

# Friends Of Kids With Cancer

## Parent Group Meeting

*Kathy Gavin MA, ED*

*Laura Hanks, MSW, LCSW*

*Jim Russell PhD*





# Rejection Sensitive **Dysphoria** **RSD** Session Agenda



Emotional  
Dysregulation



Emotional  
Hyperactivity



Rejection sensitive  
dysphoria (RSD)



Treatment for RSD

# Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria RSD



## 01

**Understanding RSD**  
Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria represents a core emotional challenge faced by individuals, characterized by intense emotional responses to perceived rejection or criticism.

## 02

**Emotional Challenges**  
This presentation explores the unique emotional difficulties experienced by cancer survivors following treatment, addressing the psychological impact of their journey.

## 03

**Cognitive Effects**  
Includes memory difficulties, changes in processing speed, and executive functioning issues that commonly arise following chemotherapy treatment..



# Three systems

1. **Emotional dysregulation** is a broader term that encompasses difficulty managing emotions across many situations. For example mood disorders. This is an **umbrella term**.
2. **Emotional hyperreactivity**, by contrast, specifically describes that immediate, intense spike in emotional response: the zero-to-sixty quality that catches you off guard.
3. **RSD** focuses on one particular trigger: perceived rejection or criticism



# Emotional Dysregulation



**Emotional Dysregulation** is a broader umbrella term.



Emotional dysregulation refers to a general difficulty modulating any emotional state, whether that's anger, sadness, anxiety, or even excitement.



A term describing trouble with the whole process of managing emotions: recognizing what you feel, tolerating uncomfortable feelings, and bringing yourself back to baseline.



It's not specific to ADHD.



# Emotional Hyperreactivity

Emotional Hyperreactivity, specifically describes that immediate, intense spike in emotional response: the zero-to-sixty quality that catches you off guard.



It focuses specifically on the initial response. It's about intensity and speed at the moment of emotional activation, rooted in how the ADHD brain processes stimuli differently.



It is about the spark, not the sustained fire. Your nervous system responds bigger and faster than the situation calls for.

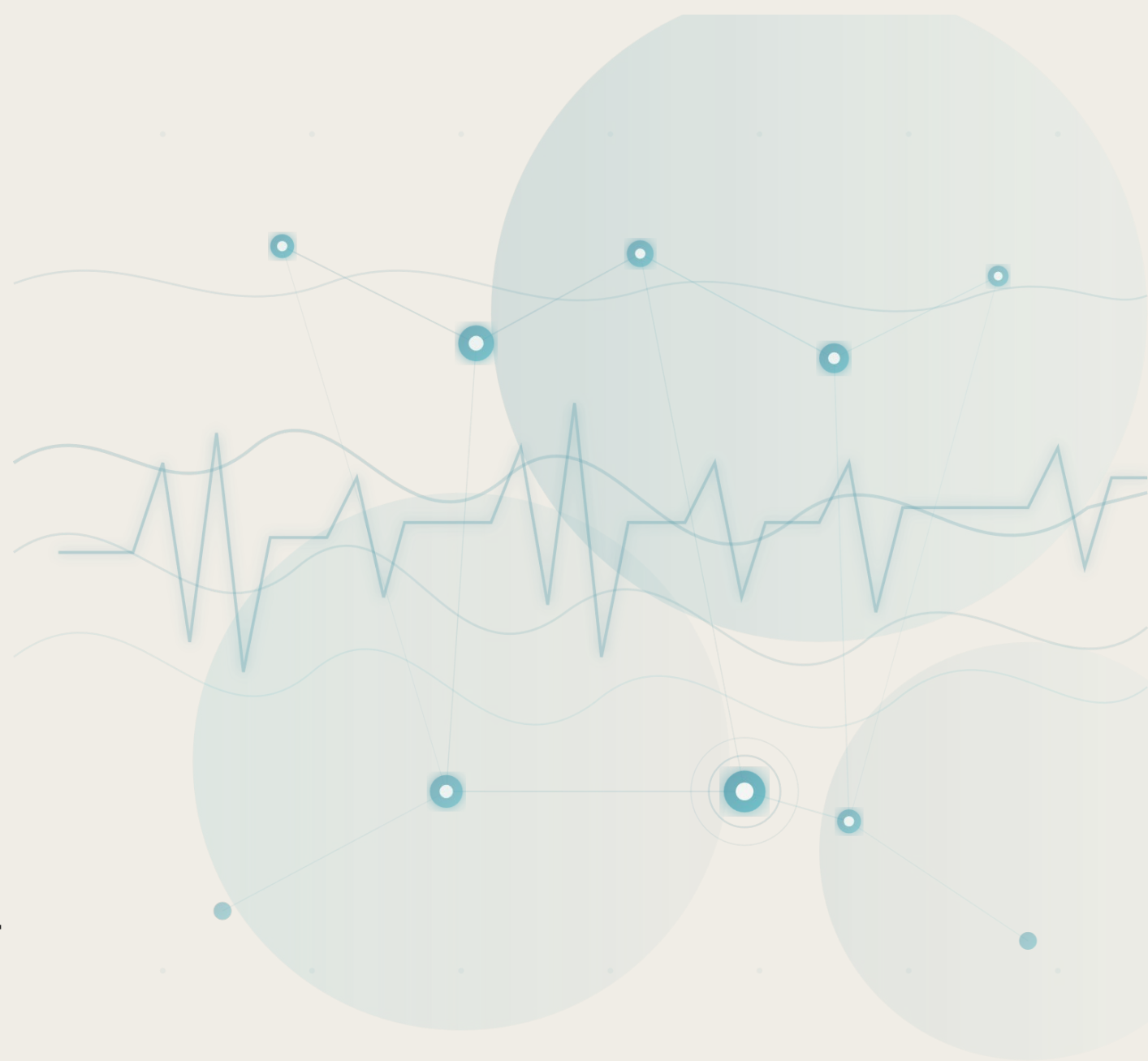


Emotional hyperreactivity may respond well to strategies targeting that initial surge.



# Rejection Sensitive **Dysphoria** **RSD**

Exploring emotional challenges faced by cancer survivors





## RSD in ADHD



- RSD **focuses** on one particular trigger: perceived **rejection or criticism**.
- RSD **narrows** the focus even further.
- It can create a **physical sensation** of devastation.
- RSD often requires specific work around rejection triggers and core beliefs about worth.



Someone with ADHD may experience all **three**, and knowing which one is driving a particular struggle helps you and your therapist choose the right tools.



