

Assessing and managing Crisis
using ISTDP
2022 Swiss ISTDP Immersion

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**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

Inspiring Minds



Upcoming Immersion with Borderline Patient

- You are welcome to this June 1-3 course using the Core Training discount cost
- It is 17-2400 your time.
- All video subtitled in English
- Link is Here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bringing-structural-change-in-the-fragile-patient-3-day-imm-wdr-abbass-tickets-211475858987>



Jun 01

Bringing Structural Change in the Fragile Patient: 3-Day IMM w/Dr. Abbass

by [ISTDP San Diego - Tami Chelew & Matt Jarvinen](#)

227 followers [Following](#)

\$205 - \$550

- Overall plan for the course
 - Overview of ISTDP model
 - Crisis and ISTDP
 - Crisis sessions across the spectrum
 - 3 supervision cases

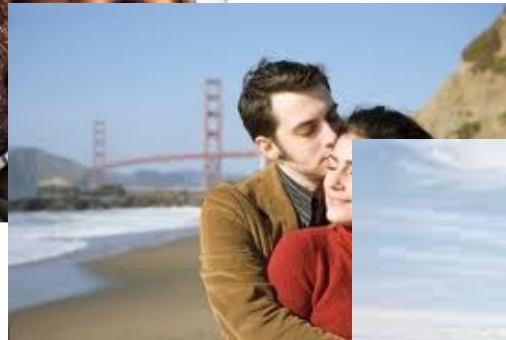
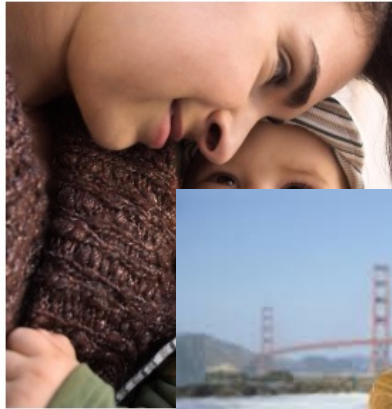
Central Points

- ISTDP has broad use as a treatment for diverse psychiatric presentations
- ISTDP requires development of an intrapsychic crisis to open the unconscious
- When patients are in crisis there is some risk but also possible access to the unconscious
- In crisis patients have changes in anxiety and defense patterns that may need to be managed
- With management, crisis sessions can be a huge leap forward for patients

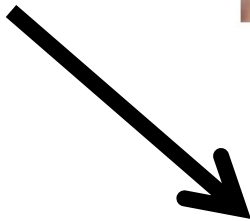
Crisis and ISTDP

- ISTDP works in part by causing an intrapsychic crisis, loosening and changing defenses, leading to access to the unconscious
- Crisis can result from intra-psychic and or extra-psychic events
- Anything that causes defenses to shift can bring a crisis
- Any increase in self love or good events is a major risk for crisis in resistant and fragile patients
- When you hear “Crisis” think “Opportunity”

Metapsychology of the Unconscious



**BOND
With
Parents**



**BOND
With
Others**



BOND
With
Parents

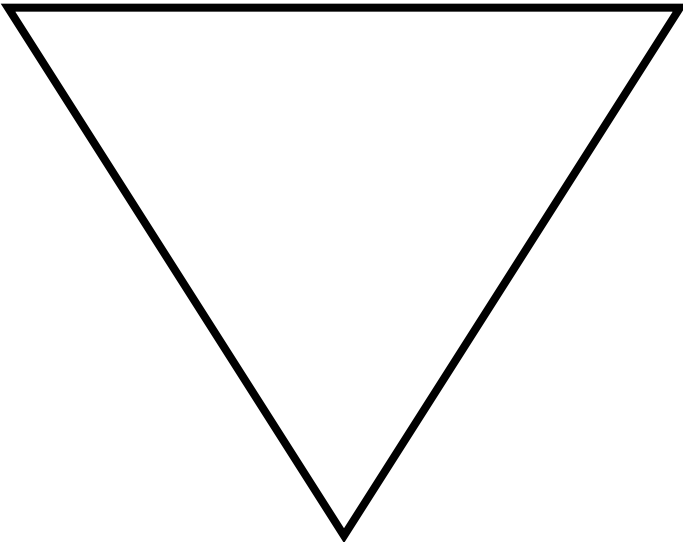
Trauma

PAIN
FEAR

Rage, Guilt
about the Rage

Self-destruct
Symptoms
Somatization

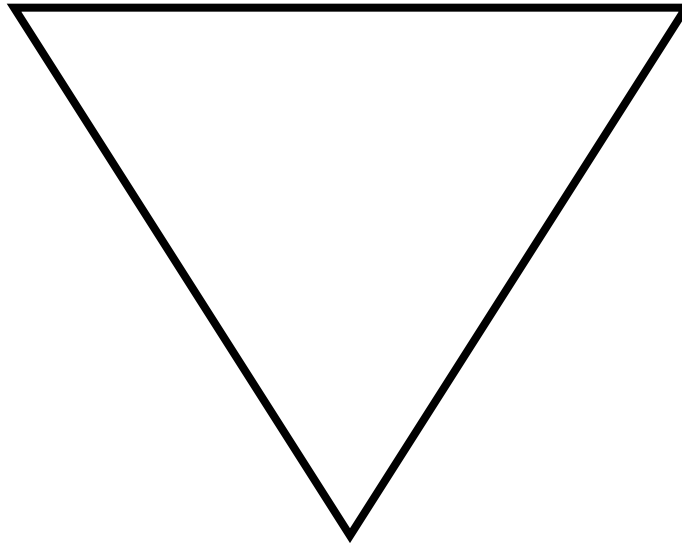
Transference
(Therapist/
Doctor)



Current
person

Past
person

Unconscious
Defense

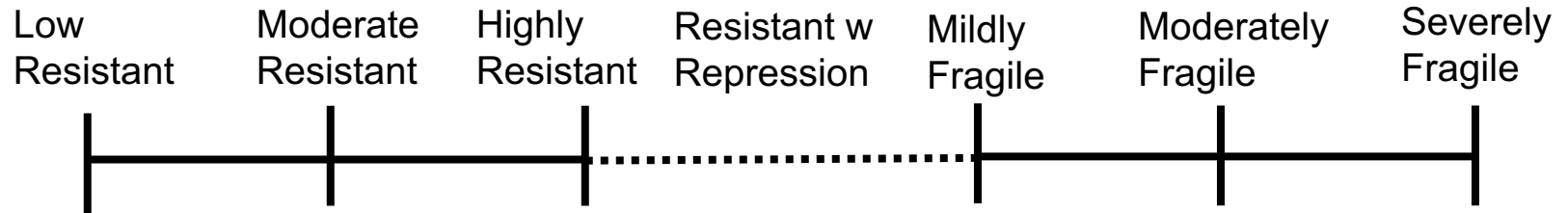


Unconscious
Anxiety

Unconscious
Impulses & Feelings

Spectrum of Psychoneurotic Disorders

Spectrum of Patients with Fragile Character Structure



Violent Rage

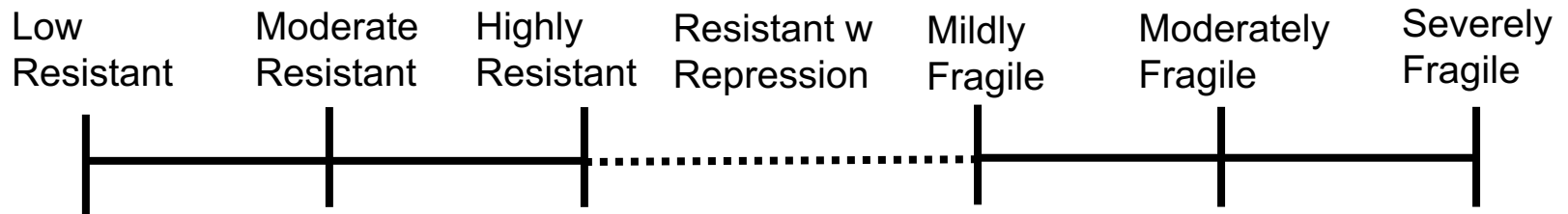
Murderous Rage

Primitive Murderous Rage

Primitive Torturous Rage

Spectrum of Psychoneurotic Disorders

Spectrum of Patients with Fragile Character Structure



Striated Muscle + Isolation of affect

Smooth Muscle/Conversion + Repression

Cognitive-Perceptual Disruption + Primitive Defenses

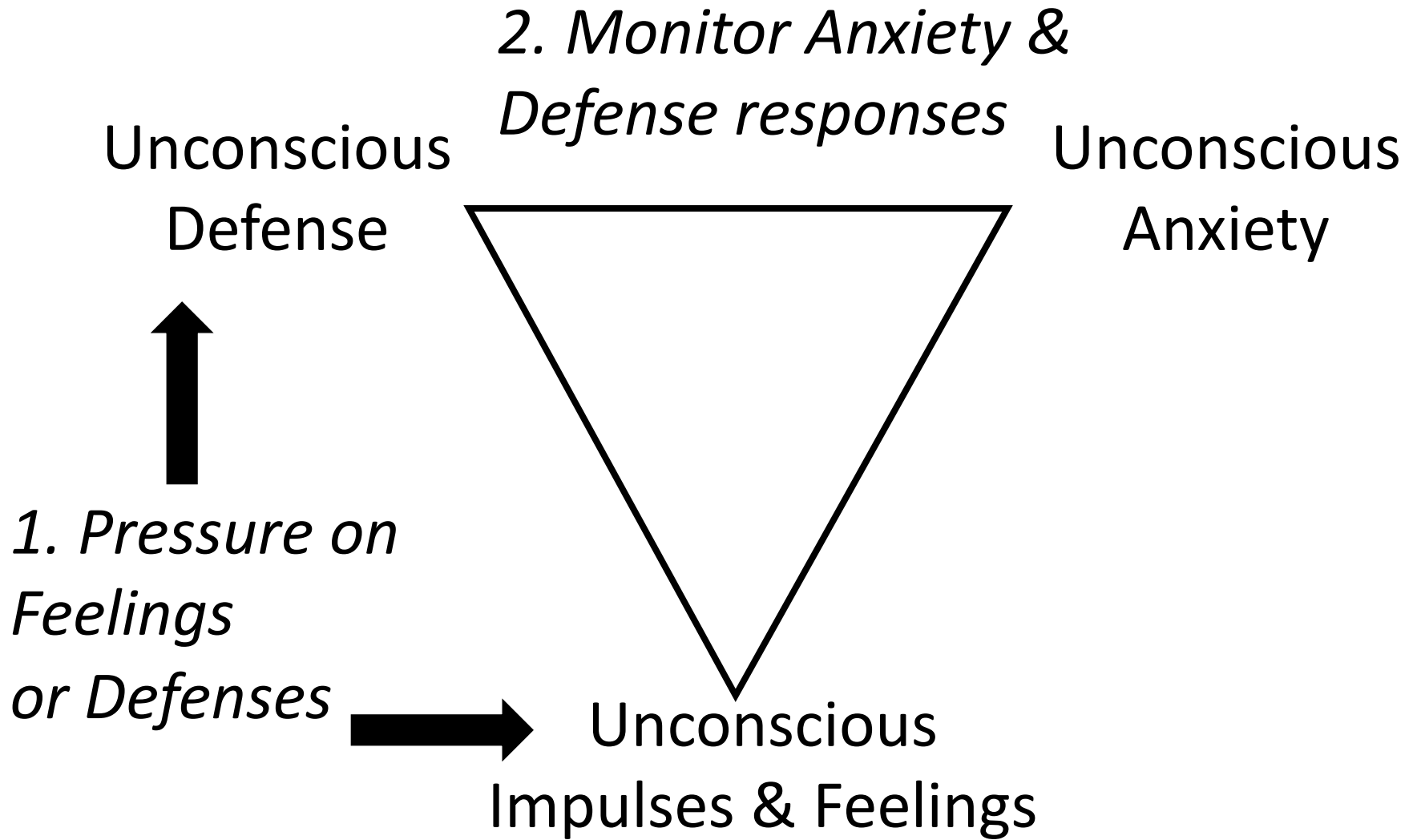


Table 9.1 Examples of pressure

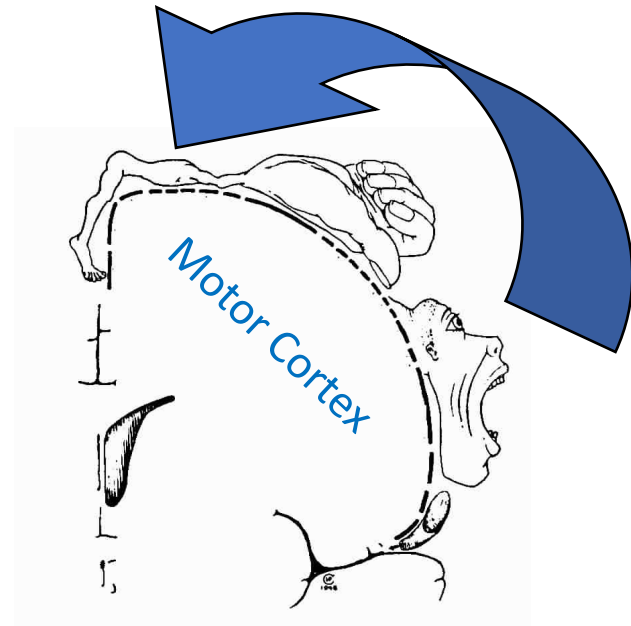
Types of pressure	Examples	Defense being worked upon
Pressure to feelings	How do you feel? How do you experience the feeling? What does the rage want to do?	Emotional avoidance and repression
Pressure to task	Can we examine how this problem affects you? Can we explore how this anxiety affects your body?	Self-neglect, tendency to be unfocused
Pressure to be specific	Can you describe a specific example of when you had the symptoms?	Vagueness
Pressure to the person's will	Is it your wish that we examine this?	Compliance and defiance
Pressure to positive regard for oneself	Let's see what we can do so you will have a good feeling about yourself and what you are doing for yourself.	Self-hatred and resistance of guilt
Pressure to encourage active collaboration	How do you suggest we approach this problem?	Passivity and compliance
Pressure against character defenses	Are you sure now is the time to solve this problem?	Character defenses such as procrastination, habitual nonverbal avoidance, externalization

Striated Muscle Unconscious Anxiety

- **Hands Clench**
- Arms, Shoulders, Neck
- Intercostal: **Sigh**
- Abdomen, back
- Legs and Feet

→ Hyperventilation, Fibromyalgia, headache, chest pain, abdominal wall pain, tremors, tics

- See with Isolation of Affect



Smooth Muscle Unconscious Anxiety

- Gastrointestinal
- Vascular, Coronary Arteries
- Bronchi
- Bladder
- Abdominal Pain, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Dyspepsia, Migraine, Pelvic Pain
- Mediated by Repression of feelings

Cognitive-perceptual Disruption

- Dissociation, losing track of thoughts, poor memory, fainting
- Visual blurring, blindness
- Dysfunction of other senses
- Hallucinations in all 5 senses: Can perceive Pain and other symptoms
- Can alternate with Projection and conscious fear
- Seen with Projection of feelings and impulses, splitting and projective identification

Motor Conversion: Muscle weakness

- → Neurology Consultation and Emergency Departments
- Seen with Repression
- Common with Pseudoseizures
- No muscle tension anxiety when conversion is active

Sympathy symptoms

- Guilt about rage causes the same symptoms as a person unconsciously wanted to induce in another.
- Common Examples:
 - Strangling → Choking
 - Head damage → headache
 - Chest damage → chest pain

Complex Transference Feelings (CTF)

- = appreciation plus irritation toward the therapist
- Due to pressure and challenge to customary defenses
- Linked to the past bond, trauma, pain, rage and guilt about rage.

Unconscious Therapeutic Alliance

- The unconscious healing force
- Mobilized by activating the complex transference feelings
- Brings mental images of past relational trauma and clear linkages to trauma

Mid rise
in CTF

High rise
in CTF

Partial
unlocking

Major
unlocking

R >> **UTA**

Whispers from
the alliance:
concise
understanding

R > **UTA**

Negation,
slips of the
tongue

R < **UTA**

Rage, grief:
clear linkages

R << **UTA**

Rage and Guilt:
image transfer

Initiating ISTDP: Steps

- 1. Handle barriers to engagement
- 2. Find the Front of the System
- 3. Psychodiagnosis
- 4. Monitor and work with 5 parameters

- These will determine next interventions, pace and expected processes

Examples of Barriers to engagement

- No internal problem
- Procrastination
- Syntonic Defiance: Don't want to deal with it
- Syntonic Compliance: going along
- Entrenched Syntonic Passivity
- Suicidal

STEP 2: Find the Front of the System

1. Activated and avoided complex feelings: focus on the cognitive and somatic experiences of the underlying complex feelings.

2. Active defenses at the front: turn him against the defences in the room and focus on underlying feelings.

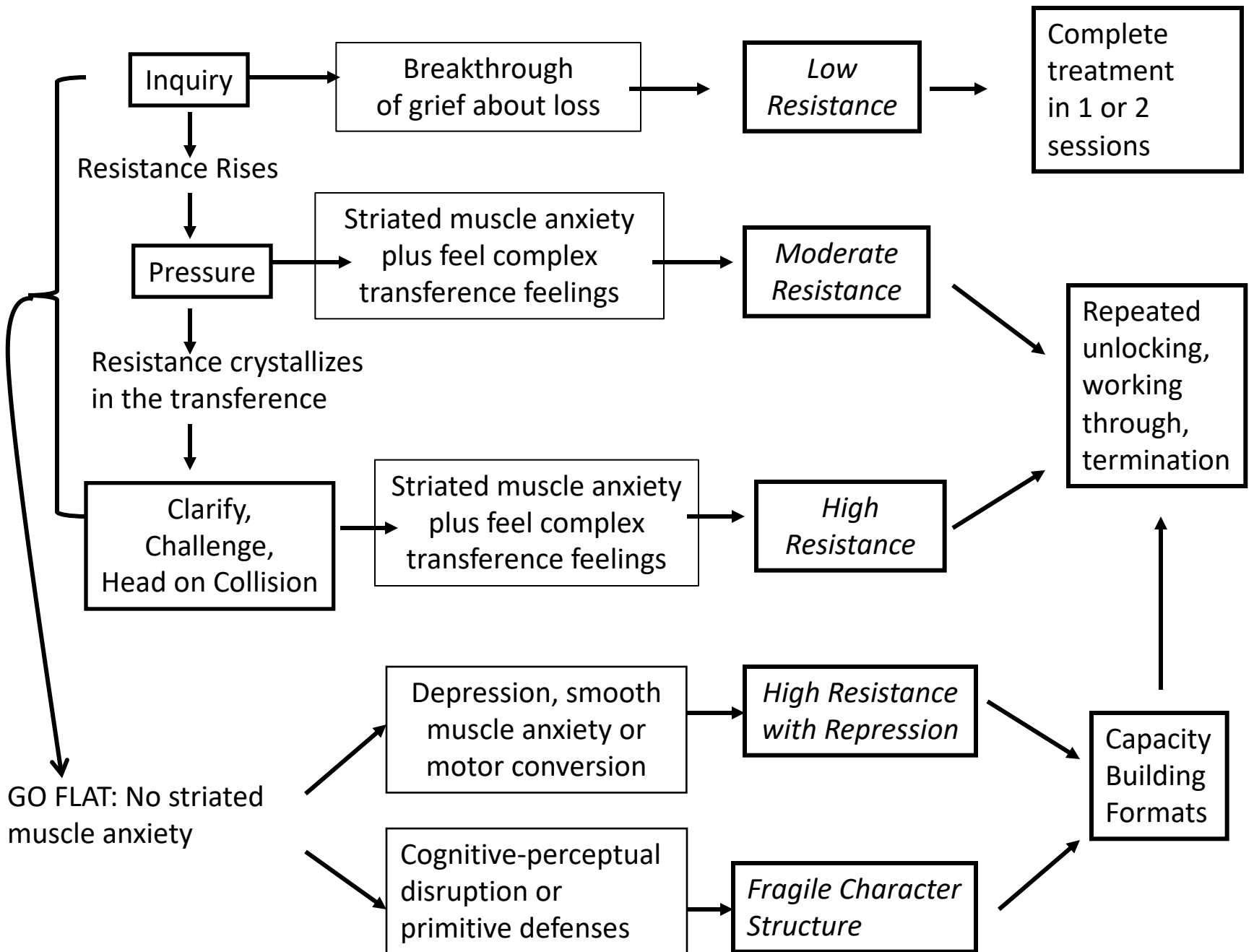
4 Fronts

3. Active Unconscious Anxiety: focus on the underlying feelings. If anxiety is too high, reduce it by recapping or reviewing bodily symptoms.

