



Supporting Your Child's Emotional Regulation

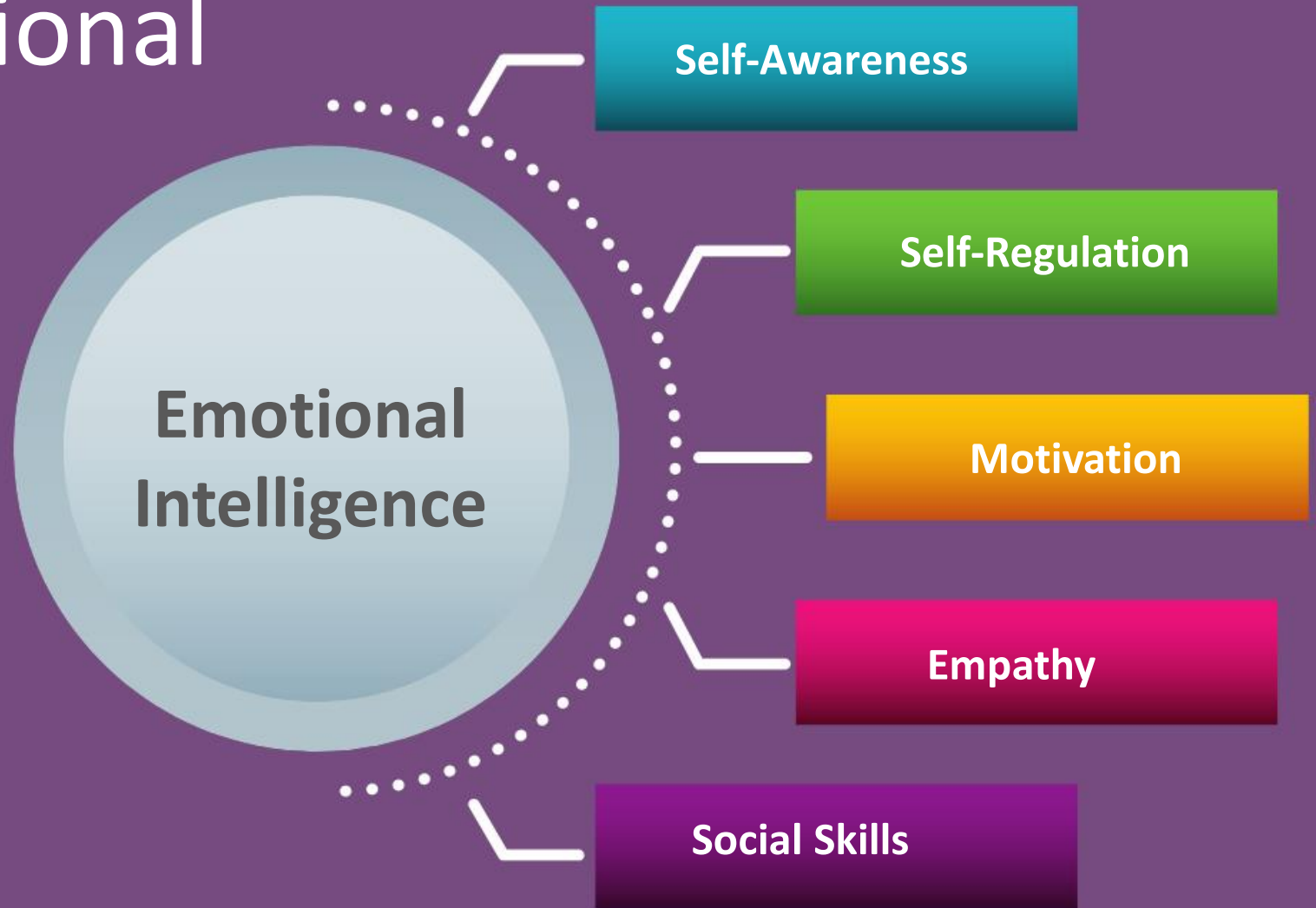
with Niki Green

'Emotional literacy is actually a better predictor of lifelong achievement than is conventional IQ. A person's IQ predicts only a small part of lifelong success – ranging from 4-20%.

Emotional intelligence on the other hand, predicts about 80-96% of a person's success in life.'

Jean Gross 2000

What is Emotional Intelligence?



Self-Awareness

- to have conscious knowledge of one's own character and feelings
- to understand your own emotions and their effect on your behaviour
- an understanding of our personal 'triggers'

Self-Regulation

- how you control and manage yourself and your emotions, thoughts and behaviours
- ability to manage your impulses

Self-regulation begins to develop when children are babies and into adulthood.

Motivation

- personal drive to improve and achieve
- commitment to achieving goals
- can be impacted by negative responses

Empathy

- to put yourself 'in someone else's shoes'
- the ability to experience someone else's emotions in a meaningful way.
- reacting to other's emotional responses appropriately – having the tools to physically and verbally express empathetic feelings

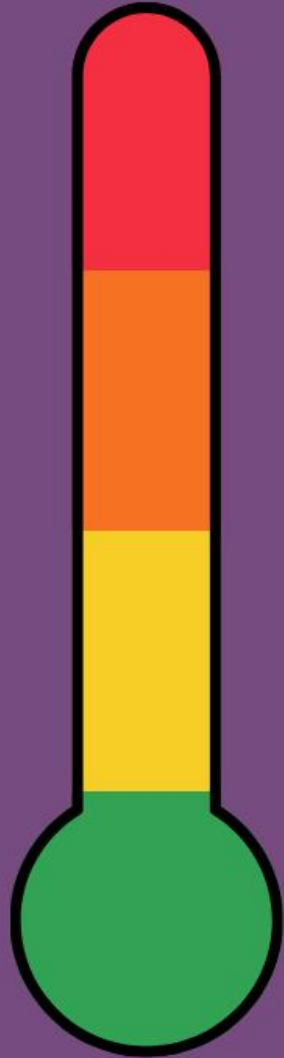
Social Skills

- Skills needed to handle and influence other people's emotions effectively
- only once you can understand and manage yourself and the feelings of others (empathy) then can you influence others
- Lego Therapy, friendship and social skills interventions to follow on from emotional regulation education.

What is Emotional Literacy?

A child who is emotionally literate...

- is aware of and can usually explain the feelings they are experiencing
- can usually understand what caused the feeling
- knows the best way to behave to deal with the feeling
- can take other people's feelings into account in any situation (empathy)



