

The Teenage Brain



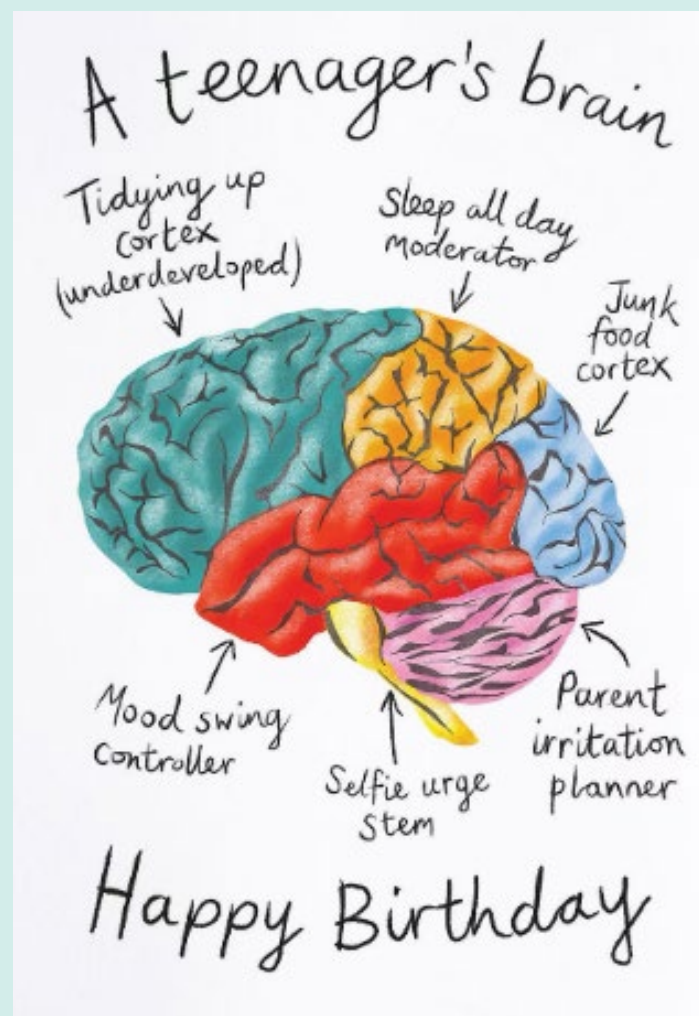
Agenda

- Brain basics
- Fight, flight, freeze, fawn responses
- Pruning
- Window of tolerance
- Strategies
- Signposting

Starter

Can you recall how your adolescence was explained to you?
Can you remember feeling excited, worried, confused about
'turning in to' a teenager?

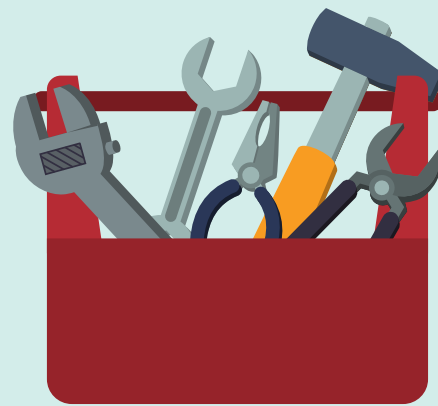
Can you think of any examples of teenagers in TV or film?



How might the presentation of adolescence in media and culture affect young people's thoughts about themselves? Feelings?

How might it affect motivation of young people to take ownership of their own emotional wellbeing?

Everyone's development is occurring at slightly different speeds, much like the different physical presentations of puberty.



The structure and activity in a teenage brain is vastly different to an adult brain.

Adolescent young people are operating with an incomplete "kit" or toolbox.



