

STAFF



# Mitigating Meltdowns

By Beth Jenson, LMHC

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# About Beth

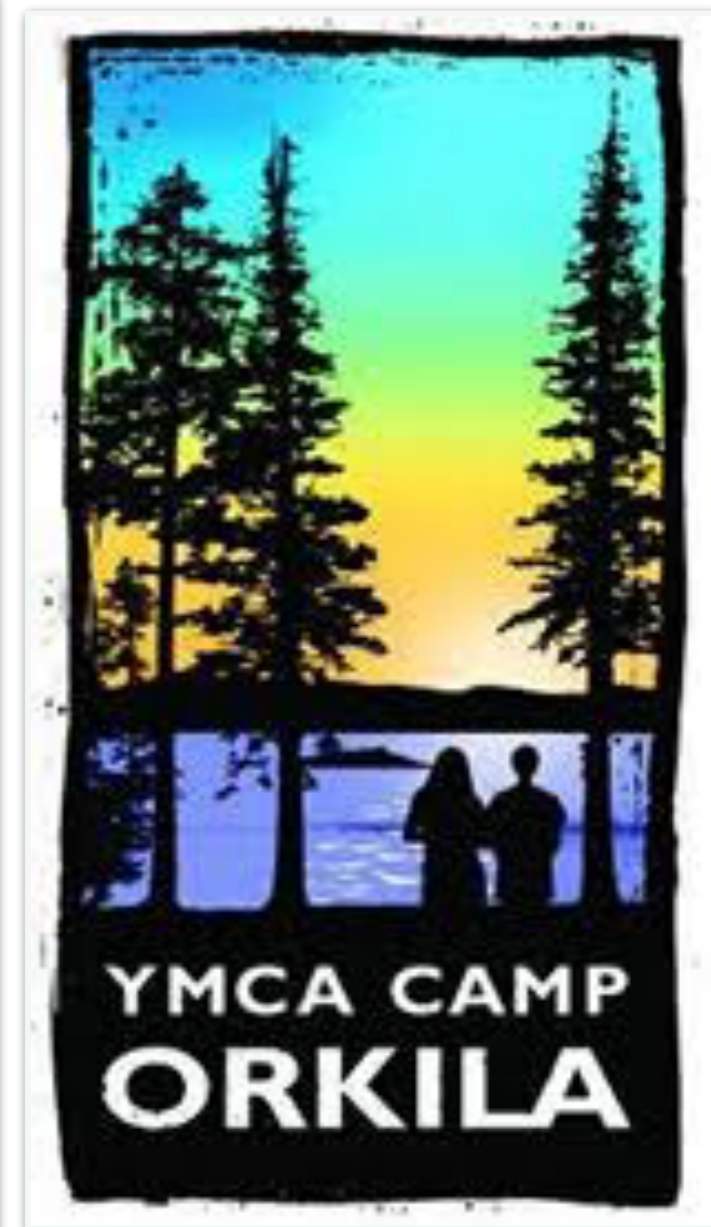


- Licensed Mental Health Counselor on Orcas Island, Washington
- Camp Orkila YMCA Inclusion Specialist Supervisor (Contractor)
- Summer Camp Kid, 12 years
- Band Camp Counselor, 5 years
- Mom of 2 Teen Camp-loving Kids
- Mediocre Tuba Player



