The Importance of Self-Compassion

What is self-compassion and why is it important?

Compassion

- feeling another person's pain and wanting to take steps to help relieve their suffering
- acknowledging that as humans 'we are all in the same boat' and that everybody hurts sometimes
- truly understanding what it means to be human and knowing that no one is perfect

Self-compassion

- applying compassion to ourselves; treating ourselves kindly
- being motivated to balance our negative thoughts and emotions by acting to relieve our distress

Self-criticism

- Neuroscientists have proven that self-criticism shifts the brain into a state of inhibition and self-punishment.
- It is not motivating and makes us less likely to reach our goals.
- It leaves us feeling threatened and demoralized, more likely to ruminate and procrastinate.
- And **what happens when we feel threatened?**

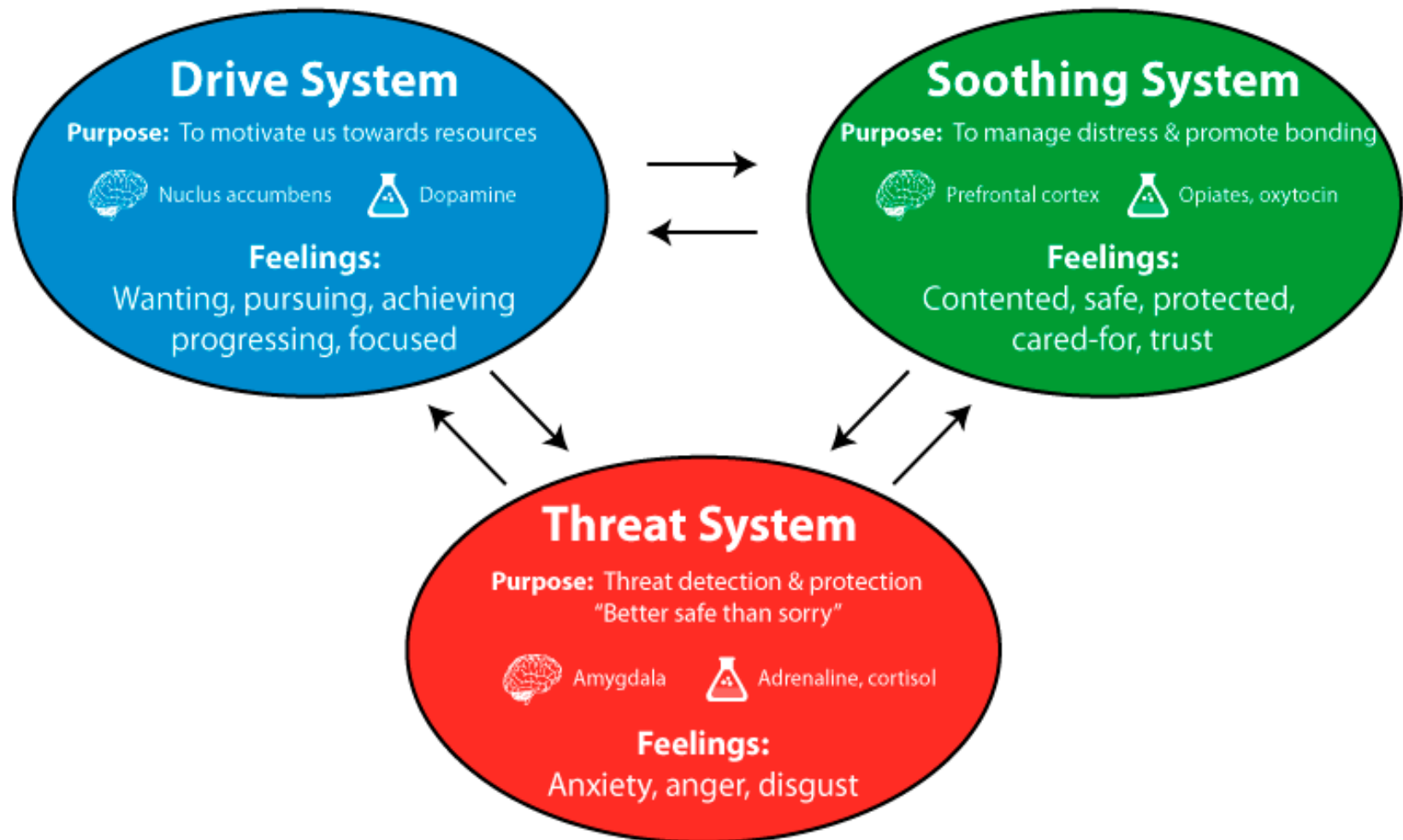Our sympathetic nervous system kicks in = fight or flight!

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Emotional Regulation Systems

Paul Gilbert's evolutionary model proposes that human beings switch between three systems to manage their emotions.
Each system is associated with different brain regions and different brain chemistry.
Distress is caused by imbalance between the systems, often associated with under-development of the soothing system.

