

Supporting Your Child through Anxiety and Trauma



HAMILTON-WENHAM
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Presenters:

Natalie Blue, LMHC, Co-Owner & Expressive Arts Therapist,
The Artful Life Counseling Center and Studio LLC

natalie@artfullifecenter.org

Dr. Kristen Lazzaro, HWRSD Director of School Counseling, PK-12,
k.lazzaro@hwschools.net

The 5 Step Self-Holding Exercise for Self-Regulation of PTSD Symptoms



There is a voice
that doesn't use
words. *Listen.*
-Rumi

What is trauma?

Trauma is a reaction to an experience, it is not an experience itself.

Types of trauma:

- Event trauma is a sudden, unexpected stressful event that is limited in its duration and location. A hurricane or fire, are examples of event trauma.
- Process trauma is defined as continued exposure to a long-lasting stressor, such as war or physical abuse.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a disorder of anticipation



What anxiety tells us:

Anxiety demands TWO things:

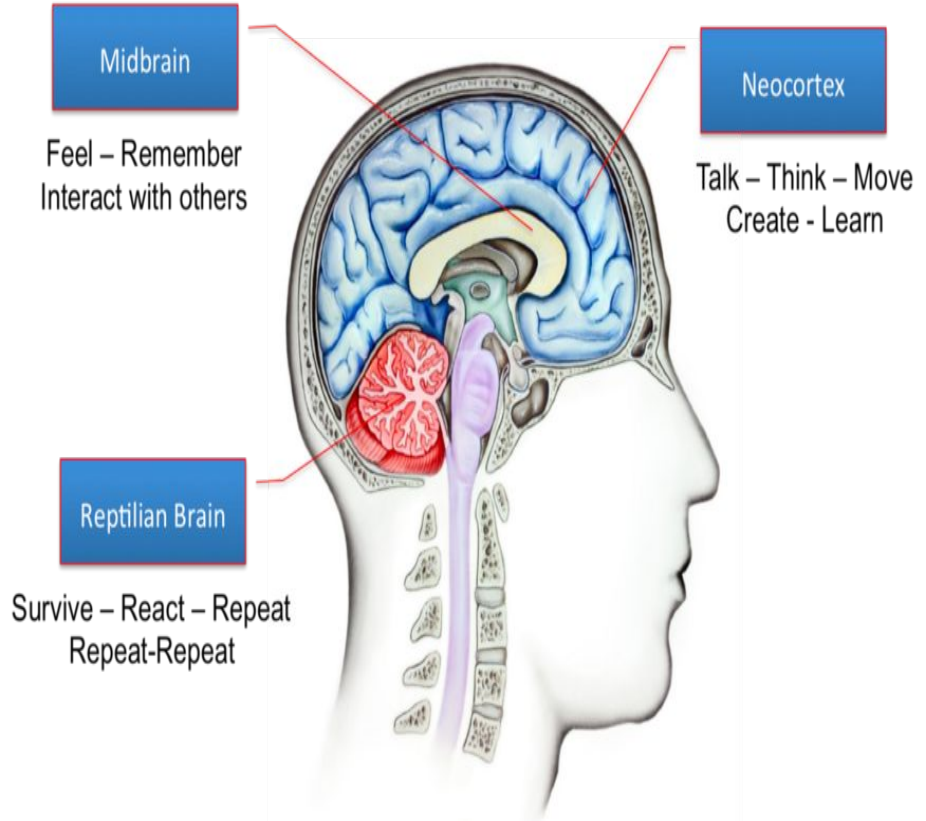
- **Certainty:** “I have to know what is going to happen next...and I want to control it!
- **Comfort:** “I want to feel safe and comfortable or else I want out!”

Source: Lyn Lyons, Emotionally Equipping our Children and Teens to Better Manage Stress and Anxiety workshop 2017

Why does trauma & anxiety occur?

Triune Brain

- **Reptilian Brain**: oldest part of the brain
 - Survival response activates nervous system
- **Midbrain**: the “Panic” button
 - Amygdala regulates fear & stress response
- **Prefrontal Cortex**: the “CEO”
 - Responsible for decision making, thinking and processing information



What is the stress response?

