

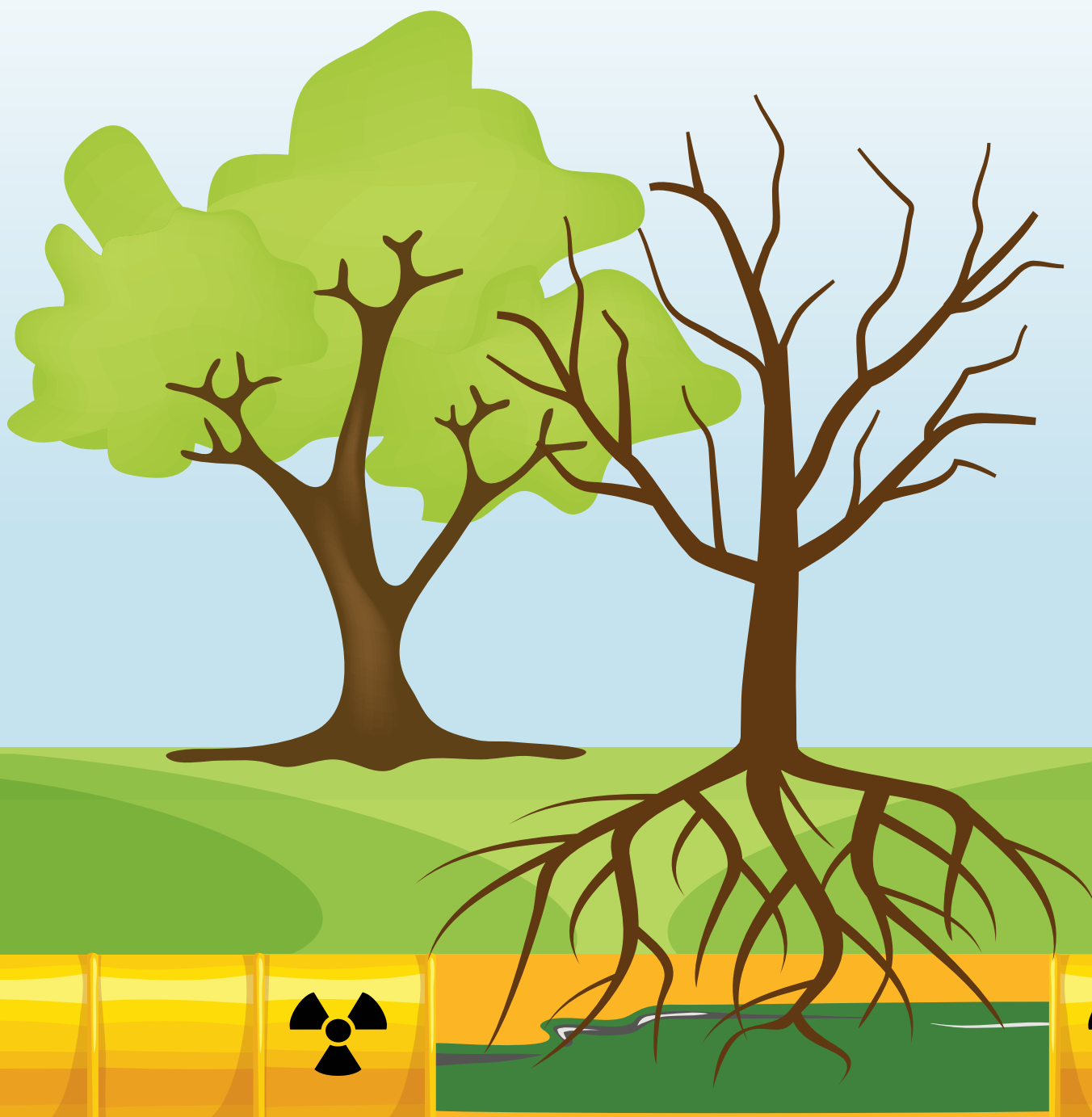
How does it feel?

How might it feel to be a biological parent that is not able to nurture their own child and feels completely disconnected from them?



