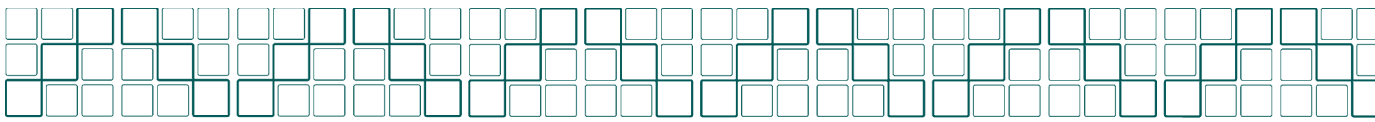


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# Strategies for Supporting Graduate Student Wellness

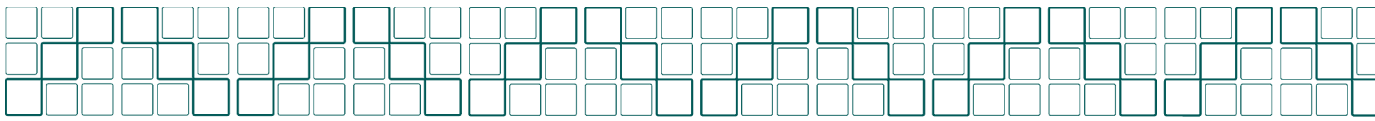
CGS, Pre-meeting workshop  
December 3, 2025





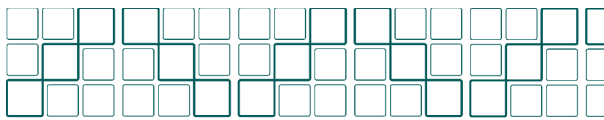
# Learning Objectives

- Articulate stressors facing graduate students at your institution
- Explore proactive strategies to promote well-being on your campus
- Assess your own well-being and explore how your views of well-being and mental health influence your work
- Consider resources available on your campus and beyond
- Share with colleagues in group activities and beyond the workshop



# Speakers

1. Dr. Sharon Milgram, Director, Office of Intramural Training and Education, National Institutes of Health Office of the Director
2. Dr. Terri Ann Camisano, Dean of Graduate Studies, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
3. Dr. Jocelyn DeJong, Director, Graduate Council and Associate Provost American University of Beirut



#News

# Mental Health Crisis for Grad Students

Study finds "strikingly high" rates of depression and anxiety, with many reporting little help or support from supervisors.

By [Colleen Flaherty](#) // March 6, 2018

72 COMMENTS

**CBE—Life Sciences Education, Vol. 18, No. 2 | Article**

Free Access

## Burnout and Mental Health Problems in Biomedical Doctoral Students

Gabriela A. Nagy, Caitlin M. Fang, Alexander J. Hish, Lisalynn Kelly, Christopher V. Nicchitta, Kafui Dzirasa, and M. Zachary Rosenthal

Diane K. O'Dowd, Monitoring Editor

Published Online: 31 May 2019 | <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.18-09-0198>

## Researchers facing 'shocking' levels of stress, survey reveals

**Nearly two thirds of those who took part had witnessed bullying or harassment**

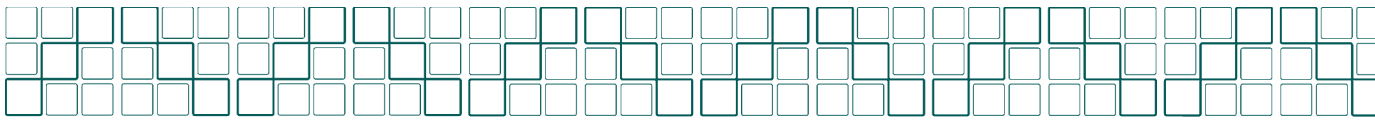
Comment | [Published: 10 July 2020](#)

## Addressing racism and disparities in the biomedical sciences

[Uraina S. Clark](#) & [Yasmin L. Hurd](#)

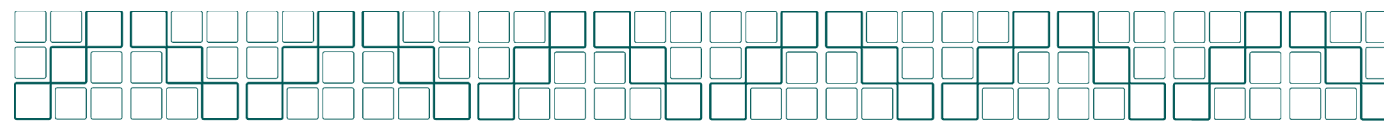
*Nature Human Behaviour* **4**, 774–777(2020) | [Cite this article](#)

