

addressing the root causes of  
**ANXIETY**  
in children and adolescents

*- an attachment-based developmental approach -*

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**A JACK HIROSE SEMINAR**

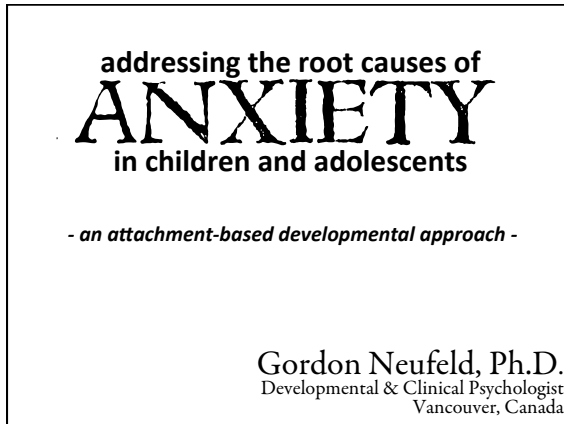
Calgary, Alberta

May 9, 2024

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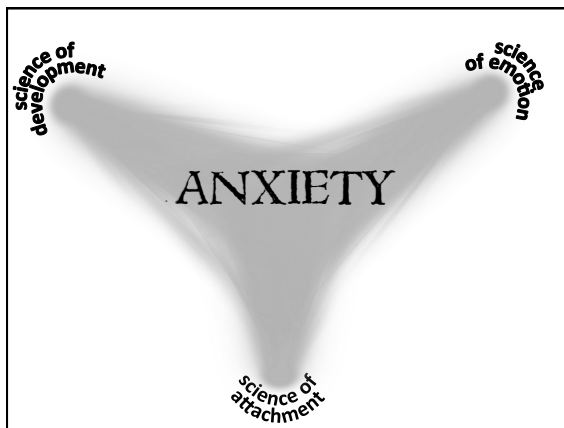
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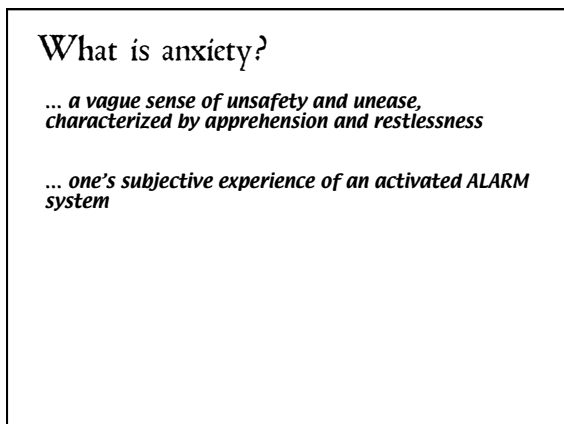
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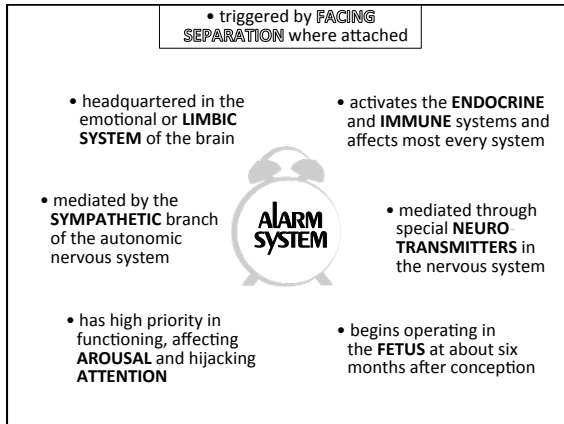
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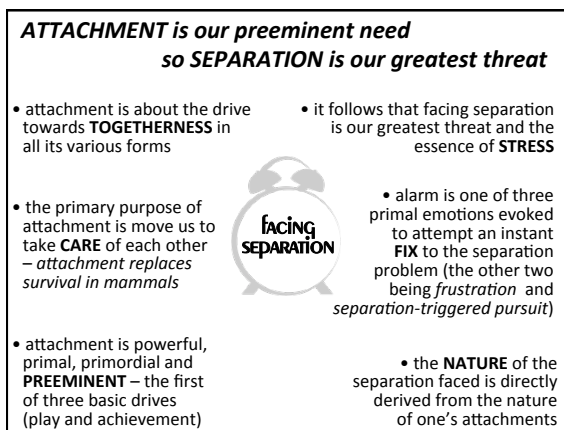
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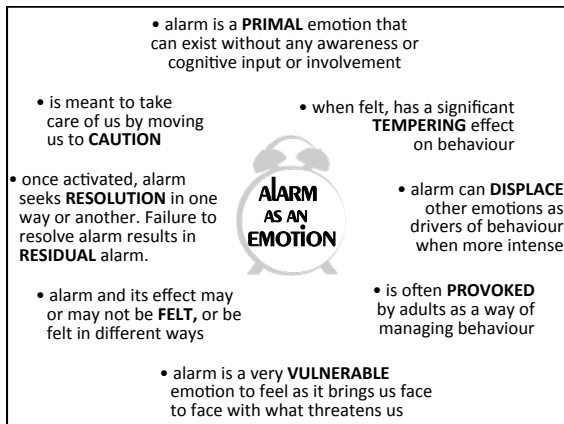
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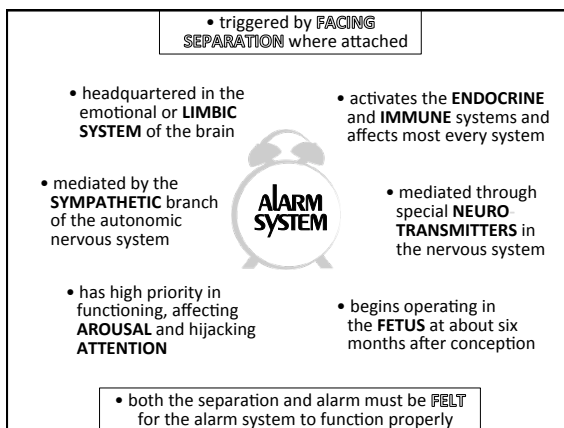
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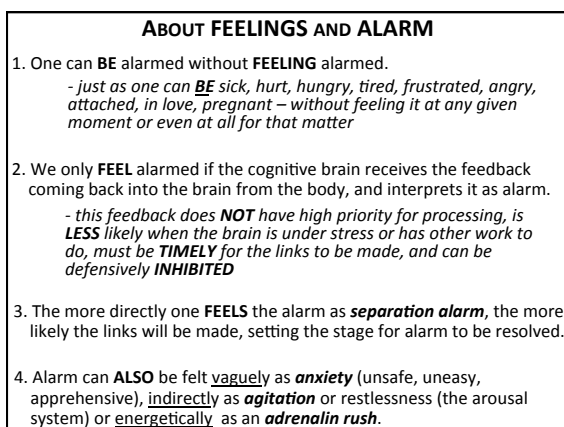
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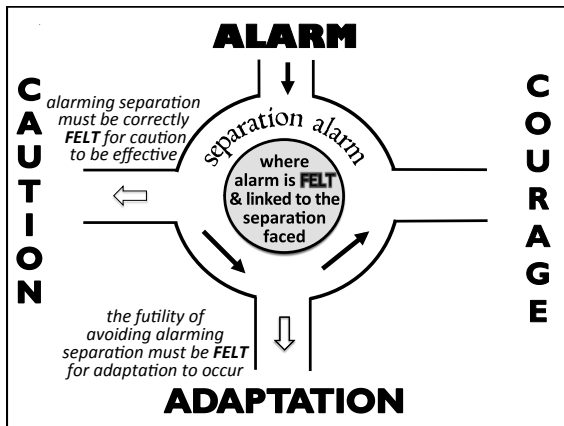
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**ALARMING SEPARATION WHERE AVOIDANCE IS FUTILE**

