

# Quirky Kids @ Camp:

Understanding the Kid that Doesn't "Fit In"  
And How We Can Help



# Today's Agenda

- What is a Quirky Kid? What do they look and act like?
- Neurological and Motivational causes
- Meltdown Management
- A Functional Behavioral Analysis Snapshot
- Helping Quirky Kids Follow Rules

# What is a Quirky Kid?

- A child that does things radically differently from his/her peers;
- Socially immature for their age;
- Unable to pick up social cues and unspoken rules;
- Few or no friends;
- Impulsive and/or spacey;
- Rigid about rules and/or routines;
- Odd sounds, walks, subjects;
- Monologues at people;
- Incongruent emotional outbursts.

# Why a Special Presentation for QK?

- It's just plain hard to be them;
- Regular behavior advice doesn't work;
- QK more vulnerable to long-term depression and anxiety
- QK often socially ostracized by his/her behavior
- QK have genuinely good intentions, yet...
- Most adults have good intentions too, yet...

# Attention Bubble: Too Small

The  
SPACE  
CADET

## What might be going on:

- \* ADHD (inattentive type)
- \* Autism
- \* Sensory Issues
- \* Trauma, Abuse

# Attention Bubble: Too Far Away



The  
SQUIRREL

## What might be going on:

- \* ADHD (hyperactive & impulsive types)
- \* Sensory Issues
- \* Trauma, Abuse

# Poor Emotional Regulation

The  
POWDER  
KEG

AAAAGH!

What might be going on:

- \* ADHD
- \* Autism Spectrum
- \* Sensory Issues
- \* Abuse, Trauma, Attachment

# Poor Group Socialization

I love Dr Who! I can't wait to tell everyone every detail I know about Dr. Who. They'll love it, just like me! Or else they're STUPID.

MR.  
OBLIVIOUS

## What might be going on:

- \* ADHD
- \* Autism Spectrum
- \* Sensory Issues
- \* Abuse, Attachment





# Attachment Injury

The  
**FRAGILE  
FLOWER**

*Boo-hooooooo....*  
Everybody hates me...  
Nobody cares about me...  
I have no friends...

## What might be going on:

- \* Autism Spectrum
- \* Mood Disorders
- \* Abuse / Trauma

# Camp life for QK

- Exhaustion;
- Obliviousness;
- Disconnection with emotions;
- Lots of social mistakes;
- Labeled “Bad,” “Annoying,” “The Problem,” “Stupid;”
- Vulnerable to predators.



# What does this usually mean for QK?



# Our Responsibility to QK

- **Believe:** All kids are doing the best they can.
- **Trust:** All kids try to “Do Good” if allowed.
- **Understanding:** Not all brains behave like ours.
- **Understanding II:** Not all people have backgrounds like ours.
- **Patience:** Some kids need more time / tries than others.
- **Inclusion:** All humans (even kids!) deserve basic respect.

# Understanding Quirky Emotional Regulation

What's going on inside  
that head, anyway?

