

ASCH

2026

**ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC  
MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS**

New Frontiers in Hypnosis:  
Human Ingenuity, AI Innovation,  
and Ethical Boundaries

 VIRTUAL

**March 20–22, 2026**

# Dr. Linda Thomson, APRN



- Linda Thomson is a Nurse Practitioner and Approved Consultant in Clinical Hypnosis, a Diplomate of both the American Board of Medical Hypnosis and the American Board of Hypnosis in Nursing and a Fellow of ASCH. Linda is a past president of ASCH and was awarded ASCH's Lifetime Achievement Award.
- She has lectured and taught workshops across the country and around the world. She is passionate about teaching health care professionals how to incorporate hypnosis and hypnotic language into their practices.

# Disclosures

**ASCH and ASCH-ERF jointly provided this program.**

**No staff or committee members involved in the development, planning or execution of educational content have any financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose.**

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**Dr. Thomson has no significant financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose.**

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- The program has been approved by American Society of Clinical Hypnosis Standards of Training Committee to be used toward Membership and Certification requirements.
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- This session is approved by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and as such is an approved continuing education course.

# Learning Objectives

- At the conclusion of this session, the physicians and other participants will be able to:
- Describe 2 exercises that can be used in a group to demonstrate the importance of establishing rapport
- Compare and contrast effective and ineffective communication
- Discuss how to develop a workshop on the power of hypnotic language



# Power of Words

# Power of Words



Sponsored by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis Education and Research Division

# Disclosure Statement

(Include your own disclosure)

Created for the  
American Society of Clinical Hypnosis  
by

Linda Thomson, PhD, APRN, ABMH, ABHN,  
FASCH

with the assistance of  
Debora Nesbitt, APRN, PMHNP-BC, ABMH, ABHN

so that others can promote comfort and healing through the

Power of Words

# Power of Words Outcomes

- Give participants the tools they need to return to their communities and offer a presentation to colleagues on how to use the hypnotic language of healing to help reduce patients' anxiety, stress and pain, and enhance their healing.
- Be able to define what is hypnotic healing language, its benefits, and how to use it.
- Explain the importance of creating rapport and how to use good communication techniques to promote healing. Compare and contrast effective and ineffective communication.

# Power of Words Outcomes

- Identify how stress and pain affect the brain and how hypnotic healing language can reduce negative effects.
- Be able to identify and construct hypnotic healing suggestions for use in specific client cases.
- Describe at least two experiential exercises that demonstrate the importance of hypnotic healing language and establishing rapport.

Do we really need to learn about  
hypnotic healing language...or the  
power of our words?

Write the best and the worst statement you have  
ever heard a health care provider say to a patient.

# Scenario #1

“We found a lot more damage in your shoulder than we anticipated. So when the scaline block wears off you can anticipate being in a tremendous amount of pain.”



# Power of Words

## Why do we care?

- Effective method to soothe and comfort patients
- Increases rapport and trust; Decreases fear and mistrust
- Creates positive expectancy and encourages dissociation from negative experiences
- Communicates confidence in the patient's abilities
- Helps stabilize vital signs
- Cost effective

# What is Hypnotic Healing Language?

Hypnotic healing language is a method of communication, using language and words, designed to create or support a focused state of attention, in which the mind is more open to receiving and responding to healing suggestions.

# Additionally, hypnotic healing language is...

- Communication that elicits positive effects on the mind and body, while building rapport and relationship that fosters health and well being, resulting in more favorable patient outcomes.





The first moment of an interaction determines everything that follows

Waiting Room / Reception Room  
Scenario

# Waiting Room



Reception Area

What do you like your friends  
to call you?

Exercise

A formal name  
you dislike

A formal name  
you like

An informal name  
you dislike

An informal name  
you like

What do you like your  
friends to call you?



Dabney Ewin

When you show deep empathy toward others, their defensive energy goes down and positive energy replaces it.

Rapport allows us to connect with another person, to build trust, develop understanding, and create a therapeutic relationship that can benefit both the patient and provider.

Within this environment our words can have a positive effect.



# Rapport

Motivates the patient to  
please you  
Encourages behavioral  
compliance



# Mirror Neurons (1980s & 1990s)

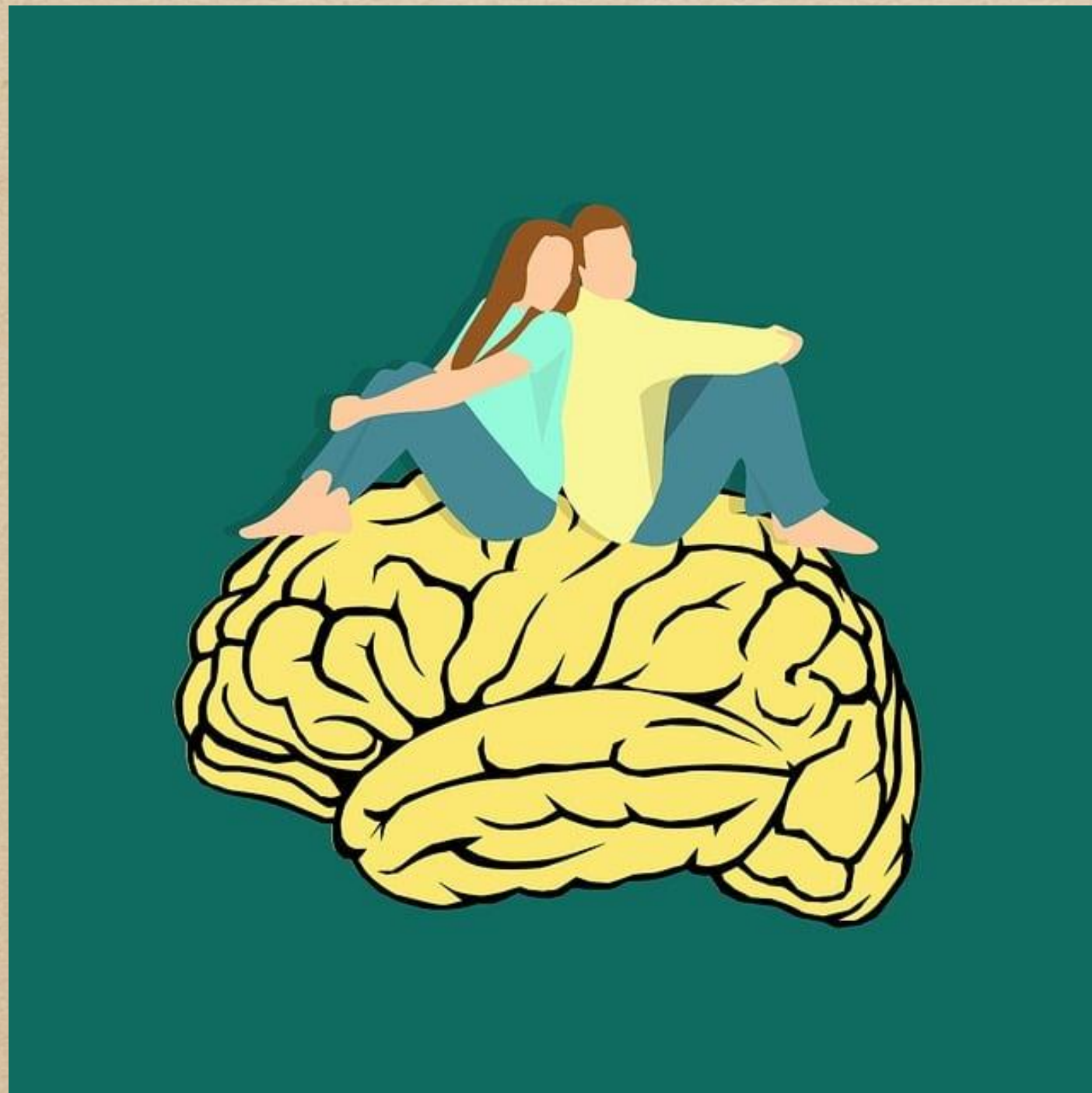
- Giacomo Rizzolatti at the University of Parma, Italy placed electrodes in the ventral premotor cortex of the macaque monkey to study neurons specialized for control of hand and mouth actions



# Mirror Neurons

- One of the most important discoveries in the last 3 decades of neuroscience
- Mirror neurons represent a distinctive class of neurons that discharge both when an individual executes a motor act and when he observes another individual performing the same or a similar motor act.
- The mirror neuron system plays a key role in our ability to empathize and socialize with others

# Communicating with Mirror Neurons



- Reflect calm and confidence and optimism in your facial expression
- Allow your body language to reflect confidence and control
- Voice should be calming, unflustered, and reflect a positive optimism

Show confidence.  
It is contagious.



# Building Rapport through Pacing & Leading

- A process by which rapport is established on a subconscious level
- Pacing, Mirroring, or Matching
  - Connecting with the other person by “being like them” or meeting them where they are
- Leading
  - Changing our behavior so they will follow

# Pacing



- The goal of pacing is to be able to lead to a more desired state, outcome or condition
- Non-verbal
  - Facial expression, eye contact
  - posture and position
  - gestures
  - tactile, kinesthetic
  - BREATHING

# Leading



- The goal of pacing is to create rapport and then lead to a more desired state.
- Once you have matched the behavior, subtly begin to change your behavior as you lead the patient to a more desired state or outcome.

