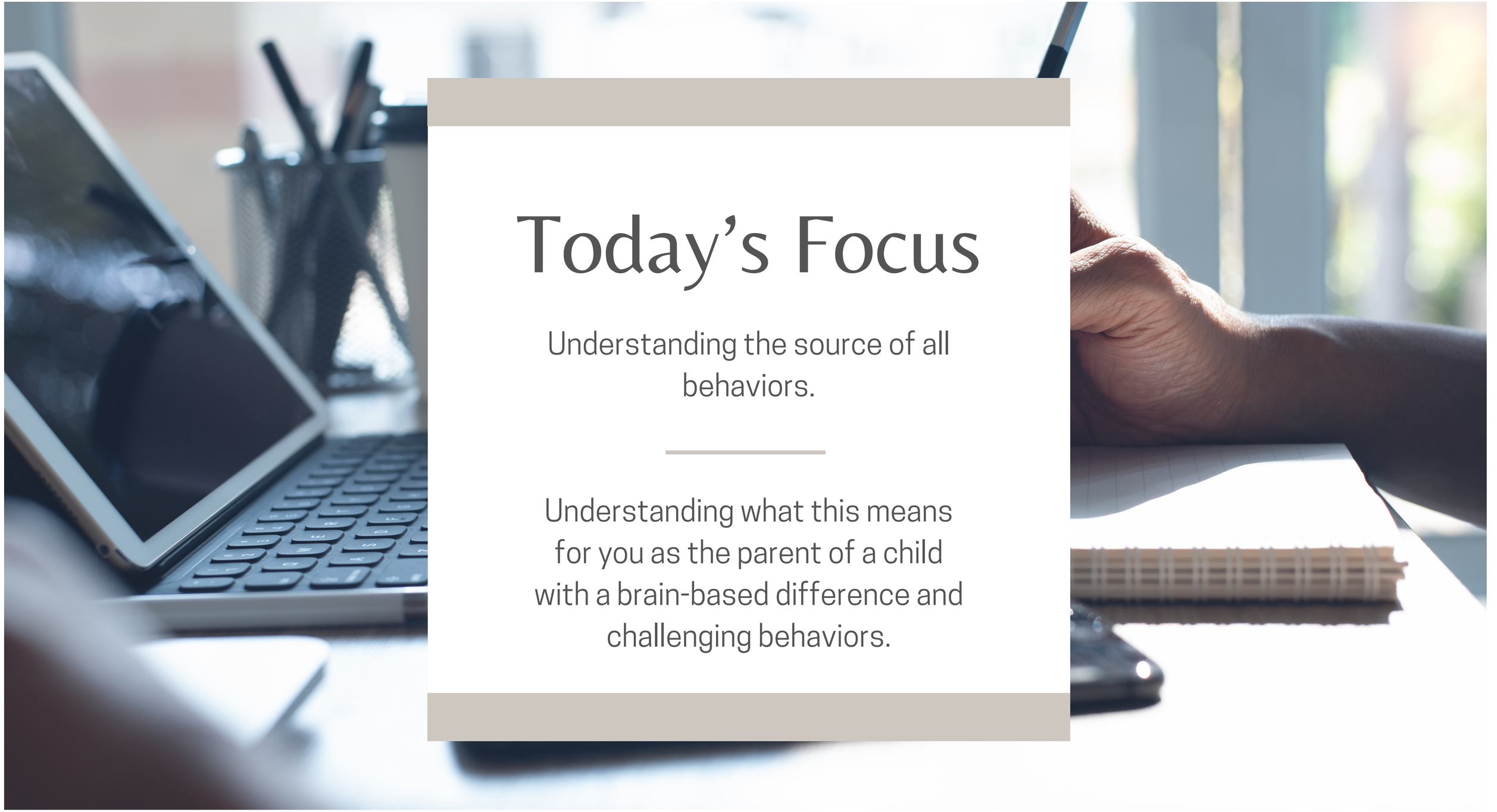
Laying the Foundation: Where is This Behavior Coming From?!

EILEEN DEVINE - MARCH 2024



Today's Focus

Understanding the source of all behaviors.

