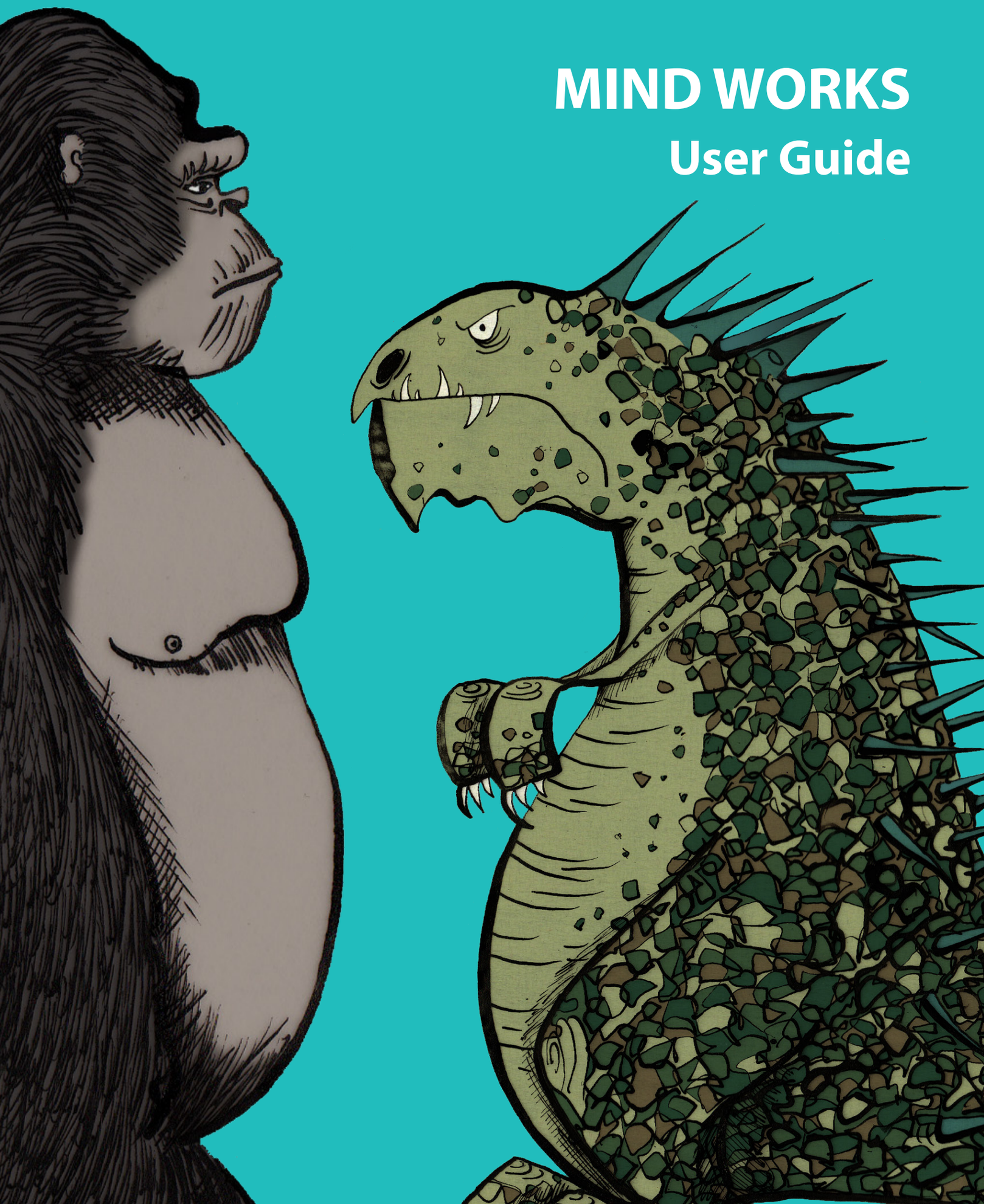
SC CR Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution | cyrenians

MIND WORKS

User Guide



WELCOME

'We want to ensure that every child and young person has the right support, in the right place, at the right time to look after and improve their mental health and wellbeing. Much of the support and services in this area are delivered through the third sector, and I know that the work Cyrenians have done to improve our children, young people and families' mental health and wellbeing is invaluable.'

Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, October 2024

Cyrenians Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution (SCCR) helps young people, parents and carers and those working to support young people and families to understand emotions, reduce harmful conflict and strengthen relationships. SCCR was formed in 2014 to address the leading cause of youth homelessness in Scotland: **relationship breakdown within families**. The consequences of youth homelessness can be devastating and long-lasting, affecting relationships, life chances, mental health and wellbeing.

During its first decade, SCCR played a key strategic role in developing a progressive model of **earlier intervention** across Scotland and beyond. Informed by the **science of conflict**, SCCR has produced resources available free at the point of delivery via our website that support young people and their parents and carers to regulate their emotions. The website also has resources and learning for those who are working to support families. SCCR also runs a series of free in-person and online training sessions, workshops, seminars and conferences across Scotland.

This **user guide** shows you **what to use**, **when to use it**, and **how to deliver sessions** safely and effectively in real-world settings, whether you're in a school, a living room, or whichever professional setting you find yourself in need of conflict resolution tools.

We thank the organisations, agencies and individuals who have supported us and collaborated in the creation of these psychoeducational digital developments. Because of their involvement, we can continue supporting families across Scotland to positively transform conflict and form nurturing relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

SCCR's resources can be found under the Mind Works tab on our website **Home page » For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works**

Monkey vs Lizard – explore reactive vs reflective responses to conflict.

Keep the Heid – learn more about anger and how coping skills can manage it.

Cranial Cocktail – understand emotional states and the brain chemicals linked to them. Help families understand typical teenage behaviours that cause conflict are a consequence of brain chemicals, or neurochemicals, released during adolescence.

The Three Brains – discover how the mind-body connection can contribute to emotional regulation and promote self-care.

We'll also reveal how **Learning Zones** for **Young People, Parents and Carers, and Professionals** present similar content tailored to each audience.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

To help **teachers, youth workers, social workers, counsellors, health professionals and mediators** confidently use SCCR's psychoeducational resources to **deescalate conflict and support emotional regulation and wellbeing** for young people and their parents and carers (including early intervention and prevention settings).

PLAN AND DELIVER

Remember:

- participants will need access to Wi-Fi and a digital device (or can share).
- activities work best if you familiarise yourself with the digital resources beforehand.
- the session could become emotional, so normalise and validate feelings, agree ground rules, and schedule a brief checkout.
- when discussing emotions and feelings, participants may need a trusted person to talk to.

Three of the four resources are presented as quizzes that finish by giving the participants some sense of how they might respond in certain circumstances. At the end of the quiz, the participant is given a result that provides a snapshot of feelings at the time the quiz was taken. It's important to stress that no quiz result is a 'good' or 'bad' result; it all depends on the situation you're currently in.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

How SCCR digital resources and the activities contained in this booklet are used will be at the discretion of those working with young people, parents or carers. We recognise that sessions with these groups are often cut short or require some improvisation. SCCR is relaxed about booklet users taking elements of the information shared in the book and making them their own as long as they stay true to the factual nature of the content itself.

To make it easier to find the digital resources, you will find QR codes throughout the book that will take digital devices directly to the pages under discussion. We also have instructions for finding the resources at the head of each activity.

ADAPTING FOR CONTEXT AND ACCESS

No WiFi or device? Use photocopies of the activities in the guide; run discussion without the online quiz.

Short on time? Watch your chosen activity's short film and pick one activity.

Offering choice and control: From the start, give the participants the option of not using personal examples; offer the group the opportunity to 'pass' on questions.

Home visits/outreach: Choose low prep activities; avoid lengthy videos; prioritise grounding skills.

WORKING SAFELY AND SUPPORTIVELY

- **Set expectations:** 'This is about understanding ourselves, not judging.'
- **Offer out-puts:** check-ins and check-outs are routine.
- **Pause if dysregulation rises**: breathing, brief movement, water break, or reschedule.
- **Safeguarding:** follow your organisation's policy for disclosures or risk concerns.
- **Disclaimer:** SCCR resources were created to support learning and conversations; they don't replace therapeutic, medical or safeguarding interventions.

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **'They won't do the quiz.'** Offer the paper prompts; discuss scenarios instead; respect when someone passes on answering questions.
- **'They've taken the result to heart.'** Emphasise it's a snapshot, not a label; results vary day to day.
- **'Emotions are getting heated.'** Pause, regulate, reduce stimulation, take a small break if you have time; resume only if settled.
- **'We ran out of time.'** Do a 60 second checkout and say you can pick up where you left off at the next session if participants want to; if there isn't another session, and the participants want more, they can self-guide themselves through the resources on the SCCR website.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

- **Neurodiversity:** predictable structure; visual schedules; concrete language; sensory friendly space; shorter segments with breaks.
- **Literacy:** use icons or illustrations; read prompts aloud; encourage drawing or choosing from options.
- **Cultural and linguistic:** define metaphors (e.g. 'keep the heid'); avoid idioms when clarity matters.
- **Trauma-informed:** choice, collaboration, calm pacing; 'right to pass'; offer grounding before personal sharing.

