



# COGNITIVE LIMITATIONS OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSES IN CHILDREN

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# WHAT ARE EMOTIONS?

- Feelings brought on by experiences that are important to us, especially when those experiences are related to our well-being
- Primary Emotions
  - Present early in infancy
  - Culturally universal
  - Include **fear, sadness, anger, joy, surprise, interest, disgust**
- Self-Conscious Emotions
  - Usually begin to appear in toddlerhood
  - Related to development of self-awareness (concept of “me”)
  - Include **pride, shame, embarrassment, guilt, jealousy, empathy**
- Think about how your children express these emotions in ways that get emotional responses out of you... we'll come back to this later on 😊

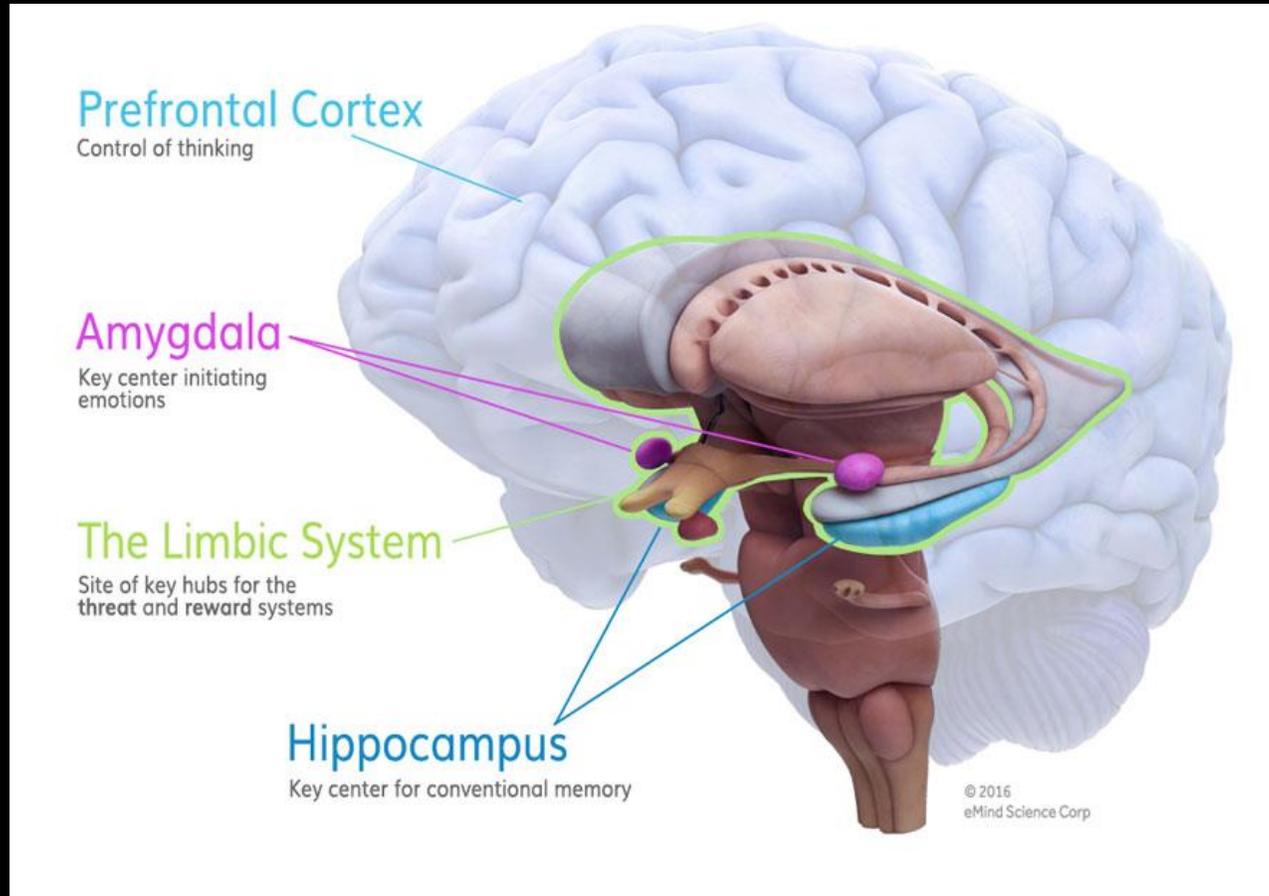
# EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

