

survive & thrive

moving forward from interpersonal trauma

Week 05

Understanding anxiety and ways of managing anxiety

Welcome back

- Reviewing last week:
 - Any questions?
 - Any thoughts?
- What did you try?
- How did you get on?



What we will cover today

- Today we are going to talk about anxiety and think about
 - How anxiety feels
 - Anxiety and stress
 - Why anxiety often follows trauma
 - Panic attacks
- Safe coping skill
- Final thought

Getting into the 'green zone'

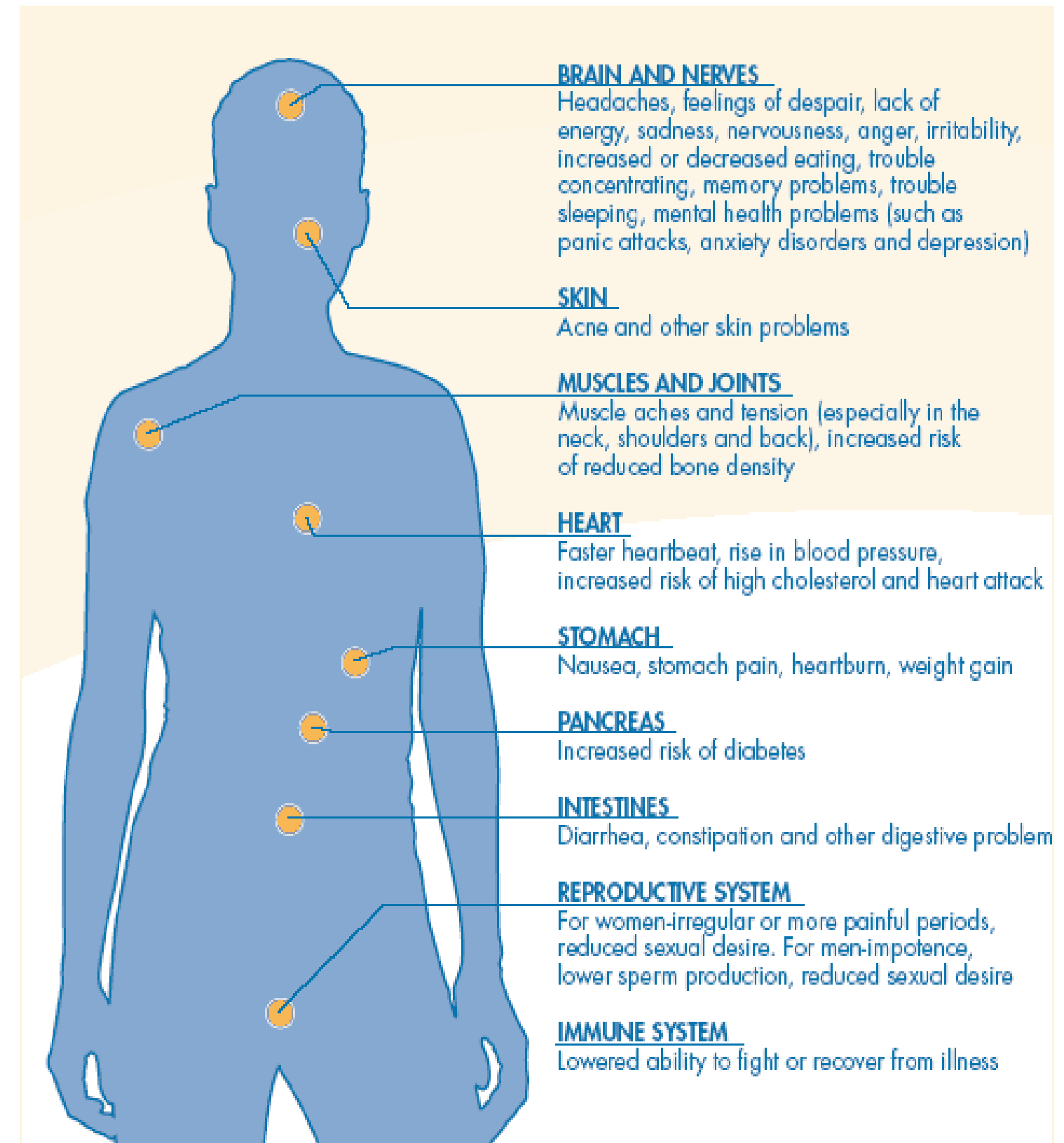


What are the physical effects of anxiety?

