

FEELING SAFE

What recent research tells us about the most
important needs of Aboriginal children
in the Care System

SNAICC National Aboriginal Child Care Conference,
July 2010, Alice Springs

Howard Bath

Board of Inquiry into Child Protection, NT

Trauma

“A psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience, often involving a sense of intense fear, terror or helplessness”

Bruce Perry



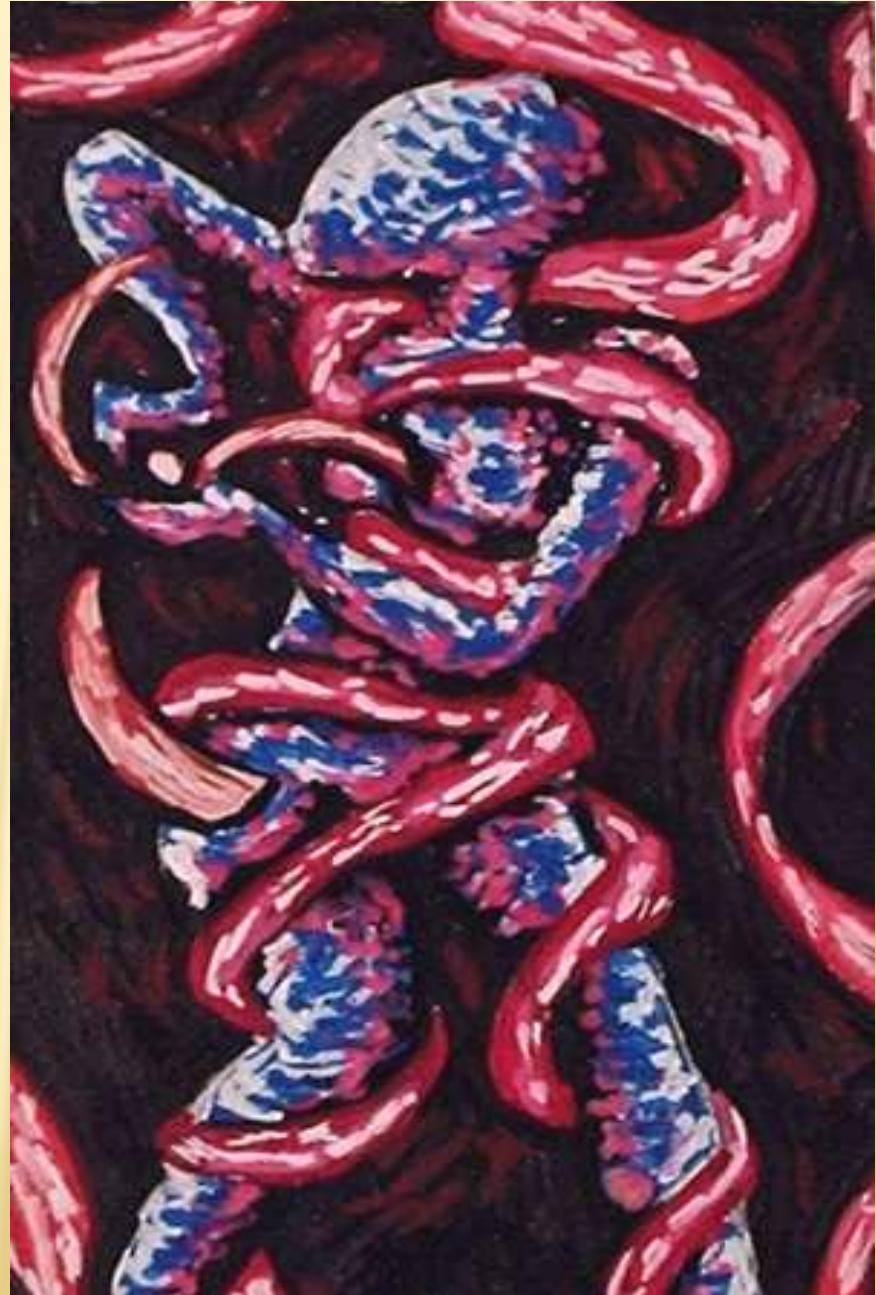
Type 1, Acute or Simple Trauma – from one overwhelming traumatic event



