The Neurobiology of Emotional Presence: Understanding JOYELY's Four Stages of Presence™

Emotions shape our every interaction, but **how** we experience an emotion can vary dramatically depending on our sense of safety, our mindful presence, and our capacity for joy. JOYELY's Four Stages of Presence™ – **Inactive, Awareness, Reflection,** and **Expansion** – offer a model for understanding the neurobiological foundations of "emotional presence." This model bridges cutting-edge brain science with practical emotional awareness. In this article, we'll explore how the brain processes emotion at each stage of presence, highlight key brain regions involved, and discuss why *presence* is the missing dimension in traditional emotional models.

Introduction: Safety, Presence, and Joy in Emotional Processing

What does it mean to be "present" with our emotions? In simple terms, emotional *presence* refers to being engaged and aware of what we feel in the moment, within a foundation of safety. JOYELY's framework emphasizes three key conditions that influence any emotional experience: **safety** (feeling physically and emotionally secure), **presence** (being mentally engaged and mindful of the here-and-now), and **joy** (the capacity to access positive, uplifting feelings). Traditional approaches often label emotions as "positive" or "negative," or rate them on a simple scale, but this misses the richness of our internal experience. Two people might both feel *anger*, for example, but there's a big difference between an anger that consumes us in a blind rage versus an anger that we mindfully observe and channel constructively. The Four Stages of Presence™ model captures this difference by showing how our brain and behavior change as we move from a reactive state to a more grounded, joyful state.

The Four Stages of Presence™ describe a progression of emotional processing based on how much safety, presence, and joy we can access in a given moment. At each stage, different brain circuits take the lead, and this shapes how we experience and express our emotions. Below is an overview of each stage:

- **Inactive (Survival Mode):** This is the stage dominated by stress or trauma responses – the classic *fight, flight, freeze* (and related reactions like *fawn* or *feign*).

When we feel unsafe or overwhelmed, the brain's alarm center, the **amygdala** (our fear and threat detector), takes charge. In this mode, presence is low; we may feel "not fully here" or on autopilot, as the mind is consumed by perceived danger. Communication of feelings tends to be unclear or reactive. The **prefrontal cortex** (the brain's reasoning and self-control center) is less active, meaning our rational, reflective capacities are offline. Other regions like the **insula** (which monitors internal bodily states) might register intense discomfort, and the **anterior cingulate cortex (ACC)** – involved in emotional regulation and attention – struggles to keep up. In short, the Inactive stage is about pure survival. We have little access to joy in this state because our brain's priority is to defend and escape. Emotions in this stage often include those rooted in pain, fear, injustice, or urgency (for example, feeling enraged, terrified, or hopeless). It often takes deliberate effort or external support to break out of this stage because the person doesn't inherently feel safe or present.

- **Awareness (Recognizing and Naming):** In the Awareness stage, we regain enough safety and calm to *notice* and *name* what we're feeling. Presence increases – we start "showing up" to our own experience instead of being lost in it. The amygdala's grip loosens slightly, and the prefrontal cortex begins to re-engage. You might feel upset but also able to say, *"I am upset, and here's why."* Brain-wise, this stage sees more collaboration between the emotional limbic system and the frontal lobes. The **insula** and **ACC** play a big role here: the insula helps generate the conscious feeling of emotions (it's often called a hub of emotional awareness), and the ACC aids in focusing attention on those feelings and detecting that something is emotionally significant. We start interpreting the situation and making meaning – *Why do I feel this way? What triggered me?* Emotions in the Awareness stage help us investigate; for example, one might feel **offended** or **anxious** – signals that something needs attention – and importantly, one is *aware* of feeling that way. Safety is still shaky in this stage, but improving. Because we're beginning to feel a bit more secure or accountable for our feelings, we can communicate them with slightly more clarity. Joy is still relatively low, but it's no longer "completely buried" – there might be a small spark of curiosity or relief simply from recognizing what's going on.

