

Developing Explanations

the 'vulnerability - stress' model (after: Zubin & Spring 1977)

Zubin & Spring (1977: 110) suggest that:

'...as long as the stress induced by challenging events stays below the threshold of vulnerability, the individual... remains well within the limits of normality. When the stress exceeds the threshold, the person is likely to develop a psychopathological episode of some sort... when the stress abates and sinks below the vulnerability threshold, the episode ends.'

using the stress vulnerability model

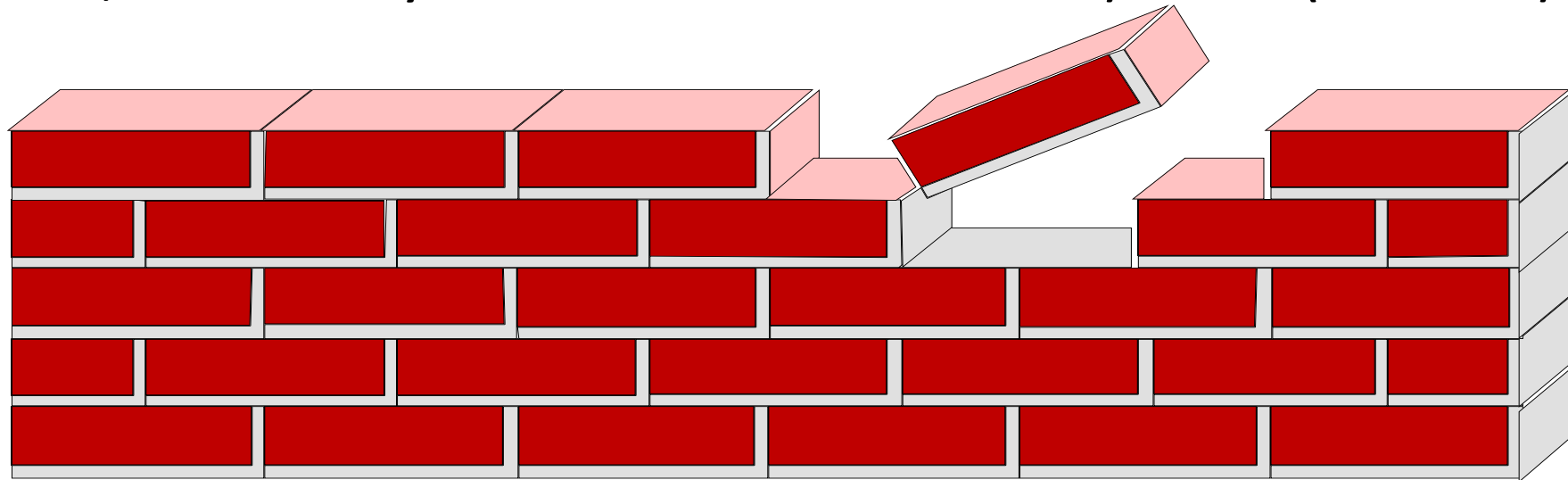
1. identify examples of stressors & vulnerabilities
2. identify some positive coping methods / protective factors
3. relate this to the stress vulnerability model and provide an explanation to the service-user and family members
4. option: *use an analogy to aid explanation*
5. create a sketch with the service-user & family, which you can then give to them – *this becomes a rationale for action*

using an analogy: *the stress wall*

(adapted from: Smith et al 2007)

ambient stress = the higher the wall, the more likely it is to fall

stress can be ongoing (e.g. the weather) or acute (a bulldozer)



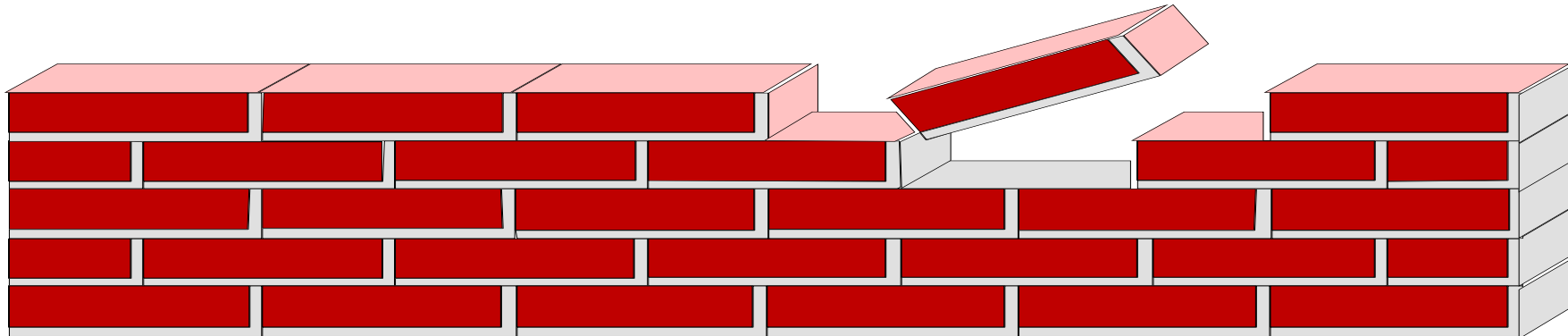
vulnerabilities = the foundations of the wall (strong or weak)

the wall is unlikely to fall completely even when stressed; early signs of psychosis = cracks in the wall; use of mediating strategies (medn or RPP) = strengthening the mortar; if part of it falls, it can be rebuilt – but easier with help & support

draw your own stress wall

1. background stress - *what are your background stressors?*

2. acute / immediate stress - *what are your immediate stressors?*



3. cracks in the wall – *what are your early signs of feeling unwell?*

4. strengthening / repairing the wall – *what helps?*

value of using the SV model

the 'vulnerability - stress' model (after: Zubin & Spring 1977)

the model generally makes sense to service-users and carers and can lead to a common understanding leading to clearer plans and intervention – a plausible model that assists engagement

the model integrates biological, psychological and social factors

psychosis is viewed as episodic and related to stress

represents a way in which mental health status at a particular point in time may be regarded as a continuum applicable to all people (Hayes 2012)

it acknowledges a person's threshold for coping

value of using the SV model

the 'vulnerability - stress' model (after: Zubin & Spring 1977)

offers a framework to build on strengths and increase capacity in managing stress

encourages early detection & management

focus upon enhancing coping, minimising less useful ways of coping, and developing protective buffers against stress

encourages hope and optimism

promotes a reduction in the potential of relapse

Key References

- Birchwood, M., Hallett, S. & Jackson, C. (1988) *Schizophrenia: an integrated approach to research and treatment*. Harlow, Essex: Longman Group UK Ltd.**
- Nuechterlein, K. & Dawson, M. (1984) A Heuristic Vulnerability / Stress Model of Schizophrenic Episodes. *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 10: 300-312**
- Smith, G., Gregory, K. & Higgs, A. (2007) *An Integrated Approach to Family Work for Psychosis: a manual for family workers*. London: Jessica Kingsley**
- Zubin, J. & Spring, B. (1977) Vulnerability: A new view of schizophrenia. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 86: 103-126**