

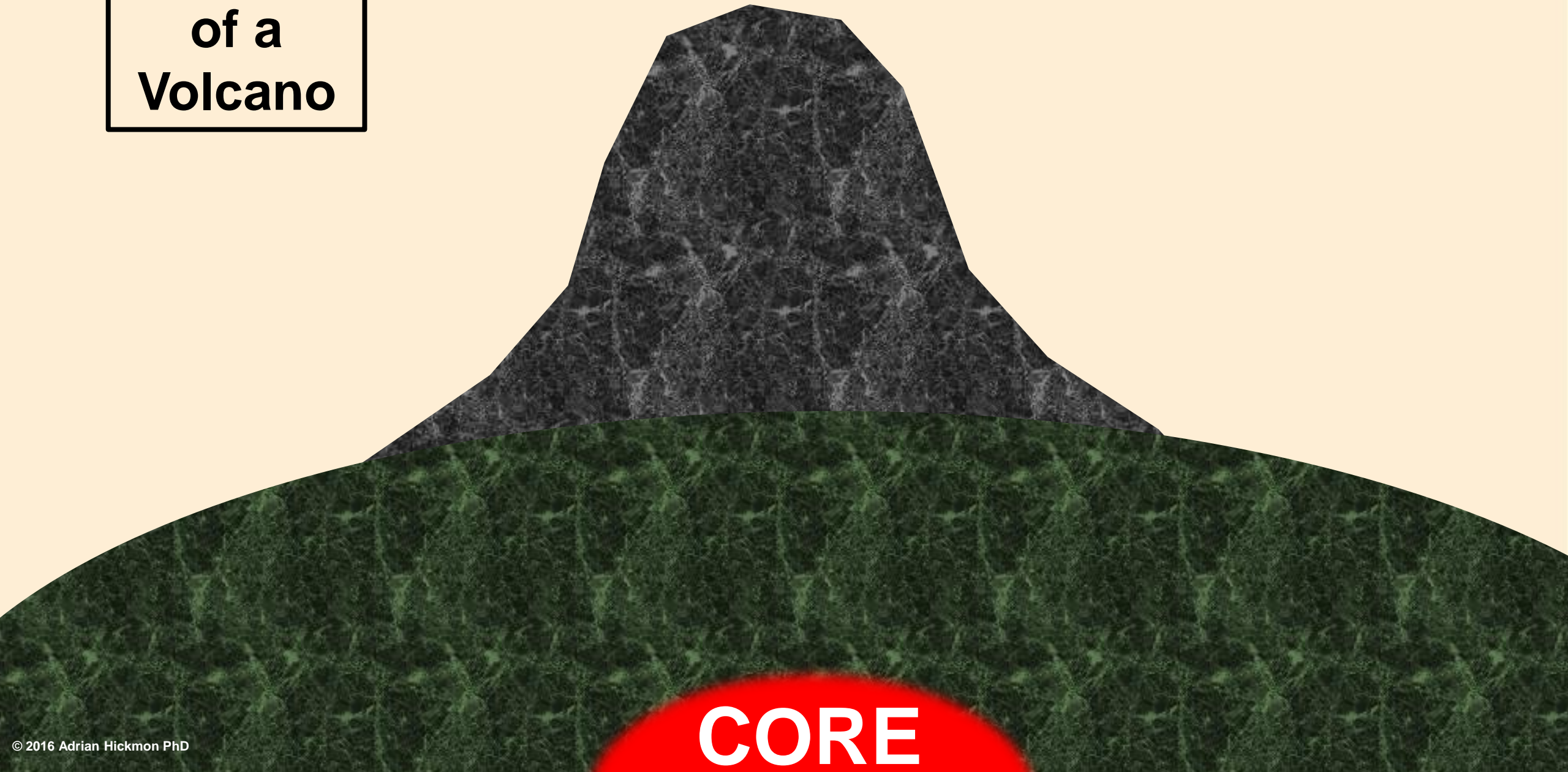
# **2025 Mississippi Addictions Conference**

