



Getting a Grip on Stress

HOW UNDERSTANDING PERSONALITY
TYPE CAN HELP UNLOCK THE DOOR TO
WELLNESS



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Chapter 1

In the grip of the hidden personality

"I don't understand what's gotten into her. She's always so nice and yet yesterday she was uncharacteristically nasty to me!" "Its so strange how he's been catastrophising his life, imagining the most unimaginable possibilities, building Mt Everest out of a molehill! He's usually so sensible!" "She's always been in control of her emotions, yet the other day she stepped into her office and just..burst into tears!"

We have all experienced that side of us which is so different to us, what we call the 'other' or the shadow. This is the side of us which confuses us when it emerges from time to time as strange and unusual thoughts, feelings and behaviours which appear completely out of character for us. We may be surprised as well to see these aberrant behaviours in others.

As a guiding principle, we tend to rely on our past experiences with people to guide our expectations of them. We expect personality to be relatively stable and we look for certain behaviour cues to help navigate how we communicate with others. If this were not the case, our relationships with our friends, co-workers and family would be as unpredictable as encounters with total strangers.

In spite of this general consistency with people, we do encounter behaviours from our friends, family and co-workers which is unexpected, odd or unusual. When we come across these behaviours we tend to characterise them as irrational, unstable or just crazy!

Jung and Myers-Briggs Theory of Personality

Understanding the theories of personality type created by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and American authors Katherine Cook and Isabel Myers have allowed us to understand the patterns that most people tend to use when taking in information (perception), making decisions (judging) and where their source of energy is derived (attitudes or orientations).

Jung hypothesised two opposite ways of perceiving, sensing versus intuition and two opposite ways of judging, thinking and feeling. he also hypothesised two opposite attitudes or orientations of energy, extraversion versus introversion. We habitually use each of the four functions in each of these two attitudes.

One person may use sensing perception primarily in the inner world of ideas and internal experiences, focusing on the accumulation and categorising of facts, data and internal sensory information while another may use sensing perception in the outer world of people and events and focus on being open to a broad range of sensory information externally.

Myers added a fourth dichotomy to the ones that Jung had theorised, a judging vs perceiving orientation toward the external world. When these four preferences are combined, we see 16 distinct personality types.

Every individual can and does use each of the four mental functions and the different personality types differ in the amount of time and energy they devote to each. It is important to note that we do not experience the energy each of our four preferences in equal amounts. As in our daily activities, we tend to expend more time and energy doing certain things and less of these in others, so it is that the same kinds of energy differences are distributed among our four mental functions.

The Dominant Function

There is a hierarchy of energy, with one function getting the most energy and one, the least. The dominant function is the one getting the most energy and is the most conscious of the four functions. We have the most awareness of it and therefore the greatest control and direction over it. This tends to be our 'go-to' function and this need to use it with great frequency, influencing not just our choice of career but also what keeps us motivated in our careers, the way in which we communicate and how we are persuaded.

The Auxiliary Function

The second function and the back up to the dominant, is known as the auxiliary function. Although the auxiliary function is still in our conscious frame, it is not as well developed as the dominant function. The auxiliary complements the dominant function by being the opposite mental process; that is if the dominant function is a judging function (T or F), then the auxiliary will be a perceiving function (S or N).

The Tertiary Function

The third favourite function and third in the energy hierarchy, is the Tertiary function. This function is opposite to the auxiliary function and is relatively unconscious. It is less easy to direct and control because of this. The tertiary function is the opposite mental process of the auxiliary. Therefore if the auxiliary is a perceiving process (S), the tertiary is the opposite perceiving process (N).

The Inferior Function

The least favourite function, the inferior, gets the least amount of energy and is essentially the most unconscious of the functions. Therefore, the amount of unconscious energy that the inferior has is equal to the amount of conscious energy available to the dominant. The energy of the inferior functions remains dormant as long as the energy of the dominant is in operation.

The inferior function is always exactly opposite to the dominant function. If the dominant is Thinking, then the Inferior is Feeling. The orientation of the Inferior is also the opposite of the Dominant. Therefore, if the dominant function is Extraverted Thinking, then the Inferior is Introverted Feeling.

The following video illustrates how we can work out our four functions, if we already know our personality type:

<https://youtu.be/1cs364m-yBk>



Chapter 2

Imposed Change and Stress

There is a difference between Intentional Change and Imposed Change. The first tends to be somewhat of a conscious, considered decision and the second can appear arbitrary and out of control, sudden, abrupt and can be seen to disrupt routines, procedures and indeed, lives! Imposed change seems to have the greatest impact on employees, especially where it concerns loyalty, expertise, consistency, credibility and motivation - all of which are critical to the success of an organisation. Even in the best of circumstances, when change decisions have been well thought out and presented, no one likes to have other people deciding how and where they will work.

The issues in question in a time of change

Employees begin to wonder who they should be loyal to and why they should be loyal when the perception is that the organisation is not being loyal to them. They question whether or not the organisation has the expertise to carry out the changes and whether or not they themselves can demonstrate expertise with their new responsibilities. There may be a perception that if the organisation has made these new changes, whether more will be on the horizon. What if any are the new norms in the organisation? Do the decision makers have the credibility to make good decisions? They may wonder if they are just a cog in the machine and whether anything they do will really make a difference. It may lead to a sense of learned helplessness.

All this leads to a sense of uncertainty, skepticism, suspicion and perhaps even anger, leading to stress. Change can be both physically and emotionally stressful and many of the ways in which people react to stress and also the strategies they use to cope with stress are influenced by their early experiences, learned skills and their own values. However the research has also demonstrated that personality type also plays a role in what causes an individual to feel stressed and in the form that stress tends to take. The dominant function plays a key role here. If one's dominant function is not attended to, each type will resist change. Under the stress of ongoing transitions and change because it is their most differentiated function, people tend to rely on this function more heavily than they normally do.

The tables on the following pages illustrate what the different types looks like at their best and in an exaggerated state:

In regular everyday stress, it is natural for people to invest and funnel more energy into their most trusted function in order to regain some semblance of control. However if stress continues and builds, the dominant function can become exaggerated and rigid. Feeding one's dominant function in this situation can be counterproductive, leading to the forms of type exaggeration illustrated in the tables below:

Table 1: Dominant Introverted Feeling (ISFP & INFP)	
At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathetic • Believe that people matter • Independent • Sensitive • Idealistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are 'rescuers' • Carry the weight of the world on their shoulders • Isolate themselves • Hypersensitive • Pompous and Demagogic

Table 2: Dominant Extraverted Feeling (ESFJ & ENFJ)	
At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging • Interested in others • Seek harmony • Outward looking • People and relationship oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insistent on 'what is best' for others • Intrusive and prying • Ignore problems for the sake of harmony • Lack focus, 'scatteredness' • Overidentify with others' problems

Table 3: Dominant Introverted Thinking (ISTP & INTP)	
At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent search for accurate analysis • Deep Concentration • Logical • Objective • Autonomous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obsessive search for truth in everything • Lost in concentration - forget the outer world • Accept only their logic • Clinically detached • Driven like an automaton

Table 4: Dominant Extraverted Thinking (ESTJ & ENTJ)	
At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coolheaded and calm • Rational • Present goals with clarity • Logical • Analytical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detached and cold • Obsessive rationality • Oversimplify for the sake of clarity • Critical of others' lack of logic • Dominate by dissecting everything

Table 5: Dominant Introverted Sensing (ISFJ & ISTJ)

At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carefully select facts• Excellent recall for details• Certain of facts and opinions• Reflect before acting• Communicate effectively and appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fixate on the one correct fact• Obsess about details• Dogmatic about own opinions• Paralysed in decision making• Shut down and withdraw

Table 6: Dominant Extraverted Sensing (ESFP & ESTP)

At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observe and reflect then do or say• Active• Talkative and sociable• Straightforward and clear• Pay attention to detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak and act without thinking• Hyperactivity• Disruptive chatter• Blunt and curt• Pedantic

Table 7: Dominant Introverted Intuition (INFJ & INTJ)

At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visionary• Complex problem solvers• See connections• Develop patterns• Brainstorm with themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unrealistic or wild visions• Arrogant about their ideas and solutions• Overly complex, see everything as connected• Force data to fit patterns• Driven inward

