

# Introducing Compassion Focused Therapy

Paul Gilbert PhD, FBPsS, OBE

Mental Health Research Unit, Kingsway  
Hospital Derby  
p.gilbert@derby.ac.uk

[www.compassionatemind.co.uk](http://www.compassionatemind.co.uk)  
[www.compassionatewellbeing.com](http://www.compassionatewellbeing.com)

## Responsibility

- During the workshop we will be engaging in various exercises such as compassionate imagery or working on self-criticism
- All exercises are entirely voluntary
- You are responsible for your own well-being
- All shared material is confidential
- You are clinically responsible for how you use CFT



## Compassion Focused Therapy

- Socratic dialogues, guided discovery, identify safety behaviours, focus on avoidance and exposure, inference chains, re-appraisal, behavioural experiments, mindfulness, body/emotion awareness and breath training, imagery practices, supporting maturation – plus plus.

### Unique?

- Psycho-education on evolved ‘tricky’ brain
- Model of affect regulation with special focus on affiliation and the parasympathetic system
- Build compassion-focused motives, competencies and identities as inner organising systems
- Working with self-criticism and self-conscious emotions (e.g., shame and guilt)
- Work with fears, blocks and resistances to compassion and positive emotion

## What is helpful?

CBT distinguishes between *unhelpful* thoughts and behaviours - that increase or accentuate negative feelings - and *alternative helpful* thoughts and behaviours that do the opposite.

This approach works well when people experience these alternatives **as helpful**. However, suppose they say, “I can see the logic and it should feel helpful but I cannot feel reassured by them” or “I *know* that I am not to blame but still *feel* to blame”.

## Nature of change

- Looking at evidence, insight, practice exposure?
- The nature of the emotional system that provides the basis for change?

*Upsetting thoughts: I am struggling with my patients – others will think I am incompetent and useless – I am*

**Behaviour Experiment:** read the below with different emotional voice tones and breath styles –what happens?

**Empathy to one's own distress:** Understandable to feel disappointed and thwarted – therapy can be hard.

**CA: Attention:** recall successful times or others were helpful

**CT: What is helpful/tolerance:** Ability to be with patients and listen and 'bear' feelings of stuckness is itself helpful

**CT: Not black/white:** focus on what I can do rather than what I can't – break issue down

**CT: Like others –common humanity:** Experienced therapists often have these kinds of problems

**CB: Help seeking:** Can share my difficulties, seek supervision/help, talk to others –keep trying my best

## **How did CFT Start? 20 years ago using CBT**

- Noticing the hostility in the alternative thoughts or when engaging in 'helpful' homework
- Negative self-monitoring is constant – even in training in mindfulness – but it's the emotional tone that does the damage (Whelton & Greenberg, 2005)
- Noticing the strong fears blocks and resistances to affiliative emotions in the alternative thoughts or when engaging in helpful homework

## **Nature of the problem**

### **Issues**

Able to generate alternative thoughts – but don't feel any better.

Struggle generating affiliative motives or emotions – partly because of high shame, self-criticism and problematic history

### **Solution**

Challenge the basis of shame and personalisation/isolation  
BY

discussing the roots of suffering in the nature of mind itself – not one's fault – common humanity

*Placing humanity in its  
context*

*Evolution and the flow of  
life*

*Our Common Humanity*

### ***Compassion Focused Therapy***

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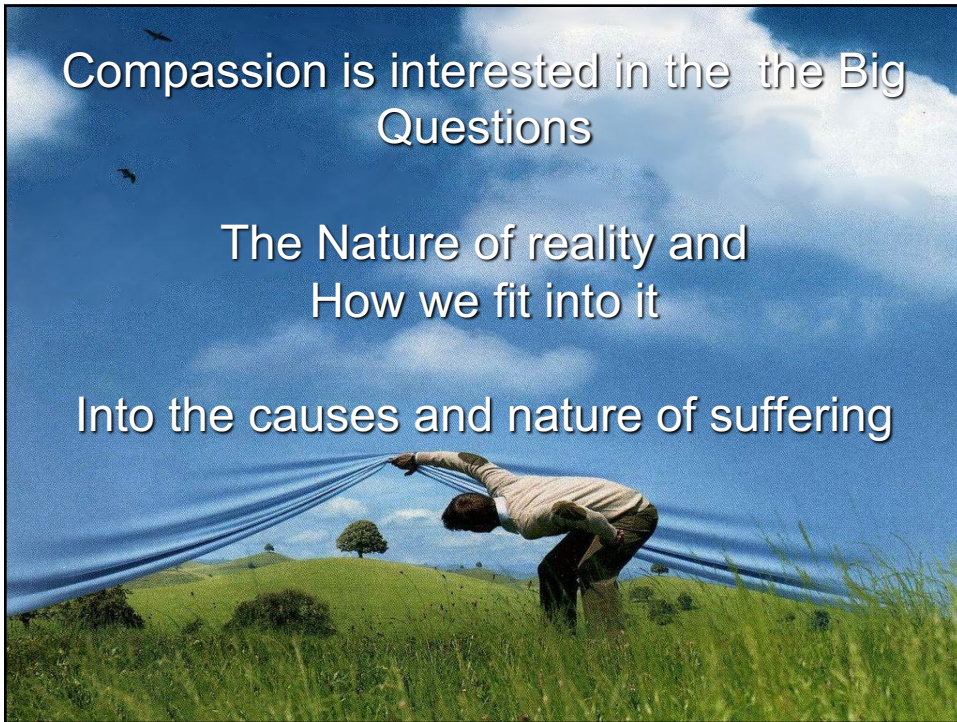
**Why do we need Compassion?  
Life is Hard**

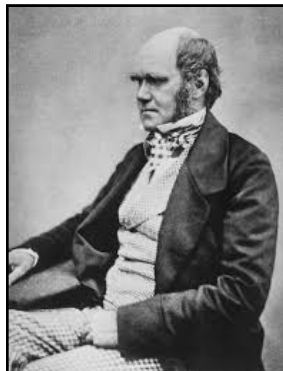
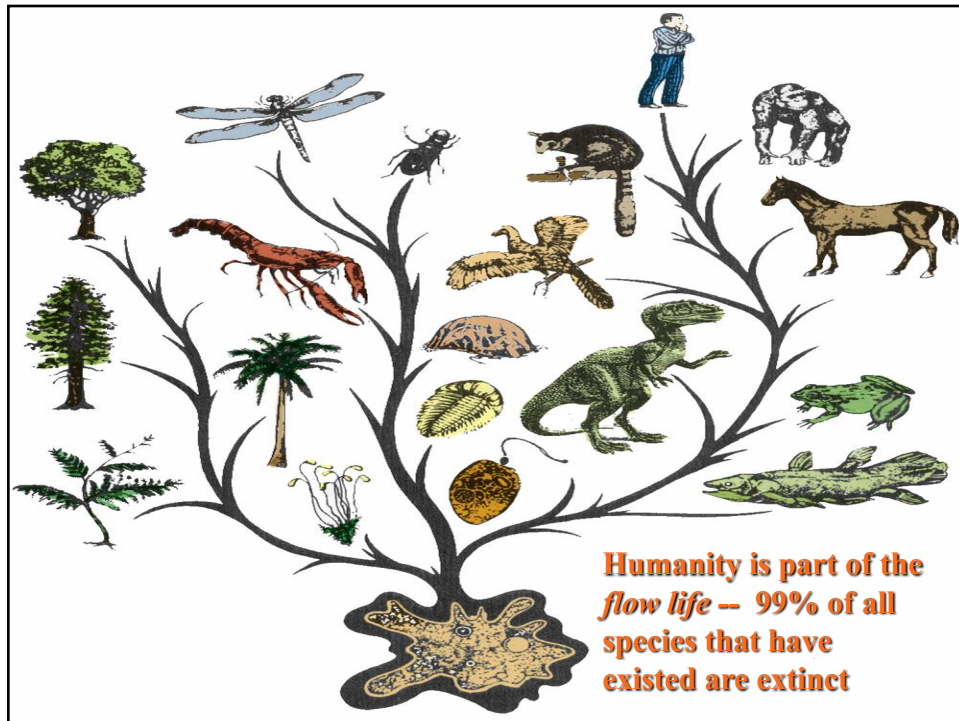


Compassion is interested in the the Big Questions

The Nature of reality and  
How we fit into it

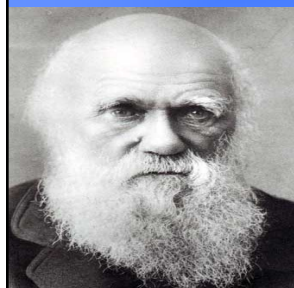
Into the causes and nature of suffering





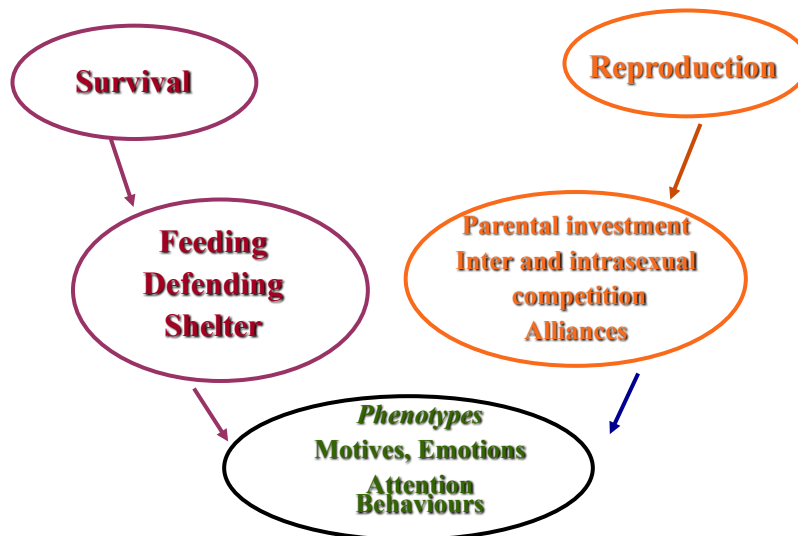
**Charles Robert Darwin,**

**12 February 1809 – 19 April 1882**



The process of change via natural selection from the challenges of survival and reproduction

## Evolution and Strategies

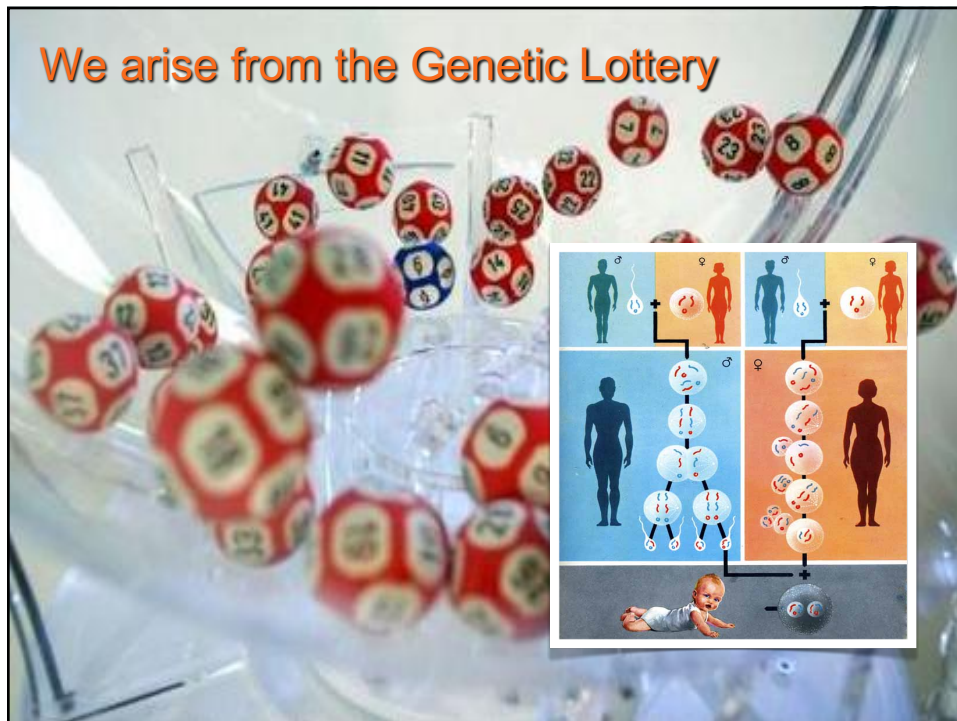


### Compassion begins with a reality check Insight builds wisdom

- We are gene-built - with evolved brains designed to struggle to survive, to want, grasp and avoid pain







**Compassion begins with a reality check  
Insight builds wisdom**

- We are gene-built - with evolved brains designed to struggle to survive, to want, grasp and avoid pain
- We are all born, grow, decay and die - and are susceptible to many diseases and injuries – life with tragedy – pain and suffering – more than impermanence
- We are socially shaped – from our gene expressions, to our sense of self and values – baby kidnap



## So, Basic Philosophy is That:

See clearly into the causes of suffering:

We all *just find ourselves* here with a brain, emotions and sense of (socially made) self we did not choose but have to figure out

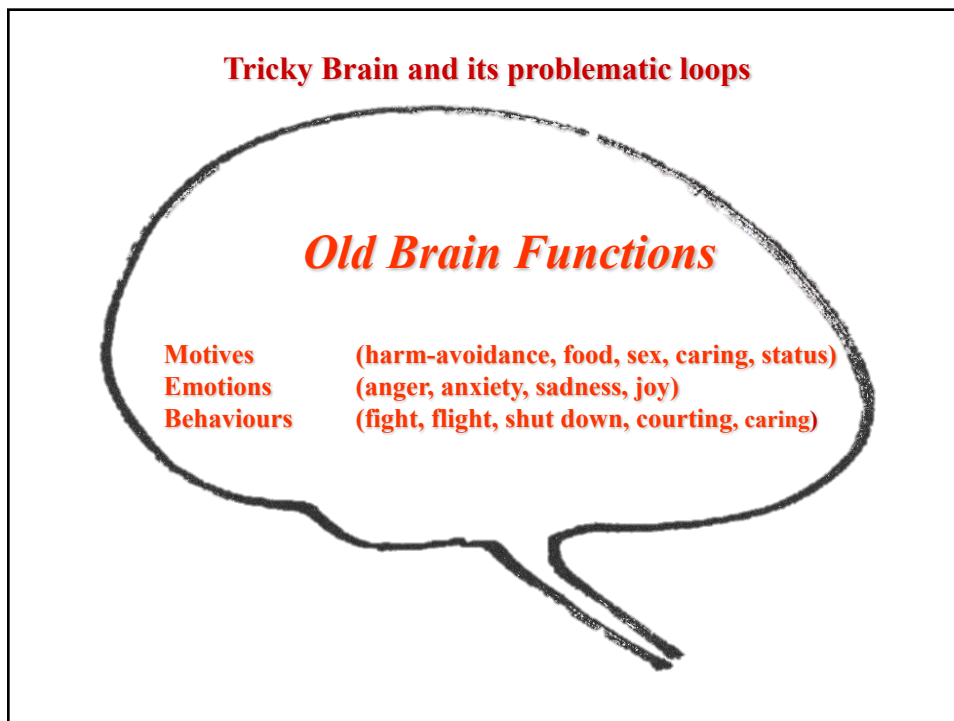
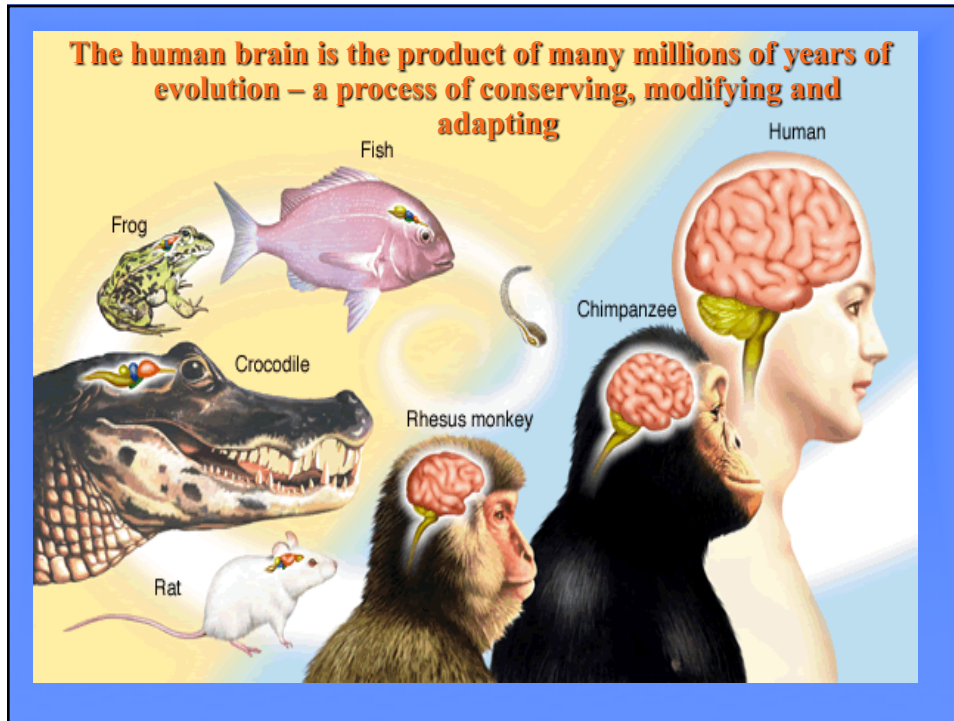
Life involves dealing with **tragedies** (threats, losses, diseases, decay, death) and people do the best they can

**Much of what goes on in our minds is not of 'our design'  
and not our fault**

**We are all in the same boat**

The wisdom of no blame with the desire to take  
responsibility

*The brain itself is  
our biggest  
challenge!!!*



## New Brain Troubles



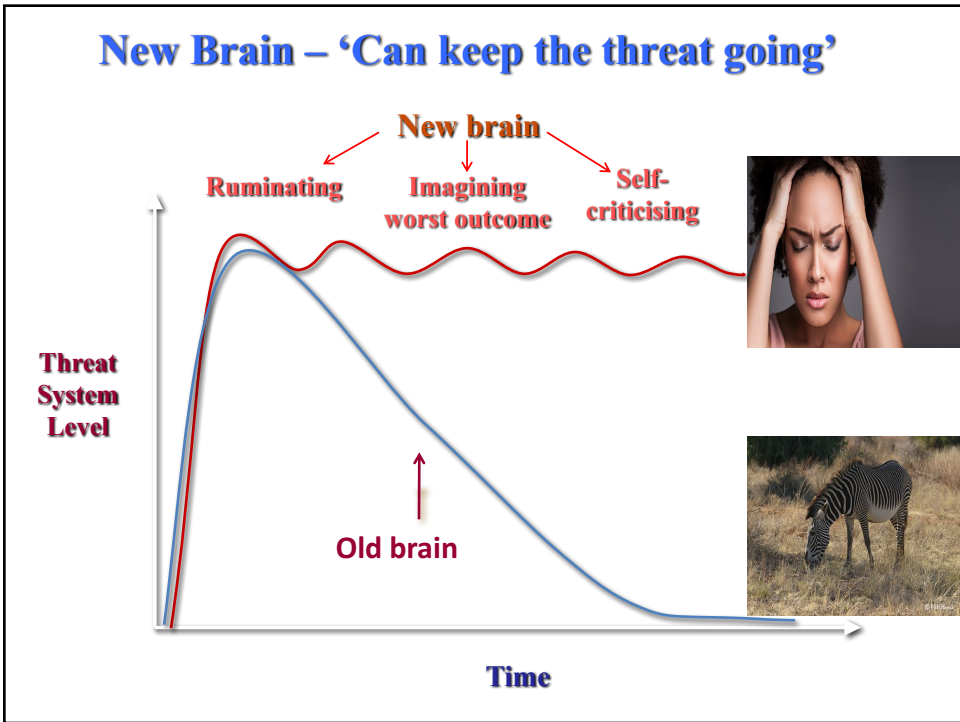
Self-monitoring  
Self-criticism  
Fearful Imagination  
Fear of feelings  
Emotional avoidance  
Shame – sense of inferiority  
Rumination

## Tricky Brain and its problematic loops

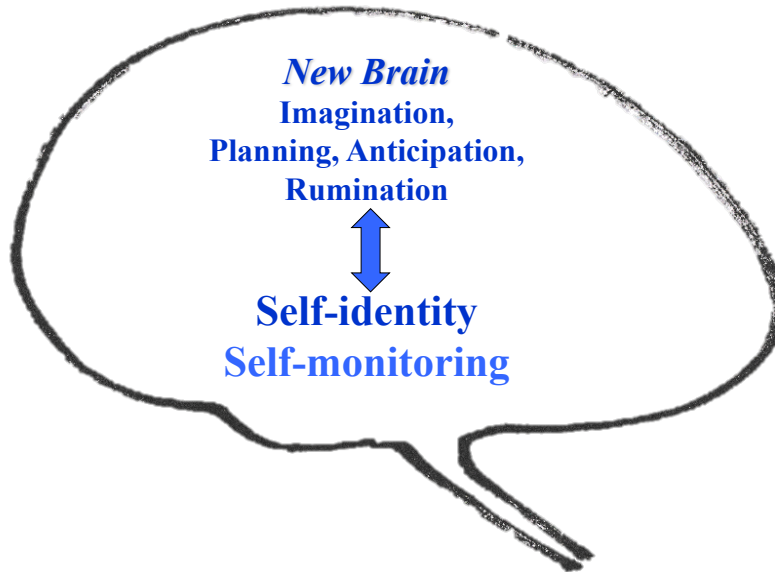


*New Brain Competencies:*  
Imagine, Plan, Ruminare,  
Self-monitor, Self-identity

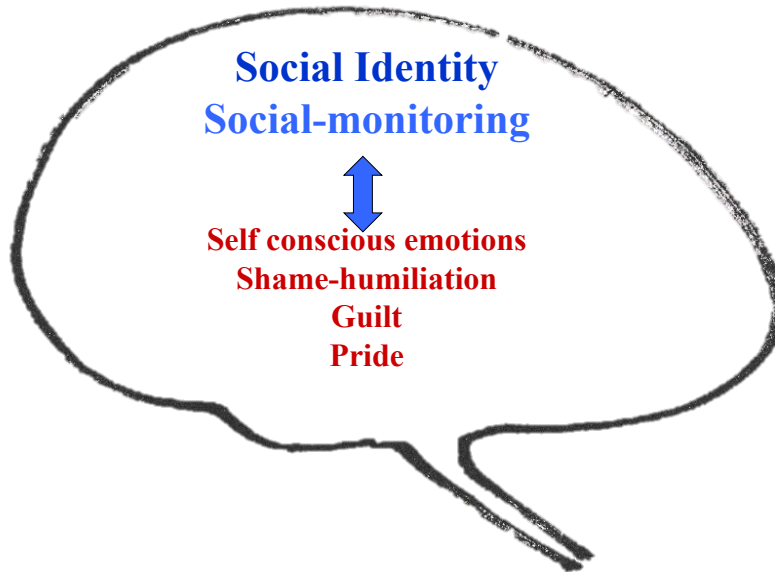
*Old Brain Fucntions*  
Motives (harm-avoidance, food, sex, caring, status)  
Emotions (anger, anxiety, sadness, joy)  
Behaviours (fight, flight, shut down, courting, caring)



**Getting Smart: New Brain Competencies**



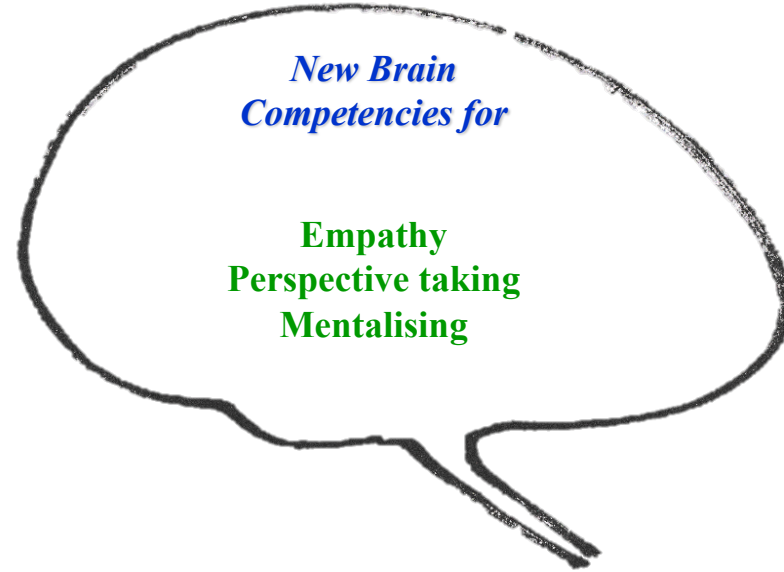
**Getting Smart: New Brain Competencies**



**Getting Smart: New Brain Competencies**

*New Brain  
Competencies for*

**Empathy  
Perspective taking  
Mentalising**



**A mind that does not  
know itself**

*Dangerous, Cruel  
and Crazy Mind?*

## Built in Biases

### Compassion insights

Biased learning – e.g., fear of snakes not electricity

Biases can be implicit (non-conscious) or explicit (Conscious)

Self-focused

Kin preferences – (nepotism)

In-group preferences – (tribalism)

## Cruelty from inequality







**Desire to make others suffer bully to  
torture**



## **Cruelty as Entertainment**



## **Tribalism - Battles often vicious and bloody**





## **We Create Horrors and Hells**



# Bombed City



## **Use of Intelligence**



## **Submissive and obedient (Milgram)**



## Belsen Concentration Camp



## Cruelty and Callousness

The deliberate causing of harm/suffering to another either for pleasure, personal benefit or social conformity

- Torture
- Slavery
- Women as property – subservient
- Chinese foot binding, FGM,
- Domestic violence, rape.

