

Unshakable Core: Growing the Inner Strengths Of Resilient Well-Being



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Resilience and Well-Being

Resilience is the capacity
to recover from adversity and
pursue your goals despite challenges.

It helps you survive
the worst day of your life and
thrive every day of your life.



Lasting well-being
in a changing world
requires resilience.

Resilience requires
mental resources.



Mental Resources
Make Us Resilient

Some Mental Resources

Executive Functions

Character Strengths

Secure Attachment

Positive Emotions

Interpersonal Skills

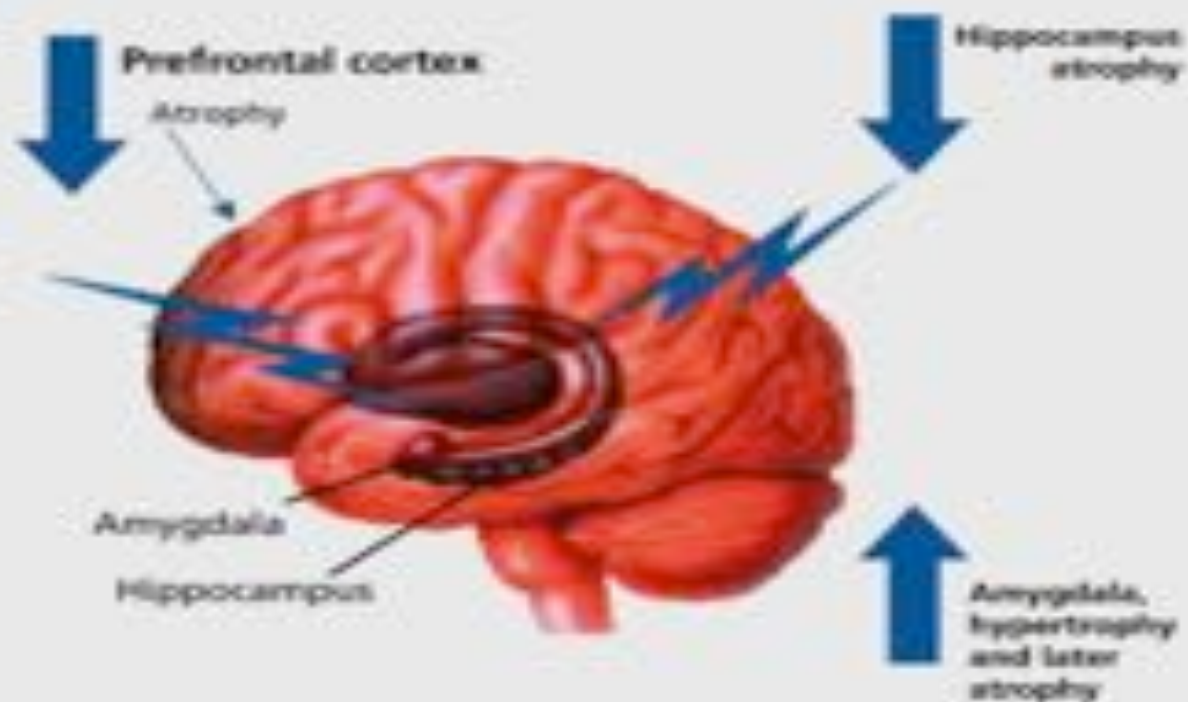
Patience, Determination, Grit

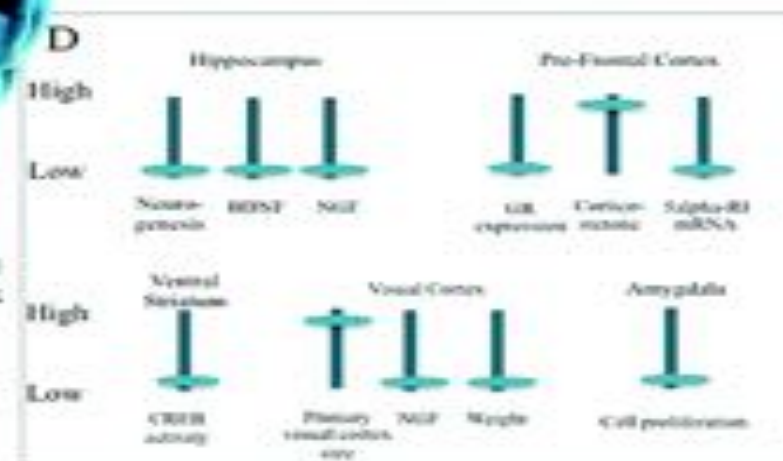
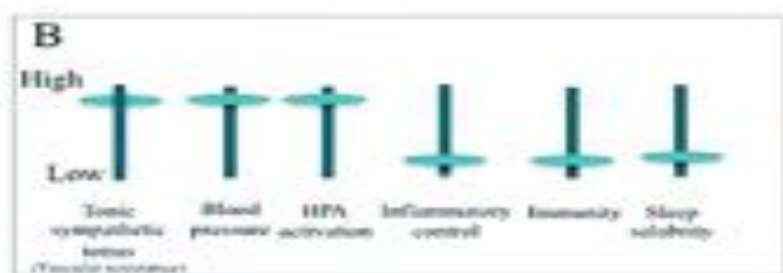
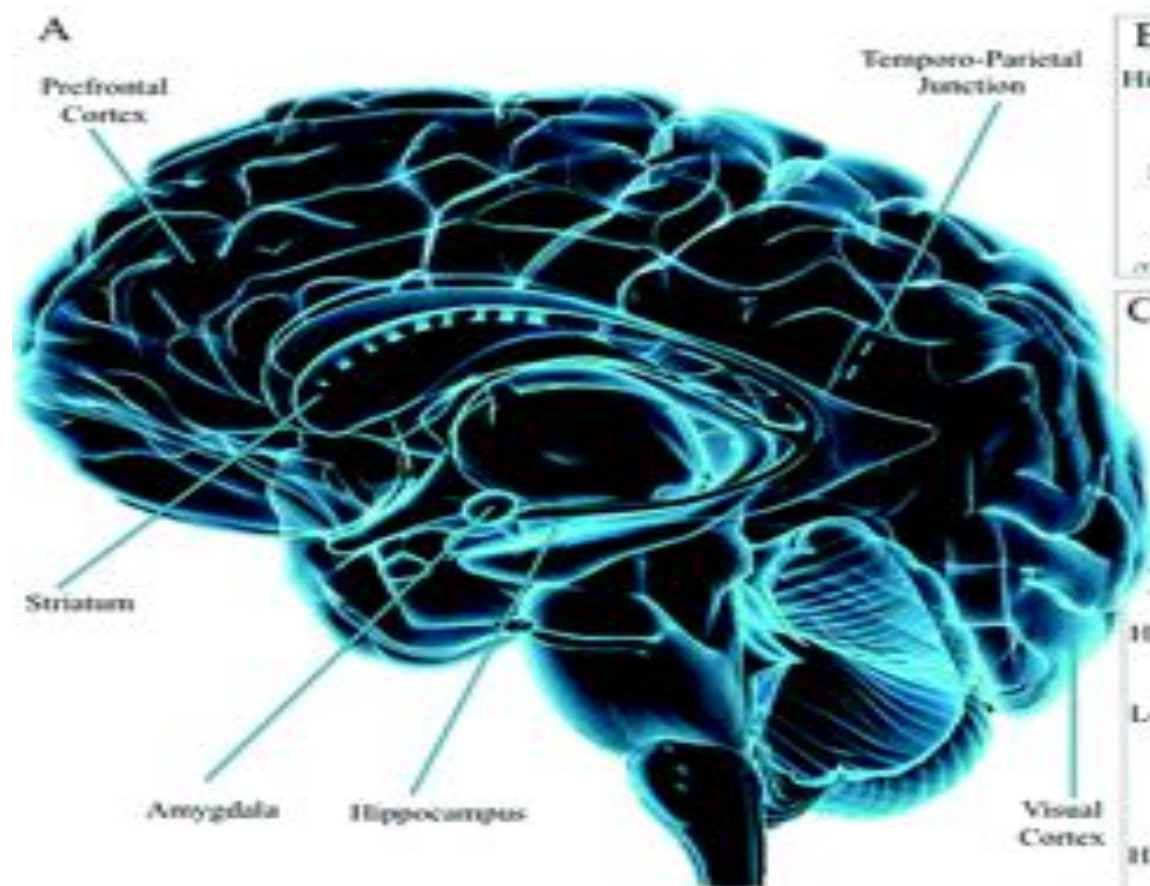
The harder a person's life,
the more challenges one has,
the less the outer world is helping –

