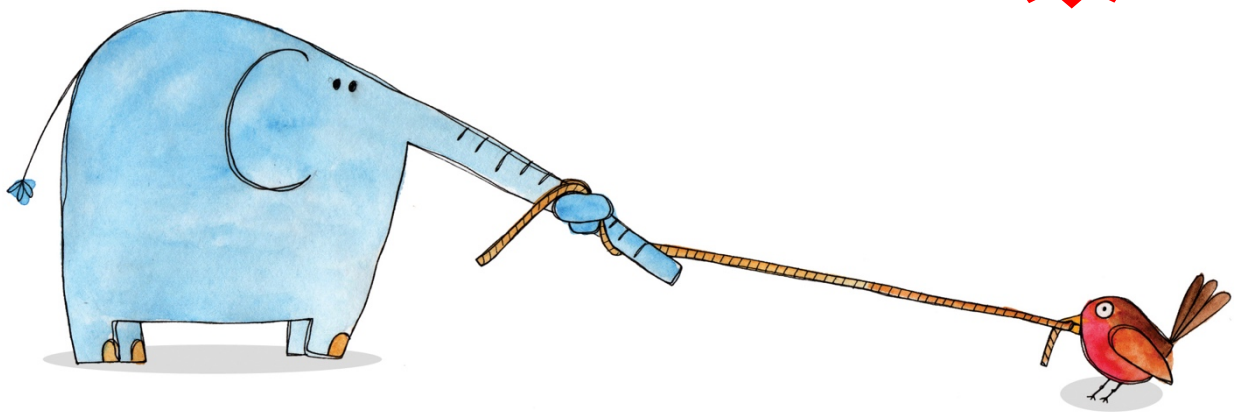


BE A MORE RESILIENT

YOU

#MakeItNormal
To Talk About
Wellbeing



JONATHAN PHELAN

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Introduction from Jonathan Phelan



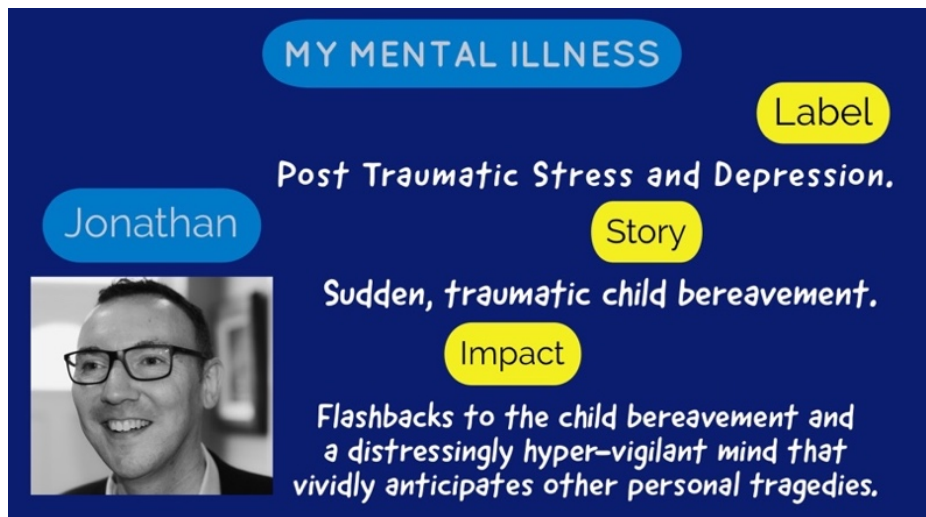
Evenhood's purpose is to give people tools to develop resilience and have more effective wellbeing conversations.

If you'd like to be more resilient, this Guide shows you the practical steps you can take to improve your wellbeing.

Your resilience can be impacted by living or working in a challenging environment. The challenges may be in the form of pressure of work, stress, difficult work or personal relationships, the impact of a physical health problem or a mental health problem.

I work as part of the senior leadership team of a large financial services organisation and my professional training is as a lawyer. This working environment is challenging in its own right. A few years ago, I faced a particularly acute additional challenge following a difficult life experience. From this experience, I discovered that wellbeing conversations are really difficult to have; both for the individual with the challenge as well as for the person doing the listening.

Take me as an example. Here's what I would be talking about if I focused on my challenges.



MY MENTAL ILLNESS

Label

Post Traumatic Stress and Depression.

Jonathan

Story

Sudden, traumatic child bereavement.

Impact

Flashbacks to the child bereavement and a distressingly hyper-vigilant mind that vividly anticipates other personal tragedies.

Imagine that you're my boss, tutor, teacher, friend, colleague or fellow student. And imagine that I've asked to talk to you about my wellbeing, so that you can support me. Now think about how you'd feel if I talked to you about the death of my son who was stillborn, the flashbacks associated with post-traumatic stress, the awfulness of depression and the challenges of having a hyper-vigilant mind that is constantly on high-alert, looking out for new traumas that could come my way. Think about how you could support me, if I told you about my mental illness in this way. It's tough, isn't it?

Now have a read of my Wellbeing Card.

MY WELLBEING CARD

Jonathan
Post traumatic stress & depression. Flashbacks & hyper-vigilant expectation of tragedy.



Triggers
Chaotic diary, interruptions, lots of things going on at the same time. Staying away from home. Absence of honest feedback.

Resilient Resources
Autonomy. Space & trust to do things calmly one at a time. Able to arrange own day. Flexibility to commute. Honest conversations & feedback.

