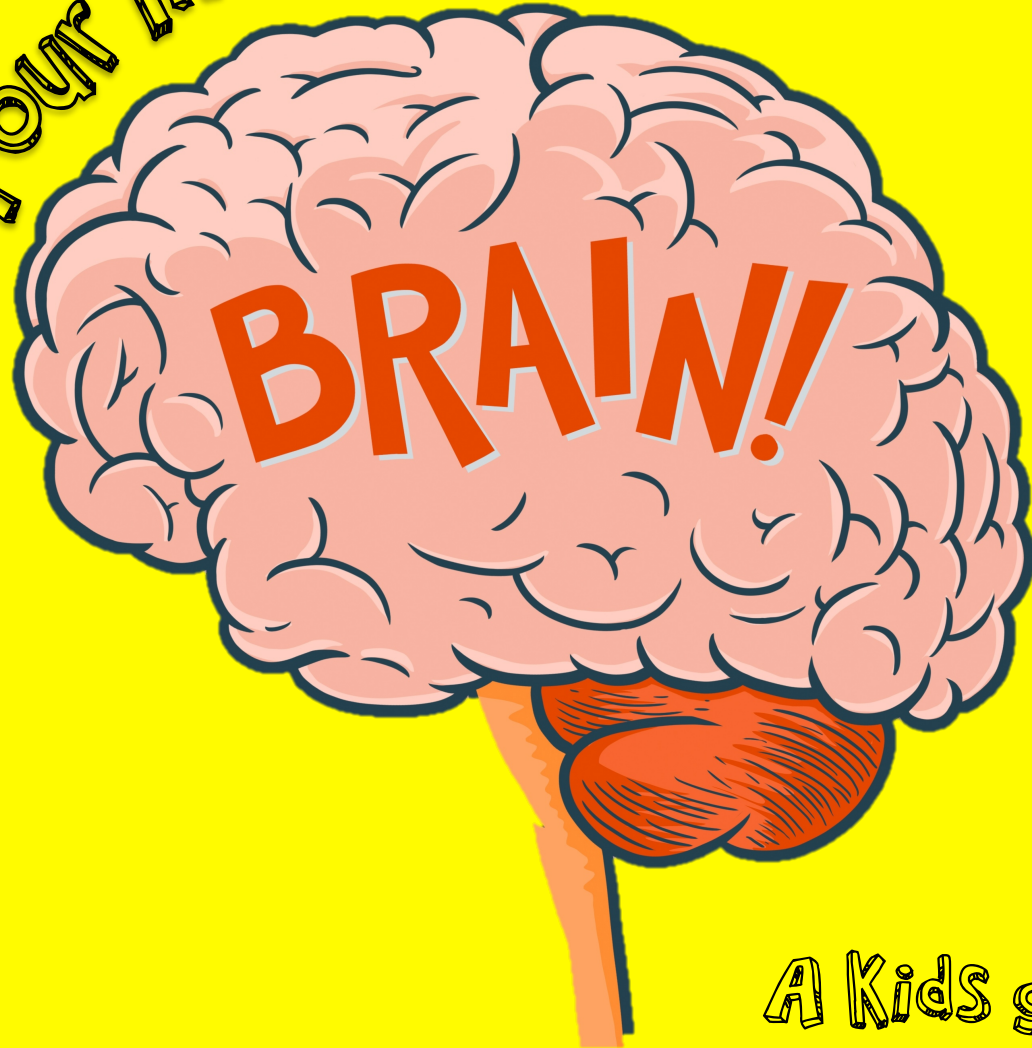


Your incredible



A Kids guide

# YOUR BRAIN IS COOL- FACT!

Inside your head is a super computer- your brain.