Type 2, Complex or Developmental Trauma – from ongoing exposure to fear and helplessness

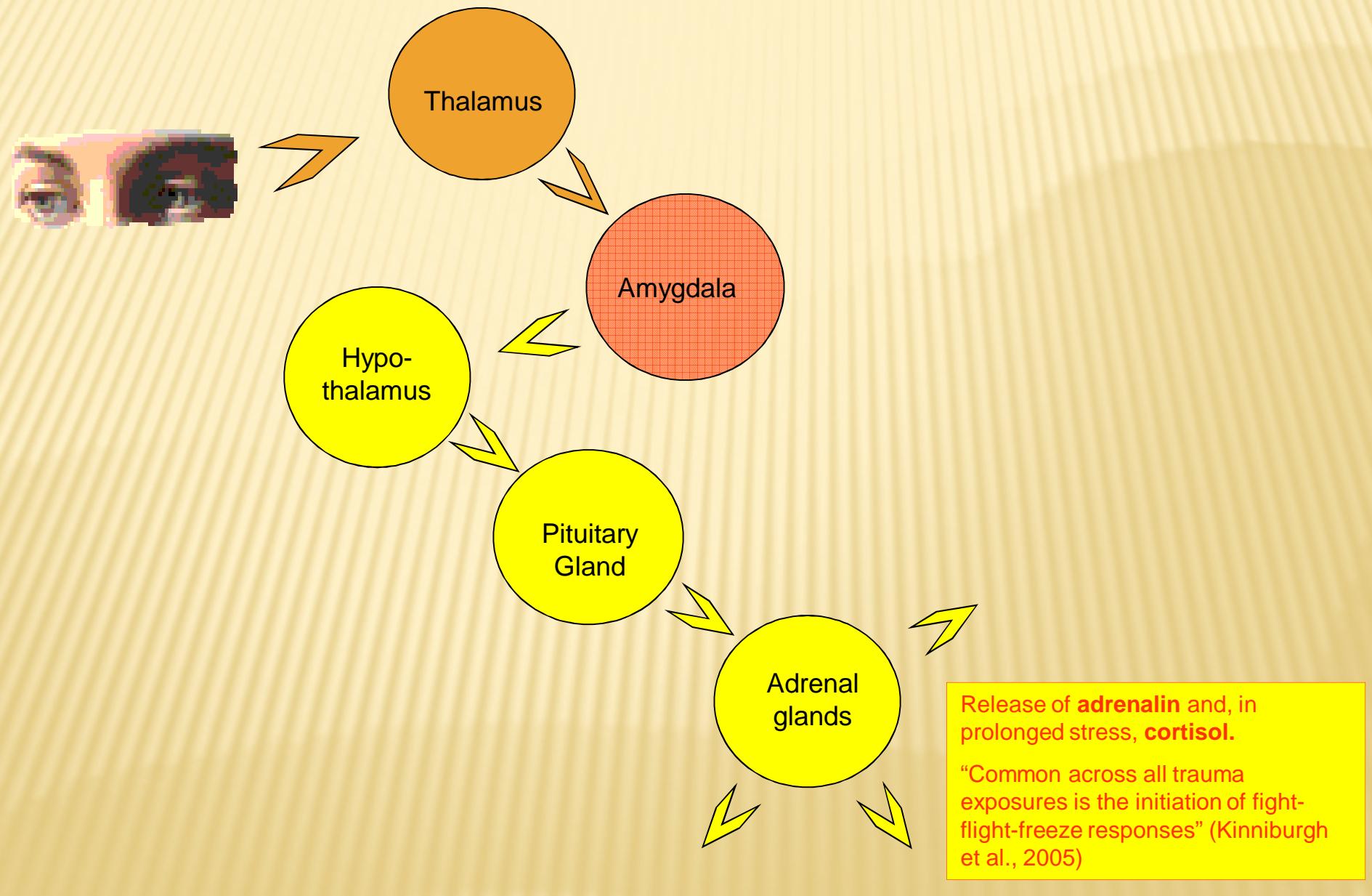
‘complex trauma’ describes the experience of multiple, chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature... and early life onset”

