

Self-as-Context -

„I will never understand what that really means... Or maybe I will?“

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INTENDED OUTCOMES

You will be able to

- understand/experience different aspects of the process of self-as-context and how to use them in therapy
- train others (clients, workshop attendees) successfully how to take a more flexible perspective on themselves
- understand how SAC represents the therapeutic process itself and use this knowledge in therapy

WHAT WE WILL DO TOGETHER

Some exercises

SAC + Pivot in the Hexaflex-Model

Flexible self

3 Selfing dimensions

Development of self

Improving deficits

GOOD TO READ

- Hayes, S.C. (2019). A liberated mind: how to pivot towards what matters. Penguin Random House, New York
- McHugh, L., Stewart, I. & Almada P. (2019). A Contextual Behavioral Guide to the Self. Theory & Practice. Context Press: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

INVITATION

- Write down an area in your life in which you don't feel like you say where it goes.

You repeat the same behavioral patterns.

You feel dominated by somebody or something.

There are factors you cannot influence.

You are suffering permanently.

You tried a lot already and the situation is still not really moving to a more valuable direction.

- Now put your note away. We will use it later.

EXERCISE: PERSPECTIVE TAKING

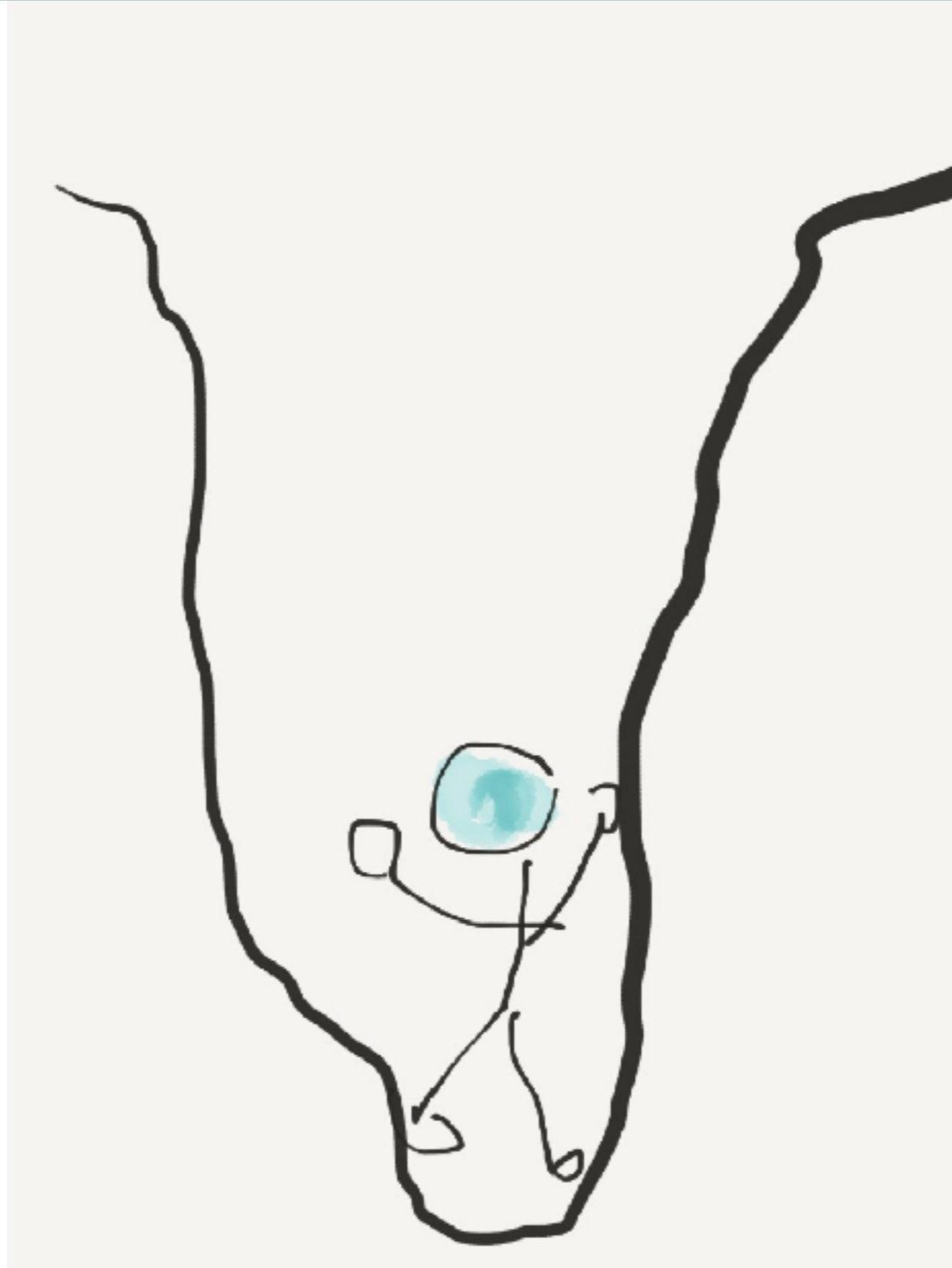
EXERCISE: PERSPECTIVE TAKING

- Notice yourself and realize that you are sitting here in this room - hearing my voice. Be aware of your body, feel it touching the chair, notice your feet on the ground or wherever they are
- Notice that you, this person you call „I“, is present in your body, right here, right now. Be aware that you moved your body here, because you want to be here. Notice that you are an autonomous human being. You could also decide to stand up and go, right here, right now.
- Something must be valuable to you, given that you are here. Notice what that is.
- Notice again that your „I“ is present in your body and that you are the only person present within your body. Nobody else could live in your body, just you. You are living in this body since you are born and until you will die.
- Notice that it is your one and only body for this life - no second version available. It is a precious thing - without your body you could not be present right here, right now.
- Please be aware that you can only notice the world from I - here - now - and that it is like that for everybody.
- Notice that you can also look at yourself from I - here - now.
- Please conclude the exercise for yourself and come back to the round.

