



GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA



FONDI.eu



Regulate to Relate



Building Emotional Intelligence Through Nervous System Awareness



Co-funded by
the European Union

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Content



- 01 How do you feel?
- 02 Emotions
- 03 The Brain
- 04 The Polyvagal Theory
- 05 Case Scenario
- 06 Strategies
- 07 The Student
- 08 Case Studies



Pick a Card



Share: Why did you choose that card?



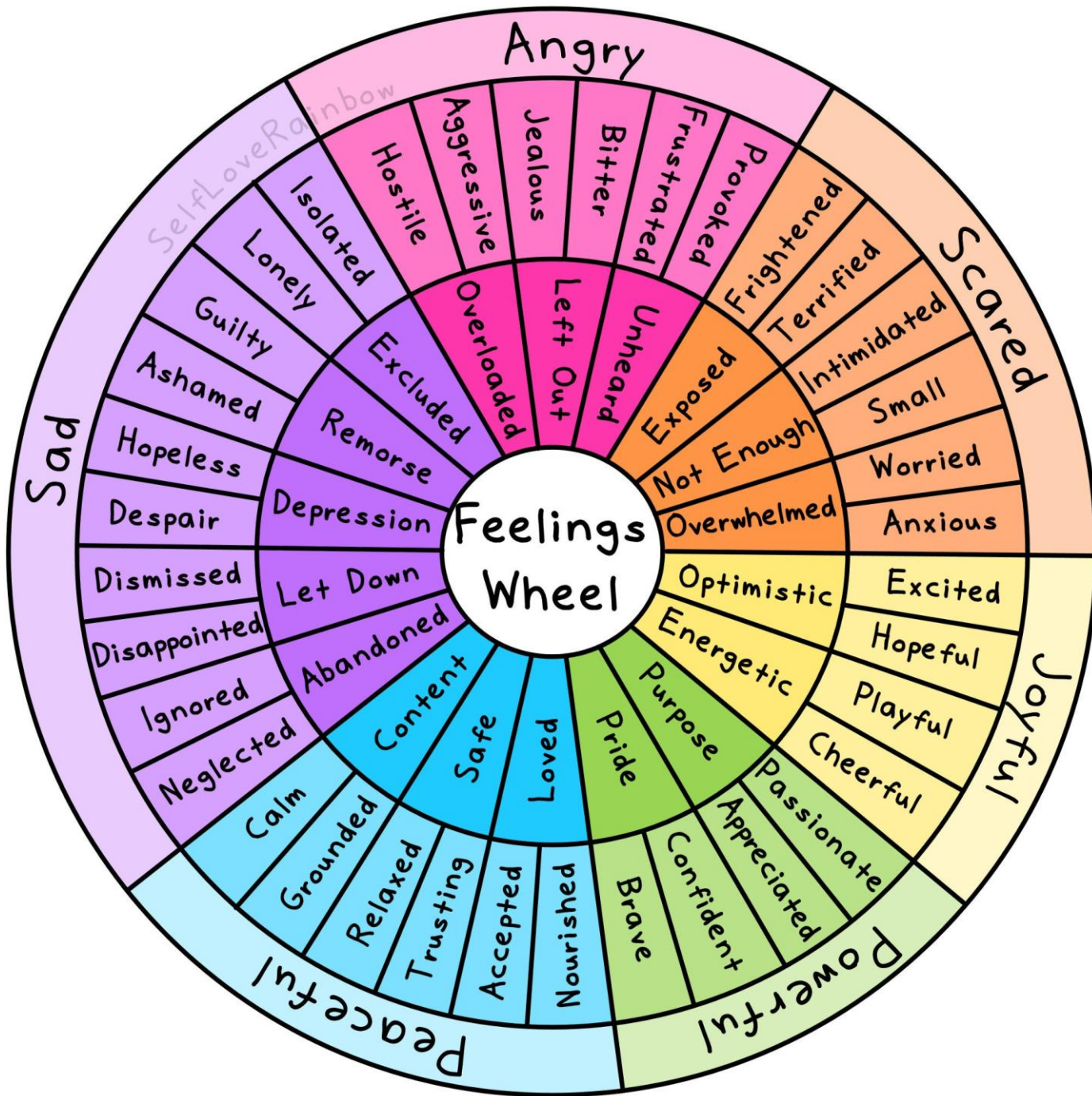
Emotions



Emotions



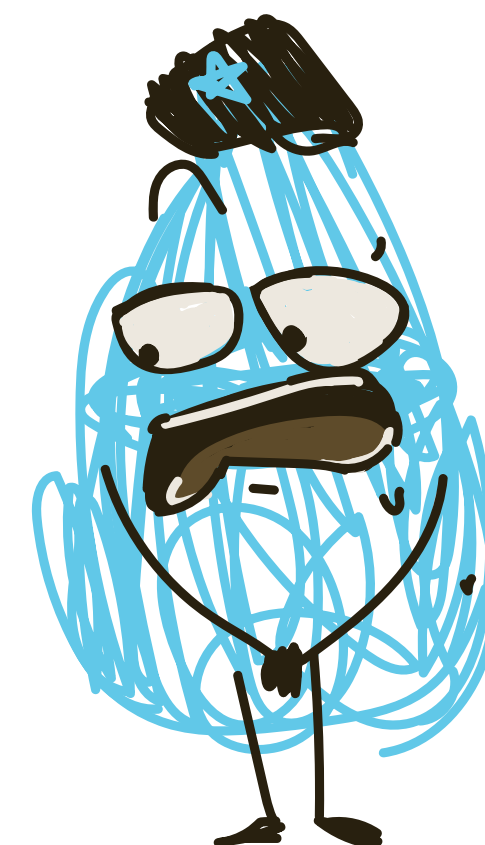
Emotions Wheel



- Starts with the core emotions (joy, fear, anger, sadness, peace, etc.).
- Each core emotion expands into deeper feelings.
- Emotions carry information, not instructions.
- Emotional intelligence begins with emotional awareness.

Reflect

IF ADULTS STRUGGLE TO IDENTIFY EMOTIONS, IMAGINE HOW DIFFICULT IT CAN BE FOR OUR STUDENTS!!!!



Reflect

WE CANNOT REGULATE WHAT WE CANNOT RECOGNISE.

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS DEVELOPING THE LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE OUR INNER EXPERIENCE.



The Brain

“OUR BRAINS ARE DESIGNED FOR SURVIVAL, NOT PERFECTION.”



THE BRAIN

Two Key Systems Working Together



EMOTIONAL BRAIN

Limbic System
(emotional, instinctive,
automatic)

KEY ROLES

- Processes emotions
- Detects threats
- Creates memories
- Drives instincts
- Works quickly,
below conscious
awareness

