

Autism and Anxiety

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

with

HOLLY BLANC MOSES, MS BCBA LPC LPA

WHY SHOULD WE CARE
ABOUT
Anxiety?

Reason

01

**Anxiety significantly impacts
behavior.**

CAUTION

Don't mistake
anxiety for "bad
behavior".

ANXIETY AND BEHAVIOR

- ♦ Father: “Please put on your uniform.”
- ♦ Son: “I’m not going! I hate scouts and I hate you!”



Reason

02

**Anxiety makes social
challenges worse.**

ANXIETY AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

- ♦ Mother: “Don’t you want to make friends?”
- ♦ Daughter: “Yeah but they just call me weird so I don’t try.”



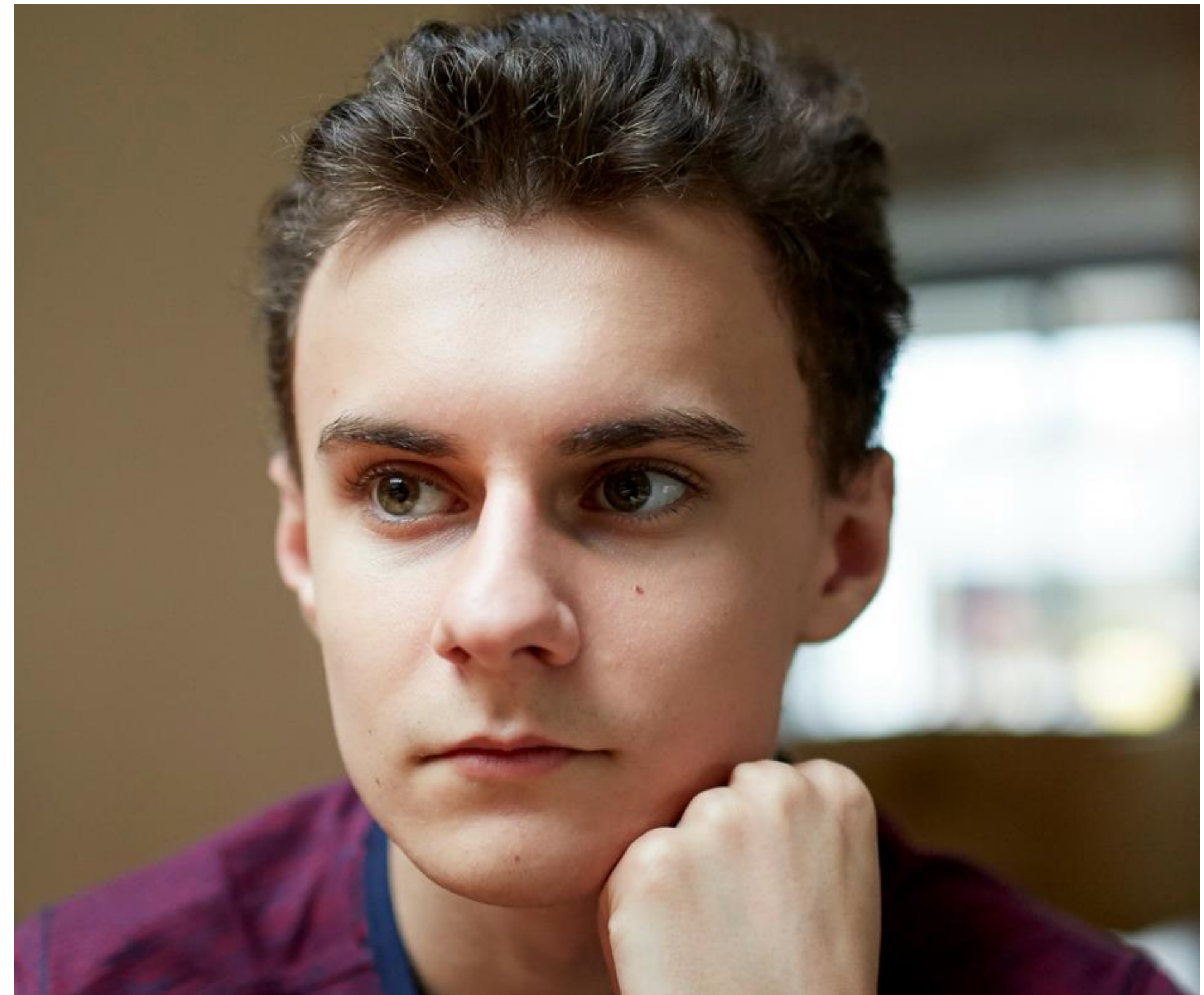
Reason

03

Anxiety impacts school work.

ANXIETY AND ACADEMICS

- ♦ Mother: “Why did you get a zero on the presentation?”
- ♦ Son: “I’m lazy and I don’t care about school!”



