SUPPORTING STUDENTS AS THEY NAVIGATE CHANGE

with Katrina Weller

WHAT IS GRIEF?

“A NATURAL RESPONSE TO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE OR LOSS”

WHAT DO WE GRIEVE?

GRIEF VS. BEREAVEMENT

Over the course of their school lives, 9 in 10 children will experience the death of a family member or close friend.

One in 20 will lose a parent.

MYTH BUSTING

HOW PEOPLE THINK IT WORKS

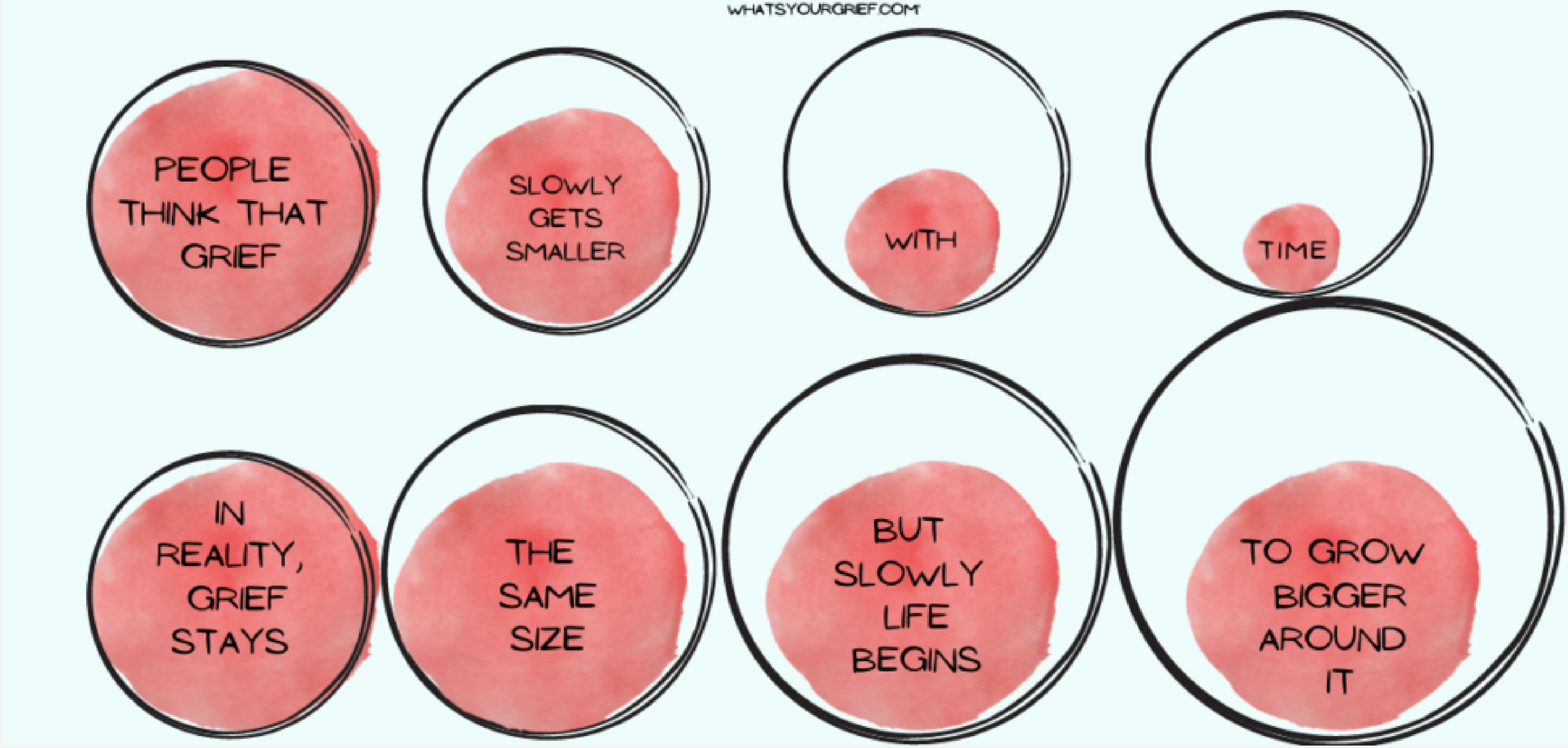
VS.