- bedtime, loss and mortality
- separation resulting from going to school, moving, divorce of parents, parents working, hospitalization, etc, etc
- the dawning realization of the inevitability of loss and losing
- always being wanted, chosen and preferred by those whom we want, choose or prefer
- being liked by everyone or avoiding rejection
- the lack of invitation to exist in another's presence
- the loss of affection or significance to another
- securing the contact and closeness in an attachment

*To attach is to face separation, but we must attach and so facing separation cannot ever be truly avoided.*

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**Adapting to Alarming Separation that Cannot be Avoided**

- **RESOLVES** alarm, providing some **REST** and **RELIEF** from the primal emotion
- develops the **RESILIENCE** to handle a world full of separation alarm
- enables **RECOVERY** from alarming events and alarming attachments

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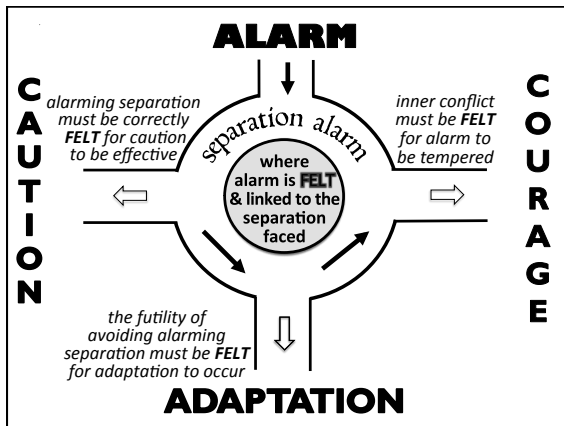
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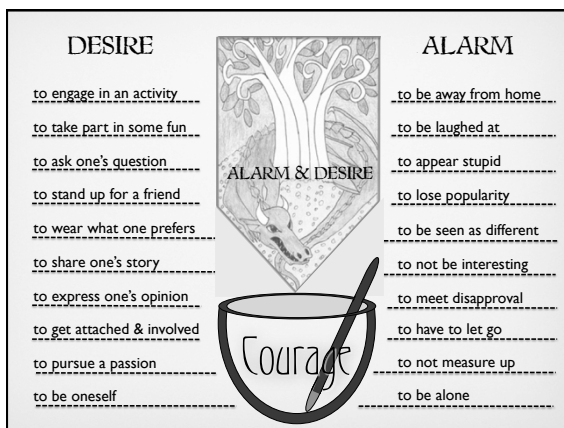
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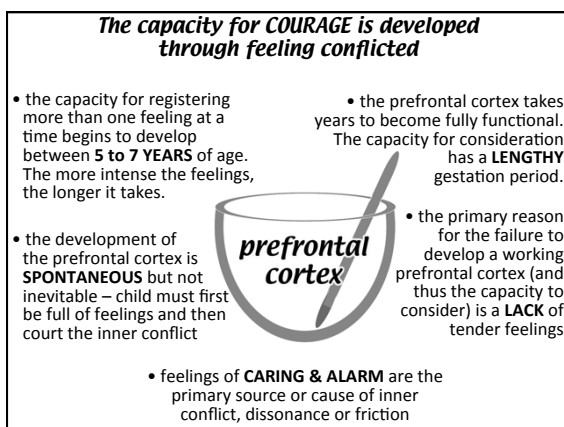
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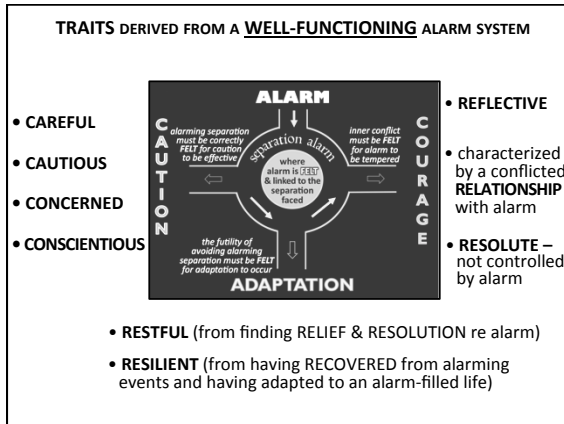
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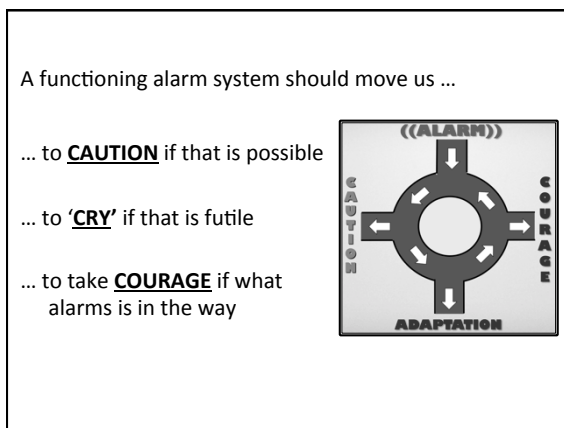
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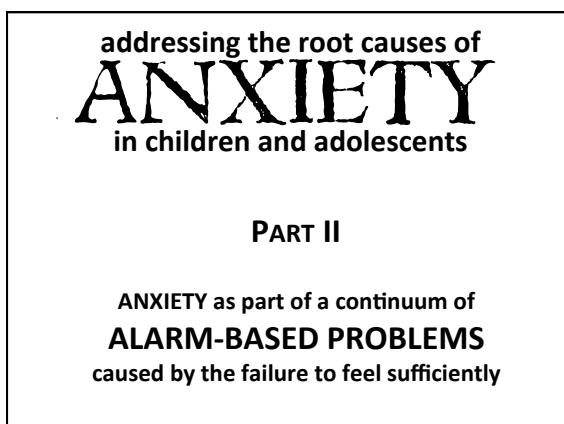
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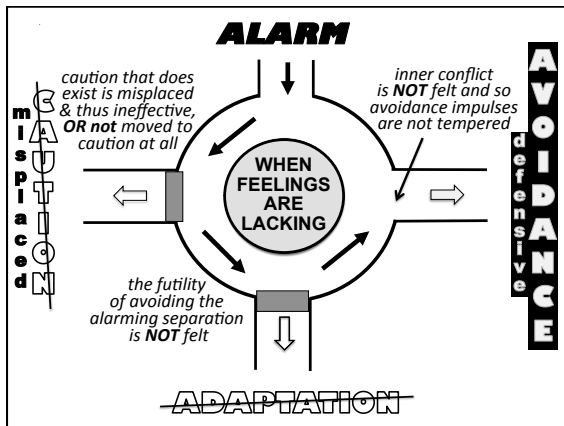
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### ALARM-BASED DEFENSIVE AVOIDANCE

