THE CALMER APPROACH

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Francisco de Paula
Director
Neurobehavioural Support Practitioner
NDIS Advanced Practitioner P0002569
Email: fran@calmerapproach.com
Mob: 0415 584 330

Amy de Paula
Director
Occupational Therapist
Email: info@calmerapproach.com
https://www.calmerapproach.com

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People with Intellectual Disability Can Shape Their Present and Future Support Through a Co-Designed Therapeutic Approach as an Alternative to Behaviour Management

ASID Conference 2025

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1. Acknowledgment of Country
2. Acknowledgment to the people with lived experience that have supported the development of CALMER
3. Acknowledgement to the people who have given their consent to share their experiences and stories as part of this shared learning.

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Background

Expectation: people with intellectual disability co-design their support, including behaviour support.

- However, is the current behaviour support designed to be co-designed?

Practice reality: meaningful involvement is often limited.

- How to overcome the limitation?

Aim today: Share how the CALMER® Approach emerged and how it enables authentic co-design.

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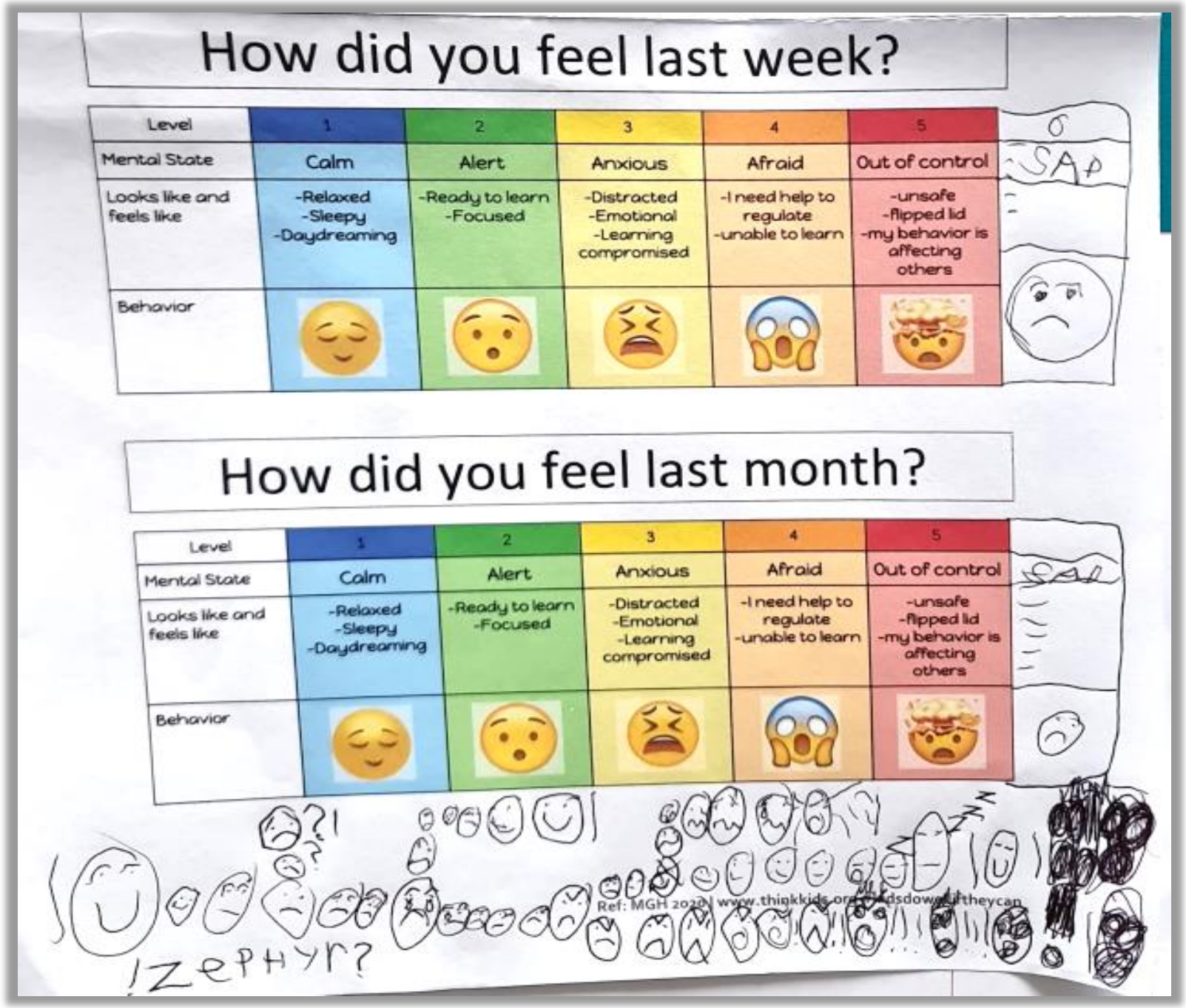
I Assumed Accessibility. The Child Corrected Me.



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Learning from the past → shaping the future

‘Nothing for us without us’

- We need to understand the person and their behaviour in real time to provide the right level of co-designed neuro-affirming therapeutic support.
- Everyone needs to feel safe, connected, heard and understood with empathy and authenticity.

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Co-Designing Neuro-Affirming Therapeutic Support (CNTP)

What are we missing?

"…while the 'why' of using co-design is well understood, there is limited literature on 'how' to co-design."

Benz et al., Research Involvement & Engagement (2024)[53]

Everyone has a role to play. What role do you play?

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Two Loops[56]: Learning from the past → shaping the future

'Nothing for us without us'

Are the current dominant systems designed to be co-designed?

Dominant System

Observable/ Measurable "Four Functions"

ABA/PBS – Behaviour Management Support Plans

Do we need an alternative?

Finding Shared Meaning

Practical, accessible, evidence-informed, ecological, effective and co-designed.

