

**Synergy**

**AT-Autism**



AIKATERINI  
LASKARIDIS  
FOUNDATION

*Changing thoughts, feelings and narratives  
around 'behaviours of concern'*

Synergy overview

Richard Mills

AT-Autism

University of Bath

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# Oscar Wilde

*“The best way to make children good is to make them happy.”*





Lorna Wing



*“Our job is to make that world less frightening”*

# Context

- How 'successful' are our 'approaches' to 'challenging behaviour' ?
- Why are we still talking about scandals and abuse?
- What difference personalisation - or training?
- Is enough attention paid to staff?







teacher



# Background to Synergy

- Began 2013 with Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, Piraeus, Greece
- Response to growth of exclusions from Greek schools related to ‘challenging behaviour’
- Austerity



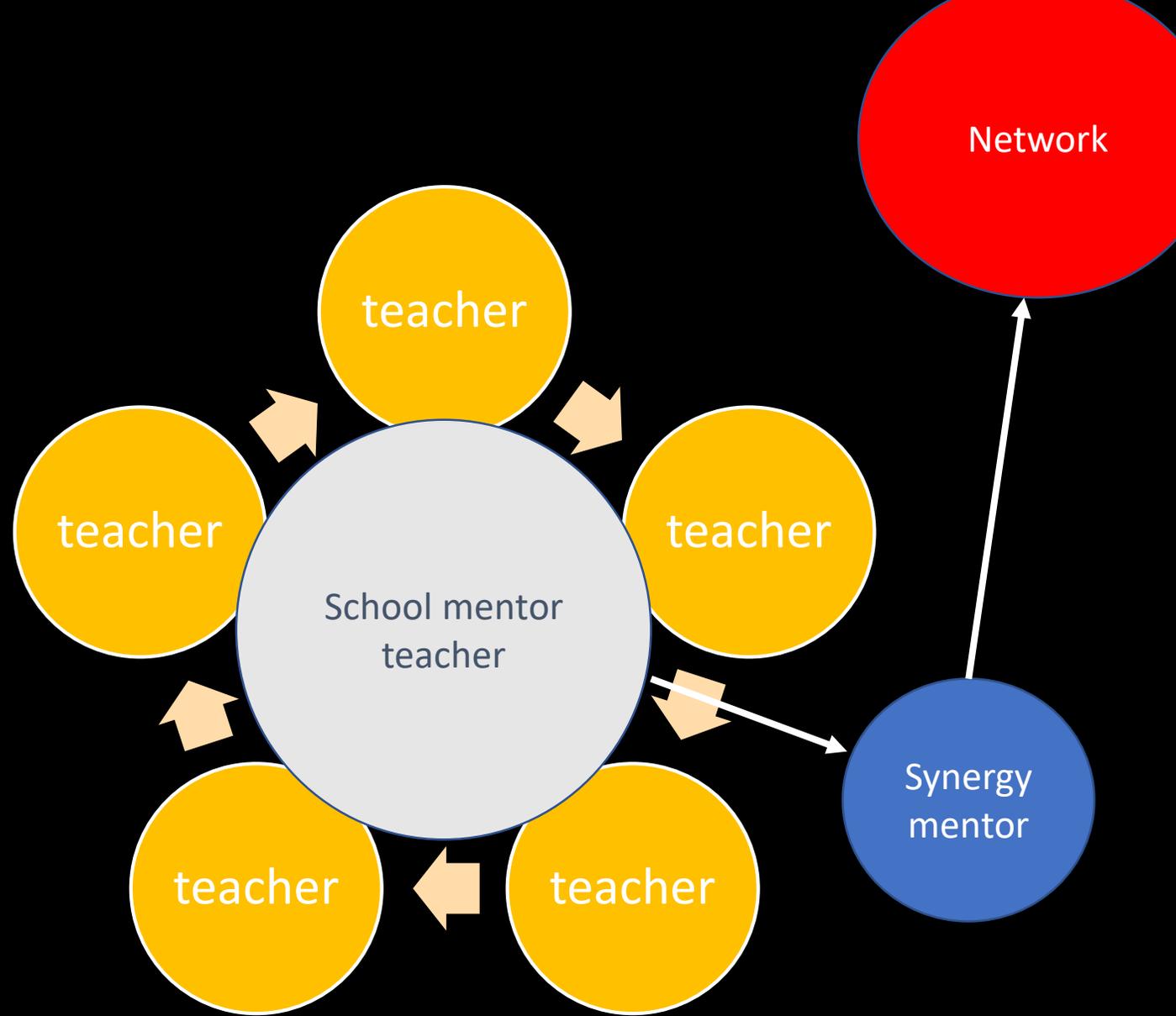
# Background to Synergy

- Generic- including refugees, intellectual disability, autism, 'behavioural problems'
- Sensitive to local culture and resources
  - austerity

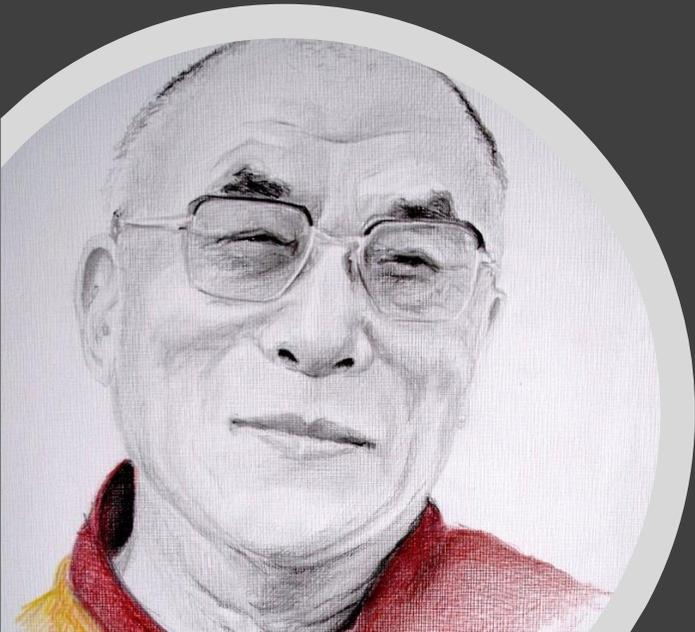


# Model : Synergy Attica

- Teachers supported by local (school based) mentor
- School-based mentors supported by Synergy mentor
- Synergy mentors supported by AT-Autism network