# The Language of Leading

- “You may be curious to notice that . . .”
- “I wonder which will be the first thing you begin to be aware of first.”
- “It will be interesting for you to pay attention to . . . .”
- “I wonder if you will decide too . . . .”

# Examples of Leading

- Breathing – gently shift your mirrored breathing to a 3 second inhale followed by 5 second exhale.
- Continue gently and easily until the patient begins to slow their breathing to match this pattern.
- Begin to slow down and quiet your voice. Lower your pitch and tone. Breathe

# Examples of Leading

Posture and gestures – gently begin to soften the muscles, relax the posture, and slow down the gestures.



# Mirror Neurons & Rapport

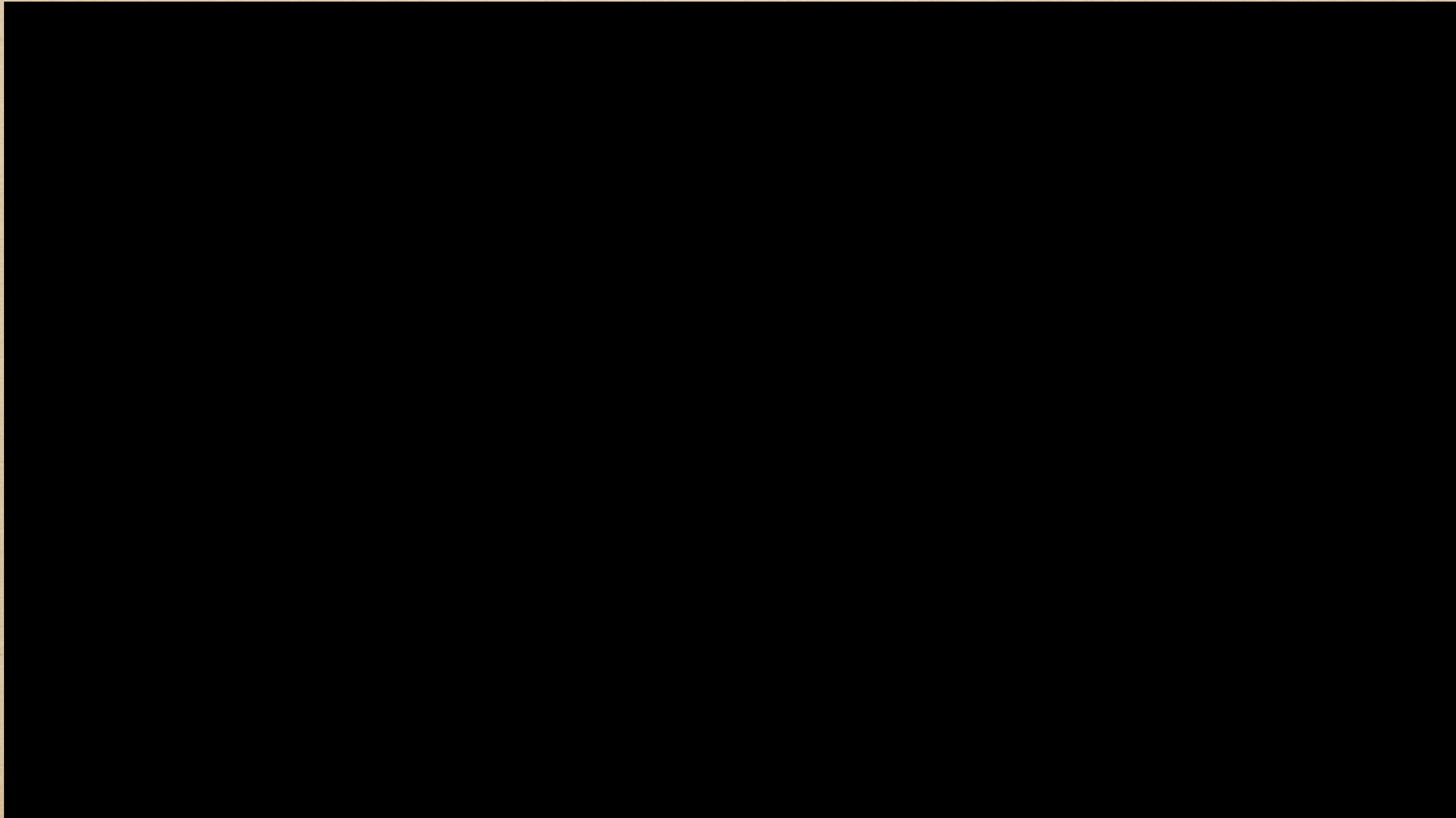
- Rapport allows us to connect with another person, to build trust, develop understanding, and create a therapeutic relationship that can benefit both the patient and provider.
- Within this environment our words can have a positive effect.
- Helps us to understand the emotions and intentions of another. We connect through empathy made available through mirror neurons.

Acharya & Shukla, 2012

# Components of Building Rapport

- Active Listening
  - Attentively looking at the patient
  - Listening without making judgements to really hear the patient
  - Imagine the situation from the patient's perspective

# Active Listening



# Components of active listening include:

- Rapport Building
- Positive Words
- Positive Regard
- Body Language
- Active Listening
- Reflective Listening
- Empathetic Listening
- Ask Questions
- Speak Pt Language
- Partner with Pt
- Cultural Competency
- Use MI Skills
- Empathy & Compassion

# Experiential: Rapport and Active Listening



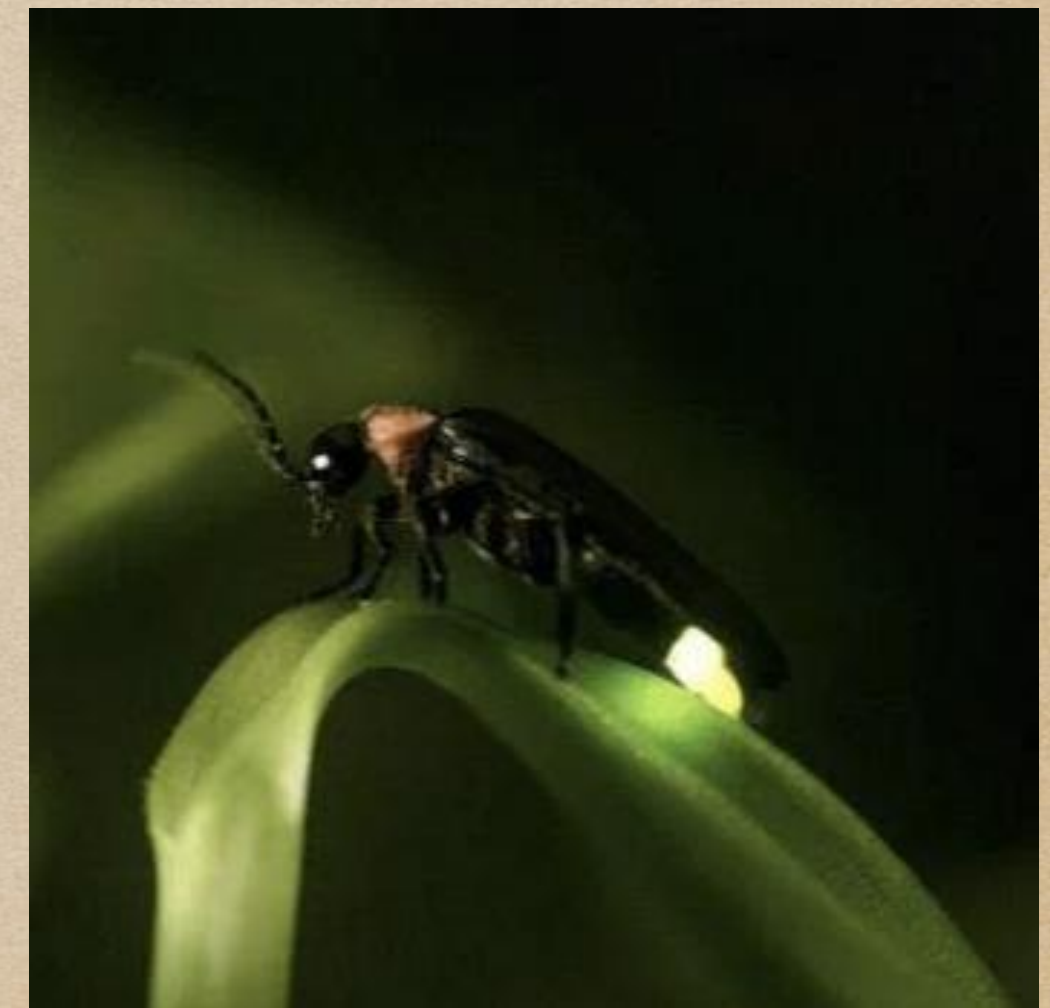
# Important to Remember

- Patients and their families entering a hospital or clinic dealing with trauma, pain, procedures, or any acute or chronic medical problem are already in a suggestible state and anything communicated to them by medical personnel may be experienced as a suggestion.

“The difference between the right word  
and the almost right word is like the  
difference between lightening and the  
lightening bug.”



Mark Twain





“Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remedying it.”

