

What Survival Looks Like...

# In Primary School



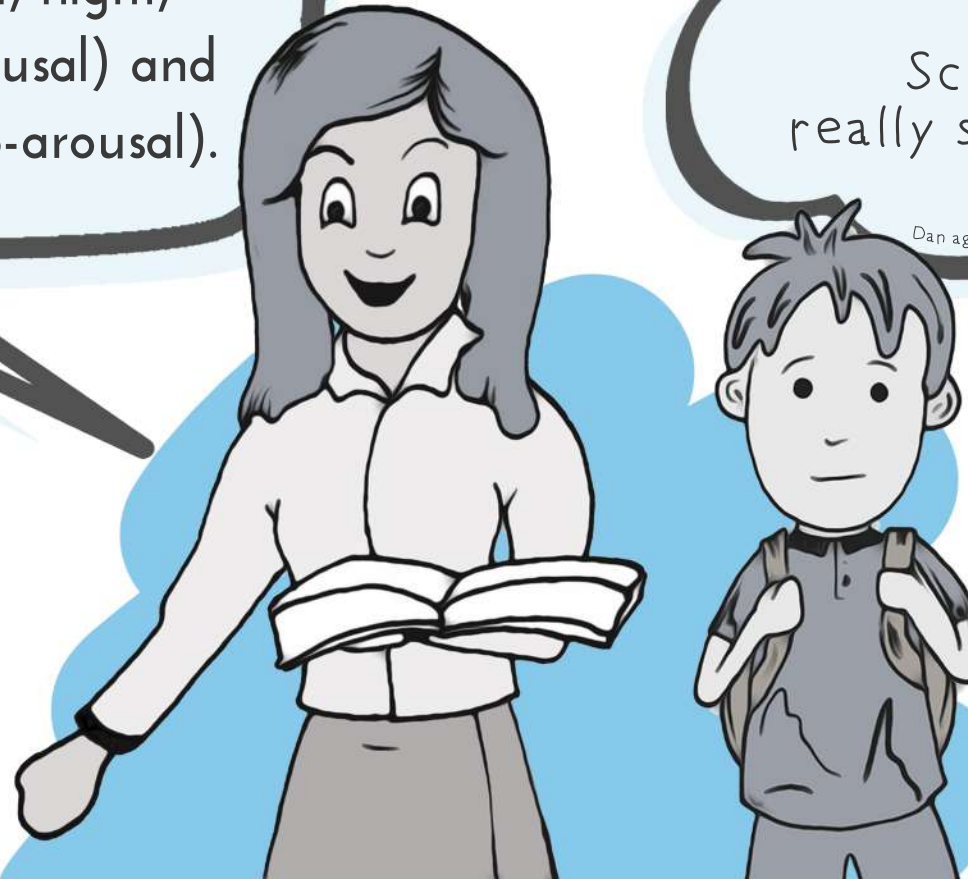
When we think and feel we are in danger, our body automatically goes into survival mode.

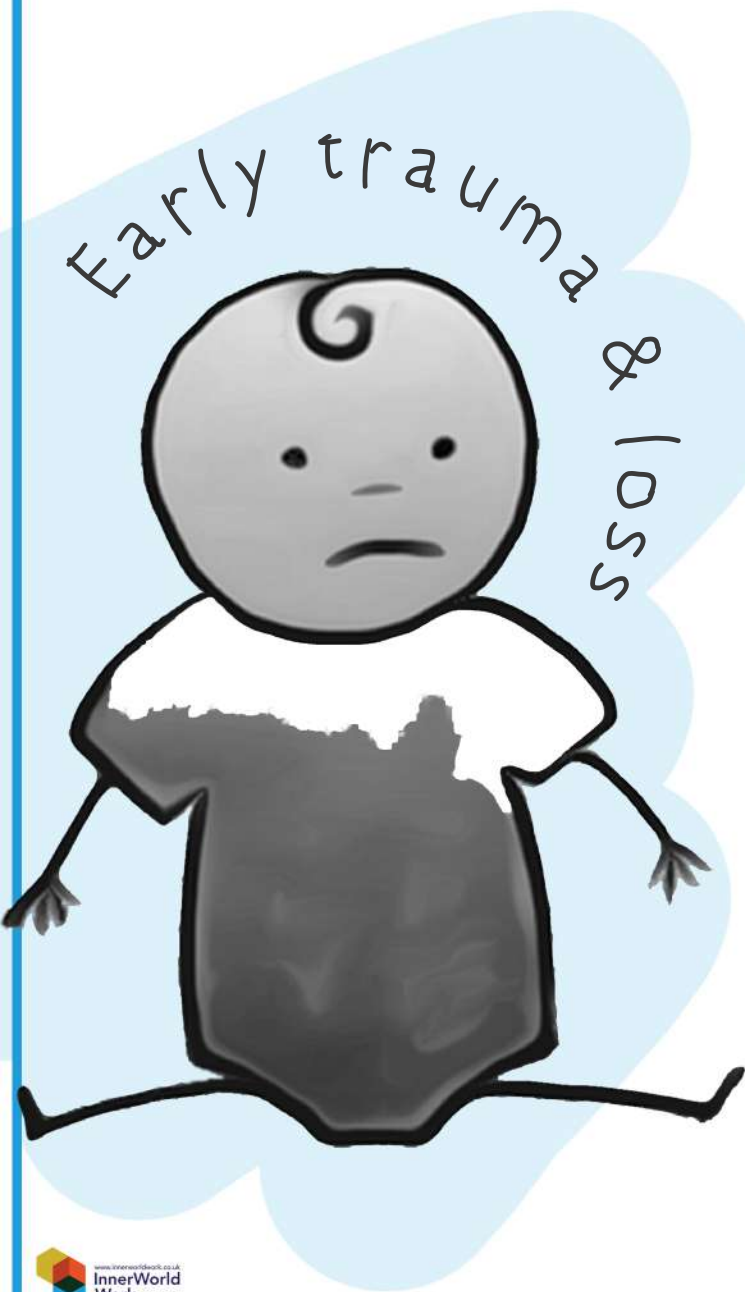
Survival mode is our fight, flight, freeze responses (hyper-arousal) and our collapse response (hypo-arousal).