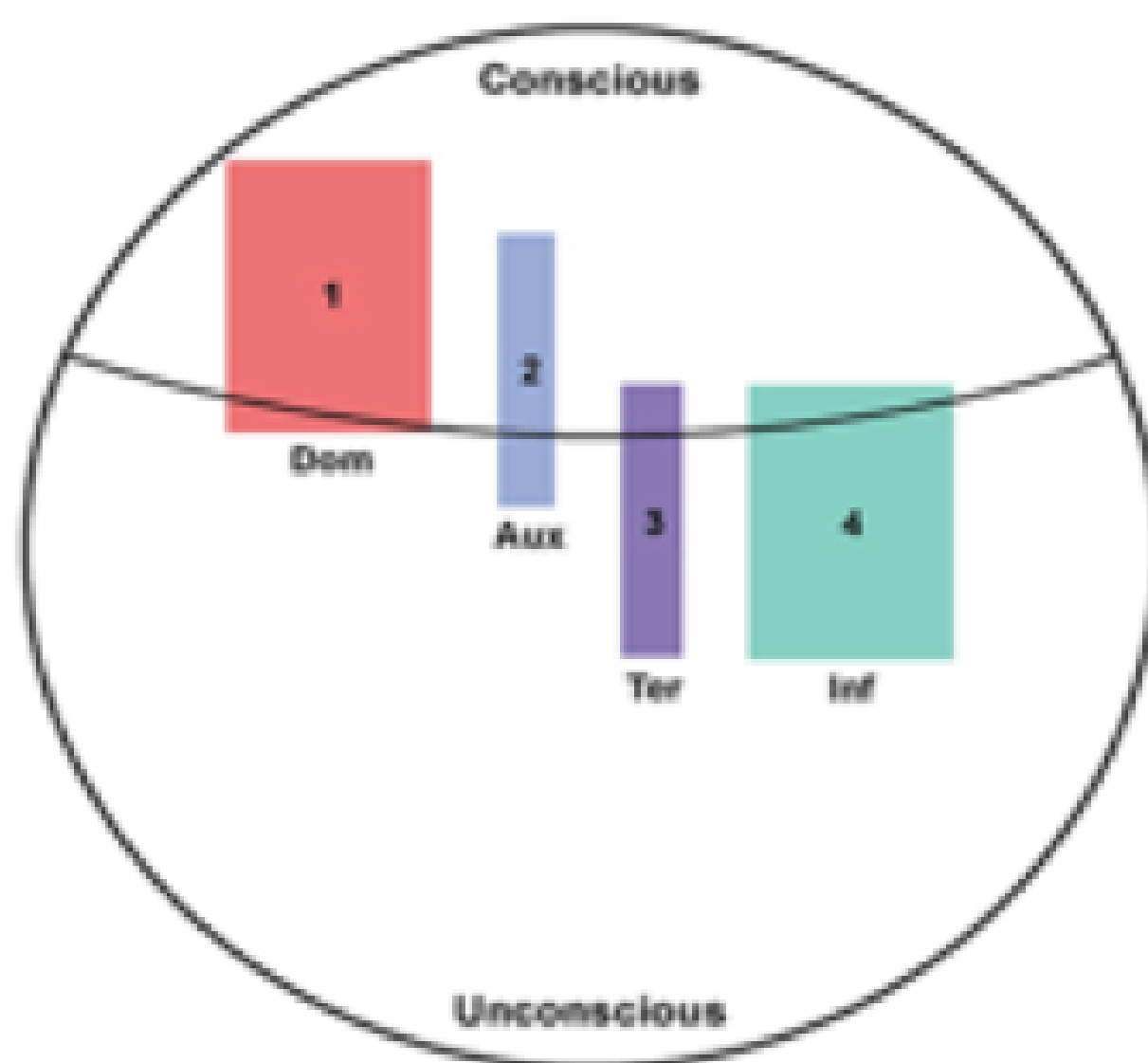
Table 8: Dominant Extraverted Intuition (ENFP & ENTP)

At Their Best	Exaggerated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop global ideas• Innovative• Enthusiastic and fast paced• See possibilities• Flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Obsessed about links between things• Change for its own sake• Frantic and over the top• Paralysed by options• Experience sudden irrational changes

Getting in the grip

Type development theory suggests that competent and well developed adults would have developed the necessary skills and maturity to use all of their mental functions in an appropriate way to deal with the stressful situation.

In an exaggerated state, people tend to access information that is distorted and where their judgement is unbalanced, are unable to plan and follow through in a competent way.



When the stressful situation persists, and the level of stress continues to build even more, a strange thing happens with our psyche. Our psyche needs to be in balance. During prolonged stress, we are obviously out of balance and a signal needs to be sent to our conscious to inform us that things are not as they should be. If you think of the balance

between our conscious and unconscious as a carefully regulated system, when we are exhibiting type exaggeration, our energy levels are obviously unbalanced. As we funnel energy into our dominant function to deal with the stress, something similar is happening within our unconscious.

More energy is being funnelled into our inferior function. Gradually as the stressful situation is prolonged or if we fail to return to a normal state, the level of energy in our inferior function continues to build until it spills into our consciousness, upends our dominant function and completely dominates our conscious mind. This phenomenon is known as being 'in the grip' of the inferior function.

Stress and the Inferior Function

The form of the inferior function roughly corresponds to the qualities associated with that function when it is a dominant function with a negative, pathological and primitive case to it. Jung referred to the Tertiary and Inferior functions as undifferentiated seeing as we do not have confidence in them nor the confident ability to wield them as skillfully as our differentiated Dominant and Auxiliary functions.

The inferior function can erupt into the conscious in a pathological form under ongoing or pervasive stress.

Whether or not the stress episode itself is short lived or chronic and pervasive, the form that the stress reaction takes demonstrates its out-of-character qualities.

One may fall under the grip of the inferior function when one's conscious energy is at a low ebb, such as when fatigued or ill or when under physical or psychological stress, alcohol or mind altering drugs. Life transitions could also at times push someone into the grip.

These days the rapid pace of change in life and at work is a common trigger for stress and the emergence of the unconscious energy of the inferior in a pathological form.

This is why it is essential for any leader instituting a programme of change to be aware of the diversity of personality types in their teams and organisations and the different forms that stress can take.

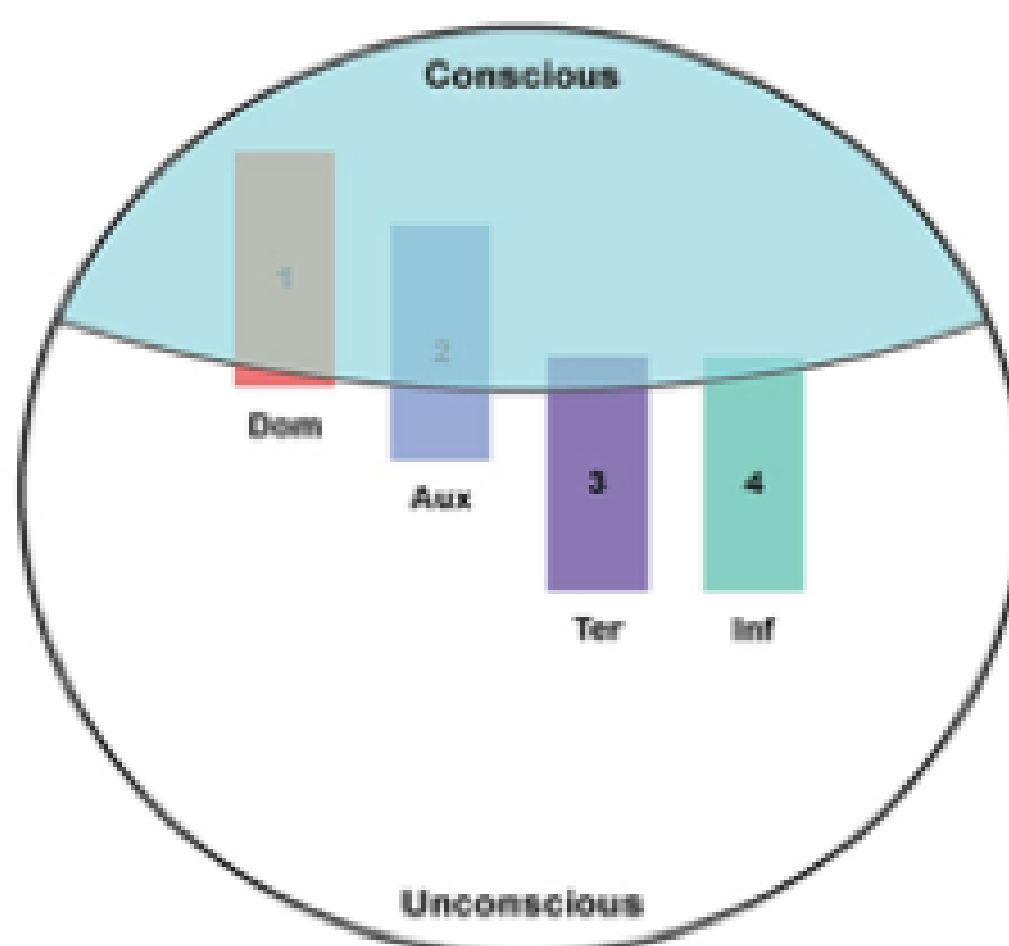
Short-term episodes of being in the grip tend to be less intrusive or distressing and the individuals tend to return to a state of 'normalcy' relatively quickly. In fact, the experience of being in the grip serves as an important 'message' from one's psyche to inform us that something in our lives is out of balance. Lengthy periods of stress with little or no respite however can be damaging to one's personality. They would be seen as a constant drain on one's energy, where one is continually forced to use the less preferred, less differentiated functions and attitudes simply to survive. People who experience chronic illness or pain, long term employment, those who are the victims of bullying; these may all serve to keep one in a chronic state of the grip.

