

UNPACKING TRAUMA NARRATIVES

Why Your Brain Keeps You Stuck and How to Start Moving Forward

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“What If” Thinking

“If only things had happened differently, my life would be better now”



“What If” Thinking

- If only I had known earlier...
- What if I had never taken the DNA test ...
- I wish I'd found out before my father died...
- ...insert your 'what if' moment here!



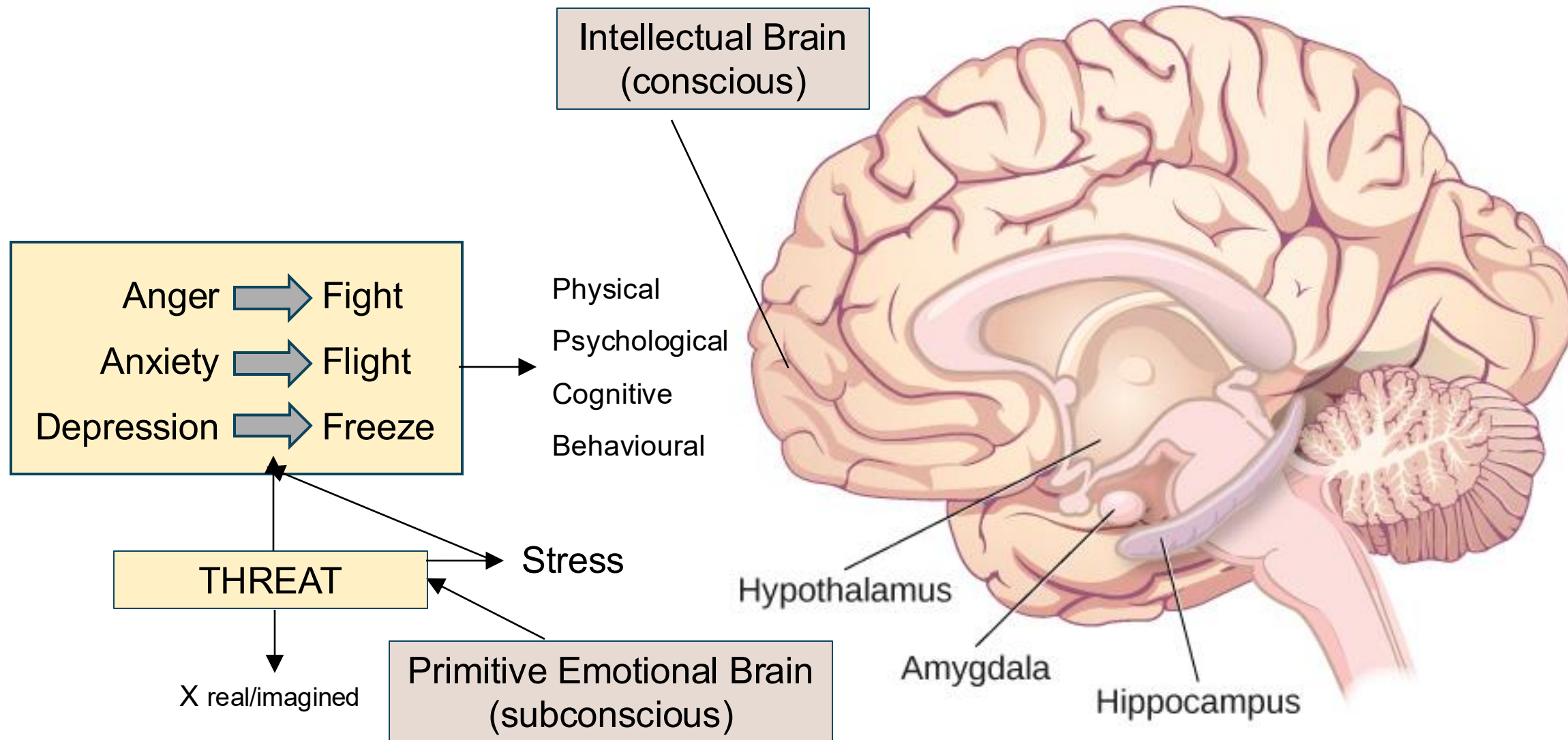
What Is Trauma?