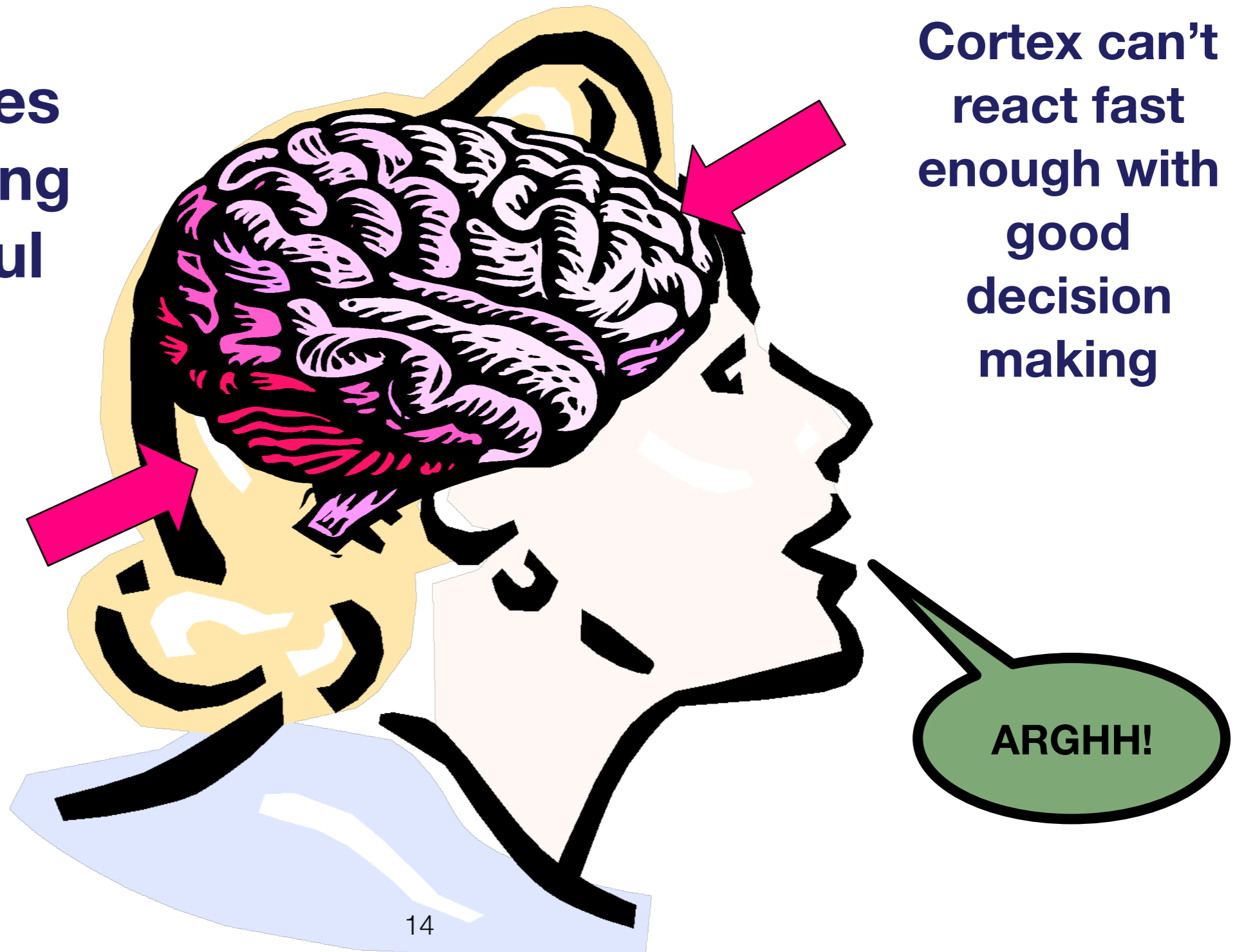


# What's Going On In There?

1. Brain perceives something stressful

2. Amygdala quickly reacts in *Fight or Flight*

3. Pre-frontal Cortex can't react fast enough with good decision making



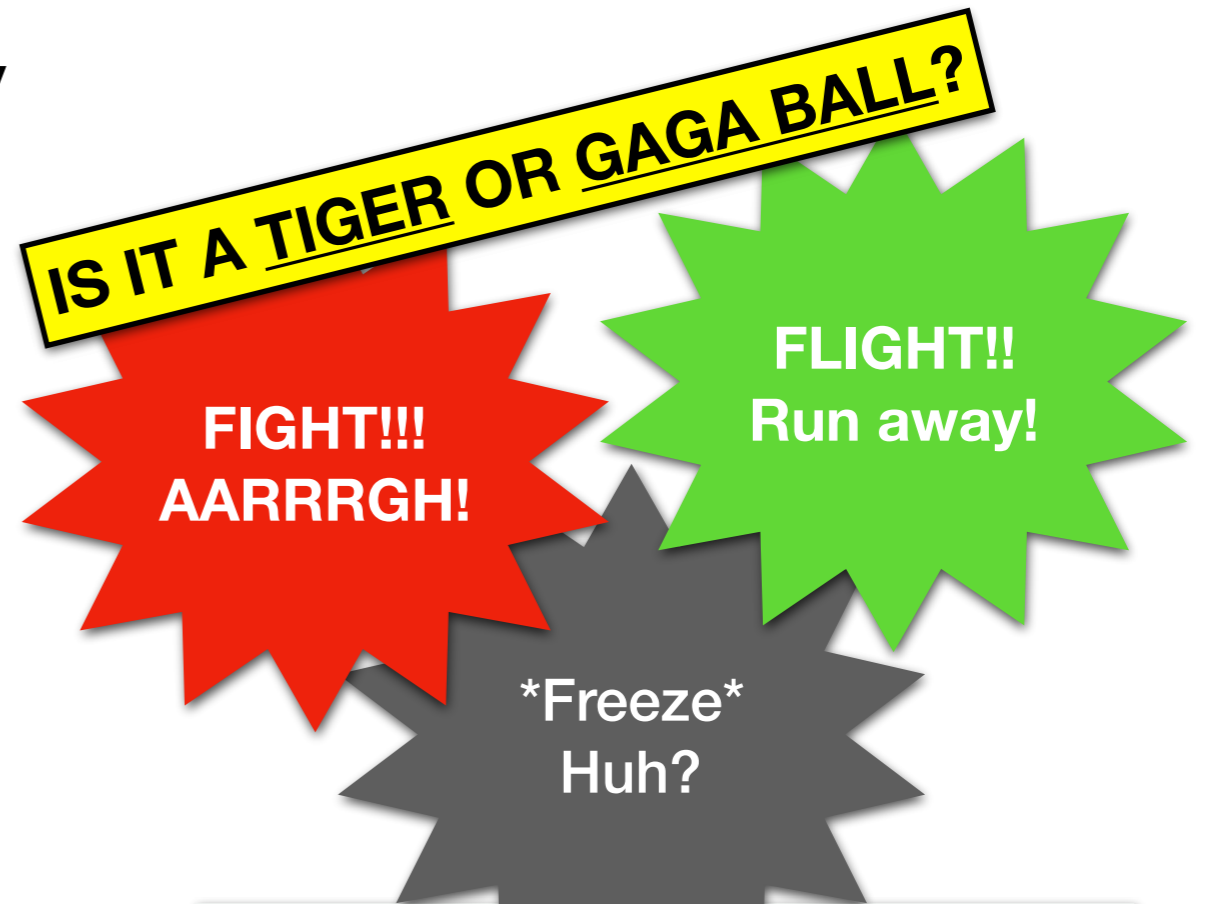
# QK's Mega-Amygdala

- Genetic Predisposition (Shy, Anxious, Pessimistic)
- Developmental Disorders : Autism, ADHD (some) Fetal Substance Exposure, Premature Birth
- Clinical Depression, Anxiety, OCD
- Childhood Abuse
- Exposure to Trauma
- Amygdala gets bigger at NIGHT



# Amy And Adrenaline

- Adrenaline floods our body to keep us SAFE:
  - Increases heartbeat
  - Shallow breathing
  - Dilates Pupils
  - Narrows thinking
  - Tightens muscles
  - Reactive Behavior
  - Slows Forehead Thinking (Prefrontal Cortex)





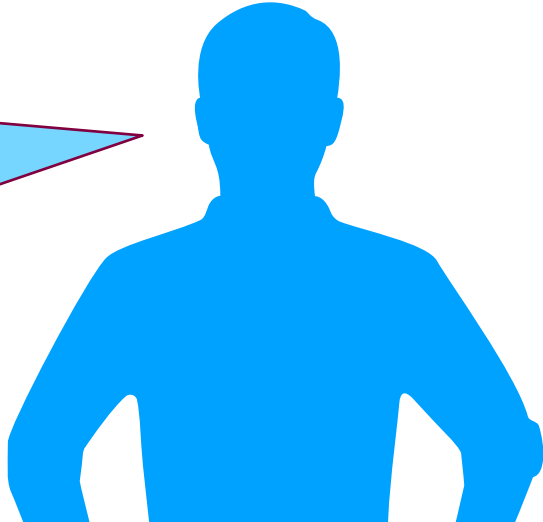
# Inhibition Man: SuperHero or SuperVillain?

- Inhibition = pausing to choose before doing
- Usually Too Little, Too Much in QK
- Inhibition uses the Prefrontal Cortex