Emergent System

https://www.transformingcities.ca/two-loops 12/11/2025

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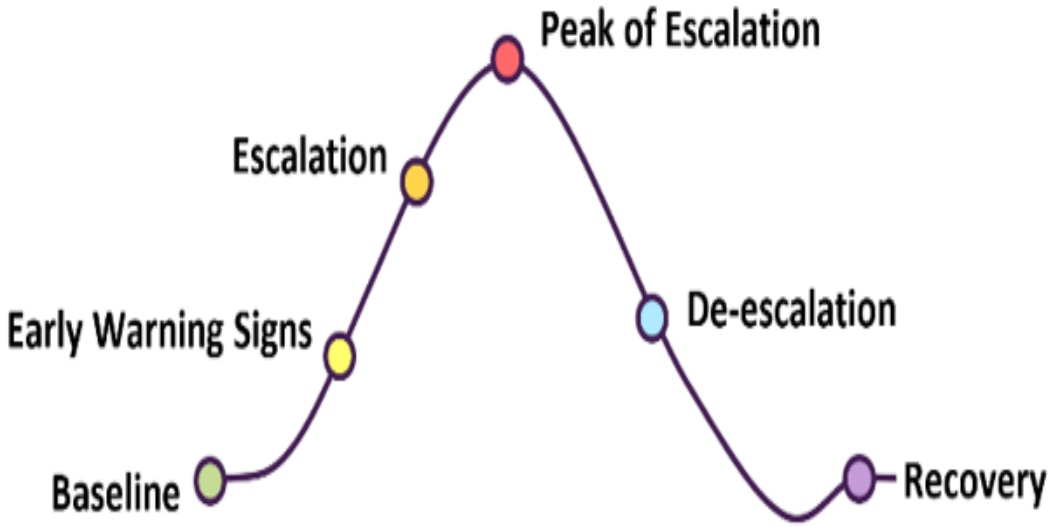
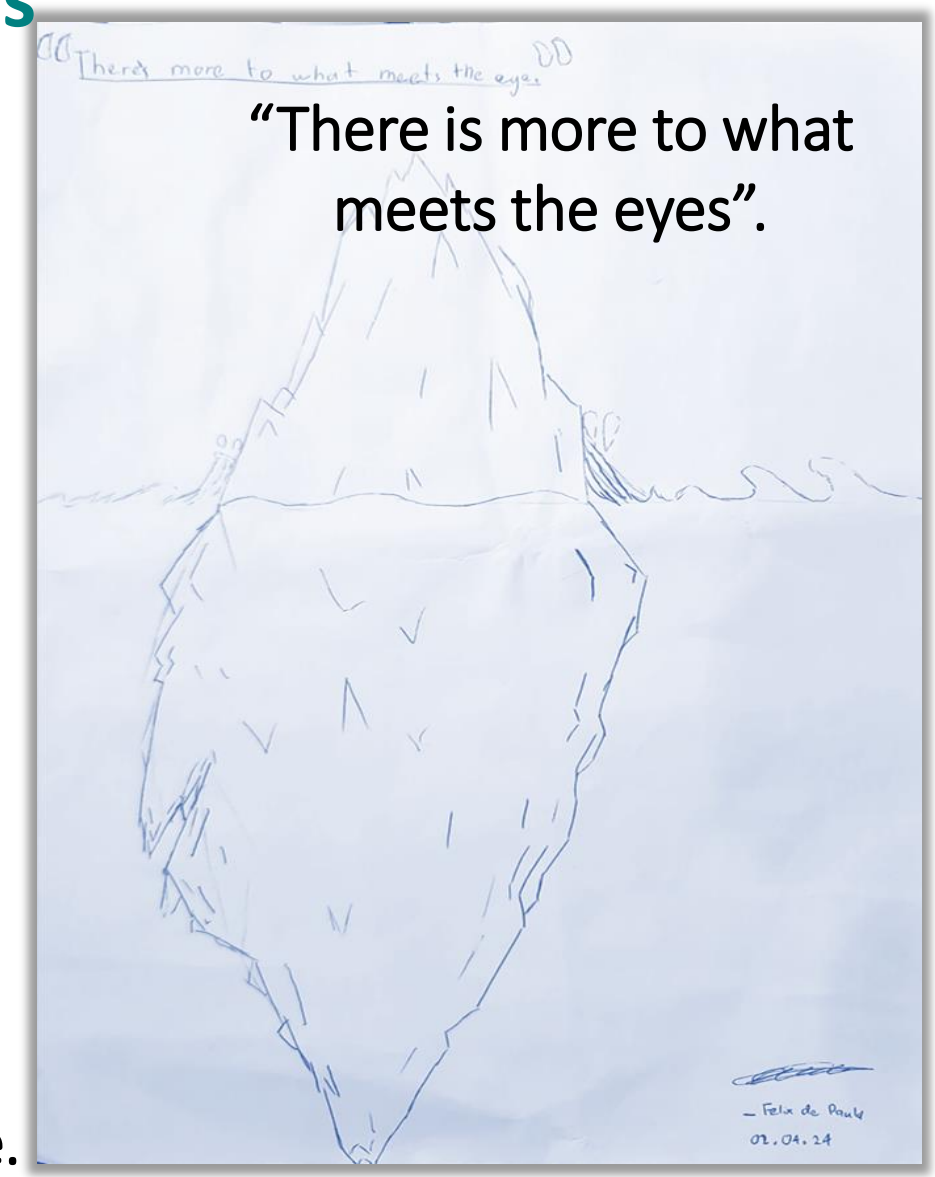
Learning from the past → shaping the future

‘Nothing for us without us’

Behaviour Continuum





There is more to understand than what is observable and measurable.

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Theory of Mind Perspective – My Mind (ME) or the Others' Mind (THEM)

Who is saying that? Who is thinking that? Whose voice am I listening?

