

# HOW TRAUMA CHANGES US & BECOMING TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

Strategies to Improve Student Learning



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A man with light brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue t-shirt with a patterned sleeve, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is smiling and looking down at his hands, which are holding a blue string. He is performing a string magic trick, with the string looped around his fingers. The background is a blurred indoor setting with other people.

# Kevin W. Spencer

Performing Artist | Educator | Speaker | Researcher

Carlow University  
Research Consultant  
Harvard Medical  
Fulbright Specialist  
Professional Magician







**CAIRO**

**ROME**

**TOKYO**

**NEW  
YORK**

**LONDON**

**HONG  
KONG**

**PARIS**

**CAPE  
TOWN**













2009 Illusionist of the Year | 2015 International Magician of the Year | 2020 Artist of the Year

# SPENCERS

## THEATRE OF ILLUSION







Subjectivity

Emotion

Qualitative

**ARTS**

Objectivity

Data

Quantitative

**ACADEMIA**













































# What is Trauma?

“An exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope.”

(Ross & Groves, 2005)

NOT the event...RESPONSE to the event

Rice, K. & Groves, B. (2005). *Hope and healing; A caregiver's guide to helping young children affected by trauma*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.



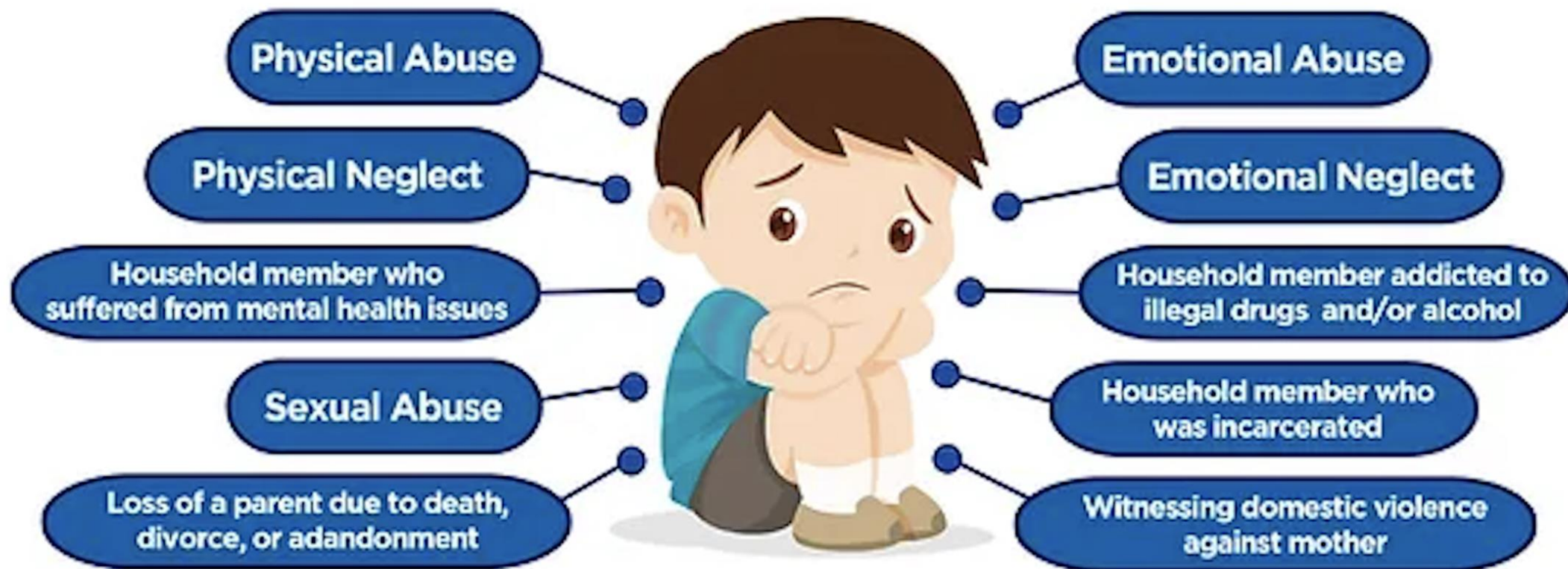
# Trauma is Epidemic

Understand, process, and manage  
all the complexities associated  
with trauma





## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES INCLUDE:





Lowers tolerance for stress, which can result in behaviors such as fighting, checking out or defiance.

Increases difficulty in making friends and maintaining relationships.

Increases stress hormones which affect the body's ability to fight infection.

May cause lasting health problems.



