

Counselling and Wellbeing services for the Veterinary Profession

“We can help you drop the struggle and
regain your mojo”

Presenter:

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Who are we?



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Dr Kathryn James
Veterinarian and Counsellor



Dr Deborah Webb
Veterinarian and Counsellor



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An industry in trouble

- ❑ Dynamic -> Cumulative stress
- ❑ Serious mental health issues
 - 4 x suicide rate
 - Highest across professions
 - 1 vet every 12 weeks
- ❑ Personality traits
 - Self-defeating behaviour patterns
- ❑ High attrition rates
 - 5 years
- ❑ Flow on effects



Some of the highs ...



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- ❑ Great clients
- ❑ Gorgeous pets
- ❑ Making a difference
- ❑ High achievers
 - Diagnostic challenges
 - Continued learning
 - New skill development
- ❑ Positive workplace culture
 - Great teams
- ❑ Never boring





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Some of the challenges ...

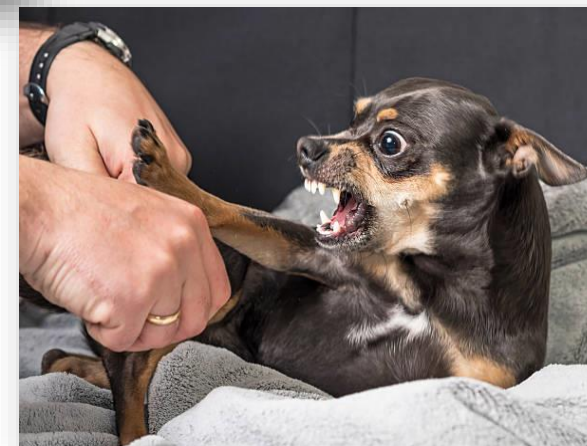
❑ Client abuse

- No 1 suicide trigger
- Deflected grief/guilt
- Anger/blame/criticism
- Physical abuse



❑ Animal factors

- Aggression
- Unexpected case outcomes
- Moral dilemmas- euthanasia, neglect, abuse





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Some of the challenges ...

- ❑ Toxic workplace cultures
 - Poor management lacking EQ
 - Emphasis on productivity
 - Team conflict
- ❑ Personal stress
 - Health
 - Relationships
 - Finances



Personality factors



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- ❑ Maladaptive perfectionism
 - Focus on outcomes
 - Lose sight of the journey
 - Anxiety
 - Avoidance behaviours
- ❑ Imposter Syndrome
- ❑ Perceived failure
- ❑ People pleasers/need approval
- ❑ “I should”, “I must” mentality





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Emotional Roller Coaster

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Burnout
- Compassion fatigue
- Vicarious trauma
- Moral dilemmas
- Limited debriefing
- Poor self-care

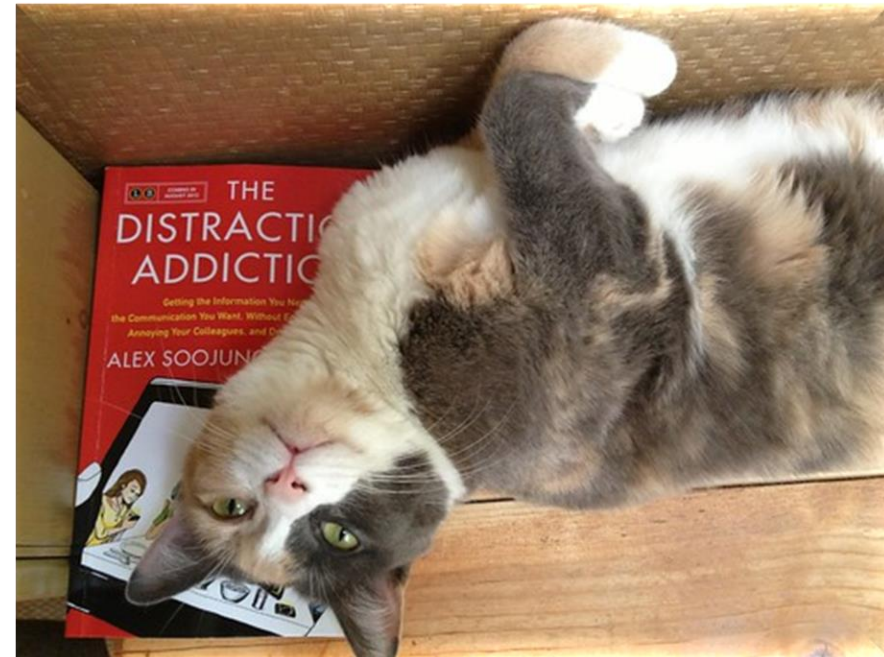


Common stress busters



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- ❑ Distracting ourselves
- ❑ Opting out
 - Lost opportunities
- ❑ Thinking our way out
 - Self justification
- ❑ Substance abuse
 - Alcohol
 - Drugs



