) *The Neuroscience of Emotion: A New Synthesis*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.

4. Kutchins, L. (2004) The pathetic fallacy. *The Georgia Review* 58(3), 528–532.
5. Schneider, S.M. (2012) *The Science of Consequences: How they Affect Genes, Change the Brain, and Impact Our World*. Prometheus Books, New York.
6. Bubic, A. and Erceg, N. (2018) The role of decision-making styles in explaining happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 19, 213–229.
7. Markus, H.R. and Schwartz, B. (2020) Does choice mean freedom and well-being? *Journal of Consumer Research* 37(2), 344–355.
8. Kahneman, D., Slovic, P. and Tversky, A. (1982) *Judgement Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*. Cambridge University Press, London.
9. Kahneman, D. and Tversky, A. (2013) Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. In: MacLean, L.C. and Ziemba, W.T. (eds) *Handbook of the Fundamentals of Financial Decision Making*. World Scientific, Singapore.
10. Oswald, M.A. and Grosjean, S. (2004) Confirmation bias. In: Pohl, R.F. (ed.) *Cognitive Illusions: A Handbook on Fallacies and Biases in Thinking, Judgement and Memory*. Psychology Press, Hove and New York.
11. Strough, J., Karns, T.E. and Schlosnagle, L. (2011) Decision-making heuristics and biases across the life span. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1235, 57–74.
12. Jay, J.J., Christensen-Szalanzki, C. and Fobian, W. (1991) The hindsight bias: A meta-analysis. *Organisational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes* 48(1), 147–168.
13. Treede, R.-D. (2018) The International Association for the Study of Pain definition of pain: As valid in 2018 as in 1979, but in need of regularly updated footnotes. *Pain Reports* 3(2), e643.
14. Singer, R., Seymour, B., O'Doherty, J., Kaube, H, Dolan, R.J. and Frith, C.D. (2004) Empathy for pain involves the affective but not sensory components of pain. *Science* 303(5661), 1157–1162.
15. Shakespeare, W. (2005) *As You Like It*. In: Wells, S., Taylor, G., Jowett, J. and Montgomery, W. (eds) *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edition. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
16. Barsade, S.G., Constantinos, G.V.C. and Pillemer, J. (2018) Emotional contagion in organisational life. *Research in Organisational Behaviour* 38, 137–151.
17. Kraft, T.L. and Pressman, S.D. (2012) Grin and bear it: The influence of manipulated facial expression on the stress response. *Psychological Science* 23(11), 1372–1378.
18. Gracanin, A., Bylsma, L.M. and Vinherhoets, A.J.J.M. (2014) Is crying a self-soothing behaviour? *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, 502. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00502
19. Cornelius, R.R. (1997) Towards a new understanding of weeping and catharsis? In: Vingerhoets, A.J.J.M., van Bussel, F.J. and Boelhouwer, A.J.W. (eds) *The (Non) Expression of Emotions in Health and Disease*. Tilburg University Press, Tilburg, the Netherlands.
20. Rottenberg, J., Bylsma, L.M. and Vingerhoets, A.J.J.M. (2008) Is crying beneficial? *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17(6), 400–404.
21. Nelson, J. (2005) *Seeing Through Tears: Crying and Attachment*. Routledge, Abingdon, UK.
22. Clay, Z. and de Waal, F.B. (2013) Bonobos respond to distress in others: Consolation across the age spectrum. *PLoS ONE* 8(1), e55206.

23. Huber, A., Barber, A.L.A., Farago, T., Muller, C.A. and Huber, L. (2017) Investigating emotional contagion in dogs (*Canis familiaris*) to emotional sounds of humans and conspecifics. *Animal Cognition* 20, 703–715.
24. Reddy, R.B. and Mitani, J.C. (2019) Social relationships and caregiving behaviour between recently orphaned chimpanzee siblings. *Primates; Journal of Primatology* 60(5), 389–400.
25. Johnson, S., Cooper, C., Cartwright, S., Donald, I., Taylor, P. and Millet, C. (2005) The experience of work-related stress across occupations. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 20(2), 178–187.
26. Corbett, M. (2015) From law to folklore: Work stress and the Yerkes–Dodson law. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 30(6), 741–752.
27. Bledow, R. (2012) Demand-perception and self-motivation as opponent processes: A response to Bandura and Vancouver. *Journal of Management* 31(9), 14–26.
28. Mills, D., Dube, M.B. and Zulch, H. (2013) *Stress and Pheromonatherapy in Small Animal Clinical Behaviour*. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, UK.

Further Reading

Adolphs, R. and Anderson, D.J. (2018) *The Neuroscience of Emotion: A New Synthesis*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey.
Goleman, D. (1996) *Emotional Intelligence*. Bloomsbury Press, London.
Hammond, C. (2005) *Emotional Rollercoaster: A Journey through the Science of Feelings*. Harper Perennial, London.
Panksepp, J. and Bivens, L. (2012) *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York.

3 Risk Factors and Influences Upon Emotional Health

> 'It's not surprising people who work with animals struggle from time to time – doesn't that type of job attract vulnerable people in the first place?'

You might have encountered this before, and perhaps even questioned whether it might hold some truth yourself.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines vulnerable as 'susceptibility to attack or injury of both physical and non-physical nature; including good-humoured teasing, criticism and false claims made with the intention of damaging reputation'.[1] However, this is an overarching human condition that anyone might experience. Does the very nature of animal welfare work really increase the likelihood that one might suffer physically or psychologically?

The study of occupational stress within animal-related occupations is gaining momentum; however, research has previously focused predominately on veterinary and rescue work, examining those working directly with animals who are experiencing, or have experienced, suffering. It could be argued, however, that behaviourists and trainers are also exposed to animals whose welfare needs are not met appropriately, however unintentional this might be.

The general body of evidence regarding professionals working directly with people or animals highlights that, as well as coping with 'normal' work stresses and dissatisfactions, including lack of resources and poor employment terms, they also need to cope with personal feelings about suffering.[2] If this remains unaddressed, feelings of physical and emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal achievement, may accumulate to create a persistent, negative mood.[3]

Exposure to euthanasia is widely cited as a primary risk factor for poor emotional health, including occupational stress, among animal shelter workers, veterinary teams, and within research facilities;[4] particularly where euthanasia is conducted for human convenience, such as population control, financial constraint, and within laboratories.[5] Frequent exposure to euthanasia may result in personal moral stress[6] and the 'caring–killing paradox',[7] where a professional obligation to perform euthanasia might conflict with personal feelings, compromising professional integrity (Box 3.1).[8]

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0003

Box 3.1

One patient's chemotherapy required regular appointments for the drug to be injected into one of her veins, but she hated coming into the clinic, even before falling unwell. Our vet wanted to sedate her before chemotherapy administration, because she just wasn't coping being in clinic and panicking on arrival. Her beloved owners wished to continue so agreed to sedation as soon as she arrived. But she still had to come inside for this and was still absolutely terrified. She had to be muzzled, as would have bitten, and panicked, scrabbling and scratching towards the door.

I was asked to help restrain her and remember feeling incredibly conflicted about it. I could understand and completely empathize with her owners' viewpoint, as I would have wanted to do anything to help my dog too, but the poor dog was shaking, had toileted in the consultation room, kept trying to escape, and was in such distress, I just felt awful. We had the owners' consent, the vet was keen to continue, and it was my professional obligation to nurse the patient to the very best of my ability, but I really didn't want to hold this dog. I felt I was betraying her because I believed if she could speak, she would say she just wanted to go home – in fact, that's what she was saying, in her own way. It was a very emotional situation. The owner was desperate for their dog to have the treatment, so I held her for the sedation despite feeling so wrong for doing it. I knew she would have to go through it again, and again, and it just didn't feel right to me because she was so distressed. I was also worried she might hurt someone, or herself, because she was so frightened.

It probably felt worse because we had another dog on the same treatment who trotted happily into the consultation room and remained relaxed throughout examination, sampling procedures, and chemotherapy. This was such a stark contrast it really drew my attention to such distressing and dangerous behaviour.

It's interesting; I don't remember ever feeling badly about anyone else for their involvement at all. Everyone I worked with was truly lovely, gentle, and kind, and understood the rationale for the treatment. However, my professional opinion was now that this individual patient wasn't suitable for this therapy, but I knew I could be asked to help again and felt such angst over it. The dog was stuck in my head, and in my heart.

Next time I was asked to help I suddenly felt a rush of blood, my heart pounding, and my face heating up. I had a good relationship with our vet, so said very calmly, 'I'm really sorry, but I would prefer not to be involved. I'm feeling so compromised about this treatment.' Fortunately, at my practice we had a culture of talking about cases and discussing treatment plans together, professionally. My vet was absolutely brilliant! She listened to my concerns, took me seriously, and respected my opinion. She had begun to feel the same way.

Continued

Box 3.1 Continued.

I still felt as though I was letting our vet down because she needed someone to assist, and I was employed to work under her direction. It was awkward, frustrating, and sad, all mixed together, but I'm glad I felt able to speak up and explain without making our vet feel judged – because I really didn't judge her, this was just about how I felt the dog felt.

Team-discussing the case allowed others to openly agree, and our vet then discussed various options with the owners, to avoid any further distress for their beautiful dog. I still felt bad for the owner; I know the treatment was what they really wanted. But I believe what they really wanted is what we all want – for our beloved friends to be with us forever, which we were never going to be able to achieve. Fortunately, we were able to provide pre- and post-bereavement support for this owner when the time came, which I'm sure helped them a great deal.

The feeling that your hands are tied, and you're caught up in something you don't really want to be but just don't know what to do for the best, is so horrible. I'm so glad that something in me just told me I had to stay true to my beliefs and because of our practice culture I did feel able to speak up.

Decisions with an ethical basis, such as euthanasia or experimenting on animals for research,[9] are liable to be perceived negatively, with those involved stigmatized.[10] This might be intensified by a global shift towards 'no-kill' shelter models, risking emotional conflict among not only animal carers, but also receptionists and other support staff.[11] Studies show that including support workers in euthanasia decisions, and in decisions over their personal involvement in the procedure, helps them feel consulted, valued, and empowered, with responsibility for their own emotional health, while confirming them as caring people.[12]

For example, within veterinary and rehoming teams, where resources permit, it's worth ensuring individuals avoid repeated euthanasia in quick succession by 'turn-taking', and facilitating group discussions in relation to complex case management. These types of discussion require sensitive, considerate management. Managers need to feel confident in facilitating and leading such conversations, supporting teams and themselves through the complexity of euthanasia and other challenging ethical decisions.

One study explored how 'shelter culture' could help workers cope with the moral stress involved in animal care and euthanasia, suggesting this protects the team by shifting responsibility to people external to the shelter.[13] This quickly creates an 'us and them' culture, making it easy to hold 'others', such as 'neglectful and irresponsible people', accountable for contributing to the overpopulation of rescue shelters. This phenomenon could easily be applied to professions such as veterinary practice, animal training instruction, and behaviour counselling.

A human Nursing Stress Scale, modified to examine veterinary practice, found the duties of veterinary nurses, care assistants, and receptionists are numerous, ever-changing, and undefined, and that demands on this workforce can become consuming.[14] Support teams were also found to be the focus for blame over negative outcomes in veterinary settings, and the study also revealed unhealthy coping strategies, such as alcohol consumption, were commonly being used. Stressors included frequent contact with dead and dying patients, heavy workload, conflicting working relationships, and prolonged moral/ethical conflict.

It's important to remember those with 'behind-the-scenes' roles, such as managers, fundraisers, health and safety, or human resource teams, administrators, researchers, and communications teams, among others – all striving for animal welfare, yet working without direct animal contact. Everyone may be impacted by work pressures relating to provision of appropriate care and meeting welfare standards, particularly where resources are scarce. Securing sustainable funding, for example, is a very pressurized role, especially for charities and the self-employed.

Where there is animal contact, managers and supporting staff might often be required to undertake administrative tasks away from the 'shop floor' or 'front line'. Reduced hands-on contact is often traded off against increased responsibility and career progression, despite entering a profession with a strong desire to work directly with animals. Managers might feel as though they've made sacrifices for very little benefit, other than financial gain, which might not seem worth it when things are especially challenging. Managers might also feel directly responsible for the welfare of their teams, so could feel frustrated when elements of their teams' roles are beyond their control, perhaps directed by senior management. This risks resentment in all directions – team members resenting their managers for inability to make changes, managers conflicted about senior leadership while feeling disconnected from their teams, and so on. It's important to have empathy for everyone, whatever their job title and salary.

Workaholism

Workaholism is a combination of working excessively and compulsively. This can create a 'gain spiral', in which working excessively fosters job satisfaction, often seen in enthused, younger workers or those new to a particular role. However, it can also produce a 'loss spiral', perpetuating persistent demand, which reduces job satisfaction. This appears more commonly in older workers, or those in long-held roles.[15]

Workaholics typically allocate as much time to work as possible, sometimes creating even more work for themselves than is necessary, developing an obsession with, and inability to detach from, their duties. Working to such extremes might be disproportionately and unhealthily linked to

one's self-esteem, self-worth, and self-identity. It's suggested that workaholics might be motivated by a dutiful internal feeling that they 'should' or 'ought' to be working, so that they may not experience true satisfaction in their work.[16] In other words, workaholics may not necessarily receive more reward for their increased efforts.

Staff turnover

It's been suggested that, when animal care workers are exposed to euthanasia, the highest degree of staff turnover occurs within the first 12 months of employment. Rather worryingly, the researchers consequentially described those filling their posts for more than 2 years as 'survivors'.[17] Data evaluating those who have left various roles are lacking; however, might prove helpful in identifying risks and rationale for diversification away from animal care roles, to inform future staff retention.

Preparedness and promotion

There might be many people who have simply been, or feel they've been, 'dropped in at the deep end', without sufficient induction, training, or any sense of readiness for the role's demands. For example, inexperienced managers might feel out of their depth, having been appointed without any prior experience or understanding of what is involved in effective people or facility management, whether administrative or emotional. New managers might also feel lonely, no longer part of the main body of the team, yet not necessarily involved in the senior team.

The realization of what a role involves can be incredibly intimidating, especially when you're already beginning to doubt yourself and your choices, and where your support network is thin. Hence why moving into a new area is a risk factor for imposter syndrome.[18] Seeking ways to undertake work experience, including job shadowing or volunteering, can be an invaluable way to assess different areas of work before committing to a specific role. It's also worth requesting a trial day before accepting a new post or asking candidates to attend for a day trial before offering a position. This also allows 'team-fit' to be assessed where applicable.

Grief

Being exposed to continual loss is a constant factor in the animal care sector. As well as euthanasia, loss can be experienced through animals being rehomed, patients being discharged, animals completing behaviour modification

programmes, or dogs graduating through training courses. You might not see again animals and owners whom you've invested time and effort into caring for. Leaving a role, for whatever reason including sickness, involves grieving for work you had expected and hoped for, and potentially invested in emotionally, financially, and over time. Colleagues are also likely to move on and we can grieve for team members we had particularly special bonds with.

Grief is experienced individually and, as well as increasing and decreasing in intensity from moment to moment, can include a whole range of emotions such as anger and bitterness as well as sadness, melancholia, and general gloom. And there begs the question: do we ever recover from grief? Or do we gradually find ways to live and function with grief, slowly detaching ourselves from its damaging grip?

The pressure of educating/instructing others

Whatever your profession, animal welfare involves education, whether helping owners understand their pet or training colleagues. It's easy to underestimate just how emotional this can be, especially when you witness owners struggling with their pet's health or behaviour. The very knowledge enabling us to help can also be hard to bear when you understand how preventable some medical and behavioural problems are.

We're often only granted a relatively short space of time to share the knowledge we believe the other party needs from us, so are forced to compromise, prioritizing the information we provide. And of course, people could very easily be overwhelmed with information, especially when we are talking about difficult things in an emotionally charged situation. We will also all have different educating styles, and our learners will have individual learning preferences, so we will always have a challenging task on our hands.

Gaining feedback is vital when delivering information to someone else, especially if you need them to replicate what you're teaching them for their animal's benefit. Seeing those we're educating carrying out our recommendations well is likely to immediately make us feel good, both about *their* ability to benefit their animal, but also that *we* have achieved our goal. However, we might not always observe this should it happen when we are not present, or if we only meet our client once.

We might also be aware that progress is dependent on the amount of practice people put in, which is beyond our control so risks frustration. We might also create plans that we rely on colleagues to carry out, so need to be prepared to delegate compassionately. We need to resist micromanaging and holding onto tasks, even though our colleagues might take a slightly different approach. Educating others requires patience and acceptance. We need to be prepared always to go at our learner's pace and, if things aren't working out, revisit the way we're imparting the information. They're relying on us to share

it in a way they can understand and replicate. When the people we're aiming to educate don't appear to follow our instruction, it's easy to blame their inadequacies or doubt our own abilities, both of which are unfair and unkind.

Sharing information is thoroughly rewarding when it goes well, but how many of us have proactively learned how to teach or influence others to behave in a particular way? Coaching, mentoring, and teaching/instructing courses are incredibly helpful in equipping people with the understanding and skills to be able to deliver information in a meaningful way for different individuals.

The amount of human interaction required

If we've embarked upon our careers with the main drive to work specifically with animals the amount of human interaction required may prove challenging. We might have underestimated just how much we'd be required to interact with, and educate, people. This is not necessarily a motivating factor for everybody, and even those who really enjoy the human element might fluctuate in how much they enjoy this aspect of the role because the way we feel is, of course, flexible.

Clients might inadvertently create a negative mood around our interaction, which we might then unfairly associate with them. They might offload about personal suffering, pain, and unique challenges, which may or may not be at all relevant to their reason for interacting with us. We might feel helpless to help them with those things that are beyond both our control and our professional boundary, yet still feel the weight of these. Much of our work requires extremely trusting relationships with clients and, while these should always be professional, it might be easy for clients to overstep boundaries because the nature of our professional relationship makes them feel cared for, despite any financial transaction. For some, this might be a feeling lacking in other areas of their lives.

We do care of course, deeply wanting to help them and their animals, so this will shine through our conversations. To protect our clients and ourselves, we can apply clear boundaries consistently; consciously keeping ourselves in check because as well as our clients crossing the line, we might also be guilty of inadvertently oversupporting, risking clients being unable to cope without us.

Competition

This is real life, where even charities face competition for funding and support.

Our competitors might be close to home, with other professionals setting up nearby, or wider spread – particularly with certain services operating online. Online resources also compete with personal services, with pet owners seeking advice, or animals to rehome, via the internet.

The rapid advancement of social media as a marketing tool and educational platform might also require many of us to keep up professional accounts, generally without sufficient training or expertise in online marketing, communication, and education. And then of course the level of engagement expected by an online audience can be time-consuming and increase the pressure to be innovative. Continual pressure to create content, ensuring the tone and images used represent ourselves accurately, could very easily become overwhelming. Competition might also be very personal, feeling directly attacked or threatened; for example, sensing our ideas and initiatives have been sabotaged or copied.

Another element of competition is the requirement to self-promote our unique services to gain clients. This can be particularly challenging for those in smaller teams or self-employment, as not everyone will feel comfortable or confident marketing themselves. We might also struggle to set realistic prices for the value we place on our work, having perhaps neither had any experience nor been taught this element of customer engagement.

Teams might also feel internal pressures, comparing oneself to one's peers and competing for progression, opportunity, and experience.

Continuing professional development

It can be difficult to stay abreast of developments in medicine, animal welfare, behaviour, training, human psychology, and other related, relevant disciplines. Difficulties might include access to academic research, lack of financial resources, or ability to take time away from work to attend training events, which could involve travel and time away from our homes, partners, and pets. For the self-employed there is an additional cost, as time undertaking continuing professional development (CPD) might mean having to say 'no' to work, which can be scary and stressful.

The pressure to be 'at the top of our game' could drive us to CPD events that we might not be able to afford financially, timewise, or emotionally. Undertaking a course of study we're not currently resourced to complete as we would wish might create frustration, demotivation, or self-condemnation, which is likely to worsen should we concede and withdraw.

We might also feel pressured to demonstrate personal skills and achievements, especially if our competitors are doing so. For example, dog training instructors running classes in specific disciplines, such as agility, might feel pressured to be competing and achieving with their own dogs to demonstrate their own capability while marketing their classes.

This poses a much bigger societal question over the way our lives – and work lives – are currently conducted, and just how much we publicly share. We need to remain aware of the impact of 'happiness ideals', as we might all too readily compare ourselves with peers.

Freelancing/locum work

Working for oneself carries a degree of a risk regarding job security, regular income, insurance, and personal benefits. For some, this might involve managing employees and all the relevant legalities that are required. Further risks include potentially reduced ability to select working hours/days, depending on the type and consistency of available work. Locums providing cover within the veterinary clinics are required to regularly learn about new places, layouts, and ways of working – all of which can be exhausting. They also risk not being able to see the outcome of their work and not feeling part of a team. Although this type of work has benefits, it does require anyone undertaking it to be sufficiently mentally and emotionally prepared; particularly to sustain it longer term.

Overtime

In many roles, we're unable to step away should an animal, or owner, appear under threat and our services are vital. Many of us accept this without question whenever we're required, as a moral obligation. Within teams, however, this risks resentment if it's always the same individuals who undertake additional hours, even though the reason for their colleagues' regular lack of availability is completely understandable. Despite accepting the demands on others as unavoidable, we might still experience a sense of injustice – even more so when overtime is unpaid. This risks creating a teamwide 'moral shift' and an unconscious negative bias towards certain colleagues. For those working individually, this might also build resentment for the work itself, or towards the individual whom we feel is responsible for our requirement to work additional hours, especially when we do not receive any financial incentive or recompense.

The effects of increasing bouts of overtime might be accumulative, particularly so when these occur in quick succession. The lack of feeling valued, remaining unpaid for our professional expertise, risks overshadowing any positive feeling we might experience from having helped the animal. And of course, we might dedicate extra hours desperately trying to help, yet the outcome is poor, leaving us physically and emotionally exhausted.

Lone working

As well as lacking an immediate support network, lone working might expose one to increased health and safety risk. There is pressure to perform, especially where no available help is at hand, and no opportunity to have your work appraised. We all know how difficult it is to tell yourself you've done a good job, or to pick yourself up without any camaraderie at the end of a day that hasn't gone so well.

Lone workers might also be required to travel alone for long distances after challenging situations, feeling disconnected from their home, pets, and partners while doing so. Lone journeys can be times when negative thoughts preoccupy minds and become pervasive, unless proactive strategies are taken to ensure those journeys are opportunities for resetting oneself rather than dwelling upon events.

Travel requirements

Many roles might involve regular time spent away from family, friends, partners, and pets, for periods at a time, allowing both additional work and resentment to build up. Family and friends might also resent someone's work taking them away repeatedly, which could manifest as overbearing negative talk about work within the home. Travel might also mean regularly missing out on opportunities for work–life balance, such as hobbies, extra-curricular activities, and get-togethers, and might also encourage unhealthy eating and poor exercise and/or sleeping habits.

Sleep quality

The importance of good sleep quality and length is well documented; however, there can be many reasons why animal care workers might sleep badly. As well as ill-health and pain, we might be unable to 'switch off' and stop thinking about animals or people we're caring for, or challenging situations we're facing, including moral dilemmas. We might go to bed with our brain completely energized, as it has so much sensory input to process.

Caring for dependants

This is a sensitive subject, because our commitments to our dependants as well as our roles could place us under moral stress, leaving us feeling conflicted about prioritizing one over the other. This might affect our ability to form bonds within our teams; for example, if we're seen to be always prioritizing our own family rather than the workload. Where we're working for ourselves, we might also be required to reject work opportunities from time to time, which might create frustration or anxiety.

Many of us also have animals of our own who suffer with medical and/or behavioural issues, affecting our ability to switch off 'work mode' and completely relax with our pets. This can be especially true with dogs who struggle when other dogs are nearby, requiring us to be vigilant and often unable to have the relaxing walk that we, and our dog, both really need – and deserve!

Guilt

> 'I've already fostered two extremely difficult dogs, and always had rescue dogs in the past. I just want a puppy I can take anywhere and have fun with now … but that's really bad, isn't it?'

There are many reasons why our work might evoke feelings of guilt. We might arrive home feeling too exhausted to give our own pets what they need from us, or to care for them in the way we would truly like to. We might feel guilty at just wanting our lives to be easier, at wanting to take a break even though the animals we're working with so desperately need our help. Or about not feeling good enough, as though we've let the animals in our care, or our colleagues, or families, down.

When things don't turn out as we'd hoped, we might blame ourselves, risking damage to our self-esteem and confidence, and potentially affecting our future performance. We might not be able to help the feeling arising within us, but we do need to challenge our thoughts and remind ourselves there are many factors influencing life's events. Therefore, to assume full responsibility for outcomes with elements beyond our ability to influence is another gesture that is both unfair and unkind to ourselves.

Self-esteem

The way we feel about ourselves might positively correlate with our ability to perform to the best of our ability, so when things aren't going well this could naturally lower our self-esteem and confidence. It can be difficult to feel better about ourselves though, as we tend to look for reasons to support our view of ourselves. We might also avoid doing things we're worried about getting wrong. Remaining completely within our, perhaps dwindling, comfort zone means we don't then actually learn *how* to do these things effectively, missing an opportunity to regain confidence. We also often listen to our inner critic, as well as projecting these thoughts onto our peers, believing that they feel the same way about us as we feel about ourselves.

Self-reflection

Some animal welfare professionals will have undertaken a prolonged course of study within their chosen field. These are likely to have an established infrastructure and support system, as well as guiding processes and continual sources of appraisal and reinforcement, geared to help students achieve their full potential.

The benefits of positive reinforcement coupled with self-reflection are well documented; however, the opportunity to receive regular feedback

within an organized framework potentially disappears within employment, depending on the structure of the organization or the quality of management. Of course, we might receive positive feedback from our animals, clients, and colleagues, but for various reasons then not be party to learning how well they have been getting on. If we don't receive imminent reinforcement regarding the outcomes of our work, and/or if we're continually waiting to see the results of our labours, then this type of delayed gratification may not be reinforcing enough to keep us motivated. For example, with the animals we try to help prepare for rehoming, we often don't get to find out how they do within their new homes, so we have to 'trust' in our preparedness of them.

We need faith in our abilities, although this doesn't necessarily gratify us or give us any information about how well we have achieved our goals, and how we could improve further. This is the same with clients attending training classes, and veterinary or behavioural consultations, where we might also be vulnerable to only ever seeing clients return when things aren't going so well.

Valuable for self-improvement, self-reflection can help us to identify strengths and gain confidence in our abilities. This is where, whether we're fortunate enough to have an effective workplace appraisal system or not, keeping a reflective work record can help us review our progress, recognizing where we're developing and where we might benefit from additional guidance.

References

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2021) Oxford University Press, Oxford. Available at: https://oed.com (accessed 1 February 2022).
2. Scotney, R.L., McLaughlin, D. and Keates, H.L. (2015) A systematic review of the effects of euthanasia and occupational stress in personnel working with animals in animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and biomedical research facilities. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 247(10), 1121–1130.
3. Boyle, D. (2011) Countering compassion fatigue: A requisite nursing agenda. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* 16, 2.
4. Frommer, S.S. and Arluke, A. (1999) Loving them to death: Blame-displacing strategies of animal shelter workers and surrenders. *Social Animals* 7, 1–16.
5. White, D.J. and Shawan, R. (1996) Emotional responses of animal shelter workers to euthanasia. *Journal of American Veterinary Association* 208, 846–849.
6. Rohlf, V. and Bennett, P. (2005) Perpetration-induced traumatic stress in persons who euthanise nonhuman animals in surgeries, animal shelters and laboratories. *Social Animals* 13, 201–219.
7. Arluke, A. (1994) Managing emotions in an animal shelter. In: Manning, A. and Serpell, J. (eds) *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives*. Routledge, New York, pp. 145–165.
8. Reynolds, S.J., Owens, B.P. and Rubenstein, A.L. (2012) Moral stress: Considering the nature and effects of managerial moral uncertainty. *Journal of Business Ethics* 106, 491–502.

9. Davies, K. and Lewis, D. (2010) Can caring for laboratory animals be classified as emotional labour? *Animal Technological Welfare* 9, 1–6.
10. Baran, B.E., Rogelberg, S.G., Lopina, E.C., Allen, J.J. and Spitzmuller, C. (2012) Shouldering a silent burden: The toll of dirty tasks. *Human Relationships* 65, 597–626.
11. Anderson, K.A., Brandt, J.C., Lord, L.K. and Miles, E.A. (2013) Euthanasia in animal shelters: Management's perspective on staff reactions and support programmes. *Anthrozoos* 26, 569–578.
12. Knesl, O., Hart, B.L., Fine, A.H., Cooper, L., Patterson-Kane, E. *et al*. (2017) Veterinarians and humane endings: When is it the right time to euthanize a companion animal? *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 4, 45. https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2017.00045
13. Arluke, A. (1991) Coping with euthanasia: A case study of shelter culture. *Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association* 198, 1176–1180.
14. Grey-Toft, P. and Anderson, J.G. (1981) The Nursing Stress Scale. *Journal of Behavioural Assessment* 3, 11–23.
15. Bartlett, D. (1998) Stress and health. In: Bartlett, D. *Stress, Perspectives and Processes: Health Psychology Series*. Open University Press, Buckingham, UK.
16. Dordoni, P., Kraus-Hoogeveen, S., Van Der Heijden, B.I.J.M, Peters, P., Setti, I. and Fiabane E. (2019) Live to work or work to live? An age-moderated mediation model on the simultaneous mechanisms prompted by workaholism among healthcare professionals. *Frontiers in Psychology* 10, 868.
17. Balducci, C., Avanzi, L. and Fraccaroli, F. (2016) The individual 'costs' of workaholism: An analysis based on multisource and prospective data. *Journal of Management* 21, 1–26.
18. Hamood, W. (2020) Imposter syndrome and the veterinary profession. *The Veterinary Record* 187(7), 268–270.

4 Stress Injuries, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

> Wanting to run away from your work makes you a human being well aware of emotional triggers which have accumulated to near-breaking point. Feeling like you just can't face or deal with another owner unable to meet their pet's needs, doesn't make you a bad person – it means you're suffering. And you are worth so much more than to suffer for your work.

Imagine dedicating your career to caring for animals but feeling too exhausted to concentrate on the care those you're helping really need. Or feeling numb to their suffering and, as a result, inadvertently adding to it. Maybe you don't need to imagine this, maybe you've been there, are there now, or are worried about a colleague or friend who is.

Compassion fatigue and burnout have been extensively researched in human health workers and described as 'the cost care-givers pay for giving', and what a cost! These distinct examples of negative well-being, or 'unwell-being', are both described as *secondary* stress injuries. But before examining either, it's worth first understanding primary stress injuries.

Primary stress injuries

Acute stress is the most common form of stress, arising from demands and pressures of the recent past, as well as anticipated demands and pressures of the near future.[1] Common symptoms include emotional distress, which can combine anger and/or frustration, irritability, anxiety, and depression, as well as muscular and gastrointestinal problems. Extreme heightening of the senses leads to elevation in blood pressure, a rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, palpitations, dizziness, migraine headaches, cold and clammy hands or feet, shortness of breath, and chest pain. At its worst, a panic attack! As harrowing and frightening as it might sound, acute primary stress is treatable and manageable.

However, acute stress occurring in response to psychological trauma can be described as a disorder.

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0004

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) characterizes acute stress disorder using specific criteria:[2]

1. Having experienced intense fear, helplessness, or horror in response to a traumatic experience.
2. Displaying three or more of certain dissociative symptoms such as emotional numbing/detachment, dissociative memory loss, feeling the world around you is unreal, and reduced environmental awareness.
3. Exhibiting at least one symptom from each of the following groups:

- re-experiencing trauma in the form of flashbacks, dreams, or recurring thoughts;
- avoidance of trauma-related stimuli;
- anxiety/increased arousal; and
- significant distress or reduced ability to function, persisting from a minimum of 2 days to a maximum of 4 weeks.

Where symptoms last longer than 4 weeks, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is diagnosed.

Three categories of symptoms are associated with PTSD:

- Reliving – through flashbacks, memories, dreams, or recurrent thoughts – potentially brought on by the environment and what is happening within it, significantly affecting everyday life.
- Numbing – efforts to avoid thinking about the traumatic event, experiencing relief through memory control.
- Arousal – difficulty concentrating, being on edge and easily startled, inability to sleep, irritability, frustration and/or sudden outbursts of anger, dizziness and chest pain, fainting.

Shared trauma refers to the stress response experienced by mental health professionals exposed to the same trauma experienced by their clients;[3] a term conceived after the World Trade Center attack on 11 September 2001. However, it does not imply that the clinician's response is the same as their clients' in terms of intensity or experience, but that both were affected in some way by the same traumatic event.

Post-traumatic growth refers to positive changes that some trauma survivors report in response to learning healthy ways to cope with traumatic events.[4]

People report five areas of growth:

- improvements in relationships;
- a greater appreciation for life;
- new opportunities;
- a greater sense of personal strength and ability to cope with crises; and
- spiritual development.

Secondary stress injuries

Secondary traumatic stress describes the phenomenon whereby individuals become traumatized, not by experiencing a traumatic event themselves, but by learning about someone else's experience,[5] whether social or professional. The negative effects of secondary exposure to traumatic events have the same intensity as though the sufferer *were* present, and can include negative visualizations, active avoidance of reminders and cues, hyperarousal, distress, and inability to perform standard routines. In severe cases, where symptoms result in significant distress or impairment in functioning, PTSD may be diagnosed.

Vicarious trauma arises through empathic interactions with people recovering from trauma, and can result in loss of hope and meaning, feasibly as a self-protective mechanism aimed at avoiding further distress. If nothing matters you can't be hurt! This can affect anyone assisting, or exposed to, those who have suffered trauma to the extent they also experience negative emotions. For example, social workers and the clergy, justice system professionals, health care and hospice providers, humanitarian aiders, and the emergency services, are all at risk. It could be argued that animal care workers experience this with animals whose traumatic experiences they empathize with.

Empathy is an ability to imagine the world from someone else's perspective, understanding how they might be feeling in response to the events happening to and around them. Perhaps an extension of, but certainly linked to vicarious trauma, empathic distress happens when we physically experience the pain another being is suffering from.

Empathic distress has been proposed as an alternative understanding of compassion fatigue,[6] because when we become empathically distressed, we lose any desire to do things we find rewarding, and experiencing pleasure becomes difficult. Animal welfare workers are at risk because we might all too readily empathize with the animals in our care, so when they're suffering, we're likely to suffer too.[7] When we feel *sympathy* for another being, feeling sorry for their condition generates positive feelings; however, when we're experiencing *empathy*, seeing life through their eyes, negative feelings result. But can't we feel both sympathetic and empathic towards another person or animal? It's extremely difficult to tease these complex emotional experiences apart.

Interestingly, a decline in empathy has been noted when someone is feeling overburdened with negative feelings arising from their work. For example, when medics go through their training, they might complete their qualification with measurably less empathy than when they started.[8]

Compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue results from the stress experienced when caring for those suffering from trauma. It has been described as the 'natural consequent

behaviours and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatising event experienced by a significant other – the stress resulting from helping, or wanting to help, a traumatised or suffering person'.[9] This leads to one almost 'switching off', unable to attend to the suffering any longer.

When studied in human nurses, this was found to result from devoting high levels of energy and compassion over a prolonged period to people suffering, often without experiencing positive outcomes such as seeing patients improve.[10] This rings true for many of us who, for many reasons, will not witness first-hand the ways in which some of the animals we've cared for will have continued to thrive once discharged from our care. We might also, of course, experience the opposite, witnessing continual suffering despite our desperate efforts to bring about positive change. As a way of coping, we might completely disengage – if you don't care so much for an animal you won't be hurt when your relationship with them ends. You might recognize this protective mechanism at play in human relationships too.

Physical signs and symptoms include:

- exhaustion;
- insomnia – not being able to get to sleep or disrupted sleep with long bouts of wakefulness;
- headaches;
- increased susceptibility to illness; and
- hypochondria.

Behavioural signs and symptoms include:

- increase in alcohol use (and/or other drugs/unhealthy dependencies);
- absenteeism;
- anger and irritability;
- avoidance of clients – whether human or animal;
- impaired ability to make decisions;
- problems in personal relationships;
- attrition – gradually wearing down; and
- compromised care for clients.

Psychological signs and symptoms include:

- emotional exhaustion;
- distancing yourself from others or social activities;
- feeling negative about yourself;
- depression;
- reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy;
- cynicism – doubting others, believing they are motivated purely by selfishness;
- resentment – feeling you are being treated unfairly;
- dread of working with certain clients – human or animal – or of going to work at all;

- feeling professional helplessness;
- diminished sense of enjoyment/career;
- depersonalization – not feeling yourself at all, having thoughts and feelings you wouldn't normally associate with yourself;
- fear;
- disruption of your worldview/heightened anxiety or irrational fears;
- increased sense of personal vulnerability;
- inability to tolerate strong feelings in yourself or as expressed by others;
- problems with intimacy;
- intrusive imagery – repetitive unhelpful, unhealthy imaginings popping into your mind;
- hypersensitivity to emotionally charged stimuli;
- insensitivity to emotional materials;
- loss of hope;
- difficulty separating personal and professional lives; and
- failure to nurture and develop non-work-related aspects of life.

Compassion fatigue can become pervasive, seeping into home life, across personal relationships, and the way you see the world. It creates an overarching sense of numbness and inability to enjoy the better times (Box 4.1).

Psychology professor and traumatologist Charles Figley dedicated years to studying occupational compassion fatigue, publishing this model in 2001[11] (Fig. 4.1).

Although the model depicts the multiple factors feeding into compassion fatigue, it has been criticized for excluding various coping strategies, other than the ability to detach, or potential moderating influences such as resilience and hope.[12] This supports the idea that well-being and coping strategies should be included and heavily emphasized within animal welfare education and workplace inductions for employees and volunteers alike.

Although generally studied within the caring professions, compassion fatigue may be experienced by *anyone* exposed to overwhelming suffering. This need not be workplace-related, although of course some working environments lend themselves much more readily to such experiences. Staff without direct animal contact can therefore also be affected, through exposure to accounts of animal suffering and trauma. This is an important reminder to widen our circles of compassion beyond frontline teams, acknowledging compassion fatigue as a very real experience, whatever sphere of animal welfare work you're in.

The silencing response refers to ways in which people might 'silence' others, possibly as a way of coping with compassion fatigue, by 'closing down' situations that risk further exposure to trauma.[13] This could be done unconsciously, and become an automatic, habitual response in particular settings, such as client interactions.

Box 4.1

I had to resuscitate a cat rushed straight from reception into the preparation room. This was my job and of course, like everything, I wanted to do it to the very best of my ability. I knew what to do, how to help, and what my role was in the emergency plan. I grabbed the equipment I needed, and began to make requests of the team as to what they should do and how, all the while remaining calmly composed.

We saved the patient, and I remember talking to the owner who'd been absolutely distraught but was now relieved and overwhelmed. They grabbed, hugged, and thanked me, and I could understand that, but I felt nothing. Even when administering life support, I'd felt numb as to the outcome. We'd either save the patient, or we wouldn't, but I realized at that time that I didn't care – which sounds so dreadful. I feel so awful saying it, but I really felt the outcome, whether good or bad, was beyond me. I would do my best, and the cat might live or die regardless. Both had happened before, and I'd done everything required every time.

Looking back, I felt so disconnected from my patients, their owners, even my team. I'd observed so much death, so much suffering, I guess I felt like everything was futile, although weirdly it still mattered to me to do my best work – it just didn't matter what the outcome was.

I don't feel like that now, and I'd never want to feel that way again, but if someone were to share that they were feeling this way I would totally understand. I know people will judge me, but I just couldn't help it. I was being good at my job, but that wasn't enough.

Soon after this I took some time off, realizing I needed a break as I knew this numbness just wasn't right. I enrolled with a counsellor and life coach, which helped me regain some sense of purpose. When I returned to work, I focused much more on the positive outcomes my work was having on clients, patients, and my team. I joined a mentorship scheme and took on a student to support. Seeing them thrive and develop seemed to reignite my passion for my work, I felt as though I was passing on the torch in some way and sharing my experiences forward with the future.

People can be quietened by the 'silencer':

- changing the conversation and diverting it to where they wish it to be;
- shutting down their client or colleague's dialogue;
- taking up body postures that have the effect of distancing them from their client or colleague;
- referring clients whom they're struggling with to colleagues or signposting elsewhere; and
- not validating what their client/colleague is saying, so they feel their contribution is unimportant.

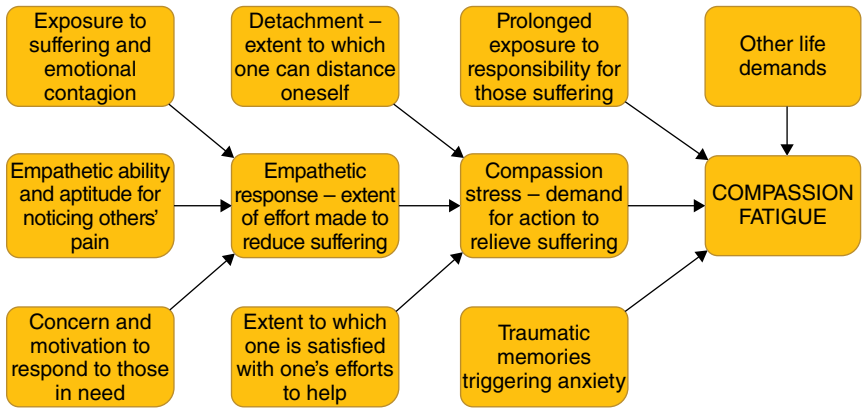

Fig. 4.1. Model of compassion stress and fatigue. (From: Figley 2001. CC-BY-SA-4.0, see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Figley%27s_model_of_compassion_fatigue_.png, accessed 2 February 2022.)

Although this could apply to anyone working with people, it also bears relevance for managers or team-leaders in relation to internal communication within the workplace, and their own relationships with colleagues. It might also apply to interactions with the animals in our care (Box 4.2).

A study examining compassion fatigue in human nurses suggests it is exacerbated when accompanied by personal distress and inadequate feedback – either completely lacking, offering zero constructiveness, or negative.[14] Effects are worsened still within environments where demands outweigh resources, linking it to burnout.

