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News Release

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Former hostage helps shed light on how we cope in a crisis

Former hostage Terry Waite will join a discussion of how people cope under pressure at this year's Edinburgh International Science Festival.

The humanitarian and author, who was kidnapped and held hostage by militants in Lebanon for almost five years, will share his experiences in captivity and the factors that motivated him to keep hope.

He will be joined by three of the UK's leading neuroscientists, who will talk about how the brain adapts to extreme stress to take us to the very limits of mental and physical endurance.

The panel will explain what we know about the parts of the brain that deal with fear and threat.

They will also discuss changes that can occur in the brain to enable the body to keep going in the face of adversity.

Taking part is Professor Sir Colin Blakemore, of the Universities of London and Oxford. He will be joined by Dr Mary Baker, President of the Year of the Brain.

Professor Richard Morris, Director of the Centre for Cognitive and Neural Systems at the University of Edinburgh, will chair the session.

Professor Morris said: "We all face periods of mental and physical anguish at some point in our lives – whether it's an endurance sporting event or the loss of a dear loved one. For some, such as Terry, the experience is more pronounced. But the mechanisms our brain uses to cope may be the same."

Terry Waite said: "Many years ago I spent almost five years in strict solitary confinement. During that time I had no contact whatsoever with the outside world and for years was denied books and papers. It was then that I realised how important it was to keep my mind active and alert in order to maintain both physical and mental health."

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