

Be Well

*The Importance of Self-Care and Emotional
Resilience*

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Questions For Audience

How stressful is it being in leadership role as deputy principal whilst 100% of you are working as full-time teachers?

Are you struggling with your W/L balance?

As 90% of you are female, is this creating an extra burden in terms of home/life balance?

Do you feel overwhelmed by administration?

Do you feel 'let down' by the whole system?

Questions For Audience

Why are 88% of you unwilling to move up to the more challenging role of principal.

Is this because this role is now seen as simply too challenging, too destructive of W/I balance, too administrative and simply not worth the effort?

Why in there such reluctance amongst most teachers to take on any leadership role at all?

Why is there such a high rate of Burnout amongst both principals and deputy principals in the primary sector?

Current 'Life' Stressors for Principals

Deputy Principals are also coping with, amongst many work issues the following life stressors:

1. Looking after their own loved ones, including challenges with elders, small children and adolescents.
2. Increase in technology and social media.
3. Constant barrage of negative and false news.
4. Housing and climate change crises.
5. Personal financial and medical issues.

Research Findings (Principals)

The following pieces of research data supports much of the above:

1. 64% work more than 40 hours a week; 42% over 45 hours; 11% over 55 hours. Crazy.
2. High levels of Burnout (almost 40%) and signs of Toxic Stress among school principals.
3. Less than 3 out of 10 feel situation is sustainable.

There is an obvious career opportunity for you all here!! There should be a stampede to take over their roles as principals.

Are You Minding Your Mental Health?

The consequences of this barrage to your mental health cannot be underestimated. But how well are you minding your own personal mental health.

Two common conditions affecting our mental health as a result can be:

1. Toxic Stress.
2. Bouts of Depression

Let's explore these further:

Toxic Stress

All of us present are at risk of 'Toxic Stress'.

If present for over 3 months we call it 'Burnout'.

This occurs when our mental and physical reserves are overrun by the pressures of life.

The consequences of burnout can be profound for both ourselves and those we love.

Let's explore this further:



Are You Stressed?

If toxically stressed you may notice some of the following warning signs:

Constant fatigue, loss of interest, apathy.

Sleep difficulties, nightmares, teeth grinding/night guard.

Feeling down or flat, easily angered or frustrated, less efficient at work.

Fighting more with partners and work colleagues.

Are You Stressed?

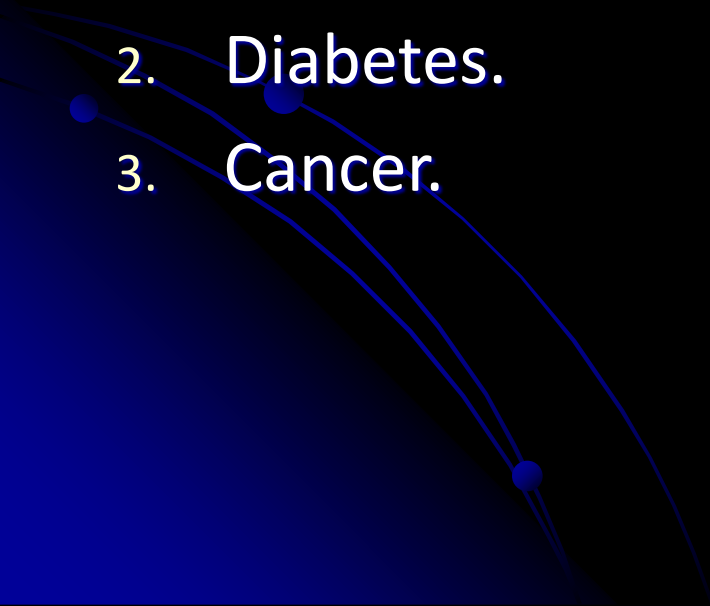
Persistent headaches, abdominal pain, and muscle pains. Increased incidence of cold sores, mouth ulcers and general viral and bacterial infections.

Poor concentration and decision making and reduction in short term memory.

Negative behaviours – stop exercising, poor diet, excessive use of alcohol or late night surfing the web.

