It is all about connection

Attachment theory in action

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LifeKind
GROWING RESILIENCE

Session outline

- What is attachment?
- The neurobiology of connection – how children depend on their adults for more than survival
- How attachment needs shape behaviour
- Neurodivergence
- Attachment styles
- What gets in the way of secure attachment
- Key skills for attachment aware parenting

HISTORY OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

losing the plot and finding it again!

Indigneous evolved needs for survival

physical and emotional attachment to one parent within community of alloparents

'civilisation', power over and behaviourism

beliefs that children need to be trained into adult world instead of naturally growing up as part of it

attachment theory

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth 1950's - children's early relationships with caregives create blueprint for life

neurobiology

technology allows research to confirm and build on understanding of evolved human needs



Neurobiology of human development

We grow and function in relationship

Children and young people need warm adult care to learn and develop healthily

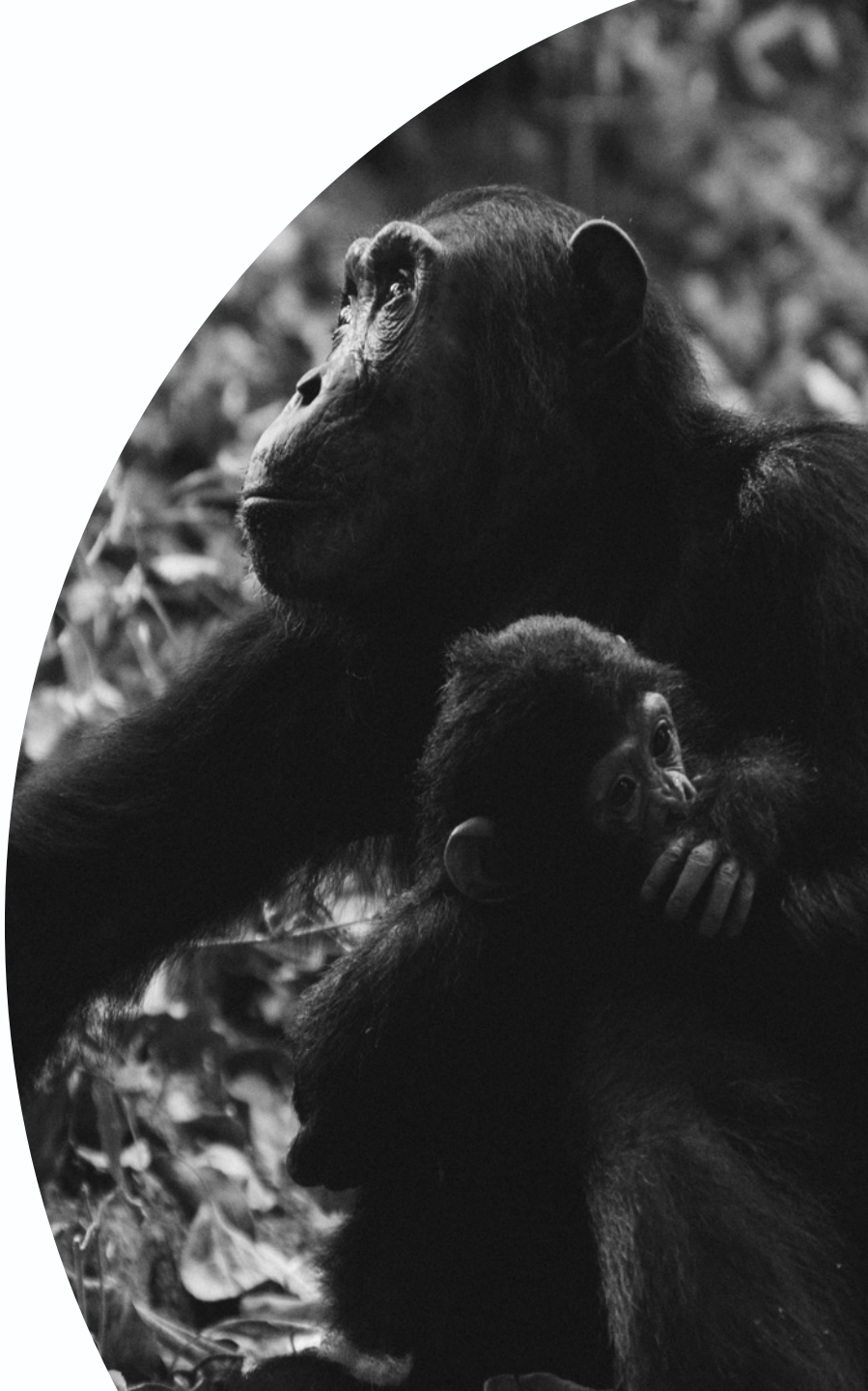
Adults need warm care to live healthily

In a nutshell:

Humans have evolved for connection

Emotions are at the heart of connection and physical development

Children’s brains and bodies develop in response to their parents/carers



The neurobiology of human functioning

Connection	Our brain cells form connections through our relationships
Attunement	Our bodies and nervous systems tune into each other

We all need connection with warm, responsive others for our brains to develop and function healthily

Parents need connection to provide connection

Our bodies, brains and nervous systems physically tune into each other.

We need each other to co-regulate

Daniel Siegel: the most dangerous idea in human history is that we are all individuals



The amygdala

Am I safe? Do I matter?

If **yes**, then the brain is able to develop and function with resilience and flexibility

If **no**, then healthy growth and functioning are interrupted until safety is found