- **Reflection (Understanding and Reframing):** By the time we reach Reflection, we have established a decent sense of safety and are fully present with our emotion. This stage is characterized by introspection, learning, and perspective-shifting. The prefrontal cortex (especially areas involved in insight and empathy, like the medial prefrontal and parts of the ACC) becomes much more active. We can analyze our behavior or the situation more objectively, almost as if taking a mental step back. The amygdala's alarm is much quieter now – we still *feel* the emotion, but it's not controlling us. In the brain, there's greater integration: the "thinking" frontal regions and the "feeling" limbic regions start working together. We might recall memories or tap into the **hippocampus** (memory center) to put things in context ("I've felt like this before and survived it"). This is often where

personal growth happens. For example, instead of just feeling offended (as in the Awareness stage), in Reflection one might feel **thoughtful**, **remorseful**, or **understanding** – emotions that indicate we're processing the deeper meaning and perhaps seeing our own role in the experience. With increased presence, we can also practice empathy (the insula and ACC are involved in empathic understanding too), or forgiveness. Joy becomes more accessible here; we might not be *happy* about what happened, but we feel a sense of hope or empowerment in learning from it. Communication at this stage is calm and considered – we can articulate our feelings and needs without the earlier charge.

- **Expansion (Flow and Joyful Integration):** This is the most integrated and free state of emotional presence. In the Expansion stage, emotional energy *flows* rather than feeling stuck. The person feels safe and grounded; presence is high – you are fully engaged in the moment, and joy is much easier to tap into. Neurologically, this corresponds to optimal functioning: the prefrontal cortex and amygdala are in harmony (the rational and emotional brains are aligned rather than fighting each other). Neurotransmitters associated with positive mood and connection (like dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin) are more balanced. People often describe this state as feeling **connected, inspired, or uplifted**. Creativity flourishes, because the brain isn't wasting energy on self-protection; instead, it's exploring possibilities. Indeed, research in positive psychology supports this – when we experience positive emotions like motivation or inspiration, our mindset *broadens*, allowing us to think more creatively and see more solutions, whereas negative emotions tend to narrow our focus to "fight or flee" responses, pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. In Expansion, the **default mode network** of the brain (which is active during moments of insight and self-referential thinking) may also come into play, helping us integrate our experience into a larger sense of self or purpose. Communication in this stage is often described as *flowing*. We feel aligned in mind and body: for example, our heart rate is calm, breathing is steady (signs of parasympathetic nervous system activation, indicating safety), and we can express even difficult feelings with clarity and compassion. This is the stage where joy is not just an outcome but a background presence – a kind of resilient joy that underlies whatever emotion we are feeling.

Illustration: The JOY Intelligence Emotions Map by JOYELY® visualizes the Four Stages of Presence™ – Inactive (outermost ring), Awareness, Reflection, and Expansion (innermost ring). Emotions are grouped by category (e.g. fear, anger, sadness) and mapped onto these stages, with ***barriers*** *like Accountability, Acceptance, and Trust marking the growth steps between stages. This wheel highlights that as we move inward toward Expansion, we gain safety, presence, and access to joy in increasing measure. Even traditionally "negative" emotions (red and blue shades on the outer rings) can transform into constructive forms (yellow and green shades) as one becomes more present and emotionally secure.*

Brain Regions at Work in Each Stage

Let's take a closer look at the key brain regions mentioned and how their roles shift across these four stages:

- **Amygdala (Threat Detector):** A small almond-shaped region deep in the brain, famous for its role in fear and anger. In the **Inactive** stage, the amygdala is on overdrive – it perceives threat and kicks off the fight-or-flight cascade (racing heart, stress hormones, etc.). At this stage, the amygdala can even trigger fear responses *without* us consciously realizing why – for example, studies show the amygdala responds to fearful stimuli even when those stimuli are flashed too fast for conscious awarenesspubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. This is the brain's "low road" of processing: quick and dirty, meant to protect us from danger before we can think. As we move to **Awareness** and beyond, the amygdala's activity moderates. By the time we reach **Reflection**, the amygdala is largely in check, and in **Expansion** it's well-regulated – it will still alert us if something is wrong (we don't lose our ability to feel fear or anger), but it's no longer running the show unchecked.

