**Minimising Stress and Maximising Potential**

**Tried and tested strategies for emotional well-being**

Attendees will leave with:

* Top tips for reducing stress and anxiety in ourselves and others
* Relevant engaging stories of how others have overcome challenges
* Strategies for increasing self-esteem, confidence and resilience
* Practical steps to put into practice immediately

I’m Cat Williams and I specialise in emotional resilience, self-confidence and removing limiting beliefs that hold people back. I’ve been a therapist for over 20 years and I’m also a military wife which brings me personal experience of overcoming many challenges, I work with clients of all ages and speak in schools, colleges and workplaces.

Today I will share as much of my tool box as I can of my tips and strategies, in particular for engaging, encouraging and motivating students and young people to believe in themselves and achieve their potential.

My over-arching approach on this subject, is that, as educators supporting the development of students we could be the only, or one of the only supportive voices they hear in their day to day lives. They are quite likely to have negative voices at home “you’re stupid, I’ve done fine without an education, what’s the point in the course you’re doing” etc and are highly likely – just like we all do – to also have a very critical internal voice saying “I can’t do this; other people are better than me; I’m going to fail; I’m not good enough”.

There are only three root causes of all emotional issues 1) That we feel not good enough in some way 2) that we feel different, fear we don’t fit in or will be rejected 3) that we know what we want but believe it is not available to us.

So think about these for yourself first of all, and for the students – we all have one or more of these three things lying at the root of our emotional health 1) How ‘good enough’ do we feel – often I ask people out of 10 and people will tell you – one of my favourite tools to use is scaling questions – ask yourself now, how ‘good enough’ do you feel out of 10, it’s a really interesting experiment to ask your partner, children, friends, students – I asked my Dad once who I assumed would say 10/10 – but he said “oh, not very high and I was completely shocked, it had never crossed my mind that my dad would struggle with how he felt about himself – so ask out of 10 – how ‘good enough’ do you feel – how different out of 10 – and how much do you believe what you want, for example success, confidence, a good relationship, etc is available to you.

The truth is of course that we all deserve to feel these things 10/10 but almost nobody does, which is where my job comes in.

Every baby arrives on the planet feeling 10/10 good enough, they’ve been fed, nurtured and kept warm in the womb 24 hours a day and they arrive and cry day or night expecting that care, attention and feeling of fitting in just as they are to continue, they know they are perfect, worthy and loveable just as they are.

But of course, over the following months and years, based on the situations we face or other people’s treatment of us as we grow up, we may form beliefs that perhaps were not enough, or that we’re different, or don’t deserve things, or that what we want is not available to someone like us. Many psychological experiments show this – that our brains are conditioned by the time we are 7, whatever has become familiar by the time we are 7 years old becomes our blue-print for life - the Jesuits hundreds of years ago said “show me a 7 year old child and I’ll show you the adult they’ll become” and in most cases this is correct, UNLESS, something significant changes this.

My aim for today is to leave you with the tools and approaches that could influence changing someone’s beliefs about themselves. We can be the drip drip drip effect of positive change that could cause someone to shift their mind-set about their own abilities – or we could say that one thing that stays with them and plants a seed that grows into something they previously didn’t imagine for themselves. There are three ways we change 1) instantly 2) gradually over time 3) retrospectively – so we are hoping to have an influence in all of these ways.

The metaphor I like to use for minimising stress and maximising potential is a hot air balloon. When people come to me I talk them through this metaphor.

The basket of the balloon is the stress that weighs us down so I’ll talk about ways to reduce this stress; the ropes that tie the balloon to the ground represent the instinctive but negative coping strategies and habits that we use to try to make ourselves feel better, but that ultimately hold us back; the flame of the balloon is our self-worth; self confidence and self-esteem; the strings that attach the basket to the balloon represent our mind-set and the balloon itself is all the ways we can lift ourselves up and travel to where we want to get to.

