



Child Therapy Service
Resources - Training - Support

Strips, Fans, Flash Cards

**Emotional Activation Scale linked to the
Polyvagal Theory**

A Short Introduction to our Nervous System

Did you know that you can map out your own nervous system – well that's what Dr Porges did, it's called the Polyvagal Theory! He did it so that we can understand how to shift between the states of our nervous system to feel more mindful, grounded, and happy during the day. The more practised we are to shift and regulate back to calm - the more resilient we become.

So, let's look at our nervous system in a little more detail:

- **First, our “rest and digest” state** – this is a response of the parasympathetic system. It is our state of safety. If we are in this state - we are grounded, mindful, joyful, curious, empathetic, and compassionate. This is the state of social engagement, where we are connected to ourselves and the world around us. Physiologically, digestion, resistance to infection, circulation, immune responses, and our ability to connect is improved.
- **Secondly, our “fight and flight” state** – this is our survival strategy, a response from the sympathetic nervous system. If you were going to run from tiger, for example, you want this response to save your life. When we have a fight response, we can have anger, rage, irritation, and frustration. If we are having a flight response, we can have anxiety, worry, fear, and panic. Physiologically, our blood pressure, heart rate, and adrenaline increase, and it decreases digestion, pain threshold, and immune responses.
- **Lastly, we have our “freeze” and “fawn” state** – with the freeze response in our dorsal vagal state (also referred to as our emergency state) - we are completely shut down, we can feel hopeless and feel like there's no way out. We tend to feel depressed, conserve energy, dissociate, feel overwhelmed, and like we can't move forward. Physiologically, our fuel storage and insulin activity increases and so does our pain threshold. The fawn response is slightly different, however does involve disassociation. It is when we are reading the social and emotional cues of others - with the sole intention to attend to and care for their needs above our own. Fawning also involves disconnecting from body sensations, going “numb” and becoming “cut off”. Our aim is to appease or please another person who is both a care provider and a source of threat.

Introducing the Emotional Activation Scale™

Now that we understand a little more about our nervous system
– let me introduce the Emotional Activation Scale™

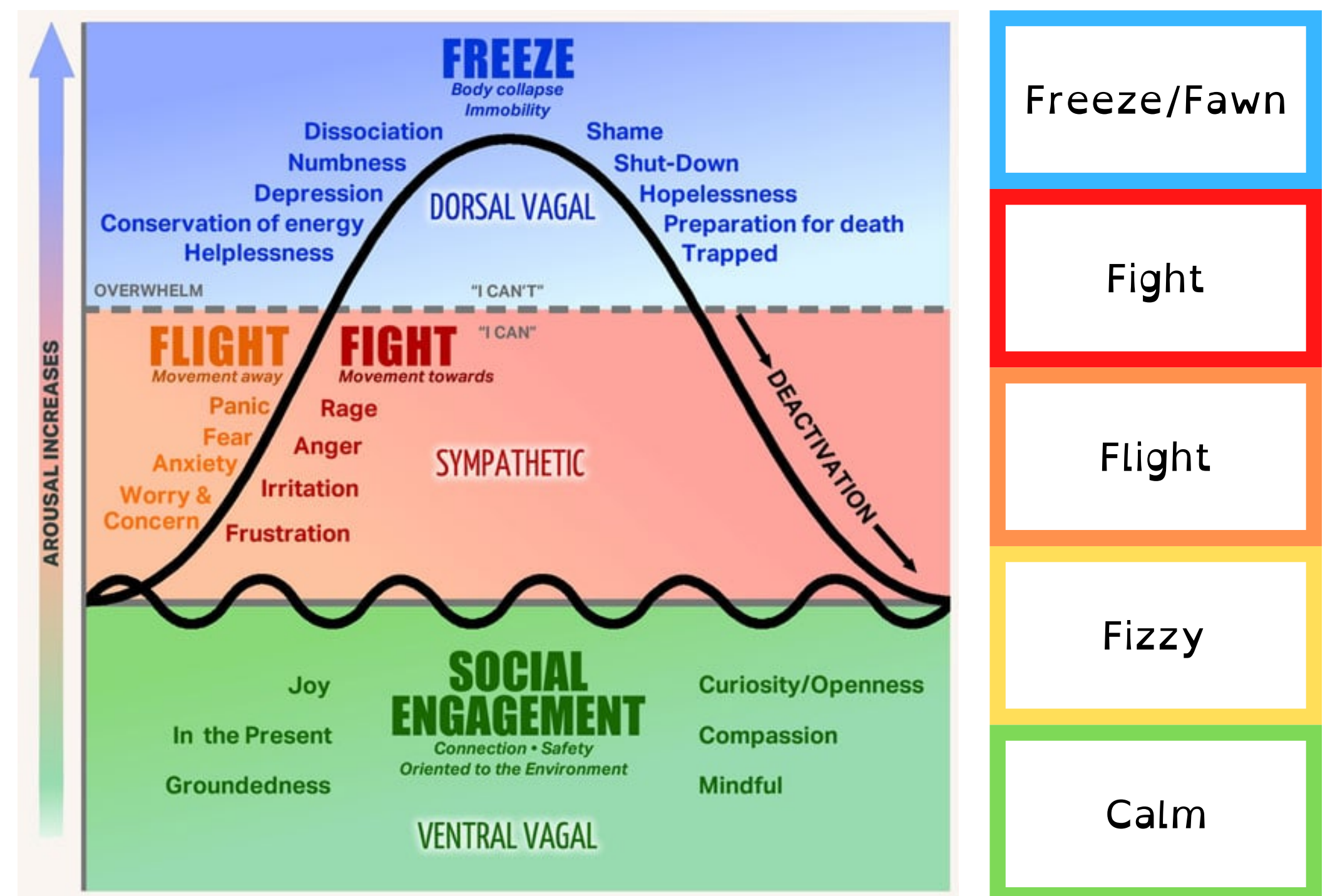
As you can see from this illustration, adapted by Dr Porges, our nervous system responds, is activated, by what is happening in our external environment and internally - by our thoughts and feelings.