Burnout

Work-related burnout can be described as cumulative stress from the demands of daily working life. It's a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by a depletion of the ability to cope with one's working environment. It happens when the perceived demands from work appear to outweigh the perceived amount or availability of resources in the work environment. This creates physiological consequences, including general tiredness, irritability, and the development of illness.

Burnout also manifests as cynicism, a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and previously championed goals; the result of occupational stress that has intensity, duration, and persistence. The loss of personal motivation can lead to negative self-esteem, poor attitude, and reduced efficiency and effectiveness.

Box 4.2

I'd restrained a cat for blood sampling and was labelling the blood tubes as the vet continued the consultation. The owner asked whether they could do anything at home to help, suggesting marking the water bowl and recording their cat's daily water intake. The vet immediately cut them off, advising them to simply wait for the test results.

I've thought about this consult often, because I'd heard an owner desperate to help, to do anything they could to feel they were doing something positive for their cat's welfare and helping them in some way, because they didn't know what else to do. I initially thought the vet just wasn't listening properly, had heard the words but not the intent behind them, missing the sense of helplessness and desire to feel included in the diagnostic process. To be honest, I thought the vet was simply being rude.

But now I can't help but wonder if perhaps this vet was really struggling themselves and just trying to dismiss the owner as quickly as possible to bring the interaction to an end. They really hadn't 'heard', or understood, the owner's despair because, rather than connect with the client, they had focused on the necessary diagnostic procedure. I feel I was wrong to initially perceive the vet as non-committal, just wanting to hurry things up and get through the client list as quickly as possible without really caring about the owner's feelings.

Understanding more about the numbness we might all be susceptible to when struggling with the continual compassion our work involves has enabled me to be more forgiving and think more deeply about why colleagues might behave the way they do, without being so quick to judge and find them obnoxious or arrogant.

Resources which could be lacking or reduced might include:

- premises;
- materials;
- equipment;
- time;
- workload;
- staff benefits;
- opportunity to undertake continuing professional development;
- training;
- opportunities for career progression and self-development;
- the number of available 'others' to assist with the workload and their attitudes, aptitude, capability, and motivation; and
- funding.

And, of course, not everyone working within animal welfare will have a stable workplace, consistent funding, experienced and knitted team,

administrative support, reliable or indeed any digital technology, and in some cases a consistent or reliable workload. Professionals such as dog trainers and animal behaviourists might also need to market themselves, aware of competition for business.

Researchers have likened burnout to the 'early warning system' employed by early miners who would carry a canary with them.[15] The canary's job was simply to breathe. When the demand for breathing outweighed the available resource of oxygen, it was catastrophically unable to continue. The death of the bird was a very clear symptom of unhealthy working conditions.

What's interesting is that some of burnout's risk factors are psychological, which makes sense if we consider that some of our greatest barriers to achieving within our roles arise from the way we feel, or *allow ourselves* to feel, about ourselves. We all benefit from being adequately prepared for our duties. Learning on the job or gaining a relevant qualification helps us feel capable and confident. When we lose confidence and doubt ourselves, no longer considering ourselves capable of achieving our goals, we are at risk of becoming burnt out. But we can also burn out if we aren't provided with the appropriate materials and equipment to perform our duties to the standards that we're either being asked to demonstrate or have set for ourselves. It's also worth asking whether the goals we're striving for are achievable or whether we're set up to struggle.

Recognizing the risks associated with burnout means keeping tabs on those resources available to us, including those related to feelings about ourselves. In this respect, we could think of our true working environment as being within our own minds. We need to be mentally prepared for our work just as much as we need to be physically resourced. This has great significance for the induction and training of new staff and volunteers, where the inclusion of well-being practices and creation of support networks and reliable escalation channels can be helpful in preparing people appropriately for their roles. This also demonstrates why course providers for various roles within animal welfare ought to include well-being modules within their content.

Six work-related risk factors for burnout have been identified; however, these can also protect against burnout in the right measure.[16] We can in turn view these as assets to workplace well-being, but only when they are not at all depleted (Table 4.1).

Because burnout is a structural problem, it's difficult to address personally. Minimizing or removing workplace or profession-related triggers is key; however, some of these might be completely beyond your control. It's worth speaking to the person in charge of your workplace about your experience. This proactivity offers a degree of control, and there might be interventions that those with the power to facilitate could implement to help prevent resource depletion in the future. However, you are better placed as

Table 4.1. Factors affecting propensity for burnout in the workplace.[16]

Factors	Presents as a risk – we are likely to feel unhappy in our work if:	Presents as a protective factor – we are much more likely to feel happier in our work if:
Workload	Our workload feels beyond us, never-ending, out of control, we feel helpless to make a difference to the workload	Our workload feels achievable, manageable, steadily paced
Control	We feel we lack control over how we carry out our work – micromanaged, unable to make choices, lacking in ability to propose change	We feel in control over how/when/for how long, etc., we work
Reward	We do not receive any additional rewards other than those arising from the helpful nature of our roles, we feel we are neither recognized nor appreciated for what we are doing, we feel stuck with no opportunity for progression	We feel rewarded and receive positive feedback about our performance, and have opportunities to grow and progress
Community	We feel lonely – even within a team, unvalued, with nowhere or very few places to turn to for help, feeling that no-one is looking out for us, no role models	We sense a support network ready for us to lean on should we need and that others care for us, we have dynamic leader figures and are encouraged to ask for help
Fairness	We feel a sense of injustice, that we are being treated unfairly and taken for granted, feeling as though we are being asked to work without sufficient training or resources	We feel a sense of justice within our work, we feel we are being treated fairly by those working alongside us and employing us, adequately trained, and provided with everything we need to do our jobs well
Values	Our personal values conflict with those of our employer/organization/colleagues	Our personal values reflect those of our employer/organization/colleagues

an individual, and particularly if self-employed, to work on those personal resources that *you* have the power to affect, such as skills that strengthen your ability to recover from setbacks and reframe work in a more positive light (Box 4.3).

Box 4.3

One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was to euthanize an owners' three dogs, mum and two sons, in the same consultation. They were very elderly, and it was without doubt the kindest thing to do for them, but absolutely devastating for the owner and incredibly difficult to contend with, trying to keep my own emotions under control during the process. All I could think about was the client returning to an empty house, having lost their whole family at once.

Having shown the client to their car when they were ready, I returned to the consultation room and immediately broke down in tears. The nurse who had assisted was still there with the dogs, also crying, completely distraught. Whenever I think about that experience it still always moves me to tears. It was to this day the most awful moment, despite my constant belief we were giving those dogs the dignified, peaceful goodbye they deserved.

We made an in-house rule, not long after, that none of our vets or nurses would be involved in more than two euthanasia experiences in any one day if we could help it. Fortunately, our hospital was resourced to share this load. This made me feel a lot better because I'd been worrying about this. Had I been faced with a subsequent euthanasia on the day we said goodbye to the family of dogs, I do not believe I could have helped the owner or patient as I should.

Having the discussion around sharing this necessary duty helped me feel understood and supported. I didn't feel as though the new protocol was implemented because I was incapable of holding things together, but as a protective measure because I was important to the practice. That's how it was positioned. The whole team contributed, and we felt respected and valued. It doesn't make this part of the role any easier but has lessened the burden and anxiety of dealing with euthanasia and processing the feelings it evokes.

Turning compassion fatigue and burnout into compassion satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction is the contentment and gratification you derive from being able to do your work in helping others.[17] For example, you might find it a pleasure to help others through your work, feeling positively about your ability to contribute to the greater good of society.

Sources of compassion satisfaction include:[18,19]

- being exposed to clients and colleagues who demonstrate gratitude and appreciation for the impact you are making;
- gaining feedback about your work from people you trust to be able to accurately, and honestly, evaluate your performance with a genuine desire to help you improve;

- being able to educate others to behave differently, achieving the positive outcomes you aspire for them;
- working within a supportive, collaborative team;
- helping others to bring about lasting improvements to animal welfare;
- feeling as though what you are doing is making a difference to the lives of others; and
- having daily meaningful interactions with animals.

Constructive feedback, communicated compassionately by a range of people whose perspective you trust and respect – from peers and seniors, as well as clients – can help you feel valued, your actions validated, and that you are cared for. If you're self-employed, it's beneficial to form trusted buddy systems, gaining feedback from others in your position through professional discussions. Alternatively, source a coach or mentor if you're able.

As well as developing an early warning system, by understanding the signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout, so you can identify them should they begin, the following steps to self-care are recommended:[20]

Record your activity – what/how much are you taking on in different areas of your life, and which of these things can you realistically cut out, reduce, delegate, or postpone? You might feel you need or want to do *everything*, but there will be time to revisit things you take a break from after a short period.

Combat the 'fear of missing out' – this can affect self-esteem, making you feel envious of others and badly about yourself, because you aren't doing the things that others are. It's the double-whammy of feeling that you're missing out on something truly important or fun, that people you want to be with or be like are enjoying, and that there's something much better which you could be doing at this moment in time. This risks resentment of the activity you are required to undertake instead, or at being unable to join in for other reasons, such as lack of finances.

You can help yourself combat the 'fear of missing out' by:[21]

- keeping a journal of the positive experiences you do have;
- keeping a gratitude diary of the things in your life that you feel appreciative of;
- planning activities with friends, or by yourself, regularly so you have things to look forward to;
- seeking out connections – if you're unable to join in with an event, reach out to someone you care about by contacting them, exchanging messages, or having a short phone call; and
- examine your social media activity, perhaps reduce the number of groups you follow or consider monitoring the amount of time you spend there and gently begin to reduce it, replacing it with direct messages or phone calls to people with whom you have a meaningful relationship – it's likely several people you know are feeling just the same.

Start a self-care 'selection' – make a list of some things you'd like to do for pure enjoyment, new activities, things you've fancied trying but have never got around to, or things you might have enjoyed in the past but have got out of the practice. Set aside an evening or time at the weekend over the next month and randomly select a couple of the activities to do. You could also do this with friends or colleagues as a group exercise and go along to each other's selected activities.

Find time for yourself every day – even though this might be just 5 min to begin with. Treat yourself to simply sitting in your garden, on your doorstep, or your comfiest chair with a cuppa. Or listen to your favourite song all the way through with your eyes shut. You might find yourself thinking 'But it's just 5 min, it's not going to make that much difference', so you might have to make yourself do it, to experience the difference it could make. Once you get into the habit of doing just one little thing for yourself each day, it should become easier, and you can extend the time you spend on yourself. And remember, you don't need to *do* anything – so many of us are out of practice at 'just sitting still'! Resting is a hugely restorative behaviour, we know that from the importance we place on it for the animals we care for, so we should extend that same compassion to ourselves and practise resting too.

Delegate – ask for help when, or even before, you need it. This might be a new thing for you, but we get better at things we practise, so once you start it should become less challenging. Think of how you would respond if someone asked you for assistance: you'd want to help and there's absolutely no reason to expect anyone to feel differently.

Have a home-time routine – make the transition from work to home something you do very deliberately. Even if you work from home, you can introduce an 'end-of-day' or 'end-of-shift' routine to help you disconnect from your 'work' mind to your 'home' mind.

Assess how much trauma you are exposed to and take steps to reduce it – think about all the areas in your work where you might experience suffering. It can help to make a record of these using a calendar or diary so you can also look for patterns or identify where you can put measures in place to reduce these as much as possible.

Learn more about compassion fatigue and burnout – becoming familiar with them means you'll have more awareness, a greater understanding of how they develop and manifest, and will be more likely to recognize the early warning signals to prompt you into seeking help if necessary.

Consider reducing your hours – this might feel like a huge deal and completely out of reach, with other demands such as finances requiring you to work your current hours. However, it helps to weigh these up against longer-term costs relating to the 'ripple-out effects' of poor health on other areas of your life, such as cherished relationships. Talking to your doctor about being signed off work to recuperate is always a valuable activity, helping you along the path to recovery if necessary. Talking to your manager about your experiences could be the first step to positive

change. If you work for yourself there might be ways in which you can delegate or reduce certain aspects of your duties to improve hours worked. This doesn't need to be forever – think about what you might advise a friend in your position.

Exercise – it's well documented that physical exercise can help you feel positive, at least afterwards, if not during, the activity. You might need to battle with yourself to begin with, but the endorphin release you'll experience should be worth it. Choose something you already enjoy and build it up gently and gradually, so it becomes part of daily life. For example, start with a little bit of gentle stretching as part of your 'winding down from work' or 'starting out the day' routine.

Making changes can be hard and you might overwhelm yourself trying to change too much at once, so don't pick the hardest thing to begin with. Pick the thing that jumps out at you as easiest to introduce and begin there. Even one small change, like a pebble dropping into a pond, will ripple outwards and positively affect other areas of your life.

References

1. Clancy, J. and McVicar, A. (2002) Stress. In: *Physiology and Anatomy: A Homeostatic Approach*, 2nd ed. Arnold, London.
2. Pai, A., Suris, A.M. and North, C.S. (2017) Post-traumatic stress disorder in the *DSM-5*: Controversy, change, and conceptual considerations. *Behavioural Sciences* 7(1), 7.
3. Tosone, C., Nuttman-Shwartz, O. and Stephens, T. (2012) Shared trauma: When the professional is personal. *Journal of Clinical Social Work* 40, 231–239.
4. Tedeschi, R.G., Calhoun, L.G. and Cann, A. (2007) Evaluating resource gain: Understanding and misunderstanding post-traumatic growth. *Applied Psychology* 56(3), 396–406.
5. Bride, B. (2012) Secondary traumatic stress. In: Figley, C.R. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Trauma*. Sage Publications, London.
6. Dowling T. (2018) Compassion does not fatigue! *Canadian Veterinary Journal* 59(7), 749–750.
7. Bloom, P. (2016) *Against Empathy: The Case for Rationale Compassion*. Ecco Press, New York.
8. Dutton, J.E., Workman, K.M. and Hardin, A.E. (2014) Compassion at work. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behaviour* 1(1), 277–304.
9. Figley, C.R. (2002) *Treating Compassion Fatigue*. Brunner-Routledge, New York.
10. McHolm, F. (2006) Rx for compassion fatigue. *Journal of Christian Nursing* 23, 12–19.
11. Figley Institute (2012) Basics of compassion fatigue. Available at: http://www.figleyinstitute.com/documents/Workbook_AMEDD_SanAntonio_2012July20_RevAugust2013.pdf (accessed 23 May 2019).
12. Sabo, B. (2011) Reflecting on the concept of compassion fatigue. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing* 16(1), 1.

13. Baranowsky, A.B. (2002) The silencing response in clinical practice: On the road to dialogue. In: Figley, C.R. (ed.) *Treating Compassion Fatigue*. Brunner Routledge, New York.
14. Coetzee, S.K. and Lashinger, H.K.S. (2015) Toward a comprehensive, theoretical model of compassion fatigue: An integrative literature review. *Nursing and Health Sciences* 20(1), 4–15.
15. Maslach, C. and Jackson, S.E. (1984) Burnout in organisational settings. *Applied Social Psychology Annual* 5, 133–153.
16. Maslach C. and Leiter M.P. (2016) Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World Psychiatry* 15(2), 103–111.
17. Jacobson, J.M. (2006) Compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout: Reactions among employee assistance professionals providing workplace crisis intervention and disaster management services. *Journal of Workplace Behavioural Health* 21(3–4), 133–152.
18. Cocker, F. and Joss, N. (2016) Compassion fatigue among healthcare, emergency, and community service workers: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 13(6), 618.
19. Figley, C.R. and Roop, R.G. (2006) *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community*. Humane Society Press, Washington, DC.
20. Mathieu, F. (2007) Transforming compassion fatigue into compassion satisfaction. Workshops for the Helping Professions. Available at https://compassionfatigue.org/pages/Top12SelfCareTips.pdf (accessed 3 September 2021).
21. Przybylski, A.K., Murayama, K., DeHann, C.R. and Gladwell, V. (2013) Motivational, emotional, and behavioural correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behaviour* 29(4), 1841–1848.

Further reading

Figley, C.R. and Roop, R.G. (2006) *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community*. Humane Society Press, Washington, DC.

Self-Care

5

> Taking care of yourself IS taking care of others. You deserve as much care, compassion, and kindness from yourself as everyone else.

Established in 1997, the Green Cross Academy of Traumatology is an international, humanitarian assistance, non-profit corporation. It brings together world leaders in the study of traumatology for the purpose of establishing and maintaining professionalism and high standards in the care of trauma victims and responders, throughout the world. They promote very specific guidelines to self-care.[1]

First, do no harm to yourself in the line of duty when helping/treating others.

Second, attend to your physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs as a way of ensuring high-quality services to those who look to you for support.

This implies that it could, or indeed should, be considered unethical *not* to extend to yourself the same quality of care you provide for the animals and people in your charge, or even prioritize it, because doing so helps protect them further too. Ultimately, although employers will have a duty of care for your workplace welfare, personal self-care is your own responsibility. Employers can help promote this, however, by encouraging the culture that peoples' ability to work as a helper of others cannot be completely fulfilled unless they are also, at the same time, helping and caring for themselves. Those of us working with colleagues, employees, mentees, students, or volunteers can encourage this viewpoint in others by role-modelling it ourselves.

Standards of self-care

1. Everyone, regardless of their role or circumstances, has a right to wellness.
2. Everyone deserves restful sleep and detachment from work that enables them to sustain their professional duties.

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0005

3. Everyone deserves to feel uplifted and refreshed, both within and outside the context of their work.
4. Everyone benefits from measuring and moderating those activities that might compromise their competence within their roles and risk reducing their ability to provide assistance to others.

Strategies for self-care

Taking steps to improve your self-care should include the above principles, aiming to improve rest and sleep quality, disconnecting from work at the end of the working day. It's about finding meaning and purpose, not only in a professional context, but outside the workplace too, and keeping a check on any behaviour that could have damaging consequences should it be undertaken without measure or balance.

Based on work within the veterinary profession, the following strategies are aimed at managing the stresses associated with animal welfare work:[2]

- Taking care of yourself physically.
- Having fun on a regular basis.
- Spending time in nature.
- Finding a relaxation technique that works for you.
- Changing your attitude to how you view the stressor/s.
- Knowing when to ask for help.
- Accepting *everyone* experiences occasional frustration or weariness.

It's important to seek to gain a sense of self-achievement, so even beginning to consider how you might be kinder to yourself is something you should feel good about yourself for doing.

Make a self-care plan

This should be a formal, measurable commitment – a promise of self-care. Studies suggest you might be more likely to stick to this if you make it public or share it with people you trust.[3] Your plan should include deadlines for goals related to specific self-care activities; however, these must be feasible and attainable.

Tailor your personal plan to your own interests and abilities, but factor in rest and quiet time too, as well as ways to help yourself address situations you find stressful in both your professional and personal life. These might well be different strategies depending on the specific context in which you find yourself under pressure (Box 5.1).

Of course, it's not enough just to create the plan. As well as being implemented, it will need to be evaluated and updated as necessary. You can do this by yourself, or with anyone who is supporting you. Go back to your plan regularly, pop a reminder in your diary to revisit it at least once a month. Reflect upon how well you are actioning each element of your commitment. If you're

Box 5.1

Complete the table to create a 'self-care commitment'.

Table 5.1. Self-care commitment plan.

Area of focus	What I commit to doing	How I will do this for myself
Physical	Monitoring my body for any tension, discomfort, or pain and take steps to reduce and treat these as soon as observed	
	Ensuring that I have enough sleep and rest	
	Ensuring that I am eating well and providing my body with the appropriate nourishment it needs to function well	
Mental	Making sure I balance work and play each day	
	Making sure I understand how to relax and factor time to do so into each day	
	Making sure I have frequent opportunities to connect with nature and/or other things that help me feel calm	
	Making sure I have regular opportunities to do something creative	
	Making sure I am reflecting upon skills such as assertiveness, reducing stress, effective communication, and time management regularly and seeking examples of when I have done this well to help me apply the same principles in future	
	Making sure I am doing something deliberately for a designated period within each day specifically to feel calm and to relax	
Social	Making sure I have at least five people, including two from within my profession where possible, on whom I can rely to be highly accommodating of me should I need to ask them for support	
	Making sure I know how to access help, whether informal or professional, which will be given to me quickly and effectively	
	Doing something that I feel will make the world a better place for everyone	

Continued

Box 5.1 Continued.

Area of focus	What I commit to doing	How I will do this for myself
Professional	Making sure I am able to dedicate sufficient time to both work and home without compromising either Avoiding overpromising within the workplace by implementing boundaries around overworking that I will stick to Making sure I am able to gain feedback on my work performance – for example, through peer support, being supervised, being mentored, or having someone I trust observe me and feed back to me constructively to help me make positive change Noticing, remembering, and recording the joys and achievement of work	

not achieving what you'd hoped, examine the barriers and resistances to this – it might be within your power to change some of these. Notice the changes you have been making and appreciate how they have been making you feel.

Self-compassion

To be able to better care for ourselves, we can treat ourselves with compassion. This means reflecting upon the way we are feeling and behaving considerately, seeking to understand why we have behaved in a certain way rather than punishing ourselves for having done so.

Three main components to self-compassion have been identified:[4]

- Being kind to ourselves rather than judging ourselves.
- Looking for the things we have in common with others, rather than those things that separate us.
- Being mindful and aware, rather than attaching ourselves to specific identities that might be difficult for us to reach or maintain.

We need to remember that *we are not our thoughts*. Our thoughts are really just passing mental constructs. Self-compassion helps to strengthen the control we are able to exert over our minds, to protect ourselves from believing the negative hype we might otherwise create about ourselves. It can help to

reflect upon those elements of your life that bring you joy, whether this be through shared experiences connecting you to others, mentally or physically enriching activities, creative pastimes, or through taking time to pause and focus on the here and now. How many, and what kind of, activities do you engage in which move you into 'flow' – a positive emotional state where you are thoroughly engaged and absorbed in what you are doing, leaving life's pressures to fade into the background (Box 5.2)?

Box 5.2. What nourishes you?

Grab a piece of paper and a pen. Make sure you have calmness and quietness, and then think about all the things in your life that provide you with fulfilment.

Make a list. Include anything which you feel gives your life meaning, which promotes growth and development, which makes you feel connected, which makes you smile, which gives you a sense of achievement, which brings you joy – things which you simply enjoy doing and gain pleasure from. Include specific people, animals, places … this is all about you, so will be unique.

If you'd like, use a free internet word cloud generator to create a word cloud for yourself (see Fig. 5.1). Look at this regularly to remind yourself of all the wonderful things in your life that aid your growth, development, and satisfaction.

Fig. 5.1. Nourishment word cloud example.

Remember, your own success will always start with **you!** Not how you do your work, but how you live your life, so how you get up, how you prepare for the day, and how you conduct yourself. You have choices about the way you live your life, and you can make a difference to it.

> You can be the change you wish to see in the world, but first you must believe that you can. The difference you can make starts with being a good friend to yourself.

References

1. Green Cross Academy of Traumatology (2021) Standards of care. Available at: https://greencross.org/about-gc/standards-of-care-guidelines/ (accessed 3 September 2021).
2. Figley, C.R. and Roop, R.G. (2006) *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community*. Humane Society Press, Washington, DC.
3. Weiner, B.J. (2009) A theory of organisational readiness for change. *Implementation Science* 4, 67.
4. Neff, K.D. (2003) Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualisation of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity* 2, 85–101.

Further reading

Frederickson, B. (2009) *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research to Release Your Inner Optimist and Thrive*. Oneworld, London.
Hoff, B. (1994) *The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet*. Methuen, London.
Seligman, M. (2011) *Flourish*. Nicholas Brearley Publishing, London.

6

Happiness, Well-being, and Positive Psychology

'Life's happiness depends on the quality of your thoughts.'

Marcus Aurelius[1]

The view of Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor 161–180 CE and stoic philosopher, is that although what happens to us is often largely beyond our physical control, we are capable of exerting *conscious* control over the way we respond to life's events. Immediately this seems easier said than done! Aurelius' philosophy suggests our acceptance of life's challenges, coupled with the understanding that we are able, if we think hard enough about it, to choose how we behave in response to them, enhances our mental and emotional strength. This ties in constructively with the concept of resilience. If we consider 'quality' here, to be a degree of excellence against which other thoughts could be measured, then Aurelius suggests that the more positive, optimistic, or hopeful our thoughts, the more likely we are to feel happy. But what does that even mean?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines happiness in the following ways:[2]

1. The quality or condition of being happy.
   a) Good fortune or good luck in life generally or in a particular affair; success, prosperity.
   b) An instance or cause of good fortune.
2. The state of being happy.
   a) The state of pleasurable contentment of mind; deep pleasure in or contentment with one's circumstances.
   b) An instance or source of pleasure or contentment.
3. Successful or felicitous aptitude, fitness, suitability, or appropriateness; felicity. Also: an instance of this.

While this mentions contentment, pleasure, and success, these could perhaps be perceived as both components and *outcomes* of happiness, as well as being used to supplement the term itself. This definition does not, however, offer a particularly straightforward explanation for what it means to experience happiness, what happiness looks or feels like, and whether it may be experienced collectively as well as individually, or across species. It also talks about being

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0006

in a 'state' of happiness, which might imply overarching permanence, but is happiness much more transient and fleeting? And why do we experience it at all – what purpose does it serve, other than making us feel good?

In 1963 ethologist Nikolai Tinbergen, working within what was then a very early field of animal behaviour science, published a seminal paper entitled 'On the aims and methods of ethology'.[3] This work described his approach to researching this area, using a set of four interlinked questions that can be applied to any observable behaviour or theory (Box 6.1). Questions that we might, perhaps a little more philosophically, apply to happiness!

Function: Why is the animal performing the behaviour? In which way does the behaviour increase the animal's ability to survive and reproduce?
Evolution: How did the behaviour evolve? How has the behaviour changed naturally over evolutionary time?
Causation: What causes the behaviour to be performed?
Development: How has the behaviour developed during the lifetime of the individual? How has it been influenced by experience and learning?

Box 6.1

Apply Tinbergen's four questions to 'happiness' by completing the table with your thoughts.

Table 6.1. Tinbergen's questions.

Function	How does feeling happy improve our chances of survival? Could this be connected to happiness helping us to connect socially?
Evolution	Can predisposition to happiness, or positive affect such as optimism, be inherited do you think?
Causation	How does happiness manifest? If we are feeling the positive effect of happiness as a 'good mood', is this likely to influence us to have more positive interactions with others, which may then serve us positively from an evolutionary perspective?
Development	Do we 'get better' at being happy, or feeling positive, or being optimistic? Can we practise it? Does this depend on the types of experiences we have, or happen regardless despite them? Do we seek happiness more as we grow older or less?

The pursuit of happiness leads us to behave in all sorts of ways, relating to our individual understanding of which specific conditions we believe will make us happy. Happiness has long interested philosophers and psychologists, with the concept of 'hedonism' believed to originate back to Ancient Greece. Hedonism argues that happiness is the combination of pleasure-seeking and avoidance of suffering, and should become the only, continual focus of daily activity, despite this potentially being detrimental to others. *Ethical* hedonism, however, adds a welfarist element, suggesting that increasing pleasure and reducing suffering should apply across *all* beings capable of experiencing such outcomes.[4]

Our minds appear predisposed to become used to the conditions within which we exist, a concept termed perceptual adaptation. In relation to hedonism and happiness, this means that although we might initially find something overwhelmingly joyous, perceiving that the more we experience the happier we will become, we will, in fact, get used to it. We habituate to what we have and what we experience, which resets the reference points by which we judge our experience and compare ourselves either with significant others, or against the expectations we have created for ourselves (Box 6.2).

Box 6.2

Take a few moments to reflect on what happiness means to you and what kinds of events or occurrences might feed into your experience of happiness. You could also discuss this as a team.

Are these contributing factors things that are currently happening, or do they have the *potential* to happen?

Do the things that you feel do, or would, make you happy relate to health, prosperity, relationships, success, or anything else?

Does your current happiness arise from your personal or professional life, or both?

How often do you find yourself comparing yourself to others, and measuring your happiness against how happy you perceive other people to be? What is it specifically about their lives that you perceive makes them happier or less happy?

Do the things that contribute to your happiness relate to you specifically, or does your version of happiness include events that affect others? And if so, who? Those familiar to you, or does this extend to strangers?

Could you feel happy within an impoverished environment if you knew those you cared about were comfortable?

Do you have a baseline for happiness – a standard set of conditions without which you feel you could not experience happiness?

How often do you feel truly happy? How would you describe this feeling?

Do you agree with Marcus Aurelius that you can experience happiness even during hardship by exerting conscious control over the way you respond to adversity? Can you think of a time when you have done this?

An equally historic, however contrasting, perspective on happiness, is Aristotle's (384–322 BCE) notion of eudaimonia – that of being true to one's inner self.[5] This involved identifying one's personal virtues or moral qualities and applying these across all areas of one's life. Eudaimonia was regarded as the ultimate goal of human activity. It differed from the concept of 'halos', meaning health, associated with biological fitness and physiological functioning. Health was, at the time, felt to be too dependent on fate, fortune, or luck.[6]

Interestingly, this ties in with the present-day Positive Psychology movement. An emerging science, this discipline seeks to understand the positive aspects of human life, in a shift away from exploring what it means to suffer, physically and psychologically. Positive Psychology seeks to highlight what is going well for people, focusing on aspirational attributes such as resilience and coping mechanisms.

However, not all philosophies harbour a necessarily positive approach to happiness and well-being. For example, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche appears scathing about hedonism and eudaimonia, suggesting it naïve to seek pleasure and abolish suffering, proposing that it is suffering, in actual fact, which causes us to achieve elevation beyond our status.[7] Nietzsche's feeling is that well-being is about being successful *in spite of* suffering, because it's impossible to avoid suffering. This implies that happiness and well-being are about how we deal with suffering just as much as how we find pleasure.

Animal care professionals are likely to be familiar with the concept of suffering and well-being as applied to animals. Ruth Harrison, a relatively unknown animal welfare activist and writer, could be seen as critical within this developing field. Her influential work, *Animal Machines*, published in 1964, exposed intense farming conditions and the suffering imposed on poultry and livestock by industrialized farming practices.[8] This led the British Government to appoint a committee, headed by Professor Roger Brambell, to investigate. In 1965, the Brambell Report dictated that an animal should have sufficient freedom of movement to be able to turn around, groom itself, get up, lie down, and stretch all limbs, all without difficulty.

In 1979 the concept of the 'Five Freedoms' was launched, stating that all farm animals should experience:[9]

- **Freedom from malnutrition** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain optimal health.
- **Freedom from discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- **Freedom from pain, injury, or disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- **Freedom from fear or distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering.
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities, and company of the animal's own kind.

These welfare standards were adopted by many animal welfare organizations for pet animals. In 2006, the Animal Welfare Act was passed, making it a legal duty of care for animal owners or keepers to provide for their animals' welfare needs, including what are currently referred to as 'the five welfare needs'. It states that every pet owner must provide for the following needs of their pets:[10]

- **Health** – protection from pain, injury, suffering, and disease, and treated if they become ill or injured.
- **Behaviour** – the ability to behave naturally for their species.
- **Companionship** – to be housed with, or apart from, other animals as appropriate for the species, therefore company of their own kind for sociable species, or to be housed alone for solitary species.
- **A suitable diet** – feeding appropriately for the pet's life stage and feeding a suitable amount to prevent obesity or malnourishment, as well as the access to fresh clean water.
- **Environment** – a suitable environment. This should include the right type of home with a comfortable place to rest and hide as well as space to exercise and explore.

This legislation stresses that species-specific needs are very different. It recommends prospective owners carrying out pre-purchase research to understand what they are mandated to provide, for the animal of their choice. Given that we place such emphasis on the emotional health and happiness of the animals in our care, it's a shame that we don't necessarily naturally extend this duty of care to ourselves.

As a human model, we have psychologist Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs', created during the Second World War, possibly as a direct response to living through war (Fig. 6.1). The pyramid design implies that each level must be fulfilled in succession. Only after lower-level needs are met can successive-level needs be addressed.[11]

Maslow's heirarchy emphasizes physiological balance as the foundation upon which all other tiers are successively built. But this progression is often hindered by lower-level needs not being met.

We may very often create our own barriers to happiness, whether physical or psychological. For example, we might create barriers to learning, and to our own enjoyment, through subscribing to beliefs and ideas we create about ourselves that prevent contentment. These might arise through fear, insecurity, and/or a sense of 'not being or feeling enough'. This is why self-acceptance is such an important part of well-being and the extent to which we can experience happiness. True to the contemporary approach of Positive Psychology, Maslow higlighted our need for achievable aspirations, but acknowledged the importance of a stable foundation of physiological and nutritional health. We see the importance of this in the animals we work with – a healthy body can pave the way for a healthy, positive emotional experience.

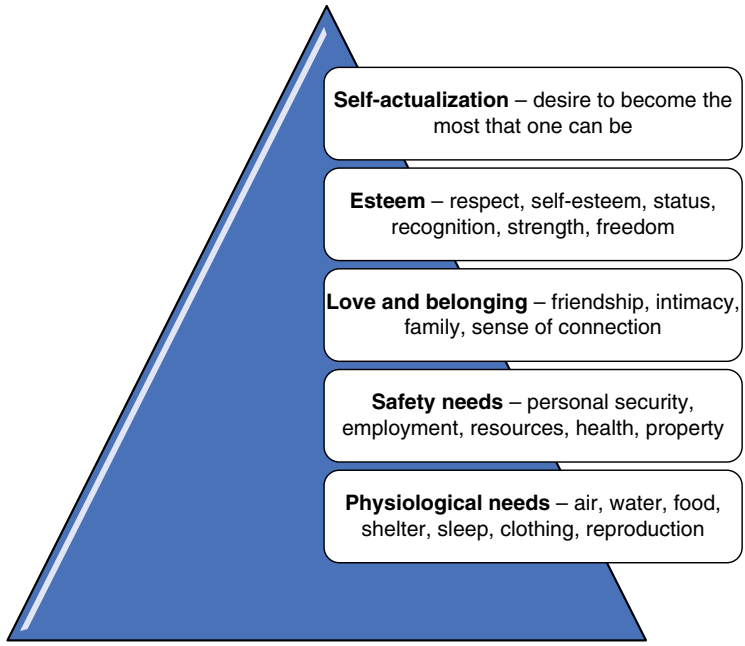

Fig. 6.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. (CC-BY-SA-4.0, see: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow%27s_Hierarchy_of_Needs2.svg, accessed 2 February 2022.)

How satisfied we feel about our lives and how we evaluate our own happiness therefore appear to be cognitively driven. Could happiness therefore be defined in terms of the average amount of satisfaction, a specific period of time, the frequency, intensity, and length of positive feelings, and the relative absence of negative experiences?

Subjective well-being is a multidimensional construct consisting of three separate components:[12]

- The presence of positive feelings.
- The relative lack of negative feelings.
- People's evaluations of their life circumstances.

Psychologist Martin Seligman is referred to as one of Positive Psychology's key founders, focusing his work on what was 'going well' for people. He attempted to scientifically measure happiness and well-being, with three viewpoints:[13]

- Past – concepts such as well-being, contentment, pride, and satisfaction.
- Present – happiness, resilience, and flow.
- Future – optimism, confidence, trust, and hope.

Seligman further asserted that these may each be examined in three ways:

- At a subjective level, through studying positive experiences such as joy, well-being, satisfaction, contentment, happiness, optimism, and flow.

- At an individual level, through studying strengths and virtues, capacity for love, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, wisdom, interpersonal skills, and various qualities considered necessary for a 'good life'.
- At group/community level, with an emphasis on social responsibilities and group ethics.

According to Seligman, humans can experience three kinds of happiness (Fig. 6.2):

1. Pleasure and gratification – someone living a life of pleasure maximizes positive emotions.
2. Embodiment of strengths and virtues – seeking to undertake activities that achieve a state of effortless engagement.
3. Meaning and purpose – belonging to and serving something outside of oneself, such as one's family or community.

Seligman suggests that people who have good well-being have better health, are more productive, and less frustrated. He developed this theory, proposing five measurable components to happiness, often referred to by the acronym PERMA:[14]

Pleasure/Positive emotions – all our lives have highs and lows. Focusing on the lows can be damaging, so Seligman encourages us to focus on the positive aspects of life. He connects pleasure to the satisfaction of our basic needs (those lower levels in Maslow's pyramid), and enjoyment to intellectual stimulation and creativity (Maslow's uppermost tier). When we find the tasks that we're required to do stimulating and enjoyable, we're more likely to continue with them should they present additional challenges, and seek creative, inventive solutions.

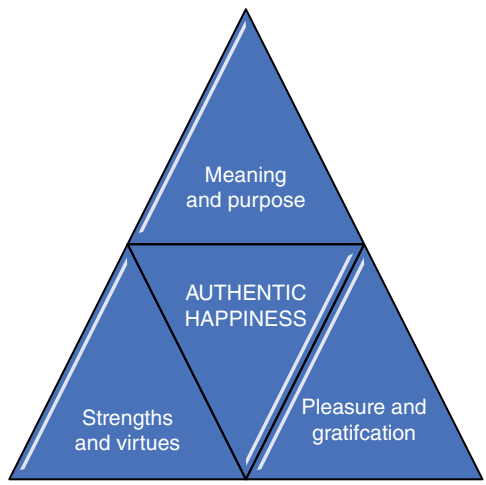

Fig. 6.2. Seligman's 'three kinds of human happiness'.

Engagement – we will naturally all find different things engaging but will all benefit from finding something to engage in that completely absorbs our attention and requires us to be present and focused.

Relationships – our social connectivity is one of the most important aspects of our lives, even though we will all experience different needs in relation to this. In evolutionary terms, our survival is dependent upon strong connections to others, and research has found that our brain's pain centres are activated when we are at risk of isolation.[15] Stable, supportive relationships will help to provide and maintain our strength when times are tough.

Meaning – understanding the greater impact of the work you do, just how far and wide your unique contribution ripples out, will help you find more enjoyment and gain more fulfilment from it.

Accomplishment – having goals that we then achieve provides us with feelings of immense satisfaction and pride. Striving towards achievable goals can help us to thrive and flourish.

Human happiness appears to be very individualistic, depending on our ideas and hopes for ourselves, and our abilities to meet these (Box 6.3).

Theories and models of Positive Psychology, happiness, and well-being

Broaden-and-build theory

> 'The psychological broadening sparked by one positive emotion can increase an individual's receptiveness to subsequent pleasant or meaningful events, increasing the odds that the individual will find positive meaning in these subsequent events and experience additional positive emotions.'[16]

It's easily appreciated that despite feeling bad, negative emotions like fear and disgust are helpful in keeping us safe from harm. Professor of Psychology Barbara Frederickson wanted to understand, from an evolutionary sense, how good feelings, or positive emotions, benefit us in terms of aiding survival, and found that positive emotions don't emerge when we're in threatening situations, but rather when we're *not*. Joyful feelings might lead us to want to approach new and unfamiliar people and things; for example, when children play in a safe environment, they are building important communication and exploratory skills that can be linked to success in adult life.[17] Likewise, feeling comfortable and content can lead people to expand their compassion outwards and extend the range of relationships they have.[18]

Frederickson suggested that 'feeling good' helps us look outwards, broadening our capacity for flexible, creative thinking. By broadening our perspectives, we can build lasting and meaningful physical, mental, and

Box 6.3

Consider your own unique happiness by completing the table.

Table 6.2. My unique happiness.

Personal happiness indicators	
Pleasure/Positive emotions	How fulfilled are you in your life and your work? What things/interactions/situations/environments/activities provide you with the feeling of fulfilment?
Engagement	How engaged are you with the people you care about, and your work? What different forms of engagement do you have with different people?
Relationships	How good are they? How fulfilling? Do you find them easy or are some of your relationships difficult? Can you see any patterns between easier and more challenging relationships?
Meaning and purpose	How much of this do you have in life and at work? Where do you feel it comes from – can you put your finger on it?
Accomplishment	Do you meet the goals you set in life? What things hinder or help you reaching your goals? How achievable are the goals you are setting for yourself?

social resources, such as supportive affiliative groups and a greater depth of knowledge about the world around us.

The positivity ratio 3:1

Some additional research into broaden-and-build theory suggests that a ratio of at least three positive emotions to every one negative emotion experienced could serve as a sort of tipping point at which someone might either struggle or flourish.[19] We can use this to our advantage by being proactive and planning to regularly undertake activities that provide us with positive feelings.

A model of well-being

Like happiness, well-being has many definitions, and is commonly used as an umbrella term for the varied assessments we make about ourselves, the things that happen to us, and the circumstances in which we live. Our well-being includes how satisfied we are with our lives, how interested and engaged we are in different things, and how joyful or sad we are, for example.[20]

One structured framework presents well-being as an interplay between four domains:[21]

- Physical – our general health, strength, and ability to endure.
- Emotional – our emotional flexibility and ability to self-regulate.
- Intellectual – our ability to focus and attend to things which stimulate our minds, interest, and curiosity.
- Spiritual – our commitment to values and tolerance of others.

These are influenced by many factors, including:

- Current conditions, such as our location/immediate environmental context and how safe we feel here.
- Relationships – how connected we feel and whether the quality of our interactions meet our social needs.
- The value we place in ourselves and how we view our contributions to society.
- How justly and fairly we feel that ourselves, and others, are treated.
- The resources and opportunities available to us.

This reflects just how complex the concept is, and how far-ranging the contextual influences upon it might be, although the authors argue it likely remains incomplete. It's useful, however, in widening the concept of well-being beyond individual subjectivity, promoting it as more than simply the absence of disease, and supporting it as a desirable state for individuals and groups.

This understanding can help us explore holistic ways to enhance well-being individually and societally, as a proactive means to promote health.

The role of optimism in well-being

Optimism seeks the opportunities and potential for a good outcome within every situation. It is defined as the confidence and hopefulness about the impending success or future of something.[22] Rather than pessimistically believe that if something *can* go wrong it *will*, we can 'always look on the bright side of life', with a tendency to generally expect good outcomes over bad outcomes.[23] We can also look at optimism, and pessimism, as ways in which we tend to explain the events of life to ourselves.

Seligman proposes that each of us has an individual way of explaining what happens in life, which he believes we develop during childhood.

Unless we deliberately seek to change our natural perspective, this will play throughout our entire lives.[24] Seligman suggests our attitude towards life is so strong because it is continually strengthened whenever we use it to make sense of whatever is going on around us.