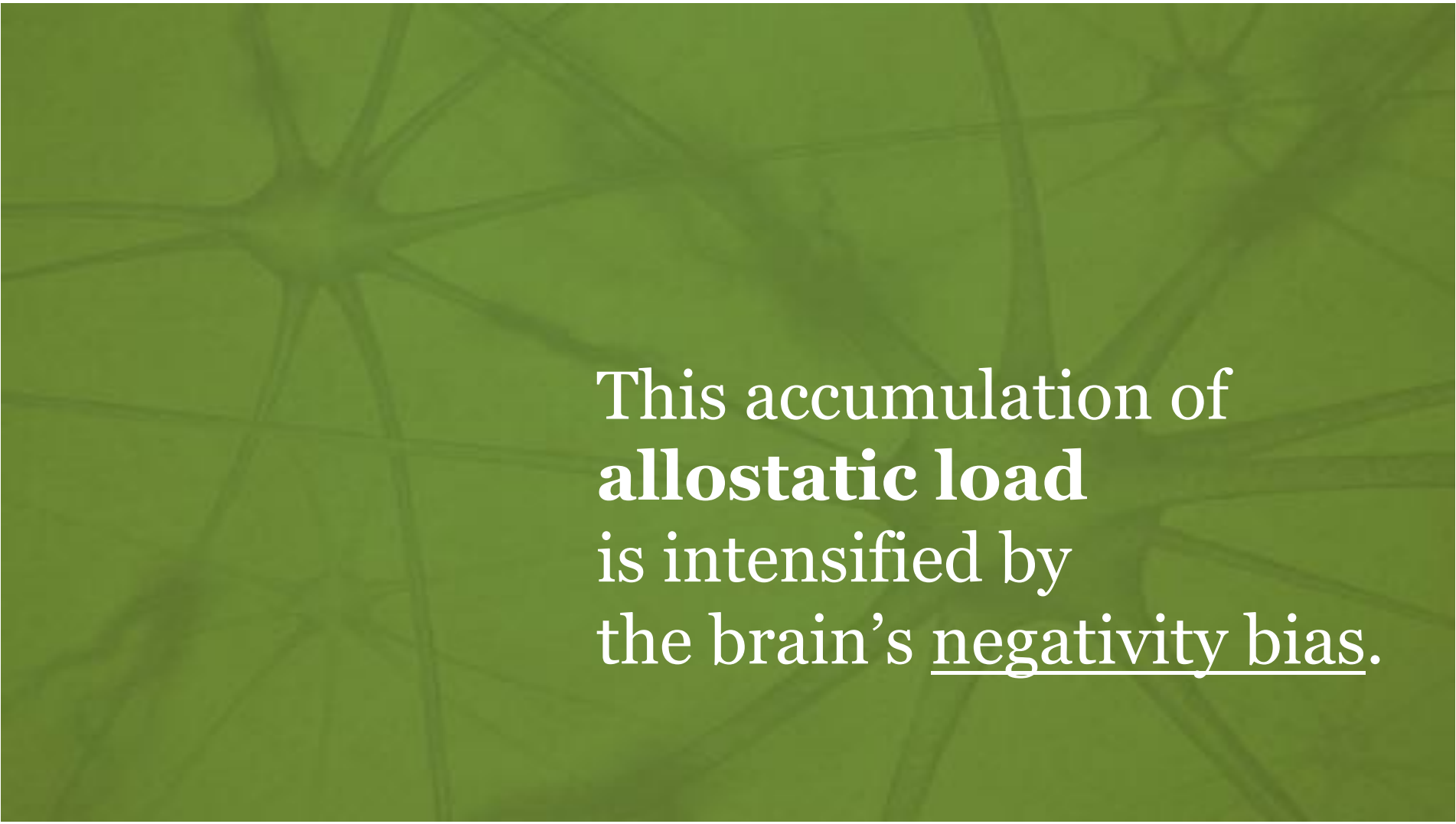
the more important it is
to have mental resources.

Toxic Stress Impairs Mental Resources

The brain under stress: structural remodeling





A green-tinted microscopic image of neurons, showing cell bodies and branching processes, serving as a background for the text.

This accumulation of
allostatic load
is intensified by
the brain's negativity bias.

The Negativity Bias

As the nervous system evolved, avoiding “sticks” was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Turn it quickly into (implicit) memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.

Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good





The Negativity Bias

Mental resources are good, period,
plus they're eroded by the stresses
we need them for.

So, how do we get them?

People focus on identifying and
using resources such as character
strengths – but what about
developing them in the first place?