# My Job at Camp Orkila

- Inclusion Specialist Supervisor
- Contractor, not staff

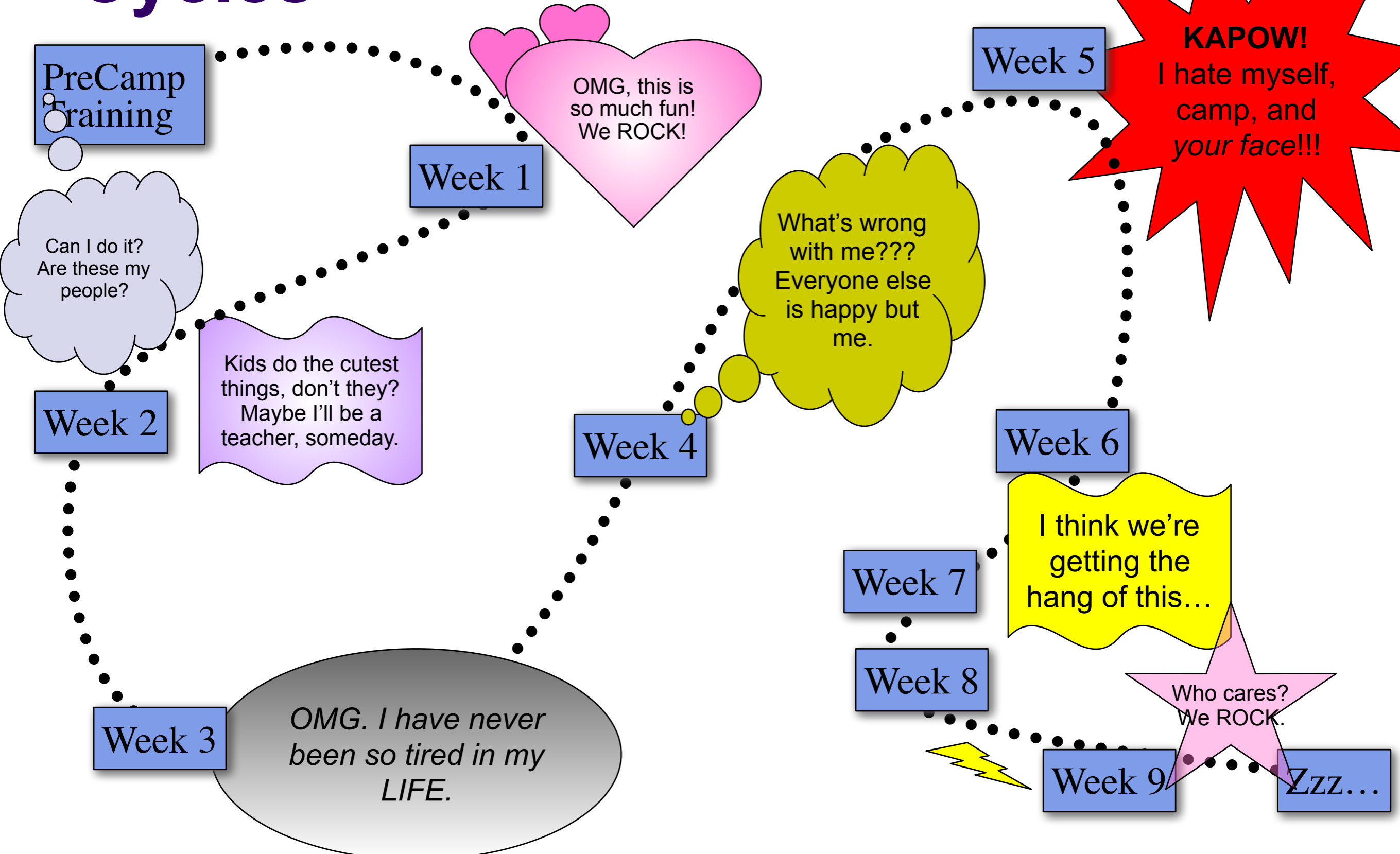
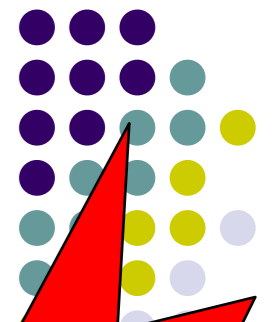