“Do you know where I learnt to be brave?”

School - it's a really scary place.”

Dan aged 5





When I was little, I felt very unsafe a lot of the time and this has impacted the way my brain developed.

The lower part of my brain (my amygdala) doesn't always communicate with the higher part of my brain to help me to accurately assess the people and the environment around me. I often think and feel like I am under attack even when I'm actually very safe. My lower brain disconnects from my higher brain and activates survival mode to protect me.

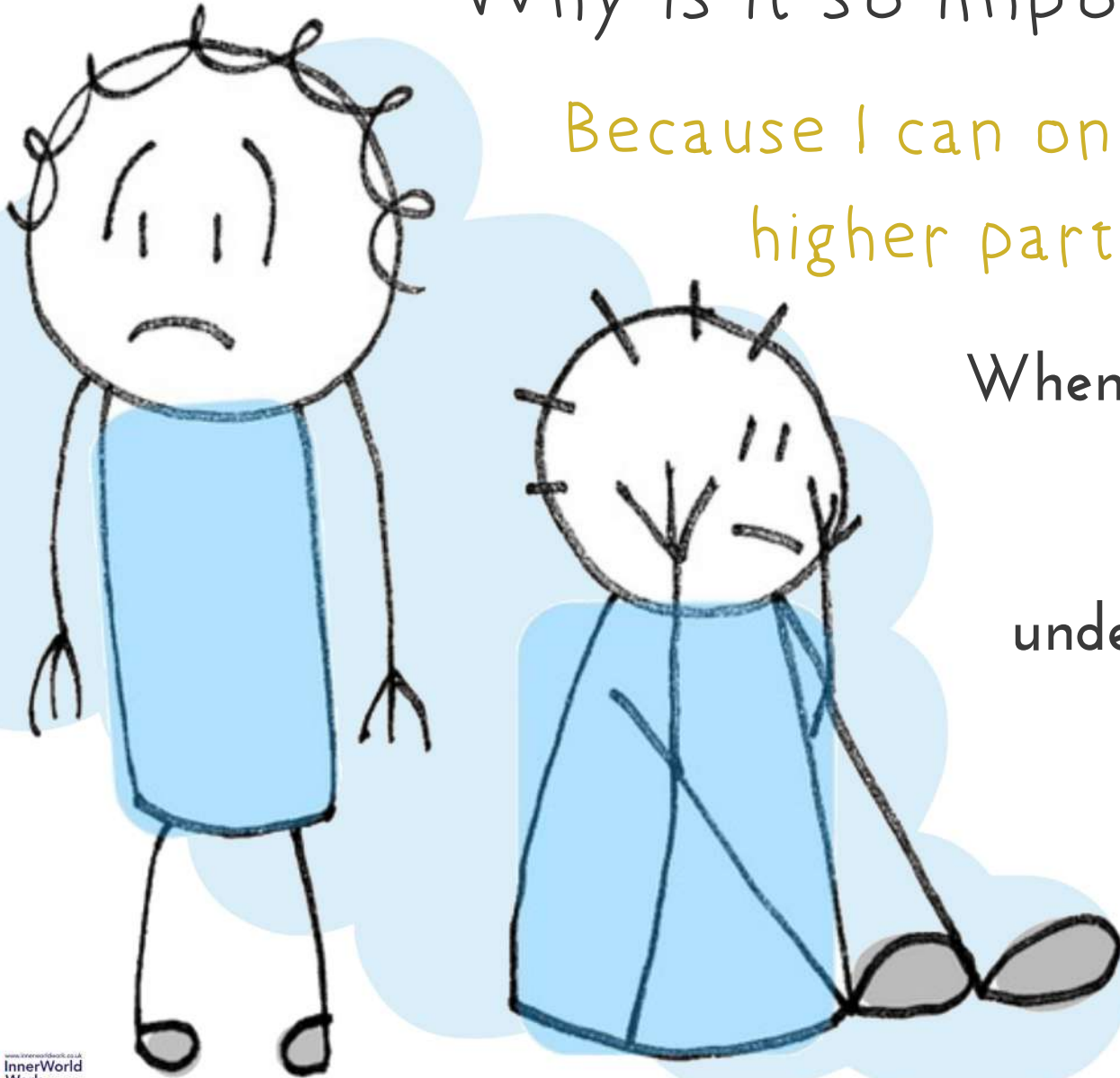
I don't even know that I have gone into survival mode, I probably can't tell you what feels wrong. It happens so often that this part of my brain is really strong and rules over the calm part of my brain. I can't turn it off by myself.