THE TEEN BRAIN

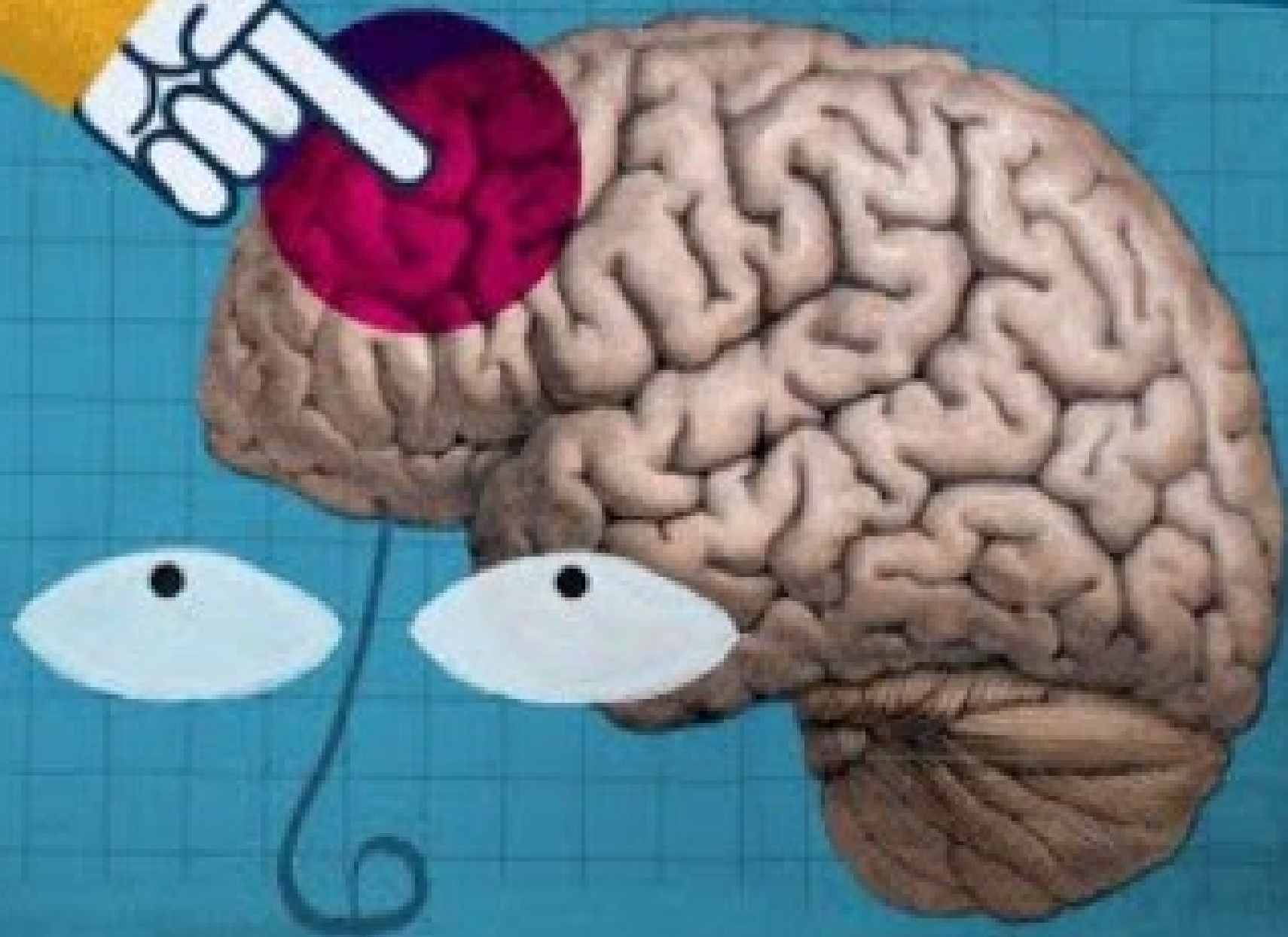
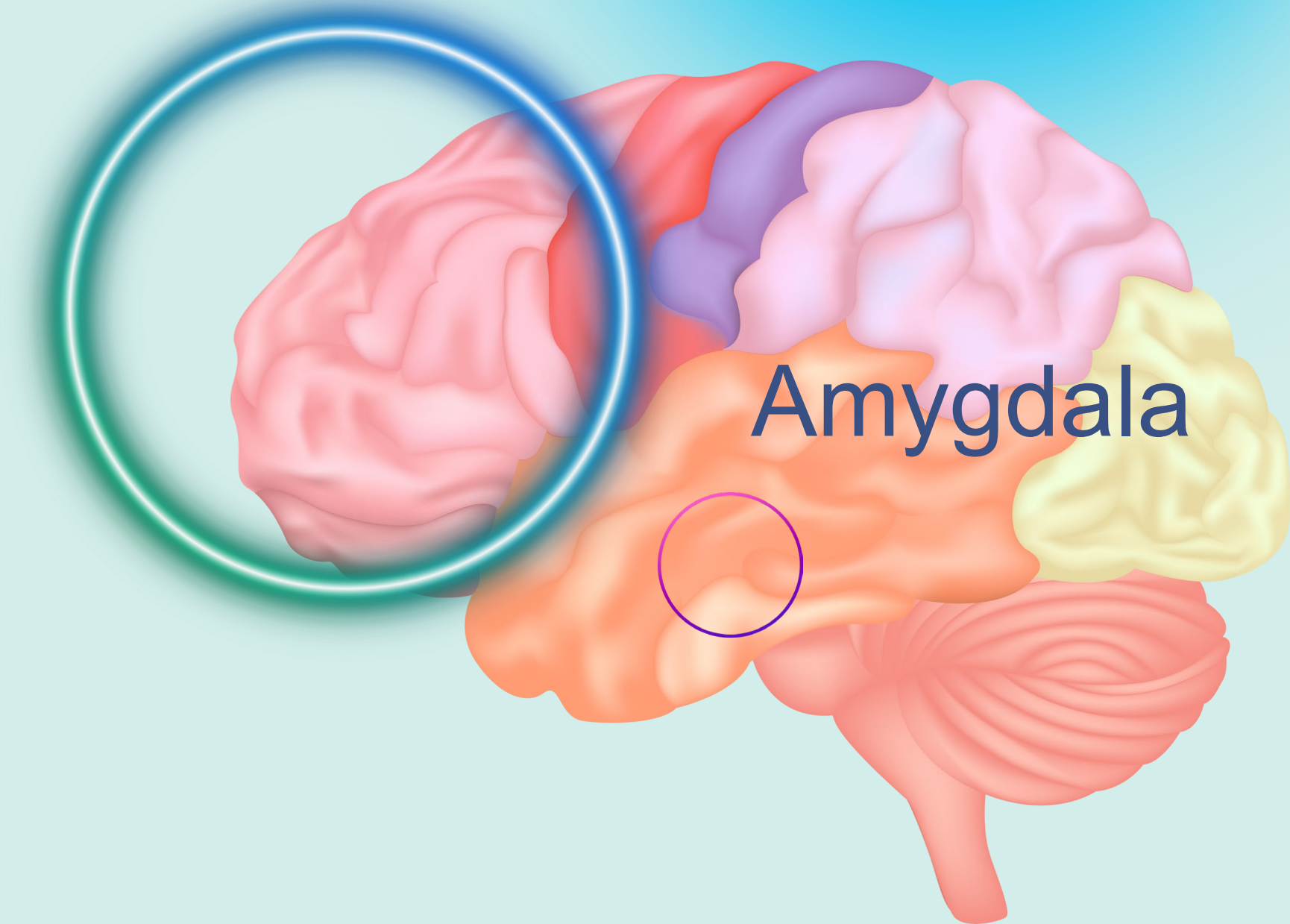


Fig. 1

Fight, flight, freeze, fawn

- Our eyes, ears, and other sensory organs send information to the amygdala.
- The hippocampus works to remind the amygdala that there is a negative memory attached to this feeling.
- The prefrontal cortex is unable to reason with them.
- If it feels we are in danger it sends a message to activate the fight, flight, freeze or fawn response.

