

# Designing interventions that have a powerful effect on promoting well-being in the changing world

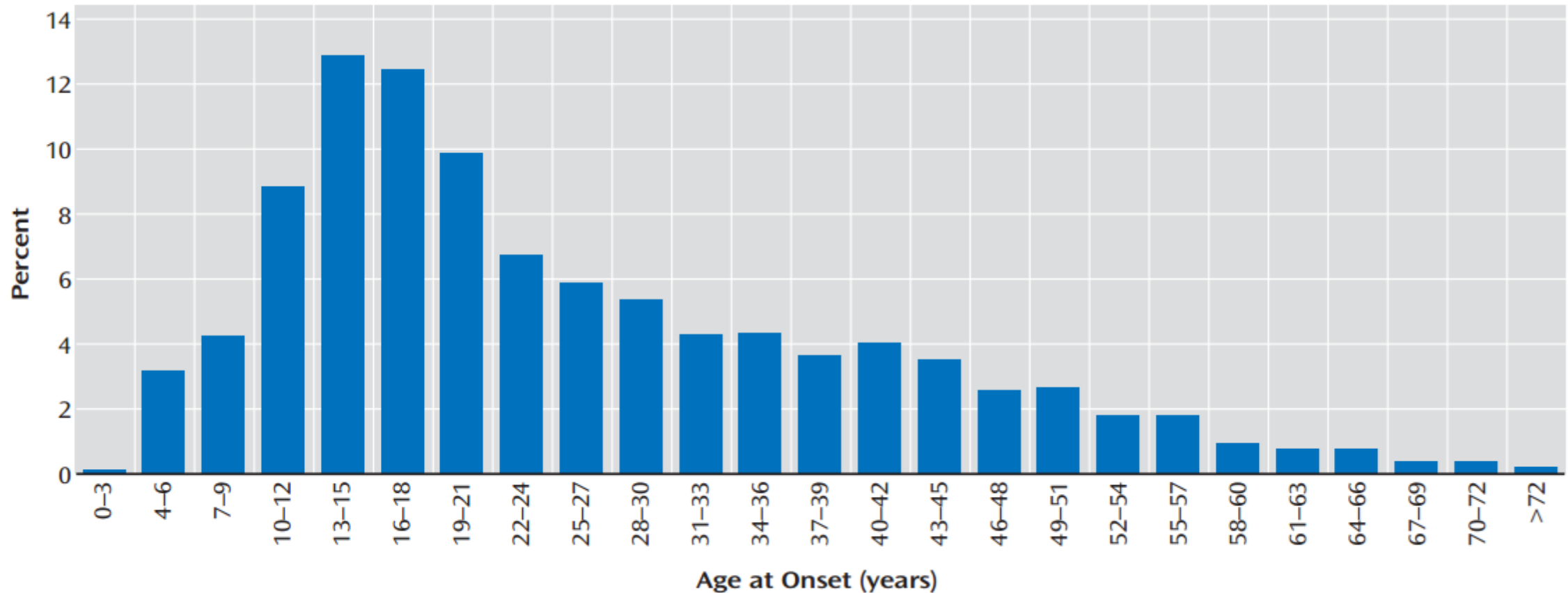
***Felicia A Huppert***

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and  
Honorary Professor, Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, ACU Sydney