**Emotional Dysregulation**



**Emotional Hyperactivity**

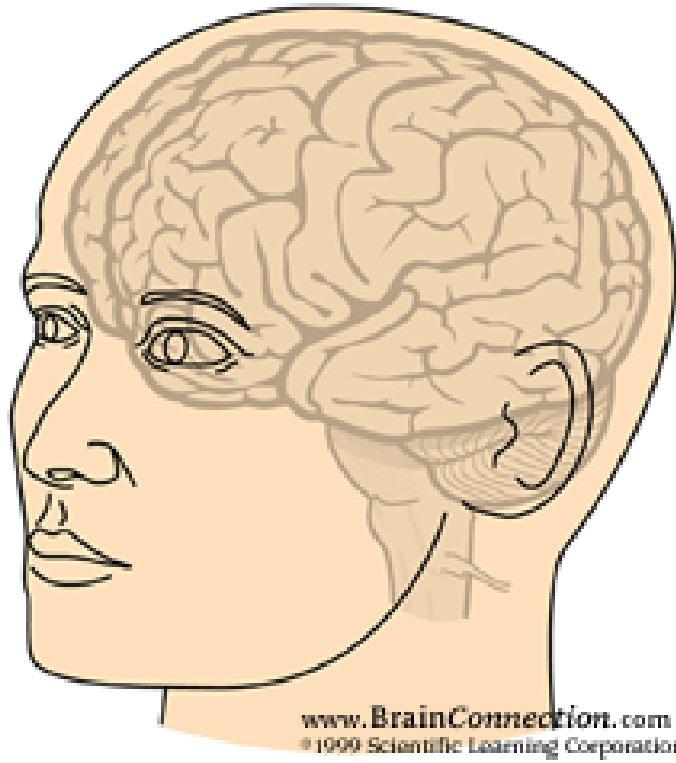


**Rejection sensitive dysphoria (RSD)**



Exploring cognitive challenges faced by cancer survivors

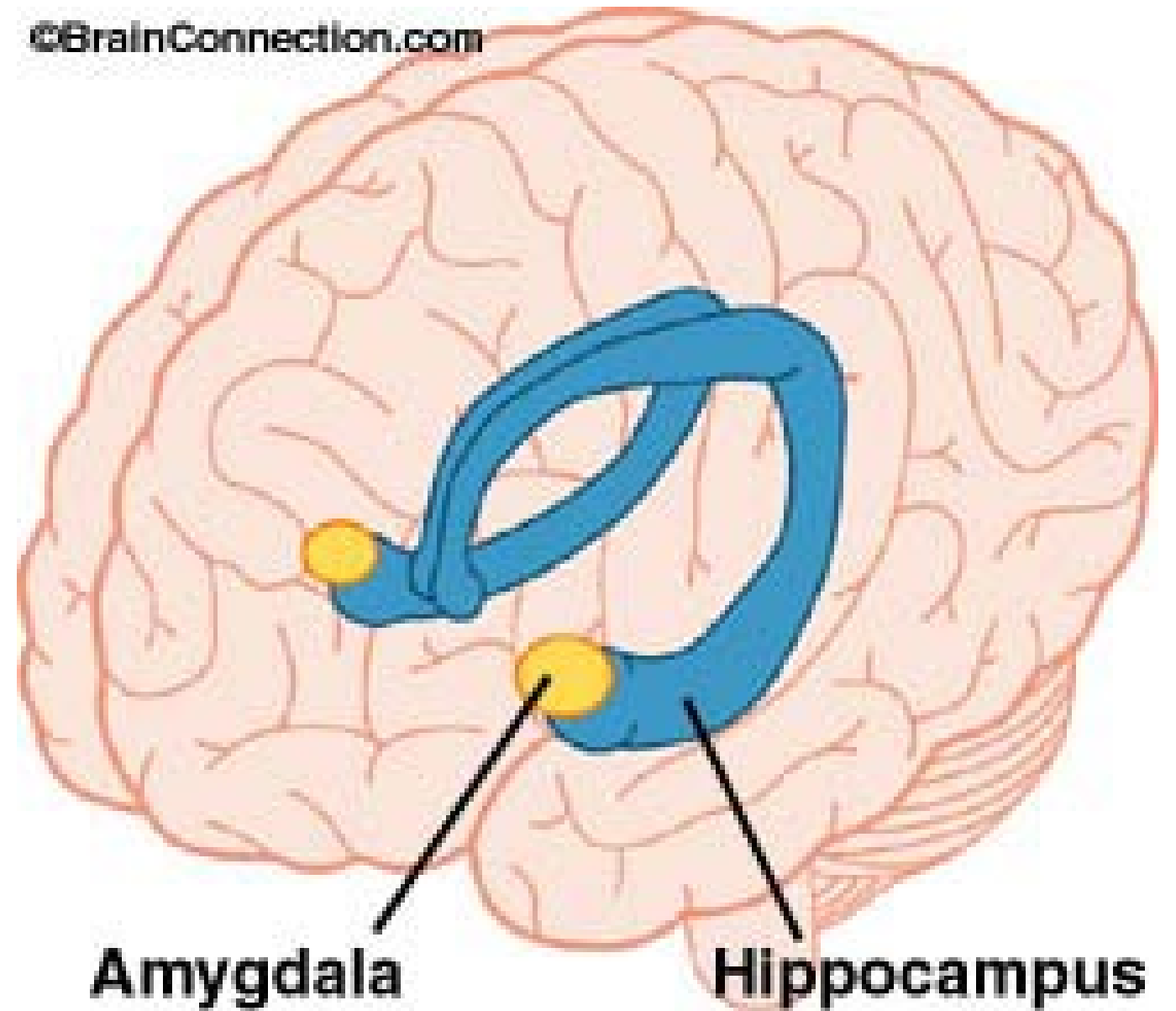
# Basic Neurobiology of the Brain





# Amygdala & Hippocampus

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## "Thinking about Thinking"

Higher Reasoning

Executive Function

## Prefrontal Cortex

9 Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex

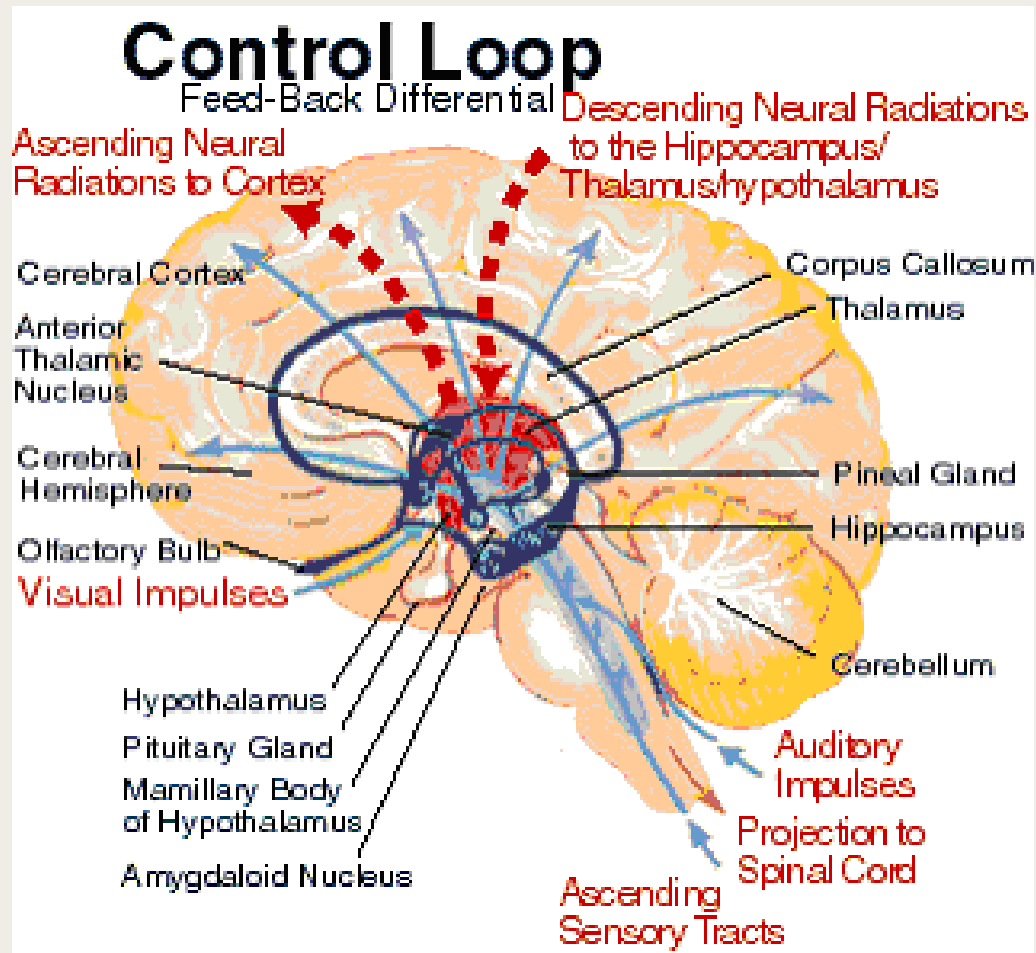
1. Empathy
2. Insight
3. Response Flexibility
4. Emotion Regulation
5. Body Regulation
6. Morality
7. Intuition
8. Attuned Communication
9. Fear Modulation



