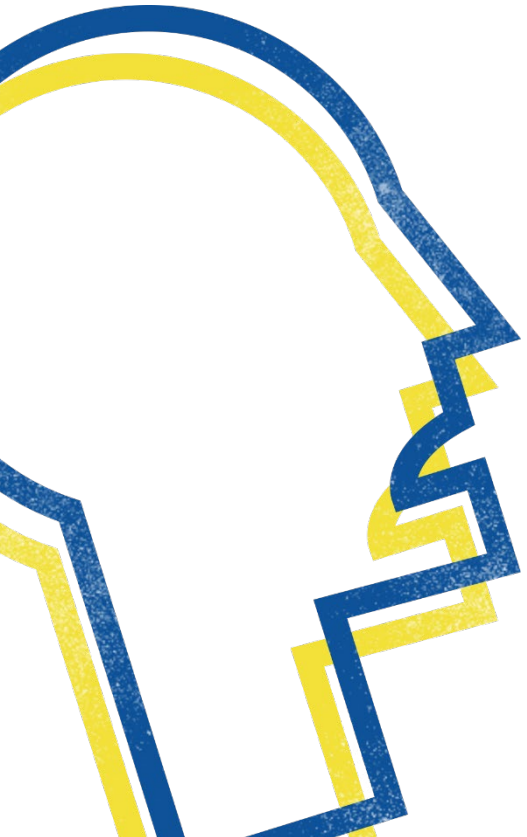




**BLUNT
EMPATHY**

Delivering unwanted news doesn't have to be
an awkward middle school dance





WHO ARE WE?



Nathan Walch

Advisor for students struggling academically

Melanie Burton

Advisor for students struggling academically

Julee Braithwaite

Advisor for high-profile, limited-enrollment programs

Sam Brown

Director for international students

Lisa Parkinson

Academic & Career Advisor, University Advisement Center

Scott Hosford

Director for students struggling academically

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO TALK ABOUT:

1. Difficulty of unwanted news
2. Advisor survey results
3. Other unwanted news research
4. Typical and dangerous responses to unwanted news
5. Tools
 - a. Empathy
 - b. Positive psychology theories
6. When it fails ...





STORYTIME

What was your worst experience giving unwanted news to a student?

UNWANTED NEWS SURVEY



Measured:

- Type of news
- Frequency

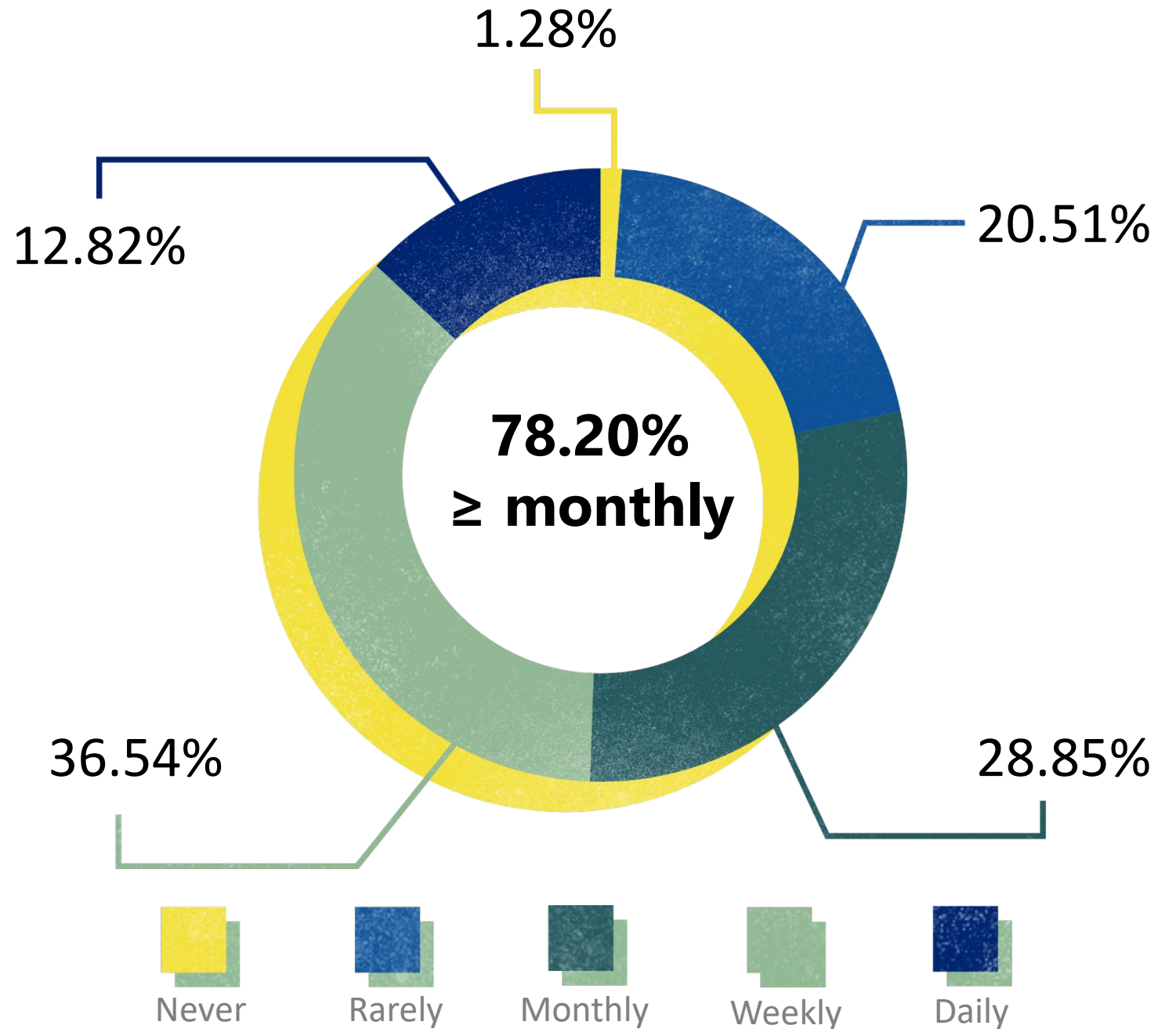
Survey (n=154):