REVIEWING AND TRACKING PROGRESS

Indicators you might log include:

- Participants can identify a **trigger** in their own words.
- Participants can name a **body sensation** linked to a feeling.
- Participants use **one coping strategy** between sessions.
- Participants **report fewer blow-ups and quicker recovery** from conflict.
- Parent and carers report **improved communication.**
- Professional observation of **participation calmness.**

OUR RESOURCES

'I can embed [SCCR resources] within the S1 curriculum to help support peer relationships and relationships with teachers and family members.'

Teacher, May 2025

SCIENTIFICALLY ACCURATE

Part of SCCR's mission is to share with the public the **science of conflict**.

The science of conflict is the study of why arguments and disagreements happen and how they can be resolved. It uses evidence from fields like **Neurobiology, Evolutionary Biology, Clinical Psychology** and **Trauma** to understand behaviour.

SCCR takes academic and professional knowledge, then works with artists, filmmakers and website designers to deliver original, innovative and multimedia work.

The result? We find that once parents and carers see that the causes of, for example, risk-taking or staying up late are rooted not in 'bad behaviour' but **evolutionary science**, it tends to take some of the heat out of a situation.

UNIVERSALLY RELEVANT

Nature or nurture?

Wherever you come down on the side of that long-running debate, here's something indisputable about humans: we're messy. We're not robots, we're not AI, our actions aren't determined by an algorithm. We have emotions and we act on them, sometimes to our detriment.

Scientific disciplines such as Interpersonal Neurobiology recognise that emotions play an important, evolutionary role in survival, learning, resilience and the development of the human brain.

A scientific approach to feelings, emotions and relationships avoids problem-focused or judgement-based readings of ourselves.

When we can understand ourselves at a physical, psychological and emotional level, it can improve our relationships with others.

So, it turns out, we are all a product of nature and nurture: our reactions are conditioned by evolutionary biology but we're also capable of learning and developing throughout our lifetimes. Teenagers do grow up, and parents and carers can learn to help them to adjust, or regulate their emotions.

GO FOR IT!

We've mentioned science quite a bit so far, but it's important to stress:

No previous knowledge of science is required to run these sessions! We shall also avoid jargon where we can in this user guide.

SCCR resources were put together so that 'non-experts' had something they could use to start early conversations about different emotional responses to conflict and disagreements.

A little thought and preparation can make the difference between a session no one gets anything out of and one where we can hear meaningful conversations and shared learning.

It's likely discussions will bring up emotions for participants in the group. To prepare, we suggest that you plan some time for group reflection at the close of the session. Why not ask everyone how they're feeling before they leave the session? Suggest an informal one-to-one session for anyone who is particularly affected or needs support.

If you require further information about the science behind our emotions, conflict styles and relationships, please contact: **sccr@cyrenians.scot**

WHAT'S THE APPEAL?

So, why use SCCR resources?

#1 We take big ideas and boil them down to their essence, so that no one feels left out. We create multimedia digital resources that can be found on our website and used for free.

#2 We portray ideas through a series of specially commissioned illustrations found only on our website.

#3 We make films and animations to explain brain activity and emotional responses.

#4 We avoid jargon when bringing in science to explain why conflict happens and what we can do about it.

#5 We collaborate with professionals who have backgrounds in science and medicine to fact-check our resources.

MONKEY VS LIZARD

When you find yourself in conflict, do you respond with your 'Monkey brain' or your 'Lizard brain'?

Learn more about the science behind the evolution of the brain – and how it can help you turn down the volume of family arguments.

MvL PAGE

SURVIVE OR THRIVE?

An argument breaks out. Do you square up to the other person – or run away? Or perhaps you try to understand where the other person is coming from – and end the conflict calmly? To put it another way – do you react with your '**Monkey brain**' or your '**Lizard brain**'? What does that even mean?

Monkey vs Lizard is a light-hearted and engaging quiz that gets us to begin to think about the way in which we manage conflict in family life, and depending on the results, offers different tips and suggestions on improving our conflict management techniques.

In addition to controlling thought, memory, emotion, movement, and all bodily functions, our brains are records of humanity's evolutionary change. They reveal the 'Lizard' phase we went on before we entered our 'Monkey' stage.

Parts of our brain evolved at different times during human evolution. Found at the back, the reptilian brain developed early to alert and prepare us for danger or flee from a threat. The persistence of our 'Lizard' brain into modern times, however, can pose problems. Automatically jumping out of the way of an oncoming car is an example of the 'Lizard' brain working well; a young person yelling at their parent because they have been asked to tidy their room is an example of the Lizard brain fuelling conflict.

The more recently evolved Mammalian brain (which sits at the front) balances the more instinctive responses of the Lizard brain with reflection and empathy. Over time our 'Monkey' brain worked out there were other ways to survive that didn't involve aggression. At some point, thanks to our 'Monkey' brain, we realised that our species tends to find itself safer in larger groups. And larger groups tend to have stronger bonds when its members care for each other. It's also more efficient to share resources, meaning planning and cooperating become necessary tools for survival.

CONFLICT AND THE BRAIN

In the natural world, monkeys and lizards don't tend to hang out – so how does having a 'Monkey' brain and 'Lizard' brain within the same head work?

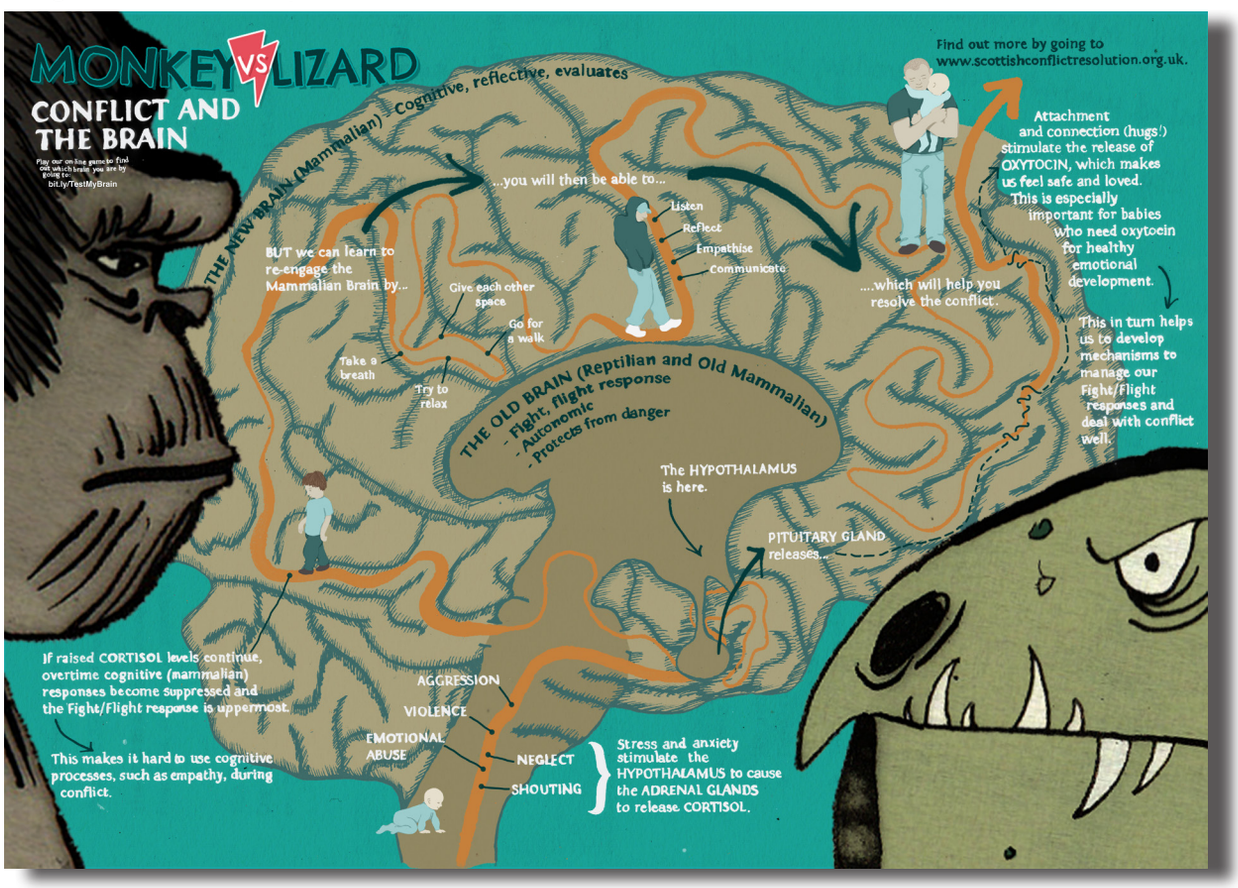
Surprisingly well, usually.

