

Get to know the Human Brain WITH MELVA AND FEGGIS

HIYER!



Meet Melva Mapletree

Some of you reading may have met her already, and for others – this might be the first time you’ve met this boisterous, mischievous and funny, nearly-11-year-old girl. Melva loves adventures, as a qualified volunteer mountain rescuer, she goes on them alllll the time, but sometimes even when she’s feeling bold and brave, her brain doesn’t feel like it works properly...



Hello you lot,
I’m Melva!

Do you ever feel a bit...worryy? You know, a bit higgledy piggledy in your brain? Like it’s sitting there in your head, but you don’t really know what it’s up to up there and it’s not being very helpful! Our brains are **VERY** clever. They are like a huge computer or a futuristic robot. And because they’re so clever, they can sometimes be hard to understand.

On my adventures so far with my friend Feggis, I’ve learnt a few things about the brain so I thought I’d catch up with you lot, to share what I know. Now when I feel all topsy turvy, scared and anxious, I kind of understand what my brain might be up to, and ways to help it feel calmer and think more clearly.

Let’s meet
Feggis...



Feggis is a mountain goat. Mountain goats, would you believe, have a big obsession with learning about the brain, weird, I know, but let’s go with it. So, with the help of Feggis, we’re going to have a look at our brains and how they work when things feel stressful.

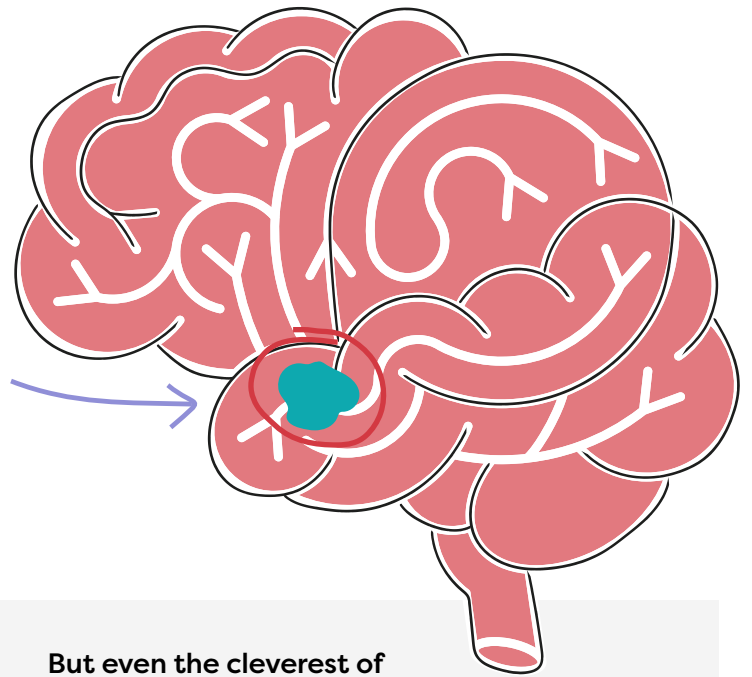
Feggis’ brain feels veryyyy squishy and full. Full to the brim of emotions. Sad, happy, scaredy, wobbly, soft, anxious, angry and then sad and happy again. All day long! But the worst of the feelings is when Feggis feels grrrrrr, stress.

THE AMYGDALA

The Good Worry Brain

This is the Amygdala, the front part of your brain- or what I like to call, the good worry part.

This part of the brain is our protector. It is our fight, flight or freeze response. It works very quickly, like a ninja and helps the rest of the brain work by telling all the other parts and our body, that something stressful is happening and to take action! This means we are ready to either fight ***Karate chops at the ready!***, run away or freeze – this is our brain just trying to help keep us safe from harm!



But even the cleverest of brains get confused. Sometimes, our good worry part of the brain, mistakes a small everyday thing (like hard homework), as a really big scary thing, (like a huge hungry lion) and we feel very anxious and scared.

When that happens, I take a deep breath to calm down and remind myself that there isn't anything to be scared of, it's just my brain jumping about and walloping a bit too much.



That's clever, yes indeedy.
But also, a bit confusing!
But that's ok; calm first,
answers later.

