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32 years experience working with children and young adults, workforce, systems levels

Member of the Youth Justice Board

Independent Consultant - Wholehearted Learning

Co-opted National Committee Member - 'engage in their future'

SEND/MITA Reviewer - London Leadership Strategy

Headteacher for 22 years;

6 in a mainstream school

16 in SEMH special schools - primary and secondary, day and residential

Experience of supporting and working in;

alternative provision, secure units, psychiatric secure, prison settings

British Schools Overseas Accredited Inspector

Experienced Additional Ofsted Inspector - 9 years

Medway Improvement Board - Ministry of Justice

ecf Uk Lead - Enhancing Children's Learning International Charity

CYP's Mental Health and Wellbeing 'Future in Mind' - Taskforce Member

Code of Practice - Taskforce Member



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Wholehearted Learning : Curious not Furious

Drawing out our inner detective!



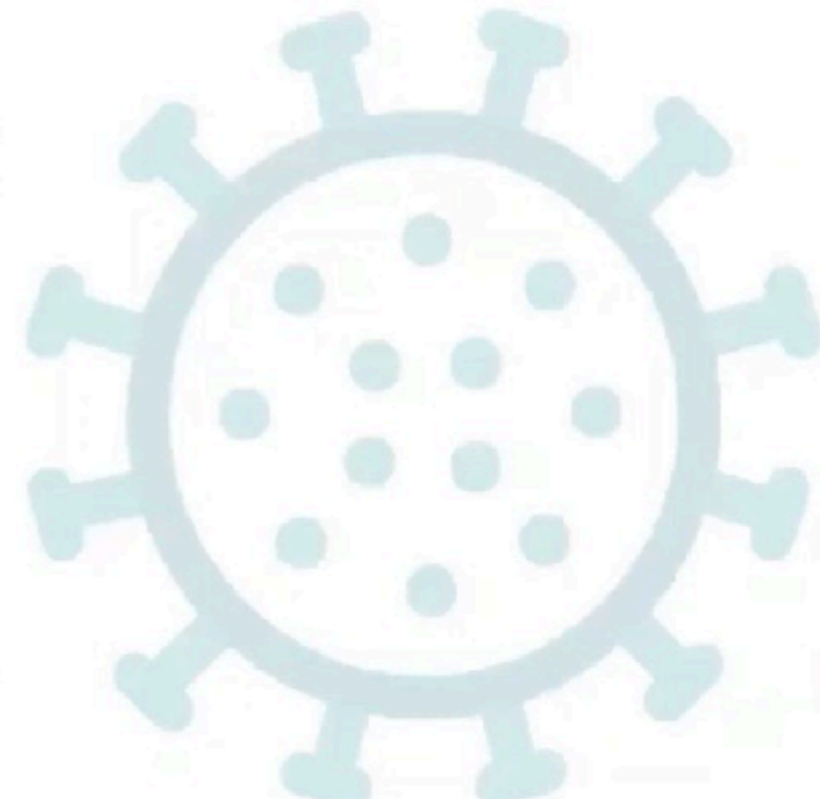
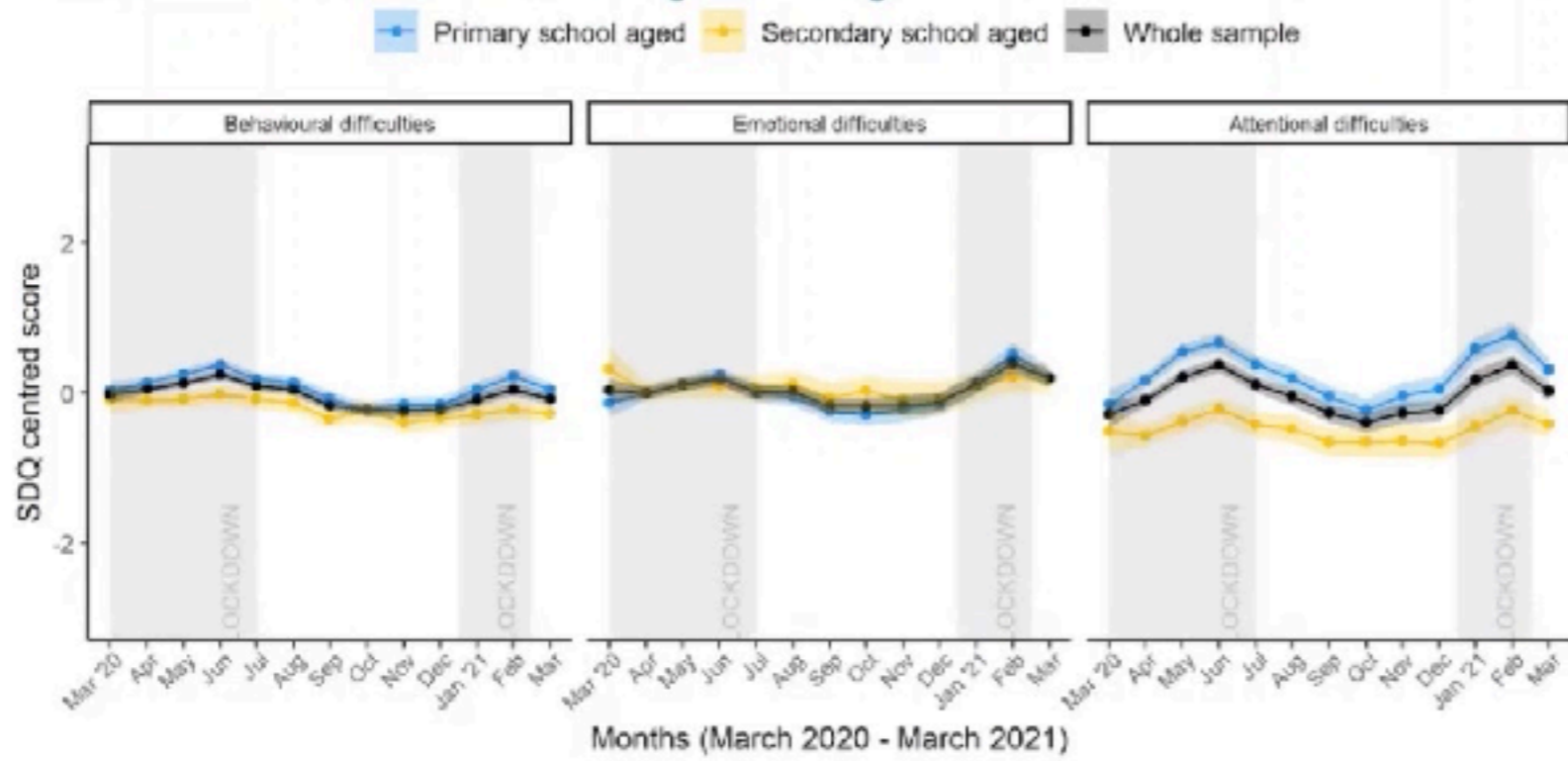


23rd March
Lockdown in
UK

www.cospaceoxford.org

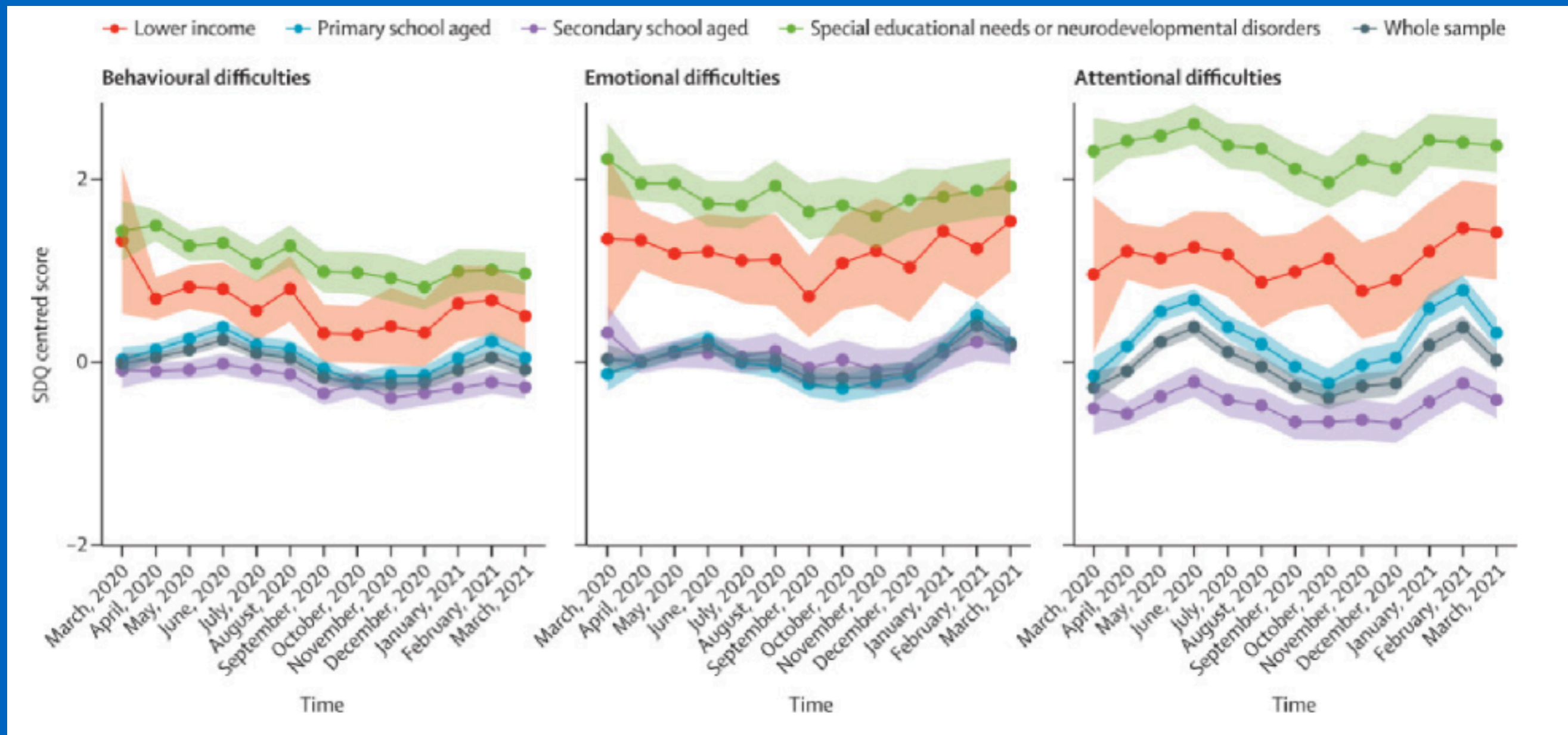
Changes in mental health symptoms over time: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

COSPACE study
COVID-19: Supporting Parents, Adolescents
and Children during Epidemics



Ultimately, the learnings from the Co-SPACE study are mostly not new. Economic hardship, special educational needs, neurodivergence, parental stress, and child and adolescent mental health are closely related.

