

From Avoidance to Empowerment
Supporting the Anxious Worried Mind in the Classroom
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KORU
FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY

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PRE-WORKSHOP SURVEY

<https://drcarolinebuzanko.com/anxiety-resilience-pre-workshop-survey/>

2

<https://parentsoftheyear.buzzsprout.com/>

OVERPOWERING EMOTIONS
with Dr. Caroline Buzanko
rebrand.ly/OverpoweringEmotionsPodcast

3

→ <https://koru-learning-institute.thinkific.com/products/courses/anxiety-bonus-resources>

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Personal action plan

What traps do I need to get out of?	How can I improve my response to anxiety?	What can I do proactively?	How can I start encouraging students?
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Anxiety Compass & Key Skills

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Goal?

✘ NOT the Goal

- Eliminate all anxiety/bog emotions
- Make students feel calm
- Reduce emotional experiences to zero
- Convince them they're safe

✔ THE Goal

- Change the brain's prediction system
- Build distress tolerance
- Increase willingness to feel
- Function despite discomfort

Build students that can function, grow, and thrive *with* anxiety/big emotions

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The Emotional Blueprint

Emotions are critical data	$ER = f(E+P+C)$ (Emotion Regulation is a function of the Emotion, the Person, and the Context).
Regulating means using emotions wisely to achieve goals.	No emotion is inherently bad. Even anxiety signals uncertain outcomes we care about.
Healthy expression is calibrated.	We share the emotion alongside the strategy for managing it.

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The (Classroom) Environment

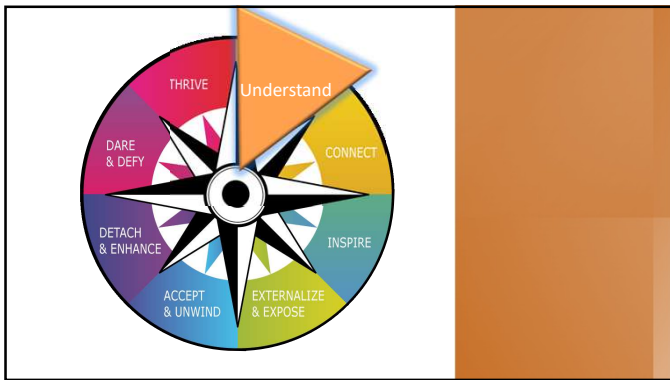
- 👤 Critical for a student's development
- 👥 Daily interactions shape both learning and development
- 🗨️ What matters most (more than experience) is the quality of the external climate is the pattern of interactions students meet every day. This climate dictates whether a student possesses the internal emotional resources to navigate challenges
- 🤝 These relationships are the foundation for learning.
- 🌱 When the emotional environment feels safe and steady, students can think, learn, and grow.

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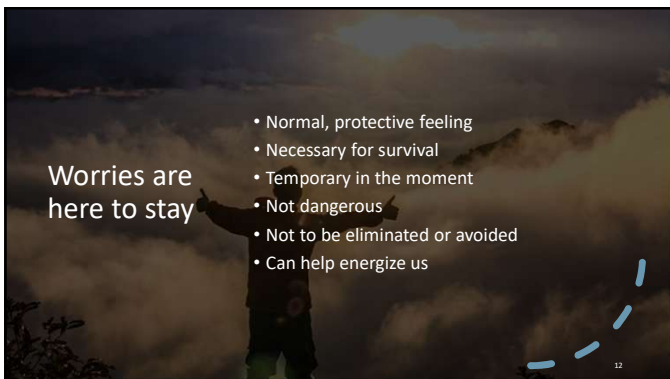
What is your Environment's Emotional Climate?

Feature	High EEC Environment	Neutral EEC	Low EEC
Adult Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notifies academic and social-emotional cues Responds before behaviour escalates Helps students solve problems effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistently aware Warm occasionally but dismissive or controlling at other times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unresponsive to needs Distress is ignored or managed away. Focus is solely on the task at hand (e.g., lesson plan.)
Student Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space for student voice, interests Age-appropriate autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides inconsistent regard for student views Fluctuates between warmth and rigid control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult-centric No flex Student input feels unwelcome
Disciplinary Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm, firm, respectful, nurturing relationships Maintains boundaries but relationship is never the cost of correction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discipline is inconsistent Students are often uncertain or hesitant about how to approach the teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sarcasm, public shaming, threats Connection is absent

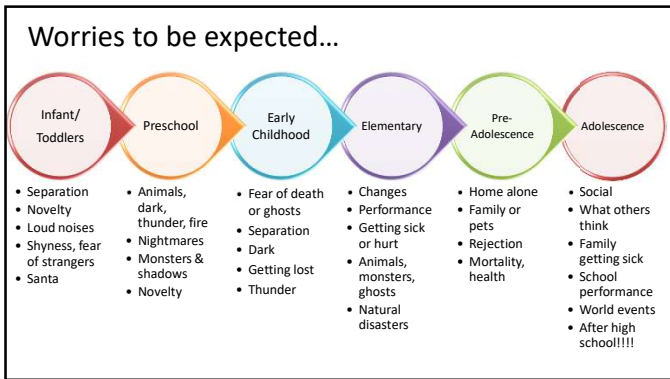
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Glitchy security system

- Amygdala – Fast, automatic, detects threats
- Prefrontal Cortex – Slow, logical, problem-solving

Amygdala reacts to perceived threats faster than the prefrontal cortex can process them

It IS doing it's job, it's just miscalibrated.

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Your Brain Detects Something New

- Thalamus makes a prediction
- Makes its best guess

Sensory Information

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Surprise!

- Information from our eyes and ears only loosely connected to what we experience
 - Fragmented
 - Ambiguous
 - Lots of effort to change them into 3-D

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Knowledge Influences Sensory Information

(e.g., all faces are always convex)

Our **knowledge/experience/what we THINK** misleads us into seeing the mask as convex

Bottom-up sensory information is overridden by top-down knowledge

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Brain: A Prediction Machine

Integrates sensory input + body needs

SO much data (TOO much) → brain compresses info

Creates summaries of summaries

Quick & dirty & sometimes **WRONG**


Makes quick guesses based on limited information

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Better Safe Than Sorry Processing

Our brain doesn't care if its hazardous or not

- Our brain will respond based on what we need to survive
- Can react in error




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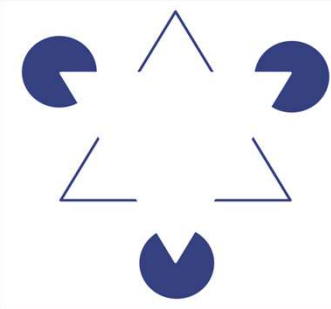
Brain fills the gaps with worse case scenarios

Worry: An act of imagination

The brain cannot tell the difference between what it actually sees and what it imagines



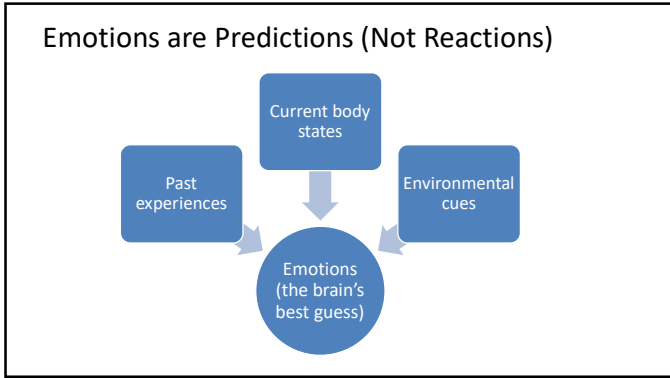
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Anxious students have more hypervigilant amygdalae

- Sends danger signals around anything that's even slightly uncomfortable.

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It's NOT about the trigger

This is not what they are avoiding!!!!

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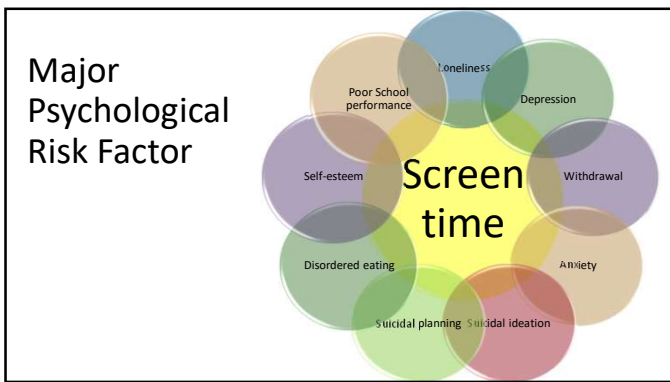
I can't handle it!

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It's all in how they respond
 Based on how they perceive the demands of the situation.

Anxiety makes the demands feel way bigger than what they believe they can manage.

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Weakens Self-regulation

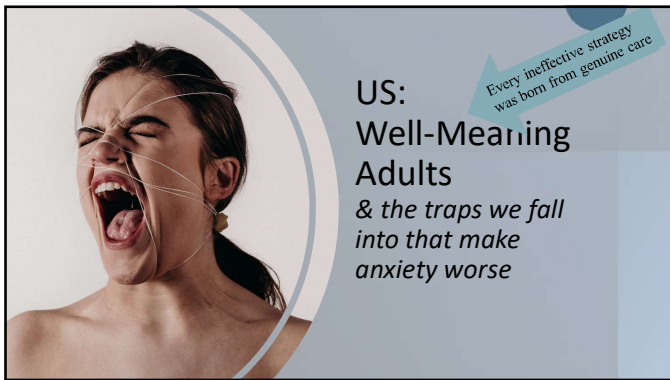
Resources used up

- Weaken kids' ability to manage emotions
 - Contributes to anxiety
- Increased emotional reactivity
- Proactive aggression
- Anti-social behaviours

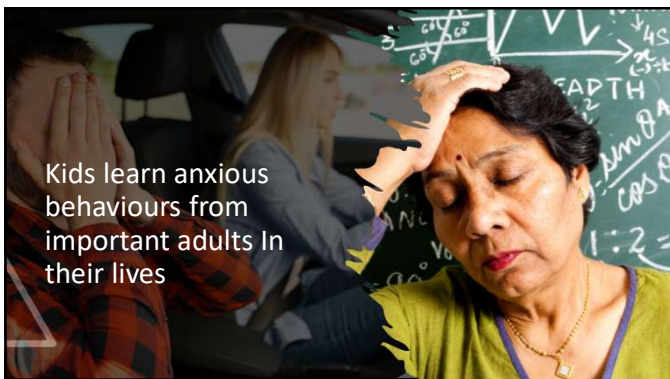
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We talk TOO MUCH

Fixing	Correcting	Controlling	Reminding	Persuading
Pushing	Punishing	Directing	Lecturing	Arguing
Confronting	Threatening	Talking	Labelling	Telling

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Unhelpful interactions, even when trying to be helpful

- Adding stress
- Creates loneliness
- Failing to meet their needs
- Unwittingly responding in punishing ways, even when trying to be supportive



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- Impairs healthy independence
- Inhibits resilience
- Disrupts emotion regulation
- Contributes to anxiety
- Contributes to emotional exhaustion
- Can lead to aggressive behaviour
- Increases risk of substance abuse and risky behaviours



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Conditional Regard

- I'm only lovable when...
- Guilt-driven compliance
- Avoidance

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Unsolicited Support


- Swooping in can:
 - Undermine the equity in the relationship
 - Create a sense of obligation
 - Independence and self-esteem threatened
 - Feel invalidating
 - Seem unsympathetic
 - Shut down communication

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Reassure or Co-compulse



Reassure everything is going to be fine!



Answer the same anxiety-driven question (e.g., "Am I safe?", "Is this okay?") more than once.

Creates dependency. Makes it a big deal. Feeds the anxiety loop.

