

Boundaries: Why are they so hard?

Angie Arora, MSW, RSW

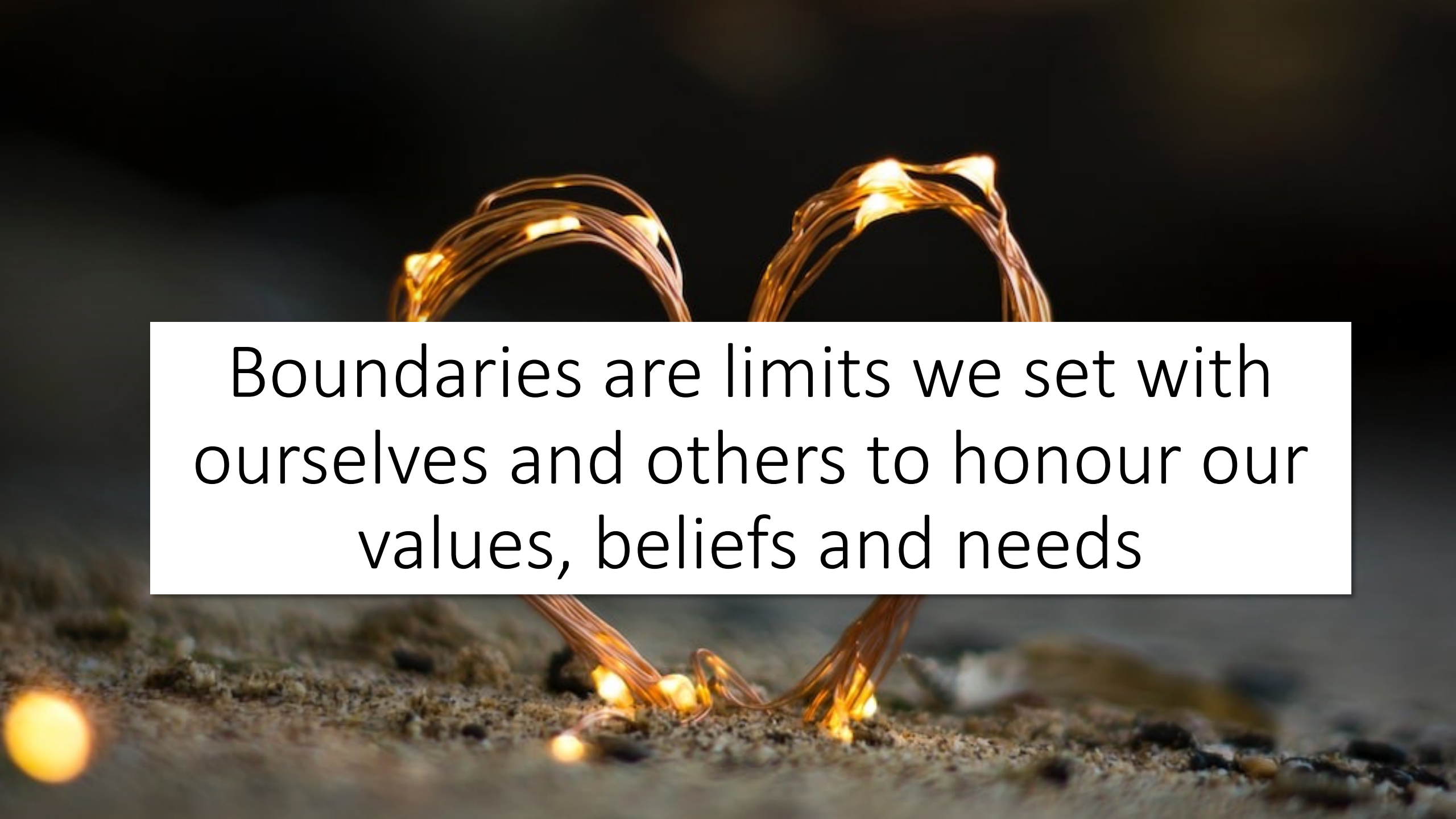
Veterinary Social Worker specializing in
Veterinary Mental Health & Wellbeing

Factors Impacting Boundaries

Personal, Familial and Social Conditioning
Veterinary Medicine Culture
Maladaptive Stress Responses

Tools & Resources

Unpacking Fawning Response
Nervous System Regulation
Values
Conflict Management
Empathic Assertions

A close-up photograph of warm white string lights. The lights are arranged in two main loops, one on the left and one on the right, with several individual lights visible. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some texture like sand or gravel. A white rectangular box is centered over the image, containing the text.

