



Grief, Loss, and Wellness Zine

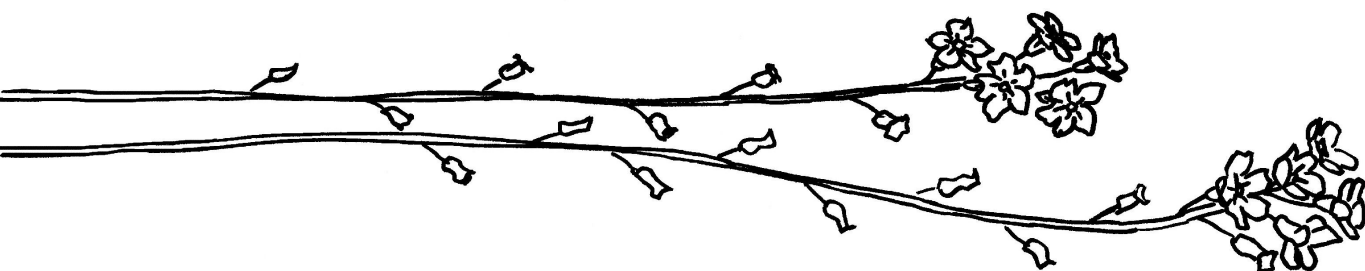
Founded at Breakaway Community Services in January 2021, the **Grief, Loss, & Wellness (GLoW) Initiative** sought to offer supports to frontline workers, community-facing management and coordinators, and community supporters who have been impacted by the trauma and overwhelming loss of the drug poisoning crisis. 1-1 and group support was delivered by community members and practitioners free of charge.

Year 1 (2021-2022) of the Initiative focused on providing direct supports to those on the frontlines (including peers and community members who are not formally employed in frontline positions). Year 2 (2022-2023) sought to expand the program to include capacity building trainings and resources to support teams and communities to respond to grief and loss.

We hope to continue this work, and we can't know what the future holds for GLoW. The reality is that funding for new initiatives like ours can be unstable due to many factors beyond our team's control. The intention of this resource is to ensure that no matter what, the knowledges we gained at this moment in time will continue to support frontline workers responding to the drug poisoning crisis moving forward.

With sincere thanks to: Melody Alderton-Ballik, Nicola Bangham, Gui Chika, Tave Cole, Anne Marie DiCenso, Morgan Elizabeth, Chris Leonard, Adrienne Mak, Yvette Perreault, Snjezana Pruginic, Rai Reece, Sarah Reimer, Tonia Richard, Kai Somerville, Richard Utama, Lindsay Williams, Juno Zavitz, and many, many others who shared their wisdom and lived expertise to make GLoW's work and this resource possible.

Illustrated and assembled by: Liz Beeforth



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This resource is for **frontline workers, community-facing managers and coordinators, and community supporters** (including peers and others not formally employed in frontline positions) **who are serving people who use substances and experiencing grief and loss amid the drug poisoning crisis.** It might be our clients, co-workers, friends, or family. Sometimes we're mourning all of the above.

This grief is often **disenfranchised** (a.k.a. invalidated, considered "less real") because it's drug-related, because we "only" worked together, or any number of other reasons people might use to dismiss our feelings. But our grief is real, and we deserve support. **That bears repeating:**

Our grief is real and we deserve support.