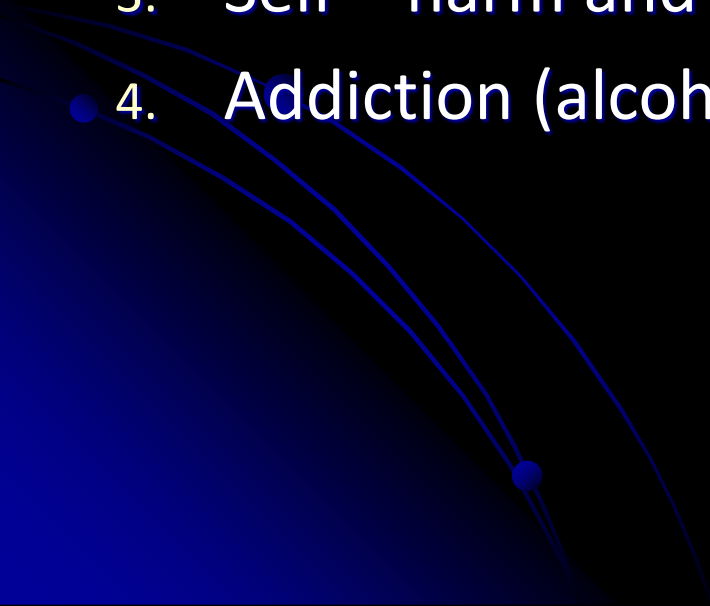
Risks of Toxic Stress

The physical risks (which you should ignore at your peril) include increased risks of:

1. Premature heart attacks, strokes, cardiac arrhythmias, high blood pressure.
 2. Diabetes.
 3. Cancer.
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Risks of Toxic Stress

The mental health risks (often overlooked) include:

1. Bouts of Depression.
 2. Anxiety in all of its forms.
 3. Self – harm and Suicide.
 - 4. Addiction (alcohol, drugs, online gambling)
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Depression

Depression is:

1. A clinical condition which occurs in bouts.
2. Each bout will normally last from 6 to 12 months. Often triggered by stress.
3. 80% will only have between 1 and 4 episodes in their lives. The other 20% may suffer from more regular relapses. In between are well.
4. 50% will present for first time between 15 – 25.
5. Twice as common in women.

Presenting Symptoms of Depression

During bouts the person may complain of:

1. Persistent low mood/emotional pain for over 2/52 – usually present for help long after this.
2. Fatigue ++, sleep difficulties (early waking), anhedonia, loss of drive, loss of appetite, loss of interest in life.
3. Negative thinking about themselves and the world (I am worthless).
4. Significant cold cognitive difficulties – key for schools/colleges to know.
5. Suicide thoughts and plans. Always ask.

How to Mind 'Your' Mental Health

There are four essential steps (one structural and three personal) to ensure that your risks of these conditions are reduced:

1. Change the structural issues underling the problem. I see this as a keep piece of the equation to prevent such intrinsically high levels of Burnout.
2. Work on your Lifestyle. We call this Self-Care.
3. Work on your Work/Life balance.
4. Work on your Emotional Resilience skills.

Let's explore these further:

1. The Structural Problem

As an observer, I would suggest the following:

1. Introduce the concept of a School Administrator in each school or in the case of small schools to cover a number of them. This will in a large part remove many of the day-to-day issues causing the problem. We did this in General Practice – the Practice Manager. It has revolutionized the situation.
2. Then work with the system to create time and space for proper Leadership teams to develop.
3. The art of Delegation must underlie any reform.

Step One: Lifestyle changes

Sleep – the most important of them all!

Exercise – 30 minutes a day. The latest data!

Diet – eat less, reduce sugar, more fruit and veg, reduce coffee, more fish, less red meat etc. T.R.E.

Alcohol - the 'elephant in the room'! The Monday to Friday rule.

Technology detox – the 'monster' in our midst!

Let's explore sleep and technology in greater detail.

The Importance of Sleep

All adults ideally need 8 hours sleep!!!!!!

If we lack this we can struggle emotionally, physically and cognitively with serious physical consequences.

Sleep is divided into 5 alternating blocks of NREM and REM sleep cycles.

The first 4 hours of sleep is mainly NREM and this is where the body consolidates memory, removes toxic waste from the brain, and is critical for your physical and mental health.

The Importance of Sleep

If we lack NREM sleep we are more prone to develop heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and cancer.