Emotional Regulation

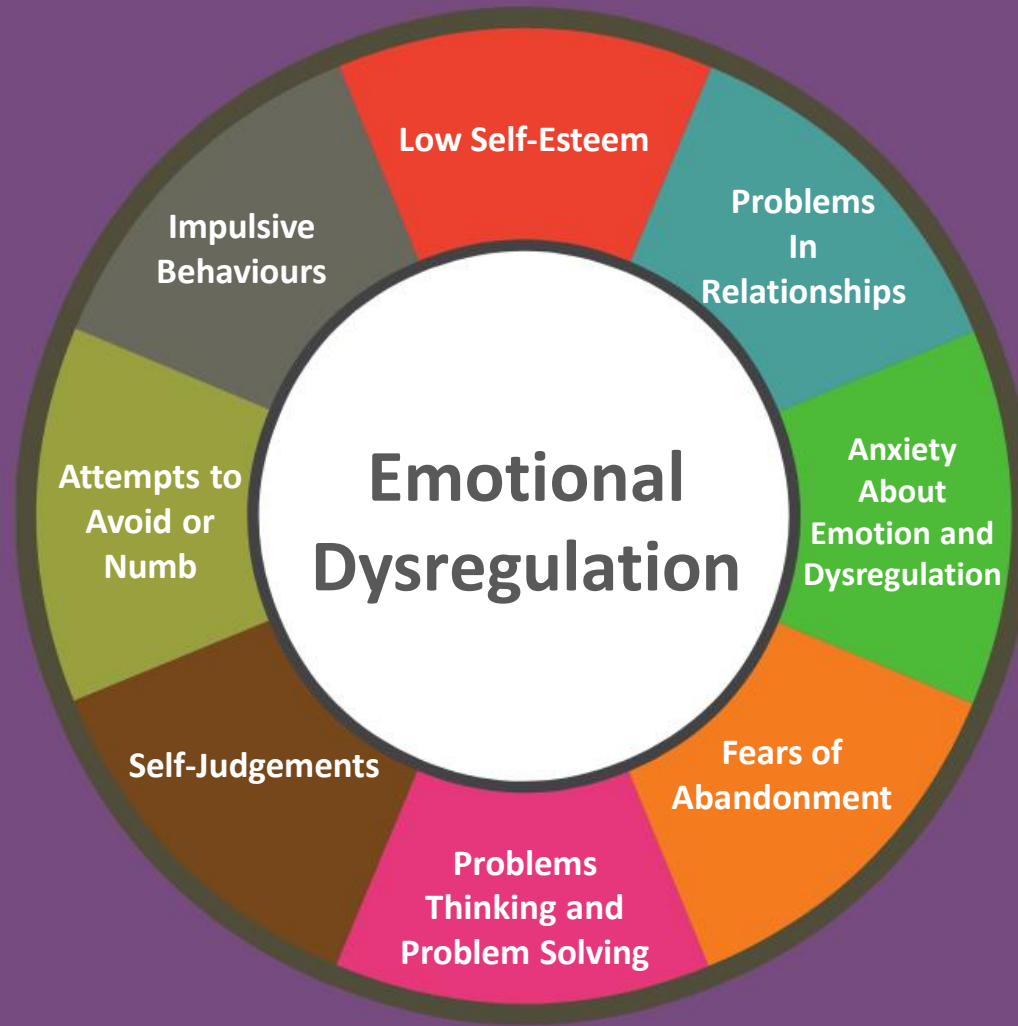
A child's ability to 'regulate' or manage his or her emotions — to express his or her feelings in constructive rather than impulsive or hurtful ways.

Emotional Regulation



We learn to **self-regulate** our nervous system by **consistent experiences with another** calm regulated nervous system, a trusted adult.

This is called **co-regulation**.





Emotional regulation means being able to think constructively about how to cope with feelings.

We want children to *have* their feelings, but not be overwhelmed by them — to feel discouraged but not give up; to feel anxious but not stay home; and to be excited but not get so carried away in their enthusiasm that they use poor judgment in making decisions.

Emotional Regulation is not fully developed until the age of 25

Research has found that adult and children's brains work differently. Adults think with the prefrontal cortex, the brain's rational part. This is the part of the brain that responds to situations with good judgment, self-awareness, empathy, and an awareness of consequences. Children process information with the amygdala, the emotional part.

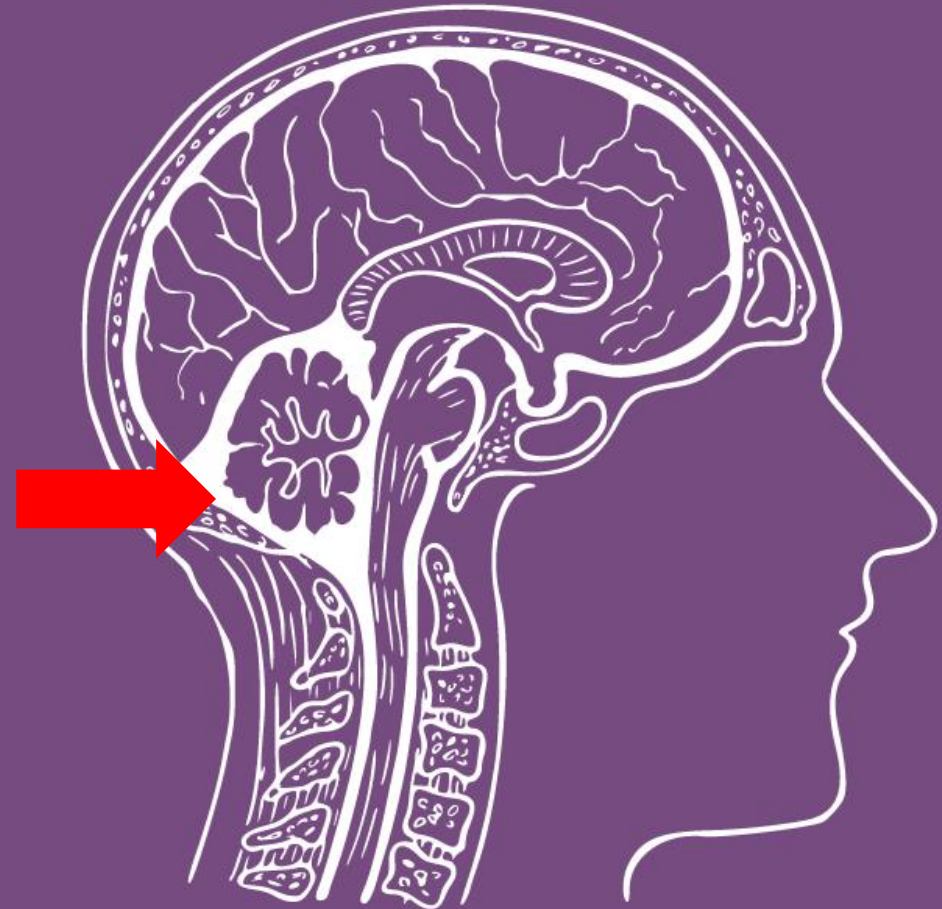
In children's brains, the connections between the emotional part of the brain and the decision-making centre are still developing.

That's why when children experience overwhelming emotional input, they cannot explain later what they were thinking. They weren't thinking as much as they were feeling.

The Primal or Reptilian Brain

Controls basic functions such as heart rate, breathing, digestion and sleeping. Wired for survival.

