Learning difficulties and autism: placing psychological wellbeing at the centre – we are all ambassadors.

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Nicola has worked as an academic specialising in health behaviour and public health at Universities in the North of England for many years. She has also designed, implemented and evaluated health interventions with schools, hospitals and councils across the UK to understand what works, for whom and when in relation to making sustained and effective changes to mental and physical health. More recently Nicola has been involved in the design and creation of digital health applications dedicated to improving psychological and physical wellbeing. With a specialism in behaviour change tools, Nicola brings this expertise to the design and delivery of Aspire software solutions.

Today:

- We can all support a positive mental health narrative
- The current landscape of mental health
- Real life application and solutions to the intersection between mental health, autism and learning disabilities
- Accountability and responsibility for our own mental health…building a toolbox
- Our role as mentors and ambassadors for others using self compassion and building self esteem

The world we live in...is actually not very ‘liveable’ and the ‘mental health problems’ we try to ‘solve’ are actually reflective of broader societal problems to some extent…?

- E.g. right now:
- Post pandemic
- Economy
- Ukraine
- Social media
- Marginalisation

Therapy cannot solve societal and hierarchical problems and economic problems

Those with a learning disability and or autism face increased marginalisation and heightened awareness or sensitivity…..

Permacrisis:

Collins dictionary 2022 word of the year

We have all been living in a continued period of insecurity and instability

This is extended to a point which feels unbearable for most

Launching from one crisis to another without drawing breath

Brexit, pandemic, severe weather, economic instability, Ukraine, energy prices, cost of living crisis……

- **Where are we now?**

- Emerging from a pandemic… research (SARS) suggests PTSD and trauma for many
- Increased generalised anxiety disorder and depression
- A typically unhealthy population with large percentage of inactive people and some of the highest rates of cardiovascular disease…
- High levels of burnout
- Significant rise in mental health disorders predicted to continue
- Rising demand on mental health budgets

The intersection and gap between learning disabilities, autism and mental health

“Depression is just as prevalent among people with learning disabilities as it is in the wider population and they are frequently exposed to known vulnerability factors for low mood such as lack of social support and purposeful activity. Yet there remains a paucity of evidence about effective interventions for depression”

Jahoda, A. (2020) Tizard learning Disability Review

“…research is identifying a strong association between camouflaging autistic traits, with poor mental health, well-being, and high rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviours in autistic people”

High degrees of stress emerge from camouflaging behaviour

From a sense of isolation

From loneliness

The perception that you are not welcome….

The intersection and gap between learning disabilities, autism and mental health

- High risk of mental health problems for individuals with autism spectrum disorders
- Shortage of professionals trained in autism and mental health
- “Hence, despite autistic people being at significantly increased risk of mental health problems and suicidality than the general population, they appear to be less likely to be able to access support and treatment for these difficulties”
- Lack of validated assessments to measure MH
- Lack of adapted psychologies
- Limited researched on experiences of autistic individuals receiving therapies or treatments

- Camm-Crosbie et al (2019) ‘People like me don’t get support’: Autistic adults’ experiences of support and treatment for mental health difficulties, self-injury and suicidality. *Autism*. 23. 6.

Investing in mental health has a very positive ROI …we are gradually becoming more aware of the VOI.

But what do we know about investing in mental health support and provision for those with Autism and/or Learning Disabilities?

Deloitte and WBCSD (2022)

Healthy People, Healthy Business: Embedding a cultu of employee health and wellbeing

How are we acting as ambassadors

How are we walking the talk in spaces and communities and organisations?

What is psychological wellbeing?

Research shows we are most effective at managing stress when we really tap into what works for us

How do we teach those around us about building this first aid box?

Where do you need to go?
Who do you need to speak to?
What do you need to do?
What environment will help right now?

Stress and burnout in life and work emerges when:

We exist in a culture that doesn’t have psychological safety

Where there is a mismatch in our values and what we are doing/seeing/hearing

When we can’t manage workloads

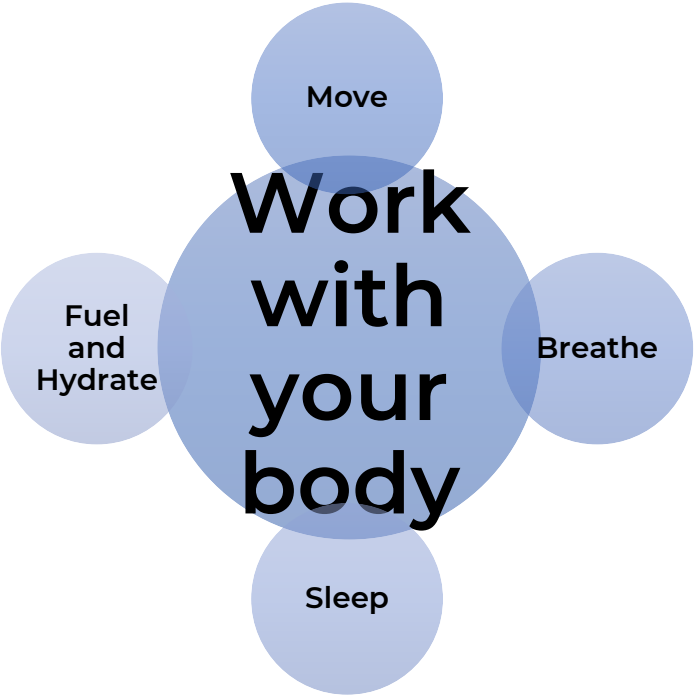
When we don’t feel able to set boundaries

