



Behavior as Communication: Understanding and Supporting Depression, Anxiety, and Behavioral Responses in Children

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RUTGERS UBHC

THE PATH PROGRAM SCHOOL BASED YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAM



Goals & Objectives

Goal: To provide families with strategies for supporting themselves and their children during this challenging time.

Objectives: At the end of this presentation, guardians will be able to:

- Understand differences between stress, anxiety, and depression
- Identify signs of anxiety and depression in children and adolescents
- Develop at least 3 new strategies for supporting themselves and their children



How do I feel?





What is Stress?

- Stress is any uncomfortable "emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological and behavioral changes" (Baum, 1990).
- Stress is a state of tension related to your body attempting to cope with its environment, is the body's way of preparing to meet a tough situation.
- The stress response involves the nervous system and specific hormones in the body, and it enhances the ability to perform under pressure as well as avoid danger.
- Stress is individualized, affecting everyone uniquely in terms of the symptoms they experience.



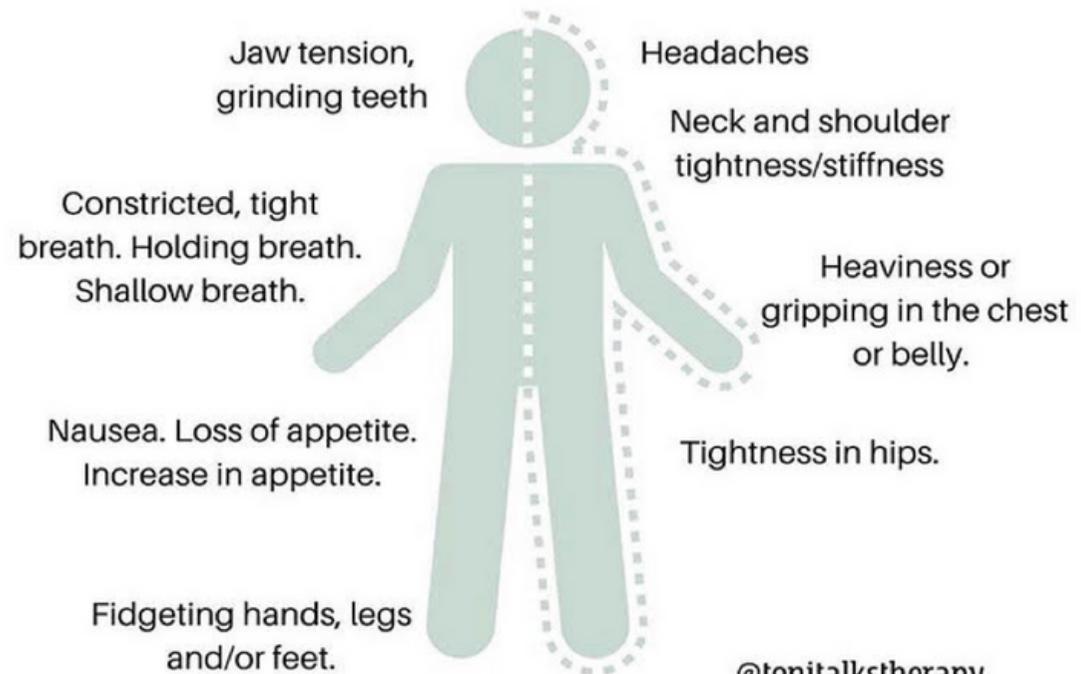


Symptoms of Prolonged Stress

Behavioral	Physical	Emotional
Over eating	Fatigue	Loss of motivation
Under eating	Sleep difficulties	Increased irritability and anger
Drug and alcohol use	Stomach aches	Anxiety
Social withdrawal	Shortness of breath	Depression or sadness
Nail biting	Chest pain	Restlessness
	Muscle pain and tension	Inability to focus/concentrate
	Headaches and migraines	Mood instability
	Indigestion, Nausea	Feeling overwhelmed
	Weakened immune system	Feeling nervous or jumpy

Recognize Stress Signals

HOW STRESS SHOWS UP IN THE BODY (OR: AN ANATOMY OF 2020)





Stress vs. Anxiety

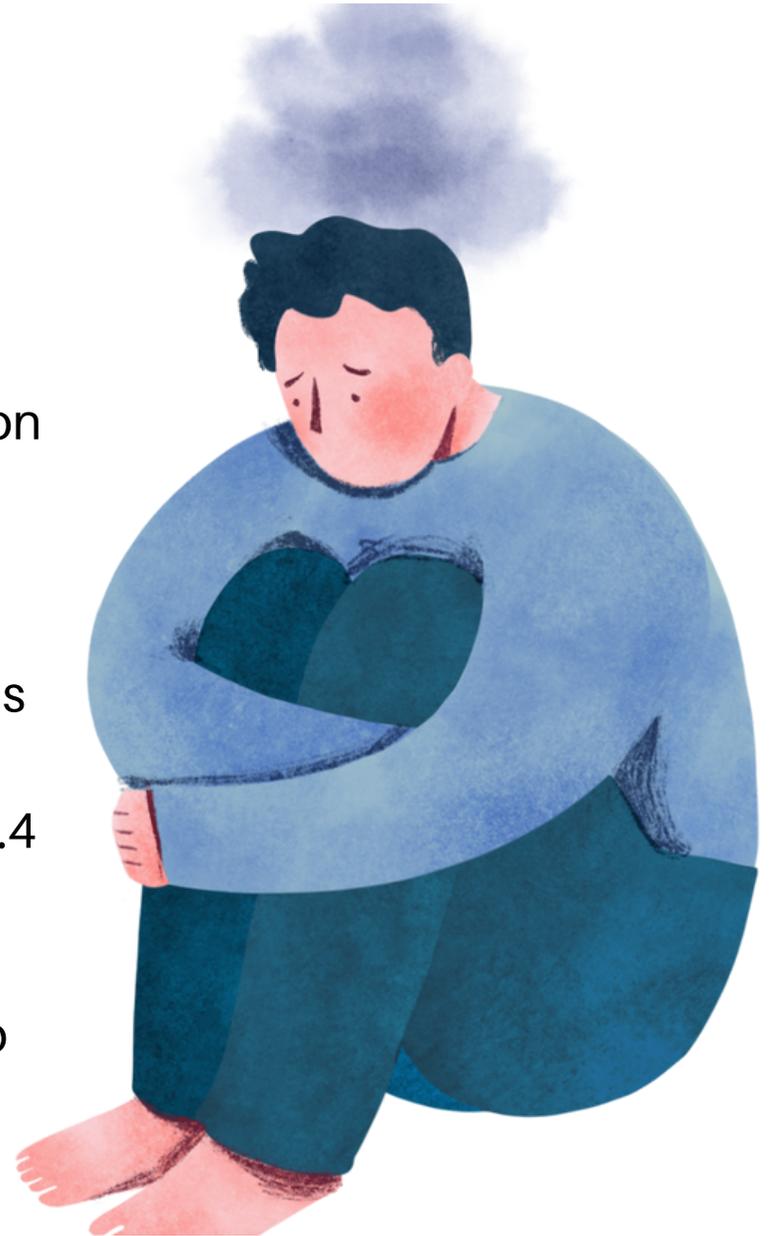
- Stress is normal and can be adaptive.
- It is when stress is excessive or ongoing and interfering with functioning that stress becomes a problem.