*Albus Dumbledore*

# Important to Remember

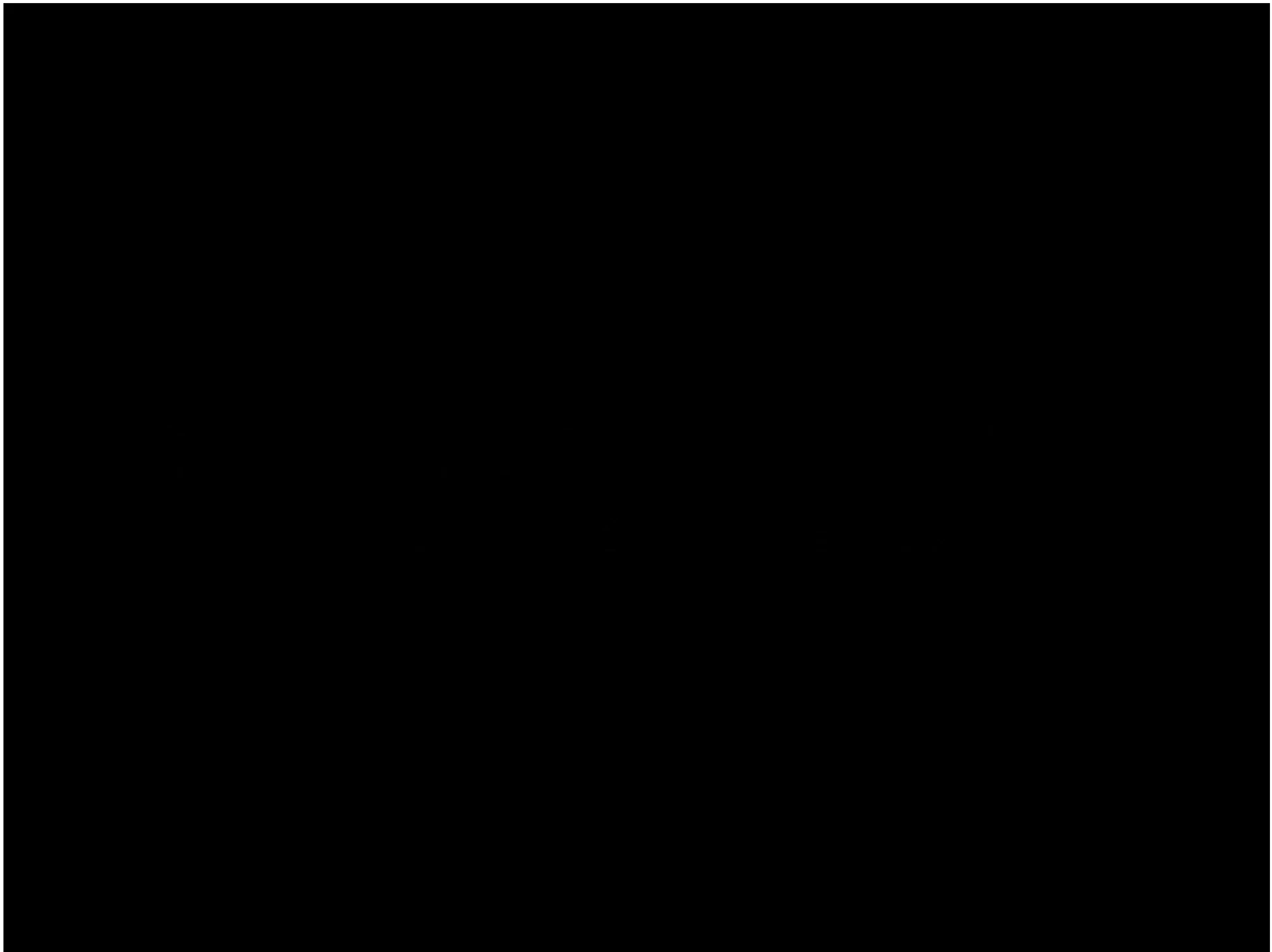
We are always communicating with our patients.

Is your language hurting or helping?

# Trance

- A naturally occurring phenomenon, an altered state of consciousness in which an individual has narrowed their focus of attention and becomes more suggestible to verbal and non-verbal communication.





# Clinical Hypnosis

- Narrows scope of focus while engaging the imagination
- Utilizes trance with its increased suggestibility and the power of words to help individuals be more open to new possibilities and positive changes by tapping into their own inner strengths and resources creating an effective way to heal, to reduce anxiety, relieve pain, and create chosen changes in their lives
- Changes the chemical and neurological way the brain processes information, bypassing the critical factor or filter

# Negative Trance States

- Patients in extreme situations of fear, pain or stress are in a natural trance state, an altered state of consciousness
- Trance states are characterized by focused attention and highly elevated suggestibility
- The medical environment is full of suggestions
- Most of them are negative



Unintended suggestions made by authority figures to persons in critical life situations in spontaneous trance states may have enormous positive or negative effects.

*Eva Banyai*

# People in crisis

- are frightened and tense, and sometimes are in pain
- have lost their feeling of being in control,
- are vulnerable, powerless, helpless and dependent,
- feel weary, dull or blunt,

# People in Crisis

- spontaneously and unconsciously change their usual frame of reference,
- often misunderstand the information, that is offered
- the conscious part of the mind becomes overwhelmed and ceases to function logically

H.A.A. de Berk

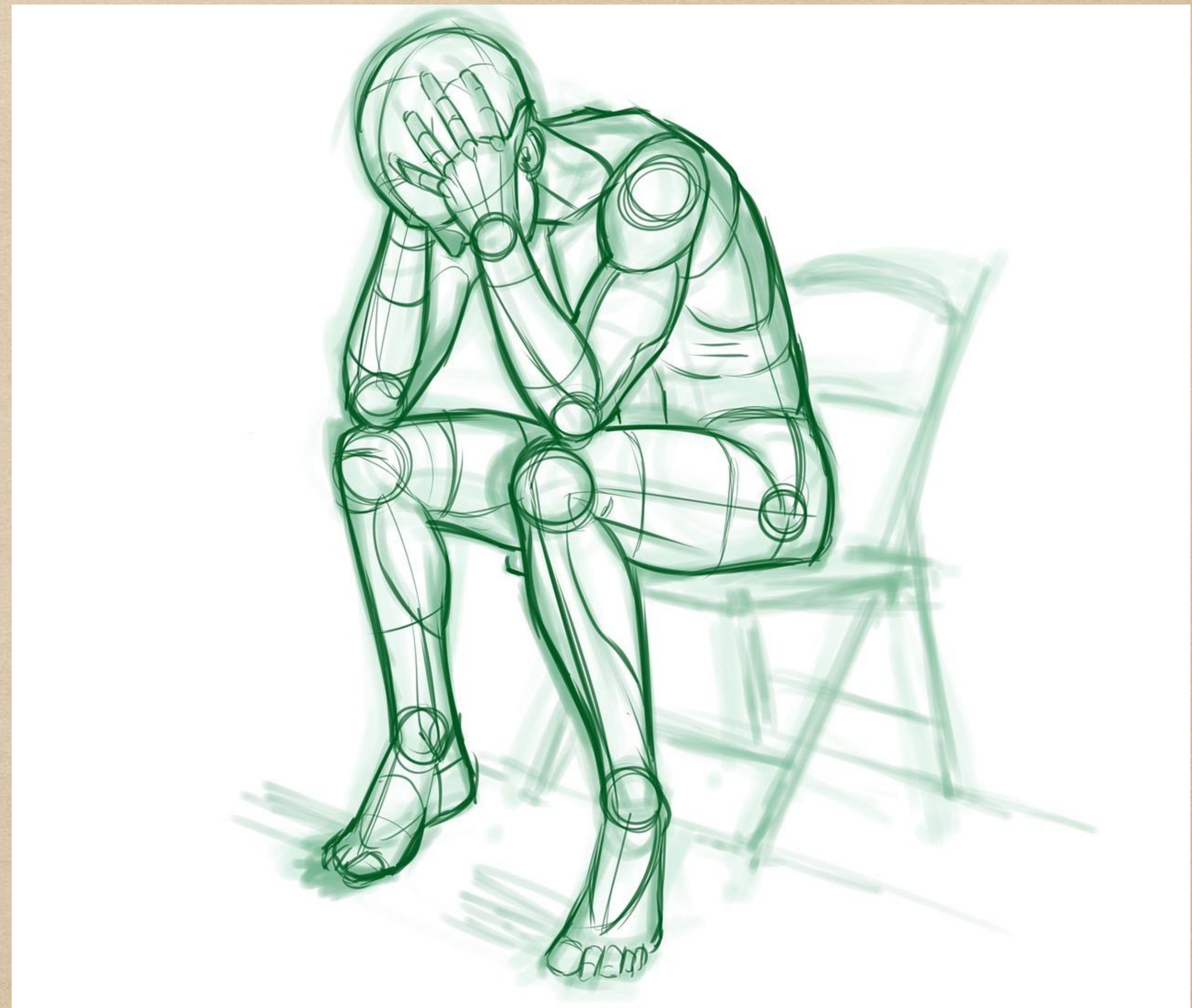
# People in Crisis

- become more susceptible to positive and negative suggestions.
- develop an altered state of consciousness -a spontaneous negative trance which can be counterproductive and impair healing and recovery