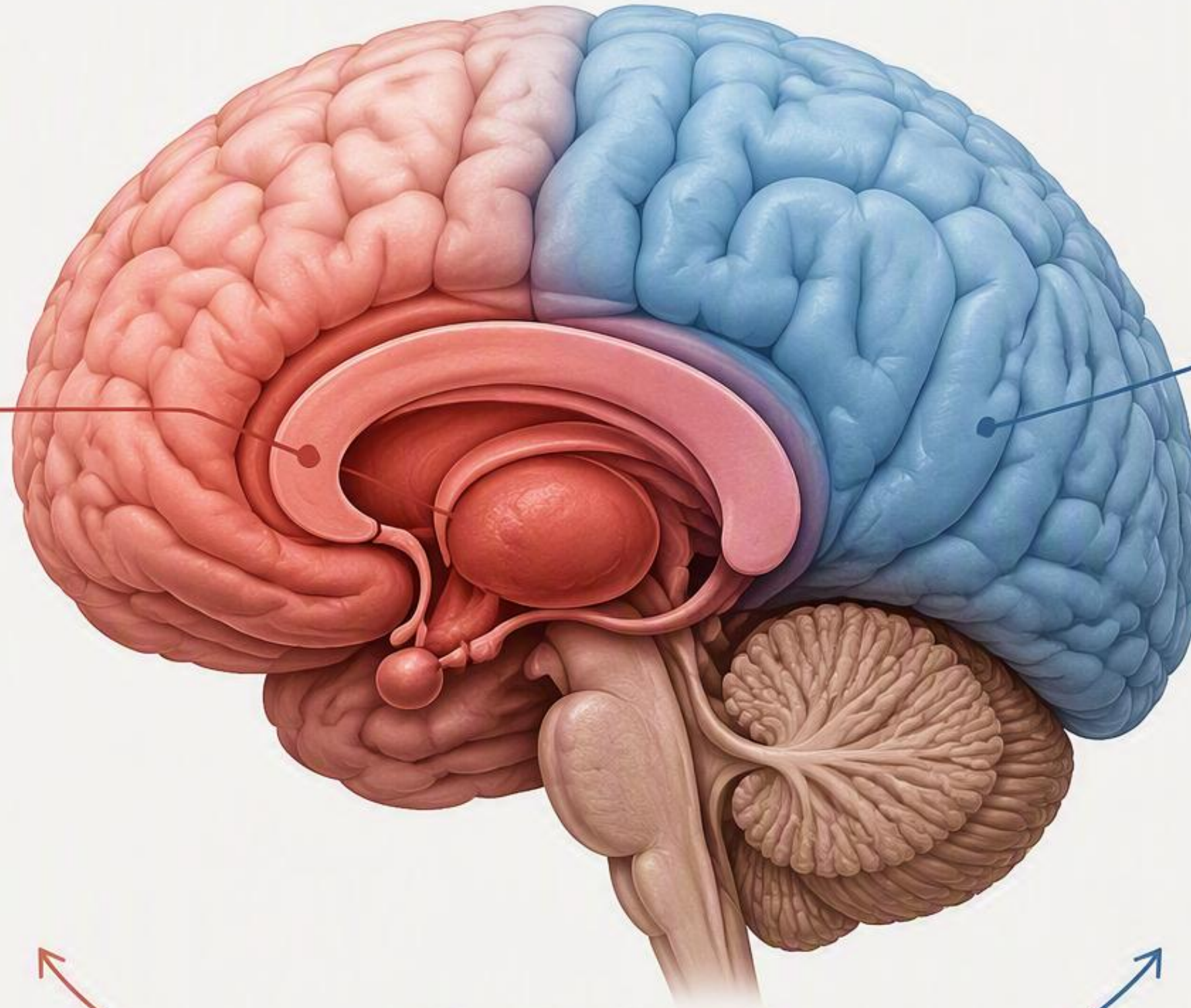


RATIONAL BRAIN

Prefrontal Cortex
(logical, thoughtful,
reflective)

KEY ROLES

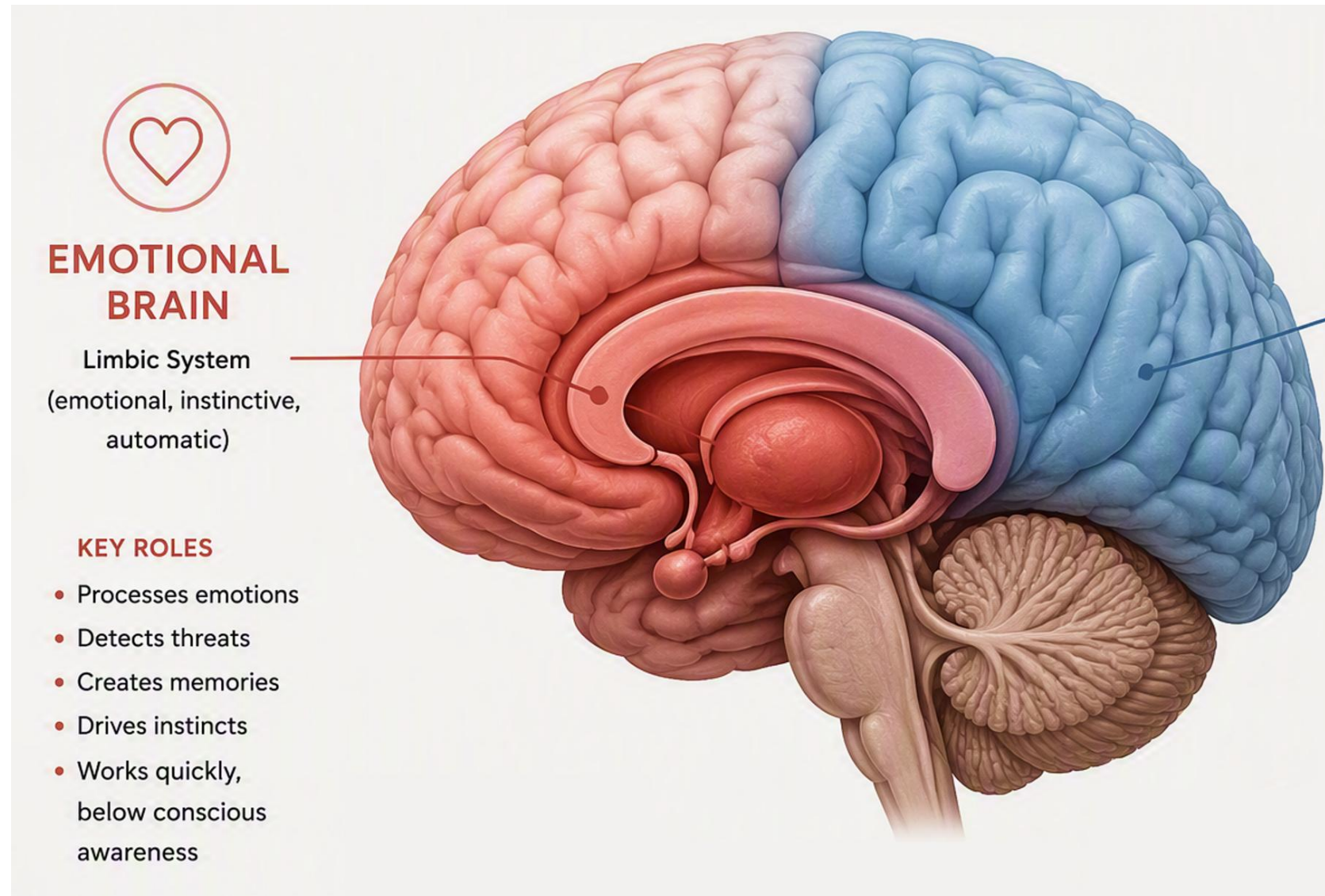
- Thinks and reasons
- Plans and problem-solves
- Makes decisions
- Considers consequences
- Works more slowly,
with conscious
awareness