- Having awareness of one's own emotional states
- Ability to detect emotions in others
- Using vocabulary to articulate emotions appropriately
- Having empathetic and sympathetic responses to the emotional experiences of others
- Recognizing that inner emotional states and outer expressions do not need to correspond
- Implementing coping skills to reduce the intensity and duration of negative emotional responses
- Being aware that our emotional responses have social implications

# EMOTION COACHING

- Parents and caregivers can foster emotional development by
  - Monitoring children's emotions
  - Assisting children in labeling emotions
  - Using children's negative emotions as positive learning opportunities
  - Teaching coping skills for dealing with emotions, particularly in social contexts
  - Discussing and modeling emotional regulation for our children
  - Recognizing that emotional skills will vary with age, temperament, personality, and experience
  - Accepting that the development emotional regulation lasts into adulthood

# EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION



Infants and toddlers (birth – 2 yrs) are learning to self-soothe and make sense of emotions.

Young children (2 – 6 yr) are working to understand and control emotions.

In middle childhood (6 – 11 yrs), we see improved memory, emotional competence, and self-initiated strategies for emotional regulation.

In teens (11 – 18 yrs), the amygdala develops at a faster rate than the PFC, resulting in greater emotional lability.

In young adults (18 – 25 yrs), the PFC is not fully developed until around age 25 years.

One of the hallmarks of adult (25+) development is the successful merger of cognition and emotion.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE OFTEN MAKE THE MISTAKE OF  
EXPECTING TOO MUCH FROM OUR KIDS  
EMOTIONALLY...

AND WE END UP EMOTIONAL OURSELVES...

AND IT'S EXHAUSTING.



# THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S CALL TO US

- We are called to power through the trials and exhaustion.
  - Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
  - James 1:2-4 “Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

# THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S CALL TO US

- We are called to attend to our children's needs ahead of our own.
  - Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."
  - Philippians 2:14-15 "Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like the stars in the world."

# THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S CALL TO US

- We are called to be as patient with our children as God is with us.
  - Psalm 145:8 “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in faithful love.”
  - Ephesians 4:32 “And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.”
  - Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control.”

# THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S CALL TO US

- We are called to choose our words and actions carefully.
  - Proverbs 15:4 “A tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit.”
  - Proverbs 26:4 “Don’t answer a fool according to his foolishness or you’ll be like him yourself.”
  - Ephesians 6:4: “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

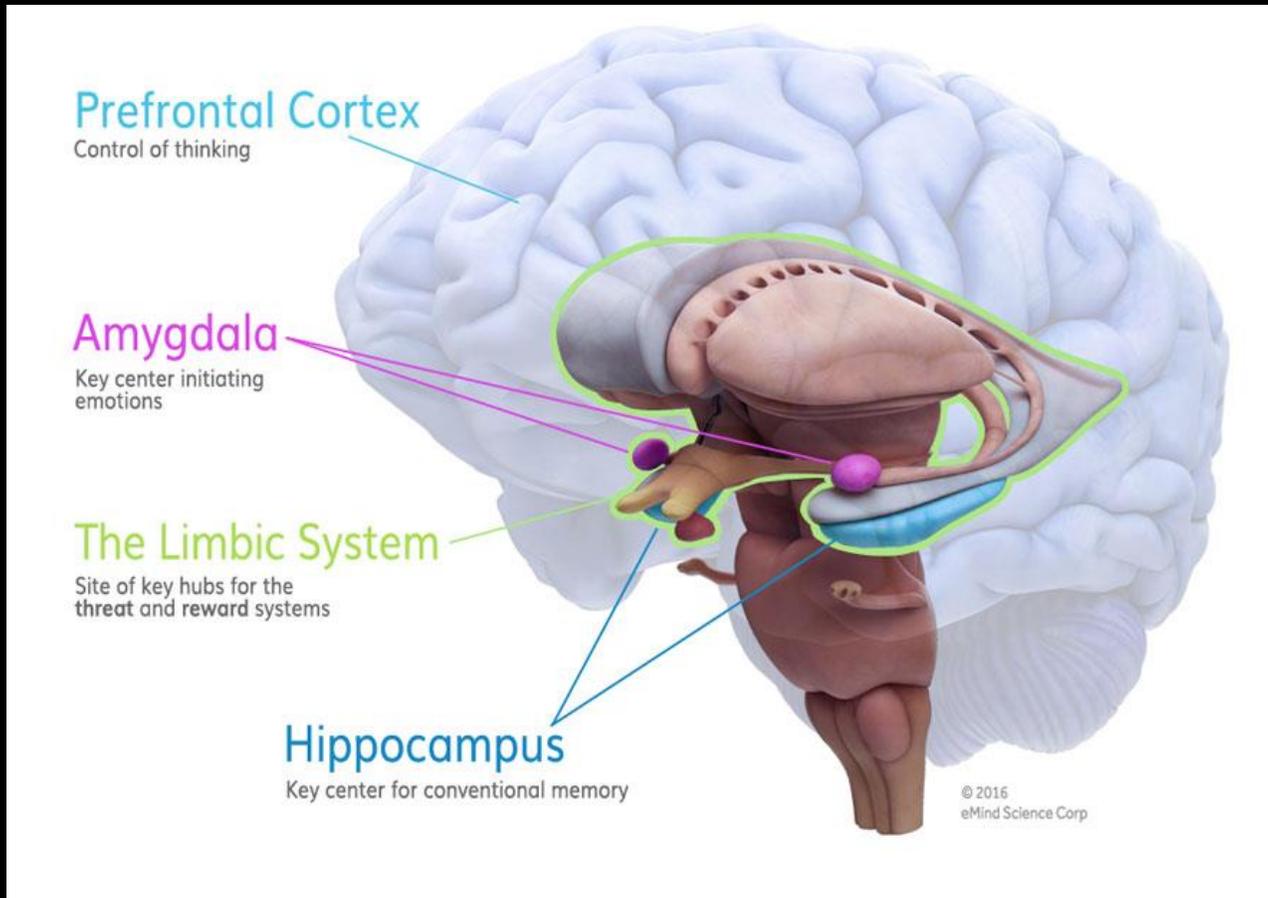
# THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S CALL TO US