DEVELOPING from 5th week after conception

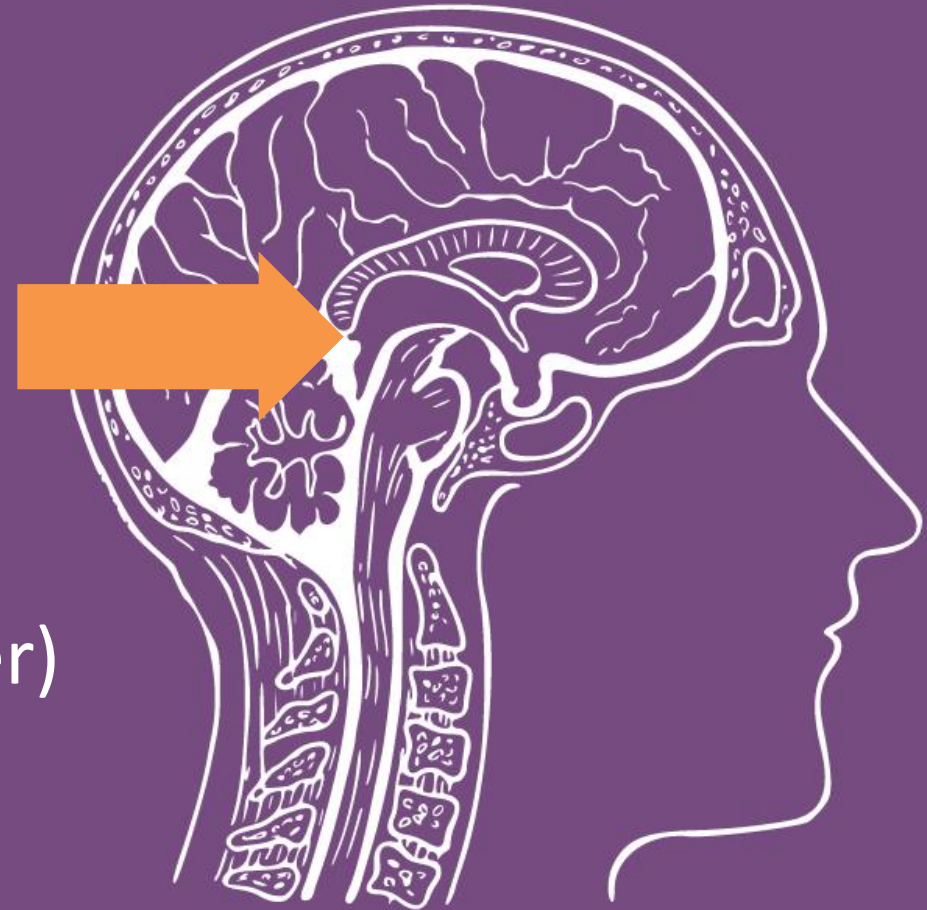


The Emotional Brain

The amygdala is part of the limbic system
Which is responsible for emotions, survival
instincts and memory.

Can be hypo (under) or hyper (over)
reactive.

DEVELOPMENT MOST ACTIVE from 2-7yrs



The Rational Brain

Pre-Frontal Cortex

- Executive Function
- Planning
- Decision Making
- Impulse Control
- Self-Control

RAPID DEVELOPMENT from 3-6yrs

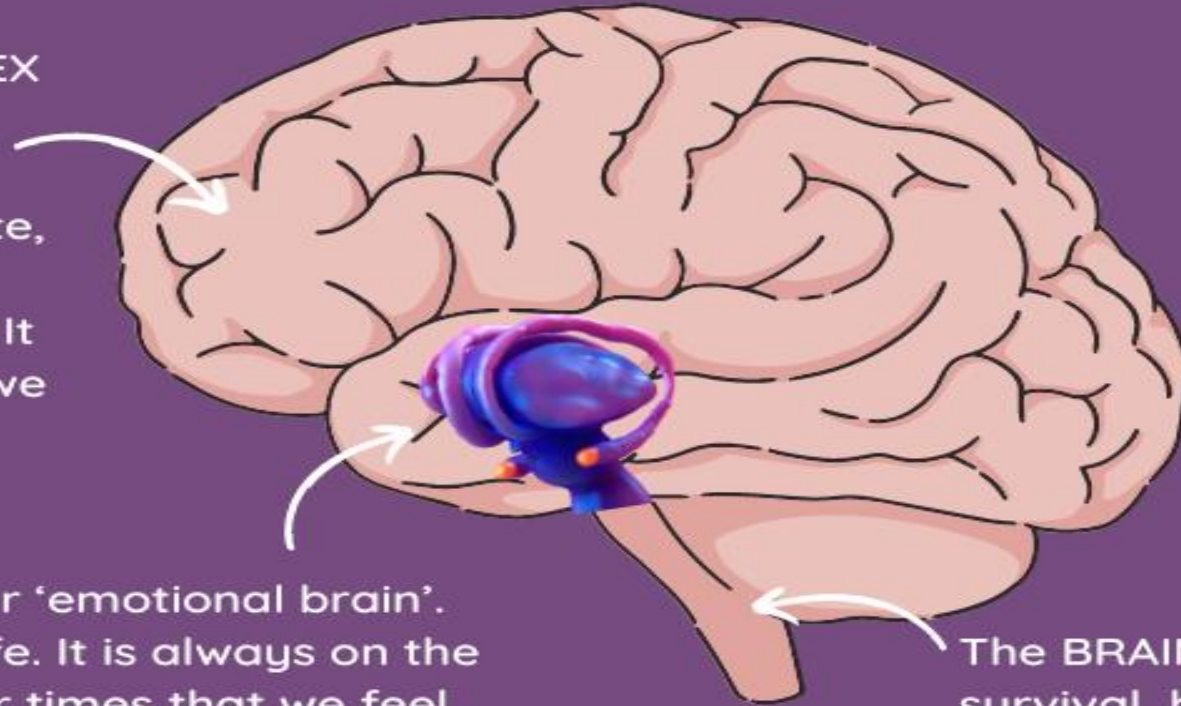
Increases again during adolescent to 25 yrs



The Protective Brain

The PREFRONTAL CORTEX is our 'thinking brain'. It can help us to make good choices, concentrate, learn, process our emotions and stay calm. It helps us to think before we act.

The AMYGDALA is our 'emotional brain'. It helps us to stay safe. It is always on the lookout for danger or times that we feel threatened. It is where all our emotions come from. BUT if we have tricky emotions it may send a message to our brain stem to protect us.



The BRAIN STEM is our survival brain. It controls our breathing, heart rate, sleep, and digestion. It's job is to keep us alive.

When the Amygdala Sets Off the Alarm



Think of your amygdala as an alarm, it is always on the lookout, thinking “Am I safe?”

If the amygdala senses tricky emotions, like anger, anxiety or fear, it may set off our internal alarm. It may send a message to our brain stem to protect us.

This is called the FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE-FAWN response.

The Stress Response

Changes that occur within the body to prepare for survival.

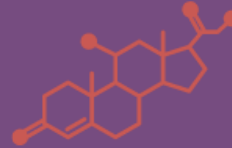
Body is flooded with cortisol (stress hormone) which curbs functions not essential or detrimental to fight/flight.

Changes in the Body



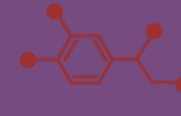
Oxygen is diverted from your thinking brain which means you may find it hard to 'think straight' or feel confused. It will be hard to make good choices.

Cortisol is released into your body. This is to get you ready to fight.



You may breathe quicker - this is to get oxygen to your muscles to make you faster and stronger.

Your muscles tense. This is to get you ready to run or fight. They may shake or tremble, particularly if you stay still. You may notice that you are fidgety.



Adrenalin is released. This is to get you ready to stay safe - this will make you feel jittery or fidgety.

Heart beats faster - this means more blood gets to your muscles to make you stronger and ready to fight.



Your digestion shuts down which means you may feel like you have 'butterflies' in your tummy. You may even feel sick or that you need to use the toilet.



FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE or FAWN



FIGHT may make you want to use your hands and feet, as well as voice to stay safe. You may

- clench your fists
- shout and argue
- kick or punch



FLIGHT makes you want to get away from what is making you feel in danger. You may

- run away or hide
- feel trapped or tense
- jiggle legs



FREEZE makes you

- want to be alone or hide
- can't speak
- refuse instructions
- feel stuck

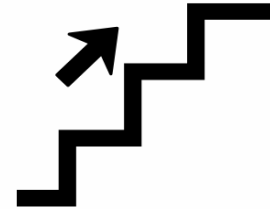


FAWN makes you

- want to be with someone you feel safe with
- scared to say what you think or want
- say sorry when you don't need to
- ask lots of questions

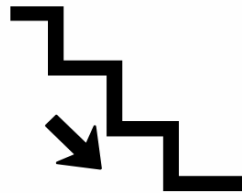
When I am in my UPSTAIRS brain I...