WORKING TOGETHER

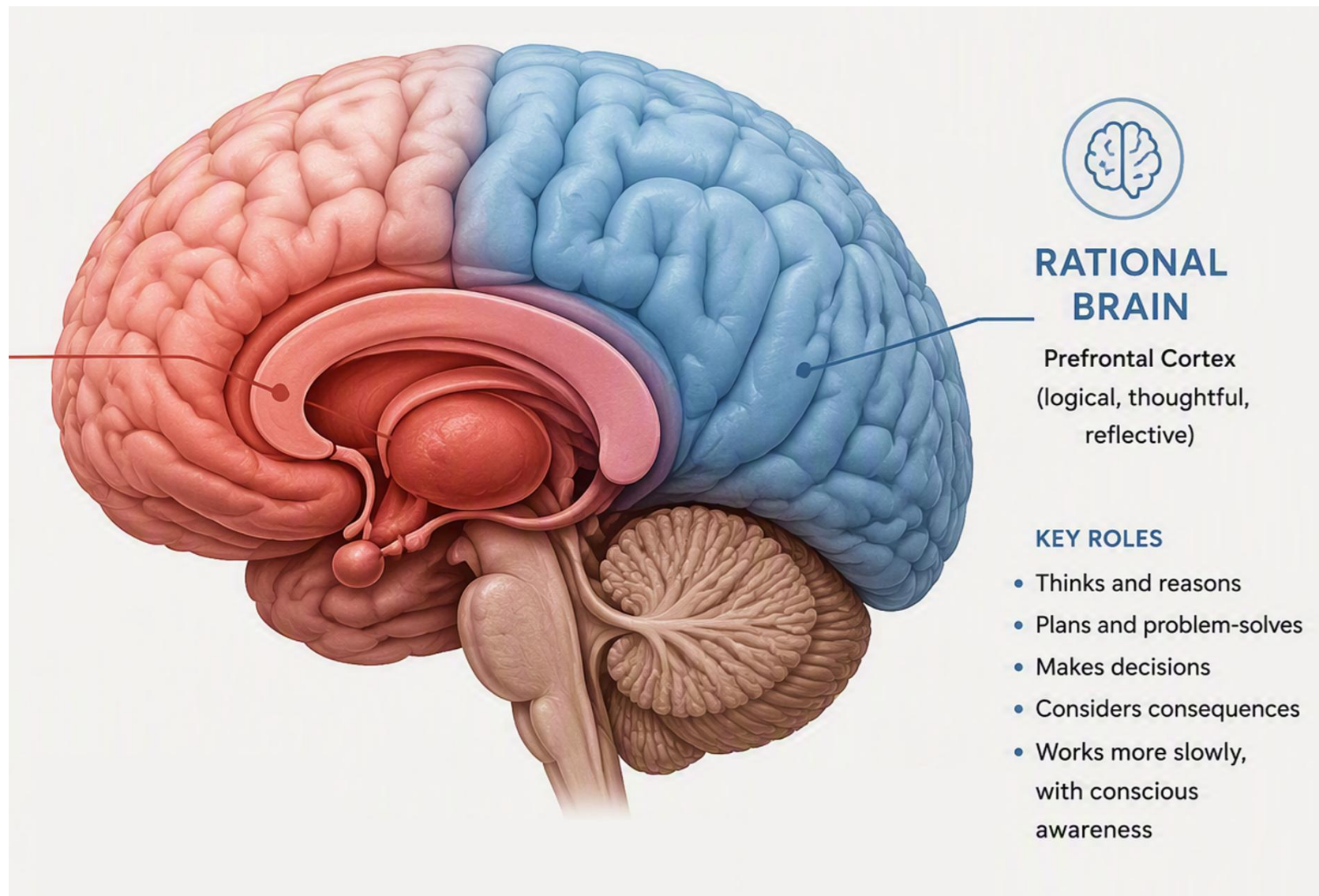
When these two systems are in balance,
we can feel, think, and respond in
ways that serve us well.

The Emotional Brain



- Fast.
- Automatic.
- Focused on safety and threat.
- Generates fight, flight, freeze responses.

