

# Dying to Farm: Developing a Suicide Prevention Intervention for Farmers in Ireland

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á Forbairt

Building a  
Better Health  
Service



Connecting for Life



UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science  
UCD School of Psychology

# CONTEXT

Year	Number of deaths by suicide and self-harm (CSO, 2020)		Farm accident fatalities <sup>3</sup> (HSA, 2020)
	State <sup>1</sup>	Farmers <sup>2</sup>	
2014	567	34	32
2015	489	25	18
2016	516	26	21
2017	447	23	25
2018	437 <sup>4</sup>	25	15
2019	421 <sup>4</sup>	25*	19

- Priority group: Male + Middle-aged
- + farming
- Other occupations?
- Other countries?

# THIS STUDY

## ■ Objectives:

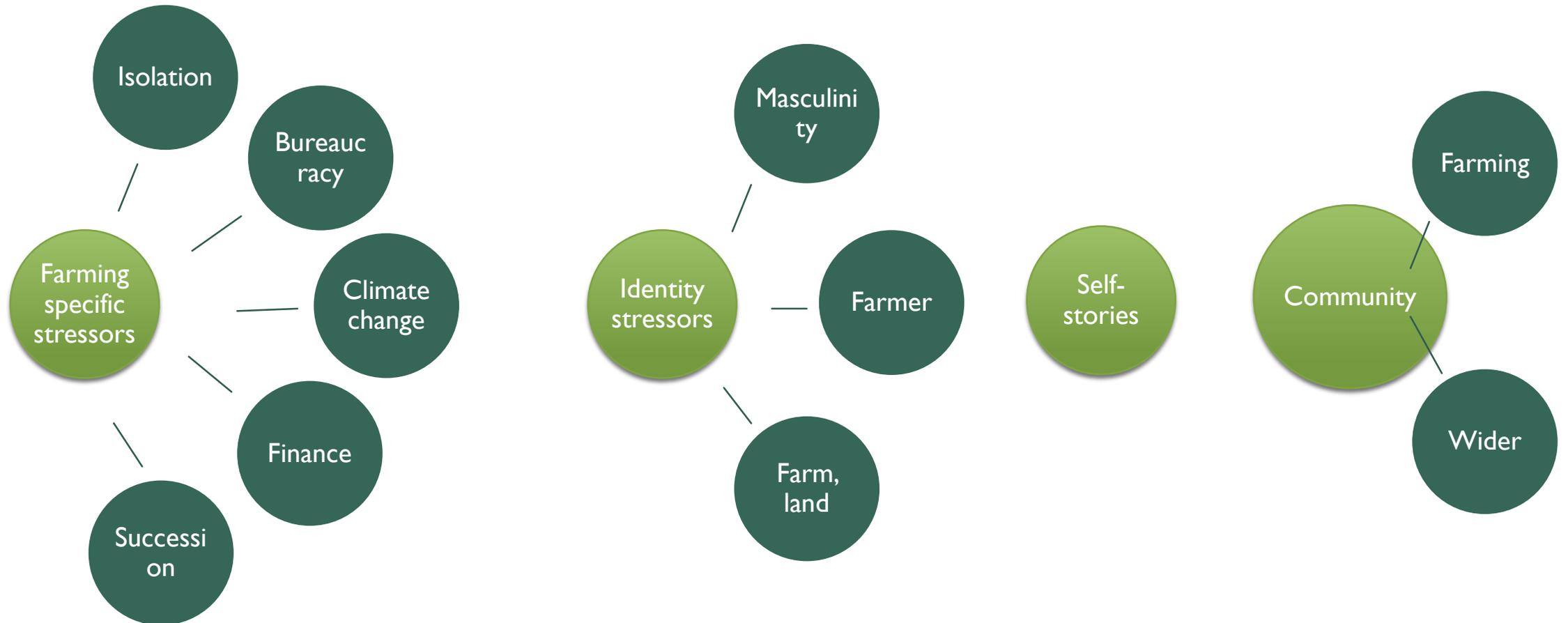
- Investigate risk factors of mental health and suicide among farmers in Ireland.
- Identify acceptability/ format/ type of interventions to support mental health among the farming population in Ireland.

## ■ Stakeholder Group

## ■ Methods

- Focus groups
  - **Professionals** providing support services to farmers
  - Three focus groups with five **farmers** from each of the NUTS-2 regions
- One-to-one interviews
  - Ten male **farmers**, range of enterprises, ages (30s to 60s), half currently have off-farm employment
- National level survey – Ongoing
  - Well-being, farming stressors, coping

# PRELIMINARY RESULTS



## HOLDING TIGHTLY TO SELF STORIES CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS...

- “Getting stuck in that view of like oh well I’ve always done things on my own so why would I bother”
- “its more than a job for a lot of people, farming, you know you should be running it as a business per say but there’s another layer to it than that, there’s pride of maybe you’ve inherited this from your parents or you know this has been in your family for generations and you know there’s that added pressure of I can’t be the one to, you know to see this place go under or to see this have to stop, you know what we’ve been doing here for years type of attitude”
- “even when there is probably not a great financial outlook you know. and if that gets in the way of your decision making ... So that could lead you to a position where you could be under pressure as regards your mental health as well. Because you become desperate to just keep the farm enterprise going when it’s really I suppose not viable anymore, you know.”