# Hypothesis



- Being in control of our feelings and behaviour (being virtuous) reduces stress
- We make bad decisions when stressed /through our biases
- We can learn to change our behaviour
- Recognition of what we can control and what we can't- improves practice and reduces stress
- Mentors important –support/challenge question

Ellis 1955; Kahneman & Tversky 1974; Davidson 1992; Rutter 1990; Lockwood 2017

# Overview

## Focus of Synergy

- Mindsets , stress, behaviours and **skills** of support adults (e.g. teachers, staff)
  - NOT 'child behaviour'
- What we can control
- Narrative

# FOCUS

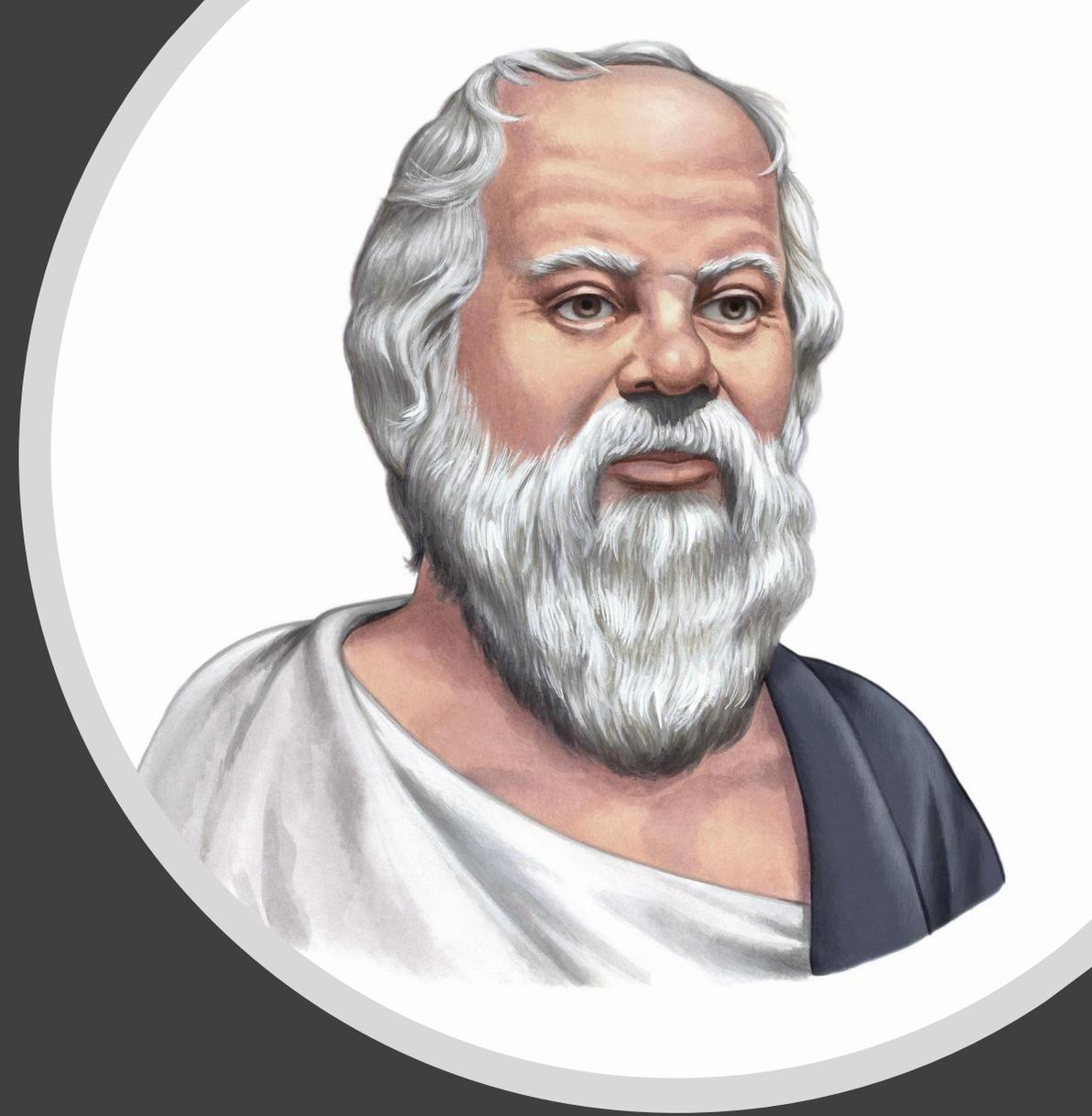
ON THE THINGS YOU  
CAN CHANGE AND  
LET GO OF THE THINGS  
YOU CAN'T.

WELIFEHAPPY.COM

## Context

### The Socratic tradition

- 1. Humans can know themselves**
- 2. Humans can change themselves**
- 3. Humans can consciously create new habits**  
of thinking, feeling and acting



## Feelings

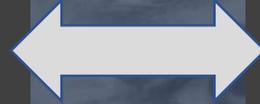
Good (feelings)

Bad (vindictive)

## Acts

Good (virtuous)

Bad (vicious)



## Character

Good (virtues)

Bad (vices)

Should we pay much more attention to staff virtues?

- Character?
- Feelings (Beliefs and mindsets) ?
- Acts (Behaviour) ?



# Reframing Mindsets, narratives and behaviour

*“people are not disturbed by things but rather by their view of things.”*

Albert Ellis 1913-2007

*“Men are disturbed not by things, but by their opinions about them”*

Epictetus 55 – 135 AD



*“While such training is generally well evaluated by care staff, there is limited evidence that training alone changes poor attitudes or improves staff performance. ....*

*Training has not been linked to quality of outcomes for service users.”*

- Cullen 1992



*“Staff can be taught to behave appropriately in our training sessions but they do not necessarily behave appropriately when they return to their work settings.*

*In fact it would not be too strong to say that they rarely do so”*

(Cullen 1992)



- Staff who work with service users with ID and challenging behaviours feel negative emotions such as anger, guilt, anxiety, self-blame and powerlessness
- Recognition of value of psychological support
- Is this enough?

Hastings 2003; Mills & Rose, 2011; Rose & Cleary 2007; Needham et al. 2005.