## **Endangered Potential In the Trenches with Young Adults & Adolescents**

**Adrian Hickmon PhD  
Founder & Clinical Architect Capstone Treatment Center  
Executive Chair Capstone Foundation**

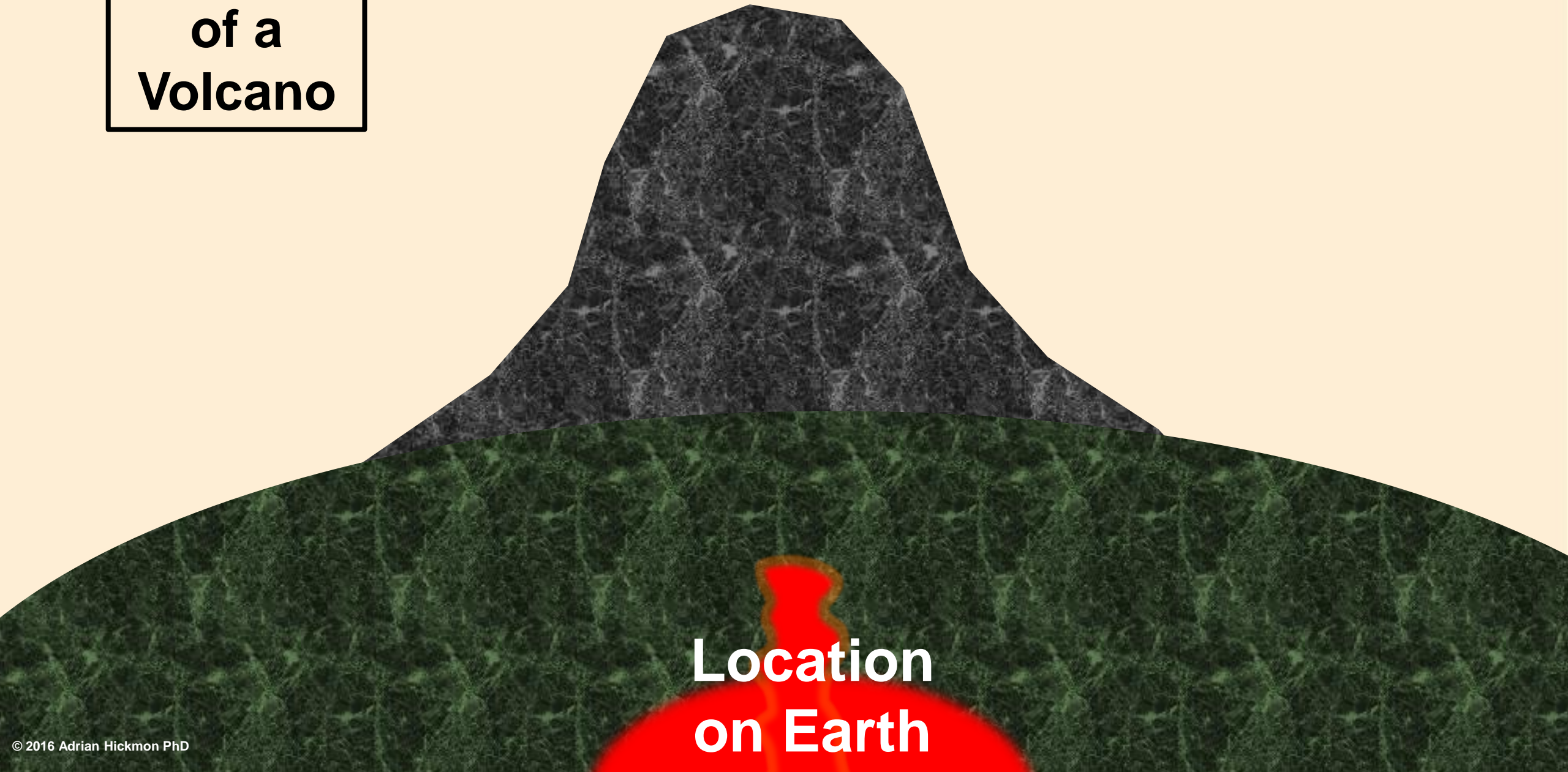


# Anatomy of a Volcano



**CORE**

# Anatomy of a Volcano



Location  
on Earth

# Anatomy of a Volcano



**Magma  
Chamber**

**Location  
on Earth**

# Anatomy of a Volcano

Eruption

A diagram of a volcano. The volcano is a dark grey, conical shape with a jagged top. A bright red, glowing stream of lava flows down the center of the volcano. Above the volcano, a large, red, cloud-like shape represents an eruption. Below the volcano, a red, cloud-like shape represents the magma chamber. The volcano is situated on a dark green, textured surface representing the Earth's surface. The background is a light yellow gradient.

Magma  
Chamber

Location  
on Earth

**Anatomy  
of a  
Human**

**Coping  
Behaviors**

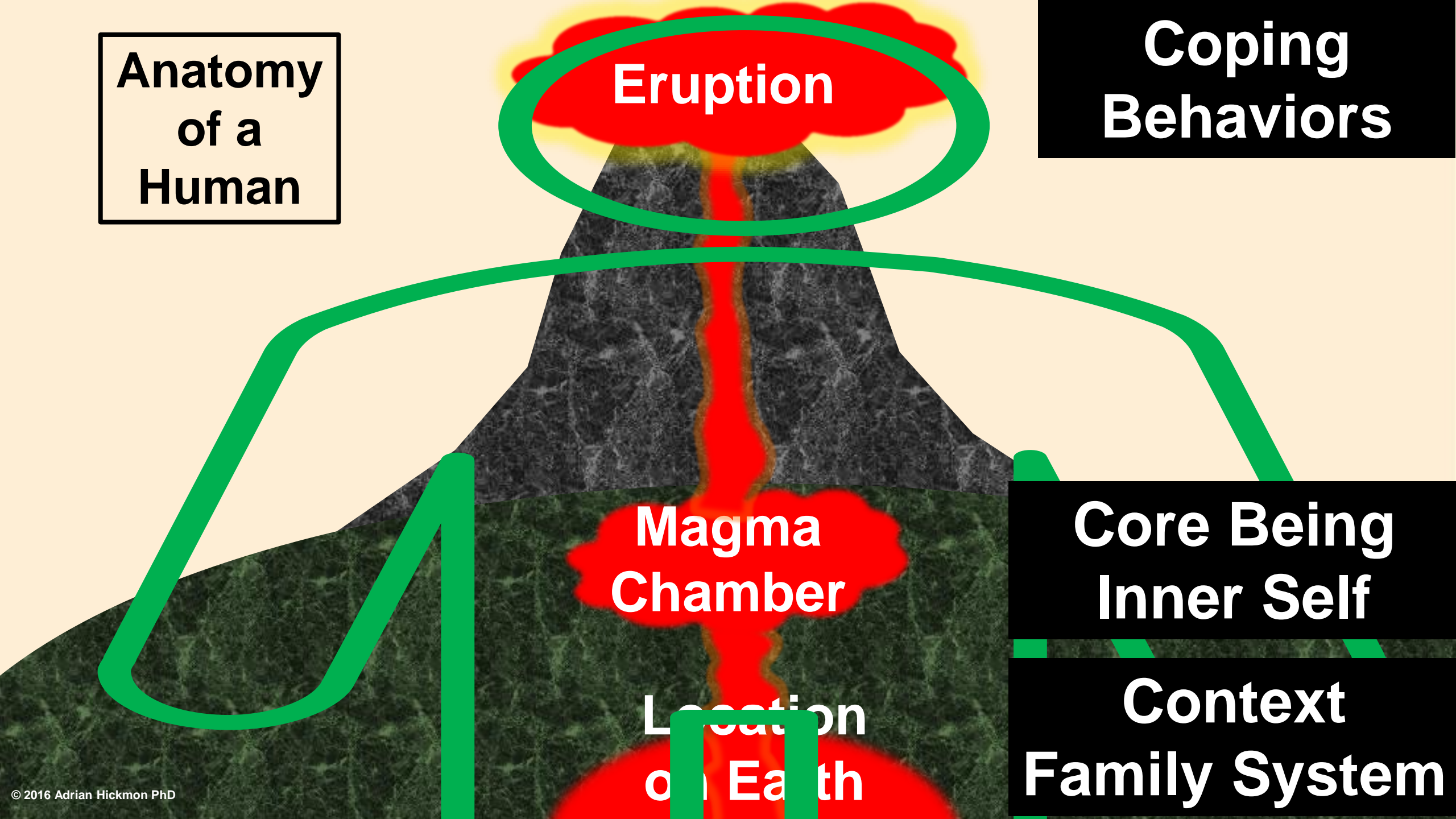
**Eruption**

**Magma  
Chamber**

**Location  
on Earth**

**Core Being  
Inner Self**

**Context  
Family System**





**Anatomy  
of a  
Human**

**Eruption**

**Coping  
Behaviors  
System**

**Magma  
Chamber**

**Core Being  
System**

**Location  
on Earth**

**Context  
System**

**Anatomy  
of a  
Human**

**Drugs, Alcohol,  
Porn, Sex, Food...**

**Coping  
Behaviors  
System**

**Magma  
Chamber**

**Core Being  
System**

**Location  
on Earth**

**Context  
System**



**Anatomy  
of a  
Human**

**Drugs, Alcohol,  
Porn, Sex, Food...**

**Coping  
Behaviors  
System**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

**Core Being  
System**

**Location  
on Earth**

**Context  
System**

**Anatomy  
of a  
Human**

**Drugs, Alcohol,  
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**Coping  
Behaviors  
System**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