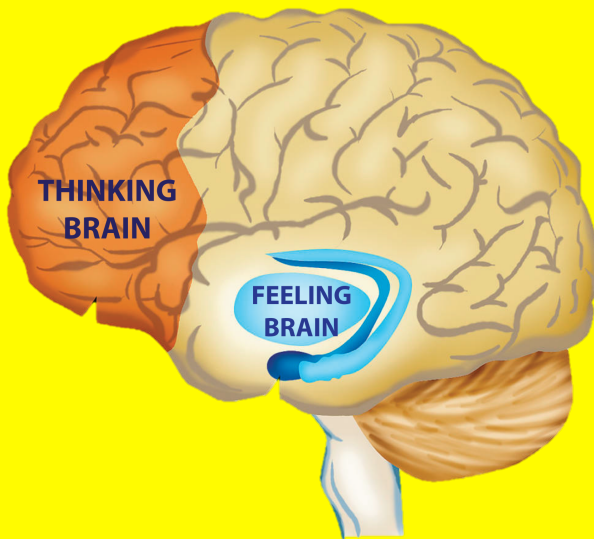
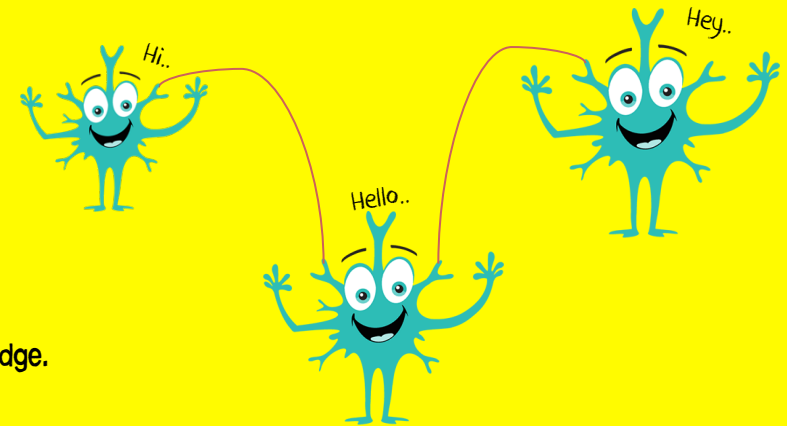
It is made up of 85-100 billion neurons

These neurons are connected by wires that send messages to your body and tell it what to do and how to feel.

If you were to count them one by one, it would take you over 3000 years!

For a message to be sent, two or more neurons must connect to each other- like a bridge.

The neurons are always rebuilding and rewiring- a bit like lego master builders.



There are lots of amazing parts to your brain but the bits which we are going to focus on are:-

## THE FEELING PART THE THINKING PART

- Limbic System- where we feel fear, anger and sadness
- pre-frontal cortex- where we imagine and solve problems.

We will learn that how you think effects how you feel and how you feel effects how you behave.

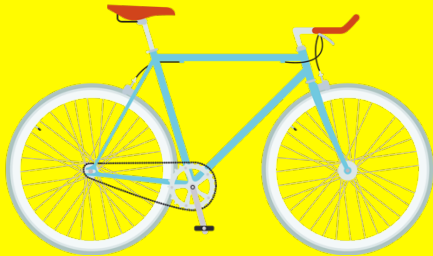
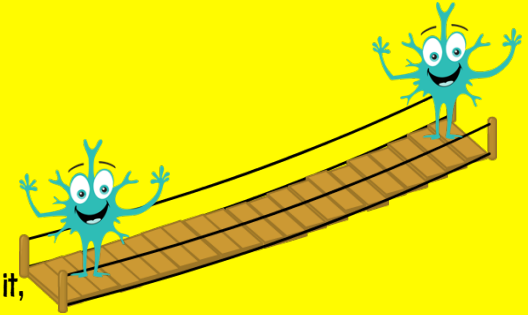
So changing just one of these can rewire your brain and do a lot to help you change things.

We will learn how you can be the BOSS of your own brain and retrain it to do what you want it to do.

# HOW OUR BRAINS LEARN

We learn and remember things by repeating them and this builds a bridge between neurons, the more times we do it, the stronger the bridge.

When you do something new– like learning your times tables– it may feel really hard because the bridge is just like a rope bridge which is difficult to cross and feels scary, but if you keep doing it, those ropes become stones, then bricks then steel! Before you know it you have built a long lasting bridge that is super strong and you feel really confident crossing it.



*Here's an example. When you first learn to ride a bike, you wobble and fall – a lot. That's because the 'riding a bike' bridges in your brain aren't very strong yet. The more you ride, the stronger the pathways get, so the easier the 'this is how you ride a bike' messages travel around to the parts they need to travel to. Over time, the bridges get stronger and you become a genius on the bike.*

This can also happen in ways that aren't so good. Like when you might meet a dog and it is not very friendly. A rope bridge is built between neurons to tell your brain that dogs are scary...the more times you see that dog and are scared, the more times that bridge gets stronger until every dog you meet makes you scared.