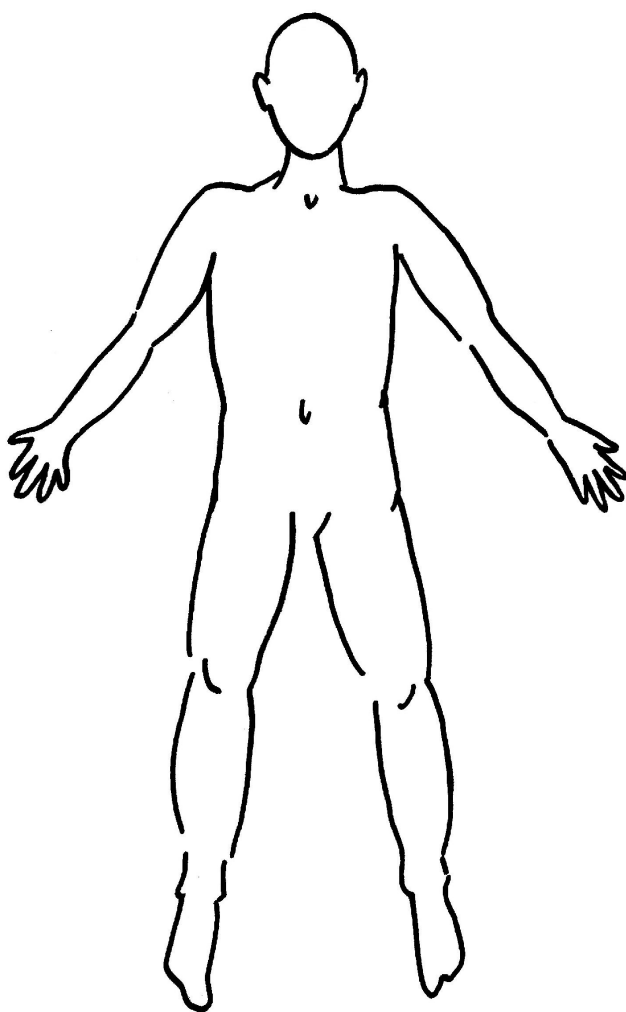
In this colour-along activity zine, you'll find **information about trauma and grief** and the ways it can show up in our bodies, **activities that will support you to explore & identify your experiences, harm reduction strategies** for coping with grief and softening post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and PTSD-like experiences, and a **build-your-own toolkit** that can help you plan for and practice self & collective care.

Let's start with an exercise called

What **colours**
are your feels?

How are
feeling

How **big** are
your feels?



What does your body need today?

What about your



Note: This and other exercises in this resource have been modified to reflect Indigenous worldviews and philosophies. We are grateful for these teachings <3

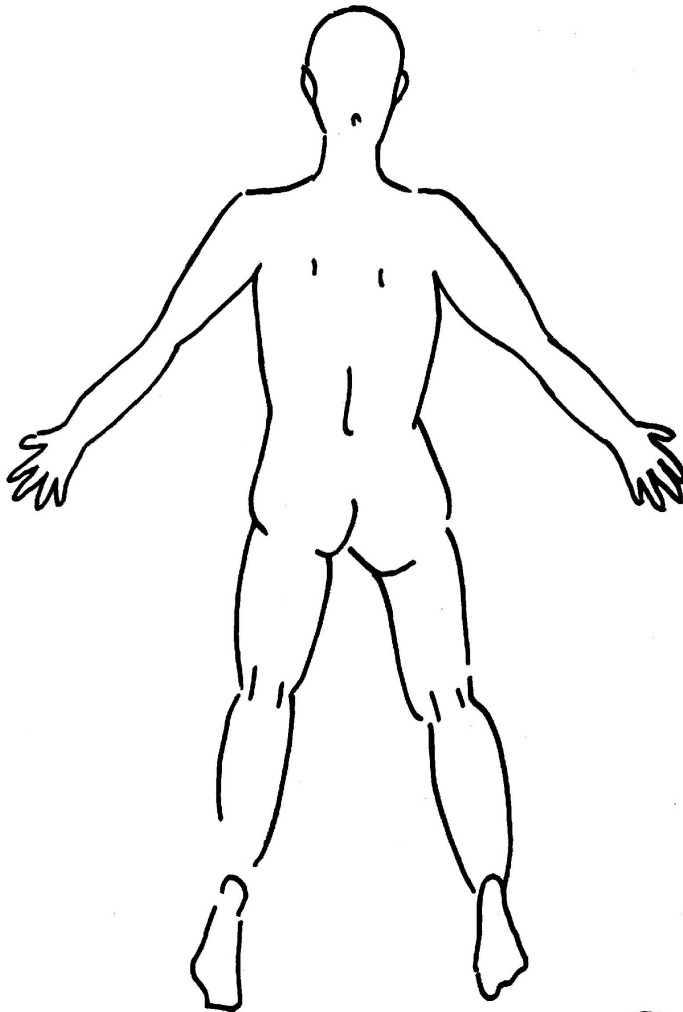
body mapping.

Body mapping is a creative way to explore and express how we're feeling by writing down, drawing, or colouring out our experiences and mapping them onto the places they live in or around our bodies.

Where you do feel the colours on your body?

you
today?

What texture
are they?



Your



Your



or your



Everyone has a **Window of Tolerance***, but grief and trauma can push us out of it. Our brains have a 6th sense that primes us to respond to our environment by activating our nervous system in one of three ways, often without our awareness.