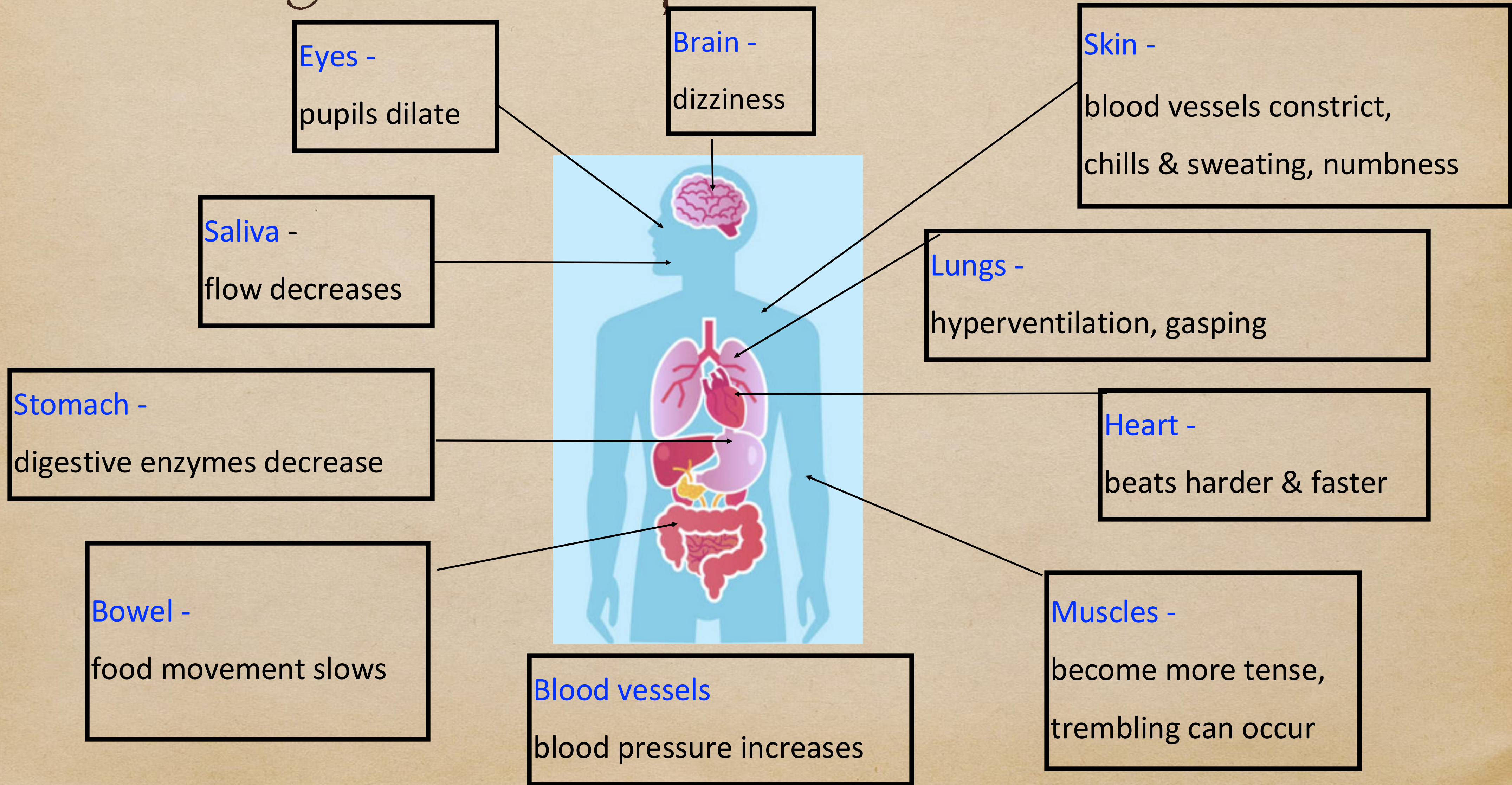
When a person is in pain, anxious, or frightened and they hear a statement that could be perceived as positive or negative, they will invariably assume the negative.



How stress  
affects the  
body



# Physical Response to Stress



# Cognitive Response to Stress



- Overestimating the risk
- Underestimating resources and ability to cope
- Hypervigilance / preoccupation / obsessive and intrusive thoughts
- Catastrophic thinking
- Distractibility

# Emotional Response to Stress

Irritable / grumpy

Crying / Tearful

Anger

Aggression

Sense of dread

Withdrawal

Repeatedly seeking reassurance

Giddy



# Behavioral Response to Stress



- Flight / fight or freeze response
- Rigid behavior
- Tantrum
- Regressive behavior / withdraw, shy
- Sleep problems
- AVOIDANCE

# Effects of Stress on the Brain

## Cortisol Levels Spike

- Too much cortisol interferes with neurotransmitter function

## Prefrontal Cortex Shrinks

- impacts attention
- impacts learning
- impacts memory

## Neurotransmitter Changes

- Disrupts synaptic regulation
- Kills brain cells
- Reduces excitability of neurons
- Suppresses neuron regeneration

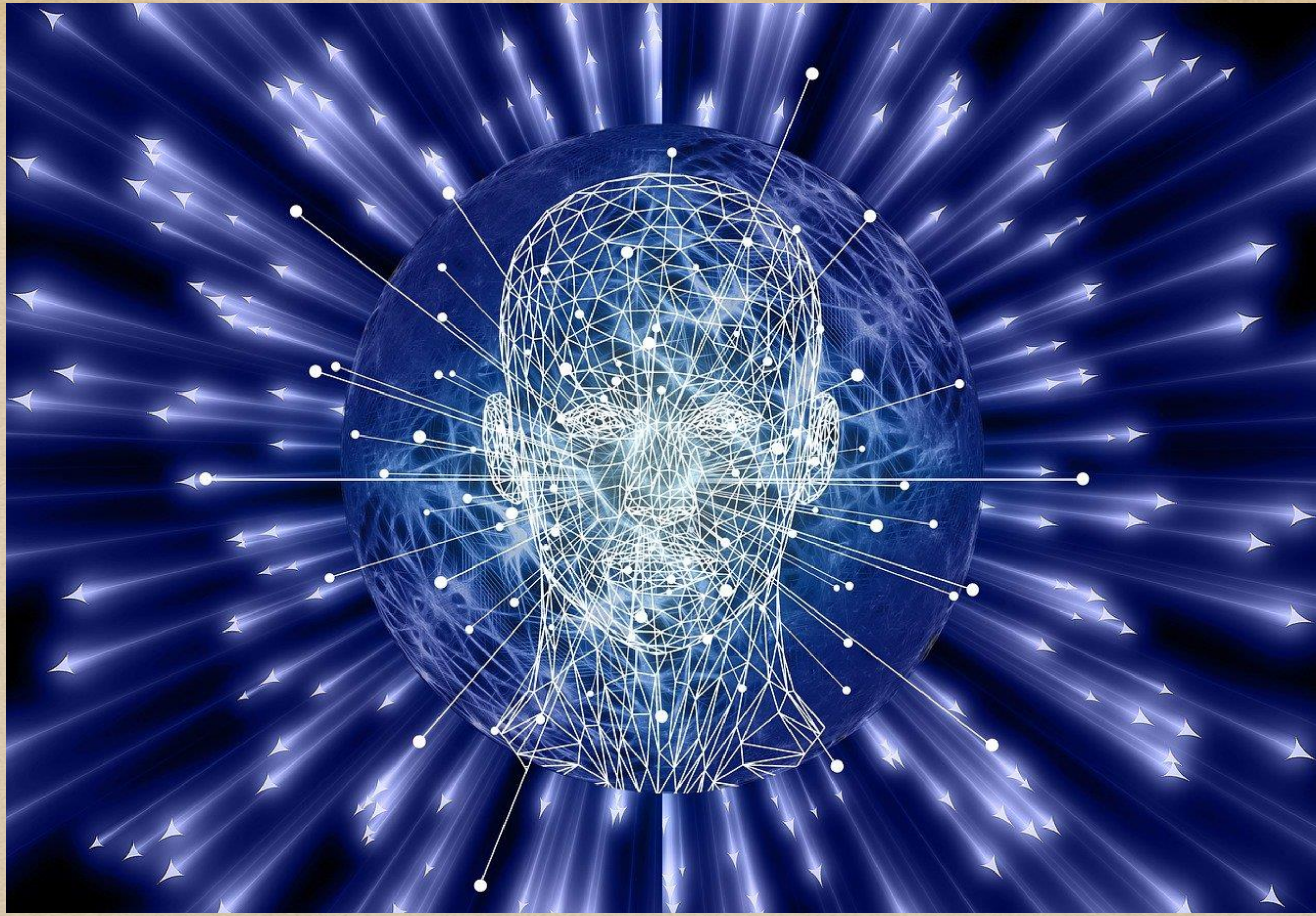
## Cellular Changes

- Affects the hippocampus, responsible for motivation, emotion, learning and memory
- Affects intracellular degradation (autophagy)



