

What Survival Looks Like At Home

© Helen Townsend



In collaboration with Beacon House Therapeutic Services & Trauma Team



From the moment we met, you started making vital, life changing differences to my brain.

I know that on some days, this isn't easy.

As you know, when I was younger, the brain cells that 'fire' when I'm scared were used a lot, and the brain cells for love and safety did not develop. This means that even though on the outside I sometimes know that I am safe and loved by you, on the inside I often think and feel under attack.

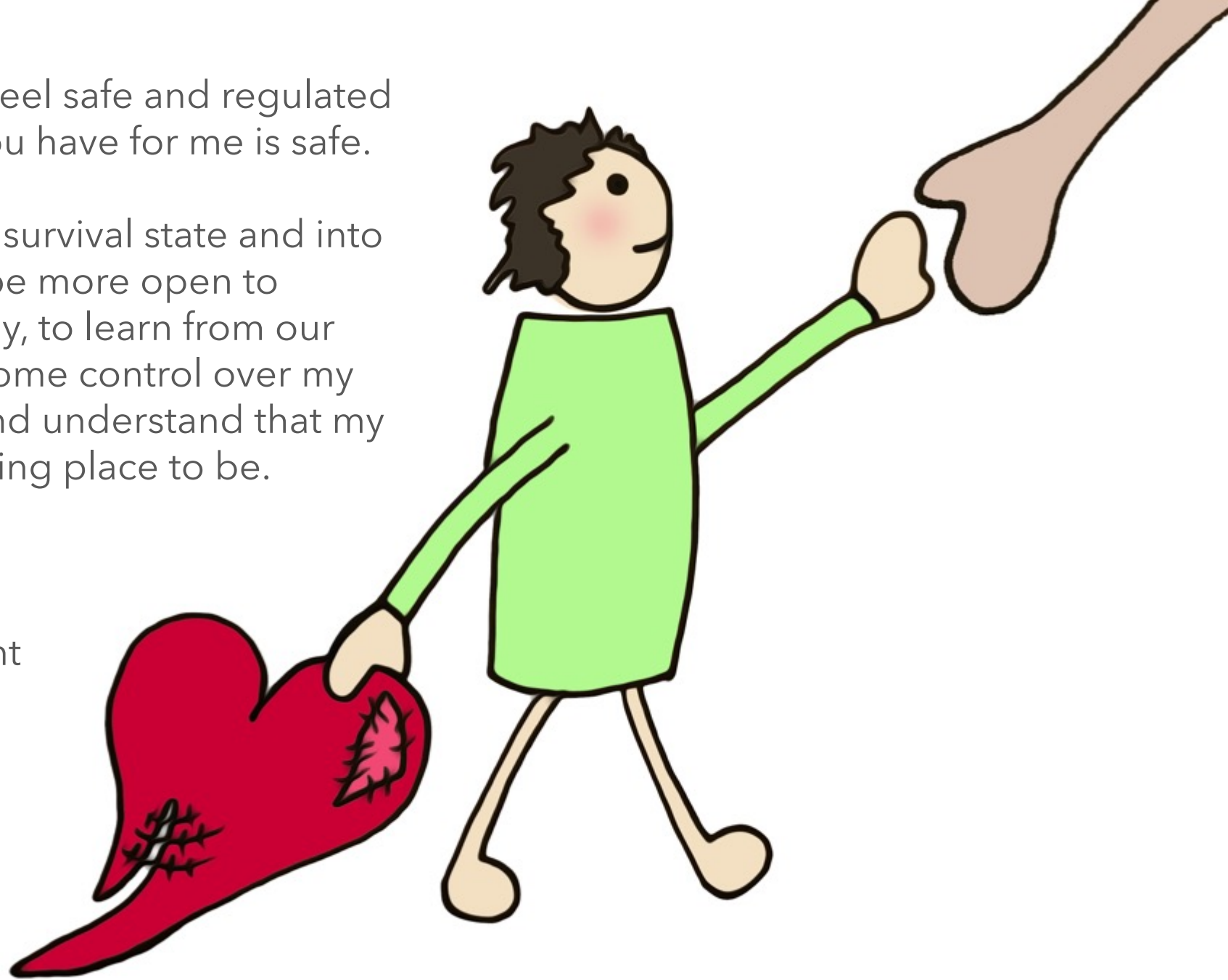
My brain activates survival mode to protect and save me from being hurt. I can't tell you when it's happening but you already know something isn't right by my body language, words, emotions and actions.