HYPERarousal

When our brains perceive a threat our body thinks it *can* meet, we're primed to **fight or flee**. Blood pressure & heart rate rise, adrenaline surges.

Optimal arousal: the "WINDOW"

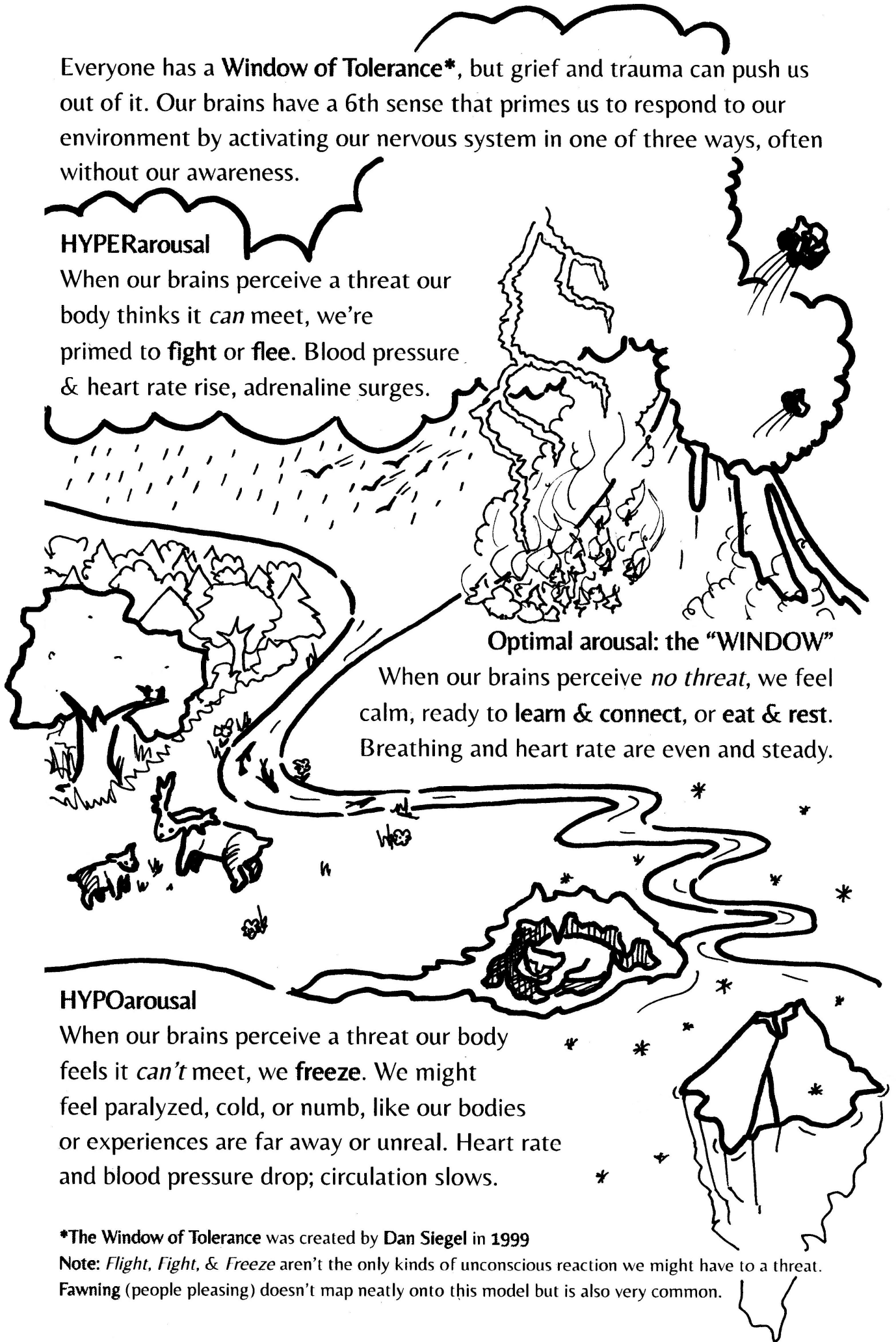
When our brains perceive *no threat*, we feel calm, ready to **learn & connect**, or **eat & rest**. Breathing and heart rate are even and steady.