Interaction Behaviour	Contributing factors: trigger - meaning stress response - chain of events – other factors			
Crying	Pain – Sad - UTI	Trauma PTSD Avoid	Environment	Survival mode
Running	Stress response	Communication	Constipated	Frustration
Repeating request	Confused Attention	Safe-connected Heard-understood	Grieving Escape	Mismatch of expectation
"Stimming"	Processing interoception	Attention Feeling unsafe	Self-regulating Medication	Self-regulation Health

All behaviour is communicating something. What is the message?

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Learning from the past → shaping the future

'Nothing for us without us'

Everyone's timeline and perspective matters in the process of finding shared meaning.

https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/what-evidence-informed-approach-practice-and-why-it-important 09/09/2023

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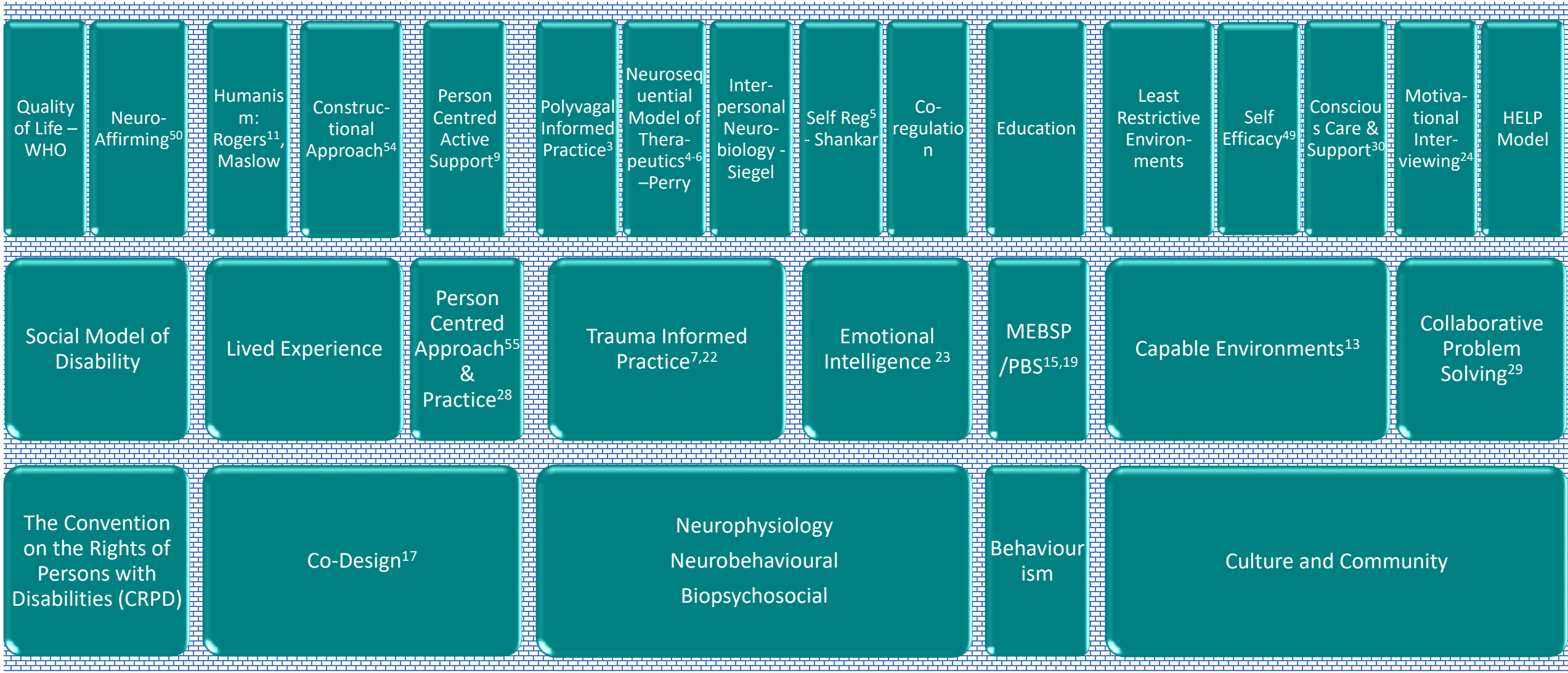
From Knowledge Foundations
To Living Ecosystem Alignment



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CALMER Living Ecosystem
Evidence-Informed Practice Framework

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Language is Important

Traditional Language

- Behaviour of concern
- Function of behaviour
- Behaviour support plan
- Functional behaviour assessment
- Behavioural Continuum
- Replacement skills
- Behavioural change
- Pro-active strategies
- Re-active strategies
- behave to gain or avoid something
- ABC – antecedent behaviour consequence

CALMER Language

- ✓ Unsafe Interaction
- ✓ Finding Shared Meaning
- ✓ Co-Designed Neuro-Affirming Therapeutic Support Plan
- ✓ Critical Analysis Process
- ✓ Frannogram Neuro-Behavioural Continuum
- ✓ Building capacity
- ✓ The environment is the focus of change, not the person
- ✓ Building capable environment
- ✓ Co-Regulation strategies
- ✓ Feeling and thinking influence behaviour differently
- ✓ ABC – Always Be Curious