**8467** Accesses | **7** Citations | **195** Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

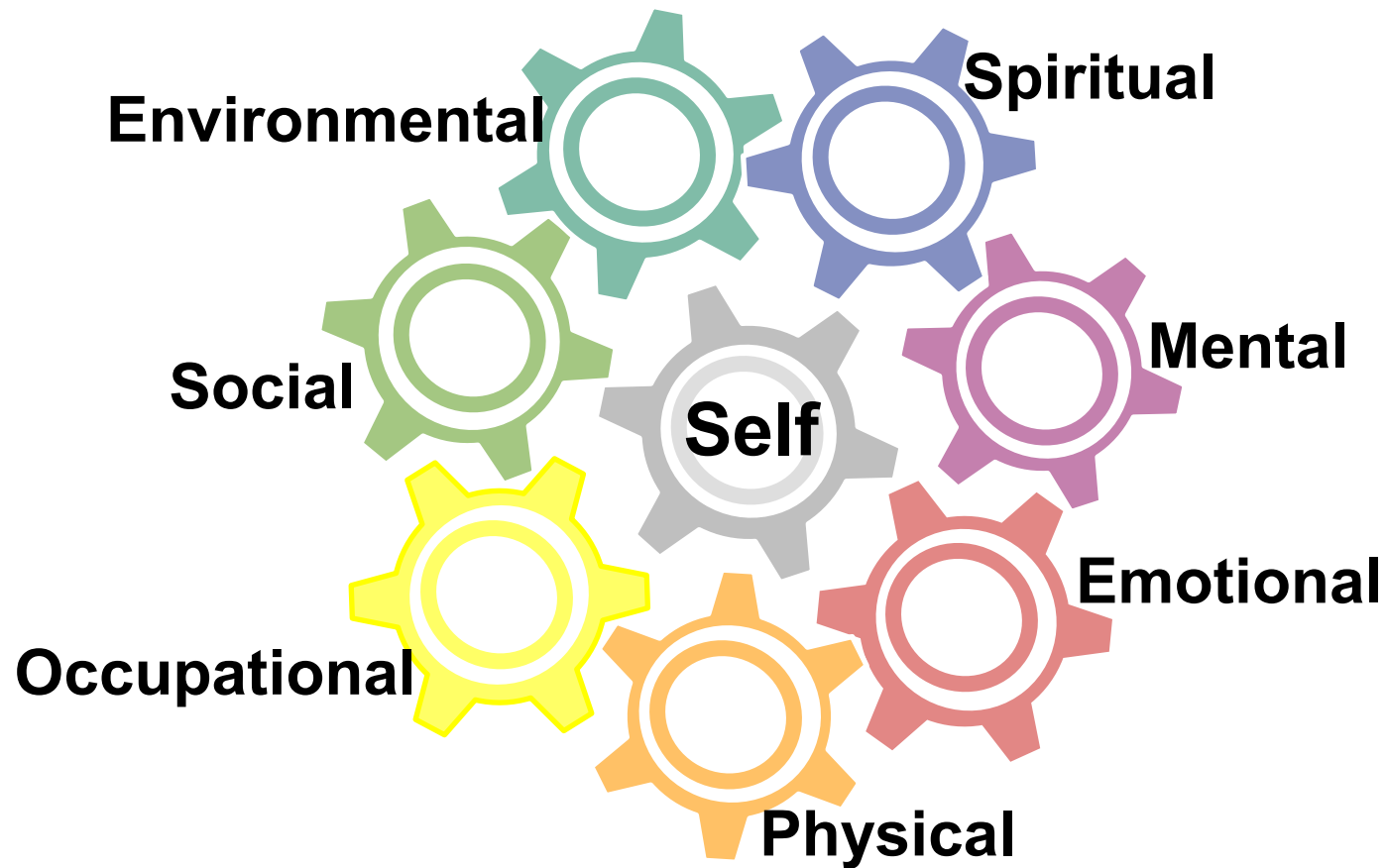


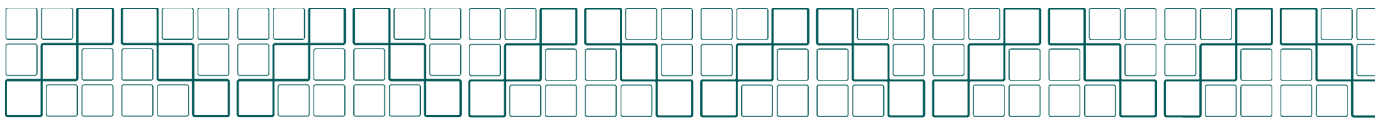
# Some Truths

- To do well, we have to be well.....
- To treat others well, we have to be well ourselves...
- To help others be well, we must work to be well ourselves



