



# **Weathering the Storm: Practical Strategies to Sustain the Healthcare Workforce**

Jennifer Potter MD & Taylor Brown MD

# Our Roots

## Fenway Health

- Independent 501(c)(3) FQHC
- Founded 1971
- Mission: To enhance the wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as people in our neighborhoods and beyond through access to the highest quality health care, education, research, and advocacy
- Integrated primary care model, including HIV and transgender health services

## The Fenway Institute

- Research, Education, Policy



# The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center

- Training and Technical Assistance
- Grand Rounds
- Online Learning
  - CE and HEI Credit
- Environmental Influences On Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) Programs
- Publications and Resources



Learning Module



Publication



Toolkit



Video



Webinar

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

# Technical Questions?

- Please call Zoom Technical Support: 1.888.799.9666 ext 2
- You can contact the webinar host using the chat function in Zoom. Click the “Chat” icon and type your question.
- Alternatively, e-mail us at [education@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:education@fenwayhealth.org) for less urgent questions.

# Sound Issues?

- Ensure your computer speakers are not muted
- If you cannot hear through your computer speakers, navigate to the bottom toolbar on your screen, go to the far left, and click the arrow next to the phone icon
- Choose “I will call in”
- Dial the phone number and access code

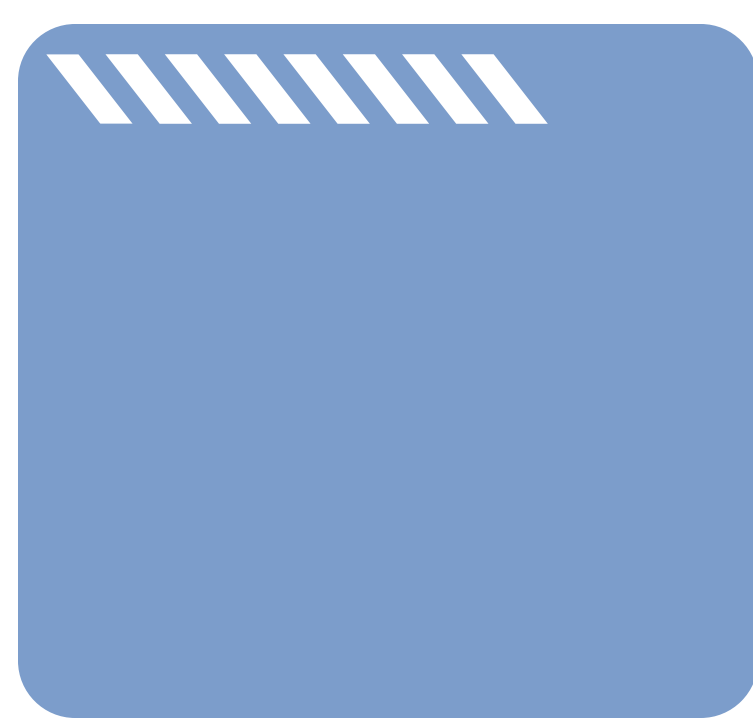
# CME/CEU Information

<b>Physicians</b>	AAFP Prescribed credit is accepted by the American Medical Association as equivalent to AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™ toward the AMA Physician’s Recognition Award. When applying for the AMA PRA, Prescribed credit earned must be reported as Prescribed, not as Category 1.
<b>Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, Nurses, Medical Assistants</b>	AAFP Prescribed credit is accepted by the following organizations. Please contact them directly about how participants should report the credit they earned. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)</li><li>•National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA)</li><li>•American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC)</li><li>•American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP)</li><li>•American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program (AANPCP)</li><li>•American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA)</li></ul>
<b>Other Health Professionals</b>	Confirm equivalency of credits with relevant licensing body.

# Learning Goals



- Describe the “Zone of Optimal Functioning” and its three sections.
- Recognize the early signs of an individual leaving the Zone of Optimal Functioning.
- Identify the signs of possible stress responses in patients and healthcare providers.
- Practice grounding strategies that can be utilized to stabilize stress responses and re-enter the Zone of Optimal Functioning.



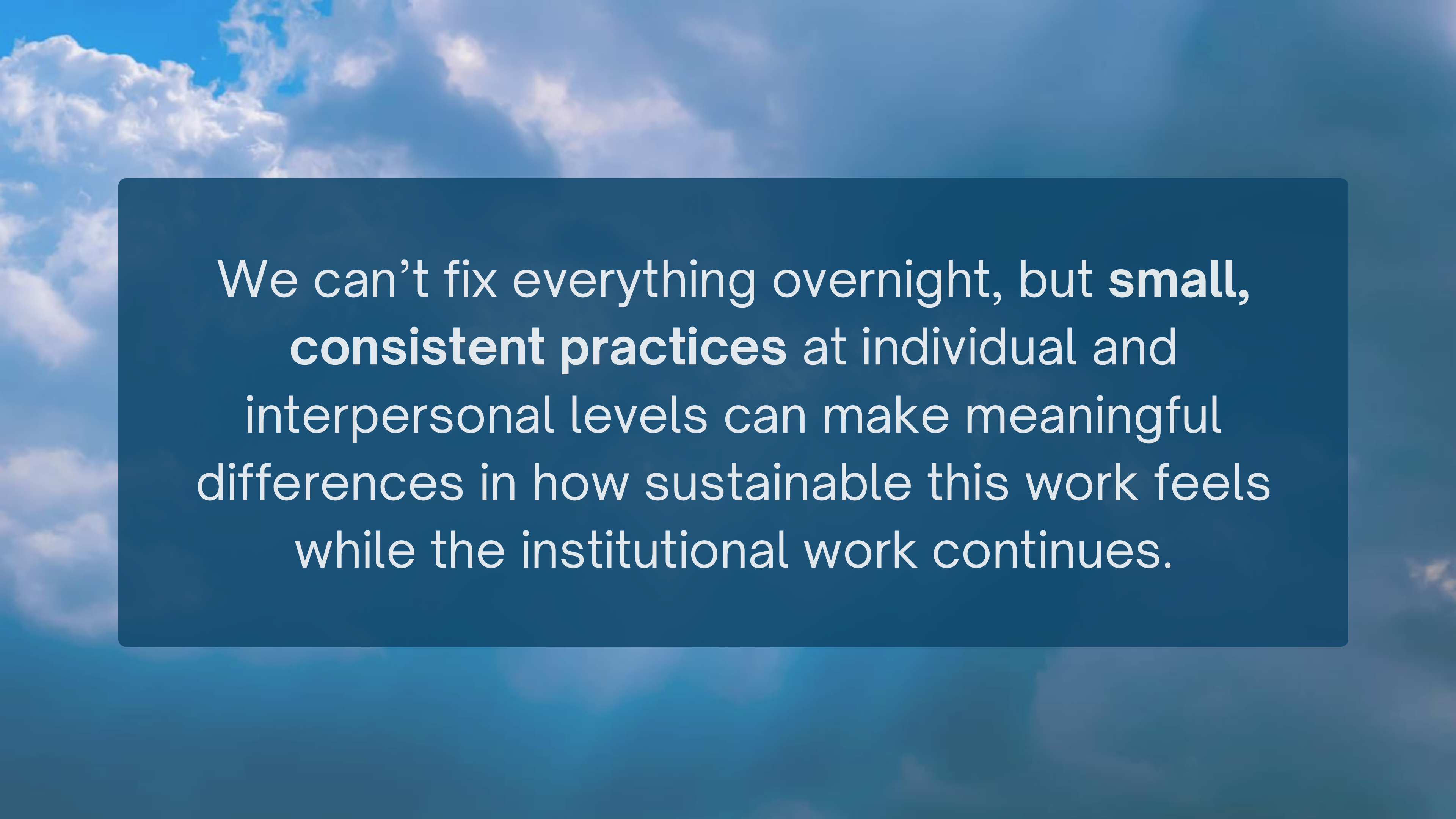
**“In one or two words, what most helps you keep going in this work?”**