When in danger, the 'Lizard' brain can snap us into a **'fight or flight'** response without us having to mull the situation over. We don't have time when we're threatened; we must act.

The 'Monkey' brain, on the other hand, does take its time to think and reason. In many situations the 'Monkey' brain will be better at responding – but we still need the 'Lizard' brain for those moments when 'fight or flight' is the best response.

When conflict looks likely, the brain produces the hormone **cortisol**, the 'protective' drug, which heightens your senses and concentration, and releases energy. We need cortisol to make self-protection effective, but for a limited time only. If the brain continues making cortisol longer than necessary, our 'Monkey' brain retreats and our 'Lizard' brain dominates; at times like these, we're primed not to back down, which can make de-escalating difficult.

For more on the role neurotransmitters play in emotional regulation, see 'Cranial Cocktail' on pages 15 and 16.



Unfortunately, evolution hasn't developed enough to give our nervous systems the ability to distinguish between being pounced on by a sabretooth tiger and being told off by a parent. Our brain interprets both as **threats** and acts accordingly.

You can, however, give your 'Monkey' brain a better chance to re-emerge during conflicts – and it's relatively simple. **Breathing exercises, going for a walk, journalling**: there are many ways we can calm ourselves and reconnect with our empathetic mammalian brain.

Attachment and connection (hugs!) stimulate the release of oxytocin, another hormone made by the brain, which makes us feel safe and loved. This is especially important for babies as oxytocin encourages emotional development, which, as we grow up, helps us manage our 'fight or flight' responses and deal with conflict better.

Try the Monkey vs Lizard quiz on SCCR's website and learn more about your 'conflict style'.

Monkey vs Lizard Activity

When to use: quick check-ins; introducing conflict responses; early intervention; group icebreaker.

Time: Individual activities (separate timings are provided for each) or 50-60 minutes total.

Find it: For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Monkey vs Lizard

Recommend: Before the session begins show the 'My Brain' video. (For Young People » The Learning Zone » My Brain.)

Part of us reacts fast to threat **(Lizard: fight/flight/freeze)**. Another part helps us reflect and connect **(Monkey)**. Both are useful! Learning when each shows up can help to de-escalate conflict.

The learning bit...

- Understand the difference between automatic (or instinctive) and learned responses.
- Get to know their responses to conflict situations and understand these can change depending on the situation and how they're feeling in the moment.
- Recognise how to manage responses and reactions by using coping skills.

Activity 1 (10-15 mins)

Go to page 28 for Activity 1 print out

1. Read scenario 1 and 2.

2. Sort the responses into Monkey or Lizard responses. Is the response reflective or reactive?

3. Discuss why each response is triggered by either Monkey or Lizard.

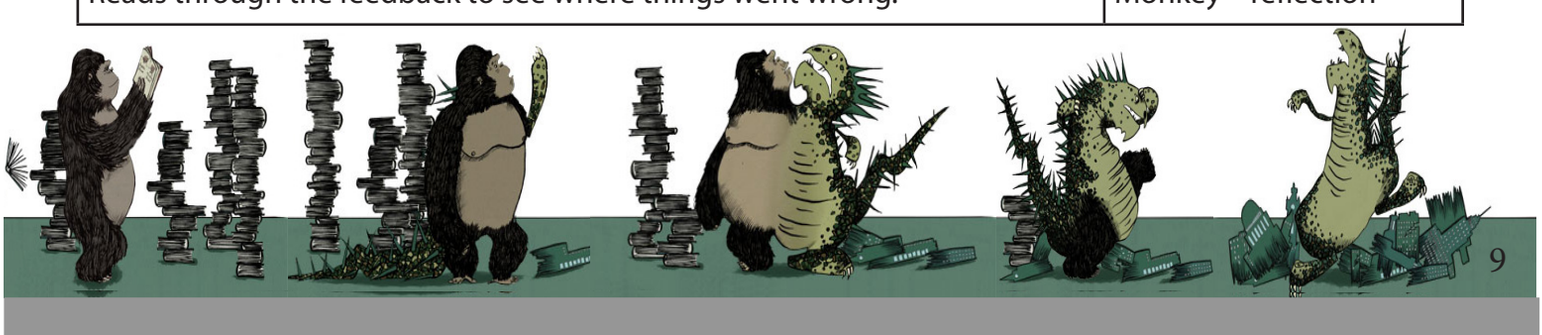
REMEMBER! Monkey responses show reflection, empathy, and problem-solving, while Lizard actions may indicate fight-or-flight responses or relying on instinct.

MvL PAGE

Scenario 1

At the start of the lesson, the teacher returns test results to the class. In front of the class, the teacher says Sam is not working hard enough. As a consequence, Sam…

Response	Monkey or Lizard
Rips up the test paper and argues with the teacher about the test.	Lizard – fight response
Leaves the classroom during the lesson.	Lizard – fight response
Keeps their head down during class and hopes the teacher doesn't bring it up again.	Lizard – freeze response
Says nothing at the time but becomes snappy with their friends later.	Lizard – freeze and fight response
Stays after class to explain the reason they couldn't study for the test and how the teacher's comment made them feel.	Monkey – reflection
Arranges a meeting with the teacher to get help with the areas they are finding difficult.	Monkey – planning, problem-solving
Reads through the feedback to see where things went wrong.	Monkey – reflection



Scenario 2

Sam has fallen out with a friend over something said in a group chat. Sam is angry, and as a result…

Response	Monkey or Lizard
Avoids the friend in school.	Lizard – flight response
Talks to the friend about how they are feeling.	Monkey – reflection, problem-solving
Considers their friend's side of the story.	Monkey – empathy
Shouts at the friend.	Lizard – fight response
Gets into a physical fight.	Lizard – fight response
Comes up with a clever plan to get their own back.	Monkey – planning
Shuts down and doesn't speak to anyone about it.	Lizard – freeze, flight response

Activity 2 (15-20 mins)

Now that you know more about the different parts of the brain and how they respond to conflict, let's find out if you are a '**Lord of the Lizards**', a '**Monkey Genius**' or something in-between.

Let's try the Monkey vs Lizard quiz! (For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Monkey vs Lizard » Take the Quiz.)

The quiz has ten questions and should take around five minutes to answer.

MvL Quiz

Share and discuss your results:

1. Talk about which character you got at the end of the quiz.
2. Does your result sound like you? Or were you surprised?
3. What does your result suggest about how you react?
4. If having a good or bad day, do you think results might change? Why?

Activity 3 (15 - 20 mins)

When we feel ourselves getting overwhelmed, angry or frustrated we might lose our Monkey-Lizard brain connection, and our Lizard brain might take over. So, let's think about how we can keep that connection or regain it by using coping skills.

My Wellbeing

1. Think about things that help you to feel calm and relaxed, to keep your connection strong and intact.

2. Create a coping skills poster by writing or drawing your ideas onto paper (if you're in a group, you could always make a poster together).

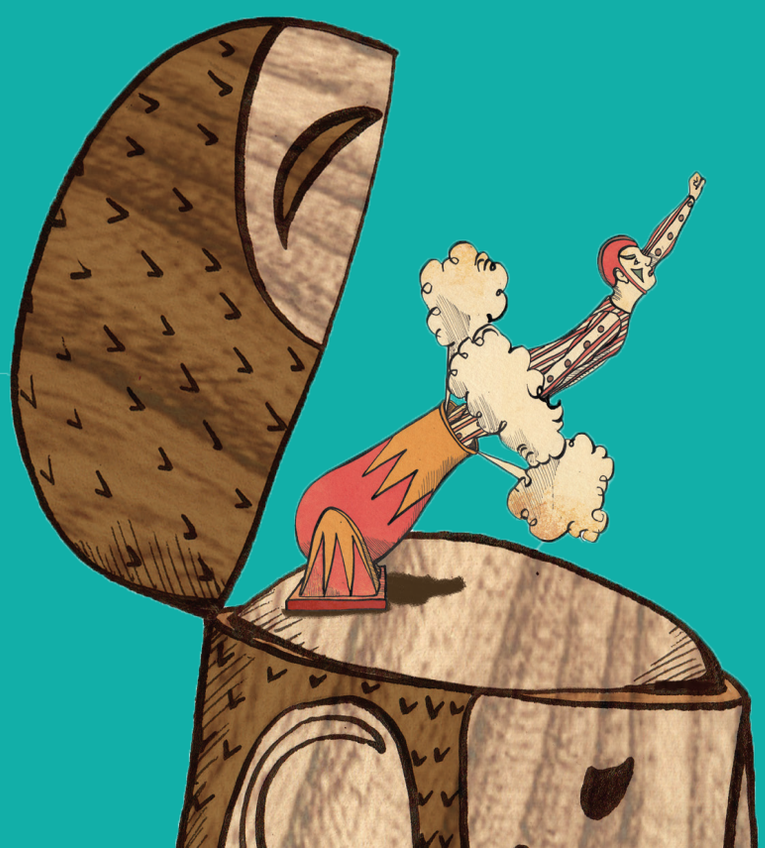
Learn more about coping skills and other complementary resources on our website (For Young People » My Wellbeing).

