

NAVIGATING ANXIETY IN YOUTH: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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INTRODUCTIONS

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WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried or tense – particularly about an event/threat in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we feel that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

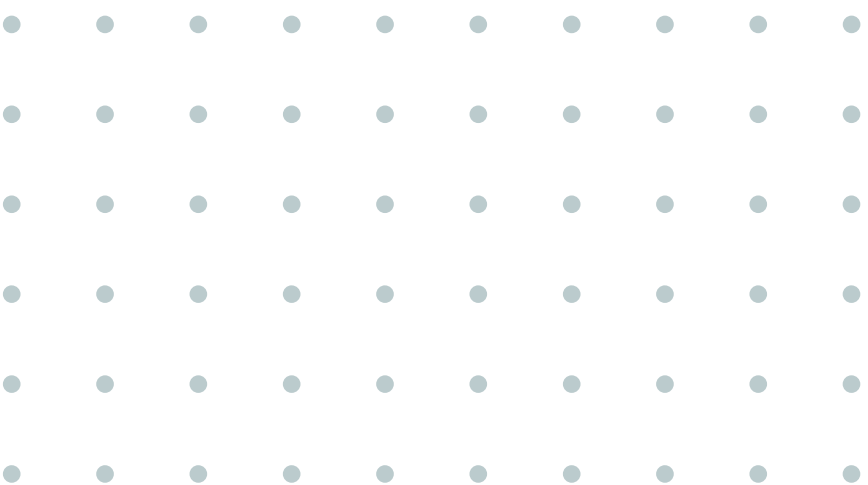




Anxiety serves a purpose

Anxiety is normal, expected and adaptive. It's what helps you notice danger and keeps you safe until a threat passes

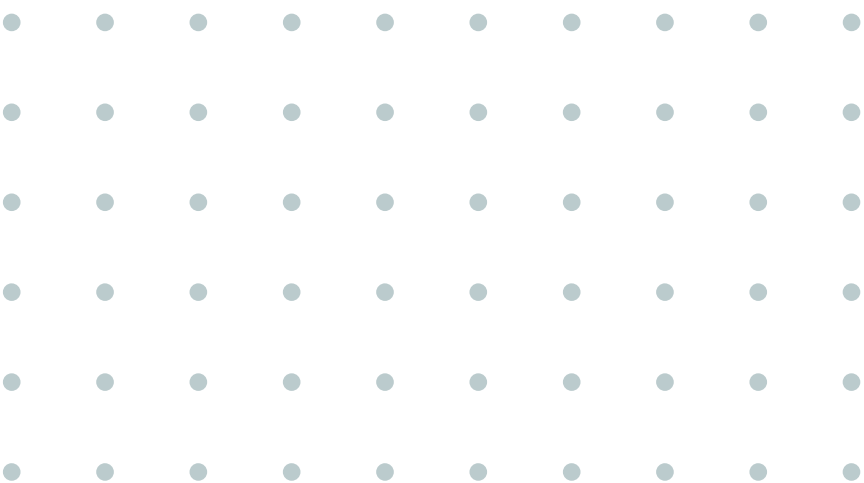
Some anxiety is necessary, even helpful. It's what motivates people to take action, or work hard to meet a goal





When is it a problem?

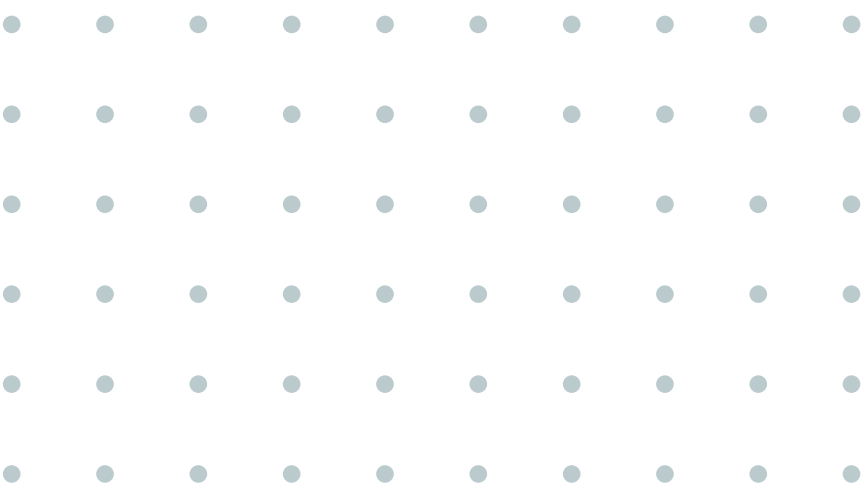
It becomes a problem when the level of anxiety is great enough to interfere with a child's everyday activities (school avoidance, new activities, separation)



What causes anxiety?

