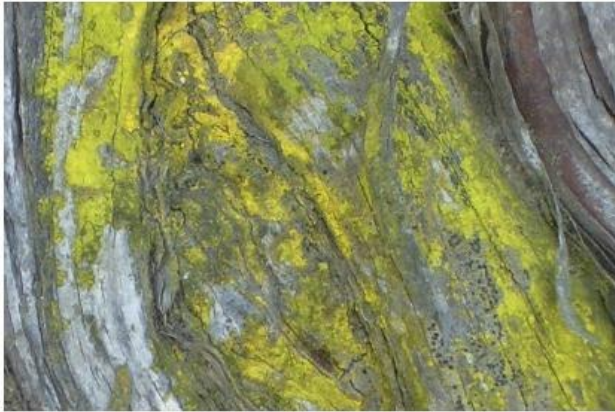


# Exploring Difficult Conversations

BCHPCA Vancouver

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Life Fundamentals

with Dr. Catherine Hajnal

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# Our path today...

- What makes a conversation “difficult”.
- What happens when we are “triggered”.
- Your Brain – focus on Limbic System and PFC
- Why that matters in the context of connection & conversation
- What we can do about it
  - Play with NVC
- Next steps
  - Does this relate to you and the work you are doing?

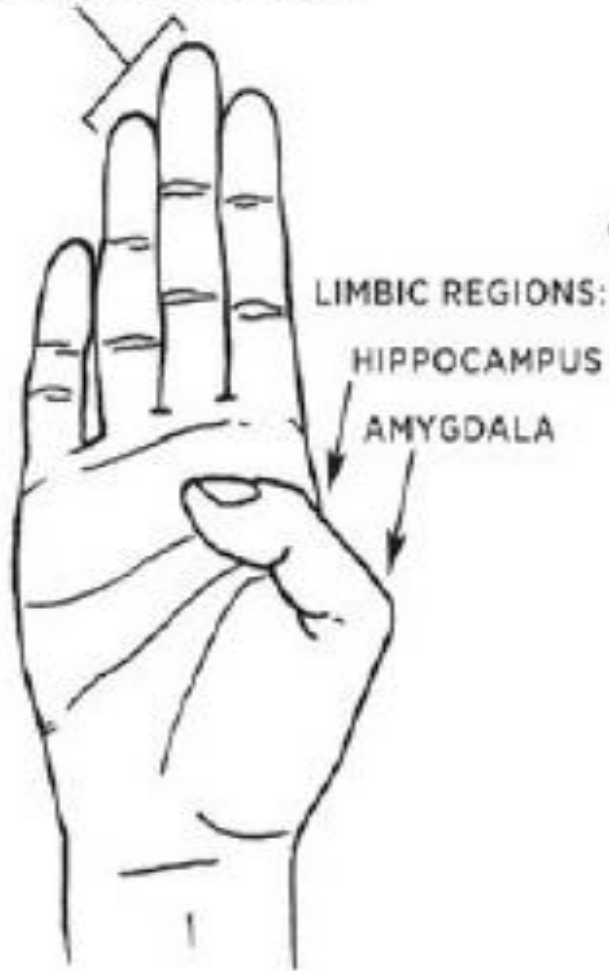
# What makes a conversation *difficult*?

or

## How do we know its *difficult*?

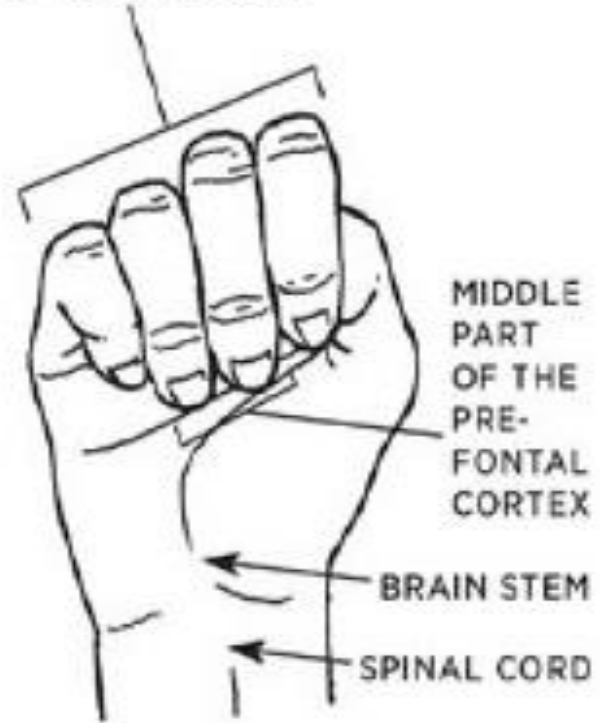
- Topic or Context?
- Possible outcomes?
- Who is involved?
- Environmental conditions?
- Sensations in the body?