Why is it so important that you know this?

Because I can only learn effectively when the higher part of my brain is working well.

When I am in a survival state it disconnects my higher brain and I cannot reflect, understand, process information and learn.

If I don't feel safe, I won't be able to learn to the best of my ability.



The problem is it can be really hard to see and believe I am in survival mode.

I might look very different to how I feel inside, and often I can remain in survival mode for so long, that it seems like part of my personality - this is even true for some adults who were never supported to calm their survival brain.

I would love your help to feel safe so I can learn. For you to see that I am in a survival state and it's not a personality trait. I really want to learn; I really want to feel ok.



Spending just a small amount of time making me feel safe, activates the thinking part of my brain and I am ready for you to teach me again. I might need you to do this over and over again every day, but the more my brain gets to practice how to connect to my higher brain, the less likely I am to go into survival mode.

Helping me in this way will make safe and life changing differences to my brain.

Please remember, it is really important to look after yourself, to help me turn off my survival mode you will need to be connected to your higher brain.

Thank you, it is an amazing thing you're doing for me.





FIGHT



# What I might look like on the outside

- Hot and bothered
- Aggressive, angry
- Argumentative, shouty
- Controlling
- Demanding, inflexible
- Lying or blaming
- Can't concentrate, unable to finish work or tasks
- Pushing people away
- Not 'fitting in'
- Loner
- Immature
- Loud, noisy and disruptive
- Disrespectful
- Confrontational





# How I might feel on the inside

- I'm scared
- I am all alone
- I feel bad
- I am bad
- Frightened
- Unimportant
- Unlovable
- Invisible
- Worthless
- Danger everywhere
- Fast heartbeat
- Cold hands/feet
- Muscles charged and ready to fight
- I can hear your tone changes
- I can hear everything
- Pupils dilate, I am focused solely on the danger
- Small appetite