Boundaries are limits we set with ourselves and others to honour our values, beliefs and needs

Staying home when I'm sick

Prioritizing family dinner instead of staying late

Saying no to a client when the schedule is full

Expressing when something is out of my scope

Taking a break when my body needs rest



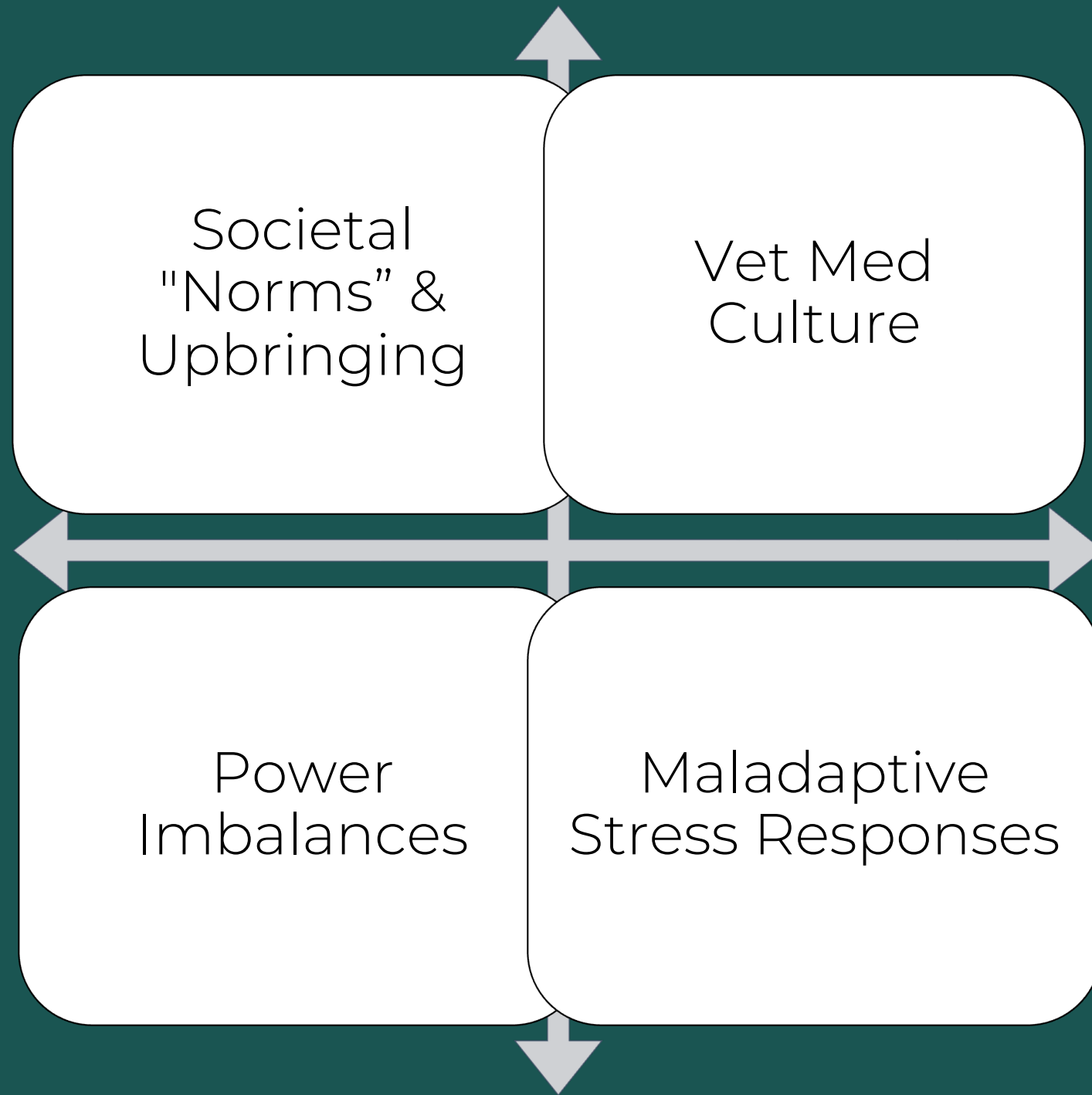
The lack of boundaries in vet med
may be normalized,
but this doesn't make it normal.