This supports the notion that our mindset may be either fixed and immoveable, or flexible, allowing us to grow. While a pessimistic person with a fixed mindset would consider a setback to be permanent and pervasive, potentially impenetrable so not worth trying to change, the 'resilient' person with a growth mindset would think about a setback as temporary, believing they are able to help change things for the better.

As well as mindset, optimism appears linked to our self-belief and sense of control. This suggests optimism is flexible and can be strengthened in line with these. Applying Seligman's notion of optimism as an explanatory style, we can see that an optimist would attribute negative events beyond their control as:

- Not personal – putting a bad experience down to just bad luck.
- Not permanent – believing that the outcome could be different next time.
- Not pervasive – seeing lack of success as a setback and opportunity to develop further to be able to thrive next time.

Whether this is a flexible state of being or more consistent personality trait has been the subject of investigation[25] as it has been suggested that it might be entirely situational and so we could feel pessimistic about one area of our lives while optimistic about another at the same time.[26] But the big question is: can we learn to be more optimistic?

Although studies have found a link between genetics and an apparent predisposition to being optimistic,[27] scientists also argue that you *can* learn to become more optimistic, having identified three mental mechanisms governing this:[28]

1. The way we selectively choose which information to focus on and process. Optimists tend to filter out negative information.[29]
2. The degree of control we believe we have over our lives. Optimists believe they're able to influence things that happen within their lives.
3. The way we interpret events as either positive (optimistic) or negative (pessimistic).[30]

Seligman suggests we can promote all of these by connecting with our inner monologue, consciously paying attention to the way we think and feel. By consciously bringing any negative thoughts to our attention, we can bring this under our control and actively decide to take a different viewpoint – monitoring and then changing our explanatory style. If we can manage to capture, control, and change our thoughts regularly, doing so will become strengthened, slowly becoming less effortful as we get used to doing so.

This is likely to pay off greatly, as being optimistic has been shown to have considerable health benefits such as a stronger immunity,[31] and reduced incidence of disease.[32, 33, 34] The effort we devote to bringing our awareness to our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour will be well worth the endeavour.

Reframe happiness for yourself – not as potentially unachievable never-ending bliss, but as being able to respond constructively to every possible situation.

References

1. Aurelius, M. (2006) *Meditations*. Hammond, M., translator. Penguin Classics, London.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2021) The definitive record of the English language. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Available at: https://oed.com/ (accessed 3 September 2021).
3. Tinbergen, N. (1963) On the aims and methods of ethology (reprinted from Zeitschrift fur Tierpsychologie). *Animal Biology* 55(4), 297–321.
4. Timmerman, J. (2005) Too much of a good thing? Another paradox of hedonism. *Analysis* 65(2), 144–146.
5. Britannica (2021) Eudaimonia. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/eudaimonia (accessed 3 September 2021).
6. Majumdar, S.K. (1996) Aristotle's ethical theory and modern health care. *Bulletin of the Indian Institute of History of Medicine* 26(1–2), 75–80.
7. Loy, D. (1996) Beyond good and evil: A Buddhist critique of Nietzsche. *An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East* 6(1), 37–57.
8. Harrison, R. (1964, reprinted 2013) *Animal Machines*. CAB International, Wallingford, UK.
9. Carenzi, C. and Verga, M. (2009) Animal welfare: Review of the scientific concept and definition. *Italian Journal of Animal Science* 9(1), 21–30.
10. The National Archives (2006) The Animal Welfare Act 2006. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/section/9 (accessed 3 September 2021).
11. Maslow, A.H. (1943) A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review* 50(4), 370–396.
12. Arthaud-Day, M.L., Rode, J.C., Mooney, C.H. and Near, J.P. (2005) The subjective well-being construct: A test of its convergent, discriminant, and factorial validity. *Social Indicators Research* 74, 445–476.
13. Seligman, M.E.P. (2002) *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*. Free Press, New York.
14. Seligman, M.E.P. (2018) PERMA and the building blocks of wellbeing. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 13(4), 333–335.
15. Hawkley, L.C. and Cacioppo, J.T. (2010) Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Annals of Behavioural Medicine* 40(2), 218–227.
16. Fredrickson, B.L. (2001) The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist* 56(3), 218–226.
17. Glascott-Burriss, K. and Ling-Ling, T. (2002) Review of the research: How much do we know about the importance of play in child development? *Childhood Education* 4, 230–233.
18. Todaro-Franchesi, V. (2019) *Compassion Fatigue and Burnout in Nursing: Enhancing Professional Quality of Life*, 2nd edn. Springer Publishing Company, New York.

19. Fredrickson, B.L. and Losada, M.F. (2005) Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist* 60(7), 678–686.
20. Maddison, D., Rehdanz, K., and Welsch, H. (eds.) (2020). *Handbook on Wellbeing, Happiness, and the Environment*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK.
21. Placa, V.L., McNaught, A. and Knight, A. (2013) Discourse on wellbeing in research and practice. *International Journal of Wellbeing* 3, 116–125.
22. Carver, C.S., Schiere, M.F. and Segerstrom, S.F. (2010) Optimism. *Clinical Psychology Review* 30(7), 879–889.
23. Scheier, M.F. and Carver, C.S. (1985) Effects of optimism on psychological and physical well-being: Theoretical overview and empirical update. *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 16, 201–228.
24. Seligman, M.E.P. (2018) *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. Pocket Books, New York.
25. Kluemper, D.H., Little, L.M. and DeGroot, T. (2009) State or trait: Effects of state optimism on job-related outcomes. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* 30(2), 209–231.
26. Chang, E.C., D'Zurilla, T.J. and Maydeu-Olivares, A. (1994) Assessing the dimensionality of optimism and pessimism using a multi-measure approach. *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 18, 143–160.
27. Fox, E., Ridgewell, A. and Ashwin, C. (2009) Looking on the bright side: Biased attention and the human serotonin transporter gene. *Proceedings of the Royal Society Biological Sciences* 276(1663), 1747–1751.
28. Hecht, D. (2013) The neural basis of optimism and pessimism. *Experimental Neurobiology* 22(3), 173–199.
29. Isaacowitz, D.M. (2005) The gaze of the optimist. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31(3), 407–415.
30. Seligman, M.E.P. and Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1987) Explanatory style and depression. In: Magnusson, D. and Öhman, A. (eds) *Psychopathology: An Interactional Perspective*. Academic Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
31. Brydon, L., Walker, C., Wawrzyniak, A.J., Chart, H. and Steptoe, A. (2009) Dispositional optimism and stress-induced changes in immunity and negative mood. *Brain Behaviour and Immunity* 23(6), 810–816.
32. Chida, Y. and Steptoe, A. (2008) Positive psychological well-being and mortality: A quantitative review of prospective observational studies. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 70(7), 741–756.
33. Giltay, E.J., Zitman, F.G. and Kromhout, D. (2006) Dispositional optimism and the risk of depressive symptoms during 15 years of follow-up: The Zutphen Elderly Study. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 91(1), 45–52.
34. Kubansky, L.D., Sparrow, D., Vokonas, P. and Kawachi, I. (2001) Is the glass half empty or half full? A prospective study of optimism and coronary heart disease in the normative aging study. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 63(6), 910–916.

Further reading

Frederickson, B. (2009) *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research to Release Your Inner Optimist and Thrive*. Oneworld, London.
Hoff, B. (1994) *The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet*. Methuen, London.
Seligman, M. (2011) *Flourish*. Nicholas Brearley Publishing, London.

7 Imposter Syndrome and the Dunning–Kruger Effect

'I honestly feel like such a fraud; everyone must know I'm totally winging this.'

Imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome is characterized by chronic feelings of self-doubt, fear of being identified as a fraud, and unacceptance of positive feedback, even from people we admire. Sufferers believe themselves to be much less intelligent and competent than those around them perceive them to be. Despite evidence of capability and competence, including qualifications, accreditations, passed assessments or promotions, people suffering with imposter syndrome are unable to identify with any sense of accomplishment.

A study among medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students found that 30% self-identified as imposters, despite feeling training was sufficient for their chosen career.[1] For these people, imposter syndrome was found to be the commonest reason for general mental distress. Another investigation including librarians, lawyers, nurses, and clinicians suggested that as many as 70% of people will experience imposter syndrome at least once during their adult, working life.[2] Interestingly, it's thought to be more frequently experienced by women, although burnout has been reported equally between genders. It's unclear why, although some researchers speculate about the role of sex hormones, suggesting reduced testosterone amounts predispose some to the condition.[3]

There appears to be greater risk of imposter syndrome when entering a new area of life or work.[4] With medical students for example, increased numbers of clinical placements requiring them to demonstrate critical thinking and complex problem-solving appear to fuel imposter syndrome.[5] This fits with so many of the animal welfare professions where we see client after client, or animal after animal, each requiring individualized attention from us – a problem to be solved. We're almost required to start each interaction afresh, not knowing what might be asked of us emotionally, and to the extent of our knowledge, experience, and skillset (Box 7.1).

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0007

Box 7.1

When I first started working there, I felt completely out of my depth. Everyone was so knowledgeable; their duties second nature. I panicked that it was obvious to everyone how little I knew. Even though I knew this was partly due to not yet knowing where anything was and having to get used to the layout of the place and where different equipment and materials were stored, and despite everyone being really lovely, I still felt inadequate and vulnerable about my knowledge, practical skills, and capabilities. It got even worse when I was instructed to assist the surgeon, who didn't look at me at all and said straight away to the Head Nurse, 'Is she qualified?'

I had only recently qualified, had worked incredibly hard, and felt proud of doing so, but in that split second, I felt everything drain away as though this vet had seen through me completely and knew I was totally faking it. Feeling physically sick, I assumed I would inevitably slip up and be sent home by the Head Nurse, who, I was convinced, would be wishing she'd chosen another candidate, not me, to join the team. Colleagues were quick to reassure me, saying things like, 'Oh, that's just how they are; they're the same with everyone' and 'It doesn't get any better'. But that didn't help; I already felt like a fraudster and so exposed.

Looking back, I'm not sure how and when I overcame this feeling; there was no defining moment. Things eased as I settled in. I felt more and more useful once I'd learned where everything was and could help effectively, understanding what various duties involved. The nursing team were amazing, teaching me without making me feel judged, although I still compared myself negatively to them all for a long time. That seed of doubt stays nagging at you, and every little thing you get wrong, or just doesn't go well, proves to you how rubbish you are. It hurts even more cos it's being bad at something you so desperately want to be good at.

I don't think the surgeon was responsible for the way I felt, just that they'd so publicly voiced my own inner fears. But it shouldn't be accepted that 'Oh, they make everyone feel like an idiot, it's not just you'. Years later, when I became responsible for the team, I tried to ensure no-one was ever made to feel that way by someone else again by trying to encourage everyone to reflect upon the consequences of behaviour and language. It was incredibly eye opening just how often people hadn't realized the effect of their actions and were extremely upset to learn they might have contributed to someone else losing confidence.

I wanted to create an atmosphere in which people felt able to have open conversations, talking confidently about how they're feeling about work, and an empathic culture where no-one need fear either speaking up or being spoken to, helping everyone feel safe and supported. That way, if you do ever need to have a conversation that could be thought of as challenging, people already know any concerns are being raised and addressed in good faith and for the benefit of the team.

As well as doubting themselves, either voicing this openly or trying to hide it – perhaps worrying about how others will see this – people experiencing imposter syndrome are also less likely to speak up or volunteer answers and information than others. This is important for managers and team leaders to note, particularly within team meetings and when identifying learning and development needs among staff.

We naturally compare ourselves with others; however, this can have both positive and negative effects, depending on the way we see ourselves in relation to them. Social comparison theory[6] suggests that we do this as a way of creating a sort of standard or benchmark against which to measure ourselves. Some comparisons will be helpful. For example, we might feel better about our own abilities and gain a confidence boost when comparing ourselves with people just starting out in our line of work, reflecting on just how far we've come. We might compare ourselves with people whom we feel are less fortunate than ourselves, expressing both empathy towards them and gratitude for the opportunities and abilities we have. We might also compare ourselves against people whose skills and knowledge we admire, as an inspirational motivator to strive for similar achievement.

But is comparing ourselves with people we'd like to emulate always helpful, or does it risk us feeling inadequate and completely put off as a result, because we don't believe we can ever reach their level? Whether we are motivated or demotivated when we compare ourselves to others depends on our self-esteem and self-belief. Because, of course, with imposter syndrome, we doubt ourselves and do not believe ourselves capable of achieving our goals at all.

Self-efficacy theory[7] describes our belief in our personal ability to succeed in any given situation. It suggests that our self-belief can be enhanced through 'mastery experiences' in which we achieve incremental success towards goals, seeing people we identify with achieving the same goals, and receiving positive feedback regarding our performance from people we trust. However, the extent of this is reliant on our well-being. Boosting our self-efficacy is much easier when we are feeling generally happy and healthy, which means we need to learn how to manage anxieties and create positive moods first. This could be difficult in animal welfare work where there is much continual 'newness' – new animals, new clients, new teams, new facilities to learn about, new methods, new situations, for example – which potentially requires a great deal of self-belief to overcome.

So, how do we overcome imposter syndrome?

A psychologist researching high-achieving students who continued to doubt their competence regardless of consistently high academic performance[8] speculated that imposter syndrome is a static trait and therefore cannot be 'trained out'.

That doesn't sound helpful at all, though, so what's to be done?

If we believe in ourselves, we're more likely to see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats to our existing knowledge and skillset.

Self-efficacy theory suggests that to strengthen our belief in our own ability and consider ourselves worthy of our successes and achievements, rather than believe these have happened purely by chance, we need to be able to regulate our emotional stance in response to the events that happen to and around us. We can do this by reframing the way we think about things, so that we may feel differently.

Self-efficacy may be enhanced through:

- Learning how to do a specific task well, to the standard we expect to be able to do it.
- Seeing people very similar to ourselves successfully completing a task we would like to achieve.
- Having people whom we truly trust – not necessarily people with greater levels of knowledge or skill – give us constructive, positive feedback that accurately demonstrates how we are achieving our desired task, and which includes specific examples of our competency in action.
- Learning both how to minimize stress and how to boost our moods, to put us in a positive frame of mind much more open to accepting positive feedback and reflecting realistically upon our own work.

So, we can help ourselves by:

1. Remembering we're *always* learning – it's not realistic to expect to be 'perfect' and we can improve with every new experience.

Our brains are constantly receiving information that either strengthens or weakens our actions and we will learn, consciously or subconsciously, with every experience. It's how aware and open we are to applying this information helpfully that really matters.

A tendency to focus upon negatives means we naturally skirt over and dismiss the positives of experiences. If we're used to looking for the downsides we will find them, because in a skewed way it can be rewarding for us to find evidence which supports our theory that we're inferior. Calling this to our attention can help us see this bias for what it is – a construct of our minds. Of course, it isn't realistic to believe we will get everything completely right and not make any mistakes, so there will always be things we feel we could have done better or might do differently next time. Aspiring to absolute perfection puts us under an awful lot of self-imposed pressure. It's worth asking, would you put the same pressure on a friend, colleague, or an animal you're working with? We can benefit from holding ourselves with the same regard with which we observe those we care about, but for many of us, this will require conscious practice.

Nudging ourselves to constructively change our approach, the next time we doubt ourselves, influences positive learning. Mistakes will happen, always risking knocking our confidence and self-belief, so we need to take extra care to learn from, and not repeat, them. Catching ourselves beginning to self-admonish, thinking or even saying out loud things like, 'It's obvious

I really don't know what I'm doing', gives us the opportunity to nip these feelings of inadequacy in the bud and retrain ourselves to think differently. Rather than allow experiences to overwhelm us, increasing our insecurities, through rational reflection we can practise actively evidencing those things we've done that have worked out well, even though the outcome might not always be what we had hoped. We can nurture, rather than quash, our self-confidence with this approach.

We might always perceive ourselves to be inferior, feeling fraudulent and unworthy of success, but the more we deliberately point out to ourselves that, despite our misgivings, we *are* achieving, we *are* doing our best, then the greater opportunity we're taking to acknowledge our role in positively impacting the lives of others.

2. Getting out of the habit of blaming ourselves when things go wrong. Blaming ourselves, damaging our self-value and belief, can quickly become a habitual response. We can take responsibility without the damaging effects of blame through kind, considerate, explanatory reflection. When things have gone wrong, or just not quite as you intended, examine what happened and why. Debriefing is an incredibly valuable learning tool that is often overlooked. Where possible, deliberately factor in time to reflect upon lessons learned as a routine part of working practices, particularly following any new or major event or experience. Gain confidence by identifying areas you can bring within your control and influence, to prevent recurrence as a healthy future-proofing activity. You might also be challenged with accepting those areas that are beyond your influence.

Seeing yourself as just one part of a wider system, or collective range of far-reaching influences, might help you realize that there are other forces at play, which often you could even be fighting against when trying to make a difference in your role. For example, client compliance is often cited as a major cause of stress, because we often take so much responsibility for having sole 'influencing power' – the ability to inform the client what to do to help their animal. But the extent to which our clients are physically – practically and financially, mentally, and emotionally – able to carry out and maintain our recommendations will rely on so many other factors. These might even span back to their unique past, as well as their present situation. We are *just one more source of information*, and although we truly believe in what we're telling them, we cannot force them to believe, or to act even if they do believe in what we're saying. This can generate frustration and disappointment. We might feel that we've let an animal down if their owner is unable to follow our plan for them, and in many ways accepting this limitation of the service we're providing is one of our hardest lessons.

We can empathize with our clients, as there'll be things which *we* feel are important and should be done, yet we still don't, but we shouldn't assume full responsibility for outcomes where our role is that of 'messenger'. Remember you are responsible for the information you provide, but it is up

to your clients how they act upon this. We can learn methods of persuasion and influential communication, but we must remember where our limits lie.

3. Having 'mastery experiences'.
Simply put, this means taking time to practise and hone your skills, and revisiting topics of interest to find out more, so you can grow in confidence in your ability and familiarity with these. This doesn't necessarily mean embarking upon a specific course of study, as there are many ways to gain greater, deeper knowledge and understanding. As you start to dig deeper into an area, you might feel as though you're in the foothills with a mountain to climb, but every step forwards will move you closer, however long it takes! Even then, you could climb the same mountain again and again via alternative routes, learning more each time. Acknowledging that you're continually developing will help you appreciate that even repeating experiences is beneficial practically, enabling you to sharpen and hone your ability.

4. Actively acknowledging successes.
It's proposed that, because imposter syndrome is partly characterized by resistance to the positive feedback given by others, keeping records of achievements *isn't* likely to be an effective defence, potentially creating pressure to live up to these expectations.[9] This is a useful consideration for team leaders when conducting appraisals, or giving feedback intended to be constructive and positive, yet might inadvertently place people under mental pressure. However, self-efficacy theory suggests the effect of acknowledging successes can be strengthened by combining this with continual learning, debriefing, reframing, mastery experiences, and social support. The critical factor is that you reflect upon exactly *how and why* things went well. Rather than saying 'That was good', say 'That was good *because*…'.

Keeping a record of the things that go well, and new knowledge or practical skills you've applied, creates a 'go-to' place to revisit when things feel tough. For example, this could be the routine practice of keeping a reflective journal detailing your steps towards reaching a desired goal. Writing these down might be a new concept, and feel a little too unnaturally self-celebratory, so you could 'do this in your head'. But, you need to be a reliable witness for yourself! Or this could take a visual form with a photo album of 'thank you' cards or pictures of the individual animals you've helped significantly. Keeping a file of messages from people grateful for your work provides a positive read when you need a boost, reminding you that you have been helpful and made a difference.

If you're a manager or mentor, this could be something you help to compile for your team, demonstrating exactly how their skills and knowledge have made a positive impact, simultaneously showing their work has been observed and recognized.

5. Connecting with people in the same position as ourselves and observing them going through the same processes.

Talking about your experiences with others in your position or a similar one, in an open, honest, and non-judgemental way, can be both a means to sound off about things, effectively acknowledging them before letting them go, and a way to work through your insecurities. You'll be able to learn from each other's experiences, debriefing on what went well, and what didn't. This will also help you to recognize that you're not alone, normalize your feelings, and hopefully remove any panic that might arise in response. You'll also find out how others are learning to cope, or thriving, within their work environments.

Witnessing those you identify with experiencing and overcoming similar situations can be really encouraging because it enables you to identify as *someone who overcomes* and works through things. You'll also learn different approaches to animal welfare practices – things you might be inspired to implement or avoid in future. If you work within a larger team or organization, or if you're a lone worker but a member of an overseeing body, buddying up with someone in a similar role to yourself and laying out ground rules for conversations can be valuable. You might wish to seek connections with people away from your workplace to gain an outside perspective.

If talking to someone else feels too difficult, or just not right for you, you can still learn through observation via material shared by those in similar positions; for example, through media such as social forums, social media groups, or blogs/vlogs.

Accessing this kind of support network could be difficult for lone workers, or those working within teams with whom they do not feel connected. However, everyone working to improve animal welfare could be considered one whole team, so if you're feeling alone in your team or you're self-employed, remember you're still part of a wider collaborative. Support can be generated through mentorships or shadowing others within your field of work or interest, or just reaching out to someone in your field to have a chat about things with. Relevant social media groups can be a good place to connect, although take care to ensure those you choose are populated with people sharing your outlook, with administrators who emphasize and enforce adherence to group ground rules and create 'safe spaces' for support-seeking.

Just recognizing that 'feeling as though there's so much more which you don't know' is widely experienced, can be a huge relief. It can help balance a negative view of yourself, enabling you to look for the positives, and more importantly, allowing you to believe them. Remember, you always have a choice: you can believe your inner critic, or you can challenge yourself with the mantra 'I'm learning as I go, each situation I encounter is different and a learning experience, and that's the same for everyone'. Allow yourself to be excited by any new challenges your work entails, rather than be frightened by them. Take the mindset that every experience is an opportunity to learn and grow.

6. Actively seeking regular feedback from those we trust to provide us with honest, constructive information.

For those working in teams, workplace appraisal schemes such as personal development reviews can be useful, especially where a learning and development programme can be implemented to meet any learning needs identified. However, the quality of these often-dreaded sessions might well depend on the experience of the facilitator, and the resources available to them. Rather than an annual occurrence, reviews should form a continual process of development, but of course that's easier said than done for busy places and where people might not feel confident to raise concerns with their managers; for example, with remote workers who rarely see their manager, or where there is an existing strain on the relationship for whatever reason.

Asking someone to mentor you, or hiring a coach if you're able to afford this, can be a good way to obtain regular constructive feedback from an external source. You could also consider asking someone you trust to observe you undertaking a specific task, something you might be worried about doing, to give you direction on what you're doing well and where you could improve. Where you actively wish to develop, avoid overwhelming yourself by completely changing the way you do things all in one go, and implement one change at a time. Videoing yourself is another way of being able to share your experience with another person for feedback, with permission from anyone else included in the film, using this for personal evaluation only.

Think about people in your line of work whose perspective you really value and trust. There's no harm and much to be gained from reaching out for a little feedback or for tips from them that you can apply to your work. Imagine if someone came to you and asked for help. How rarely do we ever say no when someone asks for our opinion and values our response?

7. Taking care of ourselves physically and mentally.

Feeling physically fit and healthy, with the right amount of restorative sleep, sets us up for success by positioning us in a good, positive general mood to feel better about ourselves. A balanced body provides a strong foundation for balance within the mind, putting us in a better place from which to learn, to see the best in situations, to forgive ourselves for any mistakes we make along the way, and recognize these are part of the learning experience we're having throughout our lives, professionally and personally.

There are many ways to aid mental relaxation and boost positive mood, but these are likely to be very individual-specific, so it's important to find something meaningful and personal. This could take a while and might need you to try a few different things out to see how you respond, but knowing how to reset yourself means you can be confident in your ability to tap into a calming, nurturing headspace when necessary.

8. Practising these activities so they become good habits, and speaking up for others too.

A big predictor for the way we'll behave in future, is the way we've behaved in the past. So, to change our future behaviour we need to challenge and change our *present* behaviour, so this becomes our past behaviour!

Factoring these steps, or elements of them, into your working day is likely to have a positive effect. And you can apply these techniques with colleagues too; for example, gently challenging someone for using language that implies they're unworthy of their success or reveals they are doubting their own ability, pointing out to them areas where their skills and knowledge have made a positive impact. Next time you hear the words, 'Oh, I'm so useless, I'm such an idiot', stop – challenge these words. Let them prompt you into positive action.

You could be the person who helps yourself, and others, to see things differently.

Dunning–Kruger effect

> If at first you don't succeed, try doing what your dog trainer/behaviourist/veterinary team/rehoming centre adviser/mentor told you to do in the first place!

This is tongue in cheek, and could even be taken as a little smug, but why does it tickle us? Because we recognize it! We've probably all thought it at some point when frustrated that people we've advised have continued to trial their own approaches instead. But we could empathize, acknowledging that we all tend to believe we know best, even in areas beyond our expertise. If we consider that pet owners spend so much time with their animals that they are likely to consider themselves expert – whether they have studied animal behaviour, health, welfare, and husbandry or not – we can acknowledge it might be especially hard to accept ignorance. Have you ever received expert instruction yet not followed it?

While there are many factors influencing our behaviour, the Dunning–Kruger effect is an unconscious, mental bias, identified by psychologists David Dunning and Justin Kruger in 1999, in which people with a lesser ability to perform a specific task display a tendency to overestimate their ability in relation to carrying it out.[10] It's related to inability to recognize one's inability, which differs from sheer 'bravado', where we're *aware* that we're not fully competent but deliberately act as though we are, simultaneously trying to instil others' confidence in us, and our confidence in ourselves – 'fake it until you make it' (Box 7.2).

So, what's going on when we believe we're competent, but we're really not?

Dunning and Kruger suggest that this effect comes to light when people are vulnerable to two phenomena happening at the same time:[11]

Box 7.2

I'd been helping at a local dog training club and, when the instructor was on holiday, I offered to start the next puppy course for them, so they didn't have to cancel. I'd spent a few months assisting, watched many classes, read as much as I could, and taken my own dog to training classes – and we'd done well. I'd watched all the various dog-related TV shows avidly and so many YouTube videos, I felt perfectly capable of teaching owners how to train their pups.

I asked the owners to take a seat at what would be their first puppy training class, and the very first I'd run myself. I was really excited, looking forward to sharing as much as I could of what I knew within the allocated time. I thought I might even be asked to carry on and finish teaching this group for their entire course.

I started by demonstrating how to teach recall using a food, but the class quickly turned into a disaster! The first puppy I tried to bring out was really shy. They just wanted to hide behind their owner and wouldn't come away from them. Another puppy wasn't interested in food and just wanted to get to all the other puppies. Some of them wouldn't settle and were barking, grabbing and lunging at their owners, who were asking me what to do and how to respond. One pup had pulled over to see another and their leads had got tangled and wrapped around each other and that became a scuffle. I tried to repeat what I'd heard the other instructors say but it just seemed to get worse. They were all so hyped, I felt lost in the middle of the commotion. One owner looked at the brink of tears at one point because her puppy had grabbed her ponytail and yanked it.

I remember feeling as though everything was happening in a blur around me, as though I was at the centre of a whirlwind, and I just didn't know what to do. I just kept going, kept talking over the barking and hoped they'd eventually settle, but they didn't. I tried another exercise, using a treat to encourage the pups into a sitting position. Some of them were able to do it but not everyone, but I just kept telling them to keep trying or to try it at home instead, as the room was probably too distracting. I could see they didn't believe it would work.

It seemed to be both the quickest and slowest half an hour of my life, and I felt shell-shocked afterwards. I knew it hadn't gone well, wasn't anything like what I'd envisaged, and I was worried I'd be told to leave the club. I dreaded the next week as I thought none of them would turn up. They must have been overjoyed when the normal instructor arrived!

I felt like such an idiot: how on earth could I have believed I was capable of delivering that session? I really thought I had it all under control and knew what to do! It had always looked so easy and straightforward.

Now, I've been helping at the club for a couple of years and learned a lot more. I've been on dog training instructor workshops and worked hard to gain

Continued

Box 7.2 Continued.

accreditation with a membership organization. I now take classes by myself and have a helper too. I completely cringe at how awful that first puppy class was. But I tell myself it was a worthwhile experience because I learned, although sadly at the expense of the owners and puppies in the group, that I wasn't anywhere near ready to start teaching by myself. I only had one method of training each exercise, which had worked for my dog, and I didn't consider that different individuals, owners and dogs, would learn differently or need different rewards to motivate them. I had no idea about the best way to connect with owners and get my messages across in a way they could understand and put into practice. But, looking back, I can see that I thought I did – I really thought I knew all that!

I've been so grateful to the club for keeping their faith in me and helping me on the way to accreditation, and I always make sure I'm fully prepared, with multiple methods that I can adapt for each individual owner–dog partnership and that I feel confident before teaching anything new.

- People are incompetent at performing the task at hand.
- Their incompetence robs them of the ability to recognize just how incompetent they are in respect to the task at hand.

The knowledge and skillset required to achieve any task well are the same qualities one needs to realize one is not yet ready or able to achieve the task sufficiently. So, if someone lacks these abilities, they'll likely remain ignorant to their own inability.

People without the skills to carry out a specific task but influenced by this cognitive bias tend to:

- overestimate their own skill levels;
- fail to recognize when they make errors and lack specific abilities relevant to the task; and
- fail to recognize the skill and expertise of others as by far surpassing their own ability.

If someone already has an overestimated view of their own capability, in their eyes they possess expert knowledge and practical skill that elevates them above others within the same field.

Another contributing factor is that sometimes a small amount of knowledge regarding a subject can lead people to mistakenly believe that they know *all* there is to know about it. People who are proficient in one area might also mistakenly believe that their expertise applies in areas in which they are less familiar. This can be enhanced by a natural human tendency to look for patterns, even where these do not exist, take mental short cuts, and 'think quickly'. We're primed to attempt to make sense of the huge amount of sensory information our brains receive from moment to moment, and

these kinds of mental leanings we have help us to do this. It's not surprising that we find it difficult to judge how well we do from time to time, especially when we really want to do well at something. We can also be vulnerable to chance and 'fluking' something the first time we do it, and consequentially believing we would be able to achieve this result every time because our actions have been reinforced.

You might be thinking, 'Aha, yep, I can think of a few people suffering from a touch of this!' But unfortunately, we are *all* affected by the Dunning–Kruger effect, and might *all*, at times, underestimate the complexity of things we don't really know that much about! This is because, no matter how informed or experienced someone is, there will be areas in which they have less knowledge and are less able overall, especially when every animal we work with has a different and unique history, so no two experiences can ever be the same. We might also misinterpret experience as ability and generalize *one* positive outcome we've had doing a task as *the* universal way to do it, considering ourselves capable after achieving it once.

For example, you can probably bring to mind someone who has 'had dogs all their lives so they know how to manage them, thank you'. It can be difficult for animal welfare professionals when it is our clients who are suffering from the Dunning–Kruger effect, particularly when their understanding of how best to help their animal could be skewed by their previous experiences, which lead them to believe they have the skills or knowledge to deal with a specific problem when, in reality, they may not.

'I've had dogs all my life, you just need to show them who's boss, right?'

Wrong!

But when we attempt to counter someone else's personal experience, we risk alienating them by challenging beliefs that might be extremely well-ingrained, or that they've learned from someone they trust and admire. When deep beliefs are challenged people can feel threatened, even when the intention is to teach them something evidenced that might be life-changing for them and their animal. We might also become disengaged from others ourselves should someone object to something we believe in or a practice to which we're fully committed.

With the ever-evolving field of behavioural science teaching us so much more about sentience, learning, and behaviour for example, as well as veterinary medicine and surgical advancement, we might very easily come up against others within our workplace with views and approaches differing from ours. Remaining open to change and being prepared to think critically, even of oneself, and examine and accept new information in light of the way it has been identified, tested, and applied in practice, helps us avoid becoming 'set in our ways'. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to animal welfare just isn't realistic, because each animal is an individual, and each animal–owner partnership unique.

However, although we might want to be open to developments within our areas of work, there can be many reasons why we cling to what we already believe to be true. For example, this can relate to our confidence and self-esteem. We fear 'appearing to be wrong' about something, in the same way that people will continue to struggle without seeking help because they fear being seen as inadequate. However, this can also relate to simply being tired, overwhelmed, and mentally unprepared to give new information the effort it requires. This tired, low-energy, and worn-down condition can add to us feeling threatened (Box 7.3).

Box 7.3

I had an owner arrive late to class, hurrying across the field with their dog on a choke chain, yanking him back really fiercely by the neck, and shouting at him, as he pulled to get to the other dogs. I could hear the other owners gasp and felt them all looking at me to 'do something about this'.

I could see the owner was struggling to get their dog's attention and suspected they were also probably feeling embarrassed at being late to class as well as being dragged around in front of everyone else, whose dogs were all settled.

I knew everyone else was expecting me to tell this owner off and challenge them for using the choke chain, but I felt if I did that I would only add to this owner's already negative experience. I told the class we would work on loose-lead walking and gave instructions while our late arrival got settled. I set everybody off training at a good distance from each other, and approached the struggling owner to talk about how they felt about their current equipment as it didn't seem to be stopping their dog pulling and would they like to try with the flat collar and soft lead I had in the equipment box, as everyone else was doing brilliantly with these and with treats – which they could see. We swapped the choke chain (for good as it turned out!) for the flat collar and the owner worked hard to follow everyone else's lead.

The best thing about this class was that everyone clapped this owner at the end of the class, when she managed to walk her dog calmly across the field and back to her place, on a loose lead, keeping his attention and rewarding him with treats every now and again. I welled up when that happened as this owner clearly felt encouraged, enabled, and most importantly included and not judged.

I look back and think if I'd taken a different approach they could easily have walked out of the class and been put off ever trying again, sticking to yanking the choke chain. It taught me, and hopefully the rest of the class, to pause, to empathize, to assess, and meet people where they are. We can find ways to challenge people's beliefs without risking alienating them. I was so proud of this owner, and they left the class really proud of what they and their dog had achieved in a relatively short space of time. It wasn't just a few steps on a loose lead; it was a turnaround in their relationship.

When people feel under attack, they're likely to respond negatively, for example, feeling invalidated, disrespected, judged, or misunderstood, and react by becoming either passive and withdrawing, or defensive and argumentative in trying to justify their position, eventually disengaging and disconnecting. Among friends, this tends to be something that is easily overcome because of all the other established areas in which both parties agree, and the experiences that have been shared – the relationship has been much invested in. However, with a professional–client relationship, the client is at greater liberty to leave, taking their custom elsewhere. We might have indeed done similar at some point in our lives.

The reality is that *everyone* is susceptible to this effect. In fact, most of us probably commonly experience it without realizing. One study asked doctors to predict how well their treatment plans would fare next to those of their peers. When results were compared, those who had believed their treatment plans would be far more successful than those of their contemporaries were truly shocked to discover they had misjudged their own work *and* that of their colleagues.[12]

This bias regarding our own ability makes it difficult to change the way we view ourselves. Acknowledging, and then coming to terms with, the realization that we don't know as much and aren't as able to perform a practical task as well as we thought we could, can be damaging to our self-perception. We might feel embarrassed, ashamed, and foolish, as well as exposed and vulnerable, especially in front of peers or clients. Our self-confidence and sense of well-being are at risk of taking a real hit, and we know we might try to avoid feeling bad.

So, how do we overcome the Dunning–Kruger effect?

The important part of this effect is that its bias is *unconscious*. If we can bring it to our conscious awareness, and recognize and accept it for what it is even though this means feeling differently about ourselves, we'll take a step in the right direction. Learning more about our personal natural tendencies can help us catch ourselves in the act when we might be overconfident – or underconfident – in a particular area. We can then examine the wider picture and reflect upon how our current level of knowledge and skillset could be applied effectively.

Dunning and Kruger suggest that we rotate through a cycle of knowledge and confidence, in which the more experience we gain within a specific subject, the more our confidence begins to weaken because we realize there's still so much that we don't know. This can make us panic and place us in a perpetual state of anxiety over how and when we will acquire the amount of knowledge we desire, and indeed feel we need, to be able to do our work. However, once we start learning more about our chosen topic, we begin to grow in confidence again because we feel more expert and have more experience, which supports self-efficacy theory.

It's important to be aware that it's natural to feel like we 'know stuff' when we first learn things. We're enthused, energized by what we've learned,

and are operating in that positive 'buzz' of new information that we can apply to our work in improving the lives of others. While we're in the throes of excitement about a topic, the Dunning–Kruger effect is likely to make us feel we're ready to go out and share this knowledge with the world, preconceiving perhaps that what we've learned in theory we'll be able to practically apply, so our judgements about our ability are based purely in assumption rather than true accomplishment.

So, what can you do to gain a more realistic assessment of your own abilities in a particular area if you are not sure you can trust your own self-assessments?

Keep learning and practising. Instead of assuming you know all there is to know about a subject, keep digging deeper. Once you gain greater knowledge of a topic, you are more likely to recognize how much there is still to learn. You can also seek constructive advice from others on how you're doing and gain valuable feedback. It might sometimes be difficult to hear, so you've got to be prepared for that and accept this in good faith, it can provide you with valuable insight into how you're translating your knowledge into practice and can only help you become even more competent.

It's also important to think critically about your work, questioning what you know and keeping abreast of advancements. Even as we practise, develop skills, and learn more, gaining feedback along the way, we might only pay attention to things that confirm what we believe we already know. This is called 'confirmation bias' – where we're primed to pick out the information that supports our own theories and ideas, about both ourselves and topics of interest. To reduce our tendency to do this, we need to take care to challenge the things we hold dear and seek out information that challenges our thoughts. This enables us to have a much more balanced and realistic view of ourselves and those things we're so passionate about.

References

1. Henning, K., Ey, S. and Shaw, D. (1998) Perfectionism, the imposter phenomenon, and psychological adjustment in medical, dental, nursing and pharmacy students. *Journal of Medical Education* 32(5), 456–464.
2. Sakulku, J. and Alexander, J. (2011) The imposter phenomenon. *International Journal of Behavioural Science* 6(1), 73–92.
3. Villwock, J.A., Sobin, L.B., Koester, L.A. and Harris, T.M. (2016) Imposter syndrome ad burnout among American medical students: A pilot study. *International Journal of Medical Education* 7, 364–369.
4. Clance, P.R. and Imes, S.A. (1978) The impostor phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice* 15(3), 241–247.
5. Oriel, K., Plane, M.B. and Mundt, M. (2004) Family medicine residents and the impostor phenomenon. *Family Medicine* 36, 248–252.

6. Buunk, B.P. and Schaufeli, W.B. (1993) *Burnout: A Perspective from Social Comparison Theory*. CRC Press, Florida.
7. Bandura, A. (1977) Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioural change. *Psychological Review* 84(2), 191–215.
8. Villwock, J.A., Sobin, L.B., Koester, L.A. and Harris, T.M. (2016) Impostor syndrome and burnout among American medical students: A pilot study. *International Journal of Medical Education* 7, 364–369.
9. Schmulian, D., Redgen, W. and Fleming, J. (2020) Imposter syndrome and compassion fatigue among postgraduate allied health students: A pilot study. *Focus on Professional Health Education*, 21(3). https://doi.org/10.11157/fohpe.v21i3.388
10. Kruger, J. and Dunning, D. (1999) Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77(6), 1121–1134.
11. Dunning, D., Johnson, K., Ehrlinger, J. and Kruger, J. (2003) Why people fail to recognise their own incompetence. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 12(3), 83–87.
12. Violato, C. and Lockyer, J. (2006) Self and peer assessment of paediatricians, psychiatrists, and medicine specialists: Implications for self-directed learning. *Advances in Health Science Education* 11(3), 235–244

8 Developing Mind Skills

'Instead of thinking "why me?", it might be better to think "well, why not me"?'
John Durston[1]

Life happens around and in spite of you, not *to* you. It's not personal, even though it might sometimes feel that way. Remember you always have a choice in how you perceive the things which happen to you. Things aren't necessarily good or bad, things just *are*. How you think and feel about them is up to you.

To help ourselves behave in healthier ways that promote our well-being, we will need to be aware of barriers to learning, which arise in the form of mind traps (Table 8.1).

We all have feelings and thoughts about every situation we're in, both at the time an interaction is happening and afterwards, as we tend to relive things over and over. Our internal commentary accompanies everything we do, wherever we are, who we're with, what we're doing, what we're saying, and how. It's incredibly difficult to ignore and might feel impossible to switch off.

But do we champion our decisions and actions, and celebrate our successes, or dwell on what we consider our personal failures? Our internal dialogue is commonly a critical voice of self-doubt that feeds personal insecurities, pointing out our shortfalls and dissuading us from feeling we can do better. It can be all too easy to listen to and accept, particularly when we're run down, exhausted, and feeling low. We might easily talk ourselves out of doing something in case we get it wrong, embarrass ourselves, or let someone down and disappoint them.

Our brains seem to naturally attend to the negative in any situation. This appears to be an 'evolutionary hangover' from a time when doing this helped us avoid danger, increasing chances of survival. So, if we're naturally predisposed to focus on the negative, believing our negative thoughts, are we able to change the way we respond to such potentially debilitating thoughts? Thanks to the brain's incredible ability to keep developing new pathways in the nervous system that communicate messages between

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0008

Table 8.1. Common mind traps.

	Example	Explanation
Black and white thinking	'I planned to have a healthy day, but I had a biscuit, now my diet is ruined'	The 'anything less than perfect is a failure' thinking, when we only look at situations in terms of extremes – as successes or failures – where, in reality, most events call for a much more measured perspective
Mind-reading	'They think I'm incapable' 'They'd rather be dealing with someone else'	When even though we cannot read each other's minds, we believe we know what others are thinking and we assume they're thinking the worst of us
Labelling	'I'm such an idiot' 'I'm inadequate' 'They're rude'	When we talk about ourselves or others only in negative ways, using a single negative descriptor – this is both unfair and unkind because we are much too complicated to be described by one word alone, and this also risks us considering ourselves inflexible
Fortune telling	'I'll never be able to do it' 'I'll mess it up'	When we predict things will always go wrong or turn out badly
Filtering	'The person at the back looked bored, so my presentation must have been awful'	When we only pay attention to the bad things that happen but ignore the good, which prevents us from drawing a more balanced conclusion by examining the situation more broadly
Overgeneralization	'I always make mistakes' 'I'm never good at that'	When we use words like 'always' or 'never' to describe situations or events when this is not the case
Overestimating danger	'I won't be able to do it' 'I'll panic' 'I'll mess up'	When we believe that something unfounded is just about to happen – this type of language can perpetuate any anxiety we might be experiencing
Catastrophizing	'I won't be able to manage' 'No one will help me' 'I'll make a fool of myself and won't be able to get over the embarrassment' 'I've ruined *everything*'	When we imagine the worst possible outcome will happen and predict that we won't be able to cope

Continued

Table 8.1. Continued.