On a sticky note/piece of paper write down how you experience anxiety in your body.

Physical effects of anxiety

- Sweating
- Wobbly legs
- Heart racing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dizzy
- Churning stomach
- Blurred vision
- Upset tummy



What makes anxiety worse?

- Not enough sleep
- Unbalanced diet
- Caffeine
- Nicotine
- Stress
- Putting things off
- Having too much to do



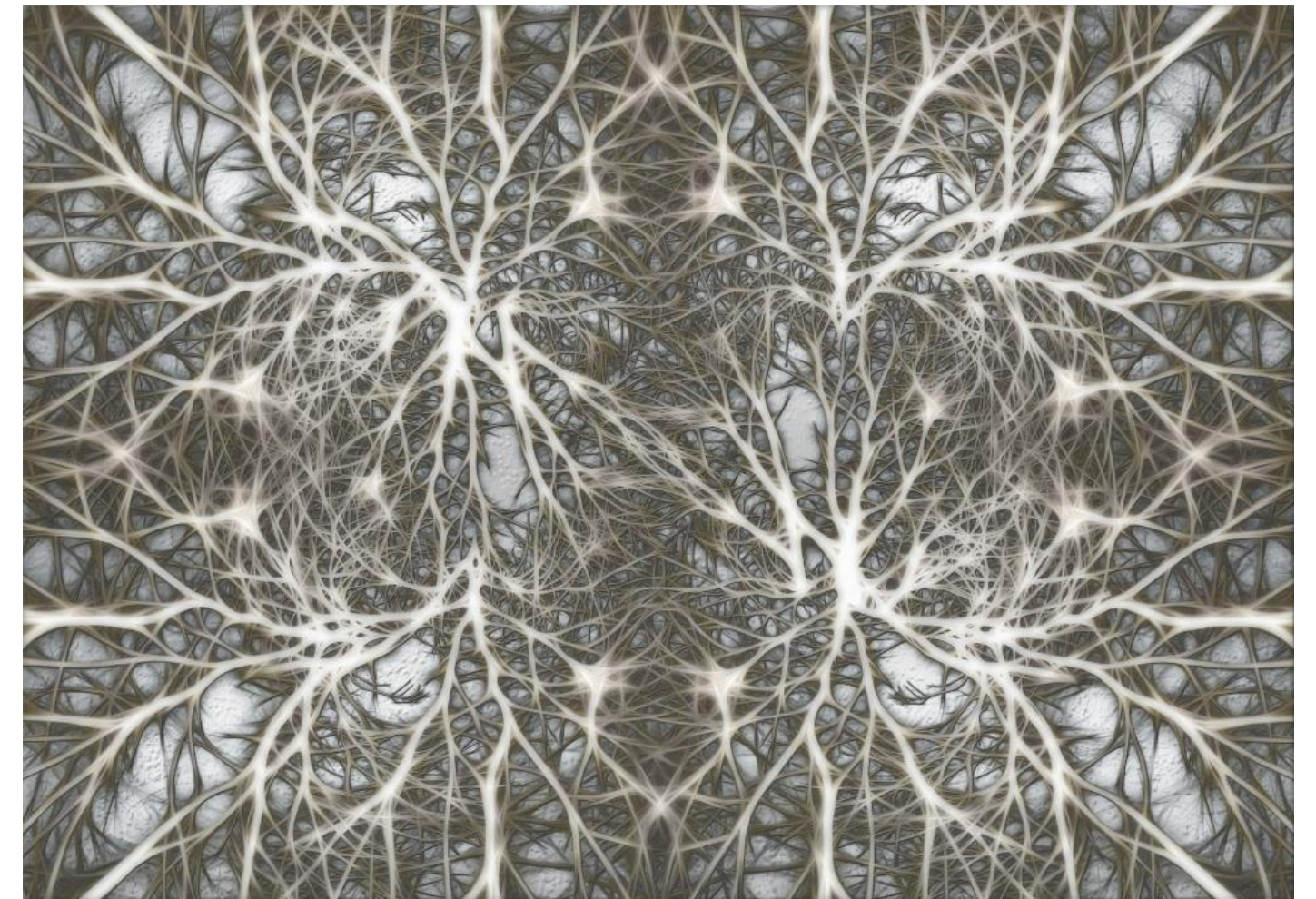
Anxiety and trauma

- Living through abuse increases the risk that we will experience anxiety by ‘wiring our brains’ to be prepared for danger.