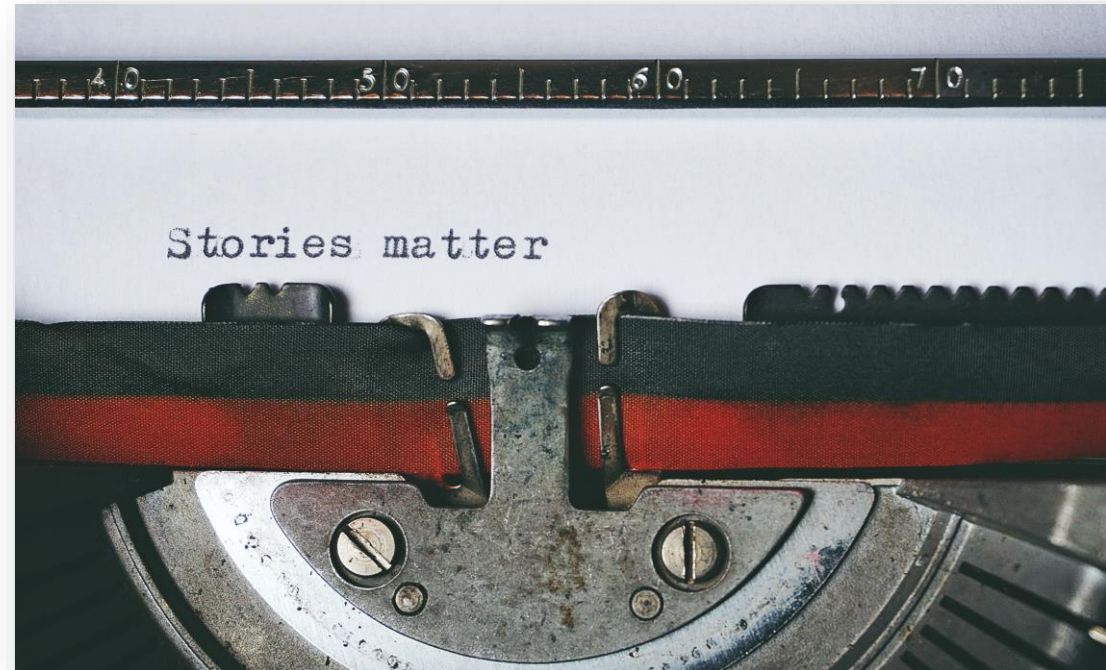
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My story



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- ❑ Father a veterinarian
- ❑ Industry advances
- ❑ Personal issues
 - I'm 'indispensable'
 - Wine
 - Medications
 - Psychologist
 - Avoidance
 - Social
 - Work challenges
- ❑ Autopilot existence



Lived experience

My story



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- ❑ Unexpected patient death
- ❑ Client grief response
- ❑ Crisis
- ❑ Major 'light bulb moment'
- ❑ Tiny goals
 - Permission to cry
 - Bike riding
- ❑ Self Compassion -> 'Recovery'
 - Avoidance -> missed opportunities



My story



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- ❑ Health issues 2016 & 2018
 - Enforced work break
 - Improved self-care
 - Considered counselling AIPC
- ❑ Mentoring: serious issues
 - Corporate productivity focus
 - Workplace stigma
- ❑ Mental Health First Aid
 - No acknowledgement
- ❑ 5 years later: took the plunge!
 - Contacted by AIPC





The big messages for vets

- ❑ We can't control:
 - Super highs and super lows
 - Other people's behaviour
 - Case outcomes
 - Our schedule
- ❑ Stressful situations, thoughts and emotions are inevitable
- ❑ We can control:
 - Our response





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The big messages for vets

- ❑ ‘Stop asking ourselves why they keep doing it, and start asking ourselves why we keep allowing it’
- ❑ Veterinary workers have the power to drive change
- ❑ A stronger workforce will promote industry changes
- ❑ Focus on staff welfare and productivity will follow





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The big messages for vets

- ❑ Support is available
 - Workplace coaching
 - Non-judgemental counselling support 'by vets for vets'
- ❑ Seeking help is a strength
- ❑ Early development of practical skills can be life changing
- ❑ Lower attrition rates





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Some insight for counsellors

- ❑ Vets need action
- ❑ Vets need hope
- ❑ Pursue the past later
- ❑ Vets like the ‘proof’
- ❑ Vets are time poor
- ❑ ‘a,e,i,o’ EQ skill development will go a long way

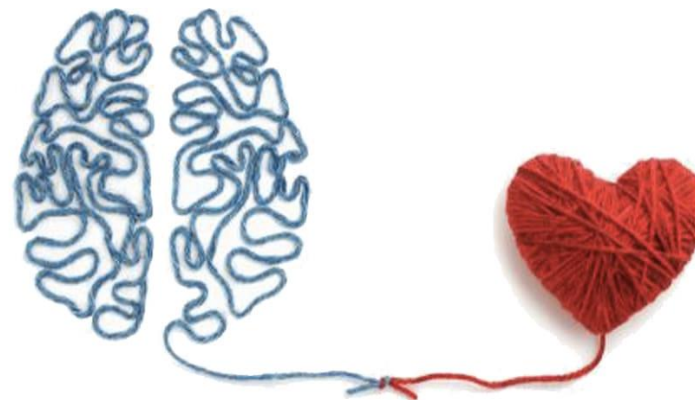




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Our vision and counselling approach

- Early intervention
- EQ
 - Self-awareness
 - Self-management
 - Social awareness
 - Relationship management
- Life skills
 - Communication & relationships
 - Boundary setting
 - Self compassion/self-care
 - Work/life balance



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Our vision and counselling approach



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□ ACT

- Normalise difficult situations, thoughts and feelings
- Values guided action
- Everyone is different
- Strengths based goals

□ Meaningful life

□ Career fulfillment

□ Thriving profession



Networking



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- ❑ We are relatively unique
 - Lived experience
 - ACT training
- ❑ Current EAP inadequate
 - Insufficient sessions
 - Lack of understanding
 - Empathy but insufficient 'action'
- ❑ Collaboration
 - Referral when appropriate
 - Addition of pet grief and loss



Thank you!

 <https://veterinaryvitality.com.au>

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