

Building Stress Resilience by Integrating Psychotherapy and Biofeedback

Patrick R. Steffen, PhD, BCB

Professor of Clinical Psychology

Brigham Young University

Past President and Fellow, Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback

Editor-in-Chief, Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback

Outline

1. Benjamin Franklin and finding your Junto
- 2. *Resilient Self-Regulation*: Learning to Regulate Your Stress Response**
- 3. *Resilient Focus*: Narrowing your Focus to what Matters Most**
- 4. *Resilient Capacity*: Developing Resilient Life Habits**
5. Conclusion

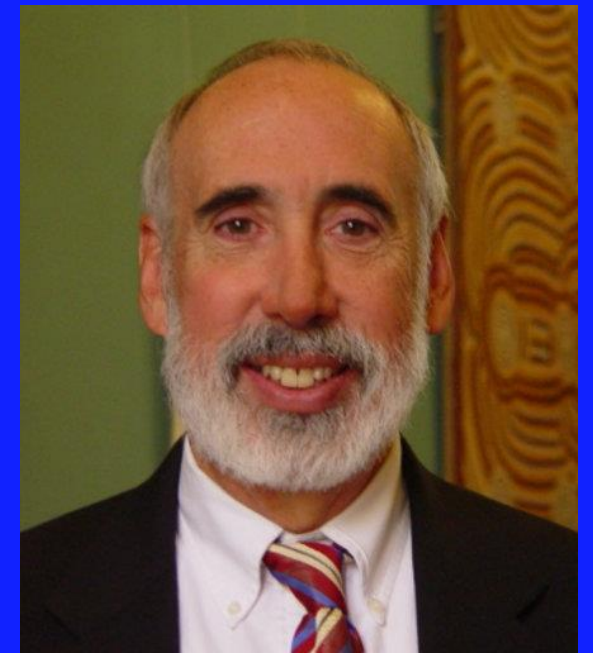
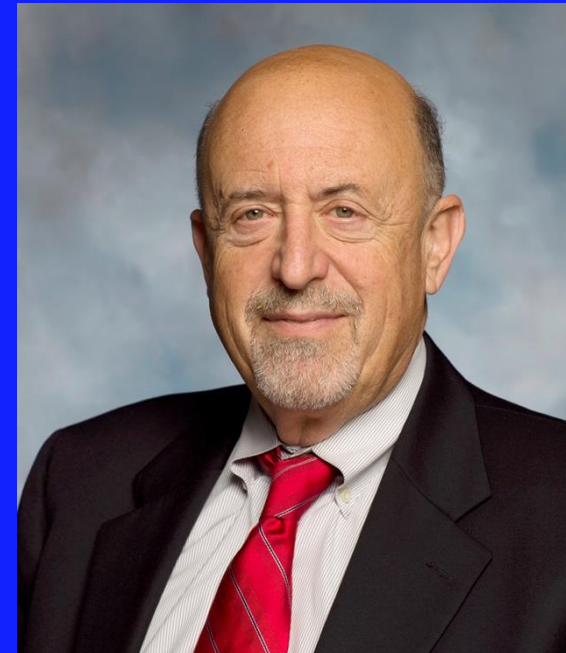
Academic Love



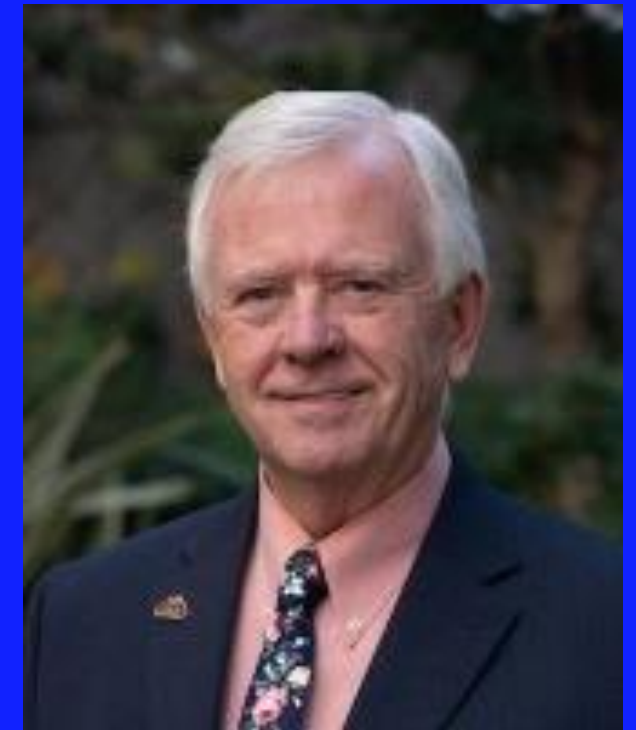
Benjamin Franklin's Junto

"I formed my best acquaintances into a club of mutual improvement, which we called the Junto."