I go into survival mode so often both at home and at school, that this part of my brain is strong and rules over the calm part of my brain. I can't turn it off by myself.

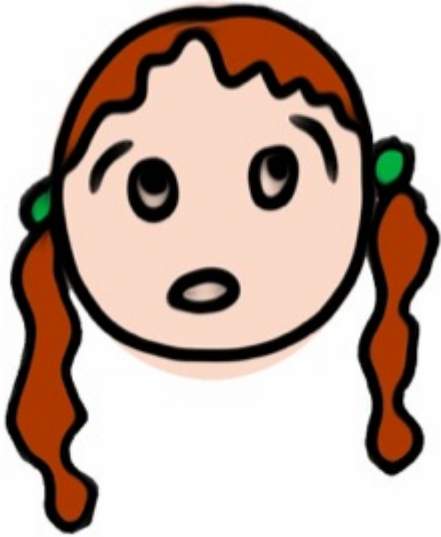
I would really like your help to feel safe and regulated so I can believe that the love you have for me is safe.

By travelling with me out of my survival state and into a calmer frame of mind, I may be more open to listening to what you have to say, to learn from our life together, play safely, gain some control over my body, enjoy my relationships and understand that my world with you is a safe and loving place to be.

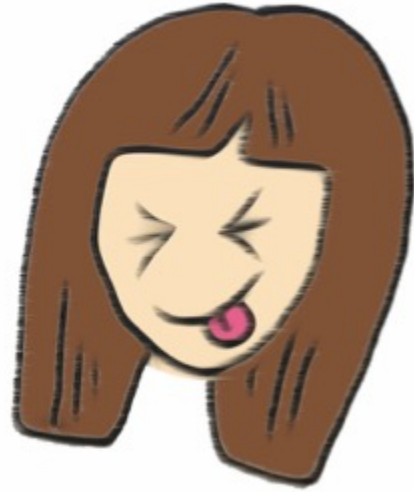
I would love you to see these hidden feelings rather than my survival state behavior, I do want to relax and enjoy our life together but I need your help to do this.



This booklet tells you about the 4 different survival states that I swing between:



Freeze



Flight



Fight



Submit

What I look like in *Freeze*...

- Bored, not interested
- Confused, forgetful
- Distracted, not listening
- Clumsy
- Talking about something else, moving you on
- Not moving to where you've asked me to be
- Standing still/sitting still (hanging/lounging about)
- Finding it hard to stay focused on what you've asked me to do
- Scanning the room
- Wide eyed, my pupils might dilate
- Zoned out, daydreaming, staring into space



Freeze

What I am aware of in *Freeze*....

- My heart is beating faster, my breathing is faster
- My brain is slowing down
- I am under attack
- I can't do what you have asked
- I am terrified
- I am trying to think of something that makes me feel safe
- Background noises, I can hear what is going on around me without needing to specifically focus
- The tone of your voices rather than the words, I can hear you're getting frustrated with me
- Feeling deeply anxious
- I need to get ready to protect myself
- I am looking for where the danger is coming from



How my body feels in *Freeze*...

- Frozen brain
- Under attack
- If I don't move you can't see me
- Everything feels like a dream
- Ready to fight and defend myself
- Very scared
- In a fog, disconnected, numb
- My pulse rate is going up
- My muscles are tensing, my hands might clench into fists
- Some sounds are louder and some more distant, I can't focus on what is being said but I can clearly hear the tone.