The last 4 hours of sleep is mainly REM sleep. This is where we detach emotions from memories, creatively solve problems, integrate memories with past ones and clear memories of previous day.

- If we lack REM sleep, we become more anxious, depressed, irritable, impulsive and poorer at problem solving + Stress++++.

Coffee and Sleep

From the time we wake we begin to build up a chemical in the brain called adenosine.

After 16 hours the level is high and attaches itself to receptors in the brain that both makes us sleepy and keeps us asleep.

Caffeine interferes with these receptors.

- We can then enter the 'caffeine – lack of sleep – daytime fatigue – more caffeine' cycle' – so destructive of our sleep patterns.

Sleep Hygiene Tips

If toxically stressed we often suffer sleep deprivation at both ends of the night.

Some sleep hygiene tips include:

1. Bed by 11 if possible. Rise at same time.
2. 8 hours sleep is the great healer.
3. No phones or devices in bedrooms.
4. Hot bath. A simple but very helpful tip.
5. Blackout blinds and well aired rooms.
6. Avoid coffee after midday.

Technology

The most common cause negative behaviour here, is to fall into the habit of checking our phones constantly, day and night, for emails, notifications and social media inputs.

We fail to understand that our brain can become addicted to such behaviour – craving positive
• intermittent feedback – giving us a dopamine high.

We can also become 'anxious' due to fear of missing out (FOMO) on some critical email or message. Imagine what it was like pre-mobiles!!!!

Technology Protocol

1. No devices of any form (including Kindle) in bedrooms.
2. Having definite 'phone/devices free intervals' where the phone is turned off or placed on silent. All meals should be phone free for example.
3. All technology switched off in every household by 10.30 pm – that includes everybody!!
4. If exercising or reading or involved in any hobby – phone free applies.
5. No phone-based work activity at home!!!!

3. Work/Life Balance

Most of us present have an extremely unhealthy W/L balance and this explains many of the burnout difficulties we encounter.

This is because our 'priority list' is often skewed.

Exploring such a list can be a 'chastening' experience for most of us!

- This is one of the most important exercises we will do today

- Let's begin by exploring what 'your priority list' would look like.

Priority List Exercise

I am going to list off (in no particular order) some different aspects of your lives and I want you enumerate them in order of priority, one to six, in your life at this moment. One being the most important and six the least.

social media/hobbies work children

wider family relationship self

A Typical 'Unhealthy List'

An unhealthy list (= stress and burnout) will often look like this:

1. Work.
2. Children.
3. Extended family – parents and siblings.
4. Relationship.
5. The Rest (social media, hobbies)
6. Self!!!

A Healthy Priority List

A healthy priority list (= less risk of stress and burnout) should look like this:

1. Self.
2. Relationship.
3. Children.
4. Wider family.
5. Work.
6. The Rest (hobbies, social media etc).

Self and Personal Relationship

The most important priority is to look after your own physical and mental health.

Many consider this to be a 'selfish' concept but in real life, it is the opposite.

We are of little use to ourselves or others if we do not get this basic priority correct!!!

Following this we must protect and nourish our personal relationships if relevant.

These form the foundations of a healthy W/L balance.

The Priority List Exercise

For the next 2 months I suggest that you and your partner (if relevant) - on a weekly basis -review your priority list.

If unhealthy, then decide together what changes you need to introduce into your lives for the following week.

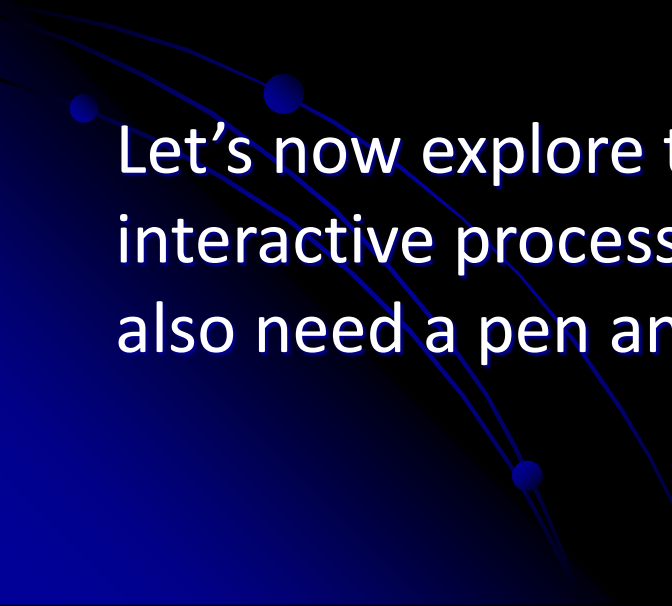
- You will notice after a month, just how less stressed you begin to feel when your list is healthy.