- While stress is temporary, anxiety is ongoing.
- When stress becomes anxiety, that is when we have a problem.



Anxiety In School-Aged Children

- Anxiety Disorders, as a group, are the most common mental illnesses that occur in children and adolescents
- The estimated 'lifetime prevalence' of any anxiety disorder in studies with children and adolescents is about 15-20%
- 7.1% of children aged 3-17 years (approximately 4.4 million) have diagnosed anxiety (Ghandour et al., 2018).
- Children with anxiety are 3x more likely to develop depression





What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

A. **Excessive anxiety and worry** (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance).

B. The individual finds it **difficult to control the worry**.

C. The anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms having been present for more days than not for the past 6 months):

Note: **Only one item required in children.**

- 1. Restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge.
- 2. Being easily fatigued.
- 3. Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank.
- 4. Irritability.
- 5. Muscle tension.
- 6. Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep).

D. The anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms **cause clinically significant distress or impairment** in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.



What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

E. The disturbance is **not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance** (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition (e.g., hyperthyroidism).

F. The disturbance is **not better explained by another medical disorder** (e.g., anxiety or worry about having panic attacks in panic disorder, negative evaluation in social anxiety disorder [social phobia], contamination or other obsessions in obsessive-compulsive disorder, separation from attachment figures in separation anxiety disorder, reminders of traumatic events in posttraumatic stress disorder, gaining weight in anorexia nervosa, physical complaints in somatic symptom disorder, perceived appearance flaws in body dysmorphic disorder, having a serious illness in illness anxiety disorder, or the content of delusional beliefs in schizophrenia or delusional disorder).



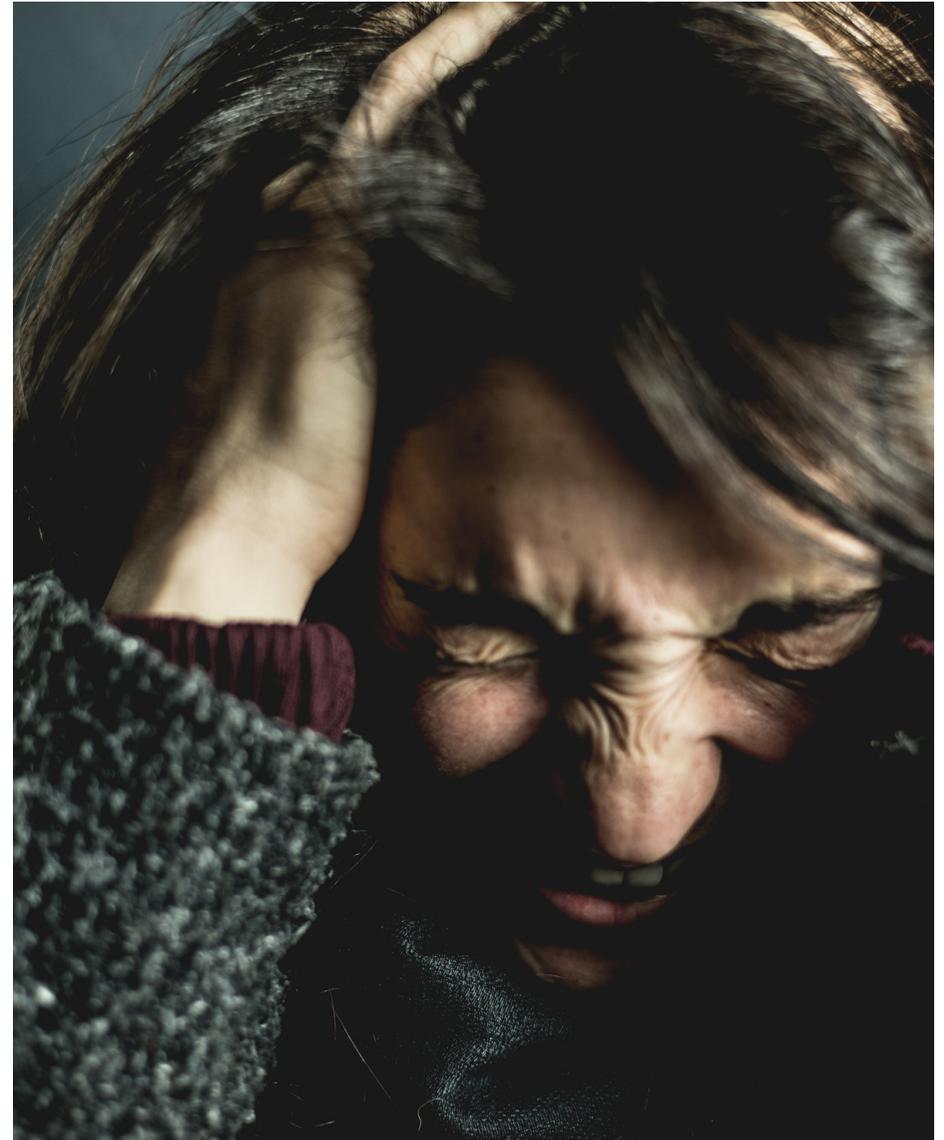
Signs of Anxiety

Children

- Physical symptoms like headaches, stomach-aches
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Avoidance (people, places or tasks)
- Irritability/Anger
- Defiance
- Lack of focus
- Overplanning
- Negative thinking

Adolescents

- Physical symptoms like headaches, sweating or stomach-aches, shortness of breath
- Sleep disturbance
- Unfounded or unrealistic fears
- Feeling nervous/on edge
- Restlessness/Agitation
- Difficulty concentrating
- Apathy, decreased interest
- Unexplained outbursts



Depression in School-Aged Children

- 3.2% of children aged 3-17 years (approximately 1.9 million) have diagnosed depression (Ghandour et al., 2018).
- Having another disorder is most common in children with depression: about 3 in 4 children aged 3-17 years with depression also have anxiety (73.8%) and almost 1 in 2 have behavior problems (47.2%) (Ghandour et al., 2018).