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Saying "Don't worry" doesn't work

- Minimizing
- No skills developed
- Creates dependency
- Get stuck in constant need for reassurance
- Act as enablers

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Our best intentions to make them feel better often works against us


- We minimize or negate their feelings
- We excuse away their feelings
- Kids may believe we don't want to hear how they feel
- We might send the message we know best
- The benefit from our hindsight is lost
- We disrupt our connection with kids when we share advice or opinions

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Misapplying Strategies




BREATHING



RELAXATION



CHANGING THOUGHTS



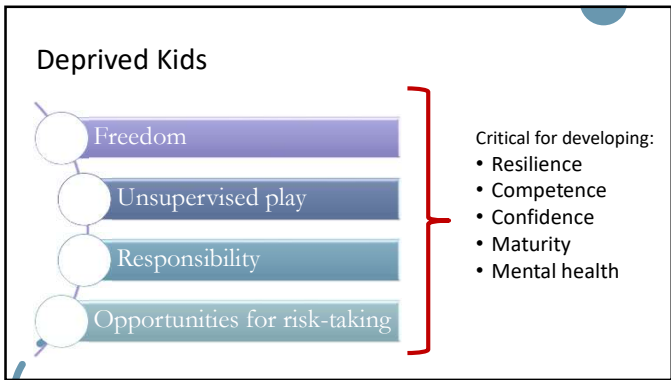
GETTING STUCK ON CONTENT

Need to teach the amygdala: I don't need to do ANYTHING.
 • Otherwise, teach it something MUST be wrong, so you SHOULD be hypervigilant.

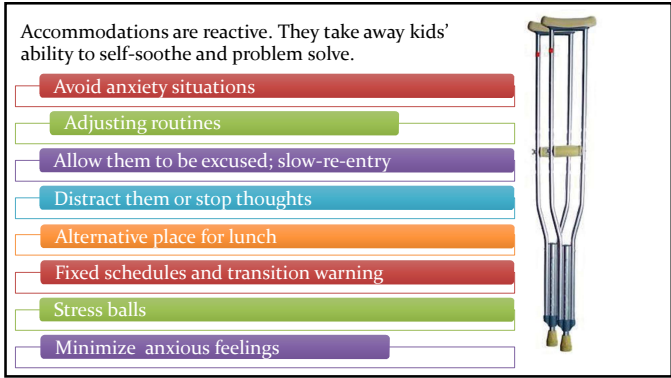
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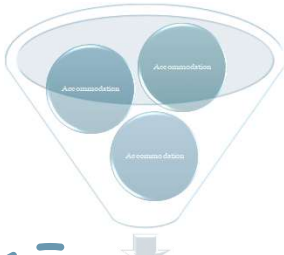


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Accommodations worsens anxiety & emotional dysregulation long-term



More impairing and severe with poorer treatment outcomes

- Fail to learn anxiety tolerance
- Fail to develop coping skills (and autonomy and self-efficacy)
- Prevents corrective learning and habituation
- Reinforce maladaptive beliefs
- Reliance on reassurance reinforces an overestimation of threats and undermines confidence
- Increased risk for other problems
- Decreased academic confidence and success
- Increased dependency
- Reinforced negative reinforcement cycle

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Accommodation behaviours

Anything YOU do to make them feel better



- Participation**
 - Assist in checking behaviours
 - Assist in avoidance
 - Reassure
 - Making things predictable
- Modification**
 - Prevent distressing situations

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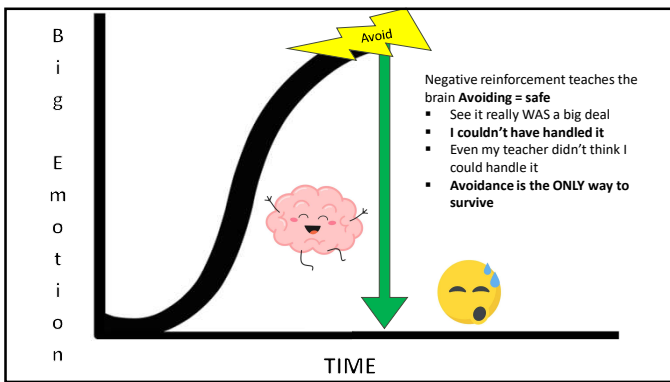
Anxiety...

- Wants certainty
- Wants predictability
- Wants comfort

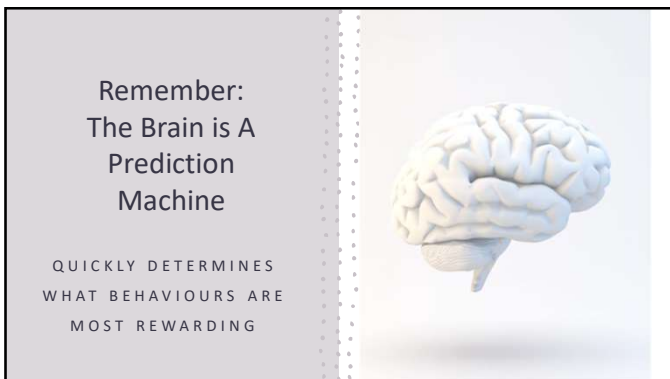
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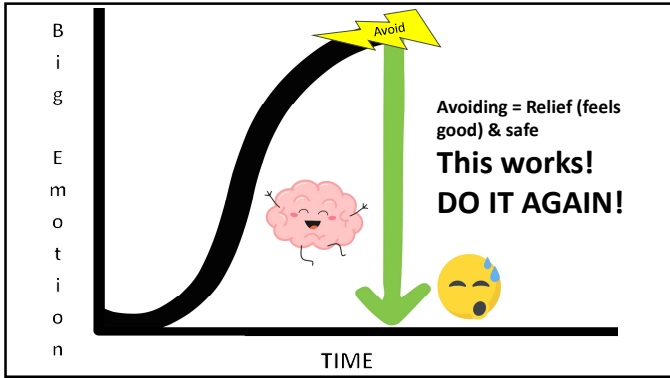
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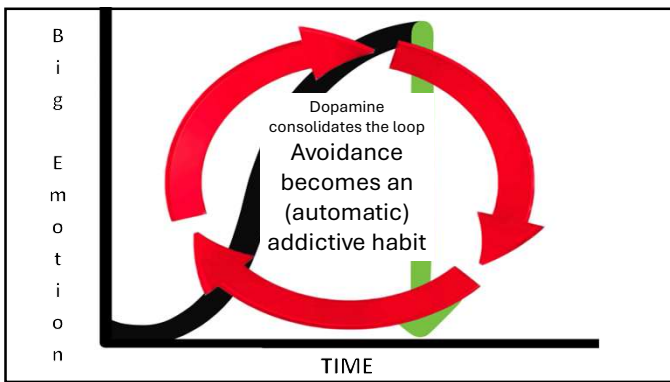
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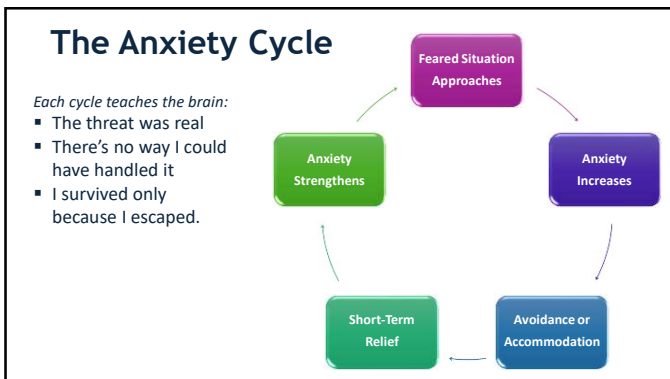
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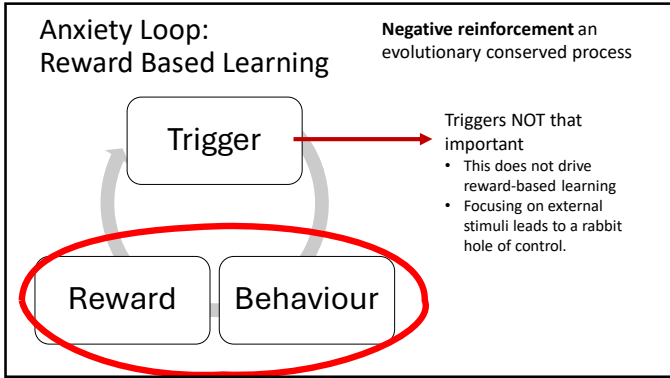
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Anxiety is a System Problem

When adults reorganize around preventing distress instead of building tolerance


- 1 Student Independence Erodes**
Self-efficacy shrinks as reliance on adults grows
- 2 Avoidance Expands**
School refusal, perfectionism, shutdown behaviours increase
- 3 Staff Burnout**
Constant "managing" of anxiety depletes energy
- 4 Missed Learning**
No opportunities for exposure, mastery, or resilience-building

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Your Big But...

		
<p>Hard to tolerate seeing them in distress, leading to our own avoidance</p>	<p>What if's</p>	<p>Other but's</p>
		<p>...they'll have a meltdown ...I don't have time ...they're not ready ...the other students need me ...they'll get hurt ...parents will complain</p>

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What are you doing for students they can do themselves?

Harming kids when we do

- Changes brain development & ingrains emotional challenges
- Makes them MORE vulnerable: Stunts confidence, growth, & resilience
 - No opportunities to experience manageable amounts of stress
 - No chance to learn "I can handle hard things"

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Great changes when ADULTS learn new skills & change their behaviours

Strategies Helpful for Addressing ANY Emotional &/or Behavioural Concerns

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Stop Avoidance!


- It is a core maintaining factor of anxiety
 - Short-term relief that reinforces maladaptive coping/avoidance
- Increases distress, and disability
- Generalizes to other areas
- It impairs kids' functioning and robs them of important developmental opportunities

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Shifting Goals

~~Instead of eliminating student distress (calm),~~
we want to

**INCREASE DISTRESS TOLERANCE
AND FUNCTIONING (BRAVERY)**




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<p>What is our job?</p>	<p>NOT To</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix • Solve • Reassure • Make them feel better • Be their therapist & treat anxiety 	<p>To</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them be the bravest versions of themselves • Build their capability • Remove obstacles to their own growth
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Homework!

- **Map the Accommodations**
 - List things you *do* (e.g., checking homework five times) or *don't do* (e.g., not making them line up with peers) because of anxiety.
 - Choose *one* specific accommodation to reduce.
 - Do not try to change everything at once.
 - Let them know the plan *before* the trigger occurs, during a calm moment.



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The Accommodation Trap

When our instinct to protect backfires

What We Often Do

- X Let students skip tasks
- X Provide excessive reassurance
- X Allow escape situations
- X Adjust schedules
- X Give pre-warnings for everything

What The Brain Learns

- "I can't handle this"
- "Avoidance = safety"
- "Distress is intolerable"
- "I need rescue"
- "My fears are justified"

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Accommodation Audit Checklist

Use during IEP/IPP reviews to ensure supports promote growth

- Are there "opt-out" accommodations for anxiety-triggering tasks?
- Is reassurance or adult presence required during tasks?
- Are specific skills being addressed?
- Are there targets to address the physiological discomfort?
- Are emotion regulation or exposure goals clearly defined?
- Are accommodations reviewed for long-term development vs. immediate relief?
- Is the student participating in planning their coping strategies?
- Is there a transition plan to the next step?

Key Question: What skills are being developed, not just what distress is being prevented?

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Supporting Students Through Setbacks

When Things Get Hard

- ✓ Back Up, Not Back Down
 - Adjust the goal mid-exposure if needed based on YOUR terms
- ✓ Focus on effort and partial successes, not perfect outcomes
- ✓ Expect an "extinction burst"
 - Behaviours may increase before improving
- ✓ View unsuccessful attempts as information, not failure
- ✓ Always model confidence & calm
 - Your nervous system affects theirs

Sample Language

- I know this feels really hard right now. You've got this.
- Every second counts, especially 2 minutes! That took courage.
- What's one thing you learned from that?
- Your brain is building new pathways right now.
- I'll be here when you're ready.

