

My Chimp Explains:

- Attachment theory
- Stress/Trauma
- Shame

Behaviour VS Person



I have a thinking part of my brain. This is called the prefrontal cortex and it makes decisions. This is represented by me.



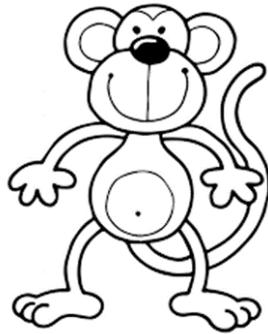
I have a survival part of my brain. This part does not think, its function is to keep me safe from danger and to react quickly. This is the primitive part of my brain. It is represented by my chimp.

Both parts of my brain work together. When they are linked strongly information flows between them. If I am upset information does not flow very well and it is hard to think clearly. If I am happy both parts of my brain work together and make good decisions.

This is me.....



.....and this is my chimp.



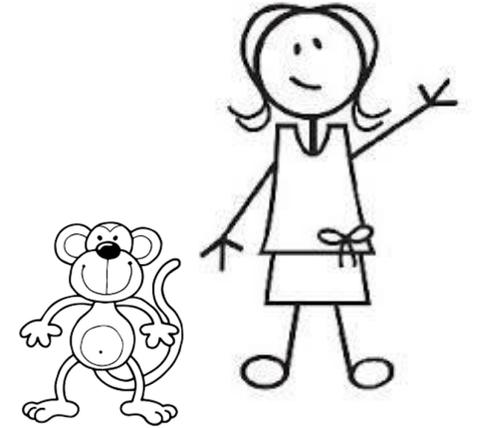
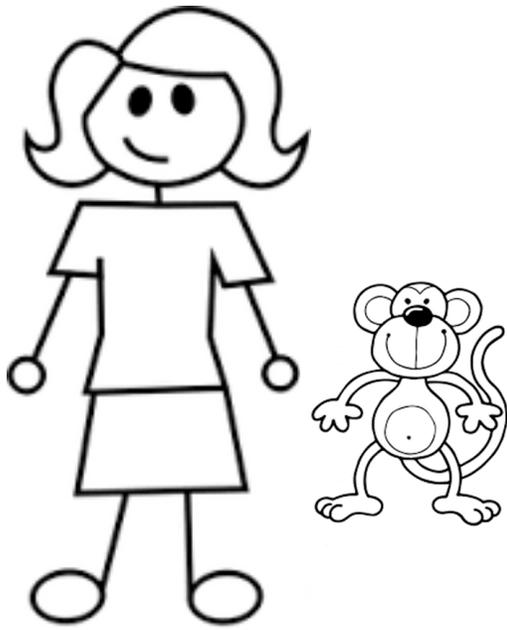
We need each other and we work together. I do the thinking and I hold my chimp's hand so that he knows not to be frightened. My chimp is there to keep me safe, I need him and he is very important. He spots danger and reacts when there isn't time to think about it.

BUT.....

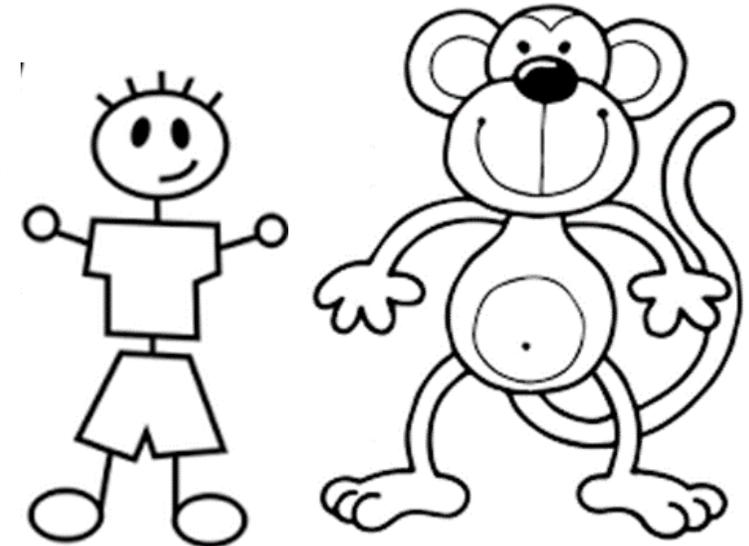
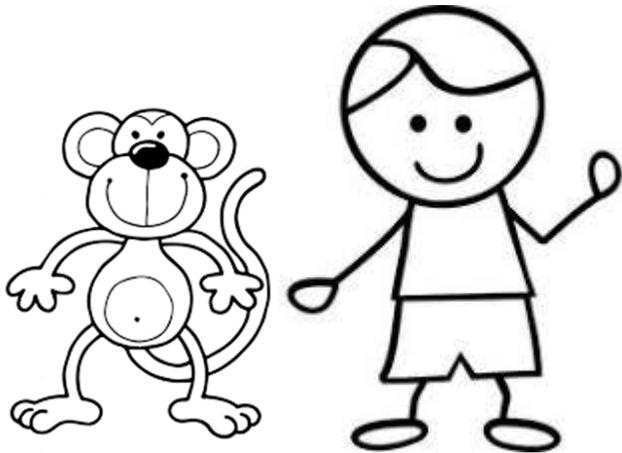
My chimp is very jumpy and can make mistakes. Sometimes he thinks things are dangerous even when they aren't. He jumps at loud noises and sees monsters in the dark. I need to make sure that I hold his hand and talk to him to keep him calm. Sometimes I forget to do this and my chimp does something silly!

