



KEY INSIGHT #2

Some individuals are more at-risk towards developing anxiety problems



KEY INSIGHT #3

Cannot address child anxiety by focusing on the symptoms directly



KEY INSIGHT #4

Most children don't need experts to support and accompany them. Parents and primary caregivers can be enough and become the child's best bet.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

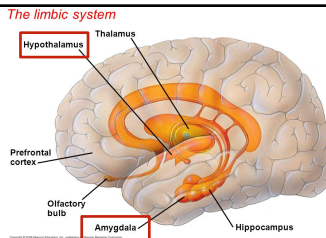
...a vague sense of unsafety and unease, characterized by apprehension and restlessness

...jangling nerves

WHERE DOES ANXIETY COME FROM?

BRAIN'S ALARM SYSTEM:

- Mediated by the **LIMBIC SYSTEM**
- **Amygdala** registers the threat (like a smoke detector)
- **Hypothalamus** orchestrates the response (it links the nervous system to the endocrine system via the pituitary gland)
- Which triggers the **SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM**



SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM ACTIVATION

CORTISOL – increase blood sugar
– suppress immune system

ADRENALINE – increases heart and respiratory rate

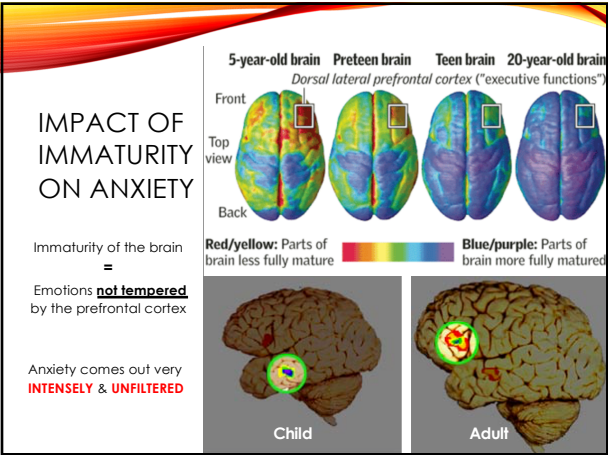
NOREPINEPHRINE – responsible for vigilant concentration

GROWTH HORMONE – increases glucose



TYPICAL CHILDHOOD FEARS	
Ages	Fears
0-6 months	fear of loud and unexpected noises, afraid when having lost physical, visual, and auditory contact with their adults
7-18 months	fear of strangers, especially when the parent is not in sight
2-5 years	afraid of the dark, fear of monsters, fear of masks, fear of animals, fear of being separated from parents, afraid of sleeping alone
6-9 years	fear of being left alone, fear of physical danger, fear of death, fear of school, fear of performance, worry about physical appearance
10-12 years	worry about friendships and exclusion
Adolescence	fear of identity, social integration, intimacy and the future

WHAT CAN 'NORMAL' ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?	
Physical sensations	Emotional reactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Butterflies in the stomach• Dizziness• Pounding heart• Shaky hands• Fidgeting, pacing• Nervous habits (ex. nail biting, chewing on clothes)• Etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upset• Feelings of worry• Withdrawn• Crying• Etc.



IMPACT OF SENSITIVITY AND
EMOTIONAL INTENSITY ON ANXIETY

Greater children are hypersensitive and emotionally intense:

- More easily they are affected and moved by their emotions
- More easily they are overwhelmed by their emotional experience
- More likely they are to be "stuck" emotionally:
 - Emotional intensity evokes more defenses
 - Intellectualization of experiences (escape of emotions)
 - Loss of tears necessary for adaptation
- More adults attempt in calming the person in order to avoid emotional eruptions, which doesn't help the situation

IMPACT OF ADVERSITY AND
TOXIC STRESS ON ANXIETY

Dr. Burke Harris reported that brain MRI studies on youth exposed to high levels of adversity and toxic stress show "a shrinking of the hippocampus [a brain area important for memory and emotional regulation] and increased size of the amygdala, which is the brain's fear center. This can make you hypervigilant—overly sensitive to threats or challenges."

