



Mastering Anger Management in Adults with ADHD: Evidence-Based Strategies for Clinicians

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Purpose Statement

The purpose of this presentation is to inform the audience about the unique challenges adults with ADHD face in managing anger and to equip them with practical, evidence-based strategies to effectively master their emotional responses and improve their quality of life.

Who Are You?



Let's get an idea of who you are and what you hope to gain from this?

Learning Objectives

1

Discuss the neuropsychology of anger, and how it manifests

2

Explain the neuropsychology of ADHD, how it manifests in people, and why anger and ADHD can exacerbate each other

3

Discuss the difficulty of anger management for a person with ADHD

4

Discuss strategies to aid in managing anger and ADHD

What is Anger? 🤔

What do we think about when we think of “anger”?

What is Anger? 🤔

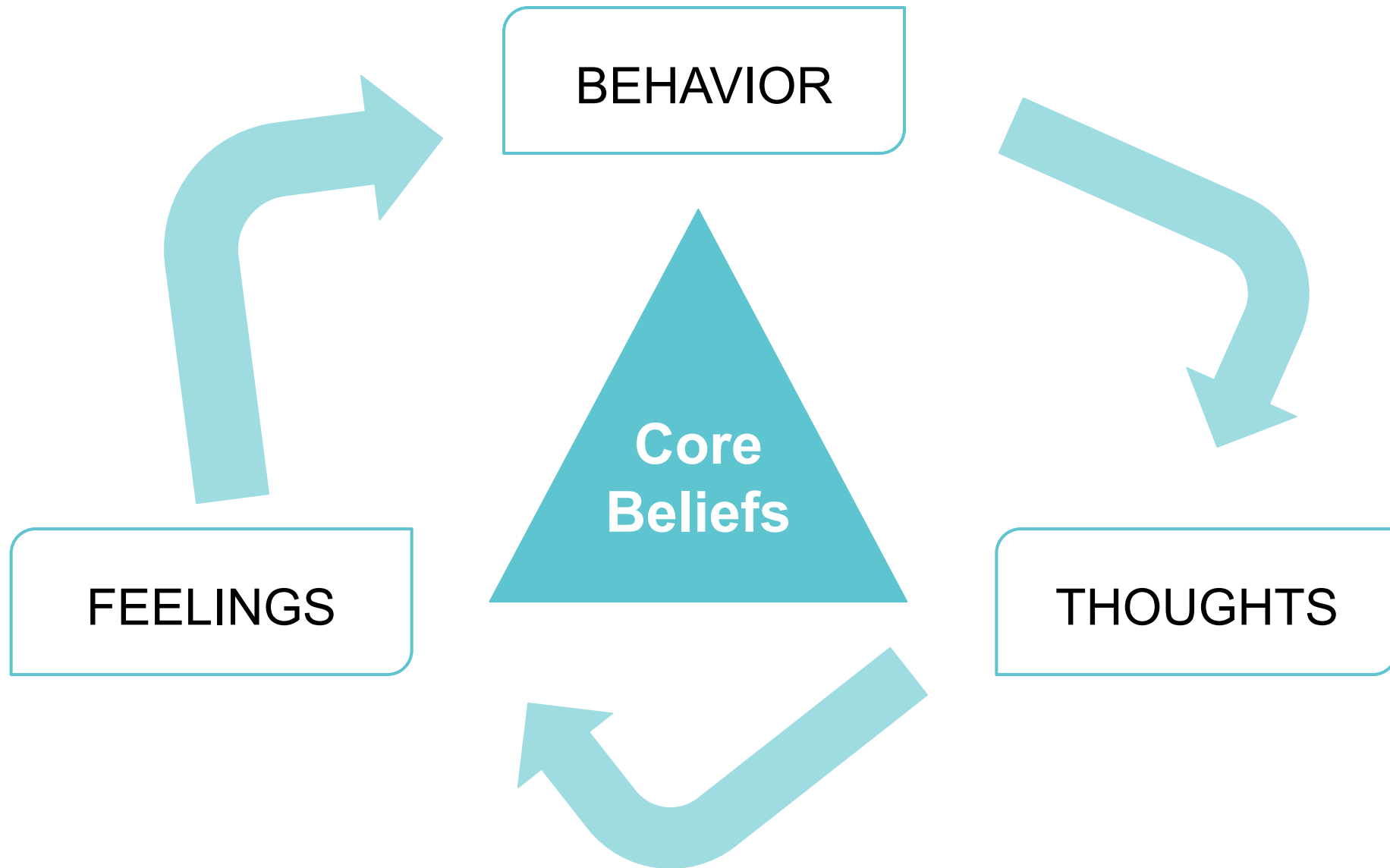
Anger is a sustained state of dysregulation, usually used to challenge a **perceived threat**, in order to **defend** our needs

What is Anger? 🤔

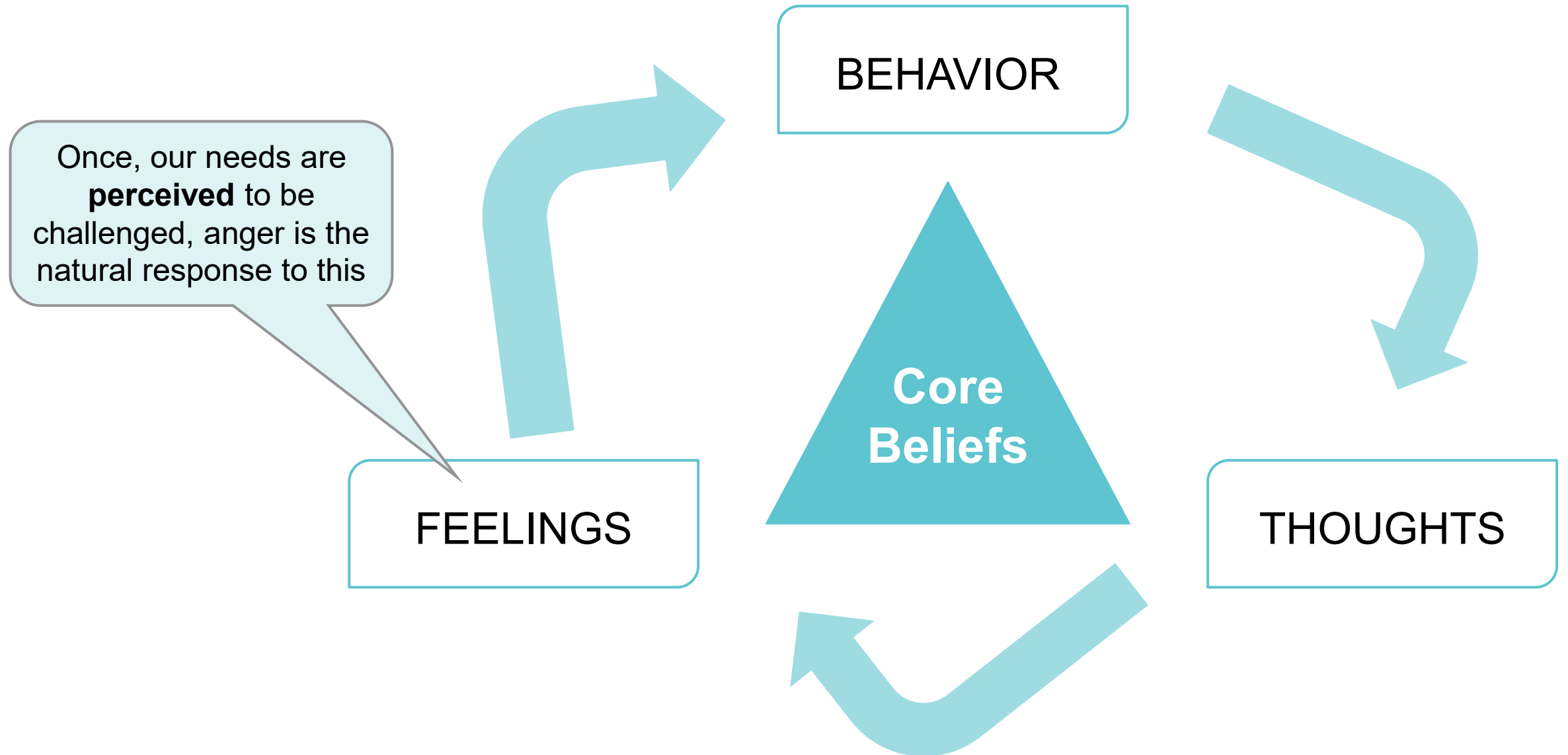
- **Anger** is a sustained state of dysregulation, usually used to challenge a **perceived threat**, in order to **defend** our needs
 1. **Perception** How is our internal objects and parts interacting with external objects and/or parts?
 2. **Needs** Objects and Actions we need to survive and thrive

How does this interplay manifest in your life?