Freeze

What's happening in my *Inner World*...

- I am a failure, you are going to send me away
- I can't be who you want me to be
- I am not worth bothering with
- Shame, I hate myself
- I need to get somewhere safe, I don't know what's going to happen
- I am an outsider, I don't belong here with you
- I can't do this and you will get rid of me when you realize
- I am humiliated, embarrassed
- I'm scared, I need to feel safe
- I can't bear your rejection



*You can help me feel **safe** again...*

- Stay with me, don't leave me alone
- Tell me I'm ok and that I am safe
- with you
- Watching TV
- Deep breathing
- Spinning on a swing, climbing and hanging
- Rolling or cycling down a hill
- Digging in the garden or in some sand
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Carry out the chore you have asked me to do with me
- Gently wonder where I have gone and invite me back to the room
- If I have forgotten what I was supposed to be doing, remind me again gently
- Hot chocolate and a piece of crunchy toast
- A nice warm bath and a warm towel
- Put a soft teddy in bed with me



What I look like in *Flight*...

- Hyperactive, manic, giddy, silly
- Aggressive, threatening: stiffening up or clenching fists
- Running away, escaping, disappearing, hiding under the table/bed/sofa
- Clumsy
- Disruptive, loud and noisy
- Not coping with unstructured time to play
- Unable to follow house rules, avoiding what you've asked me to do
- Lonely
- Keeping super busy
- Baby talk/silly voices
- Bumping into people
- Needing to get into the car/house/park first



Flight

What I am aware of in *Flight*...

- Vigilant to what is around me , everything feels like a threat
- Sudden noises (you probably won't be able to hear them)
- Overwhelmed, I am overstimulated, I can't cope or focus
- Noise levels
- The tone of your voice
- Worrying about what is happening next
- How far away I am from being safe
- I need to get out of here - now
- Lonely, even though you are nearby
- Panicky
- Feeling bad, movement is distracting
- Shame
- Anxious, apprehensive



Flight

How my body feels in *Flight*...

- Terrified
- Nauseous
- Jumpy and tense
- My joints are painful
- Increased sweating
- Numb
- I feel like I'm vibrating
- My breathing is getting quicker, I am ready to run and escape
- My muscles are tensing so I can fight my way past, ready for action
- My heart is beating faster and faster - my pulse is going up and my heart is racing



Flight

What's happening in my *Inner World*...

- I need to get out of here, I am in danger
- I need to find somewhere safe
- I want to escape but I can't
- I am not as important as my sister/brother/cousin/friend
- I am not worth much, I am worth nothing at all
- I am completely alone in this world
- I must not show how I feel to anyone, they won't want me anymore
- I must not tell anyone how I feel, they won't want me anymore
- I don't belong here, I am not part of this family