However, the disruption caused by the pandemic has put these risks for child and adolescent mental health in stark relief. The findings illustrate that some groups of children appear to be less likely to bounce back which brings further cause for concern.



Co-Space Findings

DOWNLOAD REPORTS

Results are regularly made available. Our reports include findings from families where children and young people are aged 2-4 years (Co-SFYCE) and 4-16 years (Co-SPACE). We also produce supplementary reports in response to specific requests from policy makers and other organisations.



Report 11: Changes in children's mental health symptoms from March 2020 to June 2021

Date: 23 July 2021

Report Authors: Simona Skripkauskaitė, Adrienne Shum, Samantha Pearcey, Amy McCall, Polly Waite and Cathy Creswell

Key findings

Based on parent/carer reports within the Co-SPACE sample:

- On average, behavioural, emotional, and attentional difficulties decreased as COVID-19 related restrictions eased from February to April 2021. They remained relatively stable between April and June (the month-to-month change was not statistically significant).
- The decrease in symptoms since February was especially pronounced for primary school aged children (4-10 years old).
- On average, children with SEN/ND and those from low-income households have not shown this post-lockdown recovery and have continued to have elevated mental health symptoms.



My philosophy and approach



A **systemic** approach including the whole community to ensure **authentic Inclusion**.

To **understand** the needs of all, and **see through behaviour** knowing that it is a **communication** of need.

To put the **social, emotional and mental health** of all involved at the **heart** of the school.



To ensure a **true** sense of **belonging**.

To enable **achievement** for **all**.



To ignite **energy**, facilitate **fun** and make **laughter** infectious!

It takes a whole village to raise a child.
Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) Proverb

Parents/Carers and Local Community



Living and breathing the shared vision; hearing the voices of all

- ▶ Integral to school improvement planning, outlining roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, creating action plans.
- ▶ Drive, focus and emotional connection to achieve ambitions, clarity of expectations.
- ▶ A consistent approach and language, non-negotiable.
- ▶ Displayed throughout the year, shared with all, a constant reminder.
- ▶ Opportunity to reflect on what has 'Gone before' – walking the PATH.





ACE Study

- Decade long - 17,000 people involved.
- Looked at effects of adverse childhood experiences over the lifespan.
- Largest study ever done on this subject



The ACE study revealed irrefutable evidence showing that childhood experiences are the most powerful determinants of who we become as adults.

And that traumatic childhood experiences – when unaddressed – have a significant graded relationship to the development of the most troublesome health, mental health and social problems of today

Attachment aware, trauma informed approaches, why so important???

ABUSE



Physical



Emotional



Sexual

NEGLECT



Physical



Emotional

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION



Mental Illness



Mother treated violently



Divorce



Incarcerated Relative



Substance Abuse

Positive answer to any questions for each type of ACE counts as one to create the ACE Score

The higher the ACE Score, the greater the likelihood of :

- Severe and persistent emotional problems
- Health risk behaviours
- Serious social problems
- Adult disease and disability
- High health and mental health care costs
- Poor life expectancy

4 ACEs - Life span reduction of 10 years

6 ACEs - Life span reduction of 20 years

Consideration of ACEs is therefore crucial to thinking about how to improve the lives of children and young people, to support better transitions into adulthood, and achieve good outcomes for all.

Our own experiment.....

Exploring our own stress regulation system



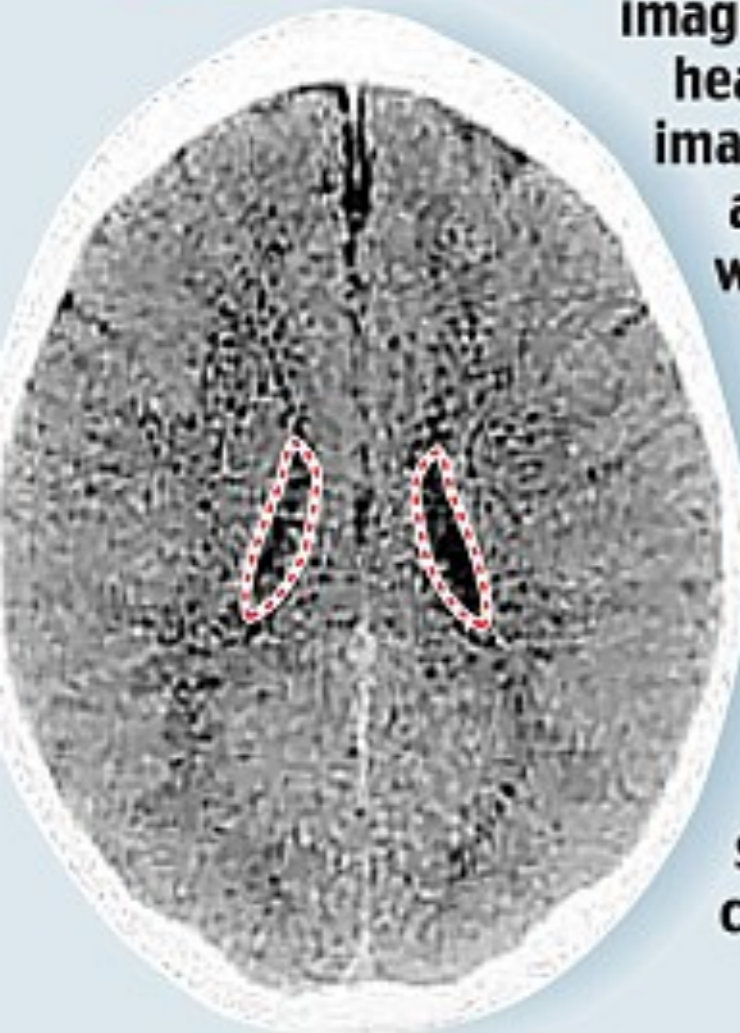
a - What are your sensations - what is happening in your body that indicates that things are not ok?

b - What are your feelings/emotions - what is the emotional or felt reaction that accompanies these sensations?

c - What are your immediate behaviours - what would others around you see in your behaviour (external manifestation of emotions/feelings)

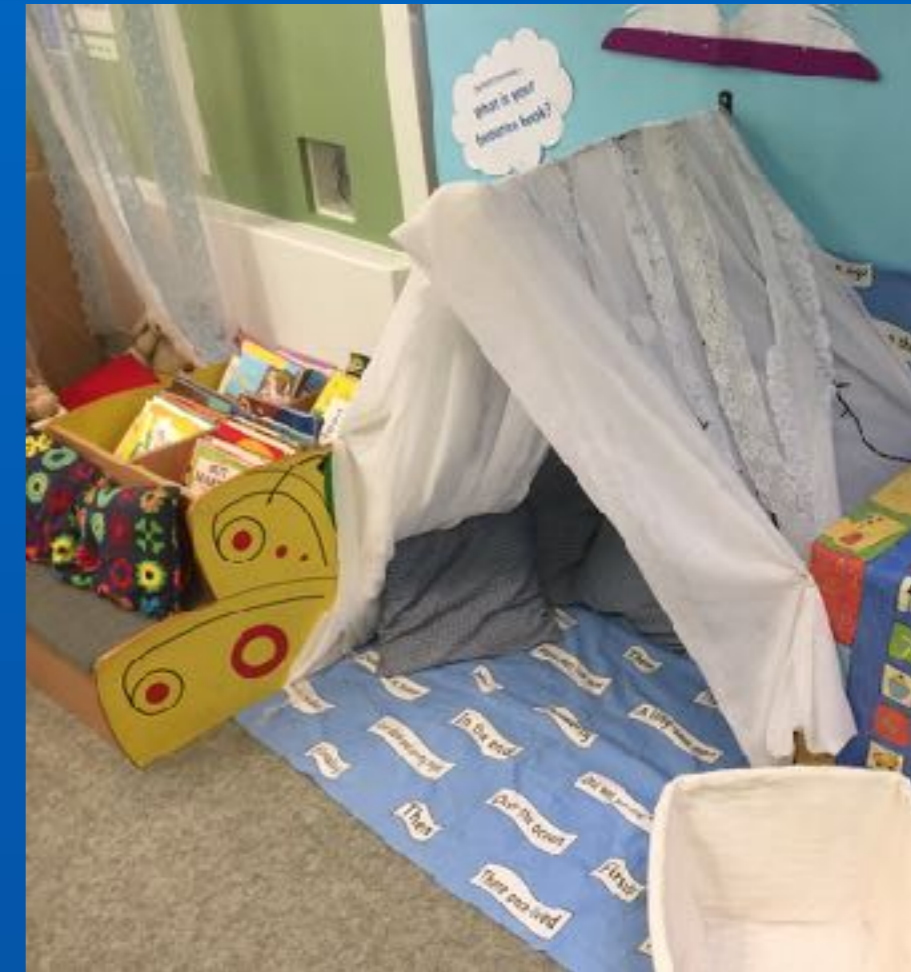
Now, consider how you might regain control and take appropriate actions

NORMAL



These are the brains of two three-year-old children. The image on the left is from a healthy child while the image on the right is from a Romanian orphan who suffered severe sensory deprivation. The right brain is smaller and has enlarged ventricles - holes in the centre of the brain. It also shows a shrunken cortex - the brain's outer layer.