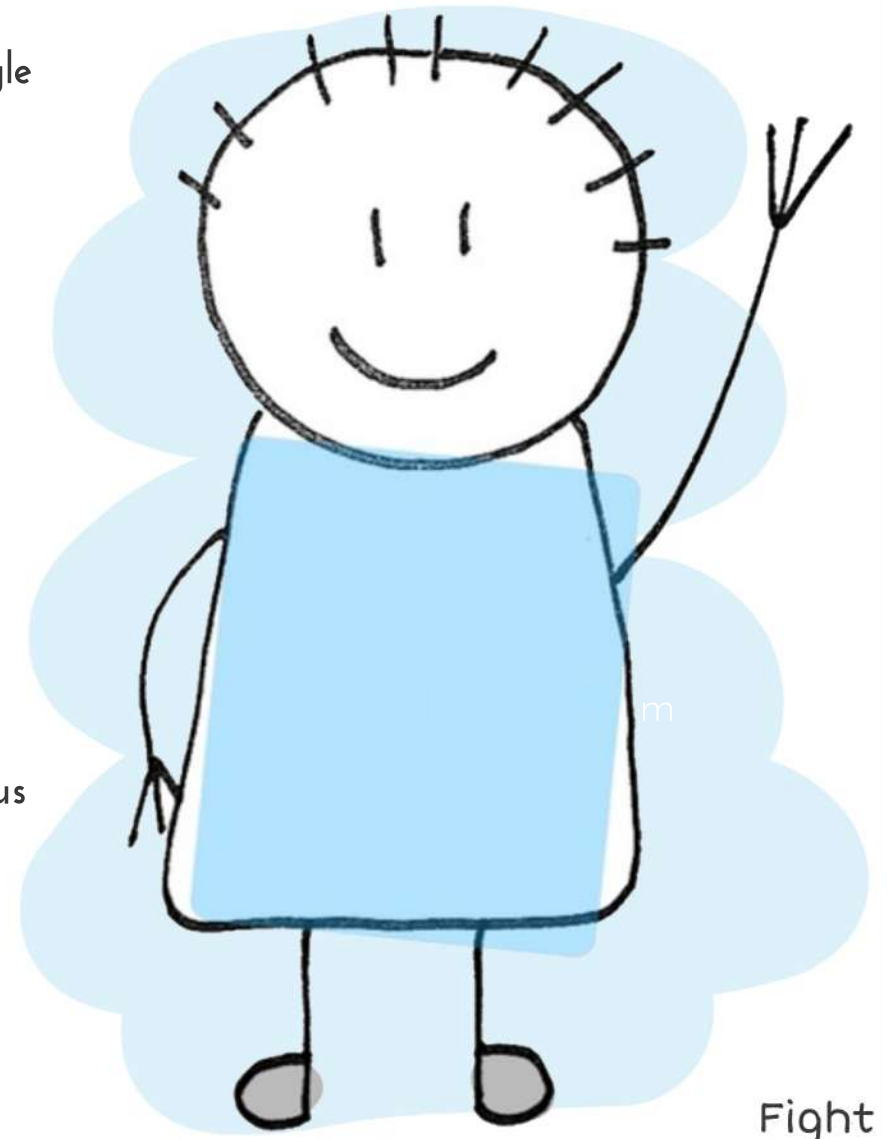


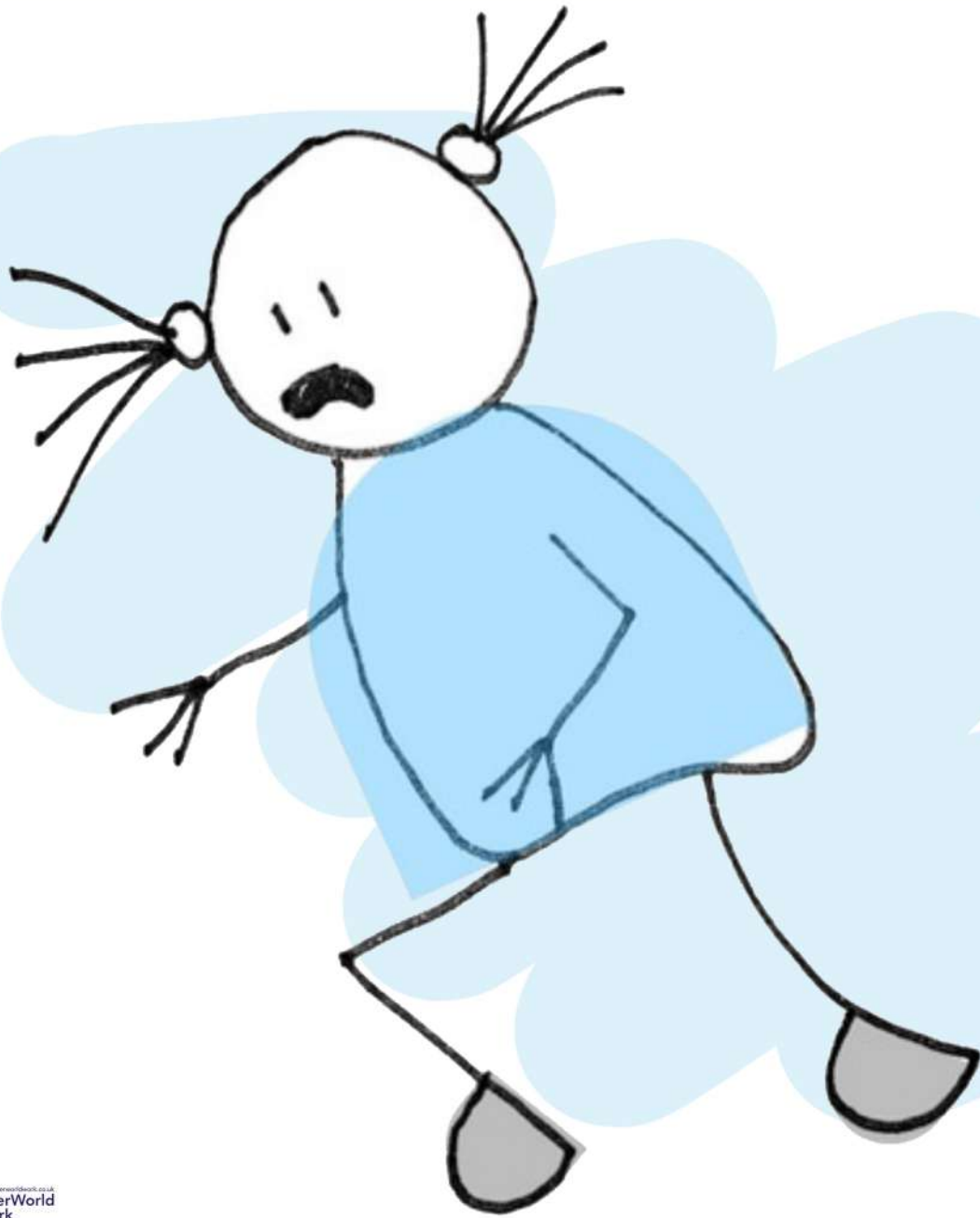
# What might be happening in my inner world?

- I can't be cross at the people I really want to be cross at
- I need to be in control, so everything is predictable
- I am going to push you away before you get rid of me
- I feel unsafe
- I hate myself, I am unlovable
- I want to die
- Why am I not good enough?
- Adults can't be trusted; they don't keep you safe

# You can help me feel safe with the following...

- Safety first. Keep me & everyone else safe
- Allow me to choose a trusted adult to go to
- Give me a role
- Support me socially
- Give me somewhere safe to go at break time
- Match my energy (not my affect)
- Make things predictable
- Let me know about changes in routine, especially if there are strangers visiting the school - even if you think they are safe, I might not
- Hanging, swinging, climbing
- Deep breathing
- Wait for me to volunteer, don't single me out
- Connect and show empathy before exploring the consequences of my behaviour
- Really chewy snack
- Give me an important job
- Accept I might not understand or remember what happened, I was trying to survive what felt dangerous
- Give me somewhere safe to go if I need to self-soothe