And how stressed you become if it becomes persistently unhealthy.

4. Emotional Resilience

This relates to our ability to emotionally cope with the slings and arrows that life inevitably throws at us.

It consists of a number of key personal, social and life skills – 20 of which I discuss in my book Emotional Resilience.



Let's now explore two of these skills. This will be an interactive process, so break up into pairs, and you will also need a pen and paper.

Empathy Audience Exercise

For 1 minute, turn to the person beside you and tell them how 'you are really struggling to cope with the stress of increasing busyness at work allied to the cost-of-living crisis'.

The person who are sharing the story with, has the task of appearing completely disinterested, even dismissive and quite cold during the conversation.

Empathy

Empathy, involves learning how to sense where others are at from an emotional point of view. Empathy is the door to the soul of another human being. it. Positive v negative empathy. The Supermarket. Emotional v Cognitive empathy! Great leaders have both.

- Those who have developed the skill will be more at peace in their lives and more effective at coping with life's challenges and often less burnt out!

They will also find their social and personal relationships blossoming.

Empathy Exercises

1. *Empathy Awareness Exercise* – here we learn to become more aware of positive and negative empathy interactions between ourselves and others over a 4 – 6 weeks period.
2. *Empathy in Practice Exercise* – here we learn to apply what we have learnt above to all social interactions over the next 4 – 6 weeks or so till it becomes automatic.

Unconditional Self - Acceptance

The most important skill in life especially and the one that best counteracts stress and burnout, is to develop Unconditional Self Acceptance.

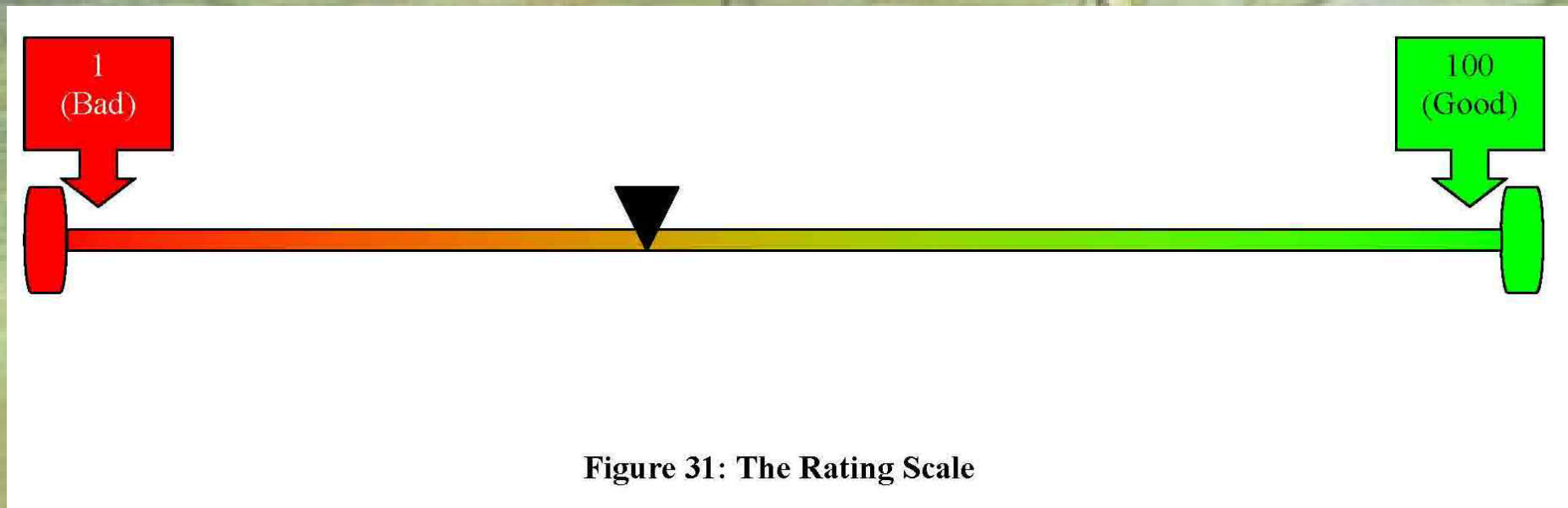
Professionals (such as yourselves) often fail to practice this skill and are very hard on yourselves as a result!