It is this activation of arousal, moving up and down the different states, that influenced the Emotional Activation Scale™. It is our body's activating response - based on our perception of thoughts, feelings, actions and environmental influences.

As you can see, the bottom of the Emotional Activation Scale™ is green and it moves up through the different nervous state colours up to blue.

Now – you may have noticed a yellow state. This was introduced because so many children I work with, in Social, Emotional and Mental Health settings, struggled to distinguish between a 'happy-excited' state and an 'anxious' one. That 'fizzy' feeling we get when opening birthday presents ... that's the yellow!

It's the thin line between getting too excited and flipping over into a fight/flight state. This is the state we need to calm down from – so that we don't go into fight/flight or freeze/fawn!



The Polyvagal Theory, Dr Porges

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4

3

2

1

5

4

3

2

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1

5 - 5.9

4 - 4.9

3 - 3.9

2 - 2.9

1 - 1.9

5 - 5.9

4 - 4.9

3 - 3.9

2 - 2.9

1 - 1.9

5 - 5.9

4 - 4.9

3 - 3.9

2 - 2.9

1 - 1.9

Sad

Angry

Wobbly

Fizzy

Calm

Sad

Angry

Wobbly

Fizzy

Calm

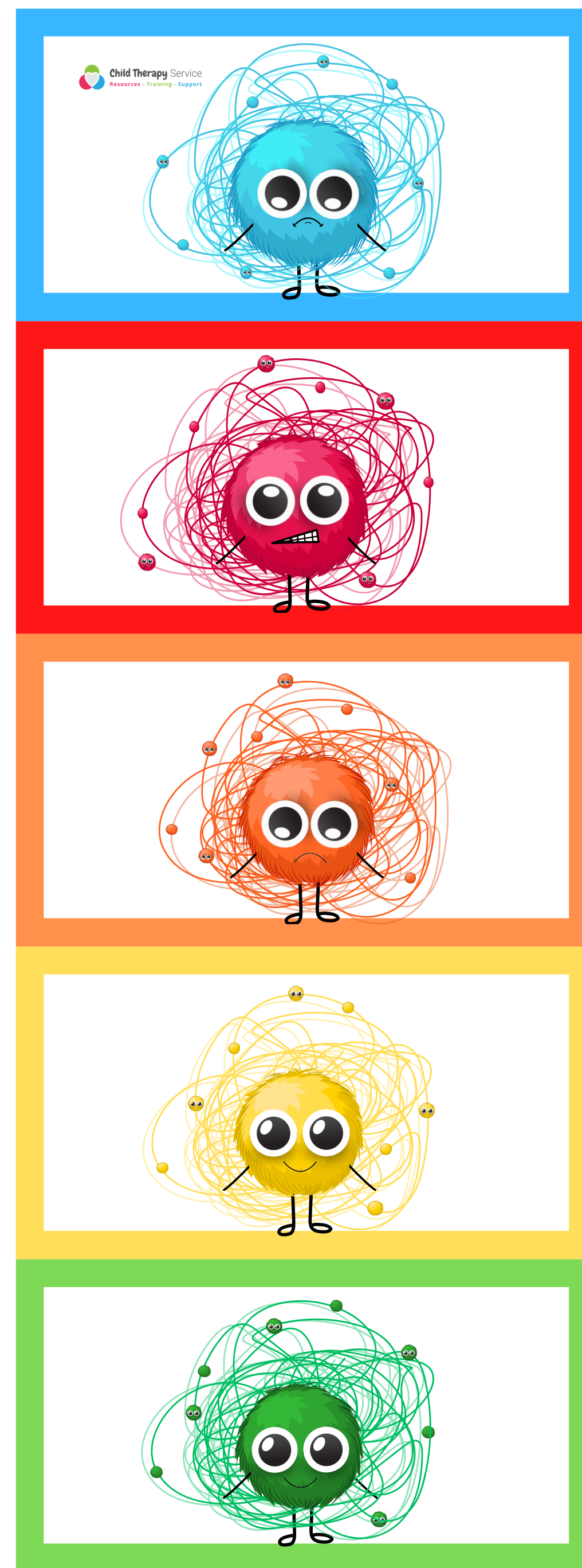
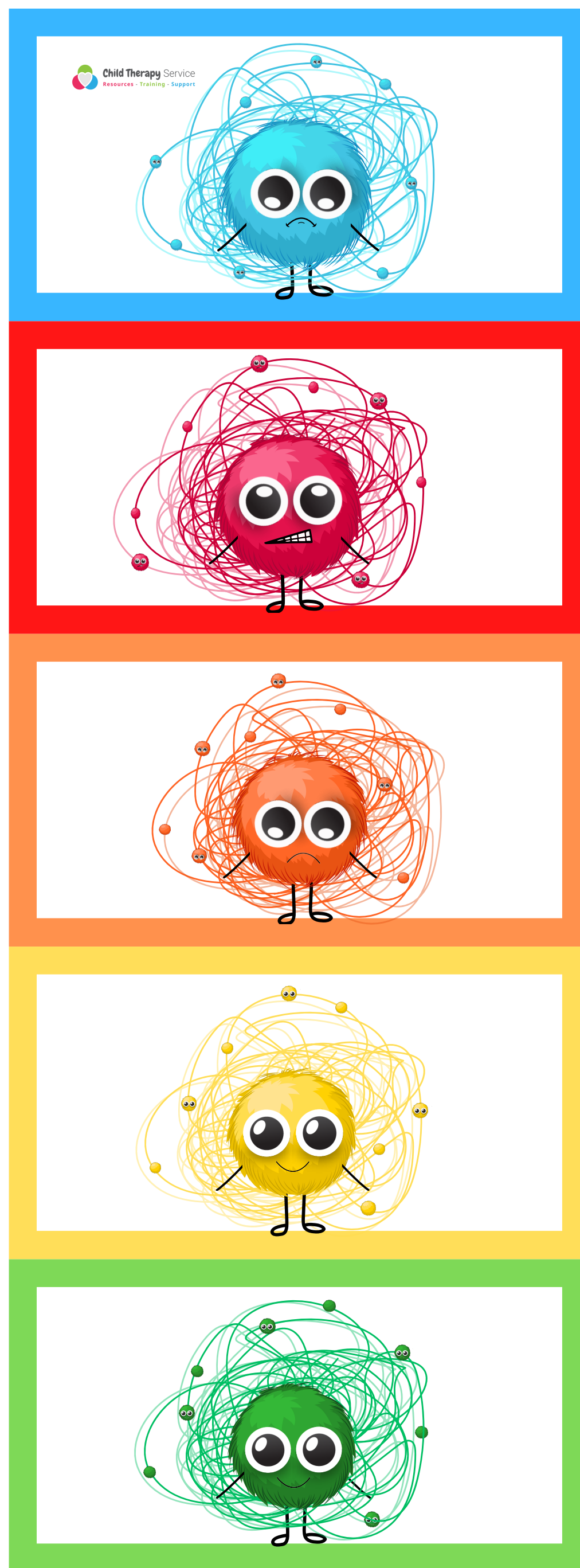
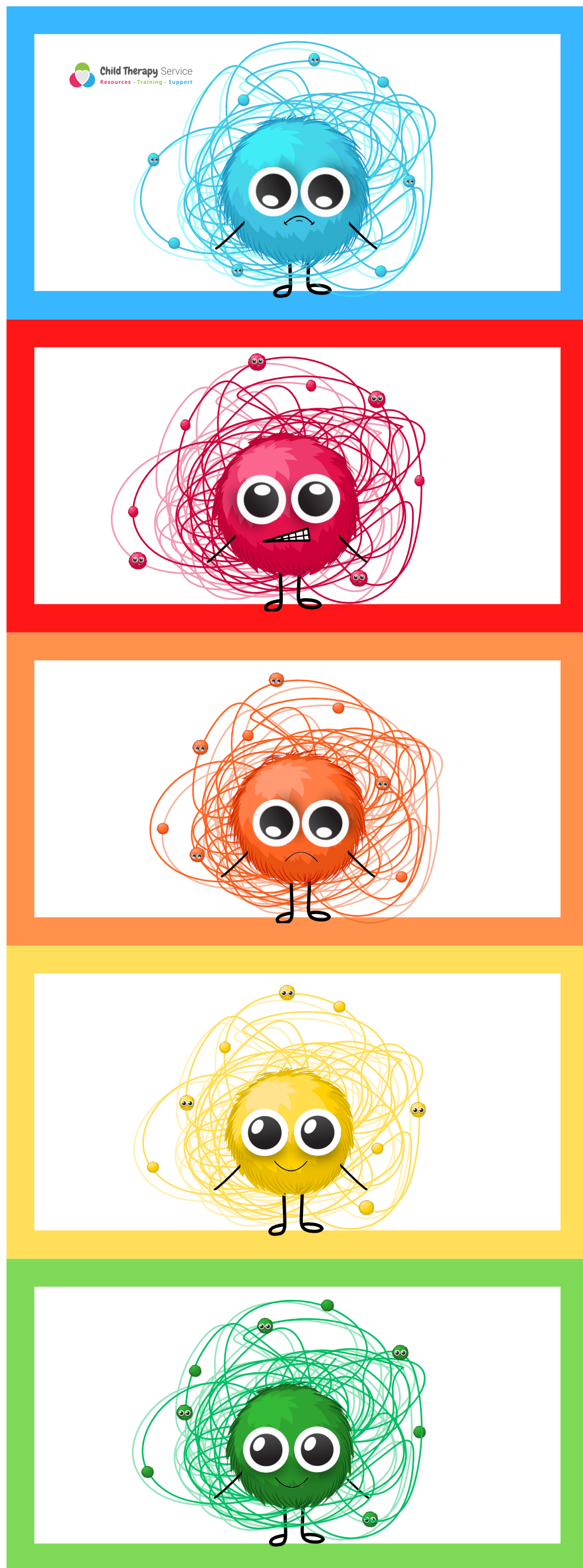
Sad