4. No activation: Take history. Explore problem areas searching for signs of anxiety and resistance.

STEP 3: Psychodiagnosis: 6 responses

- Feel Feelings with inquiry: Low Resistant
- Feel feelings after pressure: Moderate R
- Defend: High Resistance
- Go Flat: Repression: High r with repression
- Go Flat: Projection or CPD: Fragile
- No Response: Search for the anxiety and resistance



STEP 4: Monitor 5 Parameters

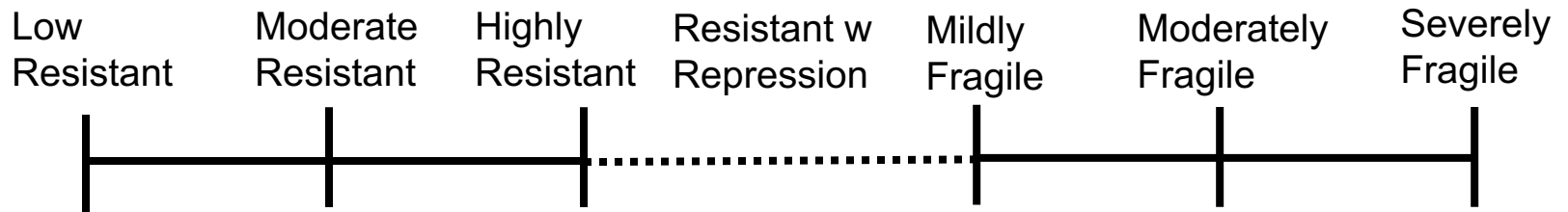
1. *Active unconscious anxiety pathways*: striated muscle, smooth muscle, cognitive-perceptual disruption.
2. *Active major defense patterns*: isolation of affect, repression, projection, and resistance of guilt (superego).
3. *Degree to which resistances are syntonic versus dystonic*: how much the patient identifies with his defenses.

5 Parameters

4. *Degree of rise in the transference:* low-, mid-, high-rise in CTF, or an already mobilized UTA.
5. *Presence of thresholds and how high thresholds are:* low moderate or high threshold to smooth muscle anxiety, CPD, repression or projection.

Spectrum of Psychoneurotic Disorders

Spectrum of Patients with Fragile Character Structure



Striated Muscle + Isolation of affect

Smooth Muscle/Conversion + Repression

Cognitive-Perceptual Disruption + Primitive Defenses

Low resistant Patient

- Any Unconscious Anxiety is Striated
- Minor Tactical defenses only
- No Rage in the unconscious = No major pathology
- These patients rarely present with any crisis

Moderate resistant patient

- Tend to respond to most treatments
- Have murderous rage and guilt and grief
- Anxiety is striated muscle
- Main defense is intellectualization
- Focus on feelings mobilizes the unconscious therapeutic alliance

Tactical
defenses

Tactical
defenses

Tactical
defenses

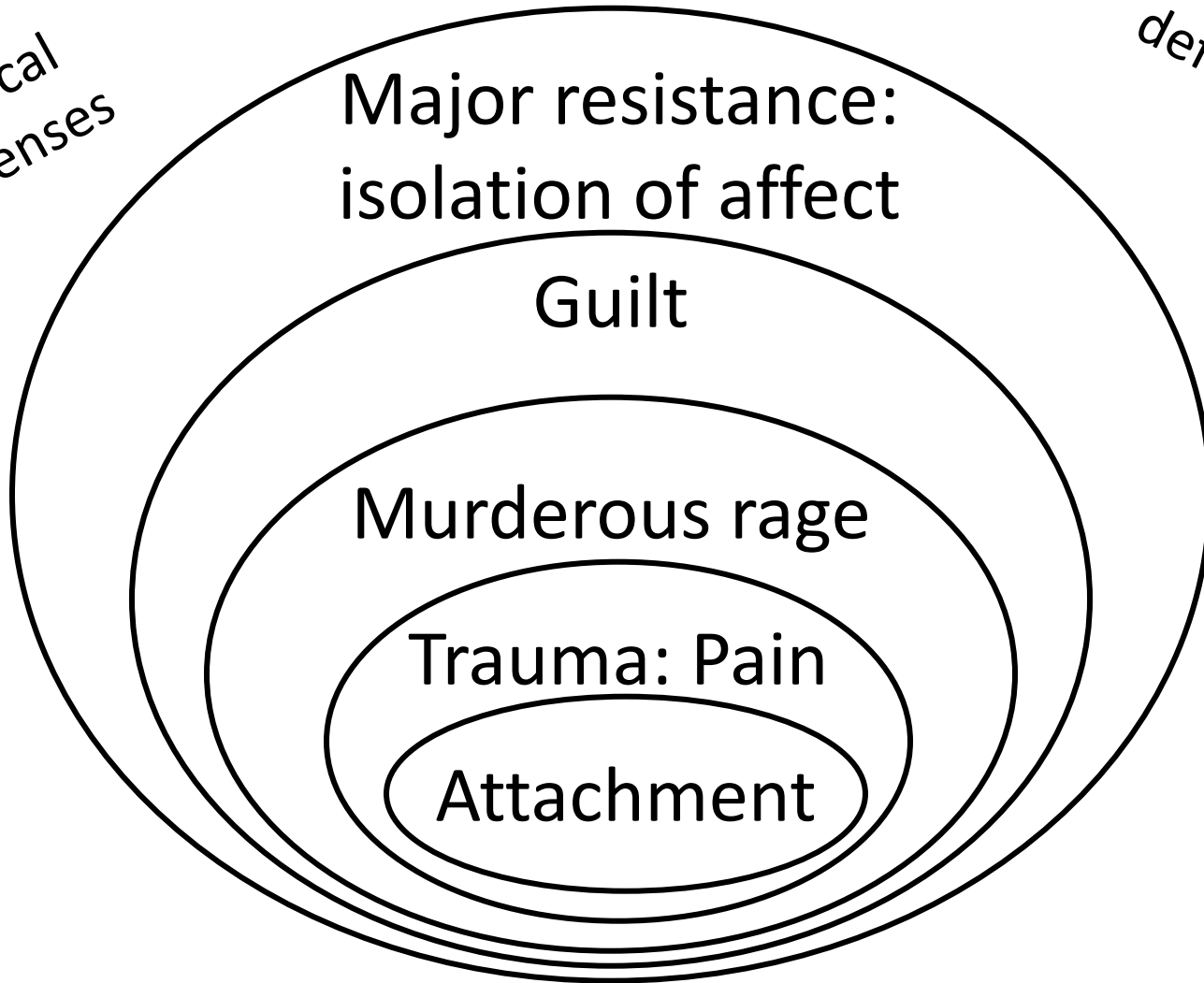
Major resistance:
isolation of affect

Guilt

Murderous rage

Trauma: Pain

Attachment



Tactical vs Major Defenses

Tactical defense

More apparent

Dystonic

Loosely held

Easily handled



Major defense

Less apparent

Syntonic

Tightly held

Difficult to handle

Figure 2.2 Continuum of tactical to major defenses

Tactical Defenses:

Try to divert the therapist

- Cover words
- Indirect speech
- Blanket statements
- Jargon
- Rumination
- Vagueness
- Rationalization
- Diversification
- Externalization
- Denial
- Indecisiveness
- Defiance
- Talking to avoid
- Body movements as defense
- Compliance

Unlocking of the Unconscious

Moderate Resistance

- Pressure and limited challenge: Complex Transference Feelings are experienced: anxiety and defence are removed or reduced
- Unconscious Therapeutic Alliance becomes higher than resistance
- Images of the unconscious emerge
- Exploration with experience of feelings
- Recap and treatment planning
- Short course up to 10 meetings

Resistance

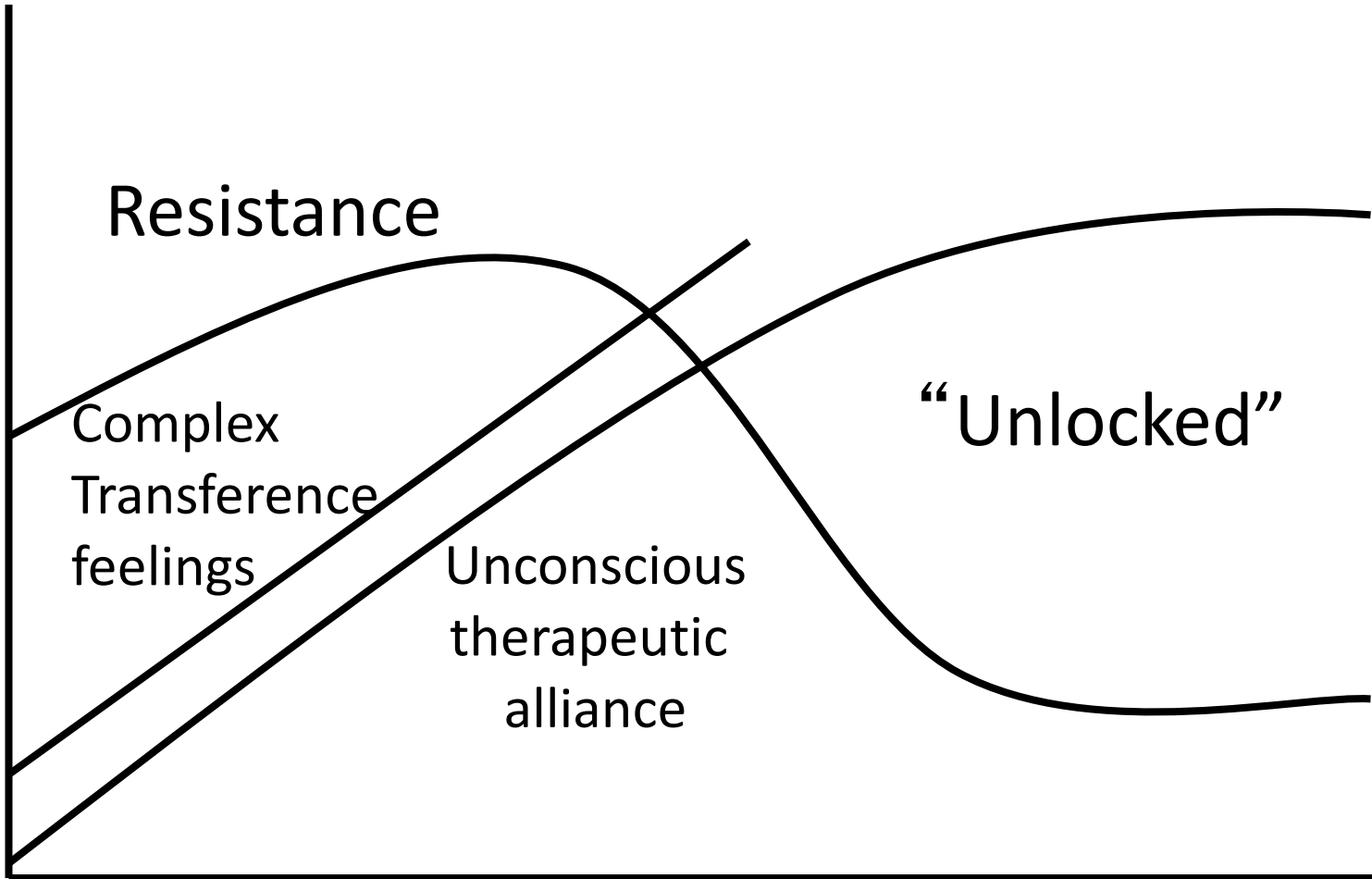
Mid rise:
Resistance
crystallizing in
transference.
Clarify and
Challenge

Low rise:
inquiry and
pressure

Complex
Transference
feelings

Unconscious
therapeutic
alliance

“Unlocked”



Spectrum of Mobilization

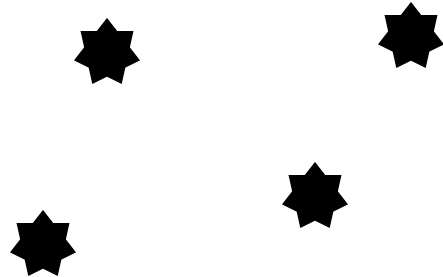
- Low Rise: Flat process: Little to no unc anxiety/defense present
- Mid rise:
 - Resistance starts to *crystallize* between patient and therapist
 - Breaking eye contact
 - Slowing
 - Ruminating
 - Tense Muscles
- UTA: May see “negation” or “Whisper from UTA”
- Intervention: Clarify and challenge Defenses and Maintain Pressure

Challenge Davanloo 1999

- This is done only when the resistances are crystallizing in the therapeutic relationship (transference), when they are an obstruction to the *therapeutic bond* and task
- First, clarify the defences with the Patient
- Then pressure: encourage the patient to overcome the resistances with you
- Finally, challenge the defences in concert with the patient.

*Low
rise*

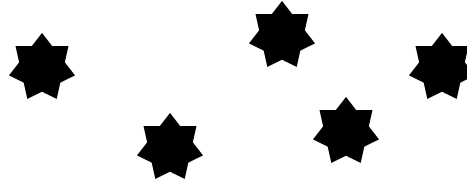
Therapist



Patient

*Mid
rise*

Therapist



Patient

*High
rise*

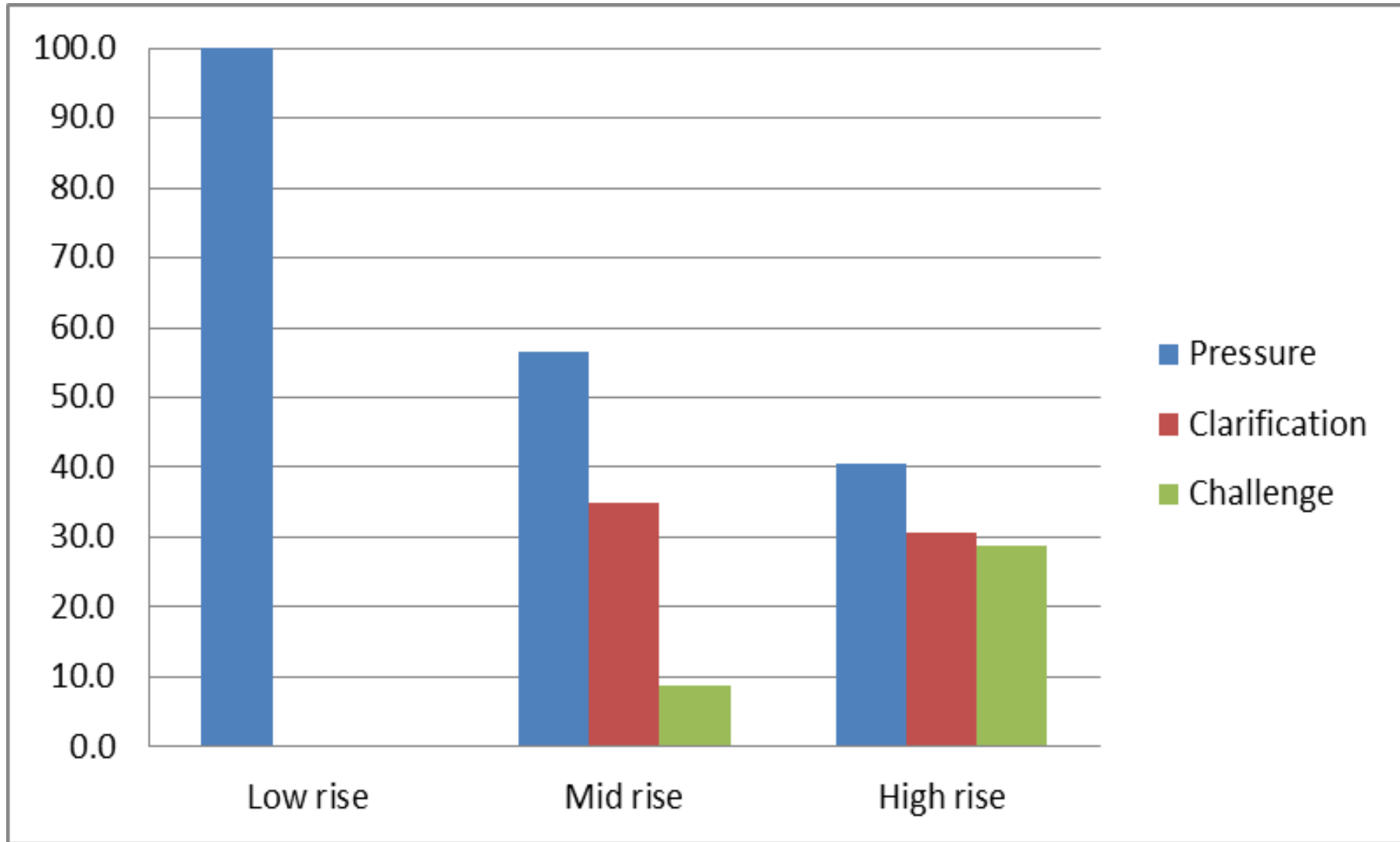
Therapist

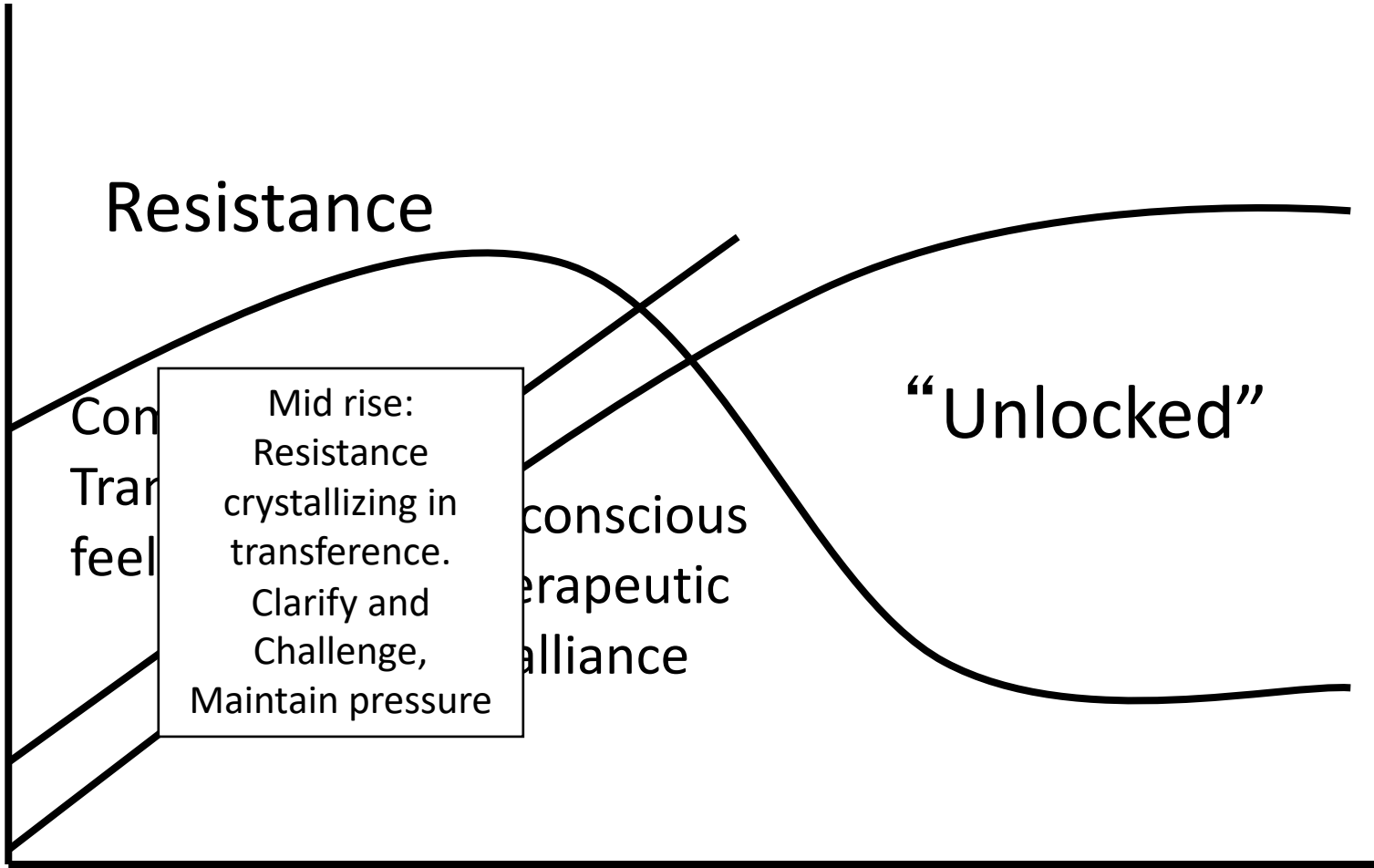


Patient

★ = Defense

Percentage of Pressure, Clarification, Challenge interventions at low, mid, and high rise.