Anxiety and trauma

- When we practice something a lot our brains become better at it and do it more automatically.
- Think about learning to drive, learning to ride a bike, walking and talking.



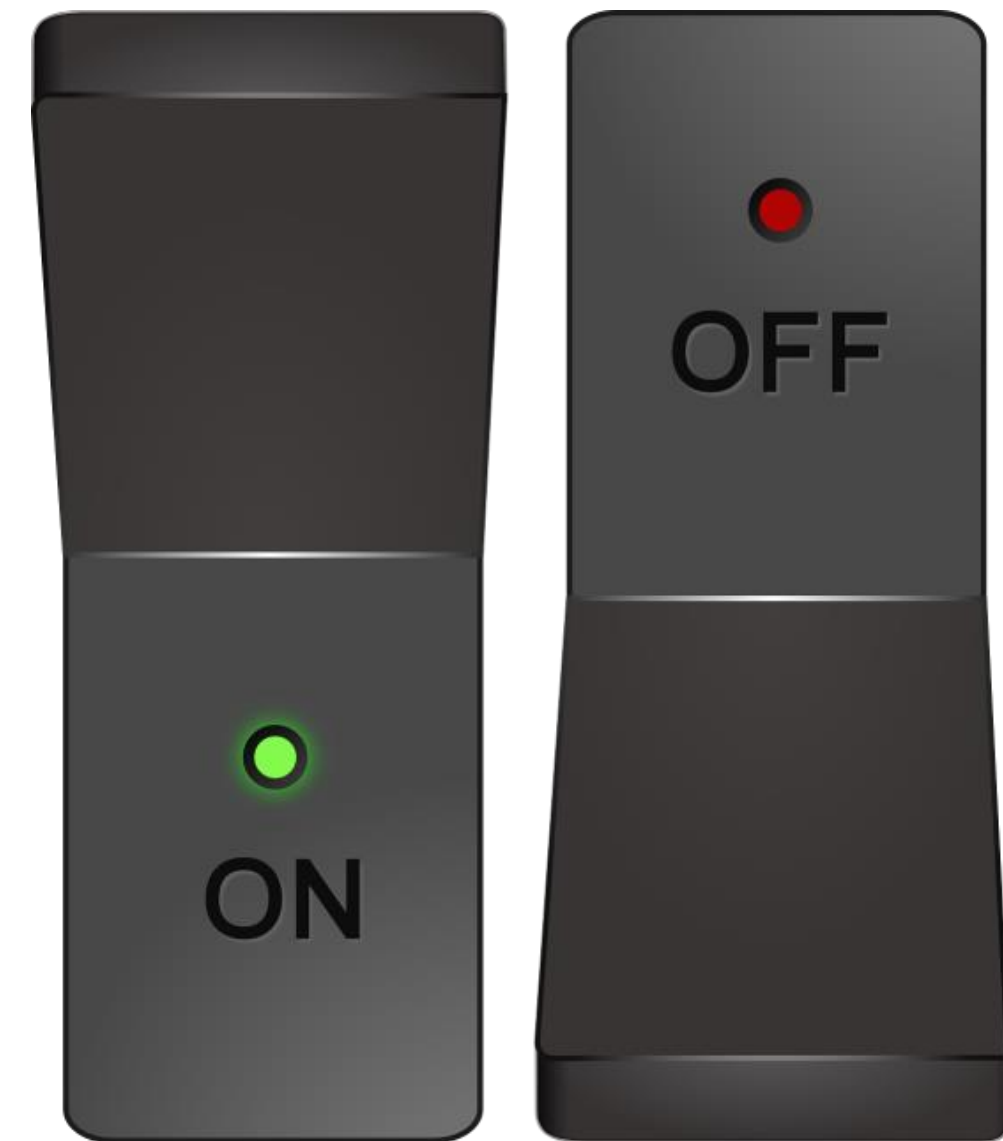
Anxiety and trauma

- When you have been frightened for a period, your brain adapts by strengthening the circuits connecting your brain's 'alarm system' to the 'flight, freeze or fight' system.
- That means your brain is super-prepared for threat.



Anxiety and trauma

- It's as if your brain has developed an over sensitive smoke alarm which goes off too easily and the 'off switch' isn't working so well, meaning that once it is going, it is hard to stop.



Brain and trauma

Frontal Lobe:

Helps us think clearly about things and organise our thoughts.