Pre frontal cortex



Fight

Try to beat the threat

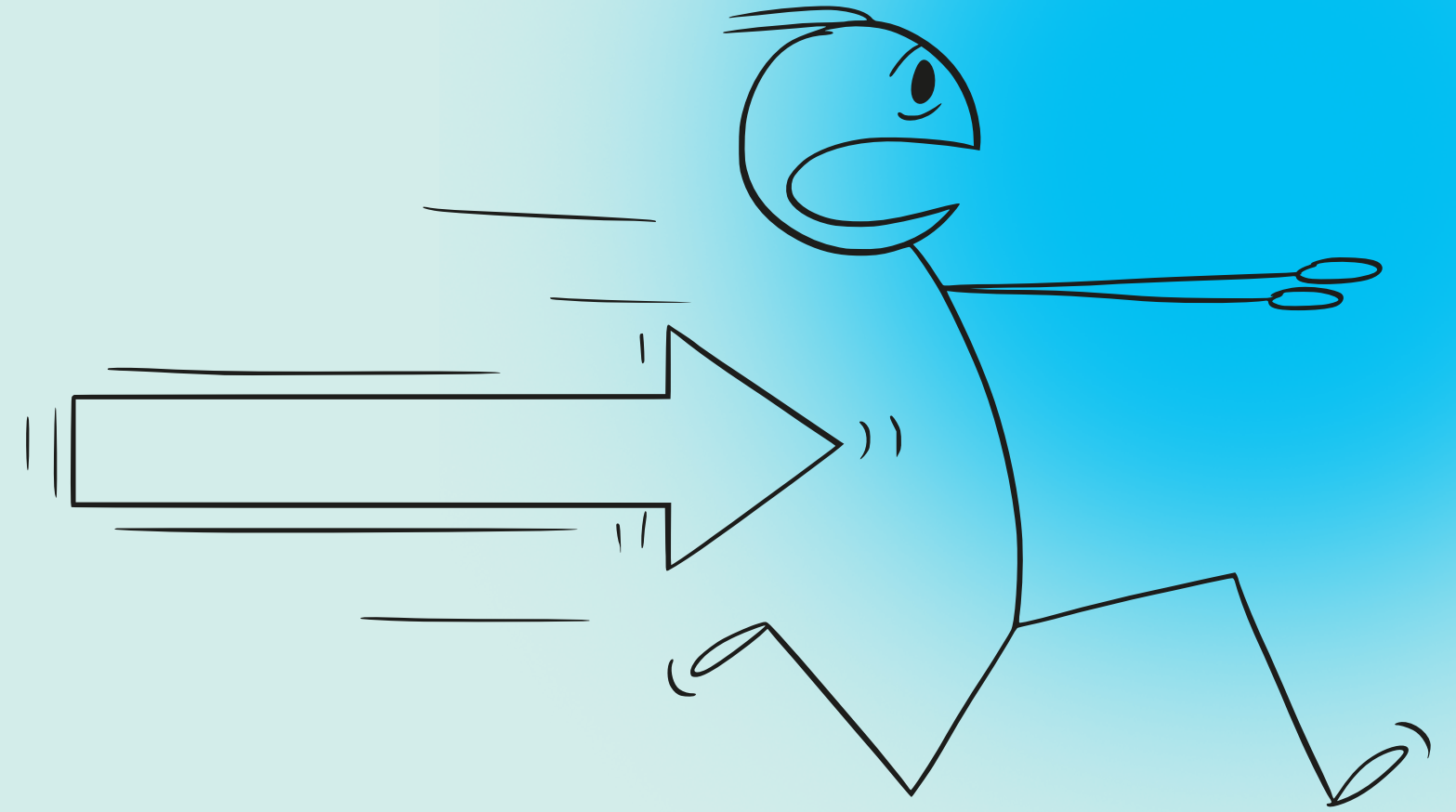
- Kicking
- Screaming
- Pushing
- Spitting
- Throwing objects
- Clenched fists
- Struggled to breathe
- Challenging
- Anger feels a safer emotion than more vulnerable emotions
- Playing arguments over in our head



Flight

Trying to escape the threat

- Restlessness
- Excessive fidgeting
- Doing anything to get away
- Running away without concern for own safety
- Using phones/ eating/ sleeping or gaming to complete a 'flight' response
- Being withdrawn
- Avoidance



Freeze

Making the threat believe you are not there

- Holding your breath
- Increased heart rate
- Shutting down
- Feeling unable to move – stuck
- Escaping your own mind temporarily
- Daydreaming
- Complaining or asking lots of questions
- Numbing out
- Muteness, inability to formulate verbal communication
- Disassociation