Which Means Changing the Brain For the Better



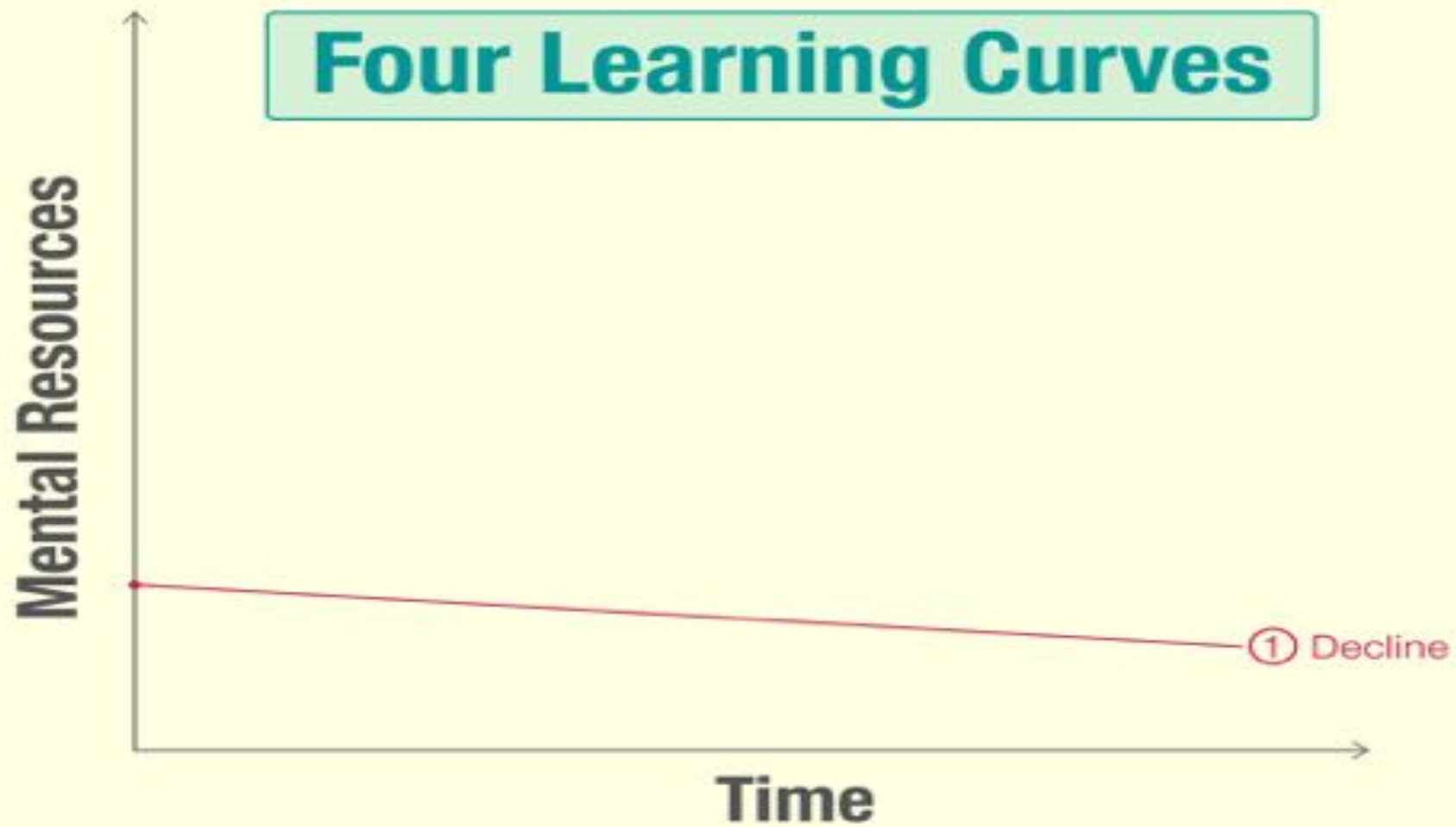


Acquiring Mental Resources

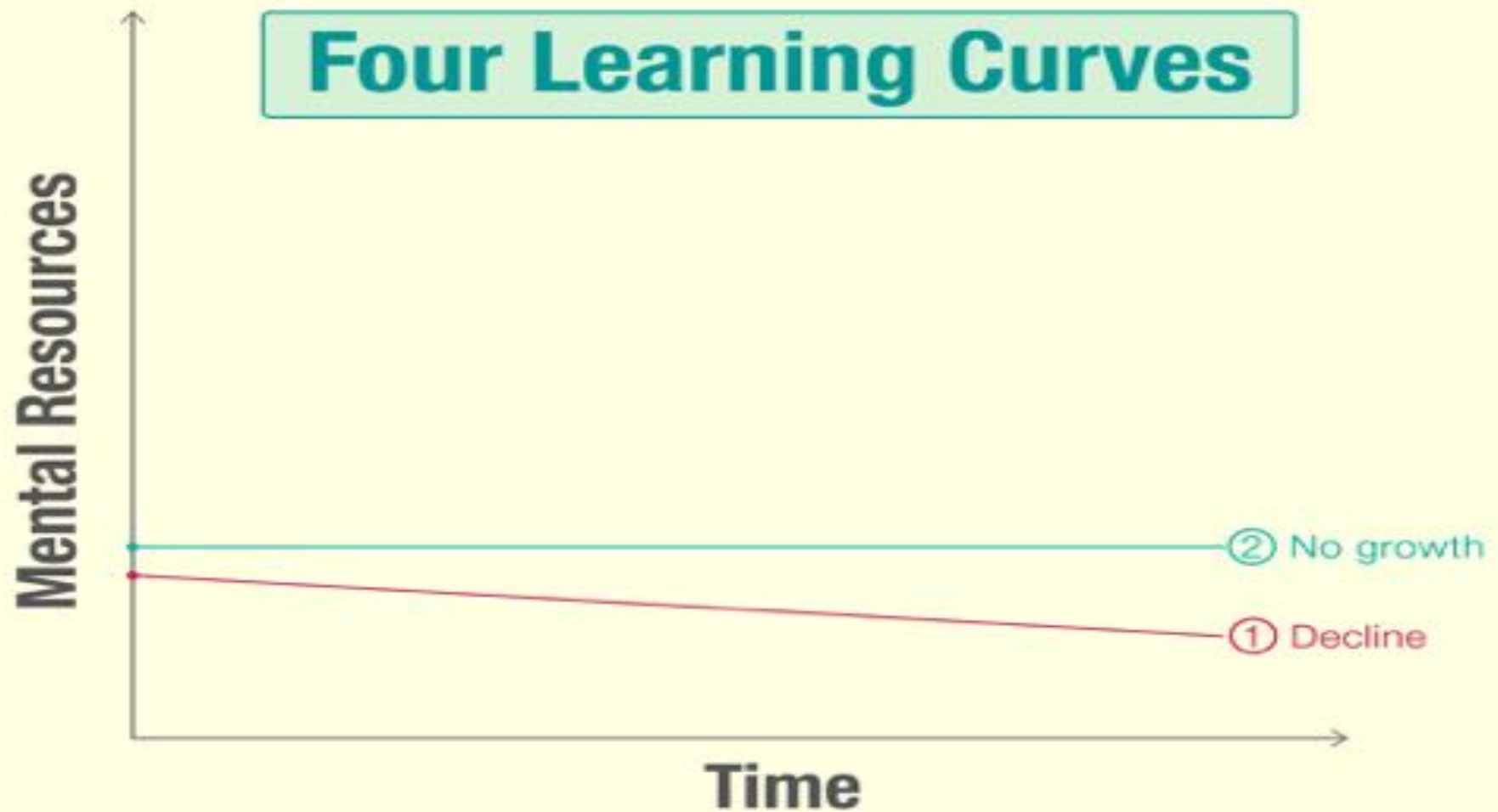
Half or more of the variation
in psychological attributes,
including mental resources,
is due to non-heritable factors.

This means there are
large individual differences
in the acquisition of mental resources.