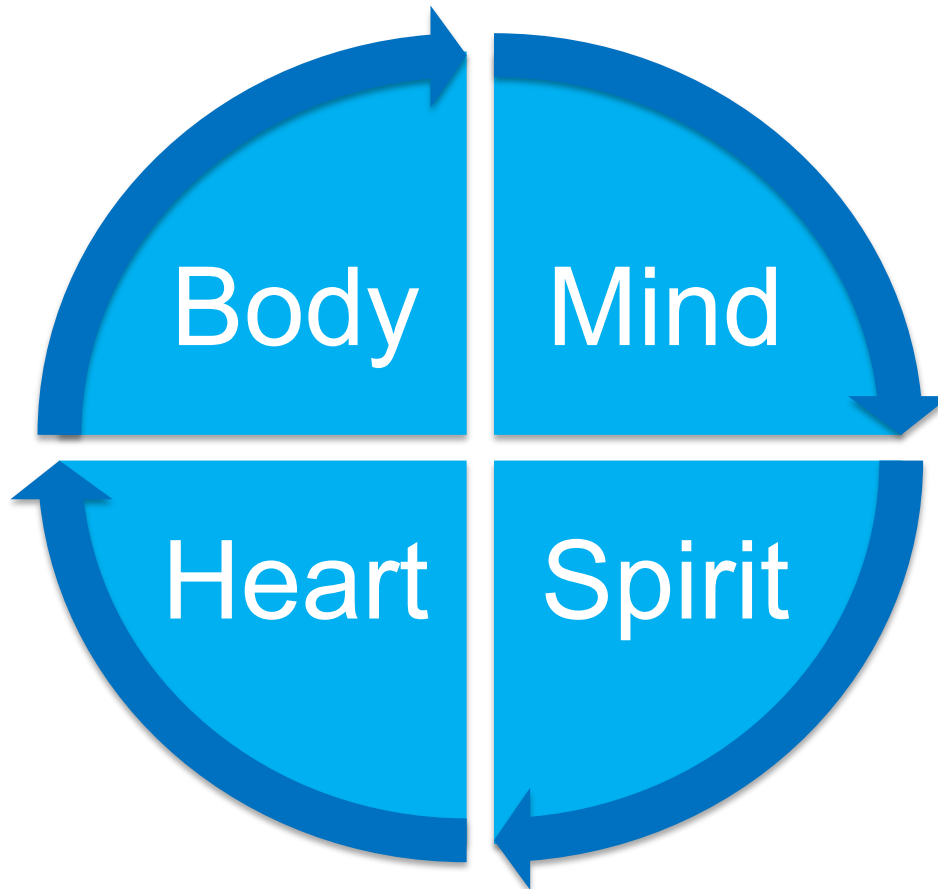
# Interlocking Dimensions of Well-Being



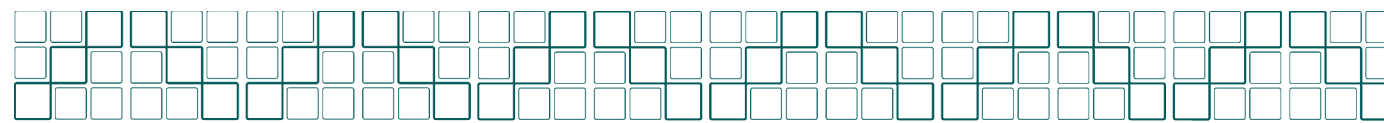


# OITE Well-Being Model

- The things we do, and don't do, to maintain our....



- Wellness is a foundation of resilience.
- Resilience is required for educational, science and career success

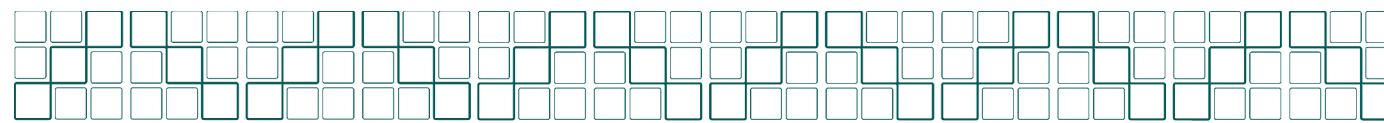


# Wellness Assessment - Body

**Never 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Always**

- I do my best to...
  - ☐ get enough sleep (7-9 hours)
  - ☐ eat balanced, nutritious meals
  - ☐ avoid excessive use of caffeine
  - ☐ avoid excessive use of alcohol and other drugs of abuse
  - ☐ get regular exercise (at least 3 times a week)
  - ☐ get regular health care for myself
  - ☐ take care of myself when I am sick, need rest, or just need a break