Resistance

“Unlocked”

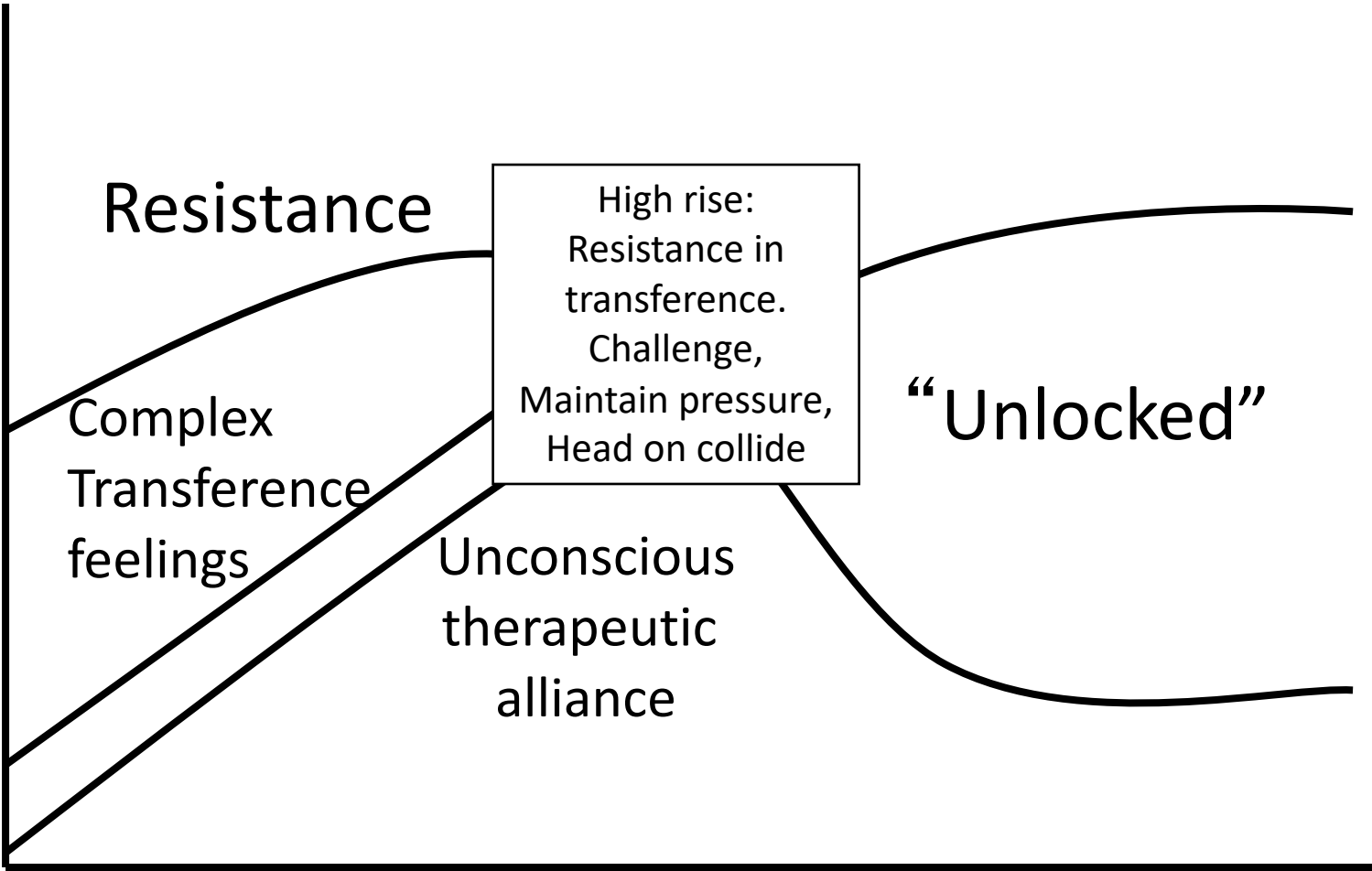
Mid rise:
Resistance
crystallizing in
transference.
Clarify and
Challenge,
Maintain pressure

Con
Tran
feel

conscious
therapeutic
alliance

Spectrum of Mobilization 3

- High Rise
 - High degree of crystallization of defenses in the transference.
 - Battle between Resistance and the Unconscious Therapeutic Alliance. Whispers and Negation.
 - High tension in muscle
- Intervention: “Head on Collision”: high challenge and pressure on defences



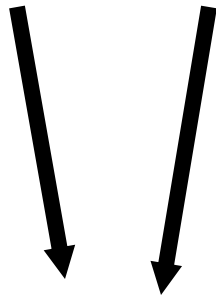
Resistance

Complex
Transference
feelings

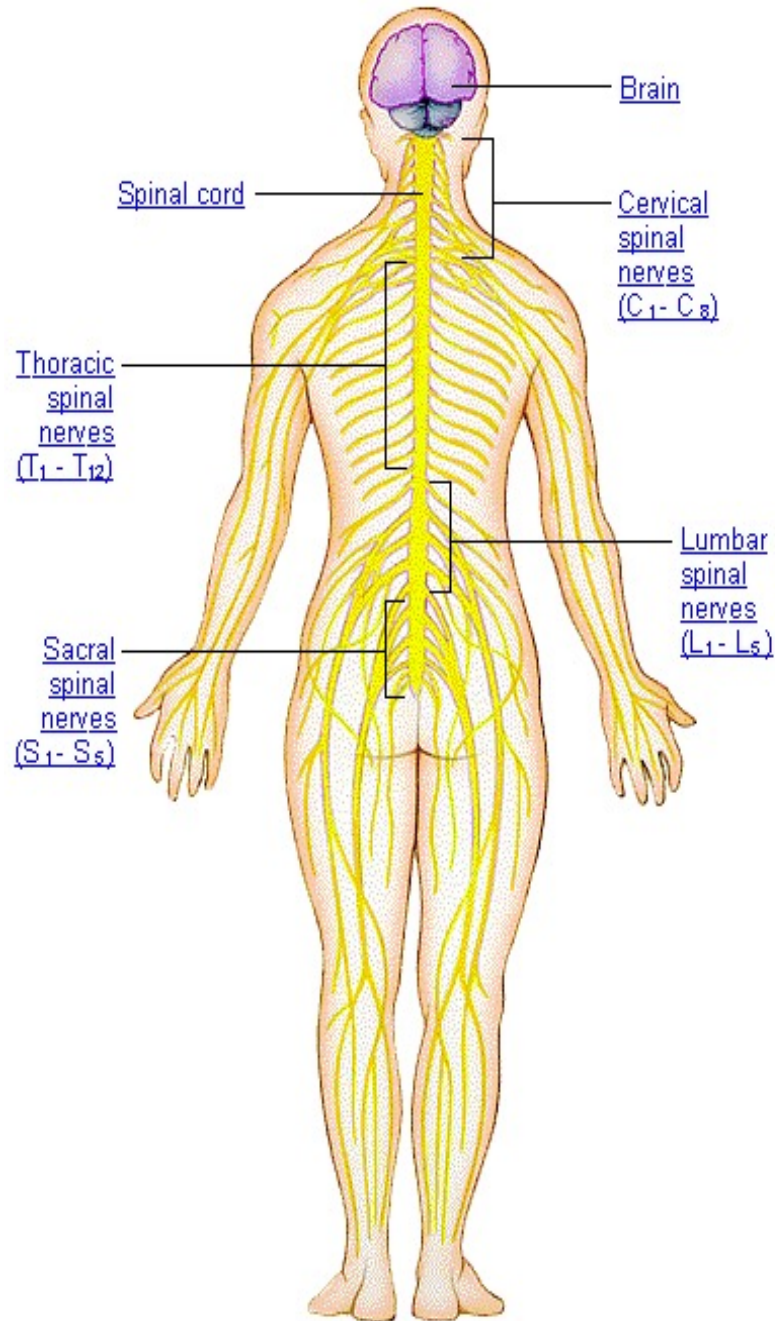
Unconscious
therapeutic
alliance

High rise:
Resistance in
transference.
Challenge,
Maintain pressure,
Head on collide

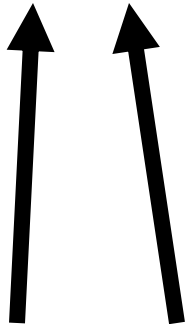
“Unlocked”



Striated Muscle
Anxiety
Goes Down Body

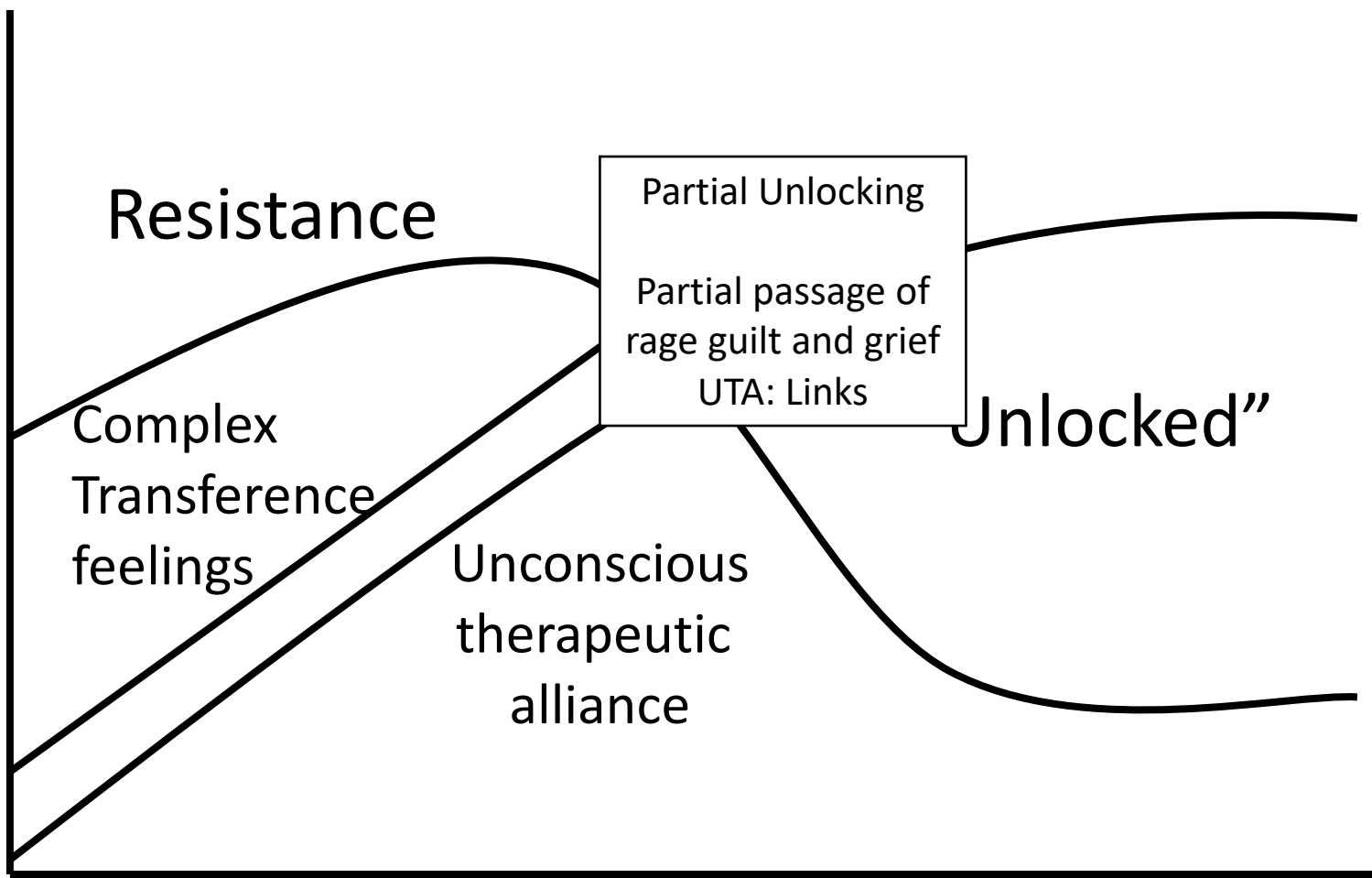


Neurobiological
Pathway of
Rage: goes up same
system displacing
somatization



Spectrum of Mobilization 5

- First breakthrough: some passage of grief with linkage to past or recent person
- Partial Unlocking: somatic pathway of love, rage, guilt and grief are experienced to small degree: vivid link to past person.

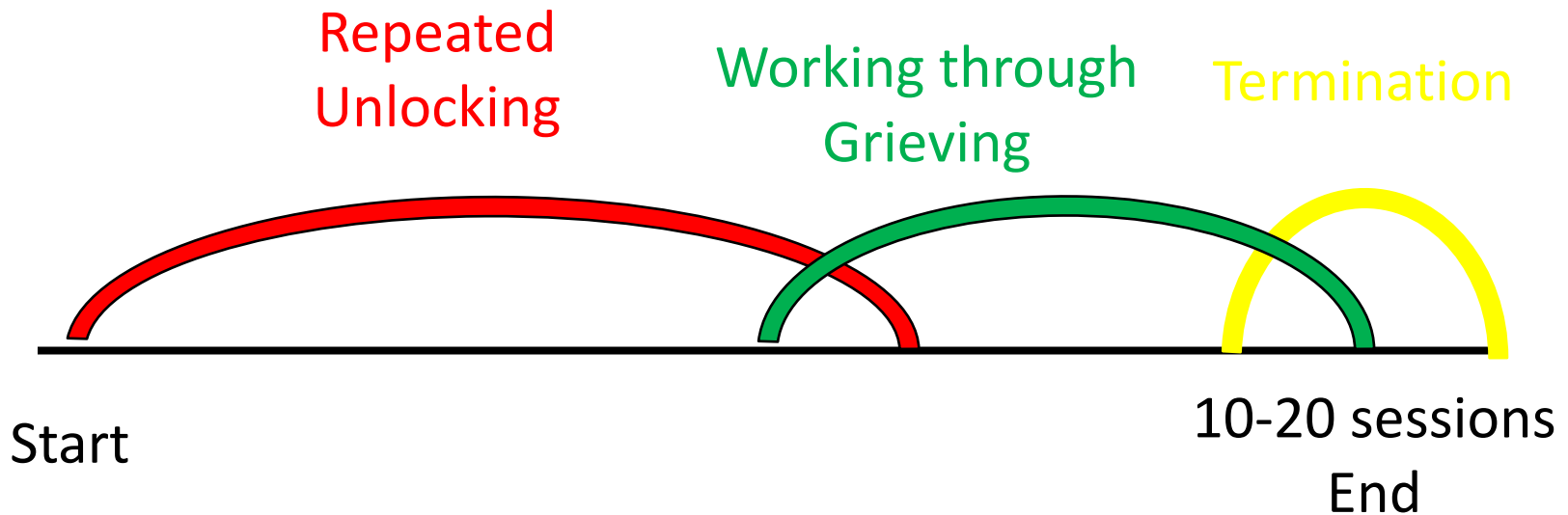


After Unlocking

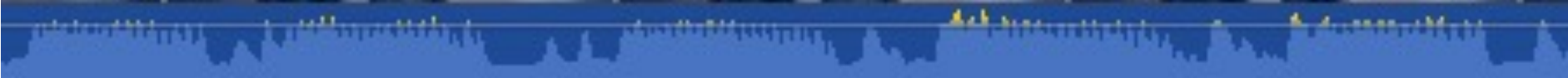

- UTA leads process to key areas
- Feelings are experienced
- Recapping in between
- Deepening insight and planning the work that needs to be done
- Recap at end

Later phases

- Repeated unlocking
- Working through
- Termination



Somatic pathways of feelings

- Love: rising warmth, urge to smile and embrace
 - Rage: rising heat up chest to head then down arms: tension and anxiety stop
 - Guilt about rage: Hard waves, pain in upper chest. Feel as if have just murdered loved one.
- 
- Grief: tears, painful feeling in chest. Waves not as hard and distinct as guilt. Not as loud or painful.
- 

Spectrum of Psychoneurotic Disorders

Spectrum of Patients with Fragile Character Structure

Low Resistant

Moderate Resistant

Highly Resistant

Mild

Moderate

Severe/ Borderline

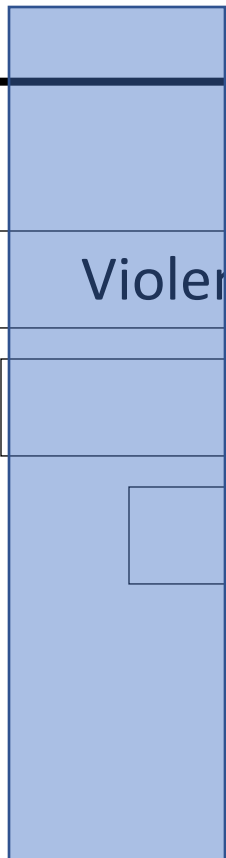


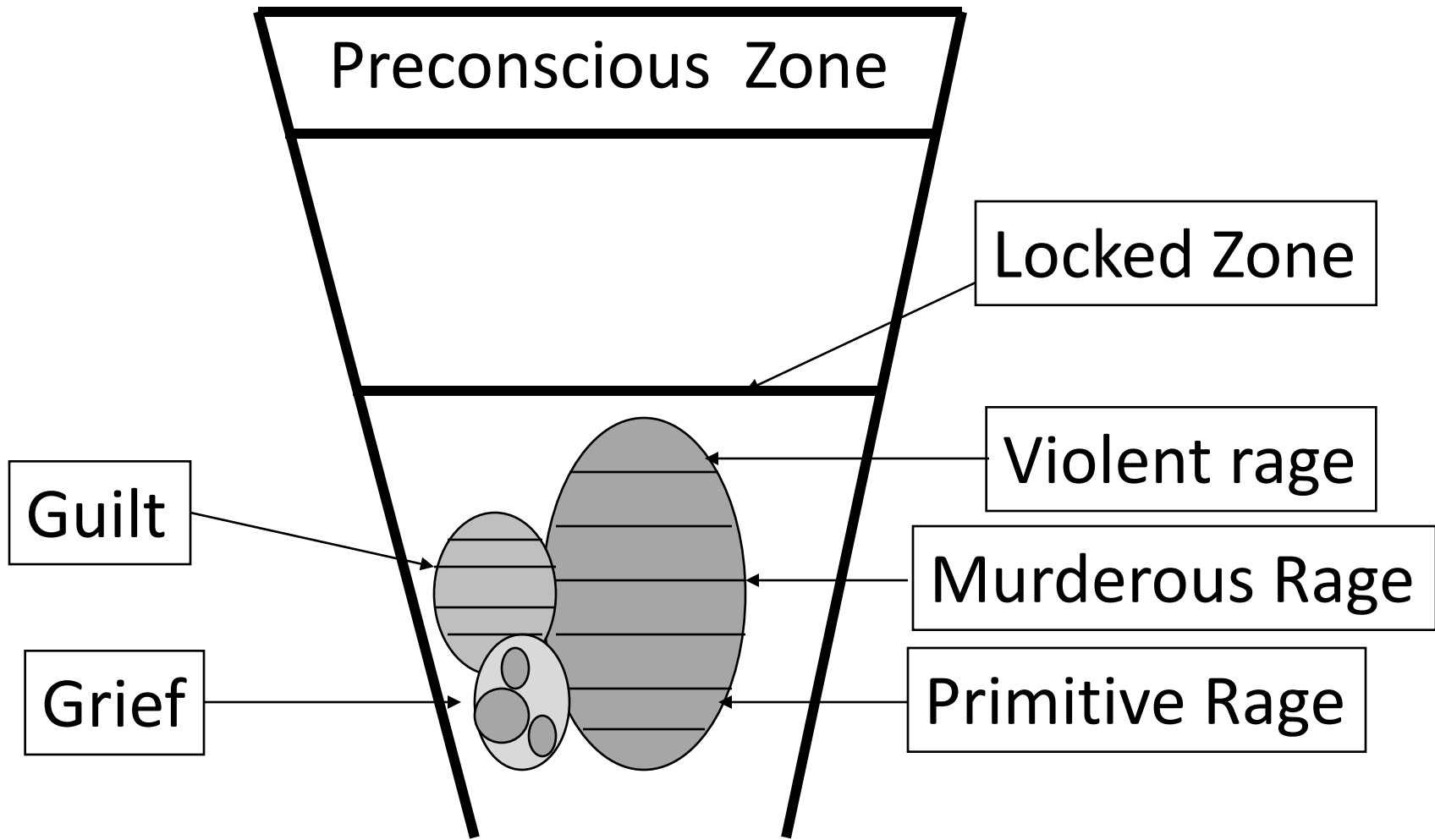
Violent Rage

Murderous Rage

Primitive Murderous Rage

Primitive Torturous Rage





Crisis in moderate and high resistant patients without repression usually is due to mobilization of intense guilt laden rage

