

# **UNDERSTANDING THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN**

**SLJH PARENT ACADEMY  
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# ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

*A teenager's brain  
"has a well-  
developed  
accelerator but  
only a partly  
developed brake."*

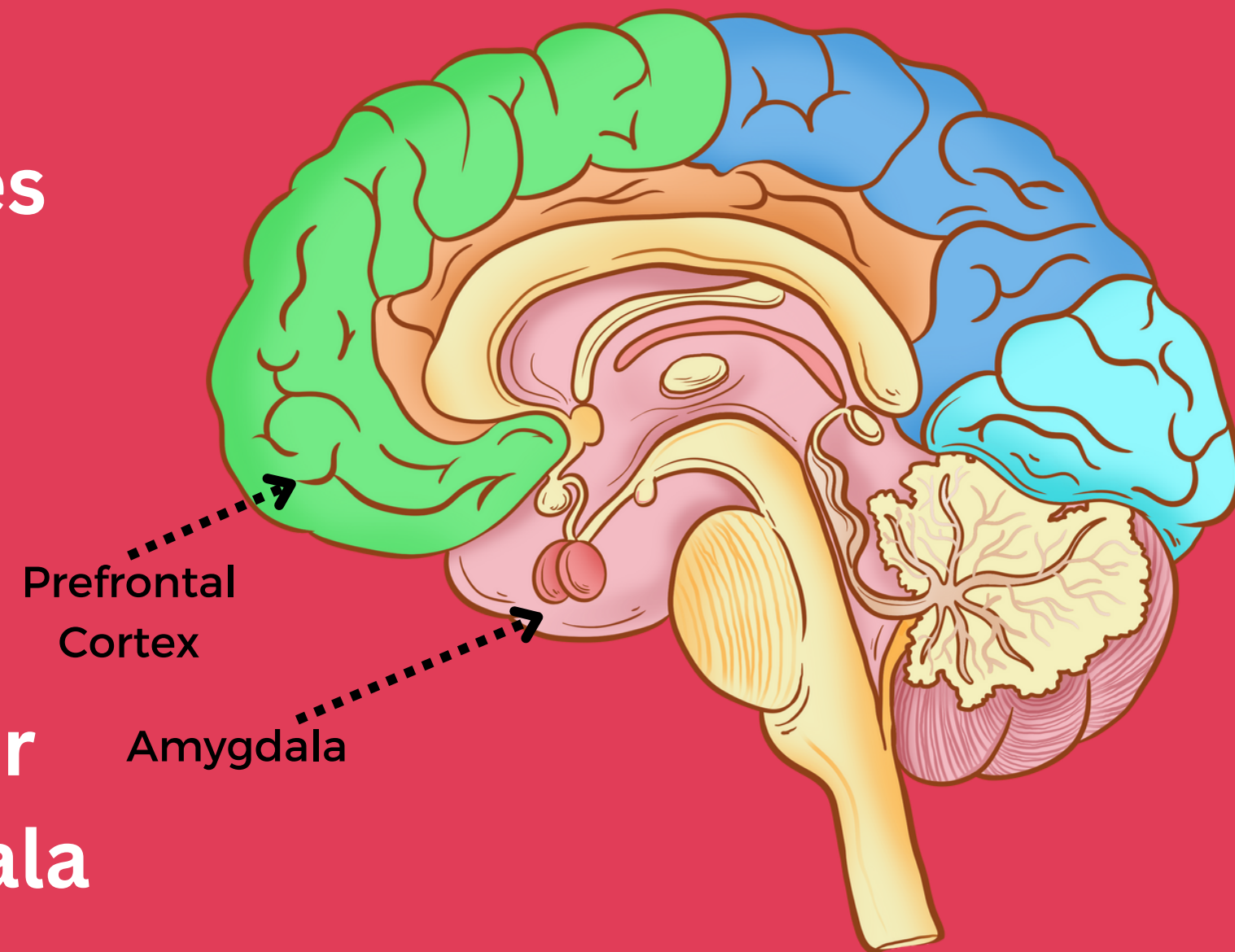
Laurence  
Steinberg





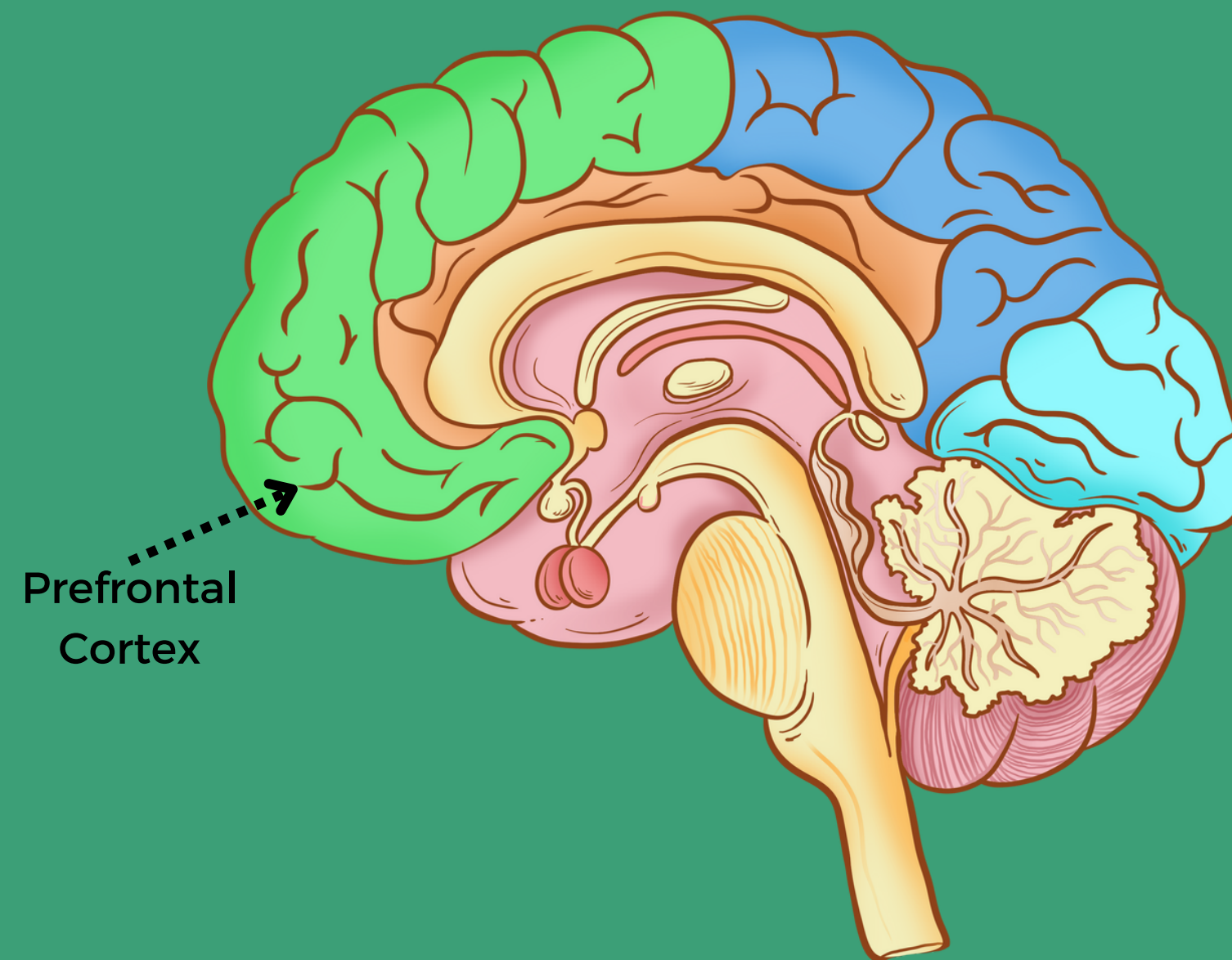
# THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BRAIN