# NATIONAL LEVEL SURVEY

## Well-being/ distress measures

- 21-item Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale
- 4-item Depressive symptom index subscale
- 14-item Mental Health Continuum-Short Form

## Farming-specific stressors

- 30-item Adapted Farm/Ranch Stress Inventory
- 6-item Adapted Place Attachment Inventory
- 19-item Adapted Endogenous Succession Cycle Scale

## Coping, resilience, and psychological flexibility

- 6-item Psyflex
- 7-item Cognitive fusion questionnaire
- 15-item Self experiences questionnaire

# GENERATED THEMES

## Farming community...

“I’d know a lot of them reasonably well, you would hate to be burdening them with such an issue”

“If you look at the media in the last couple of months like we have been used as a scapegoat for climate change and all that ... we’re being nearly hit with a stick that you have to fall into place and do what you’re being told to do.”

## Land: Grá versus ‘Land on the mind’

“They have a grá for the land and they have this hold on the land, and the land has a hold on them ... That kind of thing can cause issues like having land on the mind”

“Land gets in the lad’s mind like, on his own all day and thinking about it, thinking about it, thinking about it he’s just going to snap at some stage. Whether it's the snap on his own or kill someone else and kill himself afterwards”

# SAMPLE 1:1 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Are you aware of any mental health supports aimed at farmers?
- How does the farming community in general view these supports [/mental health supports in general]? What do you think of them?
- Have you availed of these supports?
  - How did you find it? The process of linking in with the support, experiencing the support, etc.
  - Why did you contact them?
  - Are you glad you contacted them?
  - Would you link in with them again?
  - Would you recommend them to others?
- How do you think the farming community in general views mental health? What is your view?
- What do you think are the key factors impacting mental health among farmers? What are the main factors contributing to mental health issues among farmers?
- Do you think there is any stigma associated with mental health issues among farmers? And what are your thoughts on it?

# GENERATED THEMES

## Farming-specific stressors

Isolation; Admin; Climate change policies; Succession; Finances; etc.

## Identity

Masculine identity: “just get on with life, man-up” / “that’s what lads are like. They aren’t the most sensible creatures in the world.” / “lend itself more towards a male dominated industry, you know the sort of attitude of you know you should be naturally strong”

Farmer identity: “as a farmer you’re expected to get on with things as such, you’re expected to be, I suppose physically strong and mentally strong as well”

Self-as-farm: When the farm is doing well, I’m doing well

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# FARMERS

- 
- Priority group: Male + Middle-aged
  - + farming
  - What about other occupations? (Higher burden)
  - What about farmers in other countries?
  - UK rate approx. 2 times higher than rest of population
  - Higher prevalence of mental distress and suicide among farmers than members of the general public in Australia, Canada, India, Japan, and the UK (Nishimura et al. 2004; Judd et al. 2006; Stark et al. 2006; Das, 2009; Sturgeon & Morrissette 2010).



## SO, OUR TEAM AND OUR AIMS...



### Workability, Longevity, & “Nothing about me without me”

Recognizing that there is not much known; Anecdotal evidence. We aim to:

1. Investigate risk factors of mental health and suicide among farmers in Ireland.
2. Identify acceptability/ format/ type of interventions to support mental health among the farming population in Ireland.

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# METHODOLOGY

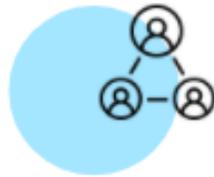
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- Focus groups
    - Professionals providing support services to farmers
    - Three focus groups with five farmers from each of the NUTS-2 regions
  - One-to-one interviews
    - Ten male farmers, range of enterprises, ages (30s to 60s), half currently have off-farm employment
  - National level survey
    - Ongoing

Nothing about me without me...



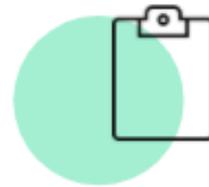
**11-Oct to 26-Oct '21**

Invitation to provide feedback on our interview and focus group materials



**Oct '21 to Feb '22**

Request to assist with recruitment (e.g., directing eligible individuals toward the study)



**Jan '22**

Invitation to review survey items for national quantitative assessment of risk factors for suicide