# Why this matters

- High stress and burnout are common in health care.
- Burnout is associated with
  - Increased turnover
  - More errors and safety events
  - Reduced quality of care and patient experience





We can't fix everything overnight, but **small, consistent practices** at individual and interpersonal levels can make meaningful differences in how sustainable this work feels while the institutional work continues.

## HYPER-AROUSAL (FIGHT/FLIGHT)

*Anxious*

*Angry*

*Overwhelmed*

*Agitated*

## ZONE OF OPTIMAL FUNCTIONING

*Present*

*Grounded*

*Able to think clearly*

## HYPO-AROUSAL (FREEZE)

*Numb*

*Shut down*

*Disconnected*

*On autopilot*



NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

# Common Stress Responses

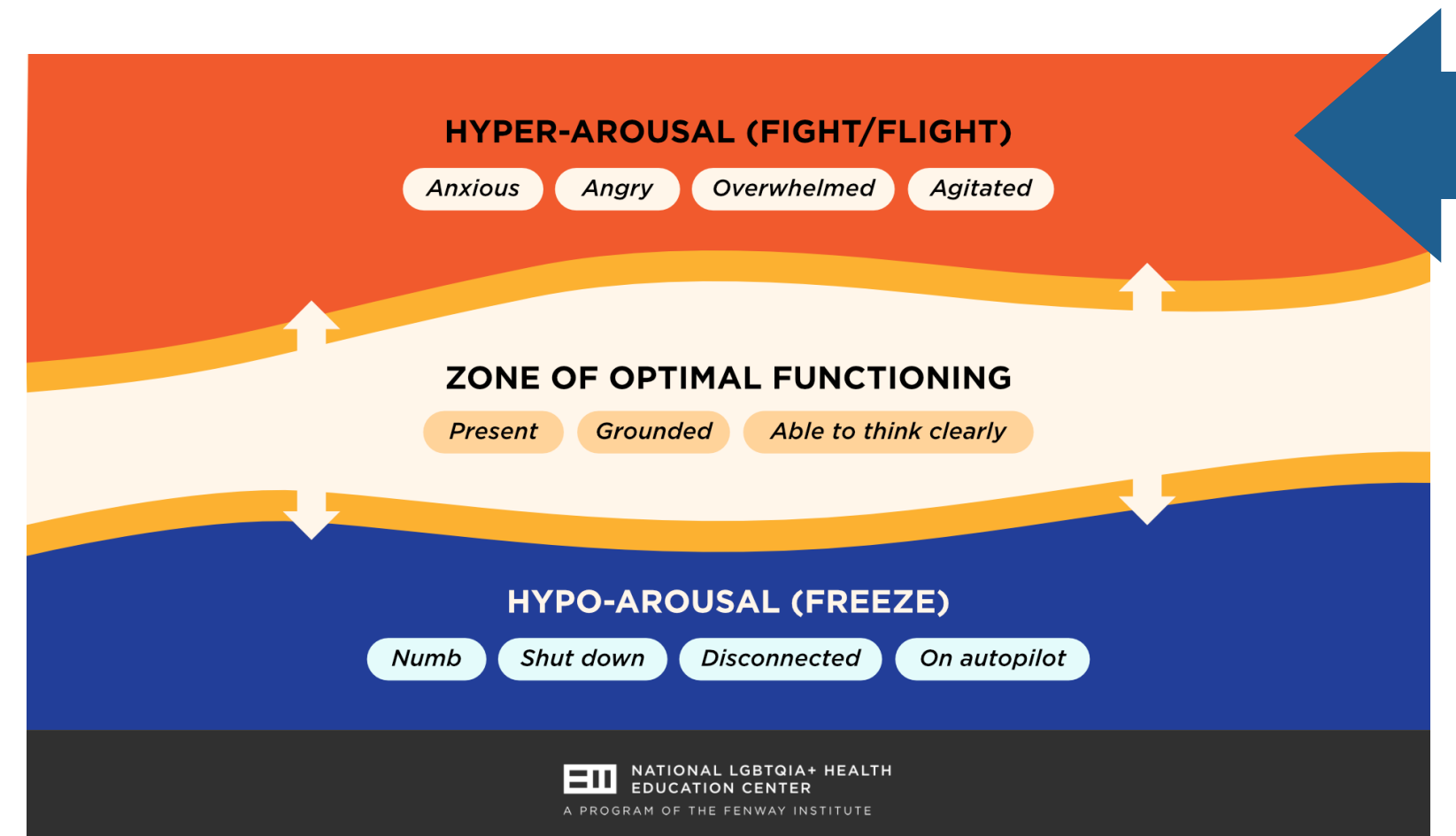
Fight or Flight

Freeze



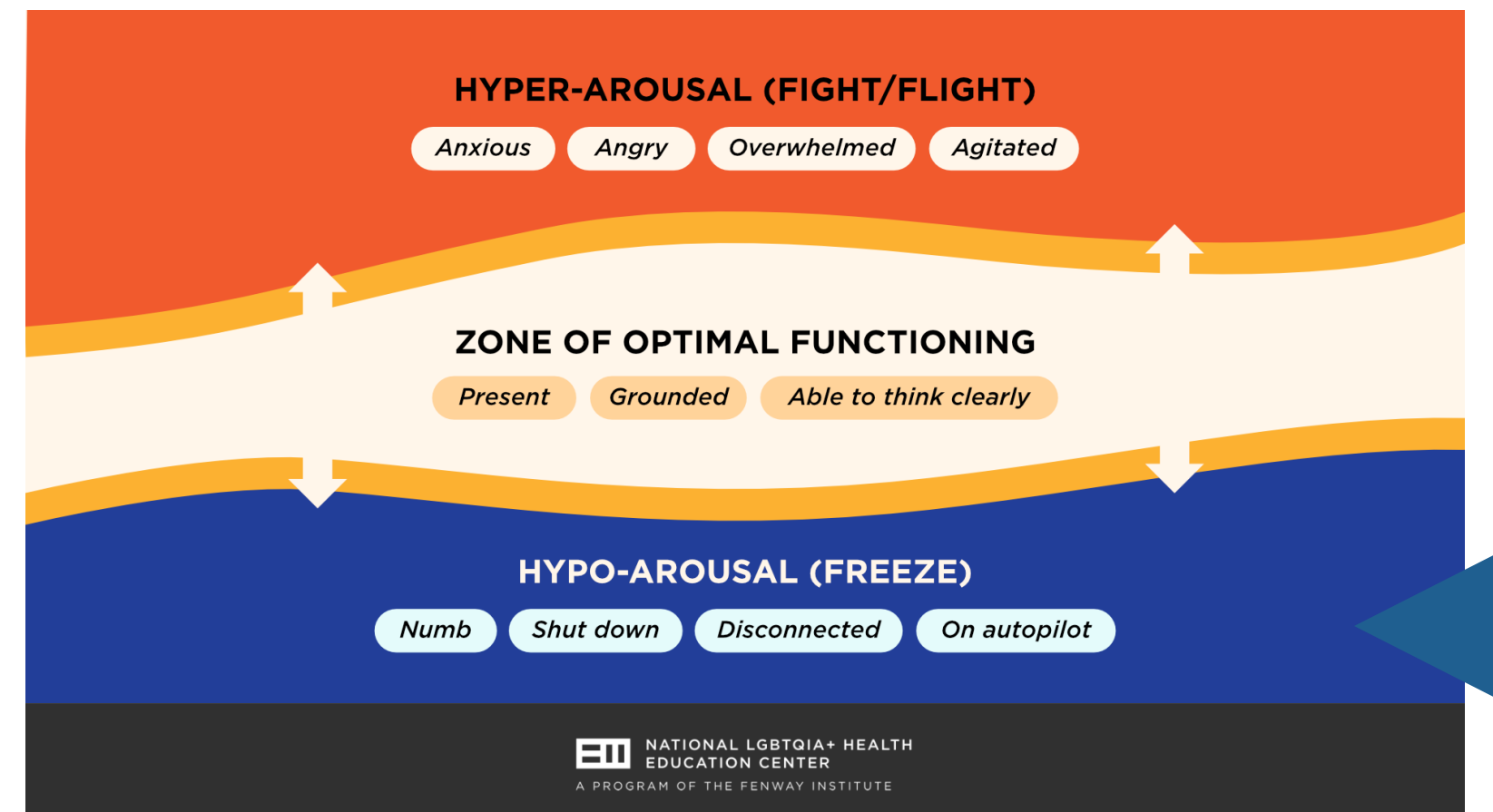
# Which zone is this?

Heart racing, talking fast, feeling like you must “fix everything” with urgency



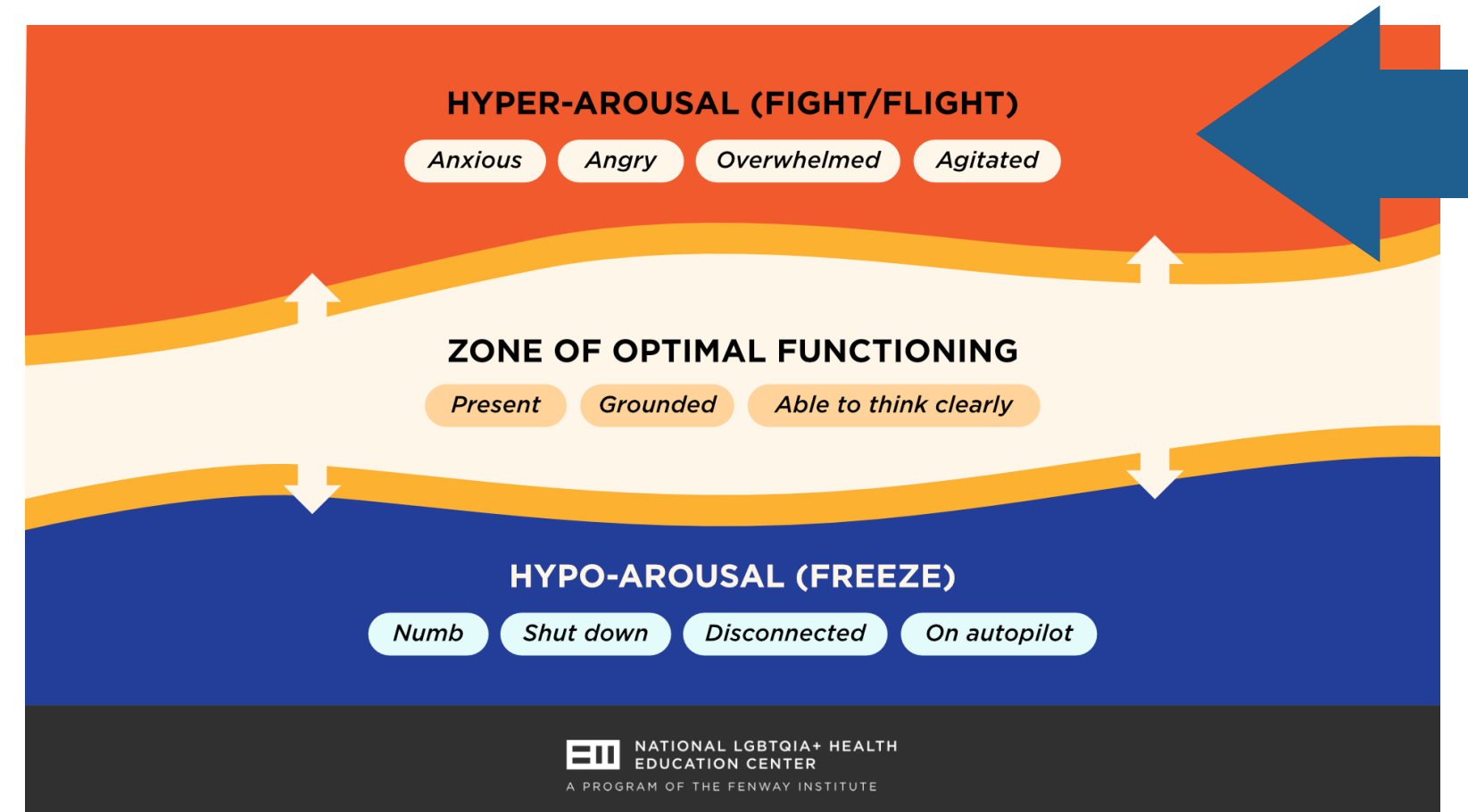
# Which zone is this?