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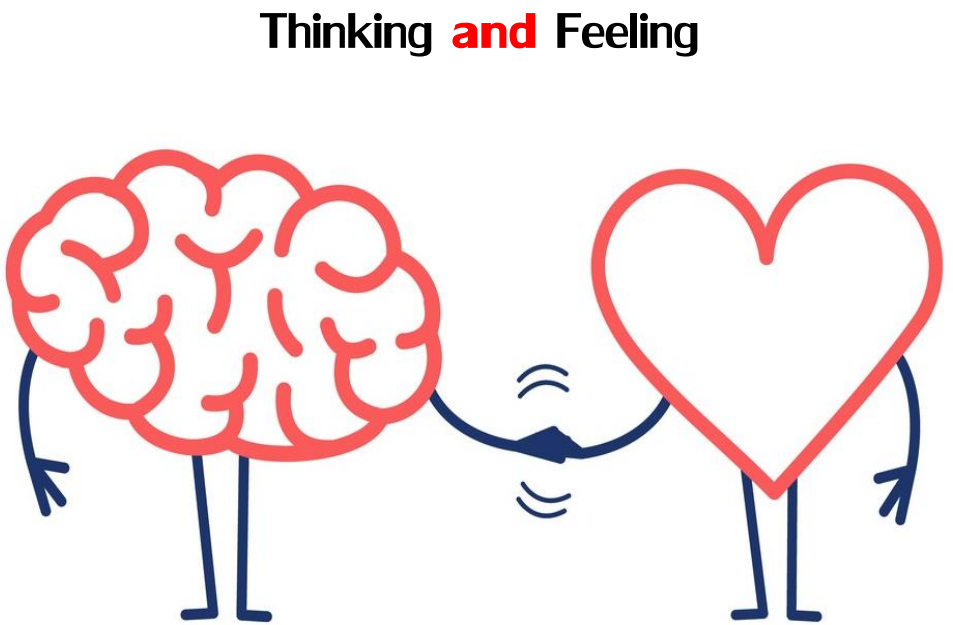
What is the basis for C A L M E R?

The CALMER Approach[6] utilises knowledge translation[7] to synthesize neuroscience[1, 8-11] and behavioural approaches[2,5,12-13] to understand the relationship between emotional regulation and behaviour[1,9].



Everyone needs to feel safe, connected, heard and understood with empathy and authenticity.

https://www.redbubble.com/people/davidmonroy975/works/22941888-feeling-vs-thinking

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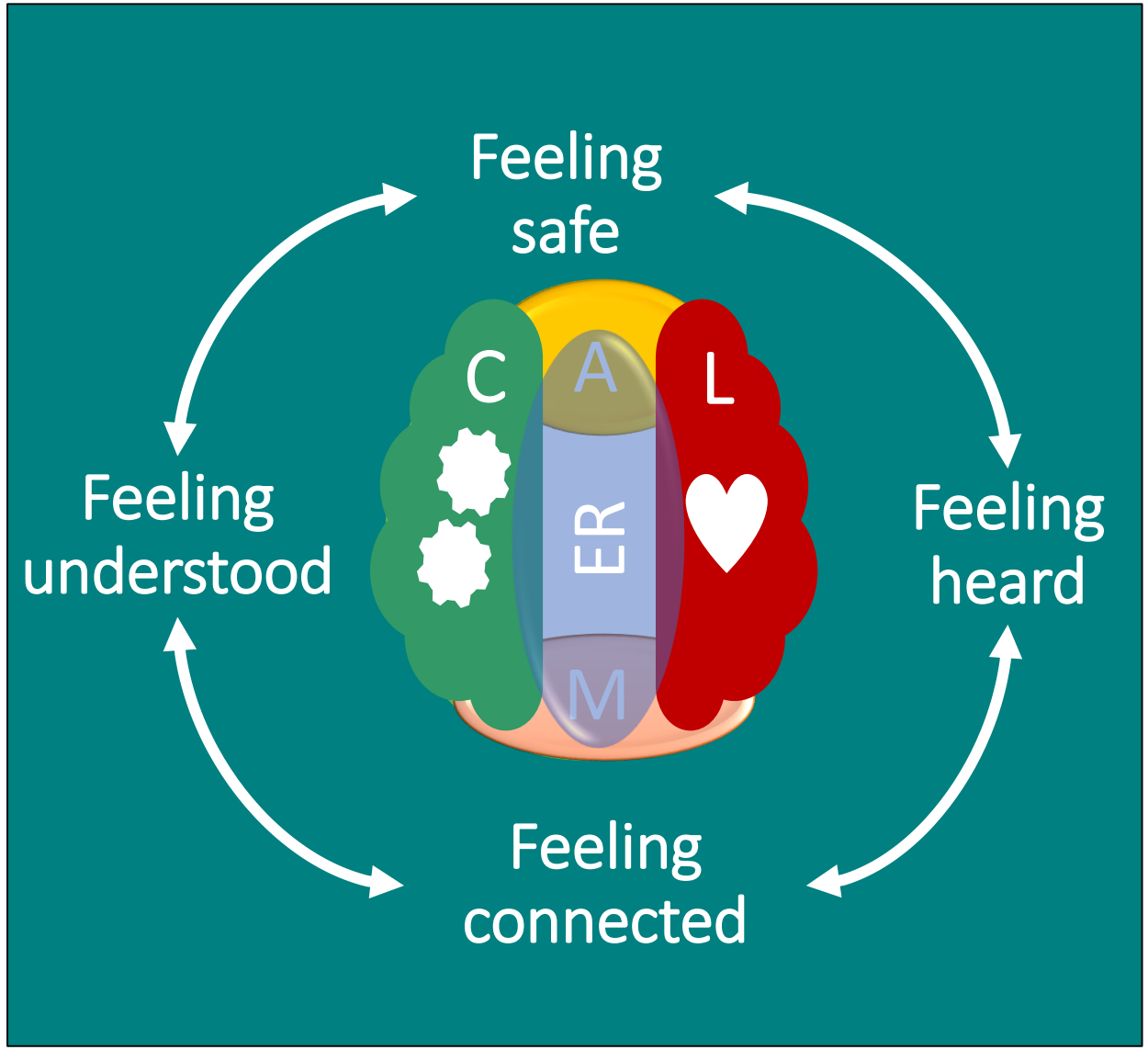
CALMER – Shared by you and me!!!