van der Kolk, 2005



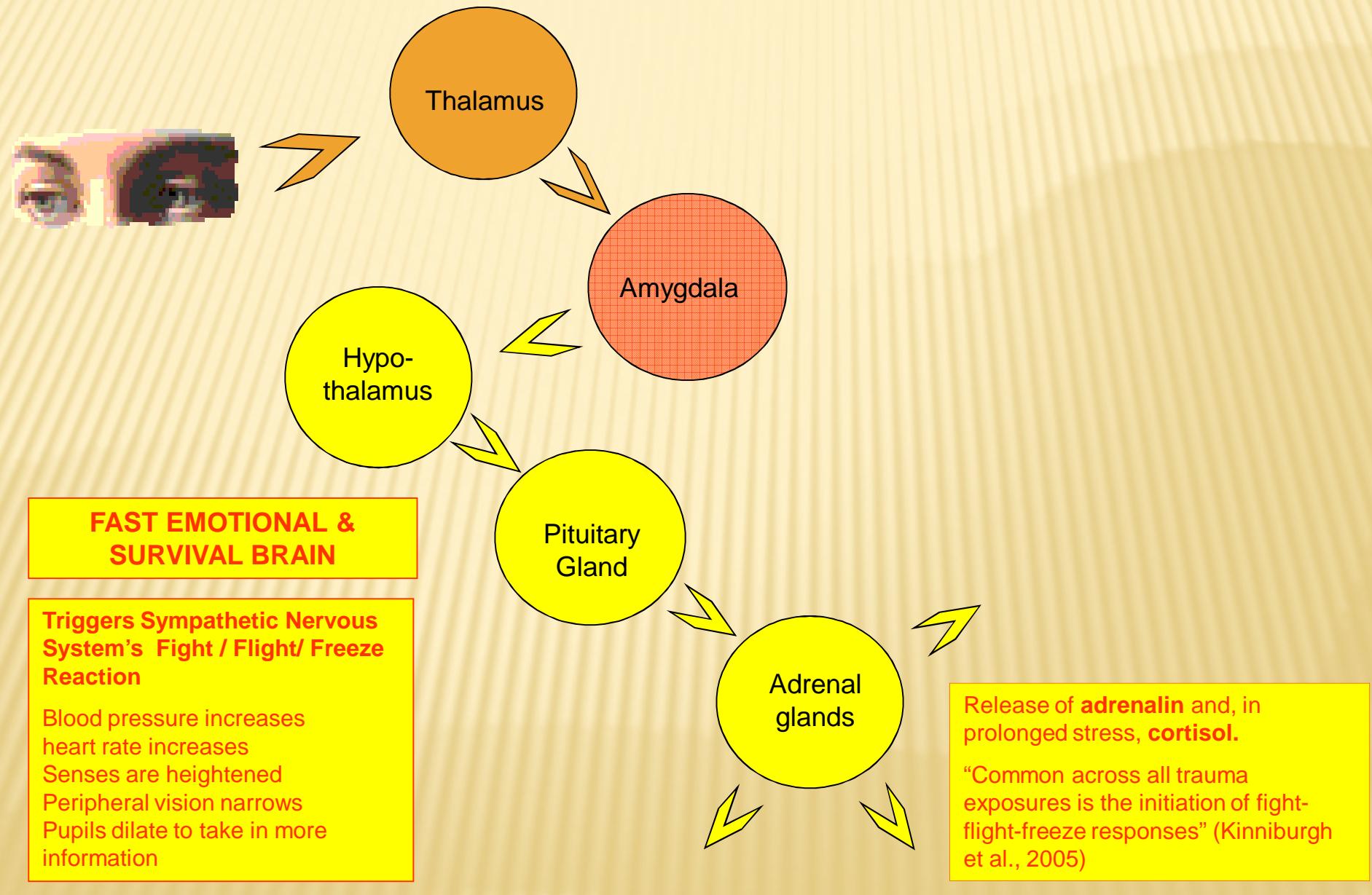
The Threat/Stress Reaction

adapted from Le Doux & Sapolsky



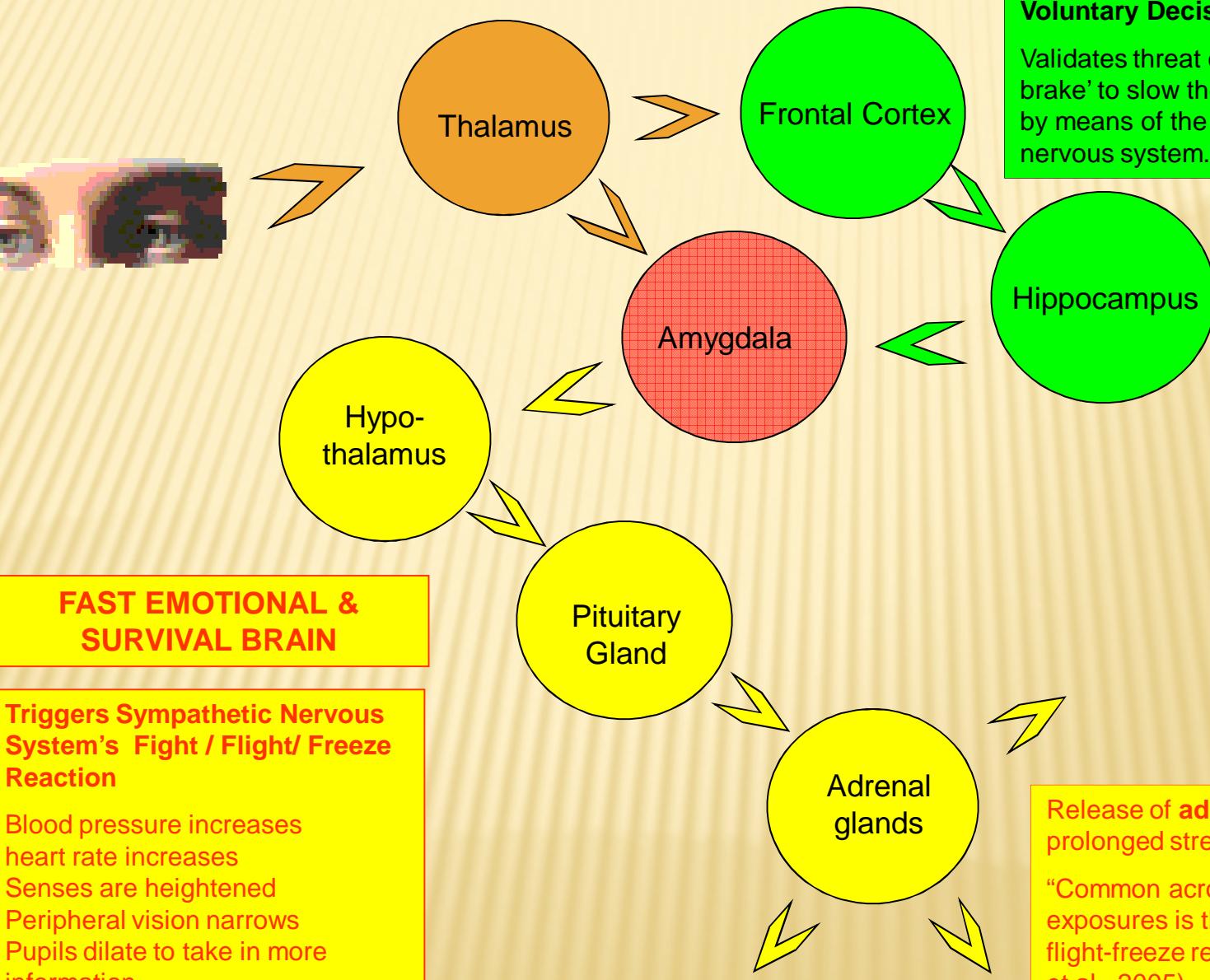
The Threat/Stress Reaction

adapted from Le Doux & Sapolsky



The Threat/Stress Reaction

adapted from Le Doux & Sapolsky

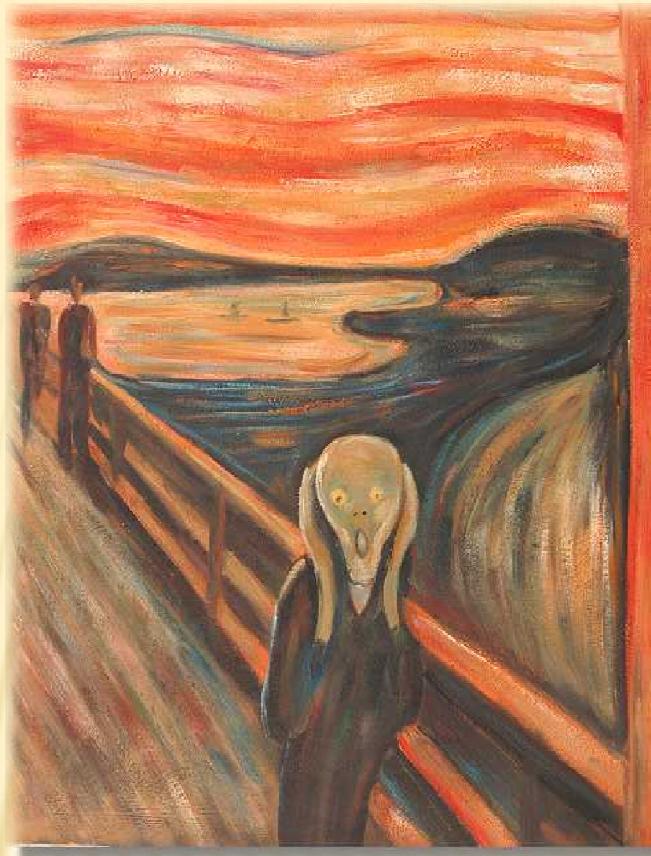


SLOW LOGICAL BRAIN

Evaluates Threat – Makes Voluntary Decisions

Validates threat or applies the 'neural brake' to slow the emotional reaction by means of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Trauma



Trauma leads to the repeated involuntary triggering of the traumatic stress reaction with feelings of overwhelming fear and helplessness.

The **amygdala** stores memories of threatening situations for future reference. Through a process of *fear conditioning*, it tags specific events or cues as potentially dangerous



Repeated and overwhelming stress
“sensitizes” the amygdala and it
becomes hyperalert to danger.

“Traumatized children reset
their normal level of arousal.
Even when no external
threats exist, they are
in a persistent state
of alarm”

Bruce Perry



Dissociation

“The escape when there is no escape”

Physiological and emotional shutdown and psychological separation from perceived threat



DISSOCIATION & AROUSAL

In severely traumatised people there is an “oscillating rhythm” between an intense re-experiencing of traumatic events and dissociative responses that include numbing, denial and emotional constriction

Judith Herman, 1992, p. 47

The Wounds of Trauma



Complex trauma can impair the development of thinking processes, relationships, self worth, memory, health, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Bessel van der Kolk and colleagues