Everybody has a chimp.

Some people have a manageable chimp who is calm and not too jumpy, they only react to real dangers. They hold hands tightly and work together.



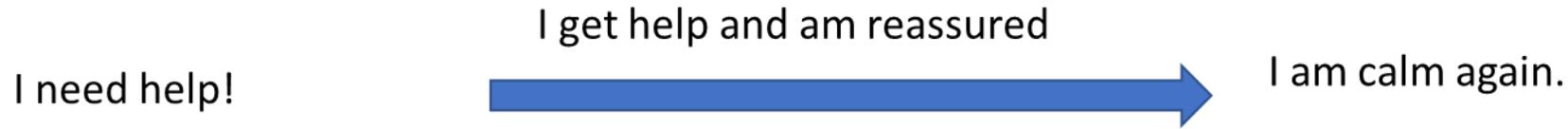
Other people have a bigger chimp to look after. It is much harder to hold their hand and help them stay calm. They are often frightened by situations that are not at all dangerous. As the chimps are big they can easily let go of their person's hand. When they do this they are not listening to their person at all! Getting them back to calm and working together is really hard leaving these people feeling exhausted!



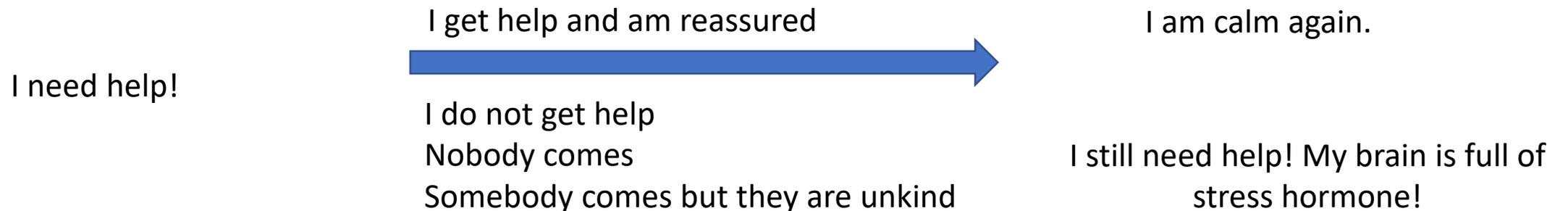
Training your chimp to be calmer and a bit more sensible is hard work and takes time. Sometimes it means asking someone else to walk with you and be near when you are worried that your chimp is going to be silly. It means having someone who will stick with you to help you think and to keep your chimp in order until you feel confident enough to do it by yourself.

Your developing brain

When you are little and you live in a calm place the response to your needs is consistent, predictable and kind. Your brain makes links which are constantly reinforced developing strong reliable pathways.

