

Impact of the Nervous System in Immunotherapy

Patient

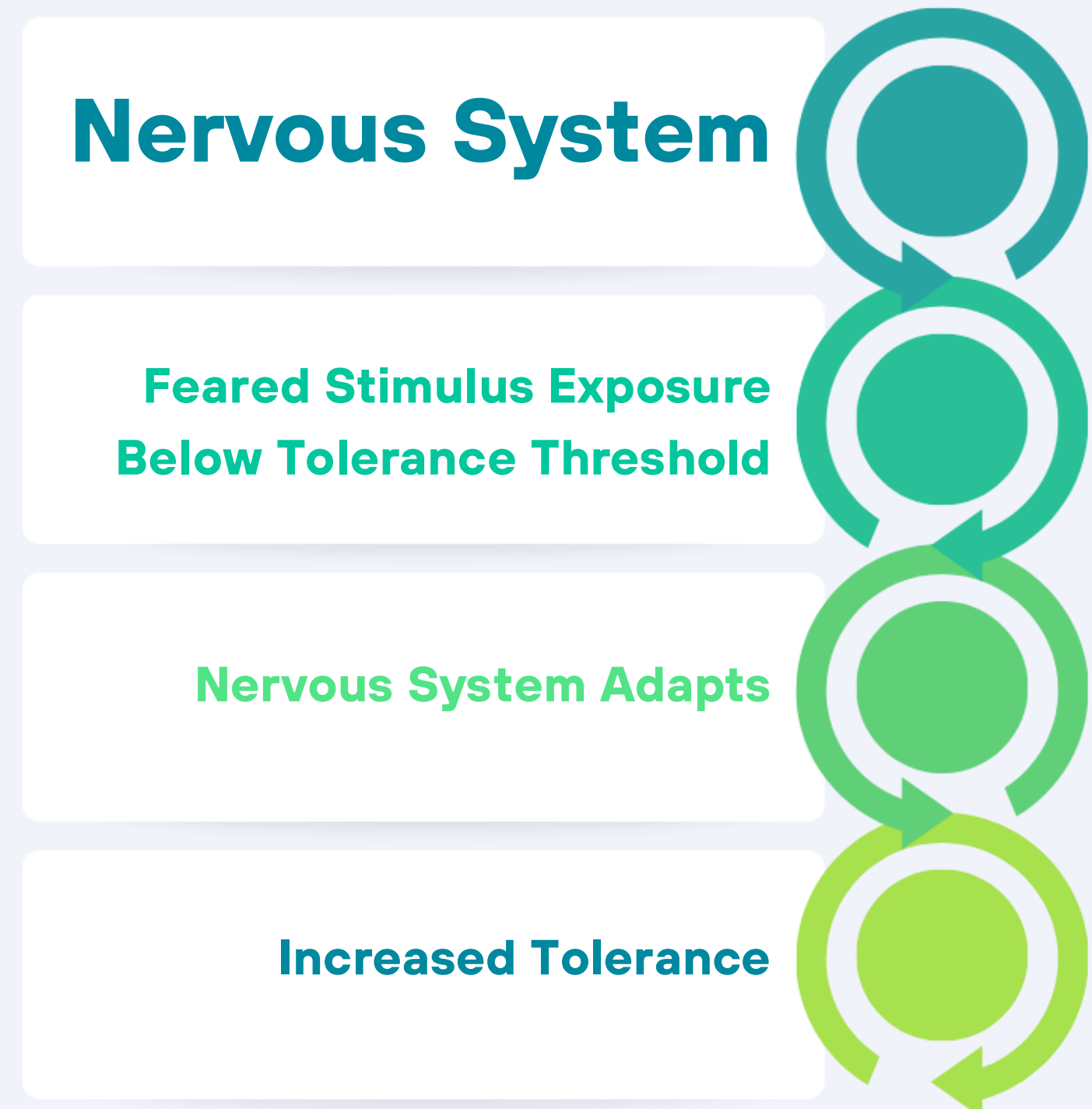