HOW IT ACTUALLY WORKS

'GROWING AROUND GRIEF'

(LOIS TONKIN, 1996)

WHATSYOURGRIEF.COM



3-5 years

Do not fully understand permanence of death

‘Magical thinking’

Temporary regression

Egocentric thoughts – self blame

5-7 years

Limited understanding of death

Increased anxiety and fear

Physical complaints

Egocentric thoughts – self blame

Blunt curiosity

7-11 years

Concrete understanding of permanence of death

Increased feelings of responsibility

Withdrawal from activities

Strong emotional responses

Isolation and loneliness

Curiosity with death

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Trouble sleeping
More irritable
Difficulties concentrating
Difficulties with memory
More distractible
Increased need for control
Low mood

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Makes it harder to concentrate

Trouble sleeping
More irritable
Difficulties concentrating
Difficulties with memory
More distractible
Increased need for control
Low mood

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Makes it harder to concentrate

Labeled ‘argumentative’
Frustrating to others
Feels ‘out of control’

Trouble sleeping
More irritable
Difficulties concentrating
Difficulties with memory
More distractible
Increased need for control
Low mood

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Makes it harder to concentrate

Trouble sleeping
More irritable
Difficulties concentrating
Difficulties with memory
More distractible
Increased need for control
Low mood

Labeled ‘argumentative’
Frustrating to others
Feels ‘out of control’

Labeled ‘disruptive’ or ‘spacey’
Harder to learn new material at school

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Makes it harder to concentrate

Trouble sleeping

Labeled ‘argumentative’
Frustrating to others
Feels ‘out of control’

More irritable

Labeled ‘disruptive’ or ‘spacey’
Harder to learn new material at school

Difficulties concentrating

Difficulties with memory

Harder to complete tests and exams
Self-esteem lowers

More distractible

Increased need for control

Low mood

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Trouble sleeping
More irritable
Difficulties concentrating
Difficulties with memory
More distractible
Increased need for control
Low mood

Makes it harder to concentrate

Labeled ‘argumentative’
Frustrating to others
Feels ‘out of control’

Labeled ‘disruptive’ or ‘spacey’
Harder to learn new material at school

Harder to complete tests and exams
Self-esteem lowers

Conflicts with parents, teachers, peers
Feels misunderstood

COMMON IMPACTS OF GRIEF

Trouble sleeping
More irritable
Difficulties concentrating
Difficulties with memory
More distractible
Increased need for control
Low mood

Makes it harder to concentrate

Labeled ‘argumentative’
Frustrating to others
Feels ‘out of control’

Labeled ‘disruptive’ or ‘spacey’
Harder to learn new material at school

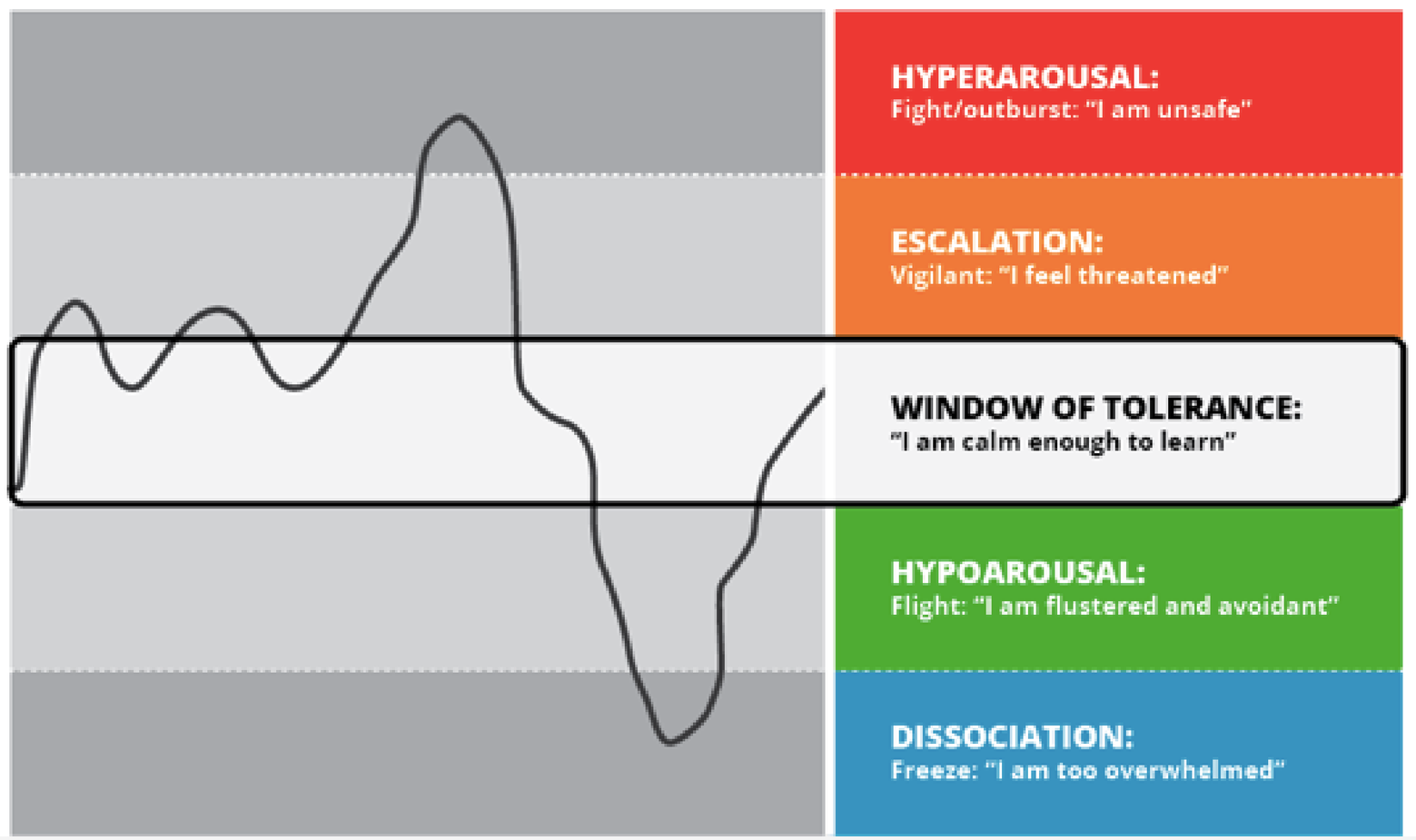
Harder to complete tests and exams
Self-esteem lowers