# Questions

- Winterbourne View Hospital, Bristol
- Are the people convicted ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ – or themselves victims?
- What is the narrative?
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-20092894>



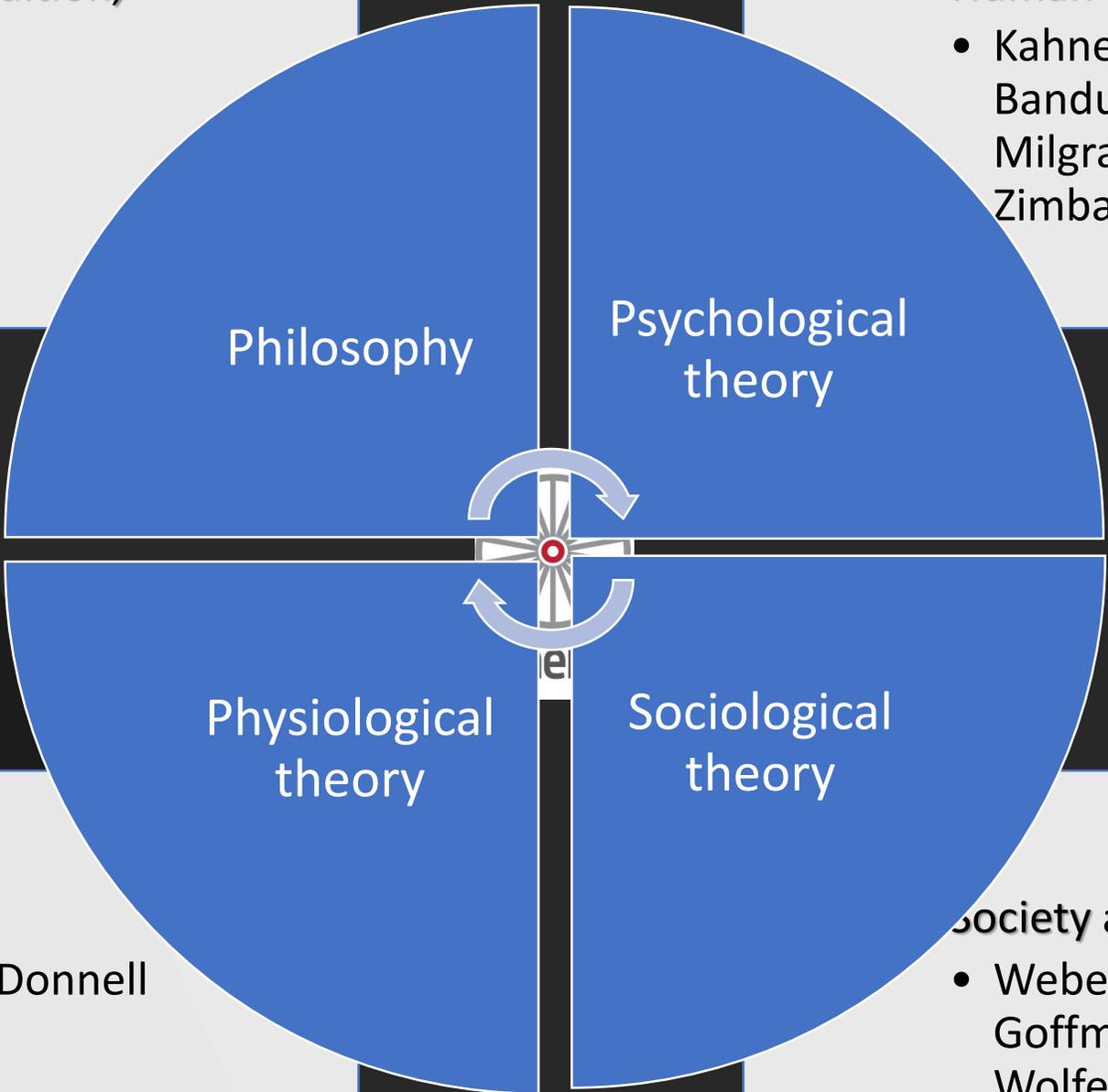
# Questions

- Do we need to pay more attention to support adults?
  - and an approach that extends beyond the workplace?
  - that gives more than 'values' or instruction on how to behave ?
  - encourage 'virtuous acts' that will endure? ... tools for life ?
- What might help to do this?



**Socratic tradition;**  
• Epictetus

**Human behavior**  
• Kahneman;  
Bandura; Asch;  
Milgram; Rogers;  
Zimbardo; Ellis



**Stress**  
• Pfaff; McDonnell

**Society and culture**  
• Weber;  
Goffman;  
Wolfensberger

Theoretical base



# Gaining control of our actions and beliefs

- Aim to do the 'right' thing
- 'Examine our impressions'
- 'Reflect on our thoughts and actions'
- Presence : Self-awareness and self-control



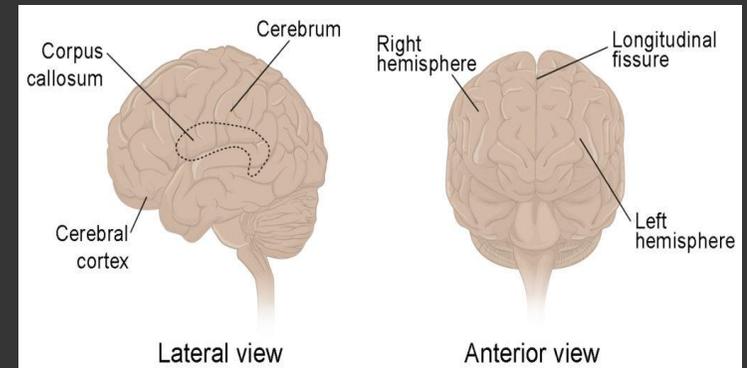
# Kahneman

## Brain system 1: the 'emotional brain'

- Fight/flight - high stress -reactive
- Impulsivity - biases - 'gut feelings'

## Brain system 2: the 'thinking brain'

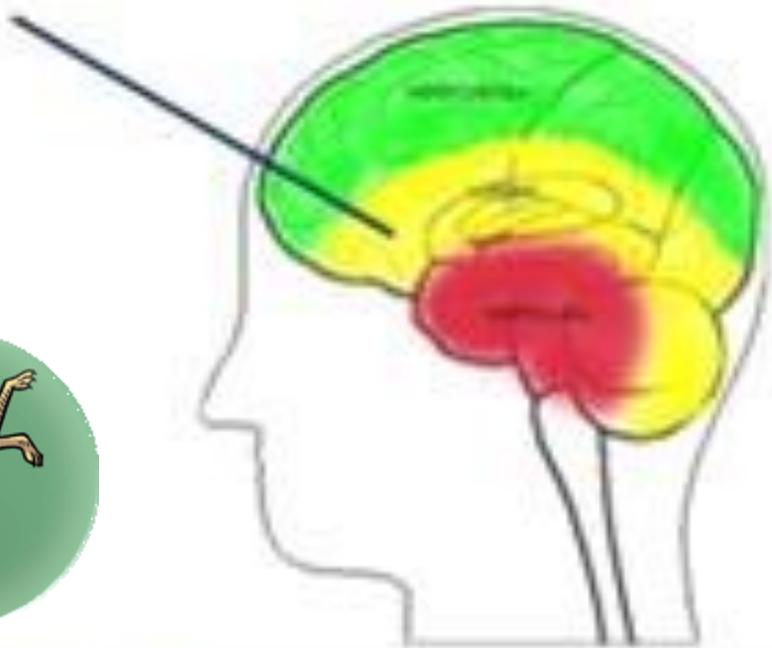
- Planning- thoughtful, proactive, considered
- Logical -based on evidence