Reason

04

Comorbidity

HIGH OVERLAP

- 40% of children with Autism also meet clinical levels of anxiety or at least one anxiety disorder
- 35% of children with ADHD meet criteria for one or more anxiety disorders

Reason

05

Anxiety Can Outweigh Everything

ANXIETY IS POWERFUL



SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- ◆ Rigidity
- ◆ Oppositional behavior
- ◆ Fear-based avoidance of harmless people, events or objects
- ◆ Excessive need to control people and the environment
- ◆ Excessive emotional reaction

SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- ◆ Frequent question asking
- ◆ Difficult transitions
- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Frustration and anger
- ◆ Crying
- ◆ Confusion



PHYSICAL SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Muscle tension
- ◆ Rapid heart beat
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Stomach ache



THE BRAIN AND ANXIETY



THE HELPFUL AMYGDALA

- ◆ Helps us be afraid of things that are out of our control
- ◆ Gets the body ready to stand and fight, run away or shut down
- ◆ Helps us read the face of other's accurately



THE HELPFUL FRONTAL LOBE

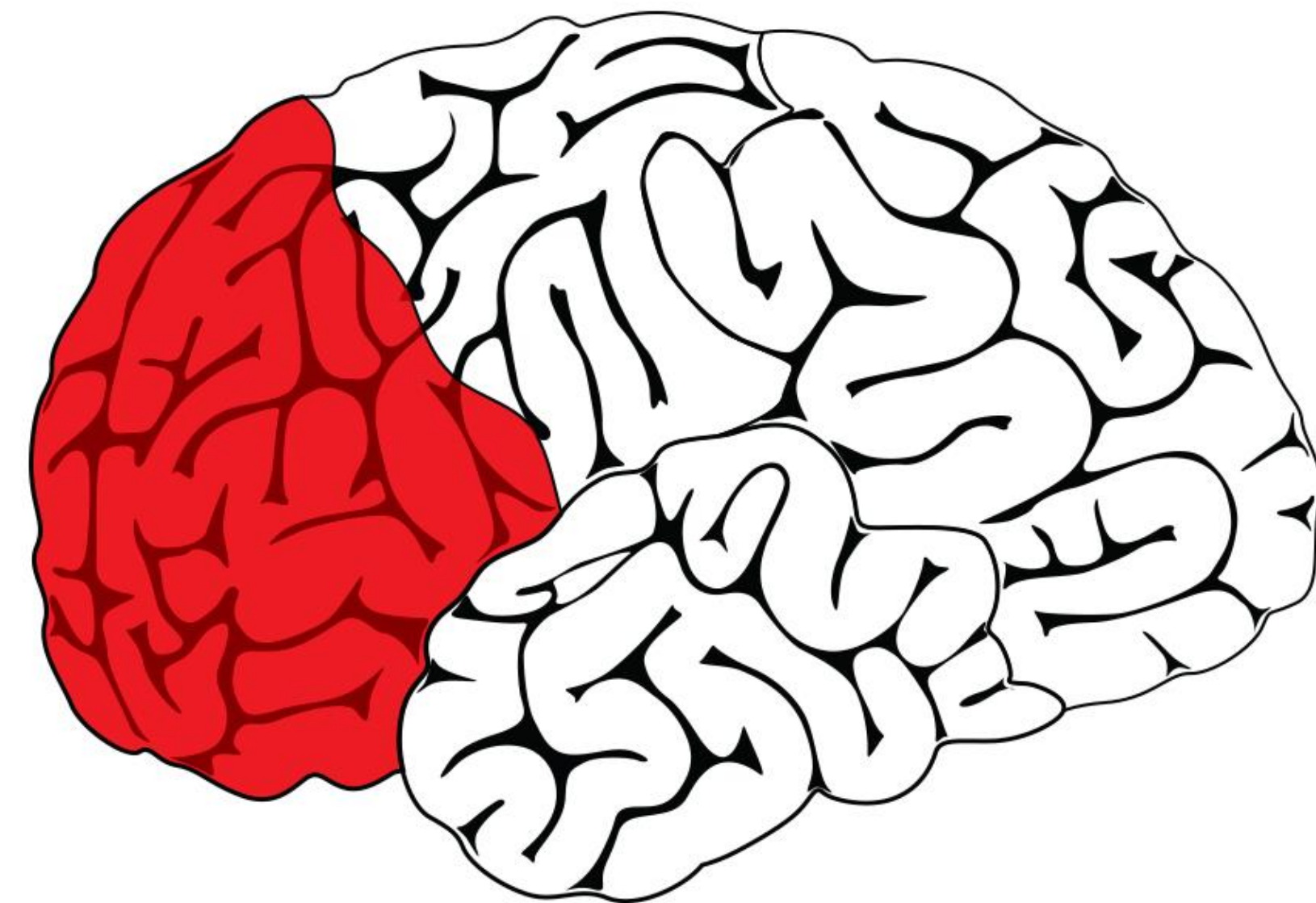
- ◆ Emotional regulation
- ◆ Flexible thinking
- ◆ Problem solving
- ◆ Thinking before reacting