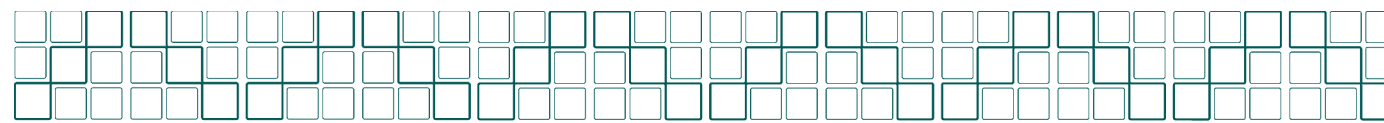




# Wellness Assessment - Mind

**Never 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Always**

- I do my best to...
  - ☐ avoid getting caught up in perfectionism
  - ☐ focus on the present vs. rehashing the past or worrying about the future
  - ☐ avoid negative or deceptive self-talk
  - ☐ practice self-affirmations and [realistic] positive self-talk
  - ☐ avoid judging myself compared to others
  - ☐ allow myself the time explore and learn about new things
- I am open to counseling as a tool to maintain and improve my health and wellbeing

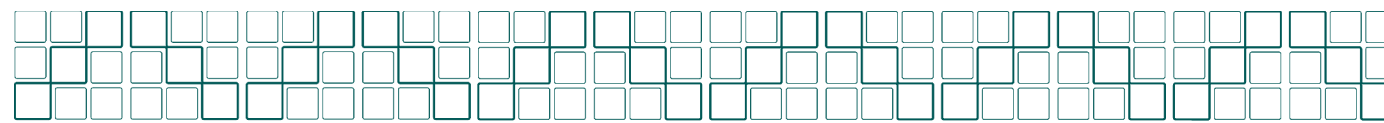


# Wellness Assessment - Heart

**Never 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Always**

■ I do my best to...

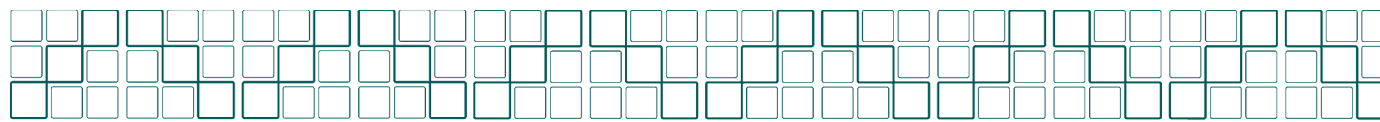
- ☐ be open to and let myself feel all my emotions
- ☐ reach out to others for support when I need it
- ☐ communicate my needs and feelings directly and honestly
- ☐ prioritize spending time with my friends and 'family'
- ☐ allow myself the time to engage in activities that are fun and relaxing
- ☐ avoid extreme use of my phone (and other electronic devices) as a coping tool/ avoidance strategy
- ☐ demonstrate compassion for myself and others



# Wellness Assessment - Spirit

**Never 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Always**

- I feel connected to something that is bigger than me – however I define that, by...
  - ☐ seeking out resources (practices, activities, people, places) that nurture me spiritually
  - ☐ reflecting on and invest in what is meaningful to me
  - ☐ Reading writings or watching media that inspire me
  - ☐ thinking of and caring about the lives of others who are different than me
  - ☐ allow myself time to just be (human *being* vs. human *doing*)
- I engage in activities that support my life's purpose



# A Moment For...

Self-reflection -- self-compassion -- realistic goal setting

Share:

- Something(s) that resonated for you
- Something(s) that poked at you or made you uncomfortable
- Something(s) you would like to explore more (for yourself or for your students)
- Thoughts on how you might use an exercise like this with your students

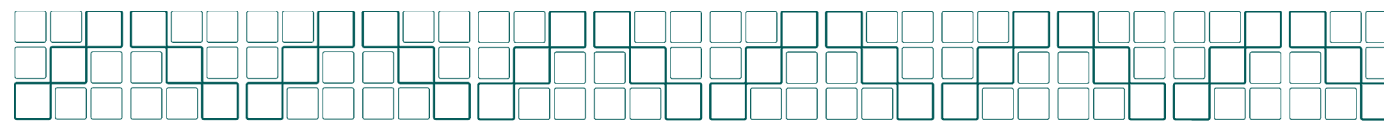
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# Strategies for Supporting the Well-Being of NIH Intramural Trainees