- Depression, Social Anxiety: too much inhibition
- ADHD+: too little inhibition
- Gets worse at NIGHT!!!




# What's Theory of Mind?

- The ability to take another person's perspective and “put yourself in their shoes.”
  - ◆ Difficulty explaining own behavior;
  - ◆ Difficulty understanding emotions;
  - ◆ Difficulty predicting others' behavior or emotions;
  - ◆ Problems with conversation;
  - ◆ Problems differentiating Fiction from Fact.
  - ◆ Poor ToM can lead to easy victimization of the QK.



WHY did you do that???



That's a dumb question.

# Meltdown Management

Understanding  
Quirky Kids'  
“Bad” Behavior



# When QKs Melt

**Amy says this is a  
LIFE THREATENING  
Situation**

**Forehead is NOT  
choosing choices**

**Body tells QK that  
if they can't control it,  
they'll die**

**Entire body tenses, ready to  
spring into protective action**

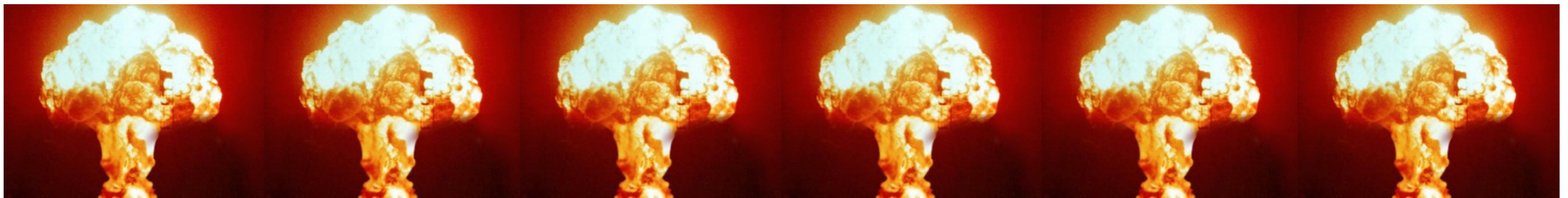


**Body tells QK if they can't  
escape, they'll die**

# Meltdown Management

- In the Moment:

- Remain Calm.
- Don't take it personal.
- Use minimal words.
- Remove child from situation, other eyes.
- This is not a “Teachable Moment.”
- Find a quiet, solitary spot to recover.



# Looking For Amy Triggers

- Sensory Overload / Sensory Deprivation
- Change and Difference
- Perceived Injustice, Past or Present
- Making Mistakes and Imperfections
- Criticism and feelings of inferiority
- “Space Invaders”
- Hunger & Exhaustion
- Unidentified physical pain



**Basically,  
everything  
about  
summer camp**

# Post-Meltdown Processing

- Wait patiently for a teachable moment.
- Keep face and voice kind, respectful, and neutral.
- Factually review the incident.
- Ask what happened (NOT why they did it).
- Appeal to their logic, not their empathy.
- Point out what they did right.



# Plan for the next one

- When calm, use example for “next time” (When, not If)
- Use a soothie poster
- Measure intensity on thermometer
- Monitor body for “rumbling” cues
- Develop “worst case plan”



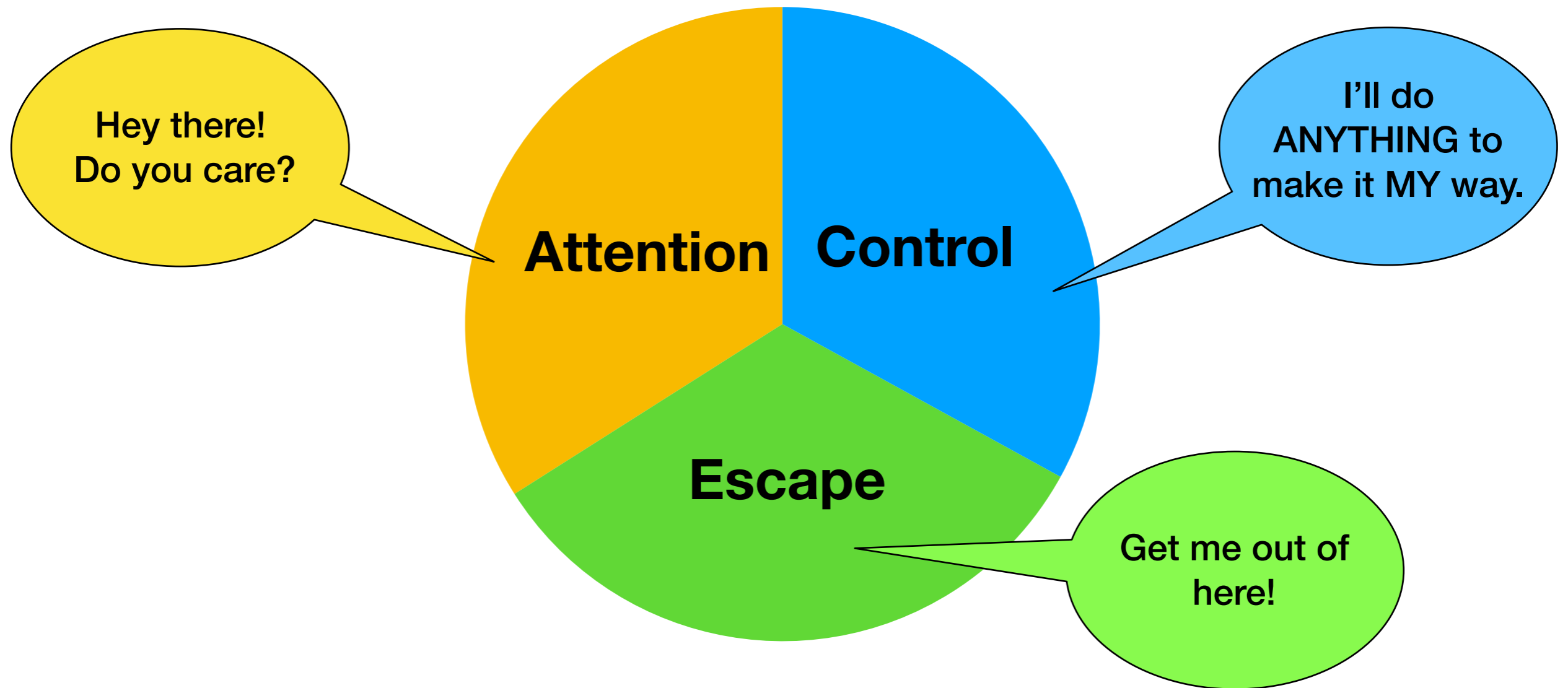
# Functional Behavioral Analysis

A reeeeaalllly basic explanation of how to do it for campers



# Bad Behavior = Needs

What am I trying to get?