Anxiety has multiple complex origins including:

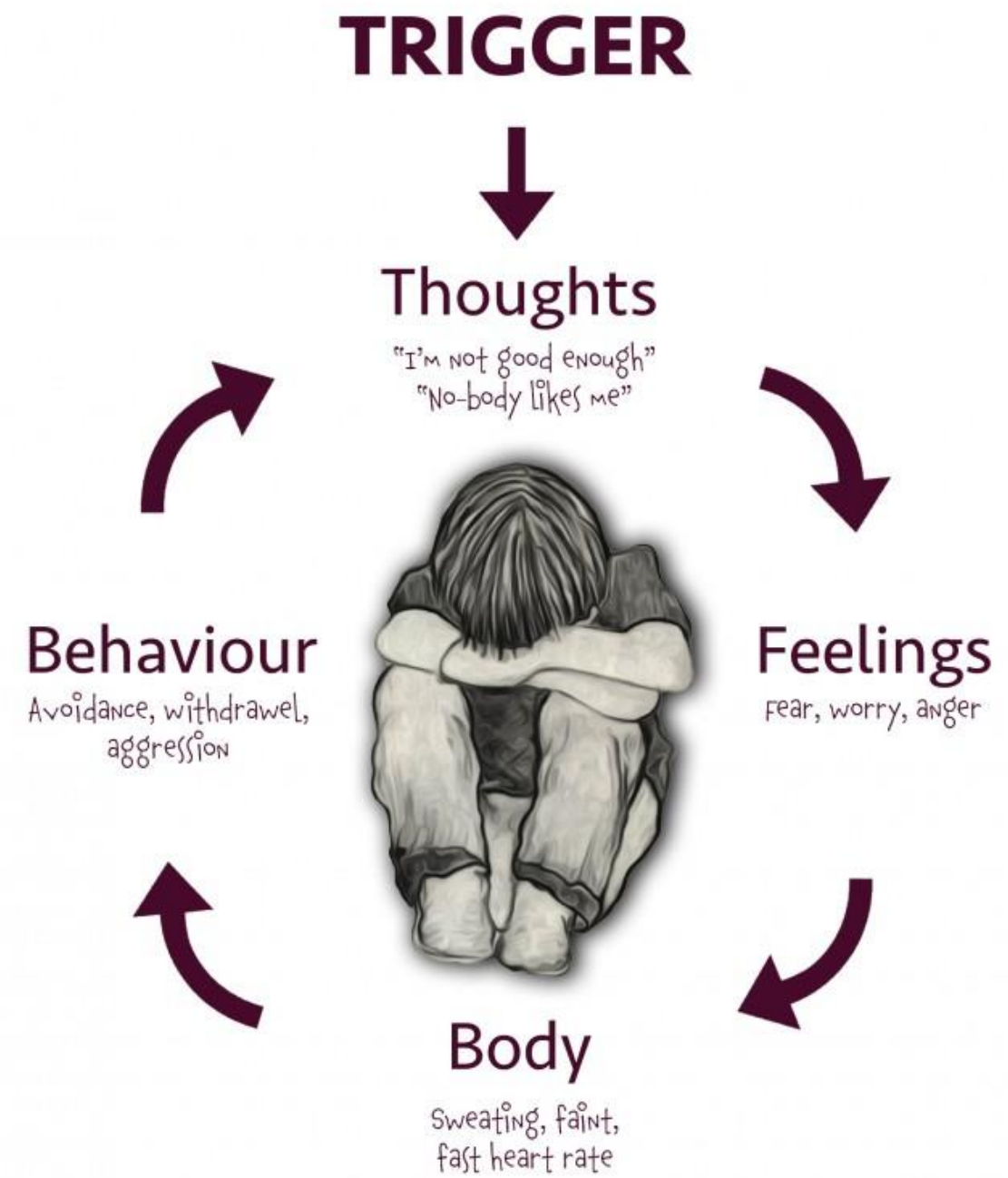
- Genetics
- Brain Chemistry
- Life Situations
- Learned Behaviours