- **Prefrontal Cortex (Executive Center):** This is the frontal part of the brain right behind the forehead – essentially the "executive" that handles reasoning, impulse control, planning, and decision-making. In **Inactive** (survival mode), the prefrontal cortex's activity is diminished; when emotions run hot and the body is in crisis mode, the rational brain tends to go offline. You might notice this as the feeling of "I can't think straight when I'm upset" – that's the prefrontal cortex being overshadowed by limbic (emotional) signals. Reaching **Awareness** means the prefrontal cortex is re-engaging – we start to interpret and find words for what's happening. At **Reflection** stage, the prefrontal cortex (especially areas involved in self-reflection and emotional regulation, like the ventromedial PFC and dorsolateral PFC) is actively working to reassess the situation: *Is this really a threat? What can I learn?* By **Expansion**, the prefrontal cortex is in healthy communication with the amygdala and other regions – what some scientists call **top-down regulation**. In fact, practices that increase presence (like mindful breathing or meditation) physically strengthen the connections between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, making emotional regulation easier. One neuroscience study found that simply focusing on one's breath can decrease amygdala activation while increasing functional connectivity between the amygdala and prefrontal regions during stressful emotionspmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. In practice, this means our "thinking brain" and "emotional brain" talk to each other more, leading to wiser, calmer responses.

- **Insula (Internal Sensations and Emotional Awareness):** The insula is a region folded deep within the cerebral cortex (on each side of the brain) and is crucial for mapping bodily states and subjective feelings. It's sometimes called the hub of *interoception* – the sense of the internal state of your body – and it's heavily

involved in the visceral aspect of emotions (like the heart-sink of sadness or the gut-flutter of anxiety). In a highly **Inactive** state, we might experience intense bodily stress responses, but paradoxically we might also be somewhat *disconnected* from them in awareness (for instance, someone in trauma might go numb or not fully register their racing heartbeat). As presence increases in the **Awareness** stage, the insula helps us actually feel and acknowledge those internal sensations: *"My chest is tight; I am really hurt"*. In **Reflection**, the insula supports a nuanced understanding of our feelings – we can tell anger from frustration, or sadness from exhaustion, based on the bodily cues it integrates with emotional context. Notably, the insula works in tandem with the ACC to bring emotional awareness to consciousness. By the **Expansion** stage, the insula is contributing to a rich, nuanced emotional experience that is well-integrated into our overall state. We feel fully *embodied* – meaning mind and body are aligned in what we feel. This alignment is part of why Expansion feels so energizing and "freeing" – there is no internal war between our feelings and our acknowledgment of them.

- **Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC – the Integrator and Regulator):** The ACC is a stripe of brain region that runs front-to-back in the midline, sort of between the limbic system and the frontal lobes. It has a foot in both worlds: one part of the ACC is connected to emotion and motivation, another part is connected to cognitive control and attention. In emotional terms, the ACC is important for noticing *conflict* (e.g., "I feel this, but I *shouldn't* feel this" or "Something about this situation isn't right") and for initiating adjustments. During the **Inactive** stage, the ACC may signal distress but often gets "overruled" by the overwhelming surge from the amygdala – think of it like a small voice saying "this is too much" that itself gets drowned out. When we enter **Awareness**, the ACC likely plays a role in shifting our attention inward to our feelings ("Okay, pay attention to this emotion now"). It helps with the process of **accountability** – recognizing our emotion and beginning to take ownership of it. In **Reflection**, the ACC is busy coordinating between the emotional and rational parts of our brain, facilitating *acceptance* (another key internal shift) – for instance, accepting that it's okay to feel what we feel, which ironically often reduces the internal conflict. By **Expansion**, ACC activity often correlates with states of empathy, compassion, and problem-solving. It helps maintain **trust** in ourselves: trust that we can handle emotions, trust in our safety. In this stage, the ACC and related networks support that sense of harmony – the feeling that "I am whole and OK" even if the outside world is challenging.