Talents & Abilities
Quiet reflector, able to spot things that might go wrong and fix them. Empathetic. Caring manager. Good listener.

My Wellbeing Card is designed to make a wellbeing conversation both easier to have and more likely to be successful. It reveals the practical things that other people can do to support me. It doesn't burden them with medical complexity, emotion or personal challenges. It just tells them what support I need so that I can manage my condition and so that I can perform and be effective. And, it can be as small as a business card.


This Guide shows you how to have a Mentally Healthy Conversation which focuses on the support you need to maintain your Resilience and manage your Wellbeing.

Take a look at a few more examples and then I'll show you how you can create your own Wellbeing Card. These are based on real-life people I have worked with through Evenhood.


#MakeItNormal - for Henry

To: My Teacher

Could we #MakeItNormal at school to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that my social anxiety can get out of control. My Triggers are when I have too many group events bunched together. I'm Resilient when my day is more varied and there's time for quieter activities between group events. My Talents & Abilities are my reliability and application alongside my intellectual capacity for my studies.




Thanks, Henry

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#MakeItNormal - for Sarah

To: My Boss

Could we #MakeItNormal to talk about my wellbeing at work? It would help me if you knew that my bipolar disorder can get out of control. My Triggers are that when I'm given too many challenges to cope with I am more prone to have a manic episode. I'm Resilient when my work is more structured and measured. My Talents & Abilities are my reliability and application alongside my intellectual capacity for the analytical work we do.



Thanks, Sarah

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#MakeItNormal - for Stuart

To: My Boss

Could we **#MakeItNormal** at work to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that I self-harm and have suicidal thoughts from depression. My **Triggers** are when I have irrational thoughts about my work and feel that people are disappointed with me. I'm **Resilient** when I know what people are thinking and get feedback, as long as it's honest. My **Talents & Abilities** are my ability to spot flaws in processes and fix them.

Thanks, Stuart



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#MakeItNormal - for Oscar

To: My Teacher

Could we **#MakeItNormal** at school to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that I get scared in new situations. My **Triggers** are the start of new terms or new lessons, particularly if I'm pushed into it and just told to get on with it. I'm **Resilient** when I can ease in gently and when people take the time to tell me what to expect. My **Talents & Abilities** are that I get really good results when I get used to things and I'm strong at sports.

Thanks, Oscar



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#MakeItNormal - for Susan

Dear Tutor

Could we **#MakeItNormal** at university to talk about my wellbeing? You could help me with managing my panic attacks which make me feel like I'm suffocating. My **Triggers** are when I feel out of my depth and self-confidence is low. I'm **Resilient** when I get feedback on how I'm doing, so I can keep things in perspective. My **Talents & Abilities** are my dedication and motivation to succeed in my studies.

Thanks, Susan



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#MakeItNormal - for Peter

To: My Boss

Could we **#MakeItNormal** at work to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that my PTSD gives me a hyper-vigilant, trauma-focused mind. My **Triggers** are that it's worse when I have a chaotic diary, interruptions & lots of things going on at the same time, when I stay away from home and don't have your open feedback. I'm **Resilient** when you give me autonomy, space & trust to do things calmly; flexibility to commute & when I get honest feedback. My **Talents & Abilities** are that I am a quiet reflector, able to spot things that might go wrong and fix them. I'm an empathetic, caring team-player and a good listener.

Thanks, Peter



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#MakeItNormal - for Dan

To: My Boss

Could we #MakeItNormal at work to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that I get chronic stress which exhausts me. My Triggers are the noisy environment I work in and the way I get instructions. I'm Resilient when I'm clear on what I need to do and when my working environment is calm. My Talents & Abilities are my creativity and the ideas I generate which help our team be as successful as it is.



Thanks, Dan



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#MakeItNormal - for Jack

To: My Boss

Could we #MakeItNormal at work to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that my PTSD causes me constant flashbacks and the fear of new traumas. My Triggers are my irregular working patterns and being put on the spot in meetings. I'm Resilient when I can plan my day and work calmly. My Talents & Abilities are my ability to identify the risk of things going wrong and fix them.



Thanks, Jack



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#MakeItNormal - for Stephen

To: My Boss

Could we #MakeItNormal at work to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that my OCD can sometimes be really debilitating. My Triggers are when I feel under scrutiny and like I'm not trusted. I'm Resilient when I have trust and autonomy and I perform really well then. My Talents & Abilities are my strong sense of good judgement and drafting skills.



Thanks, Stephen

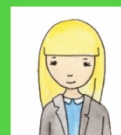


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#MakeItNormal - for Olivia

To: My Boss

Could we #MakeItNormal at work to talk about my wellbeing? It would help me if you knew that I have an eating disorder. My Triggers are when I think people are disappointed in my work and I feel responsible; being put on the spot in meetings; and at social events when people are eating. I'm Resilient when I can take regular short breaks and if there are no surprises. My Talents & Abilities are that I'm empathetic and a great team-player, popular and supportive with work colleagues.