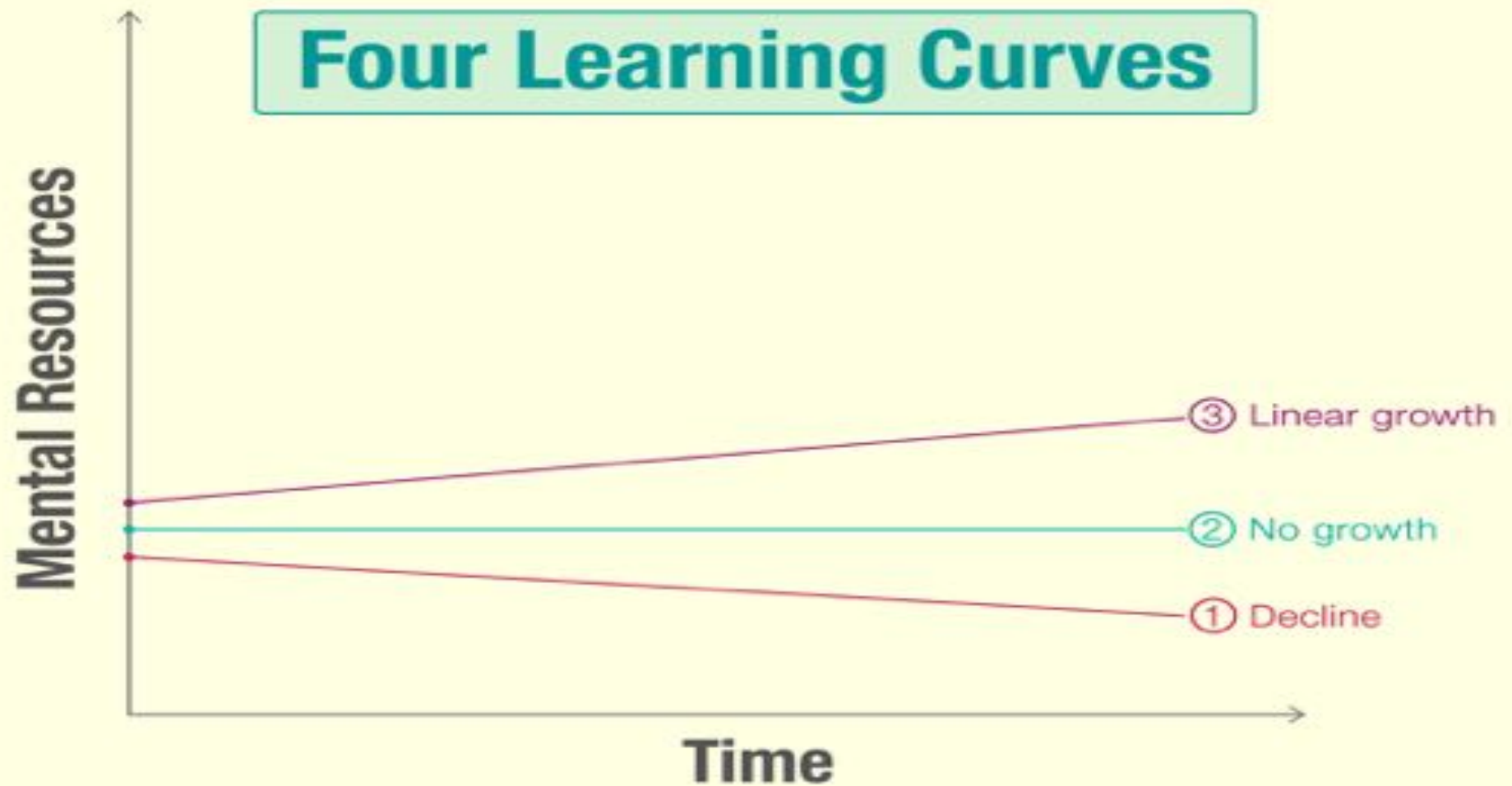
Four Learning Curves



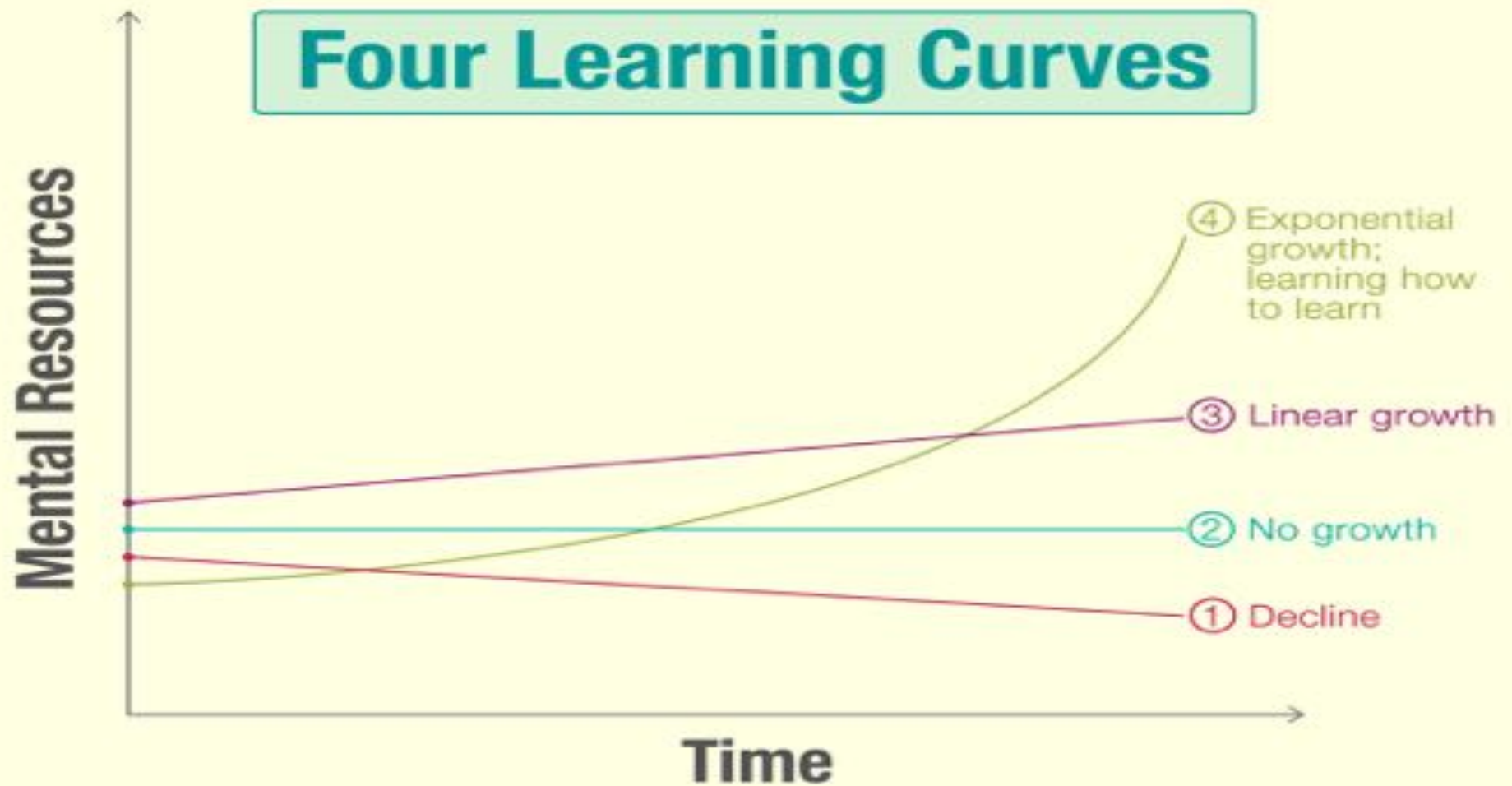
Four Learning Curves

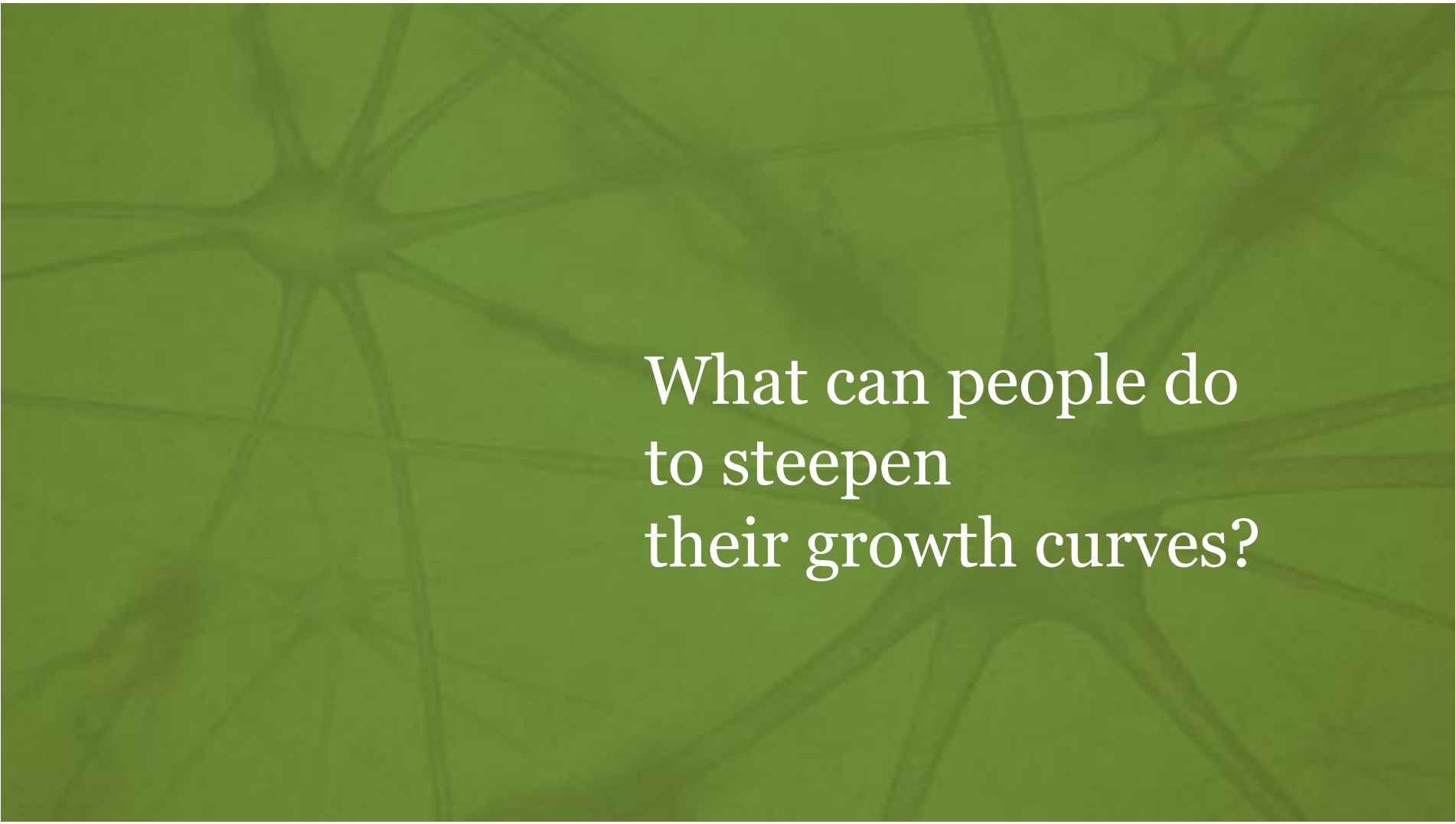


Four Learning Curves



Four Learning Curves





What can people do
to steepen
their growth curves?