#### LEVEL 1 – ANXIETY PROBLEMS

- *FLIGHT from alarming things and situations* – involves obsessions and compulsions, which can include phobias and paranoia, as well as a preoccupation with staying out of trouble

#### LEVEL 2 – AGITATION & ATTENTION PROBLEMS

- *FLIGHT from apprehension and attending to what alarms* - results in significant attention deficits, not being able to stay out of trouble, not being moved to caution, recklessness and carelessness

#### LEVEL 3 – ADRENALIN SEEKING PROBLEMS

- *FLIGHT from any sense of vulnerability whatsoever* – the adrenalin rush involved in doing alarming things when devoid of a sense of vulnerability results in being attracted to what alarms and a predisposition for being a trouble-maker

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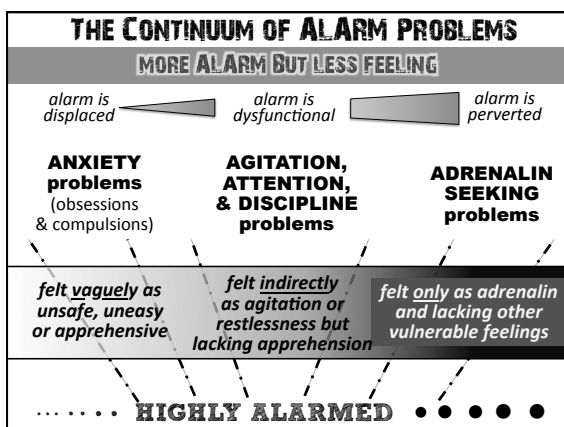
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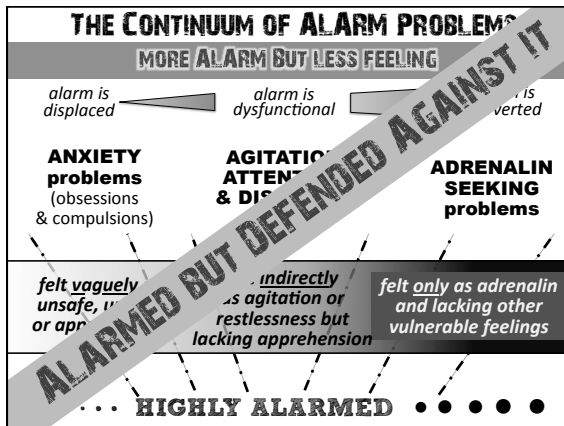
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<b>A CONTINUUM OF DEFENDEDNESS</b>	
<b>ANXIETY - based</b>	The defensive inhibition of feelings is <b>sufficient</b> enough to interfere with linking the feelings of alarm to the separation faced, but NOT enough to keep from feeling nervous. The result is <b>anxiety</b> .
<b>AGITATION - based</b>	The defensive inhibition of feelings is <b>significant</b> enough to keep from feeling nervous but NOT enough to keep from feeling agitated or restless. In addition, defensiveness in attention results in a blindness to that which truly alarms. The result is <b>agitation without apprehension plus significant deficits in attention</b> .
<b>ADRENALIN -based</b>	The defensive inhibition of feelings is <b>severe</b> enough to keep from feeling nervous, agitated or vulnerable, resulting in feeling <b>ONLY</b> the chemistry of alarm. The result is being <b>attracted to what alarms</b> .

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**What is anxiety?**

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

... one's subjective experience of an activated ALARM system

... a response to facing separation where the FEELINGS that link the alarm with the separation faced are missing

... a state of alarm-driven AVOIDANCE characterized by a FLIGHT from what our thinking brain has mistakenly assumed is the reason for alarm

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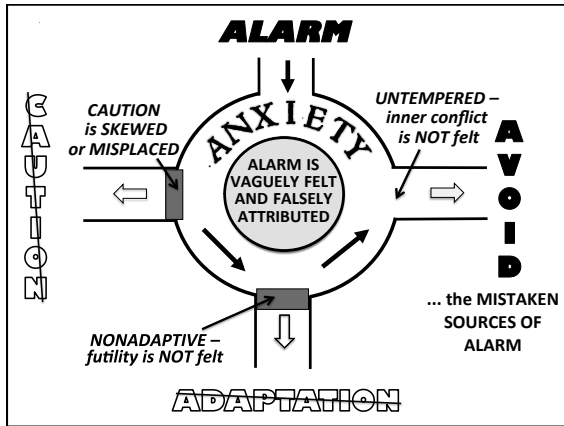
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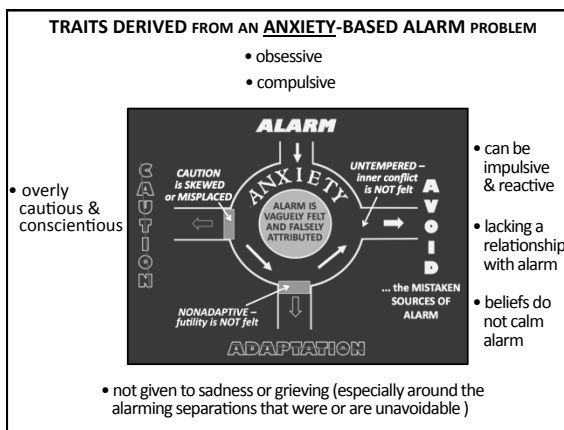
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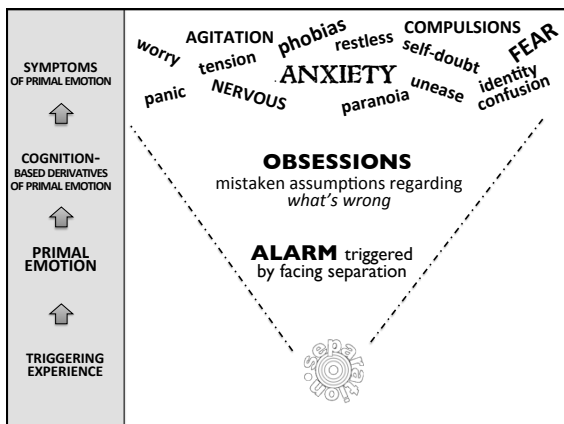
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IRRATIONAL OBSESSIONS (mistakes regarding 'what's wrong')	RESULTING COMPULSIONS (to avoid or reduce alarm)
• someone or something is out to hurt me or to get me	⇒ work at avoiding the monsters and scary creatures, avoid getting conned, uncover people's plots
• something is wrong with my health or my functioning or is going to make me sick	⇒ work at keeping things clean, at not getting sick, at avoiding germs, at avoiding contamination
• something is out of order or out of place	⇒ work at putting things in order and their place
• something is wrong with my body or with how I look	⇒ work at improving one's appearance or at changing one's shape
• some places or situations are dangerous or unsafe	⇒ work at avoiding that which makes one feel unsafe (ie, phobias)
• something has been left undone	⇒ work at remembering to complete one's tasks
• one is 'too much' or 'not enough'	⇒ work at editing or enhancing, diminishing or improving oneself