- **C -** Cortex (thinking brain)
- **A -** Amygdala (assessing safety & danger)
- **L -** Limbic (emotional brain)
- **M -** Memory (of emotions & experiences)
- **E R -** Emotional Regulation (the ability to cope with stress)

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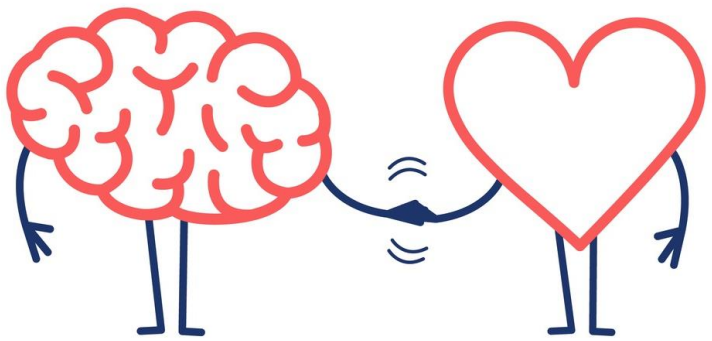
Why empathy?

"The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person". (Rogers, 1980, p140)[11]

Thinking and Feeling



"How we feel determines our subsequent perceptions and behaviour." (Porges, 2004)[3]

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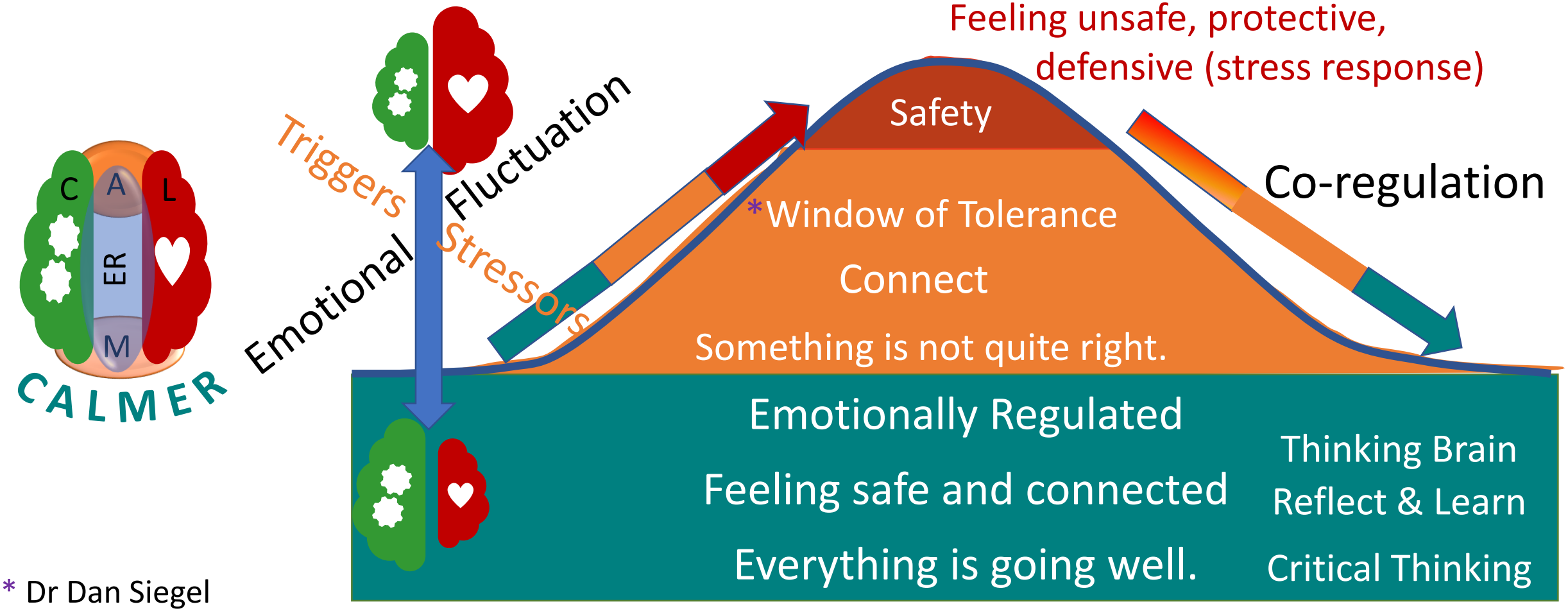
Frannogram - Neuro-behaviour Continuum

Understanding the relationship between emotions and interactions.



* Dr Dan Siegel

Depending on how you are feeling it influences how you learn, understand, engage, interact and participate.