Understanding what this means for you as the parent of a child with a brain-based difference and challenging behaviors.

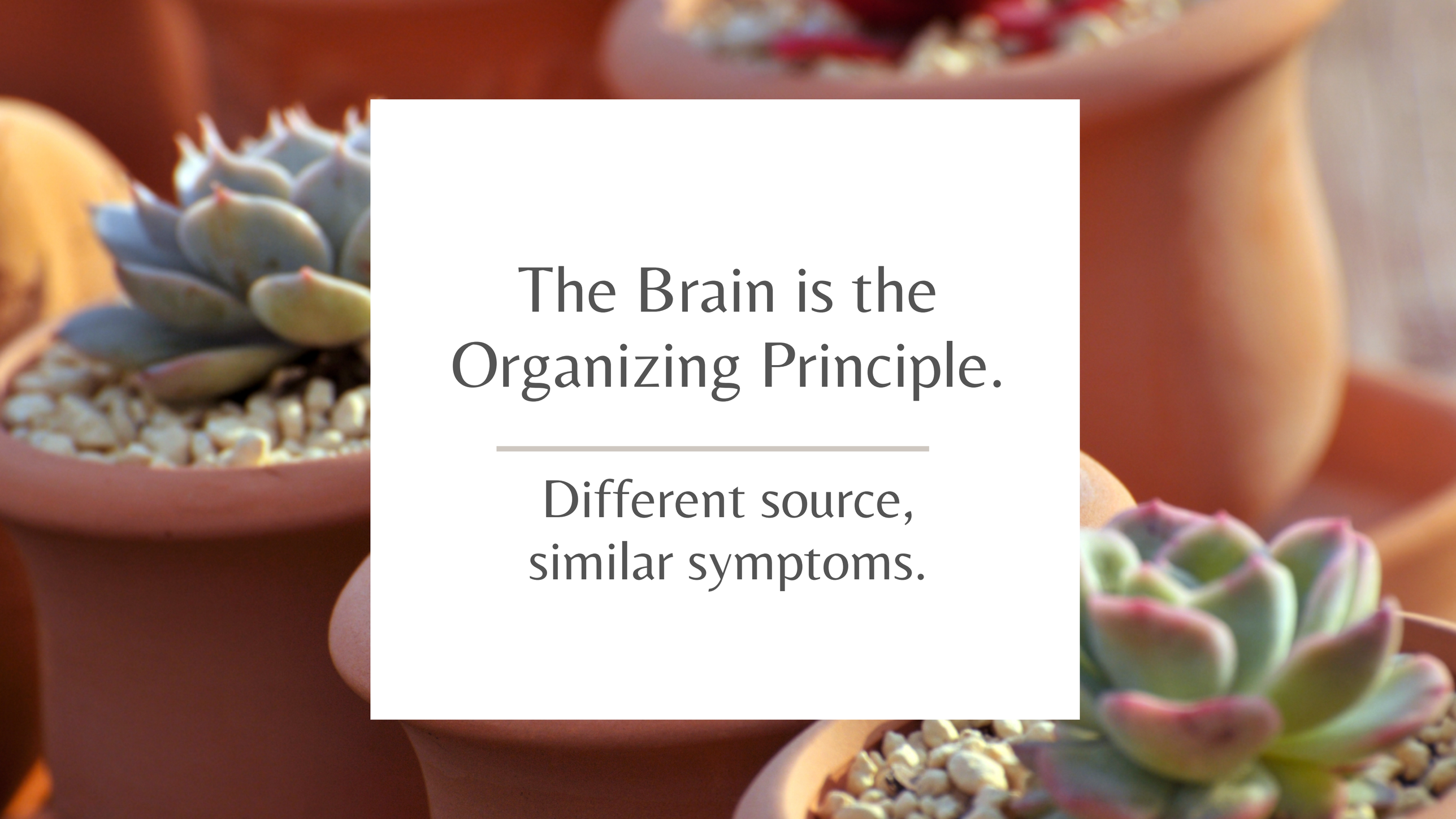
Behavior Lives Inside the Brain.

The Brain First approach to parenting is an individualized approach based on your unique child and how their brain works.

The Brain First approach to parenting takes hold over time, with consistency and practice.

