



# When Helping Hurts:

AN OVERVIEW OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

I remember the story that broke my heart...

*Take a moment to  
reflect on this*

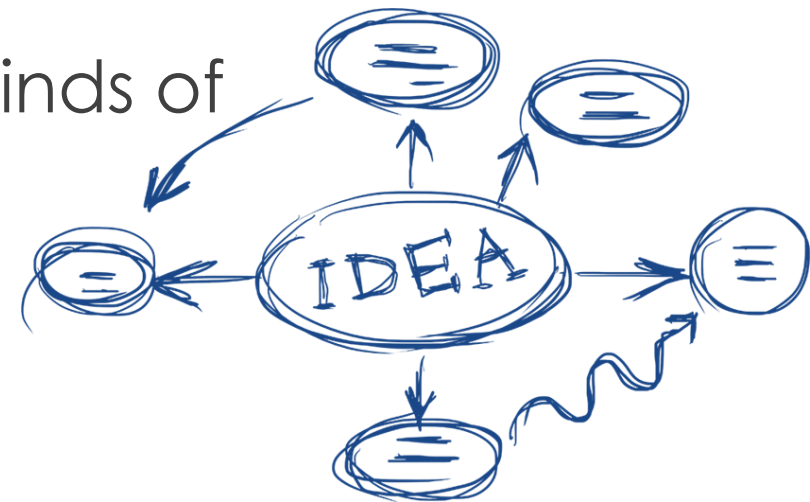


# What are the major stresses in your work?



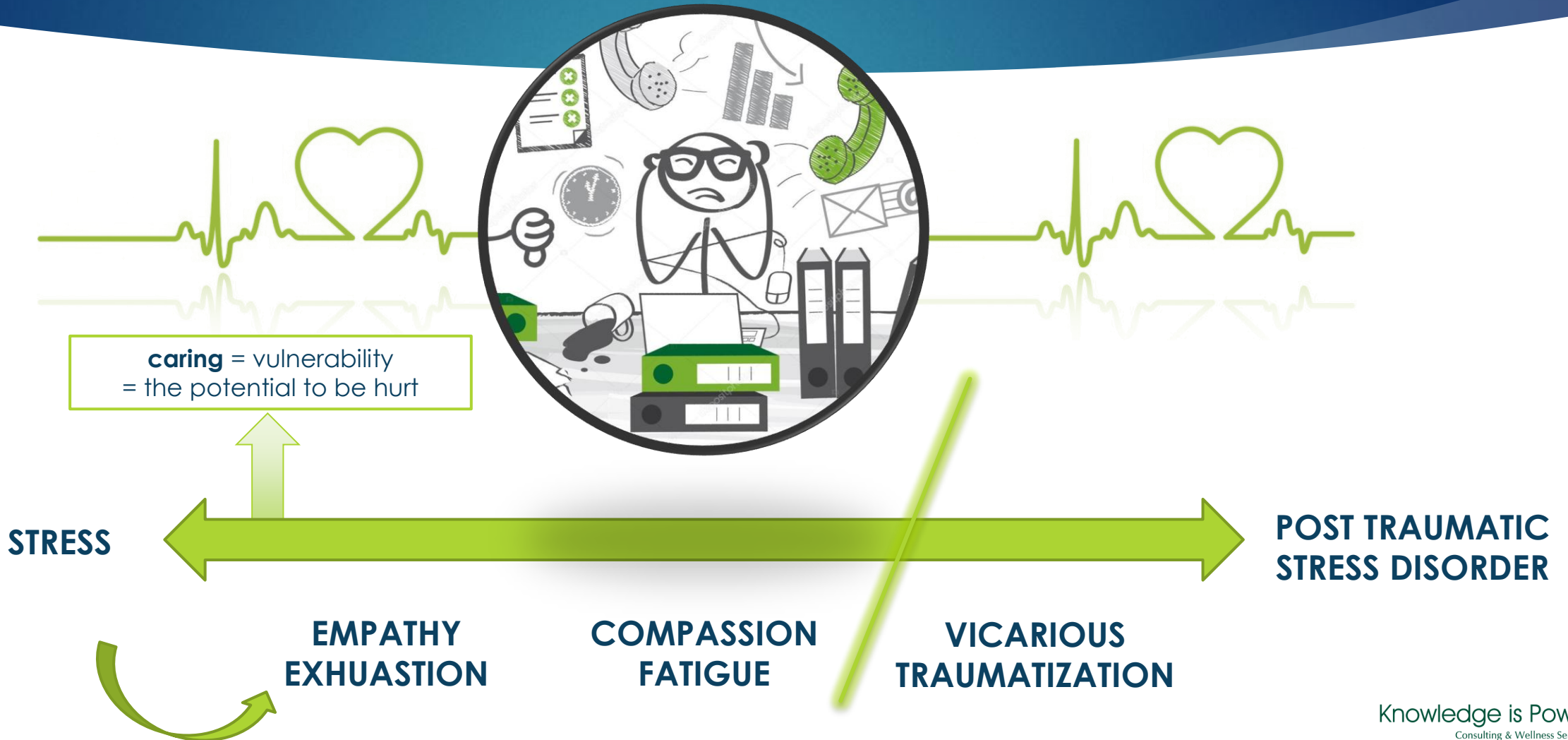
# Consider these questions....