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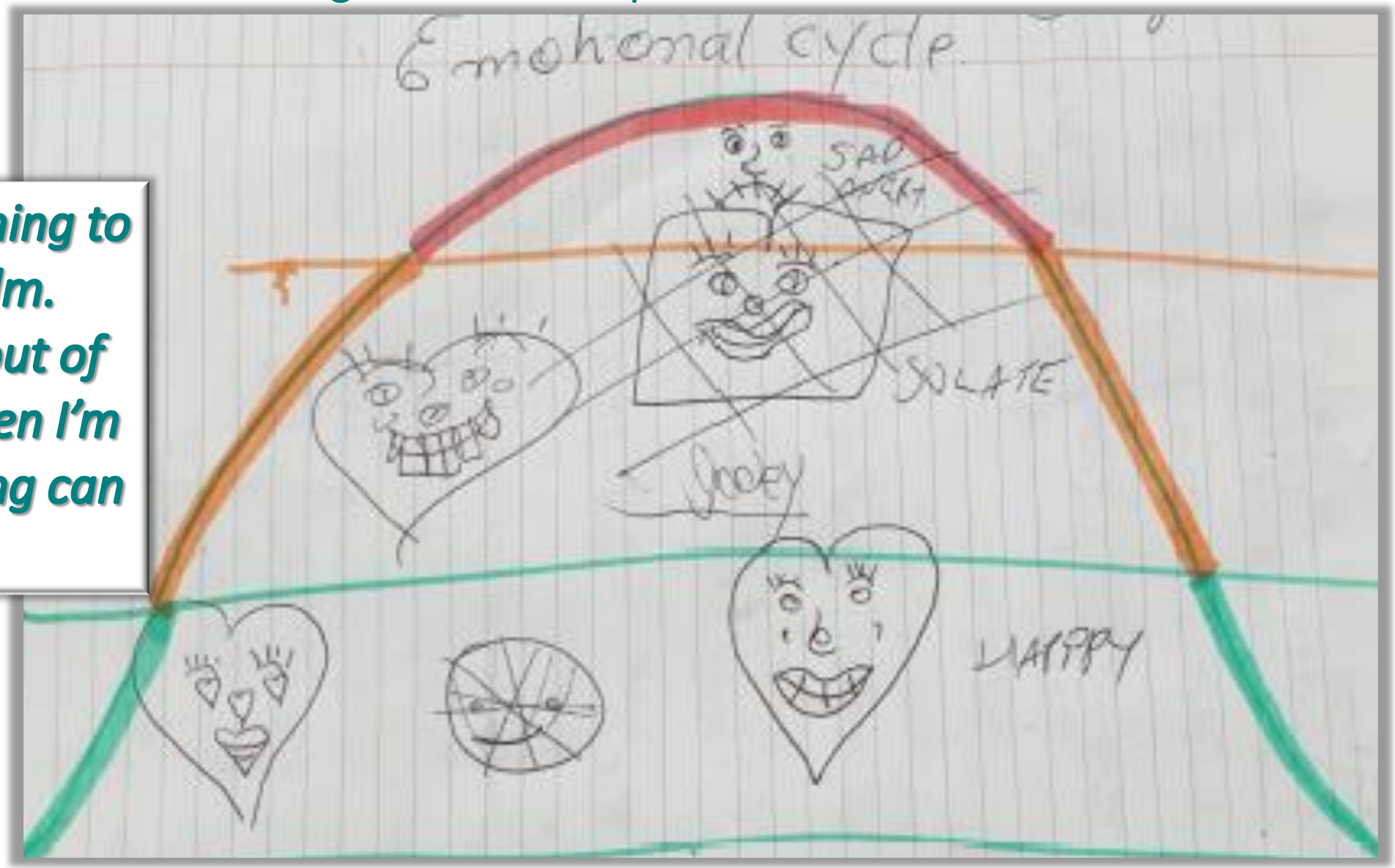
Frannogram sample

Understanding the relationship between emotions and interactions.

"I know the right thing to do when I'm calm. However, it gets out of control quickly when I'm not calm & anything can happen."



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Critical Analysis Process (CAP) in Context

Was the unsafe interaction the problem or was it the consequence of the problem?

How to prevent it from happening again?

Could it have been preventable? Yes -No

What did we learn?

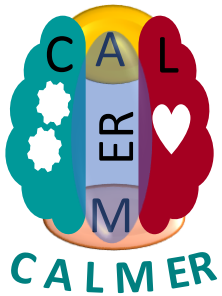
Why did it happen now?

Chain of Events

When did it happen?

How did it happen?

What happened?



What were the events leading up to it?
Other contributing factors?

Unsafe interactions happen due to a chain of events and factors.

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Measuring Meaningful Effectiveness

Maintenance

- Continuous learning and applying the learning for ongoing growth and impact.
- What is working well vs room for improvement
- Critical Analysis
- What is the 'just right' level of s

Outputs

- Immediate and tangible results
- Checklists,
- E.g.: staff training, Support Plan in place, staffing ratios in place, protocols in place.

Is it Meaningful?

Impact

- What does the change mean?
- Goal attainment: COPM, GAS
- Participation/QOL measures; WHODAS
- Qualitative Feedback

Outcomes

- **Observable and Measurable Change**
- **Standardised outcome measures:** Zarit burden scale[45]; Sheffield Learning Disabilities Outcome Measure[46]
- **Data collection & analysis**
- **$Cost effective**

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Case Study – Where to from here?

Bob (11, Year 5, ASD, verbal)

- Diagnosis: Autism Spectrum Disorder (verbal)
- Flipping tables, chairs, throwing objects→ class evacuations and suspensions
- At time of referral: Bob was suspended
- Referral: support plan to resume school and maintain safety and learning

"The program should be **co-designed with people with disability** …"

(Royal Commission…, 2023, Vol. 10, Rec. 10.1, p. 20)[57].

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Co-designed Neuro-Affirming Therapeutic Support