I spent the first lockdown using this balloon analogy to create my online resilience and well-being course so it is there for you if you would like to take it after today - it covers more than I can cover in this session and I’m looking for reviews as well so do get in touch if you would like to review the course and give feedback, that would be fantastic.

I’m going to go through each of these parts of the balloon briefly. Firstly the basket: I get asked “how can I feel less stressed, or help others to feel less stressed” and this is what I say:

1. Stress is just a question – when we feel agitated, anxious, we notice our heart rate increases, we have sweaty hands perhaps or butterflies, this is our natural fight / flight fear response asking a question – and the question our body is asking is CAN I COPE WITH THIS? It’s a very important question to ask, but in this day and age I think the reason everyone seems more and more stressed is because we’re all connected online potentially 24 hours a day – so the input coming in from social media, messages and images etc can ask this question “can I cope with – or other versions are “am I good enough; do I fit it; can I achieve success’ over and over again in just one day – many people I see are in a constant state of stress – one of the things I always say to my clients of any age – and this makes me unpopular but I say it anyway – is that in my opinion – no technology of any kind should be in a bedroom – no phone, no tv, nothing – in our house no tech is allowed upstairs – because the number 1 priority for good mental health is sleep and nothing should be allowed to disturb or stimulate us before sleep. I noticed this in myself a few years ago now that when I was stressed I would start to scroll aimlessly or binge watch and it did the OPPOSITE of help, it was triggering the ‘can I cope with this’ question, which is especially unhelpful at night – so for my own well-being, and my children’s I lead by example and I relax and read before bed and now – since bringing hypnosis into my work – I listen to a self-hypnosis recording every night for just 10-15 minutes and I have never slept better (I’ve put a free self-hypnosis recording on a link for you if you would like to try it)
2. So my answer to the stress question “can I cope with this” is always “YES” because the FEAR that triggers the question is F .E. A. R or False Evidence Appearing Real – the truth is as Shakespeare says “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” - the SAME EVENT – let’s take the coronavirus – is not innately good or bad – it is neutral, it’s a thing a situation – what makes it positive or negative is how it affects us and our THOUGHTS. The only thing we can ever control is our THOUGHTS so it’s our interpretation of an event, which determines how we feel, which determines how we behave – which determines how we think again – it’s a cycle that begins with our THOUGHTS – and that is what we are trying to influence in our students – how they THINK.

So to reduce the weight of the basket of stress we need to challenge what we think we can’t cope with and are afraid of – fear is False Evidence Appearing Real firstly because 99.9% of our fears don’t actually happen – and SECONDLY – even if they do we CAN cope with them – we either ASK FOR HELP – or REALISE how strong and capable we are – so there really is nothing to be afraid of, and that’s how we challenge and reduce our stress.

FLAME – the flame of the balloon. I use a storm lantern analogy for this – how we feel about ourselves is the light in the lantern that is protected by the glass and metal so it is never blown out no matter how strong and scary and dark the storm is. The world is an unpredictable place but those who thrive in difficult circumstances hold onto their inner belief in themselves and they find a way to shine even in the darkest of situations and the scariest of times – I say to students all the time that I see a DIAMOND in them that has been shining since they were born – just because someone else might not see it, or because something has hidden it or cast a shadow over it – it doesn’t mean it isn’t there – the only person who needs to know the diamond is there is them and if we can help them to see it we’re doing an amazing thing. A quote I use all the time is “No-one and nothing can make you feel inferior without your consent” Eleanor Roosevelt said this, it can be hard to believe, but it’s true – the reputation you have with yourself is under your control and it’s the most important thing for a successful life.

ROPES – the ropes are the things that hold us back. I’ll see a lot of this as you can imagine – an addiction is anything that moves us towards pleasure and away from pain – or that’s how it starts – alcohol, drugs, gambling, shopping addictions, porn, they all begin as a way to escape from the pain of life, and then they often become the pain itself because we believe we need them and are in control of them, until they turn around and control us.