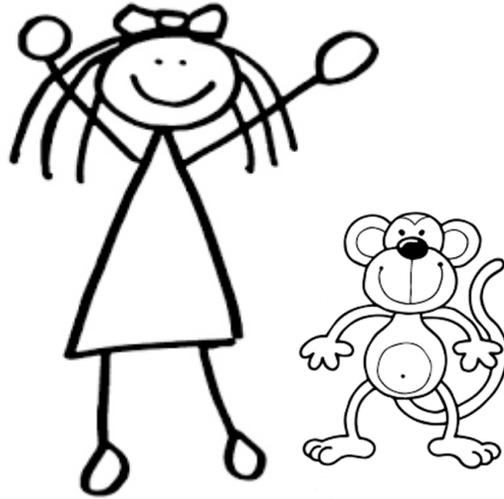


If you live in a chaotic place when you are small you never know what is going to happen. Your body makes more stress hormones and this means that your chimp grows more quickly and gets much bigger than expected. Living in a chaotic place may mean that the information you receive is not consistent and this makes it much harder for your thinking brain to develop. Instead of pathways which are followed often you have many which are not backed up so links are not as strong. Your thinking brain finds it more difficult to process the information it receives and your chimp feels frightened all the time. This is hypervigilance.



Secure attachment: my needs are met in a consistent way

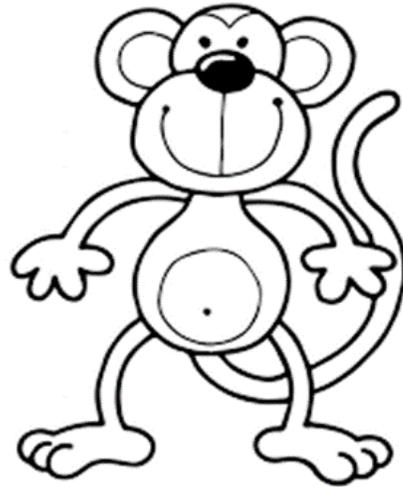
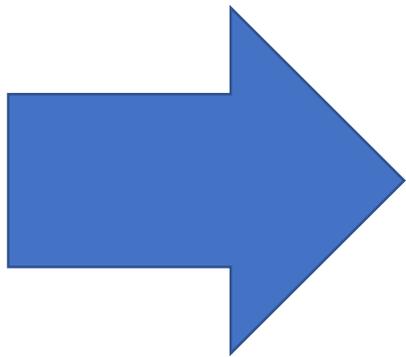
Normal levels of stress hormones during early years



My chimp and I work together and our links are strong. I do the thinking and my chimp listens to me so that I can make good decisions. It is impossible to make good decisions all the time and sometimes, when I am looking the other way, my chimp will do something silly. I know how to calm him down when this happens and how to put things right. Generally I do not need help to think but I know that when I ask for help this will be gentle, kind, predictable and understanding. Asking for help does not frighten me.

Attachment Disorder: I always get a different response to my cries for help and my needs are not met consistently. Sometimes they are not met at all.

Excessive levels of stress hormones during early years

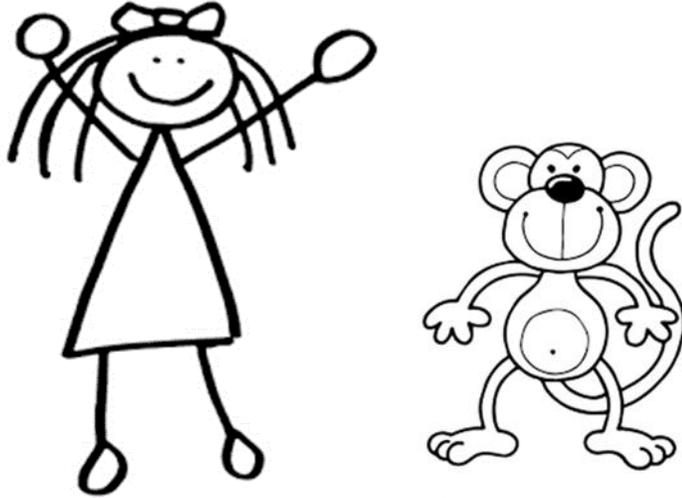


My chimp has grown out of control everything seems dangerous to him and everything makes him jump. It is difficult to concentrate when I am thinking and trying to make good decisions because my chimp will stamp and shout and confuse me. He is so big that often I am not able to calm him down. This make me feel frightened. My chimp's behaviour is out of control he often lets go of my hand and doesn't listen to me. I need help to calm him down so that I can think clearly. I cannot think calmly until my chimp is quiet and holding my hand. Needing help also makes me feel frightened because the help I have received in the past has been unpredictable and sometimes unkind. Sometimes I have asked and no help has come. I have to be in control as I can only really trust myself. Other people let me down and I believe they will leave me. Sometimes I push other people away so that I can be in control of them leaving and I am not disappointed when they go. I sense the disapproval of others very strongly. Everyone leaves me. I only really feel safe when I know what is going to happen and I am confident in the way people will react to me. When life is unpredictable I will become overwhelmed and my chimp will take over. I feel very small and vulnerable when I am forced to rely on other people.

