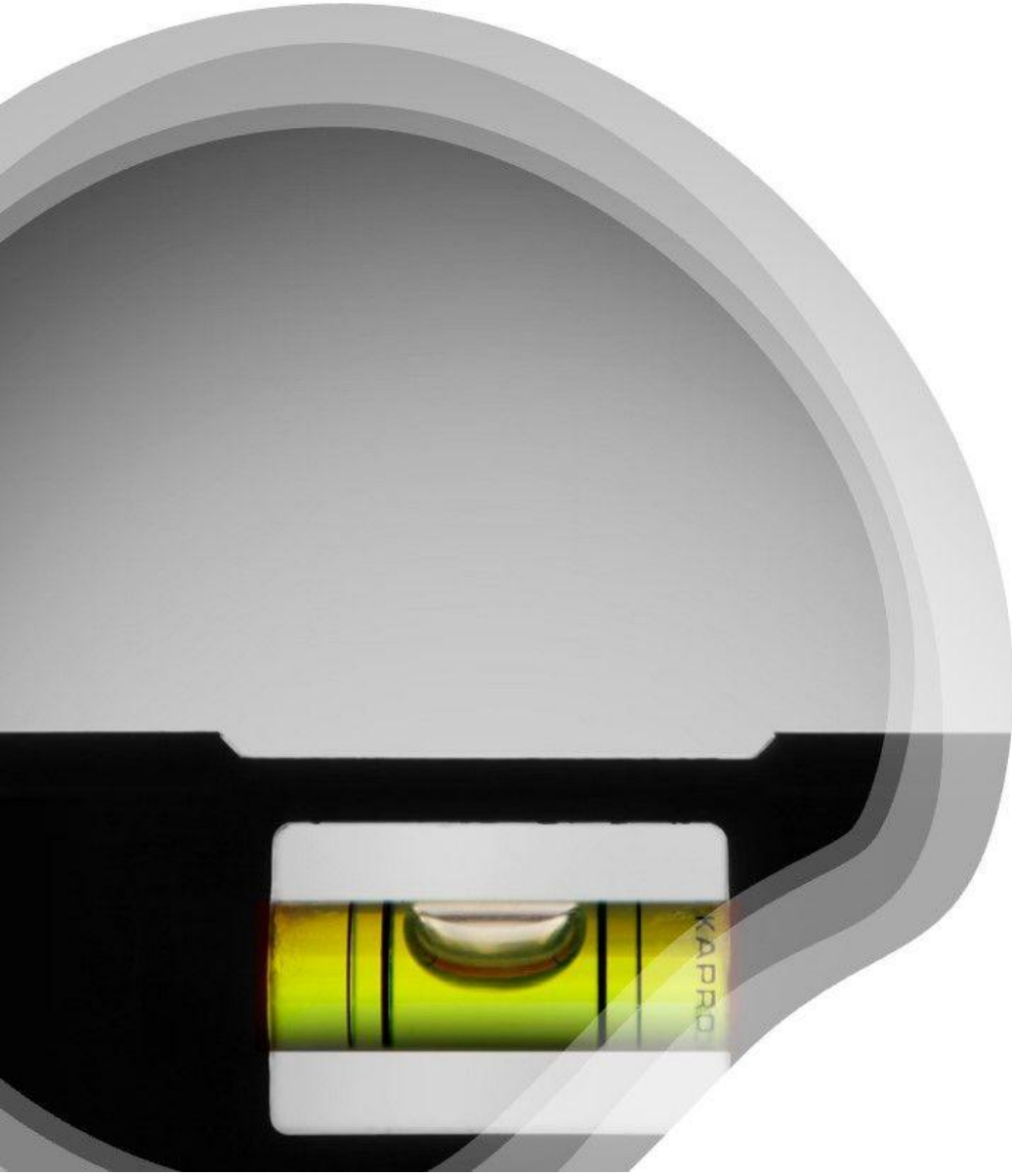




# **Finding Balance:** **Mental Health Tools for** **Displaced Researchers**

**24 APRIL 2025, 4PM-5PM (CEST)**



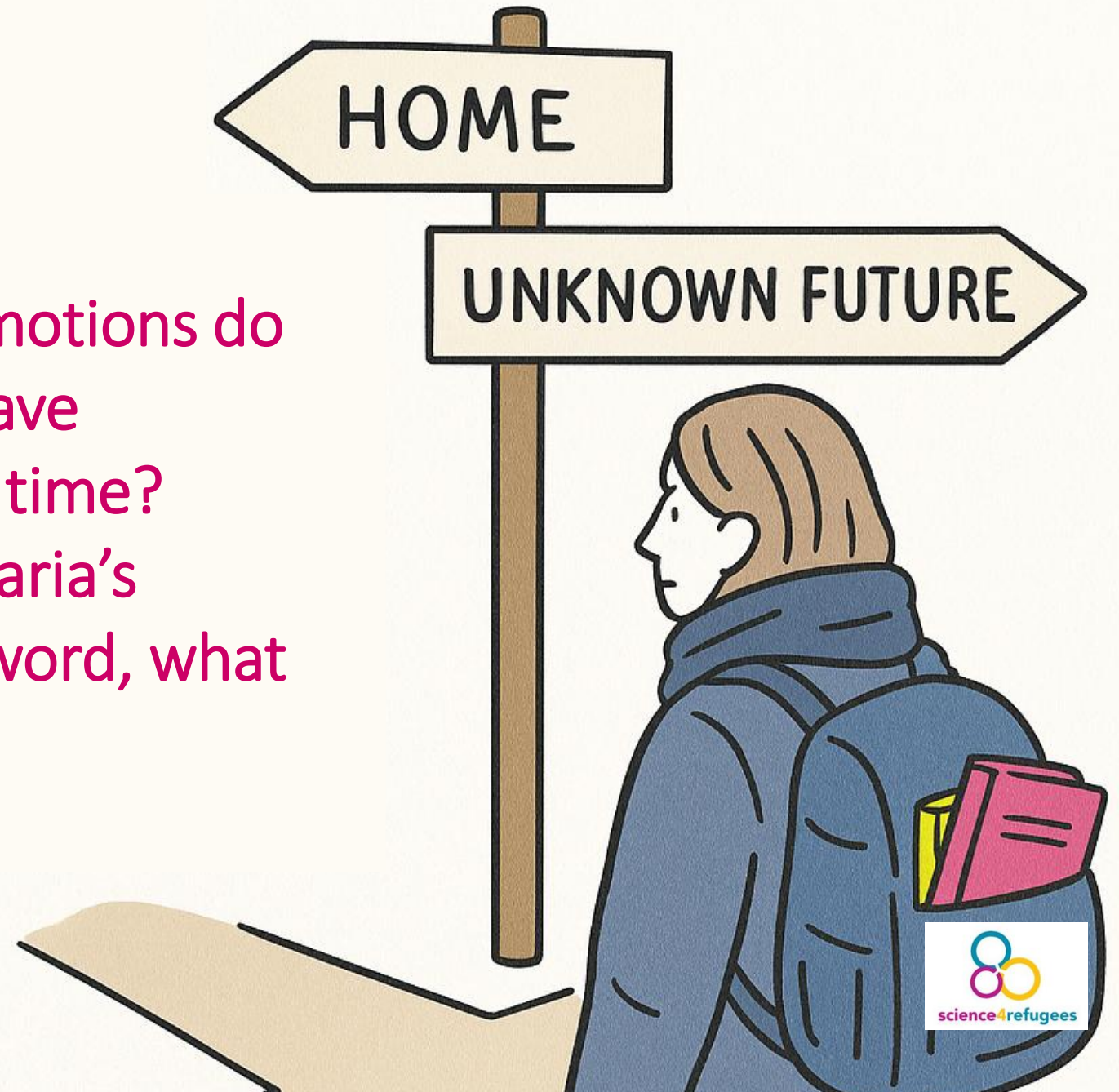
# Agenda

- How stress affects the mind and body
- Common mental health challenges for displaced researchers
- Grounding and calming techniques you can use right away
- “Is it time to ask for help?” – recognizing the warning signs
- Where to turn: available support and resources through EURAXESS and its partners