What does the brain have to do with your child's challenging behaviors?

Everything.

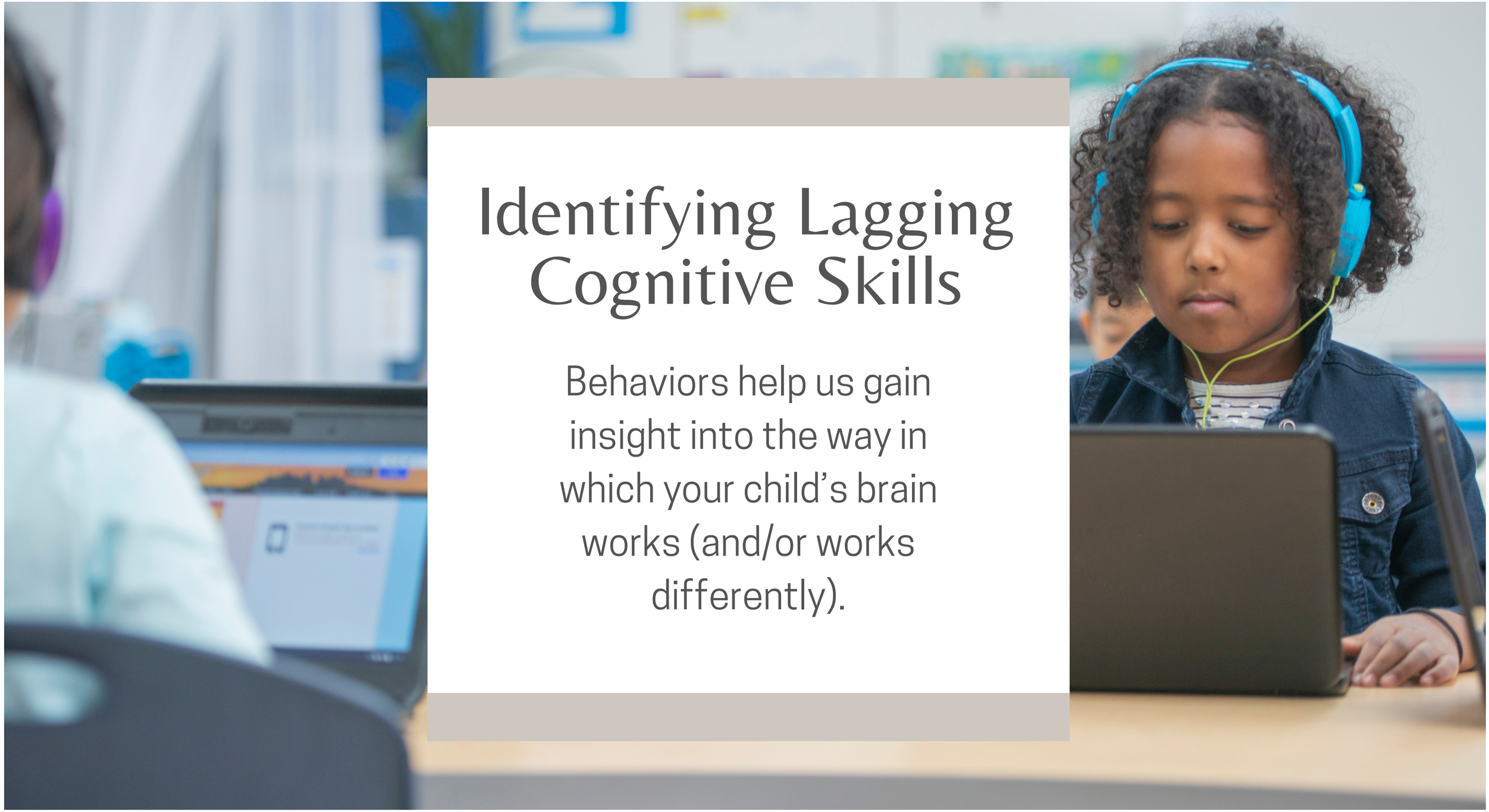


The Brain is the Organizing Principle.

Different source,
similar symptoms.