	Example	Explanation
Should statements	'I shouldn't feel anxious' 'I must control my feelings' 'I should be able to do this without crying'	When we tell ourselves how we 'should', 'must', or 'ought' to feel or behave when it is not how we are actually feeling or behaving – this can sustain feelings of anxiety and negative feelings about ourselves

brain and body, the answer is thankfully yes! But this will require awareness, deliberation, effort, and rehearsal.

Dual-process theory

In 2002, Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his pioneering work alongside colleague Amoz Tversky. They demonstrated that people commonly fail to fully apply a cost–benefit analysis when making complex decisions, and instead base significant decisions on past experiences, perceptions of fairness, and a desire to avoid loss.

Kahneman's dual-process theory proposes that we can think in two different ways, intuitively and rationally, and will engage in both types of thinking; however, not necessarily in equal measure (Table 8.2).[2]

We might have a natural leaning towards one way of thinking; however, both types have their place. Sometimes being able to make a quick decision about something, using type one thinking, immediately enables us to move forward with other activities and to be time-efficient with our attention. We might also begin thinking about a task in a 'type two' way but then it becomes a 'type one' activity when we master it. For example, a veterinary student might agonize over learning drug doses, yet through practice over time become fluent, able to calculate dosages without additional focused concentration or effort.

Type one thinking can be self-reinforcing because it produces a quick decision. Irrelevant of the outcome, simply having 'decided' could be accompanied by feelings of relief, hence strengthening this type of thinking as successful in having a positive emotional effect, however short-lived. The effort and deliberation required with type two thinking, on the other hand, might occasionally be experienced as painful or challenging and experienced as punishing. This makes a quick decision even more attractive. The more we practise a behaviour, the stronger it becomes, so we might easily become entrenched within a pattern of type one decision-making as a way of avoiding the perceived pain

Table 8.2. Fast and slow thinking.

Type one thinking – 'fast'	Type two thinking – 'slow'
This appears to be unconscious, automatic, and independent of working memory. Decision-making is conducted rapidly, almost as though we're in a sort of robotic 'waking sleep', acting upon decisions without considering alternatives or weighing up potential outcomes. Decision-making appears to be highly contextual, involving implicit knowledge based on our current beliefs and feelings, without reflection. When we're using type one thinking, we appear able to multi-task, carrying out activities in parallel	This appears to be triggered by a question, argument, or novel situation. Decision-making is conscious, deliberate, controlled, and depends on working memory. Decision-making appears rule-based, involving a process of reasoning through consequences and using abstract, logical thought. It requires explicit knowledge. When we're using type two thinking, we focus on one activity at a time

we might expect with type two thinking. The relevance here, is that when we are tired, stressed, and/or in pain – feelings that the very nature of our work often results in – our ability to engage in type two thinking is limited.

So how can we overcome this?

The **Situation–Thought–Consequence Framework** is a useful way to examine the relationship between what happens and our reactions (Table 8.3).[3]

It's clear that negative thoughts about a situation increase anxiety, with mental and physical outcomes. Our thoughts alone can increase our heart and breathing rates, make us sweat and feel agitated – we might even suddenly need to go to the toilet. For some, this acute physical reaction might be short lived, in direct response to the duration of situation itself. For others, however, it could be sustained, especially when repeated exposure to stressors *retrigger*, or maintain, this response, before the body has had the opportunity to return to a normal resting state. This cycle may well contribute to longer-term chronic stress-related health concerns such as continuing problems with digestion, skin issues, or sleeping patterns.

In a busy world, we might rarely take time to reflect on the outcomes and impacts of our behaviour, and whether we have well-rehearsed, almost 'default' behavioural responses to various types of situations that might benefit from being reframed. We might naturally place a lot of emphasis on examining the way *others* behave, however might find interesting patterns, and act more considerately, if we study our own behaviour (Box 8.1).

What's important in the Situation–Thought–Consequence Framework, is that we reflect upon the consequences that arise because of the *way* we respond, remembering the other party or parties within any situation will have their own Situation–Thought–Consequence activity at work. Our response contributes to the subsequent situation. For example, if your immediate

Table 8.3. Situation–Thought–Consequence Framework.

Situation What is happening or has just happened	Thought Thoughts and visual images relating to the situation	Consequence Feelings, physical reaction, communication, and actions that are the outcome of both the situation and your thoughts about it
Teaching a dog training class	It's not going well, they're not picking it up, they look bored, they'd prefer the other trainers were here today Imagining oneself making more mistakes and attributing difficulties to one's lack of talent/ aptitude for the task	Feeling anxious and depressed about one's performance, physically reacting with tension in the head and chest when thinking about teaching the next class, communicating inconsistently as doubting oneself, turning inwards and expecting things to go wrong

thought about someone relinquishing a cat for scratching furniture was to think negatively about them, you might feel frustrated and cross, which might affect the way you interact with them, *and* how they feel about you, and the information you have to offer them. This might result in a missed opportunity to educate them about successfully caring for their cat. Your actions are also likely to influence whether they recommend your services to others, affecting your professional reputation.

If we can control the way we *behave* in response to the *thoughts* we have, we might positively influence outcomes for everyone involved – the animal, our client, and ourselves. One of the good things about our complex minds is that we can *think about the way we think*, and what we think about, and we can learn to bring our own thoughts under our conscious control – but this is likely to take some practice.

Mind skills

Viewing our mental processes as skills that can be trained, enhanced, and controlled, and believing in our ability to apply these within our own lives, empowers us to think differently about the situations in which we find ourselves.

If we think about the way we live our lives, it's almost as though we have inner 'guides', principles, or rules that we naturally aspire to and according to which we try to conduct ourselves. The trouble is, we might easily allow this inner rulebook to set the criteria by which we could be tempted to judge

Box 8.1

Reflect upon these situations. Jot down the kinds of thoughts which naturally immediately spring to mind. Note how you might tend to behave in response, and whether you consider the consequences this might bring about (Table 8.4).

Table 8.4. Your thoughts and response to a situation.

Situation	Someone arrives for their appointment with their dog wearing an electric shock collar	Welcoming a client into a veterinary consulting room who has been sitting in the waiting room with their rabbit on a harness and lead	An owner has contacted the shelter to return their recently adopted cat because they are scratching the furniture
Your immediate thoughts?			
How you might tend to respond to the situation (owner/client)?			
How helpful are your immediate thoughts and default responses for you, and why?			
How helpful are your immediate thoughts and default responses for any other person or animal involved? How might your response affect their future behaviour?			

Reflect upon what could be influencing the way you tend to respond to different situations. For example, this might be what you know about the situation; whether you've been exposed to this type of situation before, and, if so, what happened and how you felt about it; your mood at the time depending on whatever else might have already happened before the immediate situation; or even your own health and whether you're feeling fully well, tired, and/or

Continued

Box 8.1 Continued.

hungry. Think about how your behaviour might be affected by the presence of other things happening in your life and whether these are present within your mind and distracting you. We might not always be aware of the emotions or drives affecting our behaviour. How aware do you feel you are of your decision-making and does this change depending in the type of situation you find yourself within?

others – another reason for bringing our thoughts into our conscious minds, to avoid being judgemental.

Many influences contribute to our inner voice, which feed into our attitudes and personalities. These might include the opinions and behaviour of our families, friends, peer groups, professional bodies we belong to or aspire to, where we're from, our demographic and our age and gender, as well as exposure to the media, literature, and politics (Box 8.2).

We might have rational and noble reasons for creating our internal guidelines, but these principles might also arise through less rational factors such as fearfulness, paranoia, and poor habits. We might feel we risk losing out in some way if we change our practices, and we might be driven by a desire to obtain immediate gratification and seek the relief, or positive feelings, associated with short-term results, just like relying on type one thinking.

When we think irrationally, we risk sabotaging ourselves through repeated use of language in a negative way. Common examples of thinking destructively include:

- awful-izing: 'If I don't finish this report today it'll be awful';
- 'unbearable' syndrome: 'I won't be able to bear it if I don't get this report finished today';
- self-condemnation, and that of others: 'If I don't get this report finished today, I'm totally useless'; 'I can't get this write-up finished because she kept interrupting me. She's so annoying.'

But if we were able to stop ourselves, disrupting the chain of these potentially habitual and well-rehearsed thought processes, and focus instead upon what is logical, we would learn to overcome poor thinking habits and be selective and preferential about our rules. This is more likely to result in us experiencing realistic and appropriate emotional and behavioural consequences (Table 8.5 and Box 8.3).

Our self-identity has been suggested to be a major factor in the stability of our behaviour, but how accurately do we perceive ourselves? An age-old interview question is 'How would your friends describe you?', but how might your response to this question differ should you be asked to describe yourself instead (Box 8.4)?

Box 8.2

If you're not already, imagine you are setting yourself up as a freelance animal welfare professional.

Imagine you are going to create an emblem that encompasses and expresses the way you feel about the work you do, presenting to your potential clients your governing principles and the way they can expect you to conduct your business. This could be a practice statement, or a fancy shield to display above the door.

If you had to use just three words to describe the values that you apply to your work, which would you choose? Why do you think you have chosen the words you have? Do you always live up to these or are they aspirational?

Table 8.5. Damaging vs preferential thinking 1.

Potentially damaging thinking	Preferential thinking
I must be the perfect dog training instructor, liked by everyone and in control of the class	I'd prefer to be highly competent but I'm still learning, so I'm bound to make some mistakes. I'd prefer everyone to like me, but I realize that I can't control whether they do or not, and there could be many reasons for that so it's more important to be true to myself. I'd prefer to influence the class to achieve but it's unrealistic to believe I can have total control over a group of individuals

The picture we have of ourselves consists of several different perceptions with varying degrees of accuracy. We might think of ourselves in various terms including the way we look, our age, gender, sexual orientation, culture, social class, race, our educational background, family origins, our professional title, leisure pursuits and preferences, our religious and political beliefs, current relationship status, or our health – we can use almost anything we identify with to describe ourselves.

When working within the animal welfare field it sometimes feels all too easy to identify so much with our profession, because this title is what enables us to provide the help and support that we know the animals, and their humans where applicable, so desperately need from us. We might become lost within our professional identity, unable to switch off from it, often further complicated by family and friends seeking advice from us outside of working hours.

Box 8.3

If we can catch ourselves when we're thinking fast without applying rational logic it helps make sense of our thoughts. Our environment is filled with many things that are designed to nudge us into type two thinking; for example, a speedbump in the road enables us to make what society has deemed as a 'better' decision than speeding.

How can we make ourselves more aware of how we are thinking so that we can challenge our thoughts and bring them under our conscious control?

Could you create a visual reminder or use a body movement, such as deliberately folding your arms or placing your hands on your cheeks when you need to spend more time thinking about something? Or talk about how decisions are made in team meetings? Perhaps implement routine 'end-of-day' reflections regarding the thoughts you've had and the decisions you've made throughout each day as part of your bedtime routine and jot them down?

The more we practise thinking and behaving in a particular way, the more strongly ingrained this activity is likely to become, and the easier it will get.

Box 8.4

One dimension of self-concept is questioning what's important and meaningful to us as individuals. Ask yourself honestly, 'What is important to me?' and 'What principles and values do I live my life by?'

Another important dimension of self-concept is that of positive and negative evaluations of your own personal characteristics. Ask yourself honestly, 'What do I dislike about myself?' and 'What do I like or love about myself?'

This might be a painful exercise but thinking deeply and rationally about how you have answered and why, and what leads you to feel this way, could highlight inconsistencies and unfairness in the way you view yourself.

We will all have perceptions about our own skills within our chosen field, which might include listening, questioning, and explaining skills for those of us working with human clients, or animal handling/training/observing and interpreting communication skills when working directly with animals.

However, these might be entirely inaccurate. We might perceive that we are more, or less, competent than we really are.

There are many factors influencing the way we feel about ourselves, including our self-confidence and self-esteem, all of which we will have our own feelings about, which again may not necessarily be an accurate or fair representation of ourselves. We might not always have an accurate idea about our own level of confidence. We might over- or underestimate our own self-confidence, and of course this could change depending on the circumstances we find ourselves within.

As we are all vulnerable to confirmation bias – the tendency to interpret new information as confirmation of our existing beliefs – we might use self-protective habits such as selective filtering or denying, dismissing, or distorting peer feedback. Our pathological critic, the inner voice that attacks and judges us, tends to perceive our skills far too negatively. We might only ever partly acknowledge the full extent of a positive piece of feedback, preferring to attend to the negative.[4]

It's also important to consider our 'client concept', as we are likely to perceive the person or animal with whom we're working with varying degrees of accuracy and bias. We should be careful not to distort our perceptions of our clients/animals simply to fit our own needs and agendas.

Consciously practising more accurate perception, including distinguishing fact from inference and supposition, is to undertake a 'reality check'. This involves systematically discriminating between unwarranted assumptions and separating out factually unsupported supposition to form evidenced conclusions. It's important, though, to remain prepared to continue to modify our conclusions should any further information emerge. We can also test our inferences to help us gather additional supporting material and strengthen our conclusions.

Specific errors to avoid include:

- Arbitrary inference – drawing conclusions without sufficient supporting evidence or in the face of conflicting evidence. For example, after an interaction with an animal that didn't go as well as planned, telling oneself, 'I'm terrible at my job'. Remember, one example is not representative of an entire career.
- Selective abstraction – where we selectively focus on a specific detail, which we could be taking out of context. For example, we might feel threatened or intimidated if the client we're talking to turns their head away from us, but they might be doing so to be able to hear better.
- Magnification and minimization – we evaluate events as far more, or far less, important than they really are. For example, we might feel an animal's future relies solely upon us, or erroneously reduce an animal's behavioural response to something inconsequential.

- Black and white thinking – where we perceive things in polarized terms, using language such as 'either/or'. For example, clients are either cooperative or not, and animals either have problems or are cured.
- Overgeneralization – where we draw a general conclusion from just one or a handful of isolated incidents and then apply this rule to completely unrelated circumstances. For example, 'All my initial sessions go well', or 'My clients never stick to the plan', when the reality may be that this is true for some but certainly not all. Again, we can see a bias towards negativity at play here.
- Personalization – where we tend to relate external events to ourselves, without any evidence to support this. For example, concluding that a client who walks past you without acknowledging you on the way into a training class or consultation must have done so because you have offended them.

We can consciously make a choice to proactively use the recognition that we are thinking badly about ourselves as a prompt to reframe our thoughts in a kinder way, just as we would for a valued friend. Table 8.6 provides a worked example of this.

Within any human–human interaction, whether personal or professional, there are always at least three conversations happening simultaneously – the outward public conversation, your internal private monologue, and the private internal self-talk of the other person. We cannot know if this is a uniquely human phenomenon; however, the very presence of our inner voice suggests it serves some purpose, which we might assume to be evolutionarily advantageous. Perhaps it offers us an ability to express, inside the relative

Table 8.6. Damaging vs preferential thinking 2.

Potentially damaging thinking	Preferential thinking
I forgot to add into the notes that the dog's behaviour worried me. The next person who handles that dog is going to get bitten and it'll be my fault. I'm not cut out for this	I forgot to add into the notes that the dog's behaviour worried me. I can write myself a note to add that in at the next available opportunity and try to get into the habit of always including behavioural observations when writing notes immediately after handling any animal. This is something I can get better at doing and will help other people communicate with the animal as well next time, but they have ultimate responsibility for their interactions. There are always going to be things I can do to improve the way I do my job and, although I might sometimes wish I'd done things differently, I do always try my best. I'm working hard to be as proactive as possible within my role

safety of minds, those things we feel inhibited to express verbally and publicly, because of societal pressures to conform to others' expectations and a desire to conduct ourselves within the rules that society has created for itself, and within our own chosen principles. It might help us to maintain relationships in that respect.

Our inner voice might play a valuable part in enabling us to live our lives compassionately, and exert greater control over our own behaviour because we are able to internalize our feelings. We might behave very differently were we not able to release mental tension through our inner voice! However, the downside is that we can all too easily turn upon ourselves and allow it to become a pathological critic.

Negative self-talk refers to anything we say, or fail to say, to ourselves that contributes to us then experiencing unavoidably negative feelings, which can result in unpleasant physical reactions. This might then filter into our communications and behaviour, creating a pervasive negative mood. When we create destructive statements that imply finality or weakness about ourselves and our capabilities, such as 'I can't cope' or 'I'm not sure I'll be able to…', we risk consequentially becoming less in control of our feelings and thoughts. This also risks us communicating in an explicitly damaging way.

We might talk about ourselves with a negative bias because it supports our notion of ourselves that we aren't capable, aren't worthy, aren't strong – almost as a way of supporting these misconceptions we hold regarding ourselves. Possibly, believing this about ourselves could even be thought of as a way of protecting ourselves from taking risks that might not work out. Negative self-talk could be seen as an avoidance strategy, because believing it means it isn't worth trying something new for fear of getting something wrong, failing, or exposing vulnerability to others. We might not necessarily be aware that this is how or why we are using negative self-talk.

From day to day, most people use a mixture of negative and positive self-talk; however, these might often be out of balance. Although our inner voice comments on our conduct in many ways, 'coping self-talk' refers specifically to 'instructing yourself to better experience specific situations'.

With coping self-talk we can help ourselves restore a sense of inner calmness and clarity. We can examine our goals and coach ourselves into using appropriate and helpful communication. This can have a beneficial effect on our confidence because we can acknowledge our current strengths and the support factors available to us, as well as previous relevant successes.

We are also able to make a distinction between 'coping' – doing the best we can from moment to moment – and achieving perfection. Coping emphasizes competence rather than perfection, which, depending upon other variables, might be unattainable. Therefore, if we continue to strive for perfection, we are likely to always feel unaccomplished, potentially resulting in perpetual disappointment. With continual pressures to achieve, meet targets, help animals, and make a difference it might feel as though

we're under constant pressure to be perfect. We might even have created unrealistic expectations for ourselves. Exercising coping self-talk is a way of mentally stabilizing ourselves through logical rationale and supporting ourselves with the helpful, realistic advice we would provide for a friend. We benefit from becoming friends with ourselves, but this is not always easy when we don't feel ourselves worthy of friendship. Table 8.7 provides an example of reframing negative coping self-talk in a much kinder, more realistic, and empowering way.

We have a natural need to explain, to find reasons for the things that happen to us and to others. For example, we might regularly attribute good and poor performances to any of the following:

- prior experience;
- your natural ability;
- the amount of effort you put in;
- any anxiety you felt about the task;
- the degree of difficulty of the task;
- the competence of your supervisor/teacher/instructor/mentor/colleagues/client;
- the adequacy of your training environment;
- the opportunities, or lack of, to practise skills;
- competing demands from other tasks;
- financial worries;
- work pressures;

Table 8.7. Damaging vs preferential thinking 3.

Potentially damaging thinking	Preferential thinking
This is really important, but will it go okay? Will they be able to tell I'm new/inexperienced/out of my depth? What if I can't help them? They might not want to hear what I've got to say, how will I manage them? My supervisor will hear all my mistakes	This is really important, so it's expected and understandable that I'll be nervous. I am capable of talking to them and gathering information, and I know where to seek help if I need it so I can cope with this situation. I can do my best. I do not have to be perfect, and I am learning all the time so I can learn from this opportunity too. I can't control how they're going to feel about me, but I can make it clear that I want to and will help them as best I can. I can start with a well-rehearsed opening statement and use active listening skills. I do not have to control everything that happens and, rather than try to do so, I can simply respond honestly to the information they give me, even if that means referring them to someone else. If that happens, I can still learn from this interaction

- relationship pressures;
- the extent of your support network;
- your home environment;
- your health;
- luck/fate; or
- anything else.

These explanations can influence how we think and feel about ourselves and our past, present, and future, as well as how we physically react, behave, and communicate.

A lot of the time the work we do involves courage – courage to accept times when outcomes are not as we'd hoped or expected. The sad reality for some of us working in animal welfare, though, is that we experience a sense of fatality and futility; for example in situations where we believe certain outcomes preventable. This is another reason why we might be quick to avoid the potential pain involved in self-examination following failures, as well as a focus on the negative. When things do go wrong for us, it's worth reframing this as just not yet finding the right way forward. Where applicable, we can help ourselves by preparing to fail really well, and view the struggle of being unsuccessful as part of our route to finding the solution.

Very often, we might make explanatory errors, such as projecting blame onto others. Again, this might be a skewed attempt at coping through deflection, redirecting attention away from ourselves, avoiding examining our own involvement. It might simply feel easier for us to wholly or partially explain causes inaccurately. But there is fallout. We've likely all witnessed the impact of unresolved personal issues negatively intruding into the workplace, whether our own or those of colleagues.

We might easily succumb to the temptation of seeking explanations that absolve us from any personal responsibility or further scrutiny. This could arise due to emotional fatigue and depletion of mental energy, but could also be a habit. We need to make sure we are always seeking accurate explanations, not excuses.

Assuming personal responsibility for our own work output, and the skills we bring to our roles, is aided by an ability to explain causes accurately and, where possible, address relevant considerations constructively.

It's important not to feel frightened of explaining why events have happened in the ways that they have or accepting that we all have a part to play in the events of our own lives. We can make explanations without judgements. There is value in examining our own ego, being able to step outside of ourselves and take responsibility for our own actions and the things within our direct control.

Being able to predict what will happen and when generally leads to a sense of control, which is likely to reduce anxiety. We can both positively and negatively influence the consequences of our actions and decision-making,

including our thoughts, feelings, physical reactions, behaviour, and communication – and those of others. Consequential thinking entails thinking forward and creating expectations about what is likely to happen if we behave in a particular way.

However, we might have the potential to overthink and overcomplicate. Harmful anxiety is elicited through excessive preoccupation with dangerous outcomes. If we expend too much time and energy attempting to predict consequences, especially where constructive information is limited, we might be rendered completely indecisive. If we continually burden ourselves with preoccupation relating to the outcomes of our behaviour and communication, we might risk losing all spontaneity within our lives.

Each of us creates expectations about the interactions we'll have with others, predicting either positive or negative consequences around our own and others' behaviour. Sometimes these are accurate; however, other times we may over- or underestimate the probability of potential outcomes (Box 8.5).

Time spent fretting over potential outcomes, including mispredicting them and/or their impact, can be considered ill-spent, particularly when our imaginations come into play, and we make fear-based predictions around 'worst-case scenarios'. When we feel vulnerable and threatened, we can be very tempted to catastrophize and seek confirmation of our inner fears. It helps to remember we always have a choice over how we think about things. We can be kind to ourselves by challenging ourselves to consider fully informed predictions only, using existing evidence to help us, so that we can assess the extent of our ability to positively influence these outcomes

Box 8.5

Reflect upon how much time you spend thinking 'But what if…?' and how often the outcome you were worried about ended up happening; and, if it did, was it as bad as you expected?

When you find yourself thinking 'What if…?' challenge yourself to think 'Well, so what if…?' instead. Remind yourself that you have a choice in how to respond should the very thing you are worried about come to life.

This method of turning around the potential for creating negative expectations is akin to asking yourself 'Well, why not me?' instead of 'Why me?'. We might feel naturally burdened by the events life challenges us with; however, we can always remind ourselves that life is neither good nor bad. Things happen and it is up to us how we feel about and respond to them. We can perceive something as a negative event but still have control over the way we respond to it. We have a choice in the way we think about things, and making a constructive, optimistic choice can positively impact our feelings and behaviour.

and plan for these eventualities without panicking. Again, this will take practice, because doing so means confronting our tendencies to feel and react in certain ways, and might involve us 'decluttering' our minds, learning that our feelings are unvalidated and unfounded, which could be a difficult process. Having courage, recognizing, and accepting that you are worthy of self-kindness here means you can always qualify those 'What if…?' thoughts with, 'Well, I will deal with that outcome to the best of my ability, because that is all I can do and what I always try to do'.

You might have expectations about your own ability to cope, as well as your competency. These are likely to influence how confident you feel and how well you communicate. When working with animals and people, having a complete theoretical understanding of *what* to do to help is not enough – we need to understand *how* to action and practically apply this knowledge. It takes repeated experience over time to build self-confidence, so it's not realistic to expect to be good at something right away. But this can feel challenging when you are surrounded by colleagues who appear so naturally proficient. Some people might appear naturally dextrous or talented in a certain area, in numeracy, emotional intelligence, or animal handling, for example; however, with practice, we can *all* improve our own skills. This is where we need to dig deep; have grit and faith that life is about a continual drive towards mastery.

Expectations about your own level of competence also influence how much effort you're likely to expend on practising or application, and how long you might persist in the face of setbacks and difficulties. People who judge themselves to be insufficiently competent in dealing with the demands of their skills group may exaggerate their personal deficiencies, become quickly disheartened, give up, and withdraw when faced with adversity. On the other hand, those with a strong sense of personal competence and self-belief, although they may be temporarily demoralized by a setback, are more likely to remain task-focused, intensifying their efforts when their personal performance falls short of their self-imposed goals.

We see examples of this in the animals we work with. For example, dog trainers might observe some dogs become anxious if they can't solve the puzzle of exactly how to behave to access their reward, possibly even withdrawing completely. More confident and robust individuals appear to cope much better when they do not receive reinforcement as expected, making more effort as a result. Among other factors, a dog's reinforcement history and what they've learned through previous experiences will play into this confidence, as will their relationship with the trainer. It's clear that, for ourselves and animals, being able to accept frustrating experiences when expectations aren't met, while maintaining a consolidated effort to gain the available reinforcement rather than withdrawing from the challenge, will be successful. However, for some, this might depend on the immediacy of the reinforcement and just how much desire the individual has for it.

Whether we're aware or not, we often make predictions about our ability to accomplish a certain level of performance, basing our level of engagement on how well we think we might do and whether it is worth our effort. However, the difficulty with predicting is being able to do so accurately. Of course, being able to predict how we will perform within different situations is useful, because it can help us identify where we might have gaps in our skillset or require additional support before we start, as well as helping us avoid taking on something beyond our capability. What's vital is that we practise taking conscious control over the way we create expectations. Table 8.8 demonstrates how to counter negative expectations about oneself with a realistic and much more positively framed, reassuring perspective.

The effect of impact bias

An ability to make accurate predictions can be helpful in reducing our anxieties; however, we tend to overestimate the emotional impact of a future event, both in terms of intensity and duration.[5] We can have an impact bias for positive things, but we have far more of an impact bias for negative outcomes. The impact bias for negative predictions is much worse than we think; however, our predictions about the amount of stress we will experience are generally false, and where we *do* experience significant distress as expected, this is often much more short-lived than we predict. There's no doubting or detracting from the intensity of feeling following a traumatic event; however, most of us tend to overestimate how long this feeling will remain with us. In a nutshell, things are generally never as bad as we think they will be.

Table 8.8. Damaging vs preferential thinking 4.

Potentially damaging thinking	Preferential thinking
I'm not ready or good enough to do this. I'll make mistakes and the animal will suffer because of me. I'll let everyone down. Someone might complain. I'll feel awful about it	I can expect to feel nervous as I'm still learning about how to handle this type of interaction and, in reality, I am still relatively inexperienced at this specific activity. This could be a helpful learning experience for me, and I am likely to be able to offer something of benefit to the animals and people involved. I don't know yet whether I might require further assistance but, if I should, I will ask for it because I am driven to provide the most appropriate service available for the animals and people involved because of my desire to help. This might be frustrating for myself, the animals, and people involved, but being sure of taking an appropriate course of action outweighs this feeling and will set us all up for a more positive outcome

So, why are we so apparently poor at making predictions? Possibly because we have limited experience of extremely negative events so haven't had the opportunity to find ways to deal with them, and indeed that we can. However, no one is suggesting we experience horrible things repeatedly just so we can make more realistic predictions! And where this has been investigated, repeated negative experiences that arise from specific failures do not appear to improve the accuracy of future predictions.[6]

There are two psychological biases at play here – 'focalism' and 'immune neglect':

- Focalism is the tendency to think just about one event, whether good or bad, dismissing other things that happen.[7]
- Immune neglect is being unaware that we do have a natural tendency to adapt to and cope with negative events.[8]

We are a lot more resilient than we might realize, though we might often tell ourselves, 'I just can't deal with this' or 'I can't bear it', when we are actually coping and, to some extent, continuing to function.

Revisiting the Situation–Thought–Consequence Framework

We can use this framework in a more analytical way through mind skills that challenge:

- *rules* – I need to be seen to get it right, I must do well right away;
- *perceptions* – I'm bad at my job, I'm not a good team leader, I'm not prioritizing the animal;
- *self-talk* – I might not be able to do it, I'm anxious, I'm going to get it wrong, it's all down to me;
- *explanations* – I can't remember the training, I haven't done this before, I haven't had the opportunity to practise; and
- *expectations* – I'll stuff it up, I'll prolong the anaesthetic, everyone will think I'm rubbish, I'll lose my credibility.

Table 8.9 presents alternate worked examples to demonstrate the potential difference in outcomes of approaching the same task with positive and negative thoughts about doing so and how it might pan out.

To create mind skills relating to rules, perceptions, self-talk, explanations, and expectations we need to:

- catch ourselves, acknowledge when these types of thoughts enter our minds – it might help to make a note, whether mentally or on paper, to observe for patterns in the way we think about different situations or regular occurrences;
  - ask yourself whether you noticed any of the perceiving mind traps;
  - look out for patterns in your thinking and always be prepared to challenge yourself;

Table 8.9. Completed Situation–Thoughts–Consequence Framework.

Situation What is happening or has just happened	Thought Thoughts and visual images relating to the situation	Consequence Feelings, physical reaction, communication, and actions that are the outcome of both the situation and thoughts about it
Responsible for a patient who requires dental radiography using the brand new portable dental X-ray machine, which I've just received training on but haven't used yet	This is so nerve-wracking, I'm not really sure how to use it, the training was a few days ago, and the only person who's used it so far struggled. I pride myself in doing things really well and for the patient it's important to get it right first time so we don't need to re-expose them to radiation, plus I'm in charge of the team so everyone will be expecting me to get it right too and I need to know what I'm doing so I can help others. If I mess up it'll prolong the anaesthetic unnecessarily and I just don't feel confident. Plus, I'm working with someone else who missed the training so it's all on me	Feeling nervous and anxious, elevated heart rate, sweating, agitation, overthinking/not thinking clearly and becoming preoccupied with small details, being hesitant and reluctant, possibly using curt language or not listening to others with full attention, becoming flustered, dropping things, affecting the confidence and behaviour of others, feeling inadequate, losing confidence
Responsible for a patient who requires dental radiography using the brand new portable dental X-ray machine for the first time	This is nerve-wracking because I haven't done it before, but I have had some training and I have been taking radiographs for a good many years now successfully – this is just a new way of doing it but involves the same physics that I've been working with for years. Other people whose work and ability I respect have struggled before me, which just shows that using something new is just that – new – and will require practice for everybody. I'd prefer to get it perfect first attempt, but I'm prepared for this not being the case because I am learning and it is in the patient's best interests to obtain a radiograph of diagnostic quality, even though that might require subsequent re-exposure. As always, I will take all measures to ensure the patient's anaesthetic is as safe and smooth as possible and appropriate monitoring is in place to guide me. I can help my inexperienced colleague by preparing myself by reviewing all instructions before we start and explaining that I have not used this machine before so it might require a longer time and assistance if necessary. They will be pleased that I am trying my best. If I need help, I can ask the trainer, and this will demonstrate to my team that asking for help when you need it is the right thing to do	Feeling nervous but confident that people will not be expecting me to be successful at my first attempt using a new piece of kit and that I can seek support if necessary. Feeling calmer because I am still putting my patient's interests first, breathing normally, able to concentrate, comfortable to try and prepared for the challenge from which I will learn, and happy to share this experience with the rest of the team. My team will learn that I am comfortable asking for help and this will position me as a role model – they will also have the opportunity to help me and feel good about being able to do so

- test the reality of your initial perception, where applicable replacing it with a more realistic version – you could use positive examples from previous experiences in similar circumstances to help you;
- think about what your expectations are in relation to your goals, performance, and the outcomes of your work, each task in turn, then reflect on how realistic these are;
- think about the consequences of applying the demands of thought processes such as 'must/ought/should' to our feelings, physical reactions, communication, and behaviour;
- practise changing the way you think, acknowledging insecurities but not allowing these to negatively influence your behaviour – it might help to write these out; and
- celebrate successes – keep records of times when things have gone particularly well and reflect upon why and what the specific set of conditions were that resulted in the positive outcome.

Some people tend to *picture* themselves messing things up, or imagine conversations and relationships breaking down in a very visual way. If you tend to think graphically you can use the same techniques to create positive mental images of yourself behaving as you'd like to before any situation. For many people, actively visualizing their goals and creating an inner mental picture, as though watching a film of one's own life inside one's mind, can be a very helpful practice, but still requires effort and rehearsal for it to become reliably supportive.

The Zeigarnik effect and mental loops

In the 1920s, Russian psychologist Bluma Ziegarnik was studying memory and became interested in understanding why people seem to be able to remember unfinished or interrupted tasks much better than completed ones. It appeared that undertaking a task creates mental tension that gains traction within our minds, keeping it present within our short-term memory.[9] This tension eases as soon as we finish the task, so we quickly forget about it. However, if the task is simply interrupted, and temporarily paused, the mental tension involved persists and the task will be easily remembered. The ongoing pressure is almost like a bungee cord, bouncing thoughts of the task back and forth into our consciousness. This will be severed with completion of the task, so we no longer pay it any attention.

The challenge with much animal welfare work is that we are constantly faced with multitasking, feeling as though we're pulled in many directions at once. We might create mental loops where thoughts about these tasks swirl around and, even when we are faced with another, more urgent task, we find it hard to ignore those thoughts that keep bouncing back into our attention. Our minds very quickly become debilitatingly overloaded.

We can think of our minds as like a long passage in a stately home, a never-ending hallway with several doors leading off it on both sides, each opening into a room that represents one of the various tasks we have been given or set for ourselves. All the while we're working on a task, its door remains open so we can easily access it from the hallway whenever we have time, and easily retrieve the information regarding it. Once we've finished a task, we shut the door and may never need to revisit that 'room' again. Of course we can always go back, if necessary – we have the control to do so should we wish – but it might sometimes feel as though we've lost the key, or the door is heavy, depending on what we've shut away inside.

However, the more tasks we are faced with simultaneously, the more open doors within the hallway of our minds, and the more information attracting our attention at the same time. This can be helpful, because the information we need to complete the task is readily available for us; however, the more we are trying to do at once, the more these various tasks might detract from others or disrupt others. It can be incredibly mentally draining for us to have such a myriad of open 'mental loops'. This can be a significant factor associated with burnout because the cluttering of our minds with unresolved thoughts impedes our ability to mentally recover.

Closing mental loops

This might bear more relevance applied to the administrative aspects of animal welfare work, as it is about bringing those things that we *can* under our own control, so that we are able to let go of unfinished tasks, choosing to leave them in a state of temporary closure when we need to prioritize an alternative task. Proactively making the choice to do this involves training ourselves to close those doors – but not lock them! – so we can access the information we need again when we are ready to.

This helps to bring these thoughts under our control; we can choose when to turn our attention to them and when to put them to one side. We all have different times during the day when we are likely to produce our best work or be better placed to focus our attention, so plan major tasks around these times when you are able to. This sense of empowerment and ownership adds to our self-efficacy and autonomy, reinforcing our ability to control our thoughts rather than be at their mercy.

We might not always be able to exert a consistent amount of control over the tasks required of us; however, we can help ourselves by not unnecessarily complicating things. In workplaces, and for teams, this might mean creating standard operating procedures for routine and much-repeated practices. Implementing systems so processes are easily repeated can reduce stress and increase efficiency. Documenting processes accurately means you needn't rely on your memory, plus you can easily retrieve information when you require it, lightening your mental

load. You could also consider creating templates for commonly repeated administrative tasks, such as report writing or information sharing with clients, which could be personalized as necessary. Making the work you have to do as easy as you can affords you the path of least resistance, reducing the risk of mental friction.

Creating a reliable system that you are comfortable using allows you to reliably capture your to-do list, rather than placing additional pressure on yourself to remember everything in the utmost detail. This could be done electronically or on paper, whether this is keeping a perpetual virtual list or 'desk diary' with tasks allocated for specific days/times – whatever will work best for you.

If your work is largely practical and you are regularly interrupted due to the unpredictable nature of working with animals, try 'temporarily closing mental loops' by creating a 'shut-down' routine for them and practising it. If someone needs you to assist them with something, take just a few seconds to pause and tell yourself you will let go of the task at hand and return to it when you are able. If it helps you to jot current thoughts or plans down first, then do so. Technology can also be incredibly useful here, as you can create a voice message for yourself, use a 'notes' function on your phone, or send yourself an email with your reminder as the subject.

As well as using shut-down routines to compartmentalize tasks from moment to moment across each working day, they are also useful at the end of the day. Shut-down routines can help you to mentally detach from anything unresolved and step away from work into your private time without bringing work-related tasks with you.

For example, Barack Obama was reported as employing an official 'wardrobe organizer', to remove the additional task of having to select what to wear from one working day to the next. That's a great example of how incorporating mental shortcuts can buy you back personal time – if you can afford someone to choose your clothes for you! But there's a lot to be said for preparing for things in advance so they're ready to go when you need to alleviate mental strain. This involves forward planning, but it's a worthwhile habit to get into for the time and stress it might save (Box 8.6).

Nudge Theory

In 2017 Richard Thaler won the Nobel Prize for Economics for his work on Nudge Theory and 'choice architecture'. Put simply, nudging involves introducing changes to the environment that should influence people to choose to behave in a specific, desired way – *without* forcing their hand by removing choice altogether. If we create conditions that make it very easy for people to behave just the way we want them to, they'll be much more likely to behave that way organically, *without even thinking* about it.[10] And, if behaving in a particular way is easy, it's more likely to become a habit.

Box 8.6

One of the challenges faced by many working within the animal welfare sector is the amount of repetition involved in the information we're required to share with clients, maintaining the same level of enthusiasm when interacting with the first client or group of the day and the last. Even though we might be completely invested in the information we're disseminating, many factors might affect our delivery. Awareness of this might then elicit feelings of guilt or shame that we have not provided a consistent service to all our deserving clients.

Think about all the times when, in communication with clients and/or pet owners, you feel you're repeating yourself, sharing the same or similar information. To gain a real insight you could spend a week making a note of these as they happen, or if you're working within a team select a few people to do this so lists can be cross-examined.

Set some time aside to list the types of information you are repeatedly sharing and consider whether you could present these in alternative ways, buying yourself some time back and freeing up mental energy. For example, could you create handouts, blogs, vlogs, social media posts, or webpages covering important information in support of your verbal communication? Could you create client information videos to share with clients, demonstrating certain practical elements of the advice you're repeatedly giving?

There is no doubt that creating a bank of informative materials and resources ready to share with clients requires time and effort, including considering how best to present these from a user-friendly perspective. However, the initial outlay should pay off in the future. You could rank your list and aim to create just one piece a week so that, over the course of a month or so, you'll build a pool of material at a sustainable, manageable pace.

There are also many incredibly useful publicly available resources, so creating a shareable list signposting to websites or reading material that you personally feel comfortable recommending for your clients to access could provide another mental shortcut for you. You could add an introduction explaining why you are recommending these sources and what your approach to your area of work is. This can help your clients understand your perspective, which could help to strengthen your position as a figure of trust for them, as they feel more connected with your outlook.

For example, we might take it for granted that our clients understand we use rewards to strengthen behaviour, but we might not have taken the time to explain *why* we use these methods in detail. If you work for yourself or manage a service, you could consider creating a 'Welcome to…' handout or email template, outlining your ethics, values, and mission statement if you have one. This is also likely to help clients to bond with you from the offset and generate positive affect.

Nudge Theory taps straight into Kahneman's notion of type one and type two thinking, proposing that environmental cues can automatically direct us into type one thinking, where we make quick decisions based on judgemental shortcuts. A commonly cited successful example of a 'nudge', designed to influence healthy eating behaviour, is the placement of fruit and other healthy snacks right next to supermarket checkouts. This environmental change was quickly seen to result in the desired, positive effect on consumer behaviour.

Animal trainers and behaviourists well know that the way choices are presented can determine an animal's response and are well practised in making environmental changes to ensure the 'right choices' – those that *they* wish the animal to make – are suitably reinforcing for the animal they are aiming to influence. We refer to this as 'setting the environment' up for success, a form of 'nudging' the animal into behaving as we would like them to – placing the comfiest bed, food, and all their toys in the kennel we want them to go into, for example.

Nudging others should be considered with a little caution, however, as the way you might be nudging someone into behaving differently could be deemed unethical if they are not aware of their choices and is potentially unfair manipulation without their consent. If a supermarket removed *all* foods that might be considered unhealthy to nudge people towards healthy choices, this would affect shoppers' rights to choose what to eat. Placing the unhealthy foods in the furthest corner to require shoppers to put in additional effort to reach them, over the easier option of the healthy foods right by the entrance and the checkouts, still provides them with a choice. The key principle is that you don't eliminate other options, but guide people into making the choice you feel is best for them.

Being mindful of some of the mental biases that Nudge Theory works upon can help us recognize when we are behaving perhaps habitually or automatically, in accordance with these natural biases, and challenge ourselves to think and behave differently.

- **Anchoring bias** – this is when we base our views about a topic on the very first piece of information that we learn about it, and make subsequent judgements based on that piece of information alone.
- **Sunk cost fallacy** – this is when we continue behaving in a specific way because we feel we've invested too much in it, such as time, energy, money, or reputation, for example, to risk doing anything differently.
- **Present-moment bias** – we tend to make decisions based in the immediate future, the here and now, so tend to place higher value on short-term but immediate rewards over larger, yet delayed, longer-term rewards. This is commonly applicable in relation to health where we do things that feel good right now rather than commit to doing something that we will not see the benefits of for some time, such as weight loss or strength training.

