

A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting outdoors. The man is on the left, wearing a grey hoodie and a denim jacket, looking towards the boy. The boy is on the right, wearing a striped shirt, looking back at the man. They appear to be in a conversation. The background is a bright, slightly blurred outdoor setting.

# Supporting Emotional Regulation & Development

**Welbeck Parent Café**

Delivered by:

Sarah Godwin, Educational Psychologist

# What the workshop will cover

- A brief background on emotions
- How emotions develop
- A strategy (emotion coaching) for responding to emotions

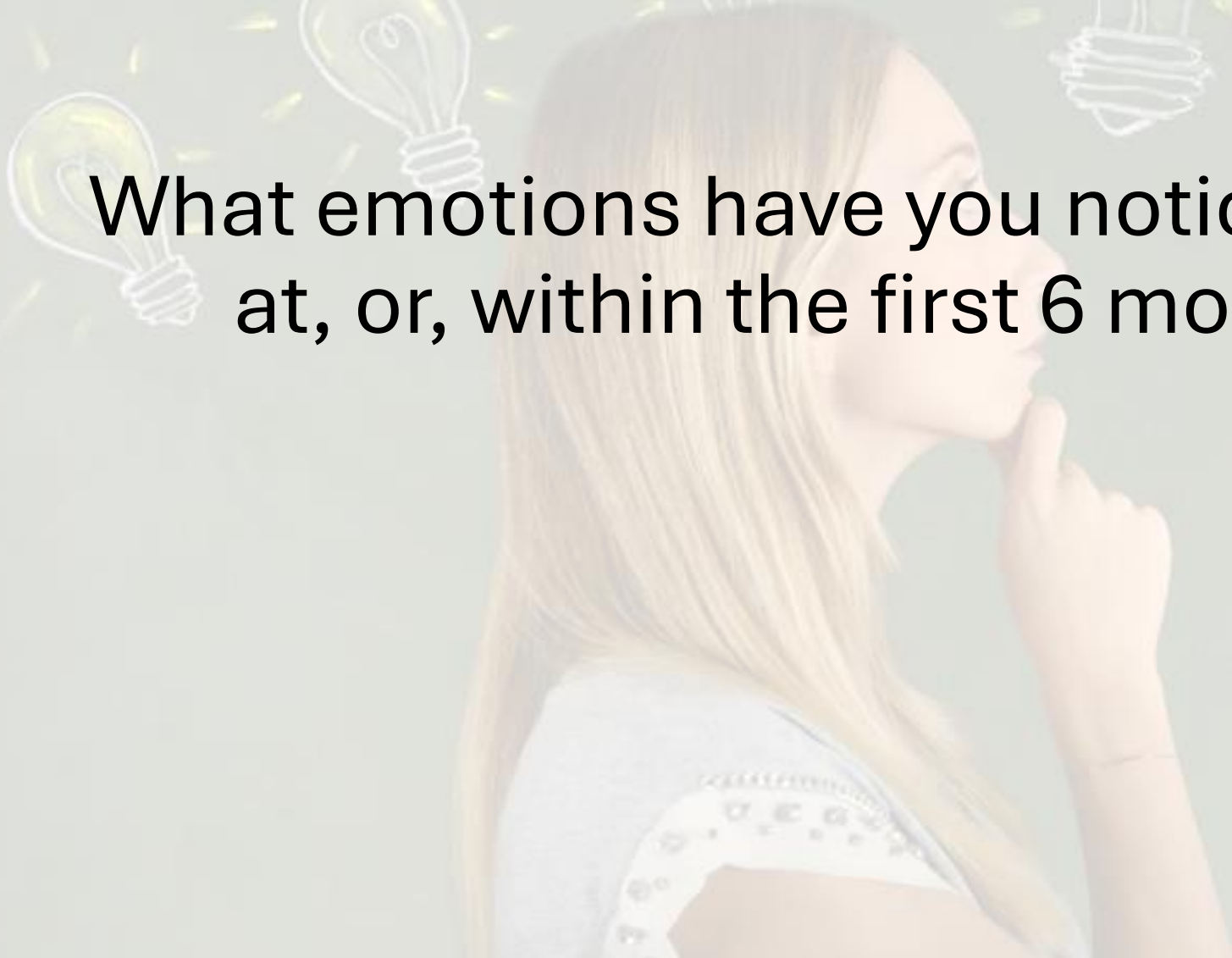
# Understanding Emotions

- Emotions are innate - we are born with them.
- They can influence our thoughts and behaviours.
- Children need to learn and understand their emotions first, before they can develop self-regulation skills.
- Children's understanding of emotions is developed through interpersonal relationships with key adults.