Obviously a student will need one to one therapy and support from other services to help with an addiction but all I would say is that telling a story of those who have shifted from a negative to a positive coping strategy might help. The human brain responds to stories – that’s how we make sense of things and how we relay information to one another – so if we can enable another person to tell themselves a better story we’ve done an amazing things.

Here’s a way to do it using your hand. So, if we’re here (wrist) facing this situation – whatever your student might be facing – here are their options – best case scenario (thumb) – worst case scenario (little finger) – most likely scenario (middle finger). We need to ask ourselves – no matter what the situation – what does a story of resilience look like here – and tell them perhaps a story of someone you know who has come through something similar – obviously we don’t want to come across as “you should do this, you should do that” that’s not what I’m saying – the most important thing is to first listen to the person’s situation and allow them to feel heard – but the story technique can open the door to a new way of thinking because it can be very subtle – you can say “I know you’re situation is different but this is what happened to someone I know, this is how they created their own end to their story” that is what we are trying to do – no matter what the beginning of the story has been – and for many many students the beginning of the story will be really tragic and difficult – but we are saying – you are now in control of how this story continues – you can write the next chapter, what is it going to be – passing your course, going on to the next stage in your life - writing your own story, or having your past write the rest of your story for you?

THE STRINGS – this ties in to our mind- set. You will have heard of a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset, and I use the most powerful three letter word to help remember this, the word YET – you can’t do that YET, you haven’t passed YET, you’re not confident with this YET but you will be, you are getting there. Resilience is similar – I explain to students that resilience isn’t like being a tennis ball where we should expect to bounce back from failure or hard situations and be the same as we were before – resilience is more like a tomato – sometimes our circumstances will squash and squish us, but it’s not hard to imagine that if a tomato is squashed and releases it’s seeds over a patch of soil, that a few weeks or months later some new tomato plants have grown there – and that’s resilience – how can we grow, what can we learn – we grown and learn every day, all the time.

I talk students through the four main rules of the mind, which I came across via the work of Marissa Peer and RTT therapy and she has many excellent videos on You Tube.

The four rules are:

Rule 1: Your mind always **does** what it thinks you want it to do and always **gives** you what it thinks you want to be given. Rule 2: Your mind is hard wired to move you towards pleasure and away from pain. Rule 3: The way you feel about everything all the time is only down to two things, the pictures in your head and the words you say to yourself. Rule 4 - Your mind loves what is familiar and doesn’t like what is unfamiliar - so if you want to succeed you have to change what’s familiar

1. **Your mind always does what it thinks you want it to do, it’s always acting in your own interest.** Your mind only has one main job, which is to keep you alive, so it listens very specifically to the information you give it ie. The words you use, so that it can carry out its job. So if students say “this work is killing me; I’m dreading the exam, job interviews are going to be a nightmare, for example, or “I can’t cope, I can’t do this, I’m overwhelmed” the mind is listening all the time and working out what you want it to help you to do.

When we say “it’s a nightmare; I can’t do this” we are telling your mind that we are not safe doing that activity, and if our mind hears we don’t want to do something, guess what, it encourages us not to do it, to avoid it, to procrastinate, to become ill and have to spend all day sleeping or binge watching TV series, to avoid whatever it is, and not apply ourselves.

When I was starting to write my book I was telling my clients about really wanting to write it and saying that they inspired me so much and would it be okay if I shared some of their stories - and then the weeks went by and even though I was saying I wanted to write I wasn’t actually getting anywhere. Then one day I realised that I was actually saying in my head, “it’s impossible, it’s going to take such a long time, this is so hard, how can I find the time, I’m going to have to stay up late or get up early and what if people don’t like it” etc etc

So guess what, my mind helped me to avoid writing the book, I procrastinated and made excuses and did everything else except sit down and write. Until, one day, I realised I had to change those words and I started saying “I’m excited about writing this book” “I choose to sit up late and get up early and I like that decision because I have something important to write”, and “as long as I like my book and my clients like what I’ve written about their stories, what anyone else thinks doesn’t scare me.”