(ACE Study, published in 1998)

WHAT IS AT THE
ROOT OF ANXIETY?



anxiety



ALARM

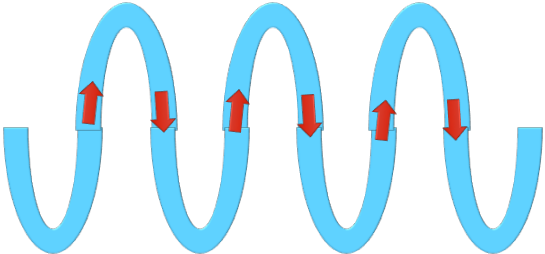
Primal **emotion**
(instinct-based)

DEFINING EMOTION

We don't choose to be affected emotionally.
Emotion:

- Stirs us up:
 - Happens to us as opposed to under our control;
 - Is irrational although the brain has its reasons.
- Moves us:
 - in ways that would serve us;
 - creates an action potential that seeks expression.

EMOTION MOVES



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT
TO EXPRESS EMOTION?

Emotion has work to do

- Feeling of alarm protects us from danger
- Feeling of frustration helps us not give up
- Feeling of pursuit allows to preserve our attachments

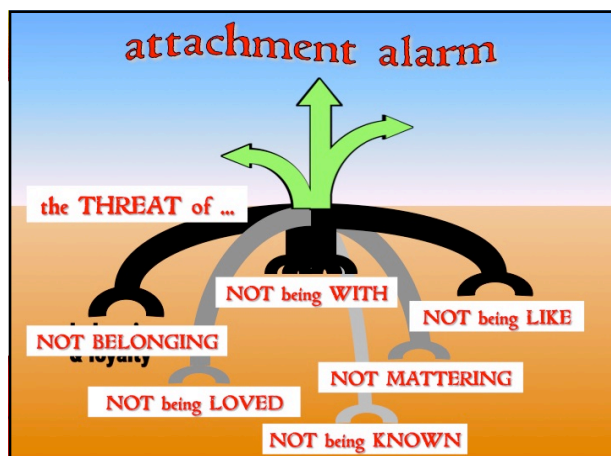
WHAT TRIGGERS EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION?

ATTACHMENT ALARM

ATTACHMENT = SURVIVAL

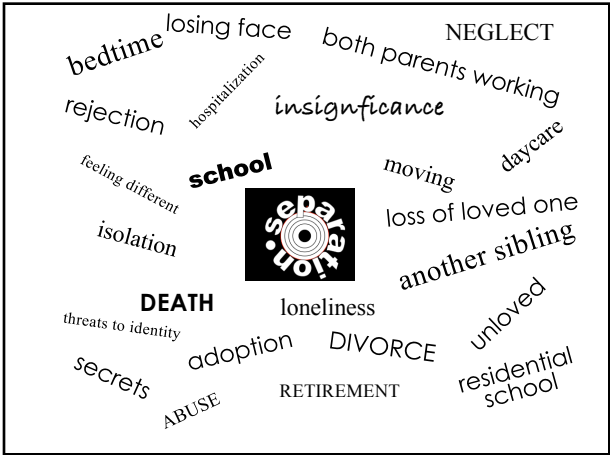
Attachment is people's most preeminent need, but also their biggest threat.

The impact of separation is more evidenced in research than any other single phenomenon (e.g. isolation research across species, human loneliness research, analysis of different population groups suffering loss and lack, longitudinal studies, etc.)



Anxiety in our Children

ATTACHMENT THREAT	ALARMING FEELING
Not being with	I'm alone, nobody is paying attention to be, no one wants to be with me, I feel rejected, etc.
Not being like	I'm different, I have nothing in common, I'm not normal, I feel prejudice against me, etc.
Not belonging	I don't feel included, Nobody is taking my side, no one has my back, people are against me, etc.
Not mattering	I don't feel noticed or listened to, I don't feel useful or important, people don't respect me, I don't feel esteemed or admired, my opinion doesn't count, my role doesn't matter, etc.
Not being loved	I don't feel taken care of, I don't feel warmth from anyone, I feel unlovable, etc.
Not being known	I don't feel truly seen or heard, I don't feel understood, I cannot share my secrets, I cannot truly be myself, etc.