Conflicts with parents, teachers, peers
Feels misunderstood

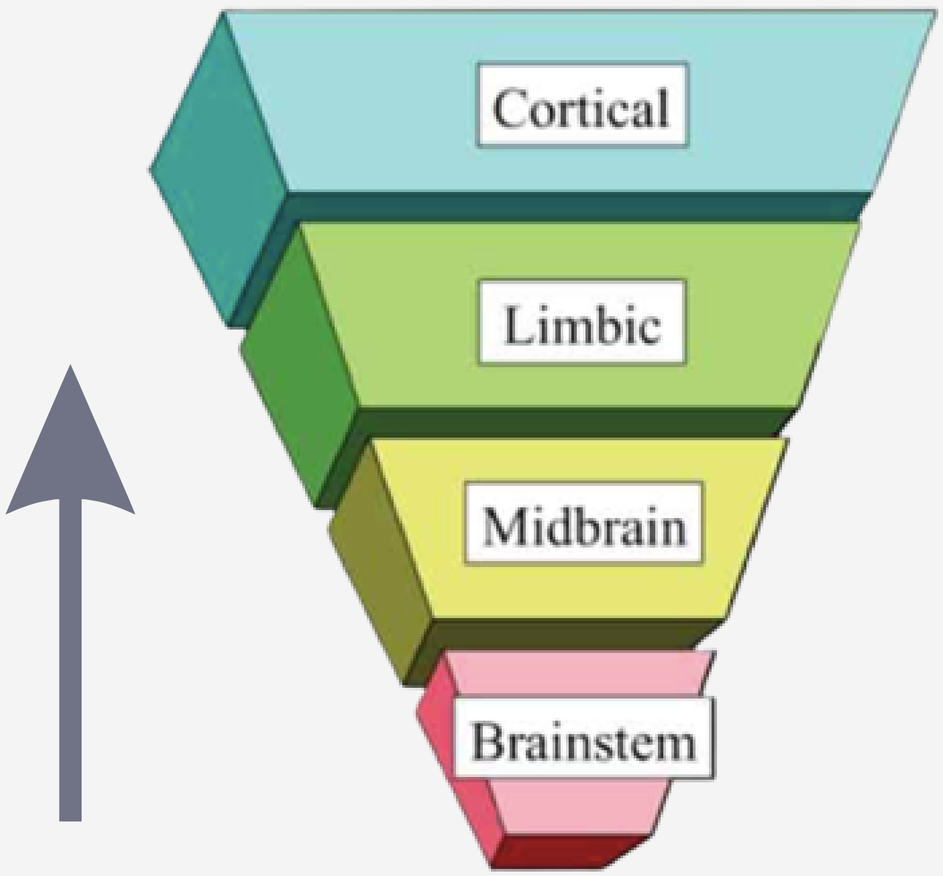
Withdrawal from peers

HOW TO SUPPORT

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE



Children who have experienced grief and significant change can have a narrower window of tolerance.



