

science minded



THE SCIENCE OF TEMPERAMENT AND EMOTION REGULATION

Practical Tools for Fostering Self-Regulation and
Understanding Diverse Behavioural Needs



A TALE OF TWO CHILDREN



Frankie



Luca



FRANKIE



LUCA

A TALE OF TWO CHILDREN



Because behind every
behaviour is a message.

And behind every message
is a need.





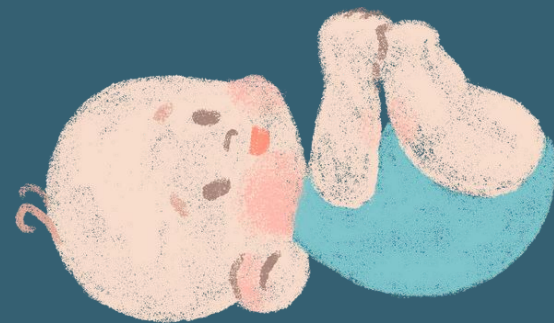
WHY DO TEMPERAMENT AND EMOTION REGULATION MATTER?

THE FOUNDATION FOR RESPONSIVE RELATIONSHIPS
AND CALM CLASSROOMS

WHY DO TEMPERAMENT AND EMOTION REGULATION MATTER?



Children are born different



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?



1. Respond to
children's needs
with empathy

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?



2. Support their
development

1. Respond to
children's needs
with empathy



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?



2. Support their
development

1. Respond to
children's needs
with empathy

3. Create calmer,
more responsive
care environments



WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT



What we'll cover:

- Children's emotional development:
Specifically how they **experience, regulate**
and **process** Emotion
- **What temperament is** and **how it shapes**
every aspect of Emotional Development
- Practical Techniques to create **inclusive,**
supportive environments that **respect**
individual differences.



WHAT YOU'LL LEAVE WITH



A toolkit of skills to:

- Better **understand** and **recognise** different temperamental needs.
- Respond effectively to these individual needs using **emotion-regulation strategies** that support diverse learners.
- Create a classroom culture that fosters **connection, emotional resilience** and **understanding**.





WHO AM I?

DR SIOBHAN KENNEDY-COSTANTINI

A Mother, Scientist and an advocate for parents,
families and the early learning sector.

Sharing the Science of Childhood with the
adults who shape it.





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EMOTIONS & EMOTION REGULATION

UNDERSTANDING THE FUNCTION OF EMOTIONS &
HOW CHILDREN LEARN TO MANAGE THEM

EMOTIONS ARE FUNCTIONAL



EMOTIONS ARE FUNCTIONAL



FEAR helps us stay safe by avoiding potential harm.



SADNESS invites others to offer soothing and support.



ANGER signals us to protect what matters.



JOY build bonds, reinforce connection and encourage play.

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?



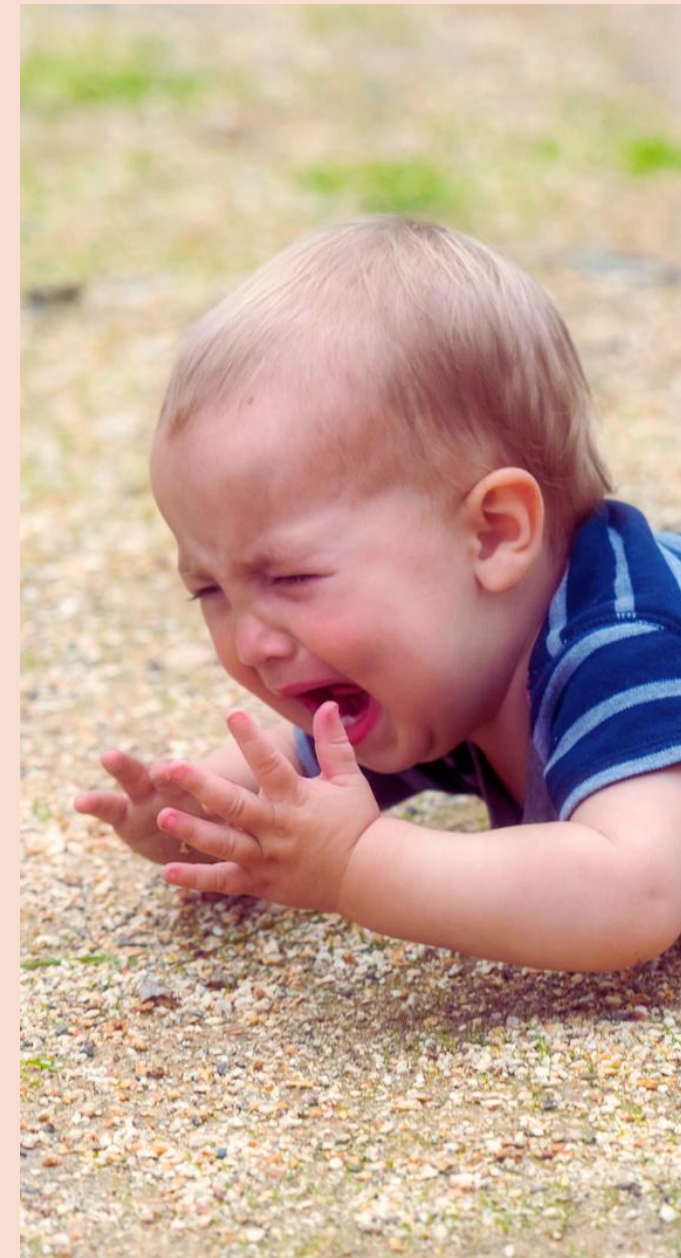
Emotions are signals.



For young children, they're a cue to gain a caregiver's attention.



Emotions act as a bridge to connect us with others.



EMOTIONS IN THE BRAIN



Hand Model
of the Brain

DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

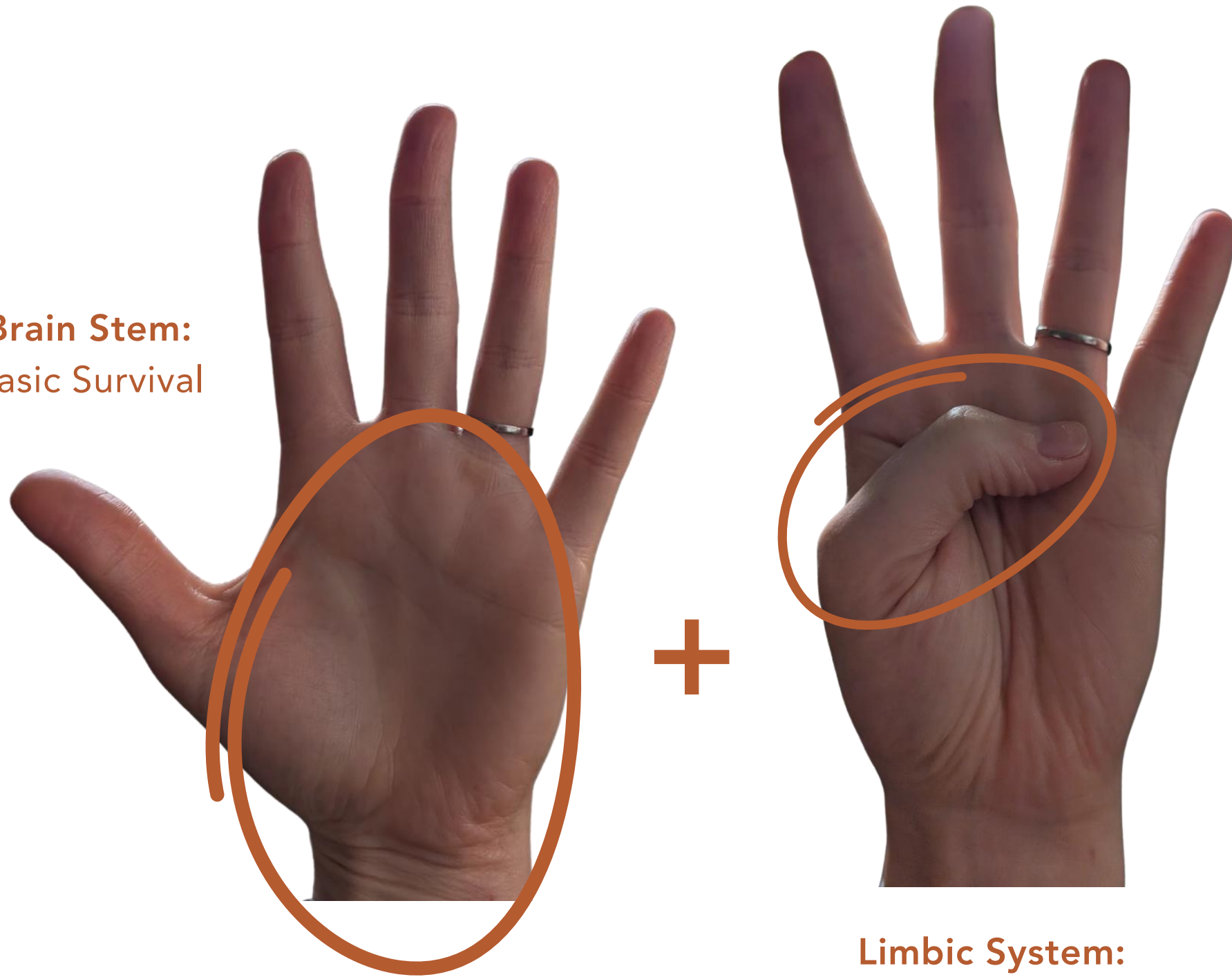
Brain Stem:
Basic Survival



Reference: Siegel & Payne Bryson 2012

DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

Brain Stem:
Basic Survival



Limbic System:
Emotional Alarm System

Reference: Siegel & Payne Bryson 2012

DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

- Controls **automatic** processes
 - breathing, heart rate, digestion etc.
- Part of brain that **reacts**
 - Fight, Fight, Freeze, Fawn



"Reptilian" Brain
(300 millions years old)



"Mammalian" Brain
(200 millions years old)

- Internal "**alarm system**" tags experiences as safe/unsafe
- Stores emotional memories
- Connects to our attachment system

DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

Brain Stem:
Basic Survival



Limbic System:
Emotional Alarm System

UPSTAIRS BRAIN

Thinking Brain:
Logic, Calm, Reason

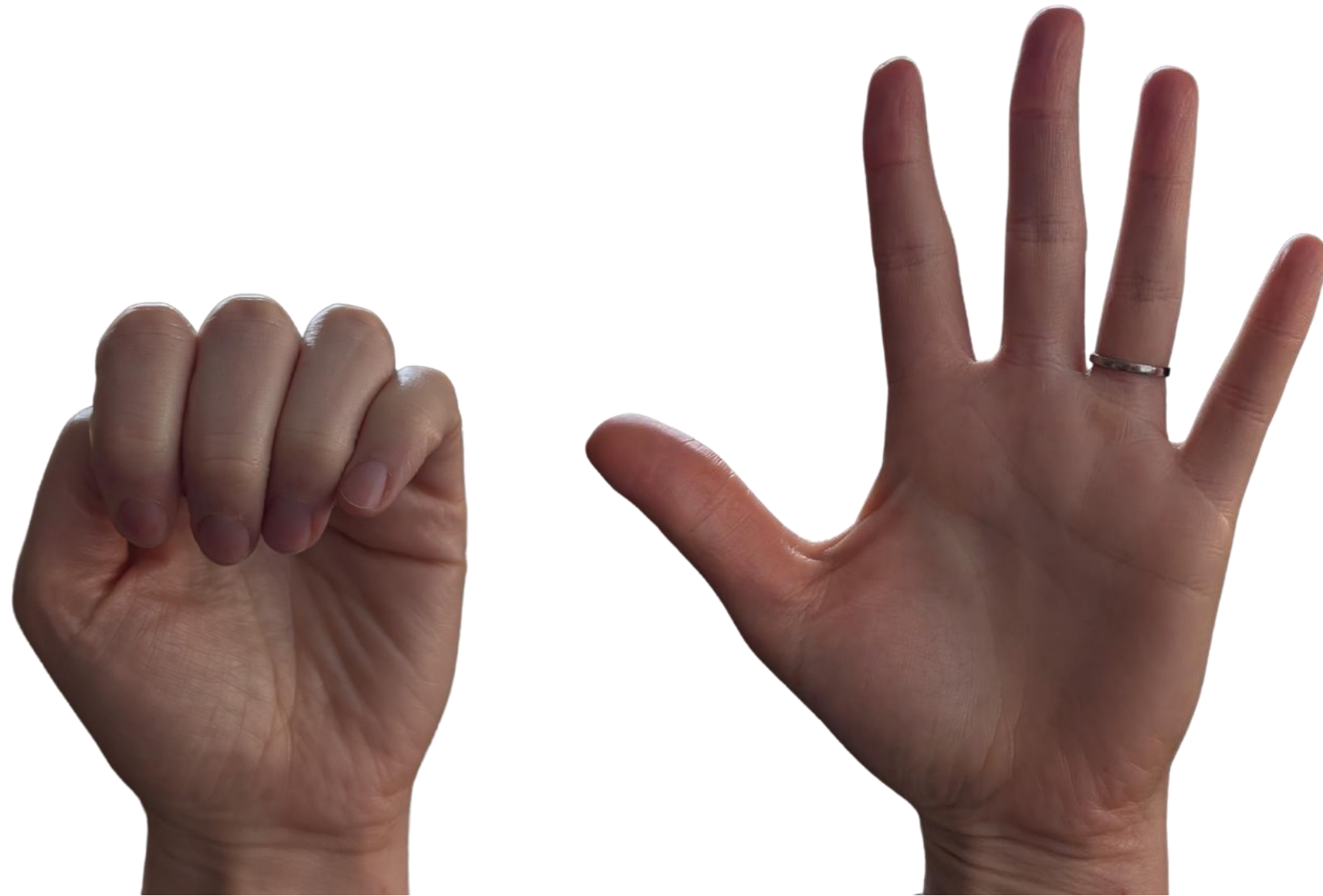


UPSTAIRS BRAIN



- Pre-frontal cortex (**not mature until 25+ years**)
- **It helps us:**
 - Think before we act (impulse control)
 - Understand how our actions affect others (perspective taking/empathy)
 - Puts the brake on our emotions (emotional regulation/inhibition)
 - Make good choices even when upset (inhibition)
 - Calm ourselves down (emotional regulation)

NEUROSCIENCE OF A TANTRUM



“Flipping their lid”

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Experiencing

Reference: Russell & Widen 2002; 2004; 2008



EXPERIENCING EMOTION

SENSATION

PHYSICAL

MENTAL



EXPERIENCING EMOTION

SENSATION

PHYSICAL

MENTAL

BEHAVIOUR

EXTERNAL EXPRESSIONS





BEHIND EVERY BEHAVIOUR IS A NEED.

CONNECTION HELPS US SEE THE MESSAGE UNDERNEATH.

BEHAVIOUR ISN'T THE END OF THE STORY:
IT'S THE STARTING POINT FOR CURIOSITY AND CARE.



WHAT YOU MIGHT THINK IN
RESPONSE TO THE BEHAVIOUR

They're defiant
I can't let them get away with this.
If this is now, what's next?

CHILD
THROWS
A PLATE

WHAT YOU THINK CAUSED IT

"I wasn't allowed to
go first!"

"Jasper just pinched
me and it hurt."

"Everyone keeps
saying no"

"I don't normally come to
daycare on Wednesdays... but I
did today. I don't know why."

"I miss my Grannie"

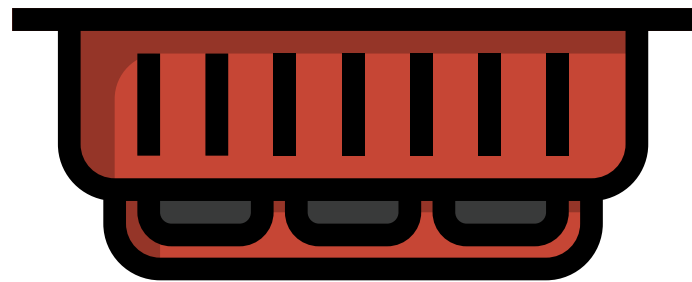
"I don't get to
choose anything"

"I've told Miss Sarah I need
help three times already!
She's not listening."

WHAT TIPPED THEM
OVER THE EDGE

BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION

**DIFFICULT
BEHAVIOUR ALERTS
US TO AN UNMET
NEED**



Being physical, getting aggressive

Defiance.
Refusal to following instructions.

Difficulties or tantrums at
Group Time and/or Transitions

Escalation that turns into
full "meltdowns"



“NAUGHTY” KIDS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS SENSITIVE KIDS

CONNECTION HELPS US SEE THE MESSAGE UNDERNEATH.

BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION

**DIFFICULT
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Being physical, getting aggressive



"I'm overwhelmed and my body is reacting before my brain can catch up."

"I feel angry but I don't yet have the words to tell you why."

Defiance.
Refusal to following instructions.



"I feel out of control, and saying no is the only way I can get some back."

"I have a good reason, but I don't yet know how to explain it."

Difficulties or tantrums at
Group Time and/or Transitions



"I need to move my body, but now I'm being asked to sit still."

"It's not the sitting still that's hard, it's the social stuff happening around me."

Escalation that turns into
full "meltdowns"



When a child is completely emotionally dysregulated and lashing out, it's not an opportunity for skill development. Our role is to show them that they're safe.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Experiencing



Regulating



REGULATING EMOTION

SELF-REGULATION

DEVELOPS OVER TIME

Develops over time. Children aren't born knowing how to manage their feelings. They learn it through experience, especially through co-regulation.



CO-REGULATION

THE FOUNDATION

Children borrow our calm before they can find their own. Things that often help include:

- A calm, steady tone of voice
- Predictable routines
- Warm, physical presence (sitting nearby, gentle touch)
- Simple language to name feelings
- Deep breaths, slow rhythms, shared stillness
- A safe, accepting adult response



REGULATING EMOTION

SELF-REGULATION

DEVELOPMENT

Develops over time
knowing how to
They learn it
especially through



BUT...HERE'S THE THING

These strategies often don't work as reliably
for Highly Sensitive Kiddos.

Or if they do, it's hit and miss.

We'll come back to why that is (and explore
what does work) in a few sections time.

REGULATION

FOUNDATION

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EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Experiencing



Regulating



Processing

Reference: Russell & Widen 2002; 2004; 2008



PROCESSING EMOTION

COGNITIVE

TALK ABOUT IT

This is just ONE way of processing. And usually, it doesn't work very well for young children.



PHYSICAL

PLAY MOTOR SENSORY

Children often process through play; reenacting events with toys, dolls or other objects.

Others might process through movement: running, climbing, dancing.



EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Experiencing



Regulating



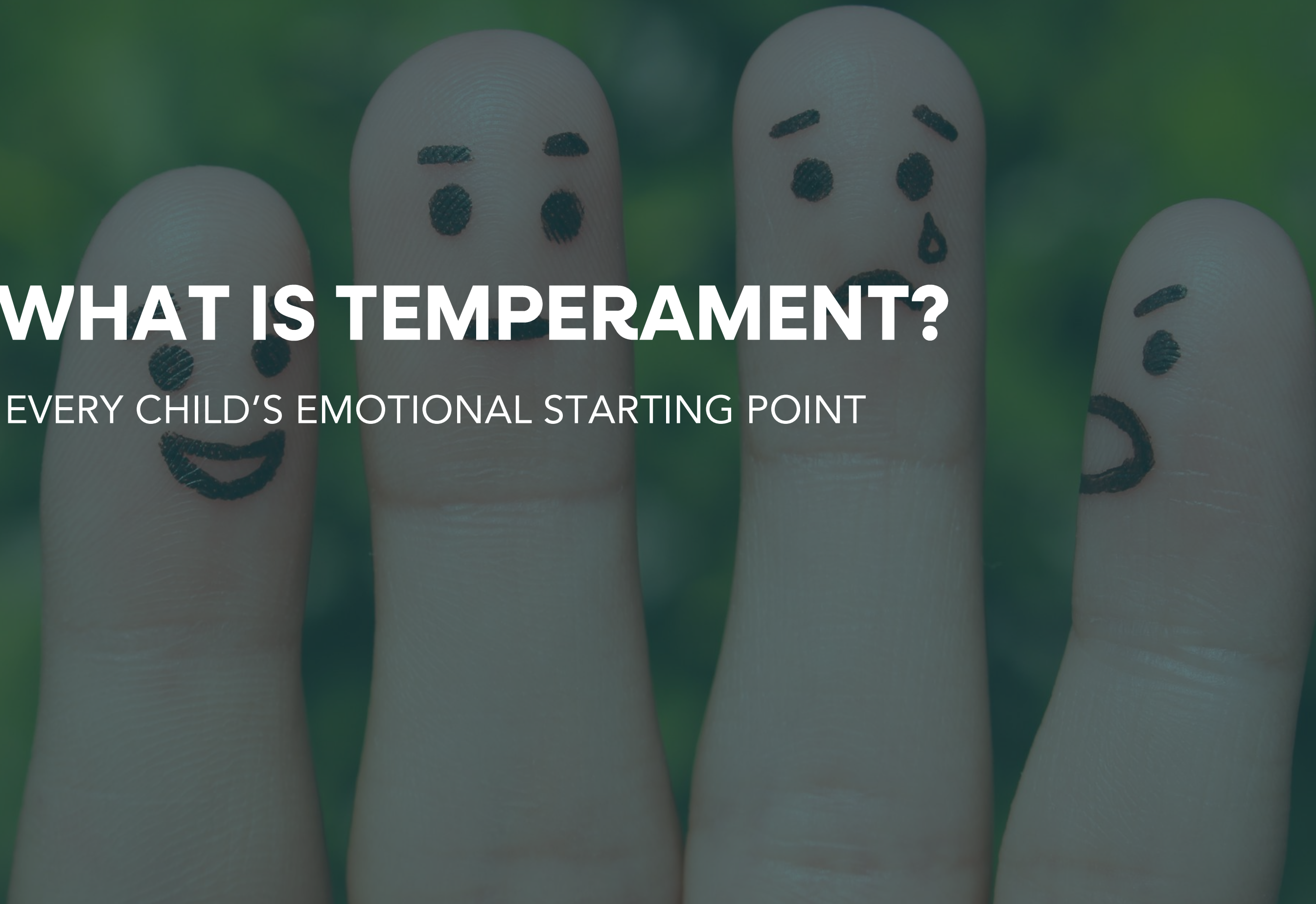
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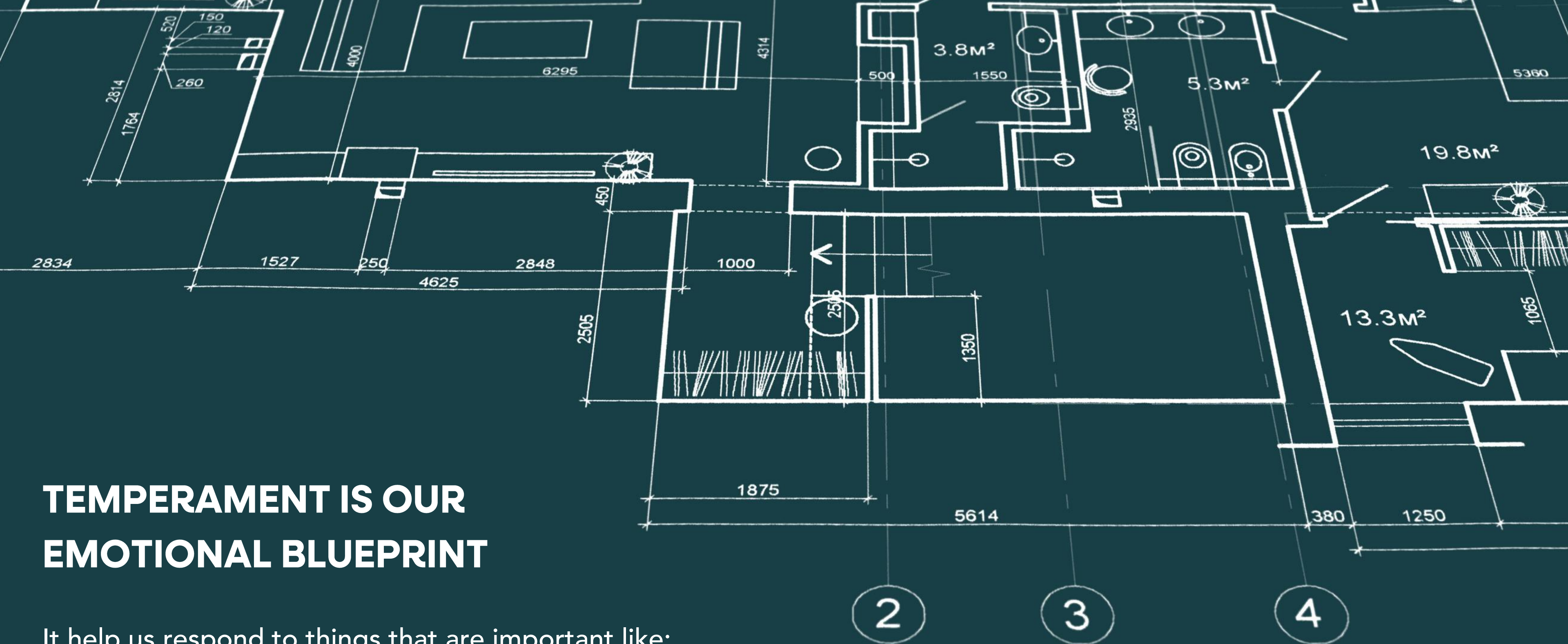




WHAT IS TEMPERAMENT?