EXTREME NEGLECT



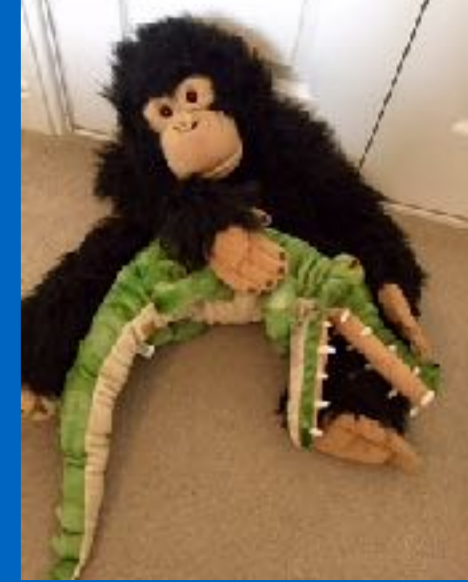
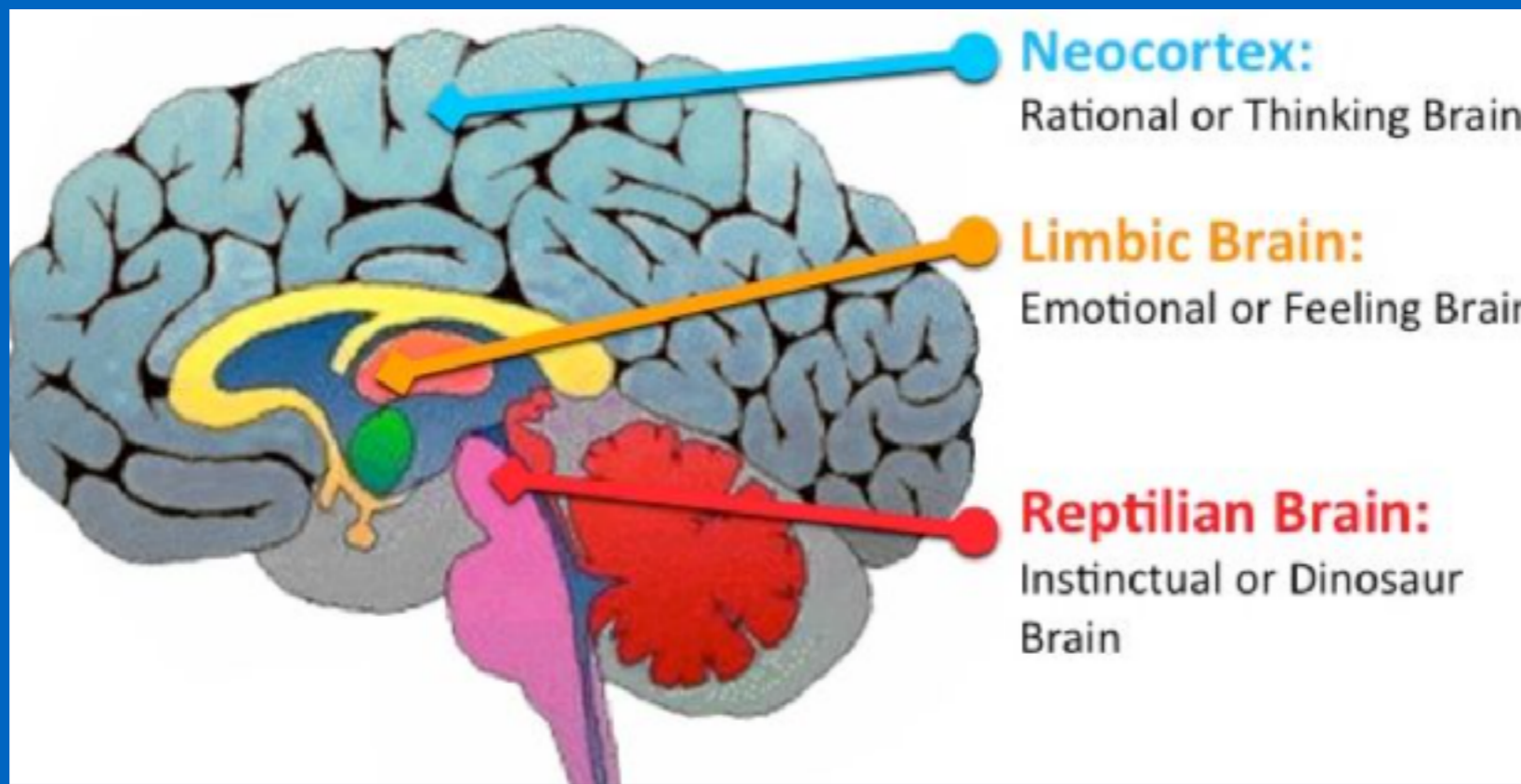
Studies of over 1,000 abused and neglected children found that children who were rarely touched or spoken to had brains 20-30% smaller than most children their age.

In some cases the brains of children from deprived environments resemble the brains of Alzheimer's patients.

Animals raised in zoos have brains that are 20-30% smaller than animals raised in the wild.



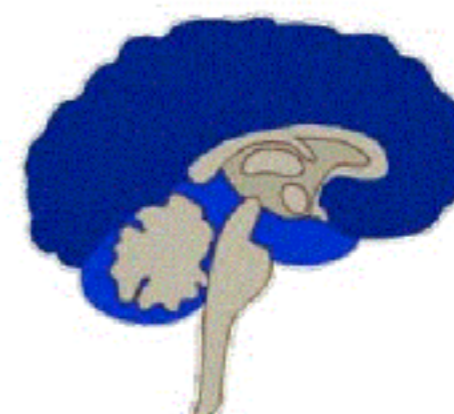
0-6 months
Physical
regulation



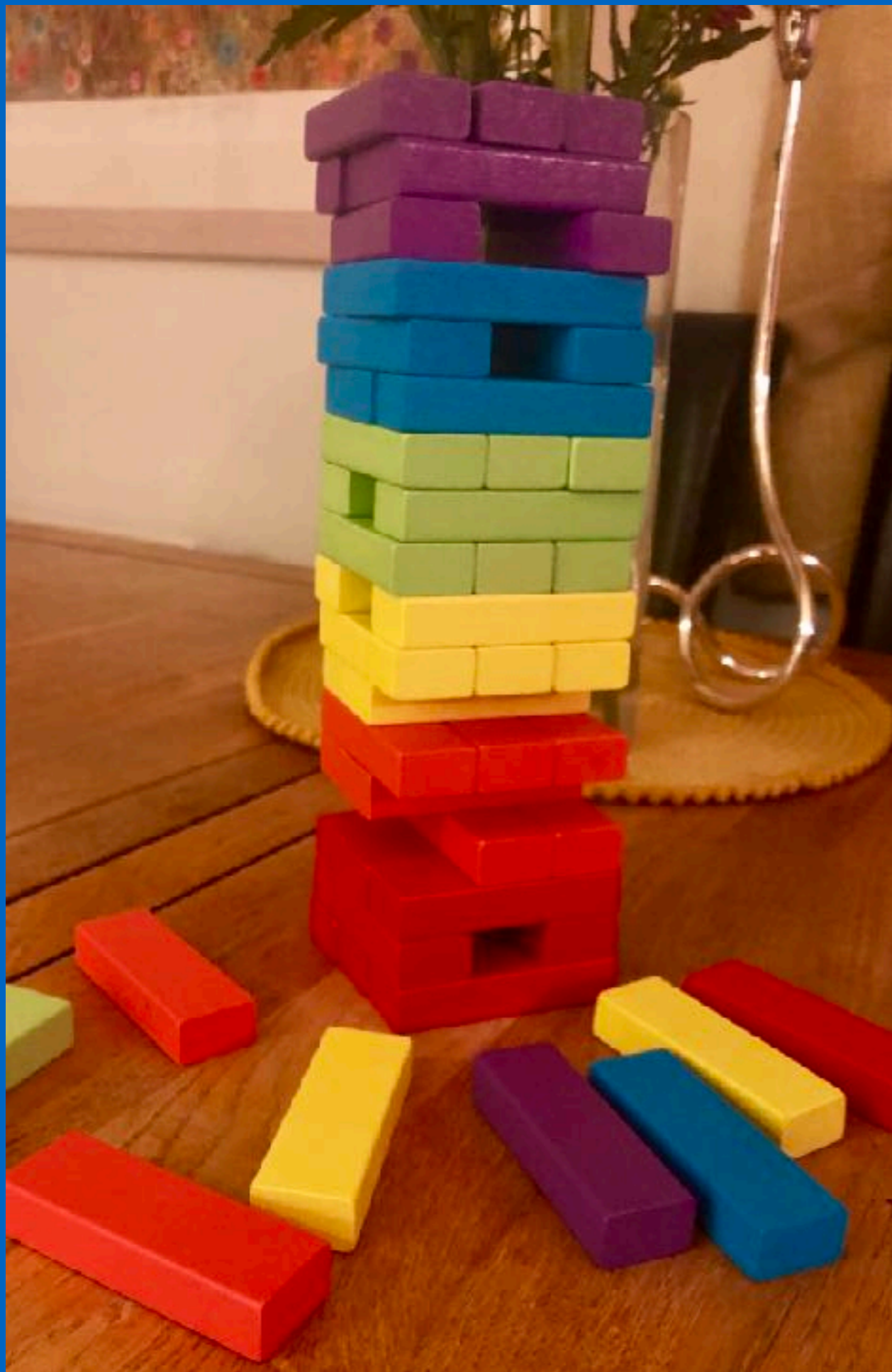
6 - 18 months
Emotional
Regulation

Triune Brain Theory

Lizard Brain	Mammal Brain	Human Brain
Brain stem & cerebellum	Limbic System	Neocortex
Fight or flight	Emotions, memories, habits	Language, abstract thought, imagination, consciousness
Autopilot	Decisions	Reasons, rationalizes