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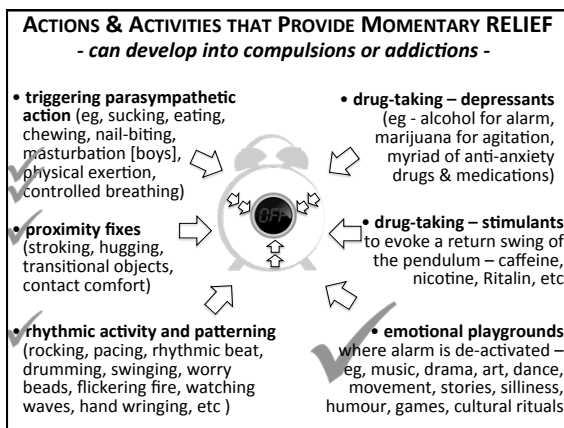
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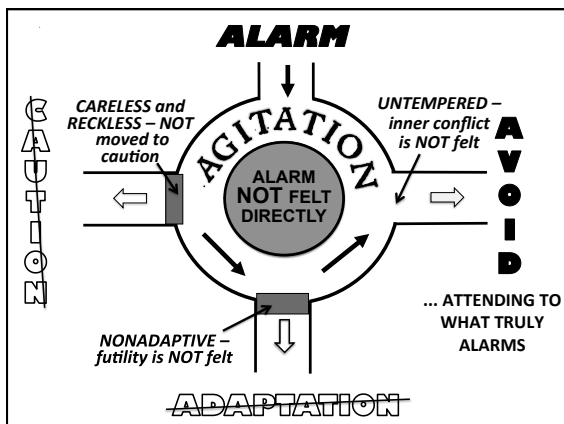
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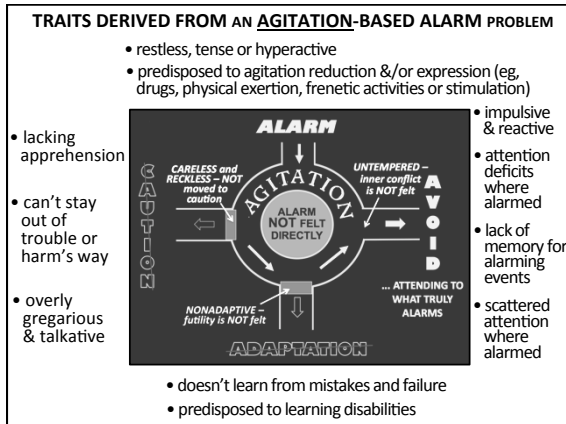
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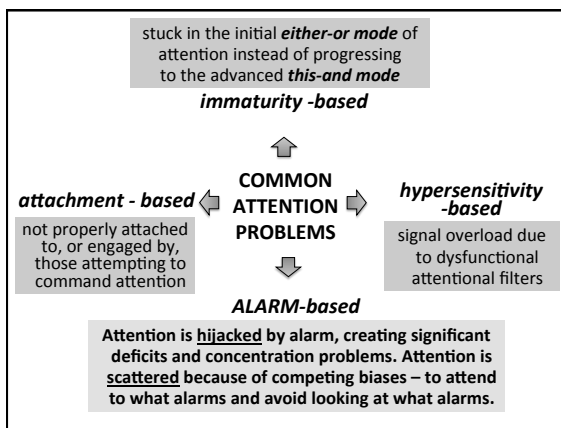
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about **alarm-based** attention problems

- key signs are '**highly agitated**' as IF highly alarmed but '**without apprehension**' as if not at all alarmed
- attention system receives **mixed messages** from the brain: *pay attention to what alarms and don't look at what alarms*
- the two primary symptoms are **scattered attention** and significant **attentional deficits** around alarming situations (eg, can't see trouble coming, can't stay out of harm's way, more gregarious than would be appropriate, somewhat reckless and careless, poor memory for alarming situations)
- typically will qualify for an **attention deficit diagnosis** as the syndrome meets the three criteria: difficulty concentrating, restlessness or agitation, and impulsiveness (only two of the three are required for the diagnosis)

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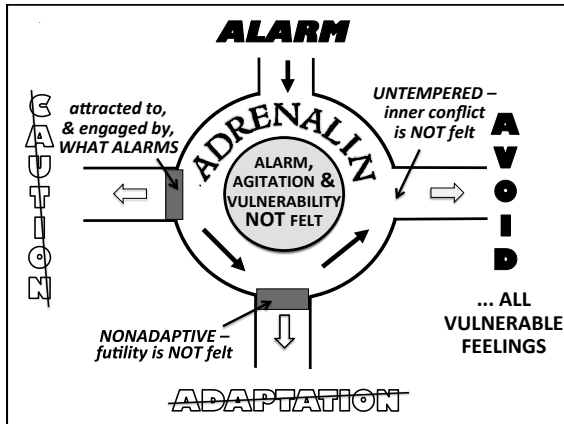
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**TRAITS DERIVED FROM AN ADRENALIN-BASED ALARM PROBLEM**

- does alarming things (eg, risk-taking, cutting, burning)
- seems relatively unaffected by what should alarm

- **FEARLESS**
- risk-taking
- can become a trouble-maker
- can lack a conscience
- more able to engage in 'cold' caution

- unreflective
- unconflicted
- inconsiderate
- unfeeling

• **TEARLESS** – lacking in sadness and devoid of grief

• adversity hardens rather than softens

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Some attractions of the highly defended ...