# My story

- ❓ My hometown has been under occupation since the start of the full-scale war. My family and I were forced to leave. Today, my daughter and I are based in Kyiv.
- ❓ Our university was relocated in May 2022 to Zaporizhzhia — a frontline city. All teaching and collaboration are now online. Our university community is scattered across Ukraine and the world.
- ❓ At first, I didn't know how to cope. So I turned to science – the one stable tool I had.
- ❓ Together with colleagues, I began researching the mental health of academic staff during wartime
- ❓ We also started peer support groups for our university staff based on the “peer-to-peer” model.
- ❓ And that's why I'm here today: to share what helped me – and what might help others.

❓ What feelings and emotions do you think Daria might have experienced during this time? If you had to describe Daria's emotional state in one word, what would it be?

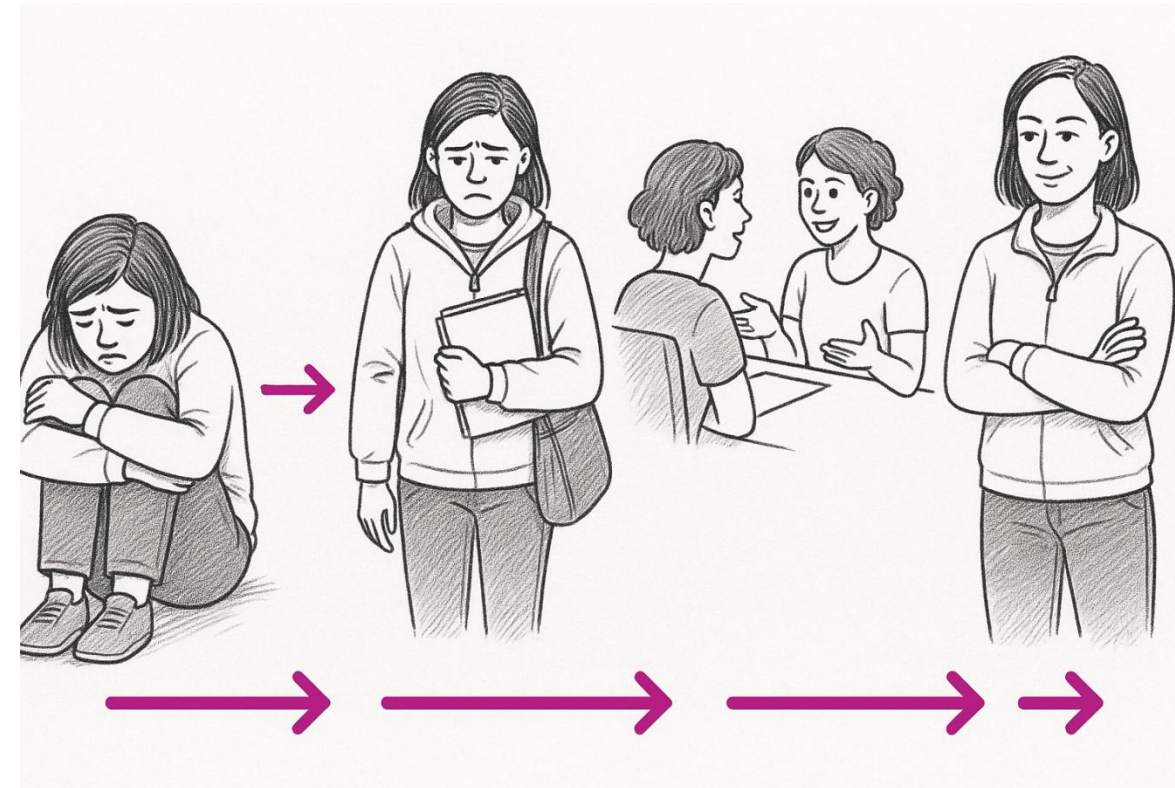


# Why Daria feels this way?

- ❓ **Loss of control and stability:** sudden trauma, lost resources, disrupted routines
- ❓ **Identity disruption:** feeling disconnected from academic roles and institutions
- ❓ **Grief and guilt:** mourning lost work, opportunities, and those left behind
- ❓ **Uncertainty and fear:** unclear legal status, unstable career prospects
- ❓ **Social isolation:** cultural barriers, lack of academic community
- ❓ **Professional pressure:** expectations to publish or apply for grants amid personal crisis

# Stages of adaptation in displacement\*

- 1 Crisis stage (shock and loss)
- 2 Disorganization stage
- 3 Initial adaptation
- 4 Psychosocial integration
- 5 Post-traumatic growth



\*Uehara, E. (1990). *Dual Frame of Reference Model of Adaptation*; Berry, J. W. (1997). *... framework*; Laban et al. (2004) *Mental health of displaced persons*; Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Cr adaptation theory*

On a scale of **1 (low)** to **5 (high)**,  
how much of this **adaptation journey**  
feels **familiar to you?**

# How stress affects the mind and body?

- ❑ Chronic stress keeps the body in '**survival mode**' – triggering constant fight-or-flight responses.
- ❑ Hormones like cortisol and adrenaline stay elevated, causing **sleep disturbances, fatigue, and tension**.
