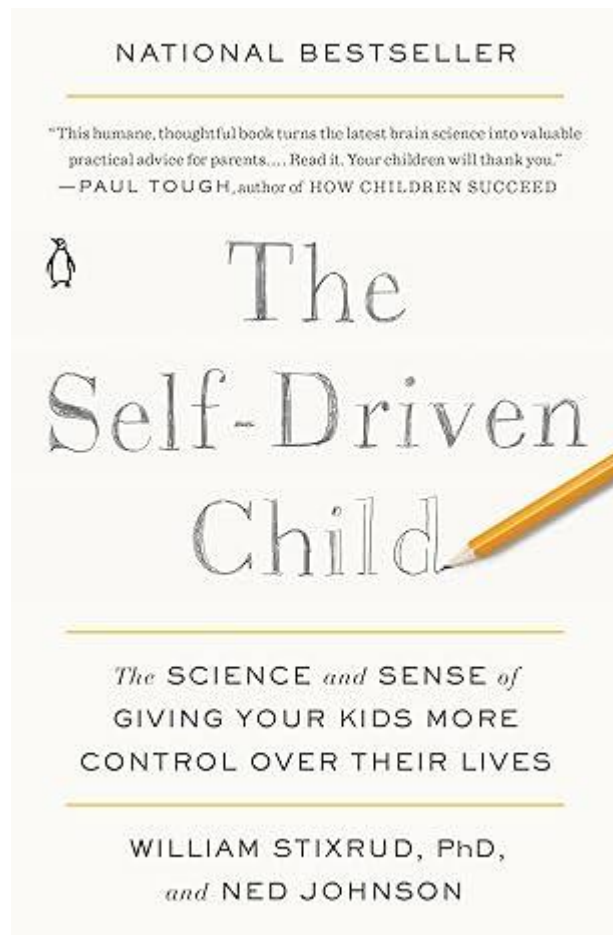


A serene forest scene at sunset or sunrise. The ground is covered in a dense carpet of small purple flowers, likely bluebells. Tall trees with dark trunks and green foliage surround the clearing. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that filters through the trees, casting long, soft shadows across the flower-covered ground.

# The Seven Principles for Raising a Self-Driven Child

William Stixrud, Ph.D., The Stixrud Group  
[theselfdrivenchild.com](http://theselfdrivenchild.com)





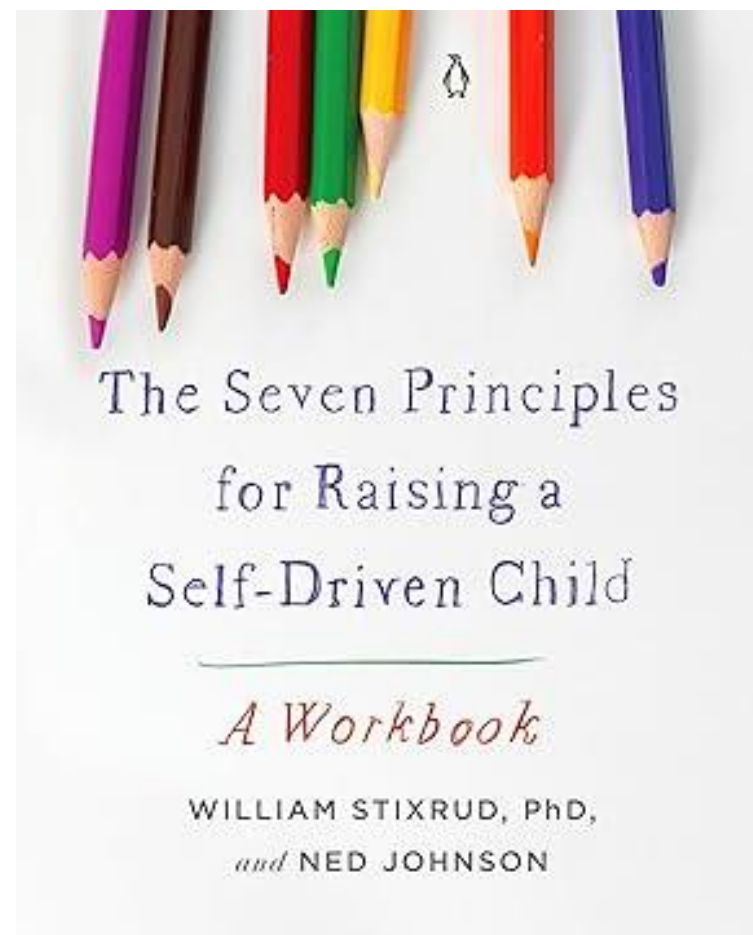
~~is everything okay, honey?~~  
~~You need to study harder.~~  
~~Because I said so.~~  
~~I know what's best for you.~~  
~~You're grounded!~~

