

THE BRAIN AND TRAUMA MITIGATION: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR VETERANS

Kim M. McGinnis, PhD
Chief Judge
Pueblo of Pojoaque
Judge@Pojoaque.org



Trauma Responsive Organizations



Understand, recognize, and respond to trauma

Focus on physical, psychological, and emotional safety

Help participants rebuild a sense of control and empowerment

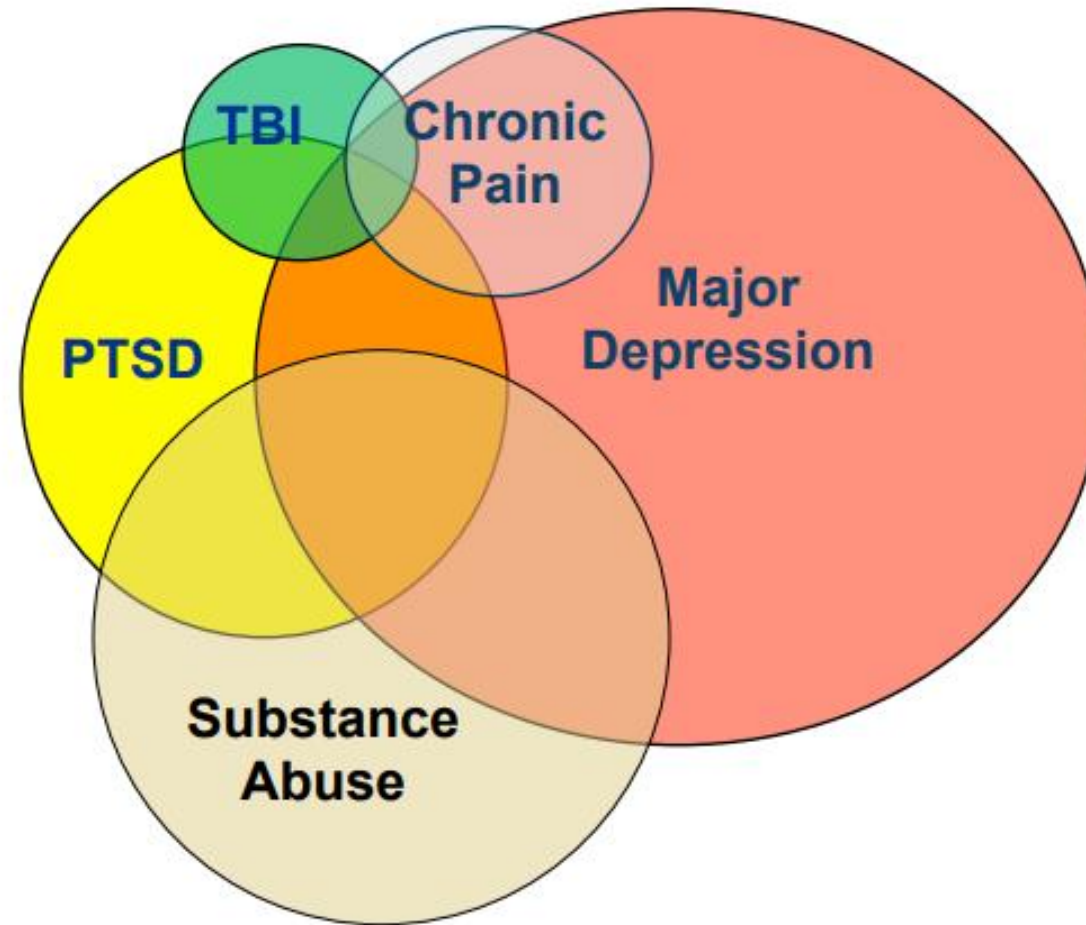
Trauma

An experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope/stay present

Act first. Think later.



Military Personnel: Co-Occurring Disorders



TBI, traumatic brain injury
Stein MB, McAllister TW. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2009;166:768-776.

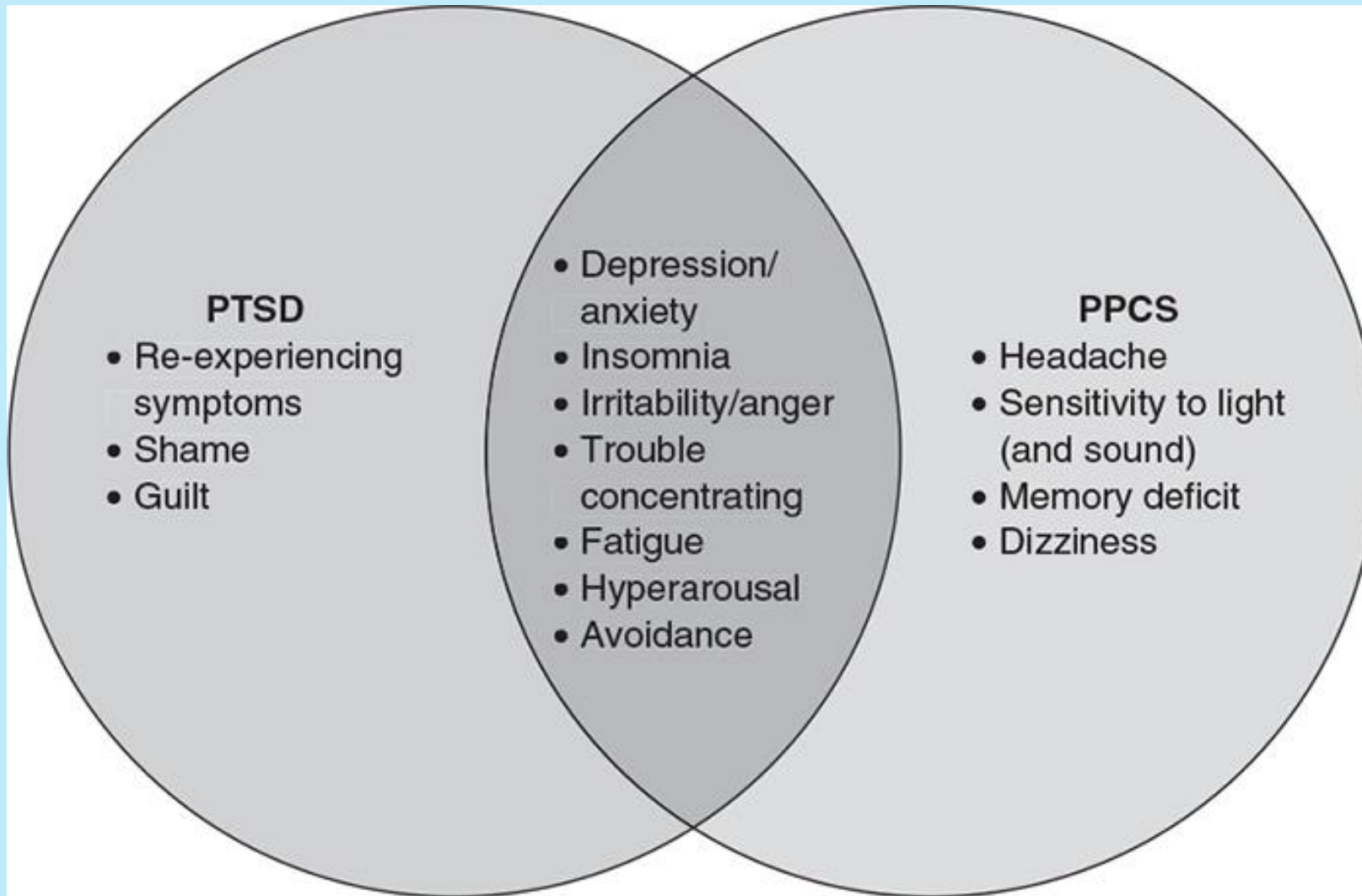
Traumatic Brain Injury



An alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain trauma, caused by an external force