- My behavior is a way to get one's needs met
- If I don't get my needs met... AAAAH!

# Figure out what they are looking for

- **Control-seeking kids:**

- Choices (visual, concrete and immediate)
- Agree / Validate with them
- Don't top-down... sideways!

- **Attention-seeking kids:**

- Move physically close
- Use eye contact and questions
- Create special missions

- **Escape-seeking kids:**

- Have an “escape route” planned ahead of time
- Steer to a non-populated space
- Fewer words / less eye-contact

# The A, B, C's of Bad Behavior

- **Antecedent**
  - What happens before the meltdown
- **Behavior**
  - What the child actually does
- **Consequences**
  - What happens next



*Adapted from Dr. Jed Baker's No More Meltdowns*

# Antecedent: Looking For Triggers

- Sensory Overload / Sensory Deprivation
- Criticism and feelings of inferiority
- Change and Difference
- Perceived Injustice, Past or Present
- Making Mistakes and Imperfections
- “Space Invaders”
- Hunger & Exhaustion
- Unidentified physical pain

# Behavior:

## What, exactly, did they do?

- Hit, Push, Kick (Control?)
- Refuse to participate (Escape?)
- Complain and whine (Attention?)
- Scream “I hate you!” (Escape?)
- Scream “You have a butt-head” (Attention?  
Control?)
- Interrupt a Group with OverSilliness (Escape?  
Attention? Control?)

# Consequences:

## What happened next?

## What did you get?

- A stern one-on-one talking-to? (Attention, Escape)
- Everyone leaves you alone (Escape, Control)
- Sit in the office (Escape, Attention)
- Stop the game and yell at you (Control, Attention)
- Success is fleeting, but still...

# Helping with Rules and Limits

Even when the rules are “*Stupid*”



# Following Rules

**Good News:** QK generally want to be “right.”

**Bad News:** QK often refuse to follow rules they don't understand or think illogical.

- QK rarely see authority or hierarchy
- QK think “out of the box” in problem solving



# Beth's Rules on Rules

- Keep them VISUAL
- Keep them FREQUENT
- Keep them SPECIFIC
- Keep them LOGICAL
- Keep them UNIVERSAL

# What's My Priority?

- What is really important to me right now?
  - Is it really “Talk to me with respect” or “Get dressed?”
- Manage my Agenda
  - Is it really “Become responsible” or “Get your towel?”
- Be the Big Person
  - Is it “Because you threatened my authority” or “Because you aren't safe?”

# Our Cabin's Anger Rules

## NOT OK

- Being MEAN
- Screaming at people
- Hitting/pushing someone, (even if they hit/pushed you first)
- Hurting on purpose
- Running Away or Hiding
- Mocking someone.
- Destroying important stuff

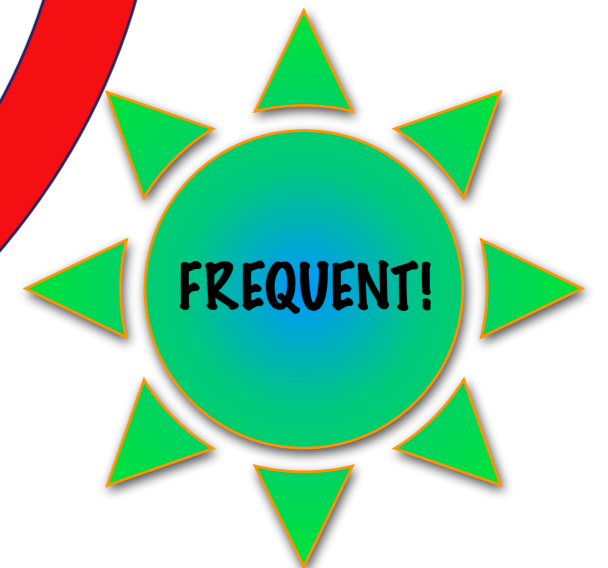
## OK

- Being MAD
- Talking in an angry voice
- Letting counselor know if someone hit/pushed you.
- Cooling off (where a counselor can still see you)
- Disagreeing with someone.
- Punching a pillow