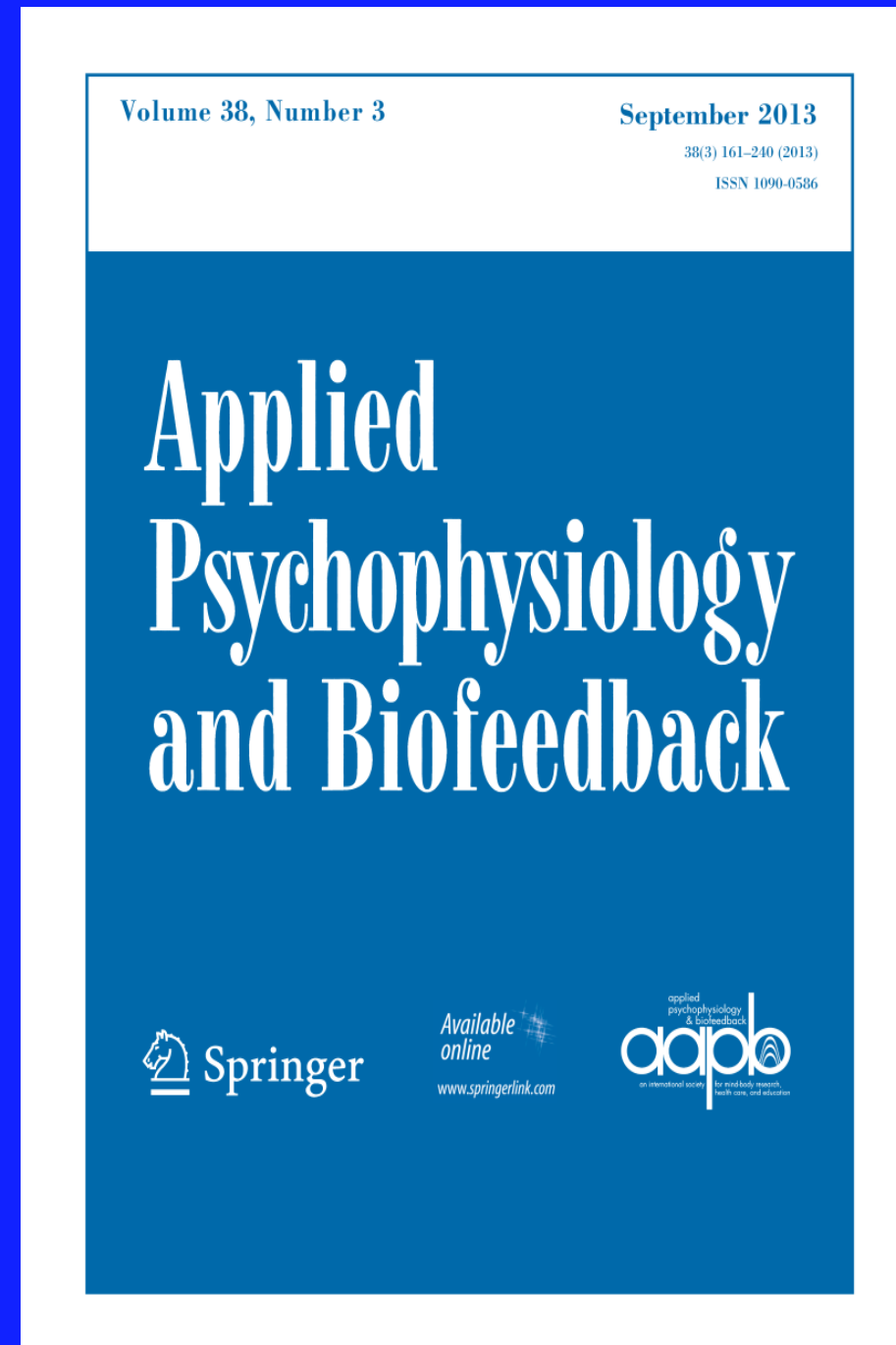
My First AAPB Meeting



Getting Involved in AAPB



Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback Journal

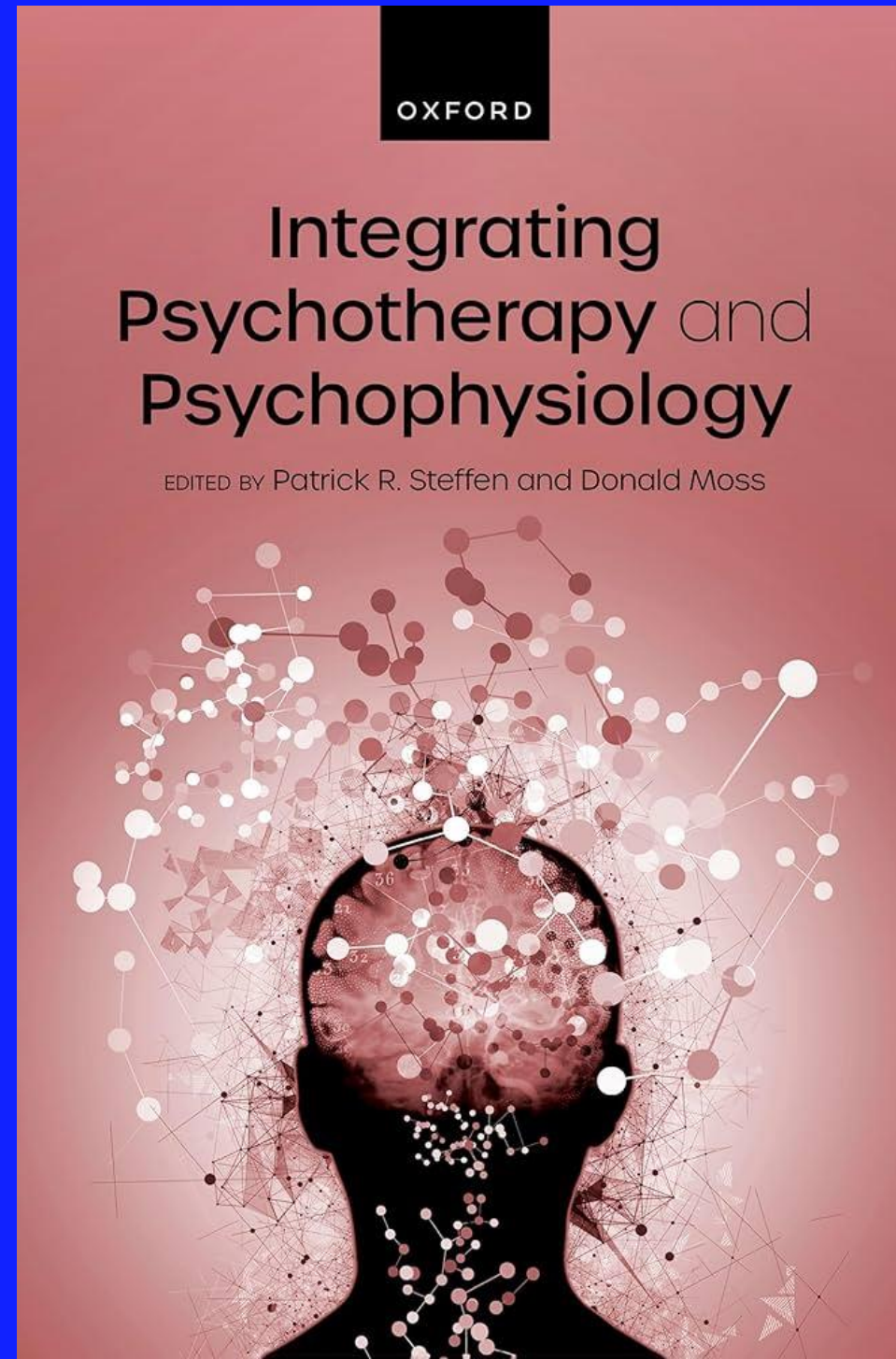


Gratitude

To everyone I have been able to work with and learn from



Integrating Psychotherapy and Psychophysiology



1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

LEARNING TO SELF-REGULATE OUR STRESS RESPONSE

Understanding Stress

Learning Biofeedback

Integrating Mindfulness and Developing Equanimity

1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

WHY DO WE EVEN HAVE A STRESS RESPONSE?

- Our bodies are built to adapt: environments change and we change
 - Balance internal needs with external demands
 - Stress response is an adaptation response
- Stress response is built to help with healthy adaptation