In the next chapter we illustrate how the experience of being in the grip manifests for the eight different functions and the subsequent return to wellness.

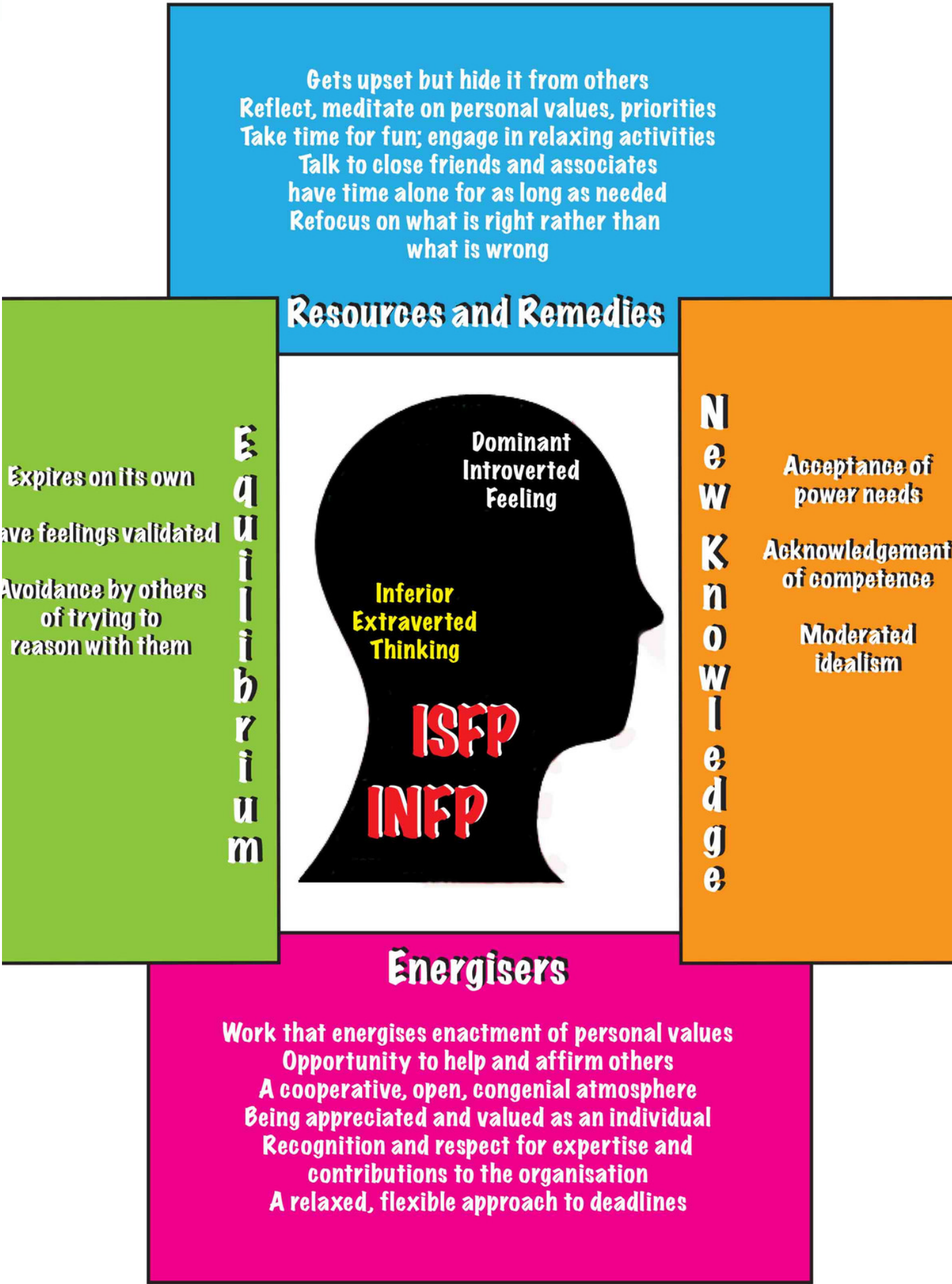
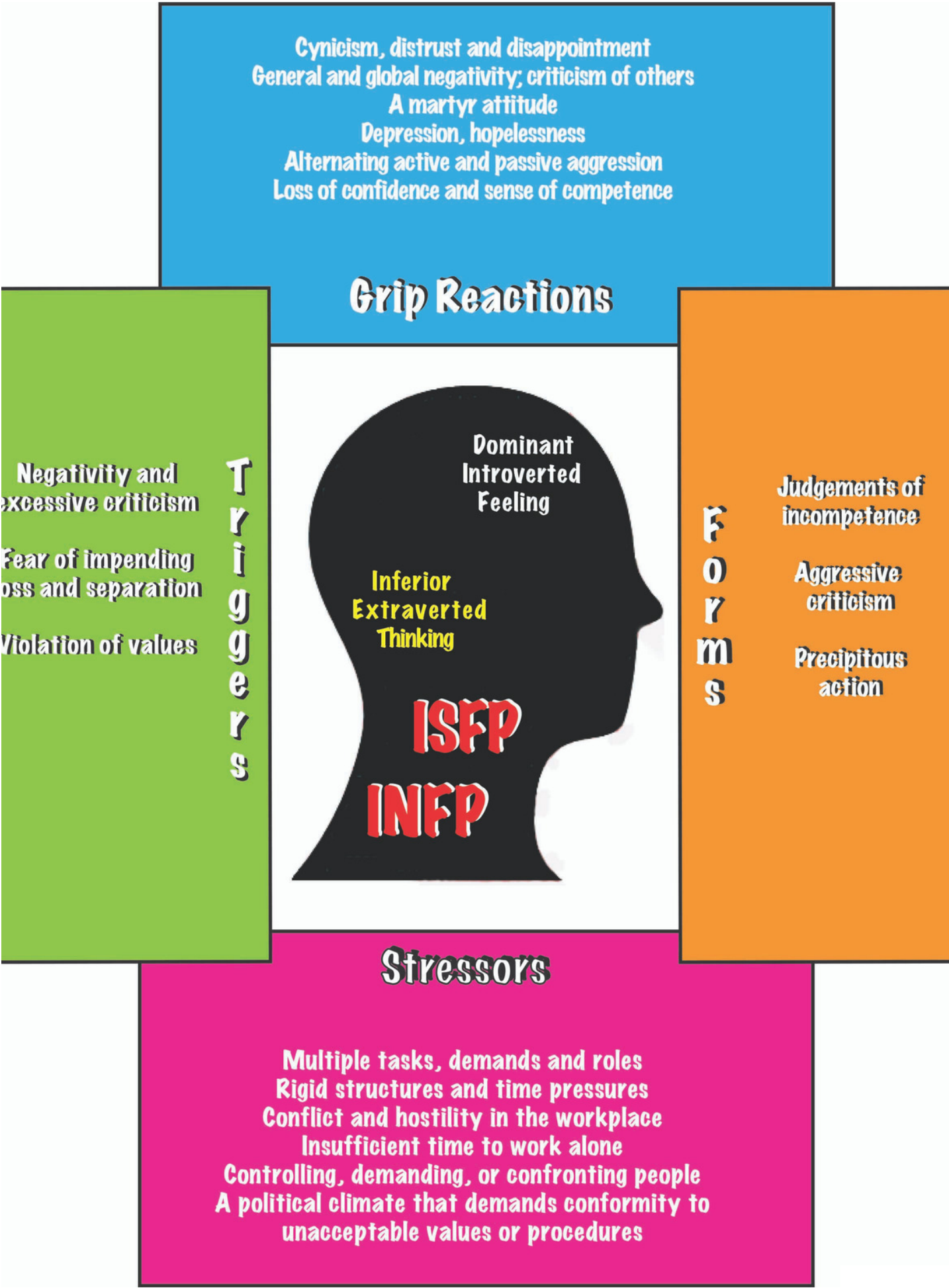
Chapter 3