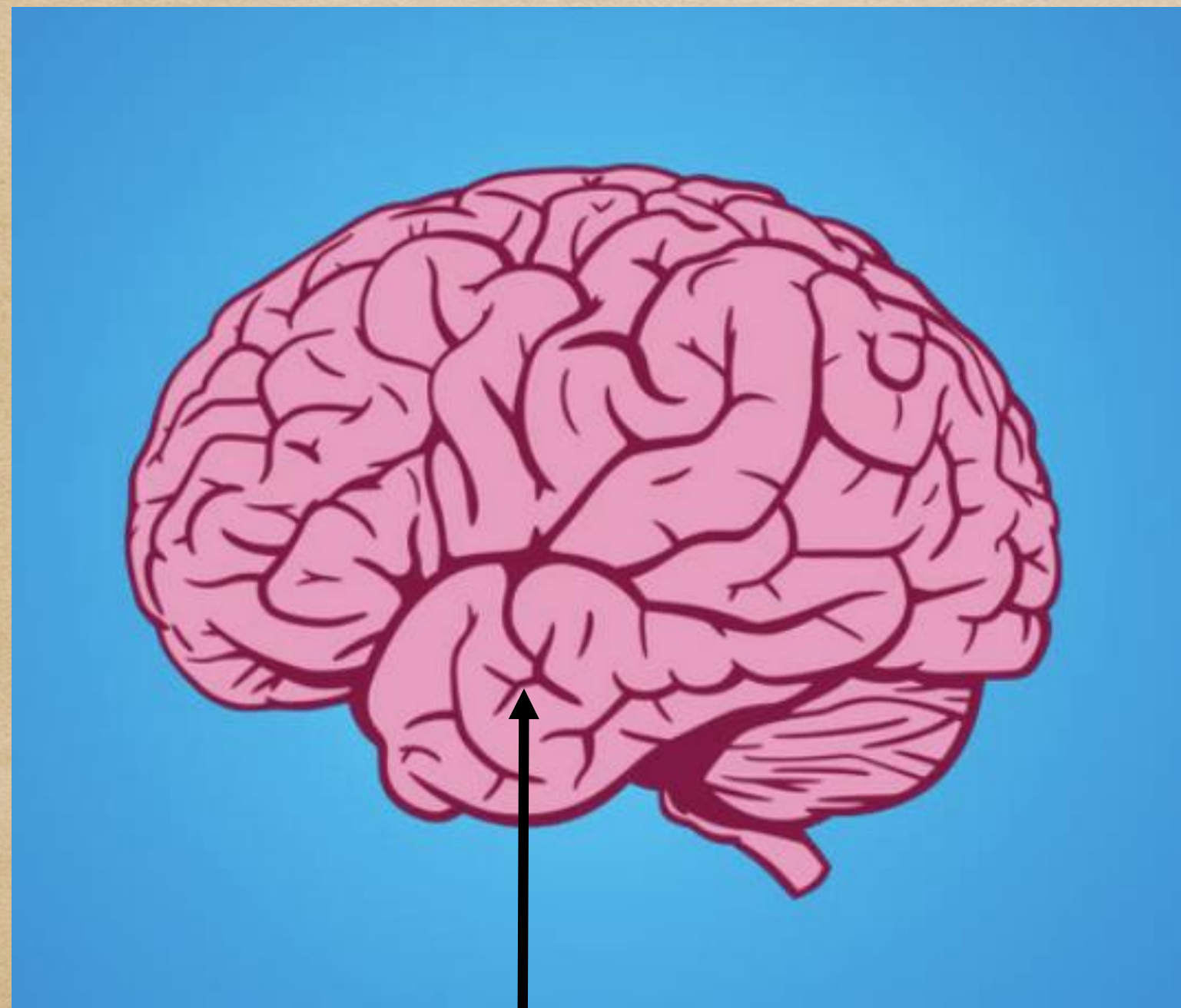
## Amygdala

- Increases in size making you more receptive to stress
- Activates H-P-A axis
- Continual activation of fight/flight/freeze response



The Brain is the first target for stress  
It regulates the body's biological response to stress

# Amygdala



Amygdala

- Where fear is processed
- Connects emotion to physiology
- Initiates the fight or flight response
- Increased activation with fear, anxiety and anger
- Can not distinguish between what is real and what is imagined
- Can not reason in words

# Unhelpful Words

- “Don’t worry!”
- “Don’t be afraid”
- “Just relax.”
- “Calm down.”
- “That’s no big deal.”
- “Don’t think about it.”
- “Don’t get so upset.”
- “It won’t hurt that much?”



# Breathing

- Breath constitutes the pivotal mind-body connection
- Breath both influences and is influenced by mind and body
- Reacts to every internal and external stimulus

Life Begins  
and  
Ends with a Breath





Breathing is the first  
physiologic function  
to change with emotion

Inspiration blocks parasympathetic tone and allows sympathetic excess.



Expiration increases parasympathetic

# Optimal Health

slight parasympathetic excess



# Diaphragmatic Breathing

- stimulates the vagus nerve
- relaxes muscles
- calms nerves
- releases endorphins
- increases percentage of oxygenated blood returning to the heart to be pumped out to the myocardium, body, and brain

# RHYTHM

- The nervous system operates on the basis of rhythm
- Connecting natural rhythms of breathing and movement, with specific reptilian brainstem rhythms create daily rhythms that are soothing

Maggie Phillips

# Breathing Exercise



# How pain works

- When pain message reaches higher brain centers it combines with beliefs, thoughts, emotions, memories and sensory input of smell, sight and sound
- The brain then filters, selects, modulates and interprets all of these dimensions in the final pain experience

Fear of  
pain can be  
worse  
than the  
pain itself

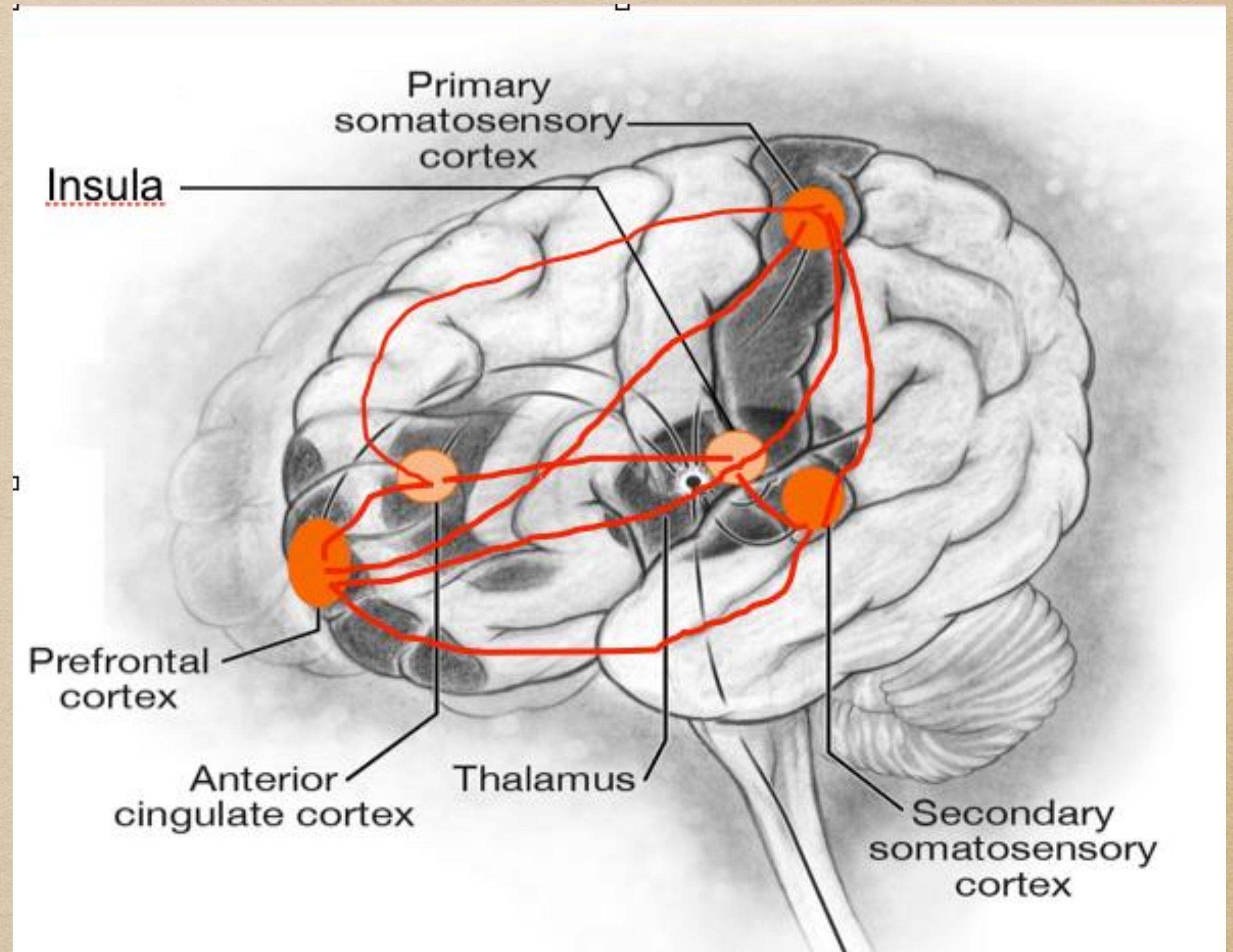


# How pain works

- Brain decides if it is pain and how to deal with it
  - if alarmed - system speeds up transmission and intensity of pain
  - if not alarmed and tolerable - descending inhibitory control system is activated
    - endorphins, serotonin and norepinephrine are released to ease the pain

# Neuromatrix of Pain Centers in the Brain

- Thalamus
- Somatosensory Cortex
- Anterior Cingulate Cortex
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Insula





↑ Activity in one area ↑ activity in others  
Decreasing activity in one area decreases activity in others

# Favorite Place

- Just having someone imaginatively experience a favorite place affects all 5 of the main pain areas in the brain





# Suggestions for a Favorite Place

- Your body needs to be here while I care for it, but in your mind you can go somewhere you love and enjoy
- Where would you rather be than here right now?...
- Go there now in your imagination.