- scary rides and horror movies
- breaking taboos and out-of-bound behaviour
- dangerous activities
- daredevil stunts
- delinquent activity and being 'bad'
- extreme sports
- cutting and burning

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addressing the root causes of  
**ANXIETY**  
 in children and adolescents

**PART III**

A closer examination of the  
**ROOT CAUSES of ESCALATING ALARM**  
 in our children and youth

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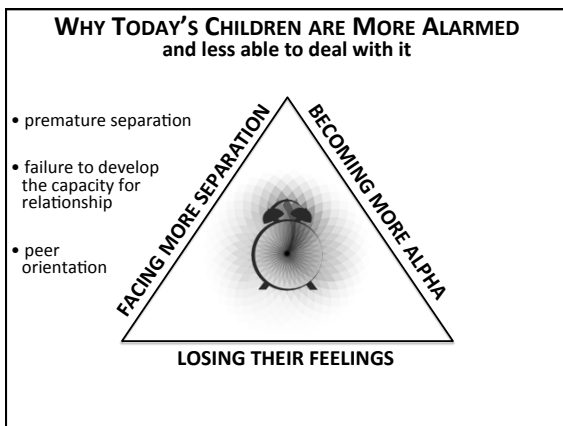
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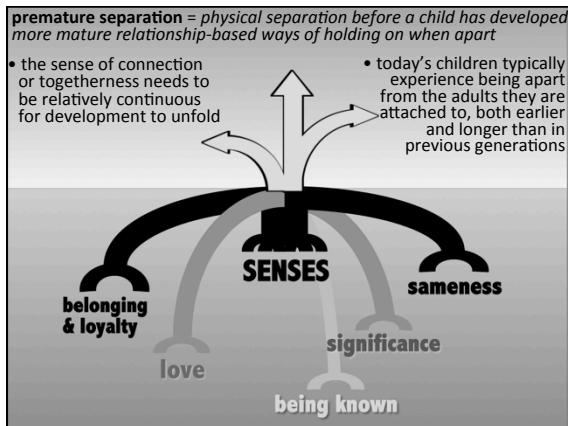
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### TODAY'S CHILDREN FACE MORE SEPARATION

- 1) more likely to be **APART** from their parents for reasons of divorce, schooling, parental employment, out-of-home care, after-school activities, and digital preoccupations
- 2) when apart from their parents, **NOT** as likely to be **ATTACHED** to the **ADULTS** responsible for them (*contributing factors include smaller nuclear families, loss of extended families, loss of the village of attachment, gradual drifting of school outside the attachment village, loss of culture that would foster the needed child-adult attachments, lack of focus on student-teacher relationships*)
- 3) more likely to become **PEER ORIENTED** as a result of falling through the attachment cracks of today's society

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### PEER ORIENTATION



*Children taking their cues from each other as to how to act, what to do, how to talk, what to wear, how to express oneself, what is valued, what is expected, what is right and what is wrong*

**The competing nature of most peer attachments today (ie, can't be close to both peers and adults simultaneously) pulls children out of orbit from around the adults responsible for them**

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### PEER ORIENTATION FUELS ALARM



- peer attachments are inherently **INSECURE** – the more one's peers matter, the more separation is being faced by default
- robs adults of the power they need to keep social interaction safe
- powerless adults, in turn, resort to alarm-based methods of behaviour management, fueling alarm further
- the peer oriented are drawn to social media where alarming interaction is the norm
- the peer-oriented can be cruel and uncaring to those outside their 'tribe', fueling alarm
- peer orientation robs children of the shielding and protection they need to live in an alarming world
- drives alarm underground as fearlessness is venerated by the peer-oriented and any show of alarm can be shamed or exploited
- peer orientation breeds **ALPHA** children, fueling alarm even further

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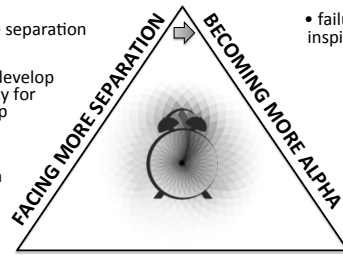
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### WHY TODAY'S CHILDREN ARE MORE ALARMED and less able to deal with it



- premature separation
- failure to develop the capacity for relationship
- peer orientation
- failure of adults to inspire dependence
- not safe to depend
- peer orientation

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### Common Manifestations of ALPHA Children



- predisposed to take charge, to take over, to take the lead
- tend to demand deference, to give orders, to take command
- inclined to command attention, to take centre stage
- insist on being the one to give directions and define the meanings
- moved to talk louder, to talk over, to talk for another
- compelled to trump interaction, to have the last word
- compelled to be first, to be the best, to be on the top
- often need to be in the know, to be the most knowledgeable