# System 1

## FIRST REACTIONS

System 1: fast, automatic, impulsive, associative, emotional and unconscious processing



# System 1 and System 2 processing

## FIRST REACTIONS

**System 1:** fast, automatic, impulsive, associative, emotional and unconscious processing



**FAST**

## THINKING

**System 2:** slower, conscious, reflective, deliberative, analytical, rational, logical processing



**SLOW**



# System 1

- Useful- Easy - Instinctive

BUT

Can result in stress and bad choices e.g.

- Panic – Impulsivity - Biases



i've heard the rhetoric from both sides... time to do my own research on the real truth



Google

Found 80,000 results.

Literally the first link that agrees with what you already believe

Completely supports your viewpoint without challenging it in any way

Another link

Don't worry about this one

CHAINSAWSUIT.COM

...jackpot



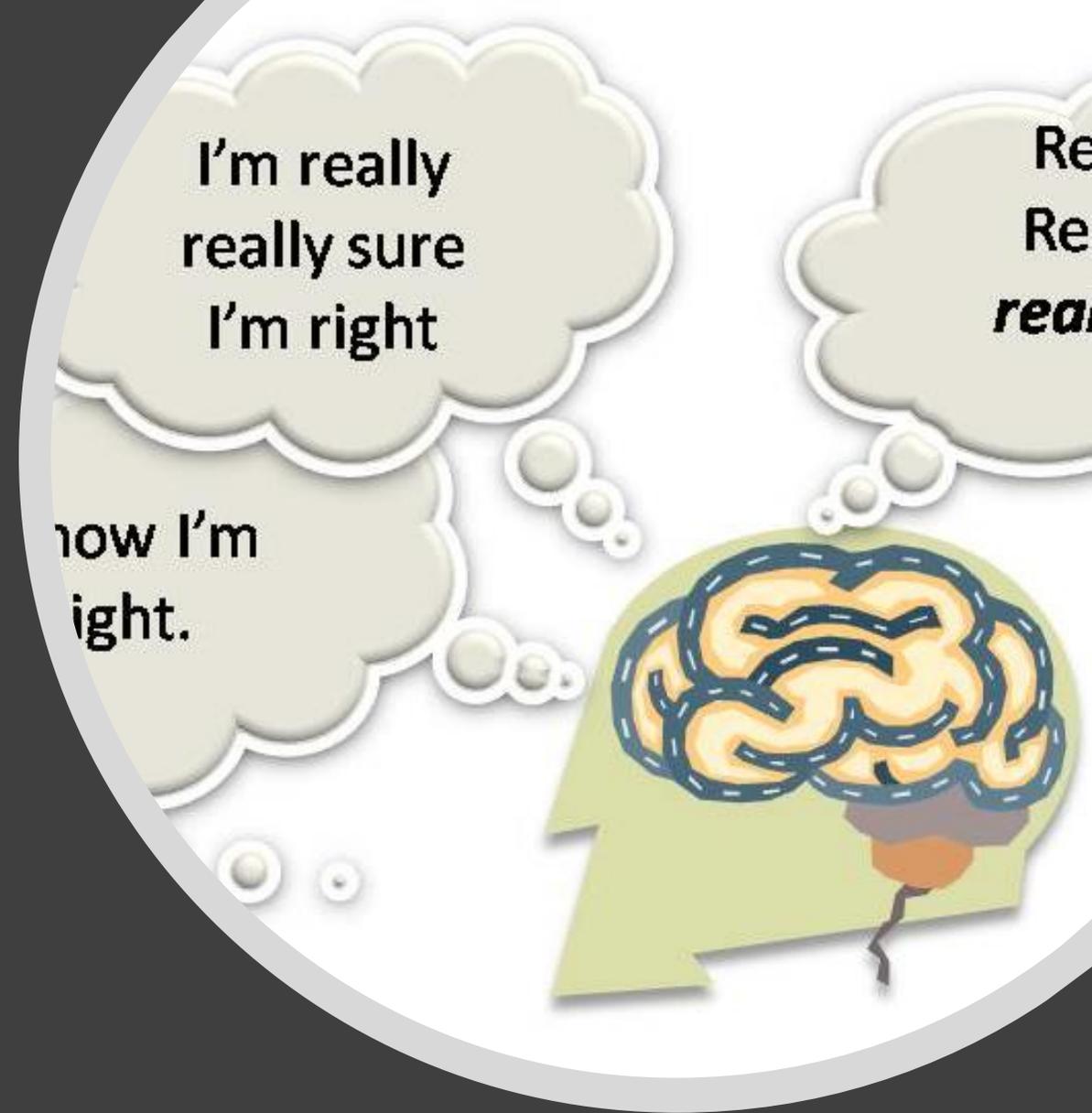


*"Since learning about confirmation bias, I keep seeing it everywhere!"*

# System 1 - Biases

- Perception
- Narrative
- Experience
- Culture
- Beliefs and feelings
- Judgements

Stigma  
'Othering'



# System 2

- In control of self - Planned

But

- Can take time and effort - skills might be difficult
- Self-awareness critical
- Rehearsal improves application