(Menon et al., 2010, p. 1638; Common Data Elements for research on TBI and Psychological Health)

Overlap: TBI and PTSD



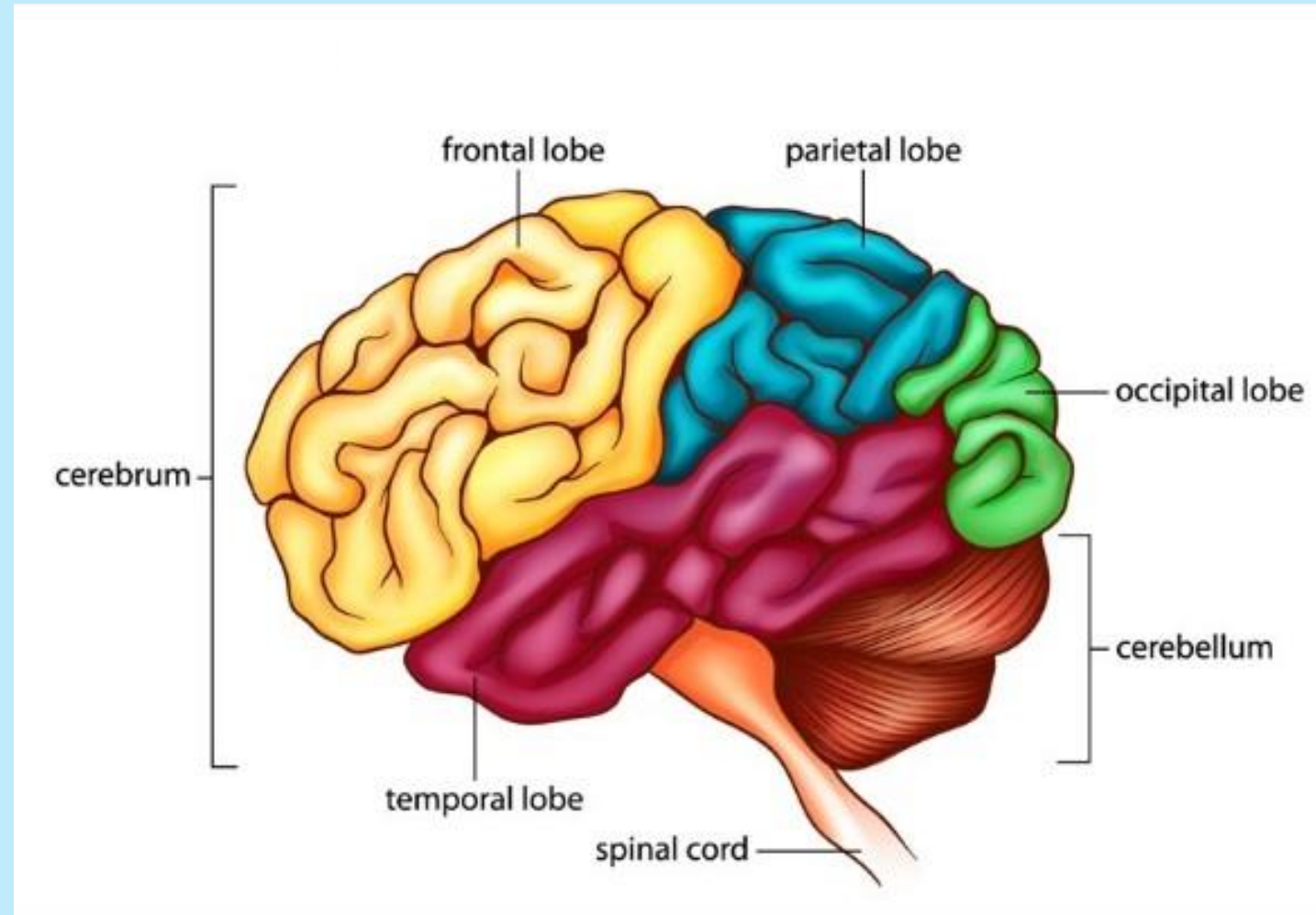
PPCS: Persistent Post-Concussion Symptoms (TBI)