## What Do You Say?

How to Talk with Kids  
to Build Motivation,  
Stress Tolerance,  
and a Happy Home

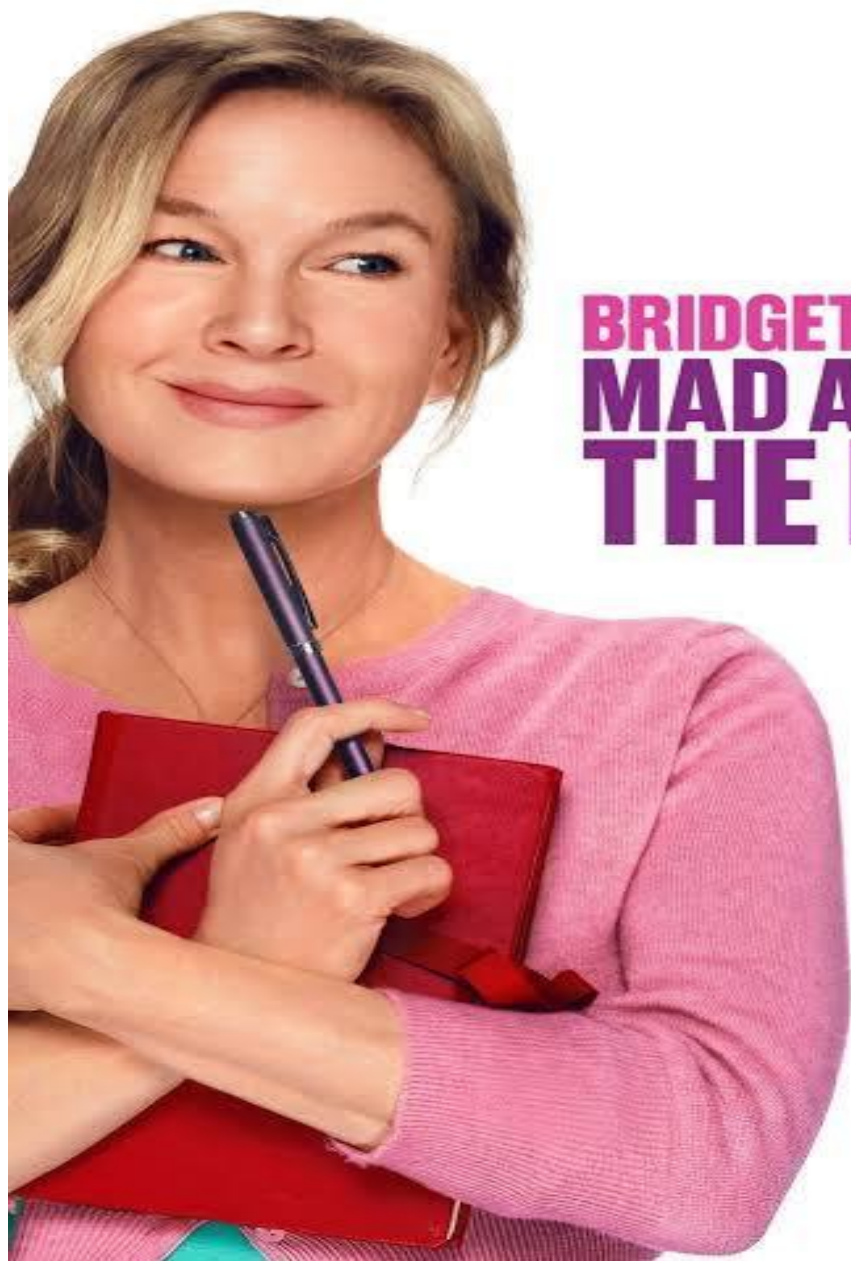
**William Stixrud, PhD,  
and Ned Johnson**

