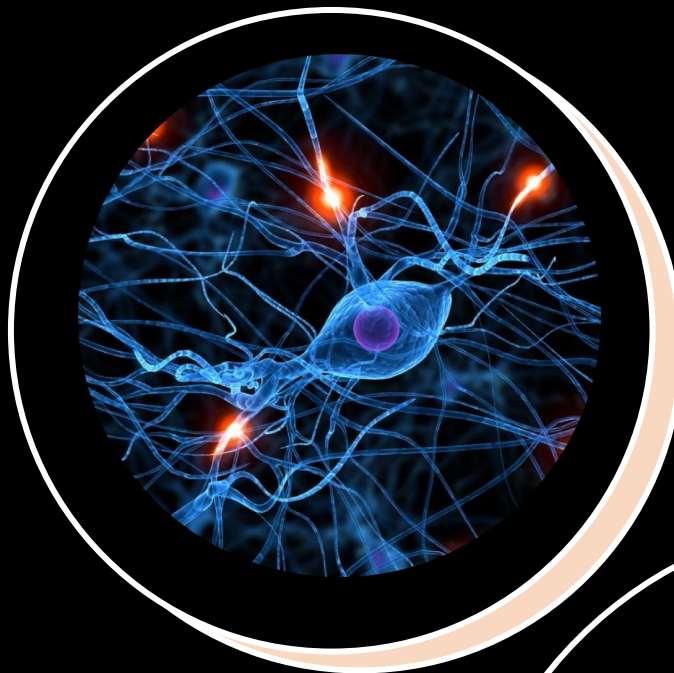


The Bad News Brain

Why We Must Force Ourselves to Embrace Well- Being and Positivity

John Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D.

<https://www.umt.edu/education/about/spec-units/cape1.php>
<https://johnsommersflanagan.com/>
<https://montanahappinessproject.com/>





Gratitude



Thanks to Aaron, Kelsey,
Scott, Siri, and everyone at
the Montana Healthcare
Foundation

Thanks to the Dennis and
Phyllis Washington
Foundation and my
colleagues at CAPE

Thanks to YOU

And Acknowledgement



Opening Story

Ambivalence

You make the case for change



PREPARATION

- **Trigger warning – Why?**

I will talk about why mental health and happiness are so elusive, and say contrary things

- **Research indicates. . .**
- **Strength-warning. . .**



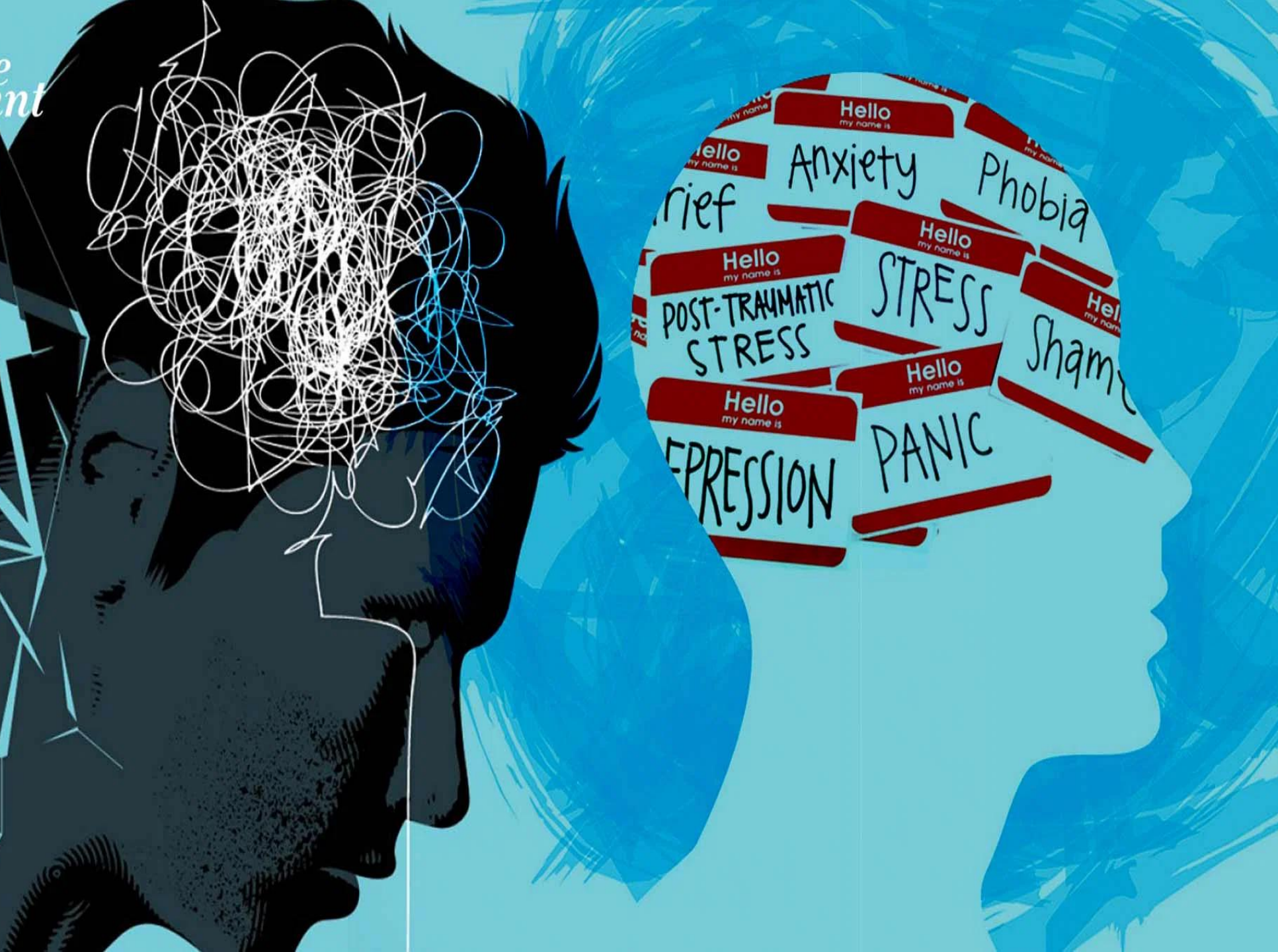
Remember . . .