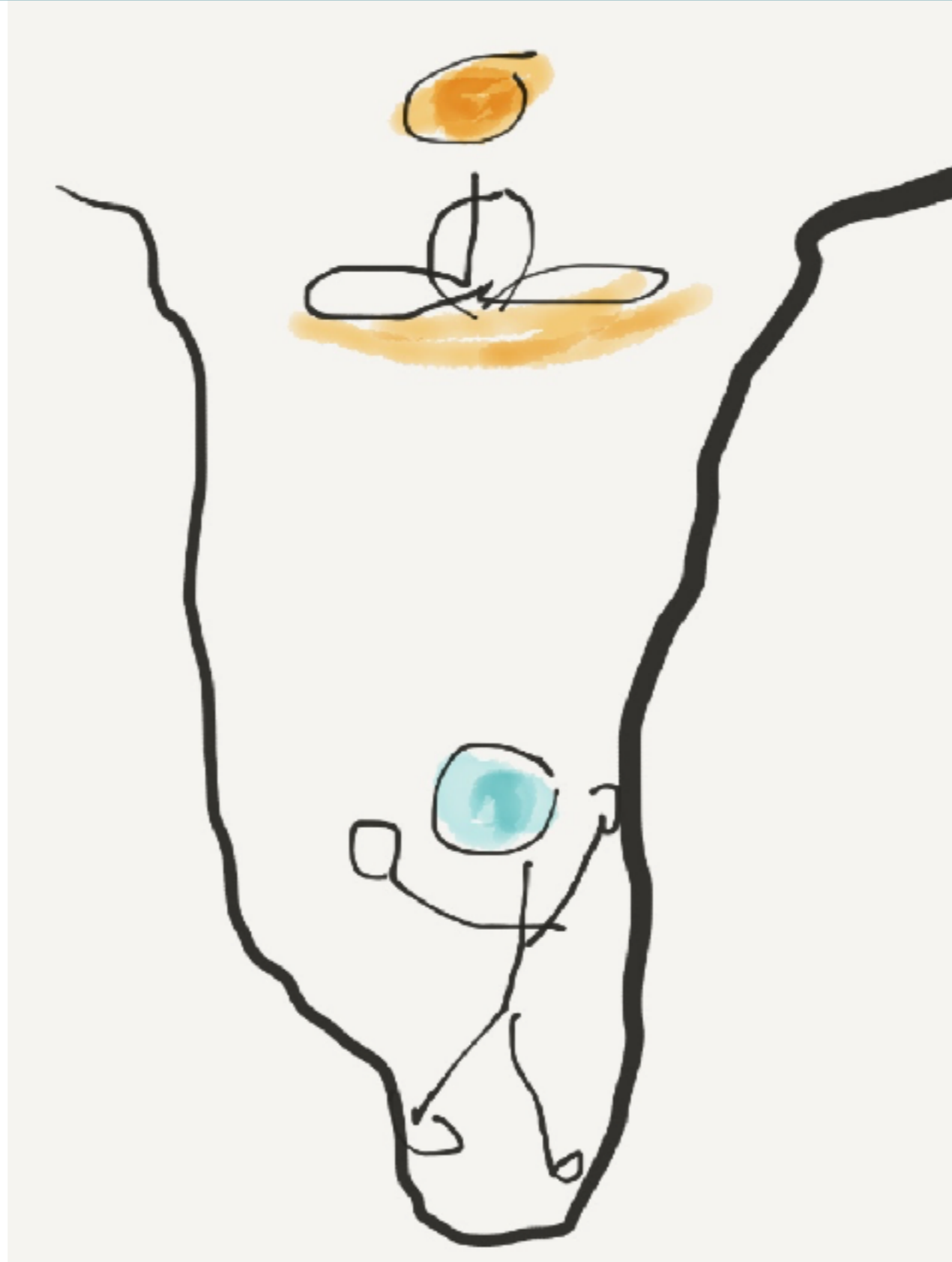
SELF AS CONTEXT



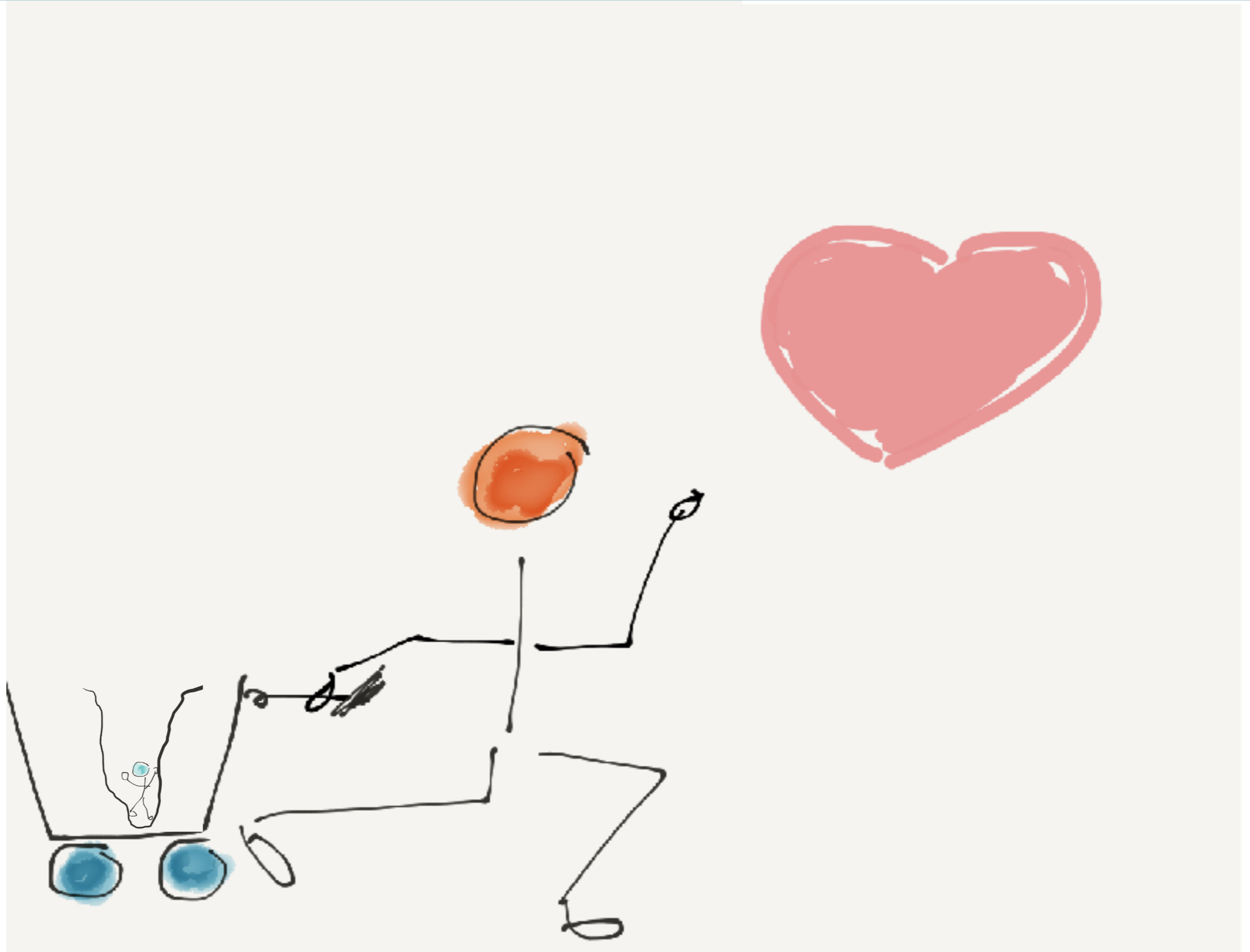
SELF IS STUCK



SELF GETS CONSCIOUS ABOUT BEING STUCK



SELF IS LIBERATED TO BE THE SELF SHE/HE WANTS TO BE



SAC IS THE SPACE YOU CAN GIVE TO
YOURSELF (AND OTHERS)

FLEXIBLE SELF - HOW DOES THAT SHOW UP?



FLEXIBLE OR INFLEXIBLE SELF?

„I am like that.
I always was
like that. I
cannot do
much about it.“

„This is how I
know myself
and how others
know me.
Could I be
differently?“

FLEXIBLE OR INFLEXIBLE SELF?

„This was not me, when I hit my wife, I was really not myself!“

„I was so furious in this situation, I did not have control over myself.“

FLEXIBLE OR INFLEXIBLE SELF?