National bestselling authors of  
**THE SELF-DRIVEN CHILD**



theselfdrivenchild.com

Coming March 25, 2025



**BRIDGET JONES**  
**MAD ABOUT**  
**THE BOY**

# Our Two Major Concerns

- 1) The **mental health crisis** affecting children, teens, and young adults
- 2) **Disordered student motivation**, ranging from “why bother?” to obsessively driven.
- Both are rooted in a low sense of control.

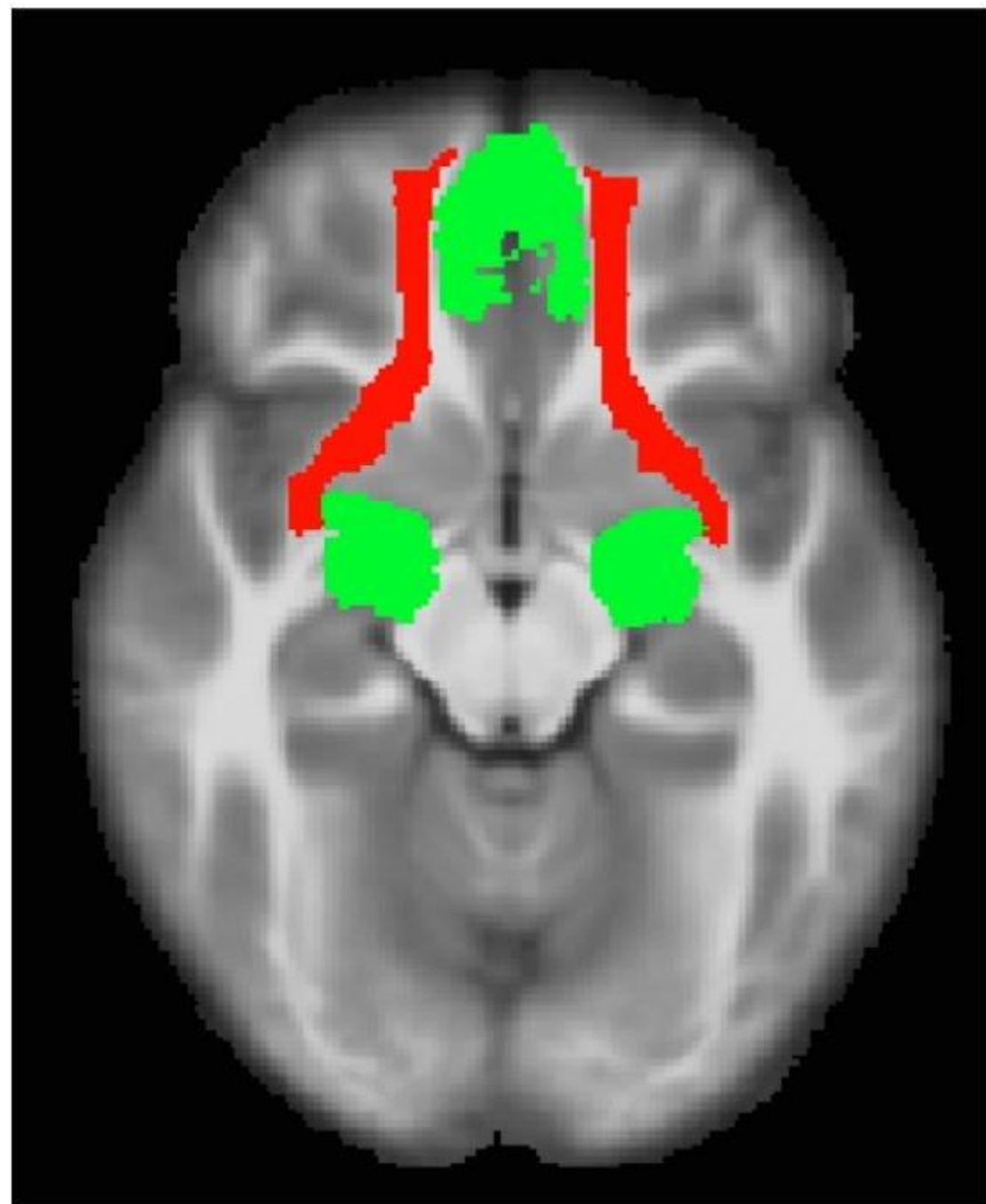






# *A Sense of Control*

- What it is - two aspects:
  - **Subjective:** “I can manage my life.” (autonomy and confidence)