By understanding these regions – amygdala, prefrontal cortex, insula, and ACC – we can appreciate that emotional presence isn't just a vague idea but a dynamic brain state. Early stages (Inactive) are characterized by a dominantly *subcortical* (below-conscious) drive, while later stages (Reflection/Expansion) engage more *cortical* (conscious, integrative) processes. Essentially, as we gain presence, we're shifting which parts of the

brain are leading: from the reactive bottom (limbic and brainstem) to the thoughtful top (cortex), and ultimately a synchronous dance between the two in the Expansion stage.

Implicit vs. Explicit Emotion: Why Presence Matters as a "Missing Dimension"

Research on fear provides a powerful example of why *presence* is such a crucial dimension in understanding emotions. Traditionally, psychologists and neuroscientists have described emotions in terms of their intensity, their valence (positive or negative feeling), and their physiological effects. But whether an emotion is processed implicitly (without conscious awareness) or explicitly (with conscious awareness) can completely change its impact on us. This is where presence comes in.

Consider a classic fear scenario: you're walking in the woods and suddenly you jump back – your heart pounding – before you even realize *why*. Only after a second do you notice a snake on the path. This immediate, unconscious fear reaction is what scientists call an **implicit emotional response**. Your eyes saw a shape, your brain's threat system (led by the amygdala) screamed "Snake! Danger!" and your body reacted – all before you became *mindfully aware* of the fear. In lab studies, researchers have found that even when people do not consciously see a threat (for example, a picture of a fearful face flashed too quickly to consciously notice), their amygdala can activate (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). In other words, the brain can mount an emotional response behind the scenes. This implicit route is lightning-fast and useful for survival, but it doesn't involve *presence*. You are literally not "present" to the emotion; your brain is reacting on autopilot.

Now contrast this with an **explicit emotional response**: imagine you *do* see the snake and you *realize* you feel afraid. You take a deep breath and say to yourself, "Okay, I'm scared but it's probably a harmless garter snake." Here, your conscious mind engages. The prefrontal cortex and other higher regions start to modulate the fear response, calming the amygdala's alarm. You might still choose to carefully avoid the snake (the fear is valid and useful), but you do so with deliberate presence rather than blind panic. This explicit processing is slower, but it allows for reflection and learning ("Next time I'll watch my step, but I don't need to avoid the woods forever").

What traditional models often missed is treating this **presence or awareness** factor as a dimension in its own right. Two people with the *same stimulus* (a snake on the path) might have very different emotional journeys depending on their level of presence. One might remain stuck in the implicit fear, heart racing long after the snake is gone, perhaps developing a phobia. Another, through presence, might quickly self-soothe and even find a bit of excitement or humor in the adrenaline rush once safe. Neither the *type* of emotion (fear) nor its basic physiology alone explains this difference – it's the presence (or absence) of mindful awareness and a sense of safety that does.

In fear conditioning research, scientists have shown that conscious awareness can dramatically change outcomes. For example, people can overcome fears through exposure therapy, which essentially works by bringing fearful reactions into conscious, present-moment processing repeatedly until the brain relearns safety. Without that conscious re-processing (i.e. without presence), the fear memory in the amygdala would just stay "stuck." Presence activates neural circuits that help *re-evaluate* the threat. The prefrontal cortex literally sends signals to the amygdala that say, "Stand down, it's okay now." This is sometimes called **top-down inhibition**. If you're not present, that top-down message never gets delivered effectively – the amygdala stays on high alert.

Even beyond fear, studies on emotion regulation find that just *paying attention* to our feelings in the moment can change brain activity. A simple act like naming your emotion ("I feel anger") engages parts of the cortex and dampens the amygdala's reactivity, a phenomenon known as **affect labeling**. It's fascinating that our brain reacts one way when emotion is implicit and unacknowledged, and a different way when we explicitly acknowledge and attend to it. Presence is the hinge between those two modes.