And then suddenly I was on a mission and I started and finished the book in less than 7 months, which was the time my husband was on a front line tour in Afghanistan – and I’m very proud of how the book turned out.

So you could use your own example to plant a seed or be that drip drip drip of change in a students mind – you could use an example of you running a marathon or achieving something difficult – if you were on the starting line of a marathon and said to yourself “I don’t want to do this, every step is going to be horrendous, I’m going to die” you wouldn’t even get off the starting line. So RULE ONE is that we need to give our minds very detailed information about what we really want and we need to say when something is hard work - “I want this, I like this, I’ve chosen this, it’s what I want’ – so in relation to studying and passing a course encourage students to take control of what they want and feel great about that.

I like to tell them the original old English meaning of the word WINNER. Winner didn’t used to mean to come first, or beat someone else, it used to mean to strive, to work, to struggle – so I tell students when they strive, when they struggle, when they work, they are winners, because they are, and to acknowledge the small things – many students (like my own children) will be addicted to gaming and binge watching YouTube videos or TV series, because there’s always another level and our brain releases a little shot of the reward hormone Dopamine every time we get a little win – but we can encourage students and ourselves to see ‘wins’ differently, a ‘win’ is studying for an hour, or getting a piece of work in, looking after themselves in other ways as well, getting a good night’s sleep, doing some exercise, choosing a healthy lunch – you get the idea – the small wins can become addictive in really useful empowering ways if we see them that way and embrace the small wins every day that are under our control. And of course this is the place to start, you can’t give to your students from an empty cup, you are a winner, you are enough, you are incredible, put that on your mirror, put alerts on your phone, put it on your fridge, if you don’t believe it about yourself how can you expect students to believe it about themselves.

**RULE 2: Your mind will always move you towards pleasure and away from pain -** my dad was bitten on the arm by a dog when he was little and he’s never liked dogs, our brains are hard wired to avoid pain. But, if pain has been linked in the past to something we now **want**, then we have to find a way to make that thing a **pleasure**,we might have picked up the belief we don’t like speaking in public, or we don’t like exams or interviews - so our brain believes those things are painful and tries to make us avoid them.

But the good news is that we as humans can choose, if we take some extreme examples, like a needle, if I ask you if you like needles you’re likely to say of course not, but if you like getting tattoos, or you’re a diabetic who knows the needle is helping them, then you have linked the needle to pleasure not pain; or exercise could be another example, if you say “I hate running” you won’t go often, but if you say “I choose this and I feel amazing about exercising my body” you see it as self-care and bringing something positive – and it does. So I encourage students to challenge what they consider to be painful, which brings in rule three.

**Rule 3: The mind responds to only two things - the pictures you make in your head and the words you say.** The body experiences anxiety and excitement as the same, there’s no difference in what’s physically going on in the body, only the words and pictures you use to describe it. We go as a family to Alton Towers every year, it’s not my favourite thing, I don’t really like rollercoasters any more, but to change fear to excitement when we all go on ‘Oblivion’ which is always the first ride we go on because it opens first and my family don’t let me out of the first ride, we have to do it together, I tell my mind “I’m excited, this is going to be great, we’ll have a fun time” and we do.

So next time you are nervous or anxious about something, you can tell your mind very clearly that you are excited and it will believe you. Our minds don’t care if what we tell it is true or false, good or bad, helpful or helpful it just let’s it in, so give your mind good strong pictures and words about what you want, and it will believe you and make it happen.

I want you to imagine now I have given you a lemon. It’s large and juicy and bright yellow. Right now you can feel the waxy skin and smell the sharp scent. Now imagine you are biting into the lemon and chewing it, really feel the sharpness and bitter skin. I bet your mouth is salivating if you picture that clearly.