## Limbic Brain

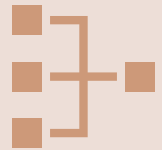
1. Fight, flight, freeze stress response
2. Thinks, "Am I safe? Do people want me?"
3. Emotions live here

# Reticular Activating System



A deficiency in the RAS:

- Inattention,
- Impulsivity,
- Hyperactivity.



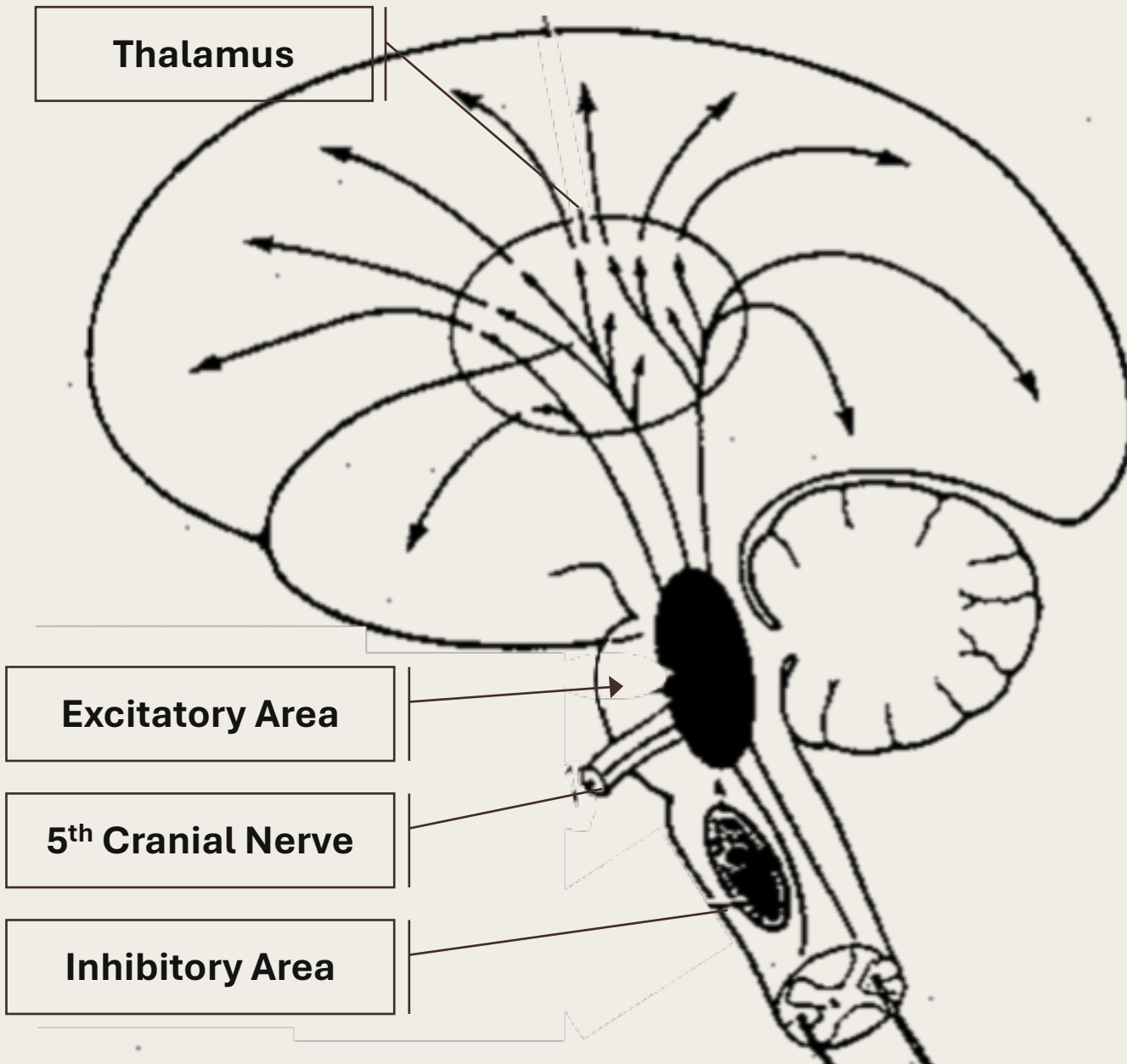
## Reticular Activating System (RAS)



This is the major relay system among the many pathways that enter and leave the brain.



# Attention & Achievement Center



Thalamus

Excitatory Area

5<sup>th</sup> Cranial Nerve

Inhibitory Area

Excitatory Area

5<sup>th</sup> Cranial Nerve

Inhibitory Area



# Acquired ADHD



Symptoms Resembling  
Acquired ADHD and  
Neurocognitive Changes

### **Acquired ADHD Symptoms**

Research identifies inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity as key symptoms resembling acquired ADHD in patients.

### **Neurocognitive Alterations**

Chemotherapy can lead to broader range of changes beyond ADHD-like symptoms.

# ADHD

Is a disorder of  
**....DOING**

Shifts focus from  
knowledge or motivation

To executive function  
processes that link

- ✓ goals to action,
- ✓ time-based self-management
- ✓ goal-directed behavior.

