

The Brain, Faulty Neuroception and What WE Can Do!

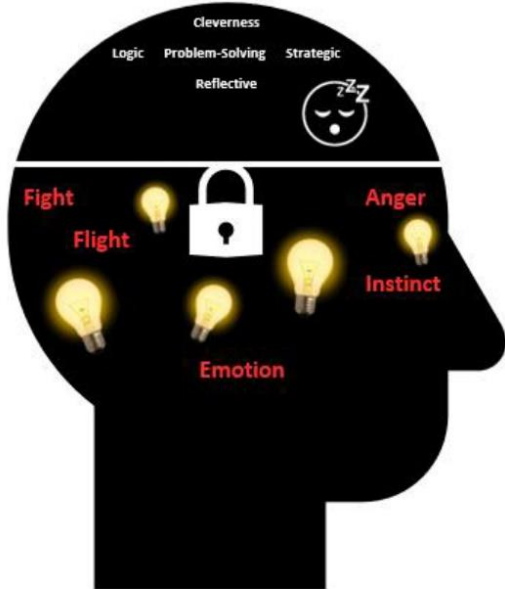


Some strategies and steps to help respond to those whose brain is protecting them a little bit too much and stopping them from thriving in life.

This little story is created by Instinct CBT and based on the work and teachings of Mona Delahooke PhD and Dr Dan Siegel.

Did you know...?

We have a lower brain and an upper brain. They both do different things for us. The lower brain protects us, and the upper brain helps us advance and do clever things.



Our problem-solving, critical reflection, thoughtfulness, logic, forethought, and cleverness all live in our upper brain. Our upper brains aren't fully developed until we are in our 20's.

Our instinct and reactive response, including fight, flight, fear, anger, and heavy emotional expressions live in our lower brain.

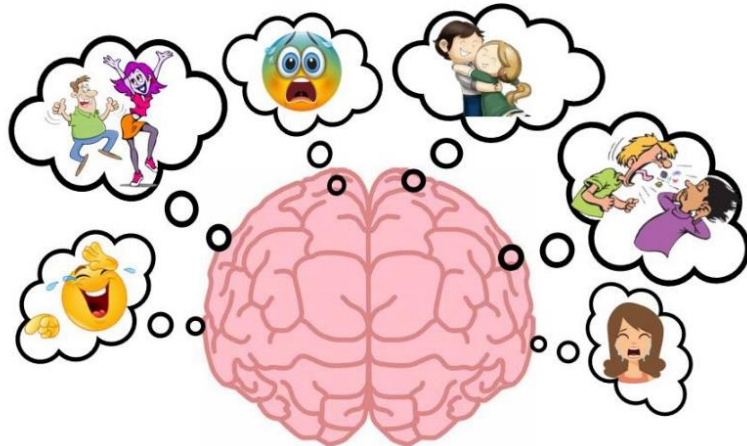
The lower brain is pretty cheeky and when it's being used, it locks us out of our upper brain!

This means, when we are in fight, flight, instinct, or reactive response mode (responding to crisis), **we cannot use cleverness, or problem solving. We act on instinct and impulse alone.**

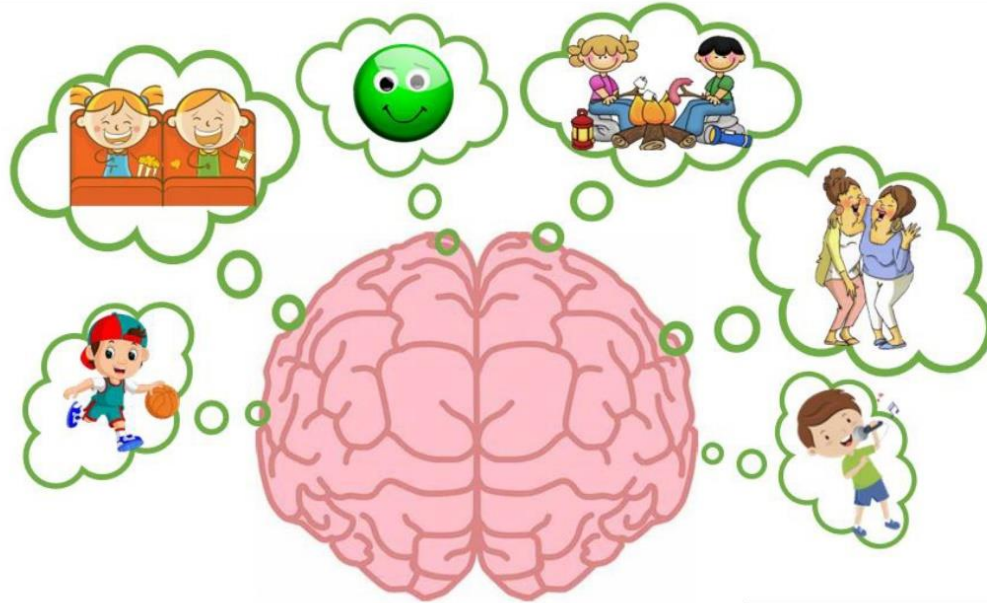
If our instinct is based on a lot of negative neural connections, then this might be very problematic ☹