Feeling numb  
or spaced-out



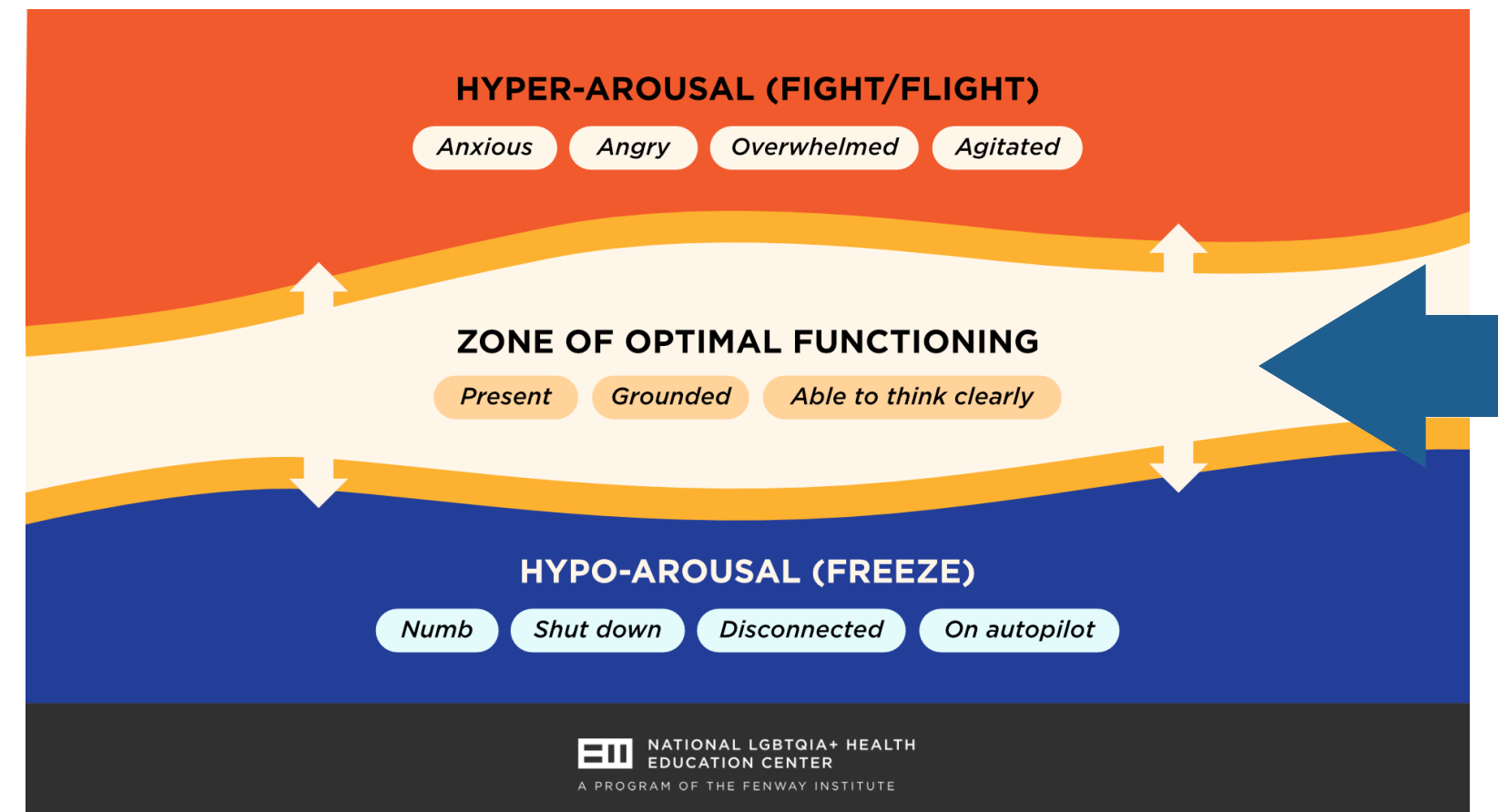
# Which zone is this?