People are usually highly stressed when they have to deal with us

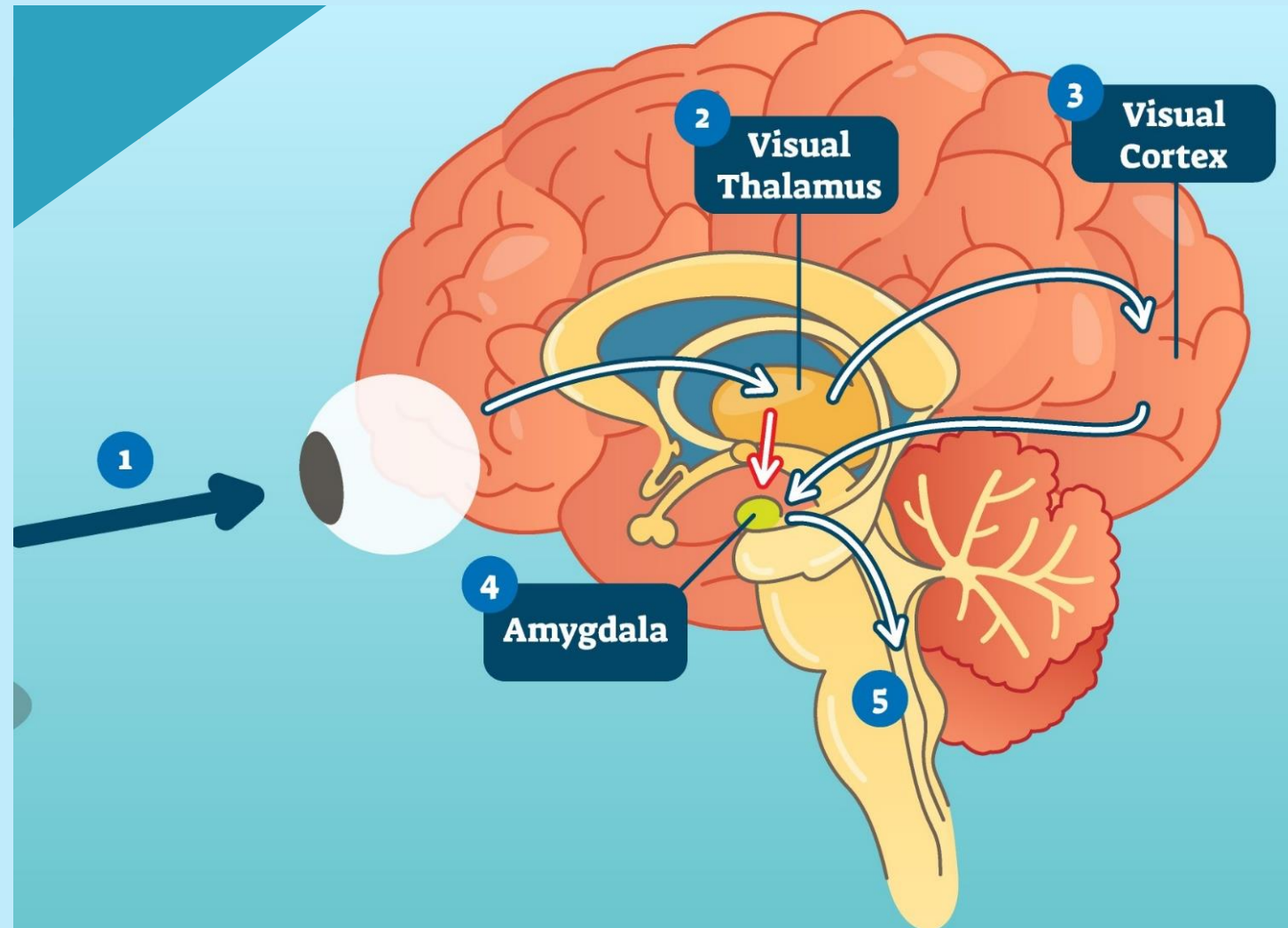


Trauma/Stress Response

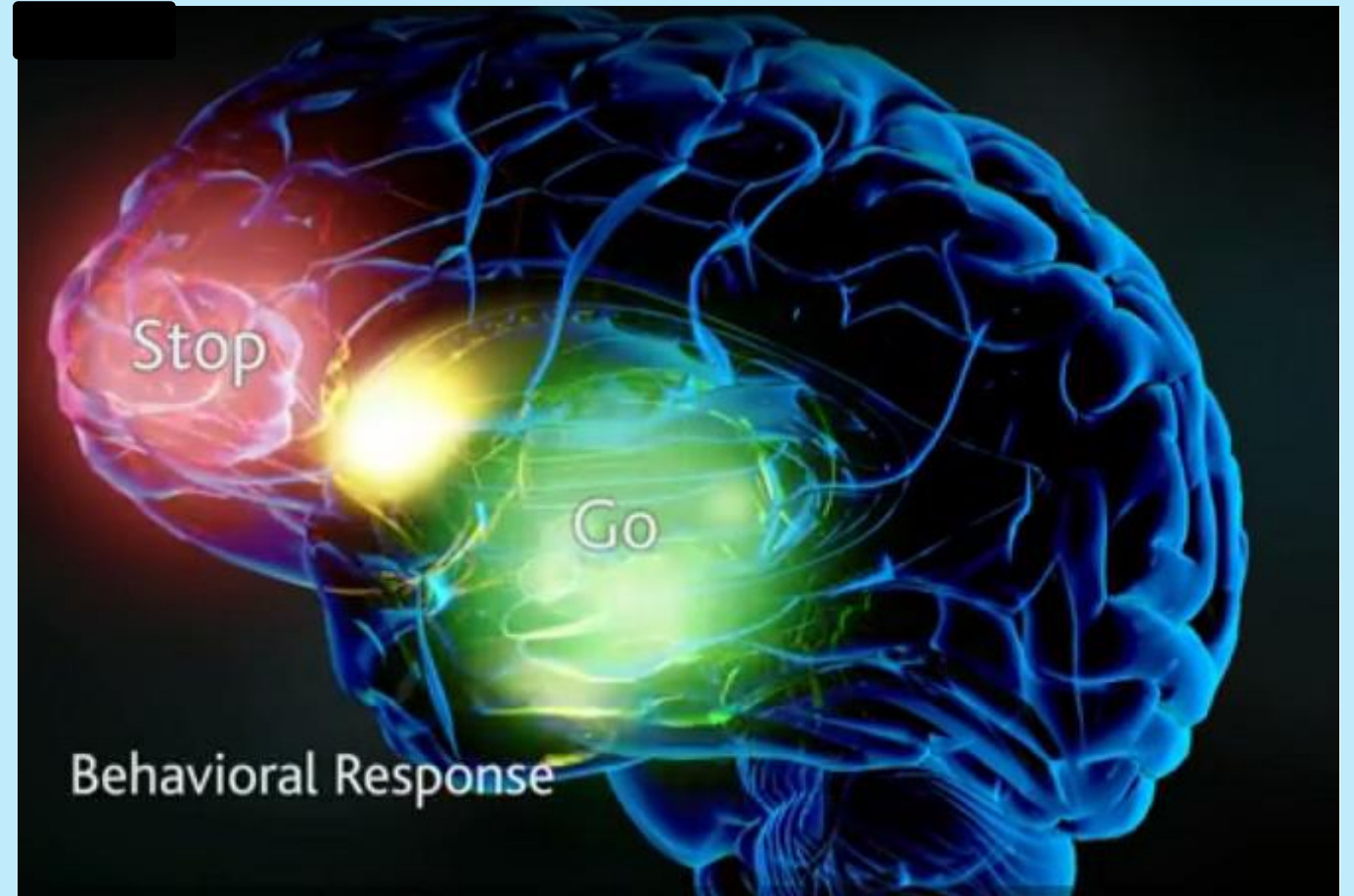
- A natural response to an unnatural circumstance
- Brain survival mode/self preservation
- Hypervigilance
- May cause people to act in unexpected ways



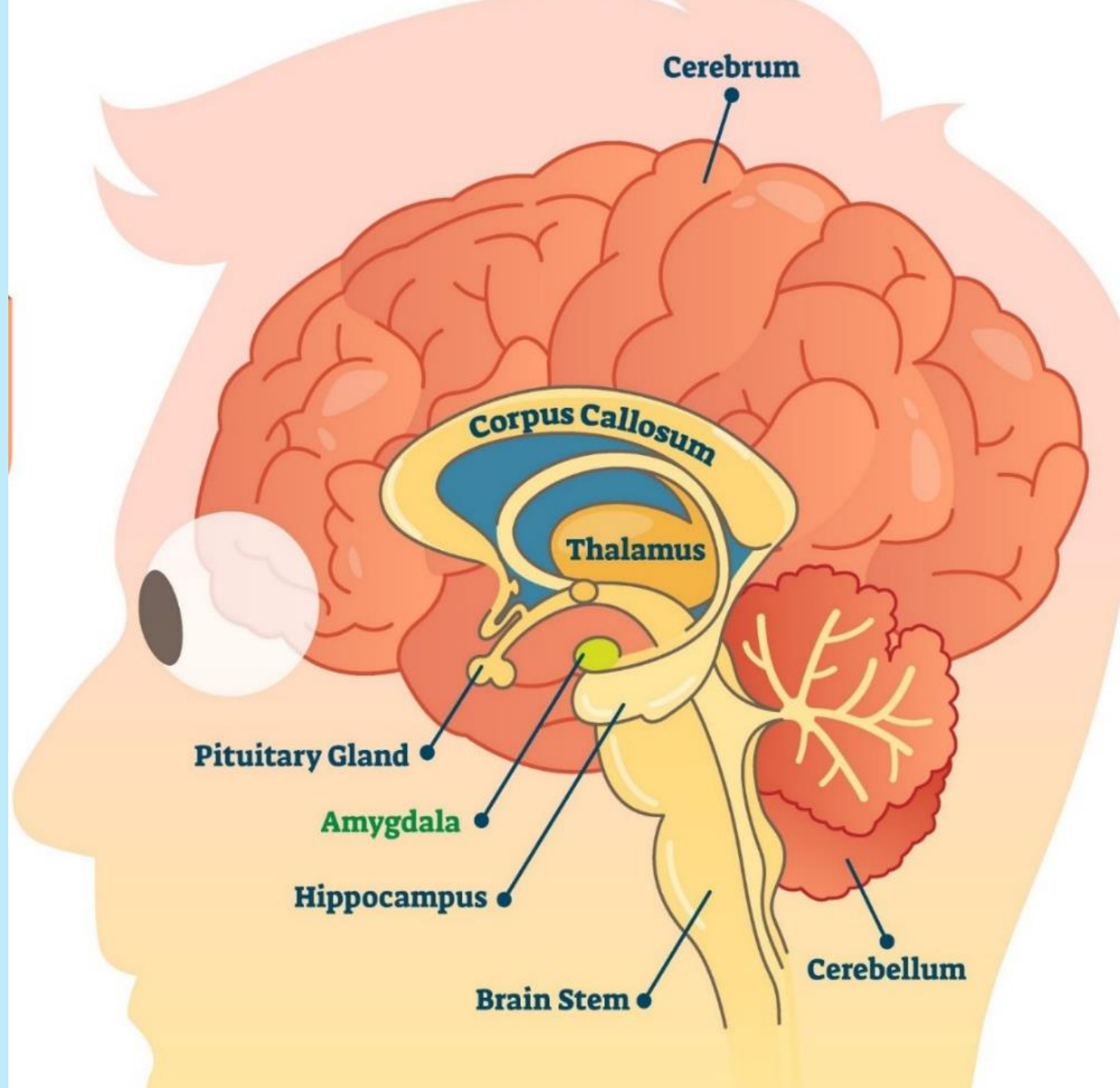
- **Thalamus:** receives sensory input and relays to amygdala and cortex
- **Amygdala:** smoke alarm; emotional information about situations/conditioned responses
- **Hippocampus:** storage/ retrieval of emotion laden memories with input from amygdala
- **Pre-frontal cortex/cerebrum:** forethought/planning; impulse control. Goal directed behavior.