- Trigger warnings are **suggestions** about what you might not be able to handle
- **Strength warnings** are suggestions about how learning new knowledge and gaining experiences **can make you STRONGER**



Learning (Learner) Objectives

1. You come with **YOUR** knowledge, experience, and expectations – You come with **YOUR WHY** and **PURPOSE**
2. I offer a few **ideas** about the brain, MH, and happiness
3. You take **what fits for you** and apply it to yourself if you feel like it

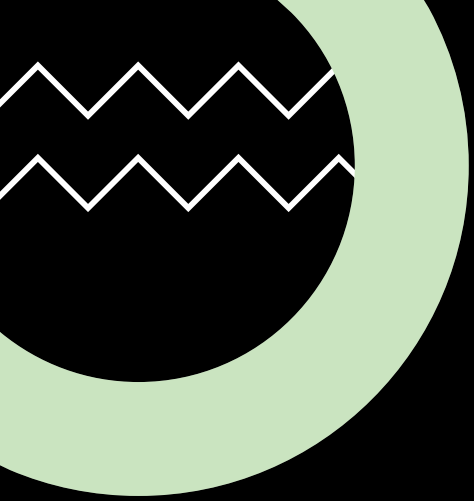


THE PROBLEM IS EXTRA LARGE

*Nearly
Every Year
1981-2024 in the
face of more
treatments*

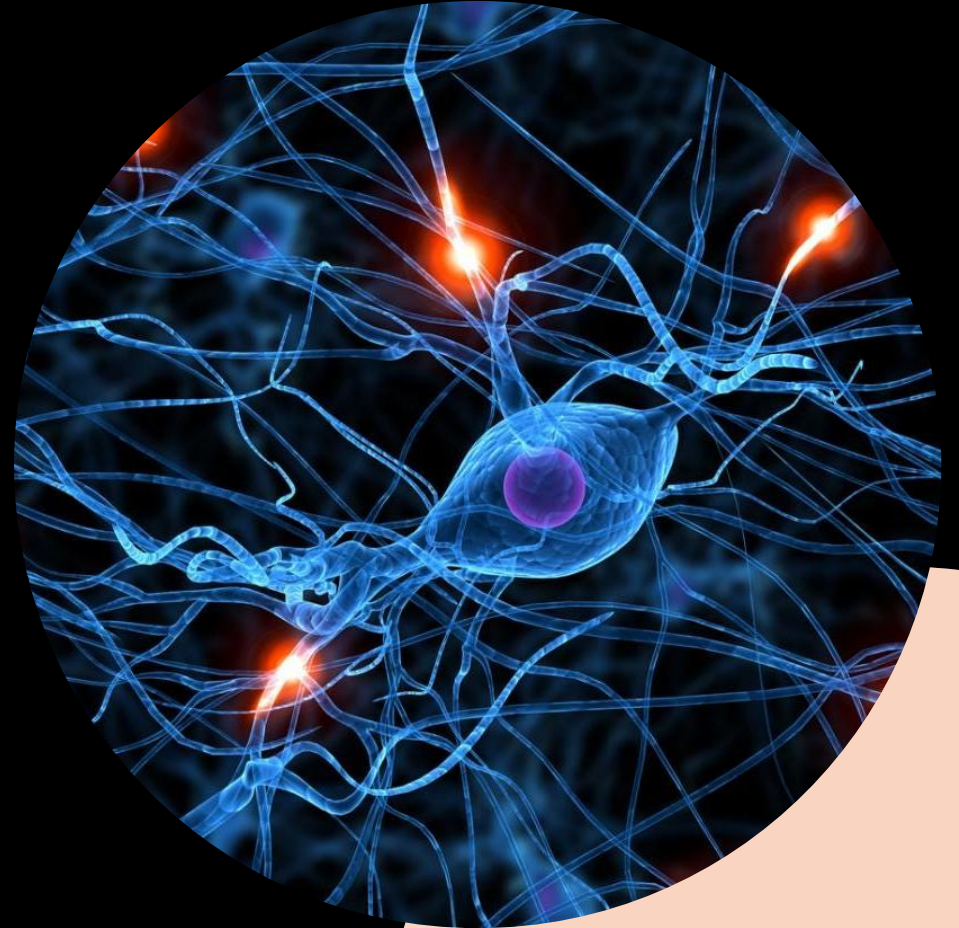


What's
Wrong with
YOU?



