

‘Persecutory Perfectionism: the key driver behind student mental health problems?’

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Safeguarding Students: Addressing Mental Health Needs

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Challenges of Supporting New Undergraduate Students: Transitions

- Transition to Higher Education
- Developmental challenges for young adults
- Attachment issues, why are people more vulnerable at times of transition?
- Factors influencing young adult mental wellbeing and psychology
- Culture of Anxiety? Students, Parents, Institutions, Media?
- Developmental and Life challenges of mature students

Key Factors and Context Affecting Young Adult Mental Wellbeing

- Social media promoting unrealistic life expectations
- Transitional issues: different models of secondary to HE modes of learning
- Pressure on students to immediately get everything 'right'. Real Learning is 'getting things wrong, being confused, struggling, feeling unsettled managing uncertainty until knew knowledge emerges' (Metaphor for becoming a mature adult)
- Transitional issues: Changes in parenting styles often giving mixed messages around separation and independence

Key Factors and Context Affecting Young Adult Mental Wellbeing

- ‘Over-medicalising’ normal but distressing life challenges and difficulties
- Rigid expectations (students satisfaction based more on how reality meets their expectations rather than quality of experience itself)
- Increased uncertainty about economic/career future puts greater pressure to succeed academically
- Persecutory/unrealistic perfectionism: key driver for mental health difficulties and serious illness
- Catastrophizing difficulties and failure

Post Graduate Students: Specific Mental Health Needs

- Transition to PG education: Different educational and psychological tasks
- Transition from previous background: Life and developmental pressures
- Isolation and need for structure
- Range of projects/initiatives: HEFCE catalyst funding

Sources of stress: external and internal



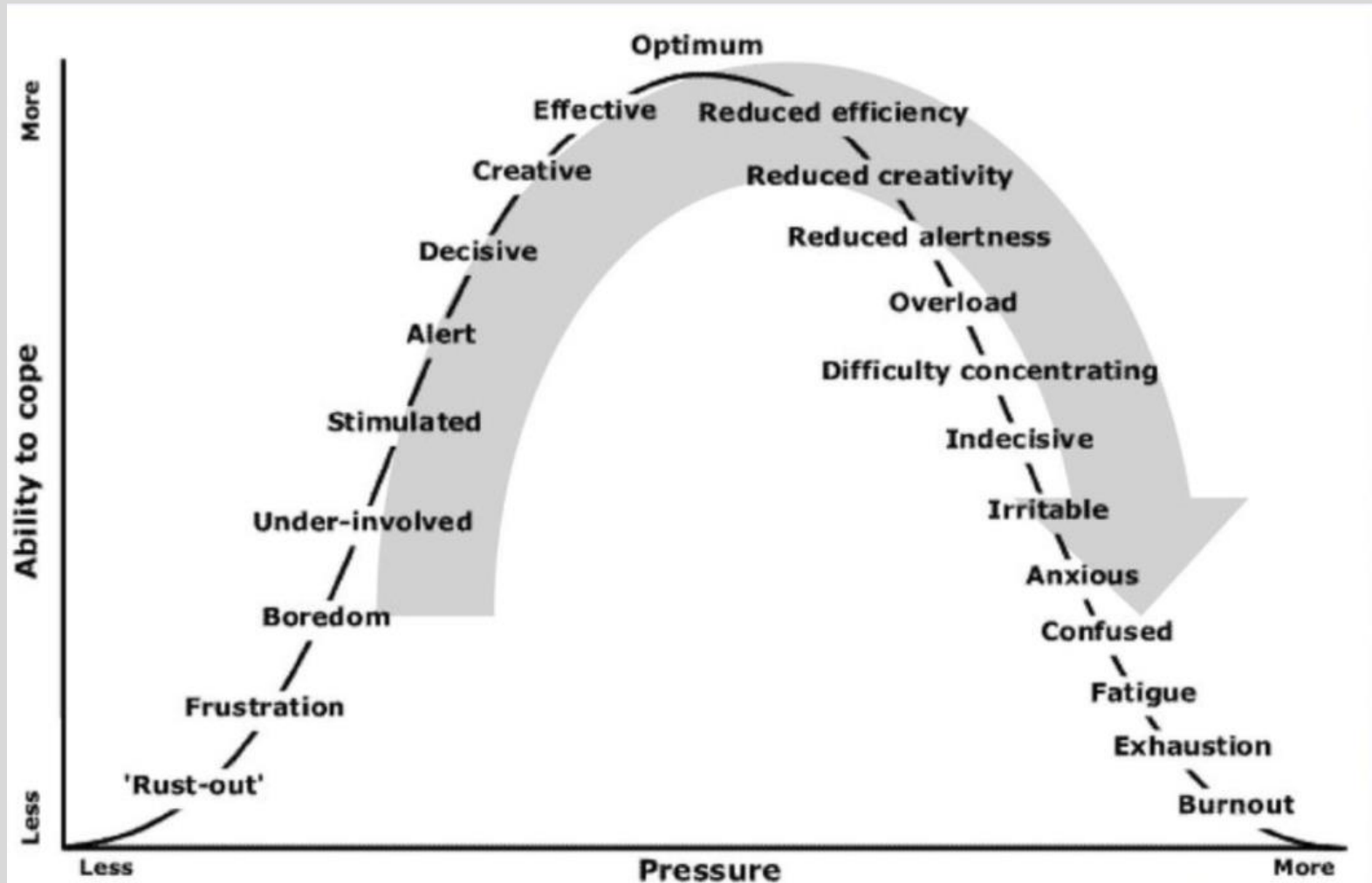
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What you
have to do