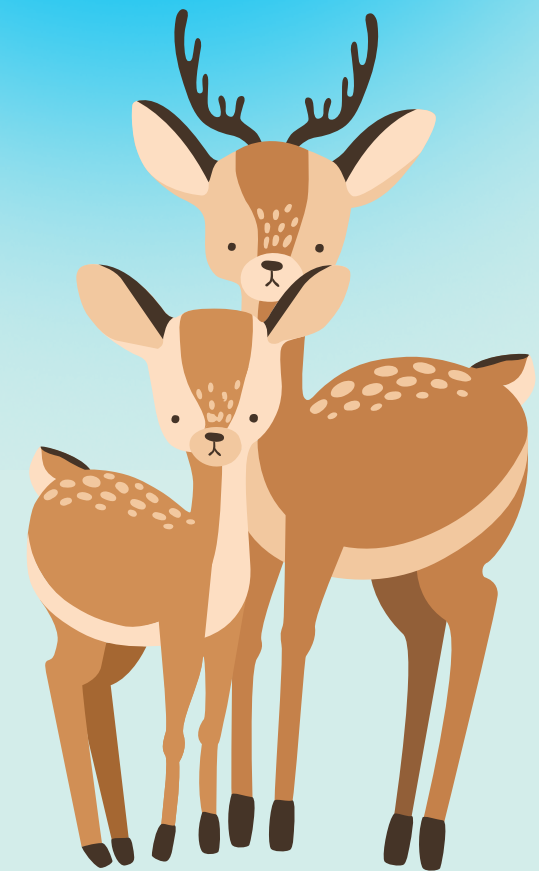


Fawn

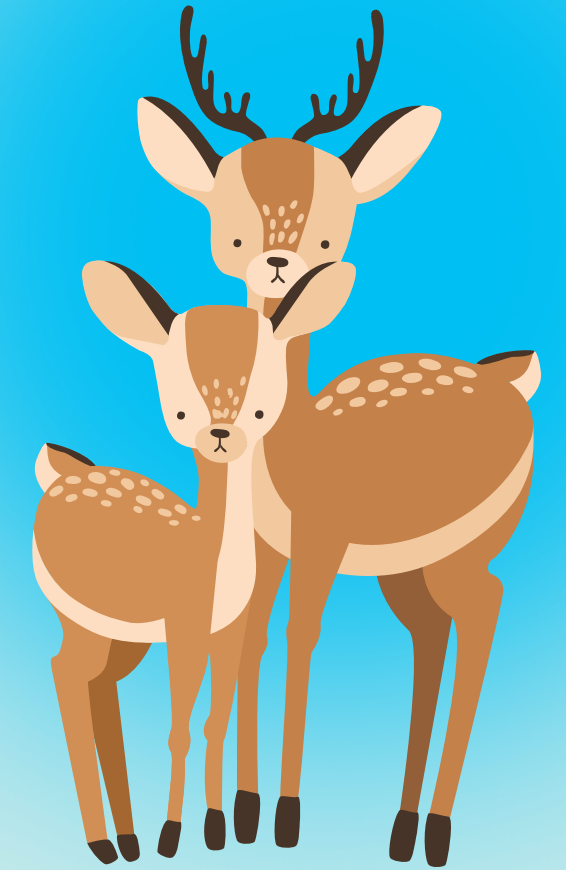
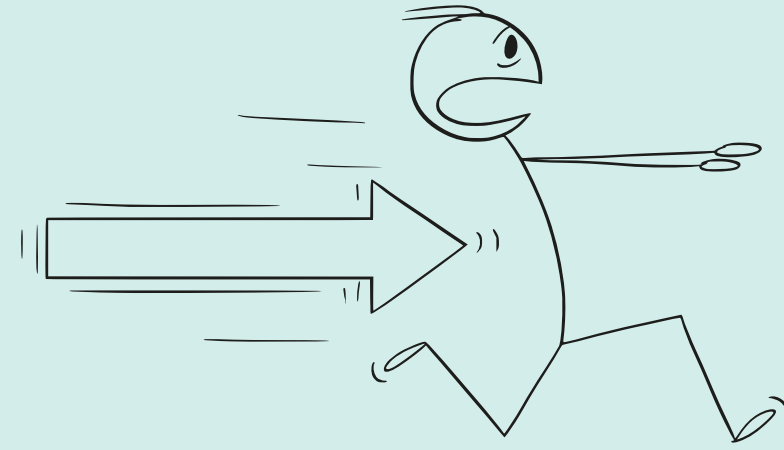
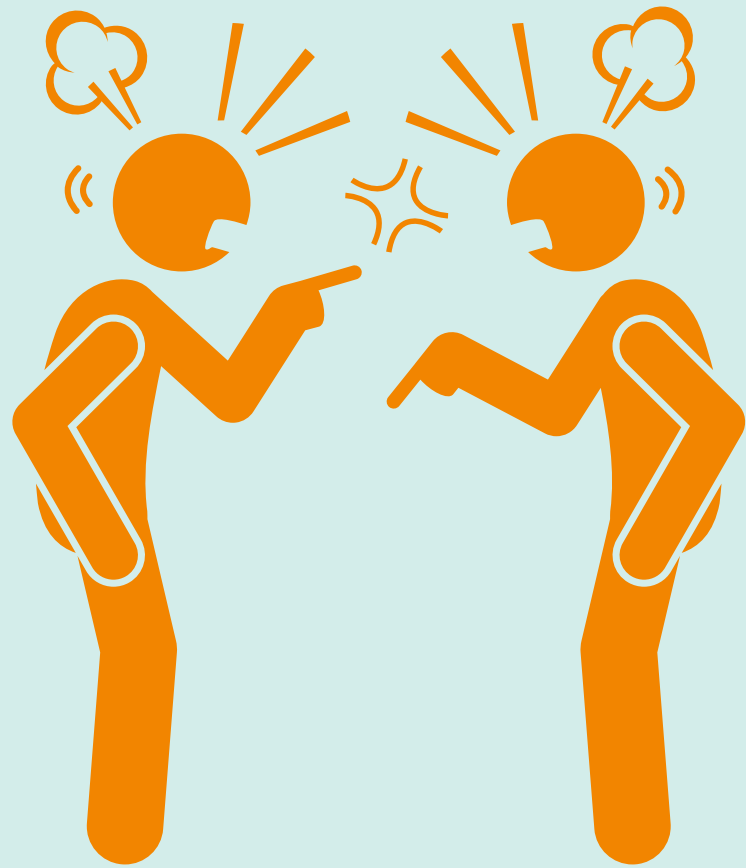
Lesser talked about FFFF response.

Trying to make the friends with the threat, in order to survive.

- Appeasing the threat
- Making lots of jokes in order to achieve positive social responses
- Quick to do follow instructions
- Humour is a defence
- Sometimes seen as “people pleasers”
- Connection seeking through jokes, banter
- Flirting a lot to feel better
- Putting the needs of others before our own



Sometimes we don't know we are in distress when in the 'fawn' response.



This is an automatic response which can lead to feeling emotionally overwhelmed.

The teen brain is more sensitive to the FFFF response.

The Hand Brain Model

When the threat response happens in the downstairs brain, your upstairs brain does not work fully. The downstairs brain includes a memory scanner, which sometimes files memories in the wrong place.

When stressed or tired, our threat response is activated more quickly and more frequently.



The Adolescent Brain

- 20-30 years ago, it was assumed that most of the brain development happens in the first few years of life.
- In the last 2 decades, because of structural MRI, and fMRI (functional MRI), scientists can now track brain activity throughout the lifespan. This turned everything previously thought about brain development on its head.
- Our brains do not get any larger after early adolescence (reaches adult size at around 11 years).
- However, our brains continue 'remodelling' in terms of neural connections, neural pathways and brain structure.
- We now know that the brain undergoes an entire remodel, from the back of the brain to front, which lasts for over a decade.



Pruning

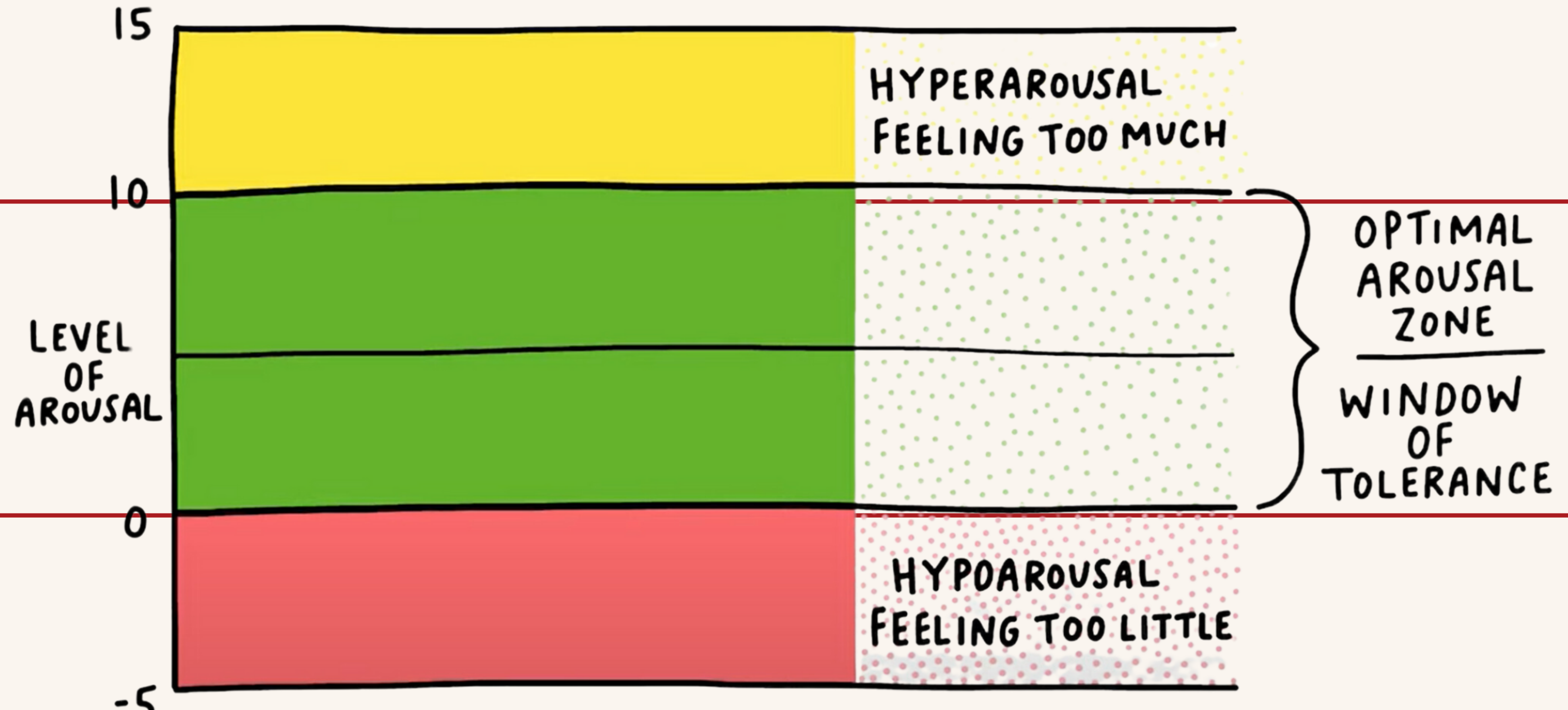
- The big implication for learning, health and wellbeing is that the teen brain is working on a ‘use it or lose it’ principle.
- Skills that are not being used, are pruned away.
- At the same time, other skills that are being practised are strengthened. This is the brain’s way of becoming more efficient.
- This is like branches of a network of trees being pruned and the remaining branches thickening.