**DIFFERENTLY WIRED
CHILDREN OFTEN SHOW
AMYGDALA AND FRONTAL
LOBE DIFFERENCES**

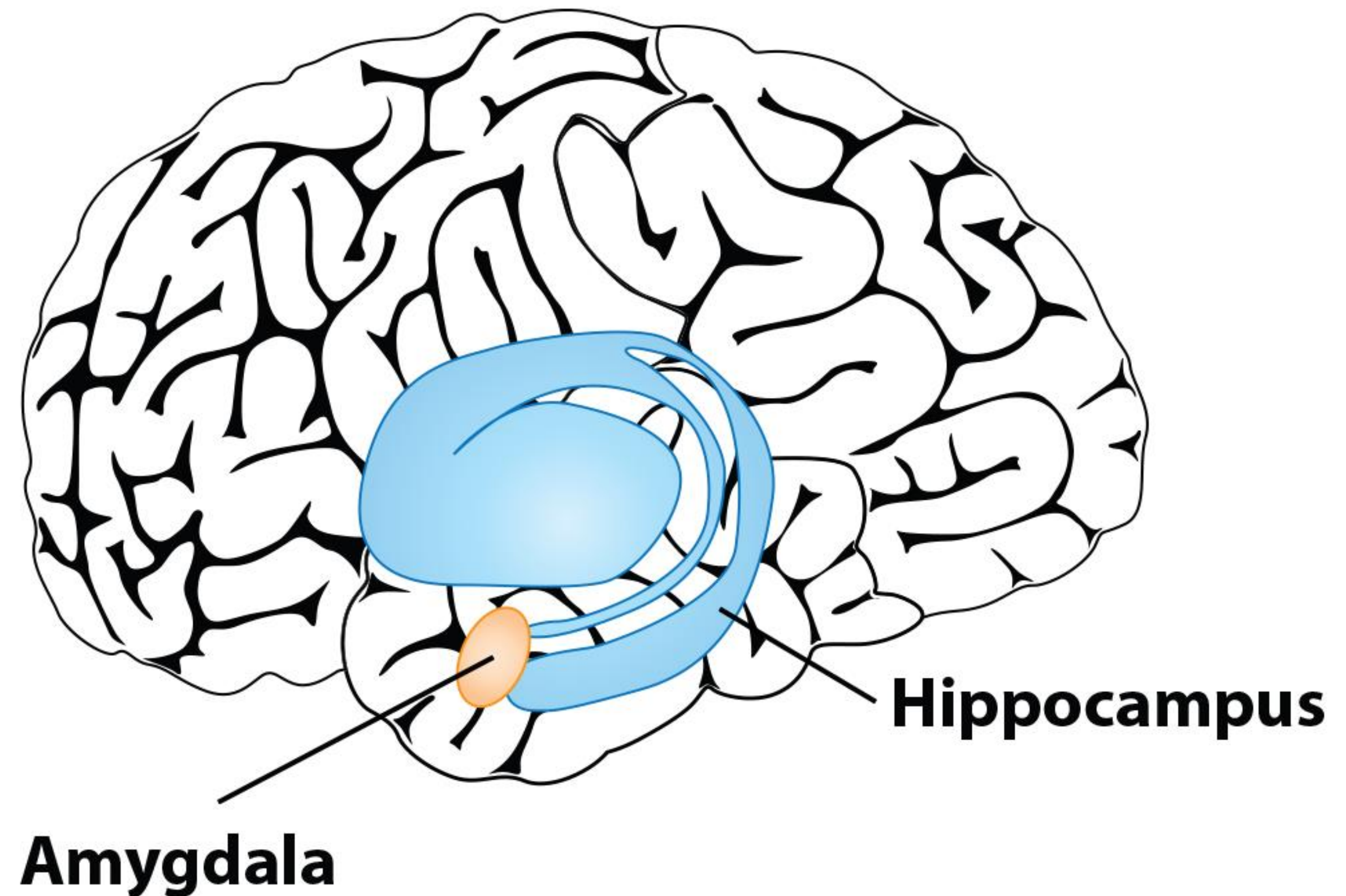
FRONTAL LOBE DIFFERENCES

- ◆ Doing without thinking
- ◆ Emotional dysregulation
- ◆ Motor planning problems
- ◆ Rigidity
- ◆ Disorganization
- ◆ Problem solving challenges



AMYGDALA DIFFERENCES

- Increased perceptions of -
 - ◆ Sadness
 - ◆ Defensiveness
 - ◆ Fear
 - ◆ Anger



AMYGDALA/HIPPOCAMPUS

- ◆ Experience enhanced memories of emotional events
- ◆ Children with autism show problems with retrieving and interpreting memories



**CHILDREN WHO ARE
WIRED DIFFERENTLY ARE
OFTEN ON HIGH ALERT.**

IT'S DIFFICULT TO SEE
PAST THE PERCEIVED
THREAT

OUTSIDE VARIABLES

- ◆ High consistency demands
- ◆ Inability to accept change
- ◆ High frequency social rejection
- ◆ Unrealistic expectations from others