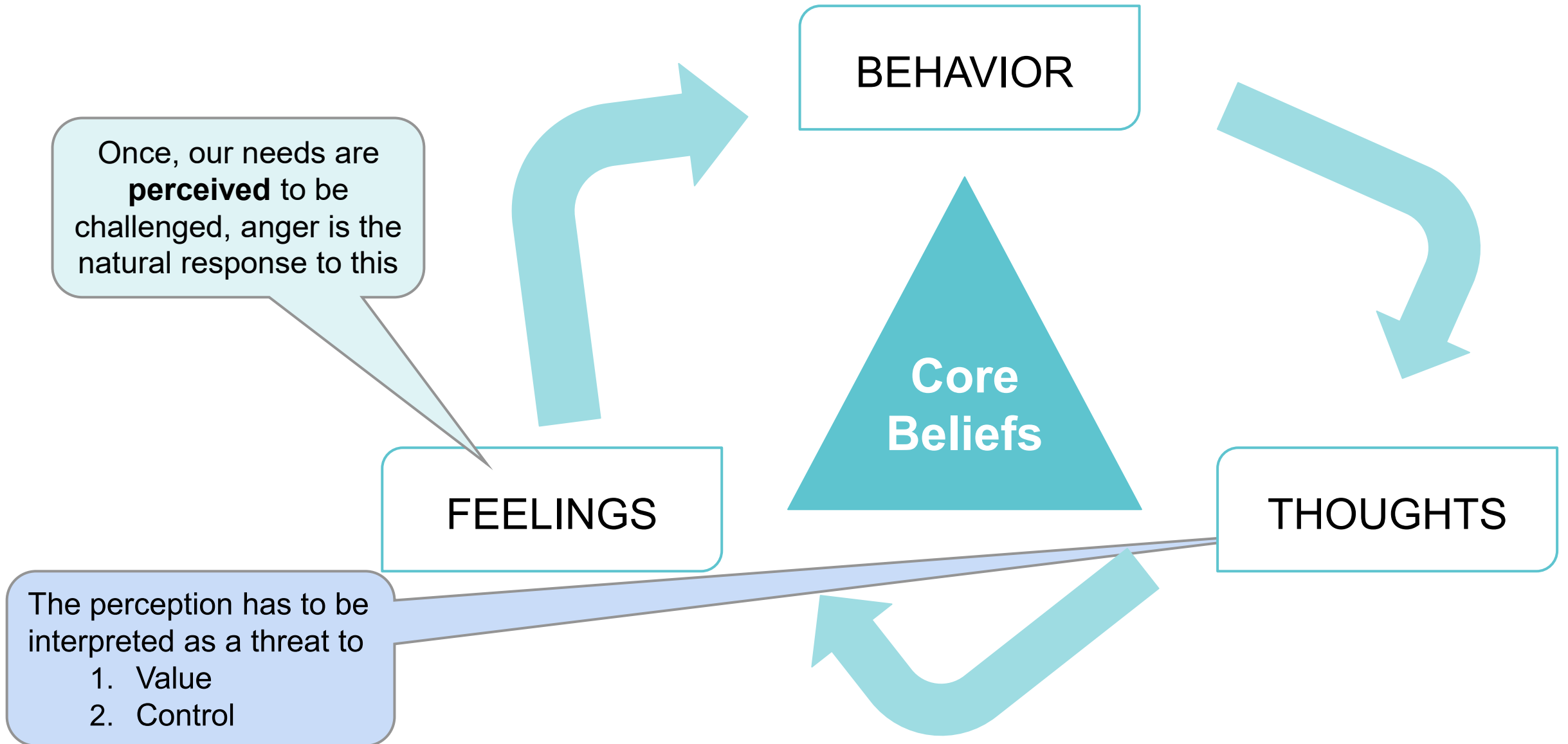
What is Anger? 😡



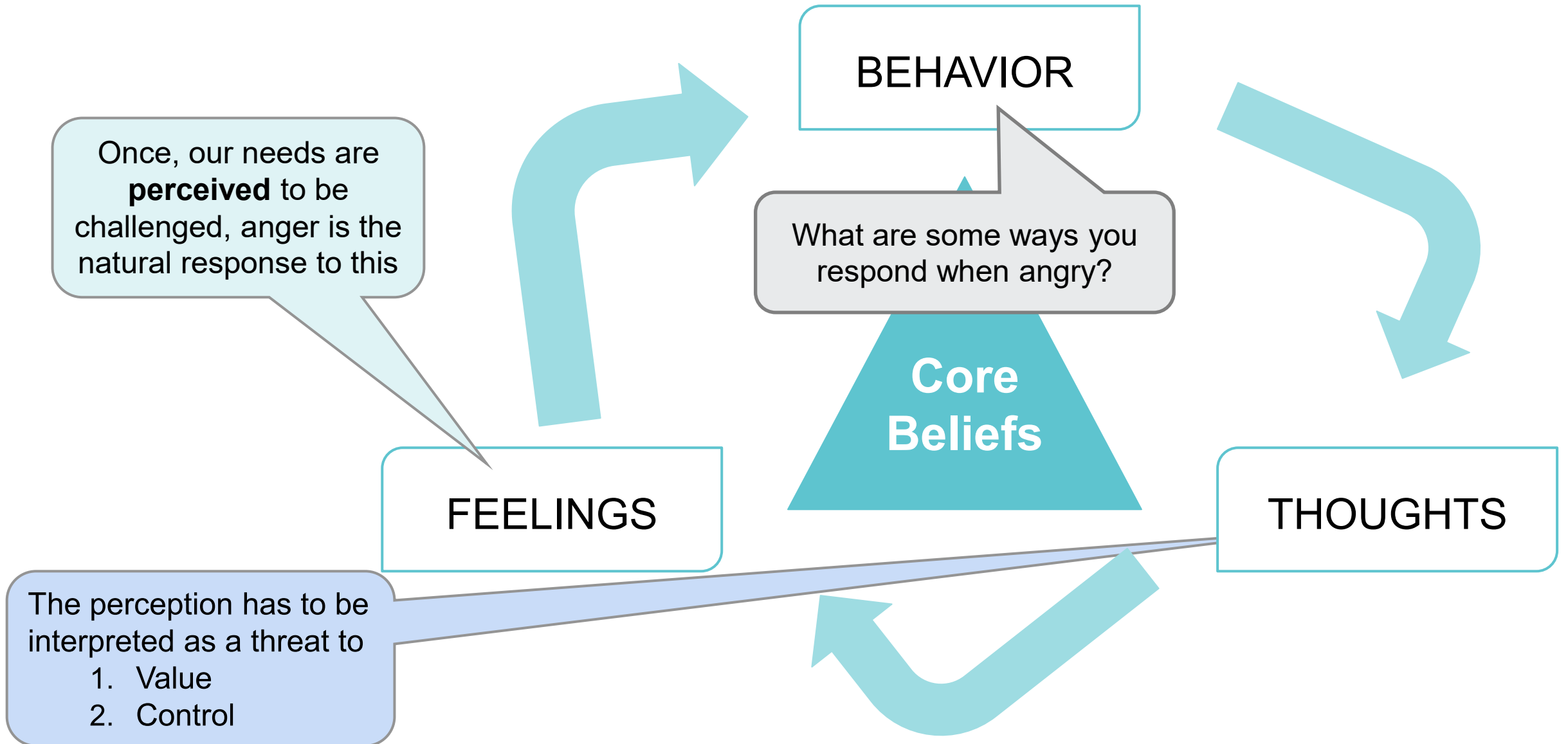
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What is Anger? 🤔



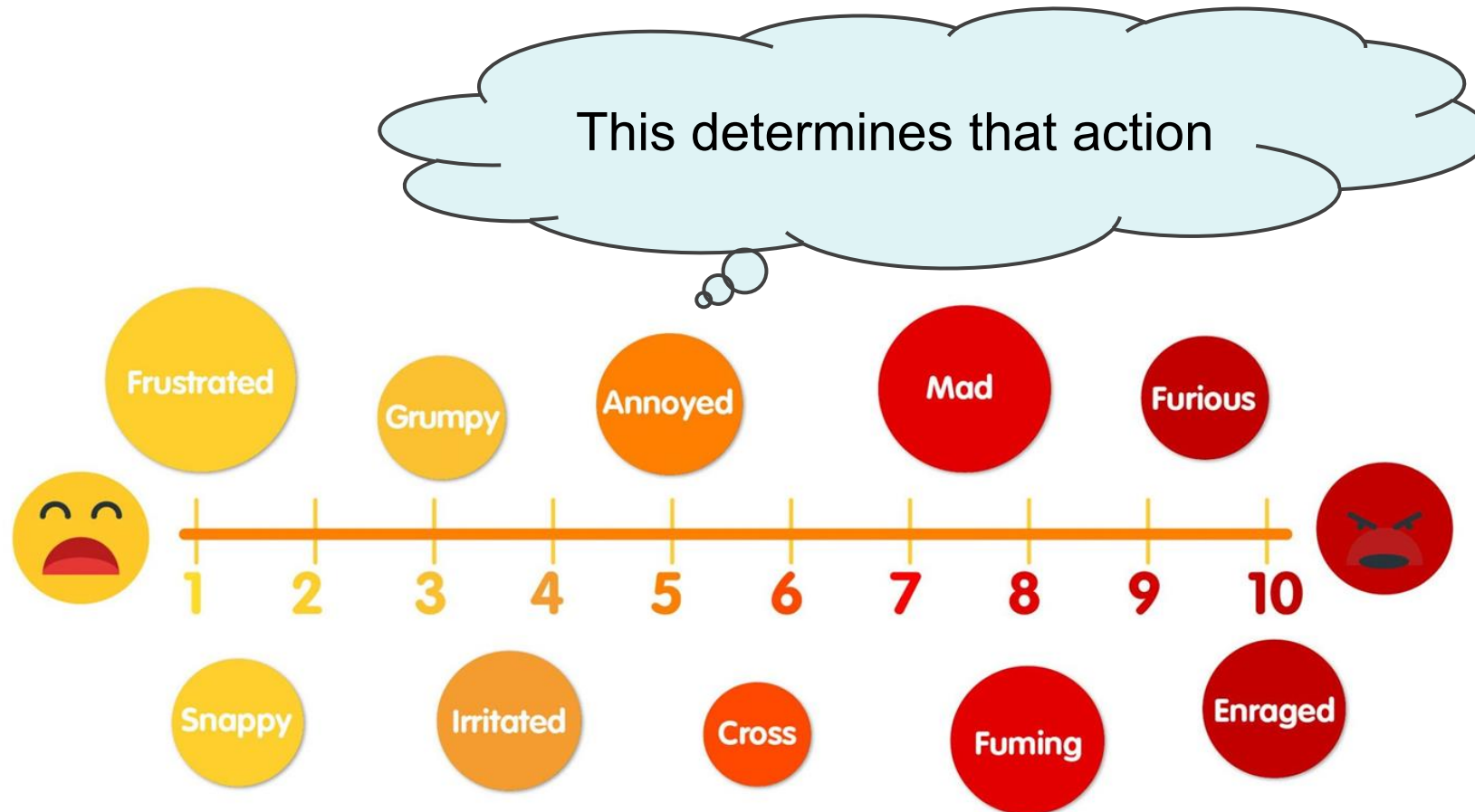
What is Anger? 😡



What is Anger? 🤔

- “Anger gives access to behaviors our principles would not allow, by developing new principles”
 1. Yelling
 2. Screaming
 3. Slamming objects
 4. Fighting
 5. Much more
- What principles condone these actions?

What is Anger? 🤔

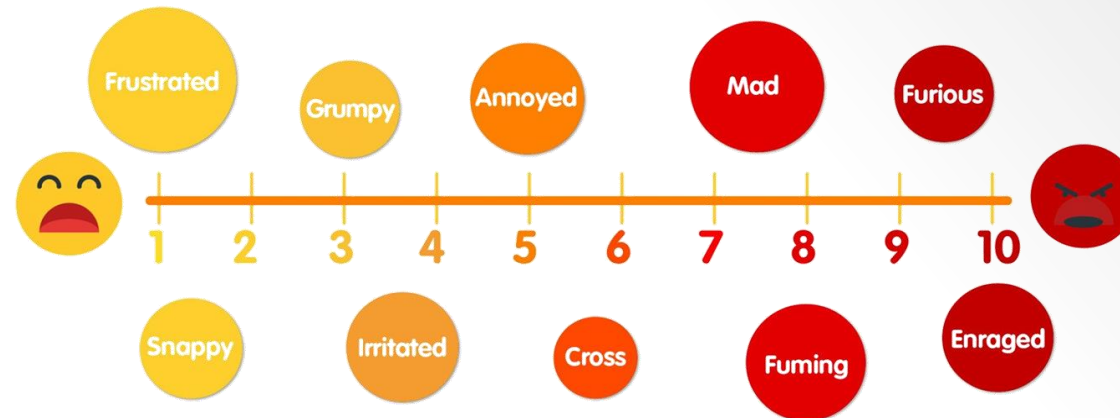


How to Manage Anger 🐒

My Anger's Principles Log		
Emotion	Scale	Principle
Frustrated	1	I want to be left alone
Snappy	2	I will make sure to get you to leave me alone
Rage	10	I have to show them they were wrong for messing with me.