HYPOarousal

When our brains perceive a threat our body feels it *can't* meet, we **freeze**. We might feel paralyzed, cold, or numb, like our bodies or experiences are far away or unreal. Heart rate and blood pressure drop; circulation slows.

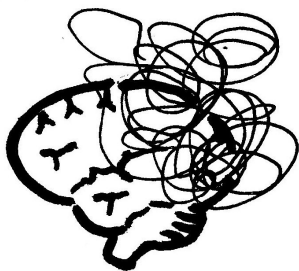
*The Window of Tolerance was created by Dan Siegel in 1999

Note: *Flight, Fight, & Freeze* aren't the only kinds of unconscious reaction we might have to a threat. *Fawning* (people pleasing) doesn't map neatly onto this model but is also very common.



Being **activated** or out of our “window” a lot or all of the time takes a toll.
We might experience:

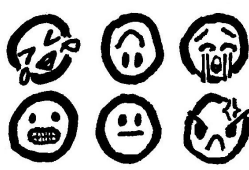
brain fog



memory problems



unpredictable emotions
or feeling numb



startle response



muscle tension



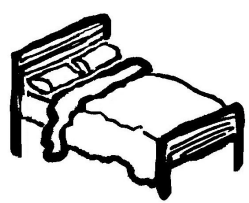
chronic illness/pain



stomach troubles



sleep disturbances

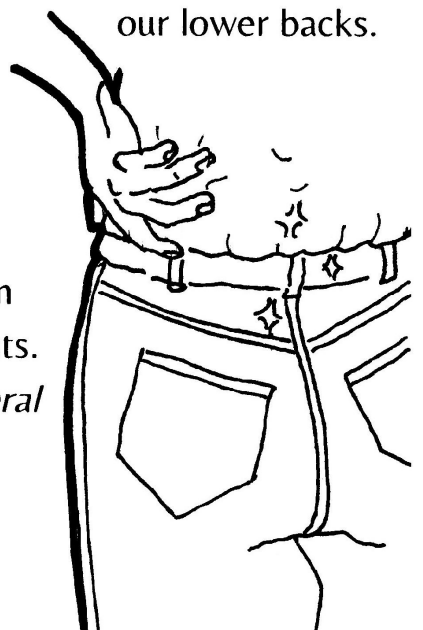


When we can't safely process our feelings or experiences, our bodies start to carry those stories for us.

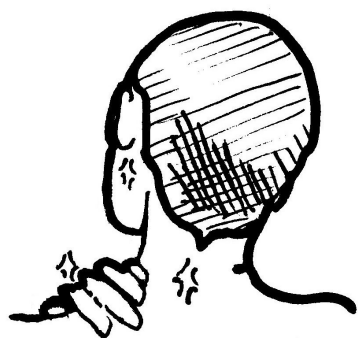
Grief can live
between our shoulder
blades.