Beacon House
Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team

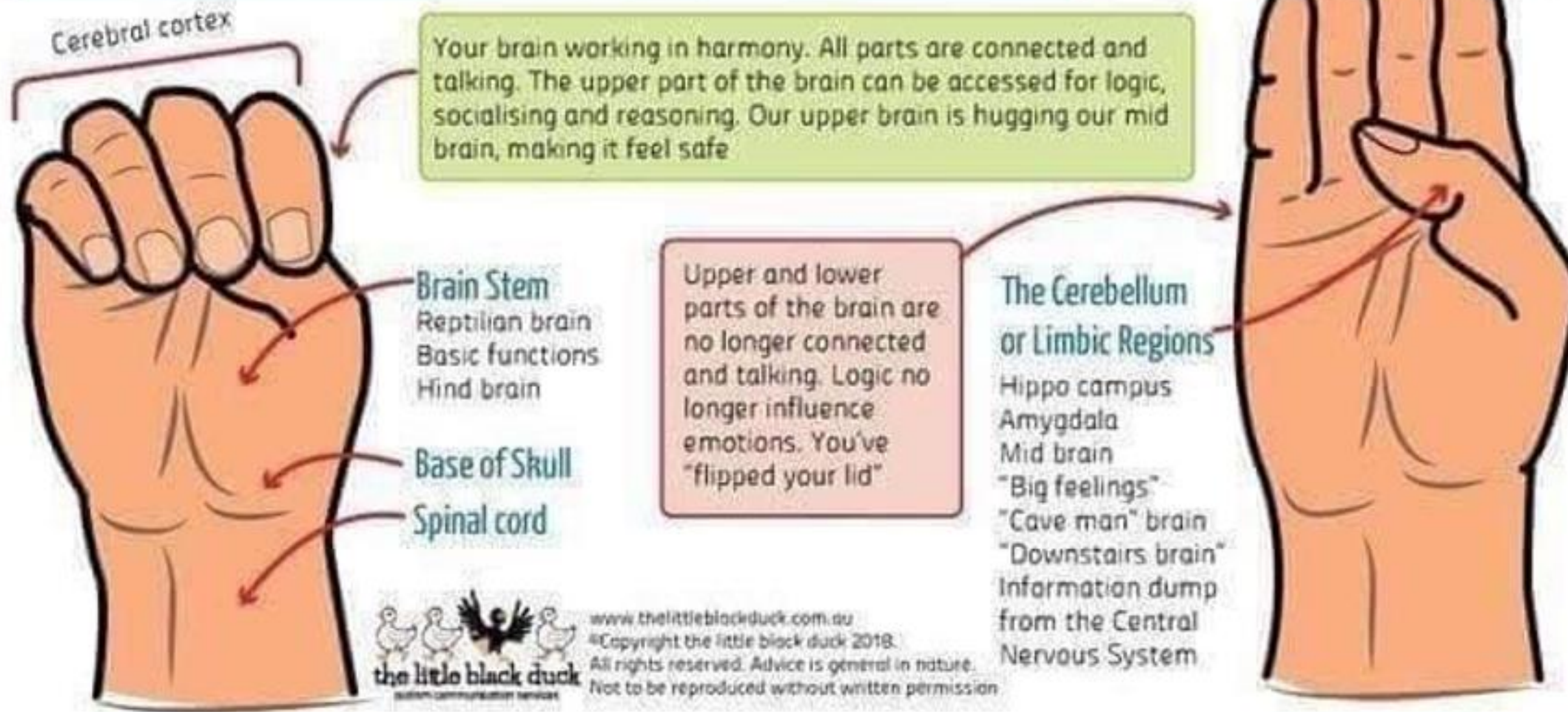
The Anxiety Cycle



The Hand Model of the Brain

What happens when we “flip our lid”

When our brain is working efficiently both the upper and mid brain are communicating effectively. Information comes in and is processed logically. Sometimes too much information is coming in for the Upper brain to process and it disconnects. We “flip our lid” and can no longer access the functions provided by the upper brain



THE BRAIN

ANXIETY MISUNDERSTOOD

Anxiety can look like:

Anger
Difficulty with focus
Negativity
Avoidance
Over planning
Difficulty sleeping
Defiance





What else affects anxiety?