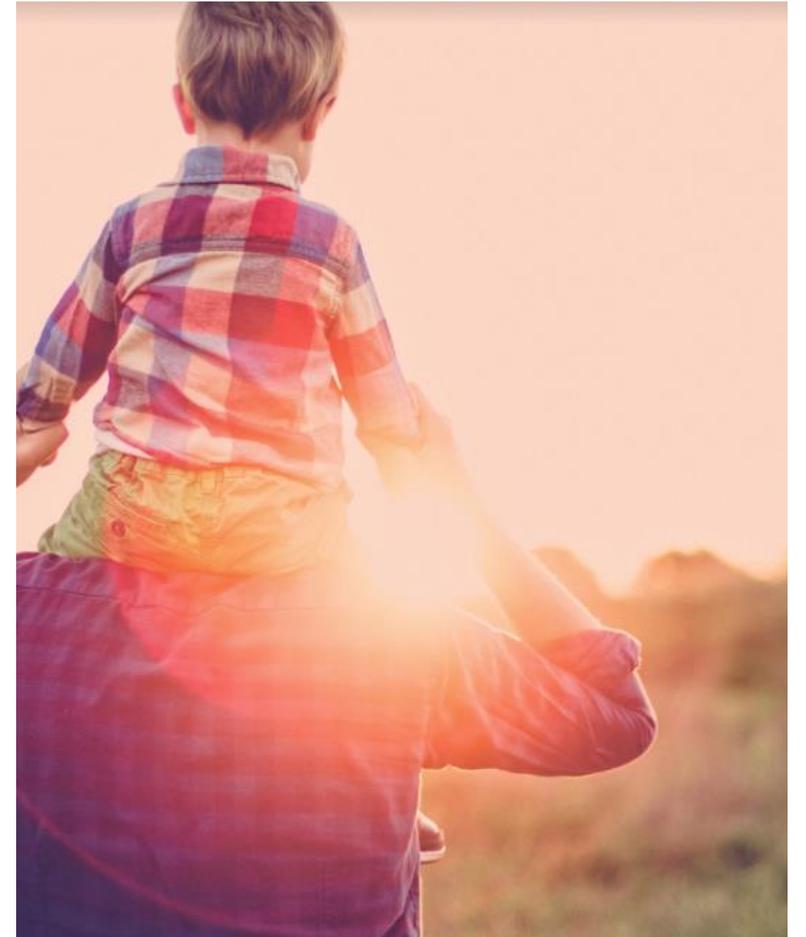
**Mar '22**

Invitation to review results of the completed manuscript

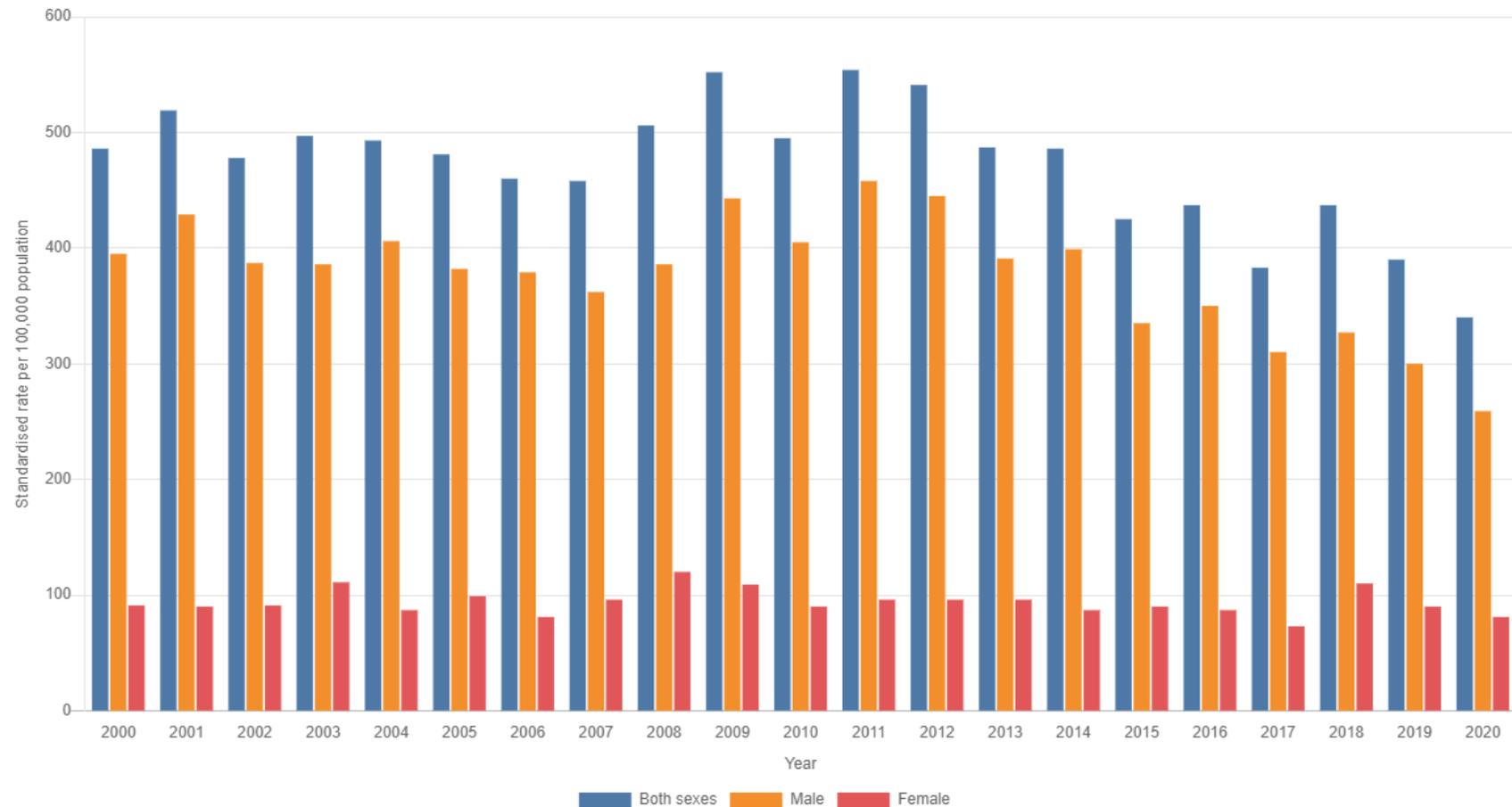
# STAKEHOLDER STEERING GROUP

# FOCUS ON FARMER