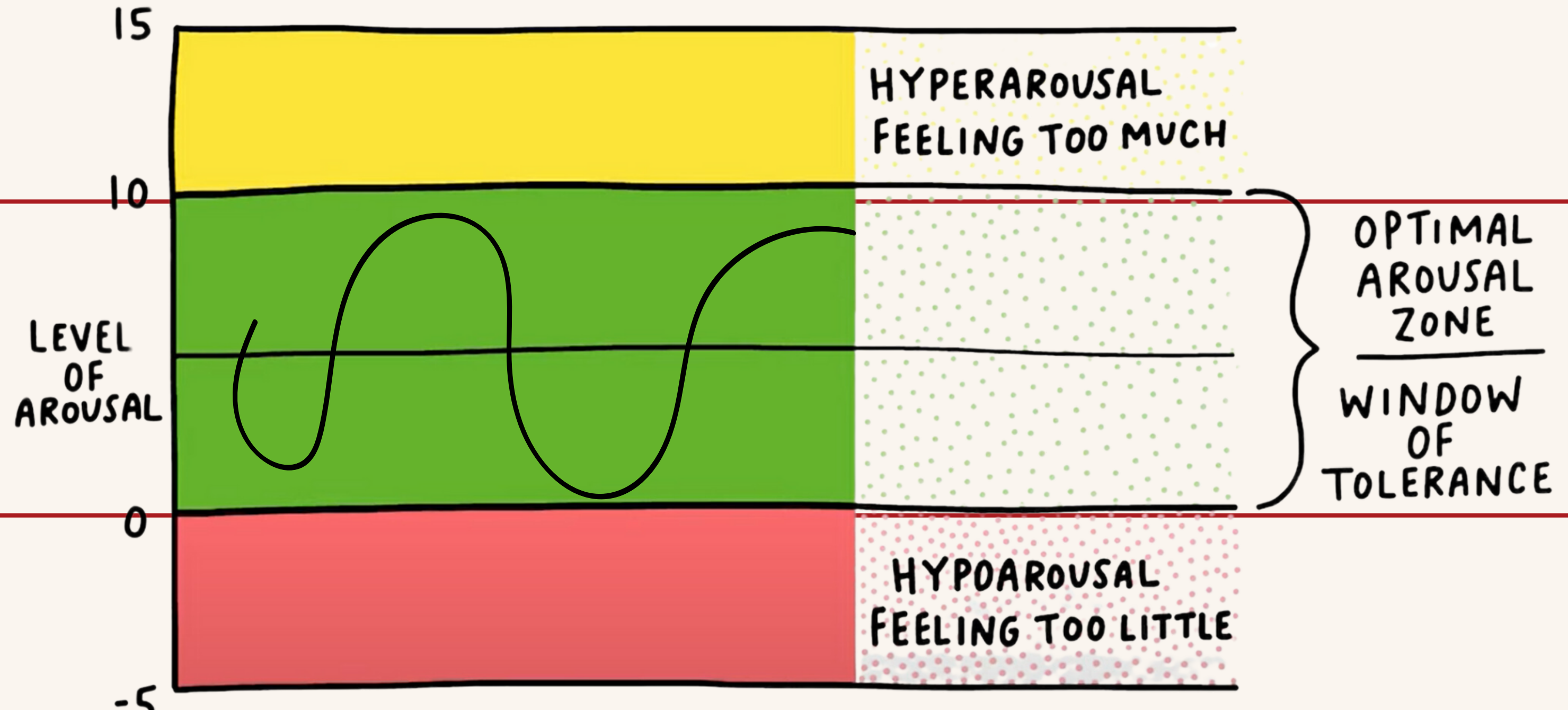
Cognitive processes practiced in the teenage years are being cemented in for life. This includes skills for mental health like talking about feelings, labelling emotions, reflecting on our own thoughts and questioning them, developing our personal strengths, using exercise or creativity to cope.



