

MOVEMENT for Mental Health

Using movement as a tool to support our body and mind

Nourished You
COUNSELLING & WELLNESS



Land Acknowledgement

Today, I respectfully acknowledge that we are gathered on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded lands of the Okanagan Nation and syilx peoples.





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*What comes to mind when
you hear ...*

Movement for Mental Health?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Share with your table!

What is mental health?

It affects how we think, feel, act, handle stress, and connect with others.

EMOTIONAL

emotions, feeling, regulation

PSYCHOLOGICAL

thoughts, belief, self-concept

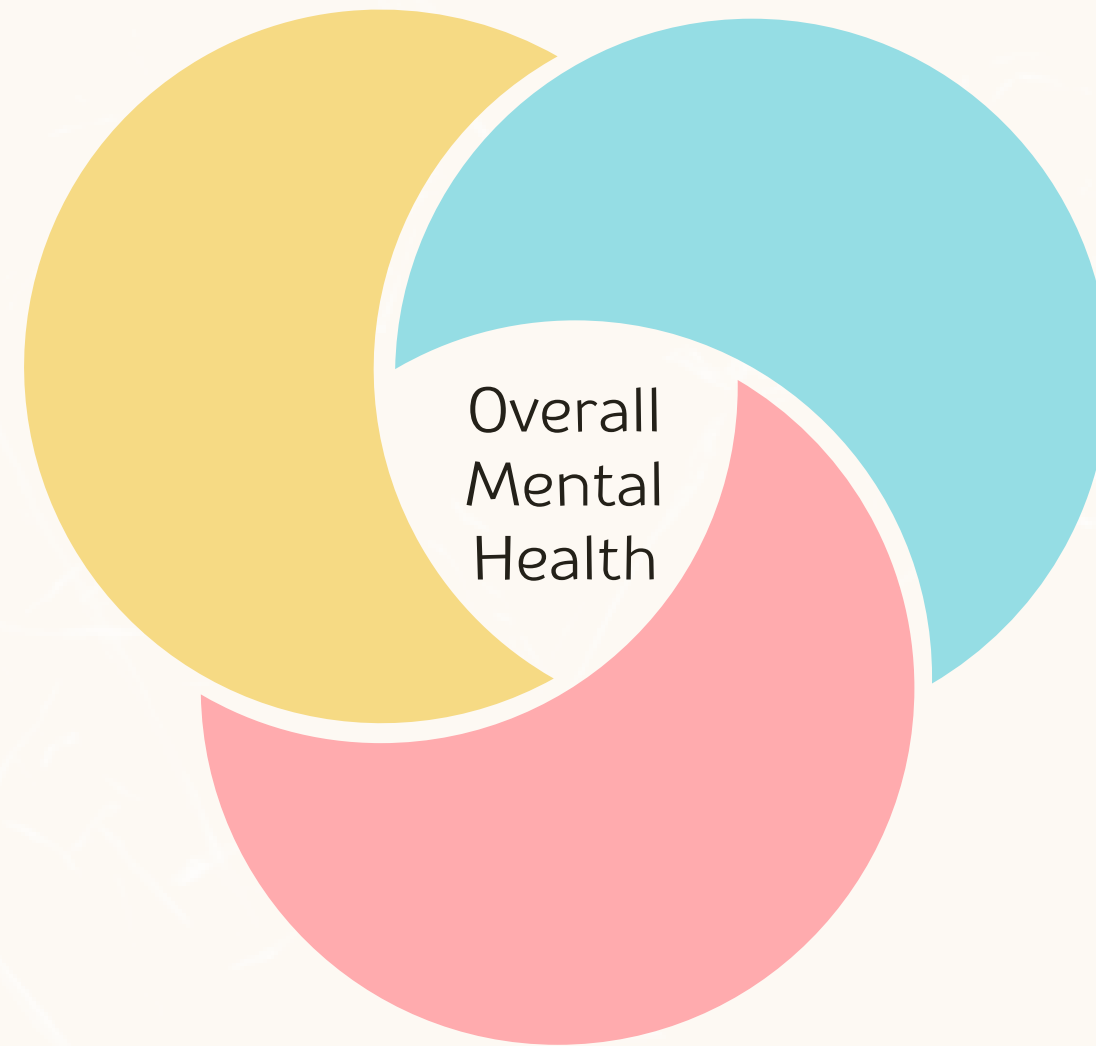
SOCIAL

relationships, attachment, connection

Why Mental Health Matters

Quality of Daily Life