## Activity: Chat to your neighbour



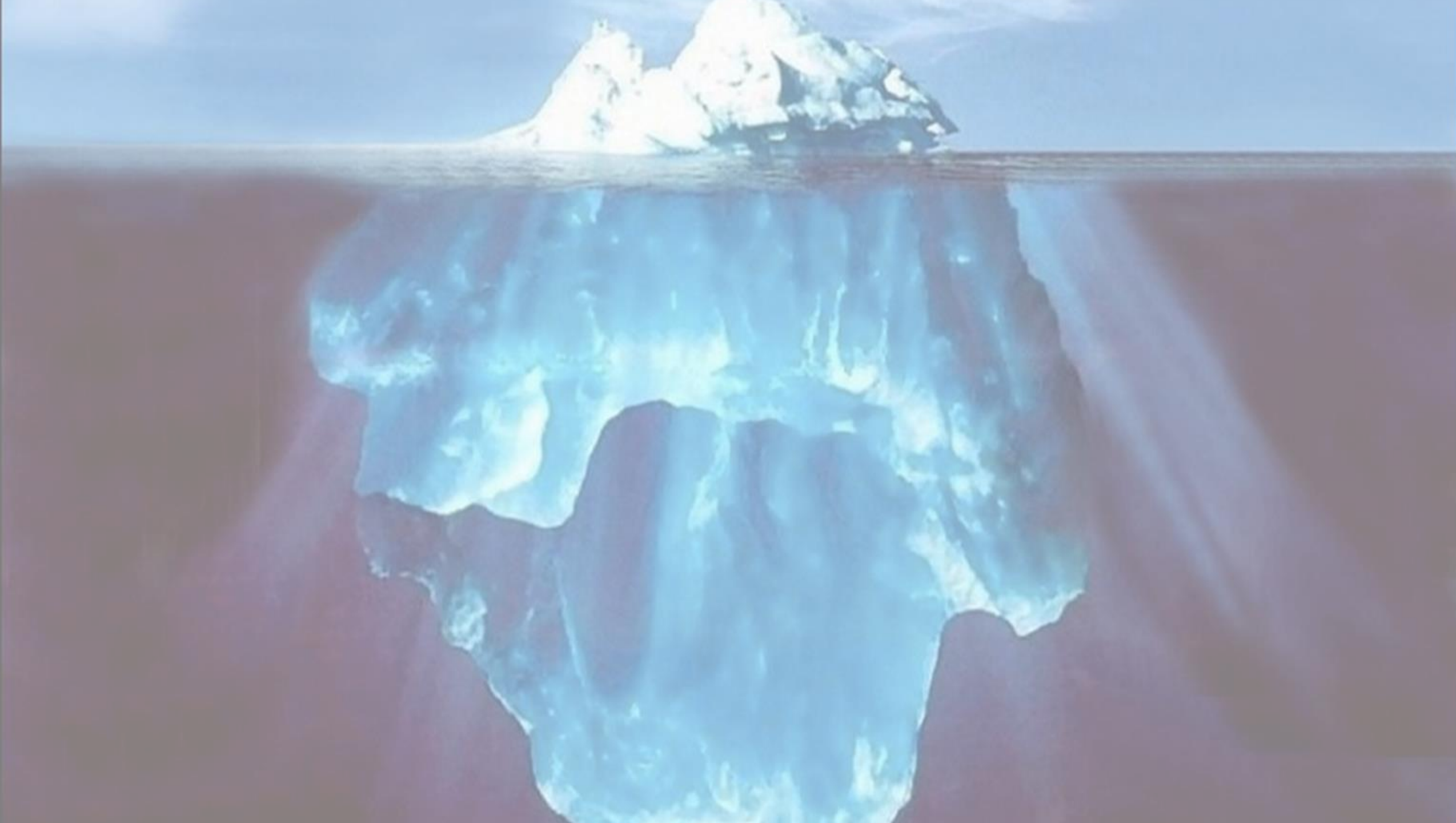
What emotions have you noticed to be present at, or, within the first 6 months of birth?