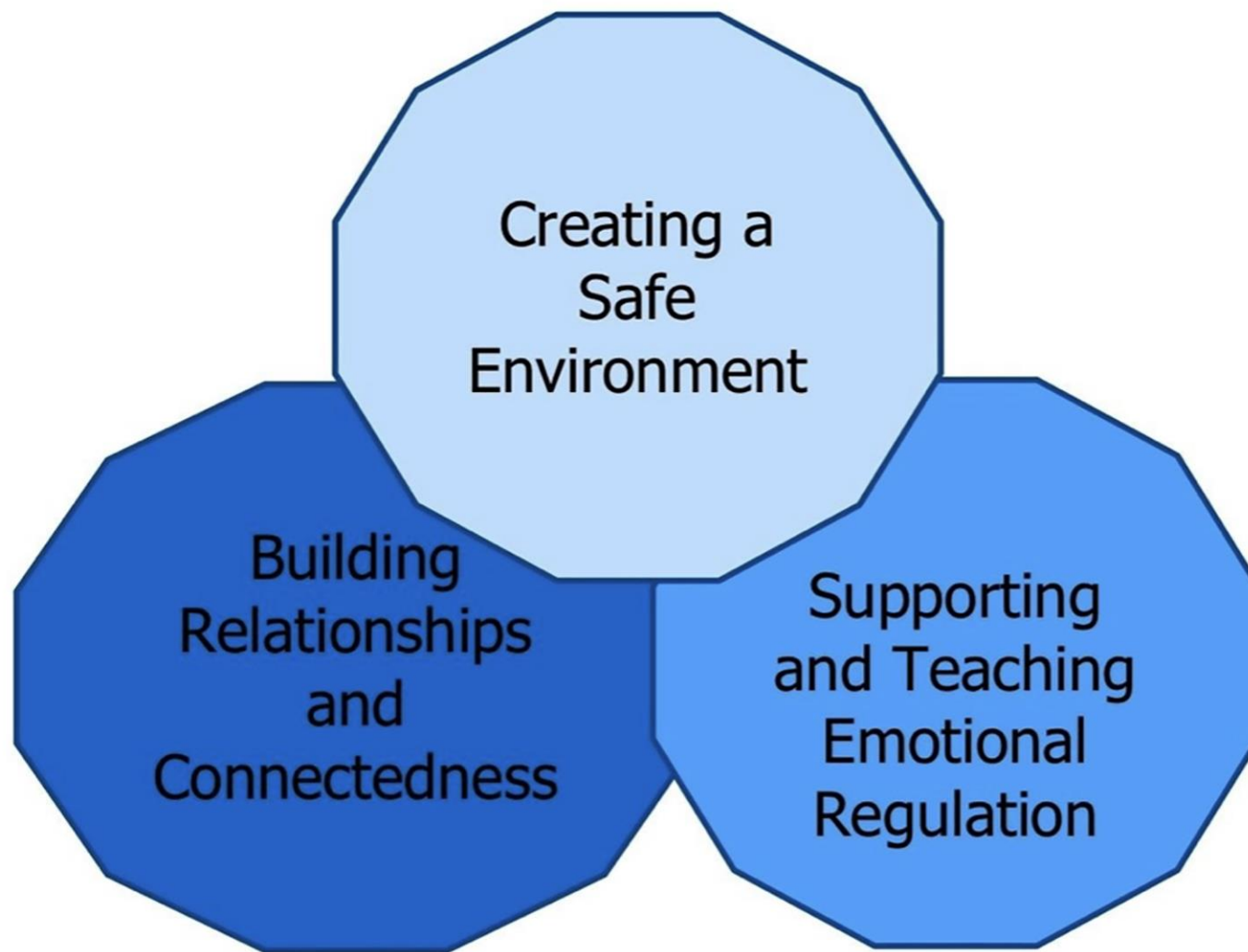
Increases problems with learning and memory.

***I can't hear you!  
I can't respond to you!  
I am just trying to be safe!***

Reduces the ability to respond, learn, or figure things out, which can result in problems in school.