- Stress & Anxiety are physical responses in the body
- Stress is NOT all bad
- **Good Stress** motivates action (i.e. study for a test)
- **Bad Stress** stalls actions (i.e. too overwhelmed to study for a test)
- **Chronic Stress:** repeated exposure to stress hormones (i.e. 2020)



Cortisol & Brain: “The Stress Hormone”

Cortisol **INCREASES** when we experience stress

- **Small increases CAN:**
- Provide small bursts of energy
- Heighten memory function
- Lower pain threshold
- Hormonal balance in the body



What happens when YOU FLIP YOUR LID

PREFRONTAL CORTEX IS ENGAGED:



Calm, rational thought, mental flexibility: Able to make good decisions

LID IS FLIPPED --> AMYGDALA IS ENGAGED

Big emotions arise - anger, fear, anxiety, sadness. Unable to make good decisions or calm down.



The Amygdala Hijack

- FIGHT
- FLIGHT
- FREEZE
- FAWN
- FIDGET
- FUMBLE

Source: The Whole Brain Child

Cortisol & Brain: “The Stress Hormone”

BIG increases CAN:

- Impacts executive functioning skills
- Stunts physical health and development

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Essential to developing Theory of Mind and generating ideas

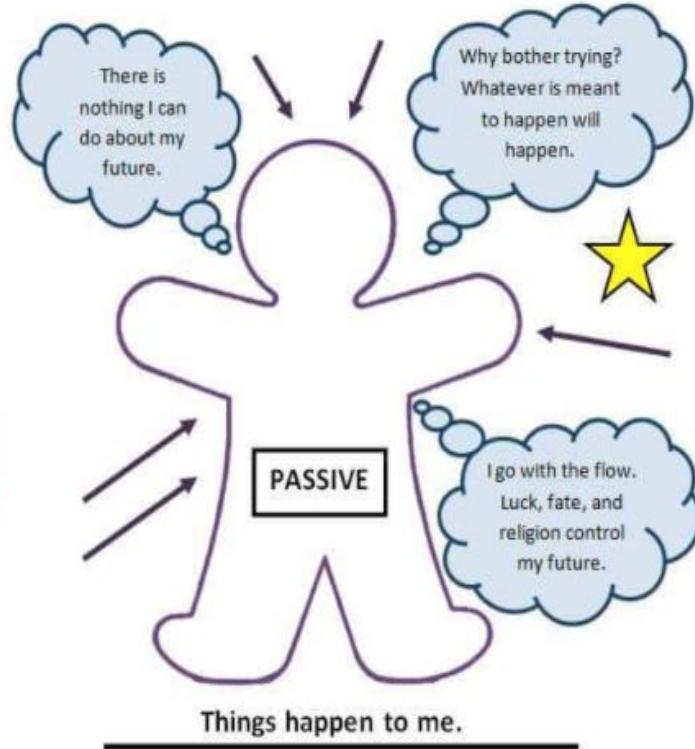
THREE PARTS:

1. **Working Memory:** Attention, inhibition, distractibility
2. **Self-Regulation:** Impulse control, self-soothing, frustration tolerance, use of feedback and self-monitoring
3. **Cognitive Flexibility:** Plan, organize, problem solve, processing speed

Internal Locus of Control



External Locus of Control



What's your Growth Mindset?

Do things happen to you...

OR

Do you make things happen?