More Outcomes of Trauma

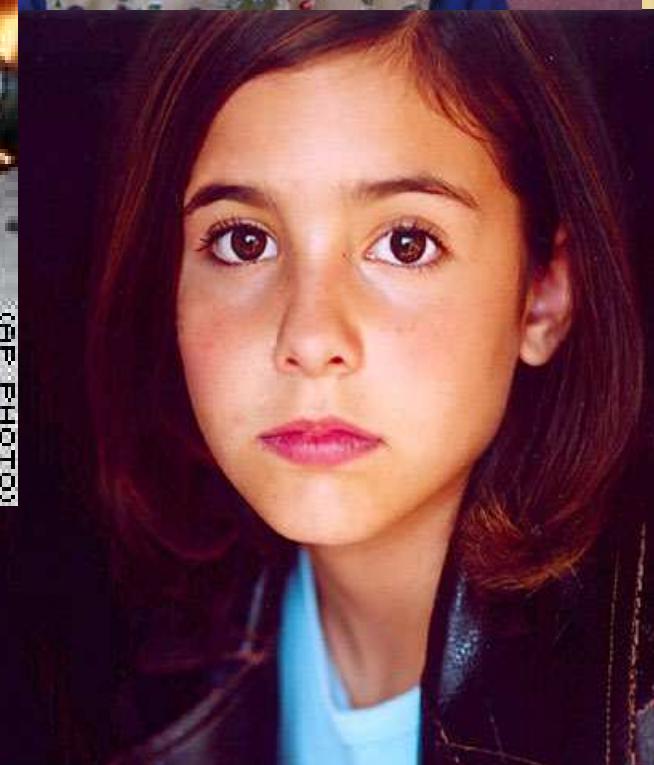
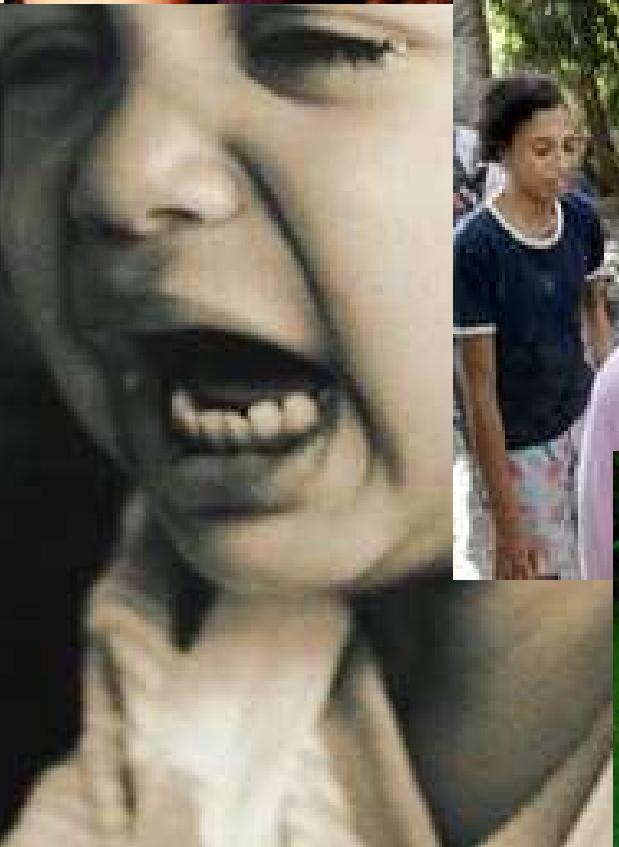
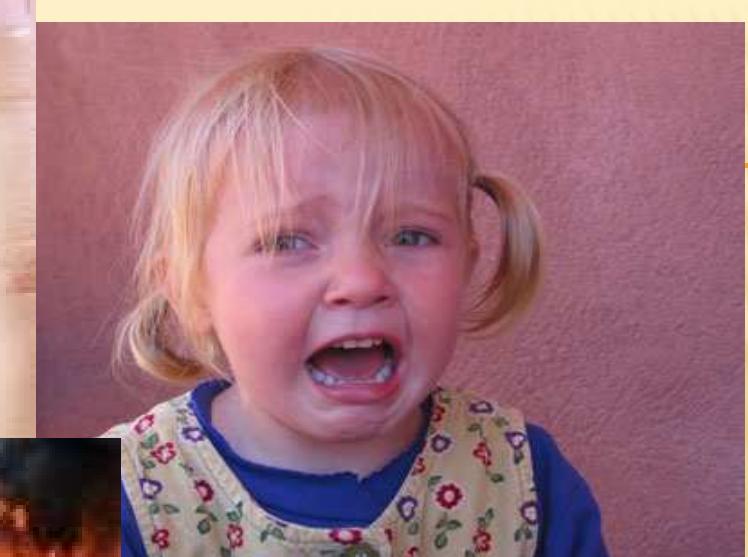