Foundational Understanding

If a brain-based difference is a physical condition (with behavioral symptoms), what does it mean for the way we support children with FASD and other neurobehavioral conditions?



Identifying Lagging Cognitive Skills

Behaviors help us gain insight into the way in which your child's brain works (and/or works differently).

Assumptions Based on "Neurotypical"

- Manages frustrations appropriately
- Think fast & listen fast
- Predict & plan ahead
- Manage uncertainty, ambiguity
- Inhibit impulses

Common Neurodiverse Characteristics

- Easily upset by minor frustrations
- Processes slowly
- Difficulty seeing what's coming next, connecting dots
- Distressed by unpredictability
- Highly impulsive

Brain Tasks

(Essential Cognitive Skills)

- Social / Emotional Skills (dysmaturity)
- Sensory Processing & Integration
- Hunger & Nutrition
- Emotional & Self-Regulation Skills
- Language & Communication
- Processing Pace
- Cognitive Flexibility
- Attention & Working Memory
- Executive Functioning

Dysmaturity

The gap between one's chronological and social/emotional/developmental age.

Dysmaturity & Uneven Development

Chronological age.....14

Social/emotional age.....10

Strengths.....16

Expressive language.....15

Receptive language.....9

Cognitive flexibility....8

Hunger & Nutrition

Cravings for sweets and fats beyond what "typical" child experience

May not experience hunger pangs, becoming “hangry”

