

# what is >STRESSING< you out?

There is so much pressure to "do and be your best" in school, at home, online, in after-school activities and your social life. Stress is just about everywhere!



## Stress

When your body reacts to stress, you can feel it. It's the sensation known as fight-or-flight. You may feel energy surge through your body if you are worried or anxious about something, or if you are in an emergency. Your instincts take over and tell you that you are facing danger and you either need to defend yourself (fight) or get away (flight).

### What Stress Can Do

Stress can cause all kinds of problems. It can make a current problem worse or give you health problems such as:

- upset stomach
- headache
- trouble breathing
- dizziness
- chest pains
- heartburn
- muscle pain, aches, cramps
- trouble concentrating
- change in sleep habits
- change in appetite.

Stress affects everyone but reactions to stress vary from person to person. You can't make stress go away, but you can manage it.



## Time to Stress Less

Reducing stress isn't about changing your life, it's about changing yourself.

To get started, it's important to learn about yourself.

- What do you like?
- What do you dislike?
- What calms you down?
- What stresses you out?

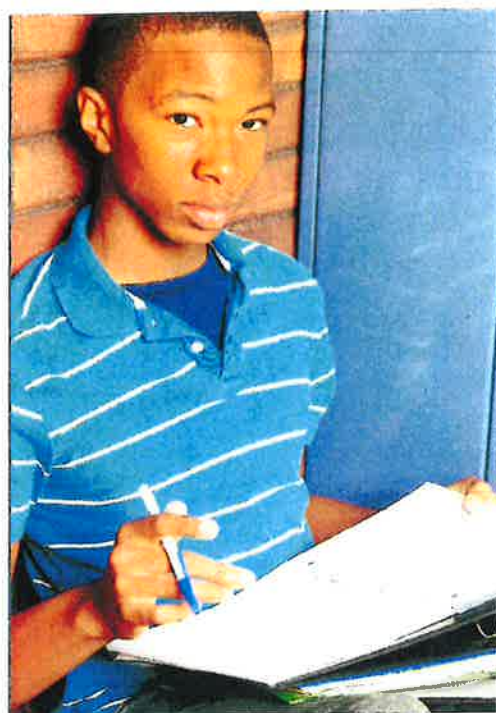
Knowing the answers to the questions will help you be on your way to managing stress.

### Here are some tips to help manage stress

- Maintain good health habits. Eat well-balanced meals and avoid caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. A healthy body tolerates stress more effectively.
- Get some kind of physical activity every day. Start with a short walk or stretching.
- Do an activity you enjoy.
- Get plenty of rest. Your body and mind need to "re-energize" each night.
- If you notice your mind racing or worrying about the past or future, take a minute to breathe deeply.
- Don't worry about things you can't change.
- Develop a positive attitude towards life. Recognize that some stress is useful and necessary.
- Avoid holding in feelings day after day. Instead, find a safe place to feel, express and embrace them.

For additional tips and resources to help you stress less, visit [changetochill.org](http://changetochill.org).

change  
to chill



### When to Get Help

Talk with your parents or another close family member or friend if stress interferes with your everyday life or you are having physical problems.

If you are or someone close to you is in crisis, call the free, 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

# THOUGHTS are **NOT** FACTS PRACTICE

When you put some space between you and your reaction, it changes your relationship to your thoughts—you can watch them come and go instead of treating them as facts.

If you're stuck on a negative thought, ask yourself:

1

**Is it true?**

Often the answer is, "Well, yes." This is the brain initially reacting—the autopilot you live with and believe is you.

2

**Is it  
absolutely true?**

Is this thought 100% accurate? Can you see the thought in a different way?

3

**How does  
this thought  
make me feel?**

Notice any storylines you're holding onto, and name your feelings: *sad, angry, jealous, hurt.*

4

**What would  
things be like if  
I didn't hold this belief?**

Imagine possible benefits to your relationships, energy levels, and motivation.



Yomind.Com  
great stuff!