Thus, presence is a "missing dimension" that complements traditional measures like intensity or valence. We can think of any emotion in a 3D space: *what* am I feeling (anger, fear, sadness, etc.), *how strong* is it, and *how present/safe* am I while experiencing it. JOYELY's model builds that third dimension into the equation. By doing so, it explains phenomena that older one-dimensional or two-dimensional models can't. For instance, **fear** can be destructive (panic) or constructive (heightened focus) depending on presence. **Anger** can be an uncontrolled outburst or a controlled, assertive drive for justice. The *difference* isn't just how angry one is; it's whether one is grounded and aware in the experience of anger. Presence transforms our relationship to the emotion.

Mapping Emotions to Presence: From Anger to Sadness across the Stages

Every emotion we experience has multiple "flavors" or expressions, and these often correspond to our stage of presence. JOYELY's Four Stages of Presence™ map various specific emotions onto each stage, illustrating how an emotion like **anger** or **sadness** might manifest when we have low vs. high presence.

Let's take **anger** as an example. In the **Inactive** stage, anger might show up as rage or fury – a blind fury where reactions are impulsive, reflexive, and disconnected from any deeper thought or awareness. In this state, the **amygdala** is highly active, and the **prefrontal cortex** (responsible for reasoning and emotional control) is offline. Communication in this state might be aggressive, lashing out, or even completely shut down. In the **Awareness** stage, anger could take on a more controlled form, showing up as offense or frustration. At this stage, the anger is still felt intensely, but the person has more awareness and can articulate, "I feel offended by what you said," or "I'm frustrated

with this situation." While anger is still present, the individual has enough cognitive presence to observe it, allowing for a bit more control over their reactions. In the **Reflection** stage, anger may still be present, but it is often reframed and used more productively. At this point, the emotion could blend with other feelings like determination or resolve. For example, after feeling angry about an injustice, you might channel that anger into passionate action – maybe explaining your boundaries calmly or taking steps to resolve the situation. Though the initial anger remains as a part of the emotional mix, it is no longer the dominant feeling, and you begin to approach the emotion with purpose. Finally, in the **Expansion** stage, anger may not be the central emotion. However, elements of it might still exist in the background as you experience something like **empowerment** or **righteous joy**. For example, after standing up for what you believe in or protecting a loved one, you might feel a sense of fierce joy or empowerment. While this joy is not necessarily caused by the anger itself, the emotional intensity from earlier stages can contribute to a clearer sense of purpose and positive action. The anger that may have started the process has now transformed into a more positive emotion, but traces of it still linger as part of the emotional landscape.

Now let's consider **sadness**. In an **Inactive** or low-presence state, sadness might feel like despair or hopelessness. It's overwhelming, paralyzing, and often experienced with a sense of withdrawal, numbness, or shutdown. The energy is flat, and the person may feel emotionally stuck, unable to move forward. In the **Awareness** stage, sadness could take on a different quality. It might feel like loss or loneliness, deeply painful but acknowledged and processed. The person might say, "I miss them so much," or allow themselves to cry. While still deeply sad, this form of sadness is more present and observed, giving the individual the space to process and feel rather than remain trapped by despair. In the **Reflection** stage, sadness might deepen into reflection or remorse. This is an active stage where the sadness is understood and integrated. The person may seek meaning from their sadness, such as asking, "What does this loss teach me about what I value?" or they may reach out for support. The brain is actively working through sadness, integrating emotional memory and perspective, which can lead to insights or acceptance. At the **Expansion** stage, sadness can coexist with gratitude, love, or even joy. This might sound counterintuitive at first – how can sadness and joy exist together? But think of the bittersweet feeling when remembering a loved one who has passed away. Tears may still flow, but a smile can also appear as you recall the happy memories. This is a form of joy within sadness. Neurologically, this might involve the activation of attachment and calming circuits alongside grief. The sadness moves through in waves, but the person feels safe enough to let it wash over them, bringing a sense of peace and sometimes a quiet joy in the remembrance.