independence,
decision-making
purpose



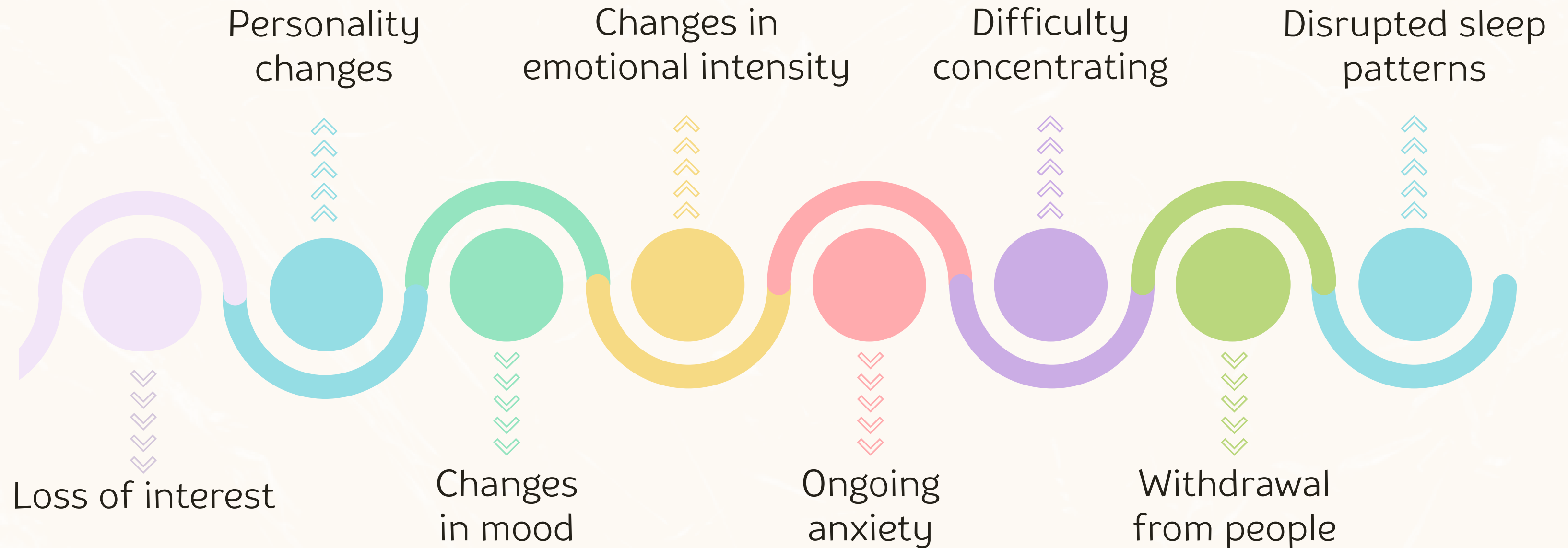
Personal Experience

emotions, stress
management,
well-being, coping

Relationships

communication, empathy,
belonging,

Warning Signs of Mental Health Challenges



Factors Influencing MENTAL HEALTH

Events
trauma, loss

Social
societal pressure,
loss of relationships

Behavioral
habits, lifestyle,
behaviors

Biological
genetics, hormones
nervous system

Environmental
upbringing, home
environment

What is movement?

Movement is our physical expression of well-being, supporting how our body and mind functions, feels, and connects.

FUNCTIONAL

how the body moves

EXPERIENTIAL (SOMATIC)

how the body feels

RELATIONAL

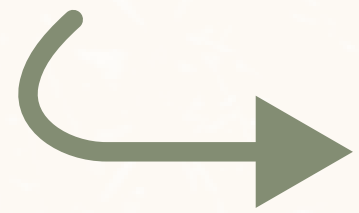
connection to body, space, and others

What are benefits to
Moving our Body?