- 3 large institutions (Utah and California)

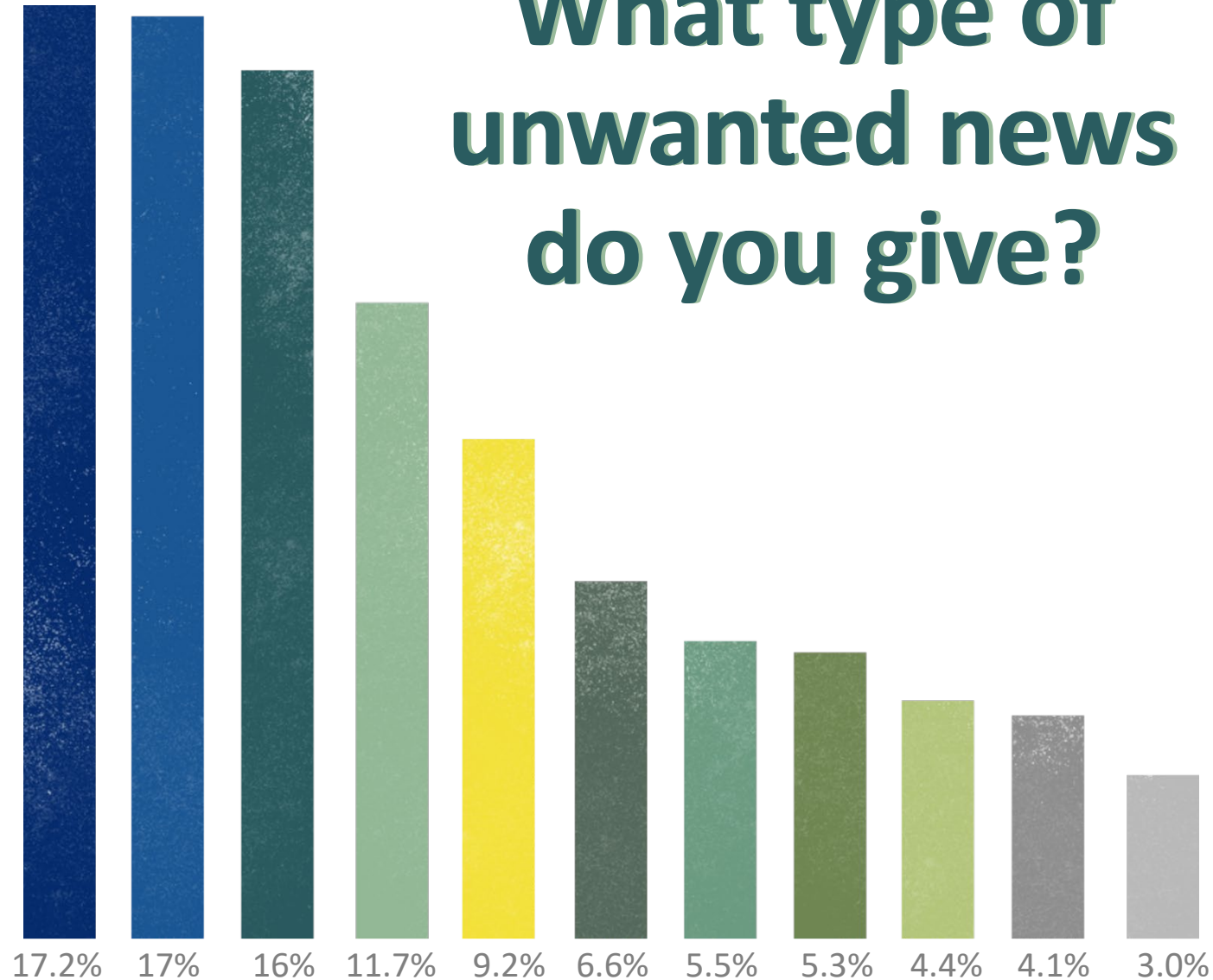
Respondents' primary responsibilities:

- Academic Advisors: 72%
- Specialty Advisors: 24%
- Other: 4%

How often do you share unwanted news with students?



What type of unwanted news do you give?



- Policy Change/Updates
- Graduation/Completion of Studies
- Student Status
- Program/Major Admissions
- Grades/Test Scores
- Other
- Finances
- Employment
- Academic Integrity Issues
- Social Behavior
- University Admission

Preferences for Receiving Unwanted News

2013 Study¹:

- “Explanatory buffer” needed

2014 Study²:

- Bad news before follow-up explanation

2017 Study³:

- Social: indirect approach valued
- Physical hazards: clear, visual signage



Preferences for Receiving Unwanted News

Context Matters!

**More research needed
in terms of following-up after
Difficult news is given**



The background features several stylized, overlapping faces in shades of green, yellow, and blue. Each face is composed of simple white lines for eyes and a mouth, with some faces showing tears or a sad expression. The faces are arranged in a circular pattern around the central text.

Typical Responses to Unwanted News

FEAR

SHAME

DISAPPOINTMENT

ANNOYANCE

SURPRISE

APATHY

CONFUSION



Intense Responses to Unwanted News

ANXIETY

BLAME



DEPRESSION

SHOCK

ANGER

DENIAL



PANIC



Dangerous Responses to Unwanted News

Threats to self (self-destructive behaviors)

- Missing class
- Binge Watching/Gaming/Eating/Sleeping/Spending
- Ignoring emails
- Isolating
- Cutting

Threats to others

- Revenge via advisor reviews/instructor ratings
- Negative social media posts/PR
- Contacting university administration



Counseling Microskills for Advisors

Counseling skills

- Rapport building
- Reflective listening
- Minimal encouragers
- Open-ended questions
- Empathy
- Problem solving
- Requesting concreteness
- Confrontation
- Immediacy





EMPATHY

Why is it important?



Why Empathy?

Dysregulated emotions

- Interactions and connections
- “Coregulation of affect”⁴



Why Empathy?

Carl Rogers⁵:

- “Being understood is the most basic human need.”

Leslie Greenberg⁴:

- An empathic relationship “is a curative factor ... in and of itself.”

Empathy Defined

- Concern and respect for another person
- Working to understand others' thoughts and feelings
- Communicating that understanding verbally and nonverbally
- Suspending judgment





Enacting Empathy

Verbal:

- Reflective listening
 - Meaning + Emotion
- Minimal encouragers
- Pacing

Empathy and Validation

“The best way to validate people’s emotional experience is to communicate that their emotional responses are understandable and make sense in the context of their own occurrence or their lives in general.”⁴



Empathy Caveats

“Giving others advice in emotional moments about the merits of more rational or realistic solutions serves only to invalidate their experience.”⁴





Nope

- “I know how you feel.”
- “I have had the exact same experience.”