Dr. Russell Barkley



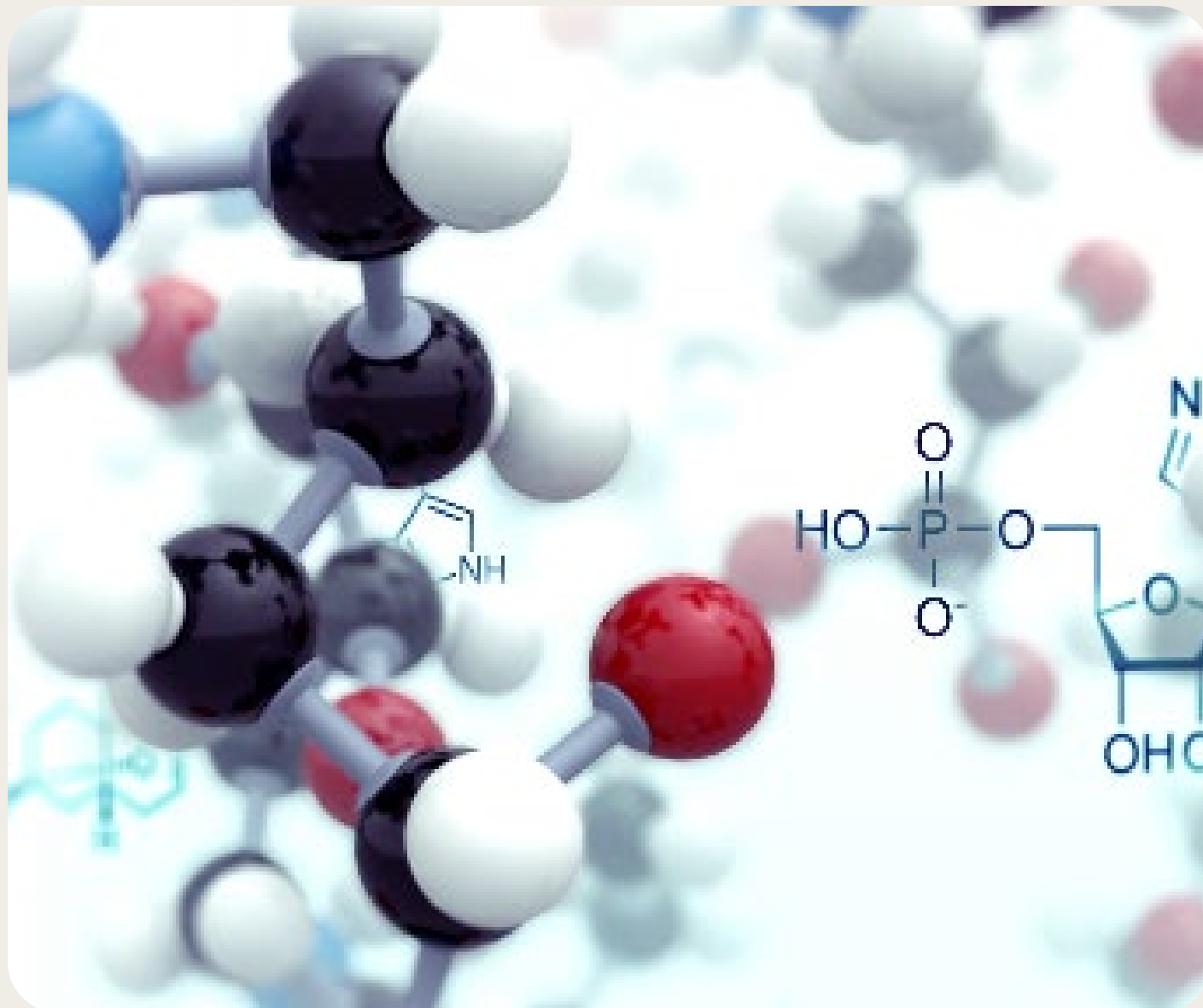
## ADHD reframed as a **DISORDER** of **DOING**



ADHD emphasized a gap between  
knowing what to do and reliably  
performing the actions at the time  
and place they're needed.

This framework shifts focus from  
knowledge or motivation to  
executive function processes that  
link goals to action, especially time-  
based self-management and goal-  
directed behavior.

ADHD emphasized a gap between  
knowing what to do and reliably  
performing the actions at the time  
and place they're needed.



## Ned Hallowell MD Emotional hyperreactivity in ADHD

Several medication categories can help with emotional regulation in ADHD.

1. Stimulant medications:  
Methylphenidate
2. Non-stimulant options:  
Atomoxetine
3. Alpha-agonist medications:  
Guanfacine (Intuniv) and  
Clonidine (Kapvay)

# Estimates of Medication Treatment and Behavior Therapy for ADHD



Medication Treatment



Behavior Therapy



Medication Only



Behavior Therapy Only



Both Medication & Behavioral Therapy



Neither Treatment

No agreed or unanimous definition

# Executive Functioning (EF)

# Executive Functions (EF)



- Novel reasoning-----(**Cold**)
- Problem solving-----(**Cold**)
- Decision making-----(**Cold**)



**DRAINS ENERGY**



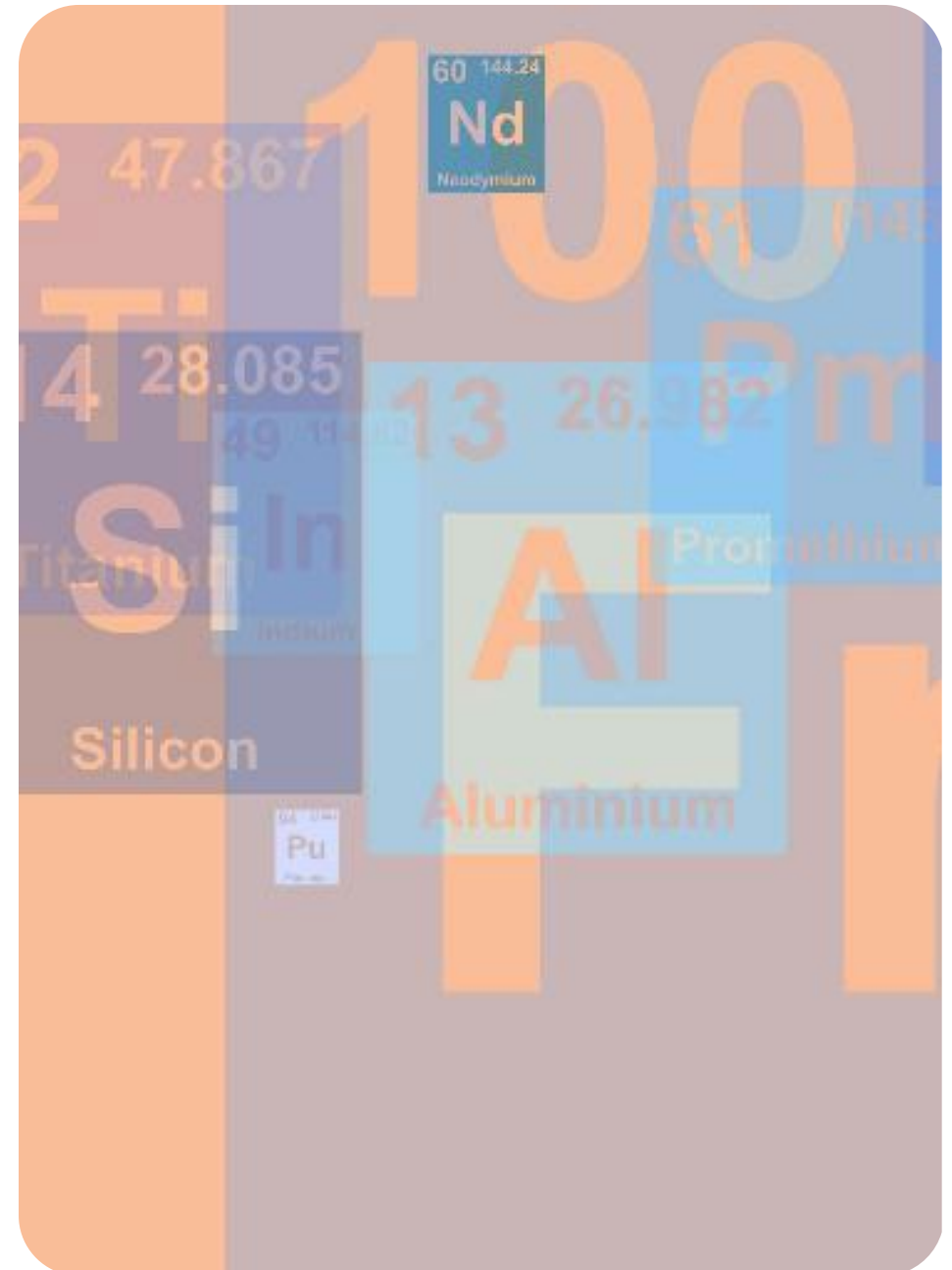
# Executive Functions (EF)

