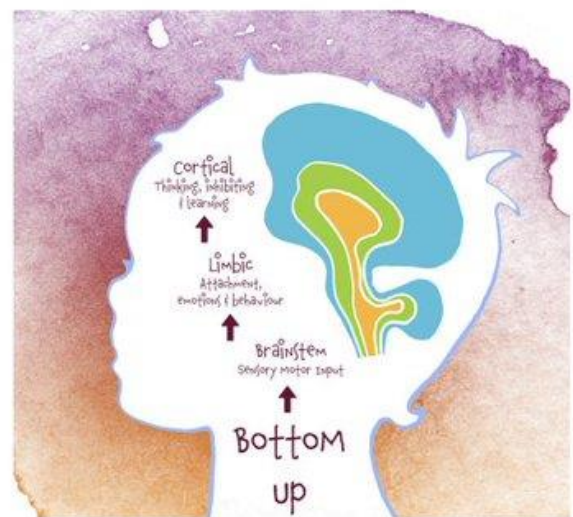


Brainstem Calmers



A psychiatrist, Dr Bruce Perry, has developed something called the 'Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics', which is a framework that helps us to know how to help children who have suffered early trauma and loss.

Children's brains organize from bottom to top, with the lower parts of the brain (brainstem aka "survival brain") developing earliest, and the cortical areas (thinking brain) much later. Traumatized children's brain become stuck in the brainstem, and they therefore swing between their survival modes of fight/flight/freeze/collapse.



One of the most helpful ways to move children from these super-high anxiety states, to their calmer 'thinking brain', is patterned, repetitive rhythmic activity

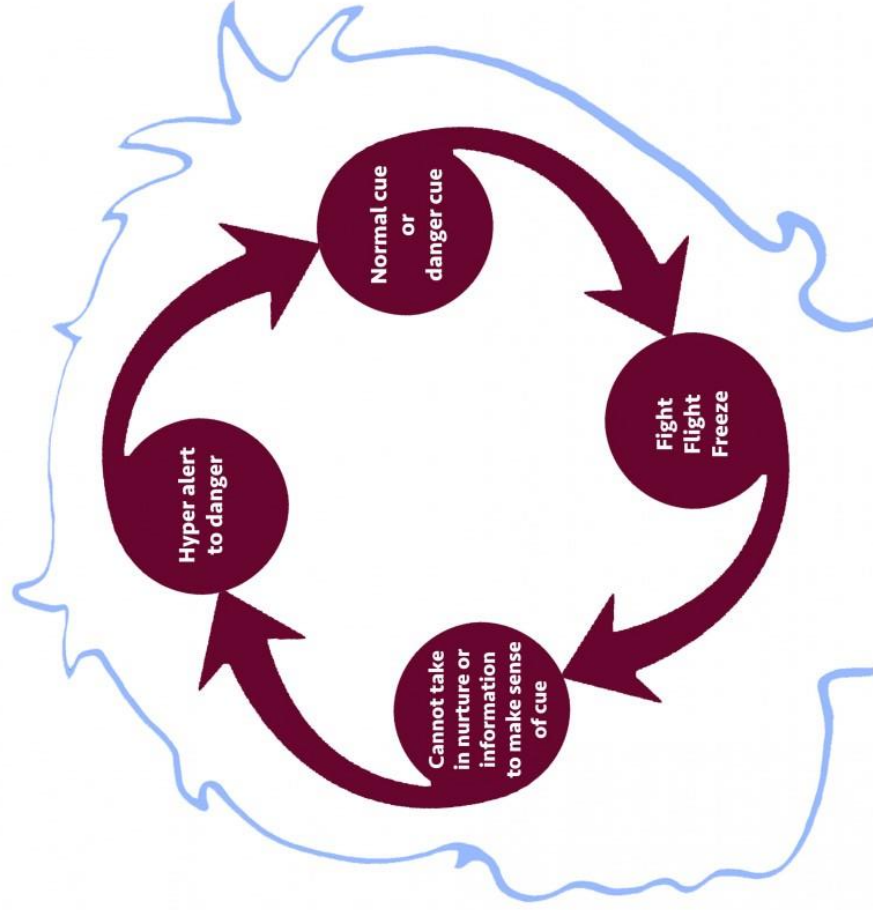
Creating a therapeutic web of relationships around the child together with regular brainstem calming activities can, over time, help a child's brain and body to learn that they are safe.