Snapping at  
colleagues or  
patients



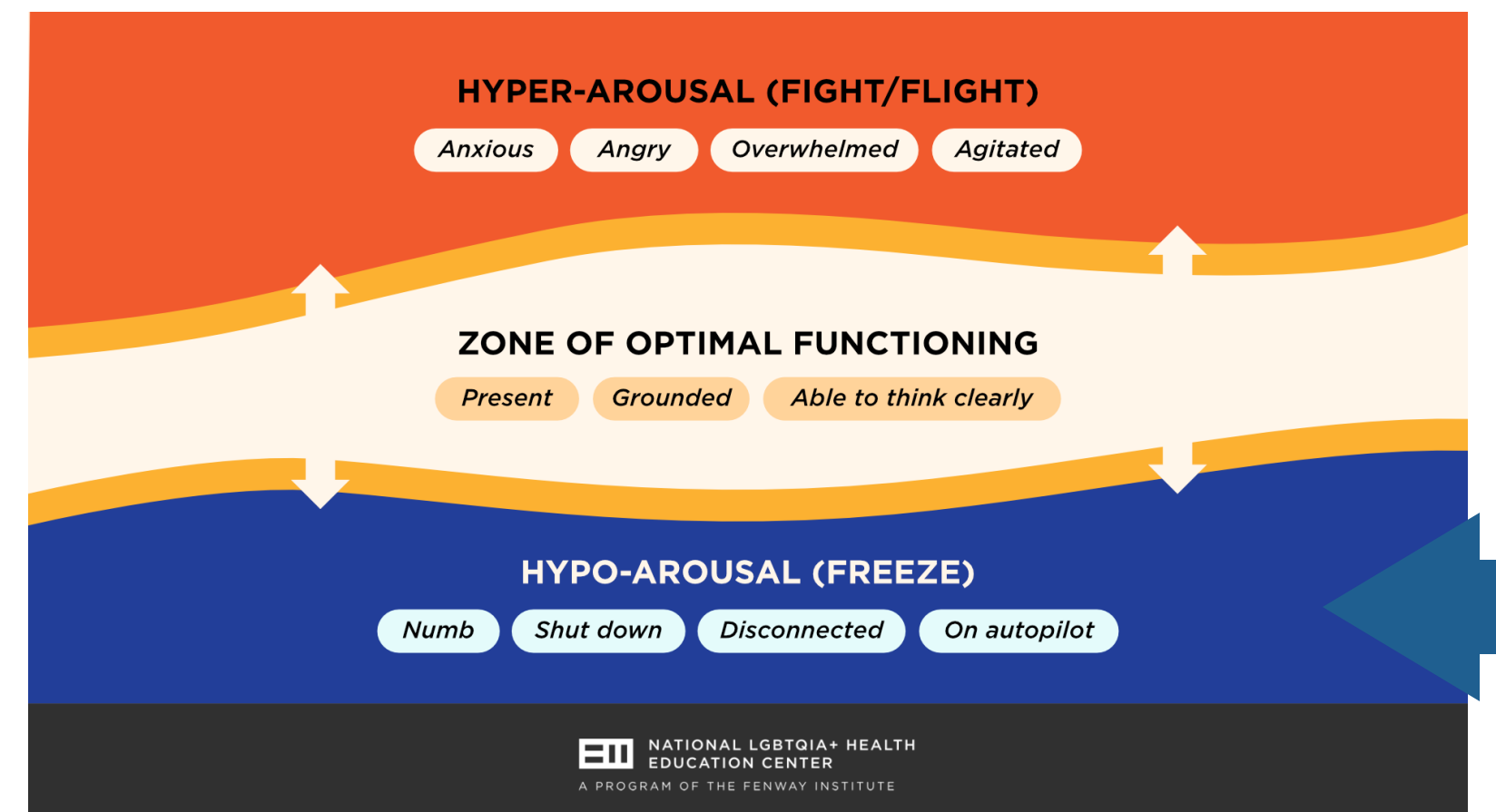
# Which zone is this?

Able to listen,  
think, and choose  
your words



# Which zone is this?

Going through the motions and not remembering the last few minutes



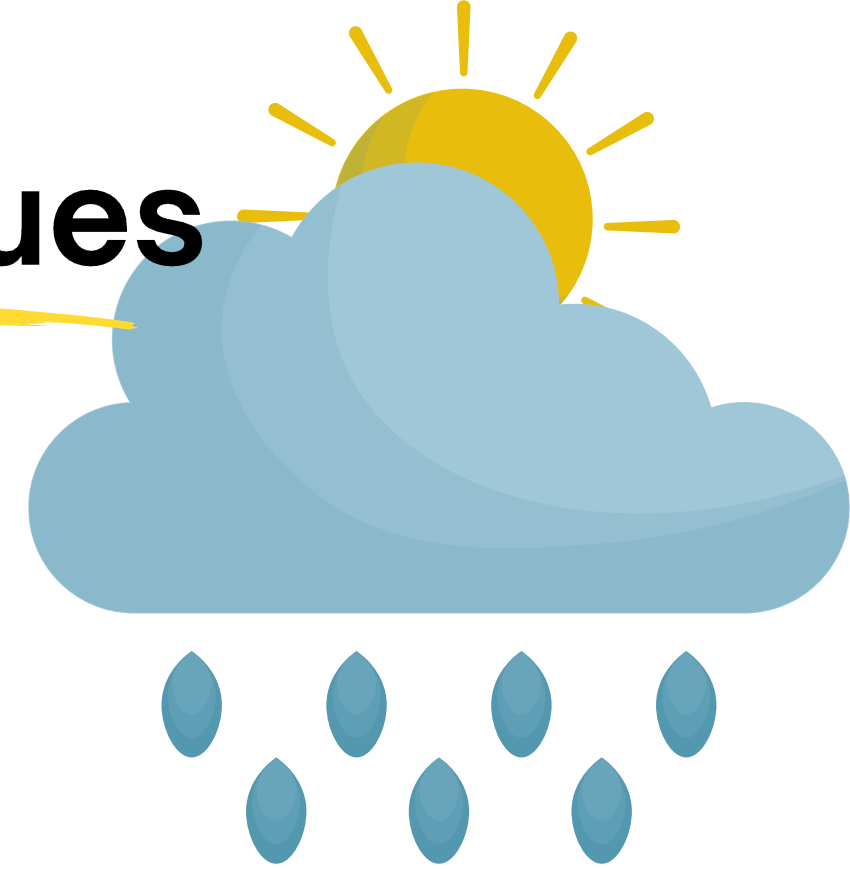
# Recognizing Signs in Ourselves



In yourself, signs of **leaving** your zone may include:

- Feeling rushed or pressured even when no one is pushing you
- Feeling irritated by small things
- Going blank or having trouble following what someone is saying
- Making more mistakes or rereading things over and over