# Switching from System 1 to system 2

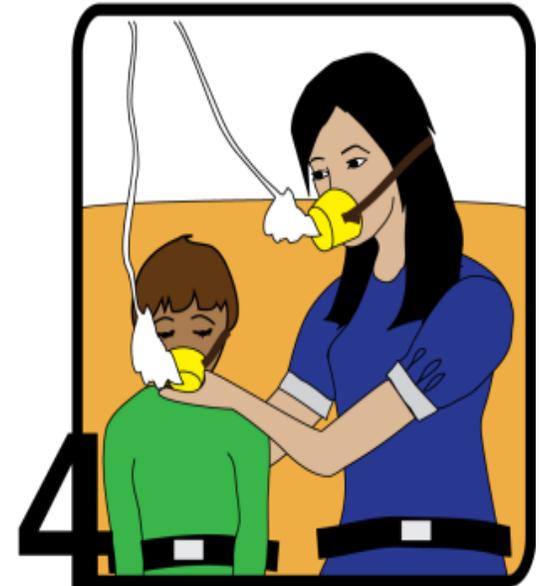
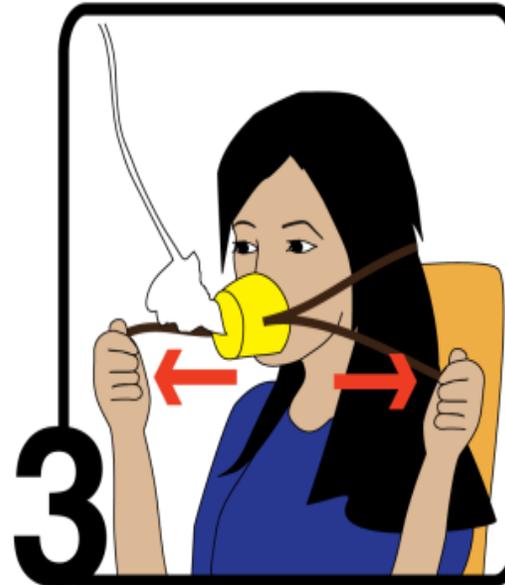
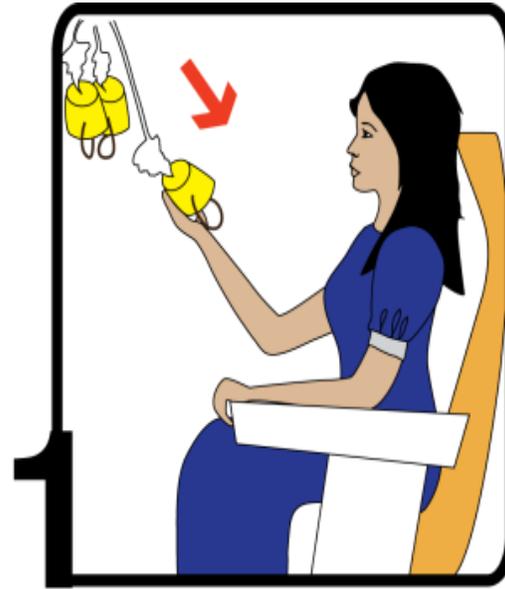
- Being calm and 'in control' and aware of which system you are in (system 1 or system 2)
- Focus on what we can control
- Making a plan
- Value of mentoring



“If the oxygen mask drops put on your own mask before helping others”

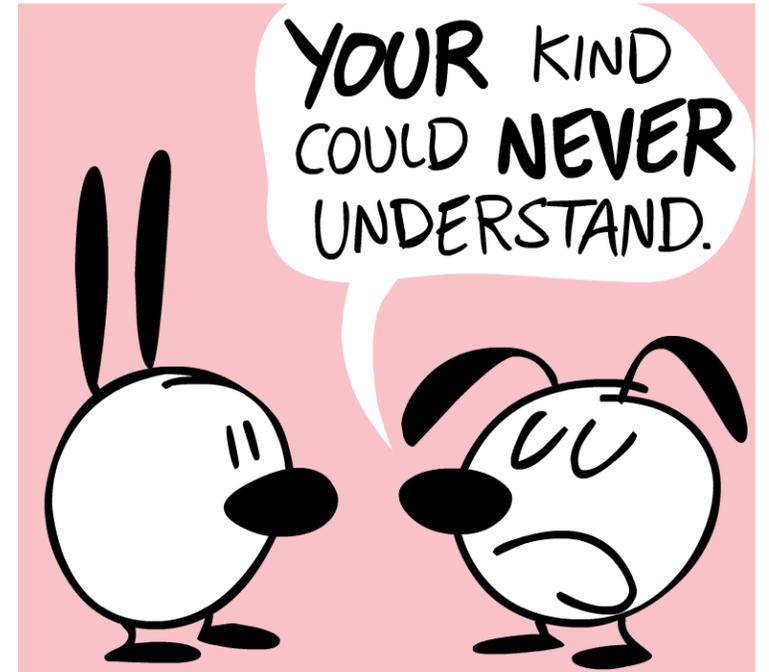
### In a crisis

- Gain control of OUR emotions
- Reduce OUR stress
- Have a PLAN





mimiandeuince.com



Othering

Words we use : Examples

Switching  
from System 1  
to system 2

Flipping narratives

Reframing

Power of narrative and language

How we describe people  
behaviour and events

## System 1 descriptions

## System 2 descriptions

Complex

Aggressive

Unpredictable

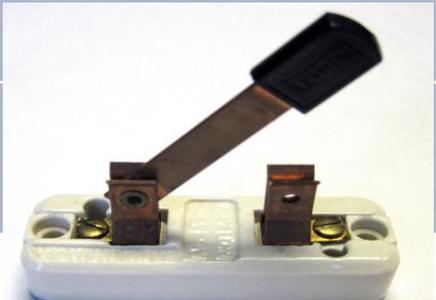
Obsessive

Repetitive

Ritualistic

Disorder

Other?



## System 1 descriptions

## System 2 descriptions

Complex

Human : Interesting: I don't understand yet

Aggressive

Scared: Unhappy: Frustrated: I don't understand yet

Unpredictable

Human: I don't understand yet

Obsessive

Expert: Interested in: I don't understand yet

Repetitive

Human: Anxious: I don't understand yet

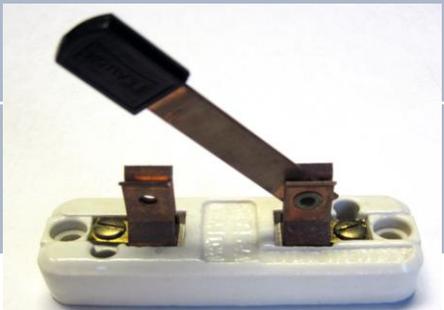
Ritualistic

Human: Anxious: Quirky: I don't understand yet

Disorder

Difference - BUT

Other?