We navigate the world without trauma, in the beginning.

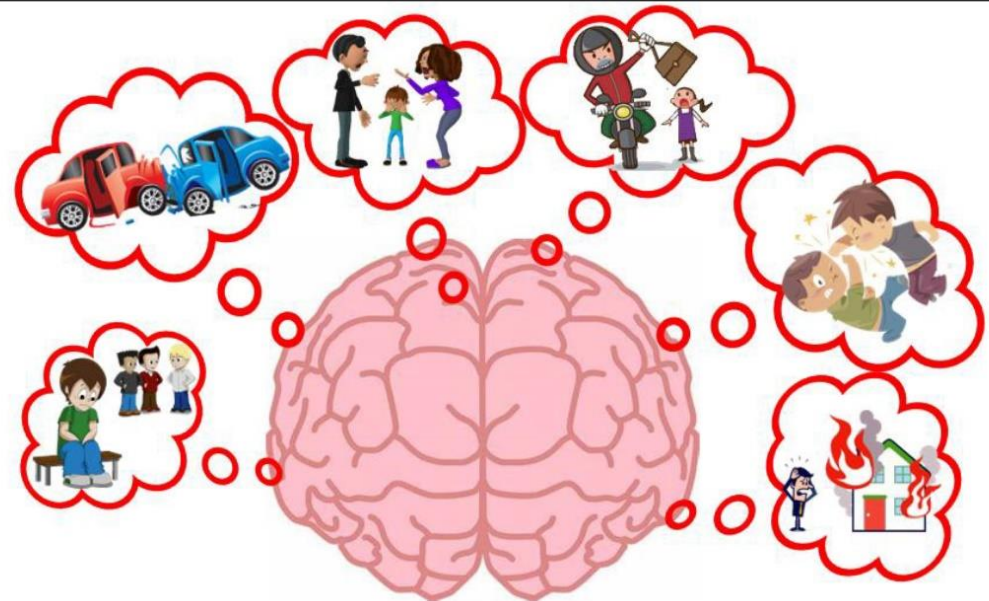


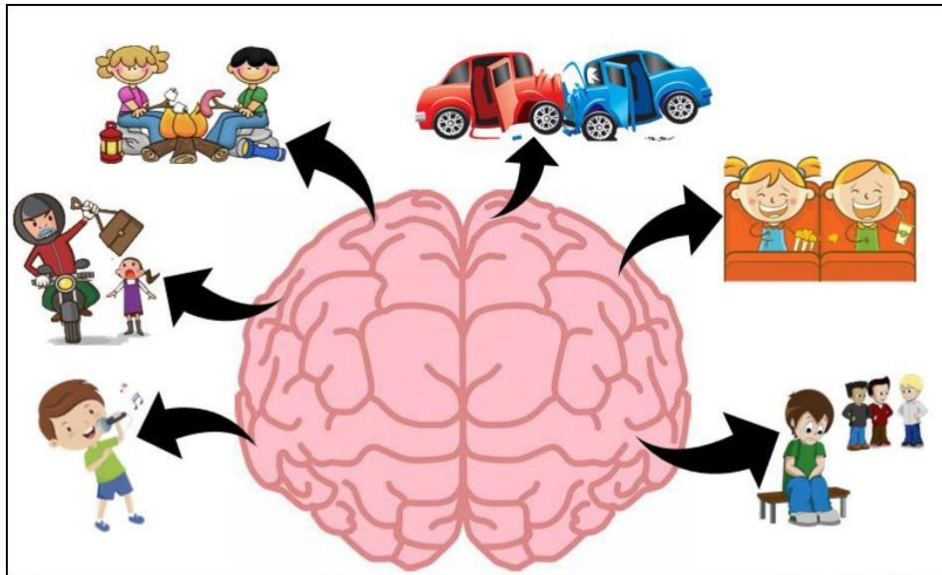
However, when things happen that hurt or scare us, neural connections (links between things that happen and us feeling happy, sad, afraid) are formed. Some neural connections are positive, and some are negative.