Stress, Crisis and Trauma

Stress is normal and in short defined bursts can lead to learning and growth.

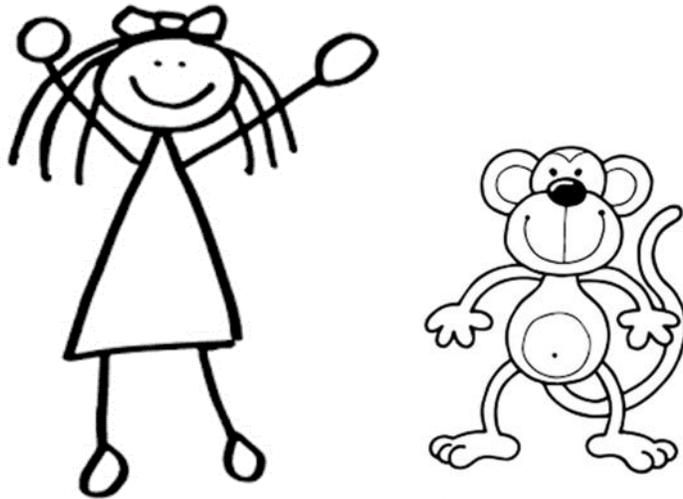
*I try something
new*



My chimp is anxious and panics a bit. He is worried about what will happen as we have not done this before. I can talk to him and convince him that trying something new might be fun. I remind him of the other new things we have tried and the fun that we had so that he calms down.

Crisis is a period of extended stress which can be navigated with supportive care and does not necessarily lead to long term negative consequences.

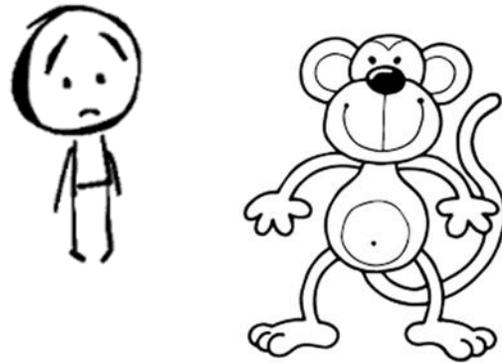
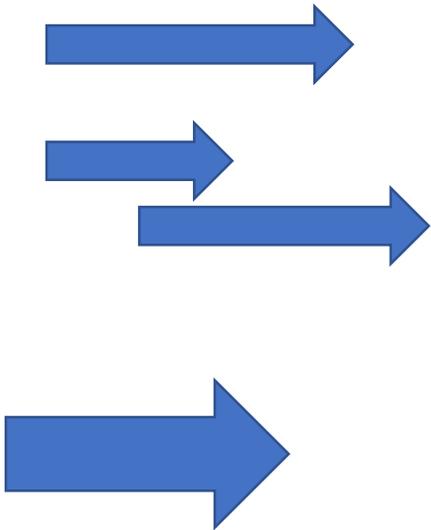
*I am anxious
and cannot cope*



My chimp panics but I cannot calm him down. He gets frightened and I need help because I am not able to cope. I have people who will help me to do this and I am able to talk to them. They are good at noticing that I need help. Being able to calm my chimp at this point will break the cycle that I am in and make a new link between us so that the next time I will be able to cope better. Being calm will give me room to think. The more chances I have to experience this help the more likely it is that I will be able to do this for myself as I get stronger and more in control of my chimp.

Trauma is caused by a series of events that lead to feelings of helplessness and terror. This is toxic stress and occurs when you are constantly soaking up the negative or abusive atmosphere around you and have no emotional connection to offer support.

I am subject to a constant stream of stress



My chimp senses danger and is frightened. The more danger he senses the more frightened he becomes and I am overwhelmed by sad feelings. I don't think I will ever be able to be normal or accepted. I have nowhere to turn to get help. I cannot ask for help anyway as I do not trust anyone and I am stuck in a cycle where my chimp is getting more and more frightened.

My fear leaks out and my behaviour changes as I can no longer control my chimp and he is going crazy! This makes things worse as people call me names and think that I am bad and this frightens my chimp even more.