Unhealthy Rewards

What unhealthy rewards do you think the biological parents receive from toxic relationships?



Two Perspectives



How do you feel about the sick tree?

Two Perspectives



With a new perspective –
how do you now feel about
the sick tree?



Visual reflections - new growth



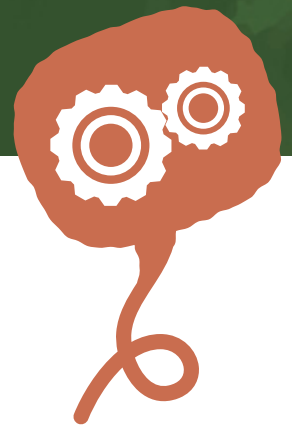
The old tree



Brain diagram



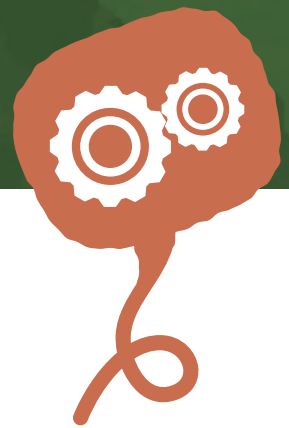
The Pre Frontal Cortex



A well-functioning PFC allows us to:

- make considered decisions
- change the way we look at things
- put the brakes on negative feelings, reflect and re-asses the situation
- do difficult things even when we don't want to
- control our impulses
- realise when a strategy isn't working & to change
- "feel and deal"

Brain Systems that Support Parenting (Dan Hughes)



The Parental Approach System

The ability to feel safe and stay open and engaged while interacting closely with our child.

The Parental Reward System

The ability to experience parenting as pleasurable, satisfying, and rewarding.

The Parental Child Reading System

The ability to understand, attune to, and empathize with our child.