What is Anger? 🤔

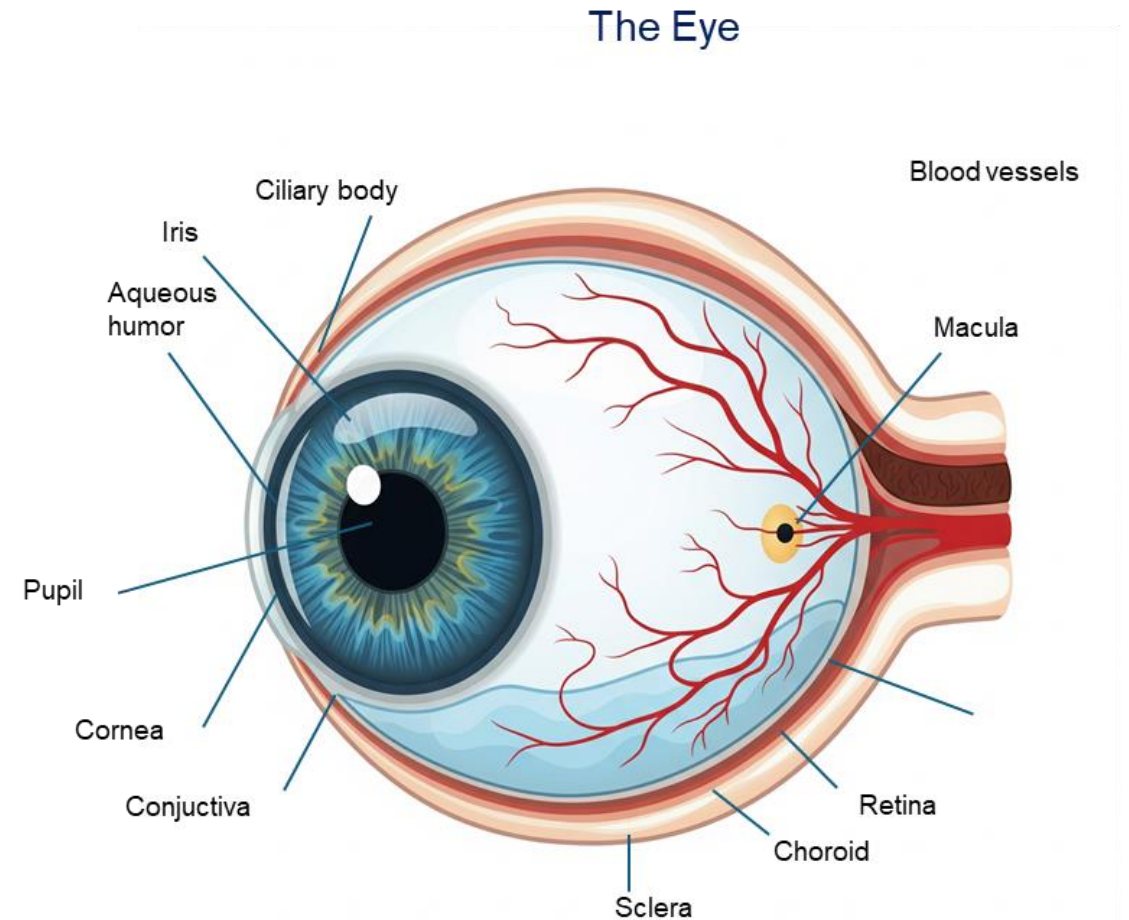
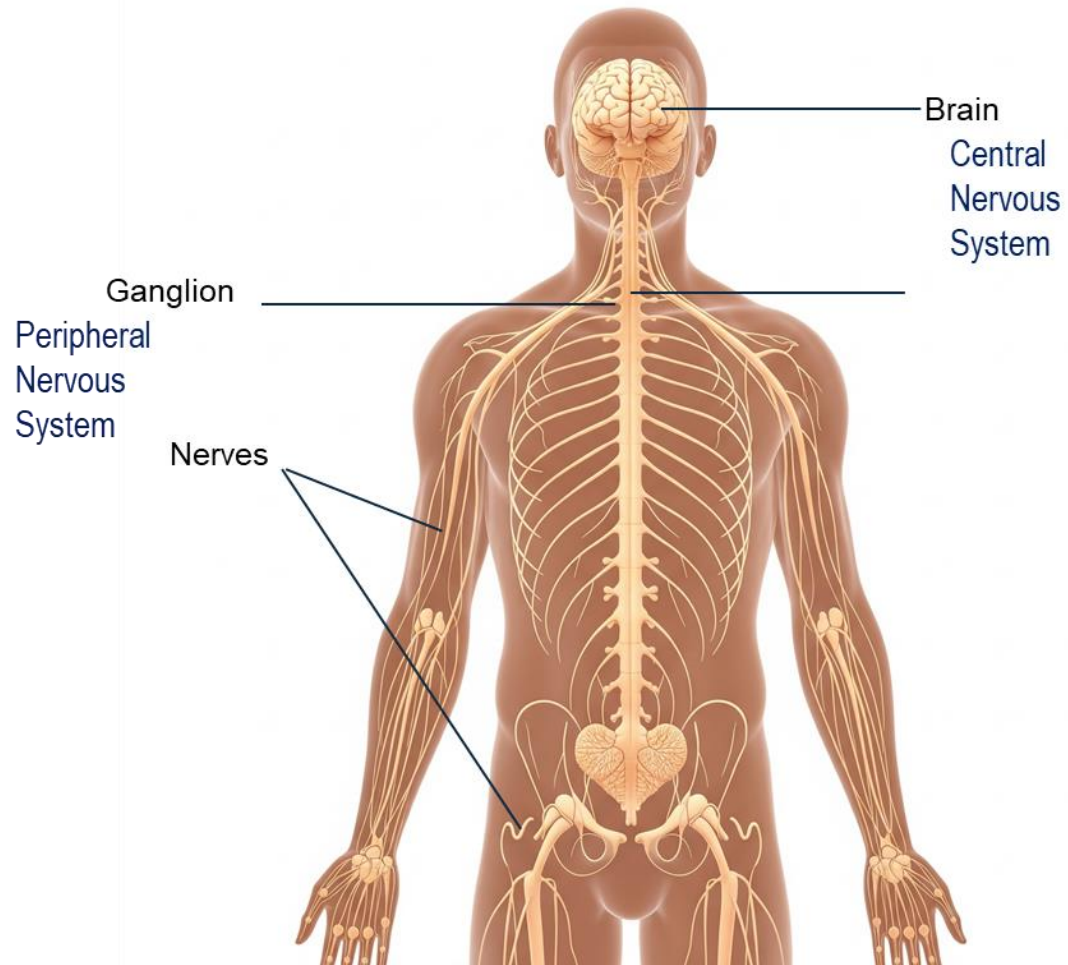
1. Take a pause! Spend 5-10 mins to assess your own scale, and complete “My Anger’s Principles Log”.
2. What new principles do you notice as you go up the scale? (Don’t judge them just notice)



