

The Compassionate-Mind Approach to Overcoming Anxiety: Using CFT to Treat Worry, Panic, and Fear

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April 14, 2012
Anxiety Disorders Association of America



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Our Talk Today

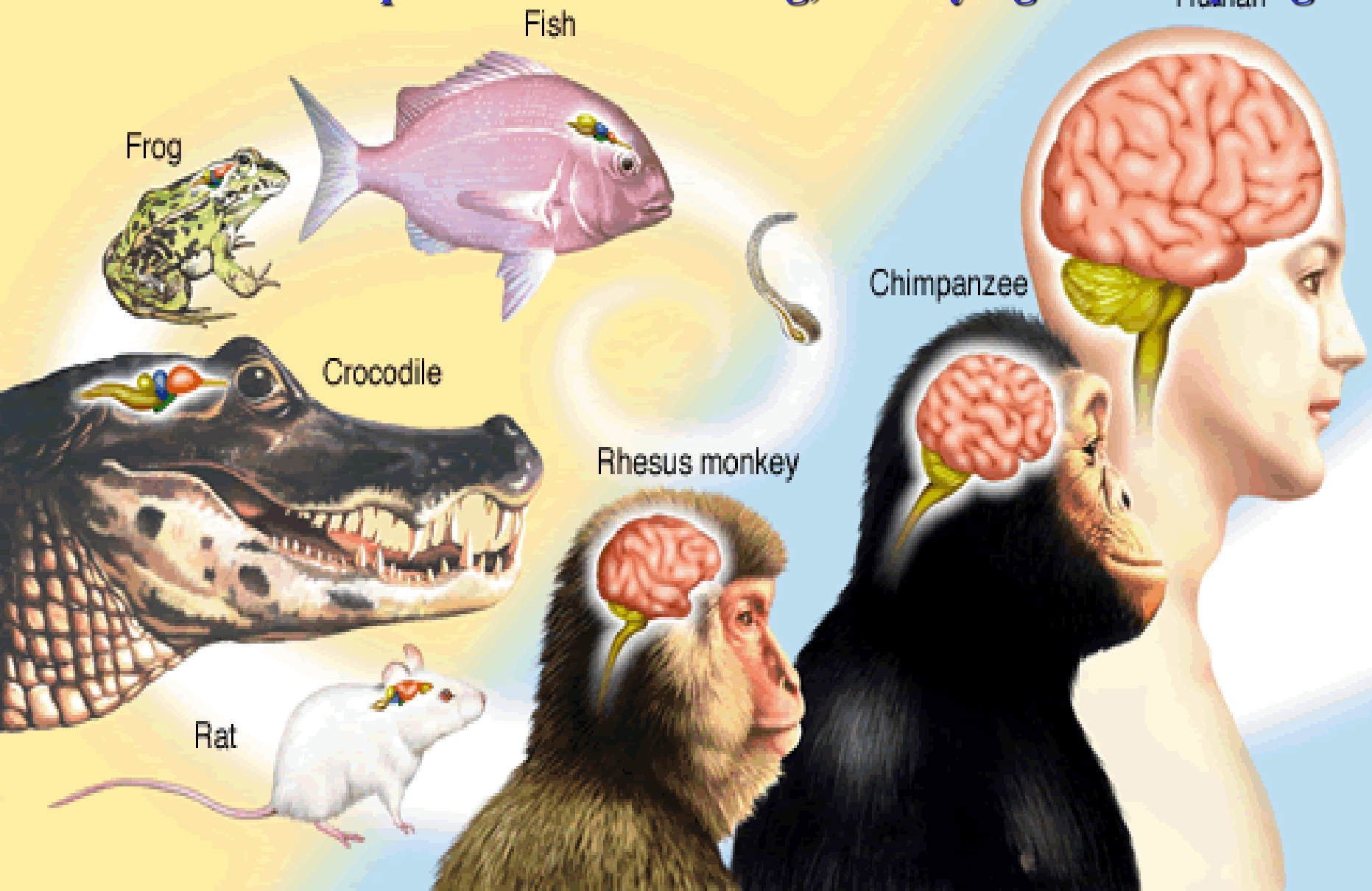
Outline basic philosophy and model of Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)

Note the powerful effects of our self-evaluation systems (self-criticism vs self compassion)

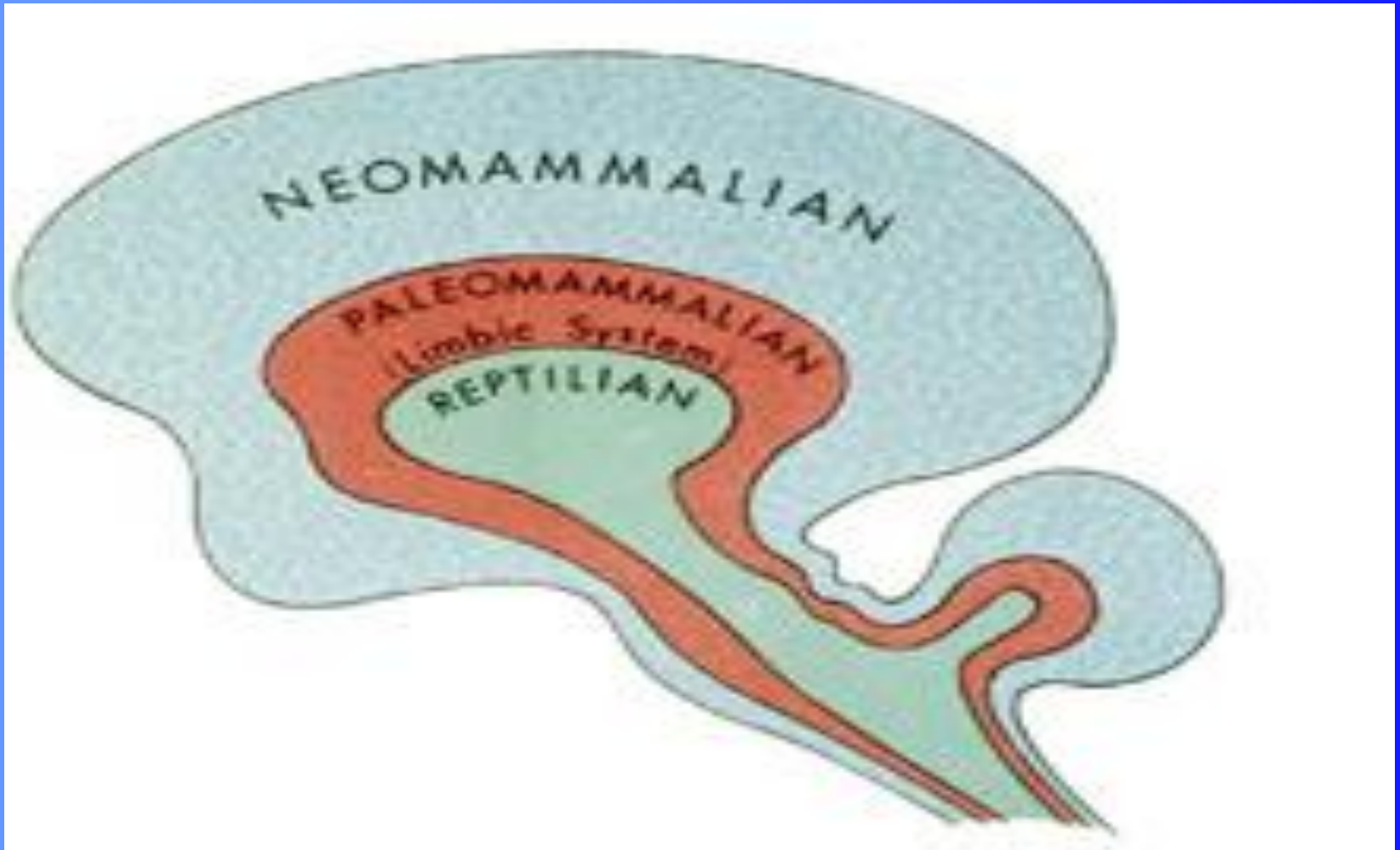
Explore the application of CFT to the treatment of Anxiety