TOO HEAVY

Expectations to tolerate
difficult environments

Expectations to be
social

Homework

Expectations of parents
and teachers

Unexpected changes

Expectations for self-
care and chores

ASD
ADHD
Anxiety

**“WHEN MY PLAN GETS
MESSED UP AND PEOPLE
WANT TOO MUCH, MY
ANXIETY SKYROCKETS.”**

SHUTDOWN



AVOIDANCE/ ESCAPE



FIGHT



FLIGHT



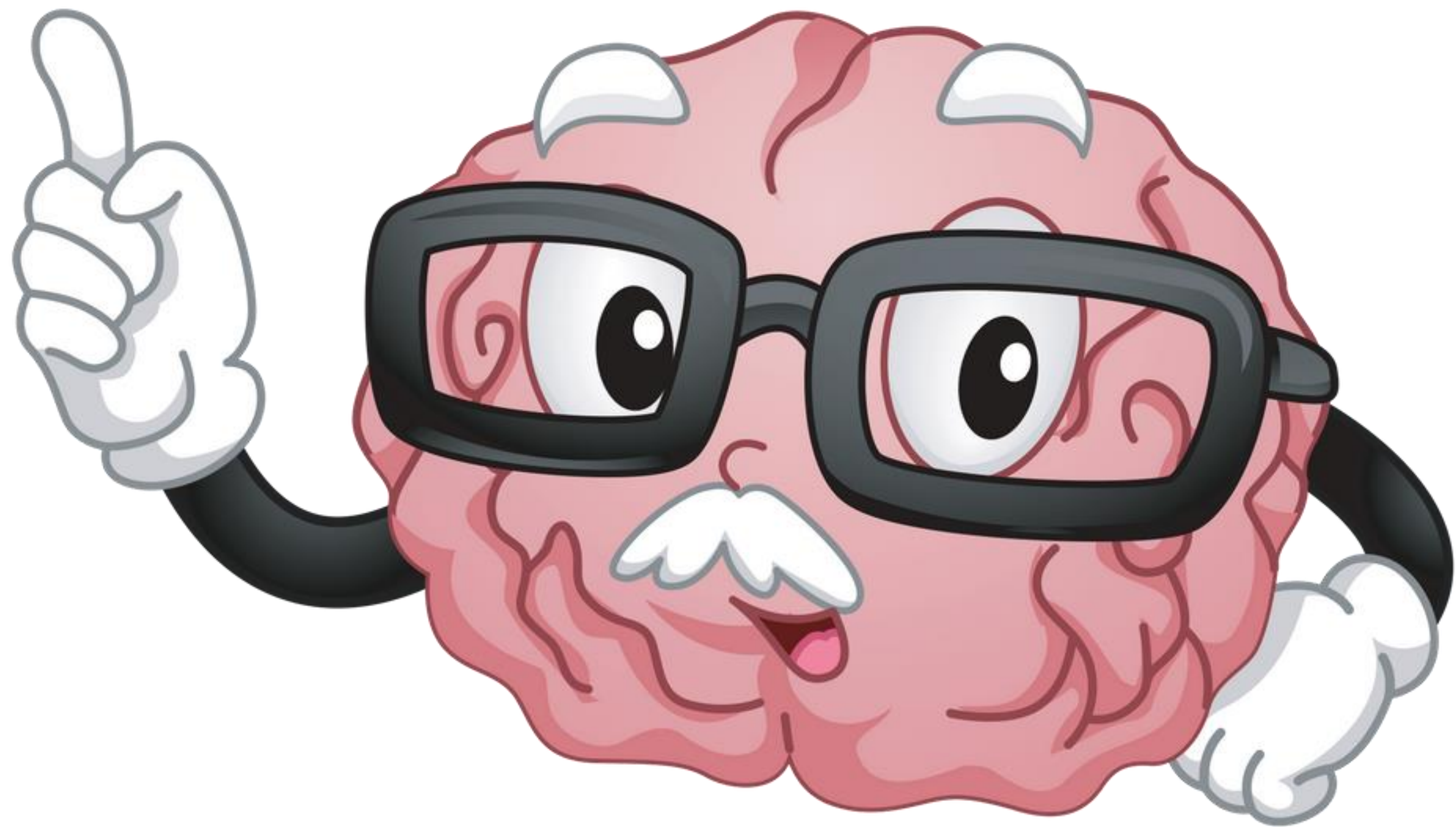
HEAVY THOUGHTS

- ◆ “It’s my responsibility to make sure people follow the rules.”
- ◆ “I don’t do anything right.”
- ◆ “I’ll never have any friends.”
- ◆ “If it isn’t perfect, I’ll fail.”

HEAVY THOUGHTS

- ◆ “Playing video games keep bad thoughts away.”
- ◆ “I stay in my room so I don’t have to monitor so many people.”
- ◆ “People are either good or bad.”
- ◆ “People have to follow the rules.”

THE BEST
STORYTELLER



WORDS HAVE POWER



Soft



Hard

MAKE ROOM
BECAUSE IT'S COMING
ANYWAY.

SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

BRAIN STORIES

- ◆ Notice my body's reaction to words.
- ◆ Make space - "My brain is telling me a story about..."
- ◆ I'm a curious scientist.
- ◆ It is just a story.
- ◆ Hold it lightly (objects)