The background is a soft watercolor illustration. It features large, vibrant green leaves with visible veins, interspersed with delicate red flowers. The colors are blended and painterly, creating a gentle, organic feel. A white rectangular box is centered over the image, containing the title text.

Factors Impacting Boundaries

If it were as simple as
“no is a complete sentence”,
we’d all have phenomenal
boundaries!





Maladaptive Responses

Do You?

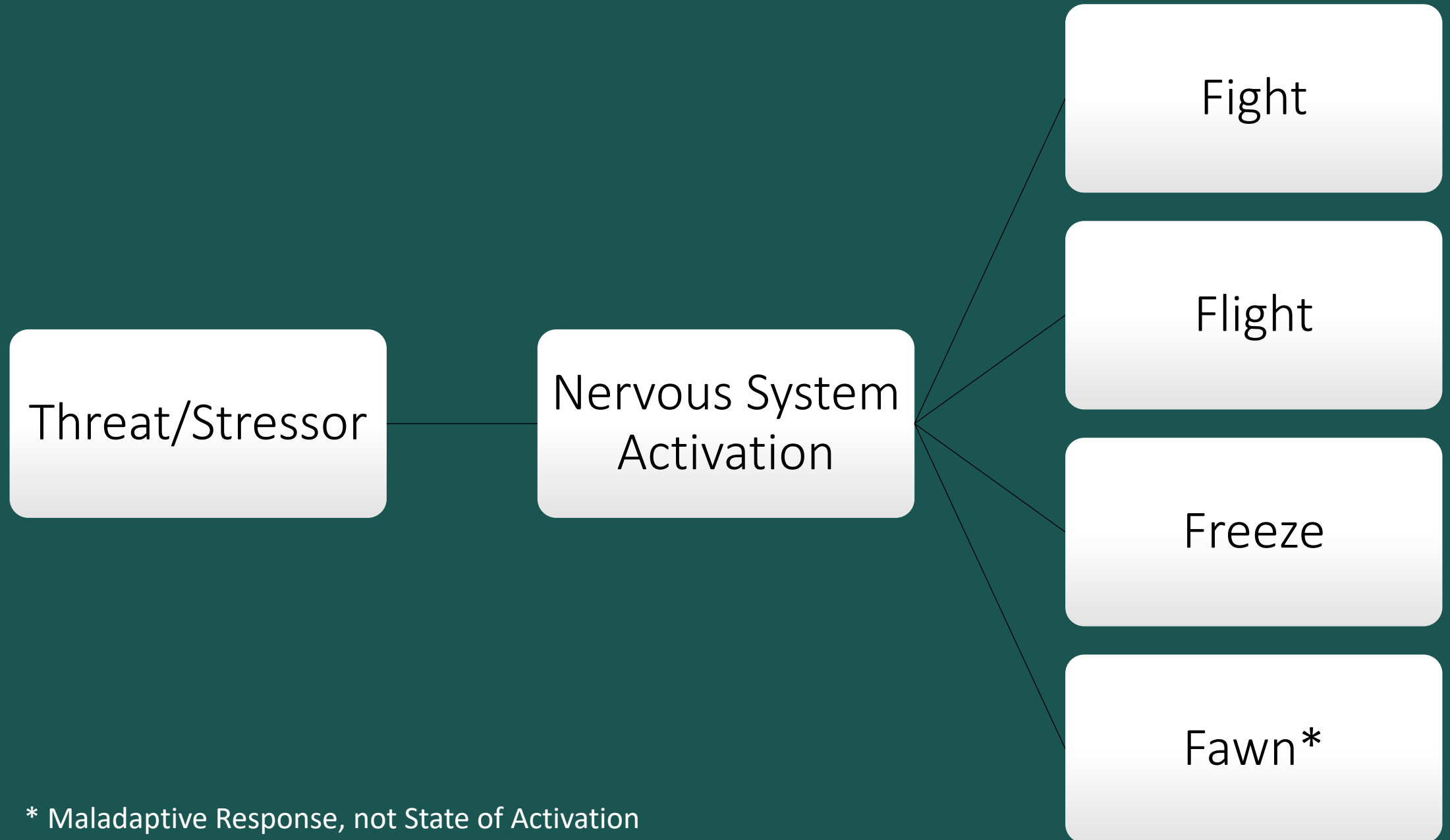
1. struggle to feel 'seen' by others
2. have a hard time saying 'no' to people
3. struggle when you're angry or upset with others
4. feel responsible for other people's reactions
5. find yourself compromising your values