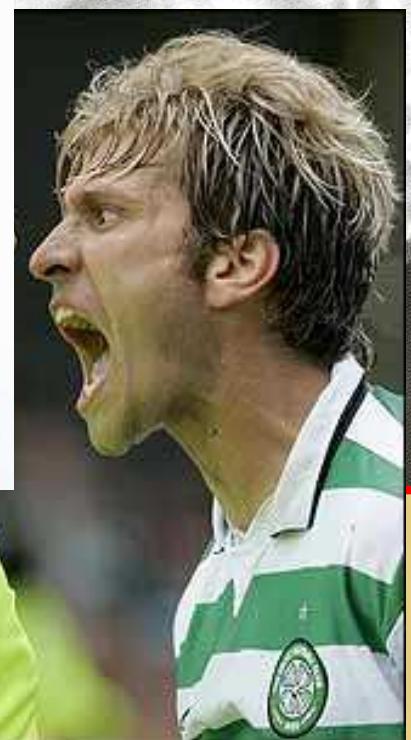
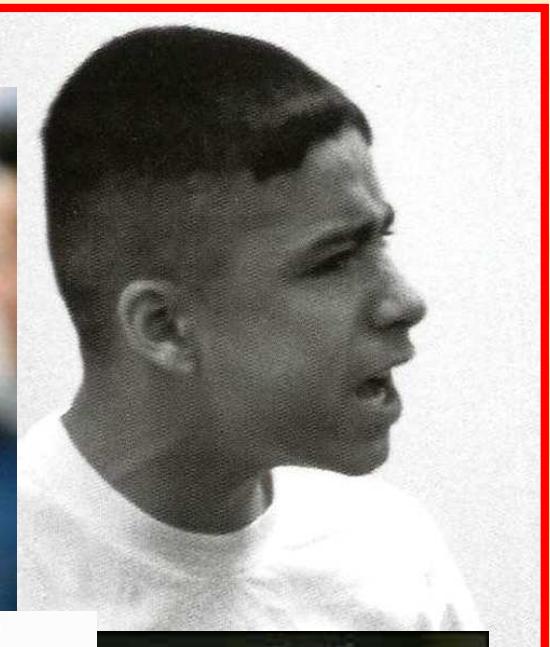
Empathy problems
Emotional numbing
Compulsive re-exposure
Substance abuse
Helplessness
Hopelessness
No future orientation

“The most significant consequence of early relational trauma is the loss of the ability to regulate the intensity and duration of affects” Allan Schore



“At the core of traumatic stress is a breakdown in the capacity to regulate internal states like fear, anger, and sexual impulses” Bessel van der Kolk