- think before I act
- am in control of my body and actions
- can focus
- can see other's points of view
- think before I speak
- feel like I can get my work done

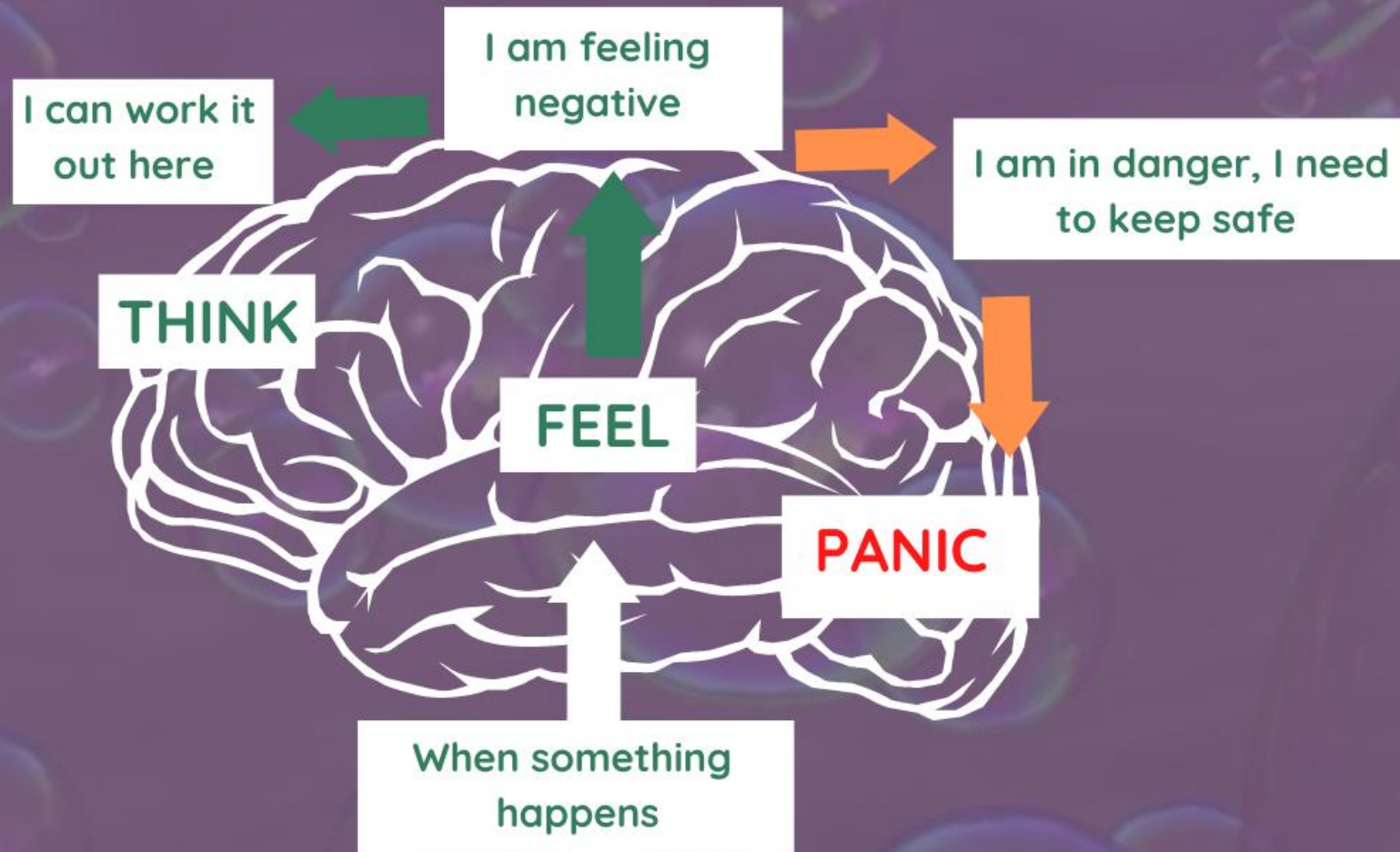


When I am in my DOWNSTAIRS brain I...

- act before I think
- am not in control of my body or reactions
- feel too tired or stressed to focus
- scream, argue, run away or hide
- only see my side of the problem
- feel like I cannot get anything done



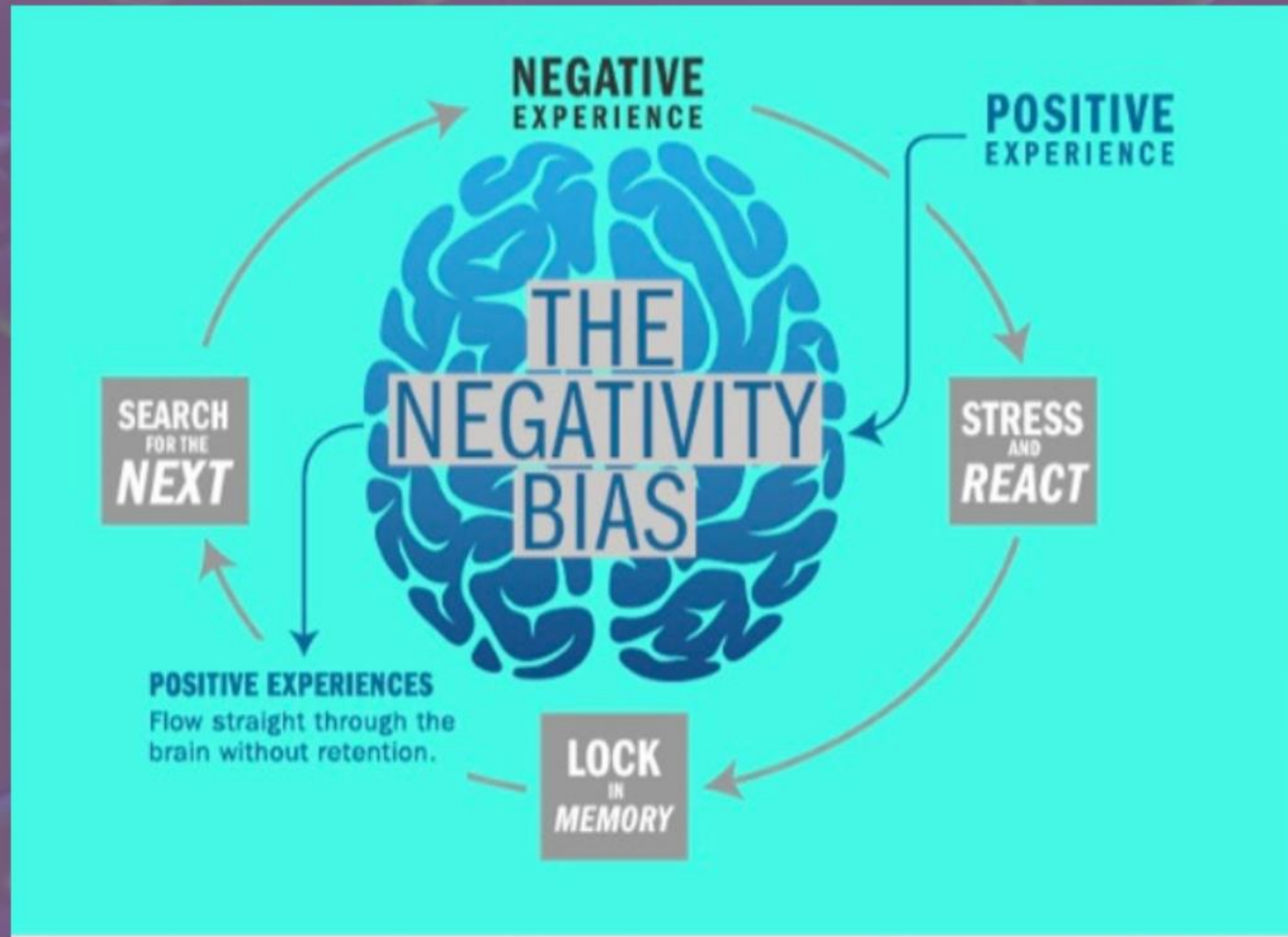
Processing Emotions



What is Negative Brain Bias?