MIDDLE PREFRONTAL CORTEX



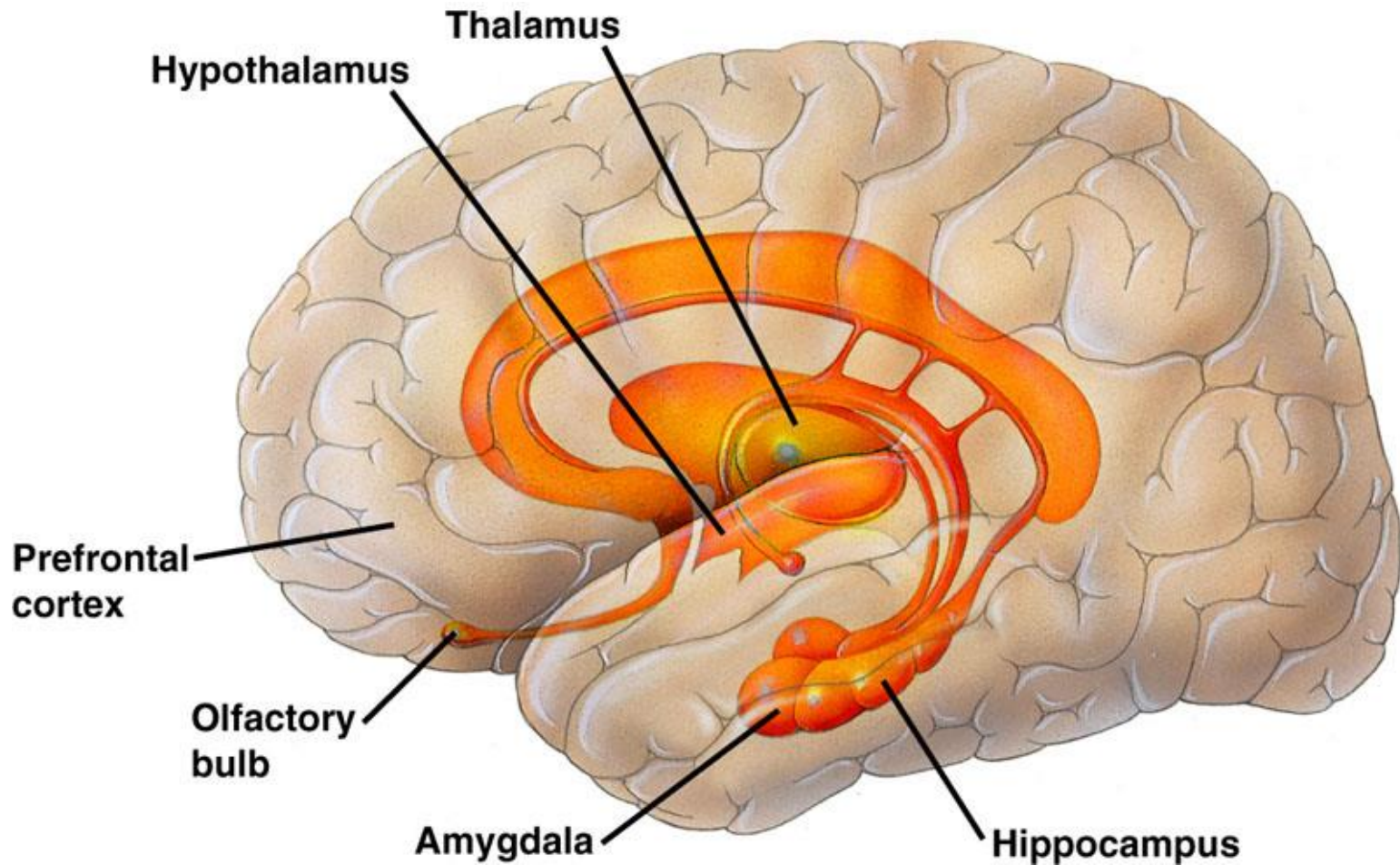
Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