- Brain development continues until the mid-twenties
- Adults think with the brain's rational part (prefrontal cortex)
- Teenagers process all of their information with the amygdala—the emotional center



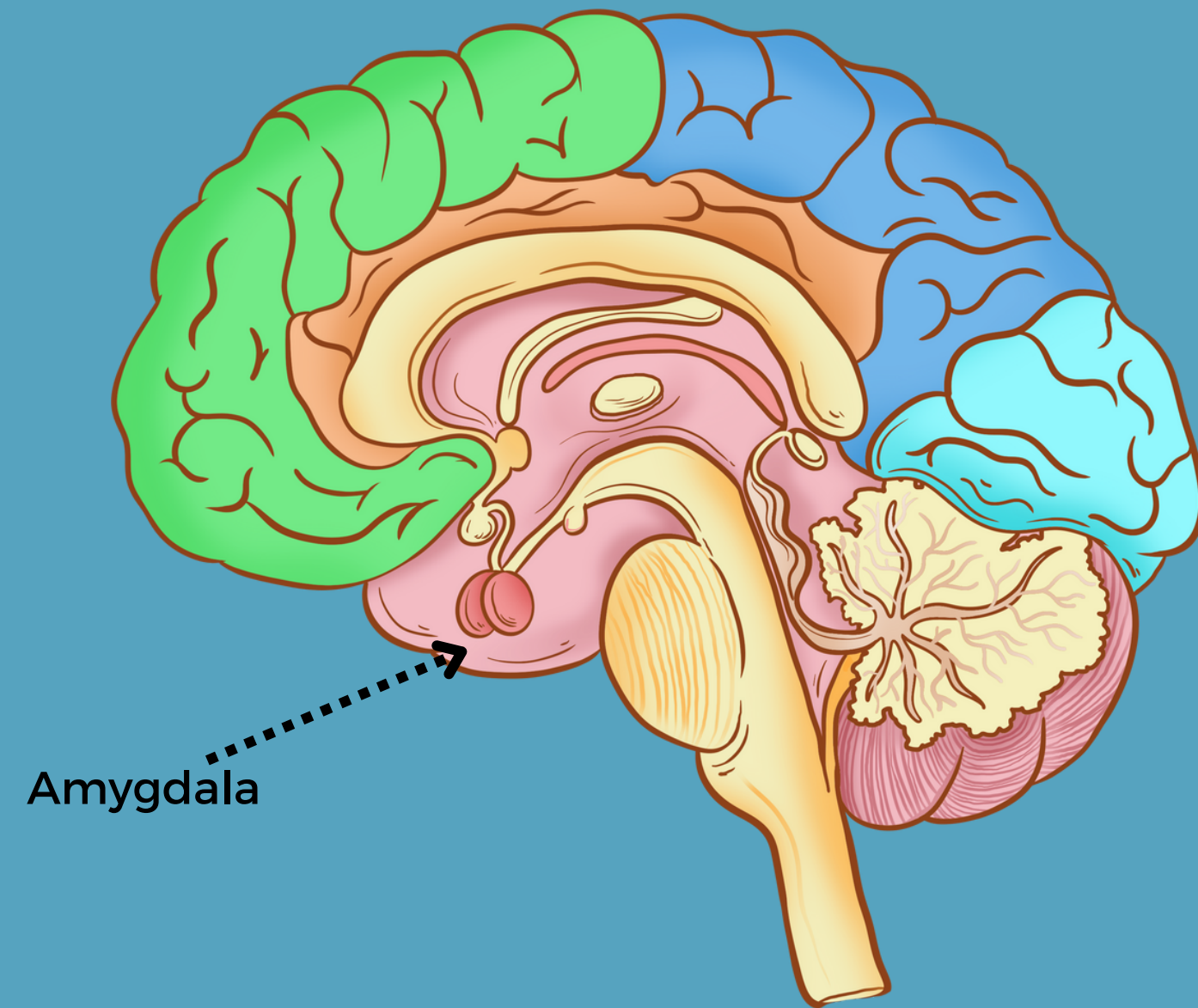
# PREFRONTAL CORTEX

The PFC is a front part of the brain responsible for thinking, decision-making, and emotions. It helps us remember things, focus, and control impulses. When we learn new things, the PFC changes its connections between brain cells, allowing us to adapt and respond better to different situations.