The brain is an auto-pilot mechanism - we have automatic thoughts all day long, usually without thinking about them. Sometimes our brains keep us in negative thought patterns without us even realising - which can make us reactive.





The Science Behind Three Good Things



Recent neuroscience research has found that by finding three positives a day and thinking about how it made us feel, we can rewire our brain to focus on the positive things in life after just 21 days.

I 'Can Do' Journal or My Positivity Journal



 **Three Good Things** 
Each day record three positives about your day.

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

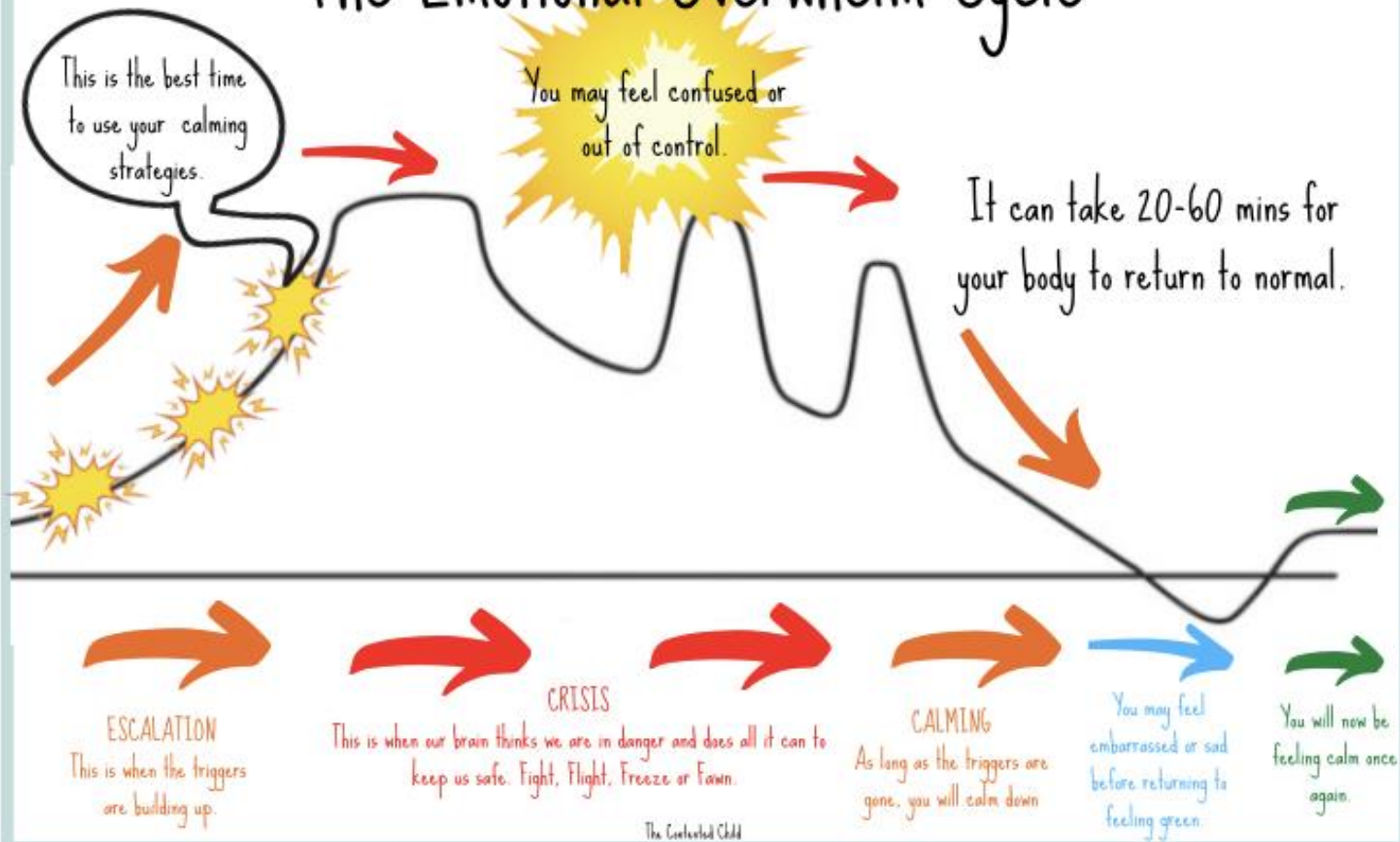
The 3 Good Things Exercise is specifically designed to highlight the positive in your life. It's simple, easy, and scientifically backed. It can boost your happiness levels. The longer you do the exercise, the more your happiness levels and positivity will rise.

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The Emotional Overwhelm Cycle

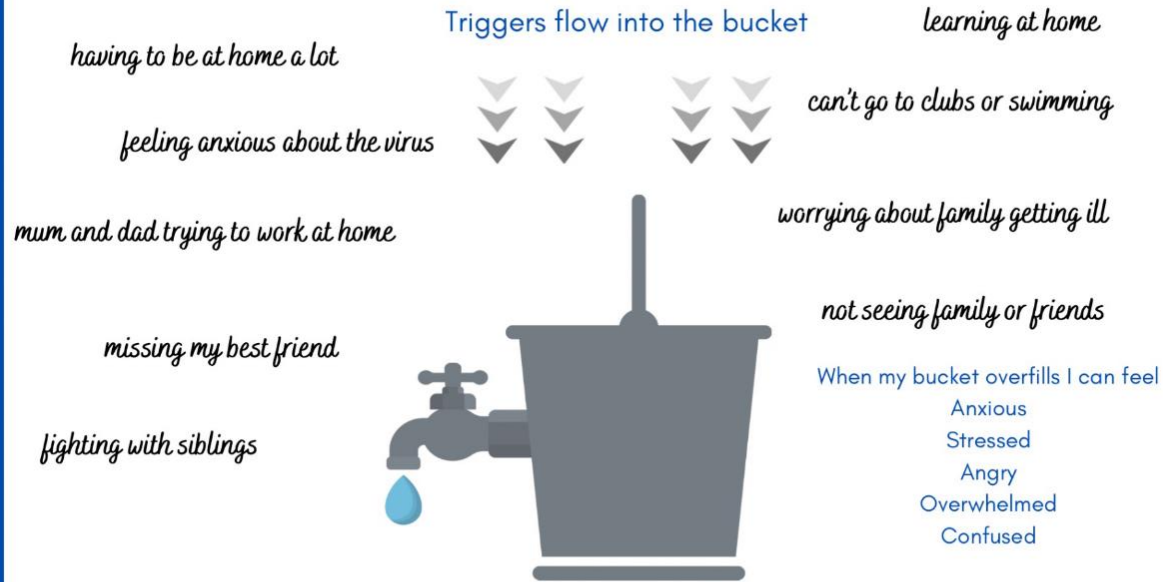


The Emotional Overwhelm Cycle



My Stress Bucket

Triggers flow into the bucket



When my bucket overfills I can feel

- Anxious
- Stressed
- Angry
- Overwhelmed
- Confused

I can empty my bucket by using self-care or calming strategies - which strategies will I use?

Talk to an adult, listen to music, go for a walk, chat to a friend on the telephone or Zoom, have a dance party, do some colouring, have a relaxing bath, deep breathing.

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What You See

This is what I may do when I am angry



What I am feeling

My feelings may show that I am angry - but underneath I may be feeling many other emotions - name those emotions.