50%+ of children from some inner cities show high rates of PTSD symptoms with a range of health and learning effects (Horowitz, McKay & Marshall, 2005)

## The reality of suffering

- Humans are one of the biggest sources of suffering to other living things including of course humans
- In addition, the way we think about and treat ourselves is a major cause of suffering to ourselves - the West is riddled with people who feel inferior, inadequate self-critical or even self-hating.

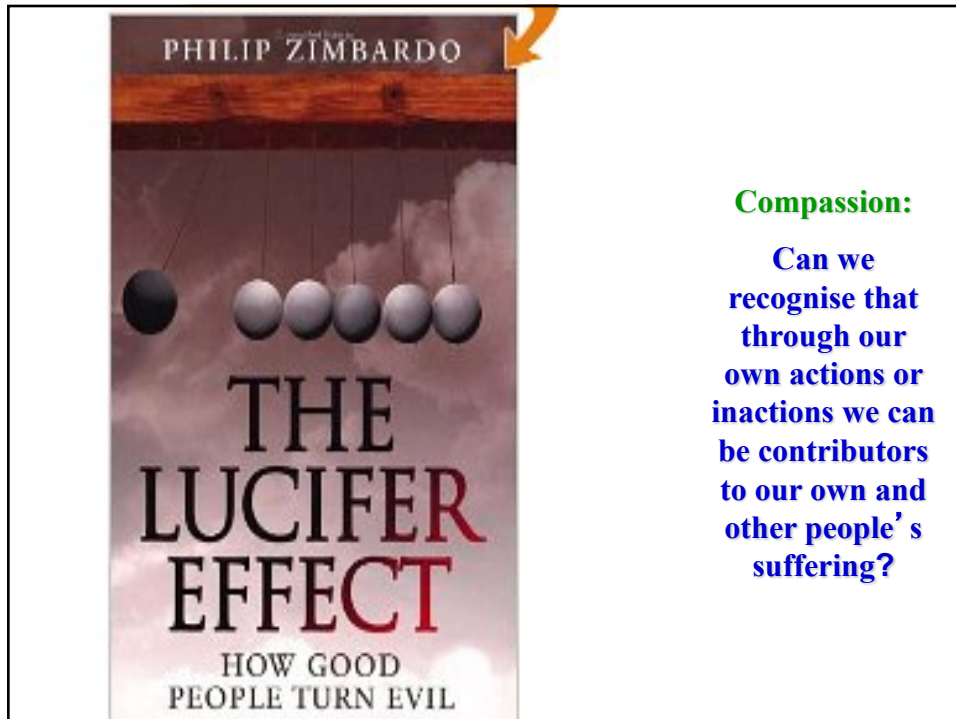
## Compassion and cruelty

(Gilbert 2005)

To understand compassion requires us to understand how compassion gets turned on **and off**, people can literally **dissociate** from pain and suffering –

The human Mind is a a major source of Suffering to self and others

This is no one's fault but – it is linked to how the brain works in certain contexts – this carries **huge implications and responsibilities** for how we build compassionate minds and societies.



**Mind as a multi-self**

<b>War</b>		<b>Peace</b>
<b>Tribalism</b>		<b>Equanimity</b>
<b>Greed</b>		<b>Fairness</b>
<b>Abuse</b>		<b>Care</b>
<b>Wound</b>		<b>Heal</b>
<b>Slavery</b>		<b>Liberate</b>
<b>Torture</b>		<b>Nurture</b>
<b>Sadism</b>		<b>Protect</b>
<b>Hatred</b>		<b>Forgive</b>

**Highly dependent on social context**



## But we are also capable of intense care and compassion

Attachment and love of our children/relatives

Care for our friends

Work for charities and good causes

The many helping professions

Helping others is a source of joy and well-being

Working for Justice and Morality

Creating the good – music poetry

Science

## Human Minds are Multi Minds

- The long progression in our self-understanding has been from a simple and usually "intellectual" view to the view that the mind is a *mixed structure*, for it contains a complex set of "talents," "modules" and "policies" within.... All these general components of the mind can act independently of each other; they may well have different priorities

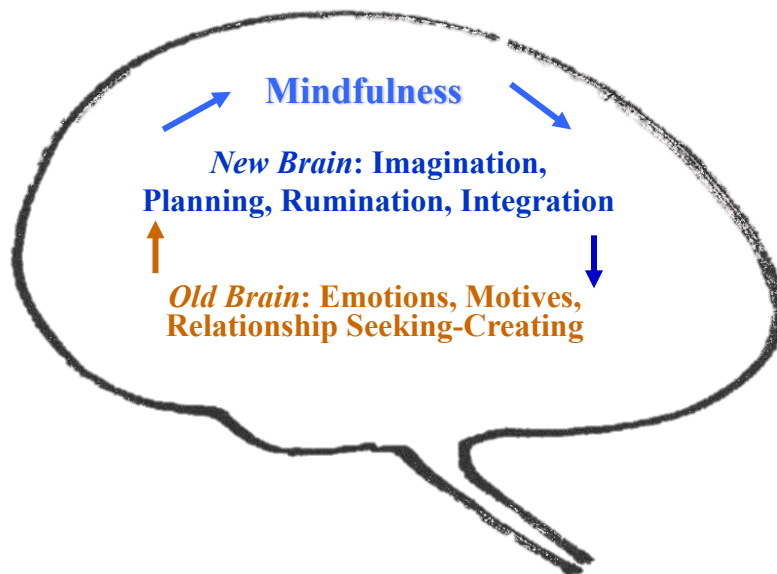
(Orenstein, R 1986 *Multimind: A new way of looking at human behaviour*)

- You are a universe, a collection of worlds within worlds. Your brain is possibly the most complicated and amazing device in existence. Through its action you are capable of music, art, science, and war. Your potential for love and compassion coexists with your potential for aggression, hatred.....murder

(Coon, D. 1992 *Introduction to Psychology*)

*Looking more deeply into  
the nature of our  
human mind*

### **Mindful Brain**



## Mindfulness as harnessing our inner **Observer**



*New Brain:* Imagination,  
Planning, Rumination, Integration



*Old Brain:* Emotions, Motives,  
Relationship Seeking-Creating



## Complexities of Conscious Experiencing

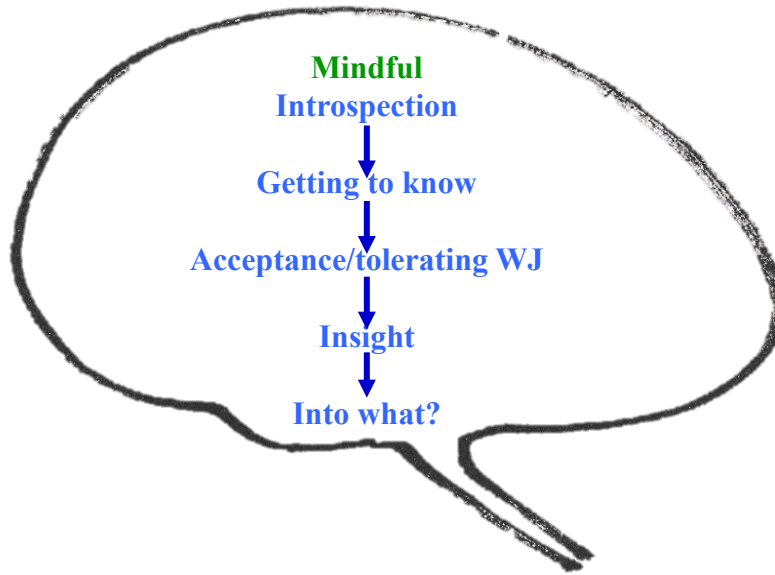
**Known and experienced**

**Known but avoided – too fearful –  
overwhelmed, poorly integrated**

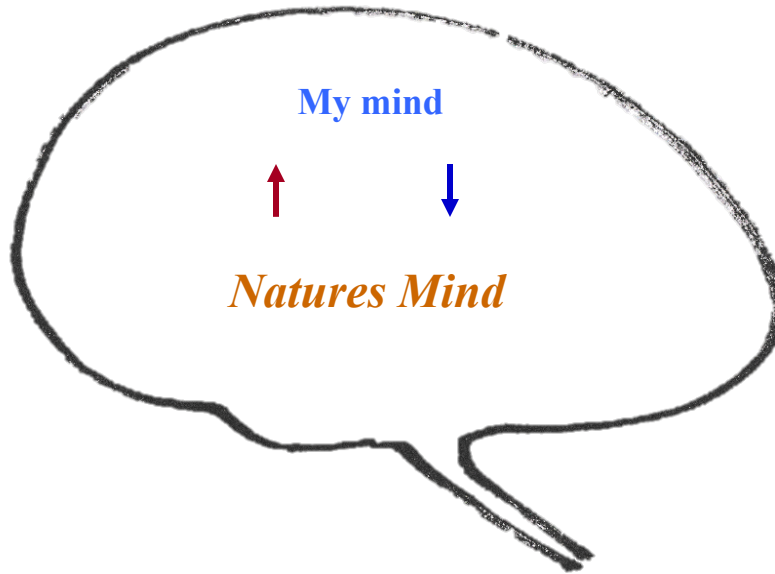
**Unknown and avoided (don't want  
to know what I am capable of –  
shadow)**

**Unknown – source of basic motives**

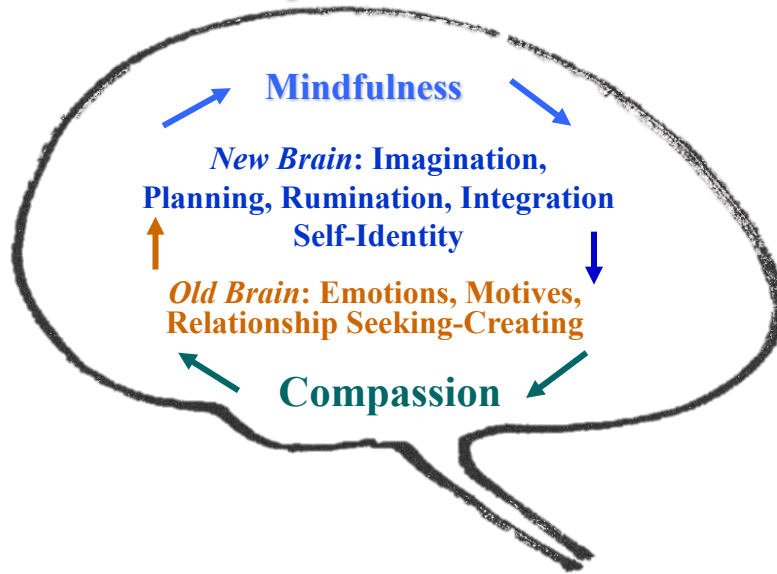
**Tricky Brain and its problematic loops**



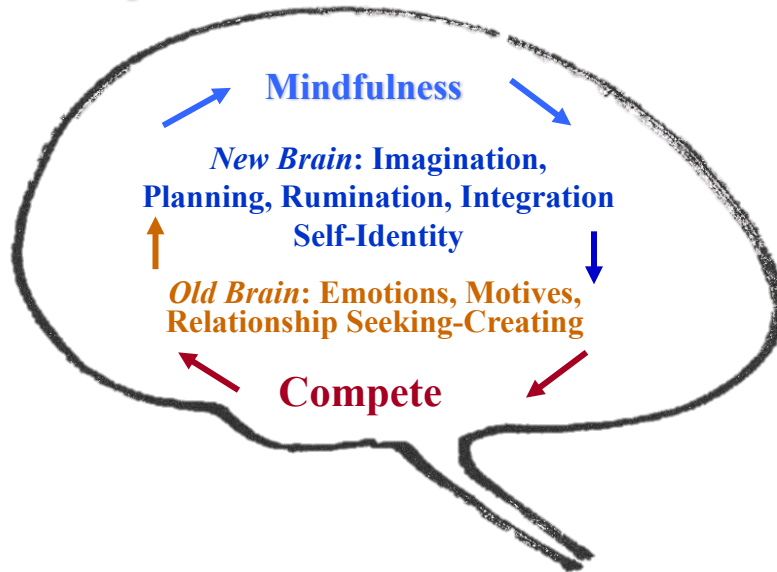
**Tricky Brain and its problematic loops**



## Mindful Compassion Brain



## Competitive Brain



## Complexities of Conscious Experiencing

**Known and experienced**

**Known but avoided – too fearful –  
overwhelmed, poorly integrated**

**Unknown and avoided (don't want  
to know what I am capable of –  
shadow avoidance)**

**Unknown – source of basic motives**

**So mindful of what?**

## Why Compassion?

- Compassion is helpful and is associated with well-being and moral behaviour – and therapy

### Deeper Level

- There is something terrifying and deeply tragic at the heart of human existence
- There is anger, fear and grief that we are normally dissociated from – until it knocks on our door
- Terror management with dissociation from reality is normal but a deeply problematic human way of dealing with reality