Fawning

“A trauma response where a person develops people-pleasing behaviours to avoid conflict and to establish a sense of safety”

-Pete Walker, M.A., MFT





The background is a soft watercolor illustration. It features large, vibrant green leaves with visible veins, some in sharp focus and others blurred. Interspersed among the leaves are delicate red flowers, possibly tulips, with soft, blended petals. The overall color palette is warm and natural, with a light cream or off-white background. A white rectangular box is centered horizontally, containing the text.

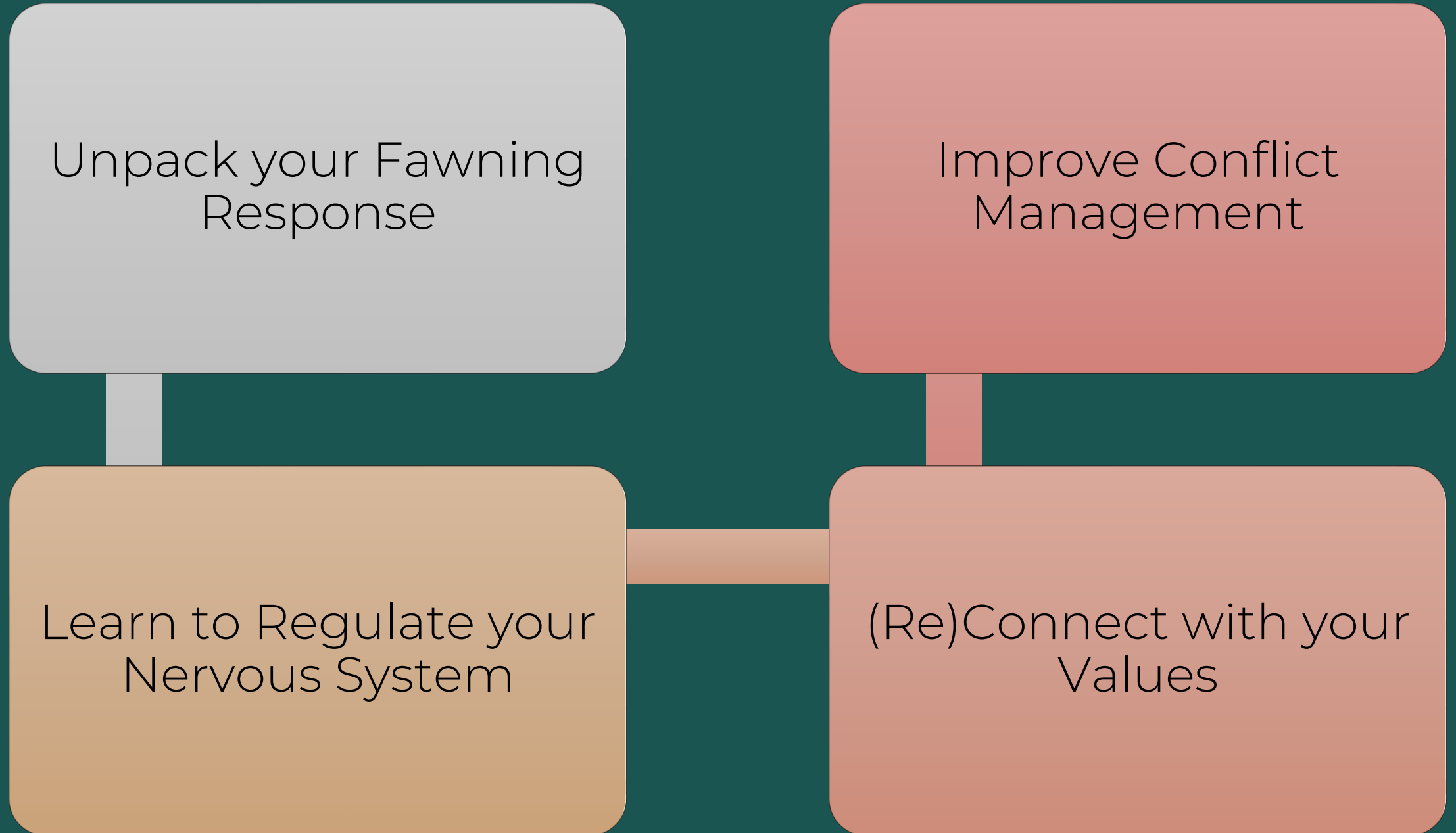
Tools & Resources

Unpack your Fawning
Response

Improve Conflict
Management

Learn to Regulate your
Nervous System

(Re)Connect with your
Values



Unpack your Fawning Response

Where in my life do I have difficulty saying no?

What's the impact of me not saying no on me?

What's the belief that makes me not say no?

Who would I be if I didn't believe that?

What am I not saying yes to, that wants to be said no to?

-Dr. Gabor Mate

(Re)Connect with your Values



Recall a moment where your life couldn't get much better.



Describe this peak experience or moment in detail.



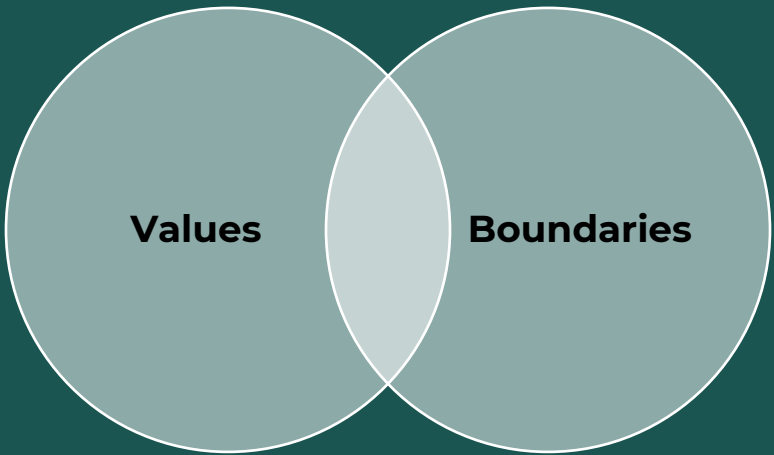
Reflect on what values are recognizable in this experience or moment.






Choose the top 3 - 5 values most important to you.



Define what your chosen values mean to you.