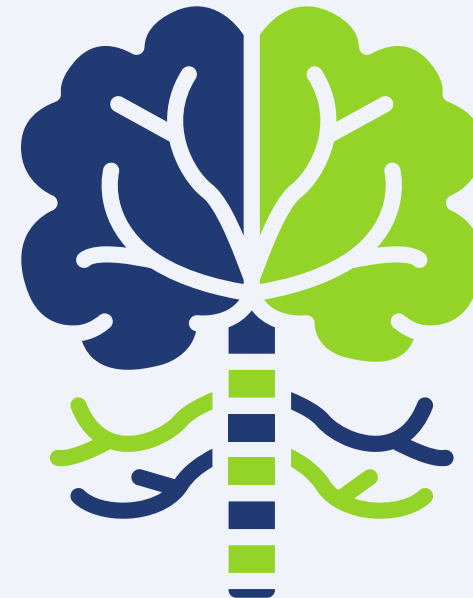
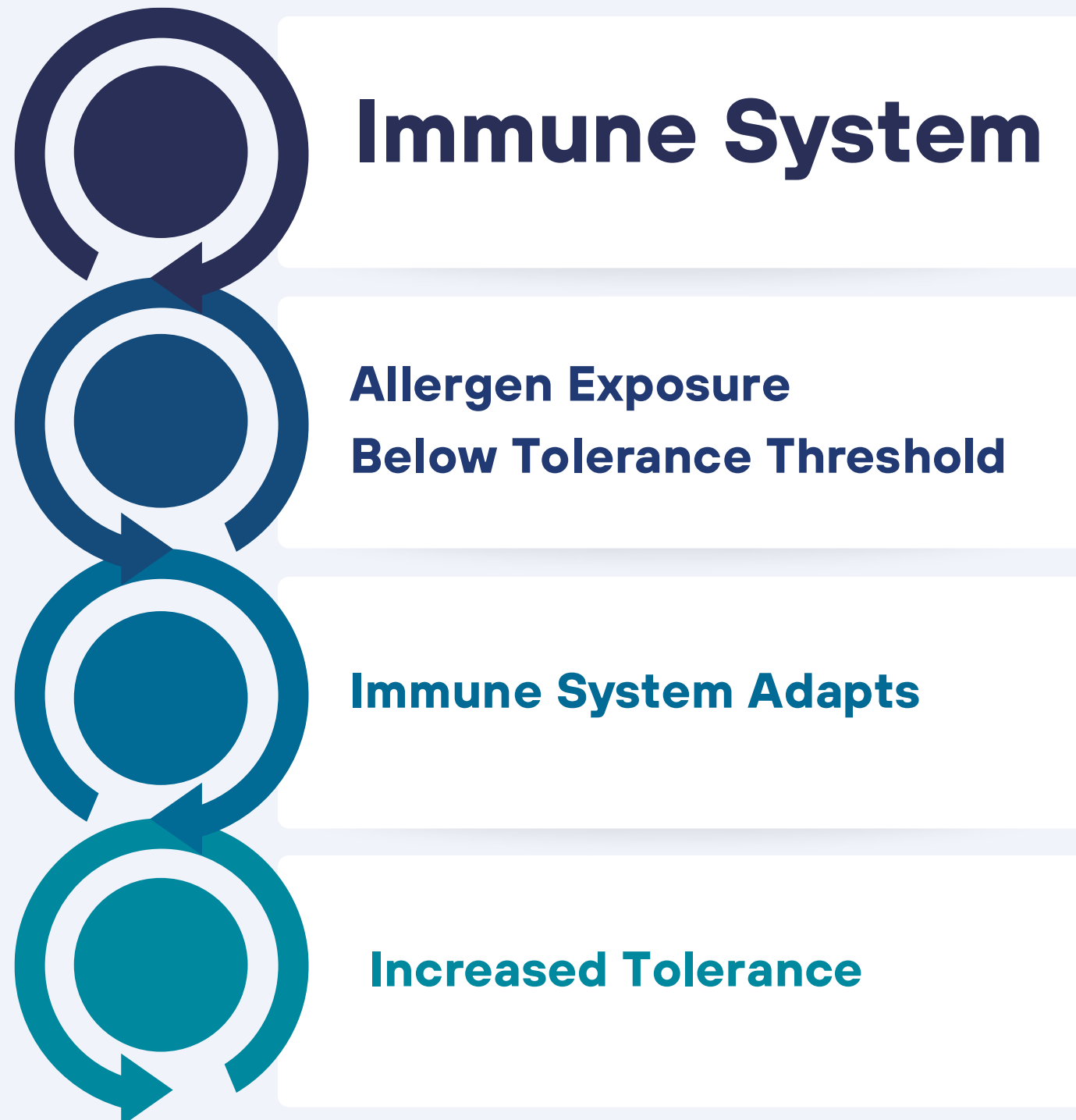
Parent