We could do a similar mapping for emotions like **fear**, **disgust**, **surprise**, **trust**, etc. In fact, JOYELY's emotions map includes many such mappings – for instance, **fear** in Inactive might be **terror** or **panic**, whereas in Expansion it could become **courage** (fear transformed by presence into something brave and proactive). **Disgust** might start as **revulsion** in Inactive and become **appalled** (Awareness, where you can at least say "this

is wrong"), then perhaps **disapproval with reason** in Reflection, and maybe **advocacy** in Expansion (e.g., channeling the initial disgust at injustice into fighting for a cause with passion).

The key point is that *each core emotion has a spectrum of expression* – from a more raw, unmediated form to a more evolved, integrated form. The Four Stages of Presence give us a framework to understand these differences not as totally separate emotions, but as variations of the same emotion unfolding at different levels of safety and awareness. This is empowering: it means we don't have to be victims of "negative" emotions. Anger doesn't have to stay rage; sadness doesn't have to stay despair. By working on the conditions *inside us* (cultivating safety, presence, and joy), we can essentially "move" an emotion from the outer rings of that wheel toward the center. We retain the *information* and energy that the emotion provides (anger's signal of violation, sadness's signal of loss and value, fear's signal of danger), but we change our *relationship* to that information.

Accessing Joy Within Every Emotion

One of the most surprising insights of JOYELY's approach is that **joy can be accessed within any emotion** given the right internal conditions. Joy here isn't used in the narrow sense of "happiness" or simple cheerfulness. It's more about an underlying sense of aliveness, connection, or appreciation. Think of joy as an inner light: in some emotional states it's obscured by thick clouds, in others it breaks through in rays, and in the best of times it shines brightly. But the light is always there. The goal of increasing our emotional presence is to thin the clouds so that even when the emotional weather is stormy, we can find moments of light.

How is it possible to feel joy when you're angry or sad? It comes down to those factors of safety and presence. When you feel fundamentally safe (at least in your body or with someone you trust) and you remain present (not denying or running from the feeling), you create a kind of emotional container that can hold positive and negative together. In psychological terms, this is sometimes called **emotional complexity** or **mixed emotions** – and it's actually a sign of maturity and resilience. For example, a person in grief might feel deep sadness and yet feel touched by the kindness of friends who support them, leading to moments of gratitude even as they cry. That gratitude is a form of joy peeking through sorrow. Likewise, a social activist might feel anger at injustice *and* feel a fervent joy in the camaraderie of working with others toward change. The joy doesn't cancel out the anger; they exist together, adding determination and hope to what could otherwise be an exhausting rage.

Neurobiologically, accessing joy within any emotion likely involves activating certain brain networks regardless of the "emotion label" we're experiencing. Joy is often associated with the release of **dopamine** (reward neurotransmitter) and **oxytocin** (bonding/love hormone) and robust activation of the brain's reward circuitry (like the ventral striatum). Normally, those might not be firing during, say, fear or anger. However, with the internal conditions of safety and presence, we might appraise the situation

differently – finding a rewarding aspect in the experience. For instance, the anger-turned-to-determination example could recruit dopamine because taking empowered action feels rewarding. The sadness-with-gratitude example could involve oxytocin and endorphins as the person feels the love in their memories or in others' support. Essentially, the brain can blend emotional states. It's not always one pure tone; it can be a chord of several feelings. **Joy can be the background note** that resonates along with the note of anger or sadness, changing the overall emotional music.

This idea is also supported by findings in positive psychology which show that positive emotions broaden our mindset and help build resilience (pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). If we can introduce even a spark of joy into a tough emotional moment, it can widen our perspective – we don't feel as trapped or defined by the "negative" emotion. Over time, training ourselves to find that spark (through practices like gratitude, mindful breathing, or recalling a sense of purpose) can rewire our emotional habits. We become more fluid and resilient. A person who has learned to access joy in the midst of stress might face a crisis and say, "This is really hard, but I know I will grow from it," deriving a sense of meaningful challenge (a form of joy) even as they acknowledge the difficulty. This is not just rosy-eyed optimism – it's a neurobiologically grounded capacity to engage higher-brain resources even under duress.