EVERY CHILD'S EMOTIONAL STARTING POINT





TEMPERAMENT IS OUR EMOTIONAL BLUEPRINT

It help us respond to things that are important like:

- recognising when something is rewarding
- potential threats
- paying attention/tuning into others' emotions or behaviour.



TEMPERAMENT

We can also think of it as the built-in “factory settings” for our Emotional Operating System

We can't change a child's temperament, but we can learn how to work with it. When we understand our child's natural way of being, we can support them in ways that help them thrive.



BIOLOGY

1

BEHAVIOUR

2

3

INDIVIDUAL

4

RELATIONSHIPS

KEY FEATURES OF TEMPERAMENT



BIOLOGY

Shaped by biological & genetic factors affecting how we react to our environment.

E.g. some babies are naturally calm and easygoing. Others are more active or sensitive.

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BEHAVIOUR

2

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BEHAVIOUR

How we handle stress or change is influenced by our temperament.

E.g. one child might jump right into a new group of friends, another may hang back & observe.

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Temperament varies from person to person.

There is no "right" or "wrong" temperament - just different ways of being.

INDIVIDUAL

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INDIVIDUAL

4

A child's temperament can influence how parents, teachers, and caregivers understand, experience and respond to their needs.

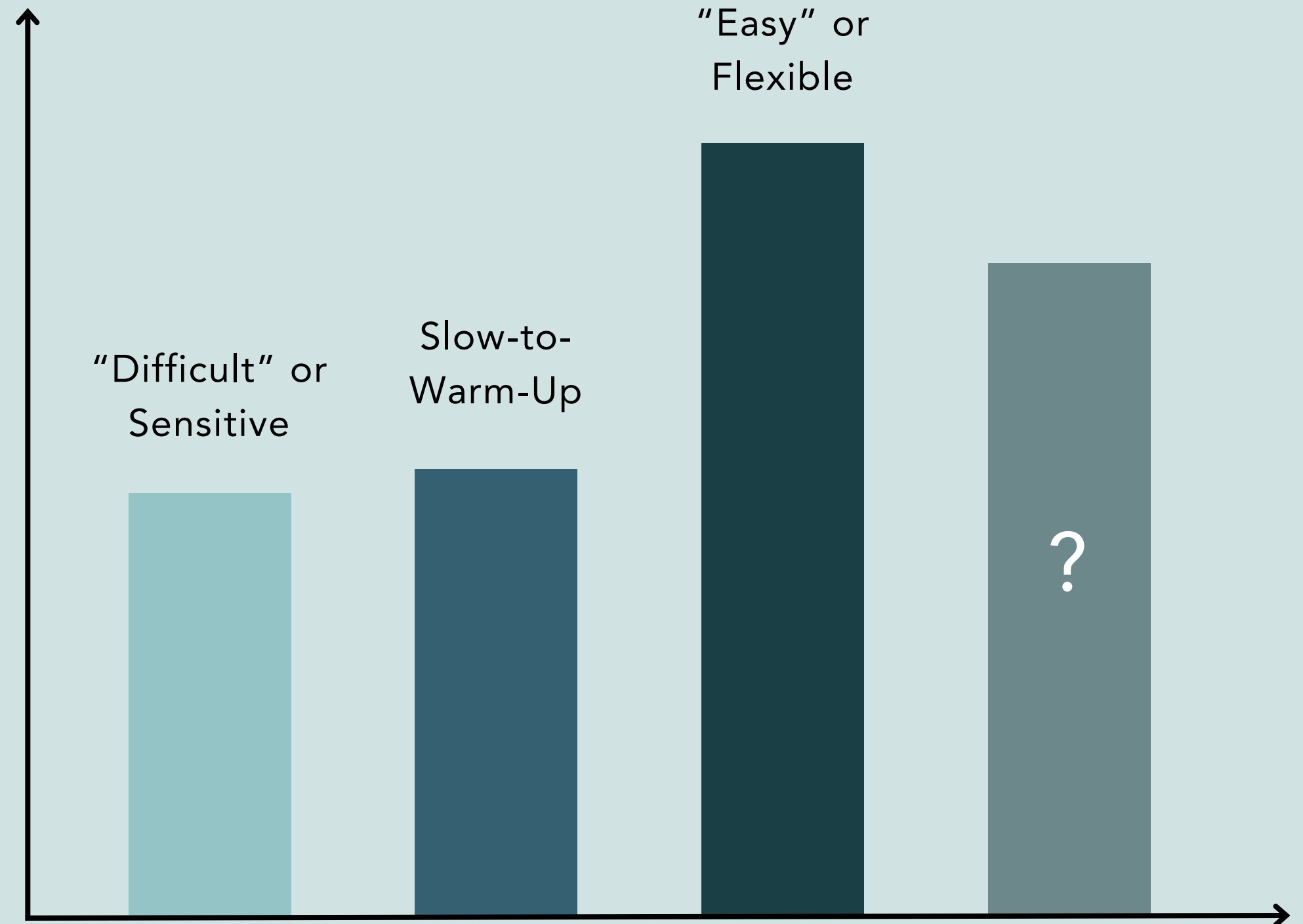
RELATIONSHIPS

KEY FEATURES OF TEMPERAMENT

WHERE DOES ALL THIS TEMPERAMENT STUFF COME FROM?

“Temperament is not a
matter of ‘good’ or ‘bad.’
It is a way of being.”

(Thomas & Chess, 1977)



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

The first day of Kindy, for three children with different temperaments: Frankie, Ethan, and Luca



