The Psychology of Risk

How do people interpret and respond to environmental risks?

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People will perceive risks as more threatening if they are…

- Close
- Obvious
- Family-threatening
- Negative

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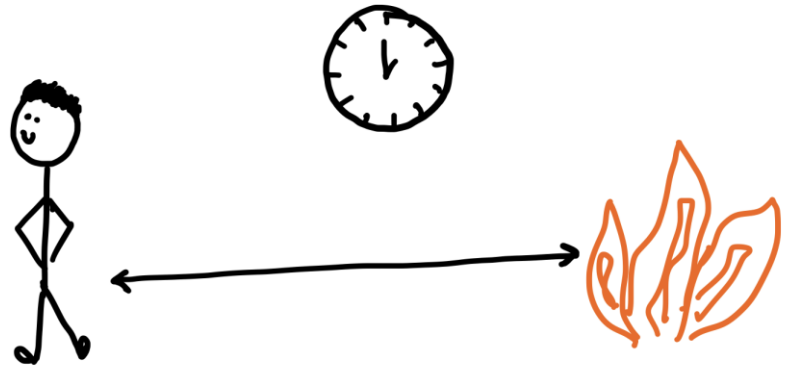
Principle 1: **Close**

Spatial and temporal discounting

Far distance or long time = underestimate severity of issue



Example:

Climate change underestimation

Advice:

Bring to attention to the here and now benefits of trees.

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Principle 2: **Obvious**

Sensory bias

Hazards are perceived as more likely if…

- Easily imaginable
- Have happened recently
- Often on your mind…

"Availability heuristic"

Example:

Branches falling

Example:

Tree roots blocking drains

Advice:

Bring attention to tangible benefits of trees.

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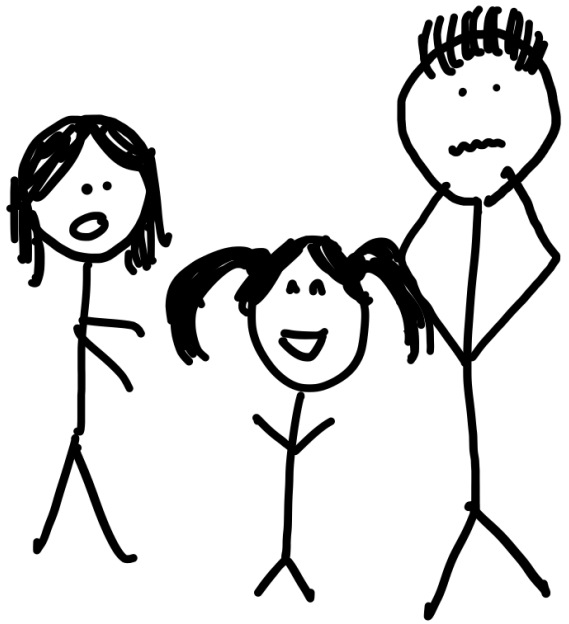
Principle 3: **Family-threatening**

People are apt to disregard risks to themselves but will **perceive family** members as **much more vulnerable.**

Example:

Heat-related illness



Advice:

Bring attention to the effect of trees on family

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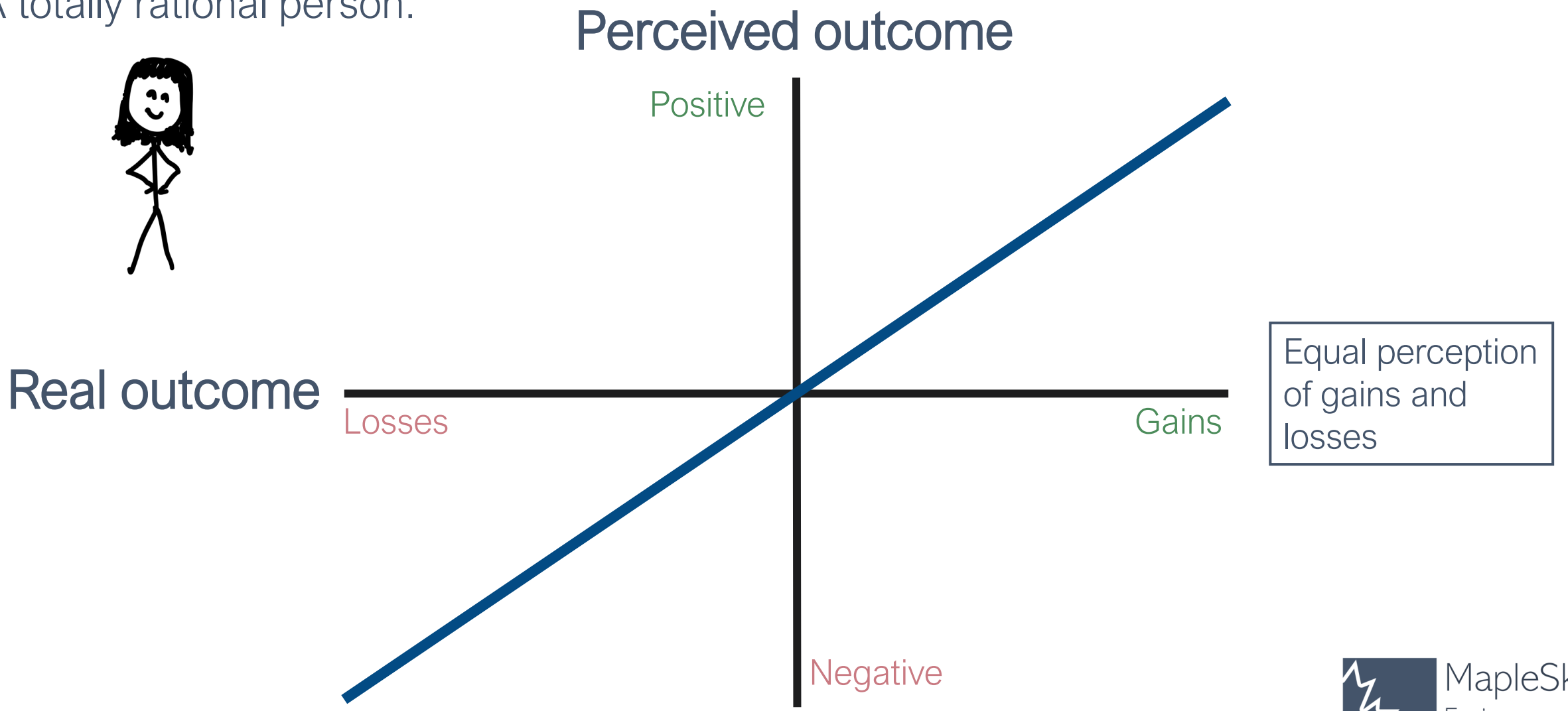
Principle 4: **Negative**