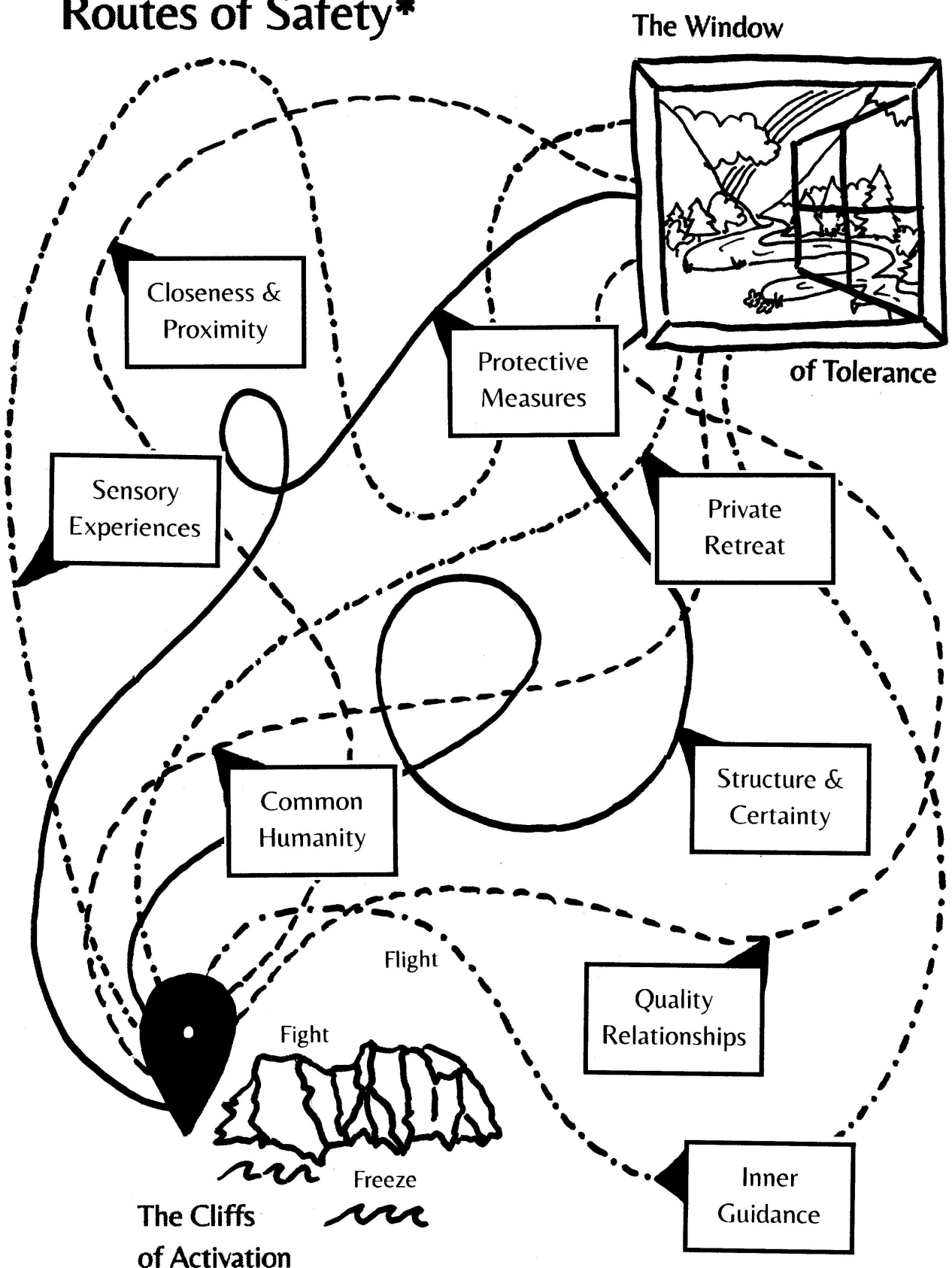
Shame can settle in
our lower backs.



Anger might twist in
our jaws, necks, or fists.
It could even be a *literal*
pain in your ass.