- Sleep
- Eating
- Screen time
- Connection

BEHAVIOUR IS COMMUNICATION



5 Domains: Stressors

Biological

Noises, crowds, visual overstimulation, not enough exercise, **lack of sleep**, sugar, junk food

Emotion

Difficulty **cop**ing with **strong emotions**, both positive (over-excited) & negative (anger, fear)

Cognitive

Difficulty **processing** certain kinds of information

Social

Difficulty picking up on **social cues**, or **understanding effect of behaviour on others**

Prosocial

Difficulty **cop**ing with **other people's stress**; **sense of injustice**

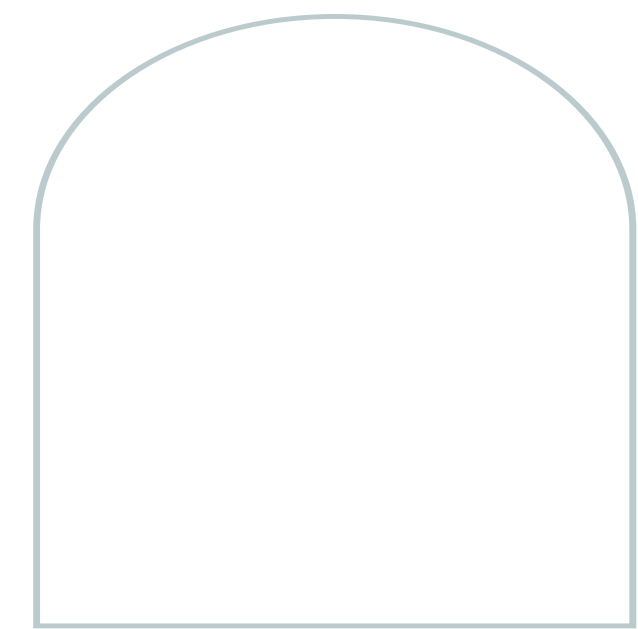


Emotion coaching

(Gottman)