Shared Learning

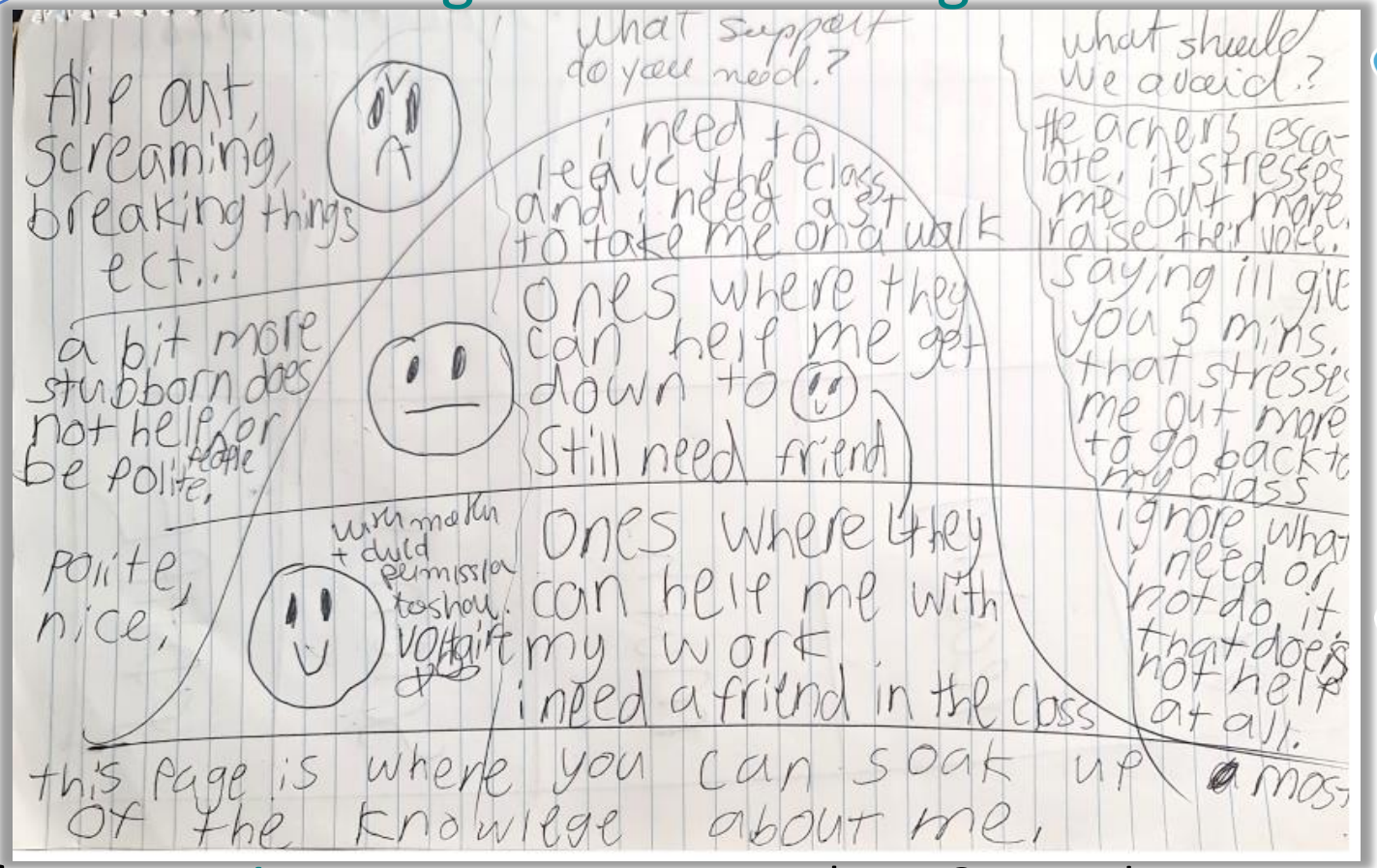
- No further classroom evacuations

Building Capacity

- New friendships
- My support was no further required

Safe Relationships Finding Shared Meaning

"I need to have a friend in the classroom"



Plan Activation Teacher & Student Meaningful Participation

- Teacher & student agreed on more group activities to facilitate new friendship.

Co-Design Co-Planning

- Everyone needs to feel safe in the classroom.
- Weekly check-in

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Feedback –

"You helped us understand why the behaviours were escalating. You made it simple and practical — we feel like we have our life back."
— **Amy, Parent**

"As the principles of your model are universal….I see a real strength of your model helping others (carers/staff/family) to understand and to challenge assumptions/perceptions/labels relating to the person they support or interact with". **Michael - psychiatrist**

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Feedback

"Understanding the CALMER approach helped me remove barriers and reframe my teaching and learning approach when supporting students with autism.

It shifted me from being reactive to proactive — changing the environment and teaching to individual strengths, rather than just responding to behaviours or meltdowns."

– Educator

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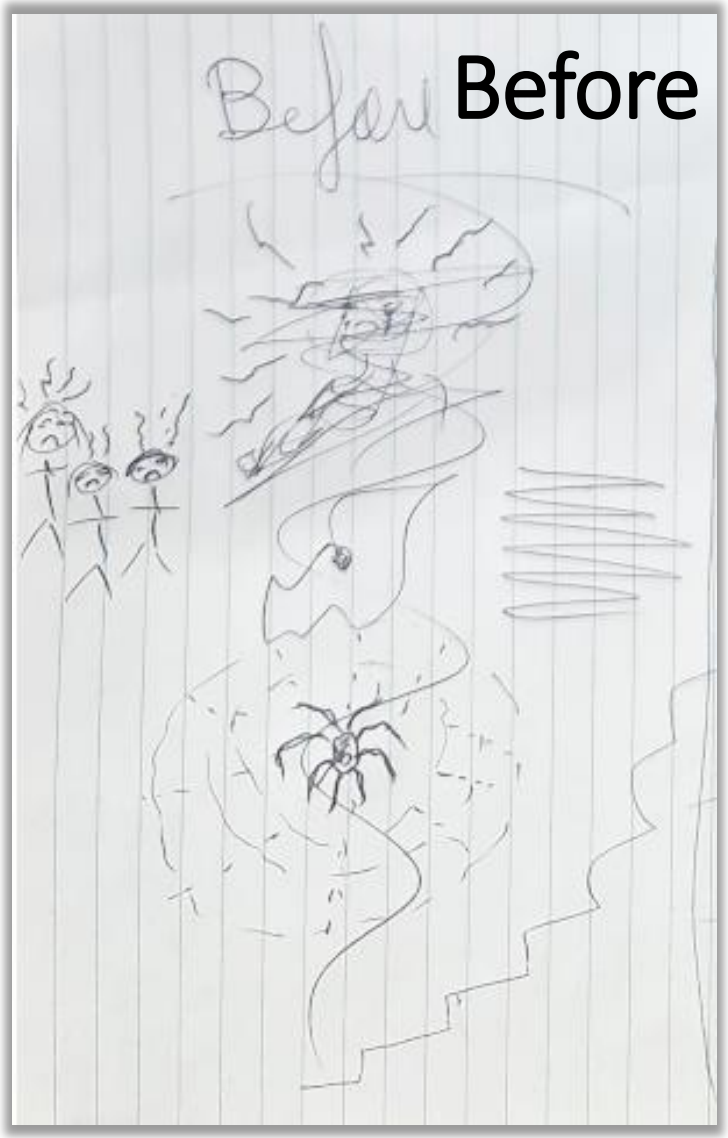
Feedback –



Now

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Learning from the past → shaping the future

‘Nothing for us without us’