# *Evolutionary Functional Analysis of Emotions*

## *Compassion Focused Therapy*

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## Understanding our Motives and Emotions

Emotions guide us to our goals and respond if we are succeeding or threatened

Emotions evolved to create physiological/bodies states that can be rapidly activated and control behaviour moment-by-moment

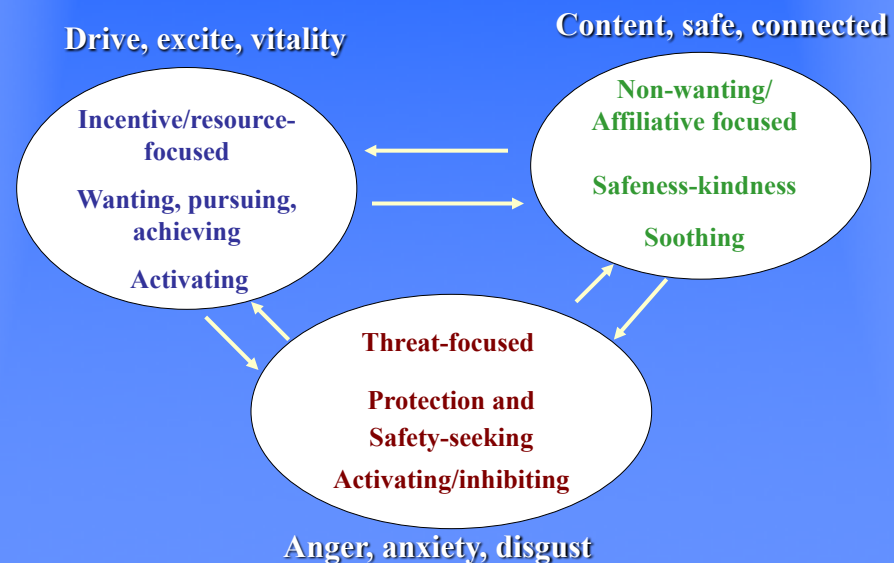
Emotions are subject to emotional or classical conditioning

Emotions can be multiple and can be in conflict

### There are three types of emotion regulation

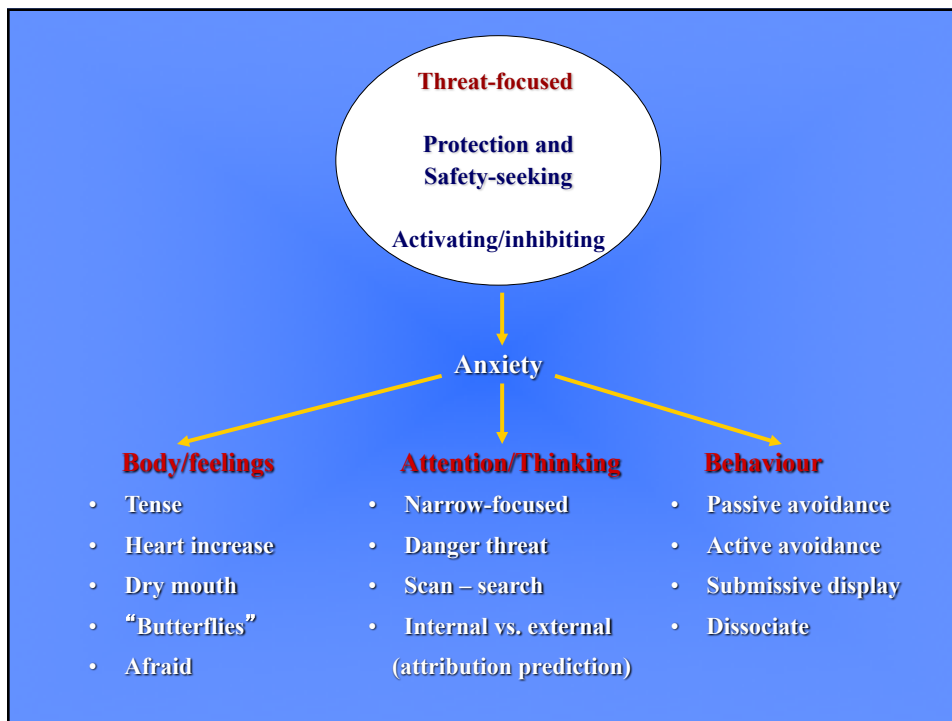
1. Those that focus on threat and self-protection
2. Those that focus on doing and achieving
3. Those that focus on contentment and feeling safe

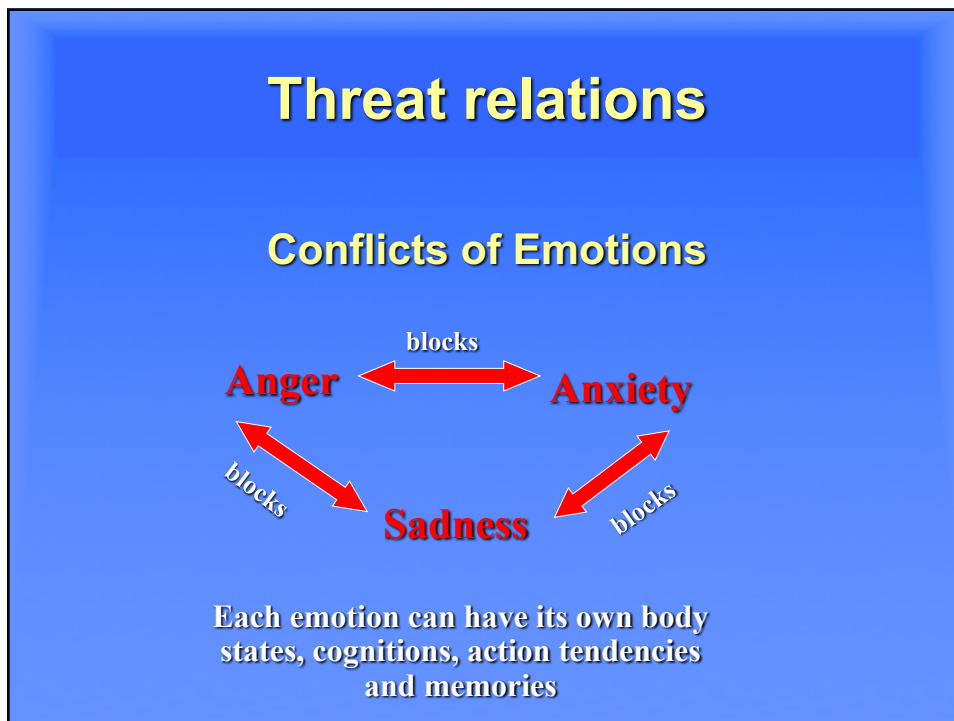
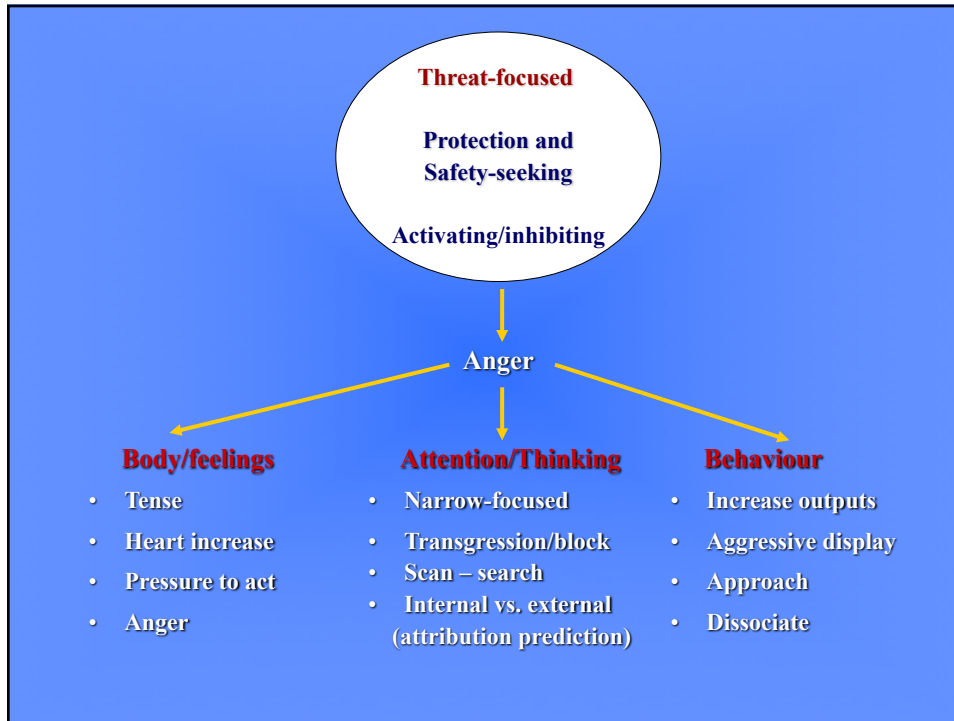
## Types of Affect Regulator Systems



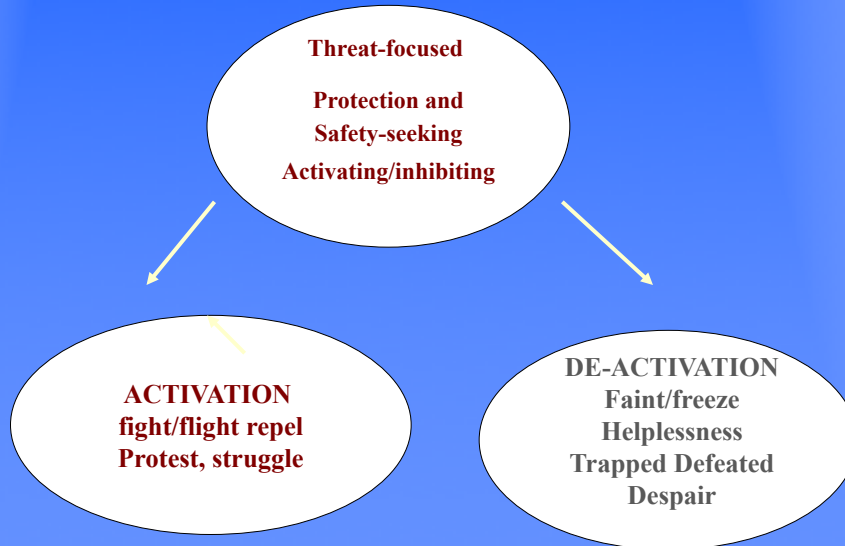


## Types of Affect Regulator Systems





## Types of Threat Defence



*Understand conflicts  
between Motives,  
Emotions and Strategies*

*What gets Blocked?*

# Varieties of Positive Emotions

## EFA

### Types of Affect Regulator Systems

Drive, excite, vitality



Anger, anxiety, disgust

# Lottery

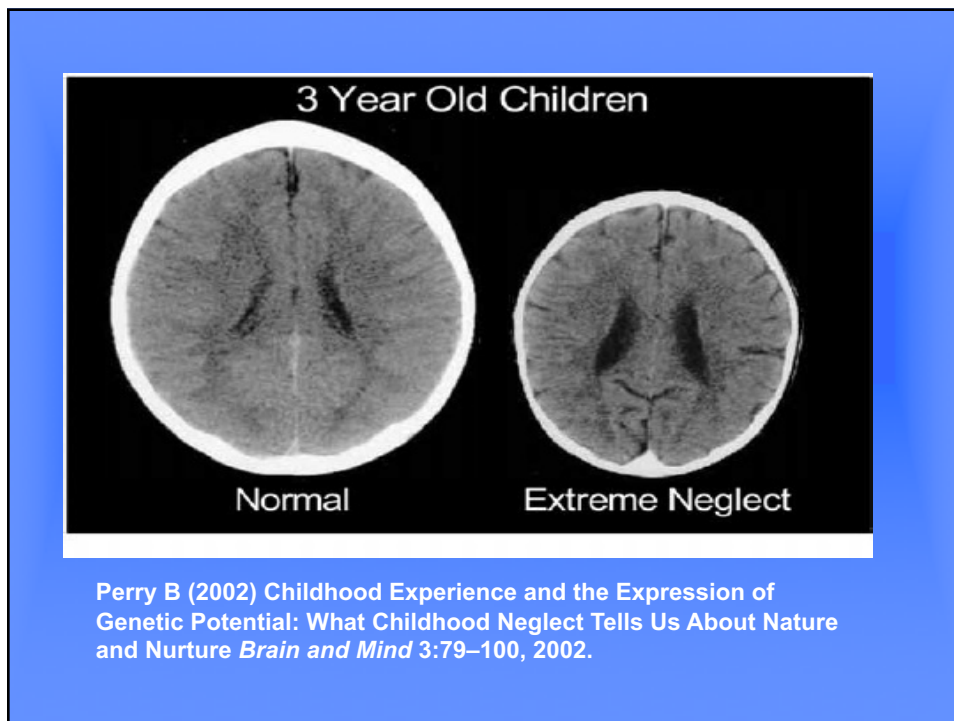
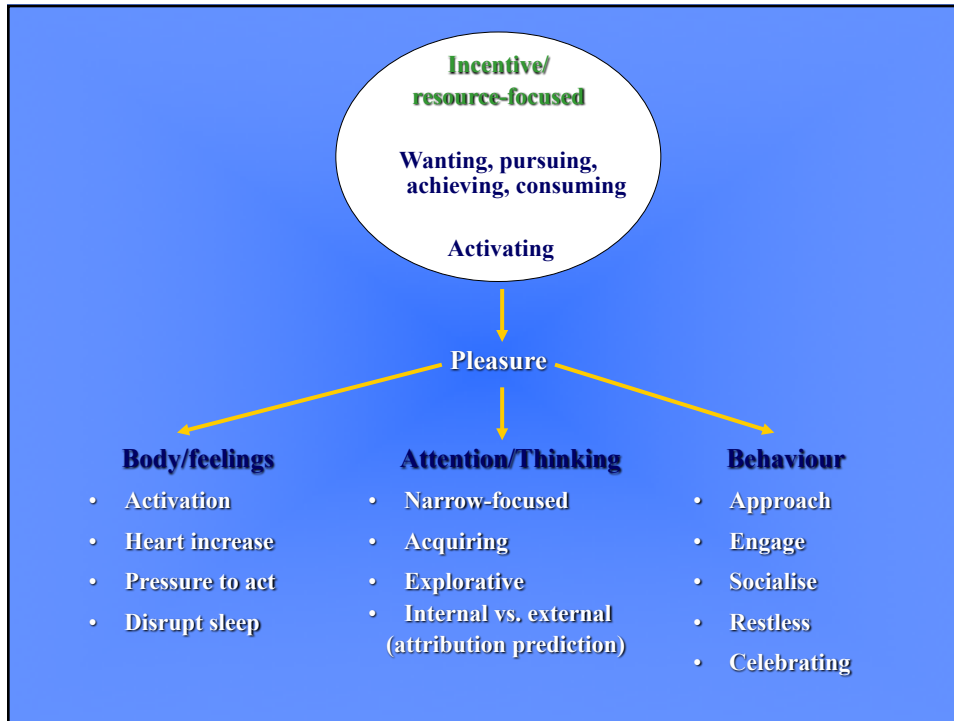