# Early Emotions



- Interest / engagement
  - Distress / Anger
  - Disgust
  - Fear
  - Surprise
- And then..*
- Joy / enjoyment



Avoiding  
Fighting  
Resisting  
Complaining  
Interrupting  
Throwing

Clinging  
Yelling  
Hitting  
Meltdowns  
Kicking  
Tantrums

### What we see

### What is happening

Lagging Skills  
Confusion  
Temperament  
Lack of Control  
Disconnection  
Anxiety/Worry/Fear  
Unmet Sensory Needs

Hunger  
Stress  
Overwhelmed  
Transitions  
Uncertainty  
Emotional Dysregulation  
Sleep Deprivation

# Levels of Development

Note: Children develop at their own pace.

| SKILL AREA                   | EARLY YEARS   |   | THE YEARS IN BETWEEN                                 |  | END OF PRIMARY   |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
|                              |   |   |  |  |  |
| <b>Attention &amp; focus</b> | Focus for short periods (5–10 mins) on preferred activities | Can attend for 10–15 mins with adult support          | Increasing ability to sustain attention (15–20 mins) | Can focus for longer (20–30 mins) with structure         | Improving sustained attention, especially when motivated |
| <b>Managing emotions</b>     | Relies heavily on adults to regulate                        | Beginning to name feelings, still needs co-regulation | Developing coping strategies but inconsistent        | Increasing self-regulation, still needs support at times | More independent regulation, emotions still fluctuate    |
| <b>Worries &amp; fears</b>   | Fears are concrete (separation, dark, routines)             | Worries about change and unfamiliar situations        | Worries about mistakes or doing things 'wrong'       | Social worries and concern about fairness                | Worries about friendships, comparison and performance    |
| <b>Impulse control</b>       | Very limited impulse control                                | Emerging ability to stop and wait briefly             | Improving control, still impulsive when emotional    | Greater control but lapses under stress                  | More consistent impulse control, still developing        |

# Some unseen behaviours may be *worries*..

## **Worry is a normal part of human development**

- Growth of thinking skills
- Sign that development is progressing
- Emotional discomfort typical while learning about uncertainty

## **What type of worries do children have?**



- Early primary: fears about separation from caregivers, the dark, imaginary creatures, animals, storms.
- Middle primary: worries about physical harm, illness, school performance, and friendships.
- Later primary: increasing concerns about peer acceptance, social comparison, academic competence, and world events.



## **These worries tend to be:**

- Triggered by identifiable situations
- Intermittent rather than constant
- Responsive to reassurance and support
- Proportionate to the context

## **The function of worry**

It helps children anticipate risk, prepare for challenges, and seek support when needed.

# Worry versus Anxiety

## Typical Worry

Linked to specific situations

Proportionate to the trigger

Time-limited

Child can be reassured

Does not significantly limit participation

## Anxiety

Generalised or spreads across many areas

Disproportionate or unrealistic

Persistent (weeks/months)

Reassurance provides little relief

Leads to avoidance and functional impairment

**Worry is part of growing up. Anxiety gets in the way of growing up.**  
“Is this feeling helping my child prepare and cope, or is it shrinking their world?”

# How we respond can make a difference

## **How we talk about worries has an impact**

Normal worries described as 'anxiety' may lead internal sensations being interpreted as something being seriously wrong.

## **How we respond to worries has an impact**

Are we overly supportive? Are we assisting the child to avoid situations? Do we restrict activities / behaviours? These may enhance anxiety.