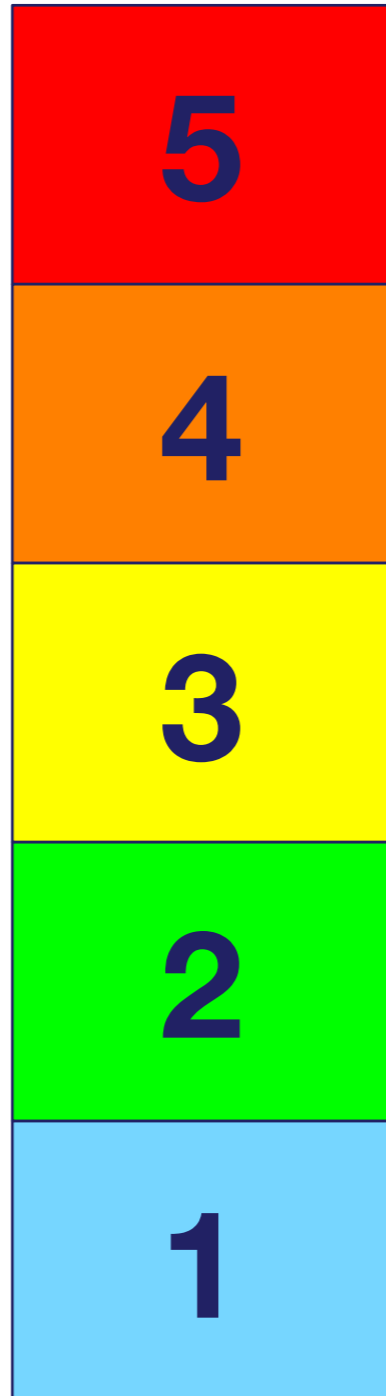
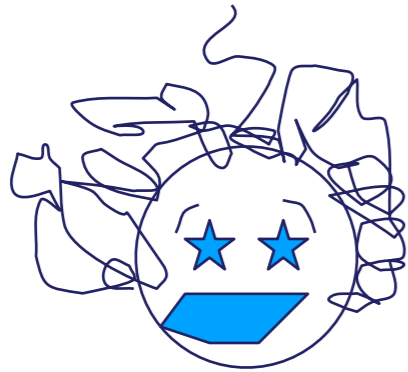


# Words We Don't Say Outloud

(Thinking them is OK)