## Your Brain in a Social Signal Processor

Humans evolved complex competencies to send and receive social signals that are motive congruent – create interactional sequences that are mutually influencing



CFT focuses on the fact the brain evolved to respond to *social signals* and communications -



# *Safeness and Soothing*

## **Self-Protection**



In species without attachment only 1-2% make it to adulthood to reproduce. Threats come from ecologies, food shortage, predation, injury, disease. At birth individuals must be able to 'go it alone', be mobile and disperse

## The Mammalian Importance of Caring Minds



Caring as “looking after”. Seeking closeness rather than dispersion. Individuals obtain protection, food, and care when ill. Key also is **soothing-calming** and physiological regulation. Few offspring but high survival rate in comparison to species without attachment, affection and kindness

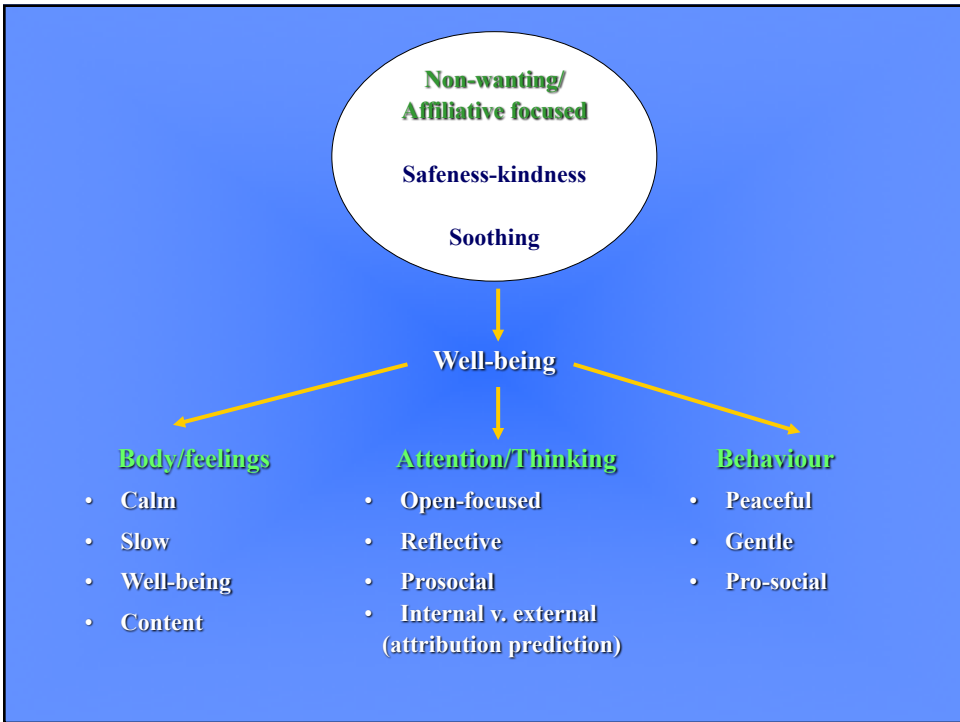
Promotes courage and engagement



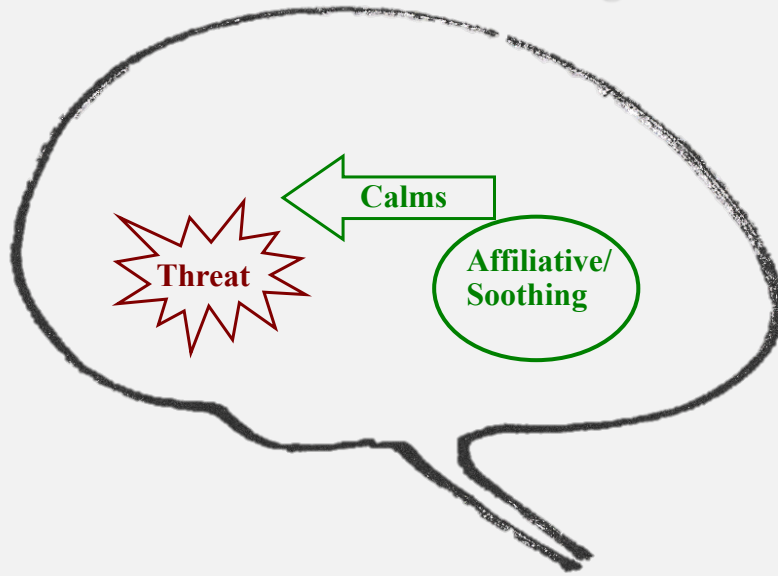
Co-operative and mutual support stimulates affiliative systems and helps regulate threat



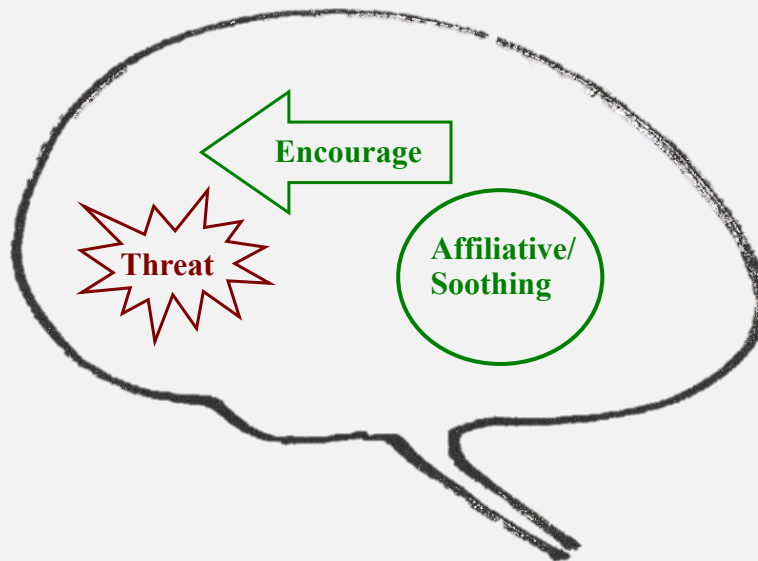




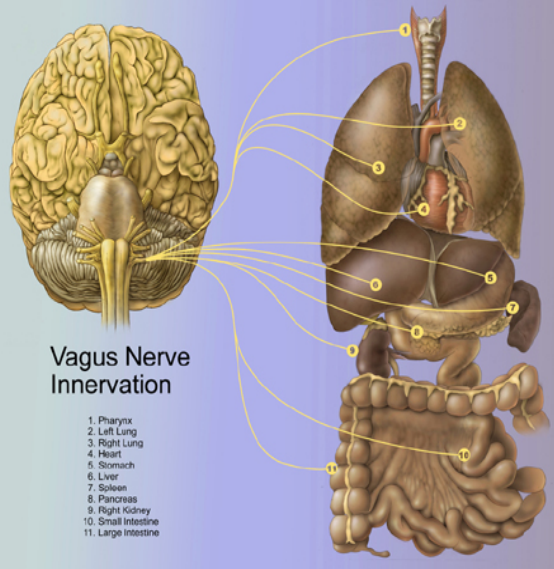
**Self-self and self -other relating**



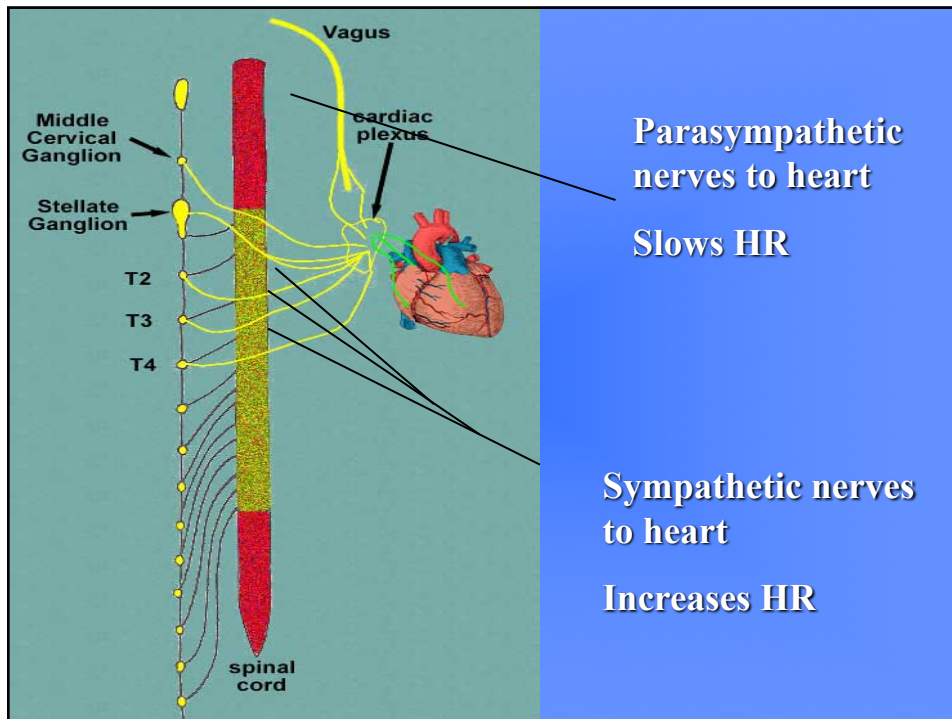
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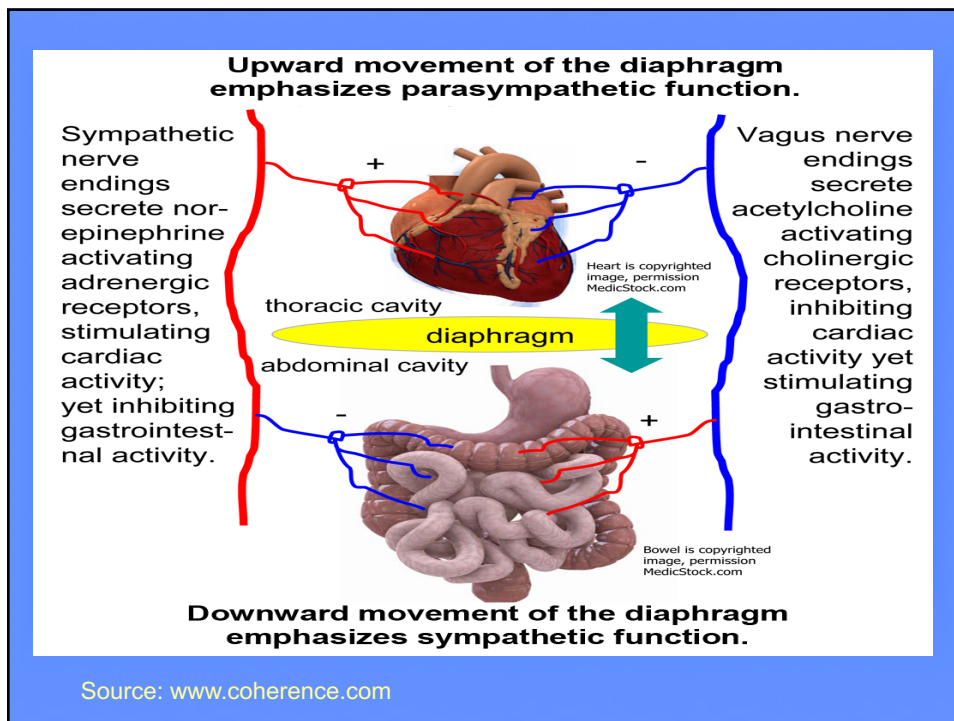
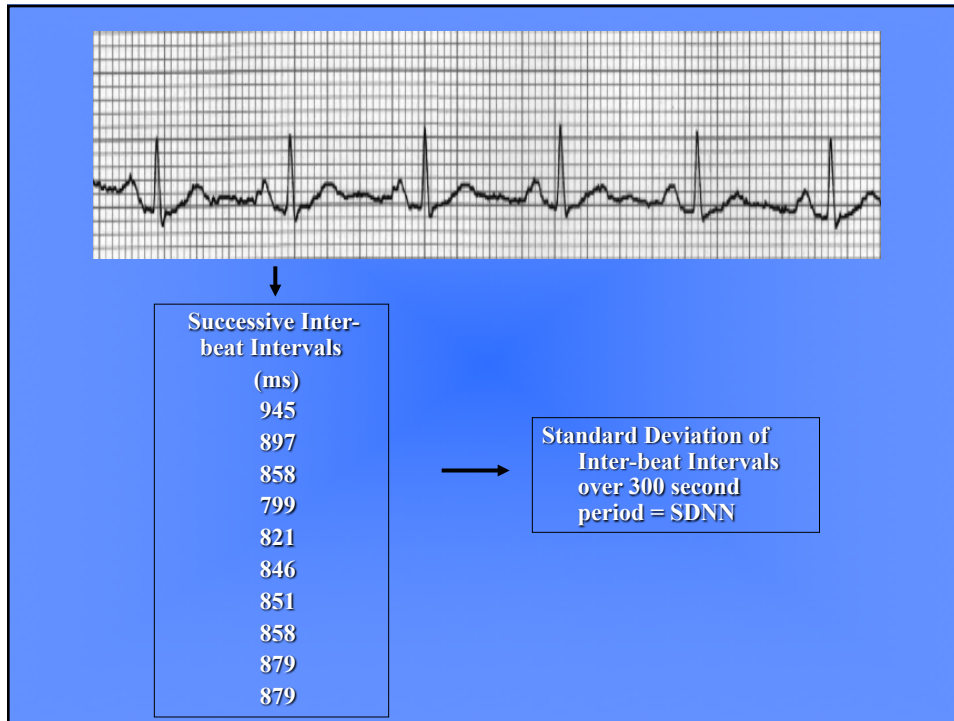