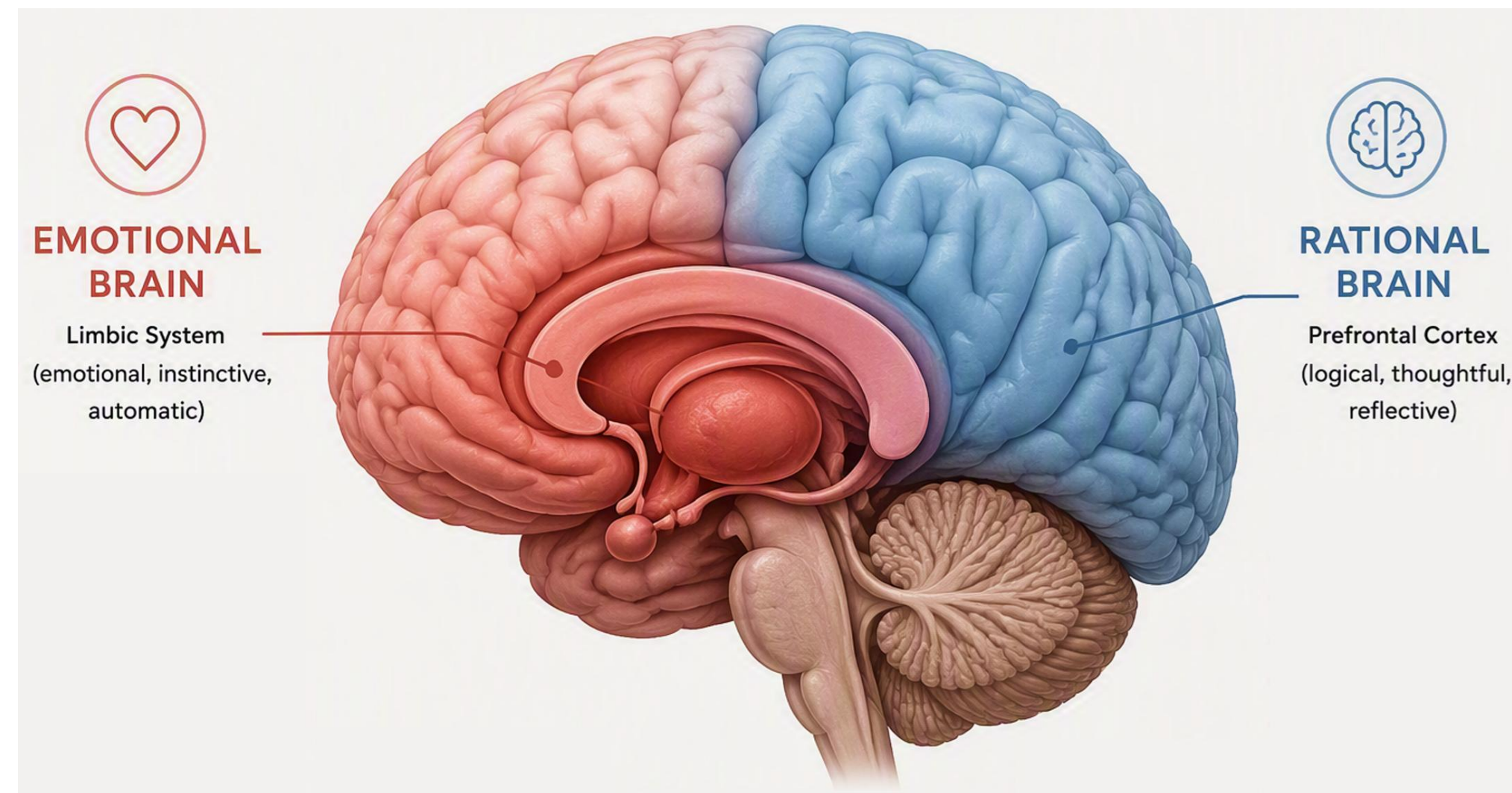
The Rational Brain



- Slower.
- Thoughtful.
- Supports reasoning, decision-making, empathy,
and problem-solving.

Emotional vs Rational Brain

When we feel **THREATENED**, **STRESSED**, **CRITICIZED**, or **OVERWHELMED**, the **EMOTIONAL BRAIN** can temporarily “take over”.