Distress is not dangerous. They need to learn they can tolerate difficult feelings.

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Partnering with Parents & Caregivers

Frame as Coaching, Not Blame

"Anxiety is no one's fault. We're all learning to respond in ways that build independence."

Explain the "Why" Behind Change

Help parents understand how their protective instincts may accidentally strengthen anxiety patterns.

Unified Approach

Both school and home need to use consistent language and resist accommodating in the same ways.

Small Wins First

Start by reducing one easy accommodation together before tackling harder ones.

We're all on the same team - helping [student] build the confidence to handle hard things.

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Supporting Without Accommodating

Helpful

- Sit nearby while they do the hard thing
- Acknowledge their courage
- Celebrate small wins
- Problem-solve AFTER they've tried
- Validate their feelings

Unhelpful

- Do it for them
- Remove the discomfort
- Provide guarantees
- Answer reassurance-seeking questions
- Make the anxiety go away

Support moves them toward capability.
Accommodation keeps them stuck.

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Distinction!

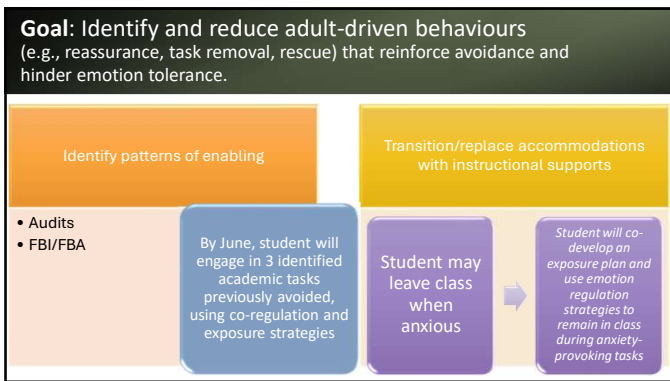
NOT About

- Tough love
- Being harsh or uncaring
- Forcing students beyond their capacity
- Ignoring mental health needs
- Removing legitimate accommodations

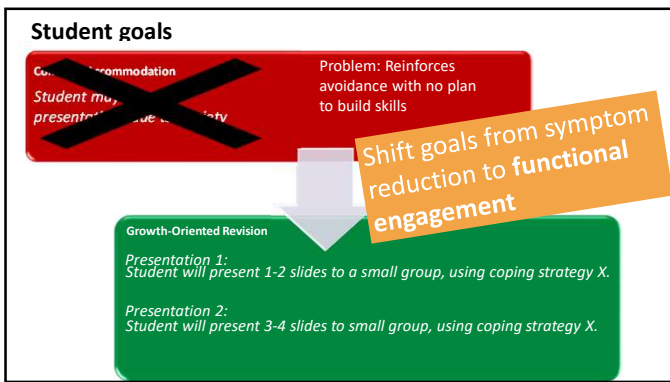
This IS About

- Stopping patterns that strengthen anxiety
- Building capability alongside support
- Knowing when you're helping vs. hindering

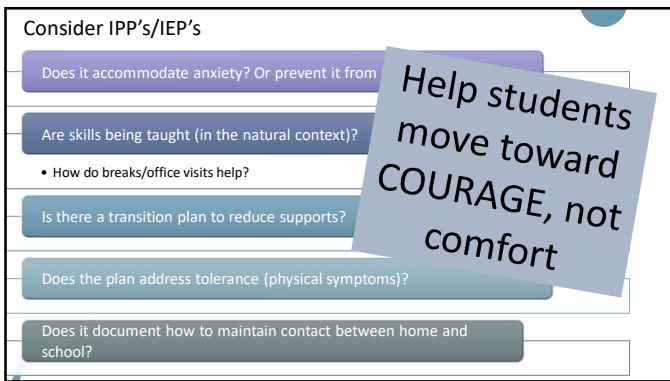
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The Loving No is NOT Punishment
(or forcing them to suffer or into situations alone)

It is

- Refusing to participate in avoidance
- Maintaining relationship while withdrawing accommodation
- Communicating belief in their capability
- Teaching their brain they can handle discomfort
- Strengthening their self-regulating brain

You're present. You're connected.
 You're just not doing the thing that maintains their anxiety.

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Stop Safety Behaviours

- Subtle avoidance & habits that maintain & worsens anxiety**
- No learning happens**
 - Believe they can't cope on their own
 - They believe they prevented catastrophe through their safety behaviour
- Still trying to control anxiety**
 - Never confront fears
 - Don't experience and learn to tolerate anxiety
 - Effortful and exhausting (which causes more anxiety and dysregulation)

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Subtle Avoidance Patterns

<p>Avoidance Disguised as Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Doing only part of the task <input type="checkbox"/> Bringing a "safe" person/object <input type="checkbox"/> Sitting near exit <input type="checkbox"/> Skipping the hardest part 	<p>Checking & Controlling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Rehearsing before speaking <input type="checkbox"/> Mental review of "what if" <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring body sensations
<p>Reassurance-Seeking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Asking same question repeatedly <input type="checkbox"/> Looking for approval cues <input type="checkbox"/> Needing constant encouragement 	<p>Escape Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Pretending to be sick <input type="checkbox"/> Zoning out or shutting down <input type="checkbox"/> Stalling (bathroom, water)

 Safety behaviours provide false security and prevent true learning that the feared situation is safe without them.

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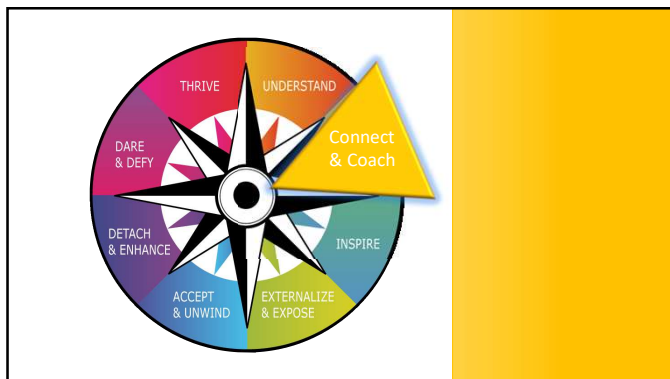
Helpful to collect data! Where are they feeding anxiety?

Where they are feeding anxiety	What you might see	Examples
Hesitating or avoiding steps	Any excessive stalling	Taking a long time to begin Asking lots of questions Reassurance seeking
Reassurance or approval seeking	Repetitive questions or emotional anchoring from adults	<i>Did I do it right?</i> <i>Are you sure this is safe?</i> <i>Nothing bad will happen, right?</i>
Refusing or negotiating	Patterns of conditional participation or constant bargaining.	<i>I'll do it, but not today</i> <i>Only if you promise...</i>


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Where they are feeding anxiety	What you might see	Examples
Using safety behaviours	Tension, subtle gestures, or having a trick that helps them cope.	Holding their breath Repeat a mental ritual/safe word Carrying a comfort object
Trying to get rid of anxiety vs. tolerating it	Hyperfixate on relief vs. task	Obsessively trying to breathe Using distraction
Downplaying exposure	Minimizing effort or creating exceptions	<i>Yeah but</i> <i>It wasn't that bad</i> <i>I didn't really do it</i>
Post-event rumination or shame	Ongoing distress or self-criticism after the exposure is completed.	<i>I looked so weird doing that</i> <i>People must think I'm gross</i> Replaying the event for flaws.

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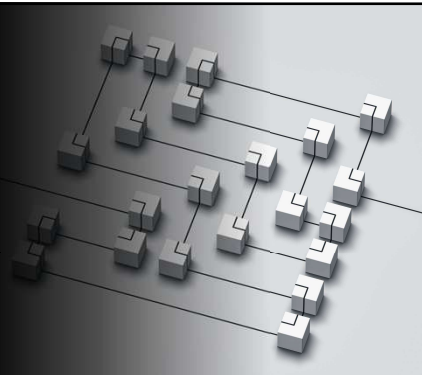
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Adult Emotion Regulation

- Avoid passing own stress on to kids!!

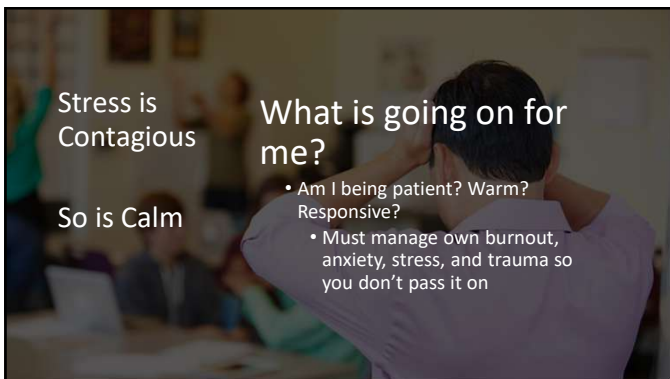
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Connection is a bottom-up process

Self-regulation is a top-down process

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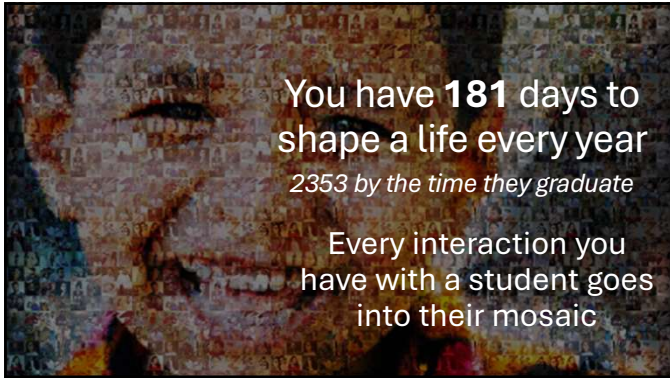
Stress is Contagious

So is Calm

What is going on for me?

- Am I being patient? Warm? Responsive?
- Must manage own burnout, anxiety, stress, and trauma so you don't pass it on

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Greet Students Every Day!
 Start each day with a "welcome ritual"
 A positive start to class greatly improves engagement and behaviours

A positive start greatly improves engagement and behaviour

We have less than 6 minutes:
 Kids need to feel liked and respected

- **Every** interaction matters:
 - How do you greet them?
 - How do you respond when they struggle?
 - What's your face telling them?
- What can you DO to strengthen your relationship with your students every day?

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RELATIONSHIP AS RITUAL

Small, repeatable, every day

Connection is a pattern. Anxious kids scan for threat; the antidote is predictable, low-cost, high-frequency signals that you see them and are glad they are here.

THE DAILY	THE WEEKLY	THE RARE-BUT-CRUCIAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Greet every student by name at the door ● One short positive interaction per student, per day ● Eye contact, a nod, a "glad you're here" <i>The content matters less than the reliability</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One individual check-in with each student over the course of the week ● Surface something specific: a skill, a contribution, a change you noticed ● End the week with a shared class acknowledgement, reflection, or ritual close 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Repair after rupture ● Name the moment, take accountability, reaffirm the relationship

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Board Members

Name	School issues	Friend issues	Parent issues	Sibling issues	Getting in trouble	Emotional	Health
Mr. Frank	X						
Dr. Simms						X	X
Susan	X	X	X				
Mom				X	X	X	
Jeff			X	X	X	X	X
Brendan		X					X
Marie			X	X	X	X	X


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Do you see behaviours as a lagging skill (ESR*) AND unintentional?

Can't connect if you view the student as intentionally difficult.

*Emotional Self-Regulation

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Reframe Behaviours!

