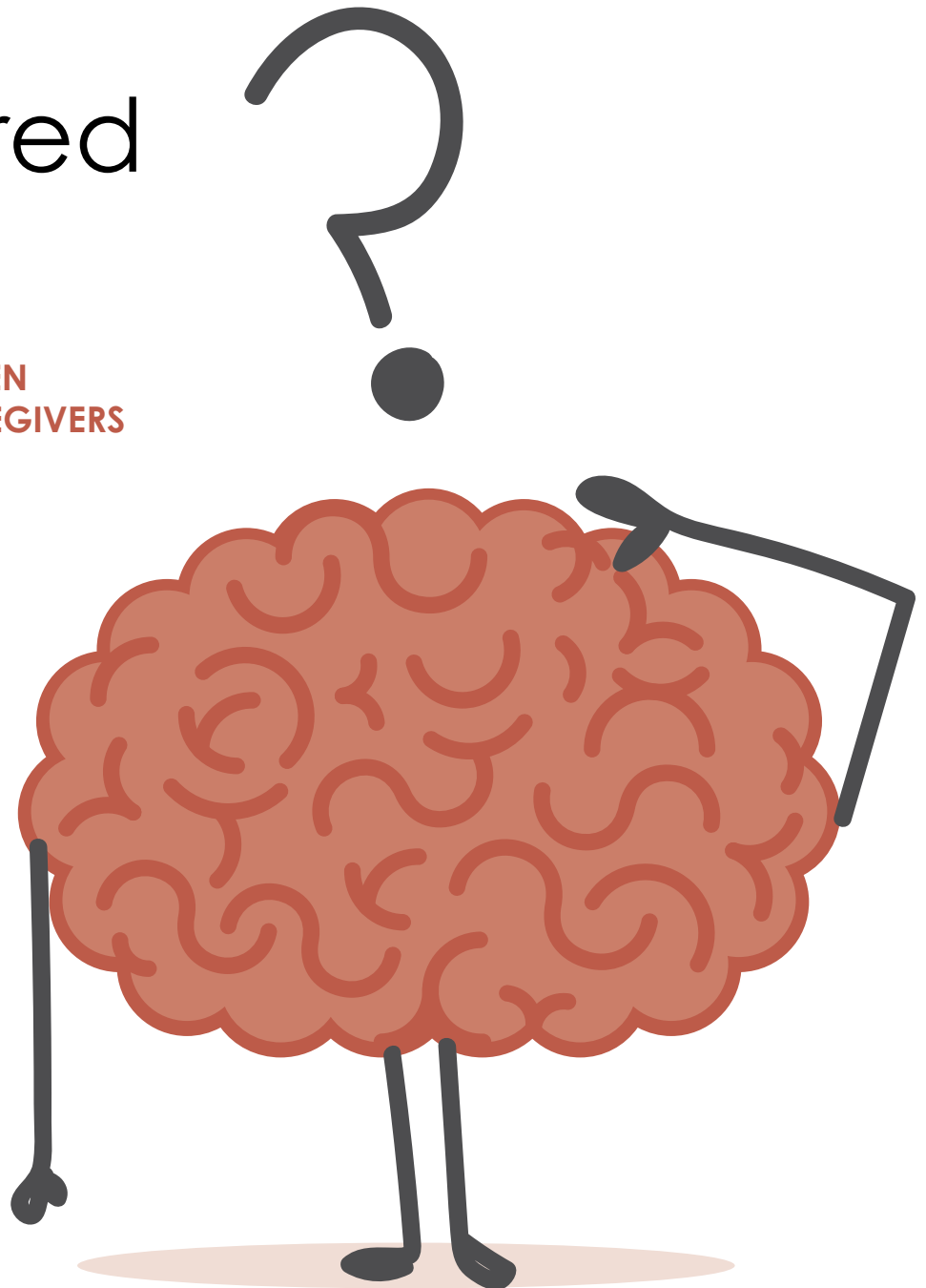


# The Injured BRAIN

EXPLAINED TO CHILDREN  
AND THEIR ADULT CAREGIVERS



## EDITORIAL

**Carole Côté**, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Centre d'expertise sur la maltraitance, Centre de recherche et d'expertise Jeunes en difficulté, Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (CCSMTL)

**Andrée Le Blanc**, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Professional Practice Development, Multidisciplinary Services Department, Professional Practice Unit, CCSMTL

## ILLUSTRATION

**Johanne Boivin**, Planning, Programming and Research Officer, Adolescent Community Services and Resources, CCSMTL

This leaflet was created after watching a video in which Allison Sampson Jackson, inspired by the work of Dan Siegel and Joseph LeDoux among others, explains in a very simple way the brain and how it is affected by trauma. To make this material accessible to young children, we decided to present it in an illustrated and playful way. To access the video entitled "Explaining the Brain to Children and Adolescents," use the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/109042767>