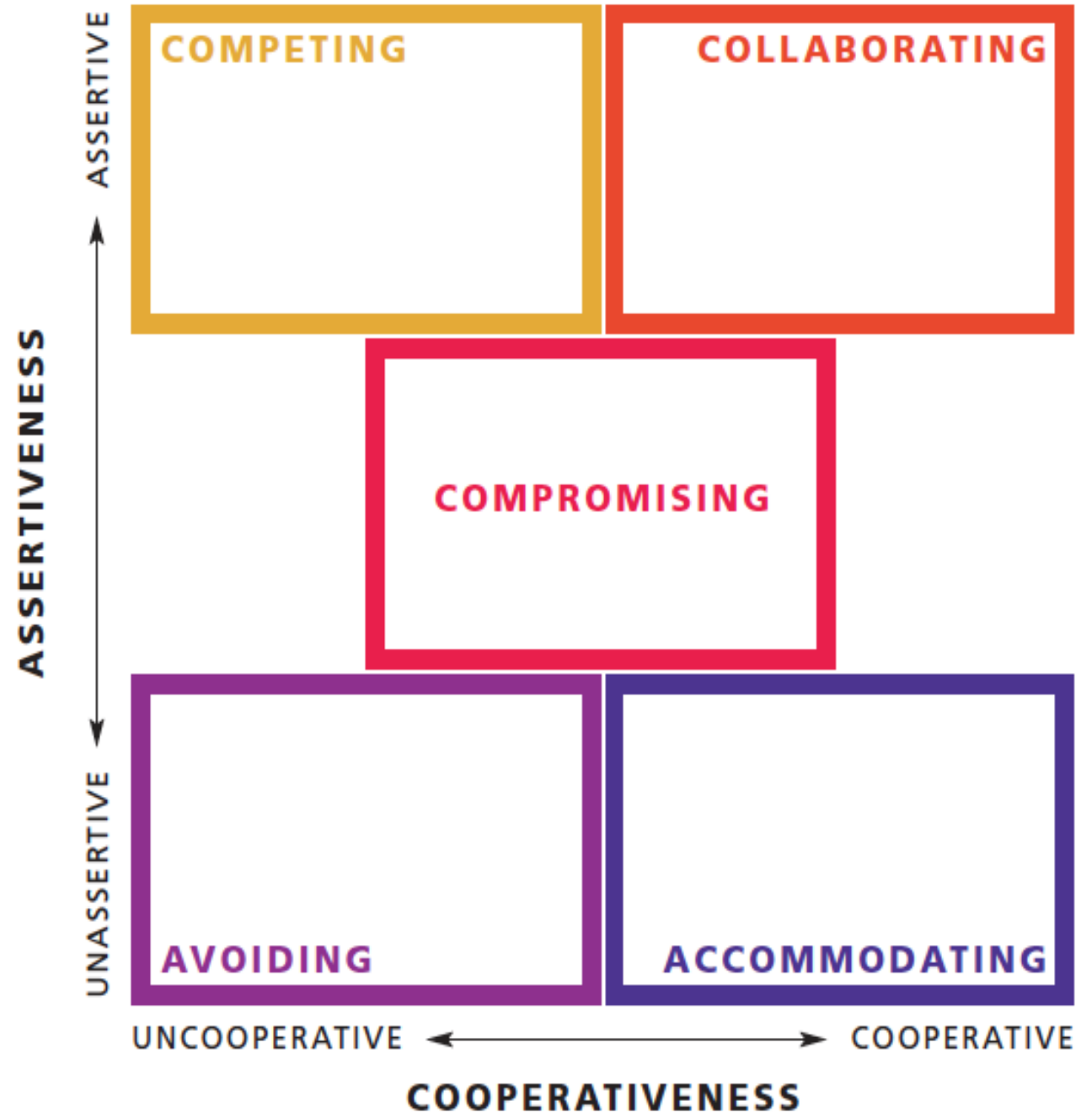
I VALUE	SO I NEED	& WILL HONOR BY
Inner Peace	Quiet time alone	Scheduling time in my day
Connection	Time with friends and family	Plan an outing at least once a month
Rest	A morning and sleep routine	Waking up and going to bed at the same time each day