 - Resilience is positive adaptation in the face of significant stress
 - Fragility is poor adaptation in the face of significant stress

1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

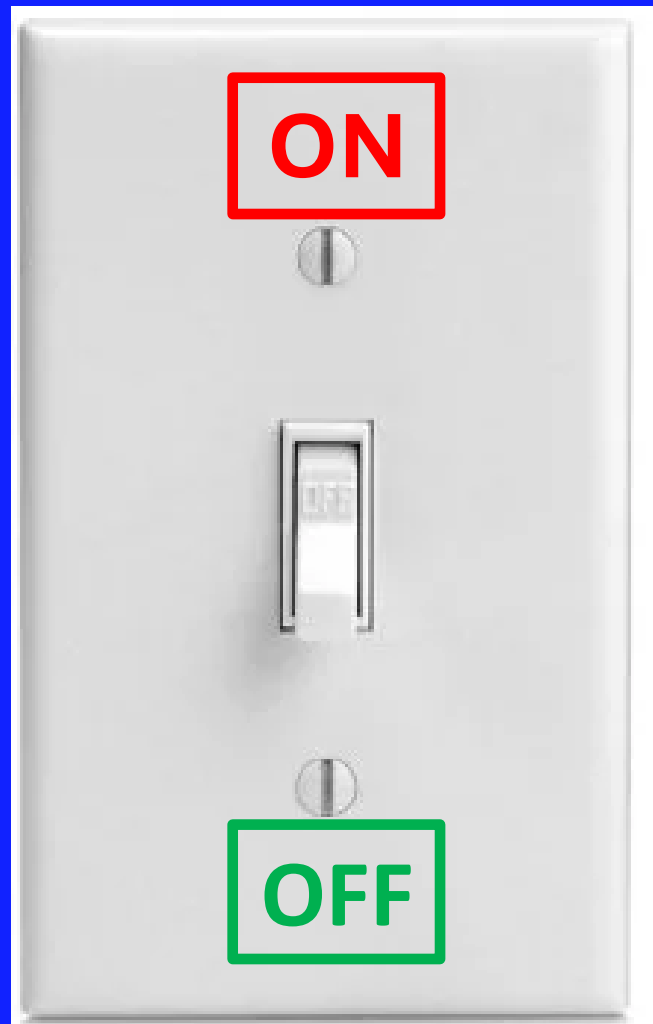
WHY DO WE WANT STRESS?

- Stress is energy to act
 - We want to harness our stress energy and use it
 - However, many avoid stress and lose out on that energy
- We do not have any purely ‘stress hormones’
 - Adrenaline/epinephrine and cortisol are energy/metabolism hormones
 - Even on our most relaxing days we have adrenaline and cortisol in our blood
 - Energy hormones is more helpful way of thinking about their function

1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

AND HOW DOES OUR STRESS RESPONSE WORK?

Is the stress response either turned on or turned off?