Conscious
Feelings

Threshold to experiencing impulse/feelings

Unconscious
Anxiety

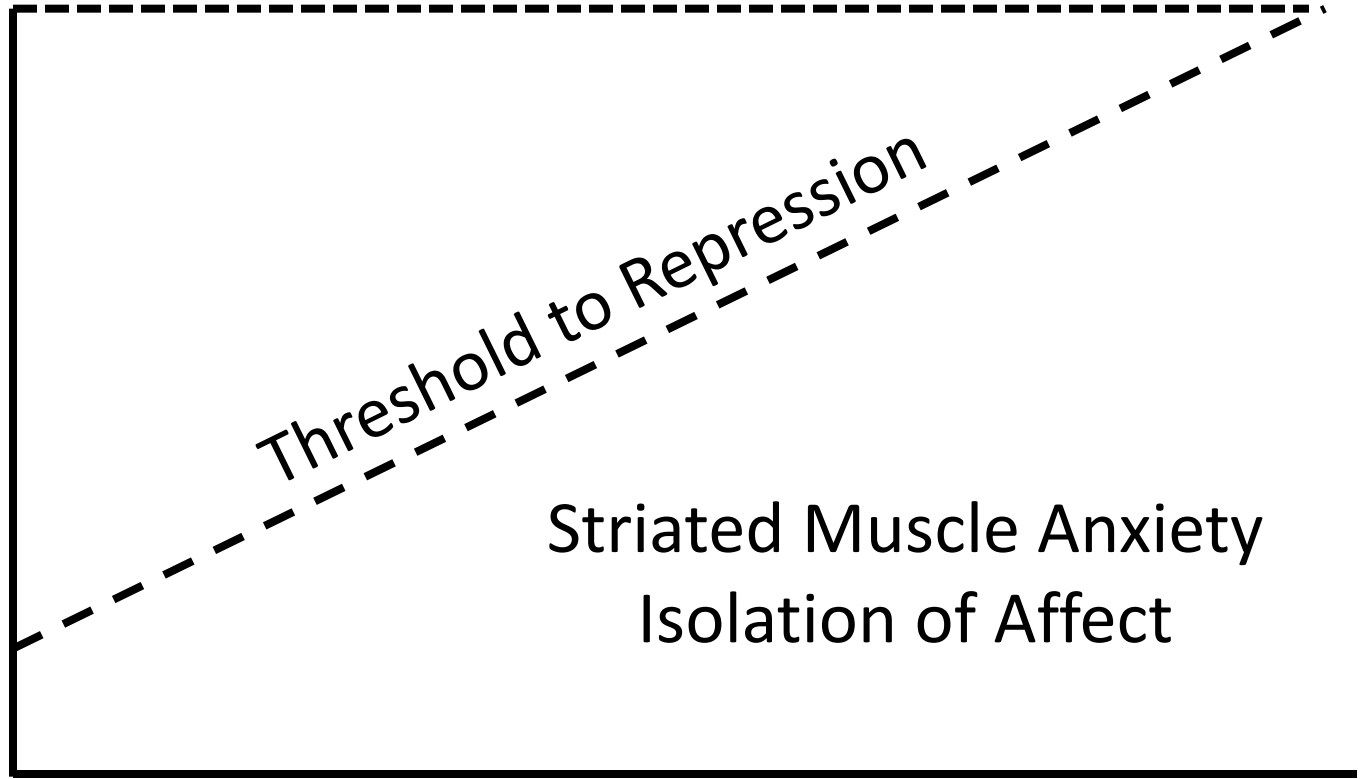
Threshold to Repression

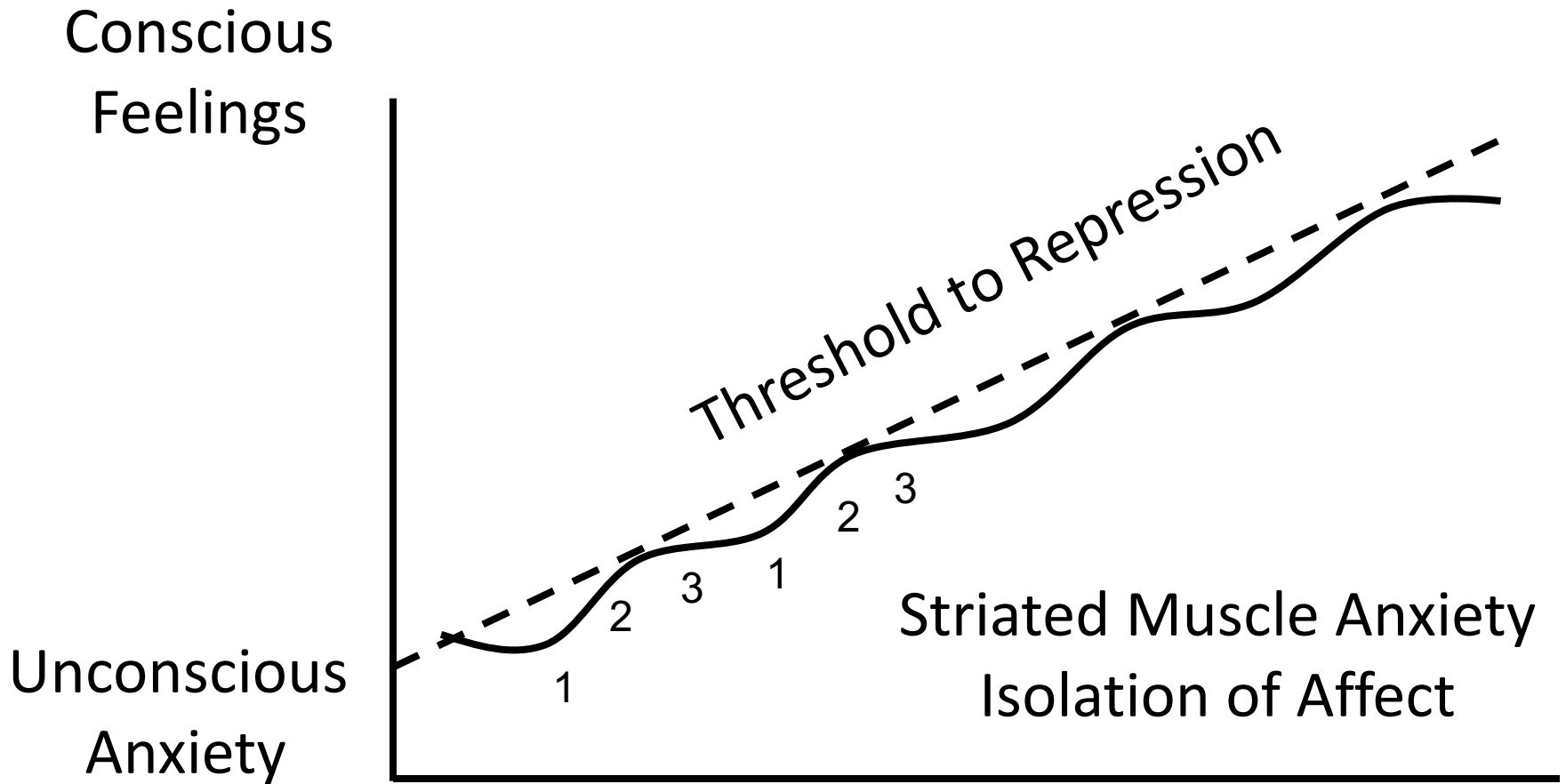
Striated Muscle Anxiety
Isolation of Affect

Severe
Repression

Moderate
Repression

Mild
Repression





1. Pressure to feelings or to defenses
2. Rise in complex transference feelings and anxiety
3. Intellectual recap to bring isolation of affect

Techniques to reduce acute anxiety

- Recap: Isolate affect
- Focus on body cues
- Explore projections
- Change station $T \rightarrow C$ or $C \rightarrow C$ or $C \rightarrow T$
- In some cases Add Pressure \rightarrow Rise in CTF drops conscious anxiety

Activate brain self reflective centres

Conscious feelings

1. Pressure
2. Rise in CTF
3. Recap

Threshold to Repression

Therapeutic window

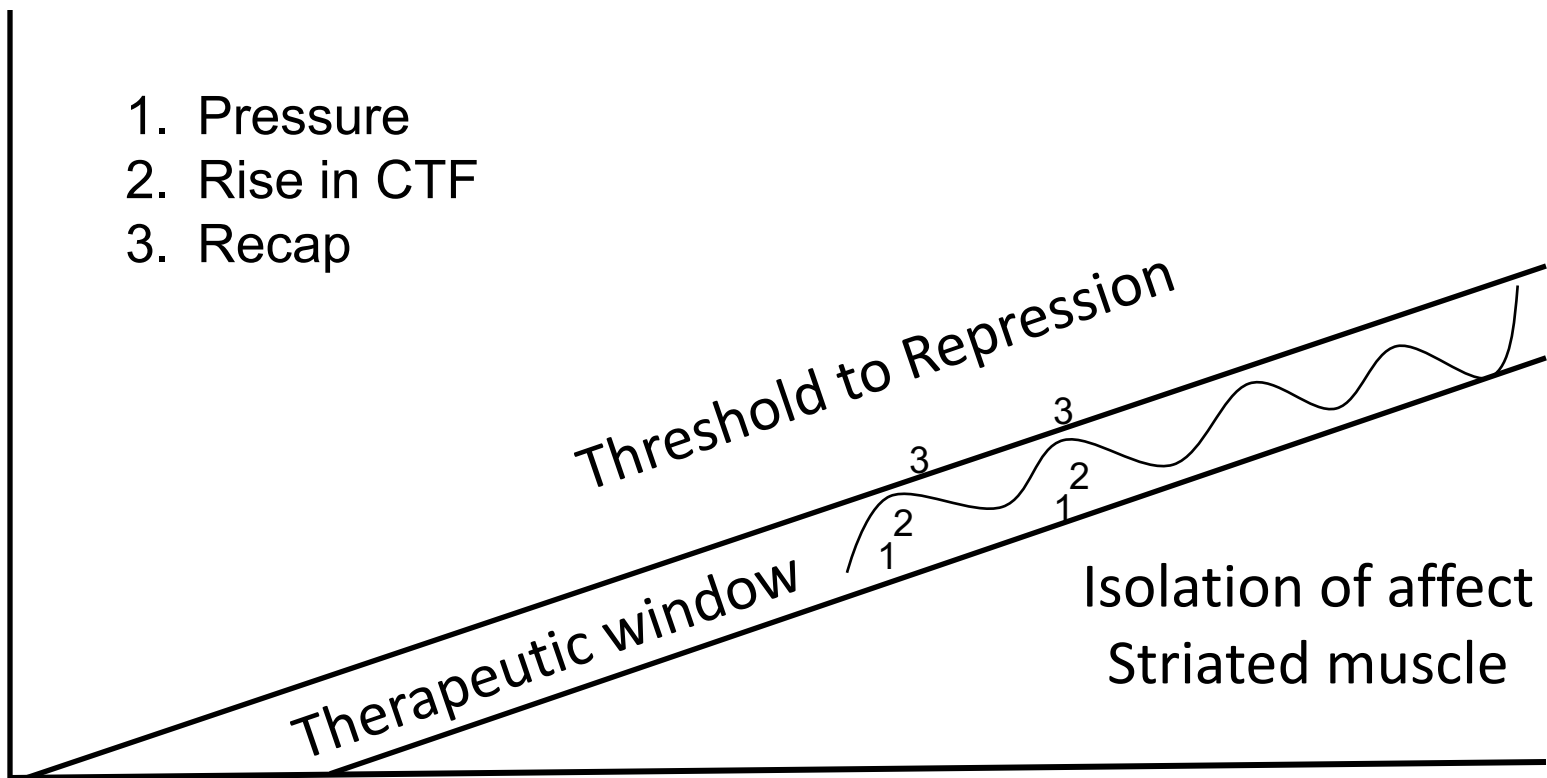
Isolation of affect
Striated muscle

Severe fragile,
borderline

Moderate
fragile

Mild
fragile

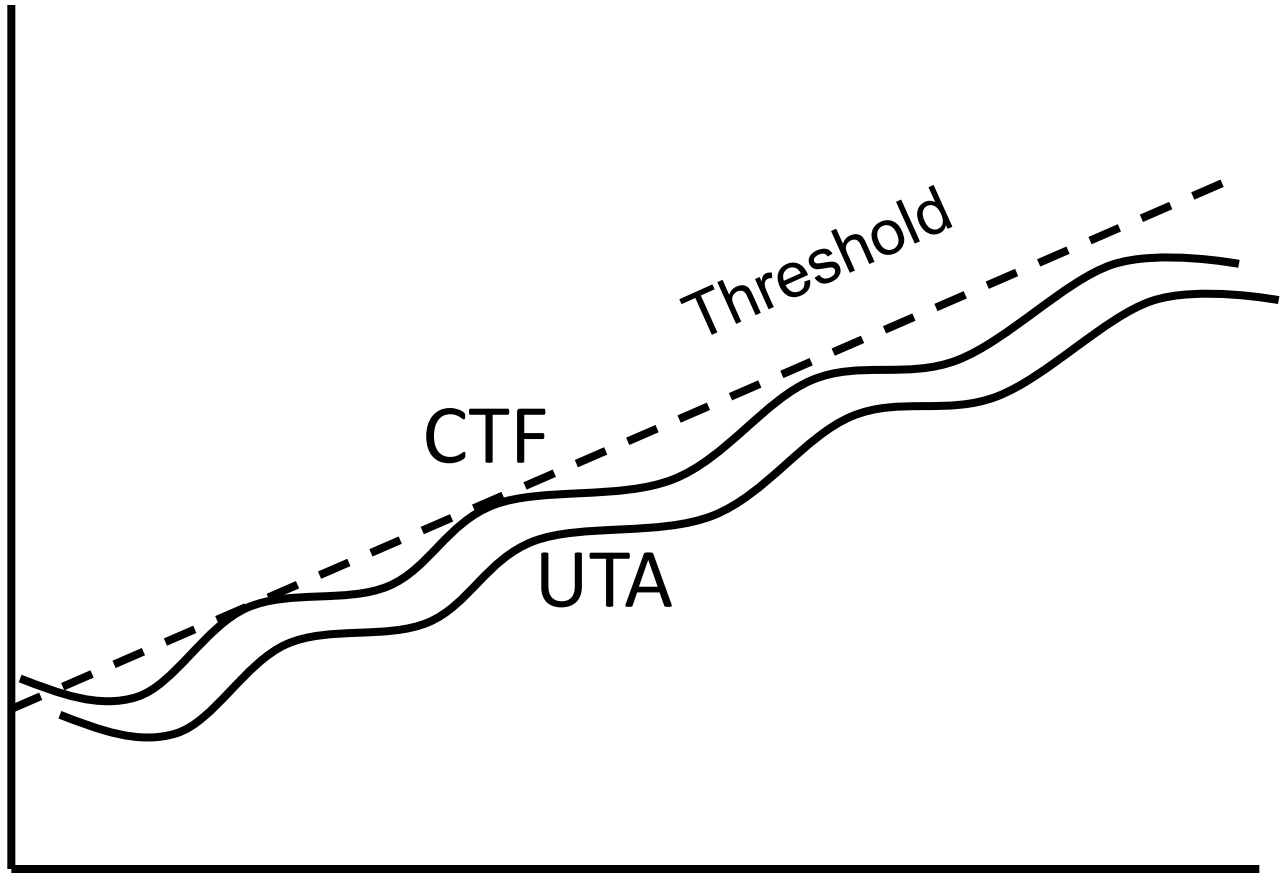
Unconscious anxiety and
defense



UTA RISES WITH CTF

Conscious
Feelings

Unconscious
Anxiety



Pressure

BRACING

Reflection:
Recap

Use when below
thresholds

Evoke feelings

Activate somatic
pathway of rage

Develop images

Fire limbic areas
including amygdala

Use to optimize
rise without being
over threshold

Combine both
self-reflection and
pressure

Train brain to fire
both functional
regions together

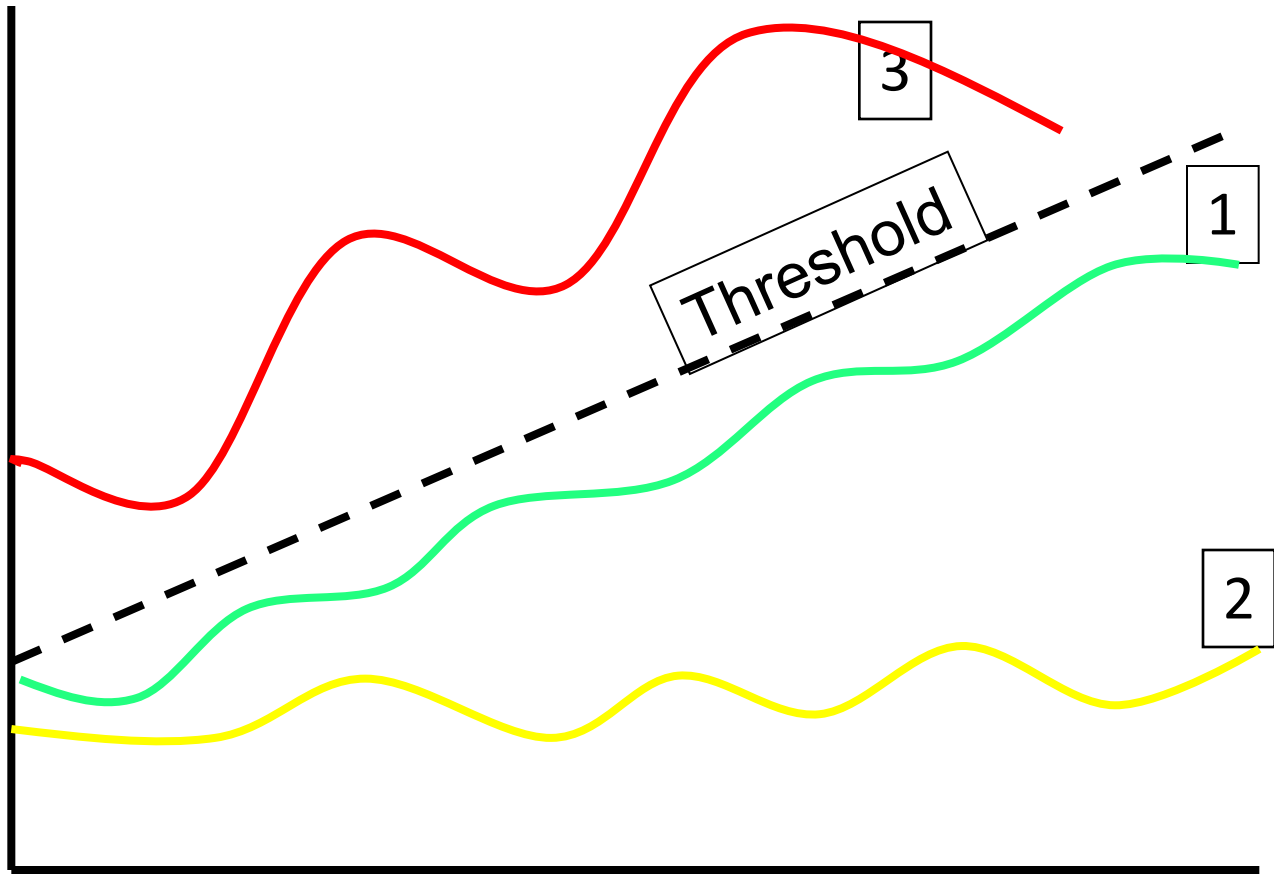
Use when above
thresholds

Self-reflect

Link phenomena
Observe the body
Observe thoughts

Fire brain self-
reflective centers

Conscious
Feelings



Unconscious
Anxiety

1

3

2

Threshold

Economy of Suffering: Repression Patients

Anxiety

Suicidal ideas or
self harm

Passivity, avoidance

Self neglect

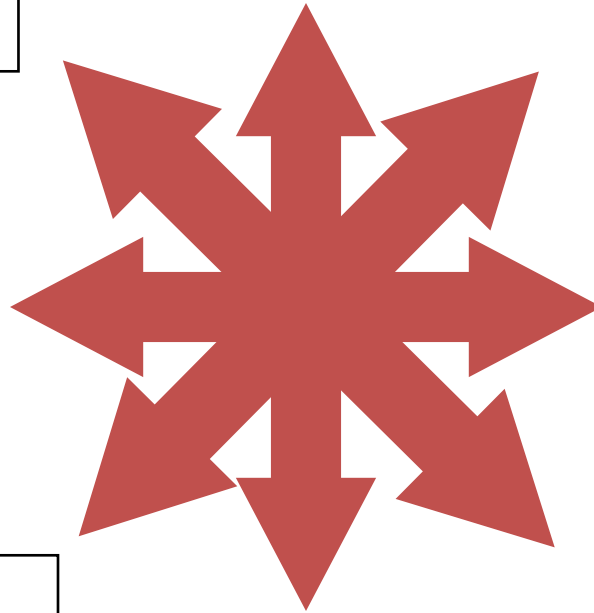
Dependence/
Addiction

Somatization:
weakness

No work or \$\$\$

Self hatred

Depression



When to press through Regressive defenses

- Pressure reduces the overall distress level and mobilizes hope and UTA
- The CTF displaces anxiety and focuses the patient into the here and now
- It can reduce the level of conscious anxiety
- You can press through:
 - When anxiety is mainly in voluntary muscle
 - When patient can isolate affect
 - When patient is not over threshold into confusion or primary smooth muscle pathway