GROUP DISCUSSION

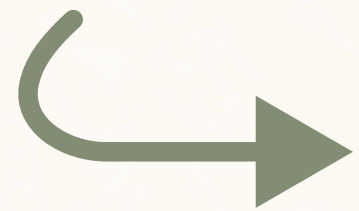
Share with your table!

Physical benefits of EXERCISE



- Build physical strength and endurance
- Supports injury prevention
- Improves metabolic function and heart health
- Promotes physical independence over time

Mental & Emotional benefits of EXERCISE



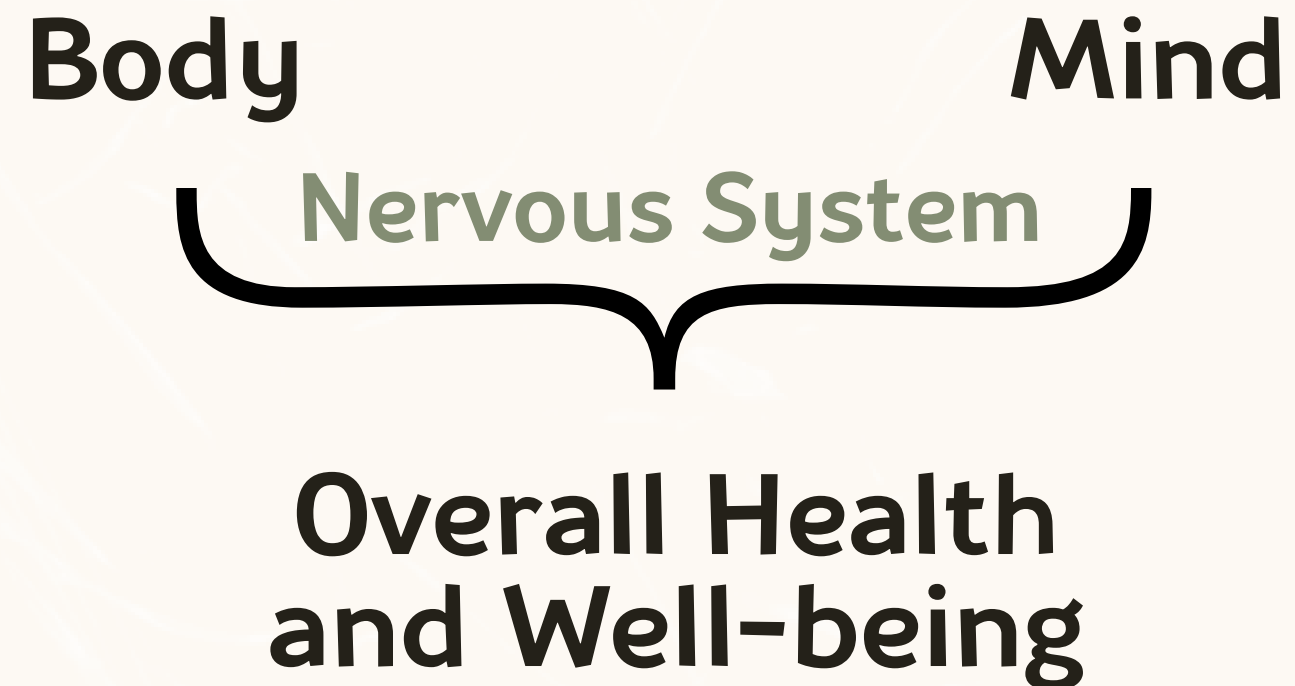
- Releases endorphins (happy hormone)
- Boost mood
- Supports relaxation
- Enhances focus and mental clarity
- Lowers stress hormones
- Stress tolerance and emotional resilience

Movement for MENTAL HEALTH

- Intentional movement and exercise supports **nervous system regulation**
- Movement supports **stress resilience and emotional processing**
- Movement can help the **body move out of survival mode** and return to safety and calm

The Mind-Body Connection

- How we *think and feel* affects the body
- What *happens in the body* affects the mind



The Nervous System

The **Nervous System** is the body's main control center and the bridge between the mind and the body