Multitasking----- (Cooler)

Time management-----(**Warmer**)

Organization----- (**Warmer**)

Self-regulation-----(**Hot**)





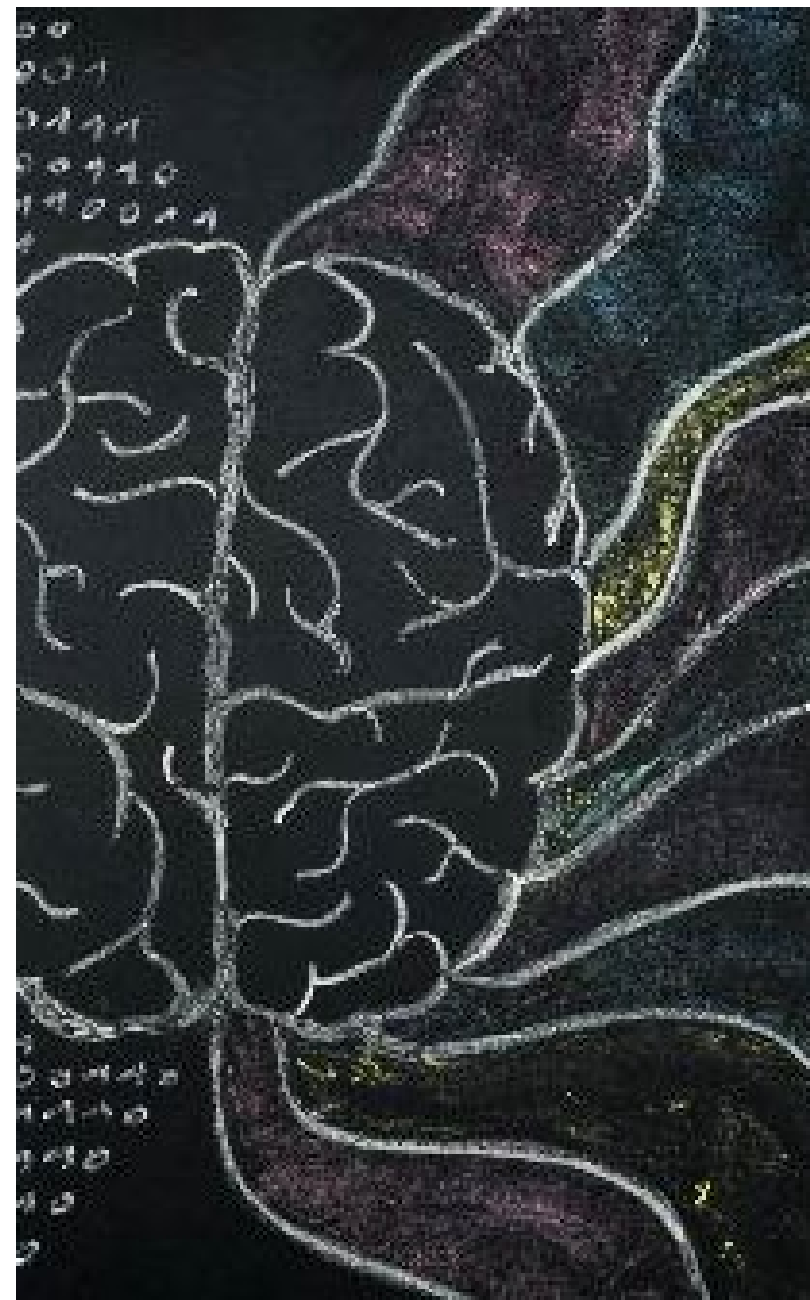
# Understanding Executive Functions and Their Role

## Problem-Solving

Problem-solving involves analyzing challenges and finding effective solutions.

## Self-Regulation

Self-regulation allows controlling emotions and behaviors to adapt to changing situations. Emotional dysregulation, Hyperreactivity, and Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) can develop after treatments.