Fragile Character Structure Patients

- Dissociate, lose vision, lose hearing, hallucinate
- Projection, splitting, projective identification
- Need capacity building then look neurotic
- Pre and post: structural changes → Striated muscle tension and isolation of affect
- Then regular breakthrough of underlying feelings, working through and termination

Table 16.1 Treatment phases with mild to moderate fragile character structure

Phase	Task
Initial evaluation and trial therapy	Management of barriers to engagement, detection of the rotating fronts, psycho-diagnosis, evaluation of thresholds and determination of pace of treatment
Graded format	Build capacity to tolerate anxiety and to overcome projection, cognitive-perceptual disruption, self-attack, and repression; building of capacity to bear complex feelings
Repeated unlocking	Experience of repressed pain, rage, guilt, and craving of attachment
Working through	Mobilization and experience of residual grief, rage, and guilt. Consolidation of gains.
Termination	Closure of the therapy relationship over ten to twenty sessions



WEAK
BOND

Trauma



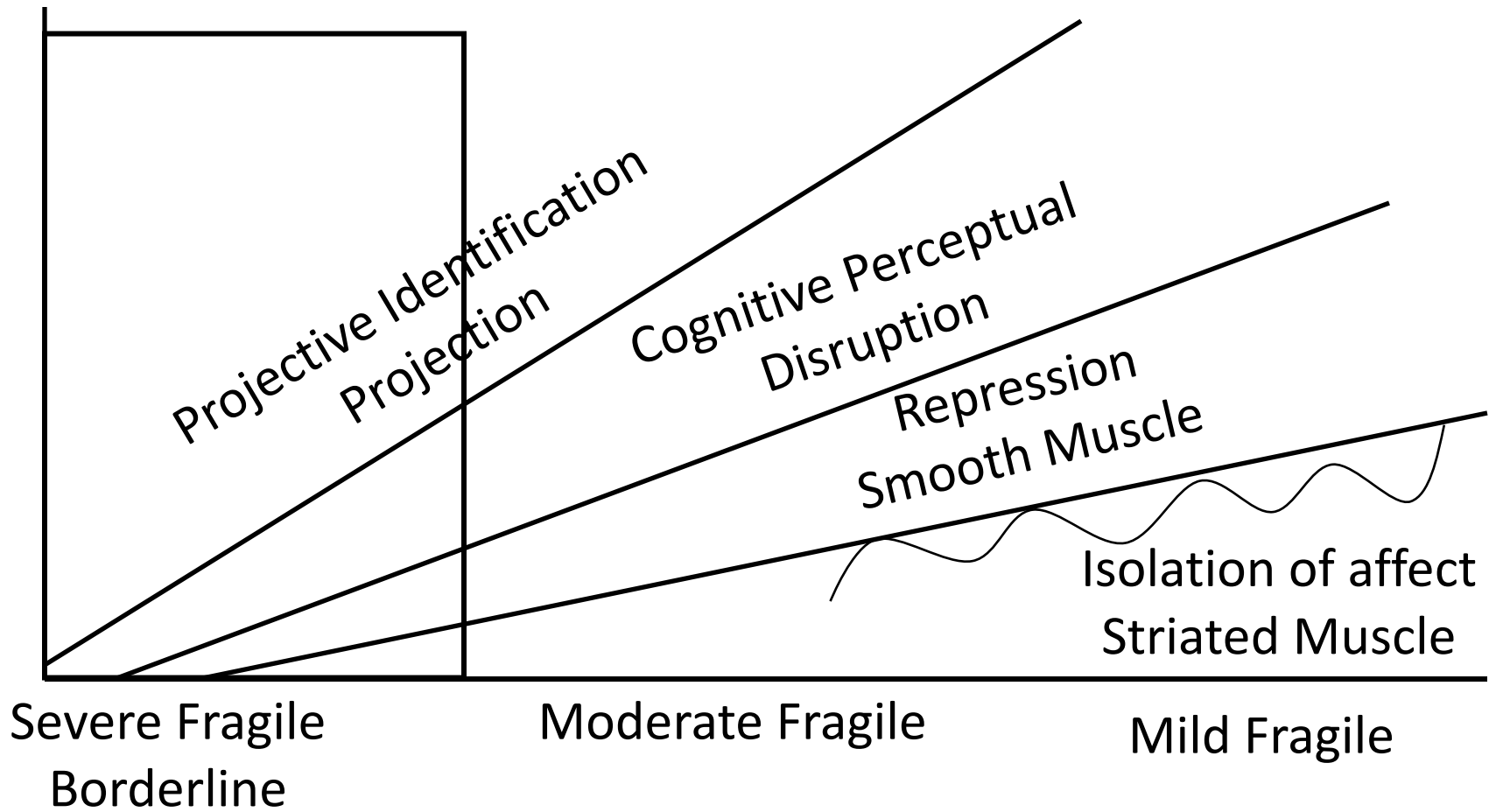
PAIN

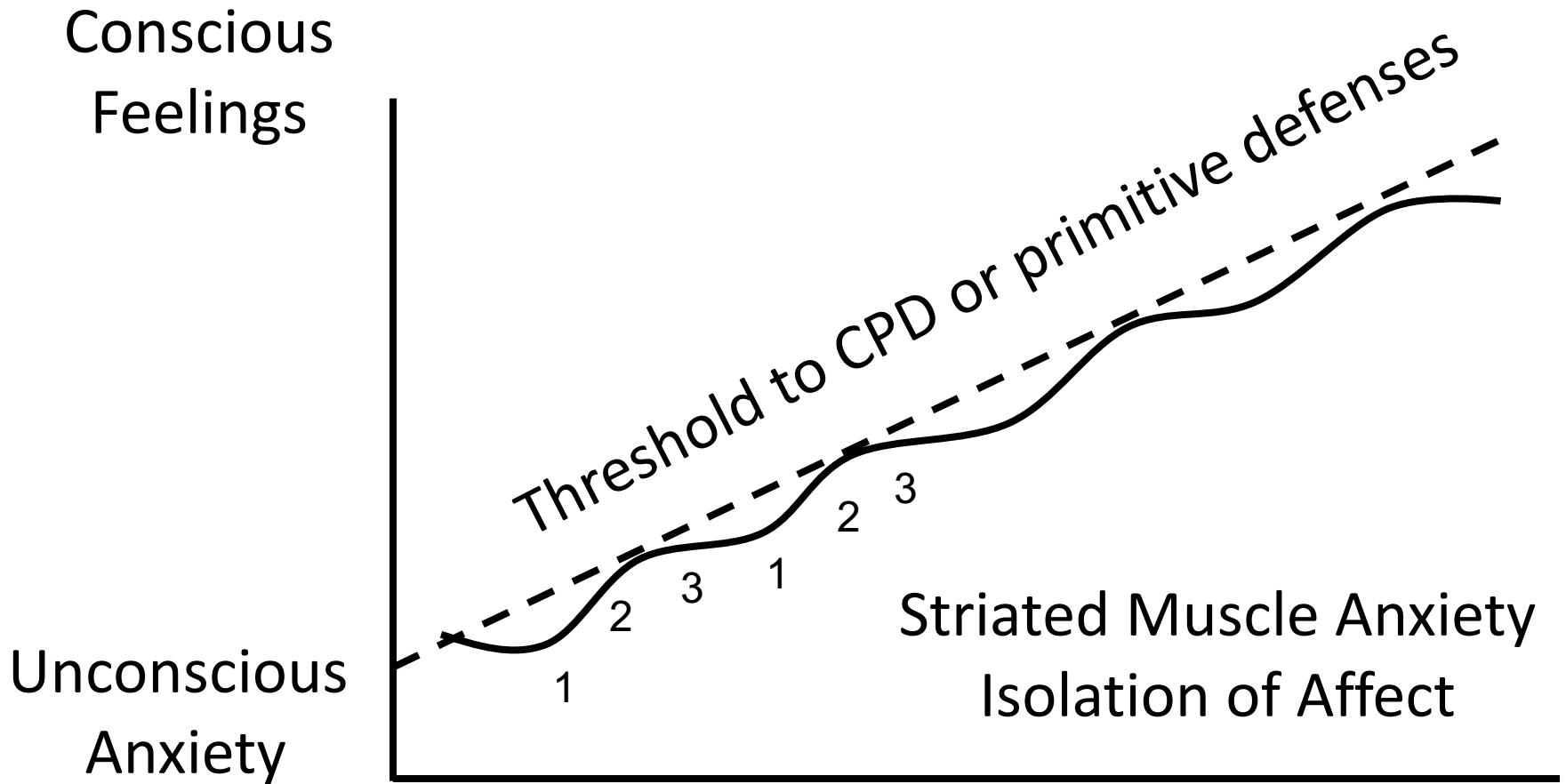


Rage, Guilt
about the Rage



Self-destruct
Symptoms





1. Pressure to feelings or to defenses
2. Rise in complex transference feelings and anxiety
3. Intellectual recap to bring isolation of affect

Conscious feelings

1. Pressure
2. Rise in CTF
3. Recap

Threshold to CPD or primitive defenses

Therapeutic window

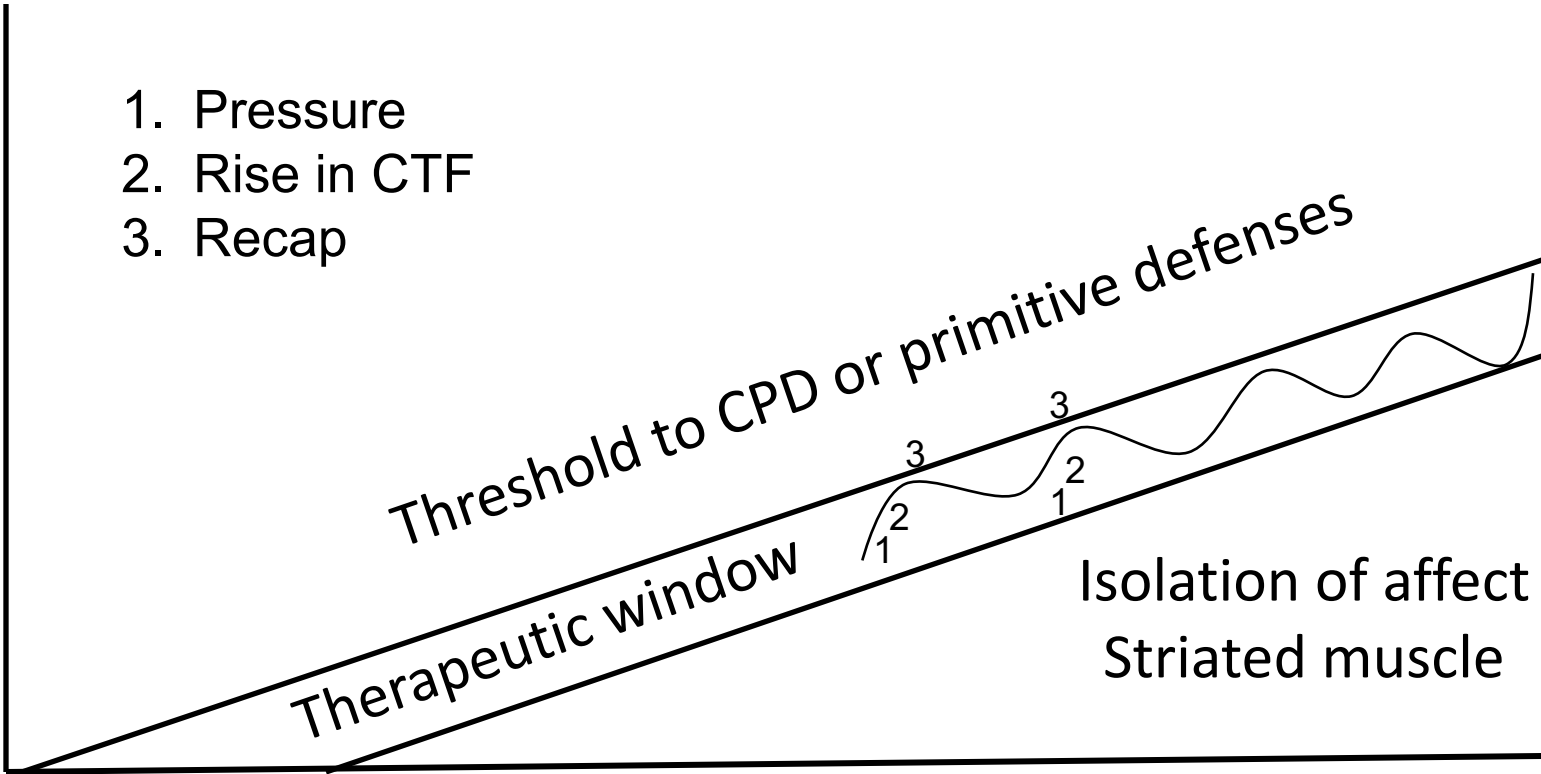
Isolation of affect
Striated muscle

Unconscious anxiety and defense

Severe fragile,
borderline

Moderate
fragile

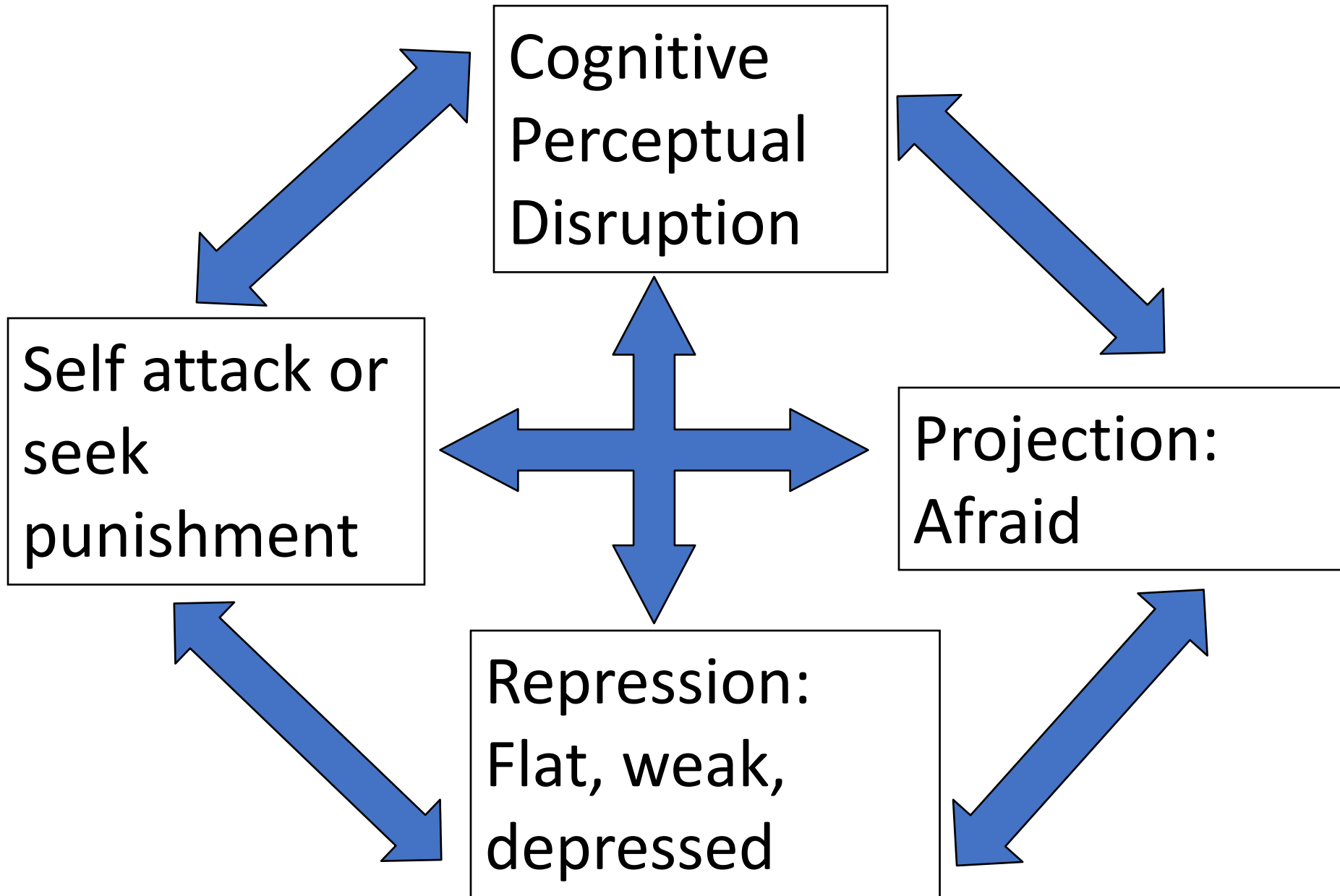
Mild
fragile



Severe Fragility

- Prominent projection, splitting, projective identification
- Split parts or Modes
- Can have full dissociation episodes
- Impulsivity and behavior problems
- Little unconscious anxiety other than drifting
- Severe early trauma