What Is Major Depressive Disorder?

A. **Five (or more)** of the following symptoms have been present during the **same 2-week period** and represent a change from previous functioning; at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.

- 1. **Depressed mood** most of the day, nearly every day as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad, empty, hopeless) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). (Note: In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood)
- 2. **Markedly diminished interest** or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation).
- 3. Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. (Note: In children, consider failure to make expected weight gain.)
- 4. Insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day.
- 5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
- 6. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
- 7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilt about being sick).
- 8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day (either by subjective account or as observed by others)
- 9. Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.



What Is Major Depressive Disorder?

- B. The symptoms cause clinically **significant distress or impairment** in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- C. The episode is **not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or to another medical condition**
- D. The occurrence of the major depressive episode is **not better explained by** schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia, schizophreniform disorder, delusional disorder, or other specified and unspecified schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders.
- E. There has **never been a manic episode** or a hypomanic-like episode. Note: This exclusion does not apply if all of the manic-like or hypomanic-like episodes are substance-induced or are attributes to the physiological effects of another medical condition

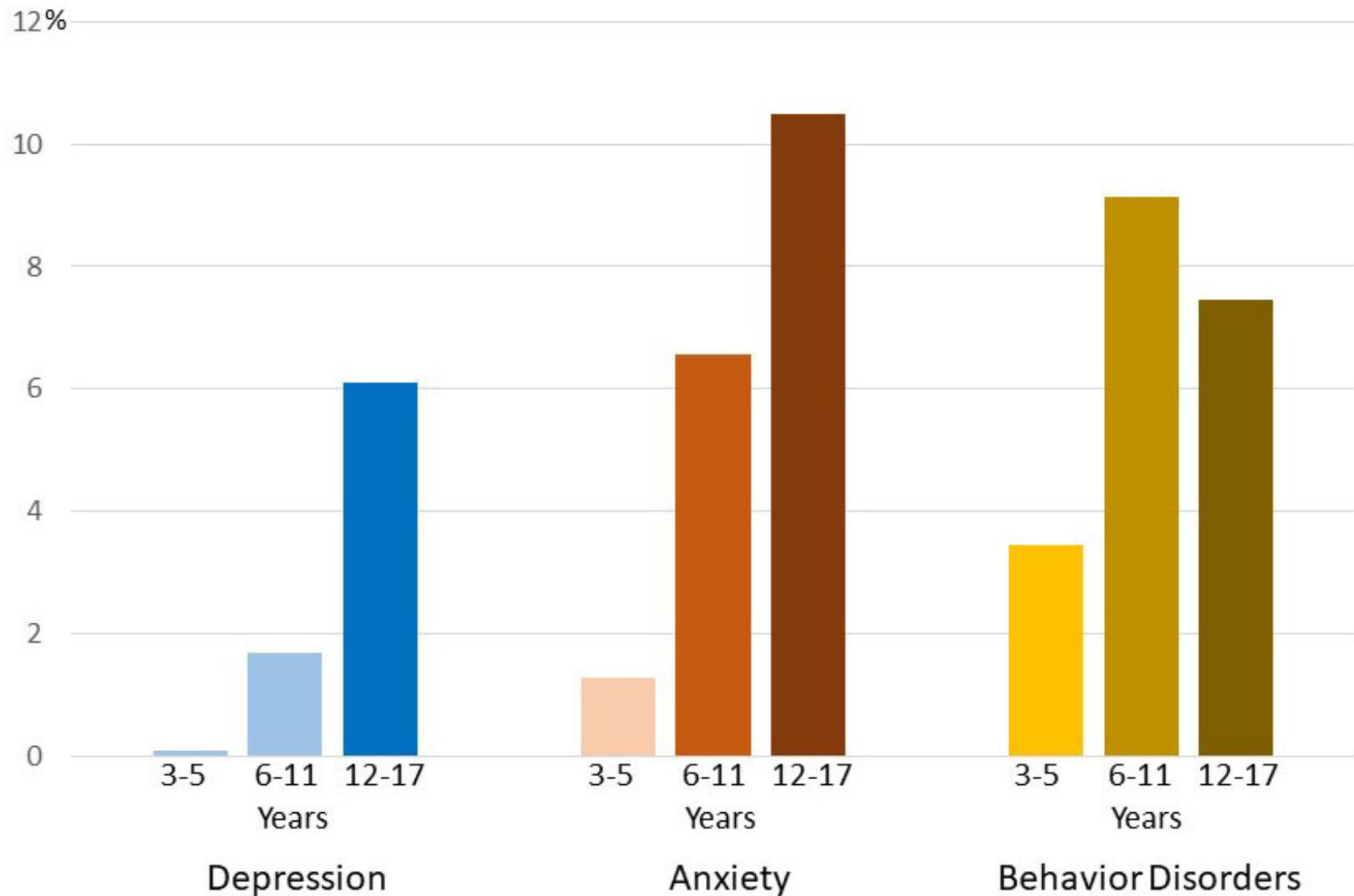


Signs of Depression

Common symptoms of depression in children and adolescents include:

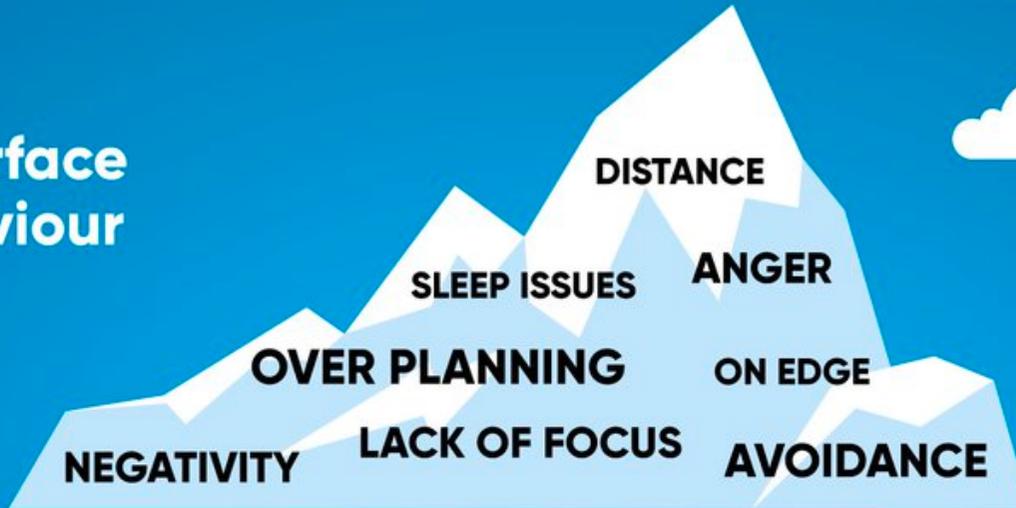
- Feeling or appearing depressed, sad, tearful, or irritable
- Not enjoying things as much as they used to
- Spending less time with friends or in after school activities
- Changes in appetite and/or weight
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Feeling tired or having less energy
- Feeling like everything is their fault or they are not good at anything
- Having more trouble concentrating
- Caring less about school or not doing as well in school
- Having thoughts of suicide or wanting to die
- Decline In self-care or personal appearance
- Physical complaints (children)
- Using alcohol or drugs (adolescents)

Depression, Anxiety, Behavior Disorders, by Age



(Ghandour et al., 2018)

**Above surface
the behaviour**



DISTANCE

SLEEP ISSUES

ANGER

OVER PLANNING

ON EDGE

NEGATIVITY

LACK OF FOCUS

AVOIDANCE

stuck

ANXIETY

hurt

grumpy

overwhelmed

depressed

unloveable

helpless

insecure

To blame

grief

sadness

confused

tired

regret

disrespected

embarrassed

lost

shame

rejected

stressed

detached

lonely

**Below the
surface feeling**

What's really happening when we go into...

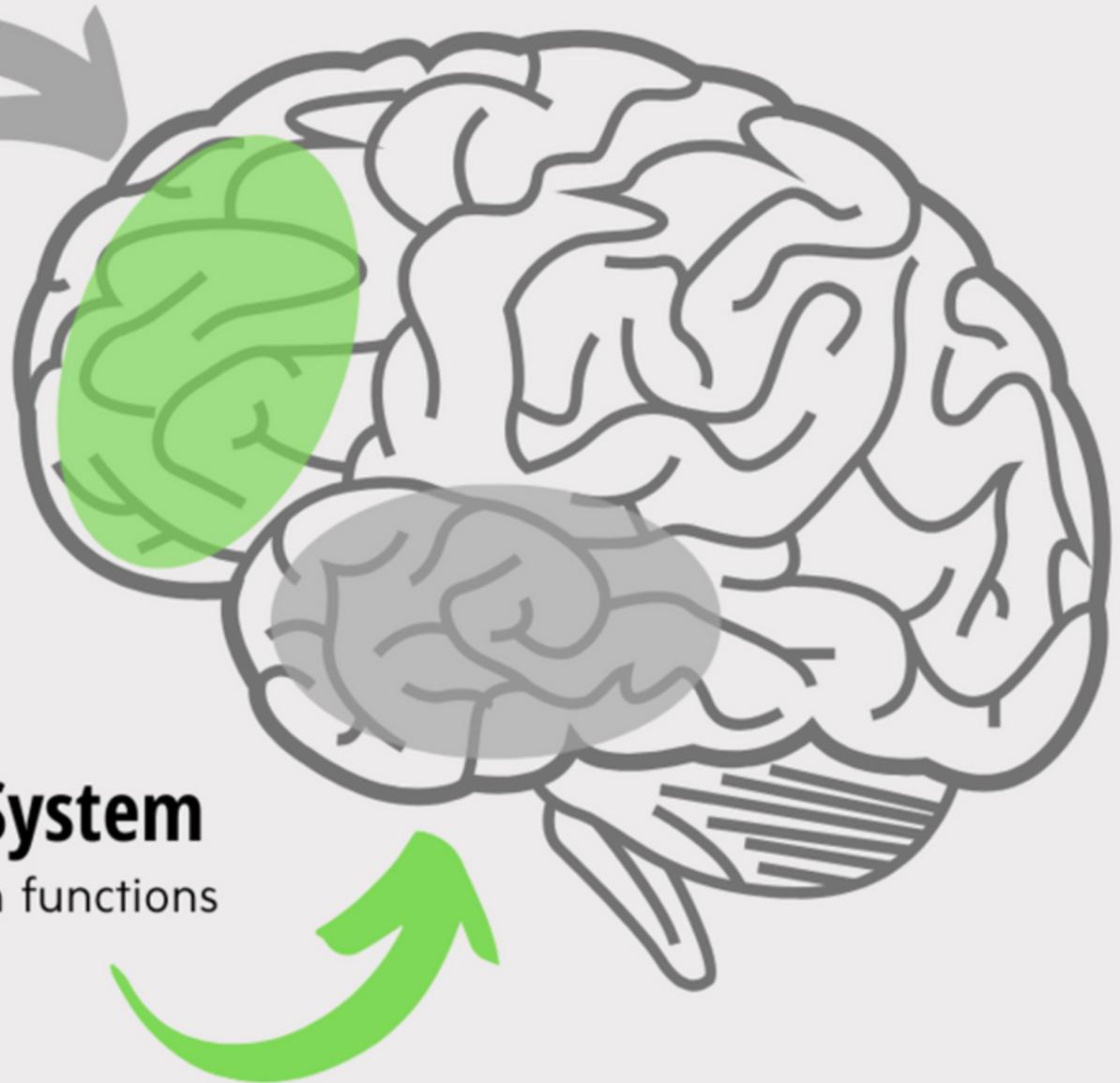
"SURVIVAL MODE"

Learning/ Thinking Brain (Prefrontal Cortex)

The logical, smart part
of your brain goes
"off-line"