18 - 36 months
Cognitive
Regulation



Child Development

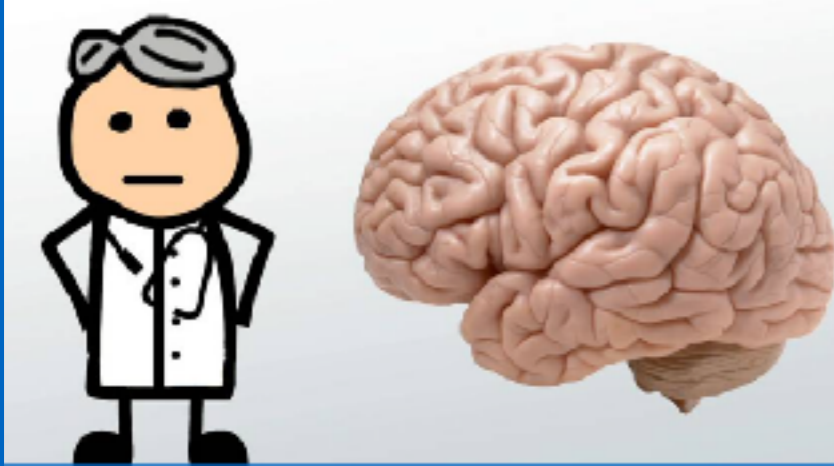
Model developed by Jean
Illsley Clarke & Connie
Dawson

'Gaps or holes' in our emotional development

“The stress response systems originate in the brain stem and as long as these systems are poorly regulated they will disrupt and dysregulate the higher parts of the brain.”

Perry B (2006).

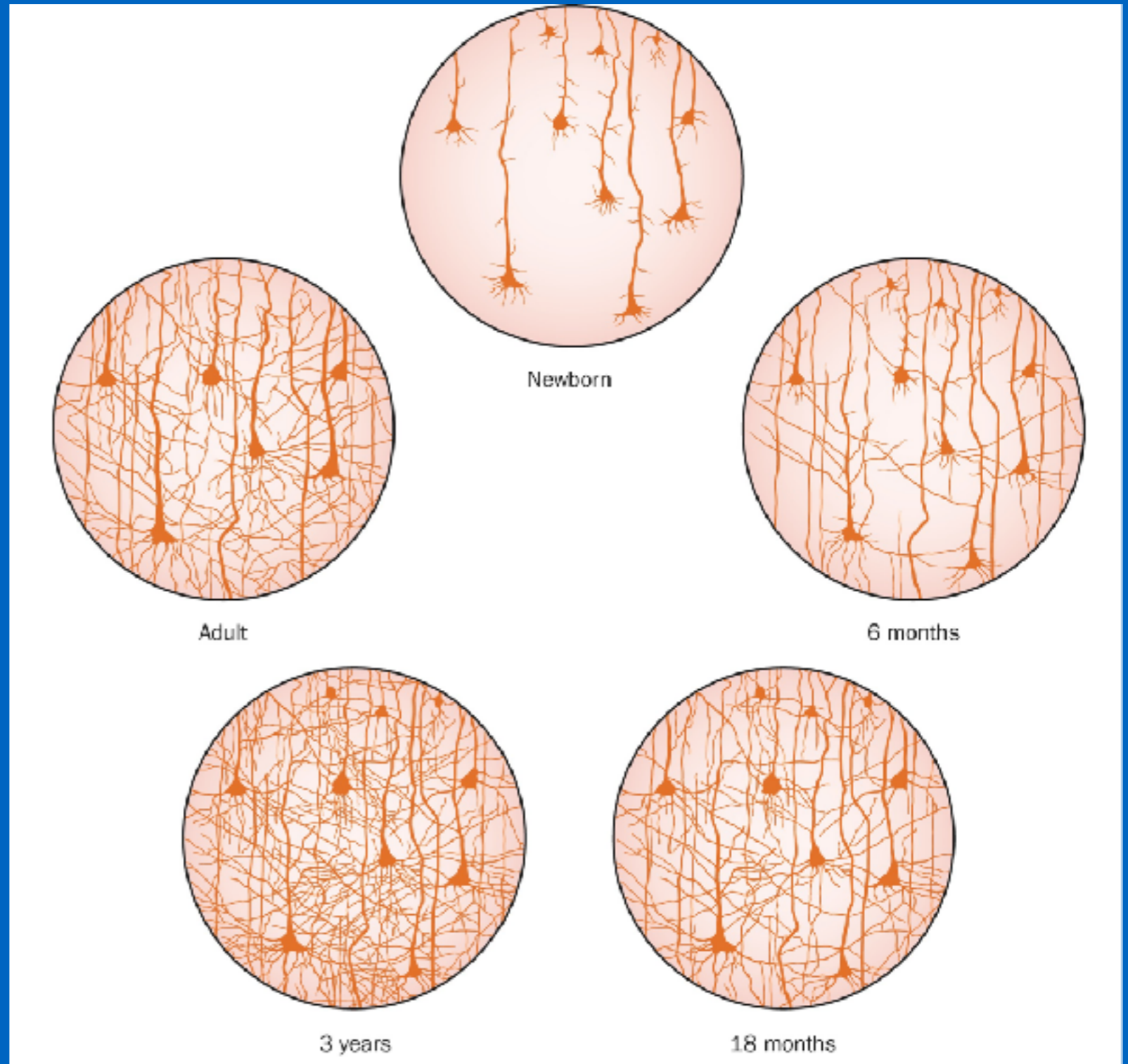
- Every one of us is shaped by our experiences.
- Life happens: separations, illness, mental health difficulties, poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, racial harassment, parent in prison, etc.
- Events like these get in the way of adults being as fully available and responsive to their children as their children need for healthy development.
- This can create 'gaps': children may miss opportunities to experience the age-appropriate care needed for positive development.
- They can facilitate opportunities to fill the gaps and rewire the brain by creating new neuronal pathways.



The development
of neural networks!

The brain is neuro
plastic.

There is huge
hope and optimism



Left Hemisphere

- Detail
- Sequence
- Analytical
- Reflection

Right Hemisphere

- Emotion
- Language
- Image
- Symbol

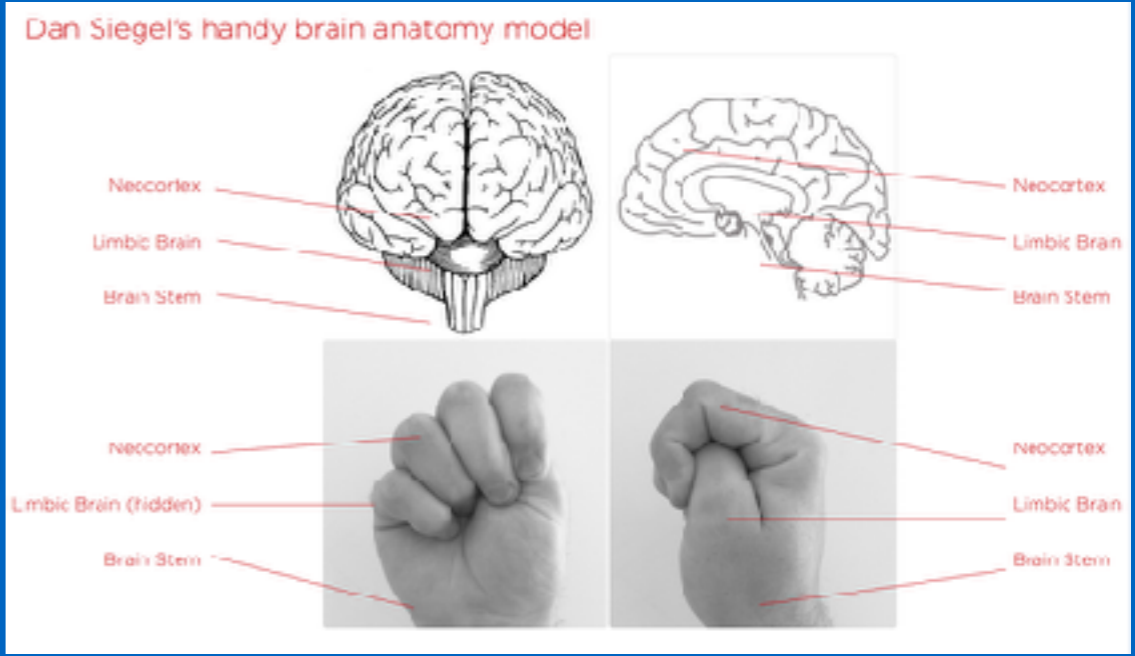
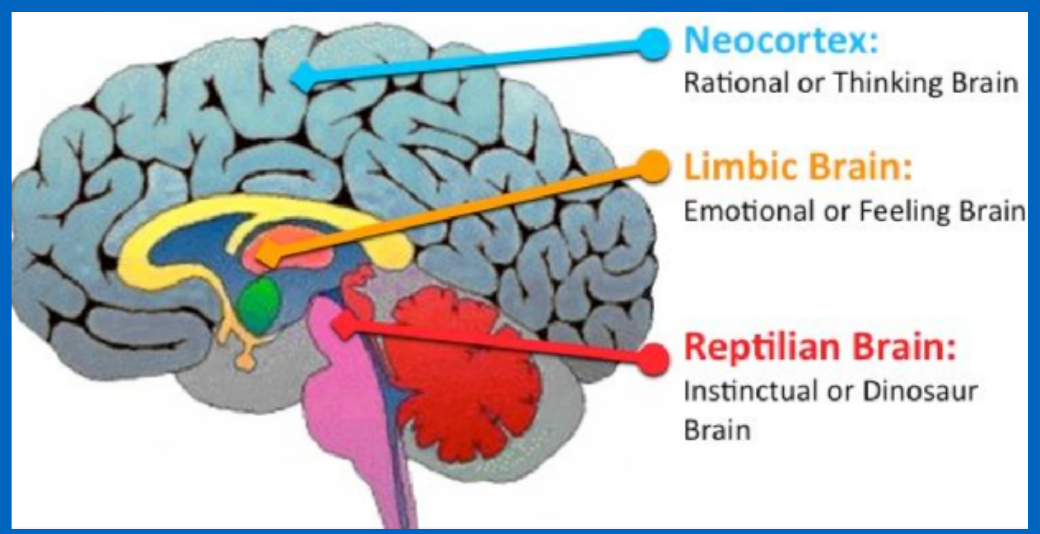