KEEP THE HEID

Do you tend to flip your lid? Or can you keep the heid?

Keep the Heid is a digital resource that can help young people and parents and carers recognise what happens inside our heads and bodies when we're angry.

KTH PAGE



ANGER AND THE BRAIN

The Scottish language is full of memorable expressions, one of which is '**keep the heid**', meaning stay calm, don't lose your temper!

The phrase contains a spark of truth for although we feel anger in our bodies, it begins in the heid or head.

Emotions are a product of the mind-body connection **(for more on the mind-body connection, read about 'The Three Brains' on pages 19 to 20)**. Emotions give humans the capacity to remember and to judge whether experiences are good or bad, which in turn helps us to learn from experiences.

Our **'Emotional Brain'** (meaning our limbic system, which connects the parts of the brain that manage emotions, behaviour, and memory) is as unique as our fingerprints; over the course of our lifetime, it changes as we gain the life experiences that develop it.

A scientific approach to talking about feelings, emotions and relationships avoids problem-focused or judgement-based approaches to behaviour and helps us to understand ourselves at a physical, psychological, and emotional level.

THE CIRCUS OF LIFE

Relationships are balancing acts, with family members having to juggle multiple commitments. Sometimes you slip off the tightrope – and discover life doesn't provide a safety net. We might all want to be the 'ringmaster' in our own home but can end up feeling like clowns, which is when we might blow our 'big' top.

Keep the Heid explores how families manage anger through a fun quiz that gives a snapshot of how long your fuse is on the day that you try the quiz. After the final question, anyone taking part is assigned a circus act that in certain ways matches up with their ability to manage anger.

Dr. Dan Siegel - The science of

"Flipping Your Lid"

Pre-frontal Cortex

The Thinking Brain processes perceptions and logical reasoning.

Brain Stem and Limbic Area

The Emotional Brain controls your emotions.

The Thinking Brain

regulates

The Emotional Brain

WHY DO WE FLIP OUR LIDS WHEN WE GET ANGRY?

Keep the Heid looks at what happens when we '**flip our lid**'.

Our brain decides whether we react automatically to a tricky situation or whether we can manage our response in a way that doesn't deepen the conflict.

Psychiatrist and author Dr. Dan Siegel popularised the idea of 'Flipping Your Lid'. When we say the '**Thinking Brain**', we mean the **prefrontal cortex**; it's responsible for our perceptions and logical reasoning. And the **limbic system** makes up our '**Emotional Brain**'.

When things are going well in relationships, the Thinking Brain regulates the Emotional Brain.

When someone 'pushes our buttons', the connections between the Thinking Brain and the Emotional Brain start to go. It's then that we 'flip our lid'.

When we 'flip our lid' we no longer behave in a controlled way; we've lost the connection to our Thinking Brain.

After we 'flip our lid', it can take between 20 to 30 minutes to bring ourselves back to a balanced state and begin to use our Thinking Brain again.

Take the Keep the Heid quiz on SCCR's website and discover who you are in the Circus of Life.

For more on the science behind the different parts of the brain, see 'Monkey vs Lizard' on pages 7 and 8.

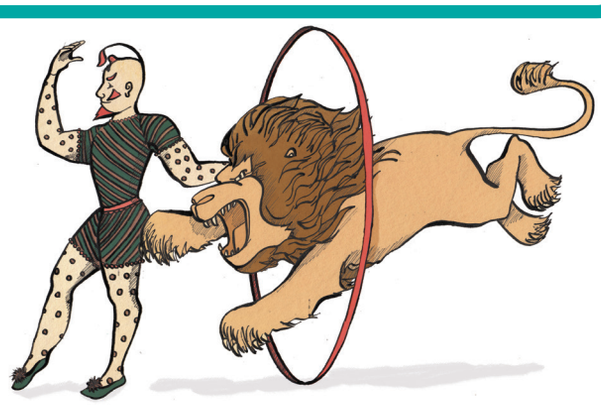
Keep the Heid Activity

When to use: anger-related issues; trigger mapping; distinguishing anger from aggression.

Time: Individual activities (separate timings are provided for each) or 45-60 minutes.

Find it: For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Keep the Heid

Recommend: Before the session begins watch the Keep the Heid video. (For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Keep the Heid.)



When we're triggered, the link between our **Thinking Brain** (prefrontal cortex) and **Emotional Brain** (limbic system) can drop out; it's then that we 'flip our lid'. To keep them connected, we can name triggers and use coping skills.

The learning bit...

- Learn about the emotional arousal cycle and how to manage the impact of conflict.
- Get to know their own responses to conflict situations and understand that these can change depending on the situation and how they're feeling in the moment.
- Identify triggers and learn about coping skills as a way of deescalating strong emotional responses.
- Recognise the difference between anger and aggression through identifying helpful and unhelpful responses.

KTH PAGE

Activity 1 (10-15 mins)

Keep the Heid activities help people recognise how they might react when feelings of anger arise, from **Human Cannonball** (Emotional Brain) to **Contortionist** (Thinking Brain), or somewhere in between.

Let's try the Keep the Heid quiz! (For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Keep the Heid). The quiz has ten questions and should take around five minutes to answer.

Share and discuss your results:

1. Talk about which character you got.
2. Does your result sound like you? Or were you surprised?
3. What does your result suggest about how you react?
4. If having a good or bad day, do you think results might change? Why?

KTH QUIZ

Activity 2 (20-30 mins)

Go to page 28 for Activity 2 print out

Now that you know a bit more about what happens when we **flip our lid** and no longer feel in control, let's have a think about what makes us angry, which we call '**triggers**'. By identifying and understanding our triggers, we can learn to recognise when we might **flip our lid** before it happens.

1. Write down things you know can make you feel angry or frustrated. If you're working in a group, share your ideas and notice any similarities or differences.
2. Now think about how you might respond to your triggers.
   a. What behaviours would help you to 'keep your heid'?
   b. What behaviours could be unhelpful and might make the situation worse?

If you need an idea of what a helpful or unhelpful response might look like, see the example below*

Thinking about helpful and unhelpful responses allows us to recognise the difference between **anger** (which is a healthy emotion that we all experience and can learn to express in positive ways) and **aggression** (which is an unhelpful behaviour that often involves force or violence). Next time you face a trigger, why not think about your **helpful vs unhelpful responses** and try to **keep the heid**.

***Example of helpful and unhelpful responses to a difficult situation:**

Trigger - A person cuts in front of you in a queue.

Helpful response – Politely let them know that the queue starts further back (they may not have realised).

Unhelpful response – Shout at them or push them out of the queue.

Activity 3 (15-20 mins)

When we recognise that we're starting to feel angry, we can use coping skills to act before things escalate and we **flip our lid**.

1. Think about things that you could do when you feel yourself getting angry to prevent your lid from flipping.
2. Create a coping skills poster by writing or drawing your ideas onto paper (if you're in a group, you could always make a poster jointly).

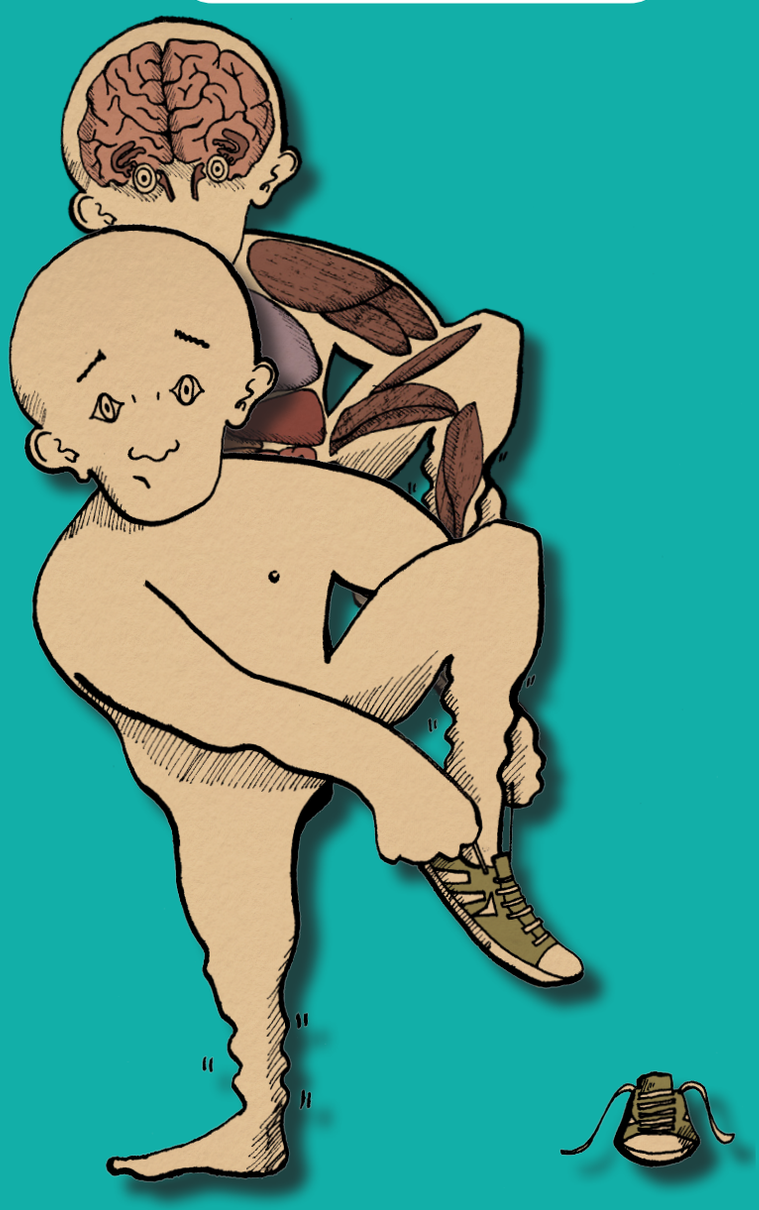
Learn more about coping skills and other complimentary resources on our website (For Young People » My Wellbeing).