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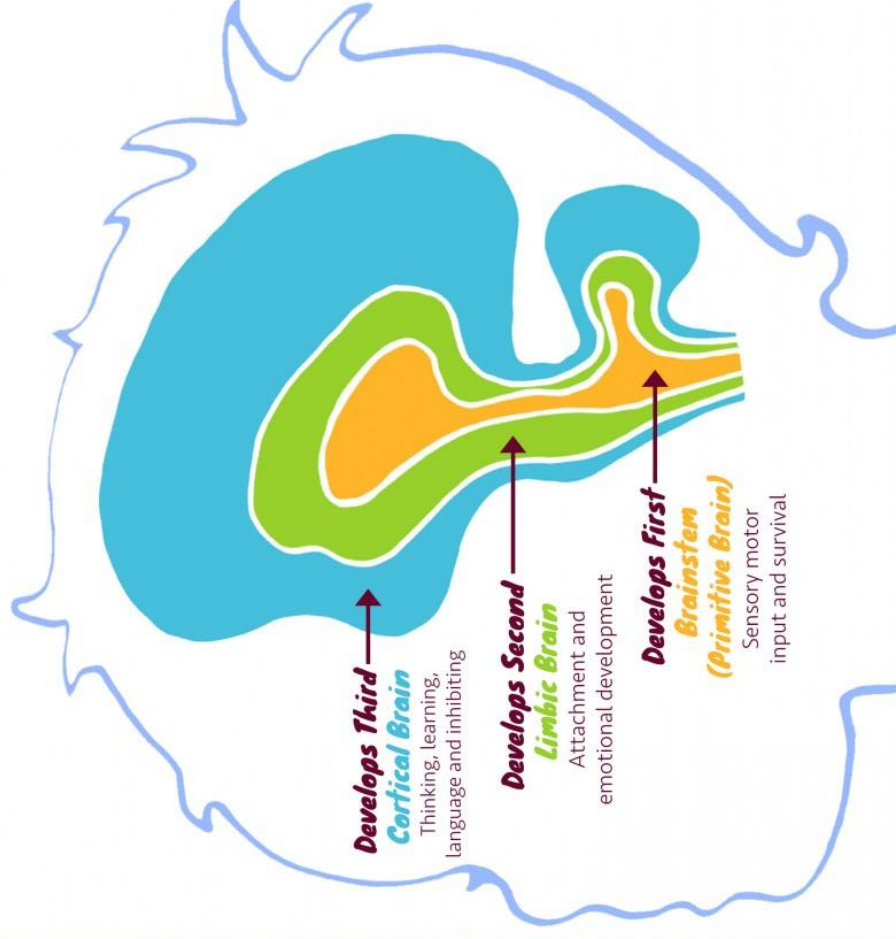
Survival Loop



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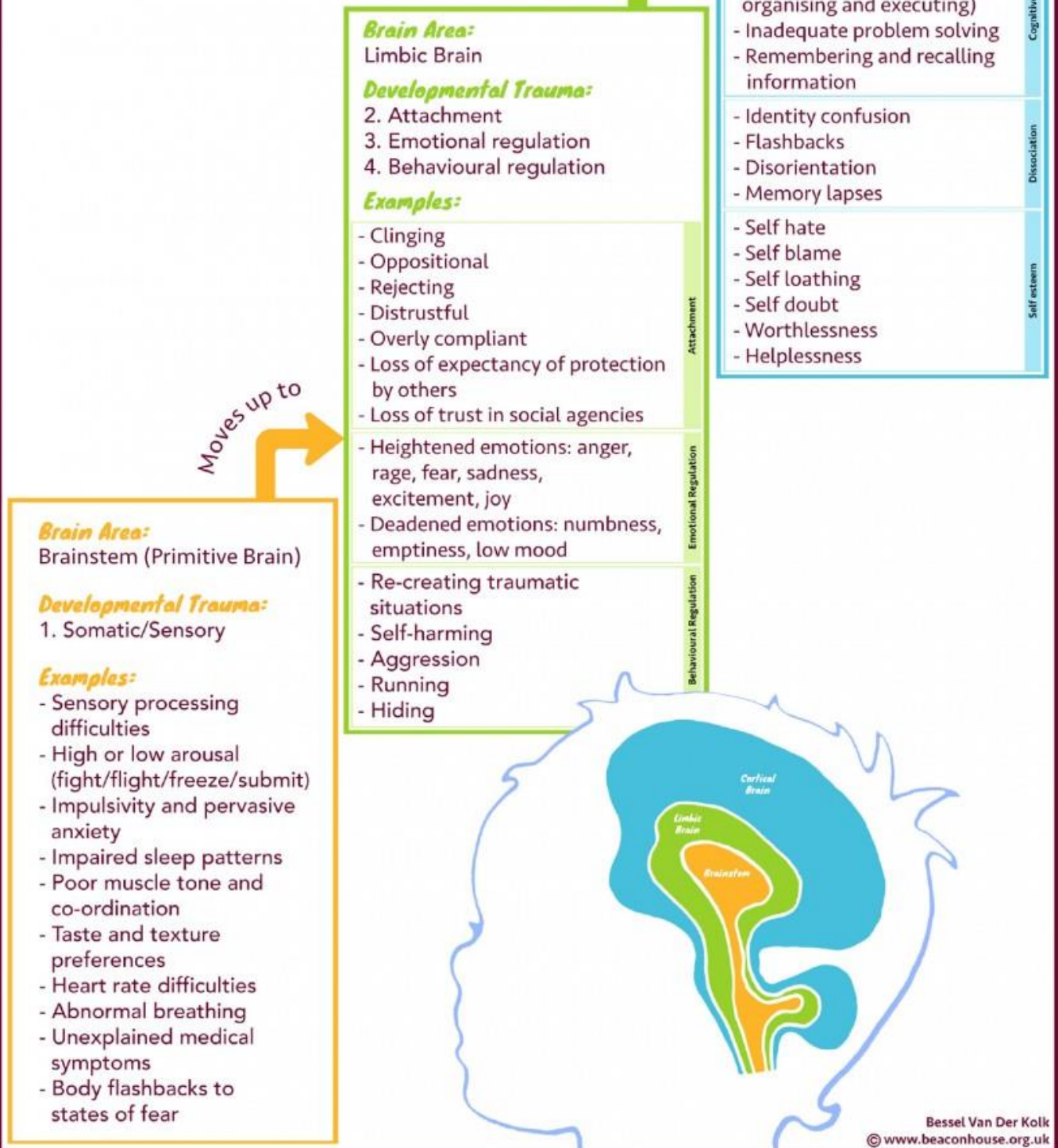