This proves that imagination is more powerful than fact. Just like a thought can make us blush or feel anxious, or excited, every thought creates a physical reaction and I have clients who listen to inner voice all day “I got up late, I’m already a failure, I should go for a run but I’m lazy, I’m useless, I’m an idiot, I’m stupid, who would want me? We are our own worst enemy when we don’t control the words we use and the pictures we have in our minds – remember – our mind just lets it in, good or bad, true or false, helpful or unhelpful, it lets it in – so give your students and encourage them to give themselves the words and pictures they need to get what they want.

Right now this COVID situation isn’t a nightmare – it’s a challenge, “I can’t cope” can become “I have incredible coping strategies” this is one of my favourites – say it now “I have incredible coping strategies”, say it to your students, they can’t argue with this one, because to get to where they’ve got to they have already demonstrated incredible coping strategies so if they say “I’m stressed, I can’t do this” you say “I see a person who has phenomenal incredible coping strategies and who can handle anything with the right support, because they have, and they can.

**RULE FOUR –** The fourth thing about your mind is that it loves what is familiar, because this feels safe, and unfamiliar things feel unsafe – and remember – the main job of your mind is to always keep you safe. So, if procrastinating is familiar, or getting up late, or not believing in yourself – then you have got to make that unfamiliar and make whatever is unfamiliar familiar e.g. feeling confident, feeling worthy, believing in yourself etc

Pretty much all of us in the UK anyway, I reckon, struggle with saying “I’m great, I’m the best” and I’m sure your students will struggle with this too, so having you say it to them will be helping to make believing in themselves more familiar, you having confidence in them helps them to become more familiar with having confidence in themselves – and you can say, nothing is difficult, it’s just unfamiliar to you, and you can make whatever you want more familiar every day.

I don’t know if you’ve come across the study of Professor Rosenthal back in the 1960’s I think, in the United States. He went into high schools and said that he could identify the gifted students and would then study them over a couple of years and see if he had identified them correctly and what the ‘gifted’ students did differently. At the end of the study he said that yes, the young students identified became the most successful students – but they he explained the real purpose of the study. He hadn’t identified gifted students in the first place at all, he had chosen so called ‘gifted students’ randomly and then the study had actually been monitoring the teachers – when the teachers knew which children had been identified as gifted they smiled at them more, were more likely to answer their questions, gave them more time, had more patience, and used more positive affirming language – therefore those children became gifted. I love that story as a reminder of the power of the story we tell ourselves and that is told to us – if the story is that we are capable, gifted, talented, successful then the mind lets it in and lives by that blueprint and that is the direction we travel in.

THREE CIRCLES – I like to use this image. The middle circle is us, the top circle is where we want to get to, and the bottom circle is the fear that holds us back. I’ve already said that the fear is made up of those three main beliefs – 1) believing we’re not good enough 2) believing we’re different or not connected or rejected in some way and 3) knowing what we want but believing its not available to us. So in order to overcome these fears what we have to do is tell our mind that we’re already up here in the top circle – we have to SEE, FEEL, HEAR TOUCH and TASTE what it would feel like to already have achieved what we want, and that removes the fear – because if our body and mind can see it and feel it, then there’s no fear holding us back.

Onto filling up the balloon now – and I could talk about a list of strategies such as emotional freedom tapping technique, square breathing, mindfulness, sleep hygiene – but you can look all these up quite easily so with the time we have together I want to share the one thing that fills peoples balloon more than any tip or strategy ever can, and that is knowing your personality strengths.

I identify people’s strengths and I use a different three circle diagram to explain why. If one circle is our goals, where we want to get to, another circle is our skills, things we have learnt or can learn, then the final circle is our innate personality strengths that energise us. When these circles overlap we get our ‘zone of peak performance’ where our goals, skills and strengths align and we feel “in our flow”.

This is how I introduce strengths. I ask people to think of a time they achieved something that was difficult at the time, they really had to struggle and work hard, but looking back, they would do it all again. For young people I often use the example of a project at school when they had to work on their own or as part of a group and the teacher said by the end of today, or the end of the week we need to have completed this project. When they think of how they did that, they will be bringing to mind what energises them. I use a strengths test called Strengthscope which is the only strength-based psychometric test accredited by the British Psychological Society, research by Strengthscope has shown that when we know our personality strengths it increases our motivation, confidence and productivity by 36% - in contrast, if we focus on improving our weaknesses or areas that don’t energise us these three factors decrease by 24%.