My Wellbeing

CRANIAL COCKTAIL

Explore the science of emotions and discover how a 'cranial cocktail' of neurotransmitters can bring about different emotional states.

CRANIAL COCKTAIL



EMOTIONAL STATES

Emotions related to conflict arise from the biological connection between our **bodies**, **brains**, and **memories**. Through learning to observe what we're feeling in our bodies and being aware of how our brains interpret these feelings, we can begin to understand our own emotional states and those of others.

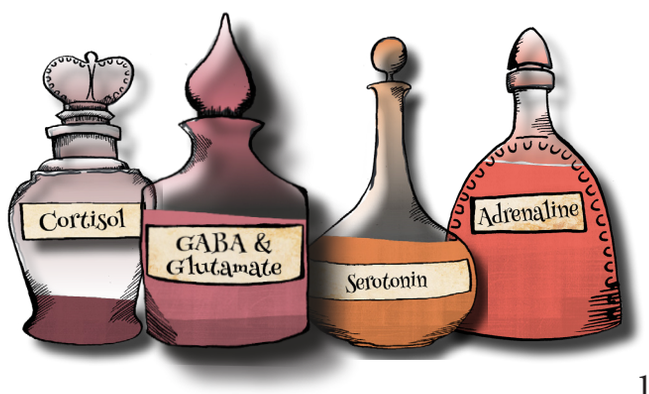
The problem is, surprisingly perhaps, we often don't recognise the emotions we're feeling. Emotions often confuse us, especially when the emotion we believe we're feeling and acting on is in fact a **secondary emotion**, covering up the true **primary emotion** behind it. Anger, for example, is often a secondary emotion concealing what a person is really feeling: fear, shame, feeling unheard.

When we're better able to recognise our own emotions, we become better at recognising others' feelings, which in turn can mean we become more empathetic. The **more empathy** we can show others, the **less conflict** we will find ourselves caught up in.

Memory is also associated with emotion. We can learn because the **Emotional Brain** holds information about what stimulates it, and over time it uses emotion – **good or bad, pleasure or pain, risk and reward** – to gain experience which then acts as a blueprint for how to behave.

Think of racing drivers. The first time they go at top speed round a course, they might crash. The second time they race around a course they know which bends to take at different speeds. Like a racecourse, the more life experience we have, the more we know when to slow down and speed up to avoid collisions!

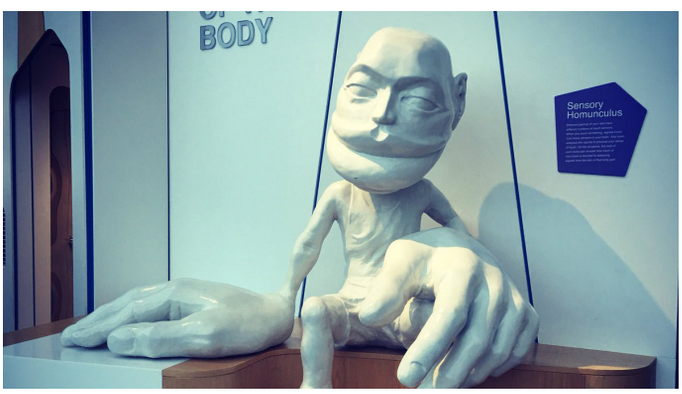
Once we understand what's happening in our minds and bodies, then we can learn to 'retrain' the brain to respond and react differently during conflict.



EMOTIONAL HOMUNCULUS

The word '**Homunculus**' comes from Latin and means 'little person'. A **cortical homunculus** is a picture or a map scientists use to show how much space different parts of the body take up in the brain for sensing and movement, with the most sensitive or precise parts drawn the biggest.

If we turn this map into a cartoon person, some parts of the body look bigger than others. That's because the brain gives more space to areas that are involved in movement, communication and expression. The hands, lips, and face are drawn noticeably big because the brain spends a lot of effort controlling and sensing them. Parts like the torso and legs are drawn much smaller because they don't need as much detailed control or sensation.



Cortical Homunculus figure at Glasgow Science Centre

For our **Cranial Cocktail** resource, we created a series of '**emotional homunculus**' states; **rest and digest**, **freeze and shutdown**, **fight or flight**, **anxious and afraid**, and **alert and engaged**. Each of these states illustrates how different emotions affect what goes on inside our body and how this might look when we feel them. For example, when in **fight or flight** and feeling **stressed**, **angry** or **scared**, our resource depicts the emotional homunculus with big strong arms and legs because our body is preparing to throw a punch or to run away.

When we look at the images of the emotional homunculi developed for this resource, we have a better idea of how emotional states translate into physical ones that have real-world consequences. When we recognise what's happening to our bodies during an intense experience, we're closer to recognising the emotion we're feeling – and taking steps if necessary to regulate our mood.

THE BRAIN'S AMAZING DRUGS CABINET

Think of the brain and body as having an amazing chemical signalling system; a kind of "**drug cabinet**" containing lots of different chemical messengers. These include **neurotransmitters**, which help nerve cells communicate with each other, and **hormones**, which are released into the bloodstream and can influence cells elsewhere in the body. Some chemical messengers can act in both ways.

These chemical messengers help your brain and body respond to what's happening around you. For example, **adrenaline** helps prepare your body for action when you're stressed or excited; your heart beats faster, you become more alert and your body gets ready to respond. **Dopamine** is involved in motivation, reward and learning, while **serotonin** is involved in a wide range of processes including mood, sleep and cognition.

And here's the really interesting bit: **what you do and experience can influence these systems too.** Exercise, listening to music, spending time with friends and other enjoyable or rewarding experiences can all change activity in the brain and influence its chemical signalling. **Our experiences and behaviour can influence these signalling systems, which in turn influence how we think, feel and respond**. But it's not as simple as "exercise releases dopamine" or "music releases serotonin". Several chemical systems and brain networks work together to create the experience.

Emotional states rarely come from a single chemical messenger. Instead, they emerge from interactions between many chemical signalling systems and networks of brain regions. Your experiences, from early childhood to earlier this morning, continually shape how these brain networks respond to what happens around you, influencing how you think, feel and behave. Several chemical messengers contribute to the creation of an emotional state. There is usually a mixture of them, which we call a **Cranial Cocktail**.

Cranial Cocktail Activity

When to use: naming emotional states; planning emotional state shifts; educating about stress.

Time: Individual activities (separate timings are provided for each) or 45-60 minutes.

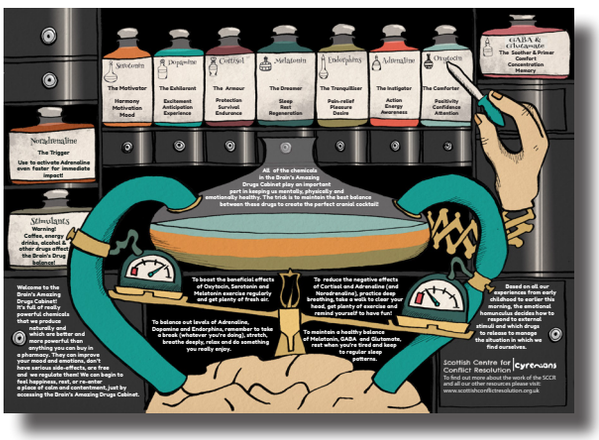
Find it: For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Cranial Cocktail » Learn more.

Recommend: Before the session begins watch the Emotional States video. (For Young People » The Learning Zone » My Brain.)

Emotions show up as patterns of **body sensations**, **feelings** and **neurotransmitters**. We can notice what our current emotional state is and, if necessary, nudge it towards a more regulated one with some simple actions.

The learning bit...