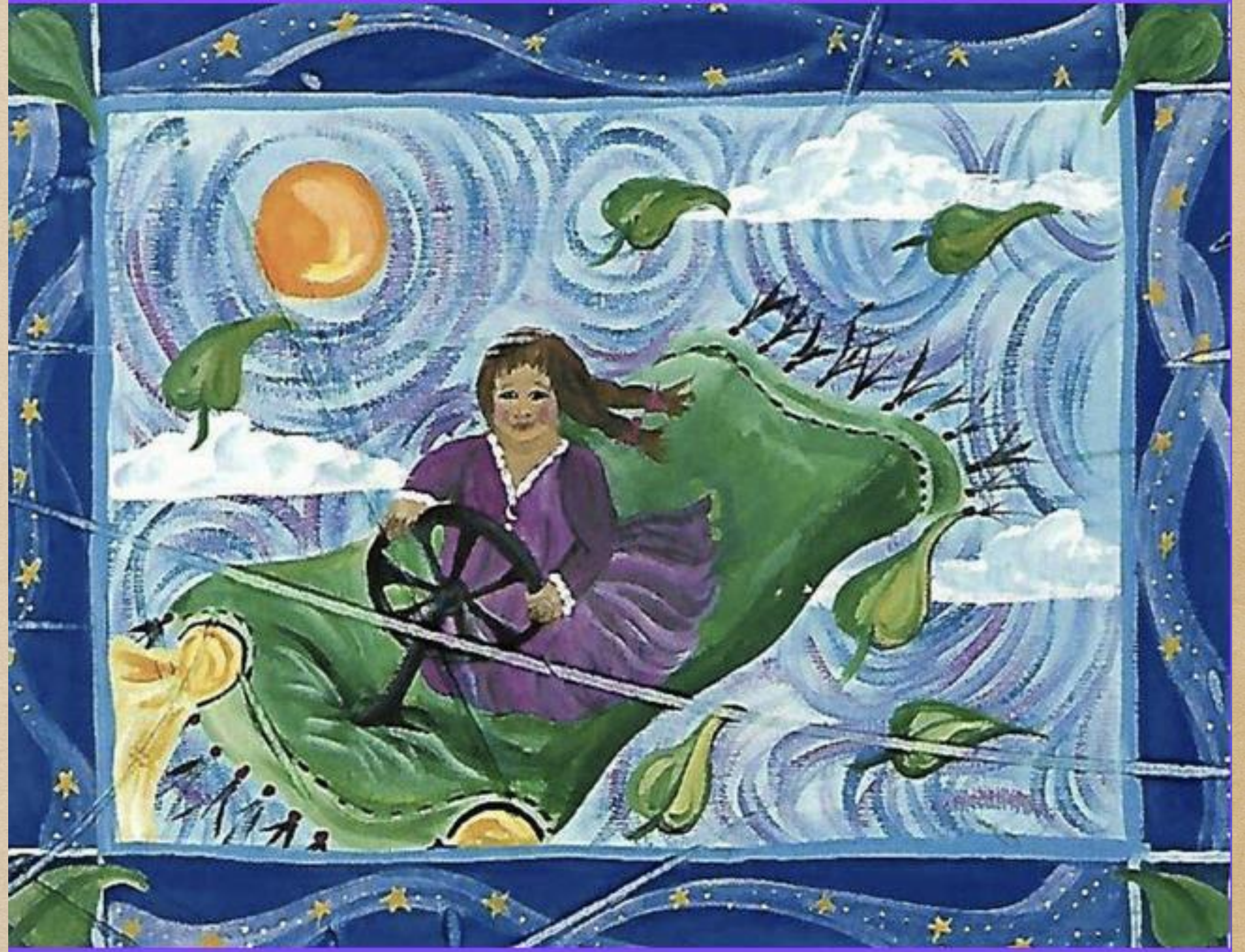




Go to your Happy Place

For Kids:

Imagine hopping on a Magic Carpet that can fly you anywhere you want to go, or back to somewhere you have already been, or maybe someplace you have never been and only imagined.



# The Effect of Hypnotic Healing Language on the Autonomic Nervous System

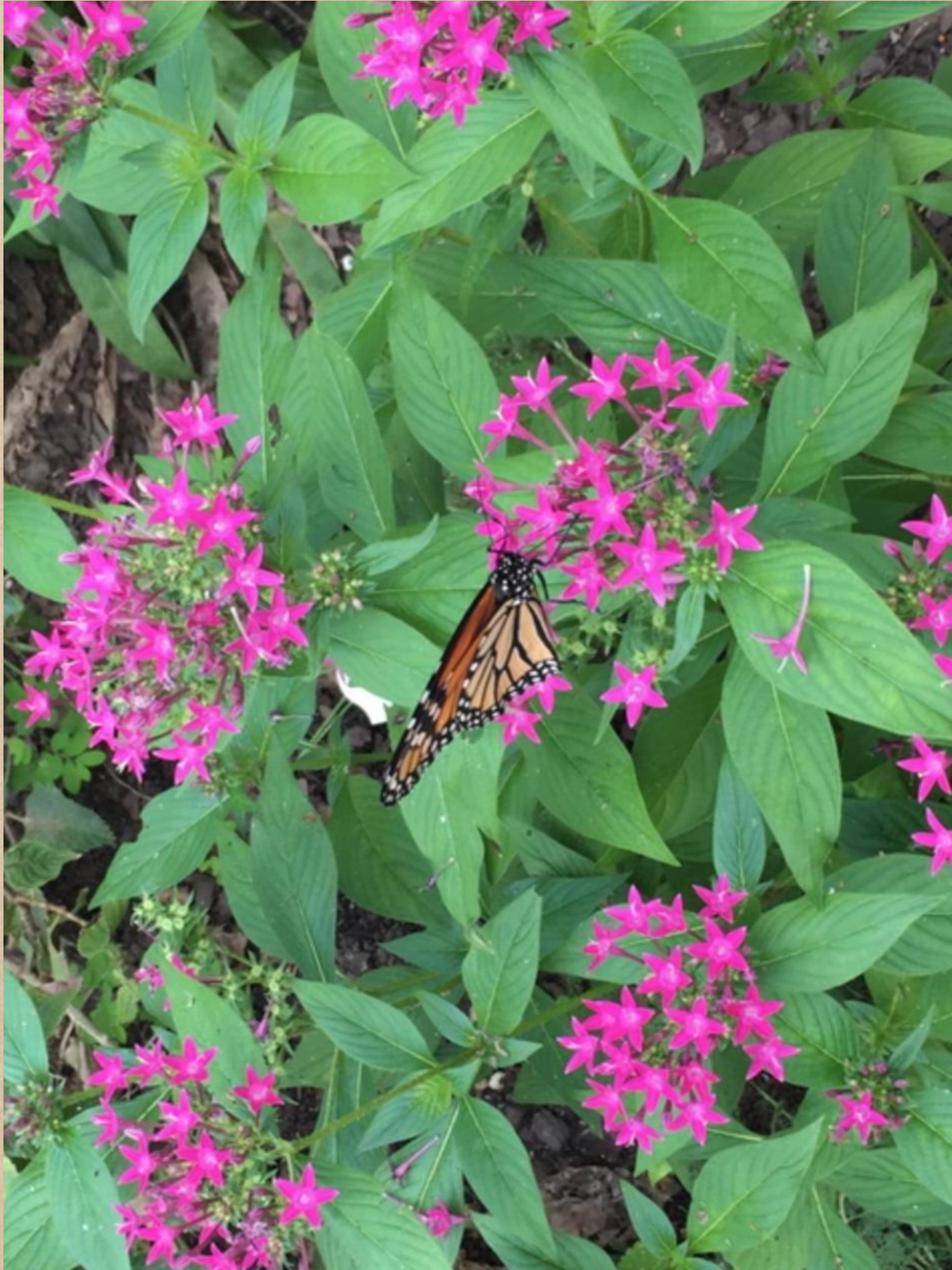
- Optimizes balance between SNS and PNS
- Stabilizes nervous, GI and CV systems
- Enhances or decreases blood flow
- Decreases patient's perception of pain and the suffering caused by pain

# The Effect of Hypnotic Healing Language on the Autonomic Nervous System

- Allows a pathway to change the significance of internal and external events
- Increases patient/practitioner control over their perception and response to symptoms (pain, anxiety, nausea)
- Increases ability to find creative solutions to physical and emotional problems
- “Calms the brain” (Mark Jensen)

# Benefits of hypnotic communication beyond somatic effects

- Restore/ maintain/ enhance competence, self-mastery, independence, dignity & autonomy
- Reduce helplessness – Increase coping skills and sense of control
- Provide skills to re-interpret experiences positively
- Active partnership of patients with their medical team
- Decrease suffering



The strongest  
medicine on earth is  
the human spirit.  
Sometimes a little  
encouragement is all  
that is needed to pull  
off a miracle!

- You are going to make it.
- You can do this
- I am here to help.
- You have got a lot a people who are here and are going to take good care of you.