**Core Being  
System**

**Family Disconnection  
Insecure Attachment**

**Context  
System**



**Drugs &  
Alcohol**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

**Drugs &  
Alcohol**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

# Sobriety



Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame



**Sobriety**

**Pornography  
Intensity-Based Sex**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

**Sobriety**

**Pornography  
Intensity-Based Sex**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

**Sobriety**

**Abstinence**

**Anxiety,  
Depression,  
DSM Disorders**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**



**Sobriety**

**Abstinence**

**Anxiety,  
Depression,  
DSM Disorders**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**





# Sobriety

**Temporary  
Symptom  
Relief**

**Insatiable Pursuit  
of Achievement,  
Success, Perfection,  
Spiritual Bypass...  
To be good enough...  
Prove them wrong...  
But never enough!**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**



# Sobriety

**Temporary  
Symptom  
Relief**

**Insatiable Pursuit  
of Achievement,  
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To be good enough...  
Prove them wrong...  
But never enough!**

**Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame**

# Whack-a-Mole game with a person's life, courtesy of the Biomedical Paradigm & Spiritual Bypassing



# Diagnose this human being...



# Closer to Suicide because No Relief Valve

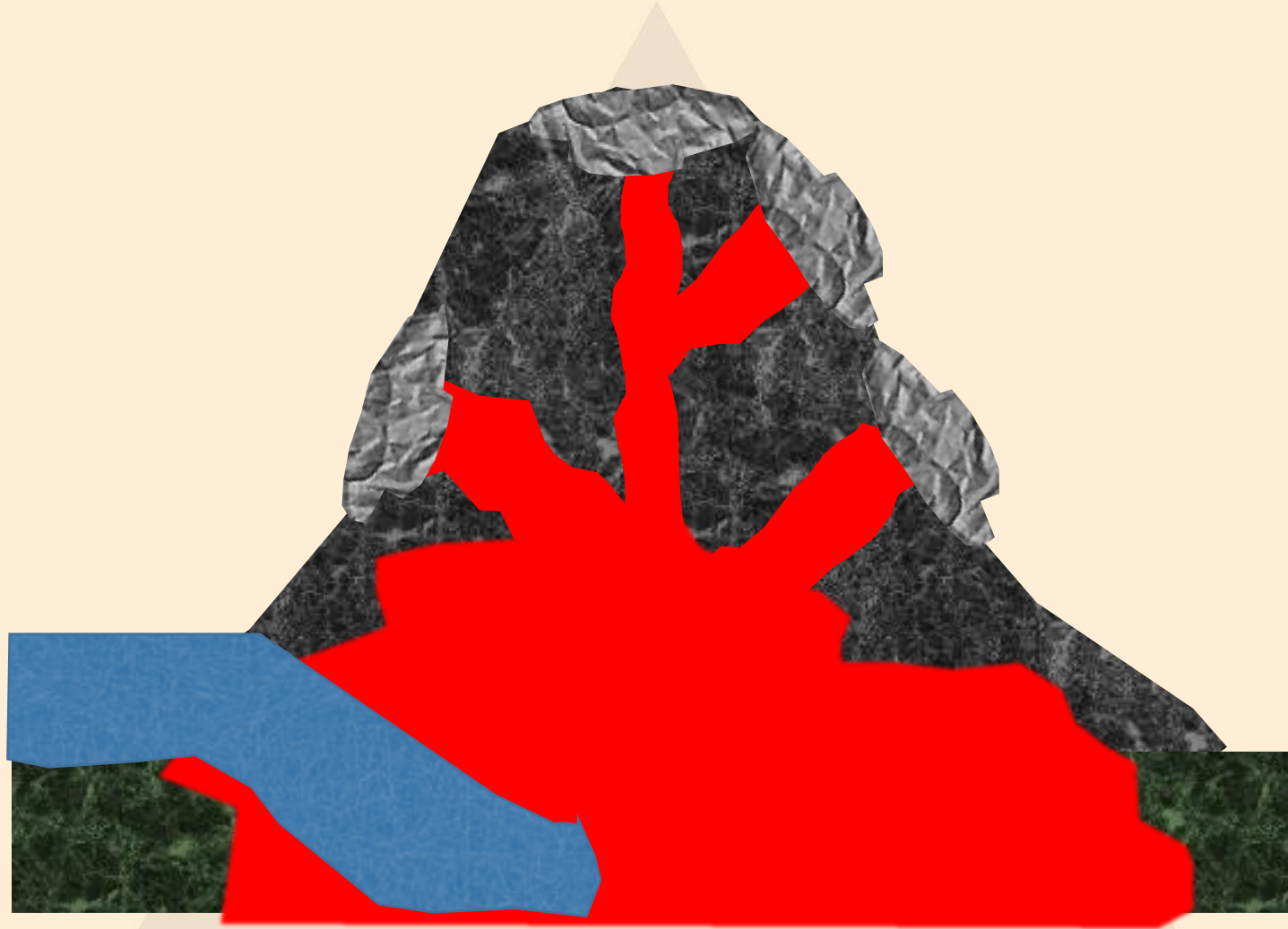


**The eruptions are survival attempts—like a life-jacket that saves you in whitewater, then turns to stone & drowns you.**