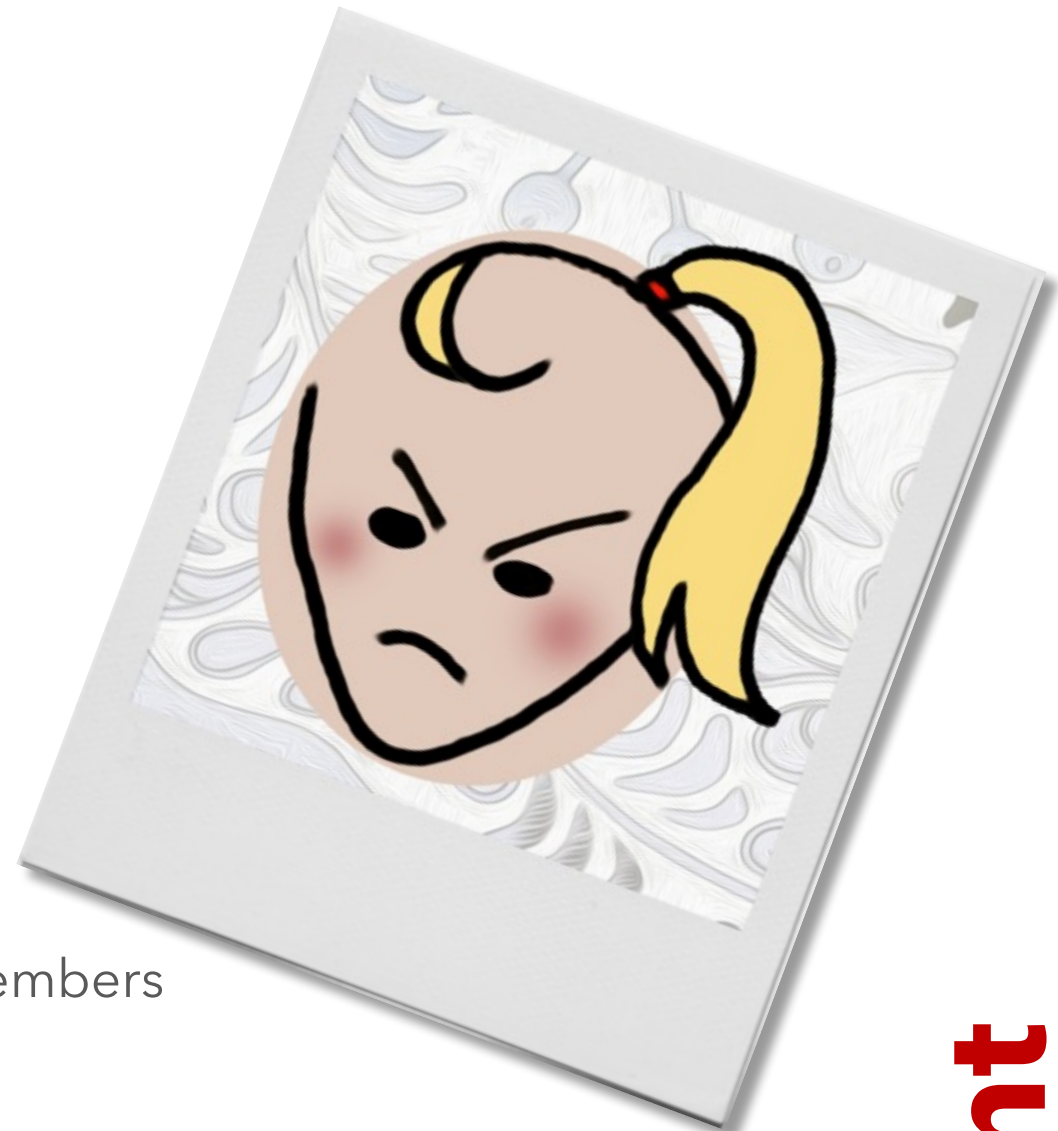
You can help me feel safe again...

- Keep me close by
- Find me again - happily or at least patiently
- Deep breathing
- Give me a familiar and easy chore to do
- Crunchy foods - carrot sticks, a biscuit, a rice cake or a packet of crisps
- Tell me that I am safe with you
- Hanging from monkey bars
- Talk through what you think I am finding tricky using a kind voice
- Heavy blankets
- Create a safe space where I can hide away I when I need to
- Tug of war
- Cup of warm milk or a hot chocolate
- Hot water bottle and a soft teddy
- Recognize you might not find 'normal' family life threatening, but I might see things you can't
- Accept that if I feel threatened, it's not just messing about or horse play to me, I feel in real danger.
- If you send me off to do something and I forget, don't make it a big thing, just patiently ask me again



What I look like in *Fight*...

- Hot and bothered
- Argumentative, angry and aggressive
- Controlling, demanding and inflexible
- Lie or blaming
- Unable to concentrate on one thing
- Unable to follow the house rules
- Confrontational
- Disrespectful
- Disregarding of others, pushing away friends/family members
- Shouting, loud and noisy
- Immature



What I am aware of in *Fight*...