Big emotions contributes to internalizing AND externalizing behaviours

- Students who appear oppositional
- Students who seem defiant
- Students who seek constant reassurance
- Students who need to go to the bathroom frequently

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Behaviours adaptive for them

They learned to be tough

- To get love, a need met, or support ... because they don't know how to get it any other way
- To protect themselves from *perceived* lack of safety

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JUDGE VS. SCIENTIST

Be the SCIENTIST (otherwise, every other strategy is going to fail)


<p>THE JUDGE</p> <p><i>What is wrong with this kid?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour is a problem to eliminate • Certainty arrives fast, case closed • Consequences first, curiosity later • Student becomes the diagnosis <p><i>Closes the door on learning.</i></p>	<p>THE SCIENTIST</p> <p><i>What is this behaviour telling me?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour is data, not identity • Curiosity is the default response • Hypothesis, observe, test, revise • Student is a collaborator in the puzzle <p><i>Opens the door to connection & skill building.</i></p>
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Tending to ourselves

- Self-care brings wholeness – we can trust and feel connection and fulfillment to our kids.
- Can only connect and support kids as much as we can connect and support ourselves.
- Better able to demonstrate patience, understanding, and empathy unconditionally.
- Appreciation for our own humanity = appreciation of theirs.

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What did you value as a student?

- What are things adults did that you valued and appreciated?
- What do you wish they did differently?
- What did they do/not do that influence how you interact with students today?
- What things did they do/not do that influence what kind of person you want to be with students today?

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Reflect on own Incentives



- What brought you into this role?
- What kind of ____ do you want to be?
- What motivates you?
- How do you want to feel at the end of the day?
- How do you want kids to remember you?

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Align with Values: From Ideas to Reality

- List concrete, observable behaviours you can do that align with your top three values?
 - Reducing corrective feedback
 - Identifying child's strengths and positive behaviours more frequently
 - Listening actively more often
 - Engaging in collaborative problem solving whenever a conflict arises
 - Showing more love
 - Engaging in more acts of kindness

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Create safe, nurturing relationships in the classroom!

- Sense of control
- Sense of belonging
 - Lunch buddies
 - Any cue of similarity
 - Coloured shirts or wristbands, birthdays, class shirts, team jerseys
 - Webs of connections, peer mentoring



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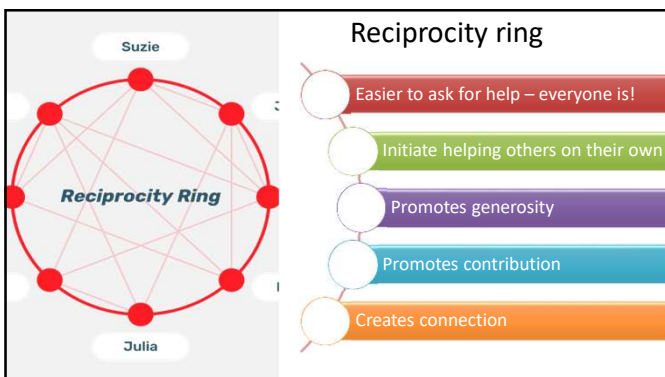
Safe, nurturing relationships...

- Sense of contribution
 - Collaborative tests.
 - Brainstorm ideas in small groups how to support peers/other classes
 - Acknowledge peer and teacher birthdays
 - Evaluate programs and activities
 - Written surveys and focus groups
 - Brainstorm ideas for improvement



92

Reciprocity ring



93

- Prevent seepage!
 - Where an unprocessed emotion from one environment is projected or taken out on people in the next.
- Take a meta-moment
 - *How do I want to be seen, talked about, and experienced in this next room?*
 - *What do I need to do to make that happen?*
 - Visualize your best self and arrive as you want to be experienced.

94

Be a good Role Model: No one is immune

Display vulnerability & cope out loud

- Empowering
- Promotes bravery, confidence, & resilience

95

Modelling Resilience

Show kids how to handle mistakes and challenges.	Make comments like, <i>"I am worried about this but this is what I am going to do..."</i>	Use reflective problem-solving aloud: <i>"This didn't go as planned—let's figure it out."</i>	Label emotions AND model how you manage them

96


Modelling Resilience

- Name the state.** Granular. One sentence. *"I'm feeling frustrated because... I said something unkind to someone and I didn't mean to."*
- Say what you value.** The reason. *"That frustration shows how much I care about showing kindness to people."*
- Say what you'll do.** An action. *"I'm going to take a walk around the block and think about what to do next."*
- Close the loop.** Take the action. Return.

97

Be a Catalyst

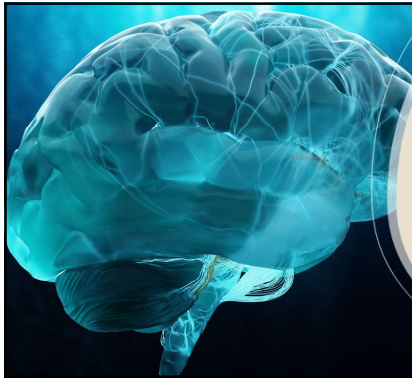
- Support without taking over
- Get them going, build momentum, and then step away

Co-Regulation 
 Regulating for them/Making them feel better

98

Bravery Coach

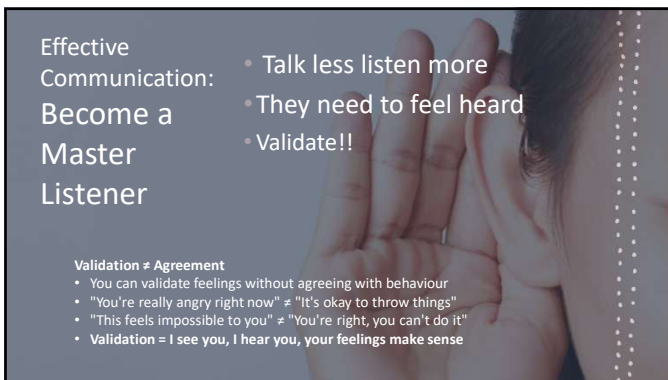
99



Understanding Perspectives

- Adults use different parts of the brain
 - We all perceive things differently
 - Students experience situations differently than you
- Must understand THEIR viewpoint to provide effective support
 - Can't help if responding to YOUR interpretation

100



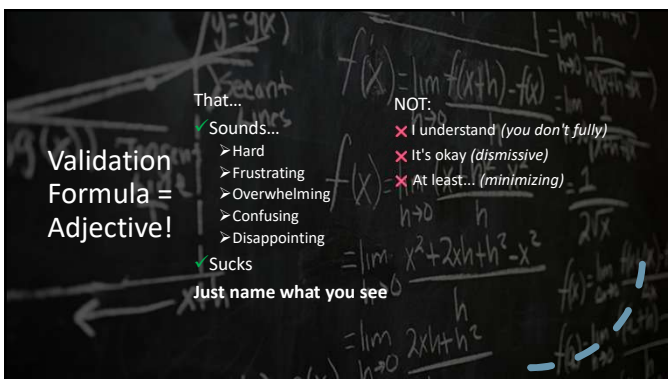
Effective Communication: Become a Master Listener

- Talk less listen more
- They need to feel heard
- Validate!!

Validation ≠ Agreement

- You can validate feelings without agreeing with behaviour
- "You're really angry right now" ≠ "It's okay to throw things"
- "This feels impossible to you" ≠ "You're right, you can't do it"
- Validation = I see you, I hear you, your feelings make sense

101



Validation Formula = Adjective!

That...

- ✓ Sounds...
 - Hard
 - Frustrating
 - Overwhelming
 - Confusing
 - Disappointing
 - ✓ Sucks

Just name what you see

NOT:

- ✗ I understand (you don't fully)
- ✗ It's okay (dismissive)
- ✗ At least... (minimizing)

102

Emotion coach

Coaches validate & then ask open-ended questions.

- What do you need?
- What do you need to do next?
- What are you going to do?
- How are you going to figure that out?



103

Power of Open-Ended Questions (vs. Directives)

Helps kids feel understood and engaged.

Fill their need for autonomy
• Boosts confidence, motivation, and resilience.

Strengthens trust and connection

Helps kids develop key skills
• Problem-solving, self-awareness, self-advocacy, and self-trust

Promotes independence

Creates cooperation vs. power struggles

Nurtures resilience & distress tolerance

104

Big emotions disrupt connection
• Their self-regulating brain is offline
No learning happening
No reasoning possible
They need TIME to process

Your job: Be the calm, create the space

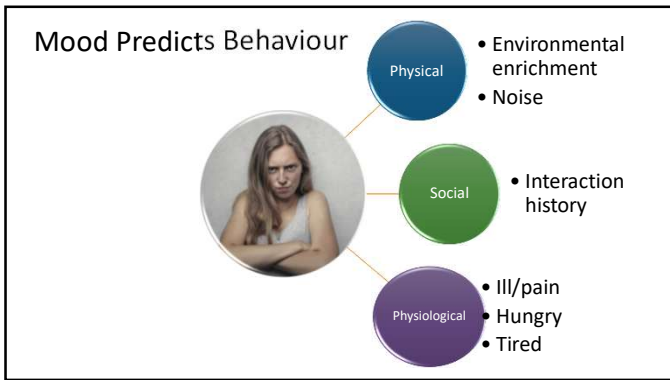
For both:
SIT WITH IT without doing anything!!!



105



106



107

Sometimes we need to focus on upregulating certain emotions
(instead of trying down-regulate all the time)

108

Our confidence in them is one of the most important factors to success

Effective Response

109

Foster autonomy!
Kids need to figure out their own challenges: Put it back to them!


<p>VALIDATE & NORMALIZE You're worried about failing, that's tough. It makes sense your stomach feels gross.</p>	<p>EXTERNALIZE Sounds like worry is trying to get you to avoid.</p>	<p>SHOW CONFIDENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body language • Tone • Sit beside (vs. across) 	<p>PUT IT BACK ON THEM</p> <p>Open questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's the plan? • What's the first step? • How do you want to do this?
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110

Meta-Moment
Visualize your best self and choose a deliberate response.

111

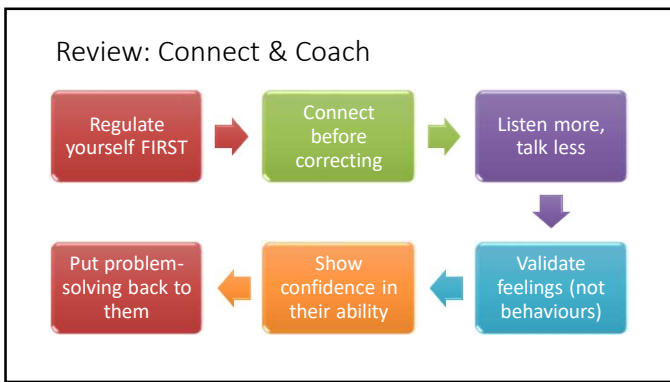
Developing Future Thinkers



Make this a proactive routine!

- Mindful Transitions
 - How am I feeling?
 - How do I want to be seen & experienced in the next activity?
 - Choose responses that align with goals & values

112



113

Emotion Regulation...

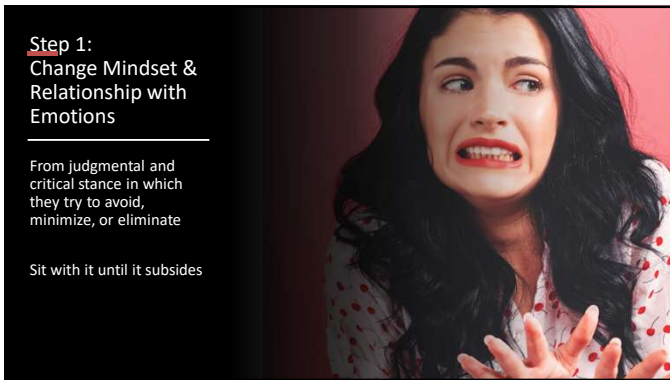
It's not about avoiding, ignoring, or suppressing emotions

It's about being aware of emotions, acknowledging them, co-existing with them, and responding in helpful ways

114



115



116

<p>Emotions Are Adaptive!</p> <p>Alert us to what's happening</p> <p>Not good or bad, just data & signals ~ needs, relationships, & your environment.</p>	<p>Anger</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alerts us to threats or injustices & protects our well-being
	<p>Fear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alerts us to danger & protects us from harm
	<p>Joy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> R+ for doing things that promote well-being and survival
	<p>Shame</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prompts self-reflection, processing, and change Maintains social harmony
	<p>Sadness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alerts us to loss or unmet needs & allows us to process Promotes personal growth and deeper social connections
	<p>Excitement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propels resilience and growth Fosters curiosity, creativity, learning, and adaptability

117



118

Emotion Mindset

Recognize emotions are data that provide signals about their needs, relationships, and environment

They believe they are highly capable of managing their emotions and dealing with life's disappointments.