Value			

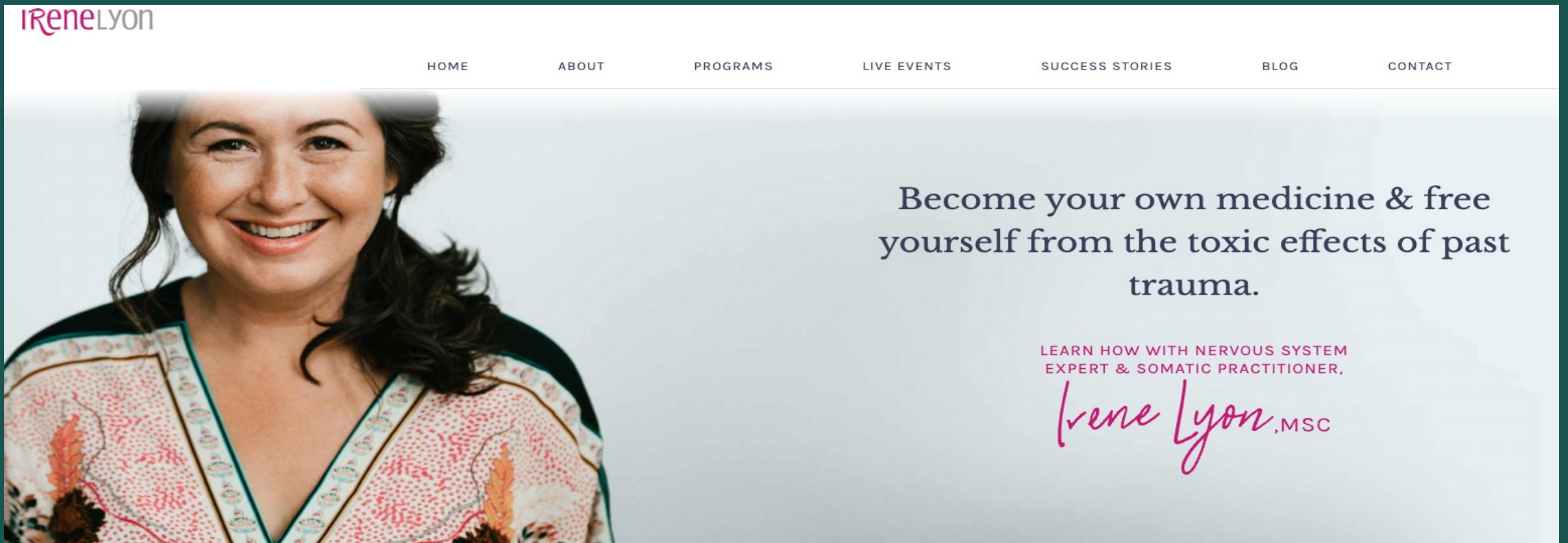
Day of Week	M	T	W	T	F	S	S

Improve Conflict Management

Thomas-Kilmann
Conflict Mode Instrument



Nervous System Regulation

A screenshot of the website for iRene Lyon. The page has a white header with the logo 'iReneLYON' on the left and a navigation menu with links: HOME, ABOUT, PROGRAMS, LIVE EVENTS, SUCCESS STORIES, BLOG, and CONTACT. Below the header is a large banner featuring a portrait of a smiling woman with dark hair, wearing a colorful patterned top. To the right of the portrait, the text reads: 'Become your own medicine & free yourself from the toxic effects of past trauma.' Below this, it says 'LEARN HOW WITH NERVOUS SYSTEM EXPERT & SOMATIC PRACTITIONER,' followed by the signature 'Irene Lyon, MSC' in a pink script font.