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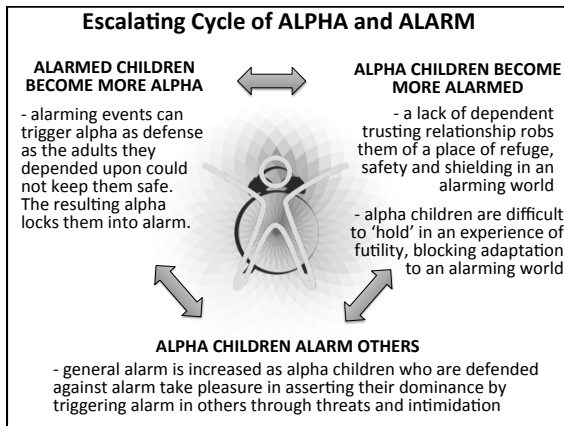
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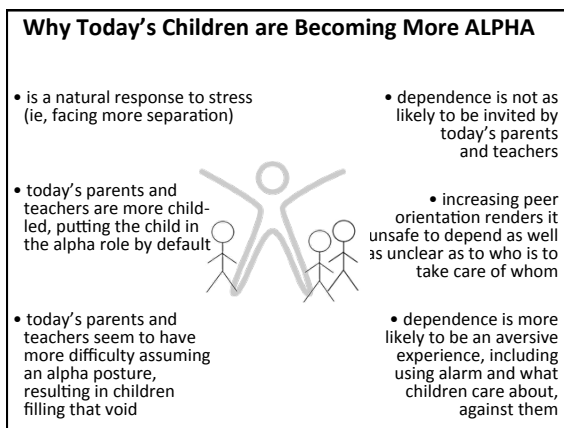
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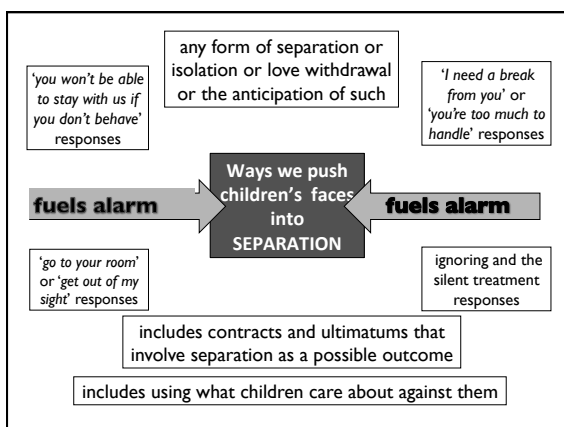
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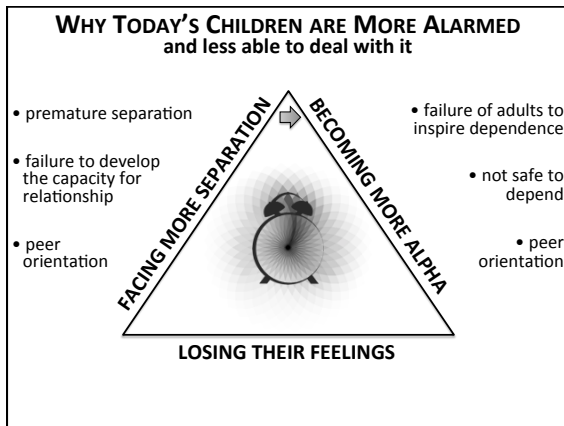
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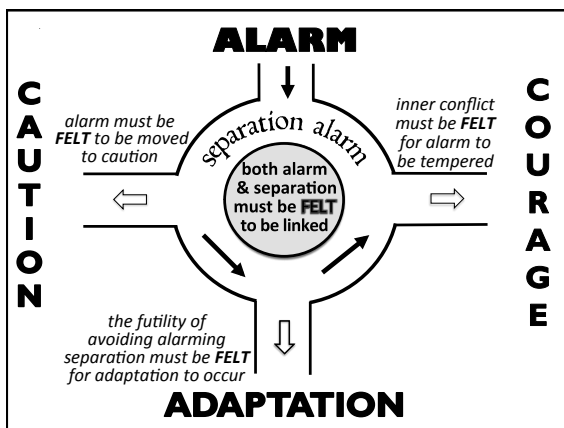
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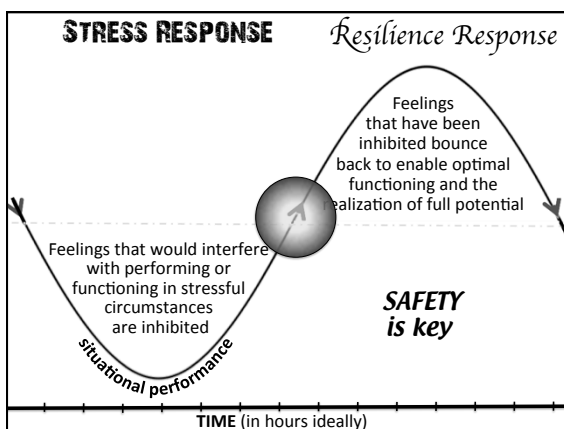
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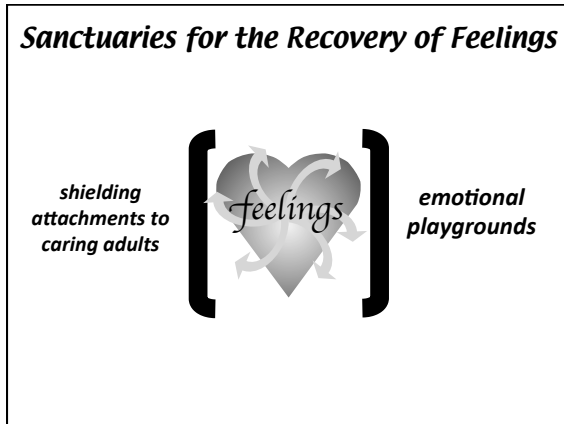
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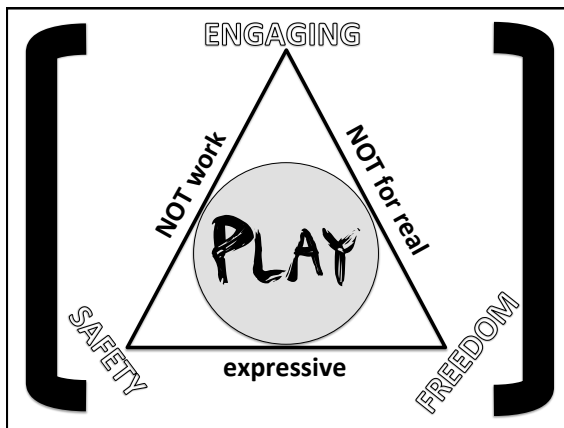
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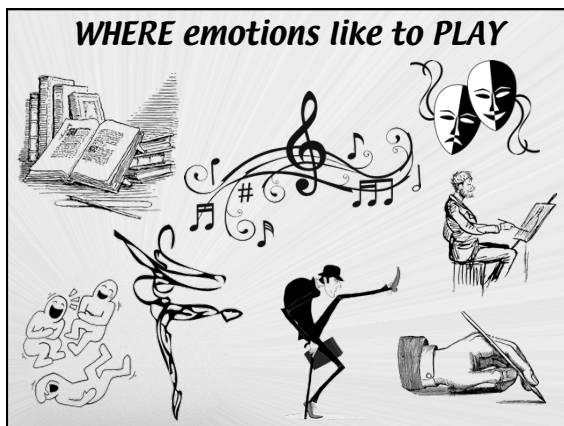
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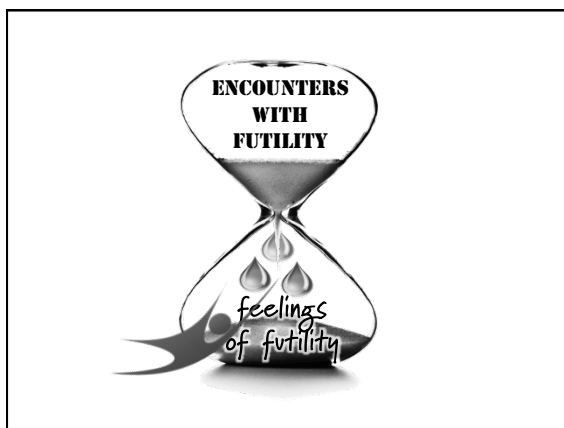