Dr. Sharon L. Milgram, Director NIH OITE  
Sharon.milgram@nih.gov // [www.training.nih.gov](http://www.training.nih.gov)

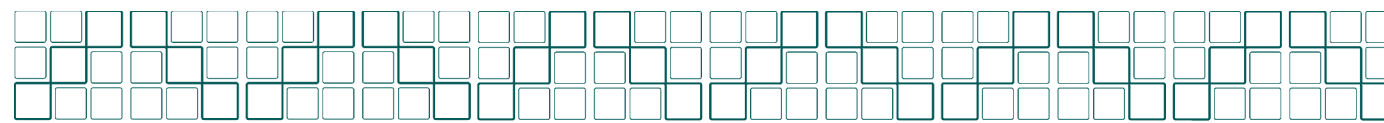


**Council of Graduate Schools, 2025 Pre-meeting workshop**



# This Is a Difficult System

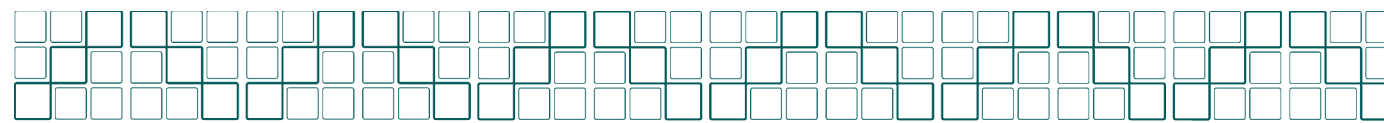
- High knowledge, high intensity, high stress
- Failure, criticism and disappointment day-in and day-out
- Problem before people
- Publish or perish
- The cream rises to the top (they only want the cream)
- Good scientists think about science all of the time
- Set up with only some people in mind
- Have to choose between me as a person and me as an academic
- Shared and unique stressors, for individuals and institutions



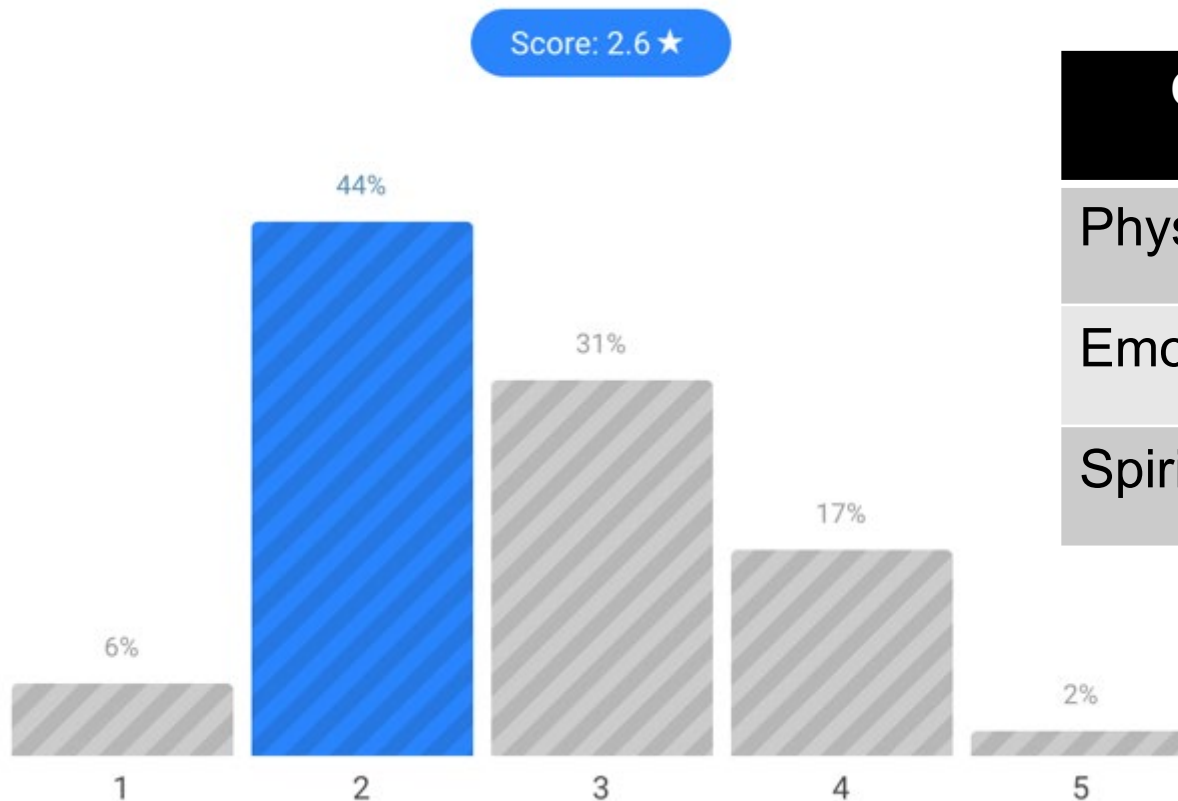
# That Makes It Hard To Seek Help

What are some of the barriers that keep you from using potentially helpful resources? (%)