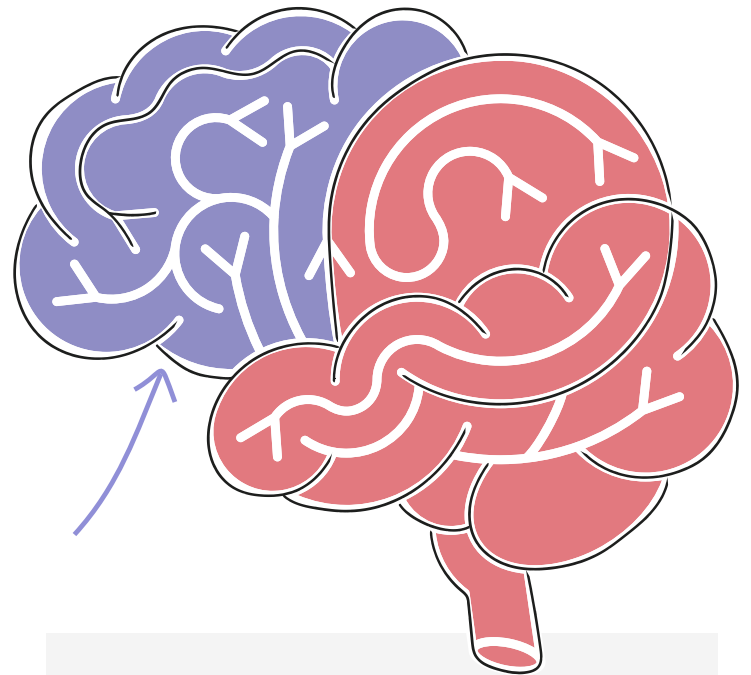


PREFRONTAL CORTEX

The Grandpa Pebble Brain

It is confusing Feggis, but Aha!
That's why we have another part
of our brain, a very wise part.

We call this The Grandpa Pebble part; he's my Grandpa and knows **LOADS** about everything! The Grandpa Pebble brain is our decision maker, it decides what we need to do, when and how. When our good worry brain wobbles, it shakes up the Grandpa Pebble brain – imagine being shaken awake in the middle of the night from your sleep.... how would you feel? You might be confused, shocked, all muddled and unable to think clearly or quickly.



I call mine Grandmammy hoof brain.
So before Feggis makes a decision
when I feel stressed, I need to
calm down, or Feggis will make
a bad or silly decision...
That makes all the sense!



So, when our good worry brain gets confused, it shakes up our Grandpa Pebble brain; we get even more confused and mixed up.

Our job when this happens is to quieten our brain, to help it think clearly, so it can use all the cleverness it has stored, to make good decisions again. Phew!

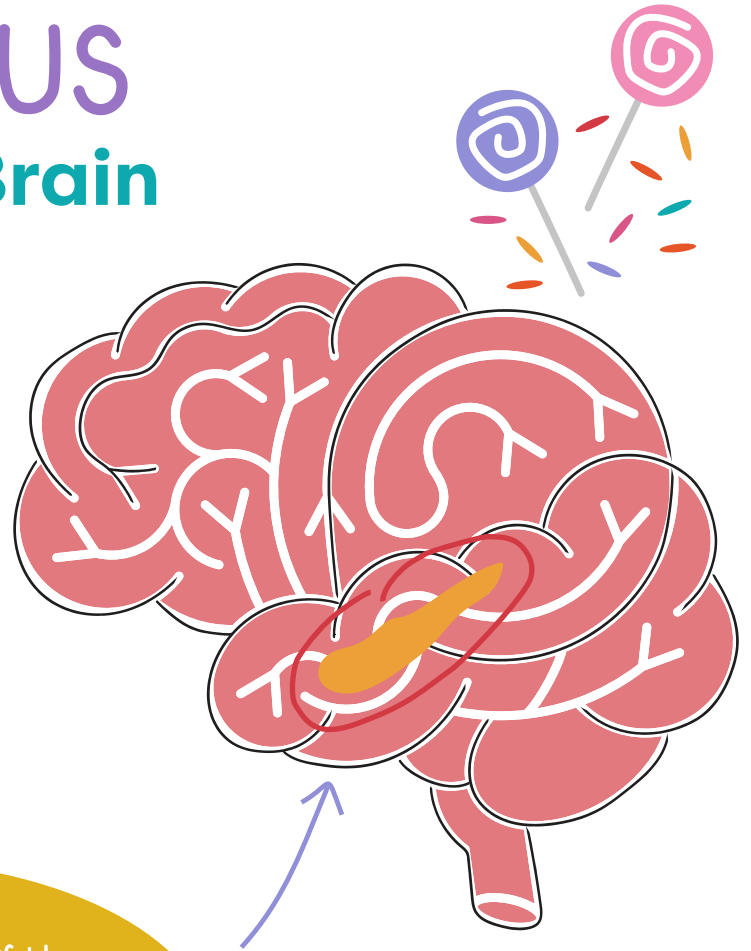


HIPPOCAMPUS

The Sweet Shop Brain

But before we learn how to be calm in stressful situations, we need to look at one more part of the brain and no, it's nothing to do with hippos!

This final part of the brain, that I'm going to tell you about is where all of our memories are stored and recalled. I imagine it probably looks like the shelves in a super fun sweet shop, with jars and jars of yummy memories, waiting to be picked and remembered. So I call this part the sweet shop brain!



So Feggis not remember if I have done stressy or scary things before?
Feggis not remember that I am a brave goat? No wonder Feggis feels all cloudy and weird when stressed!



When your good worry brain wobbles your sweet shop brain, it knocks all of those memory jars over, so they all get mixed up and you can't remember things properly. Our job when this happens, is to stop the brain from getting flustered and in a kerfuffle, and to take things step by step or jar by jar!

