

# Brain, Empathy, Creativity, NVC

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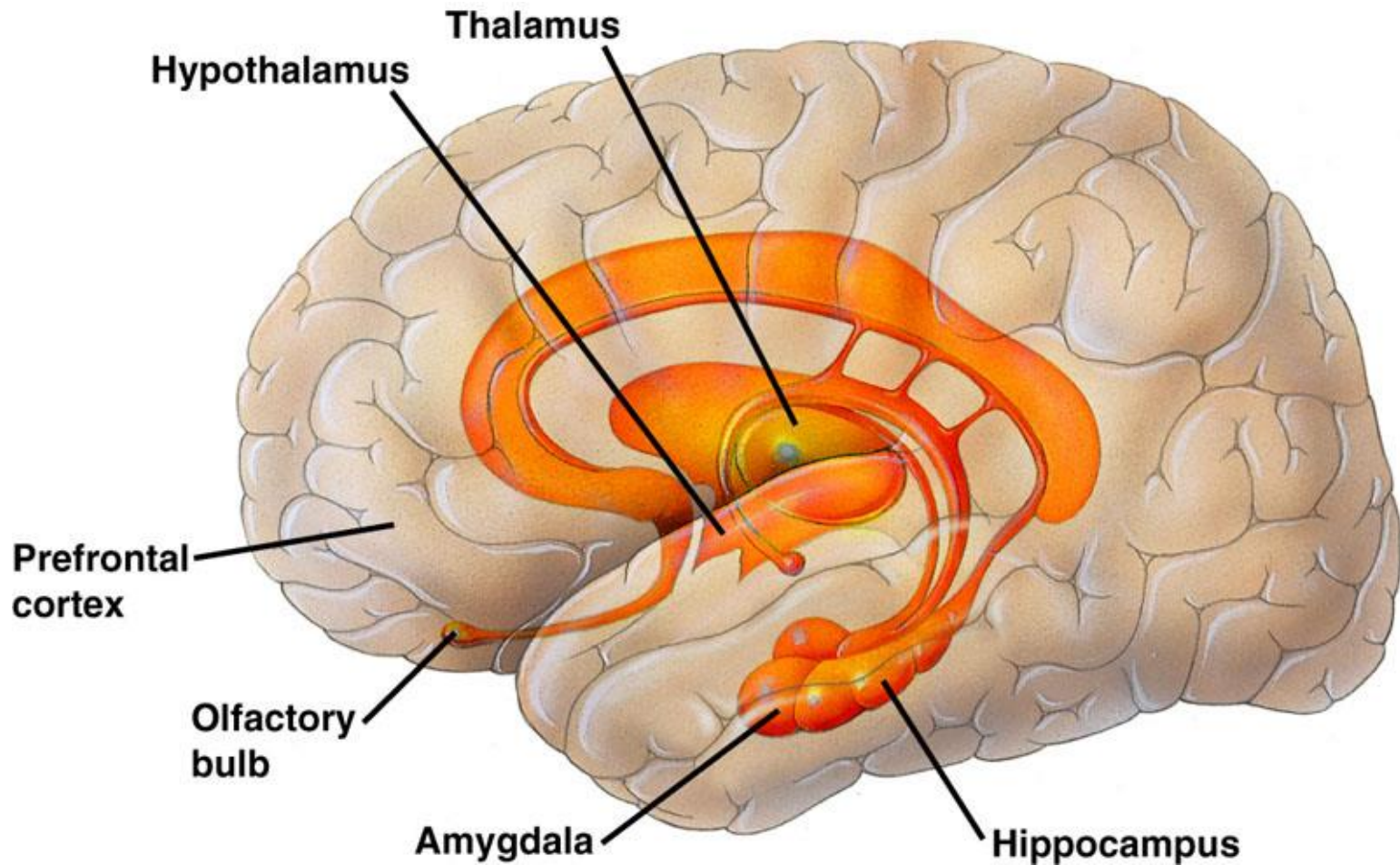
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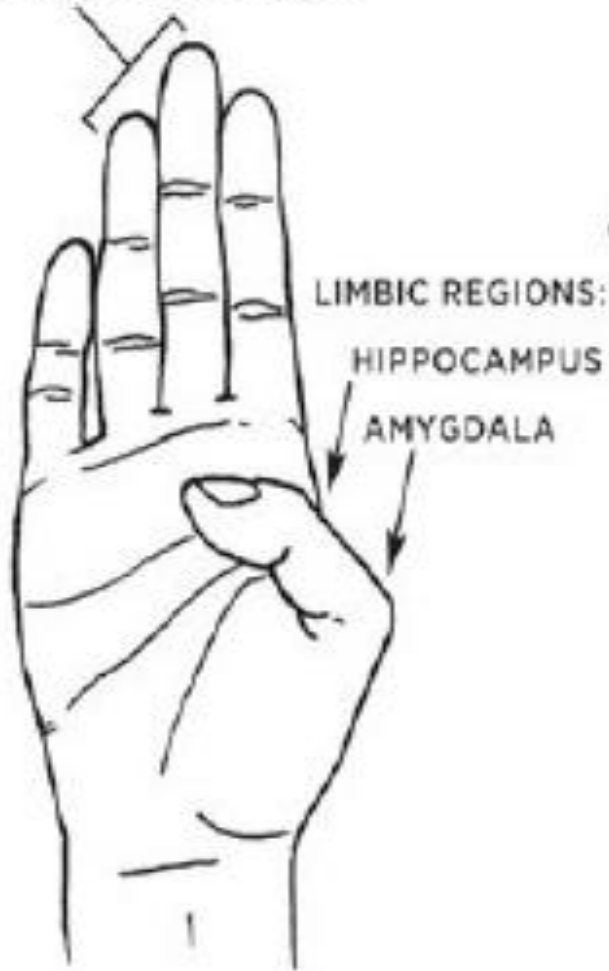
# Brain, Empathy, Creativity, NVC

- Your Brain – focus on Limbic System and PFC
- What happens when we are “triggered”
- 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?