The human brain is the product of many millions of years of evolution – a process of conserving, modifying and adapting



**To understand ourselves we must
understand our brains**



why we have complex brains and minds that are difficult to understand regulate

1. Old Brain

Emotions: Anger, anxiety, sadness, joy, lust

Behaviours: Fight, flight, withdraw, engage

Relationships: Sex, status, attachment, tribalism

2. New Brain

- Imagination, fantasise, look back and forward, plan, ruminate
- Integration of mental abilities
- Self-awareness, self-identity, and self-feeling

3. Social Brain

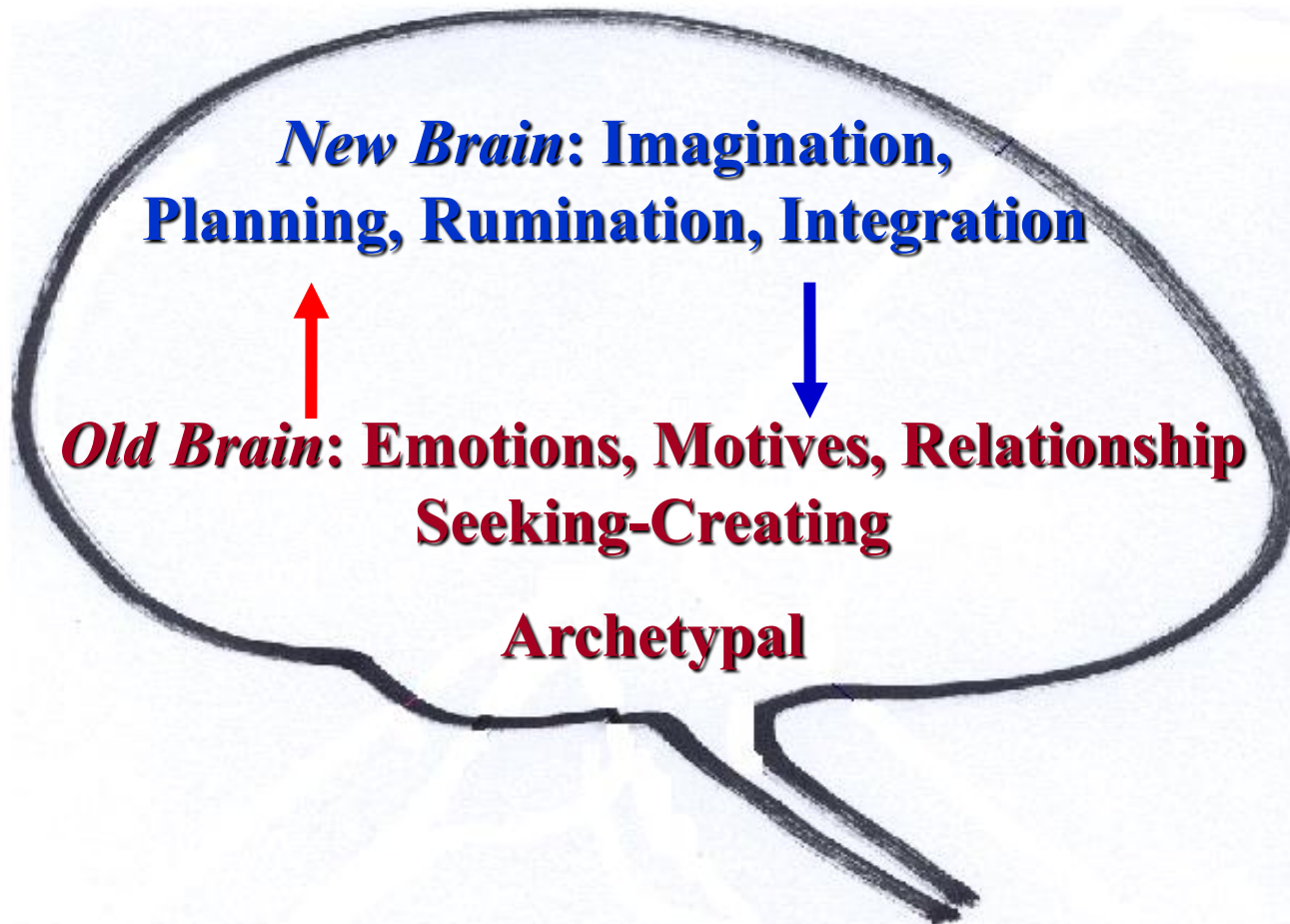
Need for affection and care

Socially responsive, self-experience and motives

What happens when new brain is recruited to pursue old brain passion



Interaction of old and new psychologies



Understanding our Motives and Emotions

Motives evolved because they help animals to survive and leave genes behind

Emotions guide us to our goals and respond if we are succeeding or threatened

There are three types of emotion regulation

- 1. Those that focus on threat and self-protection**
- 2. Those that focus on doing and achieving**
- 3. Those that focus on contentment and feeling safe**

Types of Affect Regulator Systems

Drive, excite, vitality

Content, safe, connected



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Self-Protection



In species without attachment only 1-2% make it to adulthood to reproduce. Threats come from ecologies, food shortage, predation, injury, disease. At birth individuals must be able to “go it alone” be mobile and disperse

Dispersal and avoid others



Protect and Comfort: Less 'instinctive brain – post birth learning





The Mammalian Importance of Caring Minds



Caring as “looking after”. Seeking closeness rather than dispersion. Individuals obtain protection, food, and care when ill. Key also is **soothing-calming** and physiological regulation. Few offspring but high survival rate in comparison to species without attachment. Affection and kindness