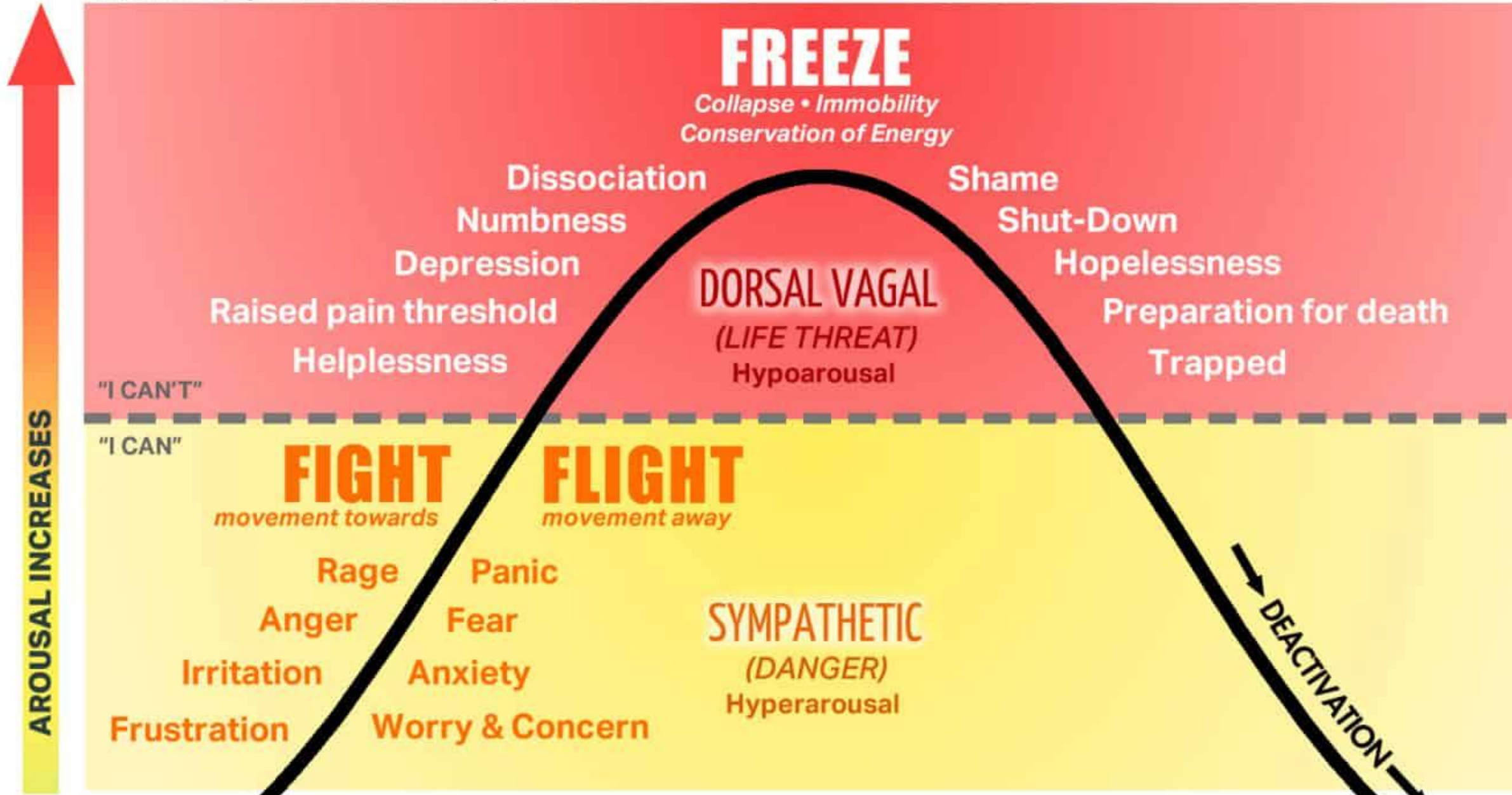
Polyvagal Theory

If the emotional brain is constantly scanning for danger, how do we help ourselves and our students feel safe enough to access the rational brain?

Before we think, our nervous system decides whether we feel safe enough to engage, need to protect ourselves or need to shut down.

POLYVAGAL CHART

The nervous system with a neuroception of threat:



The nervous system with a neuroception of safety:



PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

DORSAL VAGAL COMPLEX

Increases

Fuel storage & insulin activity • Immobilization behavior (with fear)
Endorphins that help numb and raise the pain threshold
Conservation of metabolic resources

Decreases

Heart Rate • Blood Pressure • Temperature • Muscle Tone
Facial Expressions & Eye Contact • Depth of Breath • Social Behavior
Attunement to Human Voice • Sexual Responses • Immune Response

SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Increases

Blood Pressure • Heart Rate • Fuel Availability • Adrenaline
Oxygen Circulation to Vital Organs • Blood Clotting • Pupil Size
Dilation of Bronchi • Defensive Responses

Decreases

Fuel Storage • Insulin Activity • Digestion • Salivation
Relational Ability • Immune Response

PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

VENTRAL VAGAL COMPLEX

Increases

Digestion • Intestinal Motility • Resistance to Infection
Immune Response • Rest and Recuperation • Health & Vitality
Circulation to non-vital organs (skin, extremities)
Oxytocin (neuromodulator involved in social bonds that allows immobility without fear) • Ability to Relate and Connect
Movement in eyes and head turning • Prosody in voice • Breath

Decreases

Defensive Responses

Polyvagal Theory

Polyvagal Theory helps explain why:

When people feel threatened:

- Self-awareness decreases.
- Defensive behaviour increases.
- Emotional reactivity increases.
- Perspective-taking becomes harder.