Thanks, Olivia



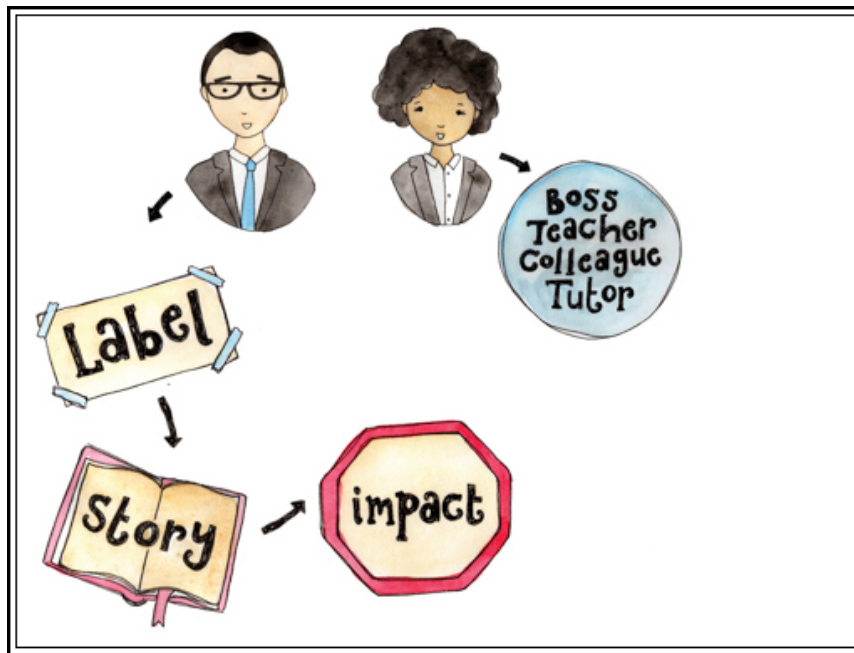
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How To Achieve a More Resilient You

Step #1 – Shift the Focus from Illness to Resilience

When we talk about a physical illness or injury, we will give a Label for the illness or injury; such as having a broken leg, developing arthritis, getting the ‘flu, discovering we have cancer and so on. We will tell the Story about how we got or discovered the illness or injury. And we will explain the Impact of it on us in terms of pain, treatment and recuperation.

Label, Story & Impact works for physical health. We generally get the support we need.



But for mental health, conversations that focus on Label, Story and Impact are difficult to have. They are emotional, personal, exposing and medically complex.

What's more, even though the people who listen may feel an enormous sense of responsibility; they usually don't have the expertise, knowledge or capabilities to provide support for such medically complex illnesses and such emotional challenges.

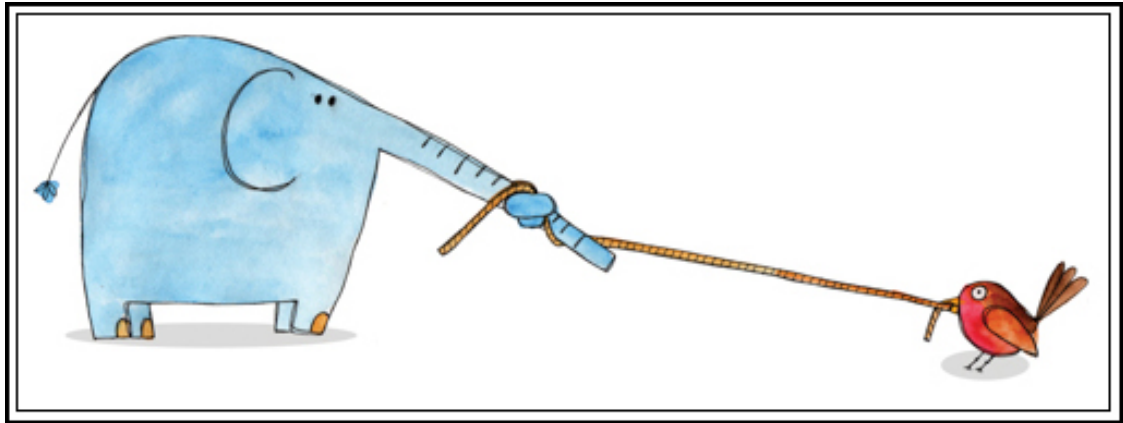
Mental health conversations often result in poor outcomes for the individual.

To improve the likelihood that people will talk about their mental health, and to make these conversations more successful in securing support, I encourage you to shift the conversation away from Label, Story and Impact.

Rather than focusing on the illness and what it does to you; try instead to focus on the practical things that other people can do to help you stay resilient.

To do that, start by thinking about what it means to be resilient.

Step #2 – What does it mean to be Resilient?



Resilience is a confusing concept. If I asked you to define it, or to research the definition, you'd find that it's about things like: being steadfast, having the courage of your convictions, having elasticity, being adaptable, being flexible, being rigid, being unmovable, unwavering, having the ability to spring back, having gravitas, having authority and so on.

Read that again. It's a confusing list of contradictions.

Take a look at the natural world and you'll get another confusing list of contradictions. Things that you might think of as more Resilient (elephant vs bird, whale vs clown fish, oak tree vs poppy etc) aren't always Resilient. It depends on their environment.

What is more Resilient in a drought – the lumbering elephant or the bird that can fly away? What is more Resilient when faced with a harpoon – the whale or the clown fish? What is more Resilient in a storm – the oak tree or the poppy?