HOLDING BRAIN STORIES

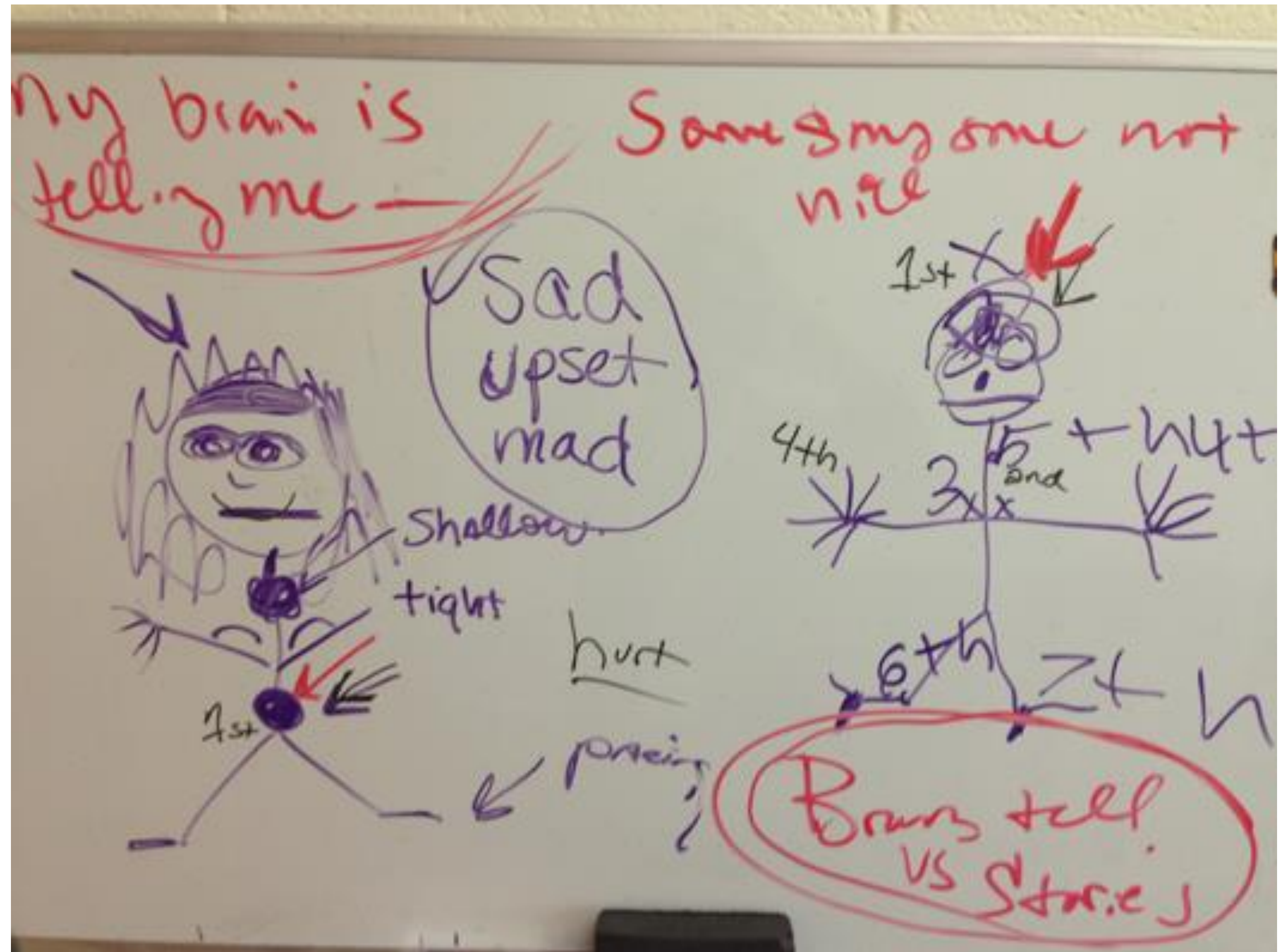


Open



Tight Grip

PHYSIOLOGICAL AWARENESS



BODY SCAN

- ◆ From head to toe
- ◆ Investigate particular body parts
- ◆ Bring awareness to breathing
- ◆ Notice sensations such as tightness, heat, cold, itchiness, and buzzing

