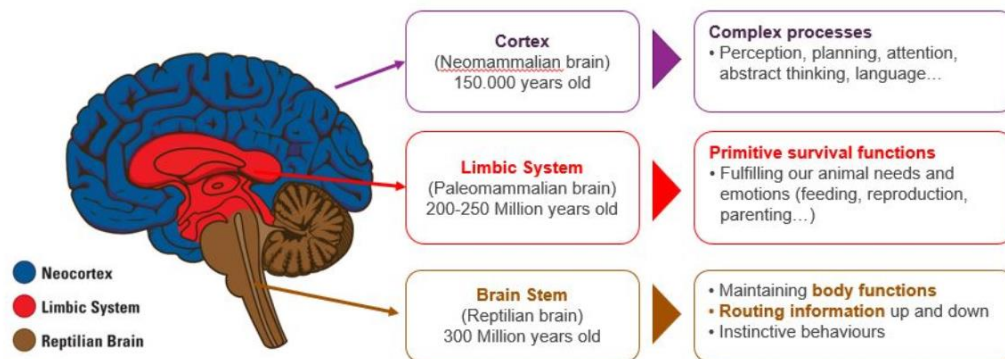


SEND/Thrive thought for the week: Why don't children know why they made a behavioural choice?

Why do children say, "I don't know!" so often, especially in relation to why they behaved a particular way?

- Those higher level thinking skills linked to understanding why they do things, and the capability to think before they act, don't emerge at the same age for all children. They can also fluctuate according to stress and hormone levels.
- For children who are neurodiverse, often their executive functioning (the analytical part of the brain) is slower to develop.
- Trauma, change, major life events and heightened emotions also affect the ability of children to access these skills, regardless of age or additional needs.
- After a meltdown or incident of great distress, the short-term memory is affected and children may genuinely not be able to remember what happened in the fifteen minutes before the emotions overwhelmed them. They may also be genuinely unable to access speech and processing parts of the brain, so they can't 'use their words'.

When they say, "I don't know," they may mean they can't cope with the question, they are worried they will get it wrong, they are ashamed and a hundred other things. It may also mean that they acted impulsively or from the limbic part of the brain (the part responsible for basic survival and sensory experience) and they can't explain why – there was no reasoning involved, they just acted.



We are not born with these analytical skills and the ability to think before reacting or to express emotional verbally improves with practice – which is why we love the Thrive approach.

Ideas for things to do at home to support Executive Function:

When you watch TV or read together: talk about situations where characters make poor choices or show heightened emotion. Link this to their own experiences and talk about motivation and the other choices that could have been made.

Play 'But' - Start a dialogue with a scenario. E.g. I was looking forward to going to Tag Rugby BUT.... (child thinks of a reason it went wrong)... so I..... BUT..... Take it in turns. This is a good one when you are in the car!

Practice pulling faces in a mirror or to each other. Link an emotion to the expression – try to introduce new words for simple things like happy, excited, sad, angry. Can they identify your emotions? Can they be your mirror?

Useful additional reading:

<https://www.boysalive.com/boys-alive-blog/why-adhd-kids-say-i-dont-know-so-often>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/what-is-executive-function-and-how-does-it-relate-to-child-development/>

<https://theeducationhub.org.nz/games-and-activities-for-promoting-executive-function-in-lower-primary-school/>

As always, if you need support or would like to know more about Thrive, SEND or mental health, please do email Mrs Darke on nancy.darke@bawdsey.suffolk.sch.uk