# Mitigating Meltdowns

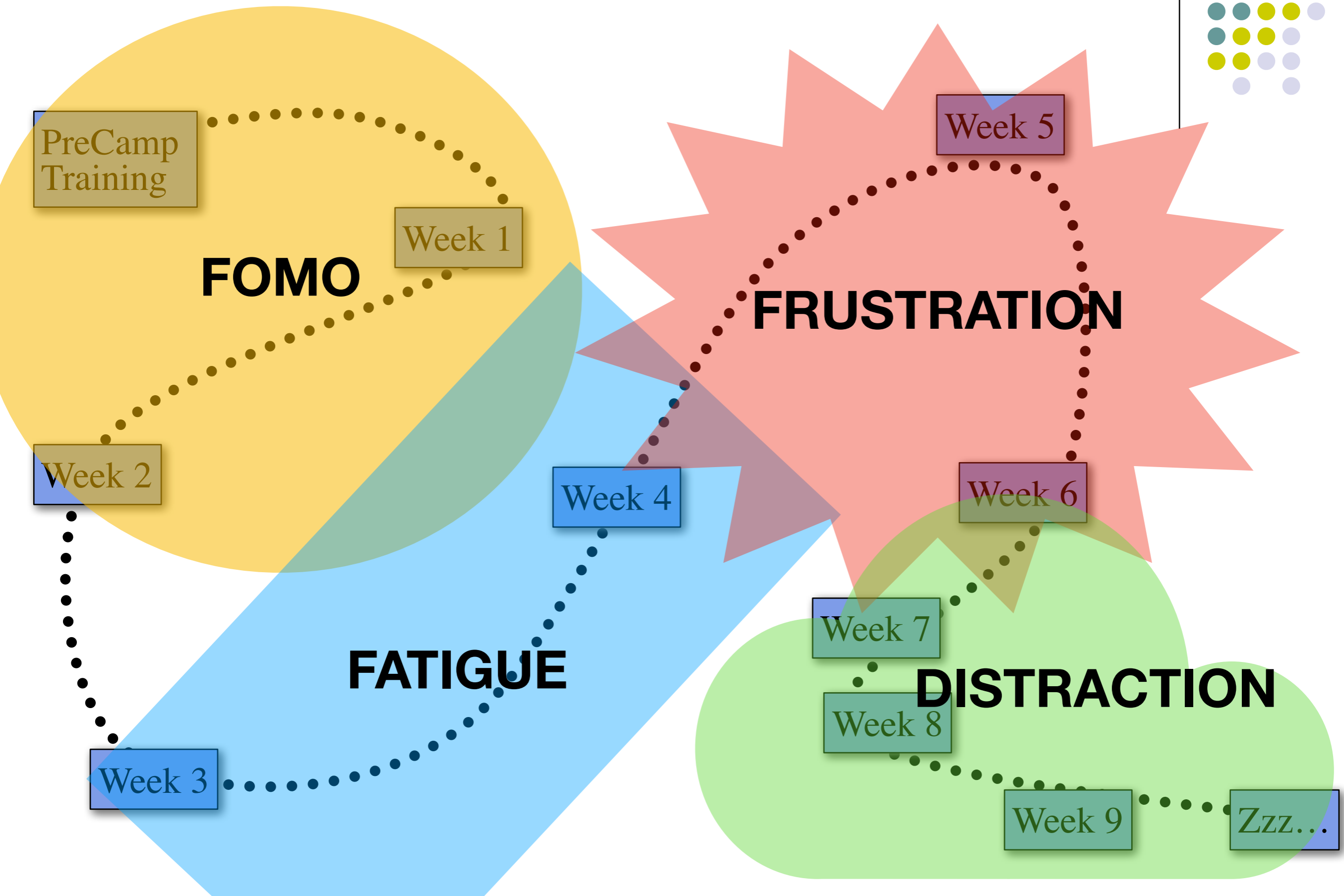
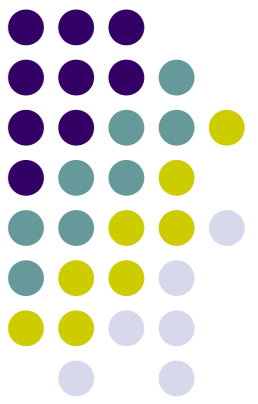