## **Prevalence**

Anxiety does exist and help should be sought; but worries are more common



# Emotion Coaching

## What is it?

- A way for adults to respond to behaviour by exploring the feelings underpinning the behaviour.
- A strategy used by adults to help children and young people to understand the emotions they are experiencing, why they occur and how to manage them.

## Why does it matter?

- Children with emotional competencies have much better life outcomes.

# Emotion Coaching Involves:

- Teaching children about their emotions 'in the moment'
- Using moments of challenging behaviour as opportunities for teaching
- Accepting all emotions as normal
- Teaching children strategies to manage their emotions
- Building trusting and respectful relationships with children



# A Relational Approach

External Frameworks

External regulation



Rewards and Sanctions

Internal Frameworks

Internal regulation



Emotion Coaching

# Activity

- Consider a time when you felt a strong emotion
  - How did others relate to you?
- What made the situation better/worse?
  - What language did others use?

# Responding to Emotions

- Emotion coaching
  - High empathy
  - High guidance
- Disapproving
  - Low empathy
  - High guidance



- Laissez Faire
  - High empathy
  - Low guidance
- Dismissive
  - Low empathy
  - Low guidance





# Case Examples

See handout for examples of different ways to responding to the same situation:

- **Laissez-faire**
- **Dismissive**
- **Disapproving**
- **Emotion Coaching**

# Activity: Response detective

The background features a woman in profile, looking thoughtful with her hand on her chin. Several glowing lightbulbs are scattered around her, and a blue speech bubble with three dots is in the upper right corner.

Identify in the scenarios what the adult response is: **emotion Coaching, disapproving, dismissive, or laissez-faire**

## **E.g., Scenario 1**

- **Situation:**

- Your 7-year-old is upset because they weren't invited to a classmate's party.

- **Parent response:**

“Oh that's horrible. You must feel awful. Don't worry, we'll just make sure you don't have to see them for a while.”

# Five Steps of Emotion Coaching

Dr. John Gottman

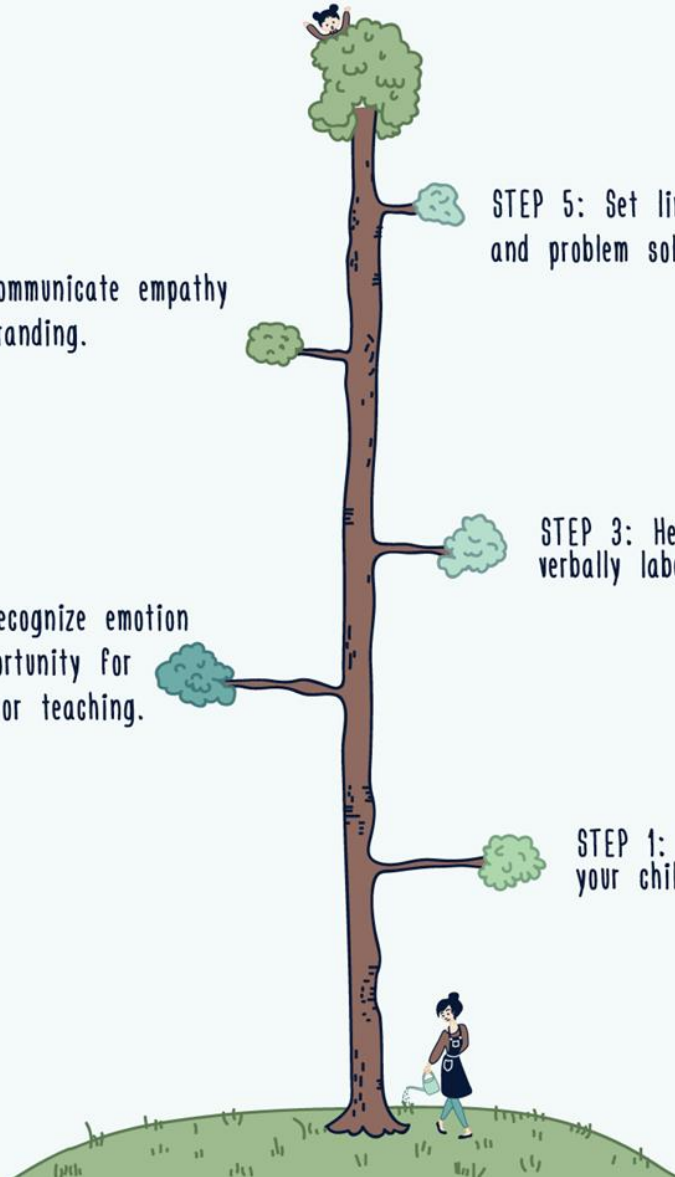
STEP 4: Communicate empathy and understanding.