„Something
inside me is
broken.“

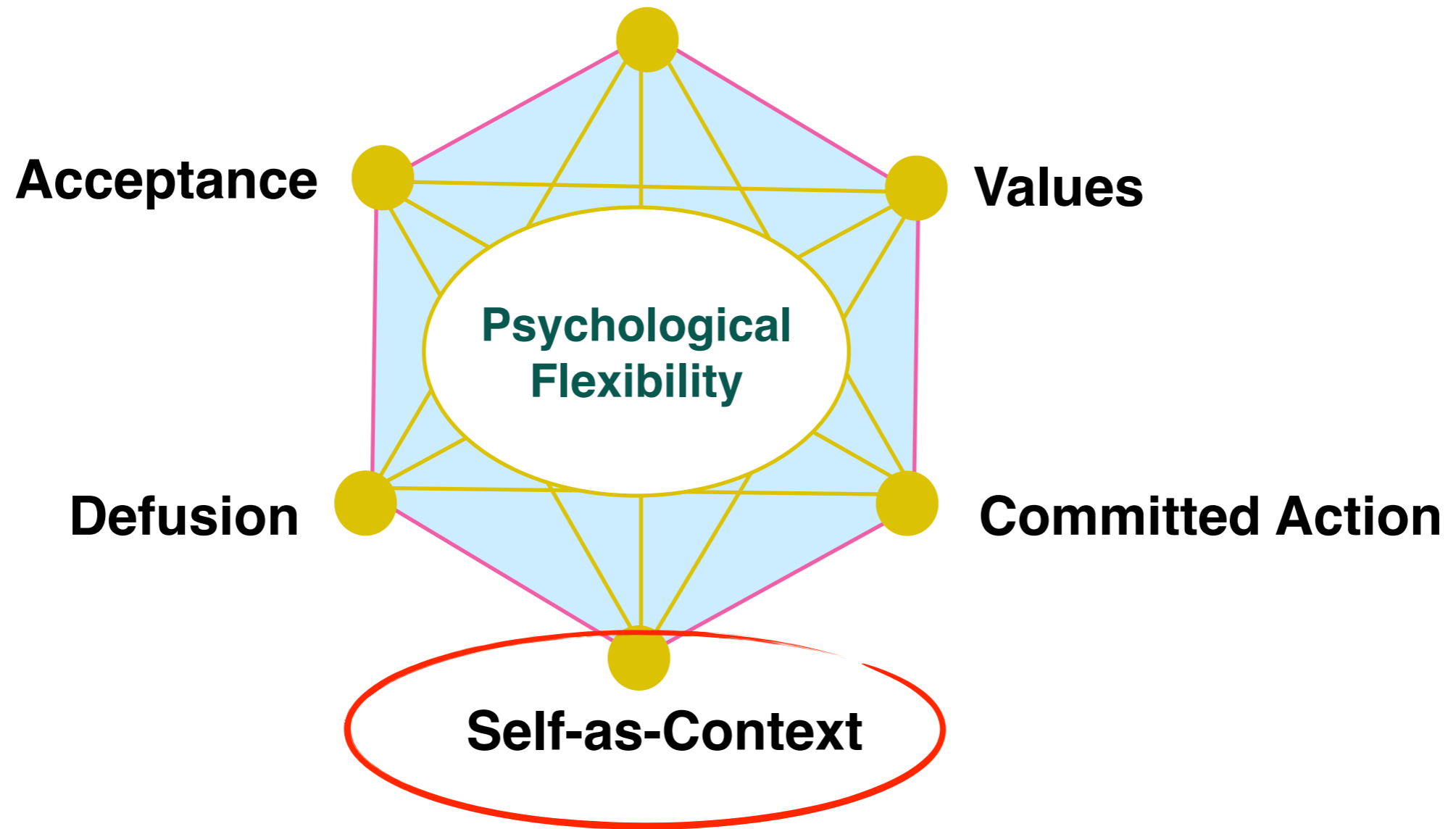
„This was my
fault.“

CAN YOU
NOTICE
YOURSELF -
SITTING HERE,
RIGHT NOW?

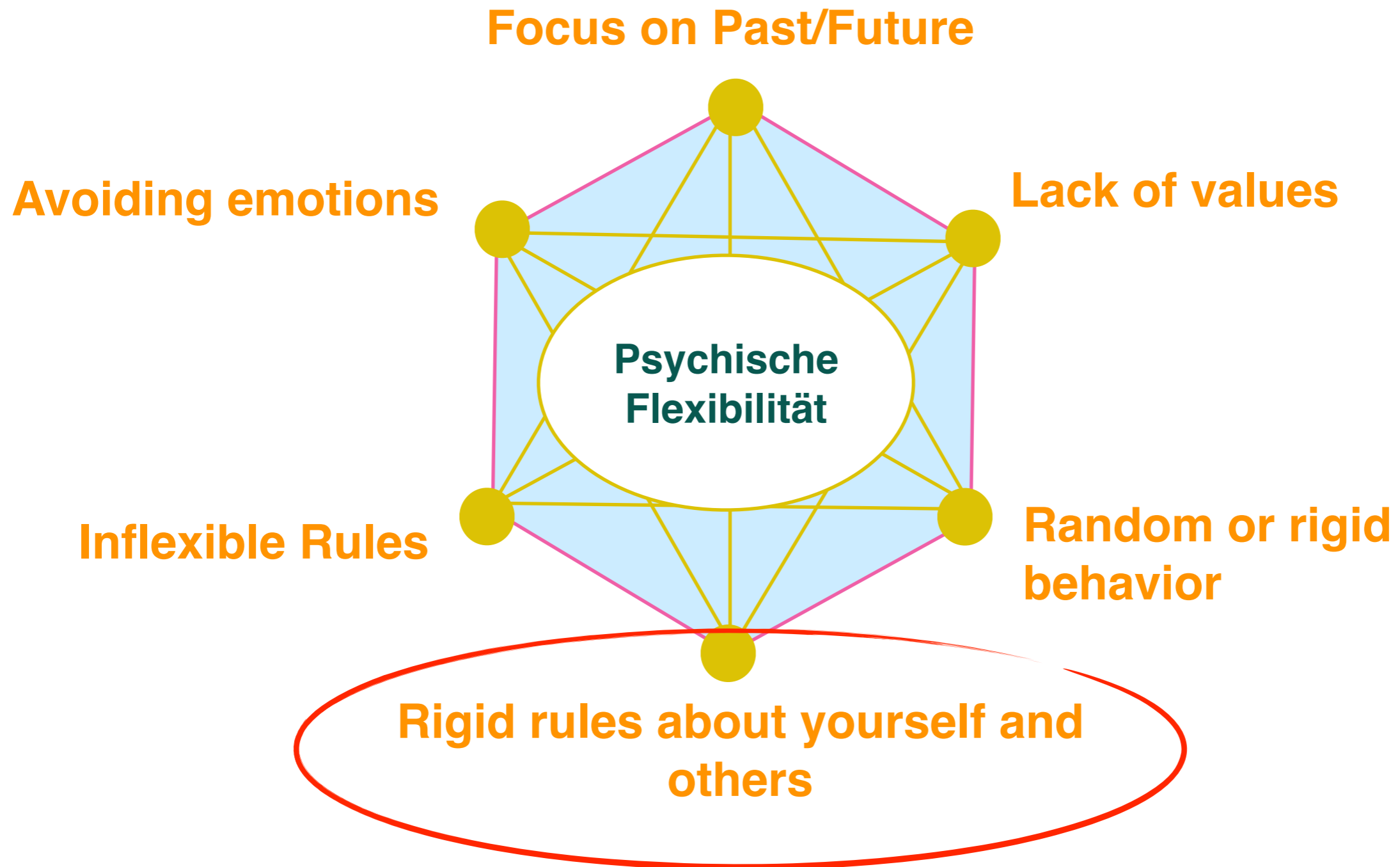


Flexible Hexagon

Contact with present moment



Inflexible Hexagon



STEVE HAYES: „THE SELF-PIVOT“

- Yearning for belonging and connection - being special
=> focus on my self-story and comparison with others
=> pretending (defending, lying and hiding) - being alone