- We are called to be consistent and persistent.
  - Hebrews 12:11 “No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace and righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
  - Galatians 6:9 “So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.”

SO HOW CAN WE BE THE PARENTS HE HAS CALLED US  
TO BE WHEN OUR CHILDREN HAVE NOT YET  
DEVELOPED THE COGNITIVE CONTROL OVER THEIR  
EMOTIONS THAT WE EXPECT?



# A LITTLE HELP FROM THE LIMBIC SYSTEM



God gave us an incredible brain with a covert learning system!

Sometimes referred to as the reward or pleasure center, the limbic system is actually responsible for much of the learning that takes place under the PFC's radar.

# CONSEQUENTIAL LEARNING

- Behaviors that lead to favorable consequences (reinforcers) tend to be repeated.
- Reinforcement helps us to learn which behaviors to perform.
- We can reinforce preferred behaviors by giving kids something they like or want (e.g., attention, praise, more time to play) or removing something they don't like or want (e.g., fewer chores).
- If our children are engaged in an unproductive behavior, we have to withdraw the reinforcer... and sometimes that reinforcer is us!
- When we withdraw a reinforcer, their behavior might get worse before it gets better, and that's a sign that we have targeted the right reinforcer.
  - Don't give up! If you do, you will have reinforced the escalated behavior, which will just make things worse.

# USING CONSEQUENCES TO GUIDE EMOTIONS

- We can use reinforcement to guide our children towards emotional competence and regulation.
- Helping children to monitor and cope with their emotions provides the attention and instruction that they need.
- Modeling our own emotional regulation and discussing it with our children can help them to learn through observation and vicarious reinforcement.
- Engaging children during a negative emotional outburst can be reinforcing if we aren't careful.
  - Better to acknowledge that you see they are upset and wait them out patiently so that you can lovingly process the incident once everyone is calm.

PLEASE NOTE: If typically developing children have immature emotional regulation systems, it will likely be even more challenging for children struggling with ADHD, PTSD, mental health disorders, and cognitive impairments. For some children, these experiences may alter the course of their brain development immutably, but the limbic learning system can still be tapped.



## YOUR TURN...

Time to workshop some examples and potential reinforcement or withdrawal of reinforcement opportunities.

Think of an emotional response or behavior that your child displays that tends to elicit an emotional response from you. How can we withdraw that reinforcement and help both of you to learn a new response?

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control.”

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The background features abstract, flowing waves in shades of red and blue, creating a dynamic and modern aesthetic.