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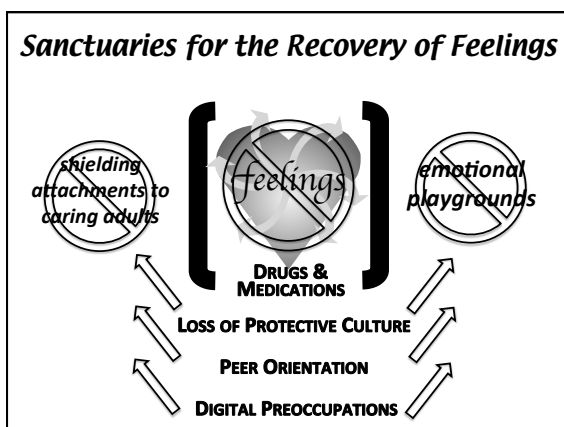
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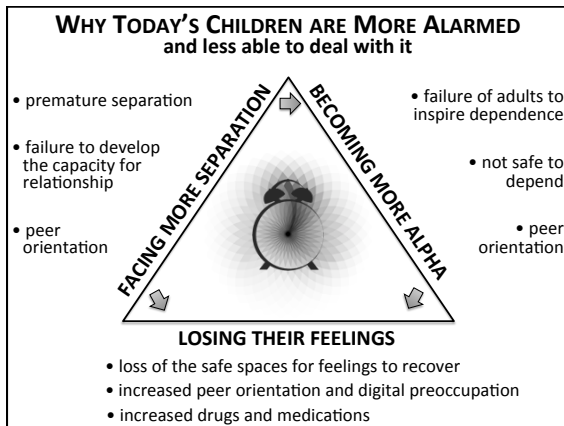
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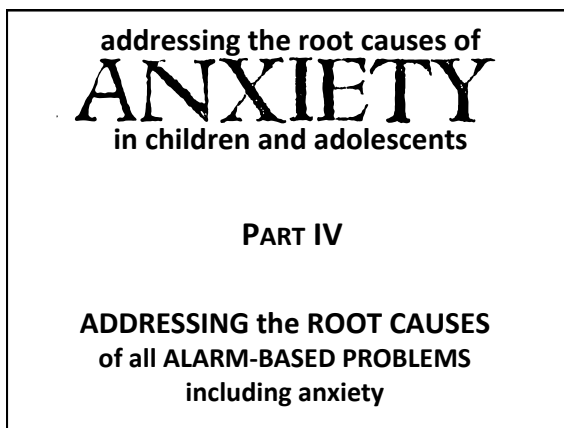
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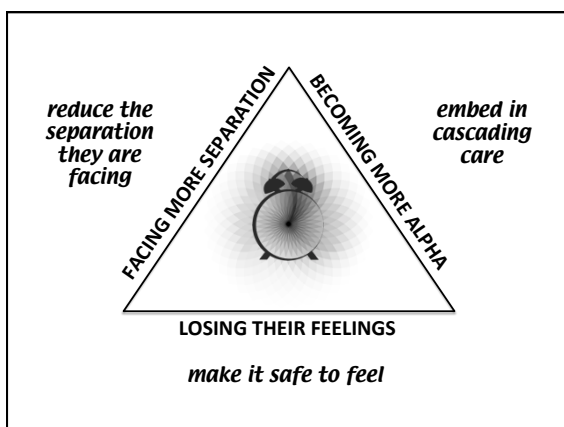
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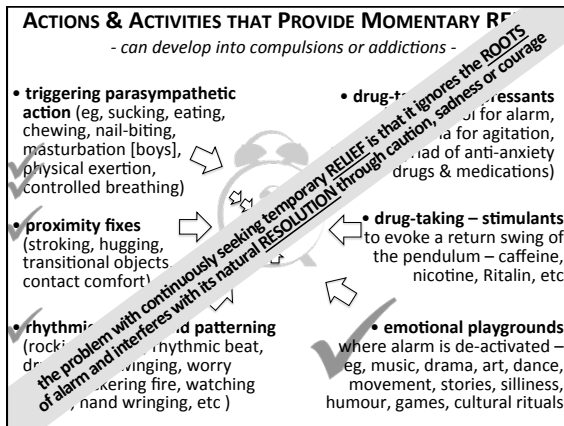
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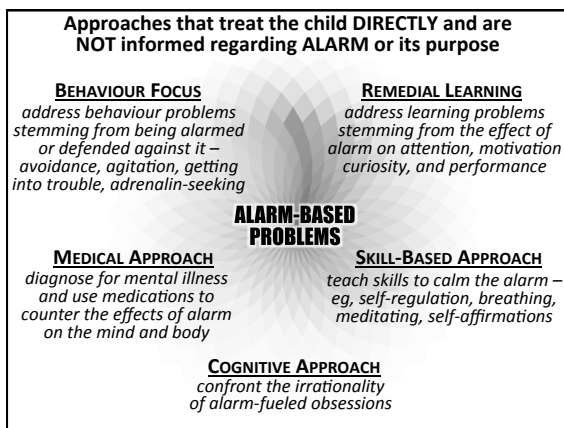
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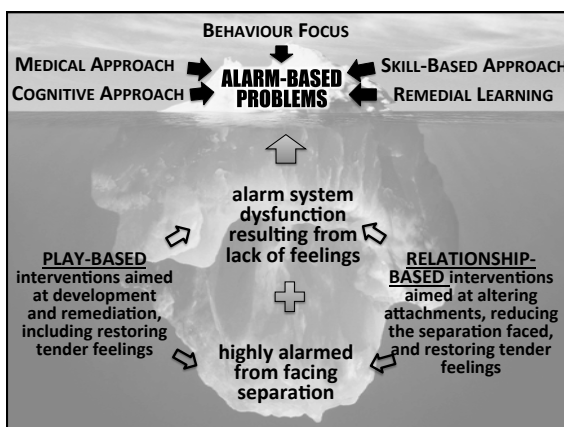
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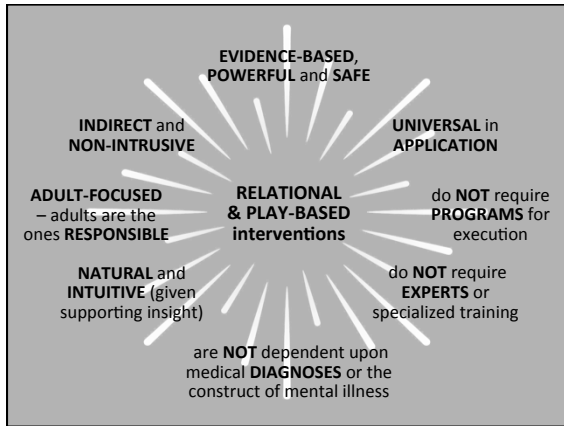
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The ultimate challenge in addressing alarm problems is to **REDUCE the SEPARATION** being faced and **RESTORE the FEELINGS** of separation and alarm, to the point where the alarm system can more easily move the child ...