Rapidly Rotating Fronts



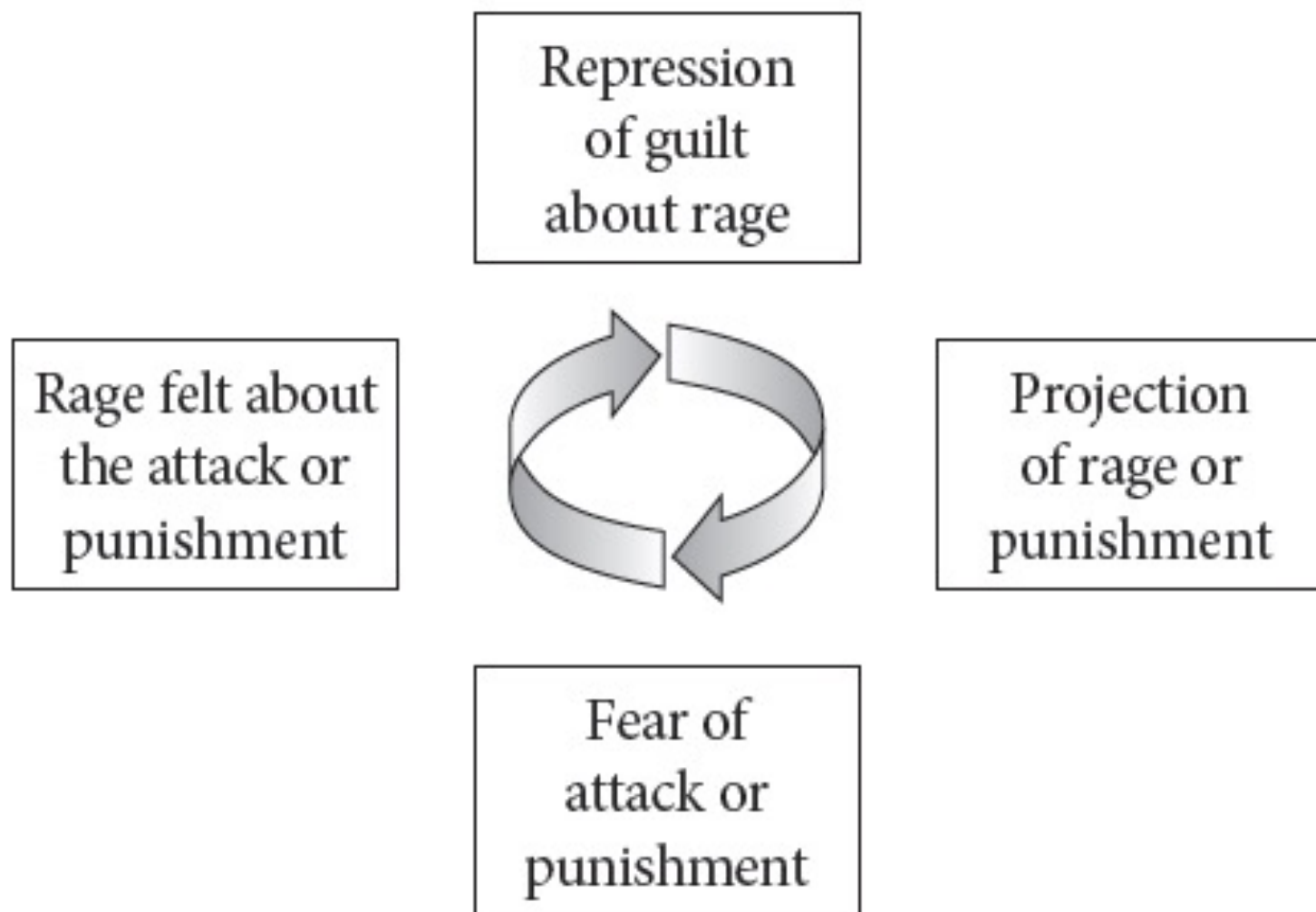


Figure 17.2 Cycles of guilt and projection

Conscious feelings

CPD primitive defenses or repression

RECAP and ANXIETY REDUCING TECHNIQUES
MANAGE PROJECTIVE PROCESSES

BRACING
PRESSURE

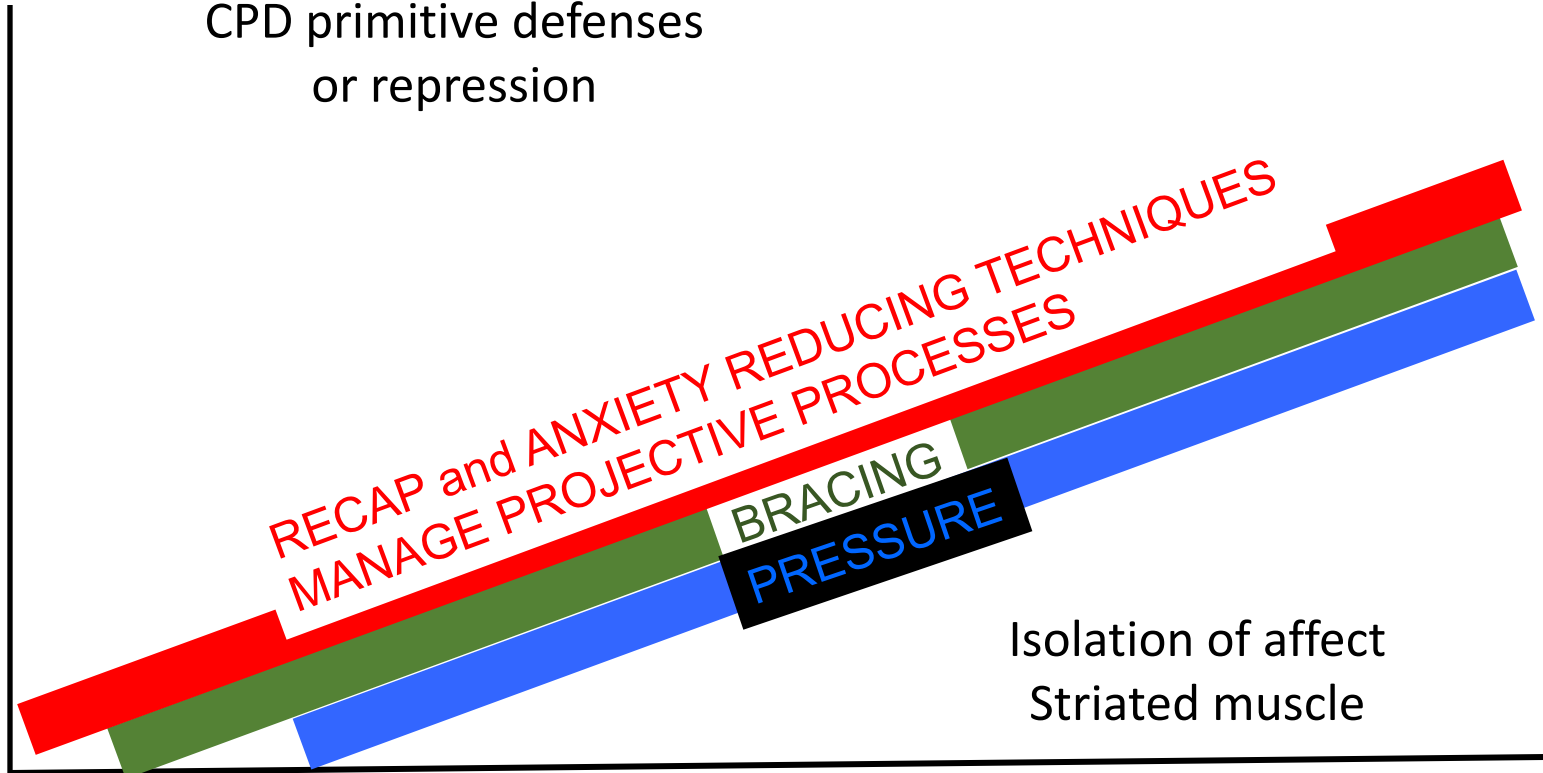
Isolation of affect
Striated muscle

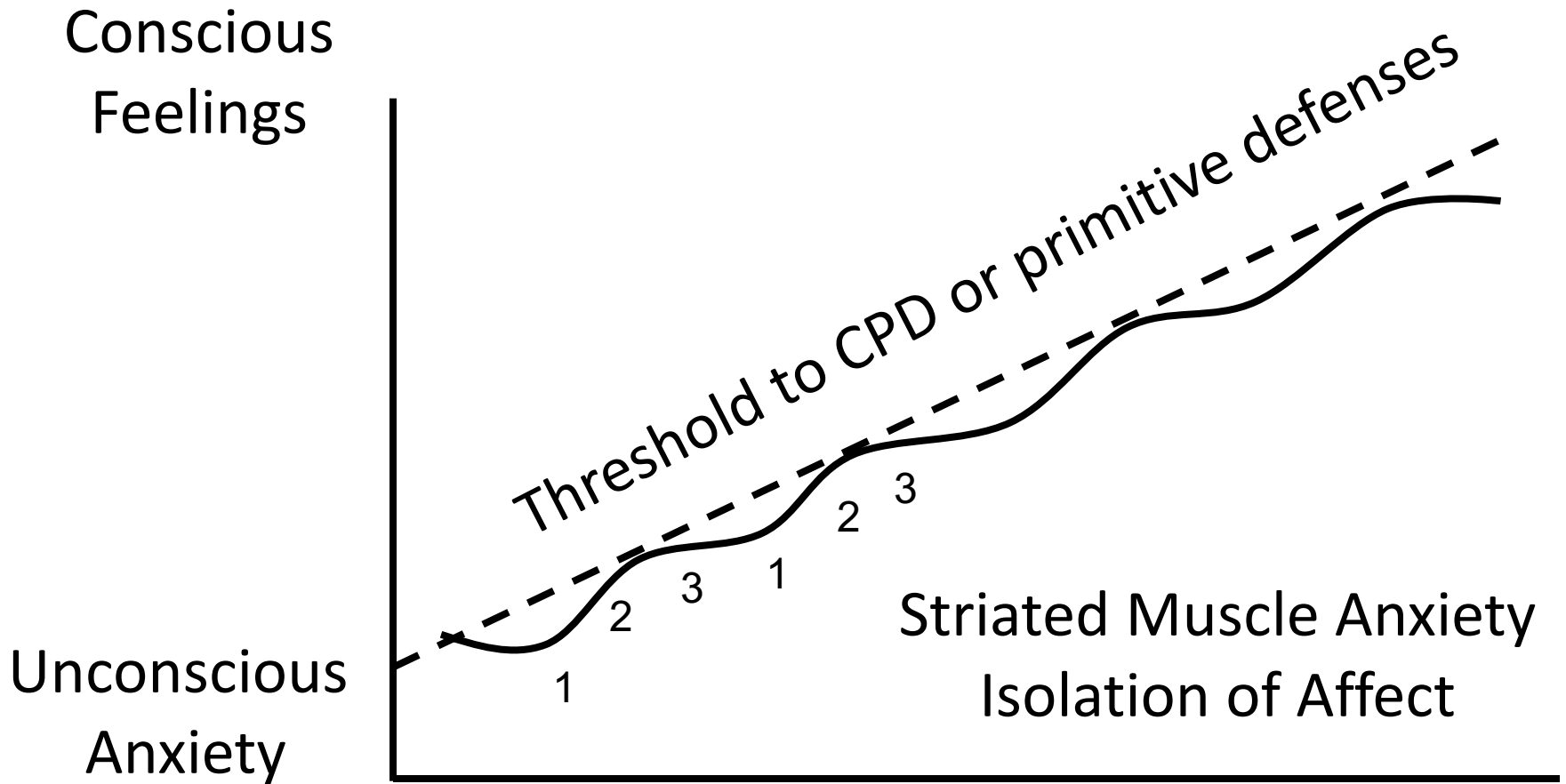
Severe fragile,
borderline

Moderate
fragile

Mild
fragile

Unconscious anxiety and defense





1. Pressure or Brace
2. Rise in complex transference feelings and anxiety
3. Intellectual recap to bring isolation of affect

Pressure

BRACING

Reflection:
Recap

Use when below
thresholds

Evoke feelings

Activate somatic
pathway of rage

Develop images

Fire limbic areas
including amygdala

Use to optimize
rise without being
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Combine both
self-reflection and
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Train brain to fire
both functional
regions together

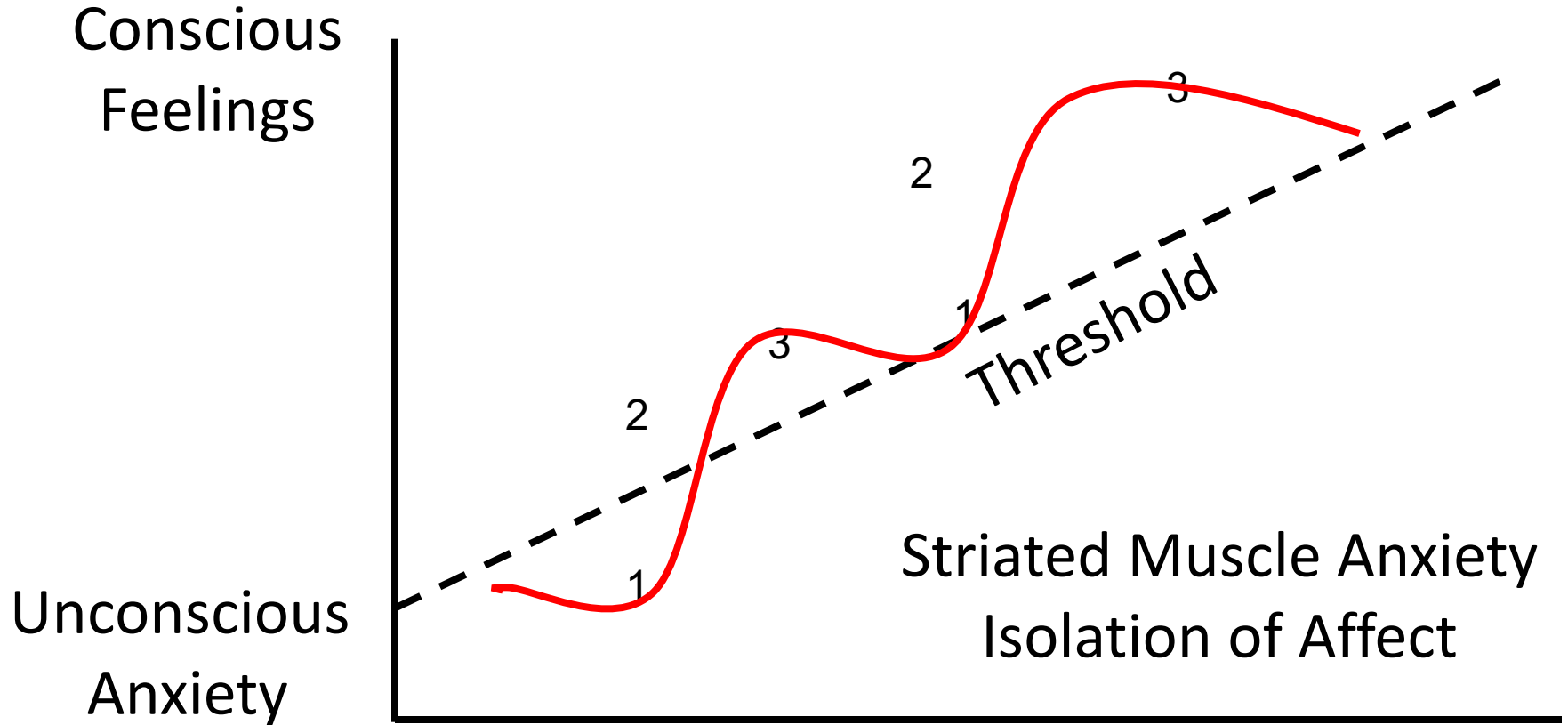
Use when above
thresholds

Self-reflect

Link phenomena
Observe the body
Observe thoughts

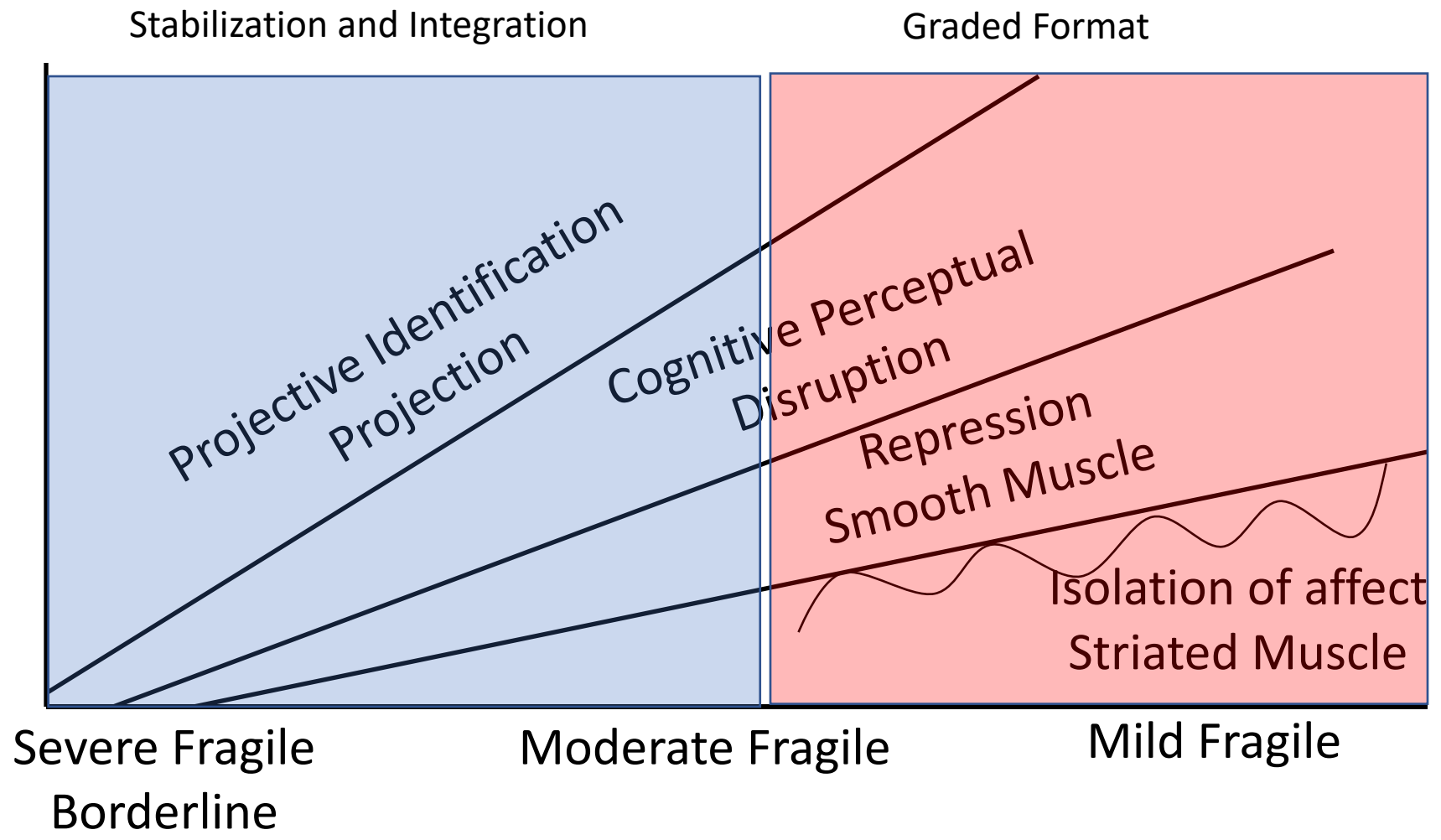
Fire brain self-
reflective centers

Focus on Guilt: Immersive Approach to Building Capacity



1. Pressure to rage
2. Rise to above threshold
3. Press to Guilt and regulate down anxiety as needed
4. Extensive Recapping