The eight forms of the grip experience and the return to wellness

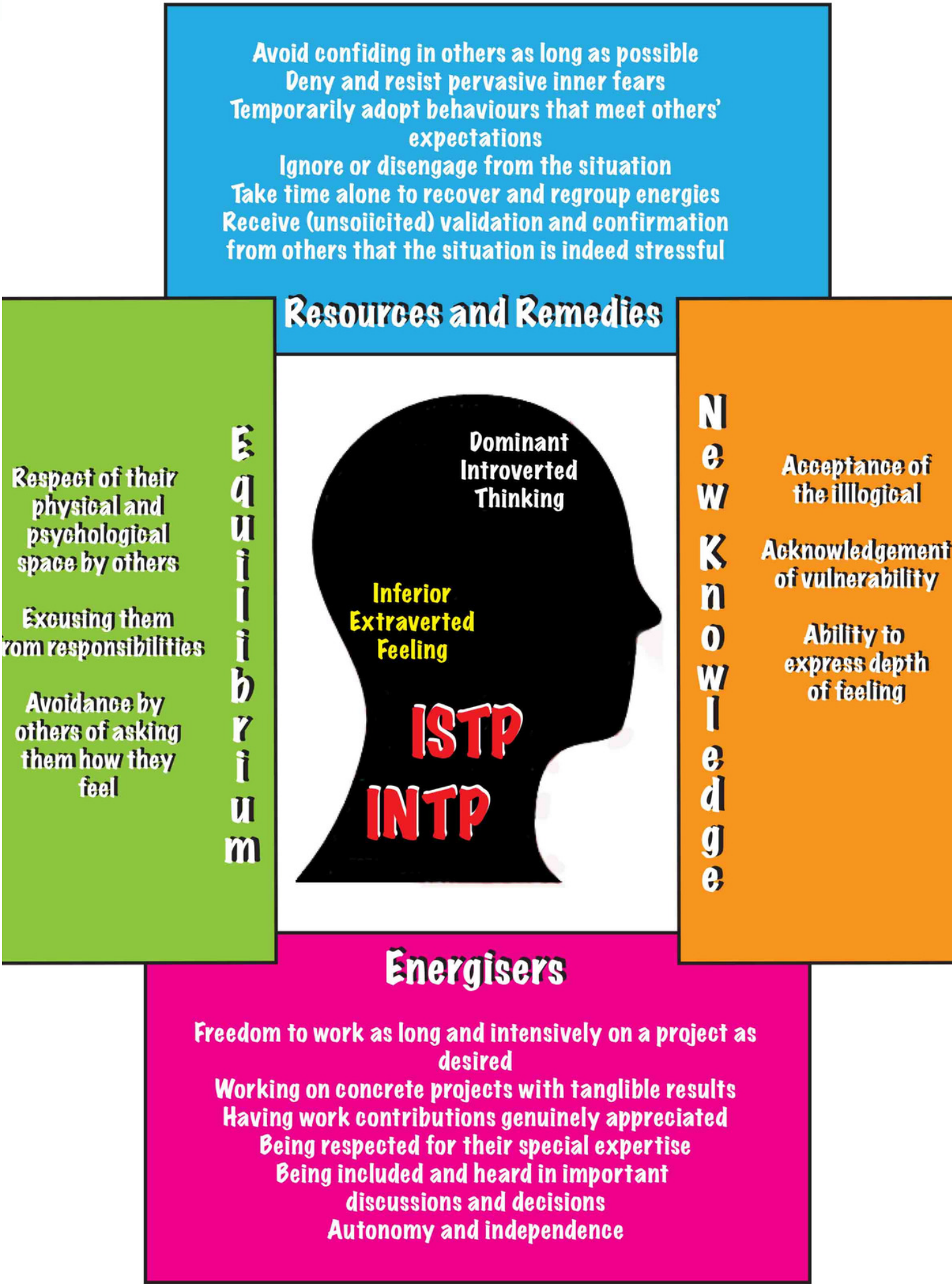
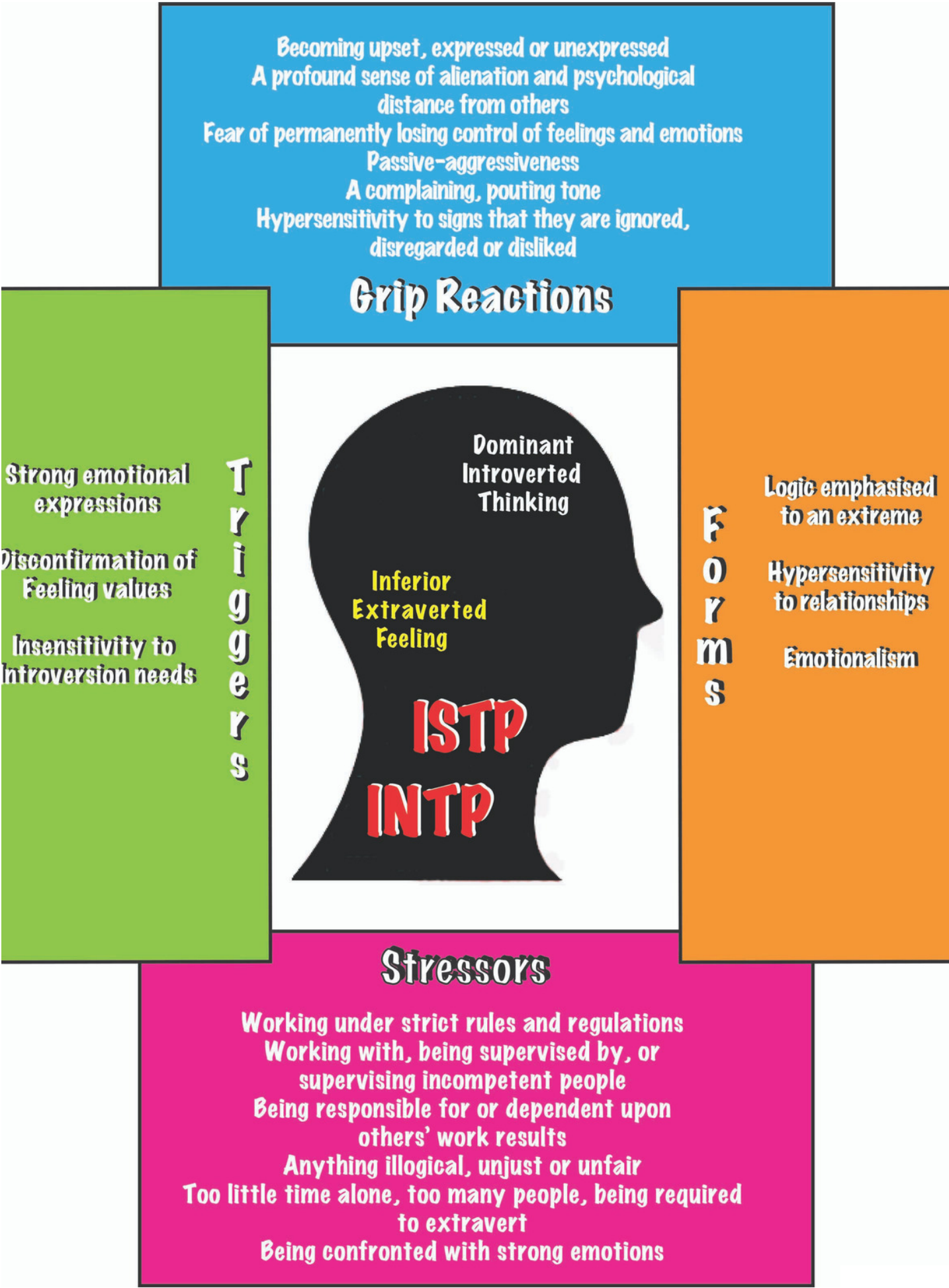
This chapter illustrates the eight different forms of the grip experience for the eight dominant functions and the subsequent return to wellness. For each function we examine the reactions that present themselves during the grip experience, the triggers for stress, the forms that the grip experience may take and the typical stressors for each of the functions. We also examine the resources and remedies we draw on to bring us back to a state of 'normality' and the different ways we can return to a state of equilibrium. The grip may also have a positive aspect to it, in that there is new learning and growth to be gained from the experience.



