

Promoting Positive Mental Health for children

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What we'll be talking about:

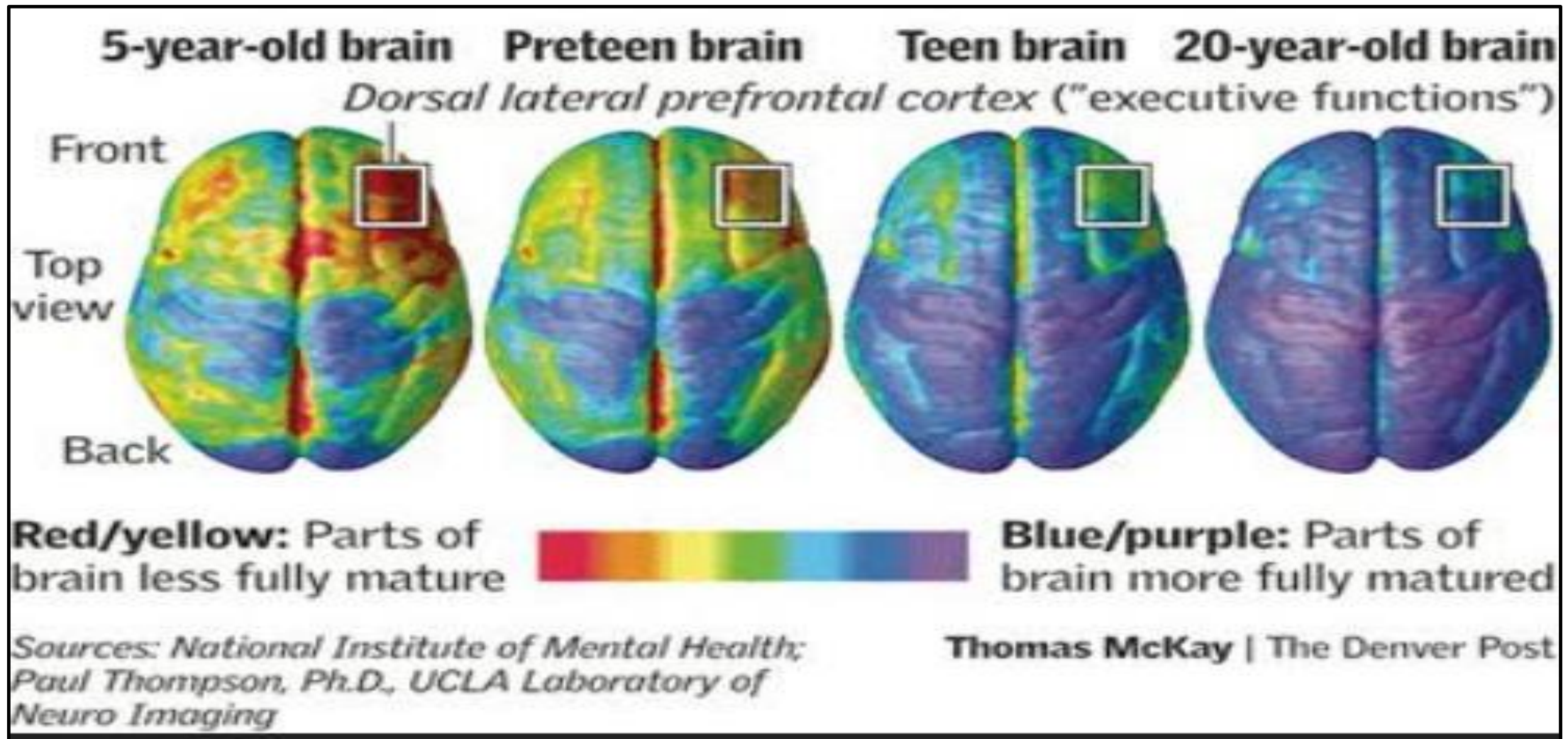


- The brain and how it affects behaviour
- Guiding principles for working on resilience
- Practical ideas for use in school and at home