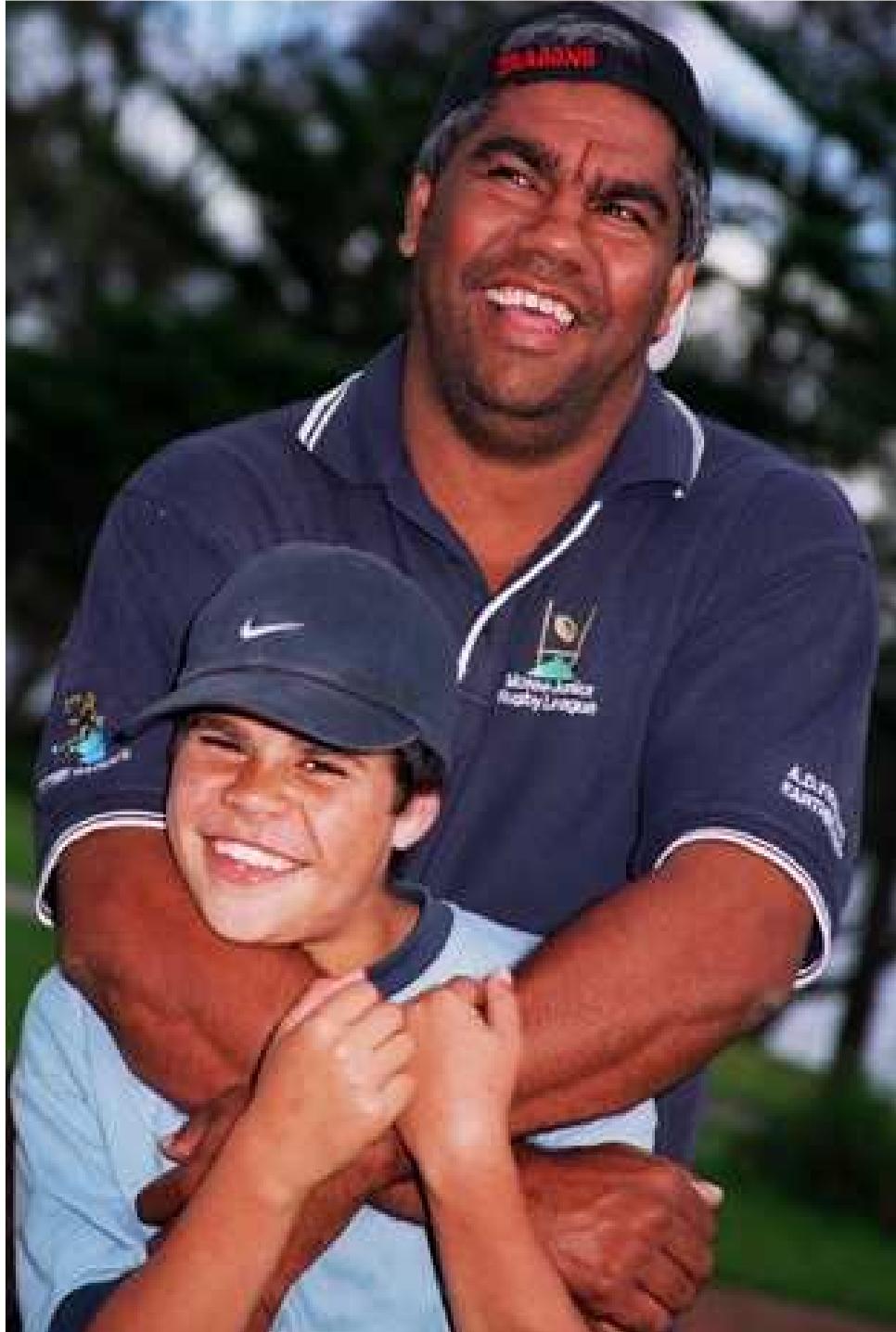
Most Frequent DSM diagnoses given to chronically abused children

1. Separation Anxiety
2. Oppositional Defiant Disorder
3. Phobic Disorders
4. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
5. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Ackerman and colleagues

Harlow's Monkey clinging
to the towelling 'mother'





Physical safety
Emotional safety
Cultural safety

Relationships and recovery



“The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change...” Perry & Szalavitz.