# AMYGDALA

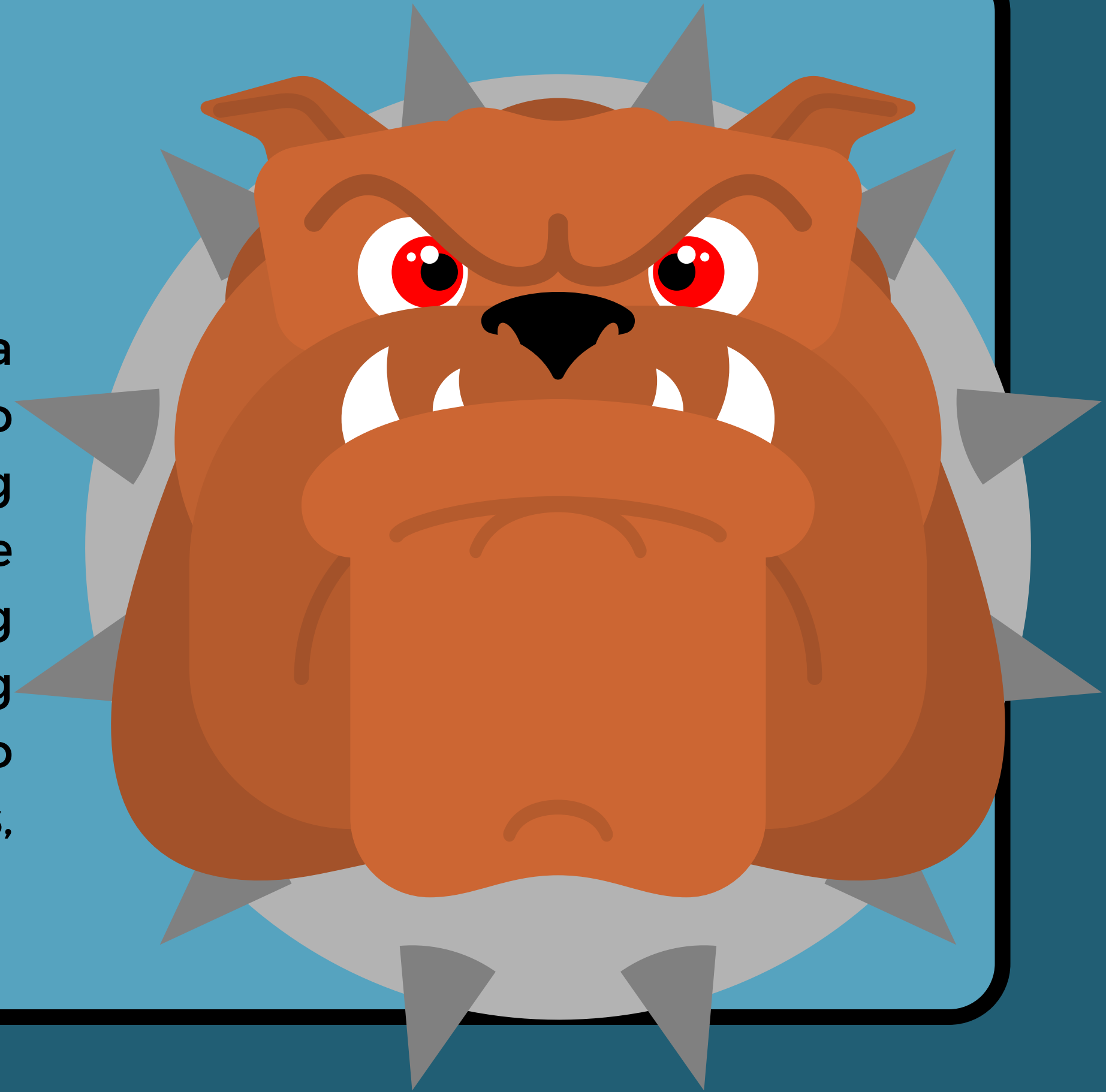
The amygdala is an almond-shaped brain structure in the temporal lobe. It deals with emotions, especially fear, and is vital for memory and motivation as part of the limbic system.