Pre-Frontal Cortex = Brakes

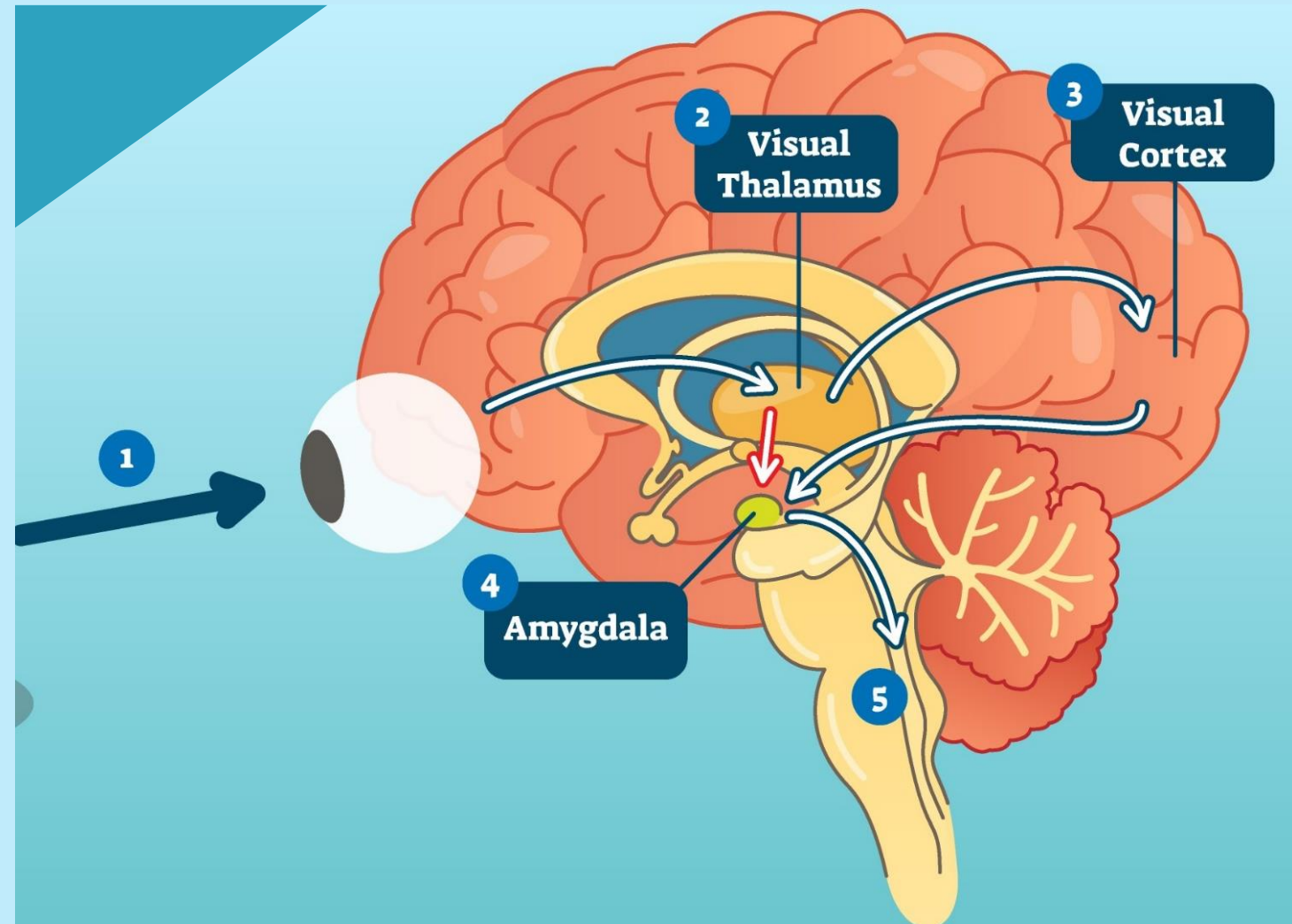


Amygdala Hijack

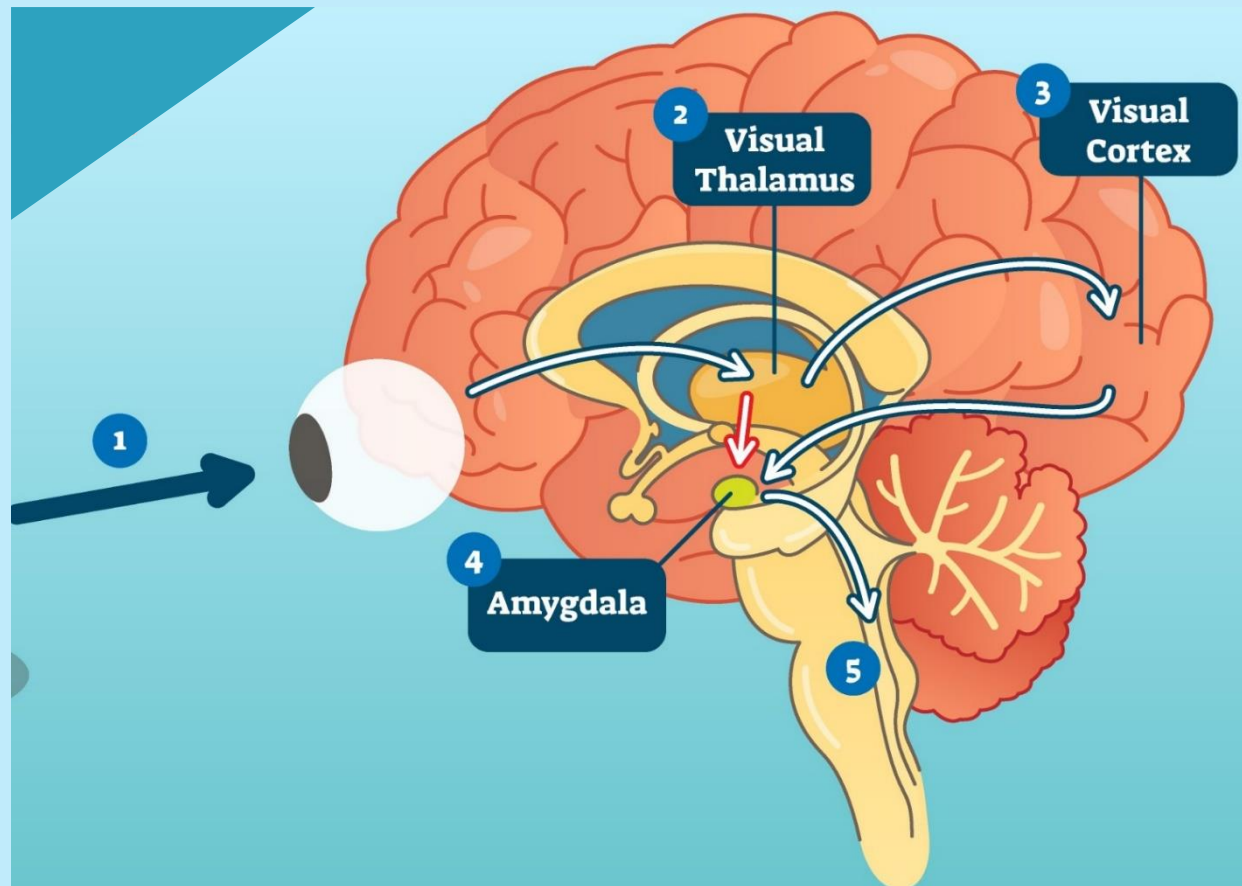