Although there has been more research examining the effect of mental bias, rather than the act of 'unbiasing', it does appear that we can help ourselves do so by considering the opposite and an alternative strategy.[11] The biggest challenge to this, though, appears to be the fact that we generally believe ourselves untouched by these types of biases – we believe they affect other people, but not us!

If, when making decisions or choices, we remain aware of the types of biases potentially influencing our judgement, we can critique our thought processing to make more reasonable and balanced decisions. Practising doing so will help this become something we naturally do more often.

We can also employ nudging techniques for ourselves, creating prompts that encourage us to perform specific behaviours which we might *intend* to do, but don't actually get round to. For example, if we're trying to make dietary changes, preparing our menu for the next week in advance so we know what we're going to eat and when, buying only those ingredients we need, and displaying the meal diary visually, means we're more likely to follow our choice. And if we share our plans with someone we trust, and/or have someone make this change alongside us, we're even more likely to complete our plans. We'll still be at liberty to pop out and pick ourselves up something off-menu; however, the easier we make the behaviour we wish to do, the more likely we are to stick to it.

The power of checklists

American surgeon and public health researcher Atul Gwande has written extensively, from the viewpoint of his personal surgical experience, about the benefits of checklists in aiding experts to meet their responsibilities. His work resulted in a global introduction of anaesthetic checklists, which aided preparation of human patients for and during surgery, significantly reducing unnecessary stress encountered should additional materials be required suddenly, or there be any unexpected problems, and, most importantly, reducing preventable errors. Gwande distinguishes between errors of pure ignorance and simply not knowing enough, and those made through improper use of the knowledge we do have – which he suggests defines failure in our modern world.[12] The significance of this is that with knowledge comes responsibility (Box 8.7).

Simply put, our minds don't enjoy feeling bad, so we use a variety of cognitive strategies to prevent this and help ourselves feel better, some of which are bad for us in the longer term. We can rationalize, however, to give ourselves, and the events we experience, meaning and reason, but employing self-aware strategies to overcome biases requires a significant amount of effort and rehearsal before these become habitual and feel natural. It has been suggested, though, that the positive impact of practising these intentional, effortful activities is more significant than the positive impact of our

Box 8.7

Creating checklists as mental shortcuts can save time and ensure you are fully prepared in the way you always mean to be for specific tasks.

Think of various activities that are repeated regularly throughout your working week. You can probably list a few tasks that you usually carry out methodically; however, when you are under any additional pressure you might rush through them, meaning you leave various bits out and then realize later, become anxious, and either work late to try to catch up, or worry about not having handed over the full information to your colleague or client, for example.

Spend time listing the individual steps required for you to complete the task in full, as you would wish to when working at your absolute best. Place these in order and create a table or tick list for use when you next come to carry out these tasks. From cleaning a particular environment, to report writing, to setting up a veterinary surgical suite, to preparing for a dog training class, checklists can make overall processes smoother and are also available should you need to hand over responsibility to someone else in your absence, knowing they'll complete the task to the desired standard.

They also help when you are under pressure because you can use them to help you prioritize which stages of the task to do first, and which – depending on what the task is, of course – you might be able to pick up the next day. It might sound like a chore, but once done the benefits gained are plenty as the evidence finds this significant in the prevention of unwanted errors.

genes or environment.[13] Such is the power of our minds – if we can catch ourselves when we're being unkind to ourselves and bring our minds under our conscious control. This ties in nicely with philosopher Marcus Aurelius' proposition that 'life's happiness depends on the quality of your thoughts'.[14]

References

1. In a conversation with J.D. Durston (1981).
2. Kahneman, D. (2012) *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Penguin, London.
3. Trifocus Fitness Academy (2019) Define the STC framework in life coaching. Available at: https://trifocusfitnessacademy.co.za/blog/define-the-stc-framework-in-life-coaching (accessed 3 September 2021).
4. McKay, M. and Fanning, P. (2000) *Self-Esteem*, 3rd edn. New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, California.
5. Wilson, T.D. and Gilbert, D.T. (2013) The impact bias is alive and well. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 105*(5)*, 740–748.
6. Gilbert, D.T., Driver-Linn, E., and Wilson, T.D. (2002) The trouble with Vronsky: Impact bias in the forecasting of future affective states. In: Barrett,

L.F. and Salovey, P. (eds) *The Wisdom in Feeling: Psychological Processes in Emotional Intelligence*. The Guilford Press, New York.
7. Wilson, T., Meyers, J.M., Gilbert, D.T. and Axsom, D. (2000) Focalism: A source of durability bias in affective forecasting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78(5), 821–836.
8. Gilbert, D.T., Pinel, E.C., Wilson, T.D., Blumberg, S.J. and Wheatley, T.P. (1998) Immune neglect: A source of durability bias in affective forecasting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75(3), 617–638.
9. Weiner, B. (1985) *Human Motivation*. Springer, New York.
10. Thaler, R.H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.
11. Rozin, P. and Royzman, E.B. (2001) Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5(4), 296–320.
12. Gwande, A. (2011) *The Checklist Manifesto: How To Get Things Right*. Profile, London.
13. Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K.M. and Schkade, D. (2005) Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology* 9(2), 111–131.
14. Aurelius, M. (2006) *Meditations*. Hammond, M., translator. Penguin Classics, London.

Further reading

Eagleman, D. (2015) *The Brain: The Story of You*. Canongate, Edinburgh.
Greenberger, D. and Padesky, C.A. (1995) *Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think*. Guildford Press, New York.
Jarret, C. (2011) *The Rough Guide to Psychology: An Introduction to Human Behaviour and the Mind*. Rough Guides, London.
Kahneman, D. (2012) *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Penguin, London.
Thaler, R.H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.

9 Psychology Models, the Intention–Behaviour Gap, and Forming New Habits

> Act now, feel bad about it later! People generally just do whatever's easiest at the time, then regret their actions.

Just think about that – do you agree? Do we sometimes all do what's most convenient even though we might prefer to be doing something else? How often do we find ourselves wanting, and indeed really meaning to do something, but just not doing it? Do we sometimes take the 'easy way out' just to avoid the strain involved in making a much more considered decision because we're fatigued or just not in the right headspace to devote the time and effort required to think harder about something? When we talk to owners about how to help their animals, they might want to, they might mean to, but how often do they actually follow our advice completely?

Humans are creatures of habit and behaviour can be very resistant to change:

- We try to achieve maximum gain for minimum effort.
- We don't like being told what to do.
- We often ignore information and warnings.
- We often look to the short term rather than the long term.

There are many theories/models that help us understand human behaviour; some explain what *drives* behaviour, while others help us understand *how* behaviour is changed. A word of warning, though, there is no single model that provides the full picture – the practical question is how useful is each theory for explaining our complicated selves?

The best we can do is to come up with a model that might be 'predictive' – a way of thinking about ourselves that helps us to understand what happens to us, when, where, and if we're lucky we might learn why as well! Many theoretical models attempt to explain why we behave in the ways that we do, often positioning our 'intention to act' as the biggest predictor of future behaviour. But is it really? How many times have we thoroughly intended to undertake something we really do want to do, yet not completed it? How many gym memberships are cancelled around each Easter time, for

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0009

example? Is the way we behave, especially if something is challenging for us, really all about our willpower or volition, or do we sometimes create unrealistic, unachievable goals in the first place, setting ourselves up for failure? Why do some people seem better able to stick to their plans than others?

The intention–behaviour gap

This term describes those times when we fully intend to behave in a particular way, stopping, starting, or continuing a specific behaviour, yet fail to do so. This can have significant physical, mental, and emotional consequences for us, because as well as missing out on the expected benefit from the intended activity in question, we might lose self-respect and consider ourselves a failure – 'I couldn't even stick to just one thing', for example. The potential guilt, shame, and embarrassment we might experience when not acting as we intended could even affect the likelihood that we try to change anything in the future, because we lose faith in our ability to carry things through.

In the human lifestyle and health behaviour setting, data suggest that of all those wishing to make a healthy behaviour change, only 30–40% will actually do so and maintain this on a longer-term basis.[1]

Factors influencing this potentiation for lasting change have been identified as:[2]

- the individual's motivation;
- the trigger or reason for wanting to make the change;
- the resulting experience and whether this is felt immediately, or with delayed effect;
- the individual's physical, mental, and emotional capacity to implement the change; and
- the process of change itself.

The Health Action Process Approach (HAPA) was developed as a model to explain what motivates people to undertake changes in their behaviour, specifically to improve personal health, replacing health-compromising with health-enhancing behaviours.[3] This approach could therefore be used to help us implement effective positive behaviour change for our workplace well-being.

HAPA distinguishes between two stages of change required to bring about the desired outcome, crossing the intention–behaviour gap:

- Pre-intentional motivation processes – which lead to an intention to undertake a specific, desired behaviour.
- Post-intentional volition processes – which lead to the actual new health behaviour.

This involves action planning and coping planning; however, after the new health behaviour is started, we also need to maintain it. This is where we're

aiming for our new positive behaviours to become almost habitual – an automatic way of life, rather than something we continually strive for.

The addition of 'maintenance of behaviour' maps HAPA across three stages of behavioural change:

1. Pre-contemplation – during this phase we are likely to assess the risks involved with undertaking the desired behaviour, consider the outcomes we're expecting from undertaking the desired behaviour, and gauge how currently able we are to carry out the desired behaviour. How we feel about ourselves and our physical/mental capability might therefore play a big part in this becoming a psychological barrier to our decision-making to endeavour towards beginning to fulfil our intention.
2. Contemplation – during this phase we intend to carry out the desired behaviour. It involves both action and coping planning, understanding what we will do and how to do it effectively in order to meet the expectation we have set ourselves, but also how confident we are that we can keep up and commit to the new behaviour.
3. Action and maintenance – during this phase we begin and keep up the new behaviour. We might need to be prepared to question ourselves about how confident we are that we can 'recover' should we behave in a way that we didn't necessarily intend to, falling off the wagon so to speak!

This is where our mindset comes into play. There will always be people with a naturally high maintenance strategy – or growth mindset – in terms of self-efficacy, their ability to produce and keep up their desired outcome – those who commonly believe that, even though things are tough, they will find a way to keep going. People who hold these beliefs about themselves are more likely to action their intentions, and potentially maintain them too. This attitude has also been linked to beneficial outcomes such as increased stress tolerance, maintenance of healthy lifestyle choices, improved work performance, and improved academic achievement.

However, a significant number of people will have much lower natural maintenance strategies – or fixed mindsets – and they are much less likely to cross the intention–behaviour gap and action their desire to undertake the new behaviour. There is also a risk, which they might be well aware of from previous experience, that starting a new behaviour is inevitably going to lead to failure to maintain it. *Not* starting the behaviour in the first place could be seen as defeatist; however, for some people it might be a means to avoid further self-condemnation. These people might commonly believe there's no point starting because it's going to go wrong in any case. Avoiding change here could be a self-protective mechanism, albeit one with potential maladaptive outcomes.

We can help ourselves and each other cross the intention–behaviour gap by:

- visualizing what it is that we want, imagining ourselves fulfilling our expectations;
- planning for the outcomes we want, being strategic, and creating realistic timeframes;

- examining obstacles and barriers already present and predicting those that might arise, developing strategies for addressing and overcoming these; and
- creating a self-regulatory strategy that can lead to improved goal attainment, such as 'if X happens then I will do Y' plans.

The way we feel about ourselves plays a big part in how we are behaving and how we *will* behave,[4] which is a real challenge when our professional roles sometimes leave us feeling bad about ourselves and our capabilities. So where do our beliefs about ourselves come from?

The 'Model of the Self'[5] suggests our self-perception involves:

- feelings of continuity – we might behave differently within varying circumstances, including different groups of people;
- focus on our bodies – we might have positive or negative feelings about what we look like and/or how healthy we are or our physical capabilities; and
- our experience of agency – we might feel that some situations are within our control while others aren't.

When a study had people ask themselves the question 'Who am I?' responses tended to fall into two categories:[6]

1. Roles and traits that were socially defined and commonly acknowledged; for example, veterinary nurse, dog training instructor, female, from London, red-haired, blue-eyed…
2. Personal descriptions that are more open to interpretation, such as happy, trustworthy, hard-working, anxious.

Box 9.1

Ask yourself the question 'who am I?' 20 times and jot down your immediate responses.

I am…	I am…	I am…	I am…
I am…	I am…	I am…	I am…
I am…	I am…	I am…	I am…
I am…	I am…	I am…	I am…
I am…	I am…	I am…	I am…

Does your list include roles or titles you hold, and abilities/capabilities you have, as well as physical characteristics?

If you had completed this 5 years ago, how might your answers have differed?

This fits in with a social psychology view of the self, suggesting that our self-concept or identity is formed in terms of the roles or positions we hold, as well as our ideas about how others see us. The link between positive feelings and beliefs about ourselves and successful work-related performance is evident;[7] however, this bears relevance for those of us who hold our professional identity so dear, sometimes becoming so attached to it that we lose sight of all the other layers contributing to our individual selves. We might alter our behaviour specifically to influence others in the workplace, to perceive us as we view ourselves.[8] This is an important understanding, as it relates to motivation and self-worth – people interpret any given situation in ways that are compatible with their current abilities. For example, one study found that school continuation was significantly predicted by a student's identification as a 'person who would continue at school',[9] and similar findings have been detected in blood donation, voting behaviour, sticking to exercise regimes, and intention to consume organically grown produce.[10]

- So, if an action is seen as being in keeping with their views of their self, difficulty is seen as an indication that it is an important and meaningful behaviour; for example, 'No pain, no gain'.
- *But*, if an action doesn't match an identity, the same difficulty is interpreted as being pointless and demotivating and 'not something people like me should be doing'; for example, 'Sorry, that's not my job'.

It has been suggested that the way we view ourselves comprises distinct components for each of the roles we occupy, and that each of these elements of our identities is multi-directional.[11] For example, our identities, including occupational titles, can be:

- past-oriented – how I used to be;
- present-oriented – how I am right now;
- future-oriented – who I expect/hope/desire to become;
- positive – who I comfortably am;
- negative – who I worry about becoming, who I wish I still was;
- long-term/consistent and ongoing, pervasive – who I present myself as in general; and
- short-term/temporary/transient, situation-specific – who I am in response to specific encounters or experiences such as a night out or on holiday.

Presenting and maintaining a professional presence is expected, particularly in roles which contain an educational element in which we are the expert advising our clients in our field of interest. However, how much do you worry about how you are perceived by colleagues and clients (Box 9.2)?

Personal identity has been proposed to have many similarities to social identity, with the two presented as existing along a continuum. We might shift along the continuum, depending on the extent to which group-related or personal characteristics influence our feelings and actions. If we positively

Box 9.2

Reflect upon these questions and whether any particularly resonate for you:

Do you think your behaviour has changed over the years? How have you changed and what has affected this?

Who do you hope to become? Is there anything you wish to change about yourself? Is there someone you aspire to be like?

When do you feel most comfortably *'you'*? How do you feel and behave when you're relaxed?

Do you worry about becoming someone who behaves in a particular way? Or being perceived in a particular way?

Do you present a different version of yourself in different situations? How does your professional persona differ from your personal persona?

Think about what influences you to behave differently in a work setting to a home setting. Do these influences relate more to the quality of your work or to elements of your personality? What matters most to you?

emotionally connect with a particular group, we're likely to define our attitudes, opinions, feelings, and behaviours in reference to that group. If a particular group's conduct does not appeal, however, we're likely to behave in line with our own attitude and beliefs.

As well as having views of the 'self' that we aspire to, we might also identify with a group, or groups, based on shared values.

- We tend to favour behaviours that the group values more than those prompted by our own personal intentions, which might explain people becoming involved in activities like football hooliganism.
- We might also start evaluating others in terms of being within or without the same group – like me, or not like me.

Social identity theory has significant implications for why people might behave in a certain way and proposes three mental processes we use when evaluating others as in-group or out-group (us and them):[12]

1. Categorization – can help us to understand the social environment and demographic (e.g. gender, race, student, full-time employed, kennel assistant, cattery manager, and so on), but the connotations we might associate with such category labels could be unhelpful.
2. Social identification – this will carry an emotional component. Our self-esteem will have become, to some extent, related to being a member of a certain group (e.g. 'responsible' pet owners).
3. Social comparison – once we've categorized and identified ourselves as part of a group, we tend to then compare our group with others. To maintain

high self-esteem our group needs to compare favourably with other groups (e.g. using reward-based animal training methods is better than using punitive methods).

This concept is key to understanding prejudicial behaviours, as people might begin to compete with members of another group to maintain or boost their self-esteem. It's important to separate out the way someone is behaving in a particular situation from the way we identify them – this can help us to remain open and non-judgemental. For example, we might have very positive relationships with people yet not always agree with some aspects of their behaviour. Remembering 'it's the behaviour I don't like, not the person' can be a helpful way to look at the world.

We often obtain significant meaning when we categorize ourselves as part of an established group; however, this might render us at risk of evaluating others as 'outsiders', creating an 'us and them' feeling. This effect, which could so easily be applied within other animal-related workplaces, has been studied in animal rescue centres.[13] It was observed as a form of 'shelter culture' construct, which helped workers cope with the moral stress involved when animals were euthanized. However, this also potentially facilitated a 'moral shift', moving responsibility for euthanasia away from themselves and onto people external to the shelter, such as neglectful or irresponsible owners.

Although there is a benefit to establishing a solid group identity, there is also a risk of this contributing to a perpetual state of distress. We know that meaning is important for our well-being, but we need to take care not to derive it as the result of the unfair judgement of others or irrational decision-making. The meaning and purpose of our lives should connect us to others rather than separate us. Of course, it's natural to have social groups and natural connections with people who share our values, but we can enjoy these without creating disconnect.

Once we've categorized ourselves as part of a social group – such as animal welfare professionals – we can be tempted to validate this, and maintain high self-esteem, through frequent comparison with other groups. For example, being a vet feels good because of X number of reasons, and this is so much better than undertaking any other role, because of X number of reasons. Here, we risk competing with other groups to maintain our self-esteem. And, of course, there are some for whom being part of a group is inconsequential; however, social comparison still plays a big part in maintaining their self-esteem.

It's vital to remember we can unattach from our social identity, from our professional roles, and recognize that underneath we're all human beings sharing some universal values. Actively mentally catching ourselves whenever we find ourselves at risk of stepping into 'us and them' territory enables us to break down this potential prejudicial barrier, which might only perpetuate mental anguish from which we have nothing to benefit. We have

professional roles for a reason, and it's incredibly beneficial emotionally for us to derive meaning, purpose, and self-esteem from them; however, we must ensure this is not at the cost of us creating disconnect from our fellows, consequentially being unable to learn from them.

A large proportion of all the theories, beliefs, and ideals we hold that inform who we are and how we should act has been described as the experience of 'agency' – the feeling that we are able to act intentionally.[14] Our social and self-identities relate to the worth we place on ourselves, and whether we see ourselves as capable of change.

Self-efficacy

Many psychologists have studied, and continue to study, self-efficacy; however, the term was coined by Albert Bandura in the 1970s. Bandura defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in their capability to exercise self-control over their own performance and over the events that affect their lives. This can make up the basis for our well-being, as well as our personal achievements and the motivation that drives us towards our goals.

We learn from personal experience, from observing and imitating others, and by acknowledging the outcomes, whether positive or negative, of these actions. However, the belief that we can successfully perform the behaviour is key. An important property of self-efficacy is that it is context-specific in nature, to the extent that it has been described as 'situation-specific self-confidence'.[15] This explains why we might feel highly competent in one area, such as theoretical understanding of animal behaviour, but not in another, such as practical animal handling and training, or vice versa. Self-efficacy can therefore be considered a critical determinant of our motivation and action, because we might avoid undertaking tasks we do not feel we can realistically achieve, even though there might be learning to be gained from doing so.

Bandura proposed that people's beliefs about their own competency are influenced by four constructs[16]:

- Mastery experiences. This is where we gain confidence through our past successes and achievements and is thought to have the greatest influence upon our beliefs about our capabilities. In the animal training world, we always try to 'set an animal up for success' by ensuring we've taught them the necessary skills to enable them to thrive within their living conditions. We want the same for ourselves and our colleagues – confidence to undertake new tasks and perseverance to succeed even despite occasional unsuccessful attempts. This clearly has significant implications for people training to work within the various animal welfare fields. The value of robust induction processes and the benefit of gaining work experience to build self-confidence, especially

where necessary practical motor skills can develop through practice and repetition, are evident.

- Vicarious experiences. This is where we observe someone else who we feel is comparable with ourselves successfully carrying out the activity at which we hope to become accomplished. This can be highly influential, particularly when someone we strongly identify with overcomes difficulties matching our own. Witnessing a significant other triumph over adversity appears to offer greater support than observing someone accomplishing the task with relative ease. Perhaps this is because we naturally identify and empathize with the struggler, so gain from their victory because we feel this is the level of determination that we would need to accomplish the same task. We're encouraged by seeing their fortitude pay off, beginning to believe the same might be possible for us. This supports, where possible, including demonstration within training and induction procedures to enhance confidence. Mentoring schemes are another way people may gain vicarious experiences from colleagues they trust and aspire to emulate.
- Verbal, social persuasion. This is where being told we have done something well, and that we have the skills and ability to overcome something we have previously found challenging, helps to build our self-belief. This is more effective if the feedback highlights particular strengths and previous successes. But, of course, we need to believe what the other person is telling us! Although we might value positive feedback from our friends, knowing they wish to support us might lead us to take their account for granted. However, we are likely to cherish feedback from an aspirational source, someone we personally wish to impress, whom we believe has the appropriate level of understanding to be able to recognize our ability and assess role competence accurately. Again, this supports the case for mentoring, whether formal or informal, and where possible and practical, induction processes in which the new worker's competencies and learning needs are assessed. It also emphasizes the benefit of establishing a culture where feedback is regularly provided at all levels. Frontline staff and managers alike should feel able to highlight incidences of excellence and/or significant achievement across teams, but might require the confidence to do so, especially if this is done publicly. A difficulty faced by many within the animal welfare sector is that of lone working or sole practice, where there isn't really anyone able to provide feedback. Buddying schemes might therefore be mutually beneficial for lone practitioners, in which work tasks can be discussed, reviewed, and positive feedback given.
- Emotional arousal. This is the idea that our emotional, physical, and psychological condition will influence how we feel about our personal capability in any given situation. Our self-efficacy is much more likely to be enhanced if we are feeling healthy and relaxed, and we might typically expect to be successful when we are calm and able to focus.

However, Bandura suggests that it is not necessarily our physiological condition that has the greatest relevance here, but how we perceive, interpret, and manage it. For example, although we might be experiencing intense emotional arousal in relation to a specific situation, such as feeling stressed and under pressure, this doesn't necessarily mean we're going to fall apart. If we have a positive self-belief, we can view this experience as energizing, enabling us to produce our best efforts. However, someone holding onto self-doubt in the same situation might view their experience as debilitating and a barrier to success. Learning to manage anxieties and boost our moods, especially when we feel under pressure, can improve our self-efficacy (Boxes 9.3 and 9.4).

A further route to self-efficacy, that of 'imagined experience',[17] has been proposed where you visualize yourself actively achieving success within a particular situation. This involves seeing yourself living out achievable goals, behaving effectively within challenges, and confidently realizing the tasks you have set yourself. This approach might be more effective when applied to practical tasks but can be used to mentally rehearse responding to different outcomes, creating a pseudo-muscle memory for various eventualities that might arise. This can aid vital 'if X, then Y' planning, allowing visualization to build a sense of feeling 'ready', and increasing confidence (Box 9.5).

Box 9.3

Think of a scenario in your work setting and identify places where each of the four sources of self-efficacy might be introduced to enhance someone's self-belief. Create a take-home message for your workplace.

For example, a new Welfare Assistant joins the team in a rehoming centre cattery. They're able to observe established members of the cattery team caring for the cats (vicarious experience). During their first few months they're observed themselves by an assigned mentor, who gives constructive feedback and suggestions (verbal, social persuasion). This feedback, along with the opportunity to practise the duties the role requires, decreases the new Welfare Assistant's anxiety (emotional arousal) and helps them perform well within their new role (mastery experiences). This builds the Welfare Assistant's self-efficacy and improves future performance.

The take-home message here is to ensure all new Welfare Assistants are given the opportunity to watch their peers carrying out the duties expected of them, and to appoint colleagues to provide encouraging support and guidance.

Box 9.4

Nurses in our practice are placed on a rota system comprising eight duties, each undertaken for a full week at a time. Over the course of 8 weeks, a veterinary nurse will therefore have engaged in a variety of duties including radiography, patient preparation for medical and surgical intervention, theatre nursing, anaesthetic monitoring, laboratory tasks, nurse clinics, care of the hospitalized patients, and reception/client care. Although many will have favourite areas of work, this approach keeps our nursing team well-practised and accomplished in all areas of our multi-faceted profession.

Whenever new nurses join the team, their induction process lasts for the 4 months of their initial probation period. Throughout this period our new team member is placed on one of the eight rostered duties for 2 weeks at a time. During the first week they shadow one of our existing team, including our student veterinary nurse – where it's appropriate for them to demonstrate a specific activity. This way our new nurse gets to learn what each duty entails with no pressure to perform or meet any expectation of them without first having had the opportunity to learn where things are and how the clinic works. They see what incredible standards of nursing they can expect to reach within our hospital, and it signifies how much we respect our team's knowledge, including our student, in being able to induct a new colleague.

During their first week working on any new duty, our new nurse is encouraged to begin to join in with practical activities once these have been demonstrated, and constructive, supportive feedback is provided. For the second week they are on the same duty but with sole charge, although, of course, able to seek assistance at any point from any member of the team.

For the next fortnight they move onto a different duty, again shadowing one of our existing team for the first week and going solo, with support readily available, for the second. It might be that someone requires longer shadowing a colleague, especially if they've never undertaken a particular duty such as nurse clinics or laboratory work previously, so that's not a problem and it's made clear at the start we'll try our best to facilitate additional shadowing in that area before they are given full responsibility for it.

We are very fortunate to have the luxury of being able to implement such a scheme, and although it is time-intense we feel it definitely pays dividends. We have excellent staff retention and a nursing team who understand what their duties involve, have witnessed each other's skills in practice, and been able to inspire each other. By the time they're passing their probation they will also have had the opportunity to work alongside everyone else in the nursing team and develop understanding working relationships.

Box 9.5

Think of a work-related task you're required to action, one that you might be worrying about, and take a few moments to visualize yourself carrying it out.

See yourself capably and competently turning your attention to work through each stage of the task, successfully carrying out what it demands of you, responding to the needs of the task and anyone else involved, efficiently dealing with difficulties as they arise. Where this requires additional assistance, picture yourself sourcing the appropriate guidance to be able to continue effectively.

Envisage yourself enjoying undertaking the task and imagine what completing it looks and feels like.

Picture how your completion of the task will positively impact the lives of others.

We can also focus our attention to the way we carry out tasks or activities and conduct ourselves. Self-efficacy can therefore directly relate to how confident we are in our ability to *recover* from having behaved in a way we didn't necessarily intend to, how confident we are to keep doing – or keep not doing – something, and how confident we are in our ability to start a new behaviour. This is connected to, but not the same as, our self-esteem.

Self-esteem is the respect we have, or the regard we hold, for ourselves. Both self-efficacy and self-esteem affect how we perceive:

- our ability to take appropriate, effective action; and
- how far-reaching the effect of our appropriate, effective actions can be.

It is important to remember that someone with low self-esteem might still have a high sense of self-efficacy, and vice versa. Both social and self-identities relate to the value/worth we place on ourselves (esteem) and to whether, or not, we see ourselves as capable of change. This also affects how we perceive our own ability to take action and what those actions can achieve, which is also connected to the degree of control we perceive we have over the events within our lives.

This psychological construct is termed our locus of control, which in turn connects with our sense of 'agency' within a given situation.[18] The theory behind us having an individual locus of control was developed through an amalgamation of:

- Attribution theory[19] – how we interpret available information to establish causal factors for events; for example, witnessing others using a particular animal training technique effectively.
- Social learning theory[20, 21] – the expected consequence of our own behaviour and the value this outcome holds for us; for example,

the belief that engaging in a specific training technique will lead to the behaviour we want to see in our animal – an outcome that we value.

We might attribute responsibility for the outcome of specific events to internal factors relating to the self or external factors relating to the environment and others within it. Therefore, someone with a tendency to take responsibility for the events of their life would be considered as having an internal locus of control, while someone who generally holds others, or abstract concepts such as fate, responsible for outcomes would be thought of as having an external locus of control (Fig. 9.1).

Those with an internal locus of control tend to:

- apply greater effort to control their environment;
- take responsibility for their actions;
- actively research information relating to specific situations they are likely to become involved in; and
- demonstrate more autonomous decision-making.

This has been seen to lead to better outcomes in terms of general health and well-being; therefore, an external locus of control tends to be thought of as maladaptive. Feeling that one is absolved from responsibility for the events that happen, or that endeavouring to influence the events of one's life is futile, may result in an individual avoiding engaging in certain activities or pursuits. Consequentially, this results in poorer outcomes. Interestingly, people have, at times, been observed to have higher levels of satisfaction when circumstances are beyond their control – perhaps because their 'I can't do anything about it' theory is supported in these situations, reinforcing their 'there's no point trying' avoidant behaviour.

Researchers specifically looking at how 'in control' people felt about their health, have suggested three independent perspectives:[22]

1. Internal health locus of control – people believe their health is the result of their own actions and are more likely to engage in higher levels of health-promotion behaviours.
2. Chance health locus of control – people believe their health is the result of chance, luck, or fate, rather than their own behaviour and are less likely

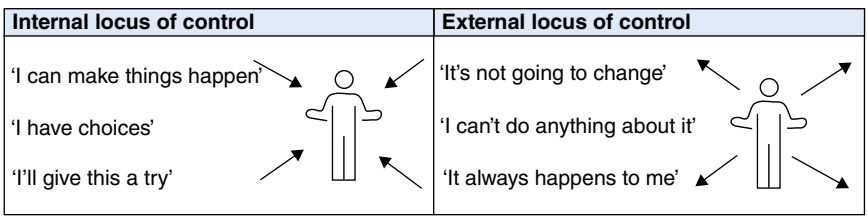

Fig. 9.1. Locus of control.

to engage in health-beneficial behaviours. However, in situations such as terminal illness, where there is very little chance that someone could influence their health outcomes, belief in fate might prove helpful.
3. External/powerful others health locus of control – people believe their health is the result of others in positions of power such as health professionals and are more likely to seek their help and follow their advice. However, individuals might expect to be 'fixed' by powerful others, and unprepared to manage their condition.

As we learn through consequences, the beliefs we develop about what *is likely to happen* due to our involvement within any situation could hold greater predictive value about how we might behave in future than our individual locus of control. However, it's important to remember that our beliefs will only influence our behaviour when we truly value the outcome of that specific behaviour. Otherwise, we might not be motivated enough in the first instance to take any action at all.

When we feel out of control, we might begin to panic, a negatively experienced emotion that incorporates grief. Here, we grieve not only for loss of control but for those expected outcomes we had hoped and planned for, but now feel are way beyond our reach. This sense of powerlessness can mean we quickly lose confidence in our abilities, so we experience further loss, becoming increasingly demotivated and self-doubting. We also risk losing respect for ourselves through being unable to meet the expectations we had set for ourselves.

We might also feel as though we have different levels of control over different situations, so the construct should be considered specifically rather than overarching. However, there might be times when the two are operating in tandem. For example, someone might decide to book an appointment to take their cat to the vet (internal locus of control – taking appropriate action to resolve a problem), trusting that their vet will be able to help (external locus of control – an educated professional with the knowledge and skills necessary to help their cat). As this scenario demonstrates, where we might knowingly succumb to an external locus of control, we are still indeed able to retain an element of control for ourselves, but only if we consciously consider *where* this occurs. Even during times when we feel as though things are spiralling beyond our control, which can increase feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, by using a growth mindset, we can reframe the situation to examine where we do have choice, and what small elements of influence we're able to retain and exert.

Control can aid our self-efficacy and esteem, enabling us to do something tangible, feeling empowered even though within limits. From the animal behaviour world, we know that choice and control are primary reinforcers, strengthening those behaviours that brought them about. They are feelings

that enhance our 'feelgood' neurochemistry, so even the smallest amount of control is likely to have a positive effect on our general demeanour.

Beliefs, values, and attitudes

- Beliefs are what we think is true, and can arise from our experiences or experiments, acceptance of cultural or societal norms, or through what we're told by other people we trust.
- Values are what we think is important – the standards by which we live our lives.
- Attitudes are the way we express our beliefs and values in thoughts, words, and actions.

Our attitudes can be helpful in allowing us to predict what is likely to happen, communicate who we are, help us connect with social groups, and protect our self-esteem. However, the opposite might occur when we do not share attitudes with others and are unable to accept differences.[23]

Many factors influence our attitudes, including the behaviour of others whom we admire, our natural prejudices, the society we grew up within, our family, the beliefs and values of those who are important to us, what we have faith in, the media, and our educational experience. Our professional attitudes might be shaped by career success or ambition, finances, mentors, and role models (or lack of), experiences, education and training, peer pressure, and convenience, for example.

Motivation

This is our drive or desire to behave in a particular way, from moment to moment. As with our intentions, motivation alone isn't necessarily enough to *make* us act upon our desires; other factors come into play to determine we will see our motivations through to fruition.

While we might be motivated by longer-term aspirations, we are generally continually engaged in a constant decision-making process between different options with varying appeal on a moment-by-moment basis. For example, at any given moment there might be numerous possibilities for how we might choose to behave.

We learn through the consequential processes of reinforcement and punishment, and our behaviour, including our motivation, may become 'conditioned' in response.

Behaviours can be reinforced, or strengthened, in two ways:[24]

- **Positively (positive reinforcement)** – by introducing something an individual finds valuable, either to them or to their environment.

- **Negatively (negative reinforcement)** – by removing something an individual finds unpleasant from them or their environment.

The opposite of reinforcement, punishment weakens behaviour making it less likely to happen again. Behaviours can be punished, or weakened, in two ways:[25]

- **Positively (positive punishment)** – introducing something that someone finds unpleasant to them or their environment.
- **Negatively (negative punishment)** – removing something that someone values from them or their environment.

Distinguishing between punishment and reinforcement can sometimes be difficult, as these processes can operate simultaneously. For example, strengthening one behaviour might naturally weaken, or punish, another.

So, we might *learn* from the outcomes of our previous experiences, to be motivated to avoid specific situations, altering our behaviour accordingly. For example, not talking about our feelings in order to avoid any unpleasant feelings we suspect this will evoke, or behave in 'self-sabotaging' ways to avoid opening ourselves up to emotionally painful experiences.

Two approaches to understanding motivation have been traditionally distinguished:

- **Biopsychological** – examining biological motives, which might influence across animal species, such as hunger, thirst, sex, and resource retention.
- **Sociopsychological** – examining cognitive motives typically considered to predominate within our human species, such as achievement, fulfilment, and perhaps power.

The **biopsychological perspective** originated with the work of Charles Darwin. The biological aim of any species is to survive long enough to reproduce and replicate genetic material, supporting the survival of one's offspring to the same outcome.[26] So, at very base level, whenever aiming to understand our own behaviour, we can seek to answer, 'How does behaving in this manner help me to thrive and survive?'

The **sociopsychological perspective** is where motivation refers to the types of goals people choose and how they go about implementing them. This involves the selection of a particular course of action, and then actioning and regulating the chosen course of behaviour.[27]

Need Theory suggests that all human behaviour is motivated by three potential outcomes, achievement, power, and affiliation,[28] which could be seen to increase the chances of our reproductive fitness, although we will individually desire these in varying degrees. For example, one person's need to achieve in a particular area might be stronger than their need for companionship. This ties in with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; however, many people might not realize or be aware of just how much their well-being is

dependent on each of these factors, or the benefit of acknowledging the experience of meaning and purpose within daily activity.

Self-determination Theory was developed nearly 40 years after Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and appears to break down the top tier of self-actualization – reaching your full potential – by proposing that people's innate psychological needs are the basis for their motivation, and that we all have three basic needs:[29]

- **Autonomy** – need to control the course of their lives.
- **Competence** – need to be effective in dealing with the environment.
- **Relatedness** – need to have a close, affectionate relationship with others.

This suggests that commitment, effort, and high-quality performance are most likely to be created within environments and social contexts that support and promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Importantly, motivation here is presented as a continuum, distinguishing between autonomous (or self-determined) motivation at one end of the scale, and controlled (non-self-determined) motivation at the other:

- **Controlled motivation** could be thought of as 'carrot and stick':
  - You've either been seduced into behaving, perhaps by the offer of a reward, or coerced into behaving, perhaps by the threat of punishment.
  - You feel pressured, either way, and there is a lot of tension and anxiety as all these things have potentially negative consequences for your performance and well-being.
  - You tend to take the shortest path to the desired outcomes when your motivation is controlled.
- **Autonomous motivation** could be thought of as 'coming from within'.
  - You will experience a full set of volition, willingness, and choice about what you're doing.
  - At the moment you're doing it, you're endorsing the *doing* of that behaviour.
  - You're fully willing to engage without any additional incentives, so the behaviour becomes self-reinforcing.
  - Your behaviour will be more creative, you'll be a better problem solver, better able to think outside the box when you encounter obstacles, your performance will improve, and your emotions will be much more positive.

This has to do with interest and enjoyment, as well as deeply held views and beliefs and values. If you're interested in an activity and you enjoy doing it, motivation is right there inside you ready to move you to the next course of action. And if you really have something that you truly value, that's important to you, you're motivated to engage in behaviours which are consistent with that.

As well as being motivated by what we might personally gain, we might also be simultaneously motivated by a desire *not to lose out*. For example, working towards meeting an established recognized standard of excellence in one's field, such as a professional qualification or membership, might be driven equally by a desire to succeed and a fear of failure. Likewise, we might be driven to spend time with others by a desire to enjoy social bonds but also by a fear of isolation, rejection, or loneliness (Box 9.6).

In general, we're motivated to engage in activities we believe will work out well for us, or others, weighing up all the possible outcomes of all our available choices and deciding which is going to be best for 'right now'. Our professional behaviour is regulated by factors such as our work ethics, codes of conduct we've signed up to, personal moral codes, expectations placed upon us by others or ourselves, and any ulterior motives we might hold.

We might therefore inhibit our own behaviour, perhaps due to a sense of duty or obligation, our motivation to adhere to these principles overriding our motivation to perhaps avoid an unpleasant experience or undertake something that will involve a significant effort or challenge. It's often a case of 'head over heart', in which we are emotionally conflicted between two courses of action, sometimes deliberately choosing not to behave in the way we really want to. This type of internal conflict, where we are faced with competing motivations, can be effortful and therefore fatiguing longer term.

Box 9.6

Think of your professional role and what specifically motivates you to do it.

Do you have an overarching motive relating specifically to a broader cause, e.g. helping those less fortunate, which runs alongside more personal motives and aspirations?

Is the reason you continue to work within your field the same as the reason that initially brought you to this line of work?

Despite broader motivations for your work, do you find you feel differently about undertaking different elements of your role? Do certain tasks appeal more, potentially offering you greater reward, than others? Why do you think different parts of your work hold different meaning for you?

If you work within a team, do you perceive everyone to have the same motivations for working through each day or do some of your colleagues feel differently about what they hope to achieve from their daily work? Despite individual differences, how well do you manage to maintain any shared core values?

Remember, there will be several factors influencing people to think, feel, and behave differently, and everybody's unique experience is valid.

At a basic emotional level, we generally seek 'rewards' in some form. A complex part of our emotional system is dedicated to this, and the experience of anticipating rewards can feel so good that it becomes addictive as we look forward to gaining even more. This is an extremely oversimplified view of what's happening in the brain and body when we experience good things happening, or being *about* to happen; however, it does begin to explain why we might easily repeat behaviours that could have longer-term poorer outcomes – behaviours that immediately give us an outcome we perceive as 'beneficial', even though this be due to feeling relief at avoiding something more challenging, *at that specific moment*. We can then crave this feeling, and so the experience of relief should not be underestimated as a strong reinforcer for our behaviour. Behaving in avoidant ways can become more attractive and more likely behaviour for us in future. And this is how bad habits develop!

Habit forming

We tend to think of them as being bad, but we can have really good habits. In fact, up to 45% of our daily actions are habitual, automatic behaviours that do not require us to pay too much attention to them, almost as though we are conducting ourselves in a sort of 'waking sleep'.[30] They can be individual behaviours such as nail biting or brushing our teeth, or 'groups' of behaviours such as driving or our bedtime routine. In this way, habits allow us to direct our energy elsewhere, potentially allowing us to be more efficient.

A habit is a consistent repetition of behavioural action in the company of established contextual cues that strengthen the behaviour until it becomes automatic.[31] We do something, and it feels good or works out so well for us in some way that we do it again, and have the same result, so we do it again. We might even develop cravings for that 'feelgood' outcome, which encourages us to repeat the behaviour, so we do it again, and so on. This cycles around until we no longer even think about doing it, we just do it! And are likely to continue doing it even after we perhaps no longer get the same feeling from doing it. This is referred to as the habit loop,[32] and where this loop happens repeatedly, a habit can form in an average of 66 days, with a range of 18–254 days varying between individuals.[33]

Habits:

- are efficient – we can even do another task while performing a habitual behaviour;
- do not need a conscious plan for us to carry them out;
- do not need us to be aware to carry them out once they are established; and
- to begin with at least, meet goals, even though these might not be obvious; for example, nail biting might have started with the goal of alleviating anxiety, but is now performed even without any anxiety.

If we want to try to form positive, healthy habits we need to be prepared for these to take time to embed but should feel encouraged to persevere with new behaviours to help them become automatic. It can help to break the behaviour down, either if you're trying to understand a bad habit or plan how to create a new one, and ask useful questions such as whether there is a pattern to your habitual behaviour. Does it happen at the same time of day? Is there something specific that triggers it? Does it happen in a particular place? What are the rewards you experience, or would like to, for doing the behaviour? For example, are these emotional, personal, financial, or psychological? For a current habit, are the rewards immediate? Do you still notice them?