When people feel safe:

- Self-awareness increases.
- Empathy increases.
- Listening improves.
- Conflict management improves.

Polyvagal Theory

One of the most practical ideas from the Polyvagal Theory is that we regulate each other.

A calm leader can help calm a stressed team.

People look for:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Predictability

Through:

- Tone of voice
- Facial expression and body language
- Presence

Case Scenario

A student repeatedly interrupts your lesson after you've already addressed the behaviour several times.

EMOTIONAL BRAIN

- He is disrespecting me.
- I feel frustrated or angry.
- Reaction: Raise my voice.
- Consequence issued impulsively.

RATIONAL BRAIN

- Pause.
- Notice your frustration.
- Consider what might be driving the behaviour.
- Respond calmly and intentionally.

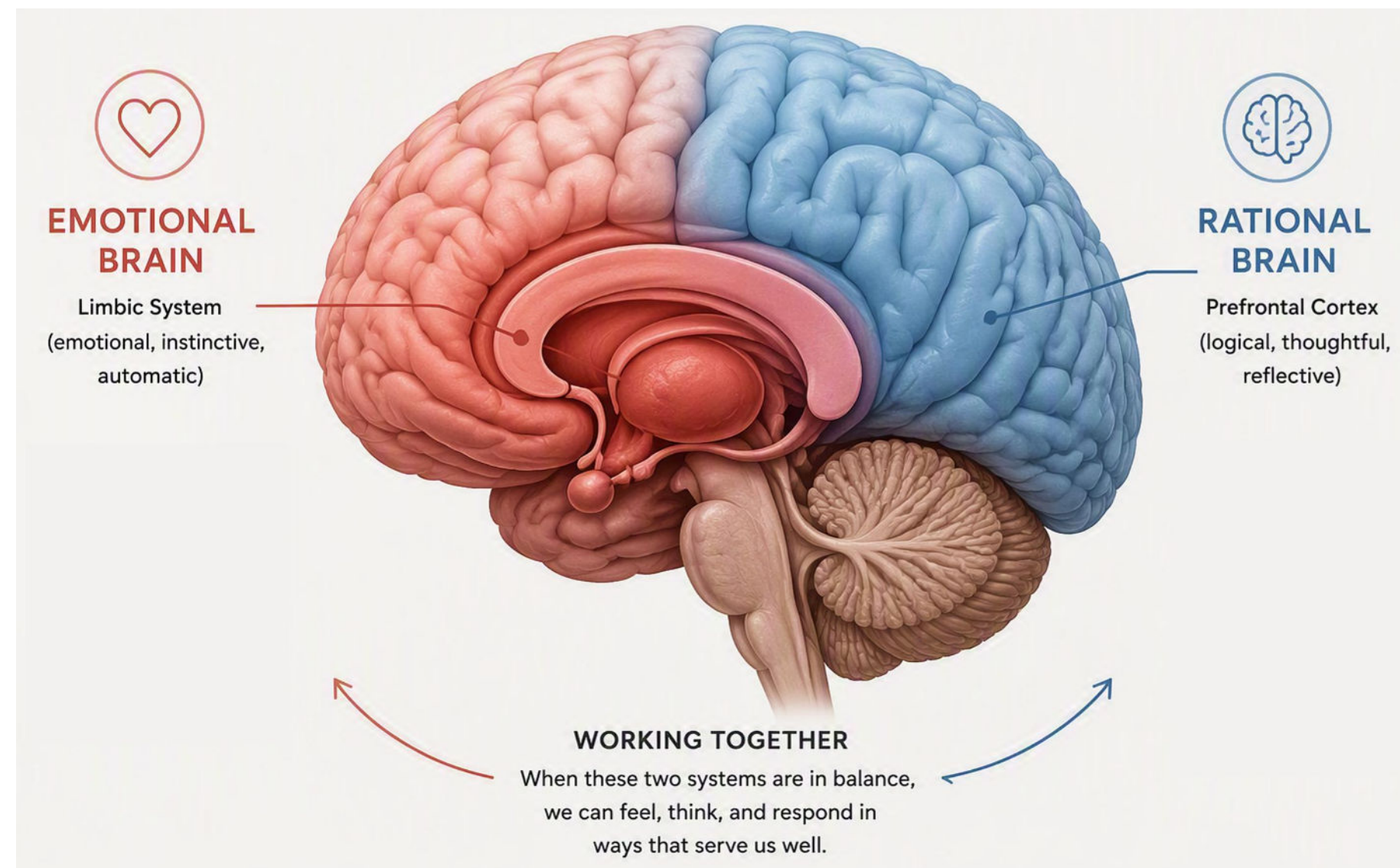
Reflect

HAVE YOU EVER REACTED ONE WAY IN THE MOMENT AND LATER WISHED YOU HAD RESPONDED DIFFERENTLY?