- Greater perspective taking sense of self - being whole
=> focus on awareness and connection with myself and others

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=> focus on awareness and connection with myself and others

FLEXIBLE SELF

- A person in good contact with her own perceptions
=> tracking: what is happening? Is that o.k. for me - or do I want to change anything?
- aligns actions with the actual contingencies
- maintains a distance to her own content => makes free choices about behavior in terms of her own values
- stable but not rigid
- kind with herself

There is space for self-expression, for a fulfilling life, in good contact with yourself and with others.

AND:

CAN YOU
NOTICE YOUR „I“
- SITTING RIGHT
HERE, RIGHT
NOW?



THREE SELFING DIMENSIONS OF AN ADULT PERSON

- **Self as process** - the ever-changing experience of ourselves (continuous flow of experiencing and responding to our own experiences)
- **Self as content** - our concept of ourselves (self as content of verbal references)
- **Self as context** - the observer self (self as context of verbal references)



HOW DO WE DEVELOP A SELF?

IF IT GOES WELL IT COULD LOOK LIKE THIS



- „I am your mom and you are my sweet little girl.“
- „Are you happy? Do you like to play this game?“
- „Oh, I think you are sad. Come to Mummy.“
- „What do you like better, chocolate or vanilla ice cream?“

AND THE KID LEARNS



- „Ah, this is sad. This is happy. I like chocolate better.“
- „So I am here and mom is there. Mom looks at me and I matter to her.“
- „It matters to me how she sees me. So I better behave well.“
- We start to evaluate ourselves and to act according to the standards we picked up.

(vgl. Hayes, Liberated Mind)

WE CANNOT DEVELOP OUR SELF-KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT ANOTHER PERSON

„....In Skinner’s words, “self-knowledge is of social origin” because “it is only when a person’s private world becomes important to others that it becomes important to him” (Skinner, 1974, p. 35). Questions such as “How are you?” and “What are you doing?” help young children establish the ability to discriminate different forms of their own behavior.“

(McHugh, S. 63)

WITHOUT
„YOU“





NO „I“



WITHOUT „HERE“

NO „THERE“



WITHOUT „NOW“

NO „THEN“



EXERCISE - TACTING/EXPERIENCING AND NAMING IN CONTEXT

Turn to your partner. Choose A and B

A begins: "I feel "X"

B responds, "It makes me feel like I'm 'Y'."

A: "It makes me feel 'Z'."

B: ...

2 minutes alternately and notice the effect.

WHEN IT DOES NOT GO SO WELL

- Lack of conversations about feelings
- Dictatorial reference persons, lack of interest, lack of openness and acceptance
- Deliberate distortion by caregivers, abuse, invalidation

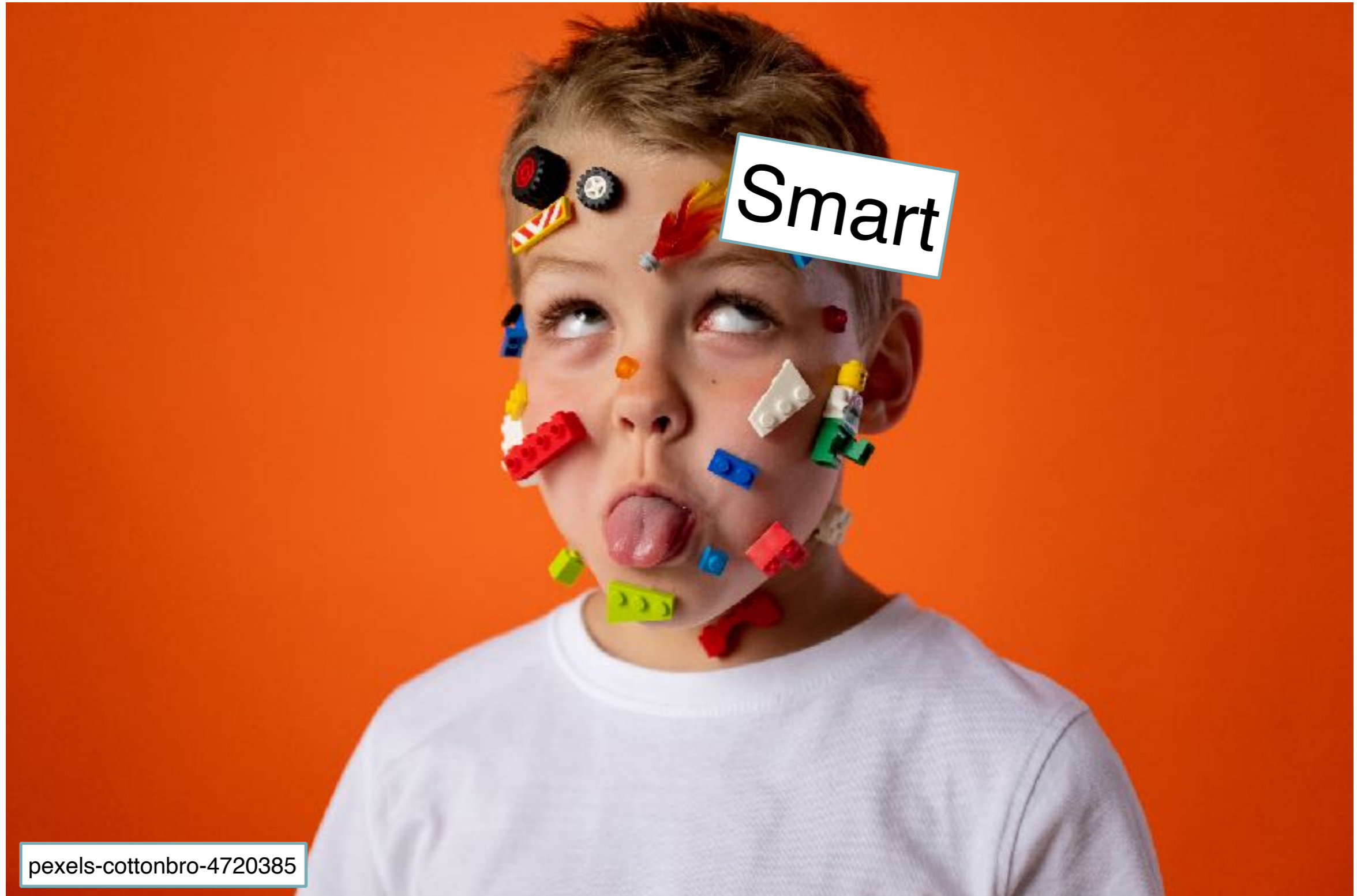


LOTS OF CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- **difficulty to observe, describe and allow one's thoughts, emotions, and sensations** (depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and borderline personality disorder)
- **inability to persist in or change focus** (attention disorders, obsessive self-focus leading to phobic anxiety)
- **dominance of a conceptualized past** (rumination, depression) **and future** (worry, anxiety)