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Benefits of Improved Emotional Regulation

- Pay more attention
- Can achieve more
- Work harder
- Able to resolve conflicts with their peers
- Show lower levels of stress/anxiety
- More caring towards others
- **ARE HAPPIER CHILDREN**



Signs of Poor Emotional Literacy/Regulation

- Cannot describe how they are feeling
- Rarely talk about their emotions
- Don't ask for or expect help
- Express their emotions by displaying undesired behaviours
- Don't recognise their behaviours 'got the better of them'



The Importance of Reflection

Reflection is a key component of emotional intelligence. It enables children to understand themselves better, to reconcile their weaknesses, strengths and build empathy.

The process of reflection allows children to contemplate their actions and develop healthy choices moving forward.

When to Reflect

- When a child has returned to a calm state.
- Led without judgement.
- Be matter of fact about consequences.

It is an opportunity to reinforce positive choices and to develop calming strategies.

Five Magic Questions

Where were you and what happened?



What were you thinking?



What were you feeling?



Who else did it affect and how did they feel?



What can you do to make it ok?

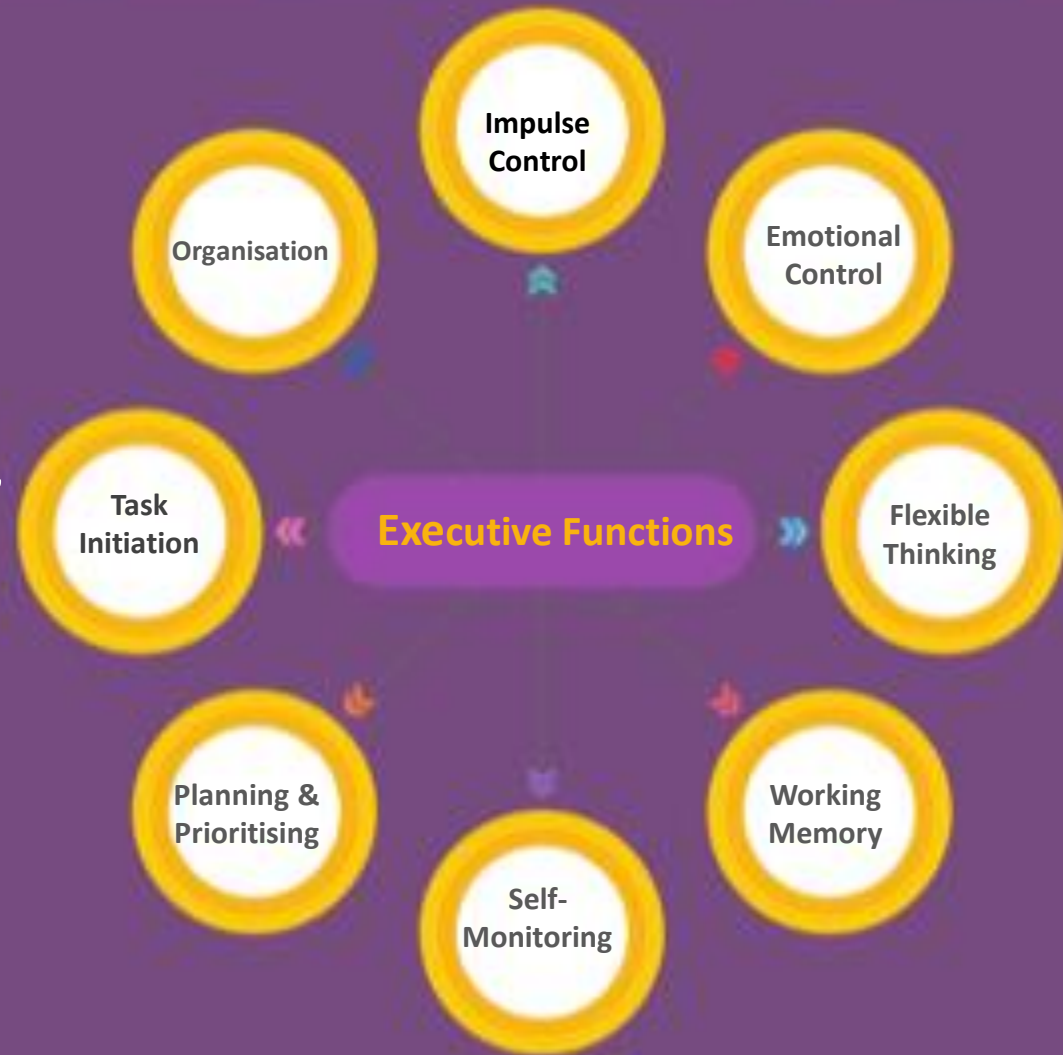


Executive function is a set of mental skills.

We use these skills every day to learn and manage daily life.

Issues with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, handle emotions and display appropriate social behaviour among other issues.

Research has shown significant emotional dysregulation is associated with problems with executive functioning.



INTEROCEPTION

A lesser known sense that helps you to understand and feel what is going on in your body – your ‘inner engine’

A young person may have issues with interoception if

- *Difficulty with toileting*
- *Unable to track food or hydration intake*
- *Unable to tell how loud their voice is*
- *If they are too hot or too cold*
- *Difficulty regulating emotions*
- *Feeling pain*

Alexithymia:

(pronounced ey-lek-suh-thahy-mee-uh)

Difficulty in experiencing, expressing and describing emotional responses.

Difficulty in describing feelings to other people.

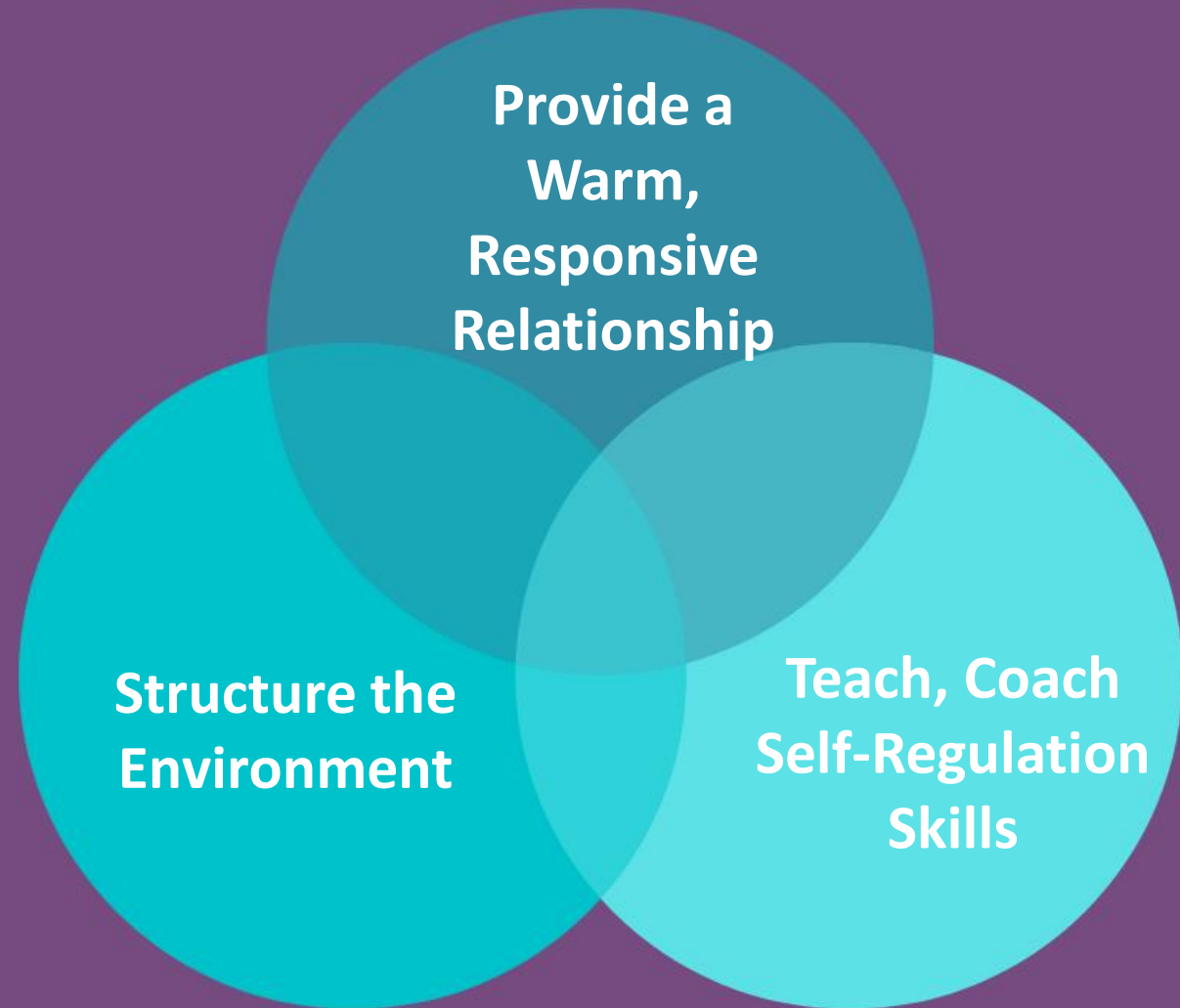
Difficulty linking emotions to events.