OR

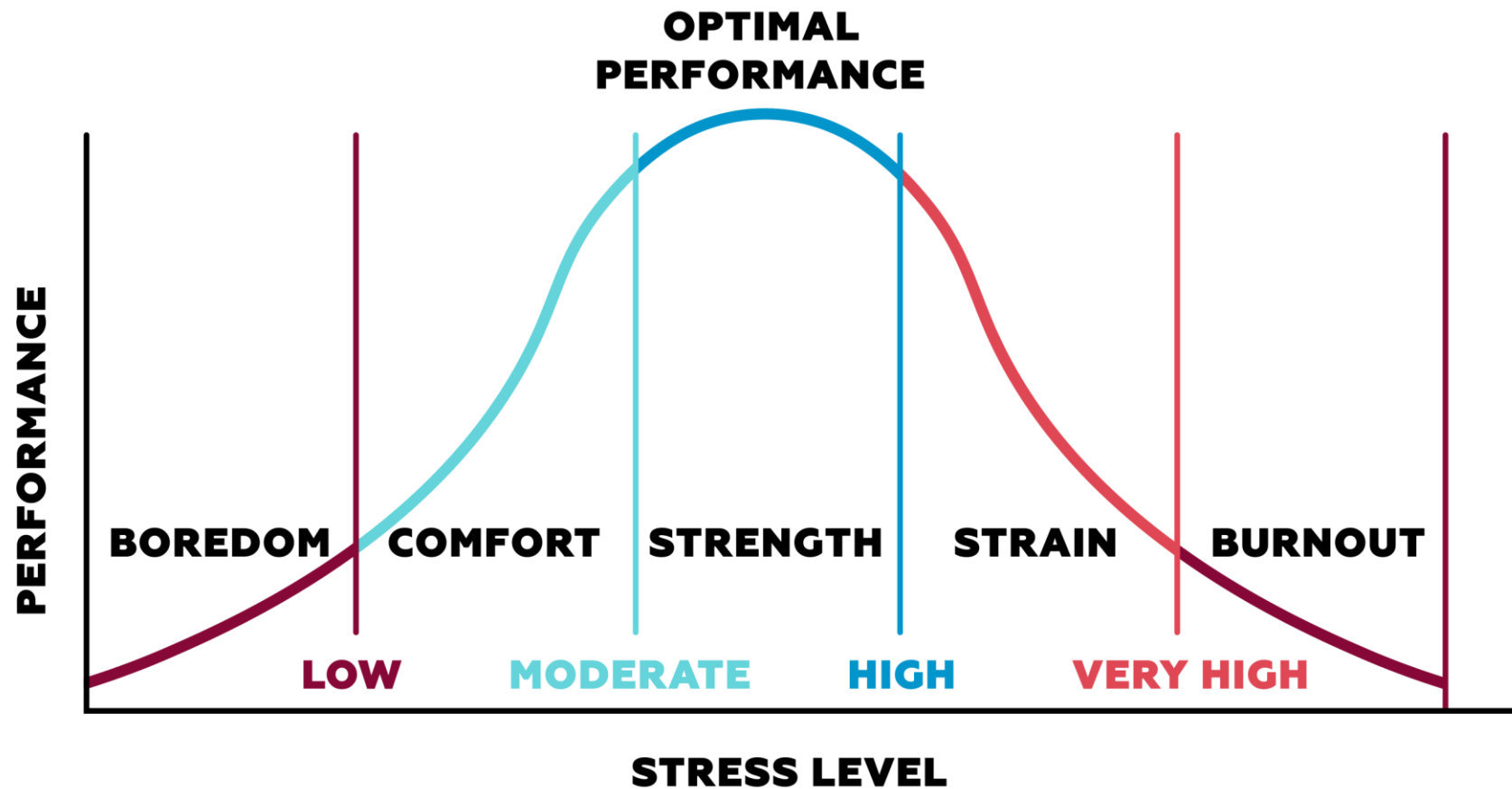
Is the stress response more like a dial with many settings?



1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

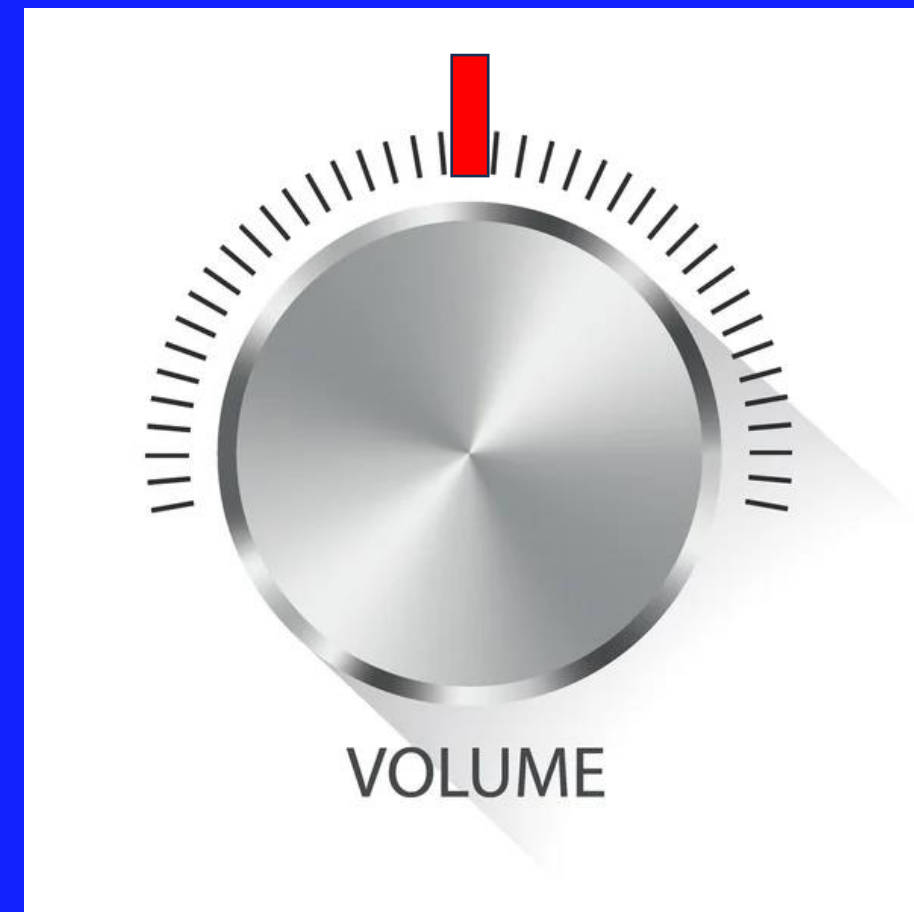
STRESS RESILIENCE IS ABOUT BALANCE

STRESS CURVE



1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

STRESS RESILIENCE IS ABOUT BALANCE



1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

BIOFEEDBACK IS SELF-REGULATION

”Integrating self-regulation into everyday life”