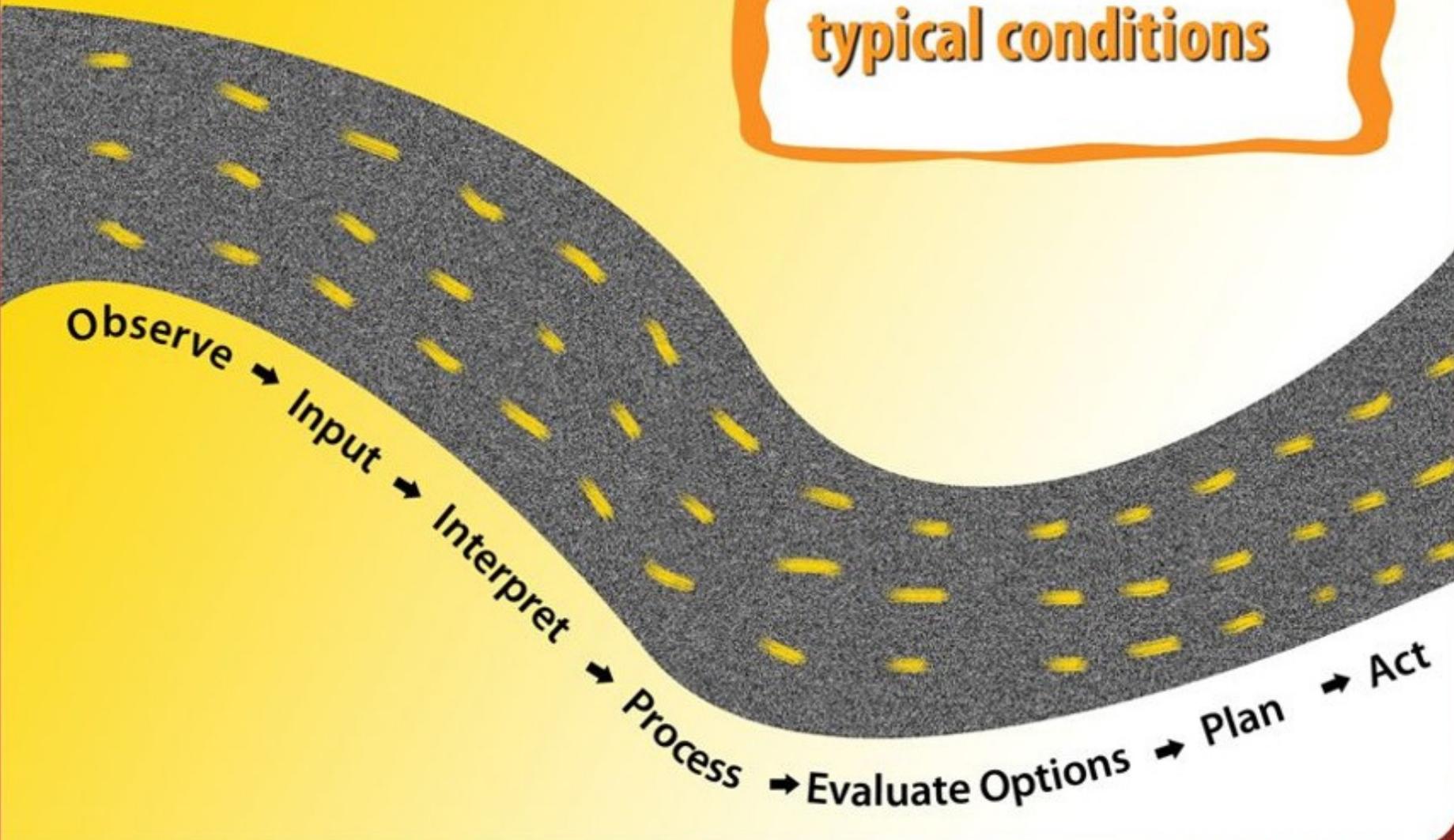
Limbic System

Lower brain functions
"take over!"



Brain process under typical conditions

Observe → Input → Interpret → Process → Evaluate Options → Plan → Act



Alarm system "Express Route"

Observe

Interpret

DANGER

Act

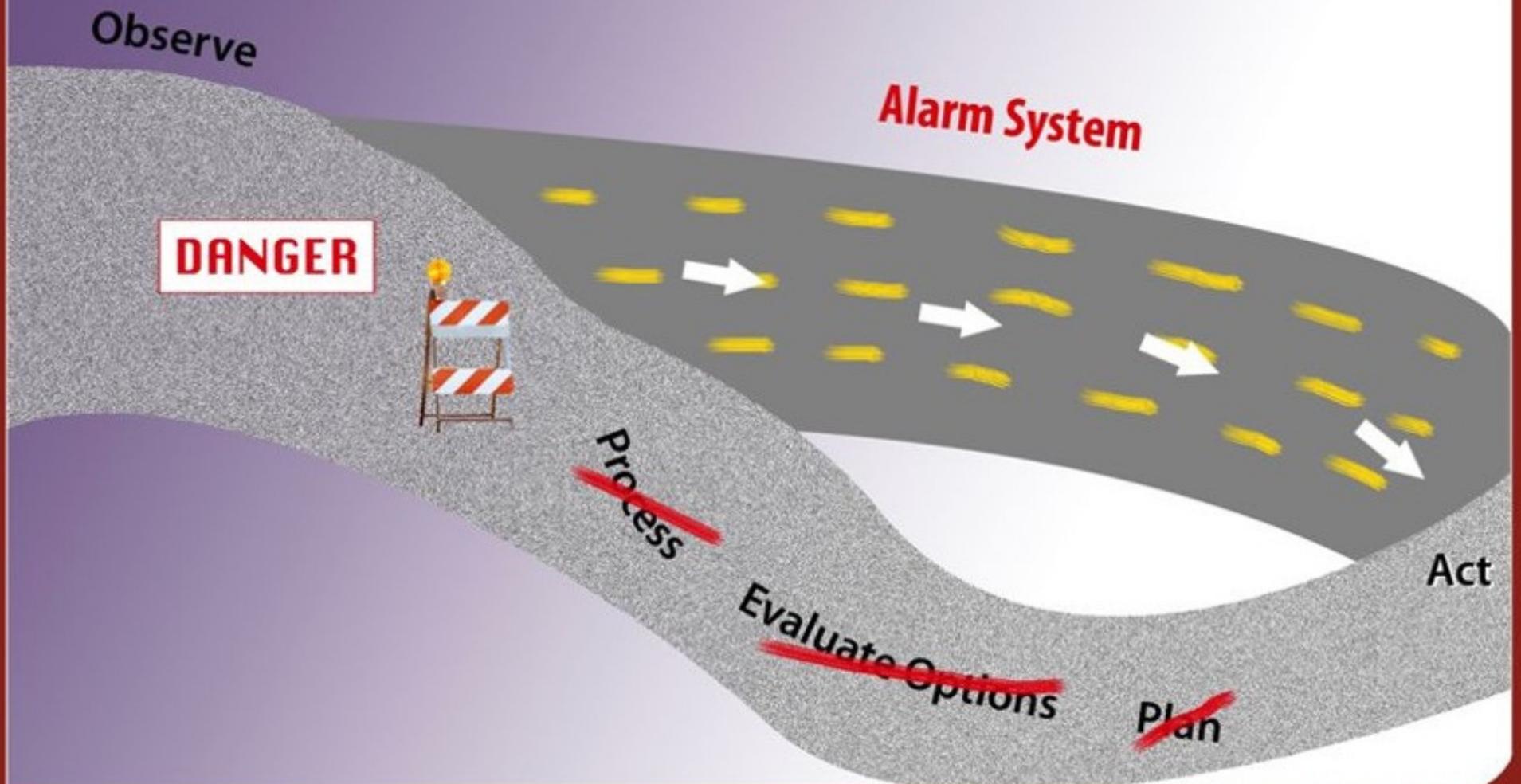
React (Flight - Flight - Freeze)