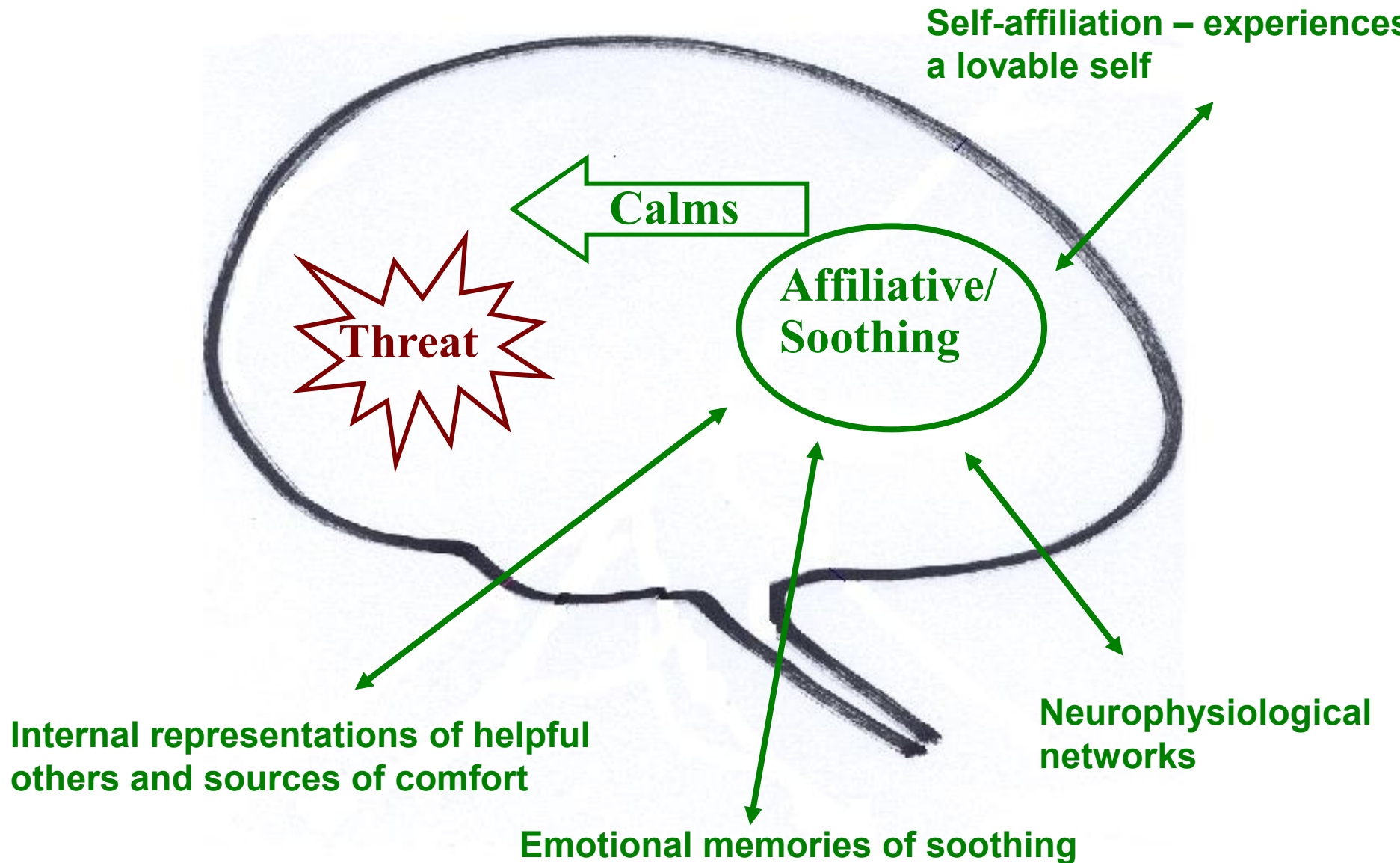
Co-operative and mutual support can develop as we see that our prosperity impacts on that of others, sharing and not-exploiting

Self-Compassion

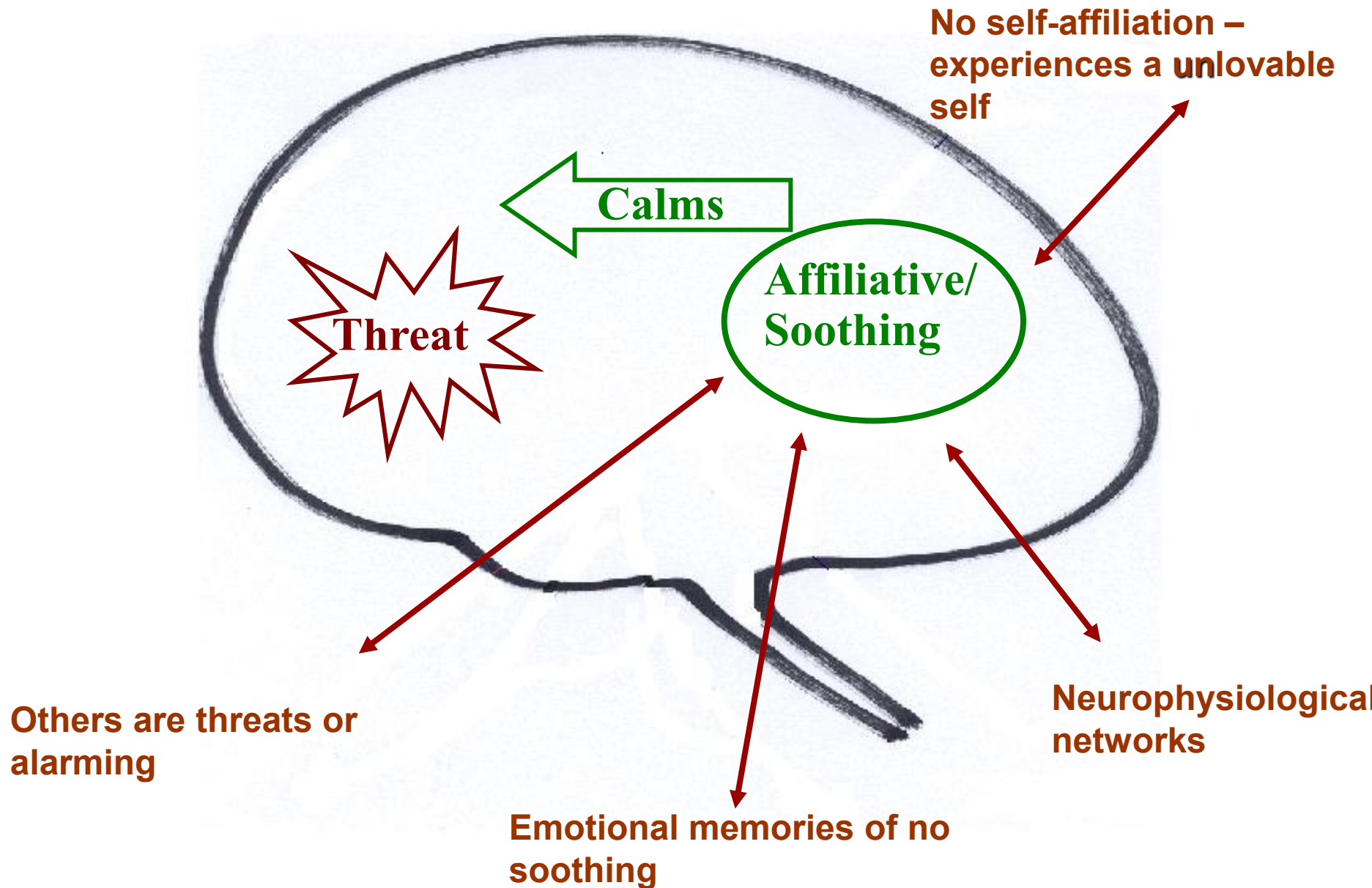
Higher levels of reported self-compassion have been found to be correlated with lower levels of depression and anxiety (Neff, 2003; Neff, Hseih, & Dejitthirat, 2005; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007).