However, if you meet a friendly dog, and learn to trust them, then another bridge begins to get built that tells your brain this dog is not scary. The more times you meet the friendly dog, the stronger the bridge until you feel that not *all* dogs are scary– just some.

# HOW WE LEARN TO FEEL

The bridges we build between neurons are not just made when you do something– they are also made every time you think or feel something.

It is in this feeling part of the brain that our friendly inner guard dog lives and he is in charge of keeping you safe from harm.

Our inner guard dog tries to keep us away from things which might put us in danger. But which things our inner dog senses are dangerous, can be up to us. It is not the object or situation that we are frightened of it is our perception ( feelings, ideas, thoughts) of that situation or object that make us scared of it,



Not everyone is frightened of spiders, or snakes or clowns. So it is not the spider that is scary it is our brains telling us to be scared of it because we have seen, heard or encountered someone or something which taught us they are dangerous/scary and then we have carried on telling ourselves– and our brains that.

Just as when we learn to ride a bike– those bridges between our neurons get stronger until we ride it without even thinking about it. Our fear of things becomes automatic because we build a bridge telling us that something is a threat.

**Did you know**  
we are only born with two fears – fear of loud noises and fear of falling. Everything else we learn to be scared of .

This is where our inner guard dog comes in. They are not the ones who decided that a snake or clown is scary but they are there to protect you from them so you don't get scared again. They do this by reminding you of all the bad things about them– they might bite you, they could be poisonous– best to run away or hide.

This is fine when it is a real threat but when it isn't your inner guard dog can make you think scared thoughts or angry thoughts about things you no longer need to be scared and cross about because they are in the past and you are here and now.





# THE THINKING BRAIN

Your thinking brain is the smart part, it helps us with solving problems, making good decisions, and allows us to imagine and remember.

Now I am going to tell you something **magical** about your brain. it doesn't know the difference between imagination and reality. You don't have to actually encounter something scary or nice to feel a response.

## TRY IT

**Try closing your eyes and focusing really hard on imagining your favourite food.**

Maybe its chocolate. Think about what it looks like, how it tastes, imagine yourself eating it ..can you feel your mouth watering and your tummy rumbling? That is your marvellous brain telling your body to get ready to eat it- even though its not there.

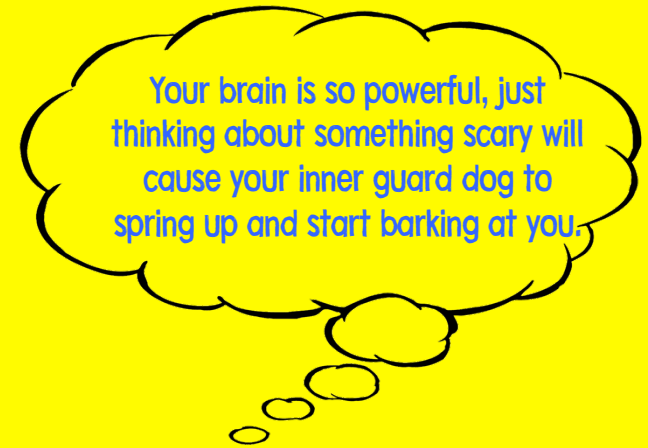
The trouble is, your inner guard dog doesn't know the difference either, so this means when you imagine or remember things that are bad- your inner dog will react as if you are in danger and try and protect you.

When we worry- we often imagine things that might happen in the future- your dog will react as if its real and try and keep you safe from something that hasn't even happened yet and might not ever happen. Usually this is by making you scared so you do not want to do it.

Also when we are worried about something, we tend to think about it a lot. Which as we now know builds a bridge between neurons so your guard dog learns to react quicker next time you have a test!

So even just thinking about having to take a test you are worried about means your inner guard dog is barking and sending out the message that there is danger and you need to escape and avoid the test. However, you have to take the test so he isn't being helpful.

Remember- your inner dog is just doing his job- if he is doing it wrong- he needs you to tell him what is ok and what isn't!



# WE NEED BOTH BRAINS

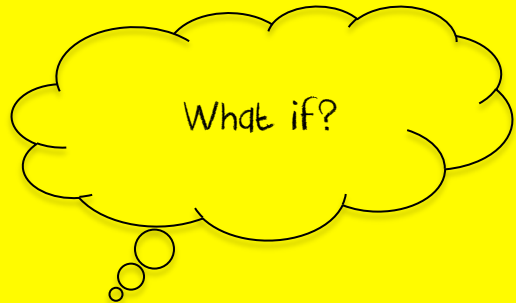
Humans are the only animals to have both a thinking brain that lets us imagine and a feeling brain. So we are very special but it also makes the world a tricky place for us unless we learn how to take charge of both parts.