Feelings are the root of behaviour

Distress and anxiety are shown in nervous system activation

Fight

Flight

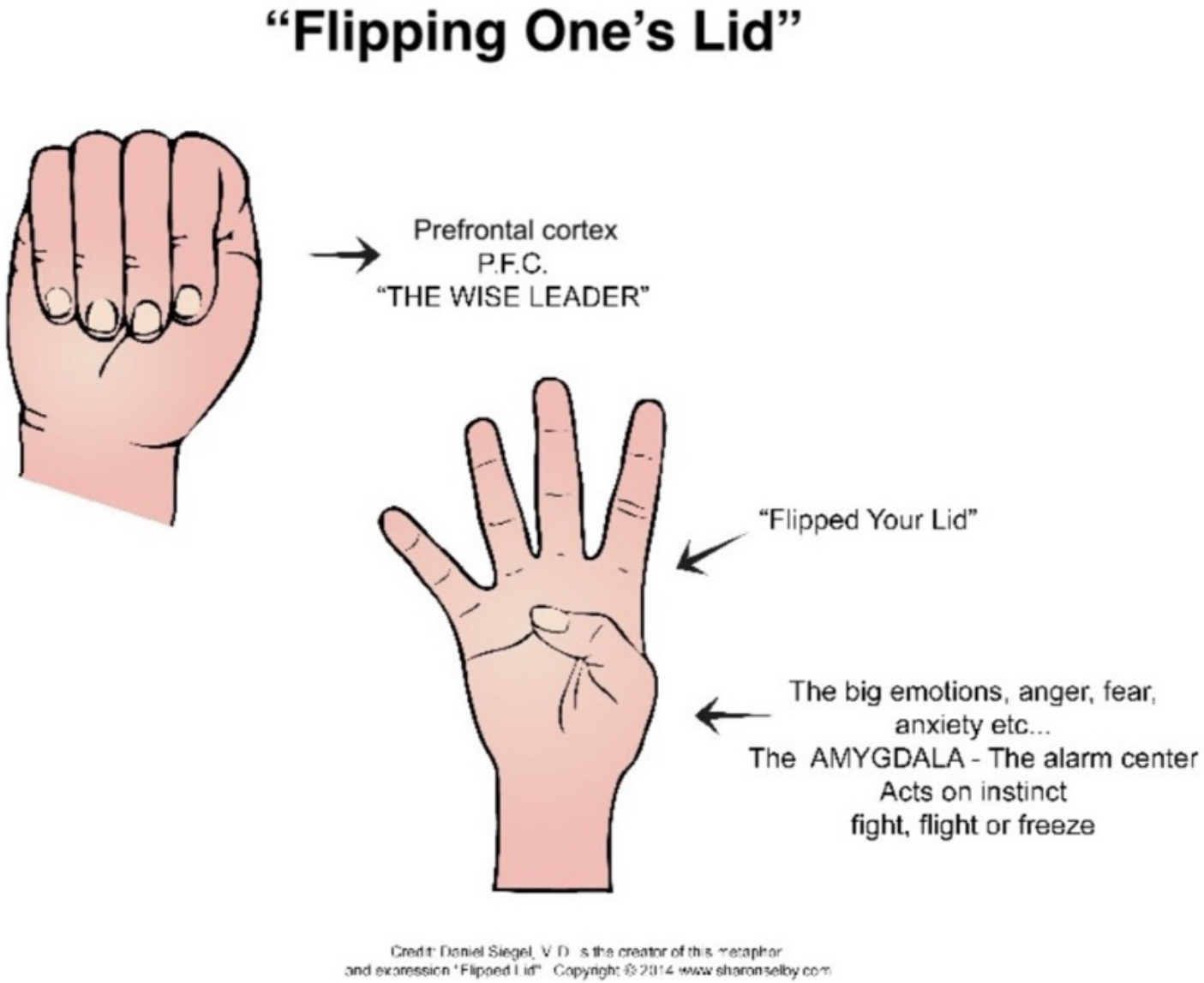
Freeze

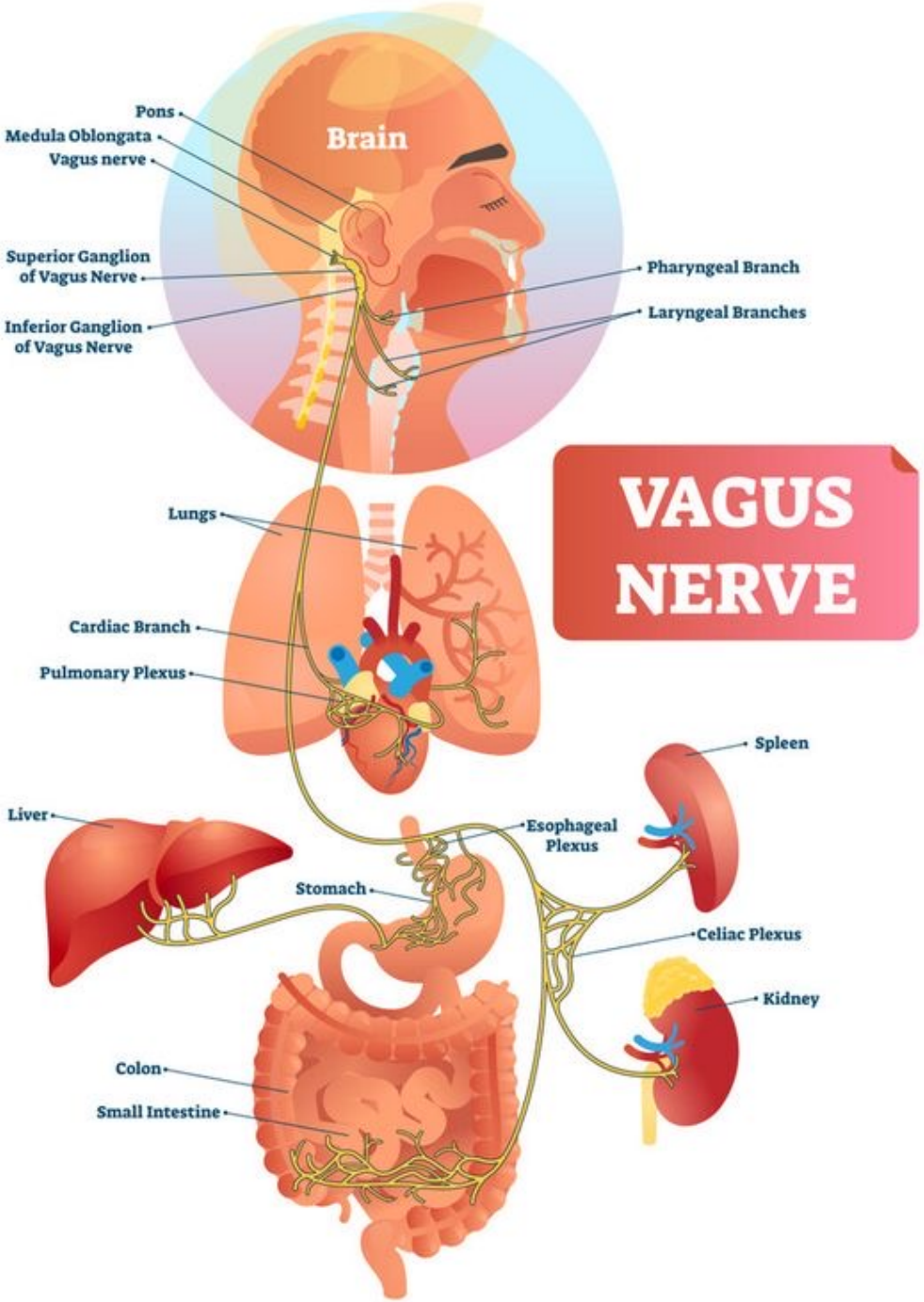
This is not a choice, it is automatic



Hand model of the brain