Neff and colleagues' research has demonstrated positive correlations among self-compassion and a range of positive psychological dimensions (Neff, Rude, et al., 2007). These factors include, but aren't limited to life satisfaction, feelings of social connectedness (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007), and personal initiative and positive affect (Neff, Rude, et al., 2007).

Internal Threat and Soothing



Internal Threat and More threat



Compassion Solutions

Ancient wisdom

**Compassion is the road to happiness
(Buddhism)**

Evolution

**Evolution has made our brains highly
sensitive to internal and external kindness**

Neuroscience

**Specific brain areas are focused on detecting
and responding to kindness and compassion**

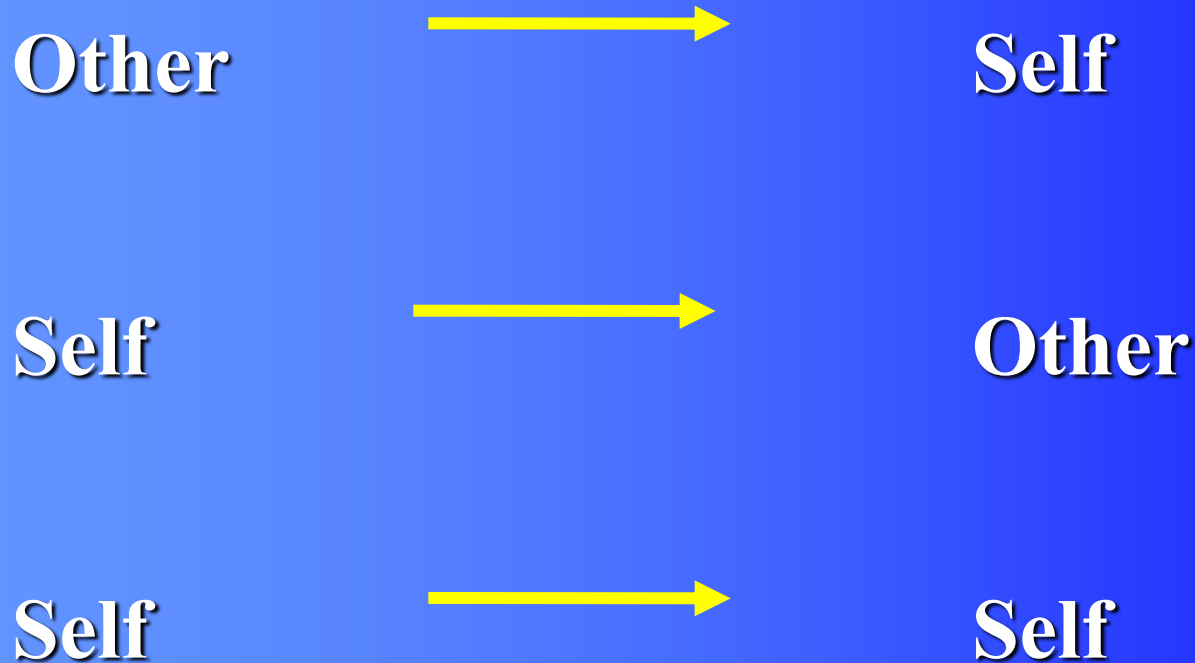
Compassion

Compassion can be defined in many ways: “As a sensitivity to the suffering of self and others with a deep commitment to try to relieve it” Dalai Lama