- ❑ Over time, this leads to **burnout, cognitive fog, emotional instability, and weakened immunity**.
- ❑ **Long-term stress rewires the brain** – impairing memory, focus, and emotional control.









- ❑ **Mental health:** high rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD among displaced individuals.
- ❑ **Sleep disruption:** cortisol and adrenaline interfere with sleep cycles, worsening exhaustion.
- ❑ **Physical symptoms:** muscle tension, fatigue, headaches, and increased health risks.
- ❑ **Cognitive impairment:** memory loss, reduced concentration, and decision-making difficulties.
- ❑ **Professional impact:** decreased work performance, risk of burnout, loss of motivation.



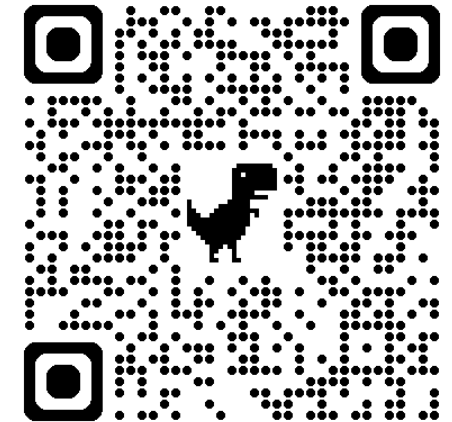
# Mental health challenges for displaced researchers



-  **PTSD, depression, anxiety:** over 1 in 3 displaced people suffer from these conditions (WHO, UNHCR).
-  **Burnout:** chronic stress from instability, trauma, and academic pressure leads to exhaustion, depersonalization and decrease personal accomplishment.
-  **Loss of academic identity:** separation from institutions, community and projects often triggers grief and self-worth disruption.
-  **Isolation & disconnection:** lack of social and professional networks increases risk of loneliness and depression.
-   **Career disruption:** interrupted or stalled academic paths contribute to frustration, uncertainty, and stress.

How many of these challenges  
have you felt in your own story?

## Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide



Grounding and  
calming techniques

# \*5-4-3-2-1 Grounding (Five Senses Technique)

## How to do it (anywhere, anytime):

- *Pause and breathe.* Take a slow, deep breath to center yourself.
- *Engage the 5-4-3-2-1 sequence.* Silently observe your surroundings and name **5 things** you can see. Next, identify **4 things** you can feel (the chair beneath you, your feet on the floor, etc.). Then note **3 things** you can hear, **2 things** you can smell, and **1 thing** you can taste (or simply a flavor in your mouth).
- *Notice the effect.* As you list these sensory details, your attention shifts to the here-and-now, helping you feel more grounded and calm. Continue slow breathing as needed.