& Provider

Amanda Whitehouse, PhD
Licensed Psychologist
& Food Allergy Mom

Repeated Safe Exposure

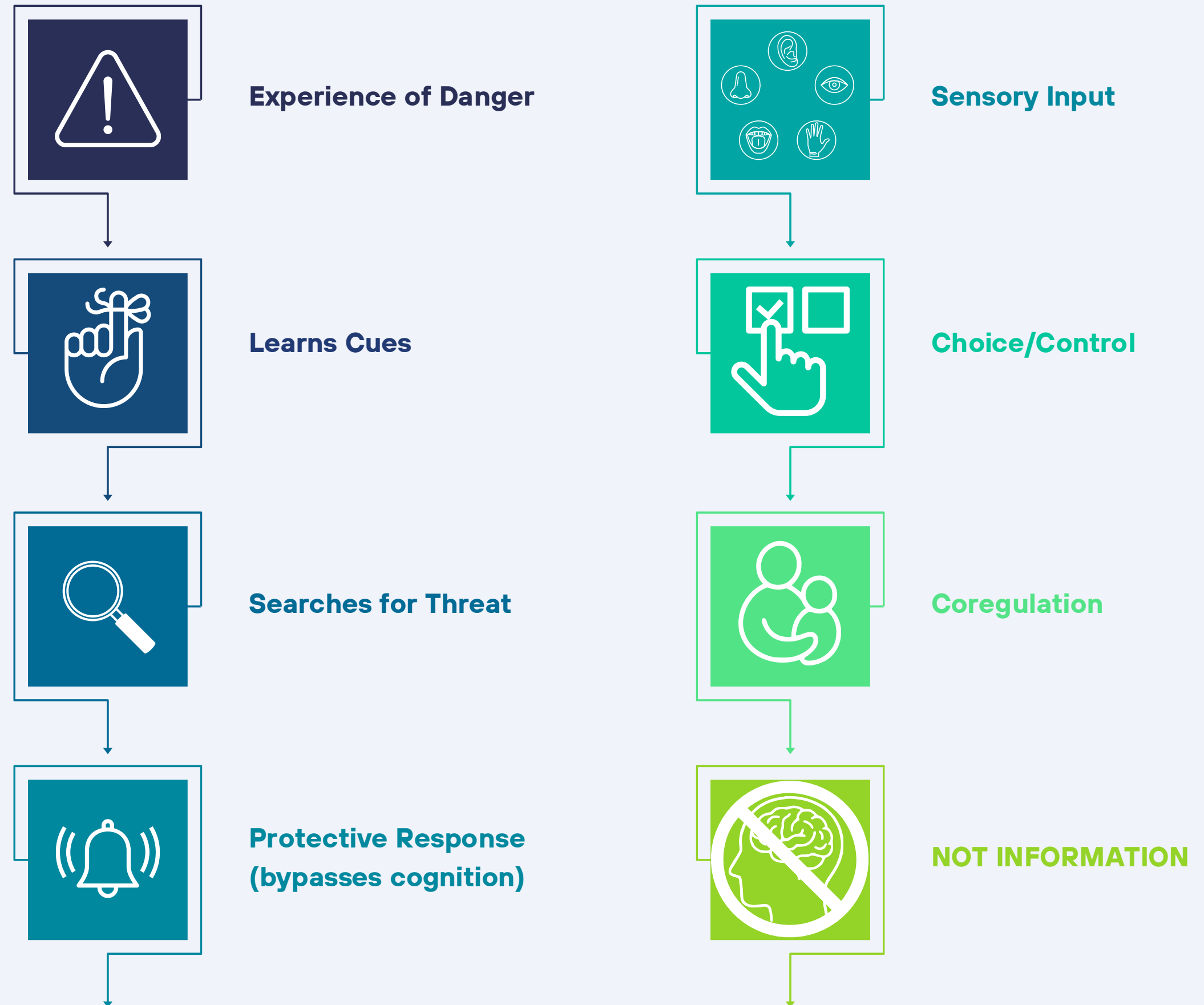
(Same process, different systems)



The Nervous System Prioritizes Protection

It looks for clues
of danger, not
evidence of
safety.

Grogans et al., 2023



The Nervous System Doesn't Ask: "Is This Logical?"