LUCA



ETHAN



FRANKIE

TEMPERAMENT



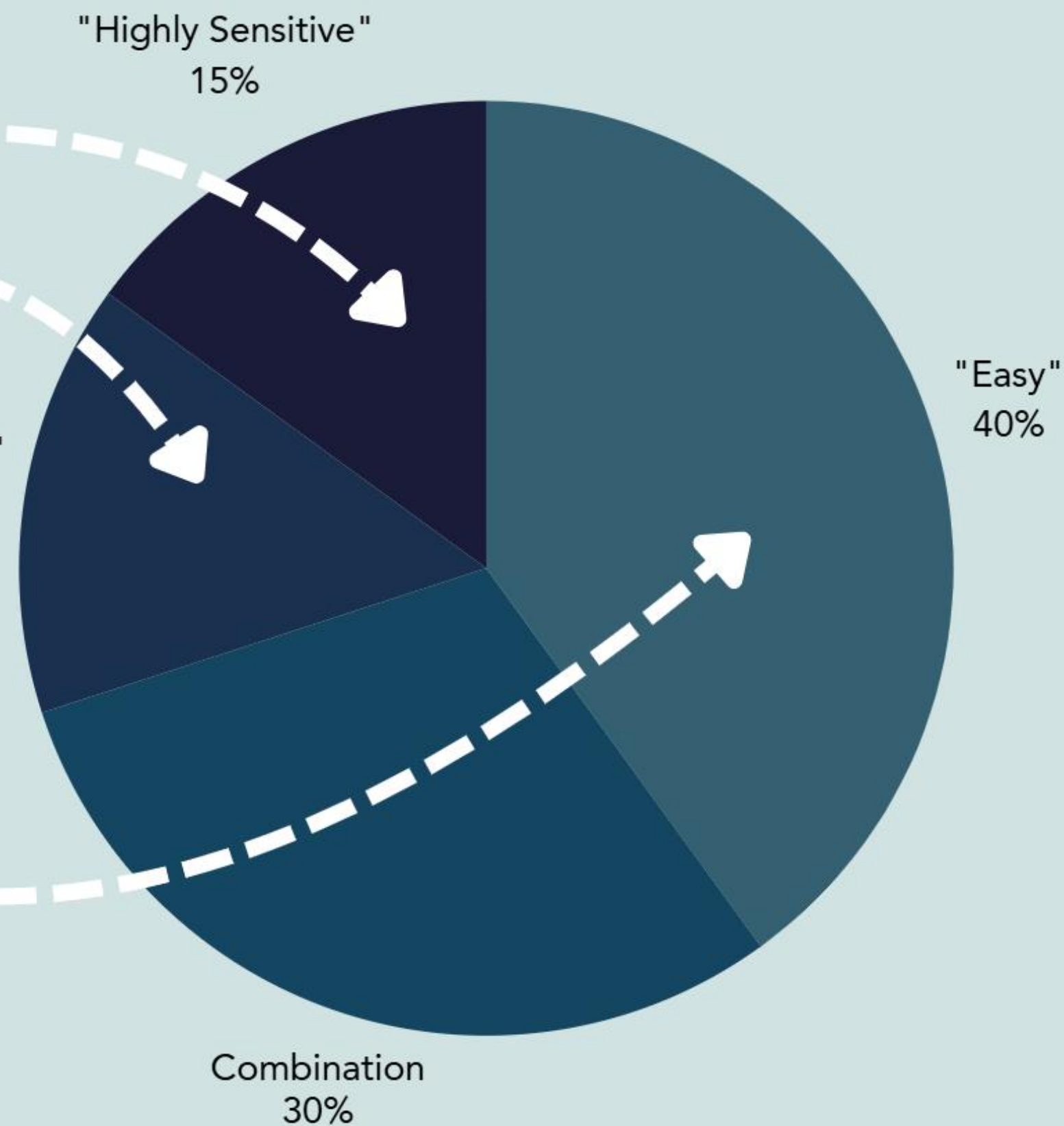
LUCA



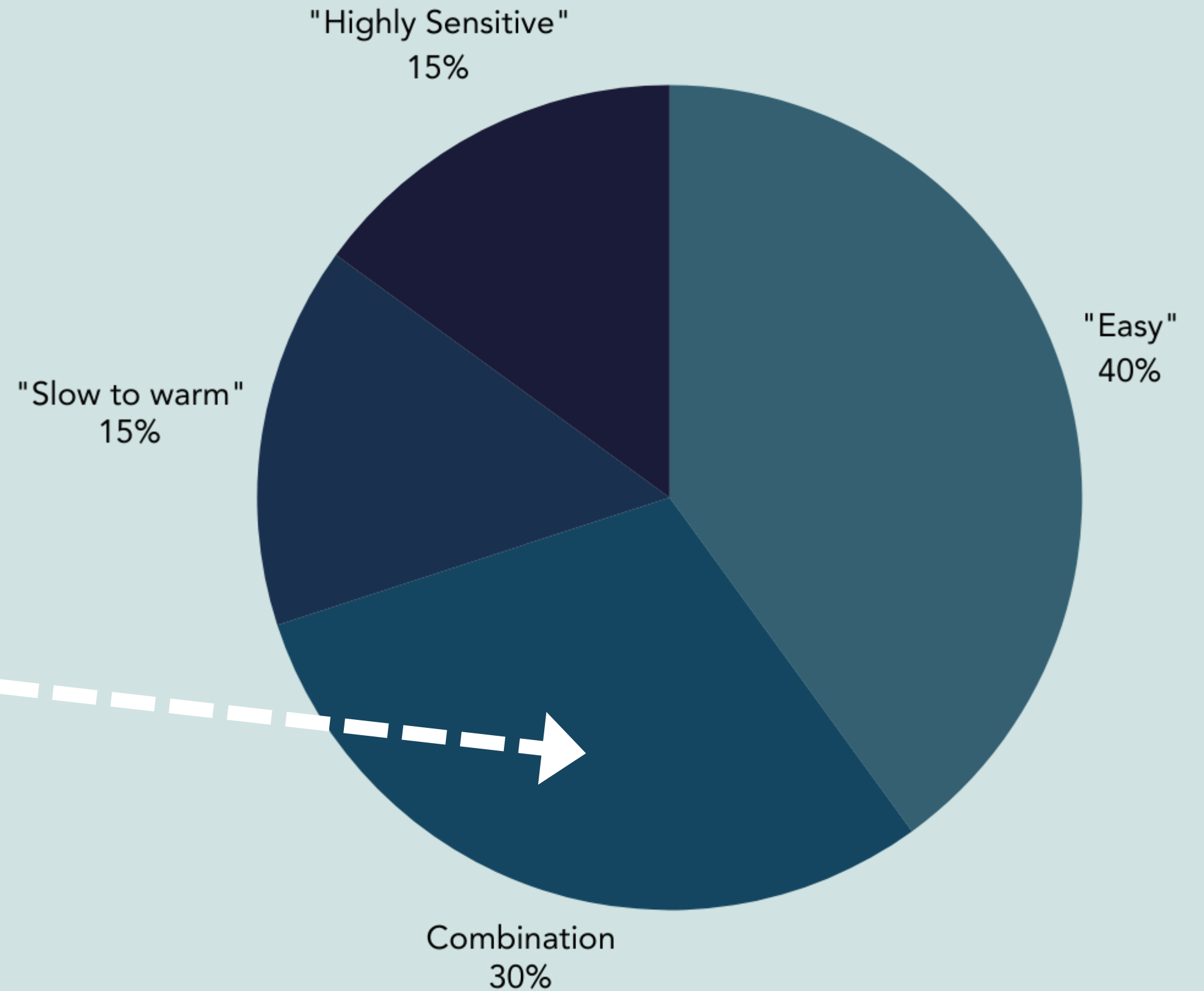
ETHAN



FRANKIE



TEMPERAMENT



HOW DO WE MEASURE TEMPERAMENT?

Thomas & Chess (1977)



Energy

AKA Activity Level



Alertness



Intensity



Rhythms

AKA Regularity

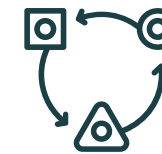


Sensitivity

AKA Sensory
Awareness



Approach



Adaptability



Persistence



Mood

TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Let’s all do this
together

Source: Adapted from Thomas & Chess (1991)

DIMENSIONS	TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR	SCORE
ACTIVITY LEVEL Rate from 1-5 how active the child seems to be. QUIET - ACTIVE	“Quiet” children tend to stay in one place when asleep, sit still quietly for extended periods of time, are quiet and relaxed while being dressed (score = 1). “Active” children move around a lot in their sleep, are always on the move, kick and squirm while being dressed or changed (score = 5).	
ALERTNESS Rate from 1-5 how alert the child seems to be. MILD - HIGH	“Mildly” alert children are not bothered by crowds and are happy to eat, play or sleep anywhere (score = 1). “Highly” alert children require soothing in crowded places, stop eating if there is a commotion and need a lot of help to fall asleep (score = 5).	
INTENSITY Rate from 1-5 how strong the child's emotional reactions are. RELAXED - REACTIVE	Children who have relaxed responses rarely get upset, cry more subtly when they do and are more easily soothed (score = 1). Very intense/reactive children often go from 0-100, cry louder than other children and can be challenging to calm (score = 5).	
REGULARITY Rate from 1-5 how predictable the child seems to be. PREDICTABLE - UNPREDICTABLE	“Predictable” children are hungry at regular intervals and have predictable nap times & bed times (score = 1). “Unpredictable” children are hungry at different times each day and nap times always seem different day to day (score = 5).	
SENSITIVITY Rate from 1-5 how sensitive the child is (how aware/affected they are by their environment). LOW - HIGH	“Low Sensitivity” children sleep through noise, do not need to be held to sleep, don't seem to notice a dirty nappy (score = 1). “Highly Sensitive” children must have quiet to sleep, wake if put down, fuss when their nappy is dirty (score = 5).	
APPROACH Rate from 1-5 how the child reacts to new people or places. EAGER - CAUTIOUS	“Eager” children tend to approach new things easily, are calm when they meet new people and enjoy new places (score = 1). “Cautious” children are distressed by new things, get upset when approached by new people and often fuss in new places (score = 5).	
ADAPTABILITY Rate from 1-5 how adaptable the child is during transitions. MORE - LESS	A “more” adaptable child easily starts & stops eating at mealtime, falls asleep quickly, wakes up happily or quietly (score = 1). A “less” adaptable child cries or is upset when mealtime begins or ends, struggles to fall asleep or wake up, usually crying or upset (score = 5).	
PERSISTENCE Rate from 1-5 how persistent the child can be. LOW - HIGH	“Less persistent” children are distractable, even when hungry, they do not get upset if a toy is taken away. They are capable of being redirected (score = 1). “Highly persistent” children, when hungry need to eat immediately, get very upset if a toy is taken away and are not easily redirected (score = 5).	
MOOD Rate from 1-5 how serious or happy the child tends to be. POSITIVE - SERIOUS	A more often “positive child” is typically in a good mood, even when hungry or tired (score = 1). A more “serious child” appears thoughtful, focused and is often seen as more of an 'old soul' (score = 5).	

TOTAL = _____



ENERGY LEVEL

A.K.A Activity Level

High



Wiggly, squirmy, bouncing around. Always on the move. Seeks and craves activity and movement.

“Jaya - Personal Trainer”

Thomas & Chess (1977)

Low



Content to sit quietly and observe. Prefer more sedentary, calm activities.

“Leo - Librarian”



ALERTNESS

A.K.A distractability

High



Very alert, pays attention to and notices everything in their surrounding environment.

“Amira - Preschool Teacher”

Thomas & Chess (1977)

Low



Don't seem to notice or be affected by what's going on in their environment much.

“Sam - Businessman”



INTENSITY

High



Reacts strongly to things, both good and bad. Go from 0-100, experiencing high highs and low lows.

Thomas & Chess (1977)

“Mei - Drama Teacher”

Low



More even-keeled. It takes a lot to get a reaction out of them, good or bad.

“Tom - Early Childhood Educator”

TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

	DIMENSIONS	TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR	SCORE
How much movement and physical energy you naturally bring to your day.	ACTIVITY LEVEL Rate from 1-5 how active you/they are. QUIET - ACTIVE	You tend to be physically calm. You sleep soundly in one position, are comfortable sitting still for long periods, and generally relaxed during everyday routines. (Score = 1) You are always on the go. You shift frequently in your sleep, prefer to be moving throughout the day, and feel restless during routine tasks. (Score = 5)	
How easily, automatically do you notice changes in the environment.	ALERTNESS Rate from 1-5 how alert you/they are. MILD - HIGH	You are generally unbothered by busy environments. You can relax or fall asleep even with noise or activity around. (Score = 1) You easily notice changes to the environment. You may find busy places overwhelming or struggle to focus or sleep when overstimulated. (Score = 5)	
How intensely do you feel/react to things. For positive AND negative emotions.	INTENSITY Rate from 1-5 how strong your/their reactions are. RELAXED - REACTIVE	You have stable emotional responses. You rarely become visibly upset, you express emotions subtly and if you are upset, you return to a calm state easily. (Score = 1) You experience emotions intensely. You react strongly and quickly to situations, express feelings loudly or visibly, and take longer to calm down. (Score = 5)	

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REGULARITY

A.K.A rhythmic

High



Very predictable. Tend to eat, sleep, toilet at the same time each day. You can set a clock by their bio-rhythms.

Thomas & Chess (1977)

“Ella - Hairdresser”

Low



Unpredictable or variable appetite or sleep. May reject strict schedules & find structured routines stifling.

“Jordan - Relief Teacher”



SENSORY

High

Low



SENSORY

High



Easily affected by sensory stimuli like light, noise, temperature, hunger or discomfort.

“Dylan - Speech Therapist”

Low



Unaffected by sensory stimuli. Can sleep through anything, eats anything, doesn't rattle easily.

“Ava - Sports Coach”



APPROACH

A.K.A approach/withdrawal

High



Tend to approach new situations & environments with excitement and curiosity.

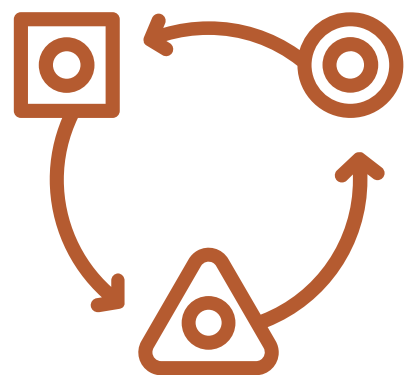
“Lucy - Trainee Educator”

Low



Slow to warm up & more easily overwhelmed or distressed by new places, people or things.

“Tedd - Experienced Educator”



ADAPTABILITY

High



Deals with change and transition relatively easily.
Tends to be happy to go with the flow.

“Rosa - Nurse”

Low



Finds change & transitions highly challenging.
Doesn't adjust easily to plans being altered.

“Nick - Accountant”



PERSISTENCE

High

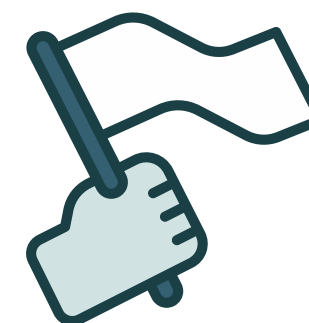


Continues trying even when things are challenging or difficult. Can be stubborn and time-consuming.

“Nina - Compliance Officer”

Thomas & Chess (1977)

Low



Moves on to a new task if things become too difficult or are not working.

“Ollie - Program Coordinator”



MOOD

High



Usually content, easy to please, cheerful and easy going. Happy go lucky.