Think about the new behaviours – such as self-care practices – which you'd like to become habits. What will 'cue' or instigate the new behaviour? What will encourage you to or make you do it, or remember to do it? Can you time it within something you already routinely do to help you remember to do it every day? For example, if you plan to keep a gratitude journal, can you pop your notebook by the kettle if you generally stand and watch it boil in the mornings, prompting you to fill it in during this time? If we plan to link new behaviours to existing things that we do which are strong, deep-rooted behaviours, we're more likely to keep up with the new ones too.

What will be your reward and is this enough to keep you going? This is vital, because some rewards might be delayed; for example, if our desired new habit is to exercise daily to get the reward of weight loss we're unlikely to experience that and need to mentally prepare ourselves to place as much emphasis on the understanding that we are moving towards a longer-term goal – we are choosing to be healthy and making a change for our future – and for that psychological benefit to be 'enough' to keep us going meanwhile. However, where some rewards are delayed, we might need to plan to give ourselves a 'bridging' treat in the interim – if we can plan this in advance, we can manage this and avoid it being something that risks jeopardizing our overall goal. We could all too easily reward ourselves for going to the gym with a takeaway pizza treat, which, due to its rewarding nature, could easily become a habit in itself!

Make things simple, don't plan to change too much, stick to one new thing at a time to avoid becoming overwhelmed, plan ahead, and prepare for how you will respond to temptations – have a healthy home-made pizza treat, for example. Frame things positively for yourself and remind yourself that taking steps to introduce a new habit is all about you taking control over your feelings and outlook (Box 9.7).

Frame things in achievable steps and factor in ways to remind yourself, such as Post-it® notes, mobile phone alerts, fridge posters, or calendar entries. If your new behaviour requires specific equipment, prepare this in advance so it's ready when you need it. For example, leave your sportswear out to pop on first thing in the morning, or make your lunch the evening before so you don't risk grabbing something unhealthy on the way into work.

Box 9.7

Complete the boxes to draw a habit loop for a behaviour you would like to become a habit (see Fig. 9.2).

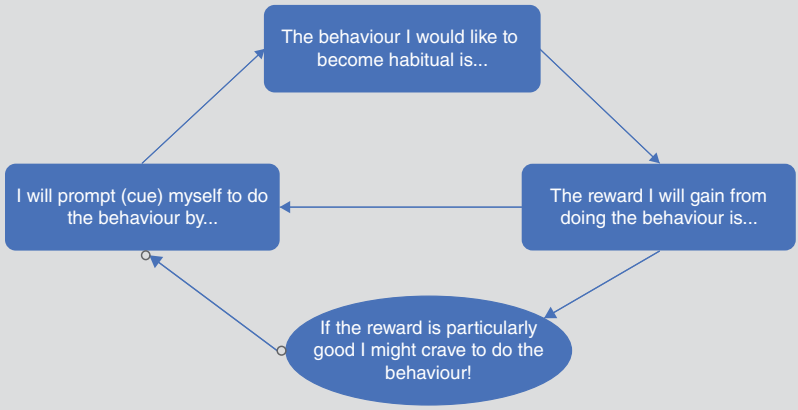

Fig. 9.2. A habit loop.

It can also help to monitor yourself. Keep a list on your calendar or write yourself out a plan to tick off each day, as we tend to enjoy completing these so they can become an additional part of the rewarding experience. The idea is not to shame or pressure yourself into doing the new behaviour; it's to remind yourself you're doing it for all the positive reasons. Keep a growth mindset and see developing a habit as a healthy opportunity.

References

1. Rhodes, R.E. and de Bruijn, G.J. (2013) How big is the physical activity intention–behaviour gap? A meta-analysis using the action control framework. *British Journal of Health Psychology* 18, 296–309.
2. Faries, M.D. (2016) Why we don't 'just do it': Understanding the intention–behaviour gap in lifestyle medicine. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 10(5), 322–329.
3. Sutton, S. (2008) How does the health action process approach (HAPA) bridge the intention–behaviour gap? An examination of the model's causal structure. *Applied Psychology* 57(1), 66–74.
4. Leone, C. (1995) A review: Eagly, A.H. and Chaiken, S. (1993) *The Psychology of Attitudes*. Brace & Janovich, New York. *Psychology and Marketing* 12, 459–466.

5. Fossati, P., Hevenor, S.J., Graham, S.J., Grady, C., Keightley, M.L. *et al.* (2003) In search of the emotional self: An fMRI study using positive and negative emotional words. *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 160(11), 1938–1945.
6. Kuhn, M. and McPartland, T. (1954) An empirical investigation of self-attitudes. *American Sociological Review* 19(1), 68–76.
7. Stajkovic, A.D. and Luthans, F. (1998) Self-efficacy and work-related performance: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin* 124(2), 240–261.
8. Oyserman, D., Elmore, K. and Smith, G. (2012) *Self, Self-Concept, and Identity. Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2nd edn. Guildford Press, New York.
9. Biddle, B.J., Bank, B.J. and Slavings, R.L. (1987) Norms, preferences, identities, and retention decisions. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(4), 322–337.
10. Terry, D.J., Hogg, M.A. and White, K.M. (1999) The theory of planned behaviour: Self-identity, social identity, and group norms. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 38, 225–244.
11. Serpe, R.T. and Stryker, S. (1987) The construction of the self and the reconstruction of social relationships. In: Lawler, E.J. and Markovsky, B. (eds) *Advances in Group Processes*. JAI Press, Greenwich, Connecticut, pp. 41–66.
12. Turner, T.H., Turner, J.C., Austin, W.G. and Worchel, S. (1979) An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In: Hatch, M.J. and Shultz, M. (eds) *Organisational Identity: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 56–65.
13. Arluke, A. (1991) Coping with euthanasia: A case study of shelter culture. *Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association* 198, 1176–1180.
14. Fossati, P., Hevenor, S., Graham, S.J., Grady, C., Keightley, M. *et al.* (2003) In search of the emotional self: An fMRI study using positive and negative emotional words. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 160(11), 1938–1945.
15. Feltz, D.L. and Chase, M.A. (1998) The measurement of self-efficacy and confidence in sport. In: Duda, J.L (ed.) *Advancements in Sport and Exercise Psychology Measurement*. Fitness Information Technology, Morgantown, West Virginia, pp. 278–294.
16. Bandura, A. (1977) Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioural change. *Psychological Review* 84(2), 191–215.
17. Maddux, J.E. and Kleiman, E.M. (2021) Self-efficacy: The power of believing you can. In: Snyder, C.R., Lopez, S.J., Edwards, L.M. and Marques, S.C. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 3rd edn. Oxford University Press, New York.
18. Rotter, J.B. (1966) Generalised expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 80(1), 1–28.
19. Fiske, S.T. and Taylor, S.E. (1991) *Social Cognition*, 2nd edn. McGraw-Hill, New York.
20. Perry, C.L., Baranowski, T. and Parcel, G.S. (1990) How individuals, environments, and health behaviour interact: Social learning theory. In: Glanz, K., Lewis, F.M. and Rimer, B.K. (eds) *Health Behaviour and Health Education: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Jossey-Bass Wiley, San Francisco, California.
21. Rotter, J.B. (1954) *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*. Prentice-Hall, New York.
22. Wallston, K.A., Wallston, B.S. and DeVellis, R. (1978) Development of the multidimensional health locus of control scales. *Health Education* 6(2),160–170.
23. Katz, D. (1960) The functional approach to the study of attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24(2), 163–204.

24. Schneider, S.M. (2012) *The Science of Consequences: How They Affect Genes, Change the Brain, and Impact our World*. Prometheus Books, New York.
25. Sidman, M. (1989) *Coercion and its Fallout*. Authors Cooperative Inc., USA.
26. Ruse, M. (1975) Charles Darwin's theory of evolution: An analysis. *Journal of the History of Biology* 8(2), 219–241.
27. Alexander, R.D. (1975) The search for a general theory of behaviour. *Behavioural Science* 20(2), 77–100.
28. McClelland, D.C. (1985) How motives, skills, and values determine what people do. *American Psychologist* 40(7), 812–825.
29. Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (1985) *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour*. Plenum, New York.
30. Wood, W., Quinn, J.M. and Kashy, D.A. (2002) Habits in everyday life: Thought, emotion, and action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83(6), 1281–1297.
31. Lally, P., van Jaarsveld, C.H.M., Potts, H.W.W. and Wardle, J. (2010) How habits are formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40(6), 998–1009.
32. Duhig, C. (2014) *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, Barcelona, Spain.
33. Lally, P., van Jaarsveld, C.H.M., Potts, H.W.W. and Wardle, J. (2010) How habits are formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40(6), 998–1009.

Further reading

Eagleman, D. (2015) *The Brain: The Story of You*. Canongate, Edinburgh.
Jarret, C. (2011) *The Rough Guide to Psychology: An Introduction to Human Behaviour and the Mind*. Rough Guides, London.
Kahneman, D. (2012) *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Penguin, London.
Pink, D.H. (2009) *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*. Canongate, Edinburgh.
Sapolsky, R. (2017) *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. The Bodley Head, London.

10 Resilience, Mindset, and Mindfulness

> 'Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.'
> Oliver Goldsmith[1]

Life will be stressful for us all but need not be 'stress-full'. From time to time unescapable events will lead us to experience deeply negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, anger, fear, or panic. Fortunately, when facing adversity, our inbuilt physiological warning system prompts us to take direct safety action. However, when bad things happen, although we might all agree it's perfectly normal to feel upset – indeed it would be unusual if we didn't! – inability to recover from distressing events can be dangerous.

Some people appear to recover much more quickly from difficulties than others, but why? Can we *learn* how to bounce back more effectively, or should we simply resign ourselves to our fate while feeling unduly unlucky and envious of our more upbeat peers if we are the ones who seem to really struggle (Box 10.1)?

Although definitions of resilience vary, it's generally described as the ability to successfully adapt your behaviour in response to what happens to you or others around you, or to changes in your environment.[2] As well as our emotional recovery or 'bouncebackability' from negatively experienced events, resilience also encompasses our ability to persevere and persist towards goals when we're challenged.

Psychologist Martin Seligman uses the term 'grit' for the character strength of perseverance towards long-term goals, persisting through unavoidable obstacles.[3] People with typically low resilience tend to give up quickly. There can be many valid reasons for this. It doesn't mean they're any less 'good at life', just that they have a different outlook at that moment in time, when giving up seems the best option. We tend to do what *feels* right in the moment, even though this might not be the most sensible choice longer term, as the relief of not having to continue could override associated feelings of guilt. It's always going to be complicated emotionally (Box 10.2).

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0010

Box 10.1

Consider a now resolved work-related situation that led you to feel negative emotions.

What were your thoughts and feelings when you first became aware of the situation?

How did you initially react? Did other people involved react in the same way as you?

How did you respond over time? Did your feelings about the situation change? How did you cope?

When you reflect upon the experience, would you say you demonstrated resilience? What is it about your behaviour and the outcome of the situation that specifically leads you to view your actions as resilient or not?

Looking back, do you now feel as though you coped much better than you thought you were doing at the time?

Did you communicate to others or want them to believe that you were coping, when you didn't really feel you were? Did this depend on who you were communicating with?

What do you feel influenced the candidness with which you communicated your experience to others at the time?

Box 10.2

Consider the qualities of resilience, bouncebackability, and grit. Reflect upon your career and recall one or two challenging situations you've faced.

Did you find it difficult to let go of negative feelings that arose at the time, carrying them with you instead?

Do you still feel the same way now, or have your feelings changed and reduced in intensity over time?

Were you able to work through the situation at the time or did you redirect your attention elsewhere? Did you step away altogether or were you determined to undertake the task regardless of the negative impact it was having on you?

Consider yourself or colleagues who have struggled with challenging situations leading to seeking work elsewhere. Was this the same type of work, or a complete change? What was the effect of this?

We might retain a determination to stay in the field of work we're so passionate about, despite at the same time finding it difficult to let go of negative feelings about a specific situation.

Research examining the effect of difficult backgrounds on children found that experiencing adversity didn't necessarily lead to adverse consequences. Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner was a pioneer in child development and

resilience. His Ecological Systems Theory proposed that the resilience of an individual could be represented by a system dependent on:[4]

- their health – the quality of their immune function and emotional regulation;
- the strength of their family and support network; and
- their wider community and their socio-political environment.

Any of these could present as barriers to, or bringers of, well-being, depending on the type and quality of their relationships with the individual. A useful exercise is to examine the system around yourself for barriers to and bringers of well-being (Box 10.3/Fig. 10.1).

Box 10.3

Consider yourself at the centre of such a system. You could draw it out like a target with you in the centre, then your health as the first ring around you, your family and support network as the next ring, and finally your wider community as the third (Fig. 10.1).

Who and/or what would you place in each section?

Would you consider each a barrier or an enabler of you bouncing back from any adversity faced? Might that depend on the specific situation?

Think about the labels you place upon yourself, or which you feel society places upon you, such as your age or the type of education you've had. Do these create barriers, e.g. expectations we must live up to? Or are there ways in which each could help us thrive?

Fig. 10.1. Separating out barriers and enablers of well-being in different areas of your life.

A genetic component to the enviable natural ability of some to look on the bright side, typically putting a positive spin on things, has been identified. Still under research, genes that contribute to susceptibility to anxiety and stress disorders are suggested to significantly influence our response to challenging experiences.[5] Encouragingly, though, the protective mechanism of resilience has been found to be behaviourally flexible. This means that, despite any genetic predisposition for optimism or pessimism, our ability to adapt well to life's events may be learned, strengthened, and enhanced through experience[6] – although of course the *quality* of our experiences will matter. The behavioural flexibility of resilience is great news, however, – as any optimist would say! – because despite our natural tendencies, we can take steps to improve our ability to cope with whatever happens to or around us.

Medical models have examined the body's resilience, or resistance, to diseases and biohazards. These suggest resilience is developed through controlled exposure to physical stresses, so it's important not to avoid stress altogether. In the companion animal behaviour field, the concept of 'stress inoculation' is considered an important part of preparing young animals for life as pets. Evidence has shown that a carefully measured, controlled amount of stress, experienced at an intensity at which the animal is able to learn, without panicking, enables them to discover which behaviours work out best in different situations, such as looking to their owner or handler for guidance.[7] Complete avoidance of novel events or potential stressors isn't helpful, because the individual has zero opportunity to learn anything positive about that type of experience. For example, if we grow up without ever experiencing any form of rejection or disappointment, should we later face situations in which our expectations are not met, we'll have limited experience rehearsing appropriate skills for dealing effectively with such feelings. We're likely to become distressed and/or frustrated.

Gradual, considered exposure to stressors allows us to learn how to experience these in a way that promotes healthier behavioural responses when facing similar challenges in future. When we set about teaching an animal what might be termed 'life skills' we are effectively aiming at introducing, and then strengthening, behavioural choices that will help them feel safe and thrive within their relationships and environment. Similarly, factors found to improve our resilience include early experiences that help us develop 'coping skills', alongside achieving successes. However, an individual's judgement of their own personal circumstances also plays a significant role, highlighting the power of psychological influences on our behaviour.[8]

Resilience researchers examining young people faced with adversity during development shortlisted what they termed 'predictors' for resilience (Table 10.1).[9] We can examine these against our own childhood and adolescent experiences, reflecting upon those we feel have played a positive role in our lives (Box 10.4).

Psychiatrist George Valliant explored ways in which our thoughts and feelings change when we're under pressure, and how different mindsets affect general well-being. He suggested we have good and bad defence mechanisms when we're facing anything we perceive as an immediate threat. 'Good' defence strategies result in high-resilience tendencies, while 'bad' defence mechanisms negatively impact well-being through reduced mental functioning and inability to act with clarity or make sound, rational judgements. This appears to be independent of social class, education, or IQ.[10]

The thought of 'good' and 'bad' coping strategies battling over our resilience helps to explain the fluidity of our behaviour in response to stressful situations. It's as though we're on a seesaw, with the ability to slide from one end to the other at any moment. These competing forces are also risk factors and protective factors in relation to our ability to cope.

Positive psychologists have identified several risk and protective factors, applicable to both personal and professional life (Table 10.2).[11]

These are considered universal; however, those of us working within animal welfare are also vulnerable to additional risk factors, such as the dependency or overreliance of clients on our services, lone working, sole responsibility for one's practice, long hours, and regular incidences of unavoidable overtime such as attending to emergencies, potentially coupled with student debt following academic study or financial pressures due to self-employment. One randomized study examining 778 veterinary surgeons and auxiliary personnel over a 12-month period, found that veterinary surgeons

Table 10.1. Commonly observed predictors for resilience in young people.[9]

Promotive/protective factors	What settings might influence and enable these
Positive relationships with caring adults	Feeling connected to trusted adults
Effective parenting	Family
Intelligence, problem-solving skills	Learning and thinking systems
Perceived efficacy, internal locus of control	Mastery motivation – achieving success in desired goals
Achievement motivation, persistence	Mastery motivation – achieving success in desired goals
Self-regulation skills	Solid executive function systems
Effective stress management	Healthy stress response systems
Positive friends, romantic partners	Peer and family systems
Faith, hope, spirituality	Religion and cultural systems
Belief that life has meaning and purpose	Religion and cultural systems
Effective teachers, education, and role models	Education systems

Table 10.2. Competing forces on resilience.

Risk factors – maladaptive behaviour	Protective factors – adaptive behaviour
Isolation, loneliness – feeling this even when within a group setting	Proactive help-seeking
Not asking for help	General optimism
General pessimism – unsupported expectation of failure	SMART goal setting
Lack of meaning and purposes/absence of or minimal goals – which could be triggered by perceived loss of control or a dramatic/traumatic event	Wide support network
Negative emotions such as anger, frustration, low self-esteem, feeling overwhelmed	Internal locus of control
Addictions – for example, drugs, alcohol, gambling, social media, work, exercise	Positive feelings about oneself – motivation, good self-esteem, self-confidence
	Following a particular system of belief or faith (e.g.religion)

working an excessive 48 h per week correlated with significantly more driving accidents when travelling to visit clients.[12]

In a systematic review of work and sport-related resilience studies, 12 mental resources were commonly identified, associated with the building and maintenance of resilience, as well as occasional references to hope, focus, and self-sufficiency.[13]

- support;
- self-efficacy;
- optimism;
- coping skills;
- motivation;
- perspective;
- self-regulation;
- hardiness;
- proactiveness;
- adaptability;
- sense of control; and
- positive mindset.

Although 'support' appeared to be the most important resource, it's unclear how to define this or ensure it's sufficient, because what support looks and feels like will be individual-specific. One review of resilience studies

Box 10.4

Reflect upon your working environment and the duties you undertake on a regular basis.

Make a list of the various risk and protective factors that come to mind as you consider your personal working environment/s. For example:

Risk factors	Protective factors
Lack of resources, feeling pressured	*Good friends/teamwork*
No one to talk to	*Adequate training courses*
No leader figure/role model	*Able to take breaks and start/ finish on time*
No opportunity for career progression	*Help is available if I need it*

You could do the same for your home/personal environment. The idea is not to overwhelm yourself by merely pointing out the amount of risk factors, but to enable you to critically examine which you might be able to change for the better. You can also compare them to the suggested protective factors for resilience, to help identify areas where you might build in protective factors, or proactively work towards reducing those risk factors within your control.

observing palliative care nurses found that, although nurses receiving support they described as adequate *did* feel they coped better with their work, resilience only increased when they engaged in 'meaning-making' activity. This involved making sense of their experiences and purposefully expressing their thoughts and feelings.[14]

Resilience was measured using a self-reported scale. Several are available; however, some are suggested to have greater application within specific settings:[15]

- The Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale, used with survivors of post-traumatic stress:[16]
  - This examines the way people adapt to change and deal with whatever happens, how they cope with stress, whether they remain focused and think with clarity, and how they handle unpleasant, negative emotions.
  - It suggests that when people are faced with adversity, they will respond in one of four ways:
    - Develop ways of coping that will potentially create longer-term damage or deleterious effects.
    - Recover, but still experience a degree of internal disruption.
    - Overcome the disruption and return to a balanced mental and emotional state.
    - Continue to grow and develop increased resilience.

- The Brief Resilience Scale for use in non-clinical settings:[17]
  - Rather than look at personal characteristics or social resources that aid coping, this scale aims to evaluate how someone recovers from a period of stress, using six items:
    - I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.
    - I have a hard time making it through stressful events.
    - It does not take me a long time to recover from a stressful event.
    - It is hard for me to snap back when something wrong happens.
    - I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.
    - I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.
- The Resilience Scale for Adults, for use in clinic settings:[18]
  - This assesses key contributing factors identified in people who are highly resilient:
    - Personal competence.
    - Social competence.
    - Social support.
    - Family coherence.
    - Personal structure.

Resilience and well-being research suggests that *anyone* working within the wide range of caring and helping professions is vulnerable to risk factors for lowered resilience and increased workplace stress. Promotion of resilience should involve both the buffering of aversive experiences and the enhancing of positive experiences.

In the workplace, this indicates the need to:

- reduce work overload;
- increase protective factors;
- increase self-efficacy;
- increase personal control over one's work;
- develop meaningful work; and
- develop positive social professional relationships.

The increasing need to develop ways to care for those whose vocation it is to care, has resulted in a three-pronged intervention aimed at managing workplace stress (Fig. 10.2).[19]

But how easy is this to put into practice? How emotionally able, equipped, and prepared are individuals to carry out the relevant care?

Many people within the animal care industry are working long hours, remotely, in isolation, or running a business without support networks or robust job security. Even for those adequately resourced in terms of finances, premises, equipment, and staff, supporting others as well as caring for oneself might not necessarily come easily. The three-pronged approach could become unbalanced; for example, if individuals emphasize the workplace health of their colleagues over their own, believing themselves

Fig. 10.2. A three-pronged intervention aimed at managing workplace stress.

undeserving of care. Should managers struggle to support staff equally and fairly, organizations could suffer due to inconsistently applied care. Other barriers to personal well-being include peer and/or self-imposed pressure to be seen to be functioning, capable, and coping, and belief that animals may suffer if one is not personally able to care for them – this correlating with self-esteem.

The emerging concept of self-help

Self-help, also termed self-care or self-management, is a concept that carries a wide range of meaning between individuals, but ought always to create and strengthen resilience. There is limited supporting literature for any single strategy for this because of the very individualistic nature of the 'self', and because each of us has unique needs and sources from which we derive meaning and purpose.

One systematic review, grouping over 100 techniques under various categories including medicine, homeopathy, physical treatments, lifestyle, and dietary changes, concluded that exercise and relaxation training are best supported for addressing generalized anxiety. The authors also suggested people might generally orient more to definitions of self-care that incorporate social networks and widespread lifestyle strategies.[20]

Literature examining self-help strategies tends to focus upon management of health problems under the guidance of a healthcare professional, and has identified three essential elements to successful self-management of health problems:[21]

1. The quality of information available.
2. Personalized access to services chosen specifically for the individual's requirements, introduced gradually.
3. Established trusting relationships with healthcare professionals and a visibly flexible response to person-centred needs.

These all rely on an existing, and importantly, trusting relationship with a healthcare professional. Perhaps seeking this is the biggest hurdle we face as a body of animal welfare professionals.

This could be related to time and/or monetary costs, although might be compounded through feeling undeserving of support. Animal welfare workers are also embedded within professions in which *we* attempt to fix things, making it especially difficult to seek assistance ourselves.

Mindfulness as a model

One area of evidenced-based positive psychology with growing application to strengthening workplace resilience is that of mindfulness.[22] Mindfulness is a form of metacognitive experience without fixation or judgement.[23] It is promoted as a profound mechanism for change, which participants resonate with in caring for themselves.[24]

Mindful meditation and mindfulness practice are becoming increasingly popular in those experiencing anxiety and stress-related problems, including occupational stress. Practice involves the individual consciously setting aside all the apparent stressors of past and future, bringing their attention wholly to the present moment and the information being received across all senses. This increases resilience through benefits including sustained positive affect within the workplace, enhanced empathy towards colleagues and clients, and increased 'bouncebackability' following setbacks. An advantage of mindfulness is that, once the technique is learned, practice may be undertaken anywhere without any cost. Evidence suggests mindfulness can be effective within as little time as 3 min,[25] and therefore could be factored into time-pressured shiftwork with minimal disruption.[26]

Such activities are believed to reduce distress by consciously redirecting the mind and body into a very specific focus on the present moment. The idea is that through awareness of what is happening in terms of sight, sound, smell, and touch, and accepting these compassionately, we remove judgement and stop trying to avoid, control, or suppress experience. However, this is why mindfulness might not be suitable for everyone, as the present experience could be completely overwhelming for some. The first port of call for any anxiety experienced should always be your GP.

Other forms of mindful awareness exercises specifically guide people to focus on paying attention to different areas of the body in turn, in a non-evaluative way, experiencing the different physical sensations in the

Box 10.5

A common technique is to direct your attention to your breath, focusing on the rate and quality of breathing. For example, are you taking full, deep breaths that fill your lungs, or breathing in a rapid, shallow manner? Here, the task is to become aware of the physical sensation involved with breathing, and its effect on the rest of the body. Thoughts will naturally spring to mind, but the idea is not to chase them away but to let them come and go. You accept these are simply thoughts within the mind, which you can choose to pass by. Should your mind wander, remind yourself you have a choice in whether to attach your mind to this chatter, or to instead redirect your attention back to simply breathing. You can allow the repetitive action of inhaling and exhaling to become a focal reference point for the present moment.

way they impact the body (Box 10.5). Guided forms of mindful awareness practice can be delivered in person, either in the presence of a mindfulness coach, or via an online presence. These might involve being told to 'Consider the feeling of yourself upon the chair, your clothes upon your flesh, your feet upon the floor', then guide your attention to the sounds that come and go, any scent you can detect, and if your eyes are open, to simply focus upon the colours and shapes you can see without applying any meaning to them – so not seeing walls or objects, just colours and forms. Although you do need to pay attention to the voice instructing you, following simple instructions requires little effort, and can help to reduce the tendency of the mind to drift.

These types of exercise may also be performed by groups practising simultaneously; for example, during a team meeting. However, some may not feel as comfortable as others being asked to commit to these kinds of activities within a group. Although thoroughly enjoyed by some, this could be nerve-wracking and/or demotivating for others. If mindfulness works for you on an individual basis and you want others to share in the experience, consider trialling an optional group session. Allow people to come in their own time and let things develop without placing anyone under unnecessary pressure.

The aim is to gradually build up the length of time for which you remain focused solely on the present moment, so it makes sense to practise somewhere calm, when you're feeling relaxed. However, once well-rehearsed, the benefits of mindful awareness exercises may be gained during very short periods of time. For example, focusing on the present for 30–60 seconds in between veterinary or behavioural consultations, attending to animals within a rescue centre, or between training classes can help to rest the mind (Box 10.6).

Three workplace conditions have been highlighted as necessary for successful implementation of management-encouraged mindfulness practice within workplaces:[27]

1. Awareness of escalating tension.
2. Understanding the value of mindfulness as a tool.
3. Emotional investment across the team.

Mindfulness approaches to resilience offer a variety of ways to establish these conditions, including increasing positive emotions within the workplace, building empathetic interpersonal communication, celebrating positive outcomes with greater significance, addressing setbacks resiliently, and promoting the 'shared core' between colleagues working towards a shared end goal.[28]

The work of Seligman

Positive psychologist Martin Seligman developed self-facilitated activities designed to boost mood, enhance well-being, and build resilience:[29]

- **Three good things** – every day, list three things that went well that day, why they happened, and how they made you feel.
- **Using signature strengths** – we all have individual signature strengths such as honesty, loyalty, humour, creativity, kindness, and fairness. Every day, record at least one example of when you have used a signature strength.

His work was replicated by a team who tested the validity of these activities by including additional control measures and placebos. These comprised writing about early memories, and writing about specifically good, happy, positive memories, each evening at bedtime (Box 10.7). Analysis revealed Seligman's interventions did indeed increase happiness, although the placebo did too. However, researchers concluded these simple techniques boosted well-being specifically through activating self-affirmative information rather than any other factor.[30]

Seligman also created the ABCDE Model, which suggests the degree of resilience we bring into play is directly influenced by the beliefs we have about ourselves, the way we do things, and whether we achieve our best.[32]

Seligman suggests we explain events in one of three ways:

- Personal – 'I'm so useless', 'It must be my fault'.
- Permanent – 'There's no point; I'll always be useless at this!'
- Pervasive – 'Everything I do is useless so there's absolutely no point trying anything new at all'.

He identified a link between pessimism and lowered resilience, suggesting pessimists tend to explain why things go wrong, or why negative events

Box 10.6

There's a lot to be said for the power of sitting in silence and allowing the mind to focus on the present moment. It's something I learned from my dad! He absolutely blew me away when presenting a charity fund-raising quiz night. People were hustling and bustling into the community centre, finding tables with enough chairs for their various teams, catching up with each other, trying to settle their kids, and decide on team names.

My dad took to the stage and spoke into the microphone to thank people for coming, gave all the necessary housekeeping info, and introduced the quizzer. But, having grabbed everyone's attention, he spoke in a gentle, quiet voice and said, 'Let's first all take a few moments to pause, to sit together in silence and allow the business of our lives and the various stresses of the day up until this moment to float away. Let's instead focus our attention to where we are, to being here together to celebrate our community and this charity, and to the evening we will spend together.'

The crowd became completely quiet, and my dad just stood there smiling for a few moments – just the right amount of time – before thanking everyone for engaging with the evening's activity wholeheartedly.

Since that day, whenever I've been required to deliver presentations or webinars, I've opened with that same way of bringing calmness and attentiveness to those present, and to myself. It helps me to let go of all my worries about how I might come across, the doubts I have about the quality of the material I'm about to present, or my ability to do the material and the audience justice.

When I've had the opportunity to do this in person, with the audience physically present, I've found the collective spirit of like-minded people hugely inspiring, almost as if you can feel the power this audience has to go out and share further the information presented; what starts as small ripples gaining strength and becoming huge waves of change for animal welfare.

happen to them, in a permanent and/or pervasive way. This can be linked to helplessness. If we feel nothing can be done, because everything is useless, then we'll be less likely to try to seek help or act towards positive change, simply because we don't believe it worth the effort. Even though this type of pervasive negativity could appear to be a sound defence mechanism, offering protection from having one's expectations crushed, it has been evidenced that individuals with a pervasively pessimistic perspective are less likely to achieve academically, less likely to be promoted, and unlikely to earn as much as their more optimistic colleagues.[33]

Although we might each be naturally optimistic or pessimistic, it's suggested we can train our brains to be more optimistic. The ABCDE Model is a way of doing just that. It suggests that the way each of us addresses challenges relates specifically to the interrelationship between

Box 10.7

Look at the example, and then reflect upon how you might complete the table for yesterday.

'Good things' needn't relate to you directly, they can be things you've seen other people doing, or happening elsewhere (Table 10.3).

Create a diary template for the next week, with headings for each day, and commit to completing this for at least 1 week. Use the notes pages in your phone if you prefer, although consider the novelty of a notepad, it might serve a useful prompt to remind you to do this! It will provide you with a tangible, solid account to use as a reference point for well-being in future. After the week has passed, reread your entries. Reflect on how recording these positive outcomes is making you feel, and whether this is something you will continue with.

With regards to your 'signature strengths', you might already feel as though you have a good grasp of your key strengths and traits; however, there are online tests available, such as at www.viacharacter.org.[31]

Table 10.3. Good things that happened to me today.

Date	Three good things that happened today, why they were 'good', and how they made me feel	Example of how I used a signature strength today	A positive memory from the past
X/X/XX	Friend's dog discharged from the vets after bout of pancreatitis – really happy they're no longer suffering and my friend has them back at home, makes me feel pleased and happy to know my friend is relieved and also that the vet team have done a great job in helping my friend and her dog '*Sewing-Bee*' semi-finals were on TV – really enjoyed the programme, the camaraderie of the contestants and	Humour – used a joke to put someone at ease during a team meeting and move the conversation along, preventing an awkward silence	My friend's birthday weekend when a group of us went camping together – walking, pub lunches, campfire fun!

Continued

Box 10.7 Continued.

Date	Three good things that happened today, why they were 'good', and how they made me feel	Example of how I used a signature strength today	A positive memory from the past
	the warmth of the judges is so pleasant to watch, I love seeing the garments they come up with and the creativity in action, and I could just completely relax without thinking about work or anything else, with my dog lying next to me on the sofa We had a message from an owner who adopted one of the rescue centre's cats that I really loved, to say they've settled in now and their patch of fur loss is growing back. Really pleased to know the cat is doing well and their new owners adore them. Makes me feel proud of the way we found the right home and helped both the family and cat have enriched lives		
X/X/XX			

our beliefs and behaviour. For example, if we believe we're useless, this is both personal and permanent. It is self-limiting, because it will be apt to reduce the likelihood that we will try anything new. This belief will therefore spill over and influence our behaviour in a potentially predominately negative way.

Seligman argues that by fixing or reframing our beliefs, we will consequentially positively influence our behaviour. The ABCDE Model uses optimism to create feelings of self-belief, confidence, and competence (Table 10.4). By implementing 'best practice' we may change our beliefs, and consequentially our behaviour (Fig. 10.3).

Fig. 10.3. Seligman's Beliefs, Behaviours, and Best Practice.

Table 10.4. Seligman's ABCDE Model.

Adversity	Reflect upon the challenge you're faced with
Beliefs	What are your beliefs about the situation and your role within it?
Consequences	What are the effects of your current beliefs on you physically? Socially? Mentally?
Disputation	With disputation you need to combat your beliefs and ask yourself where do they come from? Are they based in evidence or assumption? Did you come to these beliefs yourself or did someone else suggest them for you? Have you ever thought about looking at the situation differently? Disputing with yourself is difficult and can be hugely challenging because it requires you to be honest with yourself and prepared to accept that you might have been misled or just not been fully aware of all the ins and outs of a situation before. The good thing is, we can change our minds, sometimes this requires courage, but the strength that can arise from that will be worthwhile and lasting
Energization	This is where you can channel your behaviour differently and evolve

Animal behaviourists and trainers might recognize this approach. When addressing a behaviour experienced as problematic by owners, professionals benefit by understanding the animal's individual perception of the situation, the triggers for the unwanted behaviour, the emotions underpinning this behaviour, and their expectation about what might happen. Behaviour modification programmes and training plans can then be designed to help influence the animal to begin to *feel* differently about the situation, to enable them to learn to behave differently.

We can also be conditioned to feel and behave in a particular way within a particular situation. However, just like the animals we work with, the way we think, feel, and behave remains flexible and able to change. The brain's lifelong plasticity is a truly wonderful thing.

Mindset

Dr Carole Dweck is a professor of psychology commonly cited for her work researching the human mindset, which she began decades ago, interested in student's attitudes towards academic failure and setbacks. She was intrigued as to why some students appeared to rebound and overcome difficulties and disappointments, while others seemed to fall apart at what might be broadly considered to be fairly minor setbacks. The terms 'fixed' and 'growth' mindset grew out of Dr Dweck's observations of children and have come to be largely applied to the underlying beliefs individuals hold about their own intelligence and ability to learn.[34]

When people believe they can learn new information and develop new practical skills, they appreciate this learning is directly related to the amount of effort that they put in, and that effort makes skills and knowledge stronger. This is the **growth mindset**, in which it is believed that applied effort over time leads to greater and lasting achievement. People with a growth mindset believe that they may always be able to learn and develop.

Those with a **fixed mindset**, however, tend to fear learning new skills or theory, because this might put them at risk of being exposed as unable to learn. Instead, people with a fixed mindset perceive intelligence or practical capability to be more of a natural 'gift or talent'; one that if you don't immediately appear to possess it, then even with the hardest amount of work, over the longest amount of time, you couldn't develop to any significant standard whatsoever.

Using Seligman's ABCDE Model, we can develop a growth mindset by consciously making a mental switch in the beliefs we have about ourselves. For some, though, this will require a considerable degree of mental effort so it can help to challenge ourselves to do this in a systematic way.

> 'A goal without a plan is just a wish.'
> Antoine de Saint-Exupery[35]

Goal setting

It's very easy to become obsessed with big, overarching goals, so we need to set ourselves small goals. This reflects the way we might create a training plan or behaviour modification programme to change an animal's behaviour! Set the environmental conditions for optimal learning, make sure appropriate reinforcement is available and criteria are clear, then progress in very small increments to build confidence and ensure wanted behaviour is reinforced.

For example, if you're writing a thesis, start by writing just 500 words each morning, or if you want to introduce something new to your life, such as daily yoga practice, start with just 5 min a day and build from there. We should all be able to achieve getting up just 5 min earlier, especially if we *really* want to do something. If those 'actually, maybe I'll start tomorrow' thoughts arise, acknowledge them but remind yourself you don't need to act on them, these are just thoughts, and you have a choice in how to respond. After a week you'll have 3500 words, or have done 35 min of yoga, without this feeling like a chore or a burden.

But, of course, it isn't always that easy! We all differ in the way we prefer to set our goals and might feel differently depending on whether goals have been assigned to us or whether we are setting them for ourselves. For example, whether we strive to achieve an assigned goal might depend on our relationship with the person setting the goal for us. And if we're working towards self-set goals, our commitment might depend on how feasible these are to achieve compared to alternatives. If we don't factor in the feasibility of attaining our goals, we might also risk setting unrealistic, 'fantasy' goals.[36]

When it comes to setting our own goals, our mindset will play a part. For example, people with a fixed mindset are more likely to create goals related to performance that are not reliant upon learning or development, using existing skills only.

Research suggests that very specific goal-related activity is positively linked to achieving them:

1. Specifying what you want to achieve, when, where, why, how, for how long, and with whom can lead you to be more successful.[37]
2. Visualizing not only what your end goal looks and feels like, but also all the various barriers you might need to remove along the way and how you will do so.[38]
3. Planning how you will respond to all sorts of things that might happen along the way, will mean you are prepared to avoid temptations and overcome obstacles.[39]

It's also important to remember that plans and goals can be changed, as necessary, because life changes. There is no point sticking to a plan you no longer believe in, or which is no longer providing you with meaning or purpose simply to execute it. There is a strength in being able to take a step back and say, 'That's no longer the right thing for me',

and reassessing your goals. Evaluating as you go will help to keep you working towards goals that are meaningful for you.

If–then plans

The critical part of goal setting is to work out how you will overcome obstacles *before* they arise – 'if X happens, then I will do Y' planning.[40] Preparing, and practising, in advance how to respond should certain situations develop can aid feelings of readiness and confidence, reducing the risk of feeling out of control and panicking in the moment. Knowing what to do, and indeed rehearsing the necessary motor skills before you need them, can increase self-efficacy. Think of this as future proofing, and factor them into any task you undertake. They help us respond rationally to the often unpredictable nature of our work, but depend upon us accurately predicting what *could* happen. You can learn from others too, gaining vicarious experience that strengthens self-belief, through discussing 'What did, or would, you do if…?'

These are also incredibly beneficial when working with clients, for example, helping them train or medicate their animals. Creating these together with your client allows them to feed in with what they're able to realistically achieve. You can also help them rehearse their 'if–then' responses before they might need them, further developing confidence and self-belief. For example, in a behaviour modification plan for an owner whose dog struggles being close to other dogs, the 'if–then plan' might be as follows:

- **If**: When on a street walk, we turn a corner and suddenly encounter another dog;
- **Then**: I will immediately turn around and walk away calmly, getting a reward ready for my dog.

Keep a growth mindset and reflect upon how much you are improving over time. Rather than focus on your performance, which you can evaluate once you have achieved your goal, focus on how much you're learning and developing as you work towards your goal. This will help make the challenge of doing so, despite requiring determination and persistence, feel even more rewarding. The positive feeling of continual growth should help to keep you on track towards those goals.

References

1. Goldsmith, O. (1801) *The Miscellaneous Works*, Vol. 3. Nicholas and Son, London.
2. Wu, G., Feder, A., Cohen, H., Kim, J.J., Calderon, S. *et al.* (2013) Understanding resilience. *Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience* 7(10). https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2013.00010

3. Seligman, M.E.P. (2002) *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*. Free Press, New York.
4. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
5. Morris-Rosendahl, D.J. (2002) Are there anxious genes? *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 4(3), 251–260.
6. Collins, S. (2007) Social workers, resilience, positive emotions and optimism. *Practice: Social Work in Action* 19(4), 255–269.
7. Mills, D., Dube, M.B. and Zulch, H. (2013) *Stress and Pheromonatherapy in Small Animal Clinical Behaviour*. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, UK.
8. Rutter, M. (1993) Resilience: Some conceptual considerations. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 14(8), 626–631.
9. Masten, A.S., Herbers, J.E., Cutuli, J.J. and Lafavor, T.L. (2008) Promoting competence and resilience in the school context. *Professional School Counselling* 12(2), 76–84.
10. Vaillant, G.E. (2000) Adaptive mental mechanisms: Their role in a positive psychology. *American Psychologist* 55(1), 89–98.
11. Bannon, A. (2021, 3 June) Emotional resilience skills for the veterinary profession. Mind Matters and Two Roads Charity, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Available at: https://www.bsava.com/emotionalresilience (accessed 11 February 2022).
12. Trimpop, R., Kirkcaldy, B., Athanasou, J. and Cooper, C. (2000) Individual differences in working hours, work perceptions and accident rates in veterinary surgeries. *Work and Stress: An International Journal of Work, Health and Organisations* 14(2), 181–188.
13. Bryan, C., O'Shea, D. and MacIntyre, T. (2019) Stressing the relevance of resilience: A systematic review of resilience across the domains of sport and work. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 12(1), 70–111.
14. Powell, M., Froggatt, K. and Giga, S.I. (2019) Resilience in inpatient palliative care nursing: A qualitative systematic review. *Supportive and Palliative Care* 10(1), 79–90.
15. Windle, G., Bennett, K.M. and Noyes, J. (2011) A methodological review of resilience measurement scales. *Health Quality of Life Outcomes* 9(8), 1–18.
16. Connor, K.M. and Davidson, J.R. (2003) Development of a new resilience scale: the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and Anxiety* 18(2), 76–82.
17. Smith, B.W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P. and Bernard, J. (2008) The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioural Medicine* 15(3), 194–200.
18. Friborg, O., Hjemdal, O., Rosenvinge, J.H. and Martinussen. (2003) A new rating scale for adult resilience: What are the central protective resources behind healthy adjustment? *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research* 12(2), 65–76.
19. Cooper, C.L. and Cartwright, S. (1997) An intervention strategy for workplace stress. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 43(1), 7–16.
20. Jorm, A.F., Christensen, H., Griffiths, K.M., Parslow, R.A., Rodgers, B. and Blewitt, K.A. (2004) Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for anxiety disorders. *Medical Journal of Australia* 181(57), 529–546.