**Past
Danger**



**Present
Danger**



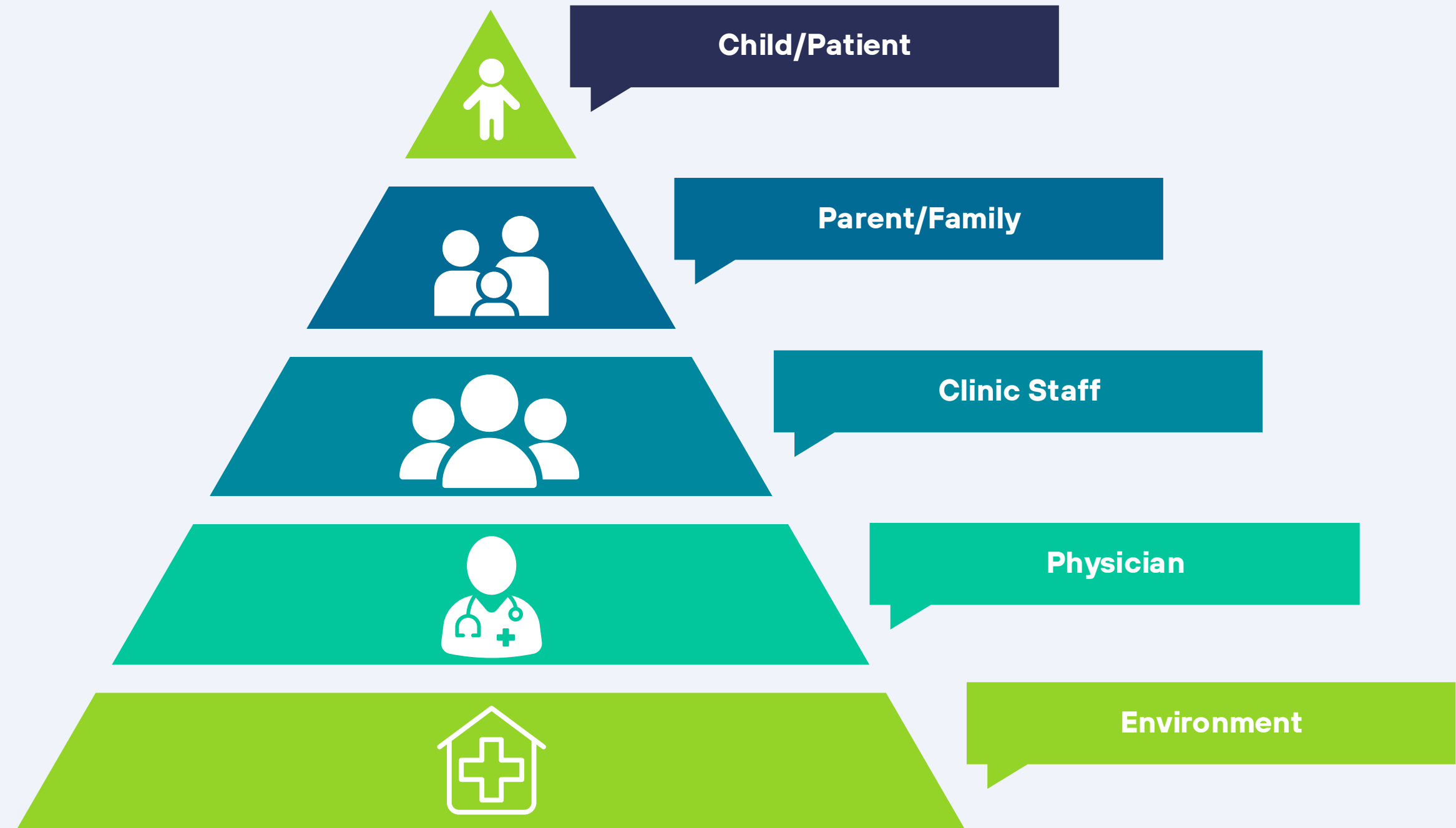
**Imagined/
Future Danger**

It creates the same physiological protective response to any perceived threat.

The nervous system is designed to detect danger, not evaluate safety.