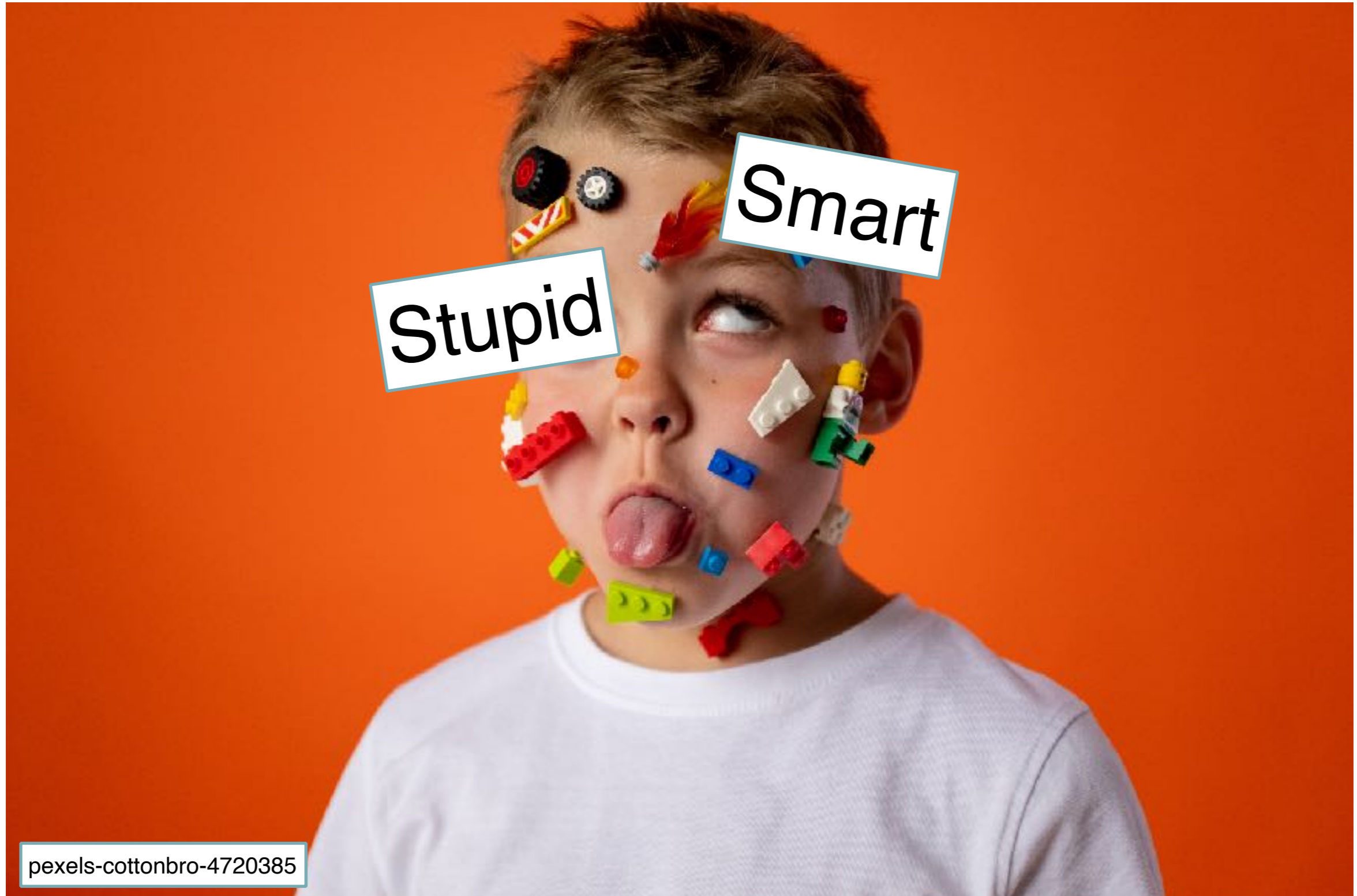
We lose our inner compass or we never develop it. We don't listen to ourselves but focus on others: what do they expect, how do they see me, how can I do it right for them.... (Pliance)