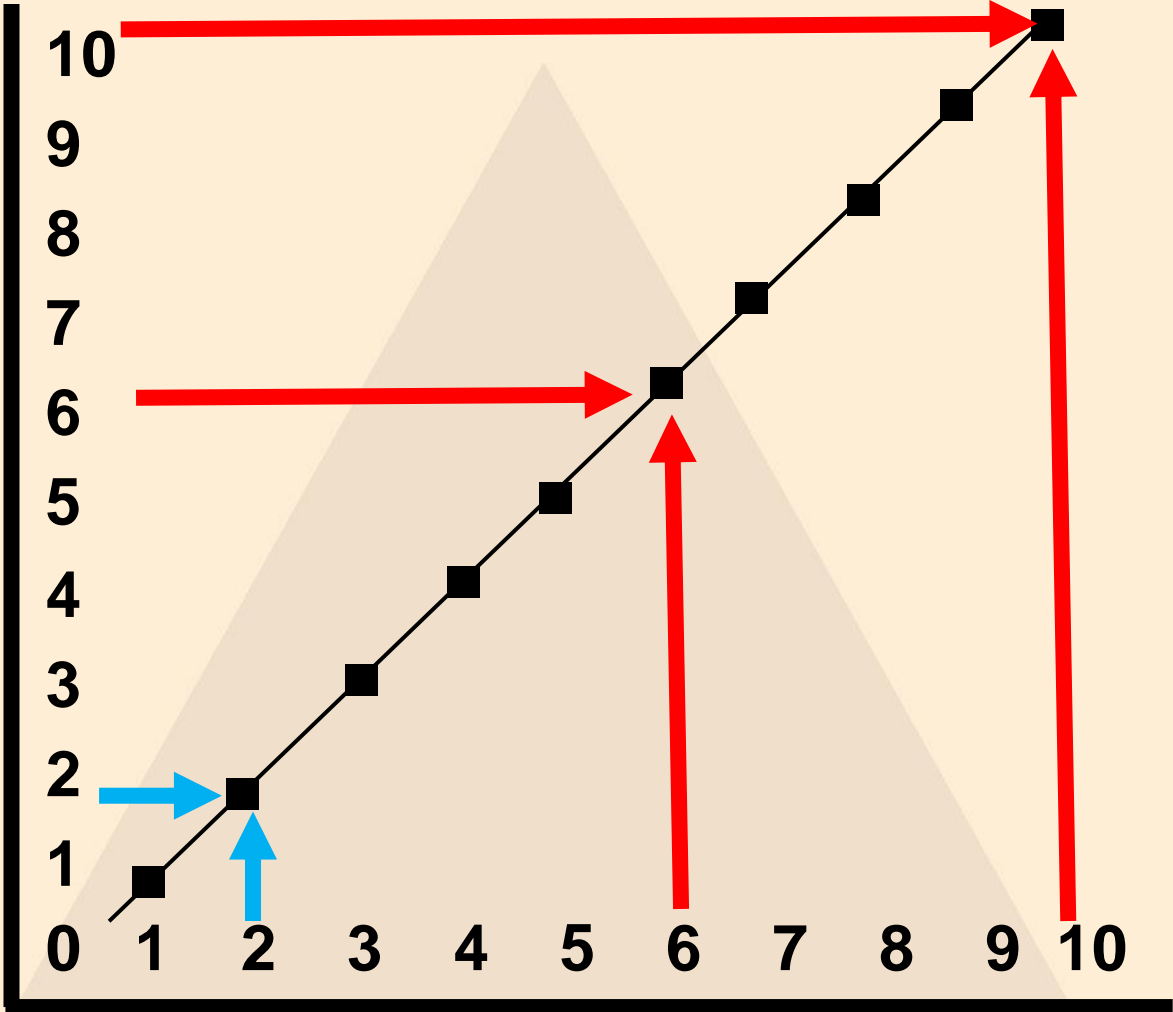


# The Core Being's magma generates the eruptions



# Coping Behavior Power Factor

**Power of Enticement from the behavior or substance**



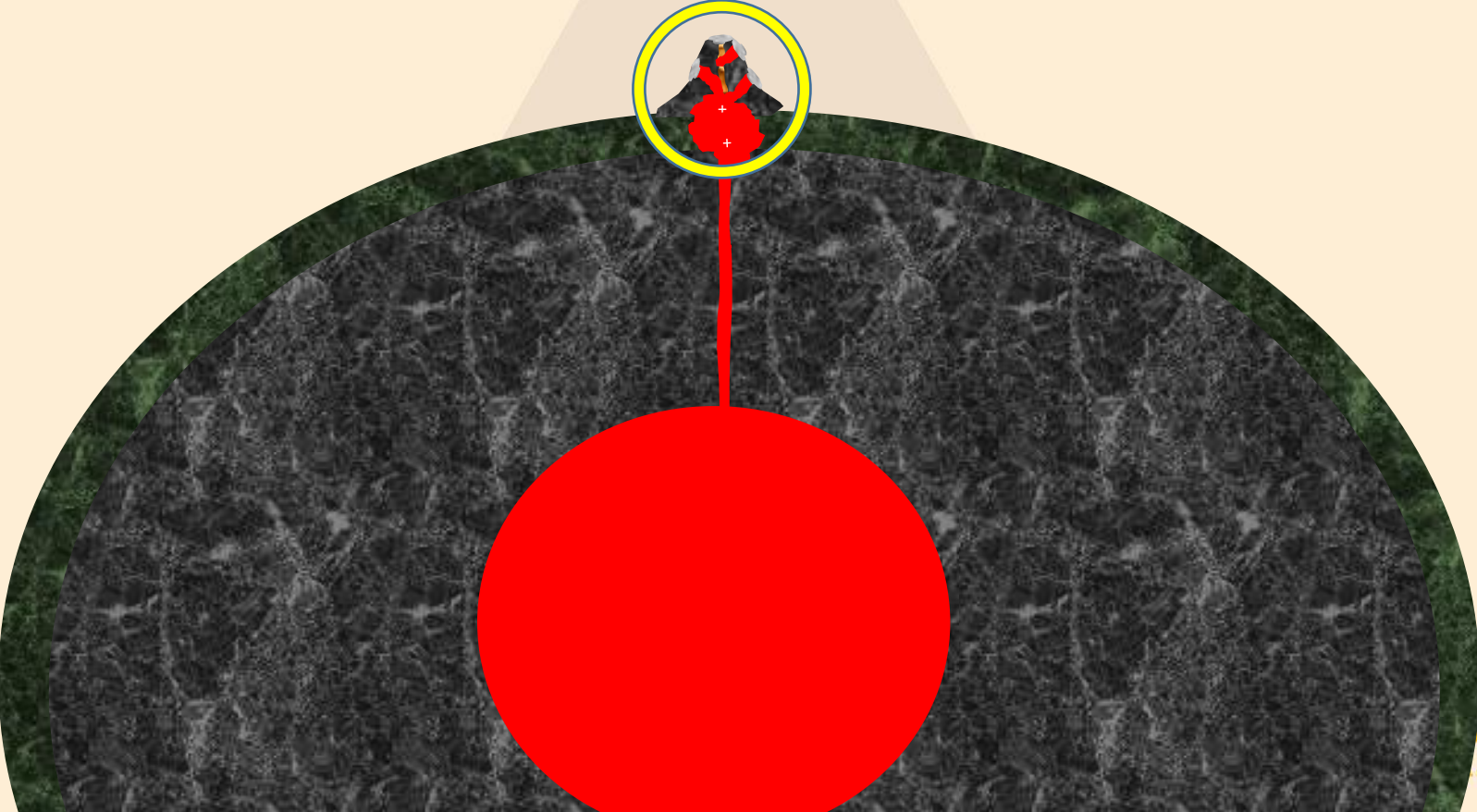
**Intensity of Disconnection, Pain, Emptiness, Fear, Toxic Shame, and lack of faith, grit, & agency.**