- Recognise emotional states in themselves and others, and how these change throughout the day.
- Build an awareness of their emotional states and the physical and emotional sensations linked to them.
- Develop an understanding of brain chemicals and how these can influence emotional states.



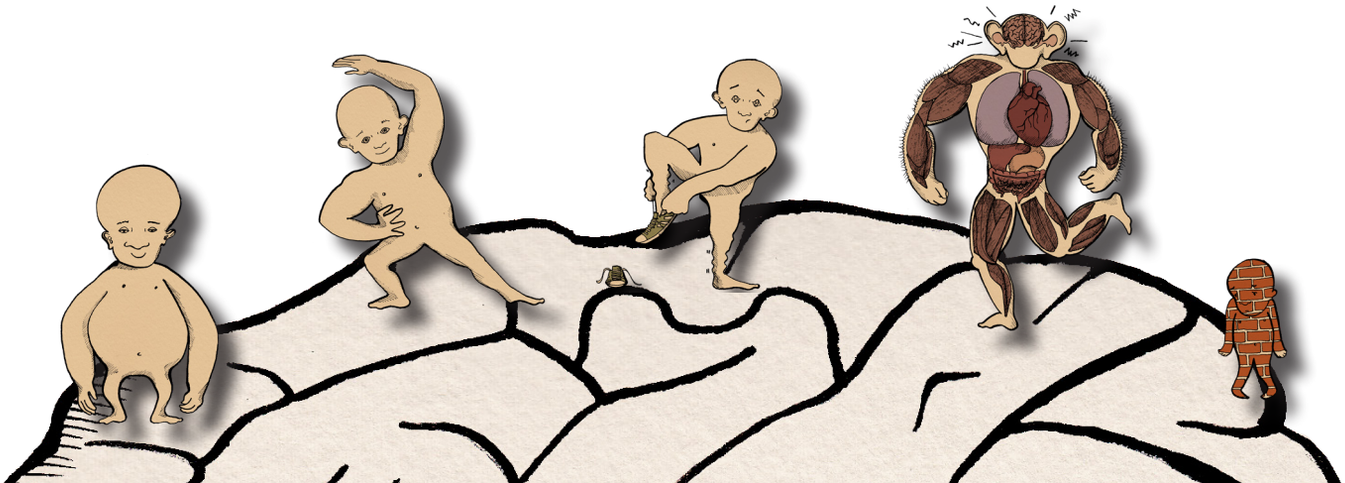
Cranial Cocktail

Activity 1 (10 mins)

Having learnt about the different emotional states and how we move through them during the day, use the digital emotional state cards to explore what happens in our bodies in each state

Think about the emotional states we've been talking about (anxious and afraid, etc). Keeping in mind emotions are experienced differently from person to person, answer these questions:

1. Think about each of the emotional states we've talked about in the booklet. How did the feeling express itself within your body? Did you tremble, get a headache, feel your heartbeat increase? Did you feel other emotions beyond the main emotional state?
2. When we're feeling the more uncomfortable emotional states (fight or flight, freeze and shutdown, anxious and afraid), what could we do to return to a more comfortable state?



Activity 2 (15-20 mins)

Go to page 28 for Activity 2 print out

Emotional states are a combination of emotions, body sensations and brain chemicals which guide our actions and how we interact with the world around us.

1. Watch the 'Brain Chemicals' video. (For Young People » My Brain).
2. Read the scenarios below and choose the emotional state the scenarios would create.
3. Find the chemicals that match that state (reminder: some emotional states are a combination of more than one brain chemical – and melatonin isn't included as it is linked to daylight rather than emotional states).
4. To find out more about brain chemicals and getting the right balance between them, check out the Cranial Cocktail carousel via the QR code on page 17.

Scenario 1: You're about to go for a walk in your favourite place. The sun is shining, you feel energised but relaxed **(clue: three brain chemicals involved)**.

Answers:

Emotional state – Alert and engaged

Brain chemicals - Dopamine, adrenaline, GABA

Scenario 2: You open your exam paper and your mind goes blank. You can't think or even pick up your pen to start (**clue: one brain chemical involved).**

Answers:

Emotional state – Freeze and shutdown

Brain chemicals – Cortisol

Scenario 3: You're about to play in a sports match. Last time you got injured and, today, the other team look tough. This could go badly **(clue: three brain chemicals involved)**.

Answers:

Emotional state – Anxious and afraid

Brain chemicals – Adrenaline, cortisol, GABA

Scenario 4: You're watching a movie with your best friend. You feel comfortable and relaxed **(clue: three brain chemicals involved)**.

Answers:

Emotional state – Rest and digest

Brain chemicals – Serotonin, endorphins, oxytocin

Scenario 5: Someone insults a member of your family, sending you into a rage. You feel your hands forming into fists (clue: there are two brain chemicals involved).

Answers:

Emotional state – Fight or flight

Brain chemicals – Adrenaline, cortisol

Activity 3 (15 mins)

1. Use the Cranial Cocktail digital cards to explore how to stimulate different brain chemicals
2. Create a cheat sheet outlining how to move from a difficult emotional state to one that is better suited to remaining calm and avoiding conflict. For example, if you wanted to move from 'fight or flight' to 'alert and engaged', you'd need to increase levels of dopamine and GABA by going for a brisk walk, listening to music you love, or having a warm bath or shower.

Cranial Cocktail Cards

THE THREE BRAINS

Learning more about the mind-body connection can lead to better regulation of emotions and so reduce conflict within the home.

THE THREE BRAINS

THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION

Did you know that your body has three 'brains'?

Okay, you only really have one actual brain, the one in your **head**, but your **heart** and your **gut** can act in some ways like a brain, or part of one.

We've known for centuries that when we feel emotional, the feeling registers in our bodies. For example, butterflies in your stomach let you know you're nervous. If your heart starts racing when someone enters the room, it might mean you're attracted to that person or scared of them (or both!).

Physical and emotional health are not separate but in fact connected. Your body responds to the way you think, feel and act – and your mind-body connection is how that happens. The **mind-body connection** is a feedback loop made up of three parts: your brain, heart, and gut.

The reason we call the heart and gut 'brains' is not because they have consciousness or can think like a brain: they can't. When we talk about the body's **three brains**, what we are referring to are the '**neural networks**' in our **brain**, **heart** and **gut**. Like the brain, the heart and gut contain specialised cells called '**neurons'**. Typically, thousands of neurons work together in neural networks. They 'talk' to each other using electrical signals and chemical messengers called **neurotransmitters**.

These neurotransmitters travel between gut, heart and brain via the **vagus nerve**. Eighty percent of the information that the vagus nerve carries travels from body to brain. That's why bodily states (**breathing, posture, gut health**) can strongly shape mood.

OUT OF HARMONY

When we don't look after the health of our 'three brains', they don't work as well as they should. **Stress**, **trauma**, **poor diet**, **lack of sleep**, and **illness** can all disrupt the relationship between gut, heart and brain. Instead of supporting the work of each other, they can get out of harmony. When your brain, heart and gut health are out of sync, you can feel out of sorts. You might feel grumpy or anxious and these feelings might lead to arguments with friends and family.

Our mood emerges from two-way communication between the brain, heart, and gut. When emotional circuits in the brain begin working, they can change sensations in the heart and gut; those bodily changes then feed back to the brain, sometimes amplifying anxiety, low mood, or tension. The prefrontal cortex – or the Thinking Brain (more about that on page 12) – helps us become aware of our emotions and respond more thoughtfully, but emotional balance depends not only on thinking differently; it also relies on restoring calm and coherent signals from the heart and gut so that all three 'brains' work together.

When the three brains align, they can act as an emotional thermostat – or like a great rock band whose music is as harmonious as the relationship between its members.

WHY A BAND?

When we were looking for a way that would help young people to understand how the 'Three Brains' work together, we soon hit upon a band. Your 'three brains' are like musicians who must be in time with each other to work as well as possible.

Also, when we introduce the idea of emotional regulation to young people, we point out that it's something they probably already do, every time they play music to cheer themselves up or make them feel a certain way.