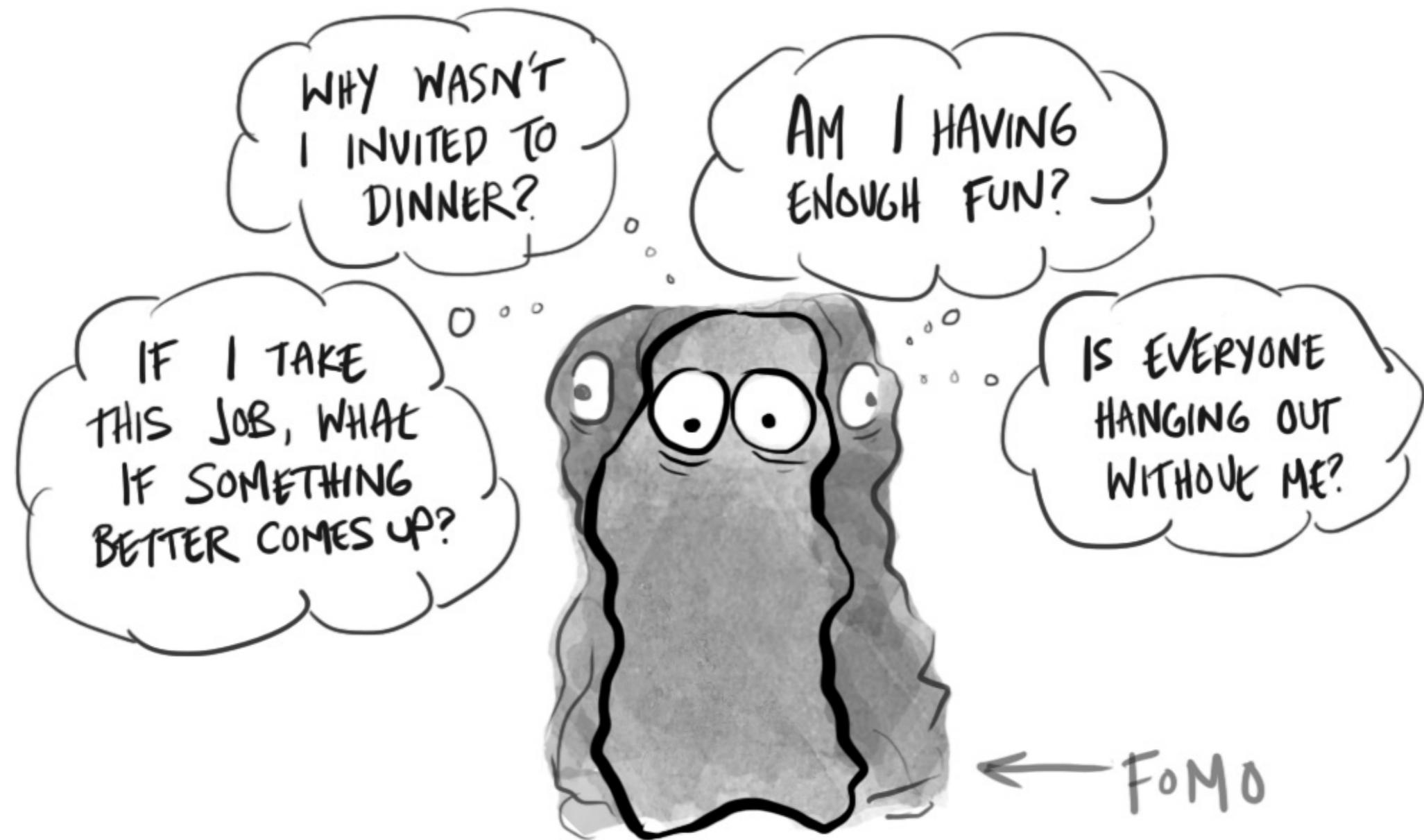
- Intro: What is a Meltdown?
- **Predict:** The Rhythm of Summer Camp Meltdowns
- **Prevent:** Interventions to meet needs before they reach critical mass
- **Manage:** When meltdown occurs, how to recover (and not make it worse)

# Predict and Plan for 9-Week Cycles



# Four Flavors of Anxiety





# Phase 1: FOMO

FOMO= Fear of Missing Out

# The Addiction?

- Is NOT to the cell phone.

- It's to ***Feeling Connected.***





# Connectivity is REQUIRED for Emotional Stability in Staff

- Disconnection = Suffering = (pain + fear)
- Strongest themes of struggling counselors =