# Components of Trauma-Informed Care





# **5 FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS**

**THAT COULD CHANGE EVERYTHING**





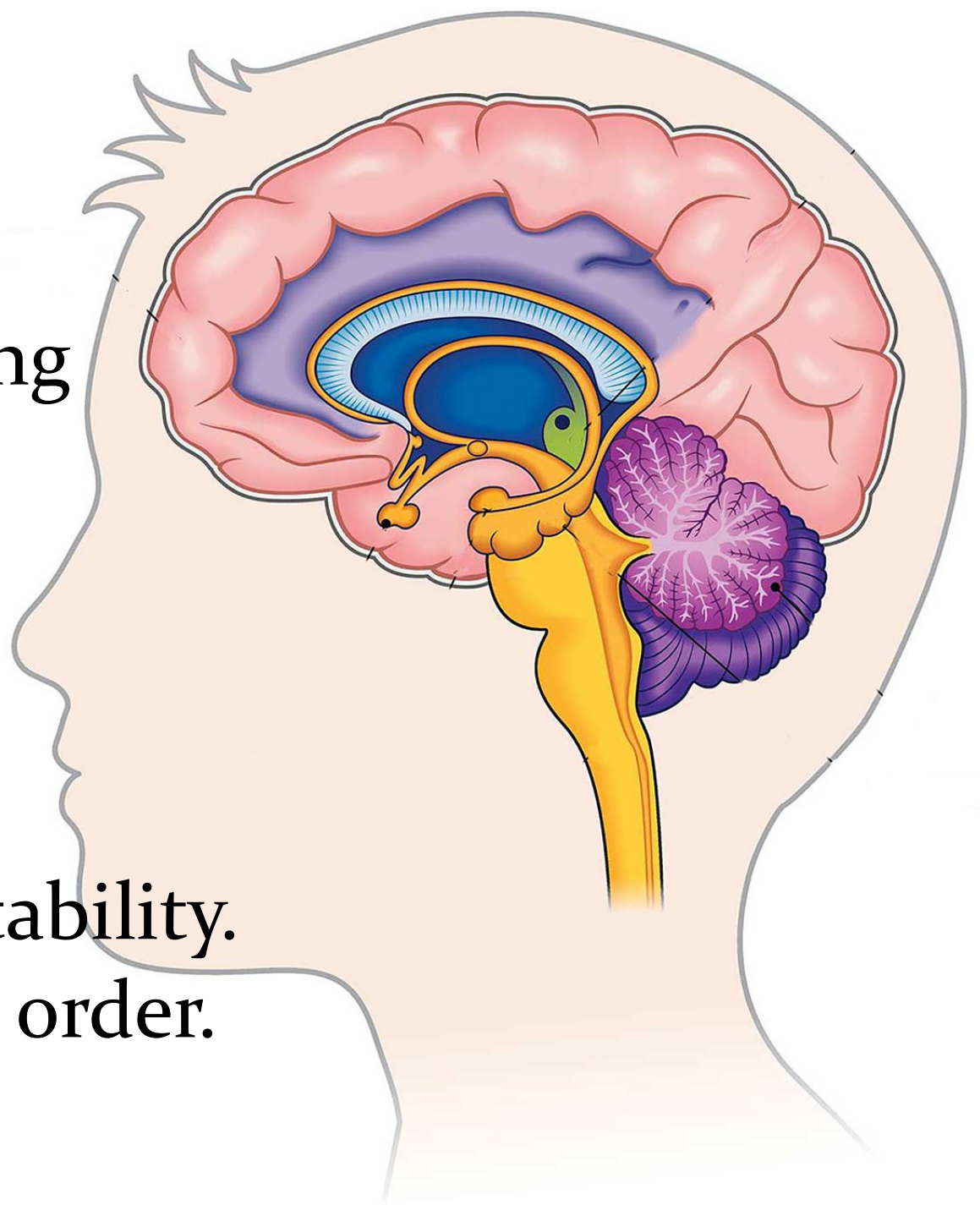
# FIVE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent.
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect learning and development in a multitude of ways.



- ❖ One Time Trial Learning
- ❖ Recognize Patterns
- ❖ Create Schemas

Safety depends on predictability.  
Predictability depends on order.













## WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR BRAIN?

Activates our right brain

*Nonverbal communication*

Deactivates our left brain

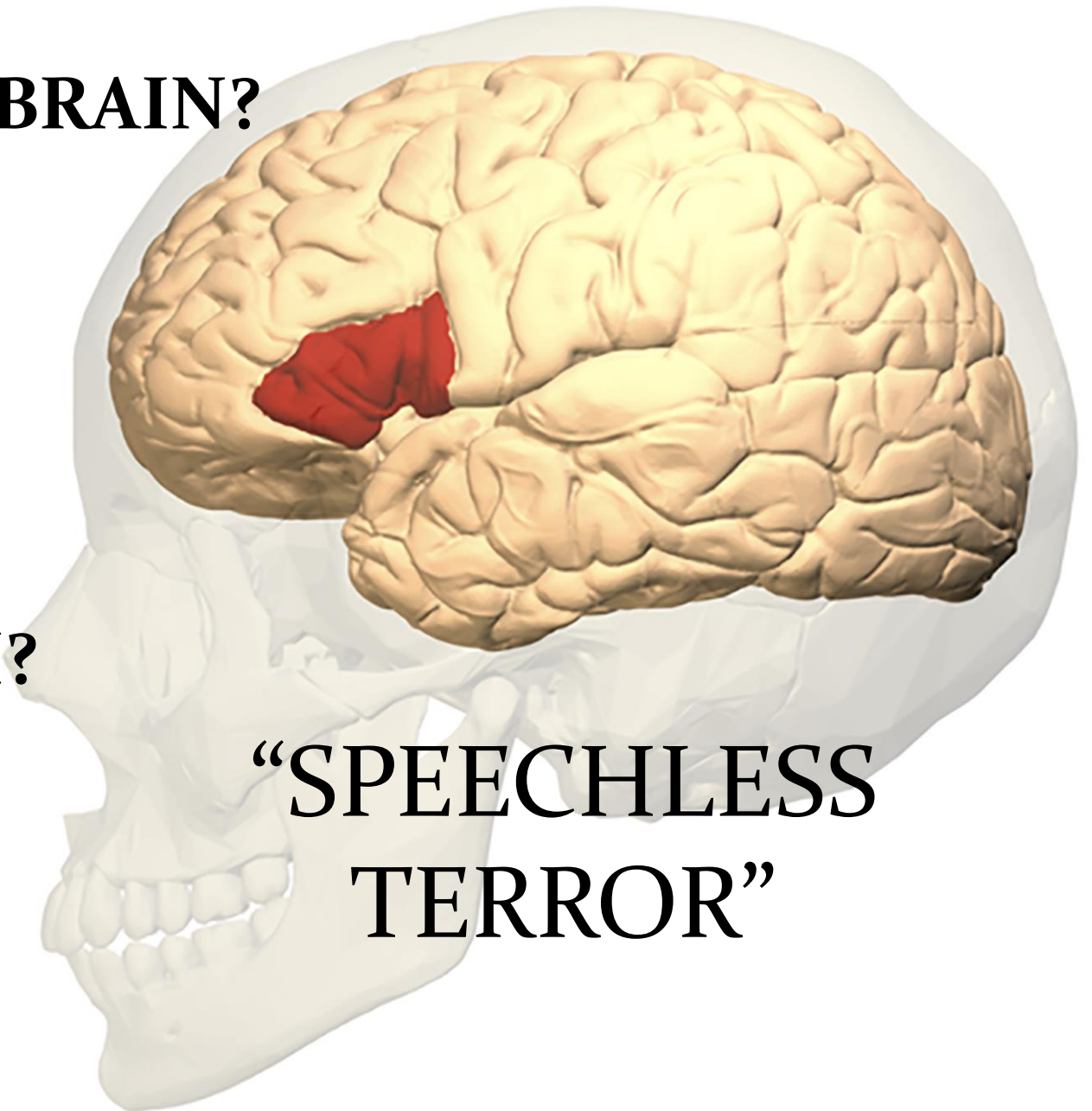
*Verbal communication*

## WHY IS THAT A PROBLEM?

*Organize our experiences*

*Express our emotions*

*Accurately put into words*



**“SPEECHLESS  
TERROR”**



# FIVE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent.
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect learning and development in a multitude of ways.
4. We need to be prepared to support those who have experienced trauma, even if we don't know exactly who they are.
5. People are resilient, and within positive learning environments, they can grow, learn, and succeed.

Souers, K. & Hall, P. (2016). *Fostering resilient learners: Strategies for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