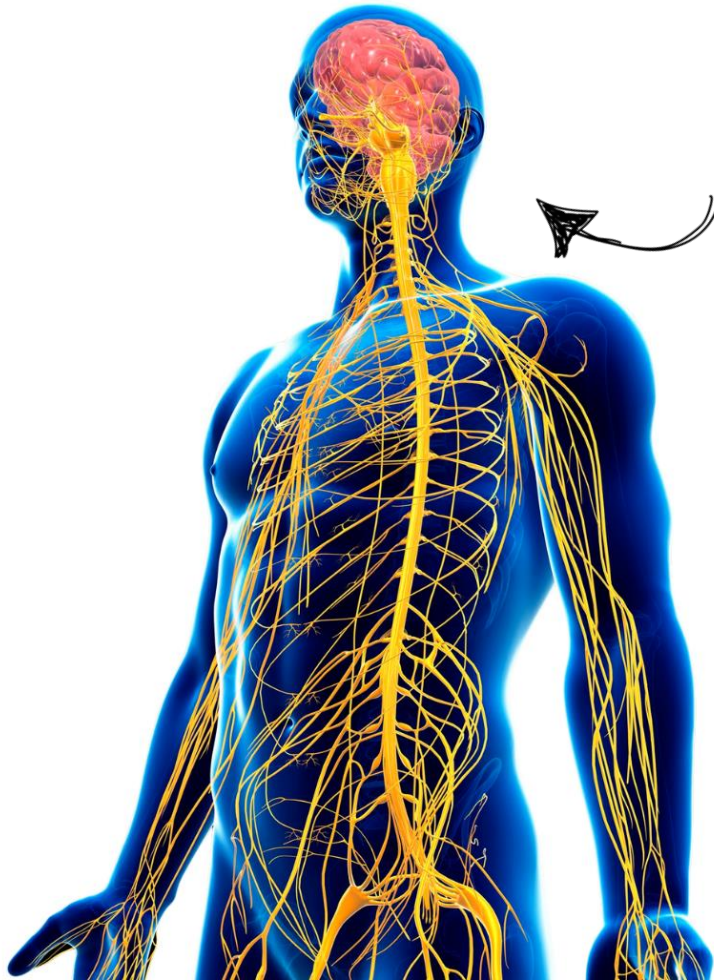
It's actually not about the event itself ...

It's about how your brain stores the event (emotional brain)





The Mind-Body Feedback Loop



Nothing magic happens at the neck!



How Our Brains Trick Us



Newsflash: Our brain makes up stories to “protect” us



Why We Get Stuck in "What If?" Thinking

The brain seeks control & meaning – it fills in the blanks

Regret convinces us that the past "should have been better"

Grief & loss make us idealise what we missed

Hope feels easier than acceptance, so we hold onto the fantasy



Why We Get Stuck in "What If?" Thinking

Unfortunately ...

We then believe the stories as if they were true

And because the emotional brain is binary...

If the fantasy version = "good" ...
then current reality = "bad"



How to Gently Get Unstuck

- Your brain is assuming that the other version of your life would have been perfect – and that this one sucks!
- Instead of accepting that as truth, challenge it:
 - What story am I stuck in?
 - What am I assuming about the “better” version?
 - What actual proof do I have it would have turned out that way?
 - What might not have worked out as I imagine?
 - Am I romanticising a life that never existed?
 - Would it really have been that simple?
- And also ... What am I forgetting about the ‘real’ version of my life that doesn’t suck and also isn’t true?



How to Gently Get Unstuck

- Imagine you're 90 years old, looking back on your life from the future
- Think about your 'what if' moment
- What do you wish the "younger you" (you now!) would do?
- Does the 90-year-old you want you to spend another 5 years stuck in this?
- What small thing might they ask you to focus on instead that might be more helpful?