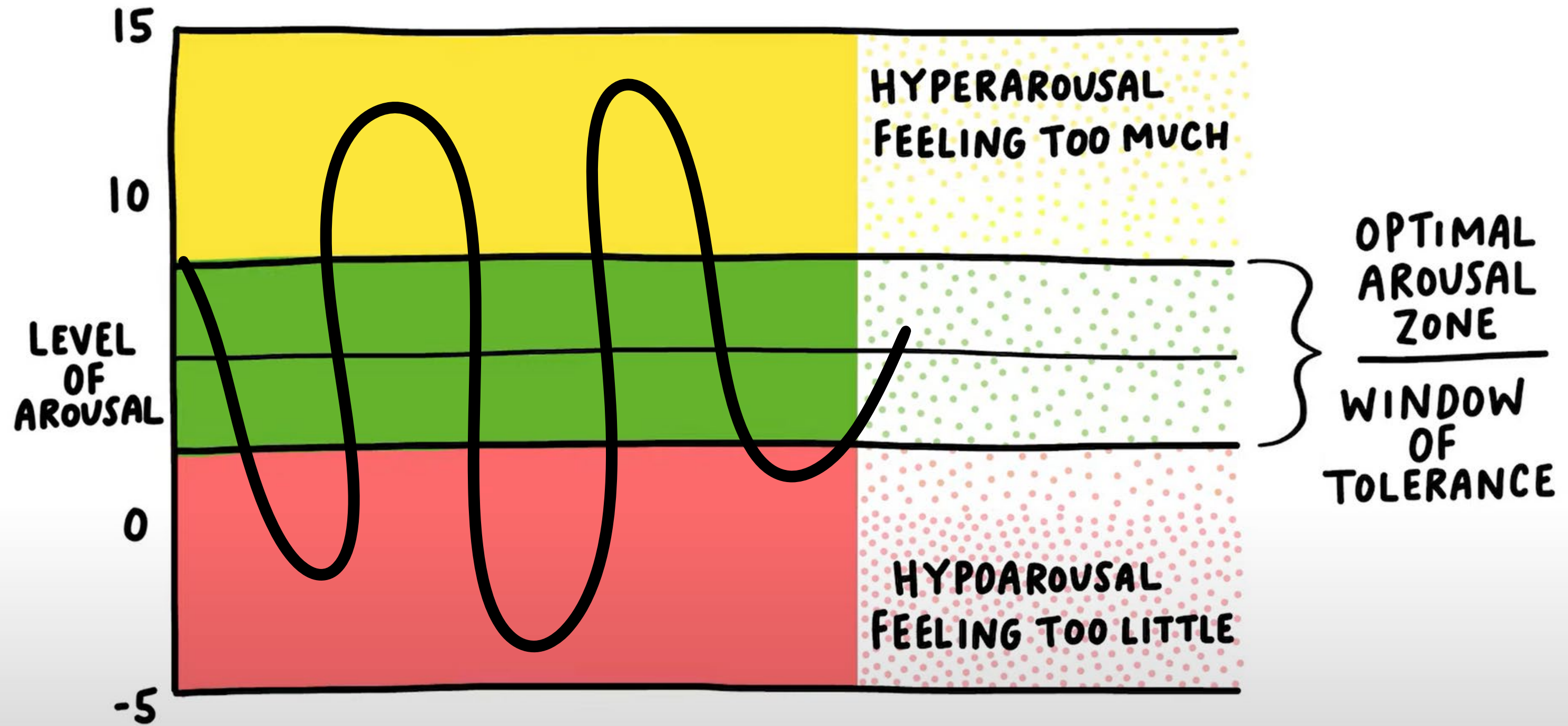
Window of Tolerance



Window of Tolerance



Window of Tolerance



Window of tolerance

crying

screaming

embarrassed

confused

withdrawal

being unkind

hurt

sad

swearing

shouting

worried

panicked

shut down

lashing out

distressed

What people see

What people don't see

Role of the Adult

- As adults, we can frame this transformation in a positive and empowering way.
- It's a time of increased vulnerability but also a time of great opportunity.
- We must motivate young people, if we want them to take ownership of their actions.
- This brain change happens to every human animal (it is natural, not a choice).

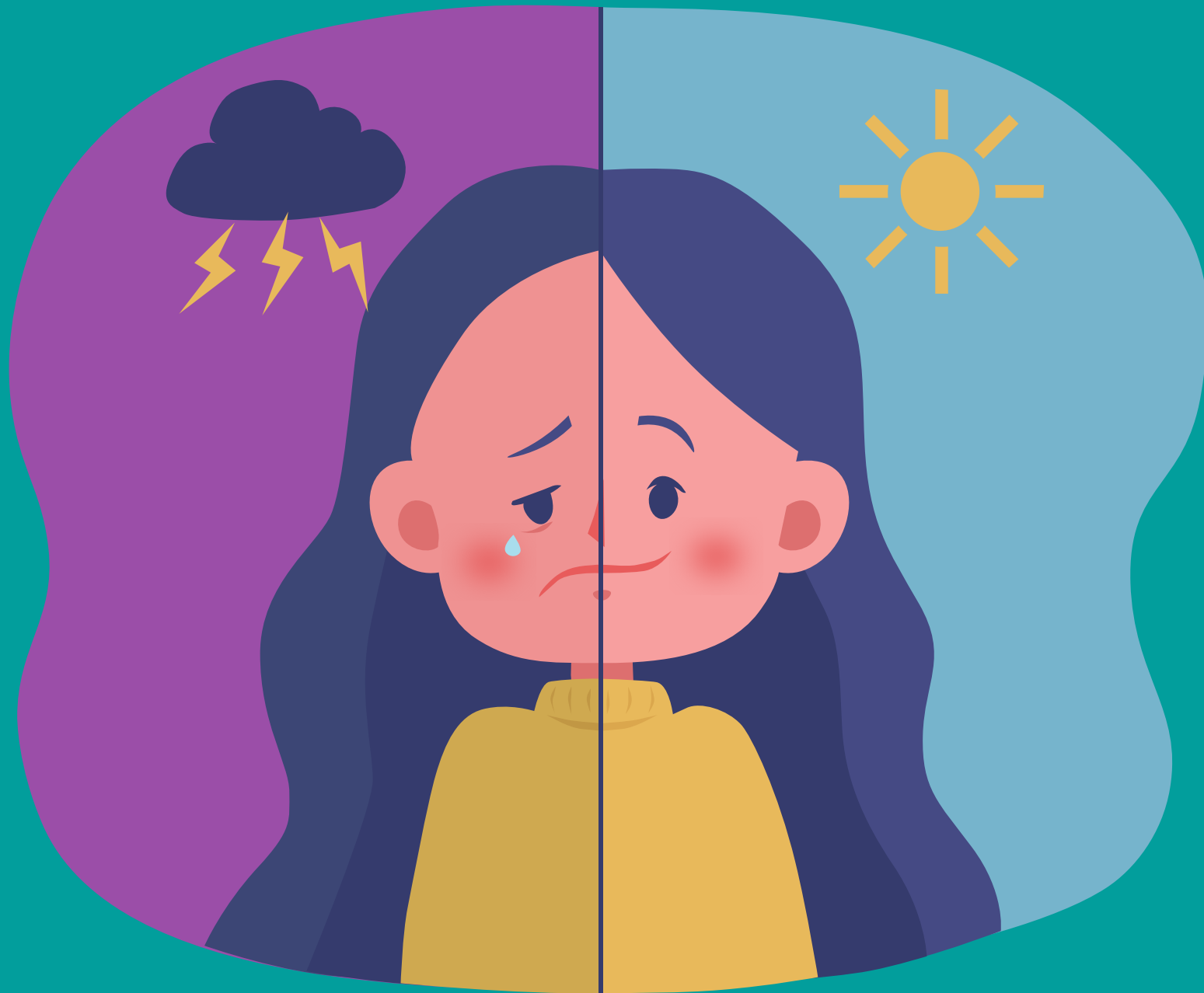
Top Tips

- Focusing on the young person's strengths. Helping them to find and talk about their strengths.
- Making sure that when mistakes have occurred, learning can happen within them.
- Help the young person feel a sense of trust and accept that mistakes are a normal part of learning to be a 'functioning' adult.