~~Process~~

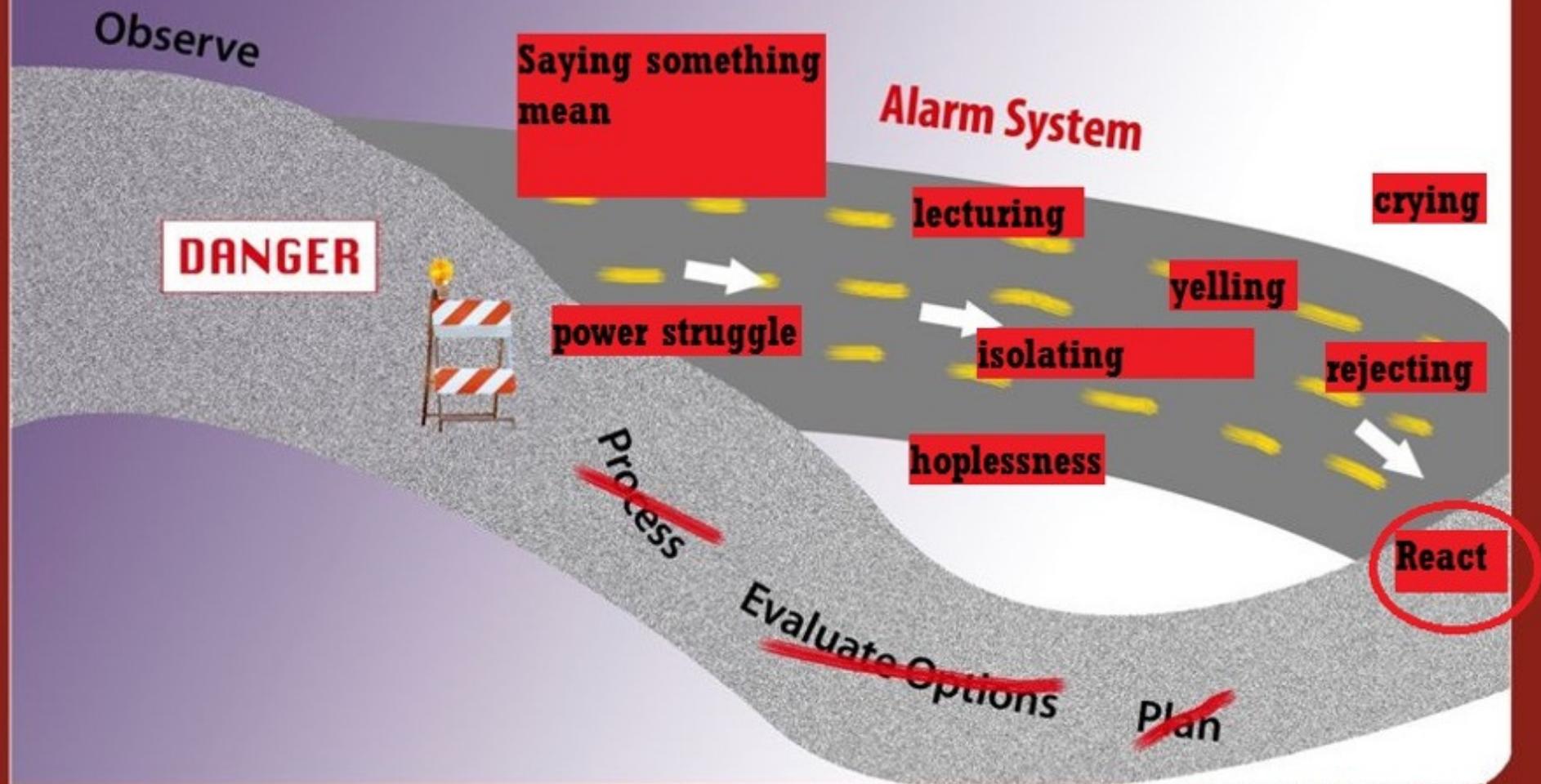
~~Evaluate Options~~

~~Plan~~

With repeated stress, the Alarm System
"Express Route" becomes the main road



What happens when you get on the express road?





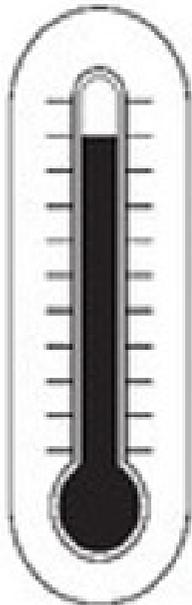
What
now?



Use Your Body as a Cue

Self Regulation : Body Signals

Everyone gets overwhelmed sometimes. What you need to know is to listen to your body and brain to stay in control. This 5-point scale maps out how some people feel at each level of frustration.



Rating	How does your body feel?
5	Exploding, threatening others, throwing things
4	Crying, yelling, swearing
3	Rapid breathing, headache, short breath
2	Teeth and/or hands clenched, nervous laugh
1	Relaxed body, slow breathing

Energy Check



Energy Check

Low	Medium	High
<p>Feelings: Very Calm, Sad, Happy, Content, Focused, Tired, Relaxed</p> <p>Tasks: Resting, Listening, Napping, Playing Calmly, Sleeping</p>	<p>Feelings: Happy, Calm but Alert, Focused, Kind, In-control</p> <p>Tasks: Playing, Focusing on Tasks, Doing Work, More Likely to Listen and Maintain Safety</p>	<p>Feelings: Strong feelings, Energetic, Excited, Happy, Angry, Frustrated, Annoyed, Very Worried</p> <p>Tasks: Running, Jumping, Dancing, Throwing Things, Loud, Trouble Following Directions, More Likely to Be Unsafe</p>

Comfortable	Uncomfortable
<p>I am able to manage how I feel. I'm not worried or nervous or unsure of what will happen next. My body feels calm and I am not overwhelmed or worried that I will lose control.</p>	<p>Something feels off in my body. I might be having a very strong feeling and not be sure how to manage it. I should take a break for at least 5 minutes.</p>

Whether I am comfortable or uncomfortable, low energy or high I will remember I can always make the right choices to help me manage my feelings and feel calm.





What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is ***awareness*** that arises through

- paying attention
- on purpose
- in the present moment
- non-judgmentally





Benefits of Mindfulness

- Supports readiness to learn
- Promotes academic performance
- Strengthens attention and concentration
- Reduces anxiety before testing
- Promotes self-reflection and self-calming
- Improves classroom participation by supporting impulse control
- Enhances social and emotional learning
- Lowers truancy and suspensions
- Provides tools to reduce stress and aggressive behavior
- Reduces rule infractions



Mindfulness Activities

- **4-7-8 breathing**
- Mindful walk (Noticing colors/ 5 senses)
- Drinking water
- Stress balls
- **Take 5 Grounding activity (5 senses)**
- Visualize black
- Five Finger relaxation
- **Progressive muscle relaxation**
- Body Scan
- Go Zen Online (YouTube)





4-7-8 Breathing

4-7-8
breathing technique

  Fulfilling Potential. Forging Success.

This breathing technique can aid relaxation and sleep. Start by sitting or lying in a comfortable position.