MENTAL HEALTH

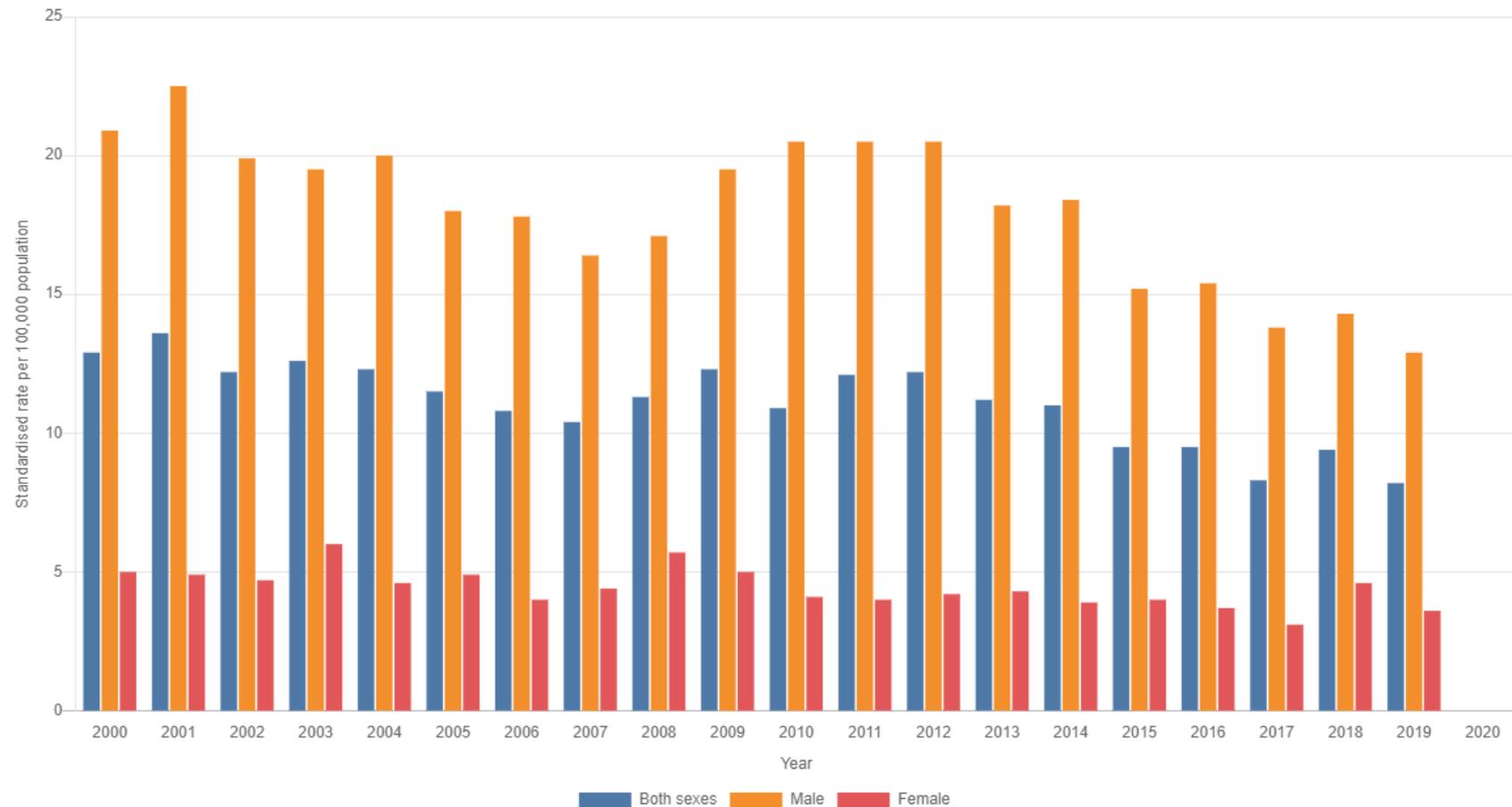
- Increased industry focus
- Recent tragic events
- Key projects/initiatives
  - Make the Moove
  - On Feirm Ground
  - Embrace Farm
  - Many others