119

Emotions Manifest Physically

WE MUST have physical reactions to alert us to what is happening
(Cannot change reactions without this understanding)

120

Physical Symptoms are a Problem

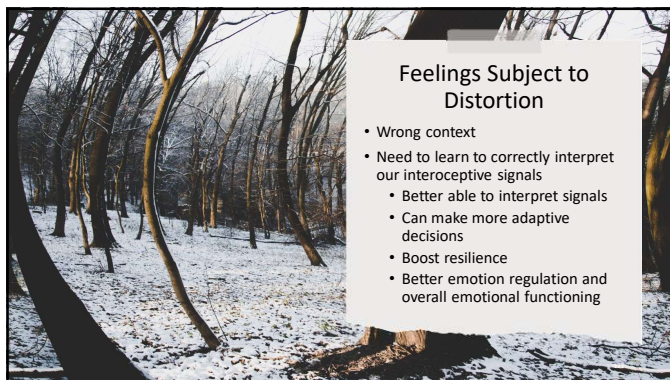
Defense response is FELT

They start to worry about the physical feelings, which are distressing, which they will do anything to stop

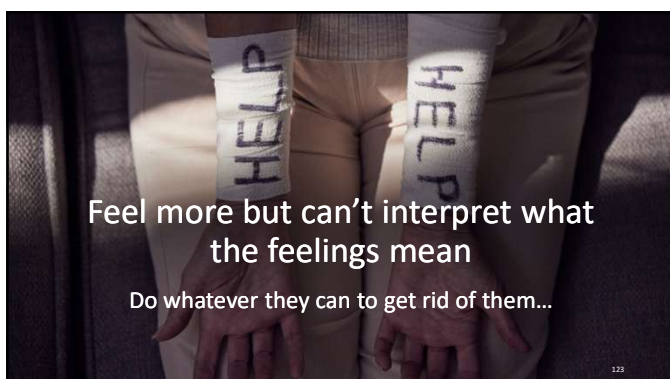
- Become reactive
- Misinterpret and leads to more sensations...



121



122



123

Remember: It's NOT about the trigger

Diluted life results from avoiding ANY discomfort.

124

The "Vitamin Shot" Study

Schachter & Singer, 1962



The physical sensations were identical but their subjective label for their experience was different. Students MUST understand that a racing heart before a presentation is the same chemistry as excitement before a concert.
➤ This understanding alone already calms the amygdala.

125

The "Vitamin Shot" Study *Schachter & Singer, 1962*

Mood NOT affected by their environment
WHEN THEY UNDERSTOOD WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THEIR BODY

126

Misattribution of Affect

Body deficit → emotional misfires

Dehydration → Anxiety

Low sleep → Irritability

Hunger → Crankiness

Depression = Body bankruptcy

drcarolinebuzanko.com

127

Check Body Budget

- Sustained focus
- Transitions independently
- Communicates needs
- Some distractibility
- Prompt to follow rules
- Transitions with support
- Mild irritability
- Reduced participation
- Easily distracted
- Appears tired
- Refuse to start tasks
- Emotionally reactive
- Withdraws
- Expresses defeat
- Aggression
- Running away
- Crying, yelling
- Refuses all instructions

- Instead of calming or safe place have a battery charging space
 - Kids get this, there's always a charging station
- See video in bonus materials – feel free to download and share!

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128

Core skill 2:
Mindful Awareness of Emotion:
What it feels like in the body!

129

Our body is ALWAYS going to respond based on its best guess

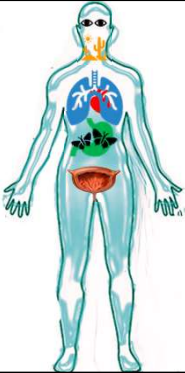


Sensitive amygdala sets of alarms whether there is any or not

- Tells body to fight, run, or freeze

130

When big emotions show up,
IT'S NORMAL



131

Understand how emotions shows up = Adaptive thinking

The mystery is gone



Of course, I feel uncomfortable!
I know what my body is doing.
I can handle this.

Now they can respond in helpful ways!

BONUS: Expecting physical sensations helps reduce signals to amygdala

132

Self-Coach

I understand what my body is doing

I can handle what my body does

I can handle discomfort

I know I can breathe to make my brain and body calm down

Expecting physical sensations helps reduce signals to amygdala

133

Now we can respond in helpful ways!

Validate the suckiness!

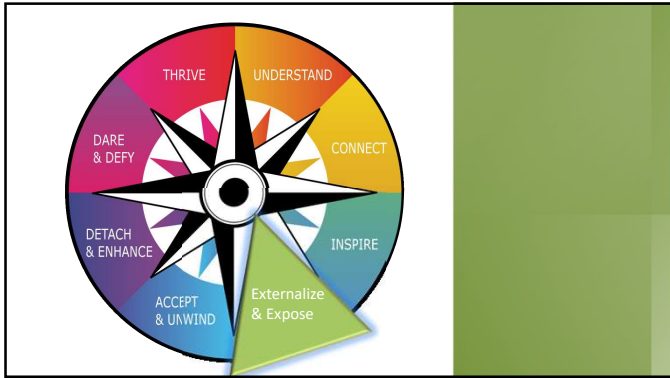
That makes sense!
No wonder - your adrenal glands have sent out all that yucky stuff.

134

Core skill 3:
Awareness &
Accurate Labelling!

It is what you do with your emotions that makes them helpful or harmful. BUT, You cannot regulate an emotion you don't recognize!

135



136

Anxiety likes to Overwhelm & Keep us Stuck

Externalize

You are not your worry
(Or other big emotions)

137

137

Saying it out loud gives us
more power

- ✓ To create distance from it
- ✓ To expose it
- ✓ To take control of their self-regulating brain
- ✓ To use helpful coping strategies

138

138

Visualization
makes it concrete

- ✓ Minimizes anxious noise
- ✓ Tames the worry

Draw it out!

139

Henchman Examples

Catastrophizing Carl	Mindreading Mandy	Humiliating Hannah	Perfectionist Paula	Overestimating Oscar
Rigid Richard	Avoiding Alison	Permanent Pete	Fortune Telling Fran	Scarcity Sam
All-or-nothing Al	Grumpy McGrumperson	Self-critical Carla	Mindreading Mandy	Negative Ned

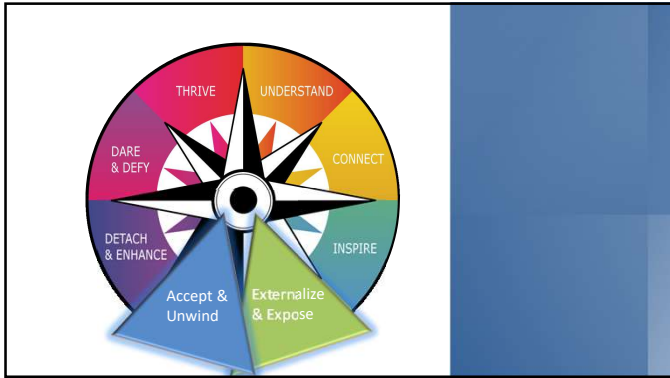
140

Externalize
They are not their behaviours

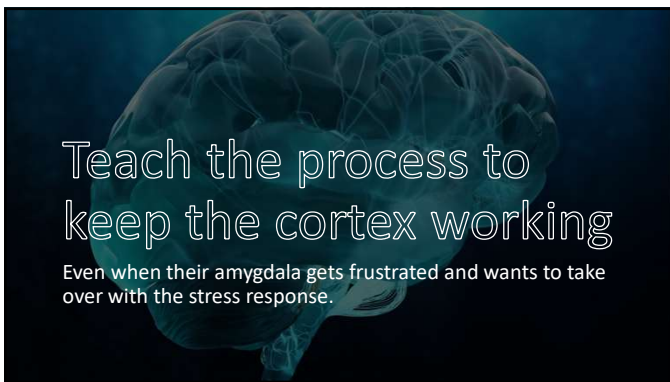
Practice practice practice – make it so automatic they don't have to think about it

- Mean Jean
- Explosive Bob
- Worry Wanda
- Yelling McGee
- When does it show up?
- How does it show up?
- What can you do?
- What support do you need?

141



142

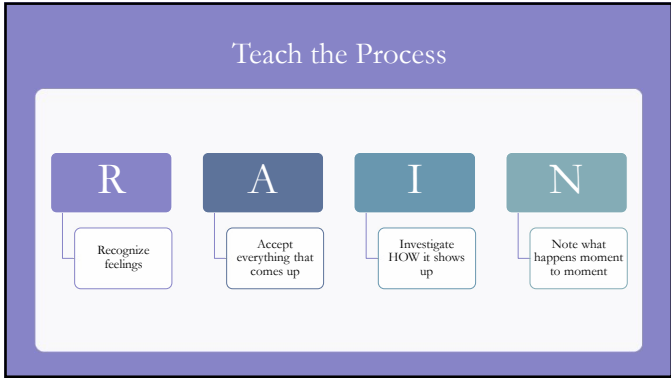


143

Curious kids feel safe & have nervous systems that self-regulates

Anxiety leaves no room for curiosity.

144



145

Recognize

- Shifts in feelings
- Name it to tame it!
 - Calms nervous system
 - Builds confidence

146

Granularity Important!

- Without words → behaviours
- With granularity, Precise labels → choices
 - Calms nervous system
 - Builds confidence
 - Engages PFC
 - Foresight
 - Clear actions

Dimensionality Reduction

Results in

- Broad categories: Threat/Safe, Pleasant/Unpleasant
- Broad labels ('I feel bad')
- & vague action (Cry & run away)

Based on past experiences + context + body state

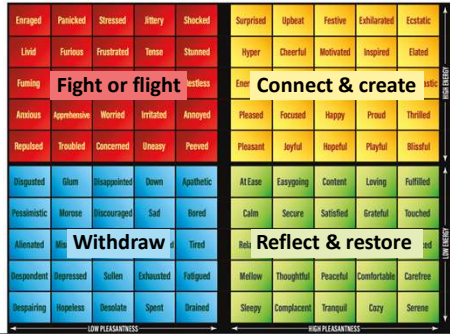
Higher granularity = better regulation

147

Mood Meter Diagnostic

We are never just “fine”

- Plot our exact coordinates to determine the specific strategy required



148

Anxiety vs. Nervousness vs. Stress vs. Pressure vs. Fear?



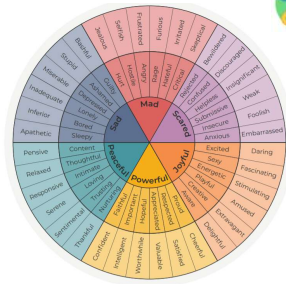
The precise label dictates the specific tool.

149

Build Emotion Vocabulary

The more specific, the better

- Nervous vs. scared
- Embarrassed vs. ashamed
- Frustrated vs. angry



150

Accept


- Mindful awareness AND acceptance of emotions must occur to respond adaptively
 - Therefore, need **LOTS of practice and experiences with UNCOMFORTABLE feelings**



151

Build Acceptance & Tolerance

- NOT resist, control, or eliminate emotions
- Focus on **ending fear of discomfort**
 - I am uncomfortable but I am going to do this anyway



152

Investigate

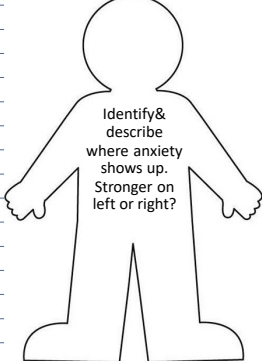
How do emotions show up?