The Neuropsychology Of Learning

Mental resources are acquired in two stages:

Encoding ➤ Consolidation

Activation ➤ Installation

State ➤ Trait

We become more **compassionate** by repeatedly installing experiences of compassion.

We become more **grateful** by repeatedly installing experiences of gratitude.

We become more **mindful** by repeatedly installing experiences of mindfulness.

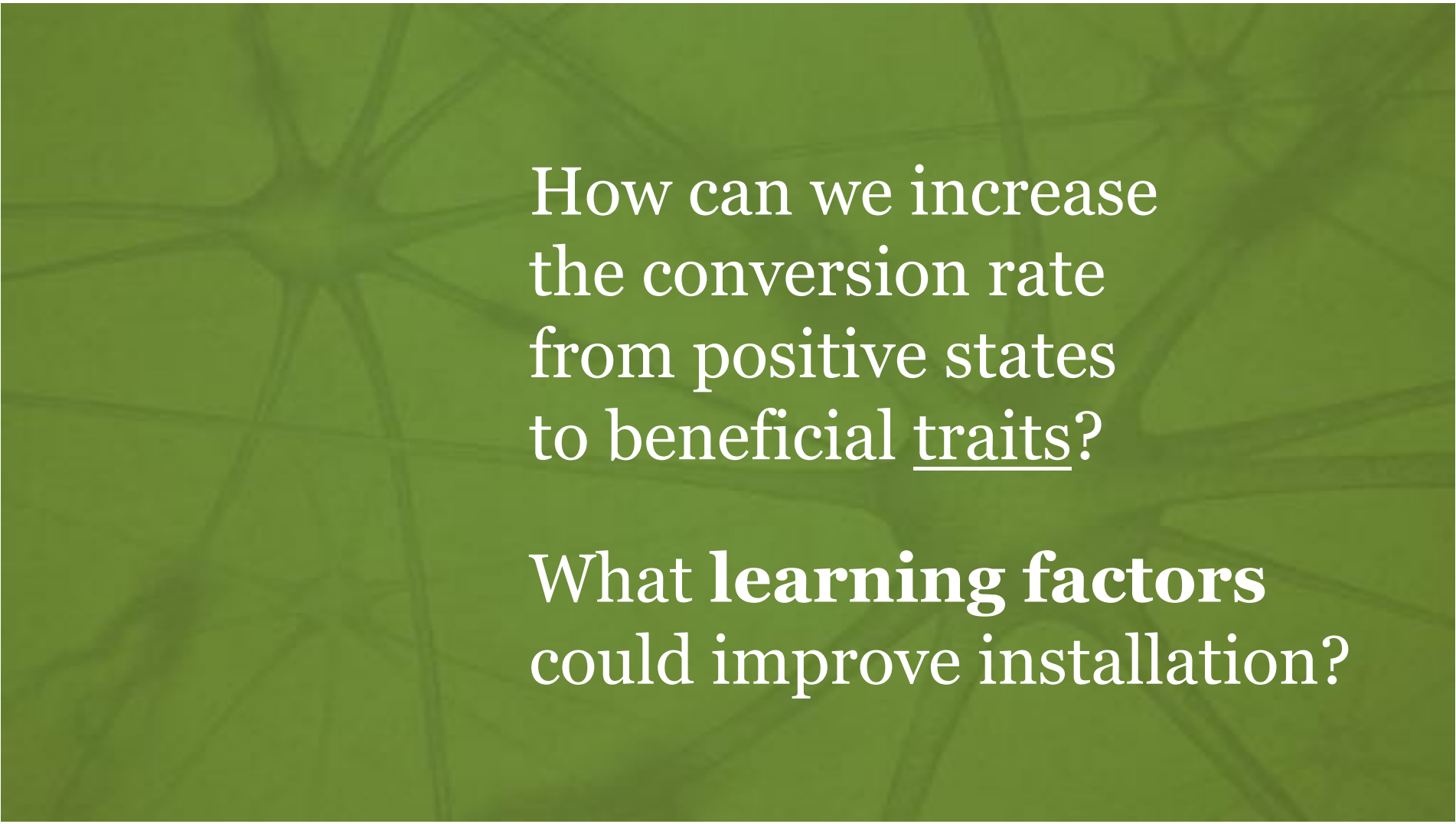
Experiencing doesn't equal learning.

Activation **without installation
may be pleasant,
but no trait resources are acquired.**

What fraction of our
beneficial mental states lead to lasting
changes in neural structure or function?

We tend to focus on activation
more than installation.

This reduces the gains from
psychotherapy, coaching,
human resources training,
mindfulness programs,
and self-help activities.



How can we increase
the conversion rate
from positive states
to beneficial traits?

What **learning factors**
could improve installation?

Steepening Personal Growth Curves

Learning Factors

Environmental – setting, social support

Behavioral – activities, repetition

Mental – motivation, engagement

Types of Mental Learning Factors

Contextual

Openness

Mindfulness

View of positive experience

Growth/learning mindset

Motivation

Self-efficacy

Self-esteem

Feeling supported

Sense of safety

Engagement

Personal relevance

Alertness, sense of novelty

Arousal, enactment

Sense of reward

Emotion

Granularity of attention

Interoception

Maintenance, repetition

Meaning, elaboration

Educators

have systematically focused on mental factors of academic learning, including teaching them explicitly.

Therapists, coaches, trainers, etc.

have generally not systematically focused on mental factors of social, emotional, and somatic learning - and rarely teach these explicitly.

Benefits of Mental Learning Factors

Benefits of both types of factors:

- Increase learning from the present experience
- Prime NS for future beneficial experiences
- Heighten consolidation of past experiences

Engagement factors have additional benefits:

- Regulate experience directly
- Increase initial processes of consolidation
- Are under volitional control

Turning States into Traits: HEAL

Activation

1. **H****ave** a beneficial experience

Installation

2. **E****nrich** the experience
3. **A****bsorb** the experience
4. **L****ink** positive and negative material
(Optional)



Have a Beneficial Experience



Enrich It



Absorb It



Link Positive & Negative Material



Have It, Enjoy It

It's Good to Take in the Good

Develops psychological resources:

- General – resilience, positive mood, feeling loved
- Specific – matched to challenges, wounds, deficits

Has built-in, implicit benefits:

- Training attention and executive functions
- Being active rather than passive
- Treating oneself kindly, that one matters