# \*Box Breathing (Four-Square Breathing)

## How to do it:

- *Inhale deeply for 4 counts.* Breathe in slowly through your nose while counting to 4.
- *Hold for 4 counts.* Keep your lungs full for a count of 4, then exhale slowly for 4 counts through your mouth.
- *Hold for 4 counts (empty lungs).* After exhaling, pause for 4 counts before the next inhale.
- Repeat this 4×4 cycle a few times until you feel your heart rate slowing and tension easing. *Tip: You can mentally visualize drawing a square – one side per step – as you breathe.)*

# \*Quick Progressive Muscle Relaxation

## How to do it:

- *Tense up a muscle group as you inhale.* For example, clench your fists or tighten your shoulders, squeezing the muscles firmly (but not to the point of pain) for about 5 seconds.
- *Release as you exhale.* Let go of the tension quickly and completely. Feel the muscle relax. Notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.
- *Repeat for a few areas.* You can perform this with another muscle group (e.g. legs or jaw) if needed. With each cycle of tensing and releasing, you should feel a wave of relaxation. Even one or two rounds can help your body unwind and reduce the sensation of stress. Remember to keep breathing slowly throughout.

# \*Affirming Self-Talk (Positive Reassurance)

## How to do it:

- *Choose a calming affirmation.* Pick a short, supportive phrase that addresses the moment. For example: **“I am safe right now,” “I can handle this,”** or **“This feeling will pass.”**
- *Repeat it slowly to yourself.* Silently say the phrase to yourself a few times, syncing it with your breathing. You might inhale and think **“I am safe,”** then exhale and think **“I am okay.”** Focus on the meaning of the words and truly acknowledge them.
- *Engage belief and breath.* As you continue this positive self-talk, take steady breaths. Let the words and the act of breathing slow down your racing thoughts. This fosters a sense of control and confidence. You’re reminding yourself of your resilience, which can quickly diminish the intensity of the stress.





Let's practice a little 😊

# \*Safe Space Visualization (Guided Imagery)

## How to do it:

- *Close your eyes and breathe.* If you're comfortable, close your eyes (or soften your gaze) and take a deep, slow breath.
- *Imagine your safe, calm place.* Envision a place where you feel completely safe, relaxed, and at peace. It could be a real location (like a favorite room, a beach, or a garden) or an imaginary haven. Immerse yourself in the scene: **see** the comforting details, **hear** the gentle sounds (e.g. waves, birds), and **smell** pleasant scents (flowers, ocean air) of this environment.
- *Stay and then return.* Spend a few moments in this mental safe space, enjoying the comfort it brings. Then take another deep breath and gently bring your attention back to the present webinar.

# “Is it time to ask for help?”

Recognizing  
the warning signs





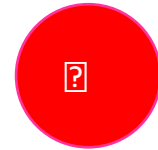
If Daria were someone close to you – a friend, a colleague, a sister – someone you truly care about and would sincerely like to help... how would you answer this question?



Emotional signs: **persistent sadness, anxiety, irritability, emotional numbness, or trauma flashbacks.**



Physical signs: **insomnia, fatigue, appetite changes, muscle tension, headaches, or chest tightness.**



Behavioral signs: **withdrawal, loss of motivation, poor performance, substance use, or neglecting daily care.**

- Symptoms persist >2 weeks
- Affect your ability to function
- Thoughts of self-harm or hopelessness
- Feeling overwhelmed by stress



\*WHO, APA, NHS, UNHCR

**Asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.**

You're not alone. Daria's story is many of our stories.



Thank you so much!  
Your thoughts matter.

Please feel free to ask questions, share your reflections,  
or let us know what resonated most with you.