CEREBRAL CORTEX

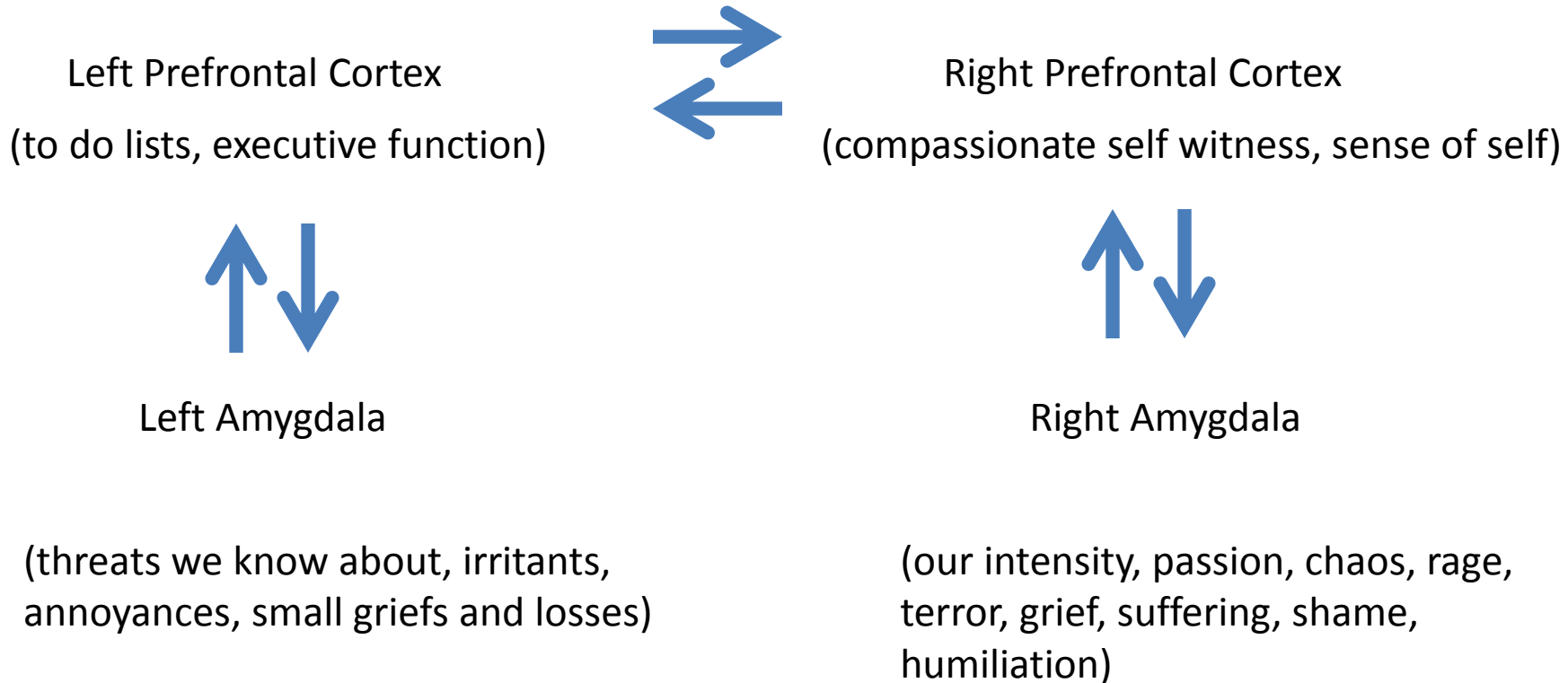


Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain.

# Limbic System



# PFC – Prefrontal Cortex



Our Hippocampi file and track our factual and autobiographical memories until they have migrated to the cortex.

# Triggered / Threats / Noise

- Constantly on the look out for threats
- Bad is stronger than good (threat  $\leftrightarrow$  reward)
- “Your ideas are crazy.”
  - as activating to your brain as a physical threat
- Activation of limbic system influences deactivation of PFC
- Little bit of threat creates lots of noise in the brain
  - insight does not happen when our brain is noisy –
  - impact on problem solving/creativity
- Regulation – a key to controlling “noise”

# Social Issues Are Primary

- Primary needs (food, shelter, water) yes AND
- For your brain, social needs are primary
- Any perceived loss of connection is a social pain that activates the same regions of the brain as physical pain.
- We come out of the womb looking for and dependent on connection.
- Status
- Certainty
- Autonomy
- Relatedness
- Fairness
- All use the primary reward and threat circuitry.
- e.g. A perceived change in status downward is considered a threat. (Our status change might influence our connecting.)
- Don't collaborate well with people who you think are foes.

***How might these play out in the context of hospice and palliative care?***



# What can we do with this?

- Regulate emotions:
  - Expression
    - Helpful but can be maladaptive depending on the context
  - Suppression
    - Limbic system stays as aroused or gets worse, memory gets worse
  - Cognitive Change
    - Less arousal, no change in memory ability
    - Requires very thing we're losing fast when aroused - PFC

# Cognitive Change Strategies

- Labeling
  - Define an emotional state in a word or two
- Reappraisal
  - Reframing/recontextualizing
  - Changing the entire interpretation of an event
- The more you understand your brain, the more you can reappraise.