iReneLYON

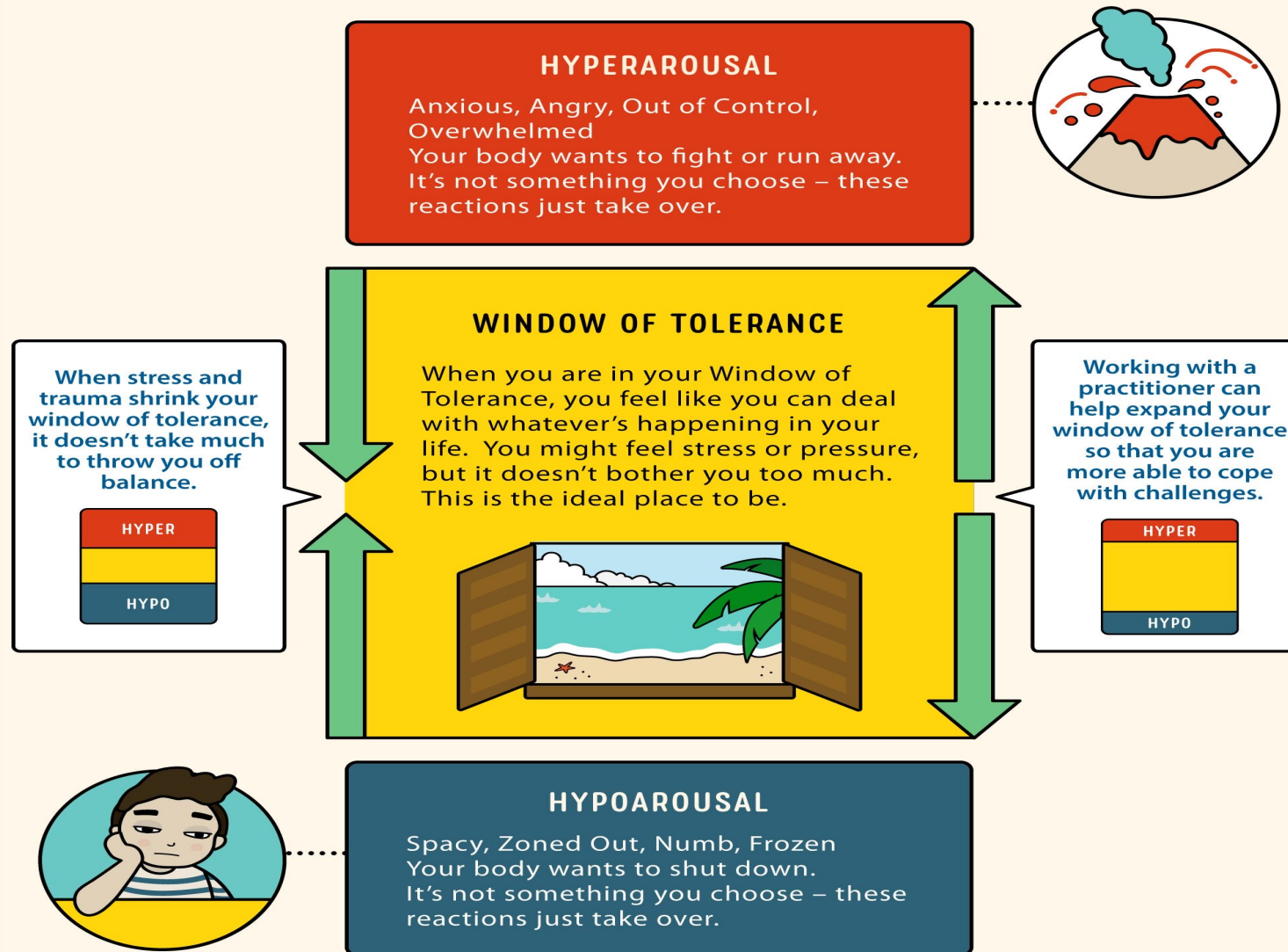
HOME ABOUT PROGRAMS LIVE EVENTS SUCCESS STORIES BLOG CONTACT

Become your own medicine & free yourself from the toxic effects of past trauma.

LEARN HOW WITH NERVOUS SYSTEM EXPERT & SOMATIC PRACTITIONER,
Irene Lyon, MSC

<https://irenelyon.com/>

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance



FIGHT

(sympathetic branch)

May become overly aggressive when trying to establish a boundary by silencing the other person and leaving little room for discussion, cooperation, or collaboration.

FLIGHT

(sympathetic branch)

May avoid establishing an internal or relational boundary to avoid conflict

FREEZE

(parasympathetic branch)

May struggle to effectively connect with what they need and therefore struggle to verbalize boundaries

FAWN

(behavioural modification response)

Disconnecting from self to focus on others

People pleasing, no boundaries, ignoring one's needs, loss of self, overlistening, overgiving

FIGHT

Discharge: squats, scream into a pillow, clench fists and release, cry, laugh, etc.

Breathwork: exhale needs to be longer than inhale

FLIGHT

Fast Forward Movement: run, walk

Shake: discharge panicky energy

Grounding: Sit outside, visualize energy leaving your body

FREEZE

Conscious Breathwork: e.g. Wim Hoff, Voo Breathing

Focus on one small thing you can do

Co-regulate

FAWN

Increase awareness of our own emotional, physical needs

Boundaries, Assertiveness

Griefwork

Resourcing Tools