# Deep understanding

Sociology

‘Verstehen’

- Deep understanding of the lived experience of the other-  
‘seeing around the corner’
- Narrative and Culture

Weber

Psychology

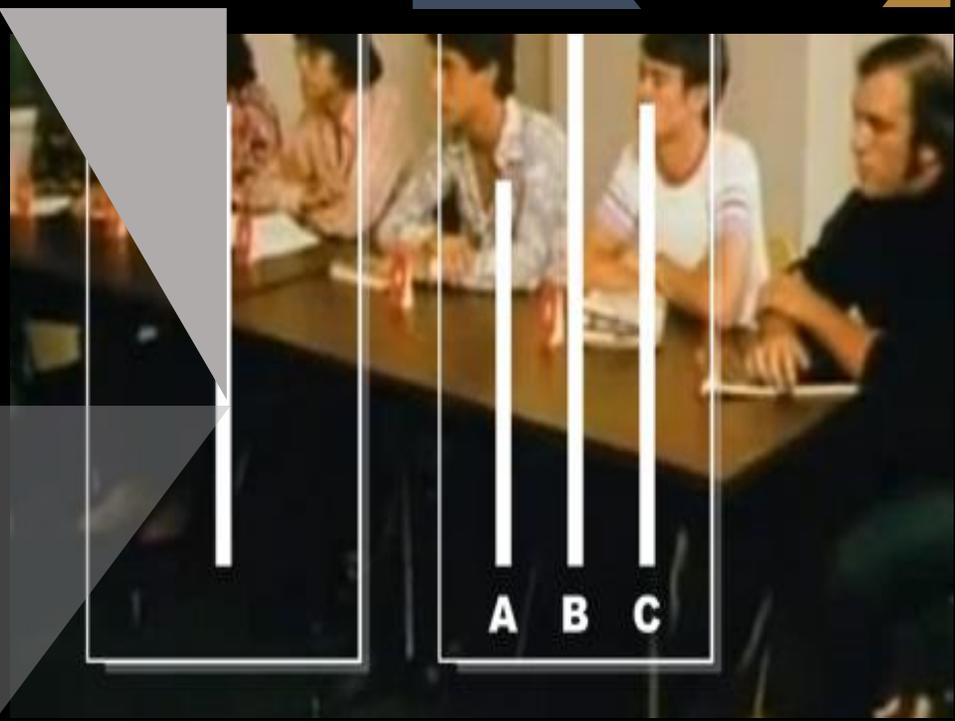
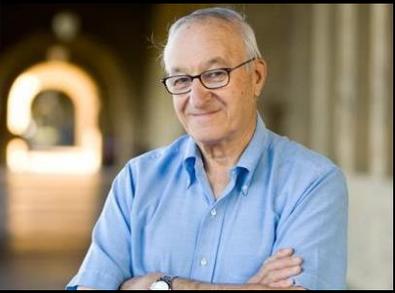
Therapeutic relationship

- Unconditional positive regard
- Active listening

Rogers



# Learning theory



- Relevance of role models
- Understanding individual v group behaviour e.g. compliance, conformity, coercion and obedience