We are not typically aware of our physiological functioning

Biofeedback is learning to self-regulate our stress response

We become aware of our current physiological state

- We see our physiological activity on a computer screen
- We learn to regulate our stress response to a healthy level

1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

BIOFEEDBACK IS SELF-REGULATION

We see our heart rate and respiration rate in real time on a computer screen

- We learn to slow breath down to ~ 6 breaths per minute
 - 5 seconds in, 5 seconds out
- Creates resonance between heart rate and respiration



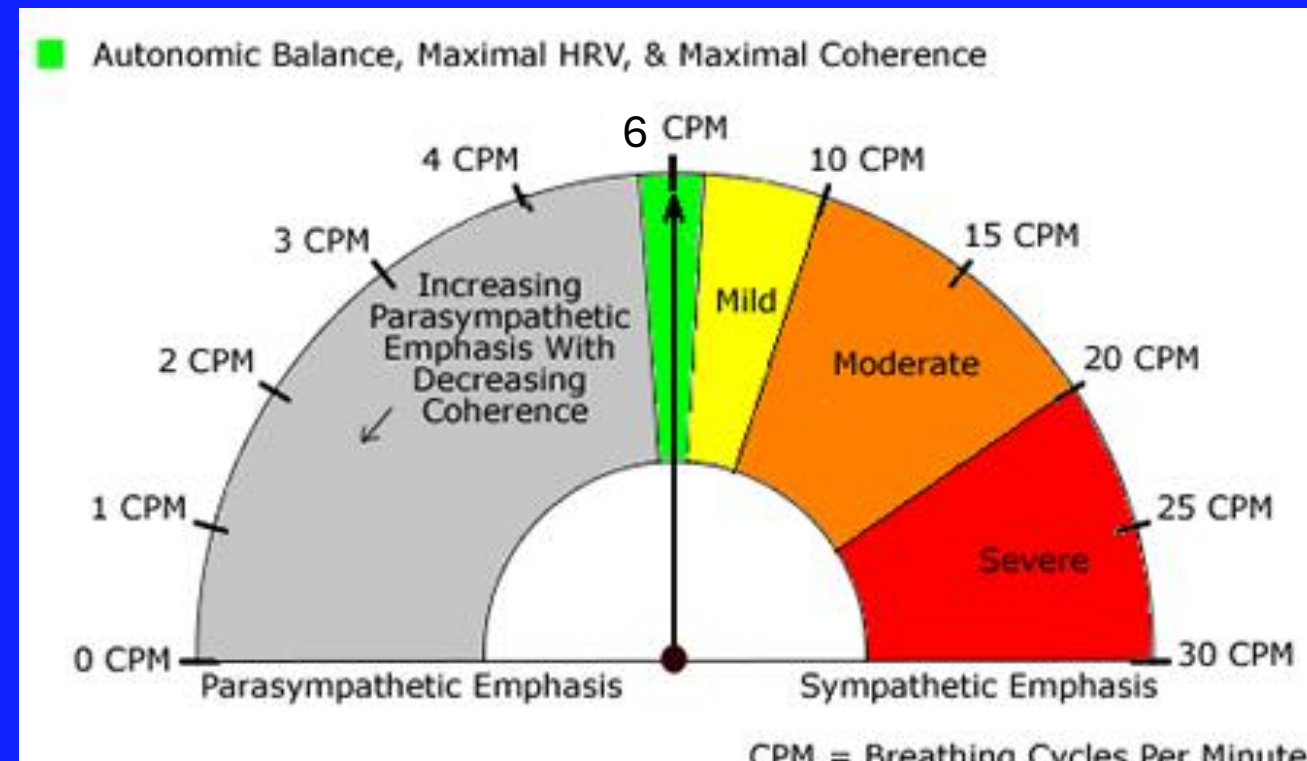
1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

RESONANCE BREATHING

Sherpas and athletes naturally spend more time breathing at ~6 breaths per minute

Meditating and praying associated with breathing at ~6 breaths per minute

Biofeedback helps us learn how to regulate our breathing at ~6 breaths per minute