Source: *The Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development (GUCCHD)*

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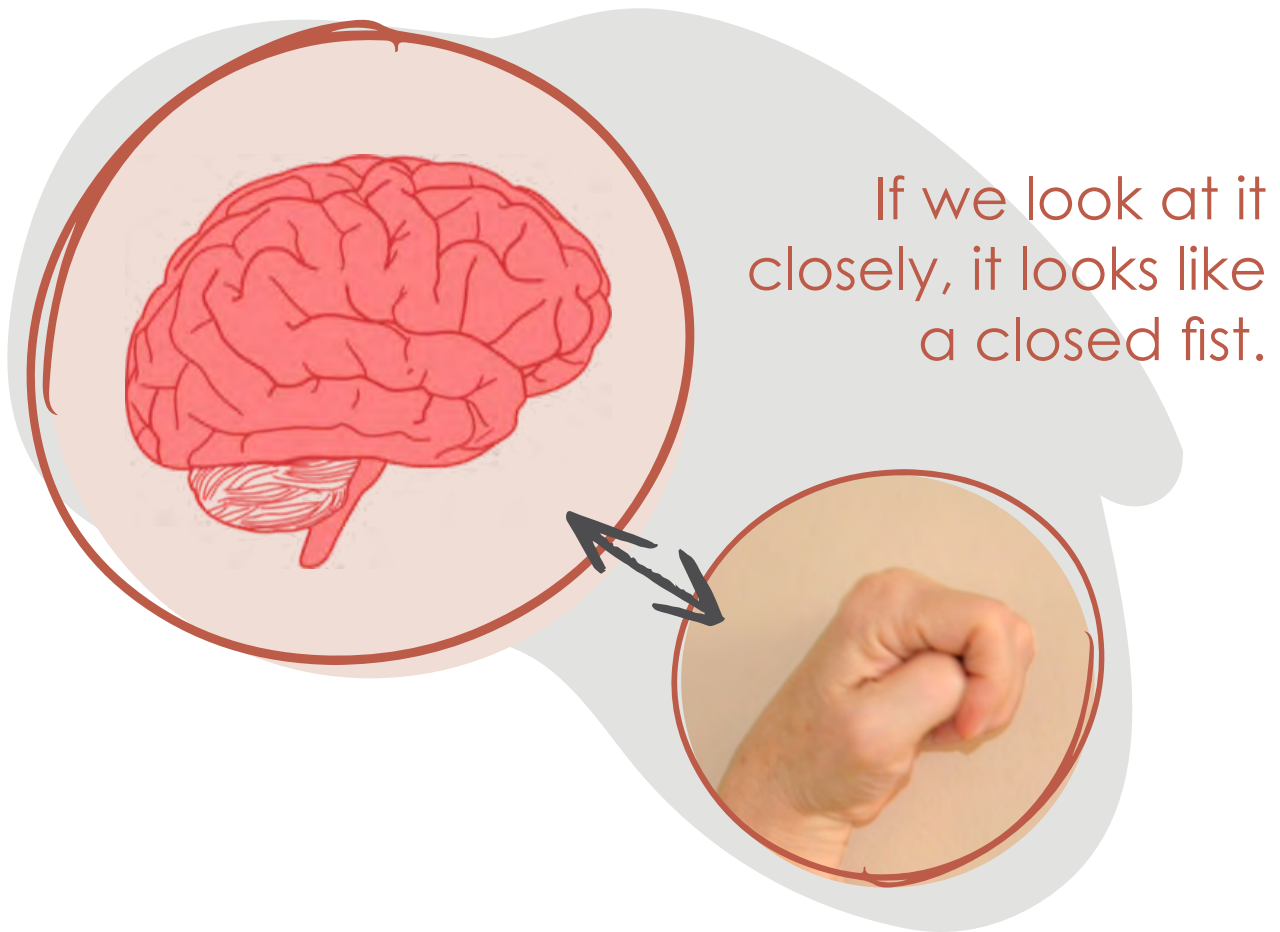
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Your BRAIN is a part of your body that is not visible to others. Yet, it's this part that helps you move, communicate, think, feel emotions and perceive your environment.



If we look at it closely, it looks like a closed fist.

The part that looks like a thumb is a very important part of your brain.



It's like a watchdog that can growl and bark when it perceives a threat. It warns your body of danger so that you can protect yourself. It's like an alarm system.





The other part resembling a hand is also a very important part of your brain. It's the one that helps you think. We can call it your "wise owl."

Hoo-hoo

Most of the time, your owl and your dog live together harmoniously.

Sometimes, something happens that puts your dog on alert.

