

The structure of the brain includes the **cerebral cortex** and the **limbic system**. The cerebral cortex is the thinking part of the brain that handles logic and judgment. The limbic system is more primitive than the cerebral cortex and is the emotional centre of the brain.

- Sensory information entering the brain passes through the amygdala where the decision is made whether to send the data to the limbic system or cerebral cortex.
- If the incoming data elicits enough of an emotional charge (like anger), the amygdala can “hijack” it and send it directly to the limbic system, causing the person to react using only the lower, more primitive part of the brain. This could feel like panic or anger. The limbic part of the brain is not involved in judging, thinking, evaluating, or self-regulation.
- At this “hijacking,” a flood of hormones is released that cause physical and emotional alarm. The subsequent surge of energy prepares the person to fight or flee.
- This feeling caused by the hormonal flush can last for several minutes. During that time, the person may say or do things that they will wish they hadn’t when the thinking part of their brain re-engages.
- Furthermore, an additional, longer-lasting hormone is released, and its impact can last for several hours to several days. This may explain why someone who has calmed down from a powerful angry reaction will later have a huge flare-up in response to some small incident. This person experiences a reaction that is out of proportion to the situation because the hormone is still active.

As we can see, a great deal goes on physiologically during anger. When we know that someone has become “hijacked,” we need to give them time for their hormones to settle, their heart to stop racing, and their anger to subside.

Name: _____

Select one or more of the situations below and answer the questions for the person described.

Situation #1: Myrna spent most of her break time alone. While the other girls would gather and talk about movies or fashion or boys, she would stand against the wall of the school and wait until the break was over and she could go back inside. This happened day after day until she could no longer stand their laughter, smiles, and loud voices. Her fists started to clench, her eyes started to water, and she could feel the tension rising in her chest. "I have had it!" she said as she stomped towards the group of girls nearby.

Situation #2: Naveen was at the breaking point. He knew that he needed to get an A on this test, but he was sure that wouldn't happen. He had studied and studied, but it just didn't make any sense to him. His parents told him that if he got an A, he could buy that new video game, but the way things were going, he'd never get that chance. Why did his older sister always get the A's? Just thinking about it made his chest tighten up, and he felt like he wanted to break something. One more word about "Sister A" and he would lose it!

Situation #3: Nell hated walking home from school. She had to walk through the park and those stupid kids were always hanging out near the trees. They made her so mad. They had started teasing her because she wouldn't talk to them. Each day, it seemed to get worse. This time, she would show them. She had a rock in her pocket. If one of them said something, they would regret it!

Questions:

What was the primary emotion the person was feeling? _____

What action does he/she seem to be ready to take? What might be the results? _____

What could he/she do to address the issue before it got out of control? _____

Name: _____

Select a scenario from below and prepare a dramatization to show what you could say to help this person.

Remember:

- Avoid statements that start with “At least you ...” or “It could be worse”
- Don’t try to make it better.
- Try not to judge their situation.
- Try to see it from their perspective.
- Recognize and validate their emotions.
- Listen actively, acknowledge their pain, and let them know you care.

Supreet seemed very sad. She wasn’t her usual bubbly self and she was dragging her feet with her head down as she walked in the hall. Her best friend, Sarah, had heard that Supreet’s parents were getting a divorce. Sarah decided it was time to talk.

Abraham loved his dog, Dude. In fact, Dude went everywhere with him, and all the guys sort of accepted him as their mascot. Sadly, Dude had to be put to sleep recently, and Abraham was devastated. He ran into the washroom and stayed there for a long time. When he finally came out, one of his good friends, Shane, went to talk to him.

Anna had always earned the top marks in math class. When tests came back, the teacher always said something about Anna and her A. However, the last few times, Anna didn’t get an A or even a B. She seemed to walk around in a daze and she just wasn’t herself. Her friends felt that something was wrong and it was time to find out what.

The boys had heard that Marek’s dad was in the hospital. In fact, Marek had not been at school for several days. When he finally returned, he seemed to keep his head down, he didn’t smile, and he hardly even touched his lunch. They wanted to help him out, but they weren’t sure what they could say.

Name: _____

Select a situation below and use the following problem-solving approach to come to a decision.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Consider the options.
3. Look at the pros and cons of each option.
4. Select an option.
5. Act on it.
6. Evaluate your decision.

LaVerne always had the best birthday parties. Her mom would take everyone to a movie and then they would have a sleepover. It was one of the highlights of the year. As usual, Macy, Sal, Ramsha, and Neesa got an invitation—but Maureen didn't. Maureen had always come to LaVerne's party, but this year, they had had a fight and she wasn't invited. Macy was Maureen's best friend and she didn't know what to do. Help!

Pedro was the video game champ. He had reached the top level in *Revenge III* and he was getting the newest video game, *Killing and Vendettas*, for his birthday on Saturday. Josh was invited and he really wanted to go. But there was a big problem. Josh's parents were very particular about what video games he was allowed to play and they had forbidden him to get *Killing and Vendettas* because of the violent content. He had to let Pedro know if he could come to the party by this afternoon, but he wasn't sure what he should do. Help!

Grace was one of the coolest kids in the school. She had a lot of friends, she was pretty and popular, and she was everybody's hero. Now Manny had a problem. He saw Grace steal Mrs. Li's wallet off her desk. Nobody else was in the room, but Grace saw him looking and just walked past him with a glare. What was he to do? Help!

Rolston was the newest kid in the school. He had thick glasses, wore unusual clothes, and talked with a lisp. All the kids tried to get him to talk so that they could laugh at him when he said words with an "s." One day, as Jamal and Sean were walking past Rolston in the hall, Jamal poked Sean and said, "It's your turn. Ask him to say 'Mississippi!'" Jamal and Sean had been friends for years and Sean didn't want to lose that friendship. He really felt pressured to tease Rolston, even though it didn't feel right. Help!