Children's brains develop from the bottom up.



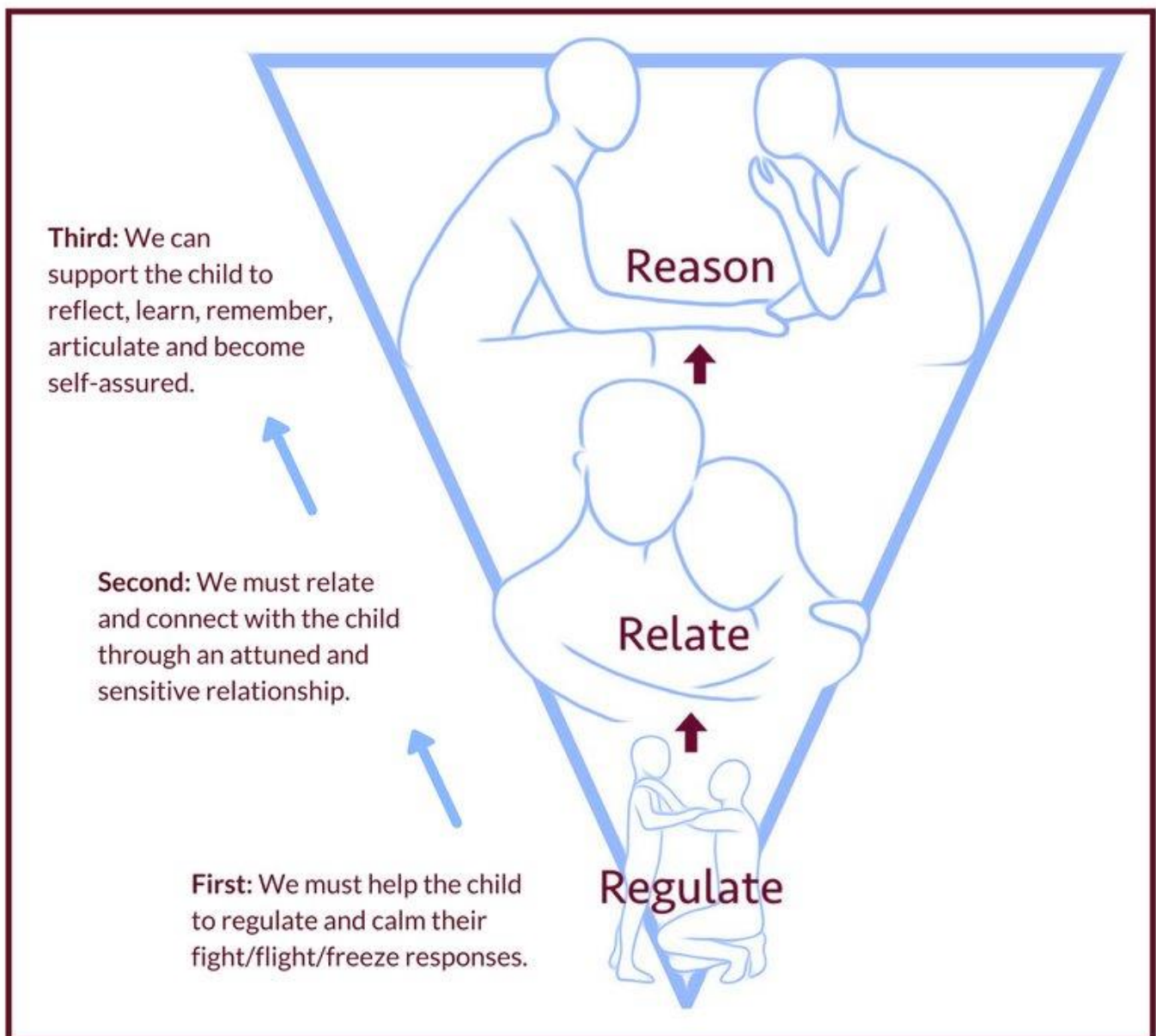
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Developmental Trauma