FLIGHT



# What I might look like on the outside

- Keeping super busy
- Running away
- Constantly asking to go to the toilet a lot (when no medical issues are present)
- Constantly asking to get something located outside of the classroom
- Hiding under tables
- Head on the desk
- Not coping in free time or able to follow school rules
- Need to be first or at the front
- Aggressive, clenched fists, threatening
- Bumping into people
- Avoiding tasks and activities or closeness to people
- Baby talk or silly voices
- Crying - especially if I normally go into fight mode and I can't as you are stronger/bigger than me
- 'Hyperactive', giddy & silly



# How I might feel on the inside

- You're bigger/stronger than me, I can't fight, it's safer to get away
- Unable to focus
- Lonely
- Panic
- Feeling bad, movement is distracting
- Shame
- Overwhelmed
- Worried about what is happening next
- Anxious, apprehensive
- Painful joints
- Numb
- Vibrating
- Ready for action
- Jumpy and tense
- Sick



# What might be happening in my inner world?

- Adults can't be trusted; they don't keep you safe
- I want to escape from this scary moment, but I can't
- I am trapped
- I don't want you to see my real feelings you can't handle them
- I am really worried I can't do what is going to happen next

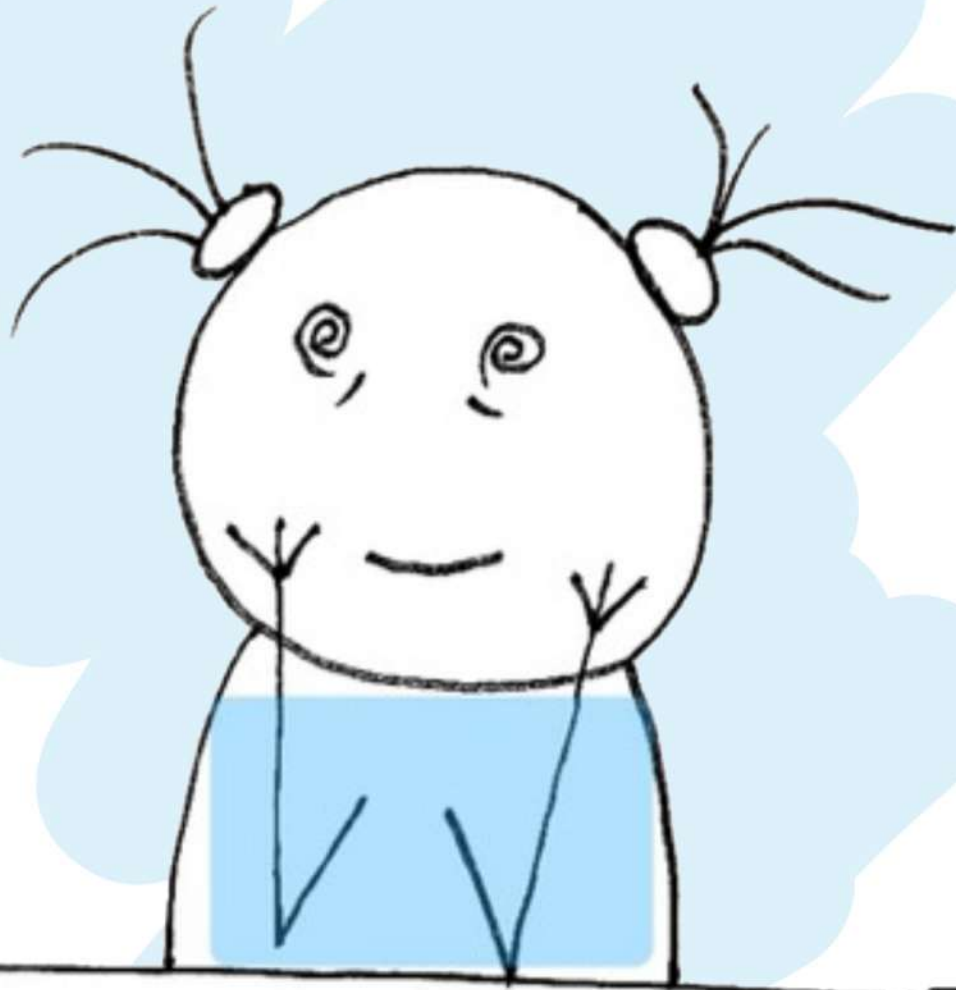
# You can help me feel safe with the following...

- Keep me close by
- Deep breathing
- Give me an easy and familiar task
- Make things predictable
- Tell me I'm safe, show me a safe place or trusted person I can go to - ask me who I feel this should be
- Hanging, tug of war
- Crunchy snacks e.g. carrot sticks, pretzels
- Kindly talk through what might be tricky
- Agree a code word/sentence with me so I can easily leave the classroom to see my trusted adult if I need to without being shamed
- Remind me what I'm meant to be doing alongside my friends rather than singling me out