Bandura; Zimbardo; Asch; Milgram

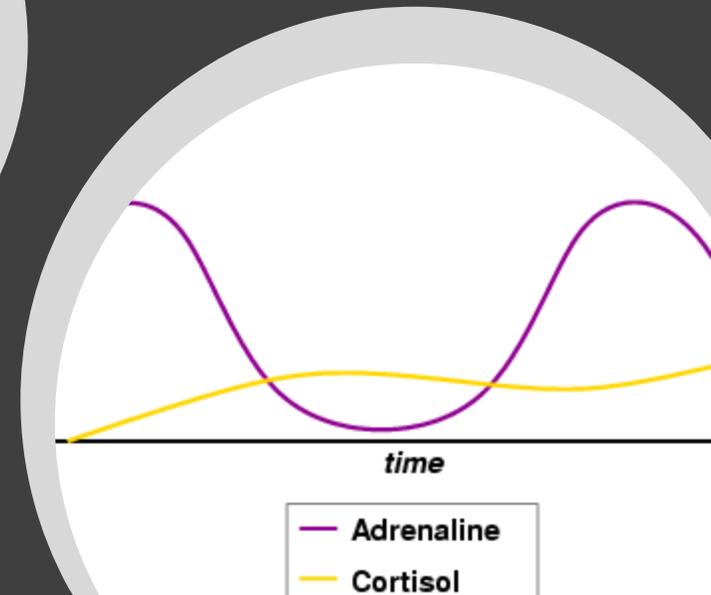
# Understanding stress

## Physiology

- Cortisol and stress response
  - Arousal
  - Brain development
  - Behaviour

Pfaff et al

McDonnell et al

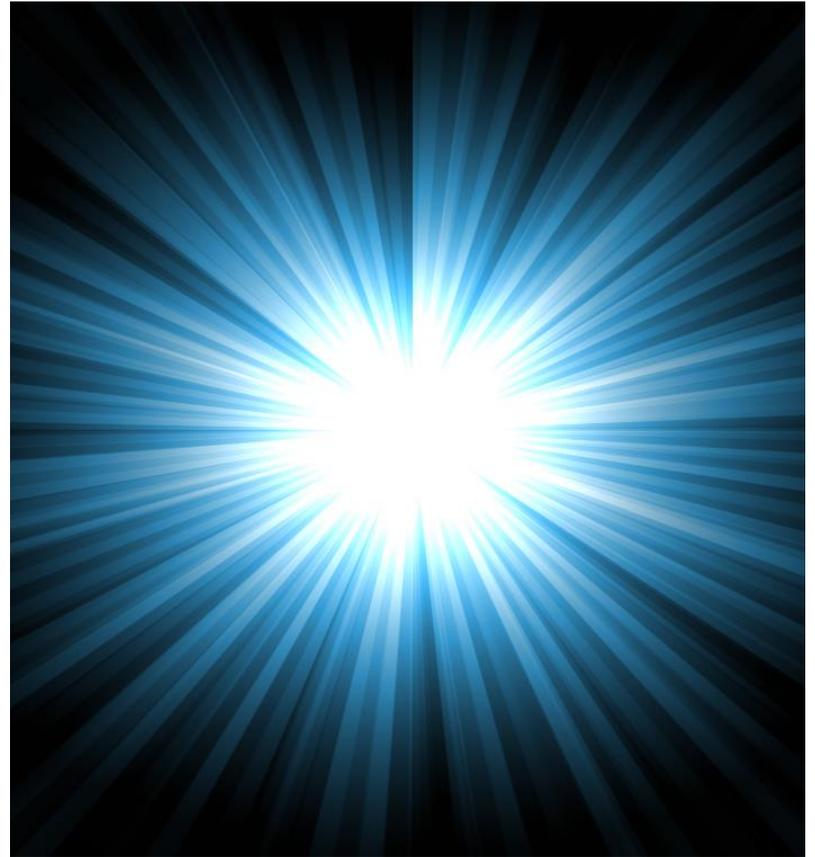
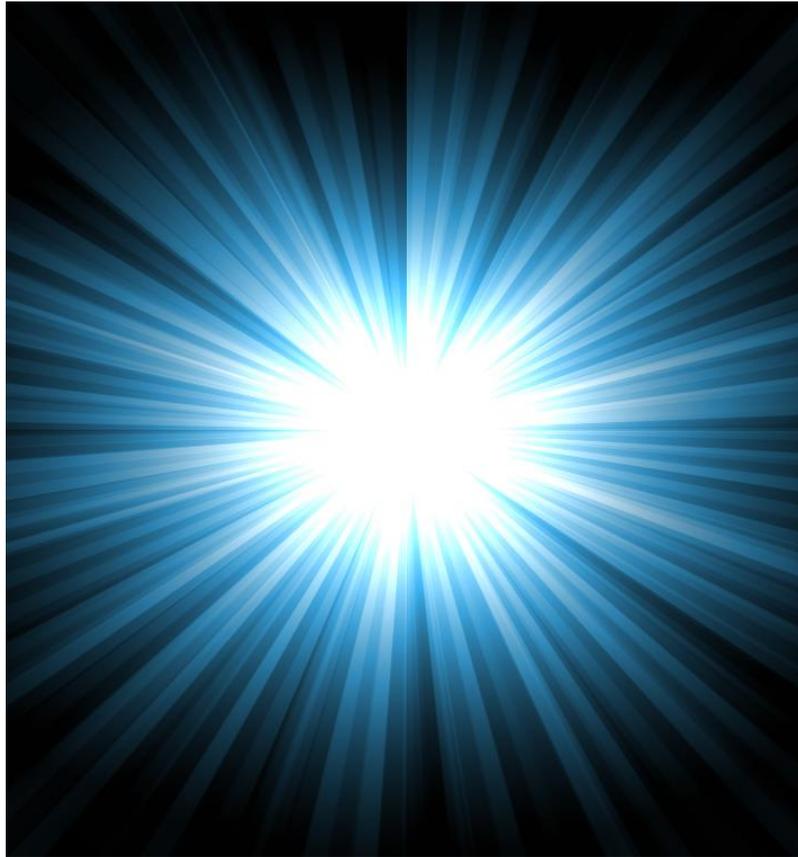


# Making a plan

System 1 to system 2

- Reducing stress through planning AND rehearsal
- Preparation ,reflection and TIME to (examine impressions) understand- self and others (Verstehen)
- Rehearse

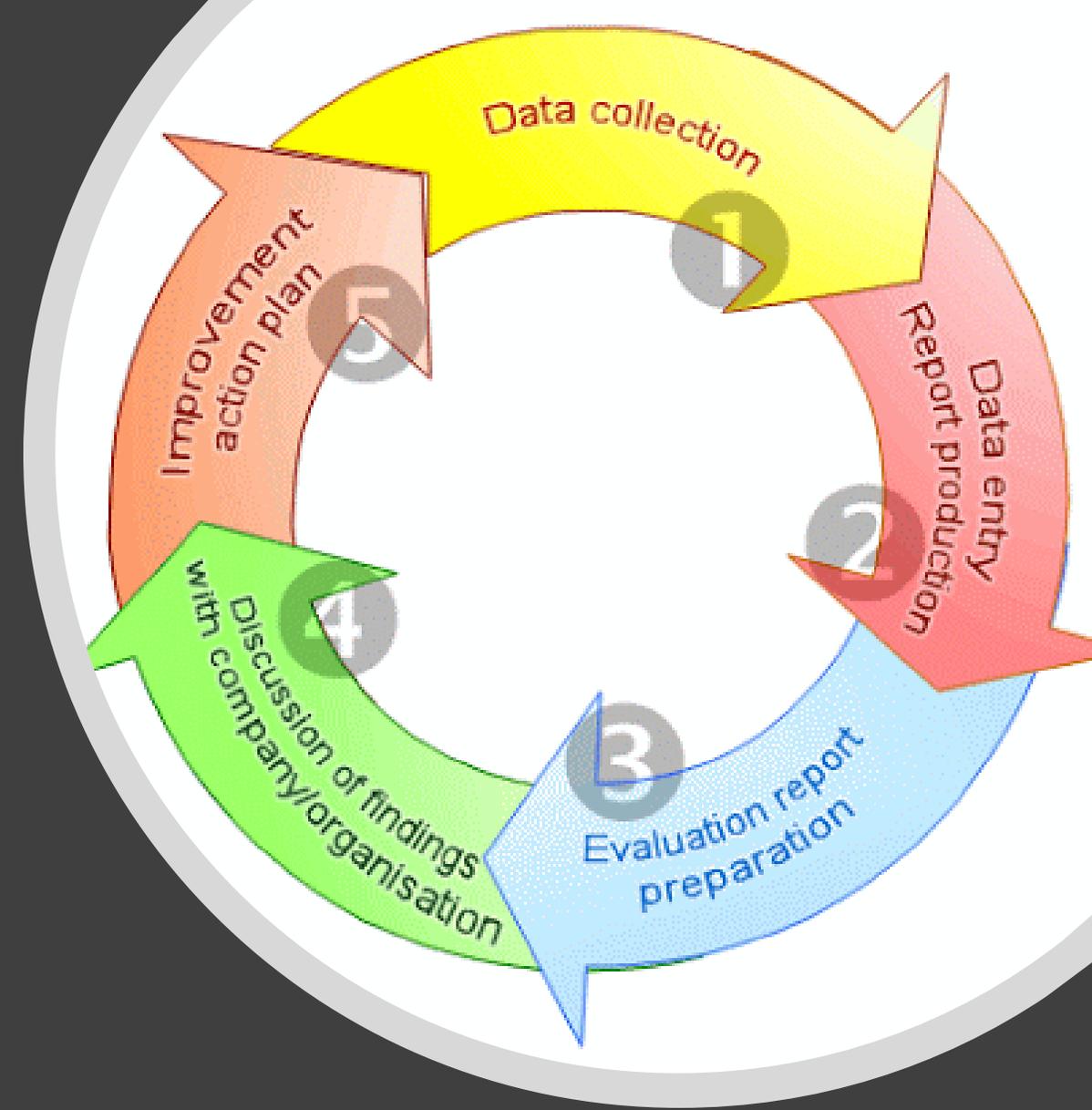




system 1 to  
system 2

# Evaluation

- Synergy is undergoing evaluation by University of Athens and University of Peloponnese