Guiding principles

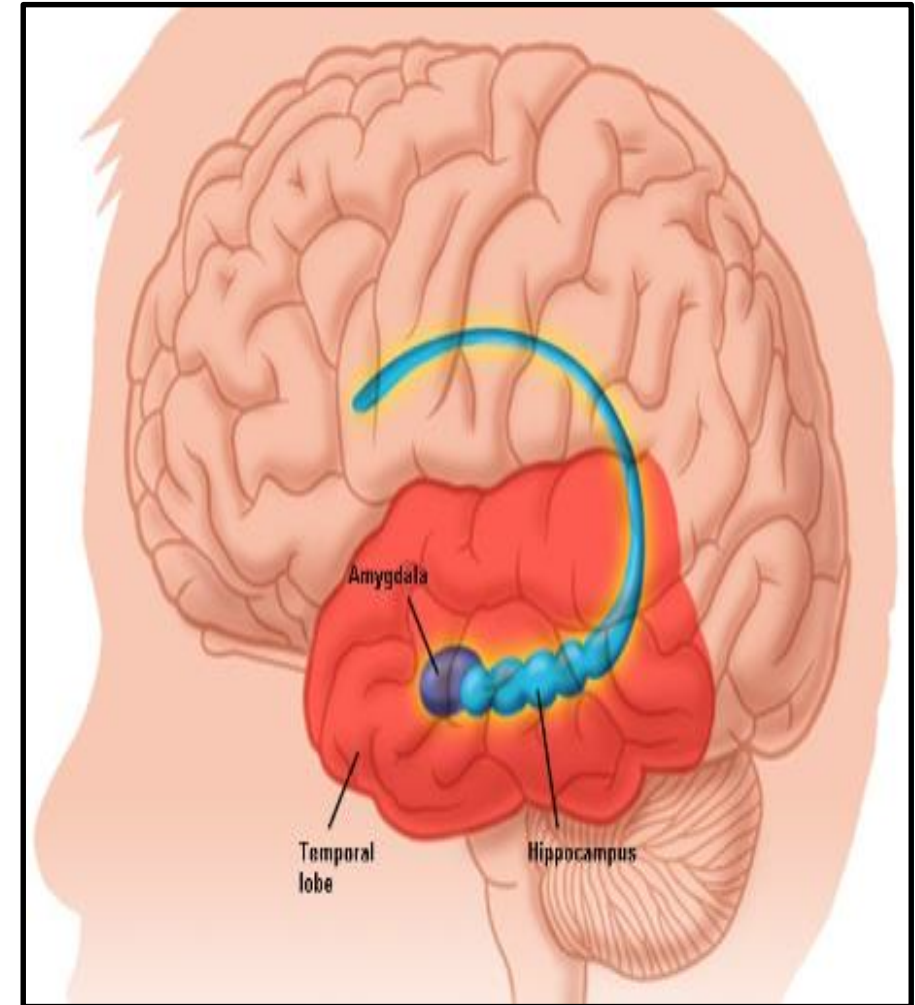
- All behaviours are forms of communication
- Your own emotional reaction is important
- People of all ages will do anything to avoid anxiety, often without realising it
- Biologically, we are still a prey animal

What on earth are they thinking?



The amygdala – part of your “lizard brain”

- Linked to survival responses – “fright, flight, freeze, food and fornication”
- Triggers an uncontrollable and unthinking physiological response
- Can’t tell the difference between real or perceived threats
- Strong links to stored memories