Threat/Trauma Trigger

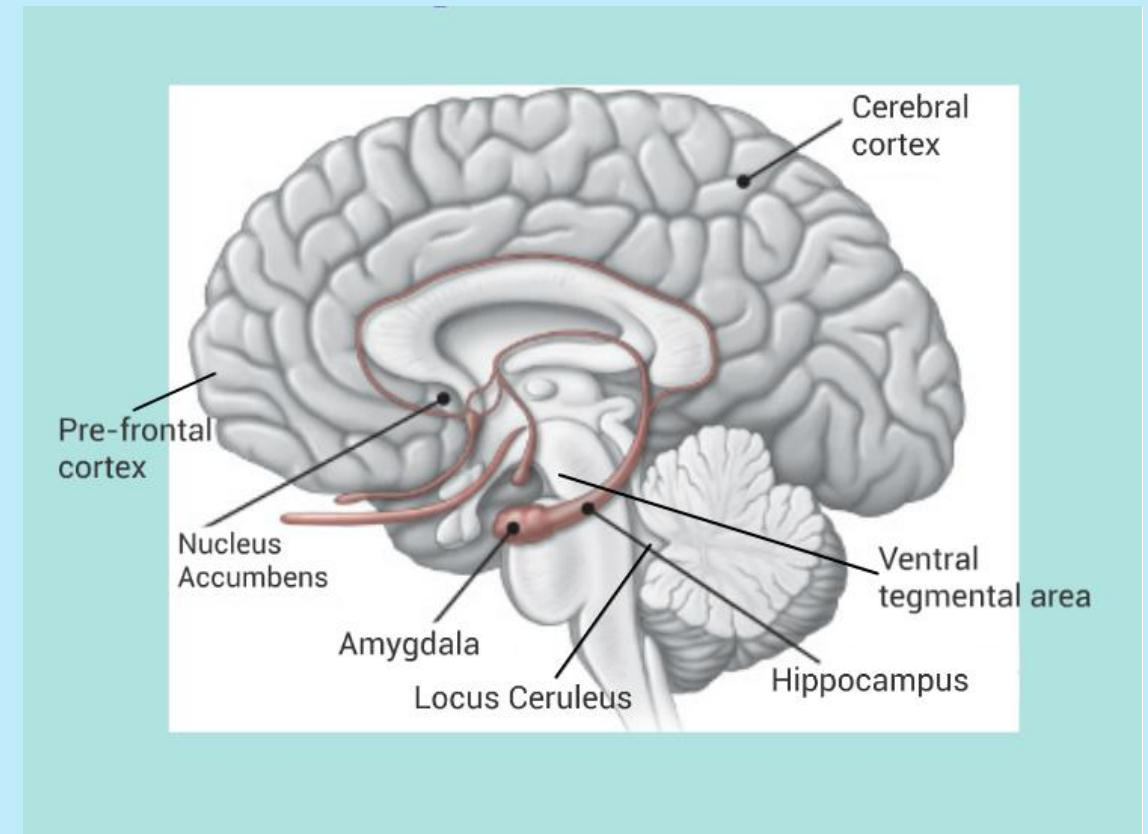
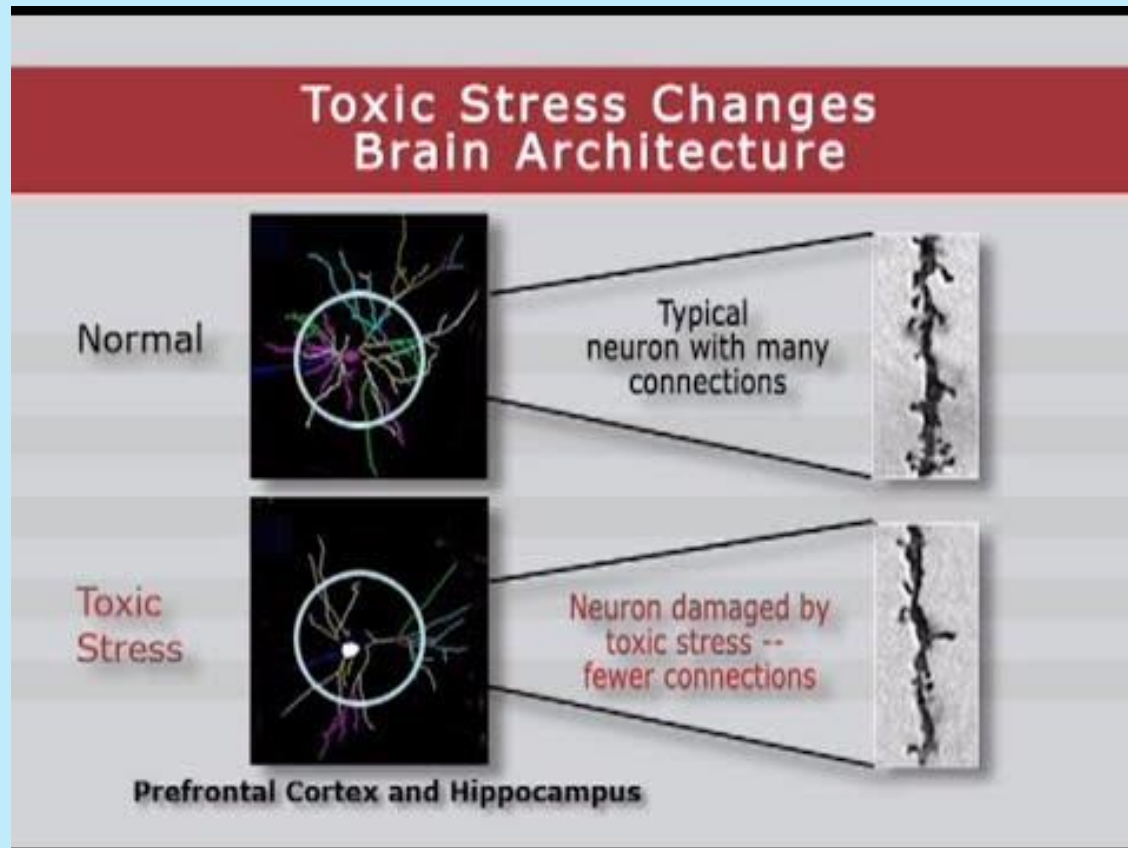
Fight
Flight
Freeze
Surrender