When we are stressed this works less well, making it harder to think and to see things clearly.

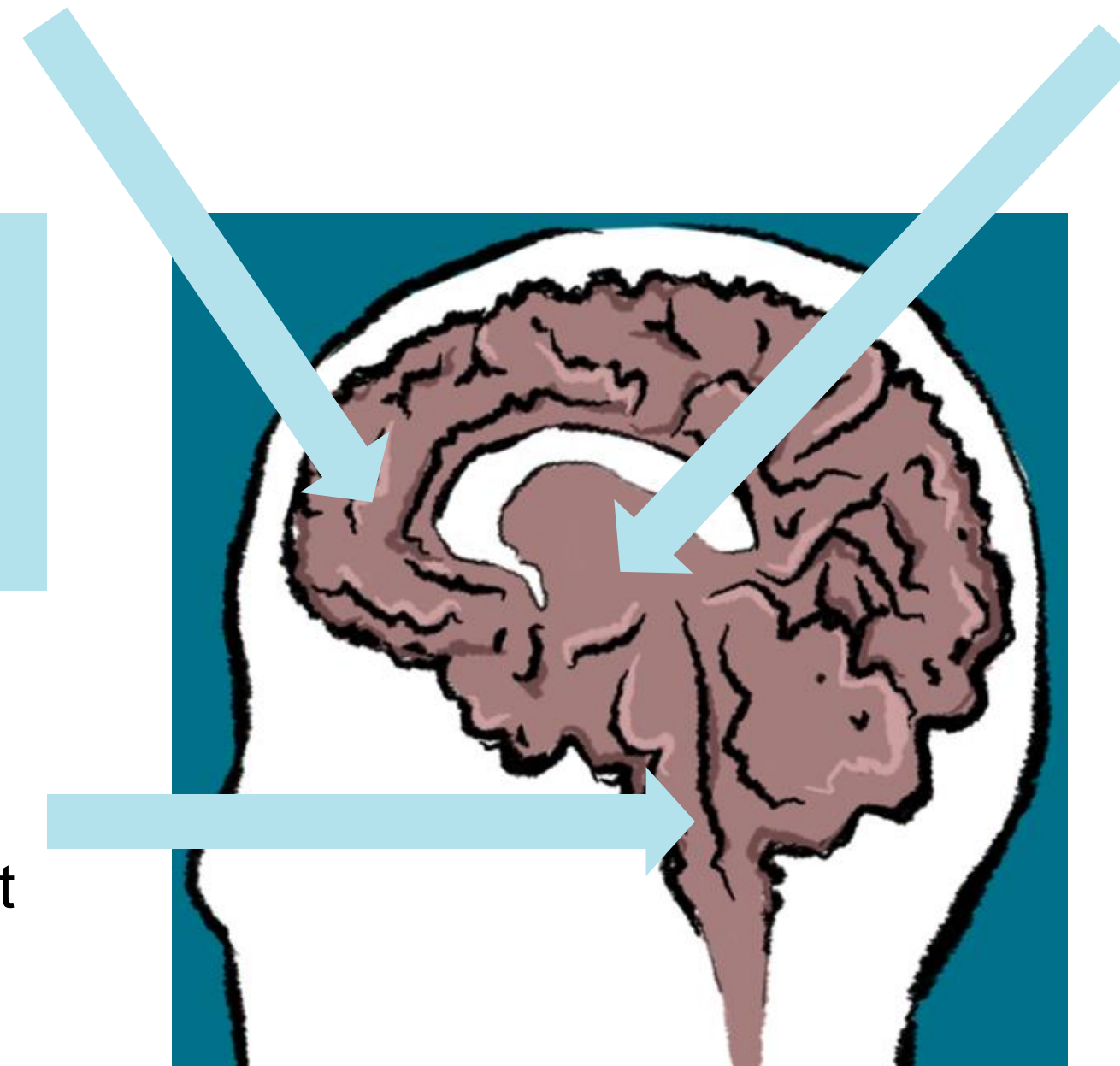
Brain Stem:

Controls our body's basic functioning—such as heart rate and breathing.