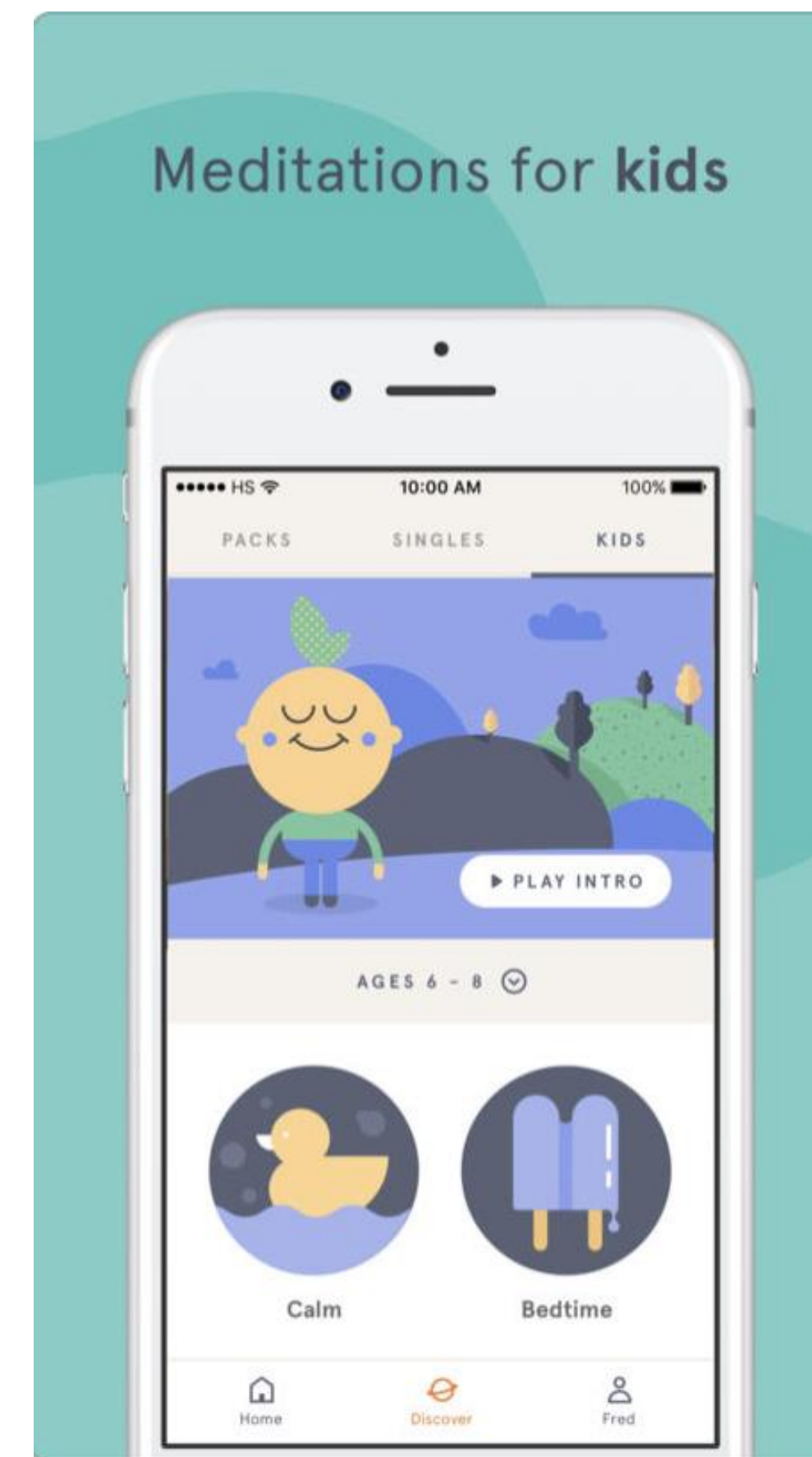
BODY SCAN



LINK SLEEPS - MILLEUDA FAN ART

RELAXATION APPS

- ◆ Calm
- ◆ Headspace: Meditation
- ◆ Stop, Breathe & Think Kids
- ◆ Wellbeyond Meditation for Kids
- ◆ Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame



BREATHING

- ◆ Belly breathing (Diaphragmatic breathing)
- ◆ Blowing bubbles
- ◆ Balloon or special interest figure
- ◆ Darth Vader



MUSCLE RELAXATION

- ◆ Make orange juice
- ◆ Crush a Minecraft rock
- ◆ Turtle neck
- ◆ Stretch



MUSIC

- ◆ Use songs that are likely to produce a feeling or thought
- ◆ Bring awareness to the feeling



SPECIAL INTEREST S



"NOT OFFICIAL MINECRAFT PRODUCT. NOT APPROVED BY OR ASSOCIATED WITH MOJANG";

BRAIN STORIES

Day- Prepare	Night- They are coming	After
Grow food - Belly breathing	Creeper – “No one likes me”	Notice without judgement
Build shelter - Stretching	Skeleton-“I’m no good”	Hold it lightly
Mine for supplies - listen to relaxation app	Zombie-“I am stupid”	Make room
Craft weapons -	Spider- “I’m overwhelmed”	Move forward

MY LITTLE PONY



“My Little Pony still. NOT APPROVED BY OR ASSOCIATED WITH HASBORO”