Angry

Wobbly

Fizzy

Calm





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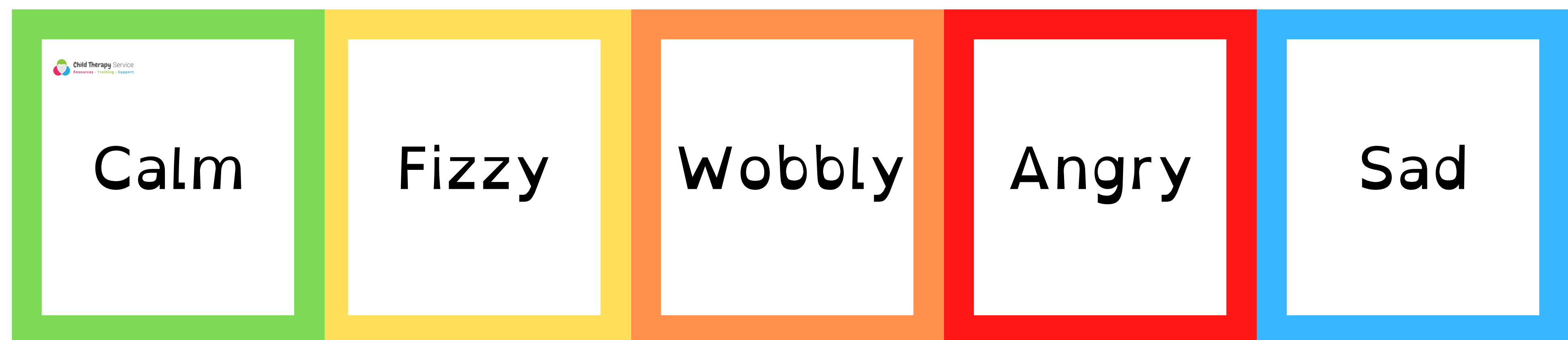
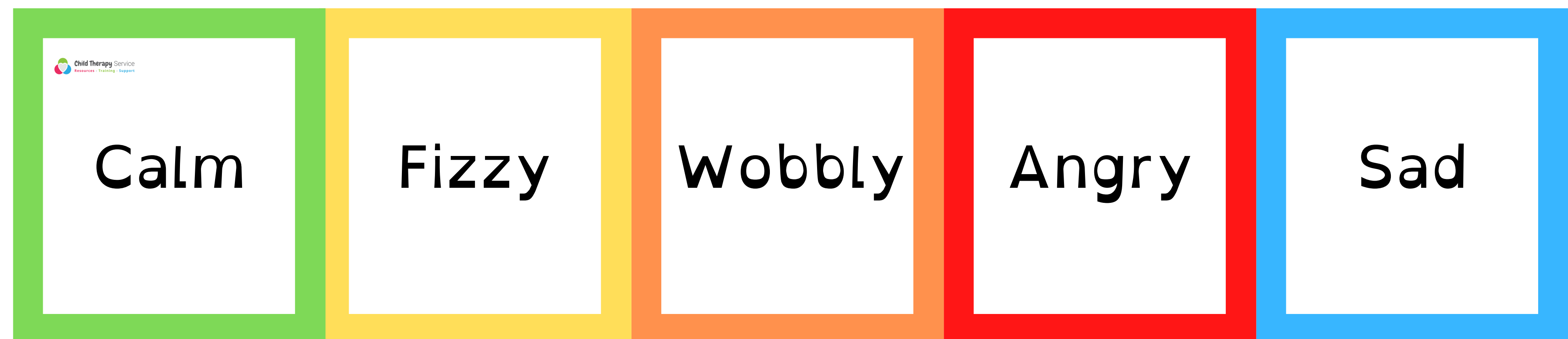