# The Silly Scale



**I am WAY too silly  
(And WILL get in trouble!)**

**I am a bit too silly  
(and might get in trouble)**

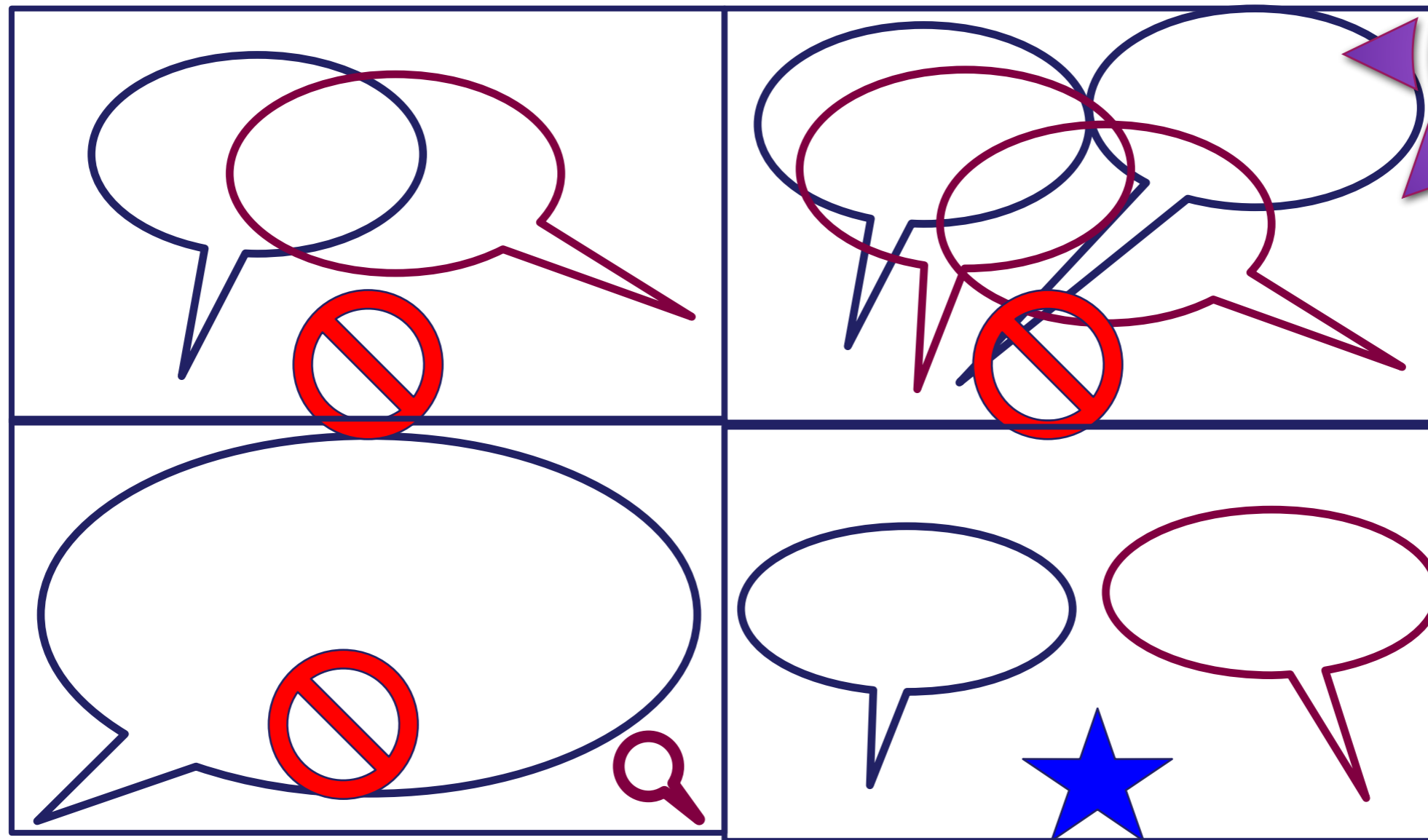
**I am loud and silly.**

**I am a little silly.**

**I am calm.**



# Our Cabin NightTalk Rules



# Cabin Apology Formula

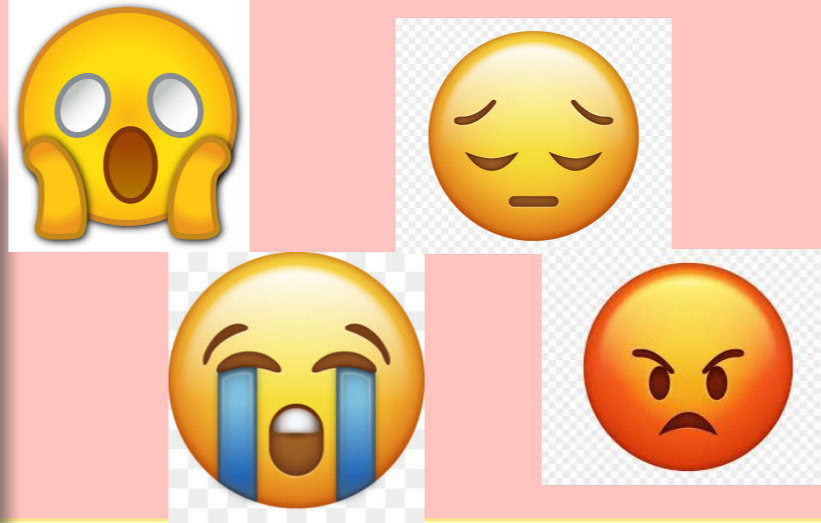
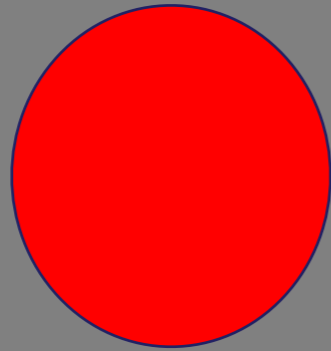
- I'm sorry for \_\_\_\_\_ (what I did)\_\_\_\_\_.
- Because it \_\_\_\_\_ (how it hurt you)\_\_\_\_\_.
- (choose one)
  - A. I promise I won't do it again.
  - B. What can I do to fix it?
  - C. Can you forgive me?





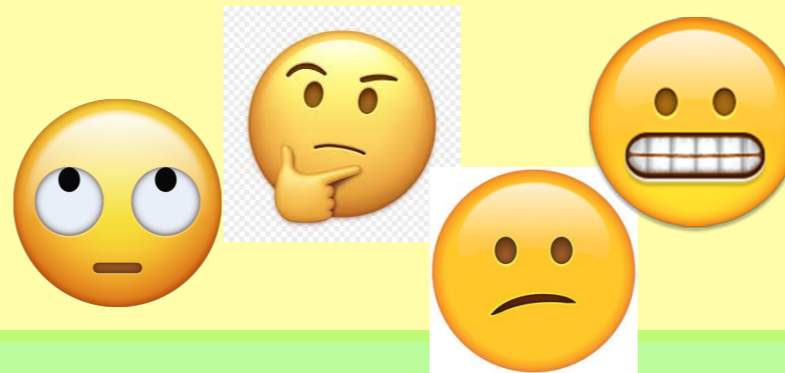
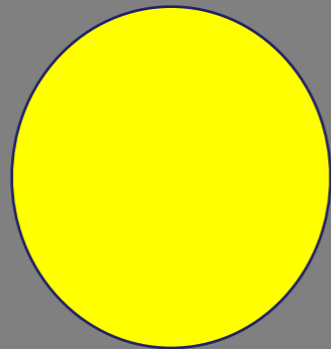
# Facial Social Cues