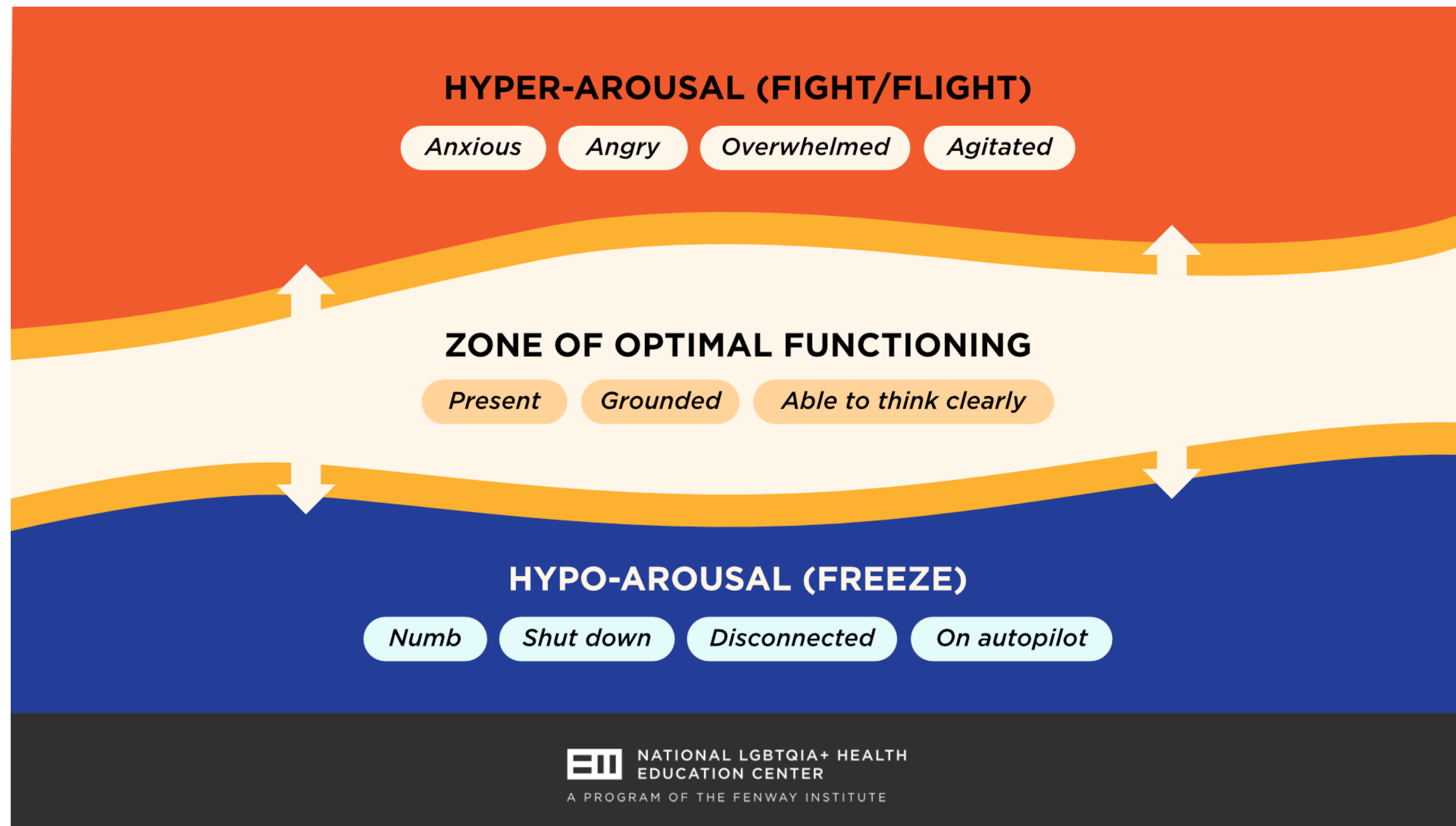
# Recognizing Signs in Patients and Colleagues



Signs of **leaving** their zone may include:

- A patient is late, speaking loudly, interrupting you, and demanding a refill on a controlled medication.
- The medical assistant avoids eye contact and finishes vitals silently.
- A consultant snapping at a colleague

The zone is dynamic and with intentional practice, we can increase the range of our zone.



# One Day Through the Zones



# Morning Chaos

You're running late to work. You spilled coffee on yourself. The first patient of the day is early and one of the nurses called out sick.

Which zone are you in?



## HYPER-AROUSAL (FIGHT/FLIGHT)

*Anxious*

*Angry*

*Overwhelmed*

*Agitated*

## ZONE OF OPTIMAL FUNCTIONING

*Present*

*Grounded*

*Able to think clearly*

## HYPO-AROUSAL (FREEZE)

*Numb*

*Shut down*

*Disconnected*

*On autopilot*



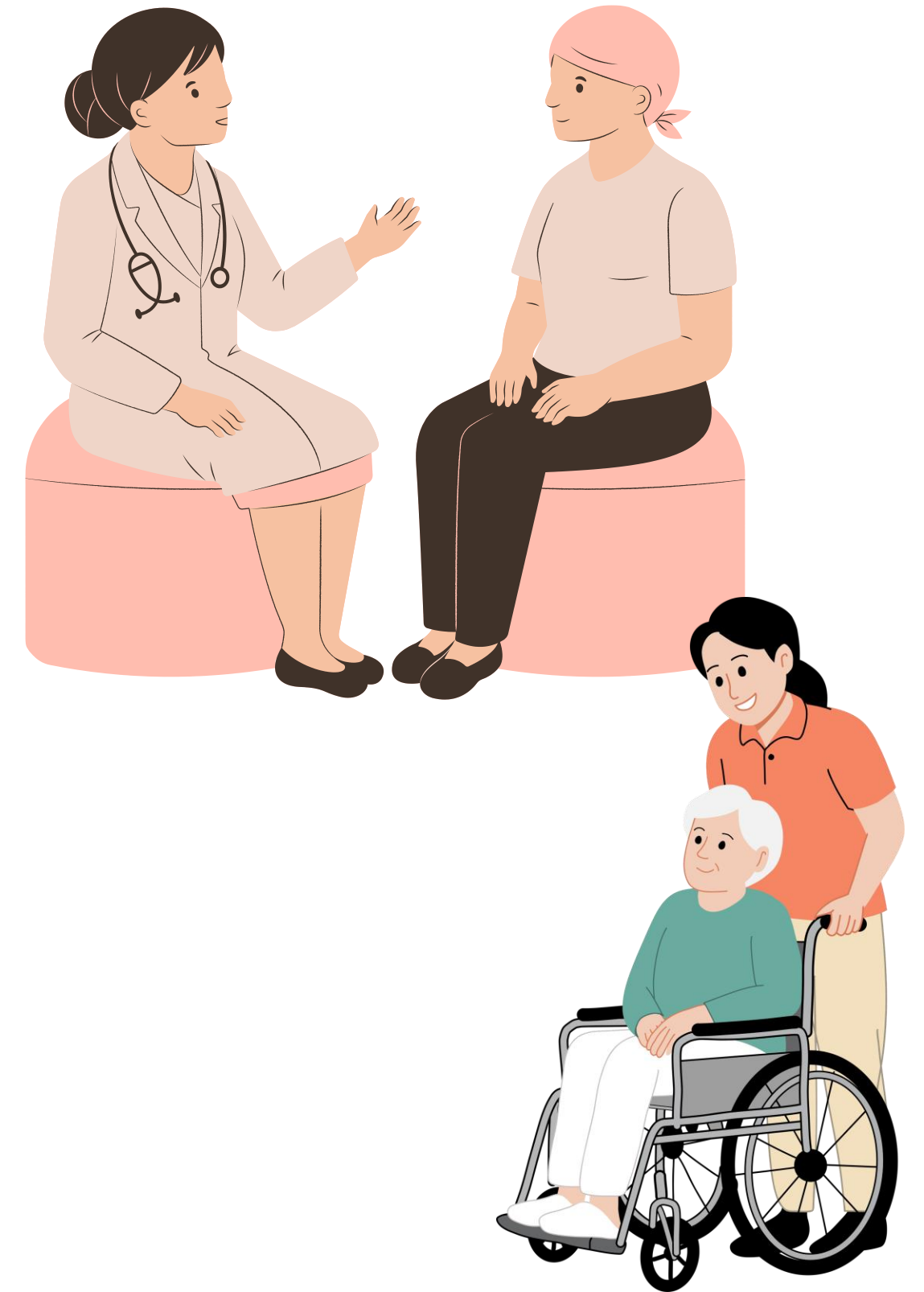
NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