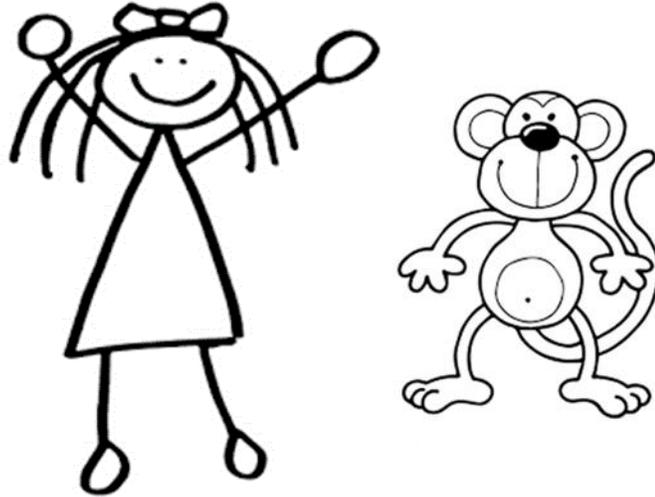
I need kindness, understanding and help really badly to break the cycle.

When you are subjected to this level of stress in the early years the primitive part of your brain is subject to such high levels of stress hormones that it is always switched on. Connections are not made with the thinking part of the brain and as a result the chimp part of the brain is overdeveloped and the formation of links with the rational part of your brain is delayed.

Shame

Shame is normal and is something we all feel at some point. This feeling is usually short lived as the result of a defined incident. We recover if the people around us accept us even though we make mistakes.

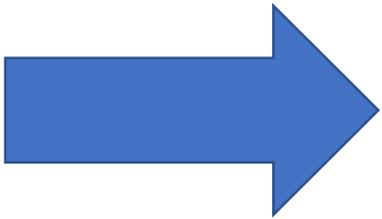
*I break
something that
belongs to
someone else*



I feel bad. My chimp is anxious and panics a bit. He wants to pretend that it wasn't us. He would like to hide and might try to convince me to lie. If I do this I will still feel bad. I know that I have support and that the people around me understand about making mistakes. I can talk to him and convince him that telling the truth and saying sorry will help us to feel better. I know that I am supported and accepted even if I make mistakes.

Shame becomes toxic when you have no emotional connection and you feel your needs will not be met. If you make a mistake the fear is intense and painful as you think that you will be rejected, abandoned and left alone.

*I break something
that belongs to
someone else*



I feel bad. My chimp is anxious and panics a lot. He wants to pretend that it wasn't us. I agree and we act as if nothing has happened. We carry on as normal and push it to the back of our mind. I still feel bad and now I have lied I know I am bad. I can't think straight and I can't get it out of my head but I have to pretend that everything is OK. We make a lot of mistakes and my chimp always says we should lie and say it wasn't us so that is what we do. I always hear people say that I am a nuisance, that I get in the way and that it was easier when I wasn't around. They are right, I cause all the problems and everything is my fault. I am all alone and even if I said it was me that broke it I wouldn't have anyone to help me and I would make it even worse.

I am stuck and I really need help to break the cycle but I don't know who can help me and I pretend that I am happy and laugh so that I am not an even bigger problem.

understand that I am more than my behaviour.

keep me in mind.

talk to my chimp when I am overwhelmed and help me to make stronger links with him.

stick with me.

model good behaviour so that I can see what it looks like.

understand that I have been let down by adults, the very people that you are now expecting me to trust. I feel very vulnerable.

do what you say you will so that I can learn to rely on and trust adults.

understand that engaging in power struggles and forcing me to comply might well result in short term compliance but my view of adults will be reinforced and will lead to deeper mistrust and resentment.

notice when my feelings are spilling over to help me to contain them and express them safely.

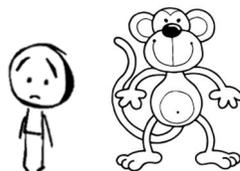
believe in me more than I believe in myself and wait for me to catch up.

help my thinking brain work out what I am feeling by wondering out loud with me when I seem overwhelmed.

understand that I have the best intentions but that sometimes I become trapped in my feelings and they spill over in an unpredictable way.

know that just joining in is so hard for me because I do not see myself as fitting in. Other people may show that I am accepted but I do not yet accept myself.

be my memory and replay it for me so that I am always reminded of the things that I can do.



I need you to...

be available for me when I need help.

provide consistency and continuity to help me to feel safe and secure.

understand that I live behind a wall and present what I think will be an acceptable version of myself. I find this very exhausting because I am always hiding and pretending.



You are not alone,
we would like to help.