Yep

- “I can only imagine how you might feel right now”
- “I can’t imagine how [insert emotion word here] this must be.”

**“You only understand
people if you feel
them in yourself.”**

John Steinbeck



Kiki - Crisis

危

機

機

會

Kikai - Opportunity

Positive Psychology Theories

- Well-Being Theory^{6, 7}

Short-term wellbeing (hedonic wellbeing)	Sustainable wellbeing (eudemonic wellbeing)
Modulate ratio of positive negative emotions (3:1)	Increase sense of meaning and purpose
Ensure basic life needs are satisfied	Live authentically in line with strengths and values
Foster positive relationships	Increase sense of autonomy
Know and use strengths	Live in line with “true self”
Increase experiences of flow	Build resilience



Positive Psychology Theories

- **Strengths Theory⁶**

Strengths = Better feelings, function,
& performance

- **What we can do:**

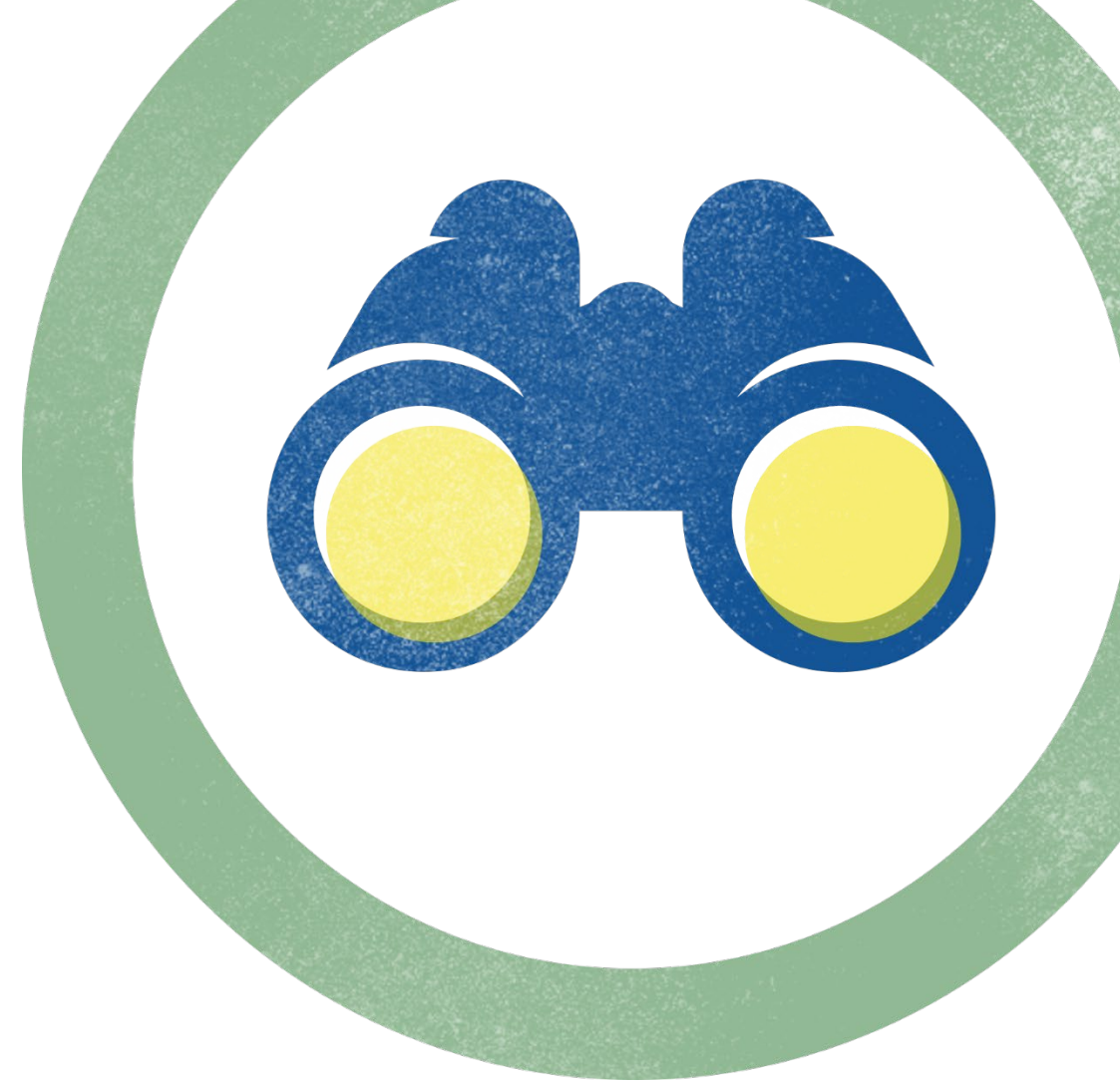
1. Help students identify their strengths
2. Create conditions that foster feelings of competence
3. Help students link strengths to goals/action