## Safeness -connecting and the parasympathetic system: The Vagus Nerve

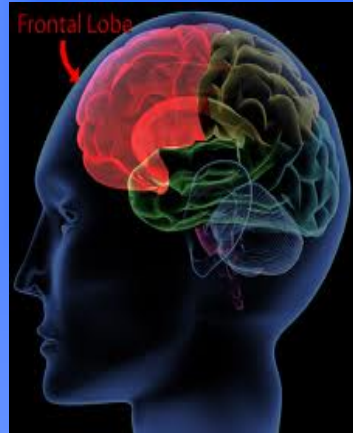


- PNS influence on heart rate – slows beat down during outbreath
- Associated with affiliation, tend & befriend, general positive emotional tone
- Sensitive to safeness





## **‘New Brain’ with Frontal cortex and PNS**

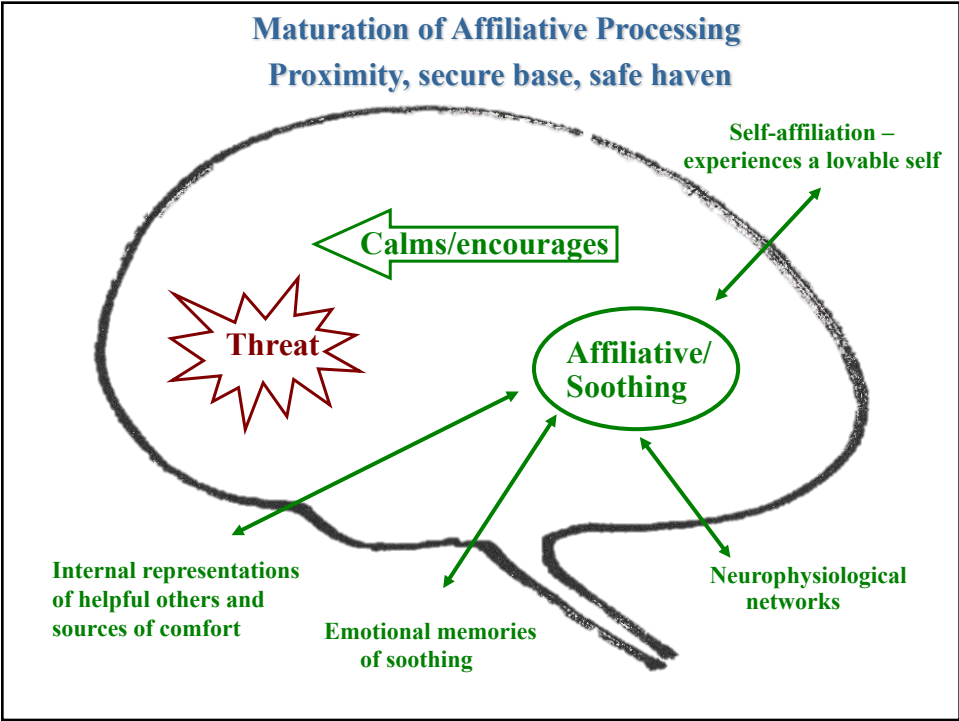
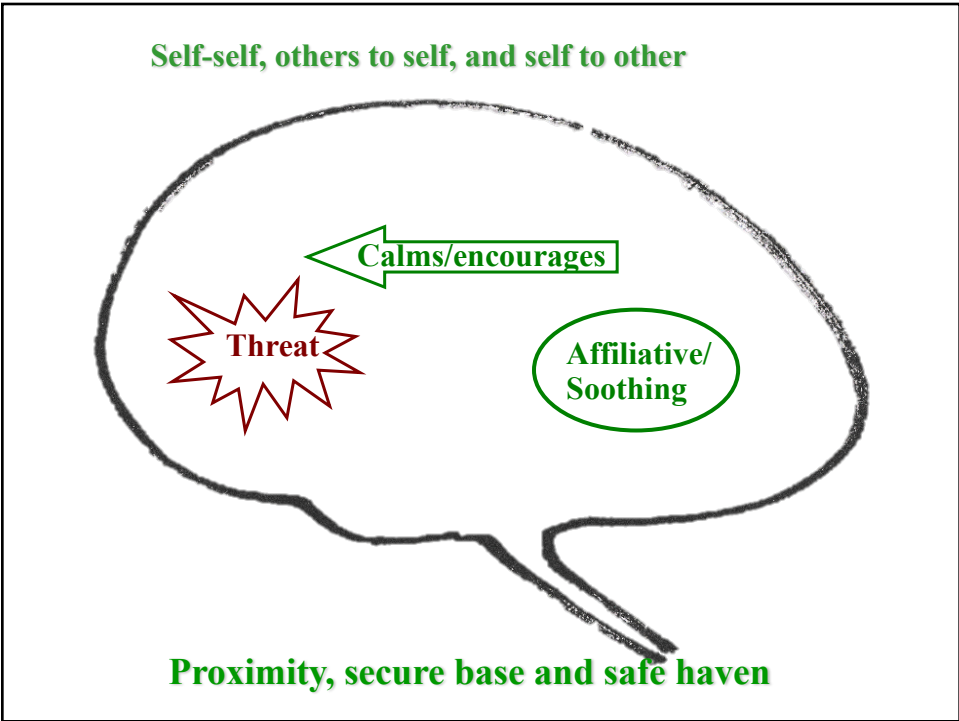


- HRV ass. with flexibility
- Mindful attention
- Control of attention
- Reflective thinking
- Empathy – mentalizing
- Not acting on emotions

## **‘Some Overloads for New brain**

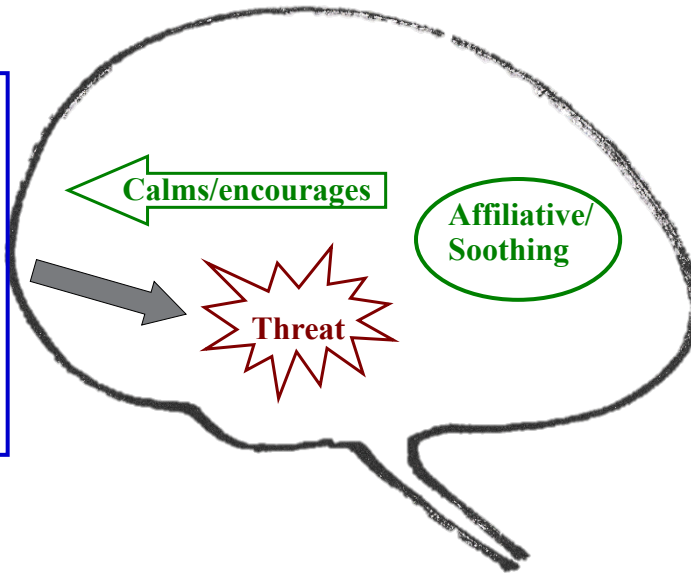


- Chronic sympathetic arousal
- Rapid shifts of attention
- No time for reflective thinking
- Fear based (personal distress) based arousal
- Self-criticism and self-doubt
- Systemic failures in support

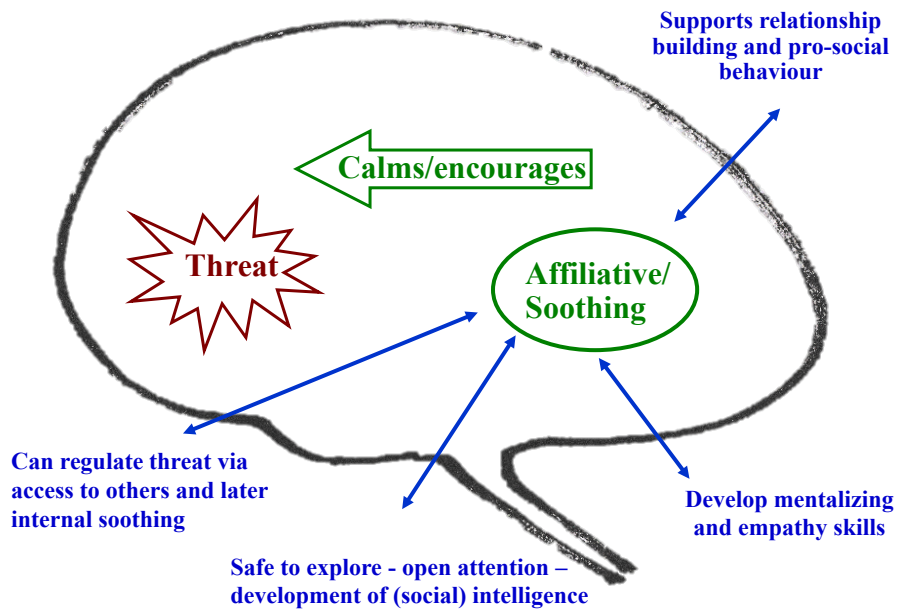


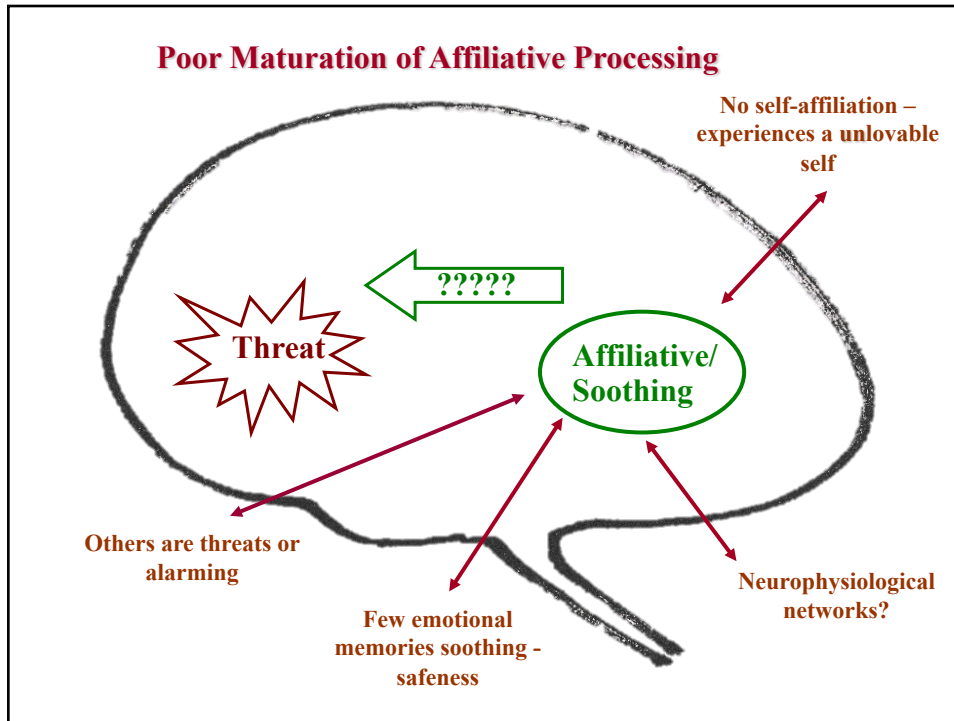
### Maturation Affiliative Processing

- Frontal
- Notice
- Mindful
- Reflection
- Tolerate
- Empathy
- Approach
- Reframe
- Regulate