- ▶ What's different about stress in the “helping professions?”
- ▶ How is emotional stress different from other kinds of stress?
- ▶ Why do we feel so deeply?
- ▶ Is it worth it....?

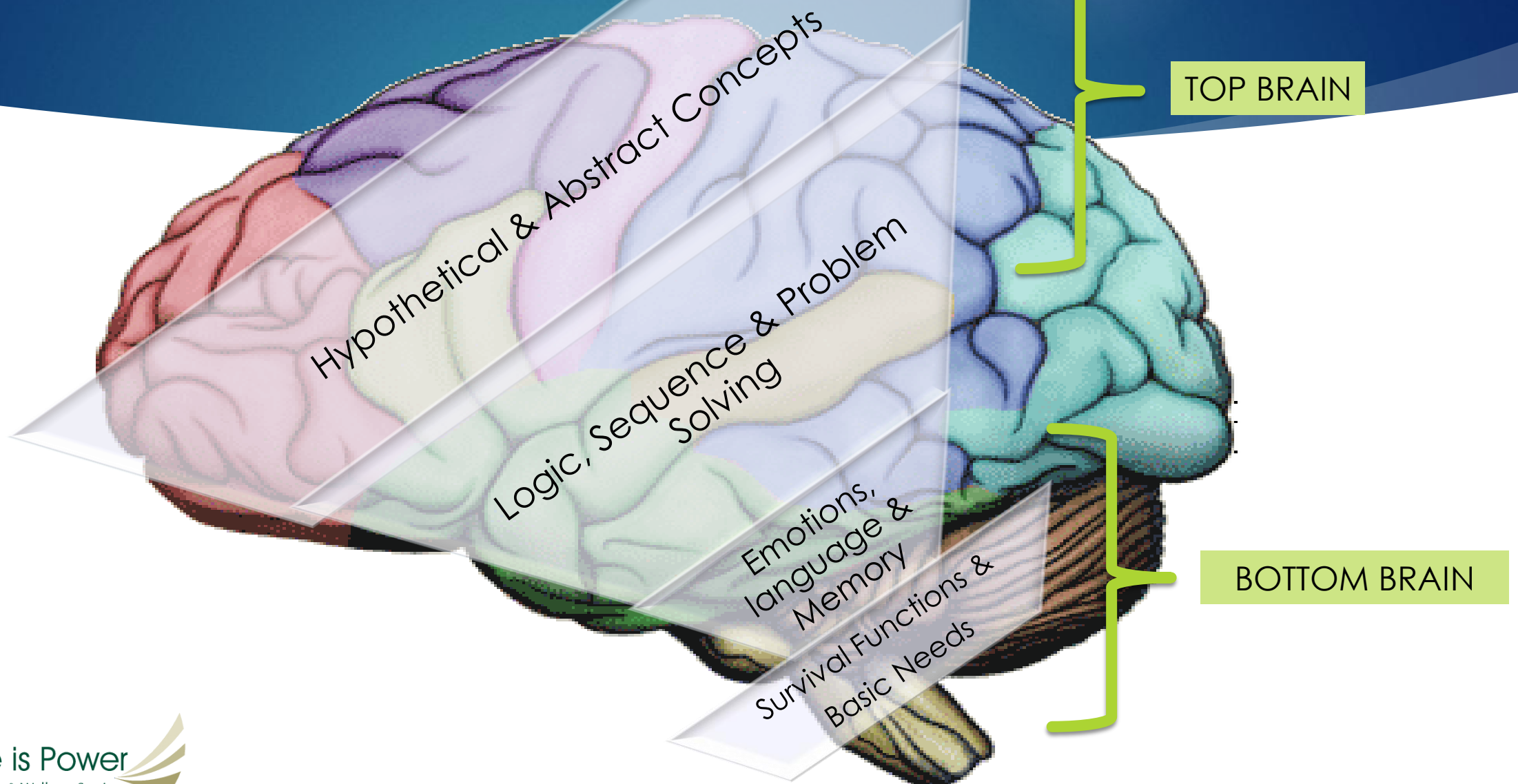


**BURNOUT**

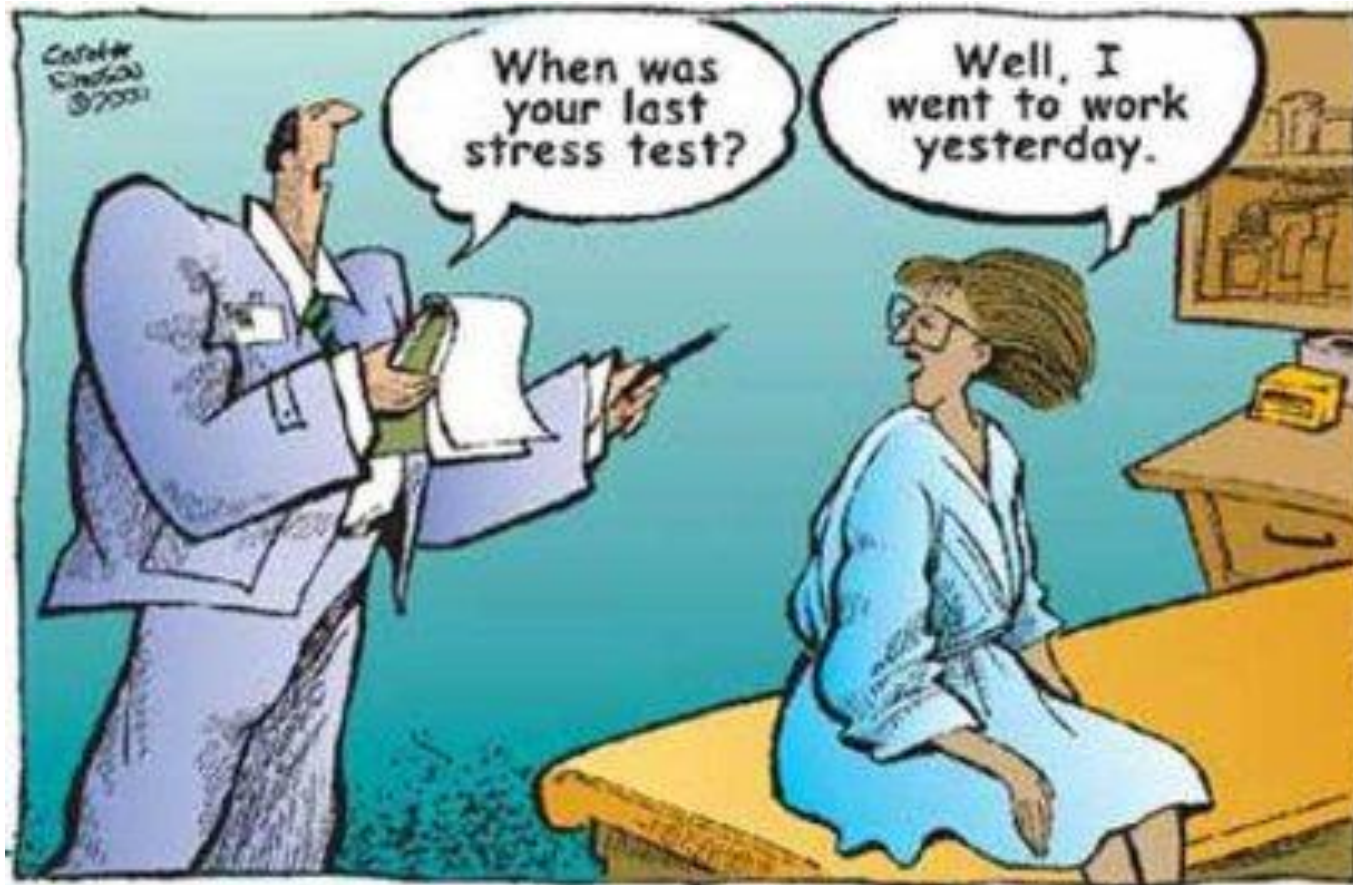
# The 'Costs of Caring' Continuum



# How our brains work...



# Stress





- ▶ Any real or perceived change or threat to the “system”
- ▶ Physical, emotional, intellectual
- ▶ Different for each of us
- ▶ Puts us into the “bottom” of our brains
  - ▶ Fight or Flight physically and emotionally
  - ▶ Clears our mind of “top brain” functions
- ▶ Leads to a variety of health and mental health issues



# Empathy Exhaustion

- ▶ Empathy is one of the most beautiful parts of being “human”
  - ▶ The neurons responsible for empathy exist in all parts of our brain
- ▶ Being overwhelmed with feeling
- ▶ Absorbing and processing negative energy (especially for those you care for or wish better for)
- ▶ Connecting with and understanding others' experiences...repeatedly
- ▶ Becoming “emotionally tired” of other people's “stuff” and the needs they have