Cortex - Cognitive/Thinking Brain

Limbic System - Emotional/Mammalian Brain

Brain Stem- Reptilian Brain
 Bodily Functions - heart, lungs, stomach.
 Poly vagal System links to good physical health and immune system

Key structures in the brain involved in the brain and the stress response system. Teaching this to children and adults can be really helpful when looking at where are we behaving from?



Name it to tame it...staying connected!

Our stress-regulation system involves:

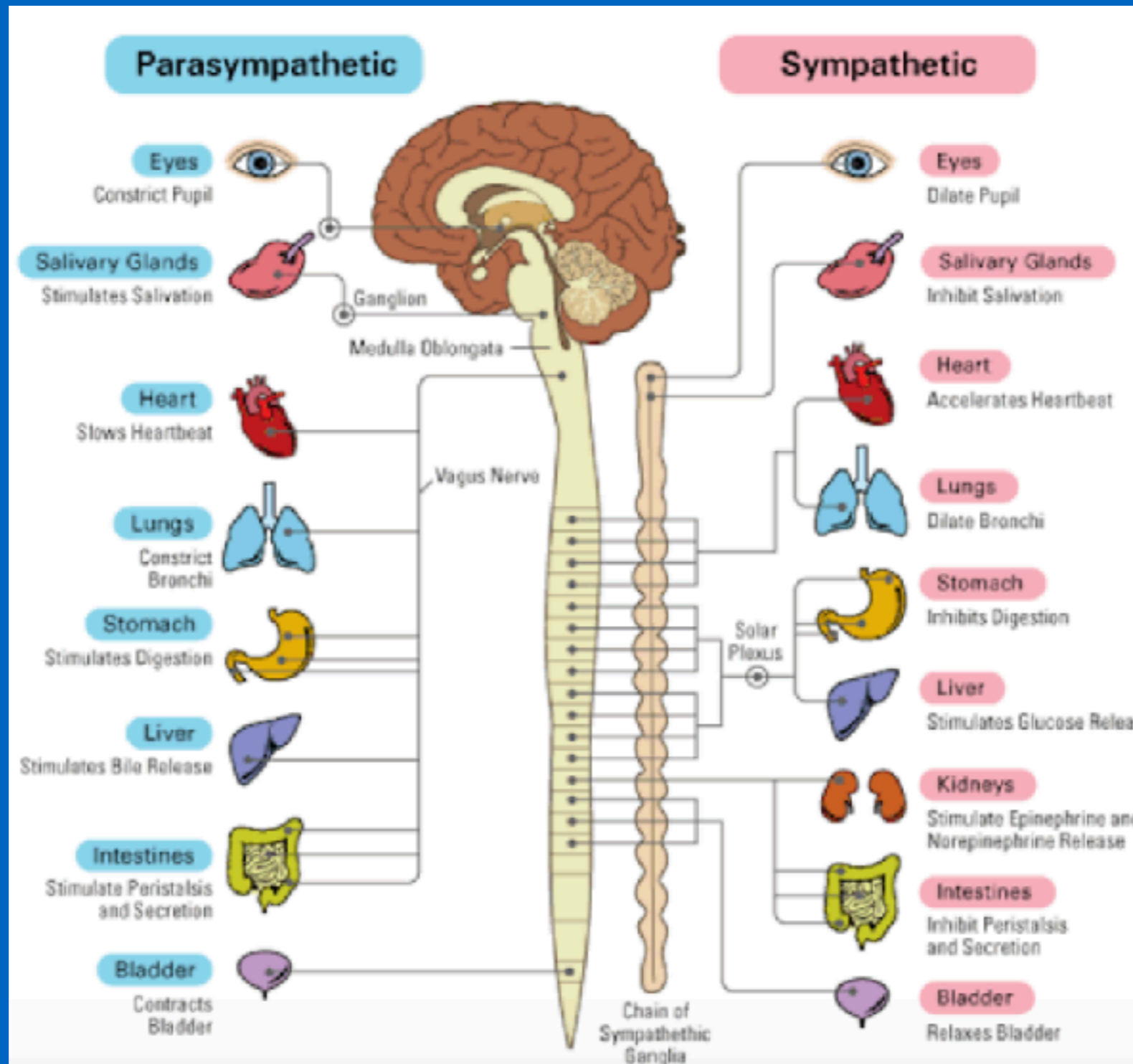


- brain
- aspects of nervous system
- aspects of endocrine (hormone) system

Our stress-regulation system is vital to our survival and is activated by our primitive survival circuits: rage, fear and separation distress.

The **autonomic** nervous system

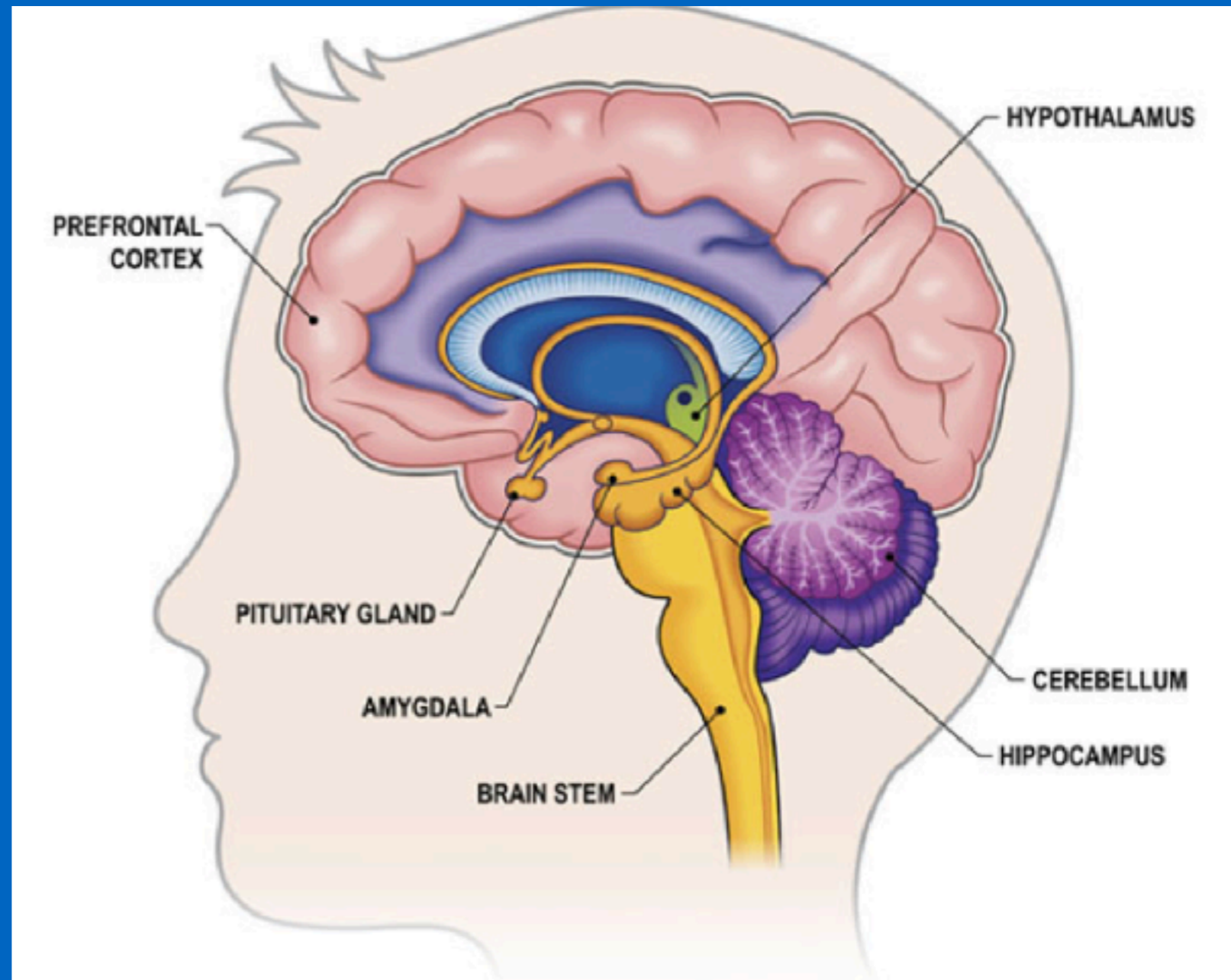
The **parasympathetic nervous system** – acts like a **brake**, slowing us down to rest, digest and connect, or in extreme situations to shut the body down in the freeze response.



