



Trusting Others:
Building Bridges – Not Walls
For Surviving & Thriving

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Trusting Others: Mother Nature's Daily Exercise

Connecting for survival: the human brain relies on connecting with self trust and trusting others for our pre-frontal region of the brain to have more “energy” to be creative, problem solve, reduce procrastination, enhance productivity, and sustain our overall wellness. Trusting others allows the brain to shift from vigilance (driven by fear of harm) to bonding (driven by psychological safety) that allows higher levels of oxytocin to be released to calm our nervous system (and as well our entire body) for better performance and in our daily lives.

This handout will highlight one model among many that can strengthen our social and emotional intelligence with the self and others. Knowing “what” comprises trusting others reduces psychological stress and physiological tension of deciding “how” to build trust for our overall wellness.



Trusting another is the nervous system learning with life's experiences,
through being vulnerable but mindful,
that connection does not have to mean danger.

Trusting Others: Gut Brain then Head Brain

1. Is this Person *Safe*?

The Intuitive Reaction: the human brain within 30 seconds will activate four key regions and their related brain regions (amygdala, insula, vagus nerve, orbitofrontal cortex) to ask an unconscious question: is this person a threat to my safety, this person is hard to read, this person presents neither a threat or opportunity, or this person an safe opportunity for connecting and socializing? The gut brain's intuition can accurately assess physical danger around 70% of the time, but trustworthiness requires more than the first 30 seconds of meeting another.

The Reflective Conclusion: our consciousness now takes the unconscious talk to a mindful self-talk to further assess the first step in trusting others; is this person a safe person? A reflective self-check could include: is my body tense or relaxed, is the tone concerning or comforting, is there respectful body language, and is the smile authentic or false? If there is a sense of ambivalence or high doubt the person is safe, setting clear boundaries and employing neutral language is key. If the person is assessed as safe, we proceed in connecting but remaining mindful that the first stage of trust is conditional trust until more connections reaffirm safety.



We learn to trust others when compassion and care remains steady,
kindness feels genuinely authentic from the other,
and we no longer have to sustain hyper-vigilance.





Trusting Others: Walk the Talk

2. Is this Person *Reliable*?

The Intuitive Reaction: the human brain is a negative bias brain to ensure we survive and thrive in our lifetime of experiences. Intuitive reliability is an embodied element of our brain-mind-body and the more calm and confident we are with our self-trust, the more accurate intuitive reliability performs to reduce our negative bias. Concurrently, secure having attachments in our work and home life strengthens self-trust which has a carry-over effect with trusting others. Inconsistency with sustaining a value and lack of reciprocity with empathy are key areas of intuitive focus with trusting others.

The Reflective Conclusion: our consciousness now takes the intuitive reliability (*do I feel safe with his patterns?*) to a rational reliability (*is there evidence that this person is consistent with kind behaviors?*) series of processes that can take minutes to hours to days and even longer. Here we gather data, analyze said data, test our theories, and then make choices that support our overall wellness and safety. The greater our unconditional positive regard to others, open-mindedness, clarity on our values and lifestyle the greater our rational reliability processes work when assessing others as trustworthy or not.

When support is mutual and returned with genuine care, reciprocity strengthens psychological safety in that space and makes connecting with others feel more secure.”