Daniel Siegel





Vagus nerve

the core of nervous system regulation

- Expression in eyes
- Tone of voice
- Hearing
- Interoception (felt sense)



Punishment and reward get in the way of attachment

Punishing distressed behaviour causes more distress

Rewarding focuses on behaviour and conditional approval

Children need to know that they are unconditionally loved and supported



Neurodivergence

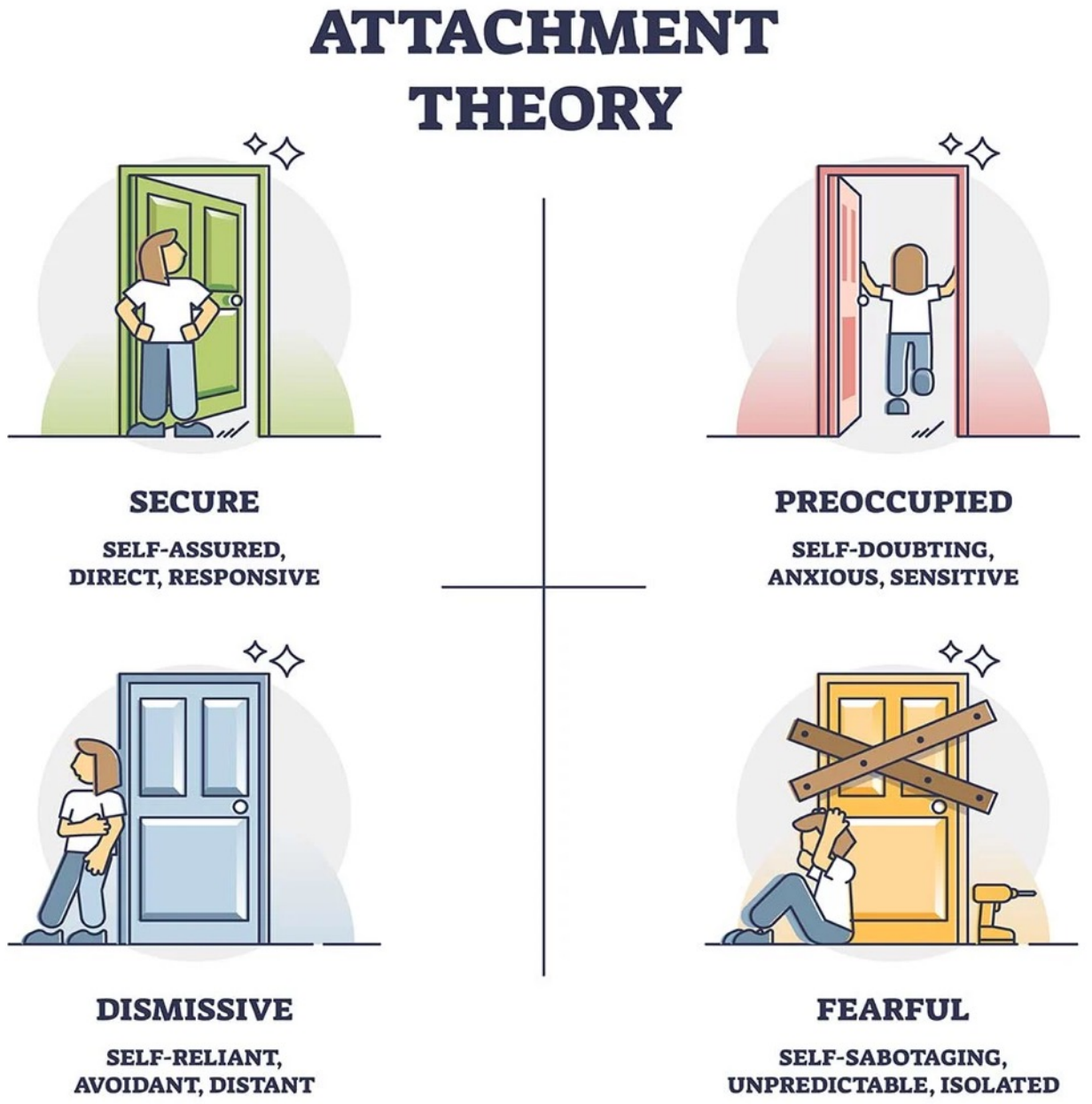
Neurodivergent children and adults have sensitive nervous systems that need even more regulating