- Stimulate the imagination
- Provide distraction
- Create images of future success
- Remembering past successes
- Stimulate a memory

# Power of Words

# Therapeutic Communication

- 7% communication is word dependent
- 38% communication is prosody and rhythm
- 55% is non-verbal facial expressions, body posture and gestures

Sugarman, AJCH, 2018

# Therapeutic Communication

- What we say
- What we do not say
- How we say it
- When we say it
- Why we say it
- Who we say it to





Stay very still

VS

Don't move

# Therapeutic Language

Focus on what you want to  
have happen, rather than  
what you don't want to  
happen



# BUT or AND

BUT negates what came  
before

AND connects them both  
and creates an expectation  
of agreement

# But or And

- The procedure will make your knee feel better  
**AND** there are some possible complications that  
can occur
- The procedure will make your knee feel better  
**BUT** there are some possible complications that  
can occur

# But or And

- There are some possible complications that can occur **AND** the procedure will make your knee feel better
- There are some possible complications that can occur **BUT** the procedure will make your knee feel better

# But or And

- “Yes, Mr. Johnson, I know this is the second time that this has happened recently, **BUT** I need to change your appointment time.
- “Yes, Mr. Johnson, I hear how frustrating this is for you **AND** what an inconvenience it causes in your work **AND** I wonder whether this Thursday or Friday morning at 8:30 will be better for you.”



“Try” implies  
failure

Do or do not do,  
there is no try

# Comment when things are moving in a positive direction

- Did you notice how your heart rate and breathing have already slowed?
- It is good to see that you know how to help yourself.
- You can change things you thought you couldn't and control what you never knew you could
- It is good to trust in your abilities

# Taking the Hurt out of Pain

- I know it hurts, but I am wondering how wonderful it would be to start taking the hurt out of the pain? It would be interesting to make it cooler - like putting snow or ice on it or changing it to a delicious numbness filtering the hurt out of the pain. With each out breath, letting go more and more.

# The Strain in Pain Stays Mainly in the Brain

- Focus the attention to another part of the body
- Give patient a task
  - curl big toe up and the others down and then switch
  - write letters in the palm of the hand
  - humor
  - magic



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



**Pain**



- **disCOMFORT**
- **unPLEASANT**
- **unCOMFORTABLE**

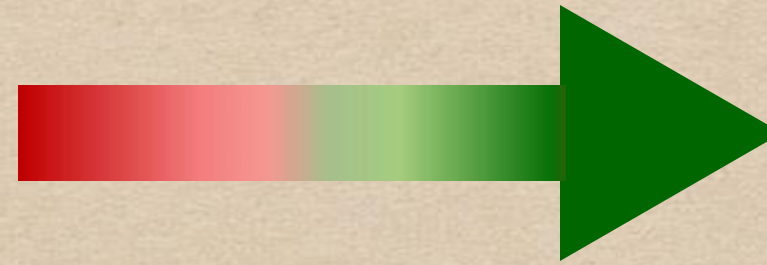


**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- Shot
- Needle



- Put some medication in your arm
- Poke
- Prick
- Pinch

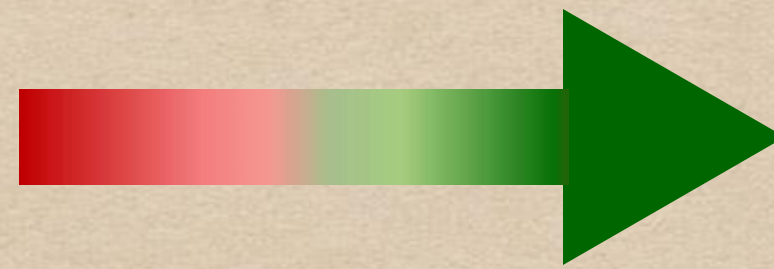


**Avoid**

**Preferred**



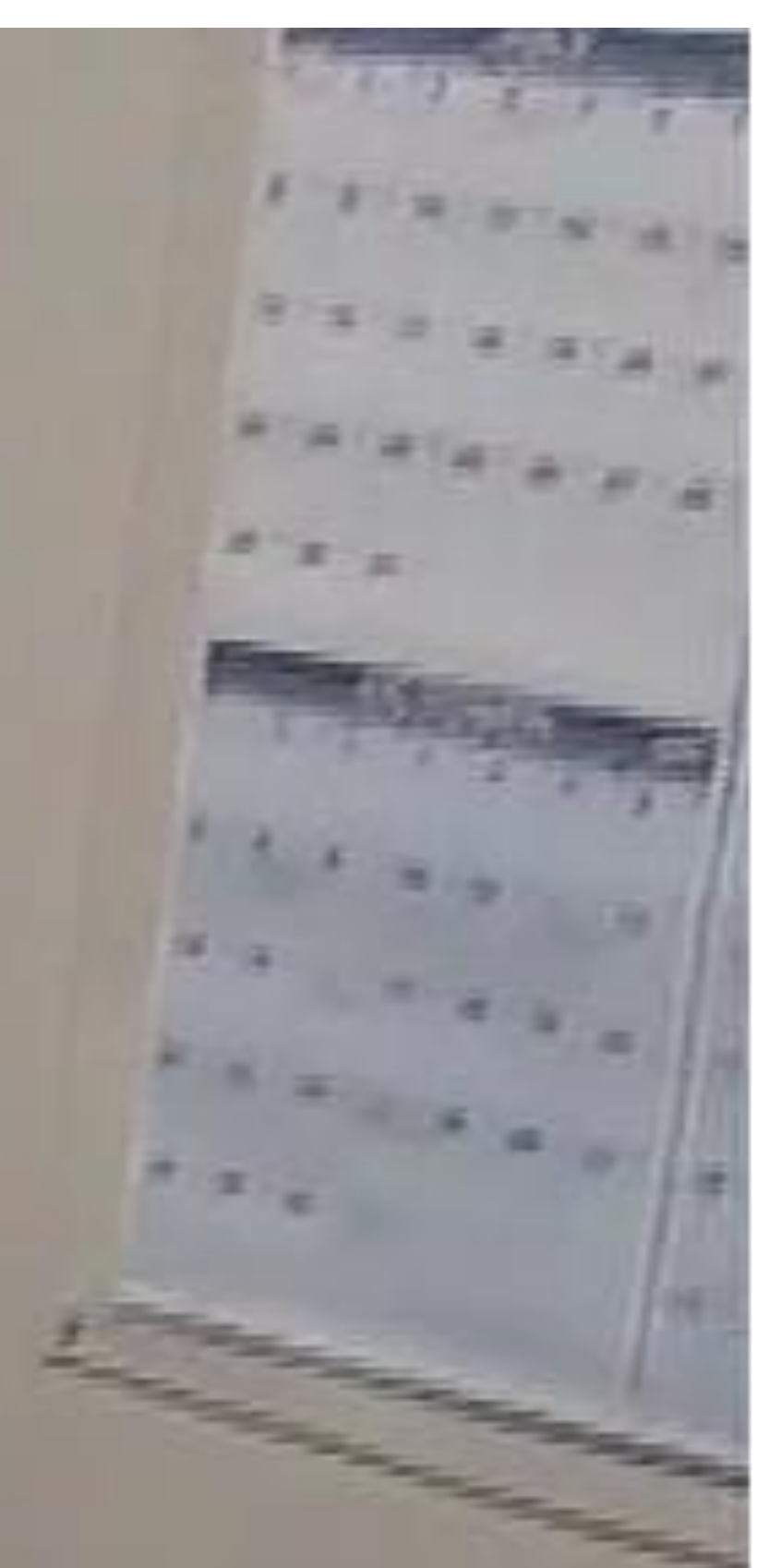
- Tongue Depressor
- Culture your throat



- Ahhhhh Stick
- Tickle your tonsils



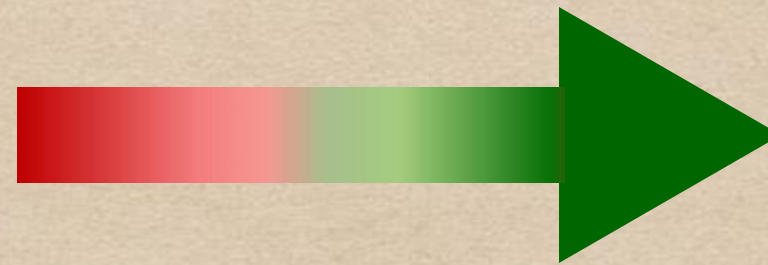
OUR KINOTHESES  
by [illegible]





## Avoid

- Burning
- Stinging
- Painful
- Hurts
- Bad
- Awful



## Preferred

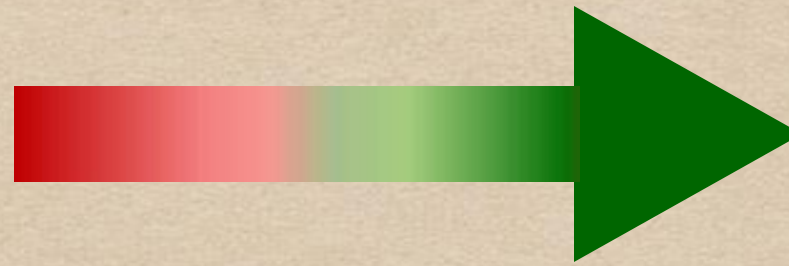


- Warm
- Tingly
- Sore
- Scratchy
- Cranky
- Soft
- Gently
- Easily
- Quickly
- Nicely
- Bothers



## Avoid

- How long has your ear been hurting you?
- What have you tried for the pain in your sore throat?
- Take this pill for your pain



## Preferred



- When did that start to bother you?
- What have you already done to make yourself feel better?
- This will help you feel more comfortable



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- That's really bleeding a lot.