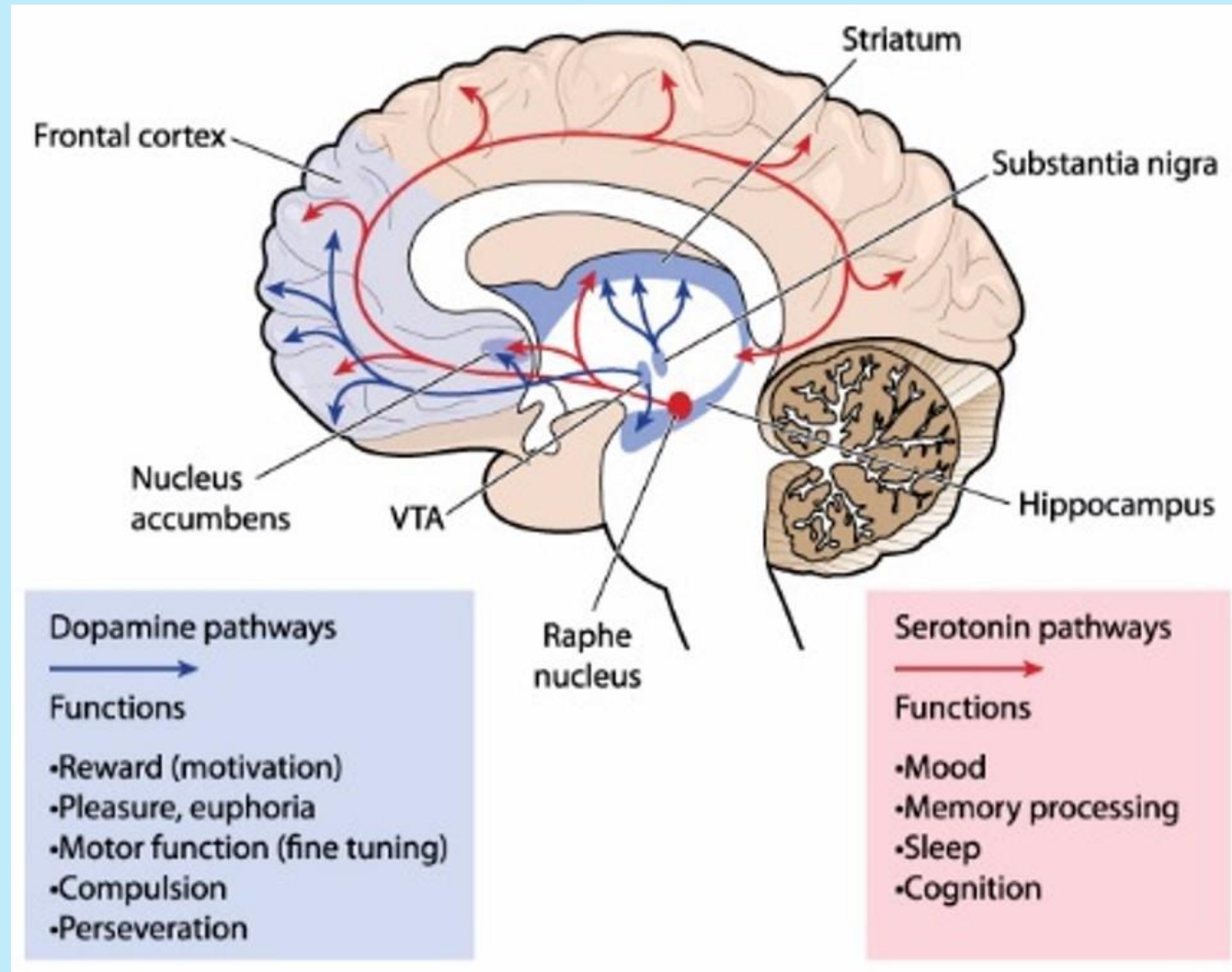
What if the mountain lion lives with you?