How Your **Brain** Works

Four (or more)
BIG
Truths



1 – We are Vulnerable to Over-focusing on What's Wrong with Us

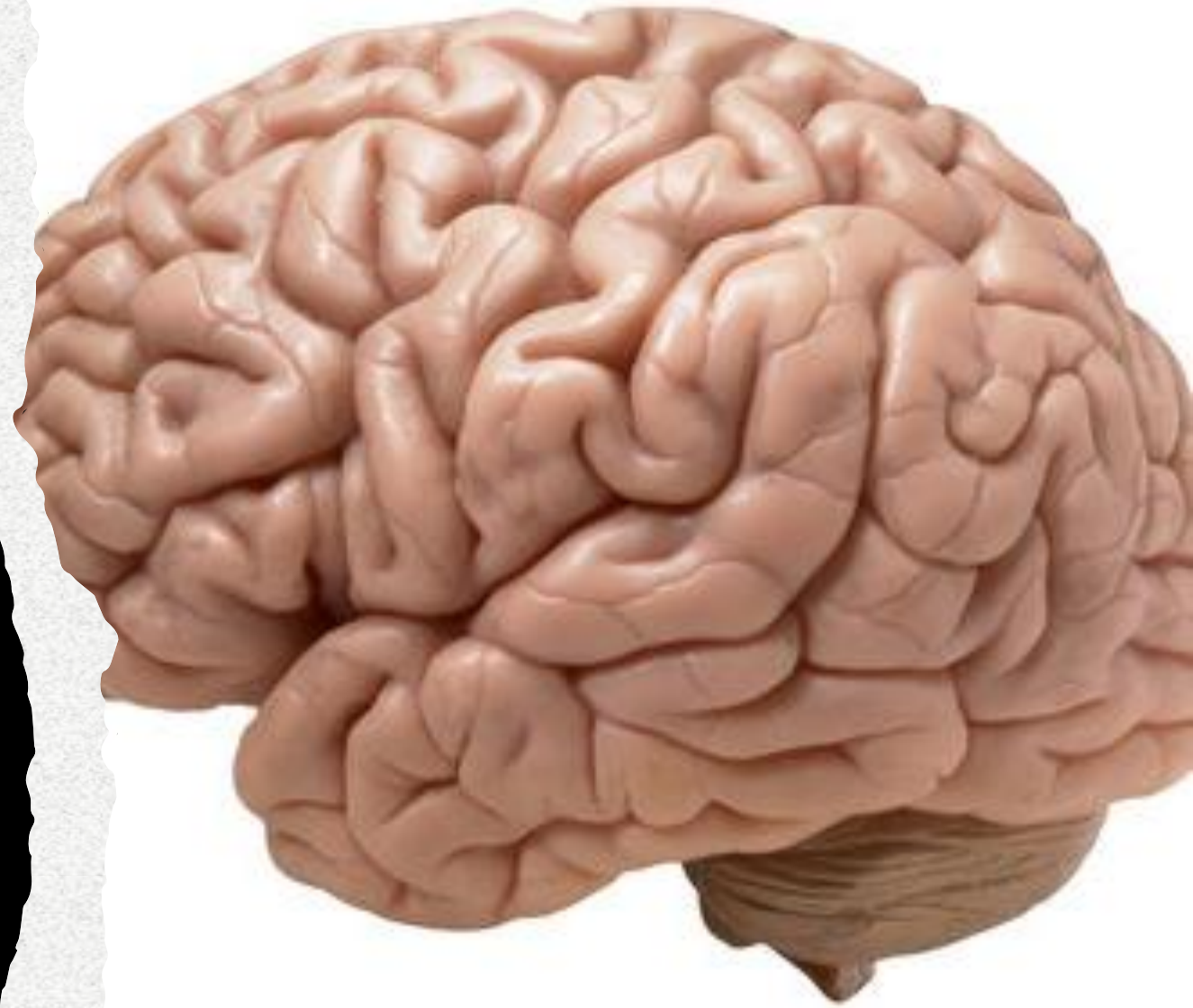


- Medical student disease
- Mental health student disease [Diagnosis+]
- TikTok

The Amazing Brain

Activity

Mindful moments



2 – Confirmation Bias



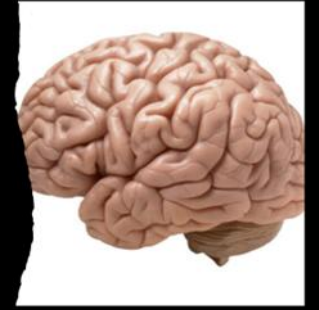
We find

what we

look for



3 – What We Pay Attention to Grows



- The parts of your brain **you use – you GROW**
- Duh: Neurons that **fire together**, wire together
- If I focus on failures, **I get BETTER** at focusing on my failures. . .and there were MANY [arguing]

Remember Those Three Science-Based Ideas



QUIZ

1 2 3

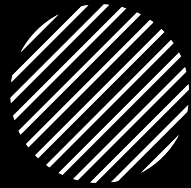
And One More

Should we
pursue
happiness?



Pursuit of Happiness?

No and yes



Yes to Eudaimonic Happiness

- Not an emotion
- Not material wealth
- Not political achievement
- Not so much an outcome, but a process of fulfilling one's virtuous potentials in the context of community
- And NO to these SELF-focused messages . . .



Are You
HAPPY
Or
SAD?