Eight fold path - represents a multi-modal approach for training one's mind

Compassion as Flow

Different practices for each

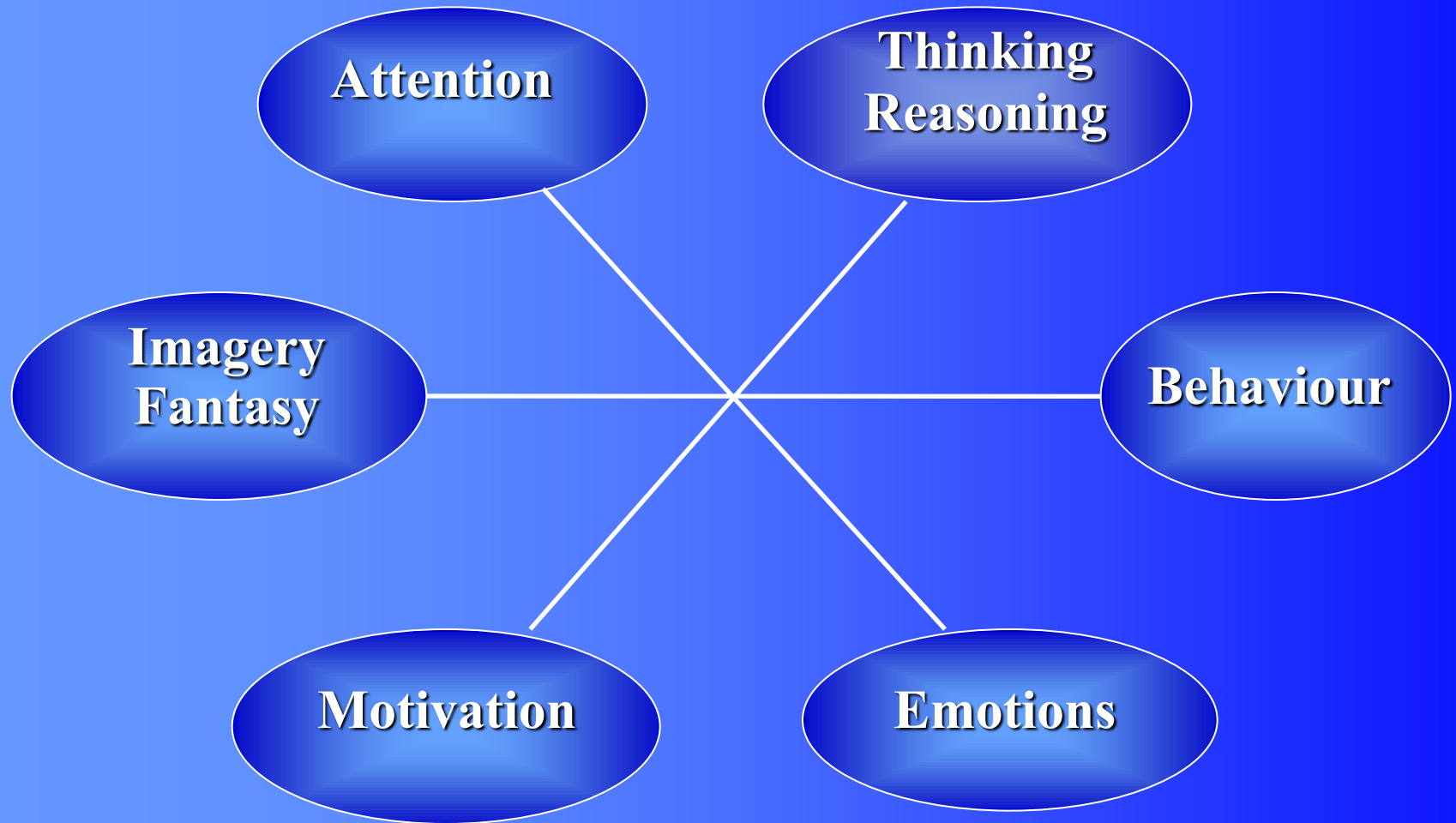


Non linear empathy for other begins early in life

Data

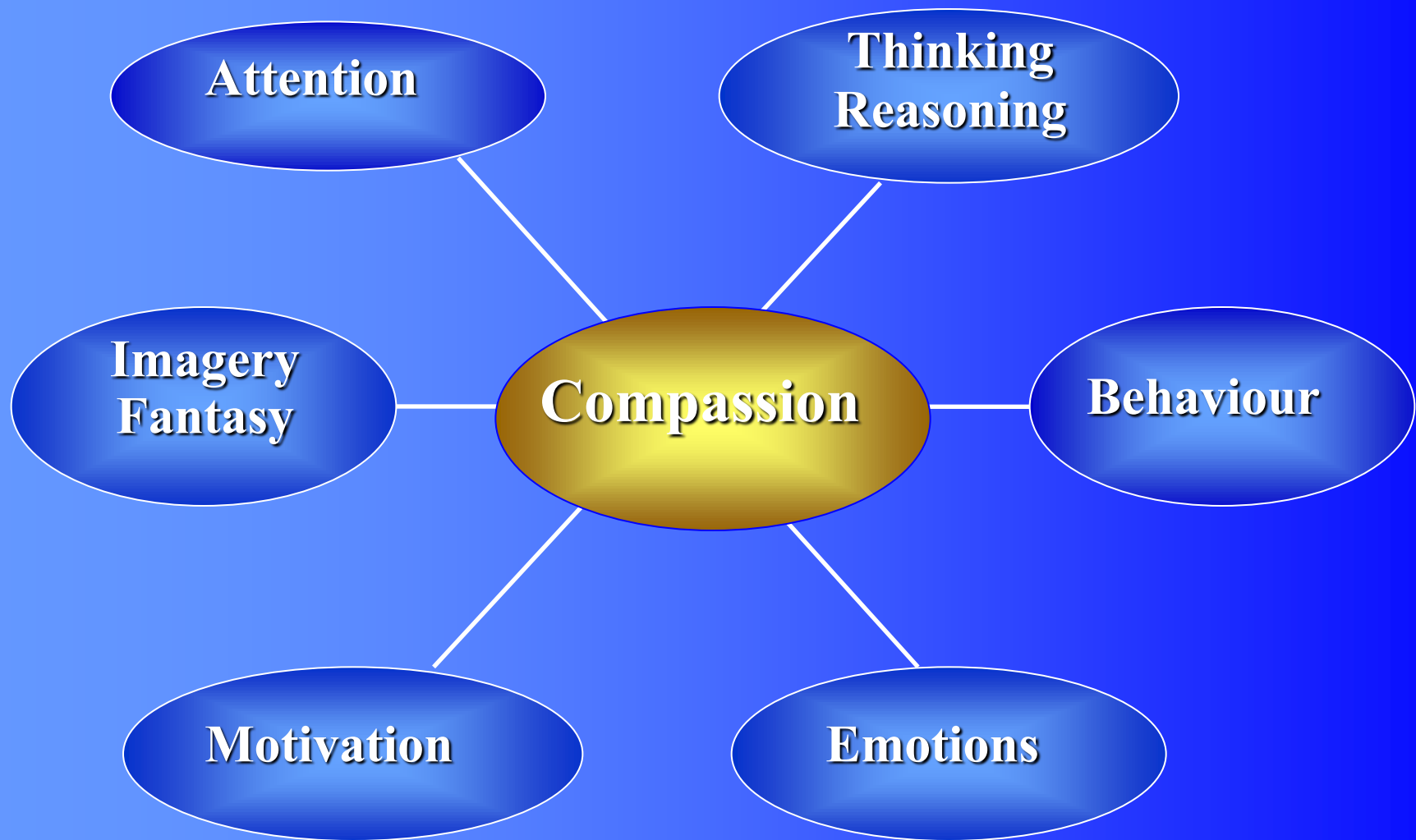
- Practice of imagining compassion for others produces changes in frontal cortex and immune system (Lutz et al, 2009)
- Loving kindness meditation (compassion directed to self, then others, then strangers) increases positive emotions, mindfulness, feelings of purpose in life and social support and decreases illness symptoms (Frederickson et al, 2008, JPSP)
- Compassion meditation (6 weeks) improves immune function, and neuroendocrine and behavioural responses to stress (Pace, 2008, PNE)
- Compassion training reduces shame and self-criticism in chronic depressed patients (Gilbert & Proctor, 2006, CPP)