Toxic/Chronic Stress/Trauma Remodels the Brain

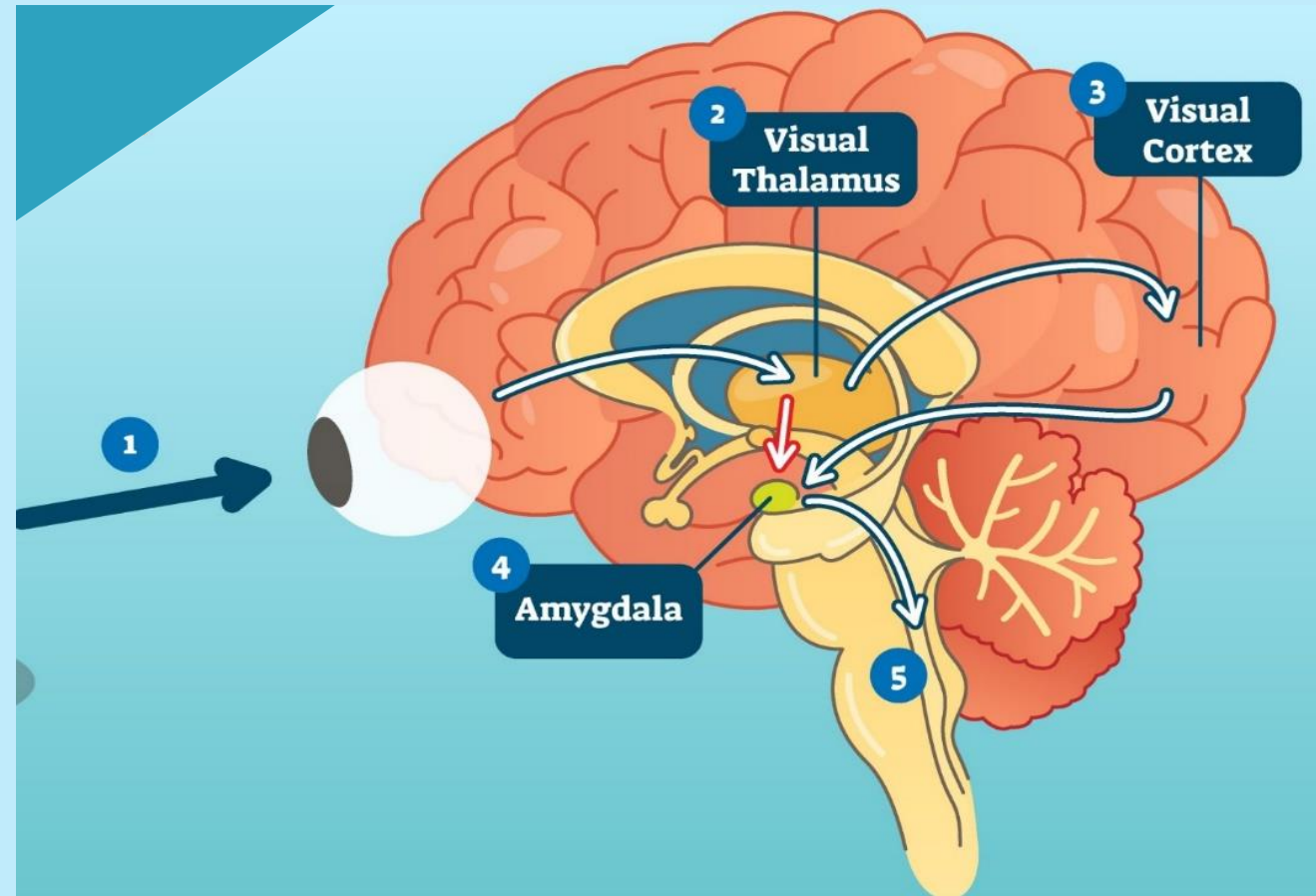


Motivation Pathway

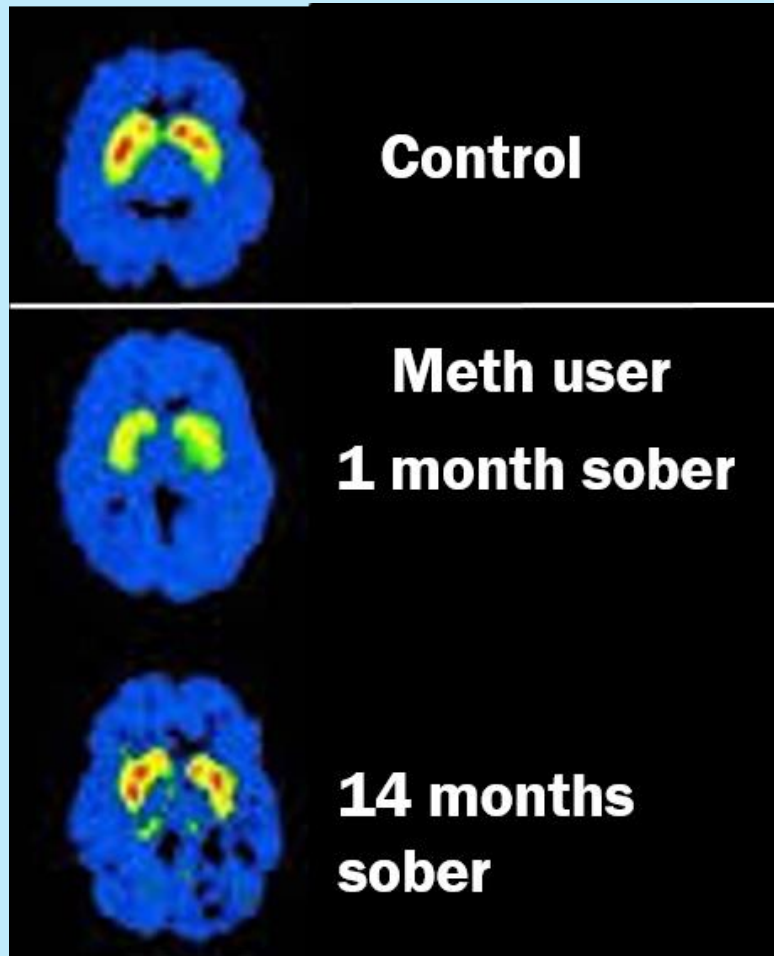


Conditioned Response

- Hippocampus
- Amygdala
- Pre-frontal cortex

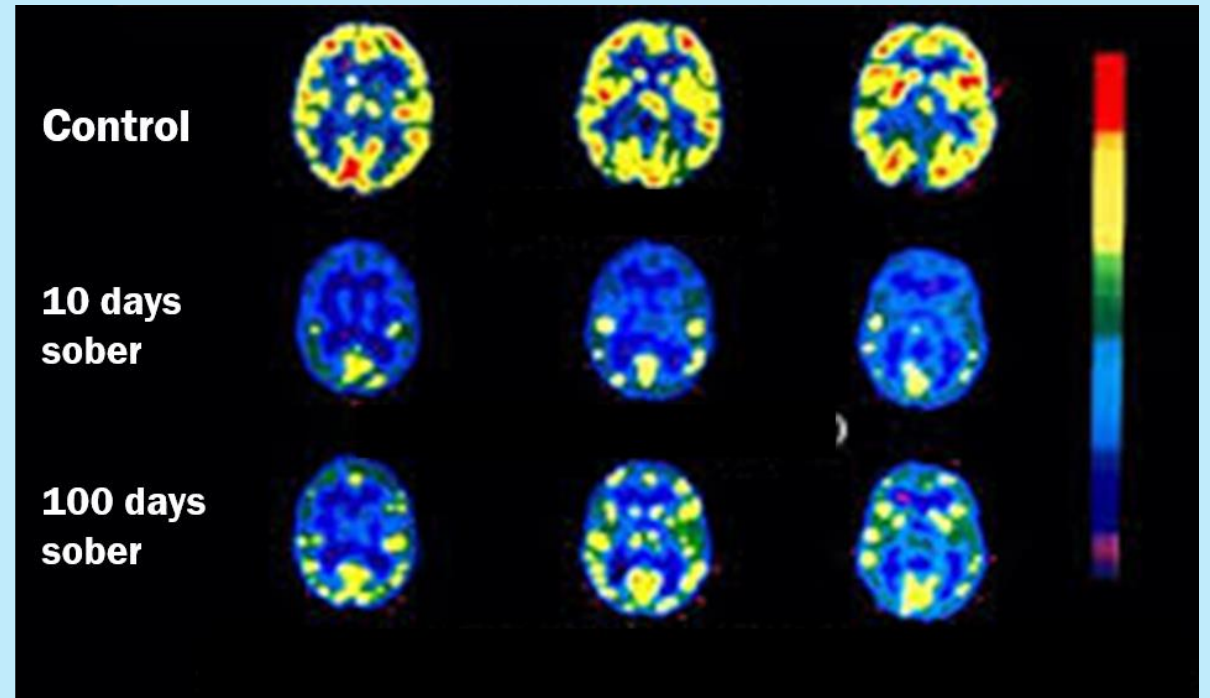


D2 Receptors (meth)

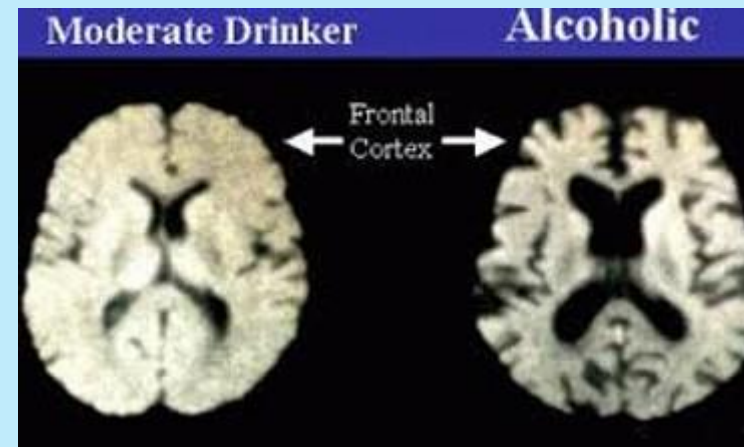


Source: NIDA

Glucose Metabolism (cocaine)