# Limbic System

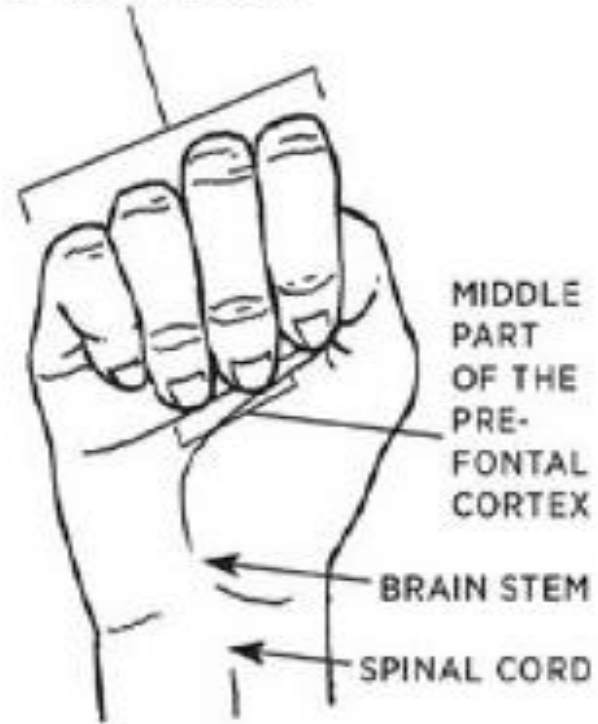


MIDDLE PREFRONTAL CORTEX



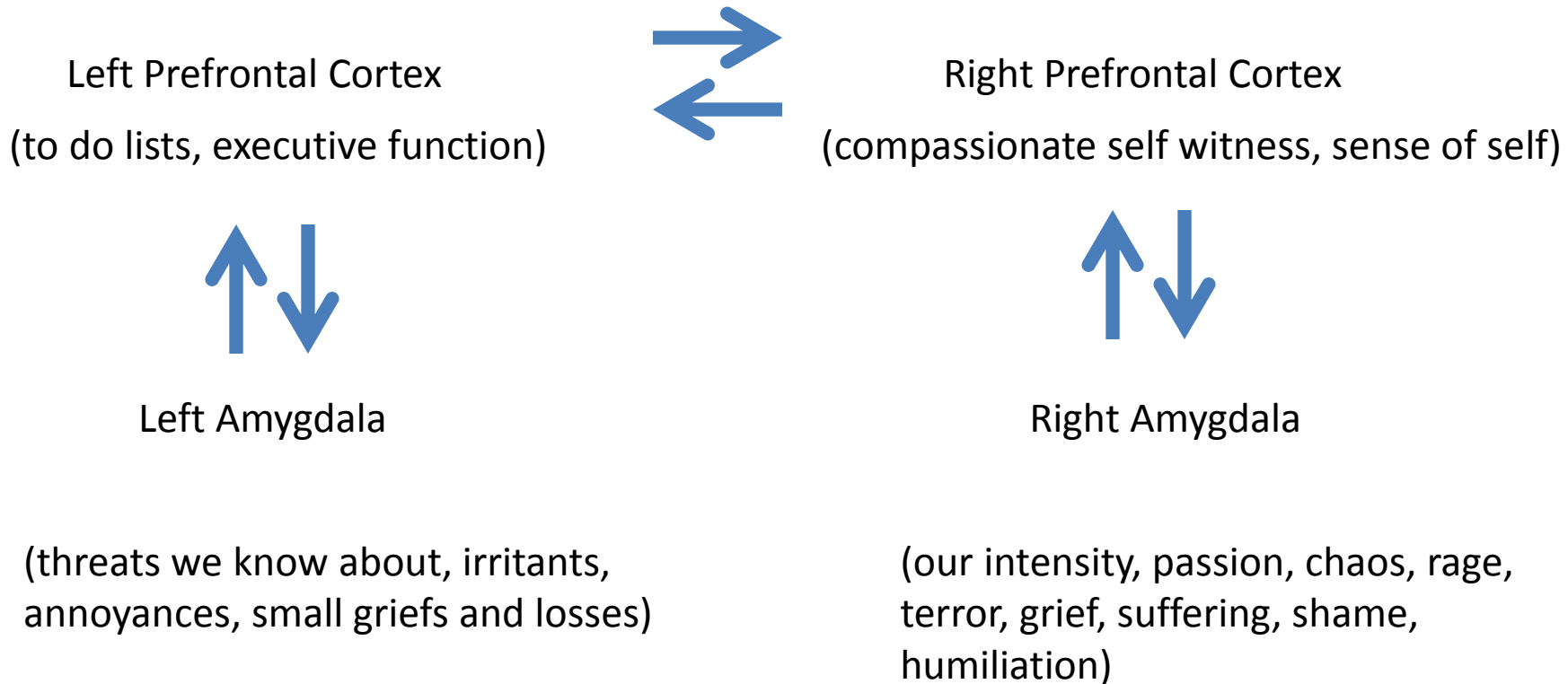
Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

CEREBRAL CORTEX



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

# 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 wired 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.

# 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
    - 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

# “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.”

# My thanks to...

- Dan Siegel
- David Rock
- Sarah Peyton
- 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/>