  - **Objective:** Prefrontal cortex regulates amygdala, stress circuits
- What it isn't:
  - Feeling helpless, hopeless, passive, impotent, trapped, or resigned
  - Feeling anxious, overwhelmed, pressured, or obsessively driven



# Fronto-Amygdala Network as a **Biomarker** for **Mood/Anxiety** Disorders

NBML Webinar, 18 Feb 2017

Hamed Ekhtiari

# How We Got To a Sense of Control (1): Stress is caused by **NUTS** (Sonia Lupien).

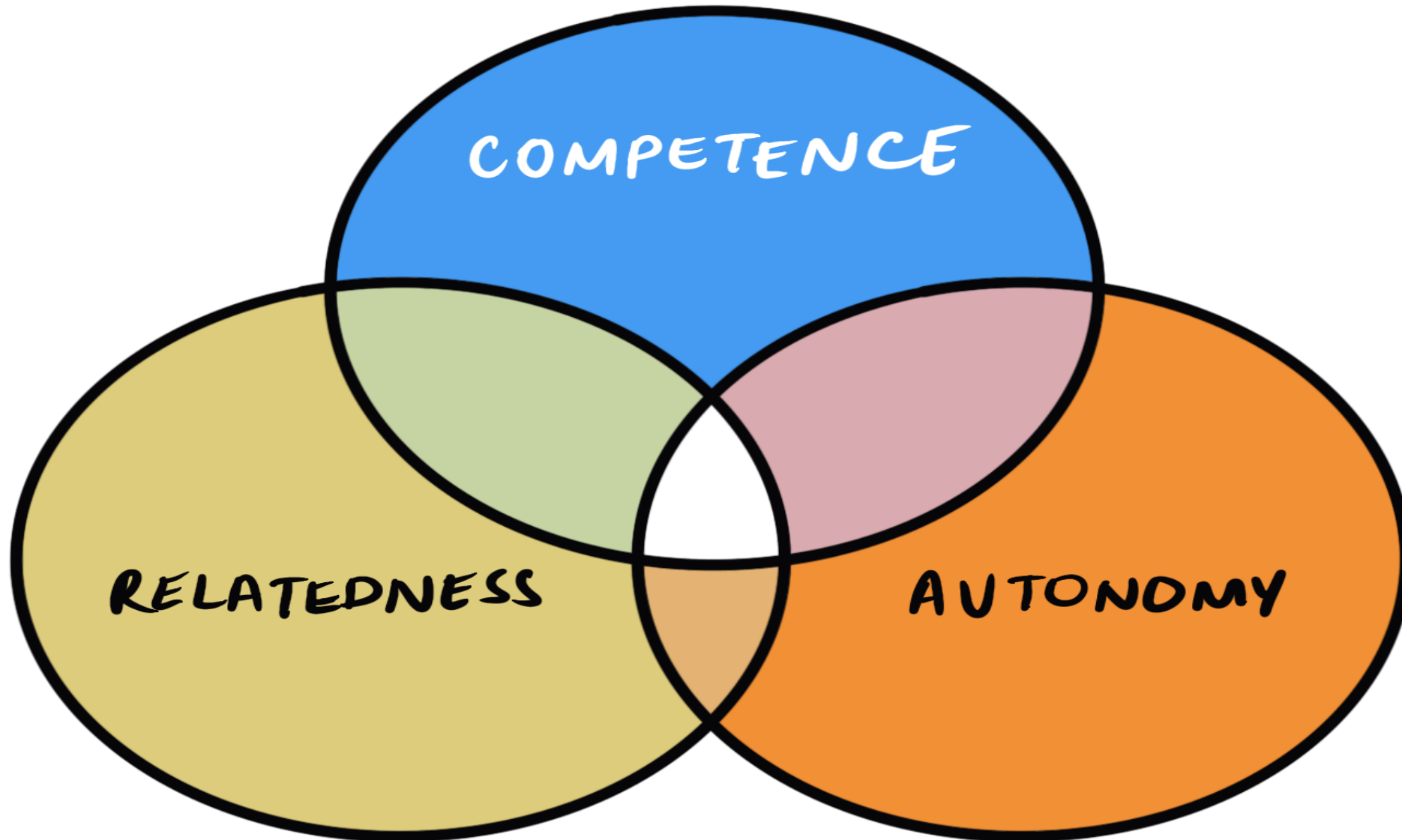
- **N** – Novelty
- **U** – Unpredictability
- **T** – Threat to body or ego
- **S** – A low Sense of control