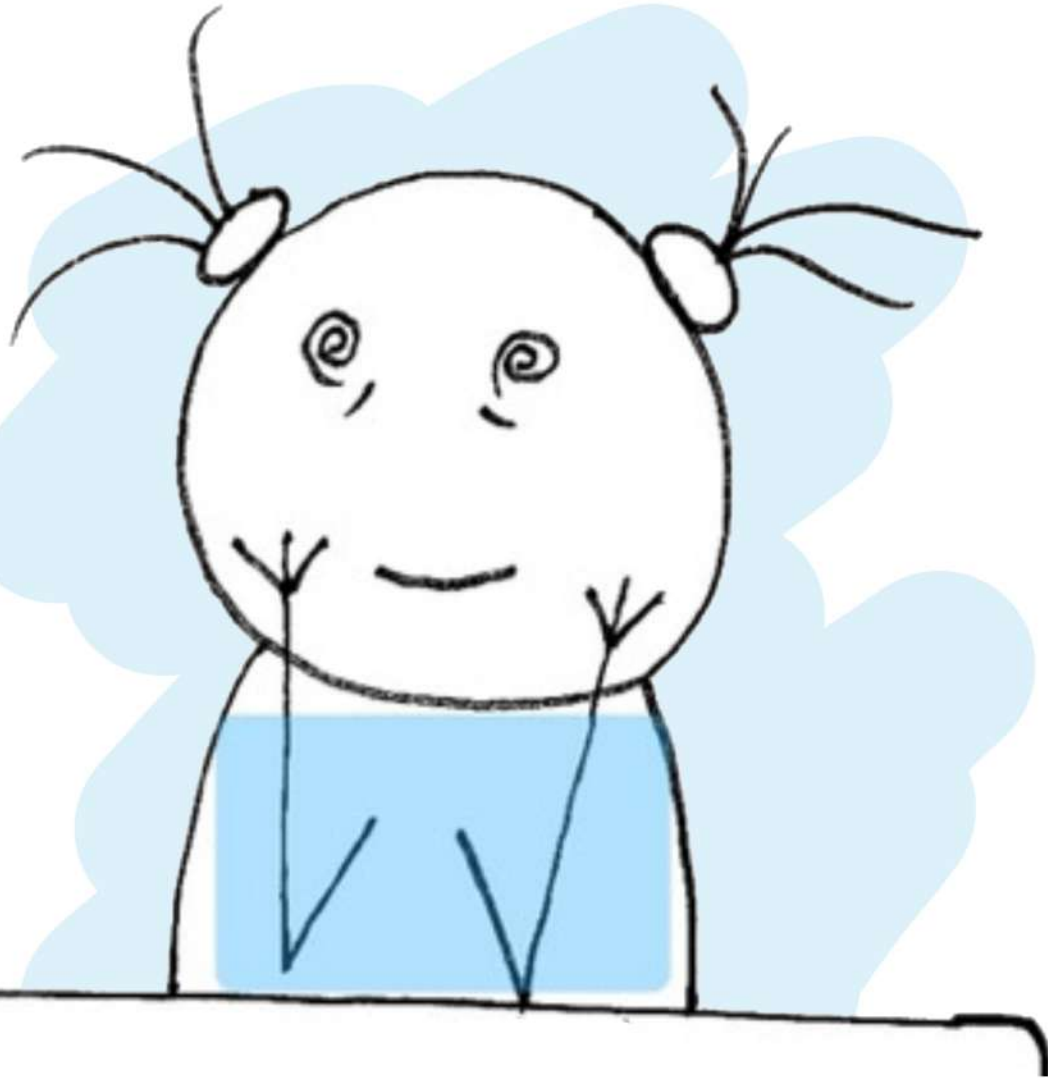


Flight





FREEZE



# What I might look like on the outside

- Not interested, bored
- Confused
- Forgetful
- Trying to distract, talking about something else
- Hard to move through a task
- Scanning the room
- Not listening
- Daydreaming or staring into space
- Clumsy
- Slow to move when they have been asked



# How I might feel on the inside

- Deeply anxious
- Under attack
- Frozen brain
- Heart racing
- Pupils dilated
- Blood is rushing to legs  
ready to escape
- My brain is slowing down
- Hearing becomes more  
sensitive
- If I don't move, you can't  
see me, or you'll lose  
interest so I can escape (go  
into flight)
- I feel like I am in a dream
- I feel under attack
- Disconnected
- I am trying to think of  
something safe
- I can't do this