# How NVC can help

## (Non-Violent Communication)

- Labeling
  - Get in your body
  - Have the words to use (feelings)
- Reappraisal
  - What’s behind the “story”? (needs)
  - Self-Empathy
- What applies to you, applies to the person you are looking at too
  - What are they experiencing?
  - Empathy for others

# Let's DO it!

- Handouts
  - Feelings
  - needs
- Partner
- Turn to your neighbour. Describe a difficult conversation you have been a participant in recently.
  - From the list of feelings, identify what feelings are alive for you now as you share this scenario.
  - See if you can identify with what feelings might have been alive for you then.
  - Have your neighbour make need guesses as to what might be behind those various feelings.
  - Remember there are no right or wrong guesses – just appreciation for whatever your partner offers.

# “Listening”

- *“Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing. Often, instead of offering empathy, we have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being.” - Marshall B. Rosenberg*
- Empathy “Are you feeling anxious because you are needing clarity around the next steps?”
- Advising “I think you should...” “Why don’t you....”
- One-upping “That’s nothing, listen to what happened to me!”
- Educating “If you looked at the situation this way....”
- Consoling “I know you are doing the best you can.”
- Story-telling “That reminds me of the project last year when we...”
- Sympathizing “Oh, you poor thing!”
- Explaining “The reason the project is taking so long is because...”
- Correcting “You haven’t spent 5 weeks on that project!”
- Interrogating “Why did you say you’d do it? What....;When...;Where....  
“How come you didn’t \_\_\_\_\_”
- Changing the Topic “Let’s go shopping.”

# How does this relate to You and the work you are doing?

- Procedures?
  - Surgery - a set of procedures that needs training.
  - Having a difficult conversation is also a procedure requiring training, practice, and perhaps supervision (support).
- Self-Empathy / Self-Care?
  - Acknowledging what you are feeling/experiencing even if the other person(s) in the conversation can't.
- Other?

# Gratitude to...

- Dan Siegel
- David Rock
- Sarah Peyton
- Rick Hanson
- Marshall Rosenberg
  
- ...for their body of work that has contributed to my understanding and evolution.
  
- For links to my favourite resources of theirs see:
  - <http://www.catherinehajnal.com/favorites/brain/>
  - <http://www.catherinehajnal.com/favorites/people-books/>

# To Connect with Catherine...

- Considering joining my updates contact list.
  - Latest blog posts on Life Fundamentals
  - Upcoming workshops and talks
  - [www.catherinehajnal.com](http://www.catherinehajnal.com)
- Consider joining my facebook page.
  - <http://www.facebook.com/drcatherinehajnal>



# Upcoming Events

[www.catherinehajnal.com/schedule](http://www.catherinehajnal.com/schedule)  
for details and to register

- Advanced Care Planning Series
  - Do you have every intention of completing your Advanced Care Plan (Representation Agreement), but seem to be struggling to make it happen? Consider this series to support you in getting it DONE this summer!
  - Begins Saturday June 22, 2013 (9:30 AM to 4 PM) with a workshop to give you a solid foundation for completing your plan.
  - Followed by 4 teleconference calls with additional materials to support you through the actual completion of your plan.
    - June 27, July 4, July 11, July 18 (7 – 8 PM PST)
    - These calls will be recorded so no worries if you can't make a particular session.
  - \$300 per person or \$500 if registered with a friend/family member.
  - \*FREE\* INTRO Session on June 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 PM if you are curious but not sure this is for you.

# Upcoming Events

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for details and to register

- Lost for Words
  - For friends and family of people who have been touched by life changing illness.
  - When someone we care for is impacted by a health challenge we want to help. What to say and how to help isn't always clear.
  - Come away from this workshop with very practical tools for connecting with your friends and loved ones that you can use right away.
  - Next offerings:
    - Monday July 8<sup>th</sup> 6:30 – 9:00 or
    - Tuesday August 6<sup>th</sup> 6:30 – 9:00
  - \$50.00 if registered in advance. \$75.00 at the door.

# Travelling through Loss into Life

- You've lost a significant person in your life. There is remains a sense of loss (there always will be) and at the same time you've started to notice thoughts about figuring out life going forward.
- What comes next? Who am I without this person? What will it be like to do things on my own?
- I invite you to come and do some travelling supported by me and a grief counsellor.
- Your fellow travelers have also experienced the loss of a loved one.
- Each day, as we explore our destination and enjoy the comforts of our hotel, we'll use the sites, sounds, and our other senses to reflect on our losses and connect with our curiosity to discover what comes next in living life.
- For more information on dates, locations, and what a typical agenda for the day might look like email [info@lifefundamentals.com](mailto:info@lifefundamentals.com) and mention Travel Through Loss.



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