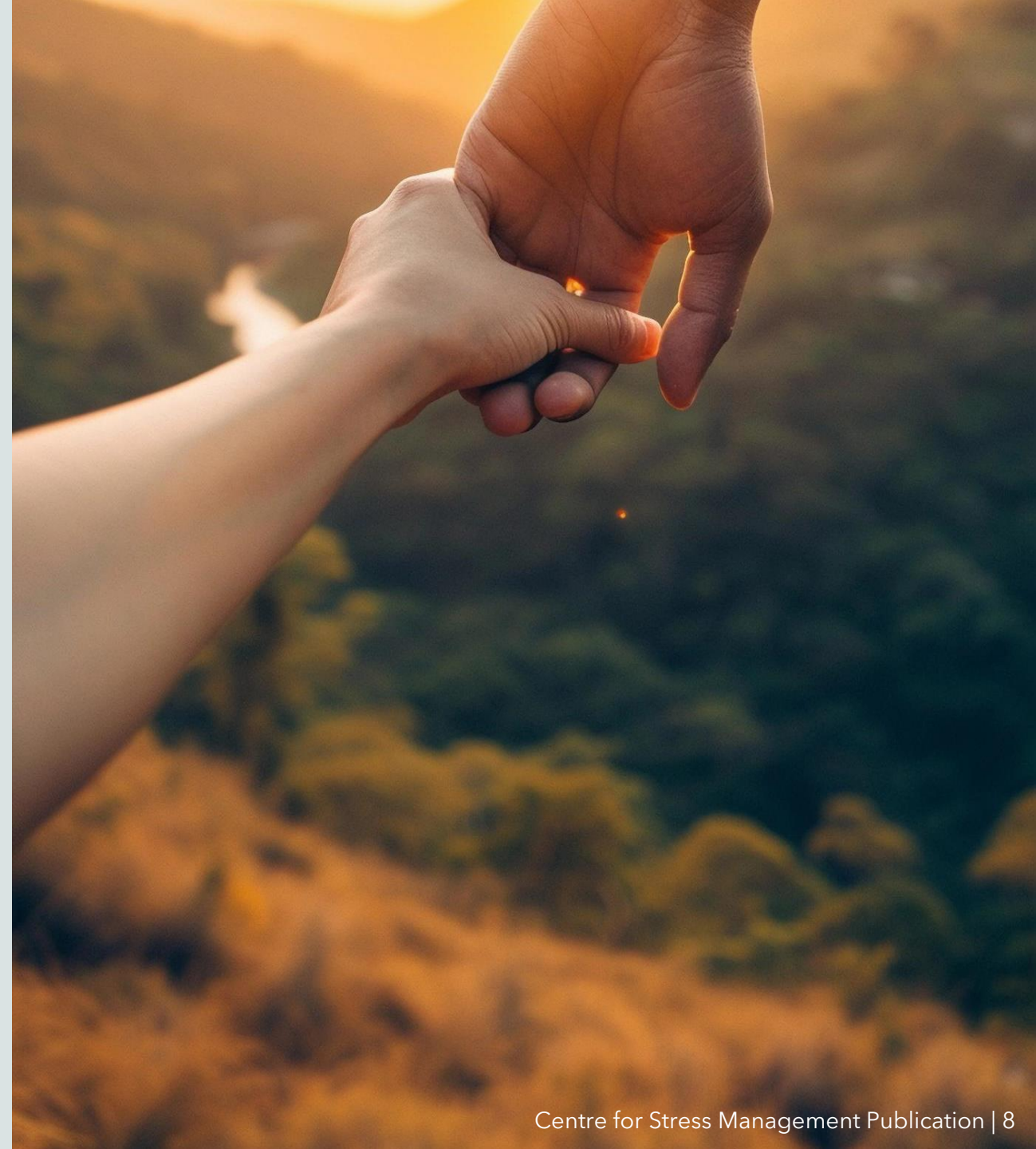


Trusting Others: Reward Driven

3. Does this Person *Reciprocate*?

The Intuitive Reaction: the human brain can very quickly experience genuine versus transactional reciprocity by way of experiencing the other person's energy, mood, vulnerability and or effort, that when experienced as genuine, we down-regulate threat and up-regulate connection. This unconscious "all clear" signal arises from a unified reciprocity experience whereby both persons are "seen" and "heard" increasing the bonding chemical oxytocin. The brain is saying to our nervous system "we are on the same wavelength and can let our guard down" to keep experiencing and connecting with another.

The Reflective Conclusion: our reflective state now shifts from "feeling safe" to a sense of "being safe," remaining mindful of possible disappointments that can interfere with reciprocity. The reflective state from time to time may review (or audit) the intuitive state to ensure there is not a false positive (another benefit of the negative bias brain) of reciprocity to ensure the relationship is a "real one" and not one because of a "deal." Our reflective brain will also note that the other person may have different types of reciprocity depending on the social setting and the type of relationship both persons are connecting through.



Connecting with others is mother nature's universal form of medicine;
it reduces fear and helps us feel safe and accepted.





Trusting Others: Walk the Talk

4. Is this Person *Connecting*?

The Intuitive Reaction: the human brain's intuitive experience when connecting with another simultaneously activates unconsciously several systems, including the limbic system and the autonomic nervous system allowing the human body to feel more open and less guarded. We then quickly have a “welcome” vibe and body language to another with vocal warmth, open body posture, and a relaxed – kind facial expression. The person who has less self-trust may often times not be fully open and transparent when connecting sending possible wrong signals to others.

The Reflective Conclusion: our consciousness now takes over and generates, sustains, deepens, and sometimes repairs (our last section of trusting others) the connection. The reflective brain will start to set wellness boundaries, differentiate between each person's identity, hold comfortably diverse views, assess when empathy is required for connecting, and be mindful of active listening. Four core reflective connecting behaviors include; sustainable active listening, curious questioning without judgment, reflecting back validation and acceptance, and consciously initiate repair and reconnect (next section). A high performing reflective brain requires regular good sleep, smart nutrition, daily exercise, and stress management practices.

You cannot repair a rupture with another if you are still at war with yourself.
Self-repair - the quiet return to your own kind self-love and self-compassion - comes first."