- Processing information from the body, brain and environment
- Sending signals that guide thoughts, emotions, and behaviors
- Making sense of what's happening
- Scans for danger or threat

Two branches of the AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Autonomic Nervous System (automatic and involuntary)

- Controls heart rate, breathing, digestion, stress response

Sympathetic Nervous System

→ activates the body's stress response (fight, flight, freeze)

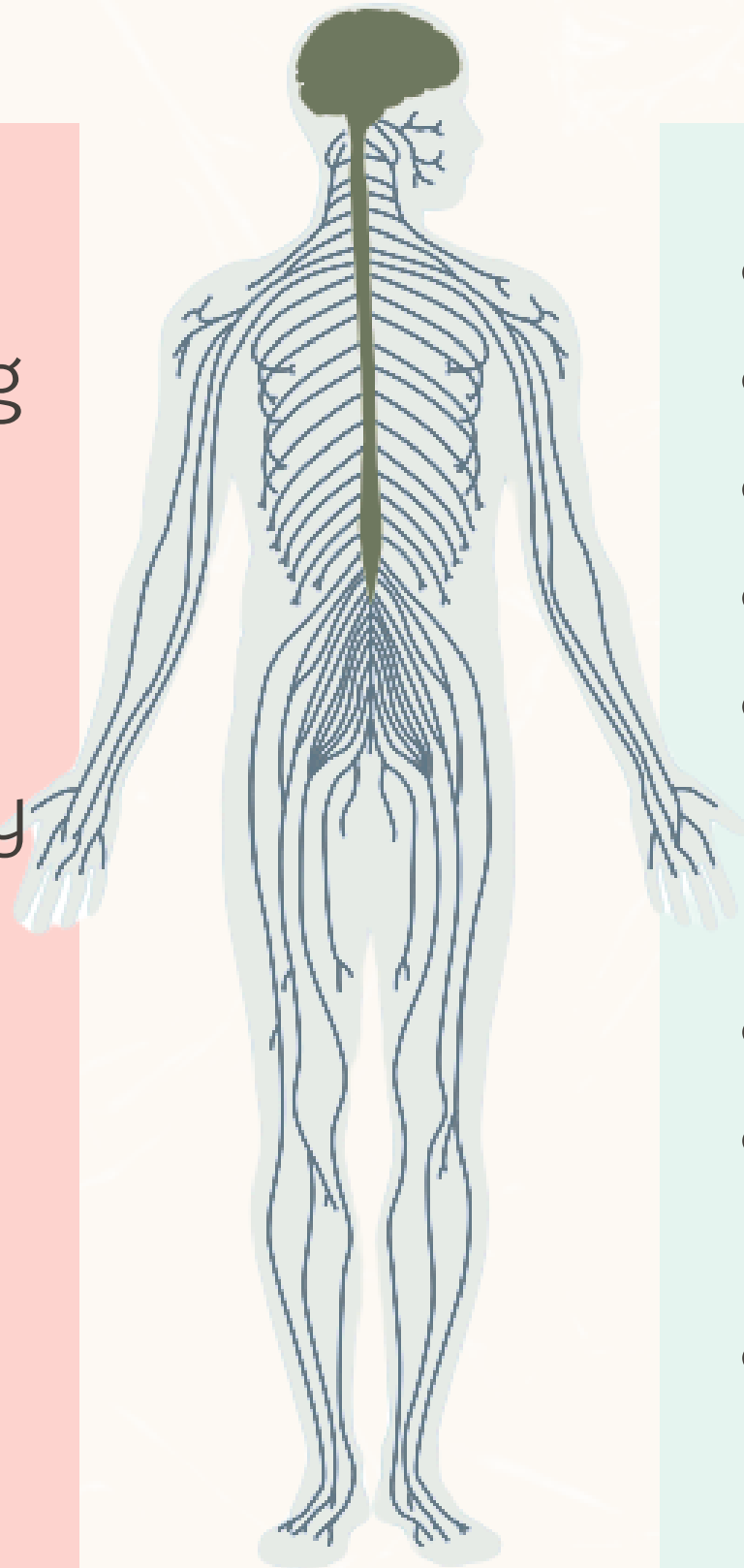
Parasympathetic Nervous System

→ supports rest, digestion, and recovery

Sympathetic

Fight, Flight, or Freeze

- Stress Response
- Increased HR, BP, breathing
- Blood flow is redirected to larger muscles groups
- Increased stress hormone
- Reduced cognitive flexibility and logical reasoning
- Thinking is rigid
- Heightened reactivity & alertness
- Emotions are less tolerable
- Survival mode activated