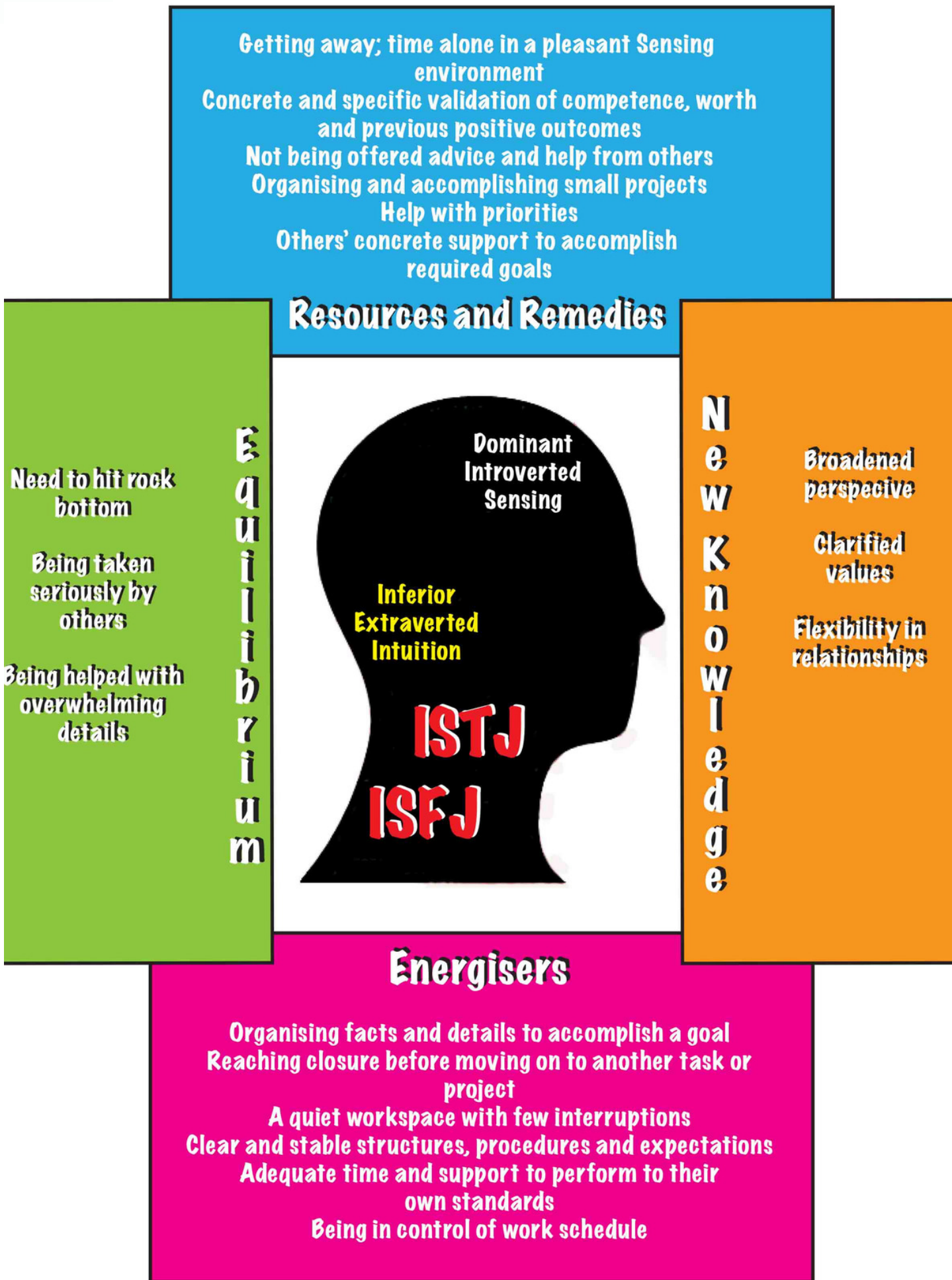
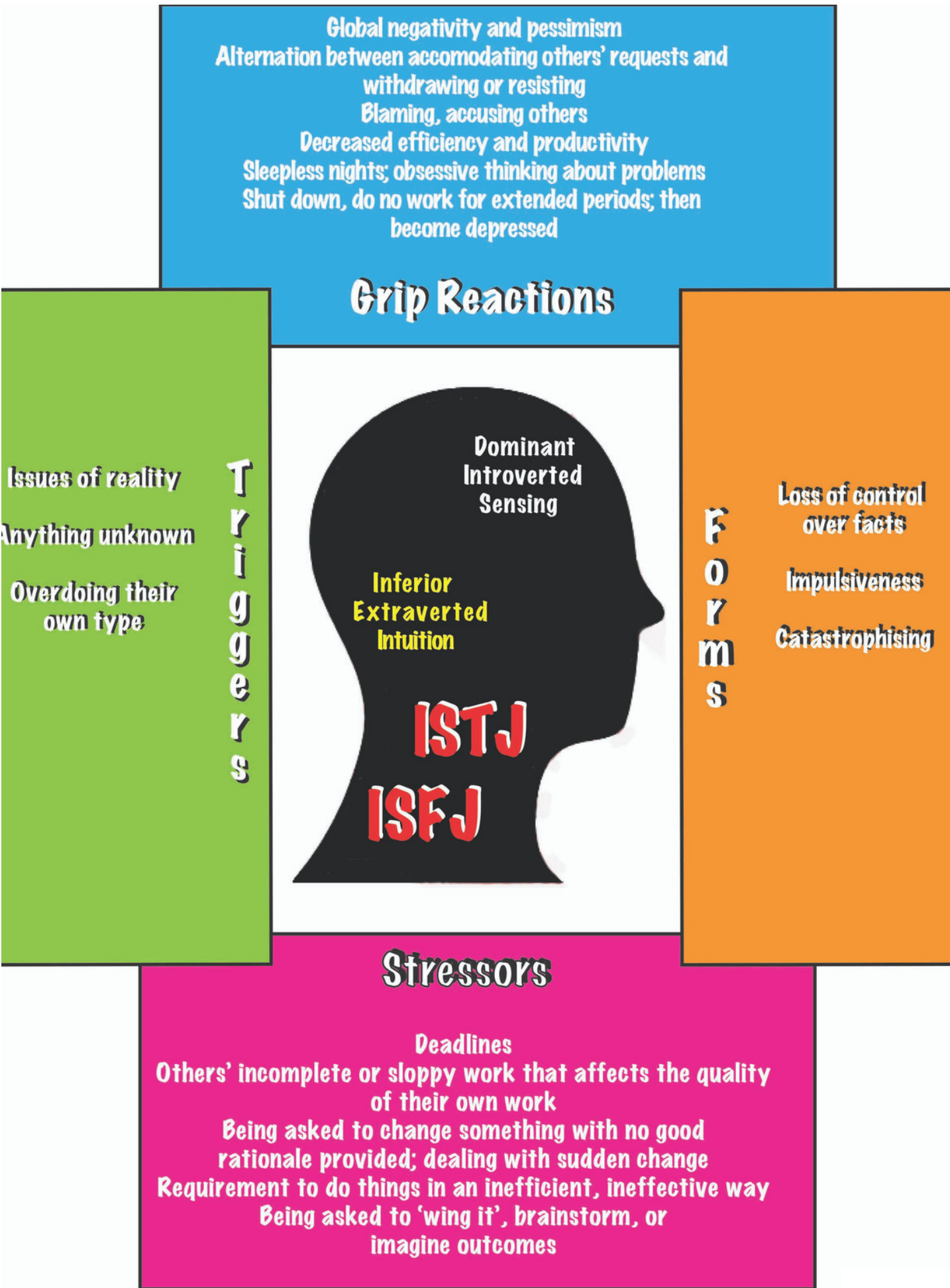
Introverted Feeling (ISFP & INFP)