## **Tool for Transformation: Breathe, Perceive, Respond**

If you feel yourself starting to get emotional and feeling strain, try this YoMIND tool for managing a situation. *Remember sometimes we can't change the situation around us....but we can change our perception of a situation.*

**BREATHE:** Take a breath, take several breaths when you feel challenge. Practice bringing attention to the breath daily so when you encounter challenges, your brain will already have healthy neural pathways and habits established so you will more likely remember this sequence.

**PERCEIVE:** Continue to breath, preferably with your eyes closed and **NOTICE.** Notice your body sensations. Notice your feelings. Notice what you might be needing. Notice what the other person might be needing. *Notice your thoughts, feelings and perceptions about what you see.*

**RESPOND:** Respond thoughtfully, with compassion, kindness and the intent to understand.

If you are still not happy with your state of mind, REPEAT. Breathe more, re-perceive, and then respond again. If you are still not happy your state of mind and the situation, REPEAT....etc.

### **Contemplation:**

***“What ever is our “most practiced” state of mind will become our default reaction during times of stress.”***

Whatever thoughts or actions we practice most will be the ones we use the most. Our thoughts, feelings and perceptions shape our brain and lay down a neural network that adapts and changes no matter if we are paying attention or not. The more we bring conscious awareness to our life, the more we are able develop healthy strategies for meeting our needs.



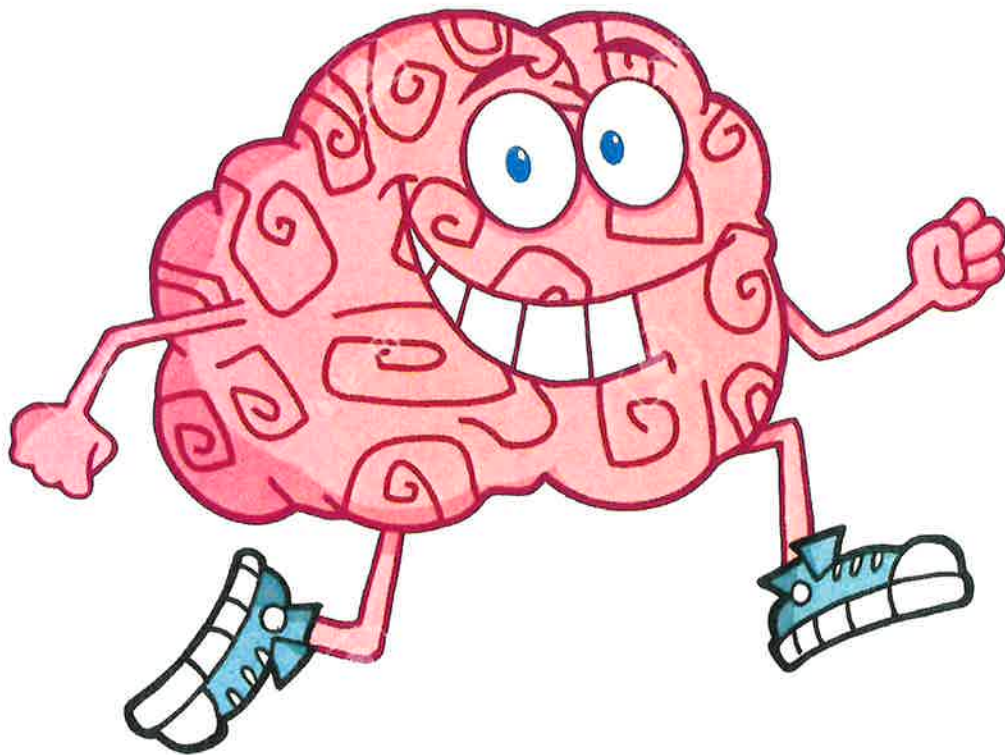
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# Brain Game:

How our brain responds to stress in the classroom

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## Introduction

1 in 4 public school children is likely to have experienced a traumatic event. Children who have experienced trauma have lost control over a major element of their lives and the desire to gain control can lead to behavioral challenges and difficulty learning in the classroom. The game is created to help educators 'see' inside the brain and deepening our understanding of how it feels to be impacted by toxic stress in school. By playing this game, we hope educators will draw from this experience to adopt trauma informed learning strategies in the classroom. Such strategies include unconditional positive regard, personalized learning, direct instruction in socio-emotional skills and a reframing on how we view defiance and lack of work completion. We also hope you have fun and enjoy collaborating with your colleagues!