# Chemotherapy-Induced Executive Dysfunction

## Impaired Task Organization

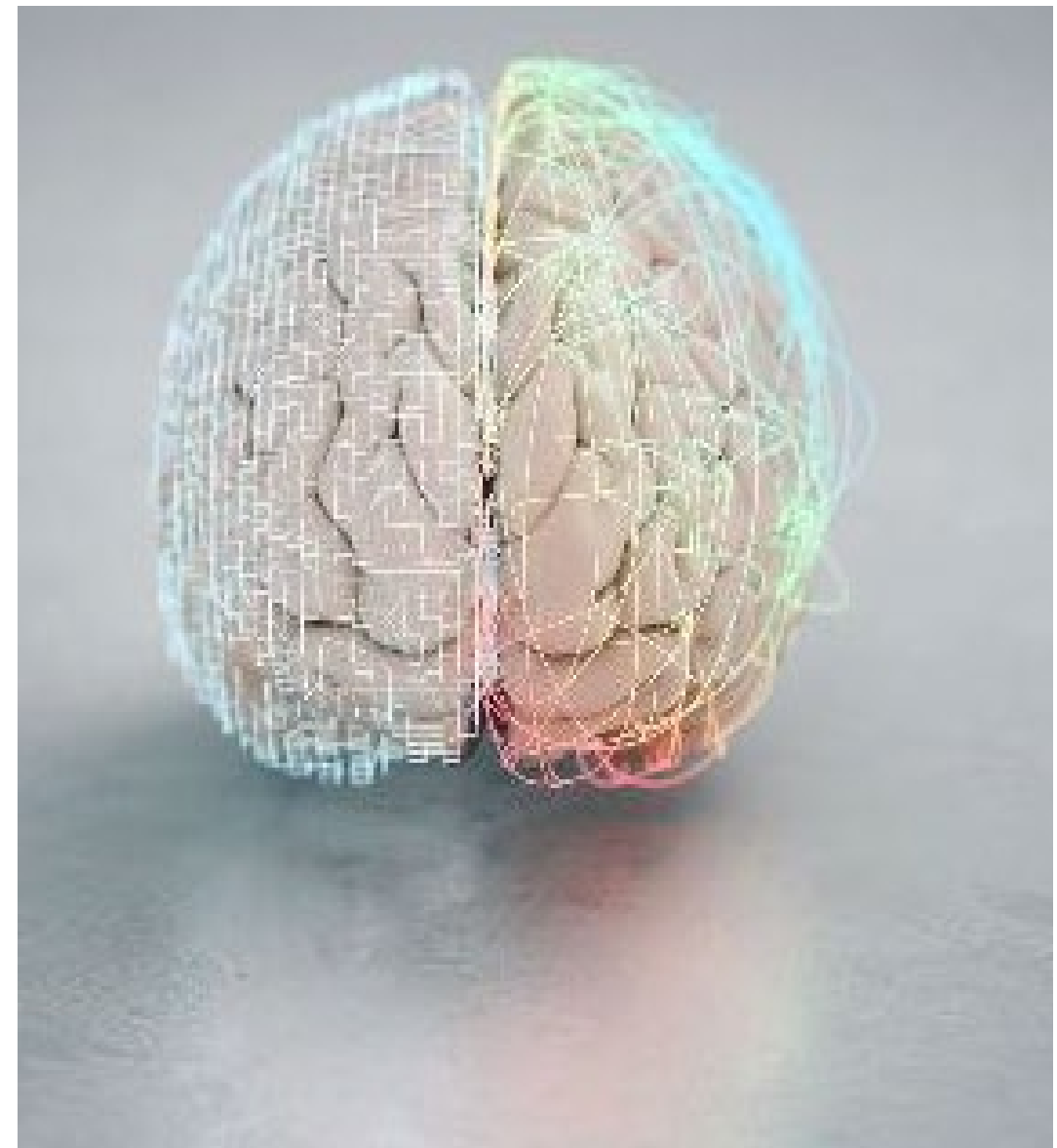
Chemotherapy can cause difficulties in planning and organizing daily tasks, impacting survivors' productivity.

## Impulse Control Challenges

Survivors may struggle with controlling impulses, leading to difficulties with decision making and behavioral regulation.

## Attention Deficits

Maintaining focus and attention becomes harder, resulting in challenges with concentration and increased mental fatigue.



# What can parents do...

**First**, the communication must be excellent between parent-child and it must be non-judgmental

**Second**, healthy lifestyle is critical for your child

**Third**, reduce chaos at home and add routine and structure -----in the extreme



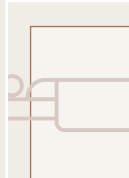
Hydration (half the body weight, 100 pounds = 50 ounces of water daily)



Diet (protein)

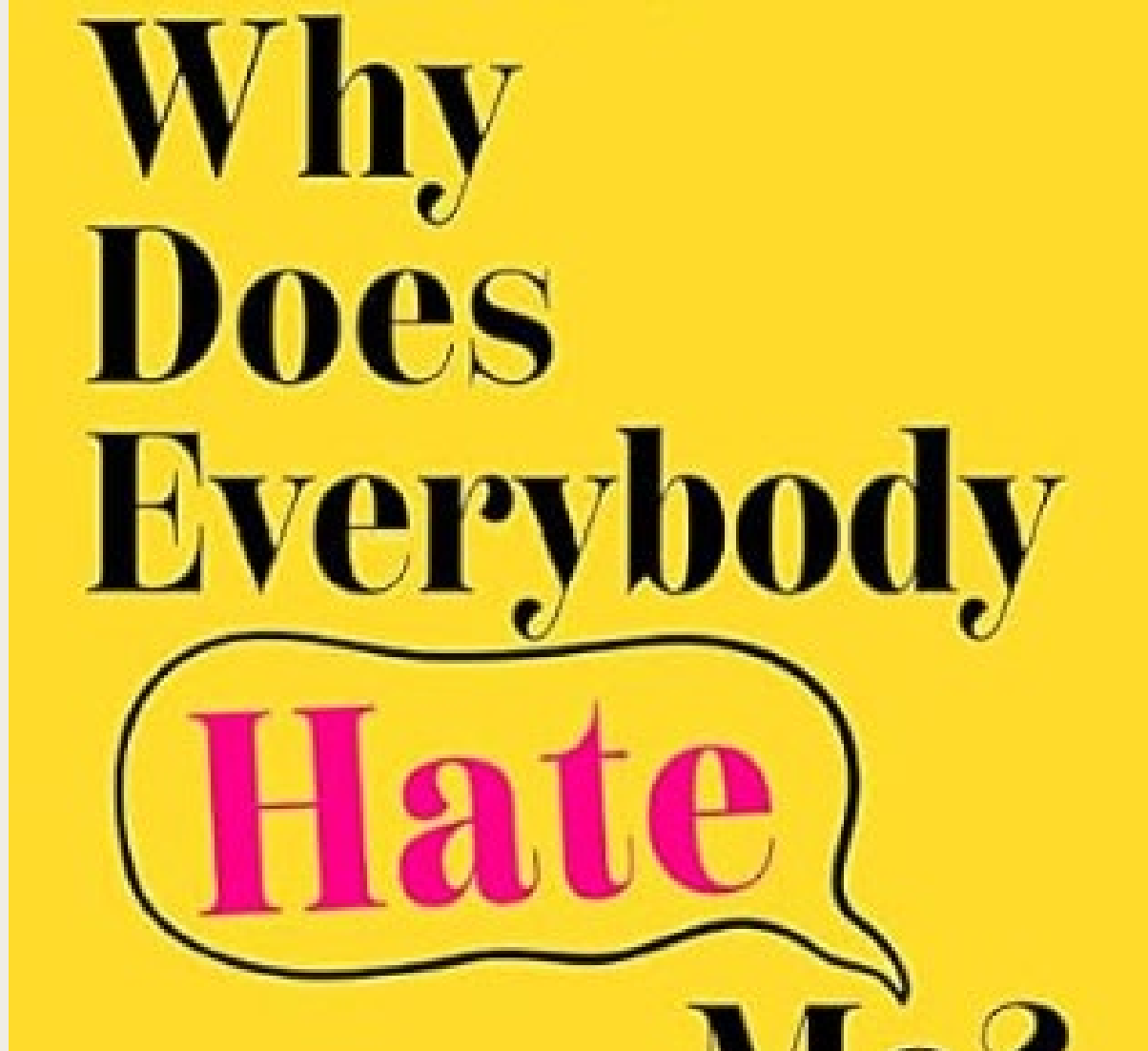


Exercise (aerobic)



Sleep (10 hours, good sleep hygiene)





Alex Partridge  
Entrepreneur ~Podcaster ~Author

Why Does Everybody Hate me?  
Living and Loving with Rejection  
Sensitive Dysphoria  
“RSD is the hardest part of ADHD.  
It’s the most **crippling, disabling, and  
debilitating**, and it’s often an  
unspoken component.”