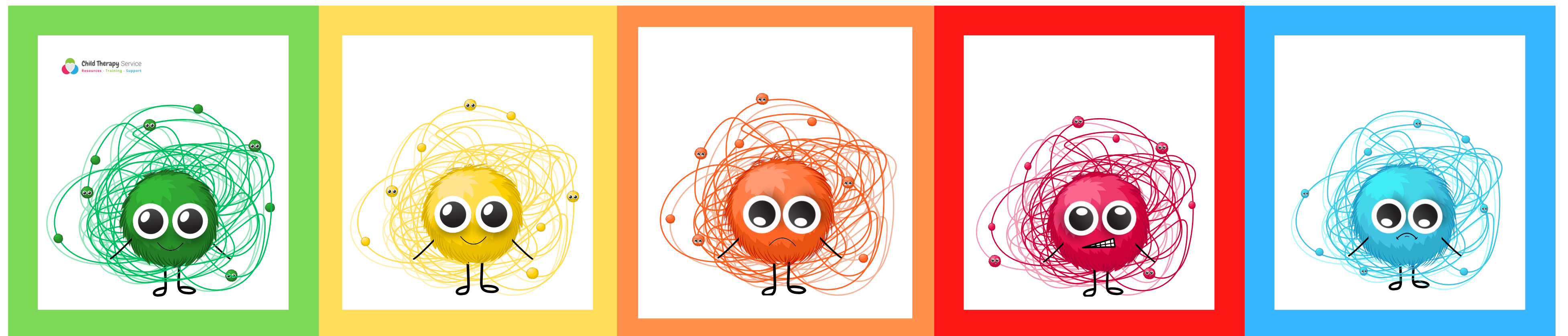
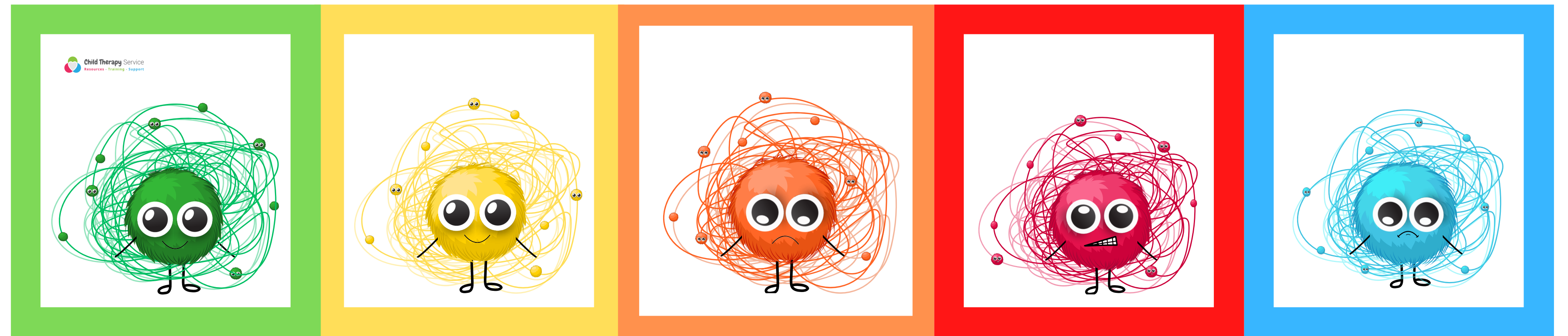
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