Constant State of  
Stress Response

Chemical Changes

Real Threat

Versus

Perceived Threat

CHRONIC STRESS





# TRAUMA RESPONSES







# Freeze

## **FREEZE**

Difficulty making  
decisions

Stuck

Dissociation

Isolating

Numb



## **FLIGHT**

Workaholic

Over-thinker

Anxiety, panic, OCD

Difficulty sitting still

Perfectionist

# Flight







# Fawn

## **FAWN**

People pleaser

Lack of identity

No boundaries

Overwhelmed

Codependent



# Fight

## **FIGHT**

Anger outburst

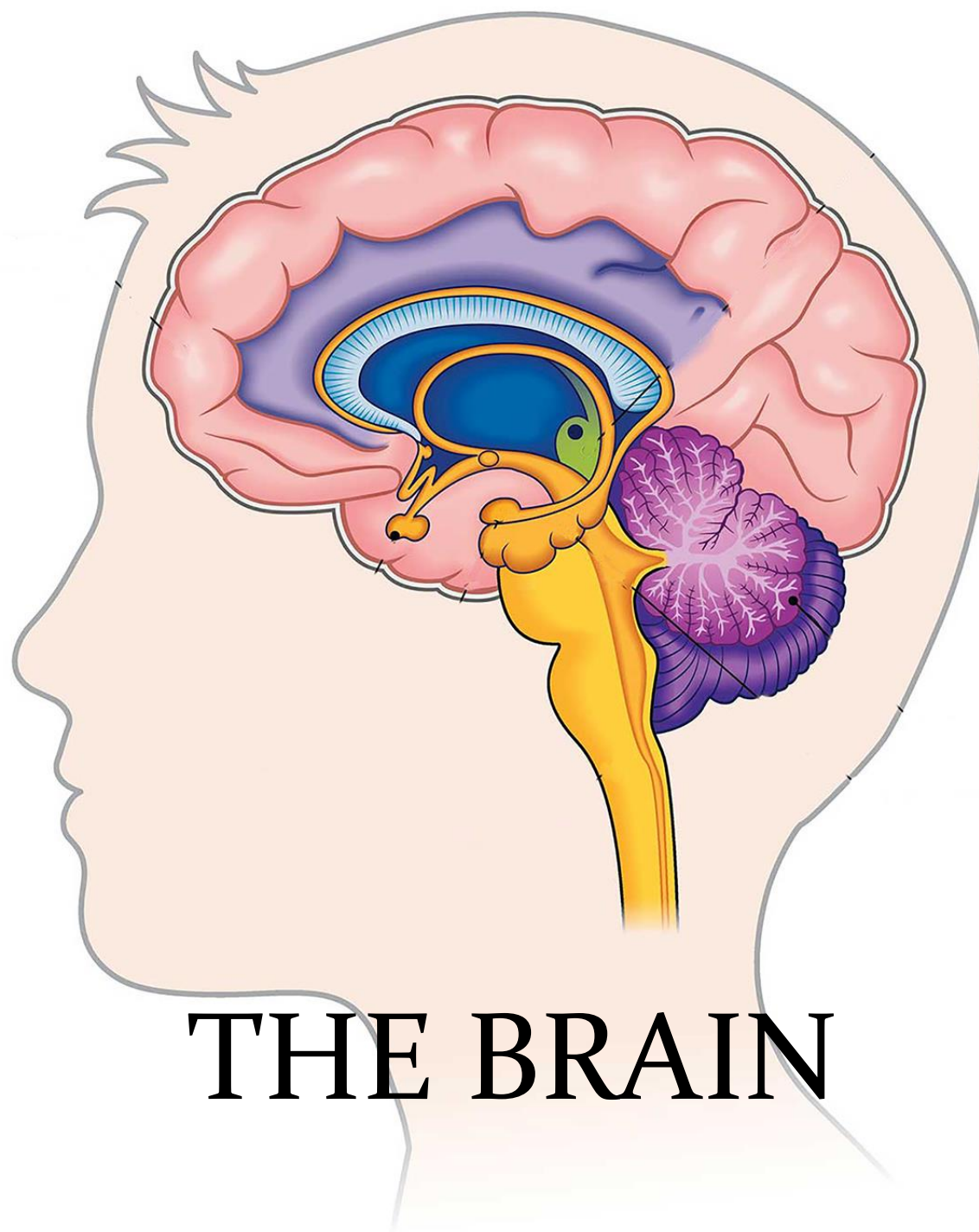
Controlling

"The bully"