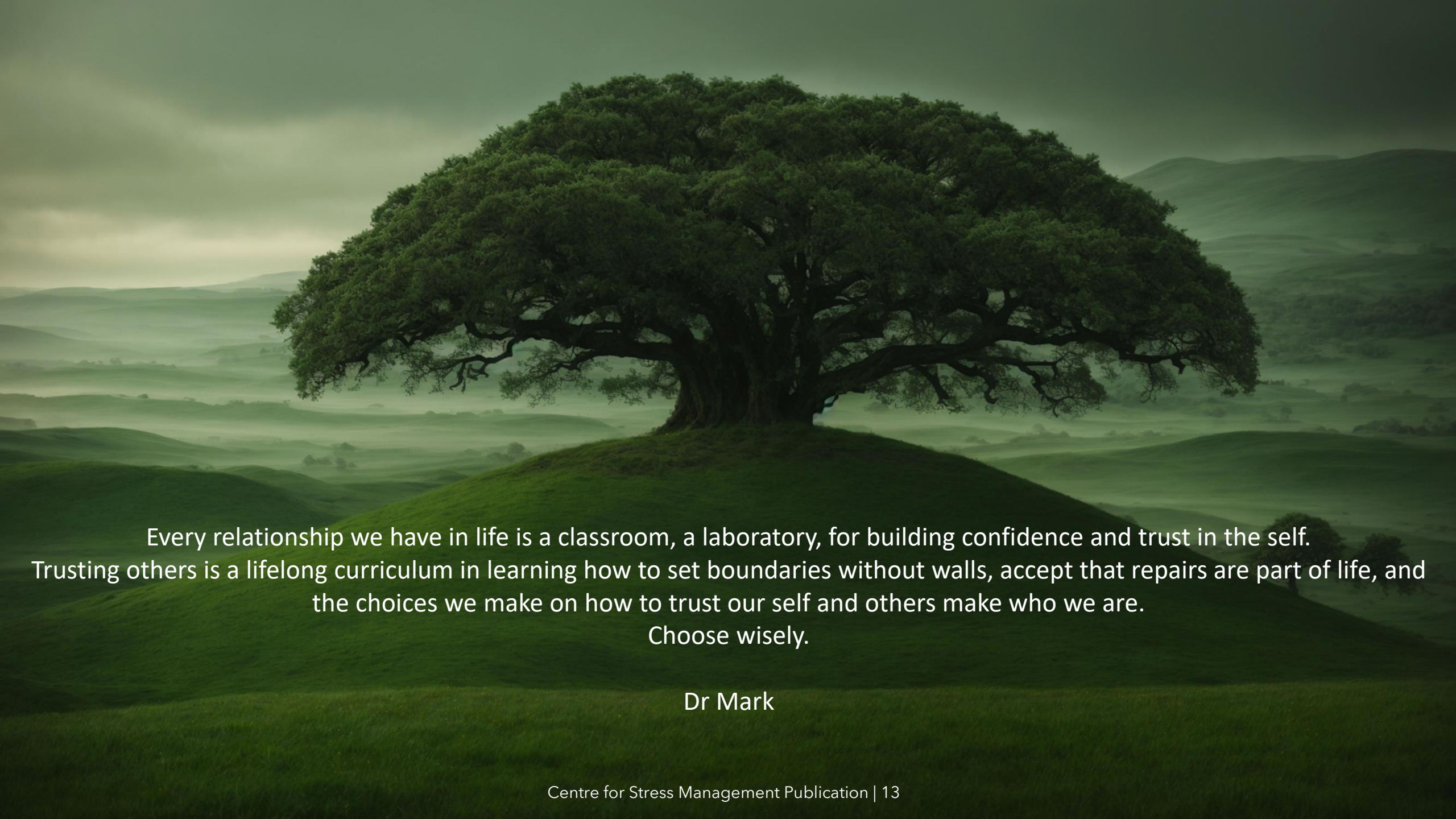
Trusting Others: Reward Driven

5. Does this Person *Repair - Reconnect*?

The Intuitive Reaction: the human brain experiences pain and healing at the same time when there has been a disruption to the good mood state and a sense of safety. At first the intuitive brain is not paying attention to specific words, instead, there is a quick scan of breathing patterns, vocal tone, body language, and micro-expressions. The unconscious will quickly assess the threat level of the rupture before it unconsciously decides to move towards repair. The closer a rupture is to suffering (physical and or psychological serious harm), the longer it takes to shift to repair. Make the rupture as civil, kind and humanistic as possible.

The Reflective Conclusion: our reflective state now shifts from reacting to the rupture to now making a choice on how to repair and reconnect if there is no threat level to safety. The values and behaviors of resilience, active listening, patience, kindness, curiosity, taking ownership, and seeing the rupture as a learning experience enhances our trust in the other. The greater a person has a growth mindset the greater the trust we have in the other to repair and reconnect. This stage of trusting others requires skill building and thought – mood regulation, take care of the “I” before you seek to repair and reconnect with another to ensure your wellness boundaries are intact.





Every relationship we have in life is a classroom, a laboratory, for building confidence and trust in the self. Trusting others is a lifelong curriculum in learning how to set boundaries without walls, accept that repairs are part of life, and the choices we make on how to trust our self and others make who we are.
Choose wisely.

Dr Mark