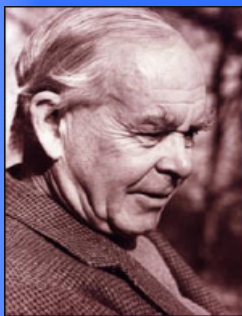


### Maturation Affiliative Processing





## J. Bowlby - Attachment



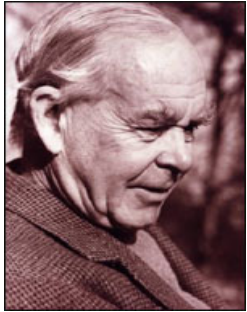
**1907-1990**

One of the most  
influential  
psychiatrists of the  
modern age

- *Proximity seeking* –desire closeness, to be with
- *Secure base* –source of security and guidance to go out, explore and develop confidence
- *Safe haven* –source of comfort and emotion regulation
- Social signals are the drivers (social mentality)
- Lack of these in early life can seriously disrupt motivation, emotion and self regulation systems



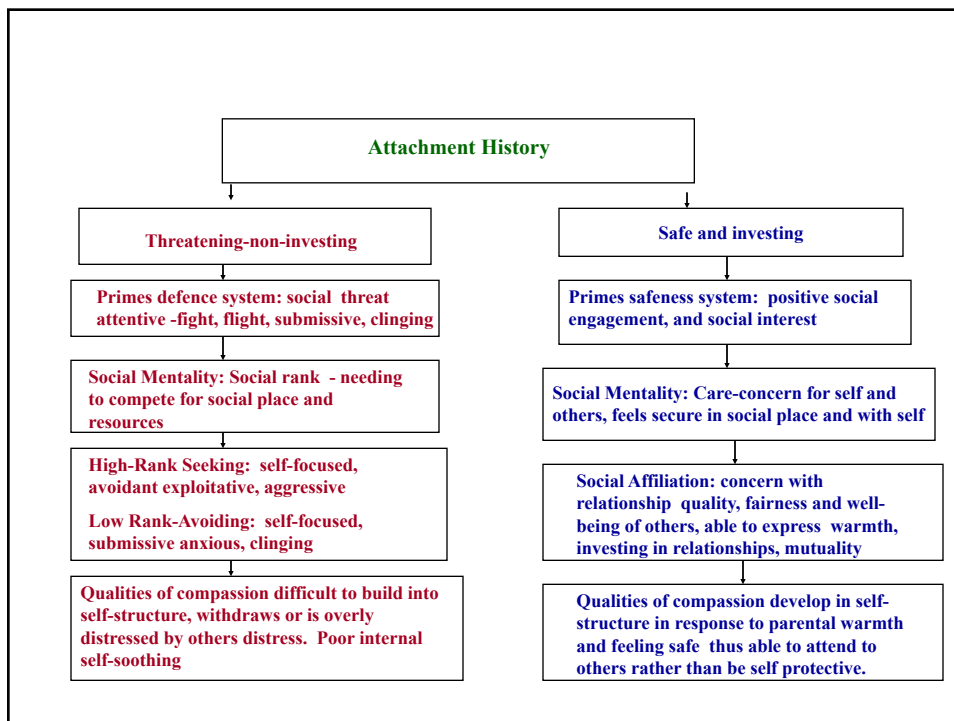
## J. Bowlby – Making safe



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Promotes courage and engagement

Co-operative and mutual support stimulates affiliative systems, helps regulate threat and also act as a secure base and safe haven

## Trust

- Child (patient) is distressed and anxious – how does s/he know if they can trust the mother (therapist) and calm down?
- Soothing is via facial expressions, voice tone, voice content, and touch – how does the infant experience the other
- Soothing also builds confidence to turn towards the fearful

## Compassion and development

- **Sensitivity to the suffering/distress of the other but**
- not relieving it -- rather creating the conditions for 'the other' to grow and develop courage, wisdom and skills to become competent themselves
- Secure, dismissive and anxious parent (therapist)

## Relationship between Defence and Safeness in Attachment

### Attachment Relationship

#### Threat/low safeness

Better safe than sorry  
Prime fight, flight, submit,  
Damage limitation

#### Safe empathic

Enhancement (vs dam lim)  
Explore, develop, initiate,  
creative, novel, open,  
relaxed

#### Role Relationships

## **Origins of Phenotypic Vulnerabilities**

Early relationships  
Peer relationships  
Cultural value systems  
Cultural opportunities

## **Some Contrasts**

### **Competitive Mind**

'Me-ness'

Ownership

Faster

Short term

Control/conquest

Block emotion

Output focused

De-regulate

### **Compassionate mind**

'We-ness'

Sharing

Slower

Long term

Relate to, nurture

Enable emotion

Input focused

Regulate

## **Attachment style**

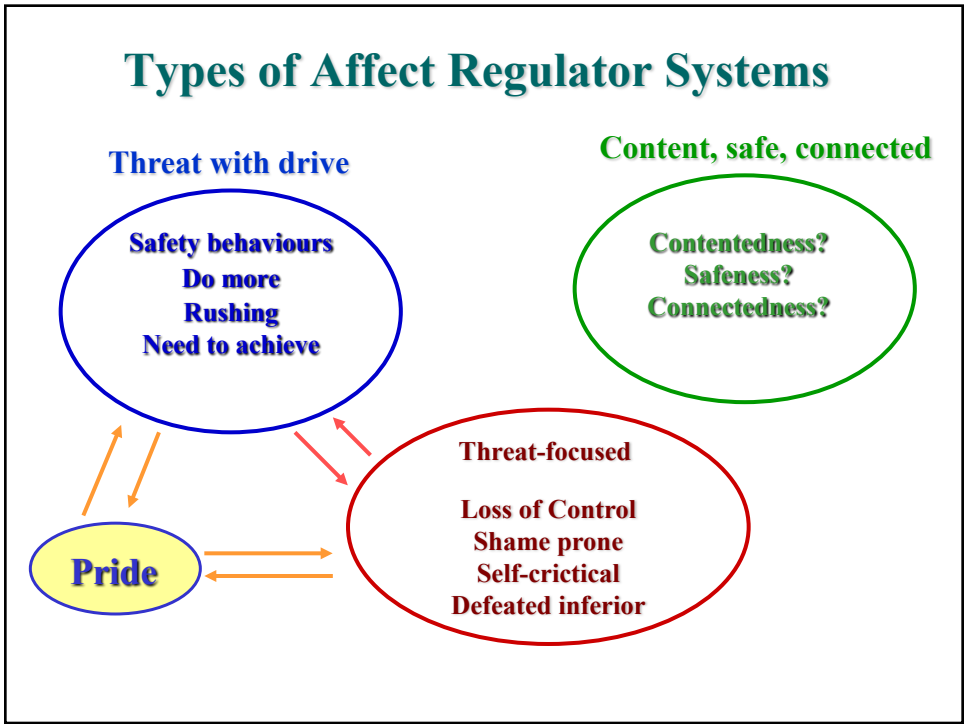
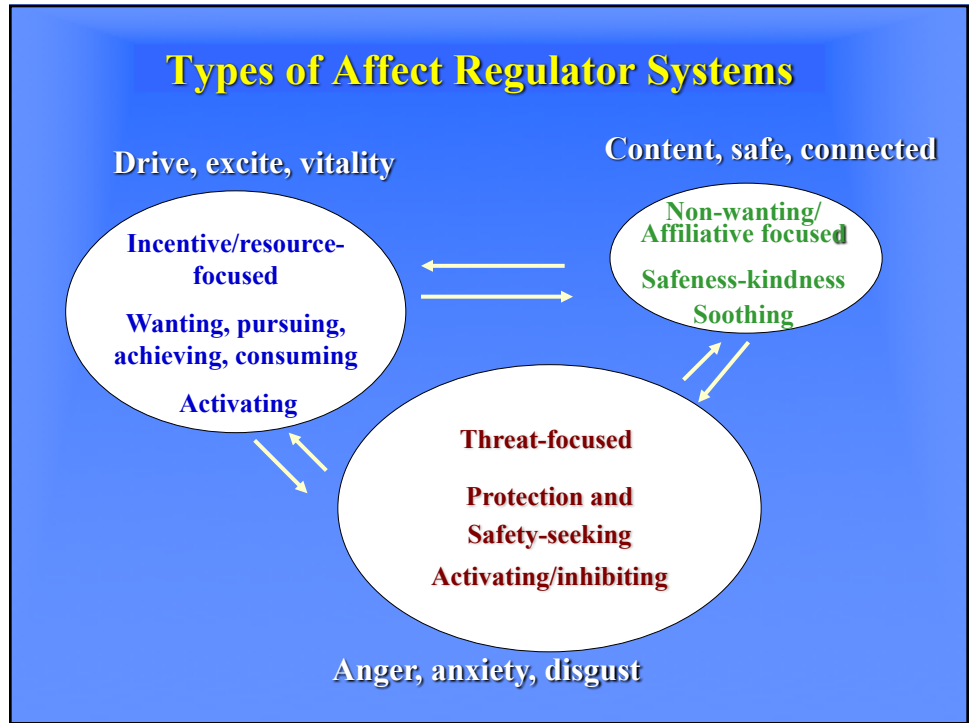
- Secure
- Anxious-ambivalent
- Avoidant –fearful – dismissive
- Disorganised
- Can show different patterns at different times with different people

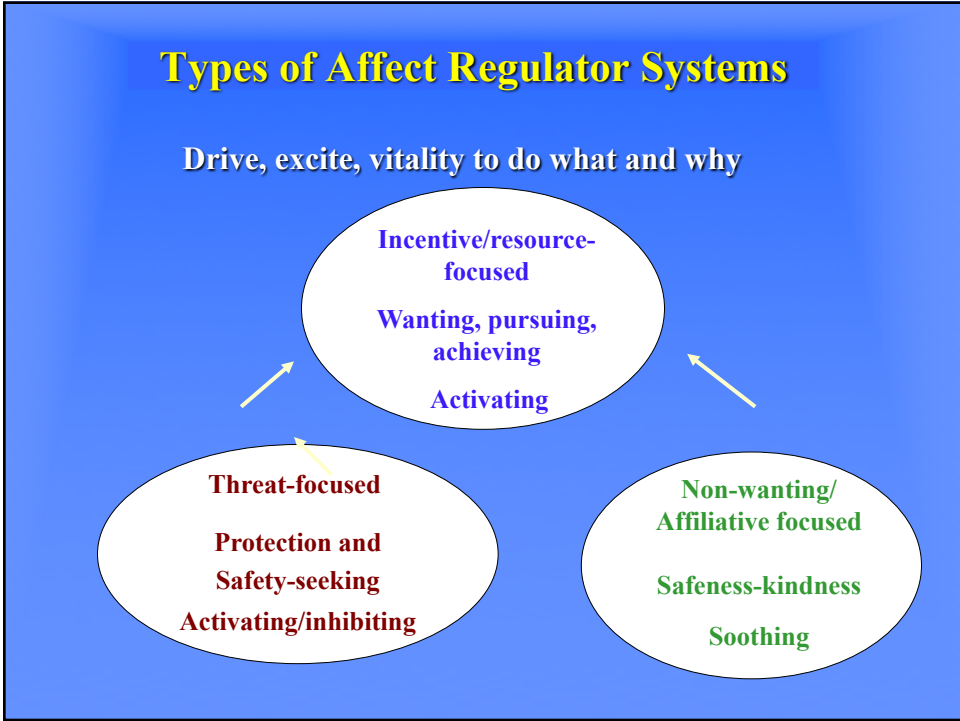
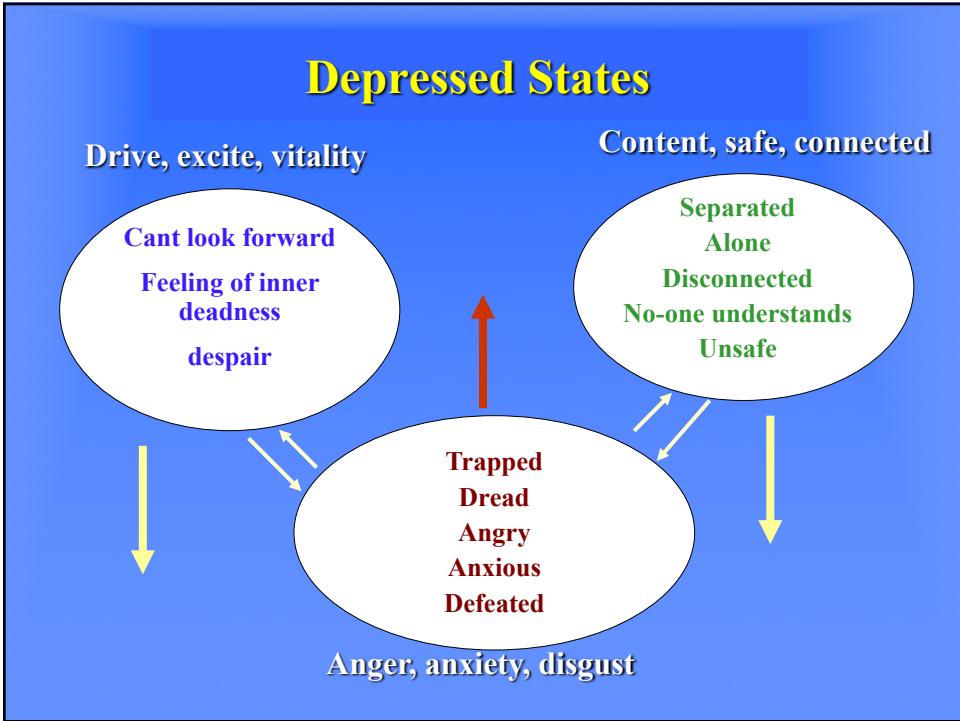
## **Attachment**