Limbic System:

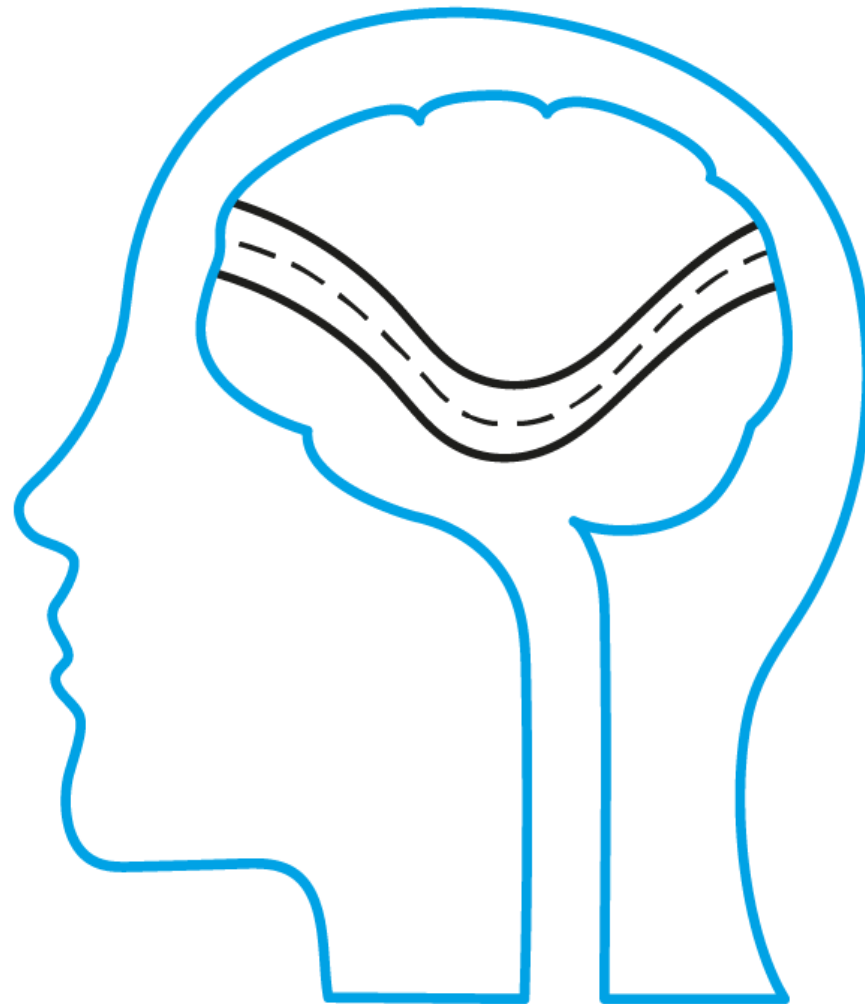
This is our brain's alert and alarm system.

Long term trauma and abuse “jams” this on red alert meaning that we see danger and threat in everything, making us jumpy and anxious.