IF IT GOES WELL OR NOT SO WELL: WE FILL OUR SELF WITH CONTENT

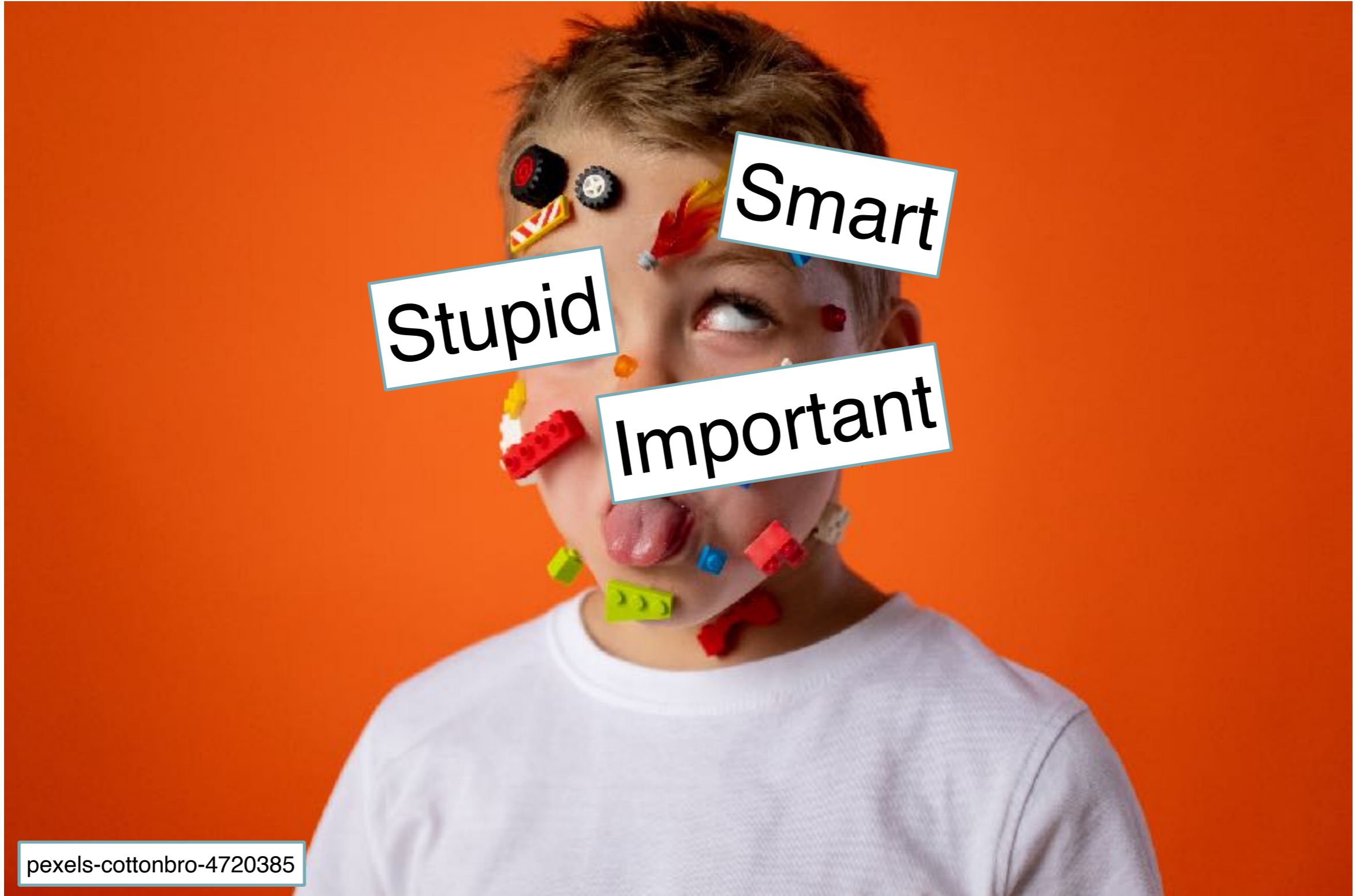


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JUST DIFFERENT FLAVORS



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



MORE CONTENT



WE START TO THINK:



This is who I am

OUR BRAIN LOVES COHERENCE AND PREDICTS:



This is who I am

This is who I will be

LET'S PLAY WITH THAT

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I. WHAT IS A STORY YOU LIKE TO TELL
ABOUT YOURSELF?

FIND A PERSON NEXT TO YOU AND TELL
HER THIS STORY ABOUT YOURSELF, THEN
SWITCH

EVERYONE HAS ONE MINUTE

**2. WHAT IS A STORY YOU ARE A LITTLE
UNCOMFORTABLE TELLING ABOUT
YOURSELF?**

**FIND YOUR PARTNER AND TELL HER THIS
STORY ABOUT YOURSELF, THEN SWITCH**

EVERYONE HAS ONE MINUTE

3. WHAT IS A STORY ABOUT YOU THAT IS
FICTITIOUS AND COMPLETELY ABSURD?

FIND YOUR PARTNER AND TELL HER THIS
STORY ABOUT YOURSELF, THEN SWITCH

EVERYONE HAS ONE MINUTE

4. WHAT IS A STORY ABOUT YOURSELF THAT
IS MADE UP BUT YOU THINK IT WOULD BE
REALLY COOL IF IT CAME TRUE.

FIND YOUR PARTNER AND TELL HER THIS STORY
ABOUT YOURSELF, THEN SWITCH

EVERYONE HAS ONE MINUTE

DEBRIEF:

WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?
DO YOU HAVE MORE OR LESS
DISTANCE TO YOURSELF?
DO YOU TAKE YOURSELF MORE OR
LESS SERIOUSLY?
HOW ARE YOU NOW?

AGAIN:

PLEASE NOTICE
YOURSELF,
SITTING RIGHT
HERE, RIGHT
NOW

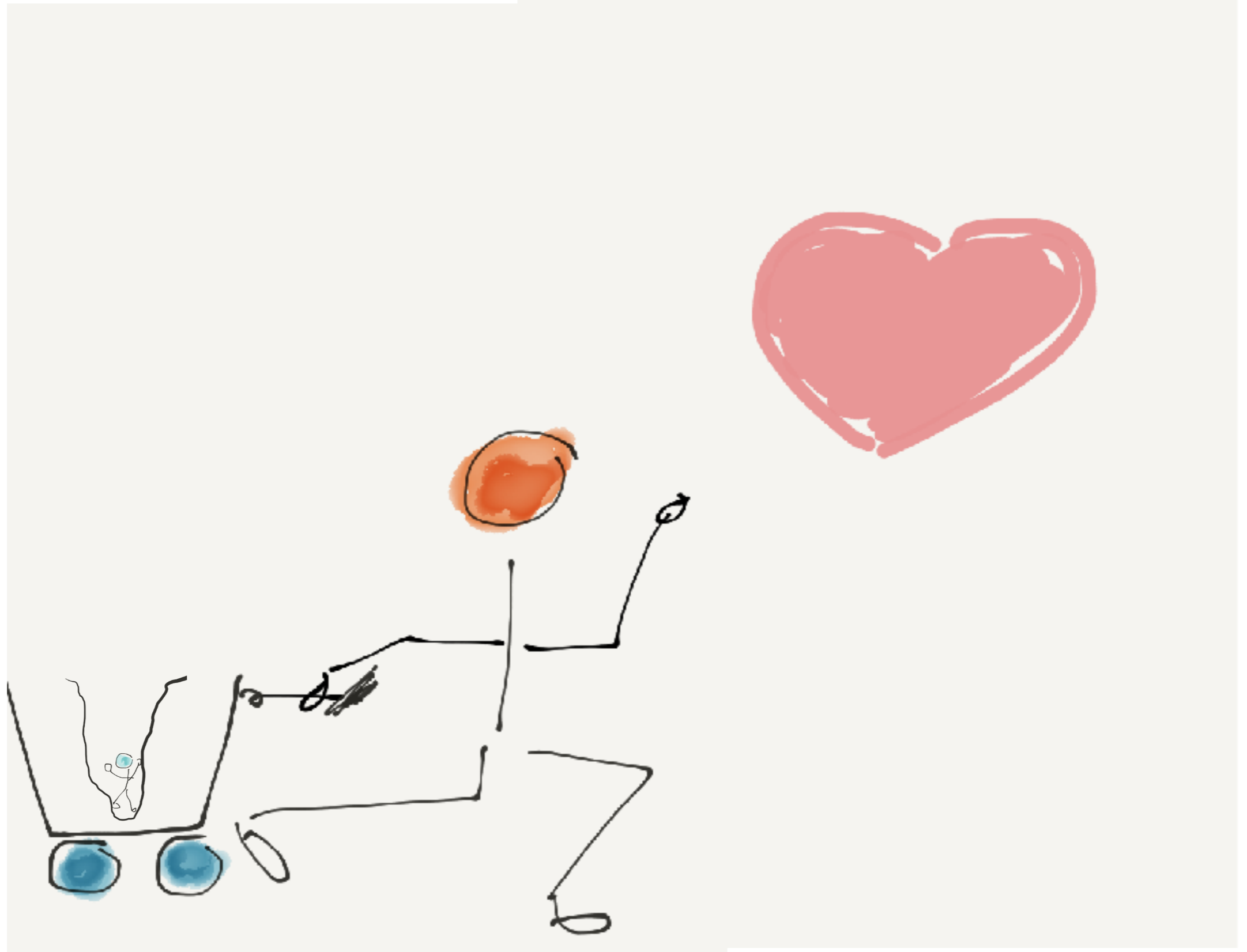


HOW CAN WE FOSTER A MORE FLEXIBLE SELF IN SESSIONS?