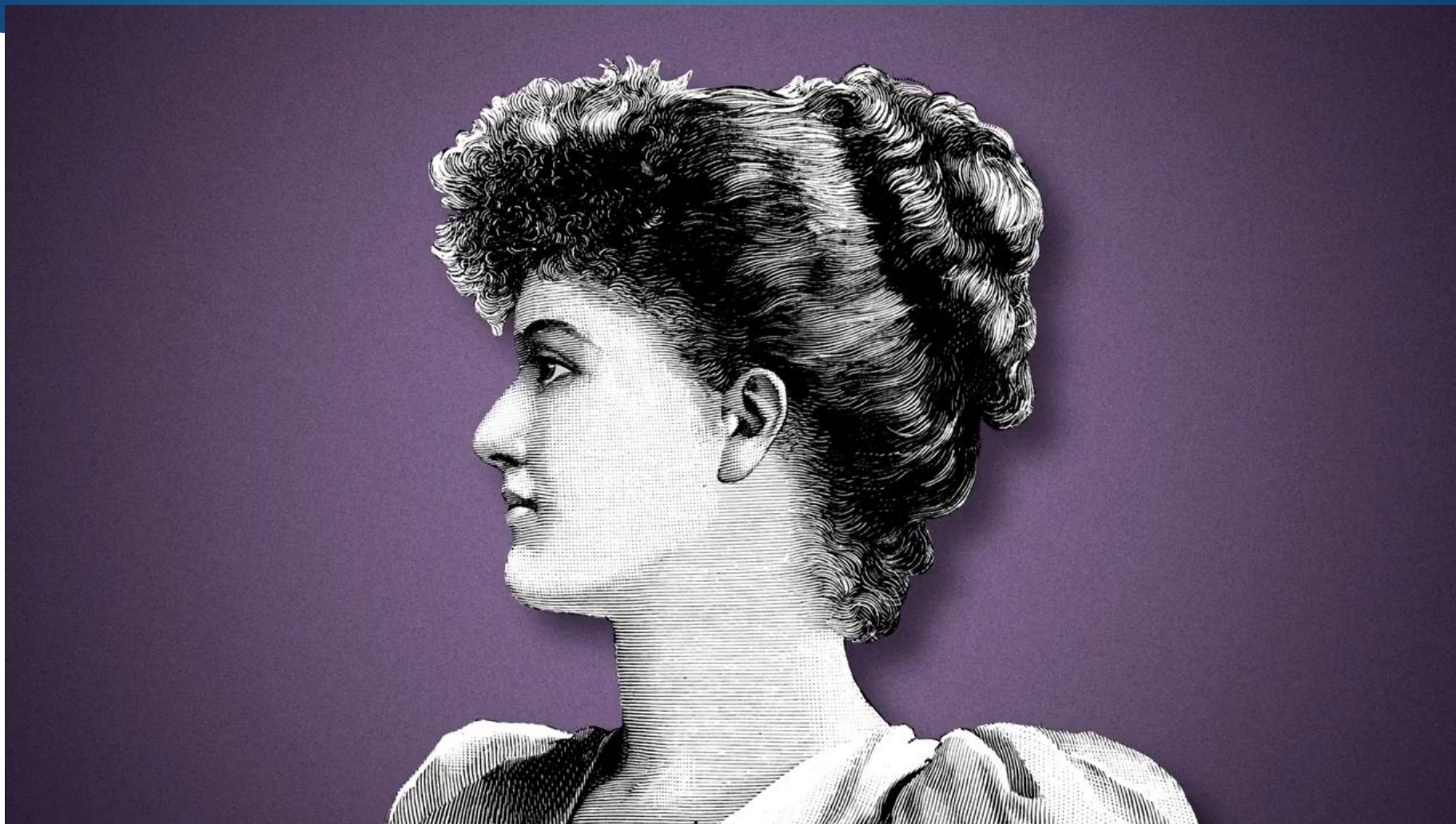




# Mirror Neurons: the way animals communicate

- Neurons that fire in your brain not only when you do something but when you see someone else do it
- These have been linked to empathy and emotions
  - Getting angry or excited during a sports event
  - Crying at a heart-wrenching movie
- Our brains are acting as if we are the one playing the sport and or taking part in the movie
- Why is this important?
  - If seeing something done fires the same neuron in our brains as if we had done this, others reactions and actions are (biologically) linked to how we feel and act

# What is Empathy?



# Compassion Fatigue



- ▶ Similar to Empathy Exhaustion in many ways; additionally we begin to see “reactions” and behaviors
  - ▶ Apathy
    - ▶ Move away from caring deeply to not caring
  - ▶ Cynicism
  - ▶ Judgement/ Blaming/ Frustration
  - ▶ Giving up/ Why bother?
  - ▶ Begin asking philosophical/ meaning questions
    - ▶ Change of worldview

# Vicarious Traumatization/ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- ▶ Intrusive memories, sensory “triggers” and fight or flight symptoms related to a traumatic event (or as a result of a close relationship or understanding of another’s)
- ▶ Compassion Fatigue can be a symptom of/ one of the “diagnostic criteria”
- ▶ VT / PTSD are diagnosable mental illnesses. These experiences are debilitating and affect one’s ability to *think, feel and act in positive or productive ways, interfere with their ability to go to work or school, take care of themselves and have healthy relationships.*



# Warning!

- ▶ **COGNITIVE:** lowered concentration, rigidity, apathy, disorientation, minimization, preoccupation with trauma
- ▶ **EMOTIONAL:** powerlessness, anxiety, guilt, anger, numbness, fear, hopelessness, sadness, depression, shock, blunted or enhanced affect, recalling/ dreaming about frightening experiences
- ▶ **BEHAVIOURAL:** irritable, withdrawn, moody, poor sleep, appetite changes, nightmares, hyper-vigilance, isolation
- ▶ **SPIRITUAL:** questioning life's meaning, pervasive hopelessness, questioning religious beliefs, disconnection
- ▶ **SOMATIC:** sweating, rapid heartrate, difficulty breathing, aches & pains, dizziness, nausea, impaired immune system, difficulty falling or staying asleep



# Coping with the Costs of Caring

Just as the costs of caring move along a continuum, so do the coping “strategies” that will work for them...



# Coping & Healing Strategies





Find your people



# Thank You



Knowledge is Power  
Consulting & Wellness Services

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