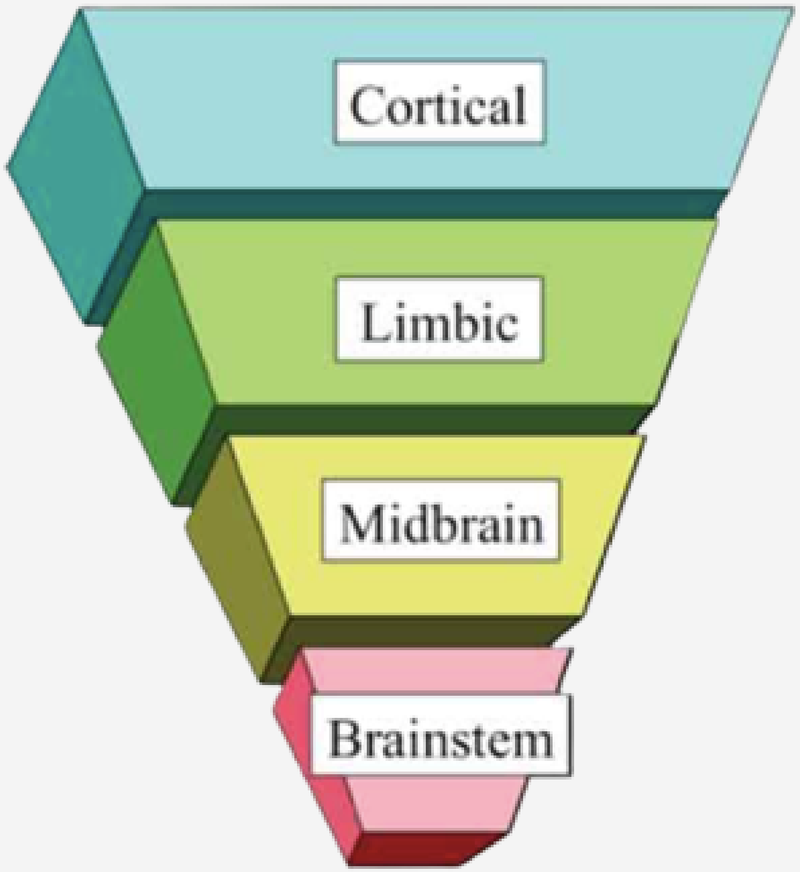
Abstract thinking, logical reasoning, reflective thinking, problem solving