N=334	% of responses
Fear/Shame	44.9%
No time	12.9%
Lack resources or knowledge	8.7%
Too exhausted/defeated	8.4%
Feel the need to handle by self	6.9%
Negative self-talk	5.7%
Other (e.g., Mentor)	4.5%
Denial of the problem	3.3%
Stereotypes/cultural differences	1.8%
Mental health conditions (ADHD, PTSD, etc)	1.8%
Bad previous experience	1.2%



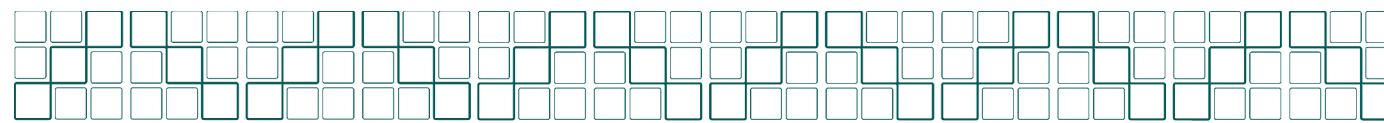
# Our Trainees Are Struggling To Take Care Of Themselves (Mental Health Domain)



Other Domains of Wellness	
Physical	3.3
Emotional	3.0
Spiritual	3.2

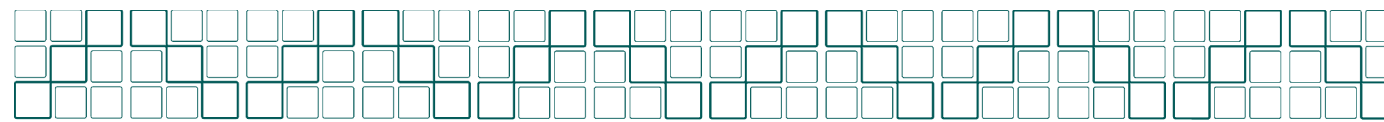
\*Similar responses from HS sample on Mental Wellness:  
N= 30, 2.6





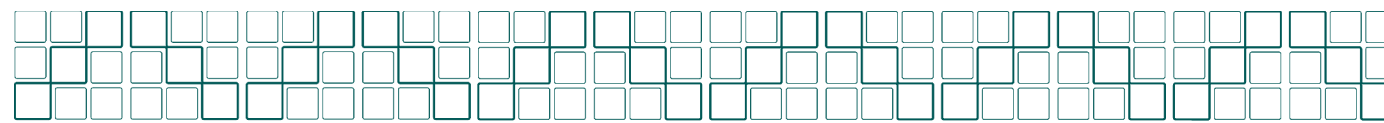
# Change Takes An Integrated Approach

- Individual self-reflection, learning and change
- Group reflection and learning leading to the development of new policies and community agreements to drive culture change
- Support for change at all levels and by all stake-holders
- At NIH, we sought to build a culture of well-being based on..
  - the agreement that time for well-being is a right - *not an extra* - and not something that detracts from your worth as a scientist
  - a common language and set of models that resonate broadly in our community



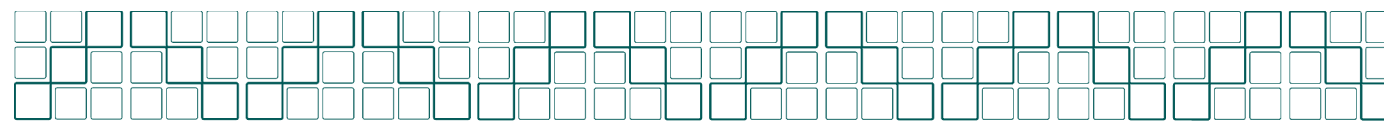
# If Money Were Not An Issue....

What would a top-notch well-being/resilience program for biomedical scientists look like?