  - Loneliness in a crowd
  - Not being included in time off
  - Feelings of disconnection from home
  - I'm the only one who...
  - ... therefore I must be doing it wrong.

# A Big Difference

**Fitting In =>**

**We're just the same! =>**

**I hide my differences =>**

**Paralyzed in Shamey Spot**



**High FOMO,  
Frequent feelings  
of Loneliness**

**Belonging =>**

**Unconditional Positive Regard =>**

**Safety in who I am =>**

**Calm and Attentive**

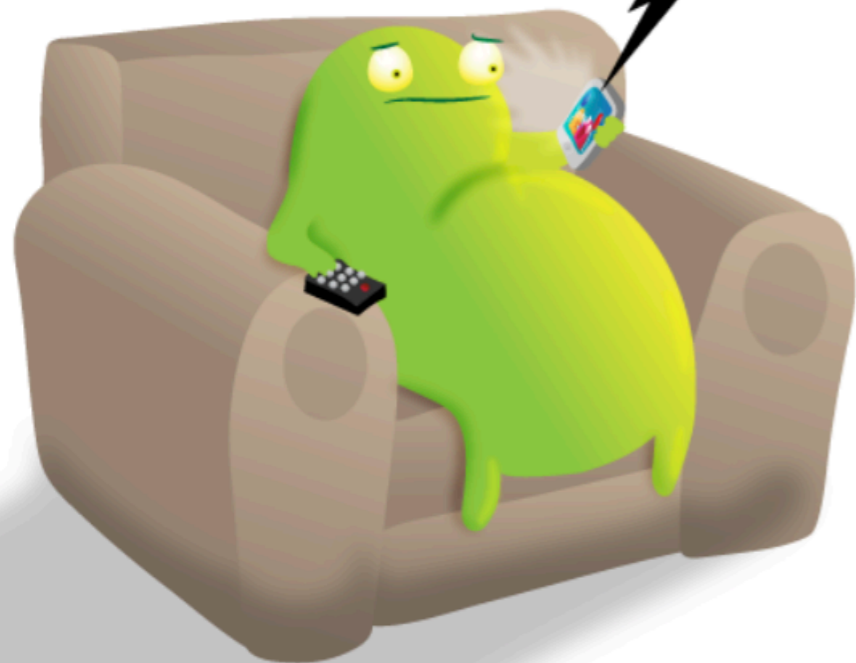


**Low FOMO,  
Frequent feelings  
of Connection**

# High FOMO Camps...

## F.O.M.O.

(Fear of missing out.)