Co-Regulation (Borrowing Safety)

The most powerful tool in the clinic



Anxiety Doesn't Always Look "Anxious"

(It often looks behavioral)



Children/ Patients

- Avoidance
- Physical complaints
- Symptom preoccupation
- Refusal
- Silliness
- Clinginess
- Disconnection
- Tearfulness
- Sleepiness
- Perfectionism
- Sensory seeking



Parents/ Family

- Repeated questions
- Reassurance seeking
- Symptom focus
- Hesitancy
- Catastrophizing
- Jumpy/on edge
- Forced cheerfulness
- Fawning
- Emotionally flat
- Withdrawn/detached
- Skipping/delaying doses



Staff Members

- Rushing
- Delaying
- Over-explaining
- Avoiding conversations
- Lowering expectations
- Taking on others' emotions
- Overly empathetic
- Overly detached/formal

Trauma-Informed Care



Realize

the impact
of trauma



Recognize

the signs
and
symptoms



Respond

in practice
and policy

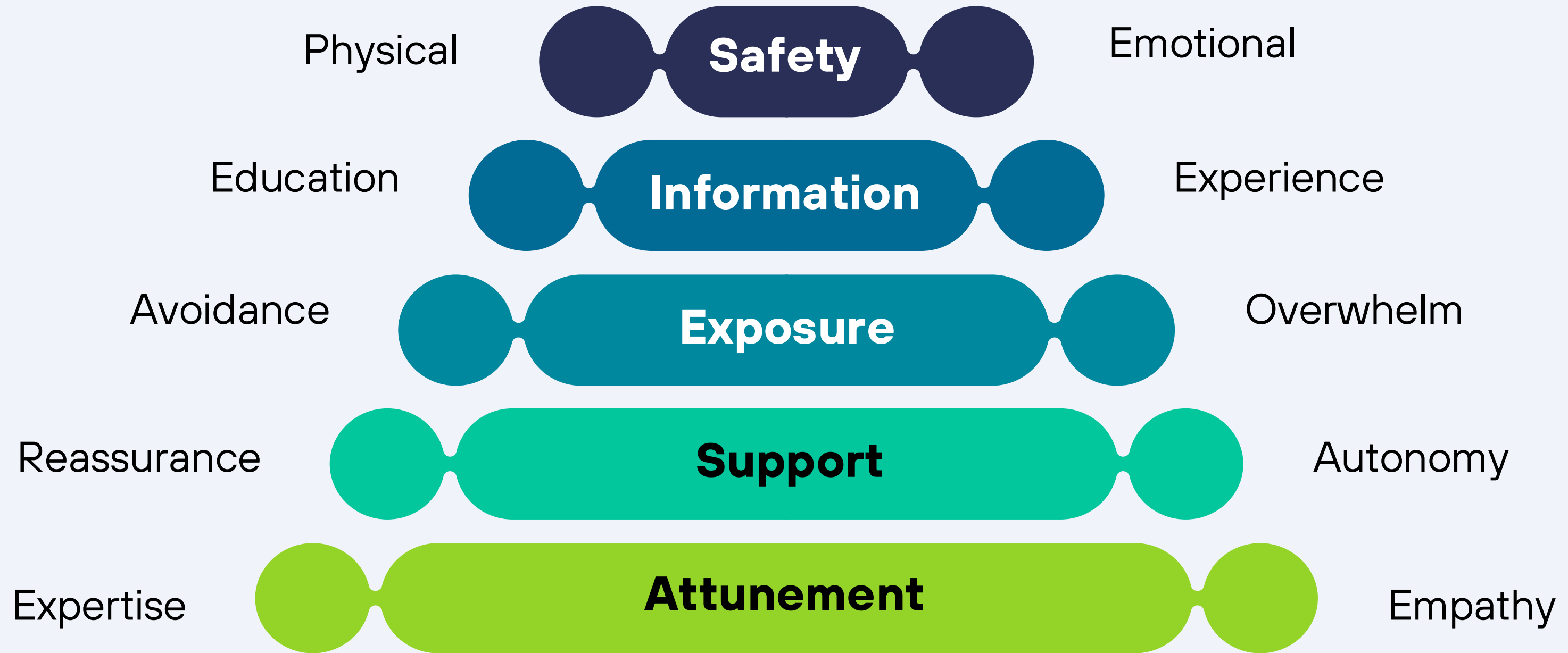


**Resist
Re-
Traumatizing**



Trauma-Informed Care

You hold the balance



The Four C's that Create Safety

Creating meaningful participation

Choice

"Yes/yes" → controlled choices
(Which arm/flavor/activity?)
Incorporate strengths & interests
Patient-centered goals
Incorporate silliness and play

Connection

Shared decision-making
Opportunity for questions
Not feeling rushed
Announce and greet consistently
Eye level and open posture