Develop it and you will never look back! Dismiss it and you will pay the price.

‘If I make an error, I am a failure’! = burnout!

This brings us to explore the world of self/other rating.

Let’s firstly perform the following exercise.



The Rating Exercise!

Mark down on this scale where you rate yourself as a person between 1 and 100!

Then mark down where other people rate you as a person!

I am then going to ask you to visualize that you are informed that you have made a major mistake at work. Or informed that you are a poor parent! Or are told you have Depression and put on Tx.

Now re - mark on your scale how you would rate yourself and how others would rate you if any of the above happened in real life!

The Rating Scale!

Now consider:

1. How many of you changed your rating depending on the question asked?
2. On what grounds did you rate yourself?
3. On what grounds did you allow others to rate you?
4. Can you rate a human being at all?
5. What is the measuring tool?

Unconditional Self Acceptance

The most effective technique for all of us to become 'comfortable in our own skins' is to develop Unconditional Self-Acceptance.

This is where we:

Learn to accept ourselves, without conditions, for the special unique human beings that we are, but feel free to rate or measure our behaviour, which includes our skills and talents.

Unconditional Self-Acceptance was created by the father of CBT Albert Ellis.

Unconditional Self Acceptance

What this means in practice is:

1. I am not allowed to rate, or judge myself as a person.
2. I am not allowed to accept other people's rating, or judgement of me as a person.
3. I am allowed to rate or judge my behaviour and skills but not myself as a human being.
4. I separate 'who I am as a person' from 'what I do' (e.g. my work as a deputy principal) – the real secret to true mental health!

Our PC

The enemy of unconditional self – acceptance is the '*pathological critic*' embedded in our emotional mind. It is often formed in earlier life.

When negative as in stress, anxiety or depression, our PC (who is vague, a bully and talks rubbish) can be nasty – convincing us as individuals that what it says is true.

It suggests we are *useless, weak, a failure, boring, worthless* or simply *abnormal!!!!*

All of which are a form of rating!!

How to develop Unconditional Self - Acceptance

Over a 2-month period carry a notebook. If you find yourself self rating, write down the trigger and the rating. Then later challenge *on paper* your PC:

'Am I a weak person' or 'am I weak at a particular skill or behaviour'?

'Am I a useless person' or 'just useless at a skill or behaviour' which I can then work on to improve?

'Am I a failure as a person or simply failed at a task at a moment in time. Remember that the only failure in life is not getting back up again'!

Other 'Useful' Resilience Skills

1. How to manage Procrastination.
2. How to Manage Interpersonal Conflict.
3. How to Prioritize and then Problem-solve issues.
4. Learning how to detach from the 'big picture' and focus on the individual person and situation in front of you.
5. Learn how to delegate.
6. If struggling with hurt or concept of unfairness, learn how to challenge and banish it from your life.

Summary

Each one of you present, need to be especially aware of the dangers of burnout in particular, to yourselves and your families, with increased physical and mental health risks.

Never were Lifestyle changes and a healthy W/L balance more relevant.

- Work hard on your emotional resilience skills++++

As a group, you need to work on the structural issues underlying current situation, and embrace the ideas of Administrator, Leadership time and space and art of Delegation.

Useful Links

My website is drharrybarry.com (videos and list of books). Some of my books:

Toxic Stress (Orion Spring)

Depression – a practical guide' (Orion Spring)

Anxiety and Panic (Orion Spring)

Emotional Resilience. (Orion Spring)

Self-Acceptance. (Orion Spring)

Emotional Healing. (Orion Spring)

Embracing Change. (Orion Spring)

The Power of Connection (Orion Spring)

Note

I will be signing copies of Toxic Stress and Emotional Resilience at the end of this talk.