PERFORMANCE
ANXIETY



ATTACHEMENT
ALARM

WHEN ANXIETY
BECOMES A
PROBLEM





WHEN TAKING A WRONG TURN

- When getting lost in technology
- When replacing adults by peers



DEFENDED AGAINST VULNERABILITY

When a child experiences:

- **Overwhelming sensitivity**
- **Wounding environment**

It could lead to defendedness and stuckness



BRAIN DEFENSE SYSTEM

Our brain protects us by:

- ✓ **NUMBING OUT** feeling that are too much
- ✓ **TUNING OUT** from seeing things that would be too hard to see
- ✓ **BACKING OUT** of relationships where you might get hurt

WHAT YOU CAN
DO TO HELP





Our **ROLE**
as the adult

teacher

Educator

parent

COACH

grandparent

caregiver

counsellor

Adjusting our VIEW

- Acknowledging emotions happen to us as opposed to under our control
- Understanding maturation as key to managing emotions
- Recognizing emotions as being untempered and intense


Adjusting our STANCE


- Not alarming them with our own alarm, frustration or disapproval
- Normalizing the experience of alarm and its energy to move us


Making ROOM for child's


- Emotions that come up
- Type of expression and release
- ...even for the uncomfortable stuff


HELP FIND WAYS TO EXPRESS OR RELEASE














Presented by Catherine Korah

11

To come alongside a person's feelings is to...

- a) accept their existence regardless of how irrational and unreasonable they may seem;
- b) normalize the feelings rather than treat their existence as a problem;
- c) Make room for the feelings rather than try to get rid of them.

To come alongside a person's feelings is to
Refrain from:

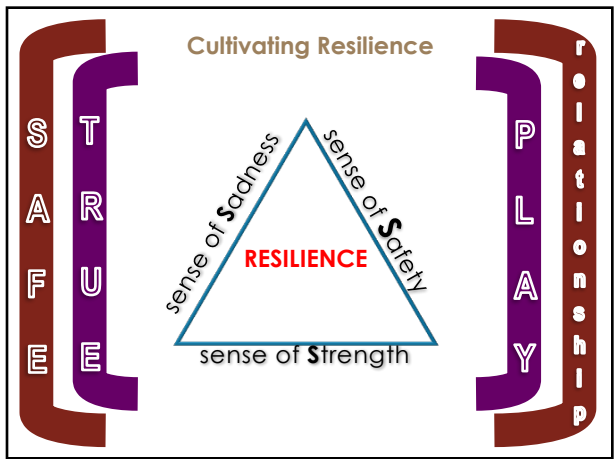
- Judging feelings
- discounting/negating/countering feelings
- defending oneself or another
- conveying that they are too much to handle
- teaching a lesson
- solving a problem

ADDRESSING ANXIETY

Natural solution to anxiety is building:

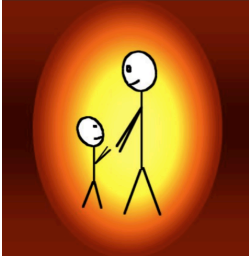
RESILIENCE = CAPACITY TO BOUNCE BACK





ATTACHMENT AND RESILIENCE

- Health and emotional growth in youth require adult collaboration (co-regulation)
- Emotional experiences in a caring/supportive relational context allow teens to develop their resilience (sense of security and confidence)



PLAY AND RESILIENCE

PLAY AS A NEURAL EXERCISE

Dr. Porges describes play as a “neural exercise” healing behavioral and emotional dysregulation. It is a necessary tool in our toolbox for supporting youth with behavioral challenges.

It’s a neural exercise in that it flexes the “muscle” of emotional regulation through reciprocal interactions under conditions of safety with others.