# Alex Partridge

## Entrepreneur~Podcaster~Author

- “RSD is the hardest part of ADHD. It’s the most **crippling, disabling, and debilitating**, and it’s often an unspoken component.”
- “I still feel intense sadness when someone criticizes me, but I understand now that RSD is causing this.”
- I call the RSD “Dave the Dragon.”





# Alex Partridge

Entrepreneur~Podcaster~Author



Dave the Dragon

If you don't put a pause between the trigger of the RSD and the response to it, it can quickly escalate into bad outcomes."



Such as explosive rage or sadness which is the source for huge shame and anxiety.



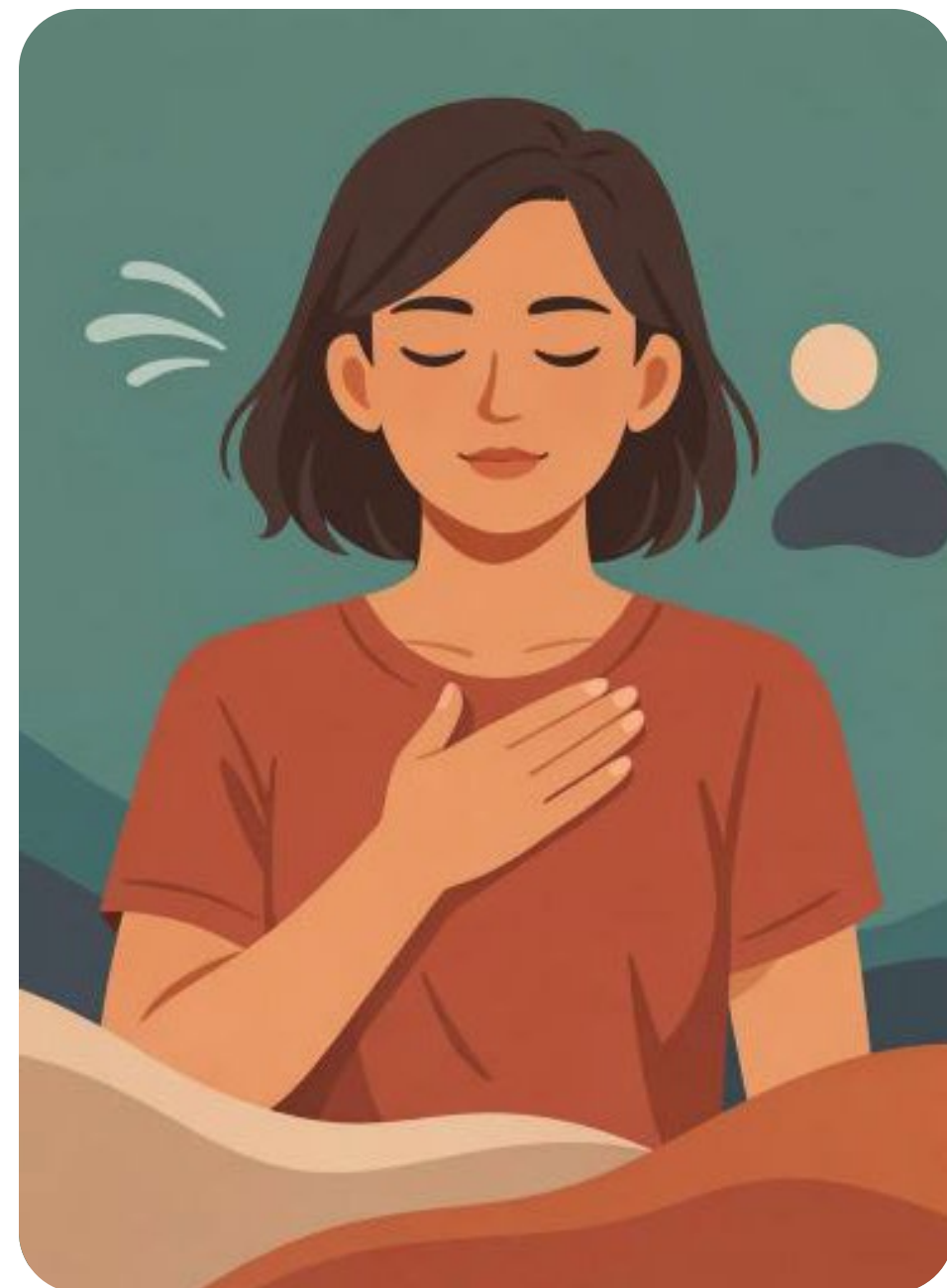
Use the **STOP** technique when you feel an emotional surge building.

**Stop** what you're doing completely

**Take** a slow, deep breath

**Observe** what's happening in your body and mind without judgment

**Proceed** mindfully with your next action



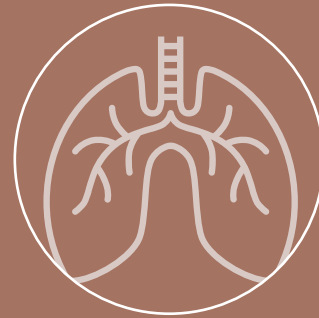


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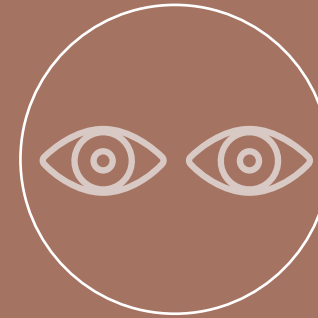
**STOP**

what you're doing completely



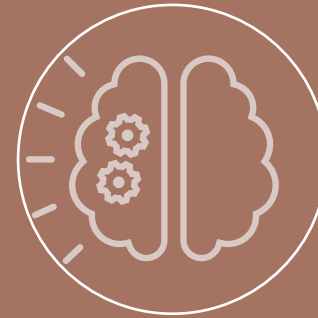
**TAKE**

a slow, deep breath



**OBSERVE**

what's happening in your body and mind without judgment



**PROCEED**

mindfully with your next action



Ned Hallowell MD

Emotional hyperreactivity in ADHD



This technique works because it interrupts the automatic reaction cycle.

Those few seconds of **pause** give your prefrontal cortex time to catch up with your emotional brain.

Ned Hallowell MD

Emotional hyperreactivity in ADHD



# Dr. Russell's recommendations for RSD

## PARENTS



Parents, understand that it's brain chemistry. Critiquing your child's behavior in the moment-is never helpful.

## STOP



- Teach them to
- Stop,
  - Breathe,
  - Count to 10,
  - Do anything other than react in the moment-
  - it will pass.

## SELF AWARE



Learning the triggers for RSD by being more self-aware is very helpful.

## SLEEP



- Practicing good
- Sleep,
  - Hydration,
  - Exercise
  - Diet

# SHED

## PHYSICIAN CONSULT



- Consultation with your physician for possible Medications
- ADHD,
  - RSD,
  - anxiety,
  - depression.