When our good worry brain is calm, it makes all the other brain parts calm too, so the Good Worry Brain, the Grandpa Pebble Brain and the Sweet Shop Brain, can all work together as a team.

When you are able to stay calm, even when you're anxious, worried or scared – your brain doesn't feel quite as higgledy piggledy.

Activity

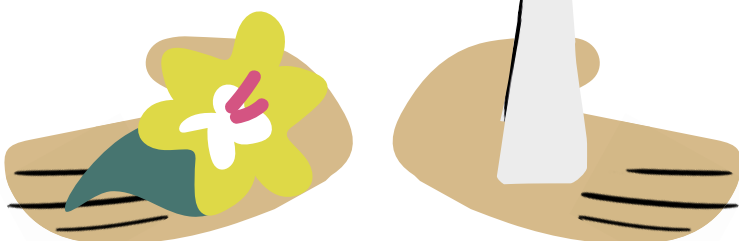
The Flower & Candle Breathing Exercise

This is a simple relaxation technique that encourages deep breathing. It helps to calm all those brain parts when you feel a bit fuzzy or overwhelmed.

Let's have a go!

- Pretend you have a nice smelling flower in one hand, then pretend you have a slow burning candle in another hand.
- Breathe in nice and slow through your nose as you take in all of the flowers lovely scent, tracing your hand with your finger.
- Then breathe out just as slowly through your mouth as you blow out the candle.
- Try this a few times in a row to slow down your brain.

Breathing deeply and slowly when you're feeling anxious can help you feel calmer and clearer; it tells the brain that you're ok and helps you relax.



So, what can we do to feel calm when you're anxious, worried or scared..? Well, I have some tried and tested ideas that might help you...

Activity

54321 Exercise

This is a simple grounding and mindfulness activity, that helps when your thoughts are racing a million miles an hour! When you feel that panic and the flight part of flight, flight or freeze, this activity is great to help you feel present in your body and aware of the space around you.

Let's have a go!

Tell us (or write down):

- 5 objects that you can see right now
- 4 objects that you can feel or touch right now
- 3 things that you can hear right now
- 2 things that you can smell right now
- 1 thing that you can taste right now.

By thinking about something else for a short period of time that is grounded to where we are right now and following simple instructions, it not only helps the brain feel calmer and quieter, it also jump starts the ability to think more clearly.



Activity

Invisible Clay

When our brains get confused and stressed, we sometimes don't notice, that we hold a lot of that worry in our bodies and our muscles, which leads to feeling even more stressed! This is a relaxation exercise, that will help you relax and release muscle tension.

Let's have a go!

Pretend you have a big ball of clay in both hands.

- Rub and roll the imaginary clay in your hands.
- Squeeze it so tightly so that you can imagine the clay popping out from in between your fingers and hold it for a few seconds.
- Then... relax your hands and go back to rubbing and rolling the clay softly.
- Repeat a few times.
- When you're doing it, notice the soft, zingy feeling in the muscles in your hands as they begin to release, relax and calm- the very same thing is happening in your brain.

The great thing about invisible clay – is that you can take it anywhere and get it out at any time, as a stress reliever and helps you feel more aware of the physical sensations of the body.



Have a go at these activities when things feel a bit too much!

It can be very overwhelming when we feel stressed and anxious – but remember everyone feels like that sometimes.

When you look at how complicated our brains are, it's no wonder we can feel higgledy piggledy and when we do feel that way, it's an important sign, that we need to give ourselves a very important moment of calm.



Me, me, me...
Feggis knows this one!
Don't be silly billys, calm first,
answers later!
Clever Feggis, yey!

That's right Feggis, a calm mind can focus and think clearly, a calm mind can remember things more easily and a calm mind can make better decisions. A worried and scared mind is no use to anyone!

We **ALL** feel worried and scared sometimes. Humans... AND even mountain goats! But in those moments of calm, you'll remember that you are capable and I promise to whisper in your ear every now and then that **brave isn't how you feel, it is what you do!**

Melva

xx

If you're interested in finding out more about Melva and Feggis, well you can!

For Schools

MELVA digital is available to schools and educational settings now; it's a fun and accessible creative intervention, supporting children (aged 7-11) and the adults in their lives to talk openly about – and better understand – their mental health, emotions and wellbeing.

Consisting of an online portal with an episodic film with wrap around activities, lesson plans, resources AND a choose your own adventure digital game with an interactive activity booklet, toolbox of resources and a user guide; the Melva digital programme is a meaningful way to invest in the long-term well-being of young people and teaches recognised mental health strategies in an innovative way.

For Families

Melva Mapletree and the Quest for Barnabas Boggle: Our online, interactive storytelling game is perfect for families to use as a tool to help facilitate conversations about mental wellbeing.



Clap Clap everyone - see you next time!

"I learned that being afraid of something doesn't mean you can't do it!"

Melva Young Participant

You can visit the Melva website to find out more via:

www.melva.org.uk



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