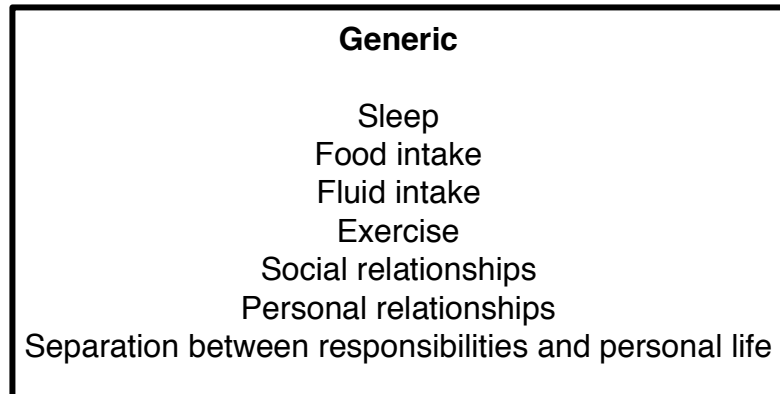
This glimpse into the natural world gives you an idea of how you could think of Resilience, because what we find is that it depends on the individual and their environment.

In the right environment for you, you feel comfortable. Someone else may, in the same environment, be totally uncomfortable. As you move away from your preferred environment you may be able to manage, but you may become increasingly uncomfortable. As you move further away, you become more uncomfortable to the point of being unable to manage.

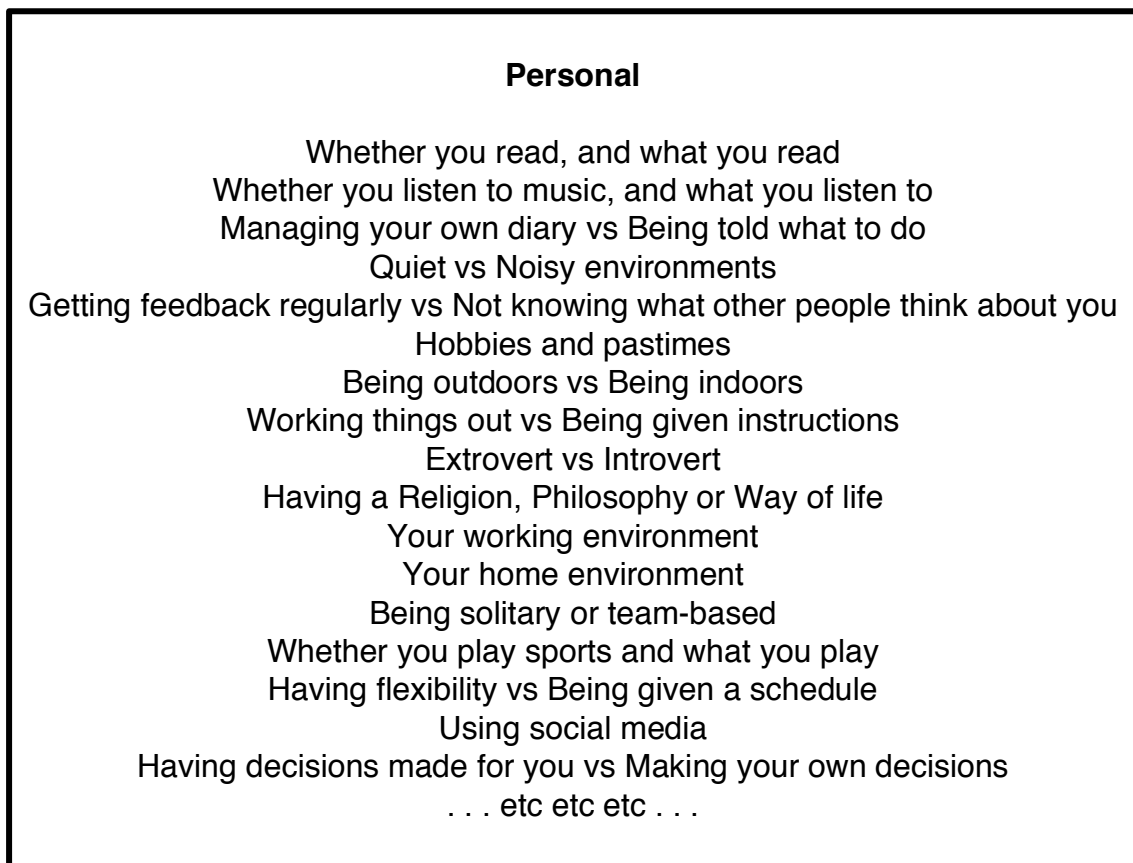
So, if Resilience is about you and your environment, your next step will be to map out your environment.

Step #3 – Map out your personal Environment

There are certain things that everyone has in their Environment. These will be on your map, as they will be for everyone else.



Beyond this list, there is then a much more personal list. Everyone's life is different. So, you can map out the sort of things that exist in your personal Environment. They might include some of the following, as well as other things.



Having mapped your Environment, you can now consider how each Environment impacts your Wellbeing by giving each Environment a Wellbeing Score.

Step #4 – Score your Environment

For each Environment, ask yourself about the sort of Outcomes, Behaviours, Feelings & Reactions that you commonly experience when you are in that Environment.

Think about what happens when you are in each Environment. Do you feel refreshed, alert, happy, attentive, good-natured, motivated, engaged etc. Or do you feel more like the opposite of these things? Are you happy with the outcome? Do you behave in a way that you are comfortable with? Do you react well, or not-so-well? Do you feel good, or not-so-good?

Overall, how comfortable or uncomfortable are you with the Environment.

For each Environment you can now give yourself a Wellbeing Score.