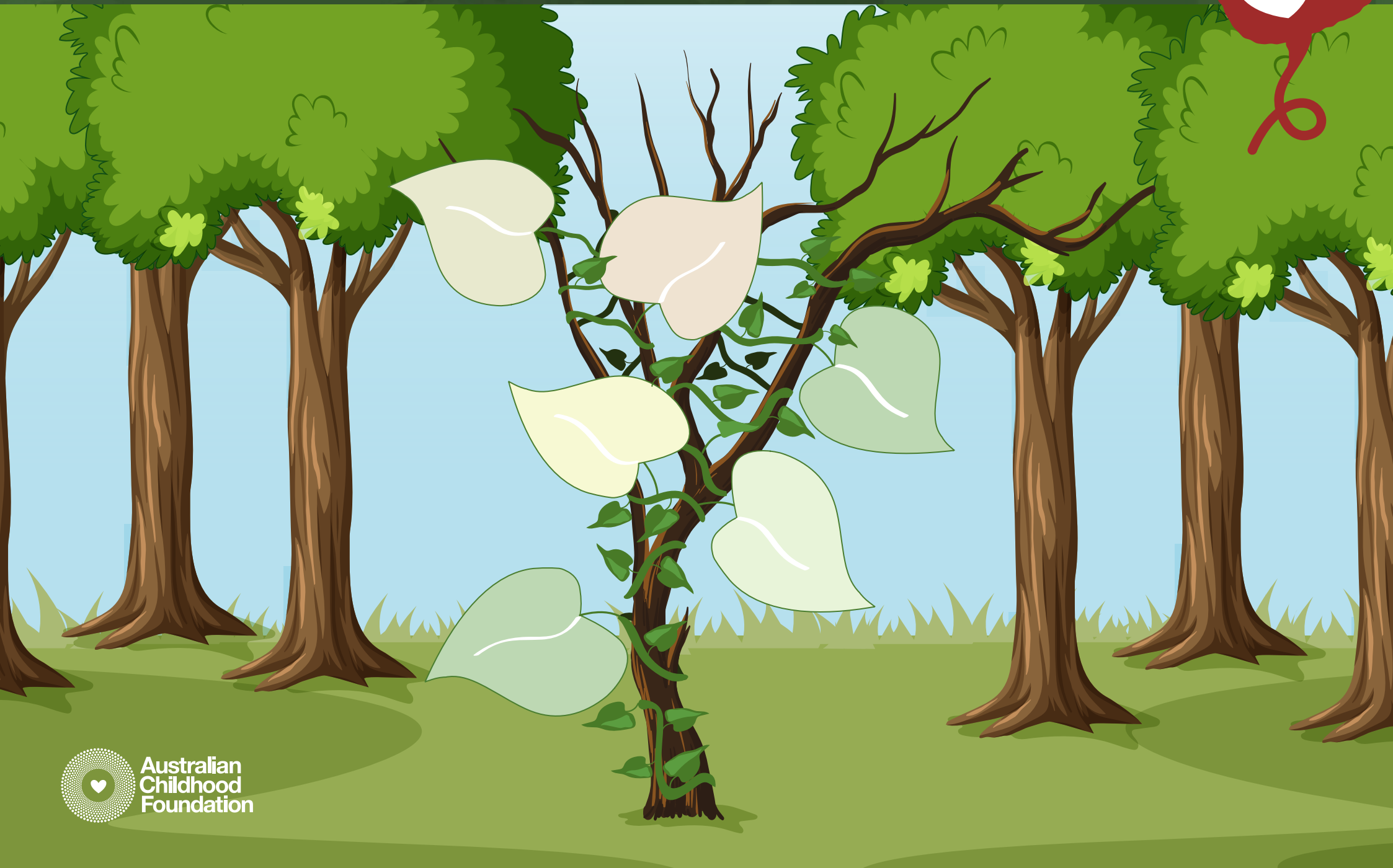
The Parental Meaning-Making System

The ability to make sense of our experiences as a parent and to understand how we came to be the parent we are today.

The Parental Executive System

The ability to regulate our internal states, monitor the quality of our connection with our child, and engage in timely repair of our relationship should it need it.

Barriers to Parenting



PFC and the reward system



Many things get in the way of a parent being able to parent the way they want to do. It is not that they don't care about their child. The brain research shows quite clearly that when other (addictive) needs register in the brain this need takes over the parents' ability to parent.

When we become a parent, it changes the configuration of our brain as specialised hormones show up to help us care for our child.

Our changing hormones talk to our hypothalamus which sends messages to other parts of our brain and our body to help us parent. The brain's self defence system is calmed which helps us want to get close to our child.

Our dopamine reward system can be driven by many things other than parenting hormones. It works by our dopamine neurons learning to associate things and actions with rewards and then functions as a reward expectancy system, going off when things around us suggest that a reward might be just around the corner.

The parental reward system is based on us coming to expect pleasurable interactions with our children.

If a parent approaches a child and the experience is less than expected, the reward-driven dopamine system can crash, and the parent could suddenly experience a defensive response rather than an approach-driven response. This is called a "dopamine crash"

Parents who have unrealistic expectations of their children are more likely to be disappointed by them (have more dopamine crashes).

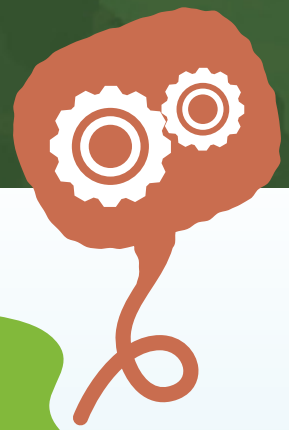
- These issues can mean a parent develops an overly-sensitive emotion reading system.
- With a limbic system primed to detect threat, these parents can tend to feel like their child is being threatening or disrespectful towards them
- When we are in defensive mode, we lose touch with our approach and reward system, making it really hard to be open and curious about our children.

When our PFC is 'off line':

- we become inflexible in our thinking and this disrupts our relationship to children
- our brain defaults to using limbic areas and we become more reactive and defensive



Kinship and Foster parenting



What they already provide

- Basic caregiving (feeding/protecting)
(requires sub-cortical brain functions)
- Self-understanding
- People-reading
- Emotion-regulation (of self and other)
- Reflection
- Adaptability
- Empathy
(all require higher-order cortical functioning)