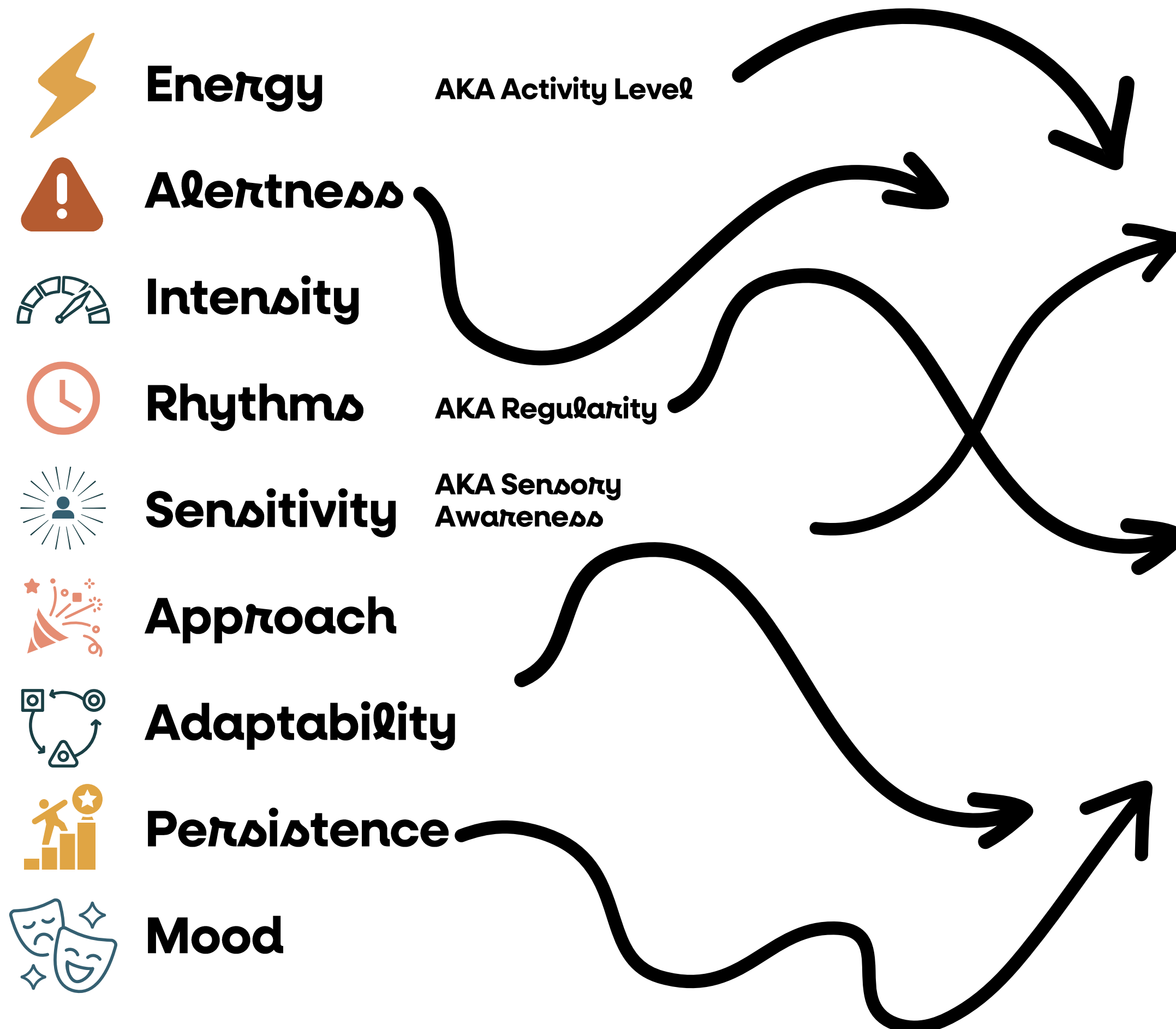
“Jess - Vet”

Low



Contemplative & deeply affected by the world around them. Experience emotions profoundly, even if they don't show it.

“Marcus - Musician”



EASY GOING

Easy Going or 'Dandelion' children are biologically resilient, and tend to flourish despite adversity.

In some cases, these children grow up to be an inspiration, with people wondering at their ability to thrive considering their circumstances.

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SLOW TO WARM

The Tulip Child is a Mix of Both Sensitive and Resilient

The medium-sensitivity child that falls somewhere in between the dandelion and orchid child.

They take their time observing their environment, after consideration they will slowly engage, always paying keen attention to their surroundings.

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HIGHLY SENSITIVE

Highly Sensitive or 'Orchid' children are more sensitive to both good and bad environments.

They are biologically reactive to their circumstances, and find it difficult to cope with stress.

They require special care, but under ideal circumstances, can grow into exceptional people who can see, understand and create things like no one else.

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References: Jagiellowicz, Zarinafsar, & Acevedo, 2020; Ershova et al., 2020



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A CLOSER LOOK AT TEMPERAMENT

UNDERSTANDING THE INDIVIDUAL
DIFFERENCES THAT SHAPE BEHAVIOUR

TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

	DIMENSIONS	TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR	SCORE
<i>This isn't influenced by your job, life responsibilities, but how you would prefer to be.</i>	REGULARITY Rate from 1-5 how predictable you/they are. PREDICTABLE - UNPREDICTABLE	You tend to follow regular rhythms. You get hungry at consistent times and go to bed around the same time each night. (Score = 1) You have fluctuating daily patterns. Your hunger and sleep times vary from day to day, and you find routines less desirable or relevant (Score = 5)	
<i>You might easily notice smells, sounds, changes in temperature, light.</i>	SENSITIVITY Rate from 1-5 how sensitive you/they are (how aware/affected by the environment). LOW - HIGH	You aren't very affected by sensory input. You can sleep through noise, and are generally unfazed by minor discomforts. (Score = 1) You are more reactive to sensory stimuli. You need specific conditions to sleep, notice small discomforts easily and are overwhelmed in stimulating environments. (Score = 5)	
<i>Not what you feel like you "should" do, but your honest feelings and preferences</i>	APPROACH Rate from 1-5 how you/they react to new people or places. EAGER - CAUTIOUS	You embrace new experiences easily, are comfortable meeting new people, adjust quickly in unfamiliar settings and are open to change. (Score = 1) You often feel uneasy in new situations. You may become anxious when meeting unfamiliar people, uncomfortable in new environments and prefer predictability. (Score = 5)	

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TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

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How easily you adjust to changes, transitions, or new routines.	ADAPTABILITY Rate from 1-5 how adaptable you/they are during transitions. MORE - LESS	You adjust easily to changes in routine, can start and stop activities (like meals or rest) with little stress and tend to wake up and wind down smoothly. (Score = 1) You find transitions challenging and need time to switch between tasks. Being interrupted or rushed leaves you feeling irritable or unsettled (Score = 5)	
How long you stick with something—especially when it's hard or not going your way.	PERSISTENCE Rate from 1-5 how persistent you/they tend to be. LOW - HIGH	You can shift focus when interrupted, tolerate delays or changes in plans, and are generally flexible when things don't go as expected (Score = 1) You stay intensely focused on your goals. You become frustrated if interrupted, struggle to let go of tasks or expectations, and have difficulty accepting changes. (Score = 5)	
Your usual emotional "set point"—are you more naturally sunny, serious, or somewhere in between?	MOOD Rate from 1-5 how serious or happy you/they tend to be. POSITIVE - SERIOUS	You tend to be cheerful and upbeat most of the time, even when tired or hungry. Your default mood is generally light and easygoing. (Score = 1) You come across as thoughtful or reserved. You are seen as calm, focused or introspective—sometimes described as having an "old soul" quality. (Score = 5)	

TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

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TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

SCORES OF 9-26

SCORES OF 27-36

SCORES OF 37-45

29

TEMPERAMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

EASY GOING

"Flexible & Easy Going"

SCORES OF 9-26

SLOW-TO-WARM

"Shy, Thoughtful & Observant"

SCORES OF 27-36

HIGHLY SENSITIVE

"Deeply Feeling & Passionate"

SCORES OF 37-45

29



WHERE DOES SENSITIVITY COME FROM IN THE BRAIN?

IS THIS ALL JUST "WIRING"?



**WHERE IN THE BRAIN DOES THIS
SENSITIVITY
COME FROM?**

OUR BRAIN'S ALARM SYSTEM

- Our amygdala helps us detect threats and respond to stress.
- In more sensitive children, this area is more active, meaning they may react more strongly to loud noises, sudden changes, or stressful situations - even if others wouldn't.
- Their brain is more frequently scanning for "Is this safe?"
- They require more reassurance, more physical comfort,



more
active
amygdala



OUR FEELINGS CENTRE

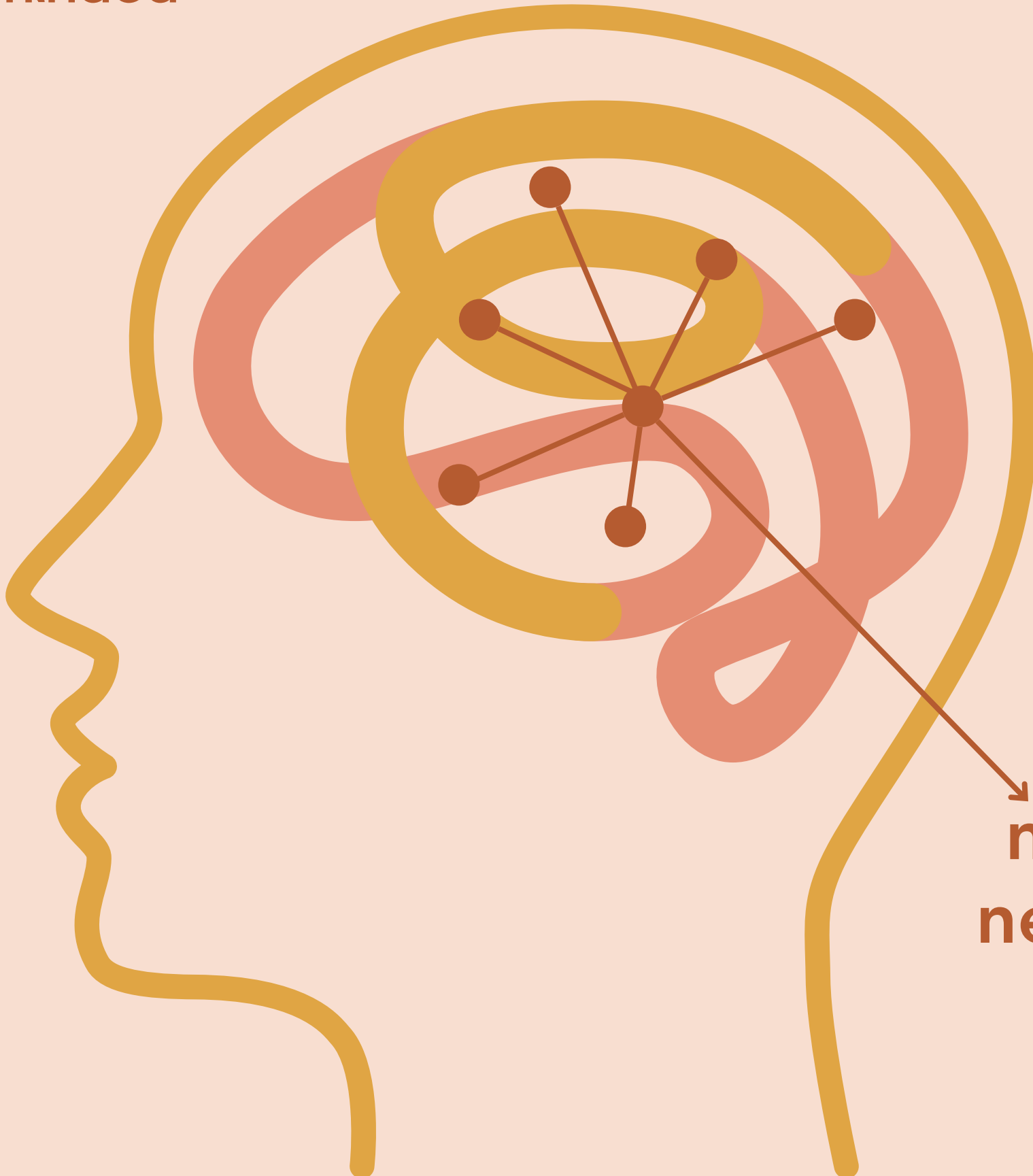
- The brain region helps us notice what's happening inside our body: like butterflies in the tummy, a racing heart, hunger, tiredness or pain.
- Highly sensitive kids often have stronger activity here, which means they may be more aware of their own emotions and physical sensations.
- They may be more aware of hunger cues, may feel physical pain more intensely, more affected by their body's cues



**stronger
reactions in the
insular cortex**

THE EMPATHY NETWORK

- This system helps us understand and “mirror” what others are feeling.
- More sensitive kids have a more active mirror neuron system, which means they often pick up more on subtle emotional cues and feel things deeply with others.
- This can make them wonderfully empathetic, but also more easily overwhelmed by others' emotions.



mirror
neurons



THE REGULATION HUB

- The prefrontal cortex helps us stay calm, solve problems, and control impulses.
- In highly sensitive children, this part of the brain is often working overtime to manage more sensory input, bigger feelings and make sense of emotional experiences.
- Because it's working harder, it can go "offline" more readily, making it harder for these kids to stay regulated without adult support.