Uncomfortable -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5 Comfortable

You could keep a diary or journal and track how your Wellbeing Scores changes over time and in different Environments. This can be useful where you don't have an instant negative or positive reaction to a particular Environment; but, over time, you might begin to observe one. This can be the case with a build-up of poor sleep, a low-quality diet that affects you over time, or prolonged lack of exercise.

Step #5 – Identify Your Triggers and Resilient Resources

From the exercise so far, you will now be able to identify your Triggers and your Resilient Resources.

The Triggers are those things about your Environment that make you feel most uncomfortable; that you find it difficult to adjust to and which have the most damaging impact on your Wellbeing.

The word "Triggers" is written in a large, bold, black, hand-drawn font. The letters have a slightly irregular, textured appearance, giving it a personal or artistic feel. It is centered within a thin black rectangular border.

Your Resilient Resources are those things about your Environment that make you feel most comfortable, that you enjoy, that allow you to feel happy or happier, more successful, more motivated, more refreshed and so on. These things enhance or improve your Wellbeing.

The words "Resilient Resources" are written in a large, bold, black, hand-drawn font, stacked in two lines. The letters have a slightly irregular, textured appearance, giving it a personal or artistic feel. It is centered within a thin black rectangular border.

Having achieved this, you can now ask others to help you avoid your Triggers and to support you in having your Resilient Resources.

Step #6 – Brain Train to Build Resilience

While you can simply avoid your Triggers, it is also possible to improve your Resilience by training yourself to become more comfortable in certain situations that currently make you feel uncomfortable. This means that you can actually develop greater Resilience if you want to.

This step involves becoming more self-aware about the thought-processes going on in your mind when you are feeling uncomfortable, stressed and unwell.

Let's look at how our thought-processes work. I think of us as having four brains.

Our Instinctive Brain might respond to a situation with an immediate command to embrace or run away; to become loving or aggressive; to eat, sleep and so on (fight, flight and essential survival). Without any conscious thought on your part, this primitive Instinctive Brain simply says: "I want to . . ." based on fulfilling an essential survival need.

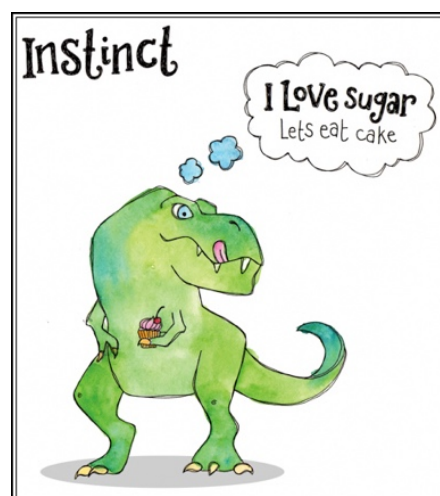
Our Experiential Brain might respond to a situation by sub-consciously going through the filing-cabinet in our memory of previous similar situations and deciding what the best thing to do might be. We might naturally avoid something that we have disliked before; or do something again that we enjoyed doing before. This more evolved Experiential Brain says: "Let's do this again, because it was enjoyable before" or "Let's avoid this, because I didn't enjoy it before."

Our Logical Brain might respond to a situation by working out the pros and cons of the situation and deciding what the best thing to do would be. Like a Judge, this Logical Brain says: "On balance, the best thing to do is . . ."

Our Values-based Brain might respond to a situation by working out what the right thing to do would be based on our values – whether religious, ethical, social, family or personal values. Like a respected role-model, mentor, or guide, this Values-based Brain says: "The right thing to do is . . ."

Let's give this an example. Let's say that Bob has brought cakes into your workplace to celebrate his birthday.

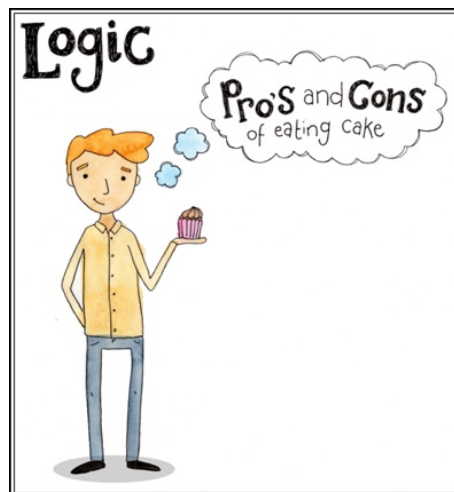
Our Instincts may crave sugar and carbohydrates. They feed and sustain us.



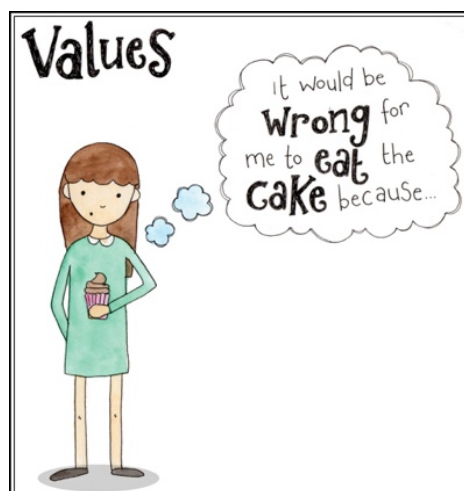
Our past happy Experiences of cake-eating might prompt us to accept the offer of a cake. Then again, past bad Experiences might do otherwise (memories of past over-indulgence, diabetes or gluten intolerance, for example).