Stephen Porges, The Polyvagal Theory, 2011


EMOTIONS AT PLAY

Outlets that help children stay engaged on their emotional journey:

- laughter and humour
- drawing and painting
- drama and theatre
- dance and movement
- singing and music
- stories and writing
- teasing and silliness



ADDRESSING ANXIETY



SENSE OF SAFETY

How can we help a child feel SAFE enough when faced with stressful and wounding situations?

- Through the presence of a warm and trusting adult, which allows the child to experience some **EMOTIONAL REST**
- Through the experience of well-being in a safe place
- Through the experience of safety when pretending to play something stressful or dangerous

CARING & TRUSTING ADULT

Adult's role:

- ✓project calm and confidence (If necessary, fake it until you can make it!)
- ✓reassure and take the lead



The diagram illustrates the relationship between 'seeking' (dependent) and 'providing' (alpha) instincts. It features two stick figures: one labeled 'seeking' and the other 'providing'. The 'seeking' figure is on the left, and the 'providing' figure is on the right. A curved arrow points from the 'seeking' figure towards the 'providing' figure. The 'seeking' figure's instincts are listed under 'dependent instincts' and include: to get one's bearings, to serve and obey, to seek assistance, to look up to, to belong, to follow, to wait for orders, to look for guidance, and to comply and conform. The 'providing' figure's instincts are listed under 'alpha instincts' and include: to orient and inform, to protect & defend, to guide and direct, to look out for, to possess, to lead, to give the orders, to transmit one's values, and to command and prescribe.

SAFETY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

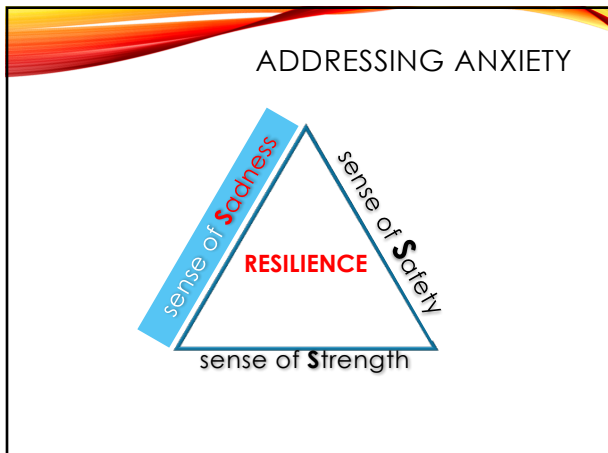
Not whether we (adults) think that the child is in a safe place or whether we believe the child should be feeling safe, but rather it's the child's own subjective experience and interpretation (feeling "Brain-Safe")



The collage shows four different ways to create a safe corner for a child. Top left: A corner with a green rug, blue and red pillows, and a small shelf. Top right: A tent-like structure with string lights and a small shelf. Bottom left: A corner with a black wall, framed pictures, and a small shelf. Bottom right: A corner with a white wall, a small shelf, and a small table.

SAFE CORNER







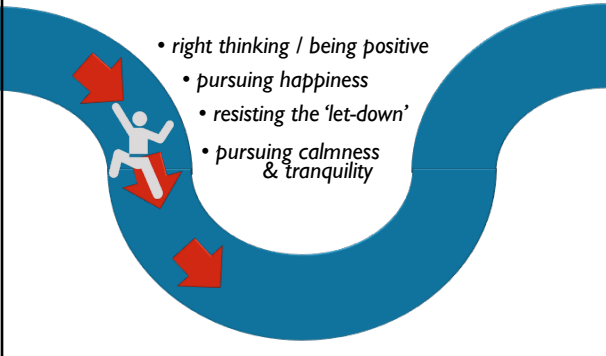
SENSE OF SADNESS

How can we help a child feel SAD enough when up against that which one cannot change?

- Through adult warmth and comfort
- Through emotional expression in the play mode: drawing, drama, dance, signing, music, etc.