May sensitize brain to the positive

Fuels positive cycles with others

*Keep a green bough
in your heart,
and a singing bird
will come.*

Lao Tzu

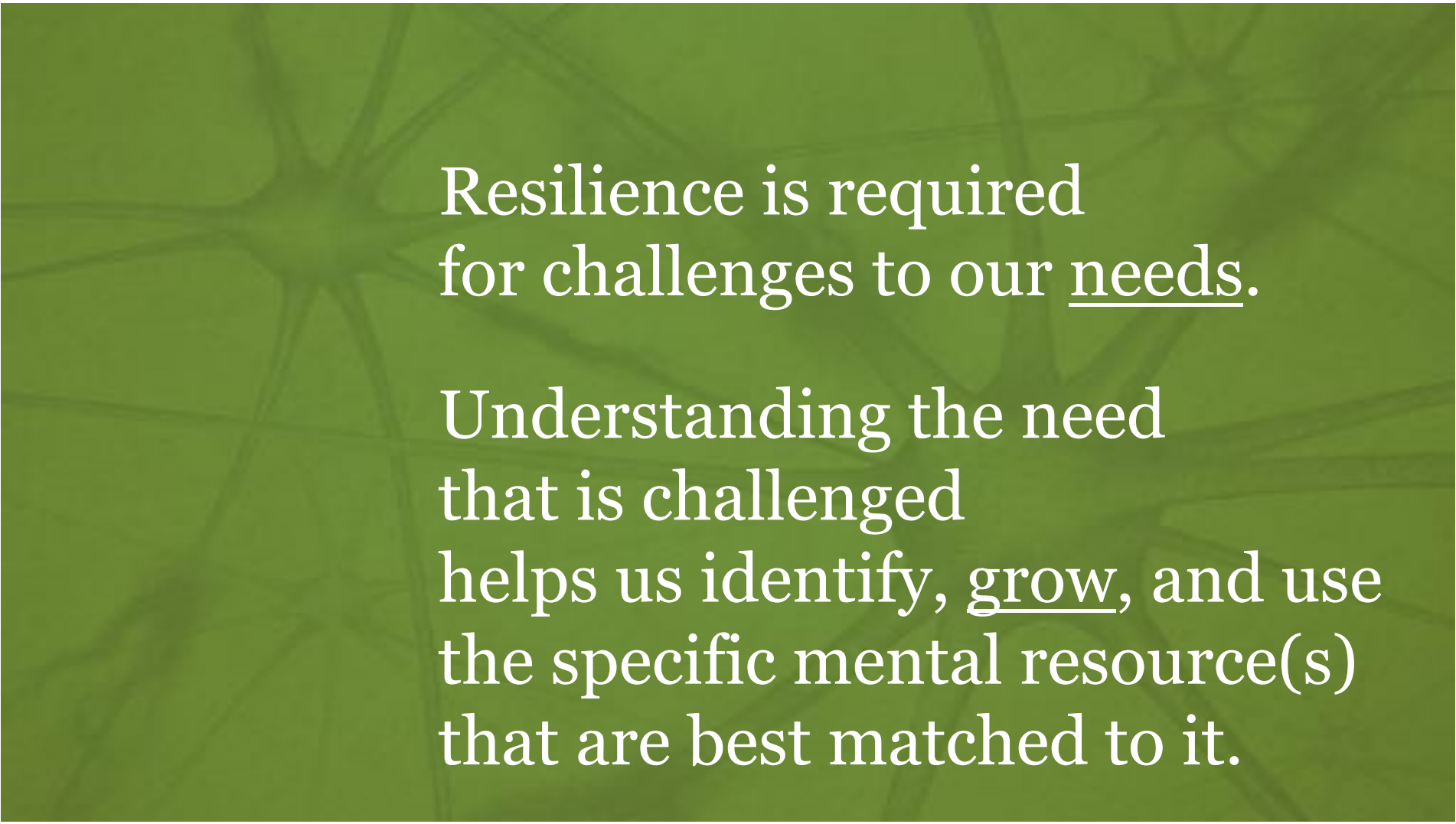


Learning
is the strength of strengths,
since it's the one we use
to grow the rest of them.

Knowing how to learn
the things that are important to you
could be the greatest strength of all.



Growing Key Resources



Resilience is required
for challenges to our needs.

Understanding the need
that is challenged
helps us identify, grow, and use
the specific mental resource(s)
that are best matched to it.

Our Three Fundamental Needs



Safety



Satisfaction



Connection

Meeting Our Three Fundamental Needs



Safety

Avoiding
harms

(threat response)



Satisfaction

Approaching
rewards

(goal pursuit)

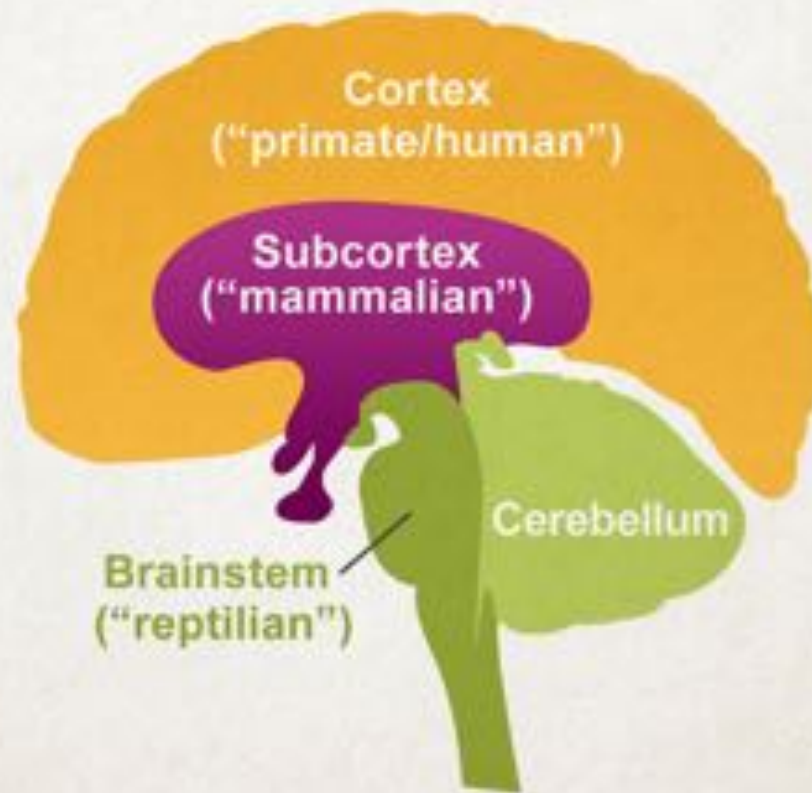


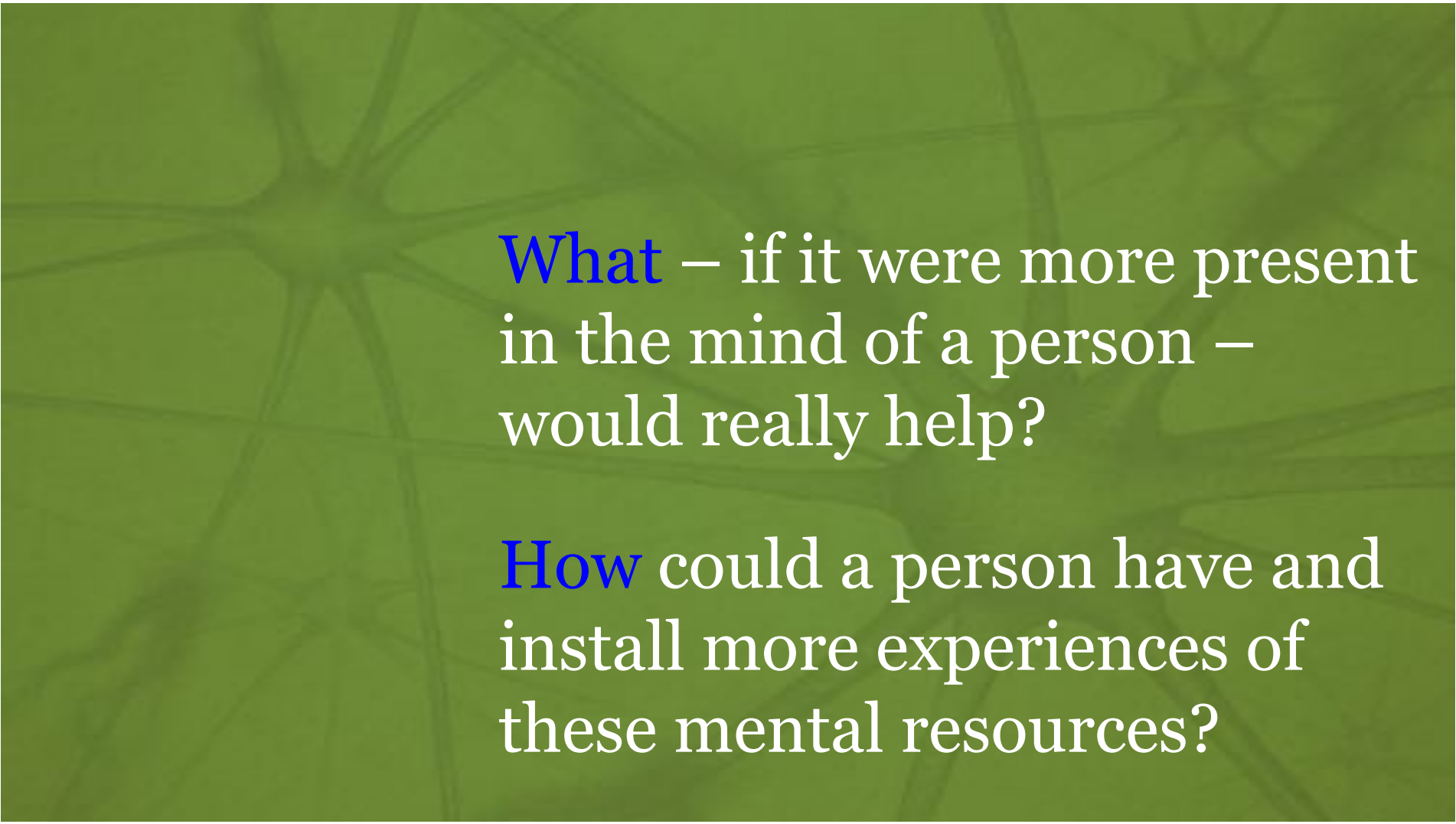
Connection

Attaching
to others

(social engagement)

The Evolving Brain





What – if it were more present
in the mind of a person –
would really help?