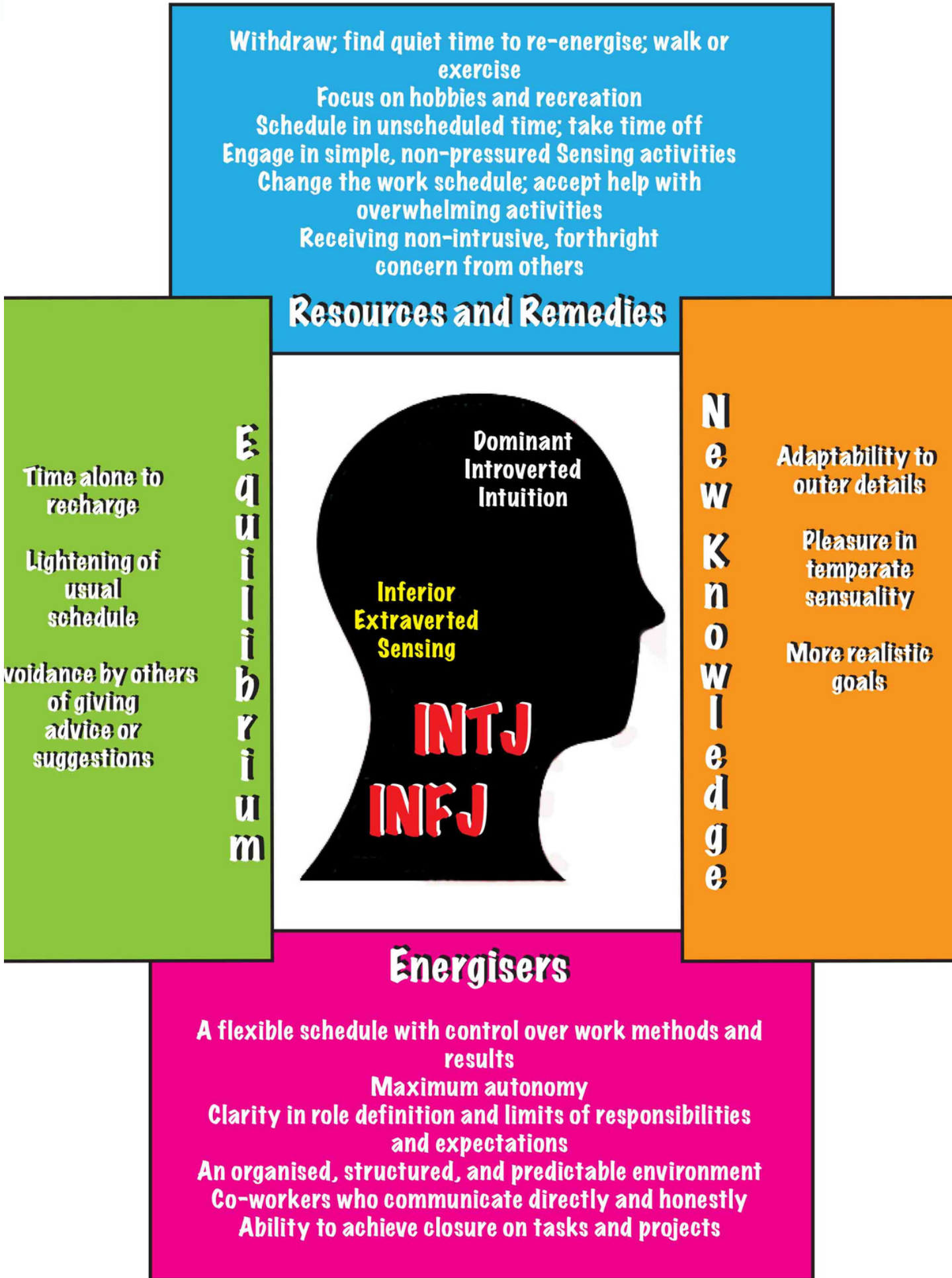
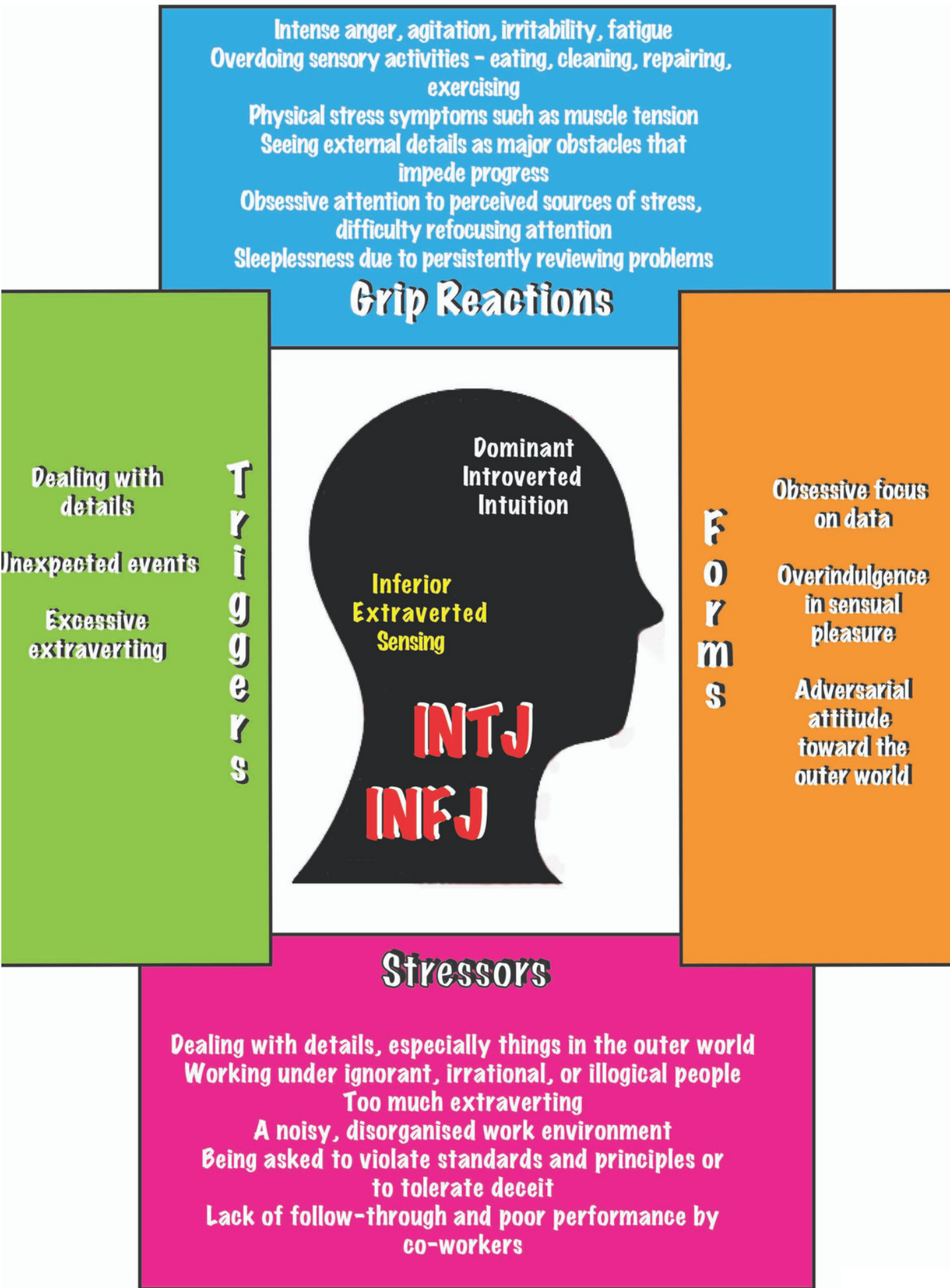
Introverted Thinking (ISTP & INTP)



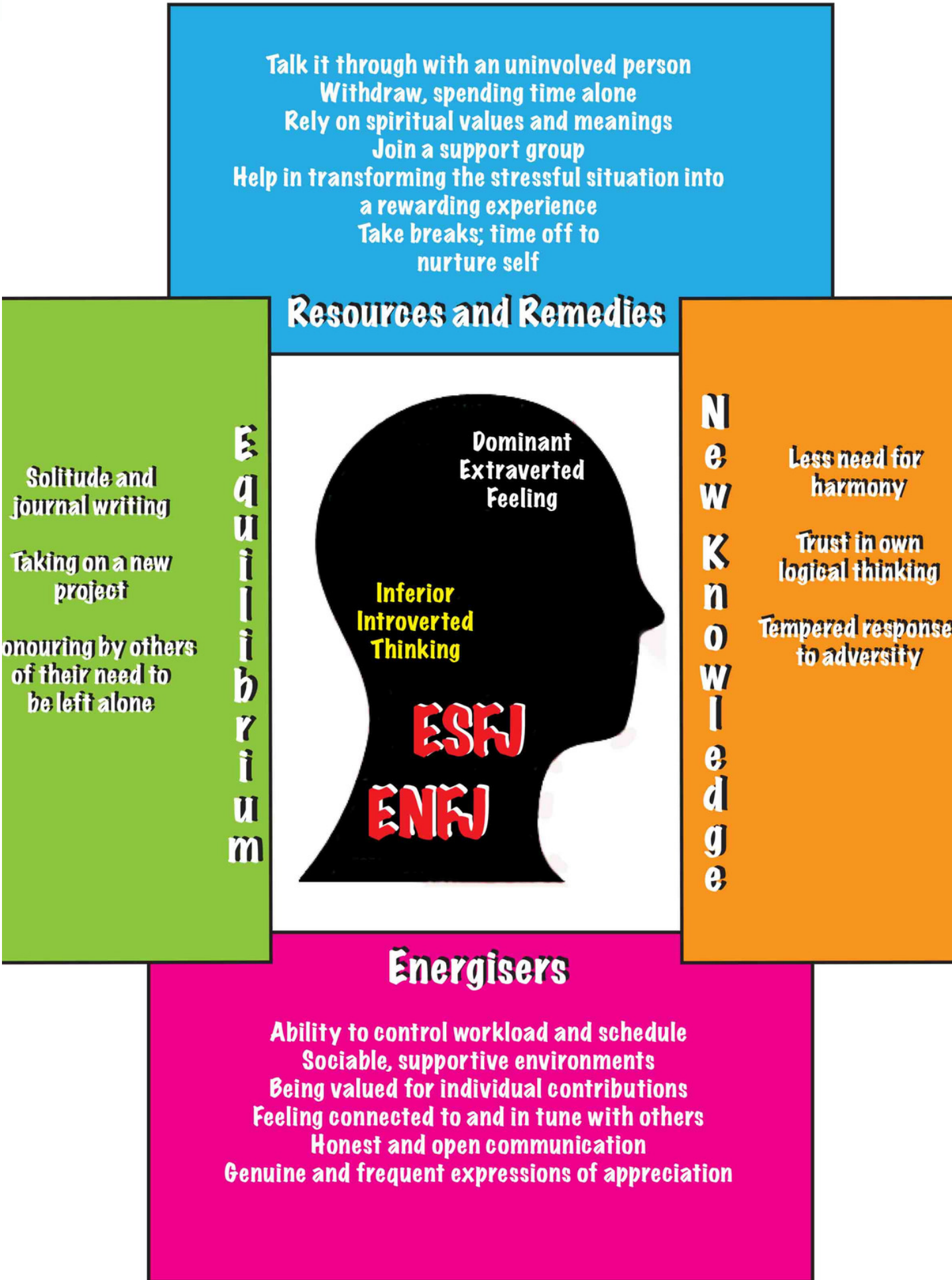
Introverted Sensing (ISFJ & ISTJ)