Sounds like:
List the worried thoughts and images that come up:

Feels like:
List physical symptoms associated with worries:

Looks like:
List behaviours that result from the worries, including avoidance:

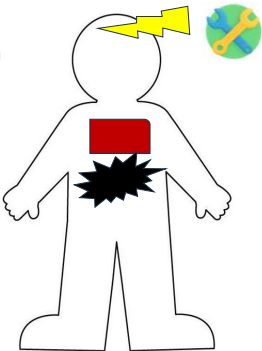
153

Dizzy	 <p>Identify & describe where anxiety shows up. Stronger on left or right?</p>	Shivers
Racing		Increased heart rate
Tension		Weak legs
Achy		ringing ears
Sore		Blurred vision
Hot		Muscle tension
Cold		Shaking
Tingly		Trembling
Numb		Chest pain
Sharp		Headaches
Breathless		Burning skin/sweating
Shivering		Blushing
Sweating		Changes in breathing
Trouble swallowing		Stomach-ache/ Nausea
Tired		Relaxed

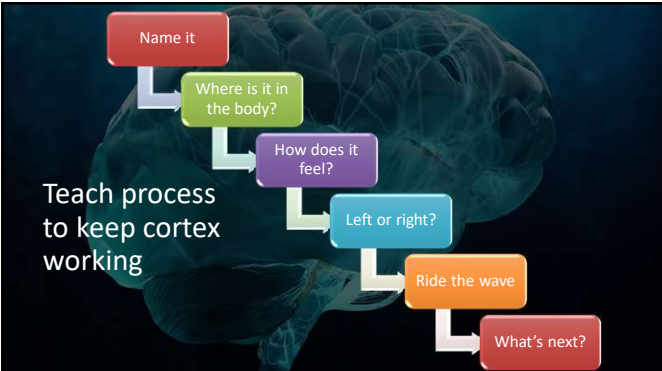
154

Quick Daily Check-Ins

- Change our interpretation of the
- Change how our body responds
- Dampen amygdala's false alarm
- Turn on prefrontal cortex
- Learn that we have control over our responses
 - *I know what this is & I know how to handle it*
- Avoid getting sucked in – it's just piece of information
- Make adaptive decisions



155



Teach process to keep cortex working

- Name it
- Where is it in the body?
- How does it feel?
- Left or right?
- Ride the wave
- What's next?

156

Emotions vs. Feelings

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Automatic ▪ Subconscious ▪ Show up physiologically ▪ Universal to all humans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conscious experience of emotion ▪ Subjective interpretations of what we're feeling. ▪ Differ from one person to the next
---	--

157



Did you know?
 Fear and excitement
 feel the same in the body?
 But how we think about it makes all
 the difference in the world...

158

<p>When does the threat response trigger?</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Threat vs. Challenge Response</h3> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Not good or bad, different purposes</i></p> <p>Threat response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survival mode • Situation we're not equipped for • More cortisol (defend/protect) <p>Challenge response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth opportunity • Manageable but hard • More adrenaline (achieve goal)
<p>When does the challenge response trigger?</p>	

159

Different hormones released to prepare for what's to come.

How does our body know?

Depends largely on our evaluation of the situation

COMES FROM EXPERIENCE!



160

Resilience

Ability to adapt well to **adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress.**



161

Amygdala Relies on Past Experiences

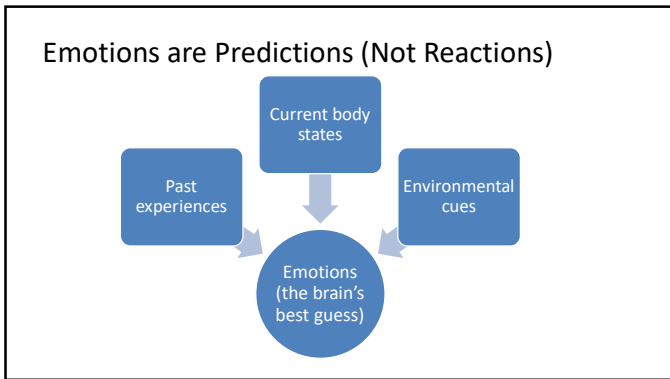
The amygdala is often mistaken

- Doesn't have all relevant information
- Always rather be safe than sorry
- Does not know what will happen

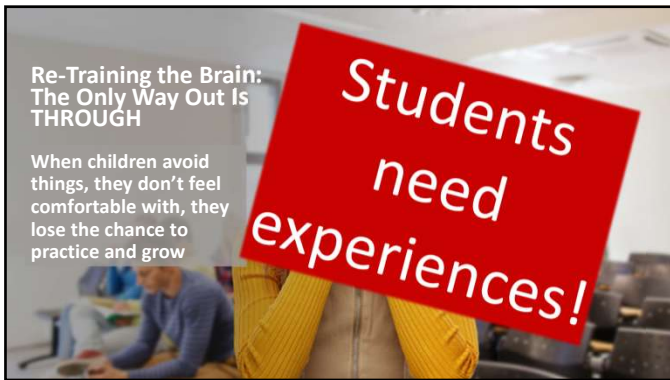
Needs to be corrected!




162



163



164



Talking & thinking does NOT retrain the amygdala

The **ONLY** way the thalamus and amygdala learn is by **EXPERIENCING**

The **ONLY** way to teach your alarm system that you're safe:

- **Face the scary thing**
- **Feel the feelings** without trying to escape or fix them.
- **Do nothing** to make the anxiety go away — just let it be there.

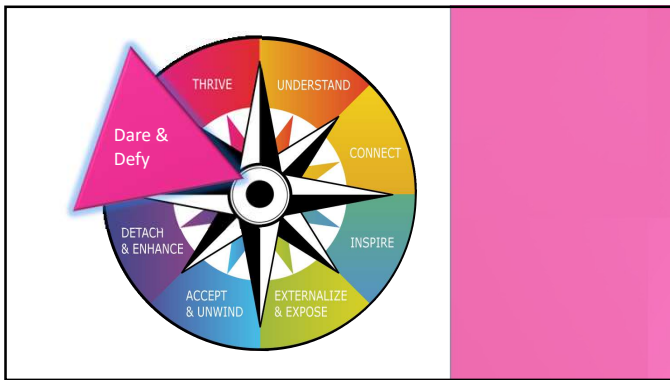
The more you practice, the more your brain learns

165

Core skill 4: Master adaptive responses!

It is what you do with your emotions that makes them helpful or harmful!

166



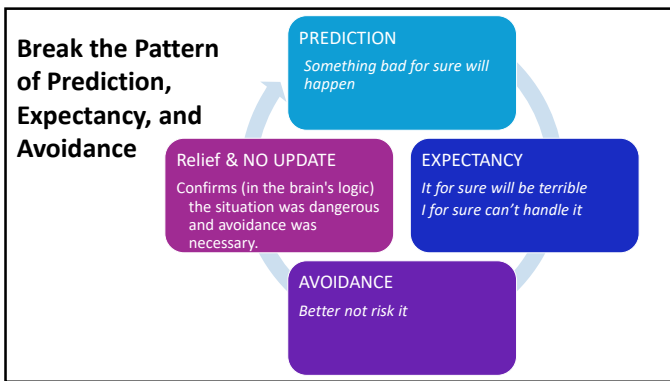
167

THE FRAMEWORK

Six moves, three layers

LAYER 1 HOW ADULTS SHOW UP <i>The interior layer — invisible but detected</i>	LAYER 2 HOW EMOTION IS TREATED <i>The visible-daily layer — the language of the room</i>	LAYER 3 HOW STRUGGLE IS HANDLED <i>The deliberate-practice layer — the culture of approach</i>
1. Adult regulation	3. Emotion is normal	5. Brave is the norm
2. Relationship as ritual	4. Mistakes are the point	6. We do hard things together

168



169

Integrate Skills through Emotion Exposure

Integrate skills to master adaptive responses

- Talking not enough to change the brain!
- Doing makes stronger memories
- Doing gives us experience
- Quicker progress
- Provoke **STRONG EMOTIONS** - MUST show up for learning to happen

170

Become so good at managing ANY emotion that comes up

Learn to *respond differently* to emotions

LOTS OF EXPERIENCE

- Anxiety
- Shame
- Guilt
- Rejection
- Disappointment
- Frustration
- Self-doubt

REINFORCE BRAVERY!

The more microsucks throughout the day, we build resilience, motivation, and tenacity

Practice practice practice – make it so they don't have to think


171

BRAVE IS THE NORM / WE DO HARD THINGS TOGETHER

The culture of approach

MOVE 5 Brave is the norm	MOVE 6 We do hard things together
<p><i>In this room, approach behaviour is so common it stops being remarkable.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brave jar / brave wall A visible, low-stakes way to note small acts of courage (yours and theirs). ● Catch and name brave Notice out loud when you see it, in the same tone you notice good thinking. ● Call on with warmth Name it for what it is: "I'm going to give you a brave question now." ● Normalize dread "You might feel nervous walking up to the board. That's your body getting ready. Let's go." 	<p><i>Struggle is a shared, named, collectively-held part of how this room works.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Name the room's identity out loud "This is a class where we try hard things." ● Hold the line with warmth "I see this is hard. I'm not going to let you skip it. I'm right here." ● Productive struggle, protected Build time for the class is visibly working through difficulty.


172



Inhibitory Learning

Provoke **STRONG EMOTIONS** - **MUST** show up for learning to happen

- Build anxiety tolerance



173

Actively cultivate skills to override automatic habitual reactions

Practice Coping with Uncertainty and UNCOMFORTABLE Feelings!

174

174

Structured opportunities to practice

- Frustration tolerance
- Roleplays

Mindful
Mood Induction

175

Meditation

Good stress tolerance practice!

Practice sitting still and resisting the urge to get up and move, they are building the mental discipline required to tolerate discomfort

176

Set up Behavioural Experiments to ensure learning!


We are going to be detectives, or scientists, and going to check out these conspiracy predictions

177

Hypothesis Testing

Lots of experiments and experiences needed!


- How awful will it be?
 - How long will the awful last?
- What do I think will happen?
 - Henchmen will say, make me feel, try to make me...
 - Other's responses/outcomes
- What will I learn?
- What do I have to look forward to?



178

Was the hypothesis right?

- How awful was it?
 - How long did the awful last?
- What did happen?
 - Henchmen wanted me to say, made me feel, tried to make me...
 - Other's responses/outcomes
- What did I learn?



179

Predict to Maximize Learning!

Antecedents (Triggers to anxiety)	Predicted Awfulness	Actual Awfulness	Later
Walking by M's desk and saying Hi	90	80	10

Predictometer says this will happen	What really happened?
I will turn bright red	Face felt warm, probably blushed
I will stare like a deer in headlights	Focused on the back desk then M
I will say something nonsensical or stupid	Said Hi
M will look at me in disgust	She smiled and said hi back
Everyone will hate me	Everyone is acting the same
I will die from embarrassment	Still breathing

180

Build a Bravery Plan with Jordan

- Jordan collaborates on creating the plan to increase buy-in.
 - Encourage him to start somewhere with a rating of 5-7.
 - Not too easy, we need the amygdala to activate! Not too hard it's so overwhelming.
 - Whatever level he chooses, everything else below it will be easy!