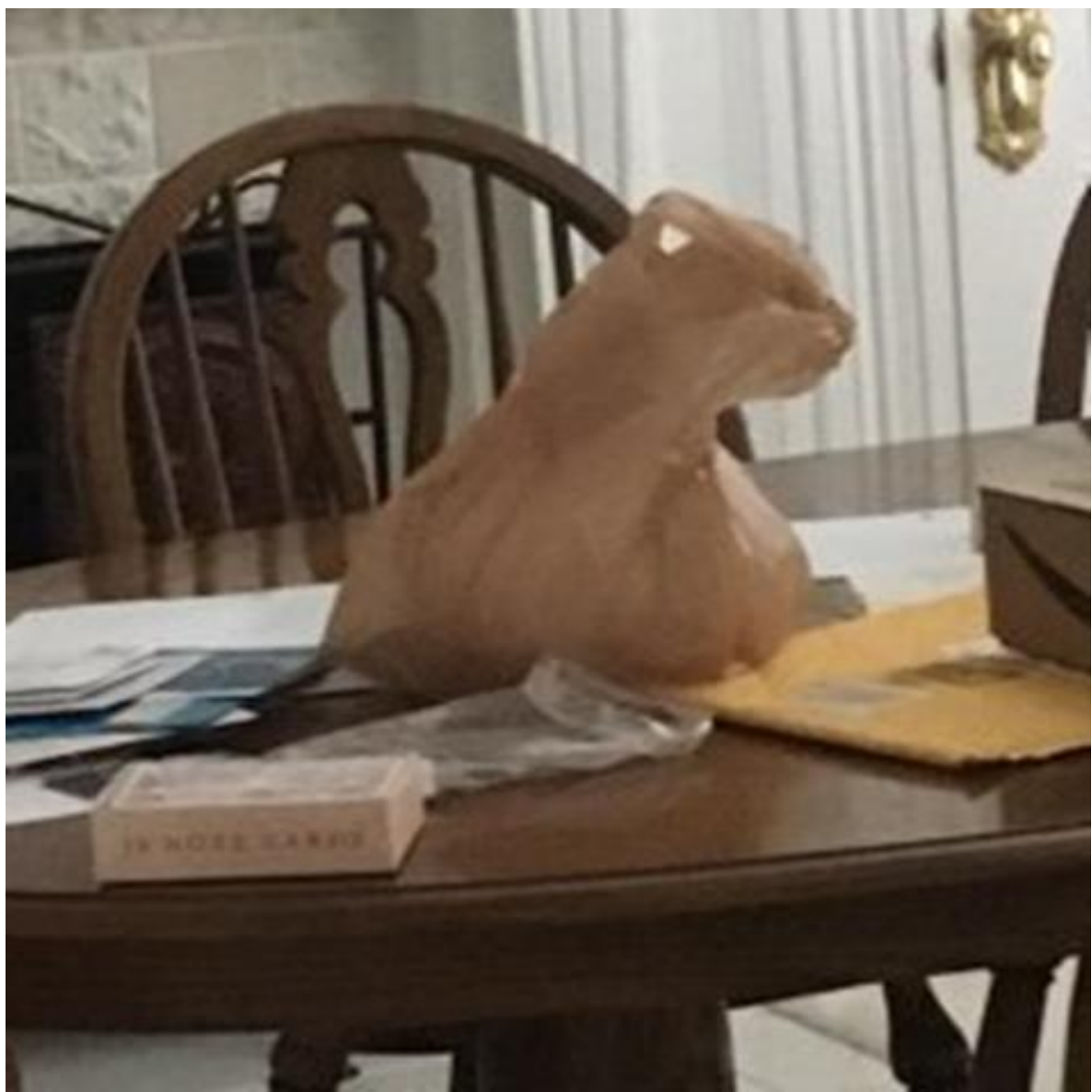


Pareidolia and the power of pictures

- Human brains work on images rather than words
- New born babies are attracted to things that look like faces
- Our lizard brain links images to memories and emotions, and this reinforces our “truth”
- Is it a shadow, or a bear?











The impact in school

You see....



The amygdala sees...



Family responses

- Help children explore the causes of their anxiety, and identify ways to defuse things
- Remember that the “flight-fright” response is often irrational
- Replace stressful mental images with positive ones
- Challenge unhelpful versions of the “truth”

The truth, the whole truth?

- Think of something you believe about yourself that is slightly negative (please be kind to yourself)
- Who gave you this belief?
- How has it affected you throughout your life - do you live up to it?
- Is it actually true?

The self-talk cycle (with thanks to the Pacific Institute)

- Human beings go out of their way to avoid anxiety
- We want our world to make sense, be safe, and be “true”
- We do our best to maintain this state through our behaviour
- However - we act in accordance not with the truth as it is, but the truth *as we believe it to be*

The self-talk cycle

Someone we believe gives us information about ourselves

This becomes our “truth”, stored subconsciously

We cannot bear the unconscious anxiety when we move
away from our “truth”

We go out of our way to make things “true” again -
behaviour becomes a solution

- “Your room is always messy.”
- Mum says I’m a messy person. Mum must be right.
- Messy people don’t put their pants in the laundry basket.
- My room is a mess. Pants all over the place.
- See? Mum was right!

- “You’re usually much tidier than this.”
- Mum says I’m a tidy person. Mum must be right.
- Tidy people put their pants in the laundry basket.
- My room’s tidy again. Everything’s been put away.
- See? Mum was right!

How to make this work for you

- Encourage your child to think about how a situation could look and feel – “think how proud you’ll feel when you finish your book”
- Use this to help them create a stored memory
- Use positive language to reinforce their new “truth”

Creating a new truth – tricking the lizard



- You never listen



- You are normally an attentive person. Not listening **isn't like you**

- It was really nasty of you to fight with your brother



- You know that fighting is not okay. **I see you** as a kind person

- Why is your homework always messy?



- Look how neat your art is. Being messy **isn't like you**

Key phrases to use and repeat

- “That’s not like you”
- “I see you as...”
- “You are better than that”
- You are the person the child will believe, so use your power wisely!



Solution-focussed thinking



- “If you had a magic wand...?” can be a helpful question
- Identify small, practical steps –what is the student already doing?
- The steps won’t address the underlying problem but will help alleviate the “symptomatic” behaviours or worries
- Use a thermometer scale to assess change

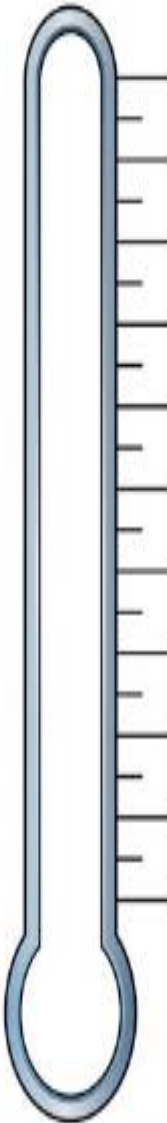
GOAL!