Key Targets of Therapy



Their pattern gives rise to a certain type of mind

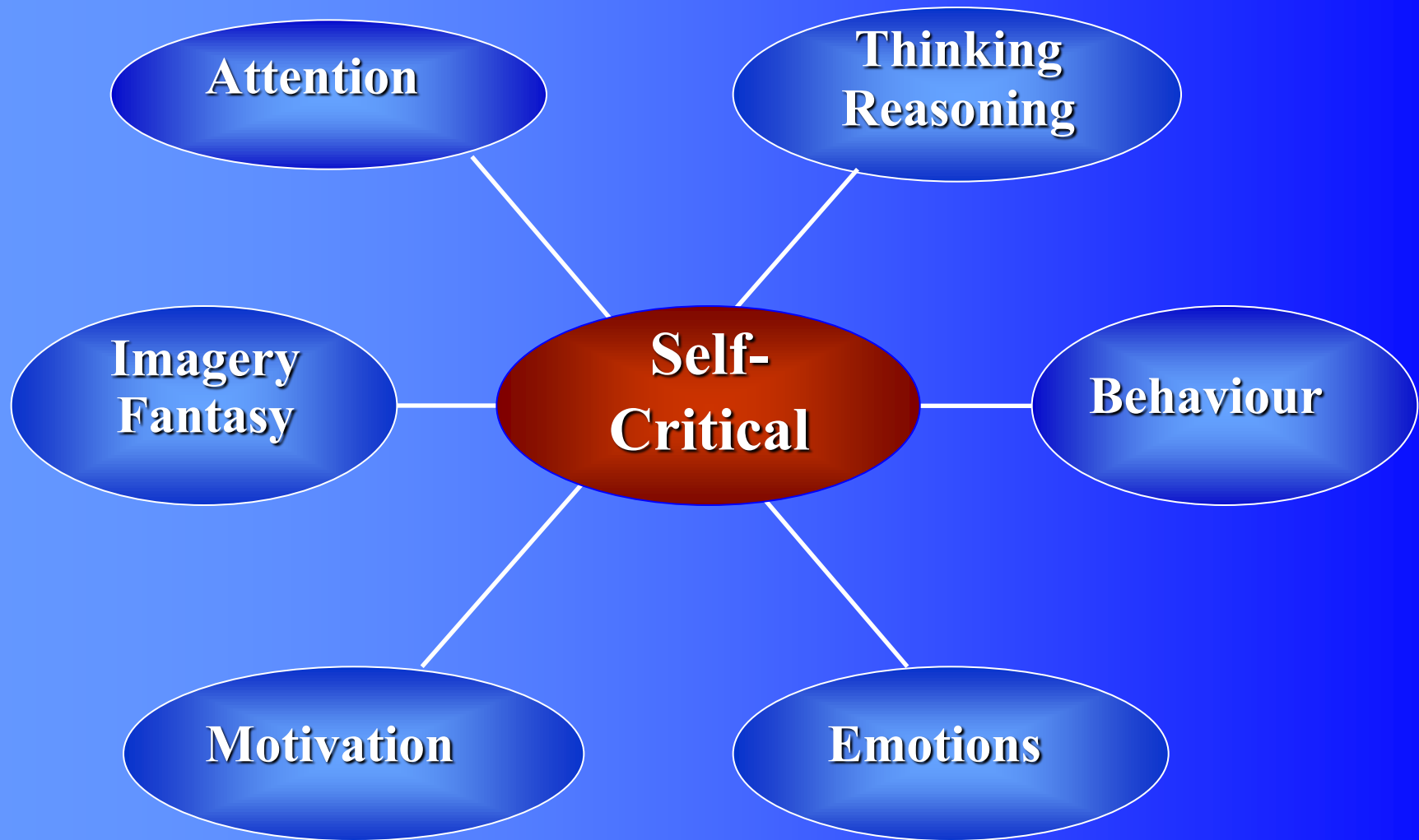
Compassionate Mind



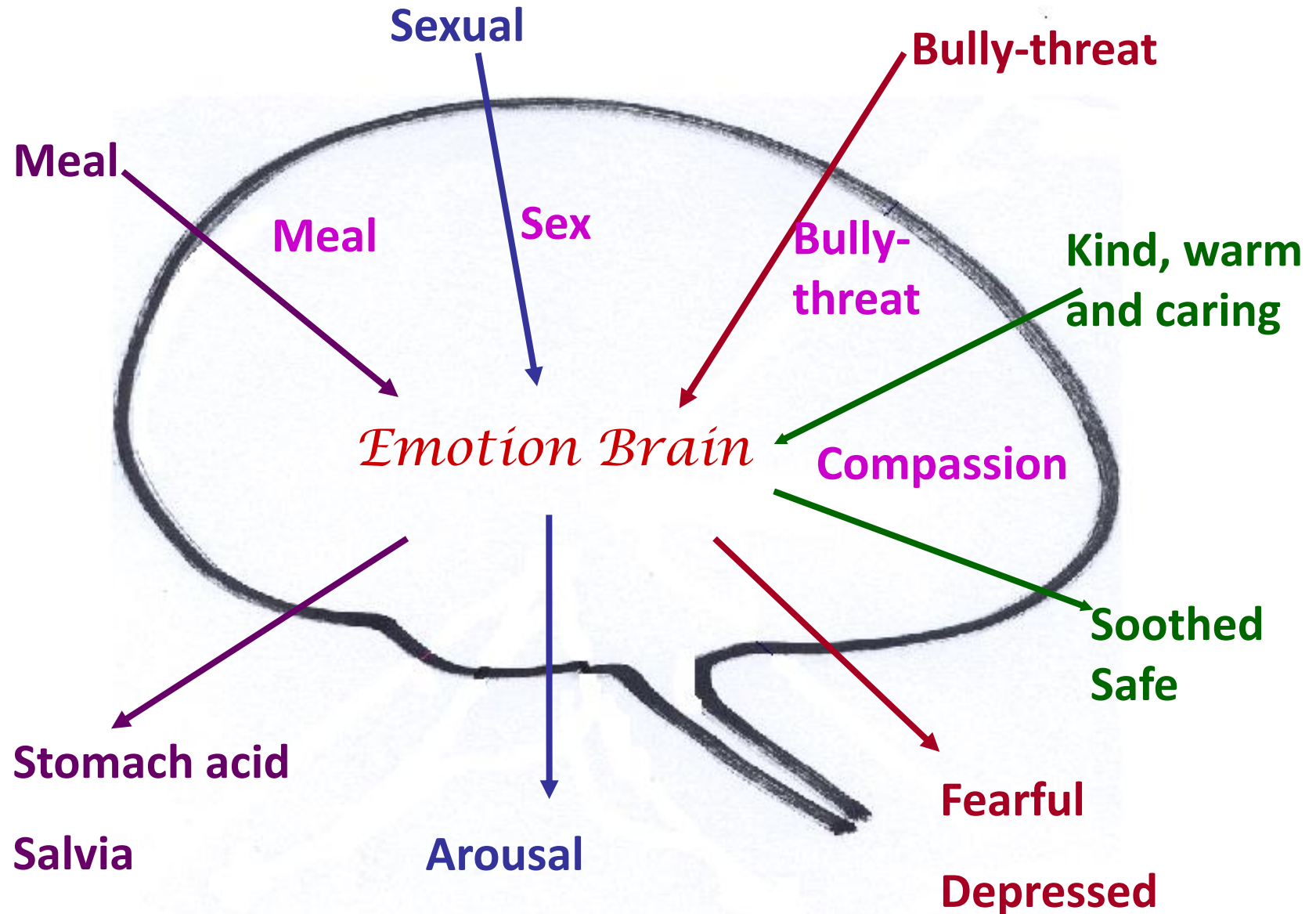
Threatened Mind can block Compassion



Self-Critical Mind is also Threat-focused Mind

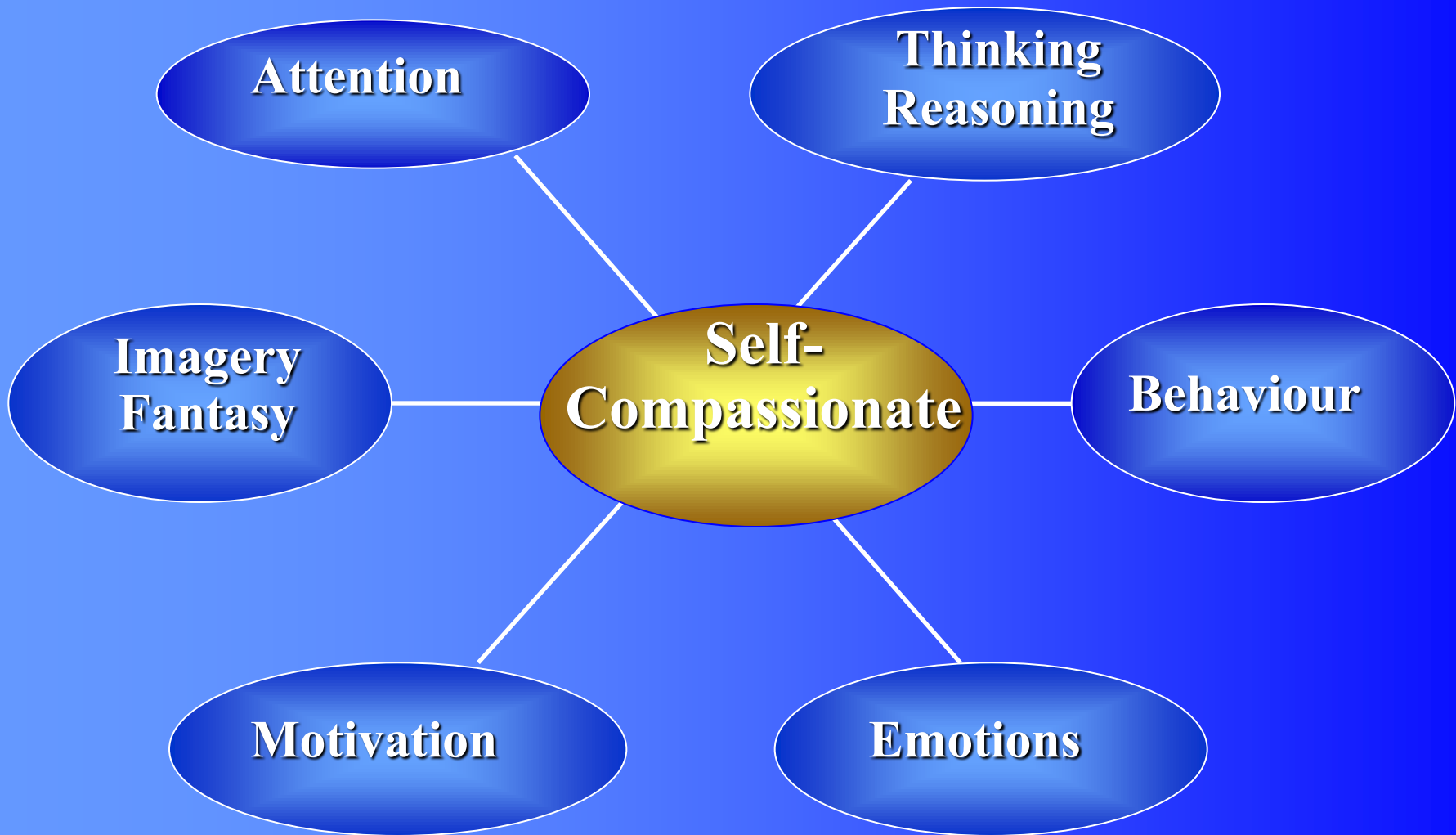


How our own thoughts and images affect our brains



Pink represents our inner images and thoughts