Attachment needs may show up differently but are still core.

Mainstream family and school expectations can miss the needs of children, including ND

Attachment styles

Adult attachment styles are formed in childhood then passed on via parenting



Children’s feelings need understanding and support

Warm attuned empathy from regulated adults

Curiosity about emotional response

Authentic friendliness



We can heal from attachment wounds

Understanding our own attachment history and making sense of it

Learning the ingredients of secure attachment

Doing inner work to bring warmth and care to our child selves

⬇

Earned secure attachment



What gets in the way of secure attachment parenting?

- Parents attachment experience in their childhood
- Culture around them that is not attachment aware
- Individualism, cost of living, unrealistic expectations put huge pressure on parents
- Confusing information and unquestioned beliefs eg don't reward bad behaviour, focus on behaviour
- Lack of support for parents – care and validation and rest
- Often different views in couples - conflict makes it worse





Key skills for attachment aware parenting

- Repair after rupture – incl. apology, empathy
- Settling your own nervous system - self-regulation
- Finding supportive adult relationships – co-regulation
- Having clear values and intentions about your role as a parent – the main job is to help child feel safe and loved
- Making sense of your own childhood experience
- Clear understanding so that you can withstand pressure from culture around you

Summary

- Warm responsive relationships are at the heart of human health and thriving throughout life
- For children, feeling safe and loved is a survival and developmental need
- Our culture does not reflect or support this
- Most of us have not had these needs met ourselves
- It takes work to parent this way
- Not everything is an attachment problem but an attachment response is always helpful





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Resonance regulates stress

I see you, I hear you, I get you, you are welcome here

- resonant accompaniment boosts **seratonin** - wellbeing hormone
- opinions, advice, fixing, dismissing (even if it is ‘kind’) boosts **adrenaline** - stress hormone

Why respond with resonance?

Core human needs:

- To be seen
- To be heard
- To make sense, to be understood
- To feel welcome

This leads to **‘I am not alone’** and allows stress co-regulation

Basic stuff about feelings

- Having a whole range of feelings is part of being human
- Feelings start as experiences in the body
- We cannot choose our feelings
- Feelings are not good or bad - they are all important
- It is normal to feel several things at the same time
- We need other people to help us make sense of our feelings
- Many of us were left alone with our feelings when we were little so it feels scary when we are distressed
- There are many ways we can learn to welcome our feelings so that we don’t feel so overwhelmed



The need for resilience

The present and future are entirely different for young people

They will need:
Resourcefulness
Practical survival skills
Emotional intelligence
Creative thinking
Collaboration
Community skills