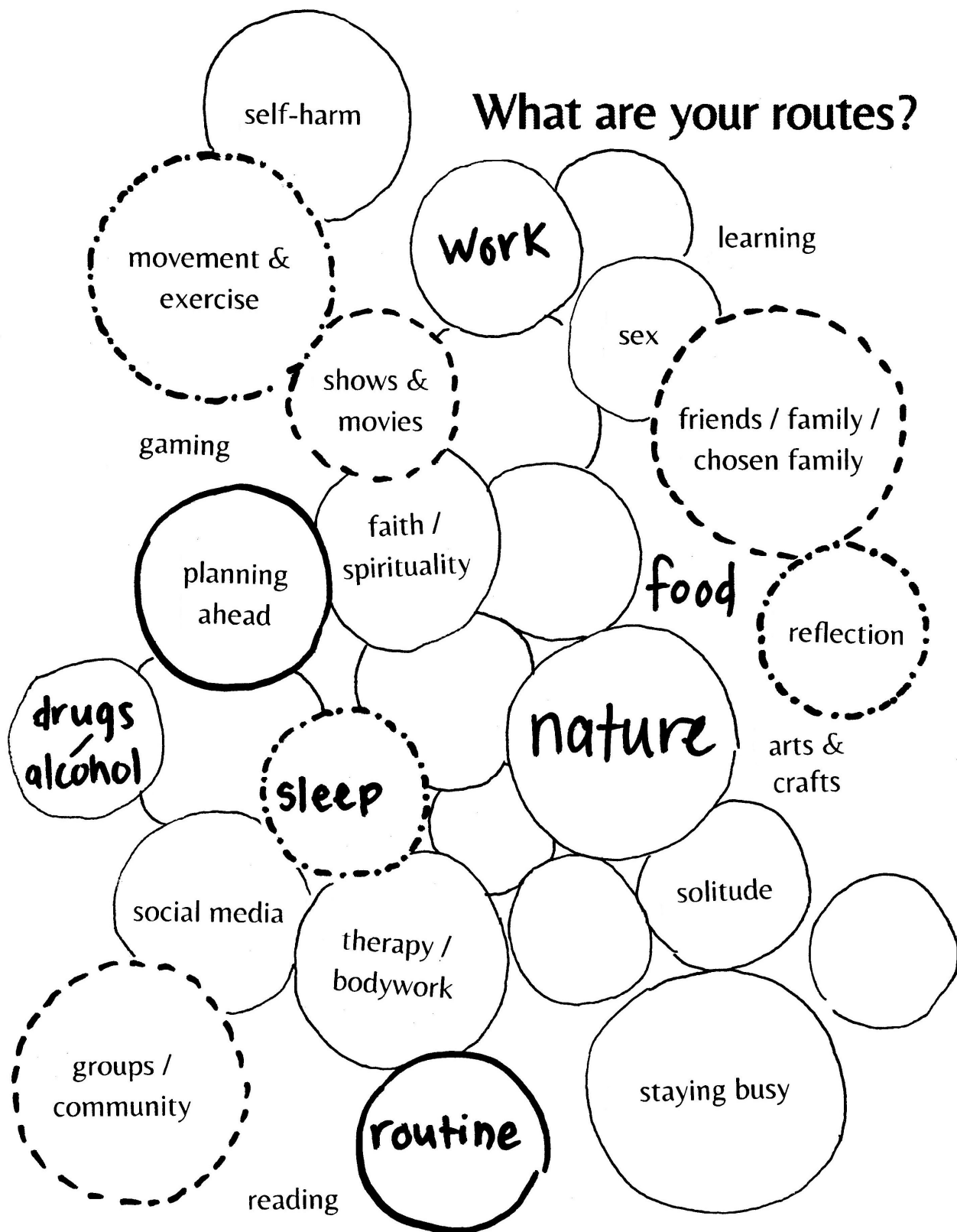


Routes of Safety*



LEGEND: --- self-resourced --- socially resourced — action-oriented

*these Routes of Safety were created by Jake Ernst in 2020



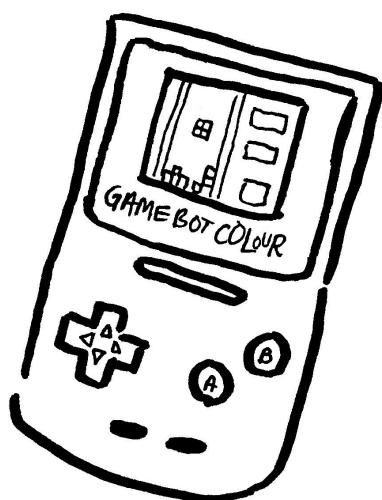
There's no one right way back to our "window", and it isn't always easy or possible to get all the way there. Different paths or strategies might be creative, effective, risky, or all of the above.

Only you know which ones are safest and most sustainable for you.

Colour in the ones that resonate or add your own in the bubbles.

Trauma first aid

In the aftermath of something traumatic, like responding to an overdose or learning that someone we care about has died, it's important to do first aid for ourselves. These strategies can be useful anytime big feelings or memories start to swell and are known to soften the intensity of grief and PTSD.



Play Tetris or Wordle
May reduce flashbacks
& intrusive memories*



Connect with others
Being present in our
relationships can
ground us in grief

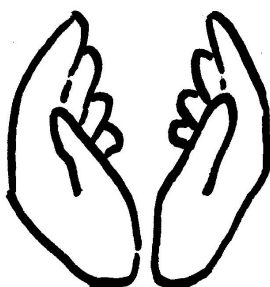


Move your body
Shake out big feelings
so they don't get stuck

When processing a loss, lean into:

Intention

Whatever strategies
you're using to cope,
do them on purpose

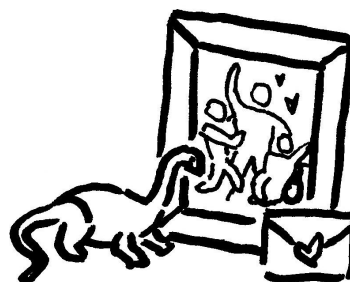


Ritual

Add ritual to everyday
activities, or create
one for processing
your grief

Memorial

Cherish and/or share
memories & things
that connect to you to
the person who died