I’m going to tell you the 24 strengths and if you would like more information on strengths discovery just get in touch with me because it takes a separate session to identify individual or class strengths, but I can talk you through an introduction now.

There are four strengths clusters each equally important – if I asked you which of these strengths clusters you see yourself in, which would you choose, I’ll describe them, and without over thinking choose one – the first is the EMOTIONAL cluster – this is your cluster if you find you find it easy and natural to identify your emotions and those of others – second is the RELATIONAL cluster – you naturally focus on relationships with other people – third is the EXECUTION cluster – you gravitate towards getting things done – and finally the THINKING cluster, which is the person who feels most comfortable thinking things through.

So, as you can imagine, your students and colleagues would be split between the four clusters, and some people see themselves in two equally, but that’s fine – what I then go on to explain is that how these different clusters interact can be interesting – if we had a team challenge to complete we need people with strengths in each of the four clusters, emotionally aware people, relational people, executors and the thinkers – but of course often the thinkers want to spend more time thinking things through, the executors want to just get on with it, the relational people are focused on whether everyone is engaging and working as a team, and the emotionally aware are tuned in to their own emotional experiences and those of others – what I like about this exercise is that already it frames our differences as strengths – we need to be different, we need others to be energised in a different way to us, but we have strengths to contribute too, we are just as valuable no matter what our strengths.

When I then go on to draw out a person’s individual strengths I explain this, the test or process identifies your 7 top strengths and these seven will be shared by only 1 in 350,000 people, and these seven when placed in your unique order 1 – 7 will be shared by only 1 in 4 million people, so you can already hear the boost that gives to someone self-confidence, self-worth and self-esteem knowing that they are not 1 in a million, they are 1 in 4 million – and personality strengths cannot be taught, they are about what innately energises us, so you can’t not have them, everyone has them, so when a student says “I can’t do anything, I have nothing to offer” I can prove that’s not true, they have natural strengths that may not have had the chance to develop and reach their full expression, but they are there whether they realise it or not and when we learn to use them it’s like we’re stretching a think elastic band, there is so much growth and resilience when we play to our strengths, we will happily draw on them again and again and again – whereas our non-strengths, qualities that don’t come naturally to us – trying to draw on these is like a thin small loom-band – there is some room for growth but not a lot and we can easily snap and give up.

I’m going to read through the 24 words and as I do take this strengths exercise for yourself – remember, they are all equal – so as I list them give each one a 1, 2 or 3, 1 if it sounds like you, 2 if not really and 3 if it definitely doesn’t sound like you.

**EMOTIONAL CLUSTER**

COURAGE

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

ENTHUSIASM

OPTIMISM

RESILIENCE

SELF CONFIDENCE

**RELATIONAL CLUSTER**

COLLABORATION

COMPASSION

DEVELOPING OTHERS

EMPATHY

LEADING

PERSUASIVENESS

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

**EXECUTION CLUSTER**

DECISIVENESS

EFFICIENCY

FLEXIBILITY

INITIATIVE

RESULTS FOCUS

SELF IMPROVEMENT

**THINKING CLUSTER**

COMMON SENSE

CREATIVITY

CRITICAL THINKING

DETAIL ORIENTATION

STRATEGIC MINDEDNESS

After this session, when you have time to reflect, or if I was doing this with students I would then ask them to pick out all the ones they’ve rated a 1 as sounding like them, and choose their top three – the three that define them the most, that if they didn’t have these they would really have lost what defines who they are. When I was asked to do this exercise the top three I chose (again, without over thinking, just go with your gut) was ENTHUSIASM; RESILIENCE and PERSUASION – and then I ask you to draw a picture of your top three strengths, and this is what I drew – sunshine, with a mountain, and me walking up it taking somebody with me, which represents me at my best – I love to be enthusiastic, I love to achieve something difficult especially if I or someone else doesn’t think I can do it, and I love to bring people with me and bring them round to my point of view.