Brave Challenge	SUDS (0-10)
Full 3-minute presentation to the whole class	9-10
Present 3 slides to half the class (other half doing another activity)	7-8
Read one paragraph of own written work aloud to class	6-7
Answer a pre-planned question in class (Jordan knows it's coming)	5-6
Present to Mr. R + one peer after school	4-5
Contribute one idea in small group (3 students)	3-4
Ask Mr. R one question after class (private)	2-3

181

Prediction Testing

Before each exposure, Mr. R helps Jordan make specific predictions, then compare to reality afterward:

Jordan's Prediction	What Actually Happened	What Jordan Learned
"If I answer a question, I'll turn red and everyone will laugh" (90% sure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face felt warm. • No one laughed. • Two students nodded. 	"Even if I feel embarrassed, that doesn't mean anything bad actually happens."
"If I present to the small group, I'll freeze and look stupid" (80% sure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice shook a little at the start, then steadied. • Got through all points. • Partner asked a question. 	"My voice shaking isn't the same as failing. I can still communicate even when I'm nervous."

182

Our job is not to convince!
Learning happens through experience

- Learning #1:
- Test the accuracy of their predictions
 - Make their own conclusions
 - Create new expectations




183

Exposure to LEARN:

Learning #2:
**Anxiety/
 Uncomfortable
 emotions are safe,
 tolerable, & temporary**

The amygdala will learn: This is not dangerous!
(And will stop sending the false alarm.)



184


Exposure to LEARN

Learning # 3

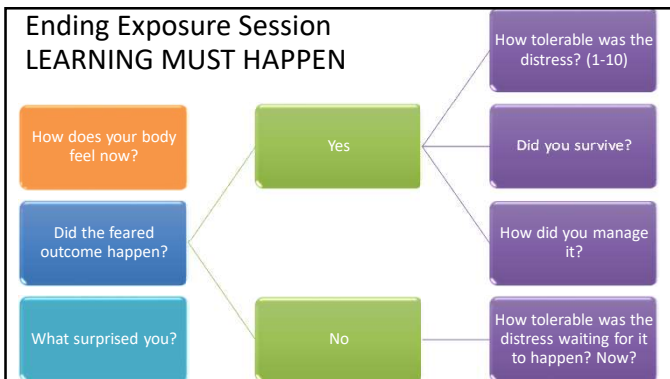
Despite feeling anxious, I **still did it**

ON MY OWN

And... I can still live life and do anything, even while feeling anxious!



185



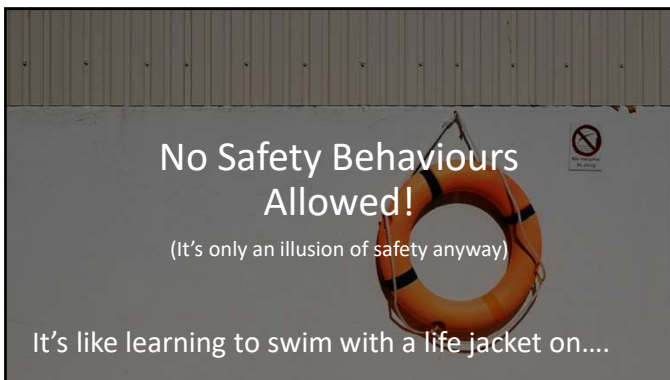
186



When something bad DOES happen

- Yay!
- What did you learn?
- Importance of keeping going

187



No Safety Behaviours Allowed!

(It's only an illusion of safety anyway)

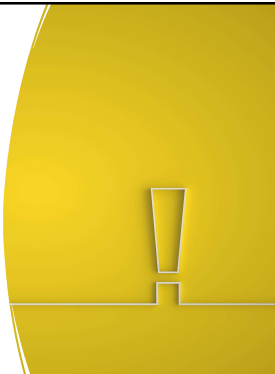
It's like learning to swim with a life jacket on....

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AVOID False Fear Blockers

Anything to make them feel better in the moment

- Taking deep breaths
- Relaxation
- Distraction



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Avoid False Fear Blockers During Experiments

✘ Calming Strategies

- Taking deep breaths
- Relaxation techniques during exposure
- Distraction from the experience
- Anything designed to make the student feel better in the moment

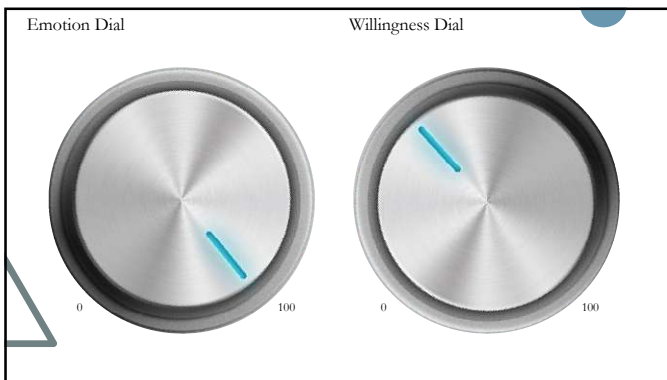
If they're comfortable, the amygdala is not learning!!!

✔ Stay Present & Tolerate

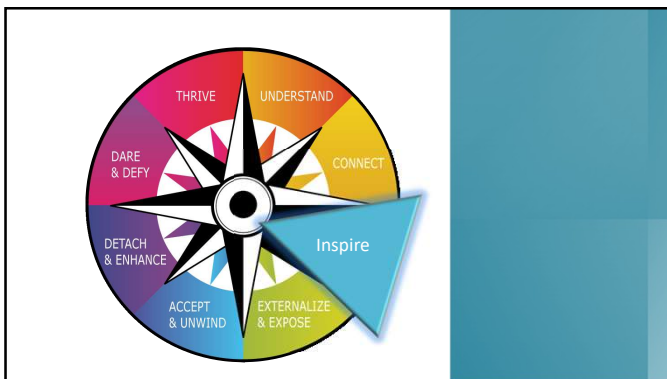
- Notice what is happening without acting
- Let the anxiety be there
- Observe that nothing needs to happen for it to pass
- The amygdala learns by FEELING the discomfort and

Discomfort IS the intervention

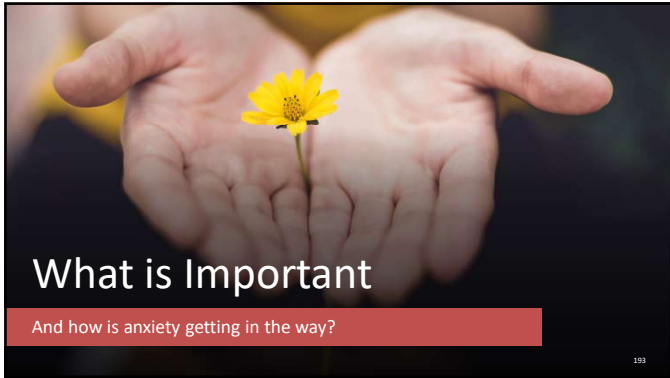
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Develop personal mantras


Fall seven times, get up eight (Japanese Proverb)

Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly (Robert Kennedy)

Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently (Benjamin Disraeli)

You miss 100% of shots you don't take.
(Wayne Gretzky)

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I am learning and strengthening my problem-solving brain

I am retraining my brain and resetting my alarm system

I can do what I want to do

It will be temporary

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Coping Cards

- I got this.
- I am worried but can do it anyway.
- I am not going to let worry get in my way.
- The outing will be so much fun – there is no way I am going to miss it!
- This worry is temporary and will pass.
- This is manageable.

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Coping Cards

What worry says:

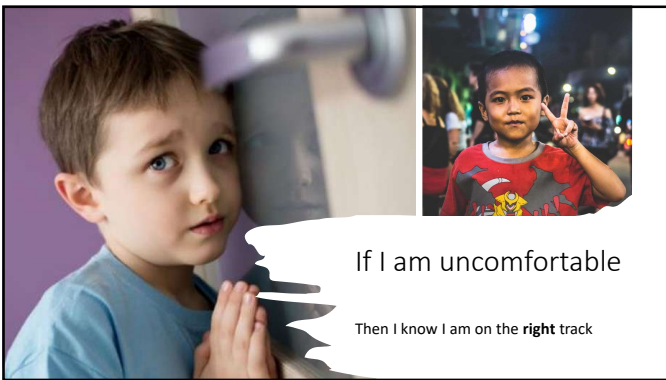
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What I am going to say back:

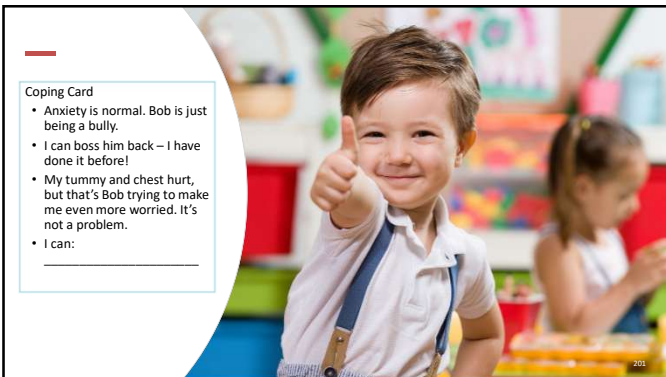
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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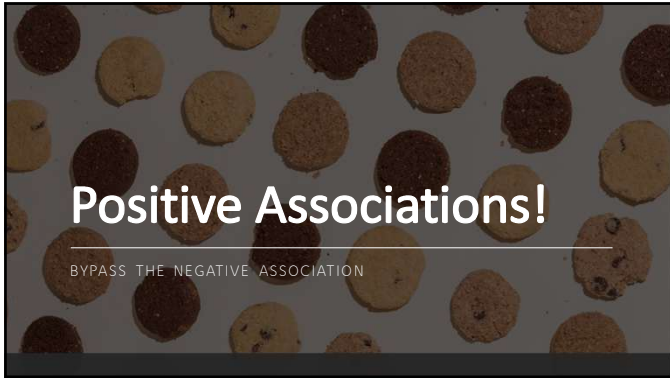
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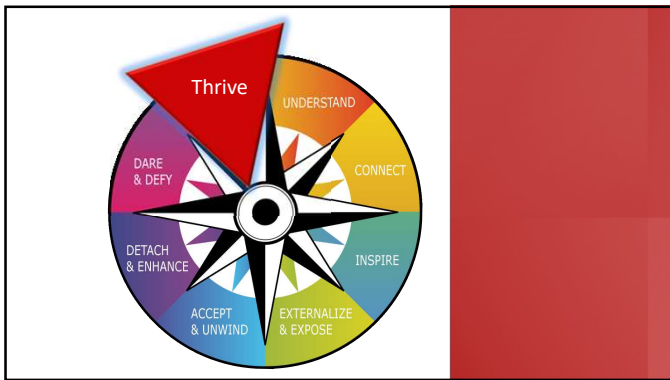
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Opportunities to Be Comfortable in the World

Promote independence!

- Give kids the chance to do, think, be, and make their own decisions and mistakes
- Encourage kids to try new things, even when scared
 - They need to know you support and trust them!



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You don't grow with easy

Experience to cope with challenges
- realize they CAN manage

CHALLENGE BOARD

- Choose tasks
- Track progress – the harder the task, the further they go!
- Journals

Partners/groups with stretch goals
- Check-in partners



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Create Many Opportunities to Focus on Emotions & Work on it Every day!

Speak in front of a small group	Make small talk with someone new	Practice losing a game to someone who cheats	Use pictures, videos, or live encounters with feared bugs
Simulate test-taking conditions with practice exams or timed quizzes.	Role-play scenarios where express their concerns or assert themselves in a safe setting.	Create situations where they can safely express anger and practice coping strategies.	Tolerating not knowing what's happening today.
Engage in activities they've been avoiding due to emotional discomfort.	Experience and tolerate physical sensations like increased heart rate through exercises.	Watch sad video	Kindie running away with the soccer ball in the middle of a game

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Missions for Self-Exposure

You're only limited by your own creativity!