Breathwork	Diaphragmatic Breathing (double breathing) Longer Exhale (4-7-8, 7-11) Five-Finger Breathing
Grounding	5-4-3-2-1, Feet on ground, Visualization
Easeful Movement	Stretch, Walk, Yoga, Muscle relaxation, Dance
Nature	Mindful experiencing
Self-Soothe	Hand over heart, Hold your own hand, Hug yourself, Hum, Sing, Weighted blankets

The background is a watercolor illustration. It features large, dark green leaves with prominent veins, some of which are slightly blurred to create a sense of depth. Interspersed among the leaves are vibrant red flowers, some in full bloom and others as buds. The overall color palette is soft, with the green and red contrasting against a light, warm-toned background.

Practical Approaches

**Basic
Assertion**

I cannot help you.

I would like to finish what I was saying.

**Empathic
Assertion**

I appreciate you need some help. I have a lot on my plate right now, and will let you know if I can help after I'm done.

I can tell you're feeling very passionate about this. Once I'm able to finish speaking, I'd love to hear your thoughts.

How to Set Personal Boundaries



DEFINE

Identify desired
boundary



COMMUNICATE

Say what
you need



STAY SIMPLE

Don't
overexplain



SET CONSEQUENCES

Say why it's
important





Remember ...

Guilt will likely come up.

Boundaries often need to be reinforced.

Boundaries can come from a place of compassion and gentleness.



@VETERINARYWELLBEINGCOACH

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