STEP 5: Set limits and problem solve.

STEP 2: Recognize emotion as an opportunity for connection or teaching.

STEP 3: Help your child verbally label emotions.

STEP 1: Be aware of your child's emotions.



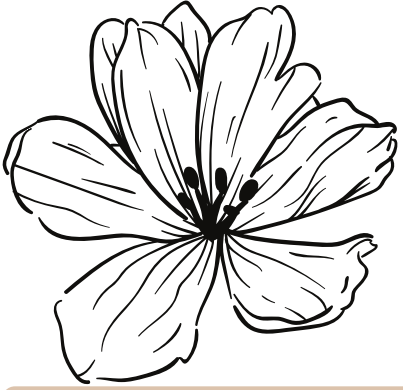


# Steps 1 and 2

## Notice emotions & recognise opportunity

- Notice physical and verbal signs of emotions
- Recognise behaviour as communication
- Come from a place of normalising emotions
- Be your child's ally

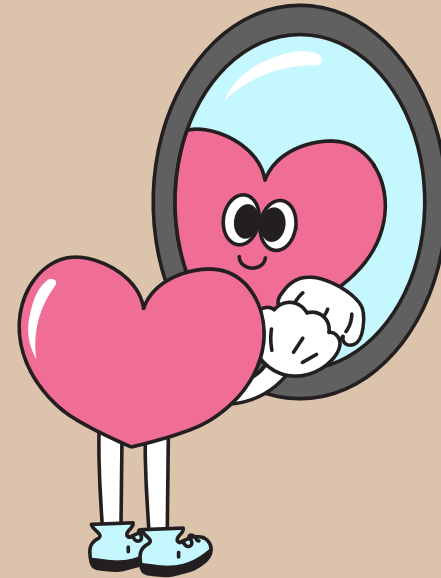




# Step 3

## Verbally label feelings

- Reflect back child's emotion
- Help child to label emotion
- Say what you see



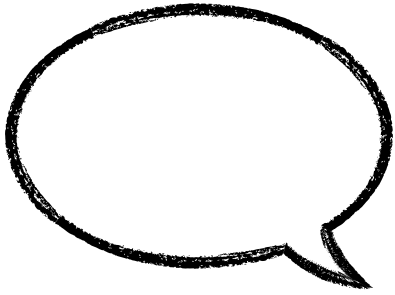


# Step 4

## Communicate Empathy and Understanding (conveys validation)

- **Connect** before **correct**
- Join the child in their feeling
- Take on their perspective
- *"Proposing solutions before empathising is like trying to build the frame of a house before you lay a firm foundation" - Gottman*

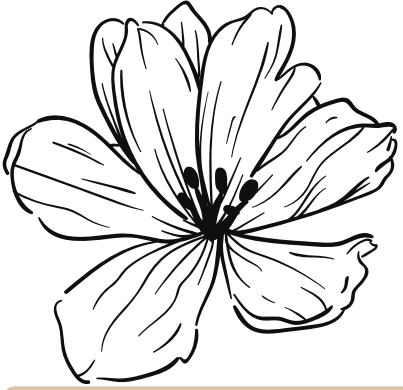




# Scripts

*'I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would feel angry if that happened to me. It's normal to feel like that'*