# The Context System

## Family

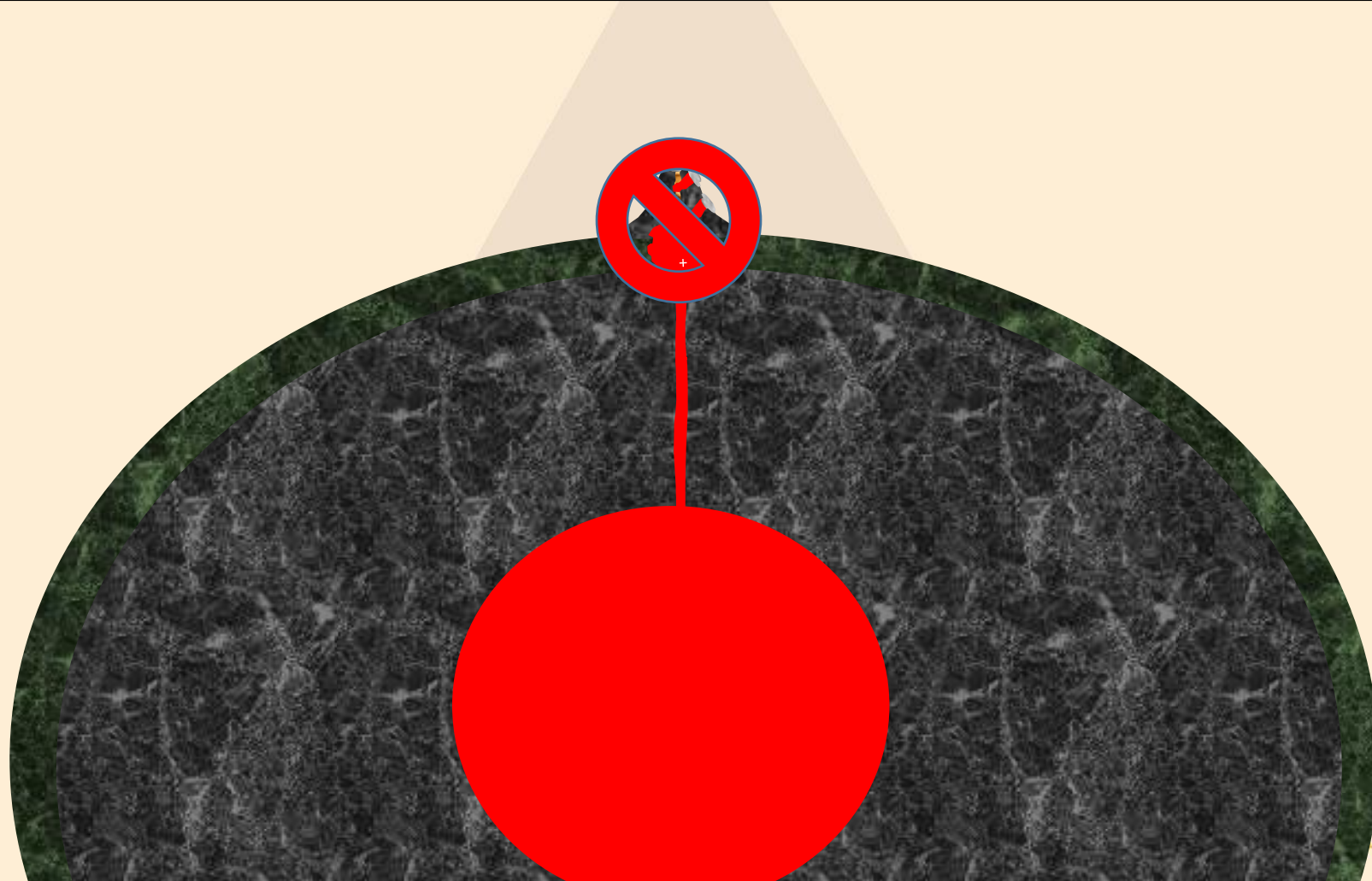
### Inner Circles, Band of Brothers & Sisters



# The Context System

## Family

### Inner Circles, Band of Brothers & Sisters



**Anatomy  
of a  
Human**

**Eruption**

**Coping  
Behaviors  
System**

**Magma  
Chamber**

**Core Being  
System**

**Location  
on Earth**

**Context  
System**



# Anatomy of a Human

Drugs, Alcohol,  
Porn, Sex, Food...