For the resource, we reimagined the head, heart and gut as three friends in a band called the Three Brains:

Head = singer / lead guitarist

Heart = drummer

Gut = bass player

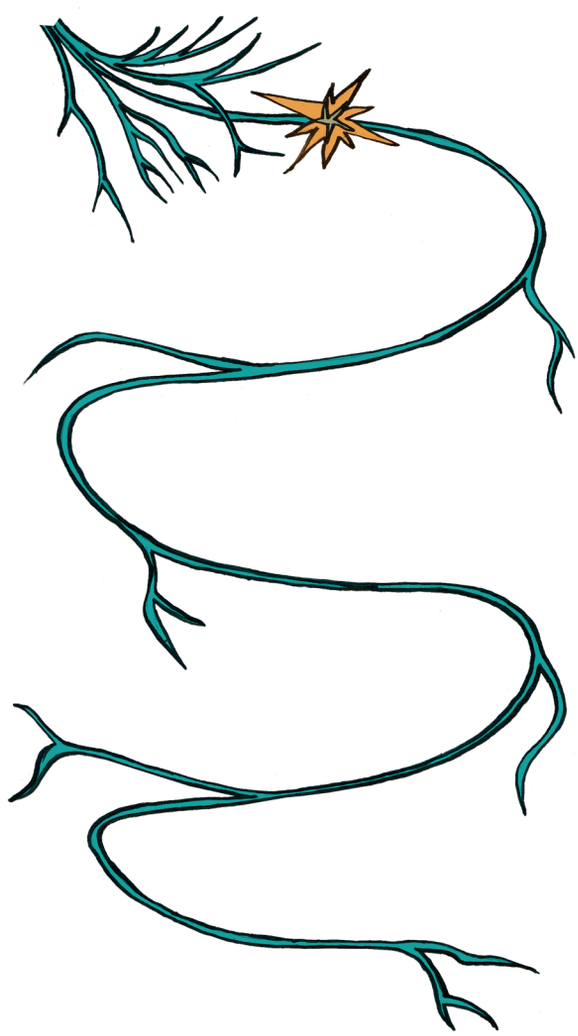
GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

We all need to become more familiar with our bodies and our emotions, and that requires setting time aside to begin to understand who we are.

Knowing yourself better is the first step to taking control of yourself and avoiding stressful and hurtful situations that damage relationships and only cause deeper hurt and anxiety, not only to yourself but those close to yourself.

To help you in this task, set some time aside to '**drop**' into your mind-body connection – in other words to just be and to think about what you feel. **Exercise**, **walking** and **meditation** can help you get in the zone. Doing **creative hobbies** is another way of getting to know who you are and what you like. Being creative can relieve stress; it energises you as you are focusing attention on something you like rather than dwelling on things that worry you.

Visit SCCR's website to 'join the band' and give you a sense of how your mind-body connection might be working.



The Three Brains Activity

When to use: routine self-care; building daily regulation habits; linking mind–body**.**

Time: Individual activities (separate timings are provided for each) or 35-50 minutes.

Find it: For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » The Three Brains.

Recommend: Before the session begins watch 'The Three Brains: Meet the Band' video. (For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » The Three Brains).

Your **head**, **heart** and **gut** constantly 'talk'. When they're in sync, self-regulation is easier; when they're out of sync, we feel off-balance. Simple routines (breathing, movement, rhythm, food/sleep) help realign.

The learning bit...

- Understand the connection between their brain, heart, and gut, and how this can affect their overall wellbeing.
- Reflect on their own mind-body connection and consider ways in which you can maintain or improve our emotional, physical and gut health.
- Recognise the impact that music can have on wellbeing and create a practical tool that can be used to increase focus and improve mood.

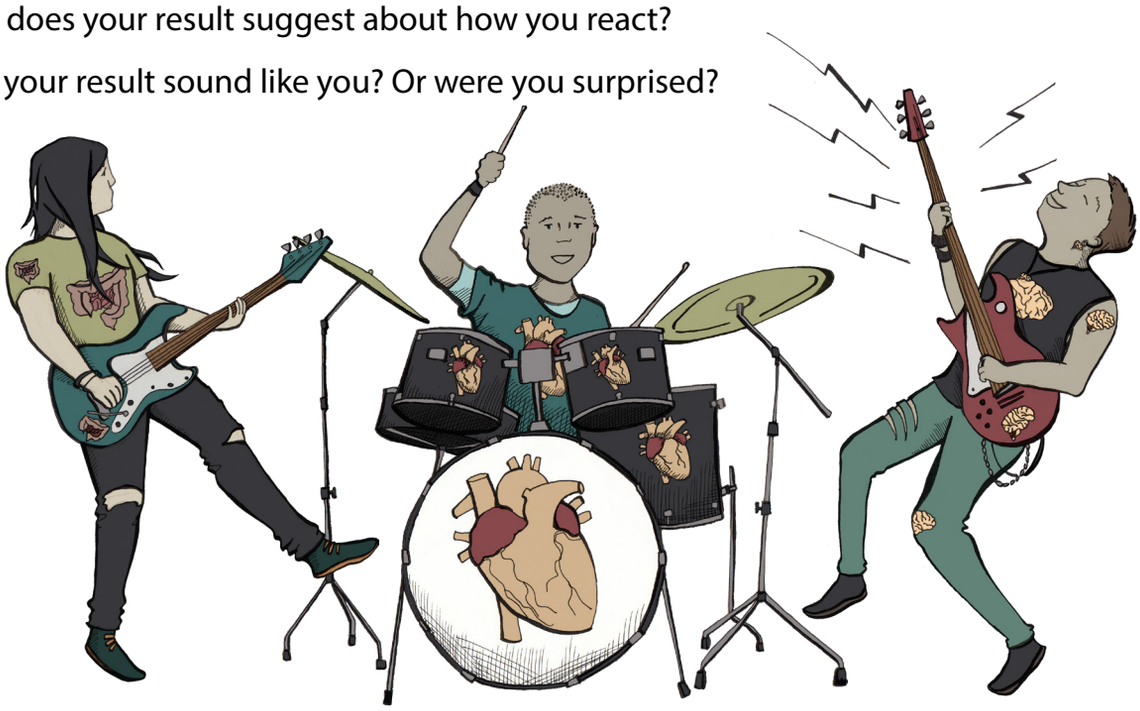
Activity 1 (20-25 mins)

THE THREE BRAINS QUIZ

Now we've learned about the three brains and our mind-body connection, let's find out whether your three brains are currently in sync. (For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » The Three Brains » Learn More » Go to the Gig). The quiz has six questions and should take around three minutes.

Share and discuss your results.

1. Talk about which record-type you got.
2. What does your result suggest about how you react?
3. Does your result sound like you? Or were you surprised?



Activity 2 (5-10 mins)

Go to page 28 for Activity 2 print out

How can we keep each of our 'brains' healthy? Create a body-mind connection 'cheat sheet' to look back on when you're feeling out of sync. Come up with one or two things you could do to improve emotional health, physical health and gut health.

Emotional Health	Physical Health	Gut Health
e.g talk to someone you trust	e.g go outside for a walk	e.g drink water

Activity 3 (10-15 mins)

The right song can set the mood. The connection between music and our mind-body connection is real and music can have a positive effect mentally and physically. It can trigger the release of dopamine, our 'joy' drug, in our brain which helps you focus and improves mood.

Why not create your own mood-boosting playlist?

1. Write down songs or pieces of music that help you to feel:
    a. Relaxed
    b. Energised or happy
    c. Comforted when sad
2. If you're in a group, you could always create a group playlist and share ideas among you – you might come across a new favourite tune or artist!
3. Have a look at our own playlist, created by young people, for some inspiration or to add to your own list.

The ThreeBrains

SCCR Spotify Profile

THE LEARNING ZONE

FOR PROFESSIONALS

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

FOR PARENTS/CARERS

LEARNING ZONE LAUNCHES

Since SCCR'S inception, we've conducted regular national surveys with young people, parents and carers and those working to support them. Young people have consistently told us that they wanted to know more about anger, emotions, conflict triggers, escalation, and coping skills. This led us to review our existing psychoeducational resources and training sessions.

We concluded that our website needed more information on **coping skills** and practical measures that help young people to respond to difficult emotions.

Our solution, the Learning Zone:

- Links the existing psychoeducational resources together into **a clear learning pathway**.
- Provides a **greater focus upstream** on emotional health and wellbeing so that young people have the tools to look after their emotional health.
- Teaches **key communication skills** to young people to de-escalate damaging conflict at home.

Soon, we realised that the needs young people had identified were relevant to parents and carers too, as well as professionals who work with families. We decided to create **Learning Zones** for each of the audiences we work with.

Consequently, we tested the content extensively with our target audiences. SCCR's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Lead worked with teachers and pupils within schools, acting on feedback to improve the resources. Similarly, we focus-grouped the parents' and carers' Learning Zone with adults who wanted to understand better their young people.

Each Learning Zone presents similar content but geared towards how that audience prefers to consume it. For example, there is more text for professionals to print-out, read and highlight relevant passages, while content for Young People is gamified. The respective Learning Zones can be found on our website by clicking on the navbar's chief tabs: For Young People, For Parents and Carers and For Professionals, Practitioners and Volunteers.

FOR TEACHERS

In addition to the psychoeducational resources and Learning Zones, the SCCR's website offers educationalists further **free digital resources** designed to help teachers support pupils in **understanding difficult emotions, regulating their moods, and building healthier relationships**.

You can find these resources under the For Teachers tab on SCCR's website.

We also offer teachers **Emotions and the Brain**, a four-part lesson pack developed with S3 pupils in mind and to be taught by PSE teachers. We recommend delivering the lessons as a whole series. However, teachers can also deliver the lessons as stand-alone sessions if preferred. Individual aspects or activities can be added to other lessons or used in one-to-one work with pupils. The accompanying workbook was designed so that it can be completed as part of the lesson, with a parent or carer or support worker, or by the young person, independently, at home.