1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

IMPORTANCE OF BREATH

During a stress response, our breathing rate increases dramatically

When we calm our breathing, we deflate the stress response

- We can't have a 'fight or flight' response with calm breathing

Breathing is key in having a resilient response to stress

1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation

MINDFULNESS AND EQUANIMITY

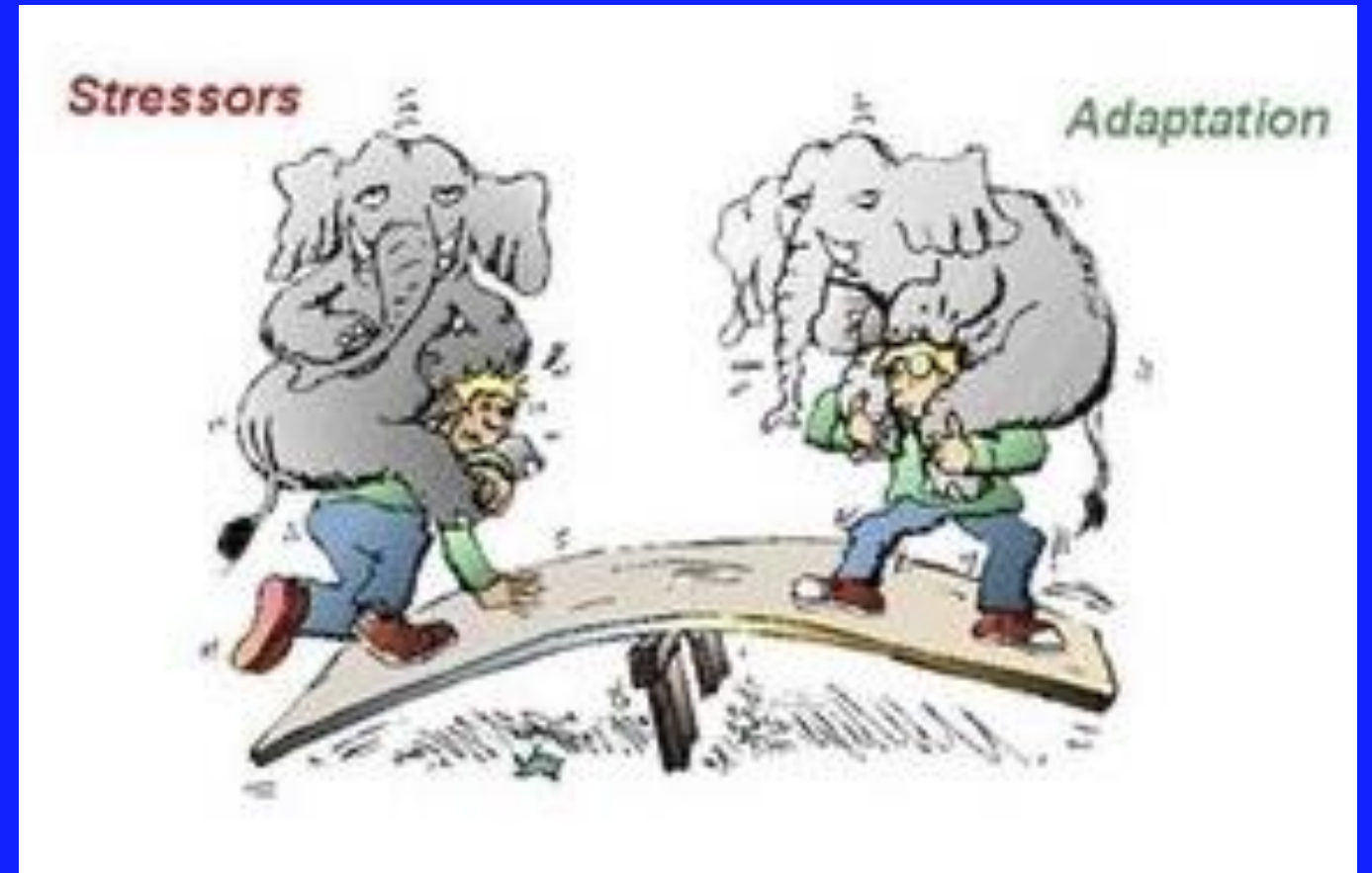
Mindfulness: being in the moment, accepting and non-judgmental attitude

Equanimity: an intentional attitude of acceptance and reduced automatic reactivity to the present moment regardless of hedonic tone

Being anchored in the present moment we can see things more as they are and engage in deliberate action

Equanimity is having balance, equilibrium in life

1. Developing Resilient Self-Regulation



2. Developing Resilient Focus

NARROWING OUR FOCUS TO WHAT MATTERS MOST (AND ELIMINATING UNNECESSARY STRESS)

Equanimity is not indifference, it is a values-based approach to life

Eudaimonic versus Hedonic Views of Motivation

Frankl and Rogers and the Why of Valued Living

Hayes and ACT and the How of Valued Living

2. Developing Resilient Focus

EUDAIMONIC VERSUS HEDONIC VIEWS OF MOTIVATION

The eudaimonic perspective emphasizes meaning, growth, and relationships with others as key motivations

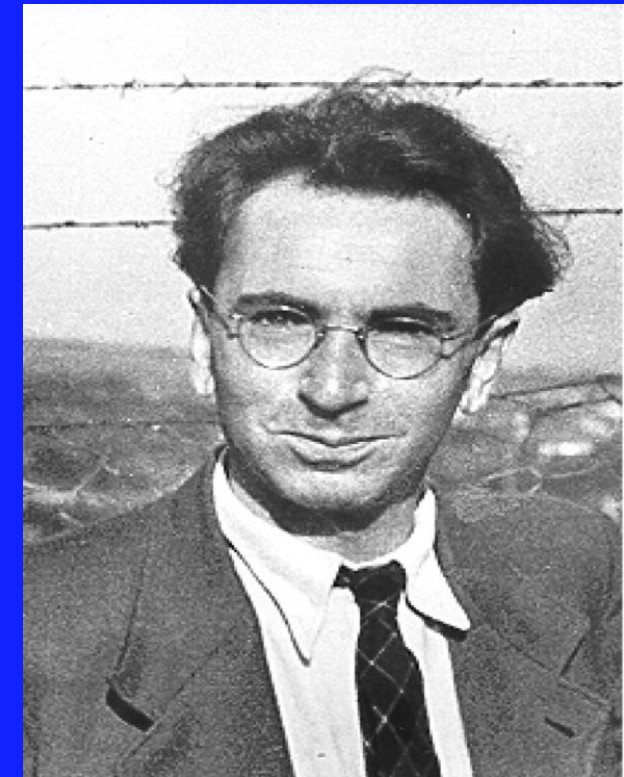
- Assumes that difficult life situations contribute to increased meaning in life
- In hedonic perspective, difficult life situations are avoided

In the eudaimonic perspective, pleasure motivation is not considered bad, rather pleasure is a result of living a meaningful life

2. Developing Resilient Focus

"He who knows the 'why' for his existence, will be able to bare almost any how."