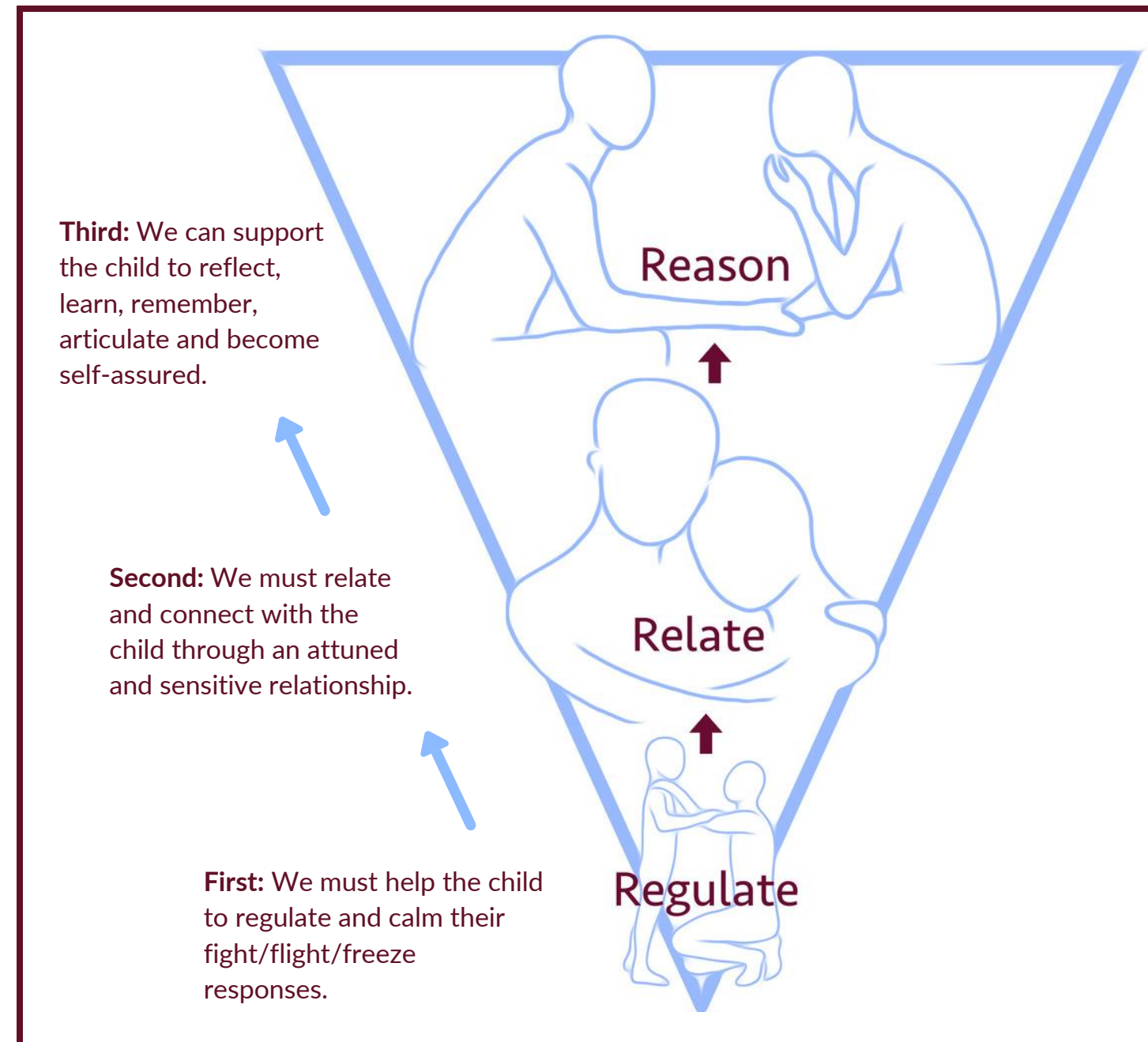


1. Be aware of child's emotions
2. See the expression of emotion as opportunity for connection
3. Listen with empathy & validate the feelings
4. Label the emotions
5. Make a plan if needed or set limit



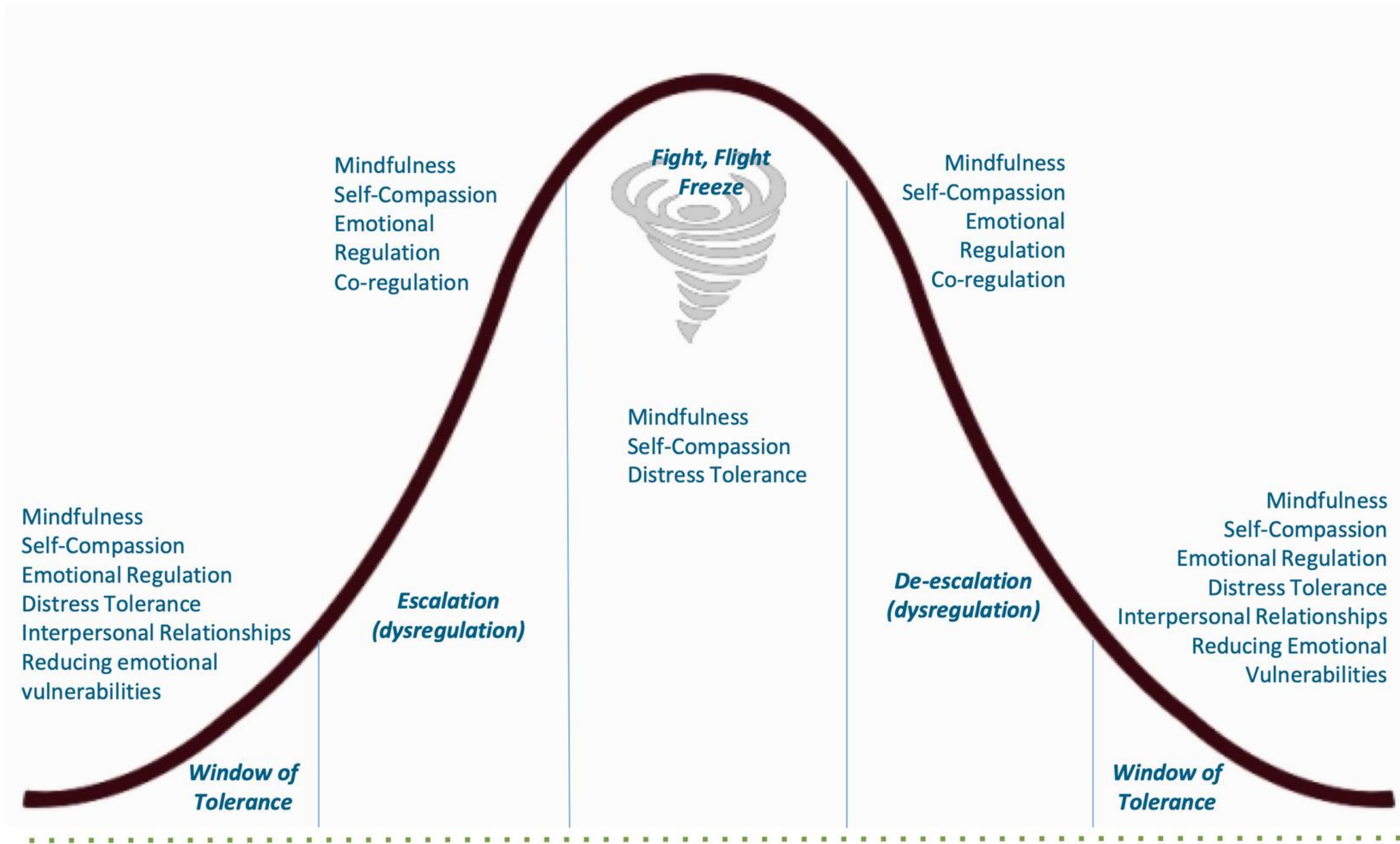
The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain

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.

Surf the Wave





HALT

Hungry

Angry

Lonely

Tired

In the moment strategies

54321

5 Things you see
4 Things you touch
3 Things you hear
2 Things you smell
1 Thing you taste
(or something you love about yourself)

- Cold water – splash on face, drink, run hands under cold water, shower
- Sour candy or gum
- Assess where anxiety is at from 1-10
- Body scan - how do you feel anxiety in your body right now? Head to toe

Strategies cont...

C.A.L.M.

Categories beginning with each letter -
i.e. countries/places, candies, colours, items of clothing, food, etc

EX: FOOD: Cauliflower, Asparagus, Lemons, Mangoes



- Flower-candle breathing – smell the flower & blow out the candle
- Belly breathing – blow up the belly like a balloon & exhale very slowly
- Box breathing – in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4 hold for 4

* If your child/teen will not do these strategies in the moment.....don't panic.....you just do them & model it (it will calm you down & you can share your calm with them)

Structure & boundaries

Kids need to know you are the pilot of the plane, so they don't have to fly it & manage alonethis means:

Structure, consistency & boundaries

AND


Love, connection & kindness



Common Anxious Parenting Patterns..... that make sense but don't work!

- Accommodation
- Rescuing
- Reassuring
- Allowing bad behavior
- Pushing too hard and getting angry





WHEN LITTLE PEOPLE ARE
OVERWHELMED BY BIG
EMOTIONS, IT'S OUR JOB
TO SHARE OUR CALM. NOT
JOIN THEIR CHAOS.
~ L. R. KNOST

Parents role

- Practice being able to tolerate the distress of our children
- Your job is not to solve the problem for them - often they just need our calm & loving presence
- Don't take away every difficult emotion/situation for them as this teaches them they cannot get through it
- Just empathize with "this is really tough hey? These feelings are really big inside. I am here with you" sometimes is what is needed.

Grounding for parents

- Anxiety is contagious & we know as kids anxiety increases so does parents - so check in with yourself regularly
- How is your alarm system? What are you feeling in your body? What is your child's anxiety triggering in you? Are they bringing up things from your own childhood? (spoiler alert - they usually are!)
- Do whatever you need to fill your own bucket - self care for you helps your child as then you can show up with more patience & calm to share. Who is your support system? If you don't have one, find one in friends or family or partners or own therapy



Takeaways

- It's all about RELATIONSHIP – you can never go wrong with relationship & connection
- Self regulation then co-regulation
- Expect anxiety to show up

Resources

Books

- Self-Reg By Dr Stuart Shanker
- The Whole-Brain Child By Dr. Dan Siegel
- Untangled by Lisa Damour
- Connected Parenting By Jennifer Kolari
- Raising Good Humans By Dr Aliza Pressman
- The Anxious Generation By Jonathan Haidt

Podcasts

- FlusterClux – Lynn Lyons
- Ask Lisa – Lisa Damour

Websites

- [Anxietycanada.com](https://anxietycanada.com)
- [Acceleratedresolutiontherapy.com](https://acceleratedresolutiontherapy.com)

Instagram

- Raising Good humans
- Dr Vanessa Lapointe