* Only true tears of sadness allow for some emotional **RELEASE** and **RELIEF**

WORKING ONE’S WAY BACK TO THE TOP



- *right thinking / being positive*
- *pursuing happiness*
- *resisting the ‘let-down’*
- *pursuing calmness & tranquility*



TRUE VS. PSEUDO RESILIENCE

THE FEAR OF TEARS

- crying may seem like one is giving in or giving up
- crying is often associated with helplessness and with 'breaking down'
- crying is wrongly associated with depression and despair
- in societies where 'toughness' is valued, tears are indicative of weakness and fragility
- it may not be safe to cry as tears are often shamed and bullies assert dominance by exploiting perceived weakness
- those who are defended against their own tears are more likely to attack others for crying

HELPING THE TEARS TO FLOW

- Sad books, movies, *YouTube*, etc.
- In a dark room – side by side
- Slight tinge of sadness in voice
- Normalize sadness and tears
- Once tears appear, if resistant, change topic but remain in the sadness

COMFORTING ADULT

Adult's role:

- ✓ don't push
- ✓ make it safe and easy to find one's tears
- ✓ reflect tears as indicative of true strength









Today, I feel...

surprised

happy

sad

bored

surprised

happy

sad

bored

angry

worried

scared

excited

angry

worried

scared

excited

EXPRESSIVE TOOLS









ADDRESSING ANXIETY

sense of Sadness

sense of Safety

sense of Strength

RESILIENCE

SENSE OF STRENGTH

How can we help a child feel STRONG & CONFIDENT enough in the face of adversity and discomfort?

- Through shielding the child from excess wounding or from situations which are too overwhelming
- Through normalizing the anxiety and conveying to the child your belief in their **COURAGE**
- Through experiencing some sense of control in the play mode

PARENTING WITH EMPATHY

- Typical examples that dismiss and invalidate:
 - ✓ Don't be silly
 - ✓ There's nothing to be scared of
 - ✓ Why are you afraid of that?
 - ✓ You see, everything turned out fine, all that worrying for nothing
- Empathic acknowledgements:
 - ✓ Wow, that was really scary
 - ✓ You look a little frightened, would you like to hold my hand?
 - ✓ Everyone gets scared at times, even grown-ups. Yes, even me!
 - ✓ Even though everything worked out, I know you were really worried

THE TREASURE AND THE DRAGON

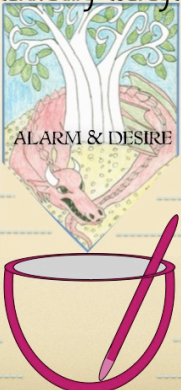


DESIRE

to engage in an activity
to take part in some fun
to ask one's question
to stand up for a friend
to wear what one prefers
to share one's story
to express one's opinion
to get attached & involved
to pursue a passion
to be oneself

Cultivating Courage

ALARM & DESIRE




ALARM

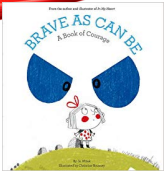
to be away from home
to be laughed at
to appear stupid
to lose popularity
to be seen as different
to not be interesting
to meet disapproval
to have to let go
to not measure up
to be alone

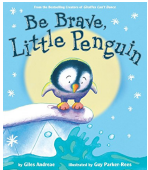
HAVE A GO


Playing with fears
allows to experience
courage and find
one's strength


Did you know
PLAY HELPS FEARS?
AnxiousToddlers.com











Presented by Catherine Korah

22

WHEN TO CONSULT?

When anxiety becomes excessive and persistent, hinders development, or significantly affects overall functioning

RESOURCES FOR ADULTS

- MacNamara, Deborah:
<http://macnamara.ca/kids-best-bet-blog/>
 - ✓ What Kids Worry and Fear at Different Ages
 - ✓ When the Worry Bugs Are in Your Tummy
 - ✓ Helping the Anxious Child or Teen Find Rest
 - ✓ Taming Bedtime Monsters: When Sleepy Time is Scary
- Neufeld, Gordon:
<https://neufeldinstitute.org/courses/>
 - ✓ Making Sense of Anxiety
 - ✓ Heart Matters: the Science of Emotion
 - ✓ Making Sense of Resilience