# NUMBER OF DEATHS BY SUICIDE, IRELAND 2000-20 (CSO)



# STD. RATE OF SUICIDE PER 100,000 POPULATION, IRELAND 2000-19 (CSO)



# RESOURCES



## ACTive: Value based living

Oisin Byrne

★★★★★ 4.0 • 2 Ratings

Free

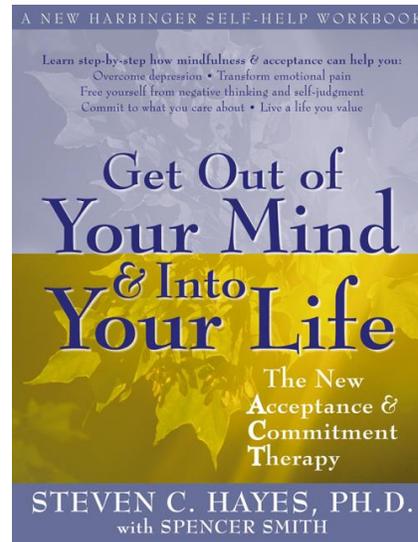
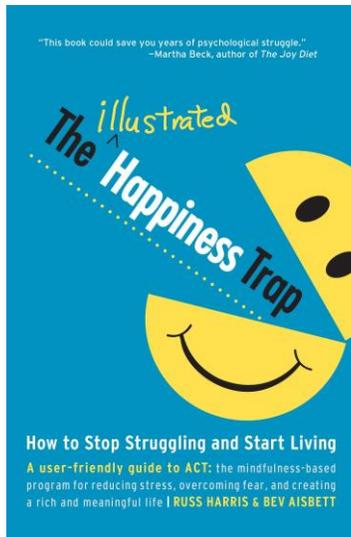
## ACT:Root to Fruit

Marcel Tassara, PhD

Science

★★★★★ 5.0 • 17 Ratings

[Listen on Apple Podcasts ↗](#)



[Youtube.com/c/UCDCBSLab](https://www.youtube.com/c/UCDCBSLab)



### [LivingWorks Start](#)

LivingWorks Start, Suicide Prevention Skills Online

Format:PDF | File Size:3.89MB



### [Understanding Self-harm](#)

Understanding Self-harm training

Format:PDF | File Size:1.43MB



### [safeTALK](#)

safeTALK, suicide alertness for everyone

Format:PDF | File Size:1.55MB



### [ASIST](#)

ASIST, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

Format:PDF | File Size:1.6MB



### [Suicide bereavement workshop](#)

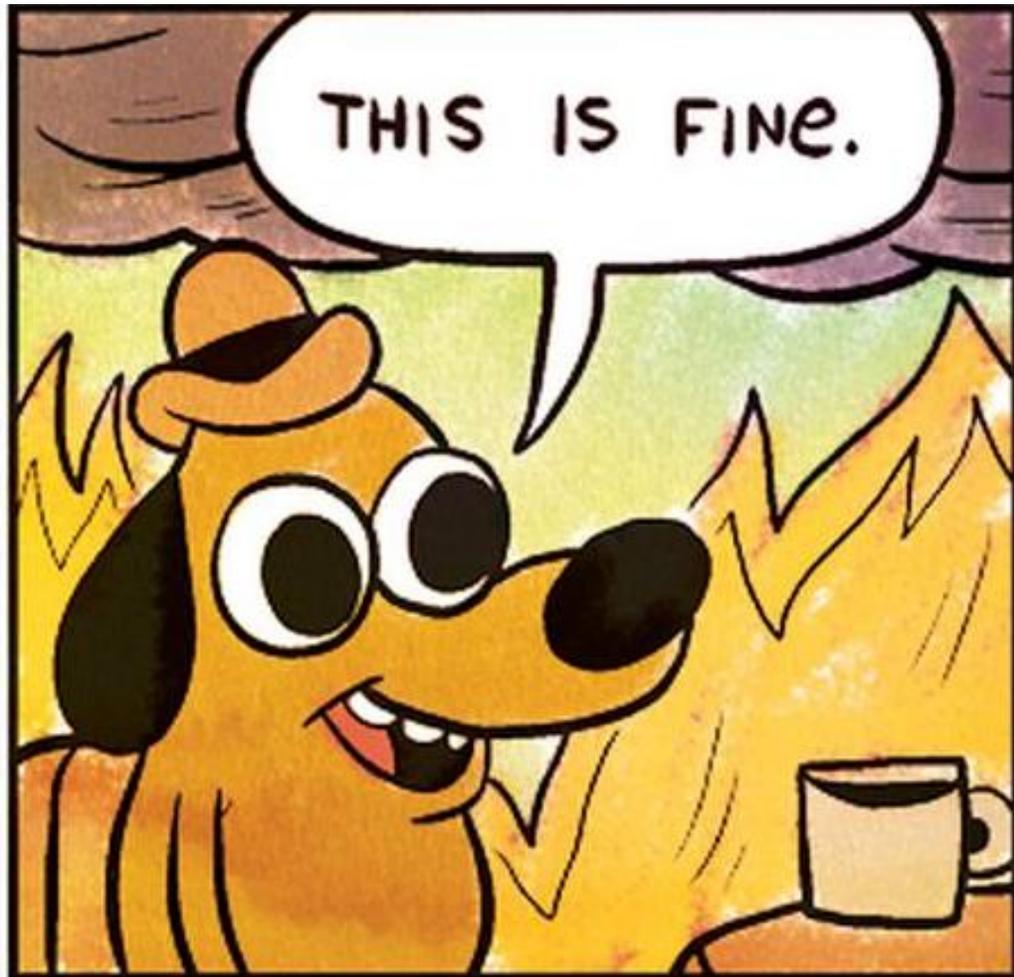
A workshop for professionals and key contact people providing support to those bereaved by suicide