How do we model these behaviours?

Self esteem – How you feel about yourself matters

Self compassion – How you talk about yourself matters

Coping behaviours and solutions

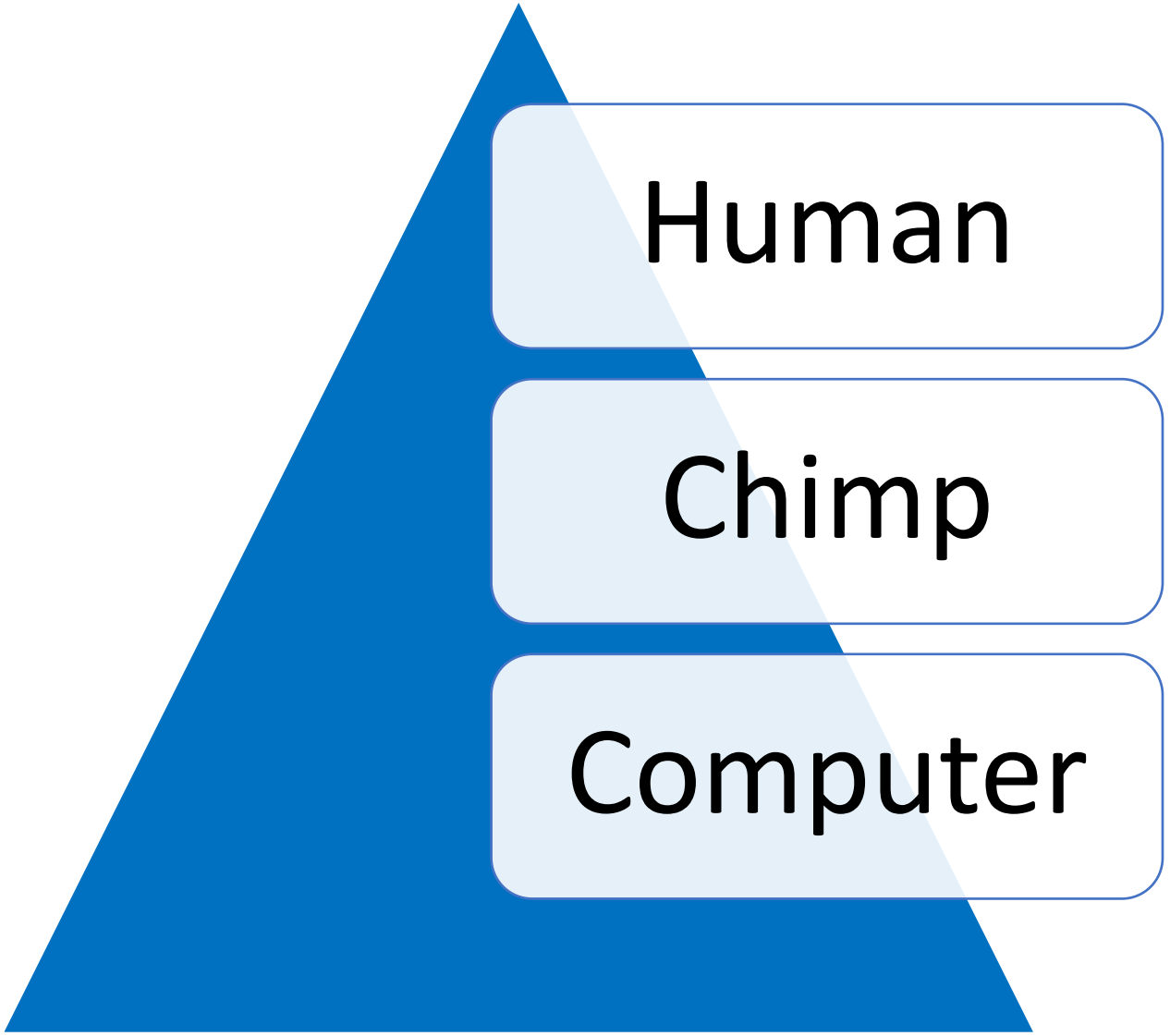

Move
Work with your body
Fuel and Hydrate
Breathe
Sleep

The chimp paradox

Demonstrating how we nurture our chimp

How we feed it bananas

How we distract her



Personal Resource Allocation: The cornerstone of alleviating stress.