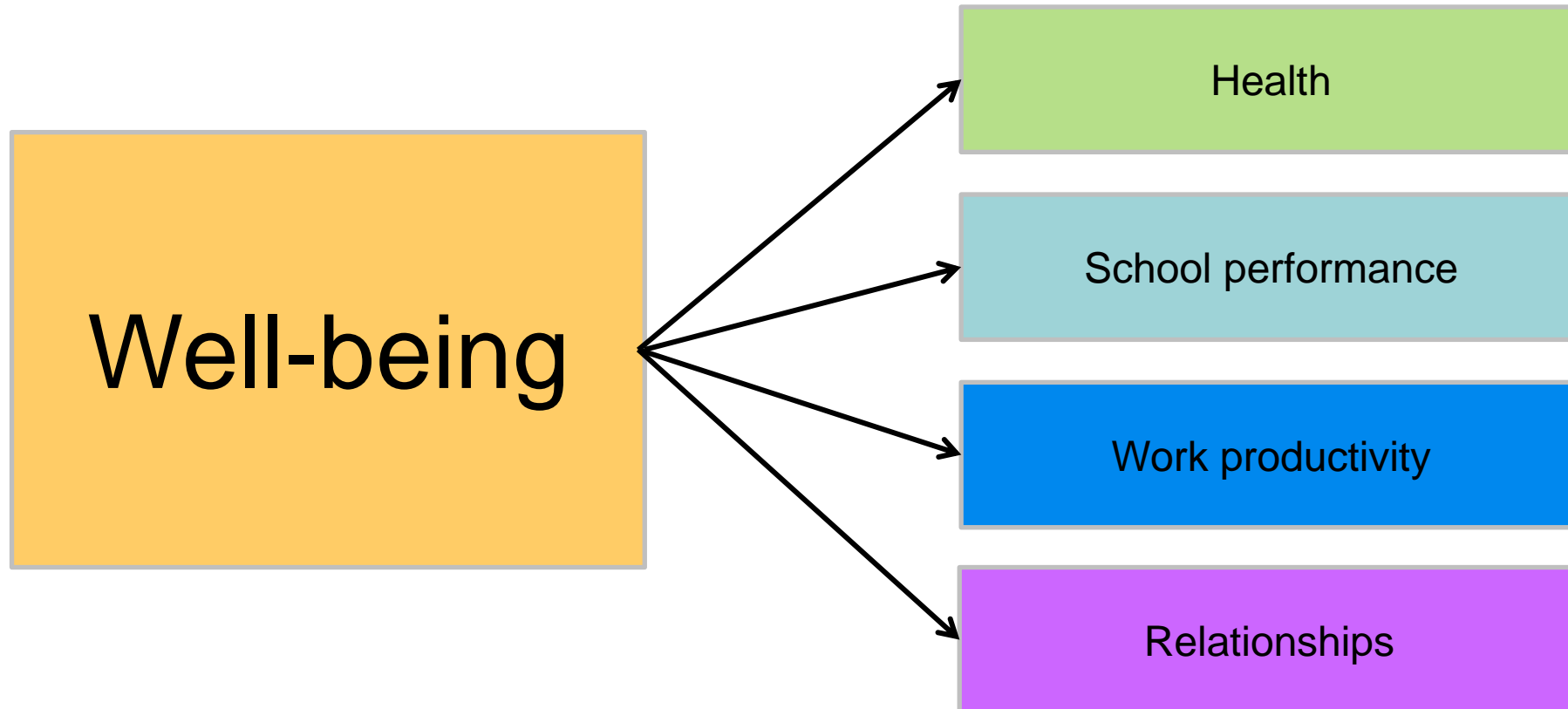
Edward F. Diener

# Distribution of age at onset of first Major Depressive Episode

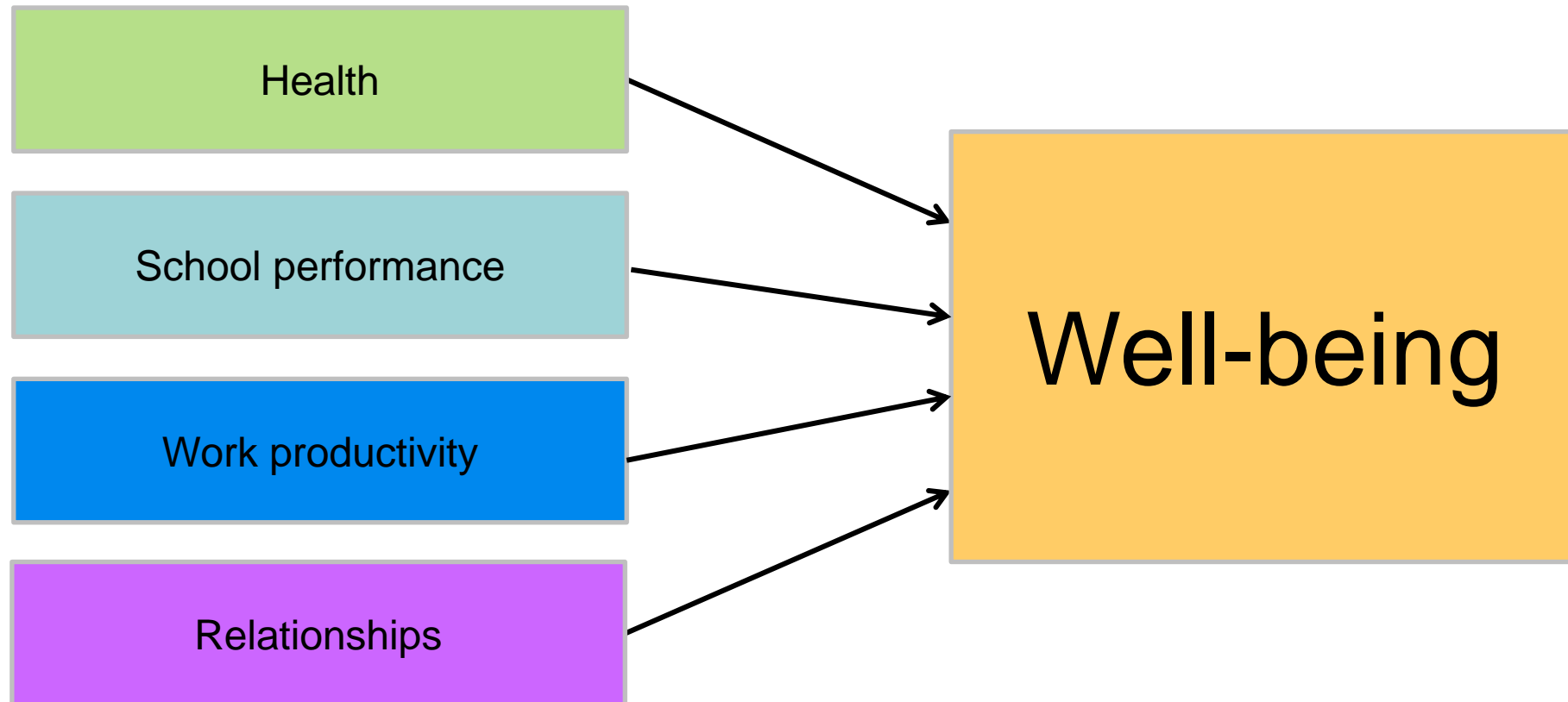


**Why subjective well-being matters**

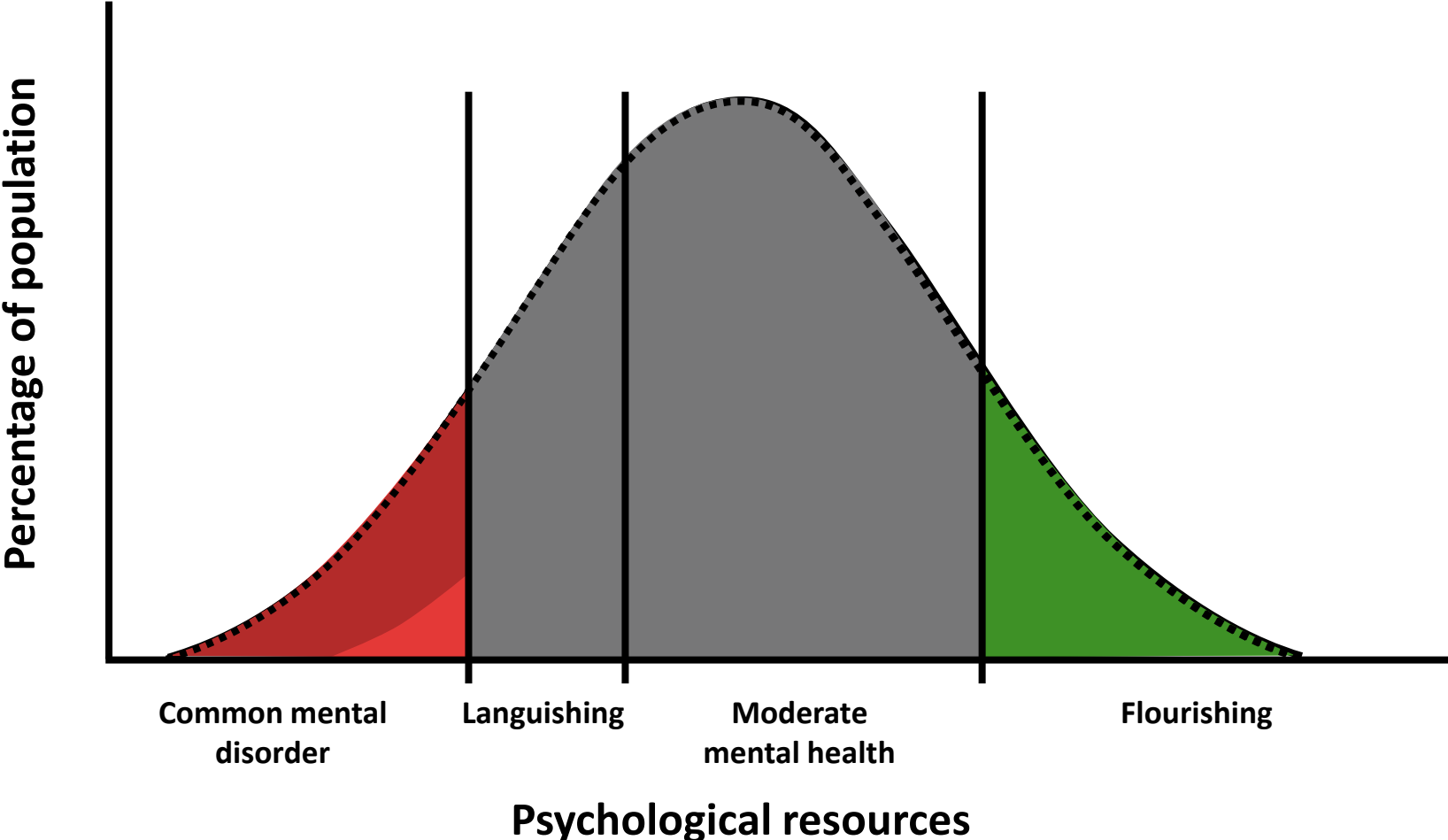
# Instrumental benefits of subjective well-being