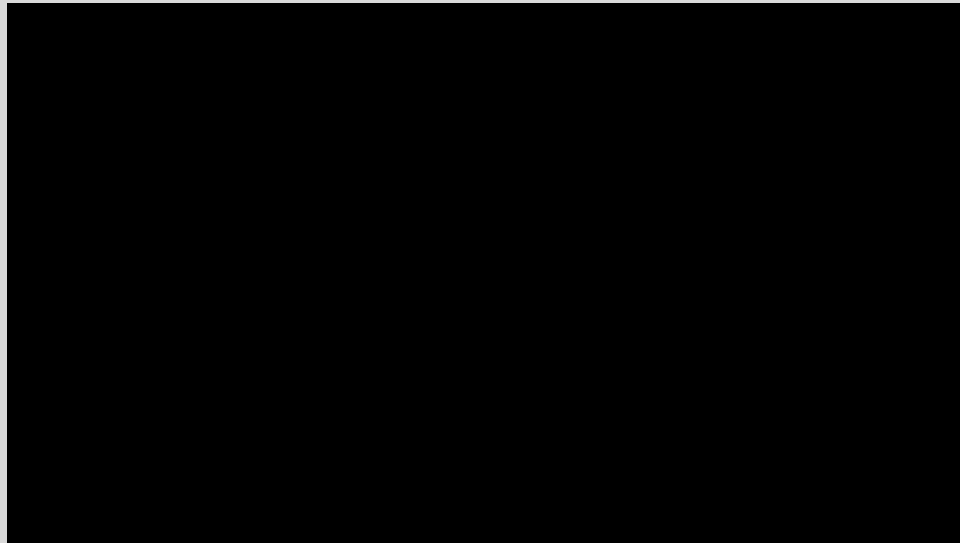
How you think about
what you have to do

Conventional stress response curve (Yerkes-Dodson Law)



Persecutory Perfectionism

- Three Types of Perfectionism: Self, Other and Socially Prescribed



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m82hibSS_tl

Work of Professor Andrew Hill and Dr Thomas Curran

Persecutory Perfectionism

- ‘Committee Theory of Self’
- ‘Self’ as Chairperson of an unruly and conflicted committee
- Aim for improving mental health to achieve a balanced and democratic resolution
- Danger of a dominant voice taking over as ‘dictator’
- ‘Perfectionist Bully’ very aggressive and resistant to change

Persecutory Perfectionism

- Feels like a helpful best friend but who has really become an enemy within
- This can make any idea of change feel like a threat
- ‘Helpful’ advice or interventions become ‘lost in translation’
- Rigid Mindset rather than Growth Mindset

Persecutory Perfectionism

- Social Media
- Secondary Education:
Result/Target Culture rather
than experience
- Student Debt? Pressure to get
exam, degree, job, etc. just to
survive
- Neo-Liberal Economics and
Competitive Individualism

Why is Emotional Resilience so Contentious?

- ‘All or nothing’ polarised thinking around student mental health
- ‘Blaming students for their problems’
- Can it be seen as empowering or enabling?
- Many ‘mental health problems’ relating to feels of being overwhelmed by life
- Have young adults got the ‘internal resources’, self confidence and compassion to face life challenges
- Culture always beats strategy!

Persecutory Perfectionism at Institutional Level

- Universities judged by unrealistic perfectionist standards in media?
- Emotional impression V Mental Health statistics and evidence
- Culture of Anxiety about HE
- Institutional Anxiety
- Reactive dangerous 'risky practice' rather than reflective professional evidence based practice

Improving Student Mental Health in UK universities

- Importance of good, targeted, practical welfare training for front line staff across the institution (usually best done 'in house')

<http://learning.cwmt.org.uk> - Charlie Waller

Memorial Trust E-Learning package for academic and non-academic staff to support students with mental health problems

Thank you for Listening

Any Questions?

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