The Three R's: Reaching the Learning Brain

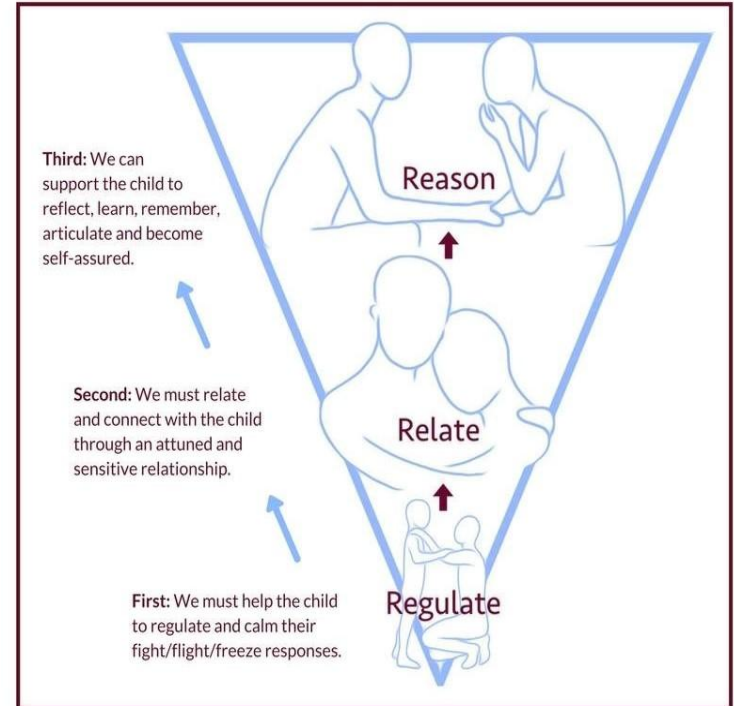
How to help a distressed child:

- 1) **REGULATE:** help the child calm their stress response
- 2) **RELATE:** connect with the child through an attuned and sensitive relationship
- 3) **REASON:** support the child to make meaning and become self assured

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The-Three-Rs.pdf>

The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain

Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable child to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence.



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

HELP YOUR CHILD PROMOTE AN INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

Tips from child therapists



NOTICE & ENCOURAGE EFFORT, NOT JUST OUTCOME

TRY: "You tried really hard, and gave it a good effort."

INSTEAD OF: "You did a good job."

HELP THEM COME UP WITH SOLUTIONS TO THEIR PROBLEMS

TRY: "What kind of help do you need...what can you try first?"

INSTEAD OF: "Let me get that for you."

PERSON CENTERED, NOT TASK-CENTERED ENCOURAGEMENT

TRY: "You are a determined kid and I'm proud of how hard you try with school work."

INSTEAD OF: "I knew you could get a good grade."

ENGAGE KIDS IN ACTIVITIES THAT HELP THEM FEEL IN CONTROL

TRY: "I notice you trying to sit with a quiet body, even though it is hard."

INSTEAD OF: "Please stay in your chair."

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS FOR KIDS

I can do hard things
I can always improve
I can do my best
I can solve problems
I can try new strategies
I can stay positive

Designed by Natalie Blue LMHC



Giving your body the “Green Light”

Ideas for Helping Children Orient to the Present

- **The ‘5’ Senses Countdown:** see (5), touch (4), hear (3), smell (2), taste (1)
- **Deep Breathing Movement:** blowing bubbles, moon walk, tennis ball bounce
- **Yoga Grounding Poses:** tree, mountain, & warrior
- **Healthy Adrenaline Release:** red light/green light, stretching, exercise, progressive muscle relaxation, fidget toys, & doodling
- **Activating the Prefrontal Cortex:** ‘Simon Says’, ‘I Spy’, simple math or spelling questions
- **Visualization:** guided Imagery, story-telling, “miracle wish”
- **Assurance vs. Reassurance**

How anxiety might impact learning

- Inattention and restlessness
- Attendance problems and clingy kids
- Disruptive behavior
- Trouble answering questions in class
- Frequent trips to the nurse
- Problems in certain subjects
- Not turning in homework
- Avoiding socializing or group work

Source: childmind.org



School and Family connection

Finding supports

- **Classroom Teacher(s):** Teachers will be able to provide observational data to help in developing an informed plan to assist you and your child work through school related anxiety.
- **School Counselors:** HW School Counselors actively pursue professional development to assist students with anxiety in the educational setting.
- **School Nurse:** The School Nurse can provide data related to somatic symptoms to help in developing an informed plan.
- **Principal/Assistant Principal:** Administrators will work with student, teacher and families to develop educational/behavior plans to help work through school related anxiety and help the student with skill building.

Developing a plan

Interventions should teach how to:

- Handle uncertainty
- Be more flexible
- Problem solve rather than ruminate
- Tolerate discomfort



Resources:

Lyn Lyons:

<https://www.lynnlyons.com>

Child Mind Institute:

<https://childmind.org>

Questions?

