

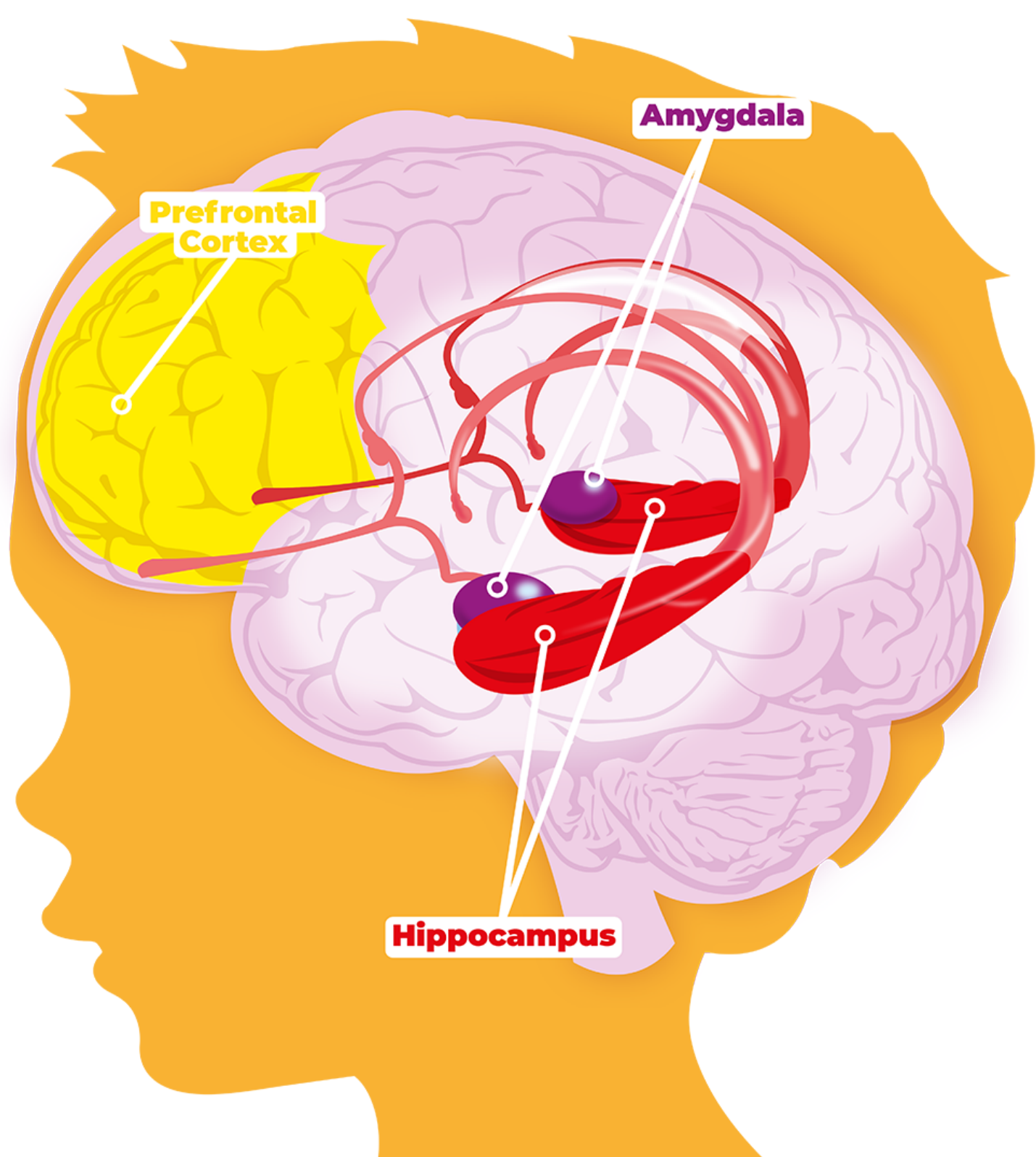
GETTING TO KNOW OUR AMAZING BRAIN

As a parent, understanding the brain can be enlightening. Having an insight into the biology of the brain enables us to be more objective in our responses to behaviours and situations.

Learning some key facts about the brain can increase our ability to help our children become more self-aware and develop essential skills to regulate their emotions, behaviours, and learn more effectively.

By developing our own knowledge about the brain, we can learn to respond differently to challenging moments with children and avoid escalation which is beneficial to all involved! We also develop an understanding of the importance of being calm to increase both our own and our children's awareness and focus.

The 3 parts of the brain that we will explore are:



Prefrontal Cortex: The executive functioning part of the brain, responsible for helping us learn, think, plan, make good decisions, and interpret our experiences.

Hippocampus: Situated in the limbic region, the primitive part of the brain. The hippocampus is important for remembering information and storing memories.

Amygdala: Situated in the limbic region, the primitive part of the brain. When operating from the amygdala, we react quickly with a flight, fright, freeze, faint response. These responses are useful when dealing with real threats, e.g. reacting to a fire alarm, running away from danger, but less useful for 'perceived threats', e.g. tests, public speaking or when someone bumps into us, etc.



Dr. Dan Siegel describes the amygdala as the downstairs brain and the prefrontal cortex as the upstairs brain in his book 'The Whole Brain Child'.

As parents, we learn to recognise when behaviour is fuelled by the reactive thinking of the downstairs brain and understand that when this is happening the upstairs brain cannot work effectively, limiting the ability to process thinking and reducing the ability to make good decisions. In these situations, the child needs safety, comfort and time to calm down. Attuned parents learn that discussions about their behaviour need to wait so that the upstairs brain can assume control.

Remember also that the prefrontal cortex isn't fully formed until individuals reach emerging adulthood in their mid-twenties. Children don't have the same thinking, reasoning, problem-solving and decision-making skills as we do.

Disclaimer: These are simplified explanations designed to make it more accessible to conceptualise the impact of the brain on our behaviour. It is of course far more complex!