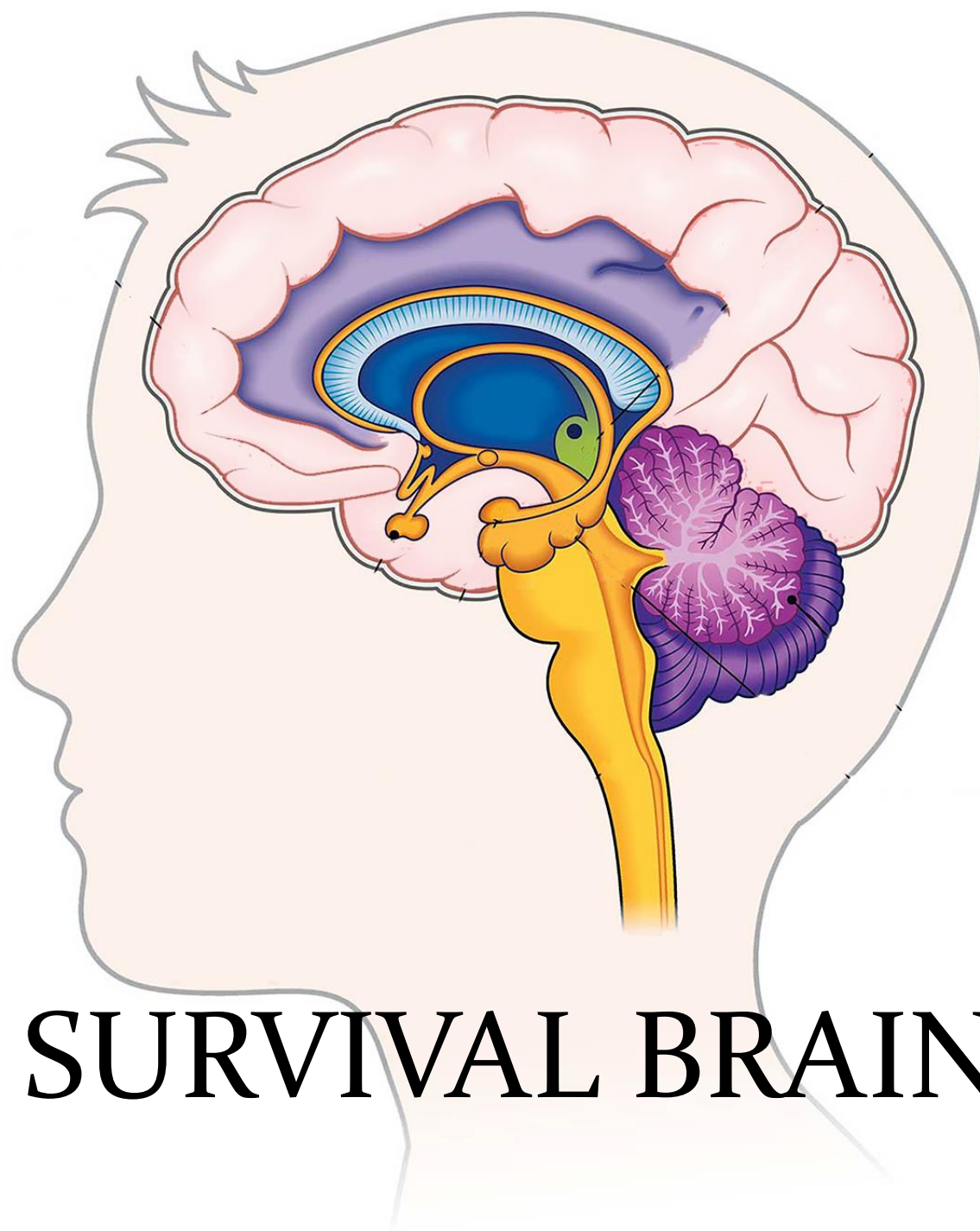
Narcissistic

Explosive behaviour





THE BRAIN

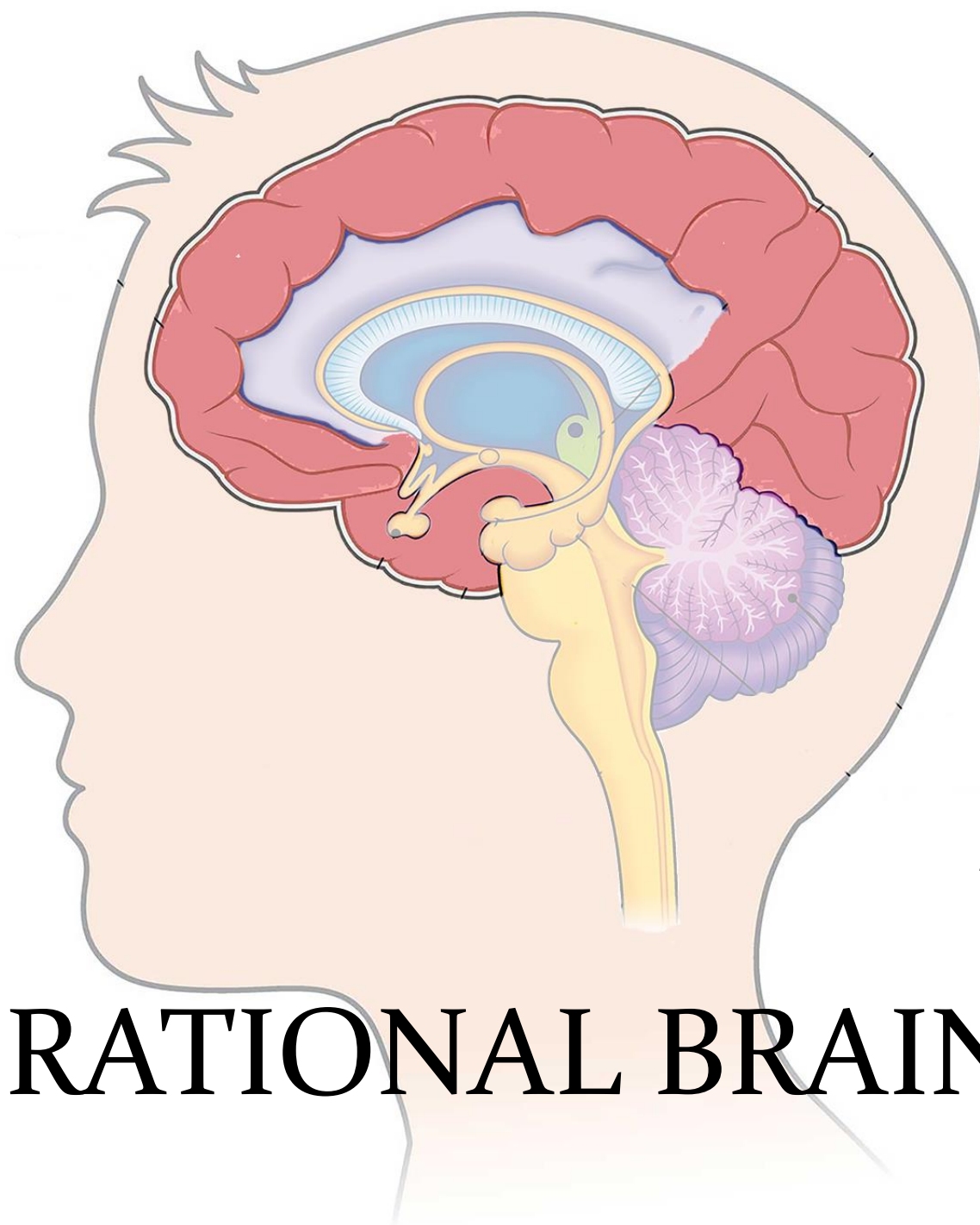


*Does not  
think*

*Only reacts*

**SURVIVAL BRAIN**



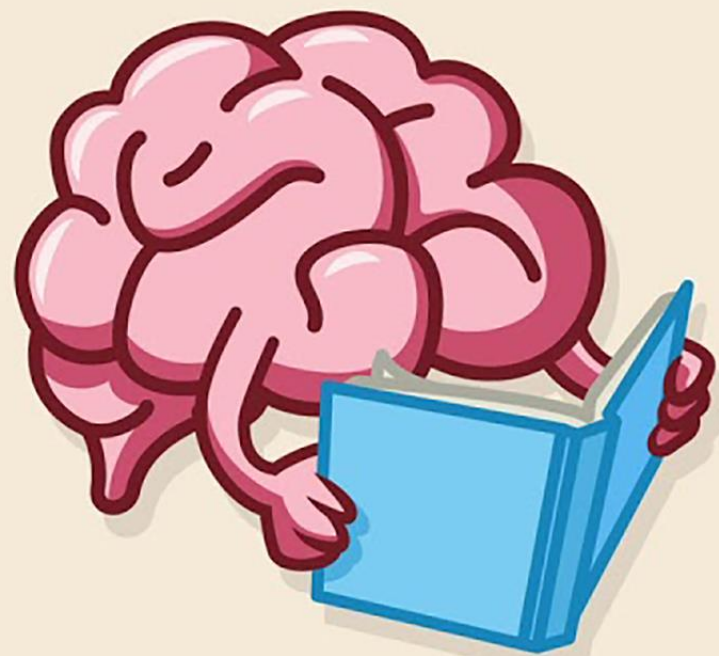


*Respond*

*Reasoned  
Action*

**RATIONAL BRAIN**

LEARNING BRAIN

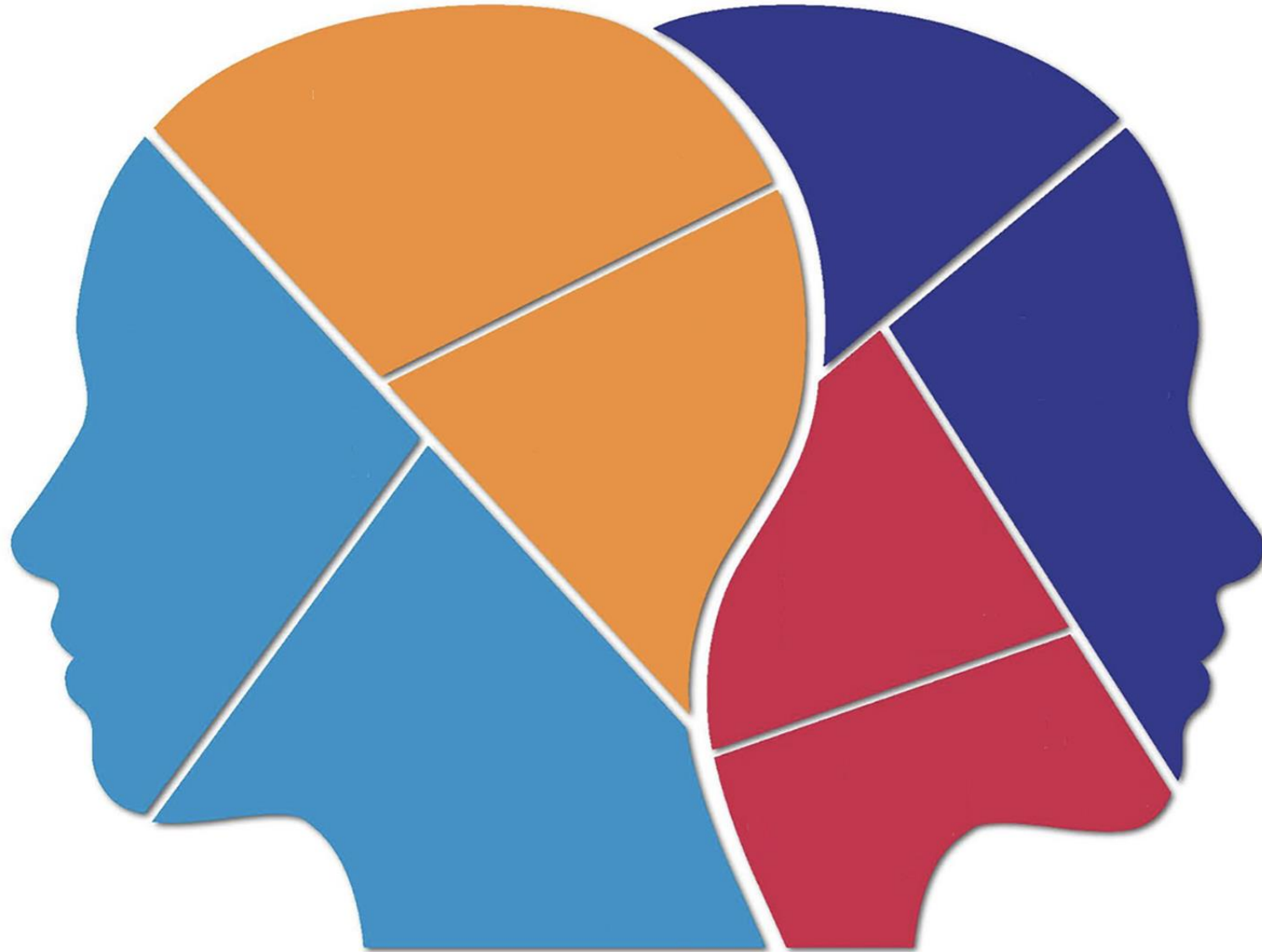


SURVIVAL BRAIN





# How to Support Someone **Who Has Experienced Trauma**



# How to Support Someone Who Has Experienced Trauma



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# **4 BIG IDEAS**

**CREATING A TRAUMA SENSITIVE  
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**



# B I G I D E A

## #1 – Self-Awareness

STRATEGY #1: Stay grounded in your core beliefs, your integrity, and your purpose.