# AMYGDALA

"The Guard Dog"

Significance: The amygdala acts like a guard dog, always vigilant and alert to potential threats. Like a guard dog reacts quickly to protect its territory, the amygdala is responsible for processing emotions, particularly fear and strong emotions. It helps us respond to dangerous or emotional situations, ensuring our safety and well-being





# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR AN ADOLESCENT BRAIN?

- The middle prefrontal cortex redevelops...which means they remaster skills learned in early childhood.
- It's a paradox: their brains are sharp, but they don't know what to do with them yet. They have fast-growing brain synapses and then sections that are not connected at all.



# BEHAVIOR



- They start to question “Who am I” and forming identity, including self-concept and self-esteem
- They express themselves through debate due to new reasoning and logic skills
- They become very interested in fairness or justice

# BEHAVIOR



- They begin to think more abstractly.
- They start developing their own beliefs and may take up a cause such as becoming vegetarian, women's rights, etc.
- They spend an immense amount of time thinking about themselves--this is not out of selfishness, it's an actual stage of teenage brain development

# BEHAVIOR



- They have a different brain experience when reading emotions. They react from their limbic area (emotions) while adults react from their prefrontal cortex (rational).
- They are naturally impulsive and lack judgement.
- Social anxiety may increase because they start worrying what others are thinking of them.

# WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CONCERN YOU ARE FACING WITH YOUR STUDENT?

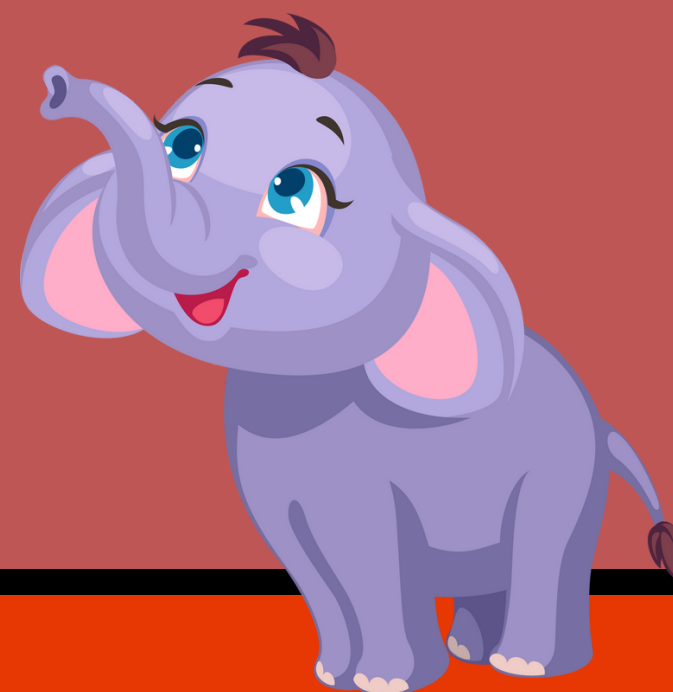
Turn to someone and discuss

Any “aha” moments so far?



# WHAT CAN PARENTS/TEACHERS DO?

- Discuss consequences—it helps their brain make the connections and wires the brain to make those connections more often
- Remind them of their resilience and competence—they play a part in changing bad situations
- Don't be too quick to jump in to “fix”—Help them with the process of problem solving



# WHAT CAN PARENTS/TEACHERS DO?

- Hold them responsible for their actions
- Be aware of their stage of life and supportive as they move forward
- Communicate feelings to expand their awareness
- Model and assist the child in developing decision making skills
- Don't take the behavior changes personally!



# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR DAILY LIFE & SCHOOL?

- Teenagers are largely sleep-deprived. Changing hormones impact release of melatonin so they tend to fall asleep later. They NEED 10 hours each night!
- Sensory overload hinders recall—we can't close off the world, so they must learn how to manage
- Help them problem solve
- Practice with them the habits you want to create
- Stay close—be interested in what interests them





# ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

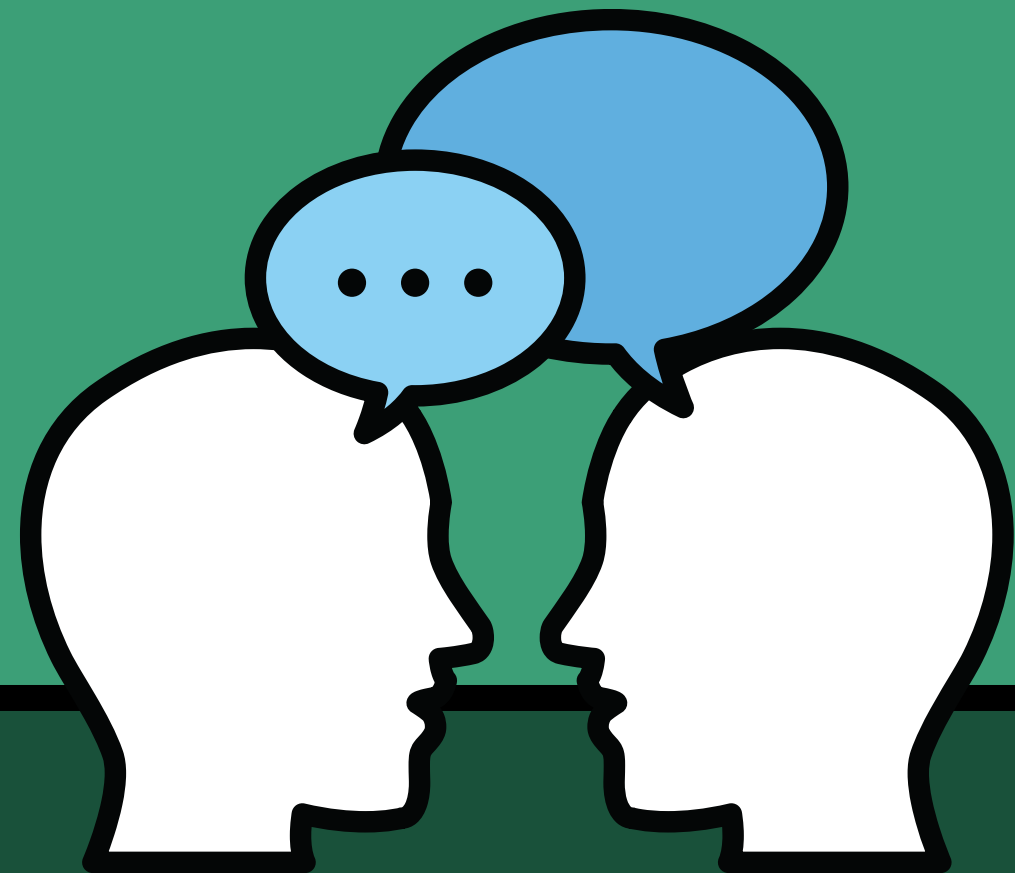
- Prepare for the following day the night before (pick out clothes, load backpack, etc.)
- Come up with a system for documenting homework (phone, planner, notebook)
- Have a conversation to help them determine what works best for them
- Practice with them until it becomes a habit and then regularly check in