Fragile Spectrum



Economy of Suffering: Fragile Patients

Anxiety

Masochism

Deception

Paranoia

Sadism:
abuse power

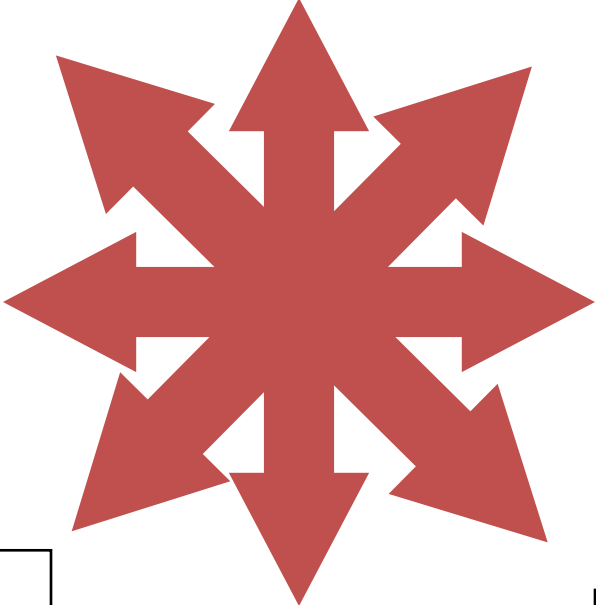
Somatization/
Paralysis

Dependence/
Addiction

Social Isolation

No work or \$\$\$

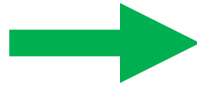
Dissociation



Depression

Cycles of gains and emotion mobilization/ crisis

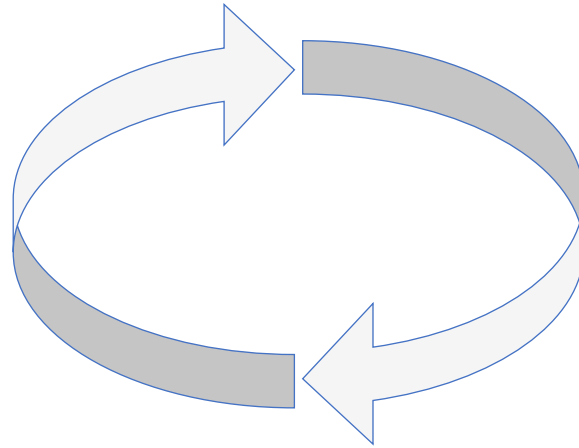
CRISIS



Experience Rage and guilt



Deeper Rage and Guilt are mobilized



More freedom to make behavior gains

Make behavior gains --> Positive feelings for self/others

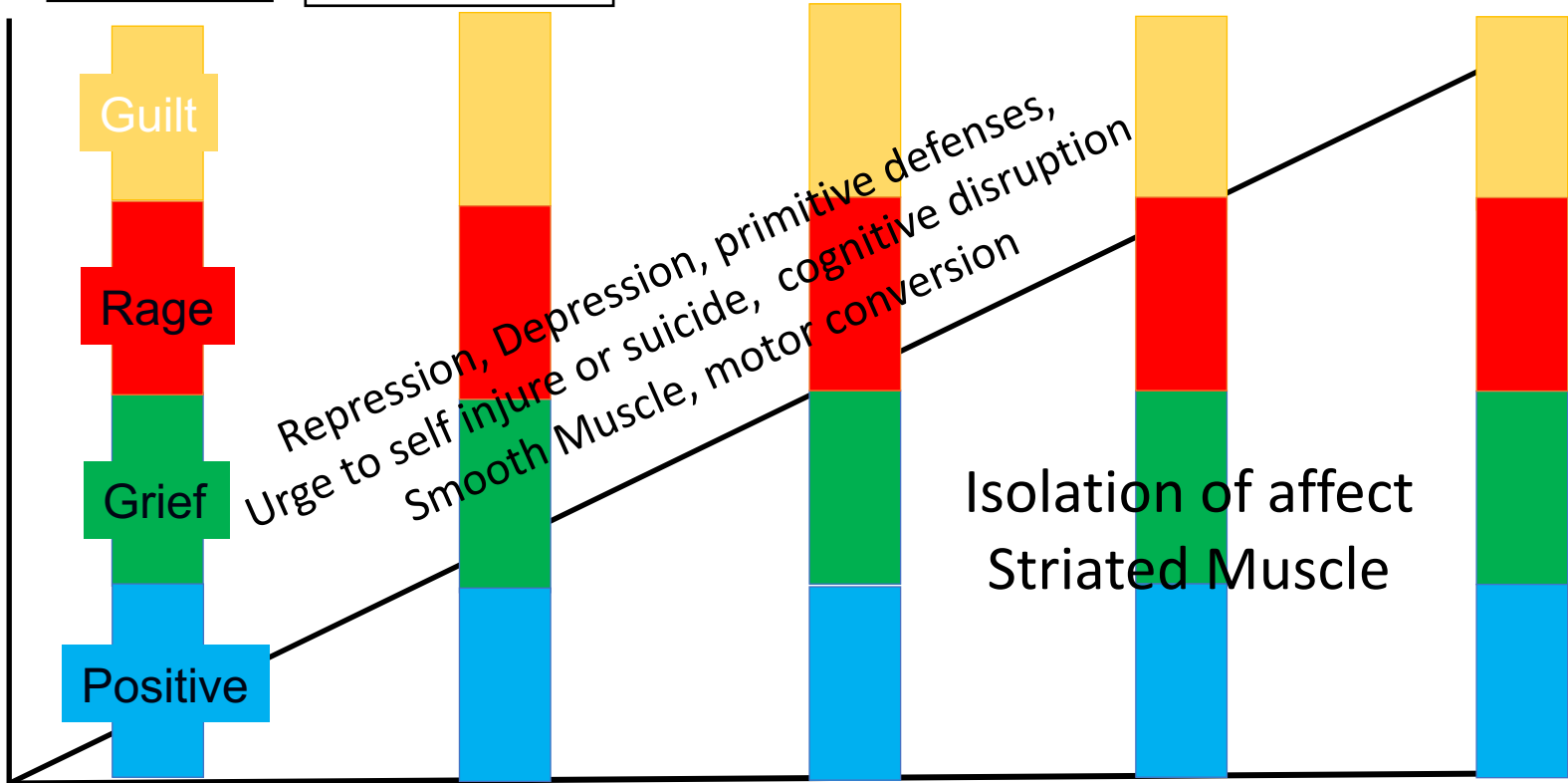
No UTA:
No rise.
Rotating
resistance
dominates

$R \gg UTA$
Mid Rise.
Whispers from
the alliance:
concise
understanding
of dynamics

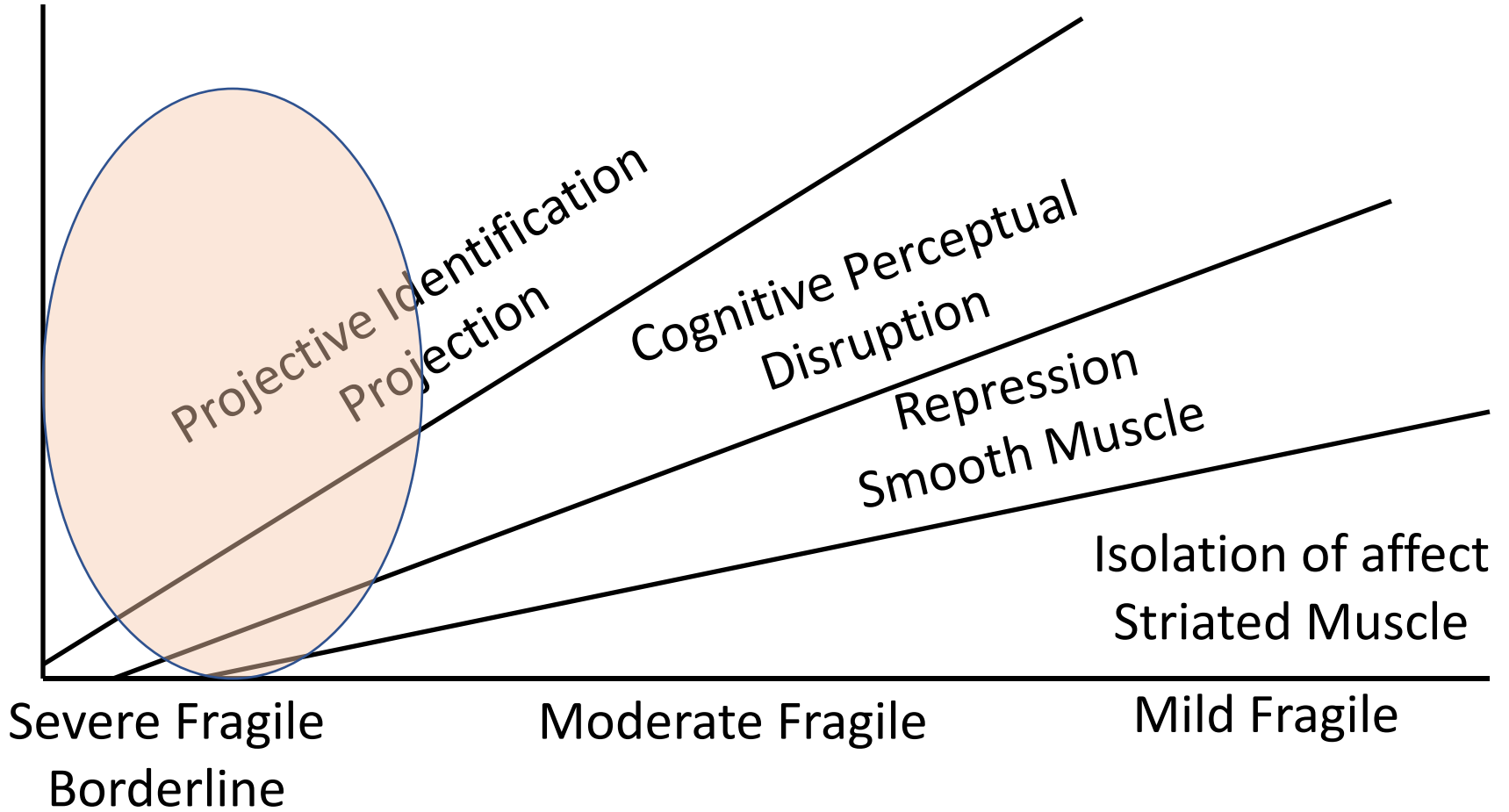
$R > UTA$
High rise.
Negation,
slips of the
tongue

$R < UTA$
Partial
Unlocking.
Rage, grief:
clear linkages

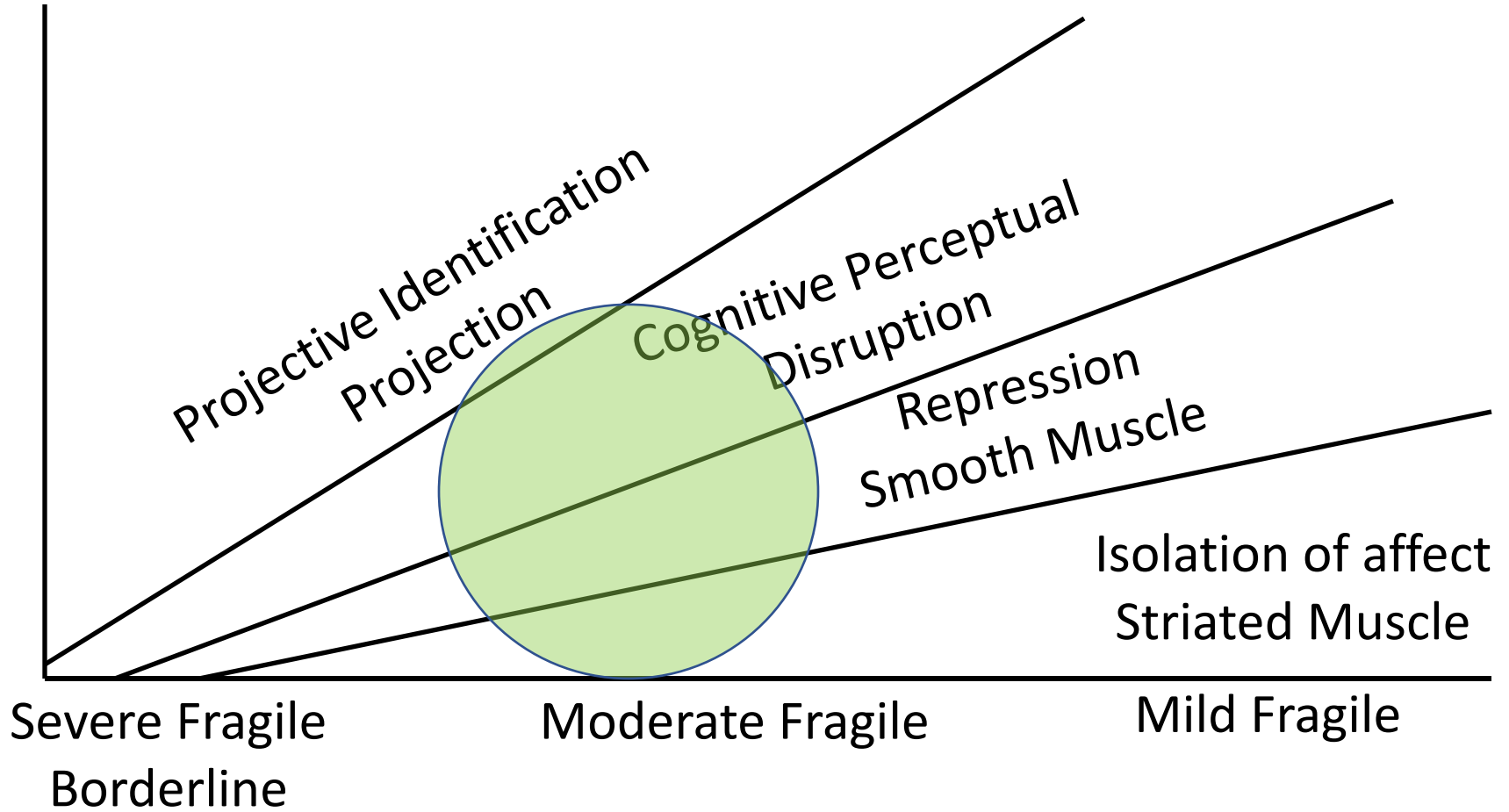
$R \ll UTA$
Major
Unlocking Rage
and Guilt:
image transfer



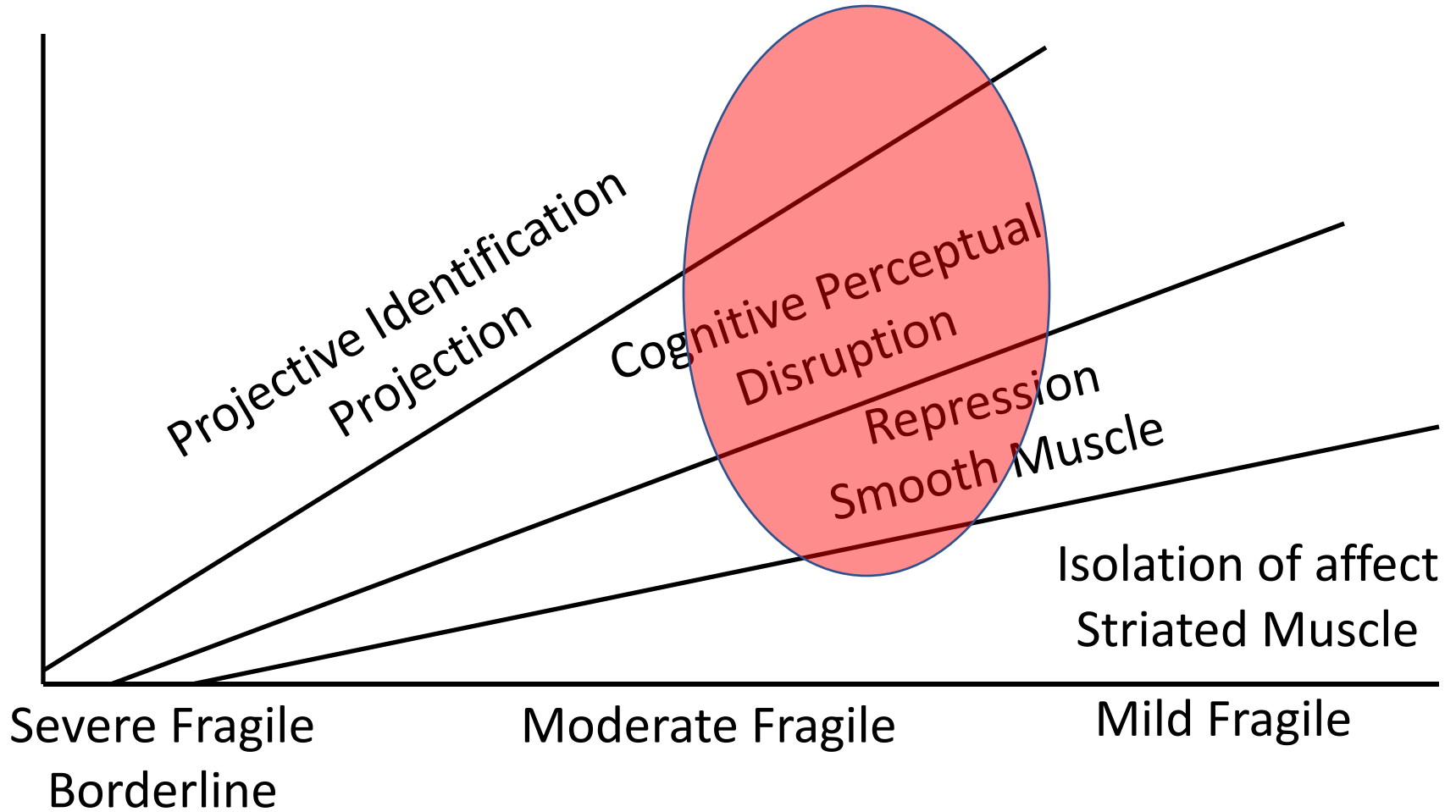
Fragile Spectrum: Initial status



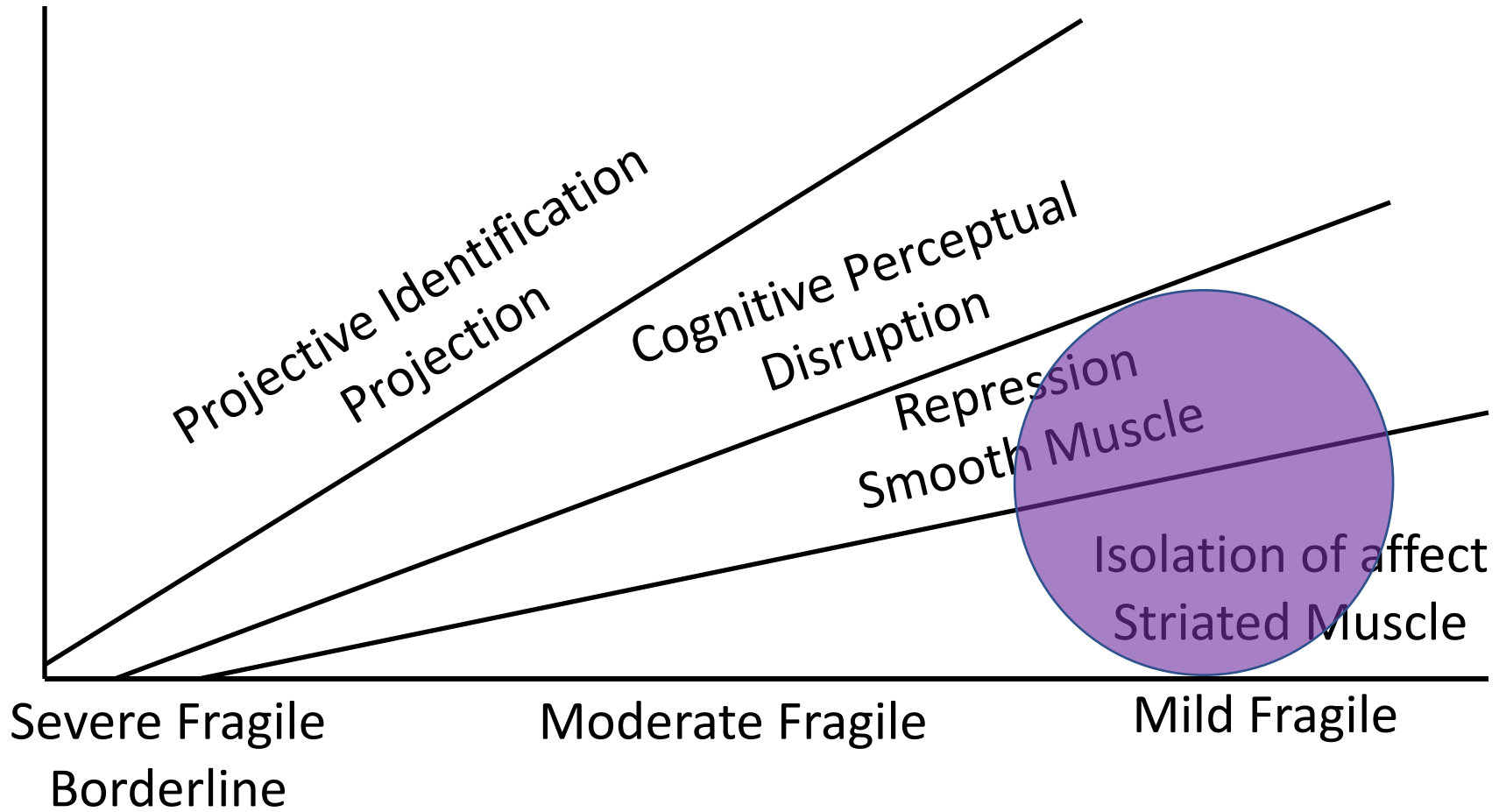
Fragile Spectrum: making gains: pride



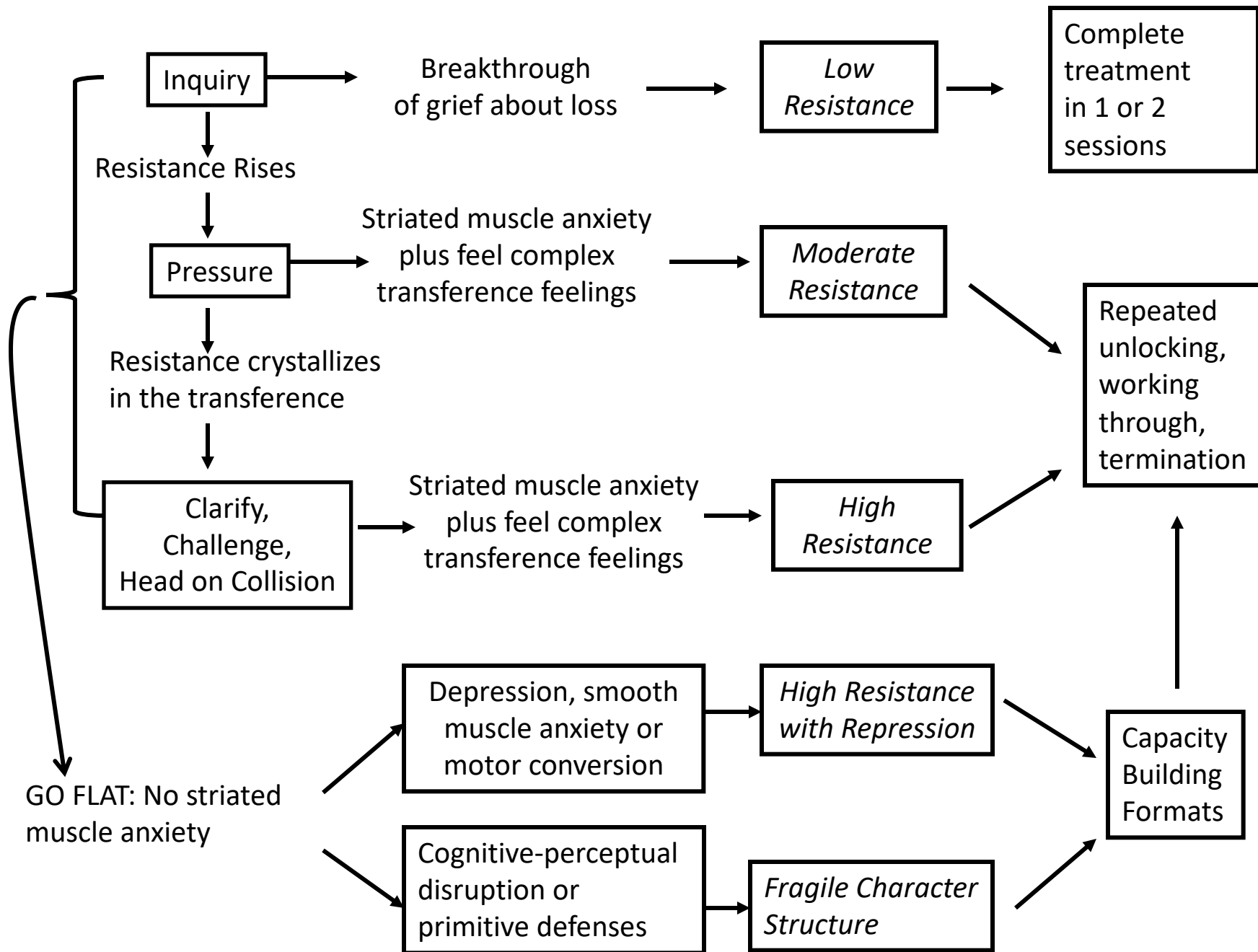
Fragile Spectrum: Crisis: revert to more primitive defenses but UTA maybe accessible