The **sympathetic nervous system** – acts like an **accelerator**, preparing us for action, such as fight or flight

Neuroception and the amygdala

Amygdala The Meerkats of the brain



Porges has coined the term neuroception to 'describe how neural circuits distinguish whether situations or people are safe, dangerous or life-threatening.'

If the amygdala detects signs of safety (familiar people, positive eye contact, smiles, kind eyes, open body language, prosodic voice, etc), it activates the social engagement system; if the amygdala detects danger (informed by past experience), it triggers the fight/flight response; if it the amygdala perceives life threat, it triggers the freeze response.

Our brain's appraisal of the level of threat/safety in our internal or external environment takes place largely outside of our conscious awareness.

Which response we default to when under stress depends on our personal history. When people have experienced traumatic experiences in which they have been overwhelmed and unable to act to protect themselves, they are likely to have freeze as their default response to stress.

When it senses threat, real or imagined, it surges the body with hormones and adrenaline to make the body strong, fast and powerful.

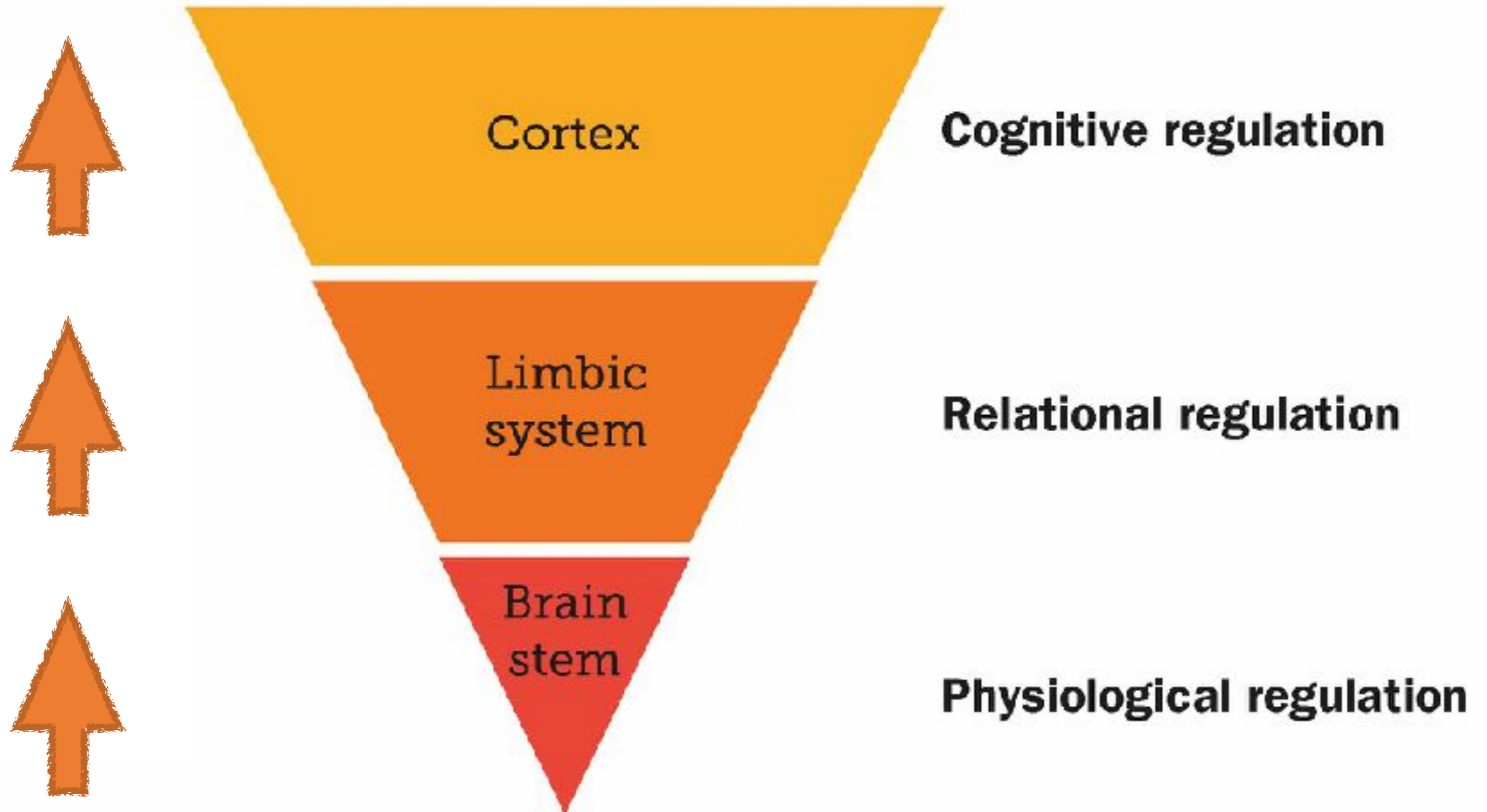
This is the fight or flight response and it has been keeping us alive for thousands of years.

It's what strong, healthy brains are meant to do.

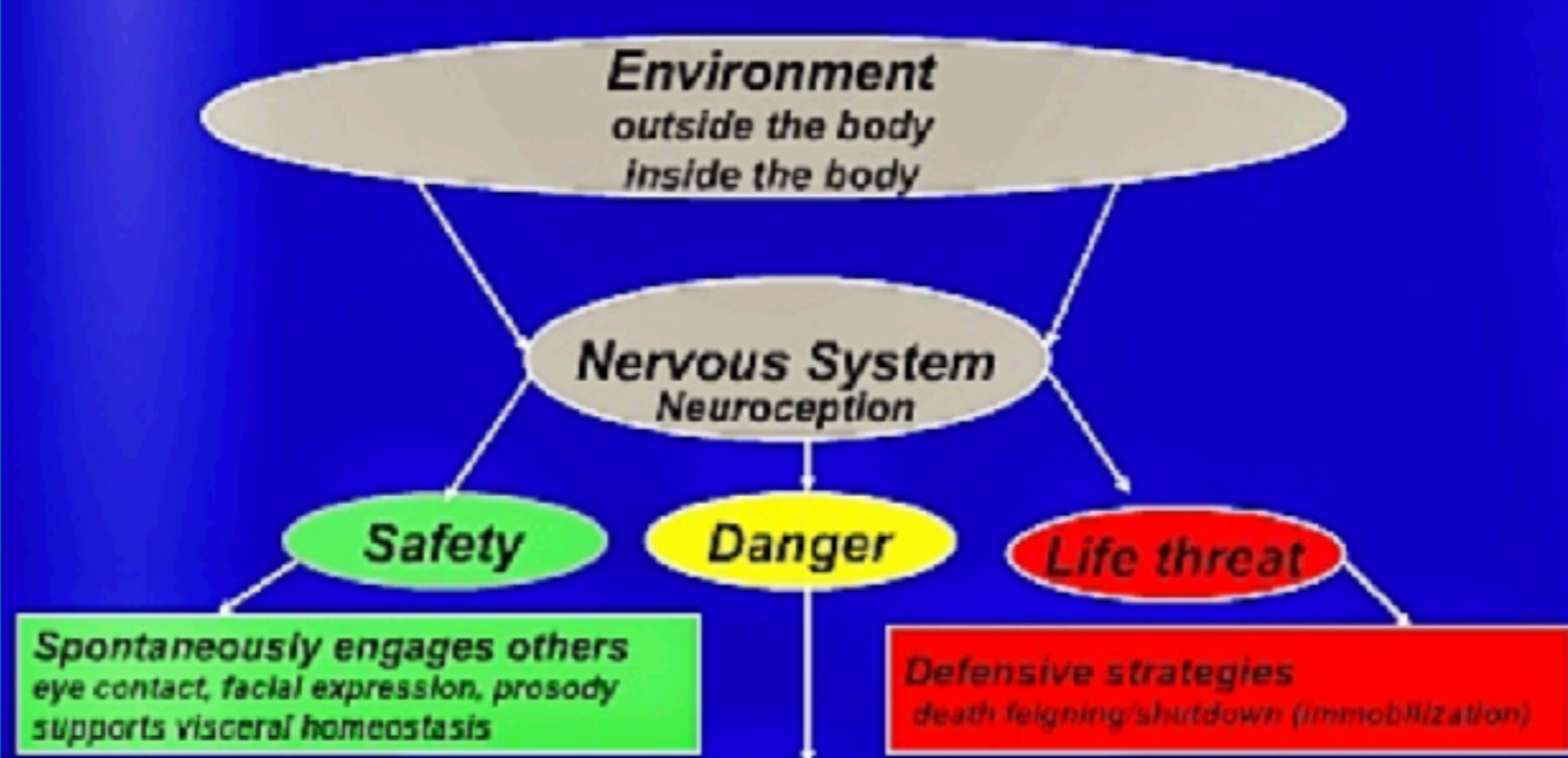
*The fight or flight response happens **automatically and instantaneously**, sending neuro-chemicals surging through our bodies, priming them for fight, flight, freeze.*

It is what has enabled our survival to date!