Drive System

Purpose: To motivate us towards resources

Nuclus accumbens · Dopamine

Feelings:
Wanting, pursuing, achieving
progressing, focused

Soothing System

Purpose: To manage distress & promote bonding

Prefrontal cortex · Opiates, oxytocin

Feelings:
Contented, safe, protected,
cared-for, trust

Threat System

Purpose: Threat detection & protection
"Better safe than sorry"

Amygdala · Adrenaline, cortisol

Feelings:
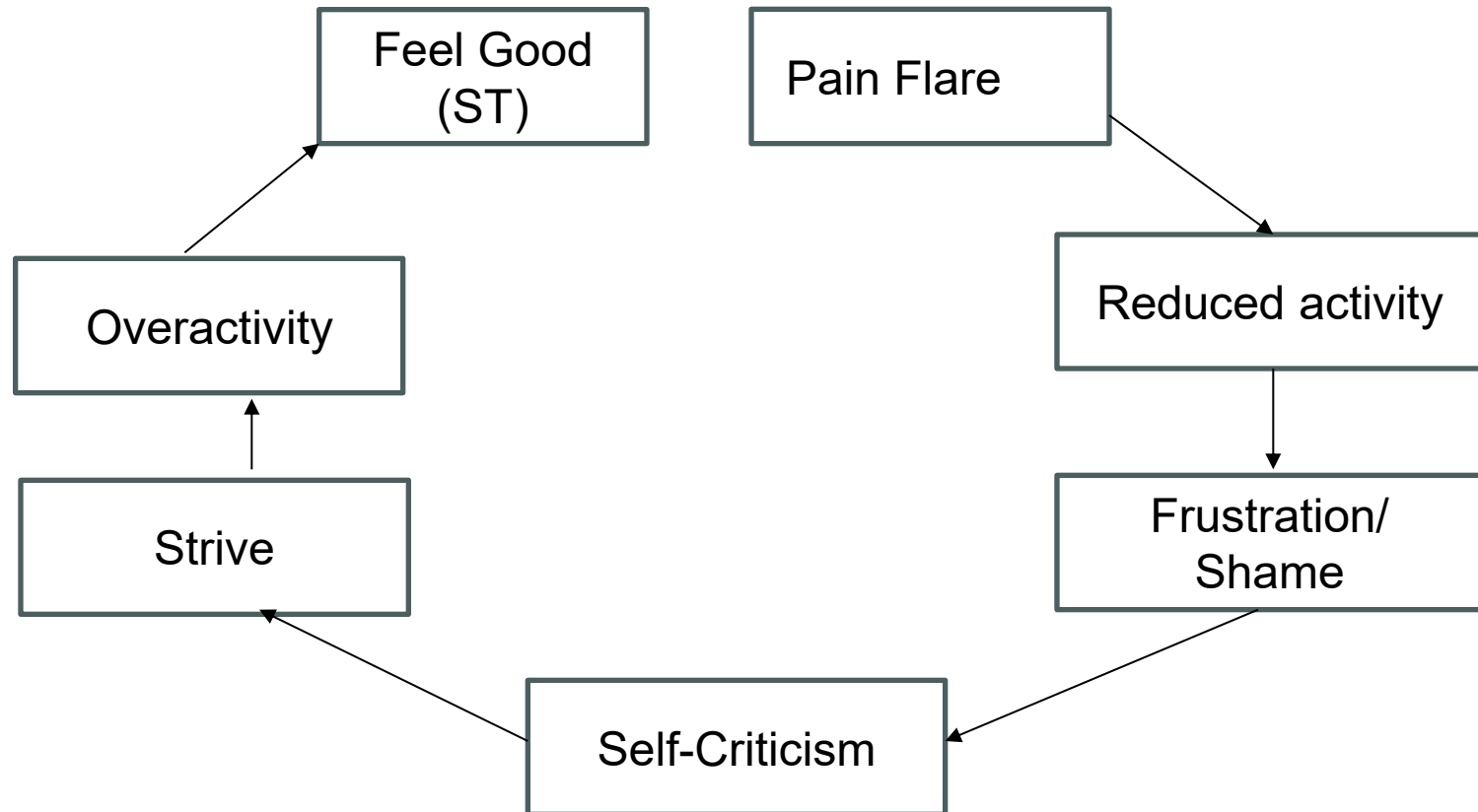Anxiety, anger, disgust

Common Critical/Harsh Thoughts

- I should be doing more
- I'm being lazy
- I'm useless
- I'm being selfish by prioritising this
- I'm letting others down
- Buck up and get on with it, don't be daft
- I'm being soft
- I'm not looking after others enough – they are more important and should be my priority
- I don't deserve it (self-care)

What are your common critical thoughts to yourself? Would you ever say them to the people you love?

Self-Criticism

Self-criticism increases the risk of boom-and-bust behaviour and the chance of a pain flare

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          ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
          │  Feel Good   │        │  Pain Flare  │
          │     (ST)     │        │              │
          └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
                 ↗                          ↘
     ┌──────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
     │ Overactivity │              │ Reduced activity │
     └──────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
            ↑                               ↓
     ┌──────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
     │    Strive    │              │   Frustration/   │
     │              │              │      Shame       │
     └──────────────┘              └──────────────────┘
            ↖                               ↙
          ┌──────────────────────────────┐
          │       Self-Criticism         │
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Developing Self Compassion

Being compassionate towards others - easiest
Allowing ourselves to receive compassion from others - harder
Being compassionate towards ourselves – much harder!!!!

Accept kindness and care from others

- notice self-critical thoughts and challenge them (gently and kindly)
- Ask for care, hugs, help, whatever we need

Kind actions to ourselves

- Self-care; doing things that help us and make us feel good/relaxed; personal rewards

Developing Self Compassion

Kind words to ourselves

Notice critical thoughts and have kinder thoughts planned.

Consider what you would say to someone you care about, note them down and practice them:

- 'This is a difficult moment, and it will pass'
- 'I'm doing my best'
- 'I am good enough'
- 'I'm deserving of help and direction'
- 'It's okay to not be perfect, nobody is'
- 'I am going to be kind to myself in this moment'
- 'I'm going to be compassionate by………..

Be your own 'Kindness Coach'

- A kindness coach is a wise and trusted ally, someone who is truly on our side - rooting for us no matter what. They care for us deeply and unconditionally, knowing that we are not perfect. They understand all of the events in our lives that have brought us to the present moment and deeply accept us 'as we are'

- How would you like your kindness coach to relate to you? What would they look or sound like? What facial expression and tone of voice would they have?