Positive neural connections are formed when we have good experiences and form great memories.

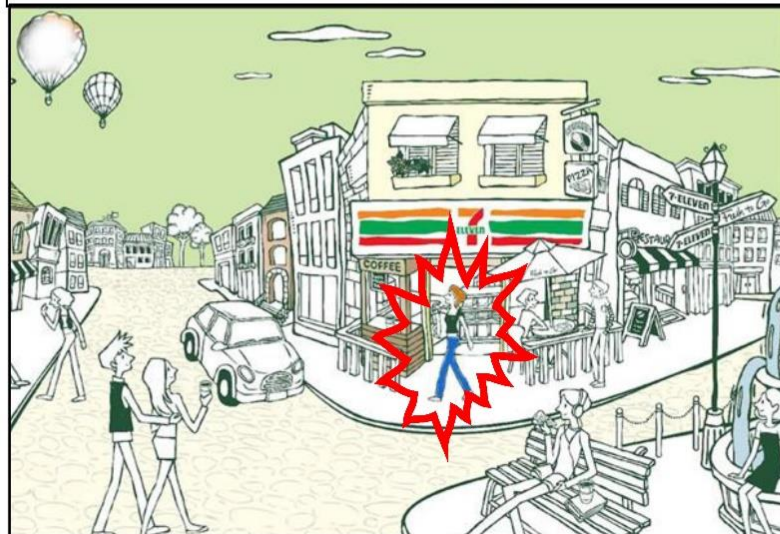
Negative neural connections are formed when we have bad experiences. Our brain connects these bad experiences to things that our brain thinks are responsible for or linked to those bad experiences. When we see or experience things after these neural connections are formed, it makes us feel a certain way.





Neural connections are essentially memories in our brain. Some memories we can share, and recall (explicit memories) and some memories are formed without us realising (implicit memories).

We often don't know about implicit memories until something triggers us. Like, when we hear a song, and it makes us feel sad and then we realise that the song was played at the funeral of a friend.

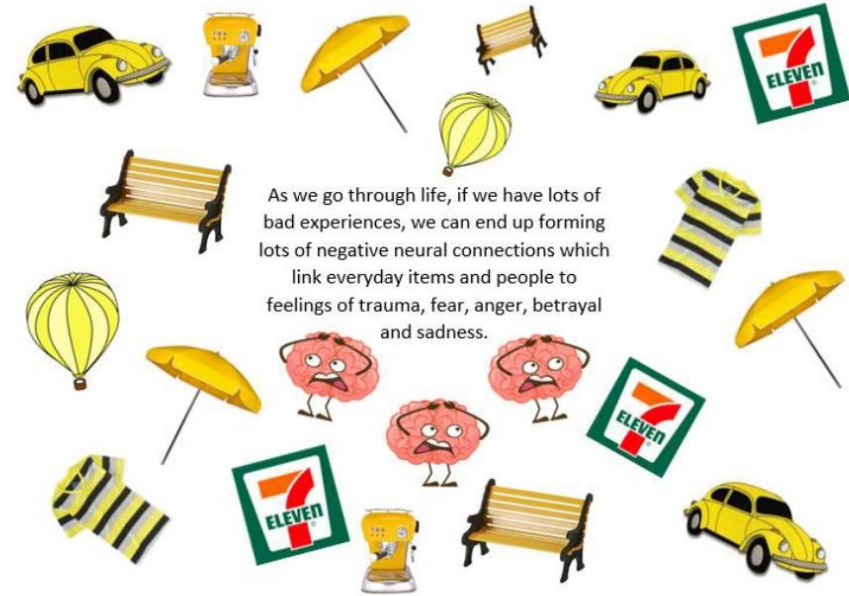
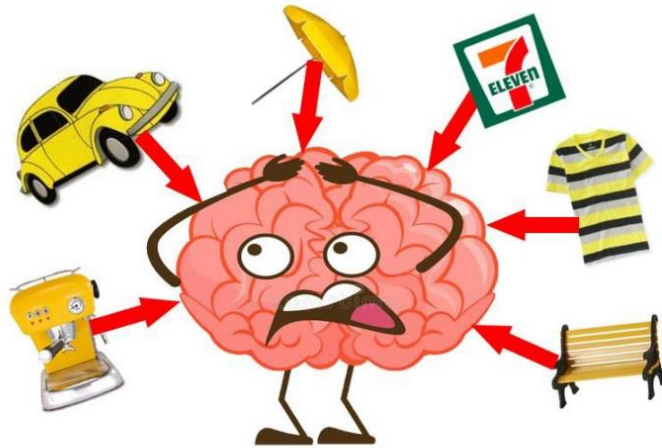