Importantly, accessing joy in every emotion does **not** mean suppressing genuine feelings or forcing positivity. It's not about plastering a smile on when you feel hurt. It's about the internal conditions: creating safety (perhaps by stepping away from a harmful situation, or establishing boundaries, or simply calming your body) and presence (allowing yourself to fully feel and observe the emotion) so that joy has room to emerge naturally. Joy might emerge as relief, as hope, as a sense of strength, or as deep-down knowledge that "I am alive and this feeling is part of my life's richness." This approach aligns with therapeutic principles of acceptance and integration in modalities like mindfulness-based therapies and somatic therapies – rather than banishing the "bad" feelings, we embrace them in a wider field of awareness and care, where surprisingly we often find moments of positive emotion appearing.

Conclusion: Toward a New Emotional Literacy of Presence

Understanding the neurobiological foundations of emotional presence through the Four Stages of Presence™ gives us a powerful new lens on mental health and personal growth. It shows that emotions are not just *what* we feel, but *how* we feel them. By accounting for the dimension of presence (and its close allies, safety and joy), we move beyond one-dimensional labels and into a more dynamic, dimensional emotional literacy. This has profound implications for building tools and interventions in the mental health field.

For mental health professionals, this model offers a framework to help clients identify not just their emotions, but their **stage** of emotion. Instead of only asking "What are you feeling?", we also ask "How safe and present do you feel with that emotion right now?" This opens up tailored strategies: a client in an Inactive-stage anger (rage) might first need grounding and safety before any cognitive reframing is effective, whereas a client in a Reflection-stage anger can jump into meaning-making and problem-solving. It aligns well with trauma-informed practice (meeting the client where they are, nervous-system-wise) and with positive psychology (leveraging strengths like curiosity or gratitude to move toward Expansion).

For the general public, the Four Stages of Presence™ is an accessible map to navigate life's emotional storms. It normalizes that being overwhelmed (Inactive) versus being calmly productive (Expansion) are different states that we all cycle through. Crucially, it gives hope that we are *not stuck* in whatever we're feeling – there is a pathway to move and transform our emotional state. By practicing presence (through techniques like JOYELY's Chair of Joy® exercise of sit, breathe, think, feel, or any mindfulness/grounding practice), we can gradually train our brains to spend more time in the higher stages. Neuroscience assures us that the brain is plastic – it can change with practice. Each time we intentionally shift from a lower stage to a higher one (for example, pausing in a moment of frustration to breathe and reflect), we are reinforcing neural pathways that make it easier next time. Over time, this builds resilience: the capacity to face difficulties with less overwhelm and more clarity.

For organizations and potential investors, there is a real opportunity here to support **emotional literacy tools that account for dimensional presence**. Many existing emotional intelligence or wellness programs focus on identifying emotions or regulating stress, but few explicitly train the dimensions *working together with joy*. JOYELY's approach, with its data-driven yet human-centered design, is at the forefront of this innovative space. By integrating neuroscience (like brain-heart coherence and vagus nerve activation) with practical habit-forming techniques, this model doesn't just aim to manage emotions but to fundamentally transform one's relationship with them. This translates to tangible outcomes: greater employee resilience, better team communication (since people can express their needs more clearly), more creativity and innovation (since teams can move to Expansion-stage thinking even under pressure), and overall well-being.

In closing, the neurobiology of emotional presence teaches us that joy isn't a luxury – it's a core aspect of how our brain can function at its best. Joy can and should be woven into every emotion, not by denying pain or fear, but by providing the internal soil (safety and presence) for the seeds of joy to grow, even in darkness. As we build the next generation of emotional wellness tools and practices, accounting for this dimension of presence will be crucial. It means the difference between an approach that merely categorizes emotions and one that truly catalyzes growth and healing. By embracing the full spectrum from Inactive to Expansion, we support individuals and communities in moving

through challenge toward growth, harnessing the wisdom of emotions with the grace of presence. This dimensional understanding of emotion paves the way for greater resilience, deeper healing, and a more joyful, conscious way of living.

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