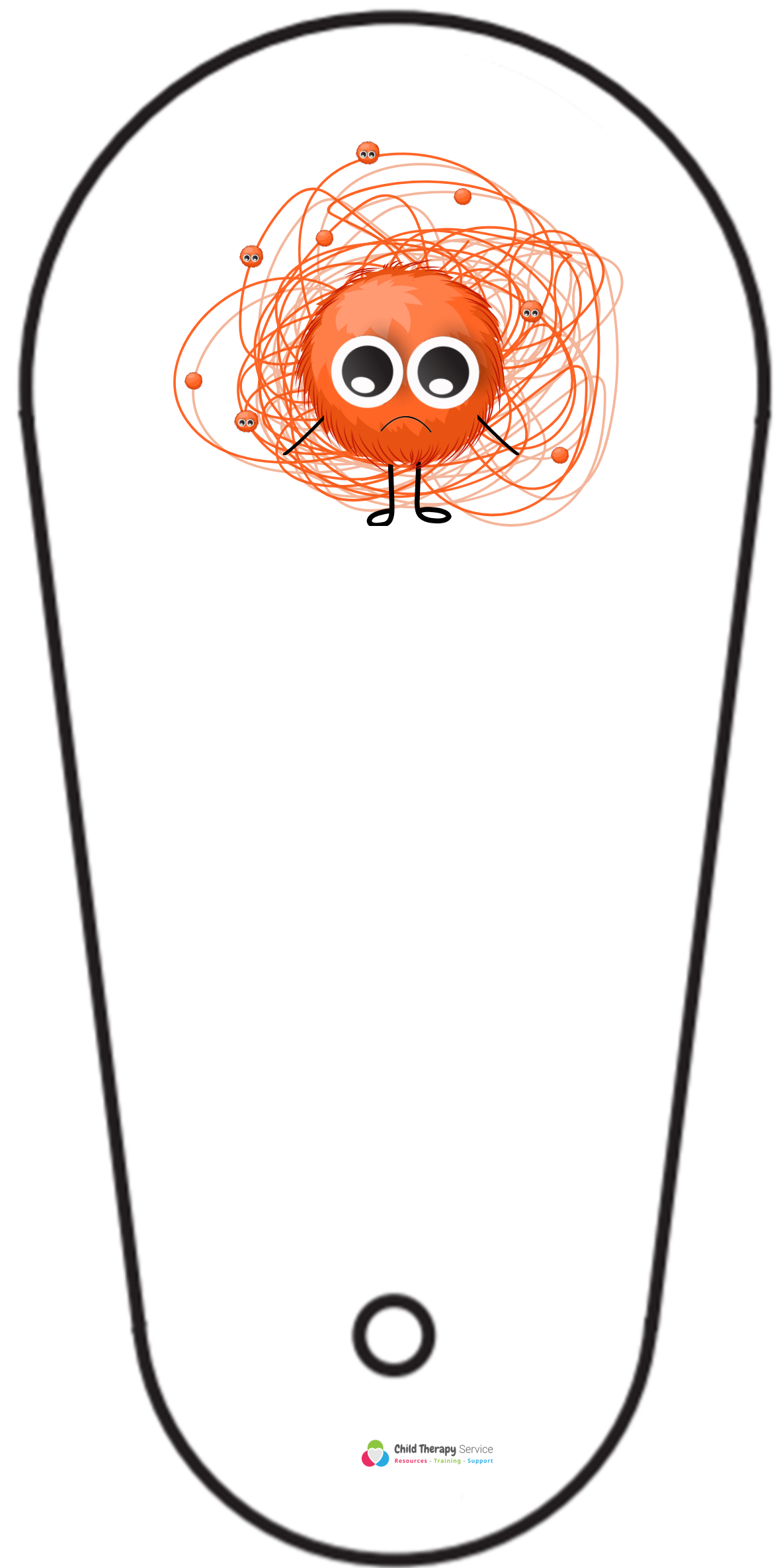
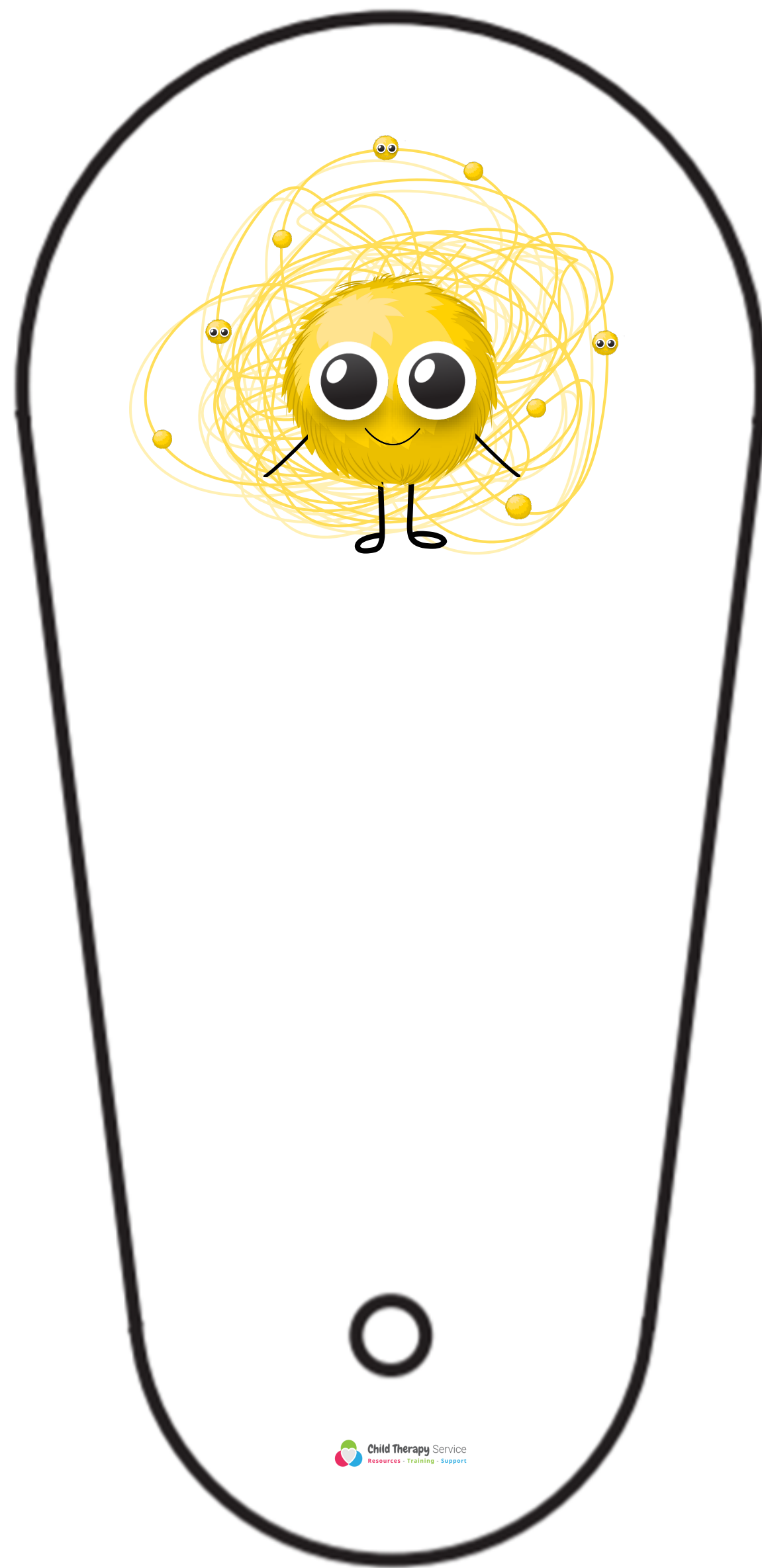