If someone physically attacks you outside a 7-Eleven, that would be a highly **traumatic** event. Your brain links feelings of fear and terror to random items, people, tones of voice, inanimate structures, sounds or even visual images.

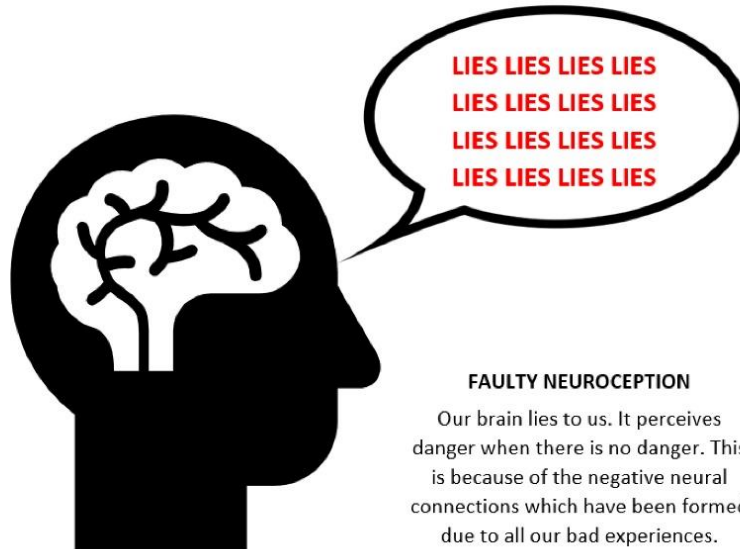


Any of these things in your environment at the time could become negative explicit or implicit memories, as a result of the way the brain makes neural connections.

Now 7-Eleven stores, certain cars, striped shirts, umbrellas or shop front coffee machines might make you feel fearful because of the neural connections formed. It is likely that neural connections form as a way for your brain to protect your body from ever having to experience an attack again. This is your brain saying "hey, this feels or looks like that bad thing that happened, run away, fight, hide or escape!!"



As we go through life, if we have lots of bad experiences, we can end up forming lots of negative neural connections which link everyday items and people to feelings of trauma, fear, anger, betrayal and sadness.



FAULTY NEUROCEPTION

Our brain lies to us. It perceives danger when there is no danger. This is because of the negative neural connections which have been formed due to all our bad experiences.

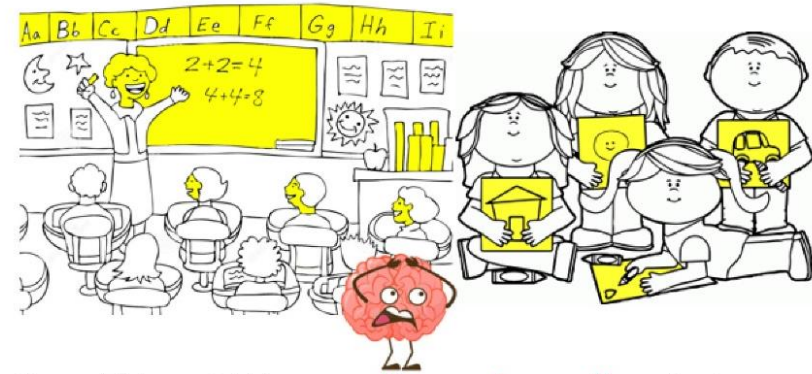


When we are fearful, or scared, we operate from our lower brain and cannot access our upper brain.