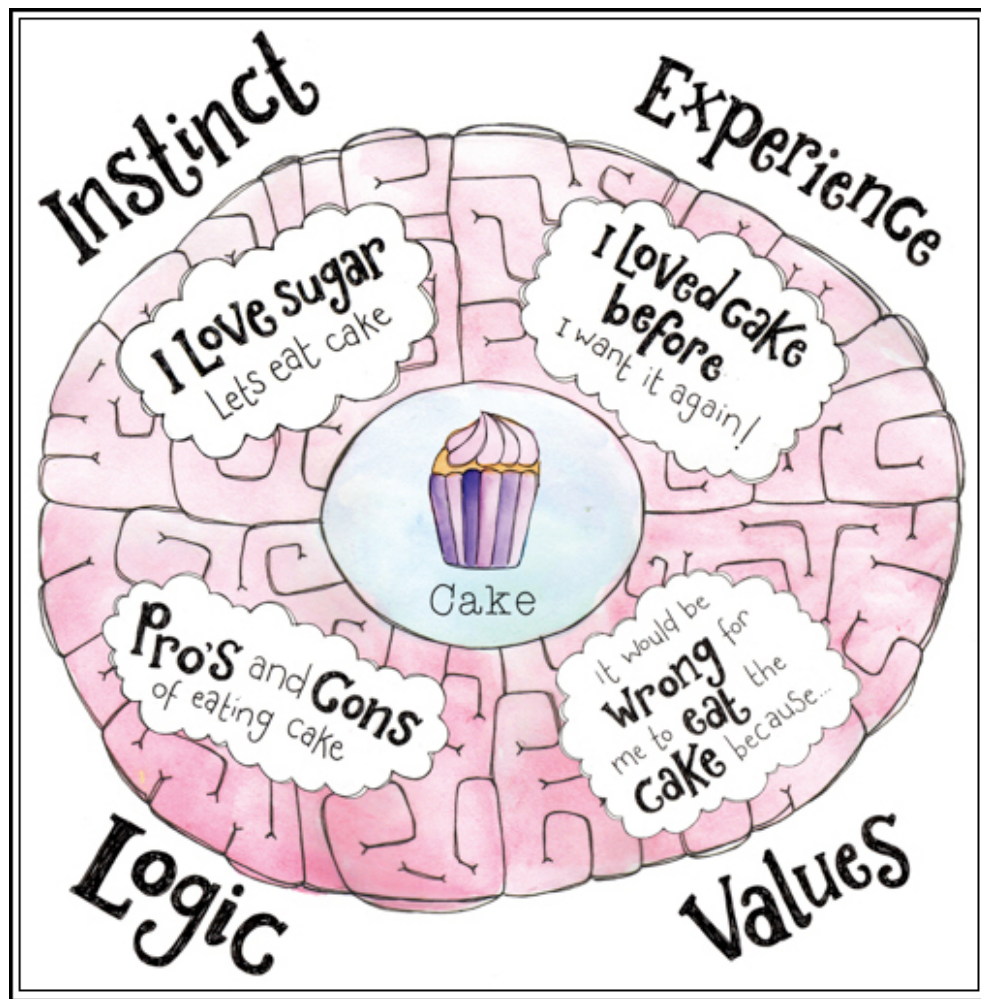
Even if we desire a cake based on our Instincts and Experiences, we may use Logic to override our instincts and experiential preferences (perhaps we don't want to ruin a meal later).



Or we may have Values that conflict with our other thought-processes (perhaps we are fasting).



Often in life, we just work out these conflicts and get on with life; but sometimes they can produce challenges to our overall Wellbeing. Because these conflicts often happen at a subconscious level, they can be confusing and uncomfortable. There is often a lot to be gained from raising our awareness of these thought-processes so we can have a better idea of how and why our thought-processes impact our Wellbeing.



With that explanation in mind, you can now have a think about your discomfort in a particular Environment. By thinking about your four brains and how they are influencing you, it might be possible to consider making some adjustments to help you develop your Resilience.

Out of this exercise, you might identify some commitments that you can make, to enhance your personal Resilience.

So, if your Outcomes, Behaviours, Feelings and Reactions to a particular Environment are getting a low score, you now have two choices. You can avoid these Environments, because they are a Trigger for you. Or you can train your brain to think differently about these Environments.

If a particular Environment makes you stressed, angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious, scared, want to run away, want to drink alcohol, want to cut off all social ties, want to over-exercise, want to over-eat, want to avoid eating, lose sleep, sleep too much and so on . . . have a go at raising your conscious awareness of your thought-processes.

See if your low Wellbeing Score comes from how you Instinctively react to the situation. And see if your inner Judge, might come to a different conclusion if you think through the pros and cons.

If you like what you think, practice it and learn to think differently.

See if your low Wellbeing Score comes from how your Values are offended by the situation. Work out whether your inner Mentor, or Role Model, might come to a different conclusion on what your Values are. Or perhaps your inner Judge might think through the pros and cons differently.

If you like what you think, practice it and learn to think differently.

See if your low Wellbeing Score comes down to how you react because you had a bad experience in the past. Work out whether your inner Judge might think through the situation differently.

If you like what you think, practice it and learn to think differently.

This brain training for Resilience can make the world of difference and help you build a new-found Resilience.

Give it a go.