“Positive outcomes are achieved when people (1) perceive themselves to have the resources necessary to effectively respond to the demands in their life, (2) believe they have sufficient control to allocate resources in a way that fits their preferences, and (3) feel satisfied with the way they have managed their resources”.

HOW do you promote this concept?

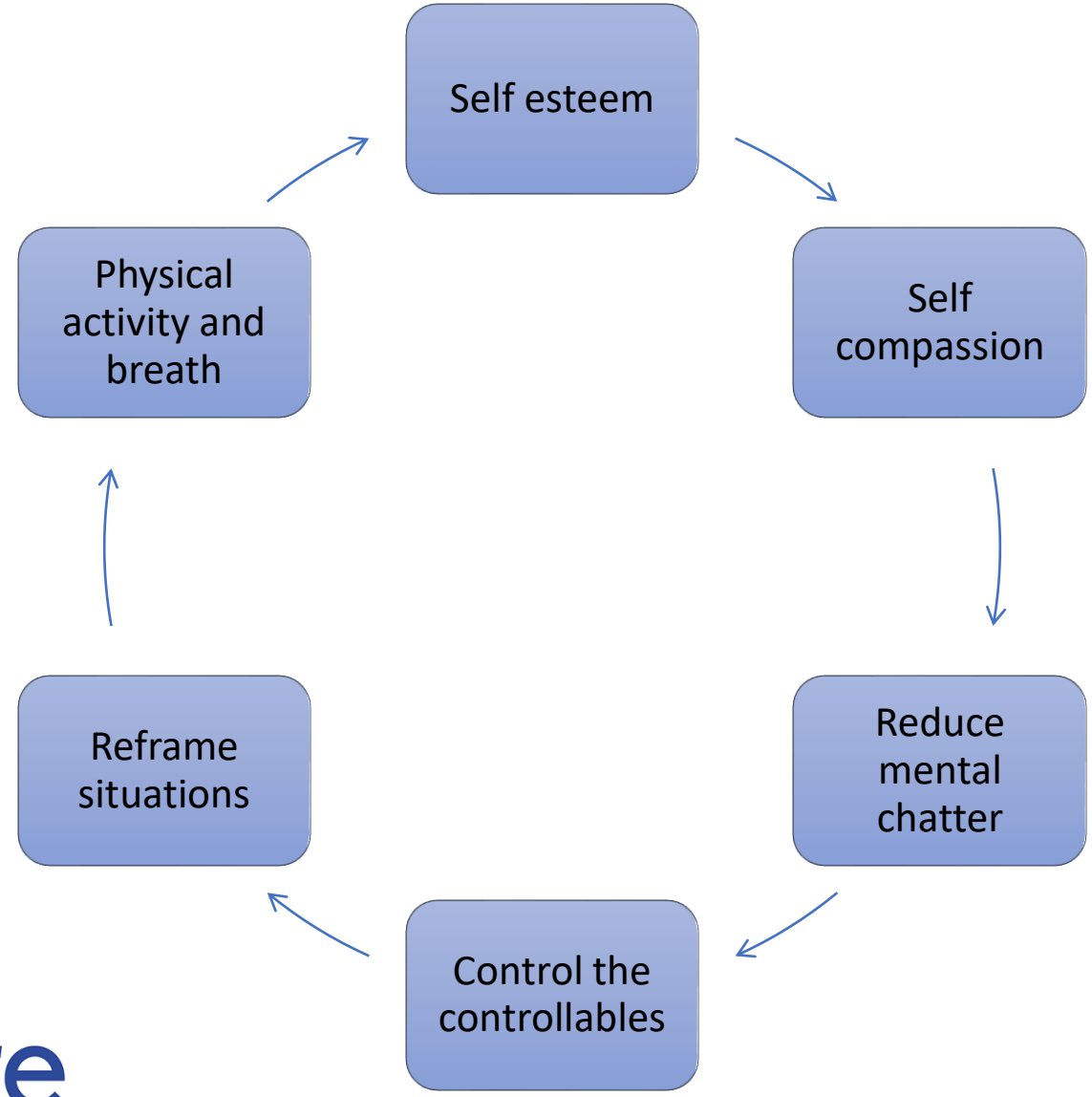
“When people are satisfied with the way they have used their resources to respond to life demands, they should be more likely to experience positive subjective well-being outcomes”

Re write the narrative

A digital solution: wide reaching, cost effective, reaches the hard to reach, unobtrusive…

The Aspire Ethos - Supporting students to achieve their potential…

Toolkit basics



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