Three levels of stress regulation



Social engagement system



Safety - Social engagement system

- Regulated by parasympathetic nervous system (myelinated vagal system)
- Optimum level of arousal
- Steady heart rate and breathing
- Relaxed, calm and responsive
- Connect to others through eye contact, facial expression, vocalisation



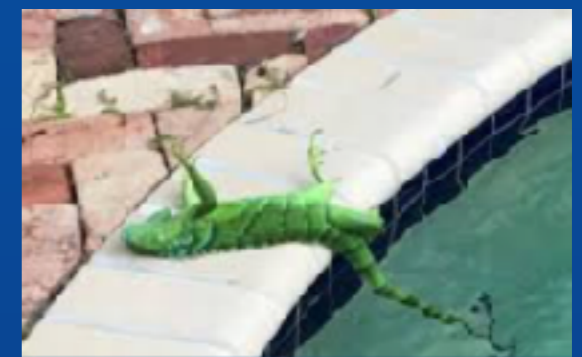
Danger - Fight/flight response

- Regulated by sympathetic nervous system
- Mobilisation
- Hyper-arousal
- Racing heart and fast breathing
- Alert, tense, angry or fearful
- Defensive towards others



Life Threat - Freeze response

- Regulated by parasympathetic nervous system (unmyelinated vagal system)
- Immobilisation
- Hypo-arousal
- Reduced heart rate and shallow breathing
- Numb, dissociated, collapsed
- Withdrawn and shut-down from others



A glowing blue brain with text overlays. The brain is rendered in a translucent, wireframe-like style with a bright blue glow. The text is white and positioned in three distinct areas: top right, middle left, and bottom right.

Leads to responses, behaviour,
frequently autonomic, automatic,
survival.....

Trigger feelings, sometimes
unconscious related to sensory
memory.....

Our experiences, the
environment
real or imagined.....

Anxiety and stress

How does the environment we create feel for some of our children - when in our care?



If stress in early life has disrupted the child's development, their stress response will be poorly regulated.

The child's brain is like a trigger-happy alarm system, wired to fire at any sensory stimulus that is reminiscent of an earlier threatening situation: a voice tone, a sudden movement, a smell that triggers unconscious memories. The survival response is triggered that propels the child into fight, flight or freeze.

When the child feels threatened, they have limited access to thinking because their lower brain regions (brain stem and limbic system) are dominant and they are surviving the best way they can.

Learning is therefore blocked until regulation happens and for this, the child is dependent on the presence of a self regulated/regulating adult.

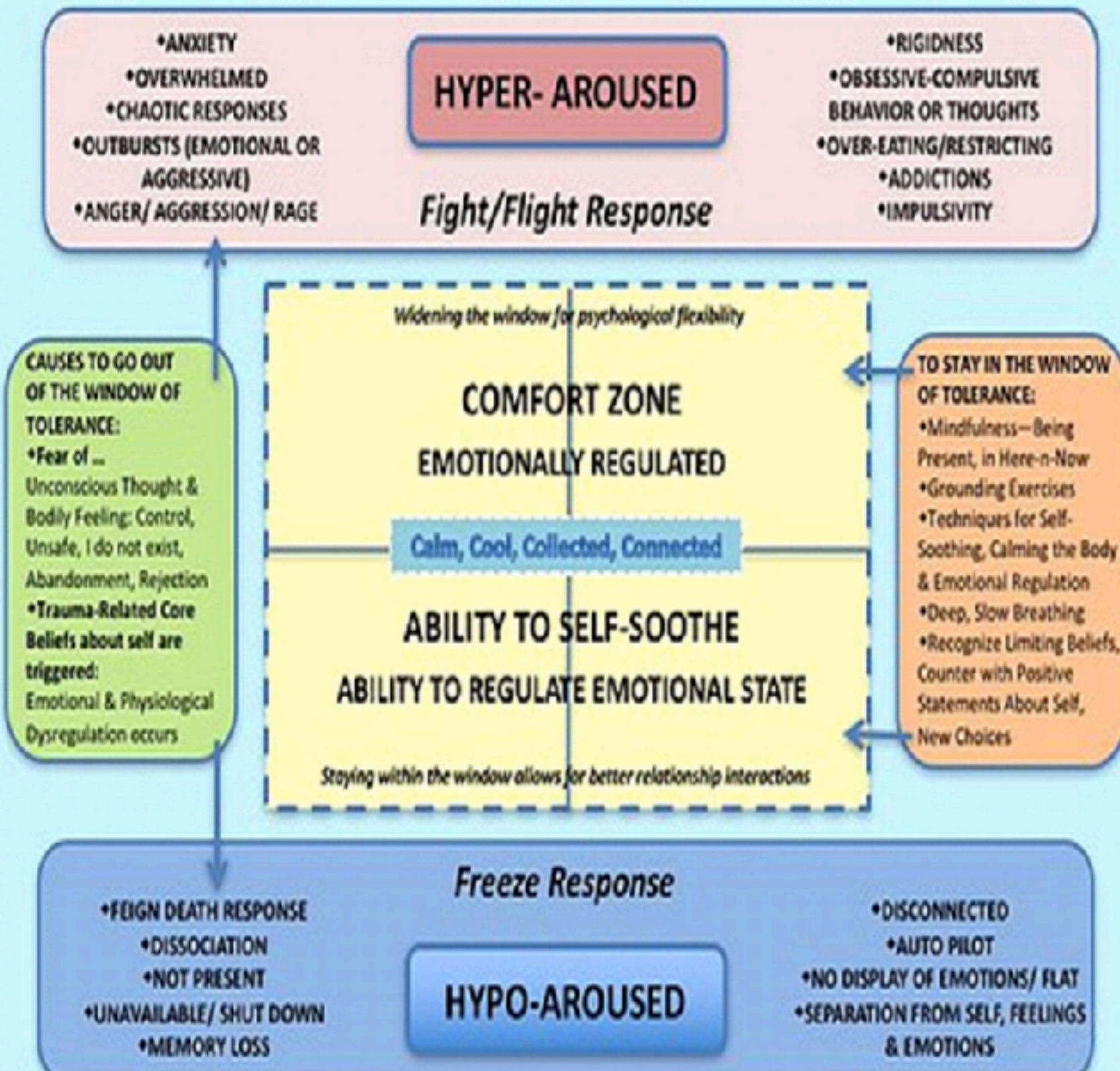
Our window of tolerance is a state of **optimal arousal**.

In this state:

- we feel safe and at ease
- we feel comfortable with everything that is going on around us and within us
- our parasympathetic nervous system is regulating our breathing, heart rate and digestion
- we're able to engage socially with others, to integrate emotions/ experiences, and to think and learn
- We're not triggered into fight/flight or freeze.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE- TRAUMA/ANXIETY RELATED RESPONSES:

Widening the Comfort Zone for Increased Flexibility



The window of tolerance.....extending the window of tolerance - developing resilience



In Japan there is an art form called kintsukuroi which means “to repair with gold”. When a ceramic pot or bowl would break, the artisan would put the pieces together again using gold or silver lacquer to create something stronger, more beautiful, than it was before.



The breaking is not something to hide. It does not mean that the work of art is ruined or without value because it is different than what was planned. Kintsukuroi is a way of living that embraces every flaw and imperfection. Every crack is part of the history of the object and it becomes more beautiful, precisely because it had been broken.

Anger and rage

- Rage is a massive disorganisation of self. It is an uncontrollable need to discharge tension.
- Rage erupts through biting, hitting, kicking, screaming, punching, shouting, etc.
- The child usually has **NO CHOICE** when he/she hits out to discharge unbearable levels of tension.
- Punishment is inappropriate for a child who is not able to control him/herself and is already experiencing acute pain.
- Self-control/willpower are not available.



Common triggers for anger - stress response!

- Frustration of anticipated reward
- Being or feeling shamed or humiliated
- Frustration of autonomy
- Powerlessness
- Loss or unwanted change
- Isolation – being alone for too long
- Perceived injustice: “It’s not fair”
- Feeling invaded or hurt in some way.



Effects of stress on learning

When our brain perceives danger or life threat in the environment, we lose access to our social engagement system and are triggered into our fight/flight or freeze responses.

When we are in these states, learning is difficult because:

- our focus is on survival
- we find it harder to attune to the human voice
- we are less receptive to the social engagement behaviours of others
- our thinking is chaotic or confused
- it is difficult to tolerate and integrate feelings.



State-dependent shifts result in corresponding changes in a host of brain-mediated functions, including problem-solving capacity, style of thinking (or cognition), and the sphere of concern - Bruce Perry 2021

“State”	CALM	ALERT	ALARM	FEAR	TERROR
Dominant Brain Area	Cortex Default Mode Network	Cortex (Limbic)	Limbic and Brainstem	Brainstem	Brainstem
Adaptive “Option” Arousal	Reflect (Create)	Flock (Hyper-vigilance)	Freeze	Flight	Fight
Adaptive “Option” Dissociation	Reflect (Daydream)	Avoid	Comply	Dissociate (Paralysis/ catatonia)	Faint (Collapse)
Cognition	Abstract (Creative)	Concrete (Routine)	Emotional	Reactive	Reflexive
Functional IQ	120 - 100	110 - 90	100 - 80	90 - 70	80 - 60

In general, the more anxious, threatened someone feels, the more control of functioning shifts from higher systems (cortex) to lower systems (brainstem).
Fear and anxiety shut down many cortical systems.