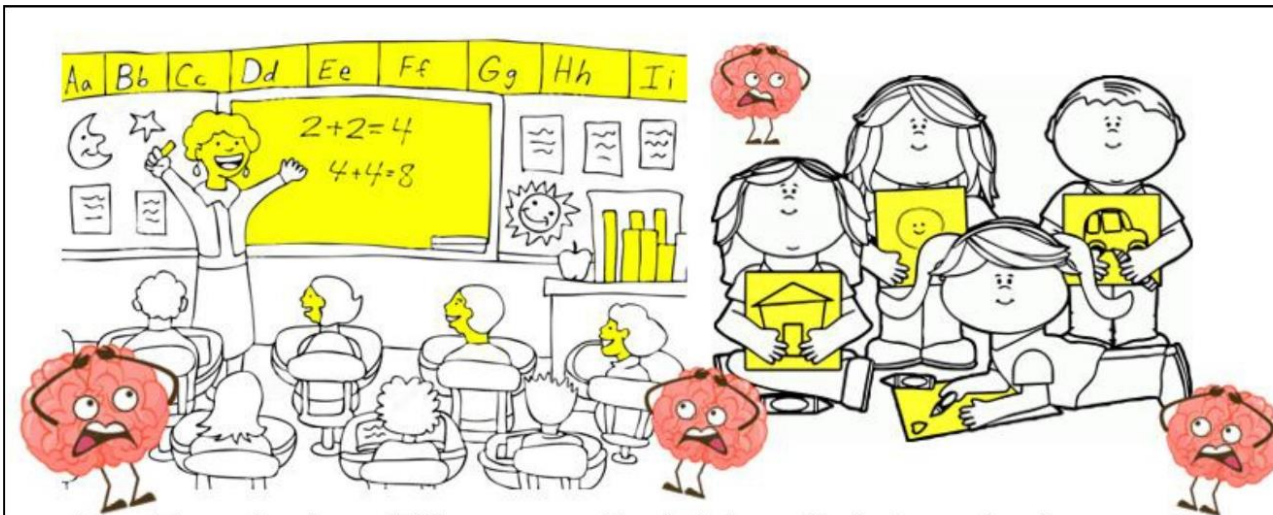
NEURAL CONNECTIONS AT SCHOOL



Just like the scenario at 7 eleven, children can form **negative neural connections** regarding many things in the school environment.



Some children might have **negative neural connections** about answering questions, being spoken to by the Teacher, children taking things from them, being asked to share their property, being told to pack up their things or being asked to come back inside after lunch.



This might make these children respond in their lower brain instantly when any of these things happen. These **negative neural connections** can be formed as a result of the numerous times their brain experienced fear, hurt, rejection or sadness and didn't have a logical reason which helped them still feel safe. This will result in the child having **FAULTY NEUROCEPTION**. Their brain will start believing there is danger, even when there's not.

REMEMBER...



Our instinct and reactive response, including **fight, flight, fear, anger, and heavy emotional expressions** live in our lower brain.

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The lower brain is pretty cheeky and when it's being used, **it locks us out of our upper brain!**

This means, when we are in **fight, flight, instinct, or reactive response mode (responding to crisis)**, we cannot use cleverness, or problem solving. We act on instinct and impulse alone.

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Faulty Neuroception

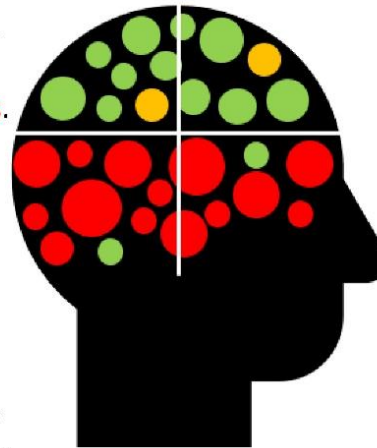
Faulty neuroception happens when our brain has formed too many negative neural connections. This makes our brain believe that heaps of things in our normal environment pose **danger** to us!

This means we go into **fight, flight, anger and instinctive response mode** and try to protect ourselves, even when we don't need to.



If we have lived through lots of **bad, scary or fearful** experiences, then our brain becomes filled with **negative neural connections**.

This will mean we will be frequently triggered to use our lower brain.



● = Positive neural connections and memories
● = Negative neural connections and memories

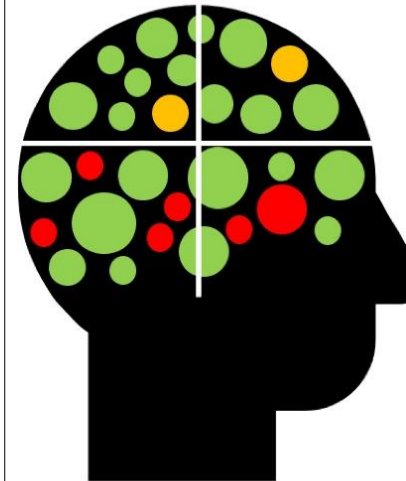
HOW DO WE RESPOND TO FAULTY NEUROCEPTION?