Theory

Feeling safe

Feeling understood

Feeling connected

Feeling heard

CALMER

Integrated Practice

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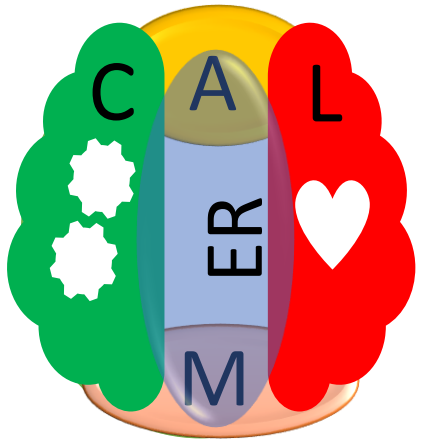
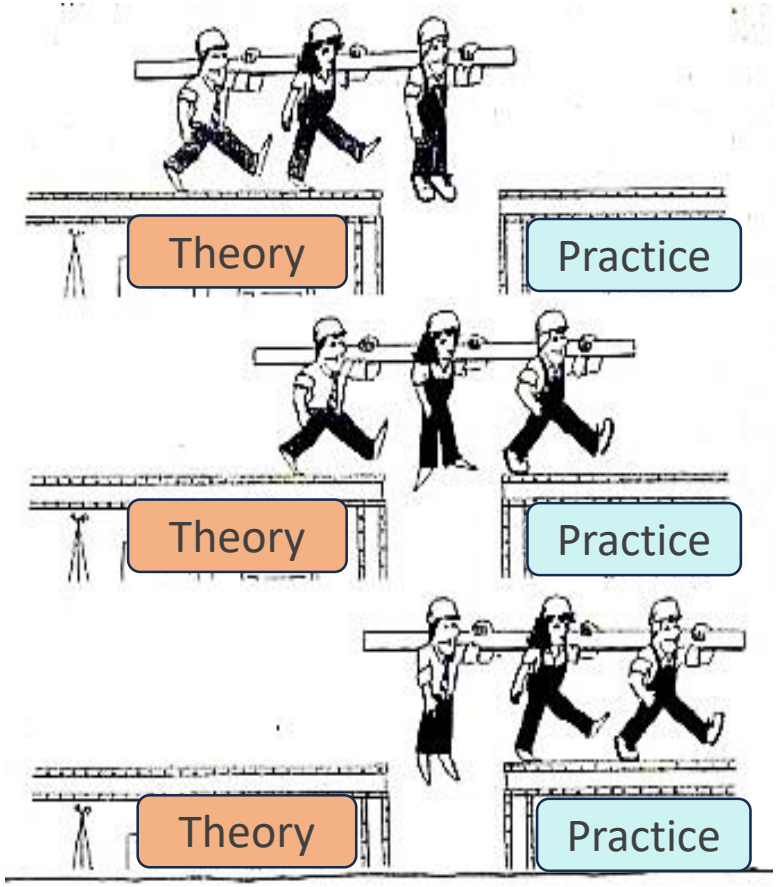
Everyone needs the right level of co-designed neuro-affirming therapeutic support.



Everyone, regardless of gender, age, race, abilities, needs to feel safe, connected, hear and understood at the right time to succeed.

CALMER facilitates the process to enhance safe relationships, co-design support, meaningful participation and ongoing learning for **everyone**.



CALMER is a co-designed approach & provides win-win outcomes.
CALMER's knowledge and understanding belongs with everyone and in all settings.

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In conclusion

- CALMER is more than a multi-integrated evidence-informed practice framework. It is a shared experience.

- The CALMER® Approach shared how people with intellectual disability can meaningfully co-design neuro-affirming therapeutic support as an alternative to behaviour management.

- The CALMER® Approach is looking for partnership to conduct a research on the effectiveness of a co-designed neuro-affirming therapeutic support.

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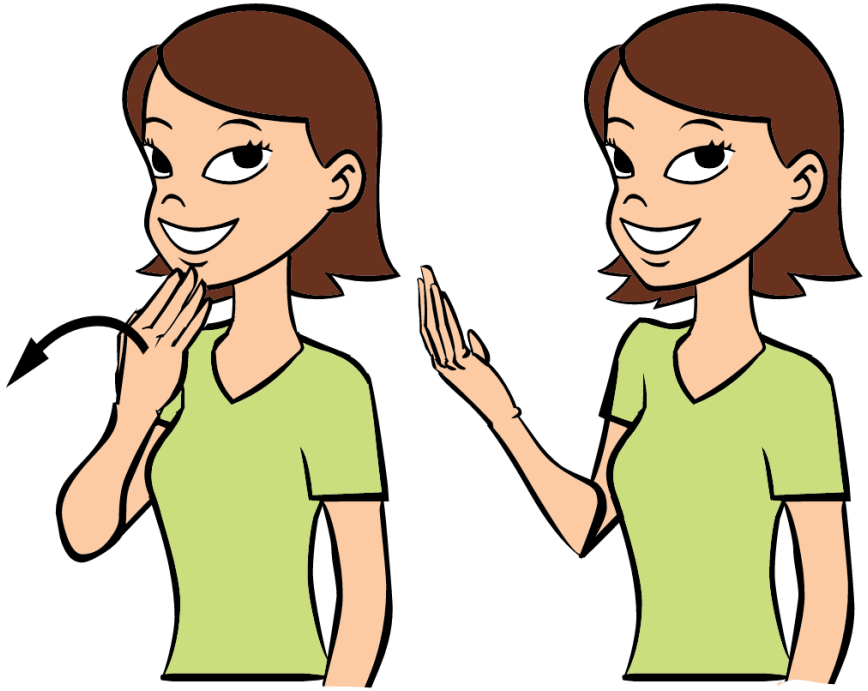
"I am an Autistic parent to two amazing multiply neurodivergent adult sons and have been supporting families for over 24 years. I was trained in ABA and PBS, but as a parent, none of it ever felt right. Later I explored approaches like the Neurosequential Model, the Low Arousal Approach, and the Trauma Wisdom Circle — all of which added value, but still felt incomplete.

What I love about CALMER is how it brings the research from all these pioneers and much more together into one approach." — ***Pam***



Thank you

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