How could a person have and
install more experiences of
these mental resources?

Matching Resources to Needs

Safety

See actual threats
See resources
Grit, fortitude
Feel protected
Alright right now
Relaxation
Calm

Peace

Satisfaction

Gratitude
Gladness
Feel successful
Healthy pleasures
Impulse control
Aspiration
Enthusiasm

Contentment

Connection

Empathy
Compassion
Kindness
Wide circle of “us”
Assertiveness
Self-worth
Confidence

Love

As people acquire resources
for a particular need,
the mental/neural systems
that manage this need
are able to do so without toxic stress –
and with the positive thoughts and feelings
of capable coping.

More generally, people commonly experience an underlying sense of deficit and disturbance that produces the “craving” – broadly defined – which causes suffering and harm.

Internalizing experiences of needs met builds up a sense of fullness and balance – so we can meet the next moment and its challenges feeling already strong, happy, compassionate, and at peace.

Pet the Lizard



Feed the Mouse



Hug the Monkey

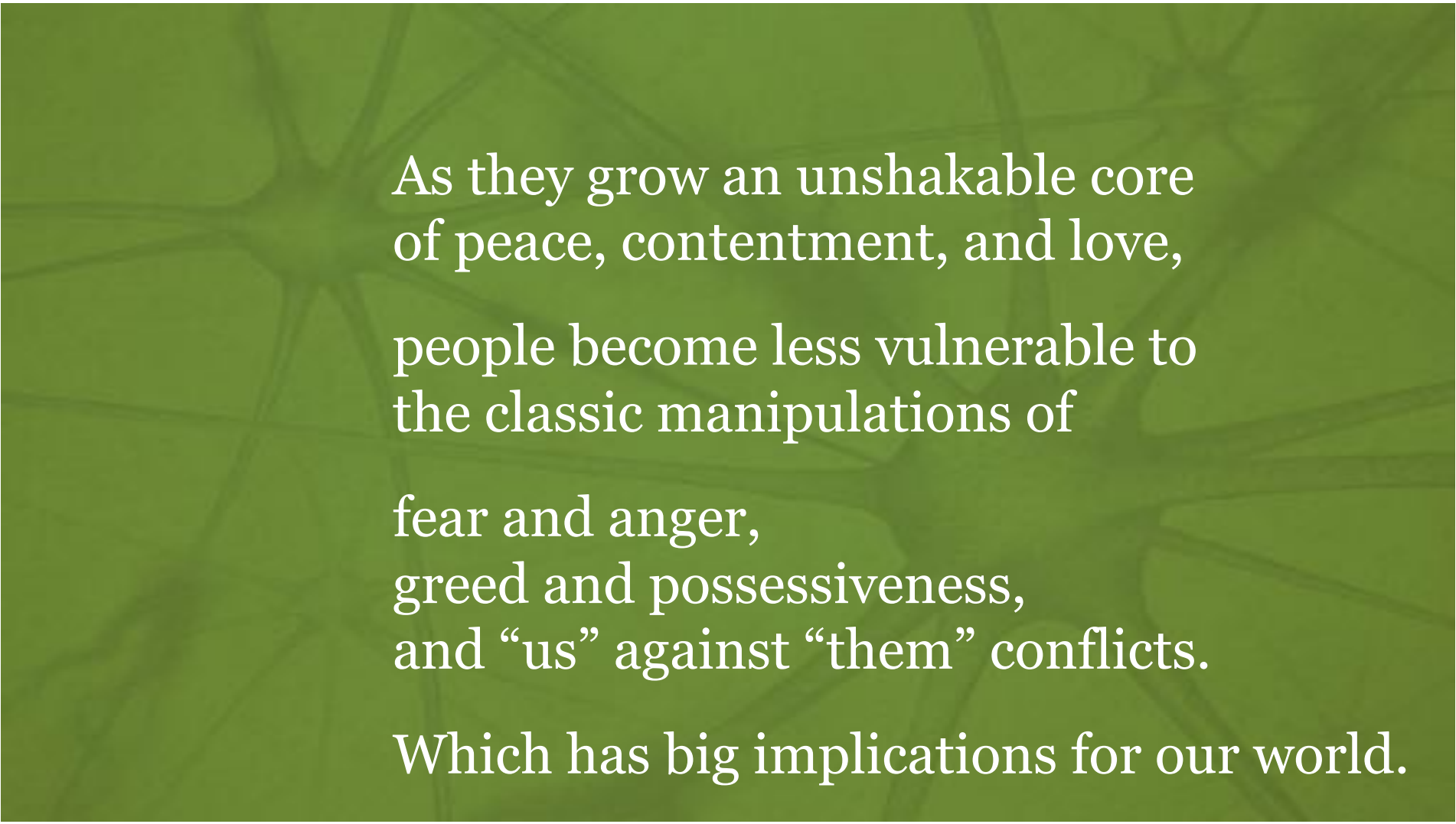


Coming Home

Peace

Contentment

Love



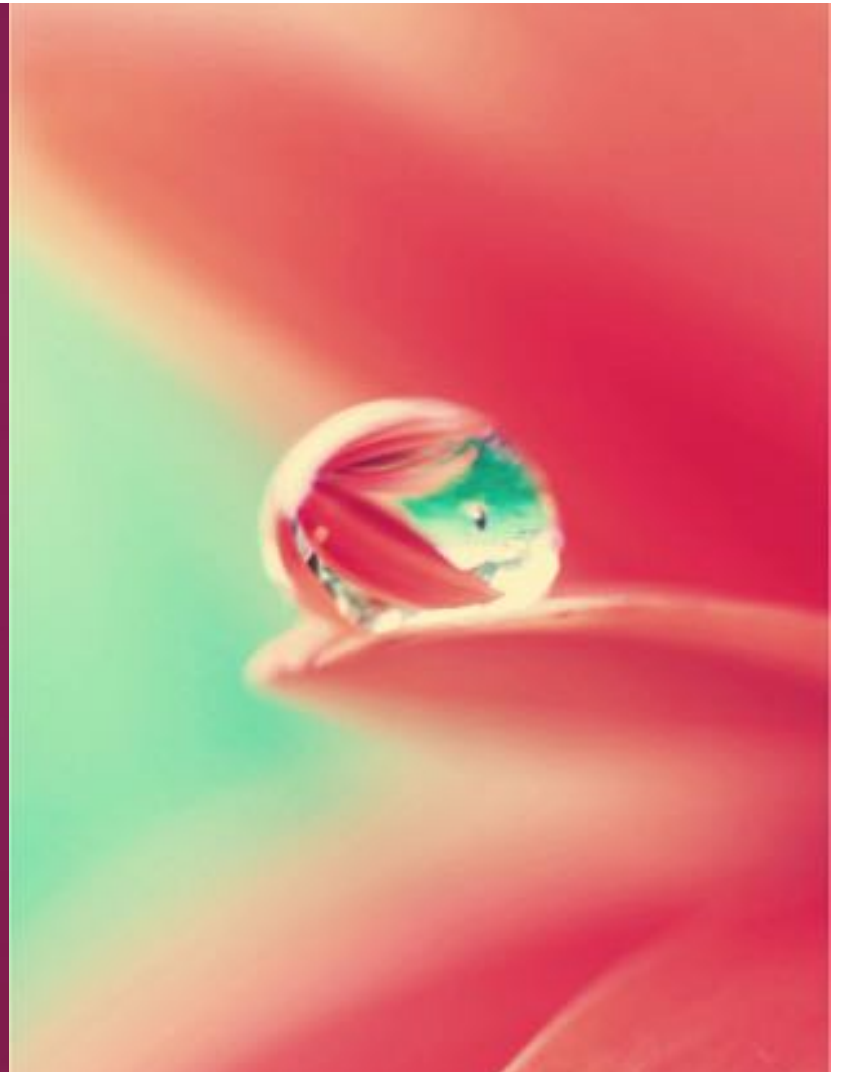
As they grow an unshakable core
of peace, contentment, and love,
people become less vulnerable to
the classic manipulations of
fear and anger,
greed and possessiveness,
and “us” against “them” conflicts.
Which has big implications for our world.