Step #7 – Identify Your Talents & Abilities

When I started Coaching people on how to have Mentally Healthy Conversations, I didn't expect to add this step. It was a surprise to me and might be a surprise to you that people with mental health challenges have some fantastic Talents & Abilities. Not only can these Talents & Abilities be put to great use, but when they are, this means that the individual's self-esteem and overall Wellbeing improve.

Talents and Abilities

Your Talents & Abilities are going to be personal and unique to you but whatever your personal Talents & Abilities are, they are worth drawing out and making sure that, as far as possible, you play to these strengths. This will help your self-esteem, your feeling that you are fulfilling your worth and it will improve your overall Wellbeing.

I've listed below the sort of Talents & Abilities that I've come across through coaching.

Talents & Abilities

Increased creativity (artistically or for generating good ideas)

The ability to identify business risks and stop them from happening

Reaching judgements and making decisions that are robust, logical and well thought-through

Increased empathy for better team-work, management or leadership

Tenacity

Process development skills

The ability to identify flaws in complex workflows

Better planning abilities

Step #8 – Bring this all together in a Wellbeing Card to share with others

Your job is now complete. You've identified a range of Triggers, Resilient Resources and Talents & Abilities. You've also decided which Triggers to avoid and which ones you'd prefer to build greater Resilience for.

You can now bring this together in a Wellbeing Card to discuss with other people.

This can be as focused as a business card, like this one for me:



Or it can be a little more detailed like the ones from Evenhood's #MakeItNormal campaign:



Or it can be more formal, perhaps for a Line Manager, Tutor or Teacher. The formal document below is the sort of disclosure document that Evenhood promotes in workplaces, universities

and schools. It has the benefit of being a triple agreement; between (a) the individual (b) their line manager, tutor or teacher and (c) the organisation. Everyone contributes to supporting the individual's Wellbeing & Resilience.

I also like to see these documents being drafted by the individual. This lowers the likelihood of confusion or misunderstanding; and it enhances the likelihood that the individual's commitment will be strong.

Tool #3 - Disclosure, Adjustments and Passport

NAME

DATE

CONDITION: this is my Wellbeing challenge.

IMPACT: this is a brief description of the impact of this on me.

This first page is just about the basic Disclosure. It is a really brief description of Label, Story and Impact. The focus of the document is on the second page where you record your Triggers, Resilient Resources and Talents & Abilities.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

The Adjustments section is the active part of the document. This records the agreement that the three parties to the agreement make.

Adjustments

[NAME]: these are things I will do to help support my Wellbeing.

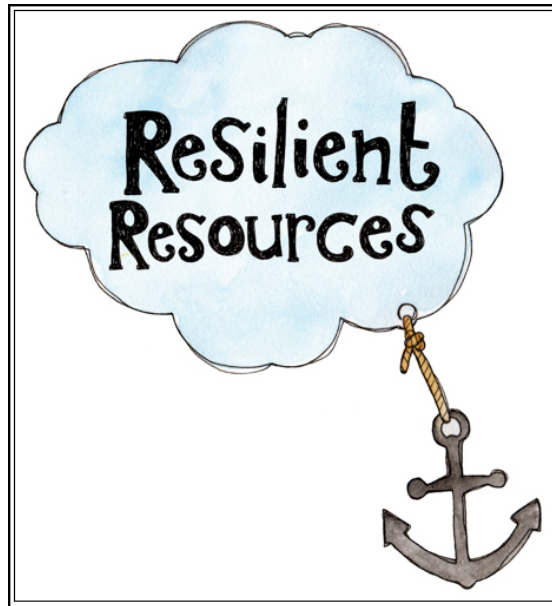
MANAGER / TUTOR / TEACHER: these are the things that I will do to help provide support for [NAME]'s Wellbeing.

ORGANISATION: these are the things that we will do to help provide support for [NAME]'s Wellbeing.

1. We will make sure that if [NAME] moves within the organisation or if his / her line manager changes, we will make sure that these wellbeing adjustments move with [NAME] without the need for a further disclosure.

Step #9 – Anchor yourself in Your Resilient Resources

The final step of the whole process is to make sure that you anchor yourself in your Resilient Resources (or help the person you are supporting to achieve this).



Anchoring involves not just identifying your Resilient Resources but keeping them with you. All the time.

Resilient Resources are like food. We can't just engage them when it's convenient. We need to do it all the time to keep our energy levels up.

And finally . . . Journal, Talk and Reflect

All of this takes a bit of work, but the work is worth it. Resilience is a lifelong asset. It's wise to invest in Resilience, to get one of the best assets you can get in life.

If you are to succeed in this, you'll benefit from setting time aside to keep a journal, talk with others to get their support and reflect. Once you do this, you'll achieve a more Resilient you.