- I am in danger, I need to escape
- I'm really scared, if I hit first, I might survive this
- If I am disruptive, I might be able to escape
- I need to get out of here, it's too dangerous
- No-one likes me, I am all alone, I am invisible
- I am not worth bothering about, I feel bad
- I have no real friends/family, they are all pretending to like me
- I don't belong here
- You don't listen so I'll just say what you want, just to make you go away
- I am not as good as my sister/brother/cousin/friend, you don't really want me
- No one really cares whether I am here or not, I am unimportant
- I can't trust anyone



Fight

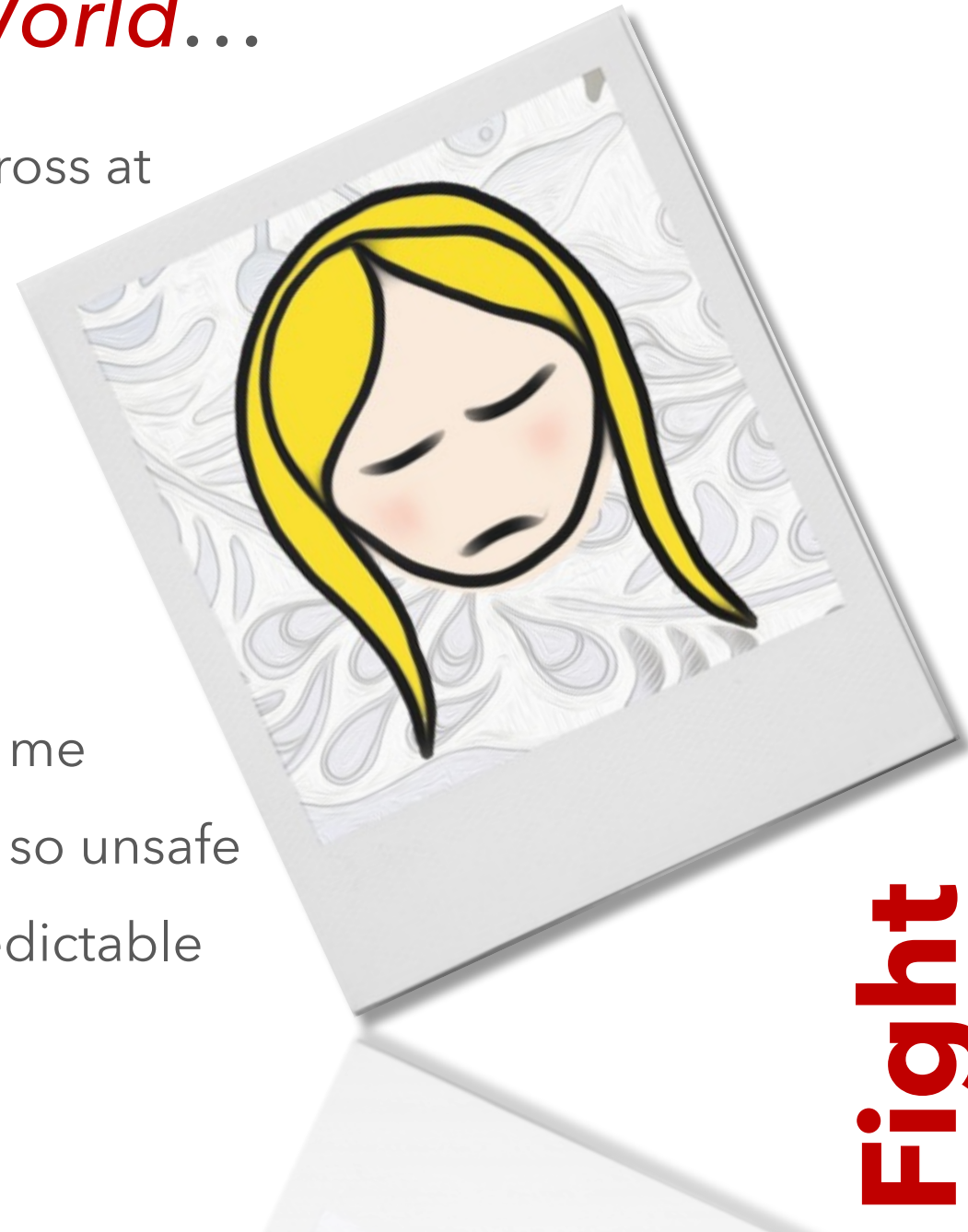
How my body feels in *Fight*...