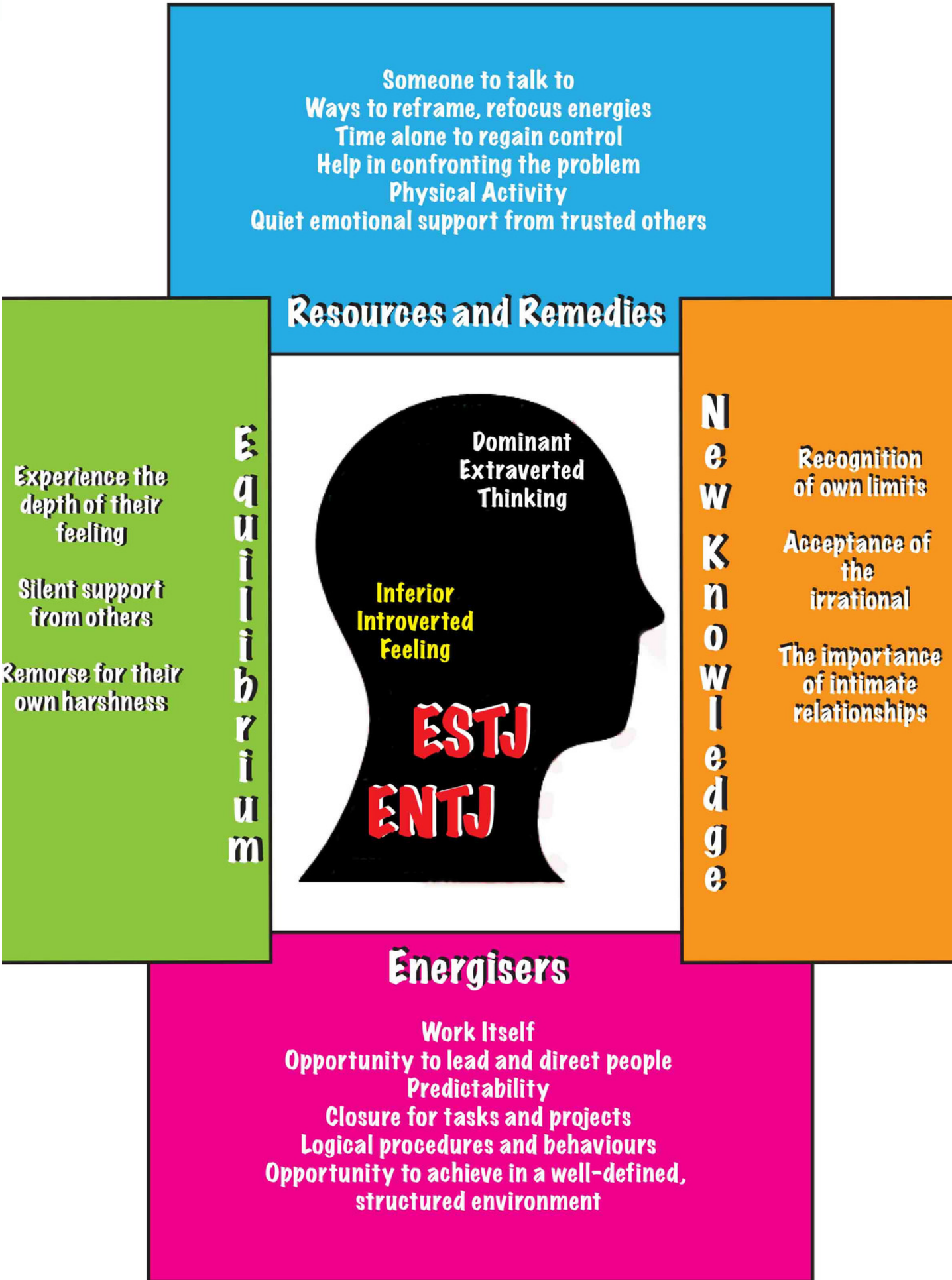
Introverted Intuition (INFJ & INTJ)



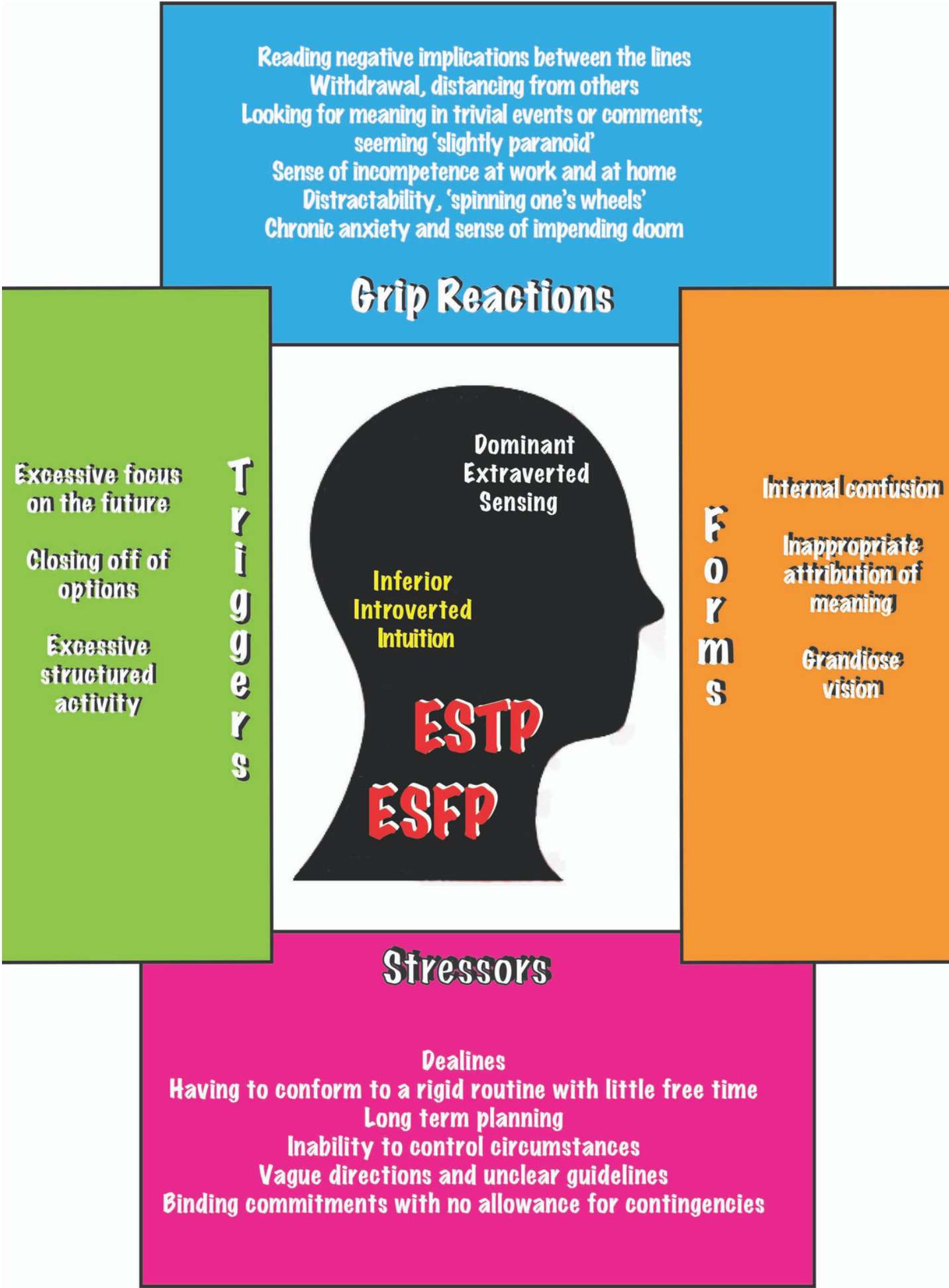
Extraverted Feeling (ESFJ & ENFJ)