A totally rational person:



Equal perception of gains and losses

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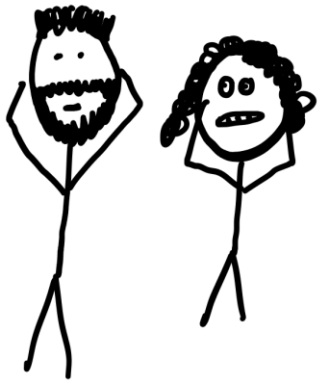
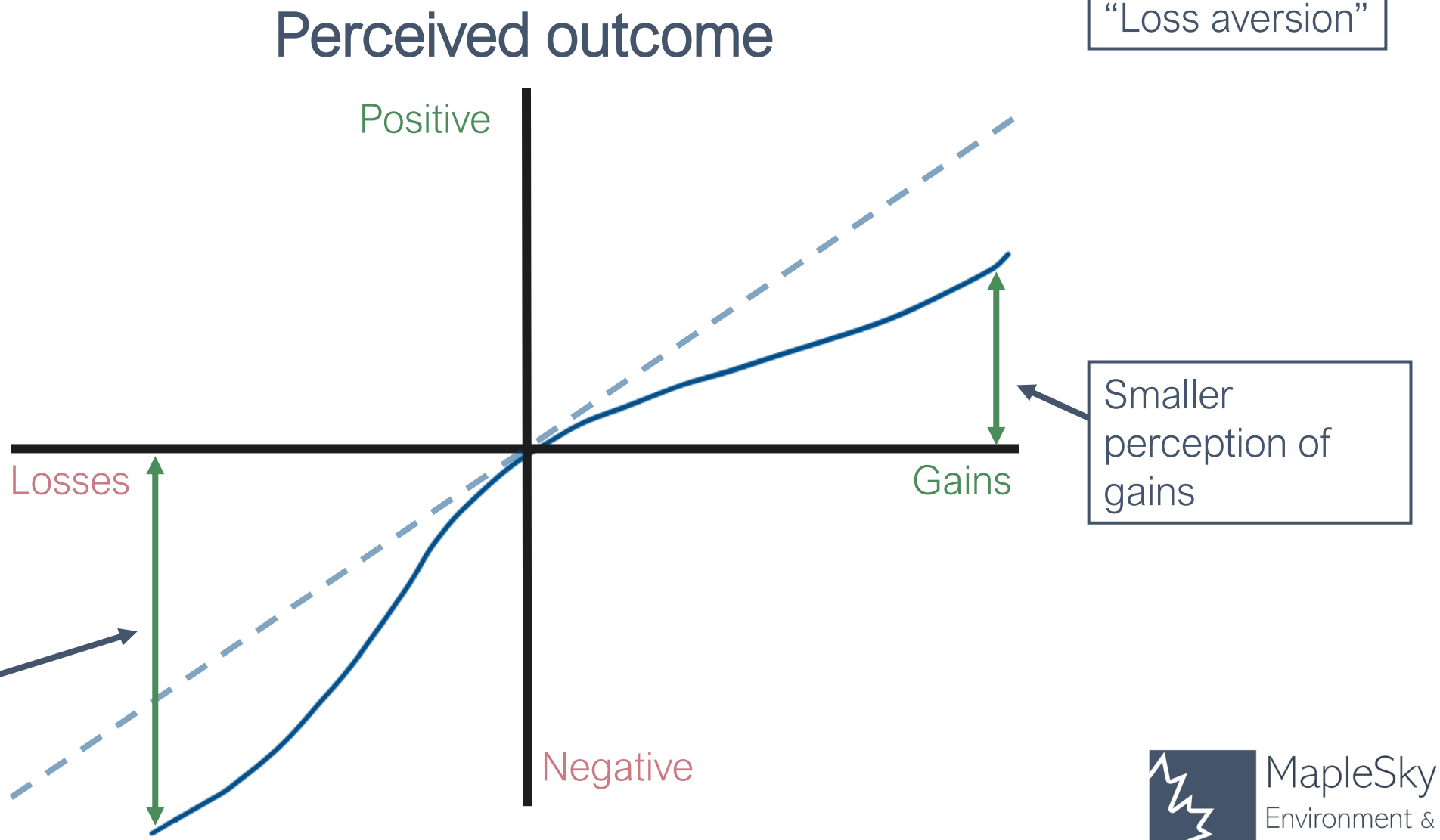
Principle 4: **Negative**

A real person:



"Loss aversion"



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Loss aversion and trees

People are wired to be more **afraid of what they could lose** by taking a risk than excited about what they may gain.

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The Psychology of Risk

It's all about **framing.**

Close

Obvious

Family-threatening

Negative

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