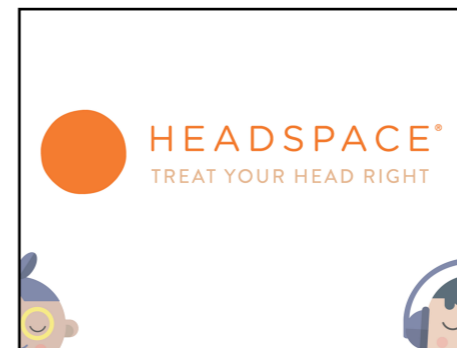
- “Tribal Knowledge” information
- Unstructured socializing: the cool kids will always win
- Very hierarchal: Titles, privileges, access, meetings
- Glory to the Extroverts (only)
- No where to hang without kids (except the bar in town)

# Low FOMO Camps...

- ***Management* takes responsibility for Social Inclusion.**
  - Inclusive welcome for ALL, not just legacy staff.
  - Repeat structured team building exercises - throughout camp cycle.
  - Honor introverted and different communication styles in group activities.
  - Exhibit connection points around camp:
    - Van to town sign-up board
    - Staff hang-out lounge
    - Communications board with two-way flow of news

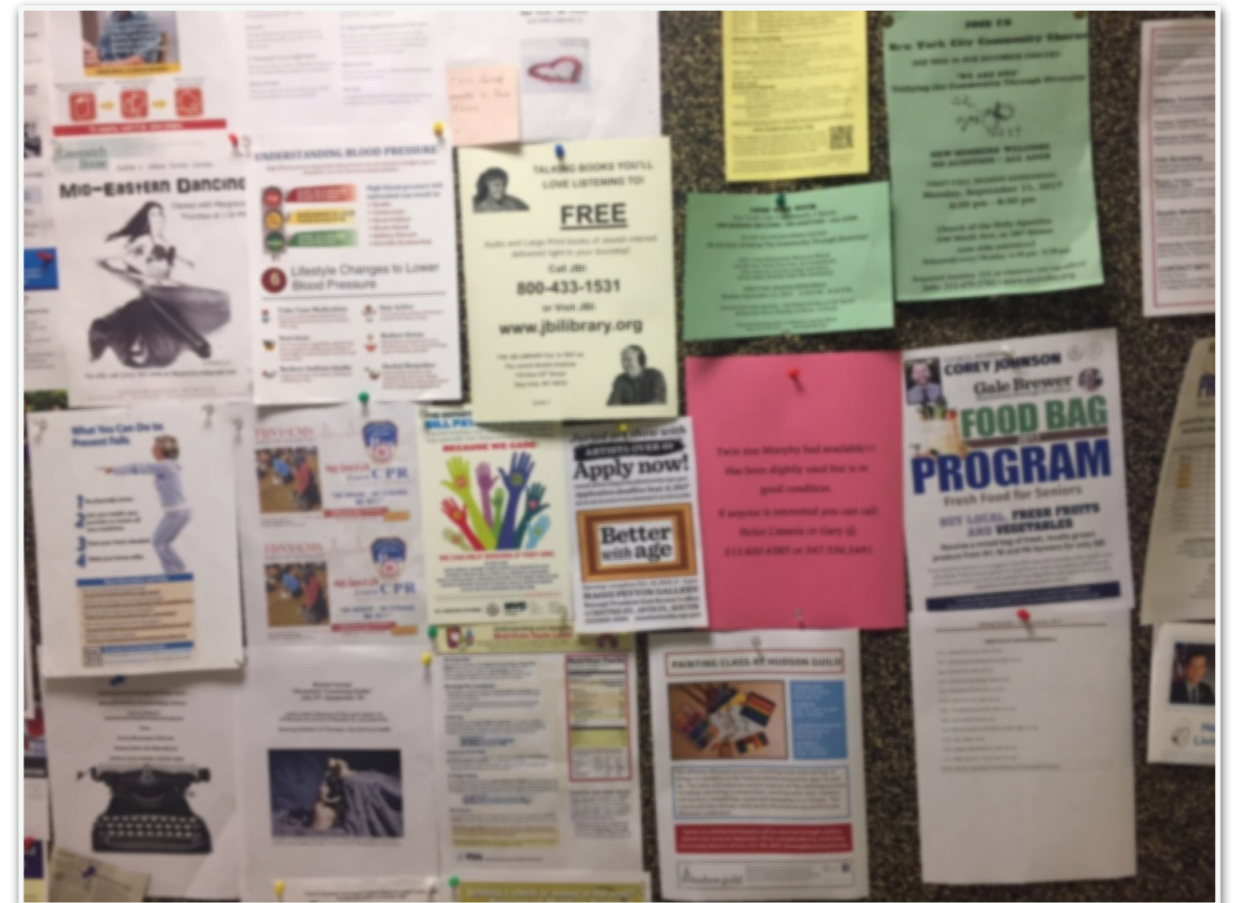
# A Proven FOMO Buster

- Regular Meditation in Groups;
- Whoever wants to come, can;
- Host daily Meditation groups in morning and/or evening;
- Quiet, dark room with chairs (or not);
- Use app like Calm or Headspace to guide mediation for 15-30 min.



# Be the Broken Record:

***“You are important to us. Your voice is valued. You are included. You are wanted here.”***





# Phase 2: Fatigue

It's not IF, but WHEN.

# EMT quote from a Melted-Down camp, after week 3:

You want my diagnosis?

- 100% exhaustion.
- These kids (staff) have no hope, no chance of recovery.
- They have zero break and most are flying solo with cabins packed to the gills with campers.
- The kids (staff) have no one to rely on for support, because everyone, top and bottom, is falling apart physically and mentally.
- Physically taxing days, huge responsibility, not enough sleep, no support, and no hope it's going to get better.
- This world is a “no-win” situation.
- No wonder they're leaving in droves.



# Wait... they get time off!

- Two hours a day... One day a week...
- To go no where without kids around...
- Not aligned with my friends...
- Still responsible for paperwork...
- No reliable cellphone/internet to call outside support...
- Just enough \$ for quarter beers...
- (Time's up. Break is over. And be cheerful, nurturing and caring!  
Because everyone's watching.)



# Highly Fatigued Camps...

- Don't have an overnight off without campers present.
- Don't have a place for staff to unwind without campers.
- Don't have access to healthy ways for staff to hang out.
- Skimp on overhead and support staff.
- Have lousy and uninspired food.
- Don't keep up with staff attrition.
- Don't take time off for staff-only activities, training, nurturing, listening, and other nurturing input.



# Low Fatigued Camps...

- Have physical and emotional support available;
- Have a dedicated “time-off” space with no campers;
- Have a legit recovery time/space at least once a week.
- Feed the body, feed the brain: snacks, treats, meals;
- Feed the soul: Eye contact! Smiles! Caring and concern!  
Repeated affirmations!
- Train and re-train (and re-train) staff on self care.
- Top-down cultural approach to sleep, health, and support.