*See Hagenaars et al. (2017): Tetris and word games lead to fewer intrusive memories when applied several days after analogue trauma. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 8(1)

Take your temperature

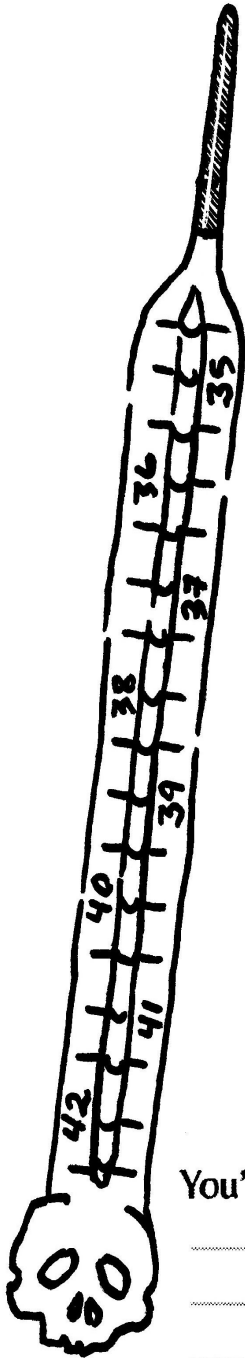
Burnout isn't a personal failing. It thrives on the frontlines because we work within systems that fail us and our communities. It can be helpful to know our early warning signs as we strive to care for ourselves and others.

Think about how your mind, body, heart, and spirit feel, or what your everyday life looks like when:

Work & life are in balance, things are good

Fever's starting, you're stressed

You're burning up out

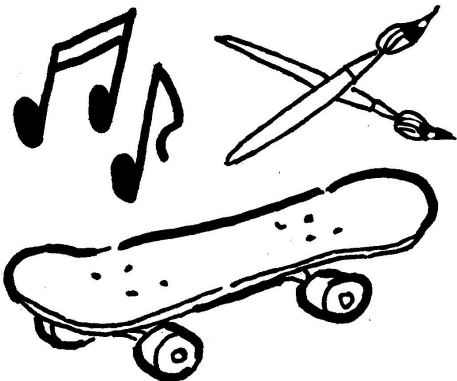


Remember: Early intervention is ideal, but there's **never** a wrong time to check in with yourself and **take action** for your wellness.

In the world we live in, it might not be possible to remove stress and trauma from our lives. What we can do is make a plan and build a toolkit to reduce their impact.

When your temperature starts to climb, what...

Activities



Places



People



might help bring it down?

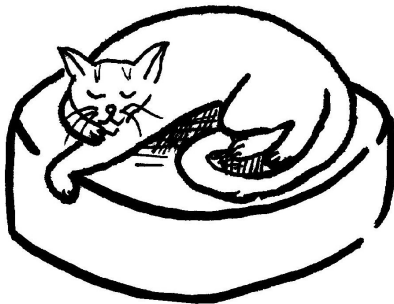
Risk is a part of our lives, and we get to decide what will work for us.
Harm reduction gives us space to think about and plan for it.

If there's a risky but effective tool in your toolkit
you might want to use, how can you...

Minimize risks & harms?



Maximize pleasure & comfort?

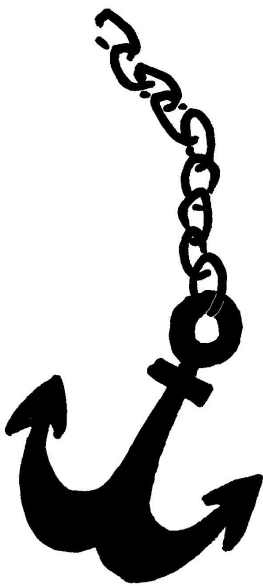


Practice intention or add ritual?



Anytime we notice we're out of our window is a good time to practice **grounding**. We can ground in all sorts of ways:

With our brains



An **anchoring phrase** can be something simple, like:
My name is _____, I'm a _____
[zodiac sign] who loves _____ [favourite food,
hobby, or colour]. Today I'm wearing _____
[outfit] and I'm in _____ [place]. It's
_____ [time & date] and the weather is
_____. Switch it up or add detail as needed.