- Early life experiences influence brain development
- Genetic expression
- Remind open – neuroplasticity

### **Learn**

- Self
- emotions
- Others





## Affiliative emotions and social contexts: Combat trauma

- Affiliative system highly linked to male buddy system – provides sense of safeness and connectedness in threatening environments
- Affiliative system, when one comes home, is now NOT entrained for safe environments, partner and child relating – loss of feeling safeness and affection plus increase threat system activation --- and sense emptiness disorientation and self-blame
- Therapists must explain – plus help understand experience of grieving

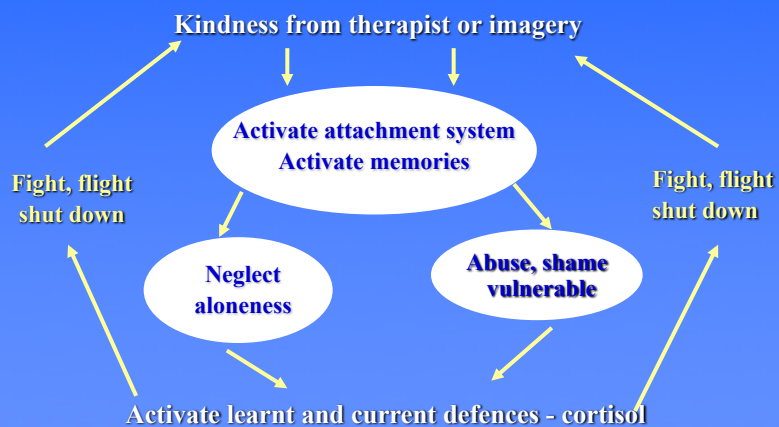
## Loneliness

- Most common experience for many clients is in a sense of loneliness –affiliative system is not accessible.
- The most common reason that people seek religion is to find a way of breaking through a 'feeling of being alone'
- Feelings of aloneness are highly associated with other emotions such as fear or anger
- Aloneness makes the threat emotions very difficult to work on and in particular the process of grieving
- CFT is particularly interested in trying to work with feelings of disconnection, alienation separation – this feeling of being inwardly alone.
- See Cacioppo, J.T. & Patrick, (2008) *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*. Norton: New York

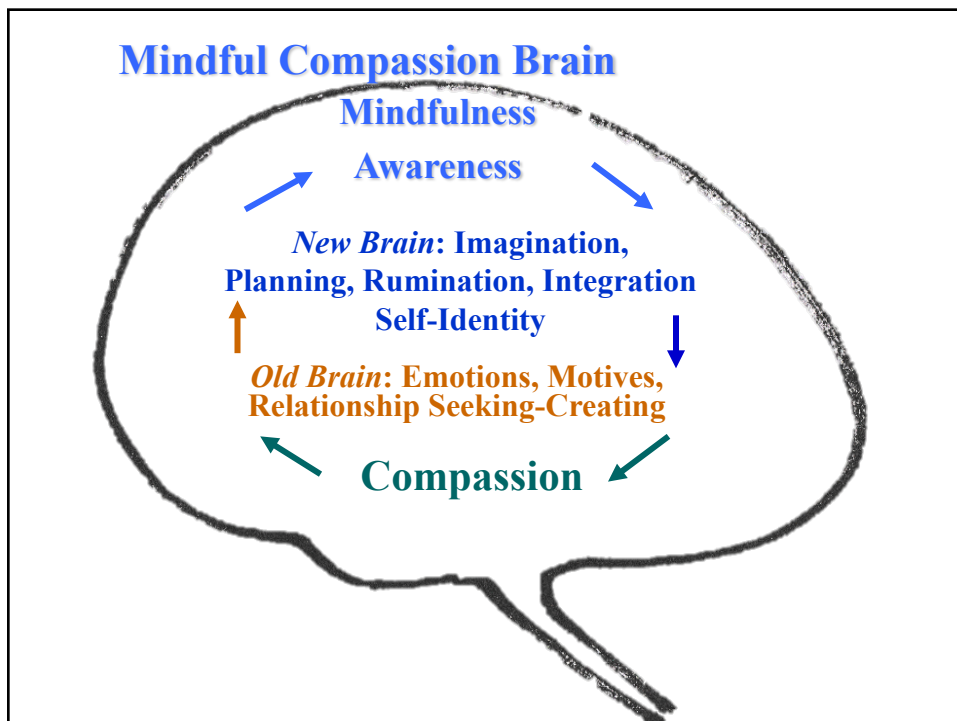


# Fears of Compassion

## Kindness, Attachment and Threat: Why helping is SO difficult



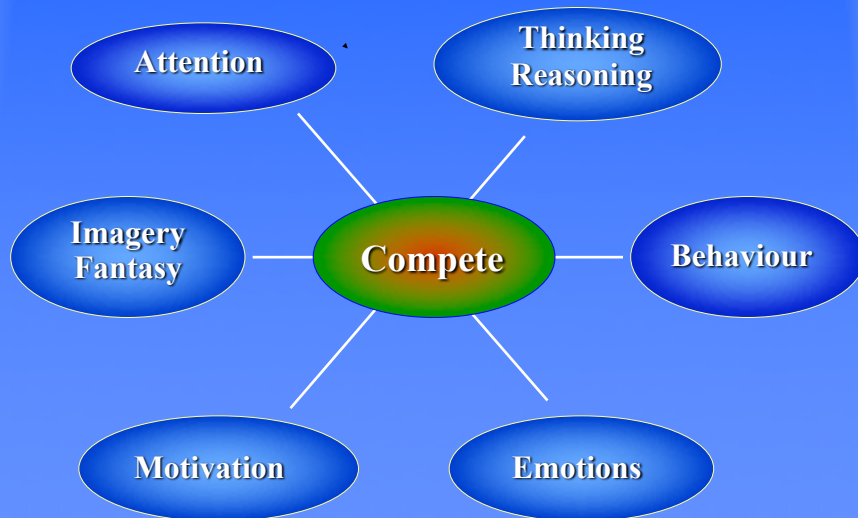
# Compassion Focused Therapy



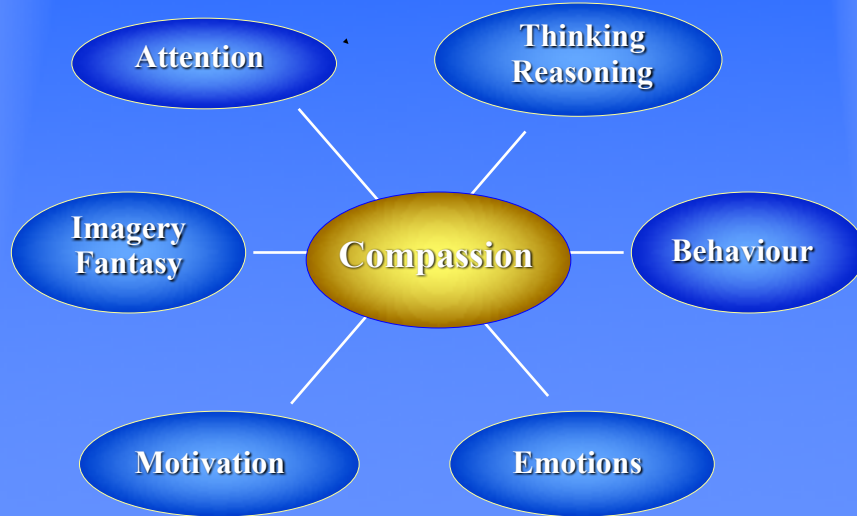
## Threatened mind can block compassion



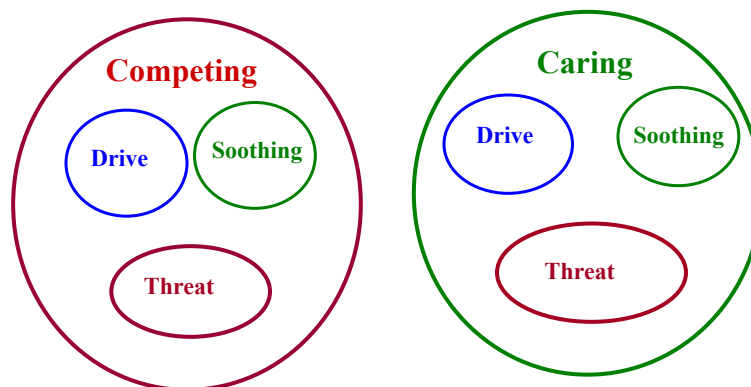
## Competitive mind can block Compassion



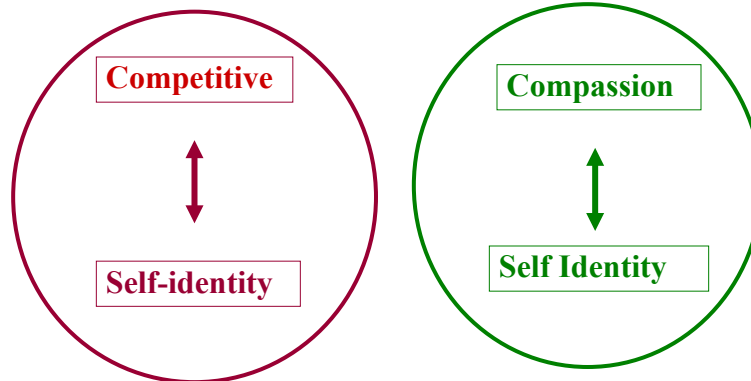
## Compassionate mind/mentality



## Motives and the Emotions unconscious and conscious



## Motives and the Emotions unconscious and conscious



### Understanding our Motives and Social

Motives evolved because they guide animals to do different things -- to survive and leave genes behind: Innate ones include being motivated to:

Avoid harms, find food, seek sexual partners, care for offspring, live in groups, compete for resources

For humans there is also new brain-led motives for seeking wisdom/knowledge, meaning, self-improvement, the desired self-identity – the self we want to be

Motives can conflict - with one suppressing another

Motives organise the mind because they direct attention and orientate emotion, behavioural and cognitive systems to reach goals.

Social motives require special processing systems for social cues/signals for self in reciprocal role relationships that can change moment by moment. These are called **social mentalities**

We develop social mentalities as 'inner role relationships' with ourselves – e.g. hostile or friendly and use similar signalling processes (e.g., voice tones)

### **The power of emotions**

- For most animals stimuli trigger emotions that trigger actions – basic evolved design –we are designed to be emotional led.
- Emotions make things matter – with them anything can -- without them nothing may
- Emotions are linked to immediate stimulus properties – but also history.
- Emotions will organise the mind and control behaviour and thinking (as they are designed to do) unless individuals become mindful and pay attention and choose otherwise
- Core question for us is:  
**would we rather have compassionate reflective wisdom or impulsive emotions running our minds?**

*Forgive others,  
not because they  
deserve forgiveness,  
but because you  
deserve peace.*

– Jonathan Lockwood Huie



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## **Compassionate Mind Foundation 2006-**

**To promote wellbeing through the scientific understanding and application of compassion via:**

- Helping to identify researchers and others who have a specific interest in the scientific study of compassion and its underlying processes, and facilitate communication and interchange between them.
- To support research and teaching of the compassion focused approach to human difficulties.
- To facilitate open discussion on how to further promote a compassionate focus in many domains of human activity.
- To engage in activities and raise funds to support the work and aims of the Foundation.