# Attica

- Attica schools
- 34 in programme - all age
- To date no child excluded from a participating school



# Attica

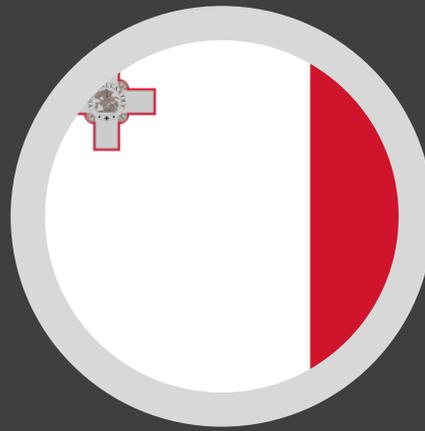
*"There is greater activation in our strategic thought processes. We now rely more on planning and less on spontaneous and impulsive action. Through Synergy we have gained a deep understanding of the "other" and the "self", and how we can empower others (teachers) through showing respect and cultivating abilities and skill sets."*

Tzonaka Josephina, Synergy Mentor



# Synergy status

- CPD accredited
- Undergoing evaluation (ongoing)
- Rolled out internationally –UK, Singapore, Australia, Malta, Greece
- Context for further in-depth work – e.g. Crisis management, sexuality, homelessness, forensic settings, Elderly persons
- University of Bath: University of New England NSW: Australia



# Structure of Synergy

## Seminar

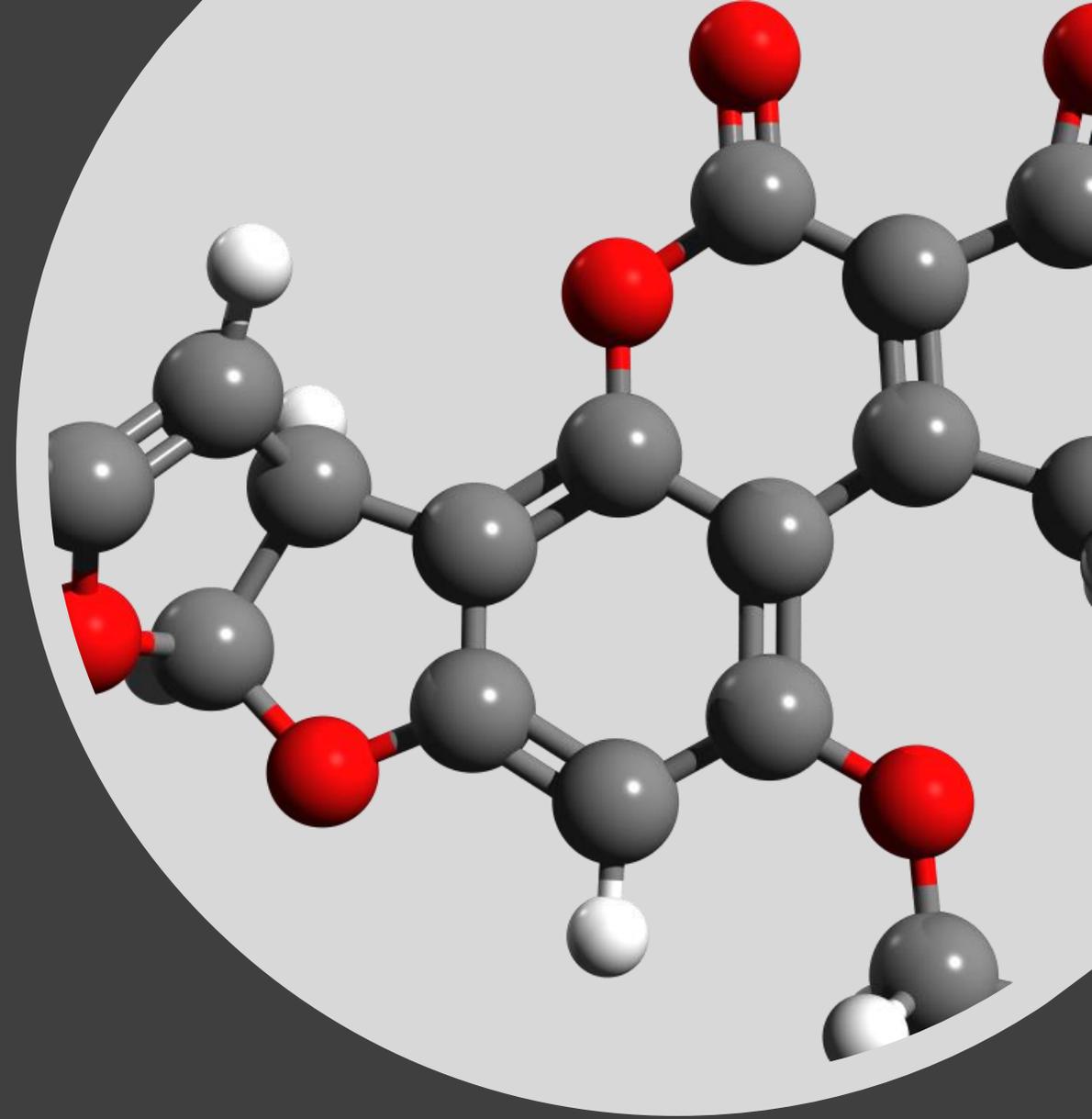
- Introduction: 2 hours
- Principles and description

## Practice workshop 6 hours (CPD)

- Principles and application
- Impact of mind-set and narrative – change strategies

## Mentor workshop 6 hours (CPD)

- Principles and techniques of mentoring and application



# Henry James

*“Three things in life are important, the first is to be kind, the second is to be kind and the third is to be kind”*



# Take home points

- *if WE change the way WE think*
- *If WE change the story*
- *If WE change our behaviour*
- *WE might change the outcome*
- *WE need help to do this*



With thanks to

*Katerina Laskaridou*

*Michael McCreadie*

*Linda Woodcock*

Synergy mentors at

AIKATERINI LASKARIDIS FOUNDATION

Piraeus, Greece

THANK YOU

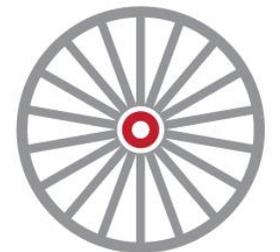
[richardmills@atautism.org](mailto:richardmills@atautism.org)

[www.atautism.org](http://www.atautism.org)

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