### Object of the Game

The Brain Game should be played with at least 9 players (a demonstration can be done with 3), 3 teams (Red, Yellow, Blue) would each have 3 players: the Frontal Lobe, the Amygdala, and the Hippocampus. The goal of the game is for teams to assemble their puzzle pieces which represents the process of knowledge acquisition and synthesis. While playing, the amygdala may or may not impact your performance. Keep in mind how the different parts play a role in learning and when the game has been completed use the questions to debrief.

**Game may be used for educational purposes by participants of the TIE program only. Provide credit to the Center for Cognitive Diversity.**

**Objective:** Participants in this activity will learn:

1. The function of three major parts of the brain
2. How stress and trauma impact the functioning of the brain
3. How trauma and learning disabilities can impact a student's ability to learn
4. Accommodations and strategies for addressing learning challenges in the classroom

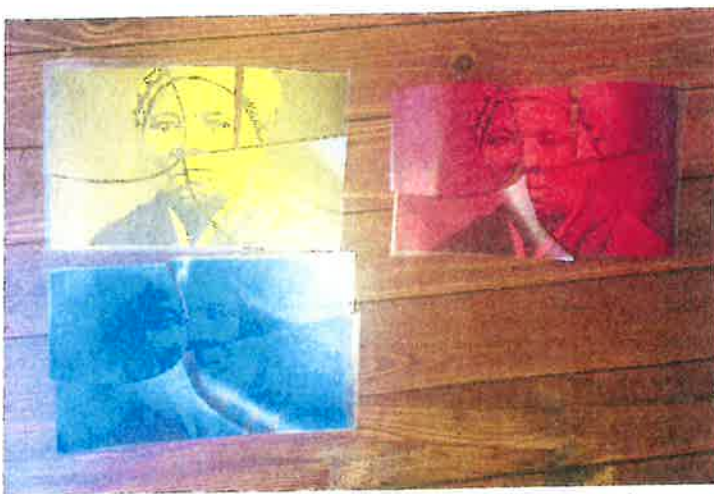
**Materials:**

2 sets of 'lessons' (pictures that are cut up into puzzle pieces and color coded for each team) for each team

3 PFC Labels color coded  
3 Hippocampus labels color coded  
3 Amygdala labels color coded  
3 Dice  
3 Scenario sheets

Print the brain game and create labels. Labels can be laminated and attached to string to wear or handed to participants to read. You can get creative! Put the PFC on a hat, the Amygdala on a giant spinner and the Hippocampus on a colored tray.

Get 2 red, 2 yellow and 2 blue pieces of paper. For the first round cut 1 page of each color into 8 even pieces. For the second round, cut the blue piece into 6 pieces that are even, cut the red piece into 6 pieces that are different, cut the yellow piece into 8 pieces that vary in size.



*Lesson 1 and 2*



*Lesson 3*

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### Rules:

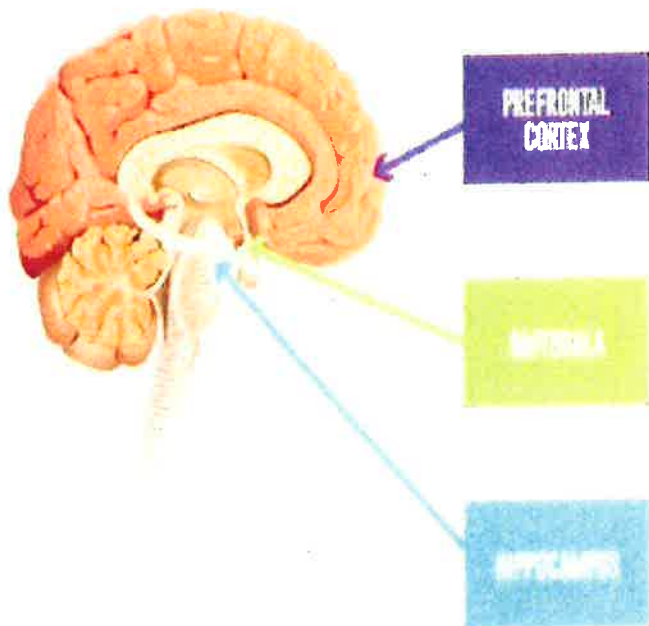
1. Each team has three members, the prefrontal cortex (PFC) must gather information (piece of puzzle) from the teacher and take it back to the hippocampus to store memory. Hippocampus must assemble the puzzle.
2. Each time the PFC makes a trip to the hippocampus, the amygdala must roll the dice. If **Amygdala!** is rolled then the amygdala must try to 'block' the PFC from reaching the hippocampus without touching them for the count of 10.
3. The game continues until each team has completed their lesson.

### Debrief:

1. What was happening to your team's brain?
2. How could the amygdala be activated? How does that impact your performance?
3. What was your team's reaction to the outcome of the game? Would you want to continue playing?
4. 10 minutes: as a team, write a quick description of your brain's learning needs and create a list of accommodations that the teacher could make in order to reduce barriers to being successful in school.



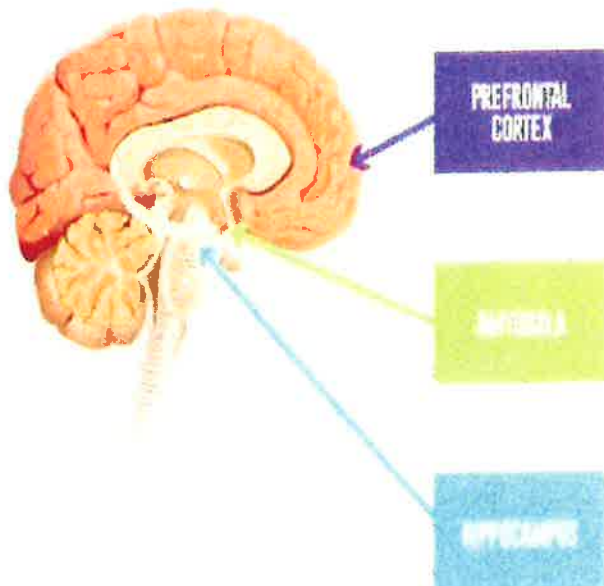
# The Prefrontal Cortex - Blue



## The Prefrontal Cortex or PFC

I am the brain's coach. I help you stop and think, organize your room, listen to others, and stay focused in class. I pass on information to the hippocampus for long term memory storage. Here's the trick, I only work when you are feeling safe and the amygdala is not activated.

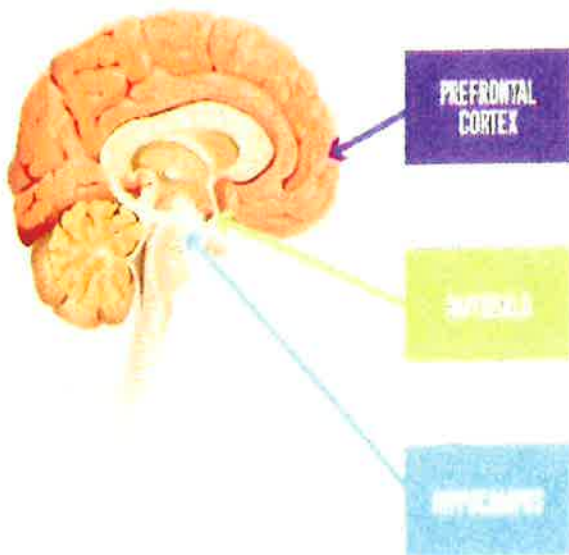
# The Prefrontal Cortex -Red



## The Prefrontal Cortex or PFC

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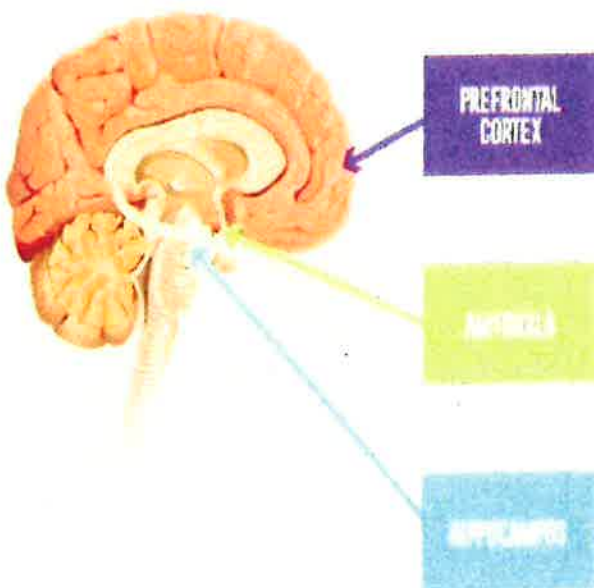
# The Hippocampus-Blue



## *The Hippocampus*

I hold all your past knowledge and experiences such as the directions to get home, facts about football, and the smell of your favorite flowers. The PFC gives me information to store in long term memory.

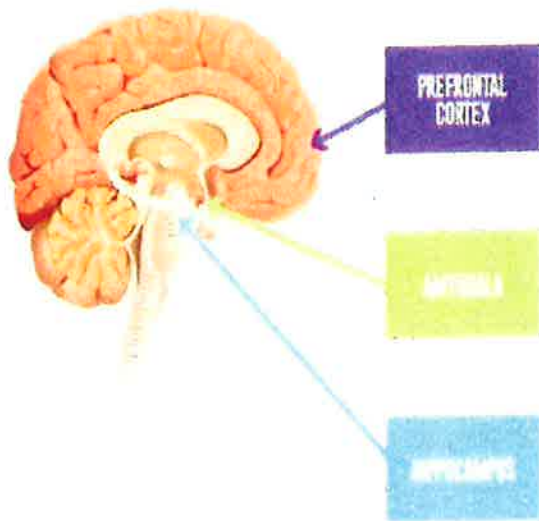
# The Hippocampus-Red



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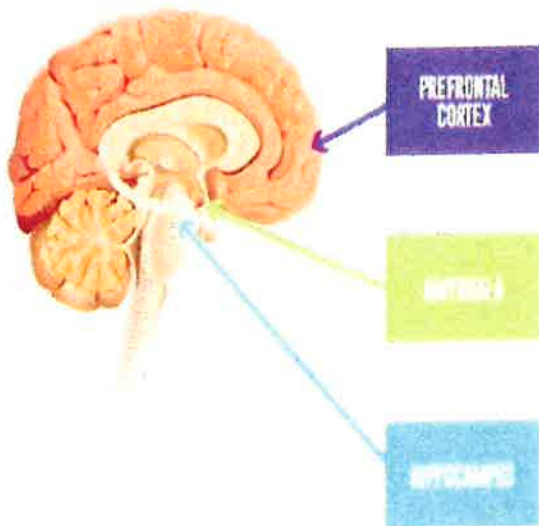
# The Prefrontal Cortex - Yellow



## The Prefrontal Cortex or PFC

I am the brain's coach. I help you stop and think, organize your room, listen to others, and stay focused in class. I pass on information to the hippocampus for long term memory storage. Here's the trick, I only work when you are feeling safe and the amygdala is not activated.

# The Amygdala-Blue

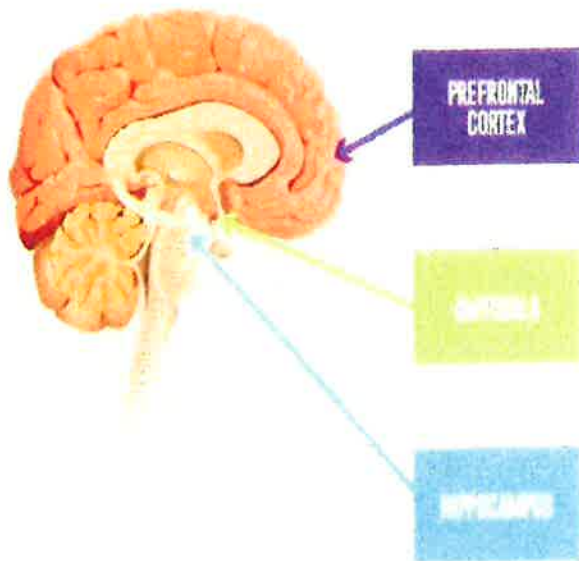


## The Amygdala

Ever act without thinking? I help you survive by triggering the fight or flight response when you sense danger. This only works when I block information to the Prefrontal Cortex in order to help you act quickly. While I can try to save you from a mountain lion, I can also be activated in stressful situations and block your ability to learn. Deep breathing can turn me off.



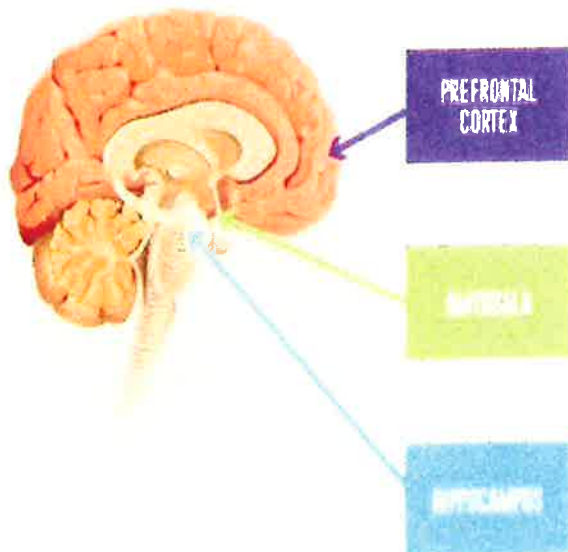
## The Amygdala-Yellow



### The Amygdala

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## The Amygdala-Red



### The Amygdala

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## Blue Team Scenario

- #2,4,6- **Keep it up!**
- #1,3,5- **Amygdala! Count to ten**

## Red Team Scenario

- #2 **Amygdala! Count to ten.**
- All other numbers: **Keep it up!**
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## Yellow Team Scenario

- #1 and #2 **Amygdala! Count to ten.**
- #3,4,5 **Keep it up!**
- #6 **Absence! Miss a round. Wait until all other teams have gotten a new piece to begin.**

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## Lesson 1

Assemble teams (Red, Green, Yellow). Teacher holds 'information' (which are identical pictures cut the same way for each team). The frontal lobe takes one piece of information at a time to the hippocampus and the hippocampus assembles it.

This is an example of an idealized classroom with no learning differences or stressors/trauma.

## Lesson 2

Using the same teams and the same information now introduce the role of the amygdala. Before each frontal lobe is able to



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access the information, the amygdala must roll the dice and follow the directions on the chart based on the number rolled. If the amygdala is activated then they must 'block' (no physical contact) the PFC on their way to the hippocampus.

This is an example of how stressors and trauma can impact the classroom.

### Lesson 3

This part of the lesson you can keep the same roles and teams or allow new players to join. They will now use the pieces for lesson 3 which are unique to the 3 teams. Each time the PFC tries to get information the Amygdala will roll the dice and follow directions. The hippocampus will work on

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assembling the pieces to complete the puzzle.

This is an example of how complex learning actually is in a classroom where children experience learning differences as well as stressors and trauma unequally.