*Think not lightly of good, saying,
“It will not come to me.”*

*Drop by drop is
the water pot filled.*

*Likewise, the wise one,
Gathering it little by little,
Fills oneself with good.*

Dhammapada 9.122



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See **RickHanson.net** for other good books.

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See www.RickHanson.net/key-papers/ for other suggested readings.

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Supplemental Materials

Key Mechanisms of Neuroplasticity

- (De)Sensitizing existing synapses
- Building new synapses between neurons
- Altered gene expression inside neurons
- Building and integrating new neurons
- Altered activity in a region
- Altered connectivity among regions
- Changes in neurochemical activity (e.g., dopamine)
- Changes in neurotrophic factors
- Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
- Slow wave and REM sleep
- Information transfer from hippocampus to cortex

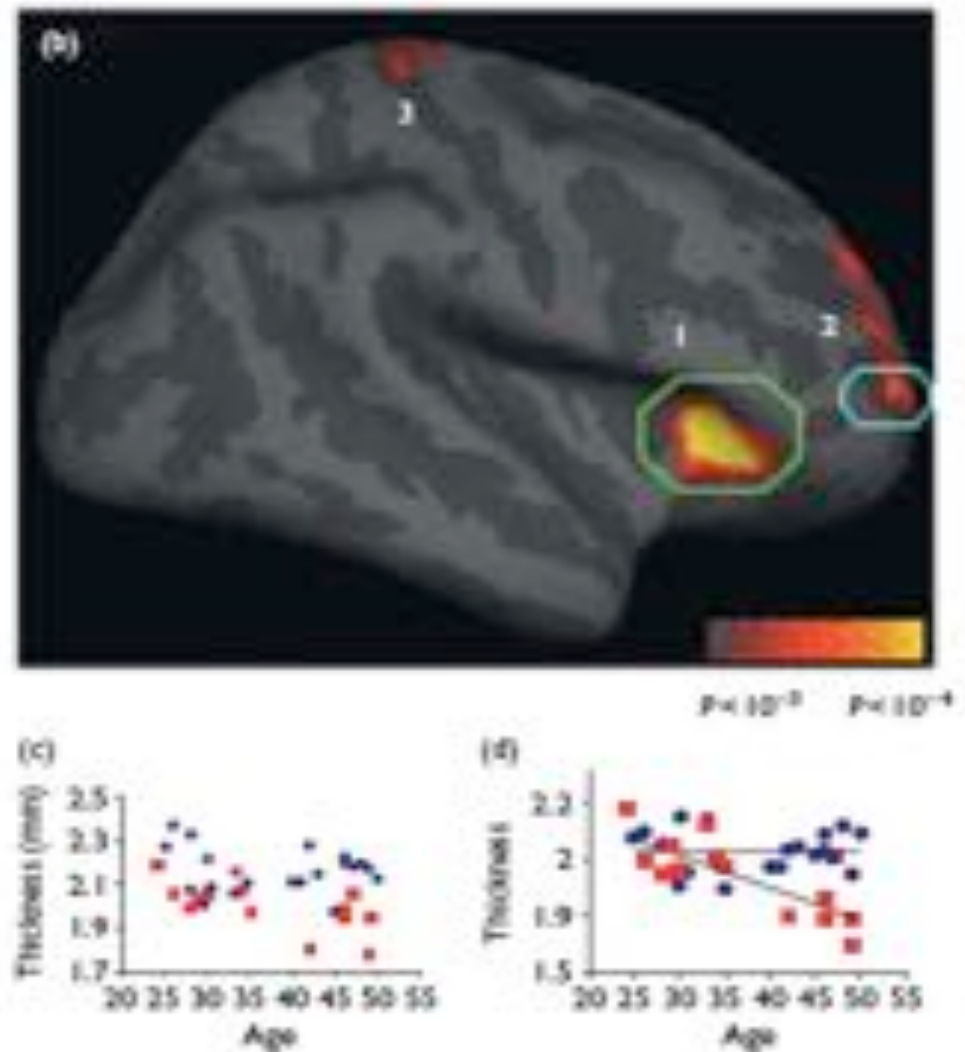


Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

Meditation
experience is
associated
with increased
cortical thickness.

Lazar, et al. 2005.
Neuroreport, 16, 1893-1897.



Four Ways to Use HEAL with Others

- Doing it implicitly
- Teaching it and leaving it up to people
- Doing it explicitly with people
- Asking people to do it on their own

HEAL in Classes and Trainings

- Take a few minutes to explain it and teach it.
- In the flow, encourage Enriching and Absorbing, using natural language.
- Encourage people to use HEAL on their own.
- Do HEAL on regular occasions (e.g., at end of a therapy session, at end of mindfulness practice)

Implicit HEAL in Therapy

- Creating space for beneficial experiences
- Drawing attention to beneficial facts
- Encouraging positive experience of beneficial fact
- Drawing attention to key aspects of an experience
- Slowing the client down; not moving on
- Modeling taking in the good oneself

Explicit HEAL in Therapy

(1)

- Teach the method
 - Background helps about brain, negativity bias.
 - Emphasize facts and mild beneficial experiences.
 - Surface blocks and work through them.
 - Explain the idea of “risking the dreaded experience,” noticing the (usually) good results, and taking them in.

Explicit HEAL in Therapy (2)

- Do HEAL with client(s) during a session
 - Reinforcing key resource states and traits
 - Linking rewards to desired thoughts or actions
 - When learning from therapy has worked well
 - When realistic views of self and world come true
 - Good qualities in client
 - New insights

Explicit HEAL in Therapy

(3)

- Encourage HEAL between sessions
 - Naming occasions
 - Identifying key beneficial facts and experiences

HEAL and Trauma

- **General considerations:**
 - People vary in their resources and their traumas.
 - Often the major action is with “failed protectors.”
 - Respect “yellow lights” and the client’s pace.
- The first three steps of HEAL are generally safe. Use them to build resources for tackling the trauma directly.
- Use the Link step to address peripheral features and themes of the trauma.
- With care, use Link to get at the heart of the trauma.

In Couples, Benefits of HEAL

- “Installs” key resources that support interactions (e.g., self-soothing, recognition of good intentions)
- Dampens vicious cycles
- Helps partner feel seen, credited for efforts
- Increases the sense of the good that is present
- Reduces clinginess, pursuing, or reproach that the other person withdraws from

Using HEAL with a Couple

- Basic steps (often informal):
 - Attention to a good fact
 - Evoking and sustaining a good experience
 - Managing blocks
 - Awareness of the impact on one's partner
 - Debriefing, often from both partners
- Pitfalls to avoid:
 - Seeming to side with one person
 - Unwittingly helping a person overlook real issues
 - Letting the other partner pile on

Uses for Children

- Registering curricular skills and other resources
- Motivation for learning; associating rewards
- Seeing the good in the world, others, and oneself – and in the past, present, and future
- Seeing life as opportunity
- Feeling like an active learner
- Developing child-specific inner strengths

Adaptations for Children

- Kids gain from HEAL – particularly mistreated, anxious, spirited/ADHD, or LD children
- Style:
 - Be matter of fact: this is mental/neural literacy
 - A little brain talk goes a long way
 - Be motivating: name benefits; “be the boss of your own mind”
 - Down to earth, naturalistic
 - Scaffold based on executive functions, motivation, and need for autonomy
 - Be brief, concrete

Occasions for HEAL with Kids

- Explicit training in positive neuroplasticity
- Natural rhythms in the day (e.g., start of class, after a lesson or recess, end of day)
- When working with an individual child
- When dealing with classroom issues