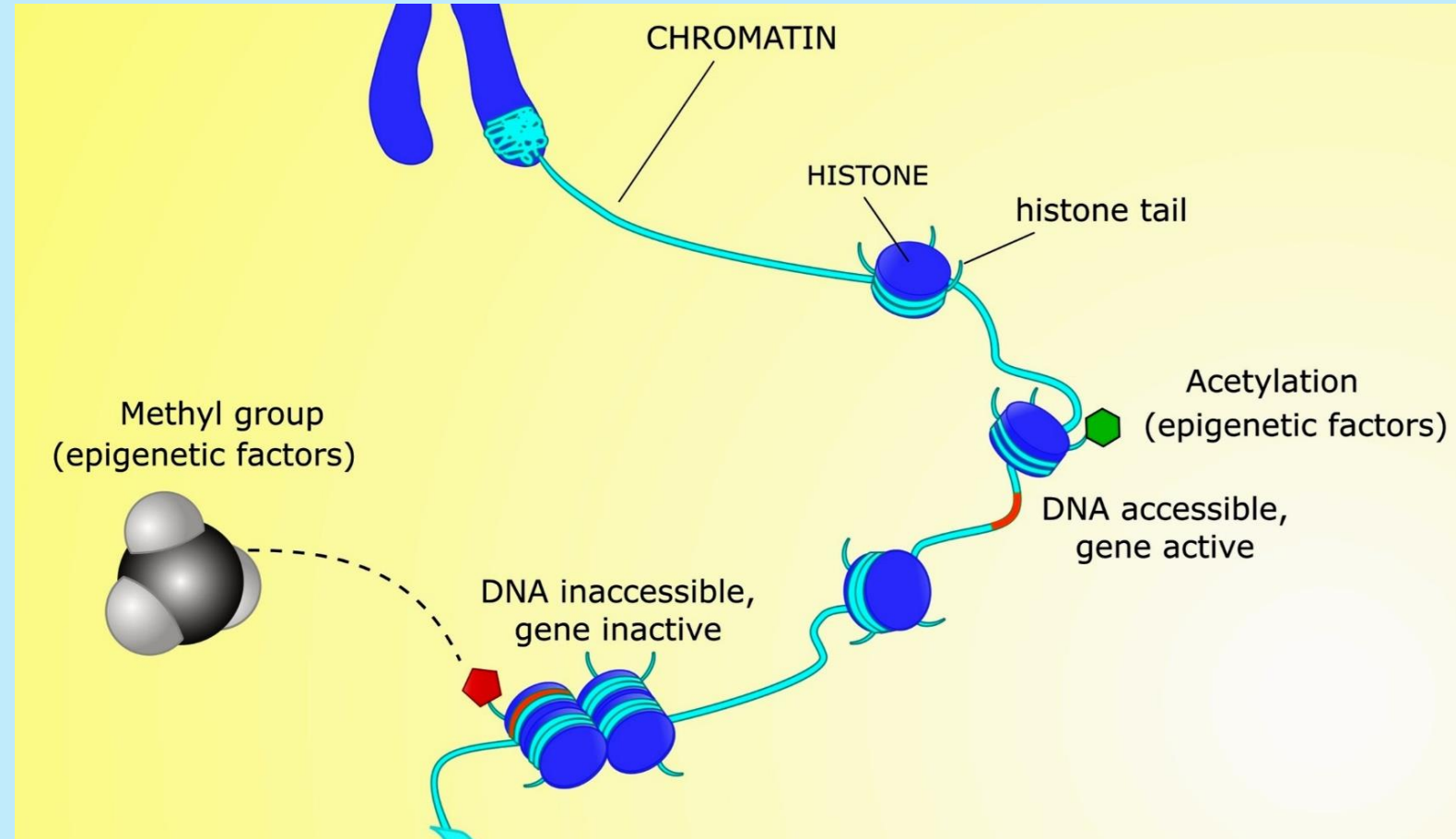
Atrophy



Epigenetics / Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma is
“a constellation of
characteristics associated
with massive cumulative
group trauma across
generations”

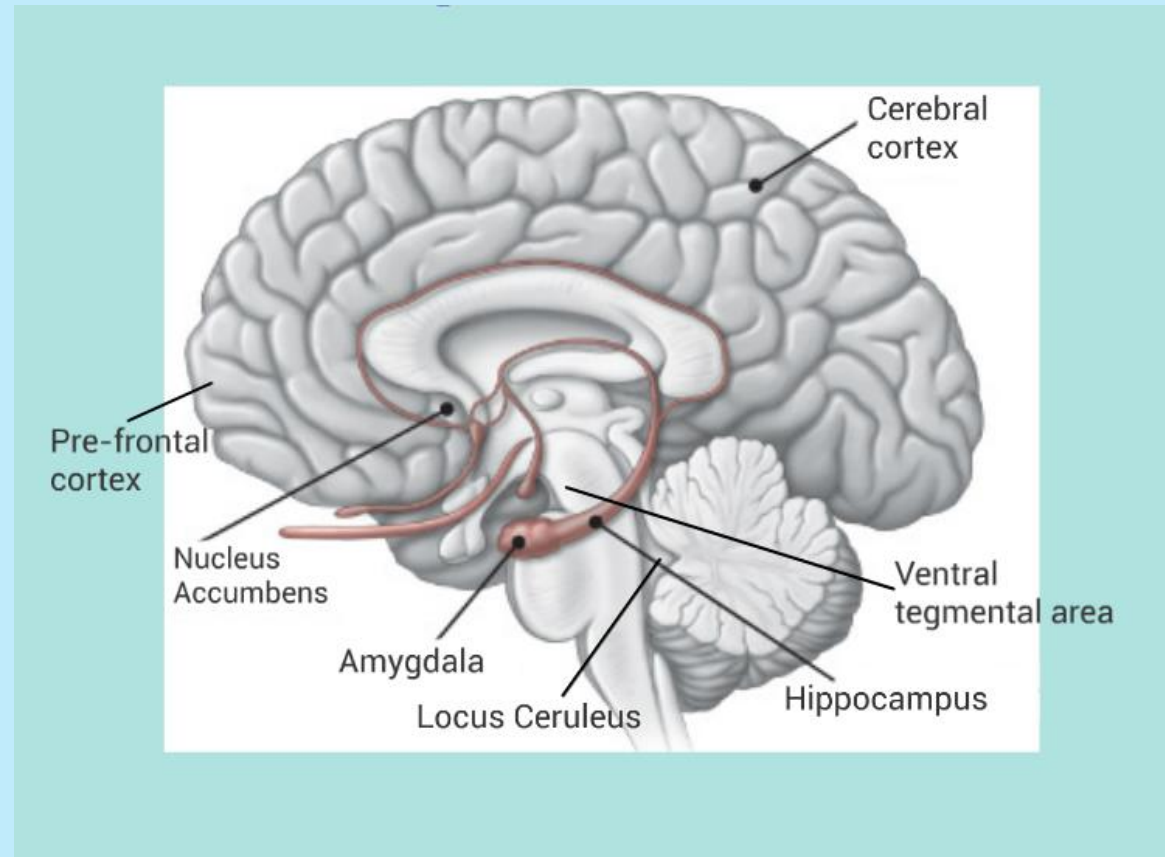
–Dr. Maria Yellow
Horse Braveheart (1999)



Relapse

- Conditioned response (context-related)
- Stress/Trauma
- Re-exposure to substance

50% of people who get treatment for any addiction remain sober after first year



Trauma Informed, Healing Focused Courts



Rat Park/Decrease Social Isolation



Healing Happens through Connection and Relationship

Resilience comes from safe, stable, nurturing, supportive relationships and environments



Pro-Social Activities

- Traditional crafts, cultural connections
- Outdoor activities: hiking, fishing, nature walks
- Group outings: movies, bowling
- Community meals
- Peer Support Groups







Environment

- Promote SAFETY
- Create an environment conducive to limiting arousal
- Environment should be comfortable: temperature, light, and noise

Rules Reduction in Wellness Court

~~No food or drink
No gum
No hats
No sunglasses
No shorts
No swearing~~

Is the rule about safety or support?

Or is the rule used to exert power and control over the participant?



Working Toward a Trauma Informed/Healing Focused Wellness Court

- Trauma Assessment
- Trauma Certification for Staff
- Motivational Interviewing training for all staff, including the judge
- Seeking Safety or other trauma-focused groups
- Reflective Supervision



Trauma Informed Communication



- Maintain a calm/patient demeanor (open face)
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Allow plenty of time for the participant to respond
- Know that slow responses do not equal lower intelligence

JUDGE'S COMMENT	PERCEPTION OF TRAUMA SURVIVOR	TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH
"Your drug screen is dirty."	"I'm dirty. There is something wrong with me."	"Your drug screen shows the presence of drugs."
"Did you take your pills today?"	"I'm a failure. I'm a bad person. No one cares how the drugs make me feel."	"Are the medications your doctor prescribed working well for you?"
"You didn't follow the contract, you're going to jail; we're done with you. There is nothing more we can do."	"I'm hopeless. Why should I care how I behave in jail? They expect trouble anyway."	"Maybe what we've been doing isn't the best way for us to support you. I'm going to ask you not to give up on recovery. We're not going to give up on you."
"I'm sending you for a mental health evaluation."	"I must be crazy. There is something wrong with me that can't be fixed."	"I'd like to refer you to a doctor who can help us better understand how to support you."



Stakeholder Groups

- Create a shared definition of trauma
- Prioritize secondary trauma
- Solicit support of community members



Neuroplasticity

Thank you!



Judge Kim McGinnis –
Judge@Pojoaque.org