Create weekly themes

- Imperfection Week
 - Make a guess when don't know
 - Focus on quantity vs. quality in a timed task
 - Fast decision making
 - Leave a mistake
- Social Courage Week
 - Ask someone for the time
 - Ask to join a game
 - Compliment someone
- Uncertainty Week
 - Try something new
 - Change routine
 - Do something a different way



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Courage Stations

Station Examples

Public Voice

Social Spark

Share & Tell

Uncertain Question

Silent Spotlight

Raise It Up

Simulation Scenario

Read a short poem or fact aloud to your group.

Start a conversation with a peer using a provided prompt (e.g., "What's your favourite snack?").

Show your drawing or story to the group and describe it.

Try answering a tough riddle without knowing the right answer.

Stand silently in front of the group for 10 seconds while they give silent applause.

Practice raising your hand and sharing an idea during a mock class discussion.

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Willingness Action Plan



Goal:



Big why:



The steps I need to take are:

I will take the first step on [date] at [time]



The discomfort I am willing to have to achieve this goal:

Thoughts
Feelings
Sensations
Urges
I can remind myself that:

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Gamification Strategies: Missions, Badges, and Quest Boards

Missions for Engagement

Missions provide structured goals that encourage users to remain engaged and focused on resilience-building tasks.

Tier 2: Social approach -15 min Available

The ordinary ask
A real-world experiment in being a little brave

THE CHALLENGE
Make one small, unrehearsed request in public today — ask for directions, ask a barista a question, ask someone for the time.

THE BRAVE MOVE
Don't over-prepare. Let the awkwardness be part of the mission.

YOUR PREDICTION
What do you think will happen? What are you afraid of?

They'll think the question is stupid. I'll go red. It'll be awkward for ten seconds.

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Gamification Strategies: Missions, Badges, and Quest Boards

Badges as Rewards

Badges serve as visual rewards that motivate persistence and recognize achievements in gamified activities.

COURAGE BADGE
Everyday courage
Approach behaviour is a muscle.

Apprentice Journeyman Master

Earned 23 April 2026
For The ordinary ask
Unlocks Social connection board

Progress to next tier
1 of 3 qualifying actions

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Gamification Strategies: Missions, Badges, and Quest Boards

Quest Boards for Structure

Quest boards organize tasks and challenges, providing clarity and enhancing user motivation.

Your collection Started 14 weeks ago 11 22 earned 10/21

All 33 Courage: 3 Wisdom: 4 Stamina: 2 Heart: 2

COURAGE 3 of 5

- Find a dog
- Everyday courage
- Good enough
- 1 (locked)
- 2 (locked)

WISDOM 4 of 5

- Wordsmith
- Skillshare
- Pattern speaker
- Myth busting
- 1 (locked)

STAMINA 2 of 5 **HEART** 2 of 5

- Star
- Heart
- 1 (locked)
- 1 (locked)
- 1 (locked)

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Use Real Challenges!

Challenges are part of life. Dealing with them is part of learning.

Use teachable moments

- ✓ Solve their own problems
- ✓ Figure things out on their own
- ✓ Take accountability
- ✓ See the consequences
- ✓ Work through next how to fix things
- ✓ Let them fail (don't set them up to fail though)
- ✓ Assert their own needs



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Integrate Problem-Solving and Flexibility into Daily Routines



Embed Skills in Daily Activities

Incorporate problem-solving and flexibility into daily routines

- Strengthens consistent skill practice
- Builds resilience.
- Generalize resilience strategies

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Opportunities for resilience: Making their own decisions

Powerful Identities

- Learn who we are based on what others tell and value about ourselves: Co-creation
- See themselves as powerful and respected
- Kids feel they have something to offer the world
- Create opportunities for kids to know themselves in better ways
- Space to express strengths and demonstrate them to others

Experiences of power and control

- Kids can make decisions in their own lives
- Opportunities to make decisions for themselves
- Decisions that matter!

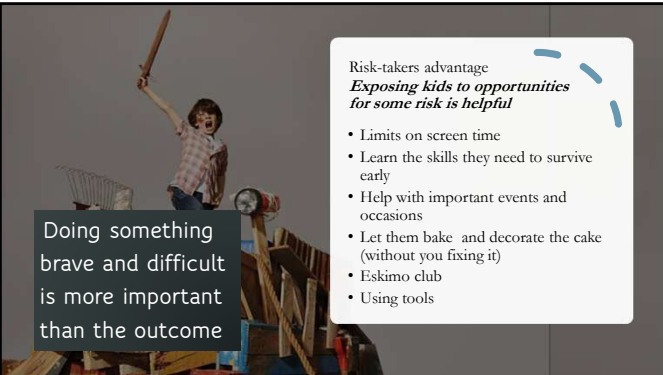
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Opportunities for Independence

- Give more responsibility
 - Get ready to go home on their own
 - Check their homework
 - Solve own conflicts
 - Make their own friends
 - Fix own mistakes
 - Solve problems
- Assert their needs (set up opportunities)
- Co-create IPP goals

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Doing something brave and difficult is more important than the outcome

Risk-takers advantage
Exposing kids to opportunities for some risk is helpful

- Limits on screen time
- Learn the skills they need to survive early
- Help with important events and occasions
- Let them bake and decorate the cake (without you fixing it)
- Eskimo club
- Using tools

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NEED TO KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THE UNEXPECTED

Skills: tolerate uncertainty and think about different options themselves

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Tolerating Uncertainty

- Life is full of uncertainty: we can never know what is going to happen from one moment to the next
 - Brain will do whatever it can to avoid uncertainty
- Build tolerance by going into the unknown!

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Unexpected event/mistake of the day & how you handled it

SKILLS: TOLERATE UNCERTAINTY AND THINK ABOUT DIFFERENT OPTIONS THEMSELVES

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<p>I don't know! <i>(We can't know, so avoid reassurance.)</i></p> <p>Let's figure that out.</p>	<p>What do you think?</p> <p>What could you do?</p>
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What I know	What I don't know
• We are going to the zoo	• if i have to go to the bathroom
• We are going by bus	• Where the bathrooms are
• We are leaving at 9:10	• Who will be in my group
• We will get back at 2:55	• if i will get lost
	• where to go if i get lost
	• What parent will be in our group
	• if we will see the gorillas
	• if i will fall down and get hurt
	• if i have an allergic reaction

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Memory Bridges



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Create new ingrained habits



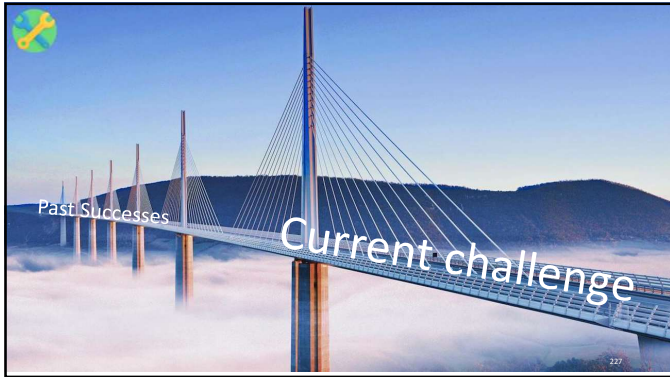
Even the most skilled of us revert to old ingrained habits when the situation is new and/or overwhelming

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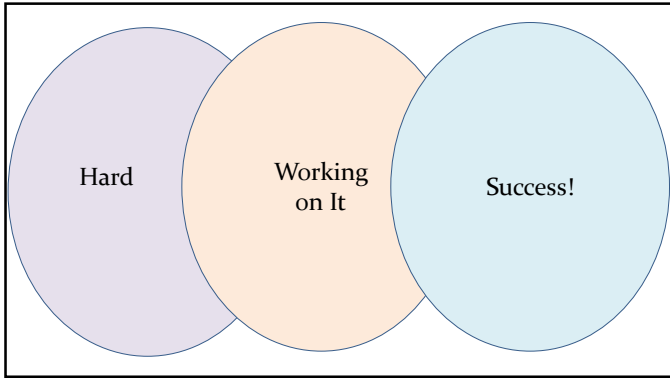
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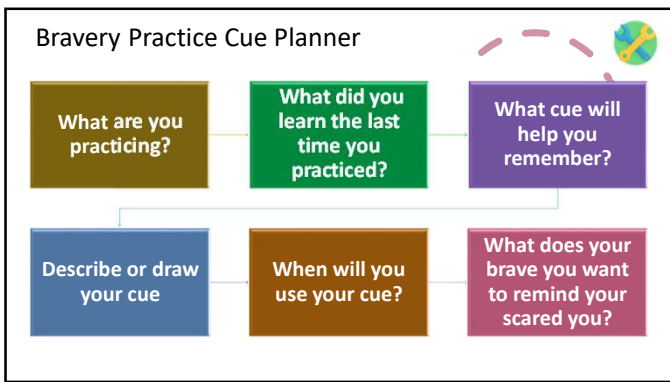
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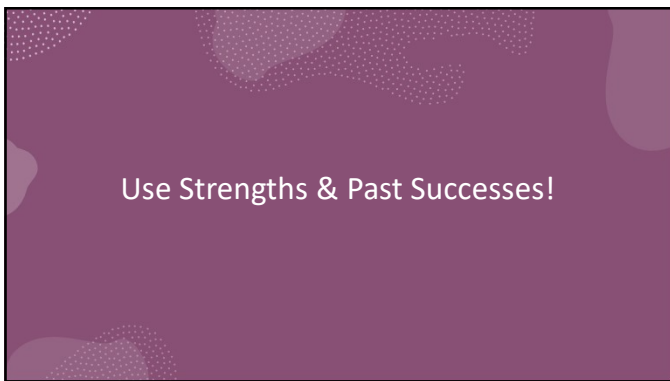
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How did I do that?

Accidental
Fire Alarm

Told myself, "You gotta do this"

Then asked, "What's next?"

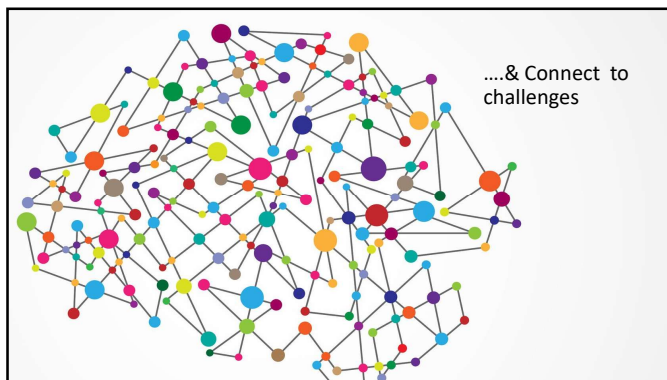
Found the map for closest exit

Went into the hallway and saw kindies

Left with them

EA went to tell my teacher where I was

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Assessment Self-reflection

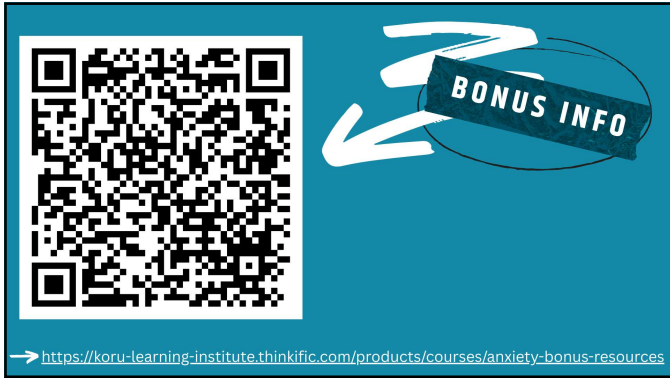
Name: _____

Strengths What were my strengths in which areas am I most successful?	
Challenges What is hard in which areas am I least successful?	
Improve What are some specific strategies or activities I can undertake to improve particular areas for next time?	

Self-Awareness

- What am I good at?
- How do I get good at something?
- What are my challenges?
- How can I use my strengths to make challenges easier?

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