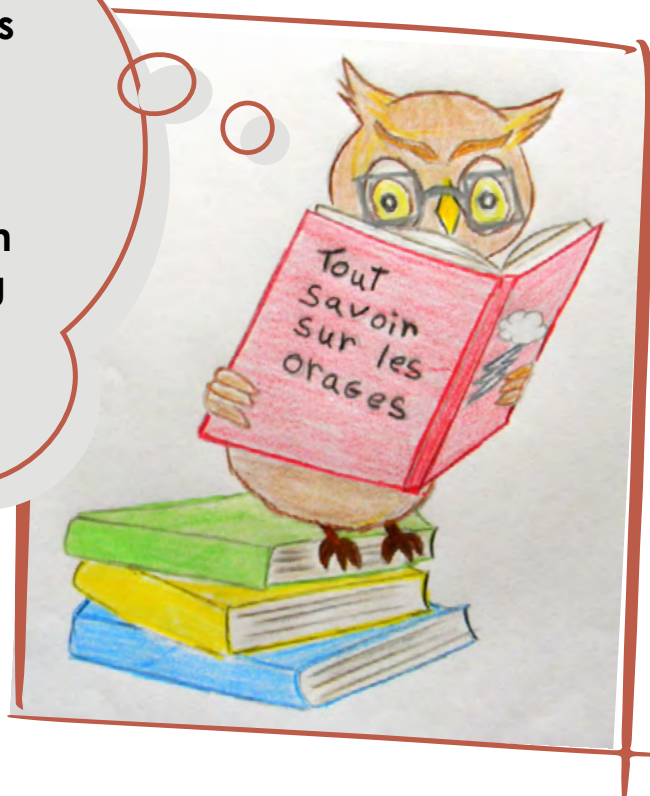
There was a loud sound of thunder and your dog was startled!



**Boom!!!**

**Your wise owl knows a lot of things.**

**It explains to your dog that it's only a thunderstorm and there's nothing to worry about in the house.**





But sometimes, your owl doesn't have time to reassure your dog...



It barks so loudly that your owl flies away.

To make your owl come back,  
you have no choice but to calm  
your dog down!



You can find activities that help you  
calm down so that the dog stops  
barking: blowing bubbles, breathing  
calmly, playing sports, etc.



You can become a good master for your dog.  
If you know it well and listen to it, you'll be able to  
reassure it more quickly when there's no real danger.



As soon as you feel that its  
fur bristles and it shows its teeth,  
that's when you have to act!

At first, you may need a grown-up to help you recognize that your dog is worried without your being in real danger. If your wise owl has already flown away, you'll need that adult to lend you his or hers.

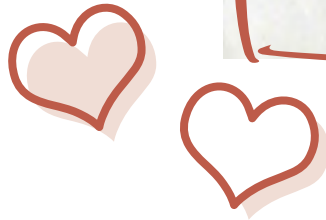


Owl owned by an adult you know who comes to the rescue.

With the adult's help, you'll find ways to get your dog to calm down and your owl to come back.

Each dog is different. Do you know yours well?  
Do you really know how to calm it down and help your owl come back?

When he's around, your owl gives your dog good advice. They're good friends!



## Help for parents or adult caregivers

Children who have experienced maltreatment and neglect and have developed traumatic sequelae have had their brain functions altered. They are very sensitive and react strongly to stress. It is important to remember that children have had to adapt and develop strategies to feel safe and have their needs met. These strategies are not always successful, but they are the ones that were available to them. When children perceive that they are in danger, their alarm system is triggered and their immediate survival reactions are put in place. These mechanisms are unconscious, therefore from the adult's point of view, there may be no reason for the child to feel threatened or experience these emotions.

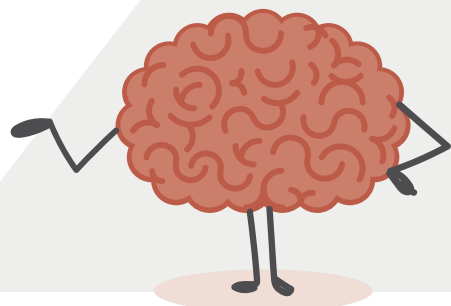
However, something in the child's past environment, which is associated with the traumatic experience, has surfaced in the present environment. This is called a "trigger." It can be a smell, a sound, a gesture, or a simple request that makes children recall the difficult events of their past. Often, the first intervention used is intended to punish the child's behaviour. We sometimes say, "Stop doing that at once." Such interventions are aimed at the wise owl. The problem is that the wise owl has flown away.

### **What to do first:**

- Take a moment to calm yourself before conducting an intervention.
- Acknowledge what the child has experienced despite the behaviour he or she is exhibiting.
- Address the safety needs manifested by the child.
- Help the child calm down the barking dog so that the wise owl can return.

*Only when this is done can the child be challenged to find a solution or better behavioural strategies.*

- Over time, it is important to examine what is causing the child stress and provoking a survival response. There are often patterns that repeat from time to time which, once they become known, can help us anticipate the child's reaction and provide the necessary support earlier (i.e., help the child calm the barking dog before the owl flies away).



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