May not experience sensation of fullness

May need to eat frequently due to cognitive fatigue

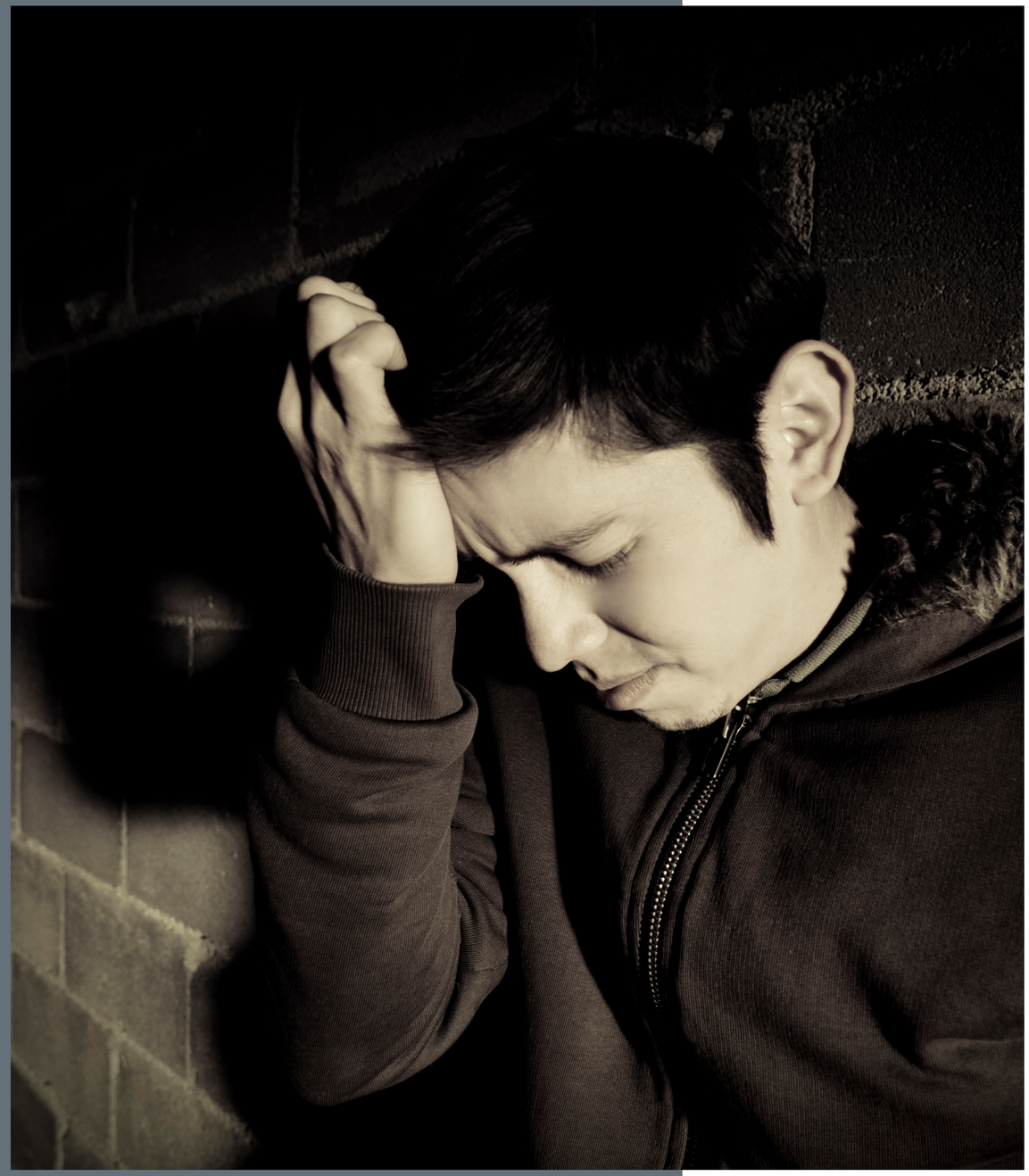
Emotional & Self-Regulation Skills

Can not think rationally/is unable to be “reasonable” when frustrated

Can not manage annoyance, disappointment, and/or irritability in age-appropriate ways

Impulsive, does not think before responding, does not think through likely consequences of actions

Can not adjust “arousal level” to meet the demands of the situation (sitting safely in the car, quieting down after active play, falling asleep/waking up independently)



Emotional Regulation & Fragile Nervous Systems

Narrow window of tolerance

"Flip their lid" more easily than neurotypical individuals

Out of "thinking brain" when this happens

Regulated --> Relating ---> To Reason

“Ten Second Child in a One Second World”

Process verbal information slowly, often asks, “What?” or responds with, “I don’t know”

Needs more time than expected to respond to or answer questions

Poor short-term auditory memory, may only do one step of three-step directions

Slow, halting speech or repetitive in words when attempting to articulate/express thoughts

Becomes frustrated/agitated when rushed through tasks or their response to questions

Language & Communication

Talks better than understands (can "talk the talk" but can't "walk the walk")

Does not understand/retain spoken directions and/or instructions

Confabulates - tells truthful lies

Doesn't seem to understand, just doesn't "get it"

Chatty, may talk a lot (excessively at times), but can't participate in the back and forth conversation/answer questions

Cannot express concerns, needs, thoughts or emotions in words

Diffculty With Cognitive Flexibility

Difficulty transitioning, shifting gears

Upset by unexpected changes in tasks, schedule, or routine (can not “go with the flow”)

Cognitively rigid

Getting stuck in behavioral or verbal loops

Becomes upset when asked to shift away from original plan, idea, or solution

Cannot see the “gray” in a situation, black/white thinker, concrete

Highly personalizes or over-generalizes

Attention & Working Memory

Poor short-term memory, especially auditory

Difficulty remembering/learning from past experiences

Can do 1 step, but not follow 2-4 step directions

Can recite the rule, but then can not follow it

Inconsistent performance (on/off days)