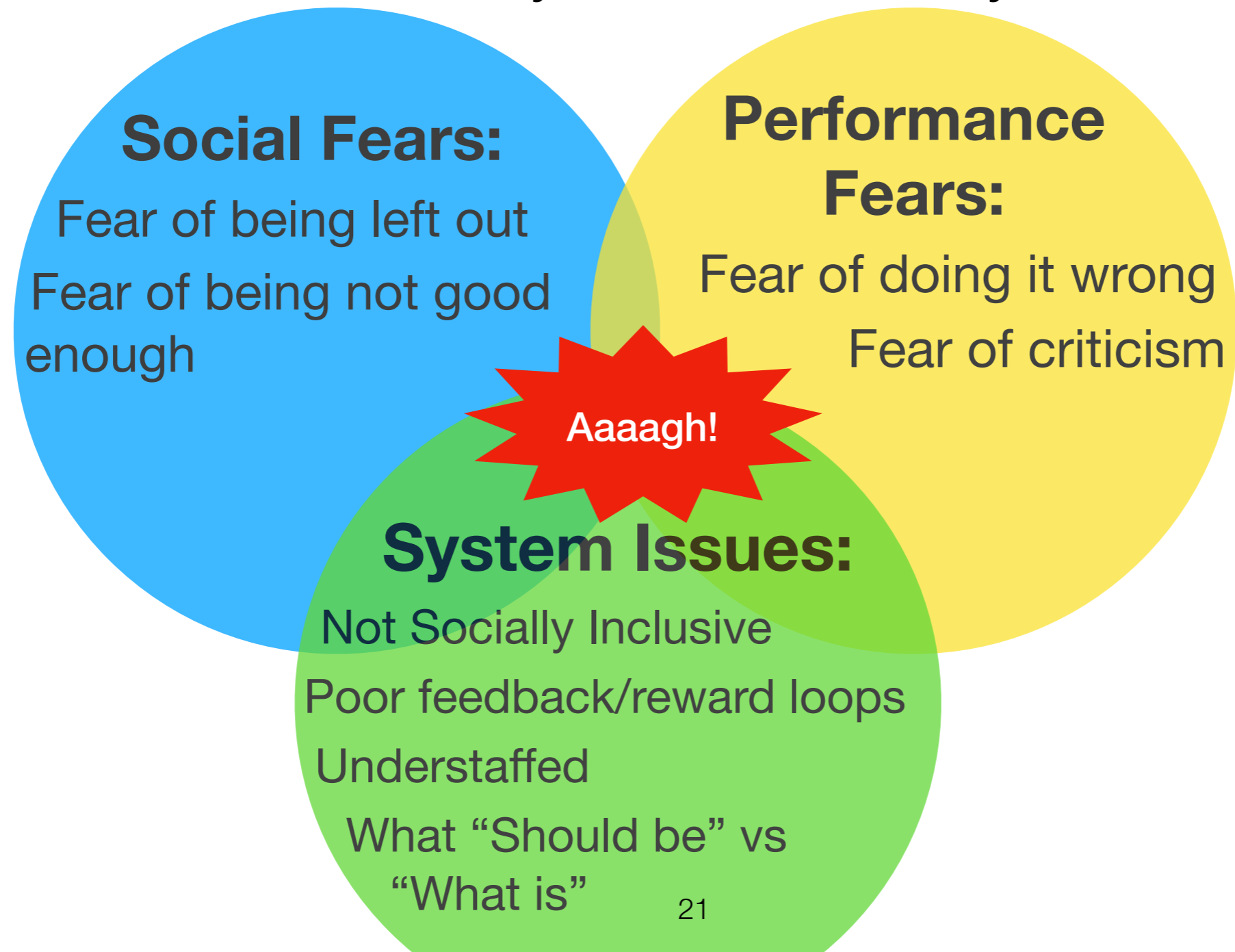


# Phase 3: Frustration

It's inevitable.

# Phase 3: Frustration!

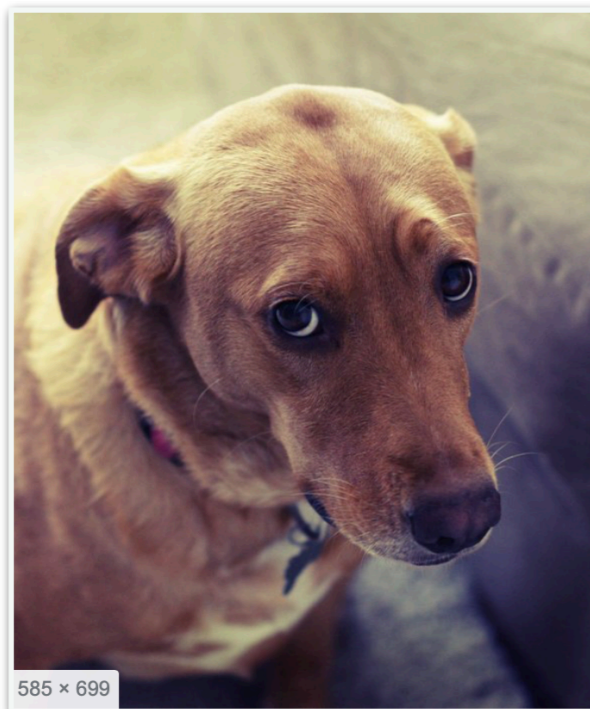
During long stretches of “tired brain,” predictable cracks have already weakened the system:



# When Tired Brain goes too far...

Depression: Internal vs. External

- I suck, I can't do anything right, I'm the problem here;
- *You* suck, *you* can't do anything right, *you're* the problem here!



# Highly Frustrated Camps...

- Don't have skills to communicate their frustration effectively.
- Attack, accuse, become defensive, and shut down.
- Have leaders that hide or sidestep from conflict.
- Play the "Who's the Bad Guy" game... constantly.
- Refuse to listen to dissatisfaction or criticism.
- Don't trust management, staff, campers, themselves.
- Give up, give in, take the low road.