The key that unlocks the door to learning

Positive human interaction

- Creates the conditions of safety needed for activation of the social engagement system
- Promotes good physiological regulation
- Integrates brain systems by developing the connections between right and left hemispheres, and between the frontal cortex and lower brain structures
- Buffers the negative effects of stress on the nervous system
- Supports the immune system
- Significantly reduces the impact of ACE's!



“Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives.” *B.V.D. Kolk*

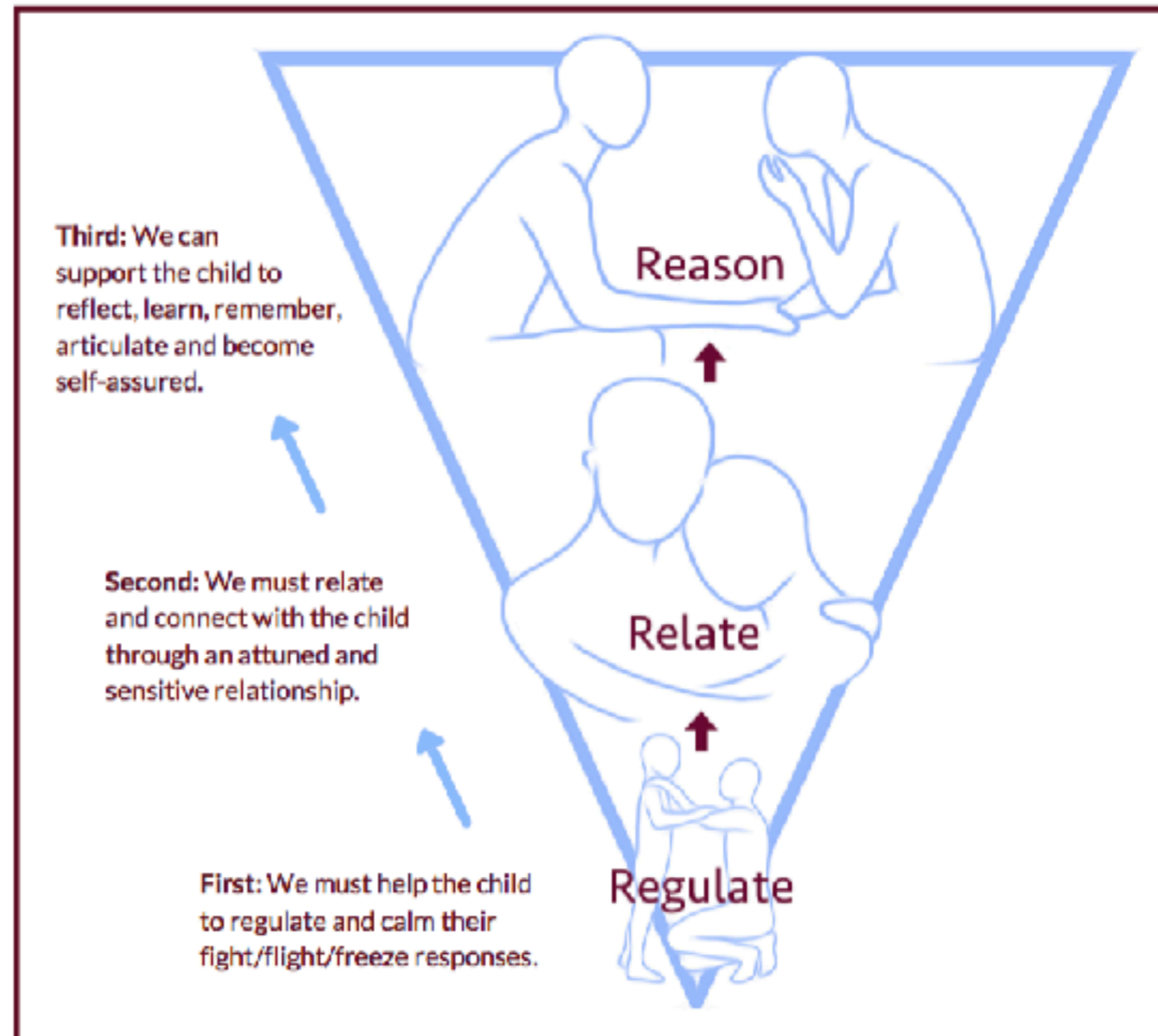
“There is no more effective neurobiological intervention than a safe relationship, the relationship works to bring the brain back into regulation.”

(Bruce Perry, PhD, MD, researcher & child psychiatrist)



The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain

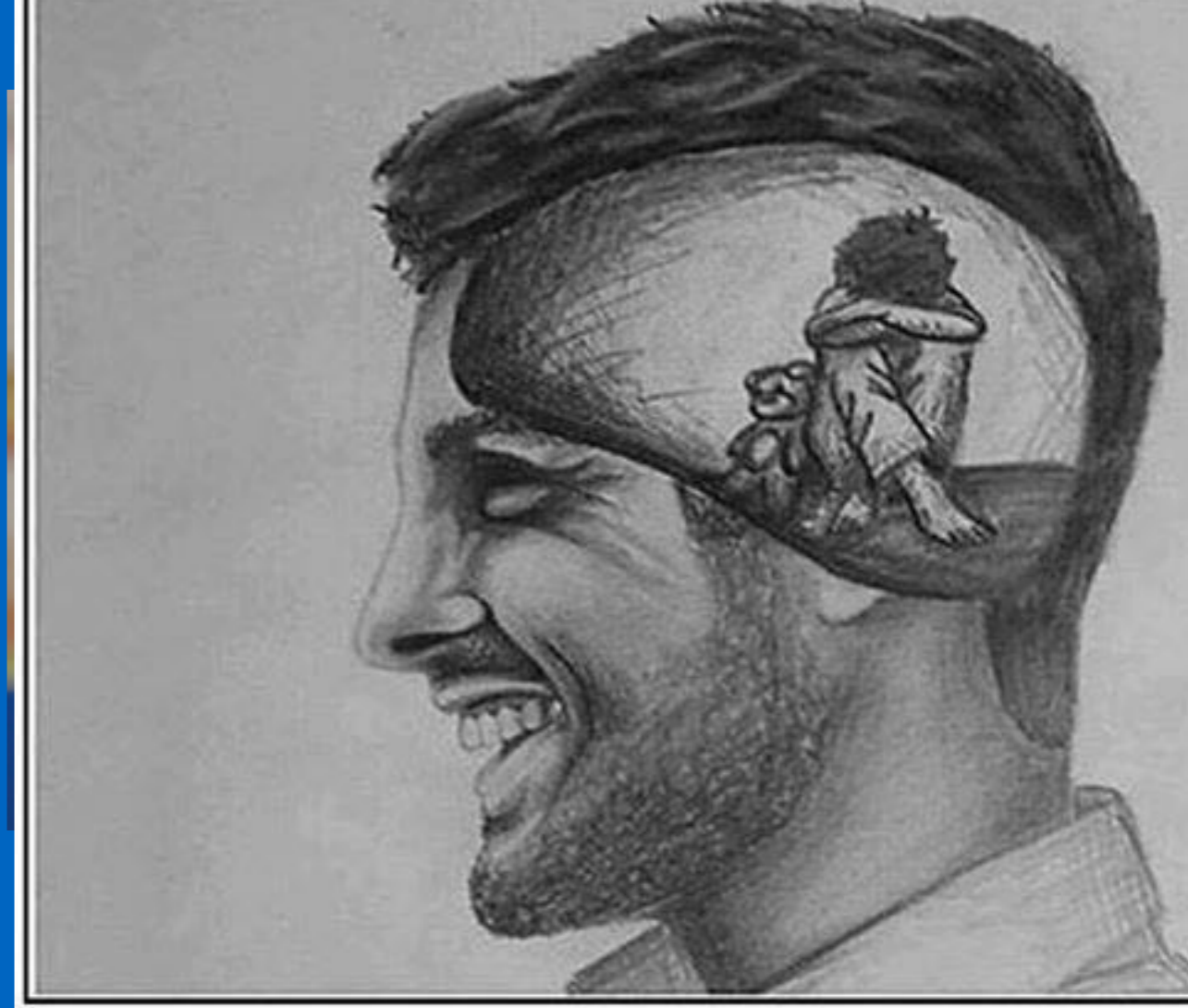
Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable child to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence.



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

The Weather.....

“I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration, I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal.



In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis is escalated or de-escalated, and a person is humanised or de-humanised.”

[Haim G. Ginott, *Teacher and Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers*](#)



Having the courage to sit with vulnerability and discomfort



We desperately need adults who are committed to courageous, wholehearted approaches and who are self-aware enough to act with steadiness from their hearts and minds, rather than self protection, defensiveness, hurt and fear.

We also have to invest time attending to our own fears, feelings, and history or we'll find ourselves managing our own unproductive behaviours. As daring leaders, we have to stay curious about our own blind spots and how to pull those issues into view, and we need to commit to helping the people we serve find their blind spots in a way that's safe and supportive.

Unsteady adults, will not create the secure base required for unsteady, anxious, frightened children and their families.

*And a final message.
Be kind.*

*We need to look after ourselves, and each other authentically,
support one another, reach out with empathy, compassion and kindness with
candour.*

*Endeavour to truly 'show up' be you, courageous in the vulnerability that we
know there are no experts in this situation.*

*We may well make mistakes, indeed we most definitely will not get it right all
the time, but we will venture through this together and will, together, find our
way through.*



Much love and all the very best,
Sharon