Logotherapy: meaning-focused therapy



Viktor Frankl, M.D.

2. Developing Resilient Focus

“A boy senses, though perhaps not consciously, that he is more loved and prized by his parents when he thinks of being a doctor than when he thinks of being an artist. Gradually he introjects the values attached to being a doctor. He comes to want, above all, to be a doctor. Then in college he is baffled by the fact that he repeatedly fails in chemistry, which is absolutely necessary to becoming a physician, in spite of the fact that the guidance counselor assures him he has the ability to pass the course. Only in counseling interviews does he begin to realize how completely how out of touch he is with his own valuing process.”



Carl Rogers

"To be mature you have to realize what you value most.

It is extraordinary to discover that comparatively few people reach this level of maturity. They seem never to have paused to consider what has value for them. They spend great effort and sometimes make great sacrifices for values that, fundamentally, meet no real needs of their own. Perhaps they have imbibed the values of their particular profession or job, of their community or their neighbors, of their parents or family.

Not to arrive at a clear understanding of one's own values is a tragic waste. You have missed the whole point of what life is for."

Eleanor Roosevelt



Now everybody's got advice, they just keep on givin'
Doesn't mean too much to me
Lots of people have to make believe they're livin'
Can't decide who they should be, oh-oh

I understand about indecision
But I don't care if I get behind
People livin' in competition
All I want is to have my peace of mind

Take a look ahead
Take a look ahead
Look ahead

Boston (Classic Rock Band)
"Peace of Mind"



2. Developing Resilient Focus

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)

1/3 of the ACT approach is focused on identifying personal values and valued living

Focus on values not goals, each day can be an excellent day if you live your values

Focusing on values first often leads to anxiety and depression lessening

2. Developing Resilient Focus

IMAGINE YOUR FUNERAL



2. Developing Resilient Focus

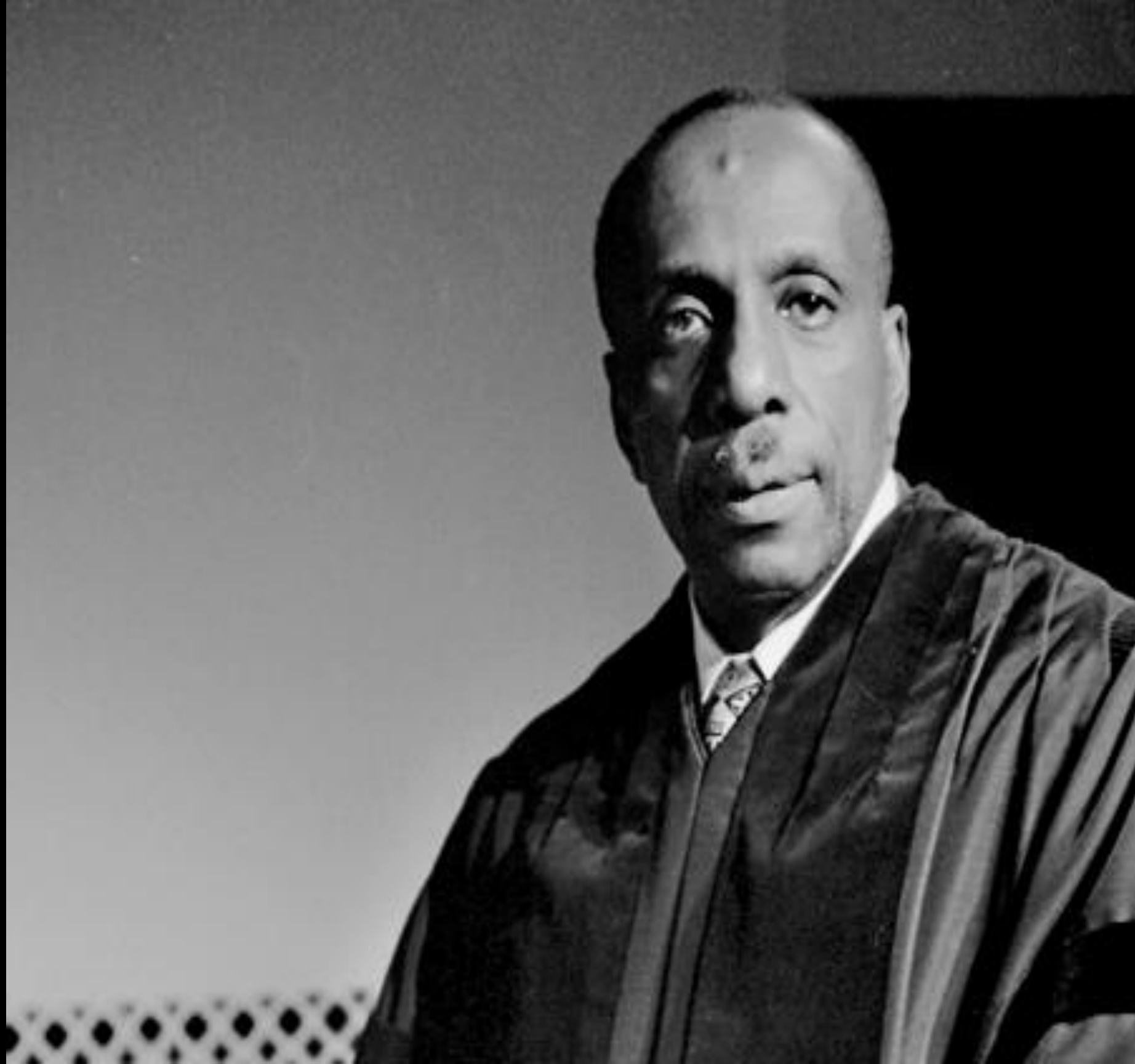
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH REFLECTION TOOLKIT

(<https://reflection.ed.ac.uk/reflectors-toolkit/self-awareness/values>)

1. What is important to me?
2. What would a perfect day look like? What values are represented in this choice?
3. What do I spend my free time on?
4. What do I enjoy doing?
5. What would I do if there were no limitations?

Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Howard Thurman,
Theologian and Civil Rights Activist



3. Developing Resilient Capacity

DEVELOPING RESILIENT LIFE HABITS

Resilient Lifestyle (sleep, exercise, diet)

Resilient Mind

Resilient Relationships

Resilient Resources

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

What is Resilience Capacity?

The set of resources we draw upon to respond to stress

Our perceived capacity represents the balance between perceived available resources and perceived external demands

Reserve Capacity Model (Gallo, 2009)

- Physiological
- Psychological
- Social
- Material

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

What is Resilience Capacity?

Our reserve capacity functions as a reservoir of energy we draw from each day

Resilient capacity is neither innate nor fixed, it evolves over time, our reservoir grows when we:

- Engage in positive health behaviors
- Strengthen our coping abilities
- Invest in social relationships
- Increase our material resources

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

Developing Resilient Life Habits Forms the Foundation of Stress Resilience

“We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Aristotle

“You will never change your life until you change something
you do daily. The secret to your success is found in your daily
routine.”

Darren Hardy, *The Compound Effect*

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

Resilient Body

Adequate sleep

Enjoyable regular physical activity

Enjoyable healthy diet

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

Resilient Mind

We are our story

- Our brains are organized to interpret the world thru narrative
- Choose the narrative you want to guide your life
- Ultimately, best story or narrative is one that most accurately reflects reality (realistic optimism)

”At the start of each day, select your thoughts as intentionally as you would choose clothing from your closet.”

Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

Resilient Relationships

Human beings are social beings

The quality of our social relationships impacts our mental and physical health

- Most important challenges are interpersonal in nature
- We cannot reach our potential in isolation
- Strong social bonds and collaborative engagement enhance adaptation

3. Developing Resilient Capacity

Resilient Resources

Education, employment, and income are key resources in our lives

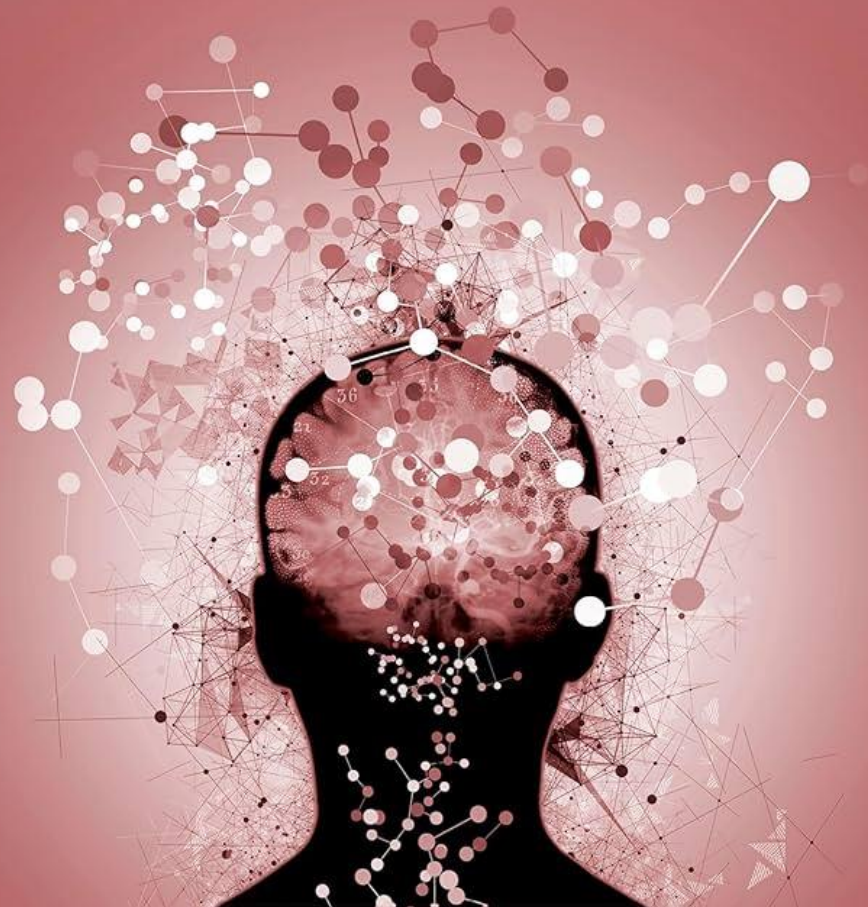
Education is probably the most helpful area of focus to improve our lives

Continuing educational pursuits enhance resources and life satisfaction

OXFORD

Integrating Psychotherapy and Psychophysiology

EDITED BY Patrick R. Steffen and Donald Moss



Conclusion

Resilient Self-Regulation

Learning to Regulate Your Stress Response

Resilient Focus

Narrowing your Focus to what Matters Most

Resilient Capacity

Developing Resilient Life Habits