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.



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Projective identification happens all the time, it's a normal part of human interaction, so why is it important to consider when you have a relationship with a vulnerable child?

Projective Identification

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The child feels

"I'm not good enough, everyone will leave me in the end"

The child shuts down, withdraws and/or fights with all his emotional strength to protect himself from hurt

The adult notices the child's feeling of worthlessness and inadequacy.

The adult takes on board those feelings, they start to feel like their own.

The adult feels

"I'm not good enough, I can't do this"

The child notices, and takes their feelings on board. They add to his hurt.

The adult shuts down, withdraws and/or fights with all their emotional strength to protect themselves from hurt.

...so what can you do?

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Noticing this pattern can help to break the cycle.

Notice the child's signs of stress; and observe your reactions (e.g. Self doubt? Withdrawal? Irritability?)

When stress knocks at your door - draw on all your resources that help to calm you (deep breathing, nurturing food, talking to a friend, having a bath, watching TV, walking the dog)

Then turn your attention back to the hurting child. Meet their distress with the 'new calm you'. Stand alongside them, bear their pain - and know that it belongs to them and not you.



For any therapeutic parenting strategy to work, some kind of connection and attunement must be present within the relationship. However, connection can be challenging as it can be rejected - and often is by children who have had early experiences of inconsistent or unsafe relationships. Therefore we might start with developing a connection in a way that feels tolerable to both child and adult. Developing or repairing a connection can start at a distance and move in over time as attunement and trust grows.

Connection From A Distance

Show them you are holding them in mind even when they are not with you

- A note in their bag: this could be a loving thought about them, a drawing, a poem, a silly joke - or a mixture. Give them blank note cards so they can give you a note too.
- Surprise them for no reason with their favourite biscuit/cake/snack in their lunch box.
- Text/WhatsApp message: simply let them know that you're thinking of them - or even just send a silly picture.
- Play a 3 word story game over text: Create a story together 3 words at a time. Take turns adding 3 words at a time to create a silly story.
- Have a special ring tone on your phone and let them know it belongs to them.
- Buy them a photo keyring to put on/in their bag - let them know it's because you want them to know you are always thinking of them.
- Reverse a baby monitor and put it in their room so they can hear/see you as they go to sleep.
- Spray your scent on to the sleeve of their uniform or let them use your moisturiser before school.
- Draw a symbol on their hand and yours, every time you press it it sends a virtual hug/kiss/love to the other person.

Tolerable Nurture

Connecting with a child who perhaps has been rejecting/violent towards you can be daunting.

Tolerable nurture offers re-connection in a manageable way and shows them you are holding them in mind - even if you are in a different room!

- Sitting next to them to watch a film/TV.
- Playing on their games system with them.
- Touching their hand/shoulder/back briefly when they are eating dinner.
- Putting recent photos up of you together in every room.
- Visible/explicit memory box of the things they have made, copies of nice texts that they have sent you etc, kept in this special place.
- Spontaneous home disco/karaoke.
- Go swimming and dive for weights together.
- Sing happy, loving songs from another room and change a key word to include their name.
- Co-create a bucket list of manageable mini dates you want to do together and surprise or schedule this in at various moments.
- £5 gift challenge. Each of you has £5 and 1 hour to find a gift for each other, it ends with hot chocolate and gift giving.
- Mutual face painting/make up/nail painting.