Emotions, relationships

Motor regulation, appetite, sleep

Automatic functions: temperature, heart rate, blood pressure

SUPPORT WITH THE THREE R'S

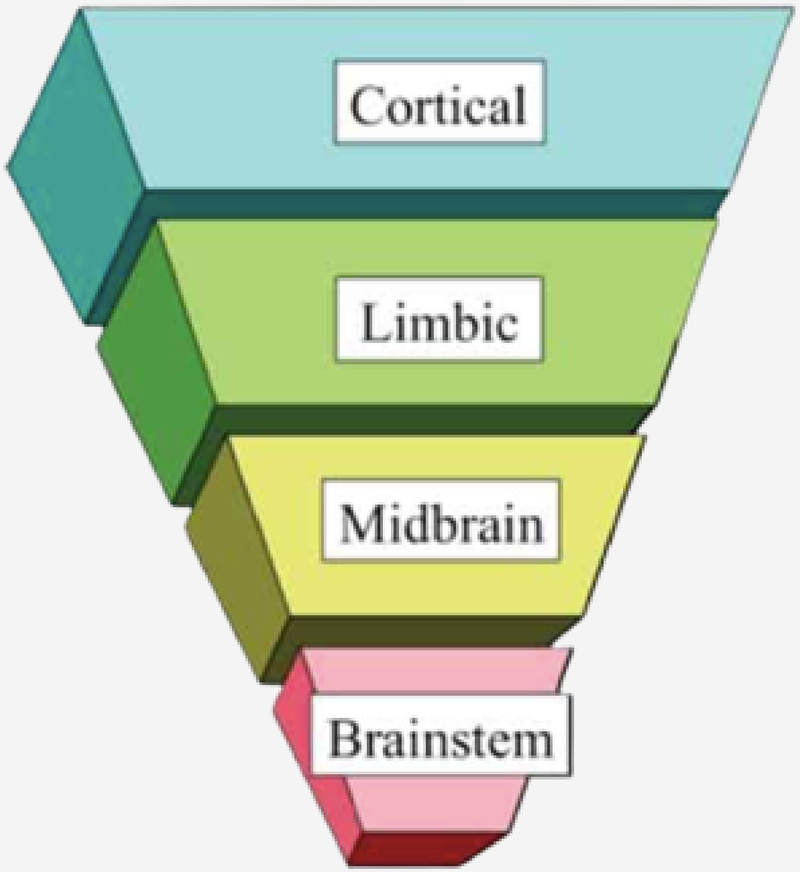


REASON

RELATE

REGULATE

SUPPORT WITH THE THREE R'S

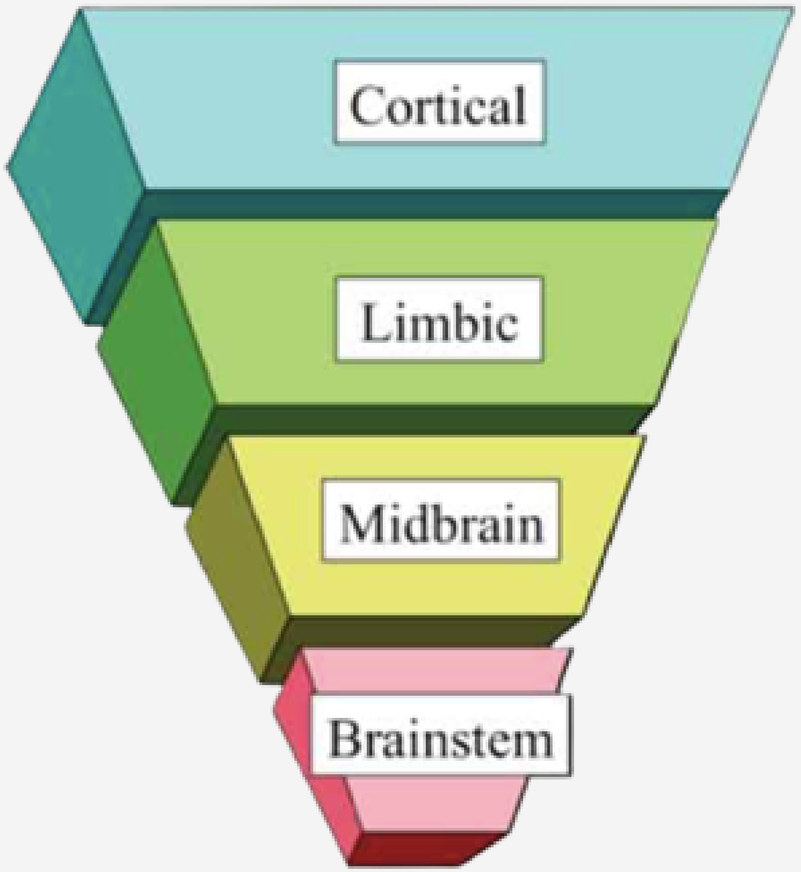


REASON

RELATE

REGULATE

SUPPORT WITH THE THREE R'S



REASON

RELATE

REGULATE

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Concrete and specific words

Age appropriate language

Use real-life examples of change

Honesty

INSTEAD OF

They wouldn't want you to be sad

At least...

You're not the only one

TRY THIS

You're allowed to feel what you need

I can see this is painful for you

What's your favourite memory with them?

IN THE CLASSROOM

Utilise books about change

Introductions topics of death, dying and change through lessons
ie. science & plants/animals

Emotional literacy

Emotion wall

Regulation activities

WHOLE SCHOOL

Monitor / observe behaviours

Emotional distance from the event

A sense of routine and continuity

Common language embedded into school

Mark significant dates in calendars

Share information during transitions

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Clear explanations

Social stories can help with preparation and understanding

Consider developmentally appropriate language

Opposite emotional response

Delayed reactions

Awareness of other people's responses

Routine and structure

SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES

Seek to understand the feelings and needs behind the behaviour

Be in control of **your own emotions** first

Provide structure and consistency, and set expectations in advance

Co-develop rules and boundaries with the child

Connection before correction!

Time in, not time out for younger children

Consequences, not punishment for behaviours

Don’t engage in the power struggle

Structure choices

CONSIDERATIONS

Confirm details of loss and wishes with the family

Are there any religious/ spiritual / cultural beliefs to be aware of?

Do the family want it to be shared with other staff?

Ask family & child how they’d like to be supported

CONSIDERATIONS

Acknowledge the loss

Agree on a ‘time out’ space or word

Empathy and non-judgement

Encourage expression of thoughts and feelings

Communicate with the family

Ensure information is passed on during transitions

Note important dates in register or on a calendar

RESOURCES

Grow with Grief
Wombats Wish
Feel the Magic
Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement
Lifeline
Beyond Blue
The Compassionate Friends Victoria