Compassionate Mind



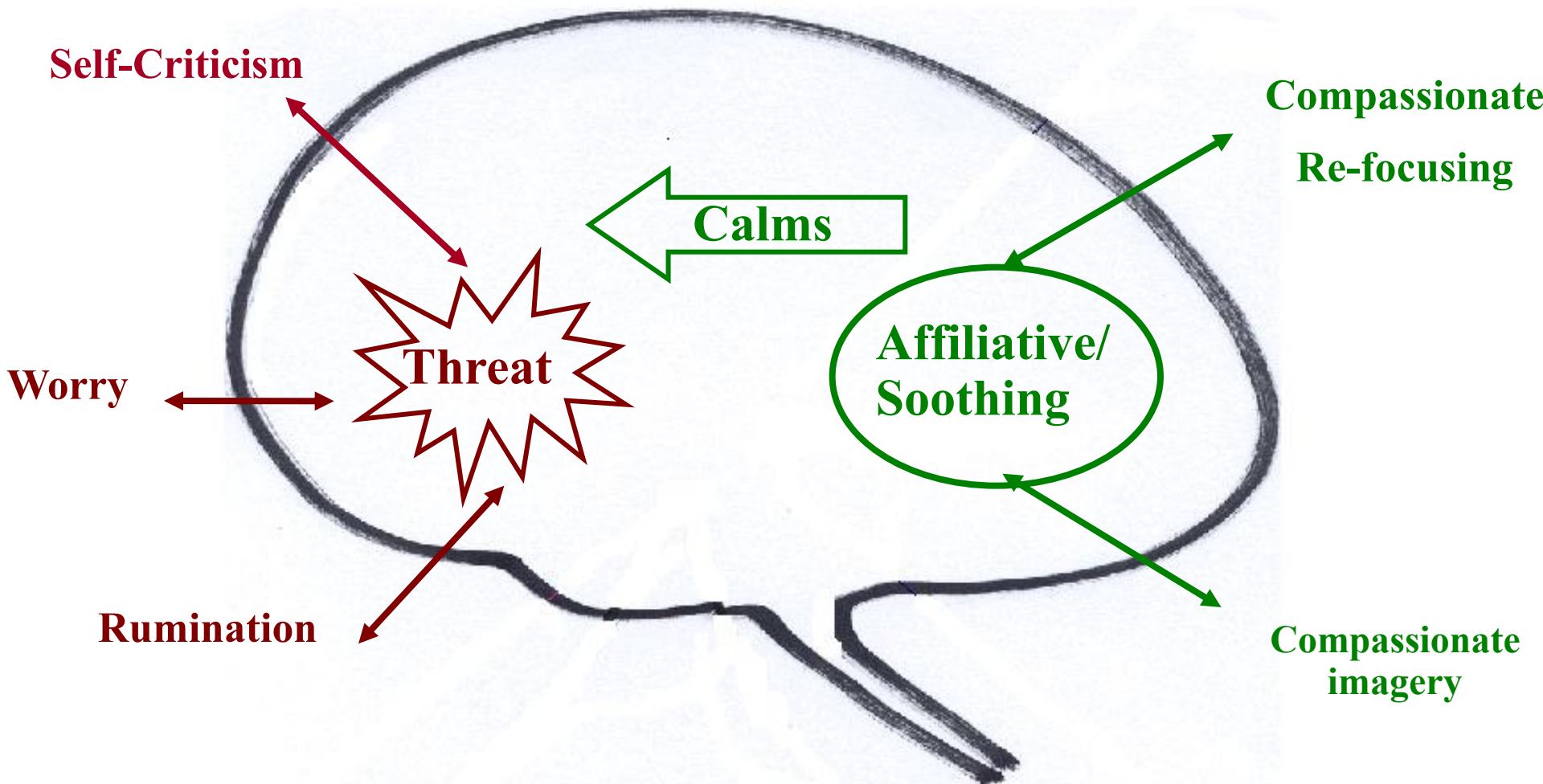
Why a Compassion Focus?

People with chronic problems often come from neglectful or abusive backgrounds, have high levels of shame, and are often self-critical, self-disliking, or self-hating

Live in a world of constant internal and external threat

Have few experiences of feeling safe or soothed and are not able to do this for themselves. Often do poorly in trials