Strategies

The goal is not to get rid of emotions. Emotions provide valuable information. The **GOAL** is to create enough **PAUSE** between the **FEELING** and the **ACTION** for the **RATIONAL** brain to **RE-ENGAGE**.



Strategies

Step 1: Take one slow breath.



Strategies

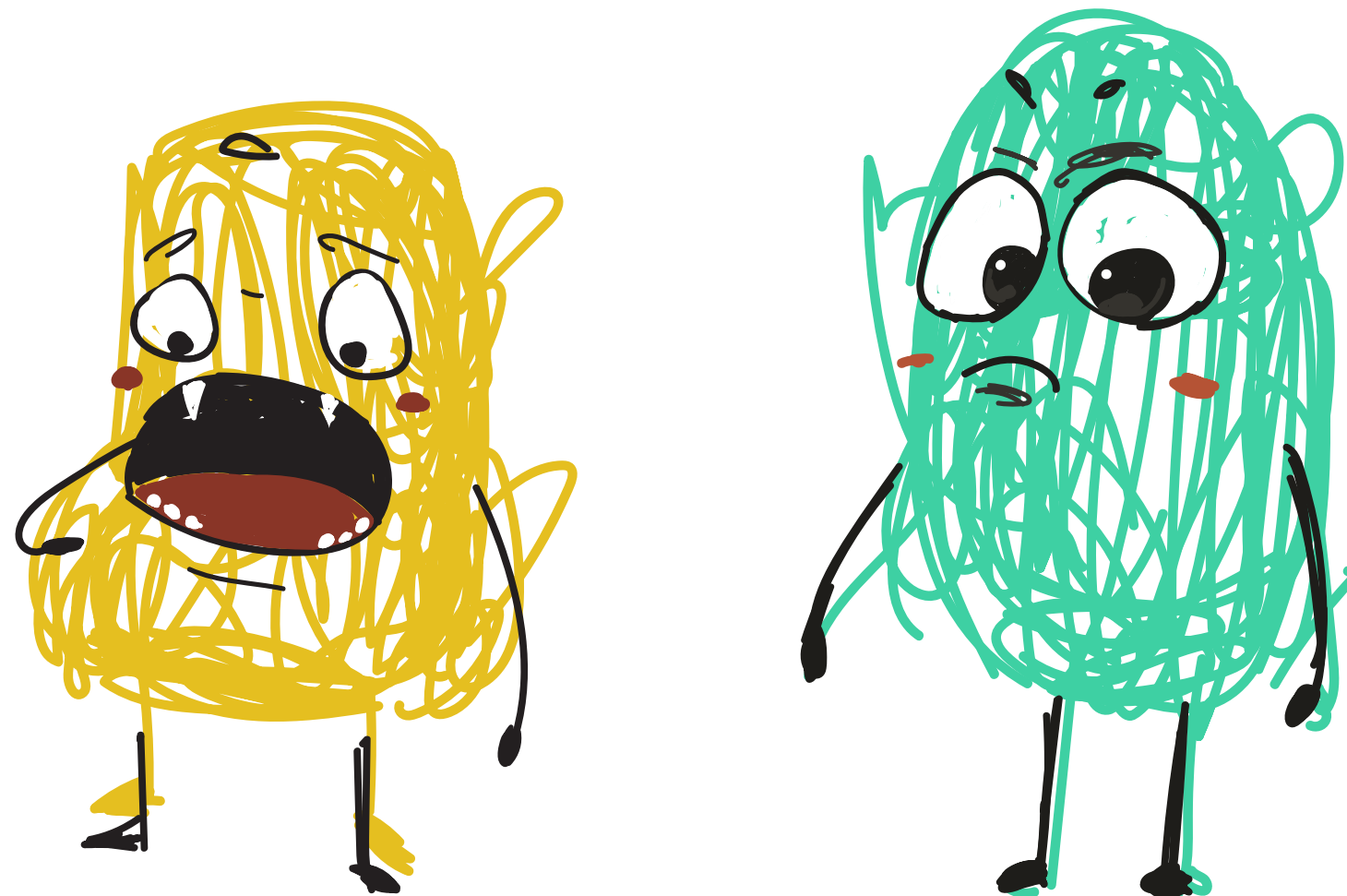
Step 2: Ground yourself.



Strategies

Step 3: Name the emotion.

When we name an emotion, we reduce its intensity and create space for clearer thinking.



The Student

The same thing happens to our students:

- Problems at home;
- Health issues;
- A lot of stress;
- Not understanding lesson/coping.



The Student

A dysregulated child often cannot:

- Think clearly;
- Problem-solve;
- Learn effectively;
- Access empathy.



The Student

Before expecting reasoning, we often need regulation.

CONNECT BEFORE YOU CORRECT.



Group Work: How would you react?