Parasympathetic

Rest & Digest

- Activates Rest & Digest
- Decreased HR, BP, breathing
- Blood flow to brain & organs
- Decreased stress hormone
- Improved cognitive function, logical reasoning and decision-making
- Thinking is more flexible
- Greater emotional regulation and capacity
- Increased sense of safety and physiological calm

The Stress Response

Your body's built-in alarm system

- Activates the Sympathetic Nervous System when something feels threatening or dangerous
- Prepares the body for action (fight, flight or freeze)
- Shifts the body into survival mode
- It's protective

What are some
Stressors in your life?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Share with your table!

The Stress Response

The brain and the body scans for anything that feels threatening, or **overwhelming, unpredictable, unsafe and emotionally significant**

Because of this, many daily life stressors can trigger the stress response.

- Conflict or criticism
- Pressure, urgency, or overwhelm
- Uncertainty, fear and other emotions
- Past experiences that felt unsafe
- Loss, grief, change or big shifts in identity

Stress Is Different for Everyone

- Genetics and life experience
- Some people are more sensitive to danger
- One person's stressor or threat may not be experienced the same way by another person

What is true for everyone!

- We are all born with a **nervous system that's hardwired for stress**

Modern Day Stressors

- It's normal and good for our bodies to respond to a stressor
- But, when stress is **persistent** and when where we're not able to run away (flight) or take action (fight), we can get stuck
- Removing the stressor (the threat) doesn't always mean your body **feels safe**

The body can stay activated and locked in the stress response.

When We're Stuck in Stress Mode

- Logical thinking brain is **less active**
- **Emotions feel more intense** and harder to manage
- Capacity **narrows** and there's less room to sit with discomfort

The nervous system becomes dysregulated

dysregulated nervous system

Emotional overwhelm
or numbness

Rigid, reactive, or
negative thinking

Difficulty concentrating
or staying present

Feeling anxious, on
edge or shutdown

Withdrawal from others or
difficulty connecting



regulated nervous system

Emotional stability and
emotional processing

Flexible thinking and
problem-solving

Ability to stay
present and focused

Feeling calm, safe,
and grounded

Capacity for connection
and healthy relationships

Decreased Emotional Capacity

- We have less capacity to pause, reflect, or respond thoughtfully
- Reactions can feel quicker or bigger — a “shorter fuse”
- We may say or do things we later regret

When the nervous system stays in survival mode,
emotional well-being can suffer

*Think of a time when
you felt like your emotion or
reaction was bigger and bolder
than you wanted it to be*

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Movement & Regulation

Movement helps the body shift out of stress mode and dysregulation

- Releases built-up tension
- Regulates and calm the nervous system
- Supports emotional regulation
- Increases our tolerate stress day to day

Movement can help us shift back into our **parasympathetic state**



Movement & Emotions

Movement shifts the body out of the stress response and into regulation, increasing our capacity to feel, process, and release emotions.

Support the body → support the mind

Bottom-Up Regulation

→ body first

Starts with the body, not the thoughts

Focuses on calming the body and regulating the nervous system through movement

Turns the logical thinking brain back online

Creates conditions for cognitive processing and top-down regulation

Top-Down Regulation

→ mind-led strategies second

Uses cognitive and emotional processing techniques

Becomes more accessible once the body is regulated

Logical thinking brain online

Regular Movement & Mental Health

- Reduces stress and emotional overwhelm
- Improves mood and emotional well-being
- Enhances cognitive function and clarity
- Strengthens connection to the body and self



What Kind of Movement *should we do?*

GROUP DISCUSSION

Share with your table!