# Thank you!

- 
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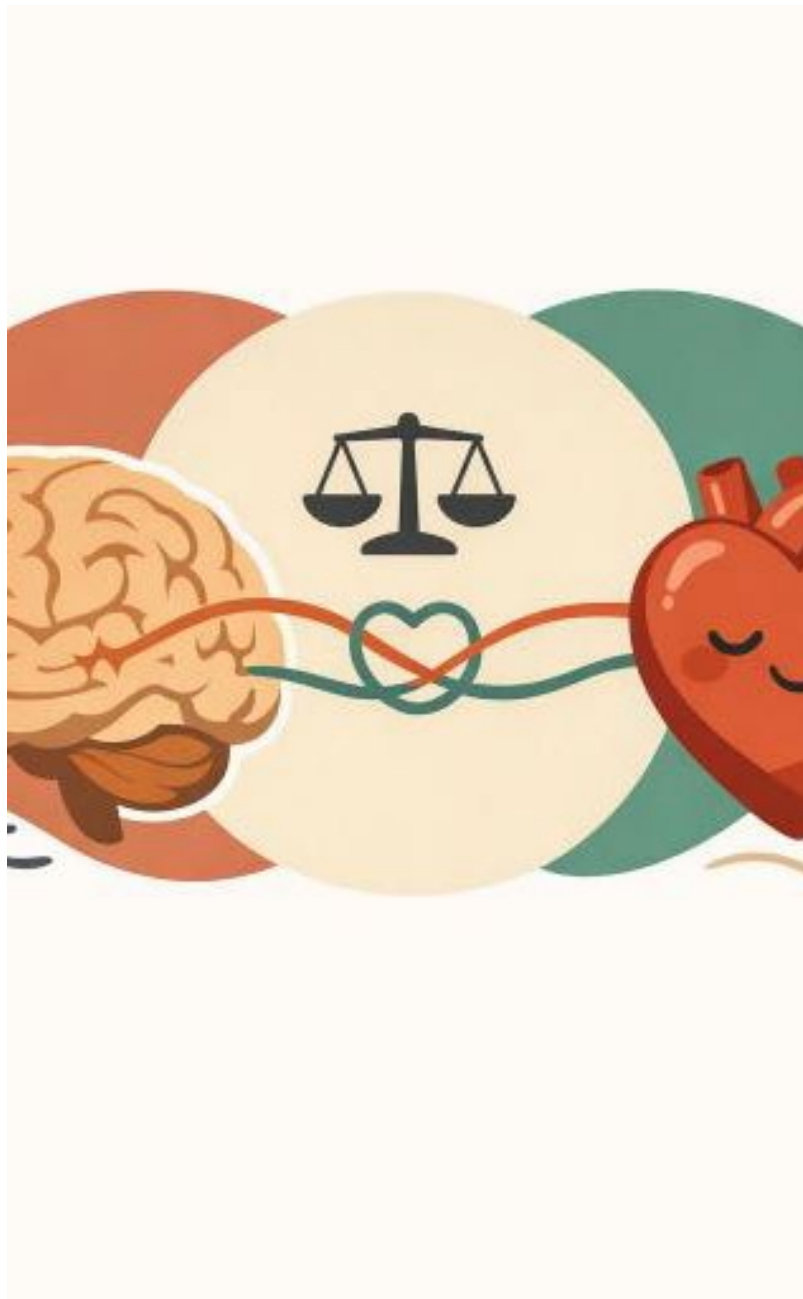


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# BONUS MATERIAL





**William Dodson M.D.**

**Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.**

## **Emotion Is Central to ADHD**

- You can't manage the impairments of attention deficit disorder (ADHD or ADD) until you understand how you process emotion.
- Yet emotional disruptions are the most impairing aspects of ADHD at any age



## William Dodson M.D.

### Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.

#### Sensitive to criticism

- Have you always been more sensitive than others to **rejection, teasing, criticism**, or your own perception that you have failed or fallen short?”
- If you answered with an emphatic “yes” to this question, you likely have RSD.



# William Dodson M.D.

## Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.

### Feeling Blue

- An instantaneous response to the trigger of rejection is experienced as a low mood episode.
- However, the low mood episode can disappear very quickly with distraction or thought stopping techniques.



**William Dodson M.D.**

**Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.**

## **Disapproval**

- The emotional response to **failure** is catastrophic for those with the condition. **Perceived criticism** and withdrawal of love and respect are just as devastating as the real thing. The term “**dysphoria**” means “difficult to bear,” and most people with ADHD report that they “can hardly stand it.”



**William Dodson M.D.**

**Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.**

## **Pain Expression**

- If emotional pain is internalized, a person with ADHD may experience periods of **sadness** and **loss of self-esteem** in the short term.
- If emotions are externalized, pain can be expressed as **rage** at the person or situation that wounded them.
- Luckily, the overly emotional response passes relatively quickly.



**William Dodson M.D.**

**Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.**

## **Always Tense**

- They are always tense and can never relax.
- Because I'm sensitive to other people disapproving of me, I am fearful in personal interactions.
- Hyperactivity can be internal-not outwardly shown.
- Dr. Russell-It is mentally draining.



## William Dodson M.D.

### Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.

#### How It Affects Personality

- Because of their innate sensitivity to emotional pain, people with ADHD might become people pleasers, always making sure that friends, acquaintances, and family approve of them.
- “Tell me what you want, and I’ll do my best to become it. Just don’t get mad at me.”
- After years of constant vigilance, the person with ADHD becomes a chameleon who loses track of what she wants for her own life.



## **William Dodson M.D.**

### **Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.**

#### **How it affects behavior**

- Some individuals with ADHD find that the pain of failure is so bad that they refuse to try anything unless they are assured of a quick, easy, and complete success.
- Taking a chance is too big an emotional risk. Their lives remain stunted and limited.



## William Dodson M.D.

### Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.

#### How it affects relationships

- RSD can wreak havoc on relationships.
- Since the wounds of RSD are almost unbearable, the only way to deal with the situation is to deny that the person — teacher, relative, coworker, or spouse — who is rejecting, critical, or teasing has any importance to the person with ADHD.
- Rather than suffer more wounds at the hands of an authority figure, he devalues the importance of the other person by reminding them often that they are in fact worthless, stupid, and that they are the real problem.



# Why Emotions Make you Feel. So. Much.

## Treating RSD



Most people with ADHD have learned to hide RSD, but it is vital for clinicians and patients to be aware of this emotional intensity that is so much a part of the ADHD experience.



It is equally important to recognize when a patient is attempting to hide this component of his or her emotional life out of fear of being wounded further if the truth were known.



# Why Emotions Make you ....Feel. So. Much.

## Medication

Until recently, all that a person could do was to wait for his dysphoria to dissipate over time.

In my clinical experience, I've found that patients can get some relief from the alpha agonists, either Clonidine ([Kapvay](#)) or [Guanfacine](#) (Intuniv).

*Talk with your doctor about these medications.*



## PARENTS



Parents, understand that it's brain chemistry. Critiquing your child's behavior in the moment- is never helpful.

## STOP BREATHE COUNT 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



- Teach them to
  - Stop,
  - Breathe,
  - Count to 10,
  - Do anything other than react in the moment-
  - it will pass.

## SELF AWARE



Learning the triggers for RSD by being more self-aware is very helpful.

## SLEEP HYDRATE EXERCISE DIET



- Practicing good sleep, hydration, exercise & diet (SHED).

## PHYSICIAN CONSULT



Consultation with your physician for possible medications for ADHD, RSD, anxiety, and depression.