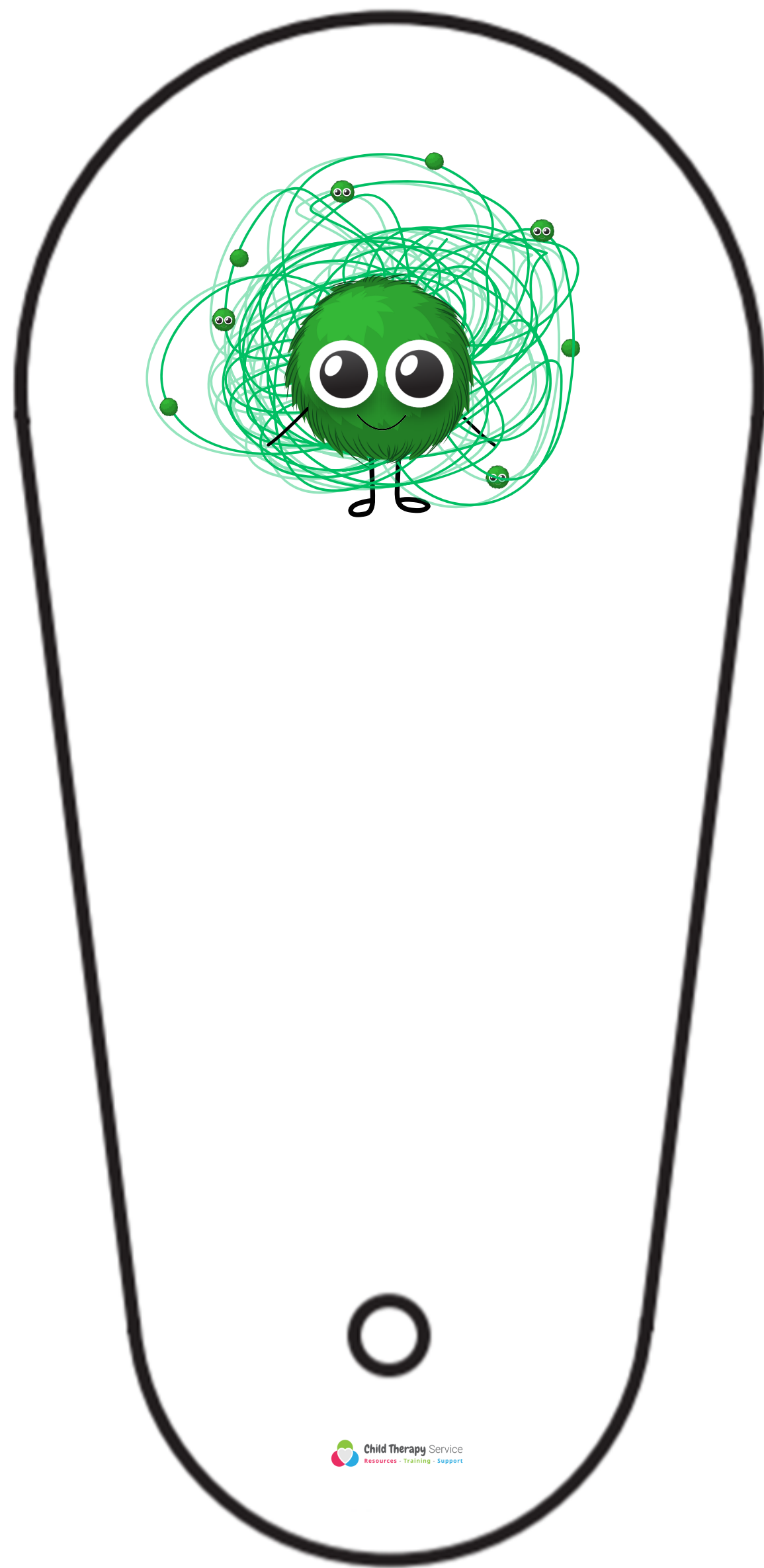
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