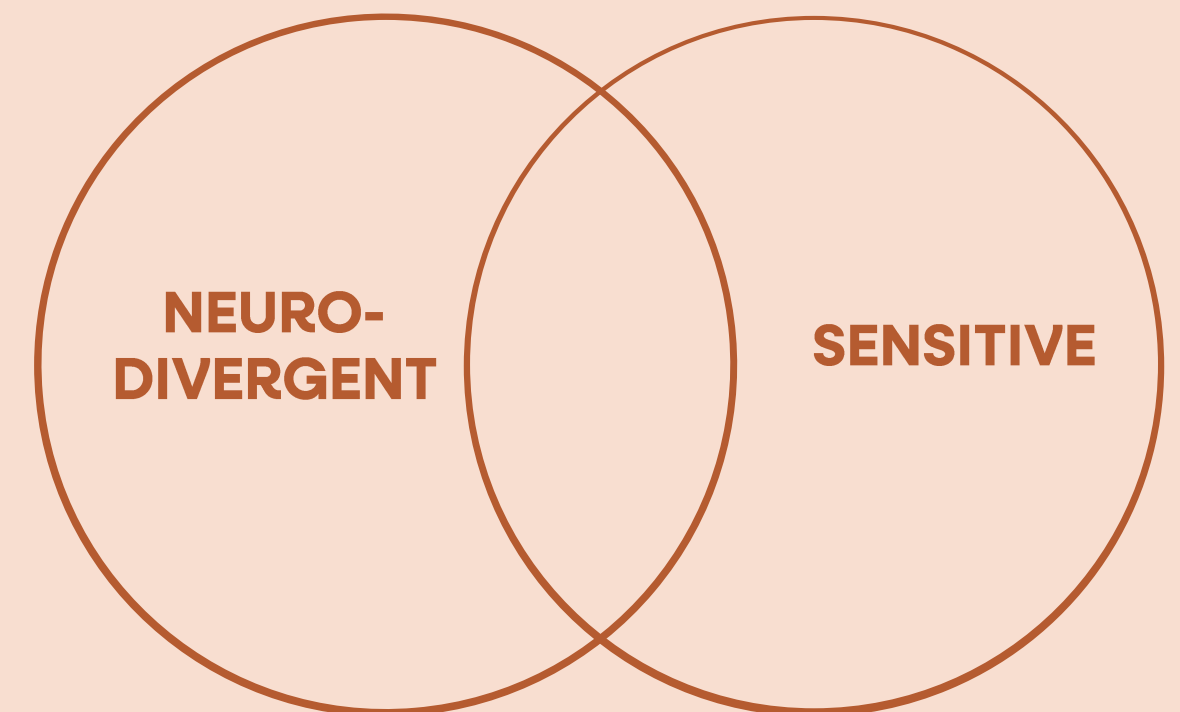
more effort in
pre-frontal
cortex



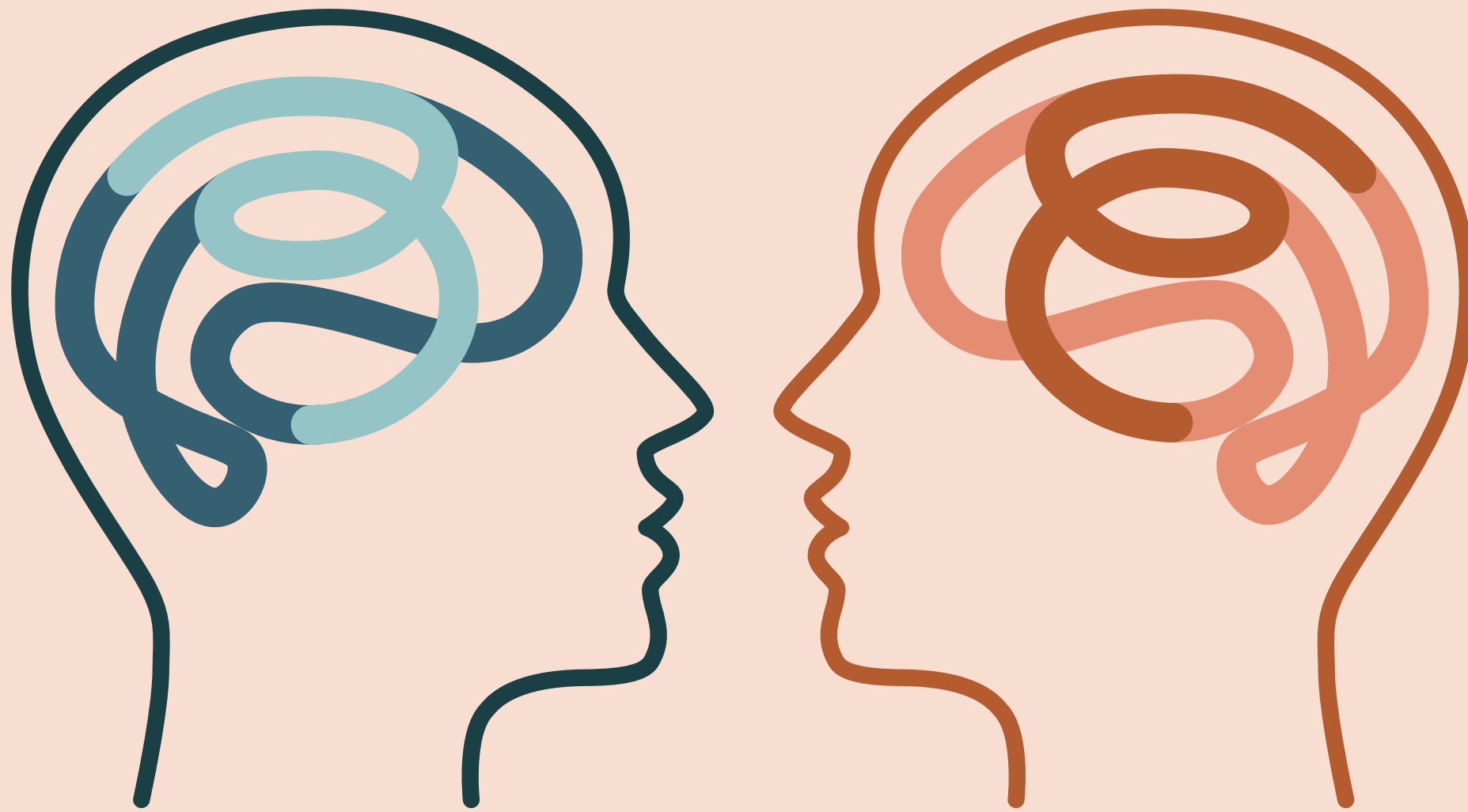
SENSITIVITY & NEURODIVERSITY

- Some of the same brain patterns found in neurodivergent people, are also found in highly sensitive
- There may be a biological connection between sensitivity and neurodiversity. Researchers are still learning about this.
- Not the same but they may need similar supports: calm spaces or gentle transitions.

same same,
but different



SENSITIVITY & GENDER



same same,
but different

- **Short Answer:** No. Sensitivity is equally present in boys and girls.
- But how sensitivity shows up **can look different across genders**, and the way it's perceived and responded to by adults is deeply shaped by social expectations.
- Boys might show it differently, often through action ("**behavioural issues**", "**defiance**" or "**aggression**") rather than words or tears.
- Boys may "act out" rather than cry or seek comfort, this means they're often labelled as "bad" or "naughty" and their **needs for co-regulation go unmet**.

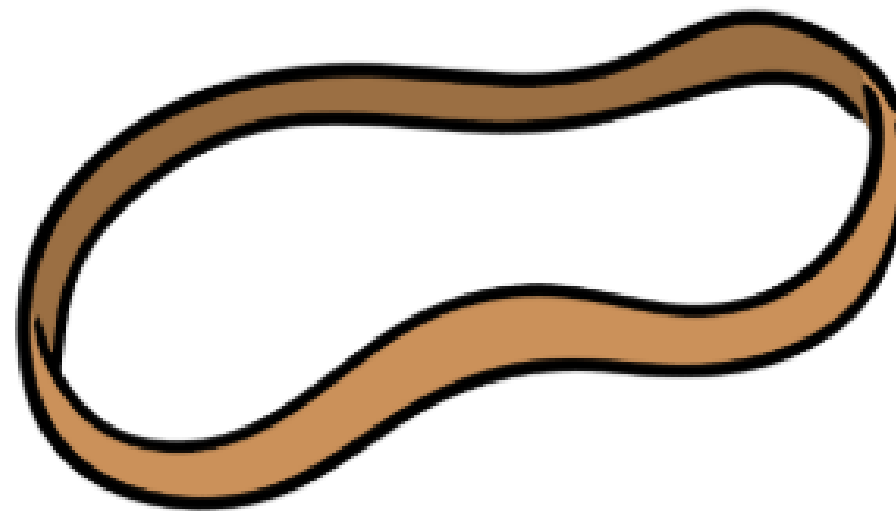


BECAUSE OF ALL THESE BRAIN DIFFERENCES

MORE SENSITIVE CHILDREN EXPERIENCE MORE STRESS, MORE EASILY

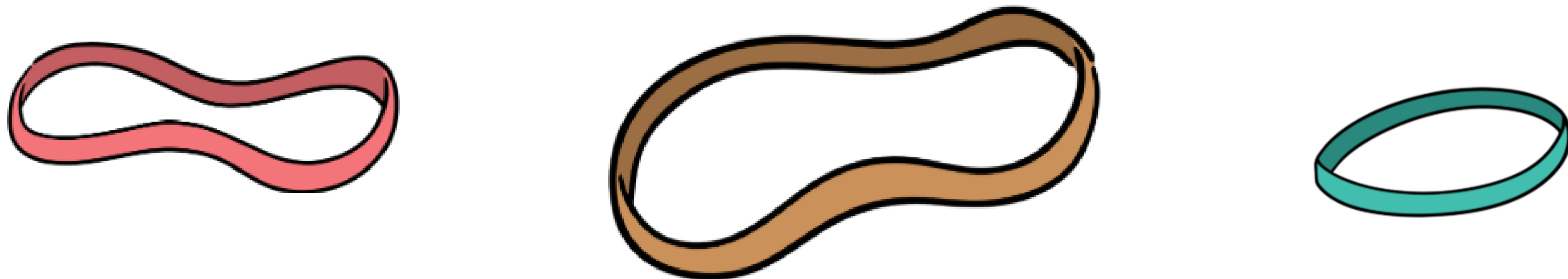
The "window of tolerance" is the space within which we are able to easily tolerate challenges and stress.

I like to think of it as a rubber band.

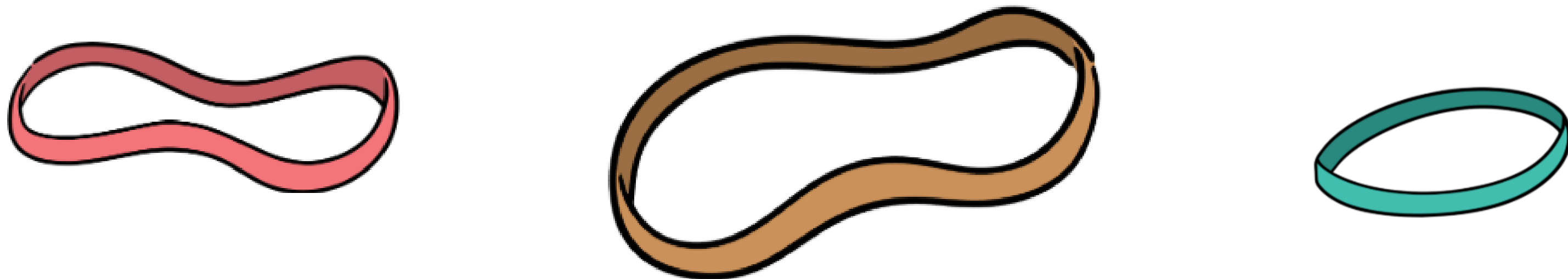


We are all born with a different rubber band.

This is largely due to our temperament.



Understanding temperament is about how we help ALL children (and especially more sensitive children) slowly and gently ease and stretch their bands, so they experience less tension (stress) and can better cope with challenges.





**THAT'S ALL GREAT...
BUT LET'S BE HONEST, SOME
KIDS ARE BLOODY HARD
WORK**

THE REAL QUESTION IS: WHY?



**THAT'S ALL GREAT...
BUT LET'S BE HONEST, SOME
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THE REAL QUESTION IS: WHY?

**Evolutionary
History**

**Survival
Instincts**

**Safety of the
group**



**Evolutionary
History**

**Survival
Instincts**

**Safety of the
group**



CLASSROOM/CENTRE CULTURE

CHANGING THE CULTURE, NOT JUST "IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES"



GOODNESS OF FIT



How well a child's temperament matches the expectations of their environment and the temperaments of the people in that environment.