21. Grady, P.A. and Gough, L.L. (2014) Self-management: A comprehensive approach to management of chronic conditions. *American Journal of Public Health* 104(8), e25–e31.
22. Kersemaekers, W., Rupprecht, S., Wittman, M., Tamdjidi, C., Falke, P. *et al.* (2018) A workplace mindfulness intervention may be associated with improved psychological wellbeing and productivity. A preliminary field study in a company setting. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, 195. Available at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00195/full (accessed 11 February 2022).
23. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2009) *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hachette, London.
24. Hugh-Jones, S., Rose, S., Koutzopoulou, G.Z. and Simms-Ellis, R. (2018) How is stress reduced by a workplace mindfulness intervention? A qualitative study conceptualising experiences of change. *Mindfulness* 9, 474–487.
25. Hafenbrack, A. (2017) Mindfulness meditation as an on-the-spot workplace intervention. *Journal of Business Research* 75, 118–129.
26. Britton, K. (2008) Increasing job satisfaction: coaching with evidence-based interventions. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice* 1(2), 176–185.
27. Hafenbrack, A. (2017) Mindfulness meditation as an on-the-spot workplace intervention. *Journal of Business Research* 75, 118–129.
28. Good, D.J., Lyddy, C.J., Glomb, T.M., Bono, J.E., Brown, K.W. *et al.* (2016) Contemplating mindfulness at work: An integrative review. *Journal of Management* 42(1), 114–142.
29. Seligman, M.E.P. (2006) *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, 2nd edn. Vintage, New York.
30. Mongra, M. and Anslemo-Matthews, T. (2012) Do positive psychology exercises work? A replication of Seligman *et al.* (2005). *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 68(4), 382–389.
31. VIA Institute on Character (2021) Bring your strengths to life and live more fully. Available at: https://www.viacharacter.org (accessed 11 February 2022).
32. Seligman, M.E.P. (2006) *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, 2nd edn. Vintage, New York.
33. Conversano, C., Rotondo, A., Lensi, E., Della Vista, O., Arpone, F. and Reda, M.A. (2010) Optimism and its impact on mental and physical well-being. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* 6, 25–29.
34. Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential*. Random House, New York.
35. De Saint-Exupery, A. (1943) *The Little Prince*. BN Publishing, New York.
36. Schunk, D.H. (1990) Goal setting and self-efficacy during self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychologist* 25(1), 71–86.
37. Oettingen, G., Peter, G.H. and Gollwitzer, P.M. (2000) Effective self-regulation of goal attainment. *International Journal of Educational Research* 33(7–8), 705–732.
38. Kle, H.J., Whitener, E.M. and Ilgen, D.R. (1990) The role of goal specificity in the goal-setting process. *Motivation and Emotion* 14, 179–193.
39. Stadler, G., Oettingen, G. and Gollwitzer, P.M. (2010) Intervention effects of information and self-regulation on eating fruits and vegetables over two years. *Journal of Health Psychology* 29(3), 274–283.
40. Bieleke, M., Keller, L. and Gollwitzer, P.M. (2021) If–then planning. *European Review of Social Psychology* 32(1), 88–122.

Further reading

Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential*. Random House, New York.
Frederickson, B. (2009) *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research to Release Your Inner Optimist and Thrive*. Oneworld, London.
Hoff, B. (1994) *The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet*. Methuen, London.
Price, I. (2018) *Headstart: Build a Resilient Mindset so You Can Achieve your Goals*. Pearson Education Ltd, Harlow, UK.
Seligman, M.E.P. (2006) *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, 2nd edn. Vintage, New York.
Seligman, M.E.P. (2011) *Flourish*. Nicholas Brearley Publishing, London.

11 Strategies for Teams

> You can't control what anyone else thinks of you. You might influence perceptions by the way you behave in company, but ultimately you can't make anyone think and feel a certain way about you. So, stop trying! Time spent worrying about the thoughts of others is better spent seeking out the shared values which connect you.

We know from working with animals that feeling safe is paramount to well-being yet we might not always feel safe and secure within our teams. The unpredictable nature of many of our roles might mean we're exposed to precarious situations, but we should always feel safe with our colleagues. Enabling another person or animal to feel safe in your company is a true gift.

Developing a team culture where people feel respected and confident to share concerns with approachable managers, without judgement or negative consequence, is key to creating a safe working environment. Listening to each other isn't enough – we ought to always respond non-judgementally, taking care not to worsen things or increase ill-feelings towards themselves, others, or the environment.

How does your workplace measure up to your ideal working environment (Box 11.1)?

Smaller-scale staff behaviours reflect team/organizational culture. It's the little things, the everyday interactions – as simple as checking in with a colleague at the start and end of a shift or making a drink for someone – which really matter. To experience another's compassion is incredibly powerful, as our sense of well-being intensifies if we feel genuinely cared for.

The National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work also focuses on the role and impact of empathy and compassion within the workplace, including:[1]

- the understanding that distressing experiences are part of normal life for everyone;
- the need to take a balanced approach to your thoughts and feelings, examining them, reframing and accepting them, even though this might be painful; and
- being kind and non-judgemental to yourself and others.

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0011

Box 11.1

1. Reflect upon what it *feels* like in your workplace. Write just three sentences that sum up the atmosphere, the communication, and how the team behave under pressure.
2. Imagine a close friend is applying for a new job. Picture the type of workplace you would like them to be working within. Write just three sentences that sum up the atmosphere, the communication, and how the team behave when under pressure.
3. Compare the two paragraphs you have written. Does your current workplace measure up to the workplace you imagined for your friend? In what way does it differ and why do you think that is?
4. Think deeply about what *one* thing could be done to bring your workplace more in line with the ideal. How could you go about making that first step towards lasting improvement? What would you need to be able to do it and who could you speak to for help in achieving it?

Reflections could be shared across the team to gain broader insight into feelings about the environment and the changes people would like to see.

This means being alive to the suffering of the self and others, accepting personal distress with courage, considering what things might feel like from another's position, and reflecting on potential consequences before acting. Team culture is formed from shared values, assumptions, beliefs, and practices that shape the behaviour of the group;[2] therefore, compassionate, empathetic approaches require embedding. This can be achieved through role-modelling caring actions throughout the team.

NHS England developed a support guide for practice approaches to self-care, empowering teams through role-modelled supportive leadership with effective, empathic communication channels.[3] Standardization of team leadership practice can safeguard against frustrations arising from inconsistency, although application of work-related policies can be difficult due to wide-ranging circumstances. Policies that offer a degree of discretion and flexibility to meet individual needs can therefore have a positive impact on staff well-being and retention.

NHS England recognizes four domains affecting workplace compassion:

- the adoption of shared cultures and values;
- inclusive, facilitated actions and activities;
- personalized policies and procedures; and
- supportive, constructive, dynamic leadership and management.

The NHS actively encourages regular group activities including a 'vision and values' exercise; consistently applied, compassionate standard operating

protocols for staff welfare; and empathetic management practices. The degree of control you might exert over these could relate to your role; however, the adoption of shared cultures, values, and engaging in team activities is something everyone should be able to feed into.

Shared activities

Team well-being relates to a strong sense of collective purpose; a sense of control over tasks; learning and development opportunities; fair, equal treatment; and trusting, communicative relationships.[4] Shared activities help to create a socially connected ambience. They can be internal, such as team training, group workshops, or mentoring programmes, or external, such as get-togethers outside the workplace. Offering those who are naturally a little more reticent the time they need to prepare to join in, planned events generally create something to look forward to (Box 11.2).

Shared learning and continuing professional development

Many roles require a specified amount of continuing professional development (CPD) each year. Even when this is not formally required, many of us undertake self-generated work-related study purely because of our interests and passion.

> 'While we teach, we learn.'
>
> Seneca[5]

Box 11.2

Create a team roulette wheel by having different people propose activities they're able to arrange or lead on. These might range from a meal out together, organized event attendance, a lunchtime or after-work yoga session, a drawing class, or a walk and picnic. If anyone has any special talent, see if they'd be willing to share it with the team by delivering an activity session.

Collect suggestions and set a regular time to draw one at random, such as at the conclusion of a team meeting, to be undertaken within the next few weeks. This can provide a focal point that can aid bonding through reminiscing about it afterwards. Having people facilitate sessions based on their own interests or skills can also help create connections across the team, building additional respect and understanding between team members.

Create a culture whereby anyone undertaking any form of CPD is encouraged to share their learning across the team afterwards, in some capacity. For example, providing a summary within a team meeting, delivering a brief presentation, making a poster of top-line bullet points on the topic, creating a staff room display, leading a team discussion, or writing a handout. Where a practical skill has been learned, this could be shared by demonstration or pre-recorded video, creating a step-by-step instruction guide, or writing a protocol for its implementation.

Andragogy means 'learning by teaching' and is well evidenced as a valuable educational method. It requires the initial learner to reflect on their experience and convey the insight gained in such a way that others may understand and apply it. This involves interpersonal skills including empathy for your learner, effective communication, patience, confidence, and self-efficacy. It's a significant responsibility to teach someone else something you know, but they don't! But empowering another with the gift of education, knowing you've enriched many lives by sharing information that they may put into place to help others, should make you feel good about yourself.

As well as the whole team benefiting from being upskilled by others' CPD experiences, capitalizing on any expense involved, this approach means everyone in the team becomes a teacher for everyone else at some point. This can strengthen respect between individuals, enabling everyone to feed into associated discussions and experience growth.

The staff meeting can be a good platform for this, as the chair is available to support the sharer, to build their confidence. It also demonstrates how seriously this exercise is taken. This will depend on each sharer's readiness, but the more commonly this is undertaken, the more likely it will become an accepted team 'norm'.

Shared experience reflection as a structured, standard part of team meetings

Allocating a specific portion of team meetings for discussions around animal care choices or client interactions can be hugely beneficial in better preparing the team for a similar situation. As well as updating people's knowledge about approaches to each situation being discussed, this type of transparent conversation can help to create and strengthen feelings of inclusivity.[6] A 'safe space' is created in which teams may process experiences without judgement – further aided by establishing 'ground rules' before discussions commence.

Although it might not influence senior-level decision-making, welcomed team input at least provides an opportunity for people to have their previous experiences, thoughts, and feelings recognized and

validated. As well as respecting and valuing people, this helps protect against imposter syndrome. For example, if someone felt an animal should be managed differently to the approach taken, professional discussion should help them understand that their methodology isn't necessarily 'wrong', as everyone will have been able to discuss the rationale behind the choices made.

This type of professional discussion also recognizes the uniqueness of every animal or animal–person partnership. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to animal welfare. Careful management will be necessary to ensure discussions are without judgement, promoting acceptance that errors may happen but if we can learn from and not repeat them, there is a positive benefit longer term.

In the veterinary world, 'morbidity and mortality rounds' are traditionally implemented to discuss errors, understand the events that led to them, improve patient safety, future outcomes, team development, and quality control. However, these types of conversation are not without risk so must be managed skilfully. People might feel embarrassed and/or anxious about talking about the event, which might evoke negative feelings. Team leaders can help by using language such as 'we' to describe the activity that is perceived to have contributed to the undesired outcome, promoting collective responsibility for making improvements. Structured formats designed to aid effective discussion, such as the Ottawa M&M Round Framework,[7] are available. These can help teams realize that attributing individual blame is unhelpful in reducing recurrence. Most situations will have multiple contributing factors, and *all* near-misses and errors should be framed as developmental opportunities.

The 'compassionate kitbag'

The compassionate kitbag[8] is an activity promoted by the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work[9] as a physical, practical, multi-sensory 'go-to' available for anyone in the team, throughout each working day. Kitbag items can be collated '*by* the team *for* the team' as a group exercise. For example, printed-out lyrics from favourite songs, messages from colleagues, pictures of the team enjoying group experiences, motivational quotes, objects that might have specific meaning for team members, and reminders of team strengths.

A team meeting activity could be the group-writing of a compassionate letter to the team, subsequently placed in the compassionate kitbag for anyone to read at any point. This could contain a sentence from each team member explaining their own thoughts about why it's important to look after each other and themselves. You could create a culture whereby someone different adds an item to the kitbag during every team meeting. This helps establish it as a working source of support.

Playing games for shared experience

Body chemistry, including hormones and endorphins, with a relaxing, pain-relieving, and anxiety-reducing effect is suggested to be responsible for the positive feelings that arise during play.[10] Those who play often are found to have lower overall levels of the hormone cortisol – increased amounts of which are associated with stress – therefore, playing games connects with living life in a more relaxed way.[11] Play enables individuals to discover new approaches to dealing with the world, including creative approaches to problem-solving, and practise these within a safe environment.[12]

However, some distinct criteria have been proposed that are necessary for individuals to engage in true 'play for play's sake':[13]

- Play needs an atmosphere of familiarity and emotional security, within a safe environment.
- Play has no other aim than itself.
- Play is voluntary and self-rewarding – it feels good to join in, even when you don't win the game.

Why is it that as adults we appear to 'stop playing', or to play different, perhaps more formal games than we did as children?

It is believed that the motivation for human–human social play is the desire for acceptance, and that the need to belong can be facilitated and enhanced through true play.[14] This supports the theory that we all need companionship and a sense of belonging, so playing together could be a novel way of helping teams to bond (Box 11.3).

Creating group vision and values

Studies have shown that optimal team working culture arises through collective participation, respect, and empowerment, all of which positively influence group performance.[15,16] This suggests that inclusivity, respectfulness, and the empowerment or enabling of others through knowledge/skill-sharing and confidence building are likely to be values shared across the team.[17,18] An exercise commonly promoted to create cohesive team culture is to collectively establish the team's vision and values.

The organization you work for might have an overarching mission or vision statement, outlining the aim of the entire workforce, and in what manner the organization intends this to be brought about. As a team, however, you can still create your own vision and values for your specific duties but will need to be mindful that these reflect the organizational approach. Your vision is your 'big plan' – what you want to achieve together and how you want to do this. Your values are the ideals that you believe in, the

Box 11.3

We'd had a complete run of awfulness. Losing a few of our long-term, much-loved animals due to ongoing illnesses, in fairly quick succession, was tough for everyone. Even when it's not unexpected you'll be saying goodbye, when it happens you still need to process all those emotions again. And on top of that we had people off sick and going through difficult personal times. When your mates are struggling that's incredibly tough too, because you just want to cheer them up, but you feel you can't even scratch the surface. It was all just piling up amid pressure to help even more animals but without any additional resources. Everyone was just feeling 'ick', and to face another team meeting with a long list of moans and more discussions about not leaving mugs near computers … it all felt so heavy and pressurized.

So, when our team leader had read out the necessary notices and then said 'Right, we're going to play a game now', everyone suddenly sat up a bit, as this was really weird.

We had to write down three celebrity names on separate pieces of paper to put into a pot. Then we had to get into threes and label ourselves A, B, and C. Our team leader read out all the names then put them back in the pot. The As went first, with 60 s each to pull names from the pot and describe them to their team, but without saying their name. B and C had to guess and after a minute, the next team's A person had their turn, and so on until we'd got through all the teams and all the pieces of paper had gone back into the pot. Then it was the Bs' turn. They had to do the same but were only allowed to mime each celebrity. Then it was the Cs' turn – who were only allowed to say one word for us to guess each celebrity.

It was just a really silly game, but we ended up in fits of laughter and giggles, and throughout the rest of day kept saying those 'single words' to each other or doing the various mimes and cracking up again.

Doing something so completely different from work, but all together, was just what we all needed at that particular moment in time, but we wouldn't have known it or thought it before doing so.

principles by which you work, and would not wish to compromise. This exercise offers a productive way of bringing people together to reflect upon ways of behaving, including towards each other, and can result in detailed conversations about conduct that really matters to people.

The first step towards establishing values is to reflect upon the principles of behaviour that people believe are vital for the work everyone is doing, such as integrity, fairness, and compassion. These are likely to differ between individuals, but you might find some repetition across the group. Discussing what each of the proposed values mean to people, and how they apply these within their daily work, should create insightful discussion. Aim to jointly refine the overall list down to a maximum of five values that the

team members agree are representative for them. This makes for both a focused discussion and a tight, easily memorable set of descriptors that best epitomize the team, with definitions agreed by the team. One benefit here is that what you come up with will be specific to your unique team, so they can take ownership and feel empowered and in control over these aspects of their working environment.

You can also discuss how these values could be applied on a wider scale; for example, including a question regarding values in interviews when recruiting. It's important everyone models the team values, whatever their role, so this becomes a living exercise. You can then use the set of values to help write a vision for your team's work. People could do this as individuals and then share, combining these to create an overarching statement – ideally just one, short statement embodying the team perspective.

> 'Our mission is to ensure animals have a good life by rescuing and caring for those in need, by advocating on behalf of all animals and by inspiring everyone to treat them with compassion and respect. Our vision is a world where all animals are respected and treated with kindness and compassion.'
>
> Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals[19]

Managers and team members alike can share examples, perhaps as a regular feature during a team meeting, where colleagues have embodied team values, strengthening the foundation for a consistent team culture.

Creating supportive networks within teams

Participating in regular peer group support sessions is championed as one of the most effective ways of managing the stresses associated with clinical practice.[20]

Peer groups may differ in terms of presentations of complex and difficult cases, some having more of a social nature while others are more formally structured. With varying technology available these presentations need not take place in person, so those working remotely can be included. However, in all circumstances, clear ground rules for appropriate discussion topics, specified time ranges, and methods of contact must be agreed upon at the outset. This protects people from being overburdened or inappropriately compromised. An 'appropriate escalation' protocol can be put in place as an action plan for anyone who needs to raise a concern more formally.

'Buddying up' can be a healthy way to have a designated point of contact with whom to discuss feelings about work. Trios can be helpful for those who feel pressured within a pair. However, care should be taken that groups do not become cliques, creating disconnect between other groups of colleagues. They could be supervised by mentors or leaders, for example. It can even be agreed that these simply provide a safe channel for 'ranting', to

get things off your chest without expecting any kind of resolution, simply a listening ear. However, where this is decided, parties must agree that any may stop a conversation if they feel they are becoming overwhelmed by another's outpouring, and interactions feel unhealthy.

It might feel like an unattainable luxury but designating and dedicating a small amount of group time for the purpose of talking through challenging experiences can make people feel valued, supported, and able to direct any negative energy appropriately.

To support others, managers must be supported themselves, and therefore also need peer groups, mentors, and/or buddy systems, as well as sufficient time to decompress. Managing a team might sometimes feel a lonely position, especially within a large organization where you might feel 'in the middle' between your team and a more senior management team. You might be required to feed information downwards, and de-escalate any negative response upwards, without feeling supported in either direction.

Despite a great deal of potential, new managers could find themselves in leadership roles without a broad range of skills and experiences to help them fulfil this role optimally right away. They might quickly feel as though everybody else is aware of their inexperience, leading to increased self-doubt and disconnect from the team. Although external CPD providers are available for those in leadership positions, involvement in peer groups with others in similar positions and the ability to share experiential learning regularly can effectively bridge this gap.

Leadership

Compassionate leadership involves being in the present moment and paying attention to people as individuals, understanding their unique strengths and motivations.

Ways in which leaders may promote well-being in their team have been identified as:[21]

- Expressing awareness of the challenges people face, as well as confidence in their abilities.
- Providing sufficient resources for people to be able to meet the expectations required of their roles.
- Creating opportunities for team members to participate in decision-making.
- Actively evaluating barriers to progression and seeking ways to develop team members in readiness for new opportunities.
- Setting inspirational, yet achievable, goals.

Team leaders can also track others' achievements on their behalf, celebrating these within team meetings where appropriate, and unlikely to overwhelm or create embarrassment, or within more formal appraisal meetings. This can be a lovely way to demonstrate to someone that you are aware not

only of *what* they have achieved but also *how* they have been performing. Include those small things that might appear insignificant, yet truly matter. For example, highlighting that you notice someone who always checks in on the last person still working before leaving, or always checks if anyone else wants a drink when they're heading to the kitchen.

The compilation of such lists might also help counter any unconscious bias you might unwittingly harbour as a team leader, guiding you to be more observant of all the positive actions taking place among your team. This should give you a boost too – attaching positive emotions to this behaviour. However, there is a risk that pointing out someone's achievements might put them under pressure to live up to what they perceive are unrealistic expectations. This can be the case with imposter syndrome because the feelings of self-doubt that accompany it are partly characterized by a resistance to positive feedback.[22] This shows how important it is to take an individual approach to managing and leading others, tailoring your style to individual needs and motivations.

When talking to someone who is doubtful of their capabilities and position within the team, seek collaboration by using language which acknowledges that they have expertise about themselves and their own lives and feelings. For example, seek their permission, giving them control over the conversation, by asking 'Would it be alright if I shared some of the things which I've noticed about your work?' You can emphasize someone's autonomy over their performance, by saying things like 'I'm happy to share some of my ideas if you think that would be useful, but ultimately you will be the one who decides, in your own time…'; for example, when asking someone to consider taking on additional responsibility.

Leaders can provide affirmations of strengths, efforts, and past successes to help to build team members' self-confidence. This is different to simple praising. Listen for evidence of the effort they've made, evidence of their strengths, qualities, and abilities, as this will acknowledge and validate their experience.

Affirming statements begin with 'You…' rather than 'I think you…':

- You're willing to try new things.
- You're always welcoming to visitors and new staff.
- You're very determined.
- You've been a very good role model for our apprentice.

These types of statement help guide someone to focus on *their* role, rather than *your thoughts about their role*, through the powerful use of carefully considered language.

Motivating teams

How managers feel about their teams will change the way they interact with them and the way they delegate tasks and responsibilities.[23] The Pygmalion Effect suggests that your expectations of someone else can influence their

performance, so feeling negatively about someone risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.[24] For example, if you doubt someone's competency and capability and they become aware of this, it's likely they'll feel embarrassed, undermined, and lose confidence. And their performance could be affected accordingly.

Challenging your assumptions, bringing them to your conscious awareness, can help you become a more understanding and empathetic leader. Use the Pygmalion Effect positively! Encourage people to perform well by having high expectations of them and championing their capabilities.

To inspire is a gift. You can inspire team members through the way you conduct yourself, the deliberation with which you make decisions, the reward and recognition you share, and the 'present-ness' with which you attend to whatever is happening around you. Enabling and empowering others, creating opportunities for their growth and development without losing sight of your own, is the sign of a great role model and inspirational leader.

Wellness action plans

Wellness action plans[25] offer a structured way of proactively and reactively protecting and enhancing workplace mental health.

These may be downloaded and completed electronically from https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download (accessed 21 February 2022) and can help prepare you for times when your work might become a little more challenging by having a plan ready to action.

Mental health first aider/well-being groups

Various mental health first aid courses are available, offering attendees insight into a range of difficulties that can be experienced within, and outside, the workplace. Having an individual who has undergone training to help them provide effective, appropriate support while managing their own experience could be thoroughly beneficial for a team, particularly when this position is recognized by job title, with time consistently allocated to support others.

However, such an individual might risk becoming overwhelmed or overburdened with the experiences of the rest of the team. They might also be placed under additional pressure if they are required to support others without the ability to make any structural changes or provide extra resources to counterattack burnout. Fulfilling this type of important role might prove very difficult without sufficient resourcing and provision in place, but, when this is fully available and actionable, could be invaluable.

An alternative, or an addition, might be the provision of a 'well-being group', instigated at whatever level the team is able to resource or facilitate. For example, a large organization might be resourced to provide a cross-departmental well-being group, with budget for implementing interventions such as social events. A much smaller team, however, might simply create a committee of two or three people to arrange an occasional activity, or facilitate a health and well-being discussion within a team meeting. It's important to work within your means, but the encouragement and promotion of such groups, and the giving over of time resource alone if that alone is achievable, demonstrates a desire to invest as much as possible in team welfare. Authenticity is key, so ideally these should be delivered by self-selected individuals with a strong natural focus on team welfare.

Checking in and checking out with people

Relatively simple to do, but so much more meaningful than you might realize, establishing a habit of finding out how people are feeling, whether they had a good evening yesterday or planned anything special for the forthcoming evening, can make a huge difference to the way others feel about starting and finishing work. Research has found the enquiry of others, genuinely awaiting their response, and reacting to it organically promotes positive feelings in you both.[26] This routine can also become ritualistic, an expected part of the working day that can add to a feeling of belonging, security, networking, and value.

For teams working remotely, this can be achieved via group chat technology, whereby the first and last 5 min of each day are given over to a 'team chat' for this purpose alone, with no other agenda save connecting with others.

Reward and recognition

Studies show that what really matters to us is having meaning and purpose in our work, and having our efforts and skills recognized and appreciated enhances this positive feeling.[27] Feeling valued boosts our body's natural reward-seeking system, which can help us bond with others and generate the sense of belonging that we all need to thrive. Recognition cements in us that our work is making a difference to others.

This needn't cost anything, although financial bonuses are likely always welcome, because there are many ways to acknowledge the impact someone is making, from gratitude messages and verbal praise to perks such as an early finish or the opportunity to undertake a novel and enjoyable activity.

Reward and recognition have been shown to be most effective when they are:[28]

- Timely:
  - Recognition can be created around milestones that are unique to individuals, such as start dates/work anniversaries, birthdays, and project completions; an animal being rehomed from a rescue centre or discharged from a hospital ward; or reaching a goal such as learning to wear a muzzle comfortably.
  - Reward and recognition are also effective when delivered while the activity is still fresh in memory, so that the value of their behaviour hasn't faded from the individual's mind when they are being recognized for it.
- Frequent:
  - As well as more significant milestones, it's important to celebrate the small ongoing wins, the little things people do that move them closer to achieving the vision of the team, the desired goal of their work, or are examples of them embodying the organizational and/or team values.
- Specific:
  - Being very specific about exactly what someone has done, and the way in which they have behaved, helps everyone understand what is being valued and appreciated, so this behaviour can be repeated, and imitated. It's so much more informative than just saying 'You did great'.
- Visible:
  - Public recognition, or recognition amid one's peers, can help to enhance its impact. Not only does everyone have the chance to learn about the commendable behaviour, and potentially copy it, but also the opportunity to contribute to the positive feedback.
  - It's also a way of sharing other people's individual talents and skills, so that they can be approached for assistance by others who respect their abilities.
- Inclusive:
  - Who is recognized by whom can be very important, as a sense of equity can develop where praise is encouraged across all levels of staff.
  - A type of holistic appraisal within larger organizations is referred to as 360-degree feedback. Here, an individual seeks structured feedback from a variety of people whose roles the individual both directly and indirectly impacts. As scary as this sounds, it can create a very balanced review and allow for a well-considered self-reflection exercise on how one is perceived and the extent of one's influence across a wider team.
- Values-based:
  - This can tie the behaviour of the individual directly to the team's desired outcome and the way they are expected to conduct themselves and carry out their duties.
  - This can enhance self-identity as well as role-modelling for others.

Box 11.4

I got a job where they had a team meeting ritual which I thought was totally corny at first, but after a couple of months I began to really look forward to it.

At the end of our monthly team meetings, after 'any other business', the team leader would ask for whoever had the 'star badge' – yes, a badge with a star on it! – to pass it on to someone else in the team. It had to be someone whom they'd seen making a real difference, or doing something extra special for someone else, whether a colleague or a client or an animal, over the past month.

The reason was shared, the badge handed over, everyone gave a round of applause, and that was it, back to work. But with smiles on all our faces each time! The badge handover and rationale for the new person getting it was documented as an important part of every team meeting. Minutes were not only shared across the team but also with our senior leadership, so we knew they would have read about the person who received the badge each month too.

I loved hearing the reasons people got the badge for, and when I got it myself one time, I was so surprised and felt so humbled that someone had noticed something I'd done that I hadn't really thought about being special in any way, but it had clearly made a difference to them. So, what I once thought was truly corny, I think I still do a little bit, but I love it too!

Round robin of reinforcement

This encourages teams to reflect and provide examples of others' commendable behaviour and/or achievements. In turn, each person must provide a piece of positive feedback regarding something they've observed in the person to their right or left. For example, an act of kindness, a character strength, a recent accomplishment, or a thank you for a personal interaction. No-one is left out, and everyone must voice a positive reflection about their neighbour, regardless of whether this person is a direct peer or has a more senior or junior title. This helps create a recognition-rich culture across all colleagues, rather than a specifically top-down praise practice, making positive feedback an integral part of team activity. Put people in the practice of doing something positive regularly enough and it's likely to become a good habit.

This can be a lovely way to end a team meeting, creating a positive group atmosphere, as people anticipate positive stories and experiences being recounted and shared (Box 11.4).

References

1. Meechan, F. (2017) Compassion at work tool kit. Available at: https://oscarkilo.org.uk/app/uploads/2017/12/Compassion-at-Work-Toolkit-FINAL-5-December-2017.pdf (accessed 21 February 2022).

2. Schein, E.H. (1985) *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. Jossey Boss: San Francisco, California.
3. Flourish Team (2018) Hope for the community. Towards commissioning for workplace compassion: A support guide. Available at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/towards-commissioning-for-workplace-compassion-a-support-guide-v2.pdf (accessed 21 February 2022).
4. Fapohunda, T.M. (2013) Towards effective team building in the workplace. *International Journal of Education and Research* 1(4), 1–12.
5. Stone, J.R. (2004) *The Routledge Dictionary of Latin Quotations: The Illiterati's Guide to Latin Maxims, Mottoes, Proverbs, and Sayings*. Routledge, Abingdon, UK.
6. Yin, J., Ma, Z., Yu, H., Jia, M. and Liao, G. (2020) Transformational leadership and employee knowledge sharing: Explore the mediating roles of psychological safety and team efficacy. *Journal of Knowledge Management* 24(2), 150–171.
7. Kwok, E. (2018) Improving morbidity and mortality rounds – the 'OM3'. Available at: https://emottawablog.com/2018/03/improving-morbidity-mortality-rounds-om3 (accessed 21 February 2022).
8. Lucre, K.M. and Clapton, N.E. (2020) The compassionate kitbag: A creative and integrative approach to compassion-focused therapy. *Psychology and Psychotherapy Theory Research and Practice* 94(1), 497–516.
9. Meechan, F. (2017) Compassion at work tool kit. Available at: https://www.alliancembs.manchester.ac.uk/media/ambs/content-assets/documents/health-and-wellbeing-forum/compassion-at-work-toolkit.pdf (accessed 21 February 2022).
10. Panksepp, J. (1998) *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*. Oxford University Press, New York.
11. Pellis, S. and Pellis, V. (2009) *The Playful Brain: Venturing to the Limits of Neuroscience*. Oneworld Publications, London.
12. Martin, P. and Bateson, P. (2007) *Measuring Behaviour: An Introductory Guide*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
13. Kaufer, M. (2013) *Canine Play Behaviour: The Science of Dogs at Play*. Dogwise Publishing, Wenatchee, Washington
14. Brown, S. and Vaughan, C. (2009) *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. Avery, New York.
15. Pérez López, S., Peón, J.M.M. and Ordás, C.J.V. (2004) Managing knowledge: The link between culture and organizational learning. *Journal of Knowledge Management* 8(6), 93–104.
16. Shin, Y., Kim, M., Choi, J.N. and Lee, S.-H. (2015) Does team culture matter? Roles of team culture and collective regulatory focus in team task and creative performance. *Group and Organisational Management* 41(2), 232–265.
17. Willard-Grace, R., Hessler, D., Rogers, E., Dube, K., Bodenheimer, T. and Grumbach, K. (2014) Team structure and culture are associated with lower burnout in primary care. *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine* 27(2), 229–238.
18. Xue, Y., Bradley, J. and Liang, H. (2011) Team climate, empowering leadership, and knowledge sharing. *Journal of Knowledge Management* 15(1), 299–312.
19. Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2021) Our mission. Available at: https://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/howwework/mission (acessed 21 February 2022).

20. Djokovic, A., Cooper-Thomas, H.D. and Gardner, D. (2021) Expectations and experiences of practising veterinarians throughout an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction programme. New Zealand Veterinary Journal. doi: 10.1080/00480169.2021.1987349
21. Martin, D. and Heineberg, Y. (2017) Positive leadership, power, and compassion. In: Gilbert, P. (ed.) *Compassion: Concepts, Research, and Applications*. Routledge, Abingdon, UK, pp. 221–236.
22. Schmulian, D., Redgen, W. and Fleming, J. (2020) Imposter syndrome and compassion fatigue among postgraduate allied health students: A pilot study. *Focus on Professional Health Education* 21(3). https://doi.org/10.11157/fohpe.v21i3.388
23. MindTools (n.d.) Motivation: Energising your people to achieve good things. Available at: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/motivating-your-team.htm (accessed 21 February 2022).
24. Kierein, N.M. and Gold, M.A. (2000) Pygmalion in work organisations: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour* 21(8), 913–928.
25. Mind (2021) Support your team and yourself with our free guide to wellness action plans. Available at: https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/#:~:text=Wellness%20Actions%20Plans%20(WAPs)%20are,health%20of%20your%20team%20members (accessed 21 February 2022).
26. Georghiades, A. and Eiroa-Orosa, F.J. (2020) A randomised enquiry on the interaction between wellbeing and citizenship. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 21, 2115–2139.
27. Malinen, A.K., Wong, J.H.K. and Naswall, K. (2020) Effective workplace strategies to support employee wellbeing during a pandemic. *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations* 45(2), 17–32.
28. White, P. (2014) Improving staff morale through authentic appreciation. *Development and Learning in Organisations* 28(5), 17–20.

12 Practical Toolkit – Everyday Activities for Maintaining Positive Emotional Well-being

> Only you live your life, not anyone else. Your experiences are yours alone. They are unique and they matter. You are unique and you matter. Life is precious, and the times we spend together are a gift – savour your connections with the living world and make every moment count.

Whenever you're finding things tough, your GP can help identify if you will benefit from consultation with a mental health professional and refer you to a suitable practitioner. However, caring for your physical health appropriately, with good-quality sleep, exercise, and nutrition that meets your individual needs is vital. The NHS website provides helpful advice regarding physical and mental health (https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/, accessed 22 February 2022).

The activities outlined here might appear overwhelming as an ensemble, but don't panic! Just see which appeal. You needn't try everything, or anything at all, but view making one small change as empowering, because you are able to exercise control.

Remember there are steps that help you cross the intention–behaviour gap to begin implementing positive changes:

- Visualization – the power of envisaging what you want to achieve. Picture yourself enjoying the outcome and imagine what that feels like.
- Planning carefully for the outcome you want before you start – considering when, where, how, and who with, for example, you will undertake the desired activity, and whether you first need to source any additional equipment or materials to help you.
- Including 'if–then plans' – preparing in advance how you will respond to things that might happen while you are undertaking the new activity.
- The enjoyment factor – making sure whatever you decide to do is something you'll find immediately enjoyable, such as planning to write a daily journal from the comfort of your bed with a tasty beverage.

DOI: 10.1079/9781789247817.0012

If we don't do anything, we're practising and getting better at *not doing*. If we take time to practise something carefully, with guidance, discipline, and measure, we get better at it – it can be that simple.

Action Control Theory[1]

Psychology Professor Julius Kuhl studied how we translate intention into behaviour, suggesting that once we've *decided* to do something, whether we *will or not* depends on a balance between how desirable it is versus anything else we could do at that given moment.[1] Kuhl found the more enjoyable we perceive our intended action to be, the less likely we might be tempted to do something else instead. We're more likely to succumb to temptation when we're in a bad mood, so can improve our resistance to competing choices by doing things that generally make us feel good.

This means reframing new well-being practices you decide to undertake, emphasizing that you're choosing to do these as a gift for yourself – a beneficial, enjoyable experience – not a chore! If you attach positive emotions to them, for example choosing a location you find particularly relaxing, listening to music you love, treating yourself to new stationary or appropriate clothing, or doing them with a good friend – whatever works for you – you'll be more likely to do them and keep them up.

A longitudinal study[2] examined the behaviour of cardiac patients advised to undertake and maintain regular exercise. They were assessed at the start of the study, then again 2 and 4 months later, to see how many were still exercising as initially intended, and if so, why. Although researchers felt further investigation was necessary to understand this complex issue, results indicated that those most likely to continue the new activity were those who put helpful measures in place *before starting*.

The three factors found to be most helpful were:

- Detailed action planning – including what kind of exercise they would take, when, where, with whom, how long for, and whether they would need any additional equipment, for example.
- Perceived self-efficacy – achieved by, for example, booking a fitness instructor or personal trainer to ensure exercise was appropriate and being undertaken safely and successfully, seeing others in a similar position to themselves exercising regularly, having social role models providing positive feedback regularly, and using prompts to get into a positive frame of mind before starting exercise.
- Action control – making the activity as enjoyable as possible; for example, by trying a variety of new sports with a good friend, in supportive, encouraging environments to avoid other 'unhealthy options' appearing a more attractive option.[3]

Diarizing time for yourself

How often do you undertake activities for no other purpose than making you feel good? Take control and add *yourself* into your to-do list. We so often prioritize others, including meeting our pets' needs, or general household admin, without setting aside time specifically for self-care.

There could be many reasons for this. We might not feel we deserve it, or we might feel that others are *more* deserving of our time. We might feel physically exhausted. We might *plan* to do it then think 'it doesn't matter if I don't get around to it, I'll treat myself tomorrow instead' but never do. We might not recognize how important our needs are, or we might be in the habit of ignoring our own needs.

Start with what's achievable, even if this is just 5–10 min each day and put this into your calendar. For many of us, having a 'tick-box' positively nudges us, as we find crossing off a task reinforcing. Seeing 'self-time' written down moves it from a mindful 'ideal' to a record on a page – an action to be done. We're more likely to be in the habit of working through a daily task list than of prioritizing ourselves. Here, we're creating a task out of, and for, ourselves.

What this involves will be different for everyone – whether listening to a podcast while lying in bed or soaking in the bath, spending even just 10 min sketching, or reading one chapter of a book. Choose whatever is meaningful, start small, and build up. Help yourself out by planning your timing to ensure you're undisturbed. For example, turning off your phone, popping up a 'do not disturb' sign, even diarizing a set worktime for being available for others – if that helps guarantee you time for yourself.

It might feel selfish and completely alien to begin with, and you might need to force yourself to stick to your plan for a while before you begin to experience the benefit. If you can, plot a week's worth of 'me-time', include a 5-min window on day seven to reflect upon how doing this has made you feel.

Saying no confidently and creating boundaries

We grow up conditioned to believe that 'no' is bad in some way, but 'no' is just information. It doesn't even need to be final, as it can mean 'now is not the right time for me'. We also attach sorrow to saying no, which might contribute to guilty feelings we wish to avoid, so could lead us to say yes. Have you ever said yes to something out loud but inside already know it's going to put you under increased pressure to fulfil the obligation?

Thinking differently about what 'no' means helps, as does accepting what we are and are not responsible for. Saying no to becoming involved directly doesn't mean removing yourself from offering alternative solutions. It means protecting yourself and being ready to say yes in future. You might

also avoid creating a pattern of 'always being the one to help' and creating a dependency on you that could be dangerous. Many of us might say yes because we enjoy the feeling of helpfulness but remember we're only as helpful as we are healthily able to assist. If helping means we're overburdening ourselves in some form, then we will be impacted, in some way, by the additional pressure if this puts us out of balance.

It's not selfish or inconsiderate. What would you say to a friend who was struggling because they had taken on too much to help others?

Healthy boundaries determine what you will become involved in, workwise or within your personal life, and when. They should be focused on you, not what others should or should not do. As well as being helpful for you, they can help others avoid frustration or disappointment because they will understand your reach. You'll be positively role-modelling for them too. Any action that protects your emotional and physical health is something of which to be proud.

Mantras

It can help to have short, snappy sayings prepared to tell yourself in difficult situations. Creating these for yourself can make them especially meaningful. Repeating them can help you persist as well as reminding yourself how important *your* feelings and well-being are. For example:

- Putting myself first is an act of kindness.
- My worth is not related to my productivity.
- I'm allowed to say no.
- I have a choice in how I respond.
- Taking a step back for now doesn't mean I don't care.
- I cannot control the way someone else thinks about me.
- My feelings about myself matter most.

Being outdoors and connecting with nature

Researchers measured the amount of the stress hormone cortisol in people's saliva relative to the amount of time they spent outdoors. They found spending at least 20 min daily, strolling or sitting in a place where you feel in contact with nature, will significantly lower your cortisol level. Additional destressing benefits were observed to continue after 30 min, but at a much slower rate.[4]

You're probably aware of how important this is, but how often do you achieve this? Do you ever purposefully take time to connect with your surroundings? The study revealed the benefits don't necessarily arise though

activity – more from feeling *connected* to nature. It's about using our senses to experience the environment in a different way, detaching from any other demands on our time and effort, and becoming fully attentive to what we can see, hear, smell, touch, and even taste, and how this makes us feel.

Unfortunately, many of us might be experiencing nature in a regular or repeatedly stressful way. For example, many of us working within animal welfare fields have dogs or horses of our own who struggle when exercised outside, requiring our continued attention. We might think we've been out for a walk yet haven't had the opportunity to connect with anything other than the animal we love and are trying so desperately to support. Those working extended hours might be required to exercise their own animals in relative darkness before and after shifts, unable to enjoy this experience in daylight. It's the *quality* of the outdoor experience that matters here in terms of emotional health.

Dog owners might also feel guilty about going out without them! But we needn't think of this as having to go very far. How about starting by just sitting for 5 min by yourself? If you're fortunate enough to have an outdoor space, choose a quieter time, prepare a long-lasting enrichment activity to keep your dog happily occupied, and turn your attention to the sights, sounds, and smells around you. If you don't have any outside space this could be done at an open window, or on a doorstep. Spend a few moments experiencing what's happening around you.

Incorporate this as a regular break during the working day. Nudge yourself by buddying up with someone else to walk around the block with you. Use a travel mug to take a drink outside with you. If you're in a very urban location, you might need to concentrate on nature through traffic, but you might surprise yourself with what you do pay attention to once you start. It'll soon have been 20 min or so without you even realizing!