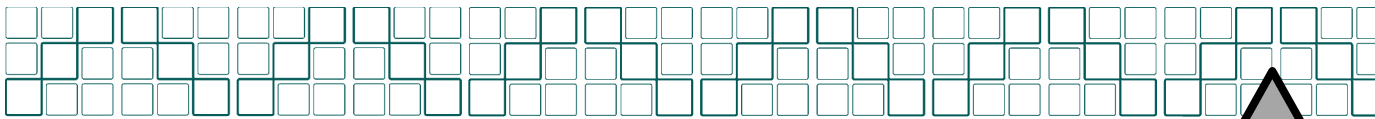
# A Top-Notch Program Would....

- Be designed specifically for the community and account for different lived experiences, needs, and views of well-being
- Have multiple entry points to reduces barriers to access
- Provide training for all stakeholders
  - Regular and on-going -- not a week, event or day
  - Sharing similar information in relevant ways
- Put well-being into the broader context of the work we do
- Have a consistent set of messages and micro-messages
- Provide three types of programs
  - Overviews (a basic took-kits)
  - Extenders (go deeper in areas relevant to you)
  - Refreshers (pause for a reminder)

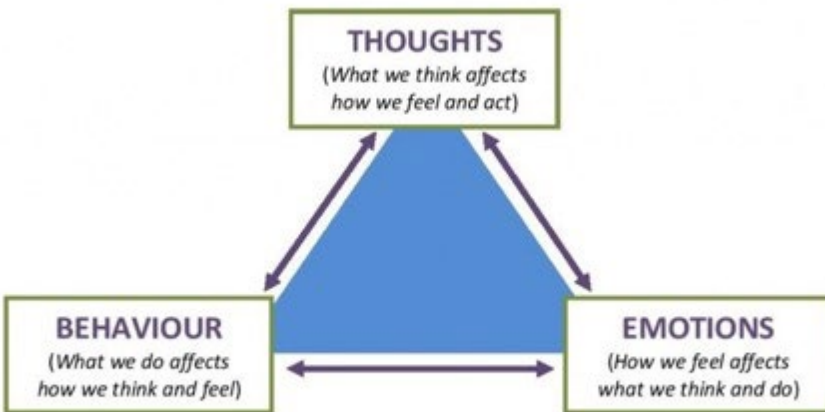


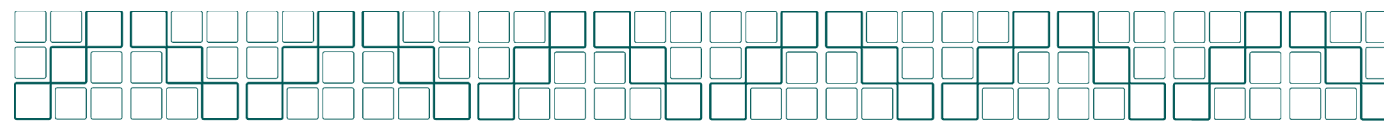
# The Resilient Scientist Model

- Decrease stigma and shame
- Articulate common models and provide a shared language
- Teach strategies - offer many, encourage curiosity, and acknowledge individuality
- Provide a forum for discussion
- Expand access on-line, through a workbook, and facilitator guides
- Assess and modify on an on-going basis



# Becoming a Resilient Scientist

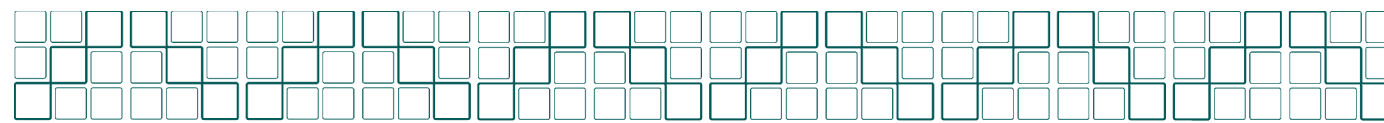




# Raising a Resilient Scientist Series

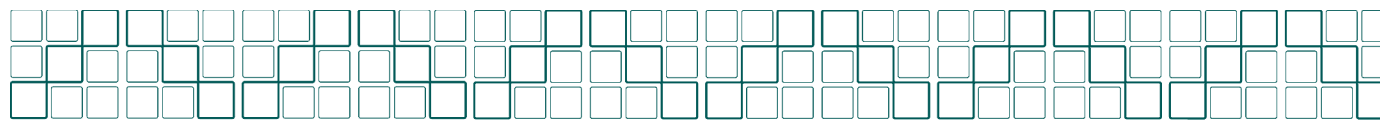
- Psychological safety and empathic communication
- Promoting individual and group resilience
- Cultivating belonging and supporting diverse students
- High-stakes conversations and feedback
- Trainee health, mental health, and well-being