GOODNESS OF FIT



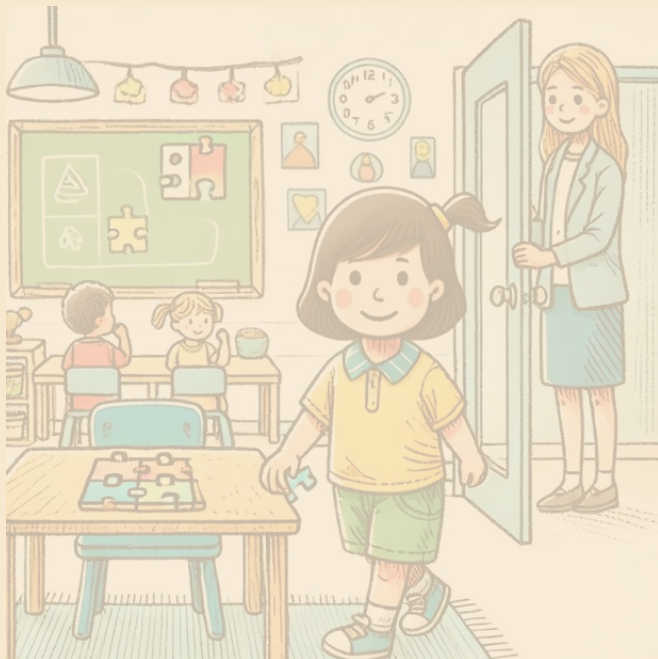
Kids like Frankie almost always fit their environment, cause they're "Easy"

How well a child's temperament matches the expectations of their environment and the temperaments of the people in that environment.





GOODNESS OF FIT



Kids like Frankie almost always fit their environment, cause they're "Easy"

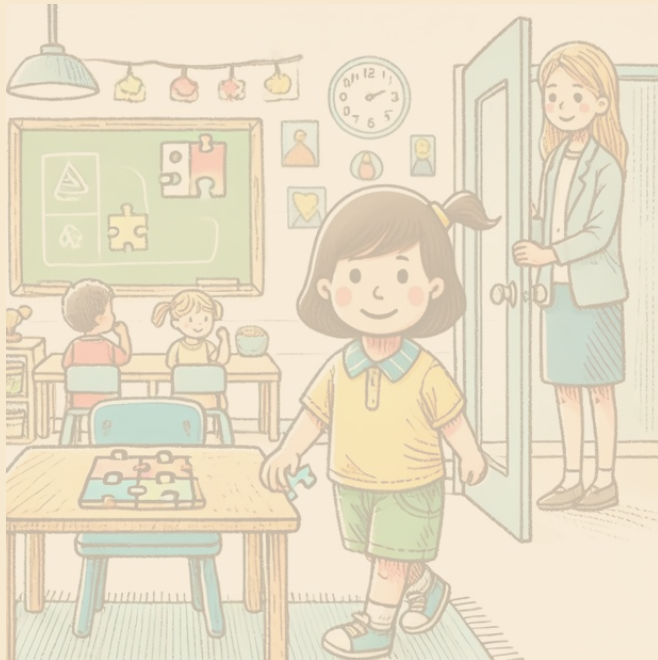
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Kids like Luca, if they're supported can flourish. If not, they might struggle and wilt



GOODNESS OF FIT



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How well a child's temperament matches the expectations of their environment and the temperaments of the people in that environment.



Kids like Luca, if they're supported can flourish. If not, they might struggle and wilt

TEMPERAMENT AS AN EQUITY ISSUE

Equality?

Evenly distributed
tools and assistance



With apologies to Shel Silverstein from @lunchbreath

2019 Design in Tech Report | Addressing Imbalance

Equity

Custom tools that
identify and address
inequality



With apologies to Shel Silverstein from @lunchbreath

2019 Design in Tech Report | Addressing Imbalance

HOW TO BALANCE DIFFERENT TEMPERAMENTS IN SHARED SPACES

YOU CAN'T RUN FOUR
DIFFERENT PROGRAMS



BUT YOU CAN CREATE ONE THAT
FLEXES TO MEET THEM ALL.



WE DESIGN STRATEGIES THAT WORK FOR EVERYONE

- QA1.1.2 • ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL
- QA1.1.3 • GROUP ACTIVITIES WITH LAYERED ACCESS
- QA1.1.3 • PREDICTABLE ROUTINES & RITUALS
- QA1.2.3 • FLEXIBLE SEATING & SENSORY SUPPORTS
- QA5.1.2 • INDIVIDUALISE WITHOUT SINGLING OUT
- QA5.1.1 • EMOTIONAL SAFETY IS THE FOUNDATION





SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

TAILORING THE ENVIRONMENT TO FIT THE CHILD

EASY GOING

- Leadership opportunities
- Stretch Challenges
- Reflective check-ins

QA1.3.2

QA1.2.3

QA1.2.2

QA5.2.1

QA5.2.2





SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

TAILORING THE ENVIRONMENT TO FIT THE CHILD

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QA1.3.2
QA1.2.3
QA1.2.2
QA5.2.1
QA5.2.2



SLOW-TO-WARM

- GRADUAL EXPOSURE
- Predictability
- Gentle encouragement

QA1.1.3
QA1.2.1
QA3.2.1
QA5.1.1
QA5.1.2





SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

TAILORING THE ENVIRONMENT TO FIT THE CHILD

EASY GOING

- Leadership opportunities
- Stretch Challenges
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QA1.3.2
QA1.2.3
QA1.2.2
QA5.2.1
QA5.2.2



SLOW-TO-WARM

- Gradual exposure
- Predictability
- Gentle encouragement

QA1.1.3
QA1.2.1
QA3.2.1
QA5.1.1
QA5.1.2



HIGHLY SENSITIVE

- Movement breaks
- Sensory outlets
- Structured choices

QA1.2.3
QA2.1.3
QA3.2.1
QA3.2.2
QA5.1.1





SUPPORTING SENSITIVE CHILDREN

PRACTICAL WAYS WE CAN HELP MORE SENSITIVE CHILDREN THRIVE

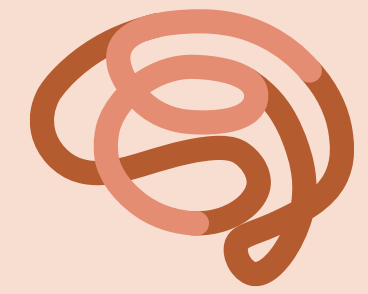
SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

UNDERSTANDING SENSITIVITY

- Share these messages with parents, colleagues
- Prioritise professional development on sensitivity co-regulation, neurodiversity and trauma.

Download and share my
free resources (QR code at
the end of the presentation)





SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

SLOW DOWN

To get more, we need to do less

- Sensitive children process more input
 - slower environments reduce overwhelm
- Fewer transitions = more emotional regulation
- Deep play needs time - rushed schedules interrupt valuable learning
- Less rushing = more attuned connection between child & educator
- Stillness nurtures imagination, problem solving, and emotional growth



QA5.2.2

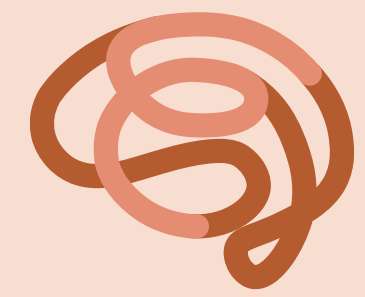
QA1.1.3



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION





SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

1. GET DOWN TO THEIR LEVEL

What it looks like: Kneeling or sitting so you're eye-to-eye with the child, offering presence and calm.



2. USE A CALM, STEADY TONE OF VOICE

What it looks like: Speaking slowly and gently, even when a child is distressed.



QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

But for Sensitive Kids...

1. GET DOWN TO THEIR LEVEL

What it looks like: Kneeling or sitting so you're eye-to-eye with the child, offering presence and calm.

- Maintain soft eye contact or allow them to look away.
- Let them control proximity - some may need space first, then closeness.

2. USE A CALM, STEADY TONE OF VOICE

What it looks like: Speaking slowly and gently, even when a child is distressed.

- Avoid sudden shifts in tone or facial expressions - sensitive kids pick up on subtle cues.
- Be mindful of metaphor, irony, sarcasm or mixed messages

QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

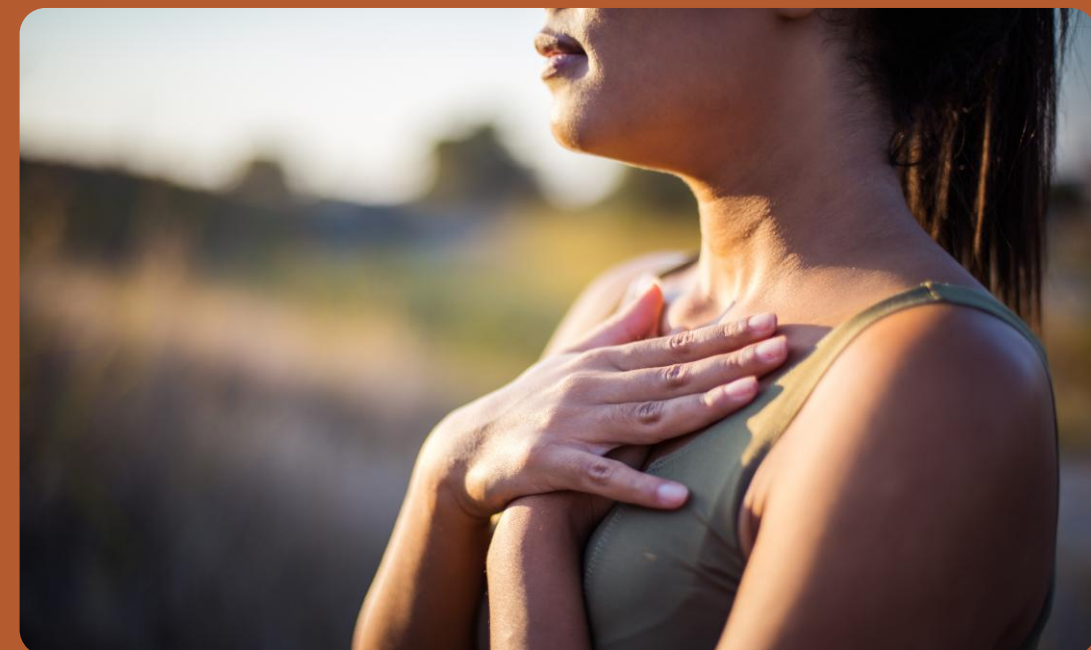
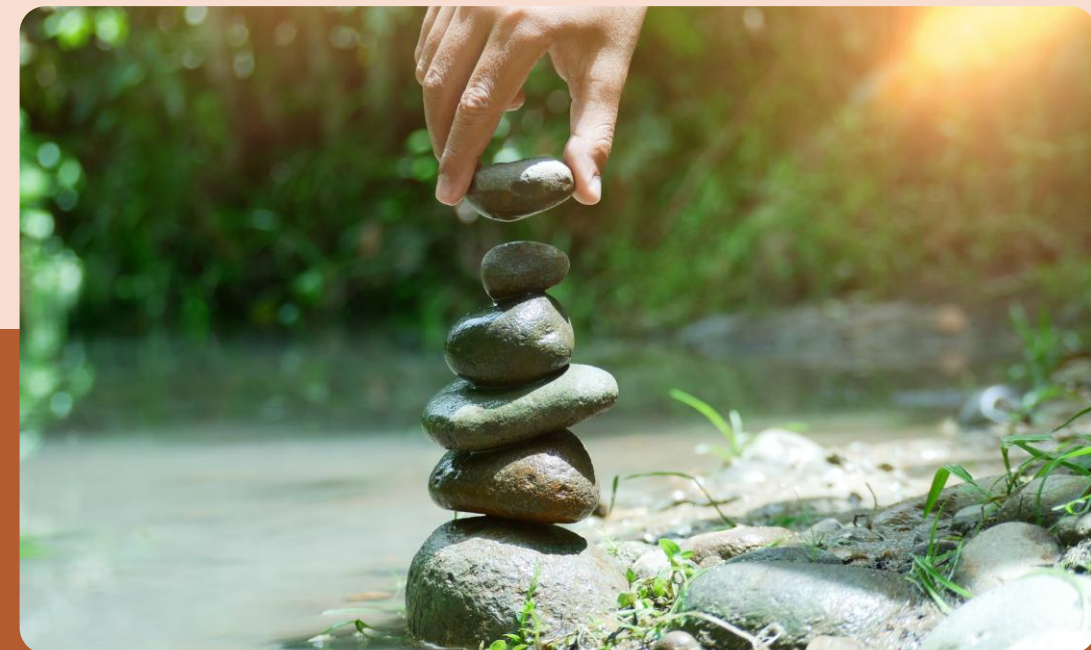
Things that often help include:

3. BE A CALM, STEADY PHYSICAL PRESENCE

What it looks like: Sitting near, staying grounded, and simply being there while the child calms down.