- That healthy bright red blood is washing away all the germs.
- I wonder which cut will stop bleeding first.



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



• How much pain are you in?



• What part of your body needs our special attention?



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



• You'll just have to learn to live with the pain



• No pain lasts forever



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- I am going to put the emesis basin here for when your throw-up.



- I am going to be here with you and have everything you need to make you feel more comfortable.



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- You are going to be in a lot of pain after your surgery.



- The sensations you feel will be those of healing and mending and need not bother you.
- It will be interesting for you to discover how comfortable you will be after surgery.



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- Tell me when your pain gets bad and we will try some pain medication.



- Tell us whenever you want some support. You know, we always can do something good for you to make you comfortable.
- You will have all the comfort you need.

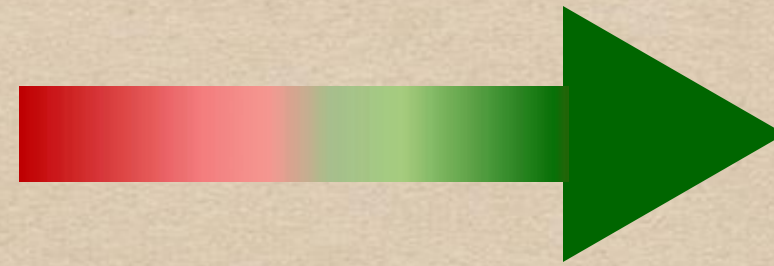


**Avoid**

**Preferred**



• I want to know if you have noticed any improvement.



• Tell me about the improvements you have already noticed.

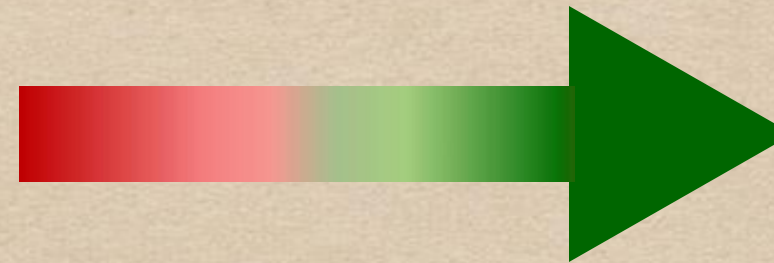


**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- Do not pay attention to the pain.
- You need to .....
- You must .....



- Focus your attention on .....
- It is possible that you .....

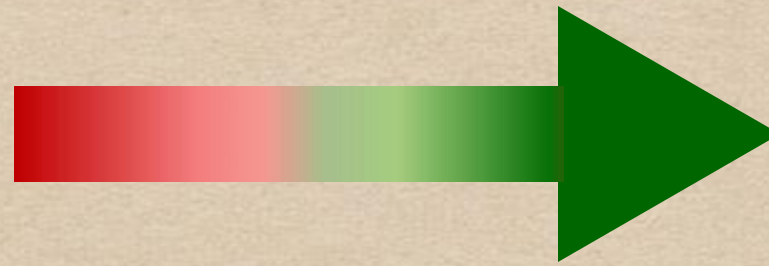


**Avoid**

**Preferred**



• We will put you to sleep.



• We will temporarily anesthetize your body.



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- It's all over. You're finished.



- When you are aware of the pressure under your bandages, you will know that you are already in the recovery room and your healing and recovery is already beginning.

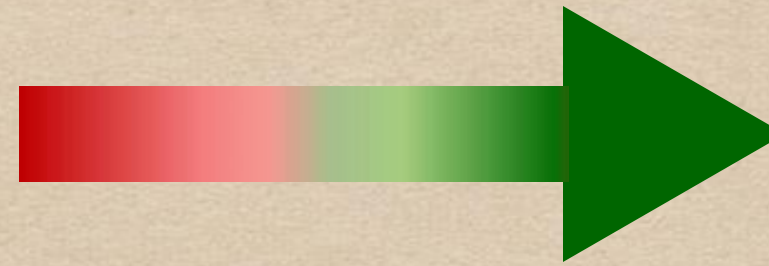


**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- Be quiet and don't cry.
- I have to give you a shot and it is going to hurt.



- You have great lungs and big beautiful tears.
- Would it be alright for this poke not to bother you?

Experiential Exercise  
of  
Effective Communication



**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- Try not to move your arm
- It will only hurt for a second
- It won't be that bad





**Avoid**

**Preferred**



- It is going to sting and burn
- It could be worse
- Let me know when it hurts a lot



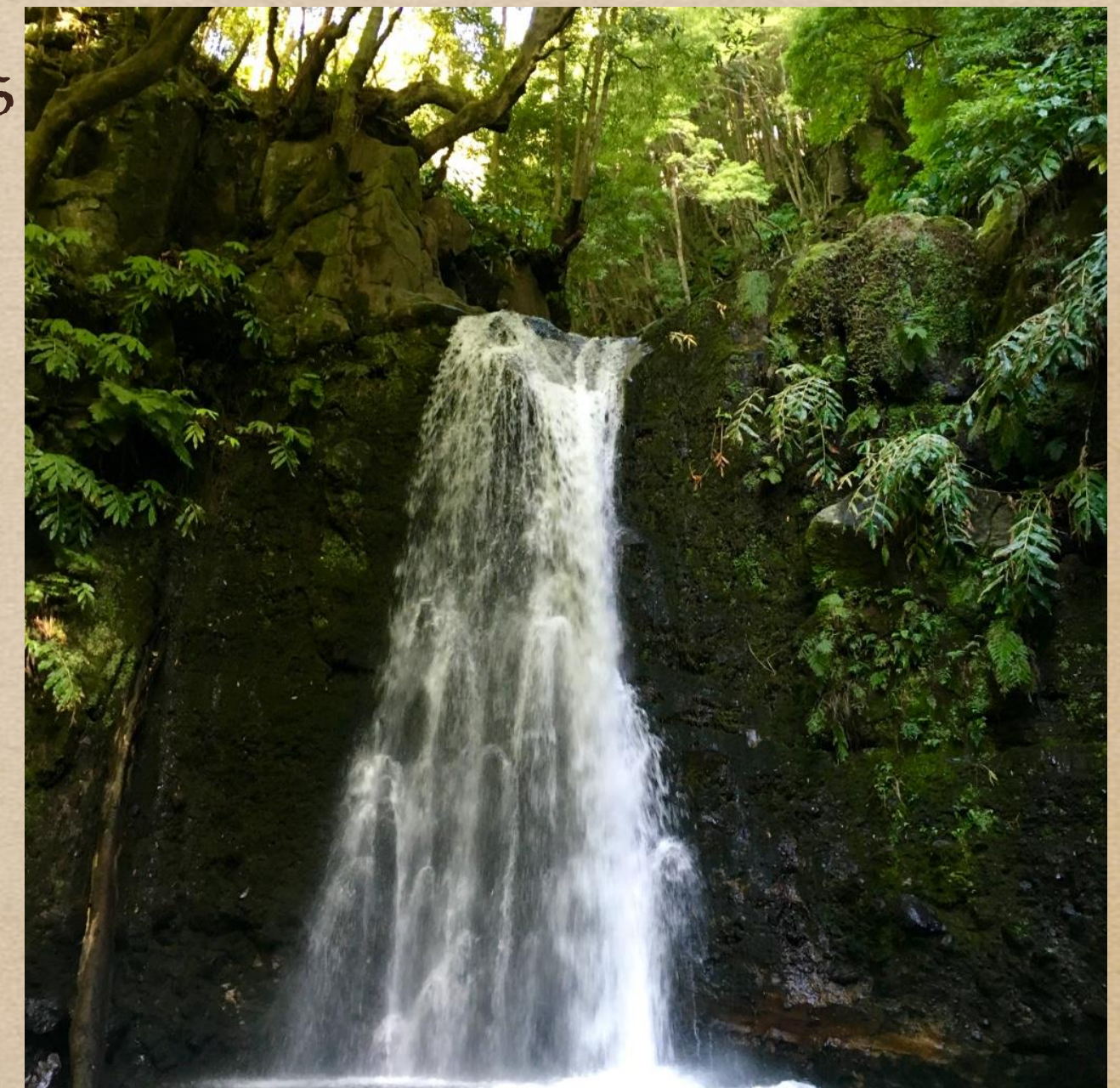
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# Take Away Points

- Be credible
- Give confidence
- Connect to the patient - develop rapport
- Be respectful and explain what you are going to do
- Be positive, create positive expectation, future focus when situation is over with successful recovery

# Take Away Points

- In a stressful or emergency situation, everything becomes suggestion
- Exude confidence and optimism
- Help patient help themselves
- Everyone has their own inner resources and coping mechanisms
- Recognize the patient's resources and use them





YZA



QZLISH—OZS



# Q & A



# Contact Information

Linda Thomson, PhD, APRN, ABMH, ABHN, FASCH  
131 Thomson Drive  
Ludlow, VT 05149

[LindaThomson@Hypnovations.com](mailto:LindaThomson@Hypnovations.com)  
[www.HypnosisforHealthandHealing.net](http://www.HypnosisforHealthandHealing.net)