Coping  
Behaviors  
System

Trauma, Pain, Fear,  
Insecure Attachment,  
Isolation, Spiritual Void,  
Toxic Shame

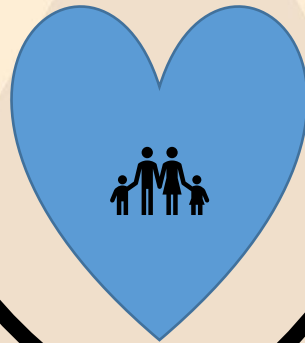
Core Being  
System

Family Disconnection  
Insecure Attachment

Context  
System

**COPING**  
**BEHAVIORS**

**CORE**  
**BEING**



**CONTEXT**

**CORE-SYSTEMS MODEL**



# Addiction

- **Addiction is the Eruption, not the Magma Pool.**
- **Basically, addiction is not a problem, but a solution to problems perceived as unsolvable.**
- **The addiction is not to the experience, but to the expectation of what the experience will do.**
  - **Anticipation or Preoccupation Phase**
    - **Gambling example...**

# Addiction

- **Addiction behaviors “almost work” by creating a temporary truce with the problem only to see the problem gets worse with each repetition.**
- **Addiction is not a “Thing” that “Those People” have and others don’t.**
- **Addiction is profoundly ordinary, connecting with all of human suffering. The Urge by Carl Eric Fisher**

# Addiction

- **Many have died from addictions... but how many would've died without them?**
- **Addiction is an Avoidance Pattern**
- **Coping Mechanism used to avoid pain, emptiness, fear, and distress.**



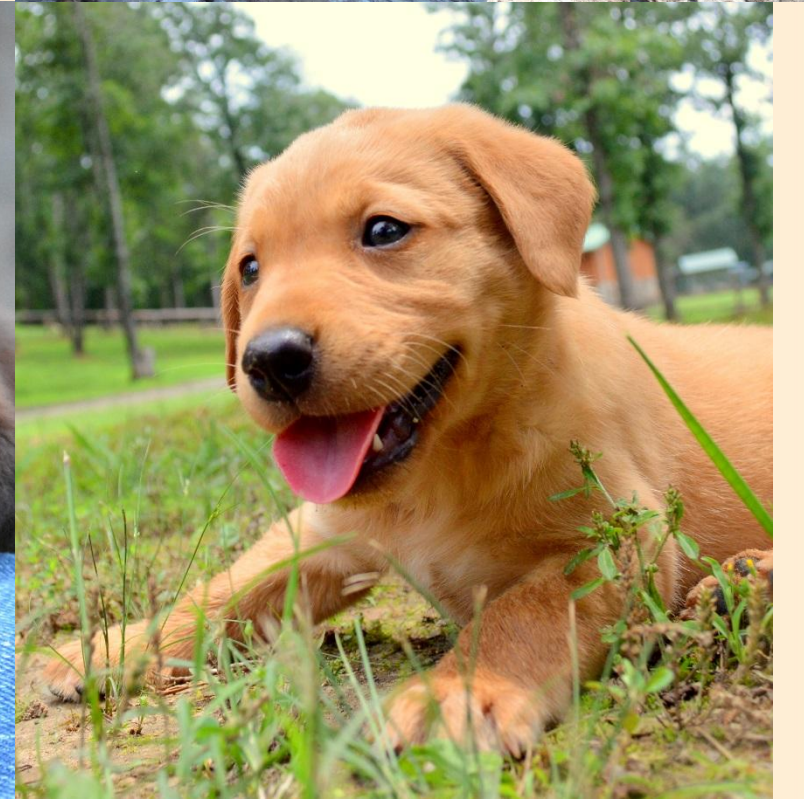
# Addiction

- From a neurobiological perspective, when a person is in “full-blown addiction” it is a severe dopamine depletion condition.
- Using just to feel normal.
- Extreme Tolerance
- Tolerance is not just about having to use more to get the same feeling.
- Tolerance is evidence of dopamine depletion.





# Pause for Discussion

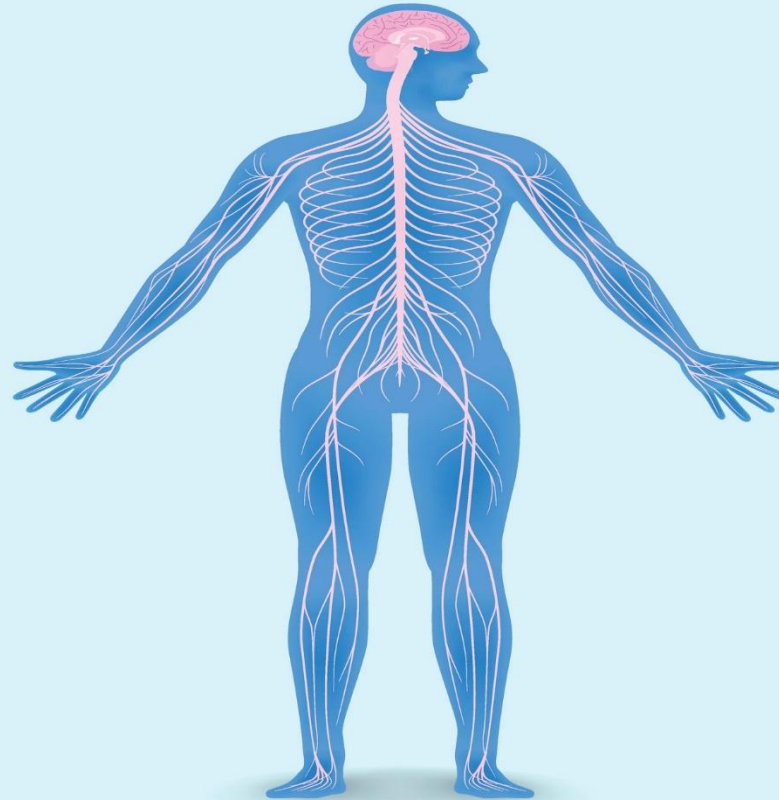




# Human Nervous System

Central Nervous System  
Brain & Spinal Cord

Peripheral Nervous System  
All other nerves to and from the Brain



# Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

1. Controls physiological functions that are necessary for life; heartbeat, digestion, breathing, body temperature, etc.
2. Constantly Scans Our Environment for Cues of Safety, Danger, & Life-Threat from within our bodies, the world around us, & our connection to others

# Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

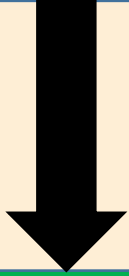
2 Branches

(SNS) Sympathetic  
Adrenaline & Cortisol

(PNS) Parasympathetic  
Endogenous Opioids



**(SNS) Sympathetic  
Adrenaline & Cortisol**

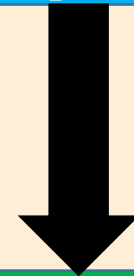


**Sympathetic**

**(PNS) Parasympathetic  
Endogenous Opioids**



**Ventral Vagal**



**Dorsal Vagal**

**Responds through 3 Pathways**

**Sympathetic**

**Ventral Vagal**

**Dorsal Vagal**

**Causes 3 States in Multiple Combinations & Variations**

**Mobilization  
Fight-or-Flight**

**Safety  
Engaged-Connected  
Poised-Vulnerable  
Confident-Creative**

**Immobilization  
Collapse  
Disconnected  
Freeze-Fawn-Flop**

- Working with the Freeze Response in the Treatment of Trauma with Stephen Porges, PhD <https://youtu.be/LJvdulzR7ac>
- Deb Dana, (2018) The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy

# Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

- Constantly Scans Our Environment for Cues of Safety, Danger, & Life-Threat

2 Branches

(SNS) Sympathetic

(PNS) Parasympathetic

3 Pathways

Sympathetic

Ventral Vagal

Dorsal Vagal

3 States in Multiple Combinations & Variations

Mobilization  
Fight-or-Flight

Safe  
Engaged-Connected  
Poised-Vulnerable

Immobilization  
Collapse

**Sympathetic  
Response**

**Ventral Vagal  
Response**

**Dorsal Vagal  
Response**

**Safety  
Engaged-Connected-Poised-Vulnerable**

- **Feel Secure, Present, Grounded, capable of “Flow” (Csikszentmihalyi)**

# Ventral Vagal Response

## Safety

### Engaged-Connected-Poised-Vulnerable

- Feel Secure, Present, Grounded, capable of “Flow” (Csikszentmihalyi)
- Able to be vulnerable and take risks to grow, connect and achieve
- Resources available for accurate reflection, social engagement, decision-making, problem-solving, etc.
- Interpret & express facial expressions, body language, voice tone, accurately
- Capable of joy, playfulness, creativity, & empathy
- Clear-headed Executive Functioning is “on”
- Curious – Seek Novelty – Growth Mindset
- Rest & Digest



**Sympathetic  
Response**

**Ventral Vagal  
Response**

**Dorsal Vagal  
Response**

**Mobilization**

- **Anger-Rage—Frustration → Fight**

# Sympathetic Response

## Mobilization

- Anger-Rage—Frustration → Fight
- Fear-Anxiety-Panic → Flight
  - Higher Cognitive Functions shut down and survival autopilot takes over
- Take Action – Don't Give Up – Try Again
- Destroy the Threat
- Compete and Win in sports, outdoors, job, mission
- Take on Challenges & Overcome
- Prevail over obstacles & Achieve Goals

# Sympathetic Response

## Mobilization

- Anger-Rage—Frustration → Fight
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**Sympathetic  
Response**

**Ventral Vagal  
Response**

**Dorsal Vagal  
Response**

**Immobilization**

- **Being TRAPPED initiates this state**

# Dorsal Vagal Response

## Immobilization

- **Being TRAPPED initiates this state**
- **Danger too big to escape or resist**
- **Collapse – Shutdown – Like “playing possum”**
- **Conserve energy for most basic functions for survival**
- **Higher Cognitive Functions shut down**
- **Lethargy, despondency, inability to self-motivate, hopeless**
- **Shame, feeling incapable, lack of feeling any agency**
- **Being in an “emotional hole”**
- **Social Isolation**
- **Slow down, sleep, repair, recover to be ready to take action again**



# Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

- Constantly Scans Our Environment for Cues of Safety, Danger, & Life-Threat

2 Branches

(SNS) Sympathetic

(PNS) Parasympathetic

3 Pathways

Sympathetic

Ventral Vagal

Dorsal Vagal

3 States in Multiple Combinations & Variations

Mobilization

Take Action

Strive

Compete

Fight-or-Flight

Safe & Engaged

Poised - Calm

Tranquil

Clearheaded

Rational

Immobilization

Slow down - Sleep

Unmotivated

Collapse

Freeze-Fawn-Flop

# Sympathetic

# Ventral Vagal

# Dorsal Vagal

3 States in Multiple Combinations & Variations

## Mobilization

Take Action

Strive - Compete

Get Up & Go

Fight-or-Flight

## Safe & Engaged

Poised - Calm

Tranquil

Clearheaded

Rational

## Immobilization

Slow down - Sleep

Shame

Collapse

Freeze-Fawn-Flop

Fight  
or  
Flight

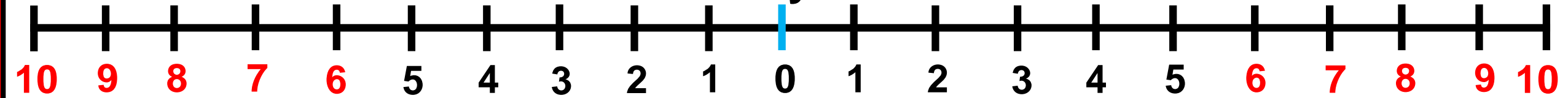
Action  
Strive  
Compete

Flow  
In Zone  
Rest

Slow down  
Sleep  
Nurture

Shame  
Collapse  
Freeze-F-F

# Perceived Severity of Threat Scale



## Hyperarousal

Low Road

Loss of

Executive

Functioning

Rage → Fight

Panic → Flight

## Window of Tolerance

by Dan Siegel

The level of stress in everyday life in which we can stay in a High Road Response