Format:PDF | File Size:3.55MB

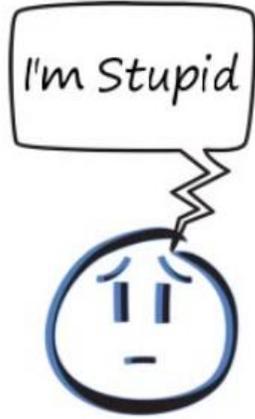
## WHAT DO WE DO WITH THOUGHTS THAT WE DON'T WANT?

- 85% of people say – try to not think about them
- ‘Don’t be thinking about that!’
- This is counterproductive





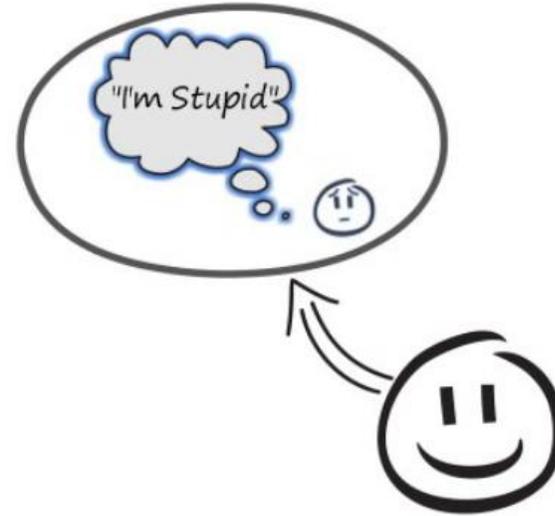
Thoughts: believe them, struggle with them, or simply notice them?



I am Stupid



I'm having the thought  
"I'm Stupid"



I'm noticing  
I'm having the thought  
"I'm Stupid"

# Defusion

Notice your thoughts while holding them lightly.



- Write down three descriptions of yourself
- Add ER to the end of them – smartER
- Ask yourself – Is this true in all contexts, with everyone?
- Do I need this to be true?
- I am / I am not...



## ENGAGE FULLY IN WHAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY DOING

- Whether it is working on the land, connecting with your family, being in the sunshine
- Getting out of your head and into your body
- It important for us to fully embrace what we are currently doing
- Evidence-based benefits for immunity and physical well-being, reduced risk of accidents (e.g., [here](#) & [here](#))



Get present:  
Come back to  
what is  
happening  
now



Three things you can see, hear,  
sense



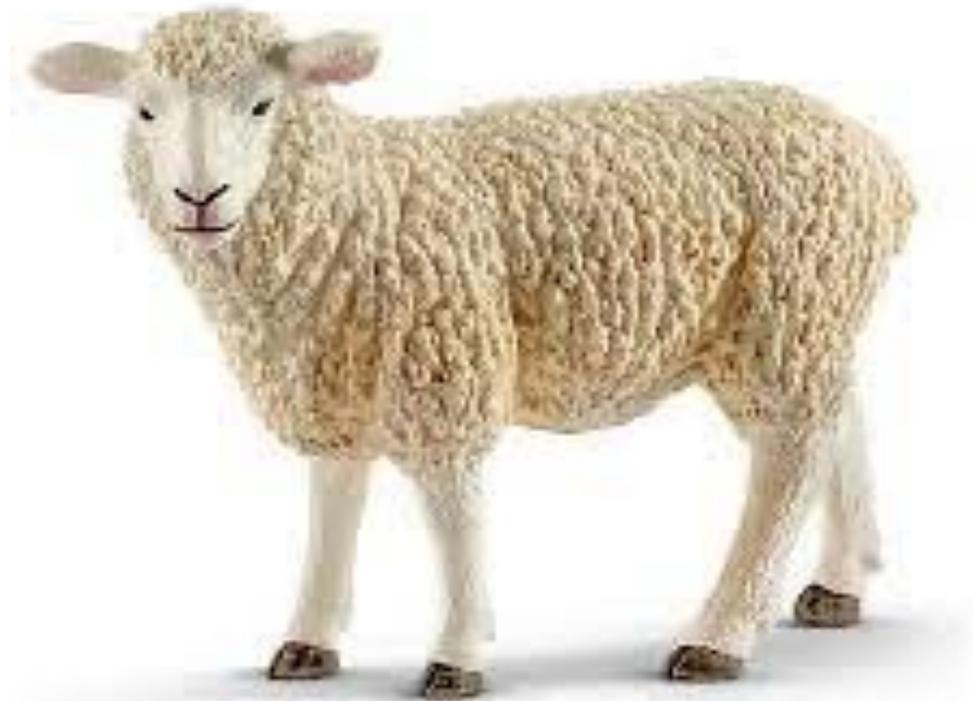
Two things you can see, hear,  
sense



One thing you can see hear sense

## NO VERSUS YES

- Let your gaze fall on the sheep
- Feel what it is like to say no to this
- Now feel what it is like to say yes to this