# Afternoon Reprieve

A follow-up patient really appreciates that you were able to fit them in. They share how much they've been juggling while caring for an aging parent.

Which zone are you in?



## HYPER-AROUSAL (FIGHT/FLIGHT)

*Anxious*

*Angry*

*Overwhelmed*

*Agitated*

## ZONE OF OPTIMAL FUNCTIONING

*Present*

*Grounded*

*Able to think clearly*

## HYPO-AROUSAL (FREEZE)

*Numb*

*Shut down*

*Disconnected*

*On autopilot*



NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

# Evening Challenge

The final patient of the day is frustrated that physical therapy hasn't fixed their back pain. They request narcotic pain medication and become very upset when you explain it's not appropriate for their type of pain.

Which zone are you in?



## HYPER-AROUSAL (FIGHT/FLIGHT)

*Anxious*

*Angry*

*Overwhelmed*

*Agitated*

## ZONE OF OPTIMAL FUNCTIONING

*Present*

*Grounded*

*Able to think clearly*

## HYPO-AROUSAL (FREEZE)

*Numb*

*Shut down*

*Disconnected*

*On autopilot*



NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE



# Key Takeaways

Movement in and out of your zone is normal and happens many times per day.

The goal is not to never leave your zone. The goal is to:

- *Notice earlier when you're shifting out of it*
- *Have a few simple tools to help you come back*



# What is grounding?

- Grounding exercises are brief actions that help your nervous system come back toward your Zone of Optimal Functioning.
- Bring attention to the present moment
- Use body sensations that signal safety

# How Grounding Helps



**Activate your  
parasympathetic  
nervous system  
("rest and digest")**

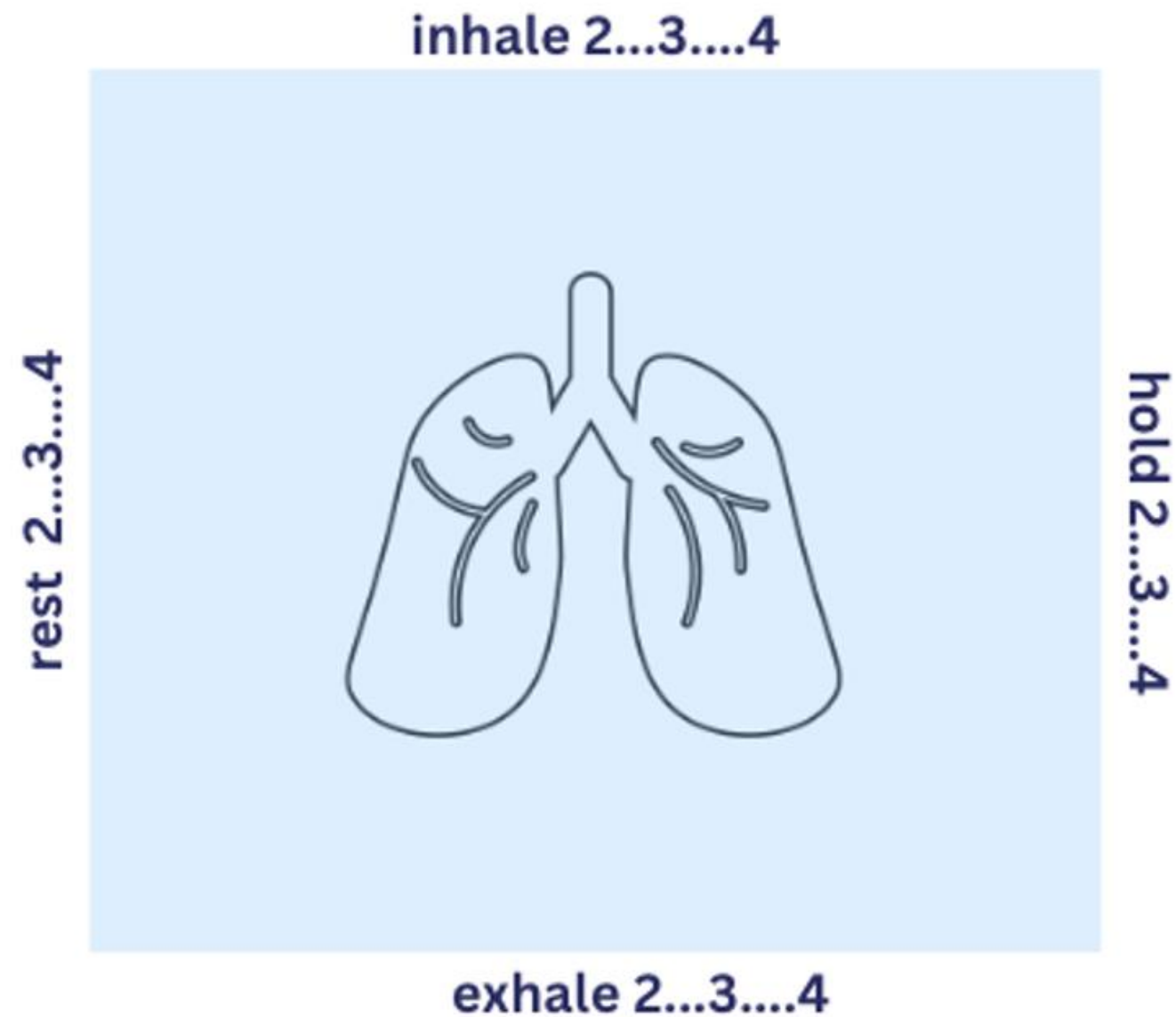


**Lower heart rate  
and muscle  
tension**



**Increase access  
to your prefrontal  
cortex → clearer  
thinking and  
more flexible  
responses**

# Try a Grounding Exercise



## 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

5 things you can see

4 things you can touch

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste

A background image of a bright blue sky filled with soft, white, fluffy clouds. The clouds are scattered across the frame, with some appearing more prominent than others. The overall tone is bright and airy.