**NO ONE CAN MAKE YOU
HAPPY UNTIL YOU'RE
HAPPY WITH YOURSELF
FIRST.**

- ANONYMOUS



DO WHAT
TAKES YOU
HAPPY



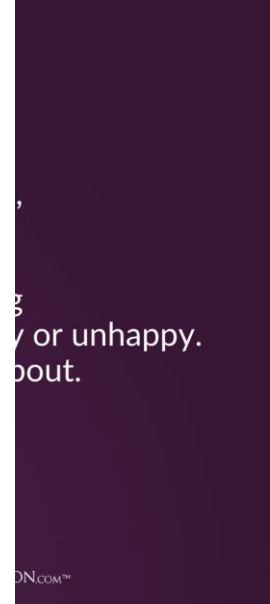
**NOTHING
IS WORTH
IT IF YOU
AREN'T
HAPPY.**

#KISHANWIZDOM

The
make you happy is being
happy with who you are,
and not who people think
you are.

GOLDIE HAWN

GRACIOUSQUOTES.COM



I hope
you're
happy
now.



Are you
happy at work?

The Best Definition and You?

That place where your greatest and unique virtues, gifts, skills, and talents **intersect** with the needs of your friends, family, communities, tribe, and the world?

JSF – Biking story



Activity

Think of a nice story of your unique strengths (gifts, skills, talents, virtues) coming out in your work or tribe or community or at home or with friends. . .

- This can feel awkward . . .



+

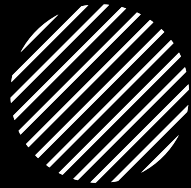
○



Flip the Happiness

- Notice. . . with others, their unique strengths
- Name them and share them
- Being seen is great; being seen for your best qualities is better
- Other people. . .

The Answers To: (What's Wrong with You?)