What Kind of Movement Should I Do

- Focus on how it feels, not what it is
- Supports regulation — not stress or overwhelm
- Enjoyable, flexible, and accessible
- Can be gentle, everyday movement
- Can be social or paired with things you enjoy



Movement is a way to **connect with and care** for your body

Let's practice!
Guided movement break

LET'S MOVE!

Cool down

Stretch, breathe and regulate

*Guided Breathwork
and Relaxation*

Check in with the nervous system

How does your body feel?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

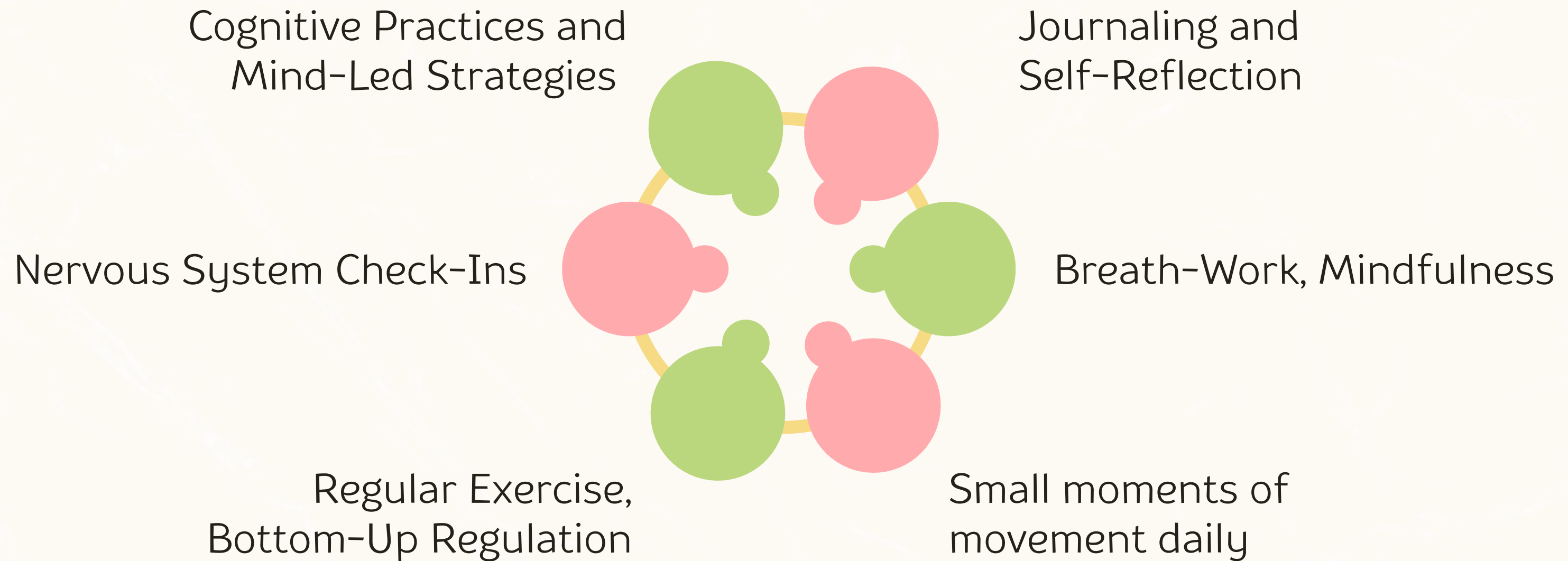
Movement Builds Stress Tolerance

- Movement mimics parts of the stress response
- Trains the nervous system to tolerate stress and discharge energy
- Helps decrease sensitivity to stress

Over time, this can reduce reactivity to real-life stressor

Movement is a stressor!

Taking Care of Your Mental Health



Thank you!
QUESTIONS

Key takeaways

- Movement supports emotional and mental well-being by regulating the nervous system and releasing stress held in the body
- The stress response is protective, but modern stress often keeps it on too long
- When stress stays on, emotional processing and logical responding decreases
- Bottom-up regulation calms the body so the mind can re-engage
- A supportive and intuitive approach to movement supports consistency and long-term well-being