Fragile Spectrum: Crisis Resolution

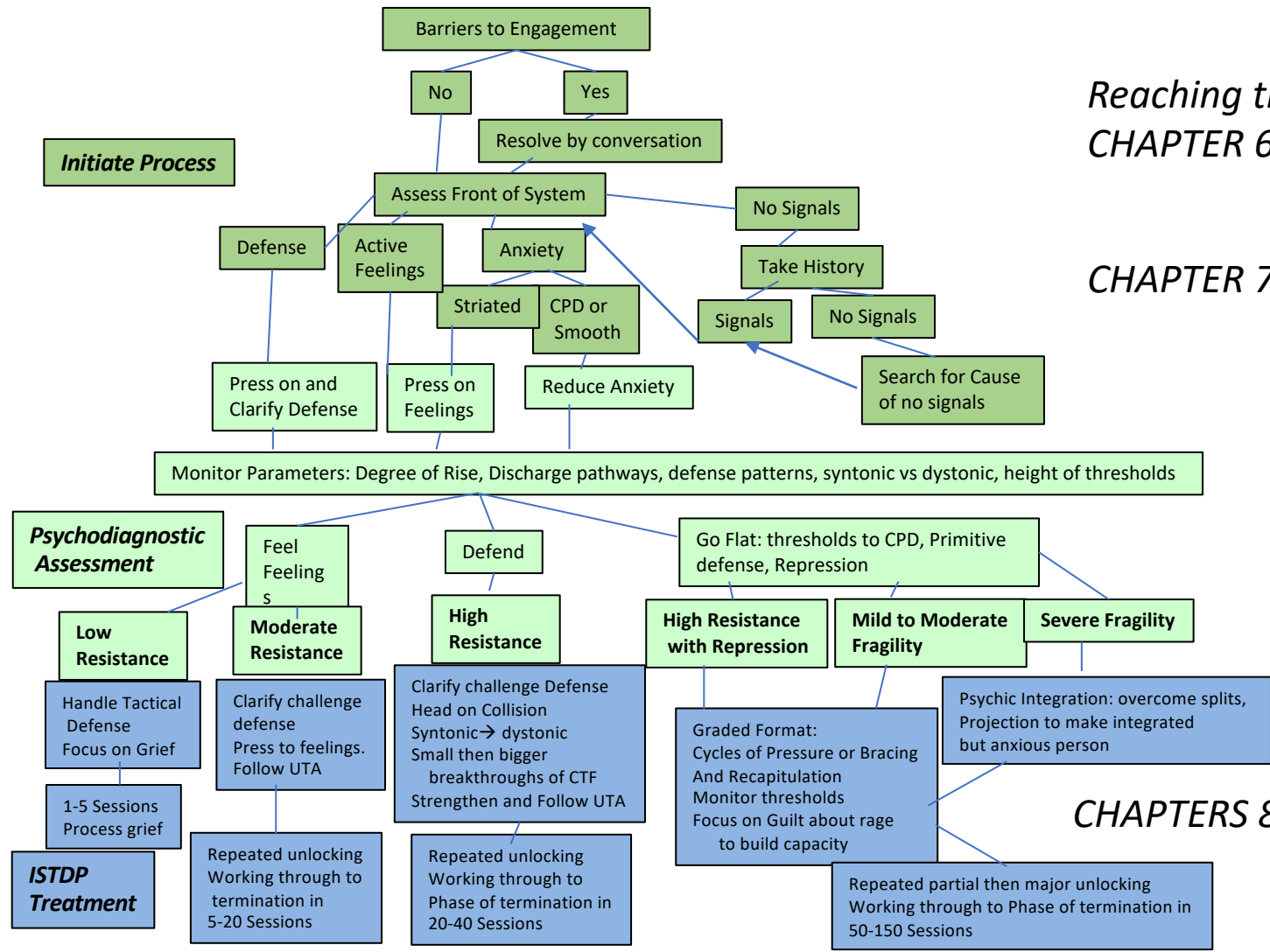


	Resistant	Repression or Fragile
Low Rise	Little anxiety or defense: some tension and isolation of affect	Tension and isolation of affect
Mid Rise	Defenses going into the T, Tense, UTA Whisper	Start to oppose repression or fragility, anxiety varies, UTA: Whisper
High rise	Defenses in the T, Tense, UTA: negation	Dislike the repression or fragility, anxiety varies, one part of mind fighting the other: UTA Negation
Partial Unlocking	Feel grief rage and some guilt. Link or image of past	Feel grief rage and some guilt. Link or image of past
Major Unlocking	Feel rage, guilt and grief. Image transfers with passage of guilt	Feel rage, guilt and grief. Image transfers with passage of guilt

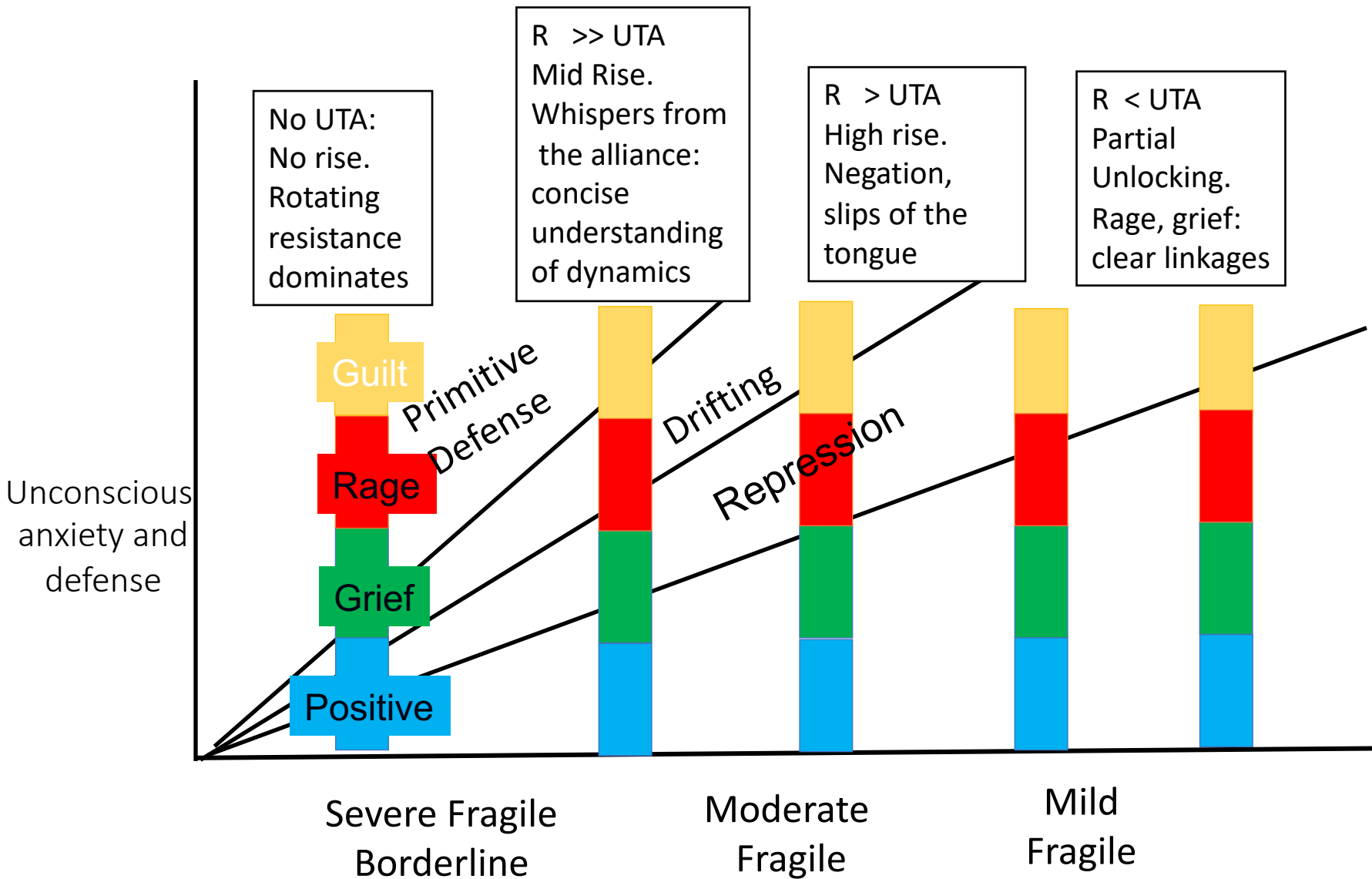


Reaching through Resis
CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 7



CHAPTERS 8-16



Feelings and UTA in severe fragility

- Small spike of grief or positive feelings → fires up massive guilt → fires the rotations: Projection, Repression, projective identification, cognitive disruption and self attack
- In later sessions with more capacity, this small spike may be seen with UTA whispers or negation which are swamped out by guilt → anxiety and rotating fronts
- *Be prepared for this when have a positive feeling for self or you*

Stabilization

- Building a raft on the ocean
- Linking everything
- Concentrate, observe and see connections
- Link and move
- Don't stagnate
- No long recaps: don't try to "hold" the patient
- Press - brace - recap on the rapidly rotating fronts



Feelings	Anxiety
Feelings	Defences
Anxiety	Defences
Transference	Current
Transference	Past
Past	Current
Bond	Separation
Separation	Fear and Grief
Fear and Grief	Rage
Rage	Guilt
Feelings inside	Feelings outside
Split parts inside	Split parts outside
Split parts Current	Split parts Past
Split parts Current	Split parts Transference
Split parts Past	Split parts Transference



Psychic Integration and Stabilization

- Linking everything together
- A link is a structure you create between different brain regions and functions
- Feeling- Anxiety, Feeling-Defense, Anxiety -Defense
- Past-T, T- Current, Past to Current
- Pain makes rage makes guilt makes self punishment
- Work with projection
- Work with split parts/ Modes
- Observing body responses
- Labeling phenomena
- *Build a self reflective more integrated structure*

Projection on front

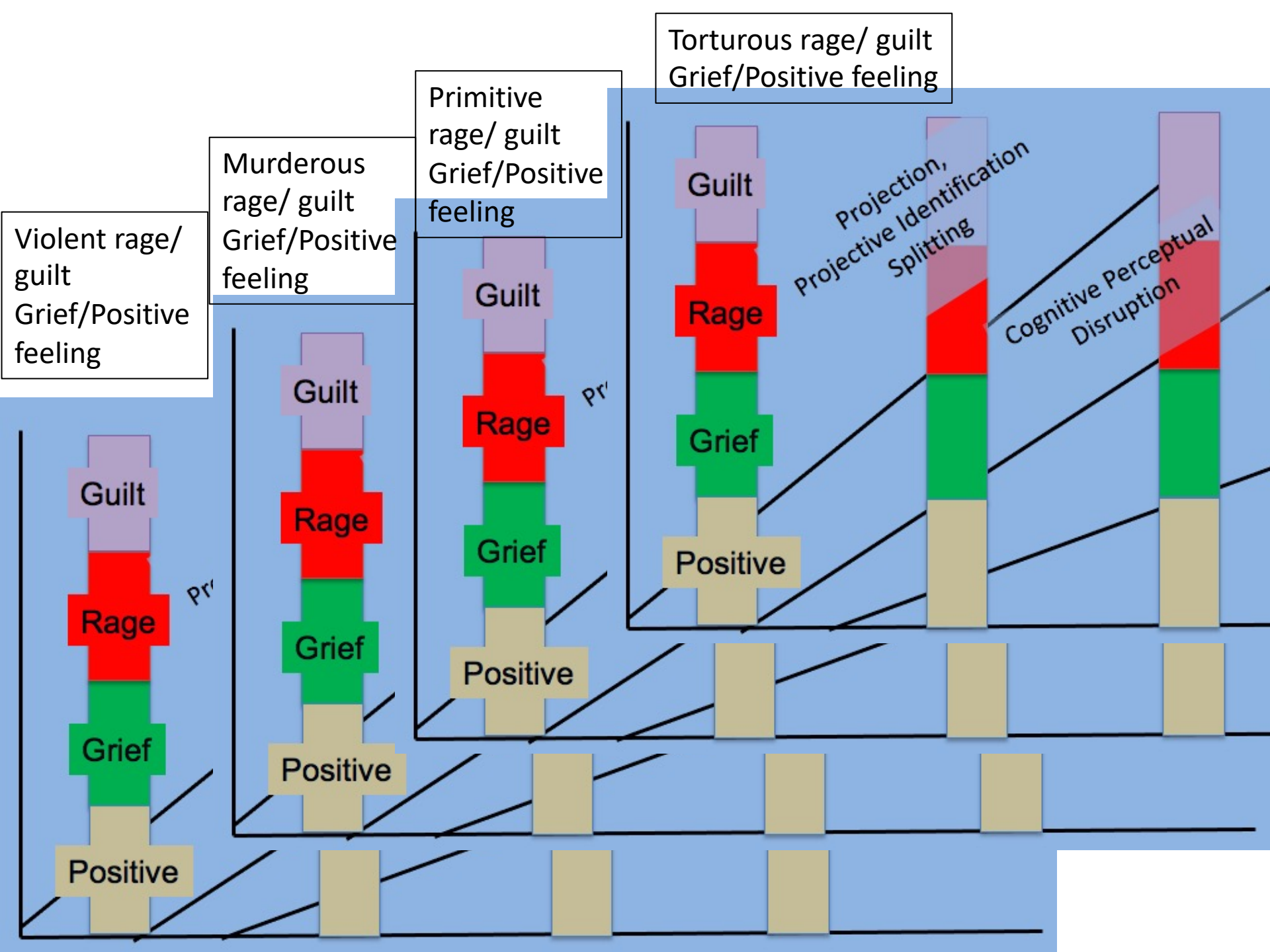
- How to detect
 - Words
 - Active fear: backing away, shaking
 - Counter-reacting with anger

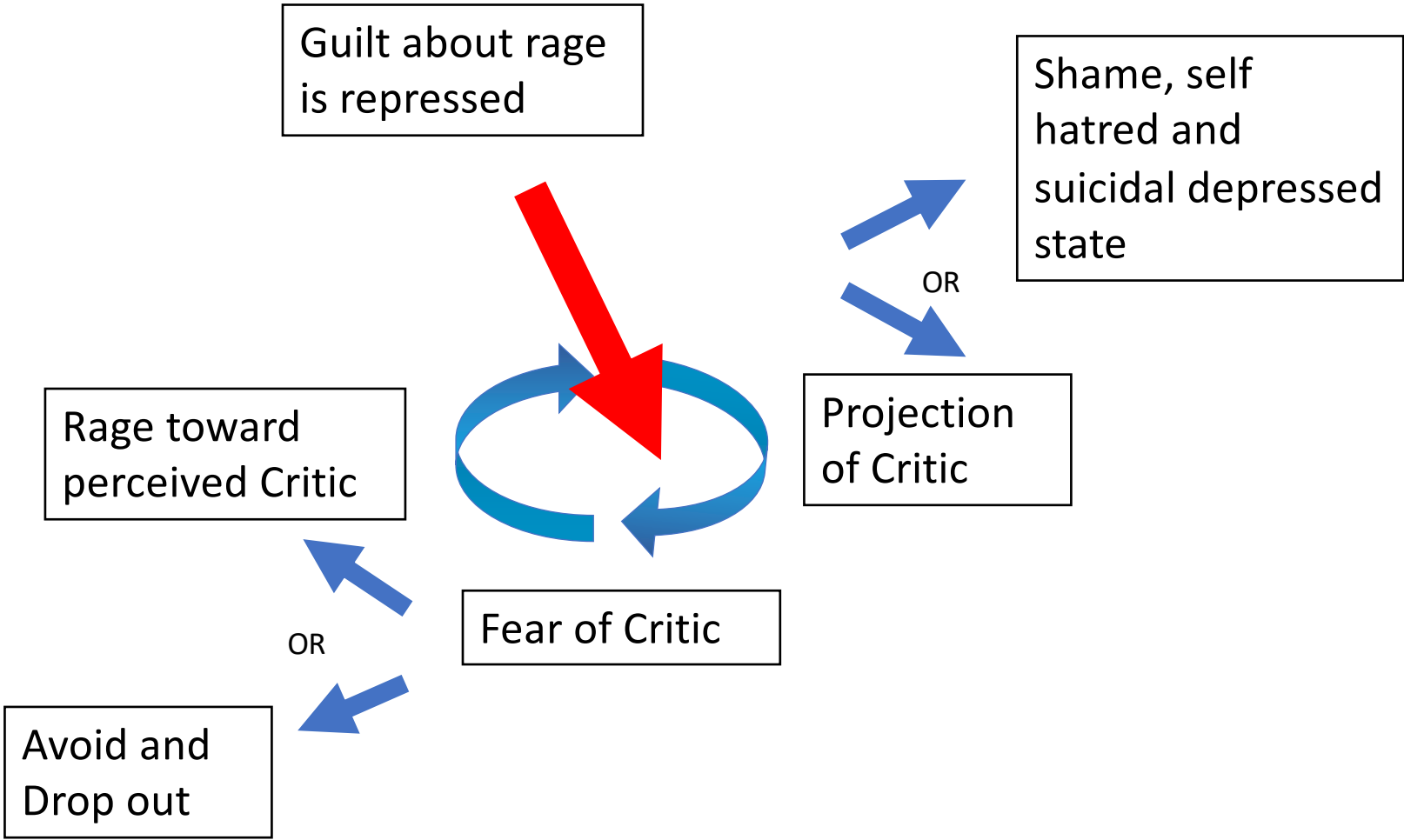
Handling projection

- Ask how they think you think or think you feel
- Reflect on thought content
- Ask where from
- Regulate down the anxiety: at least label the anxiety component
- Counter the projection: behave differently
- Speak and be present as a distinction from projection
- Watch for anxiety to go to cognitive disruption
- Recap after settling

Psychic Integration and Modes

- Help patient see the modes inside and outside
- Help understand past origins of modes
- Help see how the modes interact
- Help see the split second when one mode shifts to another
- Help hold awareness of different modes
- This tends to cause some drifting and rotation





Head on Collision

- The most powerful intervention
- Global clarification, challenge and pressure
- Statement of reality
- Different types:
 - *Short-range* at mid rise in the transference to mobilize CTF, UTA and R
 - *HOC to make defenses dystonic*: leads to first breakthrough
 - *Interlocking Chain* to systematically undermine the Resistance while mobilizing UTA and CTF: in syntonic cases
 - *Comprehensive* at high rise in the transference: to unlocking the unconscious

Head on Collision: Typical Components

- Outline the resistance
- Outline the destructive effects of resistance
- Outline the potential of alliance
- Deactivate defiance
- Deactivate the transference
- Undo Omnipotence
- High pressure to battle resistance
- Challenge to the crippling effects and masochism in the transference
- Pressure and challenge to resistances against emotional closeness