Conversations to have:

- What would 'good' look like?
- What makes today a 4?
- How will you know you've made it to 5?

0 – how things are with the problem

(I'm always arguing with my dad)



10 - The day after the magic wand has worked

(I had a great week with my dad)

5 – I've used one of my relaxation techniques every day

2 - I remember to tell my dad when I'm starting to feel angry or scared at least once a week

(With thanks to Brief Solutions)

The Three Islands



The Island of things I love



The Island of things that are okay sometimes



The Island of things I can't bear

Add a bridge to move between the islands

School's okay sometimes
except when it's PE



What is it about PE that you don't like? What would happen if you had a magic wand?

I can't bear being dyslexic



What would make things more manageable in school? What other strengths do you have?

Words



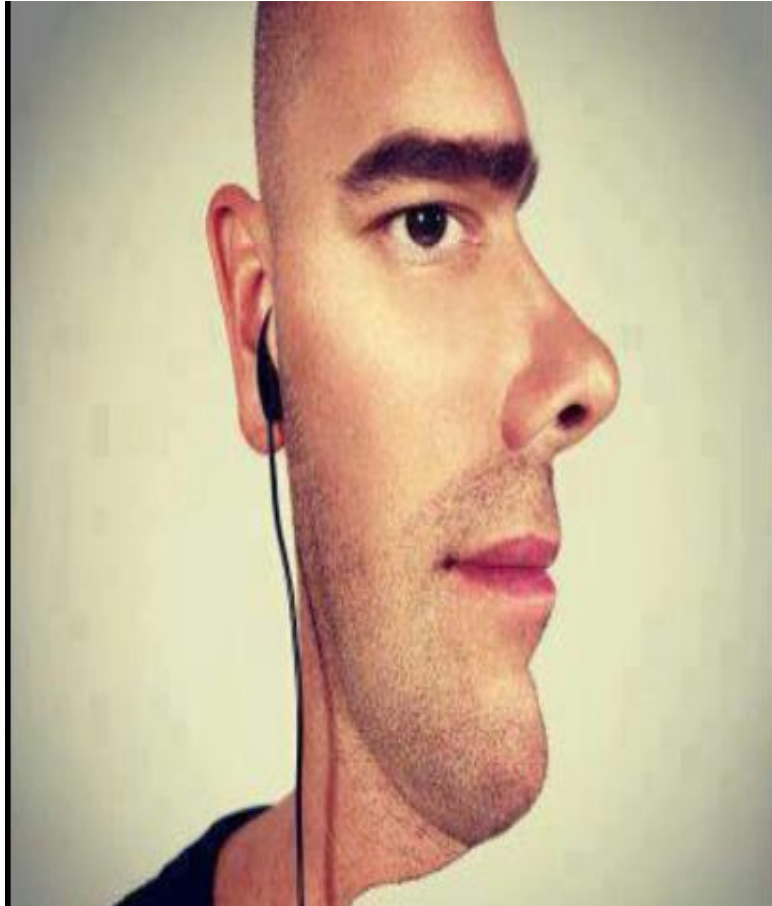
- All the ideas we've been looking at help to expand a child's emotional vocabulary
- Without the right words, they can't explain their feelings or seek help for problems
- Words also help to normalise talking about feelings and seeking help

Make it okay to talk

- Avoid phrases like “man up” or “don’t be a girl”
- Try to stay calm, however hard it may feel
- Know where to go for help and support



A sense of perspective



Try to remember how it felt to be a child yourself

Remember that children are growing up in a world that is very different to the one of your childhood

It can be scary to realise your baby is becoming a person in his or her own right

Building good communication about the small things in life makes it easier for children to talk to you about bigger problems

All the ideas we have talked about work for adults too!

A final thought

INSIDE EACH OF US ARE TWO WOLVES

ONE IS EVIL

IT IS ANGER
ENVY SORROW
REGRET GREED
ARROGANCE
SELF PITY
GUILT
RESENTMENT
INFERIORITY
LIES
FALSE PRIDE
SUPERIORITY
AND EGO



ONE IS GOOD

IT IS JOY
PEACE LOVE
HOPE
SERENITY
HUMILITY
KINDNESS
BENEVOLENCE
EMPATHY
GENEROSITY
TRUTH
COMPASSION
AND FAITH

WHICH WOLF WINS? THE ONE YOU FEED MOST



Thank you!

- Any questions?
- Please feel free to contact me: zoe.barkham@croydon.gov.uk
- Please also complete your evaluation forms