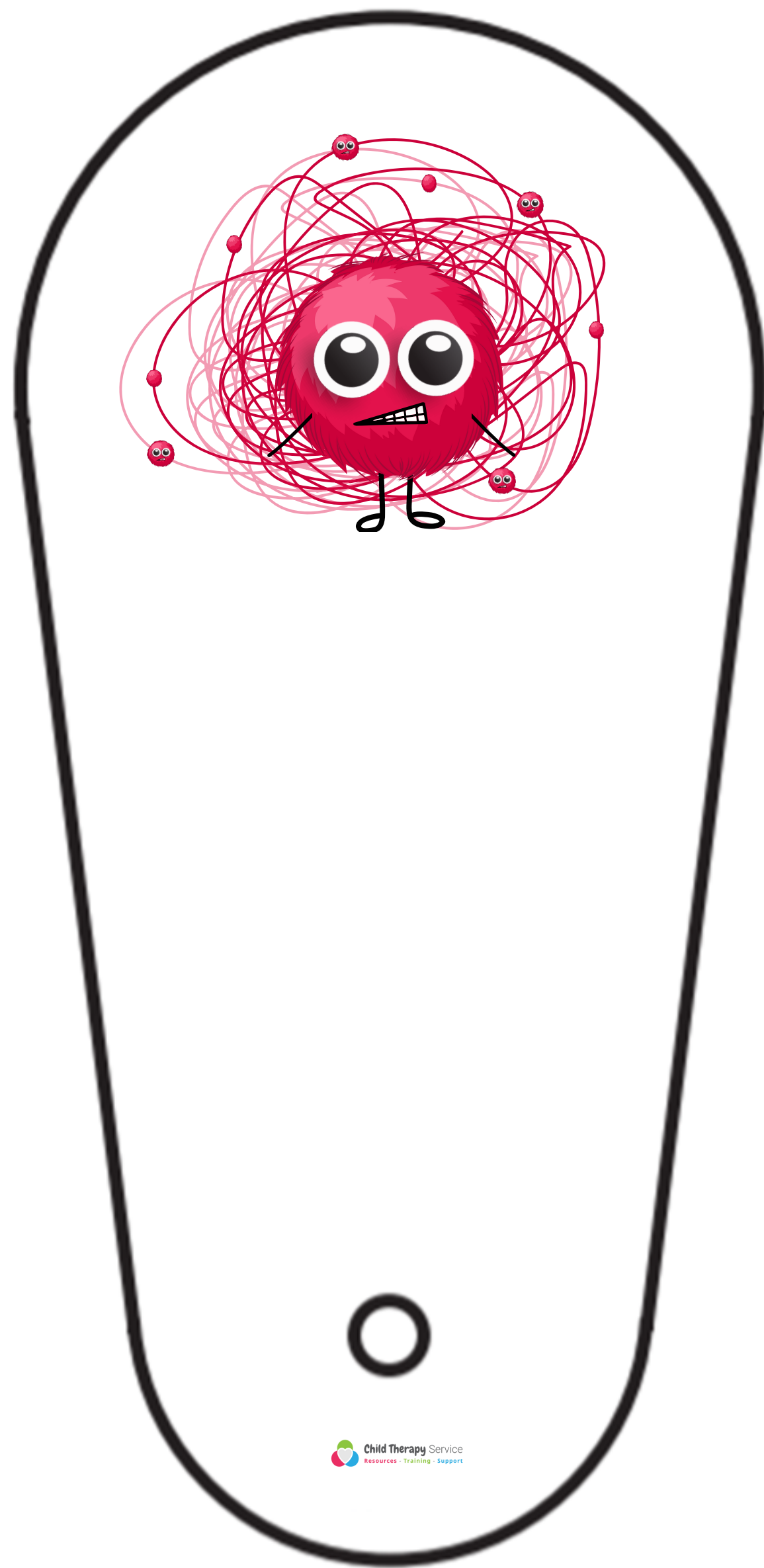
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Calm

Fizzy

Wobbly

Angry

Sad