STRATEGY #2: Do not allow a student to bring you into their chaos. If it's predictable, it's preventable.

STRATEGY #3: It's not about you. Students' actions and behaviors are driven primarily by an unmet need.





# B I G I D E A

## #2 – Relationships

STRATEGY #1: Attend to your relationships.

STRATEGY #2: View students as individuals who need your support by forgetting labels and focusing on influence.



# B I G I D E A

## #3 – Beliefs

STRATEGY #1: Forever changed but not forever damaged.

STRATEGY #2: It's OK to be Not-OK.

STRATEGY #3: Don't let fear drive the bus.





# B I G I D E A

## #4 – Live, Laugh, Love

STRATEGY #1: Show grace.

STRATEGY #2: Hand out cookies.

STRATEGY #3: Engage in Self-Care.

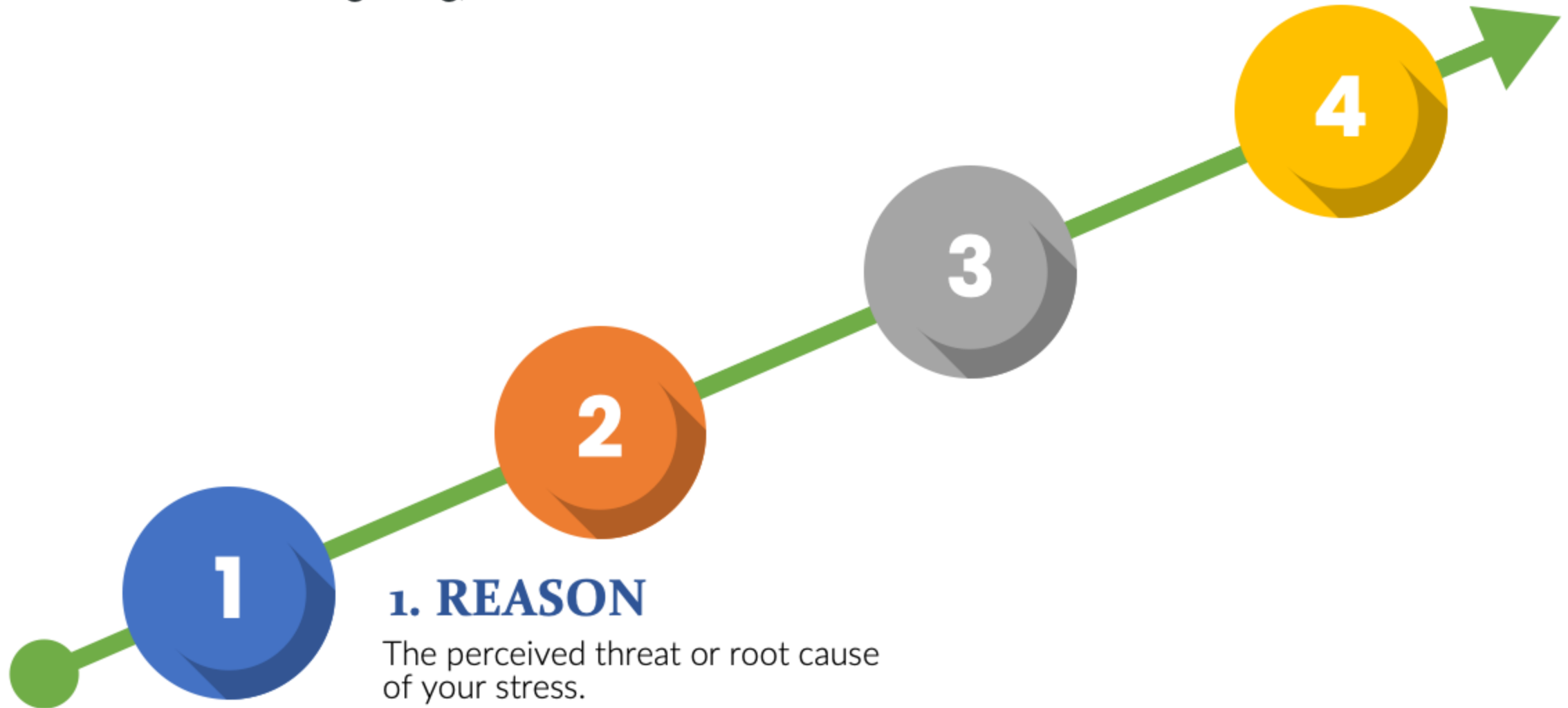
# STRESSOR VS STRESS





# THE STRESS RESPONSE CYCLE

The stress response cycle is a biological process in our bodies that has a beginning, middle and an end.



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# COMPLETING THE STRESS CYCLE

BREATHING  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY  
LAUGHING  
SOCIAL INTERACTION  
CRYING  
PHYSICAL AFFECTION  
CREATIVITY



# CREATIVITY BREAK



HOW DO WE KNOW  
?

# HOW TRAUMA CHANGES US & BECOMING TRAUMA-SENSITIVE

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