Visualization and the perfect day

Visualization techniques are widely used within the positive and sports psychology fields to help people achieve their goals, enhance their performance in specific skills, and reset themselves into a more positive mindset. Picturing yourself achieving something strengthens your ability to do just that.[5] We all visualize an awful lot in everyday life, our imaginations transporting us to various situations and activities, but not necessarily beneficially. To benefit from our imaginings, we need to practise using visualization for specific purposes. The key is doing so with deliberation and conscious awareness.

Research suggests we'll benefit most by imagining ourselves going through the process of achieving our goals *step by step*, as well as achieving the final goal and the feelings we associate with doing so.[6] This strengthens

motivation to work towards a real goal, as well as increasing belief in our ability to succeed. The more detailed we can be, including how each of our senses will be impacted during the experience, the more likely we are to complete and reap the benefits of our desired goal.

We can also do the opposite and use negative visualization to help us appreciate what we have. One study asked romantic partners how they might feel had they never met. When researchers compared their responses with those from romantic couples who were asked just to write about how they met, they found 'happiness scores' were higher when people reflected upon what they might have lost out on.[7] This suggests reflecting upon things we truly appreciate, and wouldn't want to lose, can make us feel happier about having them in the first place (Box 12.1).

Creativity

The administration many of our roles involve can feel repetitive and menial. Creativity can provide the vital balance we need for health and happiness.

When we think of creativity, we might think of arts and crafts, but there are many ways to be creative. For example, cooking and baking, putting together an outfit, designing the layout of your home, playing an instrument, taking photos, gardening – there's even artistry involved in animal training. There's also writing in various forms, whether creating a diary, jotting down thoughts, producing a blog, or a social media post. Group activities such as playing games, assembling jigsaws, or even brainstorming solutions for work-related issues in team meetings all involve imaginative thinking.

Creativity will be individually expressed and experienced. The act of producing something that did not exist previously is immediately tangible, allowing us to take ownership, demonstrate competency, and feel accomplished. We can also share outcomes, gaining recognition and value as well

Box 12.1. The perfect day.

Psychologists use this technique to help people envisage a perfect day in terms of sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and social activity too if desired, without any distraction. There are no limitations.

Set aside 10 min to write down everything you would choose to have happen on what would be, for you, a perfect day. Reflect upon how you might work towards introducing some of these factors into your day. These could be the smallest things. For example, your perfect day might include laughter or time spent outside – both of which might be within your reach every day.[8]

as positive emotions arising through shared experience – such as gifting a team with homemade goodies.

Creativity, whether we're passively or actively involved in the process, allows us to use a different side of our minds, helping us to achieve balance. For example, if you enjoy listening to music try creating various playlists with different meanings – such as songs that represent your friends and family, or holidays you've enjoyed. You can listen to these as part of your 'preparing for work' routine to help trigger or enhance a positive mood. If visual imagery inspires you, create an album of favourite images to look through whenever you need to, or as part of your daily routine. For example, create albums with different meanings, or compile a bank of videos that make you laugh. You could do this as a team and have this available for staff to flick through during breaks. Remote teams could keep an online file within a shared drive.

Learning also involves creativity. Connect this to nature by setting your creative task as learning one new animal or plant species per day. Grab a notebook or create an online file for this purpose and spend even just a few minutes sketching the day's selected species or making a few notes about it – whatever appeals to you. At the end of just 1 week, you'll have seven small sets of accomplishment, whether drawings or recorded details, which will also help you feel more connected to nature.

Be the learner

We continue to learn throughout our entire lives, whether we're aware of what we're learning, and whether we decide to do this consciously with a goal in mind, or not. Choosing to learn something, with deliberation, not only builds our experience and personal growth, but also builds empathy as we can identify with other learners. Take up something new, even if just for a very short period. Learning something we've chosen creates a positive self-challenge and the opportunity to realize our potential. To become proficient at something requires rehearsal of that activity, so learning also involves practising self-discipline.

Many of us will also train our peers, whether as part of induction processes or to carry out specific duties, as well as educating and instructing pet owners. Others potentially expose their own vulnerability by seeking support and guidance from us. It can be incredibly helpful to empathize with how this feels, experiencing the frustrations and achievements involved in learning experiences. This has another payoff – helping us deepen our understanding of the learning experiences of the animals we are working with. When we're training an animal or person, we're much more likely to achieve our goals if we communicate with clarity, having first prepared ourselves and the environment to guide them into performing the behaviour we want to reinforce. Going through the learning process ourselves builds

empathy as we can appreciate the personal impact of different methods of explanations, communication, and instruction. It can remind us of the part we play, especially when things aren't going as we intended. Then, rather than allowing anyone else's behaviour to frustrate us, we can make changes to our behaviour and communication to bring about a different outcome. We can reframe the situation to regain a locus of control.

The power of pausing – centring our attention to the present moment

We spend much of our lives in 'waking sleep' or autopilot – going through the motions without really applying ourselves with deliberation. We might think we're present, and making decisions rationally, but these are often governed by repetitive, habitual patterns of behaviour. To be able to challenge our discursive minds effectively, and to think differently, we need to be consciously aware, connected to the present moment.

Consider whether these states of attention feel familiar:

- Attention-scattered – trying to do everything but achieving nothing, attention all over the place, jobs started and left unfinished, attention can be scattered anywhere and caught up with the past or future.
- Attention-captured – your attention is trapped, you carry thoughts and feelings with you, unable to detach, unable to tune into anything else, gripped, other views and perspectives are excluded, attention may be captured anywhere and caught up with the past or future.
- Attention-open – letting go of tension, connecting with the environment with all the senses, being receptive to your surroundings.
- Attention-centred – unaffected by the past or future, in 'flow', being 'in the zone', but ready to turn your attention to something else if needs be, ready and aware.

Centring our attention must be a conscious decision. When your attention is captured, you may not be aware of it. To reflect, we need to quieten the mind. Reflection is not just chasing thoughts that are going around in your mind but coming to them creatively with a new perspective.

At both the start and end of a task, sit or stand still for a few moments to let your mind take a breath. Come to each new part of the day afresh, ready to focus on whatever immediately requires your attention. The benefit of calmly pausing is allowing us to experience a 'necessary in-between', a moment to consciously turn our attention away from the previous activity and centre it in readiness for the next. This requires discipline, practice, and deliberation, but regularly coming to stillness for just a few moments between tasks helps us disconnect, centre, and reconnect. Initially, practise this when you feel calm and less pressured by workload and meeting others' expectations. Make a conscious decision to

pause in between activities. The effort it takes will be worth it once this becomes habitual.

Pausing to focus, before starting anything new, may be done collectively so can be introduced within team meetings or events. It allows us to let go of the stresses of the day temporarily, until *we* decide to turn our attention back to them.

Attitudes to work

Do you sometimes feel pressurized to do more, but then feel ineffective or no longer experience this as rewarding? There could be an element of fear involved when we keep working on a task despite feeling as though we're not achieving our goal – what are we frightened of losing by stopping? *Who* are we trying to impress?

People might carry on working beyond limits to counteract or balance other insecurities, excessive working comprising a form of escapist coping strategy. It might also be difficult to stop working when we allow ourselves to become captured by email, phones, technology, and the concept of immediate gratification in terms of a response.

- Focus on the needs each *task* demands from you.

View the task from the objective of the person or animal you're assisting and think 'how might I empower *them* helpfully?' When we work without being driven by ego, we encourage a sense of community through working for others, not for ourselves. This isn't always easy, especially for the competitive or ambitious. There's absolutely nothing wrong with either of these sentiments, they can drive us to achieve our very best, it's just important to be aware of their influence on the way we work.

- Our work is more important than our feelings about it.

If we associate negative feelings with a task, this will invariably affect the way we perform it. For example, if we start something suspecting it will be tedious or difficult, we are likely to experience it as such. When faced with challenging tasks, we can consciously decide to change our approach and actively perceive the task to be rewarding on a broader scale. We are then likely to experience it in a more positive way. It's okay to have feelings about what we're doing, we certainly won't approach all aspects of our work with the same enthusiasm or passion, but it's important to recognize this could prevent us achieving our best.

- Work until it is time to stop!

Recognizing, in ourselves and others when it's time to stop will help avoid fatigue, positively affecting our self-esteem and value. Ask yourself 'What happens if I *don't* do this now?', and you may find you are putting

unnecessary demands on yourself. Set yourself up for success by considering how you feel about the various aspects of your work, from the bits you love to the unavoidable, necessary chores. Recognizing when your attitude influences your performance during menial tasks allows you to bring your mental approach under your internal locus of control. Take care not to place unrealistic expectations on yourself. Where your role permits, give yourself permission to bring your working day – or specific tasks within it – to a close at an appropriate moment.

Creating clear boundaries between professional and personal time

We all too often carry our work home with us. It can develop into a burden that, if we're not careful, we might become so used to carrying that we rely on its presence and become defined by it. Those who work from home face the additional challenges of continual exposure to their work environment. For example, how much control do we have to stop *just checking emails* or *writing one more section of that report ready for tomorrow*? It pays to ask ourselves honestly who or what is pressurizing us into working during our personal time.

If you're self-employed, safeguard against working extended hours without a break by creating 'shifts' for yourself so you know what you're doing, and when, during each day.

The Personal Debriefing Model[9] is a veterinary model easily applied for all. It focuses on finding ways to actively disengage from work, takes only a few minutes, and can be done on your own. It also requires self-reflection, which has therapeutic value in itself:

- Check that tasks are finished/necessary documentation completed.
- Deal with *essential outstanding issues only* or delegate or defer, adding it to the to-do list for tomorrow.
- Acknowledge that the day is done, that you did your best with the available resources, and reflect upon what went especially well.
- Say goodbye/remove your name badge/uniform instead of wearing it home – develop closure rituals which signify that work is done; for example, end the day with some gentle stretching exercises or play a specific song when your shift ends (remember how good hearing the school bell made you feel?).
- Use the journey home to separate professional and private life – if you live on-site or work from home take a short walk around the block to help you mentally and physically detach from your working day.
- If you must complete some work at home create a specific space in which to do this and *only* use it for this purpose, packing all resources used away as soon as you have finished.

Social networks

Lone working carries a risk of stress. Some of us work in remote teams spread across the country or between various sites, so might not be able to join team destressing activities that help us feel socially connected and supported.

Digital technology offers various ways for isolated people to connect but must be used wisely and meaningfully. Having trusted others within the same field to talk to is vital. They will fully empathize and understand the impact of this work on well-being. We need to mindfully set the scene to create helpful and meaningful support. It's important to establish a set of ground rules for social groups – physical and virtual meeting rooms should be safe spaces in which supportive dialogue can flourish. Otherwise, we risk fuelling and validating disheartened feelings instead of challenging ourselves to see things differently (Box 12.2).

Considered breathing

Breathing in deliberate, calming rhythms can bring about a sense of calm, even if you have only a few moments to spare.[10]

Box 12.2

I read a social media post from someone whose dog had hurt their leg, pretty badly, in an accident. The owner started their post by saying straight away they already knew the injury was very serious, and they were specifically looking for words of sympathy and encouragement to help them get through the impending surgery and recovery experience. They made it clear they didn't want anyone to attempt to diagnose or offer suggestions for how long it might take to heal such as 'My dog did similar, and it turned out to be a cruciate ligament injury'.

I thought this type of proactive self-protection really clarified how to comment from the offset, and so the person received exactly the type of support they sought without risking them reading anything they might find unhelpful or increasing the anxiety they were already feeling. It was a really lovely example of clear communication, and the following comments were incredibly respectful. It also made me think that displaying the courage to lay yourself bare and ask for *exactly* the type of help you feel you need helps other people to know what to say or what to do, rather than trying to help but get it wrong and making things worse completely unintentionally.

- Take up a comfortable position, ideally sitting with your feet flat upon the floor if possible.
- Breathe in slowly and steadily for a count of four.
- Hold your breath there for just a moment.
- Gradually exhale for another count of four, or more if you can, keeping this out-breath long and slow.

This might feel weird to begin with, but with practice you'll feel more comfortable and it will come to feel natural. Noticing the difference it's making will help it feel rewarding and worthwhile doing. This is not about focusing your mind on any particular thought, so just concentrate on your breath. If you can, aim to do this for a full 3 min each day and you should notice the difference it makes fairly quickly. But, even if you just have a brief moment to yourself, it can still be something you can use to help reset yourself quickly.

Considering dialogue

The quality of the way we talk together can optimize working relationships. Psychologist and philosopher David Bohm developed a methodology 'The Dialogue Project'[11] for workplace communication, intending to acknowledge and then remove judgements and open people up to new perspectives. From here, solutions might arise collaboratively, through people becoming consciously aware of their own thought processes and using these to enhance, rather than create a barrier to, conversational flow.

- Be relaxed.
- Be non-judgemental.
- Be curious.
- Listen.
- A dialogue is a direct, face-to-face encounter.
- Dialogue is something creative.
- There shall be no speaking at each other.
- We aim to share our opinions without hostility.
- Can each one of us be aware of the subtle fear and pleasure sensations that block our ability to listen freely?
- In a dialogue everybody wins; there shall be no attempt to gain points or to make your opinion dominate.
- Accept that an opinion is an assumption – it is important to reflect that the different opinions you have are the result of past thought.
- Can each participant try to suspend their assumptions – do not judge them as good or bad.
- We will share our judgements and assumptions with the spirit of fellowship and trust.
- It isn't necessary that everybody be convinced to have the same view.

- Each person shall participate: partake of the whole meaning of the group.
- We shall make something in common by creating something new together.

We can also apply this ideology to working with animals and the types of communicative 'dialogues' we have when interacting with them, with our words, tone of voice, and our body language.

One thing Bohm considered was 'necessity', suggesting that once we've judged something as absolutely necessary, this removes our desire to negotiate over it. So we take up polarized positions against those feeling differently, a type of conversational situation that is extremely difficult to overcome. We can help ourselves by challenging our assumptions about what is necessary, and widening our consideration as to whether there are any other necessities or what happens if things do not happen as we intend. Even this simple broadening of our mindset can aid collaboration, empathy, compromise, and the implementation of workable solutions.

This can lead to cultural change, as we become used to thinking critically, and collaborative communication in which everyone present may feed into the conversation without fear of judgement or dismissal. We're likely to develop a more trusting, and therefore positive and engaging, working environment, as well as overarchingly better-considered decision-making.

Who is the teacher in front of me?

We can learn from every interaction we have with absolutely everyone we encounter, person or animal. But do we? It's easy to overlook this opportunity, or only to apply ourselves within formal learning such as attending courses or training sessions. We can miss the chance to gain valuable insight into the people and animals we're working with. Keeping the question 'Who is the teacher in front of me?' in mind, we help ourselves take a step away from casting judgement, acknowledging that we can learn from everyone, as we need to be actively aware for conscious and meaningful learning to take place.

Those of us involved in animal training place great emphasis on the animal we're working with being our teacher, guiding us through our interaction with them, and shaping the way our relationship and interventions progress. Maybe we don't place such importance on the human element when working directly with people. We often talk about what our animal friends have taught us, but we don't often let each other know just how much we've learned from each other, and how valuable that knowledge is!

Take a veterinary waiting list, or behaviour counsellor's inbox – a certain client's name appears on the list, which can create a physiological, as well as mental, response, based on established feelings about that person

from previous interactions. If you catch yourself doing this, remind yourself this person has something to teach you. Change your mindset to turn what you might have originally perceived as uncomfortable, unpleasant experiences to be transformative.

This type of thinking also encourages self-reflection during and after interactions, allowing us to modify our behaviour with measure, regulation, and temperance. Practise asking yourself, 'What can I learn from this person? What do they have to teach me?' with every encounter you have, and you'll be pleasantly surprised!

Meeting people as though for the first time

It follows that we can also optimize every learning opportunity by resetting ourselves every time we interact with anyone, so we're not holding on to any preconceived ideas or unconscious biases about how they might behave. Unfounded predictions will affect our own behaviour, setting us up for poor communications. We know our behaviour is shaped by previous experience, and that every previous interaction with someone will influence our feelings towards them; however, we must be mindful that the way anyone behaves is also influenced by many variables. We might be unfairly assuming about another person's character or motivation at that moment.

We can also practise monitoring our own behaviour and seeing how differently *we* behave in different situations. This should help us to be more understanding, and more forgiving, of those with whom we interact.

Ultimately, if we carry judgements and expectations of others to our next meeting with them, we can be tempted to respond to them in kind. For example, if you expect someone to be agitated or irritable, you might present yourself that way. If you've known someone for a long time this could be difficult, but think about how you feel when you're with someone you feel has pre-judged you, even if you know them well.

Always meeting people afresh, as though for the first time, allows us to listen to *them*, rather than being critical of their ideas.

Listen without agenda

This is a very simple practice, and well worth implementing; however, surprisingly difficult. If we're listening passively to someone, already preforming what *we* want to say and listening only for moment to interject, then we'll miss out on what they are telling us. Focusing on our own thoughts and opinions is being ego-driven rather than driven by desire to understand the perspective of whomever we are talking with.

Next time you're having a conversation with someone, try actively listening to what they are saying as if you were going to be asked to recite their

speech straight away afterwards. If thoughts about what you want to say come into your mind, consciously push them aside. See how you respond when the conversation naturally falls to you to continue.

There are workplace conversations in which we do have an agenda and need to pass on very specific information. The more practised we are at listening to another's perspective, the better able we will be to impart the information without detracting from the other person and while giving them our attention. Rather than impose information onto them, risking them being pushed away in response, we'll be able to provide them with it.

Unattachment

Our work is often complex, stressful, frustrating, and sad. It's helpful to remember that these need not be carried with you. We need to find ways to acknowledge the sadness, loss, or frustration that working in the animal welfare sector invariably involves from time to time, but to leave it behind us.

Whenever something evokes an emotional response, we connect with this and can become attached. We can develop attachments to people, animals, places, our beliefs, pieces of artwork, or music, for example. This is wonderful; it makes us who we are and connects us to the world around us. Attachment is an incredibly valuable thing *as long as we can unattach*, without lasting and debilitating mental/emotional discomfort. Otherwise, we might always be at the risk of becoming 'overattached' to people or beliefs.

We might become attached to an idea we have for ourselves, for example of 'wanting to do something very well', becoming frustrated when we're unable to, for whatever reason. We might also become absolutely dependent on things we attach to, feeling as though we cannot cope without them.

If you find that something makes you feel/react and experience a deep emotional reaction and connection to it, consider how attached you are to it and whether this is affecting your ability to fulfil your potential? Is there anything in your workplace or about your role that you might find hard to let go?

It's important to be able to acknowledge that there might be pain involved in unattaching; for example, as we learn to let go of animals we have cared for with such compassion and dedication. It's vital to remind ourselves that being able to unattach doesn't mean we stop caring – it means we are able to take a little time out of mind to care for ourselves (Box 12.3).

Acceptance

We all have days when we face additional or increased difficulties, either related to our work or to our personal lives, and may become overwhelmed by them, gripped by unhelpful anxiety. Anxiety is, by definition, a feeling of worry about a situation where the outcome is *uncertain*, and so certainly

Box 12.3

When I moved jobs, after 14 years working in the same place, it was a real personal test. I felt so attached to the people I worked with – we were such a phenomenal team. So well-practised at working together, always having fun even when the work was stressful, and we were working under pressure. The camaraderie was something I'd not experienced anywhere else, and felt I thrived within. I'd felt supported by, and connected to, everyone, and also in a weird way, the premises! Even the journey to and from work was something I felt so attached to, as though it in part defined me and I would have to wrench myself away from it.

So, when I was offered the dream job, I knew I would have to detach myself and walk away from what had become a total comfort zone. Some of my fear was bound up in having to put myself right out there and completely start again from scratch, build working relationships, and learn a new way of working. Even though I wanted to, because it was the work I really wanted to undertake, the thought of potentially not working in the same kind of team was very scary.

I was given some advice from a trusted friend, who said, 'There's no reason to think the new team might be any different in terms of how you all work together, it'll just be different people but everywhere you go you'll find lovely people'. After all, the new team were doing the work I was moving into, so could teach me so much! But still, I loved my old team, and it would be them I would personally miss more than anything.

Despite these feelings, I did identify as someone who 'lived in the moment' and always saw the positive, so part of me thought I'd be okay. But – this would be when I'd find out if I was the person who I thought I was.

Turns out I was able to look forwards, rather than cling to the past. My old team were still the people I loved, and our connections didn't change, they just became 'out of the workplace' relationships. Plus, I had all the lovely new people to get to know and work with. My wise friend was right – people are lovely everywhere, and stepping away from things you feel so attached to doesn't need to necessarily change the way you feel about them.

many of us spend a good deal of time worrying about things that *might* happen, despite the fact they might *not*!

Learning to accept what we can't control is challenging because at the same time we must accept our vulnerability. We can help ourselves by practising focusing on things we are able to feel a degree of certainty about.

As regularly as you find helpful, jot down the things you are worrying about. Focus on each one in turn and assess whether you are, realistically, able to influence it in any way. Remind yourself, in a measured way, that

some elements of life truly are out of reach and the time you are spending focusing on them is counterproductive and could be better spent actioning things that will definitively benefit you.

At the same time, try to list at least two or three things that you *are able to* influence positively. If you bravely encourage yourself to examine things a little more deeply, you will find places where you are able to make changes that will ripple out and have other positive impacts across your life. This is about recognizing your personal locus of control to feel empowered and safer in the knowledge that you are able to make some changes.

Help yourself further by planning *how* to take control of those things you can. Create a prioritized 'to-do' list including 'If X happens, then I will do Y' strategies. Preparing in advance for future eventualities helps you feel safer and more confident.

A modern interpretation of the 'Serenity Prayer', attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, has been widely promoted by Alcoholics Anonymous as part of their 12-step programme to helping recovering addicts take steps towards healing:

> 'Grant me the grace to accept with serenity the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can which should be changed and the wisdom to know the difference.'[12]

It's a helpful way to look at all areas of our lives, acknowledging the bravery this involves. Acceptance isn't about us just sitting back and letting things happen to us, but about understanding what is within our power and what we are allowing to consume our energy unhealthily. And acceptance doesn't mean putting up with things the way they are, it's about pragmatism, being realistic. Seek evidence for where best you can apply and exert your energy to bring about healthy change.

Remembering you have a choice

> '…there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.'
>
> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*[13]

It's been said the only constant thing in life is change. Life is, in a nutshell, 'a never-ending series of things happening continually'. These things are neither good nor bad in themselves; they are just events that happen to and around us. It's how *we* perceive them that influences our behaviour. It's not the events themselves, but how we explain them to ourselves. We benefit by reminding ourselves we always have a choice, if we are aware and paying attention to the present moment, in how we think about things and how we behave in response.

Again, the more we practise pausing and reflecting, the more we'll be able to bring our behaviour under our control. And the more we feel in control of ourselves, the safer and more confident we'll feel – and the more resilient.

Coping and recovering

Coping is behaving in such a way as to escape the pain and tension of any given situation.

Recovering is taking time to reflect upon why and how any given situation affects our feelings and behaviour and considering ways in which to change the situation and/or our reaction to it. Then taking those steps in our own time, at a pace at which we can manage without becoming fearful, anxious, frustrated, or overwhelmed.

Sometimes 'coping' is all we are physically, emotionally, and mentally capable of. The moment we begin to *recover* is when we become aware that we are coping. And part of coping is help-seeking. There are so many ways to access professional support; however, these require you to initially tell someone else how you are feeling. This needs to be someone you trust to help you access professional guidance when you feel as though your ability to cope is fading and you are despairing.

Language can reveal this. 'I just can't cope' and 'How on earth will I cope?' are commonly voiced phrases, but if you are still able to function then in some sense you *are* coping. You benefit from telling yourself that coping isn't necessarily defined as achieving the highest accomplishment or reaching a particular goal. Making it through the demands of each day is an example of coping. The way we cope might change from moment to moment, but we must allow ourselves to acknowledge that we're coping as best we can in our current circumstances.

Kindness

Demonstrable kindness towards others can help us develop richer social relationships, positively impact our mood, and sustain this 'good' mood for longer. Research has found that even the relatively simple act of talking to a stranger when out and about – social niceties and exchanges with unfamiliar people – can boost our moods much more than we expect (Box 12.4).[14]

Try to perform an act of kindness each day; something that positively impacts another person or animal, beyond things you would normally do. Keeping a diary or jotting these onto a calendar can help you bring them to mind at the end of the week and might spur you to develop this activity into a habit.

Savouring experiences

Savouring is the act of reflecting upon positive experiences to gain greater appreciation for them, the impact they make on us, and the world around us. This means that you can enjoy the experience for even longer,

Box 12.4

Dedicate a whole week to deliberately focusing on making at least one new social connection each day, whether speaking to someone in a shop or public transport, just making small talk, or asking a colleague a question about their day you wouldn't normally ask. Take real heart in this, because although you might think it will be perceived as 'weird' and/or make the other person feel uncomfortable, research that examined the effect of people having random, impromptu conversations with strangers on public transport has revealed that happiness generally increases in the other party.[15] This is related to the fact that doing something with someone else, making a social connection even if you don't know the other person, generally increases the positive emotions experienced at the time.[16]

At least once over the week, try to connect for a little longer with someone you care about and have a deeper existing relationship with. Set aside the time to do this so you can deliberately focus on making an authentic connection with them, then reflect upon, and jot down for future reference, how this made you feel.

as you revisit it within your mind and relive the sensations it evoked. Once you get into the practice of doing this, you might find yourself taking much more notice of the good things as they are happening, taking greater meaning from them. It's another way of centring your attention on the present moment and the valuable opportunities it has to offer (Table 12.1).

Unless we take on a particular mindset, we can sabotage the act of savouring. By bringing the experience and our awareness of it into the present moment, and our conscious awareness, we can take control over any potentially negative thoughts that arise from it, acknowledge these, then let them go. We can instead draw out the joyful qualities of the experience. The technique revisits experiences to elicit positive emotions experienced at the time, rather than feeling sad something is over.

Replay a happy event in your mind, as though you were watching a video of it. One study asked participants to do just this, for 8 min a day for just 3 days, and found those who did still retained increased positive feelings when assessed 4 weeks later.[18]

What would a wise person do?

Whenever you're faced with a dilemma, pause, breathe, take some time to reflect on the situation, and ask yourself 'What would a wise person do?' Very often we have the answers; however, we need to look at things objectively,

Table 12.1. Savouring.

One study that examined the quality and breadth of experiences of people who savoured activities, found various factors which enhance or present a barrier to our ability to savour the good parts of our lives.[17]

Savouring can be enhanced by:	Savouring can be damaged by:
Talking to another person about how the activity made you feel and how beneficial that was for you	Focusing on the future – the fact that the experience will end or has ended
Looking for other people to share your experience with	Reminding yourself that it will soon be over
Thinking about how fortunate you are to have had the experience	Telling yourself it wasn't as good as you expected
Thinking about sharing this with others at a later opportunity in the future	Reminding yourself that nothing lasts forever
Physically expressing your happy energy	Thinking you will never feel that way again or have that experience repeated
Laughing and smiling	Thinking of ways in which it could have been improved
Taking pride in having had the experience	Feeling as though you didn't deserve to have the experience
Thinking only about the experience and being fully absorbed by it	Feeling as though you possibly did someone else out of having the experience who could have gone in your place

as though for a moment the outcome doesn't affect us, but someone else. This allows us to step aside, thinking less emotionally and more rationally about the conundrum. It's a nice exercise to practise, and it doesn't always follow that what we believe a wise person would do is what *we'll* go on to do, but it does allow us to balance our thoughts before acting upon them.

Compassionate imagery

Research has revealed our minds struggle to differentiate between images and reality, and that images hold significant power in evoking a variety of emotions in us.[19] This is why images of trauma can be so very upsetting. We are able to proactively, consciously, turn this around however, and create positive associations with images to promote our mood and experiences.

Use a favourite photograph or piece of art – something you can have a copy of readily accessible – that resonates with you positively, without any negative association attached to it. At the start and end of each day, sit and look at it for a few quiet moments. Or create a gallery of your favourite

feel-good images ready to look through if you need a short break at any moment during the day. Set this to music if that enhances the good feeling further.

Flow

Positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi used the term 'flow' to describe the mental state, which hopefully we've all experienced, of 'being in the zone'. When we're in flow we're fully committed to whatever we're doing with full attention. We're completely immersed with our energy fully focused upon the act in hand. In this state, we lose our sense of time, even of place, and are often abruptly brought out of it by someone appearing to suddenly demand our attention, only becoming aware of their presence when they speak. Being in this state, and being able to tap into it at will, can have positive lasting effects on our mood and well-being.

Csikszentmihalyi described flow as having specific dimensions, the understanding and deliberate application of which could help us achieve it:[20]

- Balance between ability and challenge.
- Goals that are clearly detailed.
- Direct feedback so behaviour may be adjusted if necessary.
- Total concentration.
- A sense of personal control.
- The activity is rewarding in and of itself, so it feels effortless.
- The focus of our awareness is narrowed down to the activity itself, so we lose awareness of ourselves and of time passing.

Thankfully, there are things we can do to help us reach 'flow', and practising is a good way to take some time out of life and give ourselves over completely to the present time. For example, colouring books for grown-ups have grown in popularity. These are used in adult art therapy because they are about 'being in the moment' and giving oneself over to completion of a task that requires concentration and connection. They create something aesthetically pleasing too, which is a bonus. But how can we apply this to our daily work?

Think about the many menial tasks you're faced with each day. Any task that is carried out with great care can teach you how to work with attention, providing you with the opportunity to practise working diligently and purposefully. Precision of craftsmanship, whatever the task being performed, puts you completely in touch with what you're doing. It is truly lovely to witness anybody working with great care and attention. This can generate happiness for the observer, as well as the doer.

Consider the menial tasks arising throughout the working day, and what your immediate attitude towards them is. Can you connect to their completion

as you would to create something of beauty? Can you think about them and approach them differently so that you, and others by consequence, get more out of them?

Self-forgiveness

We must forgive ourselves for the times when we don't catch ourselves and stop to think before acting, then wish we hadn't done so. The more we can understand about our own behaviour, and the influences upon it, the triggers that render us so very vulnerable to rash or evasive decision-making and avoidance strategies, the better. This is hard to do, especially when we might not feel as though we're worthy of our own forgiveness, but it is key to being able to accept, detach, and carry on.

One study that looked at undergraduate students during a period between two examinations found that students who'd forgiven themselves for having put off revision before their first exam felt less negative about their exams in the interim period. They were less likely to procrastinate before their next exam than those who had scolded themselves for avoiding revising. Crucially, although self-forgiveness wasn't related to performance during the first exam, it did predict a better performance at the second exam, as the self-forgiving students fared better.[21]

Forgiving ourselves helps redirect our motivation from avoidance to approach, in relation to our goals. If you're practised at forgiving yourself, especially for things that happened that were beyond your control in the first place, you're likely to do better in future than if you harbour ill-feeling towards yourself. Another set of researchers similarly suggest that a lack of self-forgiveness, or self-compassion, negatively impacts well-being because it leads us to go over and over the reasons why we *should* feel worthy of blame and self-critique.[22]

Remember, we are human beings first and foremost, before our job roles and requirements. We might make mistakes, that's perfectly natural, but these are 'things which happen', and we can still choose how we allow ourselves to feel about them longer term. We are always able to learn from the things that happen, to help inform our future choices. We just need to be consciously aware of doing so.

Gratitude

Child development researchers suggest that we begin to experience and express gratefulness between 7 and 10 years of age.[23]. This tentatively suggests that feelings of gratitude form as part of cultural and social learning, rather than being an innate psychological trait,[24] its benefits gained through practice. Learning to reflect on and express gratefulness enables individuals to adapt their behaviour advantageously, optimizing interactions and experiences.[25]

Positioning yourself around conscious, deliberate, reflective gratitude is said to lead to lasting, enhanced mental well-being[26] and boost subjective happiness.[27] This is because the practice of gratefulness guides us away from a negative lean, to focus on things that have impacted us positively. This helps to reframe our focus and our mood. If we get into the practice of expressing gratitude, this can become a 'way of being'.

Gratitude interventions commonly involve keeping a journal of a required number of events for which you feel appreciative, whether you have experienced these directly or indirectly.[28,29,30] When tested, positive effects were observed even after as little as keeping a daily gratitude record of three appreciated events for just 2 weeks.[31] Likewise, journalling up to five things for which you feel thankful even just once a week has been observed to boost subjective happiness[32].

Psychologist Martin Seligman tested the effect of a 'gratitude visit'. This entailed writing a letter expressing appreciation to someone who had been helpful, or shown kindness, yet had never been properly thanked … and then delivering it to the person. He found that immediately after delivering the message people experienced a significant boost in happiness, which was still measurable even after 3 months.[33] Imagine if you were in the habit of doing that?

Researchers interested in the effect of expressing gratitude in the workplace tested charity fundraisers by having a senior figure do so in person. This was found to increase productivity by approximately 50%.[34]

It's clear just how and why people working in the animal care-related fields are at risk of emotional distress, and conditions such as compassion fatigue and burnout. However, it's also clear that grit and resilience can be developed and nourished, as long as we are aware. We need to extend our awareness to others as well as ourselves, widening our circles of compassion. Practising empathy for ourselves and others is key to well-being (Box 12.5).

Box 12.5

Think of someone who has made a difference to your life in some way. This needn't have involved a grand gesture and could be as simple as just waiting for you to finish a task to lock up and walk to the car park together.

Jot down a message explaining the effect their actions had on your feelings. Doing this will make you feel good.

But you'll feel even better if you can deliver the message and know your thanks have been received.

There are so many people whose lives would be enhanced if they only knew they had made a positive impact on someone else. Let someone know if they've been that person for you.

Be that person for yourself.

The truth is, the work we do changes lives for the better, including our own. We help animals gradually learn to trust and not fear us. We enable traumatized animals to feel positively about life. We give them the gift of safety and pain relief. We tirelessly work to find them loving homes, in which they will thrive. We diagnose, treat, and nurse animals through pain, injury, and disease. We help owners understand their communication and how to meet their individual needs appropriately, to live the best life possible together. We help owners make positive changes, so no-one need live with fear or frustration. We help people teach their animals to adapt, equipping them with skills to help them take life in their stride. We campaign enduringly, as advocates, for consistent welfare standards. We empower people to connect with the animals they love. We give animals and people the care they deserve.

And the relationships we develop with the animals and people we work with enrich our lives in such deeply fulfilling ways.

Veterinary professional routes to accessing support

Online mental health and well-being support for veterinary professionals, including educational resources, an app and a 24 hour phone helpline is available via the communities: www.vetlife.org.uk and www.vetmindmatters.org (accessed 12 May 2022), funded by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

References

1. Kuhl, J. and Beckmann, J. (eds) (1985) *Action Control: From Cognition to Behaviour*. Springer, New York.
2. Sniehotta, F.F., Scholz, U. and Schwarzer, R. (2005) Bridging the intention–behaviour gap: Planning, self-efficacy, and the action control in the adoption and maintenance of physical exercise. *Psychology and Health* 20(2), 143–160.
3. Sirois, F. and Giguère, B. (2018) Giving in when feeling less good: Procrastination, action control, and social temptations. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 57(2), 404–427.
4. Hunter, M.R., Gillespie, B.W. and Chen, S.Y.-P. (2019) Urban nature experiences reduce stress in the context of daily life based on salivary biomarkers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(722). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00722
5. Brown, C. and Alcoe, J. (2010) The heart of wellbeing: A self-help approach to recovering, sustaining, and improving wellbeing. *Journal of Holistic Healthcare* 7(1), 24–28.
6. Latham, G. (2011) *Goal Setting: A Five Step Approach to Behavioural Change*. Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

7. Koo, M., Algoe, S.B., Wilson, T.D. and Gilbert, D.T. (2008) It's a wonderful life: Mentally subtracting positive events improves people's affective states, contrary to their affective forecasts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95(5), 1217–1224.
8. Therapist Aid (2021) Positive psychology techniques. Available at: https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-guide/positive-psychology-techniques (accessed 22 February 2022).
9. Huggard, J. (2014) Debriefing: A valuable component of staff support. *International Journal of Palliative Nursing* 19(5), 212–214.
10. Goldstein, M.R., Lewis, G.F., Newman, R., Brown, J.M., Bobashev, G. *et al.* (2016) Improvements in well-being and vagal tone following a yogic breathing-based life skills workshop in young adults: Two open-trial pilot studies. *International Journal of Yoga* 9(1), 20–26.
11. Bohm, D., Factor, D. and Garrett, P. (2021). Dialogue: A proposal. Available at: https://dbohm.com/dialogue-a-proposal (accessed 22 February 2022).
12. Shapiro, F.R. (2008) Who wrote the Serenity Prayer? Available at: http://archives.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2008_07/serenity.html (accessed 22 February 2022).
13. Shakespeare, W. (2005) *Hamlet*. In: Wells, S., Taylor, G., Jowett, J. and Montgomery, W. (eds) *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edn. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
14. Sandstrom, G.M. and Boothby, E.J. (2000) Why do people avoid talking to strangers? A mini meta-analysis of predicted fears and actual experiences talking to a stranger. *Self and Identity* 20(1), 47–71.
15. Epley, N. and Schroeder, J. (2014) Mistakenly seeking solitude. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 143(5), 1980–1999.
16. Boothby, E.J., Clark, M.S. and Bargh, J.A. (2014) Shared experiences are amplified. *Psychological Science* 25(12), 2209–2216.
17. Jose, P.E., Lim, B.T. and Bryant, F.B. (2012) Does savouring increase happiness? A daily diary study. *Journal of Positive Psychology* 7(3), 176–187.
18. Sheldon, K.M. and Lyubomirsky, S. (2006) How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *Journal of Positive Psychology* 1(2), 78–82.
19. Kensinger, E.A. and Schacter, D.L. (2006) Processing emotional pictures and words: Effects of valence and arousal. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioural Neuroscience* 6, 110–126.
20. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2002) *Flow: The Classic Work on How to Achieve Happiness*. Rider, London.
21. Wohl, M.J.A., Pychyl, T.A. and Bennett, S.H. (2010) I forgive myself, for now I can study: How self-forgiveness for procrastination can reduce future procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences* 48(7), 803–808.
22. Thompson, L.Y., Snyder, C.R., Hoffman, L., Michael, S.T., Rasmussen, H.N. *et al.* (2005) Dispositional forgiveness of self, others, and situations. *Journal of Personality* 73(2), 313–360.
23. Gleason, J.B. and Weintraub, S. (1976) The acquisition of routines in child language. *Language in Society* 5(2), 129–136.
24. Liao, K.Y.-H. and Weng, C.-Y. (2018) Gratefulness and subjective well-being: Social connectedness and presence of meaning as mediators. *Journal of Counselling Psychology* 65(3), 383–393.

25. McCullough, M.E. and Emmons, R.A. (2003) Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389.
26. Emmons, R.A. and Shelton, C.M. (2002) Gratitude and the science of positive psychology. In: Snyder, C.R. and Lopez, S.J. (eds) *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press, New York.
27. McCullough, M.E., Emmons, R.A. and Tsang, J.A. (2002) The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82(1), 112–127.
28. Schnitker, A.A. and Richardson, K.L. (2019) Framing gratitude journalising as prayer amplifies its hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, but not health, benefits. *Journal of Positive Psychology* 14(4), 427–439.
29. Southwell, S. and Gould, E. (2017) A randomized wait list controlled pre-post-follow-up trial of a gratitude diary with a distressed sample. *Journal of Positive Psychology* 12(6), 579–593.
30. Wolfe, W.L. and Patterson, K. (2017) Comparison of a gratitude-based and cognitive restructuring intervention for body dissatisfaction and dysfunctional eating behaviour in college women. *Journal of Eating Disorders* 25(4), 330–344.
31. Boggiss, A.L., Consedine, N.S., Brenton-Peters, J.M., Hofman, P.L. and Serlachius, A.S. (2020) A systematic review of gratitude interventions: Effects on physical health and health behaviours. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 135, 110–165.
32. Young, M.E. and Hutchison, T.S. (2012) The rediscovery of gratitude: Implications for counselling practice. *Journal of Humanistic Counselling* 52(1), 99–113.
33. Seligman, M.E.P., Steen, T.A., Park, N. and Peterson, C. (2005) Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist* 60, 410–421.
34. Grant, A.M. and Gino, F. (2010) A little thanks goes a long way: Explaining why gratitude expressions motivate prosocial behaviour. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98(6), 946–955.

Further reading

Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil your Potential*. Random House Publishing Group, New York.
Frederickson, B. (2009) *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research to Release Your Inner Optimist and Thrive*. Oneworld, London.
Hoff, B. (1994) *The Tao of Pooh and the Te of Piglet*. Methuen, London.
Price, I. (2018) *Headstart: Build a Resilient Mindset so You Can Achieve Your Goals*. Pearson Education Ltd, Harlow, UK.
Seligman, M.E.P. (2006) *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, 2nd edn. Vintage, New York.
Seligman, M. (2011) *Flourish*. Nicholas Brearley Publishing, London.

Index

Note: Page numbers in *italics* denote tables and figures

Emotional Well-being for Animal Welfare Professionals

Tamsin Durston

Each year, many thousands of animals are taken into rescue centres and animal shelters around the world. Some will have suffered neglect or cruelty, others have been relinquished because their owners are no longer able to cope with caring for a much-loved pet. Many owners will require support and guidance in meeting their animals' needs and helping them thrive in environments which can sometimes be challenging. Animal welfare and veterinary staff are often affected deeply by the decisions that they need to make on a daily basis and are at risk from a whole range of emotional health issues.

This book examines the risks to the emotional well-being of animal welfare staff and veterinary professionals. It provides practical solutions, coping strategies and various techniques aimed at restoring a work–life balance and offers guidance on creating healthy approaches to self-care for the emotionally challenging work undertaken by anyone working directly with animals. It features:

- Practical advice on recognizing the risks such as compassion fatigue, burnout and imposter syndrome.
- Guidance on creating emotional resilience through healthy coping strategies.
- Down-to-earth advice on supporting front-line team members and public-facing animal care teams.
- A range of case studies by experts that help give professionals the strength to make positive changes.

An invaluable and important text for veterinary professionals, animal rescue workers, pet behaviour counsellors and dog training instructors, as well as support, administrative and front-line animal care teams.

Front cover image: Kirsty McCallion with Herbie at Dogs Trust Basildon Rehoming Centre.