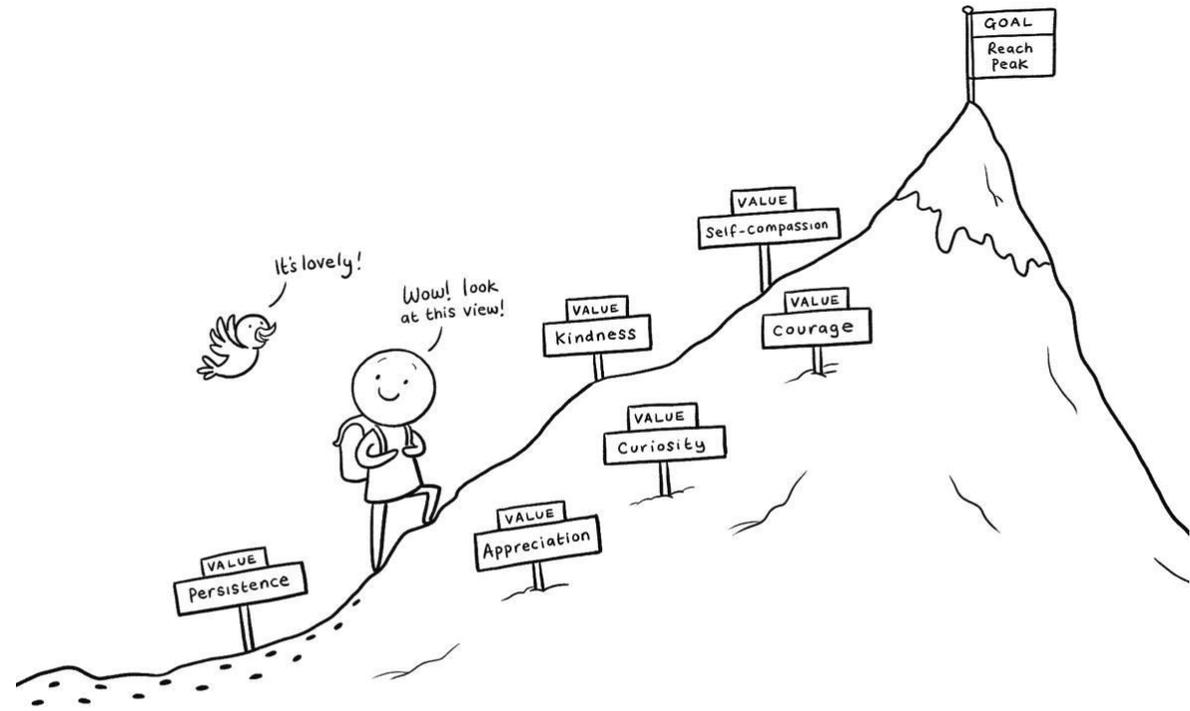




WE WANT TO HELP YOU PIVOT  
TOWARDS WHAT MATTERS

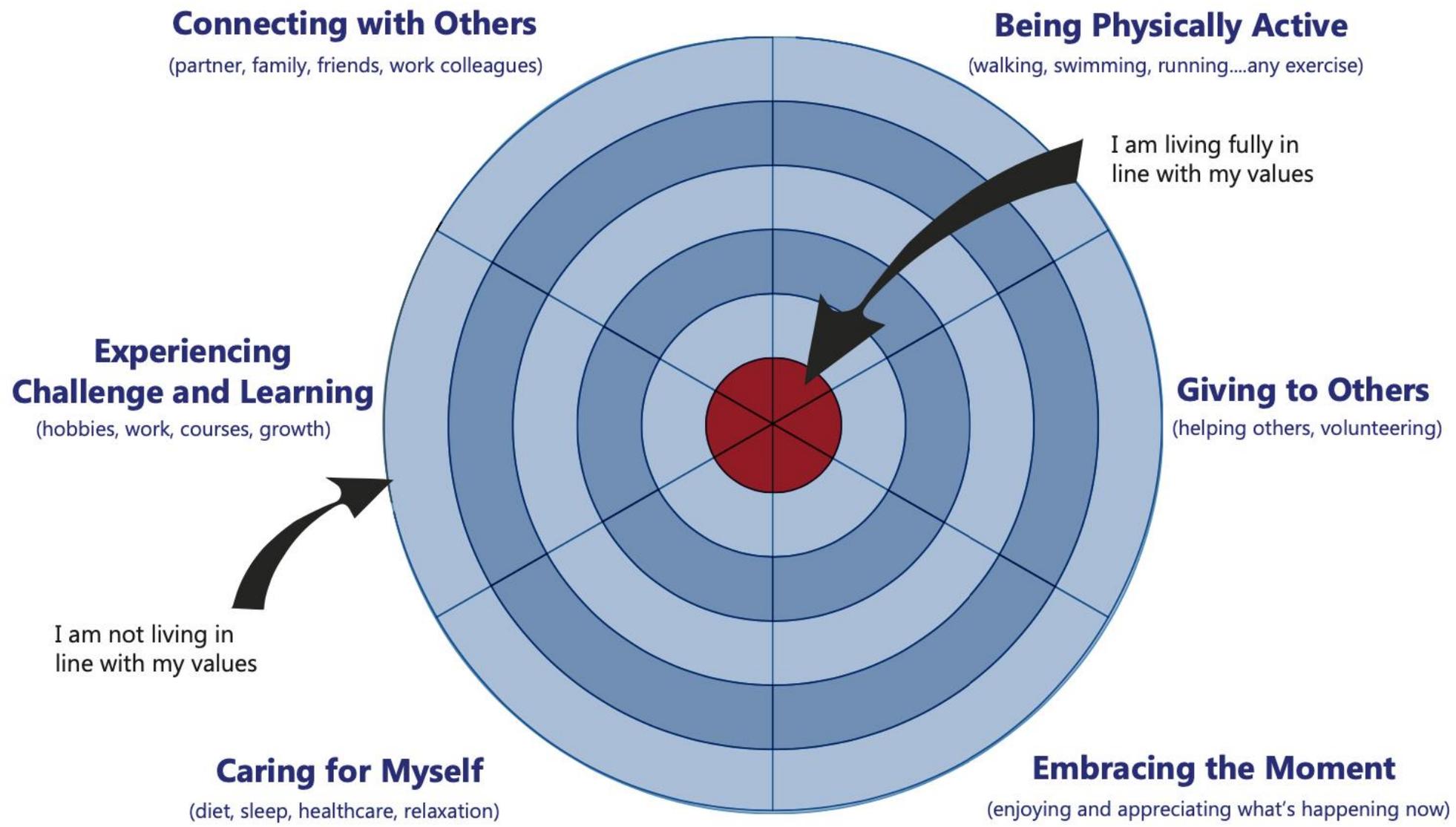


- What qualities does your best you have?
- What qualities do you NOT want to embody?
- If nobody knew or gave approval, would you still hold these values?

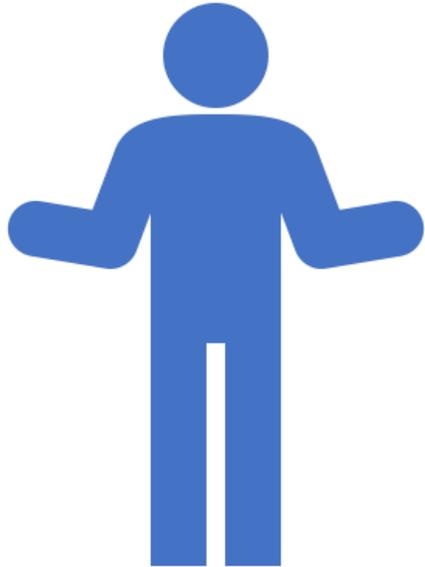


WE CAN LIVE OUR VALUES EVERY STEP OF THE WAY TOWARDS OUR GOALS  
WHETHER WE ACHIEVE OUR GOALS OR NOT  