4. BREATHE TOGETHER

What it looks like: Taking slow, exaggerated breaths to model calming your own body.



QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

But for Sensitive Kids...

3. BE A CALM, STEADY PHYSICAL PRESENCE

What it looks like: Sitting near, staying grounded, and simply being there while the child calms down.

- Avoid hovering or touching unless invited.
- A soft object (like a weighted toy or cushion) might feel safer than a hand on the shoulder.

4. BREATHE TOGETHER

What it looks like: Taking slow, exaggerated breaths to model calming your own body.

- Make it visual or playful (e.g. “smell the flower, blow out the candles”).
- Invite them to join, but don’t insist - they may need to observe first.

QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

5. NAME THE EMOTION

What it looks like: "It looks like you're feeling really frustrated right now."



6. OFFER TIME AND SPACE (WITHOUT DISCONNECTION)

What it looks like: Saying, "I'm here when you're ready," and staying nearby.



QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

But for Sensitive Kids...

5. NAME THE EMOTION

What it looks like: "It looks like you're feeling really frustrated right now."

- Keep it gentle and curious ("I wonder if you're feeling...").
- Avoid over-labelling in the heat of the moment - some sensitive children may feel overwhelmed by too much talking.

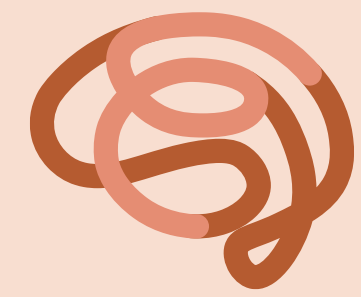
6. OFFER TIME AND SPACE (WITHOUT DISCONNECTION)

What it looks like: Saying, "I'm here when you're ready," and staying nearby.

- It make take them longer to regulate - but still need your emotional availability.
- Let them know you're not going anywhere, even if they need distance.

QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

7. USE STORY & PLAY TO REVISIT TRICKY MOMENTS LATER

What it looks like: Using puppets, dolls or drawings to help reflect on what happened, without shame.

8. RESPECT AND REPAIR AFTER RUPTURE

What it looks like: "That was a hard moment. You're still a good kid. Let's try again."



QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1



SUPPORTING SENSITIVITY

EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION

Things that often help include:

But for Sensitive Kids...

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What it looks like: Using puppets, dolls or drawings to help reflect on what happened, without shame.

8. RESPECT AND REPAIR AFTER RUPTURE

What it looks like: "That was a hard moment. You're still a good kid. Let's try again."

- Keep language soft and playful - avoid phrases like "you were being bad or naughty."
- Focus on safety, not blame: "The bear felt scared when things got loud."

- For sensitive kids, even small ruptures can feel huge.
- Repair gently, and don't rush them to "move on."
- They may need reassurance more than once.

QA5.2.2

QA2.1.1

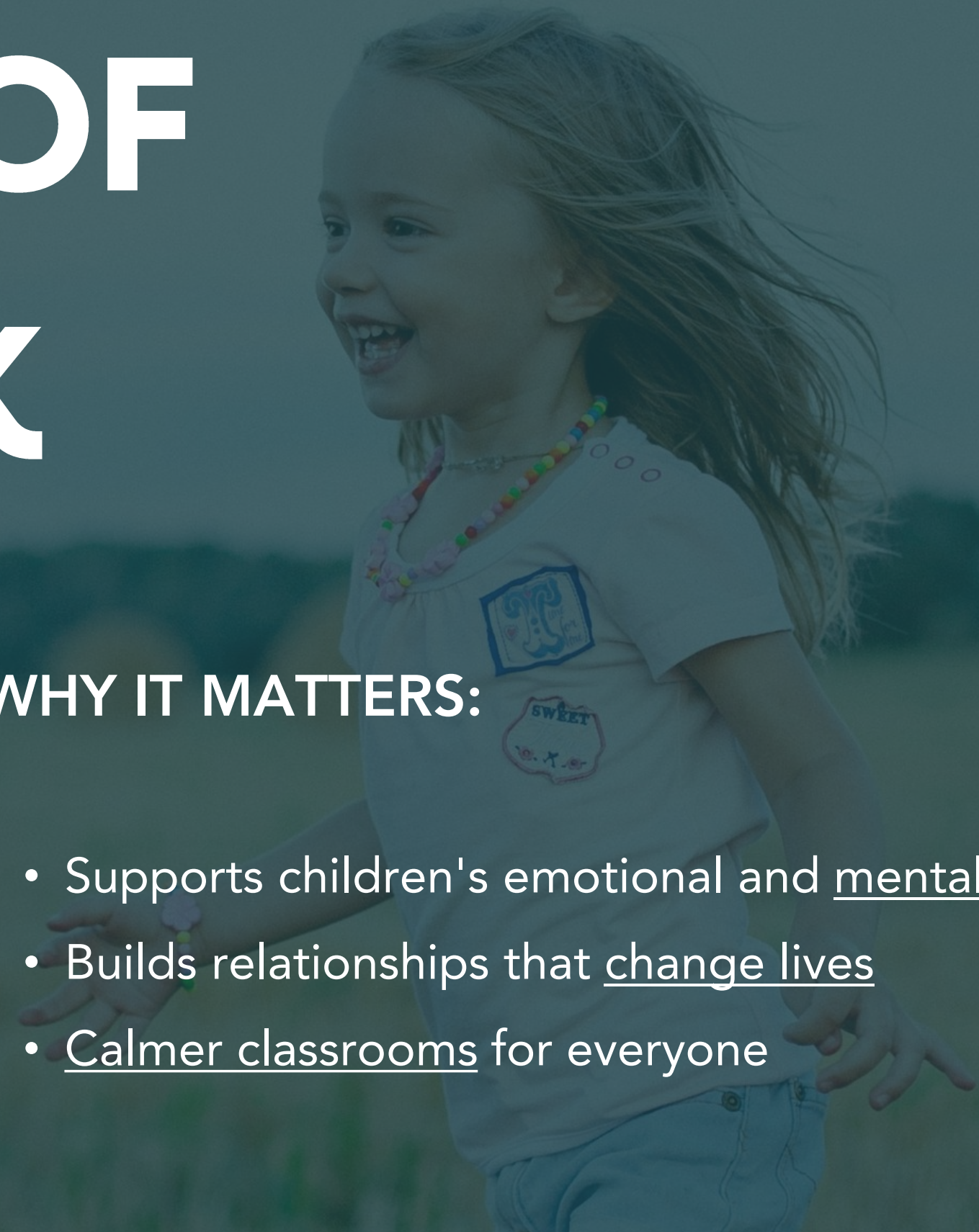
THE HEART OF THE WORK

WHAT IT'S REALLY ABOUT:

- *Seeing* all children, especially the sensitive ones
- Meeting emotional needs
- Classrooms where connection comes first

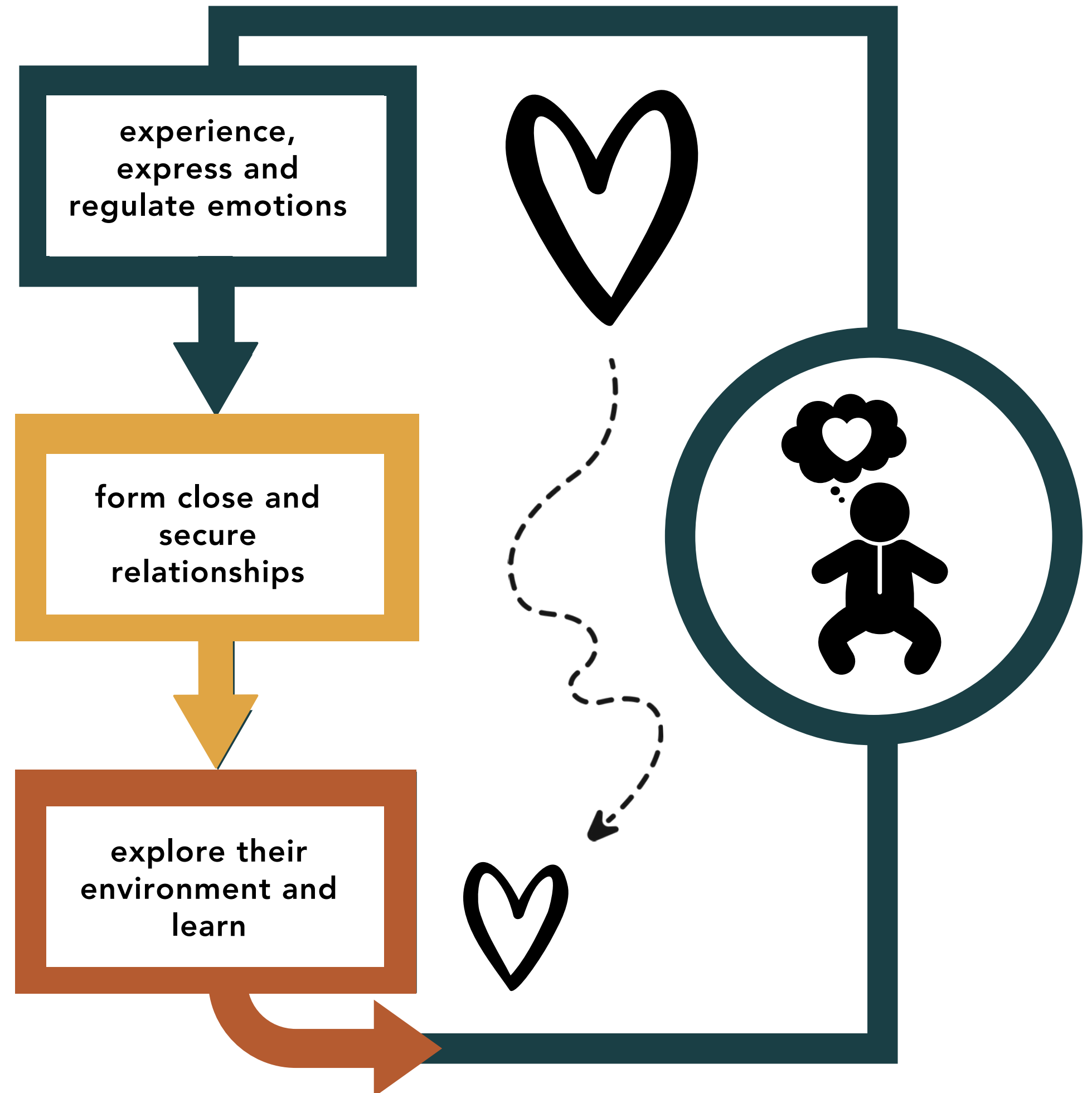
WHY IT MATTERS:

- Supports children's emotional and mental health
- Builds relationships that change lives
- Calmer classrooms for everyone



WHY IT MATTERS

Truly connecting with a child is what creates their mental health.



The single most important thing you can do to
support highly sensitive children is:

CONNECTION

The single most important thing you can do to
support highly sensitive children is:

CONNECTION

Not control.

Not perfect routines.

Not the right strategy.

Not trying to fix their feelings.

Just real, warm, attuned connection.

Because connection is what helps their nervous system feel safe.

And safety is the foundation for everything else - regulation, resilience, and growth.





Connection first.

Curiosity over control.

Never underestimate the power of the work you do.





THANK YOU

Connection first.

Curiosity over control.

Never underestimate the power of the work you do.





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