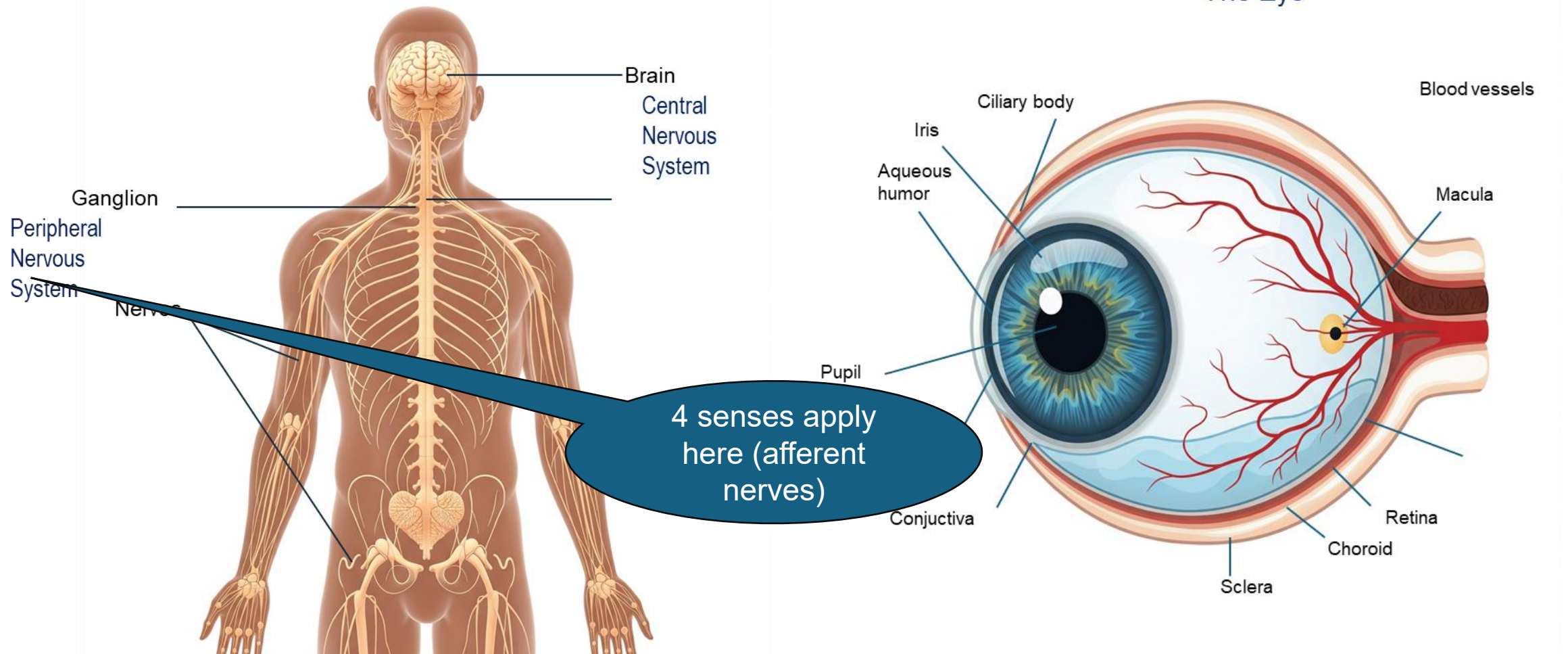
3 Steps to an Anger Response



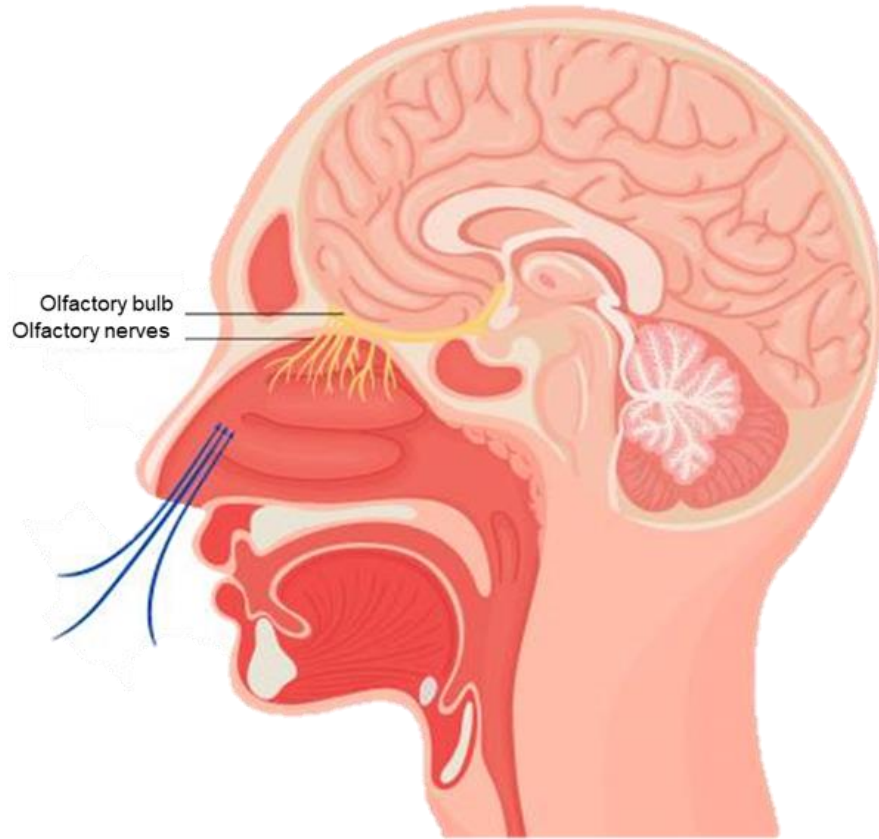
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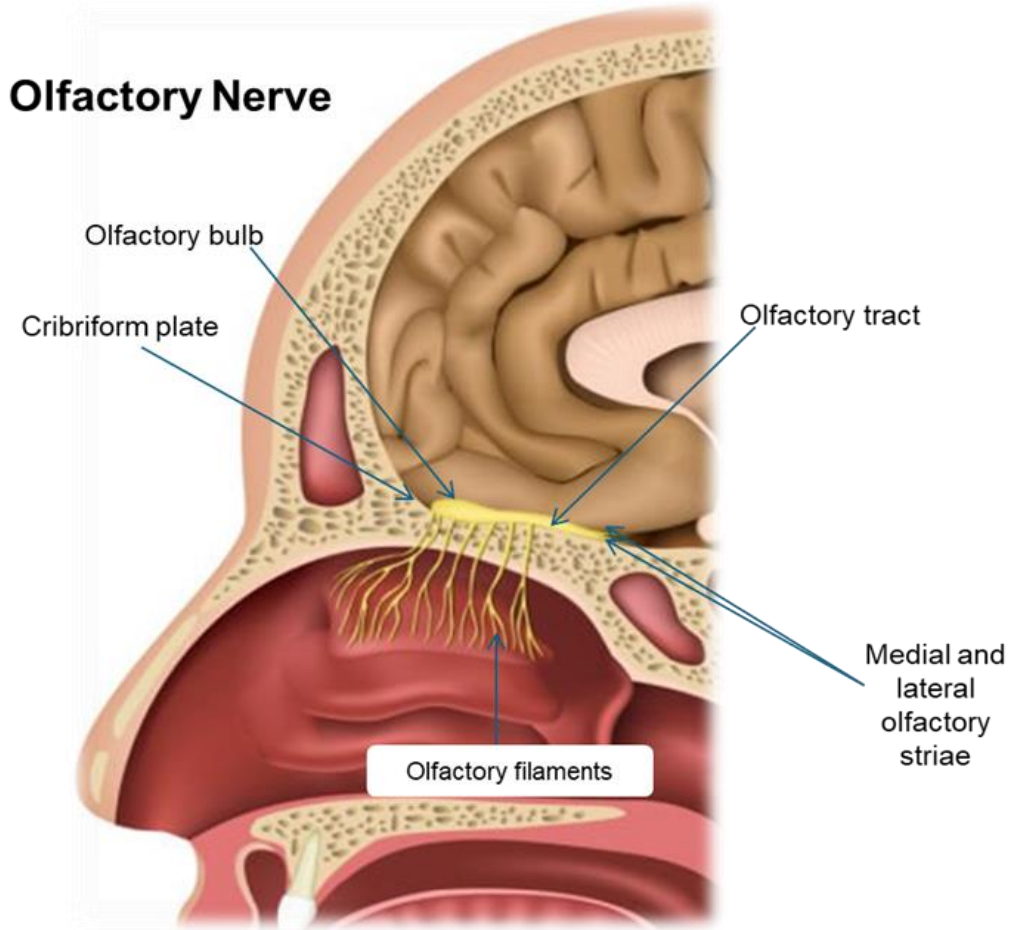
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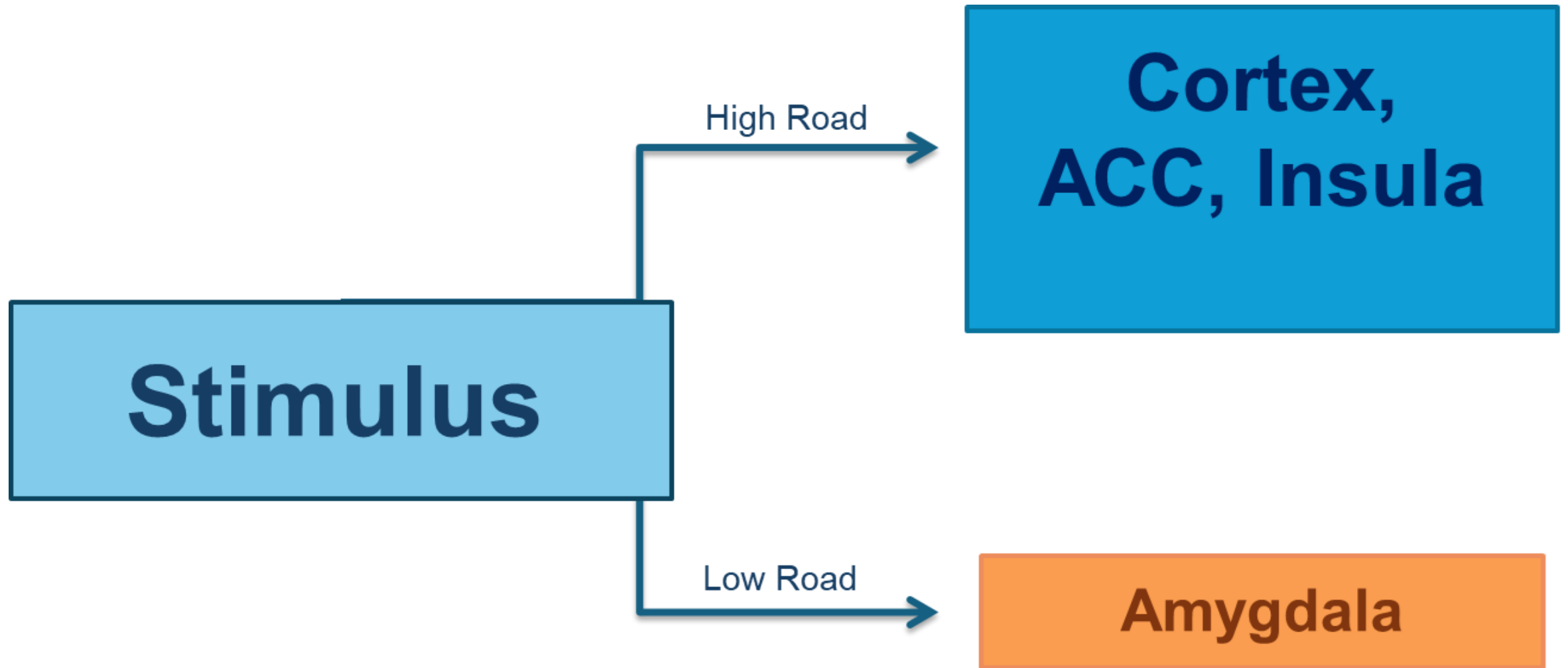
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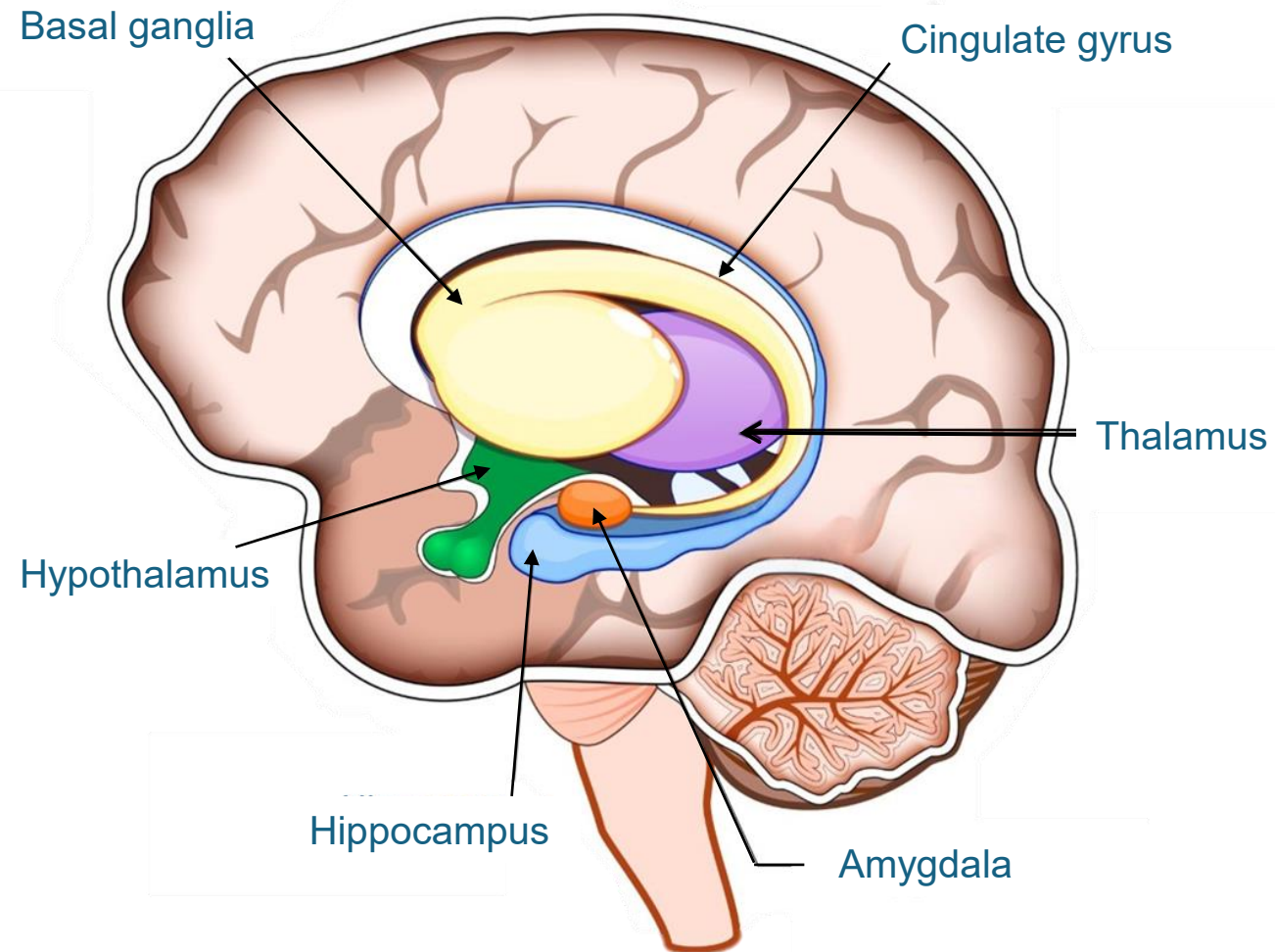
Olfactory Nerve