- Tense, I am ready for action
- Over alert, my heart is beating so loud I can hear it
- Nauseous
- Faint or dizzy
- Terrified
- I can't cope
- I am so alone, you don't understand
- I need to laugh hysterically
- I need to cry, I am so upset
- I am worthless
- I am ugly inside and out, no-one wants me here, you hate me



What's happening in my *Inner World*...

- I can't be cross at the people I really want to be cross at
- I wish I had people who loved me
- I wish I could go somewhere safe
- I am so unlovable, I want to die
- I wish I could talk to you
- I wish I was wanted, why wasn't I good enough?
- I'm going to push you away before you get rid of me
- I wish you would notice how scary this all is, I feel so unsafe
- I need to be in control and make things more predictable



*You can help me feel **safe** again...*

- Tell me you love me even though my behavior pushes you away
- Don't punish me for being cross; reward me with your kindness and love for getting calm again
- Keep me safe from hurting myself
- Match my energy
- Deep breathing
- Chewy foods
- Support me socially
- Hanging, swinging and climbing
- Warm bath with lots of bubbles
- Warm milk or a hot chocolate
- Hot water bottle
- A super soft teddy and/or blanket
- Give me something to do that makes me feel important
- Connect with me and show me empathy before exploring the consequences of my behavior
- Let me have somewhere safe to go to so I can calm down with or without you
- Make things predictable. Tell me about changes before they happen, especially if strangers are coming into the house or I have to go somewhere new
- Accept I might not know why I behaved in that way & I might not remember what happened
- Listen and acknowledge how I feel, even if you see it differently, it will help me feel listened to



What I look like in *Submit*...