I work with my Chamber of Commerce in North Wales and Cheshire on their Young Chamber programme and I was asked a year or so ago to speak to the least engaged students. They’d never met me before, they had no idea what they were coming to, and at the end a teacher came up to me about a particular girl and said she’d never seen her engage like that before – the girls top three strengths were DETAIL ORIENTATION, RESULTS FOCUS and STRATEGIC MINDEDNESS – she had drawn a picture representing these in some way and I went over to her and she said that she’d never seen them as strengths before, the teachers kept saying she was over fussy with her work, too slow with finishing things and too single minded – but she realised that those were her strengths – she really cared about the details, the couldn’t stop until she’d finished something, and she was very focused on a particular future and just not engaged with anything that didn’t lead her where she wanted to go. Now, strengths can go into overdrive and if I was working further with her I would have helped her to discover her next four strengths to make seven in total, and to think about how to use them in balance, because, especially under stress our top 3 can go into overdrive because they’re our ‘go to’ strengths - but just for her to reframe what came naturally to her as being her strengths, really seemed to have had an impact on how she saw herself and how the teachers saw her.

So there’s your homework, draw a picture to represent your top three, then look for 4 more strengths to make up your top 7, and then start to consider the strengths of those around you.

At the end of a group session I do a “call on me” exercise where all the teachers, or pupils or whichever type of group I’m working with will show everyone in the room their picture and share their top three strengths and say “You can call on my any time for my empathy, optimism and critical thinking; or you can call on me for my decisiveness; leading strength; and my courage” and of course by knowing each other’s strengths we can work together better and call on each other in ways that help us because we’re not energised in those areas, and in turn we can use our energy to help others in the way that we are at our best.

I will leave you with one final question using strengths psychology, I use many coaching questions that I haven’t got time to go into today, but here is one of my favourites – when you look at your list of seven strengths, and you consider something that you are facing that is difficult or stressful, ask yourself, which strength can help me most here?

I was giving a speech a couple of years ago now and I had to give the same speech 5 times to 5 different classes of students, and after the first one I noticed I felt more nervous than usual and not really myself, so on the side of the stage I thought to myself, which strength can help me here – my top 7 I use every day in my work, which is why I love what I do, so my top 7 are enthusiasm, resilience, persuasion (the top three) and compassion, empathy, creativity and flexibility – and I decided, in that moment, it was my enthusiasm I needed to show – so I drew on that and I stepped back up full of passion for my subject and I loved the remaining 4 speeches that I had to give that day.

So when you are facing something difficult, which of your top 7 strengths can help you most – even now with this awful covid situation, you will be drawing on your strengths; and when we think about the question of supporting students mental health at this time, I would say look to your strengths and those of your colleagues, each strength has a role to play, some of the ones that jump out at me would be:

Relationship Building – those of you who are naturally energised by bringing people together, think about how we can do that even via online means rather than face to face; Creativity goes with this as well, use as much creativity as you can to support the students in different ways; other incredible strengths at this time would be flexibility; initiative; critical thinking; collaboration; optimism; empathy and compassion – look at your list and see how you can use what comes naturally to you to make the most difference.

That brings me to the end of my talk, I hope you have enjoyed it and if I can leave you with one final instant strategy for yourself and your students it would be this – pick a soundtrack of self-belief, by this I literally mean choose songs like “Titanium; This Girl is on Fire; I get knocked down but I get up again, Roar by Katy Perry and play them at the start of lessons, or zoom calls, or just to yourself, because the soundtrack of your life is under your control and when you sing along and even dance along you will be stealing confidence and self-belief with every moment, dancing releases dopamine, serotonin and endorphins and brings an instant natural high, so it’s one of the best things to bring in every day.

Thank you very much and I am happy to answer any questions.