Needs to be retaught the same thing many times

Cannot take what is learned in one setting and apply it to another

Executive Functioning

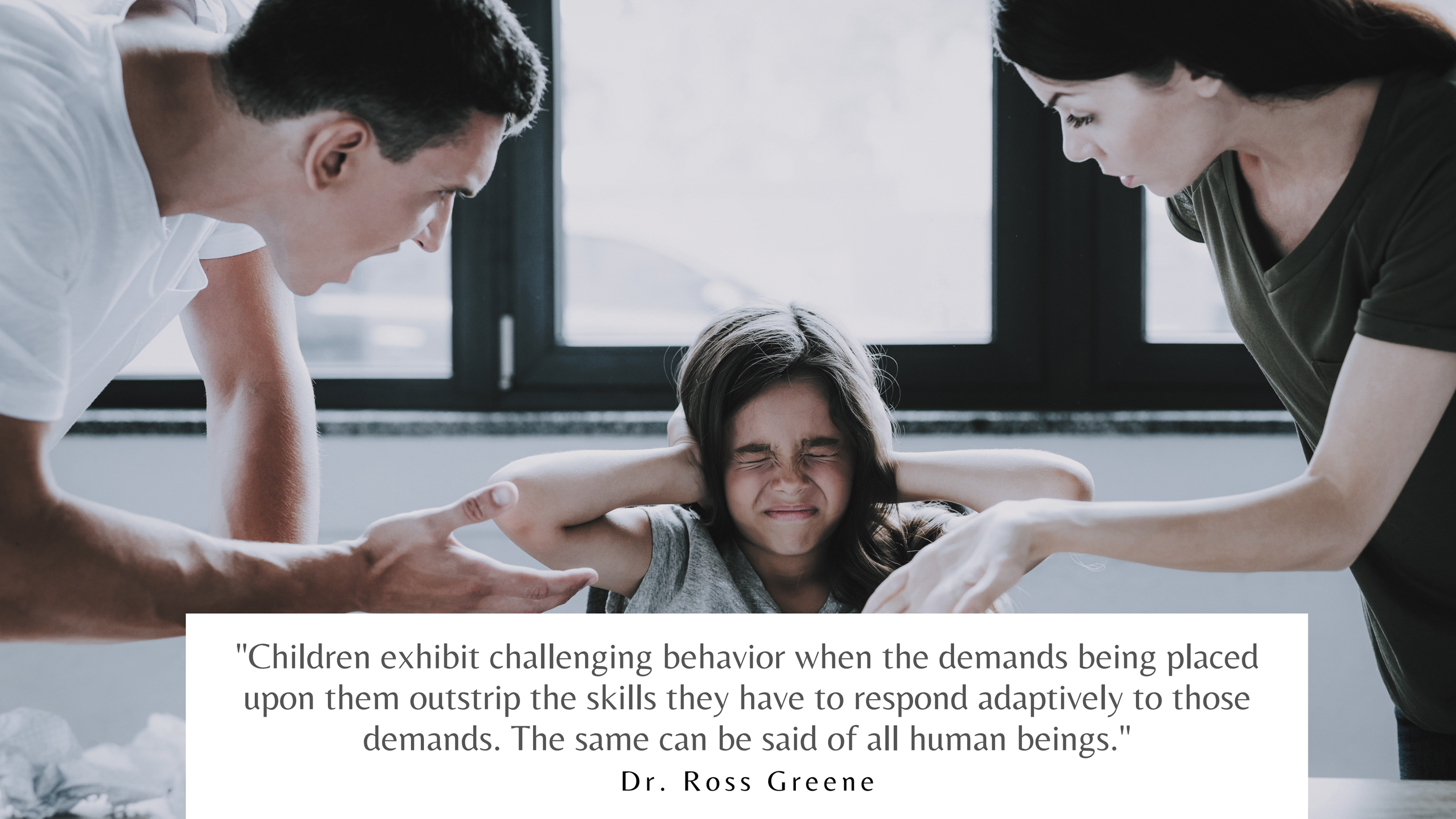
Difficulty with organizing and planning their schedule/tasks

Difficulty setting goals and breaking them down into achievable steps

Does not carry out plans/actions in a logical sequence or set order

Difficulty initiating tasks/getting started, seen as “not motivated”, especially non-preferred or challenging activities

Difficulty making links (hearing into doing, seeing into writing, thinking into talking)



"Children exhibit challenging behavior when the demands being placed upon them outstrip the skills they have to respond adaptively to those demands. The same can be said of all human beings."

Dr. Ross Greene

Common Defensive Behaviors

Irritability

Low self-esteem

Defiant/oppositional

Isolating from others, depressed

Easily frustrated, short fuse

Aggressive, explosive reactions

Anxious, fearful

Shuts down, unable to “motivate” self

Cognitive Load & Brain Fatigue

Every task or expectation we face throughout our day adds to our “cognitive load” and zaps us of our “brain fuel”.

Why We See Challenging Behaviors

Lagging cognitive skills due to brain-based difference

Expectations that do not align with cognitive skill set

A poor fit and challenging behavioral symptoms