<https://www.training.nih.gov/raising-a-resilient-scientist/>



# What I Mean By Refreshers and Extenders

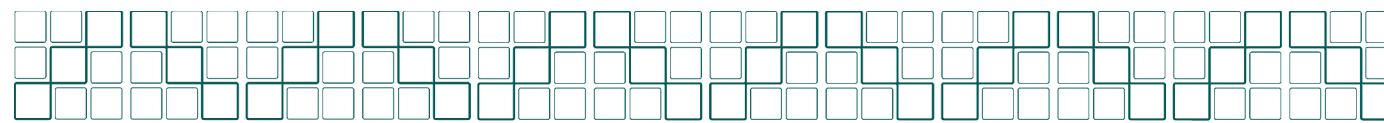
- Refreshers are reminders
  - Mini-units on stress management and well-being embedded into other programs; e.g. career, communication, mentoring, and pedagogy workshops, etc.
- Extenders are a deeper dive
  - Drop-in discussion groups focused on specific issues or targeting specific communities
  - Resilience skills groups, taking concepts from the Resilient Scientist Series and drilling down
  - Seminar series: Mental Health and Well-Being of Scientists



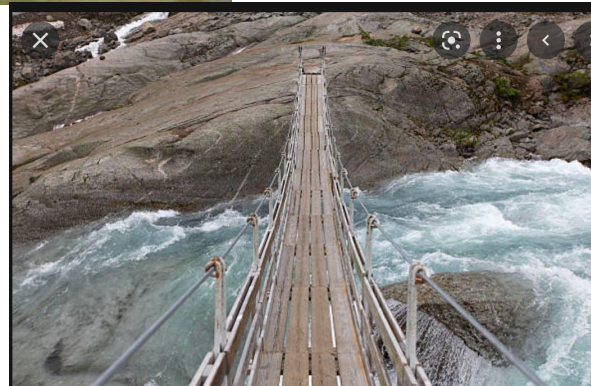
# Lessons Learned

- It takes time and frustration tolerance to gain traction
- People come when they come... but we make it easier for them to come and harder for them to avoid us
- It takes constant messaging from people who matter
- Strong student groups do some of the work (with caveats)
- This work makes it much easier to support students when there are [mental] health concerns and crises
  - Often known to us in advance
  - Faculty and peers are more aware and proactive
  - There is a ready infrastructure

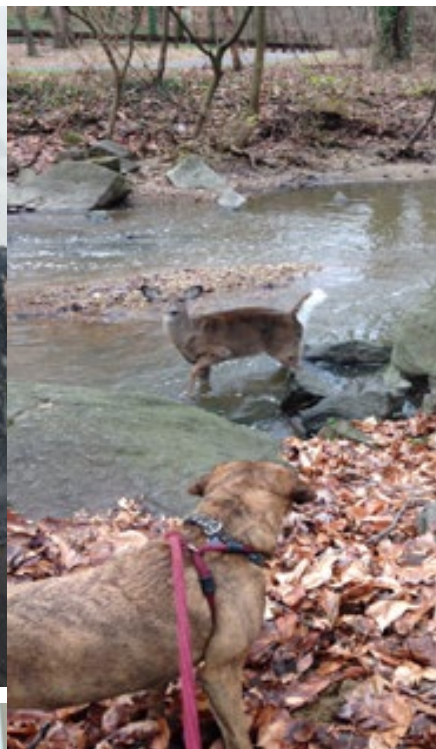


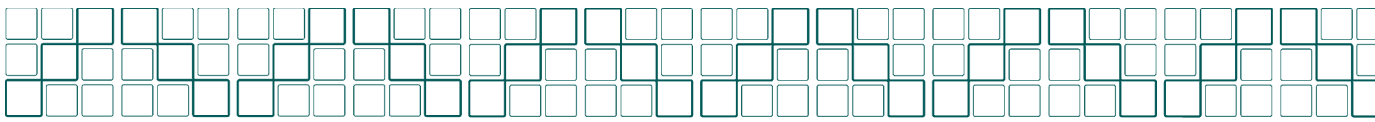


# Our Common Language









# OITE Resources

- Mental health train-the-trainer, July 2026
- You Tube channel for resources in many areas

## **Becoming a Resilient Scientist (Seminar Series)** ▶ Play all

These videos were recorded during the Fall 2024 Becoming a Resilient Scientist (BRS) Seminar Series, put on annually by the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Office of Intramural Training an...

## **Mental Health & Well-Being of Biomedical Researchers Series** ▶ Play all

This playlist contains videos from the "Mental Health & Well-Being of Biomedical Researchers" Seminar Series, spanning multiple years from 2020 through 2024. This series is run annually by th...

Work in this arena is dedicated to my students who struggle(d) and especially to those who lost so much in the struggle