Top Tips

- Resist the urge to fix emotions. Seeing and validating the emotions is often more powerful.
- Discuss brain development with young people and refer to it in terms of their emotions. This normalises and helps young people to feel that they are not alone, at a time where they may be doing things they are not proud of or having feeling things that they'd rather not have.

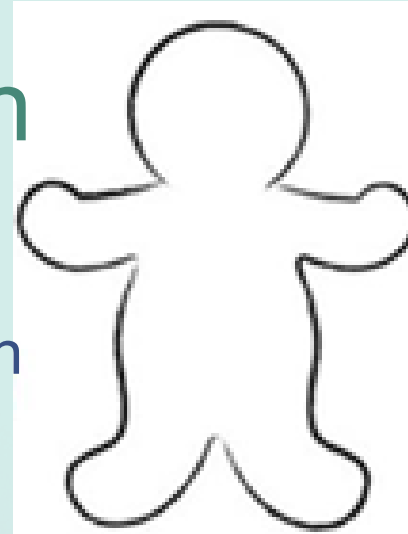
COPING STRATEGIE



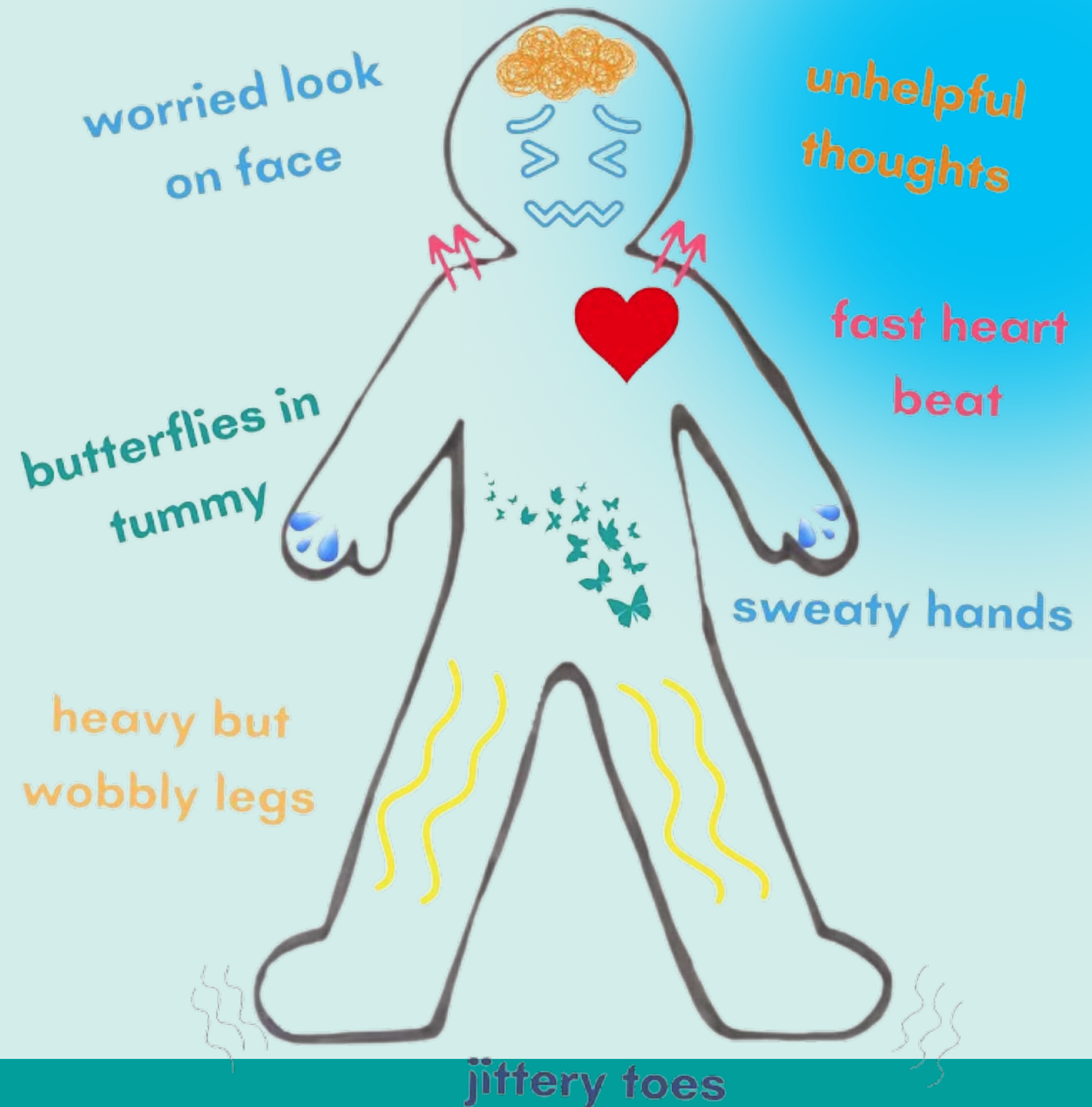
Body Scan

Body Scan

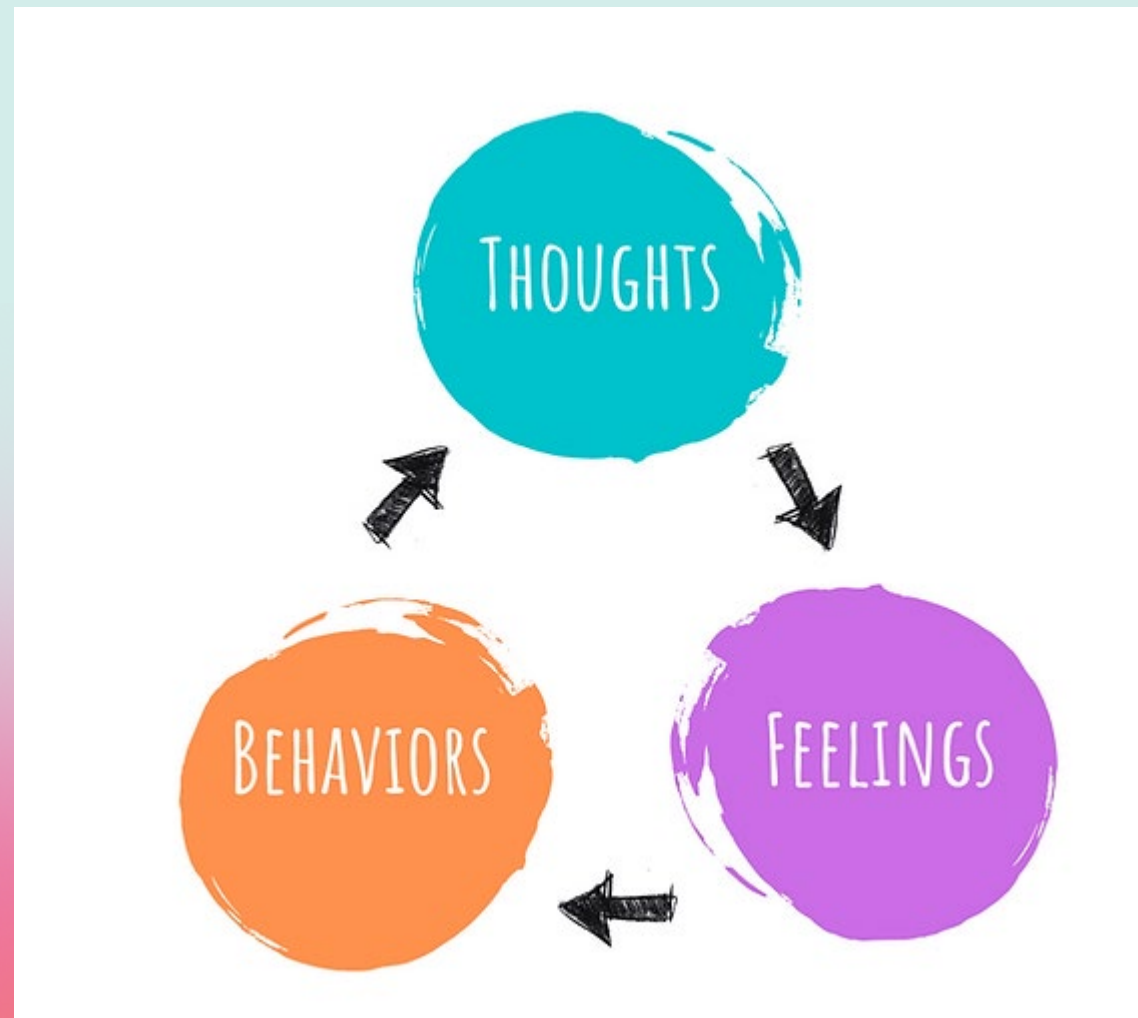
Forget everything else and focus on your body.



1. Get in a comfortable position.
2. Bring your attention to your feet, what can you feel or notice?
3. Don't try to change anything, just notice it and move on.
4. Work your way up your entire body, noticing the feelings in each part.



Thought Challenging



TIPP Skills

TIPP Skill: Temperature!

Cooler temperatures decrease your heart rate - try splashing your face with cold water, drink cold water or hold an ice cube in your hand.

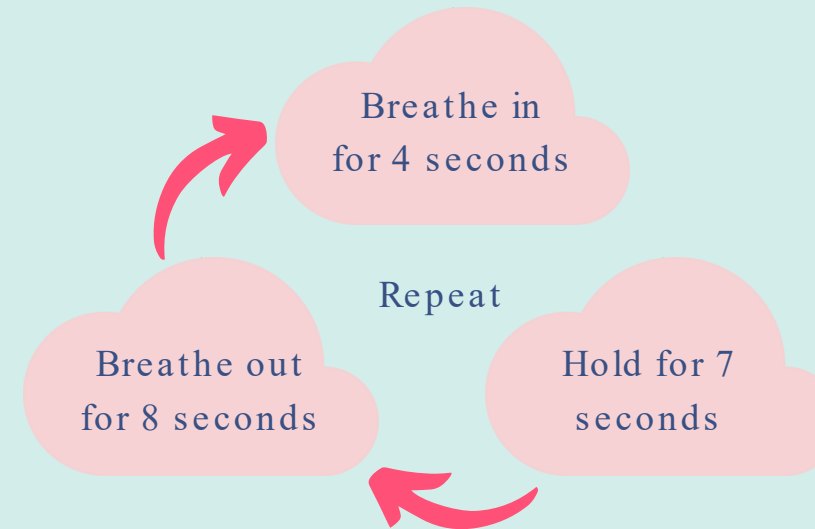


Higher temperatures increase your heart rate - try taking a hot bath, wrap up in a blanket, have a hot drink or take a walk in the sunshine.