Checklist

Map all aspects of your environment

Score how comfortable you are in each aspect of your environment

Identify your Triggers (those environments in which you feel most uncomfortable)

Identify your Resilient Resources (those environments in which you feel most comfortable)

Brain train to build Resilience

Reflect on your Talents & Abilities

Bring this all together in a Wellbeing Card to share with others and ask for their support

Anchor yourself in your Resilient Resources

About Jonathan Phelan

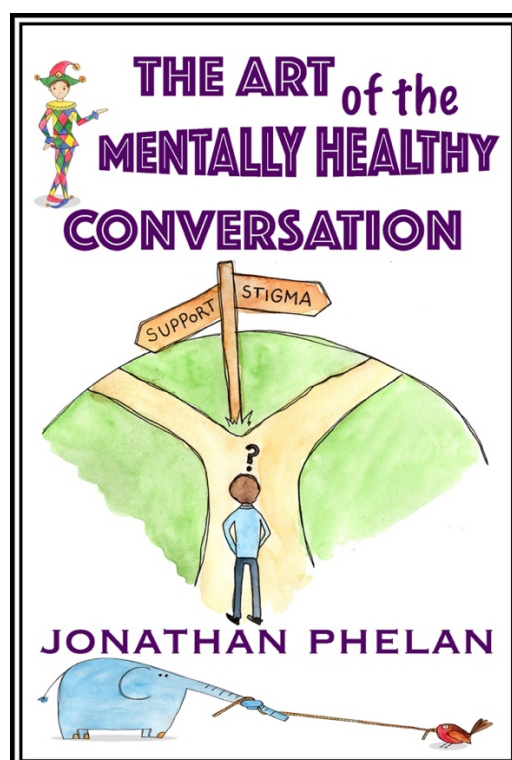


Jonathan is a Speaker, Coach, Trainer and Author and founder of Evenhood whose purpose it is to provide people with tools to develop resilience and have more effective wellbeing conversations.

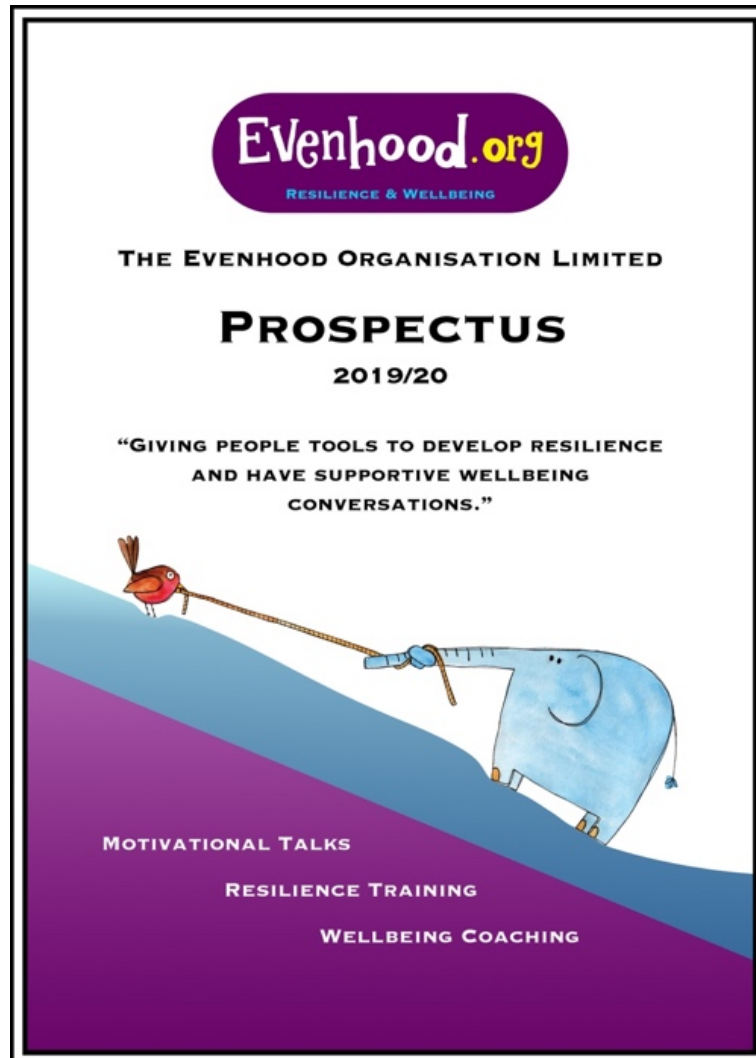
Jonathan is also a long-established senior leader in a large financial services organisation with a professional background as a solicitor.

Jonathan's book, "The Art of the Mentally Healthy Conversation", tells the story of how he grappled with the challenge of post-traumatic stress, depression, stigma and lack of support following the death of his son, Theo, by stillbirth. Ultimately, he created Evenhood to share what he learned about how to have more effective Mentally Healthy Conversations.

The book is available in paperback or e-reader from [the Evenhood website on this link](#), or from Amazon, Apple and other retailers.



Evenhood provides motivational talks, resilience training and wellbeing coaching. To date it has delivered support to around 4,000 individuals across a variety of organisations – workplaces, universities and schools. [Follow this link to get a copy](#) of Evenhood's 2019/20 Prospectus to discover how it can support resilience & wellbeing in your organisation.



If you'd like to work with Jonathan, you can contact him at jonathan@evenhood.org

BE A MORE RESILIENT YOU

MAP YOUR ENVIRONMENT	SCORE

Comfortable

+5

+4

+3

+2

+1

0

-1

-2

-3

-4

-5

Uncomfortable

TRIGGERS	RESILIENT RESOURCES	TALENTS & ABILITIES

BRAIN TRAIN TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Trigger	
---------	--

What my inner voice currently says	
My instinct says that I want or need . . .	
My experience says that I would like / dislike . . .	
My inner logical judge says that on balance the best thing is . . .	
My values say that the right thing is . . .	
What I would like my inner voice to say	
My instinct says that I want or need . . .	
My experience says that I would like / dislike . . .	
My inner logical judge says that on balance the best thing is . . .	
My values say that the right thing is . . .	