# How We Got to a Sense of Control (2) Steve Maier: **“The perception of control inoculates from the harmful effects of stress.”**



# How we got to a sense of control (3): Self-Determination Theory









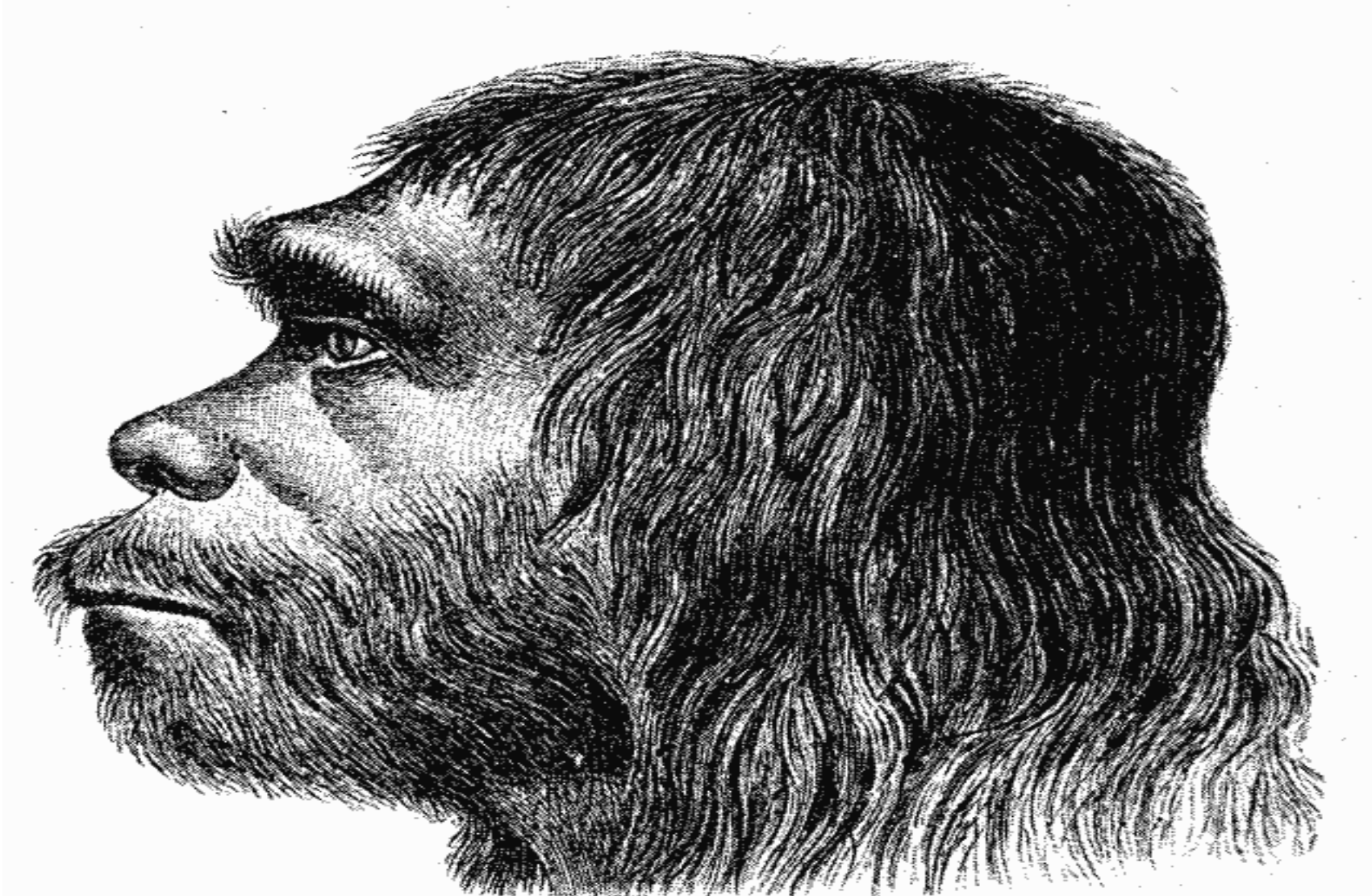
# Let's Talk About the Adolescent Brain

**25** > **The brain isn't fully mature until age 25.**  
During adolescence the brain is still developing. The prefrontal cortex -- which is critical for planning, judgment, decision-making and impulse control -- is one of the last areas to fully develop.<sup>1</sup>





The adolescent brain is “plastic” and highly adaptable.

