Ten Pillars of practice

The interdisciplinary foundations behind SMERT™ and my wider practice

Everything I teach - in SMERT™ and beyond - draws on ten interdisciplinary pillars. None of them stands alone. Together they form a single, evidence-based way of working with the Mind, the Body, and the Life a person is trying to build.

01 Neuroscience & the Biology of Wellbeing

The nervous system doesn't only generate stress - it is also the biological seat of calm, connection, attention, and joy. I ground my work in neuroscience across the board: how the stress response activates and resolves, how neuroplasticity makes meditation and mindfulness practice actually change the brain over time, and how gratitude, safety, and social connection register in the body, not just the mind.

This pillar is the mechanism underneath everything else I teach. Whether the practice in front of a client is a breathing technique, a gratitude exercise, or a meditation, this is the “why it works” layer - the shared biological ground that stress resilience, wellbeing, and flourishing are all built on.

02 Mental Health & Mental Wealth

Trained as a psychiatrist, I've spent my career treating illness. But Mental Health is not simply the absence of illness - it is a resource that can be actively built, much like physical fitness. I call this “Mental Wealth”: the deliberate cultivation of psychological reserves before a crisis arrives, not just recovery after one. Alongside psychiatric treatment, I draw on the strongest evidence-based therapeutic models - CBT, DBT, and mentalisation-based approaches - as the clinical backbone of this work, adapted for people who aren't in crisis but want to build genuine psychological reserve.

This pillar is what keeps my practice clinically grounded. Every framework I teach is evidence-based, and every claim is one I'm willing to have checked against the research - because the people I work with deserve rigour, not just reassurance.

03 Mindfulness & Contemplative Practice

Mindfulness is the thread that runs through everything else I teach. It's the practice of attending, on purpose, to the present moment without judgement and it is also where self-compassion lives: the capacity to meet your own difficulty with the same kindness you'd offer a friend. This pillar also draws on transpersonal psychology, breathwork and other contemplative practices.

I teach mindfulness not as a wellness trend but as a trainable skill with a body of research behind it - one that changes how people relate to their thoughts, their stress, and ultimately themselves.

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04 Practical Philosophy

Long before psychology existed as a discipline, philosophers were asking how to live well, manage difficult life situations and thrive in society. From the Western tradition I draw on Stoicism, Socratic self-examination, Aristotelian virtue ethics, Nietzsche and others. From the East, on Taoist flexibility, the non-dual inquiry of Advaita Vedanta, and the psychological discipline of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, and others - all treated as living tools for self-governance rather than intellectual history. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy sits here too: its acceptance-based stance and values-directed action make it as much a philosophy of living as a validated clinical therapy.

The question this pillar asks is simple and hard: how well do you actually know and govern yourself? Philosophy, done practically, gives people a way to examine their own beliefs and choose their responses rather than simply reacting to them

05 Positive Psychology & Human Flourishing

Most of psychiatry and psychology has historically studied what goes wrong. Positive psychology studies what goes right - happiness, strengths, gratitude, and the conditions under which people flourish rather than merely cope.

I use this research to help people broaden what's already working in their lives, rather than only fixing what isn't. Flourishing, in this sense, isn't the opposite of struggle - it's the deliberate cultivation of resources that make struggle survivable and meaning possible.

06 Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and relational skill are not soft add-ons to a resilient life - they are the mechanism by which everything else becomes usable in relationship with other people. This pillar takes the inner work of mindfulness and philosophy and asks: how does this show up when you're actually with someone else?

Emotional intelligence is where personal mastery becomes relational - the difference between managing your own stress and leading, parenting, or partnering well while under it.

07 Lifestyle Medicine

The mind does not run independently of the body. Sleep, movement, nutrition, substance use, and our relationship with technology are not lifestyle footnotes - they are the daily infrastructure that determines whether everything else I teach is even possible to sustain.

This pillar keeps the work practical and embodied. It's the reminder that resilience is not just a mindset - it is also a bedtime, a walk, a meal, and a boundary with a screen.

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08 Excellence & Applied Performance Science

Inner mastery is only half the work - the other half is pointing it outward. This pillar draws on the science of habit formation, goal-setting, and character to help people translate self-knowledge into sustained, real-world excellence.

Where practical philosophy asks “how well do I know myself,” this pillar asks “what do I now do with that.” It's the applied, outward-facing counterpart to the inner work of mastery - connection, character, and habits that hold up under real conditions.

09 Storytelling & Narrative Practice

Data tells people what to think; story tells them why it matters. I use narrative deliberately - real, specific stories rather than abstractions - because meaning-making is how people actually change, not just information transfer.

This pillar is also how I teach: research earns its place only after a story has already made the case emotionally. It's a reminder that transformation is a story people come to tell about themselves, not just a set of techniques they adopt.

10 Arts & Health Humanities

As a poet and filmmaker as well as a psychiatrist, I bring creative practice into this work deliberately, not decoratively. The arts and health humanities offer ways of processing experience - grief, stress, meaning, identity - that clinical language alone doesn't reach.

This pillar is the most personally mine: it's where my own creative life and my clinical training meet, and where I've found some of the most honest tools for helping people make sense of what they're going through.

Outcomes - the 5 Bs of Transformation

Building · Being · Becoming · Bouncing Back · Belonging

Shaped by science, inspired by art, rooted in spirit, held by community.

Educational and developmental programmes

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