What is Anger? 😡



What is Anger? 😡



What is Anger? 🤔

Benefits of Low Road Appraisal

- Speed for Survival
- Automatic Priming

Benefits of High Road Appraisal

- Accuracy and Context
- Regulation and Correction
- Nuanced and Appropriate Responses

What is Anger? 🤨

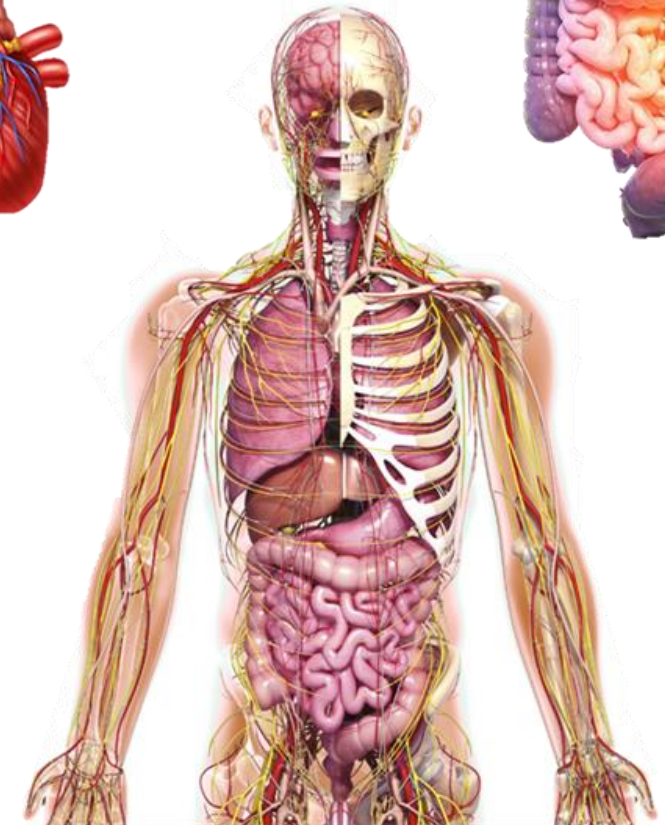
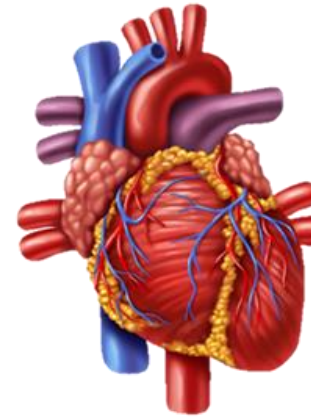
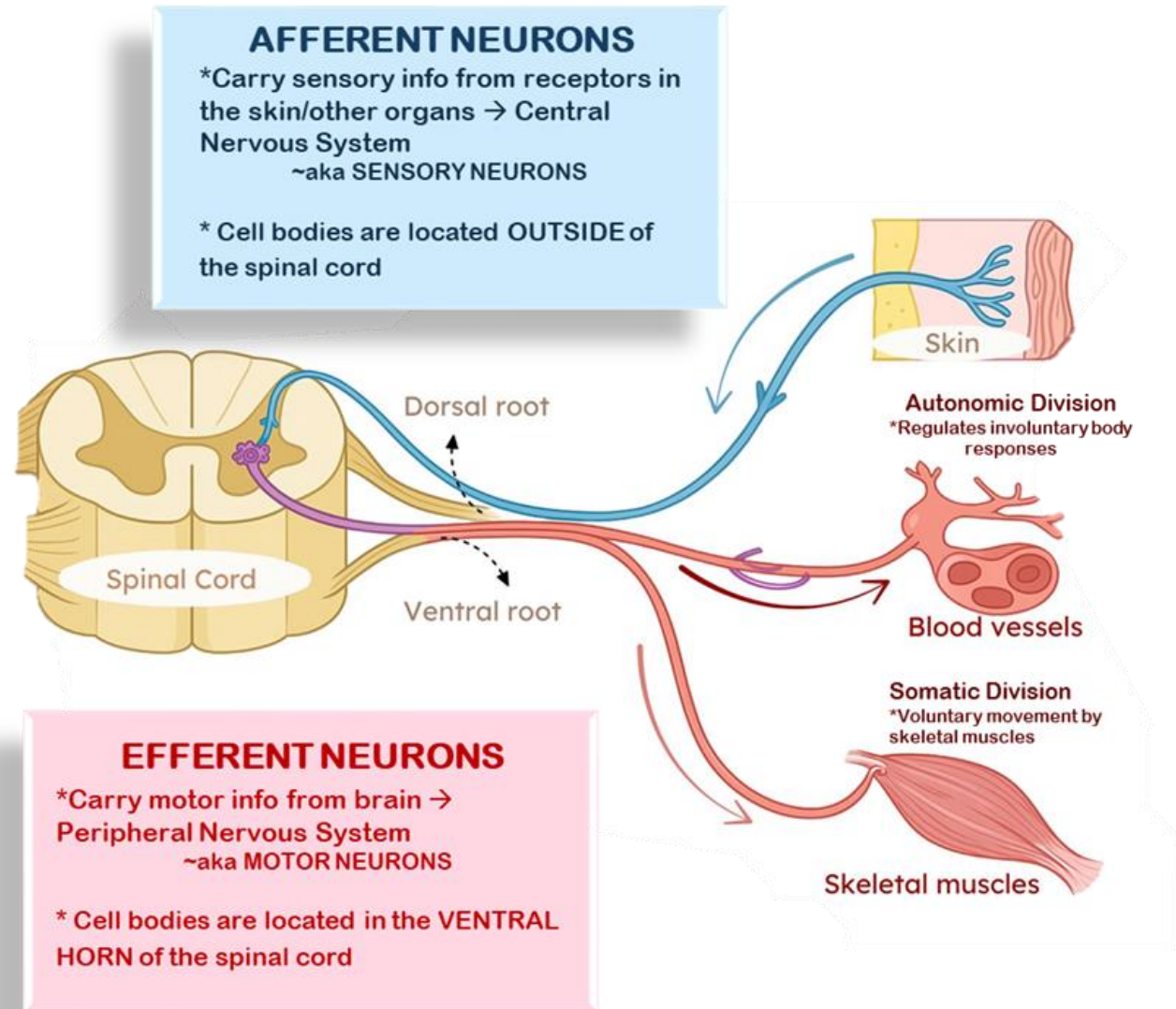
Problems of Low Road Appraisal

- Inaccuracy / False Alarms
- Oversimplification
- Less Initial Control

Problems of High Road Appraisal

- Slowness
- Requires More Cognitive Resources
- Potential for Overthinking/
Analysis Paralysis

What is Anger? 🤔



What is Anger? 🤔

Why is it important to understand the neuroscience of anger?

What is Anger? 🤔

- Why is it important to understand the neuroscience of anger?
 1. Anger is a necessary response to needs being challenged
 2. It is a subcortical operation, meaning you **cannot control being angry. We can just manage it.**

What is Anger? 🤔

Top-Down Regulation

- Mindfulness
- Cognitive Reappraisal
- Problem Solving Skills
- Affirmative in Sense of Self
- Seeking Support from Others

Bottom-Up Regulation

- Grounding Skills
- Meeting the Body's Needs (Rest, food, etc.)
- Can also be Seeking Support from Others (but more effort must come from the other)

What is Anger? 😡

Hyperarousal ↔ WOT ↔ Hypoarousal

What is Anger? 🤔

Are there benefits to anger?

What is Anger? 🤨

- Benefits of anger!
 1. Distancing oneself from restrictive principles

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- Benefits of anger!
 1. Distancing oneself from restrictive principles
 2. Gives us insight to our needs
 3. Causes us to initiate action
 4. Provides passion to our words and behaviors
 5. Gives us the strength to defend ourselves and those we care about

What is Anger? 😡

- Challenges of Anger
 1. Distant from our principles can cause actions that harm relationships

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 2. Poor consequential or critical thinking especially in **DPA**

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- Challenges of Anger
 1. Distant from our principles can cause actions that harm relationships
 2. Poor consequential or critical thinking especially in **DPA**
 3. Health challenges that arrive from a sustained stress response

ADHD?