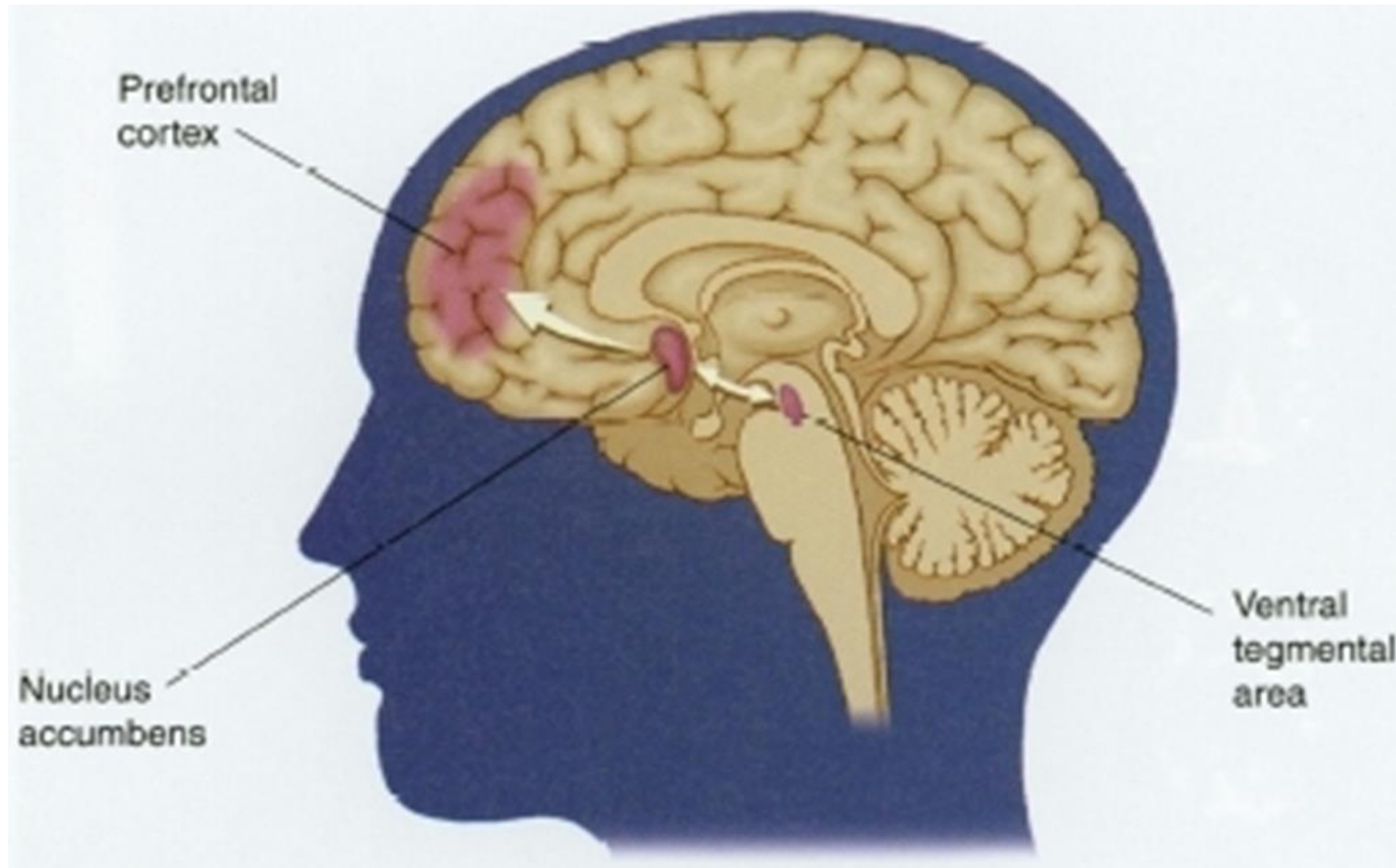


The teen brain is hypersensitive to stress.





# Changes in the reward system in teens outpace PFC development.



# Adolescent Sleep Needs

Teens need between  
**8 and 10 hours**  
of sleep a night,  
but polls show most teens get much less



**60%**

of middle  
schoolers



**70%**

of high  
schoolers



report **inadequate sleep on school nights**



# Principle 1: Put connection first.



# Connecting with Kids

- Kids told us they **felt closest to people who:**
  - “Listen to us without judging us and don’t tell us what to do.”



# “Seek first to understand.”

## The Power of Empathy and Validation

- Use **reflective listening** to communicate empathy.
  - “What I got from what you said is...”
  - “It sounds like you’re really disappointed by...”
- Use **validation** to show feelings are understandable.
  - “I think that most kids would feel that way if...”
  - “That must have been really hard to handle.”

## Principle 2: Be a consultant (rather than the boss, manager or homework police)





# Some Basic Consulting Principles

- **Offer help and advice** - don't force it.
- Be clear about who's responsible for what.
  - "I love you too much to fight with you about your homework."
  - Don't work harder to help a child than the child does.
- Encourage kids to **solve their own problems**.
- Support kids in **making their own decisions**.

# The Language of a Consultant/Guide

- **The language of getting buy-in:**
  - “Can I make a suggestion?”
  - “Is there a way I could help?”
  - “I wonder what would happen if you...”
  - “For whatever it’s worth, ...”
- **The language of no force:**
  - “I’m not going to use the force of my will...” (Ross Greene)
  - “I couldn’t make you do it.”
  - “If I tried to fight you on that, I’d lose.”
  - “I’m not going to try to take that belief away from you.”







# Principle 3: Communicate Healthy (Versus Toxic) Expectations

- **Healthy expectations (the Rosenthal Effect):**
  - “I am confident that you can do well.” “I believe in you.”
- **Toxic expectations:** “You must do well.”
- **They are toxic because:**
  - They communicate conditional love and approval.
  - They are, by definition, controlling or coercive.
  - They communicate excessive pressure to excel.
  - They contribute to perfectionism.



# Principle 5: Motivate your kids without trying to change them.



# MOTIVATION

It's not that I'm lazy, it's that I just don't care.