# Low Frustration Camps...

- Develop **good communication skills**...from the start
- Do lots of one-on-one check-ins as a habit, not a reaction...from the start
- See conflict as a normal, good thing...from the start
- Keep a “we” mindset in our camp goals...from the start
- Know and Feel that “we are in this struggle together.”...from the start
- Maintain Psychological Safety in talking and trusting...from the start



# Fighting vs. Conflict Skills

- Fighting: My need wins. Your need loses.
- Conflict: I have a need, you have a different need. We both want our needs met. Now what do we do?



**How can we both get our needs met?**

# The value of one-on-ones

- To gain the pulse of the group;
- To increase staff feelings of efficacy;
- To validate;
- To de-escalate;
- To support.

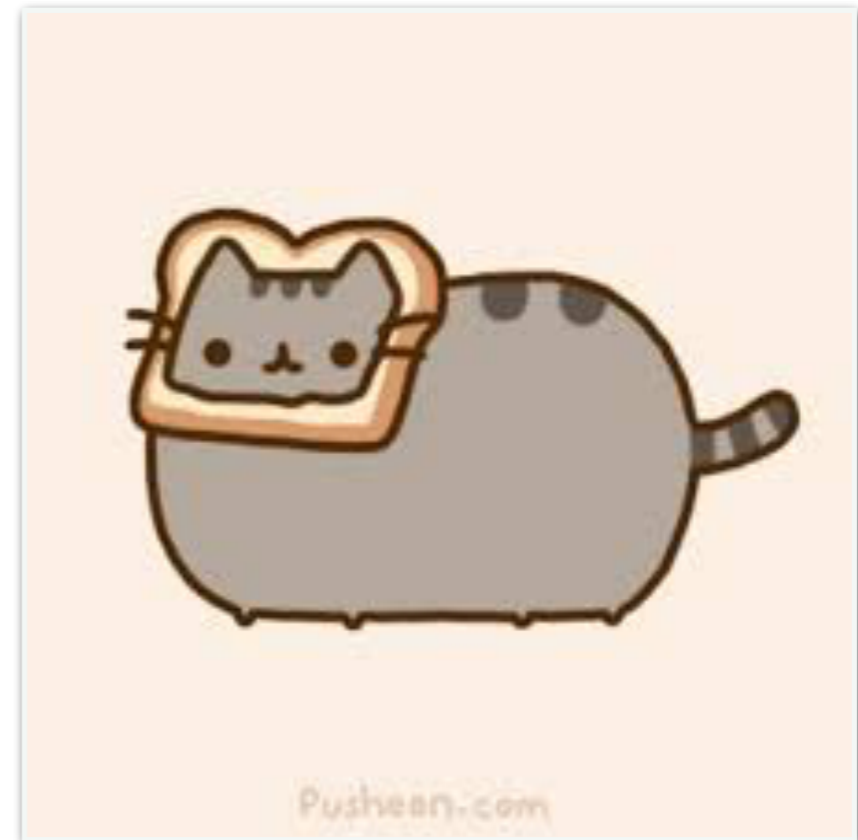


# Hints for 1:1s

- Listen. Listen. Listen.
- Ask. Ask. Ask.
- Figure out the BIG emotion. Move to soft.
  - Mad: What is Not OK or Not Fair?
  - Scared: What might hurt you?
  - Sad: What important thing have you lost?
  - Glad: What do you hope for? Why? What will it do?

# When Camp is Deep in Frustration

- Deescalate emotions.
- One on Ones. And Listen for what is really being requested.
- Don't just say no to everything. Do what you can.
- Soothe & Distract.
- Feed bodies, feed spirits.





# Phase 4: Distracted

*(and September)*

# Highly Distracted Camps...

- Don't revisit priorities.
- Feel like it doesn't matter. I'm not that important.
- Complain, but don't address.
- Ignore lowering standards.  
Oh well.
- Don't give space for September.



# Low Distracted Camps...

- Keep feeding their staff's bellies and spirits;
- Keep training ongoing, relevant, novel;
- Keep supporting through listening;
- Keep one on one facetime as a habit;
- Keep planning structured group events;
- Acknowledge staff are humans with lives.



# Staff are real people too

- Acknowledge staff's complex identities.
- Consider camp “job fair” in week 6/7 for off-season camp job opportunities. Invite a local college?
- Plan for more One-on-ones to allow staff to personally talk out anxieties/planning, then refocus.
- Tell them how **IMPORTANT** their job is. Over and over.





# We model what we've been shown.



You are GOOD.  
You are IMPORTANT.  
You are COMPETENT.  
We're cheering for you.

Meow.



Purr.

# Thank you!

## Questions?

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