Internal Threat and Soothing



Fear of Compassion

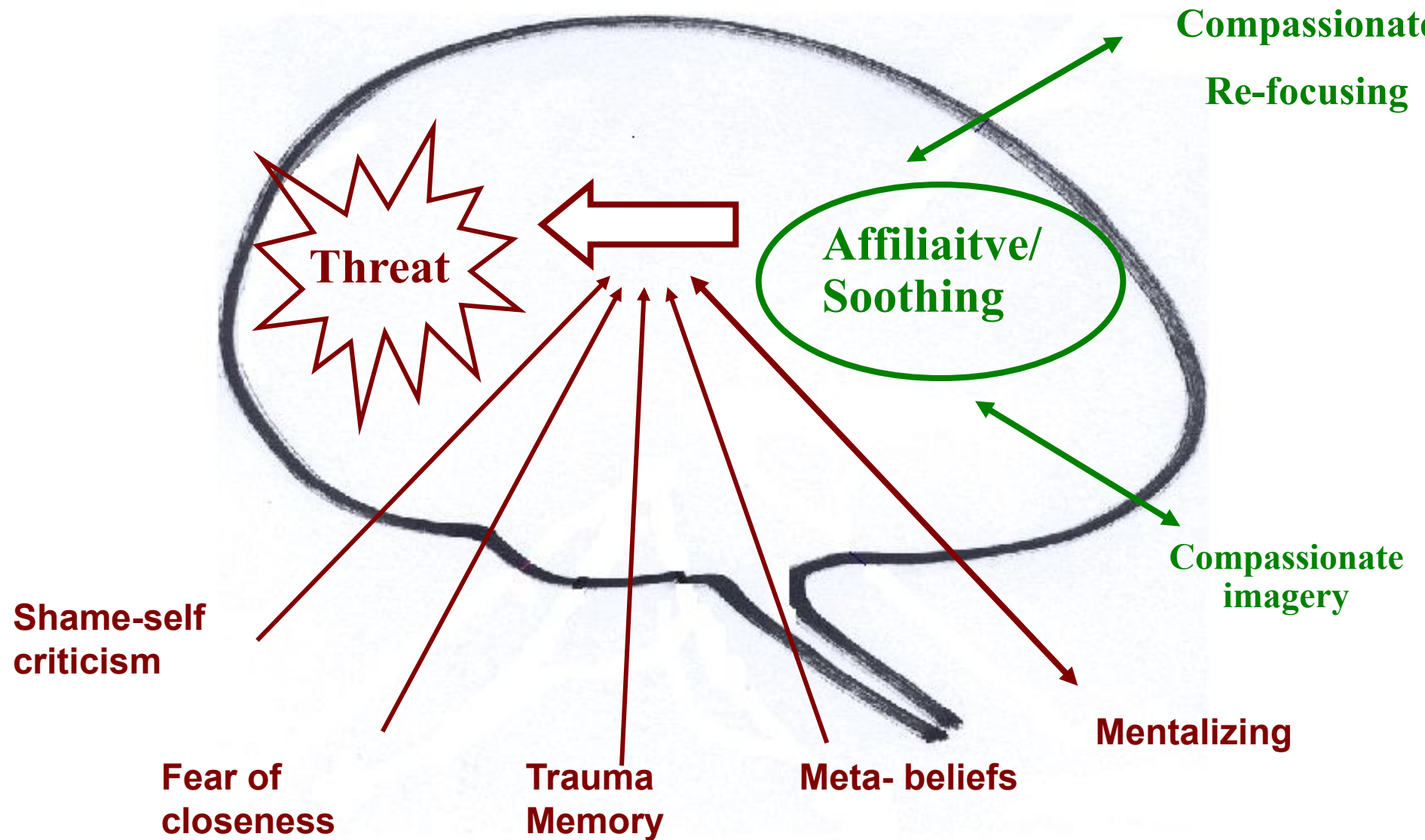
Certain types of positive feelings are threatening

It is dangerous to feel safe

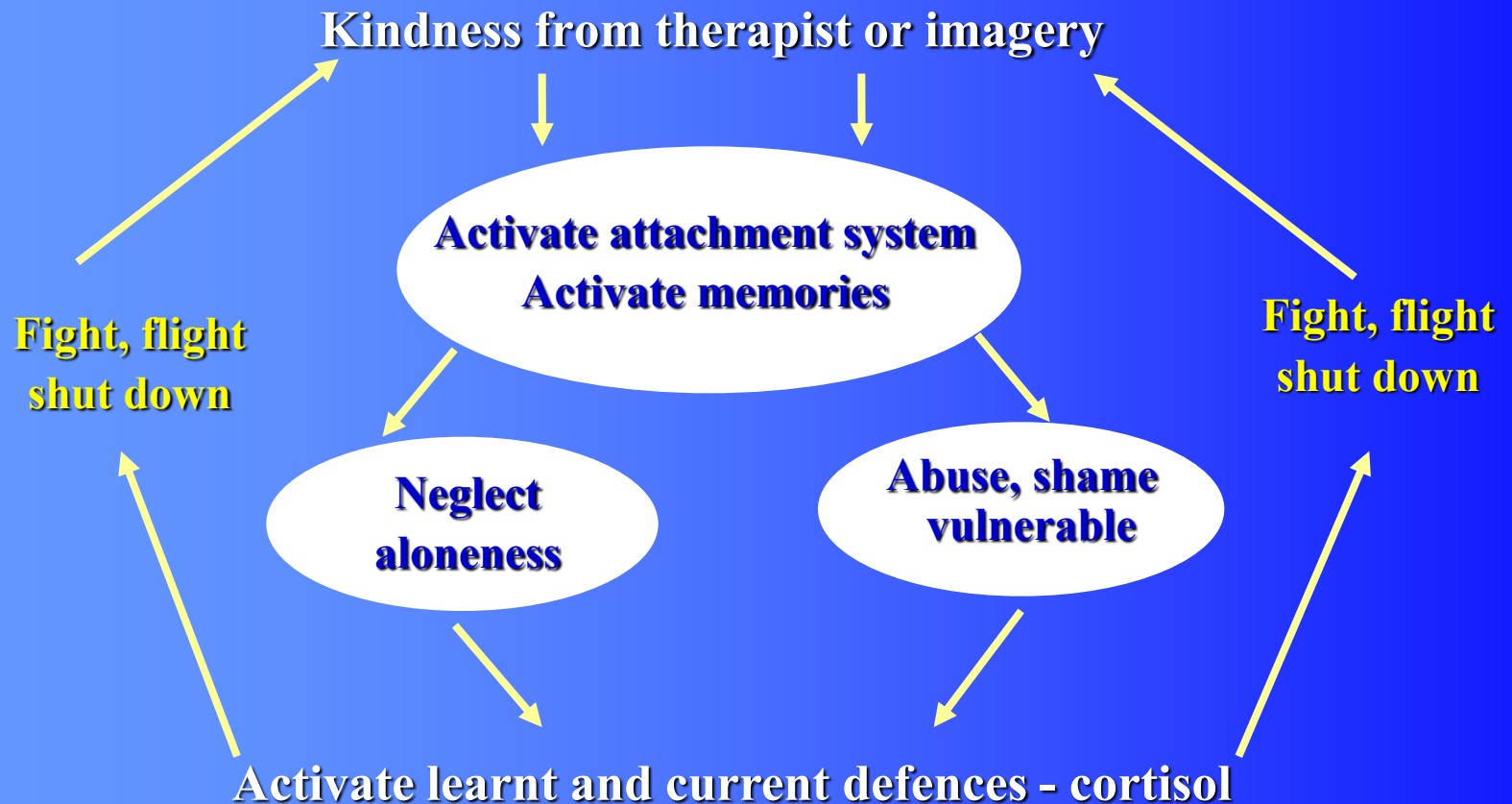
Compassion feeling are linked to beliefs such that it's an indulgence and weakness

Activated grief and or abuse memories

PROBLEM -Compassion is a threat



Kindness, Attachment and Threat



Bowlby: Kindness opens the attachment system and then whatever ever fears, anger or despair is coded there will become available and can be intensely threatening

Therapy

Life history and contextual rather than symptom focused

Background, → key threats, → safety strategies →
undesired/unintended consequence

High focus on validation, on “not your fault,” courage and doing your best.

Clarify three circle model and why we will explore helpful behaviour for **each** circles

Desensitisation to affiliative positive affect – to be able to feel safe and self compassionate