This pack tells the story of how our brains interpret the world around us and how this translates in our bodies, emotions and behaviours. If we can understand and recognise emotions in ourselves and others, we can develop skills to help process difficult emotions, respond to our emotions when needed, and improve our relationships with others.

The resources in this education pack are downloadable from the SCCR website and through key resource platforms such as Twinkl, Conduit and Glow.

We also offer schools in-person sessions run by our Emotional Health and Wellbeing Lead. We offer two school sessions, one for Young People and another which is a teacher training event. **SCCR events are funded to be delivered free at the point of use to all our target audiences.**

If you are interested in finding out more about our Emotions and the Brain lessons, please email: **sccr@cyrenians.scot**

Tried and tested in classrooms and other learning settings, SCCR's resources for teachers include ready-to-use activities for whole classes, small groups, or one-to-one work, along with a pupil workbook for ongoing reference.

FOR TEACHERS

RESOURCE OUTCOMES

Scotland's National Performance Framework

Purpose, Values and National Outcomes

Children and Young People

We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential.

National Indicators

- Child social and physical development
- Child wellbeing and happiness
- Children have positive relationships
- Quality of children's services

Communities

We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.

National Indicators

- Loneliness
- Social capital

Education

We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society.

National Indicators

- Confidence of children and young people
- Resilience of children and young people
- Engagement in extra-curricular activities
- Young people's participation
- Work place learning

Health

We are healthy and active.

National Indicators

- Mental wellbeing
- Health risk behaviours
- Physical activity
- Work-related ill health
- Quality of care experience

THE CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Our resources are recognised as helping to deliver the following outcomes in **mental, emotional and physical wellbeing** at early, first, second, third and fourth levels.

- I am aware of and able to express my feelings and am developing the ability to talk about them.

HWB 0-01a / HWB 1-01a / HWB 2-01a / HWB 3-01a / HWB 4-01a

- I know that we all experience a variety of thoughts and emotions that affect how we feel and behave and I am learning ways of managing them.

HWB 0-02a / HWB 1-02a / HWB 2-02a / HWB 3-02a / HWB 4-02a

- I understand that there are people I can talk to and that there are a number of ways in which I can gain access to practical and emotional support to help me and others in a range of circumstances.

HWB 0-03a / HWB 1-03a / HWB 2-03a / HWB 3-03a / HWB 4-03a

- I understand that my feelings and reactions can change depending upon what is happening within and around me. This helps me to understand my own behaviour and the way others behave.

HWB 0-04a / HWB 1-04a / HWB 2-04a / HWB 3-04a / HWB 4-04a

- I know that friendship, caring, sharing, fairness, equality and love are important in building positive relationships. As I develop and value relationships, I care and show respect for myself and others.

HWB 0-05a / HWB 1-05a / HWB 2-05a / HWB 3-05a / HWB 4-05a

- I understand the importance of mental wellbeing and that this can be fostered and strengthened through personal coping skills and positive relationships. I know that it is not always possible to enjoy good mental health and that if this happens there is support available.

HWB 0-06a / HWB 1-06a / HWB 2-06a / HWB 3-06a / HWB 4-06a

- I understand that a wide range of different kinds of friendships and relationships exist.

HWB 2-44a

- I am aware that positive friendships and relationships can promote health and the health and wellbeing of others.

HWB 2-44b

- I am identifying and practicing skills to manage changing relationships, and I understand the positive impact this can have on my emotional wellbeing.

HWB 2-45a

- I understand and can demonstrate the qualities and skills required to sustain different types of relationships.

HWB 3-44b / HWB 4-44b

GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD - GIRFEC AND SHANARRI

In promoting and enhancing the following life skills in young people these resources help to lay the foundation for the Scottish Government's commitment to **Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)** and positively affect a young person's wellbeing measurable by the related **SHANARRI** indicators.

- Increase understanding of anger and anxiety
- Increase capacity to form positive relationships
- Increase ability to communicate wants and needs
- Improve learning, understanding and self-knowledge
- Improve listening skills and increase confidence in communication
- Increase ability to learn from challenges and awareness of continued learning
- Develop emotional literacy
- Increased understanding of how conflict can affect relationships and how to respond to conflict
- Increase confidence and self-esteem through awareness of increasing emotional intelligence and resilience

Healthy Having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, access to suitable healthcare, and support in learning to make healthy, safe choices.

Achieving Being supported and guided in learning and in the development of skills, confidence and self-esteem, at home, in school and in the community.

Nurtured Having a nurturing place to live in a family setting, with additional help if needed, or where not possible, in a suitable care setting.

Respected Having the opportunity, along with parents and carers, to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them.

Responsible Having opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles at home, in school and in the community, and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision, and being involved in decisions that affect them.

Included Having help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities, and being accepted as part of the community in which they live and learn.

MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY 2017-2027

The **Scottish Government's Mental Health Strategy (2017-2027)**, identifies prevention and early intervention as key to minimising the prevalence and incidence of poor mental health. Our resources support delivery of the following Actions of the Strategy:

Prevention and Early Intervention

Action 1: Review Personal and Social Education (PSE), the role of pastoral guidance in local authority schools, and services for counselling for children and young people.

Action 2: Roll out mental health training for those who support young people in educational settings.

Action 5: Ensure the care pathway includes mental and emotional health and wellbeing, for young people on the edges of, and in, secure care.

Action 6: Determine and implement the additional support needed for practitioners assessing and managing complex needs among children who present a high risk to themselves or others.

Action 7: Support an increase in support for the mental health needs of young offenders, including on issues such as trauma and bereavement.

Improved support at tiers 1 and 2 could have the potential to tackle such issues earlier and stem the flow of referrals to the more intensive tiers 3 and 4.

Action 8: Work with partners to develop systems and multi-agency pathways that work in a co-ordinated way to support children's mental health and wellbeing.

Access to treatment and joined up accessible services

Action 17: Fund improved provision of services to treat child and adolescent mental health problems.

Action 25: Develop more accessible psychological self-help resources and support national rollout of computerised CBT with NHS 24, by 2018.

Rights, information use, and planning

Action 35: Work with key stakeholders to better understand Mental Health Officer capacity and demand, and to consider how pressures might be alleviated.

Relationships and behaviour in schools

National Action Plan 2024 to 2027

Theme 3 (Support for children and young people), action 9: Age and stage appropriate resources are available to support children's social and emotional development.

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ACTIVITY PRINT OUTS

Monkey vs Lizard (page 9)

Keep the Heid (page 14)

Cranial Cocktail (page 18)

The Three Brains (page 22)

Cyrenians Scottish Centre for Conflict Resolution (SCCR) is a national resource centre promoting and supporting best practice in mediation, family conflict resolution and early intervention work with a particular focus around young people and families. Our award-winning digital resources, free training and events improve understanding of conflict and emotional needs, to transform relationships and lives.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR WORK

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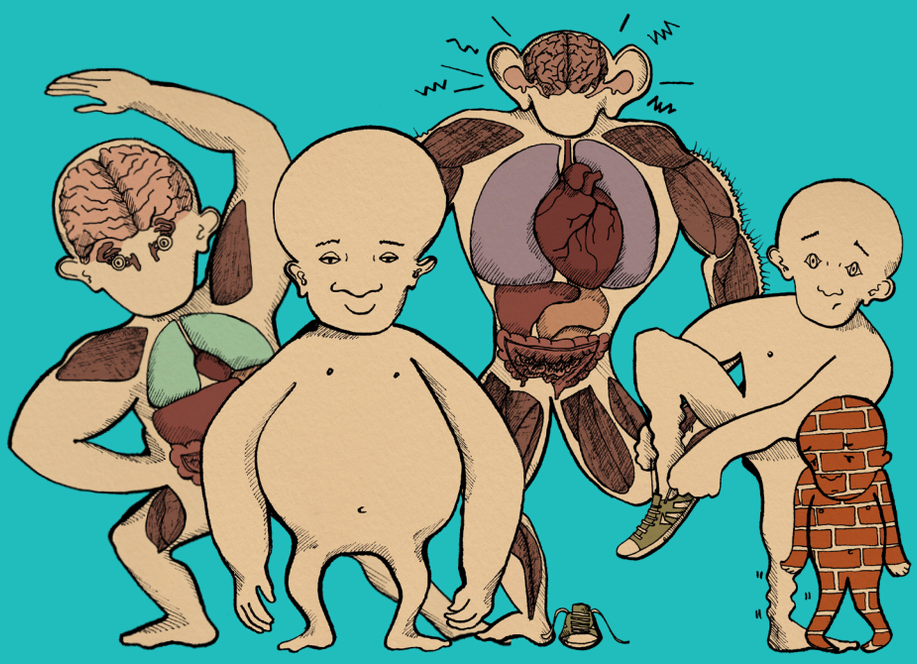

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