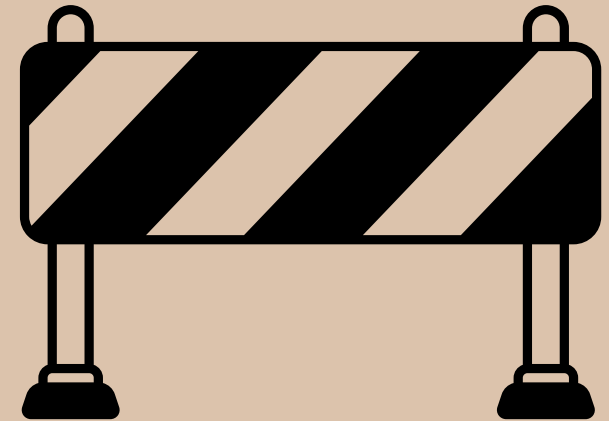
*'I can see you're frowning and you're kicking the wall and you're expressing a lot of energy. I would be feeling like that too if I didn't want to do something'*

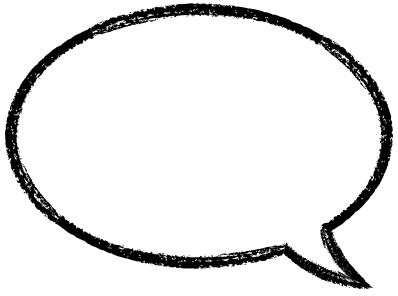


# Step 5

## Setting limits (if required)

- State the limits of acceptable behavior
- Reinforce cause and effect
- Recognise the child's need for control and provide opportunities for choice
- Create win-win situations





# Scripts

*'These are the rules that we have to follow . Doing that is not ok'*

*'We can't behave like that even though you are feeling annoyed because it is not safe'*

*'This is not a safe place to be angry. Let's go to a safe place and then we can talk'*



# Step 5

## Problem solving

‘Next time you’re feeling like this, what could you do? How do you think you will react next time or if this happens again’


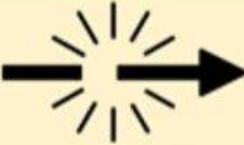




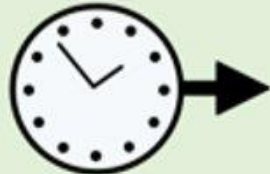


- Explore the underlying feeling
- Scaffold alternative ideas
- Empower the child



# Problem Solving

- What is the problem?
- What could I do? Think of different solutions
- List what might happen for each solution
- Pick the best solution
- Try it
- Review

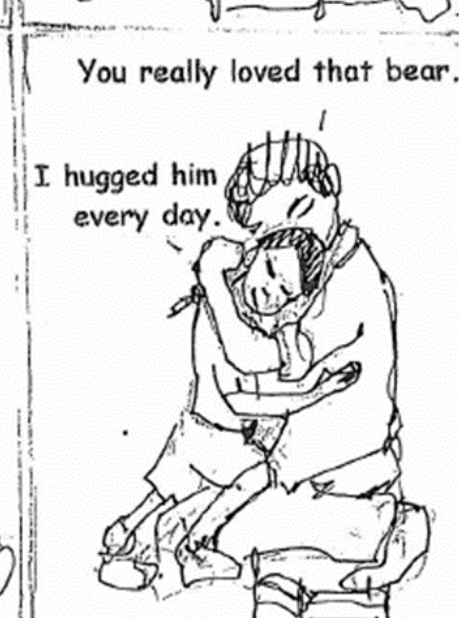


|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Past</b></p>      |  <p><b>What happened?</b></p>  |
|  |  <p><b>What were you thinking or feeling?</b></p>                    |
| <p><b>Present</b></p>   |  <p><b>What do you think or feel about it now?</b></p>               |
|  |  <p><b>Who has been affected?<br/>How has this affected you?</b></p> |
| <p><b>Future</b></p>  |  <p><b>What's needed to make things right?</b></p>                  |
|  |  <p><b>What have we learned from this?</b></p>                     |

Instead of trying to stop the emotion...



...really listen and name the feeling clearly.