- Through constant practice of self-as-process and self-as-context
=> undermining rigid rule-following + insensitivity to context
- Increasing functional coherence - adding new functions for behavior
- Goal: maximum behavioral flexibility in relation to the pursuit of values

SELF IS LIBERATED TO BE THE SELF SHE/HE WANTS TO BE



PRACTICE TACTING IN SESSION

- Start with less difficult cues (depending on the clients context e.g. social anxiety, obesity), f.ex. 5-senses-experiences
- Discriminate body sensations, warmer/cooler, more or less tense, different than before...
- Go to emotions and thoughts - noticing, naming
- Switch between all dimensions (senses, body experiences, thoughts, emotions) and speak it out loud

Let client practice in many different contexts

LETS PRACTICE

POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS TO PRACTICE TACTING AND DEICTIC RELATIONS

- „How are you now?“ „How have you been in this situation?“ „Is there a difference now?“
- „Who is noticing this feeling now?“ „Who had this thought at that time then?“
- „Your thoughts, feelings and actions are part of you, but you are more than that - anything that shows up for you?“
- „Can you see yourself like a container for all your thoughts, feelings and emotions.“
- „When you allow yourself to make a new choice right now - independent from what your thoughts and feelings tell you - what would be a valuable choice for you?“

PLEASE GET YOUR NOTE ABOUT THE AREA IN YOUR LIFE - ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE YOUR PARTNER AN ASPECT OF IT?

try out the questions

- can you broaden the perspective?
- can you add new relations?
- can you build more functional coherence?

ANYTHING NEW YOU SEE....

- ... about who says where it goes
- ... something new you could try or practice
- ... whom you could ask for help
- ... what is valuable for you in this area, as you are suffering so much



OK, THIS IS A
FACET OF ME
- AND WHAT
ELSE AM I?

WHAT AM I
UP TO?

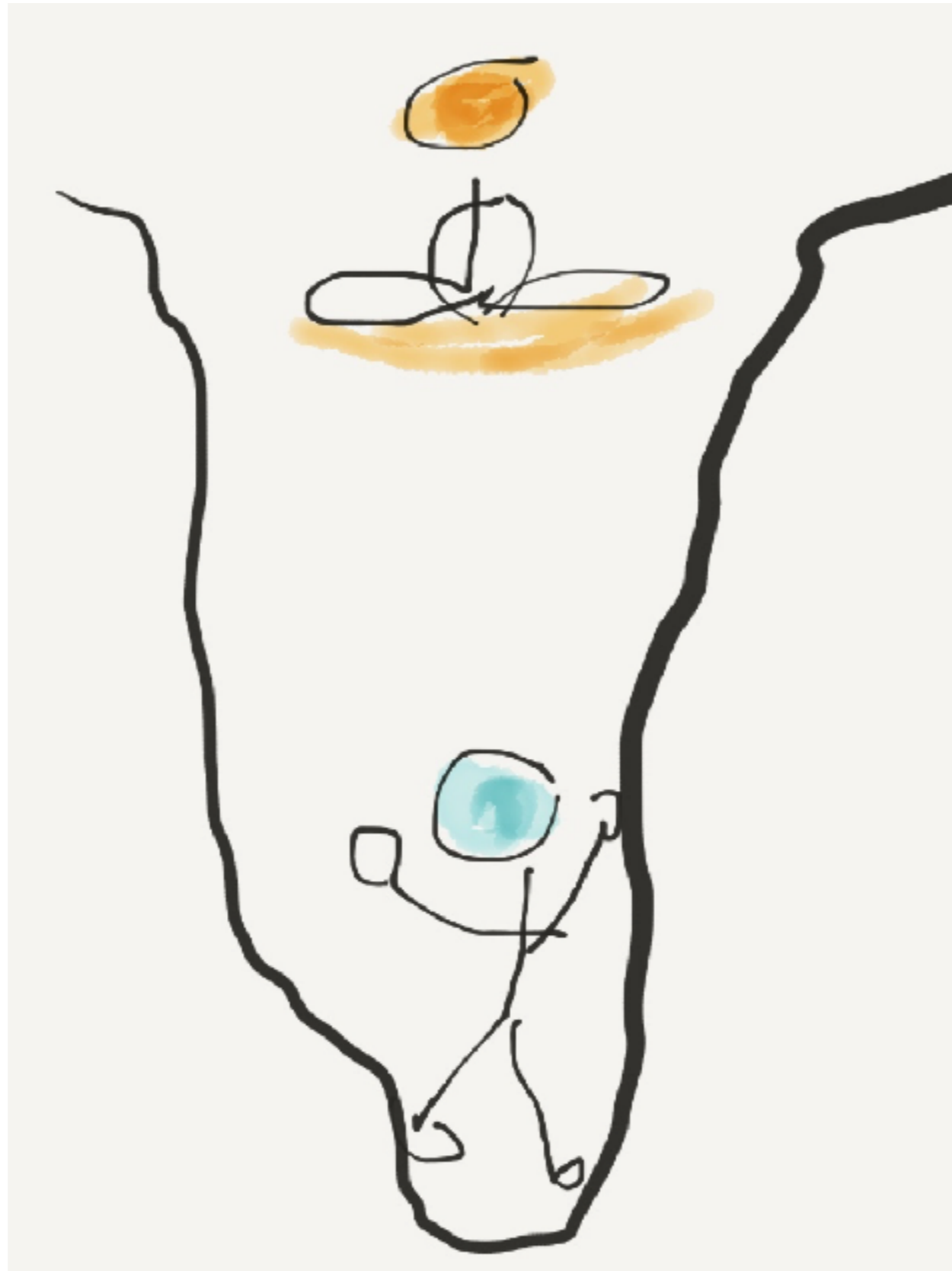
BROADEN
THE
CONTEXT!

WHO AM I?

- A coherent story (self as content) that I tell about myself, based on all my past experiences and resulting predictions for the future.
- When I bring awareness to it, I can perceive the ongoing process of experiencing (self as process) and connect to the observer level (self as context).
- The flexibility with which I can do this determines the flexibility of my self-expression and my ability to act