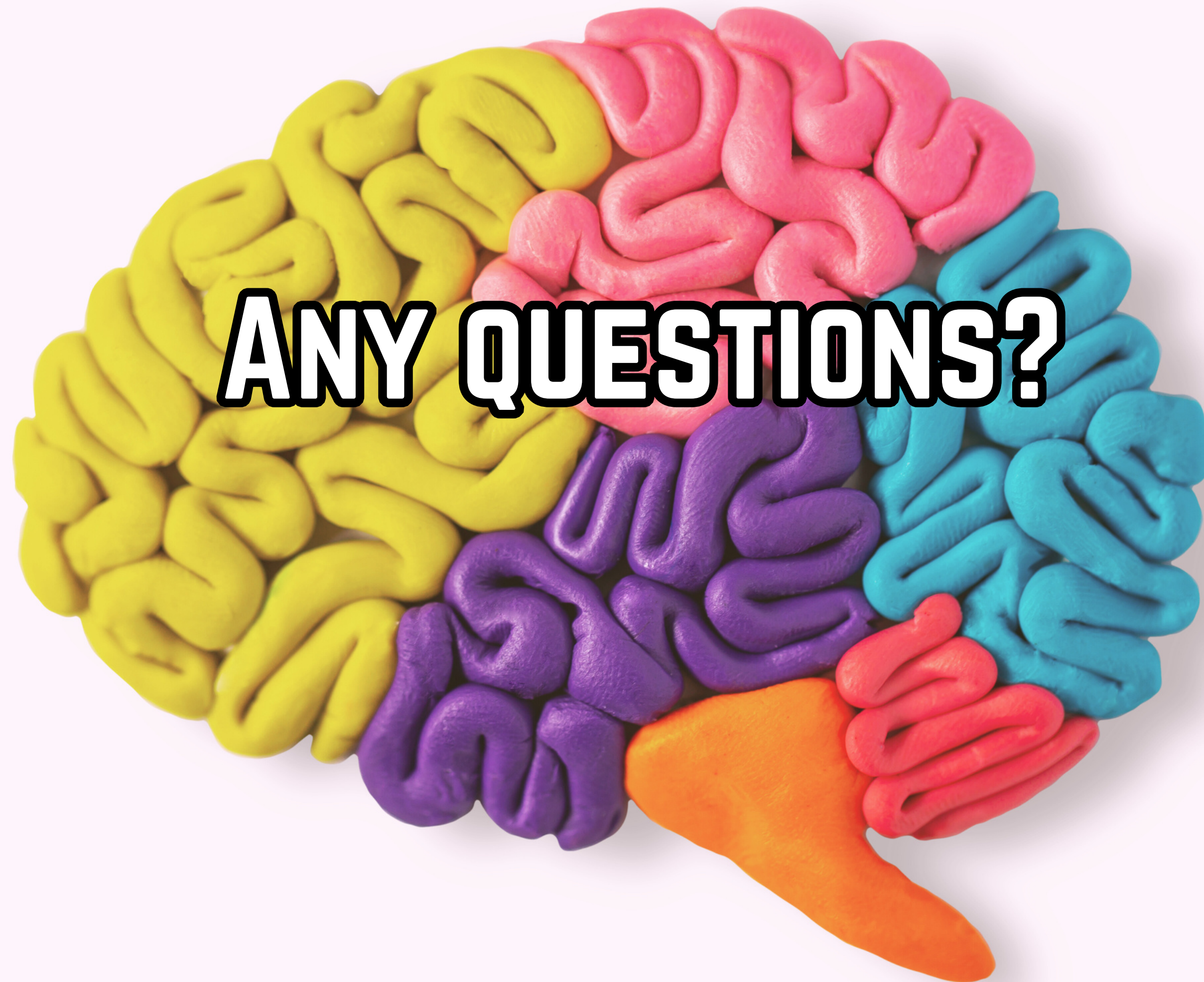




# ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

- Model how to communicate with teachers and other adults
- Model how to advocate for themselves
- Show them how to check their grades
- Do a regular “clean-out” of unnecessary papers and school items





**ANY QUESTIONS?**



# RESOURCES:

