



D34 ParentConnect Council

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Parent



Connect

Children and Anxiety: Considerations for Mindful Parenting October 3, 2019

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Mindful Parenting

Mindfulness: The practice of paying attention, to the present moment, on purpose, and without judgment

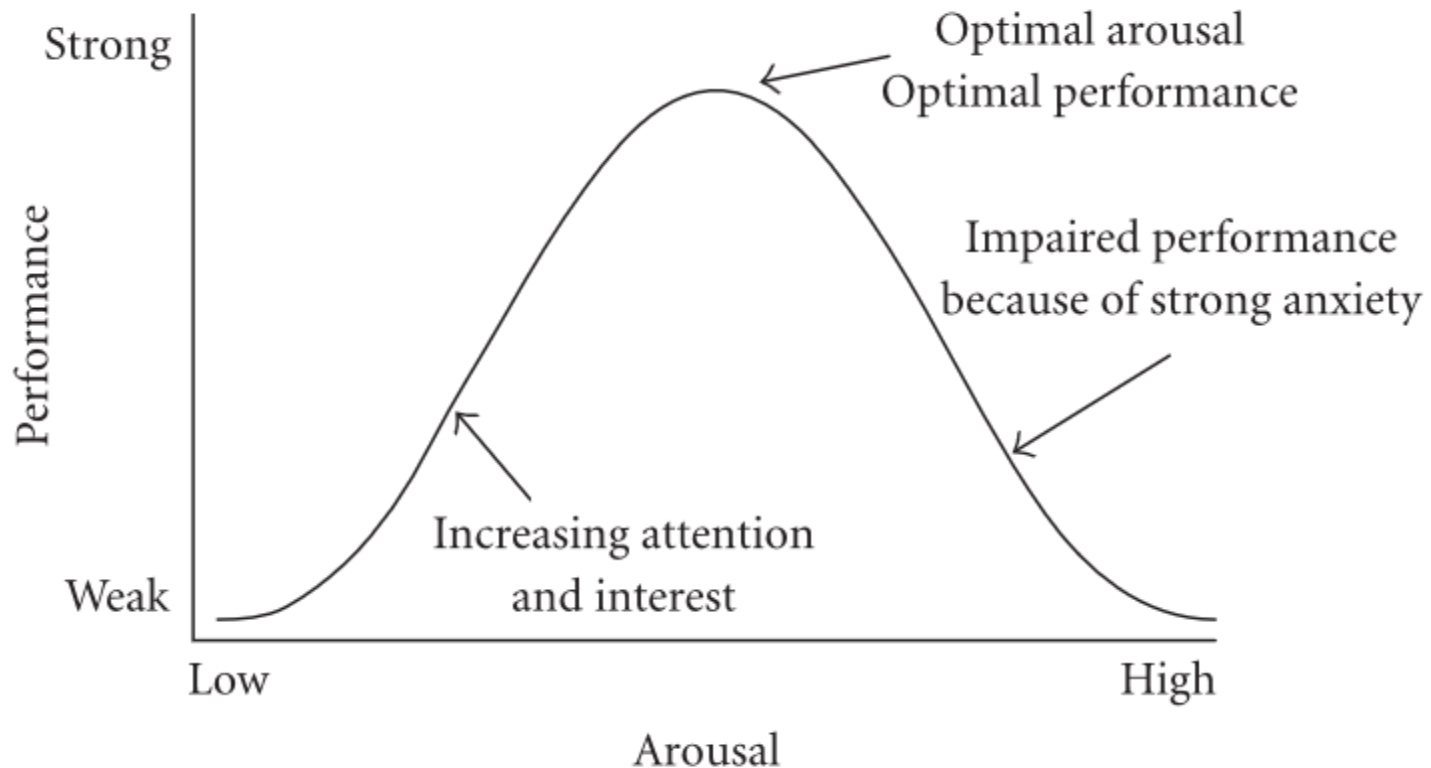
- Being Present
- Informal Mindful Practices
- Mindful Principles

Weathering the Storm of Anxiety

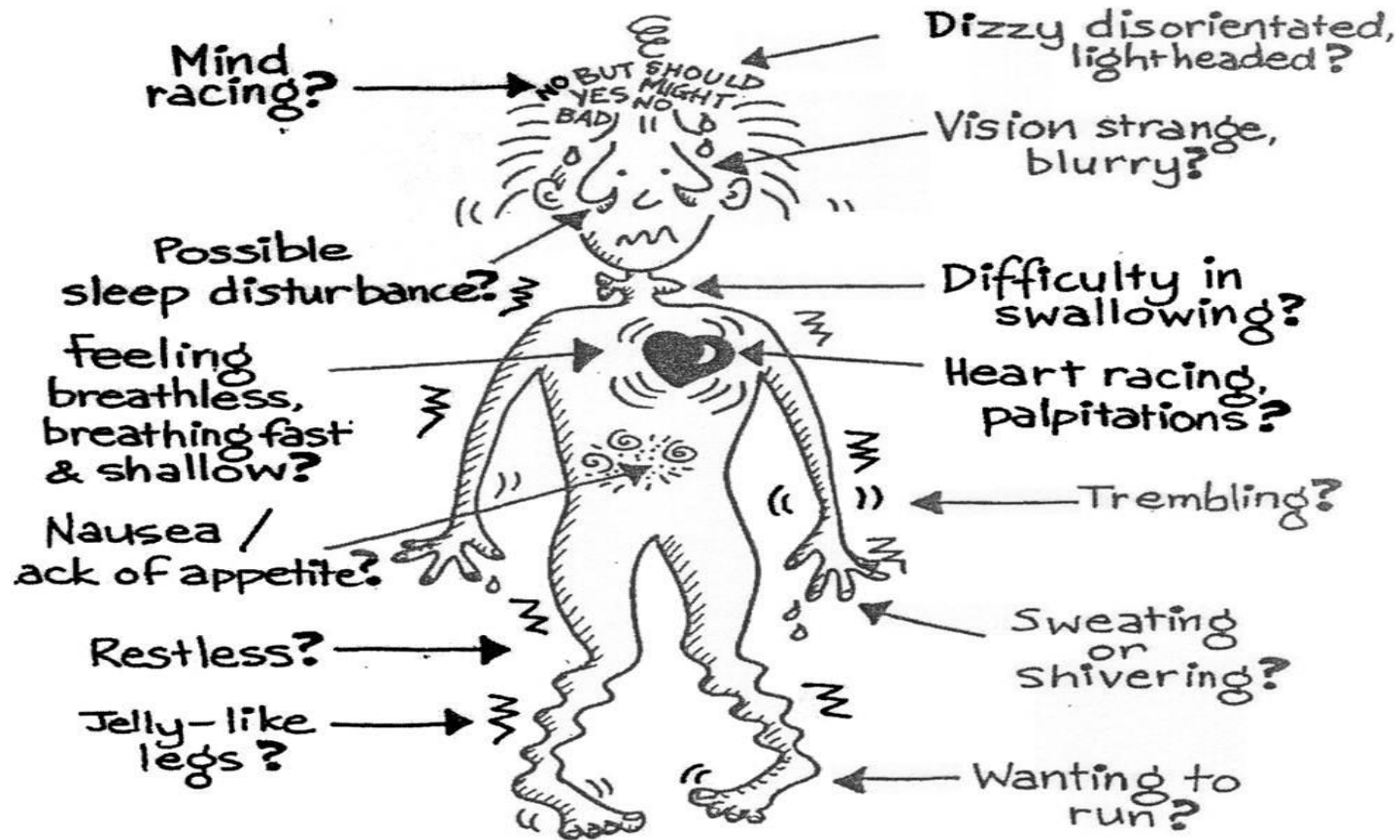


Anxiety and Performance

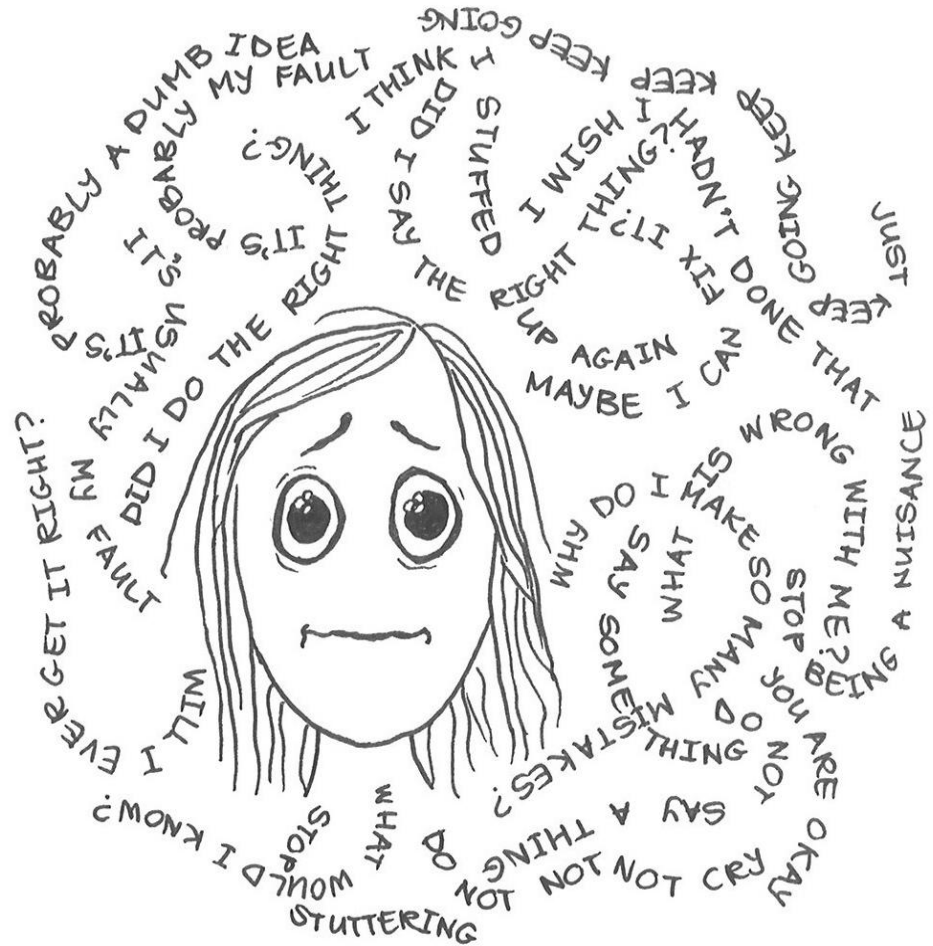
Yerkes-Dodson Principle



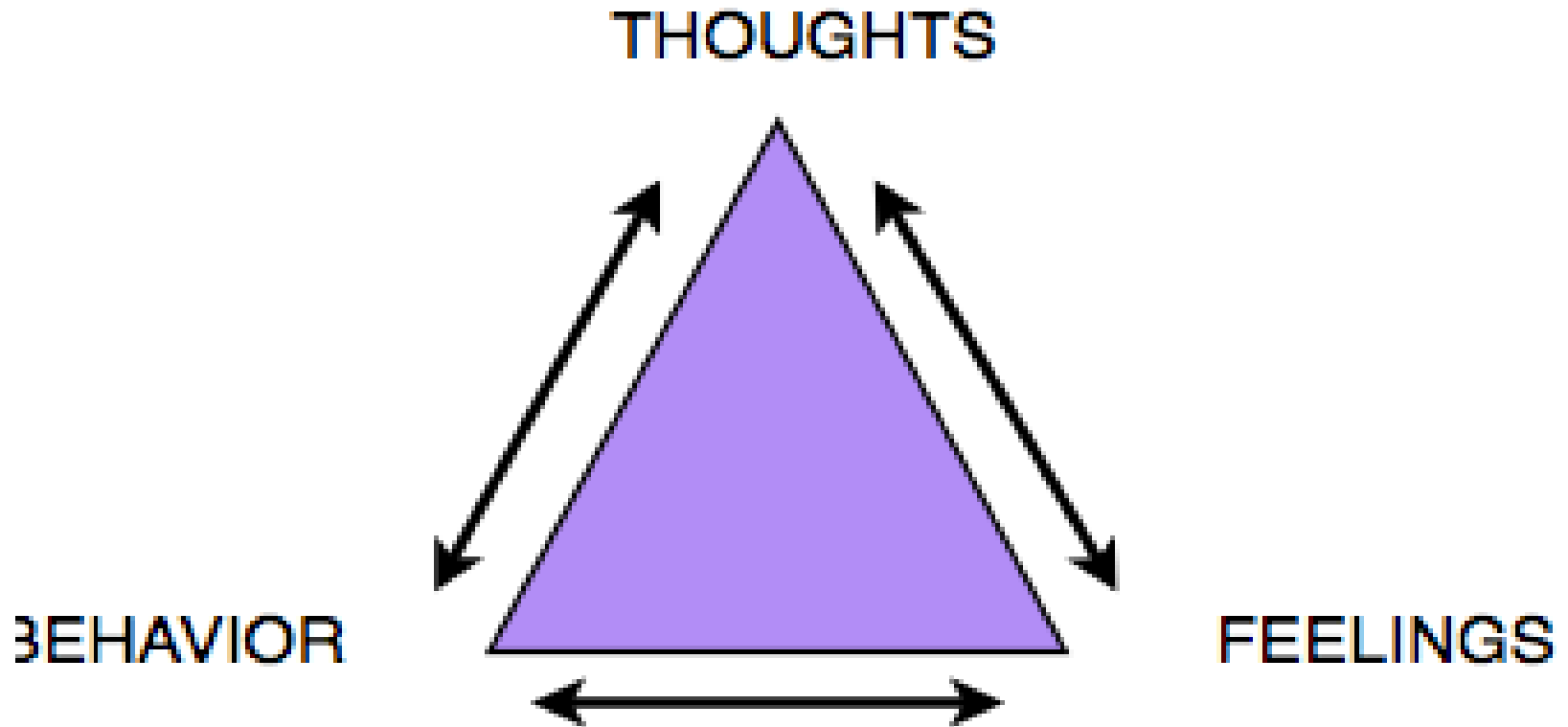
How Anxiety Shows Up



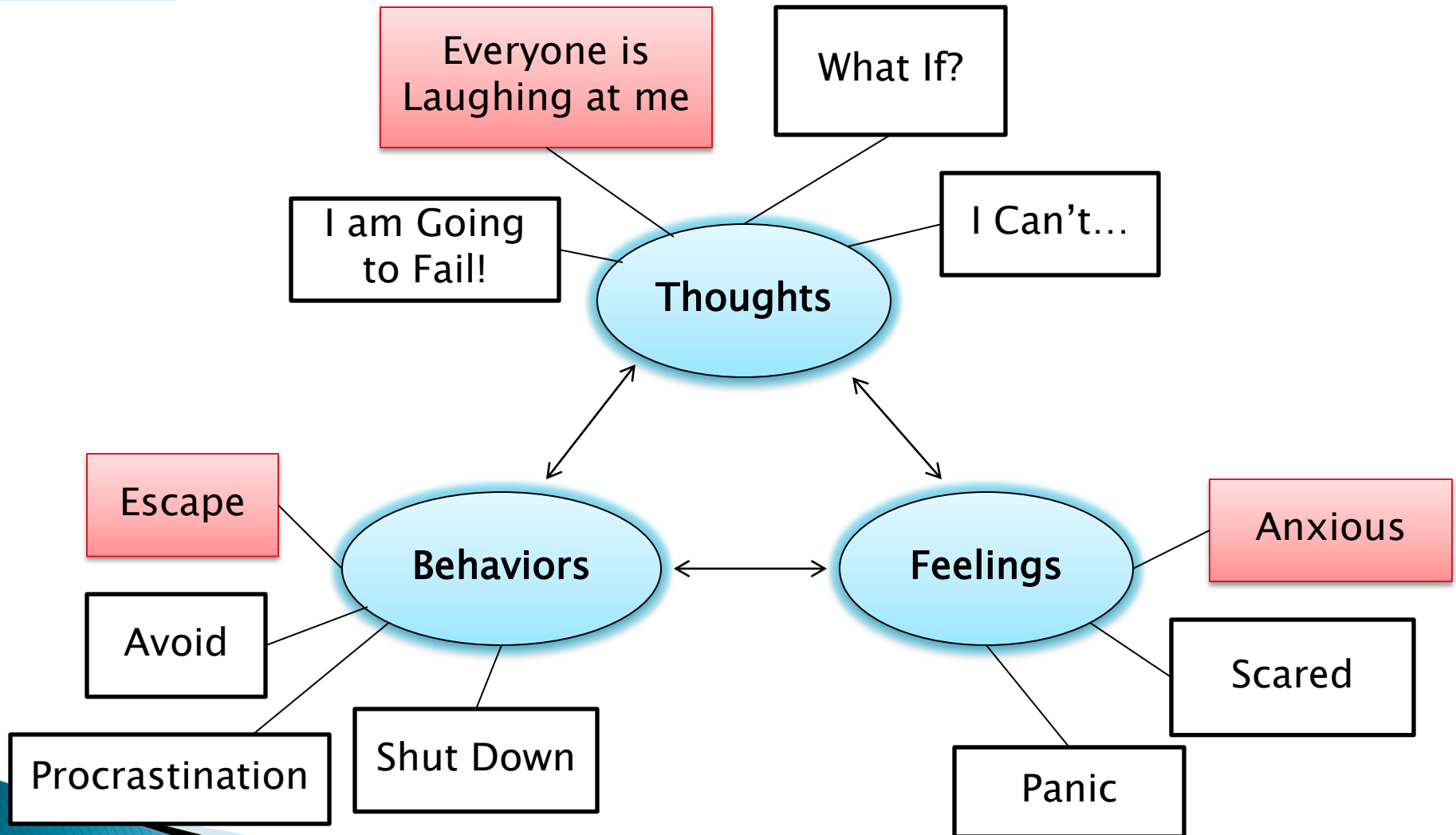
How Anxiety Shows Up



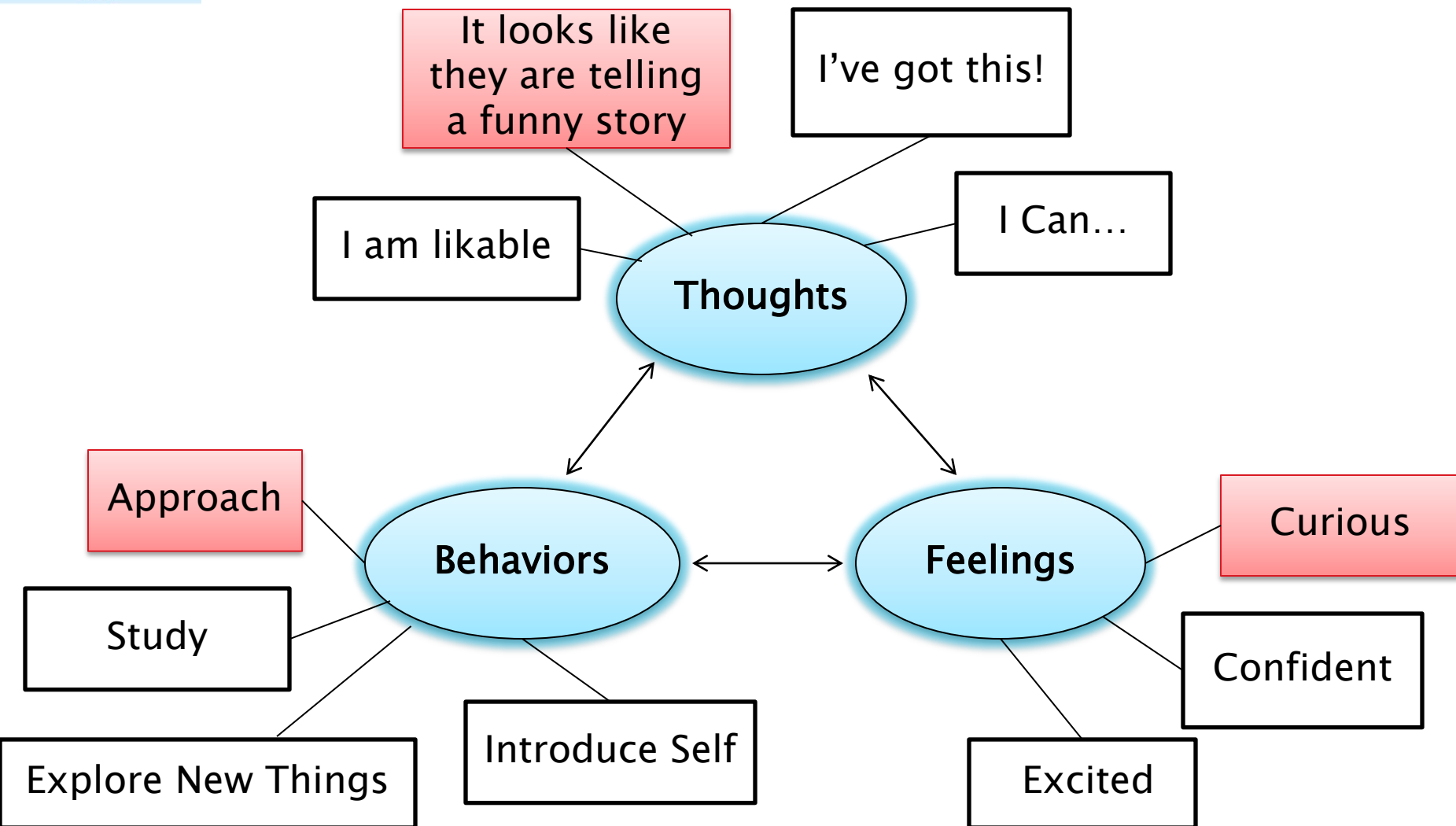
Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors are related and influence each other



Anxiety: Cognitive Triangle



Cognitive Triangle



“Friends” of Anxiety

- ▶ Perfectionism
- ▶ Attention—growing tomatoes
- ▶ Spotlight
- ▶ Competition
- ▶ Social hierarchy
 - Imaginary Audience (Adolescence)
- ▶ Fixed mindset
- ▶ Rigid thinking

“Perfectionism is a dangerous state of mind in an imperfect world.” ~ Robert Hillyer

Natural, But Unhelpful, Parent Responses–Behavioral

- ▶ Avoid and “Protect”
- ▶ Deny
- ▶ Ignore
- ▶ Logic
- ▶ Cheerleading



Natural, But Unhelpful, Parent Responses – Emotional





“We aren’t held captive for the rest of our lives by the way the brain works in this moment—we can actually rewire it so that we can be healthier and happier. This is true not only for children and adolescents, but also for each of us across the life span.”

The Whole–Brain Child

Daniel Siegal, MD & Tina Payne Bryson, PhD

What Helps?

- ▶ Neuroscience – Calming the Stress Response
- ▶ Validation, Validation, Validation
- ▶ Anxiety Education
- ▶ Preparation
- ▶ Distress Tolerance



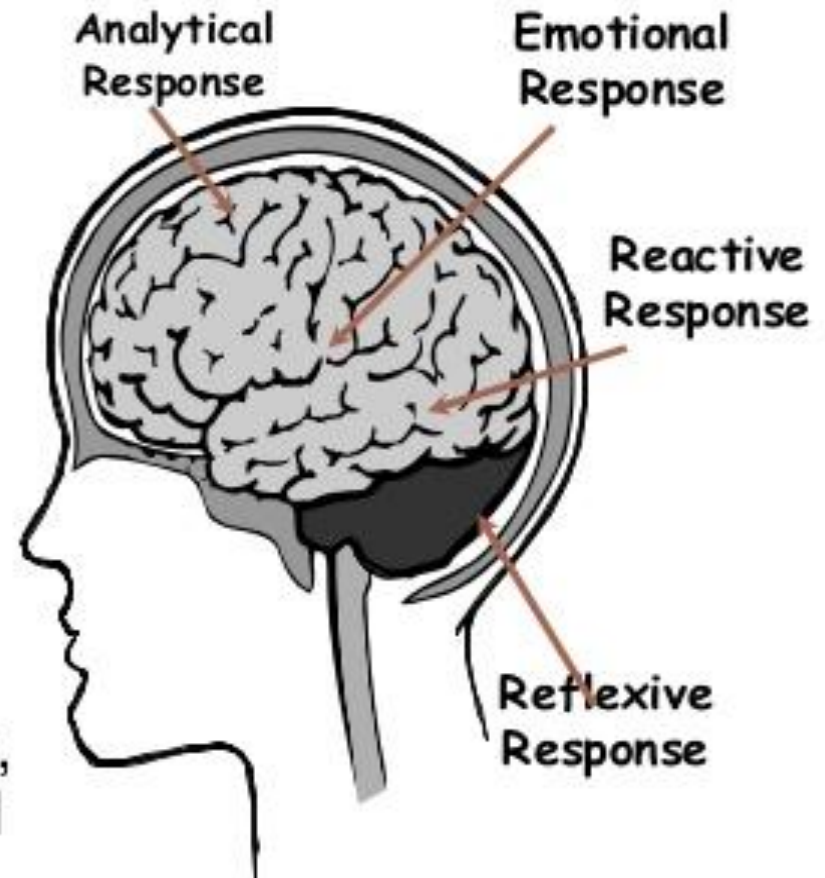
UPSTAIRS/DOWNSTAIRS BRAIN

✖ Downstairs brain:

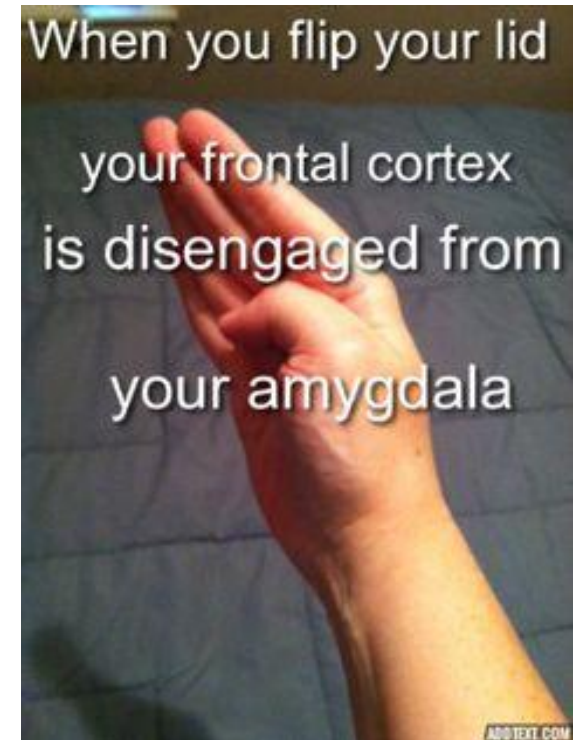
- **Brain stem and limbic region**
- **Basic bodily functions, emotional reactivity, attachment, fight/flight/freeze**

✖ Upstairs brain:

- Cerebral cortex
- Decision making, planning, self-understanding, control over emotions and body, empathy, morality, executive functioning



Handy Model of the Brain



You are the Lifeline



Target Physiology to Calm Anxiety

- Anything you cannot do while being chased by a tiger....
- Take a deep breath / Let's take a deep breath
- Want to squeeze my hand?
- Count to 10 / Let's count to 10
- Can you find three colors in this room?
- Smell the flowers, blow the candles
- Would you like a drink of water?
- Can you stand on one foot?
- Can you feel your toes?
- Can you squeeze this ball?
- Tactical breathing
- Eye contact and gentle smile



Calming Physiology: Necessary First Step

- ▶ It may not get you all of the way, but it's a necessary first step
- ▶ Calms the body down to allow for addressing unhelpful thoughts and behaviors



Adrenaline & Cortisol

Helping Your Child: Strategies

Validating, Validating, Validating

Validate their feelings even when they don't make sense to you. You don't have to agree with the logic behind their expressed reason!

Helpful language for validating

- *I see you (describe what you see your child doing)*
- *I hear you (repeat what you hear your child saying)*
- *It sounds like you are feeling scared*
- *It matters to me*



Helping Your Child: Strategies

Information–Anxiety Education

- 1) Neuroscience
- 2) Cognitive Triangle

Common thinking patterns that are not helpful

- It's all or nothing
- Catastrophizing
- Forecasting the future



Helping Your Child: Strategies

Preparation – For anticipated challenges

- ▶ Rehearse
- ▶ Problem Solve
- ▶ Role Play
- ▶ Emotional Support
 - Extra time
 - Extra snacks
 - However you demonstrate love, care, and comfort
- ▶ Talk to other adults responsible for your child's care

Debriefing – Highlighting when your child tolerates the anxiety and distress and pushes through

Tolerating & Thriving with Anxiety

- ▶ Eliminating anxiety is not the goal—helping your child manage anxiety is the goal
 - Monsters in the boat
 - You don't have to believe your thoughts
 - Without your buy in, they can not stop you
 - This, too, shall pass
- ▶ If you can provide support, don't avoid things your child worries about or fears
 - Celebrate participation/accomplishments
- ▶ Express confidence that your child will be ok, that life will continue and that their story is more than one moment
 - Help think things through and develop a plan

You Can Do It!

- ▶ The only way to the other side of anxiety is “through”
- ▶ Feel the feelings, calm the body, talk back to the thoughts, and continue on your path
- ▶ This applies to parents and children!



Reflecting on Mindful Parenting

- ▶ Informal Mindful Practices (Neuroscience)
 - Tactical Breathing, Slow Deep Breathing
 - Tuning in to Sensation (e.g., Body Awareness)
 - Present Moment Awareness

- ▶ Mindful Principles (Strategies)

◦ Acceptance	Compassion
◦ Gratitude	Curiosity
◦ Beginner's Mind	Non-Striving
◦ Impermanence	Sympathetic Joy



Key Take Aways

- ▶ Anxiety is part of life– the goal is not to eliminate it entirely, the goal is to manage it;
- ▶ Moderate levels of anxiety are associated with optimal performance;
- ▶ You are your child’s lifeline–self care and self-regulation will help you and your child; Being emotionally present with your child is essential;
- ▶ You help your child to develop necessary life skills by modeling how to manage anxiety, teaching them about what anxiety is, helping them face it;
- ▶ Avoiding anxiety provoking situations and “protecting” them from experiencing any discomfort can interfere with them learning how to tolerate even low levels of distress;

Key Take Aways

- ▶ Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors are related and influence each other– If you change one, you likely change another;
- ▶ It's very difficult to change an emotional experience directly; you usually have to go through thoughts or behavior to get there;
- ▶ Calming the Stress–Response System is a necessary first step, but may not get you the full way (It allows the thinking brain to re-engage);
- ▶ Once the thinking brain is re-engaged, you can recognize that it's “anxiety” talking, and can consider more helpful thoughts and behaviors;

Key Take Aways

- ▶ Be present with your child
 - Start with the body (mindfulness practices)
 - Coping strategies (mindfulness principles)

*“The curious paradox
is that when I accept
myself as I am, then
I can change”*

-Carl Rogers

Questions? Discussion?