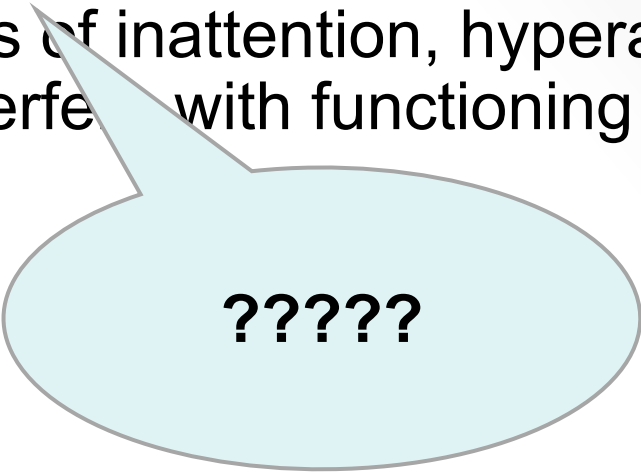
ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder –
Neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity that interfere with functioning or development.

ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder –

Neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity that interfere with functioning or development.



?????

- For a diagnosis, a person must have:
 - 6 or more symptoms from either (or both) categories if they are under 17 years old
 - 5 or more symptoms if they are 17 or olderSymptoms must have persisted for at least 6 months and be inconsistent with developmental level and negatively impact social, academic, or occupational functioning.
- A dominance in symptoms determines subtype



The diagram consists of two light blue rounded rectangular boxes at the bottom. The left box is labeled 'Attention' and the right box is labeled 'Self Control/Activity'. A light blue arrow originates from the top of the 'Attention' box, goes straight up, then turns 90 degrees to the right, pointing towards the first bullet point of the list. Another light blue arrow originates from the top of the 'Self Control/Activity' box, goes straight up, then turns 90 degrees to the left, pointing towards the second bullet point of the list.

Attention

Self
Control/Activity

Common Misunderstandings about ADHD



It is a mental health challenge for children only 🧒

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To have ADHD you must be “bouncing off the wall” (hyperactivity) 🧒

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ADHD means someone is lazy or not trying hard enough 🧒

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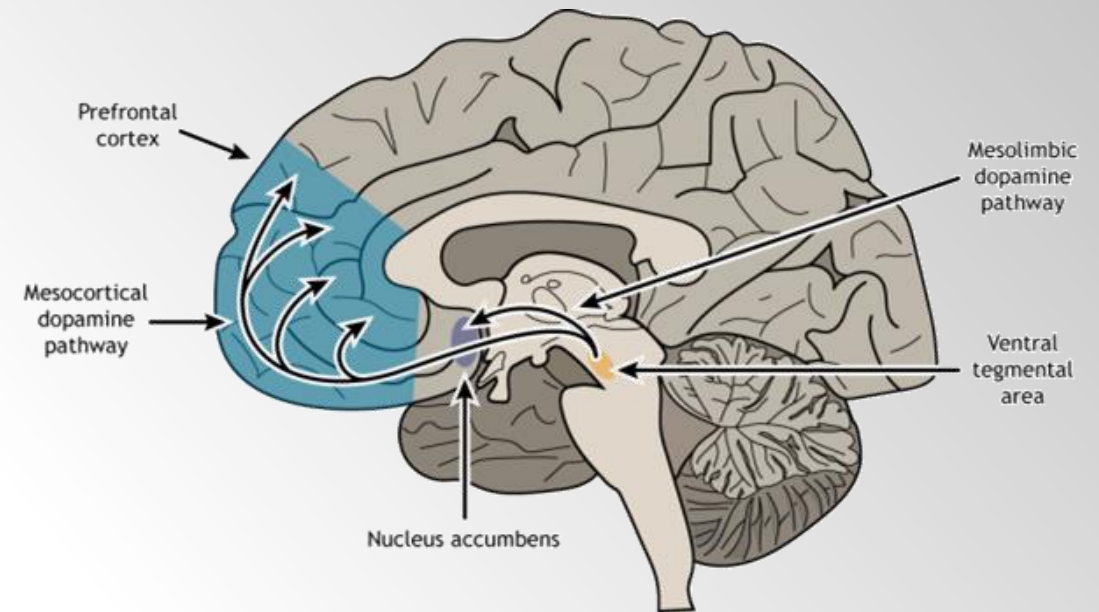
ADHD is caused by bad parenting 🧒

Important Stats on ADHD

- About 4% to 5% of adults in the U.S. have ADHD
- Some newer research suggests it might be closer to 10%, depending on how it's diagnosed (especially with increased awareness).
- Many adults with ADHD were never diagnosed as kids — estimates say only about 20% of adults with ADHD have an official diagnosis.
- ADHD is highly genetic (about 70-80% heritability)

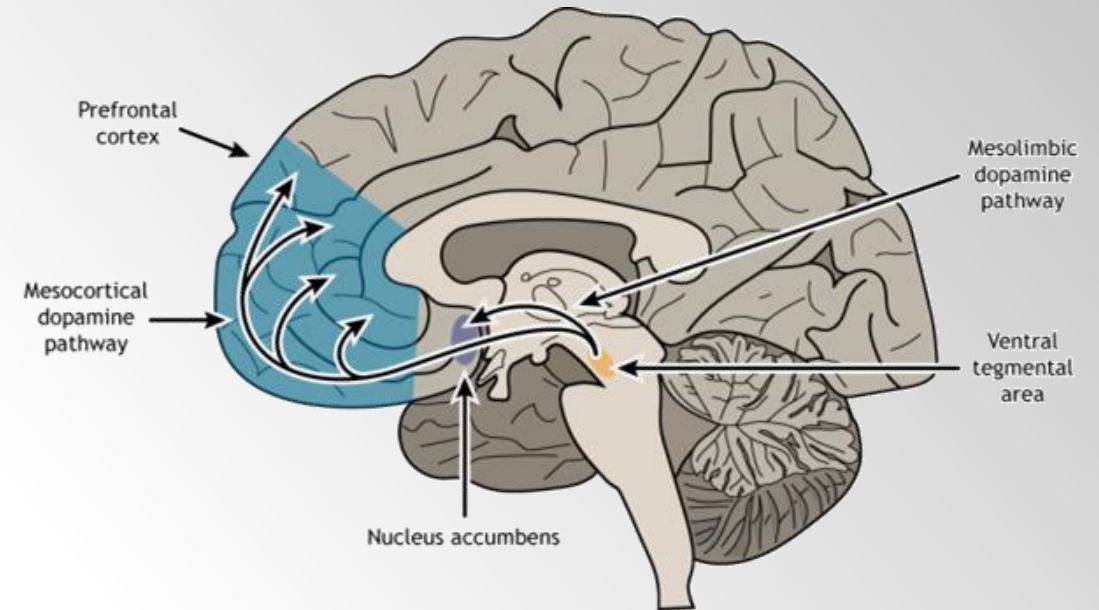
ADHD? 🤔

- ADHD shows dysfunction in three key areas, known for task management:
 - PFC
 - Dopaminergic System
 - Hypothalamus (SCN)
- *More can be considered, but these three are very important to take note of*



ADHD? 🤔

- Impairment in these three areas is linked to dysfunction in:
 - Flexible Thinking
 - Working Memory
 - Self-Monitoring
 - Planning and Prioritizing
 - Task Initiation
 - Organization
 - Impulse Control
 - Attention Direction
 - Inconsistent Sense of Urgency
 - Internal Clock



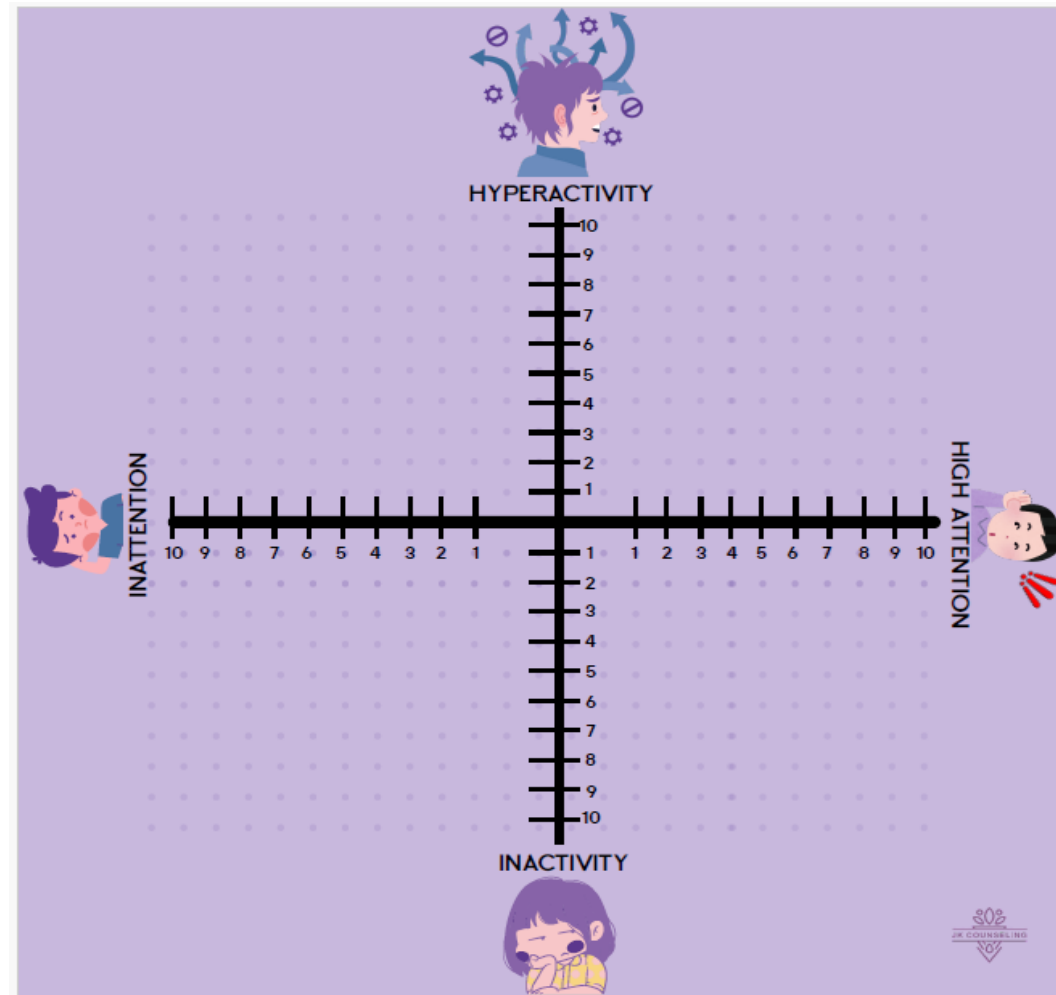
ADHD? 🤔

Are there benefits to ADHD?

Yes, but this is very context specific...