Positive Psychology Theories

- **Broaden-and-Build Theory**^{6, 7, 8}

Parallel plans

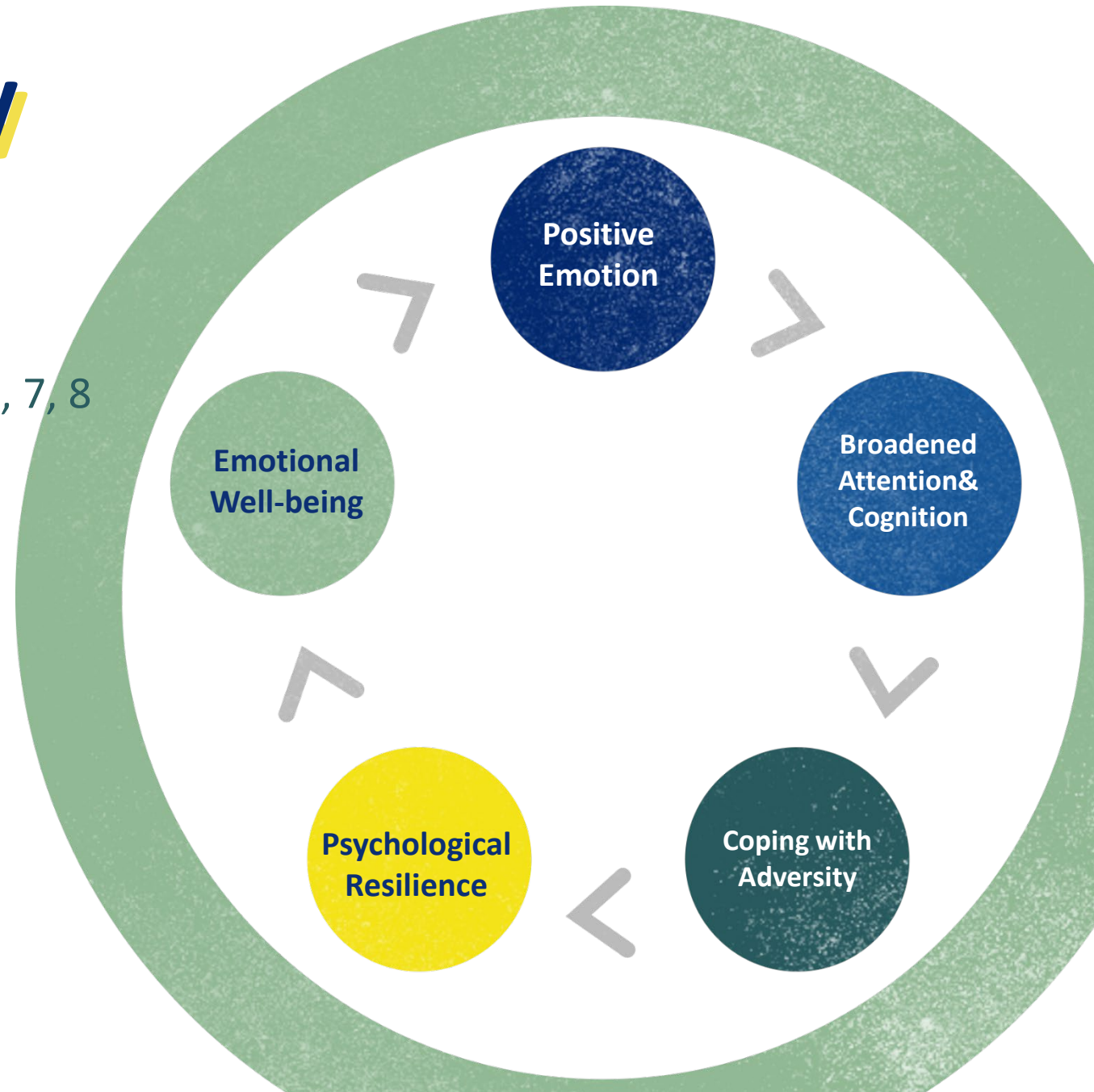


Positive Psychology Theories

- **Broaden-and-Build Theory**^{6, 7, 8}

- **What we can do:**

1. Encourage 3:1
2. Focus on value of effort
3. Help students find positive meaning



Positive Psychology Theories

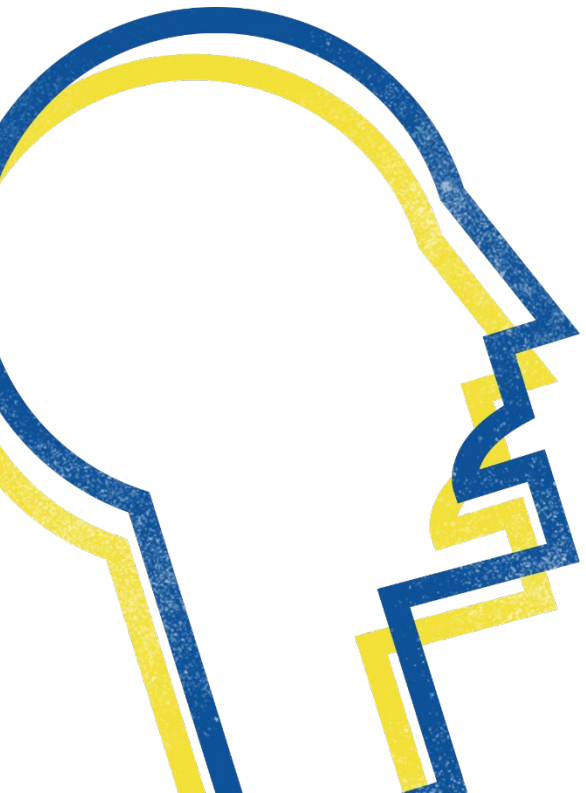
- **Self-Determination Theory⁹**

Basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness

- **What we can do:**

1. Discuss what is meaningful
2. Help students establish reasons and values for action
3. Provide autonomy support

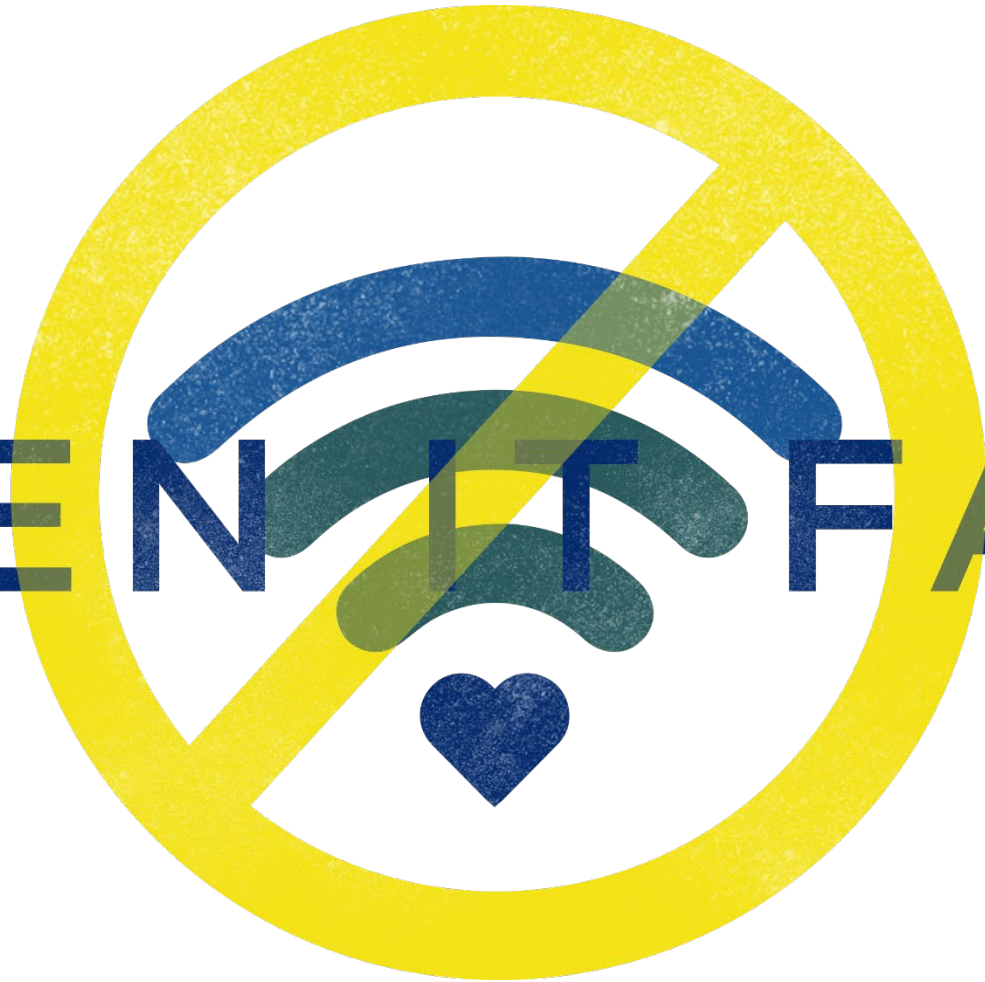




CASE STUDY DISCUSSION



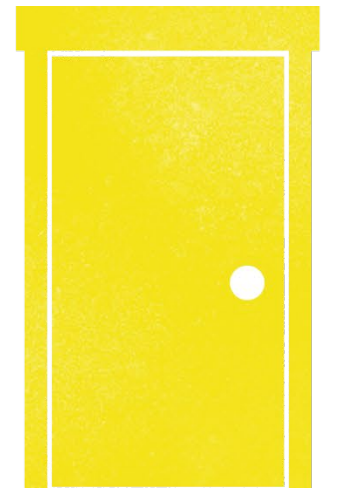
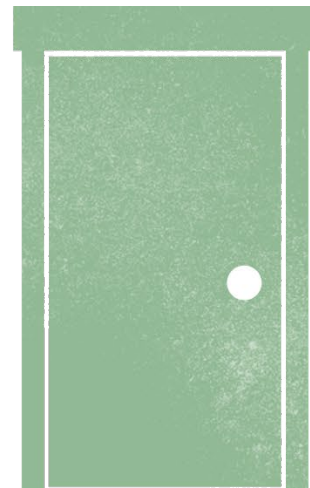
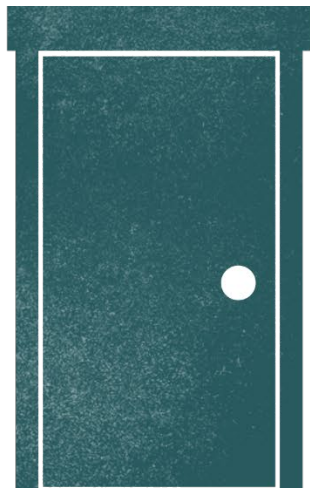