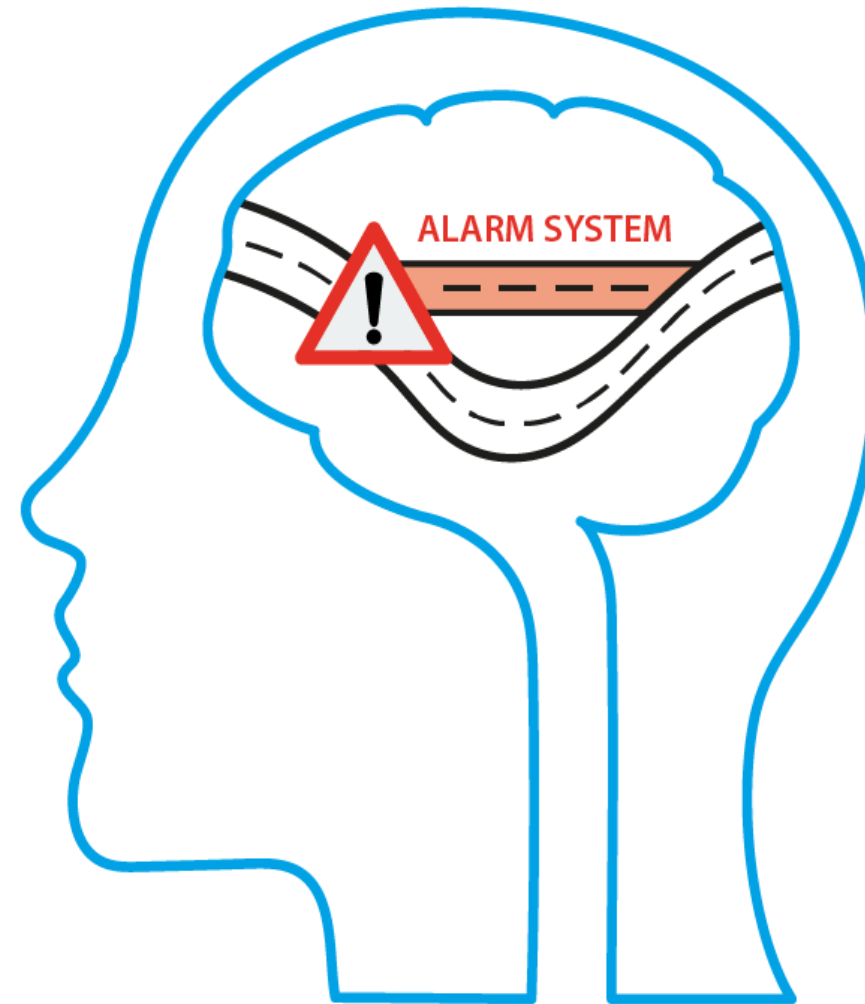


Brain and trauma

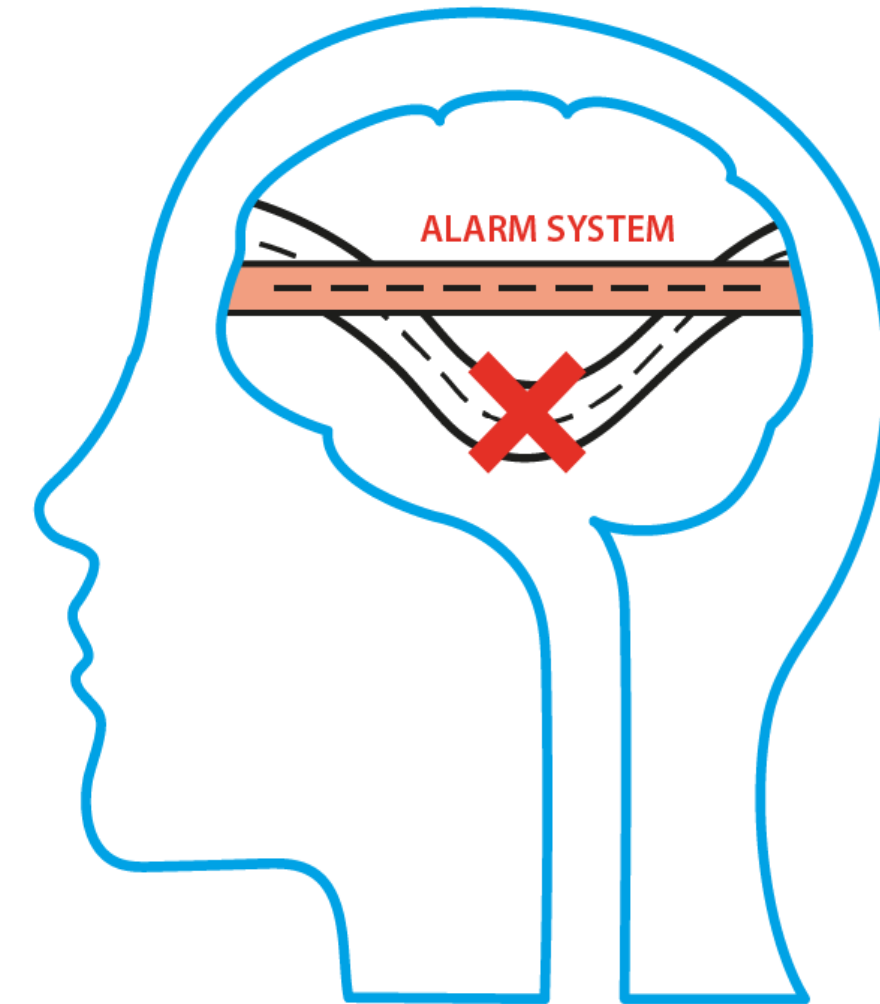
Brain process under typical conditions



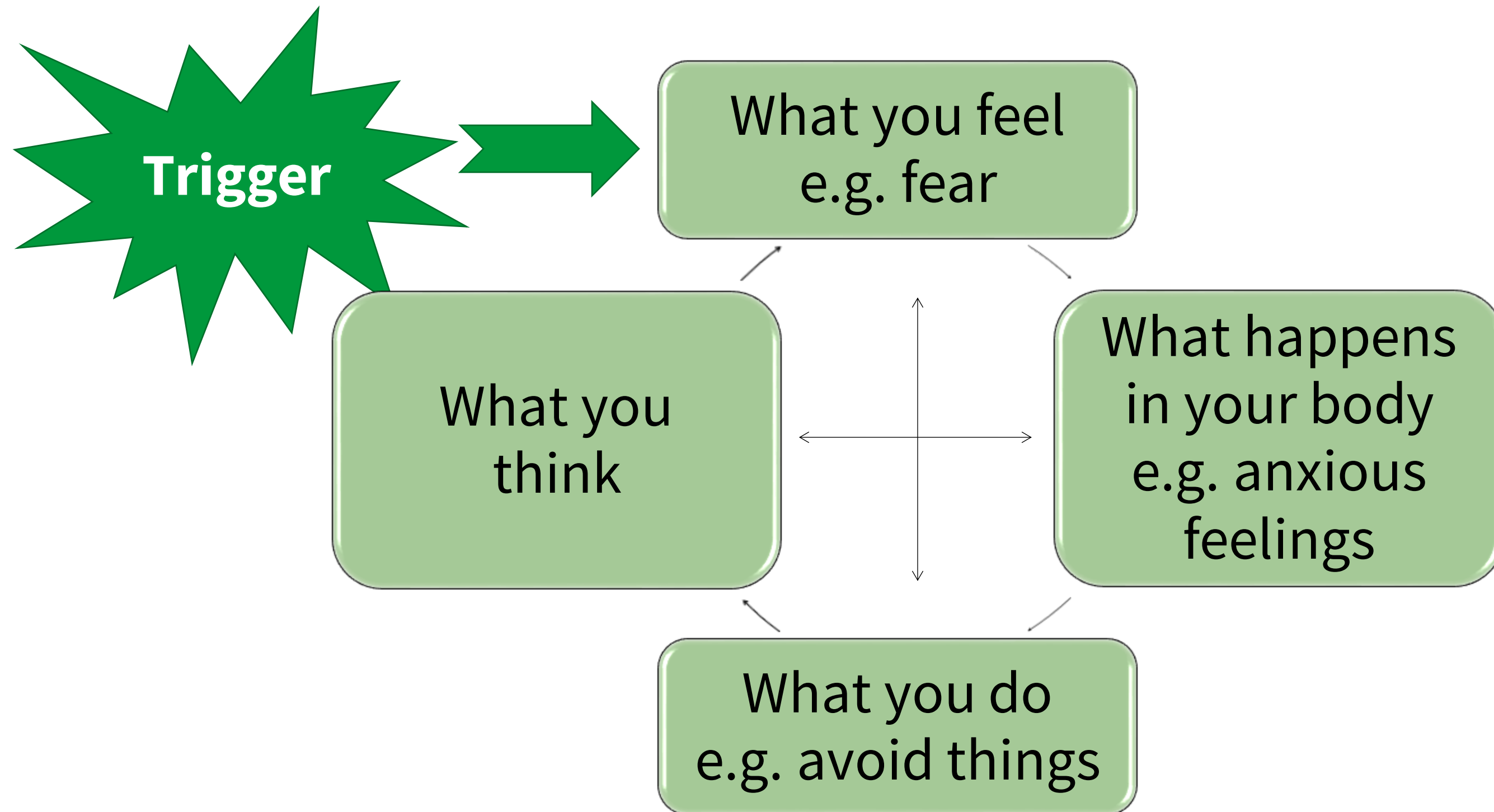
Alarm system express route



Alarm system becomes permanent reroute



The anxiety cycle



Switching off the 'red alert'

This will help us stay in the 'green zone' of the Window of Tolerance by using our safe coping skills:

- Breathing
- Relaxation
- Visualisation
- Mindfulness



Anxiety and what we do

Avoidance

- We are designed to avoid things that make us feel scared
- It is understandable that we want to avoid
- However, we may be making the problem worse not better
- It reduces our confidence
- Makes it worse next time
- Keeps the fear going

Thinking ourselves anxious

- When we have experienced trauma and abuse, we tend to think about things always going wrong in the future.
- We think about what will go wrong:
 - With ourselves
 - With the world
 - With other people



Panic attacks

This is when anxiety seems to go out of control and we feel overwhelmed.