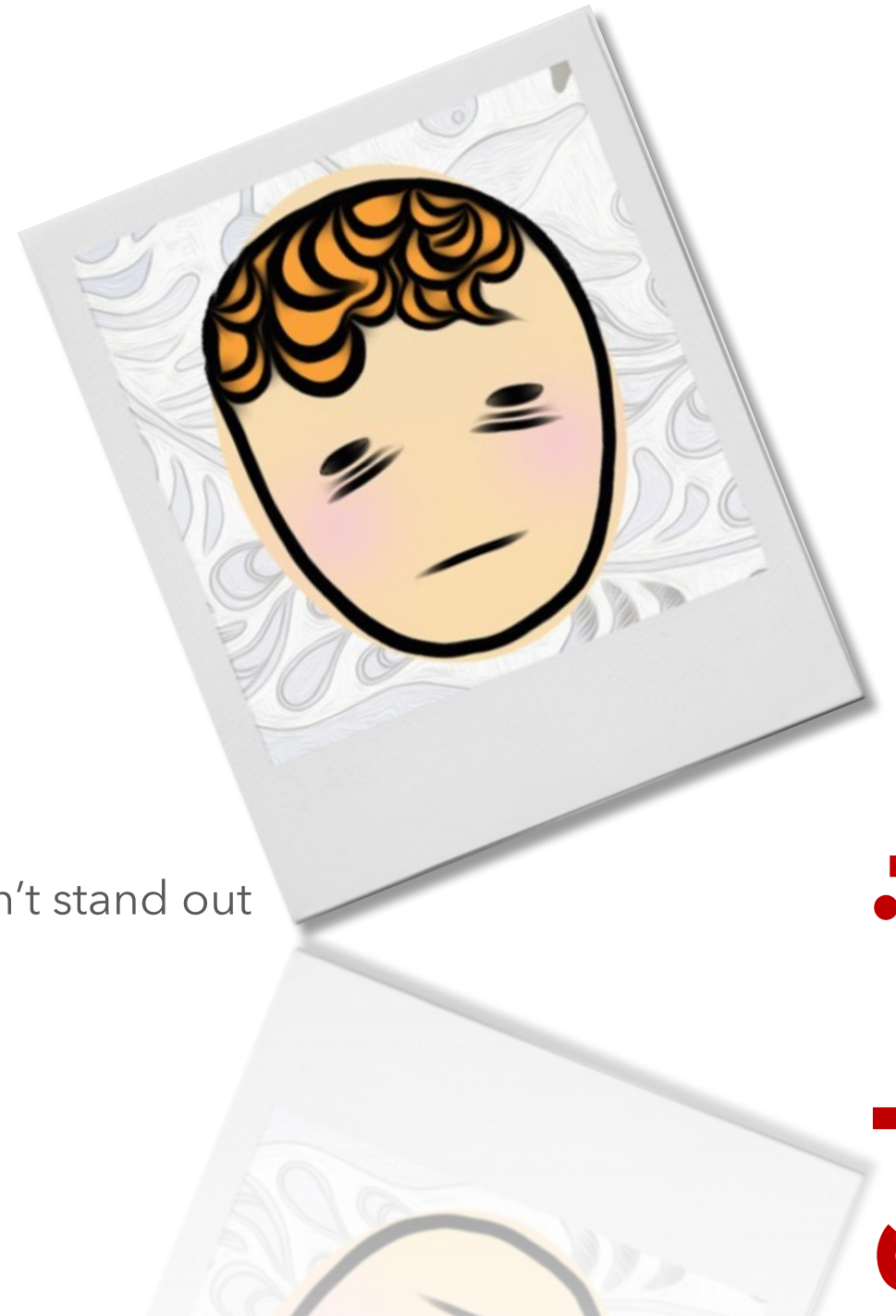
- Unhappy, low mood
- Alone or withdrawn
- Fidgety but not disruptively so - anxious
- Never questioning or asking questions, never drawing unnecessary attention to myself
- Yes or no answers - doing just enough to avoid being noticed, unable to think
- Quiet and passive, compliant, resigned to my fate



Submit

What I am aware of in *Submit*...

- I am so tired
- I must put on a brave face
- You don't really care about me, I am so lonely
- If I do what you want, you will leave me alone
- Tummy aches
- If I just sit here, you won't notice me
- If I sit over there, you won't notice me
- I can't think straight
- I need to be like my sister/brother/cousin/friend so I don't stand out
- I am sad
- I feel dead inside



Submit

How my body feels in **Submit**...

- Exhausted, worn out, I have no energy
- Depressed or anxious
- Worthless
- Guilty, it's all my fault
- Like crying or screaming
- I can't sleep
- Unable to relax or enjoy anything
- Unable to care
- Poorly, it's giving up



Submit

What's happening in my *Inner World*...