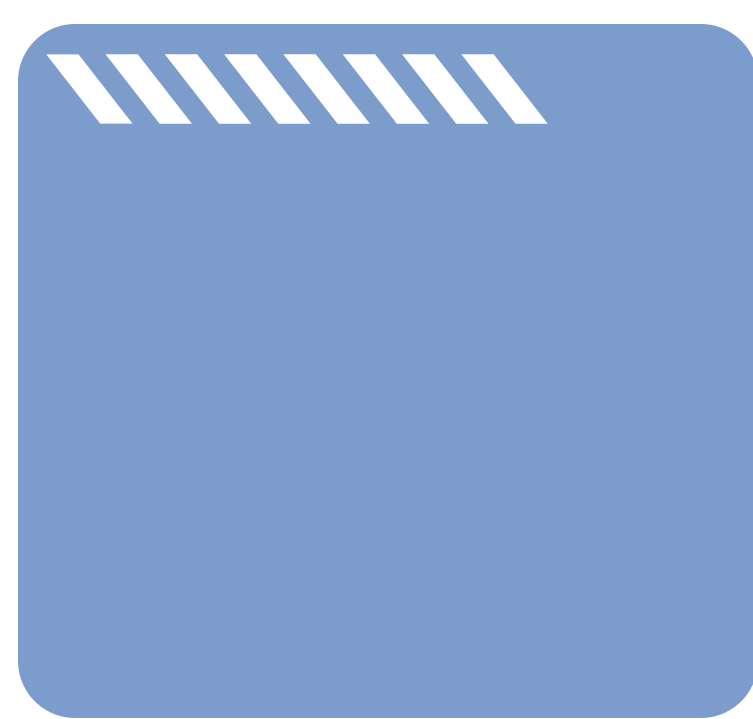
Compared to a minute ago, how  
does your body feel right now?

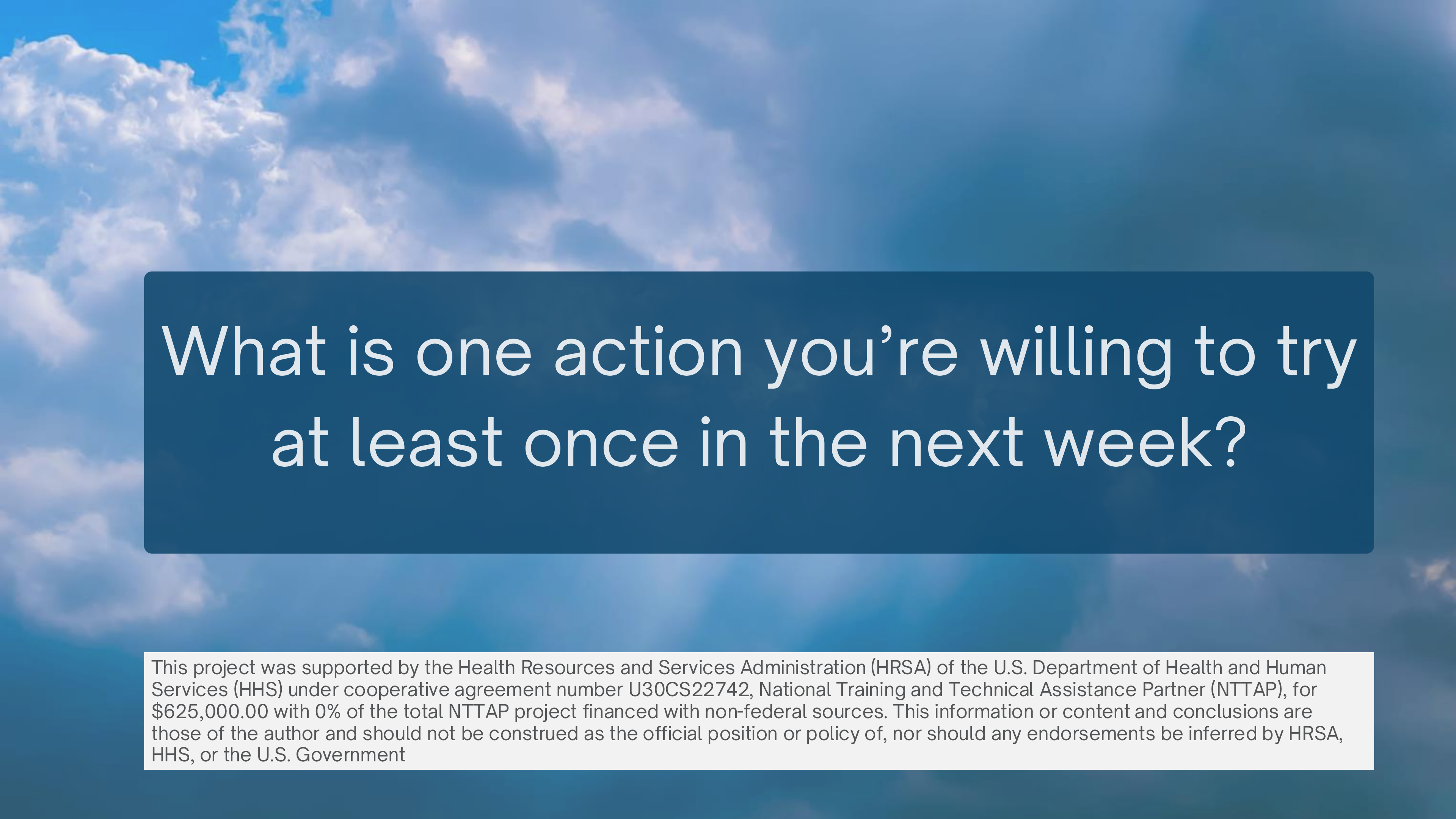


# Take Home Points



- 01 You will move in and out of your Zone of Optimal Functioning many times each day.
- 02 What looks like “difficult behavior” is often someone outside their zone - including us.
- 03 Noticing your own early signs is a skill you can build.
- 04 Brief grounding tools are performance tools that help you think clearly and care more sustainably.





What is one action you're willing to try  
at least once in the next week?

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under cooperative agreement number U30CS22742, National Training and Technical Assistance Partner (NTTAP), for \$625,000.00 with 0% of the total NTTAP project financed with non-federal sources. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government