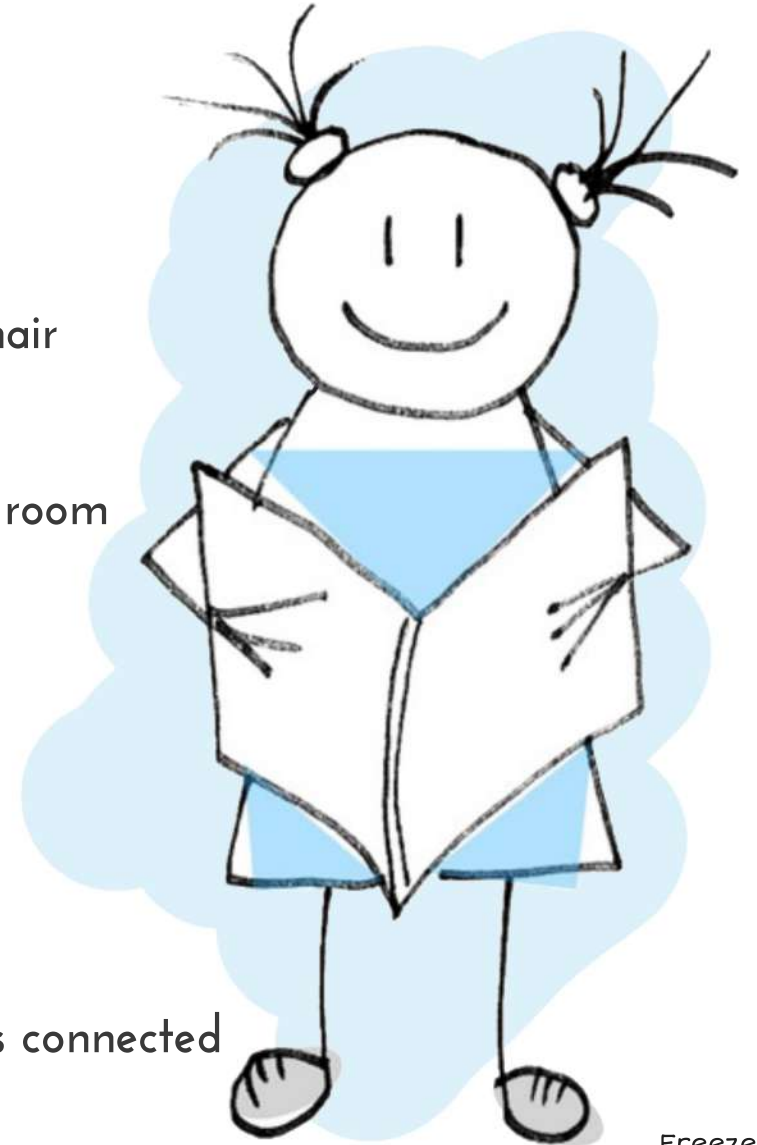


# What might be happening in my inner world?

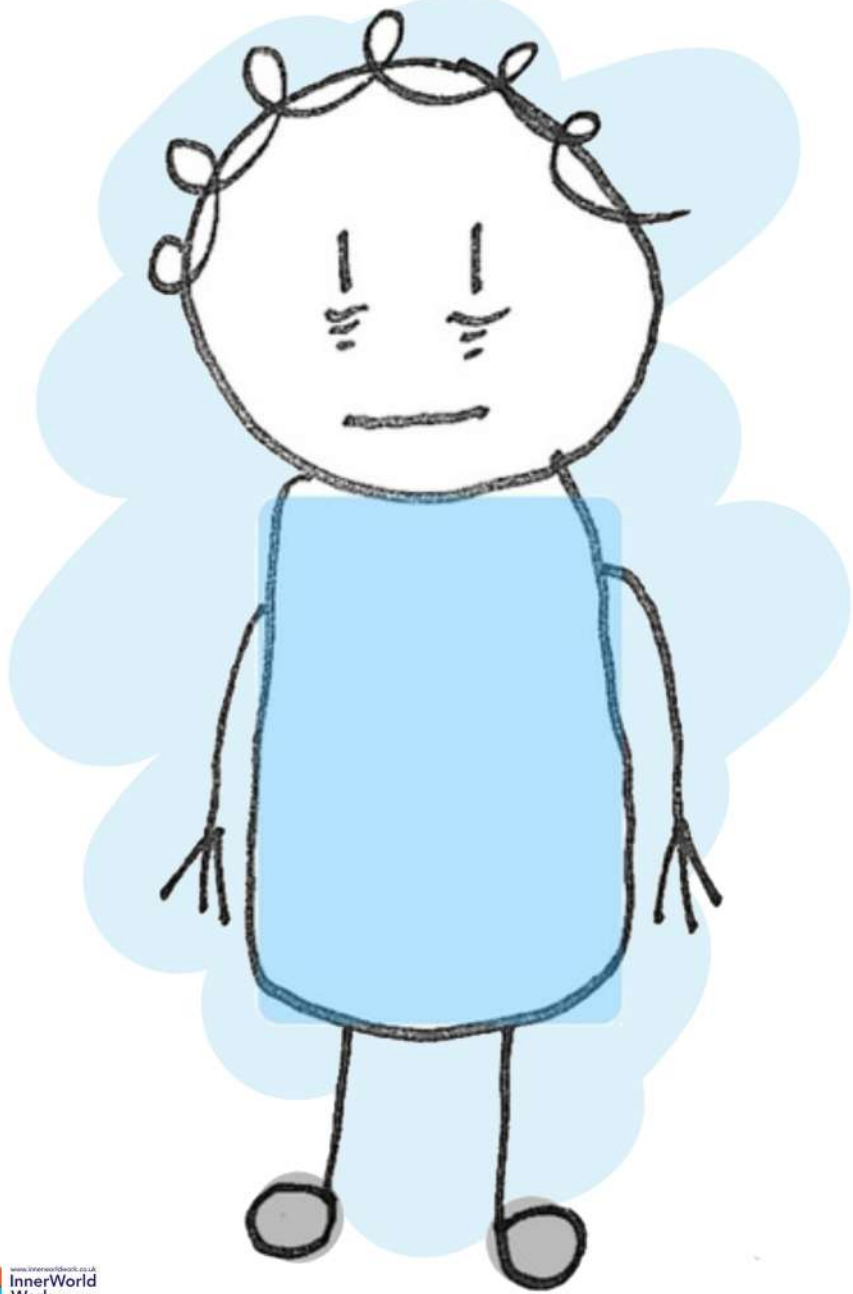
- I can't bear your rejection
- I need to feel safe
- Shame, I hate myself
- I'm scared, I don't know what is going to happen
- When I fail at this, you'll send me away
- When you realise, I can't do this, you won't want me in your class anymore
- Adults can't be trusted; they don't keep you safe