1. We need to make more **positive neural connections!**
2. We might need help from someone else to **co-regulate**. This means they help us avoid situations that could lead to more negative neural connections.
3. We need to talk about things which upset or bother us to avoid them becoming **negative neural connections**. We can do this by talking through difficult situations to help us understand why things happened & remind us that we are still safe. This then makes these experiences into **opportunities for learning** which sit in our **upper brain**.





Making **positive neural connections** is not achieved by just 'doing' or 'experiencing' things. We must discuss our experiences to make them memories, or they disappear into our brains, or get overpowered by negative neural connections. Actions or discussions transform fleeting thoughts into helpful memories which take up space in our brain.



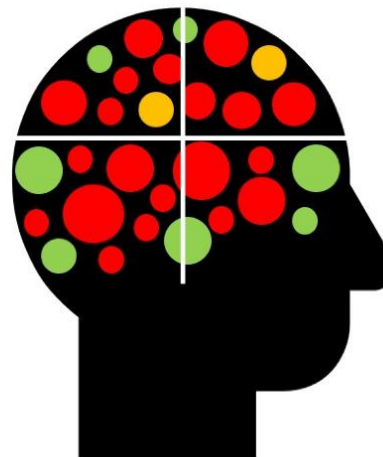
We can never eliminate all of the **negative neural connections** (red balls) however, we can create a majority of **positive neural connections** (green balls).

If we have a lot of **positive neural connections**, our brains won't kickstart our **fight, flight, instinct and anger response** (lower brain) so readily.

FAULTY NEUROCEPTION & CHILDREN

Some children's brains are filled with **negative neural connections**. This could be from overwhelming sensory experiences, feelings of being attacked, bullied, punished, disliked, or feelings of failure.

Those children will go into **fight, flight, anger mode** (lower brain) instantly. Children operating from the **lower brain** cannot **problem-solve, nor use logic or reasoning**.



If a child can't access their **upper brain**, they cannot learn. We don't learn when we are in our **lower brain**.

How do we help a child learn if the child is constantly **surrounded** by all of these triggers, in their classroom and school?

Follow the next three steps...

STEP 1: CO-REGULATION

**That's when
someone helps me to
emotionally regulate myself
and
helps me to see triggers
before they make me access
my
lower brain.**

"Hey Jimmy, that school assembly is super noisy and busy. I think you won't like that and it might make you feel overwhelmed. Let's stay here until the other children come back."

"I know you want to be the only one who plays with the new Godzilla toy, but how can we make a plan so that all the other children get turns as well? Help me to work this out."