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graph LR; A((Breathe in through your nose  
4 seconds)) --> B((Hold your breath  
7 seconds)); B --> C((Breathe out through your mouth  
8 seconds));
```

Repeat technique 4 times

Please note: If you're not used to this breathing technique, it can make you feel light-headed, so don't practice this whilst driving. If you feel light-headed, try halving the time and build up to 4-7-8.



Take 5 Grounding Activity

*Stay Grounded Using
Your 5 Senses*

Relax Your Body, Take a Few Deep Breaths and Focus on the Following...

5 Things You Can See 

4 Things You Can Feel 

3 Things You Can Hear 

2 Things You Can Smell 

1 Thing You Can Taste 



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Whole Body Script

1 Forehead
Scrunch up your forehead like you are thinking hard! Squeeze it tighter, tighter! Now you can relax. (hold for around 10 seconds)

2 Eyes
Squeeze your eyes tight like you are about to blow out the candles on your cake and make a wish! No peeking! (10 seconds)

3 Cheeks
Puff your cheeks out as far as you can! Make them bigger, like you have a mouth full of food! Now, relax (10 seconds)

4 Mouth
I want you to pretend you are chewing a really big piece of gum! It's really hard to chew, but keep chewing! (10 seconds)

5 Shoulders
I want you to try and touch your shoulder blades together! Squeeze tighter, you're almost there! Now you can relax (10 seconds)

6 Arms
I want you to make your arms as straight and stiff as possible! Pretend you are frozen! Now you can relax (10 seconds)

7 Lower Back
Sit up super straight and try to be as tall as you can! Taller! Taller! And now relax (10 seconds)

8 Legs
I want you to make your legs as straight as you can! Pretend you are frozen again! Now you can relax (10 seconds)

9 Feet
I want you to press your feet into the ground as hard as you can! Push, Push! And now relax (10 seconds)

10 Toes
Pretend you are at the beach, and squish your toes in the sand! So squishy! And now relax (10 seconds)



Other Healthy Coping Skills

- Positive self talk
- Sleep, exercise, nutrition
- Music, art, journaling
- Talk it out
- Play with favorite toy
- Take a warm bath
- Sip tea or hot chocolate
- Play a sport or game
- Pet time
- Laughter, half smile
- Cook or bake
- Play with favorite toy



Helpful Apps



Virtual Hope Box
Health & Fitness
★★★★☆ 398

GET



Daylio Journal
Self-Care Bullet Diary & Go...
★★★★★ 30K

GET

In-App Purchases



MyLife Meditation: Mindfulness
Meditate, Relax & Sleep Well

OPEN

17K RATINGS

AGE: 4+ Years Old

CATEGORY: Health & Fitness



2ndFloor: Youth Helpline
Spitball

GET

7 RATINGS

4.4

★★★★☆

AGE: 12+ Years Old

CATEGORY: Health & Fitness



Headspace: Meditation & Sleep
Stress less, Relax, Sleep

UPDATE

853K RATINGS

4.9

★★★★★

AWARDS: Editors' Choice Apps

AGE: 4+ Years Old

CATEGORY: Health



Parent and Guardian Considerations

- Monitor your own stress level. **Take care of yourself.**
- Be aware of your child's behaviors and emotions
- Build trust with your child
- Encourage the expression of feelings
- Teach and model good emotional responses
- Encourage your child to tell you if he or she feels overwhelmed
- Monitor news and television programs that could worry your child and pay attention to the use of computer games, movies, and the Internet.
- Use encouragement/natural consequences when poor decisions are made
- Seek the assistance of a school counselor, therapist or physician, if stress continues to be a concern



What is Self-Care?

- Self-care refers to activities individuals, families and communities undertake with the intention of enhancing health, preventing disease, limiting illness and restoring health
- Self care in essence is the mindful act of taking of time to pay attention to *you*
- Emotional intelligence/awareness is key to self-care, reducing burn out
- Identify barriers



Small, but powerful things I can do for myself during all of this...

@mombrain.therapist

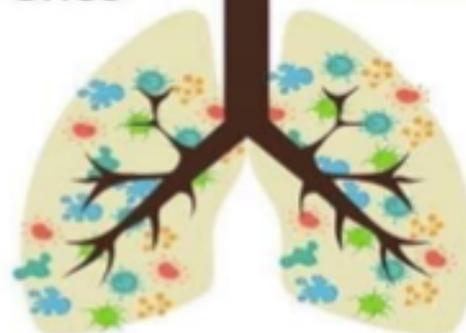


disconnect from social media



connect with loved ones (from afar!)

pause and take a deep breath

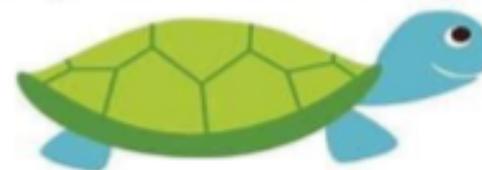


slow down & rest my brain and body

notice the good in the midst of the not so good



take a shower and put on some clean clothes



find a way to smile or laugh

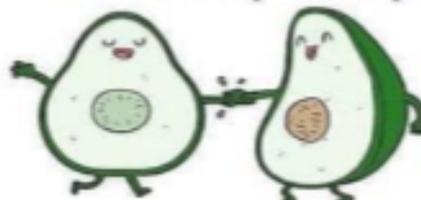


turn off the news

get some fresh air



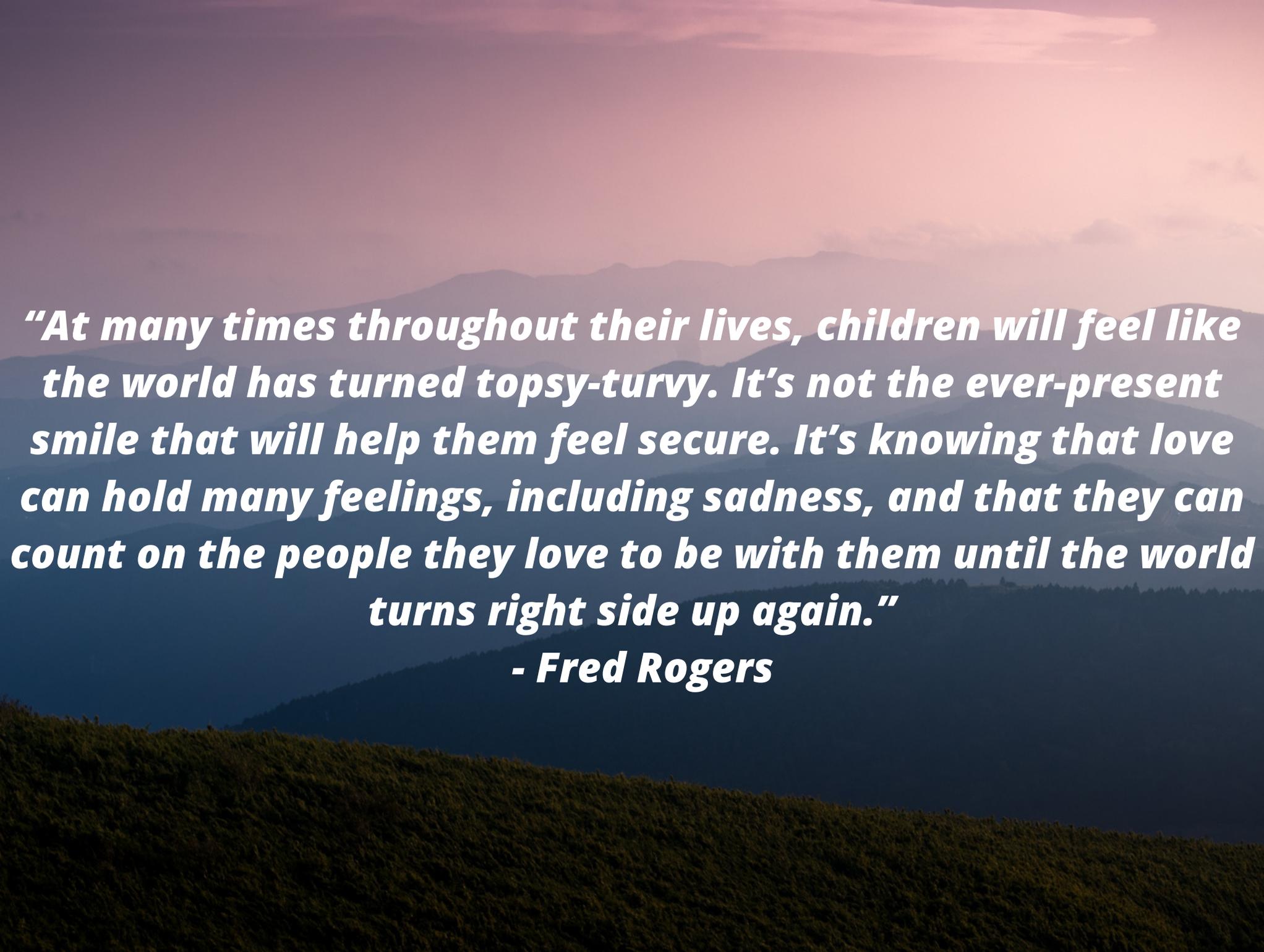
move my body





Need Extra Support?

- Visit the counseling link on the school website for additional supports
- The P.A.T.H. School Based Services--contact your child's school counselor to make a referral
- NJ Mental Health Cares – 866-202-HELP (4357)- Free hotline (7 days per week 8am-8pm)
- Children’s Mobile Response – (877) 652- 7624- Available to provide crisis support 24/7
- Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741741
- 2nd Floor Youth Helpline – (888) 222-2228
- Mom2Mom – (877) 914-MOM2
- Rutgers UBHC Acute Psychiatric Services – (855) 515-5700



“At many times throughout their lives, children will feel like the world has turned topsy-turvy. It’s not the ever-present smile that will help them feel secure. It’s knowing that love can hold many feelings, including sadness, and that they can count on the people they love to be with them until the world turns right side up again.”

- Fred Rogers

THANK
YOU



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