# You can help me feel safe with the following...

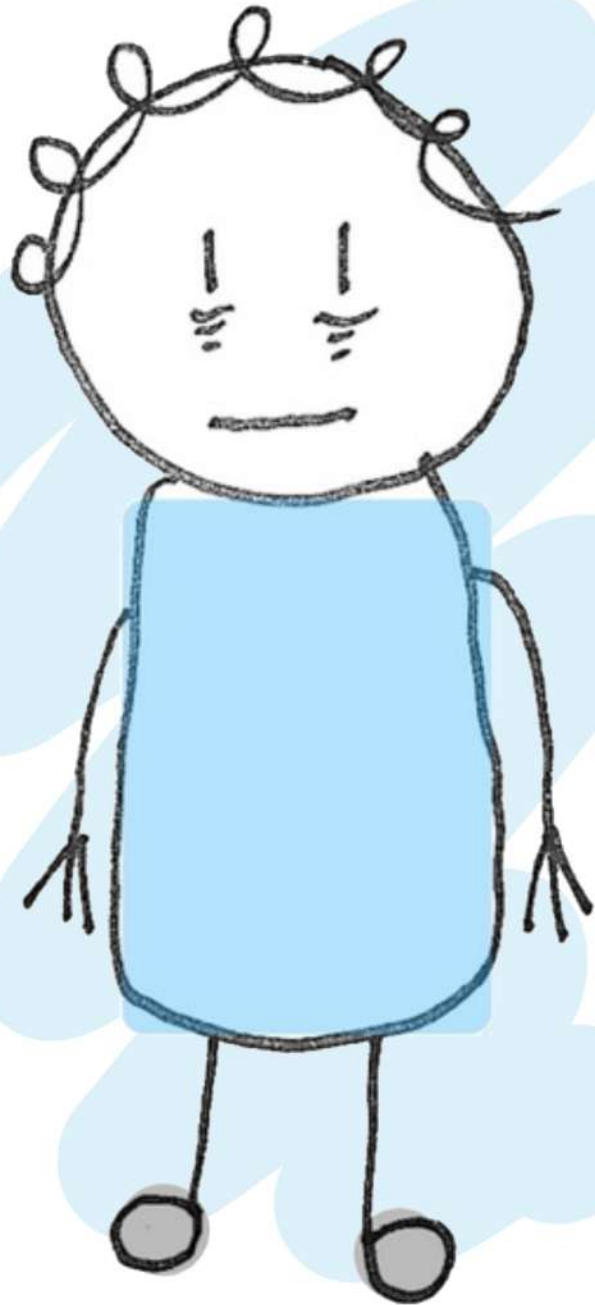
- Do the task with me
- Deep breathing
- Tell me I'm ok and that I am safe
- Ask me to push my hands down under my seat and lift myself up off the chair so my body knows I am safe in the classroom
- Stay with me, gently wonder where I've gone and welcome me back to the room
- Make the task smaller and more predictable
- Tell me kindly who I am and what I am doing
- Climbing, hanging, jumping on a trampoline
- Digging in mud/sand
- Tell me what you want me to do 1:1 without showing me frustration
- If I can tolerate touch, touch my shoulder every time you pass me to keep us connected



Freeze



COLLAPSE



# What I might look like on the outside

- Head on the desk
- Socially withdrawn, quiet
- Compliant - never drawing attention
- Unable to think, just yes or no answers
- Passive
- Resigned
- Neutral expression
- Low mood
- Slow movement
- Disconnected
- Withdrawn, loner
- Silent
- Anxious
- Easily bullied



# How I might feel on the inside

- Muscles are floppy
- Heart rate slows
- Shallow breathing
- I can't think
- My tummy aches
- Poorly
- Tired
- Worn out
- No energy
- Sad, tearful
- Lonely





# What might be happening in my inner world?

- I've given up
- Why couldn't I be better, I am completely useless
- I hate myself, I am unliveable
- The world is too dangerous, no-where is safe
- It's all my fault
- Nothing will ever feel ok
- I can't keep myself safe
- I want to die

# You can help me feel safe with the following...

- Get me moving - swinging, bouncing on a trampoline, dancing, running
- Drumming, singing, music
- If I can tolerate touch, try a hand massage
- Butterfly tapping
- Use scent, try citrusy smells or cinnamon
- Repetitive simple tasks
- Building with Lego or Playdoh
- Tell me I'm safe
- Deep breathing
- Crunchy biscuit & hot chocolate
- Spend time with a trusted adult
- Do the task with me
- Tell me what to do without showing frustration
- Let me blend in without losing me, I don't want to be the centre of attention



Collapse

For a clear and easy understanding of developmental trauma, how it impacts development and what can be done to support repair, please read the following free articles by Beacon House -

Developmental Trauma Close Up  
The Repair of Early Trauma

Download here: [www.beaconhouse.org.uk/useful-resources/](http://www.beaconhouse.org.uk/useful-resources/)