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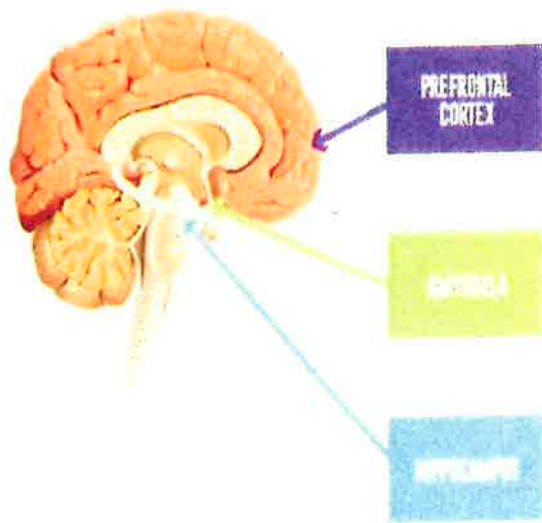
## Things to note:

The capacity to learn does not change by team. Similar to a child with trauma, stress and cortisol 'mask' their true abilities and make them feel overwhelmed, unfocused and not smart. When the frontal lobe is impacted, children have difficulty with memory, attention, self regulation and connecting with others. For children who are stressed, the amygdala becomes activated, for children who have been diagnosed with PTSD the amygdala does not have to be triggered because it is chronically activated. Deep breathing works to calm the amygdala because your breath is magic! Your breath is the only autonomic function of the body you can consciously and unconsciously control. That connection gives a powerful non verbal signal to your brain that you are safe. Because traumatic memory and stress is somatic, lodged in your body, the long slow exhale is a way to teach the body and brain that it is safe. If you were being chased by a bear and your life was in danger, you would not be able to breathe slowly! Thus your brain interprets that it is safe.

In teacher centered classrooms, children with stress and trauma can fall behind. Because their performance compared to others is so apparent, this can lead to further stress and a state called 'learned helplessness,' in which a child views their efforts as meaningless to avoid something unpleasant so they stop trying. One solution is to increase choice, control and collaboration into the classroom setting. This increases motivation, decreases competition and a need to finish first and improves a child's sense of agency in the classroom.



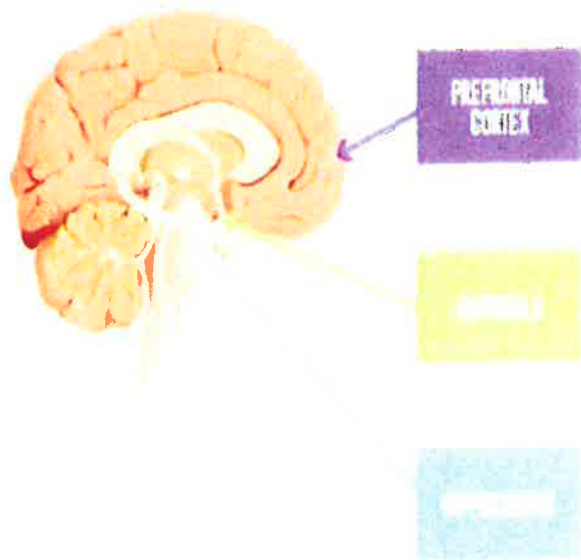
# The Hippocampus-Yellow



## The *Hippocampus*

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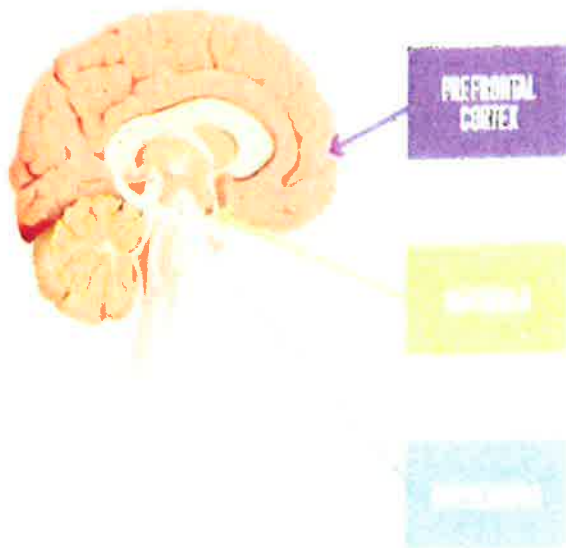
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## The Amygdala-Red



### The Amygdala

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