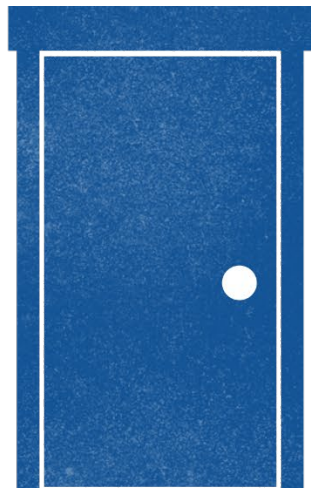
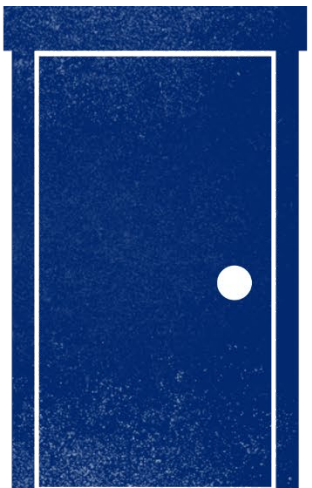
WHEN IT FAILS





- Don't take it personally
- Take a walk
- Reschedule another appointment with the student at another time
- Debrief and consult with colleagues
- Take time for your emotions to settle before analyzing what happened

Alternate Resources





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