Practice

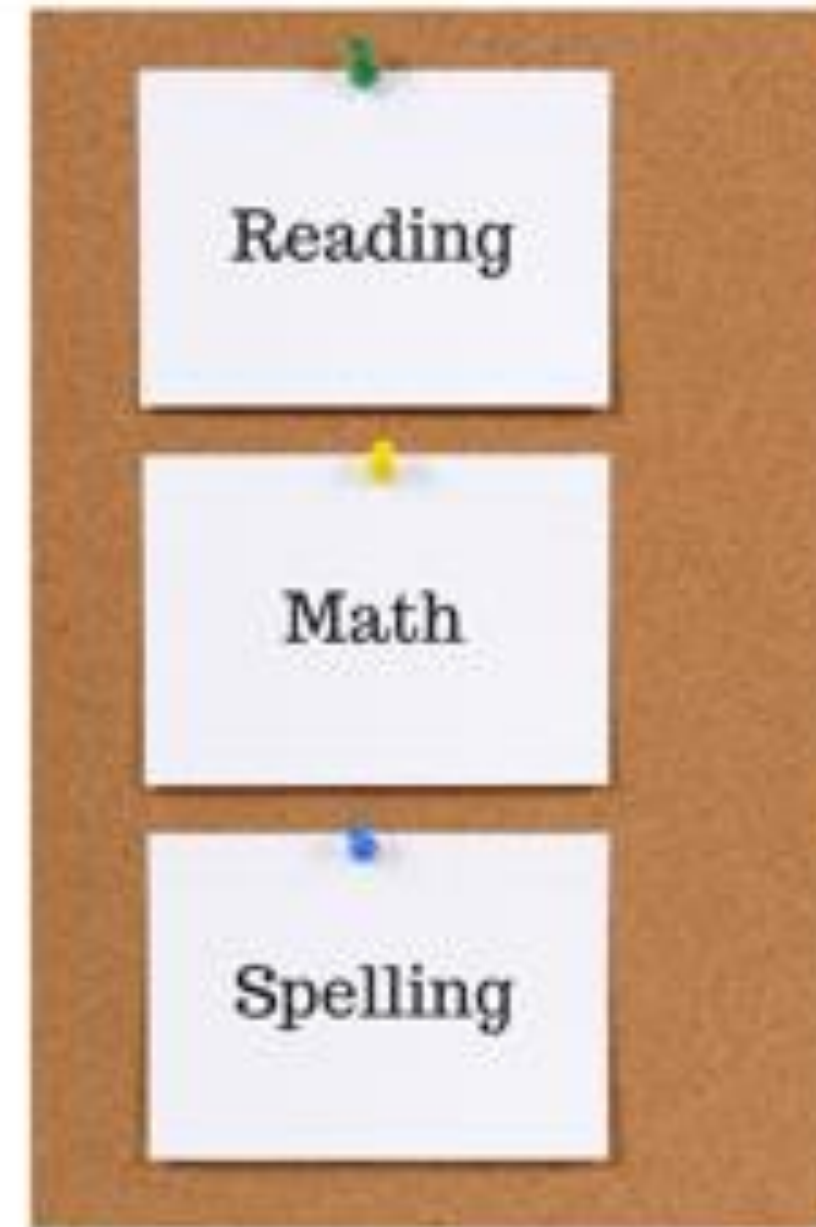
Practice

Practice

GO OUTSIDE



VISUAL ANXIETY PREVENTION



MAKE TIME
VISUAL



EXERCISE



MEDICATION



CHANGE EXPECTATIONS

“Anxiety Lies in
between what your
child is able to do at
the moment and your
expectation.”

-Holly Blanc Moses

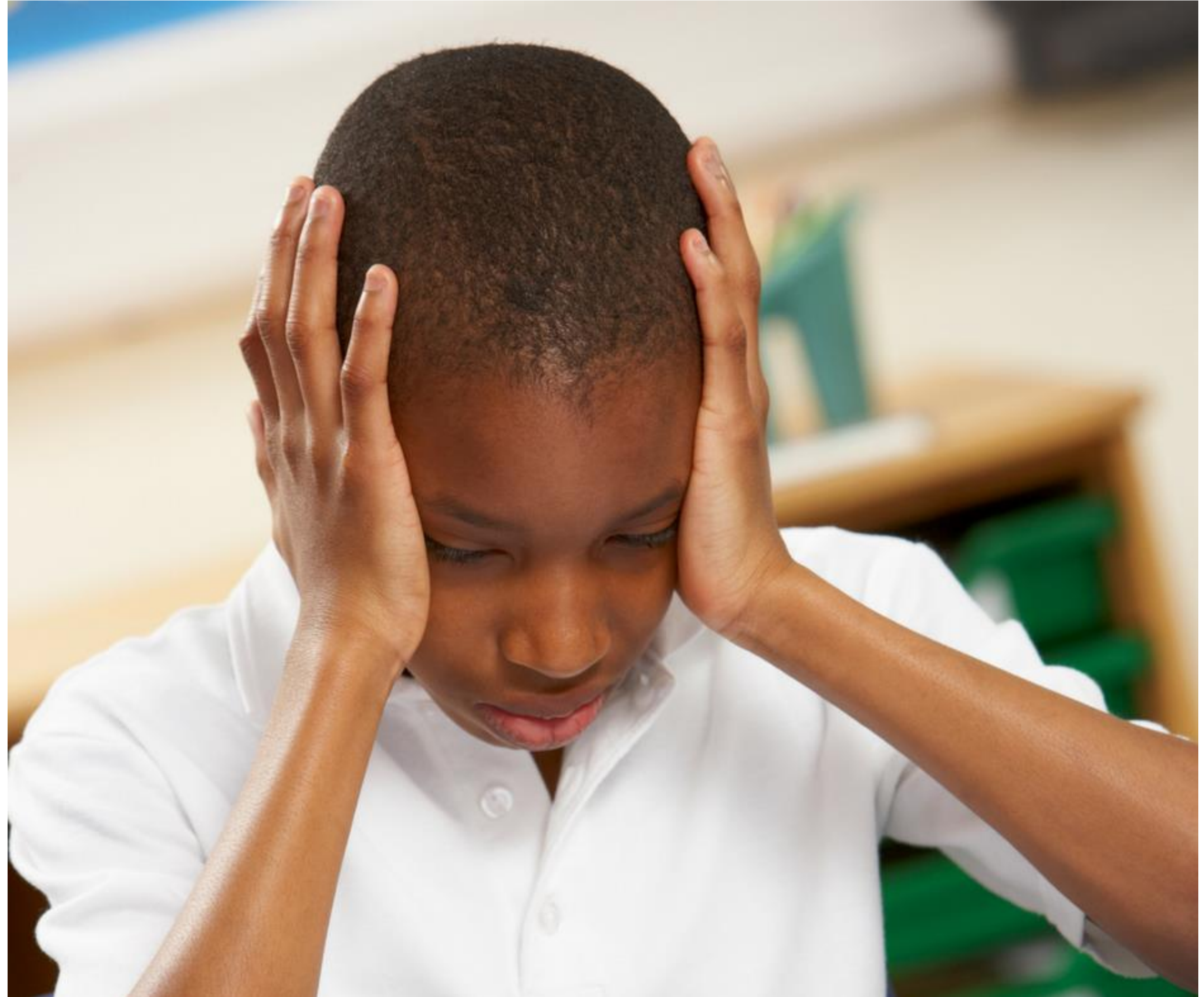
#ADHD #AUTISM
www.hollyblancmoses.com



IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONS



SCHOOLWORK HOMEWORK



FIDGETS



SQUISHY



"NOT APPROVED BY OR ASSOCIATED WITH WILLTOO";