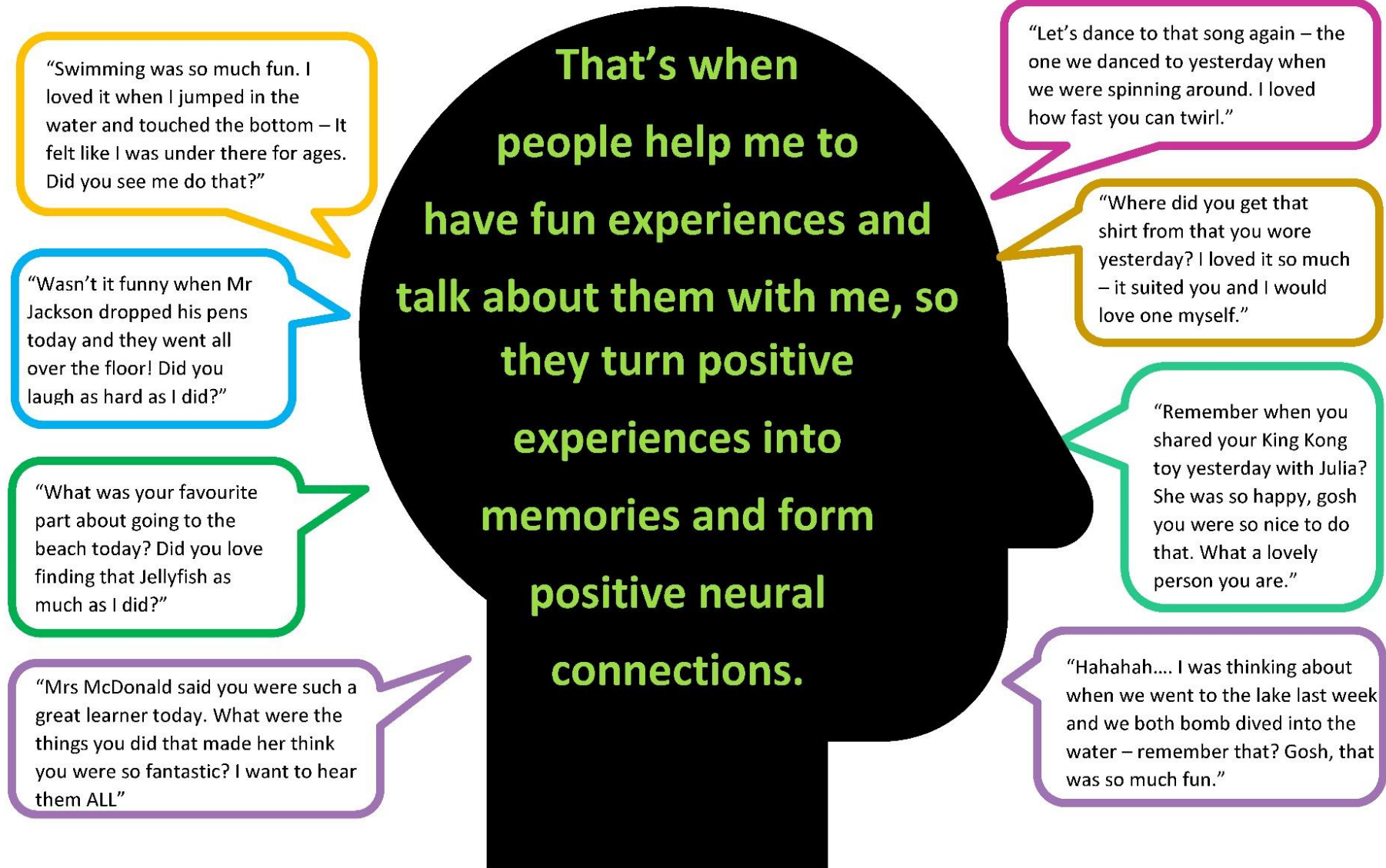
"I can see this lesson is full of things you're being told to do and you're not able to do all these things. Let's go outside for a walk for a while instead."

"You're yelling really loud right now Jenny, that's a super loud voice!! Can you help me do a fun errand and carry this to the school office? I need super strong arms like you've got!"

"I can see you need to stim / script / some quiet / some movement right now. Let's do that for a bit and help you feel more comfortable."

"Wow – this is a hard situation. You're doing really well, even though I can see you don't like it. Let's all have a break from this and have a play outside for a while. We can sort things out later on."

STEP 2: CREATING POSITIVE NEURAL CONNECTIONS & MEMORIES



STEP 3: UNPACKING AND UNDERSTANDING

"I saw the Teacher get mad that you pushed James before. I know you don't like it when Teachers get mad at you, but they had to help James too or he will be really sad. You were safe remember and the Teacher really likes you. She just had to also protect James".

"I know you probably feel angry, overwhelmed and mad now. I can see it on your face. Sorry you feel like this. This happened because the shopping centre was really noisy today and had lots of people. Your brain doesn't like that and it made you feel really awful and yuck. This is why you feel so angry now. All that noise and lights and people makes your brain feel soooooo yuck. But, we've left now. I noticed you didn't like it and I made sure we left right away. I always try to help you when you need me. You're safe and there's none of those lights and noises now".

**That's when
people help me to
understand negative
situations and turn them into
neutral situations that are
understood and stored in the
upper brain. This is done by
discussing these situations
with me and
helping me to
understand
that I'm safe.**

"I saw you grabbed your Godzilla toy off Matthew, then called him "stupid head" and the Teacher wouldn't let you play with the other children. I bet you're mad right now. [child responds with their anger]

But, if the Teacher let you play while you were that angry, then other children might not want to play with you. Not letting you join in was just the Teacher giving you space to try to breathe for a minute.

The Teacher likes you and other children really like you too, sometimes it's helpful for you to have space away from them when you're angry at them.

You were safe and you weren't by yourself though. Remember how the Teacher Aid was right there with you?"