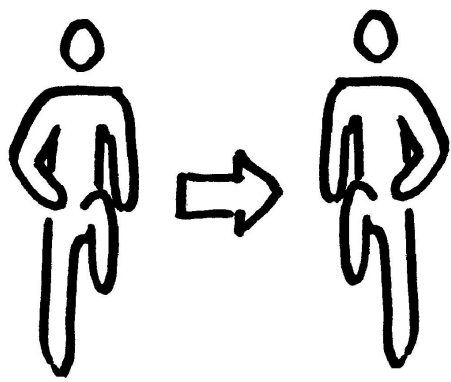
With our breath



Inhale for 4 sec, **hold** for 7 sec, **exhale** for 8 sec and repeat.
It might feel weird at first, but breathing and heart rate will slow and
steady after a few cycles. Repeat as needed.

With our bodies

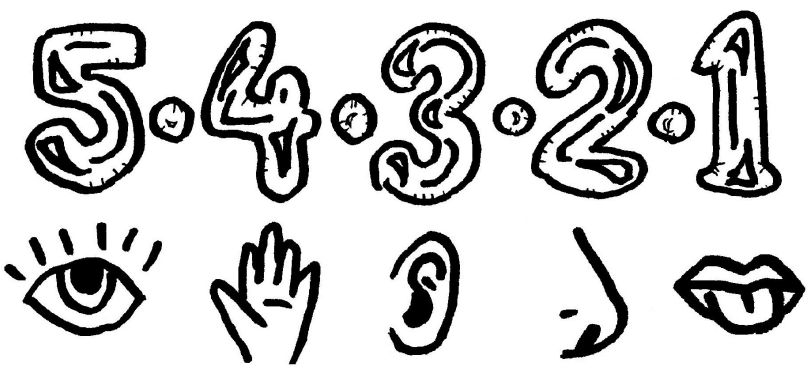
Cross crawl can be done standing, sitting, or even lying down; the important part is to touch one side of the body with a limb from the opposite side and alternate. Start with 10 reps and repeat as needed.



With our senses

Name...

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



We do the best we can with what we have in the moments we're in.

While we hope this resource gives you some tools you can use, we know there's no self-caring our way out of the drug poisoning crisis. Sometimes we need extra support. Sometimes we need to take action.

There's no one right way to survive and heal. You know yourself best <3

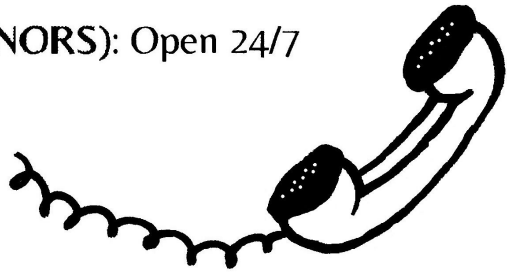
Distress & Crisis Resources

In an emergency, call 911

Gerstein Crisis Center: Open 24/7
(416) 929-5200

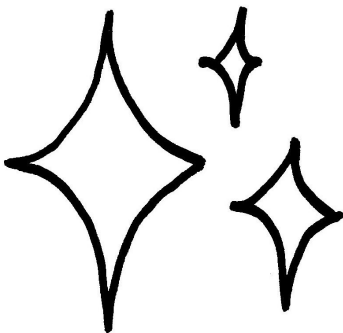
National Overdose Response Services (NORS): Open 24/7
1-888-688-NORS (6677)

Toronto Distress Line: Open 24/7
(416) 408-HELP (4357)



Get involved

The harm reduction community has an amazing and continuing legacy of collective action and advocacy. If it will help restore your sense of purpose and balance to get involved, you can check out these resources:



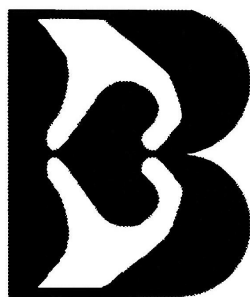
Ontario Harm Reduction Network (OHRN)
<https://ohrn.org/>

Toronto Harm Reduction Alliance (THRA)
<https://torontoharmreductionalliance.ca/>

Ontario Network of People Who Use Drugs (ONPUD)
<https://onpud.com/>

You can also ask your local MP, MPP, or City Councilor what they'll do to advance harm reduction and uphold the rights of people who use drugs.

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JB