# Brain processes in Emotion coaching

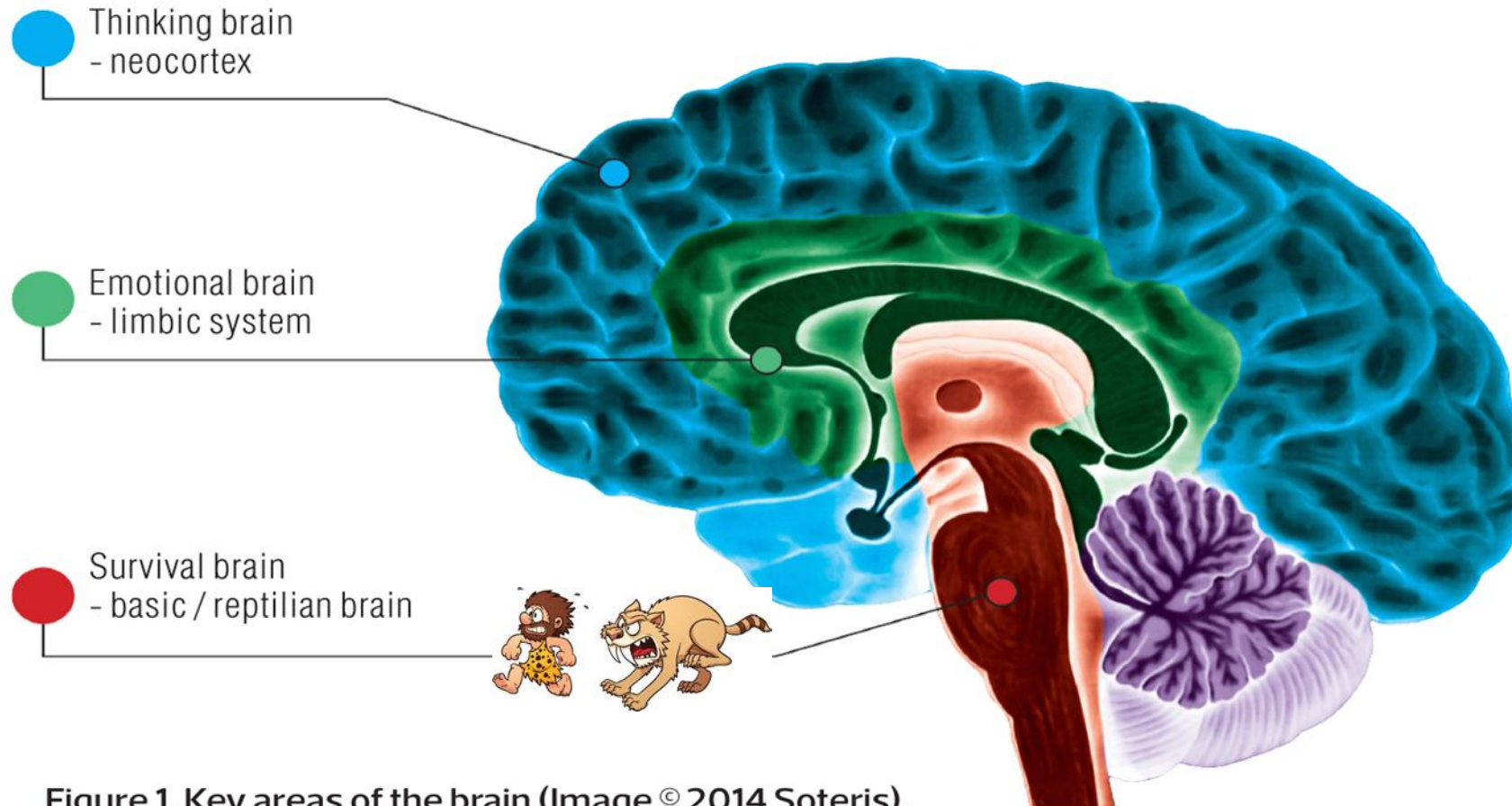
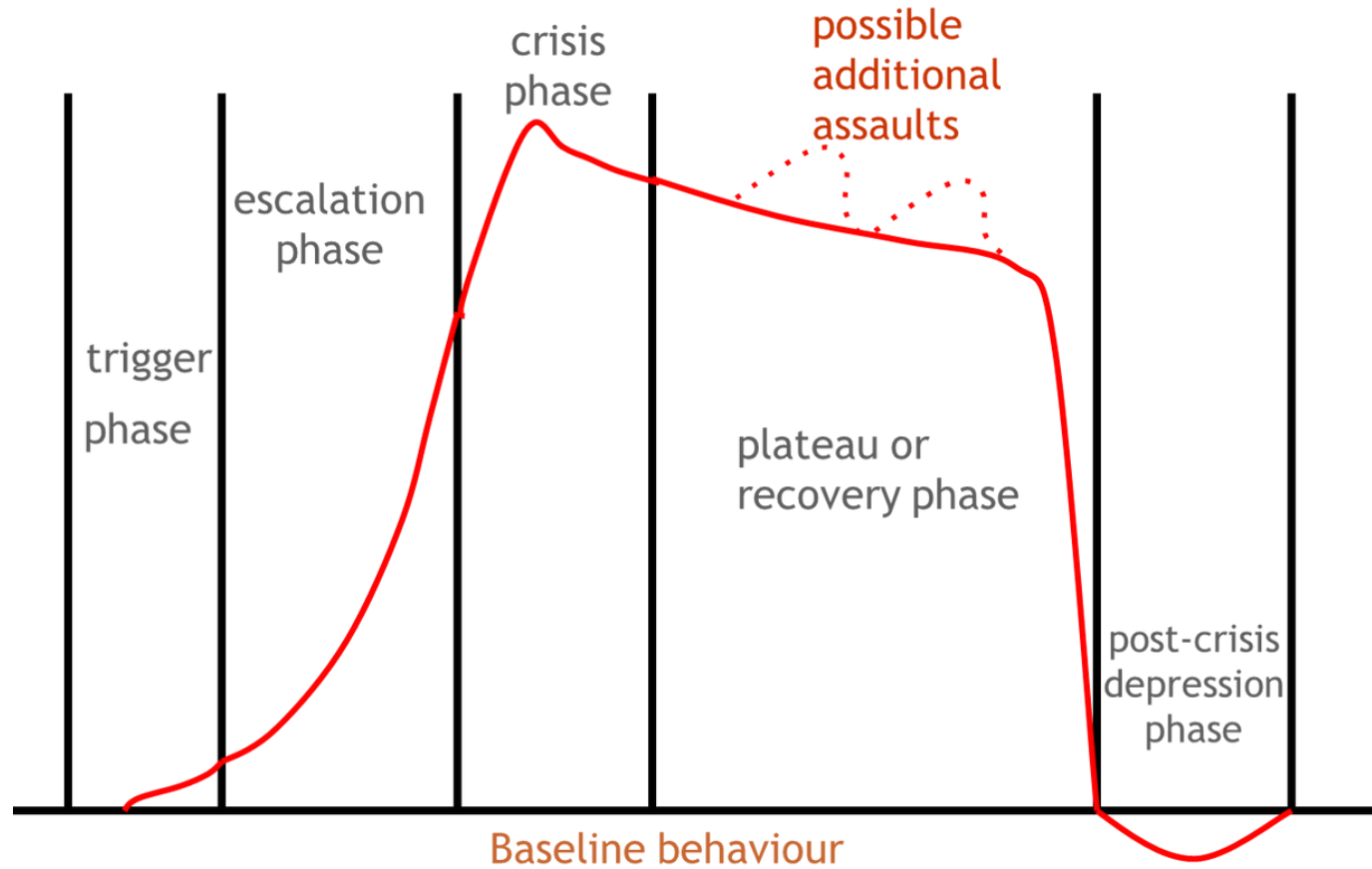


Figure 1. Key areas of the brain (Image © 2014 Soteris).

# Assault Cycle



# A METAPHOR FOR THE BRAIN



The more a pathway is used, the more established it becomes, the easier it is to use and the more it will become the chosen route

# Emotion coaching advantages

- *Finally....*
- Emotion coaching is not expected to be used all the time!
- Helps build connection and understanding
- Makes adults feel more confident and positive in their relationships with children
- May help you to feel calmer when supporting your child
- Start each day as new