... to **CAUTION** if that is possible

... to **'CRY'** if that is futile

... to take **COURAGE** if what alarms is in the way

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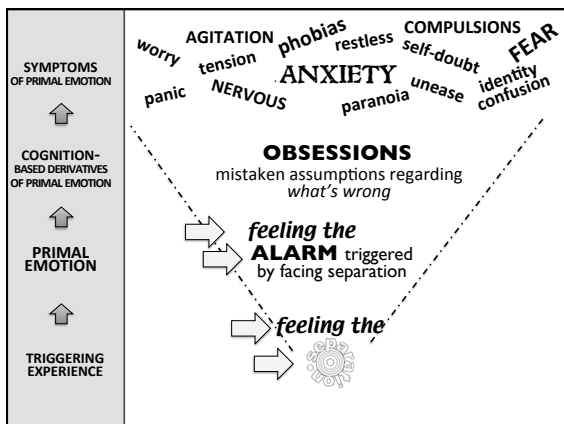
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**GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING ALL ALARM-BASED PROBLEMS**

*Treat all as HIGHLY ALARMED, especially those not manifesting feelings of apprehension*

*COME ALONGSIDE - using the insight of ALARM to find one's way to their side*

**ALARM-BASED PROBLEMS**

*NORMALIZE alarm, no matter how exotic or extreme the symptoms or pathologized by clinical diagnoses*

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*- to develop, activate and maintain a relationship as well as take the lead*

**- COLLECT -**  
*to engage the attachment instincts*

**THE PRIMARY INSTRUMENTS OF ATTACHMENT**

*- to take the alarm out of attachment, making it safe to attach*

**- BRIDGE -**  
*anything that could divide*

**- MATCHMAKE -**  
*- to caring adults and emotional playgrounds in order to provide safe refuge from alarm and safe sanctuary for their feelings*

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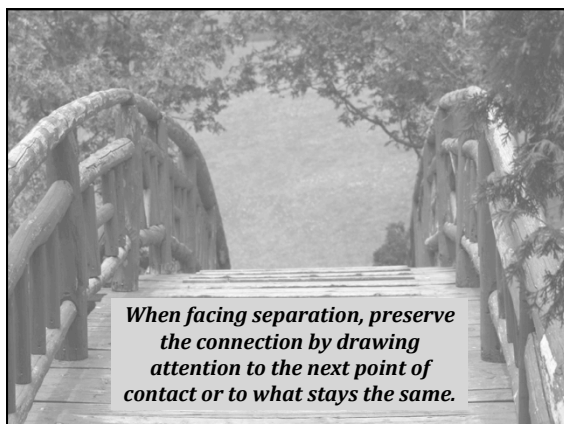
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*When facing separation, preserve the connection by drawing attention to the next point of contact or to what stays the same.*

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***Embed in Cascading Care***

- to **ADDRESS** peer orientation and alpha stuckness in order to reverse their impact on alarm
- to create a **REFUGE** as well as a safe place for feelings to **BOUNCE BACK**
- to **EMPOWER** adults to help cultivate a child's relationship with alarm and resolve it via caution or sadness or courage



- to give adults more **CONTROL** over the wounding and alarming social interaction between children
- to **SHIELD** a child against the impact of alarming interaction
- taking care of younger children provides a suitable & non-alarming **OUTLET** for children's own ALPHA instincts

*- hierarchical relationships with caring adults as well as younger children in need of their care and protection -*

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*- by taking care of them in some way or another*

*- by coming alongside*

*- by having them on your radar*

**CONVEY CARING**

*- make it SAFE to depend*

*- provide SPACES for feelings to recover*

*- inspire TRUST*

**INVITE DEPENDENCE**

**assume a CARING ALPHA role and posture**

**ANSWER ATTACHMENT NEEDS**

*- for sameness, belonging and significance*

*- for an invitation to exist in one's presence*

*- for a sense of togetherness that is not threatened*

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• **SCRIPT** cautious behaviour when needed

• teach the **LANGUAGE** of alarm indirectly through reflective mirroring

• prime **SADNESS** if possible, indirectly and one step removed, if needed

• **MODEL** a healthy relationship with alarm including the options of caution, 'crying' and courage

**from a place of trusting dependence**

• foster a **RELATIONSHIP** with **ALARM**, starting with accepting its inevitability

• lead into **MIXED FEELINGS** if inner conflict exists

• serve as **TRAFFIC DIRECTOR** if you can, helping to a resolution that is most suitable to the situation

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***Addressing ALARM through PLAY***



- playfully alarming DEVELOPS the alarm system and BUILDS tolerance of alarm
- play provides temporary REST and RELIEF from alarm
- RE-PLAY of alarming scenarios can lead to eventual resolution
- alarm can be MASTERED in play
- play can provide SAFE DISCHARGE for alarm-fueled compulsions, agitation and adrenalin-seeking
- SADNESS is much easier accessed in the play mode
- play is the perfect scenario for the 'DRAGON & TREASURE' experience
- obsessions and compulsions can be DEFUSED in play
- ATTENTION problems are best addressed through play

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***PLAYING with ALARM***



- peek-a-boo play
- rescue play
- startle play
- safe hide-away play
- ambush games
- dare games
- 'falling' play
- monsters & scary creature play
- safe-at-home play
- scary stories, games and activities

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***Playing with facing separation***



- GAMES
- POETRY & ART
- TRAGIC STORIES
- HUMOUR
- MUSIC
- CULTURAL FESTIVALS

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### Bringing obsessions and compulsions into play

*When my son was younger, around 4 or 5, he developed rituals upon walking from room to room, from inside the car to outside and so on. He would walk one step forward and then back and then forward and then back again a certain number of times. At some point I began taking his hand and "dancing" back and forth with him - which made him smile. After some time, I would lead him - get there first and eventually began to add new motions to his "dance". That turned it into a game and at some point, I'm not even sure when, this habit disappeared.*

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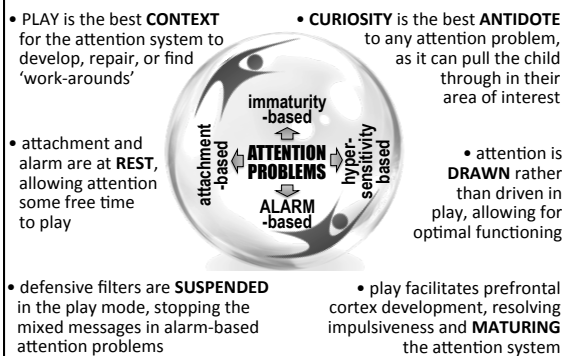
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### Play Holds the Most Promise




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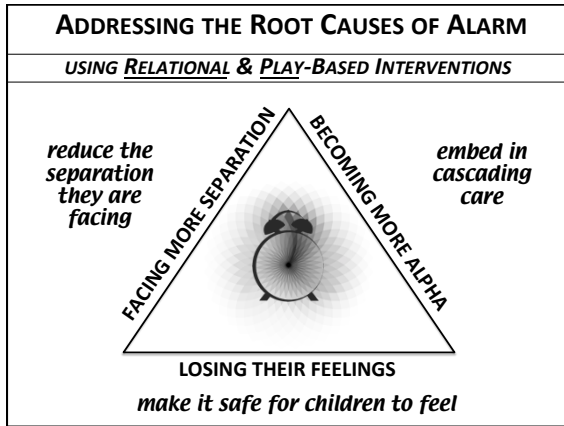
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addressing the root causes of  
**ANXIETY**  
in children and adolescents

- an attachment-based developmental approach -

Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D.  
Developmental & Clinical Psychologist  
Vancouver, Canada

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