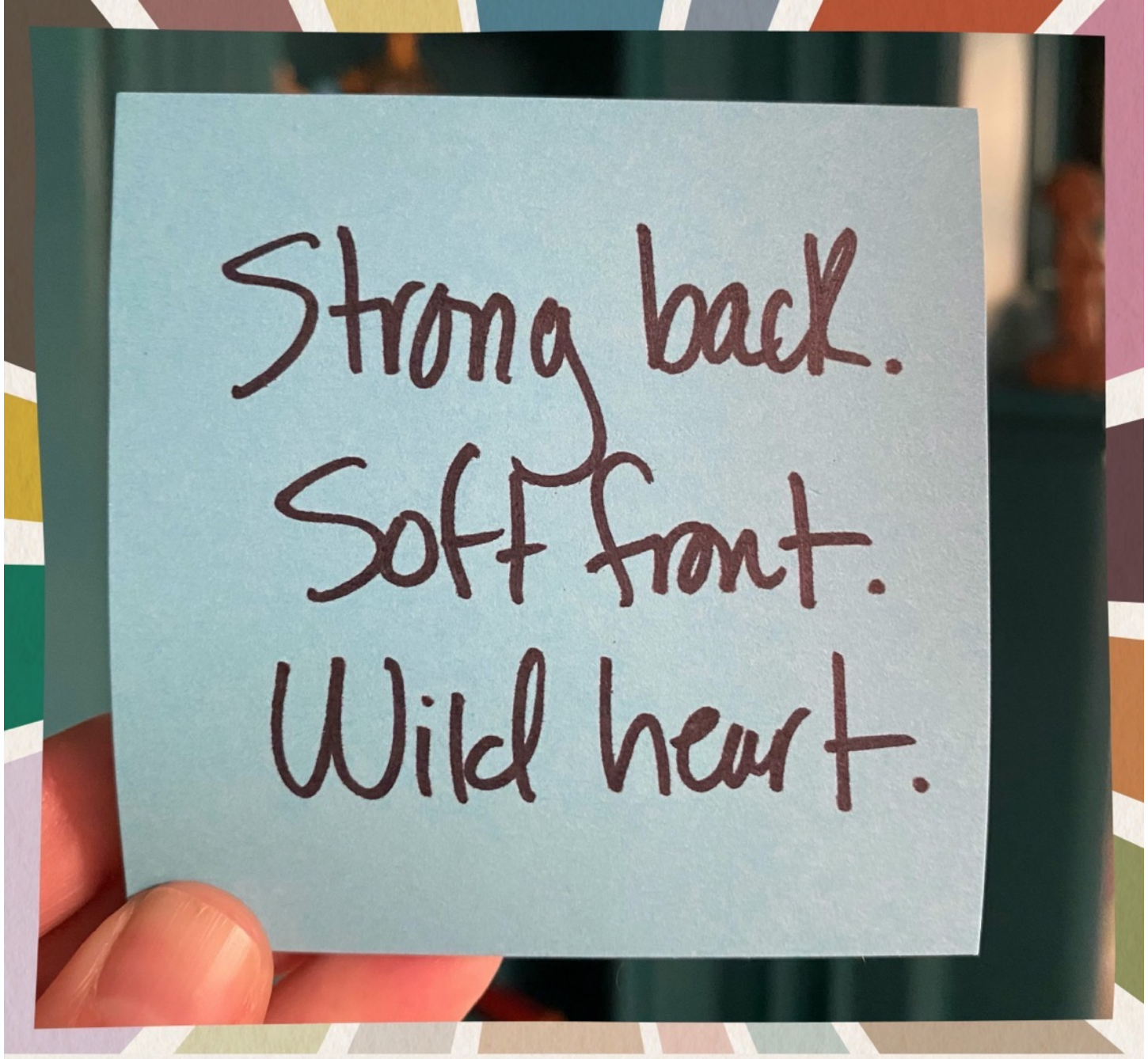
The roots of resilience are in childhood





Regulating the nervous system

- Shake Stretch Soothe


Strong back.
Soft front.
Wild heart.