THIS IS WHAT WE OFFER TO OUR CLIENTS



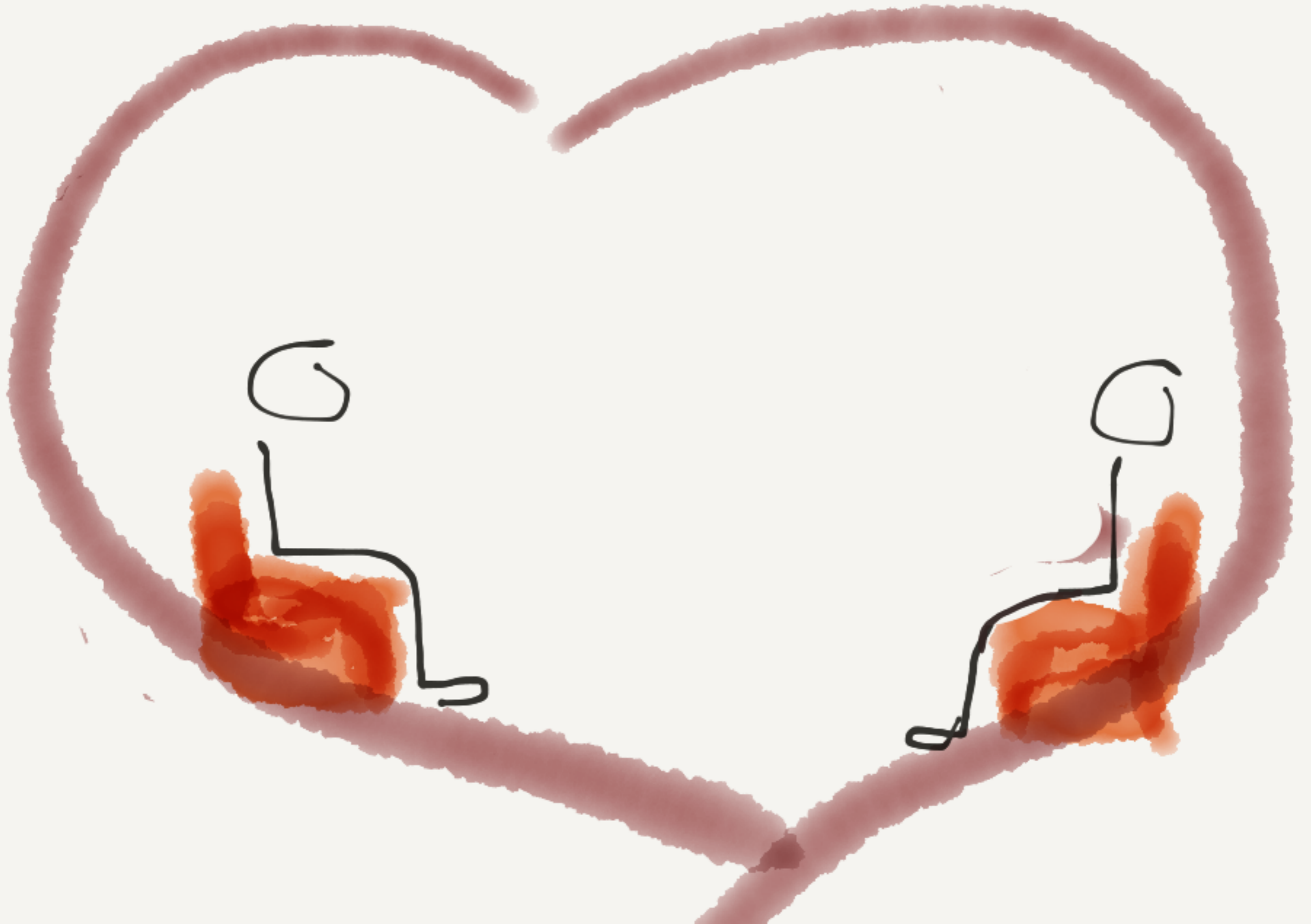
A SAFE SPACE - SAC

- where clients feel seen and accepted
- where they can share and explore
- grow and develop
- learn to develop their own SAC
- where we can learn with each other

**WE ARE THEIR SAC UNTIL THEY LEARN IT
THROUGH US**

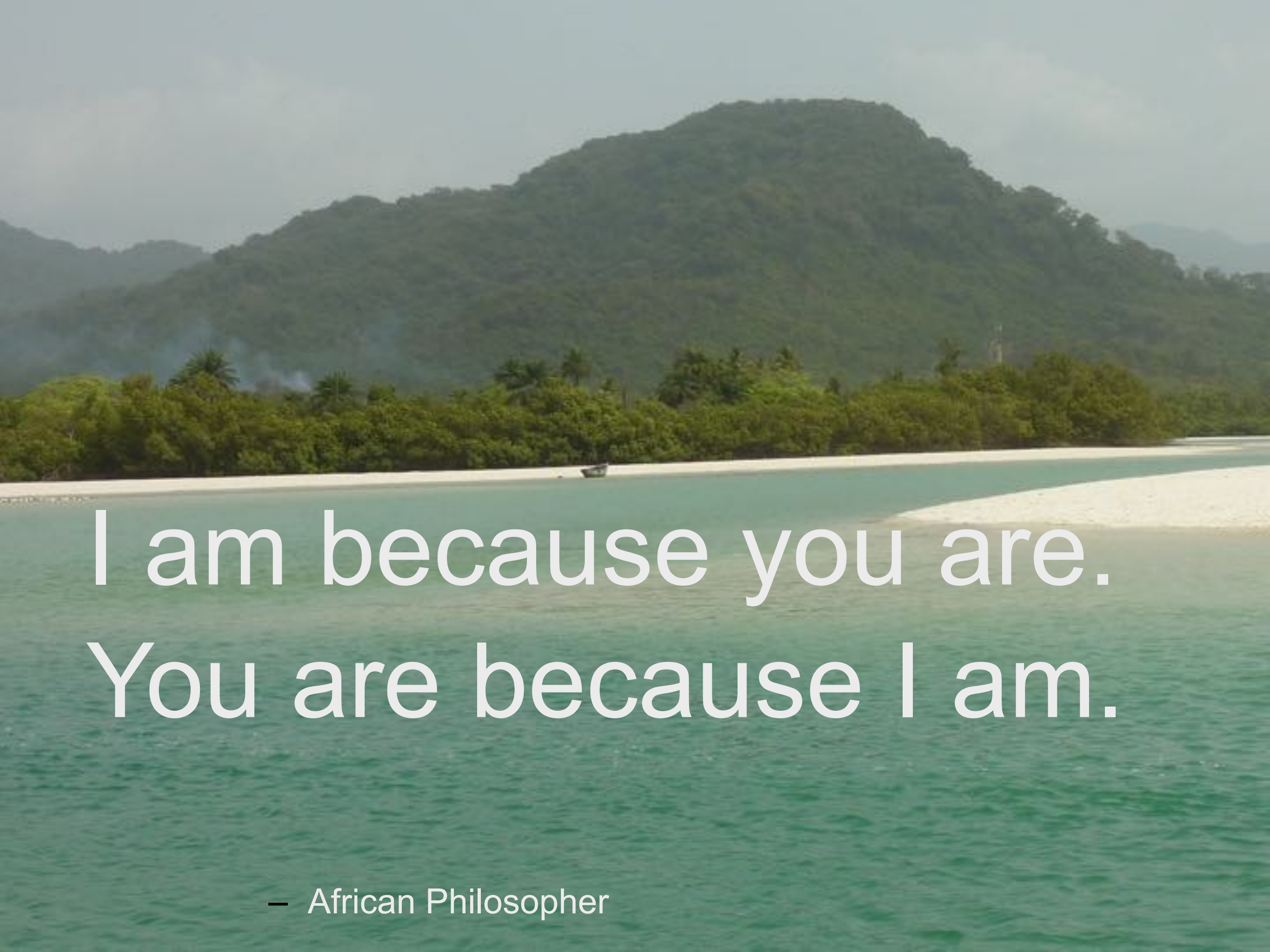
**MAY BE WE COULD SAY:
SELF-AS-CONTEXT IS ACCEPTANCE
ON A BIGGER SCALE**





WE NEED TWO WINGS TO FLY:
TO BE LOVED AND TO BE SEEN



A tropical beach scene with turquoise water, white sand, and a forested mountain in the background. The text is overlaid on the water.

I am because you are.
You are because I am.

– African Philosopher