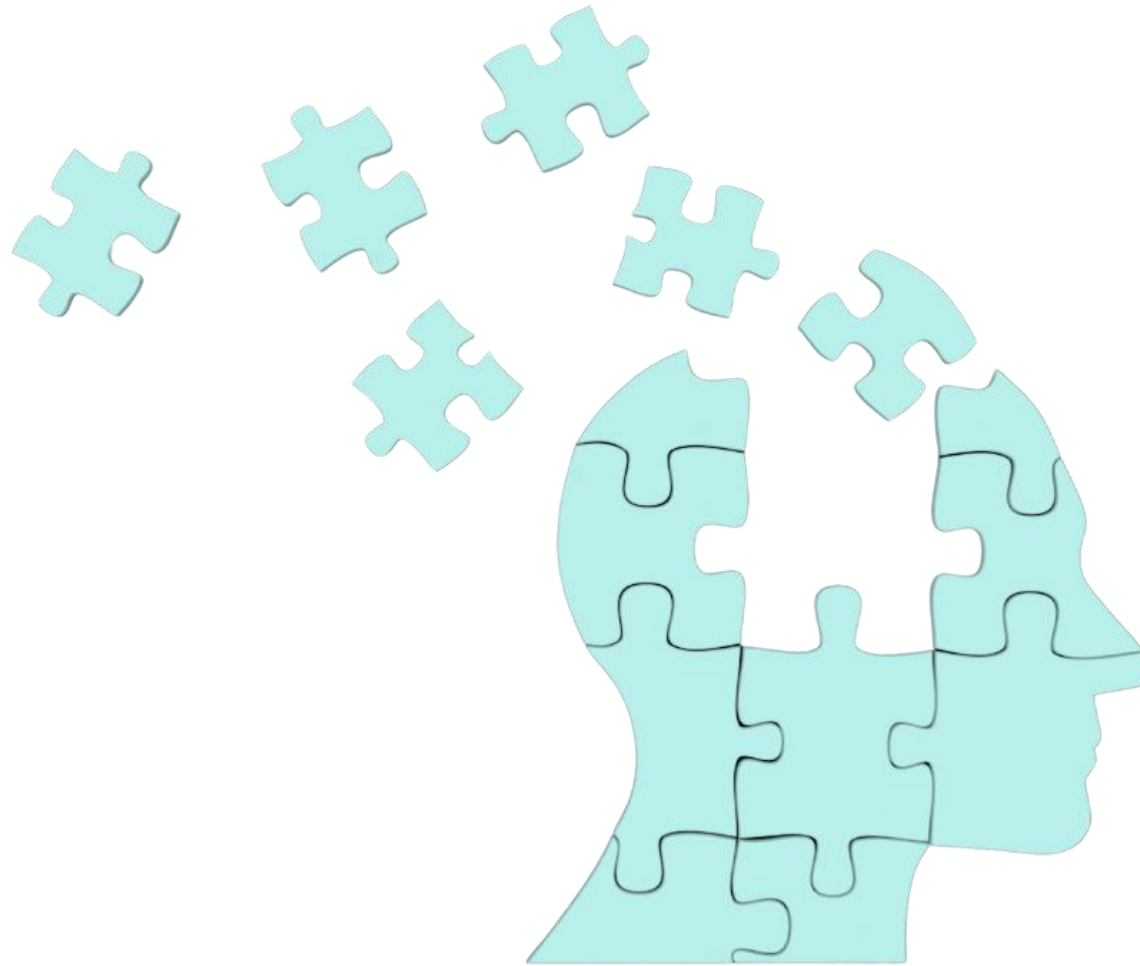


Getting Unstuck: The Reality Check

- All versions of your story “exist”, and your brain doesn’t know which version is “real”
 - The past version where the event didn’t happen exists in your mind
 - The version where you did something different exists in your mind
 - And so on.
- But the only version that truly exists is THIS ONE
- Ask yourself:
 - What would it take for me to make peace with the life that is?
 - What parts of my imagined version can I bring into my life now?
 - What do I have control over today?



Now The Good News!



Supporting Tools



Key Takeaways

#1: Your brain is telling you a story – but that doesn't make it true

- **Don't believe everything your brain tells you!**

#2: You don't have to force yourself to "move on" – but you can loosen the grip of "what-if"

- **See that another version of your story(ies) exists**

3. The only version of your life that matters – is the one you're living right now

- **✗ What-if ✓ What now?**



Instead of chasing a past that never was ...

Focus on shaping a future that actually is!