THEY HELP US APPRECIATE THE JOURNEY AND NOT JUST THE GOAL  
VALUES CAN ALWAYS BE LIVED RIGHT HERE AND RIGHT NOW

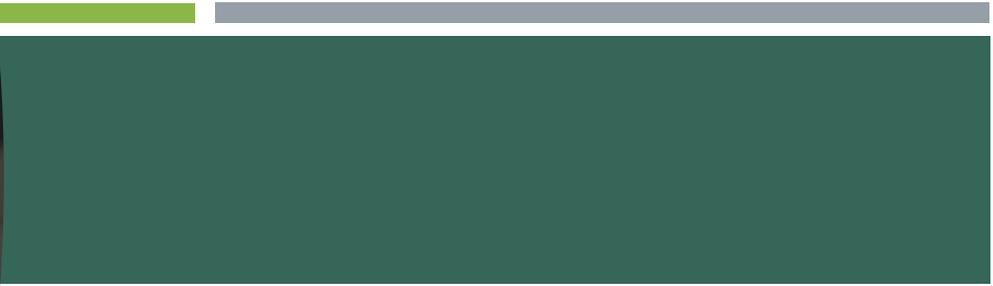




# HOW DO YOU HELP OTHERS?



- It's like the oxygen mask
- Model these behaviours
  - Be open
  - Be curious
  - Be non-judgmental (or at least notice our judgments)
  - Listen fully with open curiosity
  - Acknowledge thoughts as just thoughts
  - Let feelings come and go naturally rather than trying to fight them



**QUESTIONS?**