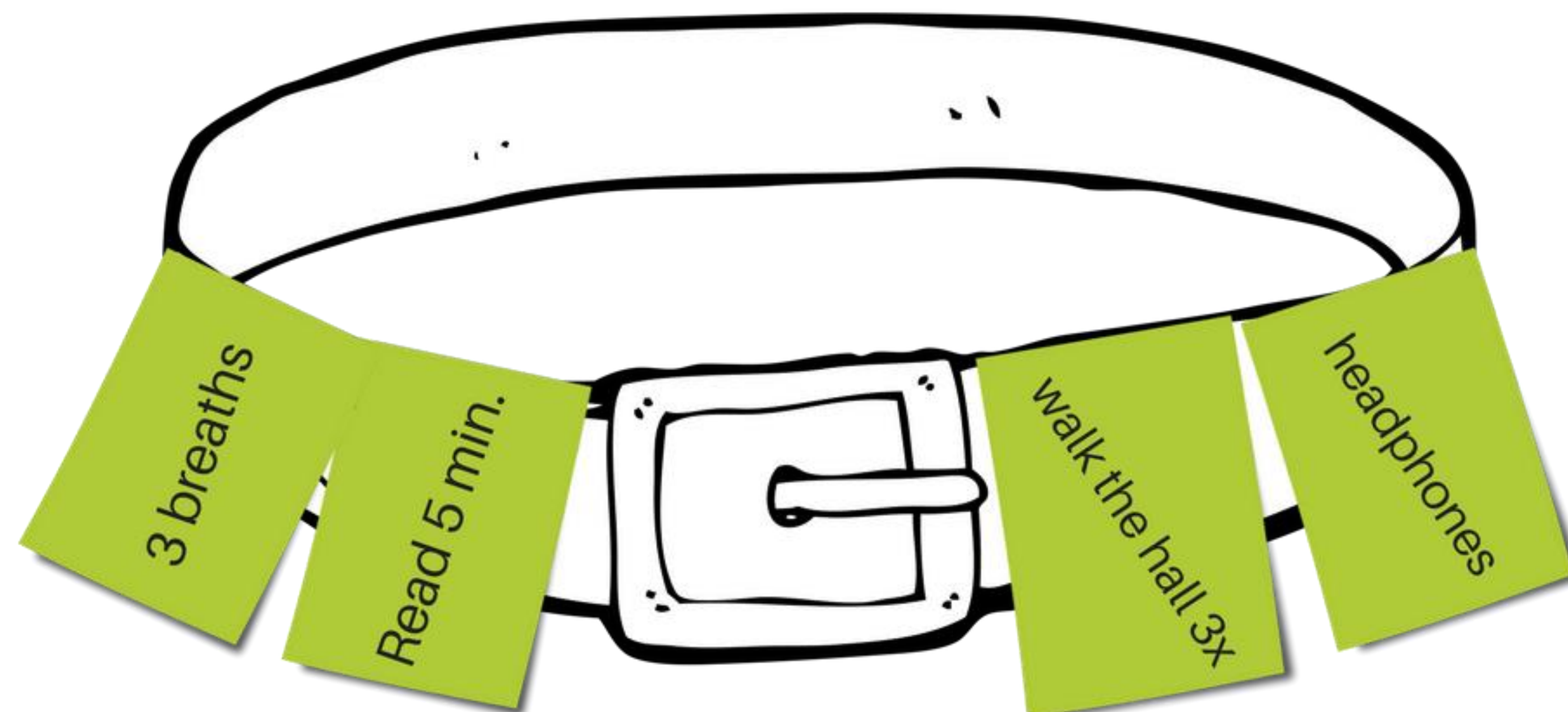
ADAPT TO SENSORY CHALLENGES



SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING



TOOLBELT



Reward

“DOING IT ANYWAY”

EXPOSURE



Quick Tips

FILL INS

- ◆ I feel nervous when_____.
- ◆ I feel sad when _____.
- ◆ When I'm anxious, my body feels_____.
- ◆ I feel relaxed, my body feels _____.
- ◆ I feel relaxed when I _____.
- ◆ I feel good when _____.

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Encourage independence
- ◆ Set reachable goals
- ◆ Create opportunities for success
- ◆ Model flexibility and compromise when possible
- ◆ Use clear one to two step instructions

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Avoid power struggles – No one wins
- ◆ Add choices as much as possible
- ◆ Help identify “the plan”
- ◆ Model brave behavior and say, “I was nervous but I did it anyway”
- ◆ Allow them to make mistakes
- ◆ Fidgets

QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Show interest in your child's interests
- ◆ Make a grocery store list with blanks
- ◆ Gaming can sometimes be a lifeline. If you take away electronics give go-to- activities to earn it back
- ◆ Identify peers with similar interests

TWO KEY QUESTION

1) What is my child having trouble telling me?

2) What can I do to help?

Questions

WWW.HOLLYBLANCMOSES.COM