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My Memoirs will be coming in September 2025.



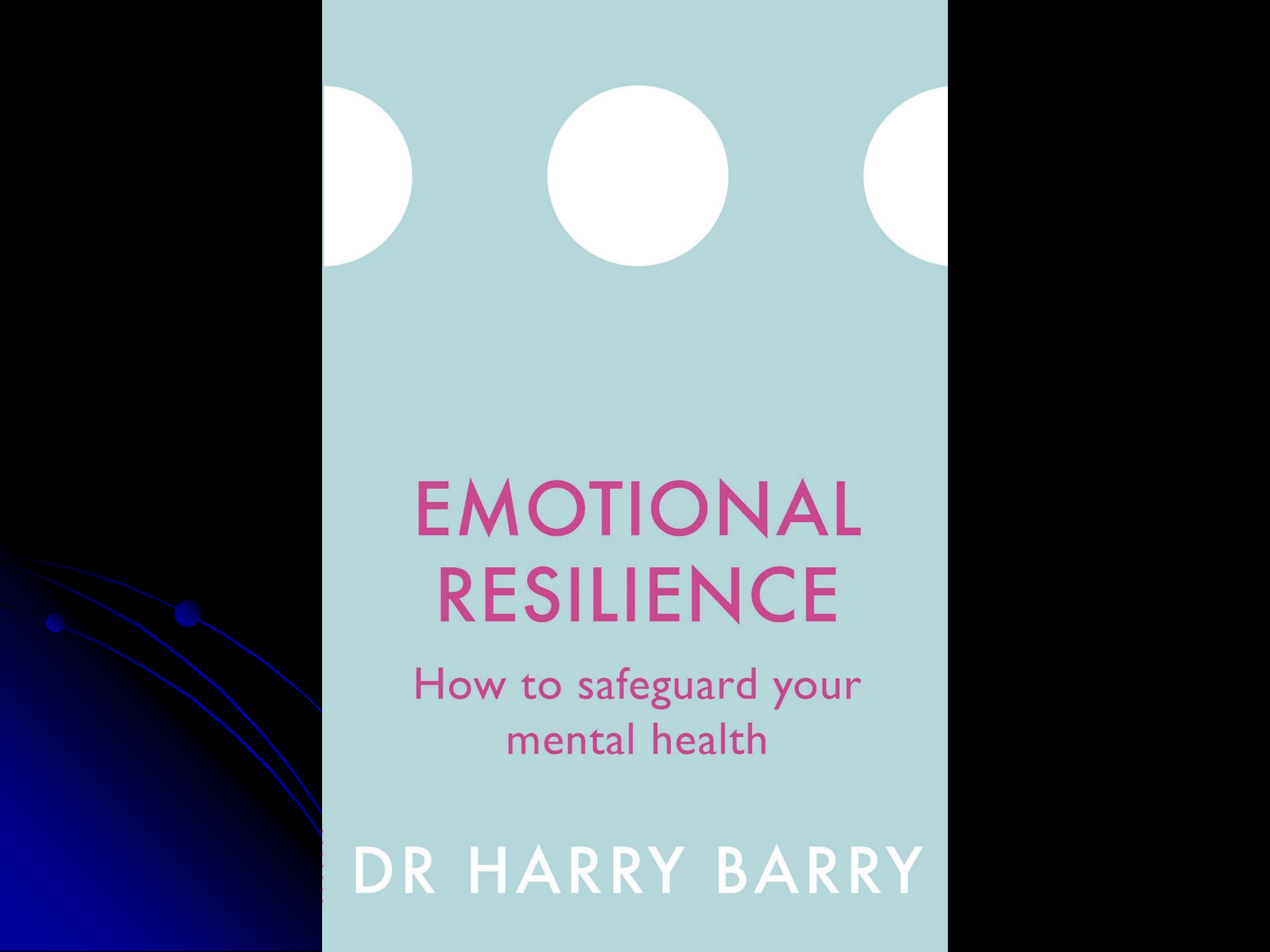


TOXIC STRESS

A step-by-step guide
to managing stress

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EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

How to safeguard your
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