Lets imagine a zebra is minding its own business, drinking from a waterhole, when along comes a lion. The zebra will get very scared and run away fast to stay safe. Once the zebra is safe- it will shake off the stress and carry on eating and drinking and going about its business of being a zebra.

That Zebra won't think about that lion over and over again, imagining what could have happened if it hadn't gotten away or what might happen to it next time. Zebras live in the here and now. Once the danger is gone, they carry on care free- until next time.

If you or me were at that waterhole and a lion showed up- we too would run away- I doubt we would try and fight it! Unlike the Zebra though, once we were safe we probably wouldn't stop thinking about it. We might have bad dreams about the lion, worry it will come back, we probably wouldn't go back to that watering hole again in a hurry.



Of course we don't normally encounter lions in our lives and in this case our inner guard dog would be right to make us run away. However it is not so great when it makes us feel worried about a sleep over at a friends because we might get homesick.

How do we take charge and use our thinking brain to stop our feeling brain and guard dog from taking over?



# HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DOG

We now know our guard dog protects us from danger, what they think is dangerous is learned through our experience. This means we can train our inner guard dog to be brave by thinking positively in situations we no longer what to be frightened of.

So we need to train our inner guard dog, just like we train any dog. First of all we need to keep our dog calm. You can't train a dog that is angry and barking or scared and shaking.

We do this by PAWS.. This stands for:

**P**ay attention to your inner dog– what are they making you feel

**A**sk yourself do you want to feel that way?

**W**alk away – from whatever your dog is barking about– a person, a place.

**S**low down your breathing– if you focus on breathing your body will relax

Calm thoughts ('Breathe in ... Breath out ...') lead to calm behaviour. Anxious thoughts ('what if something bad happens?') lead to anxious behaviour. Remember, thoughts, feelings and behaviours don't need to match. You can feel anxious and think brave, or feel anxious and do brave.

It is really important to remember our inner guard dog is supposed to be there, they are your friend. They can be really helpful as long as we have trained them. control of them and not the other way around. It is not about ignoring them or getting rid of them, they just need to be kept on a leash.



# HAPPY DOG - HEALTHY MIND

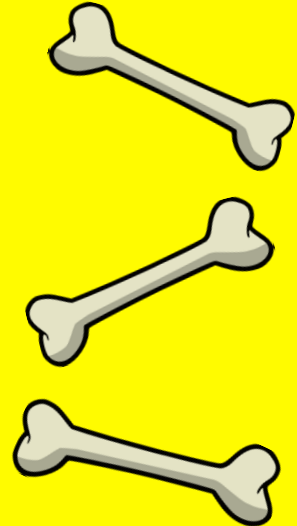
We can use PAWS when we hear that inner guard dog talking to us and put him on a leash and take back control with our breathing and our thoughts. But even when we are not feeling these things. It is important we keep him trained.

If you want a dog to sit you give it a treat and it will repeat the behaviour because it likes the treats. Your inner guard dog is no different. Only instead of dog biscuits we use the 3 P's.

**Positive Action** Doing something you enjoy for yourself or for others. Having hobbies or interests that make us feel good releases happy chemicals in our brains.

**Positive Interaction** Talking to or doing things with people/animals we like. People feel safer, stronger and wiser in groups because it's how we look after each other and share information. So try to spend time with those who feel good to be around

**Positive Thoughts** Thinking nice thoughts about ourselves and others. This can be really hard, especially when we feel sad. However, remember the power of our brains- they don't know the difference between real and imagined- so the more we think positive things and imagine them, the happier our brains will be.



When we do any or all of these things our brains release happy chemicals which not only make us feel good, but act like a dog biscuit to our inner guard dog. It tells your dog that doing this good, safe and positive.

Those positive bridges are built and strengthened every time you repeat that treat, so your feelings and reactions become easy and you don't have to think about it.

This is why it's so important that your thoughts are healthy, positive and strong. When you think brave thoughts, 'I can do that', or 'whatever happens I'll be okay,' those thoughts form a pathway. The more you think those thoughts, the more real they'll feel. Brave thoughts ('I can do this') lead to brave behaviour.