Full Executive Functioning

Poised - Calm - Safe

Attuned - Connected

Tranquil - Approachable

Optimal Zone  
of Emotional Functioning

## Hypoarousal

Low Road

Loss of

Executive

Functioning

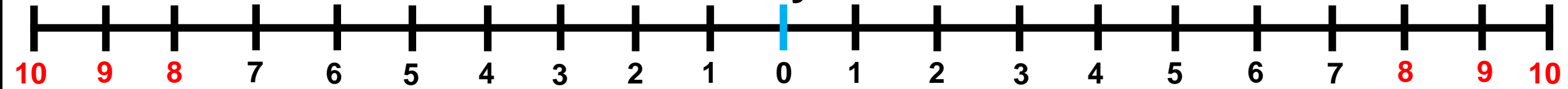
Trapped

Overwhelmed

Freeze

Fawn-or-Flop

# Perceived Severity of Threat Scale



**Hyperarousal**  
Low Road  
Loss of Executive Functioning  
Rage → Fight  
Panic → Flight

## Window of Tolerance

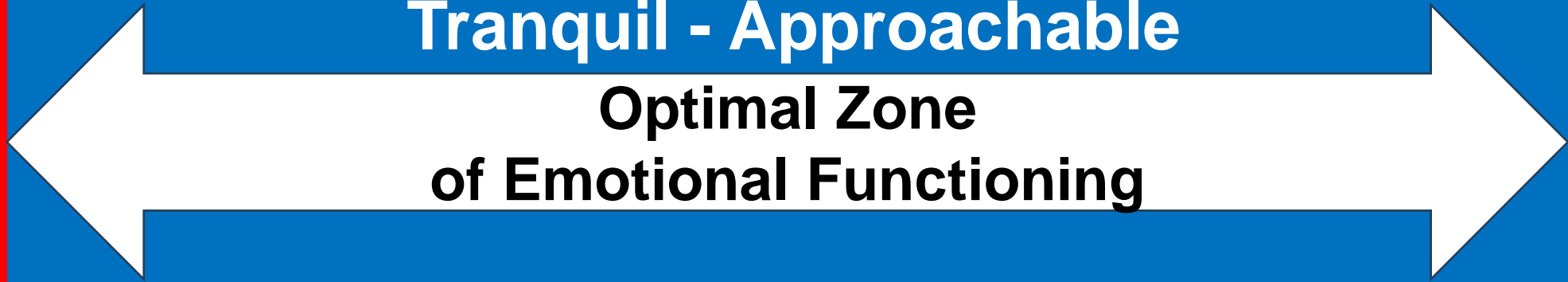
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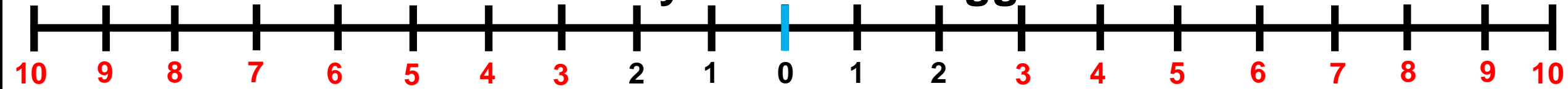
Tranquil - Approachable



Optimal Zone  
of Emotional Functioning

**Hypoarousal**  
Low Road  
Loss of Executive Functioning  
Trapped  
Overwhelmed  
Freeze  
Fawn-Flop

# Severity of Threat Trigger



## Hyperarousal

Low Road

Loss of Executive  
Functioning

Rage → Fight

Panic → Flight

## Window of Tolerance

by Dan Siegel

The level of stress in  
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Tranquil  
Approachable

## Hypoarousal

Low Road

Loss of Executive  
Functioning

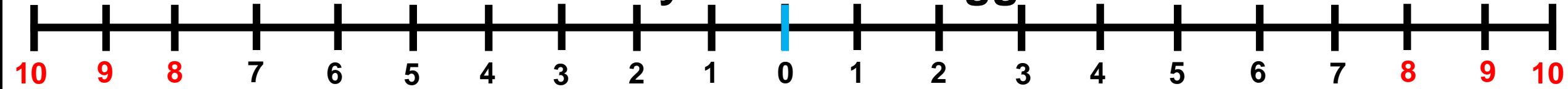
Trapped

Overwhelmed

Freeze-Fawn-Flop

Optimal Zone  
of Emotional  
Functioning

# Severity of Threat Trigger



**Sympathetic**  
Mobilization  
Take Action  
Strive  
Compete  
Get Up & Go  
Fight-or-Flight

**Ventral Vagal**  
Safe & Engaged  
Poised – Calm  
Tranquil  
Clearheaded

**Dorsal Vagal**  
Immobilization  
Slow down  
Sleep  
Collapse  
Freeze  
Fawn  
Flop

## **Window of Tolerance** by Dan Siegel

The level of stress in everyday life in which we can stay in a High Road Response  
Full Executive Functioning  
Safe - Poised - Calm - Attuned - Connected  
Tranquil - Approachable

**Hyperarousal**  
Low Road  
Survival  
Response  
Loss of  
Executive  
Functioning  
Rage → Fight  
Panic → Flight

**Optimal Zone  
of Emotional Functioning**

**Hypoarousal**  
Low Road  
Survival  
Response  
Loss of  
Executive  
Functioning  
Trapped  
Overwhelmed  
Freeze  
Fawn-Flop



- **Where do we go when we are small, alone, voiceless, and frozen?**
- **...seek out when we're hurt, afraid, & lonely?**
- **Not to those who love us 100%, or those we love 100% because you can love with all your heart and not have deep connection...**
- **...To secure attachment-based relationships.**
- **...To those with whom we can coregulate.**
- **...They feel with us, and we feel felt.**
- **IF they are safe - attuned - self regulated.**
- **IF in their Window of Tolerance.**

**Secure Attachment: a deep emotional bond rooted in trust that the relationship will always be...**

- **Place of security from which I can explore & grow**
- **Refuge for comfort, support, and protection**
- **Haven when needing protection when threatened**
- **Where I am seen, heard, pursued, & accepted**
- **Healing when I am broken**
- **Believes in me when I don't believe in myself**
- **\* Confidence that Repair will follow Rupture**

- **Insecure Attachment**
- **\* No Confidence that Repair will follow Rupture**
- **Ambivalent or Anxious Ambivalent Attachment**
  - **Fear of rejection / abandonment**
  - **Clingy – Enmeshed**
- **Disorganized Attachment**
  - **Fear of rejection - Emotional dysregulation**
- **Avoidant Attachment**
  - **Inability to develop emotional closeness**

# The Capacity to Connect

- **How is secure attachment developed?**
  - **Time, Affection, Gaze, ...**
  - **Training Princess...**
- **Confidence that Repair will follow Rupture**
- **What are the implications?**
- **That we are better and better off after repair than before rupture.**
- **The Rupture & Repair process is the prototypical process for living a healthy, good & full life.**

**Original Self**



**Kintsugi Process**





# **Kintsugi Process**

**Original Self or  
Relationship is  
Ruptured by  
Trauma,  
Toxic Shame,  
Betrayal,  
Sin...**



# **Kintsugi Process**

**Choose to not  
Repair:**

**Our Original Self  
remains lost & we  
live out of our  
Toxic Shame  
Identity**



**Kintsugi Process  
Choose to Repair  
spiritually,  
neurophysiologically,  
and relationally:  
Our relationships and our  
original self are  
resurrected and  
transformed into a better  
state & we live out of our  
Masterpiece Identity**



**The Masterpiece Effect of Rupture and Repair**