**STOP!**



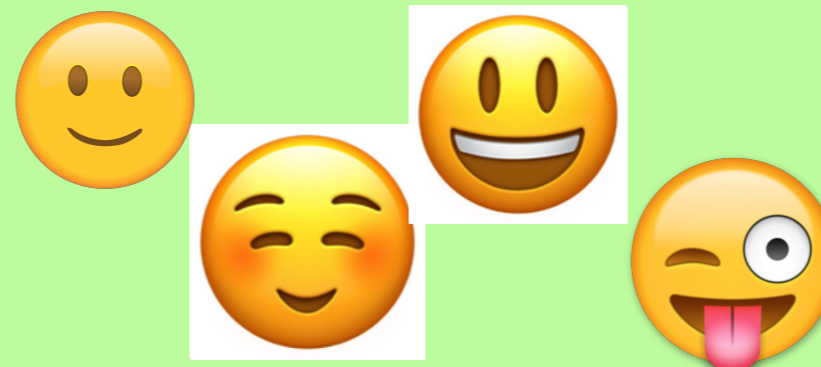
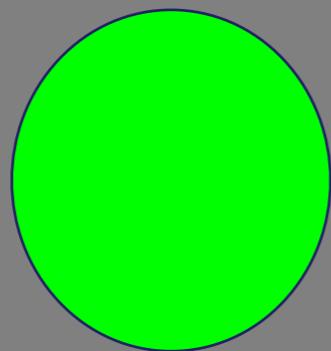
**Do you want to be left alone?  
Do you need help?  
I'm sorry if I hurt you.**

**CAUTION!**



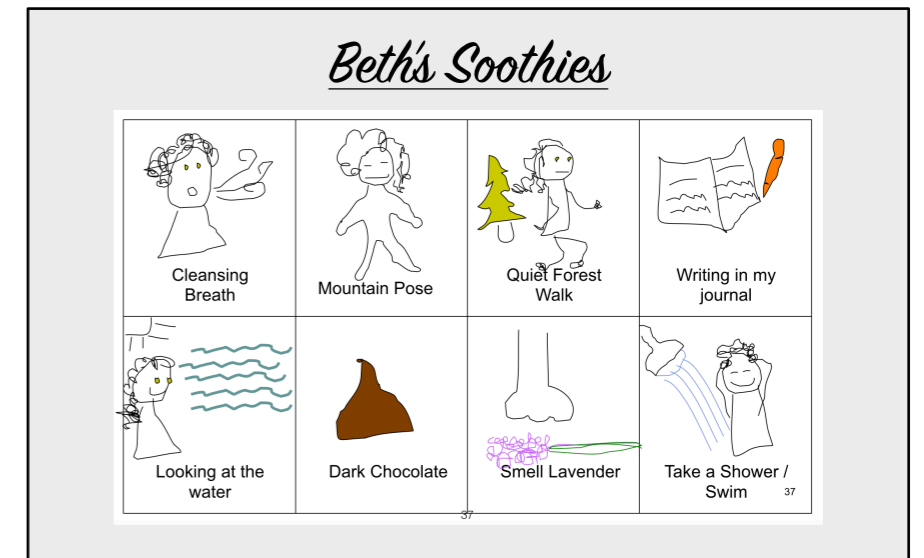
**Are you OK?  
Is something upsetting you?  
Did I say something wrong?**

**GO!**



**Hi there!  
What's Up?  
Want to play?**

# Make Cabin Soothie Posters



- What soothes you?
- Do you get energy from people or from solitude?
- Do you like touch, hugs, squeezes, massages?
- Do you like to listen to something or like it quiet?
- Do you like to talk or to be quiet?
- Do you like to reflect or to be distracted?

# Inappropriate Soothies

- Hurting someone else
- Revenge
- Suicide
- Self-injury
- Illegal drugs and alcohol
- Destruction of something valuable

It feels good now, but it won't in the long run



# Anger Speedometer



# Most Importantly...

- Tell your kids (and staff) EVERY day:



You are GOOD.  
You are IMPORTANT.  
You are COMPETENT.  
I'm cheering for you.  
I'm so glad you're here.

# Questions?