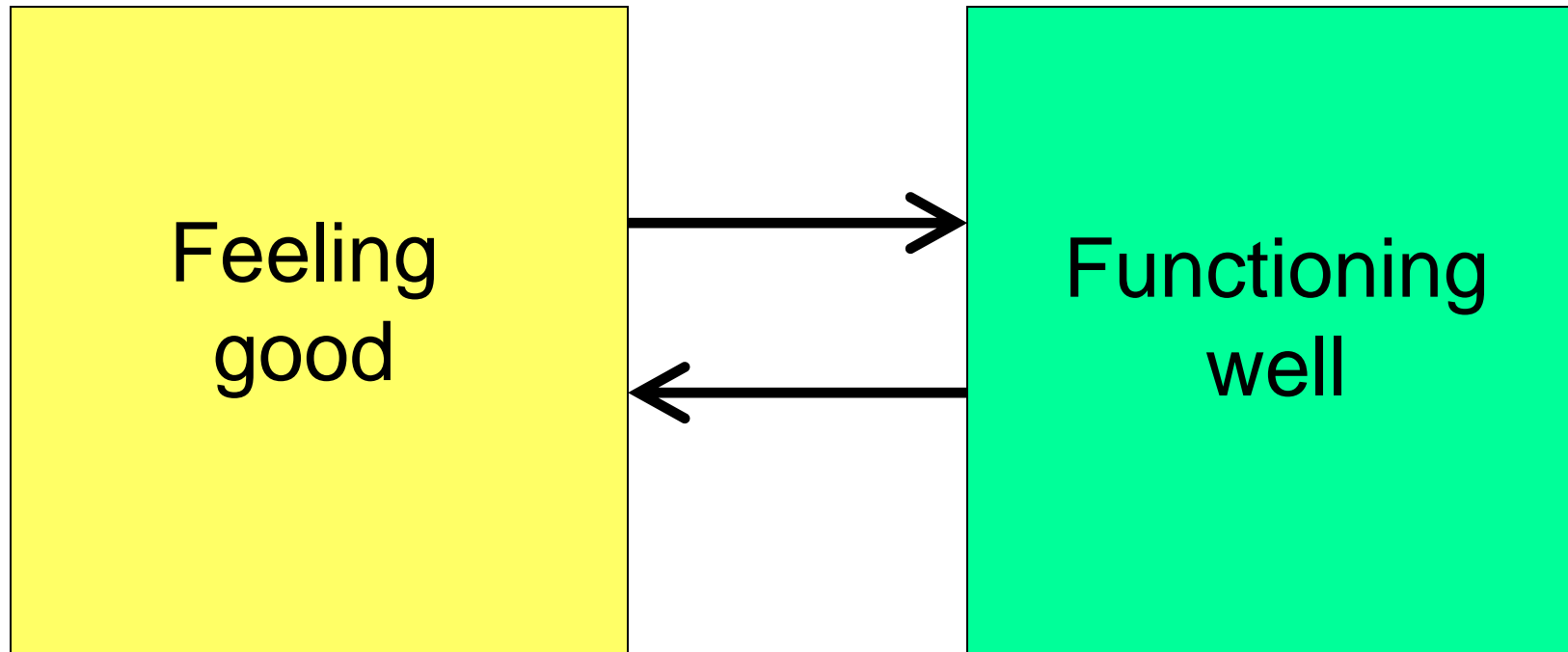
# Subjective well-being as the ultimate aim



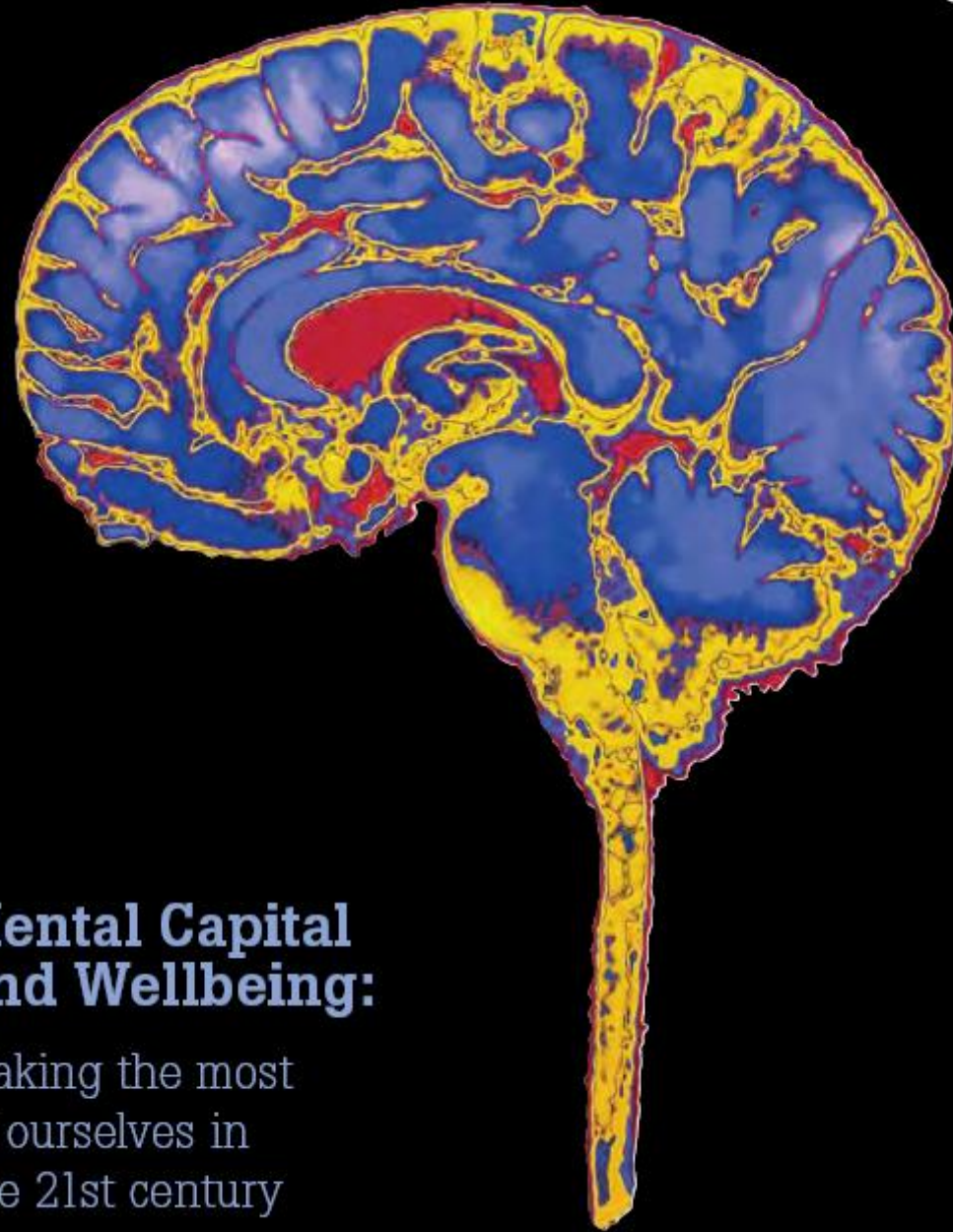
# The well-being spectrum



# Subjective well-being = the experience that our life is going well







## **Mental Capital and Wellbeing:**

Making the most  
of ourselves in  
the 21st century

# Five ways to well-being

UK Government Office for Science

Five ways  
to wellbeing

## Connect

With family, friends,  
community

Five ways  
to wellbeing

## Be active

Exercise, dance, play

Five ways  
to wellbeing

## Take notice

Be curious, be aware of  
your experience

Five ways  
to wellbeing

## Give

Your time, your  
presence, your  
appreciation

## Keep learning

Try something new,  
set new challenges

# What is mindfulness?

**Put simply, mindfulness is the ability to be aware of our experience as it is happening, while maintaining an attitude of gentle curiosity.**

# Effects of mindfulness

- **A peaceful space in our busy lives**
- **Deeper listening, seeing more clearly**
- **Greater insight and understanding**
- **Better choices, wiser decisions.**



# Mindfulness as mental training

Training covers some very basic skills

**Awareness**

**ATTENTION**



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo>

# Mindfulness as mental training

Training covers some very basic skills

**Awareness**

**ATTENTION**

**Non-reactivity**

**Emotion regulation**

# Mindfulness has two components

## What to do

Pay attention  
Notice  
Observe  
Be aware

## How to do it

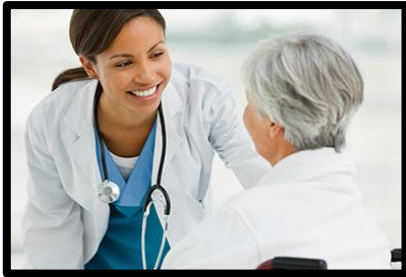
With friendly curiosity,  
Openness, acceptance  
Non-judgement  
Kindness



# Stages in managing difficult emotions and thoughts

- 1. Turning towards**
- 2. Tolerating**
- 3. Allowing**
- 4. Befriending**

# Applications of mindfulness training

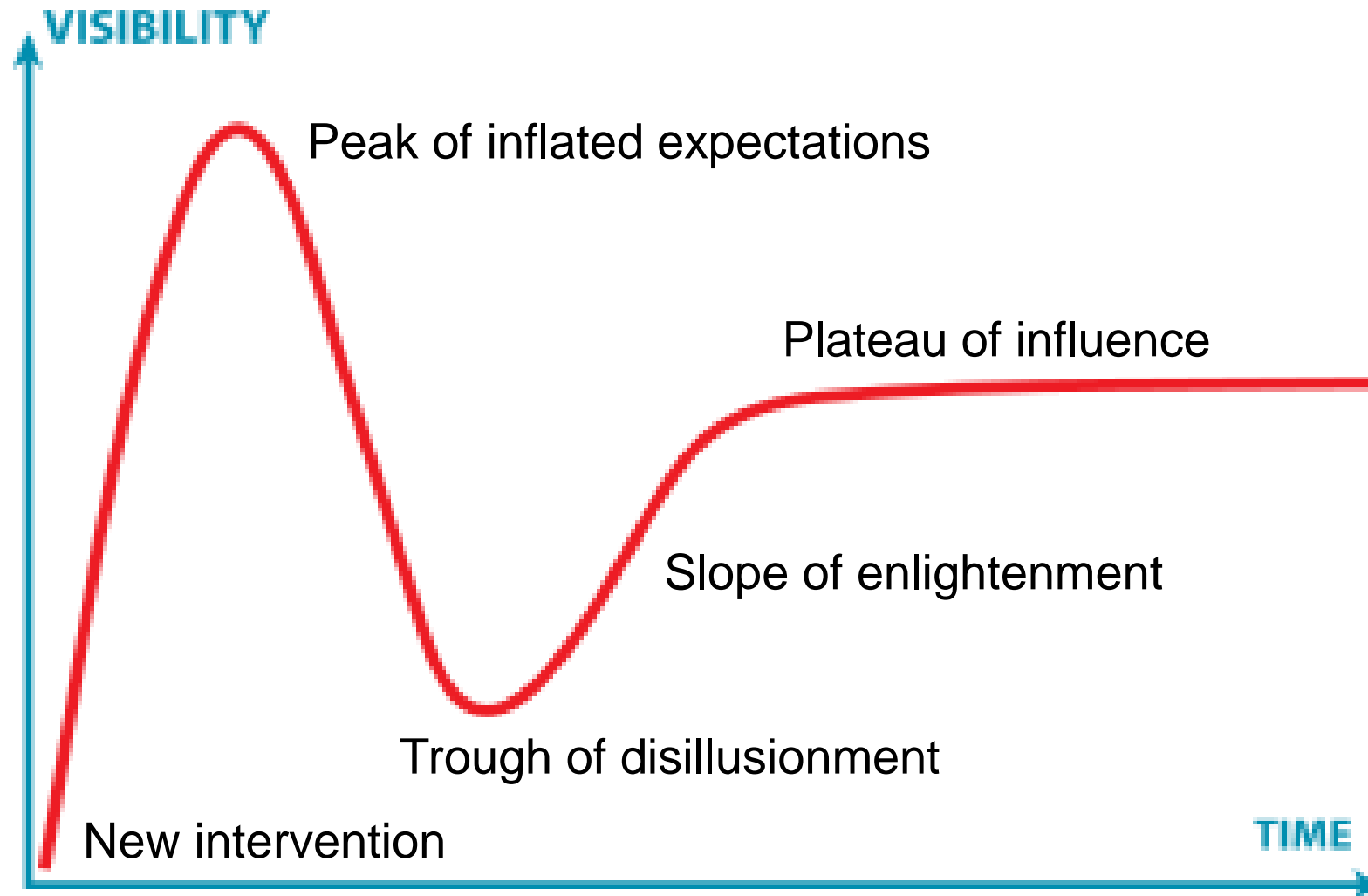


# Mindfulness for politicians

<https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/>



# The Hype Cycle



# Benefits of Mindfulness Training

Review of high quality research – Creswell, Annual Reviews of Psychology, 2017

## Mental and physical health

- depression, anxiety
- substance abuse
- chronic pain
- stress response

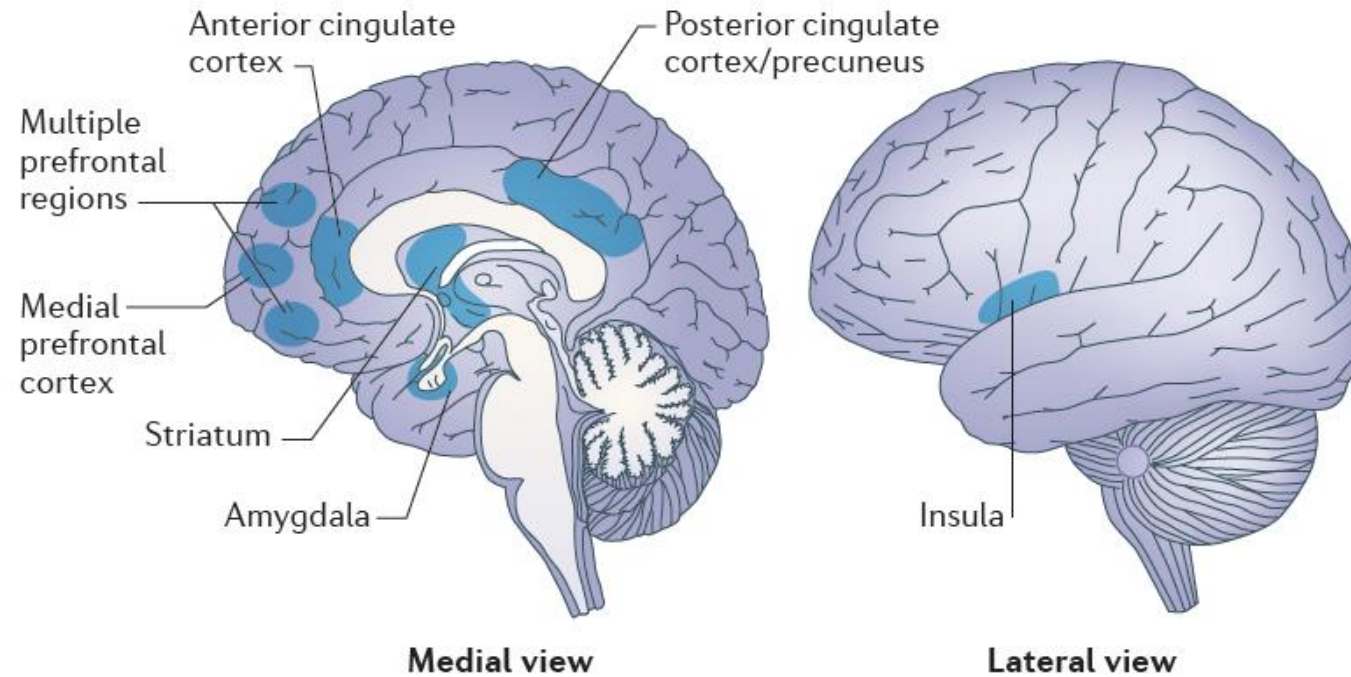
## Interpersonal outcomes

- relationship quality
- perspective taking
- pro-social behaviour

## Cognitive and affective processes

- Sustained attention, working memory
- problem solving
- positive mood
- emotion regulation

# Brain regions that show the greatest activity during mindfulness practise



**attention control**

**emotion regulation**

**self-awareness**

# Structural brain changes after mindfulness training



A standard 8 week MBSR course lead to increased grey matter density in brain regions associated with:

- **attention, learning and memory**
- **emotion regulation**
- **self-awareness**
- **bodily awareness**
- **compassion**


# **Mindfulness and Education**



# Effects of mindfulness in students

Reviews by Meiklejohn et al, Mindfulness, 2012; and Weare, in The Psychology of Meditation: Research and Practice, 2016

- **cognitive skills - attention and working memory**
- **academic skills**
- **social skills**
- **emotion regulation**
- **self-esteem**
- **improvements in mood**
- **decreases in anxiety, stress and fatigue**

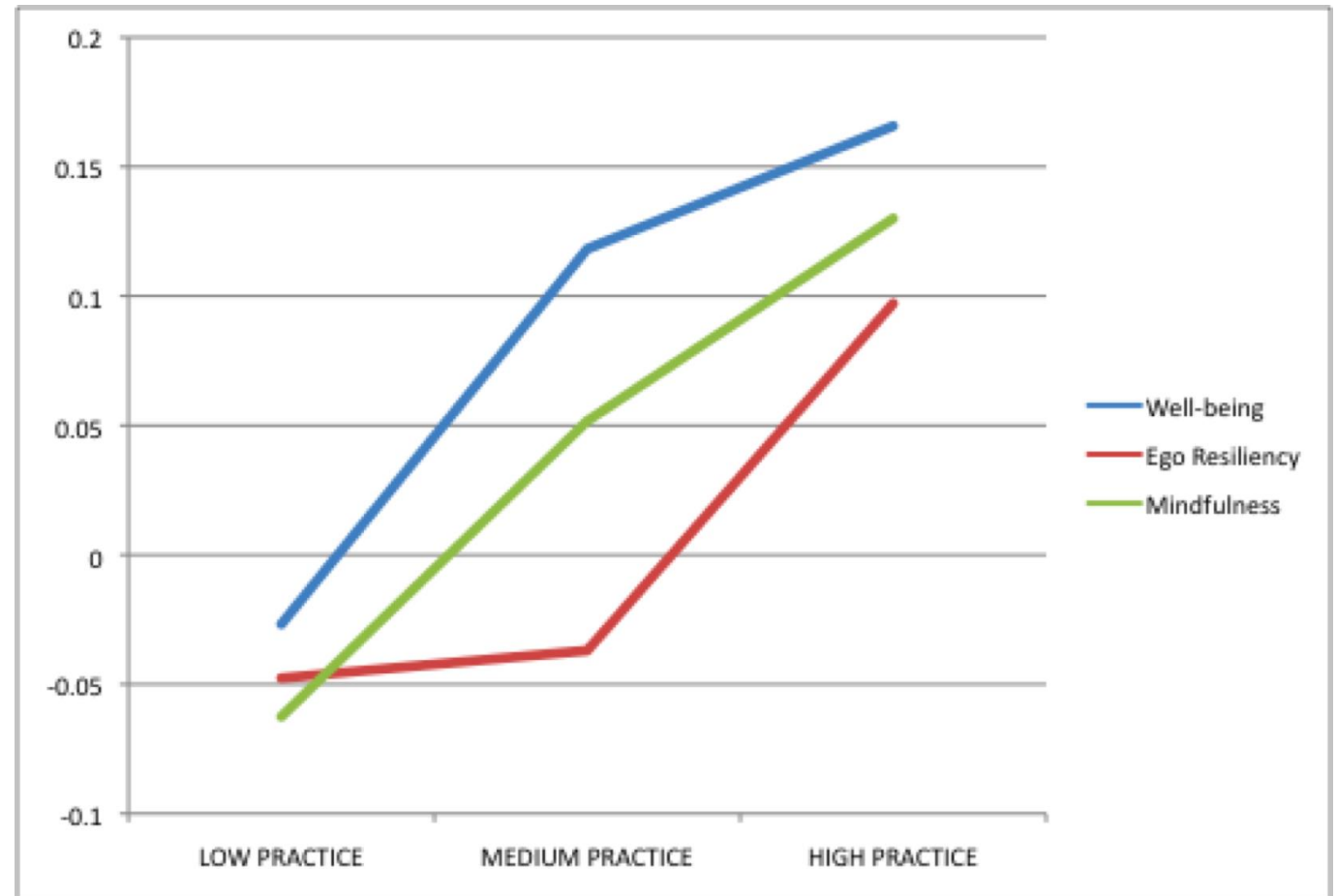


**b**

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>  
<https://mindfulnessaustralia.net.au/>

# School-based mindfulness training improves well-being

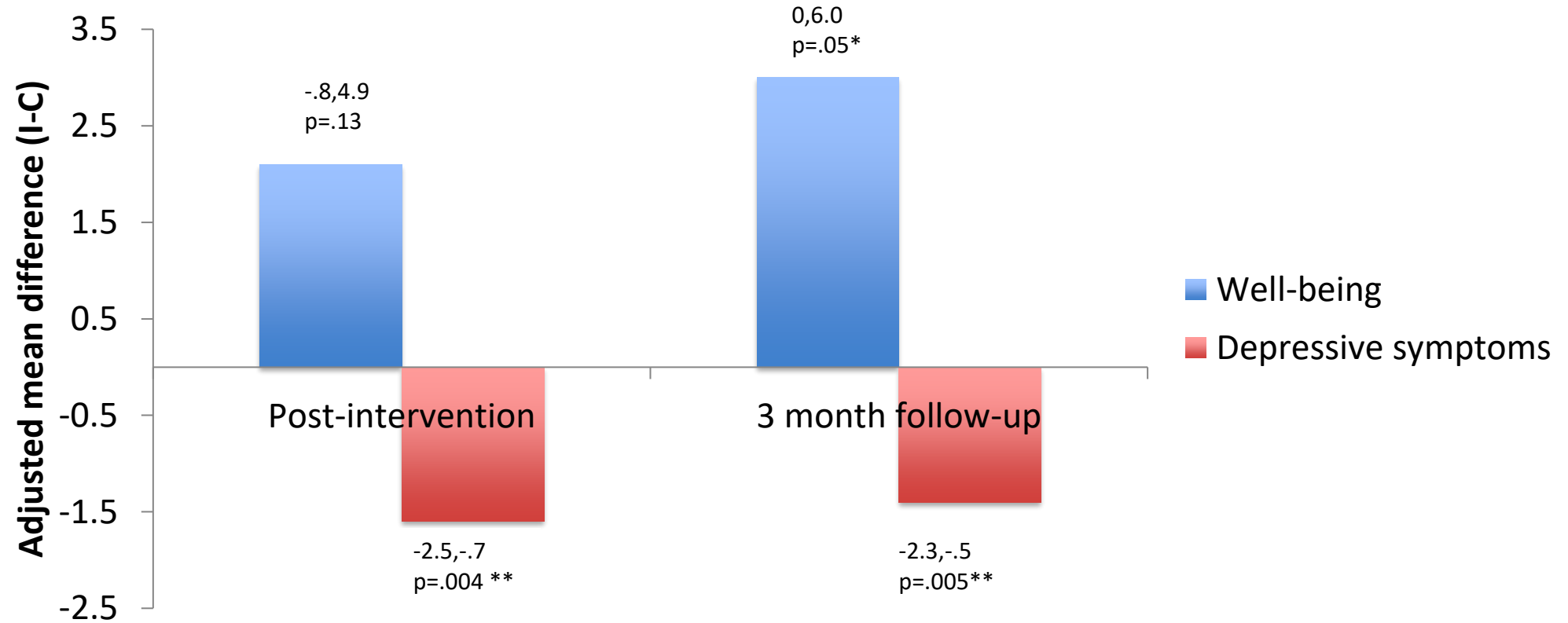
Huppert & Johnson, Journal of Positive Psychology, 2010



# Mindfulness in Schools

Outcome comparisons in adolescents at post-intervention and 3-month follow-up (N=522)

Kuyken et al., Brit.J. Psychiatry, 2013



# MYRIAD

## Mindfulness and Resilience in Adolescence

Led by Oxford Mindfulness Centre, funded by the Wellcome Trust, UK

- Randomised controlled trials of:
  - teacher training
  - student training
- 2 year follow up

**What role does compassion play in well-being?**

# **The role of self-compassion**

# Effects of self-compassion training or induction

- Prevents depression relapse

*Kuyken et al., Behaviour Research & Therapy, 2010*

- Increased happiness

*Shapiro & Mongrain, Journal of Positive Psychology, 2010*

- Increased motivation to change for the better

*Breins & Chen, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 2012*



# Relationship between well-being and compassion towards others

*“If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.*

*If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”*

Buddhist teaching

**What is the relationship between  
empathy and compassion?**

**If empathy is hard wired, can the empathic response be modulated?**



## The Brain with David Eagleman

David Eagleman: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6kGUdQSa\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6kGUdQSa_k)

# Empathy vs Compassion

Empathy means sharing the feelings of another.

Compassion means feeling warmth and concern for the other, as well as a strong motivation to help.

Compassion is feeling *for* and not feeling *with* the other.

# Findings from studies of social emotions

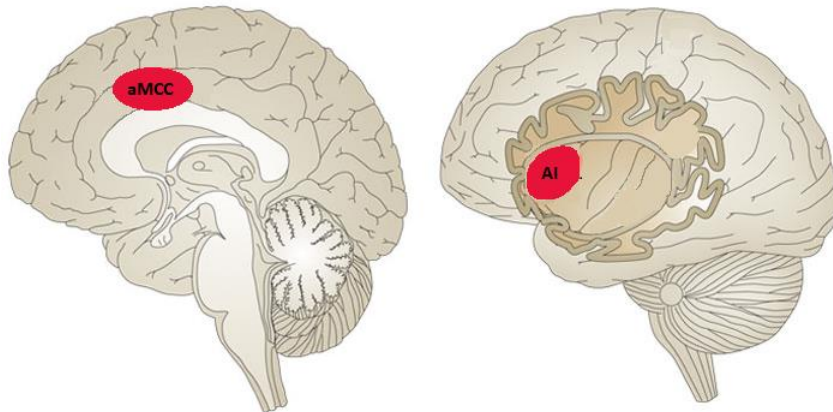
Empathy	Compassion
Negative feelings e.g. stress	Positive feelings e.g. love
Self-oriented responses	Other-orientated responses
Withdrawal	Approach, helping behaviour
Poor health, burnout	Good health

# Neuroscience of social emotions

## Empathy

Activation of:

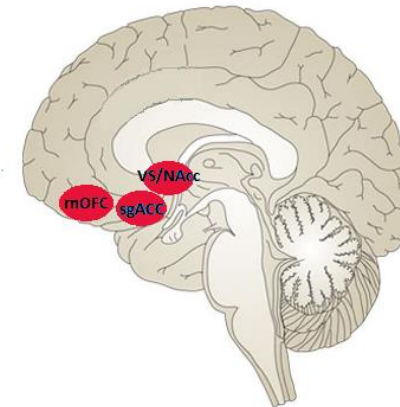
- mirror neurons and networks involved in theory of mind
- Areas associated with negative affect
- Areas associated with the integration of bodily awareness, affect and cognition



## Compassion

Activation of regions associated with:

- Affiliation
- positive affect
- reward processing



# **Effects of compassion training**



# Compassion training

Systematic review and meta-analysis by Shonin et al., Mindfulness, 2015

Better mood,  
less distress

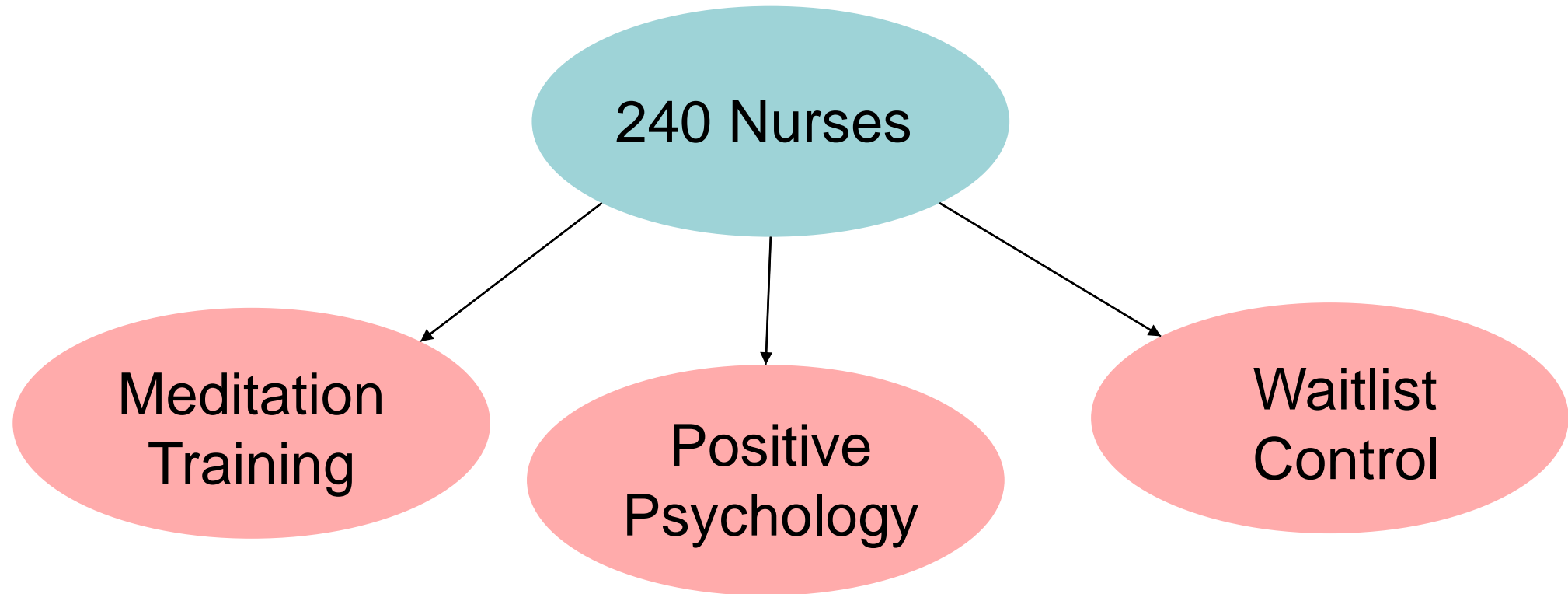
Positive  
thinking

Interpersonal  
relationships

Empathic  
accuracy

# Study of mindfulness and compassion training to improve well-being in a healthcare setting

RCT with wards as sampling unit, Sydney Local Health District



# Wide diversity of measures

- Self-report
- Performance
- Physiological
- Patient report
- Qualitative interviewing
- Ethnographic observation
- Social Network Analysis



## Preliminary findings

**Significant improvements on self-report measures pre- to post-intervention - both groups**

### Self-oriented measures

- Well-being (WEMWBS)
- Mindfulness (non-reactivity)
- Self-compassion
- Goal-directed behaviour

## Preliminary findings

# Significant improvements on self-report measures pre- to post-intervention – both groups

### Other-oriented measures

- Empathy (concern, perspective taking)
  - Compassionate care (patient-centred care)
  - Prosocial behaviours at work
  - Appraisal of patients
- 
- **Other outcomes**
    - Decreased burnout

## Preliminary findings

# Significant difference between groups pre- to post-intervention

- Meditation group reported increased meaning at work
- Meditation group performed better on test of empathic accuracy

Preliminary findings

## **Did the benefits last?**

Most (13/16) of the improvements seen at the end of training were sustained at follow up approximately 5 months later.

# Enhancing self-regulation and pro-social behaviour in young children

## The Kindness Curriculum

Randomised controlled trial with 68 pre-school children.

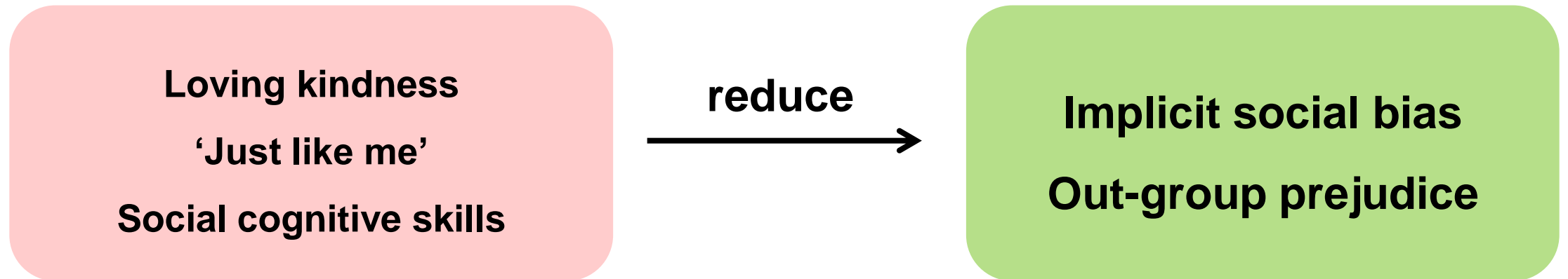
12 week mindfulness-based pro-social skills training versus waitlist control.

Benefits of kindness curriculum:

- **social competence**
- **cognitive flexibility**
- **delayed gratification**



# Compassion training reduces discrimination towards out-groups

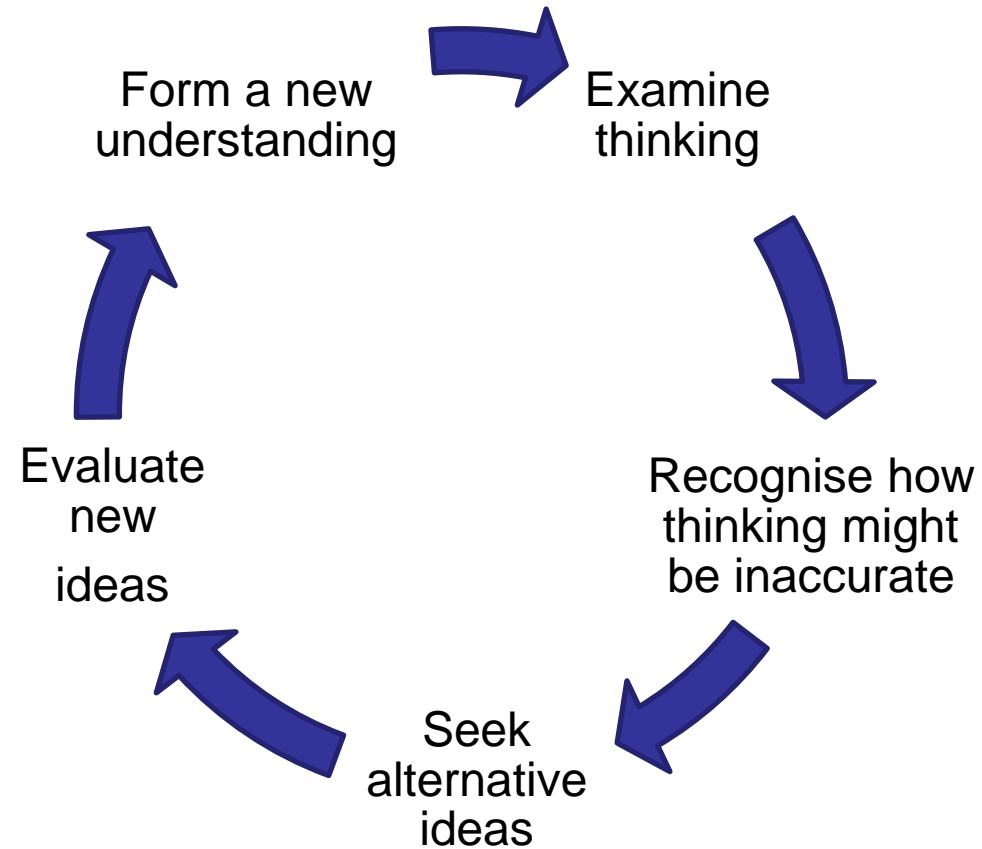


*Berger et al., Mindfulness, 2018.*

*Kang et al., J. Experimental Psychology: General, 2014.*

# **The importance of critical thinking**

# Critical thinking



# Mindfulness and Critical Thinking

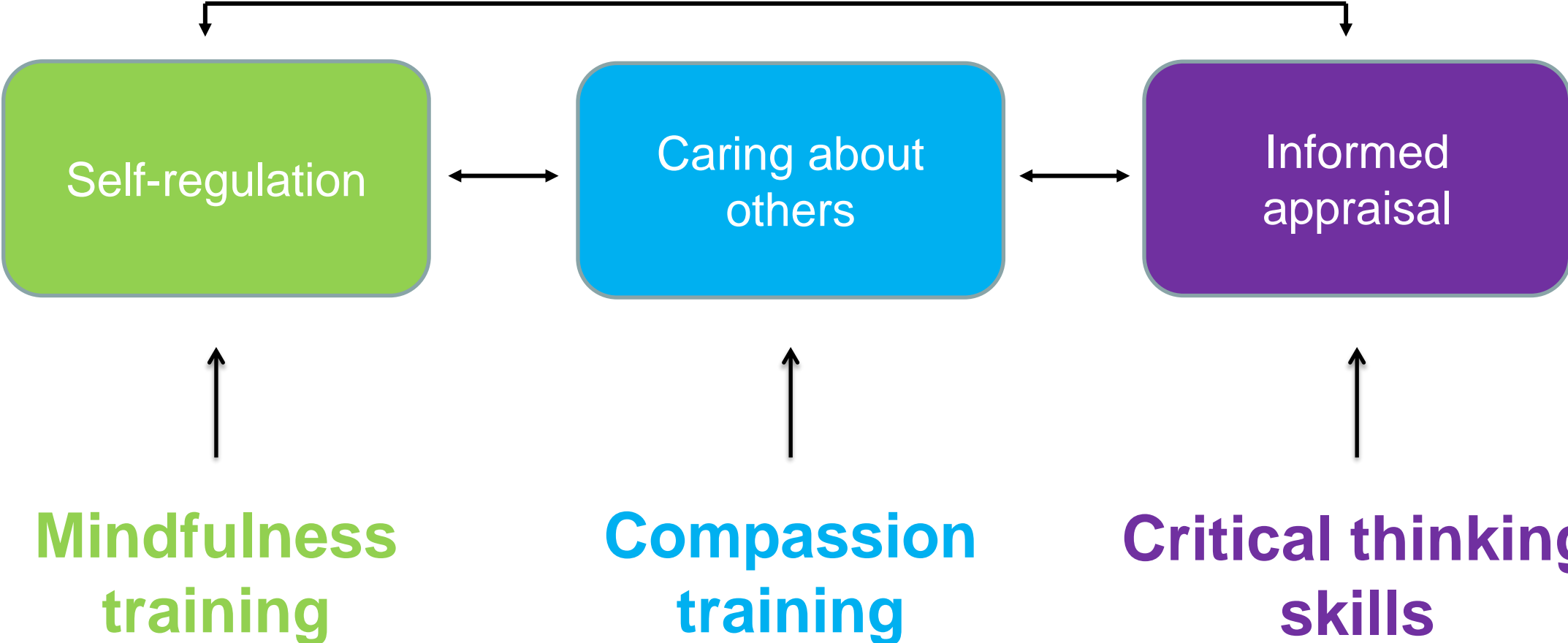


**Dispositional mindfulness is correlated with executive functions that underlie critical thinking.**

# What are the foundations of sustainable well-being?



# Foundational skills for well-being in education



# The effect of shifting the mean of the well-being spectrum