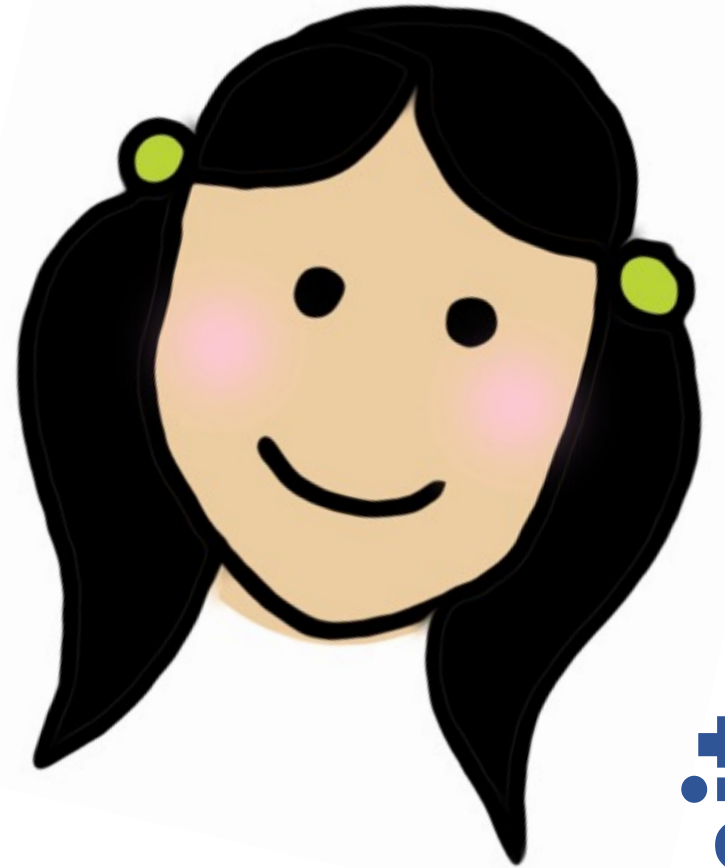
- Hurting myself helps me to feel something (*self-harm*)
- Drinking alcohol or taking drugs, helps me to feel happy
- If I join in on social media, I can talk to strangers who don't judge me and might care for me
- I'm not as good as everyone else, I am useless
- This isn't going to get any better so I might as well give up
- No-one would care or notice if I live or die
- It's all my fault, I am unlovable
- I can't win in this world - I'll never be safe, nothing will feel ok
- I want to die, I already feel dead inside



Submit

*You can help me feel **safe** again...*

- See me, listen to me
- Give me small repetitive things to do
- Weighted blanket
- Building with Lego or Play-doh
- Tell me I am safe
- Deep breathing
- Swinging
- Let me spend quiet time just with you
- Understand that social media might symbolizes a comforting connection
- Hot chocolate and a crunchy biscuit
- Wrap me up in a soft blanket and let me watch TV
- Understand that playing computer games, lets me be by myself somewhere safe
- Recognize I am hurting inside and might need professional help
- Know that I am easily bullied, look out for this rather than expect me to tell you.
- Appreciate I will say whatever I think you want me to say
- Be aware that I am an easy target and can be coerced easily to keep the peace
- Appreciate I cannot cope being the center of attention or the focus person
- Watch for me removing myself, standing on the outside of what is going on
- Warm bath and a warm towel
- Warm pyjamas



Submit

Print me and give me to a friend or relative who might need it. Why not also stick me on the fridge & in the car for when you need the information quickly!



Noticing Freeze

- Bored, not interested
- Confused, forgetful
- Distracted, not listening
- Clumsy
- Talking about something else
- Not moving to where you've asked
- Scanning the room
- Wide eyed, pupils might dilate
- Daydreaming, staring into space

Grounding Freeze

- Stay with me, don't leave me
- Tell me I'm ok & that I am safe
- Watching TV
- Deep breathing
- Spinning on a swing
- Climbing & hanging
- Rolling or cycling down a hill
- Digging in mud or sand
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Do my chores with me
- Gently wonder where I have gone & invite me back to you
- If I have forgotten what I was supposed to be doing, remind me again gently
- Hot chocolate & toast
- A warm bath & a warm towel
- A soft teddy for bedtime



Noticing Flight

- Hyperactive, manic, silly
- Aggressive, threatening: stiffening up, clenching fists
- Running away, escaping, disappearing, hiding under the table/bed/sofa
- Clumsy
- Disruptive, loud & noisy
- Can't cope with free play
- Can't follow house rules
- Not doing what you've asked
- Lonely
- Keeping super busy
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Grounding Flight

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Noticing Submit

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- Alone or withdrawn
- Fidgety but not disruptive, anxious
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- Never drawing unnecessary attention
- Yes or no answers - doing just enough to avoid being noticed, unable to think
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