Control

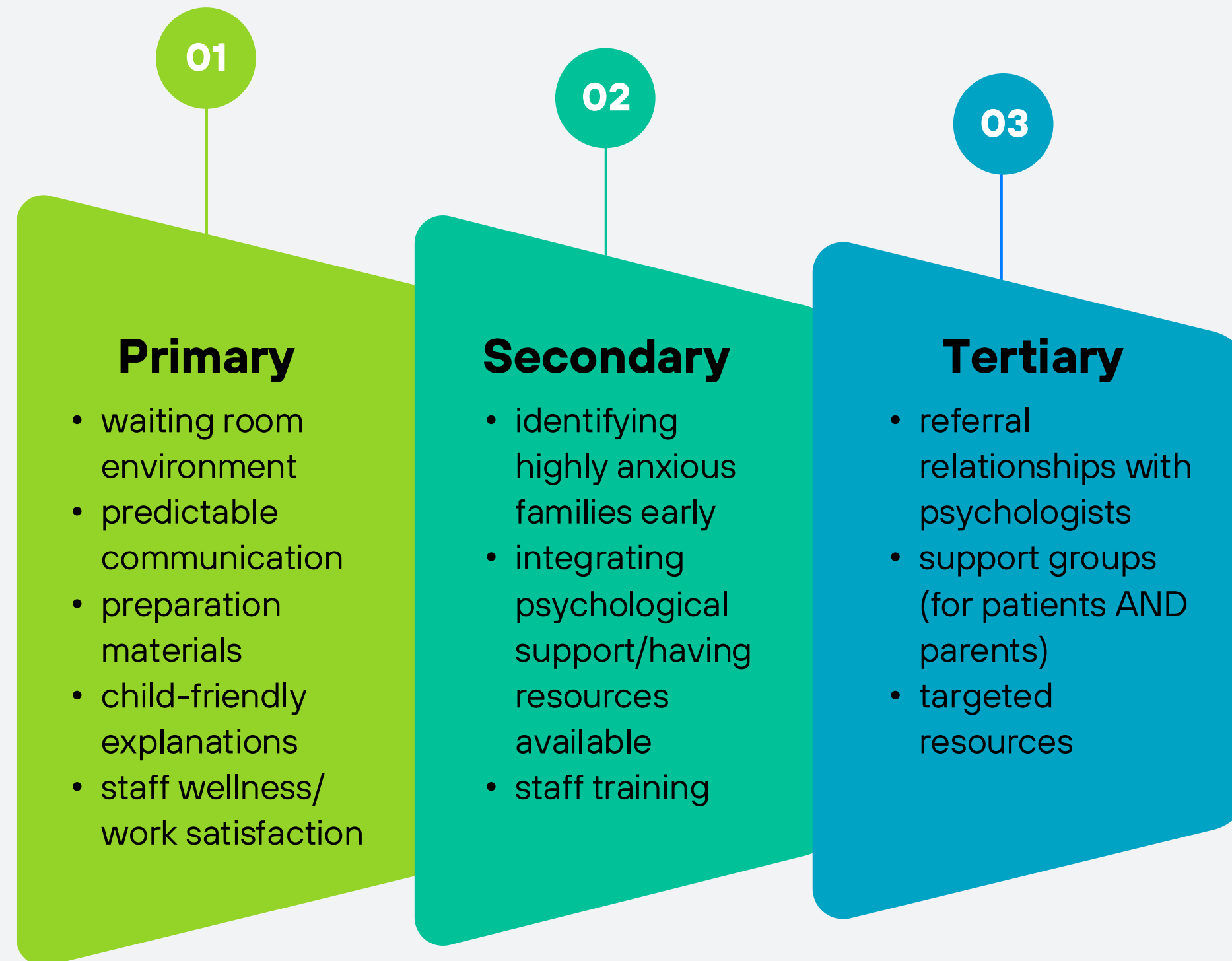
Narrate what you're doing in advance
Demonstrate on self (or parent)
Consent to touch (ongoing)
Info in multiple forms
Environment (light, music, comfort)

Consistency

Clear protocols (in advance)
Predictable responses
Team preparation and cohesiveness
Planning ahead (with details given)
Curiosity re: how patients present

Trauma-Informed Care is Systemic

Let your setup and routines carry the load



References



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Questions

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**Thank
you for
listening!**

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*From Fear to Freedom: A
Workbook for Navigating
Allergy Immunotherapy*

Consultations, client groups,
wholesale book copies, clinic
handouts/materials

Don't Feed the Fear
podcast (including
recorded meditations)