# Four Postulates Related to Motivation

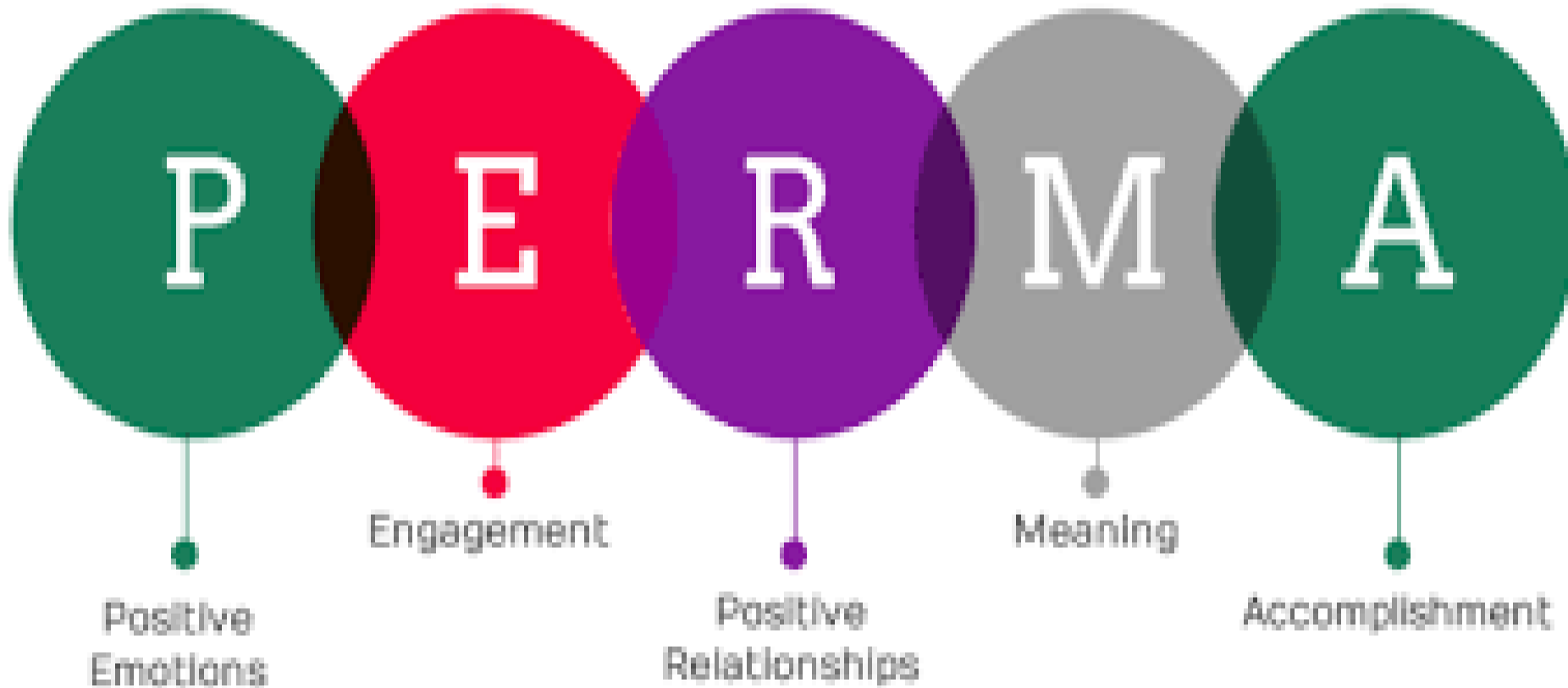
- You can't make someone do something against their will.
- You can't make someone want what they don't want.
- You can't make someone not want what they do want.
- If you try to change someone who's not asking for help, you get conflict and resistance.

## (4) Teach kids an accurate model of reality.

- Top students become the most successful adults.
- High school grades follow you always.
- College choice is crucial for life success.
- More money leads to more happiness.
- Success and prestige are the most important things.
- Successful people rarely fail.



Principle 4:  
Teach your kids an accurate model of reality.





# NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE

# Principle 6: Become a non-anxious presence in your family.





# Becoming a Non-Anxious Presence (1)

- 1. Remember to ask yourself, “Whose life is it?”
- 2. Take a long view. (All our worry about our kids is about the future.)
- 3. Focus on enjoying your child.
- 4. Practice “radical” acceptance (accepting kids as they are right now, even if they’re struggling). “This must be part of their path.”
- 5. Practice stress management.