How can
we help?



How can we support children and young people to develop the ability to regulate their emotions?



- **Show an interest and encourage a child's activities, likes and dislikes**
- **Encourage a child to express their feelings and respond without judgement.**
- **Respect their feelings**
- **Provide opportunities to develop peer relationships**

**Provide a
Warm,
Responsive
Relationship**

- **Give and allow the child to make choices**
- **Encourage independence**
- **Set family rules where appropriate**
- **Establish routines and stick with them**
- **Be consistent and predictable**
- **Establish rules and resulting consequences**
- **Keep things positive!**

Structure the Environment



**Teach, Coach
Self-Regulation
Skills**

- Identify triggers relating to individual child
- Educate and empower around diagnoses
- Ensure all adults around the child are aware of child's presentation
- Personalised calming strategies identified with the child

Self-Awareness

- Consider diagnoses in relation to emotional regulation – autism, ADHD
- Name emotions, use emotions charts at home
- Check understanding of emotions – linked to events
- Educate around the anger cycle and physical indicators of rising emotions

**Establish
understanding of
emotions**

5 Steps to Teaching Emotions

Give them the name for what they are feeling

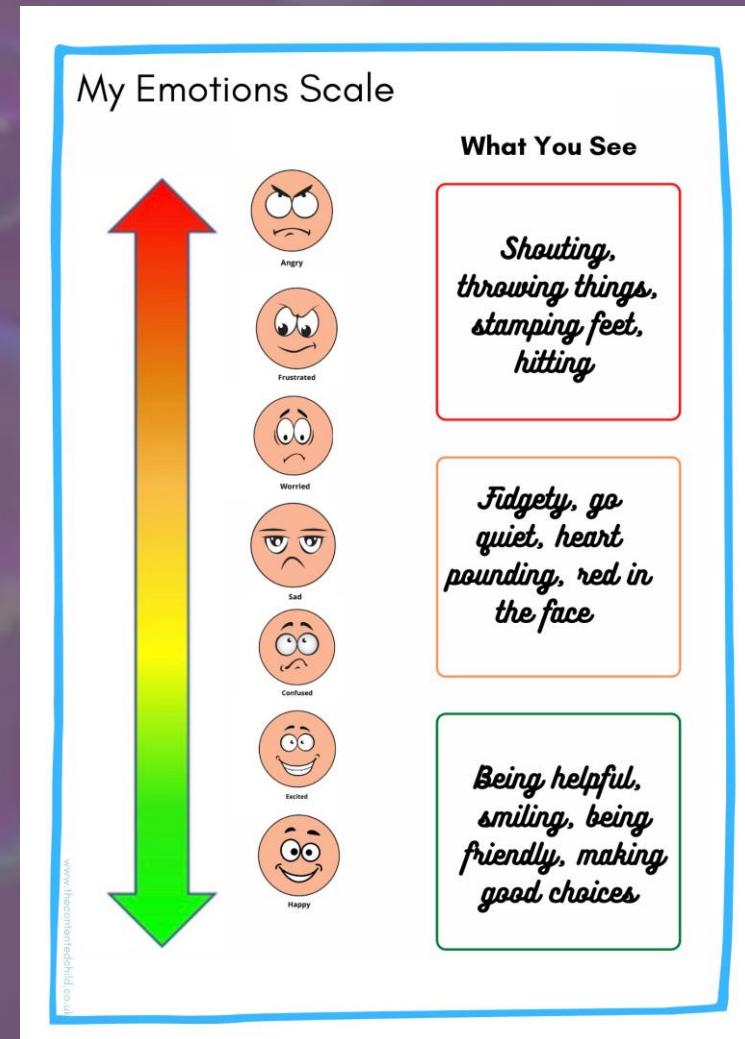
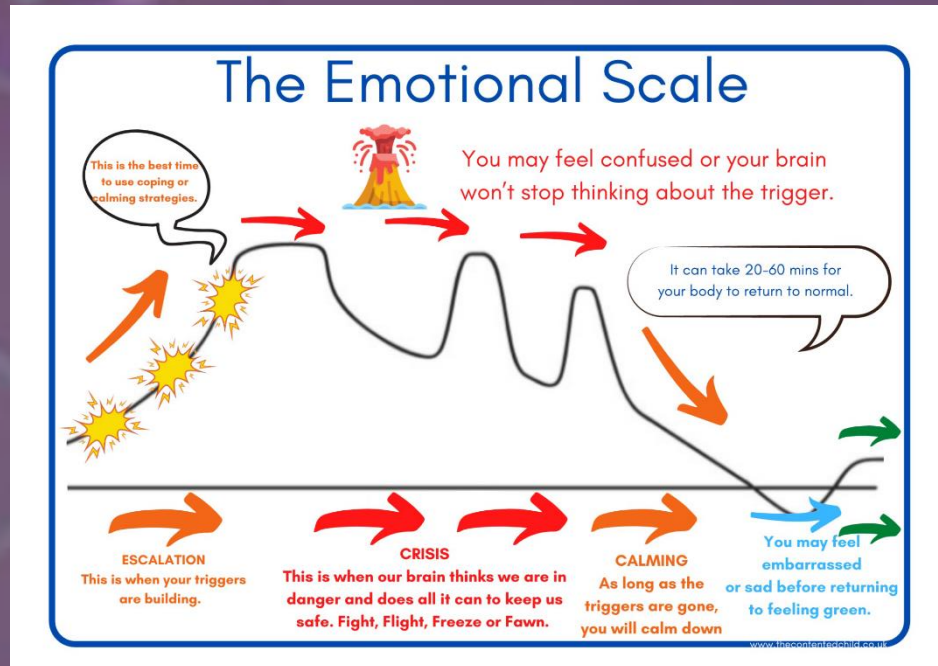
Link emotions to a cause – for them and for other people

Encourage children to look at faces to see emotions

Use a feelings chart so that everyone can express how they feel

Start teaching one emotion at a time (age appropriate)

Emotions Scale



Emotion Coaching Phrases

It is okay to be upset – it is good to let it out/it is not ok to say hurtful things or hurt others

It is okay to feel It is not okay to

I will be over here when you need me

It must feel scary to be out of control

Could you bring your voice down a bit so I can understand you?