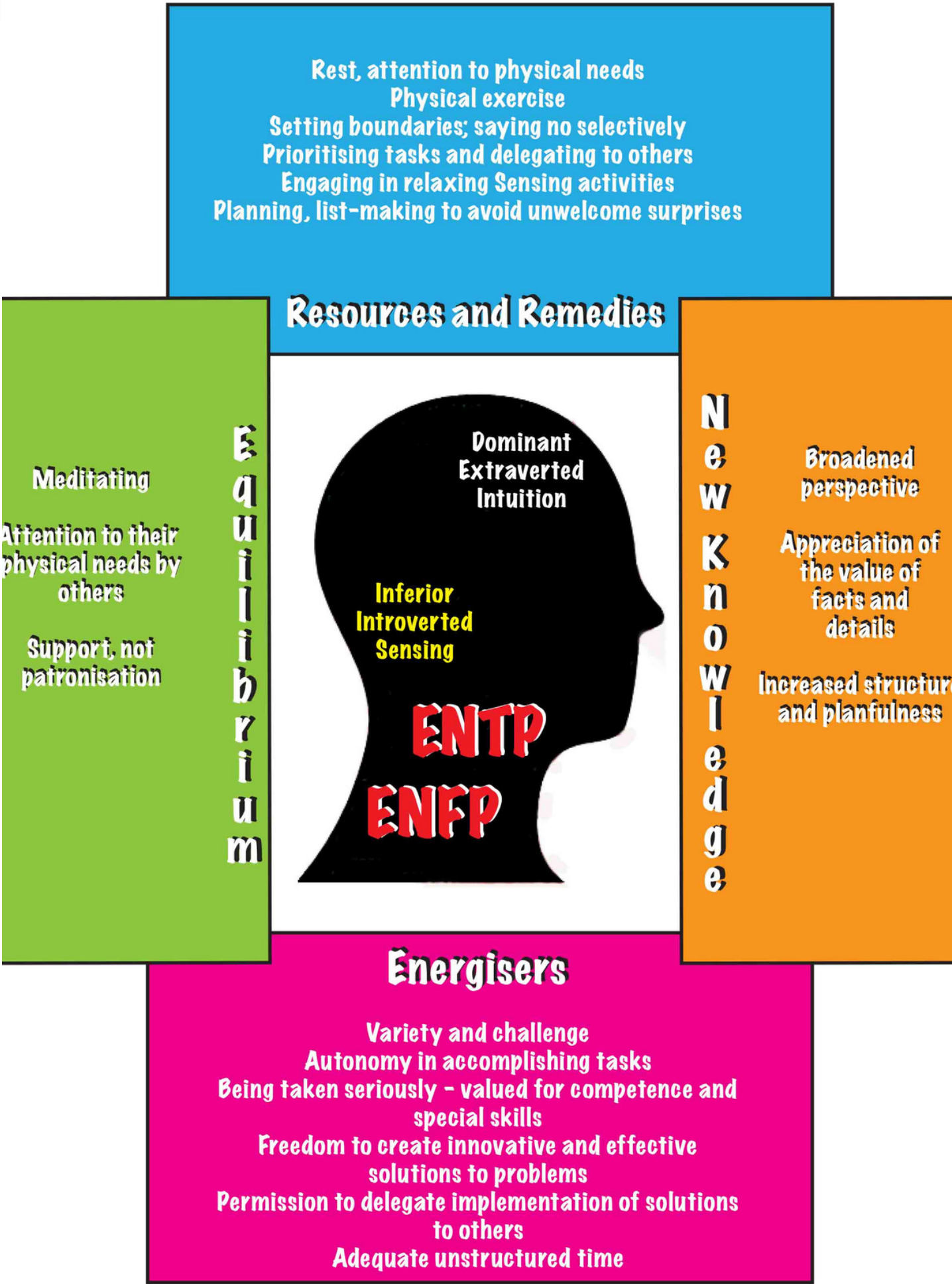
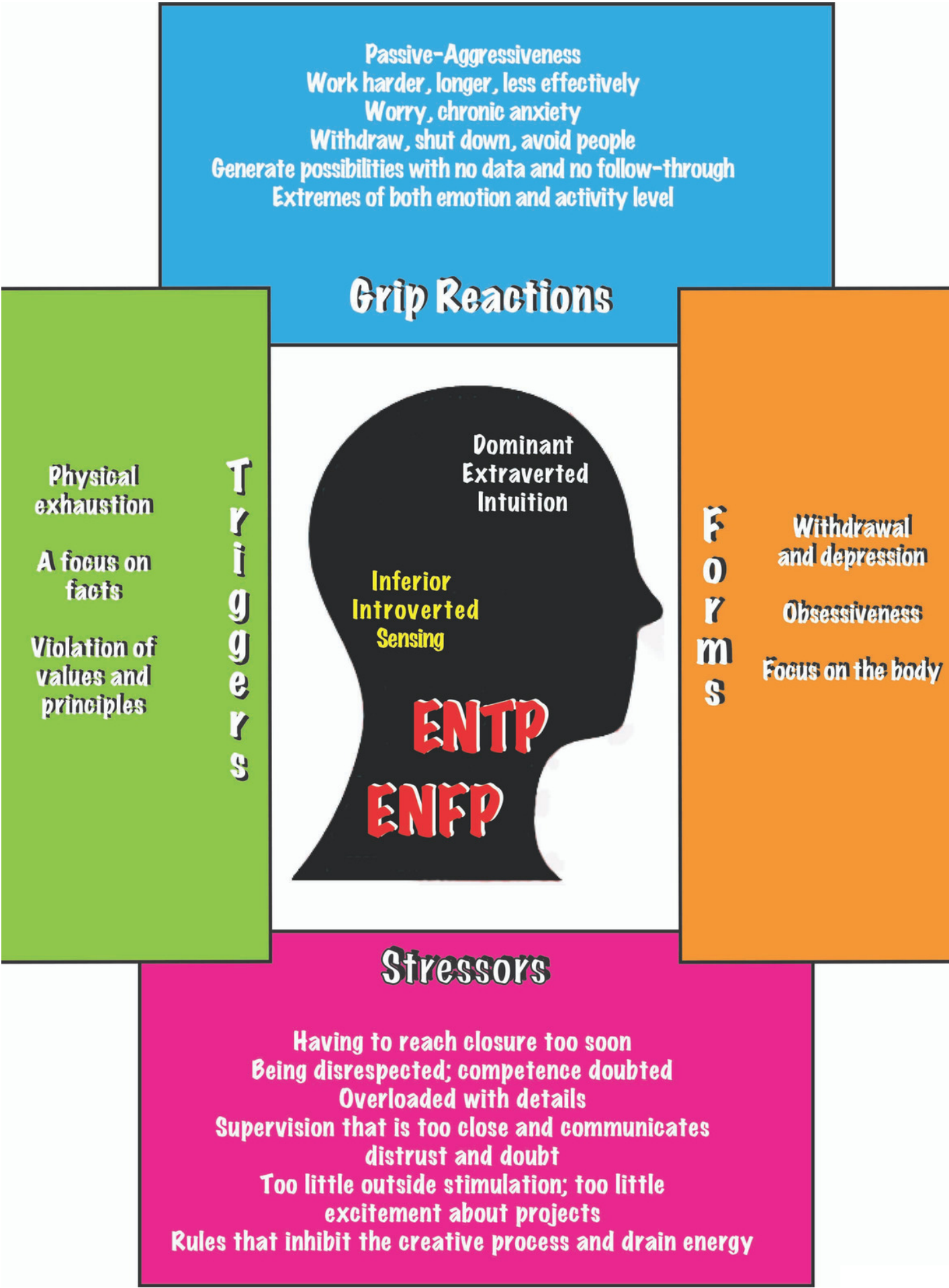
Extraverted Thinking (ESTJ & ENTJ)



Extraverted Sensing (ESFP & ESTP)



Extraverted Intuition (ENFP & ENTP)



Chapter 4

Final Thoughts

"The inferior function is practically identical with the dark side of human personality. The darkness which clings to every personality is the door into the unconscious and the gateway to dreams, from which those two twilight figures, the shadow and the anima, step into our nightly visions, or remaining invisible, take possession of our ego-consciousness. A man who is possessed by his own shadow is always standing in his own light and falling into his own traps."

Carl G Jung, 1959

I hope that this book gives you a starting point for understanding your unique triggers for and your response to stress. As you learn what triggers your grip reactions, you will also learn what to watch for in times of stress and the particular remedies for these episodes. I would also hope that, as you become more resilient to stress, you also grow and learn more about the shadow self in your unconscious, thus being able to activate this less differentiated part of your personality in a more positive way. To do this would put you on the path to what Jung described as individuation or, the achievement of self-actualisation through a process of integrating the conscious and the unconscious.

I wish you the very best in your continuing journey to self-awareness!!

Brian Lawrence

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And further reading

This E-book was adapted from the following sources:

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