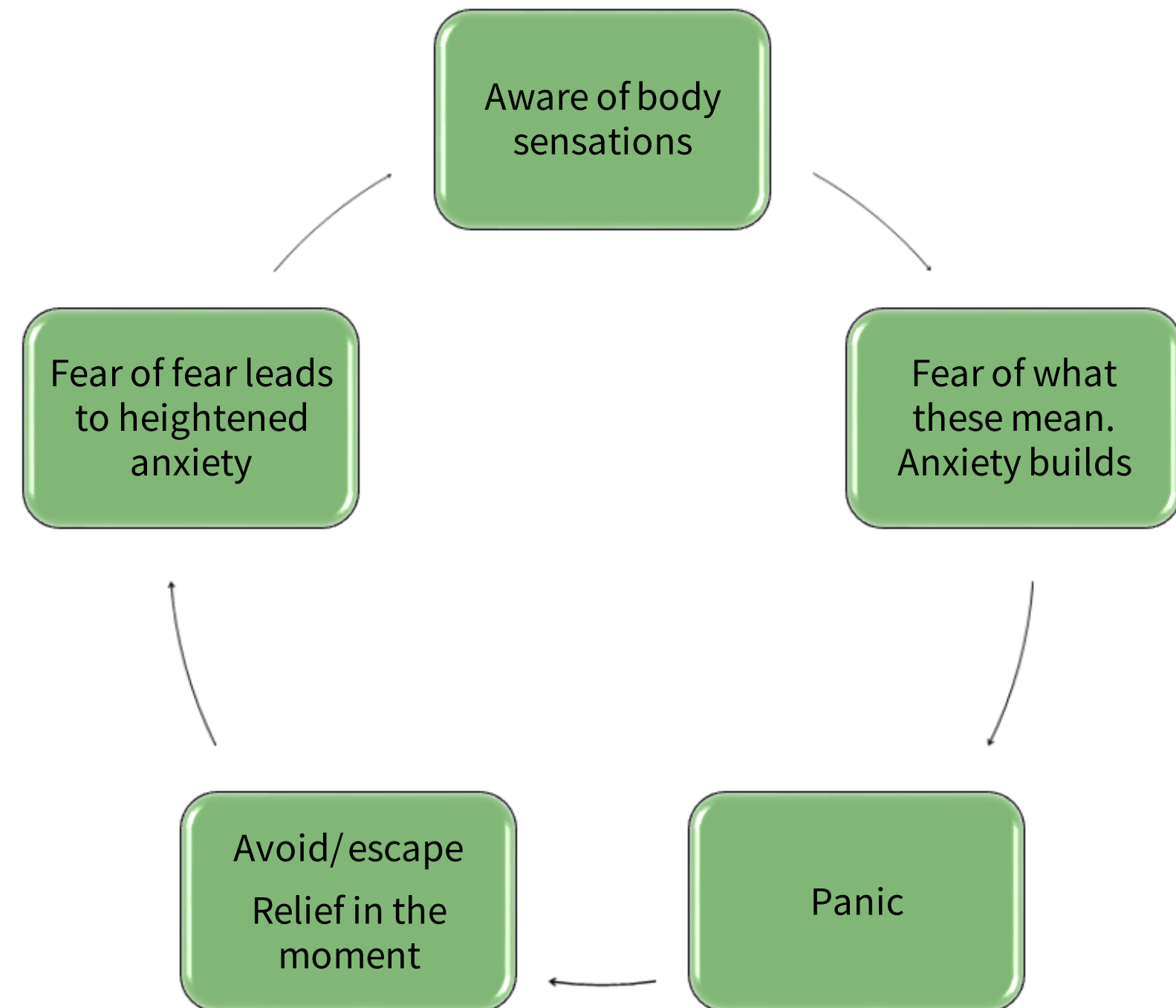


Panic attacks

- These are often linked to thoughts about the panic attack itself:
 - I'm going to lose control
 - I'm going to have a heart attack
 - I'm going to die
 - I'm going to faint.
- These thoughts often make the underlying anxiety much worse and the panic spirals out of control.

Panic attacks

- A panic attack is a self-fulfilling cycle. Because we think ourselves more anxious.
- Remember, panic is not dangerous it just feels horrible.



Coping with panic attacks

1. Breathe
2. Remind yourself you are safe, and this is a panic attack
3. Keep going

Your managing anxiety plan

Have a look at the plan and take some time to complete it

Safe coping practice



A final thought

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you stop to look fear in the face.”

Eleanor Roosevelt