Your Brain

- Orients toward what's wrong or what could be wrong and **only nibbles on what's right**
- Likes to find support for what it **already believes**
- Pays close attention to what's wrong -- **growing it**
- Tends to spoil good times with its **contrary attitude**

Knowledge is POWER



Let's talk SLEEP

Without knowledge, we make things up

MHCC and two theories

The DSM-IV-TR in 2000



Sample Intervention

Three Good Things

Survey: Three types of insomnia

Rumination is **all-natural**,
but not helpful



Three Good Things



- ▶ Seligman's signature technique
 - ▶ Before you go to sleep (or right now)
 - ▶ Write down (or think about) three good things that happened during the day (or last 24 hours)
 - ▶ Then track down in your mind **"Why" those things happened**
 - ▶ Seligman: After a week, you'll want to keep doing it (JSF: Maybe)
 - ▶ **Volunteer?**

Why Three Good Things Works

- ▶ When you go to bed, you **NATURALLY** embark on a negative (depressive) **review** or anticipatory (anxiety) **preview**
- ▶ Three good things **shifts your focus**
- ▶ Identifying “Why” those things happened activates **a brain search** toward positive attributions



Positive Psychology

What Shall We Grow?

Problems
[Insomnia
or ST viral]

Well-Being
[Feels small]

Well-Being

Grow (or boost) this: Not just inside
a person but also between and
among people and within and
between communities
Example: 3 Good Things or
Immunobooster

The Magic of Intentionality

We naturally lean toward seeing what we believe, overfocusing on the negative, growing the negative, and getting pummeled by societal messages, unless:

We practice intentional positivity (BUT NEVER toxic positivity)



Bonus: How Anxiety Works

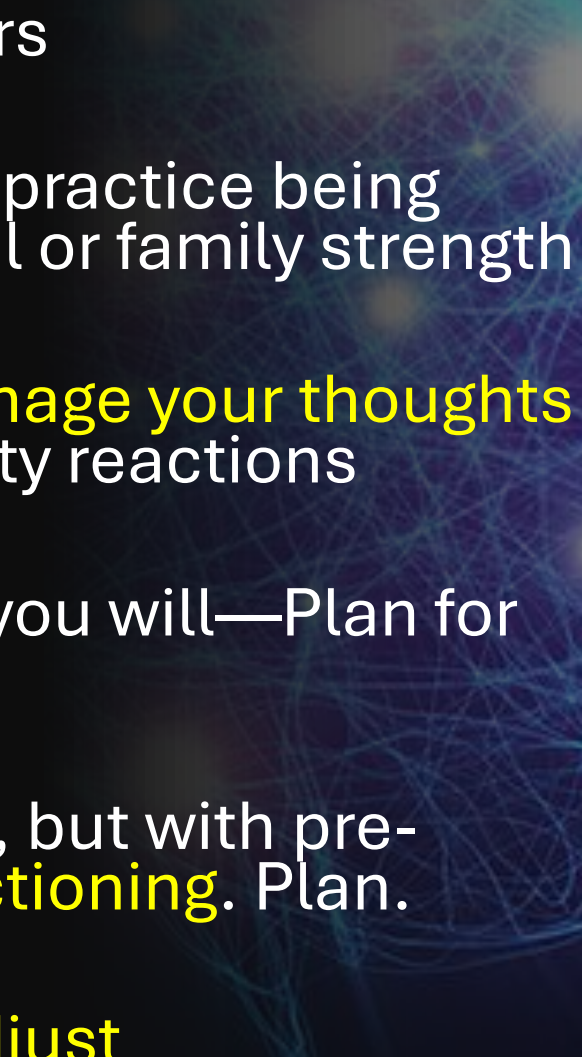
Anxiety is mostly driven by thoughts

Ever hear of: Fight or Flight or Freeze?

- Male rats
- What about female rats?
- What about humans?
- Amygdala hijack and brain shutdown?
- Adolescent brains?
- All research says... Fear of fear



Becoming Calmer

1. Know yourself and your triggers
 2. Find your **calming thing** – And practice being calmer – This can be a cultural or family strength
 3. Use your calming thing to **manage your thoughts** about yourself and your anxiety reactions
 4. When you feel anxious—and you will—Plan for how you **WANT** to deal with it.
 5. Your brain may work less well, but with pre-planning, you can **keep it functioning**. Plan.
 6. Learn from experience and **adjust**
- 

This Afternoon

Three-step emotional
change trick

EB happiness in MT

Savoring

Leveraging cultural
strengths

Strengths-based
suicide assessment

And more



A hand reaches out from the top left, hovering just above a calm body of water. The water reflects the hand and the warm, orange glow of a sunset in the background. The text "WHAT DO YOU WANT TO REMEMBER?" is centered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The entire scene is framed by a thin white border.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO REMEMBER?

Resources

John.sf@mso.umt.edu

<https://www.umt.edu/education/about/spec-units/cape1.php>

<https://johnsommersflanagan.com/>

<https://montanahappinessproject.com/>

Positive AFFECT