TIPP Skill: Paced Breathing!

Slow down your breath with some deep breathing. Ideally breathe out longer than you breathe in.



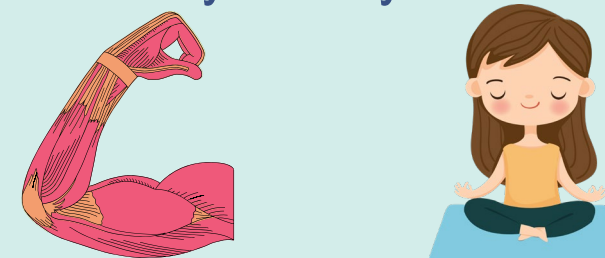
TIPP Skill: Intense Exercise!

Intense exercise for intense emotions. Try sprinting to the end of the street, jumping jacks, intense dancing, skipping or push-ups.



TIPP Skill: Progressive Muscle Relaxation!

When you breathe in tense each muscle group, working from your head down to your toes. As you breathe out, relax your muscles. Pay attention to how this feels in your body!



5 Ways To Wellbeing



SELFCARE

It's important to take care of your own well-being. For example getting enough sleep, eating nutritious food, exercising, and engaging in activities you enjoy. Self-care activities can positively impact your mental health.

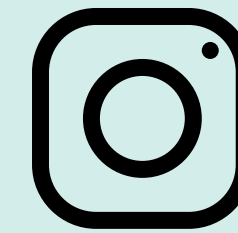
Establishing predictable routines can provide a sense of stability and reduce anxiety. Create a daily routine that includes regular sleep, meals, homework, playtime, and relaxation.



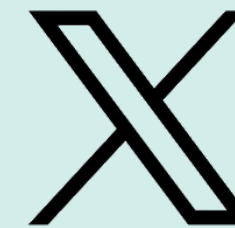
Questions?



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