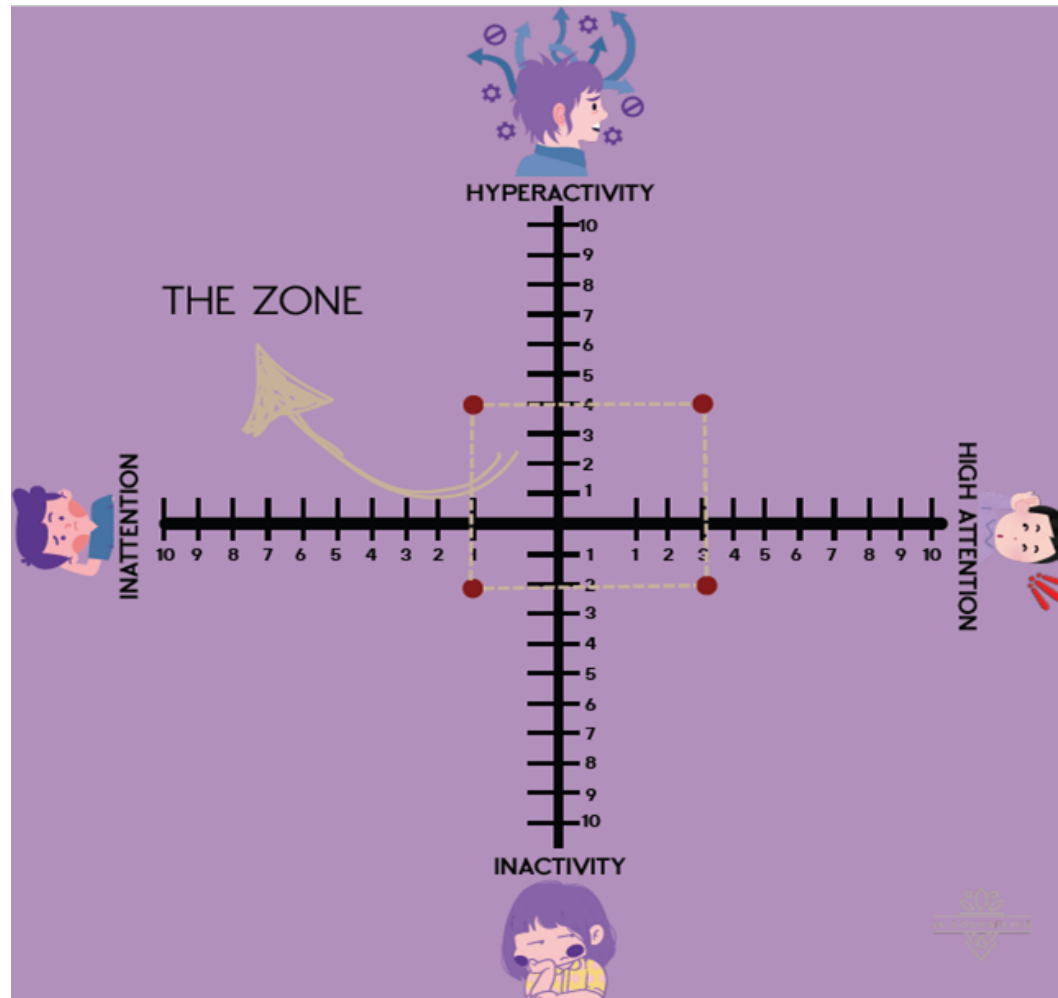
Attention-Activity Matrix

- I'll explain...



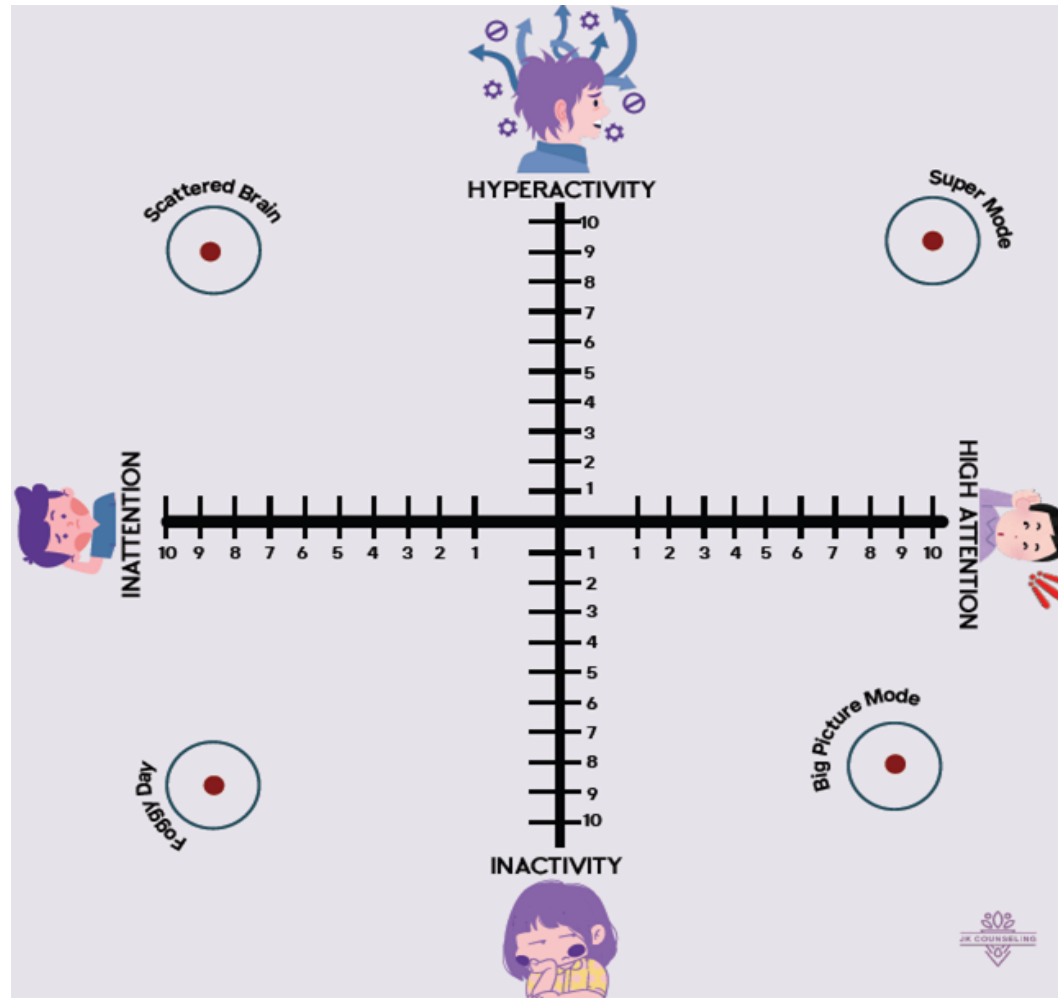
Attention-Activity Matrix

- What's your **Zone**



Attention-Activity Matrix

- Map out **your parts**!



ADHD? 🤔



MY ATTENTION-ACTIVITY MATRIX

Part Name	Attention (1-10)	Activity (1-10)	Somatic Feeling	Characteristics

ADHD? 🤔

Let's take 5-10 mins to create your own Attention-Activity Matrix.

What did you notice are the differences in your parts?
Complete the tracker!

Anger & ADHD 🤔 + 🤔 = 🤔

- There is a cyclical relationship between Anger and ADHD that we will investigate



Anger & ADHD 🤔 + 🧠 = 🧨

- Research indicates that **approximately 70%** of adults with ADHD report problems with emotional regulation, including **anger and irritability**.
- One study found that **67% of adults with ADHD** experience **impulsive anger outbursts**, difficulty calming down after getting upset, or chronic irritability (Beheshti, Chavanon, & Christiansen, 2020).

Anger & ADHD 🤔 + 🤔 = 🤔

Top-Down Regulation

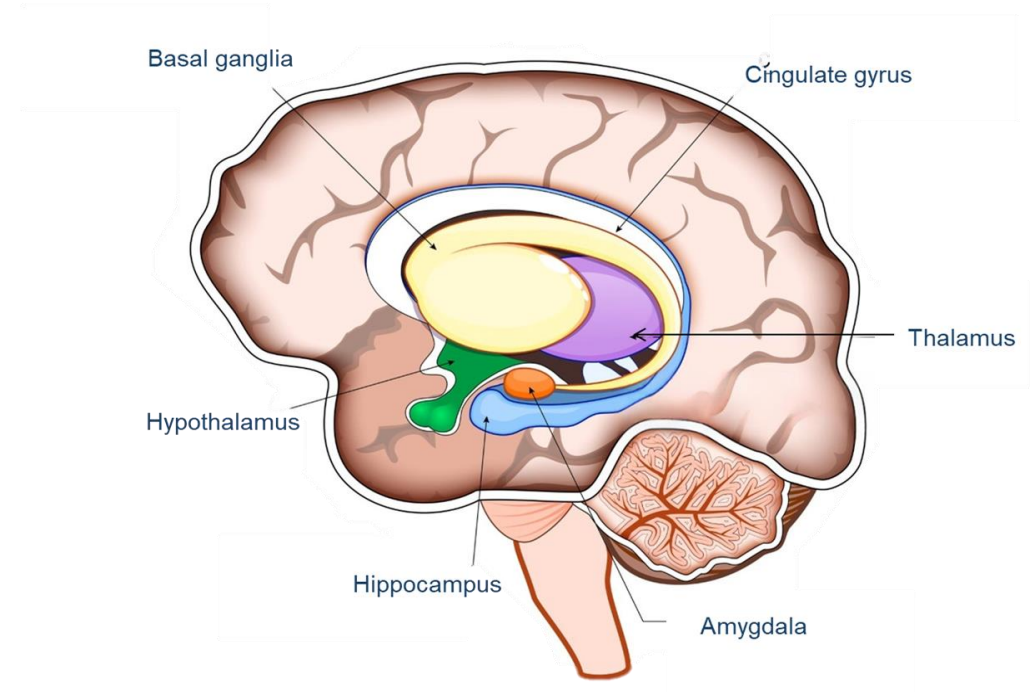
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Anger & ADHD 🤔 + 🤔 = 🤔

- **Reasons it Occurs**
 - Brain Regions impacted by each
 - ADHD is impacting Neocortical Areas
 - Anger is impacting Subcortical Areas