I hear that you are mad right now but it is not ok to talk to me like this

Could you try to say that in a different way?

Emotional Literacy

Acknowledgement of emotions – ‘I can see you are feeling (angry), I would feel the same’

ASK

What happened to cause this feeling?

Can you describe the feeling?

Would you feel the same if this happened to you?

What situations make you happy, sad, angry, excited etc?



Helping Children to Develop Empathy

A child who has developed empathy is more likely to respond helpfully to uncomfortable situations, be better at making and maintaining friendships and to be happy.

We can develop empathy by

- using stories and pictures
- real life situations to ask how people are feeling – particularly as a consequence of the child's actions
- teaching children to read other's faces/emotions

Coach children to recognise the physical symptoms of rising emotions and the optimum time to use strategies for calming

EXAMPLE WHEN I AM UPSET, I CAN FEEL IT...

The diagram shows a central line drawing of a child's body. Surrounding the drawing are several boxes, each containing a physical symptom of being upset. The symptoms are:

- feel dizzy
- frown, grimace
- tense muscles
- making fists
- want to run away
- Hot, sweaty
- headache
- clenching jaw
- heart beating fast
- tummyache
- can't keep still
- jelly legs
- stamp feet

niki@thecontentedchild

Identify calming area and strategies

Create a calming area to educate the young person to remove themselves from crisis situations

Use visual supports as prompts/reminders and aids

Create a Calming Plan

Coach child to be able to reflect upon crisis situations

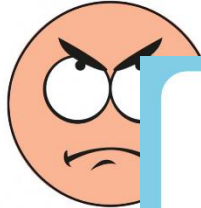
Work through solutions with child

Use visual supports as reminders and aids

Consider mindfulness, yoga etc

Build Coping Skills

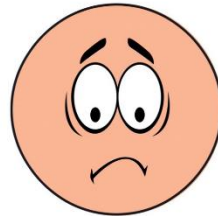
When I am angry, I can...



Angry

Three empty light blue rectangular boxes for writing strategies.

When I am worried, I can...



Worried

Four empty light blue rectangular boxes for writing strategies.

10 Count to ten	HELP Ask for help	Have a snack	Heart hug
Walk away	Rainbow Breathing	Go for a walk	Use My Keyring
Talk to an adult	Have a drink	Go to my room	Hand Breathing



Calming Strategies Visual Prompts

Calming Activities

A tight hug



A 20 second hug (60 seconds for boys) releases the hormone oxytocin which helps you to feel safe and calms fears/anxiety. If the young person also counts the seconds then this serves as a distraction.

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Calming Strategy

To Relax



Release and drop your shoulders away from your ears



Unclench your jaw



Drop your tongue from the roof of your mouth

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This strategy can really work - practise it slowly at home, feel where you notice the greatest release of tension. This strategy can be used whilst others are totally aware, on the bus, in school.

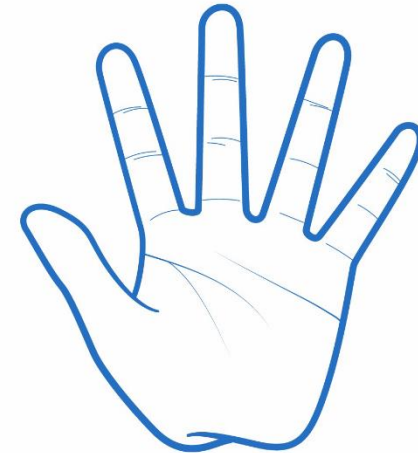
Deep Breathing Activities

Did you know normal breathing only uses 10% of your lungs capacity?

Breathing in through the nose increases oxygen uptake to the lungs by warming up the cold air which increases the lungs elasticity.

When you take a deep breath in, your heart rate quickens slightly. As you exhale, your heart rate slows. Repeated deep breaths will naturally bring your heart rate in sync with your breath. This leads your brain to release endorphins, which are chemicals that have a natural calming effect.

Hand Breathing

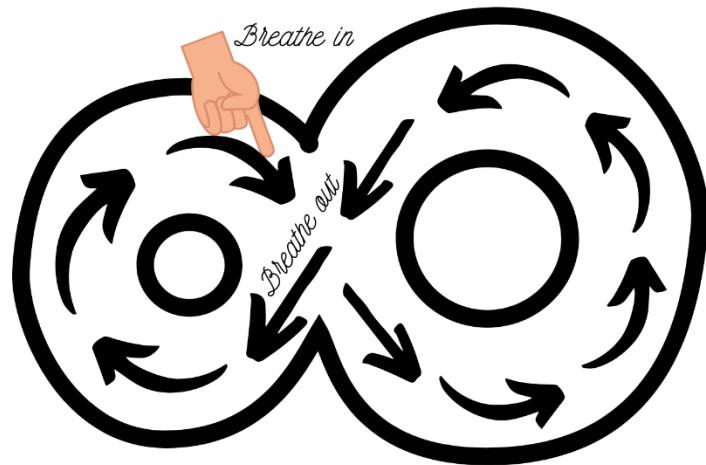


Three Steps to Feeling Calm

1. Spread your hand and stretch your fingers out like a star. You can choose your left hand or your right hand. Pretend the pointer finger of your other hand is a pencil and imagine you are going to trace around the outline of your hand.
2. Place your pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb and breathe in as you slide up. Breathe out as you slide down. Breathe in as you slide up your second finger and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your fingers and you have taken five slow breaths.
3. How does your body feel now? Do you feel calm or would you like to take another five?

Breathing Activities

Figure of 8 Breathing

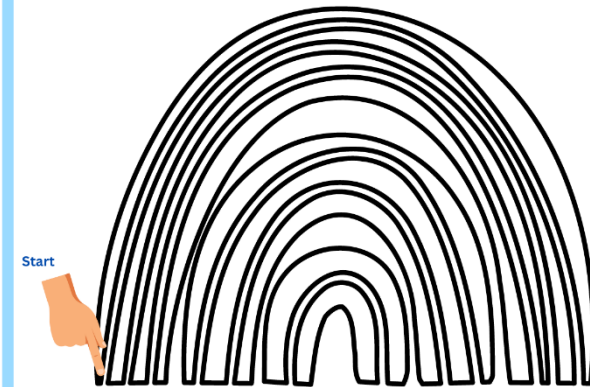


Use your finger to trace the figure of eight. Breathe in to trace the first loop, hold your breathe for one second and then breathe out for the second loop. Do this for 1/2 minutes or 10 times. You can also draw a figure of 8 in the air with your pointing finger.

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Rainbow Breathing

Colour in your rainbow.



Place your finger on a colour at one end of the rainbow. As you move your finger along the colour breathe in deeply through your nose. As you move your finger back to the start breathe out. Then move to the next colour and repeat. Keep your breaths slow and controlled.

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Hot Chocolate Breathing



Imagine you have a mug of hot chocolate.
You can breathe in through your nose to smell the hot chocolate - count 1 2 3 4 5.
You can blow out of your mouth to cool it down - count 1 2 3 4 5.
Deep breathing can calm your body and brain.

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Bubble Breathing

A good way to practice deep breathing is to do some bubble blowing, because you have to take a slow, deep breath to make a big bubble, and you have to blow the bubble really slowly or it will pop! Take a slow, deep breath in, hold it for a second, and then slowly blow some bubbles.



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Birthday Cake Breathing



Hold up one hand—it's a birthday cake with five candles! Pretend to blow out one of the candles: take a deep breath in and then blow out, curling the finger down as you finish exhaling. Repeat with the other four fingers until you have a fist. Notice how you feel now. Repeat if needed.

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TEACH STOP AND THINK



Introducing Social Scripts