Anger & ADHD



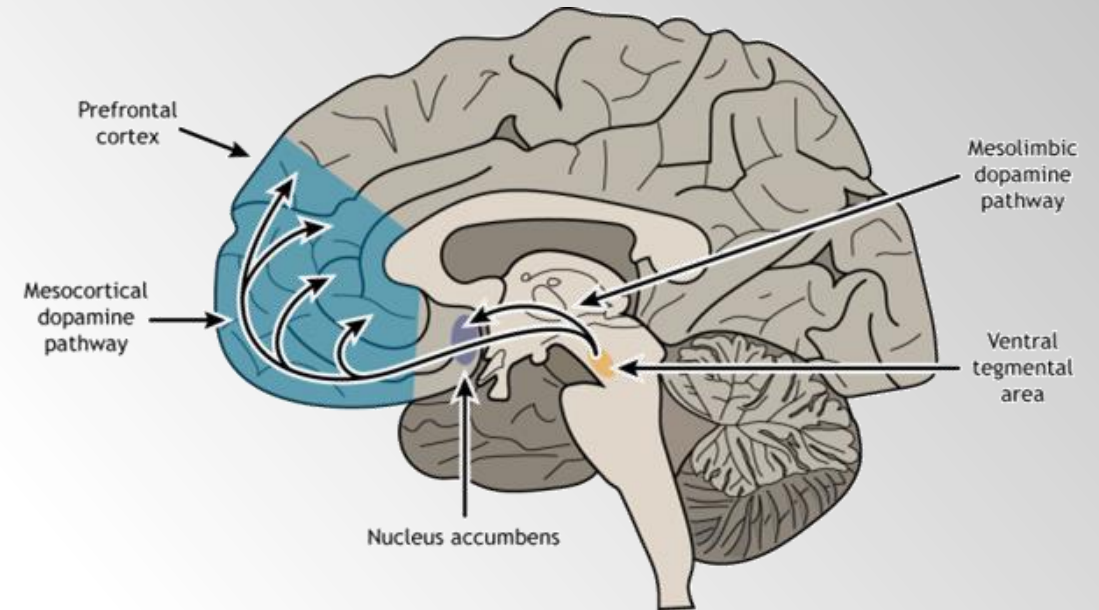
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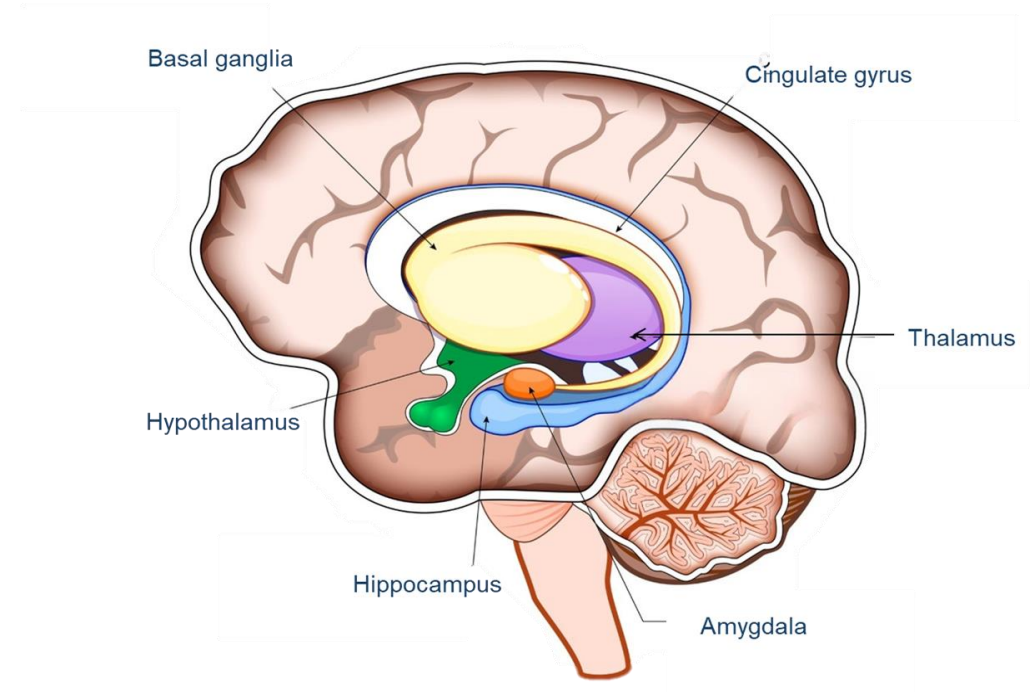


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Anger & ADHD 🤔 + 😡 = 🧠

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Anger & ADHD 🤔 + 🧠 = 🧠

- As we depart from our WOT, into DPA, the PFC begins to become overwhelmed with Limbic System activity. Making it **less effective**, ultimately creating a feedback loop that , makes re-entering one's window difficult
- Hyperarousal ↔ WOT ↔ Hypoarousal

So What Do We Do, Joel? 🙄

Keys to Anger Management in Adults with ADHD



Use a Tiered Approach



Preference must go to Bottom-Up Regulation Strategies

Strategies with Evidence 💡 😊

Preventative

- ADHD Matrix
- Shrink List Amount
- Separate Important vs Urgent
- Limit Distractions to Tasks
- Find or Create Focus Areas
- Have a Physical Clock
- “Opposite to Emotion” Planning
- Healthy Sleep Hygiene
- Healthy Diet
- Exercise, Preferably Morning
- Memory Tools
- Make an Affirmation List

Secondary

- Working Memory Hacks
- Write it Down
- Use Affirmations
- Stick to The Plan
- Use Grounding Skills
- Trust Your Gut (Literally)
- Take State Appropriate Breaks
- Give Yourself Time to Do Tasks
- Use a Clock

Tertiary

- Be Mindful of Inner Critic
- Have a Backup Plan
- Flexible Sleep Schedule
- Expect Failures (Note and Improve)
- Journal and Assess States

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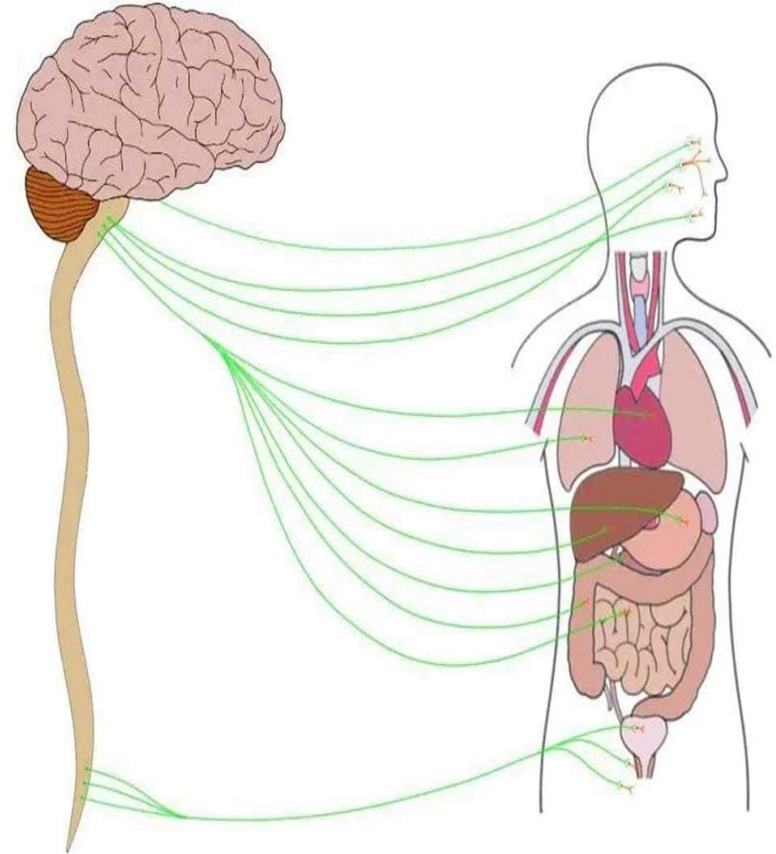
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Strategies with Evidence 💡 😏

- Preference must go to Bottom-Up Regulation Strategies
 - PFC will improve effectiveness as Limbic Reduces in Activation
 - Once regulated enough, high road processing can occur, which will continue to aid in regulating

Strategies with Evidence 💡 😏

- Parasympathetic activation, helps regulate sympathetic activation
- Because of their origin and their afferent nerve make up, they are positioned to aid the limbic system in a unique way



Strategies with Evidence 💡 😊

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Strategies with Evidence 💡 😏

- **Summary...**
 - Anger is not a pathology. Understanding it can aid in several ways. The issue lies in managing it, as DPA can lead to risks for desired outcomes
 - ADHD can also be beneficial, however due to its disordered operation it tends to exacerbate mental health challenges, especially anger
 - Anger Management in Adults with ADHD, must be predominately a body-based approach

Case Study

- The hum of the office air conditioner was a frayed edge in Earl's teeth. He stared at Maria's email: "Odyssey Project – Quick Sync?" His task was to finalize Q3 data visualizations, but his mind, instead of building a path forward, presented a list of everything he hadn't done: dentist, leaky faucet, cousin's text. He clicked over to research faucet repair kits.
- "Hey, Earl?" Kevin, a junior analyst, asked about an expense report. The simple question was an unwelcome intrusion. A hot flash of irritation bloomed in Earl's chest. "Kevin, look at the departmental memo," he snapped, his voice sharper than he intended. Kevin's face fell. Earl immediately regretted it. The shame became a buzzing insect in his thoughts.

Case Study

- Later, in the "quick sync" meeting, as Maria outlined a minor timeline change, Earl's mind drifted. He noticed a flickering fluorescent light, a pen clicking, the carpet pattern. He replayed the conversation with Kevin, cringing.
- "...Earl, does that timeline work for your data sets?" Maria asked. Every head turned. Earl blinked, realizing he'd missed the context. Panic, followed by anger, took over. "Why are we just hearing about this now?" he blurted out. "This whole rollout has been chaotic. The data integrity is compromised. It's disorganized."

Case Study

- The room went silent. Maria's smile tightened. "It was a client request, Earl. The shift is meant to help." His boss, Brenda, intervened. For the rest of the meeting, Earl heard nothing, trapped in a loop of his outburst, indignation curdling into embarrassment and self-loathing. Back at his desk, the Odyssey Project file remained untouched, his focus burned away. He completely forgot about an urgent request from Brenda due that day.
- That evening, his wife, Lena, noticed his thousand-yard stare. "Tough one?" she asked.

Case Study

- “I just don’t get it,” Earl said, frustration etched on his face. “I had all day to do this one thing. My brain wouldn’t go there. And then Kevin asks one simple question and I bite his head off. In the meeting, I sounded like a jerk. I just... I couldn’t stop it.” He sank into the couch, knowing he’d have to go in tomorrow and patch the holes he’d made.

Strategies with Evidence 💡 😏

1. What are the symptoms that you noticed about Earl's ADHD and/or Anger Management Troubles? How did they impact each other?
2. Using the framework previously discussed, build an intervention that can help Earl manage his actions. Give your rationale.

Questions?

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Thank you!